Matter of taste

Maria Loduca

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Matter of Taste

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts
in Imaging Arts

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ABSTRACT

My thesis Matter of Taste illustrates how art and design distinctly overlap. My aim was to move fluidly between art, design, and craft. This thesis represents my observation of the ways in which art and design are embedded in our daily life and culture. I began to apply photography to a greater variety of fields. Advances in printing technology now mean that images can be printed on just about anything, from garden buckets and mugs to paper towels and wardrobes.

In my thesis, I also questioned how photography can be used as an object and a design element. In terms of digital technology, I address the bridge between technology and craft. I analyze elements of art and design, production, and allocation as independent activities associated by craft. Matter of Taste can account for likes and dislikes, and to understand part of my work I explored the philosophy of beauty and how it relates to taste, specifically looking at the threads that cross over between beauty, taste, and aesthetics. In my research, I also address food and the table—how both can be seen as constructs of identity, pleasure, and transformation.
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Finally I dedicate my thesis *Matter of Taste* to my sister Lisa Marie Loduca, who at age 49 lost her life to cancer. I love you. You will be missed.
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Inspiration:

1.1

*Matter of Taste* is the culmination of my time spent at RIT. Through experimentation, trial and error, and successes, *Matter of Taste* expresses my desire to create. As therapist Carl Jung once noted, “The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.”¹

The creation of *Matter of Taste* was exciting, challenging and rewarding. In the following pages of my MFA thesis, I start with a brief account of my earlier work. Then I give an overview of *Matter of Taste*. Next I describe the exhibitions component parts using a question and answer format to discuss the making of *Matter of Taste*.

Lastly, I include my research, the use of Images with textiles, the fine line between art and design, and lastly food and the table. These three aspects contributed to the making of *Matter of Taste*.

The first of these three aspects is the exploration of the traditional form of images being woven into fabric and ways in which figures and scenes were embroidered onto materials. Second, I expand on how the creative categories of art, design, and craft no longer have set boundaries. I explain the central principles between art and design and how these standards overlap. I look at the effects of the bridge between technology and craft and how it functions in the world of art and designs today. I analyze the digital environment of art and design, production, and distribution, in terms of their being independent activities associated with craft.

Third, I address my enthusiasm for food and the table, and explain my belief that they reinforced humankind’s search for life’s essence. I explore the philosophy of beauty and how it relates to taste, discussing the intertwining threads of beauty, taste, and aesthetics.

*Earlier work*

1.2

I would like to look back at my previous artwork before addressing my thesis exhibition, *Matter of Taste*, so that my reader can have a better understanding of my use of photography and how it changed significantly at Rochester Institute of Technology.

Photography played a role in my earlier work. As a visual communicator, I found my link to photography through graphic design. My visual expression was shared through the use of images and text in the broadest of terms. It was through graphic design that I found photography as another medium in which to express myself.
Photography was used to express my critical awareness of time. In this respect, I do not see photography as a journalistic endeavor or a record of the mundane. My photographs are more closely aligned to a diaristic expression of the events of my life.

I have always experimented within the photographic medium, from photographic halftones and digital composites to salt prints. Yet, while a graduate student, I found myself departing from these earlier efforts and directing my labor toward a new course. The edges began to blur, and my role as a photographer began to change. My photographs were no longer my sole medium; they were a contribution to my overall collaborative work. By collaborative I mean my photographs were only a part of my exhibition. My thesis exhibition included photographs, wallpaper, three dimensional glass pieces the table setting and finally music.

*The Meaning of Matter of Taste*

1.3

The title of *Matter of Taste* was chosen for specific reasons. The title puts an emphasis on the connotation of my work, and the play on words allows room for interpretation. Matter by definition is something specifically being considered that needs to be dealt with, or the material substance of the universe that has mass. Taste is the sensation when one eats or drinks, but can also mean judgment in aesthetic taste.

*Matter of Taste* represents the union of art, design, and the human condition. I am interested in looking beyond the traditional boundaries that exist between art and design. The installation featured 3 component parts - the table setting, photographs, and glasswork.
The table setting titled *Serotonin* included six major elements, the tablecloth, silver plated plates, silverware that became wallpaper, benches, and the music. I designed an opulent tablecloth that was machine embroidered, using serotonin as the inspiration for the design motif. Serotonin is noted for being the chemistry of well-being. The table was set with mirrored plated plates that reflected my investigation of the concept “you are what you eat.” The pleasures of the table are conditioned and enhanced by the five senses: sight, taste, smell, sound and touch. While not considered one of the five senses physical desire was regarded equally important as the “senses.” Two major components of my work are food and the table.

I incorporated individual works, such as wallpaper created from antique silverware rubbings. My photographs were created as a design element to emphasize the importance of taste. The three-dimensional circular glass pieces, reflected molecular designs of sugar, caffeine and gold, vitamins A, B, and C, and spices, such as salt and pepper.

The pursuit of the pleasures of the table and food is one of the greatest examples of human invention. With the melding of nature, biology, and human interaction, one can celebrate and revel in the sensual pleasures of the appetite. I am interested in exploring the discourse that occurs with art and life, sustenance and human “taste.”
Chapter 2
The Exhibition Installation

Matter of Taste

2.1

Matter of Taste had a certain atmosphere when you entered the gallery space. You felt an immediate sense of pleasure. There is a feeling of elegance and opulence when you entered the installation. I converted the gallery space by bringing into play color, light density, and weight to create my expressions and ideas.

When entering Matter of Taste you first see the table setting Serotonin, your eyes are directed to the glass works that then lead you to the wallpaper on to the photographs then back to the table setting. The glass works were placed on both side of the gallery to balance out the table setting and to allow the viewer’s eye to continuously travel back and forth through the gallery space.
At first glance, the tablecloth *Serotonin* looked like it was printed, but when the viewer looked up close they could see the shimmering effects the pastel colored threads created on the silk fabric. You could see the reflection patterns from the glasses as well as the flowers when you looked closely at the tablecloth. The glasses were of the color of the rainbow, red, green, blue, purple, yellow, and pink. The plates were silver-plated. The mirrored surface of the plates reflected the glasses, flowers and lights from above. The viewer’s gaze was also reflected in the plates.

The table setting was absent of food. You noticed that the dinner was displayed through brightly colored photographs that represented the food. There was also missing silverware. Viewers could see the silverware elsewhere in the gallery as ornate black and white printed wallpaper.

One could notice that the circle played an important role with the use of design. It was the main design component in the entire show. There were circles in the glass work, circles in the photographs and the spoons, forks and knives created their own little circular pattern. It was an identifiable decorative design in *Serotonin*. The circle could represent a group of people who share common interests, while sharing a meal, or a design that repeats itself continuously, and never ends. The circle could also represent the molecular structures that lend itself to our very existence.

When the viewer came within a certain distance of the table you could hear what sounded to be a dinner gathering, there were abstract sounds of silver clanging, glasses clinging, the notes were lightly bouncing around resembling the molecular structure patterns on the tablecloth.

The photographs were just as intriguing as the tablecloth. From a distance the photographs looked like swirls of colors in slightly various patterns, then when you got up close you could see they were actual abstract photographs of food. The photographs varied in size. The appetizers started out small then you noticed each
photograph gradually getting larger with the emphasis to its part in the meal. Each photograph has its own unique taste. The colors ranged from strawberry-red to carrot-orange, including various colors of chocolate brown.

The overall appearance of *Matter of Taste* left the viewer with a sense of delight and wonderment and a tiny bit of frustration. Since they were not able to sit and dine.
The Exhibition Component Parts:
The work itself

Over the course of my studies at RIT, artists, my peers, professionals and my professors have presented questions that relate to my work. I have taken these queries as well as questions I have asked myself, and compiled these questions to offer evidence about my viewpoints concerning my thesis work and artistic objectives and what they represent for me.

