



Julijonas Urbonas

Studio as a Kitchen:

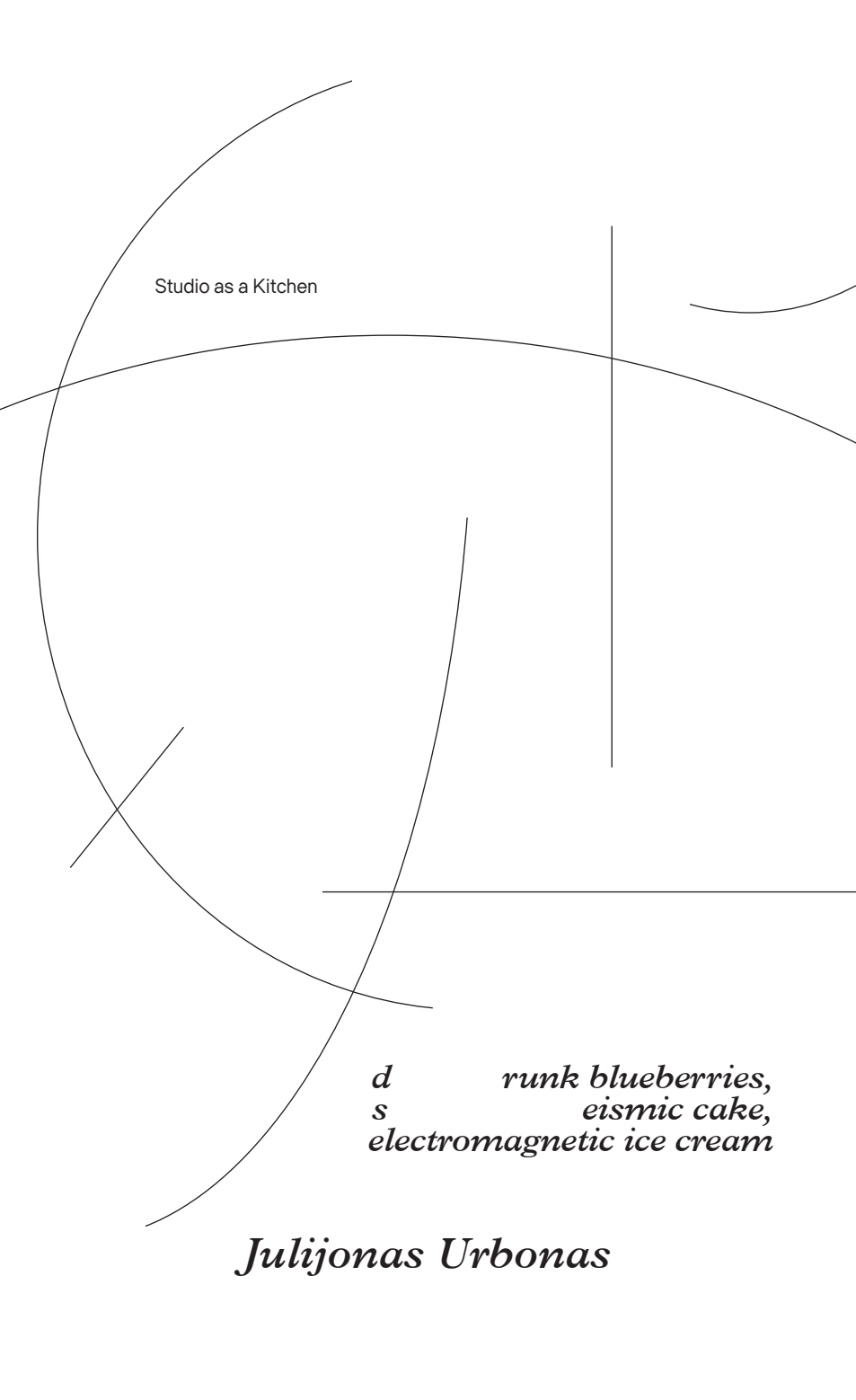
Drunk blueberries, seismic cake, electromagnetic ice cream

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expanded studio, kitchen-as-workshop, thinging, edible experimentation, embodied imagination

Summary: For decades, Julijonas Urbonas has treated the studio as an extension of his body—a “machinery of thinging” whose tools, microclimates, and mess actively shape how he thinks and makes. Beginning with an amusement park studio that seeded his “Gravitational Aesthetics,” he traces how different studios—and especially a live/work loft—collapsed the boundary between artmaking and everyday life. In that arrangement, habits reorganize: tools migrate into routines, and the kitchen becomes a stage, rehearsal room, and workshop at once. Three “recipes” illustrate this fusion of nourishment and experiment: magnet-influenced ice cream, a vibration-crumbled seismic cake, and vacuum-infused “drunk” blueberries. Together they show how living inside a studio turns eating into a material practice—part sustenance, part performance, and part method for thinking through matter.

