



A Cookbook of Artists' Creative Summer Desserts

By Julia Sherman

June 22, 2018

Seven baking-inclined contemporary artists share their go-to recipes for when they want to get their hands dirty in their kitchens.



Mari Maeda and Yuji Oboshi. Food stylist: Rebecca Jurkevich; prop stylist: Summer Moore

In the studio, an artist's job is never done; they can construct and deconstruct, reinventing forever. In the kitchen, however, cooking comes with a reliable sequence of events: a beginning, middle and end. That is even truer when it comes to desserts — recipes that tend to fall apart unless followed carefully — which is perhaps why so many artists seem drawn to creating sweets. Here, we asked seven of them to share their own back-pocket confections, the treats they turn to when trying to whip up beauty — and, perhaps, distraction — in their own homes.

Jordan Casteel

Jessica Silverman Gallery
488 Ellis Street, San Francisco, CA 94102
415.255.9508 • jessicasilvermangallery.com

Most artists jettison domestic concerns when facing a deadline, but the painter Jordan Casteel, 29, finds comfort in her Harlem kitchen. "Baking has always been my creative outlet beyond the studio," she says. Moved by the 2012 death of Trayvon Martin, Casteel began painting expressive portraits celebrating black men in 2013. And following the success of her 2017 exhibition of that work, "Nights in Harlem" at Manhattan's Casey Kaplan gallery, she's likely doing a lot more "stress baking," as she calls it.

Casteel is a self-described introvert, and baking has also become an icebreaker of sorts. In 2015, she spent three weeks at the renowned Yaddo artist residency in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., where everyone takes communal meals as a social break from solitary studio time. "I can be awkward in those situations," she says. "But when I heard artist David Colagiovanni talking about his 'life-changing' pie crust recipe to another artist, I jumped in." He shared his crust recipe and his favorite no-bake filling with Casteel; since then, not a single peach season has gone by when she didn't make this pie.



CreditMari Maeda and Yuji Oboshi. Food stylist: Rebecca Jurkevich; prop stylist: Summer Moore

Jordan's Peach Pie
Serves 6-8

For the crust (makes 3 crusts):

- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- Whole wheat flour for dusting the surface
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup butter-flavored Crisco

For the pie filling:

- 1 box peach gelatin

- 1 cup sugar
- 3 teaspoons corn syrup
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 cup water
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 3 ripe peaches, sliced ½" thick
- Whipped cream (for serving)

To make the crusts:

1. Mix flour and salt together in a medium mixing bowl. Remove ⅓ cup of the mixture and set aside. Cut in the shortening with a knife, until the mixture forms pea-size pieces throughout. Using the measuring cup you used to measure the Crisco, mix the reserved ⅓ cup flour with ⅔ cup of cold water, and stir to make a paste. Add this paste to the mixing bowl, and using a knife, work it into the dry flour. Gather the dough into a loose ball, wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.
2. When dough has chilled, cut the ball into 3 equal pieces. Wrap 2 of the pieces in plastic wrap and freeze for future use.
3. Working with the remaining ball of dough, transfer to the kitchen counter or a large wooden board, dusted with whole wheat flour. Roll from the center to the outer edge, turning and flouring the dough as you work to prevent it from sticking to the board, until you have a round shape that is slightly larger than a 9½-inch pie dish.
4. Fold the dough in half, place in a pie dish and unfold. Press it down with your fingertips, and pinch the edges tight to the perimeter of the dish. Poke the bottom with a sharp knife 4 to 6 times. Bake crust in lower third of oven, at 425°F, 10 to 12 minutes or until edges and bottom are golden brown.

To make the pie filling:

1. Mix gelatin, sugar, syrup, cornstarch and water together in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil on a high flame, stirring constantly. Boil for 1 minute and remove from heat.
2. Add salt and vanilla. When the mixture has cooled, add sliced peaches and stir until they are coated with the gelatin mixture. Pour into the baked pie shell and refrigerate until set, about 1 to 2 hours. Serve with whipped cream.

Will Cotton

"A meringue hat is just a tasty dessert you can wear on your head," says the painter and sculptor Will Cotton. If anyone can claim to be an expert in wearable desserts, it's him: Portraits of women in elaborate candy costumes, with the occasional meringue headpiece, have been the subjects of the 53-year-old artist's work since the early '90s. While his is a world of modern Venuses who lounge in cotton candy landscapes, it's not all fantasy; Cotton paints from life, a practice that complements his own insatiable sweet tooth. In his TriBeCa studio, the easels are only steps away from his home kitchen, where he personally bakes each confection featured in his massive tableaux.

If you find the prospect of making meringue daunting, “it’s way easier than you think,” Cotton says. “And it lasts forever as long as you don’t plan to eat it.” Though, just to be clear, the artist recommends that you do.



