

Friend, Food, and Fancy: The History of Guinea Pigs in Art

By: Hannah Drillings

Submitted to the Department of Art History

School of Humanities

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College

State University of New York

May 2024

Sponsor: Professor Jane Kromm

Second Reader: Professor Paul Kaplan

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Origins: The Guinea Pig in South American ‘Cuy’ Depictions
3. Cavy Fancy: Images in Europe and North America
 - A. Natural History Illustration
 - B. Still Life
 - C. Portraiture
 - D. Genre Scenes
 - E. Children’s Literature; A Shift into 20th Century Guinea Pig Art
 - F. Painting in the 20th Century and Onwards
 - G. Contemporary Sculpture
4. Conclusion
5. List of Illustrations
6. Bibliography

Introduction

The *Cavia porcellus*, or domesticated guinea pig, is not the most commonly represented animal in art. Even before the Cavy was introduced to the west, little representative art remains of pre-Columbian Andean culture, where and when the cavy was first domesticated. Since its introduction to Europe, the guinea pig has had its moments throughout art history, but they are few and far between; never reaching the popularity of other animals that were for much longer deeply ingrained in both high and low societies. However, because of the exoticism of this new pet, there are several excellent examples of portraiture in which they can be found nestled in the arms of aristocratic women and children. In addition, there are many scientific illustrations of the *Cavia porcellus*, including an excellent watercolor by the Bishop of Trujillo in the late 18th century, as he documented the local culture of Peru for Charles IV of Spain. Although the guinea pig in both past and present is not as popular a pet as a dog or cat, throughout history there have always been people dedicated to the Cavy, as can be seen in a not insignificant amount of work created in their image. This paper highlights guinea pig imagery in many different forms in many places over a span of nearly two thousand years. It is by no means a complete survey, however it does address a larger number of artworks than any previous paper or book, many of which only have a few paragraphs, a chapter, or an article on a particular piece. Hopefully this fairly comprehensive look at guinea pigs in art will inspire further research by its readers or at least to look a little closer at paintings because as will become apparent, they appear more often than one thinks.

Origins: The Guinea Pig in South American ‘Cuy’ Depictions

There are several depictions of the guinea pig in indigenous South American art, because they were important for daily and religious purposes in Andean culture, both before and after Spanish colonization. The pre-Columbian works that survive help provide a timeline of the guinea pig's existence and subsequent domestication. Like many animals, the guinea pig's history can be traced through archeological evidence, which has determined that the guinea pig was domesticated as early as 5,000 BCE. and certainly by 2,500 BCE. Although remains have been found in archaeological deposits as early as 7,000 BCE, later findings from 2,500 BCE show changes in body features, hair colors, and fertility could be identified. The existence of these specimens is also indicative of domestication.¹

There is also evidence that guinea pigs were first domesticated in the Andean region of present day South America. They mainly served as a food source, but later became a part of some ritual practices.² Mummified remains have been found in sites central to the pre-Incan Nazca culture, and evidence of Cuy pens were found in Chan Cauchi, where the capital of the Chimu empire was located. *Jaca* or *Quwi* is the Quechua word for the *Cavia porcellus*. *Cuy* is the name in Ecuadorian, Peruvian, and Bolivian Spanish. It is an onomatopoeia; when repeated quickly, it mimics the squeals of a guinea pig.³

The earliest known depictions of the guinea pig in art come from these early Andean cultures. There are only a handful of these. This makes their existence all that more precious, in

¹ Daniel W. Gade, “The Guinea Pig in Andean Folk Culture,” *Geographical Review*, 57, no. 2 (1967), pp. 217.

² Daniel H. Sandweiss and Elizabeth S. Wing, “Ritual Rodents: The Guinea Pigs of Chíncha, Peru.” *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 24, no. 1 (Spring 1997), pp. 47–58.

³ Alison Lee Palmer, “The Last Supper by Marcos Zapata (c. 1753: A Meal of Bread, Wine, and Guinea Pig),” *Aurora: The Journal of the History of Art*, 9, (2008), pp. 54–73.

both an art historical and evolutionary context. From the Moche civilization, which preceded the Chimu, comes some of the first examples of an artistic depiction. Daniel Gade's article "The Guinea Pig in Andean Folk Culture" for the *Geographical Review*, includes reproductions of ceramic Moche vessels shaped like guinea pigs, with ears, eyes, and whiskers; one with four feet and one without, dated from around 100-750 AD. (Fig. 1) These are not the only surviving examples, but they are few and far between. There appears to be minimal color on these, and the vessel with feet seems to have an opening on the back where perhaps a handle or spout used to be. The Chimu vases are the last of the pre-Incan, or even, pre-Columbian examples of artistically rendered guinea pigs. Like the Moche vessels, there are a limited number of examples, however Helen Cowie reproduces two for her essay, "Guinea Pig," in 2021. (Fig. 2) They are currently part of the collection in the Real Gabinete Português de Leitura, in present day Brazil. Both of these vessels are painted black and white, though with different patterns, and have red handles with black stripes. In Dorothy Yamamoto's book *Guinea Pig* (2015), a comprehensive look at the cultural importance of the guinea pig, she notes that inclusion of white in the coat as well as the bi-colored pattern, which would be recessive in the wild, is also indicative of their complete domestication by the time these were made, around 950-1470 AD.⁴

Around the late 13th century, the Inca civilization rose to an empire, and by the late 14th century, the state was completely eradicated by Spanish conquistadors. Many aspects of Incan culture were destroyed. In the 15th century, Spanish priests requested that the Archbishop of Lima exterminate all guinea pigs because of their use in ritual. Thankfully, he refused because he believed this would cause a rebellion. In 1615, the systematic eradication of Incan culture prompted Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala to write *The First New Chronicle and Good*

⁴ Yamamoto, pp. 30-31.

