



The impalpable mind of
Nick Cave

Vegan soul food

High fives in the Fortune 500

On the menu at Sweet Potatoes

The quilters of Gee's Bend



This publication brought to you by:





Ursula Burns

Not a carbon copy

It's an old story with a sweet twist. An unknown kid shows up to complete a summer internship, does a decent job and, as fate would have it, winds up running a \$17 billion-per-year international enterprise. But in this case, it isn't a carbon copy of an Horatio Alger story.

In July 2009, Ursula Burns became the CEO of Xerox Corp. She is the first African-American woman to lead a Fortune 500 firm, a milestone that might have gained even more attention had it not been for the more barrier-shattering election just months before of Barack Obama to the United States presidency.

Burns is a native New Yorker who grew up in a lower East Side housing project. She climbed the corporate ladder by beginning as a summer engineering intern in 1980 and became president of the printing giant in 2002. As president, Burns oversaw a large chunk of the company's operations including overseas research and development, engineering, manufacturing and marketing.

In 2008 and 2009, Burns has been included in the top 10 of Fortune's list of most powerful women in America, both years being the second-highest placed African-American woman behind Oprah Winfrey.

Burns achieved her newfound status by overcoming a childhood that few would describe as privileged. In an interview with the New York Times, she described growing up poor in "the projects" - with "lots of Jewish immigrants, fewer Hispanics and African-Americans, but the common denominator and great equalizer was poverty." Burns' mother ran a home day care and used her meager pay to send the kids to Catholic schools. Burns graduated from Polytechnic Institute in Brooklyn with an engineering degree and received her master's in mechanical engineering from Columbia University.

Of course, in the rough-and-tumble world of international business, a feel-good story without a return on investment holds little interest. Since Burns took the helm, shares of Xerox have been up 40 percent to 50 percent. Not a bad first-year showing for the Fortune 500 newbie from the East Side.

Drill master

Twenty-eight-year Army veteran Teresa King can make a room full of would-be drill sergeants sweat with just a glance, and it would have nothing to do with the notorious South Carolina heat that blankets Fort Jackson during the summer. Command Sgt. Maj. Teresa King took command of the Drill Sergeant School at the Army's largest training facility in September 2009, a promotion that has garnered national media attention. King is the first woman in Army history to hold the position, an achievement worthy of the publicity, yet Command Sgt. Maj. Brian Stall, post command sergeant for Fort Jackson, is quick to point out the obvious. "She is simply the right person for the job," he says. King will supervise the training of about 2,000 hard-nosed, spittle-spewing drill sergeants each year.

"I've been chosen to lead noncommissioned officers who are charged with a high degree of responsibility," King stated for the Fort Jackson Leader, the official base newspaper. "I'm responsible for them as they lead, mentor, counsel and train America's finest, there's nothing else that can compare to that," she adds. She also noted that a hard worker will get ahead regardless of gender, and that enforcing standards earns respect.



Command Sgt. Maj. Teresa King takes command of the Drill Sergeant School at Fort Jackson, S.C., the Army's largest training facility. She is the first woman in Army history to hold the post.

While soldiering has provided King with an excellent career that has been fueled by her passion for the military and her highly honed leadership skills, at the end of the day there are other interests that keep her awake at night. She is working on a master's degree in theology that will complement her master's degree in business management. Biblical studies, she feels, offer yet another way to study the important task of leadership.

Challenging the laws of artistic expression

In the United States and most of the Western world, we hardly think of artistic expression as being oppressively regulated, canonized or otherwise silenced by our myriad of legal entities. We are, after all, living in a postmodern world where anything and everything goes when it comes to art. But every so often, an artist comes along and reveals to us the shackles of our own ignorance. Such an artist explosively challenges the limits of our capacity to dream and exposes the folly of setting boundaries on the human mind.

Who knows why Nick Cave is one of those artists? There are the usual clues.

First, there was the kid who was born into a family where creativity was accepted and nourished. "My seven brothers and I were given a freedom that did not recognize limits on personal expression," Cave tries to explain. "My mother's parenting style gave me a tremendous sense of self-security."

