

Art in Culinary: What is and What For

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Abstract

Culinary art represents the creation of food as a product that has been commercialised, and thus operates within the sphere of business. This perspective leads to the understanding that there is an intrinsic connection between culinary experience and commercial kitchen management. In particular, within the realm of culinary artisanship, we argue that this connection emerges from the integration of artistic principles into culinary practice. Consequently, this study centres on defining the meaning and function of art within culinary practice itself. To further explore this connection, we sought to understand how art manifests in culinary practice by passively observing the daily activities of culinary artisans, particularly executive chefs, sous chefs, and pastry chefs, within a *brigade de cuisine* in hotels and restaurants. Our findings indicate that art in culinary is articulated through three primary aspects: menu and recipe design, *haute cuisine*, and plating. Collectively, these aspects form the foundation of commercial kitchen management as an essential component of culinary business. This study demonstrates that culinary art extends beyond self-expression, consumer interpretation, and sensory experience. Rather, prior to any form of expression, culinary art functions as a mode of action, an organised set of practices that facilitate the effective orchestration of culinary enterprises through professional kitchen management. Hence, art in culinary embodies the essential competencies required of professional culinary artisans, whose identity is fundamentally defined by professionalism.

Keywords: chef, art, commercial kitchen management, expression, mode of action

A. INTRODUCTION

Culinary art is a field of study that encompasses the theoretical and practical knowledge required for the creation and commercialisation of food products (Zaenal et al., 2025). As a multidisciplinary aspect (Mihalache & Zanoni, 2023; Parasecoli & Bentley, 2024), art in the context of culinary studies is often understood primarily in its technical sense (Borghini & Baldini, 2022; Vogel et al., 2021; Woodhouse & Rodgers, 2024; Zaenal et al., 2025), similar to its conceptualisation within anthropology (Bakke & Peterson, 2024). Consequently, art in culinary practice is frequently associated with creativity (Chauvin et al., 2025; Lee, 2022; Madeira et al., 2021; Öztürk, 2024), which is closely linked to tourism as both an attraction and a creator of culinary experiences (Anton Martin et al., 2021; Carvalho et al., 2021; Kuhn et al., 2024). However, despite this growing attention to creativity, previous studies have not clearly identified where "art" is situated within culinary practice itself. In other words, the field still lacks a clear explanation of what constitutes art in culinary practice and what functions it is intended to serve. This issue becomes even more apparent when considering that only a small number of studies examine art as a technical or operational element, whether as a tool to enhance culinary experiences or as an attraction within culinary tourism. Taken together, these gaps indicate the need for further research to clarify the position and function of art within culinary practice.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Culinary art, or art in culinary, is fundamentally concerned with the professionalism of culinary artisans, particularly chefs, as the highest leaders within the *brigade de cuisine* (Baytok et al., 2023; Traynor

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et al., 2022), which thus becomes a defining identity within culinary art itself (Elbasha & Baruch, 2022; Giousmpasoglou et al., 2022; Mrusek et al., 2021; Reynolds et al., 2021). Beyond professionalism, culinary art is also intertwined with the broader domains of culinary business (Elbasha & Baruch, 2022; Traynor et al., 2022) and tourism (Fusté-Forné, 2023; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2022). Studies on chefs and culinary enterprises demonstrate that art serves as an aesthetic dimension, transforming chefs' or culinary artisans' creative expressions into culinary experiences. In this sense, food becomes a medium of artistic expression within human experience, serving as one of the driving forces of travel and cultural exchange (Lee, 2022). Such studies highlight the power of art, which, in the culinary context, possesses the ability to shape both artistic and consumption experiences. This aesthetic force, in turn, contributes to a heightened sense of memorability (Borghini et al., 2023) and can also act as a form of social protest manifested through movements advocating human responsibility toward the environment (Gössling & Hall, 2021) or social justice, particularly concerning issues such as hunger, thereby positioning culinary art as a form of public art (Borghini & Baldini, 2022).

