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Arts

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Food. Il Gusto Nell'Arte: Five Centuries of Culinary Creativity

Rome's Chiostro di Bramante celebrates thirty years with a blockbuster exhibition until March 29, 2027



Italian Hours

Lucy Gordan



Still Life by Bartolomeo Bimbi (1715), Courtesy of Italy's Ministry of Culture

Time: 3 mins read

To celebrate its thirty years as the host of landmark exhibitions, Rome's Chiostro di Bramante, around the corner from Piazza Navona, is the site until March 29, 2027, of "Food. Il gusto nell'arte", a unique, unrepeatable, multimedia blockbuster. Curated by Suzanne Landau, the recently retired Director and Chief Curator of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, the several possible interpretations of its title are intentional: the flavor of the foods reproduced here in art, samples of different artistic styles, and personal stylistic preferences.

On display are some 190 artworks: paintings, sculptures, applied arts, documents, environmental, and sound installations, all on loan from museums, institutions, private collections, and the artists themselves. More than 60 artists from every continent—be they designers, painters, sculptors, writers, artisans, musicians, and filmmakers—shape an itinerary that extends from the sixteenth century to the present. The exhibition is structured around six sections: Food Journeys Through the World; Food and Body; Playing with Food; From Still Life to the Table; Food and Ecology; and Food and Memory.



THE ONION (1995), a 10-minute video of Marina Abramovíc eating a whole onion, Courtesy of the Marina Abramovíc Archives and Galleria.

"Beginning with a video of Serbian-born naturalized American Marina Abramović, 'the godmother of performance art', crunching on a whole unpeeled raw onion, the artists here have transformed the act of eating and food into a visual language," explained Landau at the press preview, "while reflecting on our identities, politics, social status, pleasures, and taboos. Food becomes an allegory, a metaphor, a rebellion, an expression of love, labor, memory, and desire."

The earliest artworks range from several still lifes of fruits and vegetables by Florentine painter Bartolomeo Bimbi (1648–1729) to two large-scale installations created especially for "Food: The Taste of Art," both hands-down the stars here.



A wall of the "Pasta Shell Grotto" (2026), Courtesy of the artists

"The Pasta Shell Grotto" by the London-based design firm Bompas & Parr invites the visitor to step inside the artwork. In answer to my post-preview e-mail of questions, Sam Bompas wrote me that the Grotto had been percolating in the firm's consciousness for some time, inspired by Bramante's Tempietto on Rome's Janiculum Hill and the ornate underground shell grotto in the seaside town of Margate in Kent, England, discovered in c. 1835. Almost all of Margate Grotto's walls and roof are covered with mosaics created entirely of some 4.6 million seashells. Its age, creators, and purpose are unknown. Instead, the Pasta Shell Grotto's decorations count 1.2 tons of 310 different pasta shapes donated by the Pastificio Molisana. The firm's Grotto aims to explore the historical expression of this ingredient now beloved worldwide, its culture, rituals, and conviviality, because during meals we exchange memories and experiences that recount who we are.



The kitchen of Simone Post's "Sweet Memories", Courtesy of Simone Post

The other star is "Sweet Memories", a nostalgic work by the Dutch artist Simone Post, born in 1990. Here she has recreated out of 700 kilos of marshmallows and hard candies, exactly to scale, room by room: the bathroom with toilet, basin, and tub; the living room with its sofa and coffee table; an entire kitchen; and her bedroom's double-decker bed, books, toys—the apartment where she lived happily as a child with her family.

Other highlights include:

A large glass table with numerous pastry molds at the center, framed by cookbooks by famous chefs through the ages.

Daniel Spoerri's contemporary still lifes: sculptures of table settings with half-eaten meals glued onto canvases, depicting abandoned foods, plus dirty plates, napkins, and eating utensils, to emphasize waste and indifference to social inequalities.

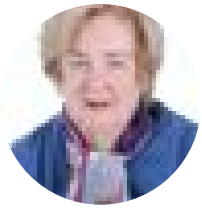
Superflex's video, "Flooded McDonald's", gradually flooding a branch with leftover food, plates, furniture, and equipment afloat, which emphasizes the hazards and consequences of contemporary consumerism and the poor nutrition of fast food; waste, pollution, and the climate change world crisis.

The last room is lined with comfortable sofas from which to watch clips of movies—*Un americano a Roma* (1954) and *Babette's Feast* (1987) among them—where food and eating are the protagonists.

Gestisci consenso

The exhibition's main takeaway is the realization that food, whether we're growing, buying, preparing, or eating it, or simply thinking and reading about it, is everywhere. It's involved in every aspect of human life.

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Italian Hours

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