The Concepts
3.1

Q: What is your concept for your Show?
MAL: Matter of Taste came from four sources of inspiration: art, design, and food and the table. There are two underlying ideas of the show. The first is how boundaries are
crossed every day in the use of art and design. The second is food and the table, how both can be seen as a transformation of humankind; coupled with the interrelated aspects of food, table and the senses.

Q: You mention how boundaries are crossed everyday in the use of art and design, what do you mean by that?
MAL: The definitions of these two disciplines are constantly changing within our culture and society. Art for me is interpreted broadly; it describes the manner in which any activity can be performed, and human needs are certainly not limited to the practical. For me, design is about personalizing an object, but then taking that object to mass production. There is a very fine line that can be crossed when these two particulars are brought together.

“Design ≠ Art” (September 10, 2004), held at the Cooper-Hewitt, was a round-table discussion I attended that gave me the opportunity to interact with the top influential artists and designers of today. During this forum, I realized I had been asking the same questions that were being discussed. What is design and how is it related to art? The definitions of art and of design are not the same as they were twenty years ago, or for that matter five years ago.

Barbara Blooming, Curatorial Director at the Cooper-Hewitt and independent curator Joseph Cunningham curated an exhibition and symposium dealing with everyday issues concerning where art and design converge. Eighteen artists were celebrated in this exhibition. They included John Chamberlain, Donald Judd, Barbara Bloom, and James Turrell. “Design ≠ Art” was organized around the question, “Is the intent of art different than the intent of design?”

Roberta Smith of the New York Times wrote an article called Designers For a

Day: Sculptors Take a Turn. The article was about the exhibition *Art is not Design*, which I mentioned earlier. She wrote that the exhibition stresses that the divide between art and design is unbreachable, at least from the artists point of view. Artist can do whatever they want in their art; such liberty is the point of the activity.

Design involves a kind of selflessness and a complex awareness of the givens: the human body and its needs, social space, the laws of gravity, the means of production and the demands of the marketplace.

I felt a sense of freedom when I chose to play between art and design; I am not bound by either. I am a craftsman, I am a designer, and I am an artist, and my work encompasses all of these attributes.

Being both designer and artist, I was able to create work that resonates with a broad spectrum of people. Although I create my work for myself, I admit that while working on *Matter of Taste* I was thinking constantly about my audience. What type of people would be drawn to my work? How would they relate to my aesthetic taste—would they find it pleasing or disturbing? My hope was that they would find it both visually satisfying and thought-provoking.

Listening to other artists discussing their paths to becoming an artist, designer, or both was instrumental in my discovering the relationship that exists between my art and myself. There was no clear-cut distinction between the role of the artist and the existence of her art versus the role of the designer and her design—just the notion that this subject clearly will be explored now and in the future.

Q: The second concept for *Matter of Taste* is food and the table, what do you mean that both can be seen as a transformation of human kind?

MAL: The human race is the only species that can take a food source and create it into a culinary delight. We are masters of invention. We can completely convert our food sources into either simple meals or stunning banquets. We emphasis the use of the table
as a gathering place for eating and conversation yet some of us feel compelled to go beyond the basic table settings.

Creating a table setting for *Matter of Taste* came from my fascination with the table and all of its nuances. I do not have to question where this allure came from. There have been numerous occasions as a child upon which I sat and watched carefully my grandmother, Josephine Colombo Loduca, not even hesitating to feed ten to fifteen people for lunch. My grandmother’s table extended from one side of the kitchen to the other. There were two chairs at each end of the table. Both sides of the table had benches. There was always a nicely starched tablecloth that dressed the table. My grandmother sometimes had either herbs or flowers in a small glass jar in the center of the table. Bread, wine, cheese, and vegetables from the garden were served. Pasta, soup or scrambled eggs with vegetables were offered. My grandmother’s house was the center for family holidays, and the table served as a greeting place for all conversation. The table could be seen as having a distinct atmosphere surrounding it. There is an intimate communication between the past and present in tradition. Tradition being how it was so important how your table was set, your table setting spoke volumes about your status, regarding money and the ability to entertain. One can see the table as part of a routine of mundane living, or one can be more imaginative and see the cultural possibilities, viewing the table as a place where one is free to explore and express one’s personal values.

Q: How does your work capture the relationship of food, table and the senses?
MAL: In *Matter of Taste* there was anticipation in my own discoveries of how the pleasures of the table could be raised to the level of an art. *Matter of Taste* uses subject matter, for one example the table setting, *Serotonin*, the tablecloth addresses what one feels after a delightful meal, the silver plates gave the viewer a chance to interact with ones own reflection and the music drew the viewer to the table with
soft subtle sounds.

Normally we refer to having five senses; Brillat-Savarin writes about there being six. He emphasizes that the senses are organs through which man communicates with external objects. The first five are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and the sixth is physical desire. The latter is often excluded by science, yet Brillat-Savarin writes that it is one of the most important senses because of its ability to perpetuate the human race.3

Every situation is connected to the senses, for example, in terms of digestion, obesity, thinness, sleep, our dreams, and pleasures of the table, just to note a few.

Brillat-Savarin has 20 aphorisms that served as a prologue to his work and provided an everlasting foundation for his science. The first four of his aphorisms particularly address the issues relevant to my work.

I. The world is nothing without life, and all that lives takes nourishment.
II. Animals feed: man eats: only the man of intellect knows how to eat.
III. The fate of nations depends on the way they eat.
IV. Tell me what you eat: I will tell you what you are.4

Q: How many component parts are in Matter of Taste?
MAL: There are three specific parts to Matter of Taste. The table setting, the photographs and the three-dimensional glass works.

---

Q: How did you come to choose to create a table setting?

MAL: I choose to create a table setting partly to make a statement on how society has clearly shifted to the fast pace and away from dinning at the table, and how some thing as a tablecloth and table settings can be decorative and meaningful at the same time. I was inspired by Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s, The Physiology of Taste, his assessment of a sumptuous banquet: “Whoever has been a guest at a sumptuous banquet, in a hall adorned with mirrors, paintings, statues, and flowers, a hall balmy with scents, beautified by the presence of pretty women, and filled with the strains of sweet music – that man, we say, required no great effort of the imagination to be convinced that all the sciences have been pressed into service to enhance and set off the pleasures of taste.”

---

Q: Why did you choose a table setting of fifteen?
MAL: During my show, many people asked me why not a table setting of thirteen.
The answer is that thirteen is the number that is associated with the Last Supper. I
did not want the immediate association of Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper
to occur with my work. With a place setting of fifteen, there is an emphasis on the
head of the table plus an equal number of people on each side.

Q: From the first glance one gets the sense that you have invited the viewer to a
magnificent dinner setting, yet there is no food—what should be on the table is on the
walls or hanging. Why did you choose to not put food on the table?
MAL: I decided the “food” would be the art. The silverware became the wallpaper, the
food and beverages became the photographs, and the minerals that are in our food
became wonderful, three-dimensional glass pieces. The process of serotonin, the very
essence of what occurs after a good meal, is turned into a fabulous tablecloth.
Q: Why did you choose serotonin for your design for the tablecloth?
MAL: I chose the molecular structure of serotonin for the theme of the tablecloth because it is the molecular reaction that occurs after a pleasurable meal. I also liked the underlying sense of humor that came with the title.

Q: How did you use the molecular structure of serotonin to create your design?
MAL: I used the same idea of deconstructing an image and text, then reconstructing it to become a completely different pattern or idea. The outcome of my tablecloth *Serotonin in Matter of Taste* is a perfect example of taking fabric from the ordinary to the extraordinary. I took the three dimensional structure of serotonin and created a simple one-dimensional graphic. While the subject serotonin is anything but simple, once I deconstructed the original structure it became my pattern for the center of the tablecloth and the text became the pattern for the lace. Using contrasting colors, blue,
light blue, green, soft green, shades of whites etcetera, the colors fashioned how the shades of thread refracted the light from the surrounding elements on the table.

