About the authors:

Hannah Landecker is a historian and social scientist of the modern life sciences, and a Professor of Sociology and Society and Genetics at the University of California Los Angeles.

Cooking Sections investigates the systems that shape the world through food, tracing the spatial legacies of extractivism. Their installations and performances operate across art, architecture, ecology, and geopolitics.

Originally presented at MAPS – Museum of Art in Public Space in Køge, Denmark, the exhibition forms part of the long-term collaboration between Cooking Sections and Trafó titled Becoming CLIMAVORE. The climate crisis is transforming not only the four familiar seasons but also the seasons of production. This serves as the starting point for the collective's ongoing Becoming CLIMAVORE project, launched in 2015, which advocates for a radical transformation of agricultural practices and food cultures. CLIMAVORE is a long-term, site-responsive project, exploring how to eat as humans, how it affects climate change and how to metabolise climate breakdown. CLIMAVORE uses cultural platforms to amplify civic resistance: to this end, they introduce new seasons that both draw attention to pressing local ecological issues and, through partnerships with various arts institutions, explore regenerative solutions and alternatives.

Cooking Sections was founded in London in 2013 by Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe. Their projects have been exhibited at institutions and events including Tate Britain, Serpentine Galleries, SALT Istanbul, Bonniers Konsthall in Stockholm, Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, Lafayette Anticipations in Paris, HKW in Berlin, the Delfina Foundation in London, the Taipei Biennial, the 58th Venice Biennale, the Shanghai Biennale, the Los Angeles Public Art Triennial, the Sharjah Architecture Triennial, the Sharjah Biennial, Performa 17, Manifesta 12, the Folkestone Triennial, and Prospect New Orleans. They are Readers in Architecture and Spatial Practice at the Royal College of Art, London.

Cooking Sections was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2021, received the Special Prize at the 2019 Future Generation Art Prize and was nominated for the Visible Award for socially-engaged practices.

Opening:

18 September 2026 (Friday) 6pm

On view:

19 September – 8 November 2026

Free entrance

18 September 2026 (Friday) 20:30

Artist talk with participating artists – Iza Tarasewicz, Justyna Stasiowska, Cooking Sections, Csakoda – Main Hall

19 September 2026 (Friday) 20:00

Conversation between Cooking Sections and historian and social scientist Hannah Landecker – Trafó Gallery, Main Hall

The House that Pigs Built is a work
by Cooking Sections, 2026
Developed in collaboration with Hannah Landecker
Studio team: Max Cooper-Clark, Rosa Whiteley
Performed by: London Contemporary Voices
(Connor Going, ILĀ, Rocco, Mia Shelbourne)
Sound and Music: Richy Carey
Metal fabrication: Mitre & Mondays
Recording: Urchin Studios
Data science and AI: Aleph2
Online platform: An Endless Supply

Originally commissioned by MAPS with the support of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, CIFAR Future Flourishing Programme and the British Academy.

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The opening is part of Trafó's transdisciplinary focus Rural–Urban Relations.

trafó galéria

COOKING SECTIONS THE HOUSE THAT PIGS BUILT

Cooking Sections (Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe) investigates the systems that shape the world through food, tracing the spatial, ecological, and political legacies of extractivism. They observe and analyze our transforming landscapes, the metabolic networks of industrial food production, and the impact of climate change on food systems. Using installations, performances, and video, their practice confronts the overlapping boundaries of art, architecture, ecology, and geopolitics. Based on several years of research conducted in collaboration with science historian Hannah Landecker, the exhibition at Trafó Gallery invites us to reconsider our relationship with industrial livestock farming and, more specifically, with pigs.

Within a space that resembles a domestic environment, a cumulative tale unfolds through a variety of objects, giving voice to the invisible infrastructures that shape our everyday lives. A polyphonic chorus of furniture, household items, and architectural elements reveals how pigs' bodies are transformed into the materials that shape and make our surroundings, and how this process, in turn, affects the bodies of pigs and the industries that "produce" them.

Industrial pig farming, which poses significant ecological risks, is generally considered important primarily from the perspective of food production. Yet these facilities do far more than produce meat products: their operations are deeply intertwined with the construction industry, chemical manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and biotechnology. During the processing of animal renderings, organs, tissues, and various hormones are extracted from pigs for uses such as insulin production and the manufacture of anticoagulants. What remains of the animals' bodies is further utilized by the construction industry. From superhydrophobic coatings and seamless finishes to concrete additives that improve flowability, the by-products of pig farming surround us in countless ways. These materials have played a significant role in shaping the aesthetics of our built environment; they help insulate buildings, soften our clothing, ensure the "frictionless" operation of transportation systems, provide viscosity to our toothpaste, moisturize and tighten our skin, and make pain-relief capsules easier to swallow. Over the past century, industrial animal farming and its processing industries have thus increasingly determined not only the materials around us, but also how we perceive the world and position ourselves within it.

