

# COMPARATIVE ICONOGRAPHIES OF FOOD IN WESTERN ART

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Food, in its necessity and pervasiveness, is one of the greatest levelers on earth. The act of eating transcends boundaries of gender, social class, culture and even species. Eating functions most prominently to satiate hunger. Below the surface, however, people eat to experience the pleasures of taste, share communal interaction and participate in tradition. Although eating is a universal action required for survival, the cultural climate of consumption is a large determiner of the make-up of meals and how they are presented and consumed. It is self-evident that Western gastronomy has undergone an evolution over time – from a highly individualized, domestic means for survival to a globalized, mass produced and marketed industry. Alterations in the nature of physical meals are significantly evident in our long-term visual records – figurative representations of food by artists. They capitalize on food's simultaneous position among the most mundane of everyday objects and the most magnificent, constantly surrounding us in some form while at the same time defining us. Images of food in art are nearly infinite from antiquity onwards. Typically, artists do not depict foodstuffs exactly as they are used in everyday life, but instead arrange them to communicate a specific message. Over time and across cultures, artists' means for communicating messages through food and the messages themselves have changed to reflect new ideas and societies.

While it is impossible to generalize the limitless myriad of images depicting food as some aspect of their compositions, this paper assembles three categories of food representation that came to prominence in history and then remained as ephemeral aspects of food images that are still visible in contemporary art. These three iconographical modes are food as allegory, food as body, and food as a painterly signifier. Each code builds upon the previous one, thereby assembling a foundation for the Western iconography of food. This iconography is an evolution that naturally parallels both the evolutions of art history from Medieval to modern and of food history from meager domesticity to mass-produced convenience. Evolution is substantiated by the most definitive unifying factor intertwined in each iconographical mode: a mounting disassociation with the physical nature of sensory experience in favor of an esoteric individualized symbolism. Food stops signifying itself and instead begins to signify larger societal concepts through food symbolism trained to the gaze of contemporary viewers. Food becomes increasingly politicized and metaphorical (as opposed to allegorical). This is not to say that one iconographic program cannot appear out of turn or in combination with others. For example, Paul Gauguin's *Woman Holding a Fruit* (1893) is a painting of fruit held in front of a woman's breast, representing the abundance of womanhood. It appears centuries after many of the paintings that I discuss in the food as body section below. While each of the iconographical codes seems to originate and peak in the eras and works that I discuss, they remain present after their onset. Differences lie in the ever-changing subject matters of the images based on cultural context – the reasons that artists choose to represent food. While 16<sup>th</sup> century images of the food as body might emphasize a religious symbolism, Gauguin is much more concerned with

portraying primitive beauty and abundance in the midst of a rapidly modernizing world. The following sections include discussion of each iconography of food in detail.

The period of nearly undisputed prominence for food as allegory is long. Food was employed in predominantly allegorical constructs in the period spanning the Middle Ages and continuing through the Renaissance. Food was represented in this way before this period as well, particularly in ancient Greek still lifes.<sup>1</sup> Allegorical images tell three central stories about food that relate directly to its physical nature and the sense of taste. These allegories employ a multitude of approaches to communicate a similar theme, that food should be eaten in moderation and shared with others.

