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GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE PRESENTS

*THE EDIBLE MONUMENT: THE ART OF FOOD FOR FESTIVALS*

At the Getty Research Institute, Getty Center  
October 13, 2015 – March 13, 2016



*The pastry shop*, ca. 1600s. Abraham Bosse (1602-1676). Hand-colored etching with engraving, gouache, and gold. 2014.PR.63. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES – In early modern Europe, elaborate artworks made of food were created for royal court and civic celebrations. At court festivals, banquet settings and dessert buffets featured magnificent table monuments with heraldic and emblematic sculptures made of sugar, flowers and fruit. This perishable architecture and sculpture did not survive long, but images of them endure in the illustrated books and prints that feature these towering garden sculptures and lavish table pieces designed for Italian and French courts. On view October 13, 2015, through March 13, 2016, *The Edible Monument: The Art of Food for Festivals* features rare books and prints, including early cookbooks and serving manuals that illustrate the methods and materials for making edible monuments from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

"The Getty Research Institute's Special Collections have remarkably significant holdings related to European festivals and to the art of food," said Thomas W. Gaehtgens, director of the Getty

Research Institute. "From illustrated books, prints and scrolls, this exhibition presents highly engaging, yet little known, works of art that illustrate the importance of food and culinary practices in the social history of early modern Europe."

*The Edible Monument* includes more than 120 works from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from the GRI collection as well as select loans from local private collections, the J. Paul Getty Museum and the LA Public Library. The prints and rare books celebrate in rich detail the elaborate edible architecture and sculptures made of food designed for the many festivals that dominated the calendar in early modern Europe. The exhibition is presented in three sections that focus on the role of festivals— both popular and elite — in European society: Feasting in the Streets; Court and Civic Banquets; and Behind the Scenes

"The medieval calendar was almost evenly divided between fasts and feasts," said Marcia Reed, chief curator at the GRI and curator of the exhibition. "From Mardi Gras to the anniversary of a military triumph, these holidays became occasions for festivals. These celebrations and exuberant parties were a time-out from daily life and work for the working class. For rulers, they were occasions to demonstrate largesse and political power, bringing people together and reinforcing the community by means of sustenance in the form of specially prepared foods and entertainment."

### Theater of the Table

Civic, court, and religious banquets were elite affairs associated with congratulatory occasions, such as birthdays, name days and royal coronations and visits. Specific foods were served only to notables; by design, a person's class status was discernible by what they were served. The order of service, arrangement of tables, and even the location of the festivities established and underlined social boundaries. Royal banquets took place in a guarded palace hall where only a few guests, or just the king, dined. Others watched, and most waited, either in view of the table or outside, hungry and hoping for leftovers.

For example, in Bologna banquets were staged to mark the political terms of the city's elders and to confirm the solidarity of the city government. On February 28, 1693, Senator Francesco Ratta gave an especially sumptuous dinner for sixty-four eminent people in the Palazzo Vizzani. An unusually extensive amount of documentation—two booklets and at least nine prints—was published to record and interpret the artistic productions designed for the dinner that commemorated the end of Ratta's term as *gonfalonier*.

The frontispiece to *Disegni del convito* (Designs of the banquet) shows a circular table in the great hall of the



Sugar sculptures (*Trionfi*) of Cybele and Juno, 1687. Westerhout, Arnold van (1651-1725) after Lenardi, Giovanni Battista (1656-1704), Etching. From John Michael Wright, *Raggvaglio della solenne comparsa...* (Rome: Domenico Antonio Ercole, 1687). 83-B3076. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California.

Palazzo Vizzani. Unlike long banquet tables, this arrangement allowed guests to be seated as equals, avoiding the isolation of the head table or seating hierarchy. Hanging above are Tommaso Laureti's paintings (now lost) of the history of another great leader, Alexander the Great, and on the wall, mirrors were hung slanting down to reflect and aggrandize the artistic decorations.

