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Talking Fashion



Taste MAKERS

A fresh crop of culinary talent is rewriting the menu in the food world—just don't call them chefs.

Call it culinary fatigue: Between our aptly named social-media “feeds” and the constant chase to the latest destination restaurants, the days when three square meals were enough to satisfy the appetite seem quaint—which makes this new guard of gourmets all the more of a palate cleanse. These three innovators in the food scene are neither working the line nor brandishing Michelin stars. Instead, they're staking out their own territories at the intersection of the culinary and art (yes, art) worlds. And for two spheres long dominated by men with bravura personalities, it's telling that some of the most nuanced voices now inhabiting the gray spaces in between happen to be women.

JULIA SHERMAN

HER ONLINE PROJECT, SALAD FOR PRESIDENT, PROFILES ARTISTS THROUGH THE LENS OF FOOD. A COMPANION COOKBOOK WILL BE PUBLISHED THIS MAY BY ABRAMS.



LAILA GOHAR

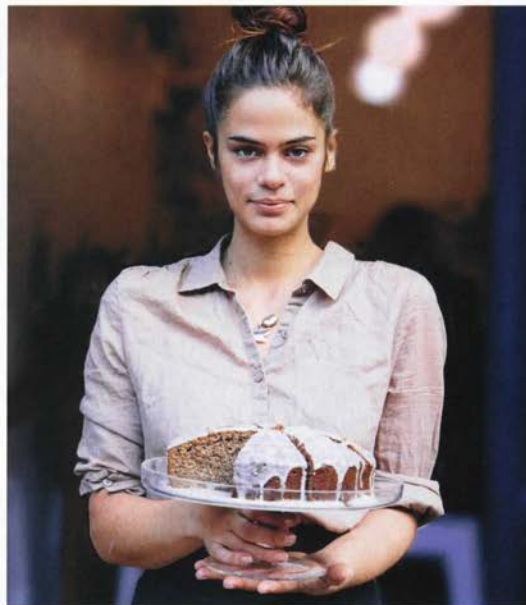
THE CAIRO NATIVE BLURS THE EDIBLE AND THE EXPERIENTIAL IN HER HIGH-CONCEPT INSTALLATIONS. ABOVE, LEFT: SWEET AND SAVORY POWDERS SHE CREATED FOR A RECENT SHISEIDO EVENT.

The hors d'oeuvres at an event run by **Laila Gohar** flip the script on white-glove fare. The Cairo-born New Yorker has become a sought-after liaison in fashion, art, and design circles, known for translating brand visions (including those of Jason Wu, Galerie Perrotin, and Opening Ceremony) into interactive food experiences. You might find yourself sifting blush-pink powder (pulverized beets and hibiscus) over mango spears at a Shiseido launch, or test-driving her bergamot-flavored take on Pop Rocks in a multisensory exploration of taste and sound. The results are inventive and thought-provoking, as was her installation late last year at NADA Miami Beach: a facsimile Katz's Delicatessen, complete with free pastrami sandwiches, in homage to the Jewish delis that once peppered the local neighborhood. So what if her work defies easy categorization? “To be honest,” Gohar says, “I'm not really concerned with calling it something.”

Lexie Smith is also one to skirt labels—including “pastry chef,” her official role at Lalo, **Gerardo Gonzalez's** Mexican-inflected café that opened to instant fanfare in downtown Manhattan last fall. A Brooklyn-based artist

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LEXIE SMITH

MINING AND SUBVERTING TRADITION WITH HER RESTAURANT CREATIONS, THE BAKER AND ARTIST PLIES SCULPTURAL SENSIBILITY IN HER WORK.

and baker, Smith has a sculptural way with loaves, often incorporating the braided or willfully misshapen masses into her still-life photography, and her menu items marry her twin loves of elemental techniques and soulful ingredients. Kabocha squash replaces apple in her flaky tarte Tatin topped with caramelized millet, while purple yams, known as ube, and bright magenta beets lend shocking color to brioche French toast and babka. “People really do eat with their eyes—especially now, when people are photographing their food all the time,” she says. It’s something to keep in mind as she plans future hands-on bread classes as part of her pop-up business, Reluctance Bakery.

Julia Sherman, meanwhile, is no stranger to process-based work. After running a gallery space in Los Angeles and earning an M.F.A. at Columbia University—apprenticing with a third-generation cobbler and living with Benedictine nuns along the way—she launched her online editorial project, *Salad for President*. Her focus is as much the artists she interviews and photographs (they include **William Wegman**, **Laurie Anderson**, and **Tauba Auerbach**) as the dishes they create. But the publication of her debut cookbook, *Salad for President: The Cookbook* (Abrams), out in May, marks a new, more durable contribution. “Finally—I made an object!” she says with a laugh. It’s a *salade composée* of the personalities she’s collected (including **Joana Avillez**, who supplies the winsome illustrations) and recipes that optimistically reimagine something as familiar as lunch. The artist’s worldview belongs at the table, Sherman insists: “It’s about being present and paying attention.”—LAURA REGENSDORF

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