A Potpourri of (Non-Tut) Met Exhibits
By MANUELA HOELTERHOFF New York
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In his morose essay on population, Malthus put forth that happiness is directly related to the quantity of food available. If proof need be offered, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has done so by mounting a very cheerful exhibition titled "The Print Collector in the Kitchen." It is on view through Sunday (if one can find one's way through the King Tut and Dresden exhibit throngs) and includes samplings of prints by various artists of people selling, preparing and eating everything from pasta to chicken, *pate-en-croute* to pastries.

A print by Rembrandt, for example, depicts a humble pancake woman; another by the 16th-Century German artist Burgkmaier presents the Emperor Maximilian carrying a tureen as he learns the workings of the royal kitchen (so that he could properly order a banquet). And what could better illustrate the pleasures of eating in quantity than some Neapolitans shoveling macaroni straight out of a vat and into their mouths with their fingers, as in one page from an illustrated book?

The Gallery

The exhibition gives equal attention to supplier and consumer as it gamely traverses about six centuries of art and eating. Particularly plentiful are images of single-item vendors who carried their goods in baskets and trays through streets and countryside announcing their arrival with cries and maybe a song: "O body well-filled out," intones a big-bellied vendor as he marches along with his roasted chestnuts. Celery, eggs, even baked potatoes are offered by other hawkers, often presented by the artists in peculiar-looking outfits that apparently symbolized their trade.

The consumers are equally varied, ranging from a refined 17th-Century party picnicking in front of a dreamy castle surrounded by swans, boats and musicians, to a very ill-behaved family throwing wine at each other (the food is already on the floor). Questionable table manners are also displayed in a print called "Dogomania" in which an eccentric lady serves a chicken leg to her table companion – a spaniel. A glum-looking maid sits behind her all alone, staring at a herring in her lap.

This is perhaps not the ideal show for vegetarians or people on a diet, but the former group might take some pleasure in a print by a 15th-Century Dutch artist, which shows happy hares gleefully roasting a hunter on a spit

Nearby is an exhibition of 51 photographs by Alfred Stieglitz of the painter Georgia O'Keeffe (through Jan. 14). Stieglitz's friendship with the much younger artist began when she was in her very early 30s (she is now 91 years old). The photographs are part of some 500 portraits taken of her, beginning in 1917, many of them never shown for reasons that remain unclear. But Ms. O'Keeffe has surprisingly approved this venture and even participated in the selection (a handsomely printed book of the exhibited works is also available).

The works on view, particularly those from 1918, of the painter in a soft, white, opened shirt, are beautiful images, taken in a gentle, caressing light. Stieglitz photographed Ms. O'Keeffe's body with such intimate knowledge and intensity of feeling that occasionally one feels rather like an intruder. At least for this viewer, esthetic pleasure mixed with discomfort, perhaps due as much to the private nature of some of the works as to Stieglitz's merciless recording of the passage of time: The last photographs taken in the 1930s of her gaunt, lined face already foreshadow the next 50 years.

Downstairs in the lower depths of the Metropolitan, usually reserved for costume shows, Diana Vreeland, the fashion world's flamboyant emissary to the Met's Costume Institute, has taken on Russia's equally flamboyant emigre to the West – the ballet impresario, Serge Diaghilev. And the result is a marvelously entertaining, visually exciting show that should send the most lethargic museumgoer into at least a mental *jete*. The exhibition (comprised largely of loans from London's Victoria and Albert Museum) is titled "Diaghilev: Costumes and Designs of the Ballets Russes," and will be on view through June. Supplementing the costumes are several sculptures – among them Malvina Hoffman's exquisite wax mask of Anna Pavlova and Rodin's muscle-rippling bronze study of Nijinsky – and numerous sketches for costumes and sets.

The material documents what surprised Europeans (the company, despite its name, never danced in Russia) called the "Diaghilev Miracle" when the dancers first burst on the scene at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris in 1909. During its 20-year existence, the company revolutionized and revitalized ballet with a brilliant synthesis of dance, decor and music. Vanguard composers (among them Stravinsky and Satie) combined forces with artists like Bakst, Goncharova, Picasso and Matisse and a heady array of choreographers (such as Massine and later Balanchine) to create a symphony of gestures and sound, passion, fantasy and color.

As is usual with Ms. Vreeland's extravagant installations, the costumes scintillate and glitter in an atmospherically lit setting. Mitsuko perfume (which Guerlain created for Diaghilev) sometimes wafts through the air, supplemented by wonderfully tantalizing sections from many of the scores used by the Ballets Russes, the "Polovtsian Dances," for example, or "Invitation to the Dance" which brought Nijinsky onstage with a phenomenal leap that, so it is related, caused the more sensitive to faint with pleasure. And there are finally (after years of grand gestures but little detail) readable labels that at least offer a bit of information about the legendary company.

One exhibit of Nijinsky's ruffle and brocade costume for the prince in "Swan Lake" is particularly well presented: The spotlight illuminating it pulsates rapidly with increasing and decreasing light intensities and one can easily imagine the great danseur floating through the air. But the real stars of the exhibition are, I think, two designers. Leon Bakst and Natalia Goncharova. Bakst's sense of fantasy was superbly suited for the more exotic ballets like "Scheherazade," and his unconventional juxtapositions of brilliant colors and patterns, derived from Persia, Turkey and India, created a frenzy in the world of fashion and interior design. Goncharova, who is equally known as a painter, is represented by boldly schematized designs for "Le Coq d'Or" that reveal her interest in the indigenous peasant art of Russia.

Those still in a holiday mood might also like to visit the yearly Christmas tree and creche set up in the museum's medieval sculpture hall against the monumental 17th-Century choir screen from Valladolid, Spain (on view until Jan. 28). A plethora of angels occupy the tree branches, with the Holy Family, shepherds and an assortment of animals placed beneath, all smoothly shaped in terra cotta and ornamented by expert sculptors of the baroque era in southern Italy. The museum also pipes in – at subdued volume – carols and organ music that are rather more pleasing than the ordinary Christmas clatter so prevalent in recent days.