Government, composed to show and convince the King of Spain, Philip IV, that the indigenous population was being exploited by the colonial government, and that they needed native rulers in order to thrive. Guaman Poma was a descendant of Incan nobility, and chronicled for the King many aspects of Incan practices that had worked successfully in the past. Guaman Poma also provided many illustrations in his chronicle. One such illustration shows three figures, one kneeling with a small child, and the other holding up a guinea pig as an offering to an Incan deity.⁵ (Fig. 3) Bishop Baltasar Jaime Martínez Compañón's *Codex Martínez Compañón* (1782–1785) contains a more detailed watercolor drawing of a guinea pig. (Fig. 4) What is particularly interesting about Martínez Compañón's drawing is the context surrounding the image. This drawing was part of a larger scientific compendium detailing the native plants, animals, people, clothing, customs, and even the popular music in Peru, where he was Bishop of Trujillo. Although he wrote the descriptions and compiled the codex, the over a thousand watercolor images were drawn by unidentified local Peruvian artists.⁶ He sent 9 volumes of his manuscript to Charles IV of Spain in 1789 along with actual examples of specimens, including three guinea pigs; one red, one white, and one gray.⁷ He also sent two guinea pig shaped vessels to Brazil, which are the same reproduced in Cowie's essay.

There is only one painting of note in the category of indigenous South American art with imagery of guinea pigs. It is a painting which hangs at the Cathedral of Cuzco, Peru, and depicts a common religious subject, the Last Supper.⁸ It was painted by Marcos Zapata, an indigenous artist associated with the Cuzco school of painters, who were active in colonial Peru in the 16th, 17th, and 18th century. However, this painting, The Last Supper, painted in 1753, looks quite

⁵ Yamamoto, 33-35.

⁶ Helen Cowie. "GUINEA PIG," *New World Objects of Knowledge: A Cabinet of Curiosities*, edited by Mark Thurner and Juan Pimentel, (University of London Press, 2021), pp.191.

⁷ Sandweiss and Wing, 50.

⁸ Christina Zendt. "Marcos Zapata's Last Supper: A Feast of European Religion and Andean Culture," *Gastronomica*, 10, no. 4 (2010), pp. 9–11.

different from its European counterparts. (Fig. 5) In this last supper, the figure of Jesus is almost overshadowed by what appears on the table before him and the twelve apostles: a roasted guinea pig on its back, feet in the air, on a large platter. This is an extremely significant piece of art for several reasons. Firstly, it is the only verifiable example of a guinea pig as a food source in a painting of the Last Supper, according, to Alison Lee Palmer, author of “The Last Supper by Marcos Zapata (c. 1753: A Meal of Bread, Wine, and Guinea Pig)” for *Aurora: Journal of the History of Art*. It is also symbolically significant. Palmer points out that the Cuy, a common sacrificial animal and food source in Peru, replaces the image of a roasted lamb, which became popular in the portrayal of European Last Supper paintings during the Renaissance. The Lamb is traditionally symbolic of Christ's sacrifice in Christian art. This painting is a prime example of colonial Peruvian art, as it showcases the mixing of two cultures, one colonial and one indigenous, and their respective iconographies. Artists of the Cuzco School studied European prints and paintings, and were taught by Spanish and Italian painters and missionaries. However, many of the Cuzqueño painters, like Zapata, incorporated regional culture into their works. Also interesting about this painting is the figure of Judas, on the right side of the composition, staring out at the viewer as he clutches his bag of coins. It is commonly acknowledged as a portrait of Francisco Pizarro, the Spanish conquistador whose expeditions led to the fall of the Incan Empire.⁹

Although many aspects of pre-Columbian culture have not survived European conquest, the guinea pig has. Cuy is still a delicacy in South America, still primarily in the Andes region, and to a lesser extent, is a part of festivities and traditional medicinal remedies. There remains a creative element as well; hollowed, decorative gourds are carved in the likeness of a guinea pig and sold as percussive instruments. (Figs. 6,7) In Churin, Peru, there is an annual festival in

⁹ Palmer, 54–73.

which elaborate homemade costumes are made for guinea pigs, who are then paraded around and judged on ‘Best Dressed’, among other categories.¹⁰ South American Cuy representations are foundational to the subject of guinea pig likeness in history. The time in which guinea pigs and humans, specifically the Quechua, began to live together, as well as the evolving relationship between the two and to the wider world, is captured by small, and therefore precious fragments of art; drawings, ceramics, and one monumental painting that capture multiple regional customs and the struggle to practice them freely.

Cavy Fancy: Images in Europe and North America

Natural History Illustration

When the guinea pig arrived in Europe, it served a much different purpose in society, and there is a larger volume of work containing guinea pig imagery that spans a larger quantity of time. The guinea pig eventually made its way to the Old World as one of several creatures passed back and forth through the Columbian exchange. Many illustrations and writings about guinea pigs followed; Europeans tried to make sense of the new animal based on their own, sometimes limited, knowledge of the natural world. The first known illustration in Europe of a guinea pig is found in Conrad Gessner’s 1553 foundational natural history encyclopedia, *Icones Animalium*.¹¹ (Fig. 8) Gessner’s work combined medieval myths and knowledge of animals with contemporary observation, and was the first modern comprehensive study of the natural world. Although some drawings are by his own hand, some are attributed to Hans Asper.¹² Gessner was

¹⁰ Yamamoto, 28-31.

¹¹ Roger Maioli, “Guinea Pigs Are Neither Pigs nor from Guinea. Then Why Are They Called That in English?” Roger Maioli, February 8 2023.

¹²Angela Fischer, “Gessner, Conrad (Konrad) von: Sik-Isea Recherche.” SIK, 2016.

given a pair of guinea pigs as a gift by an acquaintance with New World connections.¹³ The woodcut print is not an accurate depiction of a guinea pig, which may be attributed to the fact that not all drawings were made by Gessner, and even some of his own descriptions are based on the observations of colleagues. The Guinea Pig, or *Cuniculo vel porcello indico* (Indian rabbit, or piglet) as it is called in the book, is more elongated and pointed, rather more like a capybara, and has five toes on each of the front and hind paws. In reality, guinea pigs normally have four front toes and three hind toes on each foot. This book and its illustrations served as a template for artists and craftsmen, including Joris Hoefnagel, an important later figure in naturalist representation.