trafó galéria

Substances extracted from the fat, tissue and bones of animal bodies – particularly pigs – have for over a century been a more or less invisible part of everyday life. Derived from slaughterhouse waste, purified and processed, they enable materials to solidify or flow, to emulsify or shine. In *the House that Pigs built*, visitors enter a domestic environment in which each component literally speaks about their own making. Referencing children's rhymes and cumulative folktales, the house whispers a fable of extraction and shared material cycles through rhythmic structures in which one being consumes and is consumed by another. The by-products rendered from the animal industry to create foam, enable fat and water to mix, retain moisture, or generate waterproof surfaces enter an economy in which waste is transformed into value, sustaining landscapes and bodies scarred by pig megafarms.

The little red hen bakes bread. The old woman swallows a fly. The pig jumps a stile. The pancake leaps out of the pan and flees, outpacing a growing crowd of erstwhile eaters. Cumulative tales or chain folktales span cultures and traditions, their accelerating repetition portraying the nested character of the world, in which one thing is within another – the tree in a hole and the hole in a bog and the bog down in the valley-o. Or, often, how one creature eats another. This is the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built. This is the cat that killed the rat, this is the dog that worried the cat. A village chases a wolf that eats a goat that eats a stalk...

In the House that Pigs built, the objects of everyday domestic life sing the cumulative tale of our own times and landscapes. The contemporary pig jumps no stiles nor swims any streams to convince a runaway pancake to ride on its snout. Instead, chemical agencies rendered from pigs become the protagonists of tales of surface activity, hydrophobicity and sheen, moving through the world binding and repelling other substances. These agencies, which reside everywhere in the interiors and commodities of everyday life, are born from the body well beyond the more obvious harvesting of pigs for meat, literally arising from the ashes of the grease, bones, and connective tissue rendered from slaughter waste. Such materials are boiled, heated, ground, and pressurised to yield fats, proteins and bonemeal that then go through further rigorous disassembly. With the help of various distilling apparatuses, solvents, and furnaces, pig materials are split apart, only to re-enter other chemical unions, bonding to or coating other minerals and petrochemicals. One cannot help but marvel at the complex series of operations. Deconstruction and reconstitution are key processes of industrial progress: foaming agents to make things mix need de-foaming agents to avoid machine breakdown. Things are constantly separated into simplified elements that are later compounded again in oxymoronic ways: hardened to soften, purified to mix, evaporated to liquify and solidify.

In these processes, fatty acids are split from their glycerol backbone, severing what started as lard into separate components on separate trajectories through the world as manufacturing and processing agents endowing separate properties to things. One pig-derived molecule might become an emulsifier, a substance whose polar character helps bind water and oil. Another might become a humectant, its capacity for drawing water to it used to keep a viscous solid such as toothpaste moist and flowable. Bones go a different route, stripped and ground and thermally decomposed, turned into mineral ions. Then, these characters might reconvene in toothpaste or cat food, or for that matter in pig feed, meeting there not because of their common origin or species affinity, but added for their capacity to smooth and moisten, to whiten, to homogenize. The pig constitutes both object and subject in this series of deconstructions and reconstructions, at once the source for extraction and consumer of its products, eating emulsifiers and palatants; scoured by antibacterial disinfectants; supplemented with minerals from its own species' bones.

This is the pig feed of the endless loop
that builds liver, bone 'n skin
that gave the acid
that formed GMS
that thickened the gelatin
that seeped from bones
that yielded the palatant
announcing the kibble
that fed the pets
that played in the House that Pigs built.

In the House that Pigs built, more than a century's worth of animals becoming chemicals and chemicals becoming animals has been at work, shaping our expectations of how things look or feel. Industrial re-uses of animal "waste" waxed and waned over the twentieth century, as door handles made from pig blood and sawdust were displaced by other material composites and blood was repurposed as fertiliser and animal feed. Technologies of fat splitting were established in the stockyards and abattoirs of the United States and northern Europe in the early twentieth century. Denmark, in particular, became the archetype of highly efficient pig farming and slaughter, sustaining its models on centrifugal milk-separating technologies that recirculated surplus skimmed milk into casein glues and pig feed, as well as meat exports to Britain and Germany, that had prioritised industrial development over agricultural productivity. And so, right before WWI, Hungarian agricultural engineer Károly Ereky, inspired by the Danish pig slaughterhouse worker-owned cooperatives that he travelled to study, founded a pioneering 50-hectare factory-farm in Nagytétény in 1912 that could fatten 100,000 pigs annually and produced 80-90% of Hungary's pig products – allegedly one of the largest, most profitable meat and fat operations in the world at the time. His dream was to make Hungary into a Denmark, and the city into a total processing machine: "Budapest's stomach." Ereky viewed the pig as a Biotechnologische Arbeitsmaschine (biological machine) designed to convert feed inputs into fat and meat outputs, leading him to coin the term "biotechnology" as the process of biologically converting raw materials into socially useful products.

