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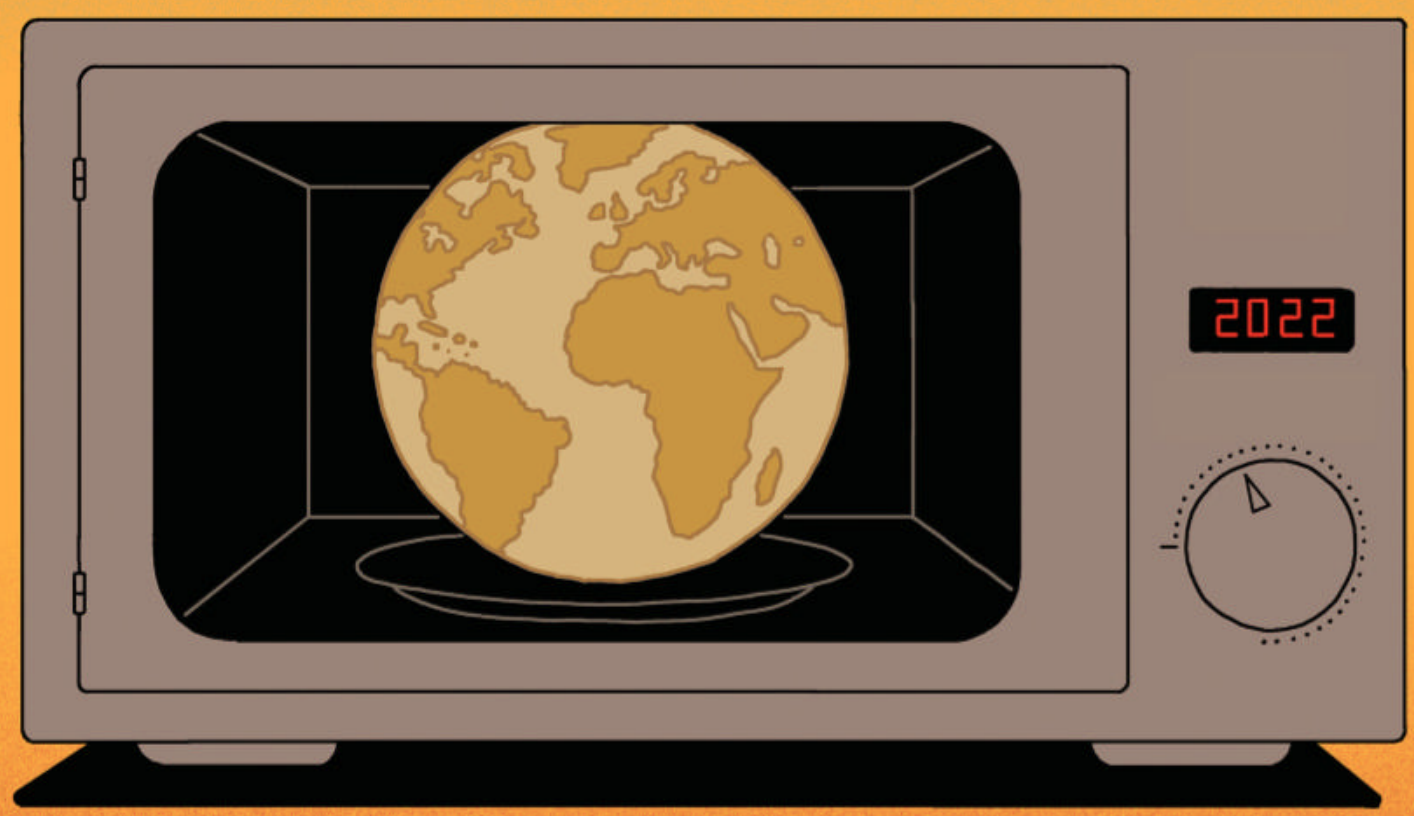
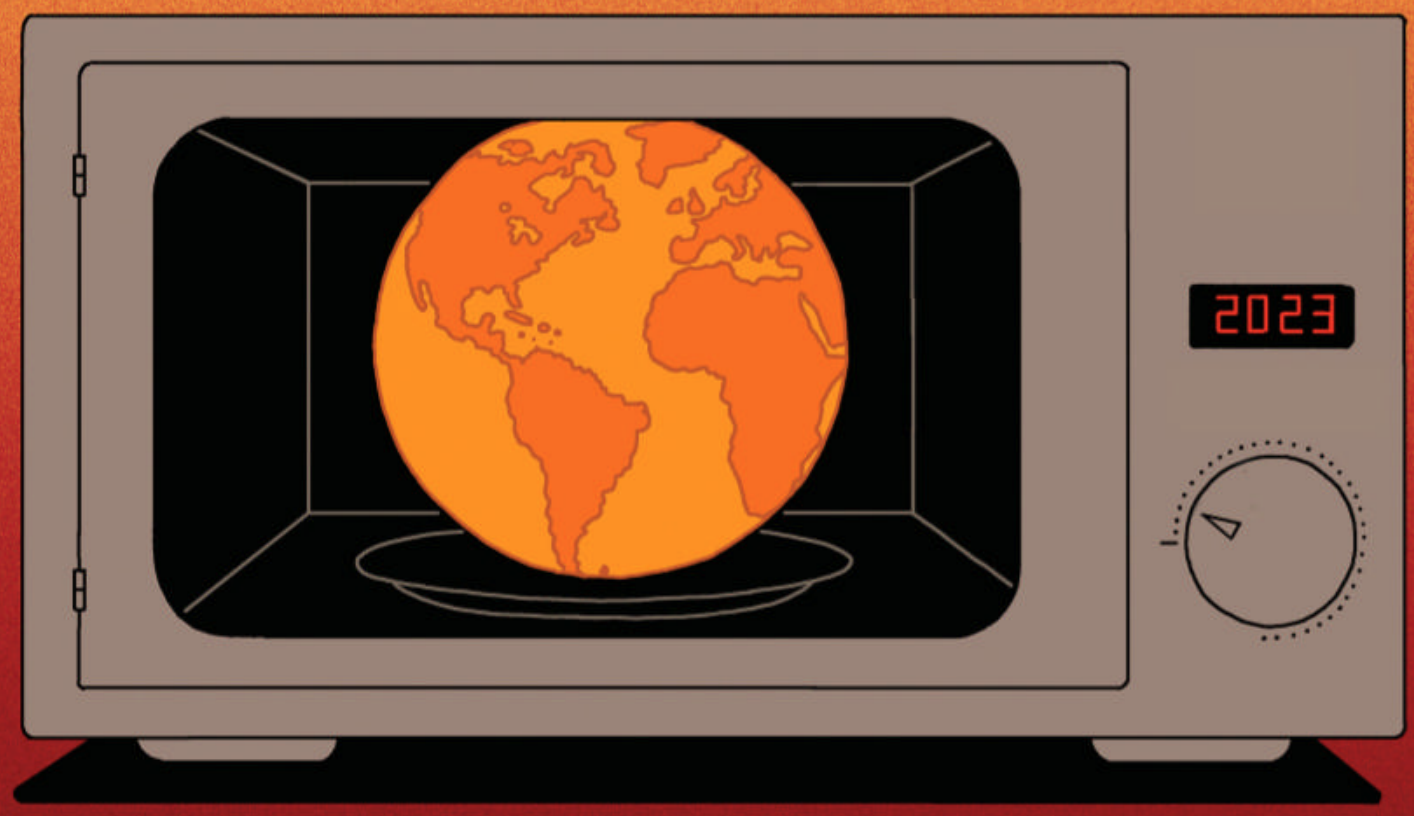
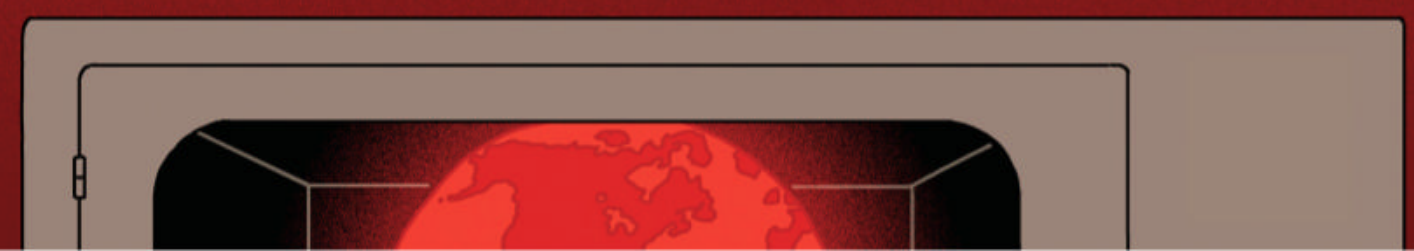
THE NEW YORKER

JULY 31, 2023







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DRAWINGS *Corey Pandolph and Sean Crespo, Barbara Smaller, Maddie Dai, Hartley Lin, Jared Nangle, Matthew Diffee, Johnny DiNapoli, David Sipress, Pia Guerra and Ian Boothby, Liza Donnelly, Sam Hurt, Lonnie Millsap* SPOTS *Antony Huchette*

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THE SPORTING SCENE

Louisa Thomas on the state of women's soccer, and why this year's World Cup might be a weird one.

ELEMENTS

Rivka Galchen writes about a new book that explores the beauty and the importance of an ancient fish.

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LEFT: SOL COTTI; RIGHT: LAURIE ROWAN

THE MAIL

LIFE IN PLASTIC

Elizabeth Kolbert, in her article about plastic contamination, mentions that microplastics "don't just leach nasty chemicals; they attract them" ("A Trillion Little Pieces," July 3rd). In Florida, where I live, the sargassum seaweed that is washing onto our shores this season has been found to contain not only microplastics but also, attached to the plastics, *Vibrio vulnificus*, a flesh-eating bacteria. This revelation suggests that, as Kolbert points out, we still have much to learn about the consequences of our unrestrained use of plastics.
Stacie M. Kiner
Hypoluxo, Fla.

I admired Kolbert's piece, which calls attention to plastic pollution without trivializing the difficulty of trying to avoid plastics in daily life. I also appreciated her emphasis on the fact that the relationship between our consumer choices and our plastic footprint isn't always clear. For example, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which Kolbert mentions, consists mostly of plastic generated by commercial fishing activities, rather than by consumer waste. A significant number of people choosing to avoid plastic packaging would not reduce the size of the patch, but if the same number of people forwent fish in their diets—a much easier proposition than eliminating plastics—the patch might grow more slowly than it does now.
W. Theodore Koch III
Niantic, Conn.

CULTURAL STUDIES

Peter Hessler's nuanced account of his twin daughters' schooling in China resonates with my wife's and my experiences ("A Double Education," July 3rd). Both of us followed our parents to the U.S. as children; returned to China, where we attended local public schools (she in Beijing and I in Tianjin and Shanghai); and then made our way back to the States for college. Hessler correctly points out that each country's education system has its strengths and weaknesses. Although we benefitted, like his daughters have, from being exposed to both systems, our cross-cultural experiences have also contributed to feelings of alienation from each place at a time of escalating tension and ideological hardening. "A history of missed connections and lost opportunities" describes more than just early educational exchanges between the U.S. and China—it might as well be a summary of contemporary U.S.-China relations. Hessler's piece is a keen reminder of why that should change.
Xiuyi (Chris) Zheng
San Francisco, Calif.

One of the math problems that Hessler's daughters attempt to solve, as part of their challenging Chinese curriculum, asks them to find the smallest number that leaves the remainders 2, 3, and 4 when divided respectively by 3, 4, and 5. Is this a trick question of the sort that Hessler depicts his children completing in third-grade math class, the kind designed to trip students up? No. What he describes is a simple introduction to a celebrated mathematical theorem known in the English-speaking literature as the Chinese remainder theorem, which guarantees that any such problem has a solution, so long as none of the divisors (in this case, 3, 4, and 5) have a factor in common other than 1. The theorem has been attributed to the Chinese mathematical text "Sunzi Suanjing," which was completed between the third and fifth centuries A.D., and it plays an important role in Kurt Gödel's proof of his incompleteness theorem. Applied here, it gives the answer to the twins' problem as 59.
Stephen Isard
Philadelphia, Pa.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Since 2008, Louis Armstrong's house in Corona, Queens, where the trumpeter lived from 1943 until his death, in 1971, has been the Louis Armstrong House Museum, celebrating the heroic jazz soloist, beloved entertainer, and civil-rights activist. Across the street is the new **Louis Armstrong Center,** an archive, an exhibition space, and a theatre. The Museum extends Armstrong's legacy in a concert series, which, on July 4, featured the singer Catherine Russell (above), whose father, Luis, was one of Armstrong's main musical collaborators in the nineteen-thirties.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MALIKE SIDIBE

As ever, it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

MUSIC

The Bad Plus

JAZZ What's in a name? In the case of the Bad Plus, it's an invaluable asset that has allowed this band to morph from a piano-driven trio to a piano-less quartet without losing its identifying patina of inventiveness and daring. After the pianist, composer, and founding member Ethan Iverson—who put in a celebrated twenty-year stint with the group—left, in 2021, the drummer Dave King and the bassist Reid Anderson attempted another piano-driven iteration with Orrin Evans. When that short-lived experiment petered out, the rhythm team threw a monkey wrench into the works, jettisoning a keyboardist and bringing in the saxophonist Chris Speed and the guitarist Ben Monder. Alongside King and Anderson, the new members were virtual comrades-in-arms during the later years of the downtown-music era, when they matured as artists, and a collegial, empathic interplay characterizes the new lineup's début recording, from 2022, fittingly titled "The Bad Plus." The quartet has yet to put its mark on rock or pop hits in the manner of the classic trio, but sonic shakeups are still the name of the game.—*Steve Futterman (Blue Note; July 25-30.)*

Beyoncé

POP Since at least the early twenty-tens, the pop auteur Beyoncé has also been recognized as one of the great stage performers of her generation. She brings presence and pageantry to a massive catalogue, with costume changes, breathless choreography, and pyrotechnic vocal runs. A theatricality has defined the presentation of her music since her video-driven self-titled LP, in 2013, extending through her 2016 visual album, "Lemonade," and her titanic Coachella performance, in 2018, which turned a career retrospective into a sumptuous communal experience evocative of H.B.C.U. homecomings. For this world tour, which is centered on her club-focussed 2022 album, "Renaissance," she again reimagines her role as an entertainer. Opening for herself (singing R. & B. ballads from early in her run), she uses the show's six-act structure to set her music in elaborate new contexts—at one point, she performs "Virgo's Groove" from inside an open clamshell—all while commanding every single note.—*Sheldon Pearce (MetLife Stadium; July 29-30.)*

DJ Assault

ELECTRO It's hard not to laugh at least a little bit during a DJ Assault set. In the late nineties, the Detroit spinner was a prime mover of a style dubbed "ghettotech," issuing a series of high-velocity mix CDs, stuffed full of tracks from wildly disparate sources, all tweaked to high b.p.m.s and many featuring filthy words about filthy deeds, all of it put over with lip-smacking insouciance. Assault seems to have mellowed with age—on a Boiler Room set recorded in New York this past year, it takes nearly half an hour for the first filthy sound bite ("Hoes, take off your clothes / Hoes, get naked") to wend its way into the mix. But that's the lane in which it stays, a zone so blunt and silly it achieves a kind of satori.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Paragon; July 29.)*

Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra

CLASSICAL This season will be the last for the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra—but not for its musicians, who will continue to participate in Lincoln Center's summer festivities under a different name next year. The lineup of six programs, each played twice, on consecutive nights, has a hail-and-farewell feeling: Louis Langrée takes a final bow as the ensemble's music director with Mozart's final three symphonies, culminating in the glories of the "Jupiter" (Aug. 11-12), and Jonathon Heyward conducts his first concerts since being named Langrée's successor (Aug. 4-5). The programs are an easy mélange of old and new, with contemporary pieces sharing space with such classics as Mozart's "Prague" Symphony (Aug. 1-2) and, with the soloist Randall Goosby, Tchaikovsky's swooning Violin Concerto (Aug. 8-9). Lincoln Center's choose-what-you-pay model returns, with tickets as low as five dollars.—*Oussama Zahr (David Geffen Hall; select dates July 25-Aug. 12.)*

Nuggets Anniversary

ROCK In 1972, amid a placid musical milieu that found the satiny "Chicago V" atop the Billboard, the Elektra label unleashed "Nuggets: Original Artyfacts from the First Psychedelic Era, 1965-1968," a compilation culling disorderly songs that were produced when rock and roll was heating to a boil. The recordings were just a few years old, but in a world suffering the indignity of "Chicago V" they must have seemed like transmissions from a lunatic realm. If "Nuggets" failed to make household names of the Blues Magoos, it planted a seed for punk; the anthology's mastermind, Lenny Kaye, would soon turn up at CBGB anchoring the Patti Smith Group. Now a half century old, "Nuggets" gets fêted in a tribute concert presided over by Kaye and featuring Smith, along with Ivan Julian, Peter Buck, Bob Mould, and other disciples. The firebolt is inevitably Smith—a uniquely transcendent artist tied to the crackling

ELECTROCLASH

As Kathleen Hanna's paradigm-shifting punk quartet, Bikini Kill, was disbanding in the late nineteen-nineties, the feminist musician and art agitator began collaging together drum machines, samples, and all manner of D.I.Y. balladry. She crafted the room-of-one's-own solo album "Julie Ruin," and with it envisioned a still vital template for homespun pop experimentation. "Julie Ruin" begot **Le Tigre,** the prescient electronic trio that Hanna pursued with JD Samson and Johanna Fateman (who has contributed to this magazine). The reunited Le Tigre arrives at Brooklyn Steel (July 27-29) with its commitment to offering a protest and a party—replete with choreography, neon, video displays, and slashed guitars—intact. The group's classics, like "Deceptacon" and "What's Yr Take on Cassavetes," offer critiques of music culture and narrate evergreen debates within art. On "Hot Topic," the group presents a celebratory syllabus of feminist and queer artistic predecessors "who made us feel like we could do anything."—*Jenn Pelly*

ILLUSTRATION BY TRACY CHAHWAN

As ardent and effusive as a valentine, **"Aliza Nisenbaum: Queens, Lindo y Querido"** (at the Queens Museum, through Sept. 10) features paintings and drawings by this artist and educator, whose portraits put dazzling public faces on otherwise private lives and intimate spaces. Nisenbaum, who first taught in Corona in 2012 and was in residency at the museum from 2021 until June of this year, renders her sitters—local families, workers, colleagues, and other folks she's met—with masklike visages in extroverted hues, admitting that artifice, projection, and perception are all a natural part of image-making. No single work can ever epitomize the entirety of a practice, or its ethos, but Nisenbaum's painting "El Taller, Queens Museum" (from 2023, above) just about does it. Depicting her students, all busy creating self-portraits in one of her workshops, Nisenbaum refracts their faces, offering two additional views of her subjects: the first, as reflections in the mirrors they're using to study themselves; the second, as they've rendered themselves in their own paintings. On an adjacent wall in the museum's gallery, Nisenbaum installs a buoyant selection of her students' work, making vivid how an artist's hand is never definitive but is, invariably, truthful in its own particular way.—*Jennifer Krasinski*

sounds of the sixties, the punk those sounds helped birth, and perhaps even the mellow songs that came in between.—*Jay Ruttenberg (City Winery; July 28-29.)*

ART

"Georgia O'Keeffe: To See Takes Time"

O'Keeffe devoted most of her ninety-eight years to grand, sometimes grandiose oil paintings, despite the ample evidence, on view in this new show of her works on paper, that she was spectacular with charcoal and watercolor. She may be the only famous painter whose greatest hits, in oil, look better in reproduction; to find one in a museum and see what all the glossy posters are hiding is a bit of a bummer. Textures stumble over each other. Shading tries, fretfully, to look 3-D. O'Keeffe's works on paper, however, are so dense with detail that the poster treatment would ruin them. "No. 12 Special," from 1916, is like a glossary of charcoal's capabilities: thin, slashing lines; plump, leisurely ones; smears pressed into the grain of the page with a rag or a fingertip. (Most of the pieces here were completed by 1917, the year the artist turned thirty.) Every generation of Americans has invented a different O'Keeffe, to match the moment's predilections. In the fifties, she was hailed as the first color-field painter; by the sixties, she'd been reimagined as a proto-hippie, dropping out of civilization to find herself in the desert; and in the seventies and eighties a new wave of feminists fell hard for her. Who's the O'Keeffe of the twenty-twenties? Generalizing about your own era is a mug's game, but, if this exhibition is any indication, ours is a jittery, in-between culture, enthralled by aesthetic forms once thought minor. To O'Keeffe, these charcoals and watercolors were experiments, rehearsals for all the major art she'd make later on. That's why they're so good.—*Jackson Arn (Museum of Modern Art; through Aug. 12.)*

Mire Lee

The most salient feature of the site-specific work of "Mire Lee: Black Moon" is not so much what Lee, a young Korean artist, has managed to achieve on her own but what she has managed to evoke: the overwhelming presence in her practice of the late sculptor Eva Hesse. Like the German-born artist, Lee uses unusual materials—fabric, steel rods, PVC hoses filled with grease, silicone, oil, and other substances—to create pieces that seem to grow and ooze before your very eyes: Lee is a devotee of the fascinatingly icky. But, unlike Hesse, the thirty-four-year-old maker wants her sculptures to feel like "living" experiences, so, using motors and other gizmos, her plastic wall pieces and tangle of plastic ropes on the gallery floor seem to pulsate in an atmosphere filled with bad air. Lee's horror-film-influenced work isn't so much scary—or about the horror of our times—as it is derivative, irksome, and, ultimately, banal.—*Hilton Als (New Museum; through Sept. 19.)*

"Sarah Sze: Timelapse"

In 1957, while construction was still under way, Frank Lloyd Wright led a reporter through the Guggenheim. As they ascended the spiral, Wright said of the oculus overhead, "You will never lose a sense of the sky." The same is true of the museum's phenomenal show "Sarah Sze: Timelapse," and not only because it counts, among its seemingly infinite motifs, birds in flight, horizon lines, and clusters of clouds. From sunset to sunrise, when the museum is closed, Sze projects footage of the moon onto the building's façade, mirroring the lunar phases visible in the night sky above. Inside, the American artist—a MacArthur Fellow, who represented the U.S. at the 2013 Venice Biennale—unites sculpture, painting, photography, drawing, and video in intricate constellations of everyday objects, which seem to be in the process of making themselves as viewers encounter them. (All but two of the works here were conceived specifically for the site.) A little, torn ink-jet image of the night sky appears at the outset of the show, in "Diver," a landscape of sorts, which lifts the eye from the lobby fountain up to the oculus by means of a nearly ninety-foot-long piece of blue string, a deceptively simple line drawing that transforms the empty space encircled by Wright's ramp into an art-making material unto itself.—*Andrea K. Scott (Guggenheim Museum; Sept. 10.)*

THE THEATRE

The Doctor

In "The Doctor," the writer-director Robert Icke's loose, modernized adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's "Professor Bernhardi," from 1912, Juliet Stevenson maintains a sense of matter under strain; her motive force sometimes

manages to muscle the show forward, even when the wheels of logic are falling off. In the play, a Jewish doctor (Stevenson) refuses to allow a priest into a dying patient's room; the resulting public furor reveals widespread sexism, antisemitism, and anti-science bias. Icke tries to shoehorn this plot into a discussion of cancel culture, but his conflation of one type of threat with another doesn't work—violent antisemitism is worse than being criticized publicly. "Jesus didn't live in the digital age," the priest tells the doctor. She responds glibly, "We crucify them differently now." Icke does not argue in good faith, and he pelts his doctor with straw men: he has a Black activist try to get her to say the N-word on air, to prove that she's racist. What? Some clever staging choices, including casting actors who don't accord with their characters' identities, get lost in this argumentative din—but a sense of stung aggrievement comes through loud and clear.—*Helen Shaw (Reviewed in our issue of 7/3/23.) (Park Avenue Armory; through Aug. 19.)*

Flex

In this new comedy of ethics by Candrice Jones, five Plainnole, Arkansas, high-school seniors on the 1998 Lady Train basketball team drill their five-pass defense strategy while also boning up on their sportsmanship fundamentals—some of which apply beyond the court. "A foul don't exist if a whistle don't blow," claims the ultra-driven point guard Starra (Erica Matthews), who eventually admits to sabotaging one of her own teammates; the resulting blowback rips the squad apart. Jones hits a difficult dramaturgical shot, treating her characters' widely varying concerns with the weight that teenagers themselves feel, so questions of who might get recruited, who got pregnant, and who hit the buzzer beater during regionals all exert the same terrible pressure. Renita Lewis stands out as the Lady Train's funniest asset, turning her wry eye to a future beyond Plainnole, and Christiana Clark excels as the girls' coach, a near-fantasy of tough-talking, warmhearted mentorship. The end of Lileana Blain-Cruz's production does get a little faint in the paint, but for most of the show's two hours and twenty minutes the director steers all her players to a consistent level of excellence.—*H.S. (Mitzi E. Newhouse; through Aug. 20.)*

Just for Us

David Yosef Shimon ben Elazar Reuven Alexander Halevi Edelman—he goes by Alex Edelman—is, as he will hasten to confirm, a very obviously Jewish comedian. In his one-man show, directed by Adam Brace (transferred, after an extended run at the Cherry Lane in 2021-22, to Broadway), he tells the insane and uproarious tale of the night he gate-crashed a meeting of sixteen white nationalists in an apartment in Queens. Among Edelman's many strengths as a writer and a performer is his exceptional eye for the absurd, not least in the way he details his hunger for approval, even when surrounded by neo-Nazis. Like all great comedy sets, this one contains a bunch of fake-outs: a barrage of self-described "dumb jokes" that are actually pretty smart; a seemingly offhand, meandering yarn that turns out to be minutely constructed; a goofy spiel that doubles as an unusually penetrating and insightful interrogation of what it means to be a Jew.—*Rollo Romig (Hudson Theatre; through Aug. 19.)*

Love's Labor's Lost

The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival's mounting of this early comedy from the Bard is an ecstatic success. It can be a difficult play to parse, with reams of contemporary in-jokes, complicated locutions, ancient politics, and antique moralizing. The director, Amanda Dehnert, doesn't stint on the wordplay—indeed, the parody of poetical forms and of pedantry (the plot concerns a young king and three courtiers vainly vowing to eschew wine and women in dedication to academic pursuit) are at the heart of the comedy. But she also gives the talented cast of sixteen plenty of opportunity for inventive, hilarious stage business. Plus, Dehnert has co-written, with André Pluess, a set of terrific rock and pop songs which punctuate the action, abstractly distilling the characters' emotions. Adding to the musicality, much of the play's poetry is in rhymed couplets, perfect for working into hip-hop beats, and for skillfully deflating the male ego. There are four pairs of lovers—actually, five, maybe five and half, but who's counting? It's all grist for the comedic mill, the talent of the company, and the verbal brilliance of William Shakespeare.—*Ken Marks (Garrison, N.Y.; through Aug. 27. Running in repertory with "Henry V.")*

Malvolio

Last season, Allen Gilmore stole the show as Malvolio in the Classical Theatre of Harlem's "Twelfth Night," so it's a delight that the actor returns, in triumph, for a verse sequel by C.T.H.'s playwright-in-residence, Betty Shamieh. (Falstaff shouldn't be the only Shakespearean fool to get a spinoff.) Shamieh imagines a future in which Volina (Kineta Kunutu), Viola and Orsino's now grown daughter, encounters Malvolio, who has re-skilled, rather unbelievably, after a career as a butler, and become a major military general. High jinks ensue—their daffy king (the Tony Award nominee and comic juggernaut John-Andrew Morrison) and his lightly homicidal son (J. D. Mollison, also excellent) offer some narrative resistance to their happiness, but soon Volina falls, ickily, for the much older Malvolio. Despite all this romance, Shamieh seems to have lost touch with what makes Malvolio lovable (it's not his macho grit), so Gilmore's performance is hamstrung by more than just his cross-garters. Happily, C.T.H.'s candy-colored, dance-filled production, directed confidently by Ian Belknap and Ty Jones, encourages a funfair mood, crammed full with laughter and visual fireworks, and these overcome any sense of fizzle happening in the story itself.—*H.S. (Marcus Garvey Park; through July 29.)*

DANCE

SummerStage

The vocalist Aaron Marcellus, a soulful master both of his physical instrument and of the electronic self-multiplication of it, first met the tap dancer Michelle Dorrance many years ago, when he attended her tap class. They've been friends and colleagues ever since, but only last year did Marcellus compose a complete work for her company, Dorrance Dance. "45th & 8th" is undergirded by soul and funk, a series of dance-and-music conversations with the music taking the lead. At this free SummerStage show in Central Park, co-presented by "Works & Process," the piece is preceded by a forty-five-minute set by the singer and his Marcellus Collective.—*Brian Seibert (Rumsey Playfield; July 26.)*

CONTEMPORARY DANCE

ILLUSTRATION BY DROR COHEN

A few years ago, Oona Doherty burst out of Belfast and onto the global dance scene with a rough-edged charisma—tough on the outside and sensitive deeper down—and fascinating works in which she inhabited the masculine posturing of Belfast youth. Her company, **Oona Doherty/OD Works,** makes its début at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (in Becket, Mass., July 26-30) with one of those early works, "Hope Hunt and the Ascension Into Lazarus," which struggles toward a dance equivalent of resurrection or heavenly assumption. It's paired with the U.S. première of the ensemble piece "Navy Blue." A pack of dancers huddles and trembles, then falls at the sound of gunshots, as Doherty, in voice-over, comments acerbically on politics, her production budget, and cosmic insignificance.—*Brian Seibert*

MOVIES

The Age of Innocence

Martin Scorsese is in peak form with this hectic adaptation, from 1993, of Edith Wharton's novel. Life in the New York of the eighteen-seventies may have been constrained, but it was never dull—not if Scorsese's camera is anything to go by. It leaps from detail to detail like the gaze of an inquisitive gentleman, homing in on the passions that had to be veiled by good manners. As the film begins—a showy, overwhelming scene at the opera—we see Newland Archer (Daniel Day-Lewis) about to announce a perfect match with the young May Welland (Winona Ryder). Yet such perfection is a prison, and Day-Lewis's vigorous sadness tells the whole story; he will never rebel, but in his eyes you see him wishing he could. Less fruitful is the casting of Michelle Pfeiffer as May's older cousin, the mysterious Countess Olenska, with whom Archer falls hopelessly in love, though Scorsese does convince you of their tragedy. This is a world run by the snob mob, the Goodfellas of Fifth Avenue, with all the control and none of the bloodshed; no wonder Scorsese feels at home.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 9/13/93.) (Streaming on Prime Video, Google Play, and other services.)*

Margaret

The writer and director Kenneth Lonergan's long-delayed second feature (shot in 2005, released in 2011) is a wildly ambitious strain of the Upper West Side bourgeois blues; it embraces grand themes and sumptuous moods with scope and nuance. It stars Anna Paquin as Lisa Cohen, a headstrong private-school teen-ager, whose innocent distraction of a Broadway bus driver leads to a fatal accident. She seeks out and teams up with the victim's best friend (Jeannie Berlin, in an electrifyingly exact yet freewheeling performance) to take practical steps to expiate her guilt. When Lisa's little world comes up against the realm of public power (via brilliant character turns from Stephen Adly Guirgis, as a police detective, and Michael Ealy and Jonathan Hadary, as lawyers), the movie rises to a grand symbolic pitch. This is a city symphony, romantic yet scathing, lyrical with street life and vaulting skylines, reckless with first adventure, and awed by the intellectual and poetic abstractions on which the great machine runs. The teeming cast includes J. Smith-Cameron, Matt Damon, Allison Janney, Jean Reno, Mark Ruffalo, Matthew Broderick, Kieran Culkin, and Rosemarie DeWitt—and Paquin impressively stands her ground with them all.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on Prime Video, Google Play, and other services.)*

The Story of a Three-Day Pass

Melvin Van Peebles directed this film, his first feature, in 1967, in France, where he had lived for years, and its boldly original inspirations reflect both French cinematic styles and American politics—it's at once a New Wave classic and one of the great American movies of the era. It stars Harry Baird as Turner, a Black American corporal stationed at a U.S. Army base in France. A manic white officer (Harold Brav) offers him a promotion and the leisure time of the movie's title, which Turner uses for a jaunt to Paris. There, gliding coolly into a night club and at first finding only rejection, Turner meets a white Frenchwoman named Miriam (Nicole Berger) in a giddily filmed, erotically charged dance scene; they begin a romance, and news of their interracial relationship sparks turmoil at the base. Turner's divided consciousness—defiant and dutiful, hip and nerdy—is the core of the movie, which Van Peebles unfolds with a dazzling array of cinematic devices, including mirror images coming to life, scenes fragmented into snippets and still frames, and frenzied fantasy sequences that evoke the tale's psychological and social complexities with wild humor.—*R.B. (Streaming on the Criterion Channel, Max, and Kanopy.)*

WHAT TO STREAM

COURTESY MUBI

True stories of political chicanery and jazz heroics, gangland rivalries and racial divisions, mesh with romantic melodrama in **"Kansas City,"** Robert Altman's hectic and seething 1996 drama, set in the titular Missouri town during its violence-riddled municipal elections of 1934. (The film is streaming on MUBI, Prime Video, and other services.) When a young white grifter named Johnny (Dermot Mulroney) robs a high-rolling Black gambler, the Black crime boss Seldom Seen (Harry Belafonte) captures the culprit—whose wife, Blondie (Jennifer Jason Leigh), a movie-mad manicurist, kidnaps a political leader's wife (Miranda Richardson) in order to get Johnny back. Altman fills the turbulent tale with desperately reckless characters and shrewdly maneuvering ones who discourse volubly about the news and their own troubles; he brings jazz legend to life in extended club scenes involving such historic musicians as Coleman Hawkins and Mary Lou Williams—portrayed by contemporary greats, including David Murray and Geri Allen. The suave yet brutal Seldom is the film's font of hard wisdom and firsthand social critique, laying bare the hatred on which American society runs and the lies with which pop culture covers it up; in one riff, Altman debunks Hollywood more decisively than he did in all of "The Player."—*Richard Brody*

Thou Wast Mild and Lovely

Josephine Decker's visionary rural melodrama, from 2014, is imbued with the blood and the muck, the harshness and the carnality, of life on a farm. Akin (Joe Swanberg), a hired hand, leaves his wife and child behind for a summer job at a ranch belonging to Jeremiah (Robert Longstreet), and begins an affair with his boss's daughter, Sarah (Sophie Traub). The stark setup gives rise to flights of cinematic invention that are as psychologically probing as they are aesthetically thrilling. The script (which Decker co-wrote with David Barker) gives the characters intimate idiosyncrasies that mesh in moments of eroticism and clash in scenes of violence. Swanberg is wracked with Akin's hidden wounds; Traub balances ethereal fancy with blunt practicality and tragic sensuality; Longstreet lends Jeremiah the destructive fury of a Biblical patriarch; and characters and performances alike are intertwined with landscape, livestock, light, and weather. Decker's ecstatic fusion of the material world and her characters' inner lives is realized by the cinematographer Ashley Connor, whose boldly agile camerawork ranges from microscopic precision to cosmic turbulence.—*R.B. (Streaming on Apple TV, Kanopy, and Prime Video.)*

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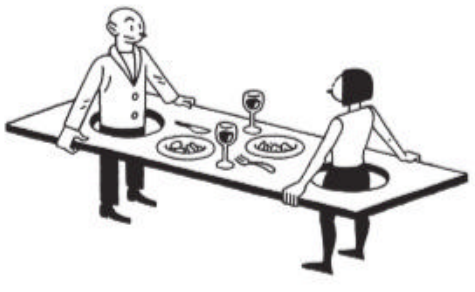

TABLES FOR TWO

Ice Cream Is Good for You

According to nutritionists, wine will either extend your life or shorten it. Until recently, I was unaware that the same can be said of ice cream. An article in *The Atlantic* reported on a funny phenomenon: to the surprise, dismay, and—to read between the lines—embarrassment of experts, more than one legitimate scientific study has suggested that the consumption of ice cream might mitigate or even prevent diabetes. And so, depending on how you read the data, a visit to Caleta, a natural-wine bar slash ice-cream parlor in the East Village (131 Ave. A; bar bites and ice cream $5.50-$16), is either an exercise in hedonistic excess or a wellness retreat. Perhaps it's the same difference when you consider the mental-health potential: by the end of a recent date there, a friend and I were both very, very happy.

We started with bar bites, all of them. There was a dish of glossy mixed olives, marinated with piparra peppers in yuzu-kosho olive oil, and a crusty, squishy half of a sourdough baguette, which we ripped into hunks to smear with butter or to sandwich with Comté cheese, housemade blackberry jam, and folds of thinly sliced mortadella arranged like a blooming pink peony. A soft pretzel dressed with mustard and a tin of mussels escabeche (from Minnow, the preserved-fish line by the owners of Cervo's and Hart's), served with matzo and more butter, made for a perfect second course. To drink: rosé (providing a dose of resveratrol, a compound found in wine which some believe protects the heart) and Figlia Fiore, a non-alcoholic aperitif made with rose extract, bitter orange rind, and ginseng, among other ingredients.

Call it a prelude to a sundae. Caleta is the first retail operation from Javier Zuñiga and Jesse Merchant Zuñiga, a married couple, both restaurant vets, who started, in 2020, an ice-cream brand called Bad Habit, previously sold in pints and through stockists only. At Caleta, they offer their French-style (i.e., custard-based) flavors by both the pint and the scoop. (They also host the occasional wine-and-sorbet tasting.) The details of the sundae shift regularly. Mine featured toasted-milk ice cream, topped with crunchy chunks of sweet, sticky honeycomb, a big dollop of soft whipped cream, a drizzle of chocolate sauce, and a maraschino cherry.

It was messy and glorious and over too fast. I took home souvenirs: pints of a super-rich orange creamsicle, with big swirls of real pulp; peanut stracciatella, flecked with shards of semi-sweet chocolate; and a zesty pomegranate-lime—plus a beautiful ice-cream sandwich made with crackly-topped salted chocolate cookies and a subtle, grassy matcha ice cream.

There are, of course, many valid reasons not to consume dairy. No dairy does not necessarily mean no ice cream, especially in the past few years, as ingredients such as cashew milk and coconut cream have been taken to new heights, but it does typically mean no soft serve. Enter Morgenstern's Bananas, a new venture from the ice-cream impresario Nick Morgenstern, in the site of his original store (2 Rivington St.; soft serve $5.55-$9.99). This is not a place specializing, as I first assumed, in banana soft serve (also known as "banana whip" or "nice cream"), for which the frozen fruit is blended, sometimes with add-ins, to surprisingly creamy effect. Only one of the non-dairy soft-serve flavors here contains bananas: banana vanilla, with a base of coconut cream.

The flavors are each made with a unique recipe, served in a brightly colored rainbow of squiggles. The other day, I ordered a pair of lovely, refreshing twists, dispensed neatly into a single cup. One side featured Mucho Mango, made with mango and orange purées, and Sumo Strawberry, made with strawberry and mandarin purées plus rice milk. On the other side was Coconut Thai Tea (coconut milk, rice milk, tea, sweet potato) and Ube Cookies N' Cream, made with purple yam and real Oreos, which happen to be dairy-free.

—Hannah Goldfield

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVAN ANGELASTRO FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

TRIAL RUN

"How does this indictment affect his candidacy?" Bill Hemmer, of Fox News, asked the former South Carolina governor Nikki Haley last week. The candidacy in question was, of course, that of former President Donald Trump. The indictment being discussed was one that Trump, in a Truth Social post last week, said he expected any day after receiving a so-called target letter from the special counsel Jack Smith, on charges related to Trump's actions in the prelude to the January 6, 2021, assault on the Capitol. It would be his third criminal indictment in about four months. And, Haley told Hemmer, "it's going to keep on going. I mean, the rest of this primary election is going to be in reference to Trump, it's going to be about lawsuits, it's going to be about legal fees, it's going to be about judges, and it's just going to continue to be a further and further distraction."

