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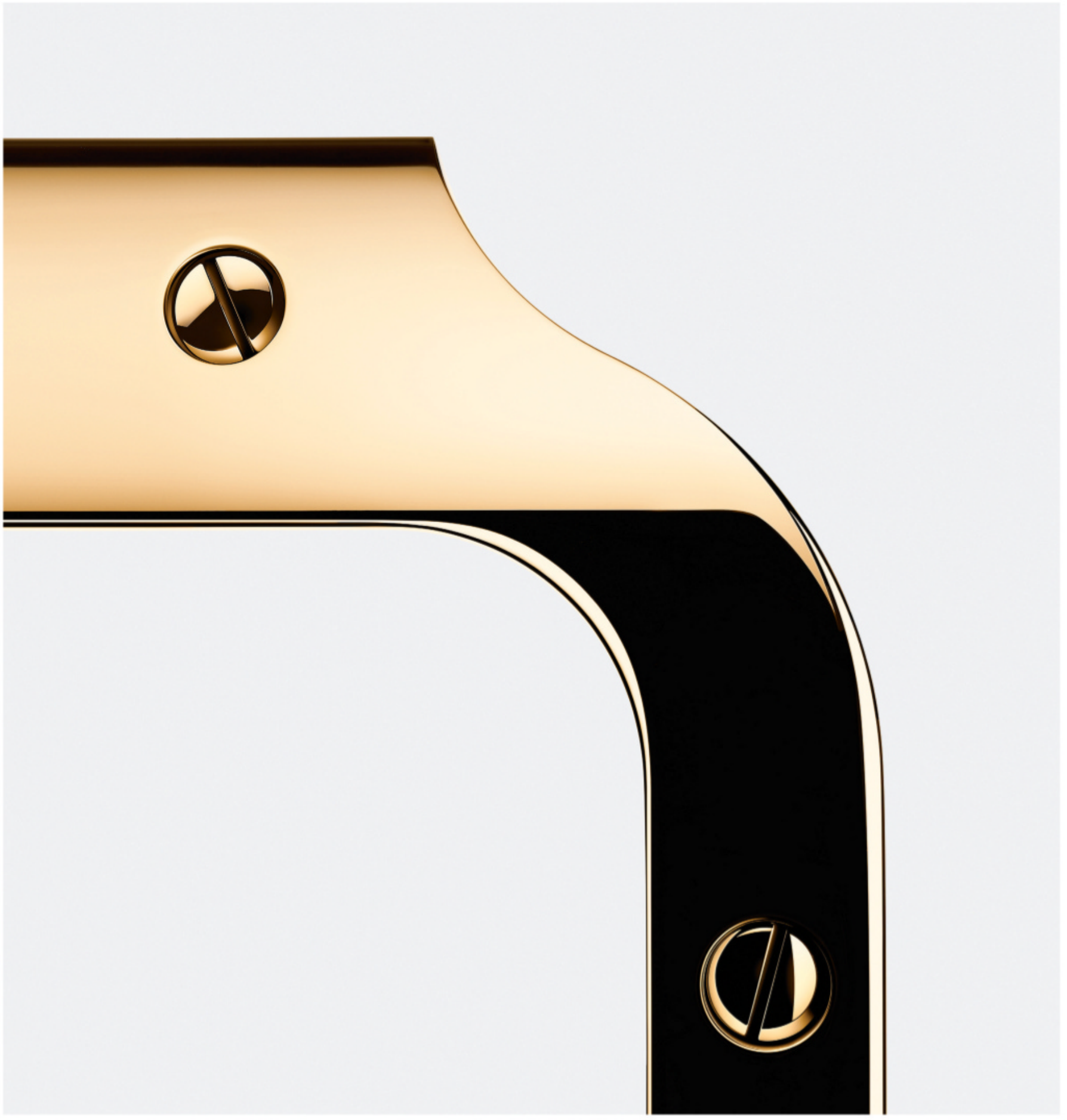
THE NEW YORKER

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CONTRIBUTORS

Sam Knight (*"An Uncertain Image," p. 48*), a staff writer based in London, recently published "The Premonitions Bureau: A True Account of Death Foretold."

Cindy Frenkel (*Poem, p. 52*) is the author of the poetry collection "The Plague of the Tender-Hearted."

Kelefa Sanneh (*"The Joker," p. 30*) became a staff writer in 2008. His first book is "Major Labels: A History of Popular Music in Seven Genres."

Victoria Tentler-Krylov (*Cover*) has illustrated several children's books. She published "Building Zaha: The Story of Architect Zaha Hadid" in 2020.

James Wood (*Books, p. 76*), a staff writer since 2007, teaches at Harvard. He is the author of, most recently, "Serious Noticing," a collection of essays.

Hilary Fitzgerald Campbell (*Sketchpad, p. 23*) is a cartoonist and a comedian. Her graphic memoir, "Murder Book," came out last year.

Molly Fischer (*The Talk of the Town, p. 20; "The Tastemaker," p. 38*) became a staff writer earlier this year.

Bono (*"Boy," p. 26*) is an artist, an activist, and the lead singer of the rock band U2. His memoir, "Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story," is forthcoming in November.

Caleb Crain (*Fiction, p. 60*) won the *n+1* Anthony Veasna So Fiction Prize this year. He is the author of "Necessary Errors," "American Sympathy," and "Overthrow."

John Freeman (*Poem, p. 65*) edits the literary annual *Freeman's*. His latest book of poems, "Wind, Trees," is due out this fall.

Roz Chast (*Sketchbook, p. 58*), a longtime *New Yorker* cartoonist, published, with Patricia Marx, "You Can Only Yell at Me for One Thing at a Time: Rules for Couples."

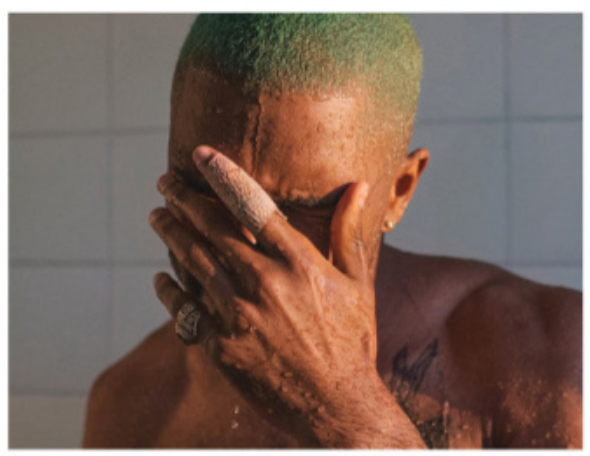
Hugo Yu (*Photographs, pp. 38–46*) is a photographer based in New York City.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



ELEMENTS

Rivka Galchen reads "The Year of the Puppy," a new book about the science of canine early development.



THE NEW YORKER INTERVIEW

Emily Witt talks with the photographer Wolfgang Tillmans about his retrospective at MOMA.

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LEFT: PETER FISHER; RIGHT: WOLFGANG TILLMANS / COURTESY DAVID ZWIRNER / MAUREEN PALEY

THE MAIL

GREATER GOOD

Gideon Lewis-Kraus's article about William MacAskill, one of the key figures in the effective-altruism (E.A.) movement, inspired me to learn more about E.A. ("Do Better," August 15th). It's hard not to admire these young people and their desire to do good. Yet, the more I read about E.A., the more I wondered why its proponents focus almost exclusively on the developing world and the future, generally ignoring problems closer to home. They don't seem especially concerned about the hundreds of thousands of unhoused people living in American cities where the tech industry has played a role in driving up the cost of housing—even though rich, tech-adjacent people seem to dominate the E.A. movement. They don't appear to talk much about gun violence or income inequality. Is this because—as I expect E.A.s would argue—an insufficient number of people are affected by these problems? Or are there other reasons, such as the fact that they don't seem solvable, or that E.A.s find it too uncomfortable to confront issues in which they themselves might be implicated?

I also wondered whether MacAskill would be able to give away all but twenty-six thousand pounds of his income if he lived in the U.S., where there is no social safety net to speak of. Here, limiting yourself to a small income can mean that you end up dependent on somebody else.

It's not that being as altruistic as you can, as effectively as you can, is a bad idea. But it seems to me that there's more to doing good than just crunching the numbers. Maybe the first priority should be to clean up your own back yard.

Shannon Stoney
Cookeville, Tenn.

The E.A.s who appear in Lewis-Kraus's article do not seem to have seriously considered a broader strategy for bettering society: progressive taxation. To be sure, the political challenges of instituting such a policy would be substantial. But one wishes that the people who lead this movement would turn their talents to efforts that have been shown to raise people out of poverty, improve quality of life, and foster a solid sense of public good. Instead, they seem largely divorced from, and averse to, the rough-and-tumble of politics. They neglect the ever-increasing need for new forms of democratic engagement that can, in turn, create institutions designed to help all of us be more altruistic.

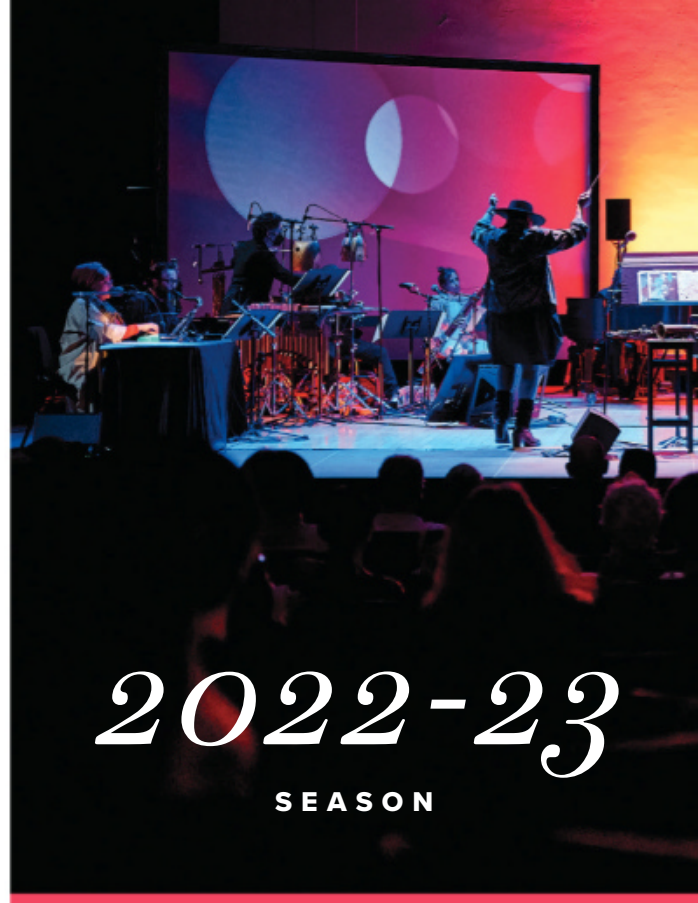
Rick Doner
Professor Emeritus of Political Science
Emory University
Atlanta, Ga.

Lewis-Kraus's piece reminded me of the cynic's version of the golden rule: "Those with the gold make the rules." Though much of what E.A.s do is commendable, I think it is worth probing the fact that their philosophy prioritizes charity over justice. E.A. groups continue in the long tradition of philanthropic organizations that operate in specific, contingent structures, while ignoring or minimizing actions that might alter the structures themselves. We proudly give alms to poor people, but we do nothing to change the conditions that create and maintain poverty. We donate to immigrant support networks but refuse to tackle immigration reform. We forgive student loans but ignore the design of student debt. MacAskill and his ilk would serve us better if they took seriously the A.I. scientist Timnit Gebru's complaint that, as Lewis-Kraus puts it, they act "as though they are above such structural issues as racism and colonialism" and instead responded to those issues directly. With all their intellect and influence, they could be a force for justice that our world sorely needs.

Alexander M. Jacobs
Milwaukee, Wis.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



"The Piano Lesson," the fourth installment in August Wilson's ten-play cycle chronicling twentieth-century African American life, reckons with the burdens of history. The Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, set in Depression-era Pittsburgh, follows a family tussling over an heirloom: a piano carved with the faces of enslaved ancestors. LaTanya Richardson Jackson's revival, at the St. James, stars John David Washington, Danielle Brooks, and Samuel L. Jackson (the latter two pictured above); Jackson appeared in the première, in 1987.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HEATHER STEN

ROCK



Some of this year's most scintillating sounds come from **Medicine Singers,** a collaboration conjoining the scorched-earth Israeli-born guitarist Yonatan Gat with members of Eastern Medicine Singers, a dramatic Algonquin drum group based in Rhode Island. Medicine Singers' self-titled album, the opening blast from Gat's Stone Tapes recording imprint, patches together players of various far-reaching traditions to gut any number of preconceptions. They land on unlikely patches of common ground, including a take on "Rumble" that casts the familiar riff by the guitarist Link Wray—not coincidentally, a rock forerunner of Shawnee descent—in powwow beats and chants. Throughout, the album breathes fire, detonating cultural walls to speak the lingua franca of international trippiness. On Sept. 24, Medicine Singers brings its psychedelic powwow to Pioneer Works in a sprawling combo that features Gat, the New Age experimentalist Laraaji, and the Sonic Youth guitarist Lee Ranaldo, all performing within a Charles Atlas installation. They conclude with a salute to the trumpeter Jaimie Branch, a frequent conspirator originally slated to appear, who died last month.—*Jay Ruttenberg*

MUSIC

Ezra Furman

ROCK During the past decade, Ezra Furman has released six full-length solo albums and one book: an entry in the 33 ⅓ monograph series which explores Lou Reed's glam-pop classic "Transformer." No doubt Furman, who calls herself a "desperately fascinated" fan of the late proto-punk icon, has learned a thing or two from that album—about mercurial narratives, aslant pop leanings, and the tensions of legibility and mystery. Her most recent LP, "All of Us Flames," offers rollicking erudition on the subjects of queer identity, Judaism, community, and survival, with a brooding sweep that might be termed heartland art-rock. Enlivened by horns, synthesizers, and sharp-witted lyrics ("The future is a text message sending"), these are resolute anthems of perpetual becoming. "If you dare to sing . . . you will reveal things about yourself," Furman wrote in her book. "A song is a bad place to hide."—*Jenn Pelly (Webster Hall; Sept. 21.)*

Jamie xx

ELECTRONIC The English producer and d.j. Jamie xx began his career as the backbone of the dreamy indie band the xx, drumming as well as playing synthesizers and samplers. After releasing a collaborative album with the poet Gil Scott-Heron, in 2011, Jamie made his solo début, in 2015, with "In Colour," a reverent ode to his club-music influences. In the years since, he's composed scores for the ballet and for a Romain Gavras film, but his chief calling is still headlining gigs to play epic d.j. sets. He shows off his eclectic taste in this big production with his fellow-producer Kieran Hebden, who performs as Four Tet. After a restless pandemic during which he released three albums in twelve months, Hebden welcomes the opportunity to discharge some pent-up energy. Together, the pair delve deep into a wide-ranging archive of dance music. Also playing: Floating Points, Avalon Emerson, and Omar S.—*Sheldon Pearce (Forest Hills Stadium; Sept. 23.)*

Arto Lindsay with Melvin Gibbs

AVANT-POP In an episode of the writer Adam Shatz's podcast, "Myself with Others," the guitarist, singer, and avant-pop producer Arto Lindsay identified the versatile bassist Melvin Gibbs as his closest collaborator. The pair's relationship reaches back to the eighties, when both were first making their respective marks in New York's noisier realms: Lindsay co-founding the No Wave trio DNA, and Gibbs backing the jazz-guitar antihero Sonny Sharrock. Later, on a fine string of albums, Gibbs assisted Lindsay—an American reared in Brazil—in combining his jagged guitar with the melodically windswept bossa nova and samba of his youth, yoked to contemporary grooves that include hip-hop and even drum 'n' bass. "When you shift tempos," Lindsay sings to one dancing subject, "won't you take me along?" The two long ago settled on a mix that enhances Lindsay's voice, a lithe, often breathy tenor.—*K. Leander Williams (The Sultan Room; Sept. 22.)*

"Monochromatic Light (Afterlife)"

CLASSICAL The Rothko Chapel—a tranquil Houston sanctuary that harbors fourteen black canvases by Mark Rothko—has inspired several compositions. Morton Feldman dedicated the nondenominational space when it opened, in 1971, with a piece that makes sparing use of very specific orchestral forces: its viola, percussion, celesta, soprano, and choir create a sound that feels like being at peace with oneself. Last year, for the chapel's fiftieth anniversary, Tyshawn Sorey, a composer who blends jazz and contemporary classical traditions in singular ways, wrote "Monochromatic Light (Afterlife)." Much taken with Feldman, he built upon the original's setup by adding piano and swapping out the soprano for a bass-baritone. Peter Sellars's staging in the Armory's capacious Drill Hall features the singer Davóne Tines, the Choir of Trinity Wall Street, original canvases by Julie Mehretu, and choreography by Reggie Gray.—*Oussama Zahr (Park Avenue Armory; Sept. 27-Oct. 8.)*

Wayne Shorter: "Live at the Detroit Jazz Festival"

JAZZ The tenor and soprano saxophonist Wayne Shorter, who happens to be one of the most significant composers in jazz history, has a tonal fingerprint on his horns, pulling listeners into his singular musical world from note one. Now in his late eighties, Shorter isn't likely to stage any further public appearances, making "Live at the Detroit Jazz Festival," a 2017 concert recording that captures one of his last live performances, a welcome gift. Working with a sympathetic, co-billed cohort—the drummer Terri Lyne Carrington, the bassist and vocalist Esperanza Spalding, and the pianist Leo Genovese—Shorter exhibits his instantly unmistakable sonic identity throughout a performance marked by intensity and uncommon musical empathy. It's not every octogenarian whose work can offer inspiration and direction to today's upcoming players, but Shorter is nothing if not a glorious anomaly.—*Steve Futterman (Streaming on select platforms.)*

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DANCE

New York City Ballet

The first week of the season is loaded with ballets by George Balanchine, including one of his most refined compositions, "Divertimento No. 15," in which a series of solos and pas de deux of great delicacy unspools to music by Mozart. On Sept. 22 and on the evening of Sept. 24, a triple bill combines two Balanchine works ("Raymonda Variations" and "Duo Concertant") with "Piano Pieces," a late Jerome Robbins ballet that the company brought back last season. The piano pieces in question are by Tchaikovsky, short works as melodic and melancholy as art songs. And although the opening and closing sections, full of pseudo-Russian flourishes, are a bit cutesy, at the heart of the ballet are three pas de deux whose quiet auras suggest friendship, love, loneliness, and loss.—*Marina Harss (David H. Koch; through Oct. 16.)*

Alan Cumming / "Burn"

In this one-man show, the slinky, raucous Scottish actor Alan Cumming takes on Scotland's national bard: Robert Burns, the son of a tenant farmer, who was a raconteur, a ladies' man, and the author of "Address to a Haggis" and "Auld Lang Syne." Burns, who died at thirty-seven from a bad heart after a life of hard living and prolific writing, is a monumental and colorful figure. Though there is scant physical resemblance between Burns and Cumming, Cumming is not lacking in charisma or chutzpah. More physical theatre than dance, "Burn" is driven by a maelstrom of words, drawn from Burns's poetry and letters, with projections (by Andrzej Goulding) and music (by Anna Meredith) at the service of Cumming's swooping, whirling performance, choreographed by Steven Hoggett and Vicki Manderson.—*M.H. (Joyce Theatre; Sept. 20-25.)*

Fall for Dance

City Center's popular festival is a mixed bag by design, each program tossing together disparate dance styles, each ticket twenty dollars. This year is short on premières, heavy on repeats and spectacle. That's especially true of the opening program (Sept. 21-22), though the spectacle of the French Algerian Compagnie Hervé Koubi's bare-chested men spinning on their heads and hurling one another into the air is reliably exciting. The second program (Sept. 23-24) offers the intrigue of a new Pam Tanowitz duet for Herman Cornejo and Melissa Toogood, and the third (Sept. 27-28) puts a new dancer (the wonderful James Gilmer) into a searching solo that Jamar Roberts made for himself in 2020.—*Brian Seibert (New York City Center; Sept. 21-Oct. 2.)*

Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods

The American-born choreographer Meg Stuart has had a distinguished career in Europe as an experimentalist. Her 2011 work "Violet," now receiving its North American première, is uncharacteristically abstract but typically intense. As the musician Brendan Dougherty builds up an industrial roar of electronics and percussion, five alienated dancers register the vibrations, their twitches expanding into convulsions and dervish-like spins until they collapse in a heap.—*B.S. (N.Y.U. Skirball; Sept. 23-24.)*

THE THEATRE

Los Otros

In this new musical, presented by Premieres NYC, two story arcs traverse decades until converging in 2000. The first concerns Carlos (Caesar Samayoa), a four-year-old Mexican smuggled to the U.S. in 1933. The second belongs to Lillian (a dazzling Luba Mason), who lives outside San Diego during the boom following the Second World War, America's putative golden age. (As an eleven-year-old in a housing project, her perspective differs: "There's nothing much to do / in 1952.") Lillian's and Carlos's narratives leap forward about a decade at a time, in alternating monologues invigorated by the music of Michael John LaChiusa ("The Wild Party"), and by Ellen Fitzhugh's plainspoken, affecting lyrics and book. The production's simplicity doesn't stop it from unearthing complexities: how xenophobia and compassion can coexist in a single person, how antagonism can inhabit a loving relationship, and just how little separates us from *los otros*.—*Dan Stahl (A.R.T./New York Theatre; through Oct. 8.)*

My Onliness

The director Daniel Irizarry stars as the mad king His Onliness, a capering theatrical creature with a goat's appetite for heights, a tyrant who is simultaneously crushed by his martyrdom to his subjects and exalted by his dominance over them. In this story, borrowed by the playwright Robert Lyons from a 1921 play by the Polish writer and painter Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (a.k.a. Witkacy), His Onliness's deranged court becomes a hallucinatory nursery rhyme for adults, a barrage of surreal images and sounds. A man stands in a tub, the word "Writer" inscribed on his belly, singing songs by the composer Kamala Sankaram; later, when the Writer (Rhys Tivey) is assaulted by his monarch, a six-foot-tall lobster wipes his brow with a tender claw. The nonsense king is served by go-go dancing "mediums" (who translate everything into American Sign Language) and opposed by a petitioner called Morbidita (Cynthia LaCruz)—but the moment you box His Onliness up into a recognizable symbolic package, the show busts him back out. Irizarry's hyperphysical work has more to do with energetic vibrations than with political satire; the show's dramaturgy is just one long

OFF OFF BROADWAY



ILLUSTRATION BY HANNEKE ROZEMULLER

In 2017, the performer Eric Berryman teamed up with the stalwart downtown-theatre collective the Wooster Group to stage a "record album interpretation." It was a genre that the Wooster Group had already concocted, when it brought to life an album of early Shaker spirituals, in 2014, resulting in something between a deconstruction and a resurrection. In "The B-Side: 'Negro Folklore from Texas State Prisons,'" Berryman gave the same treatment to a 1965 recording of work songs and speeches by Black convicts, compiled by the folklorist Bruce Jackson. Starting on Sept. 16, at the Performing Garage, Berryman returns to the Wooster Group with another vinyl-to-stage creation, directed, like the previous one, by Kate Valk. **"Get Your Ass in the Water and Swim Like Me"** is drawn from Jackson's 1976 album of the same name, which captured the Black oral tradition of toasts—witty spoken-word poems that recount the feats of fabled street heroes, prefiguring hip-hop.—*Michael Schulman*

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Have you heard the latest rumor that painting is dead? The alleged crime scene was the Colorado State Fair, where a picture made by an algorithm won a blue ribbon. For compelling proof that painting is, in fact, alive and thriving in the age of A.I., see "The Garden in the Machine," **Matthew Ritchie's** new show at the James Cohan gallery (through Oct. 15). The strange, seductive oil-and-ink canvases (including "Battle of the Trees," above) were painted this year by the Brooklyn-based British polymath, conceived in cahoots with a form of A.I. known as generative adversarial networks, which the artist fed a diet of databases containing centuries of landscapes, portraits, and more, much of it owned by the Met. (From 2019 to 2021, Ritchie was a visiting artist at M.I.T.'s Center for Art, Science & Technology, which has worked with the museum on machine-learning projects.) The results—primordial-soup abstractions, rendered in the artist's hand on six-foot-wide surfaces, in a palette of ectoplasm and viscera, with grace notes of Eden—are haunted by their human ancestors, from the anonymous sculptors who carved the Green Man on medieval churches to the German Surrealist Max Ernst, who shared Ritchie's obsession with science. On Sept. 24, the gallery hosts a conversation between Ritchie and his fellow deep thinker, the painter Carroll Dunham.—*Andrea K. Scott*

wheeeee from roller-coaster start to sudden, operatic finish.—*Helen Shaw (New Ohio Theatre; through Sept. 24.)*

This and That

Phil Soltanoff and Steven Wendt, operating under the nom de collaboration the Institute of Useless Activity, present a wordless, light, carefree something that feels like a demonstration hour for multimedia puppeteers. First, we see live video feedback—improvised digital interference, essentially—accompanied by recorded music. On a wall, these feedback-generated shapes look like abstract animation: pink rectangles grow and iterate, fuzzy fractals curl toward each other in time to, say, a Bach cantata. In the second section, Wendt goes even more old school, making hand-shadow vignettes on the wall, and they're utterly convincing—his hands and fingers become ripe, maternal figures, or a meditative elk, or a disco dancer you would swear is actually snapping his own fingers. Soltanoff treats his high-tech tools like toys, and Wendt also seems animated by a "let's see what I can do" spirit, impressed by the simple, childish pleasure of making a rippling ocean from nothing but light and obstruction. If "This and That" reached for meaning, I missed it. In fact, afterward, I scoured my mind for evidence that I had been to the theatre and found only a sort of bright, humming breeze, sweeping out the corners, cleaning as it went.—*H.S. (Chocolate Factory Theatre; through Sept. 24.)*

ART

Robert Colescott

"Art and Race Matters: The Career of Robert Colescott," a clamorous retrospective at the New Museum, bodes to be enjoyed by practically everyone who sees it, though some may be nagged by inklings that they shouldn't. For more than three decades, until he was slowed by health ailments near the end of his life—Colescott died in 2009, at the age of eighty-three—this impetuous figurative painter danced across minefields of racial and sexual provocation, celebrating libertine romance and cannibalizing canonical art history by way of appreciative parody. In a mood to be rattled? Contemplate "Eat Dem Taters" (1975), an all-Black recasting of van Gogh's "Potato Eaters" with an aura of minstrelsy. A lot goes on in the pictures on view, starting with how they are executed, in a fast and loose, juicy Expressionist manner and by means of a blazing palette that runs to saturated pink and magenta and thunderous blue. Colescott shrugged off abstract and conceptualist fashions, guaranteeing himself a marginal status in the mainstream art world. As if in sweet revenge, his atavistic style and what-the-hell nerve continue to influence younger artists. Without the spur of Colescott's breakthrough audacity, it's hard to imagine the triumphs of, among others, the fearlessly satirical artists Kerry James Marshall and Kara Walker.—*Peter Schjeldahl (New Museum; through Oct. 9.)*

Miles Huston

Fairy-tale allegories merge with real-world narratives in the deceptively appealing objects and arrangements in this exhibition, titled "Cinderella Had a Farm." Collages contained in colorful house-shaped frames exude a friendly air—until, that is, their barbed commentary on agricultural policy and global warming sinks in. The series "Steve Bannon's Gamine" juxtaposes photos of Greta Thunberg (whom Bannon's podcast recently claimed was directly responsible for Russia's invasion of Ukraine) with emissions statistics. Other works utilize NASA mission patches, an ad for Chevron fertilizer, and a news clipping about Ronald Reagan's veto of a farm bill, to similarly pointed effect. But the star of the show is the three-part installation "Plantwater," a piece that Huston began in 2012. On one wall, sixty-four fantastically varied, vintage watering cans are installed in a grid. It's a festive sight, but the fact that they're made of nonbiodegradable plastic renders their sculptural beauty—and their symbolic power as surrogates for generations of gardeners—bittersweet.—*Johanna Fateman (Gordon Robichaux; through Oct. 30.)*

Sable Elyse Smith

In this New York artist's large paintings, bright oil-stick characters, which seem to leap from inky-black backgrounds, might be mistaken for religious figures. In one work, a woman is encircled by rays of light as a bird perches in her hand—at once the Virgin of Guadalupe and St. Francis of Assisi. In another picture, hellfire threatens to consume a trio of men in judicial robes; above their heads, the line "All types of people are judges" is faintly visible. Smith's longtime subject is the carceral state, and the images in her new series are derived from a coloring book that she found on a street in Harlem. It was meant for children whose relatives are navigating the court system, but the anodyne images of judges take a sinister turn when enhanced by the artist's vibrantly expressive gestures. The sardonic Christian iconography of these magnetic compositions is

COURTESY THE ARTIST / JAMES COHAN

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echoed, in a coldly complementary way, by the wall sculpture "Gravity," from 2022, a crucifix constructed from waiting-room seating. The work's welded severity reflects the punitive grammar of prison space, and it speaks powerfully to the notion that justice is somehow divinely ordained.—*J.F. (JTT; through Oct. 21.)*

MOVIES

Catherine Called Birdy

This medieval coming-of-age comedy, written and directed by Lena Dunham, is packed with piquant details, ruddy humor, and joy in performance. The eponymous heroine (Bella Ramsey) is a fourteen-year-old girl in thirteenth-century England whose parents (Andrew Scott and Billie Piper) are trying to marry her off, against her will, to a rich suitor who can pay the family's debts and save their manor. Though a gentlewoman, Birdy is hardly genteel. She's exuberant, insubordinate, and witty; at the urging of her older brother, a monk named Edward (Archie Renaux), she keeps a diary, and the movie follows Birdy's discoveries about herself and her small but teeming world. Dunham, adapting a novel by Karen Cushman, sharply sketches a vivid array of characters, including the ambitious goatherd Perkin (Michael Woolfitt); Birdy's dashing uncle, George (Joe Alwyn), a Crusader with no illusions about the glories of war; and a worldly-wise widow named Ethelfritha (Sophie Okonedo). The movie plays lightly with history but draws dramatic weight from Birdy's antic yet risky schemes to avoid marriage, and symbolic power from the deep and conflicted bond between father and daughter.—*Richard Brody (In theatrical release.)*

Old Boyfriends

After writing "Nashville," Joan Tewkesbury directed this drama, from 1979, which explores the perilous mental landscape of a woman in her thirties as she endures a tense, tough road trip. Talia Shire stars as Dianne Cruise, a Los Angeles psychologist who drives cross-country to track down men from her past—including an idealistic filmmaker (Richard Jordan) from college and a coarse rocker (John Belushi) from high school. Dianne's reckless yet finely calculated mission, haunted by memories of frustration and abuse, combines exorcism and revenge. Working with a script by the brothers Paul and Leonard Schrader, Tewkesbury deftly balances a discordant range of tones: realistic and symbolic, comedic and tragic, lucid and unhinged. By way of Shire's masklike performance and a chilling array of point-of-view shots, mirrors, and frames within frames, Tewkesbury evokes a Hitchcockian depth of subjectivity in what is essentially a first-person survey of women's hidden terrors. It's Tewkesbury's only feature to date.—*R.B. (Streaming on Tubi, Kanopy, and Kino Now.)*

Together

Lukas Moodysson's exemplary 2001 comedy, one part distressing to two parts delectable, is set in a hippie commune in the mid-nineteen-seventies—in Sweden, no less, where the hippie ethic was an article of faith. Within minutes, we know not only where we are but whom we are dealing with; as a director, Moodysson is the perfect host, calmly introducing us, without the trace of a sneer, to a broad selection of trolls and eccentrics. What follows is a dance of desire, as men, women, and even children pair off with one another; under it all, like a bass note, sounds the story of Elisabeth (Lisa Lindgren) and her drunken husband, Rolf (Michael Nyqvist), strangers to this utopian colony, who finally find refuge, and a kind of reconciliation, in its absurd dreams. That is Moodysson's great trick: to blow hot and cold, allowing us both to laugh at these bearded types and to respect, even envy, their frazzled companionship. With the excellent Emma Samuelsson as the warring couple's daughter, and with the help of ABBA—what did you expect?—on the soundtrack.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 8/20/01.) (Streaming on Hulu, Kanopy, Prime Video, and other services.)*

SCREENING AND STREAMING



PARAMOUNT PICTURES / EVERETT

An artistic highlight of the twenty-year nostalgia cycle that brought the nineteen-fifties back in the seventies is **"American Hot Wax,"** the 1978 bio-pic of the seminal rock-and-roll d.j. and impresario Alan Freed. (It's showing Sept. 27 on TCM and then streaming through Sept. 30 on Watch TCM.) The action is set in New York, where Freed (played with cool understatement by Tim McIntire) is the imperturbable eye of the musical storm that he helped unleash. It's a story of inspired connoisseurship and passionate advocacy that's perched on the front lines of social change; Freed galvanizes a young audience around a new kind of music, with a racially integrated set of performers and a candid new set of mores, making him a target of the government. When he organizes a mega-show at the Paramount Theatre, in Brooklyn, starring Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Screamin' Jay Hawkins (playing themselves), the forces of order close in. The director, Floyd Mutrux, shares the earthshaking thrills in sharp-angled, hard-edged images filled with exuberant performances, as in a recording-studio scene, centered on the song "Come Go with Me," where, in the heat of the moment, history is made.—*Richard Brody*

The Woman King

This historical drama, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood, combines spectacular action with the intricacies of royal intrigue, military strategy, and personal conflicts. It's set in West Africa, in 1823, when the kingdom of Dahomey was under the yoke of the Oyo, who were selling African captives to European and American slave traders. The Dahomean king, Ghezo (John Boyega), puts his trust in Nanisca (Viola Davis)—the leader of the Agojie, the kingdom's feared all-female fighting force—to overthrow the Oyo's dominion and end the sale of captives. The drama is launched by the arrival, among the Agojie, of a new recruit, the nineteen-year-old Nawi (Thuso Mbedu). She is driven to excel by loyalty to Nanisca and to another officer, Izogie (Lashana Lynch), but she also dreams of love, in defiance of the Agojie's oath to remain unmarried and childless. The crux of the drama lies in the balance of obedience and independence, martial discipline and intrepid ventures in the resistance to oppressors. Though Prince-Bythewood doesn't range far amid the story's implications, the tale of history, tradition, and memory nonetheless yields taut suspense and strong emotion.—*R.B. (In theatrical release.)*

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TABLES FOR TWO

Osteria La Baia
129 W. 52nd St.

The other night at Osteria La Baia, a "coastal Italian" restaurant that opened last year, in midtown, a genial manager asked my party how we'd heard about the place. As we began to stammer an awkward reply, she cut in—"You walked by and saw our car out front?" Yes! That was it, the baby-blue vintage coupe parked on the sidewalk, silk flowers bursting out of its windows and open hood. It beckoned to us as we sauntered aimlessly down Fifty-second Street.

The truth was that we'd read about it. In February, Politico identified Osteria La Baia as a favored haunt of Eric Adams, New York City's mayor. Last month, reporters for the *Times* determined that he'd visited on at least fourteen occasions in June alone, often arriving late and closing down the dining room—the private dining room, to be exact, which is encased in frosted glass.

The twin brothers Robert and Zhan Petrosyants, whom employees referred to as the restaurant's owners, are close friends of the Mayor. They are also convicted felons who are prohibited from holding a liquor license—in 2014, they pleaded guilty to a check-cashing scheme—and are known, too, for their affiliation with a pair of Brooklyn restaurants that owe more than a million dollars in debts.

Adams's support of La Baia—appearances there with other high-profile figures, including Andrew Cuomo and Bill de Blasio; promotion on social media; and glowing praise, as quoted in the *Post*—sits in an ethical gray area. The *Times* reporters did not observe the Mayor handling his check at the restaurant, though a member of his camp assured the paper that he pays a monthly tab. They did observe the Mayor (who wrote a book about keeping a plant-based diet) being asked by a server if he'd have his usual: the branzino.

The meticulous investigation was missing only one key aspect: How *was* the branzino? That night, before our drinks had arrived, a server presented me with an enormous bowl of chocolate gelato. We both laughed at her mistake, but as dinner progressed it became clear that the error was my own. If only I'd eaten the ice cream and left.

A Caesar salad was palatable enough, if overdressed. The vitello tonnato, finished with caper berries, was unobjectionable—the high point of the meal, in retrospect—and I could muster only faint complaints about the lukewarm vegan pizza topped with delicata squash and green dollops of hemp ricotta.

Chewy lobster did nothing to redeem limp garganelli. The rigatoni alla Norma was overcooked and undersalted, the eggplant in the too sweet sauce barely traceable. Still, none of it prepared me for the main event. Never had I seen a fish thus presented: gutted and splayed skin side up, with its head in a forward position, tail at attention, like a fish-skin rug. When I sent a photo of it to a friend, he asked if I had seen the movie "Midsommar": "They kill a guy the way that fish is prepared."

The edges of the skin were bubbled and charred, but the center was taut and stretchy. My companions and I poked halfheartedly at the white flesh beneath, which sat on a mess of olives, tomatoes, and sweet peppers. It was enough to turn a pescatarian off fish. But then what would she eat? The mushrooms in the single vegan entrée tasted as though they'd been left to ferment under a heavy layer of damp leaves in a forest, and not in the René Redzepi way.

When an editor at this magazine inquired with La Baia management about arranging a photo shoot, demurral was swift: no photographers, even for reviews. The photographer would simply go to dinner, then, armed with an iPhone. Hours before her reservation, she got a call: the kitchen was closed, owing to a mysterious electrical problem. That evening, which happened to be September 11th, Instagram told a different story. The Petrosyants twins seemed to be throwing themselves a birthday party, according to time-stamped videos posted by guests. In one, the camera scanned a long table, lingering, for just a moment, on the Mayor. *(Dishes $16–$155.)*

—Hannah Goldfield

PHOTOGRAPH BY SASHA ARUTYUNOVA FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE





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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
PANDEMIC CHOICES

Isaiah Berlin, the twentieth-century philosopher, spent much of his life arguing that we can't have it all. In any weighty societal matter, worthwhile values invariably clash: liberty and equality, justice and mercy, impartiality and love. Such collisions, Berlin wrote, are "an intrinsic, irremovable element in human life," and realizing some ends "must inevitably involve the sacrifice of others." But he also argued that we can soften the impact of this "value pluralism." Our aim should be to "maintain a precarious equilibrium that will prevent the occurrence of desperate situations, of intolerable choices—that is the first requirement for a decent society."