The majority of early Western art was concerned with members of the elite class as its subject matter – the patrons and lifeblood of artists. Patrons often commissioned images that were flattering to their wealth and subsequently their moral character. When wealth is presented in the form of food or feast, the patron is characterized as a humble provider, sharing food with others so as not to overeat themselves. This was the purpose of some of the first still lifes, the *Xenia* of ancient Greece. While in the case of most *Xenia*, only fragments remain and very few of them are in *situ*, they are recorded by Greek historians Philostratus and Vitruvius, and some of the original wall paintings survive.<sup>2</sup> *Xenia* were primarily images of food, but when they continued in the Roman Empire, also began to include elements of architecture and window-like imagery. They are most commonly paintings of raw, untouched ingredients like fruit, eggs and whole fish. *Xenia* as a style, according to Vitruvius, was a response to Greek prosperity. He wrote of the purpose of *Xenia*, “For when the Greeks became more luxurious ... they began to provide dining-rooms, chambers and stores of provisions for their guests from abroad, and on the first day they would invite them to dinner, sending them on the next chickens, eggs, vegetables, fruits and other country to guests ‘*xenia*’.”<sup>3</sup> Not only do *Xenia* represent the Greeks sharing their homes and food with the guests, but also an emotional respect for the individual needs of the stranger, allowing them to prepare their food themselves, on their own terms.<sup>4</sup> *Xenia* reflect a unique custom of hospitality that all Greeks would understand, rather than providing guests with a banquet on their first night in the household, the host would provide them with autonomy and equality – their own household within the household. According to Norman Bryson’s essay on *Xenia* in *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, the images reflect a principle of reverse hospitality, suspending rank and regional traditions of cuisine in favor of austerity and a mutual understanding that if the roles were reversed, guest as host and host as guest, the same equality and respect would prevail.<sup>5</sup> By including *Xenia* on the walls of one’s home the patron communicated a desire to share wealth with others and a sense of hospitality that transcended social and cultural boundaries. Patrons of *Xenia* were actively portraying themselves as gracious and kind people demonstrated by the images of raw, bountiful ingredients.

In one of the most prominent book of hours paintings in history, the January illustration of *Les Tres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (1412-16), patron hospitality is approached in a more Medieval manner. According to C.M. Woolgar, it belongs to a series of Medieval feast allegory illustrations called “*Le bon repas*” that depict hospitality via food.<sup>6</sup> The image represents a New Years feast presided by John, Duke of Berry, a buffet table stocked with ample refreshments prepared for his guests served from golden china including elaborate and expensive salts and fine meats while Berry simply eats a modest bowl of pottage (meat stew).<sup>7</sup> While the guests are certainly not paupers, they are lower than Berry and encouraged to eat and warm themselves near the fire by a servant who tells them to “*approche, approche.*” Here Berry is

portrayed as a kind ruler who imparts feasts upon his inferiors hospitably while avoiding overindulgences himself. These images of food as an allegory for hospitality stand in direct opposition to greed and gluttony, which looms as a potential wrongdoing over all people with more food than they can and should eat.

Images of hospitality acknowledge class structure, but some artists allegorized class structure indicated by food to a more dramatic extent. Some of the most interesting examples of allegorized class structure fall in late sixteenth century Italy as Italian artists began to draw inspiration from naturalistic Dutch genre scenes. Vincenzo Campi and Bartolomeo Passarotti painted a select number of market scenes based on counterparts from Antwerp. Shelia McTighe argues that the Italian scenes are much more political than Dutch images, however.<sup>8</sup> Each painting shows a series of grotesque and comical peasants, both male and female handling market stalls where they sell wares like poultry, vegetables, fish and fruits. The peasants are often so ugly and their gestures so exaggerated that the images have been accepted as primarily comic paintings.<sup>9</sup> However, it is vital to note that the foodstuffs these peasants sell are not for their own consumption, and would in fact be considered dangerous to their health. Peasants consumed a diet of dark bread, red wine, beans and cheese. Bartolomeo Pisanelli asserted in his *Trattato della natura de' cibi et del here* that because a unique combination of foods cultivated humoral balance and health for each individual person, it was possible to generalize that some foods were unhealthy based on class structure.<sup>10</sup> Delicate and refined foods were only appropriate for refined, educated, elite people while people who did daily work and were uneducated would be better nourished by rugged foods. Peasants had been known to get sick and die from eating such delicate foods as white bread and thin meat.<sup>11</sup> Obviously intended for the eyes of the elite, Campi and Passarotti's paintings illustrate Pisanelli's ideas. In Passarotti's *Butcher Shop* (1578-80), the two male figures are presented as particularly bestial when surrounded with cuts of meat meant for the wealthy, both in the way that they handle the meat with unabashed severity and in their rough faces. Similarly, in Campi's *Cheese Eaters* (1580), men eat a hunk of cheese rudely and hungrily. McTighe cites a trend in these Italian market scenes toward a more bestial representation of peasant men in the face of elite foods and in their consumption of peasant food juxtaposed with an enticing idealization of peasant women next to elite foods to make them more appealing. Campi's *Fruit Vendor* (1580) is a prime example of female idealization as precariously stacked platters of ripe, luscious fruit surround a beautiful peasant woman's defined bodily curves. The female body becomes another object for elite consumption while peasant men simply represent peasant inferiority.

Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *Fight Between Carnival and Lent* (1559) depicts the cycle between feast and fast as a moralizing allegory of class structure. The image is a literal food fight of pretzels and bread (holy foods) versus pancakes and fish (celebratory foods) between peasants representing the coming of Lenten fast after Carnival feast, a necessity of not only religious, but also food preservation purposes (the time of Lent was a time of scarcity). The image is also a battle between austerity and greed, according to Bryson. The elite gaze on this image likely intends one of two outcomes: a vision of peasant simplicity in the face of moral matters to establish elite superiority or, as Bryson speculates, a moralizing vision of universal inner battles between greed and abstention. Brueghel could be portraying the struggles of avoiding gluttony that are present regardless of social class, allegorizing the common moral disputes the elite (who have access to unlimited foodstuffs year-round as opposed to peasants) face as much, if not more so than the peasants do.

The underlying signification of food in the previous two allegorical situations was avoiding greed and overeating, symbolized by other relevant societal themes. There are also allegories of food that directly refer to the human tendency toward gluttony, spurred by food's addictive pleasures. This description encompasses a huge number of artworks, particularly in the Northern European tradition; however, this paper will focus directly on images that personify the sense of taste. A specific genre emerged for allegories of the senses, echoing the Platonic idea that sensory experience cannot compare with spirituality, which reached its peak of popularity in seventeenth century Northern Europe.<sup>12</sup> A series of six tapestries called *The Lady of the Unicorn* by an unknown artist (1490-1500) depict a woman experiencing each of the five senses and surrounded by mystical animals. The sixth tapestry shows the woman placing a jeweled necklace into a box, renouncing her worldly passions. In the images representing hearing and sight, the woman actively engages in each of the senses for the delight of others (playing an organ for the unicorn and reflecting the unicorn's face in a mirror). In taste, touch and smell, the woman begins to engage in each sense, but pauses. She toys with a flower to sniff and a berry to eat, but instead simply holds them, while animals around her, particularly a monkey, take part in each sensory experience without restraint. The series of tapestries demonstrates the human ability to thwart the senses by renouncing them in favor of intellectual and spiritual pursuits. This is the distinguishing feature of human consciousness that separates us from unruly animals. The senses are depicted merely as a means to understand the potency of God's power, and the passions of physicality should be avoided. In a similar, yet more brutal discipline, Jan Brueghel the Elder painted a series called *Allegory of the Five Senses* (1618). A nude woman surrounded by related trappings like telescopes, musical instruments and tactile objects represents each sense. The woman partakes in the sense along with a cherub. That is, with the exception of the sense of taste. In *Taste*, a fully clothed woman sits at a table eating greedily as a devilish satyr encourages her to continue, and the cherub is nowhere to be found.<sup>13</sup> In *Making Sense of Taste*, Carolyn Korsmeyer states that the woman's gluttony will spur lust and the satyr will benefit sexually from her stimulated taste.<sup>14</sup> Brueghel's image of the sense of taste is decidedly more severe than the other four sense allegories. The association between taste and sin is much more potent and real indicating an intensive caution toward gluttony. All three predominant allegories of food are rooted in cautions against overindulgence. They clutch onto food's physical functions of connoting hospitality, maintaining health and stimulating taste.

