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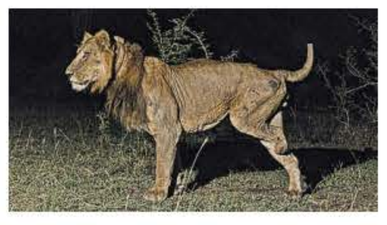

PAST THE LEGEND: WHO WAS HARRIET TUBMAN?

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The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION | SATURDAY-SUNDAY, JUNE 29-30, 2024

Tiny words often create big uproars

John McWhorter

OPINION

As a linguist, I pay close attention to debates about language. But I won't be telling you anything you don't already know when I say that in recent years pronouns have become a subject of intense interest for reasons that have nothing to do with grammar. Around the world, debates rage about the effects of letting people decide whether to be called "he," "she," "they" or anything else they choose.

My own opinion on the matter makes no sense whatsoever — at least not the opinion that A.I. recently attributed to me. I checked the other day after seeing a social media post that described me as not approving of trans people. Figuring maybe something I wrote about gender-neutral pronouns had gotten lost in translation, I searched and got this: "He found the use of 'they' to replace gender-specific pronouns to be clumsy, disruptive, and unnecessary, and that it could sometimes reduce clarity. McWhorter also suggested other gender-neutral pronouns, including 'que, 's/he, and 'one.'"

The outrage over new pronouns fundamentally misunderstands how language works.

Hmm, not a word of that is true. I wouldn't be caught dead endorsing the ungainly, unpronounceable "s/he" or the hopelessly wooden "one," and God knows what "que" is.

In reality, I am very much in favor of the new prevalence of gender-neutral pronominal usage. As conceptions of gender become more fluid, we need a pronoun that allows for more possibility. Plus, "they" had already been used in a singular, gender-neutral way ("Each student has an hour to complete their test") for several centuries. Shakespeare did it in "The Comedy of Errors": "There's not a man I meet but doth salute me / As if I were their well-acquainted friend." Many sticklers consider it incorrect, but it is native to casual speech (including, I suspect, that of many of the sticklers).

The most heated arguments about

MCWHORTER, PAGE 12

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.

UMA BISTA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Desperate for a job, Krishna Bahadur Shahi, a 24-year-old civil engineer from Nepal, joined the Russian military, believing — wrongly — that he would not be sent into battle.

Escaping the Russian Army

KATHMANDU, NEPAL

Facing grim job prospects in Nepal, he found work, then betrayal in combat

BY BHADRA SHARMA AND JEFFREY GETTLEMAN

He didn't have any documents.

Or money.

Or even a phone.

He was wrapped in bandages and 2,500 miles (4,000 kilometers) from his village in the Himalayas.

But as he lay in a Russian military hospital, wounded in battle and surrounded by people speaking an alien language, Krishna Bahadur Shahi, an out-of-work engineer from Nepal who had committed the mistake of joining Moscow's army, made a vow.

Somehow, he told himself, I'm getting home.

"I had to get out," he said in a recent interview. "I was even thinking of killing myself. I knew if I didn't leave that hospital, they would send me back to the front, and if they did that, well, there would be no possibility of returning alive."

ESCAPE, PAGE 6

NARENDRA SHRESTHA/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

A sit-in near the Russian Embassy in Kathmandu, Nepal, in April, to protest against the recruitment of Nepalis by the Russian Army to wage war in Ukraine.

WAVES OF RUSSIANS CHARGE FRONT

More than 1,000 Russian soldiers in Ukraine were killed or wounded on average each day in May. *PAGE 4*

Small circle led Macron to gamble with France

NEWS ANALYSIS
PARIS

Decision to call an election was unknown to most, and some say he's gone too far

BY ROGER COHEN

His prime minister was among the last to know. That is how secretive, how confined to a small group of advisers President Emmanuel Macron's shock decision to dissolve Parliament and call French legislative elections was.

Gabriel Attal, 35, was a personal favorite, his wunderkind, when Mr. Macron named him prime minister in January. Yet, just months after entrusting Mr. Attal with the task of revitalizing his government, Mr. Macron snubbed him as he considered one of the most important decisions of his presidency: whether to call an election at the very moment the anti-immigrant National Rally party had surged.

Mr. Macron's style has always been intensely top-down, but this time he has played with the possibility of ushering in the once unthinkable in the form of a far-right government. The small group making the decision was so insular that even many of his ministers and supporters were left dumbfounded at his readiness to take such a gamble.

A photograph posted by Mr. Macron's official photographer on Instagram captured the dismay when, on June 9, Mr. Macron told his government of his decision. Mr. Attal, arms crossed, looks blank. Gérald Darmanin, the longtime interior minister who has since announced he will likely leave the government, looks incredulous, his hands clasped in front of his face.

Mr. Macron, defining himself as an "incorrigible optimist," insists that he had to call the election, which would leave him as president but could force him to share power with his sworn opponents for his final three years in office. His favorite word has become the "clarification" that he says only a national vote can deliver. After his party was trounced by Marine Le Pen's National Rally in European Parliament elections, to have carried on as if nothing had happened would have been to show contempt for democracy, he told journalists.

Still, nothing obliged him to hold a snap election, just weeks before the Paris Olympic Games, that could bring the nationalist right to power.

FRANCE, PAGE 2

American gymnasts get a warm and fuzzy vibe

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DESIREE RIOS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Beacon is an affectionate 4-year-old golden retriever who works for U.S.A. Gymnastics as a therapy dog and wears a credential, right, just like the athletes and coaches.

MINNEAPOLIS

Therapy dogs help athletes emotionally as they vie for spots on the Olympic team

BY JULIET MACUR

Just before the United States Olympic gymnastics team trials in the past week, a very eager worker flew to the host city of Minneapolis with protein treats, a collection of colorful bandannas and a stuffed turtle. Upon his arrival he was given a U.S.A. Gymnastics badge to wear around his neck, identifying him as "Goodest Boy."

His name is Beacon, and he is a 4-year-old golden retriever therapy dog with soft blond fur that smells like champagne and raspberry shampoo. His job is to de-stress the American gymnasts at their national-level meets, including trials, the competition that will determine the United States team for next month's Summer Olympics in Paris.

"Beacon, I just love you so much!" the national team gymnast Joscelyn Roberson said as she lay down next to him for 30 minutes after a training session at the recent national championships in Fort Worth. "He's so cute! I've already told people that this is the best thing that U.S.A. Gymnastics can do for us."

Beacon, handled by his human, Tracey Callahan Molnar — who is a former rhythmic gymnast and a longtime coach — plays a warm and fuzzy role in an effort by U.S.A. Gymnastics to promote a culture that protects the well-being of its athletes.

For decades, the culture was just the opposite: At every level of the sport, it was not uncommon for tyrannical coaches to scare young athletes into subservience and silence as they — or other adults — abused those gymnasts physically, emotionally, or both.

In 2016, a sexual abuse scandal involving a former national team doctor, Lawrence G. Nassar, shed a bright, harsh light on what was happening,

DOGS, PAGE 2

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PAGE TWO

Tiny circle of advisers led Macron to gamble big

FRANCE, FROM PAGE 1

"He has played Russian roulette with France," said Célia Belin, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations in Paris. "It's close to unpardonable."

Certainly, something has shifted. Mr. Macron, who took the country by storm seven years ago when he came from nowhere to bury the old alignments of French politics and become president at the age of 39, seems increasingly isolated now in his bold — some say hubristic — certainties, surrounded by a shrinking circle of acolytes.

"'I take you, I drop you': That's Macron and that's what he did to Attal," said Marisol Touraine, a former minister of health and social affairs who has been Mr. Attal's political guru. "He consumes people."

Paris chatter is alive with expressions like "wild gamble," "lost touch with reality" and "blinding ego," as people struggle to comprehend why their president chose to risk so much.

The reality of France today is that the National Rally, having softened its image but retained its core belief that immigrants represent a dilution of Frenchness, has proved the party most adept at tapping into widespread fears, resentments and anger at a lofty president.

Mr. Macron has defended his decision to call a snap election as an effort to attain political "clarification" for France.