During the pandemic, few issues have crystallized the trade-offs we face as the disruptions to education have. This month, more than a million children returned to New York City's public schools. They joined students around the country who, for the first time since 2019, started the school year without major COVID restrictions: no universal mask mandates, physical-distancing protocols, compulsory quarantines, or remote learning. But they are among a cohort that has experienced historic losses in educational achievement. According to data from the Department of Education, reading scores for the nation's nine-year-olds declined this year by the largest margin in three decades; their math scores dropped for the first time on record. These findings are especially troubling in light of research showing that third-grade competencies have a pivotal influence on life outcomes, such as the likelihood of graduating from high school, the risk of being incarcerated, and the ability to earn a living wage.

Some of this decline was unavoidable—the result of a once-in-a-century virus. But our choices mattered. In the spring of 2020, nearly all American schools switched to remote learning, in an attempt to mitigate the worst of desperate situations—overrun hospitals, rationed ventilators, mass death. Since then, however, there's been wide variation in how long and how frequently schools shut their doors. The result is clear: the more time students spent remote, the more their education suffered. According to an analysis from Harvard, the American Institutes for Research, and NWEA, children in "high-poverty schools" who spent most of 2021 learning remotely lost more than half a year's worth of instruction. The effects were most devastating for Black and Hispanic children and for those who were already struggling academically.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

This was a trade-off we chose—mortgaging the quality of education in an effort to protect parents, teachers, communities, and (to a lesser extent) children themselves from the coronavirus. Now the U.S. seems to have arrived at another judgment: the value of normalcy exceeds that of caution. "COVID no longer controls our lives," President Joe Biden said this month, and most Americans agree. In a recent poll exploring which of fifteen issues voters feel are most important ahead of the midterm elections, the coronavirus ranked fifteenth. Even among Americans who identify as "very liberal"—the most COVID-cautious political demographic—worries about the coronavirus have plummeted. Last week, Governor Kathy Hochul allowed New York's COVID-19 state of emergency to expire. (Connecticut and Rhode Island are the only states in the Northeast with ongoing emergency declarations.)

Part of this shift reflects a genuine reduction in the virus's toll. With vaccines, boosters, antivirals, monoclonal antibodies, and more than eighty per cent of Americans having been infected, COVID's case-fatality rate has fallen significantly, and I.C.U.s once overflowing with coronavirus patients now care for a pre-pandemic variety of illnesses. But much of it simply reflects

the passage of time—a once novel threat fading into the background.

Owing to a lack of congressional funding and a desire to move past the "acute emergency phase," the Biden Administration is taking a less central role in managing the pandemic. It recently paused a program that sent out free coronavirus tests, and soon it will stop paying for vaccines and treatments. Instead, these products will be purchased by insurers, who will pass the cost on to consumers through higher premiums; people without coverage will have to purchase the products on their own. COVID will become just another of the many diseases that afflict Americans—a circumstance that says more about our social and political choices than about our medical reality. The U.S. continues to suffer more than two thousand COVID deaths a week; it records more than sixty thousand new cases every day, and these represent a fraction of the true number of infections. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than half the country has high or moderate levels of viral spread, and many experts anticipate another COVID surge this winter, possibly alongside a brutal influenza outbreak. (Australia, which often acts as a bellwether for the U.S., just had its worst flu season in five years.) Meanwhile, it's increasingly evident that infections can have lasting health and economic effects: by one estimate, COVID-related illnesses have reduced the U.S. labor force by half a million people. And many elderly and immunocompromised people remain at risk for serious illness, even after immunization.

Last month, the Food and Drug Administration authorized a redesign of COVID vaccines. The new "bivalent" boosters target both the original strain and the hyper-contagious Omicron subvariants BA.4 and BA.5. The updated shots should, theoretically, offer better protection against the versions of the virus currently circulating, but because they were authorized on the basis of data in mice, instead of in humans—a decision prioritizing speed over certainty—it's unclear how much benefit they will provide in the real world. The White House signalled that, going forward, Americans will probably need only an annual booster that takes aim at the variant du jour; that recommendation, though, seems based less on rigorous data than on a wish to assuage a weary public.

For much of the pandemic, COVID discourse assumed a stark political polarity. Conservatives advanced arguments rooted in freedom and autonomy; liberals focussed on health equity and communal well-being. For better or worse, the two camps seem to have coalesced around a shared understanding: the coronavirus is here to stay, and it's up to individuals to decide how to live with it. But, still, there are no universal truths. The value pluralism that Isaiah Berlin identified in societies is now roiling within individuals. On some days, at some events, for some people, the risks feel worth it. In other moments, they don't. These internal tensions are inescapable—part and parcel of our own precarious equilibriums.

—Dhruv Khullar

ON THE RUNWAY

LIKE LICHEN



Lichen is made up of at least two organisms: fungus and algae, photosynthesizing in symbiotic harmony. The other day, the Brooklyn Museum was overtaken by lichen of unusual composition. The vast ruffled puddles that spread out across the museum floor—swirls of green, pink, brown, red, and yellow—were composed of approximately twenty thousand chrysanthemums, carnations, zinnias, and cockscombs.

They were the work of Emily Thompson, a New York flower designer whose tastes run toward the wild and the overgrown. Lichen is a pet fascination. "I grew up in a place with very beautiful rocks," Thompson, who is from Vermont, said. "And, of course, the best rocks are the ones that have developed lichen." Thompson trained as a sculptor before turning to flowers, and has created projects for fashion shows, restaurants, and the White House. At last, she'd found a client willing to realize her long-standing fantasy of lichen-inspired floral arrangements—the fashion designer Ulla Johnson, whose Spring-Summer 2023 collection was making its début in the Brooklyn Museum's Beaux-Arts atrium.

Johnson's show was scheduled for 10 A.M. on Sunday, and flowers began arriving at 8 A.M. on Saturday. Thompson had biked over to greet the trucks. She was working with a team of fourteen other florists, who wore mostly black; Thompson, who has curly hair and wore reading glasses attached to a thick green chain, was dressed in a sturdy cotton shirt and forest-green pants; she compared her look to a park-ranger uniform. After several freight-elevator loads of blooms had been ferried upstairs, she gathered her team in a circle at the center of the ten-thousand-square-foot space. She handed around clipboards with a floor plan, reference photographs of lichen in psychedelic colors, and pictures of a sample lichen flower mosaic she'd assembled at her Manhattan studio.

"This is not a map you're going to follow," she said. The floor plan showed what looked like five continents of irregular size and shape, to be carpeted with the stemless heads of flowers placed flat on the ground. "What I really want to see is your own ideas of how the colors blend and contrast," she explained. Also marked on the plan was the "*Vogue* shot": the path down the runway that press cameras would capture in their definitive photographs



Emily Thompson

of each outfit. Ideally, things would not get too pretty. "Seduction-repulsion, always!" Thompson said.

The florists set to work laying flowers on cotton tarps they'd spread across sections of the floor. Thompson started building a wall of crab-apple branches, one of the few elements of the installation to rise more than an inch off the ground. "It's just like being a beaver," she said. Her dam aloft and sturdy, she paused to take a lap around the atrium to examine the patterns taking shape on the tarps. Chrysanthemums with pale-lavender petals tipped in neon green nestled beside crinkly burgundy carnations edged in pink, interrupted by ripples of yellow cockscombs.

"I love this awful gray-purple," Thompson said, pointing at a clump of carnations. "It's like a corpse, a rotting corpse." The progress excited her: "It's so much better than when we made it in the studio. It's so much better with all these human brains."

The progress, however, was slow. (Actual lichen often grows less than a millimetre a year.) "Smoosh your carns," she advised the team—that way the blossoms would take up more space. "We've got to crank. I want to see fifty per cent soonish." After lunch, she walked to the vantage point of the *Vogue* shot and surveyed the space, hands on hips. She considered pitching in on the tarps, but she trusted the other florists more, because they'd been at it for hours. "There's a weird communion that happens," she said. "Your minds meld a bit."

Ulla Johnson was scheduled to inspect the lichen early that evening. ("I'm very hands on," she explained.) Thompson spent the remaining time calling in favors from flower venders; more pink mums were on the way. "Florists are always making something out of spit and toothpaste," she said.

Johnson, when she arrived, worried that the patches of green and brown looked too much like camouflage. "The brown is killing me a little," she told Thompson.

"She's taking out the ugly," Thompson said to a colleague. But this was to be expected. The work of the mind-melded florists was being subsumed into the event's larger ecosystem.

A minutes-long fashion show brought into existence a teeming biome that dissolved almost as quickly as it took shape. By Saturday night, the atrium was full of photographers, electricians, lighting technicians, carpenters, and musicians with dramatic hair, in addition to Johnson's pack of closely conferring, mostly blond staffers. A migratory flock of models arrived on Sunday morning, followed by the show's three hundred and twenty-five invited guests—many of whom paused to photograph the pools of flowers before taking their seats.

The scavengers, a team from an event-cleanup service called Garbage Goddess, were the last to appear. They came after the show, wearing plant-dyed overalls, and transported the now wilting flowers to a compost facility on Long Island.

—Molly Fischer

UNIDENTIFIED PARCEL
LISTENING PARTY



In 2015, Don Fleming and Jason Stern were in the West Village, at Sister Ray Enterprises, the office of the late Lou Reed, when they made a startling discovery. Fleming, a musician and an archivist, and Stern, who had worked for Reed, had been hired by Reed's widow, the avant-garde musician and artist Laurie Anderson, to catalogue Reed's archive, which she later donated to the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts. On a shelf behind Reed's desk, amid Velvet Underground-related books and music, Fleming spotted what resembled a CD box. "I picked it up and said, 'Oh, my God, this isn't a CD,'" he said. It was a notarized, self-addressed package, to and from Lewis Reed at his parents' address on Long Island; it appeared to contain a tape, and was postmarked May, 1965, when Reed was twenty-three, working as a songwriter at Pickwick Records, living with his parents, and busking on street corners with his new friend John Cale. "The Velvet Underground & Nico" would come out two years later.

Should they open it? They spent years deciding. "We were treating it like a relic," Anderson said. They finally did, and the results, an album called "Words & Music: May 1965," came out this month. The other day, Stern, Fleming, and Anderson met up at the library to reënact their first listen; they gathered around a laptop in a conference room near an exhibition of the archive, which features everything from Reed's Max's Kansas City bar tab to a "Transformer" Christmas sweater. Fleming, sixty-four, has black glasses and free-wheeling white hair; Stern, thirty-six, is long-haired and affable; Anderson, seventy-five, has softly spiky gray hair and wore flowered sneakers that she'd picked up in France. "I've been on a travelling jag," she said: the Camargue; the Acropolis, to perform ("improv things with a cellist, stories about Greek history"); Copenhagen ("to rehearse with a backward choir from Romania").

In 2017, when they opened the package, "Don did the actual slicing," Stern said. An audio-preservation expert guided them through the playback process; anticipation was high. "We're excited, we're nervous," Stern said. "What if it's a duplicate? What if it's a dud?" At the library, they cued up the first song. Young Lou Reed said, " 'Men of Good Fortune,' words and lyrics, Lou Reed." Reed's 1973 solo album, "Berlin," has a song of the same name. "That was the first huge surprise," Stern said. "We didn't know another one existed." The "Berlin" song has a righteous, aggressive vibe ("Men of good fortune often cause empires to fall / While men of poor beginnings often can't do anything at all"); the early "Men" takes a gentler approach, with strummed acoustic guitar. "My dear mother told me / an old maid I'd be," Reed sang. Anderson put her hand to her heart. " 'Less men of good fortune came courtin' for me."

"It sounds like a Greenwich Village folk song, or an old British ballad," Fleming said.

"In the voice of a young girl who's twirling around in her new dress," Anderson said. Reed played melancholy notes and sang of pretty red dresses with pretty red bows, of town boys and drunkards and dying alone. "It sounds like fifteen-thirties Yorkshire," Anderson said, as Reed busted into a harmonica solo.

"In retrospect, there couldn't have been

a more confusing first track," Stern said.

"He'd seen Dylan in late '64, at Syracuse, and his band there covered Dylan songs," Fleming said. Reed's version of writing about Dylan-esque "real things," Fleming said, was writing "Heroin." On the tape, "Heroin" was next. The version the world knows is a seven-minute experimental symphony of craving, urgency, anguish, and satisfaction, driven by electric viola and chaos; this one is quiet folk. The tape proceeds apace. "The Buttercup Song," an elusive V.U. track, went over big. "I was, like, 'This is that song that everyone thinks is lost!'" Stern recalled. "We're on a roll!" Reed and Cale, in rollicking goof-harmony—"It's getting very music hall," Anderson said—advise the listener to "never get emotionally involved / with a man, a woman, a beast, or a child," and Reed sings of the botany of the "androgynous small buttercup."

"I love the idea of them singing this on a street corner, people walking by," Fleming said. In an acoustic, bluesy "I'm Waiting for the Man," Cale, Welsh and elegant-sounding as ever, does the "Oh, pardon me, sir" part of the dialogue.

"They really seem familiar with the material—they're joking, improvising a bit, comfortable with the songs," Fleming said.

The deluxe version of "Words & Music" includes a copy of a 1965 letter that Reed wrote to his mentor, the poet Delmore Schwartz, describing his life in New York: songwriting, avoiding the draft, meeting Cale, "a starving viola player." "It's a treasure," Anderson said. "He trusted Delmore so much, told him everything."

The tape "makes me laugh every single time I hear it," Anderson said. "It makes me so happy. Just that a kid could do that. It's like Baudelaire or something—a kid who's that literary and that adventurous and that kooky." And who didn't end up an old maid.

—*Sarah Larson*



Lou Reed

DEPT. OF LABOR

JOUSTING IN JERSEY



The market, of late, hath proved fertile soil
For those who would want more say in their toil.
The spirits of labor strife branch like a tree,
From Starbucks and Amazon to the 'leventh cent'ry:
In Jersey, knights and queens, godly and wyse,
At a Medieval Times did unionize.

On a recent evening, a pilgr'mage was planned,
By curious experts, a motley band:
One Spencer Strub, a medieval scholar.
(Brown was his beard and cotton his collar.)
Beside hym, Ellora Derenoncourt,
Like Strub, her spouse, a Princetonian sort.

Ellora, a prof of econ'my and labor,
Was drawn by these workers with horses and sabres—
What if their efforts could give forth a clue
As to what other modern unions might do?
Into this question, the pair was immersed;
And journeyed, by Honda, to humble Lyndhurst.

As Spencer ferried the pair to the fest,
Ellora laid bare their scholarly quest—
Just like Guinevere and her Lancelot,
In the safe precinct of the parking lot,
The profs would rendezvous with the Queen
To discuss the union, sans being seen.

But first they took in the feast and the games
With which this castle hath long made its fame.
Soon sacred music filled a sandy ring.
(Spencer: "The Church disapproved of this kind of thing.")
The Queen took her throne, announcèd the feast,
And each knight came in, asaddle a beast.

Pepsi and chicken were served to the throngs
By a man called Serf Mike, wielding some tongs.
A jouster tossed fayre Ellora a flower.
"Courtly love," Spencer shrugged, without sounding sour.
Combatants were slain, and squires, unsung,
Came through with their spades to shovel horse dung.

The profs made their exit, abided outside.
The cland'stine meeting would happen curbside.
With hope almoost lost, a figure appeared.
The image of grace, our liege! they both cheered.
Clothed in dark leggings, her bearing pristine,
Her V-neck declaimed, "It's good to be Queen."

She drew the professors close to the shade
To tell them how little her knights were all paid.
But this, alas, only her sad tale's start:
"The trumpeters' horns—they're falling apart."
She longs to learn the fine art of falconry,
But her income would plummet—and drastically.
And her warriors performing feats of endurance,
Oft did so without proper health insurance.

The knights from the castle, 'pon hearing her sound
Came over at once and compassed around.

Each rider and squire had his own story,
How he came to this hall to seek noble
glory.
One knight did serve in the U.S.
Marine Corps,
"Before that at Best Buy," awalking the
floor.
Another played Romeo, with surfeit of
sighs,
And a baddie, on "Blue Bloods," who
gouged someone's eyes.

As rumor did leak of union plans made,
The C-suite set forth to try to
dissuade.
The C.E.O., a lord from far-off Spain,
Had come with entreaties to tell it plain.
Bearing subs of meteball and eggplant
parm,
He'd pledged to protect his workers
from harm.

But their resolve to vote did not abate;
And his catered cuisine turned
second-rate—
Hot subs became cold cuts and
sundry snacks
And a few health bars fished out of his
slacks.
(On these details and other misc'llany
No comment was issued from the
Company.)

The vote had been taken, but the
contract, unsigned,
Meant many more months of
bargaining grind.
Ellora observed the knights' worthy
passion;
They enjoyed their jobs; it wasn't a
cash-in.
Riding homeward, she recalled one
saying, It's true,
"I could work at Popeyes, but I love
what I do."

Old Europe had its plague, and now
so do we,
Both maladies brought many a job
vacancy.
Strub noted: serfs of yore took arms
'gainst their abbey
When working conditions got
woefully shabby.
Looking back is good, Ellora replied,
when querièd.
"But maybe not as far back as the
medieval period."

—Neima Jahromi

SKETCHPAD BY HILARY FITZGERALD CAMPBELL



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PERSONAL HISTORY

BOY

Leaving Cedarwood Road.

BY BONO



The author (far left) in 1971, with his mother, father, and brother, in Dublin.

I have very few memories of my mother, Iris. Neither does my older brother, Norman. The simple explanation is that, in our house, after she died she was never spoken of again.

I fear it was worse than that. That we rarely thought of her again.

We were three Irish men, and we avoided the pain that we knew would come from thinking and speaking about her.

Iris laughing. Her humor black as her dark curls. Inappropriate laughing was her weakness. My father, Bob, a postal worker, had taken her and her sister Ruth to the ballet, only to have her embarrass him with her muted howls of laughter at the protruding genitalia boxes worn by the male dancers under their leotards.

I remember, at around seven or eight, I was a boy behaving badly. Iris chasing me, waving a long cane that her friend had promised would discipline me. Me, frightened for my life as Iris ran me down the garden. But when I dared to look back she was laughing her head off, no part of her believing in this medieval punishment.

I remember being in the kitchen, watching Iris ironing my brother's school uniform, the faint buzz of my father's electric drill from upstairs where he was hanging a shelf he'd made. Suddenly the sound of his voice, screaming. An inhuman sound, an animal noise. "Iris! Iris! Call an ambulance!"

Racing to the bottom of the stairs, we found him at the top, holding the power tool, having apparently drilled into his own crotch. The bit had slipped, and he was frozen stiff with fear that he might never be stiff again. "I've castrated myself!" he cried.

I was in a state of shock at seeing my father, the giant of 10 Cedarwood Road, fallen like a tree. And I didn't know what that meant. Iris knew what it meant, and she was shocked, too, but that wasn't the look on her face. The look on her face was the look of a beautiful woman suppressing laughter, then the look of a beautiful woman failing to suppress laughter as it took hold of her. Peals of laughter like those of a bold girl in church whose efforts not to commit sacrilege just make for a louder eruption when it finally arrives.

She reached for the telephone, but she couldn't get it together to dial 999; she was bent double with laughter. Da made it through his flesh wound. Their marriage made it through the incident. The memory made it home.

Iris was a practical, frugal woman. She could change a plug on a kettle, and she could sew—boy, could she sew! She became a part-time dressmaker when my da refused to let her work as a cleaning lady for the national airline, Aer Lingus, along with her best friends from the neighborhood. There was a big showdown between them, the only proper row I remember. I was in my room eavesdropping as my mother reared up at him with a "you don't own me" tirade in her defense. And, to be fair, he didn't. Pleading succeeded where command had failed, and she gave up the chance to work with her mates at Dublin Airport.

Bob was a Catholic; Iris was a Protestant. Theirs was a marriage that had escaped the sectarianism of Ireland at the time. And because Bob believed that the mother should have the deciding vote in the children's religious instruction, on Sunday mornings my brother and Iris and I were dropped at the Protestant St. Canice's Church in Finglas. Whereupon my da would receive Mass up the road in the Catholic church—also, confusingly, called St. Canice's.

There was less than a mile between the two churches, but in nineteen-sixties Ireland a mile was a long way. The "Prods" at that time had the better tunes, and the Catholics had the better stage

HEWSON FAMILY ARCHIVE

gear. My mate Gavin Friday used to say that Roman Catholicism was the glam rock of religion, with its candles and psychedelic colors, its smoke bombs of incense, and the ringing of the little bell. The Prods were better at the bigger bells, Gavin would say, "because they can afford them!"

For a fair amount of the population in Ireland in the sixties and seventies, wealth and Protestantism went together. To be mixed up with either was to have collaborated with the enemy—that is, Britain. In fact, the Church of Ireland had supplied a lot of Ireland's most famous insurgents, and south of the border its congregation was mostly modest in every way. My da was hugely respectful of the church community he'd married into. And so, having worshipped on his own up the road, he would then return from his St. Canice's to wait outside our St. Canice's to drive us all home.

Iris and Bob had grown up in the inner city of Dublin around the thoroughfare of Oxmantown Road, an area known locally as Cowtown because every Wednesday it was the seat of the country-comes-to-the-city fair. In nearby Phoenix Park, Bob and Iris loved to walk and watch the deer run free. Unusually for a Dub, the term for an inner-city resident, Bob played cricket in the park, and his mother, Granny Hewson, listened to the BBC to hear the results of English Test matches.

Cricket was not a working-class game in Ireland. Add this to my da's saving up to buy records of his favorite operas, taking his wife and her sister to the ballet—and then not letting Iris become a "Mrs. Mops," as he called it, even though her friends were—and you can sense that there might have been just a bit of the snob in Bob. His interests were not the norm on his street, that's for sure. Actually, the whole family might have been a little different. My da and his brother Leslie did not even speak with a strong Dublin accent. It was as if their telephone voice was the only one they used.

My da's family name, Hewson, is also unusual in that it is both a Protestant and a Catholic name. I once saw in a posh pub a death warrant for the beheading of Charles I, with one John Hewson among the signatories. A republican? Good. One of Oliver Cromwell's henchmen? Bad.

As a kid I could see that Hewsons tended to live in their heads while Rankins were more at home in their bodies. The Hewsons could overthink. My da, for example, would not go to visit his own brothers and sisters in case they might not want to see him. He would need to be invited. My mother—a Rankin—would tell him just to go on and drop in on them. Her siblings were always dropping in on one another. What's the problem? We're family. Rankins are laughing all day long, and, if the Hewsons can't quite do that, we do have a temper to keep us entertained.

There's another difference. The Rankin family is susceptible to the brain aneurysm. Of the five Rankin sisters, three died from an aneurysm. Including Iris.

My mother heard me sing publicly just once. I played the Pharaoh in Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." It was really the part of an Elvis impersonator, so that's what I did. Dressed up in one of my mother's white trouser suits with some silvery sequins glued on, I curled my lip and brought the house down. Iris laughed and laughed. She seemed surprised that I could sing, that I was musical.

As a very small child, from when I stood only as high as the keyboard, I was transfixed by the piano. There was one in our church hall, and any time alone with it was time I held sacred. I would spend ages finding out what sounds the keys and pedals could make. I didn't know what reverb was; I couldn't believe how such a simple action could turn our church hall into a cathedral. I remember my hand finding a note and then searching for another note to rhyme with it. I was born with melodies in my head, and I was looking for a way to hear them in the world. Iris wasn't looking for those kinds of signs in me, so she didn't see them.

When my grandmother decided to sell her piano, my hints about how well it would fit in our house could not have been any less subtle. "Don't be silly, where would we put it?" was the reply. No piano for our house. No room. When I interviewed at St. Patrick's Cathedral Grammar School, in the city center, the principal asked if I had any interest in joining their famous boys' choir. My eleven-year-old's heart stirred. But Iris, sensing my nervousness, answered for me: "Not at all. Paul has no interest in singing."

My attendance at St. Patrick's was ultimately unhappy for me and unhappy for them. I lasted just a year. The final straw involved a Spanish teacher known as Biddy who I was convinced put lines through my homework without even looking at it. When the weather was good, Biddy would take her lunch from a clear plastic Tupperware box on a park bench in the shadow of the magnificent cathedral. Schoolboys were not allowed in the park at lunchtime, but I'd found a way to mount the railings, and one day, with a couple of accomplices, I successfully lobbed dog shit into her lunchbox. Unsurprisingly, by the end of term Biddy wanted this little shit-throwing shit out of her hair, and it was suggested I might be happier elsewhere. In September, 1972, I enrolled at Mount Temple Comprehensive School.

Mount Temple was liberation. A nondenominational, coeducational experiment—remarkable for its time in conservative Ireland. Instead of an A class, a B class, and a C class, the six first-year classes were D, U, B, L, I, and N. You were encouraged to be yourself, to be creative, to wear your own clothes. And there were girls. Also wearing their own clothes.

It took two bus rides to get to Mount Temple, a long journey into the city center from the northwest side and then out to the northeast. Unless you cycled, which is what my friend Reggie Manuel and I began to do. It was on one never-ending incline of a hill that we learned how to hold on to the milk van. I'm not sure I've ever felt as free as I did on those days cycling to school with Reggie. If the weather meant we couldn't cycle all the time, leaving us to the drudgery of the bus, compensation would come on Fridays, when we would stop in the city center after school to visit the record store Dolphin Discs, on Talbot Street. This is where I first saw albums like the Stooges' "Raw Power," David Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust," and Lou Reed's "Transformer."

The only reason I wasn't standing in the record store at 5:30 P.M. on May 17, 1974, is that a bus strike meant that we'd

had to cycle to school. We were already home when the streets around Dolphin Discs were blown to bits by a car bomb in Talbot Street, another in Parnell Street, and another in South Leinster Street, all within minutes, a coördinated attack by an Ulster loyalist extremist group that wanted the south to know what terrorism felt like. A fourth explosion struck in Monaghan, and the final death toll stood at thirty-three people, including a pregnant young mother, the entire O'Brien family, and a Frenchwoman whose family had survived the Holocaust.

That same year, in September, we celebrated my grandparents' fiftieth wedding anniversary. They danced and sang Michael Finnegan's reel. My mum's da, "Gags" Rankin, had such a high time that his children worried he'd wake in the night and not make it to the bathroom. They left a bucket beside the bed. And my grandfather left this life kicking that bucket, with a massive heart attack on the night of his wedding anniversary.

Three days later, at the funeral, I spot my father carrying my mother in his arms through a crowd, like a white snooker ball scattering a triangle of color. He's rushing to get her to the hospital. She has collapsed at the side of the grave as her own father is being lowered into the ground.

"Iris has fainted. Iris has fainted." The voices of my aunts and cousins blow around like a breeze through leaves. "She'll be O.K. She's just fainted." Before I, or anyone else, can think, my father has Iris in the back of the Hillman Avenger, with my brother Norman at the wheel.

I stay with my cousins to say goodbye to my grandfather, and then we all shuffle back to my grandmother's tiny red brick house, 8 Cowper Street, where the tiny kitchen has become a factory churning out sandwiches, biscuits, and tea. This two-up-two-down with an outdoor bathroom seems to hold thousands of people.

Even though it's Grandda's funeral, and even though Iris has fainted, we're kids, cousins, running around and laughing. Until Ruth, my mother's younger sister, bursts through the door. "Iris is dying. She's had a stroke."

Everybody crowds around. Iris is one of eight from No. 8: five girls and three boys. They're weeping, wailing, struggling to stand. Someone realizes I'm here, too. I'm fourteen and strangely calm. I tell my mother's sisters and brothers that everything is going to be O.K.

Three days later Norman and I are brought into the hospital to say goodbye. She's alive but barely. The local clergyman Sydney Laing, whose daughter I'm dating, is here. Ruth is outside the hospital room, wailing, with my father, whose eyes have less life in them than my mother's. I enter the room at war with the universe, but Iris looks peaceful. It's hard to figure that a large part of her has already left. We hold her hand. There's a clicking sound, but we don't hear it.

My father was a tenor, a really good one. He could move people with his singing, and to move people with music you first have to be moved by it. In the living room, standing in front of the stereo with two of my mother's knitting needles, he would conduct: Beethoven, Mozart, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf singing Richard Strauss's "Four Last Songs." Or "La Traviata," eyes closed, lost in reverie.

He is not precisely aware of the story of "La Traviata," but he feels it. A father and son at odds, lovers torn apart and reunited. He senses the injustice of the human heart. He is broken by the music.

After my mother's departure, Cedarwood Road becomes its own opera. Three men used to shouting at the television now shouting at one another. We live in rage and melancholy, in mystery and melodrama. The subject of the opera is the absence of a woman called Iris, and the music swells to stay the silence that envelops the house and the three men—one of whom is just a boy.

My brother Norman has always been a fixer, an engineer, a mechanic who could pull things apart and put things back together. The engine of his motorcycle, a clock, a radio, a stereo. He loved technology and he loved music. A large chrome Sony reel-to-reel tape player took pride of place in our "good room," and Norman was enterprising enough to figure out that the reel-to-reel meant he didn't have to keep buying music. If he borrowed an album from a friend for an hour, it was his forever.

Because Norman, seven years older than me, was already a working man when I was in Mount Temple, the reel-to-reel was my only company when I got home from school. Some late afternoons I'd arrive so hungry but soon forget who and where I was. I'd stand in front of the stereo, just like my father, and let the house burn down while I listened to opera. Rock opera: "Tommy," by the Who. Charcoal smoke would fill the kitchen and seep into the living room.

Norman taught me to play guitar. He taught me the C chord, the G chord, and, much more difficult, the F chord, which requires holding down two strings with one finger. Especially difficult when the strings are quite a way from the fretboard, as they were on Norman's rather cheap guitar. But with his guidance I learned to play "If I Had a Hammer" and "Blowin' in the Wind." I worked out how to play "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "Dear Prudence," and "Here Comes the Sun" on my brother's guitar.

Norman and I fought a lot. He'd come home from work and I'd be watching the telly, not doing my homework, not having prepared the tea. He would give me some lip. I would return it. One of us would end up on the ground.

He had a bad temper, but he was a clever boy who, like his da, should have gone to university. He'd won a scholarship to an institution called simply the High School, a prestigious Protestant secondary school that leaned in the direction of maths and physics but was best known as the alma mater of William Butler Yeats. But Norman never felt very welcome there with his secondhand uniform, his secondhand books, and the secondhand religion of his Catholic father. He was upbeat by nature, except when the melancholy had him. Then it really had him.

The quality of my schoolwork had improved when I'd first arrived at Mount Temple, and I'd done better there than I had at St. Patrick's, but when Iris died I lost all concentration. Teachers lamented my scrawly handwriting, noting that my father's letters to them about me were in such beautiful calligraphy. While I loved poetry and history, I didn't feel as clever as my friends. I was afraid deep down that I was average. I even

stopped playing chess, which I loved, because I'd begun to think of it as "uncool." And I had no mother to tell me that nothing cool was "cool."

My da had taught me to play chess one summer in the seaside town of Rush, just outside Dublin on the north coast, where Grandda Rankin had turned an old railway carriage into a summer chalet. There was nothing much to do at "the hut," save for a few card games that didn't interest me. I was interested in my da, and if he wasn't golfing or reading or hanging out with his brothers-in-law I would try to catch his attention. I remember walking the pier and feeling the warmth of his hand on my neck.

At first I thought he was letting me win, but eventually I noticed that he wasn't. This was how to take his attention off whatever he was thinking about and put it on me. To best him, to beat him! Bob didn't like losing, and maybe that's where I learned that I didn't, either.

Bob loved music, but, in tune with his wife, he never suggested we get a piano. Nor did he ever ask me about how my music was coming on. He talked about opera, just not to his sons. For years after Iris died, he would serenade rooms of relations with Kris Kristofferson's "For the Good Times." I still wonder if he was singing it from my mother's point of view: "I'll get along, you'll find another."

He once told me that I was a baritone who thinks he's a tenor. One of the great put-downs, and pretty accurate. I, too, had the seeds of a performer, and, above all, performers don't like to be ignored. Maybe Bob didn't take me too seriously as a teen-ager because he could see I was doing a great job of that myself. But I can still hear his voice in my head, especially when I sing.

In those days, when I remembered to eat, I'd return from Mount Temple with a tin of meat, a tin of beans, and a packet of Cadbury's Smash. Cadbury's Smash was astronaut food, but eating it did not make me feel like Elton John's Rocket Man. In fact, eating it was a lot like not eating at all. But at least it was easy. You just put boiling water on these dry little pellets, and they would shape-shift into mashed potato. I'd add them to the pot in which I'd just cooked the tinned beans and the tinned meat. And I ate my dinner out of the pot.

I still don't enjoy cooking or ordering food, which may go back to having had to cook my own meals as a teen-ager. That was when food was just fuel. We used to buy a cheap fizzy drink called Cadet Orange because it had enough sugar to keep you going but was so foul you would want nothing else down your throat for hours. I'd drink it after I'd spent my food money on something more important—Alice Cooper's "Hello Hooray," for example. Sometimes such a purchase—Santana's "Abraxas" or Black Sabbath's "Paranoid"—required my investing the whole family's grocery money. On those occasions, I confess, I'd sometimes have to borrow the entire grocery list from the shop, and fail to give any of it back. It was easy, apart from a loaf of sliced bread, which was difficult to hide up your jumper. But I didn't feel good about it, and by the age of fifteen I'd put away a life of crime.



In 1975, Norman got a job at Dublin Airport. Airports in the seventies were even more glamorous than color television, especially if you were a pilot. Norman had applied to be a pilot, but his asthma disqualified him from the trainee program, and instead he got work in Cara, the computing department of Aer Lingus. Computers, Norman told himself, were even more glamorous than airports, and he committed to learning to fly small airplanes, just as soon as he'd made some money.

Thousands of Irish plane twitchers would turn up at Dublin Airport each weekend to see flying machines defy gravity, taking off for somewhere else. Every flight was a reminder that there was a way out of Ireland if it was needed. In the fifties and sixties, more than half a million Irish people bought themselves one-way tickets out.

The good fortune for Da, Norman, and me at 10 Cedarwood Road, just two miles from the end of Runway 2, was that Norman managed to talk his bosses into allowing him to bring home the surplus airline food. The meals were sometimes still warm when he carried them in their tin boxes into our kitchen, to be heated in the oven for twenty-three minutes at three hundred and sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit. This was exotic fare: gammon steak and pineapple, an Italian food called lasagna, or a dish in which rice was no longer a milk pudding but a savory experience with peas. I told Norman that this was the worst dessert I'd ever had.

"It's not dessert, and by the way half the world eats rice every day."

Norman knew stuff that other people didn't. If my father and I were proud that my brother had relieved us of the need to buy groceries or even to cook, after six months the aftertaste of tin was all we could remember. At night, I took to eating cornflakes with cold milk.

I thought another culinary salvation had arrived, this time at Mount Temple, when the end of the lunchbox era was announced. Imagine a fanfare of trumpets and cheering at assembly—that's how excited we all were at the dawning of the age of school dinners. But I was punching the air only briefly. The school dinners, the headmaster explained, would not be cooked in the school canteen. It wasn't big enough. Instead, they would be arriving by van in tin boxes . . . from Dublin fucking Airport! They would be heated, he announced proudly, at three hundred and sixty-five degrees for twenty-three minutes in new ovens the school board had paid for.

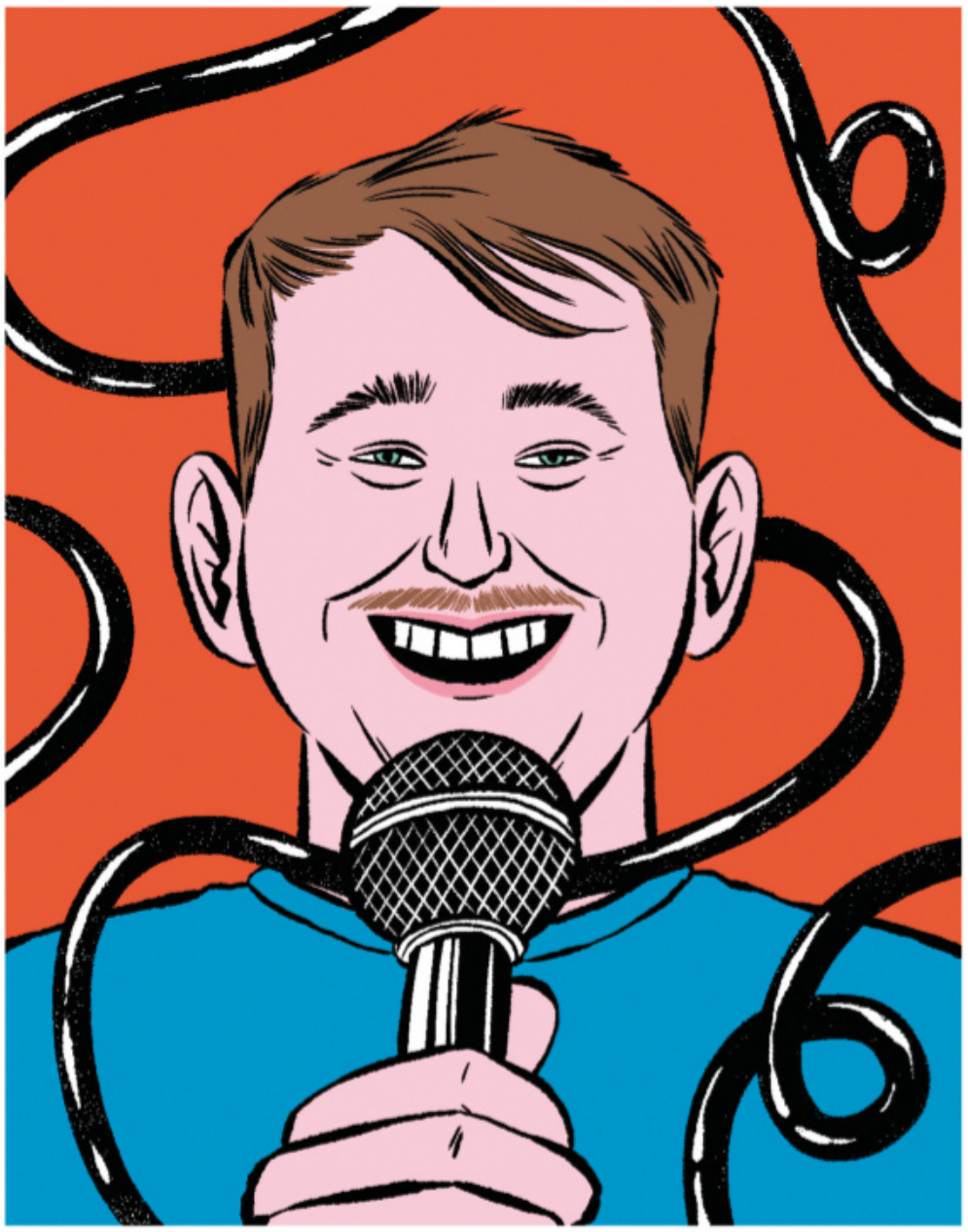
I had never been on an airplane, but already my romance with flying was over. Airplane food for lunch and airplane food for tea was more than any budding rock star could handle. In time, with my band, I would take to the skies, and on those early Aer Lingus flights I would look out the window and try to see Cedarwood Road. As I finally left this small town and small island and rose above these flat fields, my mind filled with memories of the phone box on the street, teen-agers with broken bottles and hearts, sweet and sour neighbors, and the vibrant branches full of cherry-tree blossoms outside our house. At which point the air hostess would arrive and place one of those little tin trays right in front of me. ♦

ANNALS OF COMEDY

THE JOKER

Shane Gillis's fall and rise.