Images of food as body cross over into a new iconographical realm where food is separated from taste and instead comes to represent the idea of both religious worship in Western culture and the human body itself. A preoccupation with the shared qualities of food and humanity as well as a person's diet forming the composition of their body emerged, particularly in Northern Europe following the Renaissance. The period of religious symbolism of food as body spans centuries starting in the Middle Ages, and later, post-Renaissance motifs that share the bodily theme pull from ideas of food as body in Christianity.

Eve's naked form was totally exposed as she picked the apple from the tree of life and ate it. Followed by the temptation of Adam and the Fall of Man, what has been called Eve's lust or gluttony by scholars transformed the body from a safe encasement for the soul to a cage wrought with pain and suffering – the agony and dangers of childbirth a particularly important alteration for women.<sup>15</sup> Where the temptations of lust, ripeness and taste are the source of original sin, food is also the closest humans can come to salvation on Earth. According to Caroline Bynum, eating was the closest and most basic way of communicating with God in Catholicism, a holy and sensual experience.<sup>16</sup> Before the modern era of food in particular, when famine and hunger

struck suddenly and proved deadly, each meal was a blessing. Food signified a gift from God that fueled the body to continue surviving and provided a sense of distinct pleasure that was entirely irreplaceable. Food was nature's bounty and the link that connected God to the human body. Furthermore, the holy Christian meal of bread and wine served as Eucharist at mass was not food; it was God's flesh to be eaten. Christian doctrine before the Protestant Reformation was decidedly based in the concept of transubstantiation, meaning that the Eucharist, when raised above the priest's head during mass was transformed into the body and blood of Christ, just as it was at the Last Supper during Christ's passion.<sup>17</sup> The painting *Christ as Man of Sorrows* (1469) by German artist Friedrich Herlin evokes transubstantiation poignantly representing Christ's *stigmata* on his hands and feet pierced by a stalk of wheat and a grape vine. The Eucharist specifically represented the bleeding Christ dying on the cross, and ingesting it imparted an understanding of His death for the sins of man. Images of transubstantiation continued to prevail in later centuries in response to Protestant questioning of the idea. To eat the bread and wine at mass did not mean to ingest Christ. It meant to assimilate God into the body – the food, the body and the God as one.<sup>18</sup> To invigorate the holiness of receiving Eucharist and induce gifts from God, the church required Christians to fast during holy seasons, meaning that they were not allowed to eat meat and were encouraged to partake only in bread and water. According to Bynum, some of the holiest Christian men and women fasted in a more extremist manner, denying themselves all food other than the Eucharist for periods of time and fasting outside of required abstention periods.<sup>19</sup> The conclusion of fast was greeted with periods of feasting at holidays to counteract hunger and celebrate harvest. The prototypical meal of the Eucharist loomed over all feasts because while bread and wine were considered holy, more worldly foods represented flesh and pain of human existence. The Eucharist represented Christ's body in that it transformed the holy body and blood, while typical meals were markers of human flesh and earthly unpredictability; fast signaled vulnerability in the face of God and feast, a test of restraint.<sup>20</sup> Bynum's major argument in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* is that women experienced the fasting traditions of Christianity more potently both emotionally and physically. The intensity of female religious experiences related to food was brought on by two factors: female control of the kitchen and perceptions of women's bodies as representing abundance and food in themselves. Women's writings from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries indicate a preoccupation with motifs of food, hunger and blood to represent religious subject matter. Women were known to fast for extreme periods of time to the point where normal bodily functions such as menstruation ceased, living only on the Eucharist. Bynum speculates that this is because food was one of the very few aspects of life that women had control over in a male-dominated world. With a passionate desire to live religiously and chastely, fasting and giving alms of food were the most potent and simple act for women to show their devotion to God.<sup>21</sup> As is acknowledged above, women were both perceivers of food imagery in art and the perceived as their bodies represented food and appetite in abundance, fertility and lust under the superior male gaze. The literal food that women's bodies provided was their mother's milk, and Mary was often represented breast-feeding Christ, her body turning into his sustenance. Even characterized an often-blissful scene of motherhood, Mary's milk is associated with the Eucharist as Christ receives a supernatural gift of life from the body of his mother, just as he gives the gift of his body to the human race.

