When the bankrupt American artist James McNeill Whistler was living in Venice from 1879 to 1880, he joked that he was so poor that he had to eat “cat’s meat and cheese parings.” In reality, his palate did not suffer as he routinely stretched his meager resources to dine and enjoy after-hours coffee at fashionable Venetian eateries such as Café Florian, Café Quadri, and Café Orientale. Whistler was, of course, a social creature who had been embraced by the wealthy American expatriate community that frequented these restaurants. But he never would have tolerated bad food for the sake of good company: Whistler was known to be as particular and opinionated about his meals as he was about his painting. And so, when I first read about Whistler’s sojourn in Venice years ago, I became distracted by ruminations about what Whistler ate. What was on the menus at the Orientale or the Florian ago, I became distracted by ruminations about what Whistler ate. What was on the menus at the Orientale or the Florian? Did it nourish Whistler the artist? For anyone who cared about a whimsical personality and Größe, his name was Whistler. The book: it gives us a window into the culinary life and personal habits of Man Ray who, not surprisingly, enjoyed the pungent taste and afterlife of strong garlic and onions. Charles Demuth’s Spice Cake, which his mother, Augusta, baked for him, has a rich, complex flavor but suffers from structural deficiencies that I have yet to resolve. Batali’s admonition to cooks is well taken: this book is best suited for one who is comfortable appraising recipes and, if necessary, making adjustments to produce optimal results.

So why should we care about what well-known artists ate? Does knowledge of Whistler’s particularity about his food shed new light on his art? Fedele writes in his introduction that the culinary arts have an affinity to the visual arts in that they each “incorporate elements of color, form, and texture” that are blended together to form a sensory experience. The Artist’s Palate does, in many cases, illustrate a striking parity between artists and their favorite dishes. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s festive version of Lobster à l’Américaine, for example, evokes the exuberance of the dance clubs he celebrated in his work, and the re-created recipe for Paul Cézanne’s favorite dish, pommes de terres à l’huile, (much like his still-lifes) praises the simple perfection and vitality of nature. We can therefore affirm certain
understandings about artists through their relationships with food (it’s more clear than ever that Whistler was driven to aesthetic perfection), and we can also enjoy some surprises, too (who knew Jackson Pollock was an accomplished baker?). The Artist’s Palate offers a tasty glimpse into the culinary lives of beloved artists that allows us, by re-creating their favorite dishes, to relate to them through the common ground of food.

—Stefanie Spray Jandl, Williams College Museum of Art

*Pomona Londinensis*

William Hooker

Oakland, CA: Octavo Editions, 2003

Illustrations. $30.00 (CD-ROM)

An apple, gleaming in the sun, is a work of art that is often overlooked—perhaps not surprisingly, as most of our daily experiences with produce revolve around supermarket aisles of commercialized fruits that have been stripped of the unique forms, colors, and even tastes that nature provided them. However, upon examining Octavo’s new digital edition of *Pomona Londinensis*, one is quickly reminded of a time when fruit was more than just a dusty breakfast staple.

Painted by William Hooker between 1813 and 1818, *Pomona Londinensis* was a field guide to the different fruits grown in London at that time, much in the same fashion that Audubon’s guide examined American birds later in the century. Commissioned by the London Horticultural Society, *Pomona Londinensis* was a product of the interest in pomology (the study of fruit). In his opening commentary to the new Octavo digital edition, historian Ian Jackson explains how Hooker’s paintings, in particular, illustrate the zeal with which scholars studied fruit. According to Jackson, “Hooker’s paintings not only reflected the state of horticulture but a style of patronage. The early nineteenth century was a period in which gentlemen in Europe and New England met for pomological table-talk much as Chinese scholars and poets gathered in lychee clubs to admire and praise the fruit” (p.1). Indeed, the forty-nine hand-colored fruit paintings of *Pomona Londinensis* are the star attraction of the book, expressing the vibrant colors, sensual forms, and delicate details of each fruit far better than the esoteric text by botanist Richard Anthony Salisbury. Intricately painted on a white backdrop, occasionally accompanied by a few leaves of foliage, Hooker’s illustrations of fruit seem to pop right off the page, appearing as luscious and ripe as they would in nature.

The Octavo digital edition of the book displays each page with an amazing clarity that does service to Hooker’s art. Laid out in an easy-to-follow format in Adobe Acrobat, the disc contains a complete scanned copy of the original *Pomona Londinensis*. This facsimile, scanned from an edition belonging to the California Academy of Sciences, includes not only every page of text and illustration but also scanned images of the bindings, appendices, and blank pages of the book. In addition, the images of the book can be examined by zooming in at up to 200 percent of the original size without their becoming grainy or lackluster in appearance.

Aside from the clear scanned images of the original text, this new digital edition has several useful features that put the historical work into a modern context. As the scanned copies of the text are difficult to read, Octavo also includes a transcription of Richard Anthony Salisbury’s text that is cross-linked with the corresponding fruit paintings by Hooker. Furthermore, each fruit is linked to modern notes by horticultural historian C.T. Kennedy. Overall, navigation through the work is especially easy, as bookmarks and thumbnails directly link readers with the page or subject of their choice.

The digital edition of *Pomona Londinensis* opens with two well-written essays by botany historian Ian Jackson. The first essay is an opening commentary on the history of *Pomona Londinensis*, putting it in the historical context of the early nineteenth-century study of pomology. This commentary prepares and educates the reader for Hooker’s book, but it is Jackson’s second essay, “The Fruit Garden Display’d,” which is of more interest. Originally published in the periodical *Pacific Horticulture*, this essay succinctly tells the story of fruit painting in a matter of eight pages. Jackson explains how the subjects in fruit painting evolved from portraying irregular, bizarrely shaped examples to subjects uniform in shape and color. At the end of the piece, Jackson even shows how scientific breeding of fruit parallels the decline of artistic fruit painting.

He explains that

Hand coloring, as practiced in pomological illustration until the middle of the last century, accorded perfectly in method with the discovery of seedling fruit and the random practices of the early plant breeders in its entire lack of uniformity. The techniques of photographic illustration are equally well matched with the eye of the scientific hybridist. Fruits are no longer meant to be viewed as works of art; scientific principles have replaced individual taste and feeling, and yet fruit is served as honestly as ever by illustration. (p.8)

Though we may not be able to bring back the exotic and unique varieties of fruit that were prized two hundred years