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Food-themed art, culinary program coming to Dunedin Fine Art Center

New exhibits explore the intersection of food and art.

BY JENNIFER RING — SEP 27, 2018 11 AM



Dominick Critelli's "The Persistence of Pizza" is a tongue-in-cheek tribute to Salvador Dalí.

DOMINICK CRITELLI; PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNIFER RING

When does food become art?

It depends on who you ask.

“If you ask a chef, they’ll tell you that food becomes art the moment they plate it,” says Ken Hannon, vice president of the Dunedin Fine Art Center.

If you ask Gail Gamble, DFAC board member and former home economics teacher, there are many moments when food becomes art. Gamble cites “creativity in combining ingredients, serving food in an attractive way, and setting a nice table that’s appealing to everybody,” all as examples of food becoming art.

If you ask an artist, well, God only knows what they’ll tell you. Creatives are unpredictable in the most wonderful way.

Local artist Gaior Roberts realized food was art while chopping up a green bell pepper for dinner one night.

“I looked at this green pepper, really, for the first time in my life,” says Roberts. What she saw before her was such a beautiful arrangement of seeds that it inspired an entire series of fruit portraits she calls *Genesis*.



Gainor Roberts' plum in egg tempera; Genesis

GAINOR ROBERTS; PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE DUNEDIN FINE ART CENTER

Genesis is one of five food-themed art exhibits at DFAC this fall. Roberts paints each of her fruits using the ancient technique, egg tempera, where the artist mixes egg yolk with powdered pigment to create paint.

After she finishes the paintings, she bakes them in the sun for a couple days to bind the egg yolk to the pigment and the canvas in a hastened polymerization reaction. So, when you think about it, it's like she's painting food with food, and then cooking her artwork.

Since that fateful day in 2007, Roberts' *Genesis* series has swelled to 56 paintings, the last of which she finished a few months ago. They form a delectable grid of 6"x8" painted panels in DFAC's Syd Entel Founders Hall.

“I keep thinking I’m going to shut this thing down, then I see something at Publix,” Roberts says.



Raphaelle Peale's Still Life with Oranges, 1818, is an excellent example of the classic still life.

RAPHAELLE PEALE [PUBLIC DOMAIN], VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The classic still life is the most common artistic interpretation of food as art. You can see dozens of these still lifes in paint, colored pencil and mixed media in DFAC’s *You Are What You Eat*, the result of an open call to artists. Michele Tuegel juried this exhibition of creative still lifes, artistic interpretations of people eating and other food-forward art, which fills two hallways at DFAC.

DFAC’s curator of exhibits, Catherine Bergmann, confesses she was more interested in the language of food than food itself. Out of this interest Bergmann built an exhibit — around the word “insatiable.” People can be insatiable for all sorts of things, although food and sex are probably the first things that come to mind. *Insatiable* features work from four artists: Quentin Walter, Elizabeth Barenis, Kay Ritter and Renee Ray.



Renee Ray's He: Sustaining; oil and charcoal on unstretched canvas; Insatiable

RENEE REY; PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE DUNEDIN FINE ART CENTER

Renee Ray's artwork offers a fascinating interpretation: the insatiable desire for all things in nature, including humans, to be treated equally. Three of her paintings cover a single wall of DFAC's Entel Family Gallery. To call them grand would be an understatement. Ray started working larger during a residency in Colorado Springs, where she was inspired by the grand rock formations of the Garden of the Gods.

Bergmann's use of foodie language as a theme appears again with *Banquet*. DFAC's Douglas-Whitley Gallery is stuffed with stoneware, paintings, glass, jewelry, collage and sculpture, meant as a feast for the eyes. Indeed it is, but there are so *many* different things happening in this gallery, it's a tad overwhelming.



Fantabulous Foods in the Kokolakis Family Youth Gallery

JENNIFER RING

The food theme extends into the children's gallery, the province of Todd Still, DFAC's youth education director. Over the summer, Still worked with kids in DFAC's summer programs and created art for the youth gallery, including a don't-miss glow-in-the-dark food pyramid.

Why so much food? It coincides with DFAC's new Food Arts program, which they'll officially open in January (that's when they expect to finish the kitchen). They're rolling some things out this fall, including 15 new cooking classes taught by Chef Craig Tinling.

The center already has many food-related course offerings, Hannon says. Plates, bowls, and mugs can be made in pre-existing pottery classes, table linens in textiles classes, knives in the bladesmithing class, and fruit-heavy still lifes in drawing and painting classes. DFAC aims to tie the new cooking classes in with these older art classes to form their new Food Arts program.

Gail Gamble was the first to propose that the DFAC add cooking classes to their offerings.

“It just seemed like it would be a great way to get a different group of people into the art center — maybe people that didn’t feel like they had artistic talent in drawing or painting, but they’re creative and food could be an outlet for them,” Gamble says.

DFAC won’t be the first museum in the area to tie food into their art exhibits and projects — The Dalí did this in 2016 when it paired images of Chef Ferran Adria’s creations with some of Dalí’s food-inspired paintings in the memorable *Ferran Adria: The Invention of Food*. In 2015, St. Petersburg’s Museum of Fine Arts published a cookbook, *Food + Art*, featuring gorgeous food photography one expects from an art museum. Incorporating food into art museums extends far beyond St. Petersburg — it’s a major national trend.

“I think within the past 10 years, we’ve become more of a food-centric culture in America,” Gamble says.

“There probably hasn’t been a time in the United States when the demand for artful food has been so high,” says Hannon, “[but] we have this big disconnect of high expectations and everyone feels like, ‘I could never do that.’ And that’s kind of what we’ve been about to begin with — making that connection. Yes you can. Of course you can. Come on over. Let’s try it out. Start at whatever level you want, and we’ll get you wherever you want to go. That’s always been our position with art. We don’t want to turn anyone away.”

Fantabulous Foods

Through Oct. 12

Gainor Robert’s Genesis Series & You Are What You Eat

Through Oct. 15

Insatiable & Banquet

Through Dec. 23

Dunedin Fine Art Center, 1143 Michigan Blvd., Dunedin

Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sat., 10 a.m.-2 p.m.; and Sun., 1-4 p.m.

727-298-DFAC. dfac.org