

**CULINARY SPECTACLE, PERFORMANCE, AND DISPLAY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE
EXPLORED IN EXHIBITION
*STAGING THE TABLE IN EUROPE 1500–1800***

**On View at Bard Graduate Center
February 17 to July 9, 2023**

Bard Graduate Center Gallery (BGC) will explore elite dining customs and fashions in the exhibition *Staging the Table in Europe 1500–1800*, opening February 17, 2023. The exhibition uses illustrated manuals and handbooks published in Early Modern Europe to give a window into a world of culinary spectacle and shed light on what became a pan-European culture of elaborate performance surrounding the preparation and presentation of food. With more than fifty examples of books, knives, carving sets, linens, and other items from the late Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century, *Staging the Table in Europe* reveals how the realm of food and table service became a space for practices and objects designed to inspire wonder. The exhibition will be on view at Bard Graduate Center from February 17 to July 9, 2023.

Exhibition curator Deborah L. Krohn, Associate Professor and Chair of Academic Programs at BGC and a leading expert on Early Modern European culinary culture, said “The historic manuals at the heart of *Staging the Table in Europe 1500–1800* contain a wealth of information on otherwise invisible aspects of material and social life. Through intriguing and often beautiful illustrations, they provided the people of Early Modern Europe instruction on expertly carving meats and fruits, folding napkins into animal forms, performing tableside magic tricks, and creating tablescapes for courtly banquets. These volumes were tremendously popular and appeared across Europe, and they are as arresting in our day as they were in their own time. *Staging the Table in Europe 1500–1800* reveals the spread of this new culture of the table and enables visitors to connect our present-day interest in food service and presentation to the practices of this period.”

Staging the Table in Europe will feature rare and historic volumes including Vincenzo Cervio’s *Il Trinciante* (Rome, 1581, and after), Mattia Giegher’s *Li Tre Trattati* (Padua, 1629, and after), and Georg Philipp Harsdörffer’s *Vollständiges Trincir-Buch* (Nuremberg, 1642, and after), and other illustrated manuals, looking at them as both utilitarian sources of information and designed objects of curiosity. While these manuals have been mined as sources for food history and histories of manners and domestic service, this exhibition will be the first to examine them for what they reveal about the material culture of the period.

The exhibition brings together images from these volumes with examples of the objects they portray—carving sets, knives made of precious materials, and damask linens featuring biblical imagery. Contemporary recreations of historic napkin sculptures will also be on view.

Catalogue

Written by Deborah L. Krohn, published by Bard Graduate Center, and distributed by University of Chicago Press, *Staging the Table in Europe 1500–1800* will explore depictions of rarefied techniques of tableside display and performance in Cervio's *Il Trinciante*, Giegher's *Li Tre Trattati*, and Harsdörffer's *Vollständiges Trincir-Buch*, among many others, connecting them to early modern developments in the printing press, manners, mathematics, and cartography. The catalogue will feature close to one hundred images, including those of objects and illustrations displayed in the exhibition. Finally, the catalogue shares the same mission with the manuals that are its primary subject: to record a once ubiquitous nexus of objects and practices enacted on tables across Europe.

Exhibition Support

Support for *Staging the Table in Europe 1500–1800* is generously provided by The Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation and Joseph S. Piropato with additional support by Cafaro Foundation as well as donors to Bard Graduate Center.

About Focus Projects

Staging the Table in Europe 1500–1800 is part of Bard Graduate Center's Focus Projects series, which are curated by faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students and emerge from their research and teaching. These exhibitions form part of an innovative program that promotes experimentation in display and interpretation, provides graduate students the opportunity to be involved in every aspect of exhibition development, and engages the public with new ways of understanding the material world. Past Focus Projects include *New York Crystal Palace 1853*; *The Codex and Crafts in Late Antiquity*; *Jan Tschichold and the New Typography: Graphic Design Between the World Wars*; and *Conserving Active Matter*.

About Bard Graduate Center

As the leading research institute in the United States dedicated to the study of decorative arts, design history, and material culture, Bard Graduate Center has pioneered the study of objects to better understand the cultural history of the material world. Offering experiences for scholars, students, and the general public alike, Bard Graduate Center is built on multidisciplinary study and the integration of research, graduate teaching, and public exhibitions. Since its founding in 1993, Bard Graduate Center has established a network of more than 400 alumni who work in

leading museums, universities, and institutions worldwide to advance new ways of thinking about material culture. For more information, visit bgc.bard.edu.

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