Mr. Macron, twice elected and never defeated on the national stage, still believes he will triumph, and of course it is still conceivable he could.

He believes that, confronted by the far right with its threat to some of the core values of the Republic and a far left whose antisemitic outbursts have shocked many people, the French will opt again for the common sense of "la Macronie," the pragmatic politics of a right-leaning center.

In his entourage, officials who insisted on anonymity in line with French political practice, said the notion that Mr. Macron had become unpopular was a myth. They cited as evidence his appearance this month in the streets of Bayeux, a town in Normandy, where some 3,000 people turned out to greet him, far more than an expected 800.

"Plenty of people might not like Macron, but they respect him," one official said.

It took boldness to change a country resistant to any dilution of its social model. Over seven years, Mr. Macron has slashed unemployment, made France attractive to fast-growing foreign investment, fostered a thriving start-up technology sector, fought hard to persuade the French that a retirement age of 62 is no longer reasonable, and steered the country through the Covid-19 crisis.

POOL PHOTO BY BENOIT TESSIER

President Emmanuel Macron, above, received a giddy welcome this month in Bayeux, but his party was far behind in the polls before the first round of elections on Sunday. Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, right at center, was not consulted on the decision.

What Mr. Macron has been unable to do, however, is shed an image of arrogance shaped by elite schooling and remoteness from the concerns of French people who struggle to make it through the month in places far from the knowledge economy of big cities.

This failure is now accompanied by the beginnings of a fin-de-régime rush for the exits because Mr. Macron is term-limited and must leave office in 2027.

The result is clear enough. The latest Ifop-Fiducial poll in the past week gave Mr. Macron's party and its allies just 21 percent of the vote in the two-round election on June 30 and July 7. The National Rally was in a comfortable lead at 36 percent, and the New Popular Front group of parties ranging from the socialists to the far left at 28.5 percent.

So acute is the perceived animosity toward him that many centrist candidates have been insistent that they do not want Mr. Macron's image associated with their campaigns.

In many regards, the way Mr. Macron decided to dissolve the National Assembly and call elections appears as Exhibit A in his highly centralized style of governing. Even by the standards of the Fifth Republic, conceived in 1958 to give the presidency enormous powers, Mr. Macron has governed in his own head and by his own edict.

"He never conceded a little of his power to exercise it collectively," said Hakim El Karoui, a private consultant who works on the immigration issues that have been at the core of the rise of the National Rally.

Even Mr. Macron's own government has frayed. A group of just four people, among them a former journalist, Bruno Roger-Petit, who advises Mr. Macron on French national memory, dreamed up the idea of a dissolution the night of the European Parliament election, according to an account in Le Monde that has since been widely confirmed.

ARNAUD FINISTRE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

This led Bruno Le Maire, the economy minister, to describe Mr. Macron's advisers as "lice," in a TV interview this month. Mr. Le Maire has had to battle hard to stabilize the French economy since the snap election was called. Unpredictability is not what investors like, and France's debt had already soared from support for workers and businesses during Covid lockdowns.

Mr. Macron's former prime minister, Édouard Philippe, widely seen as a likely presidential candidate in 2027, declared this month that "It was the president who killed the presidential majority." He added, "We're moving on to something else, and something else can't be the same as before."

That much seems near certain. It is likely that the National Rally will be the largest party in the new National Assembly, even if it may well fall short of an absolute majority. It is also likely that Mr. Macron's party will come in third, behind Ms. Le Pen's and the New Popular Front representing the left.

This, then, would be the "clarification," but one that involves redoubled murkiness.

If the National Rally does secure an absolute majority, Mr. Macron may have to name Jordan Bardella, 28, Ms. Le Pen's popular protégé, as prime minister. Mr. Bardella could then choose his cabinet. France has known "cohabitations" before but never between two men of such diametrically opposed convictions.

Even if the National Rally does not win a majority, Mr. Macron will face a sharply divided Parliament, more ungovernable and less favorable to him than the one he chose to dissolve, with the possibility of political chaos over several months. He has denied he will resign in such circumstances.

Mr. Macron remains immovable in his conviction that he will be vindicated. "I don't have a defeatist spirit," he declared recently.

Anne Hidalgo, the Socialist mayor of Paris, was not persuaded. She accused Mr. Macron of spoiling the Olympics. "Why ruin this beautiful moment with an election called at the drop of a hat without consulting anyone?" she asked.

On June 18, Mr. Macron attended a gathering to commemorate Charles de Gaulle's famous broadcast from London on that day in 1940, calling for resistance to the Nazi occupation of France. The occupation would soon birth the collaborationist French Vichy government, a troubling memory at this moment for the many who fear the far right.

When asked about Mr. Attal by a boy in the crowd, Mr. Macron said, "He could be my little brother." Soon after, Mr. Attal, 35, who has agreed to lead the centrist campaign in the election, appeared in the same spot and was told of the exchange.

Clearly confused, or incredulous, the prime minister responded: "He said what?"

If nothing else, Mr. Macron's decision on the snap election has dizzied his compatriots: To what end is the most frequently asked question in France today.

Ségolène Le Stradic and Catherine Porter contributed reporting from Paris.

Pettable pooches bring gymnasts a warm and fuzzy vibe

DOGS, FROM PAGE 1

prompting sponsors to drop U.S.A. Gymnastics. Nassar is now in prison for molesting hundreds of girls and women.

At the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, Simone Biles, the greatest gymnast in history, pulled out of most of her events because of a mental block — a move that made her just as famous for what she did not accomplish at those Games as what she did as the most decorated athlete in her sport.

"There's no question that there was a lesson learned from Tokyo in terms of mental wellness being so critically important," Li Li Leung, chief executive of U.S.A. Gymnastics, said. "But if we just launch a therapy dog program, OK, great, you have a nice, cute fuzzy dog to pet. But it doesn't mean anything unless you have everything else in place."

Since taking over in 2019, Leung, a former elite gymnast, has focused on making her sport a better place for its athletes, in body and mind. She has made strides, but it's a never-ending process, she said.

At nationals, a sports psychologist from the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee offered mindfulness sessions in a dark, quiet room inside the arena. Carly Patterson, the 2004 Olympic all-around champion, was brought in to give the women gymnasts pep talks and advice. Local doctors and mental health professionals are now on call during U.S.A. Gymnastics events as part of a mental health emergency plan instituted two years ago.

Sponsors have returned, including Nike, Xfinity, Samsonite and Skippy, and Leung said all of the federation's sponsors must acknowledge that some of their money will go to mental wellness programs, including therapy visits for coaches and athletes.

"They've turned things around entirely, and now they are clearly thinking, 'What does the athlete need?' and it's so nice,'" said the three-time Olympian Sam Mikulak, who struggled with anxiety and depression when the Tokyo Olympics were postponed from 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Sometimes, just being there is all someone needs to get through a tough time," said Mikulak, who is now a coach. "And a dog brings that triple-fold."

When it comes to mental health initiatives in gymnastics, Beacon is the star of the show.

He is Callahan Molnar's service dog, and they are inseparable. At home in Pasadena, Calif., near Los Angeles, they volunteer at a hospital and also head to the nearby California Institute of Technology, where students pet Beacon to unwind.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DESIREE RIOS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Left, at the U.S. National Gymnastics Championships in Fort Worth this year, nearly 20 dog-and-handler teams were available to athletes; above, the popular therapy dog Beacon played fetch with his human handler, Tracey Callahan Molnar.

"I always felt that it would be selfish for me to keep him to myself," she said.

Callahan Molnar, who turns 65 on July 1, experienced the power of a therapy dog when her husband, David Molnar, was undergoing chemotherapy to treat cancer. He told her that their own dog, Tulsa, should be a therapy dog.

"That dog at the hospital helped distract him from, you know, the tough stuff," Callahan Molnar said, adding that Tulsa started working as a therapy dog six months after David died in 2013. "I'm so sorry that he didn't get to live to see it happen. This is sort of my way to honor him."

After Tulsa passed away, Callahan Molnar got Beacon as a puppy and eventually enrolled him in therapy dog training. A few years ago, she and Caroline Hunter, the head of U.S.A. Gymnastics' rhythmic gymnastics program, began discussing the idea of bringing him to events.

