August 20, 2020
Greetings @michaelstevensonjr here for this week's Instagram takeover! This week I'll be sharing about Grandmother(s)'s Kitchen, a facet of my artist's practice inspired by my grandmothers Louise Stevenson and Mimi Sforza, that centers food and gathering around it.

Originally from Gaithersburg, Maryland, I now reside in, and practice primarily from, Portland, Oregon. My practice has a wide range including but not limited to collaborations with young people featuring projects like the Afro Contemporary Art Class at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School, Real Food Faux Truck Food Truck, and exhibitions with @converge_45, @ksmoca, @picapdx and others.

I also frequently collaborate with currently and formerly incarcerated folks featuring projects like Gallery Blue, a curatorial project featuring exclusively the work of currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. As well as Tin Can Phone, a podcast project chronicling former inmates who have different levels of incarceral experience, racial backgrounds, and upbringings, slated to debut on @kbooradio in the Fall.

Follow me over at @michaelstevensonjr to learn more about these projects as they develop! For now, let's talk about food!

As mentioned above, my grandmotherly qualities were inspired by paternal and maternal grandmothers who would both convene large groups of friends and family over holidays and celebratory life events. In my practice I produce projects in domestic and public spaces leveraging convening around food as a moment to contemplate the surrounding contexts within, and beyond, a contemporary art discourse.

Over the next week I'll be sharing more about the different projects I've done, some of the underlying contexts in that work, and how I've drawn inspiration from my own lineage and kitchens around the world.

All of this will be building up to my @picapdx event happening on Sunday September 13th from 1-4pm, that will be free and open to the public, featuring @keesloadedkitchen and @itsplantbasedpapi, so stay tuned!
Hello again! Artist Michael Bernard Stevenson Jr. (AMBSJ for short!) @michaelstevensonjrw here to share more about my artist practice as it relates to food. I mention in my first post that much of my work revolves around collaborative and co-authored projects with young people, and I thought, what a great way to kick off talking about my work, but to discuss how those things overlap!

Also as mentioned, much of my inspiration around food is via my grandmother(s) Louise and Mimi. Much of youth education happens in the home, and often individuals providing primary care to children are women. I learned much of what I know about life, love, child rearing, cooking, and more, from one of my primary childcare providers, my grandmother Louise. In this I have found not only a penchant for food and gathering around it, but also that of working with and for the growth of young minds.

While much of the work I do with young people has nothing to do with food, I have plenty of examples where the two overlap!

In this first series of images you can see Elijah (who just turned 10 yesterday!), a young man who I've been working closely with for going on 4 years at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School through an artist mentorship program @ksmoca. Together we've done amazing things! And we've cooked some amazing meals! The first of which being Elijah's first pancake! Which, will be discussed more tomorrow.

To read more about the images, check into the comments for descriptions!

In the first image you can see Elijah approving of his first ever smoothie. Recently his mom was doing daily smoothies and Elijah couldn't get enough! When we started making it, he didn't think he would like anything that looked like what we were making. It is important not only to teach young people how to do things, but also why. I explained to Elijah that what we were making was what I had for breakfast every day for years, and that it’s very healthy. Once he got to try it himself, he loved it 😍
In the next project you can see Elijah making sausage. I told him after pancakes that we’d focus on breakfast foods, and I asked him to tell me his favorite. He said he wanted to make sausage. I went out and got different spices and three different meats to make our own house breakfast sausage. When we started, he was like... what's this?! I thought we were just going to make sausage?! I said, this IS how you make sausage, from scratch! We went around and shared the food with his teachers, in the second image in the set Elijah is feeding one teacher while getting praise from another for the delicious meal!

A few years later, Elijah and I had done a number of projects featuring large drawings, sculptures, and even a power suit designed by him and made by us together to be worn! But as a way to finalize our time year before last, Elijah had asked to make pasta, and little did he know, I am a pasta master! I taught him my Grandma Mimi’s famous Italian gravy recipe. Seen in the short movie Elijah is dishing up his creation for his whole class to enjoy! Which you can see in the following image!
A popular and fun project I did my first year in grad school is Real Food, Faux Truck, Food Truck (RFFFTFT) which was an intergenerational collaboration with young artists Riley and Beck to make real food behind a fake truck facade. In this project I was excited to make food because they were excited to make food. They made the menu themselves, Bacon, Pancakes, and Kale. We had grand plans of making macaroni and cheese from scratch, which we made at their home, but ended up not making it for the event. In anycase, our menu was a HIT and we had a line the whole time! In this project I was also reflecting on collaborating with young people of a mixed heritage, being seen collaborating with young people of mixed heritage, and the making of our own culture and story by working together to do new things.