Q: With the latest technology in printing on fabrics, why did you choose to use embroidery for your work?
MAL: I had already completed several works that were printed on fabric. I felt that it would be more of a challenge to have the tablecloth stitched. I also could not dismiss the fabulous works of Belgian and Italian artesian embroiderers I had researched.
Q: How was the tablecloth stitched? By hand or machine?
MAL: I found a woman Susan Higgins in Rochester, New York. When I interviewed her she had a certain spirit that I cannot explain. She was extremely knowledgeable with computers and was very creative. She had never taken on a project as large as this. She was extremely detailed-oriented and that is what I was looking for. We broke the tablecloth down, center, front, back, and the two sides and that is how it was stitched. She had a special embroidery machine that embroidered each pattern structure individually. It was extremely time consuming. We met every week to go over the progress of the work.

When she opened up the tablecloth for the first time completely stitched and finished we were elated. She had never worked with an artist and I had never collaborated with a seamstress with something like this. It was a fantastic and rewarding experience.
The Plates

Q: What made you decide on silver-plated plates for the dinner plates?
MAL: I thought about designing a pattern for each plate, or perhaps designing a complete set. Somehow I could not imagine a china setting to go with this elaborate tablecloth. I mirrored the plates, going along with the theme of “you are what you eat,” of seeing our self-essence in relationship to what we eat. The mystery of infinity looking into the mirror continues on forever. It involves seeing more than what is.

I was drawn to the aura that occurred with the use of the mirror. Brunelleschi discovered perspective while using the mirror. Dante himself was fascinated by the divine geometry of light observed in mirrors. It was this mirror magic in later centuries would enchant the halls of Versailles. But most important is the fact that this silver substance is the very platform for analog photographs.
The Silverware: The Wallpaper

Q: Why did you decide on wallpaper?
MAL: I wanted the plates to be the prominent feature on the tablecloth. I was playing with antique silverware choosing ornate patterns and making rubbings from them on velum paper. Originally, I was going to have them individually framed, one fork, one knife and one spoon. In the course of my research I visited the wallpaper archive at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum and decided to create wallpaper from the rubbings I was working on.

The Benches

Q: Why did you choose to have benches instead of chairs?
MAL: I loved the idea of benches around the table. Before chairs were invented most seating was done on the ground or stumps and elevated planks of wood. I like the idea
that the benches were just below the tablecloth line. I did not want anything blocking the view of the tablecloth. I divided the length of the table, and then decided with two shorter benches one on each end of the long bench in the center. I had a friend make the benches for me. Daniel Hahn, who is gifted in crafting wood, took my design and created the benches from the sketch I made. Each bench can be taken apart and easily assembled. I distressed each bench by hand painting them first with a pastel blue paint then rubbing a copper and gold patina to give them an antique appearance.

The Music

Q: What made you choose to use music as a part your thesis exhibition?
MAL: The first time I watched Babette’s Feast I knew I wanted music to accompany my work. The silence that occurs when the food is finally served, the echoes of silverware and whispers of voices commenting on the amazing tastes, the tinkling of silverware against china, and the slurps of decadent wines—all these elements enthralled me. The sounds at the dinner table cannot be ignored. They are just as important as the visual elements.

Q: Did you create the music yourself?
MAL: Although I am musically inclined and have a great ear for music, I chose to have an accomplished composer by the name of Martin Jaroszewicz create my music. I also feel there is something to be said for creating collaborations between two different artists using different mediums; it is exciting, challenging, and extremely rewarding. In the beginning I had decided on music that was more classical, emphasizing the use of violins and a harpsichord, but as my work evolved so did my music. Once I sent Martin the images of the glasswork, photographs and sketches of the tablecloth, we completely changed the music. He suggested that it be more organic sounding, emphasizing the
circular designs. The music was more subdued and had a resonating sound to it, with slight clambering of glasses, silverware and muffled echoes. The music was designed to come in at different periods; we placed speakers in the front of the table, side and back, as the music played each speaker had a designated sound and/or part. I did not want it to sound like it was just coming from under the table. The placement of the speakers was key, they were projected outwards so the music actually sounded as if it were heard across the room. We set the sound just loud enough that it would not interfere with the conversations of the viewers.

_The Glasses & The Flowers_

Q: What made you to decide on purchasing glasses?

MAL: Believe it or not I actually took several glass classes at RIT and had seriously thought about making all fifteen glasses. But after I made my first glass, I knew I needed a little more practice before they would be good enough to use for my show. I also had looked into the idea of having a glass artist make them. But because of cost
and time, I decided on purchasing the glasses. The colors I choose really reflected the color of my tablecloth.

Q: What made you choose the circular glass vases for the flowers?
MAL: I wasn’t sure if I wanted flowers on the table or not. I wasn’t sure if the flowers were going to be a work of art on the wall or fresh flowers on the table. The choice was made after the tablecloth was finished. I wanted the table adorned with flowers. It was as simple as that. I chose the style of vase to reflect the circular designs on the tablecloth.

The Photographs
3.3
Q: What technique did you use to photograph your abstract food images?
MAL: I set up a set workspace area; I used a 20 x 20 inch square area.
I started out with a light box then covered the light box with a slightly opaque velum.
I placed the food upon the velum that allowed me to easily remove the food I was working with and gave the images a certain transparency I was looking for. I used Velvia 100 ISO/21” daylight film and shot with my Hasselblad (medium format).

Q: Why did you choose to create abstract still life photographs for the menu?
MAL: In the beginning, I was creating intricate patterns with photographs of food. Then I started photographing the actual food itself. Something just did not seem right. I was out to dinner eating an amazing dessert of chocolate mousse that was delicately placed on a veil of strawberry purée. I was swirling the strawberry and chocolate--that was my light-bulb moment. I began to mash the food up and started painting with the food, creating the molecular shapes in the food and then photographing the outcome. I continued this approach throughout the show.

Q: How many photographs were in your show? How did you choose your menu for the photographs?
MAL: I chose nine food images and one image of aperitifs. There were eleven photographs total. Each photograph was labeled untitled with the description of the food underneath untitled. The photographs started small then gradually got bigger. Salmon, Spinach, Love Apple, Carrot Soup with Gold, Risotto with Gold, Fish Eyes, Just Chocolate, Strawberries, Raspberries, Aperitif and Raspberries. I chose my menu mainly from fond food memories, favorite dishes and foods. When I was in Italy they had spinach balls everywhere; I love the color of spinach. As for the fish eyes, well, when I was around 11 or 12 my grandmother gave my father some homemade fish soup with a tomato base to give to my mother. We were all sitting around the table and I found
what looked like a garbanzo bean. My father told me that was indeed what it was, then my sister found another one. There were only two. Need I say more? We soon figured out that they were fish eyes, not garbanzo beans! Risotto, how can you not love risotto? My favorite dessert is any kind of chocolate. I think I tried every kind of fruit imaginable except bananas. It was tough to choose what to leave out. Ultimately it was what photographed well and was visually pleasing to my eye.

_Three Dimensional Glass_

3.4

Q: How did you get interested in glass?

MAL: I was working on different photographic processes on glass. Then as my work was becoming more pattern-oriented, I decided to use a large format UV digital flat bed printing technology (NUR Tempo), which prints on nearly any substrate including boards, papers, vinyl, wood, canvas, cotton, metals, acrylic, stone, ceramic, and glass. This was exciting and challenging for me as well as the owners of Excelsus, it was the first time they had printed on glass.

