

Chocolate: A Brief History and its Contribution to Art

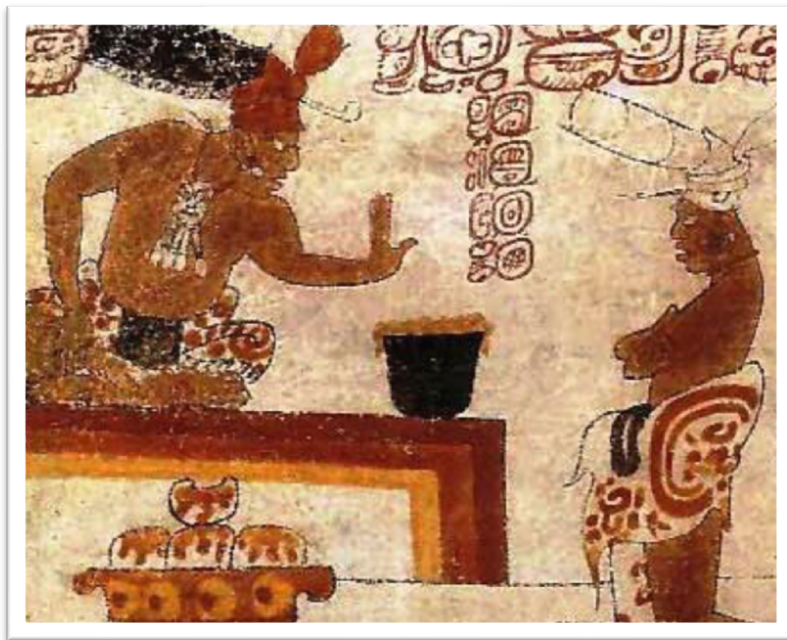
From images of cacao beans and cacao consumption in early Mesoamerican art to complex statues molded from chocolate, chocolate has played an important role, not only in various cultures, but in art.

History of Chocolate

Chocolate has an interesting history. The Olmecs of southern Mexico were probably the first to ferment, roast and grind cacao beans for drinks, around 1500 BC. Although the Olmecs have no written history, vessels from this time period have traces of the cacao chemical, theobromine.

Centuries later the Mayans called chocolate the “drink of the gods”. They made a brew of roasted and ground cacao seeds which were mixed with chiles, water and cornmeal (no sweeteners). By pouring this mixture from one pot to another, a thick foamy beverage called “xocolatl”, meaning “bitter water”, was created. The Mayans associated it with their fertility goddess, Ixcacao. They also used cacao beans as currency.

The image below is of a painting on a Mayan vase. In the painting, it looks like the lord is having the temperature of his cacao drink tested.



In the 15th century, the Aztecs also used cacao beans as currency. They believed that chocolate was a gift from the god, Quetzalcoatl. The Aztec emperor Montezuma considered chocolate to

be an excellent aphrodisiac and drank large quantities of it before spending time with one of his many partners.

Cacao is frequently featured in the art of the Aztecs, which attests to the importance of it in the culture. The Aztec figure below is of a man holding a cacao pod.



Chocolate was introduced into Europe in the early 16th century. Although not documented, legend has it that the Spanish explorer, Hernán Cortés, brought chocolate to Spain in 1528, having discovered it during an expedition to the Americas. Cortés wrote to King Carlos I that “xocoatl” is a drink that “builds up resistance and fights fatigue.” Unlike the Mayans and Aztecs, Europeans sweetened the naturally bitter chocolate, mixing it with sugar and honey.

When chocolate was first introduced into Spain, it was a symbol of luxury, wealth and power, affordable only to the upper class. Eventually its popularity spread to other royal courts in Europe, where aristocrats viewed it almost as a magic elixir.

Chocolate’s popularity eventually spread to other European courts, where aristocrats consumed it as a magic elixir with health benefits. To satisfy their demand for this heady brew, Europeans established plantations in equatorial areas to grow cacao and sugar.

It wasn't until the Industrial Revolution that chocolate became available to the masses. In 1828 the invention of the cocoa press revolutionized the production of chocolate. The cocoa press squeezed fatty butter from roasted cacao beans, leaving a dry cake that could be crushed into a fine powder, mixed with liquids, poured into a mold and solidified into chocolate.