This final project was called Tables for Two Emma and Ray. I've done many iterations of Tables for Two, but this was the first that was just for only one group of two. I was centering a single couple, in this instance, mother and son. I was able to alleviate the burden of making dinner, and so during prep, Emma and Ray were able to enjoy a leisurely bathtime, as well as get all gussied up for the night! I wowed them with a four course meal featuring an all vegan menu that would impress not only mom, but son! The food was made to be fun, nutritious, and delicious! Seen in the final image is all the different courses. A falafel with red pepper and garlic hummus, miso soup with dinosaur pasta, a forest of veggies with breaded and fried tofu cut into dinosaurs, and an avocado mousse 😋
Hello again! Artist Michael Bernard Stevenson Jr. (@michaelstevensonjr) here! And today, we're going to talk about PANCAKES! Why pancakes? Well, my grandma Louise used to make me pancakes when I was very young. Family breakfasts with my grandparents and my father (@michaelstevenson3871) was a semi-regular, and very coveted and exciting time for me. My grandmother used to make canadian bacon just the way I liked it. As well as making me large pancakes with crispy edges. Her pancakes would often get crispy on the edges, and when I started asking for those, she would make them extra special, just for me 😍. Later in life, when I could drive, I would often visit my grandparents just to enjoy pancakes with them. Of course the moment meant more than getting fed. It was a time to just sit and be together. While I visited my grandmother on many other occasions, the ritual of sharing breakfast became, and remains, a significant part of my life, and awareness of my own familial culture. It is for this reason I've dawned the pancake as a sigil of my family on my inner right forearm. I refer to this tattoo, as well as the others on my inner arms, as my coat of arms on my arms. 😍 As an adult I learned how to make pancakes with and from my grandmother. She taught me the recipe and all the tricks including using a simple butter knife to flip them and how to thin the batter to make extra crispy pancakes 😋. Ingredients:
- 8 cups flour
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- 1 scoop sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Milk to consistency

Directions:
- Heat oil in a cast iron skillet, when hot put a spoonful of batter into the skillet. If it sizzles, it is hot enough, if not let the skillet heat up more before trying again. If the skillet is hot enough the batter will start to bubble around the edges. When those bubbles begin to dry out it is time for the pancake to be flipped. Cook the other side and remove from the skillet. Once the first pancake is made and the heat is right you can make more than one pancake at a time. 😋

Make a pancake in honor of Louise and share it with us @fiveoaksmuseum by tagging us in the post. 😍 Image descriptions in comments!

In the first image you can see Elijah approving of his first ever smoothie. Recently his mom was doing daily smoothies and Elijah couldn't get enough! When we started making it, he didn't think he would like anything that looked like what we were making. It is important not only to teach young people how to do things, but also why. I explained to Elijah that what we were making was what I had for breakfast every day for years, and that it's very healthy. Once he got to try it himself, he loved it 😊.
The first few images are again of Elijah. We worked together doing lots of food projects as seen yesterday, but pancakes were our first. Why? Well, that’s how I learned to cook from my grandmother! I think passing skills, knowledge, history, and wisdom on to youth is maybe the most important transferal of knowledge our species has. To that end, I am reenacting the ways in which I’ve learned some of my most important lessons with the young people I am collaborating with. In these first few images you can see Elijah eating his FIRST ever pancake that HE MADE! He was so proud! We made them at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School as part of our @ksmoca artist mentorship. He made one final pancake to share with his teacher! Later, Elijah and I made pancakes a few times, and the last of which was filmed for a documentary!@bdt2 @doubleej_gang

