Art and Food

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The "Art and Food" symposium was the latest in a series at the Dunedin School of Art that began in 2009 with "Illustrating the Unseeable: Reconnecting Art and Science," followed by "Art and Law" in 2010 and "Art and Medicine" in 2011. What began as an event local to Dunedin—to the Dunedin School of Art at Otago Polytechnic and the University of Otago—rapidly developed into a national and even international event attracting scholars and artists from Australia, South Africa, Italy and the United States.

Each symposium has its own organising committee and set of sponsors. In the case of "Art and Food" the University of Otago partners were the Centre for Sustainability: Agriculture, Food, Energy and Environment (CSAFE) and the Food Science Department. The Otago Polytechnic had recently established a Culinary Arts degree programme and the students and staff honed their skills in providing a "Food Event" in the evening after the Symposium, which greatly impressed all the delegates and visitors, to the extent that the organisers have vowed to make it a feature of subsequent symposia.

Thanks go to Professor Leoni Schmidt, Head of the Dunedin School of Art and to Dr Janet Stevenson, Director of CSAFE, for their support for this symposium, and to Drs Paul Stock, Miranda Mirosa and Richard Mitchell, and to Cinzia Piatti, for their contributions to the Organising Committee.

The symposium was also supported with generous funding or subsidised services from the University of Otago and Otago Polytechnic, as well as the Otago Community Trust, the Asia:NZ Foundation, the Regent Theatre and Two Sisters vinyard.

The editing of these selected papers has been greatly assisted by the professional services of Paul Sorrel and Rachel Allan as well as the eagle eyes of Leoni Schmidt.

INTRODUCTION

From the very beginning of human visual culture the sacral and the secular were intertwined. Images in caves were outlines, given volume and colour by the rock surface on which they were scratched or drawn, of the animals that featured in the diet of those seeking shelter—deer, bison, aurochs, and animals feared because cavemen, women and children might feature in their diets. Survival was the daily concern, getting enough food and keeping safe. Images rapidly took on allegorical significance, expressing symbolic values and beliefs. Groups adopted lion, bear and mammoth totems: images of animals became the insignia of authority, of the clan—the people of the Elk, of the Horse. A carcase gave meat, fur and skins for clothing, fat for lamps, bones for tools—tools to assist in making images. Groups came together for the gathering and hunting of food, for mutual protection, for the telling of stories, for the making of art—marking territory with images, picturing the hunting seasons, clan symbols, their fears and triumphs, their history.

In settler societies images celebrated plenty—the seasons of the agricultural year in Ancient Egyptian frescoes and bas reliefs, the ploughing of fields, gathering the harvest, inventories of larders, depictions of feasts and celebrations, cooks and carriers. Food was associated with festivals of pagans and rituals in the Christian calendar—the miracle of the loaves and fishes in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Christ breaking bread and sharing wine at the Last Supper.

In Indian miniatures Krishna's lover Radha prepares food, adding spice to their rendezvous; Portuguese traders in Goa sampled local cuisine. Aztec and Mayan sculptors and ceramicists celebrated the maize king and the maize god, made pots to look like gourds or tasty dogs.

In the late Renaissance Giuseppe Arcimboldo created portraits out of food to celebrate, among other things, the Four Seasons, at a time when still lifes of food came into the foreground, after acting simply as by-work to the main subject of an image, now celebrating plenty, now warning against excess, as in the vanitas works of Dutch seventeenth-century painters. Annibale Caracci depicted a beaneater and the interior of a butcher's shop, whilst Louise Moillon's grand dame chose fruit for dessert from a vendor with cheeks as red as her peaches.

In the late nineteenth century the still life was resurrected in Europe less as a vanitas than as an exercise in painting and a celebration of the texture of fruit and its ubiquitous proximity to wine.

In other words art and food have a long association across time and space in the history of art. To celebrate this association, and to focus on these associations in particular times, spaces and social contexts the symposium organisers at the Dunedin School of Art in New Zealand invited speakers to join them in a colloquium on "Art and Food" on 24 August 2012.

Food needs preparation, a clean environment and running water, as well as proximity to the diners—the construction of kitchens, with practical as well as aesthetic considerations in their architecture, is examined by Estelle Alma Maré in the opening chapter. This is followed by a consideration of images of food as subjects in art in their own right, a feature of the late Renaissance, where images of plenty, confirming the new mercantile confidence of Europe, vied with warnings of excess—that food and drink are transient pleasures, like life itself, and our behaviour towards material plenty and our generosity to those less well off in the necessities of life will be taken into account at the Day of Judgement. This is the topic of Mary Kisler's chapter (Two). This theme is taken up by Monica Lausch (Chapter Three) in her examination of princely feasts, particularly those given by the Habsburgs, who took the opportunity to use such occasions to show off objects from their art- and wonder-cabinets.

