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Portrait of a creative entrepreneur



Corine Olarte stands in front of her first solo exhibition at The Photo Outfitters in Charlotte, North Carolina, in September 2025. Photo by Ro Fajardo (Create with Ro)

Almost a year ago, photographer and mixed media artist Corine Olarte exhibited 40 of her favorite photographs in her first solo show at The Photo Outfitters, a photography shop in Charlotte, North Carolina. Many people came out to see her work, giving her “a jolt of joy,” she says.

“I was really nervous about this show,” says Olarte, a Charlotte resident. “I tried not to think too hard and trust that the process was going to lead me to the format. (The event) was a very big confidence booster.”

In 2007, when Olarte was 8 years old, she immigrated with her family from Baguio City, Philippines, to the United States. While attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s pre-med program, she assisted a student organization as the publicity chair. The previous chair showed Olarte how to use his Nikon D3100 and later gave the camera to her.

“I did not have experience with designing things for an organization or taking photos,” Olarte says. “My friends thought I had the eye for it.”

In focus

While in school, Olarte participated in a [universal basic income](#) trial - a social welfare project following 11 households from across the country. From 2017 until 2020, Olarte received \$1,000 a month to spend

however she chose. The result of the trial is the theme for “[Bootstraps](#),” a docuseries by filmmakers Deia Schlosberg and Conrad Shaw.

Although Olarte worked part time while at college, she didn’t have to work full time because of the stipend. She practiced photography and invested some of the money into better camera equipment.

“It freed up time for me to explore myself,” she says. “During that trial, I got off the pre-med track. I started dancing more and doing more artistic things. I started photographing more.”

In 2021, after graduating with a psychology degree from UNC Chapel Hill, Olarte launched [Corine Olarte Creative Co.](#) Her focus is on creative portraits, personal branding and community events.

Wide lens

As a first-time entrepreneur, Olarte attended events once a week to network and make connections with people in the community. She recommends new business owners take advantage of free classes on how to run a business and learn about grant opportunities. As for her first year as a business owner: “It was messy,” she says.

Since getting involved in Charlotte’s art community, she’s been the recipient of Charlotte Is Creative’s Helpful Unfettered Gifts (HUG) micro-grant, nominated for The Charlotte Observer’s Best Photographer in Charlotte and served as a juror in a Mint Museum photography contest. In 2024, Knight Art + Tech Expansion Fund awarded funding to 27 Charlotte-based artists and arts organizations, including Olarte. The grant provides “practitioners with the tools they need to increase the integration of technology in their work.” In 2023, she participated in the Creative Entrepreneurs Initiative through Charlotte Is Creative.

“It’s really overwhelming when you look at a business and how to start it,” Olarte says. “When you get to connect with nonprofits and organizations, they’re there to really help you and break it down.”



Corine Olarte takes photos of a client in Surf City, North Carolina. Photo by Ro Fajardo (Create with Ro)

Second chance for injured wildlife



Juliana Gill is St. Francis Wildlife Association's education coordinator and avian specialist. Photo by Marcela Herdova

In 1978, Mary Jane Mahoney founded [St. Francis Wildlife Association](#), a 35-acre wildlife rehabilitation center in Quincy, Florida. Her daughter, Emily Shaw Brann, serves as the president on the board of directors.

"Mary Jane had been doing rehab out of her garage and house before this, unofficially," says Juliana Gill, education coordinator and avian specialist at St. Francis Wildlife. "It's been a family-run nonprofit since it started."

Most years, St. Francis Wildlife admits more than 3,000 patients and serves more than 190 species. The nonprofit is "dedicated to the conservation of native wildlife in north Florida through the rescue and rehabilitation of sick, injured and orphaned wildlife, and through public education."

What do I do if I see an animal in distress?

During the springtime, animal rehabilitation centers receive many calls about orphaned animals. Juliana Gill, education coordinator and avian specialist at St. Francis Wildlife, recommends calling a local center if you answer yes to one or more of these questions:

1. Do you see blood?
2. Do you see an injury?
3. Are there fleas, flies, parasites or ticks on or around the animal?
4. Is the animal crying for an extended period?

Most animal rehabilitation centers rely on the public to call when they see an animal in distress. An initial assessment may be done over the phone to determine what the animal needs.

