

ABSTRACT

Tools of Mass Consumption

by

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Today, with cheaply produced plasticware introduced in the 1960s and foods that can be consumed directly out of the wrapper, our culture has essentially acknowledged the necessity for function and convenience when eating. I have embraced the idea of the positive effects of quality, married it with the abounding specialization found in Victorian flatware, and created a series of wares explicitly for the consumption of doughnuts and pizza. Using my eating utensils as an instrument for commentary, I encourage the scrutinizing examination of American eating habits.

Tools of Mass Consumption

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by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful parents for their continued support of my relentless artistic endeavors.

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INTRODUCTION

As the pace of life has increased, the amount of time spent dining has lessened. To celebrate two foods that I feel are most iconic of American consumption, I have made objects for the service and enjoyment of doughnuts and pizza. With the introduction of specific utensils, I intend for the user to increasingly savor and be more aware of the experience of dining.



Figure 1: Doughnut Tongs; Sterling and fine silver; 10" x 3.5" x 3.5"; 2014.

The modern objects I have constructed parallel historical implements. For example, the doughnut server echoes the many styles of bon-bon tongs that were made in the late Victorian

period.¹ A food pusher for children provides inspiration for the pizza-topping remover.² These pieces have been created with deliberate respect to historical techniques but convey the absurdity of the American food culture. Americans tend to eat too much and often make unhealthy food choices. Taking time to acknowledge the process of eating – slower eating rates are linked to consuming less calories – and being aware of what is ingested – are two cognitively simple but habitually difficult ways to have a more mindful approach to food. Is there a need for the variety of refined confections and processed food products anymore than there is a need for each to have dedicated plates and utensils?

Food is seen as insignificant when there is no celebration surrounding its consumption, yet all humans need to eat to live. It has not been since roughly the 1600s that so little tableware is used.³ On the other hand, a collector who uses his silverware every day has guests who comment, “foods – even items not ordinarily enjoyed – seem to taste better when eaten with such elegant flatware.”⁴ Instead of marginalizing food and its potential for enjoyment by serving it with plastic utensils on disposable plates, I chose to craft objects that complement the textural and sensual qualities of foods. I have embellished the utensils in a simple way so the decoration does not interfere with utility or distract from their form. By allowing the food to be complemented by the shape, function, and decoration of the objects, I intend for the experience of dining to become more valued and enjoyed.

These objects are at first humorously decadent. There is a definite sense of silliness in the re-creation of frosting and sprinkles in a dignified metal such as silver. I also find the beauty of the innate visual and textural qualities of a food simple but striking, emulating these qualities

¹ Hood, p. 104.

² Hood, p. 94.

³ Giblin, p. 70.

⁴ Hood, p. 303.

in the utensil itself. The more unusual pieces also stimulate the same curiosity or fascination as an obsolete, specialized utensil such as a marrow spoon – What is this? What is it for? Why would this be used? My utensils are recognizable enough as food related items, but their specificity makes them distinctive.



Figure 2: Doughnut Hole Tongs; Sterling silver, reticulation silver, and smoky topaz; 6" x 1 3/4" x 2 1/4"; 2015.

My collection of work is also meant to be serious. This series has been crafted with care and authenticity. I have researched extensively to find the origins of silversmithing – but very few books show how to make something as simple as a spoon. The industrial revolution allowed for great freedom in form and style (and much better corporate record-keeping) – but the register of how things were made without mechanization is often unclear. My work is an honest

exploration of the handmade. This series of substantial implements for serving and eating stereotypical American foods is a study in silversmithing and a commentary on our food habits.

CHAPTER 1: EATING UTENSILS

There is a rich history to the evolution of the utensil and dining conventions starting with primitive flint knives. Hands paired with a knife were the original eating tools. What began as skillfully chipped rocks evolved with the discovery of copper into form-defined cast tools. When bronze alloys were invented knives became more durable and strengthened again with the discovery of steel.⁵ In Eastern cultures knives were supplemented with chopsticks as the universal utensil dating back to around 3000 BCE.⁶

The next utensil to develop was the spoon, most likely made of altered shells with a wood or bone handle. These basic spoons were adopted around 5000 BCE in the areas surrounding the Mediterranean. Another early spoon example made of carved wood dating to 3000 BCE was unearthed in Switzerland. The word *spoon* comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *spon* meaning “splinter or chip of wood,” undoubtedly reflecting the commonality of wooden spoons.⁷

For much of the renaissance people would carry their own knife with them because dinnerware was not provided at taverns or by the host. These travel sets would often include a spoon-end and later a fork-end that would be interchangeable on a single handle.⁸ As dining traditions progressed it became a status symbol of nobility to be able to provide all of their guests with “tableware”. Flatware, now intentionally set on the table, is the origin of the table-knife, table-fork, and still used term tablespoon.⁹

⁵ Giblin, pp. 10-14.

⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

⁷ Hood, p. 61.

⁸ Coffin, p. 52.

⁹ Hood, p. 47.

Making tableware was a labor intensive process fulfilled by a skilled smith or cutler. Consequently the product was expensive - even more so when made of silver. Royalty would sometimes have solid gold utensils for themselves as a blatant display of wealth. However, most families were poor and used tableware made of wood or less expensive metals like bronze, tin, or pewter.¹⁰ Most metal utensils, regardless of material, were special enough to be listed explicitly in wills because of their significant value.

The triad of tableware known today becomes complete with the most recent addition - forks. Originally used as two-pronged serving pieces in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, forks were largely absent from history after the fall of the Roman Empire. In the Middle East there is evidence of two-pronged forks being used by 600 AD.¹¹ The concept of forks traveled slowly and with much resistance into Italy and through the rest of Europe. The Catholic Church claimed using forks was blasphemous for the fact that ‘God provided humans with natural forks – fingers.’¹² It wasn’t until the mid-1600s that forks became fashionable in Britain – the first hallmarked silver fork dates to 1632.¹³ With forks available, knives no longer had to be pointed to spear food – in 1669 King Louis XIV of France deemed pointed knives illegal in France and for the points on existing table knives to be ground off. This was probably a preventative measure to deter assassinations or anecdotally to prevent guests from picking their teeth with the knife’s point while still at the table.¹⁴ By the end of the 1600s the new normal for place settings was established as matching forks, knives, and spoons graced the table, and plates replaced bread ‘trenchers’ for each diner.

¹⁰ Giblin, p. 25.

¹¹ Hood, pp. 73-74.

¹² Giblin, p. 46.

¹³ Hood, p. 74.

¹⁴ Hood, p. 47.

For the next 200 years cutlery continued to be made by skilled silversmiths, including a number of women.¹⁵ The silversmithing tradition changed with the industrial revolution and the introduction of steam-powered machinery. Each piece of silverware no longer needed to be made by hand – die presses and rollers were able to stamp out blanks quickly, accurately, and in multiple patterns. Additionally, the electroplating process was refined allowing base metals to be plated with silver at a tenth of the cost of a full silver set.

By the late 1800s, the efficiency afforded by machine production allowed for a creative increase of form and function. The result was specialized utensils for many foods – the same handle pattern could be used but the head of the utensil would be changed to fit each dish. Some of the forms, like ice cream *forks*, were awkward at best for their intended purpose, while other styles like grapefruit spoons were well suited for their task and are still used today. As the table service grew so did the number of serving utensils and matching serving dishes.

During the Victorian era, the rising American middle class was convinced that they needed a specialized utensil for each food less they commit a social faux pas. Silverware was a status symbol, and to have a utensil for every dish and course was a lavish display of wealth. One such elaborate service ensemble was commissioned by the Mackay family, who owned the Comstock Lode silver mines. They sent a half-ton of silver from their mine to Tiffany & Co. in 1878. Two hundred men spent two years working on the 24-place settings. The 1,250 piece custom set cost over \$125,000.¹⁶ In today's market this equates to over a quarter-million dollars worth of silver and easily over ten million dollars in labor.

¹⁵ Glanville, 1990.

¹⁶ Hood, pp. 293-294.

The pinnacle of sterling table settings arguably occurred in the late 1800s; popularity of silverware continued to run high until the great depression and the industry was suspended completely during World War II. The silver industry was slow to recover post-war and the market for stainless steel, seen as ‘modern and practical, was growing as an alternative to sterling flatware. With cultural shifts away from tradition, the decline of formal dinners, and women maintaining a workforce presence, a silver set of utensils might only be used on special occasions.

