



Man of Ebony and Sun, III Caribbean and Central American Biennial, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 2001. A human sculpture 92-percent covered in chocolate and filled with different quality chocolates. The inauguration took place in the La Negreta Neighborhood, the first place Black slaves were trafficked in the Americas. An offering that fed almost 100 visitors to the biennial and local residents. Photo courtesy of the Caribbean Biennial. Curated by Alana Lockward.

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Food: objective correlative¹

When we talk about food and art, the first thing we think about is “culinary art.” However, food has also been an artistic medium for making statements about life, culture, beliefs, identity, and the intimate and the political, among other things. Since antiquity, food has had a very important presence in the visual arts, both due to its plasticity and to its symbolic possibilities because of what cooking and eating imply for the senses and for the body. This has led down different paths toward play, pleasure, fullness, gluttony, the body, and even the ephemeral and death.

Examples of these aesthetic and allegorical representations or constructions can clearly be found in Greek and Roman mosaics or, elsewhere, in *The Wedding at Cana* and *The Last Supper*. Painting in the Middle Ages clearly marks the changes in life through food. History reminds us of this in Hieronymus Bosch, Arcimboldo, still lifes, Velázquez, and the Flemish painters, where the representation of food goes beyond the purely aesthetic, the ritual, the erotic, and the fantastic, or speaks to abundance and pleasure.

Manet said, “A good painter can be recognized for his capacity to express the simplicity of a piece of fruit.” Thus, whether as a reason to express abilities in drawing or to create metaphors or symbols, art involving food not only as a motif, but as its media, delves very evidently into the ephemeral and its opposite, the permanent. A still life preserves an aesthetic image or the idea of the feast versus a work made up of perishable foods, such as for example, *Comedian*, Maurizio Cattelan’s banana on the wall. It also expresses how necessary food is for human subsistence or implies it as a daily aspect of existence.

Food in art may be the opportunity to play with form, color, or any of its physical characteristics, at the same time that it allows for the construction of allegory and metaphor, as well as a common narrative. Cattelan’s *Comedian* takes the representation to a series of cultural references and transcends the aesthetic to point to meta-artistic phenomena of the market and the society we live in.

While that very controversial banana was not the first time in the history of art nor the only one that has attempted to create an ideological disturbance by referring to a series of ideas: bananas had been used in very different times by both Gauguin and Warhol, who actually turned Campbell’s soup

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César Martínez



Javier Galván

In Dollar We Trust, vanilla cakes filled with hazelnut cream wrapped in cream cheese and covered with rice paper with a US\$100 bill printed in edible vegetable dye. César Martínez has offered thousands of edible dollars to different audiences in different venues throughout the world. The last performance he created fed more than 300 people at his most recent individual show, *The Idea and the Odyssey*, at the 2025 Ex Teresa Arte Actual show.



Javier Galván

Machiavellian-Warmongering Platter, free Warmongering Snacks, Combat and with Hot Sauce. At 7 p.m. on November 27, 2024, at *The Idea and the Odyssey*. A Review of César Martínez's Work at the 2025 Ex Teresa Arte Actual show, held from September 2024 until February 2025, the artist offered a banquet where participants ate gastronomic sculptures in the shape of firearms and human feces. Attended by 242 people, this work proposed a resignification of violence through the act of digestion. **Note:** The artist uses plays on words as a substantial part of his work, inventing or creating words to strengthen his concepts. This title is a double play on words in Spanish but cannot be replicated completely in English. The original is "Platón [platter or Plato] Maquia-Bélico" [as in "Machiavellian" but substituting the word "bélico" (warlike) for the last three syllables.]



Anthropophagous Neuro-economy, V Mercosur Biennial. PerformANce, human sculptures, edible man and woman, eaten by the audience who attended the Fifth Mercosur Biennial in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2005. Curated by Felipe Ehrenberg. Photo courtesy of the V Mercosur Biennial.

cans into symbols. Using food as a device involves creating a discussion about mutation, consumption, daily life, and identity, with events or notions of the current historical moment, of culture, and also about humans' creative possibilities to create a common narrative with memory, the body, death, sensuality, and economic and political systems, as in the case of pop art, or the case of the avant-gardes like Dadaism, Surrealism, Fluxus, and Eat Art, among others, who posed meta-aesthetic debates. Rubén Ortiz, a Mexican artist, also use a banana in one of his pieces.

Vik Muniz, an artist born in São Paulo, Brazil, who currently works in New York City and Rio de Janeiro, is known for making iconic images with completely absurd materials, such as the Mona Lisa made with peanut butter and jelly or other im-

ages with chocolate syrup. He often works on a very large scale, takes a photograph of his work, and then destroys the original.

Josie Keefe and Phyllis Ma, a New York-based collective who work under the pseudonym LAZY MOM. They started making art together for a self-published zine where they took photos of fruit or food. The project of "LAZY MOM was based on an imaginary mother who would rather play with food than cook for her family. LAZY MOM produced photography, self-published zines, installations, stop motion animations, gifs and music videos."

Art, illustration, and design that delve into food are not characteristic of certain periods; on the contrary, we find it in all periods, although it becomes more complex as a vehicle for representation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.



