

artconfidential



Film Issue

THE GRANDE DAMES
the grand dames
OF ASIAN CINEMA

ANDRZEJ BARTKOWIAK
THE SHADOWS OF EMOTION

HOW WATCHES INFLUENCED CINEMA
THE ARTS OF TIME

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M A G A Z I N E

PUBLISHER

Randall J. Slavin
Masterpiece Publishing Inc.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Wesley Kemp

CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER

Pauline Ta

CONTRIBUTORS

Barbie Brady
Writer
Los Angeles

Keturah King
Writer
Los Angeles

B.K. Phillips
Writer
Los Angeles

Sara Debevec
Writer
Los Angeles

Krista Kleiner
Writer
Los Angeles

JL Cederblom
Photographer
Los Angeles

Alina Ghencea
Writer
Los Angeles

Joseph Lawrence
Writer
Los Angeles


Fabian Lopez
Photographer
Los Angeles

Teresa Greco
Writer
Toronto, Ontario

Ariel Maccarone
Writer
Los Angeles

Remy Haynes
Writer
Los Angeles



Art Confidential Magazine
1106 N. Gilbert
Anaheim, CA 92801
www.artconfidentialmag.com
 @artconfidentialmag

From the Editor

As the air turns crisp and the leaves alter to amazing hues, we round the corner on the downside of another year. There is something refreshing about autumn. I muse it's relief from a hot summer and excitement for the upcoming holidays. Autumn is a time for events. As days grow shorter, perhaps it's the natural order to retreat indoors for celebrations, ceremony, and occasions.

One such occasion for us at Art Confidential is the 7th Annual Asian World Film Festival. We are delighted to be a sponsor this year to celebrate a variety of films hailing from the world's largest continent. In honor of this, our Fall Issue is dedicated to the cinematic arts. Our cover story celebrates the careers of five trailblazing women that helped open doors in the entertainment industry for those of Asian heritage. To us, they are considered The Grande Dames and we invite you to read about the lives of *Lisa Lu*, *Kieu Chinh*, *France Nuyen*, *Nancy Kwan*, and *Irene Tsu*.

We think you will also enjoy discovering the passionate vivacity of the AWFF founder, *George N. Chamchoum*. Behind his easy-going demeanor hides a man that understands if you'd like to see something different in the world, it's best to take the first steps yourself. Art Confidential is also honored to feature the fantastic cinematographer and director *Andrzej Bartkowiak*. Rarely giving interviews, he graciously sat down with us to discuss his career and why it's important to pass on knowledge of the cinematic arts to the next generation.

Thanks again to our dedicated team that brought our Fall Issue to fruition. Their creativity and passion for art truly makes our publication exciting and neoteric.

Enjoy the issue, embrace the art within yourself, and create louder.



Wesley Kemp

Editor-in-Chief

Culture & design

- 12 The Arts Of Time**
How Watches Paved the Way for Cinema
- 18 If Wishes Were Jets**
Set Jet Spreads Its Wings Across Private Air Travel
- 24 Looking Good & Feeling Fabulous**
Designer Dina Burton Strives to Empower
- 28 Dark To Light**
The Illuminating Appeal of Neon-Noir Cinema

Special features

- 34 THE GRANDE DAMES**
of Asian Cinema
- 41 Passion For Action**
The Artistic Mission of Georges N. Chamchoum
- 46 Shadows Of Emotion**
The Cinematic Vibrance of Andrzej Bartkowiak
- 52 Renaissance Woman**
Art Director Karen Steward Flexes Forward





58 A Little Something
The Fine Tradition of Indian Miniature Painting

62 Eastern Inspirations
How Ukiyo-E Inspired an Art Movement in the West

66 Beethoven's Metronome
A Tempo for Light Speed

72 Immersive Impressions
Seeing Van Gogh Through Wider Eyes

78 The Art of Recognition
Sculpting for the Cinema

84 Provocative Playground
The Exhibition of Michel Desroches

90 Perfect Provenance
The Cultural Significance of NFTs



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THE ARTS OF TIME

By Ariel Maccarone

IF WISHES WERE JETS

By Keturah King

LOOKING GOOD & FEELING FABULOUS

By B.K. Phillips

DARK TO LIGHT

By Wesley Kemp

THE
Arts
OF
TIME

Written by Ariel Maccarone

HOW WATCHES PAVED THE
WAY FOR CINEMA ten by Keturah King

Whether it be through Greek mythology, @YungPueblo's Instagram feed, or the truth you swear by in that one Subreddit, we are uniquely nourished by the meaning we find in stories. We are belief-based creatures. We guide our decisions by what we believe is true in the moment. Evolution thoughtfully wired our brains to act as sponges for information about our environment. It ensures our survival (more or less). From that deep pool of knowledge, we draw a cohesive story about how the world works. In order to thrive, or merely survive, we need story.

“
**The original cinema
cameras were clocks
that told time at 24
frames a second.**



During my research I learned that musicians once kept time using the human heartbeat, like an organic metronome. The pulse was taken as 80 beats per minute. I was captivated by the obsession with measuring, weighing and judging the world and soon learned that this addiction to precision is what built the film industry.

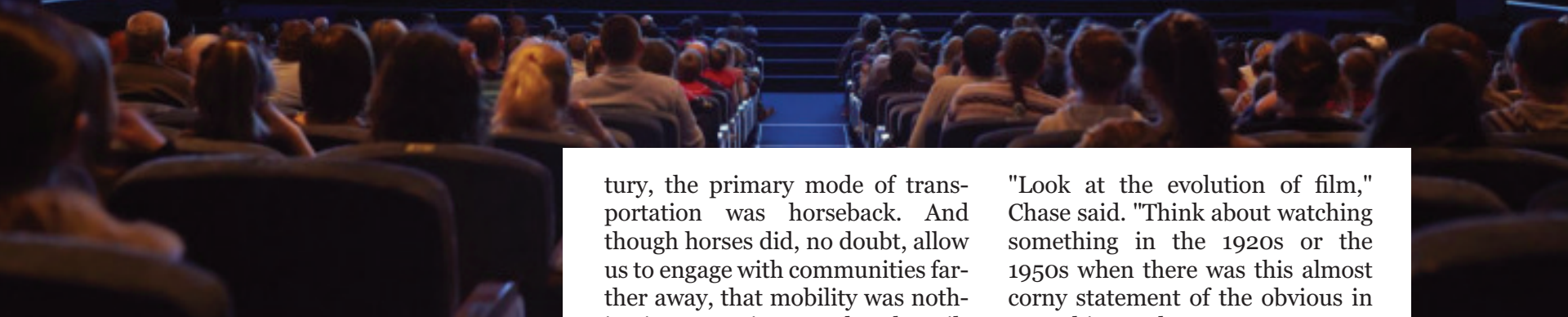
Chase Kaufman is the co-creator and original co-host of the podcast *On Time* which featured roundtable discussions with experts in the watchmaking industry. He is best described as a religious collector of obscure watches since childhood. As we sat down to discuss the relevance of watch development, I quickly realized if anyone could understand the human fascination with precision, it would be Chase.

Chase explained his love for watches during the first episode of *On Time*:

“What I like specifically about watches — what makes me passionate about them — is that watches are a kind of modern product. [They’re] the end product of what is the most important thing, what almost makes us human: our ability to measure time and the ability to understand time. That ability is unique to our species in a way we can understand it and divide it and measure it so precisely, and it’s the reason that it underlies everything that we do — every science, every piece of engineering, whether it’s the space program, whether it’s the ability to build cars or houses. If we can’t measure time, we can’t do anything.”

Our bodies are designed to rely on collaboration for survival. We are social animals. The success of that collaboration is determined, in part, by how effectively we can engage one another. Leading up to the 19th cen-





tury, the primary mode of transportation was horseback. And though horses did, no doubt, allow us to engage with communities farther away, that mobility was nothing in comparison to what the railroad could offer.

“It was the railroad that brought us time zones,” Chase said. “You couldn’t operate a complex railroad without a clock. You couldn’t have any mass transit if you think about it. Time is one of the last things which we take for granted that became democratized. People had horses well back before the 20th century, so there was relatively equal access to transportation. But the ability to have timekeeping ‘mobility’ — or timekeeping away from your town — came very recently.”

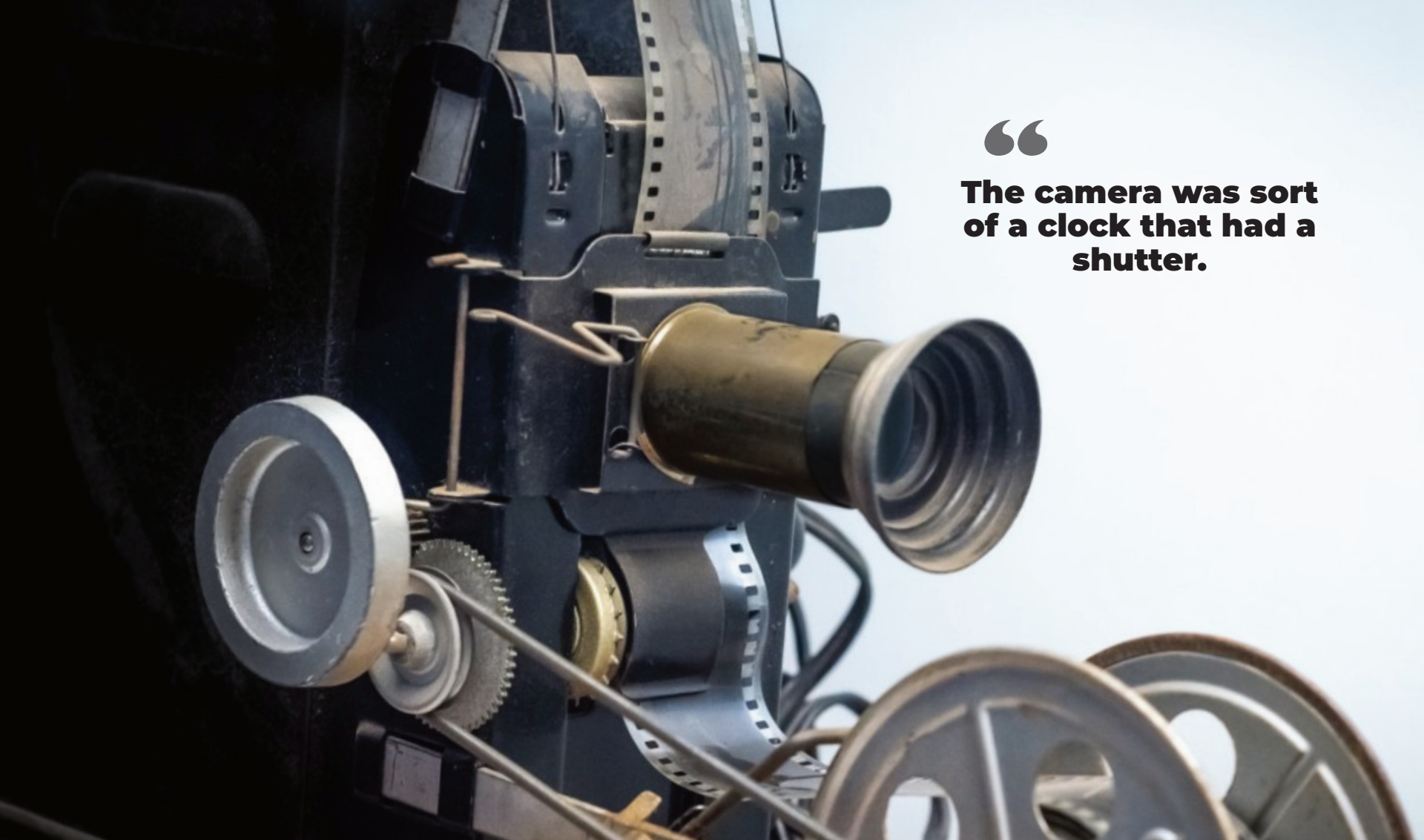
This revolution in timekeeping laid the groundwork for what Chase calls the “time arts.” Consider the “time arts” to be those artforms which are dynamic in nature and rely on movement for expression. For example: the arts of dance, music and cinema.

“Look at the evolution of film,” Chase said. “Think about watching something in the 1920s or the 1950s when there was this almost corny statement of the obvious in everything. Whereas now we represent concepts and convey thoughts in film without overtly stating them. You need to know how long it takes to convey something, and with how much force, so that people have time to digest the concept, and [do so] without dwelling on it and making it seem awkward. If you think about interactions on film, film does not accurately portray life. Film conveys life in a way that we find it digestible.”

During my conversation with Chase, Richard Goodwin — a friend and software developer who calls himself a “deckhand on the interweb” — joined us. I catch Richard up to speed on our conversation and we begin discussing how people related to the concept of time prior to industrial revolution (1760-1840).

“Think about this,” Richard said. “I [would] say, ‘Hey, let’s have lunch,’





“

The camera was sort of a clock that had a shutter.

or ‘Let’s meet next Sunday,’ and you [would] ask, ‘Morning or afternoon?’ There was timekeeping before, but the notion of time wasn’t so industrialized. Time was very important, but in a very different way. You knew when you had to plant your crops. You knew that everyone got up a bit after sunrise, but you didn’t have this notion of, ‘Let’s meet at 9:30.’ There were also elaborate, sort of celestial or religious calendars, but it wasn’t like clock accuracy.”

I then asked about the relationship between this revolution in timekeeping and the growth of photography.



“The camera was sort of a clock that had a shutter,” Richard answered. “It takes a 60th of a second. The original cinema cameras were clocks that told time at 24 frames a second. I don’t think the movie camera would have been possible without all the watch [development].”

Chase elaborated on Richard’s point saying, “The availability of photography followed relatively shortly after the availability of timekeeping. The wide availability of high-precision timekeeping is what allowed films with



sound. Broader mechanization and implementation of precision timekeeping is what allowed you to have the synchronization of multiple tracks. Without accurate time signatures you couldn't have an intelligible 'talkie,' or sound film. You would just have the video and you could interject the subtitles played through; something like that."

Later, I asked Chase how intimate the industries of film and watchmaking were.

"I can tell you, with absolute certainty," he said, "that the manufacturers of film equipment and watches were either related or one in the same — specifically in the United States. So, you had watch companies like Westinghouse which made both timekeeping and film equipment."

He explained that the United States government was also intimately in-

involved in the development of watches and research related to timekeeping.

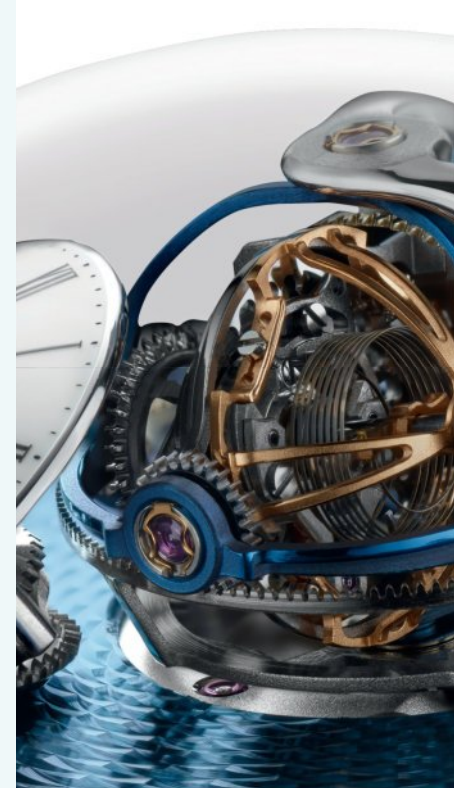
"For a long time, there were classified documents that dealt with timekeeping because the ability to produce precision 'time devices' was considered a matter of national security," Chase said. "They were declassified, I believe, in the last 20 years. One of my colleagues has books from Hamilton or Walton that are indicated as being Department of Defense paperwork and that say they are classified documents. Even today, you could go on the Department of Defense website and look up the codes and classifications for watches for different purposes. So, for a field-issue watch that would be issued to infantry, there's a code for that specification. There's one for diver's watches. There's a bomb timer. There are all types of codes that still exist for these things."

The evolution of timekeeping facilitated a certain way of seeing the world. A world in which film would become the most impactful artistic medium would not have occurred but for the innovations in timekeeping that occurred over a century before it.

"I think that so many people take for granted just knowing what time it is," Chase continued. "It's something that 300 years ago, you actually had to walk to the middle of your town to go see the one clock that was there to know what time it was. Now people just dismiss watches and clocks as commonplace, but this was kind of the most important thing that our species did that transformed us from bumbling around and basically screwing around with crude machines to being able to do everything that we do today. And so, watches are a wonderful example of the art of humanity. It's aesthetics, and it's engineering, and it's science, and it's the origin of modern humanity all rolled into one [watch] that you can appreciate every day and that you can use to express your own personal style and personality."

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If *Wishes* were JETS

Written by Keturah King
Photographs by J.L. Cederblom

**SET JET SPREADS ITS WINGS
ACROSS PRIVATE AIR TRAVEL**



For connoisseurs of The Arts; whether that takes the form of admirers of *Art Deco* Architecture or paramours of The Classics such as *Pride and Prejudice* and mouth-wateringly exquisite *Michelin* starred cuisine, Luxury Travel is not neoteric. But as the world we were accustomed to writhed, sputtered and collapsed before our very eyes, travel - whether luxe or otherwise, came to a terrifying halt. The zealous travelers amongst us spent the better part of 2020 gazing forlornly out of our windows on terra firma, earnestly wishing for the day we would once more view the clouds from above.



If wishes were horses...or perhaps Private Jets?
Cue the rise of the Private Jet Club Experience and Set Jet.

The barrier to entry for 'flying private' has customarily been sky high. If one isn't flying in excess of 250 hours a year or worth towards \$30 million in assets (UHNWI), there is no logical nor fiscal benefit in purchasing a private jet for one's sole use.

2021 has seen an influx of would-be passengers with COVID related anxiety who possess the need and/or desire to travel but would rather not deal with the health and safety threat of a commercial flight.

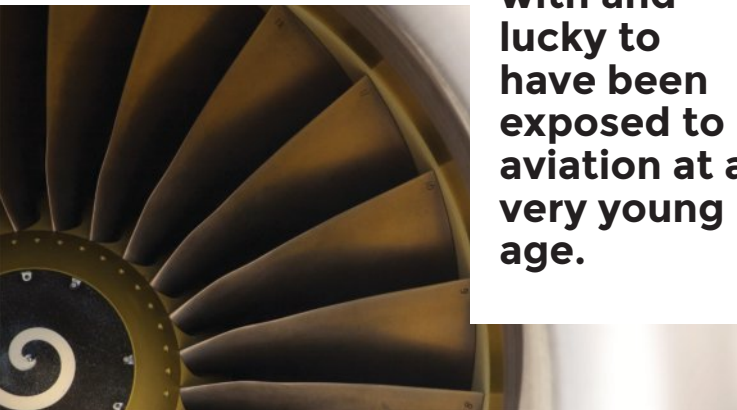
With the birth of membership based private jet charter companies, luxury travelers now have an alternative mode of transportation in these trying times that won't break the bank but will guarantee them a seamlessly sybaritic door-to-door experience while also minimizing potential exposure to health risks.

Set Jet aims to democratize business jet travel by offering competitive pricing, thereby ensuring private flights are made more accessible to a wider audience. Based in Scottsdale, Arizona and co-founded in 2010 by CEO Tom Smith, the company was one of the nation's first carriers to be operated on a membership basis.

The idea for the company was borne out of Smith's passion for aviation. "I have always had a fascination with flying. I enjoy the operational aspect of it. The fact that I can pick a



I was very familiar with and lucky to have been exposed to aviation at a very young age.



point hundreds, if not thousands of miles away and go through the planning of looking at the actual conduct of taking the machine that we're going to put at very high speed in the air; travel from point A to B, and execute that flight plan with the fuel & the weather & all the factors that go into it...that just fascinates me!" He gushes enthusiastically.