Eating utensils have changed significantly from their purely practical origins. Tableware has been taken back off of the table, become more disposable, less tactile, and has become insignificant to current American eating habits. The pervasive use of plasticware or no tableware at all is evidence that the current culture of food consumption has degraded. My doughnut and pizza accouterments are presented to highlight this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2: DOUGHNUTS

The human body is designed to cognitively reward the consumption of sugar and fat; doughnuts are a physiologically addictive combination.¹⁷ Historically a homemade treat, almost every culture has some sort of fried-sweetened-dough confection. Generally inexpensive enough to be inconsequential and not quite filling enough to be considered a meal - the doughnut is often a “discretionary snack.”¹⁸ If the customs surrounding doughnuts were more elaborate there would be more consideration in their consumption. Unlike the elaborate and delicate pastries that would grace the high Victorian table, doughnuts are an unpretentious treat with working class associations. Many doughnut shops were strategically located en route to industrial areas to attract shift workers for a pick-me-up in a low-key social environment.



Figure 3: Plate for Jelly-filled doughnuts; copper and copper/brass/nickel mokume-gane; 5 ¾" x 5 ¾" x ¾"; 2015.

¹⁷ Stice, 2013.

¹⁸ Penfold, p. 16.

My personal experience with the doughnut revolves around Fat Tuesday, a day heavy with *pączki* (*PONCH-ki*) consumption. In the Polish-Catholic tradition, Fat Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday and the start of Lent, a time of general fasting and self-restraint. Historically on this day, *pączki*, a jelly-filled yeast doughnut traditionally filled with plum-preserve, were made to use up all of the sugar, butter, jams, lard, etc. Hamtramck, a city located entirely within Detroit and once known as little Poland, is Michigan's most internationally diverse and most densely populated city. Although the population has shifted to a large proportion of newer immigrants from the Middle East, there are still a number of Polish bakeries that have lines out the door for *pączki* on Fat Tuesday.¹⁹



Figure 4: Doughnut Dunking Tongs; Sterling silver; 7" x 3/4" x 2"; 2015.

As a compliment to doughnut serving utensils and plates, coffee is a natural beverage pairing for doughnuts. Soldiers during both World Wars were given the delightful duo at

¹⁹ "Fat Tuesday Can Be Paczki Pandemonium," 2012.

hospitality stations that became known as “Doughnut Dugouts.”²⁰ Ironically, to circumnavigate World War II restrictions on drinking coffee or tea between meals the pairing was promoted as a meal itself in Vancouver, Canada.²¹ While there is no Victorian equivalent to the coffee sleeve, there is the Turkish zarf – an ornamental metal holder for ceramic coffee cups.²² Simple paper cups are either self-insulated or have a cardboard ring to protect the consumer’s hand from heat transfer. They are boring, unsophisticated, and entirely utilitarian. Coffee culture is common – note the number of coffee shops in any given town – and perceived as a minor but often necessary purchase. For something that would be used everyday, a more pleasurable coffee sleeve is an obvious creation. The elaborate nature of a six dollar, fat-free, double shot of espresso, two pumps of sugar free caramel flavoring soy mocha-latte is analogous to the coffee sleeve with a fused brass/nickel/copper mokume gane²³ band lined with felted magenta wool including orange and yellow swirls. Neither is necessary for survival, but they are both luxuries that are worthy of taking the time to enjoy wholly.

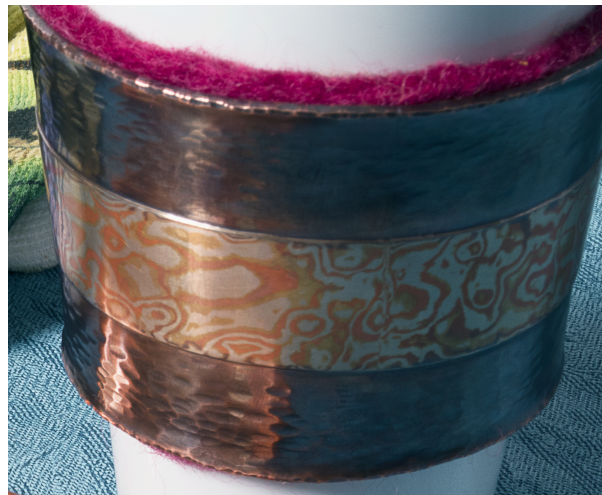


Figure 5: Coffee Sleeve; Copper and copper/brass/nickel mokume gane; 3” x 3” x 2 ½”; 2015.