In _Matter of Taste_ there were seven glass works, five on one side of the gallery _Salt, Pepper, Vitamin A, Vitamin B and Vitamin C_ and on the opposite side of the gallery I grouped _Caffeine, Sugar and Gold_. I experimented with the different widths between the layers of glass. I constantly tried out different shades of color as they were sandwiched together. I played with the different patterns and the way in which light made a vast difference in the creation of the shadows that appeared on the
adjacent walls and the ceiling.

Choosing to work with glass was a challenge. A metal smith handcrafted the frames. The glass works were individually cut, sanded, and then printed. The most difficult part of the process was actually getting the glass in the frames. My first experiments were square; then as I refined my work, the circle became the dominant form.
Q: Your work revolves around design, yet you are a photographer. Can you explain this?
MAL: I was creating intricate patterns with the use of photographs. I usually begin with several ideas, which usually evolve over time. I began to look toward design for solutions to some of the ideas I was experimenting with. Slowly, design became a large part of my work. Ultimately, I incorporated my photographs as a design element.

Q: How would you describe your approach to design?
MAL: Although my work is not created from described or preexisting plans, pattern and symmetry greatly influence the way I create my work. Almost anything can spark an idea for a project: flipping through design and art magazines, taking a walk, cooking a meal. I see shapes and colors in virtually everything I do. Along with photography, I use design as an element within my work. It is the platform where my work can unfold with unlimited boundaries. The study of geometric interrelationships between art and life can include discussions on topics that range from Plato, Pythagoras, and Archimedes to modern architecture and art. Patterns, spirals, and themes of symmetry have long been used in art.

The idea that everything is created by numbers, which is taken up by Plato, is seen not only in art, but also in biology. I looked to science for inspiration, for the patterns in my designs. *Spices and Their Morphology*, written by John W. Parry, was a great source. I was looking at the anatomy of the spices and their morphology, which is the study of the spices’ external organic forms. I was interested in the layering and cross-sections of these plants with their intricate, lacelike structures. I saw endless possibilities with parsley, caffeine, sugar, rice, and chocolate.
Q: “How does one define the nature of one’s own activity?”

MAL: I felt this was an extremely important question that was raised at the “Design ≠ Art” (September 10, 2004), symposium. While in graduate school, I had very strong feelings toward my work. The art I was creating was defined by my nature, disposition, and personality. I have only one decisive factor for defining the nature of my work, and that is to follow and trust my instincts. I begin with several ideas and/or themes that are evolving at one particular time. From there I refine the ideas and my work. As long as I trust and follow my intuitions, my work fulfills my criteria and is created as I envision it.

Q: You combine digital and traditional techniques in a very interesting way. Can you tell us the reasons for this style?

MAL: I have always looked for the union of elements; I have never really worked with a single technique. I am drawn to the traditions of the past, but am in awe of the technology of today (the digital and today’s modern printing). I have always been intrigued by the alchemy resulting from the combination of different materials and styles. I love the discovery of new paths when I combine and experiment with different materials and art forms.

Q: You mentioned you spent considerable time in New York City. How has this experience changed you and your relationship with your work?

MAL: My time in New York was an inspiring and significant experience. I filled myself with images and sensations of that wonderful city. I met artists, designers, and photographers from all over the world, and had the chance to discover other artists’

work styles and views, which expanded my creative horizon as I dove every day into something new. Two places I absolutely fell in love with was The Cooper-Hewitt Museum and Moss Design. I made a point of seeking out exhibitions that were relevant to my work, as well as those that were not. I attended seven exhibitions at the Cooper Hewitt Design Museum. I made a special visit to the Collections, both textile and wall coverings. I was introduced to contemporary artists like Hella Jongerius, Tord Boontje, and Barbara Bloom, all of whose work appeared at the Cooper Hewitt and all struck a familiar chord within me. These visits enabled me to acquire valuable information that served as a resource for me as I worked on *Matter of Taste*.

The second place that is noteworthy is Moss Design. It was like seeing an explosion: high-end contemporary art and design meets museum. Murray Moss, founder and design patron, blurs the boundaries between designer and retailer, and focuses on the consumer. He considers design an opportunity for collaborative process with both designers and artists. Each and every time I visited New York; Moss Design was usually the first place I went. The design center was always featuring new and upcoming artists. I was intrigued and influenced by every aspect of this environment; these influences helped me challenge my own work.

Q: How has your education influenced your work?
MAL: I chose RIT for its diversity in terms of its curriculum and faculty. One noteworthy occurrence was our trips to the Eastman House. Professor Therese Mulligan had arranged for our History and Aesthetics class to meet every other week at the George Eastman House. The impact of seeing original photographs and artists books allowed me to experience first hand the traditions of photography, there is no other word but simply fabulous.

The other aspect, which I really looked forward to and so truly miss, was the Monday night two-hour slide show. Professor Jeff Weiss always managed to show
work of new and up coming artists as well as the lifers-as I call them - good, bad, and the ugly. Nothing edited just slide after slide, along with conversations about what is the meaning of art – and what is real - And although he stressed you need to see art to make art - if you can’t see art - at least you can see it in slides. The room was always full and there was never a quiet Monday. Discussions about art - for art.

I was exposed to critical and creative approaches to art. As I was challenged, my work kept expanding and taking on new dimensions.

Q: Who inspires your work?
MAL: There are so many artists who inspire me; first I have to say Tord Boontje, a Dutch designer. He was an artist I felt compelled to research after I heard him speak at the “Design ≠ Art” symposium. Boontje considers himself both an artist and a designer. He explained that after his first child was born, his work took on a more playful approach, rediscovering myths inherent in universal fairy tales. Often he starts out a piece as a work of art and then manages to redirect it to be manufactured for mass production. This by no means devalues the work; Boontje emphasizes how it actually creates more of an atmosphere around the work itself. His work is an exploration of handcrafted innovations of the historical in ornamentation. With the intersections of craft and industry and contemporary design, Boontje is recognized in both fields. I also am inspired by including Christopher Dresser, William Morris, Annie Albers, entrepreneur Martha Stewart and photographer Stanko Abadžic.

Q: What inspires you?
MAL: The past inspires me, especially technology and its evolution. Mother Nature’s colors, food, and the prospect of the future inspire me.
Q: What do you consider the main obstacles to your development as an artist?
MAL: If it’s important to you, you will find the time to work as an artist. I’d say a lack of time would be my main obstacle.

Q: How do you envision your work developing in the future? What new themes do you intend to explore?
MAL: I have been thinking about anthotypes and using a combination of fabric and paper. Cross-stitch on paper comes to mind, or combining the two. I would like to create a study about what it means to be an artist. I would like to pose two questions: How does an artist separate art and life? Does your art sustain your daily living, or does your daily living contribute to your art? I would like to address artists, designers, and culinary artists.

As far as new themes to explore, I would like to address the meaning of imagination and how it governs the way we make and view art. I am also going to continue with the theme of art and design and food. I have not exhausted all the possibilities there. There is so much to look forward to.
I find it impressive that long before the age of photography craftsmen were creating intricate portraits and still lifes out of fabric and thread. I am interested in traditional forms: images first woven into textiles, and embroideries depicting life-like scenes comparable to those in a painting or a photographic image.

Today, in the age of the computer revolution, it is fascinating to note the similarities between the pixels and halftone dots that are used in creating contemporary photographs as well as textiles, and the single stitches that were used to create the tapestries of yesteryear.

This desire, a drive to represent nature, to recreate what God has perfectly
designed, has embedded our culture with stories from the past. The making of textiles was among the first skills learned by humans. “For thousands of years fabrics, threads, and patterns have passed between nations as a form of commerce. Through each passage every pattern, stitch, or design becomes a part of the culture in which it resides, slightly altered and subtly changed.”

Works that were created by Belgian embroiderers were called (“painting with the needle”). These intricate, life-like embroidered images were often based on secular events, or on Christian and mythological stories. Many famous artists supplied drawings and or paintings for works of embroidery. Sandro Botticelli (1440-1510) supplied cartoons for embroidery, as did Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528).