Although these studies apply specific definitions of art, they do not identify which aspects of culinary practice can be categorised as art. Even research that distinguishes between art and craft in culinary creation (Gualtieri, 2022) merely establishes a hierarchy between "high" and "low" art in evaluating culinary products. Moreover, existing literature often privileges pastry and bakery products over cookery, as the former's association with sweetness is commonly perceived as more inherently aesthetic. However, as a universal concept (Frigeri & Handberg, 2021; Gordon, 2023; Luft, 2024), art should apply equally across all categories of culinary production. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that art serves a significant role in management (Gössling & Hall, 2021; Yıkmiş et al., 2024). Ultimately, art in culinary practice can be understood as a mechanism in the evolution of gastronomy, where culinary techniques and food processing contribute to emerging trends such as fusion cuisine, molecular gastronomy, and slow food (Yıkmiş et al., 2024). Nevertheless, recent studies remain analytically inconclusive, as they fail to specify which components can be classified as art in culinary practice and overlook the professional context of chefs and artisans, particularly the commercial framework of cuisine, where the question of art's function truly resides.

From this perspective, the question of what art is and what it is for in culinary practice should not be approached solely from a theoretical standpoint, in contrast to conventional interpretations of art in music, poetry, or dance, often framed as modes of expression (Morphy, 2020a) or representation of something (Grimshaw et al., 2021). This approach focuses primarily on its material outcomes or visible forms. In contrast, anthropological perspectives view art from the opposite direction: art is understood through the singular ways it manifests in performance (Miller & Syring, 2023). This implies that before art materialises into form, it is preceded by a set of actions that constitute art itself. Accordingly, this study adopts the anthropological perspective of art as a 'mode of action' and 'expression' (Bakke & Peterson, 2024; Morphy, 2020a; Schneider & Wright, 2021).

On the other hand, cuisine, as a form of commercialised food, inherently demands specialised expertise and professional competence (Zaenal et al., 2025). Bringing these two concepts together, this study conceptualises culinary art as the knowledge and skills applied to the commercialisation of food, encompassing not only the creation of culinary experiences but also the managerial and operational dimensions of commercial kitchens, which constitute the core of culinary business. The novelty of this study lies in its application of an anthropological-artistic perspective to culinary practice, framed by the following questions: What is art in culinary practice, and what is it for?

C. RESEARCH METHOD

The culinary artisans within a *brigade de cuisine* constitute a living social unit. Therefore, ethnography, as a research approach focused on understanding the culture of a living group (Cabatingan et al., 2024; Letiche et al., 2024; Madden, 2023), was selected to explore the existence and interpretation of art in culinary practice. A passive participation model was adopted as part of the ethnographic method (Carspecken, 2024; Lemon, 2024; Omeihe & Harrison, 2024; Sahoo et al., 2023), involving participant observation and in-depth conversational interviews as primary data collection techniques (Miller & Syring, 2023; Omeihe & Harrison, 2024). The collected data were analysed through thematic analysis, a method commonly employed in ethnographic research (Creswell & Poth, 2024; Madden, 2023). This study draws upon the experiences and insights of three culinary artisans currently serving as executive chef, sous chef, and pastry chef within a *brigade de cuisine* at a hotel and restaurant (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2022). While the participants granted permission for their names to be disclosed, they requested that their specific workplace remain confidential to protect the privacy of their organisations. This request was honoured in accordance with research ethics and participant confidentiality standards.

The three participants in this study were chef Felix Sienatra, chef Dadang Ukkas, and chef Abdu Salam, who held the positions of executive chef, sous chef, and pastry chef, respectively. The research commenced with our initial contact with chef Abdu Salam, which initiated the purposive sampling process, through which we were subsequently introduced to chefs Dadang Ukkas and Felix Sienatra. During these introductions, we learnt that all three chefs possessed advanced culinary artistry, as demonstrated in their collaborative work within a *brigade de cuisine* at The WindChime Restaurant, a fine-dining establishment in Bandung. However, the participants are now employed at various hotels and restaurants (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participant information

