

The
Gourmand's

Egg



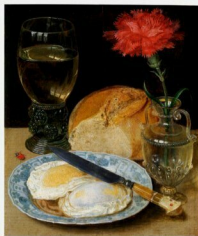
Collection
of stories
and recipes
TASCHEN



One of the earliest representations of an egg is a Roman fresco of a still life with eggs and thrushes, painted by an unknown artist on the walls of the Villa di Giulia Felice in Pompeii, which is still visible there today. But it was during the Renaissance that the creative possibilities of the egg really took hold. It appears again and again in various guises; in still lifes and allegories, as well as religious, historical and domestic scenes.

One of its most beautiful incarnations is in Piero della Francesca's *Brera Madonna* (1472–1474). A single ostrich egg, here intended as a symbol of creation and purity, is suspended from a shell above a group of saints and angels who surround Mary; the sleeping Christ Child stretched across her lap. The fact that the ostrich was a heraldic sign of the Montefeltro family who commissioned the tempera panel was undoubtedly a handy compositional prompt.

Eggs Are Everywhere



Many artists, of course, have decided to focus not on the egg's metaphorical possibilities, but instead on its day-to-dayness. In the German painter Georg Flegel's *Snack with Fried Eggs* (c.1600), an egg is an egg and no less glorious for it. The artist is displaying his talents: he can paint a reflective glass, a red flower, a loaf of bread and a couple of oily fried eggs with such vivid realism that it encourages hunger pangs.

Similarly, Diego Velázquez's *An Old Woman Cooking Eggs* (1618) is also something of a celebration of the everyday. Painted when he was still a teenager, even at a distance of 400 or so years, the picture is as vivid as a film still. The cook holds an egg in her left hand; in her right is a wooden spoon that hovers above the two eggs frying in a terracotta pot. A young boy waits beside her with a flask of wine and a pumpkin. Velázquez's prodigious talents are highlighted in the textures he

OPPOSITE Piero della Francesca, *Brera Madonna*, 1472–1474
Georg Flegel, *Snack with Fried Eggs*, 1580

Eggtymology

The world of the short-order cook is one of enforced economy of space, time and movement. Orders roll in quick, and things happen fast. Often cramped, always hot, short-order kitchens rely on an economy of the spoken word, too. And nowhere does that apply more than to the shorthand between people whose job it is to cook hundreds — maybe thousands — of eggs every day.

It all starts with the words regularly spoken by the wait staff at self-respecting diners everywhere: “How would you like your eggs?” And with this seemingly prosaic question, a world of almost infinite possibility is offered up.

Things might seem straightforward enough. Eggs can come poached, boiled, scrambled, fried or baked. Quick and clear with room for individual preference. You can add runny (if you must), soft (OK then) or firm (show a little respect). From sunny side up to eggs over easy, over medium or over hard, the fried egg lingo is pretty much set.

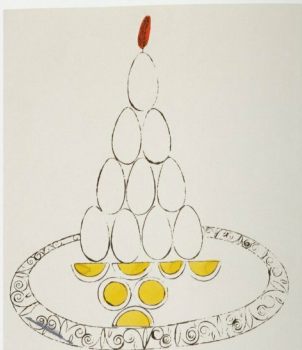
So far, so easy to call out over the hubbub of a busy dining room and kitchen. But thanks to the pervasiveness of the egg, and innate human creativity things can get much crazier. If you were to order “smashed cackle berries”, your eggs would come scrambled, as would “wrecked eggs”. If those wrecked eggs were also “crying”, they would come with a side of onions. And if you wanted the order to go, you could ask the wait staff to “put legs on it”.

Rich linguistic territory comes along with the dish otherwise known as “egg in the hole”. Cut a hole into the centre of a slice of bread, pop it in the pan, crack an egg into that hole and — hey presto — you’ve just made “toad in the road”, “egg in jail”, “hen in a nest” or “ojo de toro” (eye of the bull). In the 2005 film *V for Vendetta*, Evey Hammond (Natalie Portman) gets her fill of this particular dish, when she is served it for breakfast first by the masked V (Hugo Weaving) and later by talk show host Gordon Deitrich (Stephen Fry), who calls it “eggie in the basket”.

