



Iwona Majdan in her Plateau Montreal kitchen. The Dinner Project is about bringing people together and breaking communication barriers, she says. "Human connection is very important. I think maybe we're getting away from that."

## Guess who's coming to dinner?

Iwona Majdan, BFA 97  
The Dinner Project, Montreal

If you were stopped on the street by a total stranger and invited along with a friend for a lovely dinner, in your own apartment, would you accept?

Iwona Majdan, BFA 97, hopes so, just as many have as part of the Dinner Project, an experiment combining the art of cooking with the art of communication. Begun last June, each week the Concordia Fine Arts graduate approaches someone on the streets of Montreal and offers to cook a meal for him or her and a guest — *chez lui (ou elle)*. If agreed, the person signs a contract for the following Sunday, when Majdan will arrive with pots and pans and food in hand (and a guest of her own).

Funded by a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts as well as some private sponsors, Majdan's elaborate meals not only entice people into letting her into their homes but also allow her to watch the interaction of her subjects and record her observations in an online

journal ([thedinnerproject.com](http://thedinnerproject.com)).

The Sunday night dinners, with ingredients provided by Montreal restaurant Buona Notte, are enticing. On the menu one evening, for instance, was grilled endive salad with smoked cheese and grilled pears, then eggplant soup, followed by honey-mustard salmon with mashed potatoes and marble sour-cream cake for dessert. Could anyone say no to such an unexpected treat?

Apparently, some do. Majdan says, "Some people think my proposal is quite strange or they are afraid and they make up excuses, like they're washing their hair that night or doing their laundry."

The Dinner Project is part performance art, part psychological and cultural study. Majdan explains, "I am engaging very closely with the community. It is not art for art's sake." In her April 17 journal, she wrote, "Throughout this project, I am realizing the complexities of human relationships, and all that goes into maintaining them. No wonder we avoid

getting close sometimes."

Majdan claims to be a shy person who uses her performance art to confront her fear of intimacy. Prior to the Dinner Project, in 2002 she returned to her native Poland (she immigrated to Canada in 1982) and created the Love Project, an interactive social/art experiment for which she sent a casting call for a husband and offered the chosen man a trip to Canada to meet her family. As she'd do for the Dinner Project, Majdan described her encounters on a website. She's now engaged to the man she met through the Love Project — who says art doesn't pay?

With her one-year project — and weekly meals — nearing an end, Majdan is contemplating taking the dinners to the U.S. or Europe. She even mentions the possibility of a television series. So wherever you are, look out for an inquisitive stranger with a slight Polish accent; you too might get an invitation to dinner.

—Tamara Kramer, BA 00