Then, there was the pursuit of academic and creative excellence — a distinguished curriculum vitae currently ends with: Associate Professor, Chair, Fashion Design, School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1990). Also noted are degrees and exhibitions in New York, the Netherlands and Germany ... but none of those facts yield a satisfactory answer. Digging deeper, we might deduce that Cave's success as an artist is simply a result of the internal and enigmatic workings of a living soul that talks to itself in a unique and cozy language quite unintelligible to others. We could point to da Vinci, who simply spoke da Vinci. Or van Gogh, who spoke van Gogh.

Then again, this writer might have effectively explained as much by simply scribing the words, "Nick Cave makes the coolest stuff ever!" Ah, the economy of ignorance.



What Nick Cave makes are Sound Suits, and since his first stitchings of twigs and other former flora in 1992, he has made hundreds of these interesting pieces, which are on display by way of a traveling exhibition, currently stationed at the Fowler Museum at UCLA in Los Angeles. You Tube also has a small collection of Sound Suit videos that show another side to Cave's work, that of the performing artist.

"The Sound Suits are sculptures, but they are also fiber arts, and they are fashion, and they are kinetic. The work truly celebrates diversity because it reaches a broad audience, particularly when the suits become part of the performing arts," says Cave. "It bridges the gap between the art institution and the general community, and that's one thing I find extremely rewarding and refreshing about this work."

Perhaps it is time to add a few more details regarding the nature of Cave's work. The inspiration for creating the first Sound Suit grew out of the 1991 police beating of Rodney King. "I was mesmerized by the whole event. I was struck by the portrayal of King as larger than life, this big, African-American man that required five cops to bring him down. He was portrayed as abnormal and threatening," explains Cave.



Nick Cave

"I was sitting in a park thinking about all this, and the idea of creating art out of society's unwanted objects came to me. I started collecting sticks and twigs, which I later crafted into a large human-like sculpture. I had no idea at the time of actually wearing the suit, but eventually, I put it on and the sound it created got me hooked."

The hundreds of Sound Suits in Cave's collection are made from discarded and found objects — buttons, clothing, dishes, hair, toys and you name it. Together, they make up a brilliant, creative and sonorous cast of characters not seen since Dr. Seuss. Cave's work is truly joyful and evocative, a rare and elusive combination in a postmodern world.





"Break Dancer" and "Scratchin' the Surface" by Sheila Prevost



Spiritual rising

Black History Month is a cultural celebration of the unique experiences, accomplishments and hopes of African-Americans. The three artists featured in this edition of *Unity* express their reflections on spirituality, life, peace and the freedom to love oneself and others through words and art. Their artwork encourages viewers to steal away from the chaos and find a gentle and serene place of being. Although the work of each artist has its individual rhythm and flair, it also connects us as a whole — human beings existing in a whirlpool of consciousness.

Sheila Prevost

Growing up, Sheila Prevost's parents made sure she had exposure to creative expression as well as a solid education. Prevost remembers her artistic uncle creating whatever she requested from his imagination, and soon she began expressing herself through her own artistic imagination. A middle school teacher confirmed her gift for the arts and Prevost's parents gave her full support and every opportunity to flourish as an artist.

Remarking on her pieces featured above, Prevost explains that "Break Dancer" is an oil-on-canvas painting that was designed to be a 7-foot-by-7-foot wall mural. "I

wanted to create a piece that would allow me to interact with it and become part of its journey," she says.

With an interest in integrating music and movement in her work, viewers can visualize its conception with Prevost spinning the unstretched canvas and dancing with it barefoot — all to a selected body of music.

Prevost's "Scratchin' the Surface," is a commissioned oil-on-canvas piece created for music producer and musician Kwiz. The producer's love for music and urban culture is captured in this painting. An exploration of digital and analog audio technology is fully integrated and reflected in this composition. The scratching of vinyl, live horns, the urban New York City-inspired landscape and an elevated train weaves rides that "brings us together like music," as Prevost likes to say.

She also explains, "I integrate and celebrate all aspects of our experience through my work. People can learn and understand the many textures and contributions

that African-Americans have made historically."

It is important to Prevost that her work embodies that statement and reflects who she is as an artist. She is currently working on a body of work that will include her paintings, moving images and original musical compositions.



"Inner City" by Sandra P. Smith



Sandra P. Smith

Artist Sandra P. Smith developed an interest in art before she could even write her name. She remembers that, at the young age of 3, her mother's crisp white doilies became her canvas. Her father was convinced that her potential as an artist was imminent, a portent confirmed by Smith's numerous days spent visualizing colors, shapes and forms. When she was a child, a guidance counselor, who recognized Smith's artistic imagination, encouraged her mother to nurture it. The inspiration and passion for art was well on its way from that point on.