Credit: Mari Maeda and Yuji Oboshi. Food stylist: Rebecca Jurkevich; prop stylist: Summer Moore

Will's Meringue Hat

Serves 1

- 4 large egg whites
- Pinch of salt
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons superfine sugar
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons white vinegar
- Aluminum foil

To make the hat base:

Tear off 4 sheets of aluminum foil, roughly square in shape. Stand in front of a mirror and place 1 sheet on top of your head, pressing it down to mold it to the shape of your crown on all sides. Continue with the remaining 3 sheets, layering one on top of the other. When the 4 sheets have been molded to your head, roll the bottom edges upward, scrunching them together to create a brim around the hat. (At this point, it should resemble a tightfitting skullcap.)

To make the meringue:

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Put tinfoil hat base on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Set aside.
2. Using an electric mixer with a whisk attachment, beat the egg whites and salt on high speed until foamy, about 8 minutes. While mixer is running, add sugar in 3 parts, over roughly 3 minutes.
3. Add cornstarch, vanilla and vinegar. Continue beating at high speed until meringue forms stiff peaks, approximately 8 to 10 minutes. (Do not over-whip.)
4. Gently apply the meringue in very large dollops to the hat.
5. Transfer baking sheet to oven and bake for 1 hour 30 minutes. Turn off the heat and leave meringue in the oven overnight, to continue drying out.
6. With a pair of scissors, carefully trim away excess foil along the edge of the meringue, leaving the last layer of foil on the inside of meringue hat. Place on head.

Nayland Blake

The New York artist Nayland Blake has been inserting queer subcultures into the bastions of high art since the '70s. Blake, who goes by the pronouns they/them, references a wide array of kink — from B.D.S.M. to furies — as an artist while also pushing institutional boundaries as a curator. Blake's latest curatorial project, currently on view at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, is a show called "Tag: Proposals on Queer Play and the Ways Forward," which presents the work of little-known and emerging queer artists and celebrates the shape-shifting nature of queerness itself.

But when it comes to sweets, Blake claims to be more traditional: "My favorite dessert is a baked apple dessert, but I'm very fussy about it being tart." While Blake fondly remembers a grandmother's expert-level apple pies from a childhood spent in Bedford, Mass., the artist thinks "it would be embarrassing to make an entire pie — I can't pretend anyone else ate it but me." Instead, Blake turns to baked apples — or "bachelor's apple pie" — though, solo eating aside, the recipe has since become a standout at potluck dinners. It's nearly impossible to mess up, so long as you stick with tart apples.

Image



Nayland's Baked Apples

Serves 4

- 4 Granny Smith or Macoun apples
- ½ stick unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ cup chopped pecans or walnuts, or a combination of both

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Core the baking apples, working from the stem end. (Do not slice all the way through; leave the base intact.) In a small mixing bowl, combine butter and brown sugar with cinnamon and chopped pecans or walnuts. Fill the apples with the nut mixture. Place the stuffed apples in a 2-quart baking dish, fill with ¾ cup of water, and bake the apples uncovered until soft, about 1 hour. Let cool slightly before serving.

John Houck

John Houck is a conceptual photographer, a former computer programmer, a competitive cyclist and a trained architect. Each photo in his rigorous series "Playing and Reality," for instance, is dense with objects from his childhood — such as Lakota Sioux beadwork or his grandmother's sewing kit — and riddled with psychological cues. The photographs are printed, sliced, layered, reshot and printed again, resulting in a precise image that plays with time and space.

Houck, who is 41 and based in Los Angeles, is naturally inclined toward mathematical order and has never lacked discipline. A decade ago, he was looking for "something to give energy in the face of the torture of

grad school,” he says, so he challenged himself by adopting a macrobiotic diet. Adhering to the monkish program proved too difficult, but it did clue him into the pleasures of macrobiotic rice crispy treats. “They’re a richer, more satisfying version of the recipe with marshmallows that my mom made when I was a kid,” he says. His version uses brown rice syrup instead of refined sugar and puffed brown rice cereal in lieu of Kellogg’s Rice Krispies. The dash of umeboshi vinegar — a tart, fermented plum vinegar sold in Japanese markets — adds subtle umami and stimulates digestion. Now Houck can enjoy his favorite childhood treat and feel good about it, too.



Mari Maeda and Yuji Oboshi. Food stylist: Rebecca Jurkevich; prop stylist: Summer Moore

John’s Macrobiotic Rice Crispy Treats

Serves 12

- Vegetable oil
 - 1 cup brown rice syrup
 - $\frac{2}{3}$ cup peanut butter, almond butter, smooth cashew butter or hazelnut butter
 - 1 dash umeboshi vinegar
 - 1 dash vanilla extract
 - 3 cups puffed brown rice cereal
1. Oil a 9-by-12-inch brownie tin on all sides and set aside. In a saucepan over medium heat, warm the brown rice syrup, peanut butter, umeboshi vinegar and vanilla extract, stirring constantly until the mixture is smooth, thin and beginning to bubble. Pour cereal into a mixing bowl, add the rice syrup mixture, and mix with a wooden spoon until well combined.

2. Spoon into the oiled pan and flatten with a wet rubber spatula. Set aside to cool for 20 minutes. Slice into 3-inch squares and serve.

