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Sugar: From Fields to Global Production

Sugar, a staple in almost any kitchen, is synonymous with sweetness, in taste and thought. However, its history is more bitter. Sugar’s progression through history was built on oppression, subjugation, power, and control. The sugar we consume, known as sucrose, is a product that is extracted from various plant sources, such as sugar beet and sugar cane. Sugar is versatile in function as it can be a sweetener, a preservative, used in medicinal applications and acts as decorative material (Mintz 1986). Sugar is a complex substance that exists in many forms; from liquid syrup to crystallized solids, from slightly pure to 100 percent purity, and from dark brown to bone white. Sugar cane was first domesticated in New Guinea from where it eventually spread to the Philippines, Indonesia, and India. Europeans were introduced to sugar with the Arab expansion and their relationship heightened as a result of the Crusaders. In 1493, on his second voyage, Christopher Columbus brought sugar to the New World. Sugar was first grown in the New World on the Caribbean islands (Toussaint-Samat 2009). Sugar cane is a tropical and subtropical crop and due to the ideal warm climate conditions for sugar growth, the Caribbean sugar cane industry expanded greatly over time. This industry operated by use of the plantation form and Native American and African slave labor to do the difficult task of cutting the cane for harvesting. In response to poor traveling of pure sugar cane, the sugar was industrially refined in Europe and then exported around the world for profit. This all led to triangular trade with both common goods such as sugar, but also humans to be enslaved to do the labor of the sugar industry (Mintz 1986).

Sugar is a diverse food, it is used as a spice, ingredient, and decoration, and has a rich visual history. Throughout history the image of sugar is deeply connected with race. The crop was cultivated by slaves and then refined, and graded on its whiteness. Sydney Mintz writes in Sweetness and Power, “Purer sugars were prized for aesthetic reasons, among others…” (Mintz 1986). The aesthetic desire for pure white sugar was reflective of the Western social value placed on being Caucasian in race. In the 18th century sugar was evaluated and taxed on a color system. The Western thought was that the whiter the sugar the higher the quality, as well as the more refined the sugar is. The whiter the sugar the further from the natural form it is. In art sugar was depicted in two ways during the colonial period: first as a commodity through images of sugar plantations, slaves harvesting and milling the sugar; and secondly, to create elaborate sculptures called subtleties. These subtleties were meant to be admired and then eaten. Only the royalty and the very wealthy could afford the large quantities of sugar needed to create these pieces. The use of sugar within art evolved as the commodity evolved. No longer a delicacy for only the wealthiest, in contemporary times it is almost impossible to not eat sugar, so much so that it is more prevalent in the diets of people of poverty and low income. Sugar has always been a symbol of subjugation and consumerism, however contemporary artist are critiquing the history and meaning of sugar. Contemporary artists such as Edouard Duval-Carrié and Kara Walker are using sugar to unveil and critique the hardship, labor, enslavement, and subjugation that went behind it rather than the monetary wealth that it represented previously.

The growth and production of the sugar industry is closely associated with slavery and exploitation of countries in Africa, South America and the Caribbean. Sugar became a big commodity, leading to the need for more labor. The use of slavery facilitated the rapid growth and spread of this crop. Sugar is closely related to many political movements, including fights for independence, and movements around slavery as sugar fueled the oppression of many people, with effects of this still very prevalent today. The U.S. tried to establish their power and control of this commodity and other countries through enslavement, tariffs, and immigration and trade policies (Merleaux 2012). Sugar is something consumed in our daily lives, but it is important to recognize how it got here by being built on the foundations of slavery and oppression.
Sugar cane was first domesticated in New Guinea.

In 1493, Christopher Columbus brought sugar to the New World, where it was grown and harvested in the Caribbean.

The sugar industry in the Caribbean operated by importing slave labor from Africa to work on sugar plantations or mills.

Sugar cane eventually spread to India, where it was first processed.

Europeans were introduced to sugar with the Arab expansion and heightened as a result of the Crusaders. Sugar became a sign of wealth and power.