"I was very familiar with and lucky to have been exposed to aviation at a very young age. After which, I discovered an aviation school that had these little two-seater airplanes, at a small airport near where I lived. It was \$20 or \$25 to go up for 30 minutes. And I did that and [thought] 'oh my god, this is for me!' And as I'm flying, I'm not looking out of the side of the window, I'm looking out of the front of the plane, so I got to see everything. I was in total control of where I was going."

Smith received his pilot's license in 1985, yet pivoted to have an incredibly successful 18-year career as the Chairman and Co-Founder of TASER® International. Within this capacity, he built the business from start-up to publicly traded company - with \$100 Million in gross sales and a then \$2Bn, now \$10 billion market value. "[Piloting] was one of those things that I wanted to do before I went off to college. It's not an inexpensive form of travel, but it's certainly the most convenient. Especially in this day and age where it's just not fun to travel commercially anymore. I was trying to look at ways to make travel more affordable. We took the time to come up with the membership, to offset some of the cost of travel, thereby making it affordable for everybody, like a gym membership."

With membership starting at \$99.95 a month for regional private jet charters within the American South-West and over 2000 flights executed till date, Set Jet is already miles above the competition.

Set Jet offers its members a veritable cornucopia of benefits at minimal cost. The service facilitates VIP private jet charters to six of the most frequently traveled destinations on the WestCoast: Scottsdale, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Orange County, San Diego and San Francisco. Members can also access coast-to-coast flights between Los Angeles and New York City. Additionally, they can also participate in seasonal private jet charter



flights between LA/Scottsdale and Cabo San Lucas, as well as between LA and Aspen.

Future routes members can look forward to include Salt Lake City, Dallas, Austin, Houston, West Palm Beach and Miami amongst other business and tourism hubs.

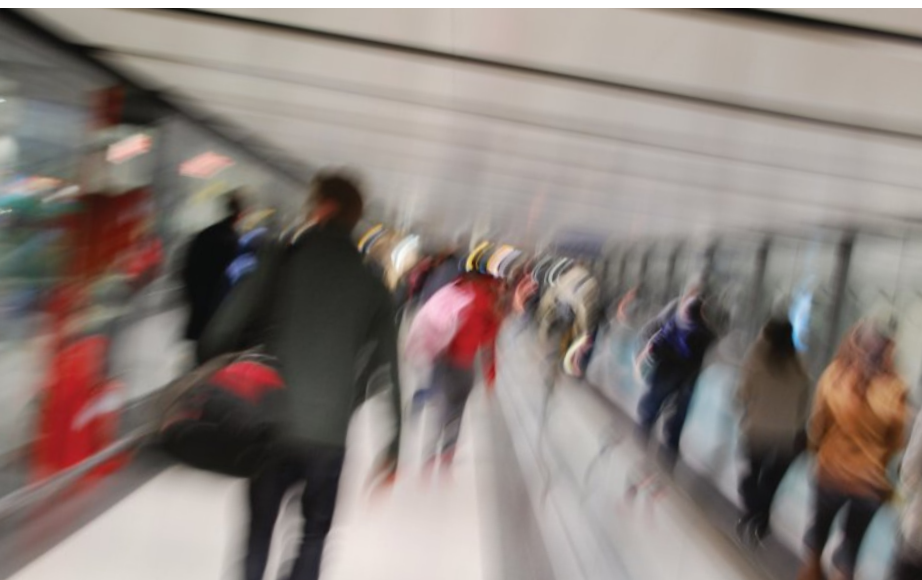
For the less than frequent flyer, enrolling in a charter-membership program arguably provides the best value for money and lowest barrier to entry, as it doesn't require a large, upfront investment or long-term financial commitment, as is often the case with aircraft-leasing or fractional-share programs.

And if that's not enough to convince you - perhaps consider the time vs money conundrum that plagues most, if not all businesspeople. With Set Jet, gone are the days of cash-rich, time-poor executives and entrepreneurs having to waste their most valuable asset sitting in traffic en route to congested public airport terminals; paying price premiums for last minute travel; having to "excuse me" one's way to the source of stalled security lines in order to make one's flight; parking expenses; and even check-in requirements. Now, pre-cleared travelers are able to call the charter company ahead and arrive just minutes before their flight for a one-way price of under \$500 on their fleet of Challenger 850 jets. Set Jets seat between 13-20 passengers and are outfitted with incredible interiors, ample space & amenities such as plush reclining chairs, sofas and conference tables.

The uniformity of Set Jet's Bombardiers not only speaks to their level of consistency in brand identity and service, but also reduces training costs for crew and maintenance expenses.

Should you need to travel even further still afield, Set Jet will soon launch their longer haul flights (LA-Hawaii / New York-London, 3 / 4 hours point to point respectively). The company will be adding 2 Aeron AS2® Mach 1.4 business jets, later this decade, which will further enable them to provide their members with supersonic five-star luxury travel experiences. The model goes into production in 2023. This gargantuan feat will serve to make Set Jet the first Private Jet Charter Service to provide environmentally responsible, expeditious private jet charters on these international routes.

This gargantuan feat will serve to make Set Jet the first Private Jet Charter Service to provide environmentally responsible, expeditious private jet charters on these international routes.



Even executives from Wall Street's East Coast to Hollywood's West Coast have recognized the convenience Set Jet affords its members and the cost effectiveness of the company's approach. Consequently, Set Jet has partnered with Hollywood studios Paramount & CBS Viacom, successfully eking a niche for themselves within their rather large share of the market.

Set Jet's success is due, in part, to their brilliant business model - but more so due to the unconditional love and unbridled passion that Smith has for what he does. "To me it's not work. This is what I love to do and the fact that I get paid to do it is just the icing on the cake. There are so many people out there that are doing something they don't enjoy every day and I just can't imagine doing that. You spend [a lot of] hours at work to earn a living...I choose to provide members with an experience that puts smiles on their faces. And bringing something that was only available to the few, to the many is just an incredible feeling."

Certain experts are of the school of thought that the aviation industry will see more services being offered by these innovative smaller airlines,

"catering to people who are not necessarily price-sensitive but more *service sensitive*," interjects business professor, Bijan Vasigh, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida.

But Smith has no fear of the adjusting economic altitude. After all, we are speaking with the man who has successfully improved the world we inhabit once before alongside his brother Rick, with whom he founded Taser. "Not many people can say that they changed the world. And I took that product and that company with my brother and created a global brand. People around the world know Taser and know that we've changed people having to use lethal force. With aviation, I think this is a chance to change this particular world...and I think that's super exciting. The convenience of [Set Jet] is the fact that people are coming to rely on us. They can take their dogs on board, their kids on board, they schedule when they want to go. I love startup companies. I love being entrepreneurial. I love doing things that somebody says can't be done and then you go out there and you do it. It's an incredible feeling and

I've gotten to do it, literally, saving people's lives with Taser and [with Set Jet] making it fun to travel again.

"People are going to tell you it can't be done, or couldn't be done, or shouldn't be done. But, it's in the drive you have to just go out there and believe in your passion and keep pushing forward to do it and to make it. Not all of my things have been successful, certainly. But, that's when you fall down, get back up, dust yourself off and keep going. That's life."

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LOOKING
Good
&
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fabulous

Written by B.K. Phillips
Photographs by Fabian Lopez

DESIGNER DENA BURTON
STRIVES TO EMPOWER

My mother's love for fashion never materialized into closets full of designer labels or a walk-in with shelves of designer shoes with hardly a worn heel. In her heyday, my mother was a tall, gorgeous woman with a great figure, who deserved to be on a runway. Like a song ties you to a certain moment in time, Dena Burton's designs brought me face to face with the moment I fell in love with fashion. My mother's collection of fashion magazines kept me occupied on international flights as a kid and little did I realize how much I was learning about clothing design,



trends, and structure. I don't believe my mother's intentions were to introduce me to fashion, but rather an attempt to keep me from annoying her and other passengers. For what it's worth, those plane rides were the genesis of my taste in fashion and Dena Burton's collection transported me to those moments instantly.

Over the years I've been fortunate enough to become an acquaintance of Dena's. Like her collections, she is a picture of grace and class. I wasn't surprised to see Dena's growth from a 3rd year FIDM L.A. graduate to full-fledged designer and business woman in an unforgiving market. If you are at all aware of the riggers it takes to start and run a fashion line, then you are aware that you must be so much more than a designer. Dena Burton fits and breaks that mold. When discussing her first exposure to the world of fashion she fondly recalls, "During my

childhood years I was constantly exposed to fashion by participating in various fashion shows. My dad actually painted the backdrops for each scene of the shows which were typically held at the notorious Chicago Hilton on Michigan Ave. So, suffice to say, I've been surrounded by fashion and the arts for a very long time."

The Chicago native and Howard University graduate has continued to approach her line from multiple directions. She has created staples for every woman's fashion needs and beyond. Today, The Dena Burton Collection brings a much-needed boost to a modern woman's wardrobe, with wonderfully designed handbags, two-piece skirt sets, shift dresses, multifunctional and asymmetrical wraps. All proudly sourced and made in the California. Her creative process is one that she is continually exploring and fine tuning- the muse visiting many

times unannounced. When reflecting on her method, Dena remarks, "You'd be amazed at how randomly an idea might come, so I'm always prepared by keeping a notepad with me so that I can do a quick sketch or write the idea down. I always allow what I'm feeling or experiencing at the moment to guide me. Sometimes my process starts with shopping for a fabric that I'm drawn to. From there, I explore different colors that are available and how will this color scheme work for the season I'm designing for." She also has a strong auditory component to spark the genesis of something new. "There are a plethora of inspirations I draw from when I'm in my creative mode, for example, music. I might be listening to a song and it will give me a mood that I begin to envision a particular design." Like all artists, Dena is impacted and draws from both experiential and imaginative elements throughout her life. "I



thetic continues to be the pieces a woman reaches for over and over again. And if you love to visit tropical climates, going anywhere without a Dena Burton dress is a wasted vacation...in my humble opinion.

Philanthropy remains at the core of her company. Earlier this year I attended an event in Malibu. While scanning the room, my eyes fell on Dena's friendly face. She spoke passionately about the causes the Dena Burton Collection champions - designing and adding signature wraps to her collection during fashion shows in support of Cancer Awareness and the American Heart Association, while also supporting The Special Needs Network for Autism. A beautiful smile that spoke volumes, grew across Dena's face as she contemplated what moves her, "We create not only for others like us, but also to enable others to see themselves as they want to be seen. We strive to empower and inspire all people, encouraging them to achieve their own aspirations. We aim to see them bold and confident as well as graceful and liberated."

The Dena Burton Collection has worldwide reach, as her contributions have supported charities in Thailand, Africa, and Jamaica. Proudly, the company supports young designers all over the world. Giving time and teaching the next generation is important to Dena. She takes pride, as one should, in passing on the invaluable knowledge she has gained through her own experiences and ca-

also gain inspiration from travel, being able to experience other cultures totally inspires me. Believe it or not, perfume or certain scents inspire me. Sometimes it takes my mind to a certain place whether I've had an actual experience somewhere or if I imagine what the experience would be like if I were there."

Dena's dedication and longevity have led to showings at fashion weeks in Miami, San Francisco, Fiji, the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week LA, L.A. Fashion Week as well as two-time invitee at the NAACP Award and Fashion Show. Her designs focus on giving shape and structure to the breadth of female forms while accentuating the finer minutia of beauty found in all figures. Her work is for everyone and she creates with all of the colors of life in mind. She asserts "They should be confident in who they are, it's not about your size, it's about how you feel and how you wear the clothes. It's not one thing you have to be, it's about how you feel inside. Once you feel that inside, you exude that."

Designing women's clothing can be as harrowing as walking a tightrope. Dena's dresses are beyond graceful. If the Greek gods touched down today they would demand to be dressed by Dena Burton. As the trend continues to downsize one's wardrobe to necessities, her aes-





reer. It's not often that a designer's efforts transcend the world of fashion. Inspiring all by her efforts and relentless drive to not only dress the masses in their new favorite head turning look, but to caress your body and soul while doing so. Looking good and feeling fabulous makes a monumental difference in the way we live our lives. If you do find yourself on a balmy island getaway, and you make your own footprints in the sand, may you be so lucky as to be wearing a Dena Burton design and walk with your own confidence and joy.

dc



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DARK
TO
Light

Written by Wesley Kemp, *Editor-In-Chief*

THE ILLUMINATING APPEAL OF
NEON-NOIR CINEMA

As cinemas begin making a return with a slate of new films scheduled for this fall and inspired by the striking colors of autumn, it seems appropriate to take a look at one of the most artful genres of the last four decades- neon-noir. What is neon-noir you might ask? To gain a complete understanding, we would be amiss by not traveling back further to explore its forerunner, film-noir.

The most appropriate translation of the French term film-noir means “dark film” and became widely used in the 1930’s to express a suspicious outlook on the world. These films are marked by low key lighting, violence, and a morally ambiguous protagonist that struggles with their interpretation of the world. Hence, the genre became emblematic with the great detective stories of Mike Hammer and Sam Spade captured by the likes of Humphrey Bogart. These film-noir pieces have etched their significance

in the entertainment lexicon most approaching their zenith with *The Maltese Falcon*, heralded as one of the best films ever made.

However, the late 1950’s marked the end of this era and “new-noir” or “neo-noir” began to rise in response to the advent of technicolor. This allowed filmmakers to experiment with a gradient of shadows and color-palettes which added new dimensions to their storytelling. One of the prime influences on this era was the Art Deco movement. Originating in Paris, Art Deco spread its influence throughout architecture, painting and sculpture. Those in the fine art world most recognize this style in the works

of artists like *Erte*, considered the father of Art Deco. Art Deco sought to infuse functional objects with an artistic element, versus fine art where there lacks a practical purpose beyond viewing. You can see the influence when looking at the costumes, buildings, and set design of neo-noir films which embrace an egalitarian, aesthetic appeal to mass produced objects used in the every day.

The 1970’s saw neo-noir grow throughout the cinema landscape with acclaimed films such as *Chinatown* and *Taxi Driver*. The genre is best reflected today by directors such as David Fincher and Christopher Nolan. Fincher has become synony-



One of the prime influences on this era was the Art Deco movement.



Fight Club (1999), 20th Century Fox



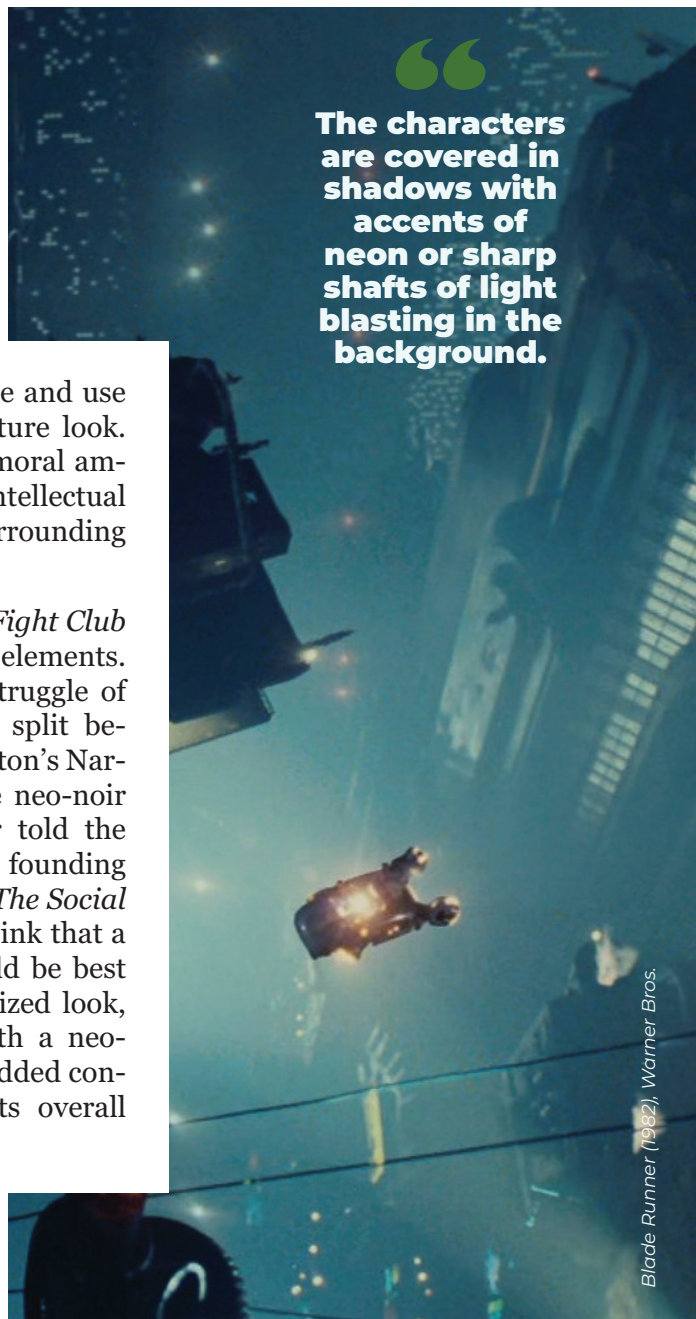
Blade Runner (1982), Warner Bros.



Blade Runner (1982), Warner Bros.



Blade Runner (1982), Warner Bros.



The characters are covered in shadows with accents of neon or sharp shafts of light blasting in the background.

mous with a muted color palette and use of shadows to create his signature look. His characters also embrace a moral ambiguity complemented with an intellectual struggle to make sense of the surrounding events of the story.

One must look no further than *Fight Club* to see all the aforementioned elements. From the low lighting to the struggle of the main protagonist, literally split between Tyler Durden and Ed Norton's Narrator, *Fight Club* embraces the neo-noir genre perfectly. Fincher later told the high-tech story of Facebook's founding through the lens of neo-noir in *The Social Network*. At first, one might think that a Silicon Valley origin story would be best suited with a kind of hip, digitized look, but blending the high-tech with a neo-noir aesthetic gave the film an added contrast, sub-consciously lifting its overall conflict.



Blade Runner (1982), Warner Bros.

Blade Runner (1982), Warner Bros.

The same can be said of Christopher Nolan, who interpreted the Batman franchise in a beautiful way. Noir character elements have always been baked into the essence of Batman, but Nolan's adherence to traditional methods of in camera photography, rather than relying on abundant CGI, gave his trilogy a more grounded, organic feel that appealed to wide-audiences and has kept post-Nolan installments trying to artistically keep pace. By treating the shadows as a character themselves, Nolan's approach keeps things simple, yet impactful by not taking the viewer out of the action with a bombardment of computer graphics and images.

Neon-noir is the more stylistic sibling to neo-noir. It contains the same hallmarks of off-balance framing and low light, but things suddenly



Atomic Blonde (2017), Focus Features



Atomic Blonde (2017), Focus Features



Atomic Blonde (2017), Focus Features

get infused with neon accents. This takes the muted color palette and creates segments of high color with the resulting contrast grabbing the viewer's eye. Best described as beautiful darkness, the variance helps create environmental conflict that raises anxiety in the image and creates a dreamlike effect to the film. Much like in great music how the melody and accompaniment are at odds, the brilliant neon in conflict with the dark shadows results in a gorgeous image that seduces both filmmaker and audience. Add in a big electronic score with a hero in solitude and viola, you are immersed in neon-noir.

One can argue which film has been most seminal in pioneering neon-noir in the late 70's to early 80's, but most can agree it was the vision of Ridley Scott and cinematographer Jordan Cronenweth that created one of the most influential with *Blade Runner* (1982). A slew of modern cinematographers credit it as either launching them into their career field or pivoting their thinking and approach

to the craft. It is also no accident, perhaps, that Jordan's son Jeff Cronenweth is one of David Fincher's most used and trusted cinematographers.