Leung was all in. She had brought her own dog — a Siberian husky named Suma — to the federation's office during the pandemic, and staff members immediately got down on the floor to pet her. "They just melted," she said.

Dr. Maggie O'Haire, associate dean for research at the University of Arizona College of Veterinary Medicine, remains fascinated that humans can have such strong reactions to dogs that they've never met before. An expert in human interaction with canines, she said petting a dog lowers humans' perception of a stressful situation, and also decreases their blood pressure, heart rate and cortisol, the body's stress hormone. Forming a bond with a dog provides even more benefits.

"It's a signal of support and comfort and something that's really valuable in these environments when you are away from home," Dr. O'Haire said.

Therapy dogs often are called to work in places of extreme stress, like towns after a mass shooting, colleges during exams, airports and, more recently, sporting events.

Just this month, at the athletes' request, more than 60 local therapy dog teams worked at U.S.A. Swimming's Olympic trials in Indianapolis. Swimmers stood in lines to pet the dogs, allowing them to have "a normal moment" during a high-pressure time, said Ashleigh Coster, executive director of Paws & Think, Inc., the group that provided the therapy teams.

Beacon was scheduled to be the only therapy dog at his first event, an elite qualifier for rhythmic gymnasts in Indianapolis last year. But when Callahan Molnar learned that 300 athletes would be there, she enlisted three local therapy dog organizations to help. Eleven additional dogs, from a tiny, poofy Pomeranian to a 100-pound Great Pyrenees, volunteered.

At nationals, Callahan Molnar oversaw 19 teams of handlers and their good dogs, including Gus the Cavalier King Charles spaniel; Gilly the Scottish terrier; Twiggy the mini beagle; and many golden retrievers.

Luna, a white and wiggly American Staffordshire terrier, wore a huge pink bow and wagged her tail as if it were a windshield wiper on the highest setting. An especially enthusiastic yellow Labrador named Molly dramatically flopped over for a belly rub at the slightest glance, and licked the chalk from gymnasts' hands and legs. Beacon worked morning until night.

"Not every dog is cut out for this, but it turns out that he's good at it, and he really loves it, which was a very important part of it for me," Callahan Molnar said. "Even if he's tired, even if he has been working for 12 hours, the second he hears his name, he's like, 'I'm up and ready and I want to say hi. Who wants to be close to me?'"

Turns out, lots of gymnasts, who shouted his name when they saw him. Judges, coaches and security workers, too, couldn't resist a pat on the head or drive-by belly rub.

Brody Malone, a normally stoic gymnast who competed in Tokyo, was a giggling fan around Beacon. He said, "I love this dog! Who wouldn't want to take a break from all this stress to love on a dog for a couple of minutes?"

Shilese Jones, a favorite to make the team for the Paris Games, traded a bathroom break for time with Beacon at last year's nationals.

"I said, forget the bathroom, is Beacon in there?" she said. "I feel like he kind of blocks out reality and sometimes that's good for us so we don't overthink things."

At this year's nationals, they reunited like long-lost friends. He jumped to his feet when he saw her, licked her face and rested his big head on her open palm.

"Oh, he remembered me!" Jones said, laughing.

Jones, who was battling a shoulder injury that caused her to withdraw from nationals, said Beacon made her feel better mentally — and also physically.

"He distracts me from the reality of the pain," she said while scratching Beacon behind his ears.

Beacon and Chester, another golden retriever, gave similar support to gymnasts when the new national team was announced this month. Gymnasts who made the team pulled on new Team U.S.A. sweatsuits. The ones who didn't were just feet away. Some tried to control their breathing so they didn't cry. Others were teary eyed.

Beacon licked tears from one gymnast's cheek and she smiled when he grabbed one of her slippers and tried to walk away with it.

A similar scenario is likely to unfold at the Olympic trials, where only five men and five women will make the U.S. team for the Paris Games. U.S.A. Gymnastics plans to have psychologists on site for the athletes whose names aren't called and there will be a private room for those gymnasts and their families.

Beacon also will be at the arena, happy to see the gymnasts, whether they make the team or not.

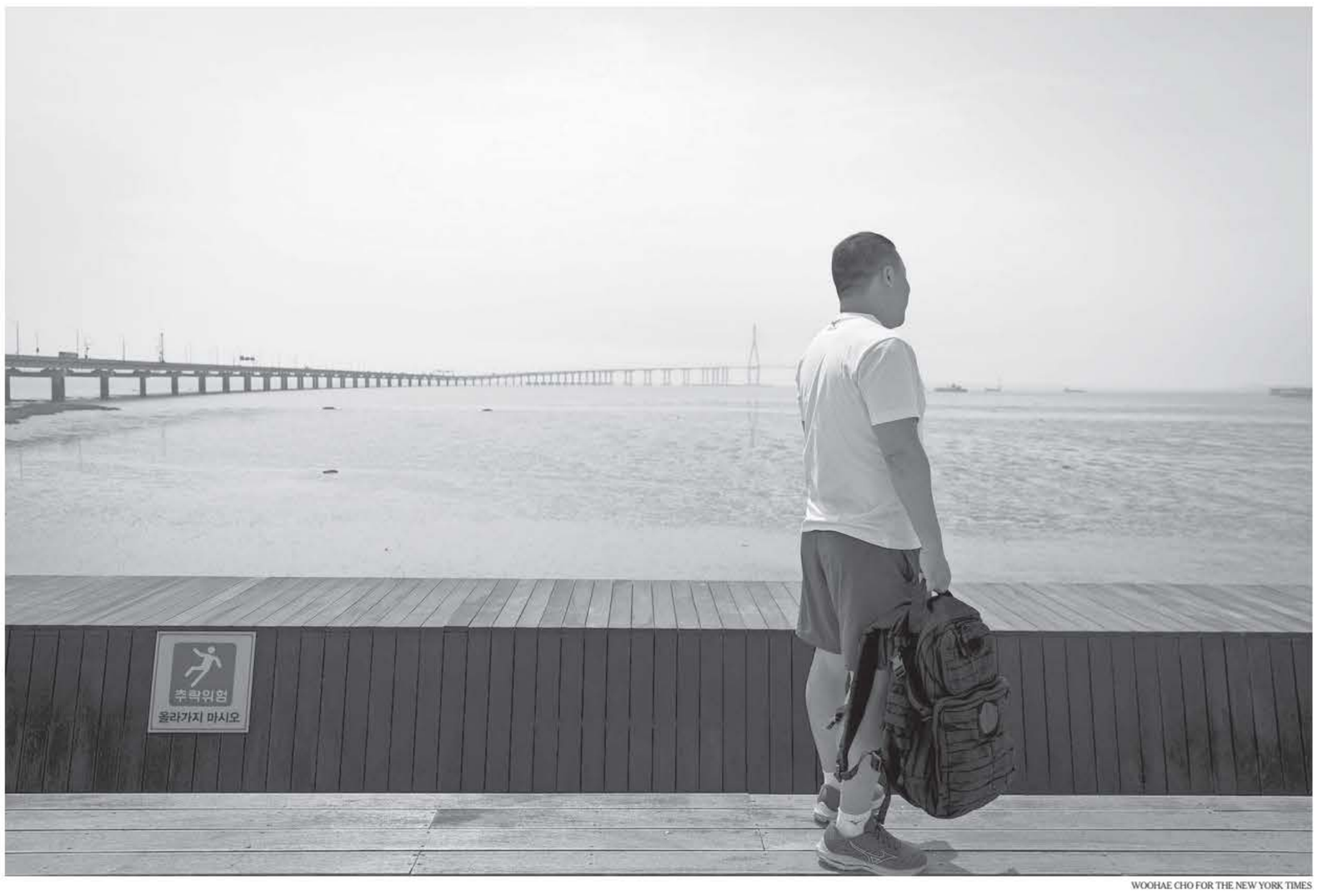
World

Jet ski refugee faces his next act

INCHEON, SOUTH KOREA

Dissident who fled China for South Korea will seek asylum in North America

BY JOHN YOON



WOOHAE CHO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The dissident's lone regret after his 200-mile escape across the Yellow Sea was not taking night vision goggles.

