

# THE ART OF FOOD FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF JORDAN D. SCHNITZER AND HIS FAMILY FOUNDATION

In its most everyday sense, food is a physical necessity, yet its overall significance goes far beyond sustenance. Food is integral to our communities, relationships, cultures, and languages. People interact with food on varying levels. Some of us grow or gather it; more of us buy it. We transform it by cutting, cooking, and dressing it with spices, marinades, and garnishes. We use food as an intermediary to connect with others through holiday meals, business lunches, dates, and more.

Our food choices also carry ethical implications. What we eat affects and is affected by an intricate global food chain. We fight over food. We deny food to some as a tool of suppression and cultural erasure. We fear for our health, the challenge of feeding a growing global population, and the effects of climate change on food production.

Featuring more than 100 works in a variety of media from the renowned collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation, *The Art of Food* showcases how some of the most prominent artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have considered this universal subject. Organized thematically, it uses an artistic lens to examine the subject of food beyond its purpose as body fuel.

The exhibition also relates to the East End of Long Island's distinguished history as one of the most important fishing and agricultural regions in New York State. The area was developed into agricultural land by the 1640s, and by the 1820s as many as 95 percent of the residents lived on farms. While Greenport and Sag Harbor were ports for trade and whaling, Peconic Bay was known for its fish and shellfish. Today, the East End remains an agricultural center, producing more than one hundred different crops, and an increasingly prominent wine region with more than sixty vineyards.

This exhibition was organized by the University of Arizona Museum of Art in partnership with the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation and curated by Olivia Miller, Interim Director, Curator of Collections, University of Arizona Museum of Art. The presentation at the Parrish Art Museum is organized by Corinne Erni, Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Chief Curator, Art and Education and Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs, with additional support from Kaitlin Halloran, Assistant Curator and Publications Coordinator.

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Spanish translation: Jaime Fatás-Cabeza, Associate Professor of the Practice; Director, Undergraduate Translation and Interpretation Program. Spanish and Portuguese Department.

# STILL LIFE

The still lifes of Ellsworth Kelly and Donald Sultan walk a paradoxical line between naturalism and artifice. They are as minimal as they are complex; their subjects banal, yet simultaneously provocative. Although these works stem from botanical illustration and European still life traditions, Kelly and Sultan have moved these genres to a new level—one where a single object is elevated to a status worthy of its own monumental size and space.

Kelly uses crisp contours to delineate the forms of fruits, stems, and leaves. While pared down to the essence of line, his lithographs stimulate the senses, asking us to imagine the color, texture, and even the taste of the fruit. In contrast to Kelly's approach, Sultan builds up the fruits' forms through layers of hazy mist. They are textural and tangible, yet also seem artificial and unnatural.

The play of positive and negative space and of weighted mass versus contour line signal differing artistic approaches between the artists. Nevertheless, their works are connected by a deep examination of the aesthetics of fruit, inviting us to wonder at the sight of these familiar objects.

# ELIXIRS AND LIBATIONS

The world of food would be unimaginable without the accompaniment of drink, that grand array of liquids that flow from the absolutely essential to the purely pleasurable. And drinks recur with insistent regularity in works of art, once we begin to look for them. Their visual depiction poses a particular challenge: liquids, of course, have no inherent shape of their own. Accordingly, artists have resorted to a variety of approaches in order to portray drinks and drinking. The works in this gallery are loosely grouped according to those strategies.

In some cases, drinking vessels stand in for the fluids they contain—we see tumblers, stemware, bottles, cups, and cans, all with their own evocative contours. In other instances, artists have turned to corporate branding, relying on well-known logos to suggest the cultural ubiquity of the beverages they represent. Finally, there is the depiction of familiar settings—for example, the bar or the coffee shop—with which we associate specific kinds of liquid consumption.

Artists have often had to approach drinks obliquely, by way of the containers, signs, and rituals that surround them. Despite their visual evasiveness, it is clear that drinks are imbued with a host of significant and shifting meanings in our culture and in our lives.

# EYE CANDY

The human capacity to be visually attracted to foods is universal. Evolutionary research suggests that we enjoy looking at food because the brain anticipates the physical satisfaction derived from eating. The shapes and colors of fruit likely drove early foraging decisions, and their aesthetics continue to play an important role in our choices about what to consume. The famous adage “we eat first with our eyes” is quickly evident in a trip to the grocery store where produce is showcased with uniformity of shape, size, and color to appeal to the casual supermarket shopper.

While our varying opinions on food aesthetics are shaped by our cultural influences and life experiences, pieces of fruit in particular offer enormous potential for artists to tease a viewer’s appetite. Through them an artist can explore form, shadow, texture, and color. In turn, they can arouse desire in the viewer by appealing to the senses of taste, touch, and smell.

Perhaps it is this inherent beauty and bodily desire for food that also makes it an apropos metaphor for sexual desire. With the associations of sin, fertility, and revelry wound up in fruits like apples, peaches, and grapes, depictions of fruits have the ability to stimulate more than one craving.