Over time, the appearance of sugar became whiter as refining the sugar of impurities became popular. This change correlated with preferences of cultures. Sugar was refined for Europeans because they preferred a whiter, "more pure" sugar. The Dutch Color System was used to identify sugar and its proximity to raw vs. refined sugar. The more refined a sugar was the whiter it was and the more pure it was. This same thinking was also applied to people regarding their race or skin color.

The exchange of goods, such as sugar, and humans for slave labor between Europe, Africa, and the Americas became known as the transatlantic triangular trade.
Kara Walker, born in 1969, is best known for her work with silhouette installations where she explores race, gender and sexuality, and other controversial topics. In the spring of 2014 Kara Walker’s largest creation to date opened, A Subtlety or Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the Unpaid and Overworked Artisans who have refined our sweet tastes from the cane fields to the kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the Demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant, the largest project Walker has taken on to date. The sculpture was a sugar-coated sphinx-like woman who was flanked by 12 molasses-covered boys. Upon first sight the central figure is undeniably black with high cheekbones and large lips. The sphinx-like woman sported a headkerchief, exaggerated lips and rear; the molasses figures that circle the central figure are frail looking with oversized heads, carrying baskets. The exaggerations in the forms are rooted in racial stereotypes and the historical portrayal of people of color as “the other”. This monumental sculpture is in an abandoned domino sugar factory. The sugar industry has deep roots in slavery and poor working conditions. Visually, sugar historically has been a symbol of subjugation and racial oppression. The manner that sugar was graded and taxed is an excellent example -- the whiter the sugar the more desirable it was to the affluent and the purer it was considered. The factory is not an exception and has a long history in the struggles of colored people’s struggles. Molasses drips from the rafters and down the walls, as if the building is weeping. The space, along with the Walker’s sculptures, through the use of form and medium prompts questions about race, slavery and the exploitation of women in both the past and today. In today’s culture women of all races but particularly of minorities, are taking back their voices and Walker’s A Subtlety or Marvelous Sugar Baby... is no exception. I argue that Walker’s installation gives the voice and power back to both women and all people of color, in the past as slaves, in the present as indentured servants, and throughout time as objects of sexual desire. A Subtlety or Marvelous Sugar Baby... gives voice and power back to those who have been silenced and oppressed throughout American history.