No	Participant
1	Chef Felix Sienatra
2	Chef Dadang Ukkas
3	Chef Abdu Salam

Note. The authors collected participant data from October to December 2024

This shared professional background was deemed strategically relevant to the objectives of this study. Consequently, their inclusion followed a purposive sampling strategy (Bell et al., 2022; Gertler, 2023; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2021). Data collection was conducted through conversational exchanges, which served as the primary method of conducting in-depth (Brinkmann, 2022; Marshall, 2023; Osborne & Grant-Smith, 2021), alongside participant observation through passive participation (Carspecken, 2024; Lemon, 2024; Omeihe & Harrison, 2024; Sahoo et al., 2023). Despite the passive role maintained during fieldwork, our presence in the commercial kitchens where the participants carried out their professional duties was essential for contextual understanding. The interviews focused on exploring the meaning and significance of art in culinary practice, as well as its relationship to commercial kitchen management and the creation of culinary experiences. At the outset, we posed the same set of questions individually to all participants to ensure that each understood the focus of our inquiry and to gauge the presence of art in culinary practice. Among the participants, we found that chef Felix Sienatra's understanding of art in cuisine was more extensive than that of the other two; therefore, his interpretation of art served as the basis for deeper exploration. In the subsequent meeting, we aimed to further examine this initial understanding to explore how art manifests in culinary practice. The insights gained from these conversations were subsequently corroborated through observation. Finally, the

collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, which identified and categorised patterns of meaning (Foroudi & Dennis, 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022).

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Our findings affirm that art indeed exists within the sphere of culinary practice, manifesting through three interrelated aspects of the professional life of culinary artisans or chefs. These primary aspects, elaborated below, are presented in the first section. Alongside their functions, particularly within the context of culinary business where both professionals and consumers are situated, are discussed in the second section. Likewise, the broader meaning of art, as it relates to the question "What is art for in culinary?", is also examined in the second section.

The Existence of Arts in Culinary

For many people, the notion of art in culinary is often understood primarily in relation to plating. This assumption is reasonable, as plating is the most visible and aesthetically orientated aspect of culinary work. We began our discussions from this point of view, and although the participating chefs initially agreed with this idea, their subsequent explanations were somewhat surprising. All three participants emphasised that art in the culinary field begins not with presentation but with the creation of the menu and the formulation of recipes; it continues through the mastery of *haute cuisine* technique, and culminates in the final stage of plating.

From the explanations given by the three participating chefs, we concluded that the issue of menu and recipe refers primarily to the act of designing. Chef Felix Sienatra explained that;

"every culinary enterprise begins with a theme, derived from either a casual or fine dining concept, which then becomes the foundation for designing both the menu and its corresponding recipes."

He further added;

"In this context, the menu refers to a list of culinary products that will later become the commercial commodities of the establishment, serving as a reference point in the process of crafting recipes and creating prototype dishes."

This activity is vital. As chef Felix Sienatra emphasised, it requires extensive knowledge and skills in selecting and processing ingredients, an aspect that, according to chef Dadang Ukkas and chef Abdu Salam, should never be underestimated. The resulting culinary products must not only align with the designed menu but also evoke a certain ambience that reflects the adopted theme. Chef Dadang Ukkas elaborated that;

"Menus and recipes are intentionally designed to shape the dining atmosphere within a hotel setting. At the same time, chef Abdu Salam described how his menu possesses the "power" to generate an elegant ambience in a restaurant context."

We understand menus and recipes as matters related to the restaurant's facilities and infrastructure, where the three participants perform their roles as chefs. Their collective explanations shaped the understanding that this activity concerns how menus and recipes are designed to fulfil the applied theme, which refers to a certain ambience in the consumption of one or several culinary products, and that this, in turn, pertains to the culinary experience. However, chef Felix Sinatra further explained to us that:

"Designing menus and recipes is not only about shaping the culinary experience but is also closely related to the operationalisation of the commercial kitchen."