Haley is herself running for the Republican nomination, so perhaps what she means is that Trump's legal troubles are a distraction from her own campaign, or from the picture she wishes voters had of the Republican Party. "We can't keep dealing with this drama, we can't keep dealing with the negativity," she said. (One wonders how she managed to spend almost two years in Trump's Cabinet, as the Ambassador to the United Nations.) And yet, in a crowded primary field, Trump is polling around fifty per cent, while his closest competitor, Ron DeSantis, comes in at roughly twenty. Haley is hovering at about five per cent, somewhere between Senator Tim Scott and former Vice-President Mike Pence. Trump, for all his drama, isn't a distraction from what the G.O.P. is; in many ways, he *is* the G.O.P. And the various cases against Trump aren't a distraction preventing people from assessing him. Instead, they provide an almost encyclopedic guide to his political and personal character.

Haley is right that the cases, criminal and civil, are going to keep on coming. The District of Columbia is where Smith is pursuing his January 6th case, while in Florida he has brought a thirty-eight-count indictment alleging that Trump, with the help of an employee, Waltine Nauta, retained sensitive documents in violation of the Espionage Act. (Trump and Nauta have pleaded not guilty.) Last Friday, Judge Aileen Cannon, who is presiding, set a trial date of May 20, 2024—a day before the Kentucky and the Oregon primaries. Trump's lawyers had wanted to wait until after Election Day; prosecutors had hoped for this December, but conceded that the timing would be "aggressive," in part because of the question of how classified evidence should be handled. Trump's lawyers will need to obtain clearances before they can even look at some of the discovery material.

Making this all more complicated is the fact that, in Georgia, Fani Willis, the Fulton County District Attorney, appears to be close to indicting Trump in her own investigation of his efforts to overturn the 2020 vote. She is reportedly looking at state election and racketeering laws, while Smith, based on what's known of the target letter, seems to be pursuing charges of fraud, obstructing an official proceeding, and the violation of a civil-rights statute. Willis won a victory last week when the Georgia Supreme Court turned down Trump's request that it block her work because, in effect, he didn't think she was being fair to him.

Judging from the witnesses who have been called, both Smith's and Willis's January 6th investigations are looking at the "fake electors scheme." This was, allegedly, a Trump-team plan to introduce "alternative" slates of electors, when Congress assembled on January 6th, for a number of states that President Joe Biden won; Vice-President Pence would then refuse to count the real votes or, at least, adjourn the session, claiming that the states were in dispute. Pence

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

didn't go along with the scheme, but Trump partisans in several states went so far as to sign certificates falsely identifying themselves as the duly elected electors. The Attorney General of Michigan, Dana Nessel, indicted sixteen of these individuals last week, on charges of forgery. (Trump himself is not a defendant.) A parallel investigation is under way in Arizona.

In New York, Alvin Bragg, the Manhattan D.A., has indicted Trump on thirty-four counts of falsifying business records, related to his alleged payment of hush money to Stormy Daniels, the adult-film actress. (Trump has pleaded not guilty.) The trial is scheduled for March 25th—between the Louisiana and the Wisconsin primaries. New York is also the site of a number of civil cases in which Trump is embroiled, including a fraud suit brought by Attorney General Letitia James, which is slated to go to trial in October; and a second defamation suit brought by E. Jean Carroll (in the first case, Trump was also found liable for sexual abuse), with a trial date of January 15th.

The calendar is getting crowded. Perhaps January 6th trials in Georgia or D.C. can be squeezed in between the Florida trial and the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, in July. The one date that can't be erased from Trump's calendar is Election Day, at least not without the help of Republican primary voters. A felony conviction does not prevent anyone from running for the Presidency, or from winning it.

Putting a leading Presidential candidate on trial, or trials, ahead of an election is a risky endeavor. That doesn't mean it shouldn't be done; accountability matters. But it must be done well and as transparently as possible. Do it wrong and the public may become increasingly convinced that both the legal and the electoral systems have been hopelessly compromised; millions of Trump supporters already believe this to be the case. Republicans have been playing on that distrust to defend the former President. (Last week, Kevin McCarthy, the Speaker of the House, suggested that Trump's target letter was distracting from a House hearing about Hunter Biden.)

Voters will have enough to do just keeping the various cases straight. We might need a good mnemonic to keep track of them all, or at least a map with a lot of pushpins. A summary of the most recent spate of legal news sounds like the recitation of a days-of-the-week nursery rhyme: Target letter Sunday; Georgia Supreme Court Monday; Florida hearing Tuesday; Hush-money ruling Wednesday. Soon, it may seem that every week has a frenzied agenda: Friday, say, a debate; Monday, a subpoena; Tuesday, a vote—or a verdict.

—Amy Davidson Sorkin

DEMOCRACY AT WORK
TAKE A HIKE

In October, 1904, a middle-aged woman from Brooklyn, as one story goes, bought the first subway ticket in New York City. The train ran from City Hall to Harlem—nine miles, twenty-eight stations. The green paper pass cost five cents, just a penny less than a can of Campbell's tomato soup. Ticket prices didn't increase until after the Second World War, in 1948, when the cost of a one-way trip rose to a dime, which was the going rate for most things around town, including soup. The price of taking the train has inched ever upward. Two dimes for a subway token, in the late sixties, became a buck twenty-five for a single-ride MetroCard, in 1993. Nowadays, the going rate for an Apple Pay iPhone tap is two dollars and seventy-five cents. Last week, the M.T.A.—which is responsible for the subway system (four hundred and seventy-two stations, six hundred and sixty-five miles of track), two tunnels, fifty-eight hundred buses, seven bridges, twelve hundred transit cops, more than thirteen thousand personal-injury claims and lawsuits, a debt so big (forty-eight billion dollars and counting) that it's roughly equivalent to New Jersey's annual budget, and a much contested plan to toll drivers between five and twenty-three bucks for entering the area below Sixtieth Street in Manhattan—voted to raise subway and bus fares by five per cent.

"A fifteen-cent fare hike! Unbelievable!" Howard Birnbaum said, on a morning in June, before taking a seat at one of several town halls that were convened downtown, at the M.T.A.'s headquarters, to discuss the increase. He had bags under his eyes, stains on his jeans, a pen in his shirt pocket, and, like hundreds of others who attended, concerns about change: "Two-ninety? Why can't you make it an even three dollars? Fifteen cents? It makes no sense!"

Down the hall, in a huge room adorned with American flags and CCTV cameras, a couple of regular town-hall attendees cracked jokes about the M.T.A. ("More Tolls Ahead," "Money Thrown Away," "Missing Trains' A.C.," "Motherfucking Transit Authority.") A few cops, who were there to make sure that nothing got out of hand, stood around, shifting their weight from one leg to the other. Sitting next to Birnbaum, in the front row, was a wispy, gray-haired man wearing yellow wooden clogs and a charcoal suit. He turned to his neighbor and quietly said, "I eat five to ten pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables a day."

Attendees took turns speaking. A State Assembly member said, "We could have increased revenue and avoided this by taxing the rich!" A state senator said, "I ask you to reconsider your decisions!" A college student said, "Fifteen cents can determine our future!"

Near the restrooms, on the twentieth floor, someone asked Richard Davey, who oversees subways and buses for the M.T.A., what he thought about the complaints. He responded like a politician: "The Legislature and the governor gave us the resources to keep the cost below three dollars, and we're grateful to do that." Of the subway fare, he said, "It's still a bargain!"

The meetings went on for three days. Democracy in action: M.T.A. officials yawned, drank deli coffee, listened, pretended to listen, laughed, checked their phones.

Andrew Rein, of the Citizens Budget Commission, said, "We support the proposed fare and toll increase, since it is essential for the M.T.A.'s fiscal health." Adrian Horczak, who wore a retroreflective vest, asked, "The fare is

going to increase, but is the service going to be any better?" A guy who gave his name as Mr. X said, "What you're doing is confusing, annoying, disturbing—and confusing."

At one point, a man named Gregory Thomas approached the microphone and went off topic. "I'm just asking the M.T.A. to help me," he said. "I've got a big toll bill, and I'm disabled from Ground Zero. I have the lungs of an eighty-year-old man, and I'm sixty years old. Two heart attacks! I've got a new job starting Monday, at J.F.K., but they're taking the car from me because I haven't paid the tolls. I can't re-register my vehicle. I'm only asking for help." The room went quiet; everyone was actually listening. "I don't want to sit home and watch soap operas. I don't want to do none of that. I just want to get to work. I've made numerous phone calls to the M.T.A., but no one can help me, so that's why I'm here tonight. I just need help. I need a payment plan. You will get your money! I just need my vehicle to get to work." Then he sat down, and listened for a while before taking the subway home.

—Adam Iscoe

THE BOARDS
ALPHA FILS

Several years ago, the British actor Ian Shaw looked in the mirror and saw the face of Quint, the grizzled, Ahab-esque shark hunter from Steven Spielberg's "Jaws." Shaw had grown a Quint-like mustache for a role, but, more to the point, he'd reached roughly the age at which his father, Robert Shaw, had played Quint in the movie: "I thought, I really look like my dad when he was in 'Jaws'!" In the nineties, in Birmingham, the younger Shaw had auditioned for a production of "Hamlet" directed by Richard Dreyfuss, and excitedly told him that he was the son of Dreyfuss's "Jaws" co-star. Instead of embracing him, Shaw recalled, Dreyfuss looked "like I'd punched him in the stomach."

These twin events inspired Shaw to retrace the steps of his father's most famous role. By the time Robert Shaw played Quint, he had received an Oscar nomination for "A Man for All Seasons" and appeared in "From Russia with Love" and "The Sting." A voracious drinker, he was often cast as macho men and heavies, but he was an affectionate dad, Ian said. He had ten children with three wives, including a stepson; Ian is the ninth, and the only one to become an actor. His father died in 1978, when Ian was eight. His renewed interest in "Jaws" resulted in a behind-the-scenes play, "The Shark Is Broken," which Shaw wrote with Joseph Nixon. It premièred at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, in 2019, then played the West End. It begins previews this week on Broadway, at the Golden Theatre, where Shaw's mother, the actress Mary Ure, once starred in "Look Back in Anger." Alex Brightman and Colin Donnell play Dreyfuss and Roy Scheider, respectively. Ian Shaw plays his father.

Shaw fils, at fifty-three, is a gentler soul than Shaw père. "I'm not fearless and so, well, alpha male. But I'm honest, which is what he was, I think. And it felt fearless to attempt *this*," he said, of the play. It was early morning, before a rehearsal, and Shaw, having grown muttonchops to go with his Quint mustache, was aboard the Wavertree, an 1885 cargo ship moored at the South Street Seaport. An aide from the Seaport Museum, which maintains the vessel, showed him into the crew's quarters. Shaw felt the floor rock. "We're doing some movement in the play, and it's very nice to feel this slight unsteadiness," he said. Growing up in Ireland, he would take a ferry to and from boarding school in England. "That was just a nightmare, because I was so seasick," he went on. He had just scotched an outing to Rockaway Beach, after his driver told him about a recent spate of shark sightings.

He sat in the captain's saloon, where an antique map of New York Bay lay unfurled on a table. When he was five, in 1974, he visited his father on the set of "Jaws," on Martha's Vineyard. He remembers meeting one of the three mechanical sharks (collectively nicknamed Bruce, after Spielberg's lawyer), which terrified him. He also met the twenty-seven-year-old director: "Looking back, I thought, He looks quite young to be telling my dad what to do." Mostly, he

Ian Shaw

remembers playing on the beach. "Film sets are just dull," he admitted.

The "Jaws" set, however, was a legendary disaster. The fake sharks, which had been tested in a freshwater tank, malfunctioned in salt water. The shoot went more than a hundred days over schedule, and the crew nearly turned mutinous. Quint's fishing boat, the Orca, sank. Shaw and Dreyfuss squabbled. "Robert, perhaps, was trying to school him, because he thought that Richard was a bit vain," Shaw said. One day, his father was pouring a drink between takes and Dreyfuss hurled the glass through a porthole.

On days off, Robert flew to Bermuda and brought Ian, who was unaware that his father was trying to spread out his working days in the U.S., to avoid a tax penalty. Researching the play, he culled from books, documentaries, family stories, a fan site called the Daily Jaws, and even his father's "drinking diary," in which Robert recorded the booze he did—and didn't—resist. "You see a portrait of someone who is really struggling to win a battle, but they're losing," Ian said.

The play builds toward the famous "U.S.S. Indianapolis" speech, in which Quint recounts undertaking a wartime mission to deliver the Hiroshima bomb and watching his shipmates get devoured by sharks. Robert wrote the final version of the speech, which was originally several pages long. His son delivers it onstage every night. "When I started, it felt like a huge responsibility," he said. He studied his father's performance closely: the way he removes his cap; his

mordant laugh after growling, "No distress signal had been sent." "It's been in my blood for years, though," the younger Shaw said. "Because I've always loved the film. If I wasn't anything to do with Robert Shaw, I'd be a 'Jaws' fan anyway."

—Michael Schulman

TEST-DRIVE DEPT.
DO YOU TAKE BITCOIN?

"This is the decentralized future of money," the actor and cryptocurrency skeptic Ben McKenzie said the other day. "This is freedom. Don't you feel free?" He was standing in front of a battered LibertyX A.T.M., by Fulton Hot Dog King, in Brooklyn. "Buy Bitcoin on every block," the machine's screen read. McKenzie believes that most of the crypto industry operates like a pyramid scheme. "Regular people put the real money in, and they provide the liquidity for all these other people to engage in shenanigans—fraud, money laundering, sanctions evasion, tax evasion, avoiding capital controls," he said. He recalled overhearing, during school pickup, a mom in "head-to-toe Lululemon" urging another mom to invest in a digital coin that she was pushing. "Peak absurdity," he said.

To test how overhyped crypto is, McKenzie wanted to acquire some bitcoin and try to spend it. "You need not just one app, you need two," he said, swiping on his phone. "And, you'll see, they're going to charge me—I think it's eight per cent." He tapped the screen. "In order to do the transaction, you've got to pay a 'miner's fee,' for the computers, and an A.T.M. fee," he went on. "It's all kinds of bananas." After inserting his debit card and entering a long code from his phone into the A.T.M., he asked to buy thirty dollars' worth of bitcoin. ("That's how much the Salvadorans were given by their beneficent President when he introduced cryptocurrency as legal tender in El Salvador.") In a few minutes, McKenzie's app showed that he had successfully obtained 0.00085672 of a bitcoin.

Ben McKenzie

He approached the counter at Hot Dog King and ordered a burger, holding up his phone to show the app. A man in a backward ball cap laughed and waved him away. "We don't take any bitcoin here," he said.

McKenzie, who had roles in "The O.C.," "Southland," and "Gotham," is an unlikely Cassandra of the crypto bubble. When the pandemic stopped show business in its tracks, McKenzie, stuck at home with his wife and children, started feeling anxious about the future. A college friend suggested that he buy bitcoin. Cryptocurrency prices were rising as people made bets with their COVID stimulus checks. After looking into it, McKenzie concluded that most cryptocurrencies were essentially worthless and that the industry was rife with scams. He rented an office near his house in Brooklyn and holed up there, eating edibles and reading books about tulip manias and the history of Ponzi schemes. He wondered if he should go public with his views. "I'm a middle-aged guy, mildly depressed, in the middle of a career transition—what do I have to lose?" he remembers thinking. "If I'm right, the upside is very high. And the downside is, I look like an idiot." He decided to write a book with the journalist Jacob Silverman. (They had some trouble finding a publisher at first; concerns about the former teen idol's limited credentials prompted one editor to ask, "Why isn't Paul Krugman writing this book?") "Easy Money: Cryptocurrency, Casino Capitalism, and the Golden Age of Fraud" was published last week.

In May, 2022, a few months after McKenzie started to work on the book, the crypto market crashed. The Federal Reserve raised interest rates, and bitcoin and Ethereum began to fall. FTX, the giant crypto trading exchange founded by Sam Bankman-Fried, filed for bankruptcy, and, in December, Bankman-Fried was charged with fraud. (He denies the charges.) That month, McKenzie testified before the Senate Banking Committee. "By the time the dust settles," he told the senators, "crypto may well represent a fraud at least ten times bigger than Madoff."

He decided to road test his thesis some more. At a Starbucks, he asked a barista, "Do you guys take bitcoin?"

The barista furrowed her brow: "Is it like a debit card or credit card?"

"It's on this app," McKenzie said.

"Does it have, like, a barcode we can scan?" the woman asked. McKenzie shook his head. "Has anyone ever told you you look like the guy from 'Gotham'?" she asked.

"No, never," McKenzie said, then copped to it. He blushed and produced a credit card to pay for his Frappuccino. Next, he wandered into a Citizens Bank branch to see if he could open an account, transfer the bitcoin into it, and withdraw it as cash. A banker behind a desk told him that he'd have to open a brokerage account somewhere else, transfer the bitcoin into it, and then transfer it to Citizens as dollars.

McKenzie entered a pizzeria and ordered two slices. "Do you guys take bitcoin?" he asked.

"Excuse me?" a counterman said.

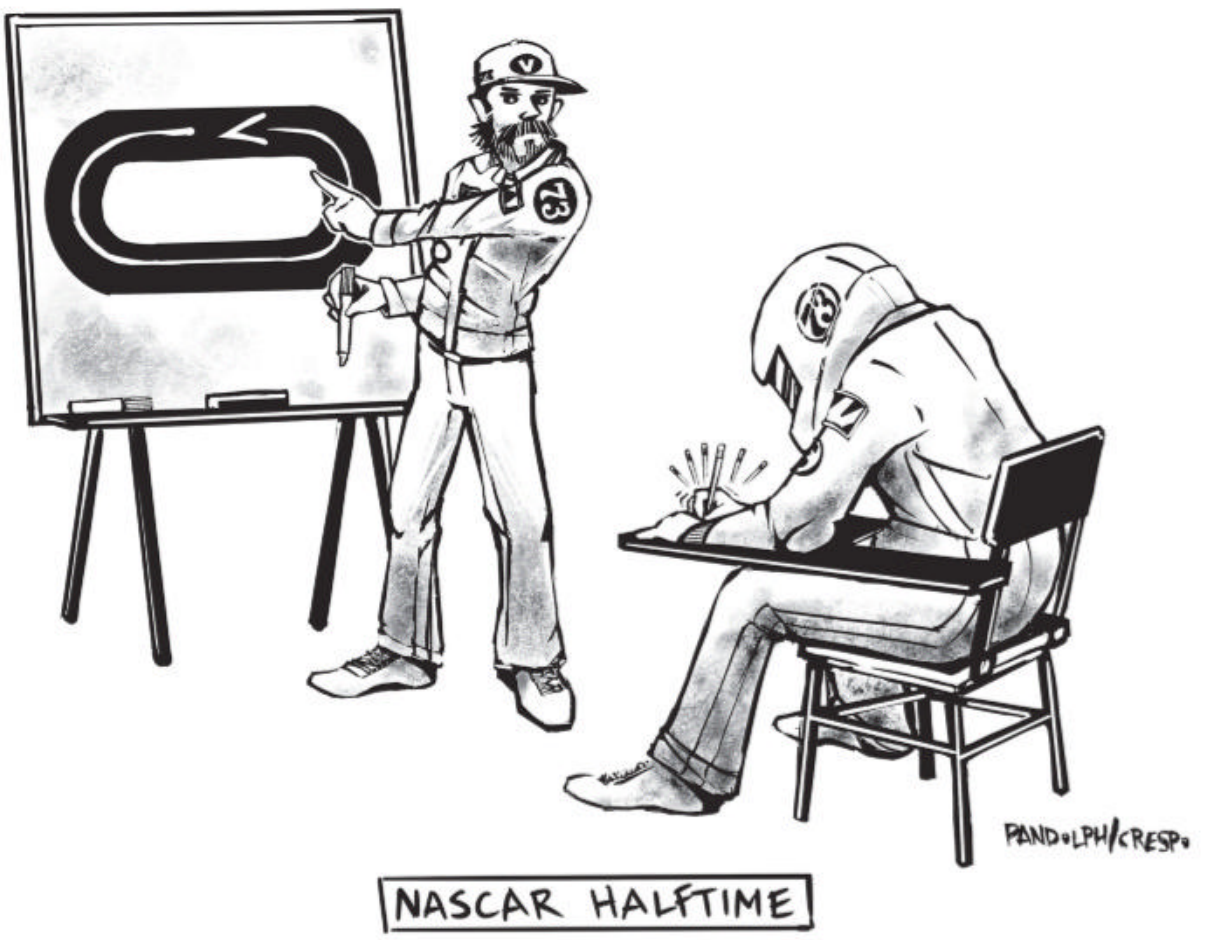
"Bitcoin?" McKenzie said, louder.

"I have a quarter, I have a dime, I have a nickel," the man said, spreading some change on the counter. McKenzie pulled out his wallet.

—Sheelah Kolhatkar

ON THE WATER
NOT A SHARK

WasteShark is not a shark. It is an unmanned watercraft that its creators named for a shark, owing to similarities between how WasteShark collects its prey and the feeding habits of the *Rhincodon typus,* or whale shark.



Cruising slowly, the whale shark takes in water and filters it for plankton and krill; WasteShark, meanwhile, filters urban waters for trash. But, whereas the whale shark can grow to the length of a subway car, WasteShark is only five feet long, three and a half feet wide, and a foot and a half thick. As the bright-orange fibreglass craft floated on the Hudson River recently, off Pier 40—collecting trash at or near the surface in its wire-basket-like interior—it looked less like a fish than like something accidentally dropped from a cruise liner. "I thought it was somebody's luggage," a member of the Village Community Boathouse said, after WasteShark whisked past.

When full, WasteShark's hold is emptied by its minders—in this case, Carrie Roble, a scientist who is in charge of research and education at Hudson River Park, and Siddhartha Hayes, who oversees the park's environmental monitoring. Hayes grew up jumping into swimming holes in the Catskills, while Roble swam in metropolitan Detroit, affording her insight into a still widely held view of urban rivers. "I used to swim in the Detroit River, and people would see me and say, 'I can't wait to see your third arm,'" she said.

WasteShark, which costs twenty thousand dollars, is joining the park's scientific team more as mascot than as player. Roble hopes that it will generate interest among passersby and among "field assistants" (interns), who will pilot the trash-eating drone this summer. "We see WasteShark as a tool," she said.

WasteShark's latest test run in the Hudson happened to take place on the very day that forest fires in Quebec turned New York into a Mars-scape, adding a sense of urgency to WasteShark's mission. As Roble and Hayes wheeled it out on a dolly from Pier 40's Wetlab, the park's aquarium and field station, they donned N95 masks and life jackets, and were joined by two interns: Vivian Chavez, a student at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, and Stefan Valdez, from Lehman College, in the Bronx.

They lugged WasteShark down a gangway to a dock floating in a cove bounded by Pier 40 and the pier leading to the Holland Tunnel ventilation shaft—discharging carbon monoxide and pulling in what was passing that day for fresh air. A wake caused by a ferry buffeted the dock, sending an observer to his knees. Hayes knelt by WasteShark, touching its stern. "O.K., so these are the thrusters," he said, pressing the start button. "I'm holding it until it's blue."

Roble detailed WasteShark's features—a camera, sensors for measuring depth and temperature—while managing expectations. In 2020, Roble and Hayes published, in the *Marine Pollution Bulletin,* a comprehensive analysis of the lower Hudson estuary's high levels of microplastics, against which WasteShark is powerless. WasteShark is the robotic assistant to a volunteer shoreline trash pickup. "For that plastic water bottle that is just out of reach," Roble explained.

They lowered WasteShark off the edge and, with a handheld controller, turned on the thrusters, which propelled the craft quietly. Chavez took the controls. "It kind of feels like you're walking your pet," Roble told her, "'cause we end up following it along."

As the skies darkened, Chavez smiled and set a course for some rejectamenta. Roble mused about potential attachments, including one that resembles an Arctic fox, to deter congregating Canada geese, which are a threat to passenger jets. "Or maybe googly eyes," she said.

Chavez attributed her immediate proficiency to her gaming skills, recently honed via the latest Legend of Zelda game, Tears of the Kingdom. She handed the controller to Valdez, who steered WasteShark toward the West Street shore. "I think it handles well," he said.

"They are the guinea pigs, and they are basically loving it," Roble said, pleased.

A waft of trash came up from under the pier, and a gaggle of high schoolers walked out onto the pier to take pictures of the orange sky. "It's the end of the world," one of them shouted—then he spotted WasteShark. "Wait, are you guys monitoring something?"

After an hour, WasteShark was heaved onto the dock, and Roble and Hayes, wearing surgical gloves, picked through its haul: a baseball, bits of wood, a Diet Coke can, a water chestnut, a cigar wrapper, a toy-A.T.V. part ("Always a lot of toys," Roble said), an amphipod, a glop of gray mush not immediately identifiable, a bag of Utz barbecue-flavored Ripples, bladder wrack, seaweed ("Good adaptation," Hayes said), a Canada-goose gosling (deceased), a coffee-cup lid, and an Amazon bag.

—Robert Sullivan

ANNALS OF LAW

COURTING FAME

How Alex Spiro became the trial lawyer celebrities want on their side.

BY SHEELAH KOLHATKAR

Spiro is "a bit of a cowboy, and he's very good at it," an opposing lawyer says.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GILLIAN LAUB

In the summer of 2018, four years before he bought Twitter, the entrepreneur Elon Musk was facing legal consequences for two of his more reckless forays on the social-media platform. A boys' soccer team in Thailand had been trapped in a flooded cave for more than two weeks, and a caver involved in the rescue said on CNN that a bespoke submarine Musk had sent to save the children was a "PR stunt." Infuriated, Musk told his twenty-two million Twitter followers, without basis in fact, that the caver, Vernon Unsworth, was a "pedo guy." The tweet went viral, and Unsworth's attorney threatened to sue Musk for defamation.

Soon afterward, Musk tweeted about Tesla, the electric-car company that he runs: "Am considering taking Tesla private at $420. Funding secured." To many people, the message suggested that Musk had arranged a buyout of the company; Tesla's stock price rose almost eleven per cent by the end of the day. A week later, however, the *Times* reported that the potential backer, Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, had never agreed to a deal. The stock price dropped, investors claimed that they had lost money as a result, and the Securities and Exchange Commission began investigating Musk for securities fraud.

Musk, like many billionaires, is perpetually at the center of dozens of lawsuits, and he has historically relied on establishment law firms for help. To handle the S.E.C. investigation, he turned to Williams & Connolly, an old-school Washington firm. For a suit arising from Tesla's takeover of a solar-panel manufacturer, he brought in the élite corporate firm of Cravath, Swaine & Moore. To handle the potential defamation suit, however, Musk sought more aggressive representation. After briefly engaging Hueston Hennigan, a boutique practice in California, he reached out to a scrappy thirty-six-year-old attorney named Alex Spiro.

A partner at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, Spiro has, in recent years, become one of the best-known trial lawyers in the country, a feat attributable to a streak of victories in high-profile cases and to frequent appearances in popular media outlets ranging from the Washington *Post* and the New York *Post* to the Shade Room and TMZ. A graduate of Tufts University and Harvard Law School, he possesses a plain-spoken charm that clients and juries find beguiling. With that common touch, he's come to specialize in protecting the rich and famous from the consequences of their poorest decisions.

Spiro represented Robert Kraft, the owner of the New England Patriots, who was accused of solicitation at the Orchids of Asia massage parlor in Jupiter, Florida (charges dropped). He defended the twenty-two-year-old son of the industrialist Peter Brant and the supermodel Stephanie Seymour when the young man, inebriated at J.F.K. Airport, punched a Port Authority police officer (charges dismissed after community service). He came to the aid of Alec Baldwin after the actor accidentally shot and killed a cinematographer with a prop gun on the set of the movie "Rust" (charges dropped). He has represented Jay-Z in multiple disputes, and Megan Thee Stallion, after Tory Lanez shot her at a party. He also does the kind of pro-bono work that makes headlines: assisting Kim Kardashian in her campaign against wrongful convictions, and pushing for prison reform in Mississippi with Jay-Z.

When Musk asked him to meet, Spiro flew to San Francisco from New York, dropped off his bags at a hotel,

and headed to the Tesla headquarters, in Palo Alto. He was left there to wait for hours. (Spiro's ego rivals that of many of the plutocrats and celebrities he represents, but he must suppress it when cultivating a new client.) Finally, Musk emerged, apologetic, and told Spiro he was headed to L.A., and that their meeting would happen on the way. Spiro thought ruefully of the luggage sitting in his hotel room as he followed Musk to his private plane. (Musk did not respond to *The New Yorker's* request for comment.)

After asking Spiro a variety of mettle-testing questions, Musk hired him to handle the repercussions of his "pedo guy" tweet—a situation that Musk had recently made even worse. He had apologized to Unsworth and deleted the offensive tweet, but he had also scrambled to find evidence against the caver. Might he really *be* a pedophile? Musk hired a private investigator, to the tune of fifty thousand dollars, to explore whether Unsworth, a Brit who had lived part-time in Thailand for years, had a troubled history with underage girls.

After several days of research, the investigator reported some preliminary findings, including that Unsworth, who was sixty-three years old, had met his Thai girlfriend when she was eleven or twelve. Musk, evidently feeling emboldened, tweeted, "You don't think it's strange he hasn't sued me?" Musk also sent an e-mail labelled "off the record" to Ryan Mac, who was covering the dispute for BuzzFeed News, telling him to "stop defending child rapists, you fucking asshole." In the e-mail, Musk described Unsworth as an "old, single white guy from England" who moved to a community known for sex trafficking "for a child bride who was about 12 years old at the time." He added, "I fucking hope he sues me." Mac had never agreed to keep the e-mail off the record, and BuzzFeed published it.

The private investigator, it turned out, was a convicted con man, and the allegations that Musk had passed along to BuzzFeed were false. Musk would later describe the e-mail to Mac as "one of the dumbest things I've ever done." Still, when Unsworth filed a defamation suit, Musk was unwilling to settle. He wanted to go to trial, although most experts following the drama believed that he—and Spiro—had no case. David Lat, a former federal prosecutor who writes the legal newsletter "Original Jurisdiction," said, "A lot of us thought Musk was toast."

At the trial, which took place in Los Angeles, Spiro portrayed Unsworth—who testified that being branded a pedophile had made him feel "humiliated, ashamed," and effectively sentenced by popular opinion to a "life sentence without parole"—as an egomaniacal bully. The true victim, in Spiro's telling, was Musk, an idealist and a business visionary who had been unjustly injured by the caver's disparagement of his submarine. As Spiro recalled to me, "They wanted to make the case about the rich billionaire who decided to defame this guy, and I wasn't going to do that. I was going to tell the story of how he went there to save these kids, not about the fucking spelunker who tried to steal the spotlight."

Standing six feet two with blue eyes and the broad-shouldered physique of a professional athlete, Spiro has an undeniable magnetism in the courtroom. During Musk's trial, he lumbered around in an orthopedic boot (he'd ruptured his Achilles tendon playing basketball), arguing that Unsworth, in his hunger for publicity, had not only maligned Musk's contribution to the rescue but also exaggerated his own role in it. The facts weren't entirely in Spiro's favor. Musk's sub, which had created a media frenzy, was judged too large to wend through the narrow passageways of the caves where the boys had been trapped; Unsworth's expertise in the cave system's structure had, by the account of the lead diver, proved essential to the rescue. He had created a detailed map of the area and helped recruit and advise the divers who eventually brought the boys to safety.

Before the jury, Spiro's core argument was that an impetuous tweet shouldn't get someone sued. To help make that case, he offered the jurors an acronym: JDAR. It stood, he said, for a joking, deleted, apologized for, responsive tweet. Unsworth, he claimed, had made a big deal out of nothing—a silly JDAR—just to promote himself on television. And the fact that use of Musk's e-mail to BuzzFeed was limited in court was almost certainly to Spiro's advantage.

Spiro is "a bit of a cowboy, and he's very good at it," G. Taylor Wilson, one of Unsworth's lawyers, told me. "He framed the case as this sort of back-and-forth joke: Why are we in court over this 'pedo guy' tweet?" What had started out as a serious matter—a heroic volunteer being falsely branded a child molester—suddenly seemed no more than a petty accusation, a waste of the jury's time. After less than an hour of deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty.

"My faith in humanity is restored," Musk said as he left the courtroom. Wilson, for his part, thinks that humanity might be better off, and public discourse more civil, had Unsworth prevailed. "I do think that Twitter and social media in general would be a bit different if we had not lost that case," Wilson said.

Before long, Musk would call on Spiro again. With the help of his Williams & Connolly counsel, Musk had settled with the S.E.C. over the "funding secured" tweet: Musk and Tesla were each obliged to pay a fine of twenty million dollars, and Musk agreed to establish a board committee to oversee his tweets and other communications. However, he soon came to regret the settlement. And so, in January, 2019, when a group of investors filed a consolidated class-action fraud suit against Musk and Tesla over the tweet, alleging that they had lost more than a billion dollars, Musk decided to turn to the cowboy.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville described lawyers as "the most intellectual section" of American society, and "the most powerful barrier" against "the unreflective passions of democracy"—a source of restraint in times of populist impulses. A century and a half later, lawyers are perhaps less averse to exploiting unreflective passions. The O. J. Simpson trial brought television cameras into the courtroom and heralded the rise of the popular legal spectacle—a spectacle that fed on daily drama and conflict. The Simpson defenders Johnnie Cochran, F. Lee Bailey, Alan Dershowitz, and Robert Kardashian became celebrities themselves, combining, each in his own fashion, theatrical technique and an intimate knowledge of how modern media works. In the twenty-first century, social media brought clips of courtroom performances to vast audiences. In this volatile environment, Spiro thrived.

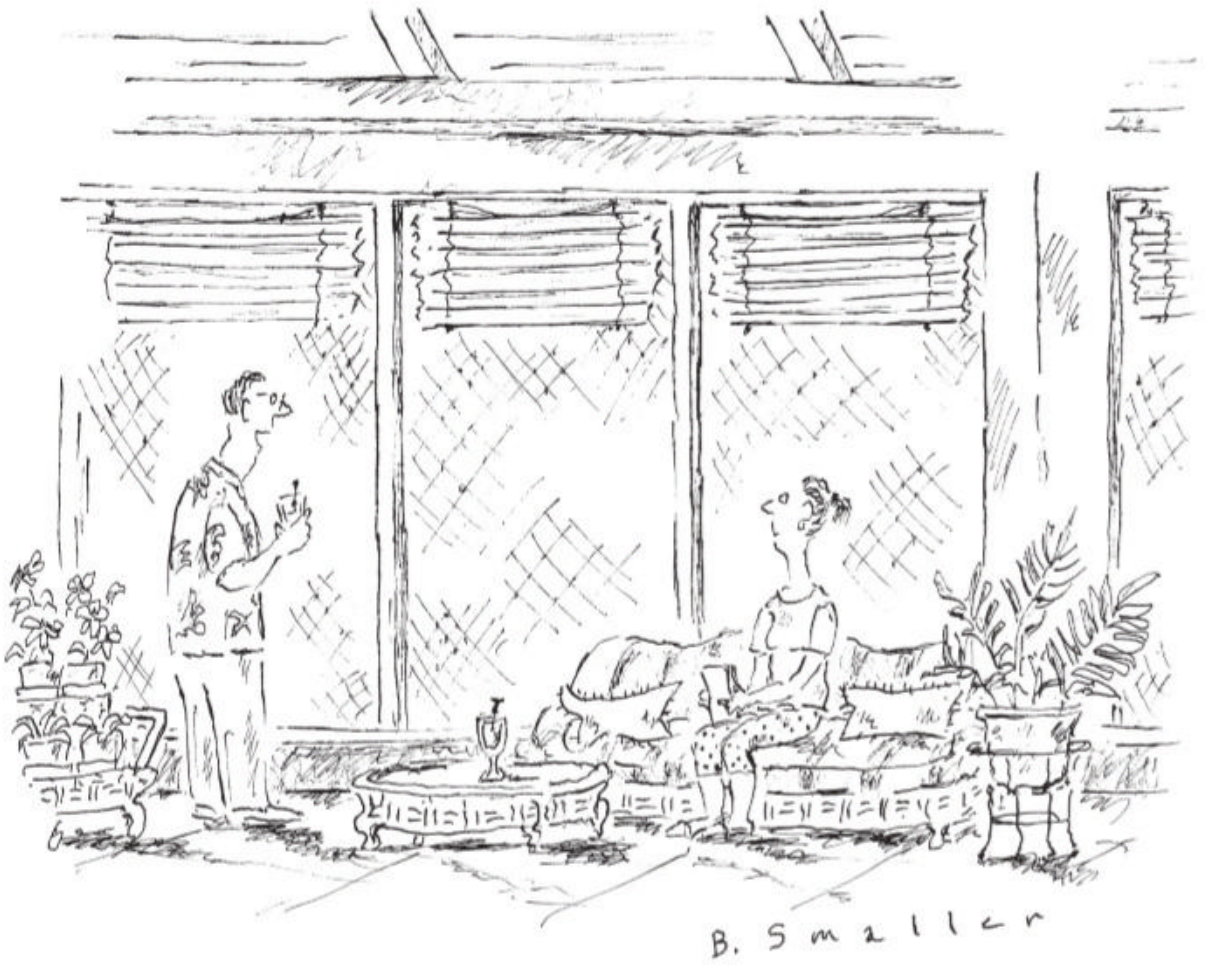
"When a case is in the public eye,

you have to be conscious of that when you're litigating it," he once told the *Harvard Crimson*. "And how you deal with that and interact with the court of public opinion matters."

On a recent afternoon, Spiro was in the Coconut Grove, Miami, offices of Quinn Emanuel, which has thirty-three branches around the world. (Spiro and his family relocated to Miami from Brooklyn Heights during the pandemic.) "It's a not-so-secret of mine, I fucking hate experts," he told several colleagues on a video call, as they debated hiring an outside consultant for a foreign-bribery case involving a multinational corporation. Spiro believes that hired experts who testify in a trial often come across to jurors as insincere hacks, and that the reports the experts submit in discovery can tip off his opponents about how he plans to present his side of the case. As Spiro and his colleagues reviewed the staggering cost of bringing in an A-list consultant, he was simultaneously carrying on a conversation over text. Out the window, yachts were sparkling on Biscayne Bay.

At the firm, Spiro has more than a hundred people working with him, and he juggles some fifty cases at a time. A single big case may involve four partners, another eight attorneys below them, and a handful of paralegals, researchers, and investigators. This "cavalry," as Spiro sometimes calls his team, does much of the day-to-day preparation, including the writing of briefs. But when a case goes to trial Spiro conducts most of the openings, closings, and cross-examinations himself.

Spiro sometimes likens what he does in those openings and closings to making a painting. The experience can be so intense that afterward, he told me, he can't always remember what he did with his brush. "There's a flow to it," he said. "I'm trying to tell a compelling, interwoven story. And there are hints I'm dropping throughout cases, for the jury." Michael Lifrak, a Quinn Emanuel partner whom Spiro refers to as his lieutenant, notes that those arguments stem from considerable front-end labor. Spiro "will look at every document in the case," he said. "I have never seen a first-chair trial lawyer do that, and I've been doing this for more than twenty years. He dives into the details. And that's probably one of the reasons that clients like him." Another reason clients like Spiro is that, by his own account, he's won every case he's brought to trial in a decade of private practice.



"I wouldn't say I'm an indoor person or an outdoor person. I'm more of a screened-in-porch person."

"I have a photographic memory, basically—that's my special secret sauce," Spiro told me. "That and my ability to sleep three and a half hours a day and process information quickly. If it weren't for those things, I would have zero chance of survival." He's also shrewd in his choice of jurors. He looks for people whom he could "take out for a cup of coffee and convince of my point of view" and those who might be inclined to like him—for instance, he believes that Black Americans may be particularly aware of his representation of professional basketball players in police-brutality cases and of his connections to Jay-Z and other hip-hop artists. In the courtroom, an environment Spiro describes as "me in my swimming pool," he often forgoes slick PowerPoint presentations, scribbling on poster boards instead. He sometimes puts witnesses on the stand with minimal preparation, in the belief that their testimony will seem more authentic.

After the meeting, he packed up and walked home, his body listing to one side on account of yet another basketball injury. On the way, he consulted by phone first with a celebrity whose endorsement deal had run into legal problems, and then with a client who had to testify before a grand jury. In addition to his official cases, he has "lots of 'situations,'" he said. "Somebody called me the other week, through a friend, and said somebody was in custody in a foreign country, and could I make a phone call."

Spiro's vanity is much discussed among his colleagues and his rivals. One attorney who has worked with him said, "He's a bright young man, but he's an incredibly good self-promoter. We used to make fun of him—he's a 'one-upper.' He knows everyone and knows everything." A former colleague told me, "I think the key to Spiro is that he has this form of fearlessness, which is good, and can also be really problematic for a lawyer. It's like being a Sherpa without any fear. You're climbing Everest with a client, and you both could fall off the mountain."