Cadbury's (of Cadbury's Easter egg fame) produced their first chocolate bars in 1849 and in 1854 became purveyors of chocolate to Queen Victoria. In 1861, the company created Fancy Boxes, a decorated box of chocolate; in 1868 they were sold in boxes in the shape of a heart for Valentine's Day. Thereafter, boxes of filled chocolates became associated with the holiday.

Switzerland became a leader in milk chocolate production. Daniel Peter experimented with adding milk powder made by his friend Henri Nestlé to his product, giving the world its first milk chocolate. In 1908, Theodor Tobler put milk chocolate, nougat, almonds and honey together and pressed it into a triangular shape, leading to the Toblerone bar. Many believe that the Matterhorn was Tobler's inspiration. Rodolphe Lindt developed a conching method (which involves an extended process of heating and mixing the ingredients of chocolate) which resulted in that "melt in your mouth" experience.

Chocolate first came to what is now the USA in 1641 aboard a Spanish ship. During the Revolutionary War, chocolate was provided to soldiers as rations and sometimes as payment instead of money. Chocolate became more affordable when Milton Hershey began producing large masses of low-priced milk chocolates. In 1905, to be near farms that could supply fresh milk, he opened a new chocolate factory in Pennsylvania that would become the world's largest. Milton Hershey is credited by some to be the "Henry Ford of chocolate".

Chocolate in European Art

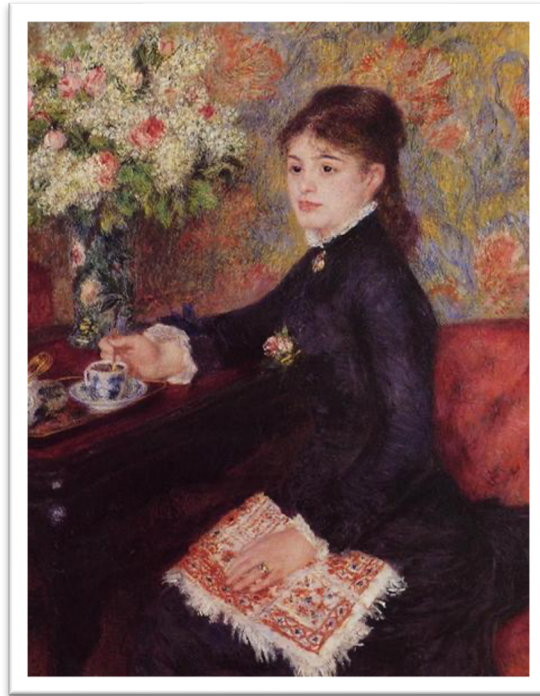
In light of the importance of chocolate to European society, it is not surprising to see it featured in various works of art.

Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702-1789), a Swiss artist, devoted an entire series of painting to ladies drinking or serving hot chocolate.

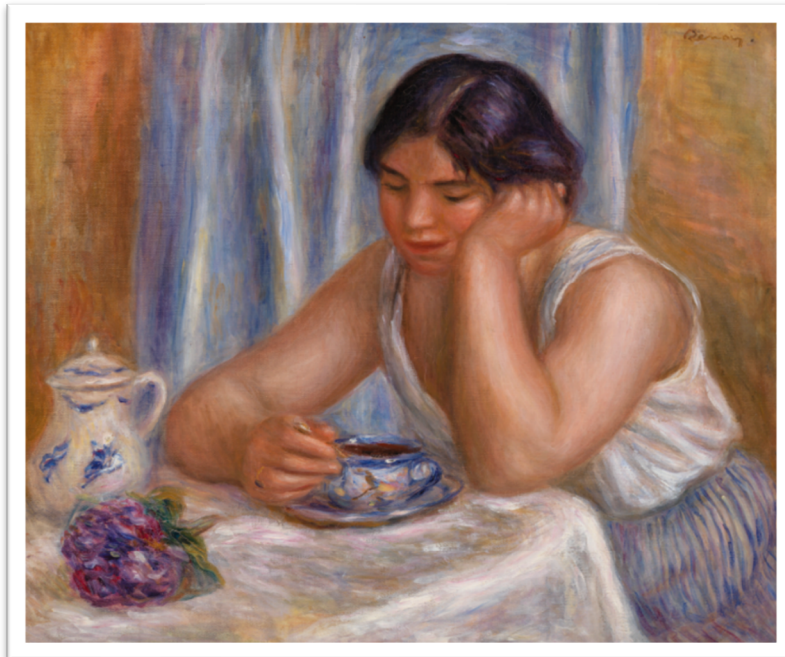


Jean-Etienne Liotard, *Chocolate Girl*, 1754

Pierre-Auguste Renoir features hot chocolate in a number of his paintings of women.