After early experiments in Denmark, and drawing upon Ereky's scientific developments, the volume of generated byproducts from rendering pork waste at industrial scale established a global market in purified glycerin and fatty acids that had expanded in scale to the hundreds of thousands of tons by the 1940s. Fatty acids as a profitable commodity form then became a draw for tall oil waste byproducts from pulp and paper processing and synthetic forms made from fossil fuel. Competition from this new fungibility between sources of industrial fats pushed yet more rounds of innovation and consumption in the revalorisation of animal waste, such as the post-war invention of fabric softeners and anti-cling dryer sheets made by bonding ammonia and fatty acids into new petro-animal molecules.

A midcentury modern of distillation apparatuses and processing agents underlies a contemporaneous architectural and bodily aesthetic of clean lines, shiny surfaces, white teeth, and soft fabrics. Today we would be hard-pressed to know which glycerol monostearate (GMS) molecule or calcium phosphate compound spent time as back fat or shinbone, and which circulated first through a coconut or was mined from bird guano. Yet humans and pigs alike are consumed in this material flow of superhydrophobic coatings and seamless finishes, moldable agents that make cement flow and wall panels antibacterial. Revalorisations of waste transform markets for pig-derived rendering products into markets for slipperiness, emollience, cleanliness. And the market for sheen and clean becomes as much a motive force in the economic engine of industrial farming as a receptacle of its byproducts. Thus the pig is in the building, in that its bodily materials have been rendered into surfaces, finishes, and household goods. The reverse is a bit harder to perceive, but one may equally say that the building is in the pig, animal life shaped materially by eating these very same emulsifiers and detergents, and economically by the market in aesthetic goods that supports the industrial form of the factory farm in the first place.

The codevelopment of modern aesthetics and economies of growth and slaughter has long been based on animal byproducts. Icons in the history of 20th-century design (plied wood, bent tubular steel, high-span beams, soft weaves, germ-free ceramic) necessitate porkmodern geometries, textures, and material processes that do not exist without pig rendering technologies. This animalisation of industries developed over the 20th century makes us not only live on the inside of the product of the byproduct, but has also required that many people live with the outsides of what that entails – the residue that is externalised and not factored in as waste. The space that visitors find themselves in reverberates the relentless poetry of contemporary processing, from the undead depths of everyday objects, circling through the pig becoming world and the world becoming pig. And what a world it is. Industrial pork megafarms dominate the agricultural landscape, driving a system of intensive breeding and genetic modification in which sows are engineered to birth more than twice the natural number of piglets, producing tens of thousands of dead piglets every day as a collateral. These integrated facilities deplete groundwater systems through manure runoff, often sprayed as fertiliser on fields, leaching into protected natural areas and eventually into peatlands, wetlands, rivers and seas.

One should not need pig fat-based sealant to seal homes, but the processes that emerged from distilling and splitting pig fat have made such insulation affordable for the masses, an economy of scale bringing formerly luxurious materials and surfaces into the reach of many more consumers. Pig bodies are rendered into properties of smoothness and hydrophobicity that seem to be everywhere and come from nowhere, yet people still live in the places in which these bodies grow and die. Here, the result of economies of domestic comfort is life lived with the residue of pig value right in front of the door, and there is no window silicone or glass coating on the market capable of stopping the stench or blurring the view.

Sensing the extractivist aftermath embedded in animal circulation across bodies, domestic interiors and bog landscapes is not simple. It requires crossing knowledge systems concerning the chemistry of industrialised pigs, the history of slaughterhouses, the design principles of modern architecture, and the many possibilities for sonic unpacking of what is cumulative in accumulation and appreciation. Indeed, 3D rendering aesthetics and technologies involved in making mass market interiors desirable were also needed in order to visualise and stage the installation. Sharpening our awareness required rendering these aesthetics audible through a flock of asynchronous characters: door, laundry rack, window, table, chair, cat bowl, toilet, floor tile, bed, kitchen counter, and toothpaste tube. We can thereby better sense the role these house parts play in the industrialisation of animal life and see what circularity actually means for the bodies along the cycles of reuse. We may then ask what implications for animals and environments it carries, and what is hidden in revalorisation. This is a cumulative tale warning us that making something circular does not necessarily make it sustainable. Indeed, making circular economies does not make problems go away. the House that Pigs built resonates with the sound of connected parts of a dismembered home speaking their voice, telling tales of our times.