

Freshmen get a taste for the art of eating

Seminar participants take a closer look at the art and culture of the dinner table

By: [Mike O'Brien](#) | News Reporter
Issue date: [11/29/07](#) Section: [News](#)
Oregon Daily Emerald

On a dinner table in the University's Millrace Studios Wednesday, the actual soup bowls were much wider at the bottom than at the top. To keep from see-sawing, the serving platter had to be supported by Wheat Thins crackers. The cups were cone-shaped and the salt and pepper shakers were stuck together, though their holes didn't align properly. To keep from getting sushi, cottage cheese, sweet plum tomatoes or caramel popcorn on themselves, the three dining companions - wearing a Hawaiian shirt, sweatpants tucked into riding boots and a bright, mismatched outfit, respectively - had paper napkins tucked into their shirts like bibs.

"These napkins are exquisitely awkward," said Sana Krusoe, an associate professor of ceramics in the University's art department. "I'd like to congratulate you on the decision to do that."

The Awkward Table, where everything was designed not to work, was one of six final group projects in Krusoe's three-credit Eating and Art course. A freshman seminar, Krusoe's class focused on examining the intersections of social practices, literature, film, art and food, and then designing their own table settings. Other themes included the Zen, Great American, Kiddo, Sexual Tension and Dare Tables.

"Food is turning up in art in a lot of different ways," Krusoe said. "Contemporary ceramics practice is right now, really doing a lot of work with vessels and kind of a relational aspect."

The 18 freshmen read and watched food-centric material - such as the movies "Like Water for Chocolate" and "Super Size Me" - and then teamed up to create dinnerware from clay to correspond with their themes.

The Sexual Tension Table featured plates shaped like broken-heart halves, which were covered with chocolate and strawberries. Dates could feed one other across the table using the extra-long silverware. The centerpiece - a long vase filled with a condom bouquet, and round salt and pepper shakers - was shaped like a penis. A painting of a rose and some 1990s R&B music rounded out their setting.

At the Great American Table to the right, students in flannel shirts sipped Coca-Cola from cups shaped like Abraham Lincoln's signature top hat. They used red, white and blue utensils to eat steak and vegetables from their plates, which were painted to look like flags.

"I definitely think about place settings a lot more now, how the table set-up actually affects your conversation," said Cassie Russell, who was part of the Dare Table.

In Russell's group, they made plates with caution signs and cow faces, a large monkey head and yellow test tubes. Anyone who sat down at their table was dared to eat monkey brains (noodles on pomegranate halves), cow tongues (rolled-up bologna), eyeballs (gummy eyes covered in vanilla pudding), or drink toxic waste (bright green Jones Soda). There was a disposable camera stationed nearby to document the dares.

Russell said Krusoe made Eating and Art a fun class.

Sasha Simpson, who liked Krusoe's vivid teaching style said: "She's really inspirational, to say the least. She's definitely an interesting character."

Simpson was part of the Kiddo Table, where the mini juice cups had handles and the food - all of which was candy, cookies and chips - was served from colorful trucks. The Kiddo team also had a laptop playing cartoons and olives to stick on their fingers.

"We had grape juice all over the tablecloth and Cheeto cheese all over the tablecloth," Nicole Potts said. "It was a real 'play with your food' type of theme."

Finally, the Zen Table had makeshift toga-clad students eating miso soup and sushi. They employed Feng Shui motifs with simple designs on their plates and ceramic statues of the Buddha.

"We had a salt Zen garden," added Chris Schaefer. "Instead of candle holders, we had an incense tower." Krusoe, who often teaches freshman seminars, said Eating and Art "went beyond (her) wildest expectations."

"This is one of the freshman seminars I'm happiest with," she said. "I would really like to start implementing this into my upper-division classes because it really works."

Before the final Eating and Art class came to a close, Krusoe reminded her students that she needed them to fill out course evaluations.

"Food stains on your evals are fine," she called out. "You guys rock. This was so intensely, wonderfully cool... but before you go, please wash your dishes in the bathroom."

mobrien@dailymerald.com