

# Food + Chef

MAGAZINE

Interview with:  
**LUKADUKE**

Food Inspired Art  
Art Inspired Food





# A Brief History of Food & Art

By Simone Innamorati

**T**he connection between food and art is as undeniable as it is delicious. Throughout the centuries, food has left an indelible mark on art. The same cannot always be said of art on food. Unfortunately, art inspired food isn't always captured in the way we would hope. The temptation to consume food is far greater than the need to devour art.

Perhaps, this is why we have so many records of food inspired art. The story of haute cuisine is an ancient one, stretching back to the Romans, who were notorious for their gluttonous appetite. Eternal pleasure seekers, the Romans understood the finer things in life. In this mural discovered in the Pompeii ruins, we see a typical Roman larder stocked with the catch of the day, most notably a dangling squid.



<http://www.utexas.edu/courses/romanciv/Romancivimages21/4thstylestilllife.jpg>



Fish and squid formed staples of the local diet. Squid was stuffed with succulent pork forcemeat, before it was cooked in a rich wine sauce thickened with egg yolk. Recreate these decadent dishes with *Apicus-Cookery and Dining in Imperial Rome* by Joseph Dommers Verling.

Art documents how our tastes have evolved. It testifies to important historical changes in society. The 17th century was an exciting period of exploration and innovation in and outside the kitchen. New territories opened up, bringing exotic spices like cardamom, ginger and tarragon to the dinner table never before seen. Trade also popularized cinnamon, nutmeg, and sugar, which were previously too expensive to use in everyday recipes.

Suddenly, cooking got a whole lot more interesting

The 17th century Dutch painter, Pieter Claesz showcased these changes in the sumptuous work, *Still Life with Turkey Pie* (1627).



Expensive dishes like turkey pie, a highly prized lemon and fresh oysters are laid out on a beautiful table. Salt and pepper spilling out from the leaf of an almanac are also on display in Claesz's work, testifying to the maritime influence of the Dutch empire. It is important to remember that salt and pepper were still considered a luxury in this period.

The works of Roman and Dutch artists perfectly capture the delicacies of the day. However, there is one delicacy notably absent from both works, dessert. Until the 18th century, sugar was simply too expensive to use in everyday dishes. Cakes were sweetened with honey, fruits or ground almonds.



## ART INSPIRED FOOD

Europeans began growing sugar cane on an industrial scale in South America. A new world opened up to tease the taste, sweeten sensibilities and tempt in every form. An entire industry sprang up seemingly overnight to accommodate the growing sweet tooth of industrial nations. This was most pronounced in America during the American Industrial Revolution, when candies were manufactured on a large scale for the first time. With mass production also came the desire to refine and distinguish recipes, giving rise to beautifully decorated patisseries or specialized bakeries like Ladurée the infamous Parisian tea salon.

Ladurée represented a very important step towards art inspired food. The decoration of the shop was entrusted to Jules Cheret, a famous turn-of-the-century painter. Using painting techniques borrowed from the Sistine Chapel and the Garnier Opera, Jules added depth and



relief to the ceilings of the shop with paintings of cherubic children playing in the clouds. The effect was a combination of airy pastels and charming faces peering down at the clients taking their afternoon tea.

It was in the rich, pastel surroundings of the shop that Pierre Desfontaines, second cousin of Louis Ernest Ladurée created the first macaroon.



He adjoined two shells with a delicious ganache filling. Pierre's legacy for art inspired food continues. These exquisite cakes, crisp on the outside, smooth and soft in the middle, are made every morning in Ladurée's "laboratory". The cakes range in color and flavor, but each features a distinctive pastel palate and deep, lingering flavor much like the Impressionist works of turn of the century artists: Monet, Van Gogh and Renoir.

There is something deliciously resonant about the pastel, opaque strokes on Monet's canvas, the way water lilies glimmer in a quiet pond. Macarons offer the same visual pleasure. Perfectly round cakes balanced on a soft paste. Each macaroon is calculated to tease the palate and the eye with its pleasing textures and pop of color.



Thanks to the invention of photography in the mid 19th century, images of art inspired food became more and more prolific. Food took center stage with the help of commercial book publishers.

This is when cook books really came into fashion. Julia Child's cook book, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* is arguably one of the most famous, thanks to the recent Hollywood movie *Julie & Julia*. The film and subject matter blurred the lines between art inspired food and food inspired art. Although Julia Child was moved by the artistic surroundings of Paris and French cuisine, her food became a source of inspiration in its own right, something she could have scarcely dreamed of during the years after WWII. Rationing and poor communication meant people didn't always have the time to cook and appreciate food.

Decades later, devotees began cooking her food in homage to her butter laden recipes, which became works of art in themselves. Here, the lines between art and food bled to create a fantastic confusion between fact and fiction. The

truth about food is not easily understood. Our understanding of food shifts over time. However, one thing remains certain about food; it is an art unlike any other.

Our appetite for art has not decreased. It has increased with our need to understand art not just visually but through our other four senses, taste, touch and hearing. Social media and blogs have made art and food more accessible, igniting debates from critics.

Art is no longer two dimensional. While the works of great masters will never diminish in their historical and social importance, food represents an immediate pleasure for the taking. The Romans understood this. Food represents the moment, art represents the ideal. Both are necessary, but sometimes the moment dictates our full attention.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simone Innamorati is a published author and freelance writer, residing in London, U.K. She writes on a variety of subjects: food, lifestyle, self-help and men's fashion. She is an avid baker and wine enthusiast. She hopes to release a book on a collection of recipes that have been in her family for 200 years, promoting sustainable living and traditional French country cooking.