BY KELEFA SANNEH



Shane Gillis has noticed that when he tells people his father watches Fox News they sometimes do something rude: they boo. Gillis is a standup comic, which means that he spends a lot of time at clubs in big cities, where he can seem a bit out of place. He is six-three and beefy, with a round head and small eyes that, he says, combine to make him look like Mimsy, a minor character from "South Park" who is too dull-witted to effectively throw his weight around. Gillis grew up playing football in Mechanicsburg, in central Pennsylvania, and he brings to the stage not just a lineman's body and a coach's mustache but a faint Pennsylvania accent, which he sometimes exaggerates for effect, and a much stronger Pennsylvania attitude, which he almost always exaggerates for effect. At first, he was surprised by audiences' eagerness to boo his father, but soon he made it part of his act. "Don't," he warned a crowd in Austin, after mentioning Fox News. "I see you guys—most of you have Fox News dads." He feigned consternation. "How dare you deny your fathers?"

The show was recorded and released as Gillis's first special, "Live in Austin," last year. Onstage, he is a convivial figure, but an unpredictable one: a beer-loving bro who is quick to let the crowd know that he is just joking—or maybe, unsettlingly, that he isn't. Early in the special, he talked about the shock of moving to New York, where some of his new friends ("communists from Brooklyn") liked to assure one another that they weren't racist. Gillis was unimpressed. "Being racist isn't, like, a yes-or-no thing," he said. "It's like being hungry." He paused for two awkward seconds; the audience didn't know whether this analogy would lead to a conclusion they could endorse. "It's like, yeah, you're not hungry *right now*. But a cheeseburger could cut you off on the highway. And you get hungry." Now people were laughing, comfortable for a moment. Gillis took a swig of beer, tucked his chin, and dropped his voice. "The cheeseburger's Jewish, in that joke," he said. "No, no, I'm kidding," he added, with a reassuring smile. "The cheeseburger is whatever type of cheeseburger you thought it was. In your racist heart."

"Live in Austin" was not streamed by Netflix, HBO, or any other network. Gillis funded it himself, and released it for free on YouTube, where it has been viewed nearly seven million times, earning raves from comedy connoisseurs and practically no attention from the mainstream media. "Live in Austin" was both a début and a reintroduction: a chance for Gillis to make a fresh impression on people who had not thought of him since 2019, when for a few days he was perhaps the most talked-about comedian in the world.

The talk began on September 12th, when "Saturday Night Live" announced that it was hiring three new cast members, including Gillis, who was then a little-known standup and the host of an obscure podcast. In the hours after the announcement, an independent journalist named Seth Simons, who writes about the politics of comedy, unearthed a clip from the previous year, in which Gillis and his co-host, Matt McCusker, rambled about Philadelphia's Chinatown. "It's fuckin' *Chinee* down there," Gillis said, sounding baffled by the foreignness of the place. "Let the fuckin' Chinks live there." He said this second sentence out of the side of his mouth, seemingly impersonating a disdainful white politician from an earlier era. But he said it nonetheless, and the fact that he had uttered a racial slur soon became the one thing just about everyone knew

Fired from "Saturday Night Live," Gillis vowed to "keep saying wild shit."

ILLUSTRATION BY NÚRIA JUST

about him. Several seconds later, talking about the neighborhood's restaurants, he used a slang term derived from an imitation of a Chinese accent. "Fat white idiots like me are down there, suckin' down *nooders*," he said.

By the morning of September 13th, Gillis was at the center of a major news story. One of his fellow-hires was Bowen Yang, who was widely celebrated as the show's first Asian American cast member; this summer he starred in "Fire Island," an acclaimed queer rom-com. Compared with Yang, Gillis seemed to many observers like a throwback to the bad old days of comedy. (Over the years, some white actors have done Asian impersonations on "S.N.L.," including Mike Myers, who portrayed a chuckling Japanese game-show host, and John Belushi, who played a chaotic samurai.) Gillis issued a grudging semi-apology, calling himself "a comedian who pushes boundaries," and adding, "I'm happy to apologize to anyone who's actually offended by anything I said."

In retrospect, it was probably inevitable that Gillis's invitation to join the show would be rescinded. More unexpurgated remarks were found, including Gillis's description of Judd Apatow, the comedy auteur, as "gayer than ISIS." (Apatow, who is not known to be gay, responded, "I don't mind but I think ISIS probably feels bad.") Lorne Michaels, the executive producer of "S.N.L.," told me that he was and is a fan of Gillis, but that the network was concerned about a backlash. "NBC was in something of a panic," he said. "It was, like, 'They're going to boycott these sponsors!'" On September 16th, he released a statement, saying that Gillis "will not be joining SNL," and that his podcast comments were "offensive, hurtful, and unacceptable."

A different sort of person in Gillis's situation might have argued against censoriousness, casting himself as a defender of "freedom of artistic expression." That is precisely what Dave Chappelle did, in his most recent Netflix special, which was less a standup routine than a lecture in which he addressed his many critics. But Gillis pointedly declined to plead his own case. "I don't want to be a victim—I want to be a comedian," he told Joe Rogan, the comic and podcast host, last year. "So I don't want to come on and do stuff where I'm, like, 'Yeah, it was unfair how I was treated.' It's like, no, I get it—I understand why I was treated that way. I said wild shit. I'm going to keep saying wild shit."

Like countless comedians before him, Gillis relishes the sense of surprise generated by saying something socially inappropriate. (Decades ago, common profanity served this purpose; audiences today barely register George Carlin's seven dirty words.) But Gillis's brush with fame brought new followers, not all of whom seemed to understand what he was doing. One afternoon, in his apartment in Astoria, Queens, he recalled that after his firing he sometimes had to contend with audience members who prized offensive speech for its own sake: "Dudes would come up and be, like, 'Chi-i-i-ink!' I'd be, like, 'No. That's not it.'" The "S.N.L." incident also endeared him to a cohort of politically conservative fans, some of whom probably had second thoughts when he joked onstage that, of all the American Presidents, Donald Trump would make the funniest assassination victim. (Fox News ran a story about the remark, noting that the White House had not responded to a request for comment.)

To anyone who thinks that comedians ought to prioritize non-stigmatizing language, or to be reliable allies for marginalized groups, Gillis might seem strikingly unreformed. He is, even now, the kind of straight guy who sometimes uses "gay" as a mild pejorative. But he excels at winning over skeptical audiences. When a joke gets a muted reception, he likes to look around the room and spread his hands slightly, in a "Ta-da!" gesture; the point is to acknowledge—and thereby shrink—the gap between what he thinks is funny and what the crowd thinks is funny. In November, Gillis is scheduled to headline Town Hall, as part of the New York Comedy Festival. Meanwhile, he is perfecting a new hour that includes a long, carefully calibrated story in which he interrogates his feelings about slavery and the Founding Fathers.

Gillis's unpredictable comedy can make his peers seem dull by comparison. The comic Jerrod Carmichael—whose melancholy recent special "Rothaniel" attracted unanimous critical acclaim—considers Gillis one of the few truly funny standups working today; this summer, he drove from Los Angeles to Irvine to watch him perform. "His material still feels dangerous," Carmichael told me. "It's because it's truthful, right?" Back in 2019, a prominent YouTuber named Jenny Nicholson tweeted, in exasperation, "Was SNL hurting for 'guy in your boyfriend's friend group who always says inappropriate things but your boyfriend insists he's known him forever and he's a really nice guy' energy." Evidently not. But, like most great comedians, Gillis has found a way to be thoroughly and recognizably himself onstage: he makes audiences feel that he's not pretending to be any better or worse than he actually is.

Gillis's career began in earnest less than a decade ago, when he was living in Philadelphia and performing at Helium, a subterranean theatre that is the nucleus of that city's standup scene. This summer, he returned there for a weekend of sold-out shows. It was a triumphant homecoming: friends from the local scene served as his warmup acts, and the bar was selling a Fuck S.N.L. cocktail—not Gillis's idea, he hastened to explain. These were Gillis's people. During his set, they whooped when he requested a fresh Bud Light. When he confessed that he missed Trump's press conferences, because they were "fun," he heard a cheer in the crowd. "No, no, no—chill the fuck out," Gillis said, jovial but firm. In his view, partisan cheering is just as inimical to comedy as partisan booing. Gillis tries never to inspire "clapter"—the sound of an audience broadcasting approval, rather than enjoyment.

When his set was over, Gillis held court in the theatre bar, where he was approached by a stream of exuberant young men. One bought him a beer and asked for a picture in return. Another said, "Not to sound gay, but I'm a big fan." An old friend urged Gillis to do a shot, but he was distracted by a glassy-eyed admirer, who wanted him to record a message for a friend: "Let's make a video and tell him, 'You missed out, *bitch!*'"

"I don't want to do that," Gillis said, softly.

"No, he can take it—he's a dawg,"

the fan insisted. Avid listeners of "Matt and Shane's Secret Podcast," which still releases episodes weekly, are known as "dawgz"; a dawg is essentially a bro, only better.

"I don't want to make fun of him," Gillis said, and the fan settled for a photograph.

Gillis used to be frustrated by having to perform in front of audiences full of young men whose enthusiasm outstripped their comedic discernment. (He would sometimes think, "Please, dude—I'm trying to be *good* at standup.") As his crowds have grown, they have grown somewhat less homogeneous, and he sometimes jokes about seeing stone-faced women who seem to have been dragged to the club by their podcast-loving boyfriends. Comedy podcasts have been important to his career, and in the aftermath of 2019 he bolstered his following by appearing on a number of them. These shows tend to be contemptuous of the decorous sensibility of the mainstream entertainment industry, and they often purport to be speaking for a counterculture, although the numbers suggest that the "counter" may in fact be bigger than the "culture." Joe Rogan's show, which hosted Gillis for the first time last year, reportedly reaches something like eleven million listeners—about twice the typical audience of "Saturday Night Live." Gillis's podcast has hundreds of thousands of listeners, many of whom pay one or five or ten dollars a month for access to bonus content. And for two weeks this summer he was part of a tour headlined by Bert Kreischer, a gregarious comic who is also the host of "Bertcast," a podcast devoted, as many of them are, to long discussions of nothing in particular. The tour played mainly arenas and minor-league baseball stadiums; if this is niche entertainment, then so is just about everything else.



On a podcast, unlike onstage, Gillis is unscripted, and only intermittently hilarious; he says he views podcasting as a supplement to his real profession, which is being a standup comic. But it's not clear what people want from standup comedy these days. The form is as prominent as it has ever been, and as divisive. There may be no comic more popular than Chappelle, whose routines about trans identity have sparked protest and backlash. (His specials earn him eight-figure checks from Netflix, but a recent performance at a theatre in Minneapolis had to be moved at the last minute; the venue suggested that hosting Chappelle would be incompatible with creating the "safest" possible environment.) And some of the most acclaimed specials of recent years have treated standup itself with suspicion: in 2018, the Australian comic Hannah Gadsby released "Nanette," in which she suggested that comics and their audiences were trapped in "an abusive relationship." She explained, "Punch lines need trauma, because punch lines need tension, and tension feeds trauma," and added that she might need to "quit comedy." (Happily, she didn't.) Meanwhile, late-night hosts like Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Kimmel are now known less for telling jokes than for delivering earnest liberal commentary. A few days after Hillary Clinton lost the 2016 election to Trump, "Saturday Night Live" began its broadcast with Kate McKinnon, dressed up as Clinton, singing a thoroughly laughless version of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah"; nowadays, the show tends to depict Joe Biden, rather sympathetically, as an aging normie, a more or less sane man in a mad world. Often, the implicit message is that we are living in a tragic era, not a comic one.

Gillis remembers the shock of performing on November 8, 2016, as it became clear that Trump had been elected President. "People were, like, crying onstage," he says. "So I went on and I was, like, 'We're back, dudes! White dudes are back—let's go!' Like, *obviously* an insane thing. But people were mad. Which, I guess, is why it's funny." Gillis professes to be incredulous that anyone would worry about a comedian's political convictions. (One afternoon, at lunch, he likened himself to the guy who brought him a sandwich. "It's like being mad at a waiter," he said.) But he often tells audiences, as a conciliatory gesture, that he never voted for Trump. He jokes that this took considerable restraint, given that he felt Trump was targeting his particular demographic. "His whole campaign was at me," Gillis once said. "He was, like, 'Are you a fucking fat idiot?' I was, like, 'Yeah, dude! Yeah—what are we doing? What the fuck are we doing, dude? We're building walls? *Hell* yeah!' " He has developed an uncannily good Trump impersonation, one that is neither an endorsement nor an indictment. He reliably gets a big laugh imitating Trump as he brags about the elimination of an Islamic militant by bellowing, "He died like a dog." It is an absurd moment, but not a fictional one: this is exactly what Trump said, in 2019, when he announced the death of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the ISIS leader.

During the pandemic, Gillis resolved to bring his Trump impersonation to the screen. He and a comedian friend from Philadelphia, John McKeever, used their own funds to film twelve sketches, including one that drops Trump into a speed-dating session; they uploaded them to YouTube, where "Trump Speed Dating" has been viewed more than two million times. The show is called "Gilly and Keeves," and the two recently shot a second season, which they plan to sell online. Gillis enjoys the freedom of being a do-it-yourself comedy star, but he also wouldn't miss being his own marketer and distributor if a big media company decided to write him a check. In the meantime, standup provides him with both structure and community, so when he is not on tour Gillis can often be found at the Stand, a club in Union Square, or at the Comedy Cellar, a Greenwich Village institution. Passing through the Cellar's doors sometimes feels like returning to an era before social media: in an effort to make sure nothing goes viral, bouncers require patrons to seal their phones in bubble mailers, which the club purchases by the pallet. (The mailer is not entirely impregnable, but it makes a conspicuous squeaking sound if someone tries to rip it open mid-set.) Most nights, an atmosphere of cheerful indiscretion prevails, and during one recent appearance Gillis was introduced by an m.c. who had previously delivered a series of ribald jokes about gay sex, sometimes punctuated with the snap of a folding fan.

Welcoming Gillis, he told the crowd, "Your next act has a dick I think about all the time."

Gillis, bounding onstage with a can of blackberry hard seltzer, said, "If he *knew* what my dick looked like—aw, he'd be sad."

Fans of Gillis often tell him that he reminds them of someone from their home town, which might be a polite way of saying that he doesn't much resemble a celebrity. "You see a guy like me on TV, he's usually doing something pretty bad," Gillis says. The word he uses to describe his appearance is "oafy." Growing up in Mechanicsburg, he was known as a big guy who liked to drink beer; at thirty-four, he works hard to maintain this reputation. Over the summer, he appeared on a drinking-game podcast hosted by Barstool Sports. Gillis, wearing a Phillies jersey and face paint that resembled an Eagles helmet, helped his team win by downing something like sixteen beers in sixty-three minutes.

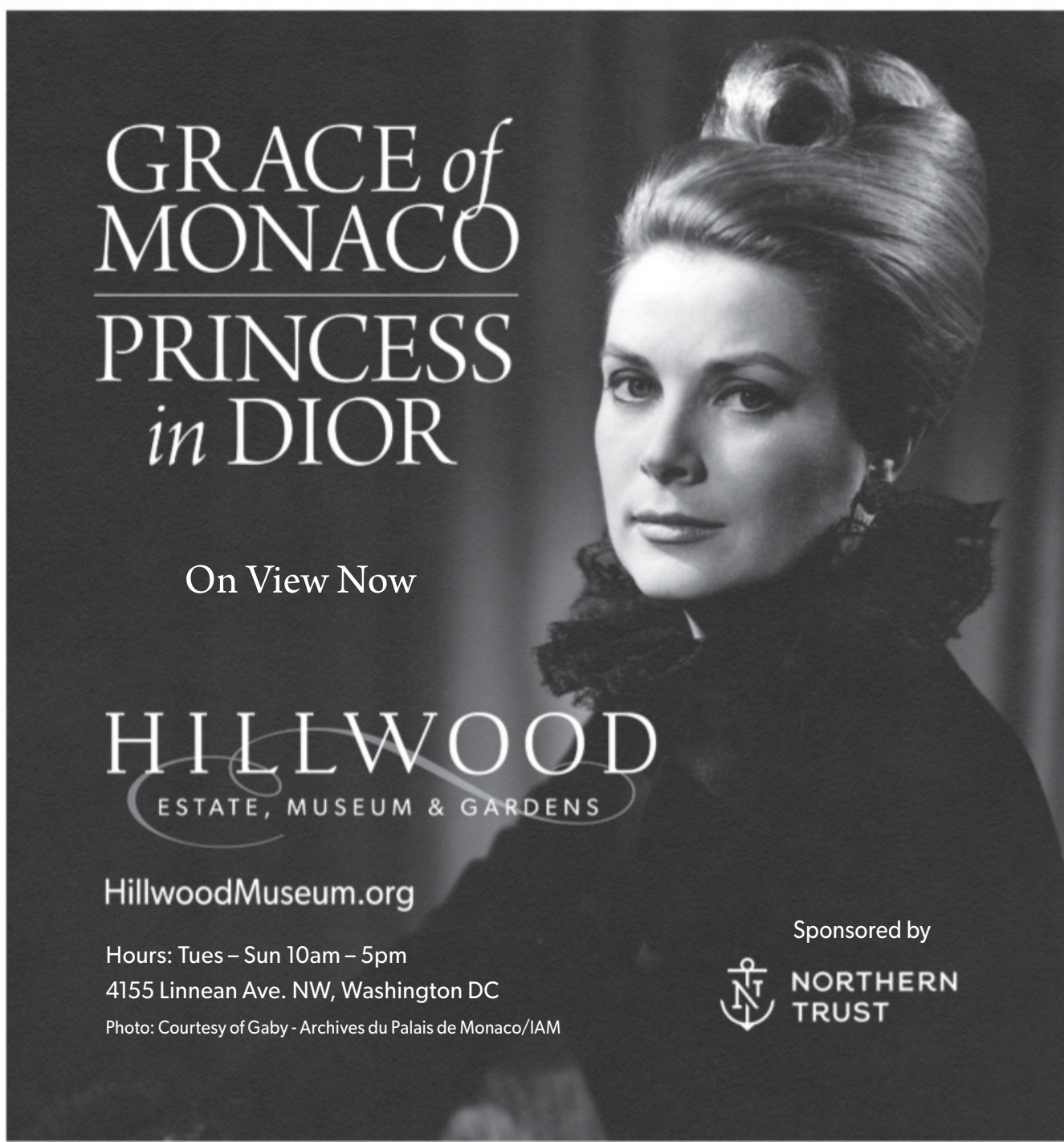
Forty-eight hours later, he was horizontal on his couch in Astoria. "I kind of hate myself right now," he told me. "My girlfriend's out of town for, like, a week, so the place is trashed." It actually looked perfectly respectable: American-history memorabilia on the walls; ESPN, muted, on the television; a package from Sheath, an underwear company that sponsors Gillis's podcast, on the table. He was using comedy to distract himself from how lousy he felt. "Last night I did seven sets," he said. "I needed to kill seven times to feel better."

Like most kids, Gillis knew about comedy long before he knew about comedy clubs. His father, who sold food-packaging equipment, had some George Carlin CDs, but Gillis was more drawn to high-energy comics like Carlos Mencia and Dane Cook, who were ascendant in the early two-thousands. Most of all, he remembers watching "Old School," the 2003 Will Ferrell movie, and thinking that he could do what Ferrell was doing, though he didn't know how to start. After high school, he was recruited to play football at West Point, but he quickly realized that he did not enjoy the gruelling team workouts. He transferred to a less exacting program at Elon University, in North Carolina, where he spent a year practicing with the team and neglecting his studies; he was asked to leave, and found himself back in his parents' house, going to community college and washing dishes.

Gillis eventually earned a degree, in history, from West Chester University, outside Philadelphia, where he started doing comedy at a local bar; he learned first that it's a bad idea to go up with nothing prepared, and then that it's nearly as lethal to go up with a rote routine. He worked for a while selling Hondas, and spent six months teaching English in Spain. But he was obsessed with standup, and gradually learned to command a room; in the summer of 2016, he won the annual Philly's Phunniest competition, which was about as far into the future as he had planned. People from beyond Philadelphia began to take note, including Dan Soder, a comic and an actor who met Gillis at Helium and eventually took him on the road as his opening act. It seemed to Soder (who now plays Dudley Mafee on "Billions") that Gillis was already "fully formed." He told me that Gillis would walk onstage, grab the microphone, and say, matter-of-factly, "*Hell* yeah." It made him seem less like a performer than like a friendly guy at the bar, one whom audience members already knew.

In Philadelphia, Gillis had befriended Matt McCusker, a fellow-comic, and they spent enough time trying to make each other laugh that they figured they might as well set up some microphones and start a podcast. They are a complementary pair. Where Gillis likes beer and sports, McCusker is a devoted pothead with a fondness for dubious schemes and theories; he has a master's degree in social work and, nowadays, a wife and two children. Their podcast has always been extremely casual, and extremely intimate. They recorded a recent episode lying in a hotel bed together, trying to recover from whatever they had done the previous night.

The appeal of this kind of podcast is that listeners, if they have the patience to sit through hours of idle banter, get



a chance to hear something uncensored and unfiltered—just two guys talking. In this case, those guys are also comics, and sometimes you can sense that they are trying on different points of view, rooting around for one that might be funny. When McCusker mentioned the exuberance of Pride celebrations, Gillis said, with exaggerated umbrage, "It's a jizz parade." Then they reconsidered.

McCusker: I get it. I feel like they got bullied pretty hard.

Gillis: They got bullied, and now they're out dancing in the street, saying, "Fuck you!"

McCusker: They are dancing in the end zone.

Gillis: They're showboating a little. Good for them for that, honestly!

McCusker: It's true.

Gillis (*coachlike, increasingly heated*): You wanna keep 'em from celebrating, dude? Don't let 'em score. Don't let 'em in the end zone. They scored already. They're *allowed* to dance.

This kind of talk is certain to offend plenty of people, virtually none of whom are likely to be regular listeners of "Matt and Shane's Secret Podcast." Such is the allure of shocking content: it can turn those who enjoy it into insiders, united against those outsiders who don't. In this sense, Gillis and countless other provocative comics and podcasters are descendants of the so-called shock jocks, radio personalities who inspired loyalty precisely because of their determination to violate taboos. Younger listeners who know Howard Stern as a thoughtful celebrity interviewer are sometimes startled to hear old recordings of him bantering with a Klansman, or asking women profoundly inappropriate sexual questions.

"Opie and Anthony," which began broadcasting in 1995, cultivated a more scabrous sensibility, and a closer relationship with standup: in the two-thousands, the hosts organized an annual comedy tour. Anthony Cumia was fired from the show in 2014, for provocations that were more angry than funny. (After what he said was an altercation with a Black woman in Times Square, Cumia posted a picture of the woman, along with the words "animal pig face worthless meat sack.") He subsequently launched his own streaming network, Compound Media, which was the home of "A Fair One," a podcast that Gillis used to co-host.

One of the things that Gillis learned in 2019 is that comics should expect to be judged by whatever they say on podcasts. Compared with the old shock jocks, though, today's provocateurs can seem positively erudite. Stern sometimes tried to coax women guests to sit on an ottoman-size vibrator he had in the studio; Rogan recently spent two and a half hours talking to the theoretical physicist Michio Kaku. The regulatory environment has changed, too. Stern's show was repeatedly fined by the Federal Communications Commission. His heirs worry less about government action than about the complicated mixture of approval and outrage they inspire among members of the general public, and among the corporations that often determine the limits of acceptable speech.

Gillis doesn't complain, because he recognizes that part of what makes taboo humor funny is that it is, in fact, taboo—which means that comics who argue against linguistic taboos are usually being hypocritical, or at any rate self-defeating. During a recent podcast appearance, he acknowledged that certain jokes rely for their impact on the idea that someone, somewhere, might be upset by them. "If literally there would be zero blowback for going on a podcast and being, like, 'Here's some funny things about Hitler,' it's not as dangerous," he said. "It's not as funny."

Gillis was not quite as surprised as the rest of the world when he was hired by "Saturday Night Live," in 2019. By then, he had signed with United Talent Agency and moved to New York, and that summer he performed at high-profile showcases in Montreal and San Francisco, where he presented himself as a red-state emissary to a blue city. (He teased the crowd about the election: "Do you guys remember how, like, *confident* you guys were, going into that last one?") In 2019, *Variety* reported that Lorne Michaels had brought in Gillis as part of an effort to "appeal to more conservative viewers." Michaels denies this, but he allows that Gillis does provide a different point of view. "He's from a part of the world that should also have a voice," he told me. "He's very funny. And he's good with language, which I always look for."

Gillis knew he had probably said more than his share of offensive things over the years, but he couldn't quite remember what, and he says that representatives of the show told him he had passed a background check. For five or six hours, he could enjoy the idea that he had joined the most venerable institution in American comedy; as a boy, he had wondered how a regular guy becomes Will Ferrell, and the shortest answer is probably "Saturday Night Live." Then he heard from someone at his agency, asking if he had ever used the word "Chink." Gillis's response was "Of course not!" But his memory was soon jogged by the video clip that Seth Simons had found and posted to Twitter. Simons says now that he was less worried about Gillis than about the fact that a cohort of comics seemed to think it was fine—or even cool—to use offensive and dehumanizing language. "I don't think he is, at all, the worst offender in that world," Simons told me. "But I think he is part of a culture that believes in, just, total impunity for going out and saying a bunch of slurs on your podcast."

Bowen Yang did not comment publicly, but plenty of other performers did. The actor Daniel Dae Kim, from "Lost" and "Hawaii Five-0," wrote, "It took 45 years for @SNL to get an East Asian cast member and in that same year he'll be joined by someone who would have no problem calling him a 'fuckin' chink.'" Another actor, Simu Liu, from Marvel's "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," wrote, "This word has been used to dehumanize my people for over 150 years. You don't get to use it in the name of edgy comedy."

Gillis's first public statement, about being "a comedian who pushes boundaries," sounded ridiculous to many people—including Gillis, who has since apologized for saying something so pretentious. The argument over his firing was not about free speech; it was about what sort of performers "Saturday Night Live" should hire. Not many people knew enough about Gillis, or his work, to defend him. A few of the show's veterans spoke up on his behalf, on principle, including Norm Macdonald, who lived by the creed that comedians should be troublemakers, and Rob Schneider, who wrote that we were living in an era of "cultural unforgiveness,"

and suggested that Gillis was being unfairly punished for "comedic misfires." (Schneider, who joined "S.N.L." in 1990, is sometimes described as the show's first cast member of Asian descent; his maternal grandmother was Filipina.) But there was no public outpouring from people insisting that the show should keep a cast member who had uttered a racial slur.

Gillis remembers those days as a surreal blur of frantic meetings and phone calls and texts; U.T.A. dropped him as a client, while clubs like the Stand kept booking him. If anything, the episode made him more devoted to comedy, because he wanted to prove that he really was funny. It was during this period that a friend put him in touch with Louis C.K., whose tenure as one of the country's most widely admired comics ended suddenly in 2017, after five women accused him of sexual misconduct. C.K. discovered, as Gillis has, that he could keep doing standup despite public opprobrium. (This year, he won a Grammy for "Sincerely Louis C.K.," a self-released special; the award suggested that there is a considerable gap between what show-business professionals say in public and how they vote in private.)

C.K. considers Gillis a "great comic," and loves watching him watch the audience, registering people's delight or dismay. "He has a fishbowl face," C.K. told me. "Like, you can see what he's feeling all the time." Gillis and C.K. are now close, and they recently collaborated on a marathon podcast in which they attempted to discuss all forty-five American Presidents; it lasted nearly six and a half hours. Another of Gillis's fans is Andrew Yang, the former Presidential candidate, who argued in 2019 that Gillis deserved a second chance. This seemed like a political stratagem (Yang was positioning himself as a candidate who could unite a divided America), but the two stayed in touch. Gillis recently appeared on Yang's podcast, where Yang told him about how he used to fight schoolmates who teased him for being Asian American. And, in San Francisco this summer, Yang introduced Gillis before a performance, and tried out some comedy himself. "I first met Shane when I was running for President of the United States and he was trying to join the cast of 'S.N.L.'—and we both fell short," Yang said. Then he turned serious, delivering the kind of heartfelt message that Gillis avoids at all costs. "Through everything," he said, "Shane has kept his spirit, stayed true to himself, honed his craft, became a better human being and a better comedian."



"I'm not a mad scientist—I'm just a disappointed scientist."

• •

Among some of his peers, Gillis is now viewed as an expert on what can and can't be said. Theo Von, a garrulous Louisianan, hosts one of the most popular comedy podcasts on YouTube, and when Gillis paid a visit last year Von paused in mid-conversation to ask, "You feel like we've said anything cancellable?" Gillis didn't think they had, but an hour later he issued a warning. Von was talking, for no good reason, about Lester Holt, the host of "NBC Nightly News," who is Black, and who is known for his careful diction. "I feel like Lester Holt's secretly a white guy," Von said. "You telling me that's not a white guy in blackface?"

Gillis demurred: "This type of thing is a little dangerous. Speculating on a Black guy's race?"

Von tried a different tack. "In the future," he said, "everybody's going to be beige, and it's going to be ridiculous we were ever even arguing about race stuff."

Again, Gillis demurred: "It's funny for white people to say that, though. To be the purveyors of racism for the longest time, and then towards the end be, like, 'What are we even fighting about?'" He laughed, and added, "It's good for the honkies, trying to hit the Eject button."

Gillis has now had three years to think about linguistic taboos. But he is less interested in right and wrong than in audience reactions: which words are distracting, which words make a joke less funny instead of more. "I definitely don't say the F-word onstage—I really try not to," he said, referring not to the common expletive but to the anti-gay slur. During a recent episode of Rogan's podcast, Gillis did an impression of an obnoxious drunken tourist in Hawaii, slurring, "You're from a fuckin' *island*, faggot," and then caught himself. "Delete that—my bad," he said.

One lesson from Gillis's experience might seem simple enough: Don't use racial slurs. But what about sexual slurs? Almost no one calls for male comics to be censured for saying "bitch." And what qualifies as a race, anyway? Gillis recently filmed a sketch for "Gilly and Keeves" that consists of almost nothing but Italian American stereotypes; the underlying joke is that, in the current political environment, you can say whatever you want about Italian Americans. It is probable that the more taboo words there are, the less

consistently the taboos will be honored. And it seems certain that there will always be comedians and audiences who revel in the illicit thrill of bad words, no matter how we define "bad."

Hannah Gadsby is right: punch lines need tension, which means that comics must often find ways not just to tolerate tension but to generate it. Gillis will sometimes play the role of the angry conservative, if he's talking to a liberal, or vice versa. This summer, onstage with the right-leaning comic and producer Adam Carolla, he responded to a joke about abortion with an unexpected blast of feminist sarcasm. "We could let *women* decide—nah, I'm fuckin' around," he said. "What, are we fuckin' nuts, dude? Don't let them make *choices*."

Gillis is in some sense a purist: he cares more about standup than about anything else. That means he would rather be funny than correct. It also means he recognizes that there is more to standup than just making people laugh. Gillis's heroes are performers like C.K. and Chris Rock, who were widely celebrated not just for their punch lines but for their insight. It is probably thanks to these performers that so many people now take comedy seriously—more seriously, sometimes, than comedians might prefer.

The second season of "Gilly and Keeves" had its première in person, at the Theatre of Living Arts, in Philadelphia. Gillis and McKeever sold out two performances in one night, even though they weren't quite sure what they had signed up to do. Gillis emerged, squinting into the audience. "During rehearsals, we were, like, 'We can just fuckin' wing it,'" he said. "It's a lot different when these chairs are empty."

For about an hour and a half, the two screened their new sketches, which were closer in spirit to "I Think You Should Leave with Tim Robinson," the unhinged (and sometimes menacing) Netflix series, than to "S.N.L." Gillis's Trump reappeared, in a sketch about desperate film producers who can't find anyone to play Hitler in their movie; Trump takes the role and takes over, doing his best to turn Hitler into a character that audiences will root for.

They got through the first show, and then emptied and refilled the theatre to do it again. After the second show, Gillis led a dozen friends and collaborators down South Street, looking for someplace to drink. He was stopped by a pair of police officers, who recognized him from YouTube and asked for a selfie. "We were just talking about 'Uncle Daycare,'" one of them said. He was referring to a "Gilly and Keeves" sketch about a crew of moronic white guys who are sent to learn basic life skills: how to debunk vaccine conspiracy theories, for instance, or how to refrain from harassing underage girls.

One theory of Gillis's career is that it mirrors a cultural and political divide within comedy. Maybe audiences increasingly expect comedy to reflect their own beliefs, priorities, and identities. By some metrics, "Saturday Night Live" is as diverse as it has ever been, and perhaps as politically partisan, too. In alternative rooms, where a new generation of performers embrace surreal humor and insist on the importance of identity, old-fashioned joke-tellers like Gillis are sometimes known, not always admiringly, as "club comics." Meanwhile, Rogan and a whole cohort of comics and podcasters, many of them white and male, find big audiences by pushing back against the perceived hypocrisies and excesses of liberal culture. Everyone can feel comforted by the thought of watching something someone else would *hate*.

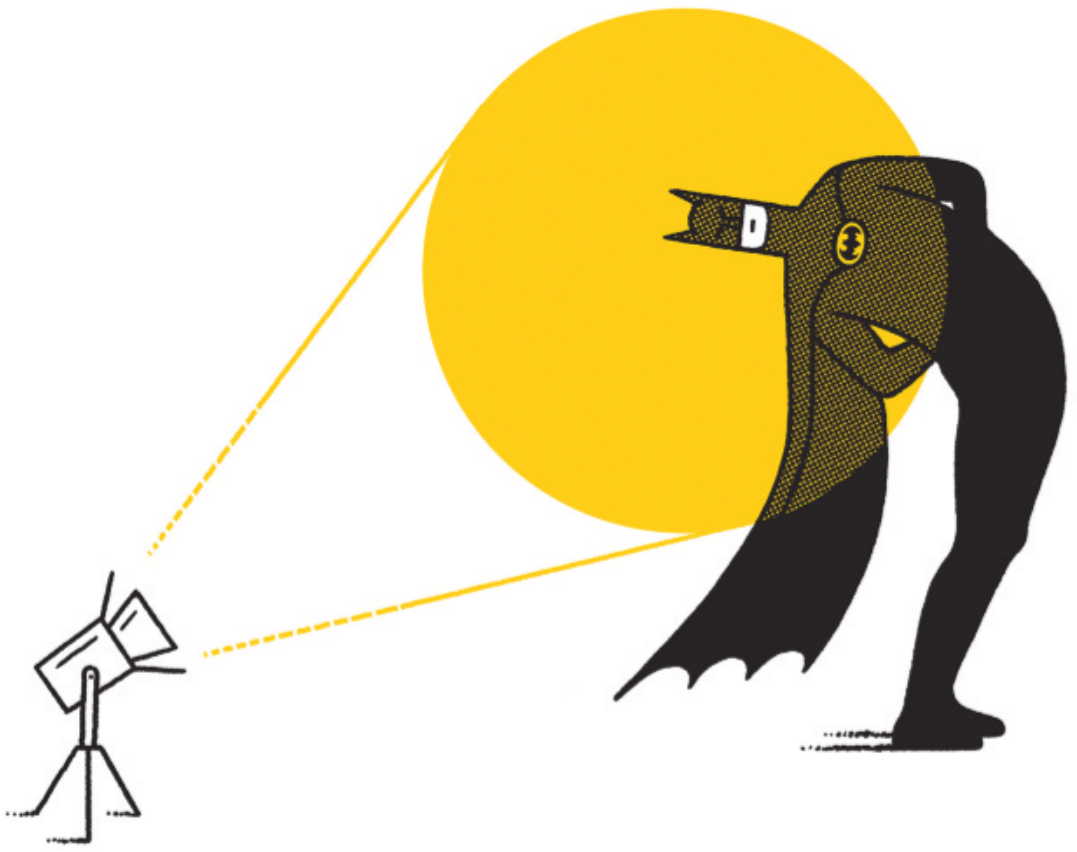
In a "Saturday Night Live" sketch from this season, which was cut from the broadcast but posted on the YouTube page, the cast members seemed to be mocking people like Gillis. John Mulaney, the host, played a man who had just lost his job for having made inappropriate comments. "I guess I should have deleted my old podcasts," he lamented. Then the mood brightened, and a voice-over cut in, advertising a useful product: the Fisher-Price Podcast Set for White Guys. You could rant all you liked, secure in the knowledge that the microphone was fake, so that nothing was actually being recorded. By the end, Mulaney's character was happily playing with his new toy. "I can say whatever I want, and I can never get cancelled," he said. "Even the N-word!" This was a witty expression of anti-anti-cancel culture. It was also a demonstration of the appeal of linguistic taboos: the phrase "the N-word" carries just enough transgressive power to make the sketch funnier.

The promise of comedy is that a truly great joke, a truly great performer, is undeniable, almost no matter who you are. And Gillis's standup does not seem to be particularly polarizing, at least not if you compare him with Chappelle, or with Ricky Gervais, whose most recent special includes a punch line involving an exaggerated Chinese accent. In the industry, comics pay close attention to who can make a crowd laugh so hard that people are gasping for air, and who can reliably fill venues around the country. Gillis is already known as the first type of comic, and he seems to be in the process of becoming the second. He recently signed a deal to do his first national theatre tour, starting early next year. "So few people are good at their craft," Jerrod Carmichael says. "No matter what you identify as—as a woke comedian, or anti-woke comedian, whatever—none of that really matters. Just sell tickets. Be interesting and sell tickets."

One night not long ago, Gillis was in a cramped hallway in the basement of the Comedy Cellar, which is lined with photographs of famous comics—not including him, at least not yet. He was working on a tricky and possibly ill-advised joke about the sexual orientations of people with Down syndrome. (He says, if it matters, that he has a relative with Down syndrome, and that he has spent time as a Special Olympics coach.) Audiences didn't like it, but Gillis was sure he could make it work, and so he kept at it. During his set, it failed again, and he seemed both frustrated and amused. Mostly, though, he killed, expertly creating and resolving moments of discomfort. He was a bellicose patriot one moment, a terrorist sympathizer the next. The crowd seemed unsettled, not quite sure where he was coming from, but everyone laughed.

Rich Vos, a veteran who has been performing for nearly forty years, watched from the hallway and shook his head. "He got so fuckin' funny," he said.