A second set of chapters are focussed on the Modernist avant-garde in Russia and Italy. It opens with Peter Stupples's examination (Chapter 4) of the relationship of the Russian avant-garde to class as exemplified by their use of food as a visual motif. He highlights the fact that the early avant-garde came largely from the middle classes serving upper class patrons and, despite their often radical stance, not turning to the worlds of lesser mortals until the neo-primitivists around 1910. Cecilia Novero elaborated on Daniel Spoerri's *Eat Art*, a paper not included in this anthology, but elaborated in her book *Antidiets of the Avant-Garde: From Futurist Cooking to Eat Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Diane Langman took her cue (also not included in this volume) from Italian Futurism, where the centrality of food to performance art is extrapolated into the wider context of "eating out," often turning into a theatrical event, and food is presented less as a gastronomic necessity than as an essential part of the game which clients, restaurateurs and their staff play in a theatre of "tastes," in all meanings of the word. Cinzia Piatti (Chapter 5) relates this theme to a theoretical consideration of haute cuisine as a higher form of food preparation akin to a higher form of art. She emphasises this

close conceptual relationship through an examination of the work of Gualtiero Marchesi, transforming famous artists' works into recipes and these recipes themselves being used as the source of his own "artwork" displayed in galleries such as the Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Reveto.

Art practitioners also took part in the symposium. Chee Wang Ng, a Malaysian Chinese photographer working in New York, sent two videos (*108 Global Rice Bowls* and *Rice Bowl Homage to Sol LeWitt*), an installation (*The Community Gathers for Dinner*) and 16 lambda prints, each 122 x 122 cm. This was a major contribution to the discussion at the symposium as well as an inspiration to visiting artists. Chang draws upon ancient allegories triggered by images of specific food to address issues of identity throughout the Chinese diaspora by re-evaluating, challenging and modernising the values inherent in traditional Chinese culture. Chee Wang's work may be accessed via http://www.ngcheewang.com/. In addition Paul Hamilton installed a margarine sculpture and gave a paper (not included in this volume) on the marginalisation of margarine and ice sculpting as acceptable contemporary art practices.

Blair Kennedy and Andrea McSweeney (Chapter 6) showed three paintings in the exhibition related to European settlement at the mouth of the Toitu Stream in Dunedin in the 1840s, at a spot traditionally used by Māori to moor their canoes when visiting the harbour, to forage or trade food. It was food that brought Māori and pākehā (non-Māori settlers) together in a symbiotic relationship before Europeans took over the Toitu site and incorporated it into what became a purely European harbour. Simon Kaan, an artist of Māori and Chinese descent, together with Ron Bull jnr., a Māori muttonbirder, reported at the symposium on their preparations for an indigenous [first] peoples' cultural art and food exchange in New Mexico a week or two later. The chapter included in this volume (Chapter 7) reports on the outcome of this project, *Kaihaukai: The Sharing of Food*, and highlights the way Māori have adapted to contemporary cultural conditions and technology to develop traditional culinary arts, not unlike Chee Wang Ng, to the twenty-first century, and to create installation art forms to celebrate the vitality of their culture, to demonstrate their willingness to share its achievements with others, and to use the internet to bring cultures together, a creative medium enabling conversation and celebration both in the art gallery and gastronomic contexts.

Meaning was elaborated by the *Kaihaukai* project collectively, as well as individually and in small groups, not only on site in New Mexico but also via Skype and hyperlinks with indigenous participants in Aotearoa/New

Zealand and elsewhere in the world. In this way the term "commensality" was extended to include eating and socialising "at table" in an extended sense, across space, the space of the world, but also in real time, so that a genuine exchange of experience could be felt, articulated and used creatively by artists and viewers. The concept of commensality in contemporary art practice, of which the Kaihaukai project is an example, is taken up by Leoni Schmidt in Chapter 8, examining the efficacy of new value systems and social orders in an era concerned with the potential non-sustainability of food resources.