Part of Spiro's legal playbook is arguing, sometimes implicitly, sometimes brazenly, that famous and powerful people should be treated differently from ordinary citizens. Before meeting with

Musk for the first time, Spiro was helping Jay-Z resist the S.E.C.'s request that the impresario testify in person in a case involving the accounting practices of Iconix Brand Group, a company that had bought his apparel line, Rocawear. When the S.E.C. declined to waive its rules about in-person testimony, Spiro countered that Jay-Z was so busy that he could testify for only two hours. The S.E.C. rejected the time limit, and the parties ended up arguing about the matter in federal court. At one point during a hearing, the judge turned his attention to Spiro and said, "With all due respect to Mr. Spiro, it's not his job to determine what information the S.E.C. does or does not need to conduct its investigation, or in what format that information should be provided." In the end, though, the judge urged the S.E.C. to get its questioning done in one day.

"I'm not a huge believer in people trying to slow me down," Spiro told me recently over lunch in Miami, Visine in his pocket and his leg jiggling under the table. "There's somebody I know who describes me as 'irreverent.' I think that's accurate. I'm probably difficult to manage." Yared Alula, Spiro's friend and former law-school classmate, told me of Spiro, "He looks at any institution, any rule, as just an opening salvo in a negotiation."

Spiro's mother, Cynthia Kaplan, a clinical psychologist who specializes in child and adolescent trauma, noticed that her son was a debater from the start. "At eighteen months, he talked like he does now," she said. "I remember him saying, '*Actually*, Mom,' at that age." He was the first of four children, and spent his early years in Manhattan, where his father, a dentist and an athlete, often brought Spiro along to weeknight basketball games.

Shortly before Spiro started kindergarten, his family moved to Wellesley, Massachusetts. Several years later, Spiro's comfortable suburban life began to unravel—his parents split up, his mother was working long hours at a hospital, and his father was given a diagnosis of a degenerative neurological disorder, which eventually rendered him blind and unable to walk without assistance. Spiro was suddenly on his own much of the time. "I think he had to fend for himself a lot," his mother told me. "He became more competitive, more determined in those years."

When Spiro was in high school, his mother helped him get a job at McLean, the psychiatric hospital where she now worked. There, Spiro spent time with young people who had been given a diagnosis of a spectrum disorder, and was mentored by Shervert Frazier, a prominent psychiatrist who specialized in schizophrenia. Spiro decided to major in psychology at Tufts, and continued working with Frazier. One day, Spiro recalls, Frazier's assistant told him, "You won't shut up. You should go to law school."

The idea took hold, and Spiro entered Harvard Law School in 2005. While studying, he accepted a fellowship with the C.I.A., and, after graduation, he joined the Manhattan D.A.'s office as a junior prosecutor. Spiro was not, fellow-prosecutors recall, a deft writer of briefs, but he stood out in the office for how aggressively he sought to work on cases that were going to trial. Elliot Felig, who overlapped with Spiro as a prosecutor, said, "He loved the courtroom. He would go door to door and say, 'You have anything that's going to trial?' He'd be happy to take cases from colleagues that were trial-ready." He lost a couple of cases, and won more.

In 2010, Cyrus Vance, Jr., became District Attorney and created a unit to reëxamine unsolved cases. Before long, Spiro was helping two senior colleagues revive a cold case against a notorious serial killer, Rodney Alcala, who was often called the Dating Game Killer because he'd been a contestant on the TV show decades earlier. Alcala was already on death row in California for killing four women and a twelve-year-old girl. But, back in the nineteen-seventies, he had also been a suspect in the brutal deaths of two women in New York.

Spiro seized on the opportunity to be part of the high-profile murder case. He reinterviewed old witnesses and eventually helped secure Alcala's indictment for both murders. In 2012, Alcala pleaded guilty.

Martha Bashford, one of the lead prosecutors, credits Spiro for pushing the case forward, though she acknowledged he wasn't the most politic employee in the office. "Alex reminded me of when you have a new puppy," she said. "They're just so excited. They run around, their tails wag, and they often knock things over."

Spiro also worked on the prosecution of Travis Woods, another notorious murderer, who was known as Travice in the neighborhoods around Harlem, his base. Woods had been tried for murder three times; each time, the jury failed to reach a verdict. Spiro helped bring the case to trial a fourth time, the office won a conviction, and Spiro decided that it was the moment to move on.

"Being a defense lawyer was very natural to me," he told me. "I find it compelling to help people and fix their problems, right the wrongs. Corny as it sounds."

Figuring that he wouldn't fit in at a big firm—"too corporate for me, too many blocks and barriers and bureaucratic rules"—in 2013 Spiro took a job at a boutique firm led by the legendary defender Benjamin Brafman. Brafman, a self-described "short Jewish guy" who'd performed on Catskills comedy stages while in college, has a reputation as fierce and self-consciously flamboyant. His client roster included the hip-hop producer Sean (Diddy) Combs (acquitted of gun possession and bribery after a night-club shoot-out); the hedge-fund manager Martin Shkreli (convicted of stealing millions of dollars from investors); and, later, Harvey Weinstein (convicted of myriad sexual-assault charges). Under Brafman, Spiro, eager for clients, networked at parties and at sporting events.

A trader at a big bank who had been charged with fraud told me that Spiro had counselled, "If you play softball, you're not going to get anywhere—you've got to push the limits a bit and be aggressive." Spiro convinced the trader to let him hire a private investigator to interview potential witnesses before the government got to them. "Even back then, when he didn't necessarily have the track record to back it up," the trader said,

Spiro "was so confident that you just tended to believe him." In the end, the trader was acquitted.

At around 2 A.M. on April 8, 2015, a forward for the Indiana Pacers was stabbed outside 1 OAK, a Manhattan night club, and Thabo Sefolosha, a forward for the Atlanta Hawks, was on the street outside as the N.Y.P.D. tried to clear the block. Sefolosha, who is Black, got into a dispute with JohnPaul Giacona, a white police officer. Sefolosha told the officer, whom he called a "midget," that he could act like a "tough guy" only because he had a badge. According to Sefolosha, Giacona responded, "With or without a badge, I'll fuck you up."

Sefolosha and a teammate were about to leave when Sefolosha started walking back in the direction of the officers, trying, he later said, to give twenty dollars to a man who was begging for money. A video shows a group of officers surrounding Sefolosha and wrestling him to the ground.

Sefolosha was arrested, taken to a holding cell, and charged with resisting arrest. His leg throbbed; he later learned that during the arrest his fibula had been broken—an injury that would end his season and diminish the Hawks' hope of winning in the playoffs. Around dawn that morning, Spiro, who'd received a call from a Hawks lawyer, appeared at the precinct to represent him.

Sefolosha told me that his first thought on seeing Spiro was how young he looked. "But then he came in and took charge of the whole situation," Sefolosha said.

After many meetings at the Manhattan D.A.'s office, his former workplace, Spiro received an offer from the prosecution: a deal that would lead to the dismissal of the charges in six months, but without an admission of fault on the part of the officers. To Sefolosha, any agreement that let the officers off the hook was unacceptable. "It was a no-brainer for me," he said. "We had to go to trial."

During an evening stroll in Coconut Grove, near the luxury residential tower where he lives, Spiro reënacted one of the moments in Giacona's cross-examination. Spiro had asked Giacona if he remembered saying to Sefolosha, "I'm going to fuck you up." Giacona replied, "Not that I recall." Spiro's eyes bulged as he recounted the moment. "You don't remember the most important day of your life?" he bellowed, jabbing his finger at the imagined cop. "You were in the fucking New York *Post*. You don't remember staring into the eyes of the starting forward for the Atlanta Hawks?"

On October 9, 2015, the jury, after around forty-five minutes of deliberation, acquitted Sefolosha. He later filed a civil lawsuit against the officers and the city, and received a settlement of four million dollars.

Spiro's pugnacious style is very much in the Brafman mold, but people close to Brafman told me that the older lawyer now says he regrets hiring Spiro. David Jaroslawicz, a civil attorney who worked with them both, said of Spiro, "I think he wanted to be the No. 1 man in the firm, and as long as Brafman didn't retire *he* was the No. 1 man."

As Spiro began mulling his next career move, shortly after Sefolosha's acquittal, he experienced what he considers one of the greatest disappointments of his career. He was representing Thomas Gilbert, Jr., who had murdered his father, the hedge-fund founder Thomas Gilbert, Sr., in midtown. At the time of the murder, Spiro had known Thomas, Jr., a Princeton graduate, for years. His mother, Shelley, had originally hired Spiro to smooth things over when her son was expelled from the family's Hamptons country club for reportedly threatening an employee. Thomas, Jr., was thirty years old and had received diagnoses of severe compulsive disorder, depressive disorder, paranoid disorder, and psychosis.

The patricide was covered in lurid detail in the press. Thomas, Sr., had just reduced his son's weekly allowance. Thomas, Jr., came to his parents' apartment, sent his mother out to buy a sandwich, shot his father in the head, placed the gun in his dead father's hand, and fled. When his mother returned to the apartment and discovered the horrifying scene, she called 911 and told the dispatcher that her son was "nuts" and had killed his father.

Shelley told me that Spiro's experience at McLean gave her confidence that he understood mental illness, "which most of society did not." Spiro's goal was to have Thomas, Jr., put in psychiatric in-patient care rather than tried for murder, and he was buoyed when two court-appointed psychiatrists found his client too ill to be tried. ("I put everything I had into that case," Spiro said.) However, a forensic psychologist hired by the prosecution convinced the judge that Gilbert was sane enough to stand trial. With a conviction now looming, Spiro dropped Thomas, Jr., as a client. Shelley's legal fees were mounting, and Spiro was planning to accept a partnership at Quinn Emanuel. He was reluctant to carry the murder case to his new firm, where he would soon be the most celebrated partner—the star he wasn't able to be at Brafman's shop.

Spiro can plausibly claim that in private practice he's never lost a case before a jury in part because he's canny about what he takes on and what he walks away from. Shelley Gilbert did not blame Spiro for dropping the case, but a subsequent lawyer, whom he had recommended, was unsuccessful. In 2019, Thomas, Jr., was convicted and sentenced to thirty years to life.

The rapper Bobby Shmurda stands out among Spiro's clients for having publicly criticized the lawyer's work on his behalf. In 2014, when Shmurda was twenty-one years old, with his music career just taking off, he was arrested and charged with, among other things, weapons possession and conspiracy to sell narcotics and to commit murder. The evidence against Shmurda included wiretaps and witnesses. He pleaded not guilty, was held on two million dollars' bail, which his family was unable to raise, and spent more than six hundred days in jail awaiting trial. Shmurda called in Spiro, who advised him that the evidence was compelling and that he should consider accepting a global plea deal, in which he would admit guilt on two charges and, like, most of his co-defendants, receive a seven-year sentence. The alternative was going to trial and risking more time behind bars. Shmurda accepted the plea. However, at the sentencing hearing the musician attempted to fire Spiro on the spot, telling the judge, "I was forced by my attorney to take this plea. I do not want to take this plea!" (Shmurda did not respond to a request for comment.) Spiro denies forcing the plea on Shmurda,

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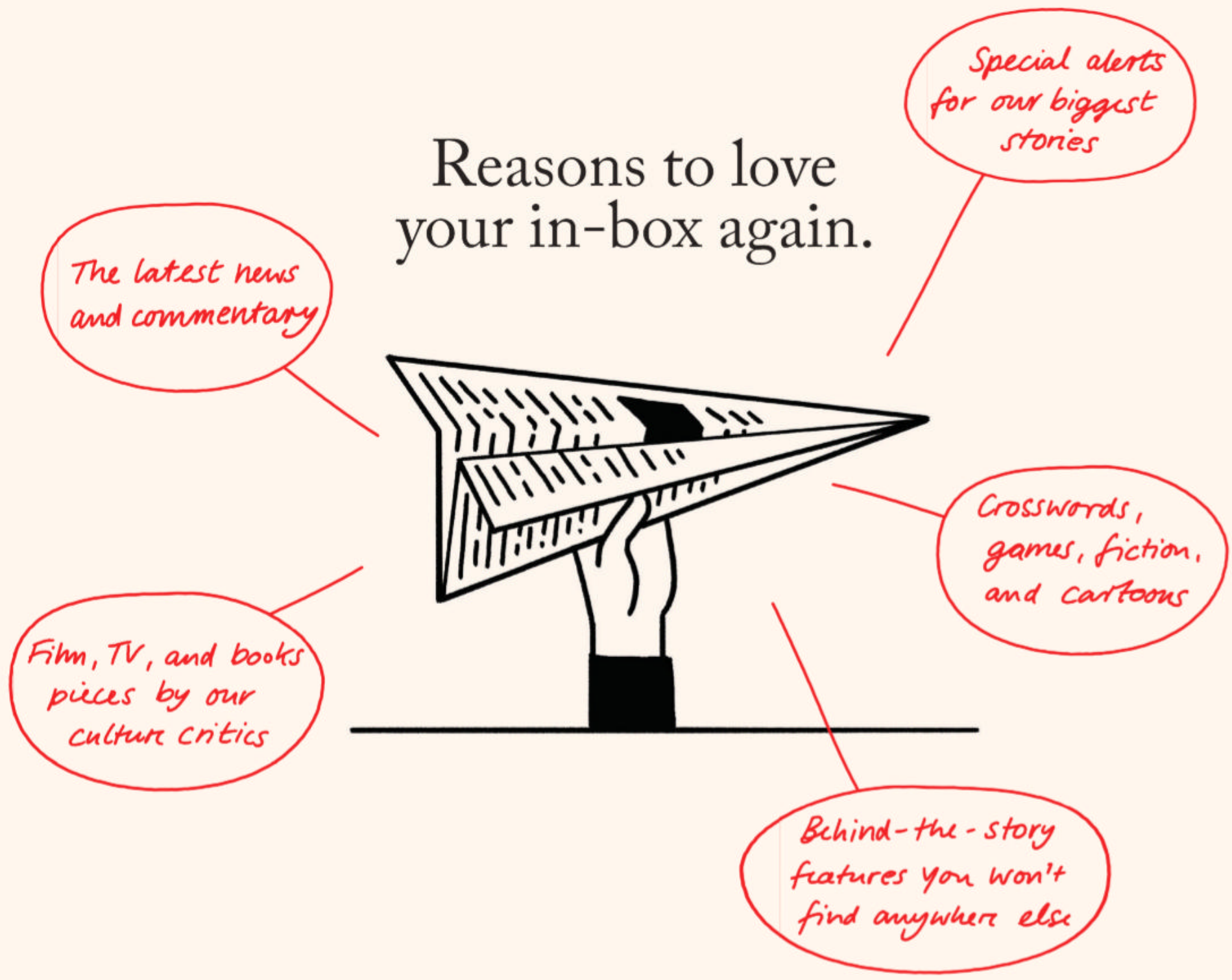

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and points out that a co-defendant who didn't accept the deal was later sentenced to more than a hundred and seventeen years.

Spiro sometimes struggles to project a coherent righteousness from the wild mashup of cases and personalities he embraces. In conversation, he can make his arguments on behalf of Elon Musk sound as noble as his crusade, in the late twenty-tens, for New York bail reform. But several people who worked with Spiro rolled their eyes at his attempts to frame himself as primarily a do-gooder. They saw him instead as an opportunist.

In 2016, the former N.F.L. star Aaron Hernandez, who was serving time for a murder conviction, hired Jose Baez, a high-profile defense lawyer, and then Ron Sullivan, who'd been a mentor of Spiro's at Harvard Law, to help him fend off another grave charge—this one for a double homicide in Boston. The lawyers brought in Spiro, but the team soon parted ways. According to Baez, Spiro stepped back from the case early on, "before we even started working on it." Nonetheless, he has taken credit for being one of the attorneys who helped secure Hernandez's against-all-odds acquittal.

Early this year, the lawsuit filed by Tesla investors who claimed that Musk's "funding secured" tweet had defrauded them went to trial in San Francisco. Spiro's team included about twenty Quinn Emanuel lawyers. Musk's reputation had deteriorated in the three years since Spiro had helped him avoid repercussions for vilifying the caver who had helped rescue the boys' soccer team. Now, when prospective jurors filled out questionnaires, some described Musk as, variously, "the next Trump," "a delusional narcissist," "arrogant," "irrational," and "crazy."

Spiro's understanding of Musk had no doubt evolved, too. He'd just come off a brief role handling legal matters for Twitter, which Musk had purchased the previous fall. The company was carrying about thirteen billion dollars of debt as a result of Musk's buyout, and advertisers were fleeing. Musk's panic was palpable as he introduced, and then abandoned, new initiatives to generate revenue. He also fired entire teams, reducing Twitter's staff by about fifty per cent in a matter of days. The chief privacy officer, the chief information-security officer, and the chief compliance officer left. One afternoon, when morale was especially low, Spiro addressed the staff at Twitter's San Francisco headquarters, making an impassioned case for sticking with Musk and trusting in his genius. Not long afterward, following a heated discussion with Musk in a glass-walled conference room, Spiro began spending less time at Twitter. (The *Times* reported that Musk had soured on some of Spiro's decisions.) But he remained Musk's go-to lawyer.

Before the Tesla-investor trial began, the judge ruled that the lawsuit had established both that Musk's tweets were false and that Musk had made them recklessly—effectively, a partial decision in favor of the plaintiffs, signalling that Musk could be held liable for their losses. To prevail, the investors now needed to establish that Musk's Twitter statements had caused the stock-price movements.

Opening arguments took place in mid-January. The plaintiffs were represented by a team led by Nicholas Porritt, a British partner at Levi & Korsinsky, who had previously recovered hundreds of millions of dollars in a shareholder lawsuit against Larry Page and the board of Google. Porritt began by telling the jurors that they were there because Elon Musk had lied, causing Tesla investors to lose "millions and millions of dollars." Spiro, in his opening, reprised his best lines about Musk as a truth-telling visionary. Musk was considering taking Tesla private and, Spiro claimed, had access to the financial resources to do it. The "funding secured" tweet was inconsequential, he said—"not even a full sentence. It's a thought bubble." Spiro conceded that Musk, rushed and distracted, had chosen his words artlessly, but, he emphasized, "this was all done for the mission, it was all done for the shareholders, and it was all done in good faith."

Three days later, Musk, flushed and wearing a dark-brown suit and combat boots, marched into the courtroom to testify. Porritt questioned him about, among other things, his habit of publishing information about Tesla on Twitter, and the impact of his tweets on the company's stock price. (Musk said that it was difficult to correlate Tesla's stock price to any particular tweet.)

When Spiro's turn came, his line of questioning became almost comical in its intent to make the billionaire seem at once relatable and untouchable. Spiro asked Musk what his childhood was like ("not good"), and about immigrating from South Africa to Canada when he was seventeen, and why he'd moved to the U.S. as soon as he could ("it is where great things are possible"). At Spiro's prodding, Musk talked about working his way through college and graduating with a hundred thousand dollars of debt. He listed the many companies he had founded or helped found. "I think I've raised more money than anyone in history at this point, by a significant margin," Musk said. "But, you know, the reason I'm able to raise money easily is because investors trust me to be truthful and responsible with their money."

Spiro, delivering his closing argument in a thundering voice, returned to Musk's humble background and pure intentions, then homed in on his point. "Ultimately, whatever you think of him, this isn't a bad-tweeter trial," Spiro said. "It's a did-they-prove-this-man-committed-fraud trial. And you know he didn't."

As the jury left to deliberate, Spiro and his cavalry repaired to a bar a few blocks from the courthouse. They had yet to finish the first round of drinks when one of Spiro's colleagues received a message that the verdict was in. They rushed back to the courthouse to learn that they had won.

In the months since the verdict, Spiro has sometimes worried that his chosen career isn't challenging enough, and has considered doing something else. He was recently approached to head an activist investment fund, he said, and to run several companies. But he wondered whether such jobs would give him the same thrill as working the courtroom. When Musk came calling again, earlier this month, to threaten Meta with a lawsuit over Threads, its new Twitter competitor, and, a second time, with a bid to curtail a Federal Trade Commission investigation into Twitter's data-security practices, Spiro signed on. "There's no other fight like this," he told me, eyes gleaming. "What other sophisticated profession is this binary, where somebody wins and somebody loses? "♦

ROYALLY SPEAKING

BY PAUL RUDNICK

Harry spoke with multiple producers and production houses . . . to discuss possible shows. Along the way, Harry listened to various ideas from others but mostly stuck by his own—including one about childhood trauma. The concept: Harry would interview a procession of controversial guests, such as Vladimir Putin, Mark Zuckerberg and Donald Trump, about their early formative years and how those experiences resulted in the adults they are today. . . . Harry hoped to have Pope Francis on as a guest.

—*Bloomberg*.

Many of these chats were recorded. Here's a sampling:

HARRY: So, was your childhood difficult? I mean, compared with mine?

PUTIN: Well, did you know my grandfather was a cook for both Lenin and Stalin? Can you imagine? Both of them, they'd pretend to eat grains and dirt, the food of the people, but Grandpa is fixing them kugel and vichyssoise and cupcakes. Lenin loved cupcakes. He would ask, "Should I promise the people cupcakes?"

HARRY: But were you hounded by paparazzi?

PUTIN: No, just wolves and other children. But, when kids would pick on me, do you know what I'd do? Two words: poisoned cupcakes.

HARRY: Was your father very distant?

PUTIN: Yes, sometimes we were in Leningrad, he was in Moscow. Many kilometres.

HARRY: Did you ever feel lost?

PUTIN: Of course. In the Leningrad train depot, because sometimes it was called St. Petersburg, so I'd wonder, How did I get to Florida?

HARRY: Mr. Trump, when you were a child, did you think your life was glamorous?

TRUMP: I grew up in Queens, so yes.

HARRY: Did you always want to be a businessman?

TRUMP: No, actually, I wanted to be a baseball player, but my dad gave me a million dollars and said, "Now you're a businessman." Then I went bankrupt six times and my dad said, "I should've been more specific. I should've said, 'Now you're a *good* businessman.'"

HARRY: Did you have trouble dating, because you were famous?

TRUMP: Never. So many girls—all they wanted to do was date me. So I'd pay them, and then they'd want another date. I thought, Man, I'm so popular.

HARRY: Why didn't you join the Army, like me?

TRUMP: Bone spurs, I think on my hands, somewhere. I wanted to enlist, but my doctor told me, "You have bone spurs, also syphilis." I'm kidding! I didn't have bone spurs.

HARRY: When you were little, did your footmen ever laugh at you?

ZUCKERBERG: Everyone laughed, because I cut my own hair, in a bowl cut. So I told myself, "Someday they'll be sorry. Someday I'll cut their hair."

HARRY: Did people expect you to be perfect?

ZUCKERBERG: Define "people."

HARRY: Your parents or teachers or your whole country.

ZUCKERBERG: Speak English. I'm still not getting the "people" thing.

HARRY: Did you dream of stealing the idea for Facebook and making billions?

ZUCKERBERG: Yes. And now I'm in a cage match with Elon Musk. Which was also a childhood dream. Along with having sex several times, with another person. Oh, now I'm getting your "people" thing.

HARRY: Your Holiness, when you were in grade school, did your teachers say, "You'd better behave, because someday you might be the Pope"?

FRANCIS: Yes, and then my mama would say, "If everyone else in the world dies."

HARRY: Do you miss your mom? She would've been so proud.

FRANCIS: Sometimes I picture her in Heaven, telling Jesus, "It's still not a grandchild."

HARRY: Did you have problems with your brother?

FRANCIS: I had four siblings, so I'd tell them, "Someday, when I'm the Pope, you're gonna want to be blessed. And you know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna say, 'Guards, give my brother a wedgie.'"

HARRY: Are you trying to make the world a better place?

FRANCIS: Every day. Mostly so I can meet Kate Middleton. What's she like?

HARRY: A little chilly.

FRANCIS: Yum. That's my type. I once met Ivanka Trump, and do you know what she asked me? She said, "Mr. Pope, can I build a golf course in the Vatican? And am I prettier than Kate Middleton? And was marrying Jared the best I could do?" So I told her, "If you wanted my answers, maybe you shouldn't have converted to Judaism."

HARRY: What advice would you give to a young prince?

FRANCIS: Just what I told Ivanka, if I was in her shoes. I said, "Listen to me, bubbeleh: pray." ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

U.S. JOURNAL

BREAKING NEWS

A small-town paper takes on the county sheriff.

BY PAIGE WILLIAMS

Bruce Willingham, fifty-two years a newspaperman, owns and publishes the McCurtain *Gazette,* in McCurtain County, Oklahoma, a rolling sweep of timber and lakes that forms the southeastern corner of the state. McCurtain County is geographically larger than Rhode Island and less populous than the average Taylor Swift concert. Thirty-one thousand people live there; forty-four hundred buy the *Gazette*, which has been in print since 1905, before statehood. At that time, the paper was known as the Idabel *Signal*, referring to the county seat. An early masthead proclaimed "INDIAN TERRITORY, CHOCTAW NATION."

Willingham bought the newspaper in 1988, with his wife, Gwen, who gave up a nursing career to become the *Gazette's* accountant. They operate out of a storefront office in downtown Idabel, between a package-shipping business and a pawnshop. The staff parks out back, within sight of an old Frisco railway station, and enters through the "morgue," where the bound archives are kept. Until recently, no one had reason to lock the door during the day.

Three days a week (five, before the pandemic), readers can find the latest on rodeo queens, school cafeteria menus, hardwood-mill closings, heat advisories. Some headlines: "Large Cat Sighted in Idabel," "Two of State's Three Master Bladesmiths Live Here," "Local Singing Group Enjoys Tuesdays." Anyone who's been cited for speeding, charged with a misdemeanor, applied for a marriage license, or filed for divorce will see his or her name listed in the "District Court Report." In Willingham's clutterbucket of an office, a hulking microfiche machine sits alongside his desktop computer amid lunar levels of dust; he uses the machine to unearth and reprint front pages from long ago. In 2017, he transported readers to 1934 via a banner headline: "NEGRO SLAYER OF WHITE MAN KILLED." The area has long been stuck with the nickname Little Dixie.

Gazette articles can be shorter than recipes, and what they may lack in detail, context, and occasionally accuracy, they make up for by existing at all. The paper does more than probe the past or keep tabs on the local felines. "We've investigated county officials *a lot*," Willingham, who is sixty-eight, said the other day. The *Gazette* exposed a county treasurer who allowed elected officials to avoid penalties for paying their property taxes late, and a utilities company that gouged poor customers while lavishing its executives with gifts. "To most people, it's Mickey Mouse stuff," Willingham told me. "But the problem is, if you let them get away with it, it gets worse and worse and worse."

The Willinghams' oldest son, Chris, and his wife, Angie, work at the *Gazette*, too. They moved to Idabel from Oklahoma City in the spring of 2005, not long after graduating from college. Angie became an editor, and Chris covered what is known in the daily-news business as cops and courts. Absurdity often made the front page—a five-m.p.h. police "chase" through town, a wayward snake. Three times in one year, the paper wrote about assaults in which the weapon was chicken and dumplings. McCurtain County, which once led the state in homicides, also produces more sinister blotter items: a man cashed his dead mother's Social Security checks for more than a year; a man killed a woman with a hunting bow and two arrows; a man raped a woman in front of her baby.

In a small town, a dogged reporter is inevitably an unpopular one. It isn't easy to write about an old friend's felony drug charge, knowing that you're going to see him at church. When Chris was a teen-

A series on McCurtain County's law enforcement led to an explosive revelation.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOSEPH RUSHMORE

ager, his father twice put *him* in the paper, for the misdemeanors of stealing beer, with buddies, at a grocery store where one of them worked, and parking illegally—probably with those same buddies, definitely with beer—on a backroad bridge, over a good fishing hole.

Chris has a wired earnestness and a voice that carries. Listening to a crime victim's story, he might boom, "*Gollll-ly!*" Among law-enforcement sources, "Chris was respected because he always asked questions about how the system works, about proper procedure," an officer said. Certain cops admired his willingness to pursue uncomfortable truths even if those truths involved one of their own. "If I was to do something wrong—on purpose, on accident—Chris Willingham one hundred per cent would write my butt in the paper, on the front page, in bold letters," another officer, who has known him for more than a decade, told me.

In the summer of 2021, Chris heard that there were morale problems within the McCurtain County Sheriff's Office. The sheriff, Kevin Clardy, who has woolly eyebrows and a mustache, and often wears a cowboy hat, had just started his second term. The first one had gone smoothly, but now, according to some colleagues, Clardy appeared to be playing favorites.

The current discord stemmed from two recent promotions. Clardy had brought in Larry Hendrix, a former deputy from another county, and, despite what some considered to be weak investigative skills, elevated him to undersheriff—second-in-command. Clardy had also hired Alicia Manning, who had taken up law enforcement only recently, in her forties. Rookies typically start out on patrol, but Clardy made Manning an investigator. Then he named her captain, a newly created position, from which she oversaw the department's two dozen or so deputies and managed cases involving violence against women and children. Co-workers were dismayed to see someone with so little experience rise that quickly to the third most powerful rank. "Never patrolled one night, never patrolled one day, in any law-enforcement aspect, anywhere in her life, and you're gonna bring her in and stick her in high crimes?" one officer who worked with her told me.

Chris was sitting on a tip that Clardy favored Manning because the two were having an affair. Then, around Thanksgiving, 2021, employees at the county jail, whose board is chaired by the sheriff, started getting fired, and quitting. The first to go was the jail's secretary, who had worked there for twenty-six years. The jail's administrator resigned on the spot rather than carry out the termination; the secretary's husband, the jail's longtime handyman, quit, too. When Chris interviewed Clardy about the unusual spate of departures, the sheriff pointed out that employment in Oklahoma is at will. "It is what it is," he said. In response to a question about nepotism, involving the temporary promotion of his stepdaughter's husband, Clardy revealed that he had been divorced for a few months and separated for more than a year. Chris asked, "Are you and Alicia having sex?" Clardy repeatedly said no, insisting, "We're good friends. Me and Larry's good friends, but I'm not having sex with Larry, either."

Meanwhile, someone had sent Chris photographs of the department's evidence room, which resembled a hoarder's nest. The mess invited speculation about tainted case material. In a front-page story, branded "first of a series," the *Gazette* printed the images, along with the news that Hendrix and Manning were warning deputies to stop all the "backdoor talk." The sheriff told staffers that anyone who spoke to the *Gazette* would be fired.

Manning has thick, ash-streaked hair, a direct manner, and what seems to be an unwavering loyalty to Clardy. She offered to help him flush out the leakers, and told another colleague that she wanted to obtain search warrants for cell phones belonging to deputies. When Chris heard that Manning wanted to confiscate *his* phone, he called the Oklahoma Press Association—and a lawyer. (Oklahoma has a shield law, passed in the seventies, which is designed to protect journalists' sources.) The lawyer advised Chris to leave his phone behind whenever he went to the sheriff's department. Angie was prepared to remotely wipe the device if Chris ever lost possession of it.

John Jones, a narcotics detective in his late twenties, cautioned Manning against abusing her authority. Jones was the sheriff's most prolific investigator, regarded as a forthright and talented young officer—a "velociraptor," according to one peer. He had documented the presence of the Sinaloa cartel in McCurtain County, describing meth smuggled from Mexico in shipments of pencils, and cash laundered through local casinos. Jones had filed hundreds of cases between 2019 and most of 2021, compared with a couple of dozen by Manning and Hendrix combined. The *Gazette* reported that, on December 1st—days after confronting Manning—Jones was bumped down to patrol. The next day, he quit.

Within the week, Hendrix fired the department's second most productive investigator, Devin Black. An experienced detective in his late thirties, Black had just recovered nearly a million dollars' worth of stolen tractors and construction equipment, a big deal in a county whose economy depends on agriculture and tourism. (At Broken Bow Lake, north of Idabel, newcomers are building hundreds of luxury cabins in Hochatown, a resort area known as the Hamptons of Dallas-Fort Worth.) Black said nothing publicly after his departure, but Jones published an open letter in the *Gazette*, accusing Hendrix of neglecting the case of a woman who said that she was raped at gunpoint during a home invasion. The woman told Jones that she had been restrained with duct tape during the attack, and that the tape might still be at her house. Hendrix, Jones wrote, "never followed up or even reached out to the woman again." Curtis Fields, a jail employee who had recently been fired, got a letter of his own published in the *Gazette*. He wrote that the sheriff's "maladministration" was "flat-out embarrassing to our entire county," and, worse, put "many cases at risk."

Around this time, Hendrix was moved over to run the jail, and Clardy hired Alicia Manning's older brother, Mike, to be the new undersheriff. Mike, who had long worked part time as a local law-enforcement officer, owned IN-Sight Technologies, a contractor that provided CCTV, security, and I.T. services to the county, including the sheriff's department. The Willinghams observed that his new position created a conflict of interest. In late December, the day after Mike's appointment, Chris and Bruce went to ask him about it. Mike said that he had resigned as IN-Sight's C.E.O. that very day and, after some prodding,

acknowledged that he had transferred ownership of the company—to his wife. He assured the Willinghams that IN-Sight's business with McCurtain County was "minuscule." According to records that I requested from the county clerk, McCurtain County has issued at least two hundred and thirty-nine thousand dollars in purchase orders to the company since 2016. The county commissioners have authorized at least eighty thousand dollars in payments to IN-Sight since Mike became undersheriff.

Mike urged the Willinghams to focus on more important issues. When he said, "I'm not here to be a whipping post, because there's a lot of crime going on right now," Chris replied, "Oh, yeah, I agree." The undersheriff claimed to have no problem with journalists, saying, "I'm a constitutional guy."

State "sunshine" laws require government officials to do the people's business in public: most records must be accessible to anyone who wishes to see them, and certain meetings must be open to anyone who would like to attend. Bruce Willingham once wrote, "We are aggressive about protecting the public's access to records and meetings, because we have found that if we don't insist on both, often no one else will." The Center for Public Integrity grades each state on the quality of its open-government statutes and practices. At last check, Oklahoma, along with ten other states, got an F.

In January, 2022, Chris noticed a discrepancy between the number of crimes listed in the sheriff's logbook and the correlating reports made available to him. Whereas he once saw thirty to forty reports per week, he now saw fewer than twenty. "The ones that I get are like 'loose cattle on somebody's land,' all very minor stuff," he told me. He often didn't find out about serious crime until it was being prosecuted. In his next article, he wrote that fifty-three reports were missing, including information about "a shooting, a rape, an elementary school teacher being unknowingly given marijuana cookies by a student and a deputy allegedly shooting out the tires" of a car. The headline was "SHERIFF REGULARLY BREAKING LAW NOW."

Two weeks later, the sheriff's department landed back on page 1 after four felons climbed through the roof of the jail, descended a radio tower, and fled—the first escape in twenty-three years. Chris reported that prisoners had been sneaking out of the jail throughout the winter to pick up "drugs, cell phones and beer" at a nearby convenience store.

Three of the escapees were still at large when, late one Saturday night in February, Alyssa Walker-Donaldson, a former Miss McCurtain County, vanished after leaving a bar in Hochatown. When the sheriff's department did not appear to be exacting in its search, volunteers mounted their own. It was a civilian in a borrowed Cessna who spotted Walker-Donaldson's white S.U.V. at the bottom of Broken Bow Lake. An autopsy showed that she had suffered acute intoxication by alcohol and drowned in what was described as an accident. The findings failed to fully explain how Walker-Donaldson, who was twenty-four, wound up in the water, miles from where she was supposed to be, near a boat ramp at the end of a winding road. "Even the U.P.S. man can't get down there," Walker-Donaldson's mother, Carla Giddens, told me. Giddens wondered why all five buttons on her daughter's high-rise jeans were undone, and why her shirt was pushed above her bra. She told a local TV station, "Nothing was handled right when it came to her." Giddens suspected that the sheriff's disappointing search could be attributed to the fact that her daughter was Black and Choctaw. (She has since called for a new investigation.)

Not long after that, the sheriff's department responded to a disturbance at a roadside deli. A deputy, Matt Kasbaum, arrived to find a man hogtied on the pavement; witnesses, who said that the man had broken a door and was trying to enter people's vehicles, had trussed him with cord. "Well, this is interesting," Kasbaum remarked. He handcuffed the man, Bobby Barrick, who was forty-five, then cut loose the cord and placed him in the back seat of a patrol unit. An E.M.S. crew arrived to examine Barrick. "He's doped up *hard*," Kasbaum warned. When he opened the door, Barrick tried to kick his way out, screaming "Help me!" and "They're gonna kill me!" As officers subdued him, Barrick lost consciousness. Several days later, he died at a hospital in Texas.

The public initially knew little of this because the sheriff refused to release information, on the ground that Barrick belonged to the Choctaw Nation and therefore the arrest fell under the jurisdiction of tribal police. The Willinghams turned to the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, a nonprofit, headquartered in Washington, D.C., that provides pro-bono legal services to journalists. (The Reporters Committee has also assisted *The New Yorker*.) The organization had recently assigned a staff attorney to Oklahoma, an indication of how difficult it is to pry information from public officials there. Its attorneys helped the *Gazette* sue for access to case documents; the paper then reported that Kasbaum had tased Barrick three times on his bare hip bone. Barrick's widow filed a lawsuit, alleging that the taser was not registered with the sheriff's department and that deputies had not been trained to use it. The suit also alleged that Kasbaum and other officers had turned off their lapel cameras during the encounter and put "significant pressure on Barrick's back while he was in a face-down prone position and handcuffed." Kasbaum, who denied the allegations, left the force. The *Gazette* reported that the F.B.I. and the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation were looking into the death.

Chris and Angie got married soon after joining the *Gazette*. By the time Chris began publishing his series on the sheriff's department, they were in their late thirties, with small children, two dogs, and a house on a golf course. They once had a bluegrass band, Succotash, in which Angie played Dobro and Chris played everything, mainly fiddle. He taught music lessons and laid down tracks for clients at his in-home studio. Angie founded McCurtain Mosaics, working with cut glass. The couple, who never intended to become journalists, suppressed the occasional urge to leave the *Gazette*, knowing that they would be hard to replace. Bruce lamented, "Everybody wants to work in the big city."

Five days a week, in the newsroom, Chris and Angie sit in high-walled cubicles, just outside Bruce's office. The *Gazette's* other full-time reporters include Bob West, who is eighty-one and has worked at the paper for decades. An ardent chronicler of museum events, local schools, and the weather, West is also known, affectionately, as the staffer most likely to leave his car running, with the

ARS POETICA

1.

—a plum and othering dusk,
something renunciatory in the light,
until the sparrow takes the old tree's shape
and the trees untreed are everywhere.

If I could let go
If I could know what there is to let go
If I could chance the night's improvidence
and be the being this hard mercy means.

2.
These lost and charnel thoughts
less thoughts than bits of stun
I suddenly find myself among;

that are the me I am when I am not
sleeked to reason and pacific despair
speak to me of a pain that saves,

some endmost ear to shrive the mind.

—Christian Wiman

windows down, in the rain, or to arrive at work with his toothbrush in his shirt pocket. He once leaned on his keyboard and accidentally deleted the newspaper's digital Rolodex. One afternoon in May, he ambled over to Angie's desk, where the Willinghams and I were talking, and announced, "Hail, thunderstorms, damaging winds!" A storm was coming.

Bruce and Gwen Willingham own commercial real estate, and they rent several cabins to vacationers in Hochatown. Chris said, "If we didn't have tourism to fall back on, we couldn't run the newspaper. The newspaper *loses* money." An annual subscription costs seventy-one bucks; the rack price is fifty cents on weekdays, seventy-five on the weekend. During the pandemic, the Willinghams reduced both the publishing schedule and the size of the broadsheet, to avoid layoffs. The paper's receptionist, who is in her sixties, has worked there since she was a teen-ager; a former pressman, who also started in his teens, left in his nineties, when his doctor demanded that he retire. In twenty-five paces, a staffer can traverse the distance between the newsroom and the printing press—the *Gazette* is one of the few American newspapers that still publish on-site, or at all. Since 2005, more than one in four papers across the country have closed; according to the Medill School of Journalism, at Northwestern University, two-thirds of U.S. counties don't have a daily paper. When Chris leads tours for elementary-school students, he schedules them for afternoons when there's a print run, though he isn't one to preach about journalism's vital role in a democracy. He's more likely to jiggle one of the thin metal printing plates, to demonstrate how stagehands mimic thunder.

