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Student 1 • Prof. Mani • Fall 2020

Cultural artifacts in the form of tantalizing images of food are the basis of the food porn community on Reddit. Every day there are multiple posts of people displaying and showing off their culinary skills while awaiting praise and envy from other members of the subreddit. This can be representative in zoomed images of comfort foods like pizza, or in gooey depictions of decadent desserts. This community is instinctively wired to focus on the presentation of the food as the very meaning of food porn has largely to do with the provocative display of food itself. Whether that be through racy reactions, a stamp of approval of how well of a job the creator of the artifact did, or even asking for the recipe. Other reactions may even include expressions of agony in envy for wanting the food displayed.

However, all of these reactions serve as motivation and purpose for a community member to post their cultural artifact or creation. Such an environment then creates a space where members can confidently display their food with praise and circulation of their artifact in return. The exigence of quarantine allowing for more free time to create dishes, circulation in terms of badges an image may receive and the community members of the artifact then work together in the effort to upkeep the overall culture of r/foodporn on Reddit.

One can't think of decadence and comfort without thinking about pizza. In a dish created and posted by user u/jessdoit, they depicted just that. In the zoomed in photo you can see a perfectly thin crust with cheese and toppings on top that are browned to perfection. The crust appears to be soft and doughy like bread on the inside but cooked to be more crisp and have more texture on the outside. By looking at it you can imagine what it would be like to bite into a slice. You would probably have some crunch as you bite through the crisp of the crust and have your teeth then sink into the bread like texture of the inside layer of the dough. You can see the tomato sauce peeking through the toppings cheese, pepperoni, jalapeños and sausage. The toppings look all to have melted together and kissed with a brown color throughout. If you look closer you will see lemon zest that was sprinkled evenly throughout the whole pie. You could only imagine how the combination of those flavors provide the perfect savory and umami flavor. There are missing pieces to the pizza as well showing that because of how delicious it is the user probably couldn't wait to take a picture of it before grabbing a slice

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enticing hunger in all the members seeing this artifact. The key to producing this effect is that the artifact must be clear in order to show the different ingredients and elements of the dish, such as the toppings in this pizza. Typically zoomed in images like this one help strike hunger in viewers more often and helps create envy to other members viewing the photo. The seven awards and badges this image received proved how presentation of the dishes presented must be up to par to receive similar accolades.

The user who posted this artifact did so with the intended purpose of receiving praise for their work. The caption provided with this image included the detail that the pizza was freestyles and “almost all from scratch”. It isn’t everyday that one has the time or culinary skill level to make pizza dough or to combine such ingredients or even bake it at the right temperature to receive these results. It is out of the ordinary to make pizza homemade as supposed to ordering it out adding value to the artifact itself. This image for example, has seven awards or badges next to it proving that it circulated well and received the praise the user intended for it. An up-close savory shot of a beautifully prepared pizza and this user's caption including how “freestyled” it was helps perpetuate this. It creates a sense that the creation of this artifact was effortless and wasn’t straining or difficult at all. These images are targeted towards other members of the subreddit where they then can share their input on how “good” of a job they did, ask for the recipe, or include their immediate reactions. The subreddit then reveals itself to be a space where people can display their food and show off their skills and receive praise on how good it looks. Being that the community is a food porn subreddit, members are primed to respond in ways that celebrate the presentation of a particular food. How “good” something looks or including racy reactions to viewing these images are part of the culture of the community. Users like u/jessdoit post their artifacts to receive this validation for the hard work they have done creating the dish.

Along with the caption of this photo including the fact that the dish presented was freestyle it also reveals how the exigence of the photo could be influenced by the existential crisis of the member that posted it. The caption writes “just made the best possible pizza while having yet another existential crisis” which showed that the production of this artifact was used as a form of relief from the

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circumstances this member is going through. This could be due to quarantine and COVID affecting the daily lives of so many. There are frequent posts in the timeline of this subreddit, along with this one of people who are also undergoing similar existential crisis'. In quarantine there isn't much to do which has allowed for people to take up new hobbies like cooking to help contain their distress and distract their mind. Many have spent months confined in their homes with little to do and feel that their lives have completely been consumed by the pandemic. Taking up a new hobby has served to be beneficial for many looking for an escape from the harsh reality much of the world is dealing with. This easily could've been the case for this user and many others that post their dishes and are proud to exhibit them. Quarantine is also causing people to order out more instead of going out to restaurants and pizza happens to be one of the most popular foods to order out. Since this person took quarantine as the opportunity to create his or her own homemade version of the dish it helps impress the larger audience and motivates it to circulate more. While pizza is an easily accessible food in terms of restaurant and delivery it isn't something that people normally think to make or think they could produce similarly to Dominoes or Pizza Hut for example. This image serves as an example of how one can take advantage of the time they have at home and choose to make their own pizza instead of ordering it out like this user did.

