

ROCO Food Is Art Fundraiser

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My friend Sarah, both an artist and a patron of the arts, had bought a pair of tickets to [Rochester Contemporary Art Center's](#) "Food Is Art" fundraiser. Sadly, her husband would be out of town, but as ever, I was there for a friend. It was difficult, but I forced myself off the event full of interesting people and art, and artful food prepared by a half dozen or so of Rochester's best chefs.

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I got out Trusty iPhone to record conversation and take pictures. This became my modus operandi for the evening. The photos came out ok, but fortunately the lovely and talented [Gerry Szymanski](#) was there to take GOOD pictures, which he's allowed me to use here (all photos are by Gerry unless they have the RochesterFoodNet.com watermark... then blame me). But the sad part is that Trusty iPhone proved untrustworthy, and threw away my 10 minutes of interviews with the chefs. So. We're all stuck with my memory, jogged by Gerry's fine photos. So here we go.



Just past the entrance, I found Dan Martello of [Good Luck](#) with these lovely little plates. He called the thing here a "terrine" of duck and rabbit, I think (damn... memory... correct me if I'm wrong, Dan). Pâté of one sort or another showed up a bit later as well, but there can never be too much pâté, can there? (As an aside... why don't the Germans just start calling their braunschweiger, "pâté?" Free marketing advice.) Anyhow, Good Luck's

terrine had a spiced mayo underneath, fabulous clove-scented pickled cauliflower on the side (eschewing the standard cornichons), and guiding the lily, so to speak, an edible flower atop. Consider my bouche amused.



Seth Lindahl of [Max Chophouse](#) gets a whole row of photos along with the evening's Grand Prix (this is not to put down anything else... it's just that Seth really went to town). What I said about never having too much pâté? Seth had many kinds, including a country pâté en croûte that was out of this world. The French know how to name things... "stuffed bread" just doesn't hold up to "en croûte," does it? Anyhow, at the end of the table, Seth and crew had a slice of some kind of pâté (this is where

my recording would have come in handy) on crostini ("toast") with an amazing gelatin cube on top. It was one of those canapé experiences in which your tast buds go on a little journey: cruch, then the rich depth of the pâté, crunch, pâté develops, then BAM the gelatin comes shining through. Oh, and don't forget the gelatin art on the serving plates. Nice work.



Next I ambled over to my buddy, Dan Eaton, described in the promotion for the event as "Celebrity Chef" [Dan Eaton](#). To me, he's my neighbor, my friend, my bandmate, great cook, and one of the nicer people I know. I guess he's a Celebrity Chef, too. Anyhow, Dan and his artist wife, Martha O'Connor (who has a piece in the current show) were dishing out delicious smoked trout canapés. Dan made his own pumpernickel bread, spread peppered fresh goat cheese on it, then a slice of roasted beet, a piece of the trout, and baby frisée. To really make you dance, he spritzed it with truffle oil and added a dash of sea salt. Fabulous. And I'd write about his chocolate truffles except that I didn't get any (grrr...). Next time, perhaps.



Next I checked out some Art. Art Rogers. Get it? ("Maybe a picasso or a Garfunkel..."). I actually have to admit that the food art blinded me, largely, to the actual art at ROCO last night, though at the end I did get to look at a bit. My opinion is, of course, irrelevant. But I liked what I perceived as its breadth and general quality. Kudos to Executive Director Bleu Cease. Back to the other Art, chef-owner of [Lento](#)... he'd brought his house-made duck sausage (just slightly picante and dynamite), which he served (relatively) simply on toast

with a cranberry (?) mustard. This was explosively toothsome. That's a technical term.

Gino Ruggiero and Nicolette Foster from [2Vine](#) gave us two appetizers on wooden spoons (several folks served on wood). The picture is deceptive because the sign is for one of the apps, while the pictured app is the other. So, the picture shows arancini, fried risotto balls. The sign is for the other appetizer, goat cheese gougère with duxelles, which was a highlight of the evening for me. Just so many things happening in your mouth in rapid succession. Happy things. I am of the opinion that duxelles should be served to the whole world on Wonder bread. Or shingles. Cardboard. Whatever. Everything is better with duxelles.





Let's see... who does that leave. Ah! Mr. Mueller... Eric Mueller of [Warfield's](#) went the farthest in the direction of a science experiment, and managed to make it spectacularly good in addition to being interesting. The orange layer here is, if memory serves, "condensed citrus-melon." They take melon, add citrus, and put it in a cryovac (yep) and pressurize it, turning it into... well, a new thing. Yes, it tastes like melon and citrus, but on a texture level, it's more like a very tender raw fish. Amazing, really. It sat on top of parmesan custard, with a healthy dose of ground, dehydrated olive on the bottom. Topping it off was an American version of prosciutto (name... is... can't remember) and baby celery (a kind of microgreen that is just awesome). I asked what it was, ate one... asked again, ate another... then discussed it for a few minutes and... you know, NEEDED another. Art indeed, complex, cutting-edge, and delicious.

Watch for this event in the future. I could imagine such a thing being pretentious and annoying, but our chefs in Rochester just aren't pretentious and annoying. There was a nice balance between classically artful food (like terrines and pâté) and extremely contemporary gastronomy (Mueller's condensed fruit). The atmosphere was casually sophisticated, and people seemed to have a genuinely great time. I was privileged to be there (thanks again, Sarah).

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