As the Walker-Donaldson case unfolded, Chris got a tip that the sheriff used meth and had been "tweaking" during the search for her. Bruce asked the county commissioners to require Clardy to submit to a drug test. Urinalysis wasn't good enough—the *Gazette* wanted a hair-follicle analysis, which has a much wider detection window. The sheriff peed in a cup. Promptly, prominently, the *Gazette* reported the results, which were negative, but noted that Clardy had declined the more comprehensive test.

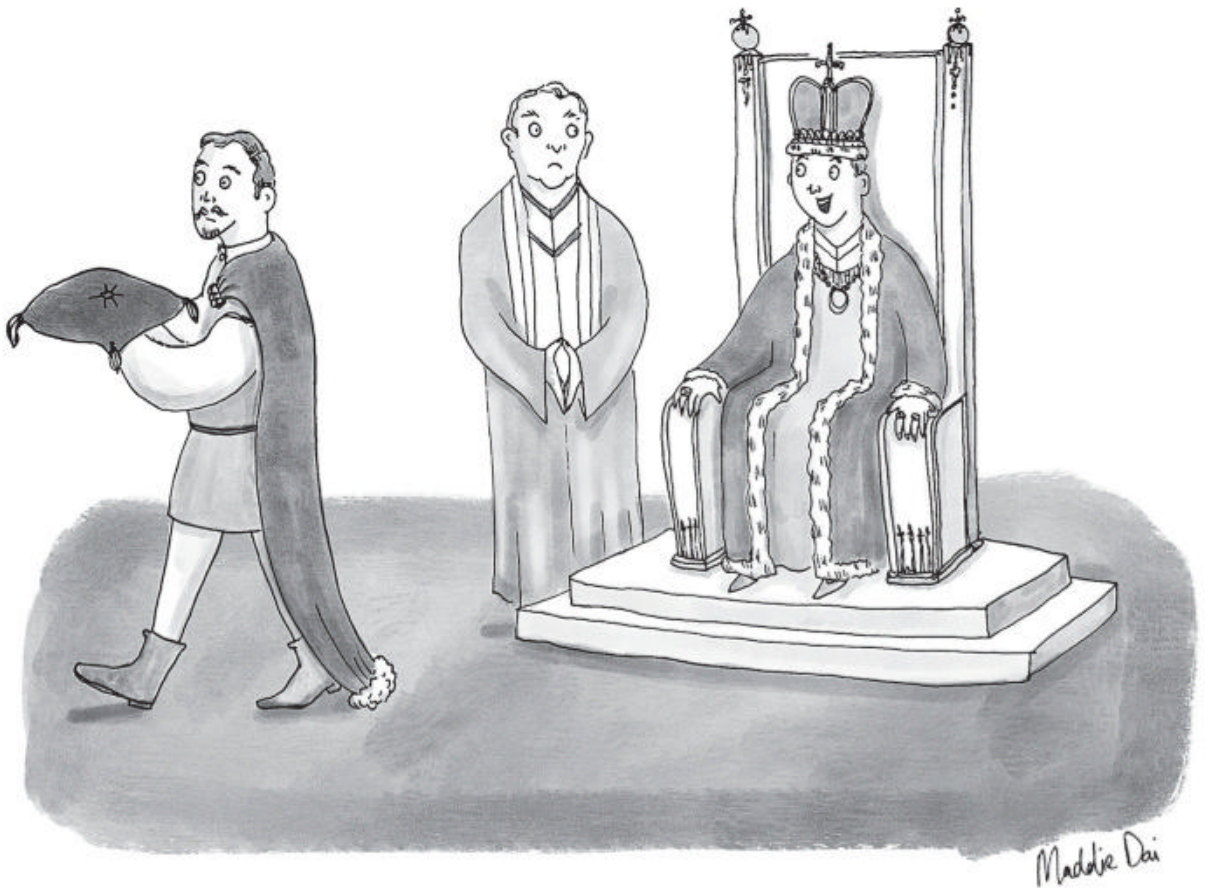
"This has to stop!" the sheriff posted on the department's Facebook page. Complaining about "the repeated attacks on law enforcement," he wrote, "We have a job to do and that is to protect people. We can't cater to the newspaper or social media every day of the week." Clardy blamed the *Gazette's* reporting on "former employees who were terminated or resigned."

Locals who were following the coverage and the reactions couldn't decide what to make of the devolving relationship between the *Gazette* and county leadership. Was their tiny newspaper needlessly antagonizing the sheriff, or was it insisting on accountability in the face of misconduct? Craig Young, the mayor of Idabel, told me that he generally found the paper's reporting to be accurate; he also said that the county seemed to be doing a capable job of running itself. He just hoped that nothing would disrupt Idabel's plans to host an upcoming event that promises to draw thousands of tourists. On April 8, 2024, a solar eclipse will arc across the United States, from Dallas, Texas, to Caribou, Maine. McCurtain County lies in one of the "totality zones." According to NASA, between one-forty-five and one-forty-nine that afternoon, Idabel will experience complete darkness.

In October, 2022, Chris got another explosive tip—about himself. A local law-enforcement officer sent him audio excerpts of a telephone conversation with Captain Manning. The officer did not trust Manning, and had recorded their call. (Oklahoma is a one-party-consent state.) They discussed office politics and sexual harassment. Manning recalled that, after she was hired, a detective took bets on which co-worker would "hit it," or sleep with her, first. Another colleague gossiped that she "gave a really good blow job."

The conversation turned to Clardy's drug test. As retribution, Manning said that she wanted to question Chris in one of her sex-crime investigations—at a county commissioners' meeting, "in front of everybody." She went on, "We will see if they want to write about that in the newspaper. That's just the way I roll. 'O.K., you don't wanna talk about it? Fine. But it's "public record." Y'all made mine and Kevin's business public record.'"

At the time, Manning was investigating several suspected pedophiles, including a former high-school math



"And how long till they start saying 'the Great' after my name?"

• •

teacher who was accused of demanding nude photographs in exchange for favorable grades. (The teacher is now serving thirteen years in prison.) Manning told a TV news station that "possibly other people in the community" who were in a "position of power" were involved. On the recorded call, she mentioned pedophilia defendants by name and referred to Chris as "one of them." Without citing evidence, she accused him of trading marijuana for videos of children.

Chris, stunned, suspected that Manning was just looking for an excuse to confiscate his phone. But when he started to lose music students, and his kids' friends stopped coming over, he feared that rumors were spreading in the community. A source warned him that Manning's accusations could lead to his children being forensically interviewed, which happens in child-abuse investigations. He developed such severe anxiety and depression that he rarely went out; he gave his firearms to a relative in case he felt tempted to harm himself. Angie was experiencing panic attacks and insomnia. "We were not managing," she said.

That fall, as Chris mulled his options, a powerful tornado struck Idabel. Bruce and Gwen lost their home. They stored their salvaged possessions at the *Gazette* and temporarily moved in with Chris and Angie. In December, the *Gazette* announced that Chris planned to sue Manning. On March 6th, he did, in federal court, alleging "slander and intentional infliction of emotional distress" in retaliation for his reporting. Clardy was also named as a defendant, for allowing and encouraging the retaliation to take place. (Neither he nor Manning would speak with me.)

In May, both Clardy and Manning answered the civil complaint in court. Clardy denied the allegations against him. Manning cited protection under the legal doctrine of qualified immunity, which is often used to indemnify law-enforcement officers from civil action and prosecution. She denied the allegations and asserted that, if Chris Willingham suffered severe emotional distress, it fell within the limits of what "a reasonable person could be expected to endure."

On the day that Chris filed his lawsuit, the McCurtain County Board of Commissioners held its regular Monday meeting, at 9 A.M., in a red brick building behind the jail. Commissioners—there are three in each of Oklahoma's seventy-seven counties—oversee budgets and allocate funding. Their meeting agendas must be public, so that citizens can scrutinize government operations. Bruce, who has covered McCurtain's commissioners for more than forty years, suspected the board of discussing business not listed on the agenda—a potential misdemeanor—and decided to try to catch them doing it.

Two of the three commissioners—Robert Beck and Mark Jennings, the chairman—were present, along with the board's executive assistant, Heather Carter. As they neared the end of the listed agenda, Bruce slipped a recording device disguised as a pen into a cup holder at the center of the conference table. "Right in front of 'em," he bragged. He left, circling the block for the next several hours as he waited for the commissioners to clear out. When they did, he went back inside, pretended to review some old paperwork, and retrieved the recording device.

That night, after Gwen went to bed, Bruce listened to the audio, which went on for three hours and thirty-seven minutes. He heard other county officials enter the room, one by one—"Like, 'Now is your time to see the king.'"

In came Sheriff Clardy and Larry Hendrix. Jennings, whose family is in the timber business, brought up the 2024 race for sheriff. He predicted numerous candidates, saying, "They don't have a goddam clue what they're getting into, not in this day and age." It used to be, he said, that a sheriff could "take a damn Black guy and whup their ass and throw 'em in the cell."

"Yeah, well, it's not like that no more," Clardy said.

"I know," Jennings said. "Take 'em down there on Mud Creek and hang 'em up with a damn rope. But you can't do that anymore. They got more rights than *we* got."

After a while, Manning joined the meeting. She arrived to a boisterous greeting from the men in the room. When she characterized a colleague's recent comment about her legs as sexual harassment, Beck replied, "I thought sexual harassment was only when they held you down and pulled you by the hair." They joked about Manning mowing the courthouse lawn in a bikini.

Manning continually steered the conversation to the *Gazette*. Jennings sug-

gested procuring a "worn-out tank," plowing it into the newspaper's office, and calling it an accident. The sheriff told him, "You'll have to beat my son to it." (Clardy's son is a deputy sheriff.) They laughed.

Manning talked about the possibility of bumping into Chris Willingham in town: "I'm not worried about what he's gonna do to me, I'm worried about what I might do to him." A couple of minutes later, Jennings said, "I know where two big deep holes are here, if you ever need them."

"I've got an excavator," the sheriff said.

"Well, these are already pre-dug," Jennings said. He went on, "I've known two or three hit men. They're very quiet guys. And would cut no fucking mercy."

Bruce had been threatened before, but this felt different. According to the U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, forty-one journalists in the country were physically assaulted last year. Since 2001, at least thirteen have been killed. That includes Jeff German, a reporter at the Las Vegas *Review-Journal*, who, last fall, was stabbed outside his home in Clark County. The county's former administrator, Robert Telles, has been charged with his murder. Telles had been voted out of office after German reported that he contributed to a hostile workplace and had an inappropriate relationship with an employee. (Telles denied the reporting and has pleaded not guilty.)

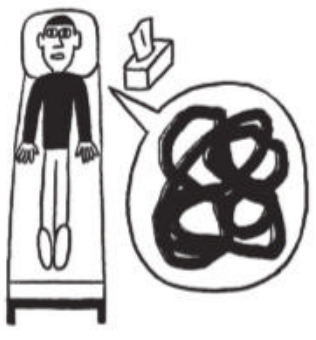
When Bruce urged Chris to buy more life insurance, Chris demanded to hear the secret recording. The playback physically sickened him. Bruce took the tape to the Idabel Police Department. Mark Matloff, the district attorney, sent it to state officials in Oklahoma City, who began an investigation.

Chris started wearing an AirTag tracker in his sock when he played late-night gigs. He carried a handgun in his car, then stopped—he and Angie worried that an officer could shoot him and claim self-defense. He talked incessantly about "disappearing" to another state. At one point, he told his dad, "I cursed our lives by deciding to move here."

It was tempting to think that everybody was watching too much "Ozark." But one veteran law-enforcement official took the meeting remarks seriously enough to park outside Chris and Angie's house at night, to keep watch. "There's an undertone of violence in the whole conversation," this official told me. "We're hiring a hit man, we're hanging people, we're driving vehicles into the McCurtain *Gazette*. These are the people that are *running* your sheriff's office."

On Saturday, April 15th, the newspaper published a front-page article, headlined "COUNTY OFFICIALS DISCUSS KILLING, BURYING *GAZETTE* REPORTERS." The revelation that McCurtain County's leadership had been caught talking wistfully about lynching and about the idea of murdering journalists became global news. "Both the FBI and the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office now have the full audio," the *Gazette* reported. (The McCurtain County Board of Commissioners declined to speak with me. A lawyer for the sheriff's office wrote, in response to a list of questions, that "numerous of your alleged facts are inaccurate, embellished or outright untrue.")

On the eve of the story's publication, Chris and his family had taken refuge in Hot Springs, Arkansas. They were still there when, that Sunday, Kevin Stitt, the governor of Oklahoma, publicly demanded the resignations of Clardy, Manning, Hendrix, and Jennings. The next day, protesters rallied at the McCurtain County commissioners' meeting. Jennings, the board's chairman, resigned two days later. No one else did. The sheriff's department responded to the *Gazette's* reporting by calling Bruce's actions illegal and the audio "altered." (Chris told me that he reduced the background noise in the audio file before Bruce took it to the police.)



People wanted to hear the recording, not just read about it, but the *Gazette* had no Web site. No one had posted on the newspaper's Facebook page since 2019, when Kiara Wimbley won the Little Miss Owa Chito pageant. The Willinghams published an oversized QR code on the front page of the April 20th issue, linking to a Dropbox folder that contained the audio and Angie's best attempt at a transcript. They eventually put Chris's articles online.

In a rare move, the seventeen-member board of the Oklahoma Sheriffs' Association voted unanimously to suspend the memberships of Clardy, Manning, and Hendrix. The censure blocked them from conferences and symbolically ostracized them from Oklahoma's seventy-six other sheriffs. "When one goes bad, it has a devastating effect on everybody," Ray McNair, the executive director, told me. Craig Young, Idabel's mayor, said, "It kind of hurt everyone to realize we've had these kind of leaders in place."

Young was among those who hoped that Gentner Drummond, the attorney general, would depose the sheriff "so we can start to recover." But, on June 30th, Drummond ended his investigation by informing Governor Stitt that although the McCurtain County officials' conversation was "inflammatory" and "offensive," it wasn't criminal. There would be no charges. If Clardy were to be removed from office, voters would have to do it.

Decades ago, Bruce launched "Call the Editor," a regular feature on the *Gazette's* opinion page. Readers vent anonymously to the newspaper's answering machine, and Bruce publishes some of the transcribed messages. When the world ran out of answering machines, he grudgingly upgraded to digital, which requires plugging the fax cable into his computer every afternoon at five and switching it back the next morning. A caller might refer to Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer as "buffoons," or ask, Why is the Fire Department charging me a fifty-cent fee? There have been many recent messages about the sheriff and the commissioners, including direct addresses to Clardy: "The people aren't supposed to be scared . . . of you or others that wear a badge."

Bruce and Gwen worried that the ongoing stress would drive Chris and Angie away from the *Gazette*—and from McCurtain County. Sure enough, they're moving to Tulsa. Angie told me, "We're forty years old. We've been doing this half our lives. At some point, we need to think of our own happiness, and our family's welfare." Bruce protested, but he couldn't much blame them. ♦

MONEY ON THE WALL

How Larry Gagosian reshaped the art world.

BY PATRICK RADDEN KEEFE

It was the Friday afternoon of Memorial Day weekend on Further Lane, the best street in Amagansett, the best town in the Hamptons, and the art dealer Larry Gagosian was bumming around his eleven-thousand-square-foot modernist beach mansion, looking pretty relaxed for a man who, the next day, would host a party for a hundred and forty people. A pair of French bulldogs, Baby and Humphrey, waddled about, and Gagosian's butler, Eddie, a slim man with a ponytail and an air of informal professionalism, handed him a sparkling water. Gagosian sat down on a leather sofa in the living room, his back to the ocean view, and faced a life-size Charles Ray sculpture of a male nude, in reflective steel, and a Damien Hirst grand piano (bright pink with blue butterflies) that he'd picked up at a benefit auction some years back, for four hundred and fifty thousand dollars. On a coffee table before him was a ceramic Yoshitomo Nara ashtray the size of a Frisbee, decorated with a picture of a little girl smoking and the words "TOO YOUNG TO DIE."

Gagosian is not a household name for most Americans, but among the famous and the wealthy—and particularly among the very wealthy—he is a figure of colossal repute. He is dubious of art dealers who refer to themselves as "gallerists," which he regards as a pretentious euphemism that obscures the mercantile essence of the occupation. He has always favored a certain macho bluntness, and calls himself a dealer without apology. With nineteen galleries that bear his name, from New York to London to Athens to Hong Kong, generating more than a billion dollars in annual revenue, Gagosian may well be the biggest art dealer in the history of the world. He represents more than a hundred artists, living and dead, including many of the most celebrated and lucrative: Jenny Saville, Anselm Kiefer, Cy Twombly, Donald Judd. The business—which he owns without a partner or a shareholder or a spouse or children or anyone, really, to answer to—controls more than two hundred thousand square feet of prime real estate. All told, Gagosian has more exhibition space than most museums, and he shuttles among his outposts on his sixty-million-dollar Bombardier Global 7500 private jet. He's been known to observe, with the satisfaction of Alexander the Great, "The sun never sets on my gallery."

Traditionally, the model for dealers has been to bet on raw talents, and support these artists until work by some of them sells well enough to cover the bets made on all the others. Under the mega-gallery model that Gagosian pioneered, the top dealers don't even bother with nascent artists. He has said plainly that an artist must achieve certain sales metrics before he'll consider getting involved. Ellie Rines, who runs 56 Henry, a small gallery on the Lower East Side, told me, "What I can do that the big galleries can't is that I spot someone who has potential. I say, 'There's something brewing here—the actual work may not be good, but there's something tingling, it's getting at something.'" Gagosian is content to let people like Rines do the wildcatting. Once they've discovered an unknown and nurtured her into a valuable commodity, he can lure the artist away with promises of more money, more support, and a bigger platform. When contemporaries describe Gagosian, they tend to summon carnivore analogies: a tiger, a shark, a snake. His own publicist once described him as "a real killer."

The languid calm that he exuded on the eve of the Amagansett party was that of a predator between meals. At seventy-eight, he remains tall and broad-shouldered, with a full head of white hair that he keeps trimmed close to the scalp, like a beaver pelt. Gagosian has blue eyes, which often flash with mirth—he has a quick, salty sense of humor—but they can just as suddenly go blank if he feels threatened or wants to be inscrutable. In conversation, these abrupt transitions from easy bonhomie to enigmatic hostility and back again can be jarring.

"I have a weakness for entertaining," Gagosian told me. At seven the following morning, he explained, trucks would arrive with garden furniture, and his staff would mobilize. There would be barbecue. Pizza baked in an outdoor oven. An Aperol-spritz bar and a gelato truck. Even as a child, Gagosian recalled, he liked to "have people over to my place," and to his many friends and customers and sycophants the yearly swirl of "Larry parties" has become its own exclusive social calendar. In addition to the Memorial Day party, there is a Labor Day party, also in Amagansett; a dinner at Art Basel, in Switzerland, every June; a one-night-only exhibition at Casa Malaparte, a cliff-side house in Capri; birthday parties and pre-release film screenings and opening-night banquets; a New Year's bash at his place in St. Barts; and a pre-Oscars party at his home in Los Angeles. The sheer magnitude of his overhead is a source of envy—and confusion. His close friend Glenn Fuhrman, a financier and art collector, told me, "I've had so many conversations with other dealers over the years who are just dumbstruck that Larry could possibly be making money. They say, 'I know how *my* business works—I don't understand how he could be making a profit.'"

Gagosian vets each guest list with the vigilance of a night-club bouncer. Of the Memorial Day festivities, he said, "There's nobody invited that I didn't approve." The crowd, he explained, would consist of "billionaires, artists, neighbors—mostly people I really know and am close to." A pause, a wolfish grin. "Or want to be close to." Derek Blasberg, a writer and fashion editor who has held a staff position at Gagosian's gallery since 2014, told me, "Larry is a full-time gallerist

ART WORKS © RICHARD PRINCE

Gagosian, alongside works by Richard Prince, insisted that he doesn't "sell art out of my house," then allowed that he has.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TINA BARNEY

and a part-time casting agent. He knows how to pull the right mix of people from worlds that are financially lucrative and creatively inspiring." Blasberg is known for his friendships with models and actresses, which he chronicles on a popular Instagram feed. Often, Blasberg told me, Gagosian will call him and say, "I saw you with So-and-So. Can you invite them?"

A Gagosian party requires adroit curation. Too many billionaires and it'll be as dull as Davos; too many artists and celebrities and who's going to buy the art? Some years ago, a staffer planning a dinner for a Richard Prince opening wrote in an e-mail to colleagues, "Before Larry approves this list he would like to know if you have sold any art to these people." That list included actors (Robert De Niro, Leonardo DiCaprio), fat-cat art collectors (Steve Cohen, Henry Kravis), and models (Gisele Bündchen, Kate Moss). Models are important, Gagosian once explained, because they "look good at a dinner table."

The beach house's front door opened and Anna Weyant, Gagosian's girlfriend, entered. She is petite and blond and was wearing oversized sunglasses and holding a half-finished beer. Her hair was wet and she greeted him warmly.

"Were you swimming?" Gagosian asked.

"Yeah," she said, smiling, before disappearing upstairs.

At twenty-eight, Weyant is half a century younger than Gagosian. She is also one of his artists, and her work has sold at auction for more than a million dollars. One painting, an eerily sensual oil portrait of an upside-down young woman who is sticking out her tongue, hangs in the vestibule, between a Prince and a Twombly.

Gagosian has been so successful selling art to the masters of the universe that somewhere along the line he stopped being their servant. "He's *one* of them," Andy Avini, a senior director at the gallery, told me. In fact, for much of Gagosian's clientele he is less a peer than an aspirational figure.

Unlike many luxury items, art works tend to be unique objects—"one of one," in the parlance of the trade. The designer Marc Jacobs told me, "Larry sells things that aren't for sale." Typically, the most coveted items become available only when the previous owner dies, or gets divorced, or goes bankrupt. An élite dealer like Gagosian, however, can sometimes wrest away a treasure by offering the owner—ideally someone he knows—a whopping premium. If you want the right kind of Jasper Johns to round out your collection, you enlist Gagosian to help you find one hanging on somebody else's wall, then make the owner an offer he can't refuse. If he does refuse, double the offer. Then, if necessary, double it again. It is the super-rich equivalent of ordering off-menu.

Gagosian maintains his influence by attending to the discreet status anxiety of the buyer who already has everything. Aaron Richard Golub, an attorney who represents galleries and wealthy collectors—and who has litigated against Gagosian on numerous occasions—told me, "People in the art world are incredibly insecure. The richest guy walks into the room. He wants a certain painting, but he can't get it. Immediately, he's insecure. That really is part of what Larry does. He exploits that." A friend of Gagosian's described attending a dinner at the dealer's Manhattan town house, along with a fabulously wealthy tech founder, and witnessing a look of "real consternation" on the young man's face as it dawned on him that, for all his money and power, he was not as connected as Gagosian, not as cultured, not as cool. Everybody was having a grand time, yet this potentate was experiencing an unspoken social demotion. Suddenly, he was a mere arriviste—a visitor at a club to which he didn't belong. "It's incredible," Loïc Gouzer, a friend of Gagosian's and a former co-chairman of contemporary art at Christie's, marvelled. "He inverted this thing where normally the art dealers were trying to emulate their clients. Larry's clients are trying to emulate *him*."

Gagosian isn't the first to pull off this transposition. He is a big reader, and one of his favored subjects is the life of Joseph Duveen, the great dealer who helped assemble the collections of Andrew Mellon, J. P. Morgan, and other Gilded Age titans. There are several biographies of Duveen, Gagosian informed me, and he has "read 'em all." According to one of them, by S. N. Behrman, Duveen made a point of "showing his multimillionaire clients that he lived better than they did."

Numerous friends of Gagosian's cautioned me not to mistake the merry-go-round of parties and galas and superyacht cruises for a life of sybaritic leisure. The dealer and collector Tico Mugrabi, who has made many deals with Gagosian, said, "The guy is always working, even when he's having fun. This motherfucker works 24/7." The British painter Jenny Saville, the most expensive living female artist, who has worked with Gagosian throughout her career, concurred: "Even if he's having dinner, or if he's on holiday on a boat, it's not a holiday. All the fun dinners—they have a *reason* for being fun."

Gagosian's longtime friend Jean Pigozzi, a photographer and collector, described the parties as marketing showcases in disguise. "Larry's a genius at finding these guys, then he brings them to his house, and people say, 'Oh, perhaps *I* should get a couple of Picassos.'" Once, Pigozzi recalled, he was at Gagosian's Manhattan home with the French billionaire Bernard Arnault, and Arnault expressed enthusiasm for some art on display. "I told him, 'Everything here is for sale. Don't be nervous. You want to buy the chair? You can buy the chair. You want to buy the painting? Just ask! It's all for sale.'" Gagosian insisted to me that he does not "sell art out of my house," then allowed that he actually has. A true dealer knows that everything has a price, and the best way to raise the price of something is to say that you would never sell it.

As Gagosian likes to point out, he didn't start life as an insider. He came of age in the San Fernando Valley, in a middle-class Armenian American family. His father, Ara, was a municipal accountant who later retrained as a stockbroker. The family never went to museums or emphasized the visual arts. But Gagosian's parents both dabbled in show biz, performing in an Armenian theatre troupe, and his mother, Ann, had a small role in "Journey Into Fear," a 1943 movie that was produced by Orson Welles. Once, when Gagosian asked his mother what Welles had been like, she revealed that he'd taken her out for coffee. "And I said, 'O.K., I don't want to know any more,'" Gagosian recalled with a chuckle, adding, "My mom was attractive."

It wasn't a happy childhood. Ara "liked to gamble, I think more than he should,"

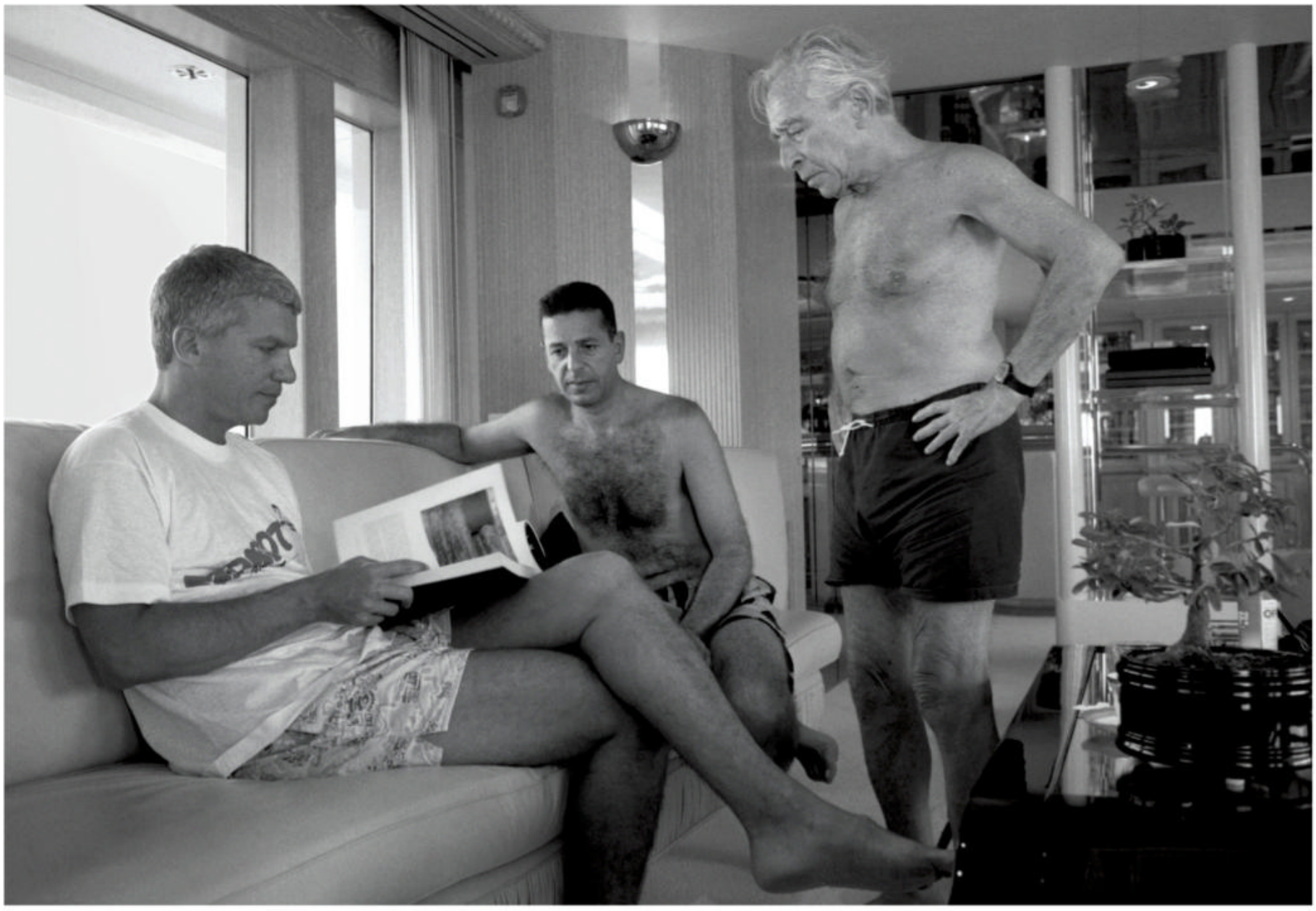
Gagosian said, and also "drank probably more than he should." Gagosian rebelled as a teen-ager, and he told me that it was hard for his father "to discipline me, in a certain way, because *his* life didn't seem particularly disciplined." Most of Ara's stockbroking, Gagosian said, seemed to consist of "trying to talk his relatives into buying securities from him." (Gagosian has a sister, Judy, who declined to be interviewed for this article.) One peculiarity of Gagosian's origin story, at least in his telling, is that his early years had a notable deficit of the quality that has come to define his life: ambition. He attended U.C.L.A., where he studied English, joined the swim team, and did a little photography. But he dropped out twice and took six years to graduate. It was the sixties, and he was in no hurry: he was a good-looking guy who liked chasing girls and playing pool and getting stoned with his pals. There was a brief, ill-considered marriage, in Vegas, to a college girlfriend, Gwyn Ellen Garside. They divorced after sixteen days. It was "stupid" to marry so young, Gagosian says now. In the divorce papers, Garside explained that she'd married him with the false understanding that they would "have children" and "both work and save to be self-supporting and to build a future together." Gagosian's aimlessness was so pronounced that his father once said, in exasperation, "If you just do something with your life, *I'll* buy you pot." (In 1969, the year Gagosian finally graduated, Ara died, of lung cancer. He was fifty-nine.)

After college came a string of menial jobs: in a record store; in a grocery store; the graveyard shift at a gas station. Then, through a cousin, Gagosian became an assistant at the William Morris Agency, answering phones and reading scripts. But he hated the airless corporate environment and the jockeying of his colleagues, likening the experience to "a knife fight in a phone booth." He has occasionally suggested that he was fired by William Morris, but when I spoke to Michael Ovitz, who supervised him there, he insisted that Gagosian quit. "I tried to get him to stay!" Ovitz recalled, adding that he thinks Gagosian could have made a formidable agent. He noted of art dealing, "The vocations are similar. You're buying and selling."

Gagosian started working as a parking attendant in Westwood. He didn't mind the job, he says: it paid better than the ninety dollars a week he'd made at William Morris. Then one day, in a moment now enshrined in art-world lore, he noticed a street vender selling posters at the edge of the parking lot. If Gagosian possesses one secret weapon that has equipped him for success, it might be his disinhibition. He approached the vender. The posters were "schlock," Gagosian told me—a kitten toying with a ball of yarn and other images you might find on the wall at a pediatrician's office. But they seemed to be selling. So Gagosian proceeded to, in his words, "copy the guy's business." The posters came from a company called Ira Roberts of Beverly Hills, and Gagosian started buying directly from the firm and selling on his own. Art was an arbitrary choice, in his account: "If he'd been selling belt buckles, I might've tried to sell belt buckles."

By adding a cheap frame, he discovered, he could sell a two-dollar poster at a considerable markup, for fifteen bucks. He leased a little patio on Broxton Avenue, in Westwood, and sold framed posters to passersby. Gradually, Gagosian's slacker instincts gave way to a more hard-nosed entrepreneurialism. He began letting local craftspeople sell leather goods and painted trinkets on the patio, in exchange for six dollars a day and ten per cent of their gross. In an optimistic flourish, he bestowed a name on his ad-hoc enterprise: the Open Gallery. In 1972, Gagosian told the Los Angeles *Times*, "It's sort of a halfway house, halfway between having to be in business for yourself and being a stone-freak-do-nothing hippie." Eventually, he hired a few people and moved indoors, opening a proper shop on Broxton. One early employee was the musician Kim Gordon, who, before she formed the band Sonic Youth, assembled thousands of picture frames for Gagosian. In a 2015

"I vow to recount every weird dream I have with a generous amount of detail."



Gagosian, the businessman and collector Charles Saatchi, and the dealer Leo Castelli, in St. Barts in 1991.

memoir, Gordon recalled him shouting at her when she worked too slowly, and noted, "He was erratic, and the last person on the planet I would have ever thought would later become the world's most powerful art dealer."

Ara Gagosian might never have made much money, Larry told me, but he always had "a nice car in the driveway." At the start of Larry's ascent, he also projected an image of success that was out of proportion to how well he was actually doing. From his first days in the business, stories circulated about unpaid bills, creditors chasing him, a repo man showing up for his car. Doreen Luko, an early staffer in L.A., told me that on payday Gagosian's employees "literally ran to the bank in hopes that there would be money there for our paychecks—whoever got there first was going to get paid on time." Mike Shatzkin, a U.C.L.A. classmate with whom he lived for a period during the seventies, told me that Gagosian sometimes walked out of a restaurant without paying the check. "I did it with him once, but it was a thing he did," Shatzkin said. (Gagosian denies this.) One detail that has gone largely unreported in chronicles of Gagosian's career is that, in 1969, he pleaded guilty to two felony charges of forgery, stemming from his use of someone else's credit card. The card was "being passed around by a bunch of my friends," he told me. "It was a stupid mistake." He received a suspended sentence and probation.

Sensing an opportunity to make a bigger mark, Gagosian began carrying fine art, mostly prints and photographs. The actor Steve Martin told me, "When he had his poster shop in Westwood, I went in. I was a novice art collector and he was a novice art dealer." Martin and other young Hollywood types who were starting to collect would get drawn in by something in the window and find themselves in conversation with the eager, gregarious proprietor. Gagosian had no training in art history, but the business he'd stumbled into was one for which he was preternaturally suited. He had a keen sense of aesthetics and design, and what fellow-connoisseurs describe as a near-photographic visual memory. He also was a quick learner. "Next to his bed, he had these stacks of art books," a woman he briefly dated around this time, Xiliary Twil, recalled. "He was really studying." One day in the mid-seventies, Gagosian was paging through a magazine and came across a series of photographs he liked—moody black-and-white shots by the New York photographer Ralph Gibson. Gagosian cold-called Gibson and announced, "I've got this gallery." How about a West Coast exhibition?

"In those days, I was selling prints for two hundred dollars," Gibson told me. "So I said, 'O.K., but you'd have to buy three or four as a guarantee.'" Gagosian flew to New York with a check. Gibson was represented there by Leo Castelli, the legendary dealer who had nurtured the careers of Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, and Roy Lichtenstein. "In those days, Leo was just the Pope," Gibson recalled. He introduced Gagosian to Castelli, and "Leo took a liking to him."

Castelli, then in his late sixties, had grown up in Trieste and come to America during the Second World War. A debonair man with courtly manners, he was a lifelong art lover who didn't be-

JEAN PIGOZZI

come a full-time dealer until he was middle-aged. He spoke five languages and was so devoted to his artists that he supported many of them with generous stipends. Gagosian began spending more time in New York, and cultivated a friendship with the older dealer over long lunches at Da Silvano. The photographer Dianne Blell once joked that Gagosian chased Castelli around "like a puppy." At one point, Gagosian presented him with a gold Patek Philippe watch. Patty Brundage, who spent decades working for Castelli, told me, "Leo was always looking at other people to kind of keep him new, to make him vital, and I think Larry was one of those people." In "Leo and His Circle," a biography by Annie Cohen-Solal, Gagosian posited that his impatience with art-world pretense may have endeared him to Castelli: "I did not do a lot of blah-blah-blah. I think my bluntness appealed to him."

One day, Castelli and Gagosian were crossing West Broadway when Castelli greeted an unassuming-looking gentleman in his fifties who was walking by.

"Who was that?" Gagosian asked.

"That was Si Newhouse. He can buy anything he wants."

Gagosian doubled back and introduced himself. "Give me your number," he suggested, without an ounce of blah-blah-blah. It was one of the most fateful introductions of his life.

Castelli specialized in what is known as the primary market: he guided the careers of living artists and sold their new work in exchange for a commission. He took pride in spotting talent in chrysalis. "When I first saw the work of Johns and Stella, I was bowled over," he told an interviewer in 1987. Castelli, who said that he dealt art chiefly "because of its groundbreaking importance," regarded the commercial side of his profession as secondary. When Gagosian initially ventured beyond poster-hawking, he had no relationships with artists, so he couldn't be a primary dealer in the Castelli mold. But what he did have was a gallery in Los Angeles, access to an untapped ecosystem of West Coast collectors, and something that Castelli decidedly lacked: chutzpah. The art dealer Irving Blum knew both men during this era, and he told me, "Leo was really aristocratic and civilized. And Larry"—he laughed—"Larry was a tiger." Castelli, who had no gallery of his own in California, began consigning works to Gagosian, including pieces by Frank Stella. Gagosian established a reputation for showing top artists who already had representation in New York. "I'm a very bad salesman and Larry is a very good salesman," Castelli conceded, with a gentle caveat about his more brazen protégé: "Of course, he wouldn't be as scrupulous as I am in advising one of my clients *not* to buy a painting because it's not good enough for them." He added, "He also knows how to deal with very rich people."

In pursuing a very rich clientele, Gagosian carved out a different niche from Castelli's—one that harked back to Duveen's relationships with the robber barons. The secondary market involves the buying and selling of previously owned work. Castelli had little interest in it, and in the mid-twentieth century—when Americans were creating the most dazzling art—the secondary business was perceived as a backwater by some dealers. It was also considered a bit distasteful: Duveen had often supplied his nouveau-riche clients by obtaining Old Master paintings from noble European families that had fallen on hard times.

By the nineteen-eighties, however, a new generation of wealthy Americans was eager to assemble great collections—and what they desired most was contemporary art. Si Newhouse had a media empire, and for more than three decades he was the owner of this magazine. (His family still owns Condé Nast, the parent company of *The New Yorker*.) He was also obsessed with twentieth-century art. On Saturday mornings, a car ferried him from his town house, on East Seventieth Street, to the galleries of SoHo. He had a sharp eye and a ready checkbook, and before long Gagosian could be seen squiring him on these excursions.

While Gagosian was on the rise, he occasionally championed promising young artists. When he saw the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat for the first time—at a 1981 group show in SoHo, organized by the dealer Annina Nosei—he bought three pieces on the spot. The following year, he mounted Basquiat's first show in L.A., where he had opened a bigger, nicer gallery. (Basquiat stayed at Gagosian's house in Venice, along with Basquiat's girlfriend at the time, a not yet famous Madonna.) But the main service that Gagosian provided for Newhouse wasn't scouting out the primary market; it was being his detective on the secondary market. The œuvres of even the most renowned artists are inconsistent. Masterpieces are rare and often hard to find. No central registry records the owners, locations, and prices of art works. Being a good secondary dealer requires knowing which people are collectors, where they live, what hangs inside their houses—and whether they might be induced to part with any of it. Gagosian excelled at what Douglas Cramer, a soap-opera producer and an early client, once called "the hunt."

Like a secret society, the art market was governed by obscure social codes, and Gagosian was so unbound in his energies and so shameless in his tactics that he immediately attracted notice and controversy. The telephone was his instrument of choice, and he often made upward of a hundred cold calls a day, sniffing out the location of an art work, lining up buyers, then haggling with the owners until the work shook free. The artist Jeff Koons, who first encountered him in this period, and went on to work with him for many years, told me that the young Gagosian infused the market with a thrilling sense of possibility: significant art that had been "locked up" suddenly became accessible. One reason that Gagosian knew where so much noteworthy twentieth-century art was hidden is that he had access to a treasure map, in the form of Castelli. "I could give him a lot of information on where the paintings were," Castelli once acknowledged. "Because I sold most of them."