Nearing the end of his 320-kilometer jet ski journey out of China last summer, Kwon Pyong peered through the darkness off the South Korean coast. As he approached the shore, sea gulls appeared to bob as if floating. He steered forward, then ran aground: The birds were sitting on mud.

"I had everything — sunscreen, backup batteries, a knife to cut buoy lines," he recalled in an interview. He was prepared to signal his location with a laser pen if he became stranded and to burn his notes with a lighter if he were captured. He also had a visa to enter South Korea, and had intended to arrive at a port of entry, he said, not strand himself on a mud flat.

It wasn't enough.

Mr. Kwon, 36 and an ethnic Korean, had mocked China's powerful leader and criticized how the ruling Communist Party was persecuting hundreds of pro-democracy activists at home and abroad. In response, he said, he faced an exit ban and years of detention, prison and surveillance.

But fleeing to South Korea did not offer the relief he expected. He was still hounded by the Chinese state, he said, and spent time in detention. Even after he was released, he was in legal limbo: neither wanted nor allowed to leave.

It would take 10 more months for Mr. Kwon to be permitted to leave South Korea. Days before he flew out last Sunday, he returned to the mud flat where he haplessly came ashore off Incheon last summer and recounted for the first time publicly the details of his meticulously planned journey.

Court documents from his criminal case in South Korea, past interviews with his friends and family and a statement from the Incheon Coast Guard last year corroborated many of the details in his account.

On a Yamaha WaveRunner purchased with the equivalent of $25,000 in cash, withdrawn from several banks to avoid tipping off the police, Mr. Kwon set off on the morning of Aug. 16 from the foggy coast of the Shandong Peninsula.

He said he wore a black life jacket and motorcycle helmet for the journey, where he crashed into 10-foot (three-meter) waves and dodged floating rice wine bottles. As his skin burned from the summer sun, he fell into the sea twice, losing his sunglasses.

He refueled using the five barrels of gas that he had tied to the WaveRunner. For himself, he had five bottles of water and five ham and tuna sandwiches. He navigated using a marine compass and a smartphone he had acquired from someone else.

His first glimpse of land came as the setting sun gave the islands off South Korea a warm glow. What was supposed to take eight hours turned to 14. By the time Mr. Kwon arrived in Incheon, the pink sky he had stopped to admire had faded to black.

WOOHAE CHO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

KOREA COAST GUARD, VIA AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Clockwise, from top: Kwon Pyong at the mud flat in Incheon, South Korea, where he arrived after fleeing China last year; a photo released by the South Korean Coast Guard showing Mr. Kwon's Yamaha WaveRunner in Incheon in August 2023; and a compass that Mr. Kwon carried on his 200-mile trip across the Yellow Sea. His trip didn't go as planned.

Mr. Kwon — who speaks Chinese, English and some Korean — called the local police for help. For an hour, he waited and tried to fend off mosquitoes.

That night, he said, the Incheon Coast Guard and the South Korean Marine Corps rescued him, detained him and began investigating him along with the South Korean National Intelligence Service.

South Korea rarely accepts refugees, and the authorities served him a deportation order. But over the next months, he was also banned from leaving the country as he fought a criminal charge of unlawful entry, which can be punished with up to five years in prison.

He said that he wondered how things might have unfolded, had his arrival gone as planned.

South Korean prosecutors did not lift the exit ban they imposed on Mr. Kwon until his criminal case was finished this month. He said he planned to apply for asylum in the United States or Canada. His flight last Sunday was bound for Newark.

"I want to live my own life," he said. "I want to live in peace for a while."

Mr. Kwon, whose Chinese name is Quan Ping, is from a city in the northeastern Chinese province of Jilin, near the border with North Korea. He has visited South Korea, his grandfather's birthplace, regularly since childhood, and his parents live there. He spent his college years in the United States.

He said he studied aerospace engineering at Iowa State University and returned in 2012 to China, where he ran an online clothing brand and traded cryptocurrencies. He continued traveling widely, touring Lebanon and Syria as an aspiring photojournalist, he said.

He first drew the ire of the Chinese authorities when he began criticizing the Communist Party online. In 2016, he posted on social media about antigovernment protests he had attended in Hong Kong, a Chinese territory. He wore a T-shirt calling China's leader, Xi Jinping, "Xitler."

The Chinese authorities arrested Mr. Kwon that year and sentenced him in 2017 to 18 months in prison for "inciting subversion of state power," a charge frequently leveled against dissidents and human rights lawyers.

After his release in 2018, the police tapped his communications, tracked his movements and periodically interrogated him, he said. State agents, he added, were alarmed by his contact with the leaders of the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising, including Wang Dan, once one of China's most wanted men.

Kwon Pyong was finally permitted to leave South Korea after spending 10 months in legal limbo.

"I couldn't live a normal life," he said.

China's Ministry of Public Security did not respond to a request for comment.

After the rescue from the mud flat, Mr. Kwon said, investigators seemed baffled by his story and interrogated him, threatened to torture him and denied his request for a lawyer. The Incheon Coast Guard, which led the investigation, said in a statement that "there were no human rights violations" during the investigation.

In court, Mr. Kwon argued that he was a political refugee and had intended to arrive legally at the Incheon Port, less than a mile from the mud flat, with a tourist visa. A judge found him guilty of unlawful entry in November, handing down a suspended one-year prison sentence with a two-year probationary period.

The verdict released Mr. Kwon from custody but not from legal limbo. Immigration officials imposed an exit ban as prosecutors appealed the judge's decision.

In May, an appeals court dismissed prosecutors' appeal, as well as Mr. Kwon's lawyers' efforts to have his sentence reduced. Mr. Kwon decided not to pursue the case further so that he could leave the country quickly, and prosecutors lifted the travel ban, said Sejin Kim, his lawyer.

At the mud flat, Mr. Kwon said he was looking forward to leaving and starting a new business venture. He said some of his friends and relatives live in the United States and Canada. He is traveling to America on a visa for visitors.

"I want to start my second life," he said.

John Liu contributed reporting.

Extreme heat threatens ambitions in Gulf nations

BY BEN HUBBARD

The wealthy petrostates of the Persian Gulf have big plans for the future, hoping to increasingly attract tourists and investors, host marquee sporting events, build new cities and diversify their economies away from oil.

But they face a looming threat that they cannot easily buy their way out of: extreme and sometimes deadly heat that roasts their countries every summer, which climate change is expected to exacerbate in the coming decades.

Sweltering temperatures drive up energy demand, wear down infrastructure, endanger laborers and render even simple outdoor activities not only unpleasant, but potentially perilous. That all will impose a significant long-term tax on the vast ambitions of Gulf countries, experts say.

"We keep thinking we want to go bigger and larger, but we don't think about the implications of climate change in the future," said Aisha Al-Sarihi, a research fellow from Oman at the Middle East Institute at National University of Singapore. "If we keep expanding and expanding, it means we need more energy, more water and more electricity, especially for cooling. But there are limits, and we see those limits today."

The threat of extreme heat became clear in recent days when Saudi Arabia announced that more than 1,300 people had died during the annual hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, including at least 11 Americans. Saudi officials said that most of those who perished had made the trip without permits that would have granted them access to heat protections, leaving them vulnerable to temperatures that at times exceeded 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48 degrees Celsius).

The deaths raised questions about Saudi Arabia's management of the event, which drew more than 1.8 million Muslims to the holy city of Mecca.

The kingdom and other countries throughout the Gulf are pouring tremendous amounts of their oil wealth into efforts to improve their economies and move up the list of popular global destinations.

Saudi Arabia is building super-high-end resorts on the Red Sea coast and a futuristic city known as Neom in its northwestern desert. Qatar hosted the men's soccer World Cup last year and has brought in other international sporting events and trade shows. The United Arab Emirates put on a splashy World Expo and its business-friendly policies have helped it become a playground for the hyperwealthy.

But these countries face significant environmental challenges.