"We handle native wildlife," Gill says. "That can be anything from a baby racoon that fell out of a tree to an eagle hit by a car. We deal with a lot of species. In the spring and summer, we become flooded with babies."

The nonprofit is operated by five permanent staff, seasonal staff, summer interns and volunteers. The organization is funded by corporate sponsors, private donations and other fundraising efforts. Although not open to the public, St. Francis Wildlife provides educational programs within the community.

"We have a small team of ambassador animals, non-releasable wildlife, that go out regularly for educational programming," Gill explains. "One of our stars is Willow. She's a barred owl. She was struck by a car. She doesn't have enough vision to return to the wild and hunt appropriately."

Triage and treatment

After arriving at St. Francis Wildlife, noncritical animals sit for 30 to 60 minutes, giving them a chance to reduce stress after the drive.

During triage, a treatment plan, possibly including wound care, medication and physical therapy, is developed. While the animals receive treatment, they stay in an indoor enclosure. When they're finished with the medication and are ready to be released, they're moved to an outdoor enclosure for observation and to re-acclimate to the outdoor temperature.

"Once they've been outside one to two weeks, they will be cleared for release," Gill says. "If this is an adult animal, we typically try to release them back where they came from. If this is a baby or a juvenile, we pick certain release sites. Those areas usually have a source of water and acres of land for them to inhabit."



Willow, a barred owl, is one of St. Francis Wildlife's ambassador animals. Photo courtesy of St. Francis Wildlife Association

The material language of Tyler Mornéy

Through painting, textiles and design, Tyler Mornéy constructs a multidisciplinary practice that transforms material, color and form into meditations on ancestry, cultural memory and the process of reconnection.

Mornéy (they/them) is a Black queer artist and designer whose practice moves fluidly across painting, textiles, graphic design and material research. Born in Los Angeles and shaped by its cultural landscape, Mornéy grew up within a family deeply connected to Black arts and entertainment. Early exposure to creative communities instilled an enduring reverence for African diasporic traditions and Black American visual language, and formed a foundation that continues to guide their work today.

Mornéy is a graduate of Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles, where they studied graphic design and developed a rigorous approach for visual storytelling. Following their studies, they worked in the textile industry to gain technical knowledge of fabric and dye processes. This background remains central to their artistic voice.

When Mornéy returned to painting, they were reminded of when they first started in kindergarten. They recall the experience, stating, "I remember finding my groove, feeling grounded and excited as my piece unfolded. I remember thinking, 'I could do this forever.'"

Mornéy's "Combs" series operates at the intersection of ancestral memory and abstraction. Rooted in a Black American experience shaped by the cultural rupture of the transatlantic slave trade, the works consider what remains when lineage is fragmented and history must be reimagined. In processing this chasm, Mornéy began researching the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols that inspired the series over 10 years ago during their time at Otis and pieced together that knowledge into creating these works.



"Green Comb"

The comb, a functional object deeply embedded in Black life, transforms into a symbolic vessel that holds absence, care and continuity simultaneously. In "Green Comb," cool greens of different shades radiate through concentric tie-dyed patterns in the background. Through this technique, Mornéy creates a meditative field where two abstracted figures seem to sit quietly side by side in contemplation. While seated, each figure of the pair places an arm on the other, which signals intimacy to our audience.

"Yellow Comb" shifts the emotional tone through deeply hued yellows. This stark transition of color from "Green Comb" to "Yellow Comb" indicates a time to rejoice. The comb form in "Yellow Comb" is more ornate and layered with looping lines and stacked shapes.



"Yellow Comb"

Two small heads emerge within the upper structure, framed as if held or protected, while another small creature seems to crawl away on top. The vertical teeth of the comb drip down in elongated strokes. Across both works, circular patterning evokes ritual, repetition and cyclical time to allow for Black history to be felt rather than recovered.

In addition to their studio practice, Mornéy runs goodjobtyler, an art and design studio that showcases collaborative and individual projects spanning concept development, visual identity, textile experimentation and multidisciplinary execution. The studio emphasizes thoughtful research and hands-on making by bridging artistic intuition with design strategy.