Whether pioneering or utilizing the aforementioned characteristics, *Blade Runner* represents all the hallmarks of the neon-noir genre. The futuristic, urban setting of a dystopian Los Angeles 2019 serves as a character unto itself. One cannot forget its impactful opening of skyscrapers blasting the city skyline with hundred-foot flames. Or hearing the angelic score from *Vangelis* juxtaposed against a dying city, weathered and beaten down by years technocracy and crime. The Art Deco influence of the film hits the viewer squarely between the eyes, from costumes to furniture to architecture. If Erte were alive in 2019, this would be his world.

Harrison Ford's *Rick Deckard* serves as a kind of Ronin for the LAPD Blade Runner units and lives a life of alien-



Tron: Legacy (2010), Disney



A Star Is Born (2018), Warner Bros.

ation and cynicism until he meets the replicant, *Rachel*. Brilliant at his job, Deckard is a man beaten down and sickened by the realities of the world until his final confrontation with Rutger Hauer's *Roy Batty*, who gives one of the most memorable monologues in cinema history and pushes Deckard to re-examine the value of life- both organic and synthetic.

Throughout the film, the characters are covered in shadows with accents of neon or sharp shafts of light blasting in the background. This can be seen to its fullest potential during the interrogation scene between Deckard and Rachel. Neon highlights are most prevalent during the sequence when Deckard hunts Joanna Cassidy's *Zhora* throughout the L.A. streets. *Blade Runner* is a film that can be dissected endlessly which is why it remains such a benchmark of neon-noir cinema to this day.

You can see Ridley Scott experimenting with this type of aesthetic earlier in commercials. A blending of high-tech with the remains of a forgotten or used up planet. It's as if a digital world was unable to overcome the anchors of analog existence and serves as a commentary on whether advancing technology insures a more fruitful existence.

An important factor considered when working within this genre is proportion. Knowing to what degree neon accenting needs to be used is key, which



Terminal (2018), RLJE Films

can distinguish films done by an experienced cinematographer. The law of diminishing marginal utility remains true. Just the right amount and you are able to maintain the neon within the noir, rather than crossing over into a more "comic book" visual experience and thus moving into another realm. Neon-noir teeters on the edge of fantasy and dark reality, many times fluctuating back and forth between the two.

Tron: Legacy employs many elements of the neon-noir genre, while at the same time giving us a clean, updated look to the world in which it exists. In contrast to *Blade Runner*, *Tron: Legacy* exists in a highly efficient setting where the film's aesthetic is one of clean lines and unblemished textures. Its main antagonist, Clu, seeks to export the efficiency of a central planned society to the fragmented and inefficient outer earth to amass power. With the accompanying electronic soundtrack by Daft Punk, director Joseph Kosinski gives us a wonderful offering for fans of neon-noir to continually revisit.

A more recent candidate was David Leitch's 2017, *Atomic Blonde*. (2017). Set in the cold war 80's, Charlize Theron serves as an assassin working to de-rail the malicious intent of anarchic-totalitarian operators. It hits the genre keystones from the dark urban setting of East Berlin to the muted colors offset by neon key and fill lighting blazing across character silhouettes. However, it carves out its own identity by fully employing a soundtrack of fantastic 1980's hits from the likes of David Bowie. Theron aptly conveys her character as one of supreme expertise in her craft yet struggles with consequences and a hollow morality only to find a particular satisfaction to it all by the end.

Although it underperformed, Lisa Joy's *Reminiscence* with Hugh Jackman is the most current example that serves as a full-on throwback to the great detective stories of the Bogart era. If for the aesthetics alone, it's one to be enjoyed by aficionados of the neon-noir genre as well as those nostalgic for crime-mysteries of the 1940's.

The appreciation of neon-noir has also seen it cross over to a multitude of pictures that would be considered slightly out of genre. You can see it in films such as Vaughn Stein's *Terminal*, Glen Ficarra and John Requa's *Focus*, Sam Mendes' *Skyfall*, as well as Bradley Cooper's *A Star Is Born*. This is no doubt due to the appealing aesthetics and themes that continue to captivate audiences. Often times undernoticed, but always seen, neon-noir elements in film will no doubt be met with continued application and adoration.



Special features

THE GRANDE DAMES OF ASIAN CINEMA

By Krista Kleiner

PASSION FOR ACTION

By Krista Kleiner

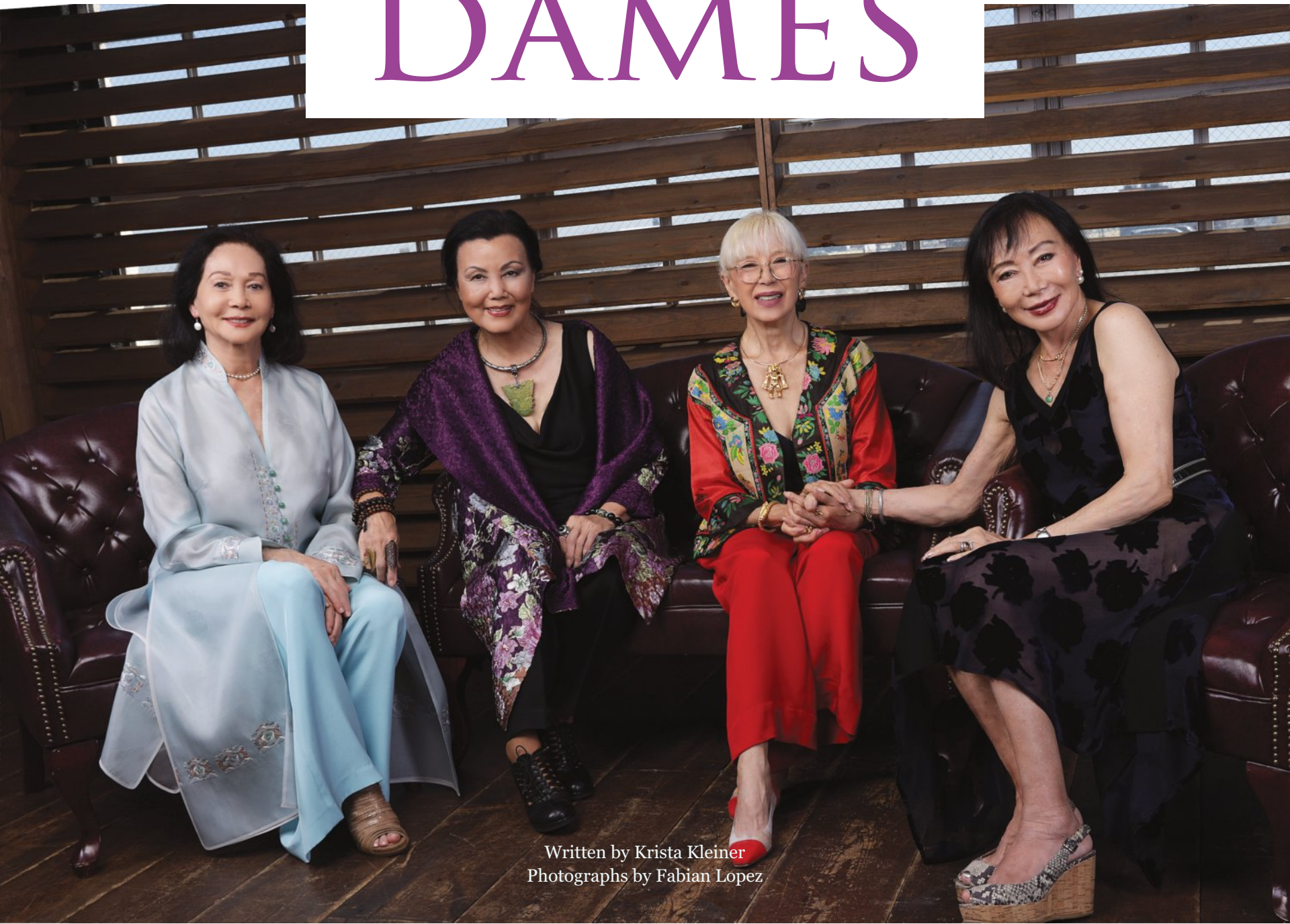
SHADOWS OF EMOTION

By Remy Haynes

RENAISSANCE WOMAN

By Barbie Brady

THE
GRANDE
DAMES



Written by Krista Kleiner
Photographs by Fabian Lopez

of
Asiatic

What does it mean to be a Grande Dame? At times it is given a wide berth, used to describe persons, places, or physical objects that have stood the test of time and become symbolic of a larger concept. Traditionally, one uses the term to pay homage to women of high ranking or expertise in a particular discipline, profession, or craft. When developing the thesis of this story, the term revealed itself as the most succinct and apt description for the trailblazing women of Asian cinema on our cover. These doyennes of film not only carved a place for themselves in the annals of the entertainment business, but also pioneered the way for many Asian actors through out Hollywood.

Widely regarded as the first Asian trailblazer was actress **Anna May Wong**. A third generation American, she is known to be the first female Asian-American movie star from the silent film era. This was during a deeply racist time with anti-miscegenation laws preventing a nonwhite woman to be cast opposite a white man in America. This left Caucasian actresses to be cast as “Oriental” women in the lead parts opposite Caucasian leading men.

Frustrated with the discrimination and limitations, Ann May Wong went to Europe for work in English and German films. With much perseverance, she caught a break in the United States on *The Toll of the Sea* in 1922, opening the door for 30 film credits in the 20s and another 29 from the 30s to 1961. Perhaps the original torch-bearer, her career set the wheels in motion for the storied careers of Lisa Liu, Kieu Chinh, France Nuyen, Nancy Kwan, and Irene Tsu.

“I actually wanted to be an Opera singer – especially as my mother was an accomplished one,” recalls **Lisa Lu**. “But when my mother told me I didn’t have what it would take to become a good Opera singer, she encouraged me to be a banker since I was good at mathematics and a trustworthy person,” she shared. “Then shortly after we moved to Los Angeles in 1957 for me to study, I expressed my desire to be an actress at 30 years old. My parents encouraged me to study acting so I enrolled at the Pasadena Playhouse, where I graduated in a year and a half.” Soon after, Lisa booked her first television appearance in *The Gale Storm Show: Oh! Susanna* (1958). “There were many good Asian actors and actress at that time but not enough



Lisa Lu

parts because we lacked Asian writers who knew Asian stories,” she observed.

Her first notable film role was in *The Mountain Road* (1960), a film considered to be a taboo for Hollywood as it touched on the tensions between allies during the war years and racism among Americans. “Since I came from China and the war, my acting was very vivid and true. So, they chose me to be the lead,” Lisa remembers.

The *Empress Dowager* (1975) produced by the well-known Shaw brothers in Hong Kong holds a special place as one of her favorite roles. It was a killer script and she holds the entire cast and crew in the highest regard. “This film gave me an opportunity to play a very dynamic character. And I really enjoyed working under Director Li. He’s marvelous,” Lisa says in complete admiration.

Lisa went on to star in the landmark movie *The Last Emperor* (1987), which was the first Hollywood film made in and about China to be produced with full Chinese government cooperation since 1949. It was also the first Western feature film authorized to film in the Forbidden City of Beijing, bringing something completely fresh to the big screen.

I actually wanted to be an Opera singer...

cinema



France Nuyen

“Initially, the writer Bertolucci approached me with a role, but he ended up needing to scrap the character. When I saw him six months later and asked why they hadn’t started filming yet, he said he was still looking for an old woman to play an elderly Empress Dowager to open the film. I told him he wasn’t looking for an old lady, he was looking for a good actress. The next morning after a test shoot, they got the makeup team, and we began filming.” When I asked her how old she was versus the character she was playing, she said, “I was 60 at the time playing someone in her 80s. But even when I was 65, I played a role of a 17-year-old. I guess you can say I look good for my age,” she laughed. That film went on to win 9 Oscars.

20th century fox called her the next Anna May Wong. 1957 was the year that **France Nuyen** stepped onto the scene. A Eurasian raised in Marseilles by her mother, it was in New York that Candy Jones Canover arranged an interview to meet Joshua Logan, Oscar Hammerstein and Richard Rodgers. The result of which was a 7-year contract with 20th century Fox. Her first role was as a lead in the American romantic musical *South Pacific* (1957) before even being able to speak English. As this film was based off a Pulitzer Prize-win-

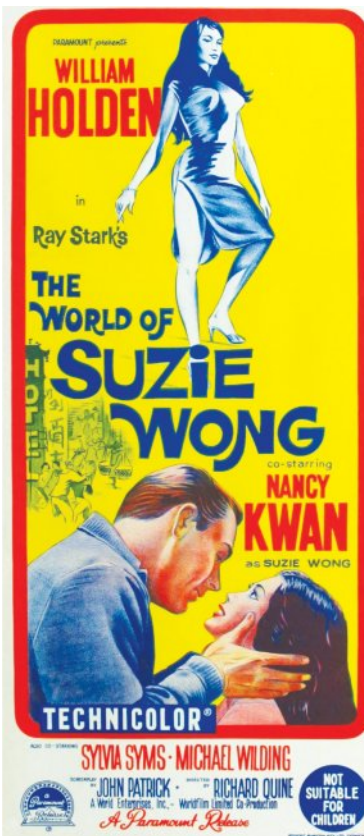
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My brave mother raised me by herself in Marseilles...

ning book and the 1949 musical, it was an exceptional start.

“I am grateful for what this world has given me coming from my humble background. My brave mother raised me by herself in Marseilles, my hometown, occupied by the Nazis during the second World War. She survived to keep me alive. It is her courage that made possible for me to be who I am today,” France elucidates. In 1958, France went on to star in the original Broadway stage production of *The World of Suzie Wong* for which she received the Daniel Bloom award. At just 19 years of age, she landed the cover of Life Magazine. She was sought after and loaned for roles starring or co-starring other top studios including Columbia, Paramount, CBS and Universal.



Nancy Kwan



Today France is most known for her role as the “Dohlman of Elas” in the third season of the original Star Trek series (1968), which continues to connect her with younger generations. Her personal favorite TV role is the series *St. Elsewhere* (1986-1988) in which she played, Paulette Kiem, a Chief of Surgery fighting for her position. What stood out to her was the extraordinary ensemble company. The producers also served as the writers, so well informed of the medical world with a fantastic sense



of humor. “They took in what we had to offer treating us as equal creators,” France explains. “You walk onto their set and you felt you belonged.”

At the height of her career, France decided to pursue further education, earning a Master’s Degree in Psychology. She began working with abused children, women in prison, troubled youth, prostitutes and people suffering from addiction in Los Angeles. This eventually resulted in her being awarded “Woman of the

Year” from the city of Los Angeles in 1989.

Connecting both parts of her career, she says “in order to build a character, you need to understand human emotions. Such understanding is the key to making an image come to life. This is what an actors work demands, to create a story.”

“I started off wanting to be a ballet dancer and somehow fate had other plans!” **Nancy Kwan** exclaims. Nancy got her big break in 1959 while studying dance at the Royal Ballet in England. She was

ment. “I hung up my toe shoes to become an actress.”

“Shortly after going to Hollywood, I joined *The World of Suzie Wong* national touring company. Seven weeks into it, I received a call from Ray Stark. He told me he arranged for me to leave the play and that I was to go to London the next day as the new lead of the film opposite William Holden. It was a dream come true!”

“ **I hung up my toe shoes to become an actress.** ”



home in Hong Kong for summer holiday and decided to attend an audition to watch her favorite Hong Kong actresses audition for the role of Suzie Wong. “Producer Ray Stark approached me and, seeing potential, he had me do a screen test of my own. The next thing I knew, I was signed to Ray Stark and his management company Seven Arts for the next seven years,” Nancy recalled in amaze-

Based off a best-selling novel that was known to be a masterly study of humanity at its best and worst, this historical film captured the world’s attention at a time when sex, prostitution and interracial relationships were taboo subjects. Nancy was awarded the Golden Globe for Most Promising Newcomer-Female that year.



Nancy became one of Hollywood's most visible Asian actresses with the hit musical, *Flower Drum Song* (1961), the first Hollywood movie musical with Asian Americans as leads. "I was looking forward to working with Anna May Wong in this film, but unfortunately, she passed away just before we started shooting," Nancy shared. "But I still had a wonderful time... It was great being able to combine my love for dance with my new acting passion."

"It is almost impossible to sustain a career in films without getting good roles – which there weren't a lot of for Asians at the time. I was fortunate to star in my first film opposite William Holden, but after that I have always tried to find interesting non-

Asian roles," – something she had the flexibility to because of her mixed background.

The documentary *To Whom it May Concern: Ka Shen's Journey* (2010) depicts Nancy's meteoric rise to fame. Both compelling and inspiring, it was a labor of love for her. "It's a story about bridging the cultural divide...a story of love, loss and life," Nancy described. "It was an honor to be recognized with the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Asian World Film Festival in 2019. To be seen and acknowledged for my life's work is a special gift." Nancy's grace regarding her journey through entertainment is something to admire. "I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to follow my dreams as I had extraordinary experiences as an actress. To all those pursuing their dreams, I encourage you to never give up!"

Having started her acting career in 1957, it was not until 1964 that **Kieu Chinh** first appeared on American screens landing a role opposite Burt Reynolds in *Operation C.I.A.* (1965). However, her rising career was dealt a blow with the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. After filming in Singapore, Kieu's attempt to return home to Vietnam was met with her arrest for possessing a passport to a country with no government. Worthy of its own film script, her miraculous journey led to becoming the first Vietnamese refugee in Canada. Kieu reached out to a person in the U.S. she had interviewed on her talk show 10 years prior- Tippi Hedren. With her help, Kieu managed to escape her tough circumstances and struggled to rebuild her career in America.

Her memoir *An Artist in Exile* traces her epic journey as a history of Vietnam, living through three wars to become an exile in the United States whilst pursuing an acting career in Hollywood.



I think education is extremely important, especially for young children after a long war and all the damage that comes with it.

Kieu notably caught a big break with the role she is most known for of Suyuan in *The Joy Luck Club* (1993), a film based on *The New York Times* bestseller. The experience holds a special place in heart as having the most memorable film team she has ever worked with. France and Lisa both happen to be part of this team, playing the roles of Ying-Ying and An-Mei. A historical film for having a mostly Asian cast and crew, the world would have to wait another 25 years before seeing this

again with the hit feature film *Crazy Rich Asians* in 2018. Till this day, almost 30 years later, Kieu Chinh is proud that she and the team are still in communication.

In 1993, Kieu founded a nonprofit organization called the Vietnam Children's Fund (VCF) alongside two partners – Terry Anderson, a well-known American journalist who was held hostage in Lebanon for six years, and famous Pulitzer Prize winning author and Vietnam Veteran Lewis Puller, Jr. Their goal was to build elementary schools in Vietnam in the villages most damaged by war to help the less fortunate children have a better education and future. Since then, VCF has built 51 schools all over Vietnam. They continue to help provide safe and high quality educate for more than 30,000 children annually.

“I think education is extremely important, especially for young children after a long war and all the damage that comes with it. It brings me much joy to be able to help the children there have a brighter future,” Kieu-Chinh shares.

After diligently working as the president and co-chair of the Vietnam Children's Fund, Kieu-Chinh will be the first ever to receive a Humanitarian Award by the Asian World Film Festival in November 2021. “Throughout my career, I've received numerous awards for my work as an actress, but this is my first humanitarian award. I know there are many unsung heroes who have done great work, and I am so very humbled and honored to have this acknowledgment.”