Food resources are also the subject of the chapter by Emily Gordon and Jenny Rock (Chapter 9). In their study of the science fiction film *Soylent Green* they examine the way art may be used to convey the crisis of the supply of food to an ever-growing world population The theme of the film is brought into our contemporary world by an exploration of the actual changes in both the production of food and the genetic modification of the seed stock in the post-*Soylent* era. The same themes are tackled by Natalie Smith in her account (Chapter 10) of Philip Frost's dystopic *Last Supper* (2008) and the fashion house NOM*d's *Danse Macabre* (2010), highlighting the way NOM*d re-works, re-cycles and gives new meaning to cast offs, turning "waste" into high fashion.

The final chapters turn their collective attention to the relationship between art and cookbooks—art as information, art as decoration and the art of the book, all three writers from Australia. Jill Adams focuses (Chapter 11) on changes in cookbook illustration and decoration in the 1950s, when colour photography began to oust the black and white drawing. Donna Lee Brien (Chapter 12) looks at the work of the cosmopolitan Maria Kozslik Donovan who brought European cuisine to the Australian housewife in the 1950s and 60s, illustrated with her own line drawings. Allison Reynolds also writes (Chapter 13) about European influences on provincial Australian cooking through the work of Sallie Heysen, the wife of the artist Hans Heysen, spreading the significance of German country cooking throughout South Australia in the early twentieth century, forever convinced that good cooking is most decidedly an art itself and convincing others of this indubitable truth.

The symposium only touched on some aspects of the topic of Art and Food but offered a range of ideas to encourage further research and creative responses in this rich field of scholarship and creative endeavour.

CHAPTER ONE

TWO KITCHENS BEFORE THE ERA OF ELECTRICITY: THE CISTERCIAN MONASTERY OF SANTA MARIA DE ALCOBAÇA AND THE TOPKAPI PALACE, ISTANBUL

ESTELLE ALMA MARÉ

The kitchen architecture of two UNESCO heritage sites, situated far apart in space but overlapping somewhat in time, are remarkable in different ways. The kitchens referred to belong to the Cistercian Monastery of Santa Maria de Alcobaça, Portugal, founded in 1153, and the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, Turkey, the residence of the Ottoman Sultans from 1465-1856. The architecture of the monastery and palace kitchens have certain traits in common, but are also vastly different—as was the food prepared for the monks and the sultans' households and guests. In the Monastery of Santa Maria de Alcobaça, the Cistercian monks were subject to austerity according to the rule of manual labour and self-sufficiency, while in the secular Topkapi Palace the cuisine served to the rulers and guests enhanced the pleasures of their opulent life.

Introduction to the cooking of food

In 2009 Richard Wrangham, a primatologist, postulated that our evolutionary success cannot be explained only in Darwinian terms of intelligence and adaptability. He presents an alternative: our evolutionary success is the result of cooking our food. His theory is that a shift from raw to cooked food was the key factor in human evolution, that the practice of cooking food made us human. Our humanity developed when our ancestors adapted to using fire for cooking. By eating easily digestible cooked food

the human digestive tract shrank and the brain grew. Time spent in chewing tough raw food could be spent more productively. Following Wrangham, I postulate that part of the free time was not only spent in acquiring more and better food by means of hunting and developing agriculture, but also in building shelters, with devices for controlling fire and making utensils for cooking. Ultimately, the design of an indoor area where fire could be controlled for cooking purposes made us civilised. In the era before electricity, cooking in a sheltered, indoor environment necessitated the control of fire in an open hearth, or much later by means of a cast iron stove connected to a pipe or chimney to allow smoke to escape outside. When the kitchen became a distinct separate area, or a special functional room in a communal living space or private dwelling, the architectural planning required a sophisticated layout for the delivery of food products, fuel and the supply of fresh water; it also necessitated tables for the preparation of various kinds of food, space for an assortment of utensils, cold storage, washing up facilities, drainage and the disposal of waste to ensure health and hygiene.

One may assume that through the ages cooks—whenever the profession of cook was established—had to instruct architects and builders about their physical needs for the preparation of meals. Preparing cooked meals, serving and consuming them in a ritualised manner, is clearly a civilized advance on merely ingesting sufficient food to keep the human body functioning. The more varied and sophisticated the meals prepared by the cooks, the greater the design expertise and specialist planning required of the architect and builder, especially until the late nineteenth century—that is before the invention of electricity—when food was still cooked, fried or grilled by means of wood, coal or gas fires in seminal stoves or ovens.

Two pioneering kitchens are found at Alcobaça, Portugal, and Istanbul, Turkey.