Liz Furiati, the general manager, was standing next to him, and she agreed. "It's *disturbing*," she said, and she meant it as high praise. ♦



CONFUSING BATMAN CAMEOS

BY JAY MARTEL

[In addition to "Batgirl," Michael] Keaton also filmed a scene for the upcoming "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" that test audiences found confusing, as it was unclear what Keaton's Batman was doing in this universe.

—*The Hollywood Reporter.*

Hondo: I don't like that look, Mav.
Maverick: It's the only one I got.
(*Batman appears from the shadows.*)
Batman: I don't like that look, either.
Maverick: Who are you?
Batman: I am . . . the Batman.
Maverick: That your call sign?
Batman: No. I am a warrior of the darkness. I am the righter of wrongs.
(*After a beat, Maverick and Hondo laugh.*)
Hondo: Who let this joker on the base?
Batman: The Joker is my nemesis.
Maverick: Whatever. I'm flying this plane. Tell the admiral to try and stop me.
(*Maverick jumps in the plane and takes off.*)
Batman: I'll give him your message.

•

Estragon: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?
Vladimir: Yes yes, we're magicians.
(*Batman enters.*)
Batman: I see without seeing. To me, darkness is as clear as daylight. What am I?
(*Vladimir and Estragon exchange a puzzled yet hopeful look.*)
Estragon: Godot?
Batman: No.
Vladimir: Then who?
Batman: I am a creature of the night. I am justice.
Estragon: I'm still not getting it.
Vladimir: Me, neither.
(*They sit, uncertain. After a few moments, Batman walks away.*)

•

Ilsa: If you knew how much I loved you. How much I still love you.
(*Rick and Ilsa kiss. Batman steps out of the shadows.*)
Batman: You're walking along and you fall through a hole. You never stop falling. The trauma never goes away.
Rick: I never heard such a load of cockeyed crap. And the bar's closed. Get the hell out of here!
(*After a moment, Batman leaves. Rick and Ilsa resume their embrace.*)

•

Freddie Mercury: I want you out of my life.
Paul Prenter: 'Cause I'm the only one left, you're blaming me for everything?
(*Batman steps out of the night.*)
Batman: Freddie's breaking up with you, Paul. You should've told him about Live Aid.
Paul: I told him. He just forgot.
Batman: You know that's not what happened. Now say goodbye. He's leaving you. Forever.
(*Batman and Freddie walk away from Paul through the rain.*)
Freddie: Thank you for your help. Will you be returning with me to London?
Batman: No. My work here is done.
(*Batman vanishes into the night.*)
Freddie: Really? That's it?

•

Laura Wingfield: Mother, when you're disappointed, you get that awful suffering look on your face, like the picture of Jesus' mother in the museum.
(*Batman enters.*)
Batman: Perhaps I can be of some help.
Laura: Another gentleman caller!
Amanda Wingfield: No, Laura. I have no idea who this masked stranger is. Who are you?
Batman: I am the Batman. I am the hero this city deserves.
Laura: Would you like to see my glass collection?
Batman: No.
(*After several minutes of silence, Batman leaves.*)

•

Hamlet: To be, or not to be, that is the question.
(*Batman enters.*)
Hamlet: What spirit are you, that walks this castle in such strange raiment?
Batman: I am the Batman.
Hamlet: Indeed. And how does the man of bat see this princely predicament?
Batman: There is . . . no question. Your father was murdered. His murderer must pay. With his life.
(*After a moment, Hamlet nods. End of play.*) ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

THE WORLD OF FASHION

THE TASTEMAKER

Behind the scenes with Laila Gohar, the Björk of food.

BY MOLLY FISCHER



Gohar elevates food to rarefied aesthetic heights, and her assemblages have become fixtures of fashion parties, gallery openings,



and international design events like the Salone del Mobile, where they provide both snack and spectacle.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HUGO YU

On a hot June afternoon in Milan, Laila Gohar emerged from a taxi at the Ospedale Militare di Baggio carrying many bags. The bags—from Gucci, from the venerable pasticceria Marchesi 1824, from the supermarket chain Penny—held food, mostly: floral pastilles, pistachio drops, sugared squares of fruit jelly, pastries shaped like maraschino-tipped breasts. Only a small number of these confections would be eaten. Most would be embalmed in shellac and arrayed in precise and inscrutable tableaux, although it was too soon to say exactly how. Gohar was in the midst of creating an installation at the independent design show Alcova, an offshoot of the Salone del Mobile, Milan's annual furniture fair.

Like many of the designers and decorators attending the fair, Gohar has made a career out of elevating something functional—in her case, food—to rarefied aesthetic heights. In 2019, when the French department store Galeries Lafayette hoped to lure luxury shoppers to its new location on the Champs-Élysées, the company turned to Gohar to cater an opening-night party. What Gohar delivered (along with a hula-hoop-wide raspberry tart and larger-than-life butter sculptures of a hand, a mouth, and an ear) was a mortadella the size of a telephone pole. It entered through the department store's second-floor windows, with the help of a crane, and came to rest on a pork-pink marble plinth, surrounded by matching flowers—a monument of cold-cut grandeur.

In recent years, Gohar's jolie-laide assemblages have become fixtures of fashion parties, gallery openings, and international events like the Salone, where they provide both snack and spectacle. She has arranged grids of jewel-like radishes for Prada and served boiled eggs and sea beans for Hermès. At a Nike dinner in New York in early 2020, Drake introduced Gohar by calling her the "Björk" of food. Many of her pieces—a swan made of artichoke leaves, a rope of braided mozzarella the length of a banquet table, a single rose inside a translucent fish molded of champagne gelatine—are arresting enough that it is not immediately apparent how or whether to go about eating them. Sometimes doing so requires the type of intervention a shy partygoer might hesitate to undertake—whacking a chocolate bust with a mallet, say. But Gohar welcomes these moments of uncertainty. "Restaurants are, by design, supposed to make you feel comfortable," she told me. "You walk in there, you're greeted, people are nice to you. But the spaces where I work are often not that." At galleries or fashion shows, "you're just kind of . . . lurking, and, when you bring my work into those kinds of spaces, it acts like an instant icebreaker. People become like children, almost." Guests start talking to one another, asking, What is that? Can I eat it? "I care a lot about food," Gohar said. "But it's not the point."

The food was especially beside the point at Alcova. Gohar was creating a display for the Italian refrigeration company Ciam that would last throughout the show; durability, not edibility, was the goal. Her team had begun preparation a few weeks before at her studio, which is housed in a storefront wedged between a school and a funeral home on Manhattan's Lower East Side. There, the artist Robert Anthony O'Halloran, a friend of Gohar's younger sister Nadia, had started the process of encasing various foods in silicone cylinders. A tangle of Polish sausage and a baguette standing on end were among the sculptures that made the journey to Milan. Now, in two rooms on the first floor of a building once inhabited by nuns, Gohar unpacked her latest supplies onto a sheet of bubble wrap, where they joined ladyfingers, cherry tomatoes, and chicken drumsticks made of chocolate, all shellacked or soon to be. Gohar was particularly pleased with the gloss on pods of cranberry beans—they looked, she observed, almost like the hand-painted porcelain vegetables that sell for hundreds of dollars at the interior-design boutique John Derian.

Gohar, wearing a black nylon Prada minidress and a Simone Rocha earring that resembled a human tooth, pulled on a black rubber glove and began painting resin on a cake. She has delicately angled features that narrow to a pointed chin, and styles her hair in a dramatic side part. She favors a tastefully nonchalant assortment of garments that tend to be very small or somewhat large, emphasizing her gamine bearing. Rocha, a friend, later told me that "nothing's too precious" in Gohar's approach to clothes. "She'll be cooking in, like, broderie-anglaise white eyelet trousers," Rocha said. "For me, as a designer, that's the ultimate compliment." Gohar slipped off her brown Hermès clogs to pad around barefoot, despite a warning from her studio director, Malena Burman, that there might be glass on the floor.

The cake was an experiment—Gohar wasn't sure how its surface would take the resin. Several of the breast pastries had been squished in transit. "We should eat them," she said. "Or give them away, so we have a bunch of new friends." The most pressing question was what to do about the baguette. It stood on a table, one end embedded in a silicone base, the other curving over so that the tip rested against a mirrored panel. "It creates an archway," O'Halloran said. "It extends the form." (He'd accompanied Gohar to Milan and was working on the installation during her supply run.) Gohar was dubious. She wanted the baguette to balance on its own, upright. Maybe the base could be propped up with more silicone, or with Popsicle sticks? Gohar's process involves a strong element of improvisation: she is inclined to believe that things will work out, and, perhaps because of this, they often do. Her longtime agent, Nick Mainwaring, says that he has learned not to provide her clients with menus in advance. The results are best, he finds, "if her wings aren't clipped in any way."

Along one wall hung a selection of linens and bows from Gohar World, a line of ornate and faintly fantastical housewares that Gohar and Nadia had débuted a few weeks before. The Alcova installation was not officially a Gohar World project, but Gohar had taken the opportunity to incorporate some of its offerings. "Surrealist" has been the word widely used to describe the collection, which features trompe-l'oeil dinnerware and necklaces of pearls shaped like chicken feet, and which arrived amid a moment of fashion-world infatuation with Surrealism. (The Fall

At right, Gohar in New York, where she lives. "I care a lot about food," she said. "But it's not the point."



2022 runways were full of Surrealist touches, from Loewe's lip-shaped bodices, which evoke the poster art for "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie," to Balmain's use of trompe-l'oeil nudity, and the work of the Surrealist fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli is currently on view in an exhibition at Paris's Musée des Arts Décoratifs.) Still, Gohar says that she does not view the twentieth-century art movement as a direct source of inspiration. The points of connection, especially with Dalí, who published a book on food featuring towers of lobster, seem to her "too obvious." To the extent that she shares a visual vocabulary with the Surrealists, she is interested less in mining the unconscious than in creating moments of wonder and surprise. "With trompe-l'oeil specifically, I feel like it's magic," she said.

At Alcova, an apple atop a swooning tower of red and green fruit wore a lacy Gohar World vegetable bonnet—which, as its name suggests, is a bonnet for produce. As with many of the pieces in the collection, it is defiantly inessential. No one needs a Battenburg-lace apron for a wine bottle, or a wrought-iron chandelier that can hold eleven hard-boiled eggs. The charm of such items lies in their roguish refusal to pretend otherwise. And the tactile, handmade look of Gohar World is an emphatic rejection of the sleekly anonymous and tech-inflected millennial aesthetic that has dominated consumer goods in recent years. "It's the opposite of a screen," as Gohar put it. She wished that she had brought the egg chandelier to Milan, but her sister, generally the more practical of the two, had thought it would be too cumbersome to pack. Nadia oversees sourcing in Egypt—where the family is from—while Gohar takes charge of promotion; they devise the products together.



Place settings from the Laila Gohar x HAY collection, 2022.

Gohar was in town for a flurry of projects timed to the Salone del Mobile. After the Alcova installation opened, she would host a party with Gucci celebrating Gohar World's capsule collection for Gucci Vault, the brand's "experimental concept space" (a Web site). Then she would unveil a multi-tiered "Pigeon Table" that she'd created with the Belgian design team Muller Van Severen, inspired in part by Egypt's pigeon houses. In between these commitments, she would take a brief trip to Florence, so that she and Nadia could attend the runway show for Chanel's Métiers d'Art collection—a showcase of traditional trimmings and handicraft, similar in spirit to the artisanal work that the sisters had enlisted for their own line's lace and linens. Then Gohar would leave for Copenhagen to preview housewares that she would release this fall with the Danish design brand HAY.

The photographer and filmmaker Andrew Zuckerman has collaborated with Gohar throughout the years, and counts her as a close friend. Last year, he shot her for Tiffany; she wore an Elsa Peretti cuff and held an egg. Zuckerman, who was at Alcova to show a new collection of wallpaper from a brand that he founded with his wife, told me he saw Gohar's work as embodying "a new luxury." Her installations are so otherworldly that you could imagine one of them appearing "twenty years from now, thirty years from now," he said. At the same time, "you can imagine, almost, one of Laila's installations happening for Marie Antoinette at Versailles."

Gohar was born in 1988 in Cairo, to an Egyptian father and a mother of Turkish descent whose family had been in Egypt for many years. Gohar's father, Mohamed, started his career as a cameraman for Egypt TV and for a time was the personal photographer of President Anwar Sadat. Eventually, he founded a news-production company called Video Cairo Sat, which grew into one of the country's largest privately owned media organizations. He strove to raise his children in a largely secular environment. Laila and Nadia, thirteen months apart, attended school at Cairo American College, near the family's home, in the suburban neighborhood of Maadi. (They also have a younger sister and brother, who were born nearly a decade later.) Their classmates were the children of foreign diplomats and wealthy Egyptians, and, though the family could afford to move in these circles, Gohar remembers feeling alienated from the haute-bourgeois conformity that prevailed. She and Nadia would go to school dressed in custom outfits that a seamstress friend of their mother's sewed from upholstery scraps. The effect, which Gohar failed to appreciate at the time, was a bit "like if Comme des Garçons made children's clothing," she said.



"Loaf," a collaboration between Gohar, the designer Sam Stewart, and the bakers Millers & Makers.

Gohar was, by her own assessment, "a difficult child." Her mother, Nevin Elgendy, remembers her as "a *very* difficult child" who was "not into rules very much." In an early family photo, Elgendy is radiant, with a bright smile and fluffy nineteen-eighties hair. Baby

ADRIANNA GLAVIANO; BRIAN W. FERRY (CHAIR)

Nadia is wide-eyed and grave, transfixed by the camera. Meanwhile, Laila, mouth open, eyes shut, is howling with toddler rage. ("Forever mood," she wrote when she sent me the picture.) Once, in elementary school, she was given three days' detention for acting out in Arabic class. Her father was troubled to learn that the punishment entailed sitting in the principal's office and doing nothing, so he took three days off work and spent them chatting with his daughter in detention. "The first day, I remember walking across the school with my dad and just thinking, I am untouchable," Gohar said. (In her father's telling of this story, she was sixteen, and had been disciplined for kissing a boy.) At school, Nadia was easygoing and popular. Laila was not, but she had the kind of precocious charisma that appealed to her parents' friends.

Her father was an inventive occasional cook, but Gohar's first forays in the kitchen were largely inspired by her dislike of the foods that her mother prepared. "My mother is just one of those people who eats to survive," Gohar told me. ("I don't have a problem eating something that is not amazing," her mother said.) Gohar remembers mushy peas in tomato sauce, schnitzel with breading that peeled off like skin, and, most of all, omelettes. "They would smell like sulfur—like gross pee-eggs," she said. "You know when that happens with overcooked eggs? And they were rubbery." The first recipe that she attempted on her own, at around age ten, came from a United Nations children's cookbook—it was chicken teriyaki, the entry from Japan. "I just became obsessed," she said. "I would make it almost every day." She started sneaking into the kitchen at night with Nadia to teach herself to make meringue. Elgendy remembers coming down in the morning with their housekeeper to find the kitchen looking like something had exploded.

Gohar knew from a young age that she wanted to get out of Cairo, and, when the time came to apply to college, she researched scholarships for international students in the United States. The University of Miami appealed to her: it was hot (Gohar loves the heat), and it was unfamiliar. "I remember arriving in Miami and thinking, This is amazing," she said. "I don't know anyone, I don't understand anything that's going on, I know nothing about this place. And I just felt so free." In her first week of school, she told a classmate that she was from Cairo; the student replied that she'd grown up twenty miles from there. She meant Cairo, Georgia. "People always think it's so exotic that I'm from Egypt," Gohar told me. "As far as I'm concerned, growing up in a suburb of the U.S. is really exotic."

While studying in Miami, she worked in restaurant kitchens, and as an assistant to a local artist. She began cooking lunches at his studio, and the meals soon attracted other artists and neighborhood friends. Gohar stopped when a reporter expressed interest in covering the gatherings. "It just made me feel uncomfortable," she said. "I wasn't doing it for any other reason than for us to be fed."

This was not Gohar's first brush with media attention. Early in her time in Miami, she had been photographed in her swimsuit for a street-style spread. Her mother remembers the day when, back in Egypt, the housekeeper delivered the news: "Madam, Laila is in *Teen Vogue*!" Gohar moved to New York City after college for a job at a now defunct food Web site, then enrolled in a New School program in media studies and worked in the kitchens of restaurants that she prefers not to name. She is impatient with the "hype-y" culture around brand-name chefs and restaurants. "It's so fetishized," she told me. "I think the only thing that establishes credibility is your own work." (A general tendency, almost a reflex, with Gohar is to resist efforts to pin her with a particular job or label. Her Instagram occasionally nods to artists and designers she appreciates—Louise Bourgeois, Isamu Noguchi, Schiaparelli—but she avoids claiming straight lines of inspiration.) At the same time that Gohar was working in New York restaurants, she started to build a catering business called Sunday Supper. An old friend from Miami had relocated to the city for a fashion job, and he introduced her to a social swirl of magazine parties and brand-sponsored benefits. A number of Gohar's early clients emerged from this world, which is one of several that her career has allowed her to move between.



Many of Gohar's pieces are arresting enough that it is not immediately apparent how or whether to go about eating them.

Today, Gohar calls the Argentine psychologist Susana Balán her "therapist," though she concedes that the term isn't quite right: they speak regularly, but Gohar does not pay for sessions. "It's more like I'm a subject she's studying," Gohar explained. The two met after Gohar read Balán's self-published children's book, "Link and

HANNA GRANKVIST



A mother-of-pearl spoon set from Gohar and her sister Nadia's design collection, with meringue swans and a tattooed potato.

the Shooting Stars," and identified with its hero. The story follows a young misfit horse, Link, who sets out to find a life that can accommodate his many talents and interests. The book is intended to illustrate a concept that Balán has developed called the "Link personality," which she feels Gohar exemplifies. Such people have "many 'I's," Balán told me.

In the past ten years, as the world's attention went digital, Instagram became central to the marketing strategies of fashion and luxury brands. But successfully using this new platform required a different tone than that of the glossy ad campaigns that once fattened magazines. On Instagram, the essential quality was "authenticity." This could mean enticing potential customers through spokespeople (from the emergent field of so-called influencers) tasked with appearing to like your products. It could also mean inspiring consumers to advertise your products themselves. Brands have long sponsored events in the hope of drawing publicity, but when smartphones and social media effectively turn every guest into a potential party reporter the goal takes on new urgency.

Gohar's career coincided fortuitously with this shift. Mainwaring, her agent, started working with her in 2015, a period when she had wound down Sunday Supper and was beginning to move in more experimental directions. Mainwaring recalls that guests would arrive at an event and see, for example, a mountain of five thousand marshmallows, which Gohar once produced for Tiffany, "and instantly they would take their phones out." They would post pictures, tag the brands, tag Gohar. "The brands were, like, Well, this is fantastic," Mainwaring said. "People are coming and they're doing the job that we actually always want them to do." No one pulls out her phone to take a picture of sliders or mini quiches—here was a way to turn catering into viral marketing. Gohar's growing online following made her an ideal subject for quick-hit fashion-media interviews and photo shoots, setting in motion the cycle of publicity and discovery by which people who seem as if they could be famous actually become kind of famous. Eventually, brand representatives would interrupt Mainwaring mid-presentation: *Oh, wait, hold on, this is @lailacooks!*

Fashion often turns to other fields to burnish its intellectual credibility and lay claim to eccentricity that defies commercial appeal. A menu wherein the food is "not the point" satisfies this particular craving. Alexandra Cunningham Cameron, the curator of contemporary design at the Cooper Hewitt, has followed Gohar's career throughout the past decade, as food gained currency as a vehicle for social commentary in the design world. She sees Gohar's work, in contrast, as more "experiential" than critical. "She seemed, in my interpretation of her work, less about using food as a start-



Gohar World's tactile, handmade feel is an emphatic rejection of the sleekly anonymous, tech-inflected millennial aesthetic.

ing point for critique—whether it be about foodways or consumer culture or aesthetics—than as a way of bringing people together and creating these delightful, unusual, novel experiences," Cameron said. In her view, Gohar is engaging with craft and tradition. "There is always such intimacy in what she's creating."

Then, too, there is the simple fact that the fashion industry shares Gohar's own unabashed preoccupation with beauty. "I basically exist for beauty," Gohar told me. "I think it's why we're here on this earth."

"She's beautiful," Kim Hastreiter, a founder of *Paper* magazine, said of Gohar's ascent in the fashion world. "If you're beautiful, that puts you in a place that gives you access to more. And if you're talented and beautiful, that's the best combination." Hastreiter met Gohar after nominating her for a design prize; they went for coffee and Gohar soon became a protégée. They began throwing joint dinner parties at Hastreiter's apartment, near Washington Square; Hastreiter said that she often went into a frenzy while hosting, but that Gohar was always calm. "She's incredibly resourceful," Hastreiter said. They'd go to hole-in-the-wall Egyptian restaurants in Queens, and Gohar knew exactly what to buy from each vender at the Union Square farmers' market—whom to ask for cucumbers, peonies, pink radicchio. The designer Ted Muehling's understated jewelry has long been a status symbol among expertly chic New York City women, and early in the two women's friendship Hastreiter gave Gohar eight pairs of his earrings—"to start my collection," Gohar said.

Gohar has always been the best embodiment of her own sensibility, and her wedding celebration, in 2017, was, unsurprisingly, an occasion greeted with rapture in the fashion press. She and Omar Sosa, a Spanish-born graphic designer and entrepreneur and a founder of the magazine *Apartamento*, got married in Andalusia, with festivities that included flamenco dancing and dinner in a historic bullring. Gohar wore a custom semitransparent dress by Simone Rocha and rode into the ceremony on a donkey.

Spain was also where Gohar was spurred to overcome her childhood aversion to eggs. Whenever she and Sosa visited, she would see tortilla española—olive-oil-rich potato omelettes—everywhere and feel a cautious interest. She'd begun to be embarrassed by her distaste for eggs: "Because eggs—first of all, they're so beautiful. It's, like, the most beautiful thing ever, an egg. Secondly, it's so versatile. It's such a perfect little food." She decided that she would force herself to like eggs, and that she would do so "by becoming really good at making Spanish tortilla." As she had in childhood, she started cooking the dish incessantly in order to perfect her technique. By the time she was done, she "really loved them," she said.

Force of will, along with clarity of



At galleries and fashion shows, Gohar's work "acts like an instant icebreaker," she said. "People become like children, almost."

vision and personal charm, often results in things going Gohar's way. But not all circumstances are susceptible to these powers, and March, 2020, brought the parties and the events of Gohar's professional world to an abrupt halt. Without the structure of her work, she began using Instagram to post recipes for the kinds of foods she made at home—beans, boiled greens, sauerkraut, rice pudding, mayonnaise. The extravagance of these offerings lay not in spectacle but in the profligate use of time. A recipe for hummus involved hand-shelling a pound of chickpeas. Of course, the opportunity for spectacle eventually returned: one of the first projects that Gohar staged in New York as the city reopened was a picnic in Prospect Park, with guests seated on a giant red-white-and-purple checkerboard blanket that could accommodate a hundred people seated six feet apart from one another. The blanket, sewn by Gohar's studio manager, Yukimi Nate, has since been nominated for acquisition by the Cooper Hewitt.

Gohar and Sosa separated during the pandemic, and she began dating Ignacio Mattos, the chef behind such New York restaurants as Estela and Altro Paradiso. In their apartment on the Upper West Side, she has installed wall-to-wall lipstick-red carpeting. Mattos told me that he and Gohar had been friends for some time before he learned that she'd worked in restaurant kitchens, too. In 2019, he was among the guests at a dinner party that Gohar and Sosa hosted and *T* magazine wrote up. Mattos joked to the reporter that he'd had to warn a fellow-guest not to eat a pre-party steak, "because Laila can *cook*." ("Gohar, over by the kitchen stove, raised an eyebrow to indicate she had heard him, but she was smiling," the article noted.)

When the people Gohar works with talk about the creations they remember best, they describe dinner parties thrown on the fly and quiet lunches at home. Zuckerman, the photographer and filmmaker, told me about a cake that she made one New Year's Day with pine needles and leftover sweet potatoes. She was staying with his family upstate, and the cake was waiting when they returned from a walk in the snow.

Gohar would like to have a family herself, and, at thirty-four, she wants to do so before too long—while also continuing to develop Gohar World, and to take on projects that excite her. Looking ahead, though, she imagines larger changes, perhaps a move into sculpture. "Part of the reason that I make this kind of work is that it's ephemeral, and I'm very nervous about making something that stays in the world," she told me. "I feel like it's a huge responsibility. Maybe when I'm closer to death I'll be more O.K. with that."

After nearly a decade of producing work within the élite cloisters of art, fashion, and design, Gohar has lately started to translate her tastes for a wider market. Since February of this year, she has written a monthly column on entertaining for the *Financial Times*' weekend magazine. The luxury supplement, long known as *How to Spend It*, has recently been rebranded as *HTSI*, a move intended to reflect the "deeper sensitivities and priorities of a changing world," as an editor's letter explained. Gohar's columns have featured "a potato party," tinned fish, and plastic-free picnics. Jo Ellison, the editor of *HTSI*, favorably contrasts Gohar's distinctive style with the sort of "genteel British upper-middle-class girl" typically found offering hostessing tips. Doilies, salamis, parties spent shelling fava beans: "There is a limit to how far that aesthetic will play, and to what extent people's appetite for it is insatiable." Still, Ellison said, "right now I think the world is hers for the taking."

Once a behind-the-scenes architect of others' viral moments, Gohar herself has become a brand, one with the kind of sparkle that bigger brands hope to borrow. Gucci was a natural fit for an uncanny-chic collaboration; the house's creative director, Alessandro Michele, once sent models down the runway carrying replicas of their own heads. The Gohar World collection for Gucci Vault offered variations on the sisters' products—slightly different colors, slightly higher prices.

The June party in honor of the collaboration took place at the Milanese restaurant Rosticceria Giacomo. Dinner was served outdoors, on a patio draped with jasmine and grapevines, at places set with Gohar linens, candles, and other table accessories. In the hours before guests arrived, Gohar climbed a ladder to pin flat the lace trim on a "Ristorante Gohar" flag that hung in the courtyard. She made sure that the waiters knew to tie their taffy-pink Gohar-Gucci aprons with the lace bows in the front. She arranged and rearranged cakes on dessert displays in the dining room. There were cakes shaped like eggplants and cakes topped with pigs, a cake that matched the lace-trimmed red Gohar-Gucci napkins, and a Swedish princess cake covered in pink marzipan. (They were baked by Sarah Hardy, whom Gohar had met while modelling for a Swiss jewelry brand; Hardy had been hired to produce Goharesque baked goods for the shoot and, in Gohar's opinion, had done an excellent job.) Gohar was out on the sidewalk when Nadia appeared with good news—Gohar World was now approved to sell on Instagram. This development had taken a while, a delay that the sisters chalked up to confusion over their salami candle; the platform forbids animal products.

Gucci provided party outfits for the sisters: Nadia wore a monogram-patterned yellow skirt and a matching bra top underneath a boxy white button-up shirt; Gohar wore a red pencil skirt that came to a point above her navel, a black crop top held in place with garterlike straps, and tall black heels. They posed for photos alongside the "Ristorante Gohar" flag. Soon enough, Gohar had swapped out the heels for her brown Hermès clogs. O'Halloran, their sculptor friend, appeared, dressed in Gohar World: shorts, an open shirt, and one of the sisters' cotton-linen "adult bibs."

His outfit was met with effusive delight, and, as the night wore on, others followed his lead. Hand-beaded wineglass "bracelets" were linked to form necklaces and looped into earrings. By the end of the party, when a light rain began to fall, guests were tying Gohar-Gucci napkins over their heads, but only Gohar's made her look like a nineteen-sixties movie star. ♦

AN UNCERTAIN IMAGE

A collector thought he had bought a Lucian Freud painting. How far would he go to prove it?

BY SAM KNIGHT

In the spring of 1997, an art collector in Geneva received a call from a contact at the city's office of bankruptcies and legal proceedings. There was an auction coming up, of an estate that had gone unclaimed for nine years, and among the lots was a painting that the collector might want to take a look at: a canvas attributed to the British artist Lucian Freud. The collector was a businessman, originally from North Africa, who was used to picking up furniture and art works at competitive prices from Geneva's plentiful array of galleries, antique dealers, and salesrooms. He is keen to preserve his privacy, so I will call him Omar.

Omar went to see the painting that day, at the auction house in Carouge, a suburb to the south of the city. The estate had belonged to a man named Adolfo di Camillo, who died in 1988. According to auction records, di Camillo appeared to have been a collector, too. In the seventies, he had sold a seventeenth-century painting of Pan, the Greek god of shepherds, that was once believed to be a Rubens.

The work attributed to Freud was a medium-sized, naturalistic oil portrait of a naked man, painted from the side and from behind. Parts of the background appeared unfinished, or hastily sketched, but the figure itself was skillfully captured, with a certain power. "Oh, it's interesting, it's strong," Omar recalled saying to himself.

The bankruptcy office had attached an estimate of five hundred thousand Swiss francs (about three hundred and fifty thousand dollars) to the work. At the time, a recognized Freud portrait of a named sitter could fetch three times that amount. Omar asked his contact to hold it back, as one of the final lots of the sale, so that the room would be quieter. On the afternoon of March 7th, Omar bought the painting for less than a hundred thousand Swiss francs, or seventy thousand dollars. He also picked up one of di Camillo's side tables, a lampshade, and a bronze sculpture in the style of Giacometti.

"After I bought the painting, I went home and put it in the rest of my collection and I forgot about it," Omar told me in French when we met, earlier this year, at an expensive hotel on the lakefront in Geneva. He wore a Harrods baseball cap and was carrying a plastic bag. For years, Freud's searching, candid portraits went against the overwhelming appetite of the contemporary art market, which was for abstraction. Although he was a famous painter in England, in part because of his surname (Sigmund, his grandfather, went to London as a refugee in 1938), Freud was a respected rather than a fashionable artist in Europe. In 2002, Omar watched a program about his career on Swiss television, which prompted him to learn more about the painting. So he put it on eBay.

Omar posted the ad on the evening of Saturday, November 30th. The item description read "Lucian Freud Painting." Omar told me that he didn't intend to sell the work; rather, he hoped to flush out information. "To do a reconnaissance," he said. Four days later, Omar got a message from the auction site: his item had been blocked because of a copyright complaint. He called eBay's office in France, and was told that the complaint had come from the artist.

According to Omar, a few days later the phone rang in his apartment. It was early in the afternoon. "I said, 'Hello, hello,' and after a long time I heard a voice: 'I am Freud, Lucian Freud,'" Omar recalled. The voice, speaking in English, but with a Germanic rasp, said that he was the rightful owner of Omar's painting and that he wanted it back. (Omar had put his phone number on the eBay ad.) Omar says that Freud offered him a hundred thousand Swiss francs, which he declined.

Three days later, the voice called back. This time, according to Omar, the man was angry. Freud was eighty years old at the time. The caller offered Omar twice what he had paid for the painting, but still the collector refused to sell. " 'No. Sorry,'" Omar remembered saying. " 'I am loving this painting. I am loving this.' He said, 'Fuck you.' He said, I remember, 'You will not sell the painting all your life.' And he hung up."

Omar has been trying to unravel the meaning of this call—and have his painting authenticated—for the past twenty years. Owning a disputed, possibly wildly valuable, art work is a cruel test of any person's aesthetic values, basic reason, and innate (often well-disguised) capacity for greed. Close your eyes and there are millions of dollars hanging on the wall. Open them, and there is nothing to see. Hope flares, dies for years at a time, then sparks again, at odd moments. The question of authorship can be both maddeningly simple and frighteningly difficult to resolve. Laboratories and lawyers might tell you what you want to hear, and charge you by the hour. Omar always projected confidence when we spoke. "There is a beautiful story behind this painting," he told me more than once. But there were days this year when I wished that I had never heard of it at all.

In July, 2005, Omar shipped the portrait to London, where it was examined by Freud's longtime confidant and biographer, William Feaver. By this time, Omar was wondering if it could be a self-portrait, noting a similarity between the face of the figure and photographs of Freud from the fifties and sixties. In customs documents, he declared the value of the painting to be a million Swiss francs.

Feaver gave it the thumbs-down: the feet were unfinished, which was unlike



The collector claimed that, one day, he got a call from Freud. "You will not sell the painting all your life," the artist said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LEWIS KHAN



"Once he loses the hat, he'll be just what the voters are looking for in an elected official."

• •

Freud; the body was too heavily built for a self-portrait; the background was stylistically off. When I asked Feaver about the picture recently, almost seventeen years after the viewing, he had no memory of seeing it at all. But after consulting his diary he agreed with his initial assertion, which was recorded by a gallery assistant at the time. "If this spectral me had gone in, he would have said roundly that it wasn't by Freud," Feaver said. "There's nothing like it in Lucian's work ever, anywhere, to survive. . . . Every single certifiable one is fundamentally quite different from this rather careful, painstaking, correct thing."

Freud was shown images of the painting several times, by his daughter Esther and by Pilar Ordovas, a former deputy chairman of postwar and contemporary art at Christie's, who is now a gallerist. Ordovas grew close to Freud in 2003, after she brought to market a rare urban scene of his, which he had not seen for thirty years. She became a regular visitor to his studio and handled his relationship with the auction house. "The artist was alive. I was doing my duty of showing him this work, slightly embarrassed," she told me. "He said, 'Pilar, absolutely not.' There was not even a moment's thought or question." After Esther showed her father images of the painting, Freud asked for his name to be removed from the frame.

Omar had more luck with independent experts. In the summer of 2006, Nicholas Eastaugh, a world authority on pigmentation analysis, travelled to Geneva. Eastaugh examined the painting, which was now being called "Standing Male Nude," with a microscope, under UV light, and took sixteen tiny paint samples. Eastaugh found "a series of points of similarity and correspondence" between Omar's painting and known Freud works: traces of charcoal in the paint, the use of hog-hair brushes, which Freud favored starting in the late fifties, and the presence of a loose preparatory drawing, in pencil. On the bottom edge of the canvas, Eastaugh also found a partial fingerprint, which could point to a more definitive connection with the artist.

In life, Freud was a keen guardian of his œuvre and of his privacy. He communicated mostly by phone but did not give out his number, and he changed it often. He was sensitive to the market for his work and hated signing his name. "He was prepared to do whatever was necessary in order to protect what he thought was his right to be able to project to the world what he wanted," Geordie Greig, a former editor of the *Daily Mail* and a friend of Freud's, who wrote a book about him, told me.

Most of Freud's failed paintings never left the studio. "Lucian was an avid destroyer of works that went wrong," Feaver wrote me, in an e-mail. "I can remember many awaiting the cull. Generally, these—portraits especially—would be stiff and, more often, disproportionate." Freud also kept an eye on paintings long after he made them. Throughout his career, he became angry when substandard works found their way to the market or forgotten canvases resurfaced. In the early fifties, the house of Gerald Gardiner, Freud's lawyer at the time, was broken into and a single picture was taken: a portrait of Carol, Gardiner's daughter, which Freud had painted but didn't think much of. The story gave rise to a legend, encouraged by Freud, that he paid criminals to get hold of paintings that displeased him or that he regretted seeing out in the world. Late in his life, one of Freud's daughters, Rose Boyt, hesitated to send him a painting for authentication, for fear that he would punch a hole in it instead.

"Everything had to be *remarkable*," Greig said. Freud was drawn to extremes, and to fights. In the early seventies, John Craxton, an artist and an intimate friend of Freud's, sold some of his drawings to a collector. When a dealer asked Freud to sign the sketches, he was furious, writing, "John Craxton is a cunt" on one of them. Freud's fight with Craxton—a mess of legal letters and injunctions—went on for years. At one point, according to Ian Collins, Craxton's biographer, Freud managed to have a Craxton portrait called "Lucian" removed from an exhibition, by saying it was not of him. "They became an art form," Collins said of Freud's feuds. "He had this phenomenal energy. He actually needed this to get him fired up. He needed enemies."

Freud died in 2011, at the age of eighty-eight. From then on, his estate, and his lawyers, took over the protection of his name. Omar felt that every attempt to have his painting authenticated, or even looked at, resulted in

a mysterious dead end. Curiosity would turn to silence. A few months after Freud's death, a French connoisseur named Hector Obalk agreed to go to Geneva. Obalk presents an art-history show on French television. In the preceding decade, he had filmed two hundred and fifty-eight Freud works, collecting hours of footage in collaboration with the artist's studio. Obalk viewed the painting in Omar's office. "He had a pipe. He stood for half an hour like this," Omar recalled, striking a pose of contemplation.

Obalk had no doubt that the painting was by Freud. But he saw limitations, too. Like Feaver, he found the feet unconvincing. He thought the face showed poor technique. Moreover, he respected Freud's right to reject the painting. "Authentication of an œuvre does not only depend on the reality of a piece of work, but also on an aesthetic decision sanctioned by a number of acts, such as its signature, the studio output, exhibition in the artist's lifetime, etc.," Obalk wrote, in a nine-page report.

But the painting didn't look like a forgery, or a case of mistaken attribution. Obalk noted a patch of impasto on the figure's flank—paint so thick that it stands out from the canvas, a characteristic of Freud's work—and a handling of the flesh tones that recalled several of his other portraits. In Obalk's analysis, the painting was *by* Freud but not *a* Freud. "In our opinion, *Standing Male* is a canvas which Lucian Freud painted, then abandoned and disowned," he wrote. "It is always more delicate to authenticate an unfinished work (in which the artist has hit an impasse) than to authenticate a resounding masterpiece."

Twelve days before he delivered his verdict to Omar, in the spring of 2012, Obalk received a warning from Goodman Derrick, L.L.P., the law firm that represented Freud's estate. The letter reiterated Freud's disavowal of the painting during his lifetime. "It seems unclear to us why you may be using your extensive knowledge of the work of Lucian Freud to back an attribution you must know makes no sense," the letter said. The law firm asked Obalk not to authenticate the painting but "to deny it," and appeared to threaten any future coöperation by the estate on Obalk's television work.

Obalk authenticated the painting anyway. He declined to speak for this article. "I have nothing to add," he said. For several years, he was the only connoisseur willing to study Omar's portrait, let alone give a positive opinion. The trail went cold until January, 2016, when Omar mounted a private show of his collection at the Freeport, a huge storage facility for art works and other valuables, in Geneva. To his surprise, an acquaintance named Ignacio Moreno stopped in front of "Standing Male Nude," and said that he had seen it before.

"It was a flashback," Moreno told me recently. Moreno, who was born in Cuba, is in his mid-sixties. He remembered seeing the nude on the wall of the apartment of the previous owner, di Camillo, where he occasionally went as a young man, in the late seventies. Moreno described the apartment as a gay oasis in Geneva at the time. He showed me a photograph of himself sitting near a fireplace, with another canvas propped against the wall behind him. Curiously, Moreno said that the apartment was used by Francis Bacon when he stayed in the city: a place of mess and paint by day, and raucous gatherings by night.