The installation references many historical practices of social standing and subjugation of African Americans, and through the multiple layers of otherness within the piece, the more time spent with the piece the more it reveals. Bell hooks presents the idea of the “other” in her work, Eating the Other Desire and resistance, as a person who is not white but rather a member of the minority race. The continual exploitation of the minority races, specifically African American people maintains the status quo, perpetuating the power of the white supremacist. bell hooks writes “Whether or not desire for contact with the “other”, for connection rooted in the longing for pleasure, can act as a critical intervention challenging and subverting racist domination, inviting and enabling critical resistance, is an unrealized political possibility” (hooks 367). A Subtlety or Marvelous Sugar Baby... acts to challenge the racial domination that for centuries has defined the black existence in America, and calls attention to and represent the many ways that African Americans have served to enrich the lives of the white American. Walker does this through the layers of “other” represented...
in the form of the sculpture. The first layer to recognize is the mammy servant figure, represented through the headkerchief, visually referencing the “Aunt Jemima” figure found in the historical stereotypes and visual history immortalized by the white supremacist culture. The black women served the affluent white family, raising their children and maintaining the home. The second layer is the “other” is the sexual objectification of women of color throughout history. The protruding breasts and rear of the Sugar Baby openly speaks to a societal habit, and desire for the other. hooks writes “Desired and sought after, sexual pleasure alters the consenting subject, deconstructing notions of will, control, coercive domination.” (hooks 637). The sexual conquest of the subordinate is a manner of which the white male established their control. Throughout American history a population of white males have worked to perpetuate this control over the black body, first as slave masters and later as white supremacists. A Subtlety or Marvelous Sugar Baby… confronts this history publicly and openly, inviting the viewer to interact and converse with her and history. Walker does not only critique the subordination of the black women but men as well. Small abstracted boy-like figures flank the central figure; they are made of molasses that melted in the heat over the course of the exhibition. Visually they reference the small Blackmores that decorated yards and appeared in advertisements in the mid 19th century and earlier. Kayla Tompkins writes in the introduction of her book Racial indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century: “The image of the black body as an edible object is a strong and constant trope in this book; and it is an image that carries the weight of many centuries of forced labor, of coercive and violent sexual desire, and of ongoing political struggle” (Thompkins 8). The black male was transported to the Americans solely for the use of their bodies for labor in the production of cash crops, sugar included. Walker’s use of Sugar as a medium contributes to her critique of the sexual subjugation of the black body. The melting molasses has a visceral quality, and one does not have to work hard to imagine the sweetness or the texture of the gooey material. The molasses figures juxtaposed next to the abstracted central figure prompts a subconscious sexual desire while simultaneously prompting a feeling of disgust with oneself for doing so. The installation symbolically juxtaposes the white and black in the use of white sugar and molasses. The large commanding central female figure is constructed of white sugar, her size and sphinx-like pose commanding the space eclipsing the small molasses boys flaking her. The juxtaposition of material and grandeur represents the relationship between the servant and the served, the black and white. In the article On the Visceral the authors establish a framework of desire and consumption, writing: “…we and the authors in these two issues see many points of convergence between sexuality and eating, food, and food labor. These “systems,” embedded in racialized economies, have tremendous impact on the construction of the human and the nonhuman in the context of a transcolonial, transnational, and hemispheric modernity” (Holland, Ochoa, Tompkins, 394). Sugar enabled the social systems imposed on African Americans in colonial times. The affluent European society exploited the black body to produce sugar. White refined sugar was a symbol of wealth served by kings, queens and knoblomen of Europe to display their wealth. Sydney Mintz writes, “What people eat expresses who and what they are to themselves and others. The congruence of dietary patterns and their societies reveals the way culture forms, whose behavior actualizes and incarnates them” (Mintz 13). In the 18th and 19th century to eat and serve sugar was to show wealth and social standing. One practice was to display subtleties, sugar sculptures intended to be viewed and consumed (Mintz). Walker references this practice in the resemblance of the central white sugar figure but also in title. The small boy figures appear inferior in size and constructed of a sugar form regarded as the poor man’s sugar. The layers of “other” I defined together critique how the bodies have been abused, brought into the white environment without any agency. The black bodies were exploited in labor and pleasure; to perform tasks the affluent white didn’t desire to do, but life required, and secondly for the sexual pleasure and domination of the male. Walker gives the central figure her agency back to her control. Walker removes the power from the viewer, choosing to show them all of her, in a subversively seductive and exaggerated manner. The viewer does not have a choice of what they see but rather are forced to recognize and acknowledge the dark history. Even as viewers visited the installation Walker continued to develop her message and critique the social constructs placed on the black woman. Walker filmed the exhibition and the manner viewers interacted with the sculpture recontextualizing who the viewer is further developing the artwork and reversing who “other” is, making the viewer the viewed, and prompting an internal critique by the viewer of how they perpetuate the racial stereotypes consciously or subconsciously. The time that we are currently living in is a time of self-empowerment and breaking from the constraints of the past. People of color are fighting against the historical stereotypes and roles that are placed on them by the people whom they encounter. The black body has commodified for the benefit of, white people, the commanding race. A Subtlety or Marvelous Sugar Baby… is an artwork that works to reclaim and redefine the black body, a movement within popular culture today as a social artwork. Walker combines the anthropology of sugar, historical stereotypes, abstraction and human interaction to create a work that critiques cultural practices of objectifying and oppressing black people.
Dunkin Molasses Cookies

Ingredients

- 3/4 c. Bacon fareyings
- 1 c. Sugar
- 1/4 c. Molasses
- 1 Egg
- 2 tsp. Baking Soda
- 2 c. Sifted Flour
- 1/2 tsp. Cloves
- 1/2 tsp. Ginger
- 1 tsp. Cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp. Salt

Instructions

1. Mix bacon fareyings, sugar, molasses and egg, beat well
2. Sift flour, soda, salt and spices
3. Add dry ingredients to first mix
4. Chill about 2 hours
5. Form into 1 inch balls, roll in sugar
6. Bake 375° 8-10 minutes