Nosei told me that, during Gagosian's parvenu years, he sometimes talked his way into parties and showed up at dinners to which he wasn't invited. When we met in Amagansett, he mentioned that, in the eighties, he'd ventured into the house we were sitting in while the owner was throwing a party. Friends he was staying with at the time were invited, he told me, so he tagged along. "There wasn't a place for me at the table, so I ate over there," he said, indicating a side garden. He developed a reputation for wandering away from the festivities

at private homes, taking clandestine Polaroids of any impressive art that he spied on the walls, and then offering those works to his collectors. A few days after a party, he would telephone the hosts and startle them with the news that he had a buyer who was very interested in the Matisse above their living-room sofa. His hunger, aggressiveness, and stamina were so conspicuous that people in SoHo began referring to him as GoGo.

Gagosian has denied surreptitiously photographing art works and offering them for sale without authorization, but there is ample evidence that he did just that. Douglas Cramer told the *Times*, "I was in Larry's office once and I saw Polaroids of pieces that were in *my home*." Indeed, a version of this gambit (minus the Polaroids) remains part of Gagosian's repertoire. Marc Jacobs told me about a dinner he once hosted at his apartment in Paris; among the guests was Gagosian. Several days later, Gagosian called Jacobs and proposed buying two paintings in the apartment—a John Currin and an Ed Ruscha. As it happened, Jacobs was about to build a new house, in New York, and needed money, so they quickly came to terms. "The deal was he would pay immediately," Jacobs recalled. "Somebody came and picked up the paintings three days later, and the money was in my account. Done."

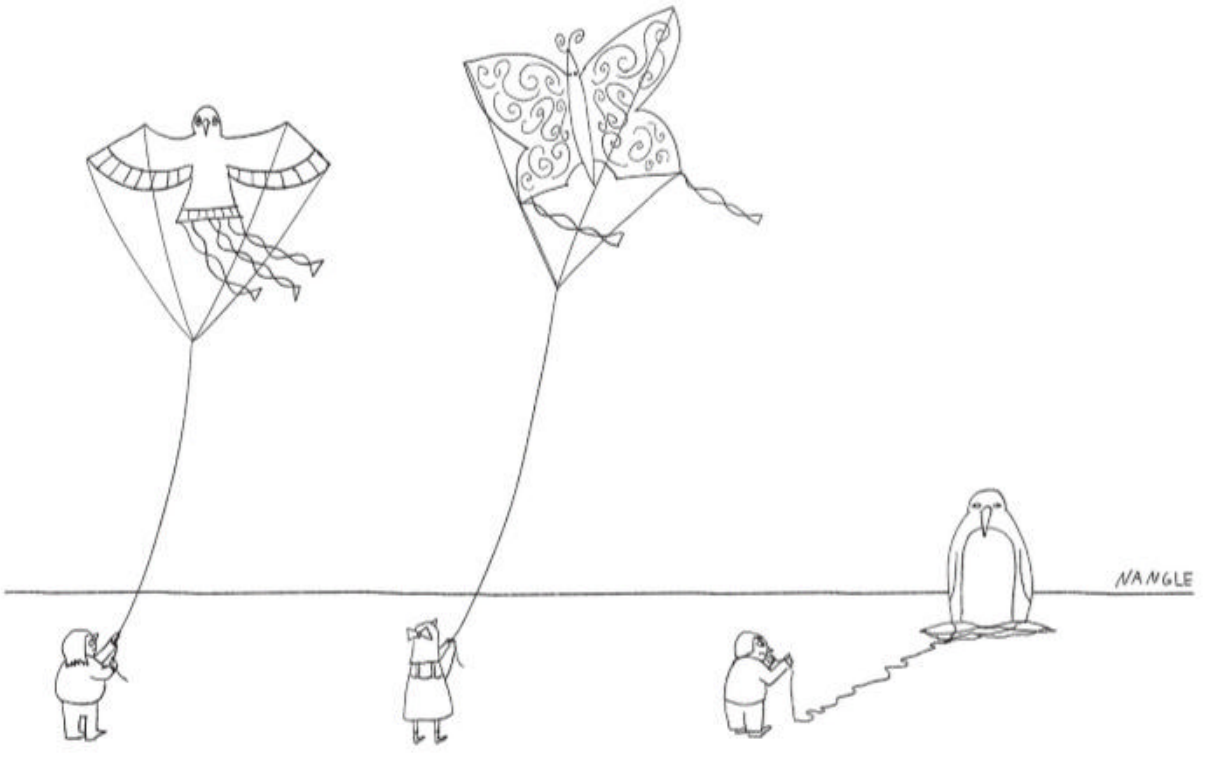
In 1985, Gagosian relocated to New York and opened a gallery on Twenty-third Street, in Chelsea, which at the time was considered a deeply inauspicious location. (He has always possessed a genius for real estate—the investment paid off handsomely.) It can be difficult these days to recall how polarizing a figure he was when he first swept into the city. Then, even more so than now, people wondered about his finances: How could he afford to live so lavishly and pay so much for pictures? Did he have a secret backer? Gagosian has always denied it. (Newhouse, for his part, said that *he* was not Gagosian's backer, but he once noted, "There are moments when I wish I were.") Rumors circulated—without any apparent foundation—that Gagosian might be fronting for arms merchants, or in league with drug traffickers. His sudden success had prompted hostility and suspicion in the business, and he portrayed the scuttlebutt as a calculated effort to undermine him. In a 1989 interview, he lamented that "people don't have anything better to do than make up gossip," adding, "I'm not going to stop making money to squelch rumors."

One widespread story at the time was that Gagosian liked to make lewd telephone calls to women. In a 1986 diary entry, Andy Warhol alluded to these accounts, writing, "Larry, I don't know, he's really weird, he got in trouble for obscene phone calls and everything." (In the 1996 book "True Colors: The Real Life of the Art World," by Anthony Haden-Guest, Gagosian responded, "He called *me* weird. Warhol!") The gossipy art magazine *Coagula* once expressed surprise that such allegations hadn't slowed Gagosian's ascent, noting, "Despite persistent rumors about dirty money and dirty phone calls, Larry Gagosian continues to fill his stable with big names."

During this period, Gagosian developed an enduring reputation as a Lothario. He dated many glamorous women, including the model Veronica Webb and the dancer Catherine Kerr; he and Kerr were briefly engaged, but days before the wedding he called it off. ("Cold feet.") On more than one occasion, he told people, "When women meet me, they either want to fuck me or throw up on me." An item from *Coagula* in 1995 described a woman who allegedly called the police because Gagosian had been sending "a chauffeur-driven limousine to her pad every night, which patiently waits for her to emerge, kidnapping-style." (Gagosian denied to me that he ever did this, pointing out, "It's *expensive* to send a limousine.")

"Talk to anyone you want—talk to people who don't like me, I don't care," Gagosian told me when I first proposed writing about him, before catching himself and saying that maybe I shouldn't talk to his "ex-girlfriends." When I mentioned that I might be duty-bound to do so, Gagosian gave a little laugh, looked at me without blinking, and said, "I hope you have a good legal department." He dismissed the stories about obscene phone calls as "complete horseshit." He suggested that the rumors had originated with a woman who worked as an art adviser and was unaccountably upset with him, even though "I never had anything to do with her." He wouldn't tell me who the woman was.

I spoke to someone—not an art adviser—who said that she'd received such a phone call. She didn't want to be named, she told me, because "Larry is very powerful and the art world is very small." But she described an incident, in New York in the early eighties, in which she and her husband attended a party, and were introduced to Gagosian. They chatted only briefly, but then Larry came back and, looking at her intensely, asked her to tell him her name again. She told him, and he repeated it a few times, then walked off. Later that night, she and her husband were asleep in bed when the telephone rang. Her husband answered and a man asked for her by name. When the woman took the phone, the caller said a series of sexual things.



"I hung up, and immediately we said, 'It must have been Larry,'" she recalled. "It was so blatant. He could have waited a week, and I wouldn't have figured it out." It was only after this incident, the woman said, "that I started hearing from others, 'Oh, he's sort of known for doing that.'" (I also spoke to the husband, who corroborated this account, and to a friend of the woman's, who remembers her recounting this experience four decades ago.)

When I told Gagosian about my conversation with the woman, without sharing her identity, he said, flatly, "Not true. Never happened. Never. I'm not that kind of guy." In any case, the consensus among people who say that Gagosian made harassing phone calls is that he stopped. I did not hear so much as a rumor about this sort of conduct occurring at any point in the past twenty-five years.

As the business grew, Gagosian lost his patina of disreputability. He built a base of top-tier clients, and often played them off one another. The Chelsea gallery's first show was an exhibition of Pop art from the collection of Burton and Emily Tremaine, a Connecticut couple with a sheet-metal fortune. Gagosian had established this relationship with his usual brio, looking up the Tremaines in the phone directory, then cold-calling them and offering to buy a Brice Marden painting that they owned. Gagosian befriended the couple, and soon they were entrusting more of their art to him. In his recollection, Burton would call and say, "Larry, we got too much art, we need some cash," and he'd reply, "I'm your guy." The Tremaines owned Piet Mondrian's final painting, "Victory Boogie Woogie," and Gagosian told them that he thought he could get eleven million dollars for it. He then telephoned Si Newhouse and sold him the painting for exactly that amount. (After the sale, Newhouse said of Gagosian, "I think he has a refined eye. But at the level I'm dealing with, his eye is less important. It doesn't take an eye to sell Mondrian's 'Victory Boogie Woogie.' It takes a willing buyer and a willing seller and someone like Larry to bring them together.")

In 1990, the owner of the Amagansett house was getting divorced, and Gagosian bought it, for eight million dollars. He bought a carriage house, with its own lap pool, on the Upper East Side. He bought a Ferrari. He also leased a big new gallery space in the Parke-Bernet building, on Madison Avenue. Allan Schwartzman, who was then a journalist and is now an art adviser, recalls meeting with Gagosian shortly after he signed the lease. The new space was still under construction, and they stood in the vestibule, looking out at the wealthy men and women of the Upper East Side walking by, like salmon running thick in a river. "He was clocking which men of extreme high net worth and which existing or potential art collectors were passing by, saying, 'There goes So-and-So,'" Schwartzman said. "He knew *who everyone was*. He saw them before they knew him. That kind of aggressiveness and that eagle sharpness for who mattered—there was no precedent for that. That's the eye of an industrialist. That's someone who was seeking to build a massive financial empire."

The Gagosian gallery is still headquartered in the Parke-Bernet building, and now takes up two whole floors. There's a retail shop on the ground floor, which sells art books, prints, and T-shirts, offering the more budgetarily constrained consumer a little piece of the action. In what seems unlikely to have been an accident of design, you must pass through the gift shop in order to access Kappo Masa, the high-end restaurant that occupies the building's basement, and is billed as a "collaboration" between Gagosian and the renowned Japanese chef Masayoshi Takayama. This was where I first met with Gagosian, for lunch in January. He was sitting at a prominent table in the wood-panelled, art-filled space, framed by an open kitchen where great flames occasionally ignited, like petroleum flares. The place was boisterous, and he greeted passing supplicants with the smiling disengagement of a village mayor. ("Hi, how ya doing? Maybe I'll see you in Paris.") He still lives nearby, but in 2015 he sold the carriage house, for eighteen million dollars, and moved into the Harkness Mansion, a twenty-thousand-square-foot domicile that he bought for thirty-six million dollars and then subjected to an exacting multiyear renovation. (He wanted a swimming pool on the roof.) It's a lot of house, he concedes, but at the time he bought it he was dating Chrissie Erpf, a longtime employee, and she had four children, so he wanted enough space to accommodate her family. Then they broke up. Now Gagosian shares it with Anna Weyant, whom he started seeing in 2021, and their respective dogs, along with some staff. The house, which was renovated with an eye for entertaining, can comfortably seat fifty people at a dinner.

When Gagosian established his gallery, he disdained formal meetings—he finds bureaucracy and protocol dull. To increase sales, he hired several people to join him as "directors," but he treated them a bit like those crafts peddlers in Westwood who had paid a commission to sell trinkets on his patio. Directors were given a phone and a computer and instructions to sell. There was no mentoring from Gagosian, and little lateral collaboration. A senior director in London, Millicent Wilner, once observed, "There's no hierarchy. There's Larry—and everyone else."

Gagosian telephones his directors all day. If he can't reach them, he will call them ten times. He will call their spouses. He will send company-wide e-mails demanding to know why people haven't picked up the phone. When *he* won't be reachable for any length of time, an e-mail is sent out: "Larry will be unavailable between 3 and 4:30 today." By implication, he is accessible the rest of the time—and he expects the same of his underlings. Because the business is commission-driven, and still dominated by its charismatic owner, competition among directors can be ferocious. "There's a lot of money on the table," a source who has worked at the gallery told me, explaining that directors can make ten per cent of the gallery's profit on a sale. The directors "are Larry's children," the person said, "and they all want to look the best in their father's eyes."

Other mega-galleries—Zwirner, Hauser & Wirth, Pace—are family operations. Gagosian has no kids. Having built this global colossus, he is now besieged by speculation about what will become of it when he's no longer in

charge. Kappo Masa was noisy, and Gagosian, who has become hard of hearing but does not wear a hearing aid, kept tilting his head so that I could repeat things. He is very well preserved for seventy-eight, but he recently had cataract surgery to fix one of his famously discerning eyes ("I couldn't read a fucking book"), and the other eye has an underlying condition that can't be corrected. Late last year, the gallery announced the appointment of a new board, a characteristically starry assortment of cultural and business types: Sofia Coppola, the film director; J. Tomilson (Tom) Hill, the former vice-chairman of Blackstone Group. Because Gagosian is such an object of fixation in rarefied circles, the press framed this reshuffle in corporate governance as a moment of Shakespearean portent. The *Times:* "WITHOUT HEIRS, LARRY GAGOSIAN FINALLY PLANS FOR SUCCESSION."

At lunch, Gagosian bristled at this characterization. "That's not really what drives this," he said. "I don't see it, per se, as succession planning." He assured me that he has no plans to retire or to even step back a little. "I enjoy what I do," he said, adding, "I don't know what else *to* do."

Gagosian, who eats at Kappo Masa several times a week, ordered grilled yellowtail and a seaweed salad. He was affable and charming but noticeably guarded. He will happily repeat anecdotes that he's told a thousand times (Basquiat and Madonna, etc.), but he greets any questions about his motivations or his psychology, or about his clients or the particulars of his business, with the stone-faced implacability of a secret agent. This may be the natural result of running an operation that is reflexively discreet: Gagosian reaps huge profits from asymmetries of information. But, fundamentally, he does not seem to be an introspective person. In Michael Shnayerson's 2019 book, "Boom: Mad Money, Mega Dealers, and the Rise of Contemporary Art," a director recalls asking Gagosian if he might write a memoir. Gagosian's response was that he avoids self-reflection, because that is how you "lose your edge." The late art critic Peter Schjeldahl once observed, "We think of genius as being complicated. But geniuses have the fewest moving parts. . . . Gagosian is simple. He's basically a shark, a feeding machine."

That may be true, but Gagosian is also a scholar of appearances, and he told me that the image many people have of him is unfair. In contrast to his mentor, Castelli, he has been seen as more of a collector's dealer than an artist's dealer—a view that Gagosian considers a caricature. Of course, in the early days he *only* represented collectors. One innovation that even Gagosian's detractors credit him for is holding museum-quality historical shows in a commercial gallery. He did this out of necessity, he explained: "We had no artists!" In 1995, he mounted a Rubens show, and later the Picasso biographer John Richardson became a consultant for the gallery. Hiring a scholar was unconventional but clever. Richardson curated a series of landmark Picasso shows, including a 2009 exhibition in Chelsea of the painter's late pictures, which drew an estimated hundred thousand people. The novelty of such events, in theory, was that in most cases the work on display was borrowed, and not for sale. But to assume that Gagosian was motivated purely by his love for Picasso or by his civic good will would be to miss his grasp of the subtle physics of the business. The historical shows were advertisements for the gallery, affiliating the Gagosian name with some of the greatest artists of all time. And often there *was* a thing or two for sale. On the gallery floor, it might have been all reverential appreciation for the brushstrokes, but a Gagosian director once divulged that Larry was also "aggressively negotiating in the back room." (Deals were made on some of those late Picassos.) As for the relationship with Richardson, Irving Blum told me, "Larry was playing the long game," adding, "He understood the involvement that John had with members of the Picasso family. He thought he could get a certain amount of material through that conduit." Richardson died in 2019. The gallery now has relationships with several Picasso heirs. In the end, Blum said, he "got much more than he ever thought he could."

Gagosian eventually amassed a stable of living artists, pursuing them as relentlessly as he had hunted for privately held masterpieces. One of the first major figures he went after, back in the eighties, was the Abstract Expressionist Cy Twombly. The artist, who died in 2011, was then in his late fifties and dividing his time between Lexington, Virginia, and the port city of Gaeta, south of Rome. Gagosian telephoned him in Italy incessantly. Nicola Del Roscio, the president of the Cy Twombly Foundation, told me that for a while Twombly greeted these intrusions by immediately hanging up. Finally, on one occasion, Twombly picked up and Gagosian said, "It's the crazy Armenian—don't put down the phone!" Twombly was so amused that he decided to hear Gagosian out.

It was the beginning of an extraordinary relationship. "I loved Cy," Gagosian told me. Twombly began exhibiting at the gallery in 1986, and in the subsequent two decades he experienced the kind of late flowering that most artists can only dream of—big, vigorous canvasses that Gagosian sometimes sold days after they were finished. In another pioneering move, Gagosian opened international galleries—starting with London, Rome, and Paris—and he often inaugurated them with a show of new Twomblys. "It was an incredible collaboration," Del Roscio said. "They almost were trying to outdo each other, like a game." These new Twombly paintings often sold for five million dollars. "Naturally, there is also a financial interest—why not?" Del Roscio said. "Money is at the base of everything." Gagosian sometimes jokes that "overhead is the mother of invention," and it's not an exaggeration to say that his gallery's international expansion was subsidized largely by Twombly. Gagosian had secured a commission rate of about thirty per cent, so if he sold ten paintings at an opening he could pocket fifteen million dollars.

When Leo Castelli died, in 1999, Gagosian inherited a number of artists and collectors. (In a public conversation at the 92nd Street Y, Gagosian was asked what he had absorbed from Castelli. He replied, "I absorbed a lot of his, uh, clients.") In 2001, a little over a year after Gagosian expanded to London, the city's dominant dealer, Anthony d'Offay, retired, and Gagosian inherited yet more, including the sculptor Rachel Whiteread. He also poached artists with abandon. One advantage of having satellite gal-

leries is that he could offer shows in other cities to artists who already had New York representation, just as he had introduced Ralph Gibson's work to Los Angeles. Gagosian scorns any suggestion that luring artists away from other dealers is unsporting, and resents any dealer—David Zwirner is a favorite example—who tries "to burnish his ethics on my hide." Gagosian may be tetchy about this subject because these days he suffers the occasional defection himself: Yayoi Kusama left for Zwirner; Julian Schnabel left for Pace. It's fair to say, though, that one way Gagosian has transformed the art business is by normalizing poaching. Many artists have clearly absorbed the idea that loyalty is sentimental and that, in a free market, they should always keep an eye out for a better deal.

When Schnabel quit the gallery, in 2016, he said, "I wanted to have a more human relationship with the person who was representing my work," adding, "You want somebody to be on the other end of the line." The sheer size of Gagosian's current roster means that he cannot visit every studio or attend every opening, and this can generate anxiety and resentment. Even with his own artists, he must contend with the Gagosian reputation. In 2011, the artist Mike Kelley, who was represented by Gagosian before his death, told the magazine *Artillery*, "Larry Gagosian, I know, doesn't care about my work. It's like, you're there as long as he can make money off you."

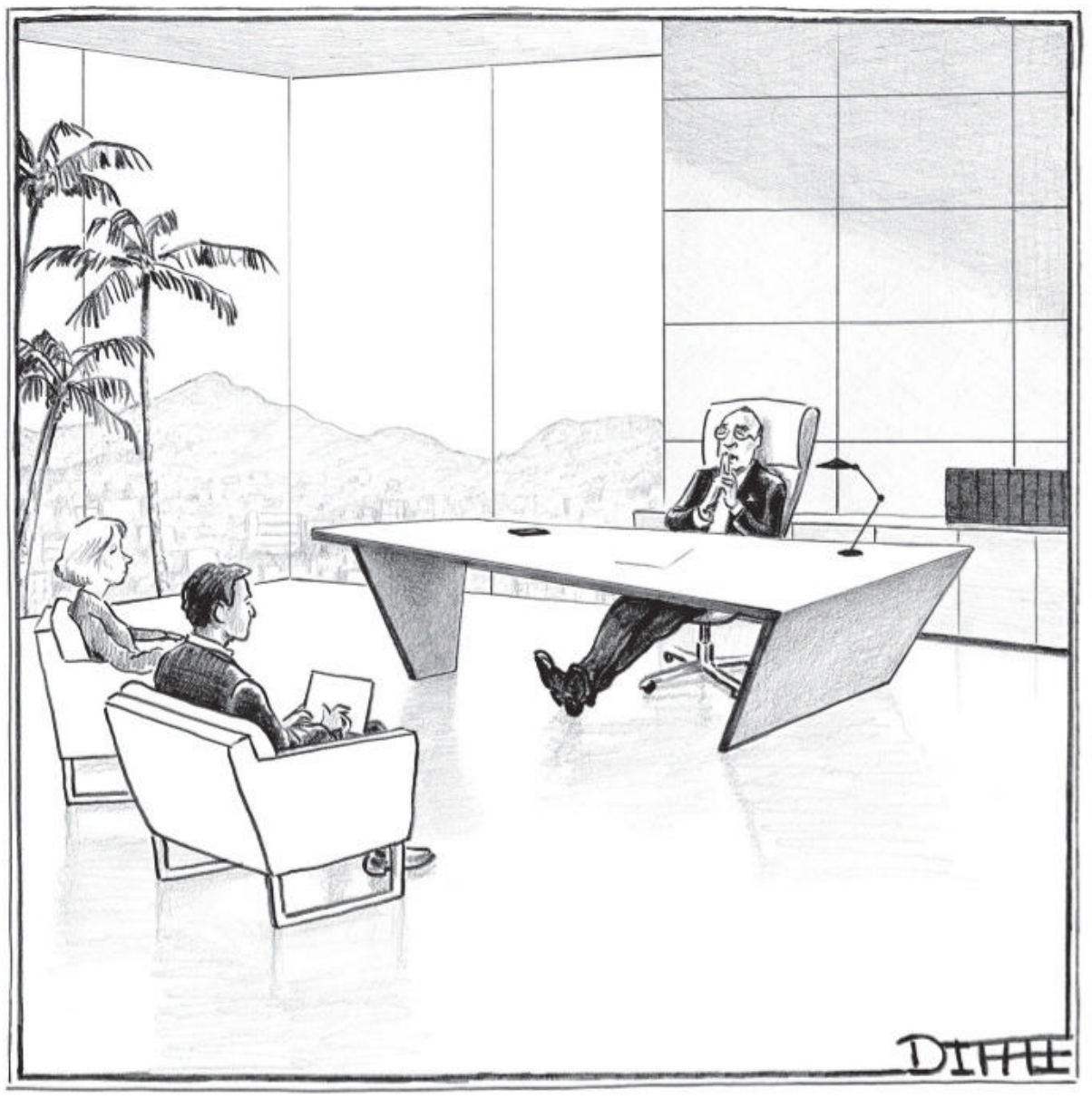
Gagosian and the artist Cy Twombly, in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2003.

JEAN PIGOZZI

Nonetheless, many of Gagosian's artists adore him. The front yard of the Amagansett house features a work by Richard Serra, who began showing at the gallery in 1983. His mammoth sculptures of weatherproof steel pose devilish logistical challenges: Andy Avini, the senior director, recalls a day when a huge curved sheet of steel was waiting to be installed for a show in Chelsea, and downtown skateboarders turned it into an improvised half-pipe. Gagosian offers artists commercial rewards, but he also helps them expand their ambitions, through big budgets and big spaces. The gallery has to approve expensive projects, and Serra once said of him, "He's never told me no."

Jenny Saville, who joined Gagosian in 1997, admitted to me that she was attracted by the illustrious lineup: "It was a gallery that showed Twombly and Serra, and Larry saw me as a peer in that way. I was twenty-six years old. What's not to like?" There was a heady sense, she continued, not simply of graduating to that pantheon of esteem but also of entering into conversation with her heroes. Once, she got to help hang a Twombly show in New York. On another occasion, Gagosian arranged for her to spend an afternoon in the East Hampton studio of Willem de Kooning, which had remained essentially untouched since his death, a few years earlier. She passed the hours studying the master's long palette knives. "I probably had ten years of development that day," she said.

The painter Cecily Brown, who grew up in England, told me that when her stepmother first met Gagosian she said, "He's so *American*." He was like someone "you would see on TV when you were little," Brown continued. "The looks. The attitude. Very male." In the early years, Gagosian often visited Brown's studio. "He had a knack for finding the oddball thing," she remembered. "There's always the obvious favorite, but sometimes the artist has a secret favorite, and I'd often find that Larry would home in on the oddball work in the corner and say, 'That's a good painting.'" Gagosian is not given to flowery disquisitions when commenting on a work of art, preferring instead to render a clipped verdict: "She's a good painter." "Not his best." For all his avaricious energy and negotiating prowess, Brown believes, Gagosian



"Your screenplay is amazing. It's fresh, original, like nothing we've ever seen before, but we can fix that."

• •

couldn't have accomplished what he has without "that brilliant eye."

When Gagosian first took on Brown, he told her, "Your paintings are too cheap for my customers." He'd propose higher prices, Brown would balk, and they'd argue until they met somewhere in the middle. Brown left the gallery in 2014, after fifteen years there, and told me that she did so only because it was time for a change. But others suggested to me that the gallery may have placed too much emphasis on selling Brown's work to plutocrat collectors, and not enough on placing it in museums. "I heard she thinks my gallery has become too commercial," Gagosian told me. (Brown, now at Paula Cooper, currently has a solo show at the Met.)

There's no question that Gagosian cares deeply about art. Like a lot of high-end collectors, he rhapsodizes about what it's like to "live with" art, suggesting that it's one thing to appreciate a painting in a museum or at somebody else's dinner party but a whole other plane of experience to wake up each day and see a Lichtenstein or a Warhol. For many years, Gagosian had Picasso's last finished painting above his bed. When I excused myself to use the bathroom at the Amagansett house, he instructed me, with practiced nonchalance, to "take a hard right at the Damien Hirst pill painting."

Then again, what does it mean to live with something if not to take it for granted? Gagosian's quasi-spiritual register often recedes in the face of more mechanistic concerns. Jean Pigozzi mused, "Sometimes it's a bit depressing to be with all these guys, because they don't really say, 'Oh, this is an incredible painting and the colors are fabulous and it was influenced by Renoir.' It's more, 'Well, this is seven million dollars, but Steve Cohen has bought one that sold for seven and a half, and there's one that's coming to auction that could reach nine.' Sometimes they forget that it's *art*."

Saville made a similar observation. "Larry loves art, but he also loves money in a way that I just don't understand," she said. "I remember there being a de Kooning painting, and we were both going to see it. I was devouring the brush marks, and I could see he was devouring the price tag." In an interview for a 2012 PBS documentary about David Geffen, the billionaire media impresario and art collector, Gagosian acknowledged that Geffen has a real eye, and loves art, and loves *living* with the art and blah-blah-blah—but then he observed that Geffen was also a master at treating art as an asset. After all, Gagosian pointed out, "it's money on the walls."

"I'm just looking in my apartment in New York at how many pictures I've bought that he's been involved in," David Geffen said, when I reached him on the phone. He counted out loud: "One, two, three . . . no, he wasn't involved in that . . . four, five, six. I mean, six pictures in my apartment. I'm sitting here in my living room and I'm looking at this Twombly triptych. I had seen it at this house Larry used to have."

Gagosian remarked to me once, about Duveen and Castelli, "It sounds egotistical, but I'm a little bit of a combination between those two. We represent some of the most important living artists, but we also have a very, very robust secondary-market business." The strategy is to skim the cream off the top of both markets. He is able to maintain this enviable position through his relationships with top collectors. Gagosian may have strong bonds with some of his artists, but he has more in common with the collectors. Their interactions are sometimes combustible, but that's inevitable, given the money at stake and the egos involved. "I've spent an incredible amount of money buying pictures from Larry," Geffen told me. "At any given moment, I may feel like I've overpaid for something. But in the end I've never overpaid for anything. For me, they've been incredibly good investments. Most of the money I've given away, which is well over a billion dollars, I financed by selling paintings that I owned."

Part of the reason Geffen's bets have paid off so extravagantly is that Ga-

gosian's tenure in the business has coincided with a period of staggering growth in the price of contemporary art. In 1980, when Burton and Emily Tremaine sold a 1958 Jasper Johns painting, "Three Flags," to the Whitney for a million dollars, the deal made headlines, because it was the first known instance in which a work by a living artist had broken seven figures. In 2010, Steve Cohen purchased a different Johns flag painted in 1958—for a hundred and ten million dollars. Gagosian has acknowledged that the market he first flourished in, during the late eighties, was so overhyped that it was "like tulip mania, like a Ponzi thing." There were subsequent dips, to be sure, but, as he pointed out to me, "each peak has been higher than the one that preceded it." In 2012, he opened a gallery on the grounds of Le Bourget airport, outside Paris, where his clients can buy art upon landing in their private jets.

Even during downturns, he has found ways to thrive. After the Dow dropped in 1990, Geffen—still as liquid as the day is long—swooped in looking for bargains. According to Gagosian, staff at the Madison Avenue gallery used to joke that when Geffen stopped by it meant that they would "make payroll this month." During this period, Si Newhouse and his wife, Victoria, moved into an airy apartment overlooking the East River. "I remember going there with Larry," Pigozzi recalled. "Larry said, 'Don't you find the view a bit boring? Why do you need so many windows?'" (Windows, Pigozzi explained, "are the enemy of the art dealer.") The Newhouses sold off part of their collection to Geffen, including many paintings that Gagosian had helped the couple acquire. For these art works, Gagosian landed a repeat commission. "I don't like to sell paintings to museums," he has quipped. "Then I can't get them back."

Serial commissions became common for Gagosian as more and more wealthy people started to regard art as a category of investment. He maintained a small club of extremely affluent collectors who repeatedly mixed up their asset allocations—trading among themselves, through him. In 2003, Steve Cohen bought a Jackson Pollock drip painting from Geffen for fifty million dollars. Three years later, Gagosian asked Geffen if he'd ever sell a de Kooning he owned, "Woman III." Geffen said, "I suppose, if you got me a hundred and forty million." Cohen bought it that day. The reverse dynamic occurred in 2020, after Cohen spent $2.4 billion to acquire the Mets baseball team. "Perhaps Steve's in the mood to sell," Geffen said to Gagosian, who then orchestrated Geffen's purchase of a Giacometti sculpture from Cohen, for a hundred and forty-seven million dollars. This is a lucrative situation in which to serve as middleman. As Geffen put it, "If Larry represents the owner, and you want it, you've got to buy it from him." And, as Gagosian recognized, the competitive drive of self-made billionaires does not exactly go into remission once they've made a fortune. "What did Karl Marx say? Money creates taste," he once joked. (In fact, he was quoting an ironic truism by the artist Jenny Holzer.)

Gagosian's efforts to ensnare prospective customers sometimes became comical. In 1989, the magazine *7 Days* described him prowling around a benefit, then spying a wealthy collector from the Midwest: "The collector, cut from his group of friends like a steer from its herd, was almost pinned against the wall." More recently, a billionaire couple were scheduled to attend a wedding in the Hamptons and inquired, through a mutual friend, whether they could borrow Gagosian's house for the weekend. They had one question about the accommo-

dations: was there an infrared sauna? Gagosian, no doubt understanding the boundless upside of such a visit, said, "Of course"—and hurriedly had one installed.

He seems also to have intuited that a certain kind of overindulged potentate is so unaccustomed to being told no that rejection can actually become an enticement. Tico Mugrabi told me about a pilgrimage that he and Gagosian made, along with two other collectors, Aby Rosen and Harry Lis, to see Twombly in Italy. "These guys are willing to spend big money on paintings," Mugrabi said. But, when they got to Gaeta, the three collectors found themselves stuck for days on a yacht that Gagosian had chartered, moored next to an unsightly naval base. At breakfast, Gagosian would announce, "I've got to go to the studio."

"Take us with you!" the collectors would demand.

"I can't," he would reply. Each day, Gagosian returned with vivid reports of the magic he'd witnessed, exclaiming, "The paintings are incredible!"

"You son of a bitch!" Mugrabi said. "We're sitting in this port and you have the audacity to not take us to the studio?" Reflecting on it now, he told me, "This is how Larry was able to lift the market: 'I can't show you the painting.' Then he shows you the painting."

By conjuring an atmosphere of unpredictability and intrigue, Gagosian imbues the dealing process with excitement—and creates a sense that when an opportunity finally presents itself you must seize it immediately, and at any cost. J. Tomilson Hill, who is a major collector, told me that when he started buying from Gagosian, in the nineties, he would go to the gallery and, in a private room reserved for V.I.P.s, spot something new on the wall. "I'd say, 'Larry, is that for sale?' And he'd say, 'Yes, I've got it until Tuesday.'" The identity of the seller and the details of this short-term consignment could be anyone's guess, but the message was clear: Move fast. "We bought our first Picasso painting from him in that manner," Hill said. "Our first Francis Bacon, too."

Gagosian complained to me that, these days, many collectors have an art consultant and want to do things by committee. With a dismissive shrug, he murmured, "Those people don't get my first call." He told me that he prefers collectors who are quick and decisive and who trust their own taste. But it has long been suggested that many of Gagosian's collectors simply ape *his* taste. In 1984, the cantankerous art critic Robert Hughes bemoaned the new generation of collectors: "Most of the time, they buy what other people buy. They move in great schools, like bluefish, all identical." Indeed, many prominent collections now reflect the sensibility of Gagosian: a Twombly, a Ruscha, perhaps a Serra. "I

sometimes wonder how everyone can agree that a certain work of art is collectible," Steve Martin told me, dryly. But the market's confidence in Gagosian's aesthetic judgment is such that he has taken one of the most notoriously subjective, eye-of-the-beholder human experiences and turned it into a matter of Apollonian objectivity. In the 2008 book "The $12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art," Don Thompson quotes a former Gagosian staffer who claims that when the gallery tells a client, "Larry said you need this for your collection," the client sometimes blurts "I'll take it!" before asking what the work costs or looks like.

Such fealty may seem crazy, but from a purely financial standpoint it might make sense. Even with secondary sales, Gagosian can demand a hefty commission—sometimes fifteen per cent—but the mere fact that he is the dealer endorsing and selling a work may well enhance its value. The artist Mark Kostabi once suggested that, whereas Gagosian started his career by adding a cheap metal frame to inflate a poster's price, eventually it was his own imprimatur that justified the markup. As Kostabi put it, "*He's* the frame." The more you pay for a work, Gagosian has said, the more likely it is that your investment will retain its value. That sentiment may seem nakedly self-interested, but it's also often true.

Diego Marroquin, a dealer who is friends with Gagosian, told me that collectors "know they're paying more with Larry, and they know they're not getting transparency, and they're still happy to do it." He added, "I've tried to sell the exact same painting to the exact same collector, and failed—and that person then went and bought it from Larry, with a significant premium on top."

An art-world source told me about a conversation he once had with Si Newhouse, in which Newhouse indicated he'd heard that the owner of a particularly coveted Robert Rauschenberg painting was willing to sell it for about thirty-two million dollars. The source, who was aware of the Rauschenberg's availability, gently corrected Newhouse: the real price was closer to twenty-five million. "No," Newhouse insisted. "It's definitely thirty-two." The point of the anecdote was not that Gagosian might have jacked up the price to fleece Newhouse, my source insisted, but that "Newhouse *wanted* it to be worth more."

Walk into a high-end art gallery and you will usually find that prices aren't displayed. You must inquire, and that feels gauche. Already, you are on the back foot, conditioned by the imperious aura of exclusivity. Legally, the gallery must tell you the cost of an art work, but employees generally give you the runaround first. At Gagosian, the fetish for discretion is so strong that the gallery's staffers are sometimes left in the dark about transactions. Though employees are typically informed via e-mail when a work is consigned or sold, there is also a secret list of especially sensitive or exclusive offerings. This information is not widely shared, in part because buyers are less interested in works that have been too "exposed"; as in real estate, the longer something is on the market, the less alluring it is.

This lack of transparency is one reason that the construction of value in the art world can be so opportunistic and imprecise. Most publicly reported prices come from auctions, which are estimated to account for less than twenty per cent of the art market. Further complicating matters, there is widespread market manipulation. *The Economist* has described Andy Warhol as a "one-man Dow Jones," because his work is seen as a bellwether for the contemporary-art market. But Tico Mugrabi and his family have effectively cornered the market on Warhol. They own about a thousand works by the artist, and are constantly buying and selling his paintings—regulating supply to keep prices high. They describe themselves, without irony, as "market-makers." Mugrabi told me, "For me, this is *inventory*. If you're dealing in currencies, and you see the dollar trading low, and you believe in the dollar, you buy dollars." When a Warhol comes up at auction, the Mugrabis often bid on it—either to acquire it or just to boost the price. They collaborate with Gagosian in such strategizing and will subtly coördinate with him, bidding on works together in order to mitigate their risk. "We're always sitting very close to each other in the auction," Mugrabi told me. "Sometimes, with just a nod, we will agree we should buy it."

According to Bloomberg, the global

THE FERGUSON REPORT: AN ERASURE

pages sixty-five to seventy-seven

They say *stand in line*,
so we stand in line. As the line
advances, they say *stand*
still. Around us, everything
going, going like cars or clouds.
Us, the blur cars pass, the blue
clouds dam. They say *wait*,
so we wait, as if for some
fragrant flower that unfurls
one night a year. They say *shh*,
so, like trees, we mouth cross
sounds of flags beaten to shreds
by wind. Our heads twitch,
birds watching for what might
be stalking. Right before
they deploy canines to bite,
there's a pause between wails
in which you hear your shut
eyes dilate. *Listen*.

—*Nicole Sealey*

art market is a sixty-five-billion-dollar industry, yet it remains largely unregulated. A former federal prosecutor who has litigated art-market cases said of the Mugrabis' control over the Warhol market, "If this were any other asset class, someone would be looking at it from an antitrust perspective, or conflict of interest, or breach of fiduciary duty." In 2014, the *Hastings Law Journal* published an article, by Nicole Dornbusch Horowitz, called "Price Fixing the Priceless? Discouraging Collusion in the Secondary Market," which suggested that the government might want to investigate such behavior. In a footnote, Horowitz disclosed that, before attending law school, she worked as an art administrator for Tico Mugrabi's father, Jose.

In 1992, the satirical magazine *Spy* described Gagosian as an "art trafficker." Although he clearly revels in the slippery customs of the bazaar, he takes umbrage at the implication that there is anything unseemly about what he does. Even after he became a success, he recalled to me, his mother frowned upon his vocation: "She told me, 'I had lunch with my girlfriends. One said her son is a doctor. Another said her son is a lawyer. I just kept my mouth shut.'" He paused. "She could see that I was making money—and she was benefitting from that—but she never said, 'Well, great, honey, I'm so glad you found something you love.'" (She died in 2005.) People close to Gagosian have sometimes been taken aback by his cloak-and-dagger tradecraft. Veronica Webb, the model who dated him, once told *New York* about a time when a helicopter landed on the lawn. Gagosian told her that he had to go and look at a painting. "When I asked him which collector and which painting, he wouldn't tell me," she said. (Gagosian maintains that this whole episode never happened.) Buyers often don't know who the seller is, and vice versa—if they did, they might well cut out the dealer. In any particular exchange, Gagosian might commission the artist, the buyer, and the seller—and not disclose a conflict of interest to any of them. He commissions his artists differently. The standard arrangement in the primary market is a fifty-fifty split between the artist and the dealer, but some artists, including Richard Prince and Damien Hirst, can command a larger share. Such accommodations are bespoke—and secret—but Gagosian confirmed to me that "in general" there is a "range within a narrow band."