Starting off as an uncredited chorus girl in *Flower Drum Song*, Irene Tsu went on to enjoy a five-decade career. She has guest starred on most of the hit TV series of the late 60's and 70s. Henry Kosta, the director of *Flower Drum Song* and one of the pillars of Hollywood, was a huge catalyst in her career. He gave Irene an important part in *Take Her She's Mine* (1963) starring Jimmy Stewart, which earned her a SAG card.

Irene famously worked alongside some of Hollywood's biggest icons, filming with the likes of Doris Day in *Caprice* (1967) and Elvis Presley in *Paradise, Hawai-*

ian Style (1966). “Working with Elvis was unlike any other,” she swooned. “I met him accidentally because the AC was not working in my trailer. I walked into a nearby building to cool off and little did I know it was Elvis's dressing room. After getting the approval from one of Elvis's assistants, I was led into a massage room where I was told to lay down. After being covered with a large towel, I drifted off. When I opened my eyes, I saw Elvis's face 12 inches from mine applying a cold compress on my forehead. The fragrance of milk and Johnson's Baby Powder drifted by...I took a deep inhale and burned the scent and his beautiful face into my psyche forever.”

When I asked what Elvis was like she shared, “He was a very sweet southern gentlemen kind of guy. We spoke about martial arts and faith of which he was a southern Methodist and I an Episcopalian. Filming a scene with him was unique as the King never rehearsed.”

Irene became the female lead in *The Green Berets* (1968) starring John Wayne and *The Yin and the Yang of Mr. Go* (1970) co-starring with Jeff Bridges in Hong Kong. “John



Wayne was another American Icon that did not rehearse with me. And we did not have a good start. He and I first met riding out to the set in a limo. When he invited me over for a drink after the shoot, I told him I didn't drink.

“

Looking back, the film was quite a feat, a very humanistic story about war...



I felt like such an idiot afterwards.” The shoot proved to be a huge learning lesson for Irene regarding military conflict. “I learned a lot about the reality of war from that film having spent nearly four months at Fort Benning in Georgia. Looking back, the film was quite a feat, a very humanistic story about war and without the aid of CGI. What you saw was the real stuff – special forces and the U.S. military at work. To me, it was eye opening to be part of such a huge production. We sometimes had three crews shooting round the clock to make deadlines.”

Irene shook up headlines when she shared in her recent memoir titled *A Water Color Dream: The Many Lives of Irene Tsu* that she dated Frank Sinatra in 1969 through 1971 when he was in his 50s and she was 21.

“I actually met Old Blue Eyes shortly after filming *Green Berets*,” she recalled. “I was invited to lunch by Aaron Rosenberg, who I had just filmed *Caprice* for with Doris Day. Little did I know that Sinatra would be at that lunch and seated directly across from me.”

Irene continues, “A couple of weeks later we met again at a private club on Rodeo Drive. The next morning, I got a call from a well-known local restaurateur who said that Sinatra had his special table prepared for us and that he would pick me up at 7:30. ‘Be ready!’, he warned. ‘He is very punctual!’ I went into a frenzy of what do I wear?!?! We ended up not having dinner that night, which was a relief on my part. However, he invited me to the desert for the weekend, and that’s how it started...one date that lasted more than two and half years. We remained friends, and he even gave me a wedding present!”

Irene is still working today. She completed *Away* in 2019 – a Netflix/Universal TV special on Christmas Eve in Vancouver. Irene also lent her voice to the Oscar and Golden Globe nominated Netflix animation film *Over the Moon*, released in October 2020. This year, the documentary *Atrophy* won her a Best Actress Award in the festival circuit.

When asked about the role they have played as pioneers in Hollywood, the general consensus is that they helped the industry gain confidence in hiring Asian actors. With a reputation of being on time and prepared to do their part, it became clear that they were serious about their profession. And while all of these women have certainly paved the way for countless Asians and Asian Americans, they are all deeply grateful for the support they have received throughout their journey.

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PASSION

For Action

Written by Krista Kleiner
Photographs by Fabian Lopez

THE ARTISTIC MISSION OF
GEORGE N. CHAMCHOUM



Long before becoming an Emmy award-winning film director and producer, Georges N. Chamchoum was born in Niger, West Africa. Being of Lebanese descent, his love for movies and the arts struck at an early age. Georges' father had a free open-air theater for locals that his mother began taking him to when he was just a few months old. His youth was filled watching Charlie Chaplin, Abbott & Costello, Laurel & Hardy and the Serials. "My brain started to register as young as a few month old when my mother took me every night in Magaria (Niger, West Africa) to the movies. There was nothing else as we lived literally in the bushes. She would tell me that my eyes where riveted to the screen the whole time," Chamchoum recalls. "My brain kept the data until I grew up and knew that the only thing I wanted to do was to be in films." Those early movies inspired him as an artform that could not only move the individual, pushing one in new directions, but also affect a broader world. Later in life, his studies took him to schools in Lebanon, France, Germany, Poland, and the U.K. However, his passion for learning notwithstanding, Chamchoum found a broad education at times frustrating. "I hated school. Not because of the learning - I loved languages, history, geography, arts in its every form, but because to get where I wanted, which is a Film School, I had to go through the torture of several years of education."

Entering the film industry in 1968, Georges went on to create films throughout Africa, the Middle East, Europe and the U.S. By the late 90s, UNESCO honored him for his body of work and dedication to Lebanese cinema. However, 47 years and 40 films into his career, Georges hit a point of frustration in 2015 that he could no longer ignore.





“

I could name at least 10 other great Asian movies that were totally ignored by the Academy.

Why, in 73 years, had only 6 movies from Asia won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film? “I could name at least 10 other great Asian movies that were totally ignored by the Academy,” Georges proclaimed. “It was painful because most movies emerging from the continent of Asia had been of an extremely high standard – in particular movies from Japan and India, and especially South Korea,” who Georges credits for reinventing the language of cinema in the early 90s. “These movies could compete with the very best from the rest of the world but weren’t being given a fair chance.”

“I hate to say it, but the members of the Academy loved their comfort zone. They would see a movie from Denmark, France, U.K. or Germany and their antenna would hit the sky, whilst poor Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Georgia, Armenia and Iraq would be relegated to the bottom of the list because they don’t have enough money for marketing and promotion,” George reflected.

It was out of this frustration that the Asian World Film Festival was born – out of a desire to help well deserving talent and films emerging from the over 50 countries of Asia have a fair chance to be shared, appreciated, and honored by the world. “We believe that each movie should receive an equal amount of attention, regardless of how much money is spent on promotion,” he declared. So, he and a group of like-minded colleagues created a film festival during award season (end of October/early November) to provide Asian films with a free platform to showcase, market and promote their projects. Georges stepped up and this nonprofit has played a pivotal role in opening up doors to Asian culture and talent.

Six years later, they’ve celebrated two huge victories – *The Salesman*, an Iranian movie, won an Academy Award in 2019 for Best Foreign Language Film; and *Parasite*, a South Korean film, took home not just one



“

It has been both a challenging and thrilling experiencing...

but four Academy Awards in 2020 – Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Feature Film – becoming the first non-English language film to ever win the Academy Award for Best Picture. “Asian films are finally starting to get the attention and credit they deserve,” Georges celebrates. “And we at the Asian World Film Festival would like to believe we are a little part of this history.”

In honor of his contributions, Georges was named one of the 100 Most Influential Lebanese in the World in 2017; and in 2018, the South Korean Ministry of Culture bestowed the coveted DARI Award upon him for bridging and promoting Korean culture in the U.S.

“It has been both a challenging and thrilling experiencing serving as the Executive and Program Director of the Asian World Film Festival,” Georges shared. “Passion at its best!” A volunteer himself, Georges stands in deep gratitude with the entire team of dedicated workers that have put in much time and effort to create and expand the festival’s impact.

Of his numerous accomplishments, he holds the Asian World Film Festival (AWFF) in highest regards. “I can say with all confidence and humility that AWFF will be leaving a great legacy. Finally, the Hollywood Spotlight is on Asian Entertainment. The seed has been planted, but we still have a long way to go,” he acknowledges.

When asked what else he hopes to see moving forward, he says he would also like to see Hollywood go back to what it was – a haven for entertainment and performance, minus the political correctness he feels is being shoved down people’s throats.

Georges’ films have always been socially and politically orientated with a Hollywood flair. The feature films he directed are *Inside Out* (1968) and *Salam, After Death* (1970) and the landmark *Lebanon... Why?* in 1978. The





Georges and Vincent Price



Emmy he won was for ABC Network (USA) – a documentary short titled *Hashim's Story* in 2010.

Residing in Los Angeles for the past 32 years, Georges has had the opportunity to pursue a number of passions, including photography. From 1984 – 1990, he was the official photographer for Visiora – Christian Dior. Throughout the 70s and 80s, Georges directed several plays in Lebanon and the U.S., along with multiple award-winning music videos. Currently, Georges is still active in movie production with two feature dramas in the works - one out of Kyrgyzstan and the other to be shot entirely in Turkey.

A true advocate for film and undermarketed groups, Georges is also an International Director of the Yakutsk International Film Festival in Yakutia (Sakha Republic), International Relations Executive for the Notre Dame University International Film Festival (Lebanon) and is on the Executive Board of the Beirut International Women Film Festival (Lebanon). In addition, he is the Co-Founder of Film Festivals Cinergy, a union of worldwide film festivals which promotes recognized talent in filmmaking.

In a continued campaign for diversity and inclusion, Georges is proud to share that this upcoming Asian World Film Festival will be launching its support for films from Africa. His passion is for the underdog and remarks, “I believe it is time that the African Continent (54 Countries) should have its place in the Sun too. As simple as this.”

For more information on The Asian World Film Festival, please go to www.asianworldfilmfest.org

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SHADOWS OF Emotion

Written by Remy Haynes

THE CINEMATIC VIBRANCE OF ANDRZEJ BARTKOWIAK

I am not the only one who appreciates the escape that cinema provides, especially during our year of collective grief and isolation that was 2020. It was never more obvious that movies allowed us a mini vacation from our lives, a deeper dive into places and planets unknown and delivered an emotional bolster so very much needed during an uncertain time. The confinement of Covid-19 reminded us that being somewhere else was a privilege and film could take us there.

When I was asked to interview cinematographer and director Andrzej Bartkowiak for this article, I decided to dig into the movie making process and learn more about the important players who create these amazing worlds for us to get lost in. Being a still photographer myself, I found much in common with Andrzej and his love of 'magic' light, happy accidents when shooting and the inspiration that foreign travel can bring. We sat down over a strong margarita with salt to 'talk shop.'

I asked Andrzej to first clarify what a cinematographer does on a movie set, what he's responsible for and who he works most closely with. I'm eager to dive into Andrzej's past, as I peer into the soulful eyes of this handsome, silver haired gentleman sitting before me, but I tread lightly as I've heard he doesn't give interviews or do much media. I respect this and understand the life he's lived has included a slew of heavy players with stories he keeps close to the vest out of deep respect for colleagues and friends who made history with him in the film business. He is eager to give credit to Joel Silver, however, who helped him transition from DP to Directing. "If it wasn't for him encouraging me, it would have been a lot harder," Andrzej reveals.



the shot. “Everyone on set took pride in that, in making badass shit happen.”

Andrzej is part of a group of people, who from the early 90’s made one film after another that hit box offices with a boom, three of which being nominated for academy awards. I re-watch a few of his films and am impressed by his choices of artistry, during a time when digital film and manipulation was just beginning and still being researched. When the iconic movie *Speed* was made with Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock, the decisions they made as artists were played out in real life. “You know Keanu was under that bus. We had to lift the bus a bit, but he wanted to do it.” I love these stories and press for more. He talks about the elevator scene in *Speed* where the elevator needed to be manually dropped eight inches each time, and the precision that it took for that to happen.



Andrzej makes sure to point out that safety and working with trained professionals on set was always a primary concern. He alludes to the recent news about Alec Baldwin and the unfortunate accident on the *Rust*



It’s all about light and shadow, but mostly shadow, that is where I can play and create emotion.

With such popular films under his belt as *The Verdict*, *Prince of the City*, *Terms of Endearment*, *Falling Down*, *Exit Wounds*, *Romeo Must Die*, and *Speed*, Andrzej has seen a lot in the forty plus years that he’s been making films. “The cinematographer first meets with the director and the stunt coordinator to decide what can be done,” he tells me. His energy changes to that of a twenty something hellraiser as he launches into stories that include blowing stuff up, hanging out of a helicopter and suspending actors under buses with unknown conclusions. Back then, he tells me, before digital manipulation, actors put themselves in real jeopardy to get

learn from it and put better processes in place so that accidents don’t happen. We have a saying in the business that accidents don’t happen because we plan for them. Every stunt in my movies was planned with every safety precaution and a trained crew.”

I ask him how he feels about the advent of digital, thinking I’ll get a response I sometimes hear from my still photographer colleagues, which is, it’s not the same. “It took the fun out of it for me,” he says. “I respect what digital can do; I really do. I just saw *Dune* in a pre-screening at Warner



Terms of Endearment (1983) Paramount Pictures



Falling Down (1993) Warner Bros.



Speed (1994) 20th Century Fox

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You know Keanu was under that bus. We had to lift the bus a bit, but he wanted to do it.

Brother's studio, the proper way to see a film, and it was incredible. It was all computer generated, not a bit of reality but it was something else, really beautiful." I'm surprised by his response but then I realize something beautiful that provokes our senses and lights us up deserves respect, no matter how it was made.

"It's all about light and shadow, but mostly shadow, that is where I can play and create emotion." I know this all too well and agree. Part of the artistry of creating mood is how light bounces off objects to create harsh or soft tones, so you must be a bit of a scientist while painting with light to convey peace, drama, or time of day, all of which helps tell the story.

You see, it's the cinematographer's job to bring the director's vision to life, physically. They must choose not only the location that will best tell the story, but the angle of the camera, the lens that needs to be used to get the right effect and the lighting that will set the tone. The cinematographer, otherwise known as the Director of Photography, crafts the story visually and must know the correct tools to use and how they work. So, this job requires not only vision and creativity but technical know-how. It is a right and left-brain marriage, which not many people are lucky enough to have strengths in both. Working with famed directors Sidney Lumet and John Huston, he says, was a great example of the artistry of directing. "Sidney had every shot planned out, where the actors

would come on set with pre-determined blocking designed by Sidney and myself. Whereas John would let the actors rehearse themselves and find their own space. Then I would come in and design the shots based on their staging.”

After leaving the Polish National Film School, a young twenty-something Andrzej moved from Lodz, Poland to the U.S. and started making TV commercials both as a director and cinematographer. “I love to travel. When I made commercials, we shot everywhere. I’ve been to every inch of the U.S. And we shot a lot in Italy. I love Italian food now. I love cooking Italian.” I realize, like any artist can attest, that there really is nothing like foreign travel to open our eyes to new ways of seeing. Travel is just a big, giant candy store for artists, and he agrees.

We meet again for another lunch, because there is too much I want to dive into with Andrzej, who I might so boldly call a bit of a legend. He starts each new conversation with a story from one of his sets. This time was about making *Dante’s Peak* with Pierce Brosnan. He takes immense pride when discussing the practical effects employed on the shoot. “We made an entire lake in the desert for the production. There were no computer images in what we were doing. It was all real. For the opening scene we had to blow mortars with lava bombs and all the crew had to wear respirators and goggles. We started with a T-32 lens and after the mortars blew we stopped down to a T-4. The scale was incredible.” For another particular sequence he continues, “We had five propane tanker trucks feeding propane through four-inch hoses that were lighting manufactured steel trees with flame

bars for the cabin escape scene on the lake in *Dante’s Peak*,” he says. “The steel trees were surrounding a replica log cabin set copied from Idaho. The talent was supposed to run when we yelled action, but they just started running and we didn’t know why. Apparently, the cabin set caught fire even though it was prepped with retardant.” Per protocol, he had the L.A. Fire Department on hand to put the fires out. “They spent hours getting that out.” So, that didn’t work so well, I say. “Yeah, we had to rebuild the cabin and come back two months later.” Add to the list of a cinematographer’s important traits- resourcefulness.

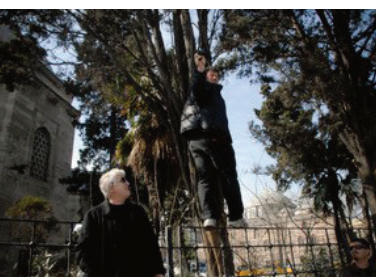
He reveals that his 27-year-old son Marco is also a cinematographer following in his footsteps, having studied at the same internationally known film school in Lodz, Poland. I discover that



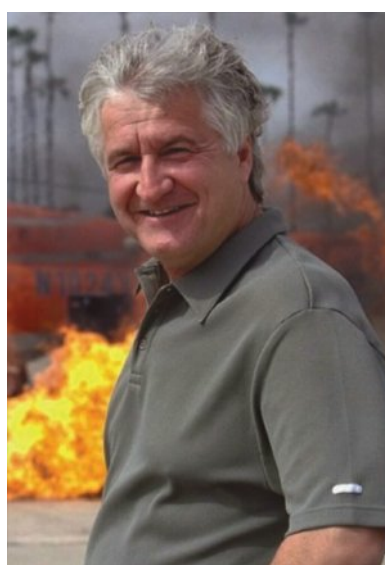
Speed (1994) 20th Century Fox



Every stunt in my movies was planned with every safety precaution and a trained crew.



Lodz Film School





After working on fifty plus films I ask him if he will ever retire.

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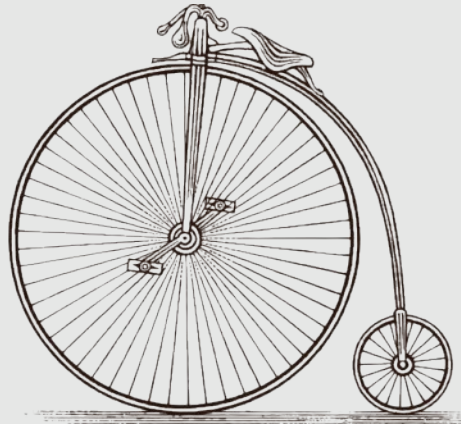
Hell no.

Lodz is a significant cultural center, not only known for its film school, but also as a hub for the best Polish cameramen, actors, and directors, including Andrzej Wajda and Roman Polanski. I see the softer side of Andrzej when he discusses his three kids, Ania, Marco and Madzia. Ania is a staff editor for the New York Times, while Madzia is a graphic designer. You can tell he is very proud and loves that his children gravitated toward careers in the arts. Andrzej beams when he tells me, “This business is all about the passing of knowledge and using my experience to guide the new generations. I’m always open to invitations by organizations to guide young students in their craft.”

As we wrap up our time together, I’m curious to know what he does with his time these days. “I’m working with writers to develop scripts and I watch screenings for the Motion Picture Academy.” I ask him about the next generation of filmmakers and if he has any advice for them. “I think schooling is important for young people who want to enter the business. They need to learn about the masters of the past. There were a generation of filmmakers who were revolutionary,” he tells me. And Andrzej learned from some of the best, mentioning such acclaimed directors as the aforementioned Sidney Lumet and John Huston, James Ivory who’s films have won seven academy awards, James L. Brooks of *As Good As It Gets*, Richard Donner of *Superman* and *Lethal Weapon*, Joel Schumacher, and Ivan Reitman. “The old masters have a big influence on modern film.”

After working on fifty plus films I ask him if he will ever retire. “Hell no,” he responds quickly. “If I stop learning, I die.” That creative mind of his is still buzzing. He has a couple of directing projects in development with no signs of slowing down. Before leaving the restaurant, he orders shrimp tacos to take to his son and he offers to walk out with me. A gentleman, a hellraiser, a father, one sharp cookie. The younger generation can learn from this bright artist who takes risks but respectfully looks back to learn from the best.