²⁰ Fisher, p. 163.

²¹ Penfold, p.39.

²² "zarf", 2011.

²³ *mokume gane*: Japanese for “wood-grained metal.” This technique involves bonding layers of different colored metals into a solid piece and then cutting through the layers to produce a pattern.

CHAPTER 3: PIZZA

Brought to the United States by Italian immigrants, pizza is another ubiquitously American food. The first recorded commercial enterprise opened in New York City in 1905. Originally an Italian peasant food, the dish was greatly popularized in Italy by the approval of the King and Queen of Italy. Having heard of pizza, they visited Naples in 1889 to sample the popular regional specialty. Queen Margherita was so delighted by the simple cheese, tomato and basil pizza that it was named after her.²⁴

Pizza became increasingly consumed in the States after World War II. Troops on tour in Italy sampled the dish and upon return they actively sought out pizza and shared it with others. Pizzerias were a popular hangout in the 1950s for those not yet old enough to socialize at bars. In the 1960's pizza gained even more momentum as a counter-culture group-centric food that was quick, cheap, tasty, and fun. Franchises such as both Michigan based Domino's® and Little Caesars® helped to spread the gospel of the pizza pie. These companies focused on establishing themselves in college towns, opening as many as three new locations per day. Pizza is still an inexpensive, extremely popular food that is well suited for groups, serves itself, and requires no utensils.²⁵

Pizza, although consumed more often than doughnuts, was a special Friday night treat for my siblings and me when our parents were dining out. My father always had a certain disdain for pizza and considered it “unsuitable as dinner,” because it is not the traditional meat/starch/vegetable format. Although probably to our health benefit, pizza was not often consumed in our household despite our protests. Pizza was and still is a favorite dish of mine. I

²⁴ Amore, 2011.

²⁵ Rothman, 2012.

have a passionate appetite for cheese; as a vegetarian, a six cheese pizza covered in vegetables and mushrooms is an ideal Friday night dinner. If those I am enjoying dinner with do not have a palate for the range of toppings, the pizza-topping removers can help to elegantly tailor the dish to their liking. The experience of using the 24 Karat gold-tipped pizza-topping remover will help to alleviate the anxiety of unwanted toppings.



Figure 6: Pizza-Topping Remover; Sterling Silver and 24 Karat gold; 9" x 2" x 3"; 2015.

CHAPTER 4: SILVER AND SMITHING

Silversmithing as a profession is most traceable through the Goldsmith's company of London, which has been responsible for testing the quality of gold and silver in Britain since 1300. Since the livery was established, wealthy patrons sustained the demand for silversmiths. Knowledge of the craft remained largely unchanged until the mid 1800s as it was passed from master to apprentice.

With the invention of the steam powered engine and tools for mass production, the industrial revolution caused much of the silversmithing process to become mechanized. This time period marks the decline of traditional silversmithing in favor of manufacturing. As a benefit, the increased production time and use of dies allowed for many new and beautiful utensils and patterns to be fostered. Even so, there were some hand-wrought silverware sets produced for a premium price. Regardless, the sheer quantity of silver produced in the Victorian era was able to spread the luxury of a fine dining experience to a wider audience.

The silver industry faced two major trials in the 1900s – the great depression and World War II. Many businesses were challenged by these two events. As a luxury item, silver had little demand during the depression and during World War II all metals were focused toward the war effort. In March of 1942 all manufacture of silverware was halted by government order and it wasn't until 1948 that full production resumed. The silver industry had a difficult time recovering after the war, with new restrictions and taxes on luxury items such as sterling silverware.²⁶ The introduction and perfection of stainless steel would begin to compete with sterling as a more durable material for flatware as well.

²⁶ Braznell, p. 189.