He continued, stating that :

"In designing menus and recipes, there are several factors that enable the process of selection even when the proposed culinary product is considered capable of generating an ambience derived from the intended theme, factors such as the availability of ingredients in the area where the culinary enterprise operates, the cost of procuring those ingredients, and the availability and capability of human resources in operating equipment based on cooking and food-processing techniques must be taken into account."

This point refers specifically to the operationalisation of a commercial kitchen. Chef Felix Sienatra's understanding was affirmed by chef Dadang Ukkas and chef Abdu Salam, respectively a sous chef and a pastry chef, even though the three chefs do not currently belong to the same *brigade de cuisine*. Their agreement was instead based on shared professional knowledge of how culinary enterprises are actually organised and executed in practice. The presence of these three factors subsequently serves as the foundation for menu and recipe design. The outcome, though not the primary purpose, is that the resulting culinary products, which will function as commodities, possess the "ability" to shape ambience when consumed, thereby achieving the main objective of delivering a culinary experience. For us, the function of menu and recipe design is crucial, as it serves as an underlying reference that subconsciously shapes a customer's motivation to visit a particular restaurant. We further observed a diversity of consumers visiting the three restaurants where the participants work, which, in our view, represents an effort to seek and obtain a culinary experience.

Within the process of designing menus and recipes, the application of culinary techniques, referred to among professional culinary artisans as '*haute cuisine*', also plays a central role. In this stage, *haute cuisine* is practised with a high degree of precision and seriousness, as each recipe comprises specific ingredients and measurements that correspond directly to the techniques employed. Chef Abdu Salam explained that although only menus and recipes are typically recorded, it is customary among professional chefs to memorise the techniques deemed most appropriate for each dish. Chef Felix Sienatra echoed this perspective. However, Chef Dadang Ukkas viewed this practice differently, emphasising that documenting cooking and processing techniques is essential. In his experience as a sous chef in a hotel kitchen, where shifts of culinary artisans frequently rotate, written records serve as crucial reminders, ensuring that all chefs not only understand but also consistently apply the established methods. Regardless of whether techniques are memorised or documented, all participants agreed that once a technique has been determined, it cannot be altered. This immutability arises because the technique is already, so to speak, installed as part of the larger effort to shape the culinary experience and ambience. Moreover, it directly impacts operational costs, including ingredient availability and equipment utilisation. In other words, the issue of commercial kitchen operations re-emerges here alongside the pursuit of creating meaningful culinary experiences.

Plating indeed represents an artistic dimension of culinary practice. The understanding we gain from our observations of the plating of each dish shows that all culinary products offered as commodities in restaurants – whether located in hotels or operating independently outside them – exhibit significant differences in their presentation models. However, as our earlier findings indicate, plating constitutes only one – indeed, the final – manifestation of art in the culinary process. Although plating is strongly associated with aesthetics and is often perceived by the public and even by some of us as an art form in culinary, the act of presentation is not driven solely by aesthetics. Instead, it reflects the rationale embedded in the creation of the culinary product itself. This understanding became clear through the explanations of chef Dadang Ukkas and chef Abdu Salam. According to chef Dadang Ukkas;

"main kitchen products, those derived from natural ingredients such as plants and meats, are typically plated according to their characteristics, whether they are sauced or dry, and portion size, following a careful selection of appropriate dinnerware."

In contrast, chef Abdu Salam;

"described how pastry and bakery products, largely fabricated or processed culinary forms, are plated based on creative rationale. This often results in presentations where individual components appear separated, inviting the diner to combine them before consumption."

Ultimately, the purpose of plating and presentation is to shape and enhance the culinary experience, beyond mere aesthetic considerations, even though such aesthetics are often the primary aspect consumers perceive and understand.