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RENAISSANCE
Woman

Written by Barbie Brady
Photographs by J.L. Cederblom
Additional photos Karen Steward

**ART DIRECTOR KAREN STEWARD
FLEXES FORWARD**

Karen Steward is an art director, an artist, a production designer and a would-be architect, all in one. Her sensibility, talents, interests and skills have culminated in one dynamic direction- one that has given her a life-long career in television and film. Like all Hollywood success stories, Steward's journey is uniquely her own.

Times are changing. The prohibitive cost of a college education, compounded by the wealth of information found freely on the internet, no longer makes a career path via university the norm. However, at one point not too long ago, college was meant as a way to find oneself and decide on a direction, while gaining valuable insights into personal growth. State schools often weren't intended to gauge away at one's financial future and the general consensus was to learn as much as possible about as many things that sparked one's interest. In this glorious space and time, Steward initially was in pursuit of a fine arts degree at North Texas State University. She took to painting and spent time working in the theater building sets and learning classical guitar. Steward remembers experiencing her thirst for knowledge in all directions and her quest to "know all of it" while absorbing all she could.

After three years in fine art, she decided to change paths and transition into a pursuit of architecture at The University of Texas San Antonio. Here she studied another three years, still unsure of an end game coming clearly into focus.

Six years into vastly different educational experiences before fate finally intervened. Production designer, Gregg Fonseca, came into town looking for architecture students who'd like to work part-time on the upcoming production of a film entitled, *Johnny Be Good* (1988.) Back in the day, once a location was secured, the production crew needed to source locals to help bring it to life. They did it the old-fashioned way, knocking on college doors to see if anyone was young and hungry to do something new. Steward, eager for another opportunity to learn, was asked if she'd like to help with set design. She accepted and started working at an abandoned car dealership that became the main set for the film.

Once the film wrapped, she remembers the great sadness that came with it. Here, she finally found a career direction that utilized not only her practical mind, but her creative mind, as well. As soon as the breakdown of the set was completed, there was no hesitation to leave behind the remainder of her semester at school. "I took my cat and my drafting table and drove straight to Los Angeles to start my new career," Steward explained. Arriving in LA on the 4th of July weekend, she never looked back - This was her *true* Independence Day.

She became a production assistant on a few small projects and then landed herself in the art department on others. She was mostly doing scenic painting and set decorating, but with each film she was learning the ropes, adding to her repertoire of knowledge. Steward was lucky to work on notable projects early on, such as *The Abyss*, as a painter, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Movie*, as an assistant art director. Steward recalls her experience paint-



ing inside an abandoned nuclear power plant on *The Abyss*, one of James Cameron’s earlier special effects laden features, “I was working on the scenic crew at the time, it was still early in my career; and we all were required to attain a PADI certification for open-water diving so that we could work inside the tank after it was filled with treated water from a nearby lake. They already had some of Jacque Cousteau’s team working with the actors, so we borrowed some over-sized wet-suits and had a local dive instructor come to the site to teach us to dive in the tank.”

TMNT: The Movie was an exciting opportunity for Steward to flex her artist muscle as assistant art director. One of the main characters in the film, April (portrayed by Judith Hoag,) did sketches of the turtles and those very sketches were executed by the hand of Karen Steward. It was an excellent opportunity for all her interests and skills to come into sharp focus, cementing her decision to pursue art directing as her main career. *TMNT: The Movie* remains perhaps her favorite film to date.



My experience hardened me to being the only woman on most sets.

Film and Television sets are highly collaborative environments. If you desire a successful run in any major entertainment field, you must learn to keep your eyes open and only speak when you know the score. In the 80’s, when Steward was breaking her way into entertainment, there were only a handful of women in all the art departments city wide. By 1999 when Steward finally joined the Art Directors Guild, she estimates there were only roughly 3% of women in the guild alongside her. “My experience hardened me to being the only woman on most sets.” Being a working woman from that era, she learned to avoid the inappropriate behavior from higher-ups, and never really let misogynistic attitudes bring her down. It wasn’t until 2016 that Steward found herself sitting in an all-female art department for a



The Abyss set





VEEP

project- It was a moment that did not go unnoticed. One of the assistant's mother's had been on site that day and had pulled Steward aside to express her appreciation for how far women had come in the industry. Tears in her eyes, she thanked Steward for providing an environment for her own daughter to contribute to that empowerment, and the opportunity to watch as she did so.

The position of art director (AD) is one of flexibility. The production designer oversees the look and feel of the television show or film, then the art director collaborates to make that vision a reality. On today's sets, there can sometimes be multiple art directors in charge of various aspects of each production. Steward revealed that her favorite role to be in, is that of the supervising art director. This position allows her to orchestrate the various art directors and assistants in order to make the production designer happy. It is also necessary to make the other key players happy as well, and that's where a talent for visual information and practical application go so neatly hand in hand. It is crucial for the AD to understand the overall visual concept for the entire show and then to communicate that information effectively to all departments so that nothing gets in the way. This communication is vital for lighting, sound, cameras, and even makeup and wardrobe, to fully realize the vision. It's a great position to pursue if you can utilize both your right and left brain equally, with a mind for budgets, and an eye for design.



Steward does have a handful of credits as the production designer, but she feels most at home as a supervising art director. She has also come to appreciate and enjoy the world of television, as opposed to the fickle world of film. The format allows a more predictable schedule and a more reliable paycheck. Both present entirely different scheduling and budgeting challenges with lots of varied nuisances. New media and the arrival of multiple streaming platforms have also altered the norm. Yet, one thing remains true for Steward. She thrives on the opportunity to continue to learn and grow and take other talented young people along with her. The act of mentoring is constant, and she prides herself on having a high turnover with production assistants; She catapults mentees right onto their career paths, with her advice being, "pick your position and aim for that place!" Basically- decide where you



She thrives on the opportunity to continue to learn and grow and take other talented young people along with her.

want to end up and don't stop learning and growing until you get there.

Steward also has a very keen interest in seeing the world of production be kinder to the planet at large. There is an awful lot of waste in making "movie magic." From the use of Luan, a type of



wood paneling that comes from the rain-forest, to "red book" policies that only allow productions to purchase from a set list of vendors- Steward is challenging these practices. "For me, the work I am doing regarding sustainability within the film industry is

something I would say that I am very, very proud of. I am currently serving on the advisory board for GREEN SPARK GROUP and have consulted with my families' urban planning nonprofit which helps to inform me in my quest to create a Circular Art Department on every show." Greenspark Group holds monthly zoom meetings to address greener production initiatives.

In true "full circle" fashion, Steward never really gave up painting either. She creates geometric abstract paintings with a minimalist vibe that has a loose Bauhaus influence. Her use of color and composition are fresh and interesting. It is possibly the only place in her life when she's creating something that's not collaborative, but uniquely her own. You can check out Karen Steward's paintings on Instagram @iona_egg. If you have an opportunity to hire, work for, or simply meet this inspiring woman- I highly recommend doing so. She's a breath of fresh air, and a dynamic force for good.

It is possibly the only place in her life when she's creating something that's not collaborative, but uniquely her own. You can check out Karen Steward's paintings on Instagram @iona_egg. If you have an opportunity to hire, work for, or simply meet this inspiring woman- I highly recommend doing so. She's a breath of fresh air, and a dynamic force for good.



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A LITTLE SOMETHING

By Joseph Lawrence

EASTERN INSPIRATIONS

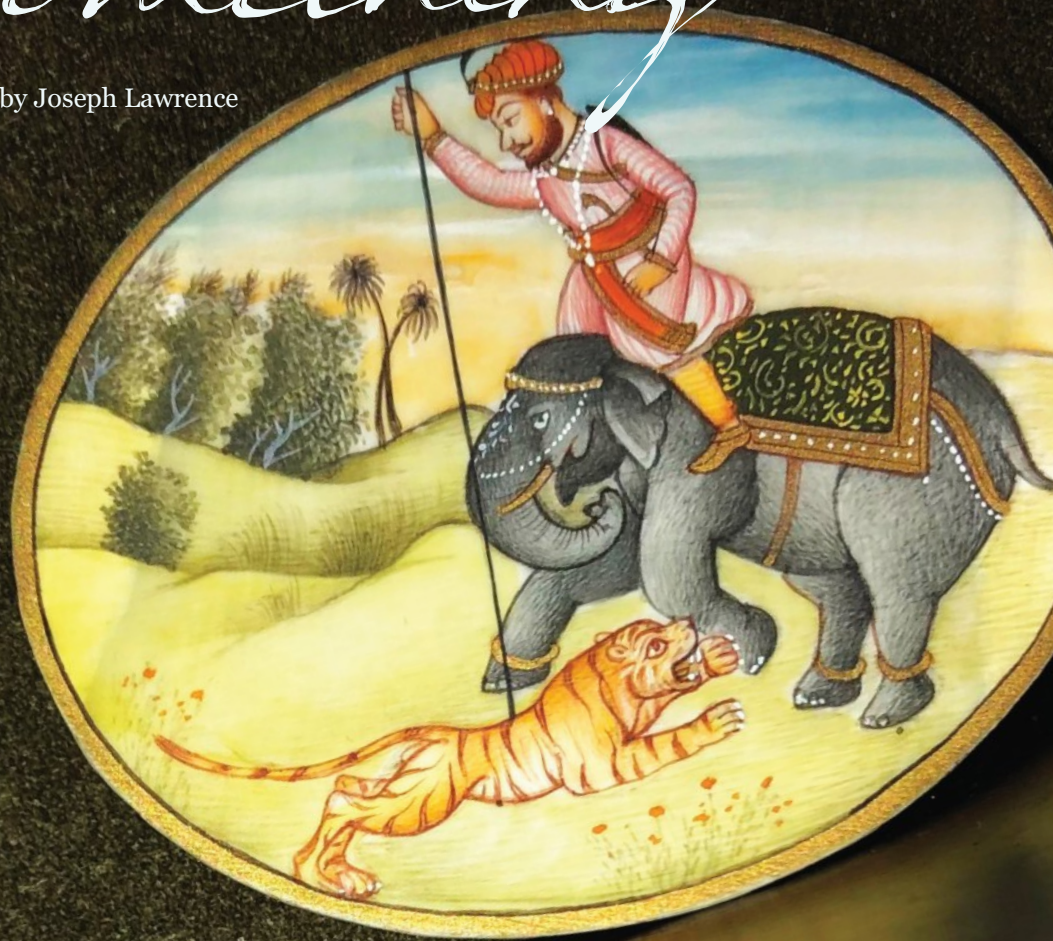
By Alina Ghencea

BEETHOVEN'S METRONOME

By Ariel Maccarone

A LITTLE *Something*

Written by Joseph Lawrence



THE FINE TRADITION OF INDIAN MINIATURE PAINTING

It looked like the perfect evening for a party. A star-filled night sky with a clear crescent moon conveyed an atmosphere conducive to the ensuing frolic. In the beautiful, tiled courtyard, courtesans danced around an ornate fountain seemingly in rhythm with the arching waters trickling down onto the polished marble. A peacock meanders into the scene, neither an invited guest nor a party crasher, just part of a familiar landscape. And in the center of it all, a Prince embraces his lover with one hand, while in the other he holds the mouthpiece to his hookah.

Amazingly the entire scene, a moment captured in time and meant to be shared into perpetuity, was recorded on a thin sheet of ivory no bigger than the average smart phone screen. The master artisan commissioned with depicting the above-described scene, had been formally schooled in an artistic



tradition that was already hundreds of years old at the time he was tasked with documenting the princely party. Among the tools of his trade was a single-haired paint brush made from the tail of a squirrel species found only in the Indian jungle. Such an implement enabled the artist to render in the most minute and miniscule detail.

The tradition of *Indian Miniature Painting* originated in the eastern part of the country around 750 AD. The earliest works were created by Buddhists who painted incantations and teachings of Lord Buddha on small palm leaves. For the illiterate, these small paintings served as a means of educating and proselytizing new converts in local village communities. Often times, small vignettes depicting noteworthy episodes in the life of Lord Buddha were painstakingly rendered in the finest detail and

would often times be mounted collectively in albums that would function as de facto holy books.

About two hundred years after the first miniature paintings appeared in the eastern part of India, the tradition had spread to the western areas of the country, in particular Gujarat and Rajasthan where religious themes continued to dominate. The medium was said to have been picked up and refined by proponents of Jainism. In fact, Jain holy men charged with writing and translating religious texts had included miniature paintings in many of their sacred manuscripts. Hundreds of pages of these texts were kept in Jain temples where they were used to inspire the local merchant class as well as devout ascetics whose rigorous religious practice and self-sacrifice pushed these devotees to their physical and mental limits.

Even though it is generally accepted that the Palas of Bengal started the tradition of painting on a miniature scale, many South Asian scholars are quick to point out that the medieval Jains were the true pioneers of miniature painting in India. Jain artists had developed many stylistic innovations in the medium including the use of paper and other base materials instead of the traditional palm leaf substrate. Jain artists also changed the way figures were depicted, especially females. Over accentuation became a hallmark, particularly in the rendering of eyes. Ornamentation was also liberally applied to add visual interest. And new and vivid palettes were appearing in later Jain pieces as influences from Persia were making their way into the artistic tradition of the sub-continent. Mineral pigments like crushed lapis lazuli and even gold were introduced to lend drama to the tiny masterpieces, while deeply hued new colors were developed including a bright yellow that was derived from the urine of cows that were fed an exclusive diet of mango leaves.



Of course, the obvious parallels to Christian iconography and the artistry seen in early medieval church manuscripts cannot be discounted even though the two artistic traditions probably evolved independently during the Middle Ages. In later centuries the influence of Byzantine and Eastern Orthodox religious art would definitely influence painters classically schooled in India and commissioned by the Royal courts.

As the art form started to flourish throughout the Indian subcontinent, various schools had arisen over the centuries, each reflecting the regional style that lent unique attributes and refinement to the genre. The aforementioned original Pala school was so influential that it not only set the stage for the evolution of the genre in India but also influenced art and religious expression throughout much of Asia.

Other regional schools and styles of note came into prominence and continued to evolve up to the Company School of painting during the British Raj. It was the Mughal school however that would set the standard and give the world the imagery that would become synonymous with the art form. The developing medium would reach its zenith under the Mughal Emperors. Persian and Islamic influences added new elements to the burgeoning style, due in part to the fact that many Mughal Royals were of

Persian decent. Interestingly, while it is generally assumed that figural depiction is prohibited under Islamic Law, Indian miniatures of the period focused on depictions of living forms as the central theme while incorporating more traditional Islamic geometric and arabesque patterns in the border and background areas. This hybridization seemed to be popular in both the Mughal and Persian Royal courts of the day.



From the earliest days of the Mughal Empire master artisans were brought in to work in ateliers with royal sponsorship, both from domestic schools as well as from Persia. One story re-

By the time construction of the Taj Mahal was completed, about mid-way through the Mughal dynasty, Indian miniature painting had become one of the most coveted art forms for royal patronage.

lates how the Emperor Humayun spent a vast sum of money to import a famous miniaturist from Persia by the name of Mir Sayyid Ali, even though it was a politically risky move given the expense during what was a time of instability within the empire. Ali was a proven commodity however, having made a name for himself by painting an entire polo match on a grain of rice. The investment in Ali would pay off as the artist would spend the rest of his life in India working on royal commissions and establishing workshops on behalf of the court.

It was Humayun's son, Akbar the Great who would be one of the Mughal rulers most closely associ-

ated with the classical period of Mughal miniatures. Akbar had a passion for the arts and spent lavishly on artistic pursuits, not unlike the Popes of Renaissance Europe who spent similarly to amass great collections created by the top talent of their day. Akbar, though likely illiterate, oversaw one of the most expansive cultural shifts into the arts ever seen in the history of the sub-continent. Akbar's son, Jahangir, would pick up where his father left off and was said to be so obsessed with painting, in particular, that he would keep his painters close by should he happen upon any scene that he wanted them to record.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, the Mughal tradition of miniature painting was in decline. This decline mirrored the decline of the empire itself. The evolution of the genre under the Mughals saw some of the greatest advancements in the art form. Not only did the contributions of Persian artists change the aesthetic but even western techniques like shading and perspective, originally introduced by the Jesuits, had begun to appear in Mughal-era works.

As royal patronage waned toward the end of the Mughal period the art form began to flower in what is today, Ra-



EMPEROR HUMAYUN



AKBAR THE GREAT

jasthan, sometimes referred to as the land of Maharajas. Artists schooled in the art form began to migrate to the areas ruled by the Rajput warrior class where they found new patrons among the Princely courts. Stylisti-

cally, the paintings looked similar to their Mughal counterparts. But in theme and subject matter the Rajasthani works differed greatly. Whereas the Mughal works focused on courtly affairs and life in the royal households, the Rajasthani works touched upon Hindu myth and illustration from the Hindu epics like the Bhagavad Gita and the Mahabharata. Royal Palaces across Rajasthan retained artisans for the indulgence of the royal households and various schools popped up around the region, each with their own distinct styles and traits.

The tradition of miniature painting in Rajasthan would continue through the period of the British Raj. As it turned out, the British were also smitten with the art form. In fact, one of the last distinct schools of miniature painting to arise in India was the Company School of Painting. This school espoused a hybrid style developed by indigenous talent working on behalf of the British East India Company. Western styles and techniques coalesced with established traditions inherent to the medium. Today, as a result of the British occupation, some of the greatest treasures of Indian miniature painting remain in British hands.

One other area of interest with regard to Indian miniatures is in the category of erotica. While never the main focus of any of the traditional schools, miniature erotic paintings do appear throughout the history of the art form. As a result, many mistakenly believe that the ancient Kama Sutra texts were illustrated with the lavish and detailed paintings we associate with the genre today. This is actually not the case as the Kama Sutra texts pre-date the classical medium by as much as a thousand years. In modern abridged translations of the ancient writings, publishers added the Indian miniature erotica to sell more books.

Today, there is a new appreciation for the art form that goes back hundreds of years. Through these tiny compositions much of the history of India and its culture can be told by examining the evolution of these works from the earliest days of the genre to the present.

Recently, many top museums have put together special exhibitions and retrospectives examining Indian miniatures. Of course, in Britain the holdings of the top institutions feature a literal treasure trove of Indian art, so much so that museums like the British Museum actually lend it out to exhibitors in India. Back in 2018 one of the more intriguing exhibits took place at the Getty in Los Angeles. “Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India” featured detailed drawings Rembrandt had made of the Mughal Emperors which the exhibit had juxtaposed with Mughal-era miniature portraits of those same Emperors.



EASTERN *Inspirations*

Written by Alina Ghencea

HOW UKIYO-E INSPIRED AN ART MOVEMENT IN THE WESTERN WORLD



**Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi bridge and Atake Hiroshige*

Western interest in Japanese culture and art was not spurious or without context. The European art universe of the 19th century was one still dominated by universities and high-class patronage. Few had yet to throw off the baroque realism that had dominated the 1700s, with many artists growing tired of these standards, if not rejecting them. Expecting to express their thoughts and creativity in new ways that mirrored the fast industrialization of Europe and modern technology, this radical environment of new politics and society was open to new creative impact and new artistic influence.

The rise of both, Impressionism and Symbolism showed Western artists were searching for new ways of expressing their artistic creativity. European exploits in the East had intensified interests in Asia. Newly established fields of anthropology and cultural studies brought new research. The Orient had been a mystical place to Europe, but now colonialism and modern technology could more readily examine it. Even books like "Madame Chrysantheme", "The Pink Notebook" and their



La Japonaise- Claude Monet

derivatives carried tremendous interest toward the East.