The tradition of images of food as representations of the human body is drawn largely from Christian associations of worldly foods with mortality, incomparable to spiritual foods. Dutch artist Pieter Aertsen represents the distinction between heavenly food and worldly food in

his painting *The Meat Stall* (1551), the first painting in history to use the technique of inverted composition to impart symbolism. Gruesomely realistic images of meat for sale fill the front of the composition, bloody and fleshy, soon to become corporeal food for the body and also a persistent reminder of the body itself. The human body is very similar to this raw meat, linked to the pain and suffering of human flesh. The meat frame three background images, the left image is a church steeple, and the right is a group of men and women interacting in a potentially suggestive manner to represent worldly pleasures. The central image is a portrayal of the “Flight from Egypt” showing Mary holding a young Christ as she feeds bread to a child beggar.<sup>22</sup> Surrounded by motifs of Christ’s passion like crossed fish and trees, it is clear that Mary is providing this child with spiritual sustenance rather than simple bodily sustenance. Aertsen’s meat in the foreground is a reminder both of the transience of the human body and of Christ’s passion specifically, its aching red flesh and blatant display are reminiscent of the blood and suffering of Christ for humanity. *The Meat Stall* invites an interesting comparison with modern art images depicting very similar subjects with a less religious association, specifically Chaim Soutine’s *Carcass of Beef* (1925). Soutine’s painting is a single large carcass, thickly painted with rough, angry brushstrokes. The red blood that swathes the bottom end of the carcass is inexplicably disgusting due to the sheer intensity of the brushwork. Unlike Aertsen, whose meat is uncensored and exposed, Soutine sought to realistically depict decay and slaughter from an emotional standpoint, a cow executed for human consumption and the commonplace nature of planned animal slaughter for human benefit. Soutine, like Aertsen, seeks to provide an association between the human body and the animals that we eat to symbolize the brutality of human life, pain and death.

More ambiguous, yet still potent bodily food imagery is found in the well-known moralizing Dutch and Spanish still lifes from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Food is represented with much different intentions in these two regional still lifes, but they share a common goal, to interpret God’s test for human beings by portraying the extent to which people can live in moderation even amongst ample foodstuffs. Seventeenth century Dutch still life, most popularly known as *vanitas* (vanity) captures a time of intense prosperity in the Netherlands from 1608-1660 brought on by its monopoly on the pre-industrial trading economy and lacking channels for spending the surplus wealth (like expensive courtly traditions or an advanced aristocracy).<sup>23</sup> The tradition of *vanitas* emerged as a caution for the Dutch people (particularly the rising middle class) to avoid becoming preoccupied with worldly pleasures as a result of newfound wealth. They are reminders of the impermanence and vulnerability of the human body and the universality of death regardless of wealth. The still life images often depict sumptuous arrangements of luxury goods and beautiful foods with blatant symbols of death among them including feathers, overturned glasses, skulls, extinguished candles, wilted flowers, spoiled foods, coins and globes. These images representing bodily extinction are often juxtaposed with representations of human triumph like telescopes and books, only as a reminder that all things are trumped by death.<sup>24</sup> *Vanitas* also evolved into new personifications of the same theme. In still lifes of disorder, they depicted human carelessness, the mess left behind by an anonymous group of entitled diners, sumptuous cups and plates and half eaten food strewn in disarray after a luxurious dinner. Willem Kalf’s unique form of *vanitas*, known as still lifes of pleasure, is hyperrealistic, creating sickeningly gorgeous banquet scenes.<sup>25</sup> These images, such as Kalf’s *Still Life with Nautilus Cup* (1662), are disturbingly beautiful and take on an otherworldly nature – creating a void of loneliness by sheer opulence. One of the most interesting still lifes of the *vanitas* period is Pieter Claesz’s *Still Life with Stoneware Jug, Wine Glass, Herring and Bread* (1642). While the