You are what you eat, recycled, compressed junk food wrappers covered with resin, 88 cm x 123 cm x 25 cm, 2016. Mexico City private collection. This and the following photos are by Pablo Llana.

In 1991, Félix González Torres presented his work *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*. It consisted of a 79.4-kilo pile of individually wrapped candies in a white room with instructions for the public that they could eat one. The candies would be replaced as the pile got smaller. This installation attempted to generate a reflection about love, medical negligence regarding HIV/AIDS, the illness that Ross, the artist's partner, had succumbed to. The candies symbolized Ross's weight, which the illness reduced little by little until he disappeared. This work's narrative was very simple, if wrenching, and tried to make visitors think about the event, the memory, the intimate and the public, and especially about transformation: food changes and changes those who eat it; it defines, creates identity, and refers to the body that consumes it, good or bad.

In Mexico, Frida Kahlo, María Izquierdo, Diego Rivera, and Rufino Tamayo, among others, used food as motifs in their painting, a particularly contextual use of identity. Other contemporary artists have used it in their paintings or in sculpture,

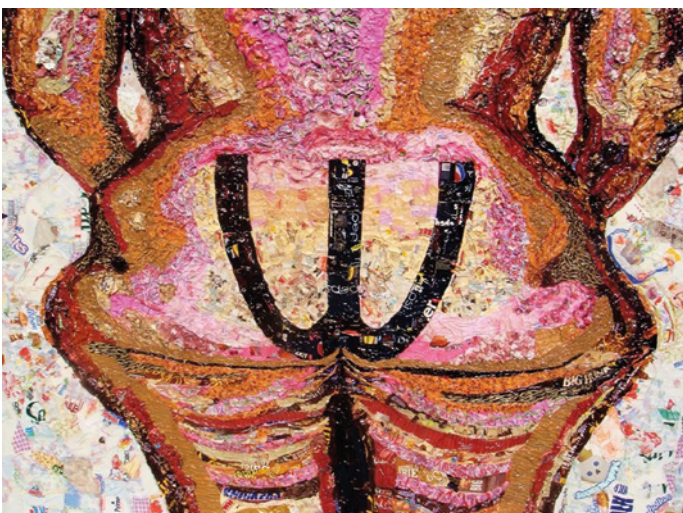
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installation, and performance, or, like Joel Rendón, in his Mexican engravings/still lifes.

The case of César Martínez's work deserves special mention. Not only is he a productive and consistently political artist, but he is also a master at including sparks of playfulness and humor in his work, in addition to creating complete discourses of cultural, political, and social references. His *Edible Performances and Sculptures*, offered to the public for eating, deal with identity, in the way that Mexicans traditionally eat death (sugar skulls or Day-of-the-Dead sweet bread, for example). At the same time, they enter into the sphere of politics and reflection about cultural mechanisms to construct similes between economic and political metabolisms and cannibalism as a symbol of consumption in both the economic and cultural spheres. His edible sculptures show us that the ephemeral can be based on the act of devouring the work, although the allegorical and symbolic implications go far beyond that to involve concepts such as consumption (in economic terms) and that of the other (in the sense of symbolic, erotic cannibalism as in the appropriation of the other or that which one has, which has political and social implications).

Another similar case is that of Pablo Llana, with his works made of junk food wrappings, which propose reflections about the culture of consumption and waste, or refer indirectly to obesity, the dynamics of globalization, and neocolonialization.

Other artists who use food in their works are Tania Libre, Sofía Cortina, María Eugenia Droz, Omar Sandoval, José M. Figueroa, and Yessica Díaz, who express food as a powerful me-



Wow, recycled junk food wrappers donated by the consumers of those products and resin on stretched canvas, 140 cm x 190 cm, 2009.

dium for creation and for opening up a reflection based on their works, with regard to Mexican culture, globalization, consumption, the ephemeral, and traditions, among other themes.

Literature is not to be left behind. Many poets around the world have dealt with food as a theme and a reason for narrating or representing: in Antiquity, Ananius, Plautus, Horace, Virgil, and Juvenal; and later writers like Marcel Proust, Federico García Lorca, Miguel Hernández, Gabriela Mistral, Rafael Alberti, Gloria Fuertes, Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Laura Esquivel, Charles Simic, Wisława Szymborska, Mark Strand, and Carlos Novo, among others. In contemporary Mexican poetry, we have recently found the common narrative of food/body to deal with the stigmas of obesity and femininity (Dolores Silva, Alejandra Estrada Velázquez, Lorena Aviña, among others), as well as aspects of memory and violence (Araceli Amador) and, last, but not least, eroticism (Víctor Manuel Mendiola). **VM**

Notes

1 T.S. Eliot's objective correlative is a literary technique that uses external objects, situations, or events to indirectly convey emotions.



Brainwash, cutouts of recycled junk food wrappers, plastic bags, and resin on canvas. 110 cm x 79 cm, 2024.



Bombing, recycled, compressed junk food wrappers, resin, and fishing line. Life-sized adult human heart. 2017. Mexico City private collection.



Cornucopia 2.0, recycled junk food wrappers donated by the consumers of those products and resin on stretched canvas. 80 cm x 110 cm, 2024.