"The cult of Japan", as Phillippe Burty would later call it, would start in 1856 with Felix Bracquemond, amusingly enough in what one might consider "trash". Bracquemond discovered a copy of the "Hokusai Manga" a series of sketches by the Japanese artist Hokusai that has been used as wrapping material for a consignment of porcelain. The Manga would be the first major European artist's contact with Japanese art, a circumstance that would inspire a movement that would radically transform Western's visual culture.

Even if Japan and France are geographically on opposite sides of the world, in the 19-century Japanese art came to have an incredible influence on western art. The impact was so significant, that the French came out with a word for the Japanese artistic style, "Japonisme". Japanese objects entered France through china shops but general

Plum park in Kameido- Hiroshige



interest in Asia soon developed into a Japan-mania.

So, what is it about Japanese art that made impressionists so roused, particularly when they previously had contact with other Eastern cultures like China for such countless years? One factor is the 200 years of Japan's isolation. What attracted so many western artists was the unique style of Japanese woodblock prints: Ukiyo-e or Pictures of the Floating World. Ukiyo-e was an inexpensive popular art form in Japan during the Edo Period (1615-1868). While some found the Japanese artistic style to be simple or childish, many artists were fascinated by both the simplicity and complexity of the woodblock prints. Ukiyo-e depicted scenes of Japanese nature or the "floating world" of Edo Period and its unique composition, flat look, and asymmetry showed that art didn't need to be photorealistic to be beautiful. The adoption of Japonisme by major impressionists introduced new concepts to their works of art, these include asymmetry, empty space, and a flat aesthetic that de-emphasized perspective and shadowing. Japa-



The Courtesan- Van Gogh

nese objects and artwork were featured in European art as exotic backdrops.

The Universal Expositions held in Paris acquainted the overall population with Japanese art and by 1875 Japonisme had been established as a movement. The use of woodblocks to reproduce the prints made them easy to mass-produce, which helped expand their availability in Europe.

An early fan of Japanese woodblock prints (Ukiyo-e) was Vincent Van Gogh, who copied Ukiyo-e to understand its composition. He discovered the Ukiyo-e earlier than other painters since the Dutch had closer trade with Japan. When he was living in Belgium, in Antwerp, two sets of prints were pinned to the walls of his studio. Van Gogh publicly declared his love and admiration for Japanese art and shortly after his fascination for Japanese art began, he started acquiring Japanese prints. It was reported that

Vincent Van Gogh owned over 600 prints. He intended to earn some money from these excellent and bright prints so he anticipated selling some during spring. He coordinated a show at 'Le Tambourin' bistro, Montmartre - run by Agostina Segatori, his sweetheart.

Some other impressionists notable for the influence of Japanese aesthetics in their work are Edgar Degas and Toulouse Lautrec.

The most famous impressionist who was influenced by Japanese art is Claude Monet. Monet looked for new models as he shifted away from traditional Greco-Roman standards of beauty. The unique aesthetic of Ukiyo-e art inspired impressionists, and its influence became deeper with time.

The impressionist artist amassed an assortment of more than 200 Ukiyo-e prints, which he proudly displayed at his home in Giverny. He constructed an extensive garden with a pond full of lily pads to serve as inspiration for his paintings. The pond is marked by an iconic Japanese bridge painted in a very French shade of green. Monet is most famous for depicting the changes of light and reflections over time. Still his compositions and theme borrow from great Japanese artists such as Hokusai.

Monet's friendship with two prominent Japanese dealers enhanced his understanding of the composition and the philosophy behind Japanese art. Hayashi arrived in France in 1878 and stayed for over two decades, when he often visited Monet at Giverny. In this time he imported over 150,000 Ukiyo-e prints to Europe. Kojiro Matsutaka, another Japanese art dealer arrived in France in 1920 and he also befriended Monet towards the end of his life. These two Japanese art dealers, Hayashi and Matsutaka became huge fans of impressionism in their own right. They collected Monet's paintings and helped organize the first exhibitions of Impressionism art in Japan.

Japonisme reached its peak at the end of the 19th century, both Japonisme and Western art continued to evolve in new directions. Japanese art now had a heavy western influence, and in France, cubism became the *mot du jour*. Japonisme influence in Western art began as an imitation or even appropriation of exotic aesthetic. With time, the integration of Japanese aesthetic principles created a new style in its own right, in the 19th century, Europe interacted with many foreign cultures, often in the role of colonizer. In these exchanges, many times Europe did not hold the other's culture in high esteem. Japonisme is a notable exception to this dynamic and it shows how appreciation and respect can lead two very different cultures to create something new and beautiful together that benefited both Western and Eastern parties and brought something new to the world.



Bridge in the Rain - Van Gogh

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Beethoven's METRONOME

Written by Ariel Maccarone

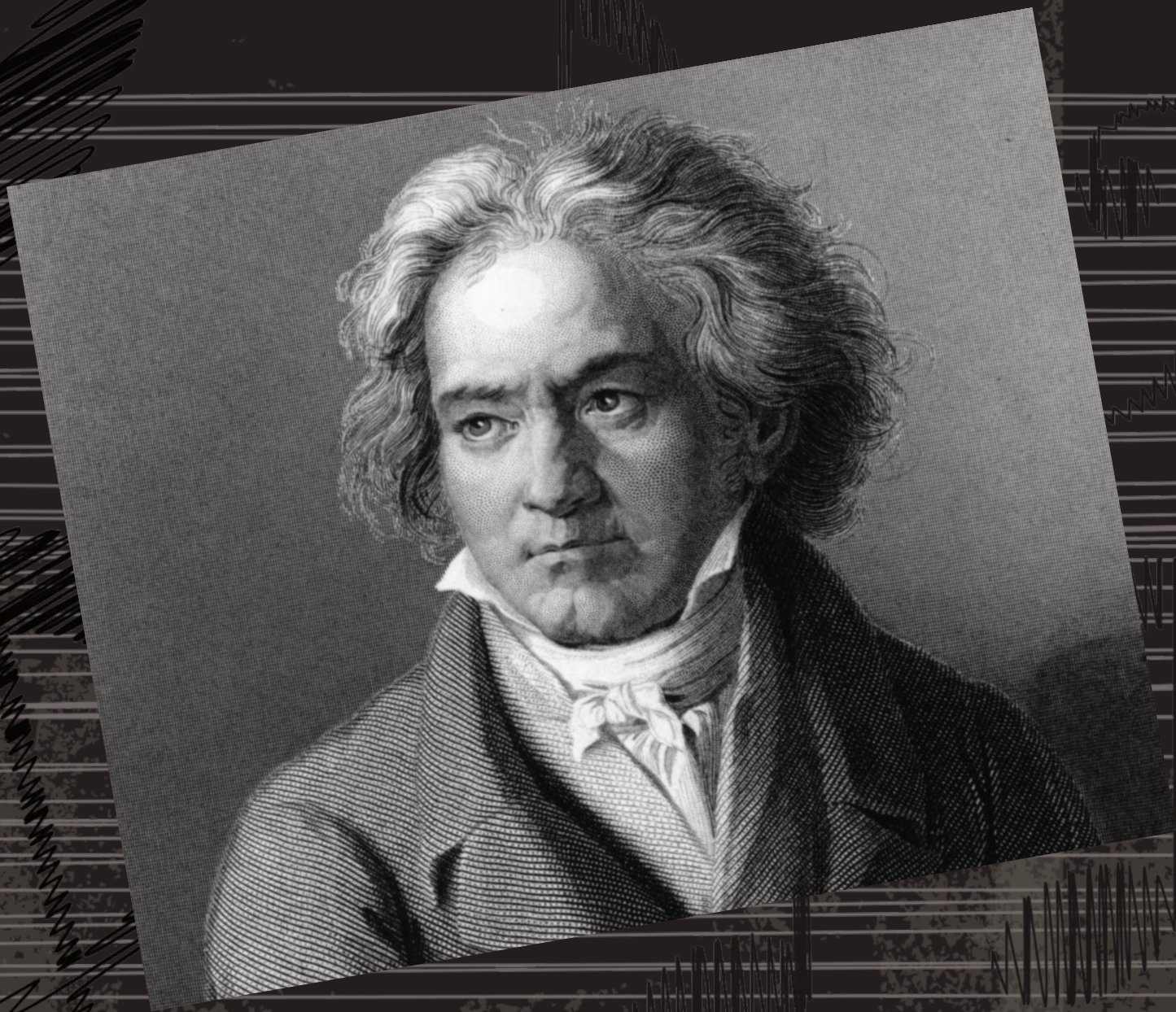
A TEMPO FOR LIGHT SPEED

One may not realize that little, if any, of Beethoven's music is performed according to his original sheet music. The esteemed Beethoven compositions that we all know, are actually slowed-down versions of the his handwritten manuscripts. In their 2013 essay ("Was Something Wrong with Beethoven's Metronome?") published in "Notices of the American Mathematical Society," authors Forsen et al. explain, "Many if not most of Beethoven's markings have been ignored by latter day conductors and recording artists. Peter Stadlen (1910-1996), who devoted many years to studies of Beethoven's markings, regarded sixty-six out of a total of 135 important markings as absurdly fast and thus possibly wrong."

In their paper, Forsen et al. explore the most compelling scenarios that might explain Beethoven's bizarre tempo markings. Could Beethoven's metronome have been damaged, and thus inaccurate, unbeknownst to the composer? Did Beethoven's infamously illegible handwriting lead others to misunderstand his notations? What if Beethoven misunderstood the device's instructions for how to properly read the time intervals? The metronome was, after all, still new to the public when Beethoven first began using one.

Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich, hosts of the nonfiction storytelling podcast *Radio Lab*, found the music community's debate

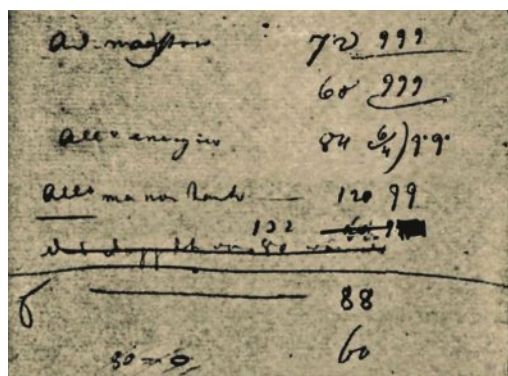
For the past two hundred years, scholars across the globe have debated whether Beethoven's metronome markings were accidental or intentional.



equally intriguing. In a 2013 episode titled, “Speedy Beet,” *Radio Lab* invited Conductor Alan Pierson and the Brooklyn Philharmonic to test whether it was even possible for a human being to perform Beethoven’s work according to the original markings. Pierson and the orchestra experimented with Beethoven’s Third Symphony as the first guinea pig.

The orchestra’s rehearsals were recorded, and the audio paints a visceral picture of what it sounds like when the world’s best musicians struggle. It leaves you in equal parts awe and heartbreak.

Pierson told *Radio Lab* that there was only one rehearsal during which the entire orchestra could reach the tempo Beethoven had originally set for the



Third. Furthermore, when the orchestra did reach Beethoven’s tempo markings, the feeling of the piece was so altered that it sounded like a completely different composition.

For the past two hundred years, scholars across the globe have debated whether Beethoven’s metronome markings were accidental or intentional. The discrepancy alone has caused its own kind of existential unrest among the masses. Either answer seems to unleash its own implications for music and its community.

The basic concept of tempo was in existence prior to the introduction of metronomes in the early 1800’s. In their paper, Forsen et al. explain that the musical notation we’re used to (the five-line staff, whole notes, half notes, quarter notes, etc.) was already widespread by the end of the 1600’s. “In fact, already in the early years of the seventeenth century, the human pulse was used for timing,” the authors explain. “It is reported that the pulse was taken as eighty beats/minute – which seems somewhat high

but may reflect the level of stress of performing artists.”

The monumental shift for music was its transition from a language rooted in verbal descriptions, to one rooted in mathematics. Mathematical notation offered a level of precision that eluded previous composers who relied on verbal time-keeping descriptions, such as “vivace” and “vivacissimo” (from the Italian system) or “schnell” and “sehr” (from the German system).

Verbal descriptions for time could never free themselves from the context in which they were being used. Thus, the understanding of tempo varied based on geography, culture, and nuances in individual perspective. Regarding individual perspective, Forsen et al. explain that we each experience the passage of time slightly differently. “A tempo regarded as fast for one person may be less so for another,” the authors explain. “We suppose that internal clocks have a tendency to run slower with age in most humans.”

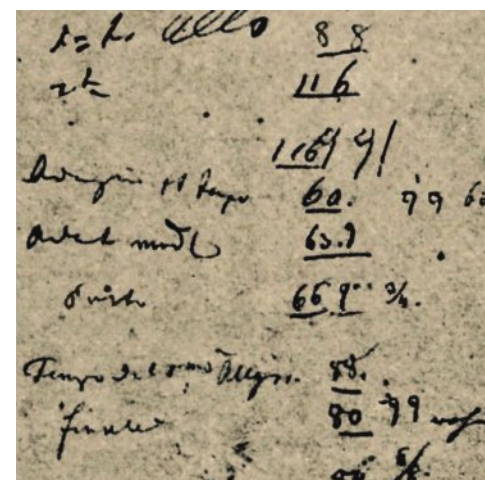
What the metronome did was reduce the ambiguity of a composer’s intentions by slicing time into smaller and smaller chunks of itself ... or rather, into beats per minute. Instead of using the term “vivace” to denote a “lively and fast” tempo, a composer could specify exactly 160 beats per minute. (“Vivace” is considered between 156 and 176 beats per minute.) Instead of using “vivacissimo” to denote a “very fast and lively” tempo, a composer could note 175 beats per minute. (“Vivacissimo” is considered between 172 and 176 beats per minute.) The metronome enabled composers to communicate to everyone – regardless of time, place or person – precisely how their compositions should be performed in perpetuity.

Not all were in favor of the metronome’s ability to increase precision within music, however. Some were worried the metronome’s mechanization of time-keeping would undo the artistic and spiritual foundations of music. Beethoven, however, became a fan of, and eventually an advocate for the metronome’s role in music composition.

Forsen et al. point to Lady Wallace’s translation of “Beethoven’s Letters 1790-1826.” In an 1817 letter Beethoven wrote

to the writer on music Hofrath von Mosel, Beethoven revealed: “So far as I am myself concerned, I have long purposed giving up those inconsistent terms ‘allegro’, ‘andante’, ‘adagio’, and ‘presto’; and Mälzel’s metronome furnishes us with the best opportunity of doing so.”

Although the invention of the metronome is widely attributed to Switzerland’s Johann Nepomuk Mälzel (1772-1838) – who patented his version of the metronome around 1816 – Dietrich Nikolaus Winkel (1780-1826) was already experimenting with pendulum-



based timekeeping by 1812 in Amsterdam. In an 1815 issue of “Reports of the Netherlands Academy of Sciences,” Winkel wrote that he invented a new version of the pendulum which operated from what he called the “double-pendulum principle,” the principle upon which the metronome was built. Winkel, however, did not patent his invention at that time and history did not look kindly upon this.

When Mälzel heard of Winkel’s invention, he went to see him in Amsterdam. After inspecting Winkel’s device firsthand, Mälzel offered to buy the rights to reproduce and sell it under his own name. According to Forsen et al., when Winkel refused to sell Mälzel the rights, Mälzel copied Winkel’s idea and went ahead with his plan anyway.

“Intellectual property rights were rarely enforced in those days,” the authors continue. “So Mälzel went back to Vienna, made a copy of Winkel’s instrument, added a scale to the oscillating beam on the side of the movable weight, took the copy to Paris, and saw to it that ‘his’ – Mälzel’s – invention was patented there

and later also in London and Vienna.” Winkel took Mälzel to court for copyright theft, but the case was tied up in the courts for years and history had moved on. Mälzel’s name became associated with the metronome instead of Winkel’s. So it goes.

Sometime between 1808 and 1813, Beethoven approached Mälzel for help to combat the composer’s hearing loss. At this time, Beethoven would have been in the twilight of his career while almost entirely deaf. At the time, Mälzel designed and constructed several ear trumpets that enabled Beethoven to amplify what little hearing ability he had left.

What if he wanted audiences and performers to feel uncomfortable while experiencing his music? The tempi in Beethoven’s original manuscripts equate to a doubling of the speed of what we are accustomed to, causing the music to stray from the select band of soundwaves that the human ear finds pleasant and digestible. If Beethoven intended to use tempo as a tool to engineer a type of anguish within listeners, he would have succeeded.

The tempi Beethoven set for his pieces requires that the body transcend the limitations it has set for itself. To play at this speed is a struggle for even the most exceptional performers. It is equally a chal-

who was gradually going deaf, to grapple losing touch with the cornerstone of his identity – sound. It’s easy to imagine the alienation he must have felt from everything... including himself.

Was he making a point?

Forsen et al. ultimately settle on a combination of the metronome’s novelty for musicians of the time (and therefore room for error in a composer’s interpretation of the device’s instructions) and the likelihood that Beethoven’s metronome was, in fact, damaged and working improperly unbeknownst to the composer. “Whatever the case,” the authors write, “our mathematical analysis shows that a



We cannot be sure how significantly the ear trumpets improved Beethoven’s ability to process sound, but we do know that at some point, he did believe his metronome might be performing inaccurately. Forsen et al. reference a letter Beethoven wrote in 1819 to Ferdinand Reis, his friend and copyist. “Beethoven states that he cannot yet send Ries the tempi for his sonata Op. 106 because his metronome is broken,” Forsen et al. write.

In the episode “Speedy Beet,” *Radio Lab* suggests that we consider another possible reason behind Beethoven’s bizarre metronome markings. What if the tempi Beethoven noted were not mistakes?

lenge for audiences to comfortably listen to music built upon an inhuman concept of time; Beethoven’s metronome markings demand more of performers and listeners.

What if Beethoven wanted to mirror the disconnect he felt within himself as a result of his increasing deafness? Alienation and angst expressed in beats per minute. If we could experience Beethoven’s music at his original metronome markings... we might also experience the composer as he experienced himself.

I prefer this way of viewing Beethoven’s metronome markings. I like wondering what it was like for this musical genius

damaged double pendulum metronome could indeed yield tempi consistent with Beethoven’s markings.”

Now, it’s your turn to decide.