In Smith's piece, "Inner City," gray tones and black lines surround a glimmer of orange light. This work was created "to give hope and encouragement to those who have lost it," says Smith. She states, "No matter where you live or how much money you may or may not have, it does not define who you are."

Smith notes that her piece, "Deep Within Your Spirit," intends to inspire viewers to be introspective. The red, brown and yellow acrylic paint, newspaper and found objects are intended to draw viewers in to find the hidden treasures we all possess and to remind us of the power of self.

Smith also states that art is not just what she does, it is who she is. Her paintings and collages are a way to share her thoughts and feelings with others. Her goal is to create "art that will inspire people to seek inner peace within themselves and take away a deeper meaning of their own life."



"Deep Within Your Spirit" by Sandra P. Smith

April Harrison

April Harrison's paintings capture and duplicate a quiet dignity of African-American life. She speaks to the "amazing strength, resiliency, determination and perseverance" of African-Americans through the use of positive imagery. Her work includes acrylics, powders, watercolors, pencils and collage. She also incorporates found objects such as coins, specialty papers, magazines and treasures found on the street. Sometimes even her nearly discarded paintings are given new life and recycled into newer works of art, thus creating a deeper texture and dimension.

Harrison celebrates the memories of children playing outside until the streetlights came on. Hopscotch, Simon Says and double-dutch jump rope were standard outdoor games back then. Hula Hoop was Harrison's favorite.

"I was often mesmerized by the sound it would make when it went round ... shoop ... shoop!" she fondly recalls. The textures and innocence in her piece, "Shoop," take her back to that time.

"Endangered Species" speaks of the urgency to preserve, protect and cherish the family unit. "Our forefathers and foremothers have left us with a tremendous responsibility to continue our lineage by forging a strong unbreakable bond of familiarity. We owe it to future generations to preserve the bond of family before it too becomes an endangered species," says Harrison.

"Shoop" and "Endangered Species" by April Harrison





Chefs Vivian Joyner and Stephanie Tyson have a loyal following at the trendy Sweet Potatoes restaurant in Winston-Salem, NC.

From Southern roots

Last year, the sweltering August heat that regularly accompanies the biennial National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, N.C., couldn't stop fans of Sweet Potatoes restaurant from standing in line for two hours to get a table. The eatery born and bred of Southern roots obviously has gained a loyal following locally and abroad. While Chefs Vivian Joiner and Stephanie Tyson enjoy the success of owning their own restaurant, quaintly located in Winston-Salem's downtown art district, the festival crowds leave them exhausted. "It's definitely a lot of work," says Tyson of the festival season, but the long hours and furious cooking come with plenty of perks. Angela Bassett, Forest Whitaker and Andie MacDowell are just a few of the celebrities who have stopped in for Sweet Potatoes' unique presentation of Southern comfort food.

Comfort food, soul food, whatever you want to call it, the menu reflects a blend of Southern, Caribbean and African-American heritage, and much, much more. Fried chicken, to be sure, is on the menu. Soaked in buttermilk and cooked at the right temperature and in the right cooking oil, the fried chicken at Sweet Potatoes is a perennial favorite. So are the fried green tomatoes. One can't be surprised that sweet potatoes are served copiously to guests, but the twist is that they come topped with coconut, diced tomatoes, cheddar cheese or a complementary ingredient of your choice.



Another favorite on the Sweet Potatoes menu, Barbecue Duck With Roasted White and Sweet Potatoes, Green Tomato and Corn Relish

Gullah Shrimp and Crab Pilau

A 1-pot meal for 4-5 from the kitchen of Sweet Potatoes restaurant.

- 1 cup diced tomato
- 1 cup uncooked long-grain rice
- 1 pound raw shrimp (21 to 25 count)
- 4 strips chopped bacon ¼ inch diced
- 2 cups peppers/onion julienne
- 2 cups chicken stock or water
- 1 teaspoon seafood seasoning mix
- 1 tablespoon parsley, plus some for garnish
- 1/2 cup crabmeat picked

In a Dutch oven with a tight-fitting lid, cook the bacon until it is crispy. Remove the bacon, set aside to drain, and pour off all the fat except 3 tablespoons or enough to cover the bottom of the pan.