The kitchen of the monastery of Santa Maria de Alcobaça, Portugal

In 1147 Alfonso Henriques proclaimed the independence of Portugal. Six years later, in 1153, the Cistercian Abbey Church and Monastery of Santa Maria de Alcobaça was founded on a hundred thousand acres of land between Obidos and Leira that could be developed for the support of a group of Cistercian monks from Burgundy. After 41 years, in which much labour was spent constructing the abbey and working the land, the Moors invaded in 1195, murdered everybody in sight and destroyed the buildings. Within ten years Abbot Ferdinand Méndez and a new group of monks

started rebuilding the abbey that was consecrated in 1252 [Fig. 1-1]. These monks proved to be skilled, not only in architecture, but also in agriculture and water engineering, to such an extent that, at the peak of its development in 1580, 999 monks could live a self-sufficient life in the monastery, where lay brothers and their assistants did the cooking in one of the most sophisticated kitchens of the pre-electrical age.[1]

As reconstructed in the 18th century, the planning of the abbey and monastery is absolutely functional. Leading from the refectory gallery is the door to the original kitchen, decorated with geometric motifs. The huge three-bay thirteenth-century refectory was matched by a proportionally huge kitchen in which, it was said, eight oxen could be spit-roasted simultaneously at the fireplace, consisting of a long line of stoves and ovens.

[Fig. 1-1. Façade of the Abbey and Monastery of Santa Maria de Alcobaça, Portugal]

The oblong-shaped pyramidal chimney above the cooking area is a free-standing structure, eighteen metres high, supported in an innovative way on eight iron columns, the first to be used in a civil construction [Fig. 1-2]. The kitchen was well ventilated and also well lit by high windows. Food was prepared on the large marble table. On one side game was heaped up and on the other vegetables and fruit. Close by there were also vast heaps of flour, rocks of sugar and jars of oil. Fish was available in abundance in the fresh water basin supplied from a rivulet diverted from the Alcoa River that actually flows under the floor, supplying fresh water to the monastery buildings and serving also for drainage and waste disposal downstream. Seven washing troughs, decorated with lion heads, are set against the kitchen walls. A further improvement was the tiling of the kitchen walls in 1752. The enormous hall with a stepped floor next to the kitchen became the monastery granary (or pantry). One reminder of the medieval morality of the Cistercian Order remains. Opposite the wash basin (lavabo), used for hand washing before meals and shaving the tonsure, is a large door

leading from the refectory on which is an inscription in Latin: “Remember that you are eating the sins of the world.”

[Fig. 1-2. View of the kitchen of the Monastery of Santa Maria de Alcobaça, Portugal. Photo by Julio Reis, 2004]

In primitive conditions cooking food demanded the control of fire. In the Alcobaça kitchen not only was fire controlled, but so also were water and air—like in a medieval alchemical laboratory. The chimney extracted air and enhanced the circulation of oxygen from outside to keep the fire burning. Fresh water circulated from the river, depositing fish in the basin and facilitated the ablution process after the serving of a meal. The land from which the food came represented the fourth element, earth. The monks industriously set up farms, tilled and drained the land, producing a variety of crops.

The cycle of cooking and feeding the monks of Alcobaça, that necessitated the design of the extensive and sophisticated kitchen, is evidence of their advanced cultural development. Portugal owes much to the Cistercian Order, especially in architecture, education and agriculture. The monks of Alcobaça effectively improved the crops on the land allotted to them, turning it into the richest farmland in the kingdom, and it still produces some of the finest fruit in Portugal. However, civilisation has shortcomings, and it was reported by travellers in the eighteenth century that the 300 remaining monks in residence lived idly in splendid luxury and became fat.[2]

In 1810 the abbey was once again ransacked and destroyed, this time by French invaders.

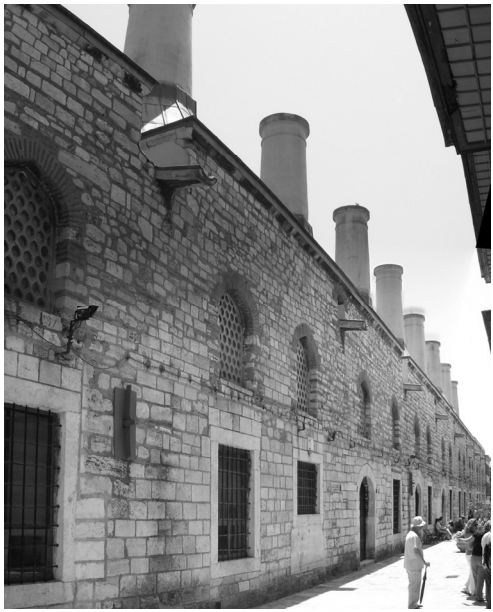
[Fig. 1-3. View of the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul]