All have long had searingly hot summers, but scientists say that climate change has already made the season longer and hotter. Some projections warn of weekslong heat waves with temperatures of up to 132 Fahrenheit (55 Celsius) during the second half of this century. Temperatures that high can endanger human life.

Gulf countries, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar, are among the world's most water-stressed, meaning that the water available barely keeps up with demand. That requires them to import water or remove the salt from seawater, an energy-intensive process.

Many Gulf countries have announced sweeping environmental initiatives aimed at slashing carbon emissions, greening big cities and developing climate-friendly technologies. They have also invested heavily in efforts to mitigate the dangers of extreme heat — often with measures that other Middle Eastern countries grappling with high temperatures, like Egypt, Yemen and Iraq, cannot afford.

But money is not always enough.

FADEL SENNA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

More than 1,300 people died during the hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia this month, when temperatures at times exceeded 120 degrees.

This month, sudden power outages hit parts of Kuwait, a major oil exporter. In some areas, traffic lights went out and people got stuck in elevators as the temperature soared.

The authorities blamed rising energy demand that overwhelmed the power stations. To reduce the load, the government has imposed rolling blackouts during the hottest hours of the day, forcing people to seek out alternative air-conditioned spaces.

The summer heat drastically restricts life in Kuwait, altering when people work and sleep and keeping those who can afford it in air-conditioned environments.

Fatima Al Sarraf, a family doctor in Kuwait City, said she took long runs in the winter but was forced to run on an indoor treadmill or go to the mall in the summer to get her daily steps.

"I do not go outside at all," said Dr. Al Sarraf, 27.

She fears for the future.

"If the temperature keeps rising, especially in the summer periods, it is expected that Kuwait will be uninhabitable," she said. "This change will definitely affect future generations."

Other countries appear to be better managing the heat, though they still face challenges.

Qatar has used wealth generated from its status as one of the world's top exporters of liquefied natural gas to cool outdoor areas, even during the hottest times of day. Stadiums it built for the 2023 World Cup were outfitted with outdoor air-conditioning so they could be used year-round. One city park in the capital, Doha, boasts an air-conditioned running track, and an outdoor cooling system was recently unveiled in a popular outdoor market.

"There is a cooling ecosystem," said Neeshad Shafi, a Qatar-based nonresident fellow at the Middle East Institute. "Everything has to be cooled — more cooled parks, more cooled gardens, more cooled shopping areas, more cooled souks are coming up every day."

But those technologies are expensive — and even more so to deploy over large areas.

"You can't cool everything in a country," Mr. Shafi said.

Nor are the protections afforded by such technologies routinely available to the most vulnerable, including the millions of migrant laborers who do everything from construction work to gardening in the Gulf. Many have no choice but to work outside, and studies have shown that working in extreme heat increases accidents and can damage the body.

To protect outdoor laborers, Qatar and other Gulf States have imposed bans on most outdoor work during the hottest parts of summer days. This year, Kuwait extended those protections to motorcycle delivery drivers, who had been roasting inside their helmets on sweltering asphalt.

But nighttime temperatures are also stifling, and as their countries get hotter, governments may need to extend the work bans or take further measures.

"These countries are fast-moving, but the temperature is moving faster than them," Mr. Shafi said.

Yasmena Almulla contributed reporting from Kuwait City, Kuwait.

WORLD

A prime minister the king may like

NEWS ANALYSIS
LONDON

Analysts say monarch and leader of Labour have much in common

BY MARK LANDLER

POOL PHOTO BY JONATHAN BRADY

King Charles and the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, at Buckingham Palace in 2022. "There's a meeting of minds in terms of the social issues at stake," a historian said.

Nearly 20 years ago, a wry young human rights lawyer, Keir Starmer, told a documentary filmmaker that it had struck him as "odd" to receive the title of queen's counsel, "since I often used to propose the abolition of the monarchy."

Mr. Starmer, now the leader of Britain's Labour Party, has long since disavowed his antimonarchy statements as youthful indiscretions. In 2014, he knelt before Charles, then the Prince of Wales, who tapped him on the shoulder with a sword and awarded him a knighthood.

If Sir Keir Starmer is swept into 10 Downing Street in the general election on Thursday, as polls suggest he will be, he may end up more politically in sync with Charles than were the last two Conservative prime ministers, Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss, whose terms have overlapped with the king's reign.

On issues including climate change, housing, immigration and Britain's relations with the European Union, experts say, Mr. Starmer is likely to find common ground with a king who holds longstanding, often fervent, views on those issues but is constitutionally barred from taking any role in politics.

"A Labour government under Keir Starmer will be more attuned to the plight of people as a social issue," said Ed Owens, a historian who studies the royal family. "These kinds of issues have long been on the radar of the king. There's a meeting of minds in terms of the social issues at stake."

If elected prime minister, Mr. Starmer would hold a weekly meeting with Charles, the contents of which would be strictly between them. But people who know Buckingham Palace and Downing Street said they could foresee a fruitful relationship between the 75-year-old monarch and the 61-year-old lawyer, who was knighted for his services to criminal justice as director of public prosecutions.

Beyond Mr. Starmer's progressive politics, scholars said that Charles would appreciate the stability that a Labour government might restore after the divisions, political upheaval and revolving door of leaders that followed Brexit. In less than two years on the throne, after all, Charles could soon be on his third prime minister.

"The monarchy seeks to be a unifying force, holding the country together, so it favors consensus rather than division," said Vernon Bogdanor, a professor at Kings College London and an authority on constitutional monarchy. "That is how the king sees his role."

But Professor Bogdanor added, "While his mother represented the wartime generation, the king is more representative of the '60s generation."

As sovereign, Charles does not vote. But in his decades as heir, he was outspoken about issues he cared about, such as organic farming and architecture. Occasionally, his views on more politically charged issues leaked out.

In 2022, Charles was reported to have criticized the Conservative government's plan to put some asylum seekers on one-way flights to Rwanda as "appalling." His comments, made in a private meeting, surfaced in The Times of London and The Daily Mail weeks before he represented Queen Elizabeth II at a meeting of Commonwealth countries in Kigali, the Rwandan capital.

Clarence House, where Charles then had his office, declined to comment on the reports, but it did not deny them.

That prompted Boris Johnson, who was then the prime minister and proposed the Rwanda plan, to complain to Charles, according to Mr. Johnson's communications chief at the time, Guto Harri. In The Mail, he described Mr. Johnson's "squaring up to the prince and confronting him about what he — as unelected royalty — had said about the actions of a democratically elected government."

Charles said nothing about Rwanda after that. In April, after Parliament passed a revised version of the legislation under Mr. Sunak, the king gave it his royal assent, as is his duty, making it law. But Mr. Starmer has vowed that a Labour government would scrap the plan, calling it costly and unworkable.

Climate policy is another area where the king might find a Labour government more aligned with his views. Ms. Truss asked Charles not to attend a U.N. climate change conference in Egypt in 2022, depriving him of a platform to speak out on perhaps his most cherished issue. Mr. Sunak later backtracked on some of Britain's emission-reduction targets, citing their onerous cost during a cost-of-living crisis.

The king has fervent views on issues but is constitutionally barred from taking any role in politics.

Labour, by contrast, announced a green investment plan worth 28 billion pounds, or about $35 billion, a year, though it has since suspended the spending targets until Britain's public finances improve. "It does sound like a new Labour government and Charles would be in step on these issues," Mr. Owens, the historian, said. "But Labour has many fine words on the importance of a green agenda. Can they match those fine words with action?"

Mr. Starmer's devotion to the law might also spare the king the kind of quandary his mother faced in 2019. Mr. Johnson asked her to suspend, or prorogue, Parliament at a time when lawmakers were maneuvering to delay his plan to pull Britain out of the European Union.

The queen assented, but the British Supreme Court later ruled that the decision had been unlawful. Critics assailed Mr. Johnson for putting Elizabeth in an untenable position, since she could not defy an elected government. Ms. Truss raised similar questions of governance when she proposed sweeping unfunded tax cuts in 2022, which set off a backlash in the financial markets that sunk her premiership.

"These prime ministers were able to run roughshod over the rules," Mr. Owens said.

