Asian in America

A symbolic exhibition and 6-course meal that explores the complex narrative of the Asian American identity through food & drink, virtual reality, spoken word and poetry.
Studio ATAO is a nonprofit production studio that creates multi-platform, impact-driven culinary content & experiences. We leverage the art of food and technology for social good, opening the minds of our guests to better understand and empathize with the people and cultures around them.

Asian in America is an award-nominated exhibition and 6-course meal that takes guests on a multi-sensory journey through the trials and triumphs of the Asian American identity. The experience addresses topics from cultural hierarchies in the food system, to the lack of the individualism granted to minorities, to the internalization of the “white savior” complex.

The goal of Asian in America is to foster empathy and cultural understanding using the familiar medium of food & drink paired with layers of poetry and virtual reality to give visceral depth and emotion to the stories. The experience is partly individual, partly communal: VR offers space for individual interpretation of the art, while communal dining brings groups of people together in close proximity to share and discuss the piece’s deeper meaning.
Food & Drink

There are 6 courses in total: 3 are presented with poetry; 3 are paired with a virtual reality recreation using Tilt Brush (a VR drawing program) and accompanied with spoken word.

The ingredients and cooking techniques are carefully chosen and harbor double meanings, which the guests uncover throughout the meal. The courses are:

1. Substitutions
2. “You Make Asian Food, Right?”
3. Stereotypes
4. Model Minority
5. Saviors
6. Fancy Because It’s French

Bonus: Dog Food Is A Necessity?
Virtual Reality & Spoken Word

Guests are outfitted with virtual reality headsets in order to experience Tilt Brush recreations of 3 dishes, watching brushstroke by brushstroke as the course is “cooked” in front of them while listening to spoken word narration highlighting the symbolism behind each ingredient and cooking techniques.

Google Tilt Brush Sequence for Course 4: Model Minority

Course 4: Model Minority

View 360 video
Poetry

For non-VR courses, guests are handed postcards that contain a poem on one side, and a course description on the other. The 3 courses of food paired with poetry form a triptych: Substitutions, Stereotypes and Saviors.

Course 1: Substitutions

Substitutions

what of me is interchangeable?
i never did ask, but you told me anyway
individualism is a majority privilege
maybe it is you who cannot taste nuance
because my memories can

“pork bbq” (jackfruit)
“chawanmushi” (aerated egg)
“nam phrik” (charred pollack roe)
pickled tindora, rose, marigold
Asian in America’s U.S. debut at the Museum of Food and Drink in NYC on August 15, 2018
Asian in America as a museum exhibition offers a visual representation of the dinner experience through 10 custom plastic replicas and photography/videography of all courses, alongside poetry placards and the full VR experience. Museum docents guide visitors through the detail and symbolism behind the food’s narrative, and members of our team are available for an in-depth Q&A.
Asian in America has been featured in Edible Brooklyn, Culture Trip, LuckyRice, Eater National, Forbes and Goldthread. The project was a finalist for the Future of Storytelling’s “Bridging the Divide” Award, has been a featured exhibit at the 2018 Future of Storytelling Summit and the 2018 ReThink Conference at the Culinary Institute of America, and is one of the selected pieces on the Tribeca Film Institute’s Virtual Reality channel.

"The Asian American identity is complicated. There is no piece that is just good, or just bad. Even the moments where I felt the most embarrassment or anger or shame in my journey, I’ve realized that was necessary to help me better understand myself and how I can reach deeper into my stories to make art."

- Chef Jenny Dorsey, in LuckyRice
About the Creator

Jenny is a professional chef, author and artist specializing in multi-platform storytelling fusing food with social good. She’s especially interested in challenging food as purely a physical experience, instead evoking emotion and vulnerability through her plates.

After changing careers into food & hospitality, Jenny worked in multiple Michelin-starred restaurants in NYC and SF before founding Wednesdays, a popular supperclub series centered on meaningful conversation, in 2014. Wednesdays quickly claimed top spots in multiple “best of” lists and ushered in thousands of guests through the years -- but something was missing. In 2018, Wednesdays was officially reborn as Studio ADAO, taking on a nonprofit status and further clarifying its mission to deeply engage its audiences around social impact issues.

Jenny's food and art has been featured in publications ranging from Harper’s Bazaar and Wall Street Journal to NowThis and Eater. She is author of multiple books, and her bylines have been published on outlets such as Narratively, Michelin Guide and VICE. She has also appeared on channels such as Food Network and Oxygen TV, and regularly speaks about food and identity across the U.S.

Full biography available at http://jennydorsey.co.
To exhibit *Asian in America* at your local museum or gallery, or to see our upcoming tour dates around North America, please contact Julie Nguyen at julie@studioatao.org.