How does a hypothetical dinner party—er successfully claim the apple? Though the apple to begin with is rife with associations ("the fall of man/original sin/Adam and Eve" being an obvious one), the viewer quickly abandons any general preconceptions of the object's worth in favor of its specific meaning for each of the 20 places. The Kabakovs state, "together the ways represent a large 'fan' of diverse possibilities: philosophical, linguistic, magical, technological, psychological, political, etc...a small encyclopedia of all possible ways of 'appropriation'...".

Discourses of appropriation are as varied as the pretend guests. The 8th Way to attain the apple involves a man tying his shoelaces together: "...I grab the fork from under the table, aim and toss it at the apple. If I have correctly calculated the length of the two laces and my outstretched arm, accurately selected the trajectory and the force of the throw, then the fork will stick into the middle of the apple...." Another Way is to forego the literal apple at the table's center altogether in favor of the metaphorical apples of a particular guest nearby.

Perhaps the balance of the identity of the installation's first character (the guard), simultaneously greeting guests/viewers at the door and forbidding certain newcomers (those representing a traffic overflow) from the gathering and/or protecting museum property ("20 Ways" being the latest contemporary art addition to the permanent collection), is a neat analogy to the characters of the installation proper. In them rests the tension of outwardly being part of a collective whole, while inwardly conjuring up myopic relations to the apple. It's interesting to consider how the viewer—with the weight of the cultural edifice (the museum) and the bearing of the guard—comes to feel a sympathy with the implied guests. Couldn't it be that viewers harbor their own fantasies about somehow ingesting the art work (perhaps even a desire to yank the tablecloth or to touch the voluptuous fruit)—desires that are held at bay primarily by an adherence to the codes of proper behavior? Radically exploratory imaginary space is transgressive. The third rail that electrifies "20 Ways" is how it scandalizes even as it receives sanction from the art establishment.

Caroline Koebel
Buffalo, New York