

thINKingDANCE

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Photo: Maria Baranova.

Geoff Sobelle's Magical Foodism at the Fringe

by Jonathan Stein

Consider the first magician and magic trip in human history. Digging in the dirt, burying a speck of something in the earth, and a few months later, presto, an edible. Of course, these early food tricks did morph over the millennia into the more complex culinary trickery of G.M.O. and Le Cordon Bleu.

Geoff Sobelle, the master trickster of devised, interactive physical theater, has added a rollicking chapter to this evolution in his newest work, *FOOD*, premiering in the 2022 Philly Fringe Festival. In his previous performance dives, he has distilled the poetry and absurdity in the quotidian of our lives. In [The Object Lesson](#) he plumbed the inanimate objects we obsessively collect and co-exist with, and in [Home](#) he explored concepts of time, space and impermanence in our domestic lives. The works he has premiered here at the Fringe Festival have often taken off onto national and international tours.

I am wary about revealing too much of this show for those yet to see it. I will say that the menus that Sobelle, our congenial server, handed out to patrons along with an open mic, were full of surprises and seeds for interactive gastronomy. My menu, which I tried to chicken out of by fobbing it off on a friend, led me to a bit of improvising about my culinary expertise in peeling and cutting, bringing some laughs from the sous chef crowd around me. After his serving segment, Sobelle had a few tricks down his gut. He took consumption and gluttony to unbelievable anatomical depths, and even found edibles in his after-dinner smokes. My appetite for any food quickly disappeared.

A second section created by what I will call "a sleight of land," transformed our dining table to a set that addressed exploitation of agricultural land and degradation of the environment, not readily the material of humor, but still fertile soil for the tricks of capitalism. This segment nevertheless captured my visual interest even if the absurdity of the themes was more pained and less comic.

Suffice it to say that the main Fringe space has never been more creatively altered than in this set appearing inches before an audience sitting around it on three sides. The same square before us became a restaurant dinner table, Arctic ice fishing hole (char anyone?), grazing and burial ground of bison, wheat field, oil fields and derricks, highways and urbanization. Closing, Sobelle pulled off a deus ex machina exit of earthy delight that brought gasps from an audience followed by a standing ovation.

Eat before you go.

[FOOD](#), Geoff Sobelle, Philadelphia Fringe Festival, Sept. 8-18.

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