

# Serving Sin

## How dining depicts good and evil



Eating together is something we do every day, in every country, across every culture, from mundane family meals to large celebrations.

The way we eat our food may seem irrelevant to our morality, but through exploring the history of art, we see sinful behaviour played out at the dining table. It was not until the Eighteenth century, when society lessened its requirement for people to conform, that art conveyed fewer moral messages.

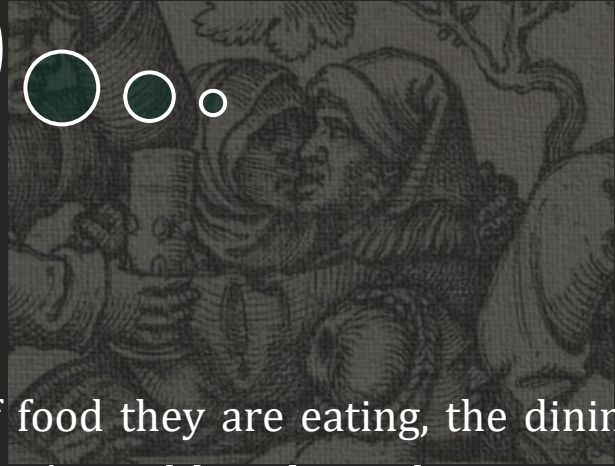


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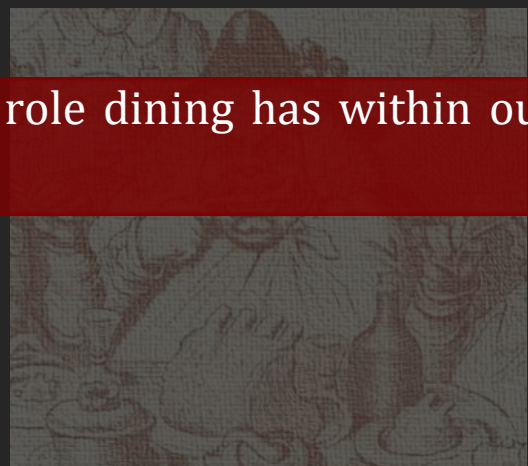
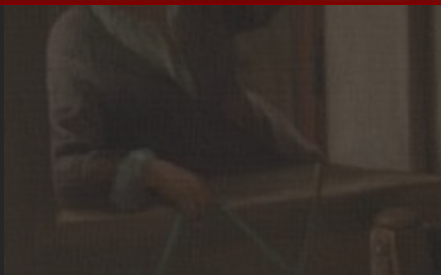


From their dress to the type of food they are eating, the dining experience is revealing of a person's wealth and morals.

This exhibition will explore society's shifting moral codes through artworks that depict morality, exploring judgements on temptation, wealth, classism and unity.

Featuring Adam and Eve, feasting peasants and the dining table of the rich and powerful, this exhibition will explore how food and dining have been used to convey moral messages from the 16th to the 19th century, and how the line between celebratory behaviour and sinful behaviour have been conflated as a warning played out at the dinner table.

Allowing us to discover a deeper role dining has within our daily lives.







## The Fall of Man

Cornelis Cornelisz. Van Haarlem, 1592

oil on canvas, h 273cm × w 220cm

In this biblical story, Eve was tempted by the snake to eat the apple despite being forbidden by God, humanity's first sin.

How can something so inoffensive such as a fruit produce so much chaos?

In this painting, the apple symbolises sin, restrictions and the immorality of human beings.



## Sinful Mankind before the Flood

*Johann Sadeler (I), after Dirck Barendsz., 1601 – 1636*

engraving, h 348mm × w 448mm

This engraving shows an alternative snapshot of the events of 'Noah's Ark' (Genesis 6-9), the earth was flooded as a punishment for the sins of humanity. We see suggestions of these sins played out at the dinner table.

Is this how people are choosing to spend their last moments?

Or are they unaware of what fate awaits them?



## Peasants at a feast

*Hans Sebald Beham, 1510 – 1550*

engraving, h 48mm × w 72mm

This is the first glimpse at class specific immorality. We see peasants eating and drinking, coming together to celebrate.

The hints at sexual desire raises the question of where the line should be drawn between celebratory or sinful behaviour.



Quitant l'orgueilleuse insolence,  
 Qui te vient de ton opulence,  
 Et de tes mouvemens pomiers,  
 Aux Pauvres esle d'être chiche;  
 Toy qui dans ces Tableaux bûtes  
 Vois l'histoire du mauvais Riche  
 Le Riche quel est l'orgueilleux.

Sa Gourmandise insupportable,  
 Dans les débauches de la Table,  
 Luy fait passer ses Thresors  
 Ces excellens mets il se degoste,  
 Et pourru quel traite son Corps,  
 Tout luy plait, et rien ne luy couste.

Sepandant le pauvre LAZARE,  
 Ala porte de ce Barbare,  
 Tremble de froid, et meurt de faim,  
 Il se moque de sa misere,  
 Et la plainte qu'il fait en vain,  
 L'effence et le met en colere.

Au lieu que sa voix languissante,  
 Dans la necessite pressante,  
 Luy deuroit gémir le cœur,  
 Et jehuman veut qu'on le chasse,  
 Et par une extreme rigueur,  
 Il joint les coups à la menace.

O que de Riches miserables,  
 Aux Pauvres sont inexorables,  
 Dans le lux de leurs repas,  
 Comme leur malheur est extreme,  
 Tu dois ne les visiter pas,  
 Si tu veux t'obliger toy meisme.

## Feast of the Rich Man (Dives) with Lazarus Begging at the Door

Abraham Bosse, 1637 – 1638

etching, h 262mm × w 332mm

Within this grand venue we see, to the right a dinner party, and through a doorway on the left a man begging.

The dining experience we see in this artwork is one of privilege and luxury and reminds us of the reality of class separation.



## Committee for the Needy

*Anonymous, 1795, after David Hess, after James Gillray, 1799*

etching, h 272mm × w 219mm

Similarly to the last piece we can see a contrast between the rich and poor.

However, the interaction between them, the wigged man acknowledging the child by giving him a scrap of bone criticises the rich's cruelty, gluttony and greed. Whereas in the last piece the rich could plead ignorance to the suffering of the poor.



## Man at a set table

*Vincent Laurensz. van der Vinne (II), 1714*

etching, h 98 mm × w 121 mm

Unlike others on display, this piece is not a warning against immoral behaviour. The secluded man sitting at his richly set table demonstrates his wealth through the food on display, epitomised by the ornate peacock pie in front of him.

However, the amount of food and the lack of company implies gluttonous behaviour.

How can one man eat all that food?





## Man and Four Woman around a table

*Anonymous, c. 1850 – c. 1880*

albumen print, h 85mm × w 170mm

A lively photograph captures a group in an ornately decorated room.

Missing one chair in front implies that the scene could be setup for the photo.

The photo shows these wealthy individuals acting out typical dining behaviour. The nonchalant scene includes their fine dress and surroundings, demonstrating their wealth without seeming to gloat.



## The Merry Family

*Jan Havicksz. Steen, 1668*

oil on canvas, h 110.5cm × w 141cm

This joyous yet nosy scene depicts this family's merriment at the dinner table. The children chime in with wind instruments to accompany their parents' singing.

However, whilst the merriment distracts the parents, the children fall into bad behaviour: one boy smokes a pipe as the others drink wine from the jug. The note hanging from the mantelpiece reveals the moral of the story: 'As the old sing, so shall the young twitter.'

What will become of the children if their parents set the wrong example?