1Recipe has been in my family for several generations.
In Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca Cola Project, (1970) Cildo Meireles uses socially engaged art through the manipulation of a capitalist circuit to protest the military regime in Brazil (1964-1985). In this piece, he alters over 1,000 coke bottles through the use of silk screen, in which white text is transferred onto the bottle with political statements and directions. Meireles made this in 1970, during a period of intense military dictatorship, which created a difficult environment for artists to create socially significant art without facing punishment. Coca Cola would have the glass coke bottles returned into their cycle for reuse, making it an ideal system for Meireles to use. The bottles Meireles altered were put into the preexisting circuit of Coca Cola, which was continued through the participation of others as they read his statement, comprehended it, drank the soda, and returned it into the system, leaving a lasting impression of his art and message on the participants. Artist Pablo Helguera discusses the framework and aspects that shape socially engaged art in his book, Education for socially engaged art. This paper builds upon Helguera’s terms about community engagement, the artist involvement, and the political statements being cultivated, to argue that Meireles’s piece functions as socially engaged art. This is proven through Meireles’s position as the artist, subverting the capitalist company through the insertion of his message into the circuit, and relying on both that circuit and the participation of others for the existence of this artwork.

In socially engaged art the artist functions not only as the creator but the facilitator. The idea of simultaneously being a facilitator and an artist in a piece of socially engaged art can be connected with what Meireles did. Meireles challenged the ideas of authorship at this time because of the strict military regime and the restrictions put on artists. Artists had to find alternative ways of creating and showing their socially significant artwork without “being charged with the authorship of what was being said”, especially with socially significant and politically charged pieces such as Meireles’s Coca Cola Project. Meireles was able to do this as he “found a gap in which to stage resistance.” (Calirman 2012) Meireles utilized a preexisting circuit as a vehicle for his piece, he was able to create his work and insert it into the circuit without having to claim it or find a place with an audience, as this was already done with the circuit. As Helguera states socially engaged artists often “redefine the notion of authorship” and the role of the artist. (Helguera 2011) The piece involved a large population of people and as a result “a shift from the individual to the collective took place, and through its circulation the work remained anonymous.” (Calirman 2012) Meireles follows the function many artists within socially engaged art serve and also addresses the topic of anonymity and ownership for artists within socially engaged art. He simply put the materials needed for the audience to participate into circulation, allowing the audience to “reiterate or resist it.” (Calirman 2012)

Meireles takes an antagonistic stance towards the capitalist company and the military regime. With bold statements such as “Yankees go home” he directly inserts his opinion on the bottle. He also included directions to create a Molotov bomb out of the bottle, giving the
receiver resources to take part in social action. Antagonistic and politically charged statements are very prevalent within socially engaged art. He deliberately inserted these statements on Coca Cola bottles, and receivers were not in control of whether they would see it or not. Meireles gave something like a Coca Cola bottle a much deeper, more meaningful association with something outside of the realm of a beverage. As Helguera associated with socially engaged art, “It is the temporary snatching away of objects into the realm of art making that brings new insights to a particular problem or condition and in turn makes it visible to other disciplines.” (Helguera 2011) Meireles does this with the bottles, he takes them from their typical circuit, alters them and returns them to that same circuit but while doing so, assigns them an entirely new meaning and function of protest. This also serves to criticize the corruption of capitalist companies as “it existed to show there are flaws in the system, flaws which could be used as a form of resistance to criticize the system itself.” (Calirman 2012) He was able to manipulate the cycle to not only promote his political opinions but address how the military and capitalist companies were large power structures within society. This also concerns Coca Cola as a powerful symbol representing “multinational corporations” and how they are part of a larger widespread problem. He manipulates and comments on the corrupt nature of large capitalist companies, through his method of protest and the idea of “de-coca-colonization” by removing the Coca Cola bottles and giving it a new purpose. He addresses an issue of coca-colonization by manipulating a direct product of it, a popular soft drink. “Coca-colonization” refers to the capitalist expansion of large American corporations and products. By deliberately manipulating it, “In Mireles’s project, de-coca-colonization is intentionally subversive, a deliberate act of resistance.” (Foster 2008) This particular antagonistic social action that Meireles utilizes would categorize the viewers into nonvoluntary form, as does most protest art. As Helguera states, nonvoluntary action can be seen as “Participants find themselves in the middle of the action without having previously consented to it.” (Helguera 2011) The audience members are participants by default when they purchase an altered coke bottle and ingest it, whether they initially realize it has been altered or not, they are now part of the circuit and therefore the artwork as a whole. Antagonistic methods are considered effective for protest within socially engaged art as it “aims to create a line of discussion around a relevant issue, provoking reflection, and debate therefor justifying its extreme measures.” (Helguera 2011) The artist had to take these extreme measures as commentary to address a pertinent issue. (Helguera 2011)