painting indicates a meal eaten by a rich person with fine impalements, it is an exceedingly modest meal without overindulgence. It capitalizes on the more blatant symbolism of previous *vanitas* to portray the definition of a virtuous meal for the rich. In *vanitas*, food symbolizes life and death, morality and sin through blatant iconography and a clear emphasis on the human element of consumption.

In Spain around the same era, Juan Sánchez Cotán was the primary influence on Spanish still life used to express religious and bodily symbolism. In contrast with *vanitas*, however, Cotán minimized human involvement in his subject matter, alienating the body from the food as much as possible. Cotán joined a Carthusian monastery in 1603, just a year after he painted his most famous still lifes, and he valued isolation and automation in his work. He staged all of his paintings in the exact same location and maintained a uniform canvas size, light source and color scheme. Cotán ritualized his paintings to avoid any signs of his own interference in the work, including brush strokes. Much like the paintings themselves, Cotán's subject matter is food completely independent of the table and human influence. His *bodegones* (Spanish for pantry, food-related still life images) are staged in a dark food storeroom, the edible items suspended in the air to preserve them longer. In Cotán's best-known still life, *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber* (1602), he depicts the foods in a mathematical formation, forming them into a perfect hyperbolic curve. They are also painted with an eerie hyperrealism to elevate the importance of these seemingly everyday foodstuffs. Bryson speculates that Cotán executed his still lifes in such an independent manner because they promoted abstention from food in religious observation and characterized food as a pure creation of God that is separate from and above the hand of man.<sup>26</sup> In pointedly disassociating the food in his still lifes with the body with the goal of delivering a bodily message, Cotán redefines food as body. Food in human perception is meant to be eaten, but by pointedly removing any human presence from his paintings he connotes food that is disassociated with body and in turn, a body that is disassociated with food. Just as the food takes on a spiritual, hyperrealistic quality, the person is spiritually fulfilled in their fast. Bryson delineates painting in two categories: megalography, or narrative images based on individual human accomplishments, and rhopography, or routine images of daily living. He argues that still life is remarkable and remains relevant (though ranked at the bottom of the painting hierarchy) due to its natural predisposition to elevate objects like food, which are rhopography to the status of megalography, despite removing direct narrative structure and humanity from images.<sup>27</sup> Still life gives inanimate objects a human quality and importance, which is why they are so powerful in representing food as body.

The final iconography of food, food as a painterly signifier, is decidedly associated with modern art. This category of edible iconography is meant to be defined as food coming to represent something completely outside of eating, shedding its associations with taste and the body and its prototypical function of satiation in order to signify wider societal contexts that are outside of human experience and touch. Food's elevation to a painterly signifier indicates its heavy indoctrination into the discourse of fine art, so much so that it is possible for people to attach symbolism to food that goes beyond its physical use. It also indicates a widening of iconography as a whole to more open interpretation and individualized meaning, an elevation in the intellectuality of art.

Cézanne's *Still Life with Basket of Apples* (1893) was one of the first and certainly the most important original work that regards food as a painterly signifier. It is a still life painting of apples that completely revolutionized artistic conceptions of composition and form with its jagged line, distinct coloristic contrast and exaggerated perspective. The subject of this still life