The very first description of a guinea pig in the English language comes from cleric Edward Topsell's *The History of Four-footed Beasts* (1607), which is a translation of Gessner's *Icones Animalium*. He provides a translated description of guinea pig, giving it an English name, "Indian little Pig-Cony," (Cony being the Old English word for 'Rabbit'). Although Topsell admits that his drawing of the guinea pig is reproduced from a print he was given, it has the accurate number of digits on each foot. The face, however, is less accurate than Gessner's and more narrow, with an extended neck. (Fig. 9) There are many other, more carefully observed drawings of guinea pigs in animal encyclopedias. Joris Hoefnagel's *Animalia Qvadrupedia et Reptilia (Terra)* (1575/1580) plates were painted by hand in watercolor and gouache. *Animalia Qvadrupedia* is comprised of several volumes of works, including fish and reptiles, and even some depictions of humans. Hoefnagel was an accomplished miniaturist and manuscript illuminator and his illustration, Guinea Pig and Hedgehogs with Melon and Cobnuts shows an attention to detail not only to the animals but to the landscape and flora.¹⁴ Hoefnagel's guinea pig

¹³ Yamamoto, 12-13.

¹⁴ Lee Hendrix, "Hoefnagel, Joris." Grove Art Online, 2003

is joined by hedgehogs, sitting on a ledge overlooking water and a melon which grows off to the side. Branches hang overhead with cobnuts (hazelnuts) dangling. Although pointier in snout than the average guinea pig, they are closer in round shape and compact body than the forms depicted by Gessner and Topsell. (Fig. 10) His work marked an important transition between medieval bestiaries and scientific observation, and inspired later Dutch still life artists, including some mentioned in this essay. Josiah Wood Whymper's much later contribution to zoological literature, *Plates Illustrative of Natural History* (1843). Whymper's guinea pigs are in a setting more true to life than Hoefnagel's, as described in the text below the hand-painted wood engraving. . At the time that the book was published, guinea pigs in rural settings were often kept in cellars or stables, the latter of which is shown in the background of the guinea pigs. Keeping them in such places was thought to keep rats away, which as Whymper points out, is not factual. The figures of the guinea pig are still oddly elongated, but still much closer to a true likeness than the previous examples.

The last notable illustrations in the natural science category come from Cavy fancier handbooks in the late 19th and early 20th century. There are several reproductions of A.F. Lydon engravings in Charles Cumberland's book, *The Guinea Pig, or Domestic Cavy, for Food, Fur, and Fancy: Illustrated*, published in 1886. This book covers almost every aspect of guinea pig existence, care, and consumption, as the title would suggest. Although there are some interesting (and sometimes peculiar) anecdotes, history, and descriptions, the highlight of this book is the wonderfully observed illustrations of guinea pig breeds by Alexander Francis Lydon, a popular natural history watercolorist and engraver.¹⁵ A range of breeds are included in these illustrations, such as the long-haired Peruvian, and the cowlicked Absyssian in addition to the smooth-haired

¹⁵ Yamamoto, 69-74.

English Cavy. (Figs. 12-14) For a more accurate example of these cavy breeds, there are several photographs and an illustration that can help one identify a breed in Henri J. Wagner's *The Cavy, our Fancy Guinea Pig* (1915). (Figs. 13-17) The 'Ideal English Cavy' example is by an artist unidentified but for his last name, 'Dreese.'

Cumberland's begins with an illustration by Lydon featuring all three show breeds sharing some lettuce leaves. This book was published during a time in which the guinea pig as a show animal was beginning to take hold, and although today there are many more breeds and variations, this book is a valuable source that was part of the origin of breeding practice. There are few examples of other breeds of guinea pigs in art besides the short-hair before this book was published. This book marks a new era of guinea pig aesthetics, and illustrations of guinea pigs after this time begin to appear in other types of literature other than animal encyclopedias.

Still Life

Although Hoefnagel's illustrations provided different compositions and animals for still life painters to draw from, the earliest European painting of a guinea pig is attributed to Giovanni da Udine (1487–1564), a student of Raphael who was known for his drawings of animals and fruit. (Fig. 26) This painting is small and looks almost cropped, as only the head of the guinea pig is visible, with unidentifiable objects cut off to the side. It is probably observation-based, more accurate than contemporary scientific illustrations. Like portrait painters, still life painters were drawn to the exotic nature of the guinea pig, like in Peeter Gijssels' elaborate and opulent *pronkstilleven*, Still Life Near a Fountain (1680/1690) which even includes a monkey amongst the fruit, flowers, and vases. (Fig. 46) Another outside bounty arrangement is Felice Boselli's Still Life with Fish, Vegetables, Cats and Guinea Pig.(1695) Boselli painted several

arrangements with guinea pigs, usually on the ground eating fruit or scraps. (Fig. 47) There are also several table compositions by several artists. 18th century painter Johann Amandus Winck painted a sumptuous scene with a bust and column visible behind a large array of game animals and fruit on a table, and of course, a guinea pig, nibbling a piece of melon off to the left side. (Fig. 48) His contemporary, Jacob Samuel Beck, also frequently painted guinea pigs in his still lifes. One includes a large array of cucumbers and coincidentally, hazelnuts, which Joris Hoefnagel also included years before. (Fig. 49) Teodor Lubieniecki painted a similarly simple yet dramatic still life with a darkened background, but two guinea pigs are surrounded by fruits rather than vegetables. (Fig. 50) Emphasized in all these still life paintings is that the subject matter is the process of eating.¹⁶ This is an action familiar to anyone who has met or owned a guinea pig. Gijssels' covies enjoy some ruffage strewn around the ground in front of them, Winck's, as previously mentioned, eats melon. Beck's guinea pig holds a piece of kohlrabi leaf in his mouth from the vegetable behind him, while one of the guinea pigs in Lubieniecki's bites a leaf attached to a plum. There are many other examples of guinea pigs in still lifes by many other artists, but the inclusion of the guinea pig in the act of eating shows an attention to detail that only an artist who has studied a guinea pig from life would observe.