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Newworld

IMMERSIVE IMPRESSIONS

By Sara Debevec

THE ART OF RECOGNITION

By Teresa Greco

PROVACATIVE PLAYGROUND

By Remy Haynes

PERFECT PROVENANCE

By Sara Debevec

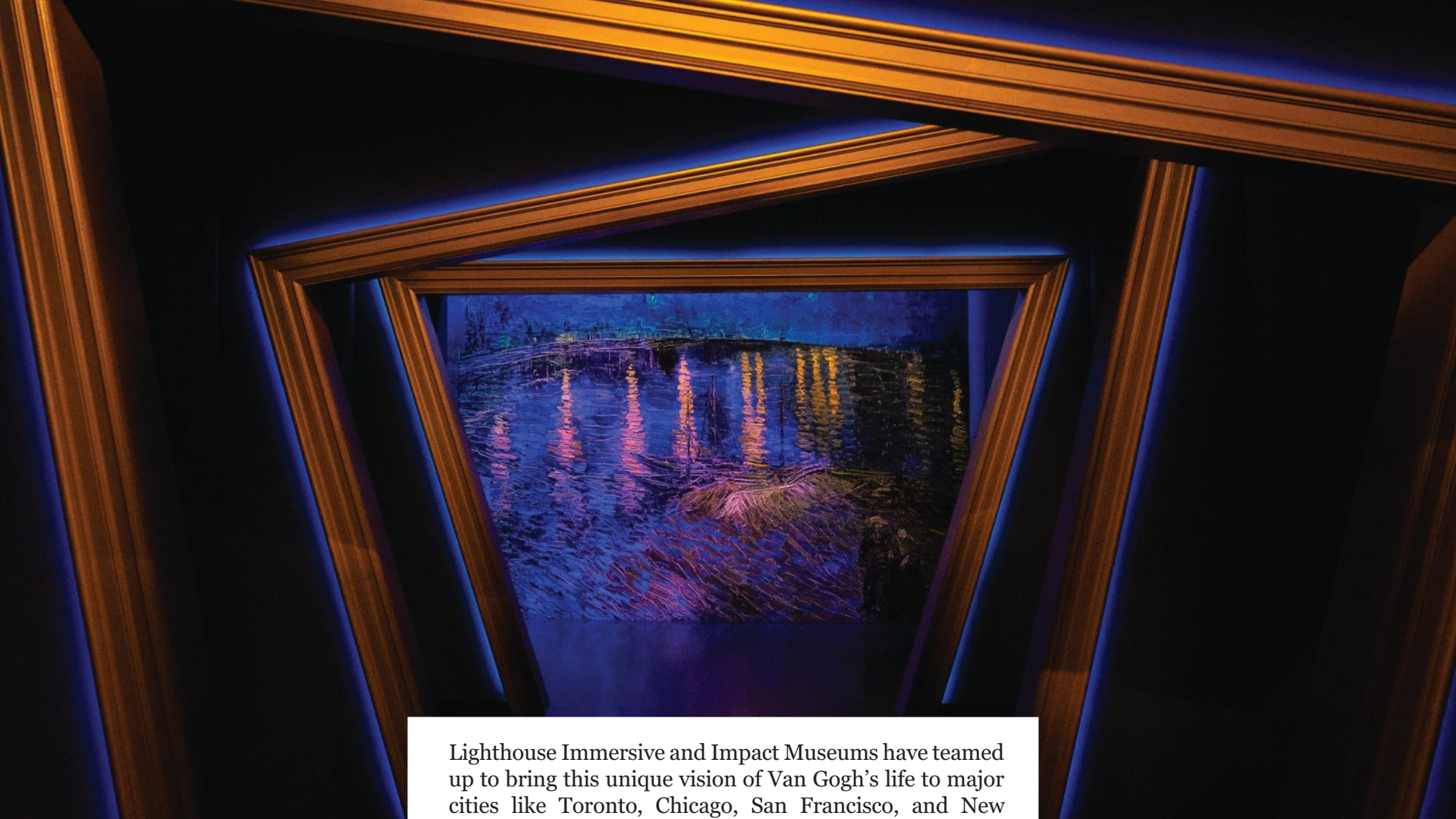
Immersive IMPRESSIONS

Written by Sara Debevec
Photographs by J.L. Cederblom

SEEING VAN GOGH THROUGH WIDER EYES

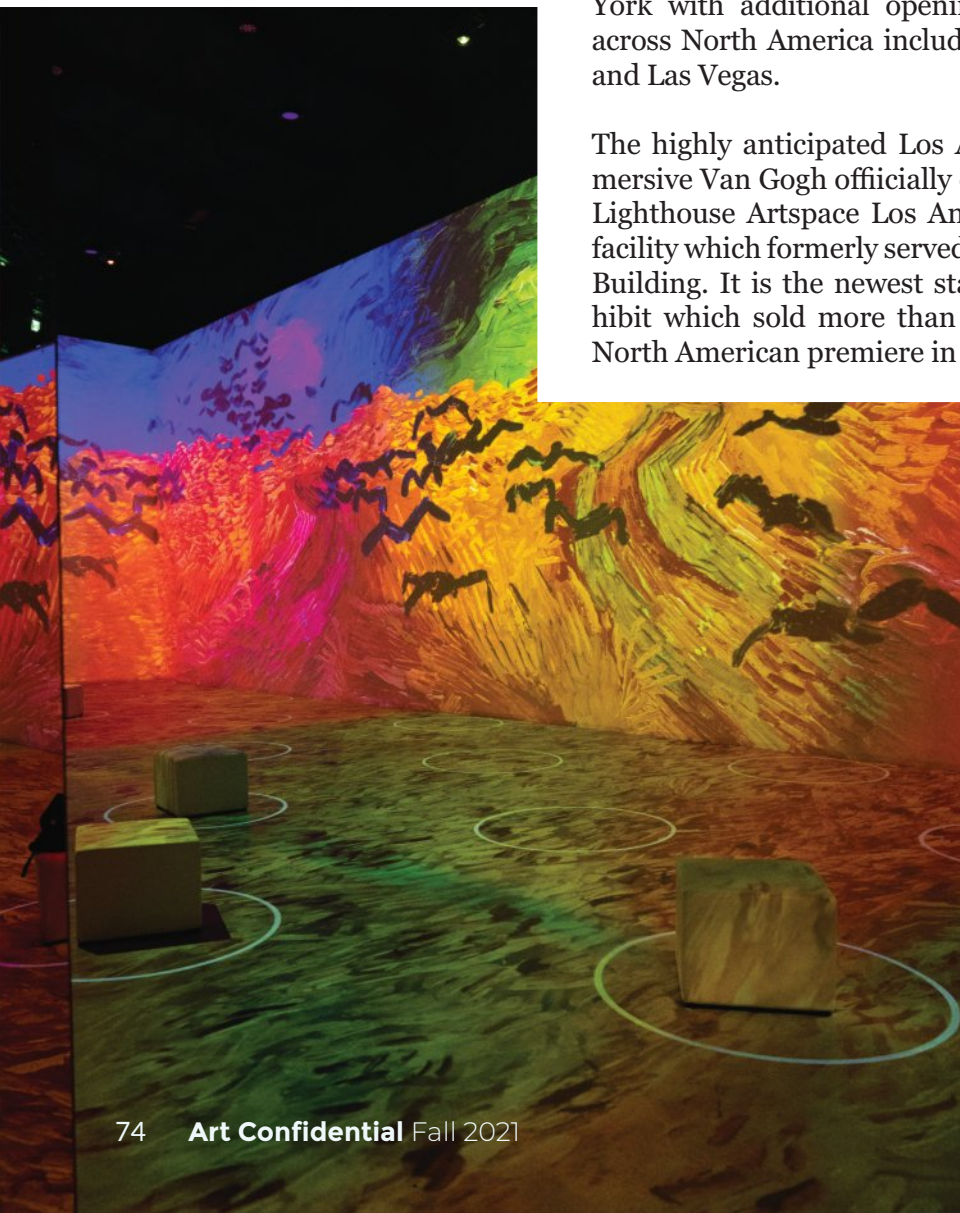
Immersive Van Gogh feels like stepping into Van Gogh's dream. A perfectly synchronized multi-dimensional performance of his mind. It's part exhibit because it showcases images of Van Gogh's paintings and part animated film because Van Gogh's works are deconstructed and mixed into a powerful story. A story told through large-scale moving images that are projected onto walls, ceilings, and floors. You're walking through the art to an original mesmerizing soundtrack that moves you and invites you to explore.





Lighthouse Immersive and Impact Museums have teamed up to bring this unique vision of Van Gogh's life to major cities like Toronto, Chicago, San Francisco, and New York with additional openings scheduled for 16 cities across North America including Phoenix, Dallas, Denver and Las Vegas.

The highly anticipated Los Angeles presentation of Immersive Van Gogh officially opened in August this year at Lighthouse Artspace Los Angeles, a 55,000 square-foot facility which formerly served as the iconic Amoeba Music Building. It is the newest staging of the blockbuster exhibit which sold more than 2.1 million tickets since its North American premiere in July 2020.





More than 2.1 million tickets have been sold to Immersive Van Gogh, making it the most popular attraction currently in North America. So what makes this exhibit more unique than anything else we have seen before?

Designed by Creator and Italian film producer Massimiliano Siccardi and featuring music by Italian multimedia composer Luca Longobardi, the production harnesses 119,000 frames of captivating video totaling 148,000,000 pixels and 500,000+ cubic feet of projections, bringing the painter's masterpieces to life. Each installation is unique to the building that hosts it and holds around 100 projectors.

Siccardi, tried to create what he thought might have flashed before Van Gogh's eyes in the moments before his death. The artist, who has been pioneering immersive exhibitions in Europe for 30 years now, has truly created an out of body experience for us through his work. So how exactly did this European- American collaboration come about?

Corey Ross, Co-Founder and Producer of Immersive Van Gogh, has been working in theater for about 20 years. "Four years ago, I started to see that, commercial producers like myself, were doing interesting projects in Europe with art exhibits," he says. Ross's interest in projection art brought him to Paris where he came across the work of Massimiliano Siccardi who has created a number of immersive



What I saw when I got to Paris, just blew my mind. It was this kind new genre...



Co-founders Diana and Mark Shedletsky



shows inspired by famous painters like Monet, Chagall, Klimt, Picasso, Bosch and Bruegel.

“What I saw when I got to Paris, just blew my mind. It was this kind new genre that was combining art exhibiting, animation, and loose narrative. It had this incredible theatrical and experiential thing to it. It reminded me of the show in New York called *Sleep No More* in the sense that the public moves through the art and you kind of choose your own adventure” adds Ross. There is something truly magical about being able to be part of a painting and experience it through a projection. This is a body of work that moves you with intention.

Designer David Korins known for his work in “Hamilton” joined forces with Italian Creative Team to Produce the awe – Inspiring Los Angeles Exhibit. He developed unique immersive elements such as intricate mirror sculptures inside the exhibition space that reflect Van Gogh’s work throughout the duration of the show. He also created a beautiful sunflower bar for refreshments and a sculpture inspired by Van Gogh’s letters to his brother Theo. With the help of AI technology, the installation lets us write letters to Van Gogh and receive letters back from him. The elements created by Korins, complete the experience, and pull you further into Van Gogh’s highly creative and turbulent world.

“Massimiliano creates these shows almost like a DJ who takes a bit from each song, puts a beat between them and turns them into a new piece of music. Massimiliano and David Korins are refracting and reflecting the world of Van Gogh, his art and essence as a person,” adds Corey Ross.

He stresses that music has been an important element of the Los Angeles show, especially at a place like Amoeba. “Longobardi and Massimiliano have been collaborators since 2012. It’s important to create the music that will propel the narrative and the story forward and add emotion to the experience [...] And we go through the show and see people weeping and other people dancing, and people certainly have these innate emotional reactions to what’s going on in the show,” explains Ross.

Van Gogh remains one of the central figures in Western Art. From iconic sunflowers to romantic starry nights, his work is deeply rooted in our culture. We all know Van Gogh as a troubled artist, who cut his own ear off, ended up in a mental asylum and later committed suicide. But so much beautiful and touching work emerged through this friction that he experienced with his own art. Wondering through the three large rooms of former Amoeba Records and soaking up the work of Van Gogh in this new and original way, gave me serious goosebumps.

There has been an incredible array of interesting celebrity artists come through Immersive Van Gogh. From Madonna and Eddie Lennox to Michelle Pfeiffer and George Lucas, many artists are intrigued and excited by this new concept. “I’m sure that a number of amazing projects and opportunities will come after Van Gogh,” says Ross. He believes that there’s going to be an incredible convergence between live, immersive, and projection art worlds in the next few years and they’re striving to be at the forefront of it.

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The *Art* of
RECOGNITION

Written by Teresa Greco
Originally published in Preferred Magazine
Photographs by Fabian Lopez



SCULPTING FOR THE CINEMA

The Asian World Film Festival (AWFF) is one of the most prestigious festivals in the world, bringing the best of a broad selection of Asian World cinema to Los Angeles, California. November 1-11, 2021, marks the festival's seventh year of bringing greater recognition to the region's wealth of filmmakers, thus strengthening ties between the Asian and Hollywood film industries.

Uniting through crosscultural collaboration, the AWFF champions films from 50 countries across Asia, spanning from Turkey to Japan and Russia to India. The festival is unique in that it predominantly screens films from the Asian Continent that have been submitted to the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences and the Golden Globes for "Best International Feature Film" and "Best Picture - Foreign Language," respectively. The festival has screened over 100 Oscar-submitted films and 70 Golden Globe submissions during the past six years.

Supported by patrons from the Los Angeles Asian communities, the Asian World Film Festival focuses on people who love cinema, especially foreign and independent films. One such person in the Los Angeles area is Sir Daniel Winn. Sir Daniel Winn is an internationally recognized blue-chip museum artist, fine-art curator, awarded entrepreneur, and highly respected philanthropist. He is a multi-talented artist with remarkable achievements, including being awarded the "Philanthropic Artist of the Year" award in 2019 by the NEST Foundation in Hollywood and recently winning the gold medals in the categories of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture from the prestigious Mondial Art Academy, as granted by 45 renowned international judges. In recognition of his direct support to humanitarian causes and having assisted in raising millions of dollars for non-profit aid in



Creating the sculpture was very powerful because it represents a birth.



the United States and Asia, Winn was honoured with the prestigious title of “Sir” when knighted in 2018 under the Princely House of Schaumburg-LippeNachod. The Vietnamese American artist has had work on display worldwide, including at the Shanghai Art Museum in a dual exhibition with Salvador Dalí and with the work of Pablo Picasso (coming in 2022). Among many other distinctions, he is the Board Chairman of The Academy of Fine Art Foundation, CEO and curator of Masterpiece Publishing Inc., and Founder of Winn Slavin Fine Art, two of the most prestigious art galleries in Beverly Hills. Located on the famed Rodeo Drive and Santa Monica Blvd., the highly reputed gallery manages, fosters, and connects a wide range of master sculptors and painters with global art collectors.

The art of Sir Daniel Winn represents a remarkable fusion of a technique reminiscent of the Renaissance masters with a contemporary approach to communicating a message that speaks to a global community. Winn’s artistic philosophy conveys balance, optimism, and courage by combining detailed realism with surrealistic and abstract elements. His artwork juxtaposes ideas of self-determination with providence, individualism with community, and the mundane with the exceptional. Creating in a style he termed “Existential Surrealism,” Sir Daniel uses a surrealistic style and subject matter to encourage the viewer to examine the nature of existence.

Recognized and esteemed for his unique style, Sir Daniel Winn has been commissioned by the Asian World Film Festival to design the new statuettes for their *Snow Leopard Awards*, *Humanitarian Award*, *Red Cross Award*, *International Benefactor Award*, and *One Heart Move-*



ment Award. Sir Daniel is also creating a special recognition award this year, the *Angel Benefactor Award* for Angelina Jolie, and is hoping she can attend the awards ceremony to receive it. The Executive and Program Director of the festival, Georges N. Chamchoum, expressed the following about Sir Daniel: “As we approach the 7th Edition of the Asian World Film Festival this November 2021, we are thrilled that we have finally found the perfect partner in Sir Daniel Winn, an artist whose talent has reached the four corners of the world, but most of all a man of great humanity with a big heart. I passionately believe that the spirit of AWFF will guide Sir Daniel’s hands to create the ultimate inspirational trophy!” The spirit of the Asian World Film Festival did inspire Sir Daniel to create all five

Tiffany Circle Red Cross Courage to Dream Award



International Benefactor Award

statuettes that are like no other. Unlike the original generic bronze award of the past, Sir Daniel was commissioned to create unique sculptures that symbolize the name and meaning of the award. “I was asked to create awards that are not only about recognition but have a profound message and philosophy in each one of them. With every statuette taking 2-3 months to create, each one is a work of art that the recipient of the award will be receiving,” explains Sir Daniel. The award statuette is extremely complex as Sir Daniel creates each one using mixed media such as bronze, stainless steel, and lucite to cast it from clay to the final product.



Photo by Reinhardt Kenneth



“
I want to get involved in doing whatever I can do to help the world understand that people are people

Sir Daniel also uses a process whereby each statuette will be handcrafted as if it was one-of-a-kind. Along with his trained artisans, he will continue to personally have a hand in the creation of these thirteen AWWF awards for years to come. The Snow Leopard Award that commemorates the Snow Leopard Trust, the primary partner of the AWWF, was the most complex award to create. “The snow leopard is rare and almost extinct, and I needed to incorporate its significance with the film industry and the Asian World Film Festival. I feel that I successfully accomplished this with the award I created,” describes Sir Daniel. Although Sir Daniel doesn’t typically take on commissioned work, as he sees himself as an artist who wants to communicate his own visual language through what he is sculpting or painting, in this particular case he made an exception, saying, “Because it was the Asian World Film Festival and being Vietnamese American myself, I wanted to create something profound and symbolic that will make a difference now and in the future for my community as well as to leave a legacy behind for generations to come.”

The newest Winn Slavin Fine Art Gallery on Rodeo Drive will host an event during the Asian World Film Festival honoring Vietnam Film and Vietnamese actors, directors, and producers. Prior to the commencement of the festival, another evening at the gallery will be dedicated to the unveiling of the Snow Leopard Award statuette. “As a supporter of the Asian World Film Festival and the cinematic art this organization champions, it is an honour to have the opportunity to commission these prestigious awards for the 2021 ceremony,” expresses Sir Daniel Winn, “My hope is that through the festival we can bring more awareness to Asian talent and global connectivity through the arts.”

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PROVOCATIVE Playground

Written by Remy Haynes
Photographs by Fabian Lopez

THE EXHIBITION OF MICHEL DESROCHES



“**M**aybe I’m a madman” he says to me, “and my art cures me.” This is just the kind of remark you’d expect from a ten-year veteran of what he calls ‘art therapy.’ It is not what you expect though, as I dig deeper into this French Canadian’s past, forging for bits and pieces of insights into what makes this madman tick. As it turns out, Michel has had a past life as a facilitator of art therapy for people with mental illness. This won’t come as a surprise when you experience his work up close at the Winn Slavin Fine Art Gallery in Beverly Hills, where on opening night a robust forty-three large scale mixed media works of art were revealed, created over four years.



‘Between the Lines’ is the name of Michel’s show at the Winn Slavin Fine Art and it simply must be seen in person. If you are familiar with such artists as Henri Matisse, Andre Derain and Marc Chagall you will see their influences here in the strong use of color and thick painterly quality favored over exact representation that is so widely known in Fauvism. But don’t be fooled, Michel’s work is also keenly inspired by symbolism and struggles to tell a different story.

“When I was young” Michel tells me, “I was fascinated by people who were strange and things that were strange or a little off. That’s why I worked in mental illness for ten years. I’ve always been curious what goes on inside someone’s mind. Genius and insanity are very close, you know.” After seeing his recent work, this explains a lot and I’m curious to know more. He goes on to tell me that this current style is a departure from the type of work he was producing prior. He favored a monochromatic palate and less drama but after moving to a beautiful countryside home in St. Jean sur Richelieu near the city of Montreal, his work has changed.

“The light is beautiful in my studio. It’s open with windows out to nature. Nature can be so inspiring.” Being able to stretch out a bit in his new creative space, Michel decided these new pieces needed to be larger than he had produced in the past. The combination of sheer size, flamboyant color and emotional rawness of his subjects is what makes these pieces so impactful. The gorgeous space at Winn Slavin Fine Art only improves their appeal, with each new face revealing itself around every new corner. Walk up the stairs and be surprised again at a six-foot by



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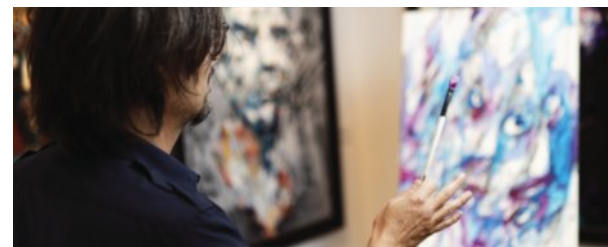
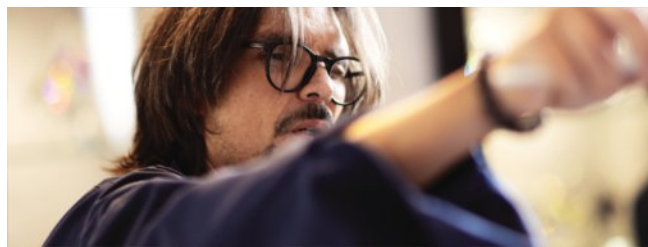
I was fascinated by people who were strange and things that were strange or a little off.



five-foot canvas of a woman's beautiful, soulful eyes starring through you, aptly named, "Follow Me."