The relationship between Freud and Bacon, two of Britain's greatest twentieth-century artists, is one of the most exciting and complex stories in modern art. During the fifties, the two



men saw each other almost every day. Bacon was thirteen years older: famous, more obviously transgressive, gregarious and rude, openly gay when homosexual activity was still illegal in Britain. Freud was, in many ways, an unlikely protégé. He was a social celebrity—the weekend guest of aristocrats, turning heads in grotty drinking dens in Soho—magnetic to an almost intolerable degree. People kept falling in love with him. But Freud was haunted by Bacon's genius: the older artist's willingness to embrace accident, his feel for paint itself. "Real imagination is technical imagination," Bacon told *Time*, in 1952. "It is in the ways you think up to bring an event to life again."

Each was entranced by the other. Bacon painted Freud at least seventeen times. The younger artist had access to Bacon's cramped, image-strewn studio. (Bacon preferred to work alone, from photographs, often taken by the artists' mutual friend John Deakin, which he first crumpled up and threw on the floor.) There was a fierce attraction. A Bacon painting, "Two Figures," from 1953, which is based on an Eadweard Muybridge photograph of wrestlers but seems to show two men making love, hung opposite Freud's bed for fifty years. He was reluctant to lend it for exhibitions.

Freud painted Bacon only twice (an exquisite, postcard-size portrait, on copper, from 1952, was stolen in Berlin in 1988 and has never been recovered), but, of the two men, he owed the greater artistic debt. "I got very impatient with the way I was working. It was limiting," he told Feaver. "I think my admiration for Francis came into this." In the late fifties, Freud moved away from his hyper-controlled, almost inert painting style to a looser, more baroque mode of portraiture, which he ultimately realized with his candid, sprawling nudes of the eighties and nineties. Freud painted from life, working on some pieces for years at a time. "My work is purely autobiographical," he said. "It is about myself and my surroundings. It is an attempt at a record. I work from the people that interest me, and that I care about and think about, in rooms that I live in and know."

As Freud fully matured as an artist, he and Bacon drifted apart, with occasional spats until Bacon's death, in 1992. In 2008, Freud's "Benefits Supervisor Sleeping" sold for $33.6 million, making him, for a time, the world's most expensive living artist. Both painters are now highly collectible, but works that carry a charge of their early love and rivalry are in a category of their own. Earlier this year, a single panel of a Bacon triptych, "Study for Portrait of Lucian Freud," from 1964, sold for fifty-two million dollars.

The possibility of a connection between Omar's painting and Bacon was

tantalizing. Had Bacon owned the work? What was he doing in Geneva?

In late 2018, Omar asked Thierry Navarro, a Swiss investigator, to get to the bottom of the authentication problem. An engineer by training, Navarro is an alert, quietly stubborn man in his early fifties, who wears half-rimmed glasses and walks extremely fast, as if he were slightly late, which he often is. His other jobs have included developing computer games and a new navigation system for motorcyclists. His father, Pedro, was a landscape artist, and Navarro himself is a self-taught painter. "I'm a multidimensional person, quite a complex one, I guess," he told me. Nonetheless, Navarro saw the question of Freud's authorship in binary, provable terms. "It has been denied. That is a fact. No question," he said. "And there is another fact: the painting is on the table. I mean, it exists. And nothing is against the attribution to Lucian Freud."

Studying Omar's file, Navarro noticed that Obalk had flagged the academic, formal pose of the subject as extremely unusual for Freud. "Throw of discus?" Obalk had asked, in parentheses. One evening, as Navarro read up on Bacon, he found himself scrolling through an online copy of "The Human Figure in Motion," a collection of Muybridge photographs from 1901. "Suddenly, I came to a series of images—then I went slowly," he recalled. The series was called "ATHLETE. CATCHING AT A BALL." Navarro stopped scrolling. "It was just, like, That's it," he said.

Navarro zoomed in. To his eye, the pose of Omar's portrait matched a figure in the third row of the Muybridge series, down to the line of the wall and the floor in the background and a blemish on the figure's left buttock. "My mind was, just, Wow," Navarro said. The only difference was that the images were reversed—a discrepancy that could be explained if the artist had been painting in a mirror, which, if the work was a self-portrait, he might have been. "You get the dots and you start drawing a line," Navarro said. "It's probably not the entire line, but there are a lot of similarities and consistency, I would say, between all those dots." If his theory was correct, and Freud had worked from a key Bacon reference, that would make the painting a remarkable artifact of the artists' relationship. "I think this might have been a challenge requested by Bacon," Navarro said. " 'Can you paint yourself from the back? For me?' "

In the spring of 2019, Omar and Navarro approached Art Recognition, a tech company outside Zurich, and asked it to evaluate the painting. Art Recognition uses artificial intelligence to detect the brushstrokes, color palette, compositional choices, and other barely definable mannerisms of individual artists. The C.E.O. is Carina Popovici, a theoretical physicist. She trained the first prototype of the system to recognize works by Max Pechstein, the German Expressionist, in order to weed out fakes by Wolfgang Beltracchi, a notorious forger, and has since worked with museums, galleries, and dozens of private collectors. In 2019, Art Recognition independently authenticated a van Gogh self-portrait at the Norwegian National Museum, in Oslo. When she started out, Popovici worried about giving owners bad news. It turns out that most people are relieved, either way. "They're just glad to have an answer," she said.

For Omar's portrait, Art Recognition used data from two hundred and thirty-five known Freud paintings and

PIT

The peach was
apricot in color—

the fibre wet
beneath its skin,

which held it in.
I consumed the

juicy flesh,
sweet meat meant

to nourish the pit
surrounding it.

A miniature sunset:
burnished hazy red,

within its bleeding
hues, there lodged

the stone, undulated
as a brain, dormant

yet alive. Reposed
within orange-and-apricot,

its seed within that stone—
harboring cyanide, just enough

to keep the deer at bay—
it could have procreated, this

pit-then-seed. And part
is now a part of me.

—Cindy Frenkel

more than three hundred paintings by other comparable artists from the same period. These were broken down into a total of some five thousand fragments, which were used to train the A.I. to identify patches of canvas painted by Freud, and those by other artists. For each art work examined by the A.I., Popovici explained, the model is run forty-five times, with slightly different calibrations, to make sure that the overall result is representative. Popovici's team found that "Standing Male Nude" had an eighty-nine-per-cent chance of being an original art work by Lucian Freud. "From our point of view, it's a very, very solid result," she told me. I asked if, to her knowledge, her A.I. system had ever been wrong. "No," Popovici replied. Then she laughed for a long time, as though this was somehow an inappropriate question.

The A.I. report appeared to vindicate Navarro's technical approach to proving that "Standing Male Nude" was by Freud. "There is no feeling," he said. "It's just facts." Navarro came to perceive the rejections of the artist and his estate as a matter of intrigue, rather than facts with meaning of their own.

"*Why* would the painter have denied this? That is really, for me, the point," he said. When I suggested that Freud may have denied the work because he didn't paint it, Navarro shrugged off the idea. Both Omar and his investigator became deeply suspicious of what Navarro called "the Freud environment"—the close group of experts, former assistants, biographers, and lawyers who guard his work, and its value—in London. "Nobody's going to move," Navarro said. "There is this kind of secret rule. You don't go against the will of someone like Freud."

In time, Omar's file of paperwork relating to the painting grew thick, becoming—in the eyes of many art-world insiders—a problem in its own right. A New York-based art lawyer told me that he tunes out whenever people start talking about scientific reports relating to disputed art works. "You can tell when something doesn't feel right," another dealer said, of similar situations, "when someone so desperately wants something." The art market can't stand doubt. Great art should be simple, agreed-upon, and expensive: visceral to the eye and to the wallet. Truth is more important than facts. "The moment the story is elaborated, the boredom sets in," Bacon once said, of complicated paintings. "The story talks louder than the paint."

It didn't help that Omar and Navarro were relative outsiders, with no track record of owning or researching Freud's work. Some of their attempts to make headway were touching in their naïveté. Navarro called Scotland Yard and the F.B.I., to see if they had copies of Freud's fingerprints that they would be willing to share. (The authorities declined.) Navarro was offended when experts seemed to skim through a dossier that he had prepared on the painting, or didn't engage with his Muybridge theory.

One prominent European dealer, who went to see the painting at a private bank in Geneva, told me that he had misgivings as soon as he walked through the door. "I'm not an expert in Freud," the dealer told me. "But I am an expert in situations." "Standing Male Nude" was on an easel, next to another work from Omar's collection, which the dealer believed was a reproduction.

"It was just a farce," the dealer said. "Everybody was talking about millions of dollars. . . . And I was, like, What are we talking about? We shouldn't be talking about money when we don't even know what we have." According to the dealer, Navarro seemed to think that it was up to the Freud estate to disprove the attribution, rather than up to him to provide any proof that this could be a Freud in the first place. "There was nothing to substantiate anything," the dealer said. "I'm not doubting the good faith of everyone. But, basically, when you're outside of the art world, you put the chariot before the cattle. I don't know how you say it in English, but you do things backwards."

During the meeting, the dealer called Ordovas, the former Christie's expert, whom he knew, for her opinion. She told him that Freud had denied the work during his lifetime, which the dealer said was the end of the matter. Navarro told me that he thought the call was staged—a stunt designed to humiliate him and Omar—and he lost his temper. "I was a bit upset," he said. He reminded the dealer of Obalk's verdict, the A.I. report, and Eastaugh's positive pigmentation analysis. "How can you say that? Do you have no respect for those experts? Who are you?" Navarro recalled saying.

The dealer softened and, according to Navarro, acknowledged, "*Ça pue de Freud.*" "It stinks of Freud." (The dealer disputes Navarro's account of the meeting.) But to what end? "Even if it was the case, there's nothing I can do about it," the dealer told me. According to Navarro, the dealer offered to send the painting to London again, to other experts that he knew, but there was a risk that it might be destroyed, or disfigured, in the process. "Come on," Navarro said. "It's a joke."

More than a hundred and fifty years after art historians began certifying Old Master paintings (for a fee, of course), the rules for authenticating art works are the same as the rules for the rest of the art market: strict, scholarly, and undermined by human sin.

People talk about three pillars, or a triangle, of authentication: connoisseurship (What does it look like?), technical analysis (What is it made of?), and provenance (Where did it come from?). But in truth every major artist's output is a fiefdom unto itself, with august gatekeepers and unwritten rules. There is no single authentication process. Some artists' estates have a committee, made up of scholars and hangers-on, to evaluate possible works. Others have disbanded theirs, in part because of the risk of litigation from rich collectors. (Since 2012, committees for Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Keith Haring, and Jean-Michel Basquiat have all stopped authenticating works.) Some artists have a single catalogue raisonné—a definitive record of all their work, typically in chronological order—which acts as the reference for their œuvre. Others have none. Modigliani has five, and they are all different.

Money makes everything worse. "You can have good people at the beginning. And then, you know, they begin to be influenced for some reason," a Swiss lawyer who works in the field told me. At the top end of the market, the power to authenticate a Picasso, a Rothko, a Hepworth, is a lambent, magical thing. Often it comes to rest—by chance or by careful plotting—in the hands of two

or three people. Preparing a catalogue raisonné is a project with its own unique rewards, risks, and access to privileged information. Dealers have been known to fund the research, in order to find out who owns an artist's œuvre. Deciding what to include, and what to leave out, can have huge financial implications. One dealer described the responsibility as a kind of curse.

But the lure of being an authenticator is strong. Since the late nineties, Marc Restellini, a French curator and connoisseur, has been attempting to sort out the Modigliani mess. He began work on a sixth (and presumably final) catalogue raisonné with a research institute in France, funded by the Wildenstein family, the legendary Parisian art dealers.

In 2001, Restellini paused his work on Modigliani's drawings after receiving death threats. I asked him recently whether the threats had come because he had been willing to include previously unrecognized works (which can drive down prices) or because he had taken out existing Modiglianis. "Out. Out. Out!" Restellini replied. For the past twenty-five years, he explained, his problem has been a catalogue raisonné first published by Ambrogio Ceroni, in 1958. The Ceroni catalogue has come to define the market for Modigliani (the most expensive Modigliani nude sold for a hundred and seventy million dollars) despite containing obvious omissions. Restellini believes that Ceroni also included forgeries and even touched up Modigliani's paintings himself. (The catalogue's publisher did not respond to a request for comment.) "The market for me is just mad," he said. "Because they are in negation of the truth for just private and financial interest."

It is unclear whether Restellini will ever set the record straight. Since 2020, he has been in litigation with the Wildenstein Plattner Institute over intellectual-property rights relating to the latest catalogue raisonné. Restellini is himself an art-world player. He has been a curator and an entrepreneur, as well as a scholar. He lends his name to a high-end art-analysis laboratory, the Institut Restellini-Investigation, in Geneva. He promised that his Modigliani-paintings catalogue will be published next year. I said that the project sounded like a nightmare. "Not so much," he replied. "I think I am the nightmare of many people."

Overturning an artist's own verdict on a work—during his lifetime or after his death—is a tough move in a tough game. In France, the moral right of an artist to withdraw or deny his work is perpetual, and passed on to his heirs. Discarding art is an aesthetic gesture in itself, the inverse of the creative act. "Cutting up the paintings was always an act of liberation," Gerhard Richter, the German artist, told the magazine *Der Spiegel* a few years ago. Richter is thought to have destroyed about sixty works from the early sixties, when he began to paint from photographs, that would now have an estimated value of six hundred million dollars. If an artist detests something he makes, particularly an early work or an experiment that failed, then the market tends to reflect that. "You wouldn't want to own that, would you?" one dealer said. "If you could buy anything?"

But what about when artists lie, or muddy the waters for their own reasons? "I often paint fakes," Picasso is said to have said. In the sixties, he was shown a photograph of "La Douleur," a painting that he supposedly made in 1902 or 1903. Picasso described the work as a "joke by friends," and it was ignored for decades in a storage room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art until it was definitively authenticated in 2010. In 1995, a New York appeals court overruled a judgment that a work by Balthus was a fake just because the artist said it was. At the age of eighty-three, Balthus had signed an affidavit saying that he was not blind and that "Colette de Profil," a portrait from 1954, was a "*faux manifeste*." But the court sided with the work's former owner and an expert from the Met, who suggested that Balthus was trying to get back at his ex-wife, who had authenticated it in the first place.

Along with the moral and legal hazards, orphaned works are often difficult to identify because they are simply not that good. "It's slapdash," Gary Tinterow, a Met curator, told the *Times*, in 2010, of the authenticated Picasso.



"Who are you wearing?"

Talking to Freud experts, I noticed that even connoisseurs who were extremely disparaging about Omar's painting often left the door open a tiny crack. "I saw a photo of this a year or two ago and assumed it's a dud," James Kirkman, one of Freud's former dealers, told me in an e-mail. "One is capable of being proved wrong, I suppose," Feaver said.

One day in February, I stopped by the Bacon estate, which occupies Bacon's former studio, in Reece Mews, in Kensington. I was looking for evidence that Bacon spent time in Geneva. Until 2016, the Bacon estate had an authentication committee, which was chaired by Martin Harrison, the editor of Bacon's five-volume catalogue raisonné. (The committee stopped meeting after the catalogue was published.) Like Freud, Bacon destroyed or abandoned hundreds of paintings during his career, many of which then escaped from his control one way or another. (Bacon's studio was burgled three times; roughly a hundred canvases that had been slashed by Bacon survive.) When genuine works have resurfaced, Harrison has had no choice but to recognize them as such. "If I believe a work to be by Bacon, I have to say it," he told me. "I wish it weren't, in many ways. What am I going to do?"

Bacon and Freud scholars maintain a quietly bitchy relationship, and Harrison, who has a mischievous side, took an interest in Omar's painting. "It doesn't stop it being a Freud just because it's not good," he said. "*I* wouldn't dismiss it." In a recent biography of Bacon, the American art writers Annalyn Swan and Mark Stevens suggested that he made short trips to Switzerland in the seventies, likely to collect money from a Swiss bank account. Harrison invited me to look at one of Bacon's two passports for the period. I found only a few Swiss border stamps, from Basel, in 1969 and 1976.

Harrison thought that Omar's painting was competently done. "Some of the Bacons that I had to reproduce were much more negligible than this," he said. In the room where Bacon used to paint, Sophie Pretorius, who manages the estate's archive, magnified an image of "Standing Male Nude" on her computer. "I just don't think the body is right," she said. "There's no distortion." Harrison looked again. "It looks like somebody else," he agreed. "But who on earth is somebody else?" Harrison said he thought the painting had a thirteen-per-cent chance of being by Lucian Freud. I couldn't tell if he was teasing.

The perils of the authentication process, and the slim chance of extreme rewards, mean that some quests never end. Eastaugh, the pigmentation expert, told me that he sees it a lot: the bulging file, the flights from one European city to another, the latest invoice for a round of bomb-pulse radiocarbon dating. It's usually a campaign carried on by men and, when they die, Eastaugh observed, continued by their daughters. At a certain point, it stops being about the painting and becomes a search for deeper, and even more impossible, forms of validation. Owning a work made by a genius induces a feeling of connection—to something pure, and, perhaps, to the purer part of ourselves. "The obsessive desire to prove parentage is quite a strong psychological state of mind," Feaver remarked. "Isn't it?"



Seven years ago, Richard Polsky, a former Warhol dealer, set up his own art-authentication business. He quoted a Talmudic idea to describe an elision of identity that can take place between owners and their unproven masterpieces: "We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are." (Polsky's life has also been threatened, over a fake Basquiat). "When you make money, you feel smart. It's as simple as that," he told me. "It does sort of justify who you are as a person—'I'm a smart person, I made a good decision. I saw something others didn't see.'" Uncomfortably, the reverse is also true. Finding out that you didn't, in fact, buy a priceless art work from a bankruptcy auction can raise troubling questions about whom you imagine yourself to be.

When I first met Omar, over lunch in Geneva, I asked him why he didn't just try to sell the painting in its disputed state, and let someone else take on the problem. He made it clear that this wasn't an option. "It is a battle," he replied.

"I think it's about personal ego," Navarro chimed in across the table, indicating a degree of association that now existed between his client and one of the greatest twentieth-century artists. "I think he has a personal feeling, or he wants to prove to himself that he can go over this decision by Freud."

There is no Freud authentication committee. In 2013, the Freud archive appointed Catherine Lampert, a curator and historian, who knew Freud, and Toby Treves, a former curator of twentieth-century British art at Tate, to write his catalogue raisonné. The first catalogue, of Freud's prints, was published in the spring. A second catalogue, of about five hundred paintings, will appear next year.

In May, I visited Treves at his home, in West London. Although Omar and Navarro had not formally submitted "Standing Male Nude" for the catalogue raisonné, Treves had seen an image of the painting in an article in the *Observer*, last year. "I don't need to see it again," he said. "If we put that painting in a line with all the other paintings that he made from 1939 to 2011, I think pretty much everyone would think, That looks like the odd one out." The selection for the Freud catalogue raisonné was practically complete. "The criteria is certainty," Treves explained. "And, if we're not certain, then that's it."

Treves acknowledged Freud's unpredictable behavior toward attribution during his lifetime. "Freud was an extremely knowing individual," he said. "And he knows about mythmaking." But Treves also observed that Freud's artistic output was well documented. He had the same studio assistant, David Dawson, for the last twenty years of his life. He worked extremely slowly, usually on three portraits at a time, and was fairly static, making almost all his paintings in London. During nine years of research, Treves and Lampert turned up only four small paintings that they previously hadn't seen, and three belonged to the family of one of Freud's lovers. "People doing these projects would love to find a new work," Treves said. "That really is finding a new poem by Keats." But he added that the chances of discovering a major portrait at this stage were almost nonexistent. "I very

much doubt it," he said. "What you may find is unfinished, abandoned paintings. . . . That's definitely happened."

In 1997, the year that Omar bought his nude, a creative director named Jon Lys Turner inherited another painting attributed to Freud which the artist had denied. Turner's portrait, of a young man in a black cravat, belonged for many years to Denis Wirth-Miller, a bohemian landscape painter. Wirth-Miller and his partner, Richard (Dicky) Chopping, were among Francis Bacon's closest friends. But they couldn't stand Freud. Freud called Wirth-Miller Worth-Nothing; Chopping kept a handwritten list of reasons he hated Freud. Turner recalled that Wirth-Miller had left the painting to him with a specific instruction: "I want it sold as loudly as possible to really upset Lucian."

But it wasn't as straightforward as that. In 1985, Christie's had accepted the painting for an upcoming auction, only for Freud to reject the attribution. The reason appeared to be spite. Wirth-Miller and Freud had studied together at the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing, in Suffolk, during the Second World War, and Wirth-Miller had owned the canvas since then. Like Omar, Turner found the task of overturning Freud's repudiation virtually impossible. Polite phone calls went nowhere. "They said, 'O.K., we'll get back to you,'" Turner said. "Tumbleweed."

As Freud's fame grew—and his prices rose—Turner's relationship with the painting became uncomfortably charged. "It's a lot like going through hell as you go through one recession after another. I used to think to myself, Imagine if this is a Freud," he said. "Imagine if this is worth lots of money." Unlike Omar, however, Turner was close enough to the London art market to be sensitive to its unspoken codes. "A lot of people were frightened of him and they weren't going to go against him," he said, of Freud. "I am a sole individual who goes into a big auction house. Which side is that auction house going to take?"

In 2015, the producers of a BBC arts program, "Fake or Fortune?," agreed to investigate Turner's painting for the show. "I was full of trepidation," Turner said. "I also knew that, at the end of it, if I did that myself, I will get nowhere." During filming, Diana Rawstron, Freud's lawyer, revealed a note from a phone call with Freud, in which he acknowledged starting Turner's painting. Technical analysis of the canvas, paint, and brushstrokes suggested strongly that the work had been completed by a single hand. In 2019, Treves and Lampert agreed to include Turner's portrait in the catalogue raisonné, as an unfinished painting.

Three years later, Turner's Freud remains unsold. He waited for the publicity around the TV show to fade and then offered to use it to endow a scholarship at an art school. But the conversations did not progress. A couple of curators asked to borrow the painting for exhibitions, but, similarly, did not follow through. When we met, Turner did not want to think about why. "I have got no evidence, no evidence for anything, but it is history repeating itself," he said. He wondered how the painting would be received by Freud's circle if he put it on the open market. "I'm still the outsider," Turner said. "Let's face it. . . . They must hate me, because I did what they didn't want. I won."

You carry on, because what else can you do? In November, 2021, Omar and Navarro escalated their campaign, sending "Standing Male Nude" to the laboratory of Marc Restellini,



the scourge of the Modigliani market. The Institut Restellini charges up to thirty thousand euros to examine an art work. A specific type of carbon dating that has been recently applied to twentieth-century canvases allows them to be dated to within a couple of years. According to the Institut Restellini, the canvas of Omar's painting dated from the early fifties, which ruled out a recent forgery. In May, Navarro told me that Omar had unearthed a second witness, based in Italy, who could also attest to Bacon spending time in Geneva in the seventies. "Excellent news are on track and should be confirmed soon," Navarro texted.

The longing is infectious. One day, I remembered something that Harrison had said, at the Bacon estate. A few years ago, he was sent a group of supposed Bacons, which had originated in Sweden. He came to the conclusion that they weren't fakes, as such, but had probably been made by an art student in the sixties or seventies, who had fallen under Bacon's influence; the paintings had later been mistaken for the real thing. I wondered if the same thing might have happened with Omar's nude. Freud supervised students sporadically throughout his career—at the Slade, in London, and, in the autumn of 1964, at the Norwich School of Art.

I tracked down Roger James Elsgood, a radio producer in his seventies, who was one of five students taught by Freud in Norwich. One morning, in the spring, we met at the Royal Academy of Arts, on Piccadilly. There was a major Bacon show on display, which included "Two Figures"—the masterpiece that had hung in Freud's bedroom—complete with an image of the Muybridge reference on the wall next to it. Elsgood didn't think that Omar's painting could have been done by a student. "It's a relatively mature work by a very middling figurative painter," he said. "They were ten a penny." Then he brought out his phone. He wanted to show me a painting that his wife, Jan, had bought in the late sixties, from Ken Brazier, an artist whom Freud painted in 1957. Elsgood had begun to think that maybe they owned a Freud, too. "Of course, when you start to wonder, you start to think, Well, we're rich," he said. He was thinking about looking into it.

In July, I flew to Geneva to see "Standing Male Nude" for the first time. It was a sweltering day. Navarro met me at the railway station, and we ate at a Lebanese restaurant nearby. I asked him what he had learned about the art market during his three and a half years of working with Omar. "There are two worlds: there is the art market and there

is the scientific world," he replied. "And I don't know exactly why, but there are intangibles into that, where sometimes they match and sometimes they don't."

According to Navarro, all the early signs from the Institut Restellini were promising. Omar was making plans to sell the painting. We talked about its potential value. Navarro said it could be worth a falafel plate if it turned out not to be a Freud. Or more than thirty million dollars. "It's a unique piece," he said. "And, if you're a collector, what are you looking for? A basic painting, or a unique one with a real story? The answer is there." Navarro had written to Treves, inviting him and Lampert to Geneva to see the work, but had not received a response. The continuing reluctance of the top Freud scholars to spell out their objections to "Standing Male Nude" only confirmed his belief that it was genuine. "There is never, in all this story, any discussion, any talks, any interest," Navarro said. "It is just, *No*. That's it. . . . It means, you don't want to see something. It's something that you want to hide."

The painting was on display in a conference room at Omar's lawyers' offices, in the middle of town. It rested on a stand in an alcove. Omar had put the portrait in an elaborate gilt frame, which was distracting. Up close, I was struck by the painting's tidy correctness. The figure looked away. The patch of impasto on the flank was the artist's only real flourish. The previous day, I had been to a small show of Freud's paintings at the Freud Museum, the London home of Sigmund, and all the works there had seemed to possess more complexity, more problems, more life. "Everything is fought over," Feaver said, of Freud's work. A home video at the exhibition had showed the artist, in his late teens and wearing a suit, performing somersaults in Sigmund's garden.

Moreno, the witness who remembered the painting and Francis Bacon from the late seventies, was also at the meeting. He wore a Panama hat, silver reflective sunglasses, and sneakers covered with rhinestones. He said that he first met Bacon at La Garçonnière, a disco bar. Moreno seemed totally plausible as someone who might have partied with Bacon almost fifty years ago. He said that Bacon loved Geneva, because of the anonymity and because it was the place where he first met Sophia Loren. (Her manager confirmed this.) "He saw that people looked at her in the street and no one bothered her," Moreno told me. "He thought, I can do my private life here." At the same time, there were gaps, and oddities, in Moreno's account. He claimed to have owned a Bacon painting, and later sent me a video of "Head," a Bacon work from 1962, whose recent owner said that the assertion was impossible. Moreno told me that he once had a photograph of Bacon in Geneva, but that it might have been lost in a flood. At one point, for complicated reasons, he showed me a pornographic video on his phone.

The margins of the multibillion-dollar art market are a bewildering place. You are touching immortality, or you are touching nothing at all. A few weeks after the meeting, Omar and Navarro fell out, over Omar's plans to sell the painting and Navarro's role in the process. (Neither man wanted to talk about the details, for legal reasons.) In the conference room, there was an intoxicating, disorienting atmosphere. I found myself doubting everything except the fact of the painting resting against the wall. When Navarro started talking about his own forays as an artist, I even had the bizarre thought that maybe he had painted it, or his father, who, as Navarro said, liked to make copies.

Across the table, Omar beamed. "I am proud to say I am the owner of a Freud," he said. He repeated his offer to the estate, and to the authors of the catalogue raisonné, to come and see "Standing Male Nude" for themselves. "It's like saying you don't like an orange," he said. "And yet you have never tasted one." ♦



"There's a phone on vibrate somewhere in this bed."

MARGIE DISCOVERS Barbiecore*

*The urge to dress in fluorescent pink with the occasional accent of fluorescent green, turquoise, or purple!

Meet Margie. She lives in your building. You see her in the elevator.

SIGH

DO NOT USE GARBAGE CHUTE. OUT OF ORDER

Lately, she's been feeling a little bit out of sorts.

CHEESE

SLIDE

CRACKER

She's been in therapy, on and off, for decades. Tried yoga, exercise, diets, meds, life coaches, banjo, plants, vitamins, Zumba, ceramics...

OMMMMMM

PLINK PLONK

Nothing works. The weight of the world is still on her black-sweatered shoulders.

Trans- and homo- phobia

Sexism

The Mideast

Global warming

Infrastructure

Money

COVID

Racism

Weird symptoms

Unfair- ness of life

Ukraine

Every day, she goes to her job at Acme Handcrafted Straws and wonders: *is this all there is?*

SIGHHHHHHHHHH

ACME STRAWS ARE THE BEST

Then one day something catches her eye.

AL'S SWEATBAND EMPORIUM

Could a hot-pink sweatband really be the answer to everything?!?

What would happen if you threw in the rest of the outfit???

In for a penny, in for a pound.

Turns out, in hot pink and on skates, a person can do ANYTHING.

I QUIT!

ACME HANDCRAFTED STRAWS

Margie, the Rollerblading Doorperson!

Margie, the Cardiologist on Wheels!

Margie, the Skating Chef!

Good evening, Mr. Murgatroyd!

Comin' through!

She writes a best-seller about her discovery which is translated into many languages.

THINK PINK!

PENSE ROSE!

Думайте о розовом!

분홍색을 생각하라!

The world is transformed.

WHEE!

WHEEE!

WHEEEEEE!

WHEEE!

COMING SOON:

Meet Margie's friend Ben.

Woe is me.

SALE

TAP TAP TAP

R. Chast



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANA CUBA

On the plane from Houston to Fort Worth, 21F turned out to be a window seat. Jacob shrugged out of his backpack and swung it down the row.

He wasn't stoned, but he had been stoned recently and still had the residual exhausted dissociated calm of someone who had recently been stoned. A state of mind that was milder and lacked any spasms of paranoia. Kind of better, actually. He kept being reminded—because every flight echoes every other flight, on account of the sameness of the costumes and rituals—of how thickly, blockily stoned he had been on the plane he had taken from Massachusetts to Houston, a few days earlier, and the memory dropped another light scrim of defamiliarization between him and the world. During that flight, everyone seemed to be aware that he was thinking about the black plastic film cannister of weed, its rubbery gray cap hopefully airtight, that he had tucked in among the socks in his suitcase just before leaving his dorm. Would the authorities find it? Was a police officer going to come shoving down the aisle? He had tried not to care that the workings of his mind were visible. Even if people could see, most of them would be constrained from saying that they could by its being impolite to say so—as impolite as saying you can see a stranger's underwear. And people would be especially constrained on an airplane, where custom seems to have preserved as if in amber the manners that obtained when air travel first became common. The nineteen-forties, probably.

No one had sat down in the seat next to him, and the cabin doors were shut now, so it looked like he was going to have some privacy. He unzipped his backpack and took out a composition notebook that he had started using as a journal.

He wanted to write about his visit to Stu Rossiter. In Houston, he had been staying with his grandmother on his father's side, and on Tuesday he had borrowed her car and driven down to Galveston to spend the night at Stu's. When he had explained the visit to his grandmother, he had called Stu a friend, but he didn't know if he really had the right to use that word. Whenever he and Stu had got stoned in the dorm, it had always been as part of a group. This visit was the first time Jacob and Stu had planned to do anything together just the two of them.

When the highway reached Galveston, it relaxed into a broad nineteenth-century avenue. Slope-shouldered live oaks shaded the median. Stu's parents, who were both doctors, were still at work when Jacob arrived, and Stu immediately led Jacob upstairs, taking the steps two at a time, through the bedroom, furnished with twin beds, that Stu had shared with his older brother when he was growing up—Jacob was to sleep in the brother's bed that night—and out onto a porch almost the whole footprint of which was occupied by a collapsed, weather-beaten pink sofa, which stank of mold, a smell almost too sharp for Jacob to convince himself that he could come to like it, that he could learn to be at home with it.

On the sofa beside Jacob, Stu rolled a joint. "Many a proud voyage hath this pink galleon sailed," he said. He had found his parents' stash once, he told Jacob. It had been in a sandwich baggie inside a cannister of cotton balls in the master bathroom. So they were cool with him taking a toke now and then. Probably.

It was a beautiful Texas spring afternoon, with terra-cotta light and a breeze that felt like someone lifting a sheet off you. Stu was shirtless, as he almost always was, because he was a kicker for the football team and as absurdly beautiful as he and Jacob were now becoming absurdly high.

"Do you feel it?" Stu asked.

He seemed to mean the diagonal of sun that was at that moment slicing across Jacob's right elbow, but how had he known that that was what was anchoring and filling Jacob's perception?

"You mean . . ." For some reason Jacob hesitated to put the touch on his elbow into words.

"Yeah, you're feeling it."

Jacob laughed. There was something in the way the drug separated the parts of thinking that maybe Jacob, if he persisted in experimenting with it, would someday become the first person in all of history to understand.

"Let's catch some rays," Stu said.

They went back downstairs. In the Rossiters' back yard, Stu handed Jacob a towel. Stu lay down, and Jacob understood that he was supposed to stretch out beside him. He took off his own shirt. Through his closed eyes the sun blanketed him and isolated him from everything in the world.

After a while he turned his head to one side and opened one eye at a time. This was one of the parts he wanted to write about now on the plane. The view out of each eye had been slightly different, and it had started to seem as if he were a little person inside his own skull, running up and down stairs to look out the window on each floor.

The pilot was announcing that they were beginning their descent to the Dallas-Fort Worth airport. Jacob closed his notebook and held it out in front of him. His hands were shaking, but only a bit worse than usual. When he was little, a doctor had told him that if the tremor in his hands wasn't caused by a serious illness it would go away when he drank, and he had recently discovered that when he drank it did go away, but he kept forgetting to check what it did when he was stoned.

After collecting his suitcase, he backtracked upstairs and found the gate where the plane from Boston would be arriving with his mother and sister. It was Good Friday, and the three of them were spending Easter weekend with his mother's parents.

He liked the alchemy by means of which people who looked like plausible New Englanders when they boarded a plane became unmistakably Texan by the time they stepped off. All the people tumbling out of the plane from Boston looked now as if they could never have been Yankees, including his mother and sister, who like him were practiced chameleons as well as actual Texas natives.

"We have to rent a car," his mother said, after kissing him with her little duck-like half bow.

"I saw the desks downstairs," Jacob replied.

"Hi, dork," his sister, Alice, said. She had cut her hair short. Jacob wondered how her first year of high school was going.

"For all I know she might not even be able to walk," his mother continued. Jacob and Alice's grandmother had

clipped another woman's car recently. "Remember the time he brought her off the plane in a wheelchair and they hadn't said anything about it?"

At the time, her father had been dosing her mother heavily with a new drug that he was very taken with. Fortunately, the use of her mother's legs and most of her vision had come back a few months after she stopped taking the medication.

"And I think he might be having trouble talking. Don't be surprised."

"How could he not talk?" Alice asked.

"She understands him," their mother said. "I wish I knew what's a symptom of what he has and what's everything else."



Parkinson's was her father's major illness. But he also claimed a number of minor ones; he was a doctor and liked to try the medications. He could still prescribe, even though he had stopped practicing some time ago, after he was warned that, because of his drinking, Fort Worth's hospitals were about to rescind his admitting privileges.

A few years earlier, their mother had helped her parents move out of the stately white-columned mansion where she had grown up, which had been the axis of what little mystery there was for Jacob in the city of Fort Worth. In front of and across the street from that house there had been brambles through which you could skip down to the fenced-off back of the city zoo. In the yard behind the house there had been an empty cottage where T.J., who had worked for their mother's parents since they first got married, had lived up until a few years after Jacob was born.

But no zoo, no servants' quarters, no history at all environed the house where they now lived, a prim one-story yellow brick ranch house sheltered from the noise of the causeway by a long concrete wall at the end of the block. T.J. still came to do yard work sometimes, but it was a long drive for him; he was getting older, too.

Their mother turned onto the street. Granddad Jay and Eleanor were standing in their coats in the front yard.

"What on earth?" their mother wondered aloud.

As they pulled into the driveway, Granddad Jay shuffled toward them, unafraid of the still moving vehicle. Eleanor, clasping a fold of his coat, kept pace. Granddad Jay was wearing a bowler that had crisp edges even though it must have been at least thirty years old. The day was a little too warm for coats, let alone hats.

"Reenie," Eleanor said, leaning into the window that Jacob rolled down, "Jay wants to take us out to dinner. He knows a place."

"What a nice idea," their mother said. "Jakey, let Granddad Jay sit in front."

"Well, aren't you a sight for sore eyes," Eleanor said as Jacob got out of the car, and then gave a little gasp of a laugh at herself for having been betrayed into open emotion. Jacob and Alice weren't allowed to address her as Grandmother, because, she had said, she just didn't like the sound of it. Her head wobbled with the effort of holding Jacob in focus. "We kids will sit in back," she told her husband.

Jacob held the door—"Hold his *arm*, Jakey," their mother scolded him, but Granddad Jay batted Jacob's hand away—as the old man with rickety slowness back-squatted into the passenger seat.

After their grandmother got into the back seat, she seemed for a moment surprised to find Alice beside her. "Aren't you lucky," Eleanor said, a little ambiguously, "to get to sit next to me."

"I am," Alice said.

"Oh, you," Eleanor said. "Sweet as sugar." And laughed at herself again.

Jacob got into the back seat on the other side of his grandmother. In the front seat, framed against the windshield like a movie projected onto a screen, Granddad Jay strained his pink hairless head, his lips puckered, toward their mother, who kissed him graciously. Then he said something that had the rhythm of a sentence but was slurred.

"He wants to know," Eleanor explained, "what you said to make them give you this nice car."

"I just said I was Dr. Wycherley's youngest daughter."

Granddad Jay spoke again.

"He says for that he could give you another kiss," Eleanor translated.

"I know what he said," their mother replied.

As Granddad Jay gave directions, Jacob began to be able to understand the old man's malformed words, which were still loud enough, even though he no longer seemed to be able to get his mouth all the way around them. He was so tall that sometimes he had to lean over at an angle to see everything through the front windshield that he wanted to see.

"Why are you bringing us this way, Daddy?" their mother asked. "This is Mother's school, isn't it?"

He didn't reply. They were driving past a Gothic brick building with mullioned windows, set back from the road in a deep lawn.

"Let's hope they don't make me go back," Eleanor said, laughing at the ghost of an old fear.

"Did you not like it?" Alice asked.

"I thought you had so many friends there," their mother said.

"You could say it was a nice enough place to go to school," Eleanor said, "if you don't mind what you say."

"This is your old office, isn't it, Daddy? Did we come this way so Jakey and Alice could see?" The car slowed alongside a mid-century-modern building, rectangular blocks of concrete studded with yellow pebbles. The porte cochère looked like a bank's drive-up window. In Massachusetts, the style of the building would have looked blunt and heavy, but in Texas you saw the simplicity of its lines and the honesty about its materials. "Whenever you had to get a shot, Jakey, we saved it up until we came to Fort Worth, because Daddy's nurse Becky was the best shot-giver in the world. You couldn't even feel the needle going in."