Tapestries were created using the process of tapestry weaving, in which every stitch is placed by hand; this technique enabled artists to create complex figurative images on an enormous scale. They are ever-present in the castles and churches of the late Medieval and Renaissance eras. These amazing tapestries were created with silk and gilt metallic threads. They provided a form of decoration and insulation that could be easily transported, which meant they were both beautiful and quite practical. For the most part, they were created for wealthy patrons who could commission designs whose subjects were celebrated or somehow tied to a political and/or religious theme. The medium made contributions to art, liturgy, and propaganda of the day.

In the late eighteenth century, so-called printworks named after the printmaking process, embroidered works, imitated the delicate lines of engravings ...

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8 Victoria and Albert Museum, [http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/textiles/features/tapestries/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/textiles/features/tapestries/index.html).
by using black silk stitches on a background of cream white silk, taffeta, or satin. It became the fashion to hang copper engravings, acu paintings, and, particularly, embroidered printworks on walls.\textsuperscript{10}

There are many stories about who discovered the secrets of etching designs onto a copper-plate roller, and about whether the process originated in India, Ireland, or France. Kax Wilson writes \textit{In a History of Textiles}, “Copperplate printing was introduced in 1752 by Frances Nixon and Theophilus Thompson at a printworks near Dublin and in 1760 the method was well known in London. The golden age of copperplate printing extended from 1760-1790, although the method was still used in the 1850s.”\textsuperscript{11}

It was this process that forever changed the way fabrics were transformed. The more intricate the plate, the more intricate the image that appeared on the fabric. Wilson describes the process:

Copperplate printing was a type of intaglio work. Fine lines were engraved into copper plates. A dye or mordant paste mixture was applied to the plate and the excess wiped off, so that only the engraved lines held color. The cloth was pressed against the plates that were held in crude presses. Copper plates were used to print large floral repeats and complex scenes of battles, political events, fables, or everyday life. Generally copperplates were monochrome- red, purple, sepia, blue and occasionally green. Additional coloured details were added with blocks or by brush.\textsuperscript{12}

The invention of the Jacquard mechanism was the next major step in the creation of inserting life-like images and daily scenes into fabric weaves. In 1801 Joseph Marie Jacquard (1752-1834) demonstrated a final version of the drawloom at the Paris Industrial Exhibition; he received a bronze metal for this invention. In 1805 he

\textsuperscript{10} Victoria and Albert Museum, \texttt{http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/textiles/galleries/95/index.html}
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 30.
introduced the punch card device that could be attached to a regular handloom. The cards could be taken off the loom, stored and used again whenever that particular pattern was wanted.13

This was considered the first power loom that facilitated the weaving of cloth with detailed figures. It was the first machine to employ the punch-card technology that would eventually lead to our computer programs of today. This development not only changed the textile industry, but also influenced the age of computers.

Many artists pursue the use of historical and modern textiles as a form of art. The new technologies are embraced as way of extending their self-expression. I myself found enormous vitality and interest in textiles and the use of fabric as part of my medium. Ingenuity can take a plain piece of cloth and turn it into something marvelous.

_Spinning Martha_ and _Allowed to Serve _were created in my second quarter of RIT where I explored combining the use of images and colorful patterns to create two tablecloths. I began experimenting with different printing methods on fabrics as well as the possibilities of creating woven images and designs into textiles. One method was called Lazertran. This special paper allows you to transfer images using your computer's inkjet printer. I tested with different fabrics vinyl, muslin, silk and wool. Some were more successful than others. I kept researching the different methods of application with images through different mediums, such as glass, plastic, wood, paper and textiles.

_ALLOWED TO SERVE_ (2003) was one of my first textile maquettes completed at RIT. Martha Stewart was the subject matter. I chose one photograph and used it repeatedly, from a distance Martha Stewarts face looks like an opulent oval pendant-when you get up close you see its Martha inside a little house. The text of Martha Stewarts trial, and letters from her avid fans became the lace like feature around the

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13 Ibid., 98.
tablecloth. The work addressed the issue of how Martha Stewart is representing and marketing a lifestyle that is perceived obtainable by the middle class consumer. It dealt with her involvement in domesticity in the way of celebrating the home. Choosing materials such as silk, linen and embroidery with beading emphasized related labors associated with women.

Although I created the work as a paper moquette, it is intended to be a Jacquard weave. There are several Jacquard manufacturers that are working with artists to help create their designs into one of a kind art works or a full production of fabric.

With work of Spinning Martha and Allowed to Serve I continued using the same methodology in the final designs for my thesis Matter of Taste. I used the same idea of deconstructing an image and text, then reconstructing it to become a completely
different pattern or idea.

Looking back on my Martha Stewart works I knew they were not enough to sustain me for the duration of my thesis but it was this groundwork that served as the impetus for Serotonin in Matter of Taste.

Women and their association with textile art.

4.2

There are loose connections in my work in terms of feminist influences regarding women and their association with textile art. Even though my work is not intended to give a feminist message, it has feminist undertones that I cannot ignore. For example in my earlier works Spinning Martha and Allow to Serve, the design was the weft and the subject matter was the warp of the fabric. Neither one could not exist without the other. I was more interested in how the home was celebrated and
Women and their association with textile art.

Two women who address the issues of feminism and domesticity in the craft of textiles are Elizabeth Wayland Barber and Janis Jefferies. They speak to the construction of textiles, both in terms of how textiles are observed in the industry and as an art form.

Elizabeth Wayland Barber started a research project that ended up as a 450-page book titled *Prehistoric Textiles*. As she compiled pages of data dealing strictly with the development of the textile craft and its history, she began noticing pieces of information about women and their social and familial roles in producing early textiles. She realized that these facts and stories regarding women in textiles offered an insight into the early creation, marketing, and making of textiles, with women at the helm.¹⁴

Elizabeth Wayland Barber compiled her book *Women’s Work: The First 20,000 Years* from facts showing the history of women as the strength and economic force behind the early fabric industry. As the printing press revolutionized the written

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word, the Jacquard mechanism changed the relationship between women and textiles.15

After the discovery of the Jacquard mechanism textile and tapestry guilds were created and women were not apart of those guilds. Before Jacquard mechanism it was mostly women who did the weaving. Women wove everything by hand using complex and both simplified looms. Weaving was done out of necessity, most cloth making, spinning, weaving, and sewing were compatible with childcare so the women were able to tend to the children and make cloth for the families clothes. The women had almost total responsibility for producing the cloth and clothing in their societies.16 Throughout history, women have come together for companionship, mentoring and teaching the traditions of their craft, so that their skills would carry forward to the next generations

Janis Jefferies, author of Text and Textiles: Weaving across the Borderlines New Feminist Art Criticism, described the stigma that surrounds the term textile. Textile work is perceived as labor-intensive, slow and painstaking and yet, in a double twist, rendered and devalued as invisible women’s work, non-work or non-productive labour. Simultaneously, textile manufacture is a multinational corporate activity in which the nimble fingers of “Oriental” women produce endless garments for tourist consumption and the conspicuous economy.17

Janis Jefferies describes textile work as slow and meticulous. I agree it is painstaking at times; like a musician or athlete, an artist might consider the calluses on her hands a trophy for the pain she goes through to achieve perfection.

Textiles offer a certain challenge while trying to dispel the stigma that surrounds the craft. Whether they are considered an art form, a craft, or a part of

15 Ibid, 30.
16 Ibid, 33.
mass consumer consumption, they are defined by the time of their culture and the
tradition within which they are created.

I choose to create tablecloths for my thesis exhibition partly to make a
statement on how society has clearly shifted to the fast pace and away from dining at
the table, and how some objects such as a tablecloth can be decorative and
meaningful at the same time.

