

Historical love-affair with indulgent foods

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#FoodPorn 500 Years Ago



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In the end, "Our love affair with visually appealing, decadent, or status foods is nothing new," says author Andrew Weislogel, Ph.D., Curator of Earlier European American Art at Cornell University's Johnson Museum of Art, "It was already well-established 500 years ago." Credit: Daniel Miller

Our desire for indulgent meals may be over 500 years old. A new analysis of European paintings shows that meat and bread were among the most commonly depicted foods in paintings of meals from the 16th century.

"Crazy [meals](#) involving less-than-healthy foods aren't a modern craving," explains lead author Brian Wansink, PhD, Director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab and author of *Slim by Design*. "Paintings from what's sometimes called the Renaissance Period were loaded with the foods modern diets warn us about - salt, sausages, bread and more bread."

For the study, published in *Sage Open*, researchers started with 750 food paintings from the past 500 years and focused on 140 paintings of family meals. Of the 36 "Renaissance Period" paintings, 86% depicted bread and 61% depicted meat while only 22% showed vegetables.

Interestingly, the most commonly painted foods

were not the most readily available foods of the time. For example, the most commonly painted vegetable was an artichoke, the most commonly painted fruit was a lemon, and the most commonly painted meat was shellfish, usually lobster. According to the authors, these [paintings](#) often featured [food](#) that was indulgent, aspirational or aesthetically pleasing.

In the end, "Our love affair with visually appealing, decadent, or status foods is nothing new," says co-author Andrew Weislogel, PhD, Curator of Earlier European American Art at Cornell University's Johnson Museum of Art, "It was already well-established 500 years ago."

More information: B. Wansink et al, Food Art Does Not Reflect Reality: A Quantitative Content Analysis of Meals in Popular Paintings, *SAGE Open* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/2158244016654950](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016654950)

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

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