Dike Blair

The New York artist Dike Blair loves his drinks boozy and caffeinated. For decades, he has documented his near-ritualistic intake of beverages. While cocktails and coffee cups are leitmotifs in his photo-based oil and gouache paintings, Blair's subject matter expands well beyond comestibles to include an array of uncanny quotidian vignettes, like close-ups of foliage and moody windows studded with condensation. These intimate paintings are most often shown as a counterpoint to his large-scale abstract installations.

Blair's preferred dessert is a frozen "fun size" Snickers bar, enjoyed alongside a shot of espresso and a shot of white grappa. Blair, 66, recommends "supermarket grappa," the roughness of which he says pairs well with the cold, sugary candy. "The espresso is there to marry the grappa and the Snickers," he adds; its bitterness complements the cloying candy sweetness and the alcohol's heat. He keeps two bags of baby Snickers in the freezer at his country house at all times, a sweet reminder that it's the weekend.



Mari Maeda and Yuji Oboshi. Food stylist: Rebecca Jurkevich; prop stylist: Summer Moore

Dike's Frozen Snickers, Grappa and Espresso Serves 1

- 1 "fun size" Snickers bar, frozen
- 1 shot white grappa (such as Candolini brand)
- 1 shot espresso

1. Do ahead: place "fun size" Snickers in the freezer.

2. When ready to serve, simply pull a shot of espresso into an espresso cup and pour a shot of grappa into a shot glass. Alternate bites of Snickers with sips of each beverage.

Hayden Dunham

Hayden Dunham is fascinated by the natural and chemical substances that permeate our bodies. In 2014, the 30-year-old artist — who splits her time between New York and Los Angeles — created an alter-ego, cyborg pop star named QT, whose entire *raison d'être* was to sell an energy beverage called DrinkQT. While the work was conceptual, Dunham also produced a limited run of the canned beverage, which she distributed at highly produced performances. Similarly, for her 2015 show at New York's Andrea Rosen Gallery, Dunham developed a proprietary substance called GEL, made from over 300 different "energizing" ingredients. She pumped GEL in vaporous form through the gallery's ventilation system so that visitors could inhale the essential components of her work itself.

For Dunham, her vegan chocolate pudding — like her work — is as much about the final product as it is about the sensorial experience of making it. "I like the way the elements move, and all the textures involved," she says. Always fascinated by materials' transitory states, she revels in "the moment when you crush the lavender, and it changes from a solid into a scent."



Mari Maeda and Yuji Oboshi. Food stylist: Rebecca Jurkevich; prop stylist: Summer Moore

Hayden's Lavender Avocado Pudding
Serves 3

- 2 very ripe Hass avocados
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon honey

- 2 tablespoons raw cacao powder
- 1 small pinch crushed, dried lavender
- Pinch of sea salt

1. Scoop the flesh of two avocados into a medium mixing bowl along with the honey. Using a hand mixer (or a fork), smash and whip the avocado until smooth and creamy, sifting in the cacao powder in thirds. When all of the lumps have disappeared, add lavender and sea salt. Continue to whip until the ingredients are evenly combined, about 15 seconds.

2. Transfer the pudding to a small dish, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate 15 minutes before serving.

Rirkrit Tiravanija

It's nearly impossible to discuss food and art without mentioning the Argentine-born Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija. He is the face of the relational aesthetics movement, a genre of art that makes way for community engagement, which all began with "Pad Thai," a series of experiences he first staged at New York's Paula Allen Gallery in 1990. By serving noodles in the middle of the gallery, the New York-based artist created a space for people to come together and share a meal – a dynamic and ephemeral event that was neither performance nor traditional exhibition.

Working with the Danish art collective Superflex in 2003, he brought food back into the gallery with a show called "Social Pudding." The artists created their own boxed product, which included a packet each of instant coconut pudding and orange gelatin. Visitors were encouraged to make a layered dish while visiting the GfZK gallery in Leipzig, Germany, using the recipe provided here. "The dessert was a metaphor about coming together from different cultures, like the Jell-O and the coconut in the pudding," Tiravanija, now 56, says. Plus, as he adds, "Jell-O is the future of food – it's underrated."



Mari Maeda and Yuji Oboshi. Food stylist: Rebecca Jurkevich; prop stylist: Summer Moore

Rirkrit's Social Pudding
Serves 6

- 1 packet of orange gelatin mix
- 1 packet of coconut pudding mix

1. Boil a kettle of water. Whisk 1 cup of hot water with the packet of orange gelatin until dissolved.
2. Add 1 cup of cold water and mix. Fill a clear plastic cup $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way with the orange gelatin. Refrigerate for 1 to 2 hours, or until set.
3. Whisk 1 cup of hot water with the packet of coconut pudding for 2 minutes. Add 1 cup of cold water and continue to whisk for 1 minute.
4. Pour the coconut pudding on top of the set orange gelatin, and refrigerate for 1 to 2 hours, creating a two-layer effect.
5. Take a knife and release the pudding from the walls of the cup. Turn the cup upside down onto a plate and serve.