seems to be a basket of apples spilled onto a table with a rumpled cloth, a green bottle and some biscuits or cookies stacked on top of each other. The true subject of this still life is actually its compositional qualities and Cézanne's artist imprint on the image, specifically the basket of apples viewed through Cézanne's individual lens of reality. The subject of the painting could be anything, it does not matter that the apples represent bounty or that the biscuits are commonplace food. Cézanne relies on the conventions of traditional still life painting in order to express his new compositional techniques. The Western viewer would be familiar with apples and bottles together as a common indicator of fine art. Cézanne wanted to change this conception of fine art, not in its subject, but in the way that he painted it. In contrast with Cotán's still lifes, Cézanne's presence in the image is evident everywhere, from the exaggerated brush strokes to the bare expanses of canvas to the bold signature in the left-hand corner of the work. This food isn't meant to be eaten and it doesn't represent consumptive traditions, but the *Basket of Apples* does have an iconographic dialogue. It references art itself and all standards of food representation, the apples are a symbol of the still life genre. Cézanne actively thwarts the artistic traditions that an image of apples brings to the surface, thus inspiring a new discussion in art simply by their inclusion in the image. He does the same with landscape painting in *Mont Saint Victoire* (1887). As a painterly signifier, Cézanne's food still life represents the boundaries of artistic tradition and then tests them, taking on a much more complex and subjective iconography than previous food images.

Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque drew much of their inspiration for Cubism from Cézanne in the early twentieth century. While Cubism certainly is not centered on depictions of food, many of the most prominent Cubist works are set in cafés, including Braque's famous Analytic work, *The Portuguese* (1911). Cafés were gathering places for artists of all sorts to discuss political matters, with their secondary function as restaurant establishments. The paintings signified food, but did not necessarily include it in images. The social and cultural role of eating as a unifying and discussion-oriented activity is the implied painterly signifier of Cubist food. Synthetic Cubism made the complex fragmentation of Picasso and Braque's work more accessible to the average viewer by incorporating color and everyday objects into its compositions and focusing on still life rather than difficult-to-follow abstracted action. By incorporating collage into still life, synthetic cubism took the representation of cafés and food to an entirely new level – incorporating actual pieces of the café experience into their work. In *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912), Picasso evokes a café table with actual chair caning and places citrus fruits and wine atop the structure. Not only does this form of food still life function similarly to Cézanne's *Basket of Apples* in that it thwarts tradition and removes associations with taste and body as a signifier of something entirely different (in this case political discussion), but it also incorporates a more abstract element of the letters "JOU" into the composition. The letters indicate the word "game" in French, but also signify the word "journal" for newspaper. Newspapers unify society in that they provide the same information to all literate people and allow everyone the same level of political knowledge. Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning* and his *Bottle of Suze* (1912), which also evokes a café discussion via the use of newspaper, were painted around the time of France's involvement in the first Balkan War. Scholars speculate based on specific newspaper clippings included in *Bottle of Suze* that artists' political discussions at these cafés concerned anarchism and anti-war tendencies.<sup>28</sup> The café/restaurant, still life and food-oriented context of synthetic cubism does not actually concern food at all, although food and drink consumption are at the center of each work. The true signification of food in these works is its tendency to encourage environments of human bonding and discussion and, in turn,

the politicized discussions that occurred amongst artists preceding the First Balkan War. Food as a painterly signifier provides the grounding affirmation that representation of food in art evolves with art itself, in its associated functions and discourse.