Featuring wonders of nature and art, the banquet hall displayed the wealth and good taste of Bologna and celebrated the genius of Senator Ratta. The centerpiece table sculpture for the reception, designed by Giuseppe Mazza, was made of sugar and sculpted by Sebastiano Sarti. More than twenty-two feet high and almost sixty feet across, the sculpture was made to be seen from all sides; the rocky crag is made of silver and covered with green foliage like the majestic palm tree that caps the arrangement. Civic emblems of Bologna are dispersed throughout the sculpture and coated in gilt. La Felsina, the crowned Etruscan warrior from whom the city derives its nickname stands triumphant in the shelter of the palm, resting her left hand on the head of a lion. The lion supports a shelf on which is inscribed "Libertas," alluding to Bologna's status as a free city under papal protection. Winged griffins stand on either side of the mounds of rocks on the sculpture, as well as on four pedestals around the room. Both griffins and the lion are emblems from the Ratta family coat of arms.

Although guests at this banquet were the city's elite, there was food for all. The Bolognese printmaker G.M. Mitelli's series of six popular prints shows a procession of foods given by the *gonfalonieri* of Bologna to the Swiss Guards. Held high above the marchers' heads, the platters and containers are paraded through the streets like booty during a triumphal procession, displaying the connections between public feasts and private celebrations.

### Spectacle in the Streets

Banquets such as these for court, civic, and religious leaders were held in palaces and gardens. By contrast, popular festivals with a focus on food took place in city streets and squares following the model of ancient Roman triumphal marches and medieval processions. They were held on traditional holidays, saints' days, rulers' birthdays and particularly to mark coronations and weddings. Celebrations of religious and seasonal events such as Carnival and wine harvests included games and contests, costumes, parades and fireworks.

These occasions allowed the rulers to create a sense of political solidarity and community, and to demonstrate the largesse and ultimate power of the government. But for the impoverished citizenry, the



*Description of the Land of Cockaigne, Where Whoever Works the Least Earns the Most*, 1606. Remondini family. Hand-colored etching. 2014.PR.72. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California.

highlight was the distribution of food.

In Italy, there were two popular street festivals—the *Cuccagna* and the *Festa della Porchetta*—both featuring ephemeral food monuments and outdoor roasts.

According to medieval folk tales, the *Cuccagna* (Land of Cockaigne) was a paradise on earth, the mythical land of plenty and idleness. Most popular in Naples, Cuccagna monuments were temporary festival structures made of wood scaffolding, papier-mâché and stucco, and decorated with meat, cheese, bread and pastry. They were usually built in the central square of the city by the royal palace. Celebrations based on the Cuccagna theme frequently included fireworks and fountains flowing with water and wine. Members of the court sat on balconies looking down at the street spectacle. When the king gave the signal, the citizenry stormed the monument in order to consume or carry away whatever food they could.

An early 17<sup>th</sup>-century hand-colored etching titled *Description of the Land of Cockaigne, Where Whoever works the Least Earns the Most*, depicts a fanciful monument with a lake of meatballs and salami, plains of marzipan and candies, a river of Spanish wine, hills of fine sugar cakes and mountains of gold. This magical place rains pearls, diamonds and cooked poultry; the landscape is filled with plants that produce cakes, pastries and macaroni; and a cave is made of ravioli. The print shows one industrious soul going to prison for working, while the laziest man, Mr. Panigon, is the master of the land. Life presents itself as easy, full of sensual pleasures, and without responsibilities. The Land of Cockaigne was the opposite of the hard life of the hungry poor. It was the perfect theme for festival celebrations that sought to take people away from the conditions of everyday life.

The *Festa della Porchetta* (the Feast of the Roasted Pig) in Bologna was held in the last weeks of August. The festival commemorated the end of a bloody civil war in 1281, and the designs created for the central square were documented with a publication and a print. Michaele Mazza's 1716 design for the *macchina*, an ephemeral festival sculpture, was staged in the Piazza Maggiore. It featured an enclosed garden with bulls running outside its fence and trees hung with birds, called *alberi della cuccagna*. Amid the games, dances, jousts and theater, the primary entertainment was the chase of livestock—wild boar, bulls and birds—let loose among the temporary festival architecture and sculpture. Rather than formal ceremony, the *Festa della Porchetta* focuses on the spectacle of the participants scrambling as they pursue food which is still on the hoof. In addition, the Bolognese people could elect to scale "trees" hung with birds. These were actually greased poles, *cuccagna* trees, hung with fowl as rewards for successful climbers.

