

Cooper-Hewitt
National Design Museum



FEEDING
Desire

Design and the Tools of the Table
1500–2005

MAY 5–OCTOBER 29, 2006

FEEDING *Desire*

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Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum Presents "Feeding Desire: Design and the Tools of the Table, 1500-2005"

In May 2006, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum will present "Feeding Desire: Design and the Tools of the Table, 1500-2005," a rich, contextual journey through the evolution of dining from 1500 to 2005. More than 300 objects, including historic and modern flatware from the museum's permanent collection, will be featured in the one-floor exhibition, on view from May 5 through Oct. 29, 2006. "Feeding Desire" will offer a scholarly yet celebratory overview of the history of culinary culture, exploring the physical forms and social meanings of eating utensils and serving tools.

Organized by Cooper-Hewitt's Sarah Coffin, curator of 17th and 18th century decorative arts; Ellen Lupton, curator of contemporary design and guest curator Darra Goldstein, food historian and founding editor of *Gastronomica* magazine, "Feeding Desire" will showcase the museum's extensive collection of flatware, cutlery and other accessories for the table, some of which will be on view for the first time in the museum's history. The installation of the exhibition is being designed by AvroKO, a New York firm known for their innovative, concept-based architecture in the restaurant industry.

"The culture of dining is an integral part of social history" said Cooper-Hewitt director Paul Warwick Thompson. "'Feeding Desire' will demonstrate how sharing food can be an expression of love and power, duty and honor, knowledge and taste."

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Smithsonian
Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum

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Cooper-Hewitt, housed in the landmark 1901 Andrew Carnegie Mansion, offers an ideal space in which to explore the culture of dining. “Feeding Desire” begins in what was once the Carnegie’s dining room, with a table set in the style of the Gilded Age, the era during which the mansion was built. This table will be lavishly adorned with period flatware and serving accoutrements, including a silver-gilt dessert service commissioned from Tiffany’s by J.P. Morgan. In this room, the major “players” that dominate the modern Western table setting will be introduced: the knife, fork and spoon. “Feeding Desire” will examine, through objects and graphic displays, the distinct origin and design progression of each utensil during the last five centuries, tracing variations in social customs, cuisines and decorative fashion in the United States and Europe. Extraordinary examples of historic cutlery will be on view, including a Northern Italian set with mother-of-pearl handles from 1590 and a mid-18th century, steel-and-silver, pistol-gripped fork owned by George Washington.

Prior to the late 17th century, eating utensils were not provided to guests by hosts or inns, and members of the upper class never traveled without their own set of flatware. In the breakfast room of the mansion, examples of pre-18th century dining kits and collapsible devices, designed to ensure that affluent city dwellers could dine outdoors conveniently and stylishly, will be juxtaposed with contemporary portable dining gear, including a 1977 plastic disposable picnic set designed by Jean-Pierre Vitrac and a dining set designed by Raymond Loewy for first-class Air France passengers.

A digital slideshow of paintings, prints and other images depicting dining throughout history will be on view in the next gallery. Touch samples also will be on display, allowing visitors to hold different types of flatware and consider the role of various design elements that influence eating, such as materials, weight and balance.

In the main gallery of the exhibition, visitors will encounter a large circular table set with eight different historical place settings, each representing a specific decorative style. Surrounding the table will be two-dimensional images of feasts and dining celebrations from Cooper-Hewitt’s drawings and prints department and the National Design Library. Objects will be organized according to a wide range of dining-related topics, such as the ergonomics of the table, commemorative flatware and flatware as social commentary in the 20th and 21st centuries. The development of production methods, such as silver-plating, forging and gilding, and the role of new materials, such as stainless steel and Bakelite, also will be explored. Additionally, a special section devoted to the 20th century will address themes such as the role of the designer, with pieces by Josef Hoffmann, Peter Behrens and Scandinavian designers, such as Georg Jensen and Arne Jacobsen.

One of the highlights of “Feeding Desire” is the collection of specialized and unusual serving tools included in the exhibition. Among the objects on view are a silver-gilt macaroni server from 1860, ice cream hatchets and saws, asparagus tongs and a scallop fork. Though many of these tools have become obsolete, they provide a fascinating glimpse into culinary design ingenuity.

“Feeding Desire” concludes with a look at some of the most innovative and influential designs from the contemporary and postwar periods, including a provocative table arrangement by Gio Ponti and a lavish place setting by Ted Muehling that includes ceramics, crystal and flatware. Artists, such as Maureen Connor, whose multimedia installation “Taste” will be on view, and the designers featured in this section, including Maarten Baptist, Sam Baron and Sandra Bautista, subvert and reinvent the iconography of the traditional table in their works. The final gallery of “Feeding Desire” reminds viewers that the tools of the table are constantly evolving yet still have the power to transform the basic ritual of eating into a social celebration.

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EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

- Curatorial:** Sarah Coffin, curator of 17th and 18th century decorative arts
Darra Goldstein, food historian
Ellen Lupton, curator of contemporary design
- Catalog:** An accompanying exhibition catalog, "Feeding Desire: Design and the Tools of the Table, 1500-2005" will be published by Assouline Publishing in March 2006. The publication will include a foreword by director Paul Warwick Thompson, an introduction by curatorial director Barbara Bloemink, essays by Sarah Coffin, Darra Goldstein, Jennifer Goldsborough, Phillippa Glanville, Ellen Lupton, Suzanne von Drachenfels, and Carolin C. Young and over 200 color illustrations.
- Sponsor:** "Feeding Desire: Design and the Tools of the Table, 1500-2005" is sponsored by the Tiffany & Co. Foundation.
Additional support is provided by Mr. John H. Bryan, Crate and Barrel, and The Felicia Fund.
- Exhibition Designer:** AvroKO
- Public Programs:** On May 6, 2006, Cooper-Hewitt will host a multi-disciplinary symposium which will include workshops and lectures on a variety of dining-related topics including rituals of eating, menu design, tableware displays and dining in the 21st century.
- General Information:** Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution is the only museum in the nation devoted exclusively to historic and contemporary design. The museum presents compelling perspectives on the impact of design on daily life through active educational programs, exhibitions and publications.
- Location:** The museum is located at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 91st Street in New York City. Public transit routes include the Lexington Avenue 4, 5 and 6 subways (86th or 96th Street Stations) and Fifth and Madison Avenue buses.
- Museum Hours:** Mondays through Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Fridays, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Sundays, noon to 6 p.m. The museum is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day.
- Admission:** General admission, \$12; senior citizens and students over age 12, \$7. Cooper-Hewitt members and children under age 12 are admitted free. For further information, please call 212.849.8400 or visit www.cooperhewitt.org. The museum is fully accessible.