



A Toast to Detroit

Chloë Brown

The Detroit Dinner Service

On the evening of **April 4th 2016** a group of twelve women from the city of Detroit, Michigan, USA met to take part in an event organised by British artist Chloë Brown at the Palestine Lodge within the city's Masonic Temple — the world's largest and still active meeting place for Freemasons in Motor City. This event was a unique piece of participatory art: a dinner party for twelve empowered women in a room that usually excludes their gender, in a place where many of Detroit's male industrialists have met in secrecy for decades, in a space that witnessed discussions that shaped the history of a city — discussions that ultimately led to its industrial and social decline. The work highlights the failure of this hidden male power in relation to Detroit's current situation, through an event that is exclusively female, in order to draw attention to the initiatives that these women are developing.

Entitled **The Detroit Dinner Service**, the event sought to question contemporary Detroit as a city in post-industrial crisis, echoing the experience of many cities worldwide that are now experiencing the so-called 'third industrial revolution'. The dinner party was tasked with considering the move from a 'traditional' manufacturing city to a 'modern' one and the alternative futures possible in a place such as Detroit through the activity of a group of women who sit outside the traditional power base of the city.

THE WOMEN OF THE DETROIT DINNER SERVICE ARE:

- 01 ROLA NASHEF** 02:01
Award-winning director, screenwriter and producer best known for her film 'Detroit Unleaded'.
- 02 IMANI S. FOSTER** 03:12
Urban farmer and community activist, Market Coordinator for *Keep Growing Detroit* and *Grown in Detroit*.
- 03 FAINA LERMAN** 01:37
Artist and co-founder of *Poppo Packing*, an artist-run neighbourhood-based arts organisation.
- 04 HALIMA CASSELLS** 01:14
Community engaged artist and co-founder of the *Free Market of Detroit*.
- 05 MARSHA MUSIC** 03:30
Award-winning writer, cultural historian and Detroitist.

The Place

The Greek Ionic Room, the home of the Palestine Lodge, is a space that combines religious and regal imagery to create a symbolically coded sense of awe. At the head of the room are three thrones and above them an illuminated 'G' for 'God'. There are no windows and the acoustics are completely dead, without echo or sustain: soundproofed for secrecy. The room is heavy with Masonic symbolism, but the symbol that took on a particular dominance during this evening was a large wooden skep (a kind of beehive). For the Freemasons the beehive symbolises the industriousness of the worker bees, but for the purposes of *The Detroit Dinner Service* this skep came to represent the Queen Bee. The object was placed on the altar in the centre of the room and it was from here that each woman took on the mantle of Queen Bee and delivered her **Toast to Detroit**.

A Toast to Detroit

Each of the women who attended *The Detroit Dinner Service* delivered A Toast to Detroit — a tribute to their city. Brown made audio recordings of the toasts and it is these recordings that form this **12 track LP**, ensuring that the voices of these women can be heard outside the event itself, outside the room **soundproofed for secrecy** and in a format that reflects the richness of the city's cultural history, particularly the soul music of Motown and Northern Soul.

The Dinner Party

The meal was designed and prepared by Detroit-based chef and food activist Alison Heeres. Much of the food served was grown or sourced by urban farmer, Gwen Meyer at their shared enterprise, Coriander Farm. The menu was designed with the female hand in mind, everything being handmade, as a rejection of the machines commonly used in cooking.

THE MENU

- FIRST COURSE:**
Spring Consommé — rich and clear sunchoke (Jerusalem artichoke) broth, Coriander Farm sprouts (kale, pea, radish, and cilantro), and fresh cheese stuffed pelmeni (a Russian soup dumpling).
- SECOND COURSE:**
Mother's roast chicken with chanterelle mushrooms, dried apple and barley.
- THIRD COURSE:**
Anise hyssop and cherry custard hand-raised pie with Detroit honey and nasturtium flowers.

The Aprons

At the start of the evening, Brown gave each woman an apron to wear throughout the dinner party. She made these in reference to the ceremonial aprons that are part of the Freemasons regalia, but whilst the Mason's aprons are of white leather, referring to those traditionally worn by craftsmen, her aprons were of white linen, a tongue-in-cheek gesture towards the traditionally female domestic environment of the kitchen and decorated with purple and green ribbons, the colours of the Suffragette movement.

The Dinner Service

The food was served on a bone china **36-piece** dinner service, also titled **The Detroit Dinner Service**. Made in Stoke-on-Trent, it uses a **9 metre** long drawing Brown made of a route through Detroit to decorate the dinner service. This scroll-like ink drawing, **From Alfred Street to Temple Street, Detroit (2015)**, was made in Brown's studio in Sheffield using Google Maps Street View as a way of 'walking' through the city from afar. The drawing starts at the scrub-land where the Brewster-Douglass Housing Projects once stood and ends at the Masonic Temple. The apartment blocks, demolished in **2014**, were where many Motown stars grew up including Diana Ross, Florence Ballard and Mary Wilson. By lining up the dinner plates, the side plates or the bowls, the drawing and therefore the route can be recreated.

Both the drawing and the dinner service used at the event are in the collection of the **Detroit Institute of Arts**.

Henry Ford

One member of Palestine Lodge was of particular interest to Brown: Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company. He was a controversial figure: an Anti-Semite who actively employed black workers, whose revolutionary manufacturing approach led to the notion of 'Fordism' — the mass production of inexpensive cars alongside high wages for the workers, and who is arguably partly responsible for both the boom and the bust of Detroit. Before the dinner party began, Brown pointed to the place where Ford would habitually sit on one of the green leather benches that line the room. The women of *The Detroit Dinner Service* acknowledged the presence of the ghost of Henry Ford as a witness to whatever was about to unfold during the course of the dinner party. And with this the meal began and the women started to talk.

WITH THANKS TO:

CHRISTINA DE ROOS
Artist, activist and director of *Kresge Arts in Detroit*. Christina acted as host and observer throughout the event.

SIDE A



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SOFT REBELLION RECORDS

PHOTOGRAPHY:
GRACE HIGGINS BROWN
DESIGN: [HTTP://DU.ST](http://DU.ST)

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The Soft Rebellions

Chloë Brown, Visual Artist (UK B.1964)

Since 2013 British artist Chloë Brown has been working in the post-industrial cities of Stoke-on-Trent and Sheffield (her hometown) and in Detroit to conduct artistic research into what she terms *Soft Rebellions*, which are a series of actions and events that involve dancing, eating, talking and applauding in places where it is considered inappropriate to do so.

She has been visiting Detroit since 2015, a city renowned for being the epitome of a place in post-industrial crisis, with her interest extending to

the development of soul music, particularly through Motown Records and Northern Soul during the 1960s and '70s. Using the histories of these cities, she challenges, questions and contributes to specific narratives, working and collaborating with the people who live there. These *Soft Rebellions* seek to question the post-industrial situation by rejecting the production of 'ruin porn' and other dystopian responses in favour of art work that is celebratory and empowering.