"I remember," Jacob said.

"I'm pretty sure he doesn't like to come back here," Eleanor said quietly.

Granddad Jay shifted in his seat. His arms hung straight down from his shoulders, limp, as if he had forgotten he could still use them. "Jacob, I hear you want to major in English, but I think you should become a doctor," he said. Jacob was surprised to be able to understand him so clearly. The old man's eyes were glittering with effort and sly-

ness. "I know a drug for shaking, if you want to be a surgeon."

"I told him about your hands," Jacob's mother explained.

"Oh, I see," Jacob said. But the reason he didn't want to be a doctor was that he didn't want to cut up dead bodies in medical school. "I'll think about it."

"It's the greatest profession in the world."

"Do you want me to stop, Daddy?" their mother asked. "We can get out and walk around."

The old man shook his head. "You can tell anyone you want that you know me, you know," he said. "You can tell anyone you want you're named after me."

"Don't forget," Granddad Jay declared. It wasn't immediately clear whom he was talking to. The car coughed as it settled into a parking space in a roadside mall. "On the way home."

"He needs a prescription filled," Eleanor explained to the others.

"Do you want to stop at Daniel Drug?" their mother asked.

"No, there's a place right near here, Reenie," her mother said. "I had to call all over town to find it. It seems to be the only place in Fort Worth that has what he needs."

"Is that why we're eating all the way out here?" their mother asked.

"Don't be silly, Reenie," her mother said.

The hostess counted out five floppy oversized menus. Eleanor said they wanted the smoking section.

It was a Chinese restaurant, and, when a waitress brought tea, Alice took charge of pouring it into the little thick-walled porcelain cups. When Granddad Jay reached a trembling hand toward the black plastic cartridge of sweeteners at the end of the table, Alice asked him, "Why do you want one of those?"

"Young lady," he said.

"Oh, I know why," she replied. She pulled the paper packets out of the dispenser and sorted them by brand. Granddad Jay had bought stock in an artificial-sweetener company a number of years earlier, and for a time one of his games had been to consume as much of the product as he could. Drawers and drawers in the house were still full of the little blue rectangles. "Five of yours, two of theirs, and three plain," Alice said when she had finished her inventory.

He ripped open one of his and poured it into his tea. It was such a small cup that the amount of sweetener was disproportionate, but old people are sometimes a little ruthless about their pleasures—about taking from the world they have survived into tokens that remind them of what they loved about the one they grew up in.

Eleanor unwrapped her chopsticks and used one to stir Granddad Jay's tea. "When I was little, I didn't dare put sugar in my tea," she told Alice. "'Are you an orphan?' Mother would ask us."

"What did she mean?"

"You know, I'm not completely sure."

"Was this during the Depression?" Jacob asked.

"Not telling."

Granddad Jay waved a hand over Jacob and Alice. "Are you going to move back here, now that they're finished?" he asked their mother.

"Daddy, Alice still has three more years of high school."

"You're still young and pretty, Reenie. And you were always the clever one."

"Daddy," she warned him.

"Your mother needs you."

"Now, Jay, why would you go and say a thing like that," Eleanor scolded him.

"Give me a cigarette," Granddad Jay said.

"Now? When we haven't even ordered?" But she took out of her purse a crinkling silver packet and the little blue finger of a lighter.

"I've quit, you know," Granddad Jay said to his daughter. "It's been six days since I had one of my own cigarettes."

"That's not how it works, Daddy."

"It's working for me. I don't have to carry around cigarettes anymore."

Eleanor helped him through a tussle with the lighter. It was odd to watch a man smoking 100s, dainty in their length and their slenderness. Because of the incongruity it was almost as though Granddad Jay were making fun of smoking.

"You're going to need to move back soon, because she gets confused now," Granddad Jay said.

"I do no such thing," Eleanor said. She rapped the table lightly and shook her head. "I declare."

"We all get confused sometimes," their mother said mildly.

"I'll just run in," their mother said, after dinner, once she had parked outside the pharmacy. She rolled down the car's four windows a crack.

"Don't let them give you any lip,"



"It is so nice to get together and trade veiled barbs again."

Granddad Jay said. "Tell them to call my office."

He didn't have an office anymore, of course. He looked away as she hurried across the asphalt.

"Reenie's so good to us," Eleanor said.

Jacob was put in a guest room where the childhood bed of one of his aunts now lay next to a console that was serving as his grandfather's desk. The console was heaped with papers, though the other elements of the room were so feminine—a sewing machine, a hand-tinted photograph of a great-grandmother as a child, a papier-mâché bust of a sort of flapper Anne Boleyn, whose plump green toque doubled as a pincushion—that it seemed unlikely his grandfather spent much time here.

On top of the pile of papers were a few dozen photocopies of a single page. *Jacob Palmcron Wycherley, Jr., M.D. / Curriculum Vitae*. They were photocopies of photocopies; the white space was freckled and the crossbars of the lowercased "E"s and "A"s had dissolved. When had Granddad Jay had them printed? The latest date of publication listed was the year of Jacob's birth. It would be a problem if Granddad Jay had lost so much on a new stock-market enthusiasm that he needed to work again.

A shout came from the other side of the house. Jacob didn't hear anyone respond to it. When the shout came again, he went to investigate.

Granddad Jay was sitting alone at the head of the dining table. He had unbuttoned his dress shirt and had managed to get one arm out. His head was hanging down at a sharp angle from his neck, like a bundle sagging from the end of a hobo's stick. He shouted a third time just as Jacob came into the room: "Wennor!"

"Can I get you something?" Jacob asked.

"Eleanor," he said.

Maybe it was because their responsibility as caretakers kept them more active that women tended to live longer than men.

Eleanor was talking with Jacob's mother and sister in the other guest bedroom.

"Granddad Jay wants you," Jacob told her.

"Oh dear," she said.

"Is he all right?" Jacob's mother asked.

"Oh, he's all right," Eleanor replied.

Returning to the room he had been given, Jacob sat down cross-legged on his aunt's childhood bed and took out his notebook.

When Stu's parents had come home, one car pulling into the gravel driveway right after the other, Stu had brought Jacob into the kitchen to meet them. Jacob shook hands with them while the blood was rushing out of his head; a darkness descended like a curtain over his vision and then fluttered there. He glanced at Stu through the shadow and saw that Stu had put his shirt back on. Had he put on his? Without looking down, he felt his tummy. There seemed to be a shirt there.

Mrs. Rossiter took cheese, crackers, and olives out of the refrigerator. Jacob's heart leaped with gratitude. She was so kind! It was her nose that Stu had. And her eyes.

He needed to remember that she was Dr., not Mrs.

"What's your position, Jacob?" Stu's father asked. The Rossiters had been having a political discussion almost since the moment Stu and Jacob walked into the kitchen, but although Jacob had been standing in the kitchen with them the whole time, he had no idea what it was about. His stoned brain hadn't considered it important to know. He looked at Stu.

"It's a pretty controversial topic, Dad," Stu said. "Abortion."

"He can't answer for himself?" Stu's father said. "He goes to Harvard with you, right?"

"I just think it's a matter of medical ethics," Stu's mother said. Was she covering for Jacob? Could she tell? "A hospital shouldn't put any obstacles in the way of care that aren't medically necessary."

"But if the state has passed a law, Mary."

"My grandfather is a doctor," Jacob said, forcing himself to speak, forcing the gears of his mind to turn. "He thinks unwanted babies bring unhappiness into the world."

He could immediately tell from the looks on the Rossiters' faces that his words hadn't come out right.

"Where does your grandfather practice?" Stu's father asked.

"He's retired now." Stu's father was only going to ask easy questions now that Jacob had been revealed as simple-minded. Unhappy people didn't not deserve to live. That was the part of his grandfather's pronouncement that Jacob himself disagreed with, the part that made it awkward to have repeated it. Should he say that he disagreed with it? But, if the moment had passed, he would be giving away that he couldn't tell that the moment had passed. "He's a pediatrician," Jacob volunteered, in a final burst of cognitive effort, seeing in the detail of his grandfather's specialization, probably thanks to his altered state of mind, a hint of complicating relevance. An idea about the alleviation of suffering that wasn't quite mercy.

Jacob's grandfather was shouting again. Jacob took his Walkman out of his backpack and put his headphones on. He climbed down into the trough of floor between his aunt's bed and the wall and lay down and gave himself up. Clicked into place inside the Walkman was a cassette of "Magical Mystery Tour" that Jacob had copied from a cassette of Stu's one afternoon, on a stereo system that belonged to one of Stu's roommates. There was this one song, "Your Mother Should Know." Jacob had listened to it so many times that he had taught himself exactly how long to hold down the Rewind button at the end of the song in order to get back to the beginning. He held down the button exactly that long now. There was something a little shameful about repeating a song, about needing it so badly. But he wanted to hear the song more than he cared about shame. McCartney started singing. Jacob closed his eyes. McCartney was singing to him. He was singing from the summer when Jacob was born. That was part of what was so ingenious: the song seemed to have known it would grow old, that everyone and everything grows old. It was a simple song, only a couple of sentences, repeated. It was about how much had been lost and couldn't be recovered. It was about an idea of the future that someone had once had. An idea that had gone by a long time ago. Jacob was able to hear so much in the song, he believed, because the drug he had been sharing with his new friends at college had recently taught him, in sessions of disintegration that had sometimes been painful, that it was only accidentally and arbitrarily and to a certain extent mechanically that he happened to be a

AMONG THE TREES

Each morning on the common, Martha stops
beneath the conifers, paws on dry needles,
the part of our daily stroll where

she allows me to kiss her stilled German
head. A long way from the boar hunts and pheasant
shoots she was bred for in 1800s Saxony.

The spruce are emigrants, too. The copse
planted to temper winds on the newly
cleared wood. Now they stand

apart, transplants like all souls turned
toward one another, while we pass
through, a softer wind.

—John Freeman

particular individual in the world, to be the person he had always thought he was. He knew he should probably stop trying the drug, given how extreme the pain could sometimes be, but he hated the idea of failing to rise to the challenge that it represented.

"Jacob!" his mother was shouting. She was in the doorway. She should know, actually. His mother should know. She wasn't even old, really; she was always being mistaken for his sister.

Jacob took off his headphones.

"Your grandfather has been asking for you."

"He has?"

"He's in bed."

At the doorway, his mother stopped him and whispered to him. "There's something—" she began. "I don't know if I should tell you."

"What?" he whispered back.

"It was your name on the prescription."

"My name?"

His mother looked anxious.

"Maybe he got confused," Jacob suggested.

"Or he had already prescribed so much of it for himself that he thought they wouldn't give it to him otherwise."

"It was a new pharmacy, though."

"That's true," she said.

He knew more about getting away with drugs than she did.

"Well, go talk to him." She squeezed his arm.

Maybe the prescription had been for the drug that had the power to give Jacob the steady hands of a surgeon.

He knocked on the door of the master bedroom, which was ajar. There was no answer. He pushed it open.

His grandfather was in bed, already under the covers. From the angle of his grandfather's head, which was turned toward the ceiling, Jacob could tell the old man wasn't looking his way, hadn't seen him yet. Jacob sort of needed to pee, so he ducked into his grandparents' bathroom.

The top of the toilet's water tank, the windowsill, the flat parts of the sink, the ledge beneath the mirror, the top of the medicine cabinet, and, Jacob knew without looking, all the shelves inside were peopled with dull orange plastic pill bottles with thick white helmets. It took a few seconds before he could start peeing. Watched by all these soldiers.

When he returned to the bedroom, he saw that his grandfather's eyes were closed. His grandfather wasn't wearing his glasses, so his face seemed unfocussed. The skin on his face looked as thin as in most people it only is under the outer corners of their eyes. There were faint speckles on his scalp and, inside these scattered dots, what color there was in his skin had been erased.

"Granddad Jay?"

The old man opened his eyes.

"Did you want to talk to me?" Jacob asked.

His grandfather nodded.

Jacob pulled a chair closer to the bed. On the nightstand a glass of water had been sitting out for so long that fine white rings marked the stages of the water's receding.

"Jacob," his grandfather said.

"Yes?"

His grandfather didn't continue. His mouth was working as if he were biting the inside of his lips.

"What's on your mind?" Jacob asked.

The old man looked at Jacob with surprise, as if he had already forgotten Jacob was there.

"Do you want me to let you go to sleep?" Jacob asked.

Granddad Jay shook his head. After a while he shifted in bed, trying to get comfortable. He strained his neck as if to pull out a crick in it, but no sound came except the rustle of the bedding. He inhaled sharply three times and again looked at Jacob as if he were startled to see him there.

Jacob tried to come up with a topic of conversation. "Mom says you like Kurt Vonnegut." His mother had told him this a couple of years before, when she noticed him reading one of Vonnegut's books.

"Who?"

"Kurt Vonnegut."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Granddad Jay said impatiently.

He had probably read the books when they first came out, and maybe that was so long ago that he had forgotten them.

"He wrote 'Slaughterhouse-Five,'" Jacob said. " 'The Sirens of Titan.'"

"I can't understand you," Granddad Jay said more loudly. He sounded agitated.

"It's O.K.," said Jacob, who knew from his own experiments what confusion was like.

"I can hear you but you're not making any sense," his grandfather said, almost petulantly, as if something had broken that he hadn't realized could be broken.

"It's O.K.," Jacob repeated. He considered summoning his grandmother, but it seemed natural that his grandfather's confusion would spiral a little at the end of the day, and he didn't want to disturb her if it wasn't necessary. "Not everything has to make sense."

Sometimes, when Jacob, while high,

got lost in the dark part of himself, he tore himself up in his compulsion to find his way back on his own and had to be helped to let go of the need to find his way back. To let go of the fear that he was alone and damaged and would never get back. He had to be helped to understand that the urgency he felt was the part that wasn't necessary. If Stu was there, all that needed to happen was for Stu to ask if he was all right, and then he wanted to be all right so badly that he was. He was pretty sure his grandfather only needed to fall asleep.

For a while, Granddad Jay's eyes moved from side to side as if following a conversation between people gathered around him. Finally, he shut them with effort and with a deep sigh.

After dinner, Stu and Jacob had got into Stu's mother's car and gone looking for a party. They drove past the houses of half a dozen of Stu's friends from high school. At a house where there were two cars in the driveway and one on the street, Stu told Jacob to wait and went and knocked. A barefoot girl came to the door and from the car Jacob watched Stu shift back and forth on the balls of his feet as he talked to her, as if Stu were in a game and was staying ready for whatever the next play was going to be. After a few minutes, she followed Stu to the car, watching her bare feet as she walked, and let Stu introduce her to Jacob. There was no party at her house, she said; the car on the street was because one of her aunts was visiting from Lubbock.

"Maybe you and your aunt could come out with us," Stu offered.

"Who wouldn't like that, but she's already in her nightie, Stu. And I got work in the morning. Where you going, anyway?"

"I don't know. Down to the seawall, get a po'boy. I'd say we'll get baked, but we kind of already started on that."

"You boys have fun," she said, before she headed back inside.

"I know what I can show you," Stu said. He turned the key in the ignition. "You ever heard of the Face?"

Stu wheeled the car around in a U-turn. He sat way back in his seat as he did it and turned the wheel with just one hand. Even in driving he had an athlete's easy confidence.

An old man's face, he said, had appeared on the exterior of one of the medical school's buildings. People thought it looked like the man who had owned the land under the building; before he died, they said, he had told his kids not to sell it to the state of Texas. After the face appeared, stoners started congregating in the parking lot at night, to stare at it, so the university sandblasted the wall clear. But a few days later the face returned, in a different panel of the wall, one floor down. So the university sandblasted again. And the face returned again, again in a different panel.

"Really?" Jacob asked.

"I'm telling you, man," Stu said.

"I don't believe in ghosts," Jacob said.

"Yeah, me neither. I'm pretty sure."

At the parking lot there weren't any guards on duty, and, anyway, because of Stu's mom the car had the right sticker.

Stu killed the engine. They didn't get out. "Do you see it?" Stu asked.

They were facing the back of a modern building. "No," Jacob said. The concrete was textured a little. Almost corrugated.

"Keep looking," Stu said.

"Where?"

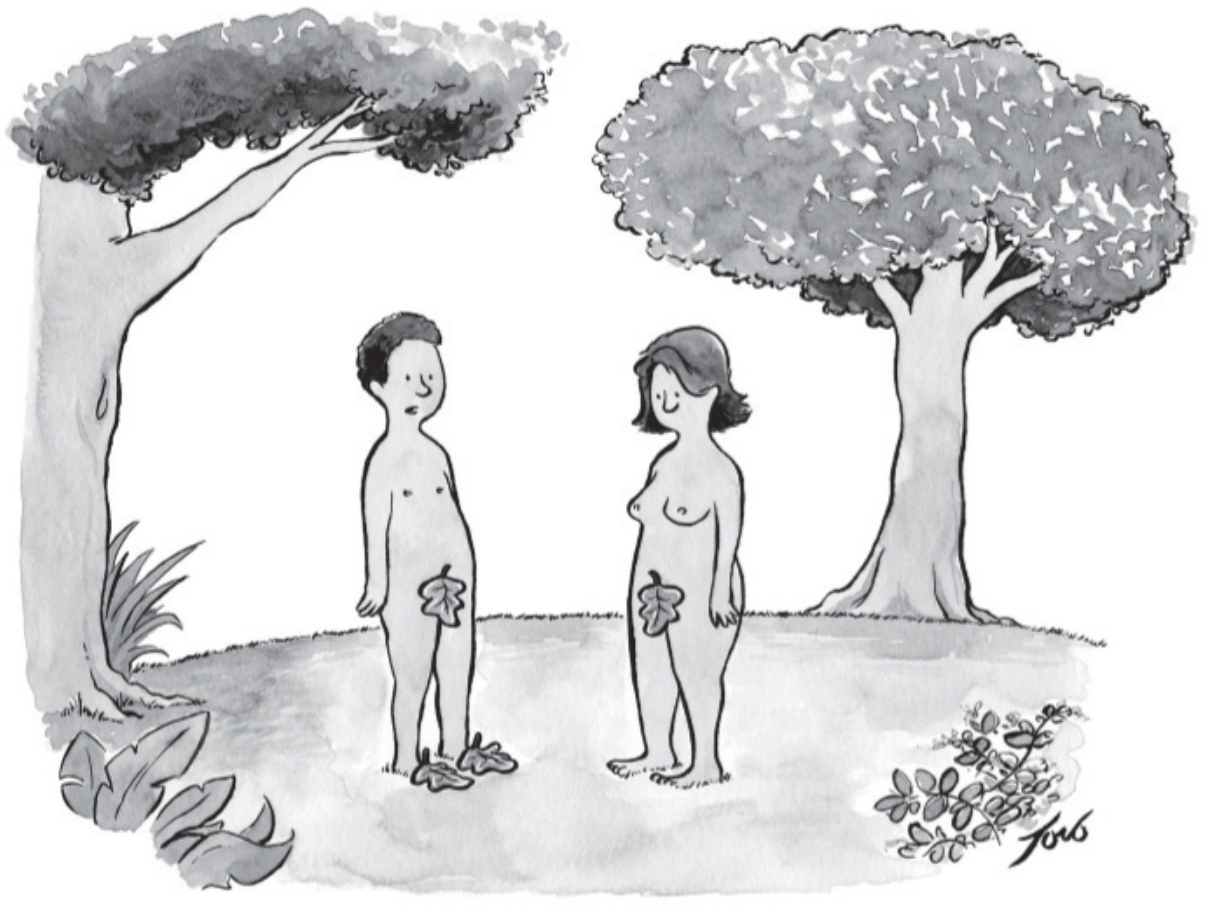
"Right where it's kind of patchy. Over the door."

Suddenly the pattern became legible. "Oh, that?" Jacob had thought the face would look as if it had been painted or drawn, but the image was almost photographic. You saw the shadows that would have been in the face rather than the face itself.

"Do you see it?"

"I see it." It was nothing.

It was a very Texan face. The way the chin was both soft and rectangular. The deep-set eyes, into which the kind of person who looked like that tended to retreat when he wanted to hide.



"I'm also self-conscious about my feet."

Jacob slept late the next morning. At one point, there had been a tradition of Eleanor toasting store-bought waffles for her grandchildren when they visited. Jacob had always needed to make sure that at least a little butter melted into every single one of his waffles' panes.

He poured himself a bowl of raisin bran and sat at the empty table.

In the sitting area, reconstituted from the old house's living-room furniture, his mother was drinking coffee and leafing through the *Star-Telegram*, her hair still in a towel because she hadn't dried it yet. In a chair nearby, his sister was reading a book of Eleanor's about elves.

Eleanor came in, left, came in again. She seemed to be tidying up. "Reenie, would you go take a look at your father and see what he's doing?" She was holding a white shirt of her husband's that

must have needed to be washed. "I don't know why he won't get up."

"Sure, Mother."

"Did you find everything you needed?" Eleanor asked Jacob. The washer and dryer were in the garage, and she headed through the kitchen to get to them.

"Jacob!" his mother stage-whispered from the corridor that led to the bedrooms.

"I'm eating."

She motioned to him, anyway. She had taken the towel off her head, and her hair was spiky and disordered.

He got up.

"Is everything all right?" Eleanor asked, returning at just this moment.

"I need to ask Jacob something, Mother. We'll be right back."

Outside her parents' bedroom, his mother held his arm. "I don't think he's breathing."

"Do you want me to listen?"

"He's cold," his mother added.

In the bedroom, Jacob held his breath, to keep himself still while he observed. But he knew in his heart that his grandfather's body already had the fragility of a thing that can no longer repair itself.

"Daddy?" his mother said, a little louder than she and Jacob had been talking. "Daddy?" She gave his shoulder a light shove. She started to cry, stopped herself. "What do we do?" she asked Jacob. "I bet he did it. That's why it was in your name. He did it so we would be here when it happened, so she wouldn't be on her own."

They returned to the living-dining room.

"Mother, I think Daddy's gone."

"Well, where did he go?" Eleanor asked.

"I mean I think he passed away."

"Now, Reenie, I was sleeping right beside him all night."

"But he's not breathing anymore. I can't hear it, anyway."

"I don't see how that can be."

"Do you want me to look again?" Jacob volunteered.

He walked back down the corridor and into the bedroom without pausing so he wouldn't think about what he was doing. The world was like this. It had events like this in it. He wondered what it meant that it had been his name. He didn't really know how much his grandfather had known or guessed about him.

The face wasn't different from the way it had been the night before. A little more sallow, maybe. Jacob held the back of his knuckles lightly against the side of the cheek. He wondered how he knew to feel with the back of his knuckles. The skin was cold, as his mother had said it would be. It was soft, too. He hadn't known it would be soft. He hesitated but then lifted up a corner of the bedsheet. The hand next to Jacob on the bed and the bottom of the arm where it rested on the bed were a dark purplish blue, as if stained by lying in an otherwise invisible puddle.

Jacob drew the sheet back up. He tugged a little to draw it up all the way over his grandfather's head. Granddad Jay had probably died just after Jacob finished talking with him. There had been something Granddad Jay had wanted to say. It was strange to pull a sheet over someone else, the way one did for oneself when one wanted to disappear. Maybe Granddad Jay, having decided, having timed it, having despite some difficulties pulled it off, had been looking forward to a last scene and had been trying to stage-manage his goodbye a little and Jacob, unaware of the urgency, unaware that there was a script and that he had a speaking role and that there was only going to be one take, had delayed too long in making his entrance and by then the drug had already gone too far. Maybe in his last moments, out of a kind of politeness, Granddad Jay had been trying not to let Jacob know that Jacob had upset his plans. Maybe Granddad Jay had been telling himself, silently, as he was about to die, *Well, there are just a couple more minutes of this misunderstanding to get through.*

"He's gone," Jacob said when he returned to the living-dining room. "His hands and arms are blue," he added, in a lower voice, to his mother. "I didn't look at his feet."

"Do you want to go see him, Mother? Before we call?"

"Who are you going to call?" Eleanor asked. "Sistie and Cal?" She was laughing, probably because her best friend and her best friend's husband, the people she used to call, once upon a time, when there was an emergency, had died years earlier. The story was that she had gone to their house with her daughters when things were at their worst, when Granddad Jay during one of his drunks had threatened her with his gun.

"Before we call the funeral home, Mother."

"You think he's really gone," she said, still skeptical.

Jacob, Alice, and their mother followed her down the corridor. At the bedroom door Eleanor glanced back at the three of them and with a half laugh shook her head, as one does over the little trials one has to go through.

"Jay?" she said firmly, as she entered. "Jay?"

She leaned over the bed and turned down the sheet that Jacob had pulled up, folding it at the level of her husband's chest and then smoothing the fold with a wobbling hand. She studied his face with her wavering eyes. "Jay," she said one last time.

When he didn't reply, she looked down and away as if embarrassed.

"Oh," she then said, in a different voice.

While she was letting Alice embrace her, she patted her back absent-mindedly.

Jacob and Stu had woken up so clear-headed, in the quiet room they were sharing, that Stu suggested they go shooting. Stu took his rifle out of his father's gun closet and put it in the trunk of his mother's car.

Jacob had never shot a gun before. It was going to be another first for him, he thought, as Stu drove them out of town, like getting high with Stu and his other new friends at college had been. His second first with Stu, who, beside him, seemed, because of the risk that they were about to take—the risk of death, if they did something stupid, which seemed small, and the probably greater but more abstract risk that is always part of doing something new—especially alive and real. There was something about doing a thing only because you wanted to. *It was such a trip*, people said, as if going somewhere were the prototype for experience. As if driving into pale, empty country with a kicker from the Harvard football team to shoot a gun for the first time were that prototype. Part of adventure was that you might not come back. Or not come back the same, anyway. They were both wearing shorts, and Jacob kept shifting to unpeel his legs where they were bare from the cool, smooth dark-blue leather of the car seat. ♦

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Caleb Crain on taking funny things seriously.

THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

THAT FIFTIES *SHOW*

"Don't Worry Darling" and "Blonde."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Ahead of its release, Olivia Wilde's "Don't Worry Darling" has worked a multitude of observers into an enjoyable lather—not just online but also, more heatedly still, in the flesh. I am thinking of the fans who camped out at the Venice Film Festival before the movie's red-carpet première, on September 5th. There they crouched beneath umbrellas, shielded against the pitiless noontide glare, for a ghost of a chance of a glimpse of Harry Styles, who acts, in the most elastic sense of that word, in the new film. As for the reputed feud between Wilde and Styles's co-star, Florence Pugh, it is widely and maturely decreed to be insoluble. Tensions are lower in the Taiwan Strait.

And what of the poor movie, lost in the fury and the froth? Well, it's a bright and whippy little fable, set largely in a small community of ideal homes. The period seems to be the nineteen-fifties, with dress codes and cocktails to match. The cars, not least an open-top silver Corvette, are a retro dream, and, every morning, they pull out of the driveways in unison and depart in proud procession, as if the street were a catwalk. The general color scheme is closely modelled on the Skittles that you will, I trust, be stuffing into your mouth as you watch the film. As for the weather, the sun shines without fail out of (a) a cloud-resistant sky and (b) the rear ends of the local guys. Or so they—and, all being well, their wives—would like to think.

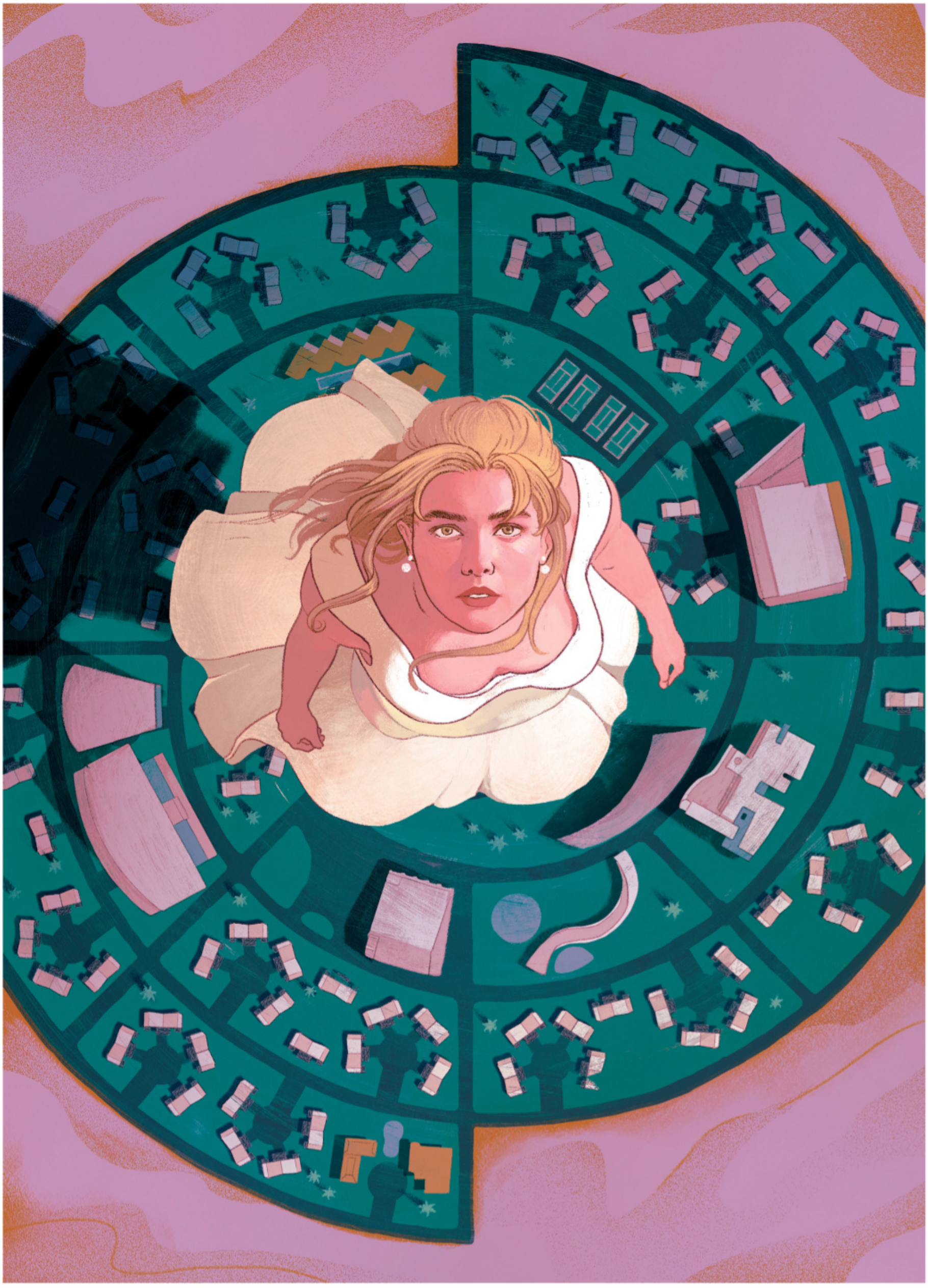
Yet all is by no means well. Consider the household of Jack Chambers (Styles) and his wife, Alice (Pugh), who is fair of face and tremulous of mind. Jack works, as do his buddies, for something called the Victory Project, which involves "the development of progressive materials," and which harbors a secret so profound that it took me as long as twenty minutes to guess what it was. After a hard day's mystery labor, Jack likes to come home and have Victory sex with Alice on the dining-room table, thus dislodging the roast that she has toiled to prepare. Her other chores include scrubbing the bathtub, watching her friend Margaret (KiKi Layne) cut her own throat and fall off a roof, and taking a ballet class with her fellow-spouses, among them Bunny (Wilde), the pregnant Peg (Kate Berlant), and Shelley (Gemma Chan), a stinging queen bee.

King of the bees is Frank (Chris Pine), Shelley's husband, and the mastermind of the Victory Project. Pine is the best thing in the film, his natural bonhomie nicely oiled and seasoned with creepiness. If only Wilde had placed more trust in his confiding smile; instead, she saddles him with slab after slab of overloaded speech. "We men, we ask a lot," Frank tells the assembled couples. "We ask for strength, food at home, a house cleaned, and discretion above all else." In other words, "Don't Worry Darling" is about the development of regressive materials—about forcing women back into boxy lives and striving to convince them that they like it there. The problem is not that this is a cautionary tale but that the caution comes as no surprise. Again and again, Alice embarks with good grace upon a social event, or a domestic task, only to be smothered by its demands. Hence the plastic wrap that she suddenly winds around her head, or the glass wall that inches toward her and almost squishes her flat. It might as well have a sticker attached to it, saying "Warning: Patriarchal metaphor! Do not smudge!"

Get ready for two big reveals. One arrives in the final stretch of the plot, as Alice's paranoid suspicions are excitingly confirmed. I would argue, however, that the confirmation has been under way from the start. We've all seen "The Truman Show" (1998), and a few of us saw "Serenity," the funniest non-comedy of 2019, so we know the rule: the prettier the paradise, the more certain it is to be a façade, with cracks that open up on cue. That's why the dystopian disclosures of Wilde's film feel so *easy*, and why I would trade it in a heartbeat for Gary Ross's "Pleasantville" (1998), the tale of two modern teen-agers whooshed back into a fifties TV show, where the bathrooms contain no toilets; the rapport with a utopian past was handled by Ross with an ambivalence and a delicate wit that are no use to "Don't Worry Darling." Oh, and the other reveal? Harry Styles can carry a tune, halfway around the world, but give the bloke a line of dialogue and he's utterly and helplessly adrift. We love you, Harry!

The new movie from Andrew Dominik, "Blonde," is full of other people's films. We get clips—or what appear to be clips—from "All About Eve" (1950), "Niagara" (1953), "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" (1953), and "Some Like It Hot" (1959). What links them is the presence of Marilyn Monroe, except that what Dominik does, with such fine needlework that you can't spot the seams,

ABOVE: LALALIMOLA



Florence Pugh stars as one of a group of women whose husbands work on a mysterious scientific project.

ILLUSTRATION BY ANGELICA ALZONA

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MYTHIC
POWER

CHERUBINI'S *MEDEA*
OPENS SEPTEMBER 27

The great Sondra Radvanovsky is the mythic sorceress Medea, a timeless archetype of women betrayed by men in power, who embraces her rage against those who have shunned her. It's the first of three company premieres, followed by Kevin Puts's *The Hours*, starring Renée Fleming, Kelli O'Hara, and Joyce DiDonato, and Terence Blanchard's *Champion*, starring Ryan Speedo Green.

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PAOLA KUDACKI / MET OPERA

is re-create these particular sequences with Ana de Armas, who plays the adult Monroe in "Blonde." The breathy gasps, the eyes that widen in pleading or panic, the fleeting frowns of perplexity, the million-watt beam: pretty much everything in de Armas's performance hits the Marilyn mark. She's so real it's unreal.

The film, hewn from Joyce Carol Oates's log-size bio-novel of the same name, clings only loosely to the chronology of Marilyn's existence. Thus, we kick off in Los Angeles, in 1933, with a fatherless and frightened little girl, Norma Jeane Baker (Lily Fisher), and her scalding mother, Gladys (Julianne Nicholson), who drives her, after dark, toward a wildfire that everyone else is eager to flee. "This is a city of sand and nothing will endure," Gladys says. (Dominik's script, as far as I can gauge, was doctored by the prophet Jeremiah.) Later, she tries to drown the child in a hot bath. From here, we leap almost twenty years to Norma Jeane, all grown up, and fast becoming Marilyn. Having read for a role, she sheds unfabricated tears. "I'm not thinking," she says. "I'm remembering."

Dominik's knack for summoning sights of great beauty and variety, as demonstrated in "The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford" (2007), is unimpaired. In "Blonde," he tacks to and fro between monochrome—often echoing famous stills of Marilyn—and glaring pops of color. The frame of the image changes shape. The white-sheeted edge of a bed dissolves into the roar of a waterfall. One scene looks as if it were shot with a night-vision camera; all but naked and ghost-pale, Marilyn stumbles around like a stranded gazelle in a documentary about lions. Weirdest of all is the womb with a view. We peer out from inside her, as a doctor deploys his speculum and prepares to abort her child.

What purpose is served here? Is the fracturing of the story meant to suggest that Marilyn's existence was all broken up to begin with, or could it be that "Blonde," below its alluring surface, suffers from a moral monotone that needs disguising, lest our attention droop? The burden of the film is that Marilyn was, from first to last, a victim, inundated with prurience, misogyny, and venom. When Joe DiMaggio (Bobby Cannavale) asks Marilyn how she got her start, she replies, "I guess I was discovered," but we know better, or worse; we saw her being raped by a studio boss on the carpet of his office. DiMaggio, in turn, marries her and savagely beats her up. Ghastliest of all is the scene in which, sluggish with booze and pills, she is ferried into the hotel suite of John F. Kennedy. Busy on the phone, the leader of the free world commands that she fellate him while he watches rockets and spaceships on TV. Of course he does.

What spoils the Kennedy interlude is not how graphic but how unsubtle it is, desperate to detail the abuse of power and thrilling to its own scurrility. Power *is* abuse, according to "Blonde," and pleasure is never unbesmirched. The closest that Marilyn comes to happiness is a languid threesome with the sons of Charlie Chaplin and Edward G. Robinson. ("At least you two have fathers," she tells them, mournfully.) Drinks on the beach with her third husband, Arthur Miller (Adrien Brody), are interrupted by a miscarriage; photographers swarm from nowhere to catch her moment of woe, like the Marilyn zealots who hail her arrival at a première, their maws gaping wide, in slow motion, as if to devour her whole.

Bedazzling, overlong, and unjust, "Blonde" does a grave disservice to the woman whom it purports to honor. Lunging into sympathy for her plights, the movie blinds itself to the resolve with which she surmounted them and, especially, to the courage of her comic splendor. Younger viewers who watch it without having seen any Marilyn movies will have no clue how funny she could be. Indeed, I wonder if Dominik *resents* the very notion of comedy—the way in which it presumes to pluck happiness out of disorder and despair. That is why he shows Marilyn, on the set of "Some Like It Hot," pausing to lash out mid-song and storming off, and why, as "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" brings the audience around her to its feet, she whispers to herself, "For this, you killed your baby?" It is as though Dominik, by putting us through the ordeal of his film, wants us to feel guilty for ever having delighted in Marilyn Monroe, and to shame us into forsaking further bliss. We must not like it hot. To which the most polite response is: boo-boo-be-doop. ♦

DISGRACED

What happened to Rudy Giuliani?

BY LOUIS MENAND



MARK PETERSON / REDUX

Andrew Kirtzman links Giuliani's descent to "the temptations of power and money."

Mayor of New York City is famously a dead-end job. The last New York mayor to win higher office was John T. Hoffman, and that was in 1868. He became governor. Every mayor since then has found the way up barred. And, for some, the way up turned into the way down.