Seen in the next few images are Riley and Beck making pancakes as part of Real Food Faux Truck Food Truck (RFFFT). They were excited to make pancakes before I even told them I was a pancake master! The next image is Bea making pancakes at the second coming of RFFFT which was rebranded Real Food Faux Ship featuring a new facade of a bunny flying a ship! @margejacobsen @beasbiglaughs @harrell_fletcher
The final two images are essentially my legacy as a food artist from beginning to forever. The drawing was illustrated by @rchlmldr. The little person in the image is me sitting next to my grandmother Louise Stevenson. She is why pancakes as a meal is significant to me, and also why I am much of who I am today. For the reasons too long to list here, I decided to commemorate my grandmother with a tattoo by @lukeloporto. I invited Luke to my home, I told him the stories, I made him some pancakes, and he photographed what he ended up eating. The photograph then became the tattoo you see on my arm. Photorealistic quality iteration of my own family’s food legacy 🥞ائمور
Hello again! Artist Michael Bernard Stevenson Jr. (@michaelstevensonjr) here! And today, we’re going to talk about an iterative project I do called Table For Two!Tables for Two is a pop-up event featuring a multi-course meal served to tables set for two. Each iteration of Tables for Two is unique, the first being on February 14th, 2013 held in the lobby of the Alfred University art building. The following four iterations of Tables for Two were hosted in personal homes to varying degrees of complexity.

The first iteration of Tables for Two has served as the precedence to my entire socially engaged art practice, with a particular emphasis on all the work I do using food and gathering around it, as a medium. Between the iterations I've served communities in four states, two countries, in public and private spaces, and courses have ranged from surf, turf, and garden grown. The project remains my most frequently reproduced artwork to date, and promises future iterations as time goes on. If you’re looking for something fun to do on Valentines day or for any other time with single, or multiple, table settings for two, book me a flight and you've got a personal chef ready, willing, and able!

To follow suit for the format, and make sure there's enough space, I'll be describing the slides in the comments, and maybe if I have the capacity, I'll put some extra images in stories!

1. A shot of me serving at the first iteration of Tables for Two
2. Me surrounded by a team of badass femmes supporting the first iteration of Tables for Two
3. Tables for Two Florida
4. Some of the food from T4TFlorida
5. Table for Two Austin
6. Food from T4TAustin
7. Table For Two Plus One
8. Food From T4TP1
9. Table for Me and You
10. Poetics from Table for Two Emma and Ray

Remember to check the comments for descriptions!
A shot of me serving at the first iteration of Tables for Two and Me surrounded by a team of badass femmes supporting the first iteration of Tables for Two were from Tables for Two Alfred was facilitated in collaboration with Sierra Sparks @ladynevada, Stephanie Joan Arthur (Giera) @stephaniegiera, Elizabeth Cote @efcote, Sam Sloan-Wiechert @samiam1104, Erin Hall @herringhull, Jessie Simmons @jess.smms, Kait Boccardo @kaitboccardo. Primary collaborator Sierra Sparks and I were excited to leverage our love of food and access to a wealth-spring of local agricultural splendor, with dishes featuring products from some of our favorite community produce and grocery vendors. The menu consisted of a sampler plate from different local businesses featuring cheese and spreads, a locally sourced salad, a pasta dish made vegan with grandma Mimi’s enhanced eggplant sauce which had won the Alfred Chef cook off, and a chocolate/regular waffle topped with homemade raw milk ice cream! The original event took over the lobby of Harder Hall at @alfreduniversity with support from @alfredsculpture family. The event featured screen printed posters, a designed and printed menu and receipt, and was able to serve multiple seatings of two or four or the odd three. Some of the documentation shows many couples who are still together today!Photo Credit - Devin Henry
Tables for Two Florida is the second iteration of Tables for Two which occurred in the home of Amy Lovett and John Messer in Inverness Florida on February 14th, 2015. Reservations were taken in advance of the event and people arrived the evening of during their reservation time. The dinner menu consisted of four courses featuring fare sourced from local vendors including fish caught by the Lovett/Messer family in a ceviche. The event was co-facilitated with Amy, John, their children Madison, Riley, Blakely, Turner, Stephanie Joan Arthur (Giera), and the members of the larger Hernando County Community. While visiting Stephanie, collaborator from the first iteration of T4T, she encouraged me to offer the event to her hometown community. It was a fun and exciting event that really leaned into the splendor available in a domestic space supported by the community around it. The menu drew from the original which drew from my own recipe book of classics, including a pasta sauce and a waffle desert based on Louise’s pancake recipe. Photo credit - @ghostofthesnail
Table for Two Austin came about after having done the iteration with Emma and Ray. I realized the magic of the project was not in valentines day, or anything beyond being intentional about how to set the table and who for. Standing as the most casual iteration of Tables for Two was prepared for friends Phil @philjacksonphoto and Ziggy’s @leighannzig Austin home later in 2018 when I was passing through on my way to a lecture at @samhoustonstate for Shaun Griffiths @s_gritty. The meal was only two courses, tofu tikka masala and a scoop of ice cream topped off with a bit of on the fly fruit compote. Also the least laborious iteration, Tables for Two Austin was an example of how the format can occur within a wide range between extravagant and highly produced or humble and nourishing. However every iteration of Tables for Two remains a memorable event for those who enjoyed an intimate meal with their friend, partner, or loved one.
Table for Two + One was done in Hamburg Germany in the home of my cousins Fabio @faofao_birdtalk and Anja @zoralorahh with their 1 year old son Vincent. The meal featured four courses for the pallets of adults and a child who eats primarily with their hands. Something I learned from my work especially the Emma and Ray iteration of Tables for Two is that one of the most interesting audiences for a lavish four course meal is folks who don't normally have access to this experience. Which is almost all parents, especially to enjoy with their young ones in tandem. Later during my trip Fabio and Anja served a lavish meal for their wedding, but during the event they were entertaining as much if not more than enjoying the experience. At Table for Two + One Fabio and Anja got to enjoy their meal with Vincent as uninterrupted family time which continues to be a specific goal of my creative practice. For the meal at home I went all out, cooking almost all day! I made a carrot potato soup inspired by Nana's my first ever food industry job, a Penne Alla Vodka in celebration of Fabio and my Italian ancestry, a pot roast with mushrooms and swischard, and a pancake with a unique dairy product local to Germany as a topping! There was a moment where Vincent was choking on a mushroom and we all panicked! I stubbed my toe running to the living/dining room and lost the nail almost 6 months later 😅[]}
Table for Me and You is the most recent official iteration of this project done with and for my at the time partner @kellylynnlunde. She was suffering from candida at the time so the menu was highly specialized to meet that dietary need. I prepped all the food in advance and cooked and served the meal while we sat together. Each dish was served on a single plate that we shared. I had documented the event using a tripod and remote of which you can see me pressing in this fun photo.

