

Written by
Gabriel Gee

OFFSITE
ART

THE CIRCLE AND THE DOTS: A SOUVENIR OF HENRI CUECO

On the second floor of a nondescript tower block – one of several connected to each other by a vast and long corridor – youthful chatter fills a room with a view over the sprawling urban landscape to the West of Paris. A light man wearing a smart black suit comes in accompanied by an older fellow, a painter, the guest of that day's seminar.

L'amandine, à la chaire fine et ferme, à la dormance courte

The scene takes place in a garden, in the countryside. A man wearing a straw bucket hat is seated at a small wooden table, outdoors. He is drawing in a sketchbook. Another man is standing beside him, observing the work in progress.

'What is it that you are drawing? The potato shoots before us?'

'Yes, the potatoes shoots.'

...

'You have quite a lot of them now.'

'Thanks to you.'

'Soon the flowers will be out, you will have to take a decision'

'A decision?'

'You might want to draw the flowers.'

'I might.'

'Or you might want to eat the potatoes.'

'I could also draw the potatoes.'

'That's an unusual subject.'

'More than the shoots?'

'I suppose they go together.'

...

'Well listen, it's getting late, I have to go, the wife and the soup are waiting. I'll see you next week, get the potatoes out for you.'

'See you then.'

POTAGE DE POMME DE TERRE

500g of potatoes
1 litre of poultry stock (or vegetable stock)
3 dcl cream
2 table spoons white flour
60g butter
Salt and pepper

Boil and mash the potatoes into a purée
Make a white roux with 10g of butter and the flour
Add the stock
Add the purée to the stock, then the cream
When ready, set aside, melt the butter in a pan and add to the soup
Serve piping hot

La désirée à la peau rouge

We are in study room. The man who had been wearing a straw hat is seated at a desk, writing. Before him, there is a sheet of paper, a pen, a lamp with a woolen lampshade, and in a little plate of grey ceramics, two potatoes. One is young, her coat a velvet robe interspaced with black patches of soil. The other is ancient, her mantle a uniform coppery skin. From time to time, the writer lifts his eyes to observe the potatoes, pensively. Then he returns to the pen and paper, the murmur of cursive script gently flowing into the room.

‘He had longed for her, watching the everchanging hues of transformation, the spirit of tenebrous and humble origins that rose above the grounds to unprecedented claims. How would he talk to her? Praised by the mighty, loved by the multitude, yet ever on the verge of assassination. Her Joconde-like debonair appearance would not prevent a murderous end, repeated through ritualized sequences in domestic settings. The frying, the mashed, the slowly roasted, and the boiling silent amongst the nutritive temples. On the television screen, her gaze intense held him mesmerized in the davenport, as she swung repeatedly with cold resolve the potato peeler in the air.’

HACHI PARMENTIER

1kg potatoes
1 tbs cream
2dcl milk
50g butter
Salt and pepper
100g grated cheese

500g minced beef/or minced pea-soya meat
1 shallot
1 carrot
1 onion
2 garlic pods
25g butter
Salt and pepper

Prepare the meat ragout in a pan
Boil the potatoes,
Turn into mash and add butter and milk
Put the meat ragout in a gratin dish (it shouldn't be too liquid)
Cover with the pured potatoes, add the grated cheese on top
Put in the oven for 10mn

La lady Christi, sensible aux taches de rouille, au cœur creux

The artist had been an artisan, the artisan an artist. Racks of stretcher bars are piled empty-handed on the walls of a tumultuous studio. Tables are packed with pots and jars of the painter's trade, gesso and turpentine, linseed oil and acrylic polymer. Brushes emerge palm tree headed behind flasks of troubled Tuscany yellow and mustard ochre concoctions. Deflating paint tubes and colonies of colors flourish amidst the rocky landscape. Papers tarnished by vaporous solvents linger beneath islands of synthetic eruptions. In the resin flavored quietness of the room, voices crackle gaily out of a black and silver radio; 'Viens mon Valamir, ô mon roi toi que j'aime, Et défais ton armure, je veux te voir sans traîne.' Bursts of laughter greet the verses, that the experts immediately cast as not being from the French seventeenth century dramatist, Corneille. Meanwhile, on an easel a prepared canvas stands regally; its vertical rectangular space has been divided in six equal areas, within which group portraits of potatoes appear in close up, their shadows varying in the morning and afternoon spotlights of their starlet momentum.

JACKET POTATOES

4 large potatoes
Olive oil
Salt
Grated cheese
Butter
pepper

Prick the potatoes and rub with oil and salt
Place in the oven for 1 hour
When ready, take the potatoes out,
cut them up and fill in with butter and cheese,
sprinkle with pepper

L'innovator à la peau rugueuse et fine, sensible au virus du tabac

Back in the garden on a summer's day, the painter and the gardener are conversing under the shade of a dandelion-hued parasol.

'You are collecting the peels of potatoes?'

'Up to a point.'

'Collecting the discarded.'

'Exactly.'

'I like the drawings you made of them.'

'Thank you. You can have one if you wish.'

'Ah thanks, but no, I understand the purpose in it, but at home, it just wouldn't fit.'

'What about the potato crop?'

'I have tons of them, I will bring you twenty kilos tomorrow.'

'Twenty kilos!? That will be too much, we already have some right here...'

'Ah yes, but you are a collector, you can find a way, besides it is a new variety I am sure you do not have.'

'So not a Bintje.'

'No, it's an Arosa.'

'Ah, an Arosa? Is that not a place in Switzerland?'

'Yes'

'What does it look like?'

'It has a pink skin.'

'Uhm, nice.'

'I'll bring them tomorrow.'

ROSTI

1kg potatoes, peeled, semi boiled, minced in thin stripes

1 onion

2 garlic pods

Grated cheese as desired

1dcl cream

1 sausage meat (optional)

Salt and pepper

butter

Put the ingredients together in a bowl

Mix well

Heat a pan

Add butter, then the potato mix,

flatten as if a pancake

cook for 20mn, turn around, and leave for 5/10mn before serving

The man in suit, Bernard Goy, director of the Fond Régional d'Art Contemporain d'Île-de-France, introduced the guest, Henri Cueco. Cueco looked at students in the room, with a mischievous smile. He then stood up, having said nothing, turned around, took a white chalk and drew a vague circle on the blackboard; he added three dots in the circle, and faced the puzzled classroom. 'I am interested in potatoes', he said. Behind him was a potato, and the eyes of the potato. Some images take time to sink in.

Henri Cueco, *Dialogue avec mon jardinier* (2000)

Xavier de Langlais, *La technique de la peinture à l'huile*

Henri Cueco, *Le collectionneur*

'Experts contre faussaires.' *Des papous dans la tête*