There’s also a darker side to egg prep terminology. Instead of boiled eggs, the callous could ask the kitchen to “drown the kids”. Instead of a poached egg, you could get your toasted muffin with a “dead eye”. But those sorts of straight-up macabre descriptors are few and far between. Though there is a darkness to what could also, paradoxically, be described as the most heart-warming of orders: the “reunion”, aka a chicken and egg sandwich.

OPPOSITE
Baker and Evans, *Unfried*, 2017





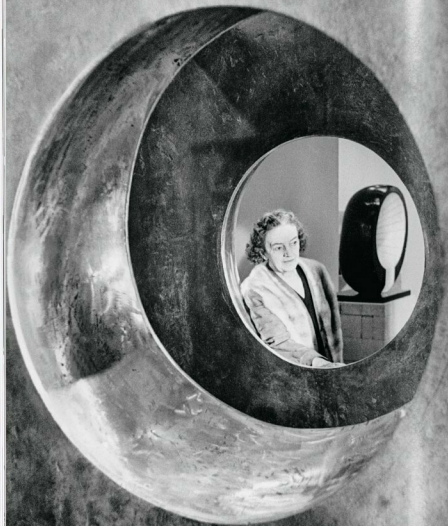
Hard Boiled Eggs

recommended by Steve Elliot

This may seem an unimportant matter to the ordinary cook, but this may seem an unimportant matter to the ordinary cook, but significant art. It is essential that all eggs be immersed in the water at precisely the same time, from the time the water begins to boil. boil eight minutes should be allowed for medium sized eggs and ten minutes for large ones. This time limit must never be exceeded as any over cooking makes the whites tough and therefore untable.

Andy Warhol, illustration from *Wild Raspberries*, 1959
OPPOSITE Andy Warhol, *Eggs*, 1982





“If a pebble or an egg can be
enjoyed for the sake of its shape only,
it is one step towards
a true appreciation of sculpture.”

BARBARA HEPWORTH

OPPOSITE Bob Aylott
Barbara Hepworth, 1968

Feminist Eggs

In Vanessa Engle's 1996 documentary *Two Melons and a Stinking Fish*, UK artist Sarah Lucas buys half a dozen organic eggs from a butcher's shop in Highbury, north London for £1.24. She later fries up two, and places them onto a varnished wooden table alongside a doner kebab — a pita bulging with strips of rotisserie meat. The foodstuffs were arranged by the artist to evoke the shape of a woman's breasts and genitals. Written on the table in black pen are the credits for the work: "Two fried eggs and a kebab, 1992, Sarah Lucas." The title echoes the kind of vulgar banter about women's bodies the artist remembers hearing while growing up in London, and she once referred to the work as a "defence mechanism", saying she had "live[d] with remarks like that all my life."

Lucas has spent a lot of time with eggs in her work. Perhaps the most famous is her *Self Portrait with Fried Eggs* (1996). This photo shows the artist sitting deep in a chair, her back straight, her denim-clad legs open at an acute angle and her gaze direct and unflinching. Two fried eggs have been

gingerly placed on her khaki green T-shirt over her breasts, the yolks pointing in different directions. Of her ability to serve up provocation and humour at once, art critic Roberta Smith once wrote, "Over the years, I don't think any artist's work has shocked me — mostly in good ways — as often as Ms Lucas's."

Since a significant number of women's bodies produce eggs on a regular basis, it's not surprising to see them show up in feminist art; often as a visual eponym for the female body itself, and to explore everything from sexism and eroticism to themes of oppression and liberation. In 1967, Brazilian artist Lygia Pape hatched out of a white box onto a beach in her video *O Ovo* (The Egg). Readable as a comment on the rigid parameters of the art world, this escape from inside a white, oppressive cube into an organic natural scene was a prescient comment on the types of gallery spaces that would grow to ubiquity in the Western world — spaces in which women artists would be regularly under-represented.



Lygia Pape, *O Ovo*, 1967
OPPOSITE Sarah Lucas, *Self Portrait with Fried Eggs*, 1996