In socially engaged art, social engagement of some sort is imperative to the existence of a piece. Meireles’s work was part of a circuit that was continued through the participation of others. The participants would read his statement after purchasing the soda, once it was ingested they would return it to the circuit for others to see the message. Meireles’s piece would not exist without the participation and social function of others. Not only were they automatically involved through the ingestion of the coke but they could also insert their own messages or stance and return it to the circuit, making the piece something that could constantly evolve. In socially engaged art there are different categories and levels of participation, following the guidelines of Helguera’s definition, the recipients of this piece take part in directed and/or creative participation. As Helguera defines, directed participation is when “the visitor completes a simple task to contribute to the creation of the work” and creative participation is when the visitor provides content which can be seen with participants who decided to also add their own messages on the bottles. (Helguera 2011) Socially engaged art relies on participation for its existence as does Meireles’s piece. He needs people to purchase and then return the coke bottles to the circuit in order for it to keep functioning. This also forms a sense of community with those who shared this experience. (Calirman 2012) “SEA usually has an overt agenda, but its emphasis is less on the act of protest than on becoming a platform or a network for the participation of others, so that the effects of the project may outlast its ephemeral presentation.” (Helguera 2011) Yes, he was protesting the political circumstances, but he included others and pushed them to be knowledgeable of the issue and built a sense of community, filled with people fighting for the same thing. By going outside of the conventional realm of art and utilizing an existing circuit within a capitalist company, he expanded the number of participants to those beyond the art community. This I addressed by Helguera “One factor of SEA that must be considered is its expansion to include participants form outside the regular circles of art and the art world.” (Helguera 2011) Typically, a select group in a specific circle of people view works of art, by extending this to a capitalist company it immensely expands his audience and reaches people who otherwise would not have encountered his art.

Meireles’s piece Insertions into Ideological Circuits: Coca Cola Project follows Helguera’s guidelines of socially engaged art. Meireles practices a form of socially engaged art through his manipulation of the Coca Cola bottles, bringing them into an art sphere unrelated to its original designated purpose as a beverage. He formulates a politically charged message, using antagonistic methods to spread it to others. And perhaps the most crucial element of socially engaged art, the social function. Meireles created a social piece, reliant on the interaction and participation of others. This piece is socially engaged art, through the role of the artist, the message and the social interaction.
Coca-Cola Float

Ingredients

- 2 cups Vanilla ice cream
- 20 oz Coca Cola
- Whipped cream
- Chocolate sprinkles
- Chocolate syrup
- Maraschino Cherries

Instructions

1. Spoon ½ a cup of ice cream into each glass and pour over 5 oz of Coca Cola or more to taste.
2. Top with whipped cream, chocolate sprinkles, chocolate syrup, and cherries.