Based between New York City and Los Angeles, Mornéy continues to expand their practice at the intersection of art and design, carrying their identity with pride. Across mediums, their work remains grounded in color theory, material exploration and community, using form and process to examine Black queer identity, history and the possibilities of reconnection.

Summer-solstice cookbook sampler

Hungry for some new seasonal cuisine?
Find inspiration in the pages of these
cookbooks.

Le Sud

by Rebekah Pepler

Pepler distills the flavors, techniques and spirit of the South of France into this collection of summer recipes, photographs and stories spanning the snowcapped Southern Alps to the French Mediterranean. The 80 recipes, accentuated by witty introductions and luscious photography, highlight ratatouille, two versions of salad Niçoise to homemade tapenades, pesto and aioli.

The Meathead Method

By Meathead Goldwyn

In this follow-up to his New York Times best seller, Barbecue Hall of Famer Meathead presents a grilling guide with 114 creative and inspiring recipes, built on cutting-edge cooking science. Techniques covered include grill frying, tea smoking, tandoori cooking and pizza making, all while busting popular barbecue myths along the way.

Project Griddle

By Steven Raichlen

Coveted for their accessibility and versatility, griddles are exceeding popular, and "Project Griddle: The Versatile Art of Grilling on a Flattop" features Raichlen's trademark approach with practical cooking techniques and nearly 80 recipes. It chronicles the history and geography of griddling, from the teppan of Japan to champa grilling in South America.



Salsa Daddy

By Rick Martínez

Award-winning author Rick Martínez presents 70 salsa recipes alongside 24 salsa-based meals. Raw, cooked, historic, avant-garde, basic, complex, earthy and spicy: The salsas are a diverse representation of the flavors of Mexico. Martínez explores using salsas as glazes, marinades, soups and barbecue sauces - each one perfect for summer cooking.

ArnieTex

by Arnie Segovia

Champion pitmaster Arnie Segovia shares the recipes beloved by his millions of loyal fans. A traditional blend of Southwest, Texas and Norteño cooking techniques in the kitchen and over open fire, Segovia's book features Mexican and Texas-Mexican favorites like fajitas, tamales, tacos al pastor, smoked brisket, authentic Texas chili and a Texas-size carne asada feast.

The Salad Lab: Whisk, Toss, Enjoy!

By Darlene Schrijver

This guide treats salad-making with the curiosity of a scientist and the creativity of a chef. Schrijver breaks down the building blocks of exceptional salads - from greens and grains to dressings and toppings - with simple, adaptable recipes designed to inspire home cooks to build a singular salad every day of summer.



An exercise in culinary endeavors



A former National and World Champion college athlete, Michelle Woodward is the founder of a fast-casual restaurant group in North Carolina. Photo by Jamie Robbins



Diced offers a build-your-own salad option. Photo by Forrest Mason

After graduating from college in 2013 with a degree in exercise physiology, Michelle Woodward felt lost. She'd been a world champion athlete and wasn't sure if pursuing a career in physical therapy was the right path for her. The idea for **Diced**, a casual restaurant, was inspired by her experience as an athlete who needed to eat healthy food fast.

"I made up the entire concept when I lived in Louisville," Woodward says. "I came up with the brand and the menu."

Woodward grew up in Centreville, Virginia, outside of Washington, D.C. At the University of Louisville in Kentucky, she competed in cheerleading, winning awards at the Cheerleading Worlds, National Cheerleader Association College Nationals and Team USA.

Team environment

After Woodward's parents agreed to be her business partners, she scoured the internet for a place to live and operate a fast casual restaurant. She located an old hot dog shop for sale in Cary, North Carolina, and drove from Louisville overnight to see it in person.

"It was kind of like a 'nothing to lose' situation," she explains. "I had lost my sport, and I didn't know what I was going to do. I just started from the ground up."

Since 2015, when the first Diced opened, Woodward has opened four more N.C. locations. The shops serve salads, wraps and grain bowls with options to add a protein and a homemade dressing. Customers may choose from the menu or craft their own.

Woodward attributes Diced's success to the dedication and discipline she learned as a young gymnast. In the beginning, sometimes her expectations weren't always conducive for a business setting.

"I chose to do whatever it took to make it not fail," she says. "I'm a little bit of a perfectionist so I'd come in daily with an improvement. I did that for two years."

