

Art Books

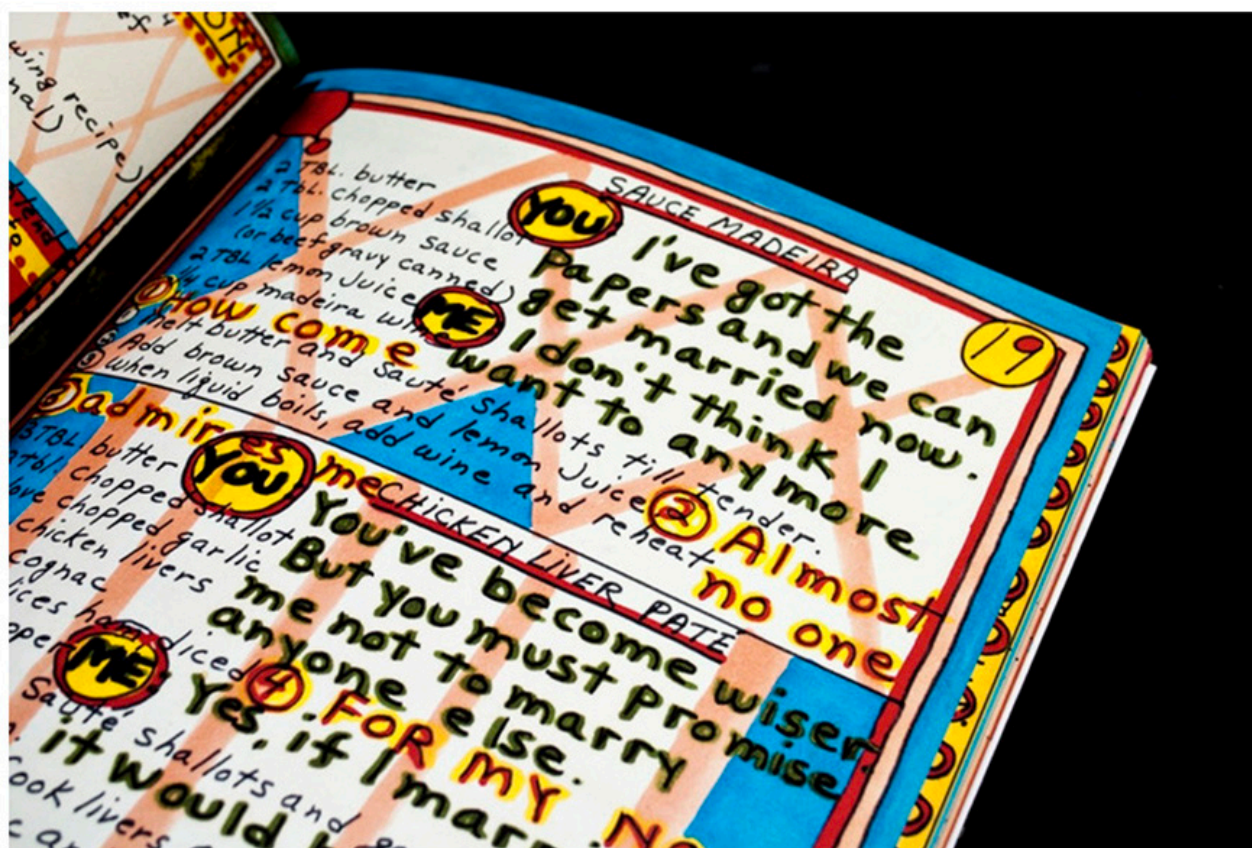
Dorothy Iannone: A Cookbook

by [Shelby Shaw](#)



In 1969, America saw the first edition of *Betty Crocker's Cookbook* (which has sold over 75 million copies since), written by a fictitious persona crafted by General Mills; risqué *Cosmopolitan* editor Helen Gurley Brown published her *Single Girl's Cookbook*; and *Alice's Restaurant Cookbook* was released with an accompanying Arlo Guthrie introduction on vinyl. While these popular kitchen aids were written by successful feminine personas selling their versions of commercial domesticity, artist Dorothy Iannone's *A Cookbook*, published the same year, is stuffed with both an international catalogue of recipes and a generous helping of Iannone's personal prerogatives.