I do not see textiles or textiles created as art strictly the work of women. Nor
do I consider creating textiles as non-productive labor. Would I want my work to
become part of mass consumer consumption? If I answered yes would it not be
considered art? Would it just be considered craft without any meaning behind it?
When does a work stop being craft and take on the label of a work of art? If some one
one wanted to mass market Spinning Martha and Allow to Serve or Serotonin in
Matter of Taste my answer would be yes. I treat them as works of art, craft and also see
them as a marketable item for consumer use as this is my intended outcome.
Chapter 5
Art and Life

Art, Design and Craft

5.1

Creative categories among art, design, and craft in the last decade have merged where purpose and function have blurred. In my earlier work and my thesis work *Matter of Taste*, I felt that I bridged design and art by connecting the handwork and craftsmanship that come from my romantic side, and the industrialization that comes from my more assertive side, a side rife with the feeling that I can create anything. Looking at the issues that revolve around art, design, and craftsmanship, I found myself seeking out artists whose work could shed light on the reasoning behind my own work.

While I said my past work was created like fabric, the design was the weft and the subject matter was the warp, neither one could exist without the other. The design element stayed constant. Regardless of the subject matter changing, my use of design became even more apparent first in *Spinning Martha* and *Allowed to Serve*, then in *Remarkable Sense*, and my final work *Matter of Taste*. I began planning and devising how I could create different patterns from different sources, intending for every pattern to have its own meaning and purpose.

I was drawn to artists whose ideology was concerned with the art of living—artists whose life’s work revolved around the intertwining of art and life. Christopher Dresser and William Morris, are two artists’ whose work revolved around aesthetic commitment to life, art, and design. I also include Marie Antoinette with whom I felt a connection. She had the ability to surround herself with artisans and craftsmen to create a legacy that is still an inspiration to us to day.
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5.2

Before the Arts and Crafts movement, British designer Christopher Dresser (1834-1904) was less well known than William Morris (1834-1896). He believed it was in society’s best interest for design to be a part of everyday living. While William Morris advocated the role of the “craftsman,” which resulted in the handcrafted object, Christopher Dresser embraced industrialization. With industrialization came new materials, new techniques, and a new way of thinking. Dresser’s 1873 book *Principles of Decorative Design* was filled with richly colored patterns. His acceptance of man-made machines and the future allowed him to flourish as a designer. He wrote “I believed that design should have the logic and symmetry of natural forms without imitating them, contending that ornamentation was a higher art than painting because it was, of wholly mental origin.” Dresser specialized in botanical studies and was a lecturer of botany. In 1859 he received a doctorate from the University of Jena for his contribution to botanical science. He eventually decided to work in design full time; in 1860 he set up a design studio. Throughout all of Dresser’s designs, including wallpaper, fabrics, and ceramics, the viewer can see his reinterpretations of natural forms and historical patterns.

*Shock of the Old: Christopher Dresser* was an exhibition presented by Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum in New York City in 2004. The exhibition featured over 300 works from Dresser’s career. Wallpaper, textile samples, glass work, and metal work were all accompanied by beautiful, intricate sketches and notes Dresser had made.

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What was so amazing about this exhibition was that at first glance the works looked so contemporary yet the artist clearly had an understanding of how to meld antiquated processes such as metalwork, enameling, and textiles with new technologies of his day.  

*Forks, Knives, & Spoons* in *Matter of Taste* was originally going to be individual pieces. The original works were pencil rubbings of antique silverware. I had planned to display each work in an individual frame, one fork, one knife and one spoon. After
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*William Morris*

5.3

The Arts and Crafts Movement in Europe and America (1880-1920) was, in part, a reaction to the Industrial Revolution. In Europe, the Arts and Crafts Movement began more as a protest than as a plan. Its founders, William Morris and John Ruskin, were in the throes of socialism and pastoralism, both of which contributed to these men’s quest for vision and beauty.

William Morris is an idealistic social reformer who envisioned an integrated society. He is a celebrated artist who spent a lifetime creating a life that revolved around art. He was a master of design, a poet, writer, calligrapher, and businessman. He mastered the production of glass, stained glass, wallpaper, woven textiles, and tapestry. He gave endless lectures on the responsibilities of the public and society to improve their standard of living through art and design. A lecture that was (and still is) used as a teaching tool was his lecture on “Hopes and Fears for Art, The Beauty of Life,” in which he remarked, “Hope must be ever with us, and sometimes perhaps it will so quicken our vision that it will outrun the slow lapse of time, and show us the victorious days when millions of those who now sit in darkness will be enlightened by an art, made by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user.”

It is unfathomable to think that there are people who live in this world without hope. I cannot imagine a world in which one cannot hope. Even in the realm of art, a large part of me believes that hope is what evokes our ideas. *Matter of Taste* was created to allow the viewer to visualize work that is aesthetically pleasing. I wanted my

\[\text{http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/morris/william/m87hf/chap3.html.}\]
audience to leave knowing that the artist put emphasis to the use of craft, design and art, through hope my ideas emerge and come to fruition.

Morris constantly spoke about how moved he was by the troubles of civilized man. He stressed that in man’s search for luxury and excess, people deprive their race of all the beauty of life. He endeavored to reach his audience and let them know the magnitude of the importance of art and design to a world that offers little or no comfort in the sphere of visual pleasures. Although Morris demonstrated a bleak outlook during some of his lectures, he strived to emphasize hope:

There is our hope, I say. If the bargain had been really fair, complete all round, then were there nought else to do but to bury Art, and forget the beauty of life: but now the cause of Art has something else to appeal to: no less than the hope of the people for the happy life which has not yet been granted to them. There is our hope: the cause of Art is the cause of the people.  

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Marie Antoinette - Opulent Design

5.4

After my first two tablecloths Spinning Martha and Allow to serve, Remarkable Sense started out as a tablecloth. Instead of Martha Stewart as my subject matter I chose Marie Antoinette. I must point out that two emerging ideas were being formed. Maria Antoinette as the first and the second was food and the table.

I resonated with Marie Antoinette because of her over-the-top style and her flamboyant characteristics. She had such a considerable influence on design and gastronomy. Like Christopher Dresser and William Morris, I was inspired by the history of Marie Antoinette.

There are few women who have had more impact on the world of design and

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art than Marie Antoinette. She had a flair for style; she was an exceptional arbiter of
taste. During the short period of 1774-1789, she encouraged some of the most gifted
craftsmen and artists of her time. Although her reign was not terribly long, she left
her mark on all the arts, from poetry, gastronomy to opera, to design and art.

Antoinette had a charming, informal style that was woven throughout her
day-to-day living. She cherished her country paradise and sought to shape all that
was around her through eyes of nature. Her desire to have a normal life was her
primary reason for creating an atmosphere that was worth living in. Nature was her
inspiration. As Andreu puts it, “She chose colors that reflected the gardens of
Château de Versailles: soft pastel blues, the palest of greens, mesmerizing lilacs, and
vibrant floral patterns.”

The color choices I made in Remarkable Sense were similar to the colors used in
some of Marie Antoinette’s designs. Soft pastel greens, pinks, different shades of
white. Each color slightly different from each other yet when put together

![Image](image.png)

![Image](image.png)

emphasized each color more. I was in awe of how Christopher Dresser, William

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Morris and Marie Antoinette designed intricate glassware. The place settings they designed when set on the table reflected the design on whatever surface it was placed. I began to explore etching images and text on glass to see the patterns that were created, once the plates were placed on the surface of the tablecloth. At this point I began to consider a full table setting and not just designing the tablecloth itself.