Add the onion and peppers, then cook over medium-low heat until onions are transparent.

Add seasoning, tomato, rice, parsley and half of the crabmeat.

Cook for approximately 25 minutes in a pre-heated 375-degree oven.

Remove pan from oven, add shrimp, and top with remaining crabmeat and cook for an additional 15 minutes.

Remove and garnish with parsley and lemon slices.

Other items on the menu are Lowcountry — the Gullah shrimp and crab pilau is fantastic — and still others that can only be described as contemporary and creative. The Carolina salmon florentine, which sits atop a serving of sweet potato cornbread, is exceptional. And who can resist the black-eyed pea and collard green salad topped with pan-roasted mahi-mahi?

There is the moral dilemma, however, of classic Southern cooking and health concerns: High blood pressure, obesity and diabetes are serious medical issues, and the animal fats and high sodium content of traditional country-style cooking are not particularly helpful. Thankfully, a number of Southern chefs have risen to the challenge of eliminating ingredients and preparation techniques that can lead to health problems. Joiner and Tyson are among them. Smoked turkey flavors the greens, olive and vegetable oils are used instead of lard, and fried

foods are cooked judiciously so as to minimize the fat content. That said, let's be perfectly clear: Flavor is non-negotiable at Sweet Potatoes.

Considering the relaxing ambience, a full selection of wines and the moderate price of most dishes, it's no wonder Joiner and Tyson's place earns plenty of accolades and recognition. But should you come during festival month, be prepared to wait.

Gullah Shrimp and Crab Pilau



Autobiographical cuisine

What do you get when a young, culinary aficionado decides to sauté his past, present and future into one dynamite dish? You get Memphis soul chopped with Brooklyn boom-bap and topped with a health portion of Oakland, free-range funk. The recipe makes for an earthy and tangy variation of an old Southern favorite: collard greens.

The young culinary professional is Bryant Terry, eco-chef, food justice activist and author of “Vegan Soul Kitchen: Fresh, Healthy and Creative African-American Cuisine.” The idea for the collards came when he was asked to submit a recipe for another cookbook celebrating the growth of community-supported agriculture. “I told (the editor) that I wanted my first published recipe to have the ‘texture of autobiography,’” writes Terry. He recalled the rows of collards planted in his grandfather’s backyard, tasty

— but not exactly presented with pizzazz. He introduced a colorful blanching technique that preserves the rich color of uncooked greens and finished the dish with Thompson raisins and freshly squeezed orange juice. The result: a creative, healthy and refreshing variation of a soul food staple that points to the future of African-American cuisine.

Flushed with success, Terry began work on “Vegan Soul Kitchen.” The cookbook is filled with more autobiographical notes and shares recipes that were collected during Terry’s trips to Africa, the Caribbean and hot spots throughout the southern United States. But there is the V-word, a word that when mixed with traditional connotations of soul food sends most people’s brain waves spiraling out of control. The only things most people want mixed with their collards are a plump ham hock and a dash of vinegar. In fact, a small-scale food fight can erupt when the discussion of Southern comfort food is interrupted by preachings on tofu and tempeh. Terry is unafraid, in part because he’s not a preacher. He firmly advocates for people finding the diet that best works for their individual bodies.

“I do realize that veganism — the avoidance of meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, dairy products and honey — is antithetical to the way that African American and Southern cooking has been constructed ... over the past four decades,” Terry writes. But he adds, “I also hope that ‘Vegan Soul Kitchen’ helps shift African-American cuisine back to our home gardens and kitchens.”

Johnny cakes combine the best of African and Native American flavors. Using whole wheat flour and extra-virgin olive oil, the cakes are healthy and light.



Johnny Blaze Cakes

Soundtrack: “Bring the Pain” by Method Man from Tical. Makes 12 cakes. (*Page numbers refer to pages in the cookbook.*)

These crispy corn cakes are all-purpose. I sometimes serve them as an appetizer topped with Rainbow Chow Chow (page 182); as a main dish, I like them with Chilled and Grilled Okra, Corn and Heirloom Tomato Salad (page 68) heaped on top; and of course you can’t go wrong serving these with Strawberry and Slightly Hot Pepper Jam (page 177) for breakfast.