From Mode of Action to Expression Way

Art in culinary practice manifests in three distinct yet interconnected aspects: menu and recipe design, *haute cuisine*, and plating. These three components are understood as forms of art because they each involve specialised methods or techniques (Borghini et al., 2023; Vogel et al., 2021; Woodhouse & Rodgers, 2024; Zaenal et al., 2025) applied in the creative process of producing culinary works. Beyond their technical aspects, these modes of practice also function as means of expression (Bakke & Peterson, 2024) through which the conceptual identity of a culinary enterprise is articulated. In other words, these three domains correspond directly to the operational organisation of a commercial kitchen, processes that unfold through managerial coordination and culminate in the formation of the culinary experience. Simply put, this can be understood through the very definition of "culinary" as food that is commercialised. Consequently, it carries significant implications for the professional knowledge and skills required to select and process ingredients, apply them creatively in culinary product development, and execute plated-dish presentations. These dimensions position culinary practice firmly within the realm of professionalism (Zaenal et al., 2025). This terminology, therefore, serves as a framework for shaping the culinary experience, one in which the artisan's creation is served and consumed in a manner that is both safe and refined. Ultimately, this constitutes the function of art within culinary professionalism (see Figure 1), operating simultaneously as a mode of action (Morphy, 2020a, 2020b) and as an expression (Bakke & Peterson, 2024; Morphy, 2020a).

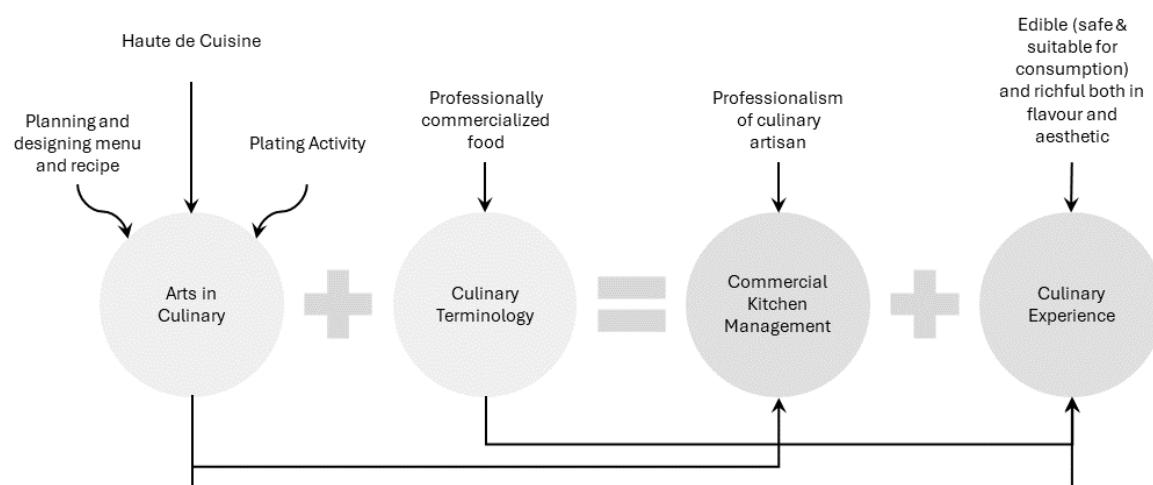


Figure 1. Arts function in professional culinary

Source: Generated figure based on study findings.

Although art is generally understood through its object-based orientation, which is why culinary practice is often perceived more as material than as functional (Durocher & Knezevic, 2023; Mihalache & Zanoni, 2023), in reality, no object can exist without praxis. This implies that art is inherently both practical and material (Bakke & Peterson, 2024). A simple way to comprehend art as both practical and material is by understanding the processes of creation and representation (Grimshaw et al., 2021), which are realised and made visible through performance (Miller & Syring, 2023). What the chefs in this study described is essentially the function of art as both a mode of action, where the design of menus and recipes initiates the management and operation of the commercial kitchen, followed by the application of '*haute de cuisine*' and culminating in the act of plating that shapes the culinary experience, and as an expression way, through which chefs, or culinary artisans, convey artistic expression embedded within the culinary experience itself. In other words, the management and operation of the commercial kitchen, as well as the creation of a culinary experience, are equal components within the art of culinary practice.

