

## **The Ugliness of Eating: Resistance to Depicting Consumption in Visual Arts**

**Authors :** Constance Kirker

**Abstract :** While there is general agreement that food itself can be beautiful, thousands of still-life masterpieces over the years attest to this, depicting the act of eating, actually placing food in one's mouth and chewing is seemingly taboo. The environment created around consumption -dining rooms, linens, china, flowers- is consciously choreographed to provide a pleasing aesthetic experience. Yet artists, from Roman frescoes painters to contemporary photographers, create images from feasts to solitary subjects that rarely show food or drink touching lips, chewing, or swallowing. Of the countless paintings of the Last Supper, the food remains on the table. Rarely is Adam or Eve shown taking a bite of the apple, initiating Original Sin. In the few examples that do depict food-in-mouth, Goya's Saturn Devouring His Son, or the ubiquitous photos of the "wedding smash" with brides and grooms pushing wedding cake into each other's mouths, the images are seemingly intended to be particularly ugly or humorous in a distasteful way. This paper will explore theories that include the rules of etiquette, some determined hundreds of years ago and still followed today, that imply eating is a metaphor for gluttony, implicit sexuality of eating, the distortion of the face while eating and the simple practicality of the difficulty of an artist's model maintaining a chewing position. If art is a reflection of society, what drives the universal impulse to hide this very human function?

**Keywords :** aesthetics, senses, taboo, consumption

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