

A meal to die for. Published in Expressen Kultur 21 March, 2005

Bigert & Bergström provide a somewhat tasteless class analysis of a holy sacrament

Hymnals fall to the floor with a bang and nylon raincoats rustle wildly as the hard-core little old ladies rush into the aisle to be first in line for communion. The tasty little crackers melt delightfully in the mouths of the righteous. Only sinners remain in the pews. And there I sat at the back, under the fading paintings of Golgotha. I stared at the supersized Catholic crucifix behind the altar and in true teenage style refused to devour the body and blood every Sunday.

Anyone can feel a rush of mortal fear when the priest uncorks the sacramental wine. And the whole creepy, yet aesthetically perfect combination of mystical symbolism and actual guilt feelings naturally makes holy communion a powerful event even in the most mundane of artistic contexts.

For example, the artist duo Bigert & Bergström's puritanically designed film *the Last Supper*, which serves to introduce the evening's theme on SVT of capital punishment, is about the no-holds-barred dinner that prisoners on death row are served the night before their execution. It contains references to Jesus's last night out with the gang and the whole ritual of communion throughout history. But in Bigert & Bergström's interpretation of the Eucharist, the last meal is not a sacred symbol of atonement, but just a large portion of disgusting social realism. Noses are wrinkled, jiggly bits of meat are tossed around, onion rings are lowered into vats of grease, endless chicken wings are served and poopy pants are showcased until the viewer simply wants to vomit.

Because most people who are executed in American prisons actually request everyday items like hamburgers and French fries before taking leave of life. In an interview in the Swedish daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* on February 26, the gourmets Bigert & Bergström explained that people who are condemned to death in the United States come from such poor social environments that they have no relationship with anything but junk food: "they don't even know what foie gras is."

So the point of the film is not only to be disgusted by the way the prisoners die, but also by the ungodly food they eat. And suddenly the *Last Supper* is not about forgiveness and dignity anymore, it's about a great filthy deadly sin: gluttony. About fat, dumb, criminal first-world slobs eating themselves to death on McDonald's. Bigert & Bergström quite simply undertake a tasteless class analysis of this form of holy sacrament. The priest's voice echoes through the church as he intones, "On the night He was betrayed, He took bread and gave thanks. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: 'Take this, all of you, and eat it.'" Biblical quotes like this are hardly appetizing. But on some level it's still about respect. For the meal. And for death.

Natalia Kazmierska

<https://www.expressen.se/kultur/en-maltid-att-do-for/>