

Stormen  
**kunst**  
**dájdda**

**Mikael Lo Presti**  
**FEAST**  
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## ***FEAST***

### **I. Souvenir**

Cicero, the famous Latin orator, once told a story about a feast-turned-tragedy, and its role in the creation of the classical art of memory. This art form, long since forgotten, was used by the ancient orators to remember long speeches. In the first step, the memory artist creates an imaginary palace in their mind. The palace has a set of rooms that one can pass through in a specific order. Secondly, each room is furnished with chairs, tables, etc. The memory artist familiarizes themselves with every nook of this virtual palace, staying there as if it were a home away from home.

In the last step, the memory artist places a thing they wish to remember in a specific room in the palace. For example: an image of a palm tree, hung like a painting on the dining room wall. Whenever the memory artist wants to retrieve this image, they enter into the palace of their mind, make their way to the dining room and the image is there. Like a word pressed into a wax tablet. The act of impressing the image on the surface is seared into memory and allows for the image to be recalled at any time.

### **II. From dusk till dawn**

We have to try to picture the feast from Cicero's story. Somewhere in the Thessaly region of Ancient Greece, a lavish palace bakes in the sun. Inside, a long oak table overflows with food and wine. During the feast, the poet Simonides recites a poem in honor of his host. But he spends too much time praising the twin gods Castor and Pollux. Offended, the host refuses to pay the poet in full. Simonides is summoned outside to meet two visitors but he is surprised to find no one there. At that moment, the palace roof collapses, killing everyone inside. By drawing the poet away from danger, the twin gods ensured Simonides was well compensated for the incomplete payment.

*Sound of rats gnawing.* The lights are out and the party is over. An odor of spoiled fish and cider-braised onions hangs in the room. From behind a cupboard, a pair of rats emerge and cautiously climb on top of the dining room rug. *Squeak*, says the first one and the companion nods in affirmation. In front of them lay the host and his guests – all dead now. A feast, violently crushed under the collapsed roof of the banquet hall. Relatives arriving at the scene are not able to recognize their loved ones among the disfigured bodies. But

Simonides recalls the seating arrangement, from which he can identify every person. From this experience the poet learns that memory relies on order and arrangement. And from this story, Simonides is credited with the invention of the classical art of memory.

### **III. Ratatouille forever**

*Sound of rats in Paris.* Waking up in a foreign apartment, yesterday is a dark green fog. Clues arrive in bright flashes of daylight, only emphasizing the mystery of night. One remembers the cute rat across the table. But who were the rest and what secrets did one reveal? Whatever the case, a feast of oblivion requires a miracle cure. And this often involves a breakfast of eggs and tomatoes. The latter must be finely sliced across the equator. An afternoon in the shade finally brings convalescence. But as one relaxes into the cushioned comfort of the next day, a terrible decision lingers. Should one commit to remember?

Eventually, the squid from last night's dinner enters into mind's eye. The image marks a shift from present to past, producing a double – a conflation of real and virtual time. World and image exist simultaneously and act upon each other, reminiscent of the memory palace of the ancient orator. The memory artist, the poet, and the painter alike, bring this home away from home into orbit, and draw from its endless stream.

### **IV. End**

Cicero's story about Simonides is a founding narrative of memory and recollection, tracing an arc that begins with the collective euphoria of the feast. Drinking together symbolizes a first era of communal bliss, where everyone kisses and tells, and the weight of tomorrow's hangover is a silly phantom. But during an altered state produced by intoxication, time is given on credit. From the very beginning, lurking disaster is a shadow component of the feast.

*Concerned squeak.*

Erik Lavesson

*FEAST* is written as a companion piece to Mikael Lo Presti's exhibition *FEAST* at Stormen kunst/dájdda in Bodø opening on May 25, 2024. Erik Lavesson is a writer and filmmaker based in Stockholm.