1Recipe adopted from Cookcraftlove
Wayne Thiebaud, an American painter from California, is best known for his whimsical and colorful still-lives, landscapes, and figure paintings. Many of his earlier paintings use everyday objects as subject matter, such as gumball machines, lipstick, toys, pies, cakes, pastries, candies, and ice cream cones. In 1963, Thiebaud painted *Cakes*, an oil painting on canvas that is about 60 x 73 inches in size. Like most of his earlier work, *Cakes* is a colorful still life of edible delights. The painting consists of three rows of enticing, decorated cakes set against a very minimal background. All but two cakes differ in decoration, shape, and color and each sit atop a thin cake stand, where they almost look as if they are floating and enticing the viewer. During the 1960's, the same time Thiebaud painted *Cakes*, a change was occurring in American society with the innovations in mass production, consumption, and “popular” culture making their way into the daily lives of Americans. Concurrently, the Pop Art movement developed, which was inspired by and responded to the changes in mass media and commercial culture. Many times, scholars categorize Thiebaud’s work, like *Cakes*, with the Pop Art movement, which is plausible on a superficial level due to his depiction of everyday objects and the visuals of abundancy. However, Wayne Thiebaud’s work such as *Cakes* complicates our understanding of Pop Art and how artwork is categorized into this movement. *Cakes* is a painting that works with and against the ideology and definition of Pop Art, which ultimately causes Thiebaud’s work to lie somewhere just outside the realm of Pop Art. The ways in which Thiebaud’s paintings work visually with his unique style, socially with the choice and handling of subject matter, and conceptually with the relationship to mass production and commercial society, and are all areas of discussion that help define where Thiebaud’s *Cakes* exists with regards to Pop Art.

To start, due to the techniques and style he utilizes, Thiebaud’s paintings oppose the visual ideology and characteristics of the Pop Art movement. As Pop Art was heavily inspired by the imagery of mass media and “popular” culture of the 1960s, a defining characteristic is that the work demonstrates “a direct relationship between popular culture and the techniques of its production and dissemination” (Hamilton 2020). This means that artist began to adopt the ways in which commercial art was being produced and applied these methods to create their own artwork. Techniques like airbrush, stenciling, Ben-Day dots, photo transfer, and silk-screen printing became conventionalized amongst artist of this movement. In attempt to visually replicate mechanically reproduced imagery of mass commercial production, artists removed the visual ques of the artist’s hand. In return, this resulted in work that was depersonalized and mechanical (Hamilton 2020). In comparison, Thiebaud’s work is the opposite of this approach to creating art. In his work the viewer can see every brush stroke made and there is no attempt to remove the process or hand of the artist from the painting. Thiebaud’s work displays a signature style of dragging the rich, smooth paint around the canvas in such a way that the paint “often transforms itself into the very material being depicted” (Nash 2000), which is an effect that Thiebaud refers to as “object transference.” This can be seen in his work, *Cakes*, where the paint mimics the actual frosting of the cakes.
and the work becomes so tactile that the viewer feels as if they can reach out and take a swipe of frosting and taste it (Nash 2000). The painting is expressive and “empathically handmade” (Ohler 2013), and does not feel as if it were produced in a factory or in an industrial manner. In contrast to Pop Art, Thiebaud’s work is a celebration of the hand of the artist and Thiebaud embracing this is key to the performance and anticipation the painting creates with the viewer.

The social implications and notions that surround cake, allows Thiebaud’s work to be more than a representation of banal objects that are products of mass production. When socially analyzed, the choice and depiction of subject matter in Thiebaud’s work blurs the line as to where his work is positioned with regards to Pop Art. The idea of depicting commonplace objects from middle class America is highly characteristic of Pop Art (Hamilton 2020). This is often one of the reasons as to why Thiebaud’s work is classified as Pop Art. For example, Sarah Ohler a single object or food but rows and rows of it, alludes to this idea of abundance and choice, from and in return lead to mass consumption. The fact that Thiebaud’s imagery is often not because as mass production increased there was an abundance of products and food to choose or wonder. With the painting, Cakes, the viewer isn’t seeing a product of mass production or commercial society when they look at the rows of cakes but are seeing an item that strikes personal nostalgia and excitement. It creates this anticipation of seeing this image of cakes, that due to Thiebaud’s “object transferences” technique seem real and tangible but being that it is a painting is unobtainable. Thiebaud’s work taps into the child-like feeling of a past memory when we were looking forward to the future to something exciting, like a birthday cake, where you can clearly see it in your mind, and it excites and entices you, but it is still out of reach. Cakes social implications to celebrations and rituals causes Thiebaud’s work to step away from a simple depiction of commonplace objects of mass production and become a narrative and performance that the viewer can place themselves into based on personal experiences and social values and ideas associated with cake.