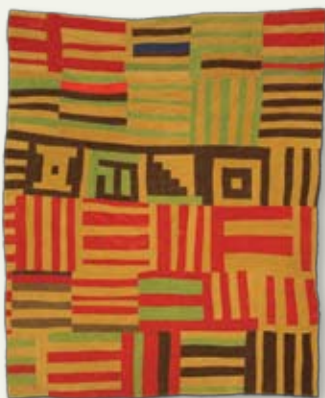
1 1/2 cups stone-ground cornmeal
1/2 cup whole-wheat pastry flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon fine sea salt
1/4 teaspoon cayenne
2 1/2 cups boiling unflavored rice milk
2 jalapeños, seeded and minced
Extra-virgin olive oil

In a large bowl, combine the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, salt and cayenne. Set aside.

In a small saucepan, bring the rice milk to a boil then slowly pour it over the cornmeal mixture, stirring as you pour. Add the jalapeños to the batter, mix well and refrigerate the batter for 20 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 250 degrees.

Warm a large, nonstick skillet or a griddle over medium-high heat and grease well with 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Add 1/4 cup of batter to the skillet per cake. A large skillet should comfortably fit 2 to 3. After about 1 minute, when the bottom starts to set, reduce the heat to medium-low, and use a wooden spoon to shape the cakes, pushing them in and up so that they are about 3 inches wide and 1/2-inch thick. Cook the cakes for 8 to 10 minutes per side, adding more oil after turning, until they are golden brown and crispy on the outside (do this in several batches). Transfer the cooked cakes from the skillet to a baking sheet and keep them warm in the oven until all the cakes are cooked.



The quilters of Gee's Bend

It started simple enough. Plenty of cotton and some old clothes plus freezing weather in an unheated shelter resulted in a clever patchwork of handmade quilts. No one judged them for their lines, colors or any other artistic value. Their job was to keep family members from freezing to death.

Undoubtedly, that scenario has unfolded many times over the course of history, but there is something special about the quilts that have come out of a small bend in the Alabama River northeast of Selma. The landscape surrounding Gee's Bend is typical of Southern back roads still recovering from the death of King Cotton. Living quietly about town are slave descendents doing their best to keep up with the times. But the specialness of the quilts coming out of Gee's Bend caught the eye of a collector, who shared the find with a prominent museum in Houston, and the rest is history ... in the making.

The quilters of Gee's Bend have something of an international following these days, and their craftwork is found not only in distinguished retail outlets but also distinguished art venues. The Flint Institute of Arts in Flint, Mich., is currently displaying a Gee's Bend collection.

It was 2002 when the quilts really took off, a success that came on the heels of a favorable New York Times profile. Art commentator Michael Kimmelmann wrote that the Gee's Bend quilts "turn out to be some of the most miraculous works of modern art America has produced. Imagine Matisse and Klee ... arising not from rarefied Europe, but from the caramel soil of the rural South."

Loretta Bennett is one of roughly 20 active quilters who are part of a 40-plus-member collective. She personally has pieced together more than 100 of the quilts that have been sold or exhibited. What keeps her going, after all the years

that include Jim Crow, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and today's powerful corporate diversity programs, is tradition. "I keep active because of our family heritage, because of my mother, my grandmother and my great-grandmother who have made these quilts and handed the tradition down to the next generation. I have been blessed with a long life, and this is a way to give back to my family and others," Bennett explains.

Speaking of corporate diversity programs, AT&T recently commissioned a quilt measuring 95 inches by 82 inches and stitched together by 46 members of the Gee's Bend Quilters collective. And Windham Fabrics, a division of Baum Textiles, recently announced a partnership to sell Gee's Bend quilt kits in stores worldwide.



Loretta Bennett

It is important to note that the last few years of acclaim pale in comparison to the many decades the quilters of Gee's Bend languished in obscurity and lived in spartan conditions. The town was founded in antebellum times and was the site of several cotton plantations, primarily owned by Joseph Gee. After the Civil War, the freed slaves founded an all-black community in Gee's Bend that was mostly isolated from the surrounding world.

It is believed that the first quilts to sport the Gee's Bend abstract designs were stitched in the early 1800s. The art survived because the younger girls picked up the craft from their mothers, female relatives or friends; yet some contemporary quilters are virtually self-taught.

Funds from the sale of quilts go to a foundation that supports the quilters and helps market the Gee's Bend brand. More information about this story can be found at www.quiltsforgesbend.com.