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Studio as a Kitchen

*d runk blueberries,
s eismic cake,
electromagnetic ice cream*

Julijonas Urbonas

For the past several decades I have been investing heavily in my studio as I always felt of it as an inseparable part of my body—a machinery of my thinging (thinking-cum-imagining-cum-making). Its configuration, humidity, light, and clutter of tools, choreography of my assistants have always been more than background—they co-engineer what and how I think, each actant, device or residue leaving tactile imprints on imagination. As my thinking evolved, so did my studios—or perhaps it was because of them—which is why they have been so different in terms of space, resources, and infrastructure.

The very first one was actually an amusement park that defined the life-long creative profile of mine even before I considered myself doing art. The amusement park, which was headed by my father, was my substitute kindergarten. Its employees—ride operators, event managers, technicians, cashiers, administrators—were my nannies, who taught me subtle ways of twisting the guts and psyche of the public, and made me see some form of underdeveloped but powerful—often stomach-churning—beauty was lurking in the park. And soon I realised that, for instance, it was unique (if not only) hybrid artistic form that engaged its audience by moving their bodies in space. Such insights fuelled my experimentation with the rides, and when I took over my father's position, I set out to raise the phenomenon to the level of art, labelling the venture "Gravitational Aesthetics." I turned the park into my studio and started two PhD research projects: one, a thesis-based, at Vilnius Academy of Arts, another, a studio-led, at the Royal College of Art. In the meantime, in the park, I was rechoreographing the motion repertoire of the machinery—mostly just slowing them down, and commissioning experimental soundtracks for the rides (partly provoked by another 'studio': running an underground music club at that time).

Later, quitting the directorship and moving away from the park, I experimented with a bit more conventional and down-to-earth format of studio, yet retaining the living-in aspect: I bought a loft and made it an apartment and studio in one. I did it by splitting it vertically—yet keeping it doorless open air space—into two halves each designated for a pair of activity groups of varying messiness. On the ground floor there was laid down the dirty stuff—tools, machinery, kitchen, WC, whereas on the upper 'clean' level—library, computer work desk, bedroom. Living and working in there, it took no time for life to be intermingled with studio work, occasionally discovering the traces of my artworks under development on various parts of the clean zone and my body, and the other way around. The separation between "work time" and "life time" collapsed. Eating, sleeping, daydreaming, and working folded into one another. Living among tools and materials reshaped bodily habits. Gestures of artmaking started to infiltrate daily routines and everything started to be seen as material. It was especially evident in kitchen that became something between a stage, a rehearsal room, and workshop. Food became simultaneously matter, artwork, performance, sustenance and social lubricant in an otherwise deadline-burdened, messy and often dangerous working environment. I started cutting bread with an angle grinder fit with custom made sugarcoated abrasive disc, brazing meat with microplasma welding torch and crumbling cakes with vibration platform. The following three selected recipes are the illustration of how living in a studio for years doesn't just alter how you make art—it reorganises your imagination so thoroughly that even feeding yourself becomes a site of experimentation, blurring nourishment, performance, sculpture, and ritual.

Disclaimer: these recipes are not only food for thought, but also for your taste buds and guts.

Magnetic ice-cream

In 2016, I spent one month in residency at CERN, where I researched the unique properties and imaginary qualities of superconductors—an essential material for particle accelerators, being the Large Hadron Collider, the largest superconducting system in the world. Particularly, I was engaged in quantum magnetic levitation—a phenomenon that occurs when a superconductor at its critical temperature levitates over a magnetic source, known as the Meissner effect. For such experiments I was using powerful magnets and cryogenic equipment that also perfectly served as instant ice-cream machinery. During one of studio visits by curators I even sprinkled iron in the form of powder and served the desert under a high electromagnetic field so that the black particles moved in interaction to the field. Later I mixed the powder in much larger quantities so that the ice cream turned black and the shape shifted (bulging, creeping, or “pinning” toward the magnet) as its surface formed colloidal bumps.

Ingredients:

(base for ~500 g ice cream)

250 ml whole milk

250 ml heavy cream

(or coconut cream for vegan)

80 g sugar

3 egg yolks (custard-style;

or 1 tbsp cornstarch for vegan
thickening)

1 tsp vanilla extract

Ferromagnetic additive

Food-grade iron oxide (E172) or microencapsulated ferric pyrophosphate (iron supplement powder).

⋮

Dose

start with 50–100 mg per serving total ~500 mg for this batch. (That’s within safe supplement range, but never exceed 1–2 g iron total.)

Method

1. Heat
milk + cream + sugar
until warm.

3. Cool to room
temp.

2. Temper in yolks
(or whisk starch slurry)
and cook to custard stage
(~82 °C).

4. Chill over-
night, churn
in ice cream
machine.

5. Whisk in the iron sup-
plement powder thorough-
ly. If using nanoparticles,
disperse in a little milk
first to prevent clumping.