By the time the second location opened in 2017, Woodward had a strong system in place, and she paid back her parents' initial investment.

Keeping a company culture where people wanted to work has been important to her. Woodward's proud about how many friendships and relationships form within the staff.

"One of my main goals was to make it a team environment," Woodward says. "(I wanted to) make it safe for everybody."

Strategic investment launches a longtime career



"When you prepare food that is so good," says Thompson Hospitality Executive Chef Chris Brandt, "it can make an impact on someone." Photo courtesy of Thompson Hospitality

As a Thompson Hospitality executive chef, Chris Brandt hosts chef's tables two to three times a week at corporate market cafés primarily in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He serves specialty dishes to employees, and they often compliment Brandt on the meal. Because Brandt's schedule rotates, he only returns to the same market café every few months, but employees remember him by the dishes he served them last.

"I've made it around to most of the accounts two to three times, so now the employees are starting to recognize me," Brandt says. "They'll come up and say, 'I remember when you were here last time and you did the tuna poké bowl.' When you prepare food that is so good, it can make an impact on someone."

Brandt grew up in Washington, New Jersey, 15 miles from where he lives now in Easton, Pennsylvania. Since age 15, he's worked in restaurants, always enjoying the team atmosphere and jovial environment. Brandt graduated with an associate degree in culinary arts from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, in 1994. He paid for school with grants and insurance money he received when his father died in a car accident.

"I wanted to invest the insurance money so it would be with me for the rest of my life," Brandt says. "I decided I was going to invest in schooling. I wasn't sure what I was going to do. I realized I kept coming back to kitchens; something was drawing me to it."

Before joining Thompson Hospitality over a year ago, Brandt opened 25 to 30 restaurants, including two establishments serving elevated Mexican cuisine.

"I learned this recipe (for mole Verde) from a Mexican chef named Roberto Santibañez," Brandt explains. "It's a unique sauce because people usually think of moles as very complicated, dark, often with chocolate and a lot of spices. This one is completely different. This one pairs well with roasted chicken and roasted pork. I like it because it's very unique, and it's healthy."

Mole Verde

8 servings

Ingredients

- 8 ounces raw pumpkin seeds, pepitas
- 1 cup white onion, chopped
- 6-8 serrano or jalapeno peppers, coarsely chop with seeds
- 3 garlic cloves
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Mexican oregano
- 1 1/2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 3 quarts chicken broth
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups cilantro
- 3 lacinato kale leaves
- 2 teaspoons Knorr, chicken base powder

Directions

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

Very gently toast the pumpkin seeds until puffed; do not get any color on them. Put the pumpkin seeds in a blender along with the onion, peppers, garlic, oregano, cumin, salt and 2 cups of chicken broth. Blend until the mole mixture is smooth.

Heat the oil in a pot over medium-high heat and fry the mole, then lower the flame to medium. Continue to stir until the sauce starts to thicken, simmer low for 20 minutes and add more broth if it's needed for the right consistency.

Return some of the sauce to the blender and add the cilantro and kale. Blend until smooth, return the puree back to the pot, along with the Knorr, and simmer for an additional 5 minutes.

Serve the mole over roasted chicken or roasted pork.

An exercise in culinary endeavors

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Lemon Basil Vinaigrette with Arugula Salad

Courtesy of Michelle Woodward

4 servings as the main course or 6-8 servings as a side salad

For dressing

- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 1/2 tablespoons pineapple juice
- 1 tablespoon white balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup water
- 2 1/2 tablespoons agave
- 1 1/2 tablespoons honey
- 1 1/2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 1 1/2 teaspoons garlic
- 3/4 teaspoon salt

- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 cup fresh basil
- 1/2 cup olive oil

For salad

- 10 cups arugula
- 3/4 cups shaved parmesan
- 1/2 cup toasted pine nuts
- 2 large avocados, diced
- 1 1/2 cups red grapes

Directions

Combine all the dressing ingredients, except for the olive oil, in a blender. Blend the ingredients until they're combined, then slowly drizzle the olive oil in to emulsify. Blend for another 10 to 15 seconds.

Combine all the salad ingredients in a large bowl. Drizzle with desired amount of dressing and toss to coat.

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