Bringing Marie Antoinette into my work seemed like a good idea at the time. I discovered that the subject of Marie Antoinette like Martha Stewart would not be sufficient enough for the base of my work. Food and the table were strongly influencing my decision to become my new body of work. Nonetheless, the influence of this remarkable historic figure resonates with the aesthetics of my thesis show *Matter of Taste*. 
Chapter 6
Food & the Table

Drawing from the Past
The Table
6.1

*Remarkable Sense* was the foundation for *Matter of Taste*, after *Spinning Martha* and *Allow to Serve (two tablecloths)*. *Remarkable Sense* was my first attempt at an installation; it is this work that led me toward candidacy. Still keeping the relationship between art and design as my underlying thread, I began addressing the table and the five senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste (including physical desire). There are both concrete and metaphorical links among food, sex, and the table, and I was curious about how these three are interrelated.

The table and food present a simile for subsistence. I identify passionately with the historical links among table, physical pleasure, and the essence of food. My vision in *Remarkable Sense* was to bring to our attention the possibilities that could exist at the table, discussions, and emotional intensity; daily routines that can become more.

Our era of economic and social change is a key component in the understanding of *Remarkable Sense*. We need the basic foodstuff of nature to provide nourishment for our bodies and our minds. Yet our society is continually getting further and further away from all that is truly nature itself. While technology and our fast-paced society pull us from the joys of everyday living, my hope is that my art will redirect the viewer’s attention to what could exist at the table, by this I designed a table setting that is anything but boring. It’s colorful, witty, and definitely brought about conversation, conversation one cannot find at a fast food restaurant or drive through.
Early in my research I was most strongly influenced by two food philosophers: Stewart Lee Allen and Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. They provide detailed accounts of the history of food through reflections, experiences, and recipes.

Stewart Lee Allen is the first author I want to discuss. I was drawn to the introduction of his book *In the Devil’s Garden*, entitled “Sin, Sex, and Forbidden Food.” His book is organized using the framework of the seven deadly sins. Stories of monks, religious folklore, and fables all revolving around food enamored me. The narratives of old tales of food’s relationship to sex are a wealth of inspiration for an
artist like myself. For example, I enjoyed reading about the etymology of the
tomato, which ended up on a plate as the “love apple.” In Remarkable Sense, I used
words such as breast, thigh, devil’s food cake, angel food cake, and certain images
that had undertones of sexual pleasure, to playfully bring food, sex, and the
pleasures of the table to the surface.

I was drawn to this book because of the taboos that accompany the food we
eat. The dietary laws that were handed down to people through religion and
superstition deeply shaped the societies in which they lived. Passed down through
generations, these beliefs or superstitions still affect how we view food and its
relationship with life.

Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin
6.4

Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin is the second author I wish to discuss. He is to
food what William Morris is to design: both had an underlying interest in how one
lives a creative and fulfilled life. Brillat-Savarin’s book The Physiology of Taste is full of
aphorisms, recipes, philosophies, and stories that move the reader to explore more
deeply what food and life mean. He writes about how the powers of taste have a lasting
success and how physical love has influenced all the sciences, musing:

It appears that taste has two principal uses: 1) It invites us, by means of
pleasure, to make good the losses that we suffer through the action of life;
and 2) It helps us to choose, from the various substances offered us by
Nature, those which are suitable as food.22

There are so many different approaches when dealing with the art of eating.

37.
There are those of great wealth who never sully their hands in a kitchen. There are those who are so poor that to even imagine such a sumptuous banquet as Brillat-Savarin described would seem impossible; for they have eaten little more than dirt and bugs, and the dirt they walk upon is their table.

It was after reading Brillat-Savarin’s fourth aphorism “Tell me what you eat: I will tell you what you are” – I knew food and the table would be my final subject matter for Matter of Taste. Remarkable Sense had its flaws, and although it was considered unfinished and unpolished, these attributes contributed to the perfection of my final work Matter of Taste.

Philosophy of Food: Part Two
6.5

Nearly a year later, the philosophy of food is still predominant and is influencing my work. Just as Stewart Lee Allen and Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin have influenced my work, Isabel Allende and Thomas Moore are sources of inspiration.

While reading their stories, I found similarities to my own family’s account in their food history. Growing up, I was privileged to see where our food came from. Our family worked in agriculture. My fondest memory is of playing in the tomato fields; I always was fascinated by the vastly different shades of red that swept over the land. I have marvelous memories of my mother receiving seemingly endless supplies of peaches, apricots, plums, and cucumbers from my uncle, which she gloriously made into colorful jars of preserves. Come winter, we would enjoy the benefits of her labor. These are the stories that stirred within me while creating Matter of Taste. I found these stories were gently seeping into my work through color and transference.
Isabel Allende

6.6

*Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses* (1997) is a book to stir the imagination. Isabel Allende creates titles such as “Cooking In the Nude,” “The Good Table,” and “The Saucy Way to Foreplay,” topics that could only entice me further in my work. I was fascinated by her stories of using the subtleties of cooking to move one’s soul.

Flavors, colors, textures, and marvelous smells came from my kitchen as I experimented with Allende’s recipes. I had just as much fun creating the dishes as I did testing and photographing them. Adams’s Nuts, Frivolous Prunes, and my favorite, Consommé Bacchus, sadly all tasted better as a dish than they looked as a photograph and were left to the taste buds only.

*Untitled: Carrot Soup with gold*  
*Untitled: Salmon*
Thomas Moore

6.7

Thomas Moore, author of *The Soul of Sex* (1999), emphasizes a quote from the Zen priest Edward Espe Brown, “Tomato Ecstasy,” in which Brown writes:

When we fail to notice the essential juicy, lush, and meaty vibrancy of tomato, somewhere inside us our “heart” shrivels up, our succulent fecundity is unrecognized and uncalled-for. We too are dry and mealy, and longing for something to break us open and make us feel alive and flowing.²²

I never thought of a tomato that way, his comparison between the tomato and the human life, is just as profound to me as William Morris’s assessment on a life without art is a life without hope. I am obsessed with tomatoes. It is no wonder tomatoes appeared swirling in olive oil as a photograph in *Matter of Taste*.

Moore writes about how certain things are not only capable of true intimacy,

but also bring a high degree of sensuality into our lives. He explains that there is a
certain dynamic between feeling and the presence of things. I feel certain that he is
right because of my experiences with my travels and artwork.

I lived in London, England and Florence, Italy for over two years. What
appealed to me most was the intimate relationship that the people of the market had
with not only their food, but also their customers. There were poultry markets with
chicken and geese suspended in air. The heads of cows, boars, and pigs glanced at me
as I gazed at the meat markets. There were vegetable stalls that seemed to wind their
way around the wine merchants. At every corner there seem to be a vendor just for
freshly made pastas and bread. I drank coffee, wine, and fresh juice, and, on occasion,
grappa.

These memories trickled into *Matter of Taste*. I brought all of these foods, at least
the colors and the idea of the food into my work. *Coffee* became *Caffeine*; wine and
grappa became the photograph for *Aperitif*, the vegetables and fruit became part
of the menu in *Matter of Taste*. 
I felt a strong connection with Thomas Moore, especially when I read his notions about losing ourselves in the fast pace of society and losing touch with the world. As I have said before, I am a contradiction: I embrace our new technologies, but long for the traditional and nontraditional values both in my life and in my art.

Isabel Allende and Thomas Moore both write about the parallel of sex and food and its importance in our everyday living. I felt that with Matter of Taste, I invited the viewer to experience a certain degree of pleasure when she or he entered the installation. I offered a sumptuous table setting, yet my guests were not allowed to eat. They were given the opportunity to imagine their own banquet--what could be possible for them. I saw positive responses with Matter of Taste; the viewer’s interaction with my work greatly contributed to the work itself by allowing me to see how creating something decorative and pleasing to the palate allows for the stirring of one’s imagination and senses.
Taste and Beauty

7.1

*Matter of Taste* can account for likes and dislikes, and to better understand part of my work I wanted to figure out the philosophy of beauty and how it relates to taste. What are the threads that cross among beauty, aesthetics, and taste? Part of *Matter of Taste* deals with beauty, and though there were underlying layers of meaning, my quest was to have a beautiful and stunning show. What I love most about *Matter of Taste* is that it deals not only with culinary aesthetics, but also with the physical beauty of art and, more importantly, the essence of our well-being, which could be considered an aspect of beauty.