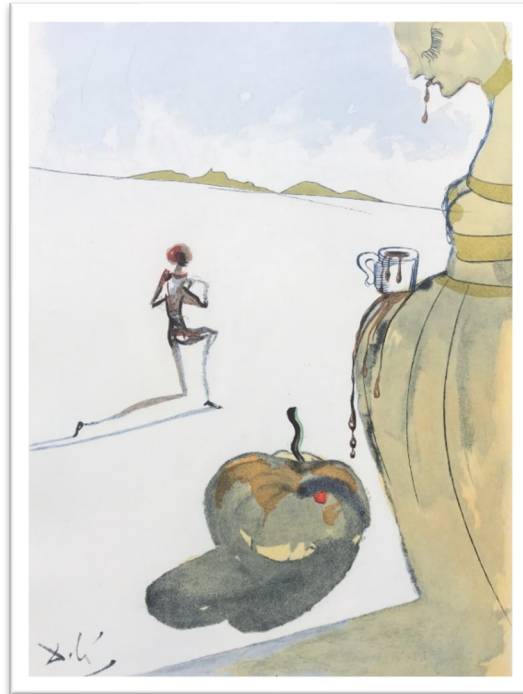


Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Cup of Chocolate*, c. 1877-1878



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Cup of Chocolate*, 1912

Finally, the Spanish surrealist artist, Salvador Dalí, featured hot chocolate in a 1967 lithograph, *Cup of Chocolate*. The lithograph is from a book *Dalí Illustrate Casanova*, based on seven short stories by Jacques Casanova.



Salvador Dali, Cup of Chocolate, 1967

Chocolate as an Art Medium

The section above was about chocolate as the subject of works of art. This section is about chocolate as the medium for the creation of art.

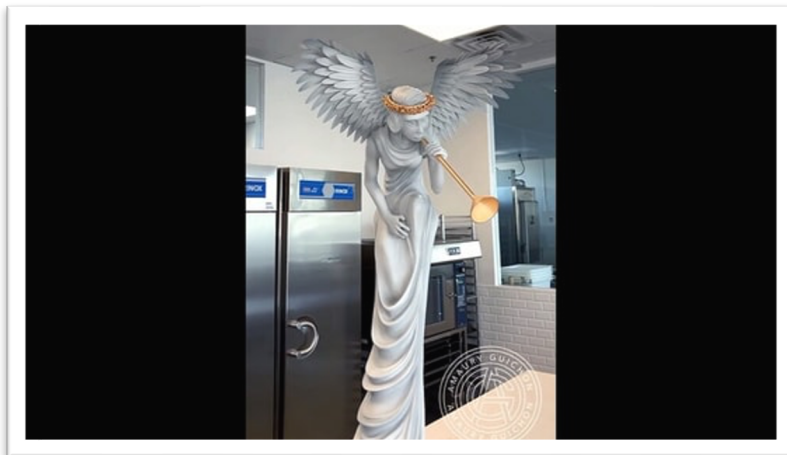
Vik Muniz is a Brazilian photographer (born 1961) known for making iconic images out of pretty unusual materials. He creates familiar images drawn from pop culture and art history from a variety of materials, and then photographs them. He has fashioned the Mona Lisa from peanut butter and jelly, Elizabeth Taylor from diamonds, Caravaggio's *Narcissus* from junk, and his self-portrait from dice. One of Muniz's most well-known bodies of work is a series of pictures rendered in chocolate sauce (specifically Bosco). Below is his 1999 recreation of Marilyn Monroe in chocolate sauce.



Since chocolate is malleable, various artists have used it to create interesting and often extremely detailed three-dimensional objects. Perhaps the best known is the French-Swiss pastry chef, Amaury Guichon (born 1991). Guichon created this life-sized lion in 2021 from chocolate, a five-day project. The mane alone took 10 hours. The sculpture is 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighs about 80 pounds.



Here is his 2022 chocolate angel creation. If you want to watch him create it, click on this link. It is fascinating. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAXTgB-5cX0&ab_channel=Flixxy



If you want to see more than 40 artistic renditions from chocolate from relatively simple to very ornate, go to:

https://www.boredpanda.com/chocolate-art/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic