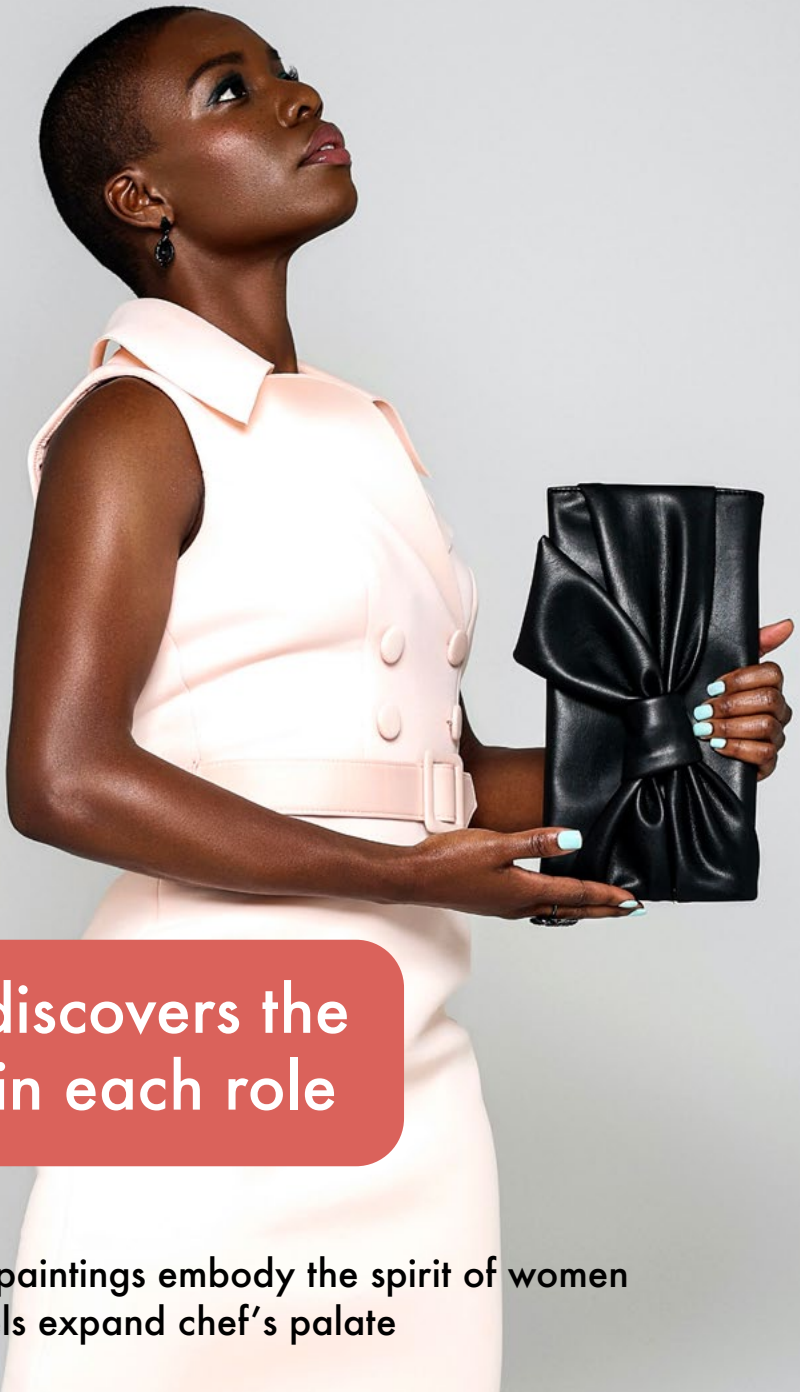


unity



Celebrating Food, Art & Culture

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Actor discovers the magic in each role

INSIDE:

**Sculptures, paintings embody the spirit of women
World travels expand chef's palate**

Unity is published in February (Black History Month), March (Women's History Month), May (Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month), June (Pride Month), September (Hispanic Heritage Month) and November (Native American Heritage Month).

Actor discovers the magic in each role



"There's a lot that goes into making a project and my piece is a small piece," says Alexis Louder, whose acting credits include parts in television and films. Photos by Jarrelle Lee

Atlanta-based actor Alexis Louder packs light when she travels for an audition or filming. Her bag is ready with a blanket for impromptu naps on set, brown sugar for tea and coffee (because hotels don't always have it on hand, she says) and a mobile taping setup (for on-the-road auditions).

A native of Charlotte, North Carolina, Louder landed in acting on a fluke: She needed an elective her senior year in high school and chose a drama class. She was terrible on stage, she admits, but something ignited inside her. She applied to the theater department at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, studied acting and graduated in 2013.

In 2014, Louder moved to Atlanta to pursue a career, first in community theater and then in [film and television](#). Her first major production was in 2018, a five-episode guest star role as Lisina in "The Originals," a vampire series on The CW. She continued to get parts in projects such as "Black Panther," "The Terminal List" and "Watchmen."

In "The Tomorrow War," an Amazon Original Movie released in 2021, Louder's character, Diablo, fought alongside Dan Forester, played by Chris Pratt, to save the Earth from aliens. In the same year, she played a fierce rookie police officer in [Copshop](#), opposite Gerard Butler and Frank Grillo. Louder plays an estranged wife in "[Violent Night](#)," a Christmas action film, released in late 2022.

Her newest role as Lillian Kagwa in "The Changeling," an Apple TV+ series, is based on the fairy-tale thriller by [Victor LaValle](#). "It's not very often that you have people of color in the space of weird fantastical," Louder says. "I feel like this show encapsulates it all: There's a bit of magic. There's a bit of family, fairy tale and it's scary."

Before shooting "The Changeling," the cast did a table reading of every episode over two days. "It was electric," Louder says. "The whole room was vibrating. When we finished the second day, the level of excitement for what we were about to embark on, you could taste it."

When she's filming, Louder starts the day by playing a Bible study on [YouVersion](#), an online ministry with access to devotions and scripture.

Louder acknowledges it takes many people to make a film. She talks with everyone involved, from the person who drives her to set to the people wiring her up for sound. "There are so many people involved in making sure you look like what you're supposed to look like when you get on camera," she says. "There's a lot that goes into making a project and my piece is a small piece."

After a long day on set, Louder returns to hair and makeup to have everything removed. Once back at the hotel, she crawls into bed and calls her mom to tell her how it went. "The day ends," she says, "but I don't want it to end."

Louder's mom, Velda Djan, and younger brother, Ahmad Holmes, are her support system in Atlanta. Holmes helps care for Hamilton, Louder's Great Dane, while she's traveling and Djan prays for Louder in a war room (a reference to the 2015 film, "War Room") she's set up in a closet in their Atlanta home.

Family has kept Louder grounded. "Being of service to my family when I am home is good for the spirit, body and mind," she says. "Then you are so much more than your work. You find meaning in other things in life. It keeps you humble."



Wakeboarder rides high in extreme sport



Mary Morgan Howell took up wakeboarding early in life – when she was 6. Photo by Jason Lee

Twenty-year-old Mary Morgan Howell has one thing in common with gymnasts, skiers, skateboarders and snowboarders. Like those aerial-defying athletes, Howell spends a lot of time practicing tricks on a trampoline, the one located in the backyard of her childhood home in Dothan, Alabama. Though she's training on land, Howell's athletic pursuit is of the aquatic variety.

At the age of 6, Howell was introduced to wakeboarding on Compass Lake in Alford, Florida, just 45 minutes from Dothan. She and her dad learned together. By age 8, Howell wanted to focus on the sport. Her parents supported her decision to be home-schooled so she could have more time to train. "The thing that was booming when I was around 4 or 5 years old," Howell says, "was this new thing called wakeboarding."

In 2021 and 2022, she was ranked the No. 1 wakeboarder by the World Wake Association, the sport's governing organization. Howell trains on land when she's working on a new trick.

Wakeboarding is a relatively new water sport created in the 1980s in Australia and New Zealand. A wakeboard looks like a snowboard. The participant – standing in two boots mounted on the wakeboard – performs stunts and tricks while being towed 75 feet behind a boat that's traveling at 18 to 25 miles per hour on a lake. "I jump the wake, that the boat creates, to do tricks," Howell says.

At 10, she competed in events under the World Wake Association. "I entered the big leagues," Howell says, "and really started learning tricks."

Tricks comprise spins and flips. Spins start at 180 degrees and go to 1,260 degrees, or 4 1/2 rotations. Howell performs eight tricks at a competition. So far, she hasn't done anything above 720 degrees, which is two full rotations.

"A key foundational element of wakeboarding is how you cut into the wake that you hit to do the trick," she explains. "You can either cut in on your heels, which is heelside, or you cut in on your toes, which is toeside. If you can put spins and flips together in the same trick, it's called a mobe."

Howell's dad recognized his daughter's wakeboarding abilities were exceeding his coaching skills and hired coach Andrew Adkison. Since she was 10, Howell has trained three days a week on the water with Adkison, owner of Experience Wake and a two-time WWA champion. She also includes strength training in her routine and practices her flips and spins on the trampoline.

A nutritionist guides Howell's diet to make sure she's getting enough calories to fuel her activity. Howell's menus stay fairly the same, even before a competition. Howell posts workout videos and healthy recipes on her Instagram account, @marymorganhowell.

Howell is a sophomore studying international business, communications and Spanish at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, close to Orlando, a popular place for wakeboarders because of the number of lakes in the area. This year, her season begins in March with the Moomba Masters in Australia and continues with the Sixty-Third Masters Waterski and Wakeboard Tournament in Pine Mountain, Georgia.

In 2022, Howell spoke to a group of girls attending a camp through JSAW, an action sports ministry and nonprofit in Minnesota. "I wanted to encourage those girls to be themselves," she says. "That's been the theme of my life, my career in wakeboarding, everything has been to be myself. Each one of us was created uniquely, with gifts. If you have breath in your lungs, you have purpose. You may not know what it is at this point in time, but you have purpose and it's unique from anybody else in the room."



Mary Morgan Howell attends university at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, close to numerous lakes to practice her sport. Photo by Tyler Soden

Sculptures, paintings embody the spirit of women

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Women's History Month celebrates the fascinating and necessary accomplishments of women around the world. This trio of artists represents the vast and varying interests and creative production of women artists from our global communities.

JUNKO YAMAMOTO

Long before becoming a professional artist, Junko Yamamoto found herself attracted to beautiful tapestries and kimono fabrics. Her work, "After the End," draws from the rich and vibrant colors of these cultural materials close to Yamamoto's heart. "Multicolored threads woven into fascinating and captivating textures inspire me to recreate my own versions of them with liquid paint on woven canvases and, with my soft sculptures, digitally illustrated images printed on fabric," the artist says.

Born in Japan, Yamamoto later moved to Seattle, Washington, to pursue her art career. She graduated with honors from the Cornish College of the Arts with a bachelor of fine arts. During her time in college, she sharpened her skills in paintings, sculpture, and printmaking. She attempted to work in a representational style, which means to paint people and objects similar to how they exist in real life.



"After the End" by Junko Yamamoto

Yamamoto also went back to her more abstract style, as seen in "Manifestation." The artist paints a cool gray over a fusion of bright oranges and dark blues. Geometric shapes lay on top to create interesting depth.



"Manifestation" by Junko Yamamoto

Similar to artists like Frida Kahlo, Yamamoto does not solely focus on her femininity in her work. However, she feels deeply that leaving space for the nurturing and loving energy natural to women is important to bring



"Between Consciousness" by Junko Yamamoto

to her artwork. "Between Consciousness" plays with this idea. Yamamoto roughly brushes orange paint onto the wall while playful sculptures hang from the ceiling in various shapes, sizes and colors. Through using these various elements, Yamamoto creates a gentle space that invites viewers in an unexpectedly feminine manner.

TRACI RABBIT

Artist Traci Rabbit is a proud member of the Cherokee Nation, and she strongly resonates with her responsibility as an Indigenous woman artist as evident in her work, "Stands Alone." Wrapped in a garment of dark lush tones, a Native American woman with sharp features fiercely looks directly at the viewer with confident defiance. Rabbit paints a large top hat on the figure with the wind softly blowing through her violet hair. In the blood red background, the artist positions a herd of buffalo marching behind the fierce woman.



"Stands Alone" by Traci Rabbit

For Rabbit, art not only represents a way to express herself and her community, but also an opportunity to connect with her late artist father, Bill Rabbit. Her mentor and protector led a successful career creating and selling paintings and other items representative of his creative and Native American heritage. Despite her father's constant support during her adolescence, she did have some doubt in her own ability to walk in her father's footsteps. Nonetheless, he never stopped encouraging her and trying to help her career with his own connections. However, Traci Rabbit insisted on "finding her own voice" and credits hours of consistent and determined practice to becoming the artist she is today.



"Remembering" by Traci Rabbit

Her somber painting, "Remembering," depicts a Native American woman dressed in washes of purple and blue paint, which seems dedicated to the memory of loved ones like her father and other ancestors.

The Oklahoma native feels her paintings represent the ability to "fly in the face of all that comes, with fierce dignity, energy and strength, and they also capture women's ability to be gentle, yielding, kind, and passionate." All of these seemingly contradictory qualities combine flawlessly in her work, "Strength of a Woman," where a serene woman glides across the canvas with feathery brush strokes. Her strength is not brash or boastful but powerfully felt in its grace.



"Strength of a Woman" by Traci Rabbit

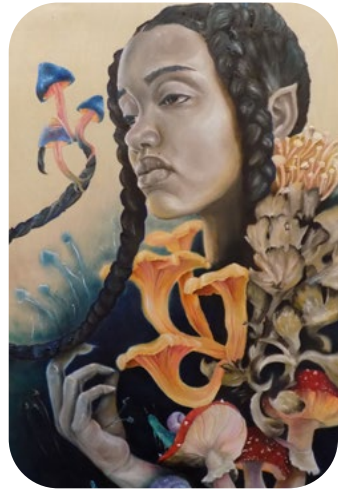
SLOANE SIOBHAN

In 2019, Sloane Siobhan bet on herself and her artwork, uprooting her life to drive cross country for a new life in the deserts of Las Vegas. The 2 1/2 years Siobhan spent there deeply challenged her but inspired her to create new works. In her work, "Mushroom Nymph," Siobhan paints a Black girl with long braids softly surrounded by colorful mushrooms of different shapes to symbolize growth and change.

Another painting, "Pieces of You," features another young Black lady looking calmly at the viewer.

Siobhan abstracts her curly afro into dots of paints across the artwork.

Despite setbacks, the artist traveled to Las Vegas with the intention of "elevating (her) art" and accomplished exactly that. According to Siobhan, these times provided her with "much-needed character development" and enabled her to step fully into her power as a "melanated queer woman."



"Mushroom Nymph" by Sloane Siobhan

Siobhan was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, and works across different mediums to create her mythically themed artwork. Siobhan



"Pieces of You" by Sloane Siobhan

graduated with her bachelor of fine arts in studio art from Appalachian State University in 2016. The artist frequently references the oral traditions of African American storytelling and Yoruba folklore in her work and seeks to share the lessons of her ancestors with her audience.

"A Blues for Nina" memorializes famous musician and activist Nina Simone and references the cult-classic 1990s romance, "Love Jones." Siobhan uses her paintbrush to bring Simone's rich ebony skin to life on the canvas and adds swirling piano keys around the crown of her head instead of hair. Similar to Nina Simone, Siobhan believes it is important for young, aspiring artists to "listen to your own artistic voice because it will guide you to learning yourself through your work."



"A Blues for Nina" by Sloane Siobhan

World travels expand chef's palate



"Through food we can heal," says Chef Tanya Cauren. "Like music, food brings us together." Photos courtesy of Barberic Design Marketing Agency



Tanya Cauren's earlier career in fashion, traveling the world, influenced her next profession: cooking, creating recipes and helping others.

When the pandemic slowed down the economy and provided less opportunities for Chef Tanya Cauren, she created "[HereInMyKitchen](#)" in 2021. Cauren shares her knowledge of cooking techniques and recipes for a variety of dishes from her kitchen in Charlotte, North Carolina, her home since 2016. "I built a website," Cauren says. "I started a brand."

Raised in Long Branch, New Jersey, Cauren grew up with memories of helping her grandmother in the house and kitchen. "If you wanted money from Nana, you had to earn it," Cauren says. "Earning it might be picking strawberries or cleaning windows, whatever she needed."

Before [HereInMyKitchen](#), Cauren traveled the world, applying what she learned at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. She led technical design teams for Boston Proper, Chico's FAS Inc., and Soma.

"I was fortunate to come into the fashion industry with a degree in fashion design at a time when the world was opening up and expanding," Cauren says. "International trade was becoming a more common thing for apparel."

Each time Cauren visited a different country, her palate evolved and she'd return home and cook, usually by trial and error. "If I went to Sri Lanka, I wanted to make Sri Lanka food," she says. "If I went to Israel, I wanted to make Middle Eastern food."

Two years after exiting the corporate world in 2016, Cauren enrolled in Central Piedmont Community College's culinary school, graduating with an

associate degree in culinary arts in 2020. "I was a pretty good cook," she says. "I wanted to sharpen the skills and learn the language of a professional kitchen. My intention was to work with not-for-profits."

While at CPCC, she interned at Community Matters Café, part of the Charlotte Rescue Mission, a nonprofit and faith-based residential addiction recovery program. She enjoyed feeding people, teaching them how to cook and do more with what they have, she says. It solidified her next steps in her career. "My goal is to help move humanity forward," she says. "Through food we can heal. Like music, food brings us together. If you really want to know someone, break bread with them because there's an exchange of words and feelings."

Cauren continues to volunteer with not-for-profit organizations. In 2022, she was paired with celebrity [Chef Chris Aquilino](#) for a wine dinner in Charlotte to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. She's a board member for the American Culinary Federation, Charlotte Chapter.

Visitors to [HereInMyKitchen](#) purchase recipes, more than 30, developed by Cauren. The varied options include instructions for Blender Crustless Spinach Quiche, Falafel With a Twist, Jack The Mack's Mac & Cheese, Seared Salmon with a Ginger and Soy Marinade and Soul Food Sunday Oxtails.

"My palate is diverse based on the exposure I've had over 30 years of working in fashion and international trade," she explains. "Imagine traveling the world that much - the food was fantastic."

Grit Medallions

Servings: 6

Ingredients

- 4 cups water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup stone ground grits
- Vegetable oil to coat a small pan

Directions

Bring water, salt and butter to boil over high heat. Add the grits, stirring constantly, ensuring there are no lumps. Reduce the heat to a low simmer and cover. Stir frequently to ensure the grits do not stick to the bottom of the pan.

Cook until the grits are creamy, about 40 to 60 minutes, adding more salt if needed in the last 10 minutes. Lightly oil a small pan with high sides, about 1/2-inch to 3/4-inch deep. Pour in the grits. Smooth the top of the grits with a spatula to create an even surface and depth. Let cool to room temperature.

Refrigerate until solid. Using a biscuit cutter, with a straight up and down motion, cut each medallion. Warm, serve or refrigerate.

Options: Add cheese or herbs to the grits to create new flavor profiles. Sauté the medallions over low to medium heat in a nonstick pan to brown and/or warm. Serve as is or top with your favorite protein.

hereinmykitchen.com/product-page/grit-medallions



*“Like music, food
brings us together.”*

Photo by Barberic Design
Marketing Agency

Flying mission: Find new homes for 15,000 animals every year

After South Carolina resident Debi Diefendorff Boies' Doberman died in 2007, she wanted to adopt another Doberman rescue. With the help of Boies' network of organizations, she found Brock within a month. He was a 4-year-old male living with a rescue group in Ocala, Florida, almost eight hours away by car.

Boies asked friends if anyone was driving through Florida who would be willing to give Brock a ride, either part of the way or all the way to Boies' home in Landrum. "My pilot friend in Knoxville, Tennessee, offered to fly down and bring him (Brock) home to me," Boies says.

Brock's flight to his forever home planted the seed for [Pilots N Paws](#). Boies, a retired OB/GYN nurse, founded the nonprofit in early 2008. The mission is simple: Volunteer pilots transport animals from one location to another. Typically, dogs are flown to a rescue shelter from an unsafe situation or are on a list to be euthanized.

Pilots N Paws celebrates 15 years this month. Boies estimates 15,000 animals are transported yearly. Funding comes from private donations.

According to [ASPCA estimates](#), 920,000 cats and dogs are euthanized in shelters each year, a decline from 2.6 million in 2011. The site also reports about [6.3 million cats and dogs](#) enter



Debi Diefendorff Boies with her Doberman, Brock. He is one of 180,000 animals that have been transported by Pilots N Paws since the nonprofit started 15 years ago. Photo courtesy of Pilots N Paws



Pilot Eva Huang finds joy by volunteering her aviation skills – and plane – with Pilots N Paws. Photo courtesy of Eva Huang

shelters each year, approximately 4.1 are adopted and more than 800,00 are returned to their owners.

Although dogs are the primary passengers, flown from point A to point B, pilots have carried a variety of animals – cats, goats, a dolphin, sea turtles, a bear cub and injured raptors.

Rescue organizations and shelters complete a form to request transport of an animal. Once posted, details such as how far the animal needs to travel, breed or type of animal, and contact information are included. Six thousand pilots are registered with Pilots N Paws. Each time a new flight request posts, pilots living along the route are sent an automated email. "If they can help, they reply to the person making the request," Boies says. "Then those two parties work together to get the mission accomplished."

Michigan-native Eva Huang has been transporting animals since spring 2021 – she loves the idea of combining her love of animals and flying. On her first flight with Pilots N Paws, she brought three Huskies from Frankfort, Kentucky, to a Husky rescue in Parkersburg, West Virginia. "Pilots N Paws is known within the pilot community," Huang says. "I fly around for fun, so why not do it toward a good cause."

She's completed about eight trips with Pilots N Paws, the longest being three hours one way. "Every time you fly them, it's like they know you're helping them," Huang says. "They're so sweet, and they want nothing but love and affection. If I can bring them to that, it brings me joy."

On the cover: Actor Alexis Louder. Photo by Jarrelle Lee. Articles on pages 2, 3, 6 and 7 by Vanessa Infanzon. Article on pages 4 and 5 by Jade Flint.

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