*Serotonin: Detail of Plate*
Umberto Eco wrote, “when it comes to beauty, man posits himself as the norm of perfection,” and he worships himself in this... At bottom man mirrors himself in things and sees as beautiful all things that reflect his image.\(^\text{24}\)

During my exhibition, I found that people looking at themselves in the mirrored plates reacted more strongly than I had expected. I wondered if they were looking at the plates out of curiosity, discomfort, or vanity, or did they in fact see their true beauty, or did they see themselves as the norm of perfection as Eco wrote?

It is difficult to judge what a person sees or perceives in regard to beauty. It is evident that beauty and art were once regarded as essential concerns of philosophy, from the works of philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, Philebus, Aristotle, Addison, Kant, and Hume, all of whom write using the words *beauty*, *aesthetics*, and *taste* interchangeably.

Taste, like beauty, is problematic, according to Clement Greenberg, an influential critic of modern art writing and author of *Homemade Esthetics*; taste can be questioned, but is extremely difficult to prove.\(^\text{25}\) I find this observation to be true; it is quite difficult to pin down exactly what the criteria are for taste. In art and design, one learns the basics of the relationships between colors and how these colors affect the outcome of one’s work. I believe taste is very subjective, yet I do feel that there are certain principles for visual elements that result in a satisfying outcome. Line, shape, color, space, and texture all play a role in how one perceives a room, an article of clothing, or a work of art. Balance, emphasis, movement, and rhythm also play their parts.


According to the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, taste can be defined as follows: “(1) to try or test the flavor or quality of (something) by taking some into the mouth: to taste food… [and] (19) the sense of what is fitting, harmonious, or beautiful; the perception and enjoyment of what constitutes excellence in the fine arts, literature, etc.”

In *Mater of Taste* I utilized the principles of balance, movement, and rhythm; to create a harmony between each piece. For example, my choice of circular glass pieces, when the viewer walked in to the installation there was a certain movement between the glasswork and the table. I chose the circle for its strength as a design element, and for its relationship to food molecules. Although the first drafts were square as I refined my work the circle was chosen not the square. The circles of glass balanced out the table setting, by being placed on both sides of the table.

In taste there are definite contradictions. I absolutely love the decorative, whereas to someone else it sounds a death knell. In *Mater of Taste*, I see beauty, harmony, serenity, and satisfaction; someone else may see the complete opposite.

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Conclusion

If I could pick one word that would describe *Matter of Taste* I would choose transformation. Transformation not only describes my work but also suggests what I experienced through my work. When I started at RIT I came in with the notion of creating some form of alternative photographs using photography as my sole medium. I ended up completing an exceptionally good installation using photographs as a component. Although in the beginning I felt compelled to use the family as my subject matter, I chose two different topics and with that created something I never dreamt of -- *Matter of Taste*. I grew as an artist while at RIT. While I am not in the habit of compartmentalizing my work, my art, my life the three of these facets started to strongly influence each other. Slowly the boundaries of each were blurred, and that’s when transformation took place. My art changed, I changed and all for the better.

I decided after my exhibition I would have changed two things. I did not video record my show and I am sorry that I did not. The footage could have allowed me to document the viewer and how they reacted to my work. The next time *Matter of Taste* will be shown, I will include a video presentation in the show. The second aspect I would change is my wallpaper piece. I had technical issues. The wallpaper kept falling down. I did not want to frame it so the wallpaper was adhered to a wooden dowel. The paper kept slipping off throughout the duration of the exhibition. I also did not like my choice of paper. It was too lightweight since it was printed on Epson silk paper. After the exhibition I chose a heavier weight paper and it is more suited to the piece. I also changed they way the piece was mounted.

*Matter of Taste* has three degrees of effectiveness: overall appearance, craft and undertone. I felt the overall appearance of *Matter of Taste* was exactly what I hoped for. In the back of my mind I kept thinking of *Remarkable Sense* my first installation at RIT and what a disappointment it was. You have grand ideas and sometimes they do not
come to fruition because of time and lack of experience. I had a feeling of achievement coupled with frustration. When *Matter of Taste* was completed and installed, I only had a feeling of attainment nothing else, no regrets, no discontent only pure fulfillment and happiness. I made a timeline from the beginning and closely adhered to it. I also had refined my skills regarding my photographs and my glasswork. There were many components to my exhibition and each took quite a bit of time. I imagined a beautiful banquet table setting and I achieved that and much more.

The craft aspect in *Matter of Taste* was the most enjoyable part in creating my exhibition. I am passionate about making objects. For me, there is a seduction revolving around an object that is decorative. I admit the outcome of my table in *Matter of Taste* looked something that might have been created in the 18th century, an appearance that suited me perfectly. Choosing the caffe latte silk colored fabric, the various colors of thread, how the fabric would lay on the table, how the glasses would reflect on the plates and on the fabric, every detail was notoriously time consuming with a triumphant outcome.

There is a line that can be easily crossed when an artist work is just about craft. I feel that *Matter of Taste* is a perfect blend of both craft and meaning. The photographs represented the menu, the glass pieces represented what effects our bodies; *Salt, Pepper, Vitamin A, Vitamin B, and Vitamin C, Caffeine, Sugar* and *Gold*. The tablecloth *Serotonin*, became the happy “feel good” tablecloth. Each was challenging to make and each had a significant underlying meaning.

Craft is about learning a skill, involving an ability to achieve perfection. Whatever the profession or activity, photography, woodcarving, glass making, pottery, or weaving, one must research and learn by doing until one achieves excellence. *Matter of Taste* had many trial and errors, but achieved a level of success I was working towards in my thesis exhibition. In my research, I found a poem that was a perfect inspiration for skilled or unskilled persons who wish to make something, anything.
This Booke some cunning workes doth teach
Too hard for some capacities to reach.
So for weake learners other workes here be
As plain and easy as ABC!
Thus skillful or unskillful each may take
This booke and of it each good use may make
All sorts of workes almost that can be nam’d
Here are directions how they may be fram’d

The Needle’s Excellency written by
John Taylor, the Water Poet, for
James Boler, published 1640

The undertone of *Matter of Taste* was the third part that I felt was extremely
effective. The two components of food and the table were melded together by the use of
design. Its subtleties were its strengths. I could have chosen so many different patterns
for the plates. In the end, the silver plated plates were an ideal accompaniment for
“You Are What You Eat” with viewers being able to see themselves in the plates. I
could have put the food on the table but I selected to have the food become the artwork.
Serotonin has such a powerful meaning behind it, and was turned into an intricate
display of lacy patterns on the tablecloth, I love that it has an underlying sense of
humor, which many viewers understood.

I felt *Matter of Taste* was a success. A friend who came to my show could not
have summed up better how I felt about my own work she wrote: “Dear Maria, you
have survived graduate school in one piece: that is your work is still *Your* work and it
is beautiful. I loved seeing the show up close, in person-it means a lot to me to see work
that is so positive, so life-centered. It is all about joy for me. I will repeat what I said in
your kitchen this morning: the work I always like most is work where I can’t tell if I like
it more for the subject or for the execution. This *works* on both levels - on all levels.” I
was touched by what my friend had written I thought her observations rang true
mirrored exactly how I felt in creating *Matter of Taste*.

I wanted the installation to be positive in nature. I also wanted it to be life-
centering and a reflection of who I am as a person and an artist.

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27 Erica Wilson, *Crewel Embroidery* (Charles Scribner’s Sons 1962), 8.
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