In a deposition some years ago, Gagosian resisted the idea that he should be constrained by fiduciary obligations. "I never get asked the question 'Are you representing both sides?'" he said, while acknowledging that he often does represent both the buyer and the seller, without revealing this to either party. When the attorney deposing him asked whether he feels any "duty of loyalty" to the seller, it was as if Gagosian, on some fundamental level, hadn't understood the question. "I just don't think about it in terms of—in those terms," he said.

Litigation occasionally offers a glimpse of the shadowy backroom aspects of the trade. In the nineties, the billionaire financier Ronald Perelman became a friend and client of Gagosian's. They vacationed together and invested in an East Hampton restaurant, Blue Parrot. Over time, Perelman bought approximately two hundred pieces of art from Gagosian and, he has said, came to think of him as a "trusted art adviser." Then they went to war. The trouble started in 2010, when Perelman arranged to purchase from Gagosian a Popeye sculpture, in black granite, by Jeff Koons. The market for Koons was so overheated that, when Perelman agreed to pay four million dollars for the work, it didn't exist yet. Nevertheless, he committed to making five installments of eight hundred thousand dollars each, the last of which would be due when the work was delivered to his home, a year and a half later. Koons fell behind schedule, however, and, when it became clear that he wouldn't meet the delivery date, Perelman decided that he didn't want the Popeye anymore. But, rather than simply ask for his money back, Perelman demanded a premium, claiming that, because the value of Koons's work rises so quickly, the Popeye was now worth more than the original price, even unfinished. Gagosian, for his part, didn't want to take the sculpture back, because Koons—a canny and flagrantly corporate impresario who worked as a commodities trader before becoming a full-time artist—had a side agreement stipulating that he was entitled to a fifty-per-cent commission if the work was resold within five years, and eighty per cent of the profit if it was resold before it was finished.

Perelman sued Gagosian, and the Popeye was only one item on his list of grievances. Another was a blue Twombly canvas, "Leaving Paphos Ringed with Waves," which he'd spotted in the gallery one day in 2011. When Perelman asked what the painting cost, Gagosian told him eight million dollars. Perelman offered six, but Gagosian wouldn't budge. Perelman kept thinking about the painting, however, and a week or so later he offered to pay up. Too late, Gagosian said—he'd just sold it to someone else. But sometime later Gagosian came back to him and said that the new owner, whose identity he didn't disclose, would sell the Twombly to Perelman—for $11.5 million. After some further haggling, Perelman, who had balked at paying eight million dollars, agreed to pay $10.5 million, and the Twombly was finally his.

What Perelman did not know was that the other party in this transaction was the Mugrabi family. Tico Mugrabi told me that his family bought the Twombly from Gagosian for $7.25 million. Then, he continued, "Larry calls me and says, 'Do you want to sell that painting?' I said, 'We just bought it!'" Tico maintains that the Mugrabis didn't know the buyer's identity. But, in the resale to Perelman, his family made a profit of two million dollars, and Gagosian got a million-dollar commission. When Perelman learned that he'd bought the painting from the Mugrabis—Gagosian's frequent collaborators—he was incensed. The Mugrabis had never even physically taken possession of the Twombly, so it looked to Perelman as though Gagosian had colluded with the family on a shakedown.

Perelman is no stranger to litigation: he has engaged in legal battles with his own brother, numerous erstwhile business partners, and one of his four ex-wives. In this instance, he was pursuing a novel legal theory—that an art dealer should have a duty of loyalty to the people he is representing. But mainly Perelman was indignant. He told the *Times* that Gagosian "is the most charming guy in the world," adding, "Everyone thinks when they're doing business with

him they're the one guy being treated honestly." This was a crusade, he promised. "Art is such a beautiful thing," he told the paper. "But it's been sullied by an ugly business." In the lawsuit he filed, in New York, Perelman accused Gagosian of "undervaluing works when purchasing them, overvaluing them when selling them, and pocketing the substantial differential."

That description may seem shady, but it's also an apt characterization of what an art dealer does. Stefania Bortolami, who worked for Gagosian for several years and now runs her own gallery, in Tribeca, told me about a Lichtenstein she once handled for him. When the gallery was trying to acquire the painting, Gagosian disparaged it, saying, "It was a good year, but this is one of the worst I've seen." Having established the lesser value of this Lichtenstein, the gallery bought it "cheap," Bortolami said. Shortly afterward, she continued, "I hear Larry talking about it with another client as if it's the best painting that Lichtenstein had ever done." (Gagosian said that this account was "malicious speculation," adding, "You don't stay in business doing things like that.")

Whatever the merits of Perelman's suit, there was something striking about his decision to speak up: the strong implication of his legal filings was that Gagosian had become so powerful in the art world that other aggrieved parties were too afraid to push back. Gagosian denied wrongdoing and moved to dismiss the suit, calling Perelman a "deadbeat" and a "bully." It was difficult to identify, in this ugly dustup, the sympathetic party. "This is a crazy case to have going on," the judge overseeing the matter declared, suggesting that the two moguls would be better served hashing out their differences over a cocktail in the Hamptons.

Perelman's case was ultimately dismissed. When I asked Gagosian about it, he didn't mask his sense of vindication. "It was complete bullshit," he said. "And he completely lost." But Perelman continued nursing a grudge. In 2018, the film producer Joel Silver sued Gagosian, alleging delays involving an eight-million-dollar Koons sculpture, but dropped the suit after court papers revealed that his legal bills were being covered by a secret backer: Ron Perelman.

Then something interesting happened. Perelman—who at his height was worth nearly twenty billion dollars—had a run of financial misfortune. In 2022, his company, Revlon, declared bankruptcy. Suddenly, he needed to offload some art. Perelman, whose collection was long on the artists Gagosian especially knew how to sell, put up the white flag.

"We've patched things up," Gagosian told me, with an air of regal magnanimity. "In the last couple of years," he continued, twisting the knife, "he's been quite *motivated* to sell . . . which I'm sure you've read about." According to Gagosian, they have since done "a lot of business." He added, "I like Ronald—he's an acquired taste, some people might say, but I always liked the guy."

When I reached Perelman recently, he had jettisoned his righteous armor and seemed ready to wallow in self-abasement. He'd acted "more out of emotion than out of fact," he told me. "In retrospect, if I wasn't so bugged by all of the issues, I shouldn't have filed the lawsuit." What precisely had bugged him? "I don't even remember." Why had he financed the Joel Silver lawsuit in 2018? Initially, Perelman denied having done this. When I informed him I was looking at a legal document indicating that he had, he pleaded temporary senility: "I don't remember that lawsuit." Apart from this minor blip, his friendship with Gagosian had been beautiful, he assured me. "We've been doing business very successfully for the last couple of years, with no problems." In Amagansett, Gagosian mentioned that Perelman was back on the guest list for Memorial Day.

The art world is a mercenary place where grudges often give way to expedience. In Phoebe Hoban's 1998 book, "Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art," the photographer Paige Powell recalls a conversation about Gagosian with Andy Warhol: "I was terrified of Larry, with Andy telling me all of these stories about how he was making obscene phone calls. And then Andy did a show with him, and when I asked why he was doing it after terrifying me for years about this guy, he said, 'Oh, well, it's cash and carry.'"

One small feature of Gagosian's business that he is particularly proud of is his publishing operation. His company is now one of the world's largest publishers of art books, he told me, with some six hundred titles. In financial terms, the books are "a loser," he acknowledged. But they are characteristically sumptuous, and artists and collectors love them. The gallery also publishes a magazine, *Gagosian Quarterly*, with interviews and essays featuring artists and others in Gagosian's orbit. The magazine runs advertising from luxury brands, he noted, "and the advertisers are many of our customers—Prada, Gucci, Vuitton." Derek Blasberg, who helps produce the *Quarterly*, gave me some copies, pointing out that the gallery's publications "spread Larry's gospel of making contemporary art such a desirable and fabulous commodity."

Paging through the Winter 2017 issue, I noticed a Q. & A. between Gagosian and his friend Woody Allen. The interview was published shortly before Allen's adopted daughter Dylan Farrow wrote an op-ed, for the Los Angeles *Times*, accusing the movie industry of ignoring her claim that Allen had sexually abused her. (Allen vigorously denies the accusation.) Gagosian and Allen go back a long way: Allen's wife, Soon-Yi Previn, once worked at the gallery, and Allen attended Gagosian's seventy-eighth-birthday party. In the Q. & A., Allen tells a humorous anecdote. It begins, "You and I had dinner at Stresa in Paris and we talked about all getting together with Roman Polanski"—the celebrated film director who has avoided the United States since 1978, six months after he pleaded guilty to unlawful sex with a minor. Allen was acquainted with Polanski, he notes, but Gagosian knew him "very well." Two weeks later, Gagosian called Allen and said, "Do you want to have dinner with Roman?" Plans were made for a gathering at Roman's house. When Allen arrived at the address, he was startled by the grandeur of the home: "I'm sitting there thinking, 'How well do his movies do? My God, he must have made a fortune.'" But when their host appeared, Allen exclaimed, "That's not Roman." At this point, the

transcript in the *Quarterly* notes, "[laughter]." There had been a misunderstanding: the house belonged not to Roman Polanski but to Roman Abramovich, the Russian oligarch. In 2022, Abramovich was sanctioned by the U.K. and the European Union in connection with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (His lawyers have recently challenged the E.U. sanctions in court.)

One way that Gagosian has insulated himself from the ups and downs of the art economy is by seeking out emerging markets. During the two-thousands, a generation of post-Soviet oligarchs—many of whom had amassed fortunes by purchasing formerly state-owned assets in dubious transactions—became eager buyers of art. Victoria Gelfand, a Belarus-born director at Gagosian who was then based in London, began cultivating them. Incredibly, between 2004 and 2008, Russian buyers were responsible for almost half of Gagosian's business worldwide, according to the *Times*. "You can e-mail a painting to Moscow and they e-mail you back the money, instantly!" Gagosian enthused in a 2008 interview. When the global financial crisis hit, later that year, Russian commissions kept coming in. Gagosian mounted a flashy exhibition at a former chocolate factory in Moscow. The timing was awkward: Russia had recently invaded its neighbor Georgia. But gallery staff vowed that this distraction wouldn't dampen the mood, assuring a reporter that international clients hadn't "canceled their trips because of the attack."

Abramovich, along with his then girlfriend, Dasha Zhukova, began collecting on an enormous scale. According to *The Art Newspaper*, in a single week he spent a hundred and twenty million dollars at auction, buying a Francis Bacon triptych and a Lucian Freud. In 2015, Abramovich and Gagosian threw a New Year's Eve party together, in St. Barts, that was reportedly attended by Chris Rock, Lana Del Rey, and Jon Bon Jovi. Abramovich wasn't the only oligarch Gagosian did business with. He became friends with the financier Mikhail Fridman, whom the European Union has described as having "strong ties to the administration of Vladimir Putin." (Fridman's attorneys have denied that this is true.)

Last year, after Russia invaded Ukraine, the New York *Post* ran a story characterizing Gagosian as "the official art dealer of the Russian oligarchy," citing his relationships with "Bond villain" types such as Abramovich, Fridman, and the Putin associate Mikhail Piotrovsky, who directs the Hermitage Museum. The U.S. Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network released a warning that the art market is "attractive for money laundering by illicit actors, including sanctioned Russian elites," and federal prosecutors began subpoenaing auction houses.

Shortly after the invasion of Ukraine, an e-mail went out to Gagosian employees. It said that "you absolutely cannot sell to a sanctioned person," the source who has worked at the gallery told me. "You cannot sell to their fake business in Liechtenstein. You cannot jeopardize the gallery to sell to these people." Suddenly, the mantra was "Know Your Customer." But this directive seemed a little disingenuous—if there is one thing Larry Gagosian has always known, it is his customers. When I asked him about Abramovich, he shrugged and said, "He's a nice guy." There was a bit of a language barrier, but they enjoyed hanging out. "He came over to my carriage house and bought, like, half of the things in my house," he continued, then emphasized, "When I was selling to him, there was no sanction. There was no war."

From our conversations, I got the sense that Gagosian does not feel particularly burdened by such ethical conundrums, and that he adheres to a simple rule. If it's illegal for him to do business with someone, he won't. Otherwise, it is not for him to parse the moral credentials of potential buyers. He has sold art to Sam Waksal, who pleaded guilty to securities fraud, bank fraud, obstruction of justice, and perjury; Peter M. Brant, who served six weeks in federal prison on charges related to tax documents, then celebrated his release with a dinner at Gagosian's house; Leon Black, who stepped down as the board chairman at MOMA after artists protested his close financial ties to the serial child predator Jeffrey Epstein; and Steve Cohen, whose hedge fund pleaded guilty to so much insider trading that it had to pay a $1.8-billion fine. (In 2004, Gagosian himself—along with his gallery—paid four million dollars to settle a federal lawsuit over unpaid taxes.) In recent years, Gagosian has also been doing a lot of business in the United Arab Emirates, a country with an appalling record on human rights and an appealing quantity of collectors.

I asked Gagosian if there is anyone he would refuse to deal with on ethical grounds. He said that he might not do business with a "convicted murderer," but that he doesn't want to draw such

"I did it! I solved the crossword! And I'm only two hours late for work!"

lines when it comes to lesser allegations. "If the money is correct, if the transaction is correct, I'm not going to be a moral judge," he said. Gagosian pointed out, rightly, that he wasn't alone in having done business with the oligarchs: "Everybody did—the auction houses, the top dealers."

In a 2019 interview with Artnet, Stefania Bortolami, the Tribeca gallerist, declared, "There's not enough 'good money' in the world to sustain this art world." She speculated that "very few artists are going to have the guts to say no to millions of dollars."

The art market is a star system like any other, and most artists, including many very good ones, do their work and live their lives far from the galaxy of Gagosian. If they are lucky enough to have representation, their work is shown by small or midsize galleries. Being supported by a mega-gallery like Gagosian is a gift, but it's complicated: such artists must produce work while this rowdy bacchanal of late capitalism plays out around them.

In a 1989 interview, Gagosian spoke with impolitic frankness to Anthony Haden-Guest about the ways money can ruin an artist. Some artists get "really fucked up" by financial success, Gagosian said, and "start getting interested in antique furniture and wine and adding another wing to the house in the Hamptons." (Money creates taste for artists as much as for their patrons, it would seem.) Such artists also become burdened with a new set of expectations, Gagosian continued: "You've got to keep the dealer happy. You've got to keep the pipeline loaded. And the marketplace doesn't tolerate a lot of experimentation."

For some artists closely associated with Gagosian, there is no apparent disconnect between the clamor of materialism and the art work itself. Admirers of Koons might claim that his glossily reflective sculptures of balloon toys are embedded with a sly social commentary on their multimillion-dollar price tags, and, for both the artist and his collectors, there must be some consolation in the idea that they're in on the joke. Last year, Damien Hirst had a show at a Gagosian gallery in London. Jonathan Jones, a critic at the *Guardian*, wrote, "This is art for the penthouses of oligarchs who look out of their windows and ask who really cares about all those pieces of meat walking about down there."

But for other artists it can be unsettling to be reminded that some of your most devoted collectors are people whose politics and life styles you find repugnant. "I don't actually think any work by a living artist should be more than a million dollars," Cecily Brown once told the *Financial Times*. "I think it's sick. It's out of control. It's about big-dick contests." Brown, whose paintings have sold at auction for more than six million dollars, has acknowledged that a relentless focus on prices could be inhibiting. "I can't come in here painting, thinking, 'Oh, this is worth . . . '" Part of her process, she continued, is to sometimes destroy her work along the way. "I don't think 'This could be $350,000' before I slash it."

Jenny Saville said that she finds it easy to leave the pressures and perversions of commerce at the studio door. In 2018, her monumental nude self-portrait "Propped" sold at Sotheby's for $12.4 million—the most ever paid for a work by a living female artist. Of course, this was the secondary market, so Saville saw none of that upside herself. But higher resale statistics generally drive up your prices in the primary market. Even so, Saville told me that such benchmarks are extrinsic to her artistic process. "It wasn't a better painting the day after the auction than it was the day before," she said. "The noise—I got rid of all that very young. I learned quickly that that's not where it's at. It's a rainy Tuesday, and you're making a certain mark in a certain way. That's all that matters."

I wondered how easy it was for other artists to maintain true north amid the powerful magnetic forces of the marketplace—to keep experimenting, to prevent their creative energies from becoming dissipated by their own wealth. (The *Guardian* review of the Hirst show—a survey of the formaldehyde-filled vitrines he's been making for three decades—lamented the artist's "progress from raw young punk to pretentious money-lover.") Then again, Picasso didn't exactly live like a monk, and he remained protean and vital until his death. Nearly five hundred years ago, Giorgio Vasari wrote about the lavish prices the great artists of the Renaissance commanded, and the manner in which they jockeyed for wealthy sponsors. Perhaps it was ever thus. In Twombly's later years, when he was ill with cancer, Gagosian offered his private jet so that the artist could travel between Virginia and Italy in comfort. In Gagosian's telling, Twombly would say, "The only two things I like are painting and flying on Larry's plane."

One explanation for Gagosian's continued dominance after five decades in the industry is that, for a white man of a certain generation, he has been surprisingly adept at shifting with the times. He still has the vibe of a nineteen-eighties corporate raider, and he pointed out to me, more than once, that he is "not very P.C. by nature." Yet he hasn't been cancelled, or sidelined as a dinosaur. And soon after stories emerged online, in 2020, alleging predatory sexual conduct by one of his longtime directors, Sam Orlofsky, Gagosian fired him, and sent the gallery's staff a memo saying that such behavior wouldn't be tolerated. "I didn't see it coming, I really didn't," he told me. He knew that Orlofsky had a certain life style ("Sometimes I couldn't get him on the phone till three in the afternoon") but maintains he had no inkling that his trusted director might have been harassing women—including staffers at the gallery. Gagosian might disdain bureaucracy, but by 2018 he had come to recognize that a muscular H.R. division was needed to keep everyone on track. (Orlofsky did not respond to requests for comment.)

The past several years have occasioned an overdue reckoning on questions of race and representation in the art world, and Gagosian has made moves that many people I spoke to praised as shrewd. In 2021, he hired Antwaun Sargent, a young Black writer and curator. Gagosian was uncharacteristically forthright about his motivation. "I may not see things as well as I saw things 20 or 30 years ago," he told the *Times*, adding, "With somebody like Antwaun, I'm able to refresh my perspective." Like John Richardson before him, Sargent was an unconventional hire; he'd never worked as a dealer. Sargent, who told me that he has a "pretty good barometer around tokenism," sensed that Gagosian was sincere in his intentions, and he immediately warmed to the no-bet-too-big ethos of the gallery. For the

début show, in Beverly Hills, of the Black painter Honor Titus—a series of paintings depicting tennis courts—Sargent got Gagosian to subsidize the construction of an actual tennis court on the gallery floor. The paintings sold. Sargent felt pressure not just to show Black artists but to make deals. "I joined a gallery, not a museum," he said. "The tokenism thing would be to say, 'O.K., Antwaun, tell me your ideas. You don't have to worry about sales.' Instead, they said, 'Hey, you want to do shows? You've got to sell those shows.'"

The decision to sign Anna Weyant could also be construed as an example of Gagosian's ability to adapt. Weyant, who grew up in Calgary and graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design, in 2017, is one of those fledgling talents originally boosted by Ellie Rines, of 56 Henry. As recently as 2019, Rines was selling drawings of Weyant's on a beach towel at an art fair in the Hamptons, for four hundred and fifty dollars each. But, after selling one piece to Larry Gagosian, Weyant ended up moving to a larger gallery, Blum & Poe ("I was absolutely heartbroken," Rines said), which raised her prices considerably. Gagosian and Weyant became romantically involved after he started collecting her work but before she left Blum & Poe to join his gallery, and both have been circumspect about discussing their relationship. From the outside, it is easy to suppose that this improbable liaison involves a familiar transaction. But unlike Susan Alexander—the hopeless vocalist in "Citizen Kane" who is promoted to the opera stage by her powerful older lover—Weyant has unquestionable skill. ("She's a good painter," Gagosian told me, with his usual linguistic economy.) And Rines, who remains friends with Weyant, said she believes that Weyant's bond with Gagosian is genuine. Invoking the "mischievous" quality of Weyant's art—lush studies of female figures, in the manner of Balthus or Currin—Rines said, "She kind of likes to be naughty and subversive, and there's something naughty and subversive about being with Larry." The *Wall Street Journal*, laying it on a bit thick, described Weyant as the "millennial Botticelli," and there's little doubt that wealthy collectors in Gagosian's circle have fuelled the vertiginous escalation of her prices. The *Journal* quoted Gagosian saying, "I'm just trying to protect her from the big bad wolves." Talk about being in on the joke.

"These days, it's all about local ingredients."

Late last year, Weyant had a solo show at Gagosian on Madison Avenue. A centerpiece of the exhibition was a large painting of a blond woman, standing on one foot with her arms outstretched; her toes graze a disembodied face lying horizontally at the bottom of the frame—her own face—as if she were pirouetting on it. The model for the painting, Sophia Cohen, is a friend of Weyant's, and happens to be an associate director at the gallery. Sophia is also Steve Cohen's daughter. Of course, museums are filled with portraits of noblemen's daughters. But, as I gazed at the painting, it seemed that Weyant was saying the quiet part out loud.

Issy Wood is a thirty-year-old artist and musician in London. She paints a range of objects (cars, clocks) and details of human figures (teeth are a favorite), and often works on velvet. Her art has a febrile air of detachment. In early 2020, she had a show at a small gallery in New York, which Loïc Gouzer, the former Christie's executive, attended. "Larry needs your number," he told her afterward. Gagosian was interested in her work, and arranged to visit her studio, in East London. "It was bizarre," Wood told me. "This was the guy that, for better or for worse, built the world that I live in as a young artist, and especially as a young painter, and he wanted to come to my disgusting studio." When he arrived, he moved quietly among the works and didn't say much. "He was shopping," Wood said. "Like it was Harrods."

Gagosian started buying her paintings and displaying them at his home in New York. Top collectors—as attentive as stock pickers to his tastes—noticed, and suddenly her paintings were selling on the secondary market for more than a quarter of a million dollars. "I could feel the hotness of Larry having approved my work," she recalled. She

attributes the surge, in part, to prospectors having heard that she might soon be joining Gagosian—which would drive her prices higher still. "It was insider trading," she said, sardonically. "It's an industry with no rules." She met with Gagosian a few more times, including at the Ritz in Paris. Wood, who is sober, was put off when he urged her to drink and take ketamine. (He says that he was aware of Wood's sobriety and would "never make such a suggestion," and denied that he takes ketamine himself.)

Gagosian told Wood that he wanted to mount a show of her work. It was unnerving to be on the receiving end of a charm offensive from "someone who has kind of transcended having to charm," she observed. "It felt like a necessary inconvenience to him." She was still procrastinating over whether to commit to a show when the pandemic began. Gagosian seems to hate being alone, and now his famous ability to convene was curtailed. He spent much of the lockdown in Amagansett. Tico Mugrabi and his wife stayed in the guest house, and he told me that, even at the height of the pandemic, Larry never stopped thinking about business.

Gagosian started texting Wood, who was alone in London and feeling isolated herself, and calling her, often multiple times a day. She came to savor these exchanges, and gradually they developed a bond. "I loved speaking to Larry," she said. To talk to him "was to be in touch with an era I was never a part of—these stories he would tell, with varying degrees of lucidity." She sent him photographs of works in progress, which he greeted with his standard, nearly monosyllabic affirmations. (Responding to a painting of a faucet: "I love faucets.") Even so, he had "amazing taste," she thought, and he could be very funny, and she admired the fact that he was not some to-the-manner-born dandy. "He was also really vulnerable, I think," she continued. "He's an extrovert and I think he was very bored."

Once travel restrictions eased, Wood visited New York. Gagosian offered to throw her a party, and suggested that she invite a bunch of friends. After she produced a provisional guest list, one of his assistants informed her that, apart from the music producer Mark Ronson, Gagosian didn't recognize the names. Wood felt a momentary flush of embarrassment that her friends weren't more famous. Gagosian, the assistant wrote, was "happy to host them but would like a little background to familiarize himself." So Wood supplied him with bios.

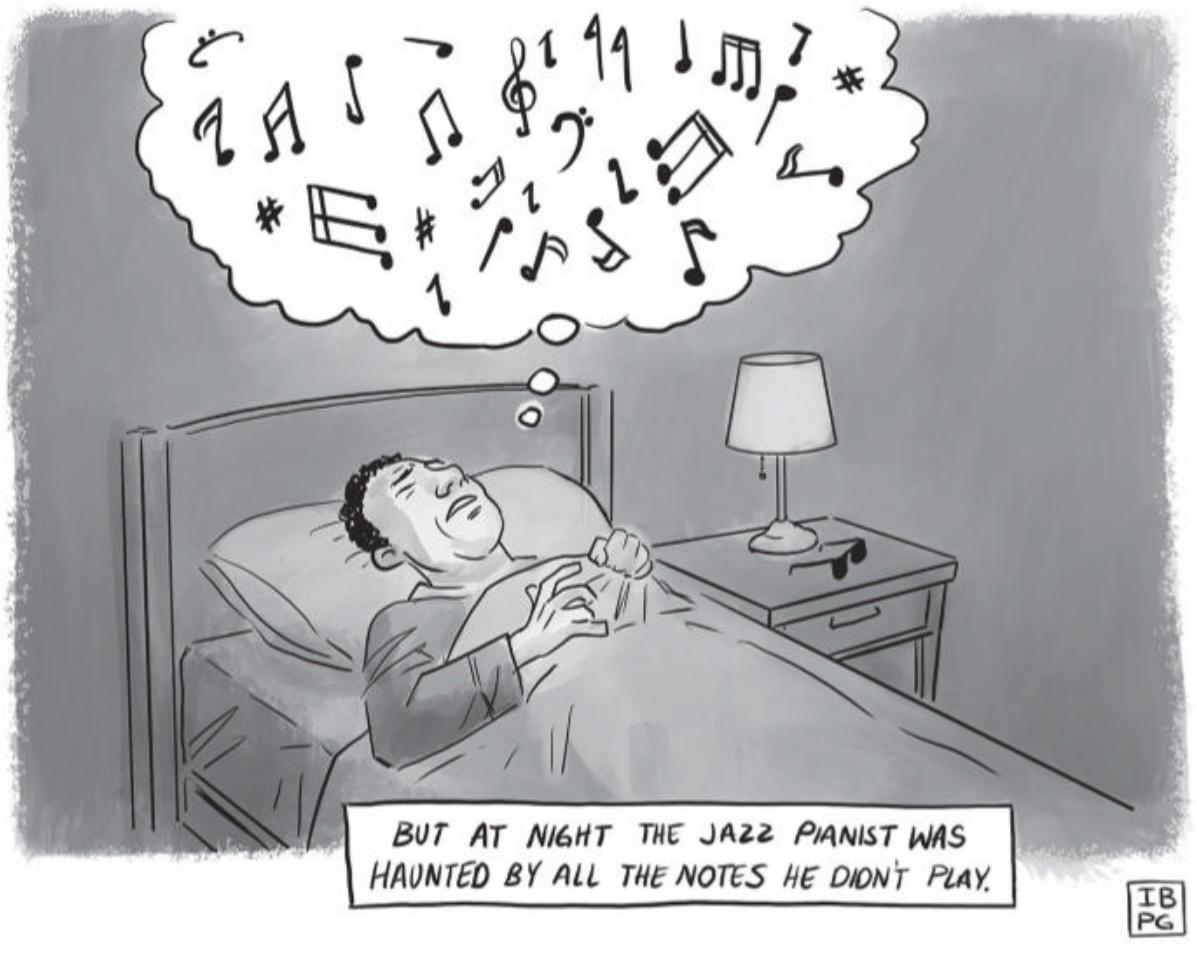
Gagosian's town house, decorated in the sterile fashion of today's super-rich, resembles an event space in an exceedingly nice hotel: zero clutter, few personal effects. The party's guest list ended up being a combination of his friends and Wood's. It was the first in-person celebration many of them had been to since the pandemic began, and the mood was energetic. "I got a little taste of what it would be like to be a Gagosian artist," Wood recalled. "It was very comforting to be around someone who is having that good a time all of the time." Weyant was there. Eddie, the butler, served food. Everyone smoked indoors. Lichtenstein, Mondrian, Picasso. Warhol's "Triple Elvis" over the fireplace. "Larry would keep insisting that I loosen up," Wood recalled. "He's, like, an old guy, and he had some crumbs down his shirt and he got so drunk and was making less and less sense, and was screaming at his staff to play Aerosmith." She paused. "I wasn't thinking, I hope this is my life." (Gagosian denies that he was drunk or requested Aerosmith.)

Afterward, Gagosian and Wood continued to discuss the idea of her joining the gallery, but her reservations were intensifying. "Maybe he's good at speaking to artists *once* they're rich," she said. "But I've never seen him do a really good job building a career from the ground up." The matter came to a head when the two met again at his town house. They sat at an oversized table. An Olympic swimming event played on a silent TV. Wood wanted to know about the gallery's long-term future, so she asked, "What will happen when you die?"

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Gagosian exploded. "Talking about my death when we're trying to have a meeting!" Wood now concedes that this wasn't very diplomatic. But she wanted an answer, and she was "pissed at him."

Gagosian told Wood that he wasn't going anywhere. It may have been that he was succumbing to an affliction that is common among megalomaniacal plutocrats: an inability to imagine a world in which he no longer exists. His friend Diego Marroquin told me that he once proposed that Gagosian sell his building in Chelsea and lease back the ground-floor gallery. Gagosian said that if he did so he'd insist on a fifty-year lease. "I said, 'Larry, it doesn't work. You're not going to be around!'"

Gagosian protested to Wood, "I'm in the best shape of my life. No one understands your work like I do. I want to make you a star." When she wasn't won over by this line of argument, he piv-



oted, saying, "I've done so much for you!" He mentioned that he'd bought her work—he owns about ten pieces—and displayed it in his house. As Gagosian was raising his voice, Wood noticed that Eddie had tactfully exited the room. Eventually, she excused herself to go to the bathroom. She sat on the edge of the toilet, staring at the room's elegant marble design, in no hurry to return. Then her phone lit up with a text from Gagosian, and then another, and then another. He had sent the same text three times (by accident, she thinks):

> The other galleries you are considering will most likely go out of business before my demise.

When Wood came out of the bathroom, Eddie informed her that Gagosian had gone to take a nap. She left the town house and ended up joining a smaller gallery, Michael Werner. "I think she's a talented woman," Gagosian told me. "Why she went sideways like that I have no idea." He seemed genuinely hurt and exasperated, and wondered aloud why she would "bite the hand that feeds her." But he repeated several times that she is a good painter. In Amagansett, before I ever broached the subject of Wood, Gagosian had shown me a small canvas of two Marilyn Monroes that she had painted, and said, proudly, "A friend of mine gave me this, as a gift."

Gagosian's board meets twice a year, at the town house. "Everybody sits around one big table," Glenn Fuhrman, who is a member, told me. People make presentations on technology, business, fashion. Jenny Saville, who is also on the board, said, "It's a big think tank for him." But nobody seems to believe that the board could take over should he die or retire.

Can Gagosian survive without Larry? When evaluating art, he has tried to pinpoint not just the works that might retain value but the ones that will endure—the masterpieces that will outlive us all. There are those who believe that the gallery could come to resemble a luxury brand: Chanel after Coco. There has been speculation in recent years of a possible acquisition by the French conglomerate L.V.M.H. (Gagosian says that it isn't happening.)

The Gagosian brand unquestionably has tremendous value, and a desirable international footprint, but so much of what has made the gallery thrive is Larry's own network and eye and persona. The art historian Avis Berman once described him by twisting a line from "Coriolanus": "He was the author of himself and he had no other kin." Jean Pigozzi put it in starker terms, saying, "If one day Larry goes, or retires, or whatever, I don't know what you're *buying*."

It's similarly unclear what will happen to Gagosian's personal collection, which includes a breathtaking assortment of twentieth-century masterpieces. When I asked Tico Mugrabi what might become of these works, he joked, "He wants to take it with him and do what the Egyptians do." Gagosian could set up his own museum, like the late Eli Broad, whose collection is now housed in a sleek white structure twelve miles east of the Los Angeles patio where Larry once peddled posters. (Broad acquired some eight hundred works—forty per cent of his collection—through Gagosian.) Among the very wealthy, a private foundation has become a fashionable way to present art and get a tax writeoff at the same time. These supposedly public-facing collections can be farcically inaccessible. Peter M. Brant, Gagosian's friend and client, opened one location of the Brant Foundation Art Study Center down the road from his Greenwich, Connecticut, estate, in a converted 1902 farm building that formerly housed an indoor tennis court. The collection is tax exempt, despite admitting visitors by appointment only and having no signage welcoming the public. (When I tried to plan a visit to the Greenwich location, earlier this summer, I learned that it is "temporarily closed.")

Patty Brundage's sister Susan, who also worked for Leo Castelli, told me, "In our day, you had collectors, but they anticipated making gifts to the museums. They weren't building temples to themselves." These temples, however, may be preferable to the fate of much art that is treated like an asset. Some major collectors now buy and sell art so frequently, and in such enormous quantity, that little of it gets displayed at all. Several years ago, the Mugrabis had a legal dispute with a fine-art storage company in New Jersey, and it emerged that the family had stashed nearly fourteen hundred works there. The Geneva Freeport—a tax-free zone in Switzerland where art is stored, for a fee, in climate-controlled, highly secure facilities—is thought to contain more than fifty billion dollars' worth of art and antiquities, including works by van Gogh, Picasso, and Leonardo da Vinci. It would be one of the biggest museums in the world if it were open to the public. "More and more art disappears into loading bays in Switzerland," Irving Blum told me. One perverse outcome of the hysterical inflation of art prices in the past half century is that great works end up reduced to stock lists, packing orders, lines on a piece of paper.

There is an extraordinary scene in the 2018 documentary "The Price of Everything" in which Gerhard Richter walks into a show of his work at the Marian Goodman gallery. "I would prefer to see it in a museum," he says, surveying his paintings. "Not in a private collection." Gesturing to one of his canvasses, he murmurs, "It's not good when this is the value of a house. It's not fair. I like it, but it's not a house." With a shrug and a laugh, he says, "Money is dirty."

It is a nice sentiment. But Richter is now one of the most expensive living artists—a single painting can sell for thirty million dollars or more. Most museums cannot afford to buy a Richter. During our lunch at Kappo Masa, Gagosian told me that he would like to see his own collection end up in a museum that is accessible to the general public. If he follows through on this impulse, it will be a gesture rich in irony—because elevating private interests, private parties, and private ownership may be his ultimate legacy in the art world. Recently, the Whitney Museum sold the building it had occupied for decades at Madison and Seventy-fifth, not far from Gagosian headquarters. The new owner is Sotheby's. ♦

A French Doll

CYNTHIA OZICK

SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS FROM GETTY

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOAN WONG

The music came down the hall from a door marked 3-C in one of those neighborhood clusters of five-story walkups, which some years later a brutish city planner would raze in favor of an imperial highway. It was not a radio or a needle wobbling on a turntable; it was living notes cascading from piano keys, and it was temperamental. Sometimes it bleated meekly, hesitantly; sometimes it raged, like scales gone berserk. The piano was mainly in need of tuning. Sometimes you heard it, sometimes not. Coming home from school at three o'clock in the afternoon, I would now and then set my knapsack down on the zigzag tile floor in front of that door and listen, not to the music but to its absence. I pressed my ear hard against the peephole until it seemed to me that someone on the other side was breathing, exhaling with an odd little groan—or was it the faint inmost rumble of my own heartbeat? An inch above the peephole was a slot with the name Isidore Atlas.

The piano itself was not an anomaly. Every apartment where there were children, from the first to the fifth story, harbored at least a secondhand upright, and the blend of the lessons, or the practicing, sent out a noisy staccato throb up and down the stairs and all along the corridors. I, too, had once been regimented by piano lessons, but it was no use. I had no facility or patience for it, and, besides, my mother, who worked as a typist in an insurance office, was too fatigued to enforce it. She believed that a fatherless child, a half orphan such as I was, ought not to be compelled to conform. There was another reason that I was freed from the piano: the cost of Miss Zink, the piano teacher.

At twelve I knew and perceived far more than twelve-year-olds today know and understand; I already understood the nature of guilt. The mood of that before-the-war world was ominous, torn open, giving off fumes not only of what was but of what would be: there were signs and meanings everywhere, and, drifting from under the lintel of 3-C, hints and implications. I understood also—it quivered in the currents of the gossip—that the unearthly space behind that door sheltered a shrine to a living deity: Isidore Atlas, venerated by Frieda, his wife. The veneration had something, or almost nothing at all, to do with the piano. I was afraid of both of them, though the husband almost never materialized in daylight. Neighbors who claimed that they had once or twice glimpsed the wife laboring up the stairs with her shopping bag testified that she had wolf eyes. The swollen veins on her hands were fattened gray worms. The floating smells of her cooking were vile, stews that smacked of potions.

And at the same time, flickering close to the fear, was the glamour of an unlikely history. It was said that they had been theatre people in their distant prime. Or else that the husband was even now a musician in a nightly piano bar. Or that he had once accompanied the choir of a famous cathedral. Or that he had performed under the baton of Toscanini. Or that all these tales, and perhaps more, were true. Or that they were all of them nonsensical inventions, and that the two old people were only what they seemed to be, elderly folk who kept to themselves.

We knew that the husband was no more when we saw the ambulance men carry a gurney precariously down the three flights of stairs. A frayed flowered sheet covered the shape of a tiny person, no bigger than a child. Two straps, one over the chest, the other around the calves, prevented it from sliding off. The wife watched with her wrathful eyes from the doorway, and the piano was mum until some weeks afterward, when its dismembered parts—first the legs, then the keyboard, then the frame with its harplike interior—were lifted over the bannisters and paraded from floor to lower floor, jingling mad, erratic, hymnlike tunes. From then on, there was silence behind 3-C; the old woman herself—the witch, the baba yaga, the bad fairy of my fright—was deemed defunct.

But she was there. I saw her standing in the partly open door waiting for me. It was plain that she was aware of when school let out, and when I would come by with my knapsack and my house key, a full three hours before my mother returned from her office. Did she also know that I had pressed my ear against her peephole?

Her left hand was clutching a crinkled paper bag; her right hand was curled in an almost-fist, but with the forefinger wagging.

"Girlie, come here," she called. "I've got a nickel for you, go buy yourself a treat."

She shook the bag. It rattled with loose coins. She was dressed only in a nightgown that was too long: the hem was caught under her naked toes. She told me that her legs were bothering her, she would trust me with the money in the bag, nickels and dimes, and all she wanted was two eggs and a quarter pound of farmer cheese—would I run down to the grocery for her?

Her look was theatrical—the looming nostrils, the wilted, insistent mouth. It could have been an ode she was reciting, or the urgings of a heroine in a play.

"I can't," I said. "I'm supposed to start my homework right away when I get home."

This was a fabrication. I was not surprised by how easily it came; I was under no such ukase, but I had the habit of guarding my habits, and I was fond of being alone. My mother complained that I had no playmates, yet she was often too tired to scold, and I was reluctant to explain how single-mindedly I gave those solitary after-school hours to my drawings. I drew clowns and skaters and bearded men and pretty girls with perfect profiles. I had a collection of colored pencils, and, with these, I delicately shadowed and rounded and ruddied the cheeks of my creations. And once, soon after glimpsing the tiny swaddled bundle of the dead husband on the gurney on its way down the stairs, I attempted to bring it to life again, and made a picture of a stunted dummy with stiff bristly eyelashes, like a doll's.

But it was not the offer of a nickel that made me all at once cast off my fear of the wife. It was a sudden itch of desire, an envy of what I could see through the doorway: where, everywhere else, there were rag rugs or linoleum, here was a verdant green carpet with fleur-de-lis designs all over it, as if a flowery meadow stretched far into 3-C. If I accepted the nickel, would I be allowed to enter that secret interior?

When I came back, she shook the bag of coins to test that its weight had not seriously lessened, and sniffed the cheese to be certain that it was fresh, and said that as a reward, in addition to the nickel, she would show me something, but only if I promised to help her out with the groceries, and from time

to time the pharmacy, whenever her legs were too sore.