Thiebaud’s works has suggestions of mass production but unlike most Pop Art, which imitates commercial art imagery, he instead embraces the power and tactics of commercial art. As stated earlier, Pop Art was a response to the upsurge of innovations and changes in mass consumption, convinence, mass production and commercialization of America in the 1960’s (Hamilton 2020). The ideas of choice and abundance are closely related to these changes because as mass production increased there was an abundance of products and food to choose from and in return lead to mass consumption. The fact that Thiebaud’s imagery is often not a single object or food but rows and rows of it, alludes to this idea of abundance and choice, and is often a reason as to why his work is classified as Pop Art. For example, Sarah Ohler states that Thiebaud’s work “points to the twentieth-century American culture of convenience foods, here presented as the many choices offered” and that his work is “a celebration of endless variety of mass-produced sweets and treats available to consumers” (Ohler 2013). However, the artist associated with the Pop Art movement often appropriated the imagery or subject matter of their work from commercial or popular culture in order to replicate commercial images. They would appropriate imagery such as “business logos, billboard and magazine advertisements, household objects, grocery store commodities, comic book strips, pulp fiction, movie icons, TV broadcasts, and more” (Hamilton 2020). This appropriated commercial imagery came with a prescribed set of ideas, connotations, and meaning related to commercial society. Thiebaud’s approach to his subject matter is in direct opposition to this as he created his paintings from memory. He did not take ads or commercial images of cakes and reproduce them. With Cakes, he created a work that depended on mental images and his personal relationship to cakes and pastries as an American (Benson 1969). This meant that the viewer doesn’t instantly recognize the cakes as signs or symbols of commercial society, and this gives the viewer space to inject their personal experience into the image. Instead of being a direct replica or mocking the idea of mass production and commercial society like most Pop Art is, Thiebaud embraces the power and tactics of commercial society. Thiebaud’s work shows how powerful imagery can be and furthermore, how susceptible Americans or viewers are to be drawn into images dealing with mass abundance and choice. Through choice in subject matter, style and composition Thiebaud is able to show that just through an image, a viewer can be seduced and compelled to believe and want to be a part of a story that actually isn’t physically in front of them. So even though Thiebaud’s work refers to the ideas of mass production or mass consumption that is associated with Pop Art, he presents it in a way that isn’t full of irony or satirizing commercial culture imagery that is common in most Pop Art (Nash 2000), but is an embrace of the power of imagery.

In conclusion, the act of categorizing and labeling artists and art to certain movements can be complicated. This can be seen in Thiebaud’s work where, Cakes is a painting that works with and against the ideology and definition of Pop Art. Thiebaud decides to use a more expressive style where the artist’s hand is in the forefront and doesn’t try to use commercial art techniques to mimic commercial imagery. Furthermore, Thiebaud often depicts still lives of objects, however, the social value and connotations of cake cause his work to be more than an simple image of mass produced objects. Finally, instead of appropriating imagery to mimic commercial society, Thiebaud creates images from memory and embraces and showcases the power of imagery that the commercial culture utilizes. Ultimately all these aspects cause Thiebaud’s work to not fully fit into Pop Art, however it also can’t fully detach from the movement either. This means that his work lies somewhere in between, where it can’t fully be put in or out of the Pop Art movement. The very nature of art is multifaceted; therefore, it makes sense that the process of labeling and categorizing art to specific movements can sometimes be complex. However, we should not feel as if every work and every artist need to fit into a certain movement or style and that it is acceptable if art lives in this gray area or in between the many layers of art.
Vanilla Buttercream Fosting

**Ingredients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Ingredient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 cups</td>
<td>Powdered sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/3 cups</td>
<td>butter, softened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 1/2 cups</td>
<td>vanilla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 tbs.</td>
<td>milk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instructions**

1. In medium bowl, mix powdered sugar and butter with spoon or electric mixer on low speed. Stir in vanilla and 1 tablespoon of the milk.

2. Gradually beat in just enough remaining milk to make frosting smooth and spreadable. If frosting is too thick, beat in more milk, a few drops at a time. If frosting becomes too thin, beat in a small amount of powdered sugar.

3. Use frosting to decorate cakes, cupcakes, or cookies. You can customize your frosting with natural food coloring or top with sprinkles to make any treat a piece of art that people crave to eat.

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1Recipe adopted from Betty Crocker
Bibliography


