

# THE BOX WAS LIKE THE DICE IT HELD (ODE TO CHANGE)

WRITTEN FOR THE OCCASION OF THE  
EXHIBITION *COOKING WITH JOHN*  
AT HAYDENS, MELBOURNE  
(22 MAY – 5 JUNE 2021), ORGANISED BY  
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## FIGS & GARLIC

the sign we pass on our way into Shepparton through pastures  
land  
the size of  
gums! rows of flaking trees long years've become of them. John mentions a past  
thought of living amongst his friends, a small area of land for-them-all-to-share, each  
with a respective house: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6... He'd walk between them in the AM sun offering  
a wake-up cup, sips of coffee and banter. Perhaps around here? We're visiting  
his pottery collection on all levels of the museum this February morning, even  
in the basement—looking at them scattered within all walls.

And was it then? That day, that he handed me the box. 3.7 x 5.6. Clear plastic. One hinge.  
He'd chanced upon it at an op shop, a sticker on its base: \$.50 it read and above, the  
numbers 3/2. Inside  
lay a  
set of  
dice. Three  
pairs, or two  
rows of three;  
six faces facing upwards. Chance said,  
there's 36 different ways two dice can land. I shook the box, 1-2, 4-4, 1-5.

Some weeks before I'd mentioned that I want to make dice myself, first in wax then cast in  
bronze. Though when scraping out tiny hemispheres in patterns to resemble numbers—  
little holes for one to six—I'd wondered whether I would change the weight of each side  
and unbalance the luck of each face. He said this box might help me understand how to  
make chance my own, how to make dice chance-ready. Surely we can ask more of the world,  
we thought, beyond rolls between six numbers <vast lands> a dice that rolls north.

I think about this other time, mid-May, how over a pastry he'd asked, "Have you been to  
DIA Beacon? If not, go." As if the choice were already made, as if the learning started  
then. New York in two weeks and he'd told me, I must visit this museum this collection  
of formalities—boxes, in NYC, no, just outside of it, an hour train ride—to see what a  
box could, if it would. Donald Judd, Walter de Maria, Fred Sandbeck. I later learn that  
the building which housed their artworks used to be Nabisco's—The National Biscuit  
Company's—built to make boxes for its products, to house containers for its cookies.  
A box factory! DIA used to be a biscuit-box factory.

## GREEN & RED

sign again  
two lines

## ALL CAPS

a white sandwich-board resting over some chairs. After lunch on our way back to  
Melbourne when this time we stop, through a long gravel driveway between rows of  
cacti, where Rocky meets us and Rocky says to us that they come around from everywhere  
this time of year for these figs this garlic, they drive for hours for these bulbs this fruit,  
what a pairing. But we chanced upon their lusciousness, driving off with a fruit box  
lined with Rocky's family of figs, his fists of garlic, in kilos. Magic works  
in pairs, the weight of chance in it.

Though what I thought was a box of chance is really a box of choice. To roll a dice,  
a multifaceted experience. To roll and then, spacious,  
to create a box to be free that freedom feels it, clear and makes it  
all the more brighter. Shades of one colour, shade, the position of a tree,  
choice in a cube. John had shared how to build a frame for chance to live in.  
You've built this vast house, now explore it.\*

Rachel Schenberg

SPECIAL THANKS TO  
TIM COSTER &  
ADAM CRUICKSHANK

**\* THIS LINE I FOUND IN JOANNE  
KYGER'S POEM "THE PERSIMMONS  
ARE FALLING," IN *GOING ON:  
SELECTED POEMS, 1958-1980***