"Generally speaking, the monarchy doesn't like it when too much attention is focused on" constitutional issues, he added.

As counterintuitive as it might seem, historians say that Elizabeth had more cordial relations with Labour prime ministers than with Conservative ones. She was viewed as particularly comfortable with Harold Wilson, while her exchanges with Margaret Thatcher, a Conservative icon, were said to be occasionally prickly.

To be sure, the early Labour Party had an antimonarchy strain. Its first parliamentary leader, Keir Hardie — Mr. Starmer has the same first name — once wrote: "Despotism and monarchy are compatible; democracy and monarchy are an unthinkable connection."

Conservative political operatives dusted off the video of a young Mr. Starmer and put it in ads suggesting that Labour hated the monarchy. But even before Mr. Starmer took over, Labour had evolved into a reliably constitutional party.

At Labour's party conference in 2022, after the queen's death, the national anthem was played for the first time. Mr. Starmer, the man who once talked of abolishing the monarchy, raised his voice and sang, "God Save the King."

Sudan closer to the brink of a famine 'catastrophe'

NAIROBI, KENYA

Civil war pushes country toward humanitarian crisis on scale not seen in decades

BY DECLAN WALSH

At least 750,000 people are on the brink of starvation and death in Sudan, where a devastating civil war has left over half the country's 48 million people in a situation of chronic hunger, the global authority on famine has said.

At least 14 areas across the country are near famine, including some in the capital, Khartoum, according to the latest figures from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a group of experts from U.N. bodies and major relief agencies that measures hunger and formally declares famine.

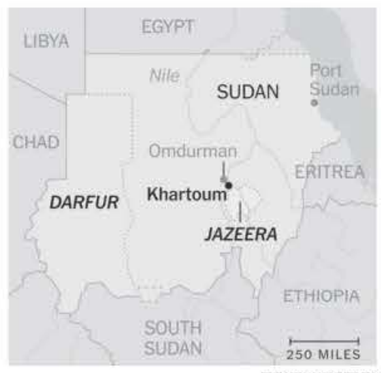
The dire update appeared to confirm warnings from aid experts that Sudan is hurtling toward a humanitarian disaster on a scale not seen in decades.

"This is possibly the crisis of a generation," said Edouard Rodier, Europe director for the Norwegian Refugee Council, who was in western Sudan this month. "I've never seen anything like it."

In a report issued on Thursday, the group said that 25.6 million Sudanese, or over half the population, were in a food crisis. Of them, 8.5 million are acutely malnourished or scrambling to survive while 755,000 are in a "catastrophe" — essentially, famine conditions.

When the group, known as the I.P.C., last issued estimates for Sudan in December, the number of people facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity was zero. The latest figures exceed even those of Gaza, where the group said on Tuesday that 495,000 people were in the same situation.

Even so, the group has not formally declared a famine in Sudan, in part because reliable data is hard to obtain. Sudan's health system is collapsing and aid workers cannot reach the worst-affected areas because of intense fighting and restrictions imposed by the warring parties.



THE NEW YORK TIMES

Still, few experts doubt that mass death is already underway and that the situation is likely to rapidly deteriorate in the coming months. In February, a senior U.N. official warned the Security Council that 222,000 Sudanese children could die in the following months.

A more recent study by the Clingendael Institute, a Dutch research group, estimated that up to 2.5 million people could die from hunger-related causes in Sudan by October.

"We may not see a famine declaration, but there's no question that the starvation crisis is on a scale without parallel for 40 years or more, and is going to kill hundreds of thousands of Sudanese," Alex de Waal, a famine scholar at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, told The Horn podcast this past week.

Since fighting broke out in April 2023 at least nine million Sudanese have been scattered from their homes. As many as 150,000 may have died, the U.S. envoy to Sudan, Tom Perriello, has estimated, although he adds that accurate figures are impossible to obtain.

The areas where the famine threat is highest include the western region of Darfur, where the siege of a major city has brought fears of a massacre; the capital, Khartoum; and the country's breadbasket in Jazeera State, the I.P.C. said. "This is the single largest humanitarian crisis on the planet," Samantha Power, the head of USAID, told reporters on June 14.

Ms. Power and other American officials have repeatedly accused the war's belligerents — Sudan's national military and a powerful paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces — of using starvation as a weapon of war.

Foreign sponsors fueling the fighting have also come under scrutiny, in particular the United Arab Emirates, which backs the Rapid Support Forces, and Iran, which has supplied drones to the military.

Yet despite the scale of the unfolding crisis, Sudan's war has failed to attract the kind of attention that was lavished on the Darfur crisis two decades ago.

"World leaders continue to go through the motions, expressing concern over Sudan's crisis," said Tjada D'Oyen McKenna, the head of Mercy Corps, a global aid organization. "Yet they've failed to rise to the occasion."

Russian soldiers liken tactic to a meat grinder

NEWS ANALYSIS
WASHINGTON

Wave after wave sent to break against defense on front line in Ukraine

BY JULIAN E. BARNES, ERIC SCHMITT AND MARC SANTORA

MAURICIO LIMA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A destroyed tank in Ukraine. On average, over 1,000 Russian soldiers were killed or injured each day during the Ukraine war in May.

May was a particularly deadly month for the Russian Army in Ukraine, with an average of more than 1,000 of its soldiers injured or killed each day, according to U.S., British and other Western intelligence agencies.

But despite its losses, Russia is recruiting 25,000 to 30,000 new soldiers a month — roughly as many as are leaving the battlefield, U.S. officials said. That has allowed its army to keep sending wave after wave of troops at Ukrainian defenses, hoping to overwhelm them and break through the trench lines.

It is a style of warfare that Russian soldiers have likened to being put into a meat grinder, with commanding officers seemingly oblivious to the fact that they are sending infantry soldiers to die.

At times, this approach has proved effective, bringing the Russian Army victories in Avdiivka and Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine. But Ukrainian and Western officials say the tactics were less successful this spring, as Russia tried to take land near the city of Kharkiv.

American officials said that Russia achieved a critical objective for President Vladimir V. Putin, creating a buffer zone along the border to make it more difficult for the Ukrainians to strike into the country.

But the drive did not threaten Kharkiv and was ultimately stopped by Ukrainian defenses, according to Western officials.

"President Putin and Moscow have really tried to make big gains, to break through the front lines this spring," Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO secretary general, said in an interview with The New York Times editorial board. "They tried and they failed. They made very small gains, and they are paying a very high price."

Russian casualties have spiked at other times, especially during the assaults on Avdiivka and Bakhmut. But the assaults on those cities were spread out over several months. The push in May, both outside Kharkiv and along the eastern front, involved more intense periods of Russian wave attacks. British military intelligence analysts said Russia's casualties in May, which they put at an average of 1,200 a day, were the highest of the war.

The fighting last month decimated the town of Vovchansk, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) from Kharkiv, where Ukrainian and Russian are engaged in a grueling battle for control.

Russian soldiers have said on Telegram, the social media and messaging platform, that their units are suffering high casualties. Some say their ranks are being cut down by drones, machine-gun fire and artillery barrages.

Russia's use of infantry in wave attacks reflects one of its advantages in the war: Its population is much larger than Ukraine's, giving it a bigger pool of potential recruits.

But the casualties have forced Russia to ship new recruits to Ukraine relatively quickly, meaning that the soldiers sent to the front are poorly trained.

The lack of structured training, and the need to commit new recruits to combat operations, has limited Russia's ability to generate more capable units. It also increases casualties.

But it is more complicated than that. The changing nature of modern warfare has also increased the body count in recent months.

Ubiquitous drones have made it easy for both sides to spot, and strike, enemy forces. And mines and cluster munitions make movement across open ground a nearly suicidal endeavor.

Since Mr. Putin undertook a full-scale invasion in February 2022, at least 350,000 Russian troops have been killed or wounded, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III recently said. British estimates put the number of Russians killed or wounded at more than 500,000.

U.S. estimates of casualties in the war are based on satellite imagery, communication intercepts, social media and news media dispatches from reporters, as well as official reporting from Russia and Ukraine. But such estimates vary, even within the U.S. government.