Born in Boston in 1933 and educated in literature, she taught herself to paint and exhibited alongside her husband, painter James Upham, in Manhattan throughout much of the '60s. Thematically anchored in eroticism, Iannone's art became distinct for her uncensored diaristic thoughts and sexuality. Within a week of meeting Swiss artist Dieter Roth in 1967, Iannone divorced Upham and moved to Europe for the next seven years with Roth as her partner, collaborator, and subject (a fact often noted in exhibition catalogues and in Iannone's biography, but oddly appearing less frequently in Roth's, despite the two artists' very public mutual influence). To capture this "ecstatic union," Iannone began a recipe book in 1968, which doubled as a scrapbook and tripled as a sketchbook. *A Cookbook* merges an affinity for pleasurable cooking with the autobiography of a woman in love, heartache, and absolute creative flourishing, uncensored on the page.



“In my atelier, I worked on the *Cookbook* on a drawing table, and when I had had enough of that, I resumed painting one of my large canvases,” writes Iannone in her opening remarks to the newly printed facsimile, published on its 50th anniversary from JRP|Ringier. “Reading the comments with which each page of the *Cookbook* is adorned, I realize that nothing less than love could have prompted the transforming of an accumulation of recipes into a work of art.” Love, yes, but also an unabashed candor of restlessness in her relationship with Roth, giving the book an authentically raw charm very unlike the era’s more common cookbooks. With full bleeds of sensational colors and sneaky notations urgently consuming every blank spot between ingredient lists and cooking instructions, flipping through *A Cookbook* is like finding the obsessively-doodled notes of a lovelorn schoolgirl who has had countless hours and pages and plenty of markers at her disposal. Her musings intersect and weave between the numerous recipes on each page, as in:

“I must admit I begin” (*Sponge Layers*) “to take pleasure in a 15-year old boy carefully” (*Rib of beef al Barolo*) “eyeing me” (*Rigatoni con Ricotta*).

And:

“Called for you” (*Alan’s Sauce*) “yesterday. Here you come today.” (*Diter’s Haddock with Mustard Sauce*) “Baby you can’t love” (*Fried Clams*) “me and treat me that way.” (*Liver Sweet and Sour*) “That’s an old song” (*Pork Chops with Mustard*).

While Iannone was kept busy with painting her large-scale “Eros” canvases, a series begun in 1968 that would total 10 paintings by 1971 in celebration of her sexual liberation with Roth, *A Cookbook* captured the peripheral runoff of her creative mind in motion. The book acted as a recorder of her priorities at the time: write a recipe, aestheticize it, insert a line about her lover (“For a man who rejoices in his contradictions, you are quite an absolutist” [*Lapin Chasseur*]), her own self-reflecting monologue (“Female was the transitional

word from girl” [*Strawberry Bavarian Cream*] “which I always almost choked on” [*Spinach Parmesan*]), a lover’s lament (“Just 1000 more embraces and I promise to keep quiet” [*Orange Bavarian Cream*]), or an aphorism (“It’s embarrassing to say one is a Leo” [*Chicken Paté Loaf*]). Voilà.



The utilitarian objective of *A Cookbook*, “to have my favorite recipes always with me when I cooked for my peripatetic beloved,” is alchemized into a dossier of Iannone’s stream-of-consciousness. Her commentary overshadows each recipe as if to distract the reader from focusing solely on the task of a woman cooking for her lover—a role still firmly sponsored by society. Instead, Iannone’s diaristic layers reveal her inner dogma to be a cornucopia of feminism ripened right alongside conventional gender roles. She expresses her love for Roth, but she also expresses her frustration, concern, and apprehensiveness towards these feelings. The radical beauty of *A Cookbook* is

that she never shies away from her relationship, instead she intentionally highlights her ruminations. It is an astounding documentary of a woman's creativity and honesty, as well as a culinary treasure.

If the kitchen has traditionally been delegated to women as their workplace, Iannone proves that a modern woman's kitchen extends into the atelier, the bedroom, and the imagination—and it is precisely this ownership that is the secret ingredient to every one of her recipes.

Contributor

Shelby Shaw

SHELBY SHAW is a multidisciplinary writer based in New York, where she co-edits the biannual art and literary journal *Storyfile*. She is the program coordinator for Projections, the New York Film Festival's section devoted to artists' films and experimental moving images, and works with the IFC Center in Manhattan.