The kitchen of the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul

Sultan Mehmet II, the conqueror of Byzantine Constantinople in 1459, initiated the construction of Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. It remained the residence of the Ottoman Sultans from 1465 to 1873 and housed up to 4000 persons. This royal residence, situated on the Seraglio Point, overlooking the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara, with the Bosporus also in sight, was a setting for state functions and entertainment. The buildings were arranged around four courtyards and contained the sultan's palace, a harem, the imperial treasury, a mint, a library, kitchens or bakeries and underground cisterns for a consistent water supply. In Ottoman times it was a veritable city within a city [Fig. 1-4].[3]

This paper focusses on the kitchen architecture. The palace developed over the course of centuries. Most additions happened during the reign of

Sultan Suleiman from 1520-60, executed by Acem Ali, his chief architect. In 1574 a great fire destroyed some kitchens. Sultan Selim II called on Mimar Sinan, the great Turkish architect, to rebuild and extend destroyed kitchens as well as other parts of the palace, which at the end of the sixteenth century acquired its present appearance. Sinan based his extended new design for the kitchens on the old plan, but added two rows of twenty wide chimneys, rising from domes on octagonal drums [Fig. 1-4 showing the exterior view of the chimneys]. This elongated kitchen arrangement has the appearance of an internal street, stretching from the Second Courtyard to the Sea of Marmara. It consists of ten domed buildings, extended to include dormitories, baths and a mosque for the employees, which additions were mostly demolished when they became obsolete. From 800 to 1,300 full-time kitchen staff were employed, most of whom were housed in the palace, starting work no later than one hour after dawn prayers.



[Fig. 1-4. Exterior view of the kitchens of the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul]

Hundreds of qualified chefs specialised in different dishes and would daily feed as many as 1,500 inhabitants of the palace and up to 4,000 and even 6,000 on special occasions. In addition, special trays of food were

regularly sent to citizens in Istanbul as a royal favour. It is said that the cooks all specialised in different dishes, but before they were appointed they had to pass a simple test: a demonstration of their ability to cook rice, the staple of high-status cooking. All dishes for the consumption of the Sultan had to be passed by an imperial food taster.[4]

At the height of its power the Ottoman Empire, spanning three continents, incorporated the cultures of various vanquished peoples. Nowhere else did the variety manifest as clearly as in the Topkapi kitchen where non-Turkish dishes added to the variety and richness of the cuisine. During the rise of the Empire the Ottomans added the cuisine of every area they conquered to their own, progressively making it even richer and celebratory during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, of which contemporary depictions give us some insight into the ceremonial meals at the Topkapi Palace.

Conclusion

History teaches us that neither religious nor secular life could be sustained without the ingenious design of kitchens. The civilizing influence of cooking needs a reappraisal, especially before the application of gas and electricity.

Notes

1. For the history of the Abbey Church and Monastery of Alcobaça see Ferreira (1989), Pereira (2003), Robertson (1992) and Rodrigues (2007).
2. See Robertson:1992, 111.
3. For the history of the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul, see Davis (1970) and Necipoglu (1991).
4. For the cuisine of the Ottoman period, see Oberling (2001) and Singer (2011).

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CHAPTER TWO

ABSTINENCE AND PLENITUDE: FOOD AND THE GAZE IN RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE ART

MARY KISLER

Depictions of food in Western art have a long and diverse history. The earliest scenes in Italy come from the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii. An important term culturally at the time was the Greek word *xenos,* meaning both stranger and host. Villas excavated from beneath the lava of Vesuvius demonstrate that Romans decorated their homes with a type of painting, called *xenia*, later known as still life.

In his text *Imagines,* the Greek Sophist Philostratus, who taught in Athens and later in Rome in the 3rd century AD, provides an *ekphrasis* of the two types of *xenia*, his powers of description conjuring up a picture in the mind's eye. He links the gathering of food and its depiction thus:

> It is a good thing to gather figs and also not to pass over in silence the figs in this picture. Purple figs dripping with juice are heaped on vine-leaves; and they are depicted with breaks in the skin, some just cracking open to disgorge their honey, some split apart, they are so ripe. … All the ground is strewn with chestnuts, some of which are rubbed free of the burr, others lie quite shut up, and others show the burr breaking at the lines of the division. See, too, the pears on pears, apples on apples, both heaps of them and piles of ten, all fragrant and golden. …even the grapes in the painting are good to eat and full of winey juice. And the most charming point of all this is: on a leafy branch is yellow honey already within the comb and ripe to stream forth if the comb is pressed; and on another leaf is cheese new curdled and quivering…and there are bowls of milk not merely white but gleaming, for the cream floating upon it makes it seem to gleam.[1]

The power of his words is enough to make the reader salivate.