Portraiture

The earliest English painting of a guinea pig was painted around 1580 by an unknown Anglo-Netherlandish artist. It is a portrait of three unidentified but well-dressed English children with their ages written above their heads; a boy aged six, a girl aged seven, and another boy, five, from left to right. (Fig. 27) The boy to the left clutches a bird, possibly a linnet, while the girl in

¹⁶ Cowie, 190

the middle holds a guinea pig in her arms.¹⁷ This is the first of a series of portrait paintings of affluent children and young women, pictured with their exotic guinea pig. Two other examples of group portraits include Adriaen van der Werff's A Boy and Girl with a Guinea Pig and a Kitten (c.1680-1722), where both sitters wear large feather hats and are partially obscured by a patterned rug, seemingly in a garden with statues behind them.(Fig. 28) Another garden portrait is Jan Stolker's Portrait of Cunera van Rijckevorsel, Isaac Hubert, and Isaac Hubert Jr., painted in 1766. (Fig. 29) This is a family portrait set in a garden with large, trim shrubbery and a pond where the child, Isaac Hubert Jr., stands with a fishing pole. In front of him is a vase filled with water, with a guinea pig, sitting rather improbably on its haunches, perched at the edge of the lip. Constatijn Netscher's Portrait of a Girl with a Guinea Pig (1677) has only one figure, also a lavishly dressed girl, but fits within this grouping of guinea pig portraits, as they are all painted by Netherlandish artists. (Fig. 30) As the Netherlands was also invested in colonizing the New World, the sudden popularity of the guinea pig pet in portraiture from the late 1500's into the 1700's is in tandem with the Columbian exchange.¹⁸ However, the subject matter in James Northcote's 1800 portrait of a young woman is set in a barn, evident by the wooden ledge that she leans on, and the metal bars of which two ducks peek out of. (Fig. 31) Two guinea pigs sit on a ledge behind her, one partially obscured in a cubby, both nibbling on leafy greens. This setting adheres to the contemporary idea that guinea pigs kept away rats, as previously mentioned in Whympers's book. However, John Singer Sargent's Portrait of Gordon Fairchild, painted 1890, shows that the guinea pig was still a fashionable pet for children of the wealthy. A leading portrait painter of the time, Sargent depicts the boy in a large wicker chair, wearing simple black

¹⁷ Yamamoto, 48.

¹⁸ Yamamoto, 51.

clothes and with a guinea pig clasped in his arms. He looks to be dozing off, slumped against a propped up cushion. It is the most intimate of all of these portrait paintings and most clearly defines the status of the guinea pig near the turn of the century; an accessible yet treasured pet. (Fig. 32)

As Cumberland and Wagner's books on rearing and caring for guinea pigs were published around the turn of the 20th Century, guinea pigs became more popular as pets for essentially anyone who could provide a hutch for them (which included street vendors, as the genre painting section will detail). As such, they appear less in portraiture, no longer a status symbol or a rare animal. The guinea pig's inclusion in portraiture of the 20th and 21st Century is based on its own merit as a "delightful" and "gentle" pet, owned by the artists who painted them¹⁹. Adolf Dietrich, a Swiss Naïve artist, raised many animals and made observational paintings of them, as well as surrounding landscapes and occasionally humans in his childhood home in Berlingen (Fig. 23).²⁰ Dietrich made many paintings of his guinea pigs, but only one that he, too, appears in; his 1948 painting, the aptly named Holding Baby Guinea Pigs (Figs. 33 and 34), where only the palms of his hand are visible, holding the small creatures. A more visible figure features in the much later painted Selbst mit Meerschweinchen (2000) by the Austrian-born Maria Lassnig. Lassnig made many self-portraits, and a few alongside several small animals, one which includes a guinea pig sitting in her hand while she stands naked and open-mouthed, looking off to the side. (Fig. 35)

Genre Scenes

¹⁹ Charles Cumberland, *The Guinea Pig, or Domestic Cavy, for Food, Fur, and Fancy: Illustrated*. London, United Kingdom: L. Upcott Gill, 170, Strand, W.C., 1886, pp. 89

²⁰ Richard Phillips, Adolf Dietrich, and Gianni Jetzer. *Richard Phillips, Adolf Dietrich: Painting and Misappropriation*. New York, New York: Swiss Institute Contemporary Art, 2010.

Jan Brueghel the Elder, son of famed Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel the Elder, was successful in his own right, becoming court painter in 1606 to Archduke Albert of Austria and his wife, Isabella, who owned a menagerie in Brussels. The couple owned three guinea pigs, among other exotic animals, and Brueghel himself wrote that he studied the animals that lived there.²¹ Brueghel went on to create several large history paintings with guinea pigs present, some of which he collaborated on with his friend and fellow artist Peter Paul Rubens. Brueghel was known for his meticulous detail work²², and in addition to mythological and allegorical works, was known for flower still lifes, as well as his landscapes. The guinea pigs are paid the same attention to detail. In fact, they are so distinctively marked, that this exact pair can be identified in several other paintings. Dorothy Yamamoto suggests the theory that perhaps these two guinea pigs with which he was so familiar, might have been his own. Marta Wiktoria Bryll supports this theory in her article “Secrets of Pets in Art” when she adds that guinea pigs were “easy to look after and keep in the studio.” One of Brueghel’s guinea pigs has a black face with a white nose stripe and a ginger rear, the other is mostly ginger with a band of black fur around the middle. In the collaborative *Allegory of the Sense of Smell* (c. 1617-1618), *Flora and Zephyr* (1617), and *The Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man* (c. 1615), the pair are picking at pea pods, while in *Virgin and Child Surrounded by Fruit and Flowers* (Early 17th century), they chew on leaves. (Figs. 36-41) This constant depiction of eating, as previously mentioned, confirms the notion that he probably closely observed guinea pigs from life.

There are later genre paintings that mark the transition from exotic and coveted companion to common pet and stable inhabitant. George Morland’s *Selling Guinea Pigs* (c.1789)(Fig.43) and Octavius Oakley’s *Interrupted Happiness* (19th Century) (Fig. 44) both demonstrate examples of

²¹Yamamoto, 50-51

²²Hans J. Van Miegroet, “Bruegel, Jan, I.” Grove Art Online, March 14, 2022.

how guinea pigs caught on with the common folk. In Morland's painting, an overturned basket of hay spills onto the ground, where three guinea pigs have ventured out of. One of the guinea pigs looks up to a small child on the steps, who in turn looks up to her mother, as if seeking approval to choose one of the guinea pigs offered by the man who kneels in front of her. A similar scene occurs on the steps of a schoolhouse in Oakley's Interrupted Happiness. Three beggar boys show off their wares to two other children, while a disapproving school teacher leans out of the door at the top of the steps. One of the boys holds a hurdy gurdy, while another shows off a guinea pig on the top of a portable hutch with others inside. Another hutch sits at his feet, with the straps that go around the neck visible. These portable hutches made it easier to travel and sell guinea pigs, and as the street setting shows, this made them more widely available.²³ Louis Émile Villa's La Japonaise (1878) is an example of their multiplicity; a lavishly dressed woman, this time wearing a kimono and headdress, is surrounded by five calico guinea pigs, one which pulls at her sleeve from a cage, while the others sit and hide around her feet. (Fig. 45) This painting illustrates the tastes of the wealthy of that time, which still tended toward imported goods. Generally speaking though, the 1800's saw a rise in the guinea pig outside the gilded cage.

Children's Literature; A Shift into 20th Century Guinea Pig Art

Through children's literature, one can trace the view of guinea pigs as an exotic New World specimen to a common and sometimes comical children's pet. They are some of many visual mediums that exhibit a change in cultural significance of the guinea pig throughout time. As the 19th century came to a close, this became more apparent.

²³ Howard N. Oakley, "Paintings of Guinea Pigs and Goldfish." The Eclectic Light Company, January 10, 2022, <https://eclecticlight.co/2022/01/22/paintings-of-guinea-pigs-and-goldfish/>

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll was first published in 1865, and many more editions were published into the 20th century, often with different artists as illustrators. Although the white rabbit is closely associated with Wonderland, guinea pigs are also present in several parts of the story as anthropomorphized side characters. A particularly memorable example is when the guinea pigs revive a lizard with brandy after he is kicked up and out of a chimney by Alice.²⁴ Gwynedd M. Hudson's illustration (Fig. 18) for the 1922 edition features guinea pigs in nurse's uniforms, with one supporting the lizard, Bill, while the other pours brandy into his mouth. Several onlookers are present, including hedgehogs, who carry a stretcher, a group of snails, and a beetle who holds up the tail. Beatrix Potter also illustrated this scene in 1893, with two, less cartoonish, guinea pigs, who hold Lizard Bill's hands. (Fig. 19) Her guinea pig illustrations in her own storybooks are more varied. In *Appley Dapply's Nursery Rhymes*, Potter describes the routine of an "amiable guinea pig," as he dresses. Her drawings show him brushing his wild hair, similar to that of an Abyssinian guinea pig, the adjustment of his bowtie in the mirror, and a final image of him, dressed from top to bottom, including a top hat and cane.²⁵ The book also features a lovely image of three (unclothed) guinea pigs nestled in a basket. Potter later published *The Fairy Caravan* in 1929, in which one anecdote revolves around a guinea pig named Tuppenny, which was borrowed from Potter's guinea pigs, of which multiple were given the name. In the story, both Abyssinians and "smooth-haired" guinea pigs are included, the former are fancily dressed and aristocratic while the latter hold regular jobs such as greengrocers. (Figs. 21-24) Guinea pigs still featured occasionally in children's books in the later 20th century such as *Olga da Polga*, a series of books first published in 1971, in which the protagonist is a guinea pig. The books were written by Michael Bond, who also created the

²⁴ Yamamoto, 125.

²⁵ Yamamoto, 127-128.

character of Paddington Bear. Olga was based on his daughter Karen's guinea pig, who shared the same name.²⁶ The original illustrations are by Hans Helwig, and they depict a lively calico Abyssinian, who in one image stands upright on a mushroom, telling a story to her other animal friends. (Fig. 25)

Painting in the 20th Century and Onwards

The amount of guinea pig paintings generally waned after the 18th century, with some notable exceptions. German Expressionist August Macke's Little Walter's Toys (1912) is stylistically typical of an artist associated with Der Blaue Reiter, painted in broad strokes and saturated colors. (Fig. 51) Norbetine Roth, an Austrian painter and printmaker, made two studies from around the same period, one in 1910 and the other in 1921, are carefully observed gouache images that emphasize delicately rendered whiskers and strands of hay. (Figs. 52, 53) Both Macke and Roth painted guinea pigs patched black, white, and red. In the late 20th Century, Animal portraitist Mimi Vang Olsen's painting Calico Cats and Friend (1998) highlights this common color combination; two calico cats stand next to a much smaller, but similarly colored Abyssinian guinea pig. (Fig. 54) Adolf Dietrich's paintings have even more variety, as one of most prolific guinea pig painters to date. He made over a dozen portrayals of them over the span of 20 years, starting in the 1930's. Many of these are intimate portraits of mothers and their young, often nestled in baskets stuffed with hay. Some include other animals such as rabbits and birds, with flowers and lettuce, a favorite treat, making occasional appearances as well. Dietrich painted all types; long-haired Peruvians, spiky Abyssinians, and smooth shorthairs. Some albino guinea pigs even make an appearance once or twice. (Figs. 55-59) In recent years, other artists

²⁶ Yamamoto, 135-137.

have made series of guinea pig studies; British artist Dan Hays began making photorealistic portraits in 1995, and still does, occasionally. (Figs. 60, 61) Dusseldorf based artist Cornelius Völker created a series in 2003, though his portrayals are much more expressively painted, with broad strokes and splatters. (Figs. 62, 63)

There are many painters and illustrators of guinea pigs left undiscussed in this analysis of paintings and drawing because there is quite a large number of works that span a larger amount of time than the works made in South America. This fact only serves to further drive the point home that guinea pigs were not an unpopular painting subject for a time; there are many still lifes, other portraits (mostly of children), and genre scenes. This is important to note, because, with a few exceptions, the appearance of guinea pigs in art decreased greatly at the start of the 20th century. Those who did portray them usually had a special interest in guinea pigs, and were owners themselves. Although they appear in significantly less paintings, they soon become subjects of sculpture, enough to merit a few mentions.

Contemporary Sculpture

The portrayal of guinea pigs in sculpture increased since the turn of the century, perhaps due to the newer and more visually interesting breeds that began to pop up. Daniel W. Gade suggests their former unpopularity in sculpture is due to their “non-descript form.” René Méréle’s terracotta Guinea Pig (1950) is an example of this; a large, jowl-y Peruvian with flowing, wavy locks.(Fig. 64) Betty Davenport Ford’s ceramic Abyssians, created in 1968, show off the characteristic cowlicks, or ‘rosettes’ as they are called by fanciers. (Fig. 65) A more recent sculpture is Tom Otterness’ 2009 bronze work, Guinea Pigs on a Fire Truck, which is a less faithful depiction, but certainly a funnier one. (Fig. 66) Maybe it foretells a future trend in art of

the guinea pig in a comedic role. Certainly when one looks through all of the images previously made, an idea of the guinea pig's unique and sometimes amusing characteristics, both in physical attributes and habits, can be ascertained.

