ForeWord Reviews

COOKING

Sustenance & Desire: A Food Lovers Anthology of Sensuality and Humor
Bascove, editor
Bascove, illustrator
David R. Godine
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Reading through this anthology is like perusing a bookworm gourmands library on a sunny slow day. Much as in the single-name editors paintings, some of which serve as illustrations, every short story and poem seems passionately selected, the collection balanced.

Bascove is known as a book-cover illustrator and for her oil paintings, which have been exhibited in Paris and Manhattan. The fifteen paintings in this anthology are lush yet stylized, an interesting tension evolving from the strict formalism imposed on the vibrant images. Bascoves style nods towards the Cubist and Constructivist artists she admires, like Liubov Popova.

Food, as the binding theme of the collection, is featured in each painting, such as the stunning sliced-open fig in “Summer Fruit.” A woman has fallen asleep while cutting some fruit. Her head lying on the table alongside the melon, peaches and figs, the woman seems just as ripe and full of light as the fruit. It is an irresistible image of contentment and wholeness. John A. Parks in *American Artist* in May 1996 quotes Bascove on her paintings influence on the viewer: “I think they provide a place of refuge, she says thoughtfully. They are about moments of quiet, a place of calm you can turn to … somewhere you can reflect and be restored.”

The same can be said for this book as a whole. The collection is broken into four sections: Nourishment, Desire, Hunger, and Sustenance. Many of the entries deal directly with food, such as Pablo Nerudas poem “Ode to French Fries,” and Jhumpa Lahiris essay “Indian Takeout,” in which she recalls her parents hauling back as much of edible India as possible from their infrequent trips home. Other pieces approach food more as a cultural or spiritual force. In Robertson Davies piece, “Love and a Cough,” which is built on proverbs, there are phrases such as, “Beware of soup warmed up, and a wife who repents.” Less picturesque, yet equally arresting, is Margaret Vissers “The Artificial Cannibal,” in which she discusses the concept and practice of cannibalism in several cultures.

From cover to cover the collection is packed with the greatest of writers, from Proust to M.F.K. Fisher to Bash, and their various meditations on food. Each piece is as compelling and

intrinsic as nourishment. The only nettlesome thing about this collection is that it almost seems too precious, too much of a gift book with no more serious intent than to offer condensed pleasurable moments. But this is hardly a crime. This quality actually perfectly suits *Sustenance & Desire* to bite-sized consumption, such as during the mornings train ride or the minutes before bed, when everyone needs a little bit of restoration, sustenance, and desire.

Naomi Millán