"You seem reliable enough," she said, "and not one of those wild animals which come spilling out of the schools yelling their heads off. How old are you, maybe thirteen, and I don't suppose you still play with dolls?"

"I've never played with dolls."

But this, too, was a falsehood, invented out of shame. It was only recently that I had given up my predilection for make-believe.

"So much the better. They afflict the mind. What do you do instead?"

I told her that I liked to draw, and that I would be amenable to helping her out. And then she shut the door and left me standing before it on the zigzag tile.

It was two weeks before she opened it again, and again I glimpsed the green vista beyond her. But this time she was dressed in a brick-red blouse with lacy ruffles at the neck and wrists, and a lavishly pleated blue-black skirt, also trimmed with lace, and white stockings and patent-leather shoes with bronze-colored buckles. Her ankles were bandaged in some thick beige fabric, one layer wound over another. She handed me the same paper bag of ringing coins, and a note that listed bread, raspberry jam, butter, coffee, milk, biscuits, potatoes, onions, codfish, and more. An hour later, seeing me breathless from hauling up four sacks of groceries, she gave me three nickels and said she would show me what she had promised—but first, because it had been raining hard that morning, she would inspect the soles of my shoes to see if they were muddy, and hadn't I been splashing in puddles?

"Take those filthy things off," she said.

I obeyed, and stepped in my socks into the luxurious caress of that green and flowery meadow. All around were, to my eyes, the furnishings of a palace. A mahogany breakfront, its four glass panels inscribed with inlaid wood tracings, a dark walnut sideboard on curled legs, and Chinese wallpaper—wallpaper!—all waterfalls and tiny footbridges. And, at the center of these marvels, a round table swathed in a damask cloth, and four chairs with elegantly carved backs. I could not have described, or even named, any of these visions, but what they signalled was, or so I apprehend it now, something ceremonial, almost ritual. She made me wait where I stood, and I heard, hidden from my sight, a muffled kitchen clatter, and the sighs of an icebox, and then her heavy steps moved into another room and she brought out, coiled in a floral bedsheet similar to the one that had shrouded the dead man on the gurney, an elongated object.

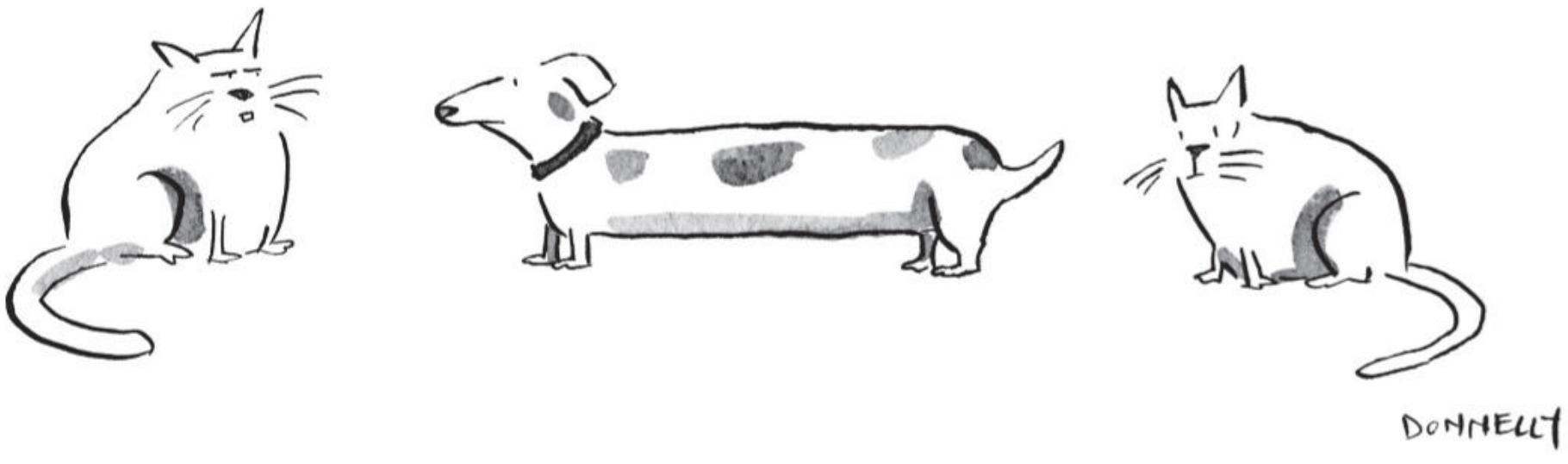
The body on the gurney had seemed miniature, doll-like. But this was, as she drew it from its windings, an actual doll. The head with its painted face was made of porcelain; the arms and legs were celluloid. It was elaborately dressed, in a long Ceylon-blue tunic with long sleeves edged in lace, and a densely ample lace-hemmed skirt and black velvet slippers over white stockings. Ivory buttons, or what resembled ivory, ran down its front. The silky threads that streamed out of masses of punctures in the buckram scalp, so minuscule they were nearly invisible, were blacker than any human hair. And glinting between the buttons on the breast was, I saw, a little silver key. The doll was long all over; its neck was lax and long and boneless. If it had been able to stand on its own, it would have been uncommonly tall. It was capable of sitting when propped, but then it sprawled. The woman had placed it on one of the carved chairs, where it lolled languidly, with its ankles turned in, one on top of the other. It was like no doll I had ever seen.

And it was both beautiful and repellent, the red lips like tulip petals, the pastel-pink cheeks, the little curved fingertips with their shell-shaped nails. But it was not a plaything, a toy baby doll that a child could dress and undress and pretend to scold in a grownup voice. It was itself a grownup thing, and I watched as she unbuttoned the front of the tunic and twisted the little silver key to unlatch a hollow torso, out of which she plucked a very small piano, made of tin, with diminutive celluloid keys and two strands of ribbon, one to attach to the doll's left wrist, the other to circle the right.

"Go ahead, touch the hands," she instructed me. A command, but also a witch's enticement. "Just give them a bit of a tug, not too hard. Here, let me do it for now and you'll see for yourself."

She tapped each celluloid hand separately, and then both together, and out of the belly of the doll came the rippling sound of an unseen music box.

It was because of this fog of the illicit—the shiver of horror at the sight of the hole in the ribless thorax, the eerily displaced sounds—that I told my mother nothing of my afternoons in 3-C, or of my increasing transactions with the widow of Isidore Atlas. It was a bargain that continued on school days and in every weather, and lured far more than my aimless hours with the colored pencils. The grocery, the drugstore, the Chinese laun-



"I know about dogs. This is the end you talk to."

dry, the newsstand, the grinding rounds her oozing legs could no longer bear: for these services I might be admitted to those sumptuous furnishings and the ornate ladylike figure with her limp and languorous limbs. The eviscerating act of unbuttoning, the turn of the silver key, the tethered hands with their shell-like nails, and the foolish little fake piano somehow began to trouble me less and less, and I was no longer unsettled when I noticed threadbare patches here and there in the green carpet, and certain small scratches and nicks that marred the grandeur of the sideboard and the breakfront, and more than one greasy stain in the damask. But the brick-red blouse with its ruffles and lace was kept away; it was only the doll's implacable stare that escaped the decay all around as it showed its face in the receding after-school light.

It came to me then, when the doll was already familiar in my hands and I tweaked the ribbons and the music began its loops, that the rite of the brick-red blouse and of the silver key (sham silver, and its usefulness, too, was sham—it was the undoing of the buttons that mattered) had a single intent. Was the doll in her fanciful dress meant to mimic the widow of Isidore Atlas, or was the widow purposefully got up like the doll? And meanwhile the nickels had stopped. I hardly minded. I was there for the doll, and for her lazy long arms and her white stockings and velvet slippers, and for her indolent poses, especially when her head slumped over her knees and she looked up at me out of the silky folds of her tunic with a painted gaze that was both detached and mocking. But whatever position or mood she found herself in, she could not resist the mechanical pull of her wrists, and by now it was I who had mastered the summoning of the music.

The doll, I learned on that long-ago sunless November afternoon in 3-C, was the embodiment of a great crime.

She was called a French doll, or else a boudoir doll, or else a fashion doll. She had once been a bourgeois fad (and what was that?), displayed on satin counterpanes, an indulgence for those who could afford her. The music box was not uncommon, though always the melodies were trivial, worthy of no better than an organ grinder with a chimp—but not *this* music, no! The sublime defiled, the sacred embedded in a thing of vanity, ridiculed, pirated, usurped, stolen. A felony, a wickedness, a sin.

I comprehended none of this. Was she speaking of the pulses and vibrations that scrolled out of the doll as a kind of sacrament? What I heard was something else: an engulfing and unholy fury.

"You see, you see? You're old enough to know that this isn't just somebody's rag doll. There are people who take it seriously, who treat it like a thing of art—they stole my husband's life to stuff it with. Tell me that you know it, even a kid like you—it's everywhere now, it's got into the next generation, everyone owns it, tell me, tell me!"

But why had she chosen me as witness, and what was I to be witness to? I listened as I hadn't listened before, twitching the ribbons again and again, straining toward the melody that inflamed her, attentive to the pitch and tone and shallow din of the silly music box, and did she intend to make me complicit in her rage? The melody, the melody, the melody, recurring, pausing, returning, in the way that a commonplace word endlessly repeated becomes denuded of sense until nothing remains but pure isolated sound . . . yet out of this disembodied echoing I caught wayward strands of recognition, and I knew that I knew these notes. I knew them with an instinct that shocked; I knew them as all the world knows the cries and rhythms of nursery rhymes and lullabies and magical spells and old ballads. What rose out of the doll's belly was nothing more than a folk song, habituated and domesticated. It was in the air; it was at home in the streets. And wasn't this the sin, wasn't this the scandal, wasn't this the very name of the crime?

Her husband, she let out in that crushing operatic voice, was a musician, a musician and more, and yes, he had performed backstage in silent-movie theatres, that lost musical art. It was he who conjured, behind the screen, the passions and longings of the actors, and, true, the plots weren't his, but the music was all of his own invention and inspiration. He was a composer, no different from Verdi, Puccini, Rossini, all of whom swiped their plots. . . .

I was ignorant of these luminaries, yet she made me understand that they were giants, and that Isidore Atlas was no less so, was, by contrast, far more so, since wicked thieves had purloined his creation, the pure, the singular, the celestial, and loosed it into the million graspings of usurpers with their alien syllables! A glory fallen now into what perverse vessel, into this, even this, this! An adornment built of rags, a corruption, a tin box in the craw of a doll. "Tell me, tell me, is 'Die Lorelei' a folk song? Is 'Ave Maria' a folk song? Who first sang 'America the Beautiful'? Tell me the name of the composer of 'Home on the Range.' I won't let this happen to Isidore Atlas." She called out, as if to a pair of scales of justice dangling perilously from the ceiling, "No!"

It meant, I saw, that it had already happened. Avaricious humankind had made its claims. Lore devours all. The doll was among the criminals. And because she had been unable to stop it from happening, the widow of Isidore Atlas was herself an accomplice.

November narrowed and fled. The door to 3-C remained shut and mute. There were no more lists, no more bags of coins. I went back to my colored pencils, and drew two figures—today I would call them effigies—one with stretched-out limbs, both in ornamental costumes, nearly matching, but it was a desultory scrawling.

December came, and with it a blizzard. Schools were closed, transportation crippled, my mother's office unpeopled. Ambulances struggled fitfully on vacant ice-bound roads, and it was on just such a dazzlingly white day that a gurney was brought down from 3-C carrying the widow of Isidore Atlas under yet another floral sheet with tattered corners. My mother had seen this forlorn parade; sequestered sullenly with my pencils, I had not.

"The neighbors were in there like locusts," she told me, "together with the cops. What a sight! A junk yard of banged-up fancy old furniture, an icebox crammed and everything in it rotting—can you imagine? It seems the old lady had nobody, the stuff is there for the taking, people were grabbing whatever they liked, and, look, I picked this up if you want it—"

It was only the music box, but, torn from the device of the doll and her ribbons, the music box declined to play. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Cynthia Ozick on artistic theft.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

SHOCK WAVES

"Oppenheimer" and "Barbie."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new film from Christopher Nolan, "Oppenheimer," starts and ends in the round. In the opening shot, ripples expand in puddles as raindrops fall. Three hours later, we get a vision of Earth beginning to burn, as nuclear explosions bloom across the globe. Nolan is always entranced by the vast and the tiny; "Inception" (2010), wherein city streets fold like paper under the pressure of dreams, concludes with a spinning top. This obsession with scale is well served by "Oppenheimer," in which the amassing of refined uranium, for the construction of an atomic bomb, is indicated by marbles piling up inside a goldfish bowl. How much roundness can you take?

The antidote to this circularity is J. Robert Oppenheimer. (Though named for his father, Julius, he insisted, with Prufrockian nicety, that the "J" stood for nothing at all.) Lean, sticklike, skullish in his gauntness, and too clever for comfort—his own or anyone else's—he has gone down in history as the director of the Los Alamos Laboratory, in New Mexico, where the bomb was built, and it is from history that Nolan seeks to pluck him. Oppenheimer is played by Cillian Murphy, who catches the quiet inquietude of the man, and his tobacco-softened speech. In the blaze of his blue eyes we see not candor but a kind of undimmed shock, as if he were staring straight through us at matters invisible to regular mortals. "What happens to stars when they die?" he says, by way of small talk, at a party in Berkeley. There he meets the incandescent Jean Tatlock (Florence Pugh); later, at her bidding, he translates a Sanskrit text as they make love. For Oppenheimer, no talk is ever small.

The film is adapted from "American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer," a 2005 biography by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin. I hate to say it, but, if you zip through all six hundred pages of the book before seeing the film, you'll enjoy the ride more. Much is omitted in the adaptation; there is no whisper, for example, of the fact that Oppenheimer was born into serious wealth. Yet Nolan, who wrote the screenplay, has a fine taste for the delicious detail. During a youthful sojourn in the Netherlands, Oppenheimer doesn't just learn Dutch in six weeks. He learns enough to give a lecture on quantum physics. The irony is that what makes the movie challenging is not the scientific theory—which is delivered with a diplomatically light touch—but a glut of political paranoia.

Like "The Social Network" (2010), "Oppenheimer" is structured around two inquisitions, each of which is designed to load us with information and to trigger significant flashbacks. If, in the process, we feel dumb and dumber, tough. The first is a closed hearing, in 1954, at which Oppenheimer's security clearance is revoked—an affront from which he never recovers. The revocation (which was not officially voided until last year) turns upon his left-wing sympathies before the war, but it has clearly been engineered by the F.B.I. and by certain figures who have Oppenheimer's worst interests at heart. The second occasion is a Senate hearing, in 1959, that is held to confirm the appointment of Lewis Strauss (Robert Downey, Jr.) as President Eisenhower's Secretary of Commerce. And what does *that*, you may wonder, have to do with blowing things up?

The answer is far from simple, and the tangle left me genuinely torn. The upside is that Downey, liberated from the stranglehold of Marvel, provides the least mannered and the most densely textured performance of his career. Polite, bespectacled, and immune to panic, Strauss—a chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission—comes across, in Downey's rendering, as the most pitiless of Machiavels. The downside is that he all but commandeers the film. Even Oppenheimer's marriage to Kitty (Emily Blunt), troubled but enduring, seems to flit by in snatches when set beside the enmity of Strauss, who believes that Oppenheimer has humiliated him. Addicts of Cold War conspiracy will be in bliss, but not everyone, I suspect, will thrill to the truffling up of former Communists in West Coast academia. Folks want some bang for their buck.

The bang is Trinity—the first detonation of a nuclear device, in July, 1945. The name was chosen by Oppenheimer, in tribute to a sonnet by John Donne. (For the complete poem, listen to the agonized aria sung by Oppenheimer in "Doctor Atomic," John Adams's 2005 opera.) The explosion, two hours into the film, reaches to the pure core of Nolan's visual intensity. For once, in the midst of this talkative movie, the chattering dies down. Many observers, including Oppenheimer's boss, General Leslie R. Groves (Matt Damon), lie flat on the ground. One scientist, confronting the blast, wears sunscreen and shades, as if he were at the beach. All music is finally hushed. The sole sound is human breathing, in and

ABOVE: ANTONIO GIOVANNI PINNA

Christopher Nolan's film portrays the creation of the atomic bomb; Greta Gerwig's brings Barbie to the real world.

ILLUSTRATION BY DIEGO MALLO

out. The clock counts down; time stops; then comes the flowering of fire.

It's a hell of a sequence, and, as you might expect, it's infernally beautiful to behold. Rising in the wake of such images is the issue of moral decorum: What can you, or should you, show? When slides of Hiroshima are projected at Los Alamos, some people look away, unable to countenance what their loyal efforts have wrought. Not a frame of this film is set in Japan; Nolan relies on his leading man to suffer the fallout in spirit. There are screen-filling closeups of Oppenheimer, who appears to be haunting himself. Now and then, the very space around him quivers in response, as if his tremors of conscience were giving off shock waves. ("That crybaby," Harry Truman says of him.) The grandeur is tremendous, and yet, this being Nolan, it needs to be surrounded with the little things. When Groves is searching for someone to oversee the creation of the bomb, he walks into a classroom for his first meeting with Oppenheimer and, to his face, calls him theatrical, egotistical, and unstable. Oppenheimer smiles. He gets the job.

What's the difference between Greta Gerwig's previous movie, "Little Women" (2019), and "Barbie," her latest enterprise? Well, one is based on a book by Louisa May Alcott, and the other on a well-thumbed classic toy by Mattel. (I won't spoil things by saying which is which.) Also, if memory serves, Jo, Beth, and the other girls didn't spend *that* much time on fluorescent Rollerblades. Their loss.

Powering the new film is the idea that there's a magical place called Barbie Land, which is home to all the Barbies, not least *the* Barbie (Margot Robbie), who is proud to describe herself as "stereotypical." She sleeps in a heart-shaped bed, in a house that lies so brazenly open for inspection that J. Edgar Hoover would moan with delight. Being a doll, Barbie kicks off her day with a dry shower, has her breakfast without consuming it, and floats down to ground level rather than taking the stairs. The dominant, not to say overbearing, hue of her existence is pink. Watching the first half hour of this movie is like being waterboarded with Pepto-Bismol.

Barbie has a male chum, Ken (Ryan Gosling), though he wishes he were more than that. "We're girlfriend-boyfriend," he tells her, running the words together into a single unit. Smooth. They can't have sex, although a showing of "Team America: World Police" (2004) might give them some handy tips. Still, they can party every night. All is well until Barbie starts having thoughts of death, whatever that may be; bewildered, she consults Weird Barbie (Kate McKinnon), who lives on a hill, does the splits, makes a case for being "sad and mushy and complicated," and proposes a trip to reality.

What we have here, in short, under layers of stylization, is a standard-issue journey of discovery. Barbie, with the uninvited yet eager Ken in tow, follows the pink road like a shrimp-colored Dorothy, travelling not from Kansas to Oz but from Barbie Land to Los Angeles. There she meets a teen-ager named Sasha (Ariana Greenblatt) and her mother, Gloria (America Ferrera), one of whom is or was Barbie's owner; if Barbie is feeling depressed or messed up, it's because of them. By a helpful coincidence, Gloria works at the headquarters of Mattel. "Barbie in the real world—that's impossible," she says, summarizing the hook of the film and, incidentally, echoing the hero of "Oppenheimer," when he learns that German scientists have split the atom. "That's impossible," he says. (I was hoping that he'd shout out "Fission: impossible!" but you can't have everything.)

A further similarity: just as Downey threatens to pull Nolan's film out of orbit, so, in "Barbie," does Gosling attract a dangerous share of the dramatic energy. His line readings keep taking you by surprise; a late-night solo dance, outside Barbie's house, has a mournful shimmy; and he is the beneficiary of Gerwig's most inspired joke, which is that Ken, in California, discovers—and totally digs—the patriarchy. "I'm just going to pop into the library and see if I can find some books on trucks," he says. He then spirits that leathery masculinity back into Barbie Land, which he rechristens Kendom. He fights with his fellow-Kens, plays guitar not to but *at* Barbie, and (this has to be peak Gosling) pauses in mid-conversation with her to smirk at the bulge of his own biceps.

All of which is tricky for the balance of the story, but, then, the entire movie, like Barbie when she ditches her high heels, struggles to find its footing. The membrane between the two arenas, the true and the fantastical, grows so porous as to be meaningless; not only are Gloria and Sasha imported into Barbie Land but so is the angry C.E.O. of Mattel (Will Ferrell), plus a gang of his corporate henchmen. "Barbie" is, in every sense, all over the place. Because it's "A Mattel Production," as the opening credits inform us, it wants to have its cake, eat it, mock it, smear it on the faces of the manufacturers, and still sell a shitload of dolls—or, as a recent piece in the *Times* suggested, "drive near-infinite brand synergies," the sort of phrase that makes me want to move to Bhutan and raise goats.

"Barbie" is fun, no question, yet the fun is fragmented. You come away with a head full of bits: interruptions that are sprinkled over the plot like glitter. Moping Barbies tend to watch the BBC's "Pride and Prejudice" for the seventh time, we hear, whereupon the screen fills with a clip of Colin Firth as Mr. Darcy. Wackier still is a scene in which Barbie complains of no longer being pretty; a voice-over (Helen Mirren) butts in to point out that hiring Margot Robbie to play unpretty is poor casting. This earned a laugh when I saw the movie, but you have to ask: Who's it for? Will young girls return to the film again and again, as they did to "Frozen" (2013)? If so, what will they make of the dialogue, with its mentions of "sexualized capitalism," "rampant consumerism," and "cognitive dissonance"? How will they react when Sasha addresses Barbie as "you fascist"?

Maybe the movie is for Greta Gerwig. And, by extension, for anyone as supersmart as her—former Barbiephiles, preferably, who have wised up and put away childish things. Nobody else would even attempt to meld a feminist colloquium with a plug for a chunk of plastic, and, if the result is a deep disappointment after "Little Women," perhaps depth is the wrong thing to ask for. Think of the kid in Charles Baudelaire's essay "The Philosophy of Toys," who shakes and bangs a toy in exasperation, before finally prizing it open. "*But where is its soul?*" Baudelaire says, adding, "This moment marks the beginnings of stupor and melancholy." Sometimes the shiny surface is enough. Or, as Barbie's beau would say, Kenough. ♦

BROTHERS IN LAW

Dostoyevsky's novel of a family at war with itself.

BY JENNIFER WILSON

"No, gentlemen of the jury, they have their Hamlets, while we still have only our Karamazovs!" Arguments are under way in the state's case against Dmitry Karamazov, on trial for the murder of his father, Fyodor Karamazov, and for the theft of three thousand rubles from the old man's room. In a crowded courtroom, the prosecutor, Ippolit Kirillovich, is reminding his audience of the unpredictable, inconsistent nature of the Russian character. Dmitry has a reputation for generosity (he was known to treat peasants to champagne), but this does not make a man incapable of murder, least of all in Russia. "We possess broad natures, Karamazov natures," the prosecutor declares. "We're capable of combining all possible contradictions and simultaneously contemplating both abysses at the same time, the abyss above, that of lofty ideals, and the abyss below, that of the most vile and stinking degradation."

The prosecutor's speech is crammed with quotable lines for journalists who have flocked to the town of Skotoprigonevsk (derived from the Russian word for "cattle yard") to attend Dmitry's trial. "'They have their Hamlets, while we still have only our Karamazovs!' That was clever," someone in the crowd remarks afterward. The trial is national news, the object of "feverish, irritating interest" across Russia. A star defense attorney has arrived from Moscow, and medical experts trained in the latest science, psychology, have been shipped in to determine whether Dmitry was overtaken by a newly discovered phenomenon: a fit of passion. "I read about this recently," one of the townswomen offers. "Doctors confirm it: they confirm everything."

By 1878, when Dostoyevsky sat down to write "The Brothers Karamazov," Russia was in the throes of a true-crime craze and courtroom trials had become media events. A few years earlier, the reformist tsar Alexander II had opened the courts to public audiences and, separately, granted greater freedom to the press. The two developments created a Russian reading public that was rabid for shocking tales of murder and a liberated press that was happy to supply them. There were periodicals devoted to crime, such as *Glasnyi Sud* ("Open Court"), and "The Criminal Chronicle" became a standard feature of Russian newspapers. (Dostoyevsky found the germ for "Crime and Punishment" in a newspaper story about a young man who killed a chef and a washerwoman with an axe; the paper said he was an Old Believer, a *Raskolnik*.) Sensing an audience, both in the courtroom and beyond, prosecutors and defense attorneys alike began to argue and persuade in style, often invoking fictional killers whose stories might distract jurors from the real case in front of them. Raskolnikov, the impoverished axe murderer of "Crime and Punishment," was a popular choice.

Dostoyevsky was as addicted as anyone to the crime stories flooding the papers. He contributed to the frenzy, covering trials in his magazine, *A Writer's Diary*, where his reporting sometimes slipped into personal testimony. Of a woman whose attacker was acquitted, he wrote, "She endured several minutes (far too many minutes) of *mortal fear*. Do you know what *mortal fear* is? . . . It's almost the same as a death sentence being read to one tied to a stake for execution while they pull the hood over his head." He was drawing from memory. In 1849, when he was twenty-seven, Dostoyevsky had been arrested for participating in a discussion group called the Petrashevsky Circle, whose members debated socialism and read banned literature. Along with other members of the circle, he was sentenced to death by firing squad. On

It is almost as if the whole Karamazov family were in on the crime together.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOE VILLION

December 22nd, just before he was to be executed, a messenger from the Tsar suddenly arrived with a last-minute reprieve. Dostoyevsky was sentenced to hard labor in Siberia, followed by six years of compulsory military service.

In the labor camp, Dostoyevsky experienced a political and spiritual conversion that led him to reject the French utopian socialism of his youth and embrace the idea of a benevolent autocracy guided by the Russian Orthodox faith. As a way of atoning for his earlier radicalism, he devoted much of his career to depicting wayward Russian youth confused and corrupted by Western ideas of progress. Years later, at a literary gathering, one such youth asked Dostoyevsky, "Who gave you the right to speak like this, on behalf of all Russian people?" The author lifted the hem of his pants, revealing scars left on his ankles from years of wearing shackles. "This is my right to speak like this," he told the crowd.

Dostoyevsky's experience colored his views on the new court system. His commentary could be conflicted, as if he were cross-examining his own soul. He had seen for himself what hard labor could do to a man, and, noting Russia's large number of acquittals, he praised his countrymen for applying the law "from a Christian point of view." (In 1889, Russian juries acquitted violent offenders at a rate—thirty-six per cent—that far exceeded those in Western Europe, an indication of pervasive mistrust of the state.) But he also feared that verdicts of not guilty were being confused with spiritual absolution. Acquittals left no room for remorse.

"The Brothers Karamazov" is the last in Dostoyevsky's tetralogy of so-called murder novels, following "Crime and Punishment," "The Idiot," and "The Possessed." In it, Dostoyevsky satirizes the theatrical nature of Russia's court system and treats what he sees as its limitations with deadly seriousness. Though no longer a socialist, Dostoyevsky could never shake his faith in the collective. He was wary of any system that held individuals responsible for the failures of society. In a country, as in a family, guilt was a collective inheritance.

In "The Brothers Karamazov," now available in a lively, fast-flowing new translation by Michael Katz (Liveright), Dostoyevsky blended the family novel with the whodunnit, revealing the capaciousness of the novel as a form and the power of blood as a metaphor. The Karamazovs fit what Dostoyevsky described in *A Writer's Diary* as "an accidental family," sons merely by birth, brothers in name only. In this, they resembled Russia, which he saw as a family at war with itself. There are three Karamazov brothers. Dmitry is Fyodor's eldest son. Alyosha, the youngest, has been living in a local monastery. Ivan, the middle brother, has been working in Moscow as a book critic. (There is also a possible fourth brother, Fyodor's servant Smerdyakov, who is thought to be his illegitimate son.) Neither Alyosha nor Ivan is a suspect in their father's murder, but the novel tries them for spiritual culpability. Did they do enough to prevent the murder, or did they look away? In "The Brothers Karamazov," Dostoyevsky puts Russia itself on trial, forcing all its children to fess up to their bad behavior.

Though Dmitry swears he is innocent, the case against him is, from a legal standpoint, open and shut. Dmitry had a motive: he believed his father had stolen his inheritance, which he needed to run off with his girlfriend, a sweet temptress with a name to match, Grushenka (Russian for "little pear"), whom Fyodor was trying to woo himself. Dmitry also had the means: he was one of two people—the other being Smerdyakov—who knew the secret knock, signalling that the "little pear" had arrived in the night, that would make Fyodor open his door at once. Then, there is the fact that after the murder Dmitry appeared in town covered in blood and waving a wad of cash around.

The only wrinkle in the prosecutor's case is the victim. No one liked Fyodor Karamazov. He was a landlord and a lecher, a proud "sensualist" who likened himself to "an ancient Roman patrician of the decadent period." He held drunken orgies in front of his children. The town doctor testifies that as a little boy Dmitry was left to wander by himself on the estate with just one button holding his trousers together. Ivan and Alyosha, Fyodor's sons by his late second wife, were left unwashed and underfed. Smerdyakov, the son of a mentally ill woman named Lizaveta, whom Fyodor was rumored to have raped, suffered from epilepsy, possibly induced by beatings. Ippolit Kirillovich gets all this out of the way at the start of the trial, anticipating the defense. "There were no paternal, spiritual obligations," he tells the jury, of Fyodor: "he raised his little ones in the backyard, and was glad when they were taken away from him. He even forgot about them completely." In short, the prosecutor concludes, quoting another cold, uncaring patriarch, the French monarch Louis XV, "the old man's only moral principle was *après moi, le déluge*."

The subject of regicide hangs over the courtroom. What responsibilities does a father—of a family, of a nation—have to his children? And what recourse do these children have when their basic needs are not met? These questions had political echoes that had already determined the fate of nations all over Europe. During the trial, it becomes obvious that the journalists are less concerned with who killed Fyodor Karamazov than with the nature of the crime: in a country ruled by one man, patricide was inevitably a symbolic act. The novel is set in 1866, a "transitional progressive epoch," the narrator, the town gossip, tells us. It has been five years since Alexander II abolished serfdom, and yet Fyodor's serf Grigory has stayed behind to serve his master, to the protestations of his wife, Marfa. "Do you understand what duty is?" he chides her. "I do understand what duty is, Grigory Vasilievich, but what sort of duty do we have to remain here?" she implores. "That I don't understand at all." When Grigory sees Dmitry in the garden at night, he screams—even without knowing that Fyodor is dead—"Patricide!" The talk about masters no longer being masters, about the order of things being rearranged, has him on edge.

By the time Dostoyevsky wrote "The Brothers Karamazov," Grigory's worries had become those of a nation, and anxiety had given way to terror. Bazarov, the charismatic nihilist of Ivan Turgenev's novel "Fathers and Sons," which was published in 1862, was smoking in parlors and seduc-

ing society women with talk of science and reason. Fifteen years later, the country's radical youth had traded their cigarettes for dynamite, and the women in their midst were being handed lists of targets to assassinate. In 1878, Vera Zasulich—a clerk who had come under the influence of a student revolutionary named Sergey Nechayev—shot the governor of St. Petersburg in his office. In a decision that shocked Europe, she was acquitted by a Russian jury. Zasulich became an international celebrity and settled in Switzerland, spreading the gospel of violent revolution; Oscar Wilde's first play, "Vera; or, the Nihilists," first performed in 1883, was inspired by her.

In 1880, the year "The Brothers Karamazov" was published, there were attempts on the lives of Alexander II and the minister of the interior. The head of the secret police had been assassinated two years earlier by an anarchist named Sergey Kravchinsky, known as Stepniak, who then fled to London, where he eventually encouraged Constance Garnett, Dostoyevsky's early English-language translator, to learn Russian. Across Europe, terrorism was referred to as "the Russian method." Kirillovich warns the jury in Dmitry's trial that all of Europe is watching to see what they decide, that foreign powers might intervene if Russia cannot keep its house in order. "Don't tempt them," he cautions, "don't accumulate their constantly growing hatred by a verdict that justifies a son's murder of his own father!"

For much of the nineteenth century, Russian literature lived, in the minds of most Western Europeans, behind, well, a curtain. The curtain was ornately embroidered with images of bears, onion domes, and noble savages untainted by logic. Russians, D. H. Lawrence wrote, "have only been inoculated with the virus of European culture and ethic. The virus works in them like a disease. And the inflammation and irritation comes forth as literature." The most inflamed Russian writer was said to be a man called Dostoyevsky. His hatred of Western Europeans only added to his mystique.

When, in 1912, Garnett translated "The Brothers Karamazov" into English, its review in the *Times Literary Supplement* covered almost the entire front page. "We are told that through him alone can we hope to understand the Russian soul, divined and interpreted in his novels as nowhere else," it announced. "Here comes the Scythian, the true Scythian, who is going to revolutionize all our intellectual habits," another critic exclaimed, invoking the nomadic people who once roamed the Russian steppes.

The English were left perplexed, as if they had survived the book rather than read it. "Amazing in places, of course; but my God!—what incoherence and what verbiage, and what starting of monsters out of holes to make you shudder," the novelist John Galsworthy wrote. Joseph Conrad echoed this ambivalence, calling the novel "an impossible lump of valuable matter." Everyone could sense that something important had happened. But what?

The answer lies in the texture of Dostoyevsky's language. The novel has a spoken quality that is meant to communicate the unreliability of memory and the fact that people tend to misunderstand one another far more often than they do the opposite. Katz is particularly attentive to this feature of Dostoyevsky's prose. His is, by my estimation, the voiciest translation of the novel thus far. He writes at the fever pitch of speech, unleashing the speed and the chaos of the original. All anyone knows of the events that led to Fyodor's murder comes through an inconsistent narrator who is often relaying rumors spread by unreliable sources. The witnesses who take the stand are nervous, stammering. They melt down in jealous rages and burst out in tears while remembering events that took place twenty years earlier. The nonplussed detectives who interview Dmitry about the night of the murder seem to have wandered in from a different novel, one in which personalities are coherent, cause leads to effect, and clues build toward an answer. When the detectives question Dmitry about the three thousand rubles he was seen with after the murder, Dmitry claims it was money he had saved and stuffed in an amulet he sewed and kept on his chest. Where is the amulet? they ask:

> "I threw it away there."
>
> "Where, precisely?"
>
> "On the square, on the square! The devil knows where on the square.
>
> Why do you need to know this?"
>
> "It's extremely important, Dmitry Fyodorovich: material evidence in your favor. How is it

you don't want to understand this? Who helped you sew it up a month ago?"

"No one helped me. I sewed it myself."

Just when you think, Dmitry knows how to sew?, the detective questioning him asks, "You know how to sew?" The detectives are from the land of realism. In "The Brothers Karamazov," narrative unfurls at the mad and authentic pace of human emotion.

Many attempts to interpret the novel have centered on a prose poem within it titled "The Grand Inquisitor." In the poem, which Ivan recounts to Alyosha, Christ returns to Earth during the Spanish Inquisition and is questioned about the forty days and nights he spent in the desert. Why, the Inquisitor asks, did he refuse the Devil's temptation, to turn stone into bread? Did he not understand that this is what people want: bread and miracles?

The Inquisitor's dictum that humanity needs a strongman who will provide material security and mass spectacle was read in the years following Garnett's translation as a prophetic diagnosis of Russian political life. Man is "too weak, or vicious, or something to share bread," Lawrence postulated in an essay on the poem. "He has to hand the common bread over to some absolute authority, Tsar or Lenin, to be shared out." Yet Dostoyevsky did not see his compatriots as simply children seeking a father. He understood them to be brothers in search of one another. His novel "The Possessed" (1872) was based on the true story of a student revolutionary who was murdered by a socialist brother-in-arms. In "The Brothers Karamazov," Dostoyevsky sought other, specifically Russian forms of brotherhood based in Christian love.

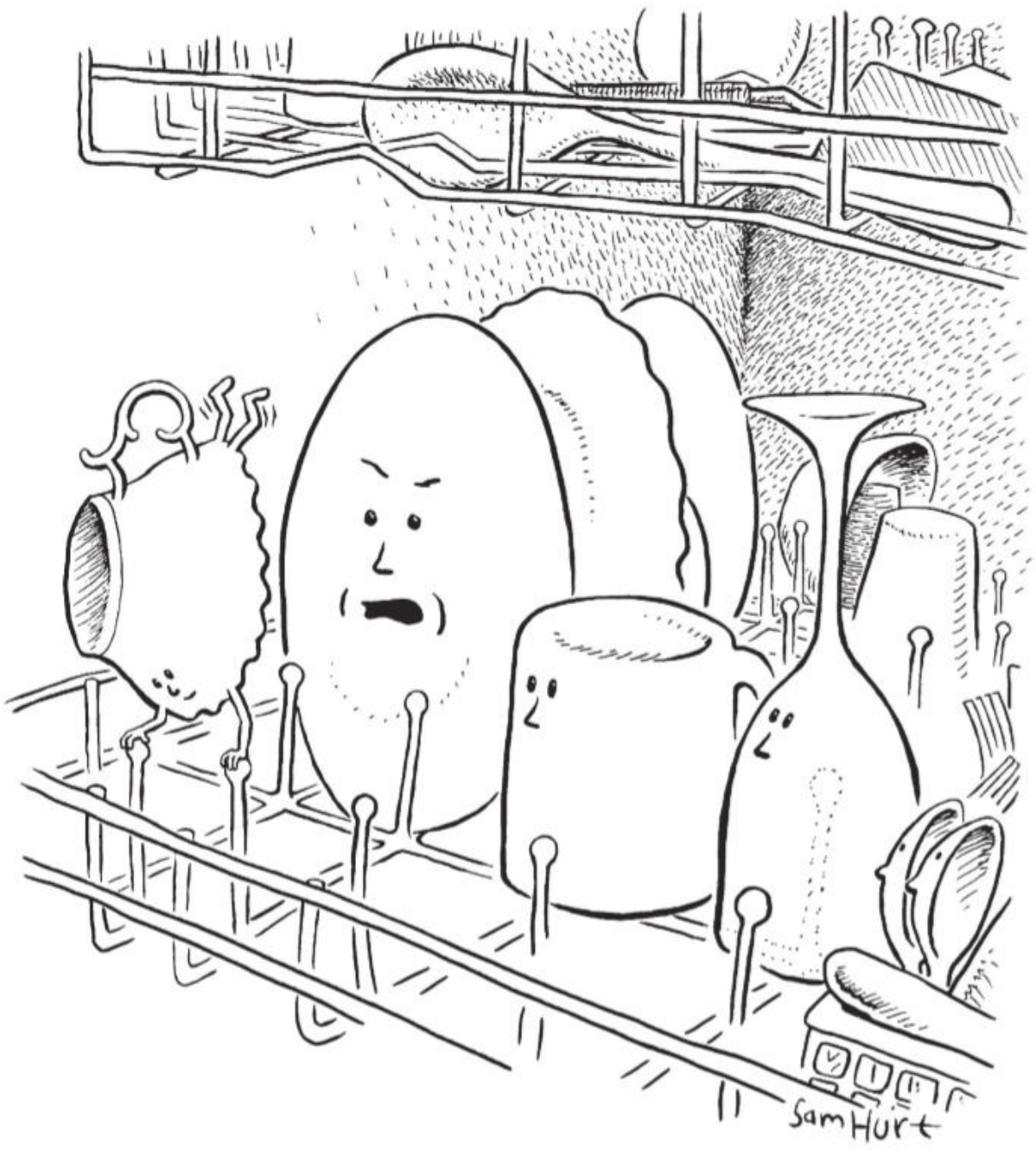
The murder does not take place until the middle of "The Brothers Karamazov," but Dostoyevsky creates a steady air of foreboding before then—no small feat in a nine-hundred-page novel. Even before a drop of blood is shed, we feel the pinprick of calamity. Everyone hints at what is about to happen; a seminarian tells Alyosha that his father's house "reeks" of crime and refers to Dmitry as "the murderer" while Fyodor is alive and well. "What murder?" Alyosha asks. "What are you talking about?" Not long before Fyodor dies, Alyosha kisses him goodbye. His father becomes frightened. "Why did you do that?" he asks nervously. "We'll see each other again. Or do you think we won't?"

It is almost as if the whole family were in on the crime together. And, in a sense, they are. In Russia, unlike in many parts of Western Europe, inheritance laws were based not on primogeniture but on an even distribution among children. All three legitimate Karamazov brothers stand to gain from their father's murder, with Dmitry's imprisonment leaving Alyosha and Ivan a greater share.