Conclusion

In summary, guinea pigs have not been domesticated as long as cats or dogs, but have still made their impact in the history of art. From ritual objects to exotic pets, they have remained an interest to artists and common folk alike for centuries. The guinea pig is an enduring figure in art, from ceramic vessels in the Andes to watercolor studies drawn on the coast in Trujillo. Far from being eradicated in 15th century Lima, they traveled far and wide, making their impact on art for hundreds of more years, from sumptuous Netherlandish still lifes to being bronze casted on firetrucks. They are often part of larger subject matter, such as mythological genre scenes or still lifes, small but carefully rendered. For viewers of the past, it was the thrill of seeing something new; now, it is exciting to see something now so commonplace in society examined through an artistic lens. People may think there is even less guinea pig representation out there than there actually is, but that is because the key to finding a guinea pig in art, like a Brueghel painting for instance, is simply looking a little closer.

List of Illustrations



FIG. 1.—Pre-Incan ceramic guinea pigs from the Moche culture on the north coast of Peru. (Reproduced from Max Schmitt: *Kunst und Kultur von Peru* [Berlin, 1929].)

Figure 1. Moche vessels, dated 100-750 AD, reproduced in Daniel Gade's article *The Guinea Pig in Andean Folk Culture* for the *Geographical Review*.



Figure 2. Moche representing a pig as symbol of the Andes, one of the few domesticated animals in pre-Columbian American Andean culture, ca. 1000-1470, ceramic, Peru (photo by H. Gonsky)

Figure 2. Chimu Vessels 950-1470 AD, sent by Compañon to Brazil, and photographed here by Helen Cowie for her essay, "GUINEA PIG."



Figure 3. Page from The First New Chronicle and Good Government (1615) written and illustrated by Felipe Guaman Poma. Depiction of a guinea pig held up as sacrifice to an Incan deity.



Figure 4. Unknown Peruvian Artist, watercolor of a Cuy with ear and mouth details, for *Codex Martínez Compañón* (1782–1785)



Figure 5. Last Supper (1753) by Marcos Zapata, a late member of the Cuzco School of painting. Depicts a roasted Cuy on a platter at the Last Supper, with other foods indigenous to Peru. Notice Judas, in the right hand corner, who is said to bear a resemblance to conquistador Francisco Pizarro.



Figures 6 and 7. Guinea pigs carved in gourds to be used as musical instruments. Made and sold in modern-day Peru.



Konrad Gessner's entry on the guinea pig, from *Historia Animalium* (1554).

Figure 8. Conrad Gessner *Icones Animalium* (1553)



Edward Topsell's entry on the guinea pig in *The History of Four-footed Beasts* (1607). Translated from Gessner.

Figure 9. Edward Topsell, *Pig-Cony*, *The History of Four Footed Beasts* (1607). *Cony* is the Old English word for 'Rabbit.'



Figure 10. From Joris Hoefnagel's *Animalia Qvadrupedia et Reptilia (Terra)* (c. 1575/1580.). Plate 48: Guinea Pig and Hedgehogs with Melon and Cobnuts. An accomplished manuscript illuminator, these illustrations were made in watercolor and gouache.

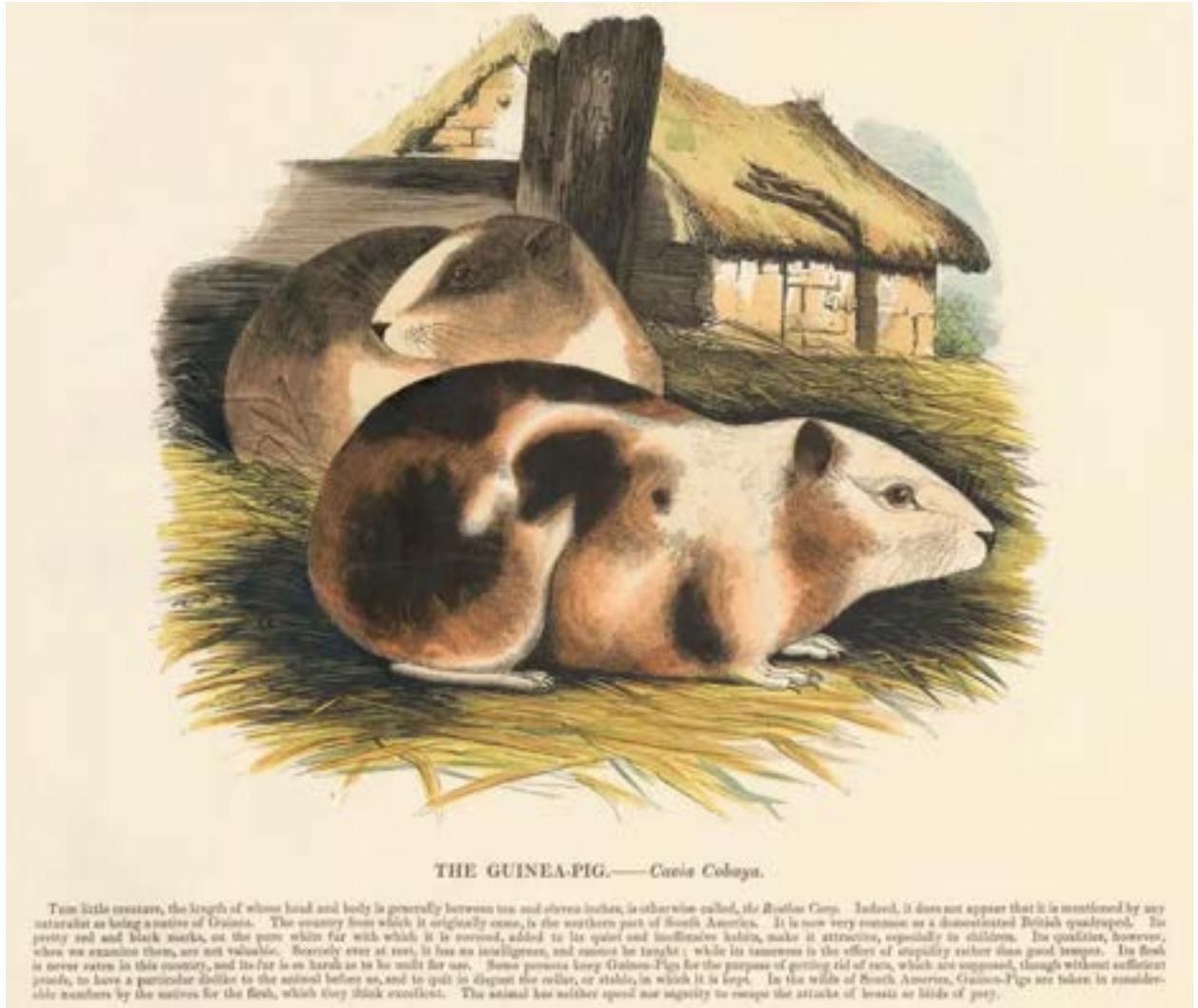
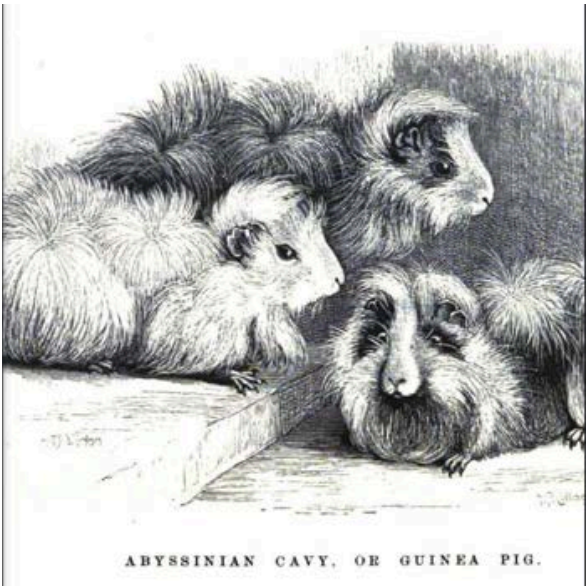