Poetics from Table for Two Emma and Ray are endless. I learned a lot from this iteration of the project both about T4T and all my work with food. I love to show the shot of them enjoying the meal, and talked about this iteration a little earlier in the week. But what often gets shifted from center stage is the connection of Emma and Ray as mother and son. Being able to host Emma and Ray in their home offered both of them the freedom to be and live in the way they do at home, but at the same time be pampered and appreciated the likes of which one usually only gets to enjoy when they go out! This dynamic, and some of the non-center stage photos from this iteration remain inspiring in my practice.@emmarosecolburn
Hello again! Artist Michael Bernard Stevenson Jr. (@michaelstevensonjr) here! And today, we're going to talk about the origins of Grandmother(s)'s Kitchen! While I have a host of other food projects to share, I thought it might be interesting to dig into my maternal grandmother Mimi's famous Italian gravy with meatballs. Which has many names, my family always said sauce, but in Italian american culture gravy is also commonly used. It was always a favorite meal of mine, and like the pancakes, decided to embark on mastering the meal. Tempered with lessons from my uncle @paul_sforza, I made a mean sauce 😏When artist Chloë Bass @publicinvestigator was invited to Portland by the @psuartandsocialpractice program we had brainstormed on how to cater the public showing of This is A Film. I was excited to turn the opportunity into a funded food art project. To receive funding I had to submit an invoice. I had created an invoice under the name Grandmother(s)'s Kitchen, already beginning to conceptualize what and why I was producing for the event. It turned out that as I was not a business I was not able to receive funding, but, the name stuck, and is now the umbrella I perceive my entire practice oriented towards food. 😏As I prepare this post I am listening to @_morganjerkins new book Wandering In Strange Lands, an account about a journey south to discover one's own heritage. In the first chapter she goes into various accounts about unpacking the lineage of Soul Food in its origin place. While listening I couldn't help but see, feel, and hear, parallels in my own relationship to food heritage and food archive (thanks @mollyalloy for the terms!). And, as I always have, I see my work oriented towards food to cover all those bases. 😏Continuing with my practice during this takeover, I will explain the individual slides in the comments. With that said, this specific project, and the larger takeover itself, all point towards my upcoming project with @picapdx called Grandmother(s)'s Kitchen Presents: Bring Your Own Blanket Free Community Picnic and Dialogue. I'll share some promotion for the event in the stories. Follow @picapdx and @michaelstevensonjr 4 more!
The first image is the flier for the Chloë Bass @publicinvestigator event. You can see the label under the photo mentioning a free dinner provided by Grandmother(s)'s Kitchen. I had conceived of a duet of baked pasta with lasagna and macaroni and cheese as a nod to both of my familial heritages. I had also made a vegan gluten free version of both, which as I continue to make food based work I have begun to make accessible options for participants with dietary restrictions.