Reliable estimates of Ukraine's casualties are more difficult to come by. Ukrainian officials guard those numbers carefully. Several U.S. officials insist that they do not have an accurate account. Mr. Zelensky has said that 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers were killed in the first two years of the war, but American officials say that number appears to understate Ukraine's losses.

Russia conducted a partial mobilization in September 2022, after which tens of thousands of young men fled the country. But Western intelligence analysts say Russia will not need another such mobilization or draft this year.

Russia appears to be able to sustain its current campaign by offering financial incentives to recruits, drawing on convicts and bringing in some Russian mercenaries from Africa.

But the major question for this year will be whether Russia's current strategy can best the Ukrainian military, which is finding its defensive footing. Arms and ammunition from a new $60 billion U.S. aid package are finally reaching the front lines, and Ukrainian commanders are no longer having to ration rounds. Russia still outguns Ukraine, but not by as much.

Ukraine has shifted its posture, building fortifications and laying minefields to slow the Russian advance. War favors the defender, and Ukraine is focusing on holding its lines, American officials said.

"What I see is a slowing of the Russians' advance and a stabilizing of that particular piece of the front," Mr. Austin told reporters in Brussels this month. "A couple of weeks ago, there was concern that we would see a significant breakthrough on the part of the Russians. I don't think we'll see that going forward."

And Russia's new buffer zone at the border near Kharkiv may be a hollow achievement.

Ukraine has still been able to use longer-range American weapons to strike into Russia because of a policy shift by the Biden administration that allows the Ukrainian military to use U.S. missiles to strike military targets just over the border.

American officials said the change is beginning to have an impact, taking out Russian artillery and making it harder for Moscow to strike against Kharkiv.

But for all of Ukraine's success around Kharkiv, there are more challenges ahead. In the weeks to come, U.S. and Western officials expect the fighting to shift back to the east and the south, as Russia continues to appear willing to expend forces to make incremental gains.

Julian E. Barnes and Eric Schmitt reported from Washington, and Marc Santora from Kyiv, Ukraine.

President confronts a coup attempt and a mentor

Bolivian leader weathers general's assault, but new challenge may be bigger

BY JULIE TURKEWITZ, MARÍA SILVIA TRIGO AND GENEVIEVE GLATSKY

At first, they heard the sirens. Then, peering out over the country's main political plaza, Bolivia's top ministers saw the armored vehicles and troops spilling out their doors. A shiver ran down the interior minister's spine, she later said.

Within moments, the president, Luis Arce, addressed his inner circle — "We are facing a coup!" — before heading to the presidential palace to confront, face to face, the general trying to remove him from power.

The coup attempt on Wednesday failed, lasting a mere three hours, and ended in the arrest of the general, whose motivation for the attack appeared to be, at least in part, anger that he had been fired by Mr. Arce the day before.

But it was hardly the end of Mr. Arce's problem, or the challenges facing Bolivia.

Mr. Arce, 60, a former finance minister, took office in 2020 during a democratic election that seemed to symbolize a new, more hopeful chapter in a country coming off a period of intense political tumult.

Now, beyond a dispute with the former general, Mr. Arce is facing a struggling economy, growing protests, criticism over the jailing of political opponents and division within his own party.

But perhaps his biggest challenge is a battle with his onetime mentor, former President Evo Morales, a titanic figure in Bolivian politics who had receded from the halls of power — and is now fighting with Mr. Arce over who will be their party's candidate in the presidential election next year.

Mr. Morales, 64, was the first Indigenous president in a country with a large Indigenous population, a socialist elected in 2006 and a leader in the so-called pink wave of leftist politicians who ran much of South America in the 2000s.

He made history by incorporating broad sectors of Bolivian society into politics, but he fled the country amid a disputed election in 2019 and chose Mr. Arce to be the candidate representing his party in a new election held in 2020.

In an interview with The New York Times that year, Mr. Arce characterized Mr. Morales as a "historical figure" in their political movement but said Mr. Morales would have no formal role in his government.

It seemed, at the time, to be a successful transition to power for Mr. Arce, who had served in the Morales administration during years of strong economic growth, fueled by a commodities boom and the country's vast reserve of natural gas.

But now, after a time in exile, Mr. Morales "is really determined to come back to the presidency," said Gustavo Flores-Macías, professor of government at Cornell University who focuses on Latin American politics. "He sees that he was ousted in an illegal way and that he has the right to be the candidate again. And Arce sees it very differently."

In Bolivia, a landlocked nation of 12 million people, Mr. Morales, Mr. Arce and their supporters have long tried to position the country as a leftist counterweight to U.S. power.

The country could play an outsize role in the battle against climate change because of its vast reserves of lithium, which is crucial to the globe's shift toward electric cars.

The coup attempt on Wednesday was led by Juan José Zuñiga, who until Tuesday evening was the commander general of the army. In an interview, the interior minister María Nela Prada said that Mr. Arce had fired General Zuñiga after he made political statements in a television interview, insisting that Mr. Morales "cannot be the president of this country again" and implying that the military would enforce this assertion.

Before then, "Zuñiga had been President Luis Arce's trusted man, his most trusted man with the armed forces," said Reymi Ferreira, a former minister of defense. The general's dismissal, however, seemed to change that.

The next day, at about 3 p.m., General Zuñiga appeared in the country's main political square — the home of both the presidential palace and a key government building called the Casa Grande del Pueblo — with the heads of the navy and air force, as well as scores of soldiers.

Mr. Arce and his ministers were in the Casa Grande preparing to begin a meeting, Ms. Prada said, and watched, stunned, as military personnel took over the plaza below.

Mr. Arce, in a black puffy jacket and spectacles, marched to the presidential palace, where, with Ms. Prada at his side, he confronted the general, who wore his green uniform and a bullet-resistant camouflage vest. A crowd of military police surrounded them.

"This is your captain!" Ms. Prada yelled, referring to the president.

"We cannot turn back!" yelled a Zuñiga supporter.

Mr. Arce told the general to turn around.

"This is an order, general," he continued. "Are you going to listen?"

"No," Mr. Zuñiga replied.

Then came a key moment, Ms. Prada said. The head of the air force, apparently having second thoughts, decided to rescind his support for the coup effort, she explained.

The police declined to join. And eventually a newly appointed commander general of the army ordered the tanks and troops to retreat.

At least 12 people were injured with firearms during the fray, according to Ms. Prada.

Seventeen people, including Mr. Zuñiga, are now under arrest. And about 200 military officers took part in the attempted coup, Bolivia's ambassador to the Organization of American States said on Thursday.

Getting Mr. Morales to back down could prove more difficult.

A former leader of the country's coca growers, Mr. Morales still retains some support among voters and members of his party, the Movement for Socialism, or MAS. A recent survey had support for Mr. Arce at 19 percent of respondents and for Mr. Morales at 9 percent.

Bolivia's constitutional court ultimately has the power to decide if Mr. Morales can run again.

Economic problems inside the country include fuel shortages, high inflation and a lack of access to U.S. dollars.

Mr. Arce is facing a struggling economy, growing protests, criticism over the jailing of political opponents and division within his own party.

In the legislature, a segment of Mr. Arce's party has allied with the opposition to block his initiatives. And his critics have faulted him for going after opponents, including a prominent politician, Luis Fernando Camacho, who has been in pretrial detention since December 2022 on sedition and terrorism charges.

Carlos Romero, a former interior minister under Mr. Morales, said that the relationship between the former president and Mr. Arce was now "abysmal," and that sowing doubt about the legality of Mr. Morales's candidacy "is part of the government's political strategy that insists on disqualifying him."

Mr. Romero said that the coup attempt on Wednesday had been "so clumsy and so improvised" that it must have been an "arrangement agreed upon with the national government" — repeating a claim made by Mr. Zuñiga just before his arrest that the coup attempt had been a stunt concocted by Mr. Arce to make him look like a hero.

Mr. Arce's government has said there is no evidence to back up this claim, and has denied it.

Carlos Mesa, a former president and a leader of the country's main opposition party, said he believed Mr. Arce was already trying to benefit politically from the coup attempt "by victimizing himself."