Figure 11. Josiah Wood Whympers’s “The Guinea-Pig” from *Plates Illustrative of Natural History* (1843). Whympers sets the guinea pigs near a stable, where they are kept by some “for the purpose of getting rid of rats.”



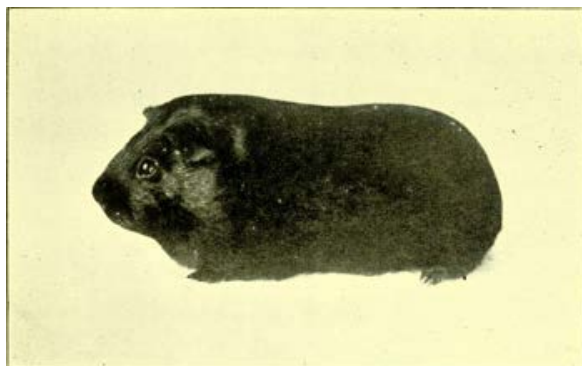
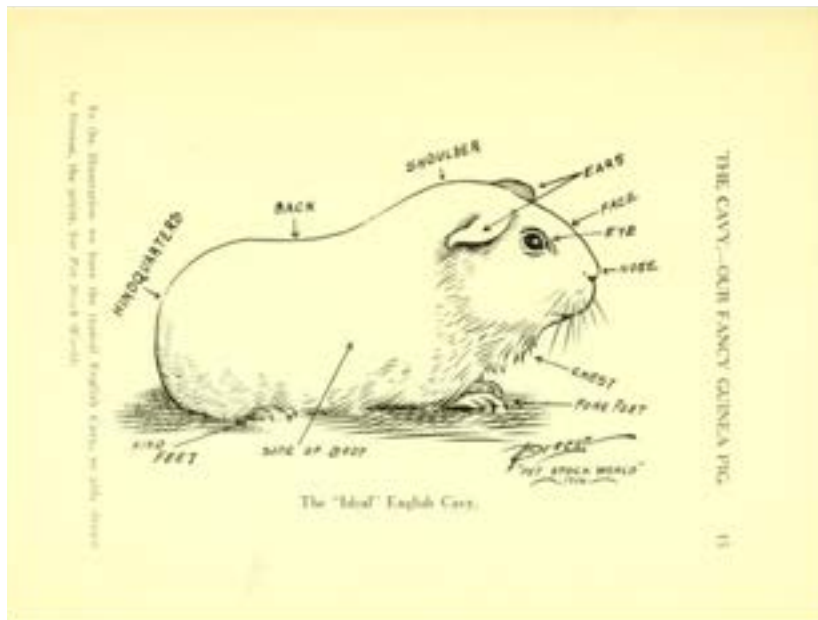
PERUVIAN CAVY, OR GUINEA FIG.



ABYSSINIAN CAVY, OR GUINEA FIG.



Figures 12, 13, 14. Alexander Francis Lydon, engravings for *The Guinea Pig, or Domestic Cavy, for Food, Fur, and Fancy: Illustrated* 1886





Figures 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. Diagram of the 'Ideal English Cavy' by 'Dreese' and photos of a Smooth Cavy, Peruvian Cavy, and Abyssian, respectively. Reproduced for Henri J. Wagner's *The Cavy, our Fancy Guinea Pig* (1915).



Figure 18. Gwynedd M. Hudson, 'Guinea Pigs Supporting Lizard Bill', for Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1922).



Figure 19. Beatrix Potter's illustration of the same scene from *Alice in Wonderland* (1893).





Figures 20, 21, 22, 23, and 24. Beatrix Potter's drawings of an 'amiable guinea pig' and Guinea pigs in a basket for *Appley Dapply's Nursery Rhymes* (1917) and scenes from *The Fairy Caravan* (1929).



Figure 25. Hans Helwig, *illustration for "Olga da Polga" 1971*



Figure 26. Giovanni da Udine (1487–1564), 'Head of a Guinea pig.' Possibly cropped, due to the inclusion of other objects in the foreground.



Figure 27. Unknown Anglo-Netherlandish artist *Unknown Elizabethan Children* ca. 1580. This is the earliest known European painting of a guinea pig alongside human figures.



Figure 28. Adriaen van der Werff, *A Boy and Girl with a Guinea Pig and a Kitten* (c.1680-1722). Both children hold a pet, though the kitten looks rather hungrily at the boy's guinea pig.



Figure 29. Jan Stolker *Portrait of Cunera van Rijckevorsel, Isaac Hubert, and Isaac Hubert Jr.* 1766. The guinea pig sits on the lip of the vase in front of the family.