The next image is a short video of my preparing the food for this event. This is one of the first times I meticulously documented my preparation. I did this because I was thinking more intentionally about my grandmotherly influences, the common narrative about labor in the kitchen being work done by matriarchal figures, and the invisibilization of that labor that occurs when the food hits the table and is consumed. The third image is a timelapse of the food being consumed. I mean not to infer that the participants did not consider the labor to get the food to hit the table. However, I was interested in creating a visual image of both gathering and consumption of food that had been prepared with love, and originated from a legacy that predates my life and that of my living ancestors. The juxtaposition is also meant to be elucidated by having documented the preparation and consumption. I will likely make more work centering this dynamic in the future.
Images 4-6 are all related to my first iteration of Belated Birthday. After Tables for Two Alfred, and my return to the DC Metro area where I was raised, I was without a community of artists. I had oriented my food based work towards my community there and without an immediate community to make food for and with I had to create a reason. My first birthday home I commandeered the kitchen of friends Ryan (whose Instagram handle I can't find), @samoid, and @ewthatsgross to host a dinner for my birthday. Pinging the comment about labor above, I actually feel more comfortable entertaining than I do being entertained. So, while labor is fiercely debated in all kinds of ways, in this regard, I find it a way of both accessing something I enjoy while paying homage to my ancestors.

When I moved to Portland for graduate school I had decided to have my first project in the @psuartandsocialpractice program be Belated Birthday. I invited the current student cohort to gather for meatballs and sauce. I didn't have a kitchen at the time and so I asked @shoshanagugenheim if I could host the event in her home. The Gugenheim Kedems keep a kosher kitchen so I had to make some adjustments to the recipe. Kosher meat, no dairy in the meatballs, as well as koshering all of the pots, pans, and utensils before and after cooking. While cooking, Shoshana's children stole their FIRST EVER meatball from the pot. A tradition I observed in my youth when grandma Mimi or aunt Mary would let me and my cousins steal a meatball for lunch while the sauce cooked down. The 6th image, 3rd in this series, I shared with you all earlier in the take over. It is the PSUSoprac gathering around the meal. The exact thing my work is designed to create.
Images 7 & 8 are of @lukeloporto and @samiam1104 (fellow Italians both) at the tattoo parlor where I got my commemorative tattoo for my grandma Mimi. The event was a project unto itself. I traveled to Brooklyn to shop at Landi's Pork Store (@landisbklynporkstore) which is where I learned to shop for the familial meal. I purchased all the necessary ingredients, produced the meal, and brought it to the tattoo shop where Luke made a plate, photographed it, ate it, and tattooed the photo the following day. This series of events was captured in a documentary called Sustenance & Spectacle produced by @samiam1104 who has been appreciating and supporting my work for years. You can find the documentary on youtube and vimeo by searching for the title.

The final series is a preparation of the full meal with both meatballs and ribs in the most traditional of ways. During the early stages of quarantine when everyone was hunkered down at home, I went shopping and prepared to make some of my favorite traditional meals. This recent iteration is the first time I made meatballs and sauce with pork ribs, an ingredient that enhances the overall flavor of the sauce, while, at the same time, providing another delicious meat to enjoy. Beyond the flavor, it summons memories, memories of eating this in my grandmothers home, during family get together, and more generally of my family heritage. The final image is a plate of my own creation depicted with my tattoo.
August 28, 2020
Artist Michael Bernard Stevenson Jr. makes pancakes Artist Michael Bernard Stevenson Jr. @michaelstevensonjr makes pancakes for their final day of their Instagram takeover for @fiveoaksmuseum! Please come and follow @michaelstevensonjr to learn more about their work. Thanks for watching!

watch video at this link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CEe51arlyoq/