

Art Will Eat Itself



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The senses most traditionally associated with art perception are vision and hearing, whereas taste is generally linked with the culinary arts. Contemporary artists, however, rarely worry about such divisions

David Hume's essay "On the Standard of Taste" posits that "To seek the real beauty, or real deformity, is as fruitless an enquiry, as to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter." Although we have yet to define a reliable rule allowing us to distinguish beauty from ugliness, and any such distinction would be purely empirical, Hume tries to use experience to find hints that would help us understand the reasoning behind our choices. One factor affecting this can be the sensitivity of our senses. It is curious that the author makes a reference to our gustatory sense in his description; he also recalls a tale from Don Quixote, featuring two vintners blessed with such an extraordinary sense of taste that they are able to pick out individual flavor notes in each wine. Hume himself had no doubt that it is the same sensitivity that guards both our culinary and aesthetic judgment.

From kitchen to gallery

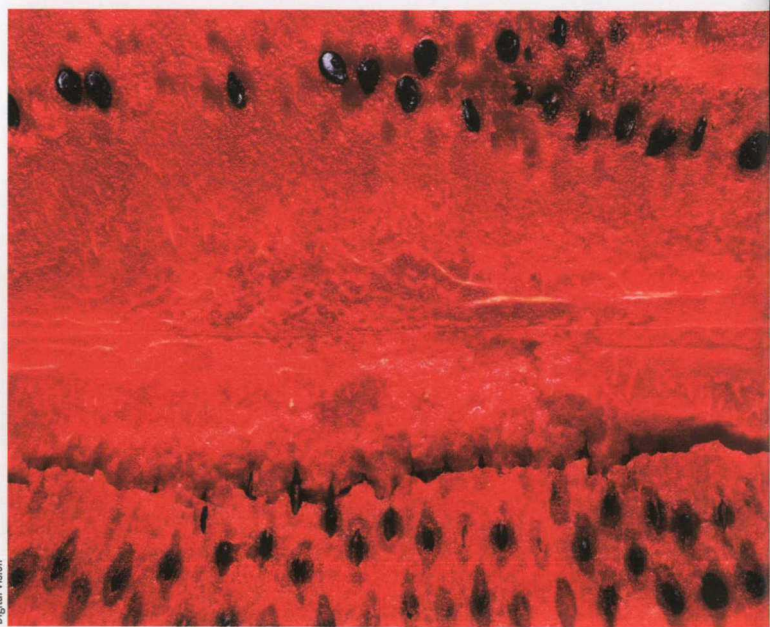
Another 18th-century philosopher interested in taste was the author of the breakthrough study "Critique of Pure Reason." While Immanuel Kant "was not an urbane gastronome, he did enjoy good food and quality wine. He also knew how to cook, bringing Hoppel to joke openly that Kant would one day write a 'Critique of Culinary Arts'" (S. Kaczmarek, *Immanuel Kant. Portrait of a Philosopher*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań, p. 56). Although such a fourth critique was not to be, many of the philosopher's other books include insight into his views on food and drink. Like Hume, Kant used the metaphor of taste to define our ability to assess aesthetic values, although he categorically distinguished unbiased

and widespread understanding of beauty from sensuous, utterly subjective preferences for different flavors.

Contemporary artists, however, reject these divisions, mixing the order of art with culinary order on a number of levels. They frequently regard food as a fascinating subject, but they also use food products as creative materials. Foodstuffs such as sugar, butter, and fruit have been used by Sonja Alhauser, Damien Thomas Rentmeister, and Zoe Leonard. Some of the most revolutionary artists have set up whole kitchens in galleries.

Food as works of art

In 1967, Daniel Spoerri coined the term "Eat Art." His objective was not to find exquisite restaurant dishes, but to focus on the basic rules guiding our diets and preferences, to question what we regard as edible. Soon after, he opened the Restaurant Spoerri in Dusseldorf, and in 1970, he established the Eat Art gallery above the restaurant. We can think of it as an attempt to fill the chasm between the world of art and everyday life. The next turn was the literal introduction of a kitchen into a gallery, and a common meal as a piece of art. We can name several artists who put a capital "A" into culinary Art. One of the best known is Rirkrit Tiravanija, serving green and red Thai curries.



The real work of art is not the culinary dish itself, but the social interaction resulting from the shared meal



Doroty Koczanowicz's archives

Elżbieta Jabłońska, *Through the Stomach to the Heart*, 9th Inner Spaces Festival, Poznań 2001

Through the stomach to art

In Poland, Elżbieta Jabłońska works in a similar spirit; her projects focus on the kitchen space, on the everyday, on cookery. She has also cooked for her audiences at her gallery. Her works are personal and autobiographical, but are also universal. The artist says, "I prepared the culinary exhibitions thinking of the many women who express their creativity and a certain heroism in kitchens throughout the country." Jabłońska has been holding "table events" since 1999, when she organized the first performance "Through the Stomach to the Heart." Many such exhibitions have been held in Poland and abroad since. Their common denominator is the food prepared by the artist during the vernissages.

For both Tiravaniji and Jabłońska, the real work of art is not the dish itself, but the social interaction resulting from the shared meal. Here, the sense of taste is equal or even more important than the traditionally more highly regarded senses of vision and hearing. The latter two are generally associated with perception of art regarded as "higher," more profound, whereas the sense of taste is associated with the culinary arts, traditionally seen as less refined and not allowed into galleries.

Chocolate walls

At times, taste demands to be noticed in some less obvious surroundings. This was the case for the spatial composition entitled "Frieze" by Anya Gallaccio, who used chocolate to cover the walls of a small room and a bench in the middle. I saw "Frieze" in 2011 at the Eat Art exhibition in Stuttgart. The chocolate was freshly prepared for the exhibition, so it generated an intensive, delicious smell, making many visitors sniff at the chocolate-covered walls. The artist watched the visitors; in one of her interviews, she explained that they frequently couldn't stop themselves from wiping a curious finger across a surface and tasting the chocolate.

While for visual aesthetes culinary art is an art in a metaphorical sense only, the appearance of food in the more traditional creative domains reveals the fluidity of artistic boundaries. After all, every cook and chef knows that preparing the perfect soup is a real artform. ■

Further reading

Koczanowicz D. (2011). *Sztuka od kuchni [Art From the Kitchen]*. Format, 59