The mayors are often a little surprised by this reversal of fortune. The assumption seems to be: If I can govern there, I can govern anywhere. This may or may not be true. What is true is that New York City's mayors have had a hard time getting non-New Yorkers to vote for them. After all, you're not likely to be elected President of the United States by promising to make the country more like New York. You basically have to run against your own home town.

When John V. Lindsay, who was elected mayor in 1965 and became one of the country's highest-profile politicians, ran for President, in 1972, he was forced to drop out after finishing fifth in the Florida primary, where he had counted on getting the votes of retired New Yorkers. He quit politics after a 1980 New York Senate bid, joined two law firms, and made regular appearances on "Good Morning America," but health problems and the collapse of both firms nearly wiped him out. In 1996, an ally on the City Council arranged for this once charismatic and commanding figure to be given two essentially ceremonial appointments in city government just so he could have health insurance.

Ed Koch (1978-89) ran for governor in 1982 and lost to Mario Cuomo in the Democratic primary after making disparaging remarks about life upstate. It's a pretty basic rule in New York politics that you don't do that if you want to be governor. After Koch left City Hall, his activities included movie reviewing, serving as a replacement for Judge Wapner on "The People's Court," and keeping alive his reputation as a great tummler.

Michael Bloomberg (2002-13), like Koch a three-term mayor, spent a billion dollars of his own money, a record, in the 2020 Presidential primaries and won a grand total of fifty-nine delegates before dropping out. He did carry American Samoa on Super Tuesday. He is now eighty years old and unlikely to run for anything in the future.

Bill de Blasio (2014-21) entered those Presidential primaries in 2019, while he was still mayor. His poll numbers hovered between one per cent and zero. This May, he announced that he was running for Congress in the 10th Congressional District, which includes western Brooklyn, where he lives. In July, after polls showed him running seventh, he dropped out. He says that he is leaving electoral politics.

Then there is Rudy Giuliani. Let's pass over the dripping hair dye; the Pennsylvania parking-lot "election fraud" press conference, where a witness turned out to be a convicted sex offender; the on-air screaming matches with Piers Morgan, Chris Cuomo, and others; the embarrassing punking at the hands of Sacha Baron Cohen; his hosting a Russian disinformation agent on his podcast. At the end of the day, Rudy Giuliani is a lawyer whose counsel led to his client's being impeached twice.

Since the 2020 election, Giuliani has had his law license suspended in New York and Washington, D.C. (Less consequentially, perhaps, Syracuse University is considering revoking his honorary degree.) Two of his former associates, Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman, have been convicted of federal crimes and sentenced to prison. Giuliani himself is a target in the inquiry into efforts to interfere in the results of the 2020 Presidential election

in Georgia, and some observers, including Ken Frydman, a former press secretary from his 1993 mayoral campaign, think he will be indicted.

And he is being sued for defamation by Dominion Voting Systems for spreading falsehoods about its voting machines. He maintained, among other untrue things, that Dominion's software had been invented in Venezuela for Hugo Chávez to steal elections.

During his last year as mayor, Giuliani claimed (amid divorce proceedings, so a grain of salt is necessary) that he was worth seven thousand dollars. But he got rich virtually overnight through a management-and-security consulting firm, Giuliani Partners, that he founded shortly after leaving City Hall—and shortly after September 11th had made him an international celebrity.

Giuliani Partners started out as a pure buck-raking operation. The Mayor and his partners had little if any experience in management consulting. And it would be a stretch to say that they had any experience in security, apart from having lived through the greatest security failure in American history. Many were cronies of the Mayor's from city government.

As Andrew Kirtzman puts it in his lively new biography, "Giuliani: The Rise and Tragic Fall of America's Mayor" (Simon & Schuster), they evidently calculated that "Giuliani's fame and reputation for integrity could be squeezed like a washcloth for all types of money-making ventures." They calculated correctly. In 2002 alone, Giuliani took in an estimated eight million dollars in speaking fees. A spinoff outfit, Giuliani Capital Advisors, made $84.7 million in 2004. By 2007, Giuliani's worth was estimated to be thirty million dollars. At one point, he owned six homes, including a nine-room co-op on the Upper East Side and a house in the Hamptons, and had eleven country-club memberships.

But his work for Donald Trump has reportedly brought him to the brink of bankruptcy. When he tried to get paid for his services, Trump stiffed him. (Giuliani apparently failed to notice the one-way sign on the Trump loyalty street.) He now hawks collectible coins, health products, and cigars on his podcast, "Rudy Giuliani's Common Sense," and sells video messages on Cameo for four hundred dollars apiece. In April, he appeared on "The Masked Singer," where he offered his rendition of "Bad to the Bone" in a rooster costume. This is someone whom Oprah Winfrey called "America's mayor," who was named "Person of the Year" by *Time*, who had an honorary knighthood bestowed on him by the Queen of England. What happened?

The rough answer suggested in Kirtzman's book is that a posture of moral rectitude, instilled in Giuliani by his Catholic education and made into a powerful political weapon by a personality that, as a friend said, lacks the fear gene, succumbed to Mammon. Righteousness, as it often does, morphed into self-righteousness. After launching his career as a federal prosecutor and winning convictions of Wall Street inside traders like Ivan Boesky, Giuliani seems to have decided that riches were his due. Back in private practice, he began taking on all sorts of sketchy clients, from Purdue Pharma to the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, an exiled Iranian militia group that, in collaboration with Saddam Hussein, had slaughtered Kurds.

Of course, bad guys need lawyers, too. The trouble was that Giuliani was cashing in on a reputation for honesty and probity with unseemly avidity. He evidently didn't care about how it looked. "His descent was the result of a series of moral compromises made over the years as the temptations of power and money grew," Kirtzman writes. "By the time he reached an advanced age all those compromises left him an empty vessel, filled with a desire for power and little more. Alcohol, and a toxic marriage, were exacerbating factors, though not the cause."

The "toxic marriage" was to Judith Nathan, a sales manager at Bristol Myers Squibb, whom he met in a cigar lounge on the Upper East Side in 1999 and who became his third wife. Kirtzman says that she was loathed by everyone in Giuliani's circle, regarded as "deeply manipulative and obsessed with status and money." As Giuliani's former chief of staff Tony Carbonetti explained the matter to Kirtzman, "She's a horrible human being."

In Kirtzman's account, Judith was demanding, questioned everyone's loyalty, and seems to have had a death grip on her man, who was terrified of her displeasure. Giuliani's children, Caroline and Andrew, stopped speaking to him for years. (Andrew later became a golfing buddy of Trump's, worked in the Trump White House, and, this year, ran for the Republican nomination for governor of New York, with his father's support. Despite the name recognition, he lost by twenty points.) The couple's divorce, in 2019, was bitterly contested.

And alcohol does seem to be part of the story. Giuliani was always a red-meat, Scotch-and-cigars kind of person, but the drinking appears to have become serious after the debacle of his



Presidential run, in 2008. That campaign was right out of the "New York mayor bombs on the big stage" playbook. In November, 2006, Giuliani was ranked the most popular politician in the country, and he went into the Republican primaries as the clear front-runner. In July, 2007, he was eighteen points ahead in the polls.

Then the New York curse kicked in. In November, Giuliani's pal and business partner Bernard Kerik, whom he had named police commissioner (despite the fact that Kerik had never finished high school), was indicted on sixteen counts of corruption. (Kerik later pleaded guilty to some of the charges and served three years in prison. In 2020, he was pardoned by President Trump. In the Trump gift shop, pardons are cheap.)

There was also a brief to-do about the fact that Giuliani Partners had worked for the government of Qatar, a nation that had given haven to Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who was named the principal architect of the September 11th attacks. And it came out that, while Giuliani was mayor, he had used the budgets of obscure city agencies like the Office for People with Disabilities to cover travel expenses, which some people connected to secret trysts he was having in the Hamptons.

Giuliani's affair with Judith, while he was still married to his second wife, Donna Hanover, did not sit well with social conservatives in the Party's base. (Giuliani had had his first marriage, to Regina Peruggi, annulled on the ground that they were second cousins. He did not inform her that he was doing this.) Nor were conservatives happy with his relatively liberal—that is, New Yorker—views on issues like gun control and abortion. A man who prospered through bluntness, he struggled to spin his positions rightward. In January, he finished sixth in the Iowa caucuses and fourth in the New Hampshire primary. He got two per cent of the vote in South Carolina.

Florida, as it had for John Lindsay, dealt the fatal blow. The campaign had doubled down in the state (those New York retirees!), but Giuliani took only fifteen per cent of the vote, good for third place. He dropped out of the race, his campaign having burned through sixty million dollars and ended up four million in debt. He had one delegate. Giuliani's career in national politics was over before it had properly begun. He and Judith were taken in by an old friend, who let them stay at his estate, Mar-a-Lago. No one else would have them.

In the years that followed, Giuliani drank heavily. "He was always falling shitfaced somewhere," Judith Giuliani told Kirtzman. (She denies saying it.) On Election Day, 2020, Giuliani—oddly, but presumably he was being compensated—did a thirty-minute show for RT, a Russian state television network, where he told his listeners that Hunter Biden served as Joe Biden's bagman, collecting bribes for him. That evening, Giuliani showed up at the White House.

He was "definitely intoxicated," Jason Miller, a Trump adviser, told the House January 6th Committee, when he insisted on seeing the President. And that, apparently, was when he advised Trump to announce that he was not conceding, because the election had been stolen—the first step on the road to January 6th and a second impeachment. Kirtzman says that we can be thankful for one thing Giuliani did in Trump's post-election madhouse, which was to oppose the recommendation to call in the military and confiscate voting machines.

It's natural when trying to understand a crash-and-burn peripeteia as spectacular as Giuliani's to wonder whether he was all that great to begin with. How far did he really fall? Kirtzman, who covered Giuliani's mayoralty as a reporter and as a host of "Inside City Hall," on the news channel NY1, and who was with him on September 11th—this is actually his second Giuliani biography—reviews the entire career in this revisionist spirit. There's new reporting and interviews; still, much of the critique covers familiar ground. The lapses and excesses had always been there to see.

Because he governed the city during a period of recovery, and because his comportment on September 11th was exemplary, Giuliani came to be regarded as a paragon of leadership. This was not unjust. A lot of political success is timing and luck. If the city's economy or crime rate had gone south owing to circumstances beyond his control, he would have had to take the blame.

In a way, the most significant thing Giuliani did for New York City was to get elected. He ran against the Great Society liberalism that had dominated city politics since the Lindsay administration and that had developed a kind of institutional sclerosis, with the competing demands of various interest groups making governance almost impossible. When Giuliani came to office, more than a million people—a third of the workforce—held publicly funded government, health, and human-services jobs. Most of those people were unionized, and the bureaucracy was essentially feudal.

There was little transparency. Just by giving the impression of clear leadership, Giuliani changed the political culture of the city—something that became vividly apparent when he left office and was replaced not (as many expected) by Mark Green, the city's public advocate, who was taken, fairly or not, as the representative of the old liberal order, but by a businessman, Mike Bloomberg.

The standard story of Giuliani's mayoral career credits him with reducing crime and restoring fiscal sanity to city government. And the city did change dramatically on his watch. When he first ran for mayor, in 1989, nearly every municipal office in the city was held by a Democrat, and Democrats had a five-to-one advantage over Republicans in voter registration. But for the middle class the quality of life was deteriorating. The city was still struggling to balance the budget after its near-bankruptcy in 1975; there were almost two thousand murders a year; public spaces were occupied by drug dealers and homeless people. Times Square was a den of iniquity; you could not go into Bryant Park. The night air was filled with the sound of car alarms. People taped signs to the windows of their cars: "No Radio."

In 1990, *Time* ran a cover story headlined "THE ROTTING OF THE BIG APPLE." Eight hundred thousand people had moved out of the city in the nineteen-seventies, and in a poll conducted in 1991 sixty per cent of New Yorkers said they wanted to leave the city, and fifty-one per cent said they were planning to leave.

In the 1989 race, Giuliani lost to David Dinkins, who became the city's first Black mayor, by only fifty thousand votes out of the 1.8 million cast. Four years later,

he defeated Dinkins by just forty-seven thousand votes, helped by a strong turnout in Staten Island, the city's whitest and most conservative borough. He became the first mayor in the twentieth century to be elected despite losing Manhattan. His crossover voters became known as Rudycrats. Under his administration, the quality of life improved enormously, and in 1997 he easily won a second term in a low-turnout election.

As Fred Siegel puts it in "The Prince of the City" (2005), a biased but insightful history of Giuliani's political career (Siegel served as a senior adviser and speechwriter for him), Giuliani ran as "a Republican playing a Democrat playing a Republican." In other words, he presented himself as a Republican Bill Clinton. Like Clinton, who declared that "the era of big government is over," Giuliani was a "reinventing government" policy wonk. Like Clinton, he made a big deal of being tough on crime, calling for more police and more jail cells. He supported the Clinton crime bill, which is now regarded as having worsened the era of mass incarceration. (That act came back to haunt the Presidential candidacies of both Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden.) Like Clinton, Giuliani rejected the liberal belief that the way to fight crime is to improve social services. And, like Clinton, he turned welfare into workfare.

In New York, Giuliani implemented a "broken windows" policing policy, cracking down on minor crimes like subway-fare beating (not a small problem: a hundred and fifty-five thousand people were jumping the turnstiles every day), and car-window squeegeeing (a small problem: there were probably no more than a few dozen "squeegee men"). The crime rate dropped. Public spaces began getting cleaned up.



But what was happening in New York City was part of a national trend. Giuliani had strong tailwinds that would have sped the progress of any administration, and he may not have been as innovative as he was given credit for being. Quality-of-life policing had been introduced in New York by Benjamin Ward, Koch's police commissioner, in 1983, and crime was already dropping under Dinkins. Between 1990 and 1994, subway felonies went down by seventy-five per cent and robberies by sixty-four per cent.

Broken-windows policing was instituted in the Dinkins administration by the chief of the transit police, William Bratton. (Giuliani made Bratton his first police commissioner, but pushed him out two years later, apparently annoyed that Bratton was hanging out at Elaine's and hogging the media spotlight.) And the city's budget stabilized, rectifying a cash-flow problem that had crippled mayors since Lindsay. Would these things have happened no matter who was mayor?

Much of urban America was blighted in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. Giuliani's election was part of a wave of urban renewal across the country. Some cities, like Detroit and Baltimore, never recovered, but others, like Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, and New York, did get renewed and became magnets for young professionals.

Giuliani benefitted from the end of the crack epidemic, which was responsible for a lot of the robberies and street crime in the nineteen-eighties. And he benefitted from an aging population. Forty per cent of crimes are committed by people between fifteen and twenty-five, which means that a lot of the crime in the United States in the nineteen-seventies and eighties was an effect of the baby boom. As population growth flattened out, crime went down everywhere.

He inherited an improving economy, too. A major stimulus to economic growth in New York City was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which replaced the highly restrictive 1924 Immigration Act. Between 1980 and 1994, 1.4 million immigrants came to New York, effectively replacing the residents who had fled. Their entrepreneurship helped revitalize the city's economy.

That economy was already undergoing a painful transition. Today, we have a hard time imagining New York as a manufacturing center. Yet the garment district was once a place where people made garments, just as the meatpacking district was once a place where people packed meat. Now the city's economy is fuelled by the giant financial-services industry, the banking and investment houses and the law firms they employ—"Wall Street."

But that behemoth didn't spring up on its own. It was boosted by the policies of the Clinton Administration and of the chair of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, and by acts of Congress. In the course of the Clinton Administration, the Dow tripled, and the federal government started running a surplus. In New York, the Clinton boom helped gentrify parts of Manhattan and much of Brooklyn, and it rebuilt the city's tax base, allowing the local government to accomplish things it could never have afforded ten years earlier.

By the end of his second term, however, Giuliani was running low on political capital. In 1999, he had entered the Republican primary for the Senate, expecting to run against Hillary Clinton, but before he had really launched his campaign he was diagnosed with prostate cancer (a disease that had killed his father) and pulled out.

In March, 2000, an unarmed Black man named Patrick Dorismond was shot and killed when police confronted him near the Port Authority Bus Terminal, and Giuliani went overboard in his defense of the cops. Just a year before, city police had killed another Black man, a West African immigrant named Amadou Diallo, firing forty-one shots before realizing that he was unarmed. Giuliani's inclination then, too, was to defend the police. This made the affair much worse, of course, and it gave ammunition to his political opponents. But he didn't learn from the experience. In the Dorismond case, he went after the victim. He authorized the release of Dorismond's criminal records, including his sealed juvenile record, and he attacked Dorismond's girlfriend when she praised him on television.

He was no altar boy, Giuliani argued—except that it turned out that Dorismond had been an altar boy, and attended Giuliani's own high school, Bishop Loughlin, in Brooklyn. Dorismond was not engaged in any criminal activity when the police approached him, and he had never been found guilty of anything more serious than disorderly conduct.

Giuliani's critics voiced anger at the way he had played racial politics. That divisiveness had a long history. Back in

1992, during Giuliani's second mayoral campaign, members of the police union, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, held a rally outside City Hall to demonstrate against Dinkins's proposal to form a civilian board that would review allegations of police misconduct. Giuliani happily showed up and egged on the crowd. Many of the cops were drunk and shouted racist slogans. They marched onto the Brooklyn Bridge to disrupt traffic, and the demonstration devolved into a police riot. Giuliani left before the rioting started, but the incident was weirdly proleptic of his actions on January 6th, when he called out "Let's have trial by combat" to the protesters. They took him at his word. Like Trump, he left before the rioting started. Light the fuse, then run.

And when he became mayor Giuliani never failed to exploit tensions between the N.Y.P.D. and the Black community. His stop-and-frisk policy, for example, was a plain case of racial profiling. Between January, 1998, and March, 1999, New York police frisked an astonishing hundred and seventy-five thousand people, half of them Black.

A few months after the Dorismond shooting, Giuliani announced his intention to separate from his second wife at a press conference. He had neglected to inform her of this, however, and a fight ensued over who would live in the mayoral residence, Gracie Mansion. In the end, Giuliani was the one who moved out. The press had a field day. New Yorkers had voted for a two-term limit for mayors in 1993 (the law would change in 2008, to accommodate Bloomberg), which meant that an already damaged Giuliani was staring at a political brick wall.

It's callous to put it this way, but September 11th was a lucky break for him. It gave Giuliani's career new life. He was on the scene right after the first tower was hit, and he had to run for his life when the second tower collapsed. But he is a tireless man, he can be eloquent, and he kept his nerve. Not having the fear gene came in handy. Giuliani stepped into a leadership vacuum left by President Bush, who was sequestered at an airbase in Nebraska, and spoke words of reassurance to New Yorkers and Americans. It was a testament to how far the city had come that, although the attacks inflicted a major wound, New Yorkers responded with compassion and manifestations of solidarity. It didn't last, but it was striking.

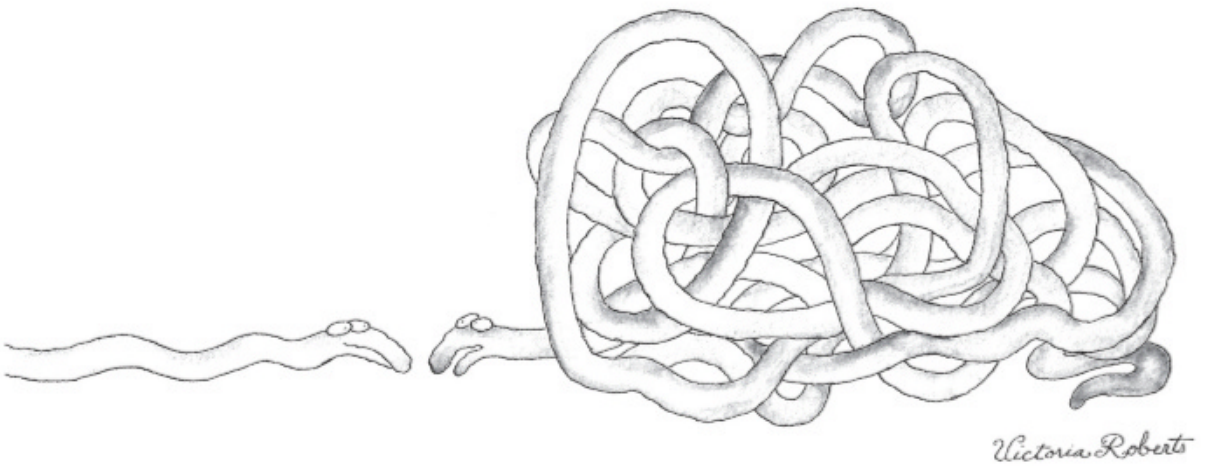
When you drill down, though, the story isn't so sterling. The city's response to September 11th begins on February 26, 1993, when Islamic extremists detonated a truck bomb in the parking garage of the World Trade Center. More than a thousand people were injured, and six people died. Giuliani took the attack very seriously. He thought it showed that New York had become a target for international terrorism.

As mayor, therefore, he ordered the construction of a high-tech bunker where emergency response could be centralized. But he insisted that the center be within walking distance of City Hall, and so, despite police-department warnings that it would be impossible to secure, the Office of Emergency Management Command Center was constructed on the twenty-third floor of 7 World Trade Center. When the towers were hit, in 2001, the center was obviously useless. The administration had to manage the crisis on the run.

One of the facts that had emerged from the response to the 1993 bombing was that fire-department radios did not work inside the World Trade Center towers. Nor were the department's radios synched with police-department radios. Although the city had had eight years to solve these problems, when the World Trade Center was attacked again the radios still did not function, and the police and fire departments, traditionally rivalrous organizations, still had not coördinated decision-making. On September 11th, even when it became clear that the lack of coördination was a serious problem, Giuliani did nothing to rectify it.

The breakdown in communications meant that 911 operators were telling people calling from inside the towers to stay put—standard advice in a high-rise fire situation—after the police department had determined that the towers were about to collapse, killing anyone who remained inside. It also meant that some firefighters inside the north tower never received the order to evacuate. At least a hundred and twenty-one firefighters died in the north tower. "There was an argument to be made," Kirtzman concludes, "that Giuliani had cost lives on September 11 rather than saved them."

This judgment seems a little severe. A truck bomb in a parking garage does not prepare you for the fiery holocaust that happened on September 11th. But it does explain why, when Giuliani entered the 2008 Presidential primaries, members of a group calling itself 9/11 Firefighters and Families went to New Hampshire to campaign against him. Although to the world Giuliani is the hero of September 11th, those people thought that he had failed them. Still, probably none of them could have imagined that he would end his career in a rooster costume. ♦

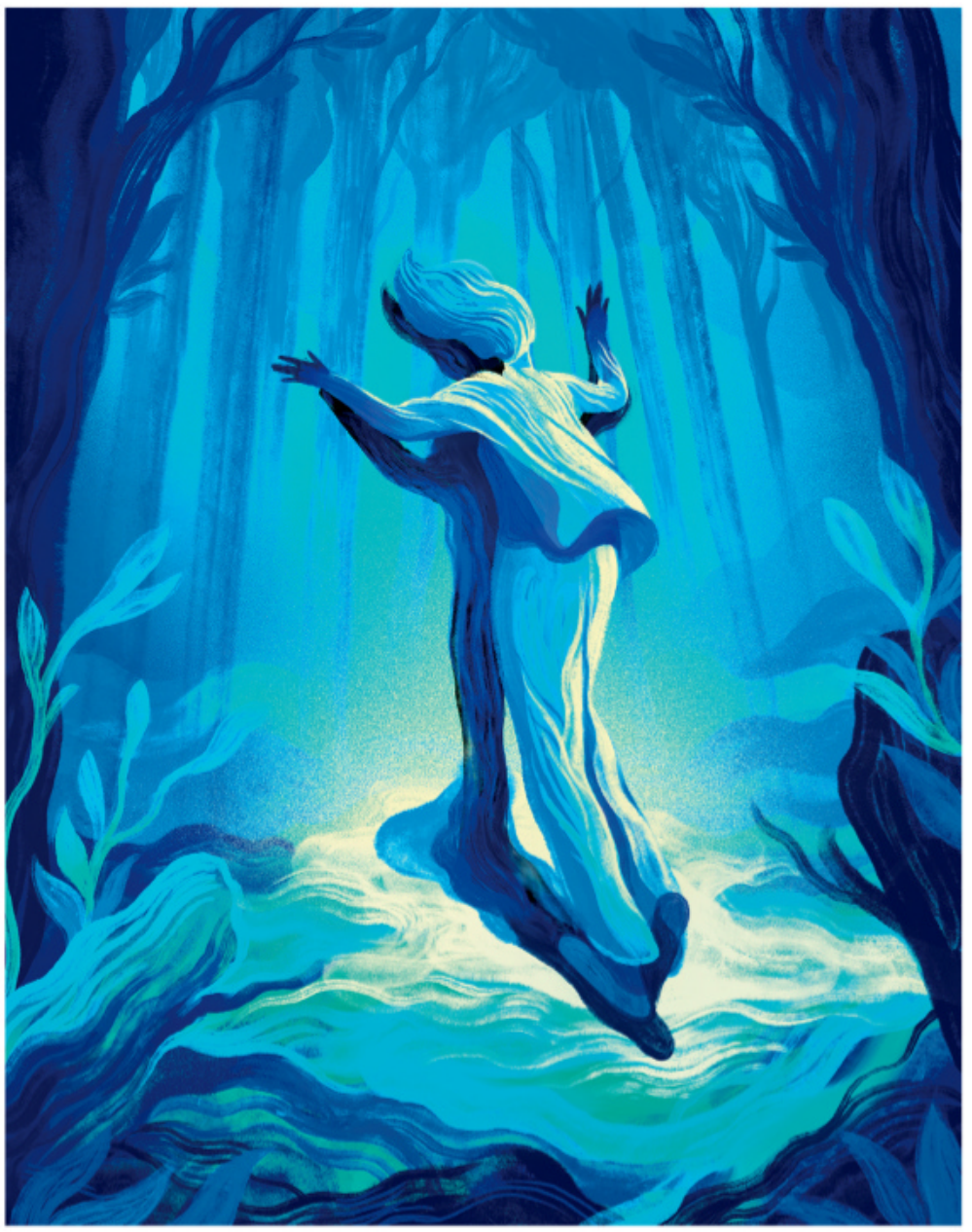


"Let's say I do unwind—what then?"

ALONE TOGETHER

A woman is isolated by a mysterious force in Marlen Haushofer's classic novel.

BY JAMES WOOD



A middle-aged woman takes a holiday in the Austrian Alps with her cousin Luise and Luise's husband, Hugo. She is their guest at a hunting lodge, a two-story wooden villa on the edge of a forest. On their first evening together, Luise and Hugo go into the local village for a drink, leaving the woman alone. She makes a risotto for their expected return. The next morning, she wakes to an empty house, her only companion their Bavarian bloodhound, Lynx. It is a sunny day, so she sets off to the village with Lynx, in order to discover what has happened to Luise and Hugo. Lynx runs on ahead, but is soon "howling with pain and shock." Bloody saliva drips from his mouth. A moment later, the woman bumps her head hard, and stumbles backward. She stretches her hand out and touches "a smooth, cool resistance where there could be nothing but air. I tentatively tried again, and once more my hand rested on something like a windowpane." Three times she checks, and concludes, with horror, that a "terrible, invisible thing" is blocking her path.

Thanks to Kafka, I have a hideously realized picture of what it might be like to wake one morning and find I have been turned into an insect. Thanks to the Austrian writer Marlen Haushofer, I have a hideously realized picture of what it might be like to wake one morning and find I am entirely alone in the world, confined by an invisible barrier. As in Kafka, a mundane realism prepares the ground for the unreal. In "The Metamorphosis," Gregor Samsa worries that he will be late for work. In Haushofer's "The Wall"—first published in German in 1963, and now reissued by New Directions in a lucid translation by Shaun Whiteside—we get sharp details about the hunting lodge, about the irritating Luise and her fat industrialist husband (Hugo, we are told, got rich by making a type of saucepan), and about their bloodhound; we also hear about desultory conversation concerning "nuclear wars and their consequences," fear of which has led Hugo to keep a store of food and other useful things in the lodge. So when we confront the impossible wall, a few pages in, it is an index of the real rather than an apparition of the fantastical. The return to the now solidly established horror, in realism's steady pacing, is always more visceral than the initial encounter. Gregor Samsa imagines sleeping a little longer and "forgetting all this nonsense." Nothing is more powerful, in Haushofer's early pages, than the narrator's tentative return to the wall, after she has had some lunch and smoked three cigarettes back at the lodge: "Then I walked on with my hands outstretched until I touched the cool wall. Although I couldn't have expected anything different, the shock was much more violent this time than the time before."

Now she must take stock. The eerie silence betokens some kind of catastrophe. She can see through the wall, and on the other side are scenes of petrified destruction. An old man, standing by a brook and still bringing his cupped hand to his mouth, remains immobilized. When Lynx sees him, the dog emits "a drawn-out, terrible howling," understanding "that the thing by the spring was not a living human being." If the man by the spring is dead, the woman reasons, "then all the people in the valley must be dead, and not only the people but

"The Wall" is a dystopian novel that gradually becomes a utopian one.

ILLUSTRATION BY RUNE FISKER

everything that had been alive. Only the grass in the meadows lived now, the grass and the trees; the young leaves brilliant in the light." All she can do now is survive. Increasingly, she will also survive for others, in order to take care of the menagerie she collects around her, the animals who, in turn, keep her alive. Centrally, she has Lynx, "my only friend in a world of troubles and loneliness. He understood everything I said, knew whether I was sad or cheerful and tried, in his simple way, to comfort me." She is joined by a cow, who blunders through the forest to join her: the woman names her Bella. Later, a cat arrives. The woman has dwindling supplies; she will have to learn how to shoot deer, an act she detests and never reconciles herself to.

She starts writing the "report" we are reading; when she finishes it, she has lived two years in solitude and can barely imagine another way of life. Even if she suddenly received the most exciting news, she reflects, it would have no meaning for her. She would still have to muck out the byre, fetch hay, chop wood. This is her calendar. She has lost sense of the days and the months, her clocks have all stopped. She is no longer "a servant of time."

"The Wall" is a dystopian novel that gradually becomes a utopian one, as our narrator makes a new community. Haushofer's inhabiting of animality is remarkably tender and selfless. The narrator spends little time mourning her two grownup children, but she becomes a loving parent to her animals. A long scene in which she helps Bella give birth to a calf is strange and wondrous. The woman understands that Bella, anxiously in labor, is calmed when she speaks to her: "So I said the same things to her that the midwife in the clinic had said to me. It'll be fine, it won't be much longer now, it'll hardly hurt and that kind of nonsense." She manages to pull the calf out of Bella's womb, and lays it next to her: "It was a bull calf, and we had brought it into the world together. Bella couldn't get enough of licking her son, and I admired the damp curls on his forehead. . . . I could read in her soft, shining eyes that she was bathed in warm delight. I felt quite strange, and had to escape from the stable."

Marlen Haushofer (1920-70) has never been as celebrated as Elfriede Jelinek and Thomas Bernhard, two Austrian writers who came of age with her. "The Wall," a cult classic of sorts, seems destined to be rediscovered by each generation, its reputation warmed by devoted readers. (I owe my knowledge of it to the writer Nicole Krauss's recommendation.) Only two other novels by Haushofer are available in English translation—"The Loft" ("Die Mansarde") and the autobiographical bildungsroman "Nowhere Ending Sky" ("Himmel, der Nirgendwo Endet"), both translated by Amanda Prantera. These novels were originally published in 1969, just before Haushofer's death.

Haushofer is a rather terrifying writer, brutal both in her unillusioned clarity and in the calm with which she tracks the consequences of her fictional premises. She became an intense critic of the afterlife of Austrian fascism, acute at tracing the state's ideological contamination of private life. Her novella "Wir Töten Stella" (1958), or "We Kill Stella," limns a world of guilty secrets and repressions. It's narrated, unreliably, by the forty-year-old Anna, who describes how Stella, a friend's teen-age daughter, came to stay with Anna and her husband, Richard; how Richard had an affair with Stella and then abandoned her; and how Stella responded by committing suicide. Anna tells the story as if Stella were an unwelcome intruder, "a foreign body in our house," whose eventual expulsion will bring the necessary return of domestic order. The political allegory is ominously legible. Although Anna is obviously saving face, privately she seems to have no illusions about the sort of postwar repressor her husband really is: "I used to blame only Richard, and I started to hate him. But now I know it's not his fault that I am reacting in this way. . . . There are so many of his kind, the whole world obviously knows it and accepts it, and no one puts them on trial."

Marital disaffection is continued in "The Loft," whose female narrator chafes at her stolidly unhappy relationship with Hubert, her husband. Hubert "doesn't like women, he merely needs them, and he doesn't really like life either, for him it is a piece of homework that some unknown teacher has set him, and that he can't get his head round, no matter how hard he tries." Like Anna, the narrator of "The Loft" lives a double life, of knowing and not knowing, in order to survive. She trudges through a poisoned, postwar Austrian existence, where everything "has lost its flavor. . . . Last time I made a veal stew Hubert said, 'Ugh, where the devil is that smell of corpses coming from?' . . . The whipped cream stinks and the fish reeks of petroleum." Her marriage has become loveless drudgery: "At some point I simply found myself there, washing Hubert's socks in the basin." As in "The Wall," the utopian alternative to the dystopia of existence may turn out to be a separate world, a place certainly lacking those human beings known as men, and perhaps lacking any human beings at all. In her loft, the room that gives the novel its title, the woman can retreat; Hubert rarely enters. Up there, she draws animals (insects, fish, reptiles, and birds, never mammals or humans). In the past few years, she has drawn almost exclusively birds, with a peculiar, somewhat gnomic aim: "to draw a bird that is not the only bird in the world. By this I mean that anyone looking at it must grasp this fact straight away. To date I have never achieved this and I doubt I ever shall."

"The Wall" is one of those books, like "Dead Souls" or "Don Quixote," which effortlessly wring meaning upon meaning from their opening narrative conceit. In part, Haushofer's novel is a sci-fi imagining of nuclear devastation, which looks with horror both forward and backward (faced with a bare cupboard, the narrator remembers experiencing an intense craving for food during the Second World War). In part, it offers a feminist rewriting of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel, "Robinson Crusoe." Crusoe blithely instrumentalizes the land, imposing on it, and on

his small human community, the colonialist terms of his native Englishness. In this sense, although he is away for thirty-five years, he never loses his political and metaphysical essence; it should come as no surprise that, when Crusoe finally returns to England, he continues where he left off, and simply resumes the life of a plantation owner, now complete with slaves. Like Job, whom he invokes, he has been punished and then richly recompensed, in one long providential arc.

Haushofer's narrator spends much of the novel shedding her essence. First to go is the social exoskeleton of her womanhood, the world's construction of her femininity. Shaped by intense manual labor, her new body is tough, wiry, "male." She has already removed her rings ("Who would decorate their tools with gold rings? It struck me as absurd"), and now cuts her hair short: "The womanliness of my forties had fallen from me, along with my curls, my little double chin and my rounded hips. At the same time I lost the awareness of being a woman."

She has little sympathy for the woman she once was. Of course, she thinks, she shouldn't be too harsh on this earlier, hapless incarnation, who "never had the chance of consciously shaping her life." She had started a family and had been immediately beset by obligations and anxieties. She would have needed to be heroically strong to overturn that inherited order, and she was never heroically strong, was "never anything other than a tormented, overtaxed woman of medium intelligence, in a world, on top of everything else, that was hostile to women and which women found strange and unsettling."

Why stop there? "The Wall" appears to propose what has been called (by the literary scholar Anna Richards) a "feminist ethics of care," in which animal husbandry is, precisely, feminized. In this regard, the novel prefigures an entire discourse of the nineteen-eighties and nineties, which has emphasized the connections between masculinism and meat-eating—and, perhaps, the male God. In classic fashion, the young protagonist of "Nowhere Ending Sky" loses her faith in a providential God when she reflects that "He sees the pigs being slaughtered and the deer lying stiff and bloody in the snow . . . so either He is all-loving and all-powerful but not all-knowing, or else He is all-knowing and all-loving but not all-powerful." In "The Wall," Haushofer's narrator, alone with her animals, establishes a kind of separatist commune deep in the woods, creating a new life so fulfilling and engrossing that it is not clear she would wish to rejoin the old, ordinary, damaged society, even if she could.

But there's a danger of locking this strange book into place, in order to make it "speak," politically. Our narrator is on a metaphysical journey, and her de-essentializing may take several further forms. There will also be a shedding of the human, whatever that quite means. It is much easier, the narrator thinks, to love Bella or the cat than to love another human being. Sometimes she feels as if she had spent fifty years in the forest. Bella has become more than her cow, has become "a poor, patient sister who bears her lot with more dignity than I do." The animals are turning human, and the human is turning animal. Or perhaps the human is turning into forest:

> One day I shall no longer exist, and no one will cut the meadow, the thickets will encroach upon it and later the forest will push as far as the wall and win back the land that man has stolen from it. Sometimes my thoughts grow confused, and it is as if the forest has put down roots in me, and is thinking its old, eternal thoughts with my brain. And the forest doesn't want human beings to come back.

One day, she looks in the mirror and contemplates her short hair and her tanned face—and, astonishingly, *disavows her face*, as Emil Cioran perhaps intends us to do when he writes that the first duty, on getting up in the morning, is to blush for oneself. "It looked very strange, thin, with slight hollows in the cheeks," she writes. "Its lips had grown narrower, and I felt this strange face was marked by a secret need. As there were no human beings left alive to love this face it struck me as quite superfluous. It was naked and pathetic, and I was ashamed of it and wanted nothing to do with it."

This disavowal of the human entails a disavowal of pattern-making, metaphysical meaning, and theological significance. As a result, "The Wall" pulses with a meaningful politics that is always in danger of being unravelled by the novel's own movement toward a resigned, fatalistic, strictly apolitical naturism, one not far removed from the passage in "The Lady with the Little Dog," in which Chekhov reminds his readers of the sea's "complete indifference to the life and death of each of us." The forest has always been there, and it will outlive all human endeavor and striving. It will eventually cover over the animal and the human. If time exists only in her head, she reflects, and she is the last human being, then time will end with her death.

