

“Culinary extravagances”

served (...) by Oskar Weiss

We have been aware of the fact that eating is a genuine art on its own for quite a long time now actually. This belief was much supported by Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin when he published *The Physiology of Taste: or meditations on Transcendental Gastronomy* in 1825. I get the irresistible feeling that Oskar Weiss's works we have a great chance to admire (...), are capable of illustrating most adequately the French Epicurean's work which was created almost 200 years ago. The talented draughtsman is popular not only in his home country of Switzerland, he has been appreciated by juries all around Europe. Thanks to him we can travel to the region which tempts us with numerous refined but also known for generations tastes. This region is situated next to Cockaigne, the Land of Plenty. However, here in Weiss's land – quite contrary to Cockaigne where people would do completely nothing, glut themselves and wait for roasted pigeons to fly in their mouths – everybody is bustling about getting goodies (by collecting, fishing or hunting for them), cooking and serving delicacies, growing miracle plants, or at least eating them. Moreover, it seems that Weiss's characters savour these dishes, and do not consume them excessively.

We may become convinced that eating is art also by *Weinbrandt¹ van Rijn* from one of Weiss's drawings, who is equipped with a paintbrush with a fondue fork on its other end. He is just making use of it at the moment while digging the fork in the pot. He is just about to dip a dice of meat in sauces disposed in a picturesque way on... the palette, not surprisingly at all. We can also see an easel with a rich frame which displays a delightful culinary still-life comprising a real onion braid, a ham and a sausage. The concepts originated in Mannerism gave birth to the following bizarre creatures: a butterfly with a pair of ham-wings, a hybrid of lobster, pineapple and pâté, which hover above the flowery meadow, these *concetti* also led to invention of orchid-like “plants”, e.g. *eggeria fritatis* or *baconia mortadellia* which are watered lovingly by Uncle Winedrop. And on the top of that even more hilarious ideas: a baby dessert in the shape of attractive breasts, a trout which can be easily consumed after unzipping, and an ironing board for... pancakes? And what an impressive gallery of characters: *Punk á la carte*, whose mohawks are perfectly suitable for refined party skewers, *Excelenz Earl von Sandwich* who mistook a palm leaf for a lettuce leaf, a combination of Diogenes with Bacchus whose barrel is richly equipped, a tennis chair umpire who takes more care about his luxury snack than a match, a completely harmless deer-cyclops-hunter who shoots with champagne, and last but not least a crazy chef who has just participated in *Tour de Marche* (i.e. “Tour de Market”) on his bike. Ah! a cow which makes no moo but fed on grapes gives... wine instead of milk quite obviously.

What a coincidence! June – time for asparagus. It seems that there are many asparagus lovers here. Weiss transforms this edible plant into pan pipes which play symphony of gods, or into arrows of hidden in a rose bush Cupid's quiver (Cupid managed to close the mouth of a Romantic girl with one of the vegetables in a rather bold way). Asparagus is grown in balcony boxes or decorates a salmon caught in a full “dress”. But above all Weiss seems to love wine. He made wine the topic of a large cycle of his drawings. The names of times of a day which serve degustation only (*Weinzeit*) or other

¹*Weinbrandt* is a German name for brandy [translator's note].

sophisticated pleasures (*Eine kleine Weinmusik*) derive from wine. Nevertheless he also warns the viewers against negative effects of excessive wine consumption.

Weiss's world is extremely pleasant. When looking at his detailed works, quite unwittingly we tend to absolve our weaknesses (love for wine vintages, night sneaking, one more cream cake or an excursion to the Alps only to have fondue on a chairlift). His masterful line which heads towards a gentle caricature, and profligate but skilful use of colour, his huge sense of humour place him among such masters as Wilhelm Busch, Tomi Ungerer (a Swiss also), Sempé, and in the Polish backyard, Jerzy Flisak or Julian Bohdanowicz. After having seen Weiss's works it is much easier to believe that *dolce vita* may be at one's fingertips. So perhaps yet another glass of wine? Let's make a toast for Oskar Weiss!

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