An example of this kind of *xenia* can be found in a fresco given the title *Peaches and a Glass Jar Half-filled with Water* from Herculaneum, which is now located at the National Archaeological Museum (Museo Archeologico Nazionale) in Naples.[2] It shows a common form of kitchen niche made up of two shelves. On the left, a branch supports two peaches on the top shelf and two that rest on the lower. On the right, a peach rests on the upper shelf, while on the lower shelf there is a crystal-clear jar almost filled with water. A further example can be found in the Roman seafood mosaic from the House of the Faun in Pompeii, also now held in the Archaeological Museum,[3] which captures the Mediterranean Sea's bounty in taxonomic detail. The swirling movements of numerous species, including an eel, squid, and an array of fish, draw attention to a lobster struggling to escape the tenacious clutch of an octopus. What both scenes have in common is that they are depictions of food that can be gathered in the wild. Peaches can be consumed in their natural state, but for the most part the fish themselves need some kind of intervention to make them palatable. Both these types of hospitality were central to Roman customs at the time. It was common for new guests to be presented with wild foods in their natural state, so that they could prepare them in the ways they preferred, and only after their tastes were understood were more elaborately processed foods served to them. Painted *xenia* worked in the same way. As well as being part of house decorations, painted scenes of food were given to guests to take away with them. In his book *Looking at the Overlooked*, Norman Bryson describes how *xenia 1* represents a world without work, whereas *xenia 2* involves natural produce which moves from what Lévi-Strauss defines as the "raw to the cooked," whether gleaned from the wild or as the produce of agriculture.[4]

The second form of imagery from the period involves *trompe l'oeil* (literally "to fool the eye"). The Vatican in Rome houses a mosaic titled *The Unswept Floor* taken from a first-century AD *triclinium* (dining room) at Pompeii. The floor is littered with the remnants of a banquet, perhaps at that moment between courses, when the eating has finished and drinking is about to begin. It was at this point, traditionally, that tables were cleared, floors swept and hands washed, and guests were splashed with perfumes before turning to the beverages at hand. The incorporation of shadows and the use of naturalistic colour enhance the mosaic's sense of three-dimensionality, and a tiny mouse about to nibble the flesh of a walnut gives an endearing immediacy, adding to its *trompe l'oeil* effect. Thought to be by Heraclitus, after Sosos of Pergamum from the second-century BC, with its scattering of fish and chicken bones *The Unswept Floor* incorporates the two kinds of *xenia* described by Philostratus.

Aspects of this ancient Roman dichotomy between "the raw and the cooked," or abstinence and excess, were later absorbed into European art during the Renaissance and beyond. The symbolism in artworks had to be readily understood at a time when the majority of the population was illiterate, not least when the themes were biblical, warning of the dangers of sin and the promise of a better life in heaven. Like so many Christian symbols, the apple from the tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden may have had its source in the classical image of the golden apple tree of the Hesperides, although there is no reference to it in the Hebrew scriptures. In classical mythology, the Greek hero Herakles (Roman Hercules) slew the serpent Ladon that guarded the Tree of the Hesperides, and he is often shown clutching the apples won from it in his hand. In Christian teachings, the association between the apple and knowledge gets specifically transferred to sexual awareness, so that the apple becomes associated with sin. Yet the same fruit, along with cherries and oranges, regains positive connotations when associated with the Annunciation, the apple representing Mary's role as the new Eve. Equally the pomegranate, associated with Artemis in Greek mythology, becomes incorporated in Christian symbolism to represent birth, death and resurrection.

References to large-scale banquets and feasts are found in the Bible in relation to Christ's miracles. These include the Marriage at Cana (where Jesus turned water into wine) and the Feast in the House of Levi, to be set alongside the simple repast of the Last Supper before Christ's crucifixion or the Supper at Emmaus (Gospel of Luke 24: 30-31), when he revealed his resurrected form to his disciples. These all became popular themes in art. In earlier fifteenth-century paintings, some of the largest depictions of banquets were frescoed onto convent and monastery refectory walls. A humble counterpoint could be found in the spare repast of Christ's Last Supper, befitting the solemnity of the theme. Yet the artistic desire to reflect everyday practice also became commonplace.

