



feast your eyes

Kasha Van Sant takes a closer look at the masterpieces on the walls of some of the best eateries in town

When it comes to viewing the wealth of art in the capital, London's major galleries are the first ports of call. However, opportunities for chance meetings with a David Hockney or a Jackson Pollock are increasingly likely now that exclusive restaurants are incorporating art into their overall dining experience. Indeed, the appetite for art is on the rise, and it is not just the abstract expressionism of Pollock or the cubist contortions of Picasso that look down on many a perfectly-presented plate. Works by contemporary talents are also growing in popularity.

MASTERS VERSUS CONTEMPORARY

The use of art can reveal a great deal about a venue; whilst some choose a

blend of Masters, others keep it to a genre. The famed Le Gavroche serves its Michelin-starred classic French cuisine accompanied by a continental art menu, with Spanish artists such as Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso and Joan Miró particularly favoured. For chef de cuisine Michel Roux Jr., the art makes a big impact on his customers and can lead the ambience of the restaurant.

For him the choice of artists, as it is for many collectors, is based on a passion for possessing the great Masters. Although, upon closer inspection, Roux Jr. alludes to art imitating life to some degree. "Picasso and Dalí were revolutionary artists and, I suppose, in our field, the Roux family has been revolutionary too. My father and uncle made a significant impact

when they first opened Le Gavroche in the Sixties; it was down to them that things really started to turn around for the UK dining scene."

Art is a matter of taste and choosing pieces for display is purely interpretive. You may think that Soho institution L'Escargot, being distinctly French, would follow in Le Gavroche's continental European theme. Here, however, the works of the modernist Marc Chagall rubs shoulders with a surrealist Joan Miró, expressionist Henri Matisse and pop artist David Hockney. You can also sit in the shadow of the impressive Mauro Perucchetti gold-leaf *Oligasaurus* sculpture, and even Picasso's ceramics get a room upstairs. Arguably, it seems that decisions are based purely on preference rather than





IMAGES OPPOSITE PAGE: THE IRY HIRSH; CUT AT 45 PARK LANE. THIS PAGE: TOP RIGHT: SCOTT'S; BOTTOM: HIX AT THE ALBEMARLE

the deeper meaning of what adorns the walls.

BRIT ART

At CUT at the 45 Park Lane hotel, Wolfgang Puck's first venture in Europe, the choice of art is being used to entice not just the discerning clientele whose own walls at home feature similarly high calibre artworks, but to create an art hub for the young arty crowd. The artist of choice here is Damien Hirst, whose *Psalm* prints, a series of butterfly-like compositions, have been used to enhance the steak-eating experience.

The decision to opt for Hirst was a collaborative effort between chef-founder Wolfgang Puck, architect and designer Thierry Despont and

art curator Roy Ackerman. According to restaurant director Loyd Loudy, "The inclusion of Hirst's work in CUT reflects the hotel's ethos to provide an environment akin to that of our guest at home, where it is normal for them to have stunning artwork on the walls of

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their house and apartments," He adds, "While there are many restaurants and hotels that have excellent artwork in their public areas, it is very unusual to have artwork of this standard in guest rooms as well."

It is Britart greats that are also favoured by another hotel dining experience. At HIX at The Albemarle, situated within the five-star Brown's Hotel, executive chef Lee Streeton and director of food Mark Hix have created an outstanding menu featuring great British classics – think rack of Launceston lamb with rosemary-roasted artichoke hearts.

It seems fitting then that this spot of Union Jack flag waving should be paired with works by leading British artists, including Tracey Emin, Michael Landy and Bridget Riley. Perhaps the most dominant piece, however, is *Eyescape* by famed photographer Rankin. As a celebration of the human iris, Rankin has said that he was fascinated by how the iris and pupils suddenly took on



the expansive qualities of a landscape picture when seen this close. It's a captivating piece.

EXPERIMENTAL ART

As HIX at The Albemarle and CUT at 45 Park Lane demonstrate, it seems that the new breed of art is as vital as the Masters. At Scott's Restaurant in Mayfair, London-based artists Mustafa Hulusi and Paula Kane make an appearance in the intimate Art Deco-styled private dining room, while the rest of the Martin Brudnizki-designed interior is nothing short of a rival to London's top art galleries, with works hung throughout the dining space.

At Sketch meanwhile, the feel is altogether more experimental. This year marks the venue's 10th anniversary, and to celebrate it charged Turner Prize-winning artist Martin Creed with the task of transforming its Gallery restaurant. Opened earlier this year, the space now blurs the boundaries

between art, food and design, becoming at once a restaurant and a glamorous exhibition and events space.

Diners are immersed in art here, with 96 different types of marble zigzagging across the floor to comprise Creed's *Work No. 1347*, while cutlery, glasses, chairs and tables – each one different – make up *Work No. 1343*. To complement

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the experience, three Michelin-starred chef Pierre Gagnaire has designed a menu inspired by Creed's artistic creativity, with dishes such as Turnips Martin Creed (think three tips of turnip presented as paintbrushes with the other delectable ingredients creating an artistic swish of colour) tantalising the taste buds. This is the epitome of an art-led dining experience and it is one to savour.

WHERE TO DINE & VIEW

CUT at 45 Park Lane
45 Park Lane, W1
020 7493 4545
Artist: Damien Hirst

HIX at The Albemarle
Brown's Hotel, Albemarle Street, W1
020 7493 6020
Artists: Tracey Emin, Michael Landy, Rankin, Bridget Riley

The Ivy Restaurant and The Club at The Ivy
1-5 West Street, WC2
020 7836 4751
Artists: Noel Coward, Howard Hodgkin, Tom Phillips

The Club at The Ivy
Artists: Maggi Hambling, Damien Hirst, Andy Warhol

Le Gavroche
43 Upper Brook Street, W1
020 7408 0881
Artists: Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso

L'Escargot
48 Greek Street, W1
020 7493 9393
Artists: Marc Chagall, David Hockney, Henri Matisse, Joan Miró, Pablo Picasso, Mauro Perucchetti

The Rib Room
Jumeirah Carlton Tower, Cadogan Place, SW1
020 7858 7250
Artist: Feliks Topolski

Scott's Restaurant
20 Mount Street, W1
020 7495 7309
Artists: Mustafa Hulusi, Paula Kane

Sketch
9 Conduit Street, W1
020 7659 4500
Artist: Martin Creed