Art in culinary contexts thus operates simultaneously as a mode of action and an expression, both of which function in relation to the management of commercial kitchens and the creation of culinary experiences. This function operates as a process that unfolds across three levels of culinary art: first, culinary art as a foundation for menu and recipe design; second, culinary art as a foundation expressed through the application of techniques in the preparation and processing of ingredients; and third, culinary art as a foundation for food presentation. This duality constitutes the essence of culinary creativity, which is inherently person-centred and involves a creative process recognised by the public (Öztürk, 2024). Such creativity follows stages of idea generation, incubation, development, and verification (Haykir & Çalışkan, 2023). The findings of this study confirm the presence of both artistic and consumption experiences (Lee, 2022), each of which represents manifestations of creativity (Haykir & Çalışkan, 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Madeira et al., 2021; Öztürk, 2024). However, this study identifies these aspects primarily within art as an expression way, most evident when chefs express their artistic sensibility through plating, rather than through menu design or the execution of '*haute cuisine*', which serve as managerial and operational foundations for constructing the culinary experience.

The interrelation between the mode of action and the expression in culinary art often goes unrecognised, primarily because art is commonly divided into the technical and the expressive. Studies on the chef profession frequently approach the technical aspect through traditional dimensions such as taste (Spence, 2022) or as part of broader social movements concerning food and health (Mutlu & Doğan, 2021), food waste (Filimonau et al., 2024; Pizzetti et al., 2023), or even the role of culinary artisans in the era of robotics (Xiao & Zhao, 2022). Therefore, understanding art in culinary practice as both a mode of action and a way of expression holds crucial significance: it enables a more comprehensive recognition of chefs' roles not only as creative artisans but also as stakeholders within the broader tourism and hospitality industries (Chang et al., 2021; Fusté-Forné, 2023; Madeira et al., 2021; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2022; Traynor et al., 2022).

The significance of this knowledge lies in its practical implications for culinary enterprises. The application of art in culinary practice is critical to the operation and management of commercial kitchens, equally vital as the formation of culinary experiences. It also reflects the professionalism of chefs and culinary artisans within the *brigade de cuisine*. Hence, art in culinary practice should not be viewed merely as a means to create sensory or experiential pleasure, as often emphasised in culinary tourism, but also as an integral component of the business dimension of culinary enterprises. This involves financial investment in raw materials, equipment, human resources, and marketing strategies. The equilibrium of art in culinary practice thus signifies the dual essence of the culinary field: as a domain of commercialised nourishment and as a site for the development of professional employment within the culinary industry.

E. CONCLUSION

Understanding art in the culinary field as a mode of action and expression for commercial kitchen management and the creation of culinary experiences has shaped our understanding of what culinary art entails and its functions. Through this understanding, the business dimension of culinary practice and its function as a form of food commercialised as both a primary and a tertiary need can further develop, as it refers not only to its role in consumerism but also to its role in production. The knowledge gained from this study enables us to pursue further research on the concrete manifestations of culinary art, including the successes and failures of culinary enterprises as implications of weaknesses or strengths in managing a commercial kitchen, and culinary products as expressions of the three aspects of culinary art. In addition, this knowledge is expected to contribute to studies on curriculum development in formal and non-formal vocational culinary education, not only as a topic within culinary arts studies, but also to ensure that culinary enterprises continue to grow in alignment with the uniqueness of culinary experiences.

This study adopts a deliberately focused ethnographic scope, concentrating on three culinary artisans who share a professional lineage within a brigade de cuisine. While this concentrated context deepens the analysis, it naturally narrows the organisational variation that broader comparative research might capture. The use of passive participation, methodologically appropriate for preserving the natural flow of commercial kitchen operations, also limits real-time access to immediate operational pressures. As the present study privileges the professional standpoint of chefs, future research may extend this foundation by incorporating other culinary enterprises, a wider range of kitchen roles, or consumer-side interpretations to enrich the understanding of culinary art as both a mode of action and a form of expression.

F. CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICAL STANDARDS

The authors declare no conflict of interest of any kind, whether financial, professional, or institutional. All research procedures adhered to established ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent from participants, safeguarding the confidentiality of the organisations in which they were working, and ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the data throughout the research process.

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