The elegant but simple repast depicted in Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Last Supper* (1486), in San Marco in Florence, has bread, nuts and wine arranged at the end of the table, somewhat resonant of the Pompeian floor scene described earlier. Ghirlandaio's fresco was created for the monks to contemplate as they ate their own simple meal, but even here there are subtle references to more indulgent practises. A peacock perches in a window niche on the right, and other birds, possibly pheasants or partridges, can be seen flying above the fruit trees in the garden beyond the refectory windows. While the game birds were mostly hunted in the wild, domesticated peacocks were considered a delicacy, and recipes refer

to them being roasted, then served draped in their own feathers as a magnificent centrepiece to a banquet table.

Early depictions of the Marriage at Cana, where Christ miraculously turns water into wine after the wine-jars have been drained, showed restraint in regard to the foods being consumed. No greater contrast can be found than Paolo Veronese's gigantic[5] and controversial *Feast in the House of Levi*, 1573, which is now in the Galleria dell' Accademia in Venice. Commissioned by the Dominicans of SS. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice for their refectory, the theme was intended to represent the Last Supper. When viewed by the commissioners, various activities depicted in the painting caused an outrage and Veronese was hauled before the Inquisition to explain himself. When asked if it seemed appropriate to him to introduce jesters, hard-drinking soldiers, dwarfs and other outrages to a depiction of the Last Supper, Veronese stated that their activities were outside the space where the supper was taking place, and therefore shouldn't detract from the central meaning of the painting.

Veronese's composition closely reflects a banquet of his time rather than a religious image. A grand display of plate stacked up on a dresser is visible on the left, behind which servants are busy pouring wine and offering dishes of food to guests. However, the only figure actually eating and drinking is a soldier in German costume on the right. As it was painted after the Reformation, the inclusion of a Protestant was not likely to find favour. A toy dog (such animals were extremely popular as pets for women at the time, as they didn't need exercising) can also be seen teetering along the edge of the table, and a mischievous cat wrestles with a finely decorated wine flask in the foreground, giving the traditionally solemn theme a decidedly carnivalesque air. Veronese's audacious treatment speaks as much for the artist's innovation as his desire to foreground religious teachings.

As with all banquets and ceremonies that involved food, in the foreground there is a master steward in striped garment, who was in charge of masterminding its organisation. The timing at banquets was important, as no matter the number of guests to be accommodated, they must always receive the same food at the same time. Paintings such as these not only represented special occasions but were also important for instructing the populace on how to behave: a beautifully laid out meal, where everything arrived at the right time, could also symbolise a stable and productive household and, by extrapolation, productive government.

However, when Veronese was asked why the master steward had been included, the artist merely pointed out that he was there to carve the meats.

Given three months to change the work, Veronese decided merely to change the title.

Michelangelo Merisi, known as Caravaggio, produced two versions of the theme of the Supper at Emmaus; one in the National Gallery, London (1596-98), and the other in the Brera Fine Arts Academy, Milan (1606). Two disciples on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus on Easter morning meet a stranger, and they agree to dine together at an inn. In spite of their common history, they only recognise their companion as the risen Christ when he blesses the meal. Traditionally Christ's hand hovers above the bread, a reference to the wafer representing his body taken along with wine (his blood) at the Eucharist. In Caravaggio's interpretation, flesh is literally present in the form of a roasted fowl. However, it is a further still-life element that catches our attention, for a bowl of fruit in the foreground is cantilevered over the table edge, as if it might suddenly tumble into our space. The deep shadow that it casts heightens a sense of reality and adds to the drama taking place. The disciple on the right wears a cockleshell, a popular symbol of pilgrimage, rather than representing food in this setting. The painting suggests that at times even the faithful may be blind to the miracles in their midst.

Caravaggio is credited with painting the first Italian baroque still life devoid of human figures, *Still Life with a Basket of Fruit*, circa 1596 (now in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan). The painting shows a wicker basket full of fruit sitting on a ledge, again projected into what appears to be the space of the viewer. Many still life paintings incorporate aspects of *vanitas*, which according to Jane Turner's *Dictionary of Art* (1996) is essentially a biblical term, referring to the vanity of earthly possessions. Historically, it describes depictions of everyday objects, and, from the seventeenth century onwards, is a type of painting concerned with the world of desires and pleasures in the face of the inevitability and finality of death; the transitory nature of human life compared with Time, Divine Power or the march of History. In Caravaggio's painted basket of fruit a peach is speckled with black marks of decay that serve as a classic symbol of *vanitas*, as all things in nature grow, reach maturity, wither and die. Yet plants produce seeds, and therein lies a promise of fertility and renewal. When narrative is the subject of a painting, it denotes change, characters shifting from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge. Without human figures, therefore, one might assume that all narrative is removed from Caravaggio's painting. However, religious symbolism is contained in the worm-eaten apple and its links to human sin in the Garden of Eden, while a dry, shrivelled leaf on the right evokes the transience of all earthly things. Our sense of seeing is mirrored by both touch and taste, while