Figure 30. Constatijn Netscher's *Portrait of a Girl with a Guinea Pig* (1677). Part of the British Royal Collection, acquired by George IV.



Figure 31. James Northcote's *Portrait of a girl with ducks and guinea pigs*. (1800)



Figure 32. John Singer Sargent's *Portrait of Gordon Fairchild* (1890).



Figures 33 and 34. Adolf Dietrich, *Holding Baby Guinea Pigs* (1948), and the artist pictured with two of his guinea pigs.



Fig. 35. Maria Lassnig 'Selbst mit Meerschweinchen' (Self with Guinea Pig)(2000).







Figures 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, and 42. Jan Brueghel the Elder, 'Allegory of the Sense of Smell,' collaboration with Peter Paul Rubens (c. 1617-1618), 'Flora and Zephyr', with Rubens (1617), 'Virgin and Child Surrounded by Fruit and Flowers', with Rubens (Early 17th century), *The*

Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man or *The Earthly Paradise with the Fall of Adam and Eve*, with Rubens (C. 1615), *The Return from War: Mars Disarmed by Venus*, with Rubens, (C. 1610), *The Entry of the Animals into Noah's Ark* (1613).



Figure 43. George Morland, *Selling Guinea Pigs* (c.1789).



Figure 44. Octavius Oakley, *Interrupted Happiness* (19th Century).



Figure 45. Louis Émile Villa, *La Japonaise* (1878). The guinea pigs and kimono are both exotic goods, but have no relation to each other besides that fact.



Figure 46. Peeter Gijssels, *Still Life Near a Fountain* (1680/1691). This painting is an example of *pronkstilleven*, a type of ornate Netherlandish still life.



Figure 47. Felice Boselli, *Still Life with Fish, Vegetables, Cats and Guinea Pig* (1695). A painting of excess, complete with a guinea pig eating in the forefront.



Figure 48. Johann Amandus Winck, *Still life with a Bust, Dead Rabbit, Poultry, and Guinea Pig* (18th Century).



Figure 49. Jacob Samuel Beck, *Guinea Pig with Hazelnuts and Cucumbers* (18th Century).



Figure 50. Teodor Lubieniecki, *Still Life* (Late 17th century).



Figure 51. August Macke, *Little Walter's Toys* (1912). Walter was Macke's son. Here again, the guinea pig is relegated to a children's pet.



Figures 52 and 53. Norbertine Bresslern-Roth's guinea pig studies (1917, 1921). Bresslern-Roth was a printmaker and painter known for her depictions of animals.



Figure 54. Mimi Vang Olsen, *Calico Cats and Friend* (1989). All three animals share the same patches of color.







Figures 55, 56, 57, 58, and 59. Adolf Dietrich, 'Angora Guinea Pig Family' (1951), 'Guinea Pigs and Canaries' (1954), 'Nine Guinea Pigs and Edible Flowers' 1953, 'Guinea Pigs in a Basket' (1941), 'Guinea Pig and her Young' (1946).



Figure 60 and 61. Dan Hays, 'Guinea Pig' series (1995-Present).



Figures 62 and 63. Cornelius Völker, from the series 'Meerschweinchen' (Guinea pig) 2003.



Figure 64. René Mérelle 'Guinea Pig' (1950), terracotta.



Figure 65. Betty Davenport Ford, ‘Abyssians’ (1968), ceramic.



Figure 66. Tom Otterness, ‘Guinea Pigs on a Fire Truck’ (2009), bronze.

Bibliography

- Bryll, Marta Wiktoria. “Secrets of Pets in Art.” *Daily Art Magazine*, July 31, 2023.
- Cumberland, Charles. *The Guinea Pig, or Domestic Cavy, for Food, Fur, and Fancy: Illustrated.* . London, United Kingdom: L. Upcott Gill, 170, Strand, W.C., 1886.
- Gade, Daniel W. “The Guinea Pig in Andean Folk Culture.” *Geographical Review* 57, no. 2 (1967): 213–24.
- Maioli, Roger. “Guinea Pigs Are Neither Pigs nor from Guinea. Then Why Are They Called That in English?” Roger Maioli, February 8, 2023.

- Oakley, Howard N. "Paintings of Guinea Pigs and Goldfish." The Eclectic Light Company, January 10, 2022.
- Palmer, Alison Lee. "The Last Supper by Marcos Zapata (c. 1753: A Meal of Bread, Wine, and Guinea Pig)," in *Aurora: The Journal of the History of Art* 9 (2008), 54–73.
- Phillips, Richard, Adolf Dietrich, and Gianni Jetzer. *Richard Phillips, Adolf Dietrich: Painting and Misappropriation: Exhibition, Swiss Institute Contemporary Art, New York, May 6 - June 26 2010 ; Kunstmuseum Thurgau, Warth, June-August 2011*. New York, New York: Swiss Institute Contemporary Art, 2010.
- Sandweiss, Daniel H., and Elizabeth S. Wing. "Ritual Rodents: The Guinea Pigs of Chinchu, Peru." *Journal of Field Archaeology* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 47–58.
- Cowie, Helen. "GUINEA PIG." In *New World Objects of Knowledge: A Cabinet of Curiosities*, edited by Mark Thurner and Juan Pimentel, 187–94. University of London Press, 2021.
- Hendrix, Lee. "Hoefnagel, Joris." Grove Art Online, 2003.
- J. Van Miegroet, Hans. "Bruegel, Jan, I." Grove Art Online, March 14, 2022.
- Wagner, J. Henri. *Cavy, Our Fancy Guinea Pig*. Baltimore, Maryland: Pet Stock World Company, 1915.
- Whympere, Josiah Wood. *Plates Illustrative of Natural History*. London, United Kingdom: Published under the direction of the Committee of General Literature and Education, appointed by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1843.
- Woollett, Anne, Ariane van Suchtelen, Tiarna Doherty, Mark Leonard, and Jørgen Wadum. *Rubens and Brueghel: A Working Friendship*. Los Angeles, California: Getty Publications, 2006.
- Yamamoto, Dorothy. *Guinea Pig*. London, United Kingdom: Reaktion Books, 2015.
- Zendt, Christina. "Marcos Zapata's Last Supper: A Feast of European Religion and Andean Culture." *Gastronomica* 10, no. 4 (2010): 9–11.