





1 A Hungry Artist

Wayne Thiebaud (born 1920) grew up during the Great Depression and has spent most of his life living and working in California. He tried cartooning and commercial art, but eventually his passion for painting and art history led him back to school to study art education and studio art. In 1951 Thiebaud began a dual career as an art teacher and an artist in Sacramento, California. Over the next ten years he experimented with compositions based on familiar subjects and his childhood memories, such as pinball machines and ice cream cones. By the 1960s Thiebaud's "delicious" still-life paintings of round cakes, slices of pie, colorful lollipops, hot dogs, cherries, cheese, chocolate truffles, and candy apples had made him a truly original American artist.

"You take a lemon meringue pie. It's quite a beautiful thing. . . . It's more than just a subject, it's also a kind of relationship to the paint itself. You really feel like you're sort of making the meringue and . . . working with the pie."

Wayne Thiebaud

2 Mouthwatering Memories

Thiebaud's paintings bring up memories of birthday parties, family picnics, and holidays at home. Perhaps they serve as a reminder of a favorite bakery or a special outing. Many of Thiebaud's works provide a glimpse of his own childhood memories, such as eating his mother's baked goods or selling hot dogs and ice cream cones on the boardwalk of Long Beach when he was a teenager. At their root, his paintings reflect his deep affection and nostalgia for the rituals and traditions of American life.

Cakes, a large canvas with thirteen colorfully frosted confections, is one of the most delectable examples of Thiebaud's work. These treats in a window display are instantly recognizable: Boston cream pie, chocolate layer cake, angel food cake, and strawberry birthday cake. Which cake would you like to taste?



top left: Wayne Thiebaud (detail), 1975, (photo: Mimi Jacobs). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

bottom right: Wayne Thiebaud, *Candy Apples*, 1987, woodcut on Tosa Kozo paper, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Kathan Brown

far right: Wayne Thiebaud, *Cakes*, 1963, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Gift in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art from the Collectors Committee, the 50th Anniversary Gift Committee, and The Circle, with Additional Support from the Abrams Family in Memory of Harry N. Abrams



3 Like Frosting

Thiebaud's subjects might be light and fun, but his approach to painting is serious. He uses still-life subjects to explore formal qualities of painting: color, line, shape, light, composition, and texture. Like the cakes, his paintings are deliciously layered.

Texture: Thiebaud became famous for his ability to use paint in unexpected ways to recreate the look and feel of the substance it depicts. In *Cakes*, he painted each dessert with thick, heavy strokes to produce a textured surface. He transformed the oil paint into dense, buttery frosting or thick whipped cream. In other works, his paint “becomes” meringue, candy, or even mustard.

“Cakes, they are glorious, they are like toys.”

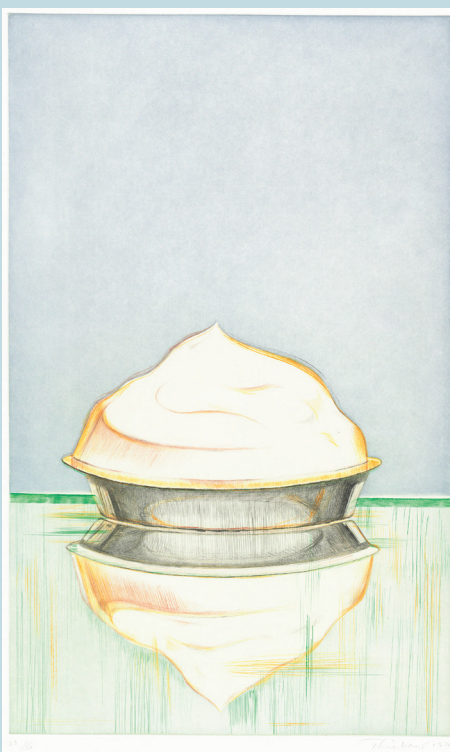
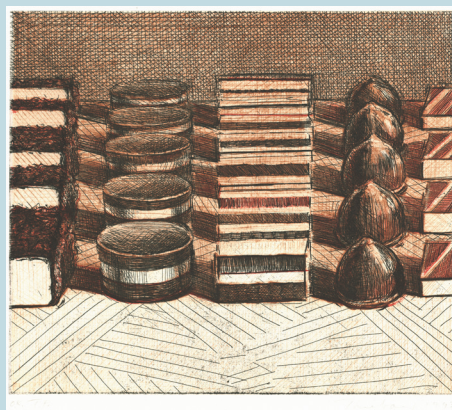
Wayne Thiebaud

Line, shape, and composition: Like a baker arranging a window display, Thiebaud carefully composes his works. *Cakes* shows a repeating pattern of cylinders set against a blank background. The artist places the cylinder cakes on impossibly tall stands, which create perfect elliptical shadows. Each cake and its stand are outlined to reinforce the shapes.

Light and color: Thiebaud's colors are more complicated than they seem—the white frosting is not just white, but it is also orange, blue, and beige. The cakes cast bluish-purplish shadows. Thiebaud developed a practice of sketching with different colored paints, which produces the rainbowlike lines that define the edges of his objects.

try this

“[My subject matter] was a genuine sort of experience that came out of my life, particularly the American world in which I was privileged to be. It just seemed to be the most genuine thing which I had done.” **Wayne Thiebaud**



Sweet Sculpture

You will need:

For your cake: papier-mâché boxes (round, square, rectangular—the size of a cake, pie, or cupcake)

For the frosting: Elmer's tile grout (one quart covers about three cakes)

To color the frosting: Acrylic paint (brown, pink, yellow, green, violet)

To decorate the cake: Palette knives and a cake decorating set (pastry bags and tips)

To top the cake: plastic berries or flowers (optional)

Mixing spoon

Covered plastic containers

Apron

To make the frosting, mix about five parts tile grout to one part paint. Stir in brown paint to make chocolate frosting, pink paint to make strawberry frosting, green paint for mint frosting, etc. The tile grout will air dry, so place it in a covered storage container to keep it soft.

To decorate the cake, use the palette knife to spread the frosting all over the surface of the box. Then use the decorating tips to create lines and shapes—perhaps a heart, flowers, or face—or to write words. Top the cake with plastic berries and decorations.

Think about: What occasion is your cake for? How do chefs express themselves artistically?

Set the cake aside. It will dry in a few hours, depending upon the thickness of the tile grout. Don't forget to put a label next to it: “Art. Do not eat!”

top left: Wayne Thiebaud, *Dark Cake*, 1983, woodcut on hand-made Tosa Kozo paper, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Kathan Brown

top right: Wayne Thiebaud, *Chocolates*, 1993, color hard-ground etching with drypoint on Somerset Satin white paper, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Kathan Brown

bottom: Wayne Thiebaud, *Meringue*, 1995, color aquatint with drypoint on Somerset White Textured paper, National Gallery of Art, Gift of David A. Blanton III