On the fateful day, Smerdyakov urges Ivan to go see about some business in a town called Chermashnya, before outlining how heated the conflict between Dmitry and his father had become—indeed, that it was likely to come to a head that night. "So why did you," Ivan asks him, "after all this, advise me to go to Chermashnya? If I leave, see what happens here." Smerdyakov answers cryptically: "Precisely so, sir." Sensing a plot, Ivan has a spasm and breaks into a fit of laughter, a sound associated in the novel with the Devil. Still, he goes.

After the murder, Ivan is driven mad by guilt. That he benefitted from his father's death tortures him; he questions whether he wanted it, anticipated it, even facilitated it. Like everyone in town, he knew that something bad was coming, and yet he did nothing to stop it. Earlier, when Alyosha tried to talk to him about the tension brewing between their father and Dmitry, Ivan had brushed him off. "What does it have to do with me?" he asked. "Am I my brother Dmitry's keeper?"

Dostoyevsky's response to this question comes in the form of a speech by Father Zosima, an elder at Alyosha's monastery. Zosima preaches a sermon on brotherhood to his fellow-monks: "You should know, my dear ones, that every individual is undoubtedly responsible for everyone and everything on earth, not only with respect to general



"Stop that. You're not even supposed to be here."

guilt, but also each individual is responsible for every single person and all mankind on earth." Zosima urges the monks, as Dostoyevsky urged readers, to see ugliness as a trait shared by the entire human family. We are all our brother's keepers. No one, not Dmitry or anyone else, should ever stand trial alone.

Dostoyevsky's prescription of fraternal love was not as pure as the language he wrapped it in. The night of the murder, Dmitry throws a bacchanal at a nearby inn. He offers a toast to the other men in the room, ethnic Poles living in the Russian Empire. "To Poland, gentlemen," he proposes. "I drink to your Poland, the Polish land!" Dmitry is paying, so they all drink up, bottle after bottle of champagne. Dmitry makes another toast: "Now to Russia, *panowie*, and let us be brothers!" His new comrades hold their glasses still. One of them suggests an amendment. "To Russia," he toasts, "within its original borders in 1772!" This reference to the year the Russian empress Catherine the Great, with Prussia and Austria, annexed a third of Poland causes Dmitry to burst out in rage. "You're little fools, *panowie!*" he shouts, now using the Polish word for "gentlemen" as an insult.

Here Dmitry is echoing the views of his creator. Dostoyevsky saw Russia's colonization of neighboring Slavic lands as akin to a brother's warm embrace and took the Polish fight for independence as a family betrayal. The Polish question was not the only "family matter" that concerned Dostoyevsky when he began work on "The Brothers Karamazov." In 1876, the principalities of Serbia and Montenegro declared a war of independence against the Ottoman Empire. The following year, Russia joined the conflict, hoping to leverage the surge of Balkan nationalism in Turkey in order to recoup territory it had lost in the Crimean War. In *A Writer's Diary*, Dostoyevsky framed Russia's intervention as an act of fraternity, a "new crusade" to protect the country's "Slavic brethren" from "Mohammedan barbarism." Brotherhood became, in essence, a perfect container for Dostoyevsky's ugliest ideas, providing, as his biographer Joseph Frank put it, "a morally attractive façade for Russian imperialism." A similar justification, based on Slavic affinity, would be used by Vladimir Putin in regard to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In December of 2022, Putin stated, in a televised address to Russian military officials, that he considers Ukraine a "brotherly nation."

There are large swaths of "The Brothers Karamazov" in which Dostoyevsky's vices are on full display. His chauvinism and antisemitism (Fyodor's avarice is attributed to his time in the Ukrainian city of Odesa, a Jewish enclave of the Russian Empire), dressed up in the language of Christian love, threaten to weigh the novel down with the flaws of its creator. But the structure of the book gives it a greatness that transcends the author's smallness. The form of the detective story forces readers to look closely for clues, to pay attention to characters or objects we might be conditioned to ignore. You do not want to make the mistake that the Karamazovs made, of overlooking what was right under their noses—the forgotten son, the disregarded brother, Smerdyakov. Did he feel slighted, rejected by his father, to the point of murder? The prosecutor does not take him seriously as a suspect. "What was his motive? What did he hope to gain?" Kirillovich asks. After all, an illegitimate son cannot inherit. But Dostoyevsky himself attends to Smerdyakov, granting him, arguably, the central role in the family drama.

Dostoyevsky's attention to minor, forgotten people—the poor, the sick, the orphaned—won him fans even among the radicals he spurned. "The Brothers Karamazov" demonstrates its author's desire to push past the limits of who can be included—in a story, in a family. The novel is filled with what you might call "accidental chapters," culled from court transcripts, hagiographies, love letters, toasts, songs, legal and spiritual confessions. At times, it feels like a scattered compilation of documents and source texts, a series of digressions vaguely related to the main plot, second cousins twice removed in a book that is supposed to be about brothers.

The miracle of "The Brothers Karamazov" is that somehow it all fits. This cacophonous novel, made up of wildly divergent arguments written by an author who refuses to let any point of view go by without cross-examination, coheres. Its elements are all made, by Dostoyevsky, to belong. Every digression becomes key to the case, every forgotten character is called to the stand. United by guilt, they all own up to the parts they played. Like good siblings, they learn to share. ♦

BOOKS

SICKENING

How bad is processed food?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

The opposition of the raw and the cooked, to borrow from the title of Claude Lévi-Strauss's most cited though not best-read book, seems basic to our ideas of nature and culture. A raw prawn is part of the sea; broiled, it becomes part of our art. But for Lévi-Strauss the real work was done by the third leg of his "culinary triangle": the rotting. Spoilage, after all, is a natural tendency of food and the most urgent reason we transform nature into culture—we're desperately trying to keep what we're about to eat from going bad.

The line between the raw and the cooked is, to be sure, nebulous; a plate of sushi is both raw and cooked, "made," in the cultural sense, by a knife and seaweed. Sushi is the dream of pure sensation, but herring is the normal state of life. The more consequential point is that cooked meat decays more slowly than raw; pickling and curing postpone the unpalatable end even longer. We save the world from rotting by rolling it in salt, smoking it in maple fires, preserving it in brine. Nature is always going bad, and the most immediate form of "good" that humans know is keeping that from happening. Sisyphus' famous boulder, rolled uphill and crashing down again, is better represented in our daily lives by the nova we eat on Sunday morning's bagel—salmon saved from spoiling by smoke and salt—with the knowledge that lox, too, has a sell-by date. Its own bagel-shaped boulder ultimately rolls back down.

The raw, the cooked, and the rotten: it sounds like a Sergio Leone movie. The odd thing is that, in the realm of culinary culture, the processed and the pickled are now in a kind of gunfight: we vilify the processed, heroize the pickled. Nothing is more fashionable than sauerkraut. (Fifteen pages of a new bible of gastronomy, derived from the ultra-chic Paris restaurant Septime, are devoted to things bathed in acid and marinated at length in jars, without a cream sauce in sight.) Yet what makes something processed rather than preserved turns out to be as difficult to define as the more abstract-seeming difference between the cultural and the natural, and between the two lie the usual snares of usage—the sort of snare that can hoist the unwary into the trees, as in "Predator," which is, come to think of it, also a tale of the raw and the cooked, though with humans as the natural objects rather than as the cultural subjects.

In the new book "Ultra-Processed People" (Norton), the British doctor and medical journalist Chris van Tulleken bravely turns himself into a guinea pig to explore the ins and outs of ultra-processed food (U.P.F.)—basically, food made up of substances that you would never find at home. He has in mind all those cereals and snacks and ice creams we see on supermarket shelves with lists of ingredients as long as the Catalogue of Ships in the Iliad. We learn that a U.K. snack known as the Turkey Twizzler is "a paste of turkey protein, modified carbohydrates (pea starch, rice and grain flours, maize starch, dextrose), industrial oils (coconut and rapeseed) and emulsifiers" that's combined with acidity regulators, flavorings, and antioxidants before being fashioned into a helix. (A helpful scientist calls it "an industrially produced edible product.") Van Tulleken "wanted this food," he reports of his U.P.F. diet. "But at the same time, I was no longer enjoying it. Meals took on a uniformity: everything seemed similar,

With food reformists, it's not always easy to separate prudence from puritanism.

ILLUSTRATION BY MOJO WANG

regardless of whether it was sweet or savoury. I was never hungry. But I was also never satisfied." He gained weight, and so did his family: "It was impossible to stop the kids from eating my Coco Pops, slices of pizza, oven chips, lasagne, chocolate." Sacrificing his health for science's sake, he drinks a can of Diet Coke every morning for breakfast "and gradually began craving Diet Coke with every meal and between meals." He devours McDonald's and KFC and countless lesser treats of British make, to find out what happens to a normal body when overexposed to the stuff.

The book isn't just a chronicle of his diet-induced damage; page after exhausting page is given over to the foundations of nutritional science—beginning with bacteria and slime munching on rocks—along with thickets of pieties so dense that they seem ultra-processed themselves. (We are told to say of someone not that he "is obese" but, rather, that he "has obesity.") The grim tale eventually takes van Tulleken on a long flight to backcountry Brazil, where he discovers that the Nestlé Corporation has brought its snacks, by boat, to Indigenous peoples, with the predictable effect of making Amazonian kids prefer junk food to the ancient and healthy staples of roots and berries. "I have not found any evidence that there were children with diet-related diabetes in these parts of Brazil until enterprises like the Nestlé boat," he writes. We are being purposefully addicted, and on a planetary scale, he concludes. Ultra-processed foodstuffs will alter our children's brains and enslave them to a global capitalist economy.

Van Tulleken slowly sickens from his food, and the reader sickens with him. It's true that his warnings about insidious mind control are dubiously reminiscent of earlier warnings about the smartphone, the boob tube, the horror comic, and the dime novel. Still, his account of what happens to our food during its trip to our gut, and the connection that bad food has to the epidemics of obesity and diabetes—"underlying comorbidities" of the type that turned COVID from a cold to a killer—is persuasive and scary.

At the same time, pondering his pages suggests a more complicated taxonomy than the one he offers. What, truly, is and is not processed? Some of the foods on his dangerous diet—like lasagna and chocolate—have been part of many people's diets long before the U.P.F. industry arose, and his lasagna, though supermarket-bought rather than homemade, isn't what we usually mean by junk food. A long discussion concerns whether Heinz baked beans, a staple of the British working-class diet, counts as U.P.F. (They make an appearance in the great 1967 album "The Who Sell Out," both on the cover and as a song title.) He finally gives the beans a dispensation, more, one feels, on the ground of class than of kind. Clearly, demarcating U.P.F. from its neighbors has some of the inscrutable qualities of any dietary religion, not unlike debates about what is and is not kosher, and though one is a product of industrial civilization and the other handed down by G-d, both enterprises share a slightly mystical insistence on purity.

Here, as so often in reformist food literature, it is not always easy to separate prudence from puritanism. Van Tulleken introduces in one chapter the concept of "sensory lies"—the result of flavorings added to something otherwise insipid. But it would be hard to say why the centuries-old staple of curried rice isn't an offender. For that matter, the vegetables and fruits we harvest are, as van Tulleken knows, hardly the deliverances of nature. The work of cultivation and breeding has produced apples in the supermarket that are, to some of us, unduly sweet; we seek out the now hard-to-find, tart, low-sugar heirloom Winesap, and regard the Honeycrisp as a sensory lie of another kind, a poisoned apple. There's also the irony that the high-end "molecular gastronomy" pioneered by the Adrià brothers at the famous Spanish restaurant El Bulli involved the deployment of commercial techniques for the ends of culinary creativity. Modernist cuisine, lovingly detailed by Nathan Myhrvold in five volumes, is, as one dour wit has said, "just ultra-processed food for rich people."

That hazy ideal of purity has long lingered like a halo above the discourse about food additives. The estimable Michael Pollan, for instance, tells us that "Great-Grandmother never cooked with guar gum, carrageenan, mono- and diglycerides, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, modified food starch, soy lecithin and any number of other ingredients found in processed food." But why is guar gum, extracted from one seed, any more artificial than cornstarch, extracted from another (originally by means of a method patented in the eighteen-fifties by a British industrialist)? Some version of carrageenan, which comes from the seaweed Irish moss, has been used in cooking for centuries; Great-Grandmother certainly used the lecithin from egg yolks, if not from soy oil, to emulsify her sauces. Vegetable protein can get hydrolyzed when proteins are exposed to acids, which is why hydrolyzed vegetable proteins are a regular product of fermentation and pickling. Technical names can make the familiar seem alien. We'd be put off if something were described as a concoction of luteolin, hydroxytyrosol, apigenin, oleic acid, and oleocanthal—but they're all natural components of your extra-virgin olive oil.

Urged to eat only food our great-grandmother would recognize as food, we may forget, too, that she would have prized white pastry flour (chemically bleached flour has been available since 1906) and oleomargarine and the hydrogenated oils, like Crisco, that became common soon after 1900. And are the people who follow their nineteenth-century forebears and dine on hominy (from alkali-treated corn), pork belly, and lard-saturated greens—or, for that matter, fat-streaked and highly saline pastrami—making a healthy choice? The history of humanity is the history of processing foodstuffs—by fire, by smoke, by pounding and pulverizing—and it can be hard to find a boundary between those ever more hallowed traditional kitchen practices and the modern ones that we are asked to condemn.

The questions that van Tulleken raises about "addiction" are more profound—exactly because the question of addiction seems to spread so readily from the food on our plates

"Wow! I guess Robert finally got a date."

• • •

to the phones in our hands and our children's. Van Tulleken is preoccupied by the issue of whether ultra-processed food retrains our brains, and he finds that when we consume U.P.F. new patterns are indeed grooved into our neuronal circuits, producing ever sharper hungers. Yet, unless we believe in ineffable phantoms of thought, every emotion and compulsion must be registered *somewhere* in our brains. This is as true of my taste for Sondheim as of my taste for sugar. I am, certainly, a sugar addict; I have a hard time drinking my morning coffee without a cube or two. But I am also a print addict of a kind, and will panic if I don't have a book to read on a long plane flight. Presumably, both addictions show up as some pattern of activated neurons; one seems unhealthy and one positive only because of how they affect the world outside myself, not because of how they light up inside me.

Besides, dietary addictions of this kind long preceded the introduction of ultra-processed food. The Scottish poet and aphorist Don Paterson has a hair-raising chapter in his marvellous new memoir, "Toy Fights," about sugar addiction in the Scottish family and town where he grew up—just as intense as the kind of food addiction van Tulleken ascribes to contemporary techniques, though the processing here is the ancient one of sugarcane refinement. Such addictions of food or drink, if properly called so, hardly seem an artifact of our era. William Hogarth's nightmarish "Gin Lane"—capturing a curse of the English working classes—was an image from the Enlightenment.

So one can wonder how helpful it is to characterize our penchant for junk food as an addiction. *Everything* we like can be cast as an addiction in some sense, but Edward St. Aubyn's unforgettable portrait of addiction in his Patrick Melrose novels is not of substances we like but of substances we hate and can't resist anyway. An element of horror in the compulsion seems necessary to the concept of addiction. Heroin, St. Aubyn writes of his unfortunate hero, "landed purring at the base of his skull, and wrapped itself darkly around his nervous system, like a black cat curling up on its favourite cushion. It was as soft and rich as the throat of a wood pigeon, or the splash of sealing wax onto a page, or a handful of gems slipping from palm to palm." Nobody feels that way about Cocoa Puffs.

No man is a hypocrite in his pleasures, Dr. Johnson once wrote; but we are all hypocrites in our prohibitions. I wouldn't let a box of processed breakfast cereal into my house, and yet ukases about what we eat make me uneasy. The act of eating bridges bodily gratification, cultural identity, and physiological necessity. We can say of someone "It's a shame he never tasted ice cream" in a way we would never say "It's a shame he never got to smoke a cigarette" or "It's a shame he never shot smack." There is an element of what can still be called innocent pleasure in eating. It's true that the innocent pleasure might not be so innocent, but even as we undermine the innocence the pleasure itself remains unsullied. (Ice cream, significantly, comes up again and again in van Tulleken's book as an instance of bad artifice, when the ice cream is not actually iced cream.) Food is essential to our existence, and, accepting this instinctively, we accept with it the possibility that some of the things we like to eat may not be the best for our longevity. We rightly try to avoid them, restrict them, discourage them. But, as someone once said, there's no point in dying in good health.

However contestable some of van Tulleken's contentions, his basic counsel seems plausible: avoid junk food when possible and be alert to the profit-seeking industries behind it. Common sense here seems more vital than a deep dive into nutrition: Margaret and Irene Li's recent "Perfectly Good Food" (Norton) makes a strong case for saving more of the food that we Westerners typically throw away when half eaten or left over; its read-

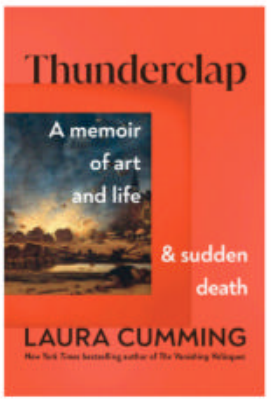
ers will start to save onions, and view the sell-by dates on most foods with more skepticism.

It's easy to forget that the longest-standing food peril for most of the planet has been not too much of the bad kind but too little of any kind; the word "famine," tellingly, appears nowhere in van Tulleken's book. For most of human history, the prime experience of eating was not. Our *great*-great-grandparents may have come to the New World to escape famines in Europe. Into the nineteen-sixties, China under Mao was ravaged by large-scale famines that cost the lives of perhaps thirty million people and cannot be blamed on planetary capitalism. There are worse things in the food world than ultra-processing. Some measure of food insecurity persists even in contemporary America, to say nothing of lower-income countries. Dilemmas of abundance are painful; the diseases of subsistence are deadly.

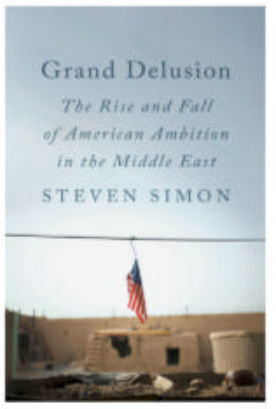
As to the niceties of nature and art, the processed and the preserved? Shakespeare, as so often, saw the problem first and says it best. In "The Winter's Tale," he has the wise Polixenes instruct the beautiful shepherdess Perdita, who refuses to include cultivated flowers in her bouquets, that "Nature is made better by no mean, but nature makes that mean / So over that art which you say adds to nature, is an art that nature makes."

In Shakespeare's sense, food made by human artifice is just as natural as the organic apple we seek out each Saturday at a farmers' market. The merely aesthetic argument against bad food may be the strongest argument of all: as van Tulleken rightly insists, there is simply something creepy about eating things whose composition we can't comprehend. We have to pick and choose from what we like and what's good for us, even if we can't resolve what, exactly, is nature and what art. The two reasonable questions of diet are: What pleasure does it provide when you eat it? and Will it kill you sooner than you deserve to die? Everything else is only the cosmopolitan confusion on our plates, which is neither wholly nature nor entirely art—just nourishment and taste, in their eternal tangle. ♦

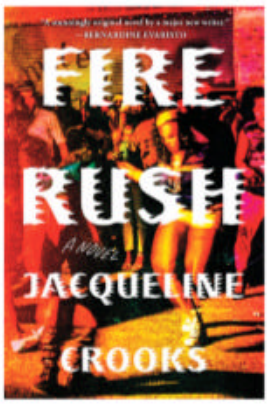
BRIEFLY NOTED



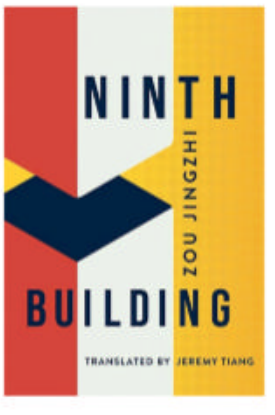
Thunderclap, *by Laura Cumming (Scribner)*. This memoir of artistic appreciation is centered largely on seventeenth-century Dutch paintings, but focusses particularly on two artists, one Dutch, one not: Carel Fabritius, a pupil of Rembrandt's, and the Scottish painter James Cumming, who was the author's father. Laura Cumming, an art critic, challenges the common views of Dutch Golden Age art as being merely representational or as depicting symbols that unlock religious or moral meanings. Instead, she examines details in the paintings to illuminate the ways in which the artists shaped what they saw: the wit in a painting of a flower, the dramatic light falling on a bundle of asparagus. Through this kind of close attention, she finds in the art works both a way to grapple with her father's death and guidance for living "in the here and now."



Grand Delusion, *by Steven Simon (Penguin Press)*. The author of this critical consideration of four decades of the U.S. government's dealings in the Middle East has held positions in the State Department and on the National Security Council, across various Administrations. His historical account is embedded with engaging recollections of his work. In 2002, for instance, he was part of a delegation that briefed Tony Blair on the consequences of regime change in Iraq; the conversation, Simon writes, "never advanced beyond" a "pseudoanalytical nonquestion." The book concludes with his belief that, ultimately, "the United States would have been better off today had it not been so eager to intervene" in the region.



Fire Rush, *by Jacqueline Crooks (Viking)*. This incantatory début novel begins in 1978, at a London-area reggae club, where the narrator, a young Jamaican factory worker named Yamaye, meets a furniture-maker with whom she falls in love. Their romance is in full bloom when he is groundlessly accosted by the police, and he dies in custody, at the hands of an officer. This loss spurs Yamaye to seek justice and to attain clarity about a murky aspect of her family. Throughout the story, music salves Yamaye's wounds; she remembers "dancing in the dark; wet, salty bodies sliding in and out of bleeps and horns and haze; transformed by bassline, a better version of ourselves in the grey light before dawn."



Ninth Building, *by Zou Jingzhi (Open Letter)*. The author's youth, which unfolded during the Cultural Revolution, supplies the material for this group of fictionalized connected vignettes. Zou conveys sharp childhood recollections: the book's narrator watches a man whip a landlord's widow with braided willow branches, and feels that the suicides that take place around the Beijing apartment complex that anchors his world are both alienating and normal. Later, when he is sent away for reëducation, hard labor replaces violin practice, and gradually he and the society around him learn to accept humiliations, heartbreaks, and the arbitrariness of fate. He begins writing with the hope that "by putting them on paper, these past events would release their hold on me."

THE THEATRE

PANIC AT THE DISCO

"Here Lies Love" boogies onto Broadway.

BY HELEN SHAW

David Byrne's electro-pop Imelda Marcos is a series of hard, mirrored surfaces.

The first thing that strikes you at "Here Lies Love," David Byrne's participatory pop musical about Imelda Marcos, is a color. As befits the summer of "Barbie," the entire Broadway Theatre (the venue's actual name) seems to have been submerged in a grenadine cocktail: pink L.E.D.s in the lobby's chandeliers saturate the white plasterwork, and, farther inside, the space has been reconfigured into a huge warehouse-style disco, pulsing with fuchsia and purple neon. The audience members braving the dance floor appear to be swimming in raspberry sauce, herded by ushers in magenta jumpsuits, who wave pink light-up traffic batons. The d.j. (Moses Villarama) supervises a preshow beat that goes *oomph-oomph-oomph*. We see pink with our eyes closed; even the shadows are having a hot time.

After the introductory hype—we make some noise when the d.j. tells us to—we meet Imelda (Arielle Jacobs), the sixteen-year-old Rose of Tacloban, a small-town beauty queen who will swell into a self-mythologizing co-despot of the Philippines. For decades, Imelda and her husband, the President and eventual dictator Ferdinand Marcos (Jose Llana), embezzled billions, a level of state theft that needed nine years of brutal martial law in order to operate at scale. But, the disco vibe implies, that doesn't mean *we* have to have a lousy night! A swift, ninety-minute retelling of Filipino history from 1945 to 1986 plays out in danceable songs by Byrne, who first released "Love" as a concept album, in 2010, co-written with the d.j. slash beatsmith Fatboy Slim. (Tom Gandey and José Luis Pardo also collaborated on certain songs with Byrne.)

Years of development, including a full production at the Public, in 2013, have forged the song cycle into a chronological sequence, with each number contextualized through video montages, by Peter Nigrini. These samplings of archival film clips and often jarring data points (about, for instance, mass torture) are the main way that the show communicates key plot developments. What makes a larger impact, though, is a giddy sense of movement: the show's director, Alex Timbers, and its superb choreographer, Annie-B Parson, whisk the performers across the space's moving platforms, and even up into catwalks along the balcony, sometimes just to instruct the audience when and how to boogie. Justin Townsend's wall-of-color lights, David Korins's mammoth night-club set, and Clint Ramos's vivid costumes create a setting that both sends up the real Imelda's passion for Studio 54 glitz and aims to have its own hedonistic fun. (The show's unlikely mix of morality play and G-rated rave felt less freighted, at the Public, before 2022 and the ascent of Imelda's son, Bongbong Marcos, to the Presidency of the Philippines.)

Kleptocracy requires scrupulous image management, and Imelda excelled at playing the provincial sweetheart and the glamorous ambassador, as power demanded. Imelda in "Love" occasionally looks like an old-model Tyrant Barbie: Jacobs changes clothes constantly, and she's exquisite in terno dresses with high butterfly shoulders. The character is as psychologically developed as a plastic doll, too, but Jacobs, her forceful voice hectic in the upper reaches, interprets the role as a kind of Junior Miss Evita, attempting to invest songs like "Why Don't You Love Me?" (which seems to be addressed to people Imelda may have had murdered) with the pathos of "Don't Cry for Me Argentina."

Byrne is clearly interested in political rhetoric—he drew many of his lyrics from statements made by Imelda, Marcos, and their rival and moral foil, Benigno (Ninoy)

ILLUSTRATION BY BIANCA AUSTRIA

Aquino (played by Conrad Ricamora), tinkering with their words for meter and tone. In musicals, characters typically sing their inner truths, but here the songs often reduce a character's interiority. In a variety of glossy bops, we hear things Imelda said publicly, such as her vapid claim that she wants the epitaph "Here Lies Love" on her tombstone. I went home and watched Ramona S. Diaz's excellent 2003 documentary, "Imelda," in which the ex-First Lady, then in her unrepentant seventies, mouths a lot of bizarre sentimental cant. Unfortunately, when sung, this kind of dreck is indistinguishable from bad lyric writing. (On the "Love" concept album, that irony was more explicit and therefore funnier.)

Reprising their roles from the Public production, both leading men have worked out ways to be uninhibited in the show while commenting wryly on it. (Llana's family fled the Philippines when he was three.) Ricamora makes a virtue of his character's hieratic flatness by compressing his voice into a Byrne-like drone, and Llana exaggerates a honeyed sensuality, letting his performance rot a little in the heat. For a few weeks this summer, the extraordinary Broadway diva Lea Salonga appears as Ninoy's mother, who rallies the country after her son is assassinated. There are moments when you feel the all-Filipino cast turning to address its compatriots, and an anthem sung by Salonga is one of these—a salvo of arrows, tearing through the room to specific targets.

It's neither an Aquino nor a Marcos who plays the main character in "Here Lies Love," though. It's the crowd itself, and the show's effectiveness depends on whether that character changes. Will the throng be seduced by the Marcoses' glamour once more, or will the people rise against it? Newly built mezzanine-level galleries run along the stage, so that audience members on three sides can look down into the milling horde below. The floor audience, in effect, plays both the adoring masses at Imelda's campaign appearances and the victorious demonstrators at the People Power Revolution, in 1986, when Ferdinand Marcos was pushed out. In asking three hundred or so theatregoers to evolve seamlessly from Marcos partisans to revolutionary heroes, Timbers, Byrne, and Parson would like to highlight our own shifting mob mentality. But can you bake your critique and eat it, too? Imelda's cardinal sin was greed; this production, even more than the one at the Public, is an exercise in ecstatic excess. I came away thinking not about revolution but about how gullible crowds are. "It takes a woman to do a man's job," Imelda sings at her disappointing husband, after he's betrayed her. People around me cheered at her girl-boss confidence. Perhaps they hadn't heard what that job entailed? Some women aren't supposed to lean in.

There's a type of spectacle that operates at the other end of the spectrum: tiny instead of grand, intimate instead of impressive. For a just closed, sold-out-before-you-heard-about-it production of Anton Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya," only forty people could squeeze into the Chelsea loft where it was performed. This ascetic yet starry project, with its exclusive micro-audiences, recalled Andre Gregory's legendary three-year "Vanya" workshop, a stripped-down chamber version presented to invitation-only groups, which eventually became the subject of Louis Malle's film "Vanya on 42nd Street," from 1994. Here the cast included Marin Ireland as the heartsick Sonya, Bill Irwin as her father, and David Cromer as Vanya—and, as in Gregory's workshop, proximity allowed us to hear the play at its most naturalistic.

Of course, the director Jack Serio, who revealed a deft hand staging Joey Merlo's murmur-quiet play "On Set with Theda Bara" last February, wasn't able to spend three years with his "Vanya" actors. In the loft, he wasn't entirely successful in wrangling the cast's wild variety of approaches. Two of the strongest performances actually diverged the most: Will Brill played the self-destructive doctor Astrov with fine-grained, rabbitlike wariness, while Irwin's mannered grotesque was a George Grosz painting come to life. In Ireland's scenes with them, she often had to swing between extremes, adjusting herself to each actor's chosen mode.

The show as a whole may have wobbled from such instability, but at least for Ireland the resulting flexibility made her Sonya into something I'd never seen before. The character is meant to be young but plain; Ireland is too lovely for the part and also too old for it, and these unsuitabilities, in tension, managed to cut her into Sonya's perfect shape. I may forget some of this "Vanya," but not the heart-stopping scene, in candlelight, when Ireland's Sonya and Brill's Astrov nearly dropped into each other's arms. Serio does his finest work when voices are low, and he surpassed himself here, holding his own directorial breath as Sonya and Astrov, contra even Chekhov, teetered on the brink. ♦

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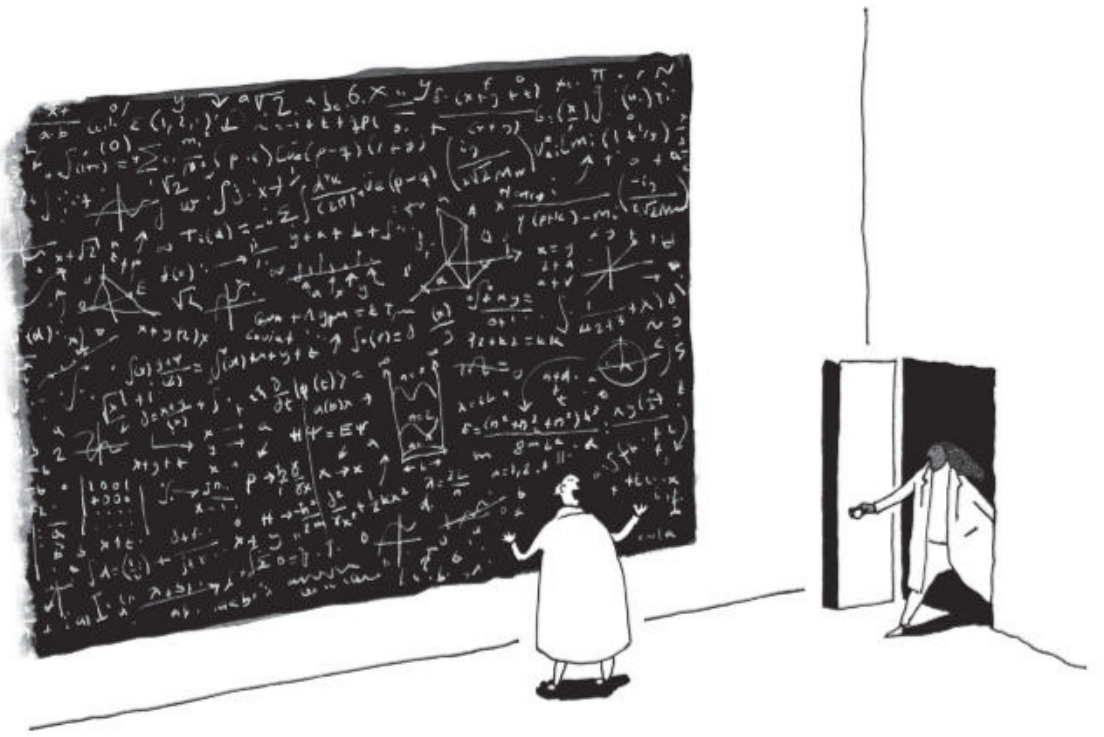
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

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 Juan Astasio, must be received by Sunday, July 30th. The finalists in the July 10th & 17th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 14th 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



“ ”

.....

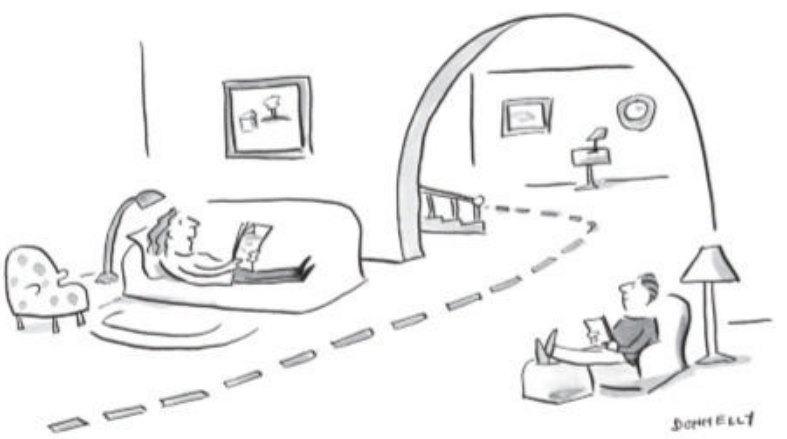
THE FINALISTS

“I hate going home. I have a million relatives.”
Jessica Misener, Ann Arbor, Mich.

“It’s better than a screaming baby. It’s better than a screaming baby. It’s better than a . . .”
Mario Valvo, Ventura, Calif.

“I don’t think those pills were Dramamine.”
Zoe Scott, Austin, Texas

THE WINNING CAPTION



“I see they’ve redrawn the congressional-district line.”
Frank Poynton, Van Nuys, Calif.

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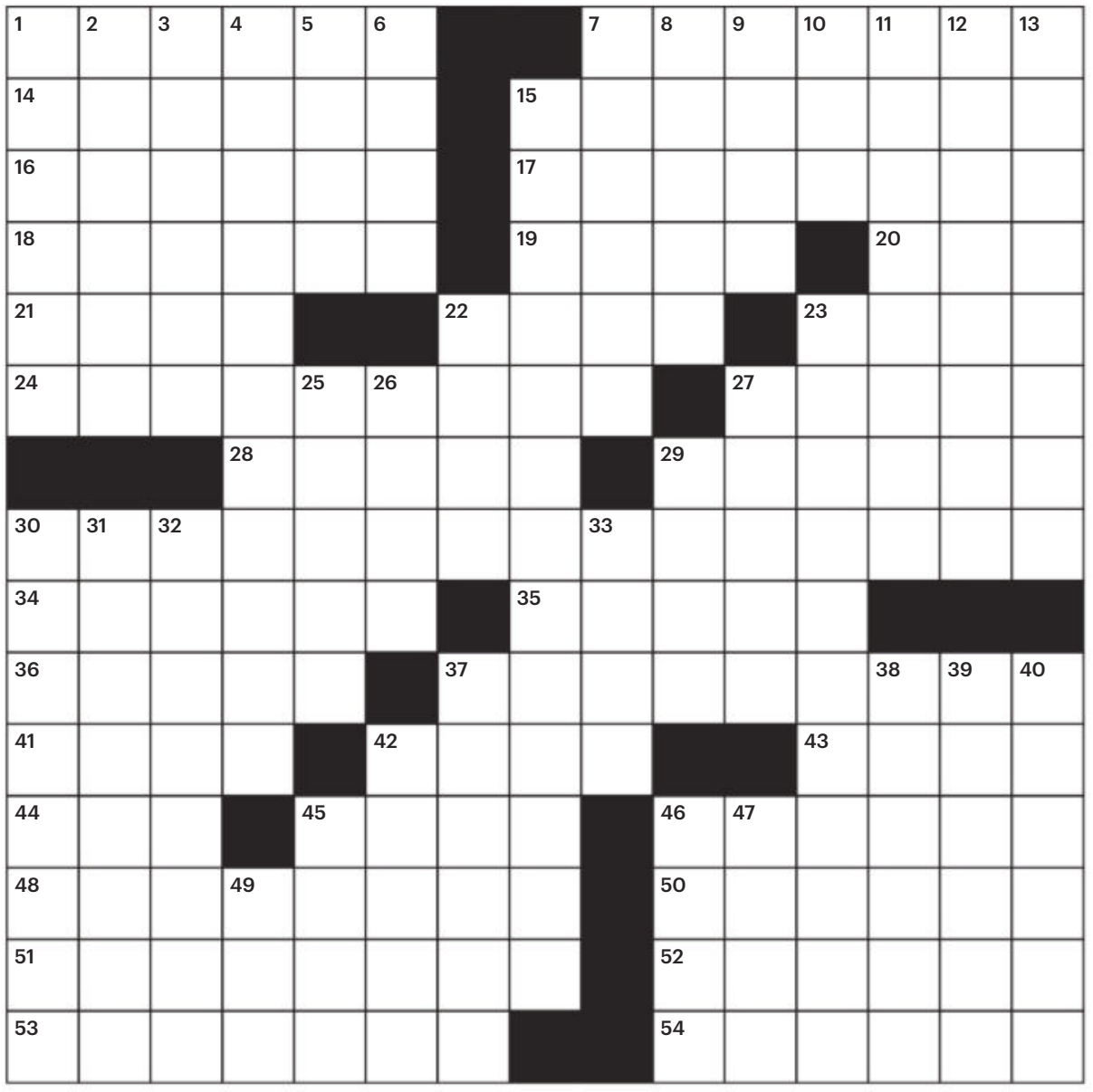
THE CROSSWORD

A challenging puzzle.

BY ELIZABETH C. GORSKI



ACROSS

1 Word on a Red Lobster menu

7 Boozy dessert

14 It may be empty or existential

15 Summons

16 Well informed

17 Flemish cartographer who coined the term "atlas" for a book of maps

18 Type of dress or knot

19 Spring, in Hebrew

20 ___ trip

21 Goofs

22 "Break ___!"

23 Kill, in a combat video game

24 Subtle pushes

27 ___ Lumpur (city that's home to the Petronas Towers)

28 Dinosaur

29 Betray, in a way

30 1957 Martin Luther King, Jr., speech that called for voting rights for African Americans

34 Relaxation exhortation

35 "It's too ridiculous to discuss"

36 Hides

37 Ones who aren't self-motivated?

41 Classmates of Rory Gilmore, on "Gilmore Girls"

42 Venice Film Festival locale

43 Emporium

44 Quotation qualifier

45 SALT I signatory

46 Little species of Antarctic penguin

48 Whopper

50 Desert spanning four states

51 Proportion affected by a literal decimation

52 Galactose, to glucose

53 Take over

54 Charges on some statements

DOWN

1 Some debate platforms

2 Cousin of a beignet

3 Husky vocalization?

4 Nasty habits?

5 Hassle

6 Microscopic

7 See 27-Down

8 Take apart, nautically

9 CCCXXI × V

10 Org. with lots of badges

11 In spite of everything

12 Dance that James Brown helped to popularize in the sixties

13 Superior

15 Babysitter's charges, typically

22 Settled

23 No light task

25 "The Foot Book" author

26 Differently

27 With 7-Down, actor who played Klaatu in 2008's "The Day the Earth Stood Still"

29 Alpine lift

30 Company whose stock was targeted by a 2021 short squeeze

31 "Mambo ___" (hit for Rosemary Clooney)

32 Cavities in volcanic rock

33 Start to morph?

37 Shelf separators

38 Charcuterie-board slice

39 Stand on a dining-room table

40 Takes turns?

42 Exams with Analytical Reasoning sections, for short

45 ___ *Reader* (publication with the motto "Cure Ignorance")

46 During

47 Two tablets, perhaps

49 Easter *fleur*

Solution to the previous puzzle:

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

Find more puzzles and this week's solution at **newyorker.com/crossword**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