

**Submission by Andrew Wisken**

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The Australian Culinary Federation is a volunteer organisation dedicated to advancing the recognition and professional skills of culinary artists in Australia and abroad.

# What is Art?

What is art?

Art exists in many forms—dance, music, painting, sculpture, and food. It is shaped by the many diverse cultures and backgrounds that make up Australia, each with its own interpretation and expression of what art means. Yet among all these forms, there is one universal art shared across every culture: **culinary art**.

Culinary art can be traced back nearly two million years, to the earliest humans discovering fire and learning to cook meat—throwing raw pieces into flames and watching them transform. Over time, these primitive methods evolved. Earthenware and stoneware were developed, followed by cast iron. Livestock was domesticated, ingredients became more diverse, and cooking methods became more sophisticated.

As civilisations developed, so too did the role of the cook. The earliest professional chefs worked for kings, aristocrats, and religious leaders, while everyday people cooked for their families. This division helped shape the many unique cuisines we know today.

In France, the study of culinary arts was formalised by thinkers such as Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, who famously said, *“Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.”* Over time, food became more than nourishment—it became science, culture, and artistic expression.

Meanwhile, in China, Japan, India, and across the rest of Asia, culinary traditions developed along their own remarkable paths, eventually blending with Western influences. Today, in our globalised world, the distinction between East and West has blurred. Culinary students are now taught techniques and traditions from every corner of the globe.

But this raises an important question:

## **Who says culinary arts are not part of the arts?**

A dancer performs for an audience.

A painter creates on a canvas.

A sculptor shapes stone or clay.

So what does a chef do?

A chef performs in front of guests.

A chef paints a picture on a plate.

A chef sculpts with chocolate, sugar, butter, and ice.

A chef creates not only with sight—but with taste, smell, texture, and emotion.

Is a cook not an artist?

Walk into a commercial kitchen and you will see artists at work—pastry chefs sculpting delicate sugar pieces, chefs plating dishes with precision and colour, cooks transforming

simple ingredients into experiences. Their canvas is a plate. Their medium is food. Their audience is the diner.

Here in Australia, culinary art reflects our multicultural identity.

From the harsh outback, where First Nations Australians continue ancient traditions of cooking over open flames using native plants and ingredients, to our cities filled with vibrant culinary communities.

Walk through Chinatown, Sydney or Chinatown, Melbourne and experience generations of Chinese culinary tradition.

Visit Lygon Street and you will find the heart of Italian cuisine.

Explore Springvale, alive with Vietnamese food culture.

Step into Oakleigh, where Greek culinary heritage thrives.

These are not simply restaurants. They are galleries of living culture.

Today, modern culinary arts education is taught worldwide in universities, culinary schools, and specialised institutions. Students study butchery, food chemistry, thermodynamics, visual presentation, food safety, nutrition, and menu design. They train in professional kitchens, mastering both theory and practice.

But education alone does not define art.

Art is creativity.

Art is expression.

Art tells stories.

Art connects people.

And food does all of these things.

Food tells us where we come from.

Food preserves tradition.

Food creates memory.

Food brings strangers together.

So I ask again:

**What is art?**

If art is something created with passion, skill, imagination, and emotion—something that moves people and leaves a lasting impression—then surely culinary arts belong among the greatest forms of art humanity has ever created.

Because when a chef creates a dish, they are not simply cooking.

**They are creating art.**

From secondary school culinary arts students to Australia’s finest culinary professionals, chefs perform just as actors and musicians do—on the world stage. Actors perform on Broadway and in West End. Artists display their work in the world’s greatest galleries.

Chefs do the same.

They compete, perform, and represent their nations on global culinary stages such as the Culinary Olympics, held in Germany every four years, and at regional events like the Culinary Cup Singapore, along with countless competitions across the globe.

Their work is experienced every day—whether in a small café, a family restaurant, a fine dining establishment, or at grand celebrations. Culinary artists nourish us, inspire us, and bring us together.

And yet, despite their contribution to culture, community, and creativity, culinary artists are too often overlooked when we speak about “the arts.”

Why?

Why is a painted canvas celebrated as art, but not a plated masterpiece?

Why do we applaud the performer on stage, but not the chef performing in the kitchen?

If we truly value creativity, craftsmanship, and cultural expression, then culinary arts deserve the same recognition, respect, and support as every other artistic discipline.

Because culinary artists do not simply feed us.

They tell our stories.

They preserve our cultures.

They shape our memories.

And every day—

**they create art.**

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