6. Scoop the smooth vanilla ice cream
with a greyish tint (iron oxide darkens
base) and play around next strong mag-
nets that would pull on the iron-rich
zones, creating faint flows, streaks or
shape deformations. I recommend using
large NdFeB blocks (or a Halbach array)
1–5 cm below the plate to get $B \geq 0.1$ T
at the food and gradients ~20–100 T/m.
Ice cream behaves like a soft yield-stress
material. A semi-soft scoop (think ~–5
to –8 °C) typically has a yield stress on the
order of 50–300 Pa. To make it creep or
bulge, the magnetic pressure/body force
needs to be in that ballpark or higher
(~0.05–0.15 T fields are enough to start
bulk deformation in a soft scoop).

In 2018, while designing a set for the opera *Honey, Moon!*, directed also by me, I was experimenting with various machines that might artificially animate the opera's living set—bodybuilders' muscles, for example, by electric muscle stimulation or vibration. One of the apparatuses was a custom designed vibration plate that trembled the fleshy bundles of the person standing on it. As my daily routine, in which food often intermingled with other workshop materials and tools, during the breaks, I'd put different kinds of meals on the vibration platform to relish an edible choreography. One of the most memorable was a crumbling šakotis, a Lithuanian traditional spit cake that, once on the machine with highest settings, collapsed almost instantly into rubbles a lot like high buildings under earthquake.

Šakotis has a crisp outer shell with a light, porous interior. You mainly need to overcome adhesion and friction at crumb interfaces. Once your vibration plate acceleration $\geq 1\text{ g}$, crumbs start to "lose contact" intermittently; 2–3 g gives consistent shedding without turning it into a projectile launcher. 30–60 Hz is a sweet spot for common shakers/eccentric-mass motors and for food—not too low and not so high that you need microscopic amplitudes.

Recipe

1. Start at 40 Hz, 2 *g* (~0.62 mm peak-to-peak amplitude).

Run 5–10 s and observe.

Chill the cake
15–20 min to
embrittle the
crust slightly.

Optional tricks
(if you want more crumble at
lower *g*)

Score along desired break lines
before vibrating.

3. If pieces
fly off, reduce
amplitude.

Practical build notes

Isolation & mass

Mount the plate on soft isolators and bolt to a heavy base so energy goes into the cake, not the bench.

Plate

A perforated plate with short food-safe pins/teeth on which the cake “sits” reduces sliding while still transmitting acceleration.

2. If chunks stick, raise to 2.5–3 *g* or dip to 30–35 Hz while keeping ≥ 2 *g*.

D
runk blueberries

My studio surfaces are peppered with blue dots, marking my obsession with blueberries. I love picking wild blueberries and preserving them by freezing, sun drying, freeze drying, fermenting, vacuum infusing—in different forms so that I can relish them in almost all seasons. Since I love snacking them while busy with machinery, the tiny blue balls often slip out of my hand finding their own way all over the place. It is especially true for the ones infused with vodka. These I made in my vacuum chamber by lowering the pressure around the berries, pulling gases and water out of their porous tissue, then releasing the pressure, thereby rushing the alcohol in, carrying flavour and changing mouthfeel.

Ingredients and Equipment

Fresh blueberries
 (firm ones work best)
 Spirit of choice (vodka, gin,
 rum, eau-de-vie, etc.)
 Vacuum chamber sealer or
 a lab vacuum pump
 with a chamber vessel
 Clean glass jar

Method

1. *Prepare the berries*

Wash and dry blueberries.
Optional: gently prick the skin with a needle for faster infusion.

2. *Combine*

Place berries in a jar.
Add alcohol to cover them fully.

3. *Apply vacuum*

Place the jar (loose lid) in the vacuum chamber.
Pull vacuum gradually. You'll see bubbles escaping from the blueberries (air and dissolved gases).
Hold vacuum for 30–60 seconds to evacuate air.

5. *Infusion time*

After cycling, taste immediately—you'll already notice flavor change. For deeper infusion, store sealed at room temp or fridge for a few days.

Variable vacuum strategy:

Alternate between partial vacuum levels (e.g. -0.4 bar, -0.8 bar, back to -0.2 bar, etc.) rather than a single deep pull. This pumps alcohol in and out, acting like a “marinade pump.”

Ratios:

~2 parts alcohol: 1 part berries is a good starting point.

Tips

Texture effects:

Full deep vacuum can collapse blueberries, giving them a candied/wrinkled texture.

4. *Release pressure*

Slowly vent back to atmosphere. The alcohol is forced into the porous structure. You can repeat the vacuum/vent cycle multiple times (variable vacuum) to increase penetration.

Partial cycling preserves more integrity while still infusing.

In the end, these recipes are less about cuisine than about conditions: how a studio's machines, microclimates, and mess re-script appetite into practice, proving making and eating are not separate disciplines, but adjacent gestures. When the workshop becomes a kitchen, the body becomes both instrument and audience—tested, fed, and recalibrated.

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If there is a lesson here, it is that imagination has a metabolism.



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