

Robert Farid Karimi • A Recipe for Survival Spinach Casserole

“Gringos Love it, so they will love you.”

My mother, Laura Colouch, gave me this recipe when I was a youthful undergrad at UCLA. I had a potluck Xmas office party. The rules: cook your own dish.

At that point in my life, my awkward, shy 19-year-old self, never been to a Xmas office party, and never cooked my own dish to bring.

I called my mom, and she suggested the following recipe because “Gringos love this. It makes them happy. Everyone will love it.”

My mother worked as an administrative assistant in a corporate office that did not treat her nicely. Many of the bosses’ xenophobic ways were repeated at our daily dinner table conversations. I knew what this meant. This was how my mom diffused them, through food. She was giving me a recipe for survival. A food force field.

She typed it up for me, so I would have it permanently. And any time, I needed to diffuse or placate or just please a diverse crowd of people who are not from my land of IranianGuatemalalandia, I use this dish. It works, every time.

Fast forward I made this for my Xmas Cooking Show in Houston. My alter-ego, Mero Cocinero needed to thwart a right-wing Oprah character who wanted to co-opt his show, so he made my mom’s casserole; he called it Spinach Frito Pie. The idea was to get the audience to have a vegetarian dish for the holidays, and to laugh at the twist I put on the Texan dish Frito Pie (there is no Frito, in it.)

Needless to say, it is the most popular recipe I am asked for to this day. For 2 years straight, older Mexicanas/Chicanas emailed me for the recipe, or they asked the producer Jorge Piña for it. Was it because it was delicious, or because they had to keep gringos happy, to stop xenophobia or racism? They never told me, quien sabe. Perhaps if we feed it to anti-immigrant legislators, they will change their policies. Or defund ICE. We can only hope food has that power.



A Recipe for Survival Spinach Casserole

Ingredients:

- 20 ounces chopped frozen spinach
- 1 can cream of potato soup (Campbell's)
- 16 ounces sour cream
- 1/2 cup parmesan cheese, shredded
- salt
- pepper
- shredded Monterey Jack cheese for topping.
My mom was adamant..."the cheese must be Monterey Jack, no cheddar!! Monterey Jack!"

Directions:

1. Thaw spinach and remove as much liquid as you can.
2. Add soup, sour cream, salt, pepper, and parmesan cheese. Mix well.
3. Place in Pyrex dish and top it with shredded Monterey Jack cheese.
4. Cover with aluminum foil and place in a 350°F degree oven, for 25 minutes.
5. Uncover and continue baking another 5 minutes or until cheese is melted.



Laura Kina, Robert Karimi's Spinach Casserole, 2021 watercolor and pen on paper, 9" x 12".

Robert Farid Karimi



Robert Farid Karimi as Mero Cocinero. #ThePeoples Cook.
Photo credit: Jeff Machtig

Critically acclaimed performer, author and social engagement artist, RobertFaridKarimi, designs interactive immersive game-performance experiences to spark players to imagine worlds of mutual community nourishment. A Creative Capital artist, Pushcart Prize-nominated writer, RobertFaridKarimi featured their work on NPR, The Smithsonian, SouthXSouthWest, HBO's DefPoetryJam, *Los Angeles Times*, *Callaloo*, *Total Chaos: an anthology of Hip Hop theory*, *Asian American Literary Review*, and *A Good Time for The Truth: Race in Minnesota*, and various platforms worldwide. Their research focuses on the power of play and playfulness in socially engaged art and the role of cultural collision in shaping the non-binary imaginary. Karimi serves as Associate Professor in the Music, Dance and Theater department at Arizona State University.

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Robert Farid Karimi, playing cards from the game-performance: *oncewehonorandlifttheweightweflythenwegottadealwiththecagesandtheracism*, 2019, laminate game spaces, international symbols, card stock, Tibetan silver wings, referee outfit, whistle.

A modern take on Posada's Game of the Goose (Juego de la Oca), a Mexican take on Chutes and Ladders. In Karimi's version, gallery participants became geese trying to migrate borders and avoid receiving a yellow or red card from a haphazard referee — hoping to get a green card, which institutionally allows them to be fly free. The design uses international road fonts to bring home the global crisis that is U.S. immigration policy and the horrific and indiscriminate treatment of Central Americans in detention centers.