### **Behind the Scenes**

These fanciful food festivals occurred long before the invention of refrigerators. Festivals were held for a period of several days up to a week; while grand banquets could take hours, and menus often listed hundreds of separate dishes. In order to support such an undertaking, kitchens became a series of complex spaces dedicated to different operations, with storage areas for specific temperatures. Specialized cooking methods required several ovens, the cold kitchen and diverse culinary devices and tools.

While festival books were beautifully printed and illustrated, they did not provide detailed descriptions of the food and how it was made. Initially, instructions and recipes were found in handwritten or modestly printed cookbooks and serving manuals. By the mid-17th century

cookbooks and related guides to carving or pastry-making were published in successive editions; evidently popular and useful, they circulated widely. Copied and plagiarized, they became models that spread throughout European court culture. Among the most popular were collected works by cooks at prestigious courts, master carvers and pastry cooks. These 'celebrity chefs' include Bartolomeo Scappi, the "private cook" to Pope Pius V; Joseph Gilliers, the dessert chef to King Augustus of Poland; and Juan de la Mata, court chef to the Spanish kings Philip V and Ferdinand VI.

### **Related Publication**

*The Edible Monument: The Art of Food for Festivals* will be accompanied by a publications of the same name. Edited by Reed, the 192-page hardcover, richly illustrated book features contributions from Getty curator Charissa Bremer-David, art historian Joseph Imorde and noted cookbook and culinary author Anne Willan. The book is published by Getty Publications and will be released in October 2015.

### **Also on View**

Concurrent to the exhibition, the J. Paul Getty Museum will present *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: Food in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* on view October 13, 2015–January 3, 2016 which, based on the Getty Museum's unparalleled collection of rare manuscripts, looks at how the cultivation, preparation, and consumption of food formed a framework for daily labor and leisure in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Illuminated manuscripts offer images of the chores that produced sustenance, cooking techniques, popular dishes, grand feasts and diners of different social classes. Food had powerful symbolic meaning in Christian devotional practice as well as in biblical stories and saintly miracles, where it nourished both the body and the soul.

### **Public Programs**

While both the exhibitions *The Edible Monument: The Art of Food for Festivals* and *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry: Food in the Middle Ages* are on view, a slate of public programs related to food will be offered at the Getty Center. Events will include tours, sugar sculpture demonstrations, cooking courses, special menu offerings and lectures on such topics as medieval recipes, edible table art and tooth decay. More information about the exhibitions and a complete guide to related events will be published online on October 6, 2015, at [getty.edu/edible](http://getty.edu/edible).

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**The J. Paul Getty Trust** is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades.

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largest art and architecture libraries in the world. The general library collections (secondary sources) include almost 900,000 volumes of books, periodicals, and auction catalogues encompassing the history of Western art and related fields in the humanities. The Research Library's special collections include rare books, artists' journals, sketchbooks, architectural drawings and models, photographs, and archival materials.

### **Visiting the Getty Center**

The Getty Center is open Tuesday through Friday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. It is closed Monday and most major holidays, open on July 4. Admission to the Getty Center is always free. Parking is \$15 per car, but reduced to \$10 after 4 p.m. No reservation is required for parking or general admission. Reservations are required for event seating and groups of 15 or more. Please call (310) 440-7300 (English or Spanish) for reservations and information. The TTY line for callers who are deaf or hearing impaired is (310) 440-7305. The Getty Center is at 1200 Getty Center Drive, Los Angeles, California.

### **Additional information is available at [www.getty.edu](http://www.getty.edu).**

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