Michel tells me that he sketches every day, no matter what. He's haunted by the faces that he helped those many years ago and new faces he meets every day. He's attracted to the lines and the imperfections on the face that reveal the secrets of someone's life, the messy details that we all experience. Playing with his sketches is his escape he tells me, of the brutal reality that surrounds us. Life can be hard, busy, and sometimes boring so why not create your own playground, your own world to play in, for your eyes to wonder around in? This is at the very core of why Michel continues to reinvent himself and try new ways of expression. "My art is a demonstration that I am strong in my heart," he says to me, and I understand why he does what he does. It comes from his heart. There is no rationalizing 'art.'

"It is my goal, to be as good as I can be in my expression of my art. I'm always practicing; my music, my writing, my sculpting, and my drawing. If I practice, I get better every day. If I get bored of my illustration, I make music. If I get bored of my drawing, I do my sculpting." If only we were all so lucky to be good at so many different types of art and expression, I tell him. Oh no he says, not everything I create is perfect. I like this and ask him to elaborate. Oh yes, he says, sometimes it's shit, and I start again. The trick is to keep starting again and trying things differently, I guess. This





is the key to longevity in art, he explains, and I agree. “If I was trapped in only one expression” he says, “I wouldn’t be happy as an artist. I feel free to express whatever I want. I prefer to have the signature be the process and not the subject I choose. That’s the freedom I’m proud of.”

As we dive deeper into a conversation on reinvention of self through art and art as therapy I’m touched by his sensitive nature. He is not what I expected after seeing “Between the Lines” at the gallery, which commands your attention and riles your senses. I was expecting to meet a madman, but I get instead a thoughtful, fragile, intuitive being who beams when he talks about his wife and partner of twenty years. “She believed in me from the very beginning” he tells me. I ask him if she weighs in on his work and tells him what she really thinks. Oh yes, he says, she sure does.

When I tell him I’m surprised by his quiet nature after seeing his art he explains that you don’t have to live as your creation shows, the creation is only one part of you. He reveals that some days he feels quiet in his studio and some days, he cranks the music and plays. “I go mad, I go crazy. I’m in my own world.” This is one of the beautiful aspects of creating art and he saw this many years ago with his patients. “I would sit with them, and they would be quiet and then I would try and provoke creativity in them so they could heal themselves. I would set some parameters for the art we would create and then let them go.” He goes on to explain the gratitude and tears he got from them after the exercise. “It was very fulfilling, more fulfilling than selling an expensive piece at a gallery.” Shh, don’t tell Winn Slavin Fine Art.

Before we wrap up our conversation, I’m curious about his artistic process in constructing these mixed media works. He explains that he carries pen and paper with him wherever he goes because he does not know what inspiration will grab him. He sketches extensively first before he puts paint to canvas. He will create the sketch first and then sometimes digitize the sketch to enhance it more in Adobe Photoshop. He even takes it further and will animate the figure to round out his ideas for color and dimension. Then it usually takes him a few days but sometimes months for a piece to be finished. “There is a dialog between the canvas and me” he tells me.

“ **If I practice, I get better every day.** ”



I ask him what he thinks his signature is. He says they are the lines and imperfections of the face. He doesn't like to work with models and he's not seeking perfection, in fact quite the opposite. He prefers the rawness of real people. "They are alive" he says, and I know he's circling back to the idea of the raw and charged emotion he mentioned feeling when he paints. "I add my emotion when I paint, as a way of connecting with the work. I feel I can capture an essential inner emotion of my subject; their quest for identity and the colors represent that emotion."

This is essentially what Michel hopes the viewer connects to when viewing and investing his art. He mentions always being interested in time and space and that when he paints, he hopes to create a dialog between his work and the viewer. He wants the viewer to feel connected to a vibrant, colorful dimension of being that he has tried to capture, all the emotion and vibration of that moment of creation. "I want to make an impact with my art, I want to touch people. When you look at it every day it will change, as you change."

As we end our conversation, I ask him what the future holds for him and his art. Will he rest now and enjoy his successes? Who knows, I say? And he agrees. "Artists are like a sponge. If you take me to Africa for a month, my art would be influenced by that." In his next breath, he admits to finding joy in seeing his works at Winn Slavin Fine Art Gallery, bold and vibrant. "I think I will progress in that direction and continue making some more of these types of paintings. It's a privilege," he tells me "to be an artist. We can hurt or we can heal with our art. As an art therapist I believe in the healing properties of art. Maybe I am just a mad person trying to heal myself every day."

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**He's haunted
by the faces
that he helped
those many
years ago.**



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PERFECT PROVENANCE

Written by Sara Debevec

THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NFTs

The market for non-fungible token art has boomed in 2021 growing by 800% in the first 4 months of the year. In August, NFT sales have reached an all-time high. OpenSea, the largest NFT trading platform, reached a transaction volume of \$3.4 billion on Ethereum – over 10 times the number of transactions it had reached in July, according to Dune Analytics. So, what could be behind this growing popularity of NFTs and how are they are influencing the world of fine art as we know it?





White Center - Mark Rothko

(uniqueness) and locale (physical and cultural). Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: Its presence in time and space, its unique existence at a place where it happens to be.” – Walter Benjamin (1935).

Owning a print of a painting, is just not the same as having an original piece hanging on your wall – yes, a part of the aesthetic is preserved but a copy merely symbolizes the original and is far from the real thing.

Alongside originality and uniqueness, art is valued for its provenance which essentially means history of ownership. Information about the ownership of a piece of art has been over centuries recorded via inventories of collections, inventory numbers on the art pieces themselves and auction sale catalogues. An asset such as art becomes more valuable if it has an interesting story of ownership.

A perfect example of this is the *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)*(1950) abstract painting by Mark Rothko, otherwise known as “Rockefeller Rothko”. The painting had been owned by David Rockefeller since 1960 when he bought it for less than \$10,000. It had been hanging prominently at the Rockefeller offices for years becoming part of the Rockefeller history. This ownership infused the painting with value and in 2007, Rockefeller sold the piece for \$72 million.

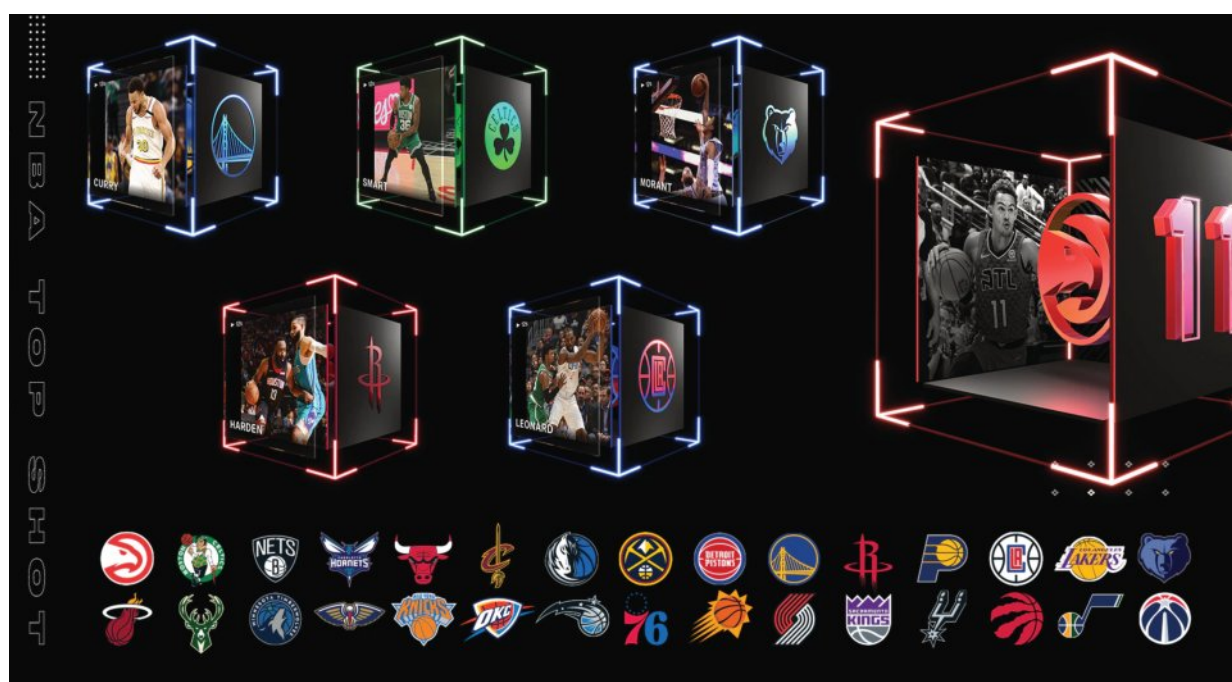
To understand the cultural significance and importance of NFTs in the art world, we must first understand what makes art valuable.

Fine Art has been seen as an investable asset at least since the early medieval period. To possess a unique piece of art, is to possess something rare, that cannot be exchanged for anything else, a ‘non fungible’ asset. The value of the art is locked within the art itself, within each element that makes it unique - the brushstroke, the marks on canvas, the color and the texture of the art piece.

In his classic work, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) Walter Benjamin claims that art is valuable because of its unique aura that cannot be reproduced. “The aura of a work of art derives from authenticity



Nyan Cat



NBA Top Shot

NFTs are a contract, a digital token of authenticity that lives on the blockchain.

With the growing popularity of NFTs and crypto art, we may ask – why would you pay for a digital piece of artwork that lives as a jpg, when anyone else can access (and reproduce) the same exact jpg, anywhere on the internet for free? “A piece of digital art is fungible, it’s not unique or scarce because it can be downloaded and copied infinitely.

With the emergence of a revolutionary new system of crypto authentication called NFTs – Non Fungible Tokens can be assigned to a digital object to give it credibility. NFTs are a contract, a digital token of authenticity that lives on the blockchain.

Creating an NFT through a process called tokenizing or minting, allows digital art to be “traceably authentic” explains Shivalik Shankar in The Times of India (September 30, 2021). Through the process of minting or tokenizing, digital assets like memes, jpeg files, Tweets and music videos that we think of as infinitely reproducible can now be made scarce...and when something becomes limited, it becomes more desirable. This process also allows for provenance because the blockchain technology helps NFTs store information about the owners in a much easier way than it has been done so far with fine art and other high end creative assets.

Nyan Cat – an animated cat in a pop tart body that was one of the most popular GIFs in 2011 –was recently sold for 300 ETH, equivalent to \$880,000 and it is all to do with the fact that it wasn’t the actual GIF that was sold but a certificate of authentic-

ity through the NFTs. NFTs have turned what we consider a freely accessible digital object into an asset we can now own and possess in our digital wallet.

This also means that the blockchain assigns the worth of an NFT adding volatility to the market and as we have already seen the market correct itself. This can greatly affect the value of art during an auction without having anything to do with the art itself. While it feels this new paradigm is creating more opportunities for artists the technological barrier of entry is still high both for creators and buyers of NFTs.

Although NFTs have grown in popularity rapidly over the last few months, the space is still fresh. A whole new market of artists, buyers and supporters from within the crypto community has emerged and NFTs have different rules than the traditional art market. Collectibles like NBA Top Shot where you can buy, sell and trade NBA moments, have surged in popularity. Video games like Axie Infinity- which use Ethereum based cryptocurrency AXS and SLP - have caught the attention of many and NFTs continue to infiltrate assets within our culture.

NFTs will complement the Fine Art market.

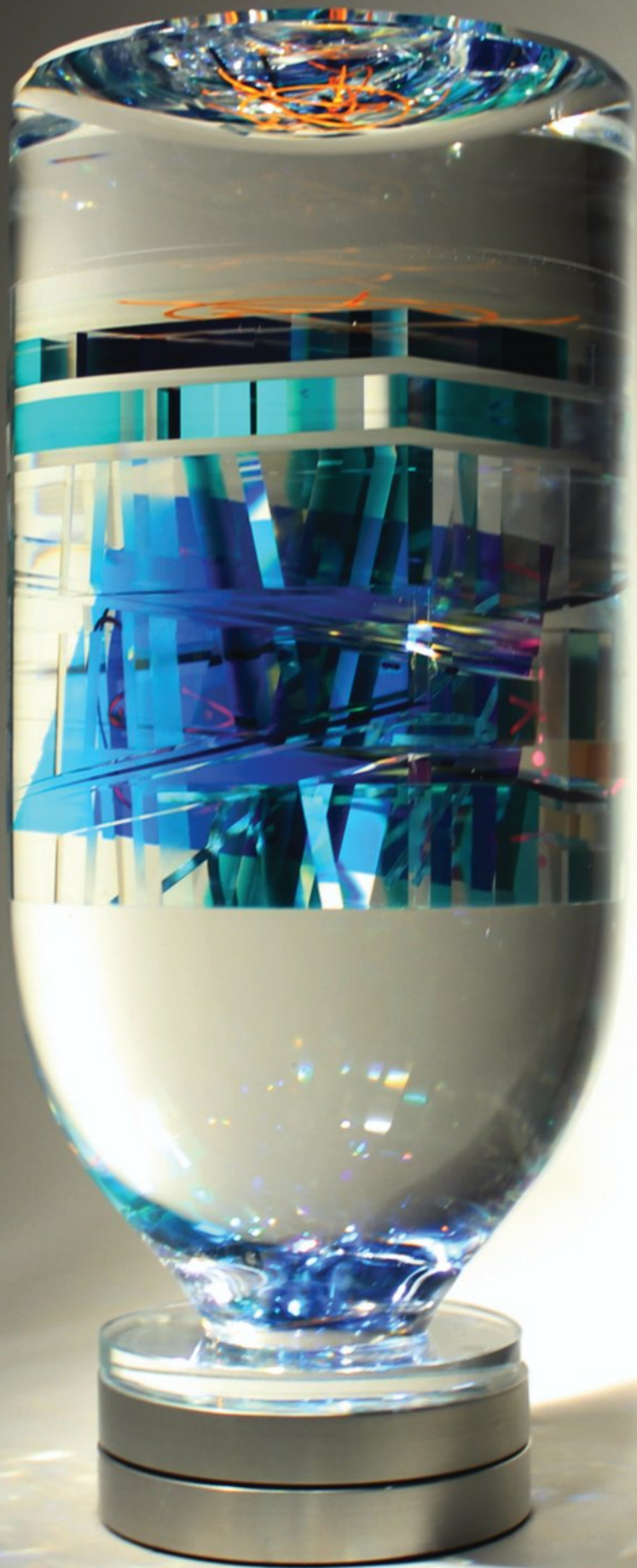
NFTs are a hybrid between art and crypto data but they will never replace the traditional art market. On the contrary, NFTs will complement the Fine Art market. It's a revolution not just in art but also sport, music, gaming and even virtual real estate.

In the era of digitization, it is not surprising we have developed a system where digital assets can be made scarce and owned. While some say the NFT model is a gallery killer because artists can now sell their own art without the middleman, what is being sold is very different. Although the NFT model assigns provenance to a piece of digital art, nothing can replace the uniqueness and craftsmanship of traditional art that exists in the physical dimension and can be appreciated with the naked eye.

The growing NFT market can also come at a high cost as each transaction requires 48.14 kWh. "For comparison, that's just over one and a half days of energy consumption within the standard U.S. household. Now, multiply that by thousands of transactions daily and you can see how NFTs' energy consumption takes its toll," says sustainability writer Dawg Hammon in *Understanding NFTs and Energy Consumption* as part of *Inhabitat*® (Apr 8, 2021). Although the technology is evolving rapidly, so are the carbon emissions and it makes me wonder if we're going to have to pay a bigger price for NFTs in the not-too-distant future.

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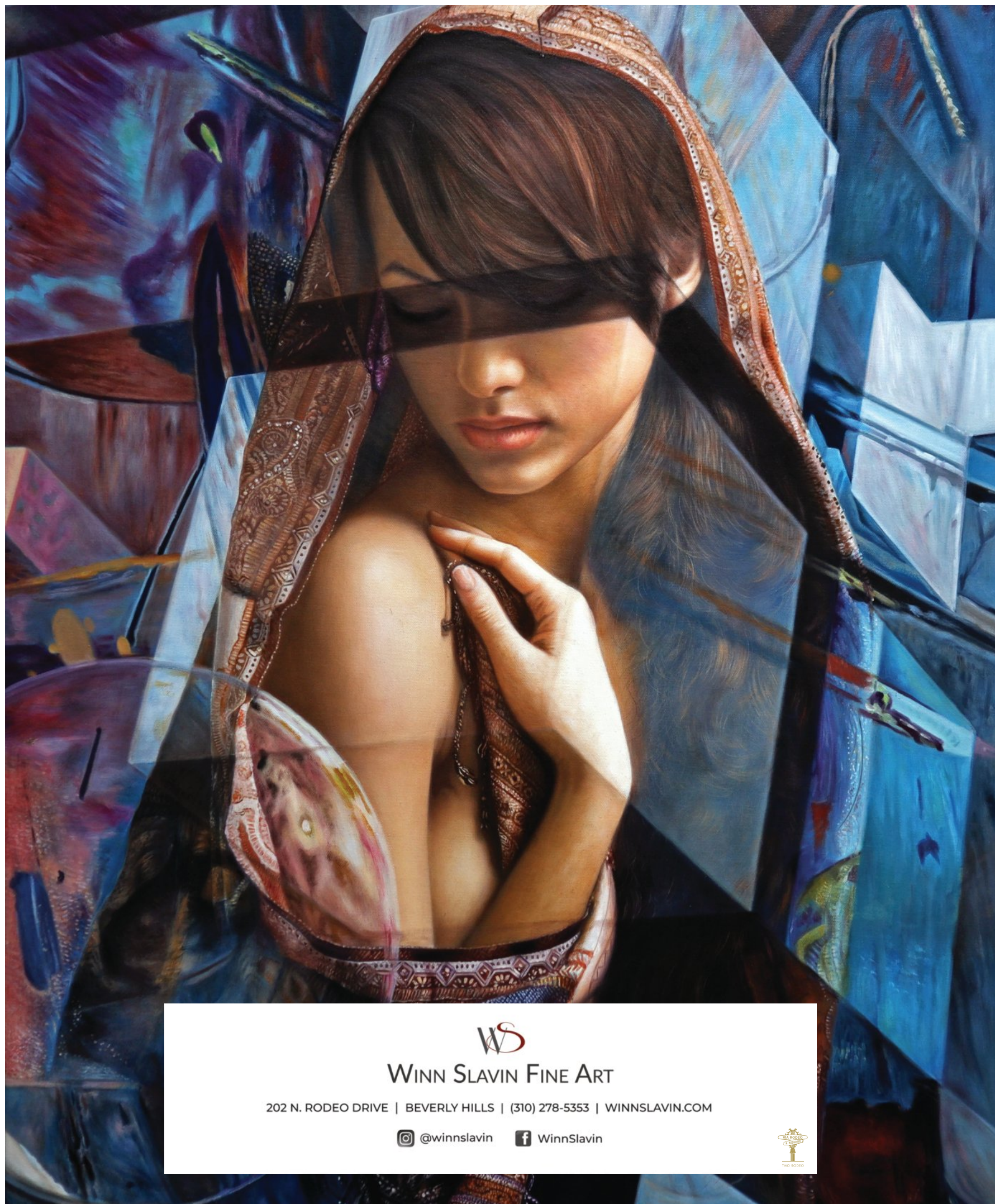
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