As I stated above, while each of these categories of food iconography has its own unique works and periods of prevalence, the categories are also easily combined in certain works and periods, each one continuing to emerge in contemporary images of food. The Pop Art movement of the 1960s is one of the most prominent intersections of the three iconographies of food. While countless pop art images by the likes Wayne Theibauld, Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol represent food with intriguing combinations of all three iconographic codes, I will demonstrate their presence in the work of Warhol. His repeating images of Campbell's soup cans depict the severe alienation of modern perception of food as a brand or an advertisement from food as a real, edible substance. Warhol never actually created any images of physical food, but instead mass-produced (by the medium of silk screen) images of mass-produced food packaging. By disassociating food from its physical form in his images, he both emphasizes the value of food and true taste experience and connotes the body in a new way. Warhol simultaneously highlights each of the three iconographies, but in a different context. Each iconography is still virtually the same, but the discourses it represents have changed along with the nature of food's position in society. The major difference is the disassociation with taste and increased association with food as an object with a more ephemeral meaning. In representing food as allegory, Warhol creates images of soup cans and bottles that seem to repeat endlessly, but are all essentially the same. He allegorizes food as a symbol of consumerist isolation. The alienation of the modern, mass-produced world filled with generalized products and automated action is evident in Warhol's repetitive yet, imperfect rows of cans. As for food as body, Donna Gustafson argues that pop art is much like *vanitas*, symbolizing consumerism as death and using pop objects to emphasize the passing of time and impermanence of life.<sup>29</sup> In Warhol's soup cans, for example, whenever one of the cans of soup is consumed and therefore meets its end, we can assume that it will be replaced with another, nearly identical can and will be subsequently forgotten. The expiration of the human body, consumed by its exhaustion with physical life may be characterized in a very similar way by a pessimistic worldview. People are replaced after death and forgotten while time, ever receding, continues to pass by, unconcerned. Additionally, with his glorification of advertising and consumerism in Pop art, Warhol glorified these hegemonic brands as a new prototypical food, a modern Eucharist. Celebrity culture fascinated Warhol and he treated consumer products like celebrities of food. Celebrities served as modern gods and products like Coca Cola and Campbell's were the epitome of food, eating them meant experiencing the holiest sense of modern catharsis: to fit in. Food as a painterly signifier in Warhol's work is present in his use of silkscreen techniques to exhibit his own trademark on the image. By making the images in a mass-produced manner, Warhol related them to the way that soup was produced in factories. Each image was meant to be perfect and exactly the same, but the silkscreen process naturally creates imperfections, which Warhol chose to preserve. In striving to avoid making any marks or corrections on his silk-screened images, leaving their appearance up to an automated process, Warhol simultaneously left a very specific artistic impression on the soup cans. This added to the allegories of taste and representation of body that the paintings already emphasized.

Even after the decline of Pop art, the three iconographical modes of food continue to prevail in contemporary art. We can see food allegories in the endless, shining candy mounds of Felix Gonzalez Torres and the fat and honey performances of Joseph Beuys. Food as body appears in art decrying anorexia and other eating disorders – self-inflicted bodily destruction by

food – like those of photographer Ivon Thiens. Food as a painterly signifier is present in feminist scenes of domesticity like Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, an installation with table settings for famous women throughout history. While it is impossible to say that these three iconographies of food are the end all of food representation, it can be affirmed that they are that they are certainly present in art throughout history and that they build upon one another as they continuously disassociate themselves with the physical aspects of food. One prevailing question that arises from the history of food images in art is the significance of real food as art. After establishing a working history of food in art, the next logical step is to understand the working history and value of real food as art and the dynamic between physical food and the food that lies in wait on a canvas.

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1. Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 17-60.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 23.
  4. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 17-60.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Woolgar, "Feasting and Fasting," 163-196.
  7. Woolgar, "Feasting and Fasting," 163-196.
  8. Shelia McTighe, "Food and the Body in Italian Genre Paintings, about 1580: Campi, Passarotti, Carracci," *The Art Bulletin* 86 (2004): 301-323.
  9. Ibid.
  10. McTighe, "Food and the Body," 301-323.
  11. Ibid.
  12. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 146-184.
  13. See Figure 8.
  14. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 146-184.
  15. M. L. King, *Women of the Renaissance*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991).
  16. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1987), 31-48.
  17. Ibid.
  18. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 31-48.
  19. Ibid.
  20. Ibid.
  21. Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 189-218.
  22. Kenneth M. Craig, "Pieter Aertsen and the Meat Stall," PhD diss., Bryn Mwar College, 1979.
  23. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 96-135.
  24. Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*, 146-184.
  25. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 96-135.
  26. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 60-89.
  27. Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 60-89.
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