While pizza may be considered the epitome of food porn in terms of desirability, a decadent dessert may come a close second. In an image posted by u/GreenMedallion, members were provided with an entire collection of homemade pies and tarts that not only look perfectly executed and artisanal but most importantly delicious. In the first image on the far left of the collage, there is a rectangular tart faced vertically and among the image the most noticeable trait is the flawless lattice pattern achieved on top. Below in the areas exposed by the lattice design, you notice an even color of dark brown that shows the chocolate filling. The crust and the dough used in the lattice pattern are browned evenly as well and perfectly cooked. In looking at the image you can imagine biting through the tart and feeling the crust crumble perfectly in your mouth as you chew through the tart and its chocolate filling. The lattice pattern is made with thin strips of dough all cut in the same thickness, width and length placed evenly

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throughout the top of the tart. As your eyes finish gracing the intricateness of the beautiful tart above you look down and in the bottom left corner you see a pie that was executed just as well. The pie appears to be an image taken right before it was placed into the oven as the dough in the crust looks uncooked. However, the point of attraction in this image was how the fruit of the pie was placed. The fruit appears to be cut in perfect slices and placed in a way to where it resembles a rose that is blossoming from the. The middle of the pie is where the pieces are cut more thinly and placed closer together to resemble the bud of a flower whereas approaching the outer edge the fruit slices become bigger to appear as the bigger petals of a rose. The culinary skill presented in these two tarts alone appear to be made in the hands of a pastry chef.

Rightfully so, this collage received the Star Struck award as all who are able to see it are left in complete awe of the execution of these two dishes. This is another example of how presentation dominates the circulation of this subreddit. While one may look at this image and doesn't necessarily feel the uncontrollable urge to eat it, you are enticed by it because of the difficulty of these dishes. A tart created in such a way is seen as unattainable to the average homecook whereas this member was able to execute it perfectly. This demonstrates that while the subreddit also values delicious looking food they also value and celebrate the difficulty of the dishes displayed. It then becomes a part of the culture of the members to post the most difficult dishes they could make and present it just as beautifully as this one to receive similar accolades.

Very similarly to the previous user looking to receive praise for their homemade pizza, u/GreenMedallion also looked to receive the same admirations. Even though this image doesn't jump out as being irresistible in the same sense as pizza is, the envy and praise is more centered around the culinary ability needed to even execute such results rather than the taste of the dish itself. Though I can imagine these tarts tasting deliciously, they are presented in a way where they look "too pretty to eat." The praise that this user received comes from members appreciating their skill and precision and acknowledging their talents. In describing this collage the word "homemade" was used in the caption most likely for the purposes of striking envy in other members that wish they had the culinary skill to accomplish this themselves. Apart from envy, a beginner looking

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to cook and bake may even feel motivated to perfect the craft or attempt to execute the tarts themselves and ask for the recipe. Due to the precision of the lattice pattern and the rose placement of the fruits one could make the assumption that the creator of this artifact is specialized in the field. It is clear that these tarts were in no way their first attempt to make a pie or a tart and that they probably have been knowledgeable in the field of making it perfectly. The technique demonstrated in the creation of this artifact is impressive to the everyday cook or baker at home. Since this subreddit is a place where one can show off their foods and receive praise that was the main intended purpose in posting this artifact much like it is for most of the artifacts posted. In that praise this member then is considered a knowledgeable person in the area that other members can trust with recipes and food tips which may be another recognition they're looking for. In a community that is meant to celebrate the presentation of food, the subreddit creates a space where specific images like this one are able to flourish and receive admiration not only for the presentation but also the skill required to create a dish like this one.

While the presence of COVID and quarantine can allow the time to create beautiful dishes like the one displayed, the exigence of this photo may also be influenced by having the time to look for secondary research to a hobby. For someone who is looking to immerse themselves and take on a new hobby secondary research is needed to help with the transition. Depending on how experienced you are and research you do you can consider yourself a beginner in the topic of cooking or an intermediate or advanced. In posting this image, the user proved that they seem to be in the intermediate or advanced levels as this looks to be something one would find in a cooking show made by a pastry chef rather than an easy at home recipe for beginners. With the time that quarantine has allowed for us to look at hobbies like cooking as a relief, one can really spend the time to perfect it and watch the cooking shows or follow the recipes that will get them to the same skill level as this user. This image may also have served as the motivation for a beginning member to go and seek secondary research themselves. Since we all have the time to take up new hobbies and are looking for ways to distract our minds from this pandemic, motivating yourself to be as skillful or knowledgeable as you can in the area of cooking might help be a relief to

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others. I would imagine that unless you are a cooking prodigy, you would be able to obtain perfectly executed results like this one on the first try. This user may have been a beginner themselves who in the time off given due to COVID was able to reach an advanced level and attempt the dish multiple times to receive the perfection displayed in the cultural artifact posted.