



Arts Watch: "Feed Me a Story" Dishes Up Seniors' Secret Family Recipes



Multi-media artists Laura Nova and Theresa Loong presenting an early version of "Feed Me a Story" on the Ellis Island Ferry. Their latest series of stories are part of the FABLES Public Art project.

This story first appeared in our May, 2014 magazine issue.

Beginning this Thursday, multimedia artists Theresa Loong and Laura Nova will be plastering a large mural made from photos of plates of food on the wall inside First Street Green Park (at the corner of East Houston Street and Second Avenue). On the plates will be dishes made from secret family recipes of Lower East Side seniors. The mural will include a link to a video of the chef preparing the food and the story behind the recipe.

Loong and Nova have been "exposing family secrets by sharing recipes and food" in different areas of the city for quite a few years now, through their ongoing project "Feed Me a Story." They are one of five teams of finalists kicking off the FABLES Public Art project produced by FABnyc. The larger FABLES project explores the Lower East Side's living cultural heritage, historical legacies and current issues in public storytelling; it runs in tandem this May with the inaugural Lower East Side History Month.

"It's always more about the story behind the food than the actual food itself," says Nova. "The sensorial memory is what gets people directly [back] to that story, because it's so visceral. You can ask someone to tell you about their life... but when you ask them to do it this way, it seems to get to the good stories more quickly."

The pair are currently artists in residence at the LaGuardia Senior Center, where they do most of their cooking and video recording.

"The interesting thing about the project is that we don't know what [the seniors] are going to say," says Loong. Sometimes their subjects are shy and speak languages other than English. "The trigger is we ask them to share a secret family recipe, as a starting question, but not everyone has a secret family recipe... when they do, that's amazing."

One woman once whispered, "Now I make it better than my mom."

Loong said the chefs often don't want to seem disloyal, but they are proud that they've tweaked the family recipe.

Eventually, they hope to add an interactive component that will allow people to submit and upload their own recipes to the video cookbook on the Feed Me a Story [website](#).

Loong and Nova's FABLES piece will include eight dishes from seniors who represent the diverse heritage of the residents on the Lower East Side. The featured recipes include recipes made by Jewish, Italian, Chinese and Puerto Rican families. They will host an opening party and potluck with a screening on Saturday, May 10th, from 12:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. at First Street Green Park.