hearing is evoked by imagining the sound the withered leaf might make if rubbed between the fingers. A painting such as this comes closest to the *xenia* of antiquity, which wishes to deceive the eye. Yet, unusually for his time, Caravaggio chose to paint the background as a plane of gold leaf, thereby removing the basket of fruit from an everyday environment. This harks back to the use of a simple field of gold (the most valuable material on earth) in medieval art to represent the unknowable nature of the divine, thereby prefiguring the conceptual underpinning of much twentieth-century abstract painting.

Caravaggio's painting reflects the influence of Dutch painting traditions. These became highly developed after the Reformation, when religious themes were no longer considered appropriate in Protestant churches and public buildings. Yet highly sophisticated symbolic associations are possible in such works, even when readily identifiable figures have been removed from the equation. In Holland, for example, the Dutch national diet was based on fish, cheese, and bread, and was commonly consumed by both rich and poor. The combination of fish and bread would also have been understood to symbolise the biblical story of the feeding of the five thousand where Christ blessed and broke bread that then multiplied to feed all who were present.

[Fig. 2-1. J. Bourjinon, *Still Life: Fruit and Shellfish*, 1657, oil on canvas, 43.3 x 137.1 cm, Auckland Art Gallery]

Painted by the little-known woman artist J. Bourjinon (also listed as Bourgeois, active in Amsterdam in the 1660s), *Still Life: Fruit and*

Shellfish (1657) is an example of *pronkstilleven*, or a banquet scene, that incorporates expensive seafood and imported fruits, along with the kind of elaborate glass, porcelain and silverware made accessible through wealth and trade. The draped curtain on the upper left is drawn back to reveal the feast laid out for our delectation. The pewter platters in Bourjinon's painting are tilted up so that we can view them clearly, and placed so close to the picture plane that they look as if their contents will tumble forward from the painted surface into the space in which we stand. Like many northern still-life painters, Bourjinon imitates Caravaggio's practice of using strong chiaroscuro, the inky darkness of the background creating a dramatic foil for the light reflecting off the various surfaces of the food and its containers.

[Fig, 2-2. J. Bourjinon, detail of *Still Life: Fruit and Shellfish*]

These gleams and glimmers (created by carefully placed white brushstrokes) enhance the suggestion of the salty freshness of the oysters, each of which has a pearl nestling voluptuously in its midst, and the plump ripeness of the various fruits that are piled like a cornucopia across the surface of the table.

The painting contains a number of references to time. The wedge cut from the upstanding cantaloupe, or rockmelon, exposes the seeds within, drawing our attention to a traditional symbol of fertility and rebirth, while the lemon is half-peeled—the curl of skin suggesting that at any moment a hand might reach out to finish the task before squeezing the sour juice into one of the oyster shells. Lemons had to be imported from the warm

Mediterranean, as did many of the soft-fleshed fruits that struggled in the harsh northern environment unless grown under glass. Salt, sugar, sour and sweet; the artist has created an image that conjures up the sense of taste as much as the pleasure of looking. One still has the sense of a harvest gathered from the wild, combined with wines that have been fermented. We see a true mixture of the raw and the cooked, for while the gleaming oysters suggest that they are fresh from the sea, the crayfish is rich red, indicating its cooked state, the golden crust on the roll of bread working in the same way.

[Fig. 2-3. J. Bourjinon, detail of *Still Life: Fruit and Shellfish*]

The domed silver lid of the ceramic wine jug shows a tiny window in its reflection, intimating a natural source of light, but also the space in which the artist is placed. The stem of the German *roemer* (wine glass), on the far right, is studded with raspberry-shaped blobs of glass known as prunts, allowing an assured grip even when fingers had become greasy with food. These glasses appear constantly in still life paintings of the period but, as they were relatively expensive, only those with a reasonable income could afford to acquire them. A further selection of fruits are piled within a Wanli kraak porcelain bowl but whether it represents an original bowl imported from China, or a Delft reproduction, is uncertain.