Contrast Defoe's confident, teleological, early-eighteenth-century Puritanism. Crusoe regularly breaks away from his industrious building and land management to reflect on the ultimately benign pattern-making of Providence, which seems always to have had Crusoe's little plight and destiny in its safe hands. For Defoe, meaning is purposive and theological, purposive *because* theological. Haushofer's narrator struggles her way to a very different modern comprehension, something closer to a combination of Schopenhauer and Camus:

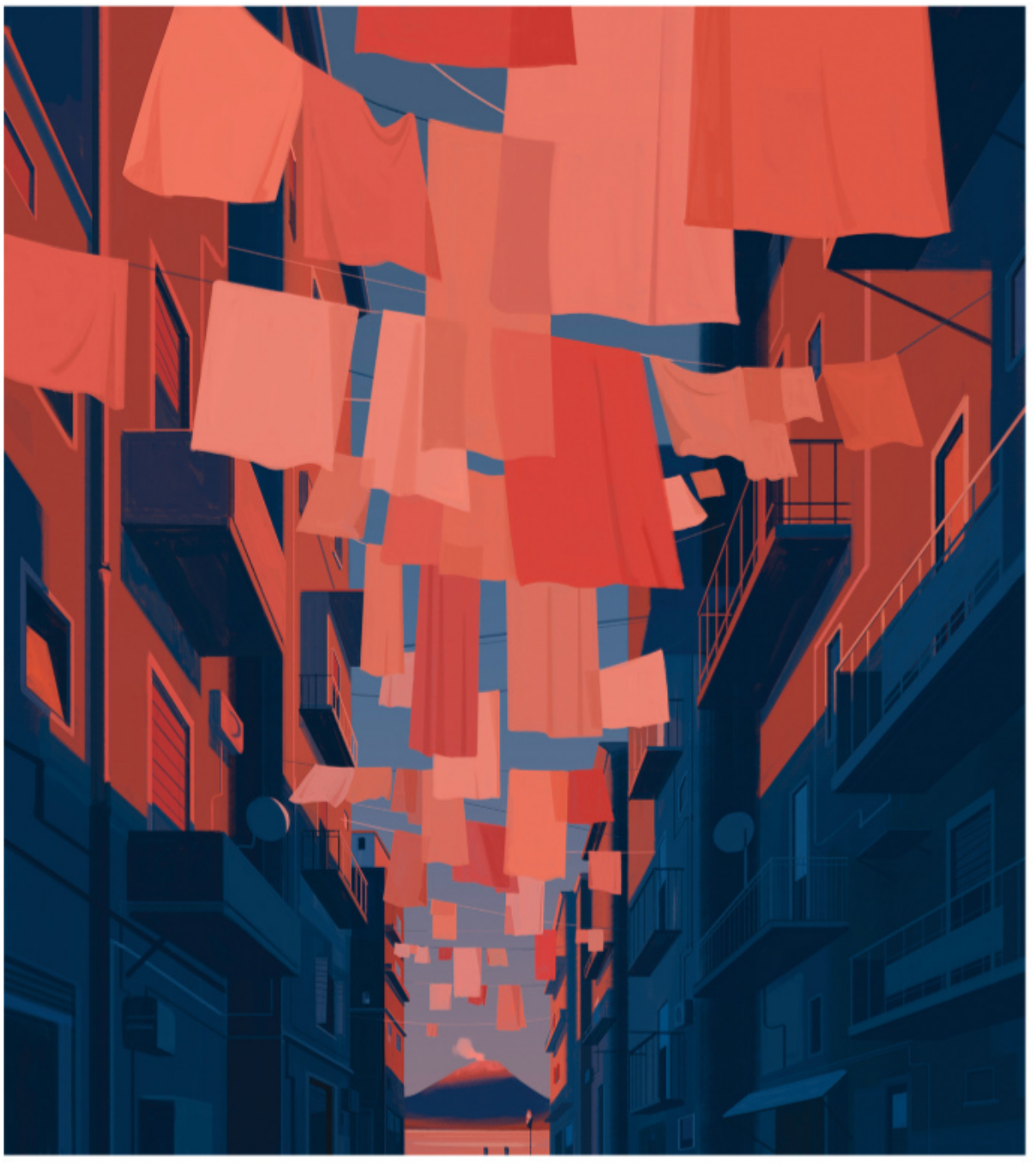
> Things happen, and, like millions of people before me, I look for a meaning in them, because my vanity will not allow me to admit that the whole meaning of an event lies in the event itself. If I casually stand on a beetle, it will not see this event, tragic for the beetle, as a mysterious concatenation of universal significance. The beetle was beneath my foot at the moment when my foot fell; a sense of well-being in the daylight, a short, shrill pain and then nothing. But we're condemned to chase after a meaning that cannot exist. I don't know whether I will ever come to terms with that knowledge. It's difficult to shake off an ancient, deep-rooted megalomania. I pity animals, and I pity people, because they're thrown into this life without being consulted.

Or, as the narrator sarcastically puts it elsewhere, she is very wise, but her wisdom has come too late. That could stand as the best possible description of "The Wall," and of the uncanny reading experience it offers: a great wisdom that has come too late. ♦

SERPENTINE CITY

In search of the soul of Naples.

BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT



Neapolitan culture, hatched in the shadow of Mt. Vesuvius, is adaptive.

ILLUSTRATION BY EMILIANO PONZI

One day a few years ago, an Englishman walked into a tourist shop on the ground floor of a Neapolitan palazzo and told a woman he encountered there that he was searching for the soul of Naples. The building, named Palazzo del Panormita, for an obscure fifteenth-century author of erotic Latin epigrams, stands near a small piazza named for the River Nile, recalling the Egyptian traders who once lived in a mini-quarter within the city center's ancient Greek grid. (There was a Greek settlement there before the Parthenon was built.) Today, that grid runs into a thoroughfare cut by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, when the Kingdom of Naples was under their imperial control. Named Via Toledo by the Spanish, the street became Via Roma three centuries later, when Naples, at last free of a series of foreign overlords, joined a unified Italy. And yet for many Neapolitans the idea of being governed from Rome was apparently as abhorrent as Spanish dominion: the name Via Roma aroused so much resentment that, in the nineteen-eighties, the city brought the old Spanish name back into official use. Even now, Neapolitans differ sharply on what their central commercial street should be called.

The soul, then, of *which* Naples? Who could think of locating so elusive an aspect of a place built on such deep yet never fully buried layers of history, myth, culture, memory? What sort of dreamer enters a shop selling Pompeian-themed mouse pads to announce this quixotic goal? The circumstances would be ridiculous, except for the fact that the seasoned Neapolitan woman replied, as though she were a Sibyl in a cave and had been awaiting her questioner for centuries, "I *am* the soul of Naples," and went on to prove her statement at least partly true.

Marius Kociejowski, the man who stood before her, is one of life's great questioners. He professes to be shy, and is evidently incapable of small talk, but something about his enthusiasm ("the engine that drives the universe," he notes) elicits answers, some improbable, most (at least those he records) detailed and shrewd. Perhaps it's because he asks the right people, the kind of people you might glimpse in a foreign city and wish (but how?) to get to know. His new book, "The Serpent Coiled in Naples" (Haus Publishing), takes on some of the largest questions that come with searching for this stupendous city's soul: Has paganism survived Christianity in subtle or not so subtle ways? Do people think differently about death when living in immediate reach of a large volcano? What does their music tell us? (Wasn't melody invented in Naples?) Yet, for all the book's exalted aims, the tone remains light, the content varied, the sense of mission wholly personal. The experience is more of an intellectual joyride than a standard history.

Kociejowski, a poet who for decades made his living in London's rare-book trade, tells a good story, and if the telling sometimes requires an imaginative leap he generally arrives at a compelling truth—or, at times, a compelling proposition. Did the notoriously unhappy poet Giacomo Leopardi find a measure of peace and even pleasure in Naples, where he moved in 1833 and spent the last four years of his life? It may be so, judging by a private list in his own hand of almost fifty exceedingly

rich dishes that he appears to have particularly enjoyed eating there: *pasticcini di maccheroni! bodin di ricotta!* Who could despair? Above all, Kociejowski realizes how much an outsider can never know, and has the good sense and the nerve to pursue a host of knowledgeable Neapolitans, not merely professors and anthropologists but painters and a chef and puppeteers and street musicians—one woman regularly drags a concert harp into the street and teaches Greek and Latin on the side—as well as sundry artisans, a novelist, and people who maintain the surrounding volcanic countryside along with the diverse entrances to Hades that the land once credibly contained.

Take, for example, Pina Cipriani, the woman in the tourist shop in the Palazzo del Panormita. Her voice was once so captivating that, for years, she drew audiences to a local theatre, which she had founded with her husband in the toniest part of town, singing Neapolitan songs accompanied by a string ensemble. When Kociejowski meets her, she still has her voice, but the woman once billed as "*la Voce dell' Anima*"—the voice of the soul—has been reduced, in her seventies, to performing to prerecorded music at the rear of the shop for small groups of tourists and old supporters. Still, if her former billing helps to explain how readily she claimed to be the soul of Naples, it doesn't diminish her assertion. You don't have to take Kociejowski's word for it. Anyone can hear her, on YouTube, singing with the soft expressiveness she insisted is required for a species of song that began in poetry. ("If you do it in an operatic way then it is not really Neapolitan.") Here is a voice imbued with what speakers of Neapolitan dialect currently describe as "*'O feeling*." There's a self-conscious irony in the borrowing of the English word, but it also testifies to the vigor of a living language, which swallows everything that comes its way.

Neapolitan culture is by force of circumstance adaptive; the exemplary Neapolitan song "'O Sole Mio" has a rhythmic pattern derived from the Cuban habanera. But the people, of course, have had to be most formidably adaptive. Kociejowski's serpentine title refers to the sudden crushing blows that fate can seem to dispense in this place. Just such a fate left Pina Cipriani, after the death of her husband and the loss of her theatre, trooping on courageously until her death, in 2019. All is exemplified in another song, the deceptively sweet-sounding "Munasterio 'e Santa Chiara," written in 1945, in which a faraway Neapolitan emigrant longs to return home but fears discovering that tales of wartime destruction are true. The song does not need to mention that the magnificent Gothic church of Santa Chiara was bombed to near-obliteration in 1943. "Six centuries destroyed in ten seconds," they say in Naples. The serpent strikes; and then you sing.

Kociejowski likes to focus on art that he describes as "reaching into people's daily lives"—the popular traditions, rather than, say, the European paintings in the city's Capodimonte Museum. Partly this is to keep to a less travelled path and to record a heritage that is at risk of disappearing, but it is also a way to get at the ever-nagging notion of the soul that every author knows (in his or her soul) can't be approached head on: "Looked at, it vanishes," Virginia Woolf famously wrote, "but look at the ceiling . . . at the cheaper beasts in the Zoo . . . and the soul slips in." Though Kociejowski is most at home among what may be termed the cheaper beasts, they themselves don't always appreciate the distinction. Kociejowski is honest enough to let us hear the rebuke of two highly articulate painters who have made an urban canvas of the walls of the city's poor and troubled Spanish Quarter. These politically minded Alex Katz-ish realists don't care whether or not they are called artists but are nevertheless unbending in their artistic allegiances. Correcting the author's populist assumptions, they express pride in their museum—"Capodimonte flows in our blood"—and refer with reverence to one of its greatest treasures: "We carry Masaccio's *Crucifixion* inside ourselves."

It's a valuable lesson. Kociejowski himself leaps across the cultural fence to examine one of the city's most prestigious art works, the sculptor Giuseppe Sanmartino's mid-eighteenth-century "Veiled Christ," a marble figure laid out beneath a shroud so transparently fine that it doesn't seem possible for it to have been carved from the same hard white block as the body it skims. Canova said he'd give ten years of his life to have made it. The sculptor's ill-famed patron, the Prince of Sansevero, was an inventor with a diabolical turn—he was said to experiment on resurrecting small animals from their gathered ashes—and a dark alchemical trickery was once suspected as the secret of the veil. (This was the sculptor's first major work, and the Prince was also rumored to have had him blinded when it was done, to be sure that he never again made anything as good. Sanmartino never did make another work to compare, although not for lack of vision, or of trying.) Kociejowski points out a barely perceptible detail that has large implications: a tiny bit of veil has been drawn into one of Christ's nostrils. Presumably, inhaled. So: he must be drawing breath. One of the world's most admired images of the dead Christ turns out also to be—as though in one of the Prince's experiments, carried out in a single stroke of genius bordering on magic—an image of the Resurrection and the promise of eternal life.

Kociejowski tries to be fair to the contemporary darkness in Naples, too—above all, to the presence of the Camorra, the murderous criminal organization that haunts Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan quartet and was widely exposed in Roberto Saviano's "Gomorrah," a portrait of Neapolitan life that shares almost nothing with Kociejowski's. (Saviano has since been forced to live in hiding, under continual police protection.) Most of Saviano's action happens on the outskirts, but Kociejowski retells the story of a murder that took place in the city's heart. The victim was a fourteen-year-old girl, caught in a crossfire outside her front door. Her funeral featured a new kind of requiem: the dead teen-ager's cell phone was placed beside her coffin, and as her body was carried away a classmate called her number, so that it rang and rang and rang. This, too, is the music of Naples.

Despite the author's preoccupation with matters of death, this book offers a mostly sunlit Naples, the evidently

grateful vision of a born outsider who has found a spiritual home. Kociejowski is not a native Englishman: he grew up in bleak rural Ontario, where his father, a Pole, and his mother, an Englishwoman, were unhappy émigrés. As a child, he longed for a fabled England of tea and bookshops but also, equally deeply, for Italy; after his parents took him to a concert by the Italian tenor Beniamino Gigli, when he was six, he demanded for years to be called not Marius but Mario. In his twenties, he moved to London; Italy took a lot longer to achieve. He has written other books about cities he loves—about Damascus, to which he devoted more than a decade of study, and about London—which, despite the distance of their subjects, display an equal wonderment with the people and their ways.

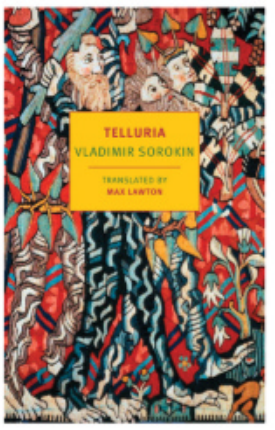
Now, having become a proud if honorary Neapolitan—anybody can become one, just as anybody can become a New Yorker, by sheer affinity—Kociejowski reaches his own conclusions about how to live next to a volcano, via the right philosophy and a little prestidigitation. Travelling to a nearby industrial town to interview a well-known master of an ancient type of goat- or sheepskin drum called a *tammorra*, which is played at funerals and may once have accompanied Dionysian rites, he finds his eminent subject, with all his life's mementos, confined to a small apartment in a drab and soulless new building. Worst of all, the sunlight virtually has to fight its way into the place, there being only one window. Kociejowski is outraged. But the view is of Mt. Vesuvius, and so, Kociejowski begins to think, the lone window may in fact be a boon, a means of protection against the volatile mountain that for millennia has shaped the local attitude toward life and death. "If it decides to erupt," he writes, with a sudden flash of satisfaction, "all one need do is draw the curtain." ♦

Dept. of Clarification

From the Times.

An earlier version of a tweet in this column misstated the name of its writer. As her Twitter handle correctly noted, she is Jillian C. York, not Chillian J. Yikes! (That is a pseudonym she created for Halloween).

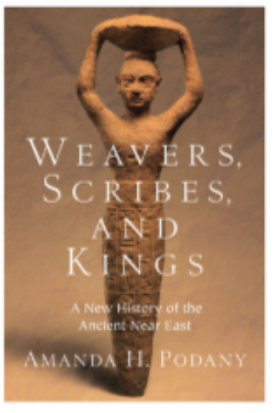
BRIEFLY NOTED



Telluria, *by Vladimir Sorokin, translated from the Russian by Max Lawton (New York Review Books)*. Taking place in 2026, this kaleidoscopic romp of a novel by one of Russia's leading dissident writers features robots, dog-men who accuse one another of being "neo-Hegelian," and an autonomous phallus that wonders "Am I depressed? Maybe." The plot, such as it is, concerns the recreational use of a drug called tellurium. Although moments hint at critiques of both Stalinism and Putin ("Collective life is hell. But loneliness isn't heaven either"), it is the novel's form, its restless joy and protean pastiche, that opposes authoritarianism's homogenizing squeeze most forcefully. "Everyone chooses what to overcome," Sorokin writes. "And they make that choice themselves!"



Sojourn, *by Amit Chaudhuri (New York Review Books)*. The narrator of this elliptical novel is an Indian writer on a visiting professorship in Berlin. Aware that he is a mere "ornament to an internationalisation initiative," he wanders the city, hangs out with an exiled Bangladeshi poet, makes a mess of a romantic prospect, suffers blackouts, and puzzles over a "plateau" inside his toilet. (Kenzaburo Oe, a previous university guest, must have sat here, too, he thinks.) Chaudhuri's preoccupation, obliquely pursued, is with the city's traumatic history; there are conversations about communism, a visit to the Jewish Museum. A friend, explaining the mysterious platform in the toilet, says that Germans like "to see for themselves what they've done."



Weavers, Scribes, and Kings, *by Amanda H. Podany (Oxford)*. This history of daily life in the ancient Near East draws on three thousand years of cuneiform records, from 3500 B.C.E. to 323 B.C.E., across parts of present-day Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. In Uruk, scribes assiduously recorded property and loan disputes, shipments of wheat and wool, workers' payments, and offerings to the gods. The picture that emerges is of civilizations greatly concerned with justice, in contrast to the stereotype of the period as "perpetually violent." Podany makes her subject accessible, pointing out that, from what people ate (bread and beer) to how they amused themselves (playing board games), "life hasn't changed dramatically from earliest times."



Playing with Fire, *by Elizabeth Wilson (Yale)*. The author of biographies of Shostakovich and Rostropovich turns her attention to the great Soviet pianist Maria Yudina (1899-1970), famous for eccentricity and moral courage. Wilson emphasizes Yudina's passionate intellectual life; a disciple of Bakhtin (who said she had "the aspect of a nun"), she was as interested in philosophy as she was in music. She supported the Revolution and played for troops in wartime, but she was also uncompromising about her Russian Orthodox faith (she had converted from Judaism). This, and such defiant acts as reading Pasternak onstage, led to performance bans. Living in poverty, she often gave her concert fees to those who came backstage afterward, and she never owned a piano.

ON TELEVISION

SECOND LIFE

"American Gigolo," on Showtime.

BY DOREEN ST. FÉLIX



The series presents sex work as a purgatory to which the innocent are condemned.

For anyone who is exhausted by the male antihero, "American Gigolo," on Showtime, is good news. Our main man, Julian Kaye (Jon Bernthal), has not committed one selfish act in his sad life. He has been groomed, pimped, framed—you name it—and still he looks out on the site of his trials, the putrid vista of present-day Los Angeles, with moist eyes, conveying resignation. David Hollander, who developed the series, designed Julian as a martyr, sanctified by his misfortune, which has been dealt to him by a parade of conniving or selfish or stupid women. This project, a reboot of the 1980 movie of the same name, is abysmal, but it is not inert. It thrums with a militancy, in its promotion of the orthodoxies of our era. It is unabashedly anti-pleasure, pro-gender essentialism.

A few months ago, on his amazing Facebook page, Paul Schrader, the writer and director of the original "American Gigolo," explained that he was totally uninvolved in the new series, and disavowed it. Paramount, which owned the rights to the property, had called him, expressing interest in a remake. "I replied that I thought it was a terrible idea," Schrader wrote. "Times had changed, internet porn had redefined male sex work, viruses, etc. I couldn't imagine Julian Kay working a Hen Party."

The original Julian Kay, as embodied by Richard Gere, was a beautiful and wretched creature who inaugurated the fixations of a decade. The character, a male escort, insinuated himself into the élite class by tending to its bored and neglected wives, only to discover that, when the ranks closed, his place among them was not real.

Schrader's "American Gigolo" was a fashion film, first and foremost. Gere was dressed almost exclusively by Giorgio Armani. Which designer would be chosen to dress *our* generation's exemplar striver, to translate his hauteur and his anguish to silhouettes? Raul Lopez at Luar? Mike Eckhaus and Zoe Latta of Eckhaus Latta? Times have changed indeed, and there is no effort, in this reboot, to do anything like updating by way of wardrobe. Offensively, the suits are standard costume fare. The series is neither a clever reimagining of the original "American Gigolo" nor a faithful tribute. (Don't let the opening credits, which are set to Blondie's "Call Me," fool you.) Julian Kay, now Julian Kaye, is unrecognizable—instead of a striver, he is a victim.

My tenuous excitement for the series, when it was first announced, hinged on Jon Bernthal—his face, specifically. It looks the way his name sounds. His nose is Roman; his mouth wanes. His beauty is coarse and a little wrong, and the combination is thrilling. The show punishes him, and us, for that beauty. The episodes weave together multiple time lines—a trope of contemporary television. We meet Julian as he is being released from prison, exonerated after fifteen years for a murder he did not commit. (In flashbacks, we see a terrified and disoriented Julian, found in bed with the fresh corpse of a client.) I am using the name Julian to refer to him, but it is an alias of a sort. It was bestowed upon him by Olga, a madam who bought him from his mother at the age of fifteen; his real name is Johnny. As a teen-ager, Johnny is played by Gabriel LaBelle, who is skinny but, crucially, cherubic-faced, a look that contrasts with the prickly detritus of

ILLUSTRATION BY JEFF ÖSTBERG

the trailer park in which he was raised.

Johnny's backstory is a buttress for the show's conservatism, which is shocking, even for mainstream culture. Sex work is presented as a purgatory to which the innocent are condemned. The protagonist had to be split in two to do it. And, when he finally escapes his terrible fate, he has to be cajoled by an old colleague, Lorenzo (Wayne Brady, completely miscast), to go back "under."

The writing in this series is only superficially concerned with sex work, or how the reality of transaction molds all aspects of human relationships. The first season will have eight episodes, and in the six I've screened there is only one sustained examination of Julian's relationship with a client. While I cannot spoil it here, suffice it to say that the drama of their night extinguishes any possibility of nuance or insight.

What should be a sprawling vision of sex is shrunk to a political tract; the show wants us to know how dutiful it is, making an awkwardly conspicuous display of Julian tearing open a condom wrapper. The shots of Bernthal's body are appropriately fetishistic, but they are not attached to an idea, to a curiosity about how his male form arouses women in society. There is no society, in fact. The environment of "American Gigolo" is narrow, largely sequestered to police precincts, Julian's apartment, a billionaire's lair. Richard Gere's Julian trotted and strutted down the streets of Los Angeles—bringing daytime glamour to the "streetwalker"—so that we could feel the paradox of his business, a human consumer good. And so that we could feel the tragedy in his downfall, when he is framed for murder.

Schrader's film is a California noir. The liaison between Julian and his lover, Michelle, a state senator's wife, is damned. To free him, she forfeits her status, providing an alibi that will expose their affair. The ending asks an eternal question: Was the loner Julian interested in love? There is nothing ambiguous, in the new "American Gigolo," about the romance between Julian and Michelle, played by Gretchen Mol. The writers go out of their way to class up the couple's affair, which is rendered in glossy flashback.

The series, in which we are made to endure a ludicrous pedophilia plot, which turns into a kidnapping plot, which turns into a murder plot, and then into a kidnapping plot again, is a straight crime drama. Straight, in both meanings of the word: in "American Gigolo," queerness is excised from the domain of sex work and brought to the realm of policing, through Rosie O'Donnell as Detective Sunday, the cop who coerced Julian into giving a false confession, and who is the only openly gay character in the main cast. (In the present time line, she wants to atone by helping the beleaguered Julian, after his exoneration.) The straightness of the world is baffling, especially when one considers that both Gregg Araki and Cheryl Dunye, stars of the new queer cinema of the nineteen-nineties, were brought on as directors for this first season. The show wants to engage queer culture, but it dares not offend its viewers.

Our generation's Julian Kaye, the writers seem to believe, should be a magnet for misery and humiliation. Even after he serves the prison sentence, and leaves his former life behind, murders keep being done either around him or in his name. But he's not as lonely this time. A mysterious pit bull trails him, as if a spirit guide. He's also got a cop and then a gaggle of Black people to help him. There's Lorenzo, but there's also Lizzy (Yolonda Ross), his landlord, who is boringly nonjudgmental, and Diamond (Paula Jai Parker), a sex worker from back in the day, who doesn't hesitate to drop her business in order to help Julian with one of his Biblical tortures.

I am assuming that the beatific haze will dissolve, by the season's finale, and that we will finally get to see Julian react, and lose it. As for right now, it hurts to see Bernthal, a leading man—if that creature still exists—struggle with the leaden material. Part of me wants a second season, to see if the show will open up; the smarter part of me wants to see Bernthal released. ♦

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THE THEATRE

IN THE RETELLING

Two plays make old stories new.

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM



Early in "Remember This: The Lesson of Jan Karski," a new play by Clark Young and Derek Goldman, the lights go low, shrouding the stage in black, and a video starts. It's an intense, moving clip of the real Karski—a heroic Polish diplomat who served as a dogged messenger to the outside world during the Holocaust, sharing his eyewitness accounts of the grotesque German occupation. Karski is a serious-looking man with flushed cheeks and tailored clothes. He tries to speak but, quickly losing his composure, begins to weep. The video—taken from Claude Lanzmann's documentary "Shoah"—is a compressed statement of the play's themes: here's a man trying to speak the unspeakable, seeking and failing to corral language for ungraspable horrors.

Once the video stops—it's the show's only detour into multimedia—David Strathairn, who plays Karski, begins, despite those awful difficulties, to talk. "Remember This," directed by Goldman, for Theatre for a New Audience, at the Polonsky Shakespeare Center, is an exhaustive (and at times exhausting) one-hander, full of the primal urge to transport an experience from one mind to the next. The spare set, a table and chairs, is, for the most part, placeless—the better to accommodate the rafts of detail about Karski's life that Strathairn pours forth, from childhood to middle age, in a jagged and immediate first-person present—but, at the outset, it resembles a classroom.

"We see what goes on in the world, don't we?" Strathairn says at the beginning of the show, before he assumes Karski's accent and mannerisms. At this point in the script, his character is designated, simply, as Man. This is direct address, meant to touch us, and to provide a kind of pedagogical context for why Karski and his tale are deadly relevant today. "Our world is in peril," he continues. "Every day, it becomes more and more fractured, toxic, seemingly out of control. We are being torn apart by immense gulfs of selfishness, distrust, fear, hatred, indifference, denial."

Karski spent his later life as a professor, and Strathairn's earnest, demonstrative tone makes it easy to imagine the theatre as a lecture hall, and yourself, an audience member, as a student, mutely dazed by an accretion of terrible facts. Karski narrates his covert mission, as a member of an underground resistance group, into the camps—and then, even more harrowingly, his attempts to get powerful people to believe him. Churchill won't give him an audience. Roosevelt listens to his litany of horrors, then changes the subject. The Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter puts together a chilling formulation, perhaps the most memorable of the show: "I did not say that he's lying. I said that I do not believe him. These are different things. And my mind, my heart . . . they are made in such a way that I cannot accept."

This is nakedly didactic theatre. (It was initially created under the auspices of Georgetown University's Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics.) It's spiced up here and there by the simplest effects of light (designed by Zach Blane) and sound (designed by Roc Lee): a bang here, a flash there, to remind you of the true dynamics of the story. But all the meat's in the words.

Sometimes the recitation—fact after fact—sounds like a lightly dramatized Wikipedia article, or a distillation of a dense autobiography. The writing can get clunky at moments of high action or excruciating emotion. But this is the unfinished-feeling awkwardness of communication that understands its audi-

David Strathairn plays Jan Karski, who gave eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust.

ILLUSTRATION BY BÉNÉDICTE MULLER

ence as a real entity, waiting—even hoping—to be changed by the encounter. It's hard not to respect such obvious belief in the power of public speech. "Remember This" reminded me of the "Living Newspaper" propaganda plays of Depression-era America, which brought news of current events—and pointed interpretation of those events—to working-class audiences. Except that, in the case of Karski, who died in 2000, the news is quite old, if not yet sufficiently understood.

It's a high-stakes time to retell Karski's story, which is itself about the troubles—the impossibilities—of telling. Europe's identity in the twentieth century was painfully wrought in the wake of the carnage that Karski witnessed; lately, its hard-won political coherence, marked by a nervous insistence on peace, feels endangered. The war that has groaned on in Ukraine for the better part of a year has, in large part, to do with an insidious reinterpretation of Russian national and imperial history. Neo-Fascist parties in France, Italy, and elsewhere are gathering support too quickly, retconning themselves into respectability, trying to erase the fact that last century's darkness had its genesis in ideas like the ones they now disseminate so blithely.

Recently, I saw the Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre's short-lived but wonderful production of "Audience," by the great Czech writer and statesman Václav Havel, at the Bohemian National Hall, on the Upper East Side. The play, which is semi-autobiographical, depicts a writer named Ferdinand Vanek—a stand-in for Havel—who is consigned to working in a brewery after running afoul of the Communist regime. He engages in a long, comic, increasingly menacing conversation with the facility's brewmaster, showing how even innocent-seeming language can be made to bend to the authoritarian Big Lie. Two performers, Vit Horejs and Theresa Linnihan—who also conceived the production—manipulated a battery of puppets, giving silent but substantial (often hilarious) form to the entire terrorized social world of the brewery. Through the fog of official obfuscation, this sly production seemed to say, the real story makes its way out in even the smallest gestures.

Here's hoping that's true. Stuck at a hinge in history, we're cloaking ourselves in new fables, making desperate, wholesale attempts at self-reinvention through the slipperiness of stories. Voices like Havel's, and like Karski's—spiky with undigestible and often incommunicable truths—will have to keep struggling to be heard.

"Marie It's Time," a new play by Julia Jarcho, directed by Ásta Bennie Hostetter, at HERE, has its own revisionist intentions. It's a riff on the famous unfinished play "Woyzeck," by the Expressionist playwright Georg Büchner. The original work, written in the eighteen-thirties, tells the story of a poor, desperate, God-haunted, love-sick army barber who is cuckolded by his common-law wife, Marie, and kills her in a rageful fury. "Marie It's Time," which was developed by the Minor Theatre, recenters the drama on Marie, who is played doubly, by Jarcho and by Jennifer Seastone.

The Maries speak to each other like split strands of a wounded soul, revealing some of Marie's psychological ruptures, which prophesy the more concrete violence to come. They talk in high-flown poetry, lending the production a sense of unreality. Sometimes the language is lovely—little rhymes run through the text, in a way that will undoubtedly reward second readings. Sometimes it's irritatingly opaque.

Both Jarcho and Seastone also play Frank, a dumb but scary interpolation of Woyzeck. Like Woyzeck, Frank is a barber, but he has no connection—at least that we're told of—with the military. Perhaps he's the perfect avatar of postwar, post-9/11, post Great Recession American male fecklessness: stripped of institutional ties and seeming to lack friends, he trains his attention on the woman he thinks he can control. Marie is overwhelmed by her baby—the mechanical cry the doll emits is shrill and rhythmic and weirdly funny—and increasingly enthralled by a musician named Major (Kedian Keohan), who sings repetitive, trope-heavy, subtly funny songs (written by Jarcho and Jeff Aaron Bryant) directly to the audience but, implicitly, also to Marie.

If Büchner—a radical who had to flee his home after calling for revolution—was moved by a twisted sense of pity for poor Woyzeck, Jarcho is intent on illustrating the double jeopardy faced by Marie, who is seemingly fated by her gender and by the intensity of her desires. Here's the potential upside of our unsettled narratives, our stories gone topsy-turvy: sometimes you find an old jewel in the rubble, and a new facet gleams. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Paul Karasik, must be received by Sunday, September 25th. The finalists in the September 12th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 10th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

.....

THE FINALISTS



"I told you I've been juggling a lot lately."
Matt Hindman, Tulsa, Okla.

"Your downstairs neighbors sent us."
Steve Helland, Minneapolis, Minn.

"You need to get your act together."
Tyler Stradling, Mesa, Ariz.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Do you mind if I bounce something off you?"
Amy Harr, Riverside, Conn.

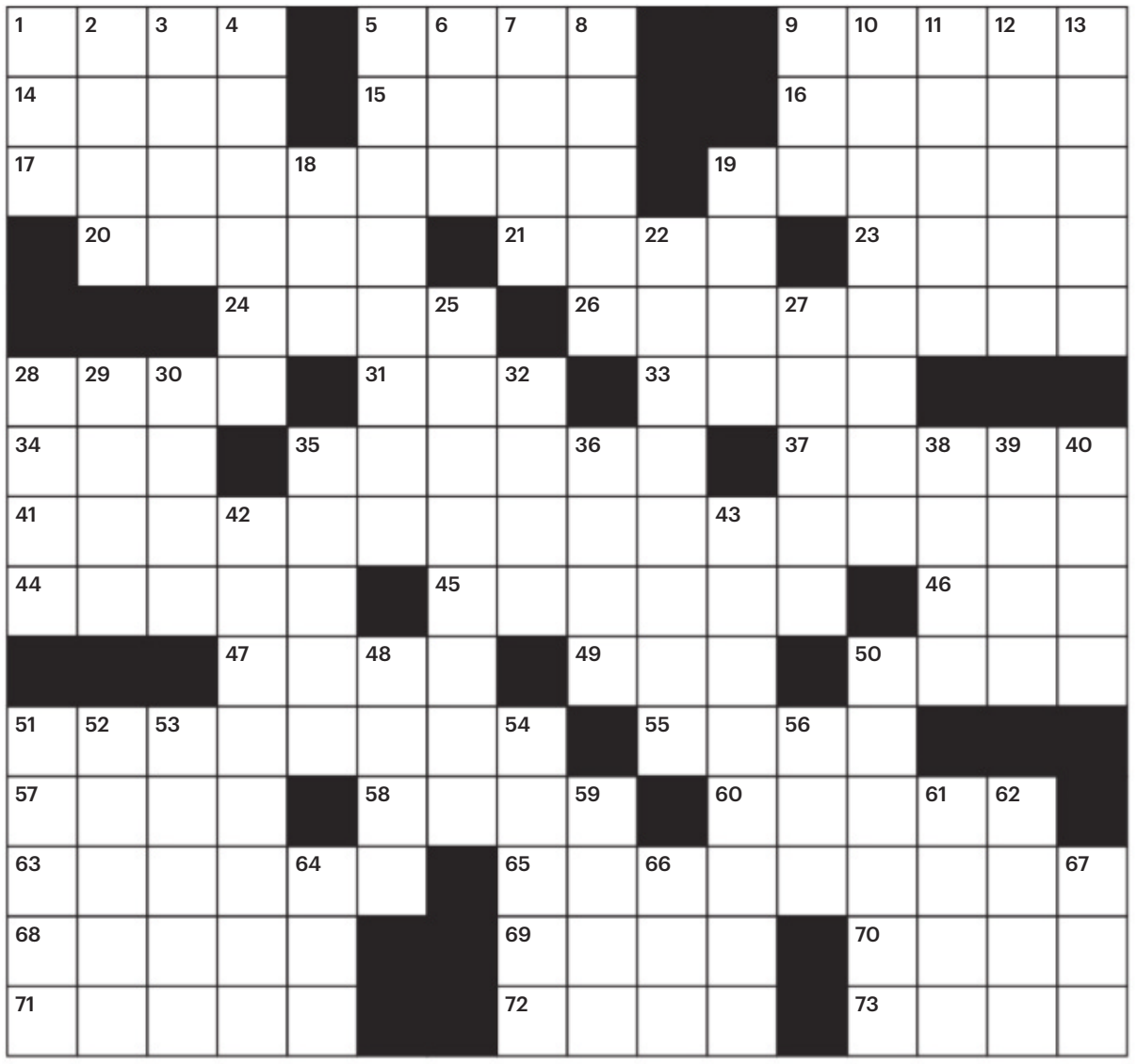

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PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

FREESTYLERS

A themed crossword.

BY ERIK AGARD



ACROSS

1 Word before surf or bag
5 Czech or Croat, e.g.
9 Big tales
14 Overhead light?
15 Largest of seven
16 Linda Ronstadt's "Canciones de Mi ___"
17 Get cold
19 Moved quickly
20 Namely
21 Amount that sounds like a total
23 "Mommy, ___ and Me" (Lesléa Newman picture book)
24 "Ha!"
26 Person whose diet might include sprouted grains and hemp milk
28 Game that can be played with whatever's lying around
31 Close to empty
33 Things that can help set the tone?
34 Mentee of Morpheus
35 Channel controlling water flow
37 Stubble remover
41 What you can do by rearranging the letters of 17- and 26-Across
44 Yoruba river goddess
45 Figure out
46 ___ up (become more active)
47 Thing everyone else already knows, idiomatically
49 Period
50 Type of housing, with or without a hyphen
51 See 26- and 41-Across
55 Singer for whom a fish native to the Orinoco was named in 2017
57 Plow pullers
58 "Parasite" film distributor
60 What a good poker face doesn't have
63 Caps, e.g.
65 See 17- and 41-Across
68 "Never Rarely Sometimes Always" writer-director Hittman
69 ___ of Jhansi (royal title for Lakshmi Bai)
70 Young princess in "Obi-Wan Kenobi"
71 Course covering contraception, for short
72 Part of "E.E.A.A.O.," in 2022 cinema
73 Circular dwelling

DOWN

1 "Pipe down!"
2 Show restraint, in a way
3 A in music class?
4 "Leave me alone!"
5 State capital where the Bird Museum of Mexico is situated
6 Baton Rouge sch.
7 Ultimate intentions
8 Airborne suspension
9 Clean Water Act org.
10 Risotto ingredient
11 Collar clip-on
12 Carnitas condiment
13 Dealership option
18 Familial term of address
19 Word used to describe grass and skin
22 Checked just to be certain
25 Exclamation during an Easter-egg hunt
27 Brink
28 Deets
29 Seven ___
30 Ultra-chic
32 Left or right
35 Strength
36 Give up
38 Jack
39 "Oh! Oh! ___" (fifties cookie slogan)
40 Reserve a seat, perhaps
42 Make more relatable
43 "Just gonna be honest here . . ."
48 "___ Search for Meaning" (Viktor Frankl book)
50 Without breaking a sweat
51 Hamster relatives
52 Displace
53 "Break My Soul (The Queens ___)" (collaboration between Beyoncé and Madonna)
54 Rhyming camera brand
56 "Can I help you with something?"
59 Bread with a Peshwari variety
61 French for "place"
62 Tend to a risotto
64 Wee bit
66 Chapel Hill sch.
67 Common church accessory

Solution to the previous puzzle:

F	U	S	S	I	N	G	■	■	■	S	L	U	S	H
A	N	T	I	Q	U	A	T	E	■	Y	O	S	H	I
T	H	A	T	S	T	H	A	T	O	N	T	H	A	T
W	O	R	E	■	■	■	S	C	A	T	T	E	R	S
A	O	L	■	L	O	S	T	■	T	H	O	R	P	E
■	K	O	B	E	B	E	E	F	■	■	S	E	E	N
■	■	G	I	V	E	A	R	I	N	G	■	D	I	D
■	■	■	B	A	S	R	E	L	I	E	F	■	■	■
F	E	W	■	R	E	C	C	E	N	T	E	R	■	■
R	A	H	M	■	■	H	E	R	O	I	N	E	S	■
A	R	E	O	L	E	■	P	S	S	T	■	T	V	S
T	H	E	B	E	A	S	T	■	■	■	F	R	E	E
R	A	D	I	A	T	I	O	N	S	H	I	E	L	D
O	I	L	U	P	■	D	R	E	A	M	D	A	T	E
W	R	E	S	T	■	■	■	S	C	O	O	T	E	R

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