With the moratorium on production and silversmiths out of work or fighting in the war, silversmithing was in a very vulnerable position after the war. The GI bill allowed soldiers to return to school without the burden of cost, freeing them to chose a livelihood they truly wanted to pursue. Many veterans chose to explore the arts – specifically ceramics, metals, and fibers – bringing a much-needed post-war revival to metalsmithing. The metal arts were also used as a rehabilitative activity for war veterans – activating both the hands and mind in creative pursuit.²⁷

The demand for traditional silversmithing has continued to wane in demand. In Britain, however, the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths still oversees hallmarks and serves as a valuable hub for those who continue to do original work in precious metals. There are devoted silversmiths who earn a living making prototypes for large silverware companies and combine traditional hand skills with 3D scanning and computer modeling. There is still demand for new silver – sets of silverware costing upwards of \$10,000 are available at a few high-end department stores.

²⁷ Braznell, p. 188.



Figure 7: Coffee Sleeve and Plate for Sugared Doughnuts; Copper, Sterling Silver; Plate – 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ " diameter, $\frac{3}{4}$ " high, coffee sleeve – 3" x 3" x 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; 2015.

I choose to carry on this tradition. As a dedicated silversmith in a modern context, I combine traditional hand forging methods with early technological adaptations such as the hydraulic press – using the most appropriate process to achieve the desired result. Sourcing ideas from different eras, I link manual production methods with variety that was only attainable with the advent of manufacturing and then bring those ideas to relevancy today within the context of familiar foods.



Figure 8: Plate for Very Greasy Pizza; Copper, nickel, copper/nickel mokume gane; 11" x 11" x 2"; 2015.

In making sterling utensils for the humble doughnut and pizza I am both elevating these foods and appropriating the cultural conventions of the historical upper class. Only the very well off would have had access to the elaborate settings and serving dishes specialized for every new food that was gracing the Victorian table. In my works, I am using the context of familiar foods to decrease prohibitive formality and make the wares approachable by all. I am re-introducing splendor and celebration for foods that would historically lack the pedigree for such treatment.

CHAPTER 5: TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The process of silversmithing has been around for millennia and most of the techniques that I am using have changed very little. I believe that I am merely a temporary custodian of knowledge passed from Silversmith to Silversmith. Contemporary metalsmith John Cogswell summarizes, “I am one in a living ‘chain,’ a metalsmithing tradition stretching from antiquity into the future.”²⁸



Figure 9: Meister Van De Bileam, *St. Eligius in His Workshop*. Engraving. 1440-1460. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. *Rijksmuseum Online Collection*.

²⁸ Rabinovitch, p. 16.

The basis of metalsmithing centers on the malleability of metal – it can stretch or be compressed to change its form. In this series of objects I used entirely traditional tools and techniques to forge and fabricate the utensils. While today smiths can use such luxuries as an electric rolling mill to reduce the thickness of metal, it would have been only a hammer and anvil until the 1800s. In a fifteenth century engraving of a goldsmith shop, most of the tools are easily identifiable and still used today. To achieve uniformity and fluid curves in the doughnut plates I used a one-sided die with a hydraulic press. This is a tool that would have not been available prior to the industrial revolution, but I embrace its mechanical advantage. In the pizza plates I used forming techniques to achieve the voluptuous curves of the plate for deep-dish plate and fabrication techniques in the plate for very greasy pizza.



Figure 10: Plate for Deep-dish Pizza; Copper and Sterling Silver; 10" x 10" x 5"; 2015.

My choice in materials was to achieve the function of each piece with as much respect to history as possible. There is a general hierarchy of metals due to their rarity, utility, and market value, with silver falling below gold but above copper. The elegance and weight of silver plus its lustrous reflectivity make eating with it special. I used sterling silver for all of the utensils, but for the plates, the amount of silver necessary was prohibitively expensive. Silver as a pure metal is not prone to oxidation, but it is not rigid. Sterling silver, an alloy of copper and silver, is used instead because it has the luster of silver and the integrity needed for flatware.

CONCLUSION

In the food-service industry, a common phrase regarding presentation is “you eat with your eyes first.” The more visually appealing food looks, the more likely the consumer is to find it enjoyable. I feel that the same holds true for the entire dining experience. One wouldn’t expect to go to a nicer restaurant and find mismatched, bent, pressed-steel silverware. The sensory qualities of “nice” enhance the overall experience. To relate to modern technological terms, utensils are the interface between the person and product (food); the better an interface is the more pleasure is derived from using the product.

This thesis has explored the question: why not have exquisite utensils specialized for each food so that they may be enjoyed in all of their potential glory? Think about what you are eating, and whatever it may be, take time to enjoy it and savor it for what it is.

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