

ORIGINS OF GENIUS

British photographer Hannah Collins embarked on a global voyage to capture the stories behind some of the key ingredients used by Catalan chef Ferran Adrià.



Seaweed

London artist Hannah Collins is based part-time in Barcelona, and has a portfolio of work that includes photos, films and books. We put some questions to her about one of her latest projects, the results of which can be seen this month at the *Fundació Suñol*.

Why and when did you decide to spend part of your time living and working in Barcelona? I moved to Barcelona in 1989—I wanted to bring up my daughter, who was then a year old, away from London and I found Barcelona very interesting at that time. I lived full-time in Barcelona until 2001 when I took a job as a professor in the University of California starting up a media department. Since that time, I live in Barcelona part-time and the rest of the time I travel, like many other people, I guess. I have always loved the relaxed, local feel of the city, though of course it's changed a lot over the years.

How did you first get to know Ferran Adrià? In your opinion, what is it that makes his work so special? I got to know Ferran in the first place because a collector gave him a photograph of mine—it's a picture of a man's hands with five eggs balanced between the fingers. He has it in his *taller* [workshop]. We then met over this project. He has a unique hold on the connection we have to what we eat; he is also witty and totally involved in his practice—it's a highly disciplined thing. But you should read my book, which speaks a lot about how Ferran's work and mine have intersected in this project.

Did you ever eat at El Bulli? I have eaten in El Bulli—it's not really the dishes but more the attitude and the precision of what they did that is impressive and the level of inventiveness. I have been looking at the things from the world that go into the kitchen so that is really my viewpoint more than the dishes themselves: roses, honey, bottarga [cured fish roe] and so on. The meal as an event is amazing though—time flies by. I particularly liked the coconut Easter Egg as it reminds me of a prehistoric dinosaur egg; it seems to have nothing to do with a kitchen.



Honey

Why did you decide to embark on this global voyage—taking in Europe, Latin American and Japan—to capture the 30 or so featured ingredients? The project was a decision between myself and Ferran...it was always about looking at the way we use different things to make food—he chose the things and I went to where they came from. So, he uses roses from Ecuador, for instance—it was important to go to the exact place each thing came from. I discovered that things come from particular locations for very particular reasons: for instance, anemones which Ferran has used come from Cadiz, where the Atlantic and Mediterranean meet; honey from northern Italy [where there are] whole areas of [just] one flower, so the honey can be made only from [that] one flower and has a particular colour and taste.

What do you think of Barcelona's own food markets nowadays?

I have shopped in Barcelona's markets since the week I arrived in Barcelona—I used to hate it when they closed a market for a while and worked on the building but it's usually done with great respect for the stall-holders, and the markets have stayed viable and modernised with time in a good way. Only the Boqueria has maybe suffered, particularly as tourism has encouraged the stall-holders to stock different things that are more about immediate consumption and less about cooking and the kitchen. I love to shop in the market but again you really have to read the book to know that!

Read the full interview online at: www.barcelona-metropolitan.com/hannahcollins

El Festi Fràgil. Rutes a Ferran Adrià (The Fragile Feast. Routes to Ferran Adrià). Fundació Suñol (Passeig de Gràcia 98, www.fundaciosunol.org), until September 1st. The accompanying book of the same name, available in English and Castilian, is on sale at Vinçon (Passeig de Gràcia 96), www.vincon.com