On Wednesday night, Mr. Arce, known widely in the country by his nickname, Lucho, appeared on a balcony overlooking the main political plaza, where hundreds of supporters had gathered, and announced that they had defeated the country's "coup plotters."

"Thank you, Bolivian people!" he yelled.

Then, the crowd erupted: "Lucho! Lucho! Lucho!"

Jorge Valencia contributed reporting.

CLAUDIA MORALES/REUTERS

Above, demonstrators in La Paz faced Bolivia's military in a coup attempt led by the former commander general of the army, Juan José Zuñiga. Below left, President Luis Arce surrounded by supporters outside the government palace; below right, Mr. Zuñiga being escorted by police officers after his arrest. The coup attempt lasted only three hours.

RODWY CAZON BARRIOS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

DANIEL MIRANDA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

A polarizing legacy for the co-founder of WikiLeaks

NEWS ANALYSIS
LONDON

Julian Assange was seeker of truth to many people, but reckless insurgent to others

BY MARK LANDLER AND MEGAN SPECIA

In his two-decade odyssey from Australian hacker to new-age media celebrity, hunted figure, perennial prisoner and finally, a free man, Julian Assange has always been easier to caricature than characterize.

The lack of an agreed-upon label for Mr. Assange — is he a heroic crusader for truth or a reckless leaker who endangered lives? — makes any assessment of his legacy ambiguous at best.

Whatever history's judgment of Mr. Assange, his appearance on Wednesday in a courtroom on a remote Pacific island, where he pleaded guilty to a single count of violating the U.S. Espionage Act, was an appropriate coda to a story that has seemed stranger than fiction.

From the time he established WikiLeaks in 2006, Mr. Assange, 52, was a polarizing figure, using the internet to solicit and publish government secrets. His disclosures, including confidential diplomatic cables and civilian deaths in the American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, made him courageous to those who believed in his gospel of radical transparency. To others who feared the information he revealed could get people killed, he was destructive, even if there was never proof that lives were lost.

After his sensational leaks incurred the wrath of the White House, Mr. Assange spent 12 years in London fighting extradition, first to Sweden and then to the United States. Holed up in a South American embassy and later languishing in a British prison, he resurfaced in the headlines whenever a court ruled on his latest appeal. He became less a cutting-edge insurgent than a ghostly throwback to another time.

"Julian Assange has for so many years sacrificed for the freedom of speech, freedom of the press," said Barry Pollack, a lawyer who represented Mr. Assange in his plea negotiations with the American authorities, on Wednesday in Canberra, Australia. "He's sacrificed his own freedom."

At its best, WikiLeaks shone a light into dark corners, often working with traditional media organizations to expose abuses like extrajudicial killings in Kenya. Documents posted by WikiLeaks about the excesses of Tunisia's ruling family presaged the upheaval that swept the region.

"Some of this going after Assange had to do with compensating for your weakness by shooting the messenger."

Alan Rusbridger, a former editor in chief of The Guardian who worked extensively with Mr. Assange, said WikiLeaks deserved credit for accelerating the political changes of the Arab Spring.

While Mr. Assange indisputably changed history, it is not clear he did so in the way that he and his apostles may have hoped when they first came to global prominence in 2010 by posting video on WikiLeaks of a U.S. helicopter strike in Baghdad that had resulted in the death of a Reuters photographer.

"Think about Julian Assange's motivation regarding Iraq and Afghanistan," said P.J. Crowley, who was the U.S. State Department's spokesman when WikiLeaks published 250,000 confidential diplomatic cables in 2010, a project in which the site initially collaborated with The New York Times and others.

"We left Iraq, went back, and are still there," Mr. Crowley said. "We stayed in Afghanistan for a decade after WikiLeaks. His legacy is collaborating with Russian intelligence, whether wittingly or unwittingly, to help Russia elect Donald Trump."

Mr. Crowley's experience with Mr. Assange is acutely personal: He was forced to resign his post after he criticized the Pentagon's treatment of Chelsea Manning, the U.S. Army intelligence analyst who downloaded thousands of documents, including those cables, from a classified government network and uploaded them to WikiLeaks.

Views of Mr. Assange soured after WikiLeaks, in the heat of the 2016 presidential campaign, published Democratic emails that had been hacked by a Russian intelligence agency. Allies of Hillary Clinton cited it as one of multiple factors that contributed to her defeat by Mr. Trump.

As secretary of state, Mrs. Clinton had to apologize to foreign leaders for embarrassing details in cables sent by American diplomats to the State Department. In one case, the foreign minister of a Persian Gulf nation refused to allow note takers into a meeting with her, for fear that his comments would be leaked.

"Some of this damage to American foreign policy was irreparable," said Vali R. Nasr, a senior State Department official at the time, who now teaches at Johns Hopkins University. "You can apologize for it, but you can't undo it."

But Mr. Nasr said the furor caused by WikiLeaks also revealed something that the United States was later able to use to its advantage: the public relations value of intelligence. Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, American and British intelligence agencies selectively declassified material about Russia's activities to warn President Vladimir V. Putin and mobilize Western support.

American officials justified their prosecution of Mr. Assange on espionage charges by saying it would deter other would-be whistle-blowers from leaking classified material. But it also reflected a collective sense of shock that the nation's most tightly held secrets could be so easily compromised.

"Some of this going after Assange," Mr. Nasr said, "had to do with compensating for your weakness by shooting the messenger."

The messenger proved elusive. Mr. Assange's prolonged exile in Britain, during which he spent seven years in the Ecuadorean Embassy and five years in London's Belmarsh prison, turned him from a swashbuckling media impresario into a haunted, if hardheaded, resistance figure.

Supporters camped outside the embassy, where he had been granted asylum, holding placards and chanting, "Free Assange!" Detractors saw him as an erratic publicity seeker. Claiming to be a victim of political persecution, he violated his bail terms after losing his appeal of a Swedish arrest warrant on charges of sexual assault — charges he described as a "smear campaign" ginned up by the United States.

From his cramped living quarters in a converted embassy office, Mr. Assange gave defiant press interviews. Activists and celebrities came and went: the actress Pamela Anderson became something of a regular.

Mr. Assange began a secret relationship with Stella Moris, a lawyer who represented him and later became his wife. They had two children while he was hiding out in the embassy.

For the British authorities, caught in the middle, it was a costly and time-consuming distraction. They had to station police in front of the embassy, while the courts dealt with extradition requests.

Sweden later dropped its case against Mr. Assange, but the United States, under President Donald J. Trump, charged him with espionage. After a change in government in Ecuador, he was evicted from the embassy in 2019. As police dragged out a bedraggled Mr. Assange, he shouted, "U.K. resist — resist this attempt by the Trump administration."

By that point, Mr. Assange's saga had become little more than a sideshow. "Journalists didn't pay enough attention to Assange's plight," Mr. Rusbridger said. "People either think he's the messiah or the devil, and there's no in between."

As the legal maneuvering came to a head, a few people were able to see Mr. Assange in jail. Among them was Rebecca Vincent, director of campaigns for Reporters Without Borders, a press freedom group that has campaigned for Mr. Assange's release since 2019. She visited him six times between August 2023 and last month and said she was often concerned about his health.

"It's not an easy situation to be in. And of course, we had concerns for his mental health, too," Ms. Vincent said. "But he was still Julian; he was still fighting."

Based on her discussions with Mr. Assange and his family, Ms. Vincent said she expected his priority now will be spending time with them. His two sons have only known their father through prison visits. She sees his release as a win but said it should have ended with all charges dropped.

Champions of press freedom agree that even with Mr. Assange's release, the plea deal set a troubling precedent.

Jameel Jaffer, the executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, said that while the agreement averted the "worst-case scenario for press freedom," it also means that he "will have served five years in prison for activities that journalists engage in every day."

Speaking in Canberra, where an emotional Mr. Assange kissed his wife after arriving home, Mr. Pollack, his lawyer, said, "Hopefully, this is the end, not just of the case against Julian Assange, but the end of the case against journalism."

WILLIAM WEST/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

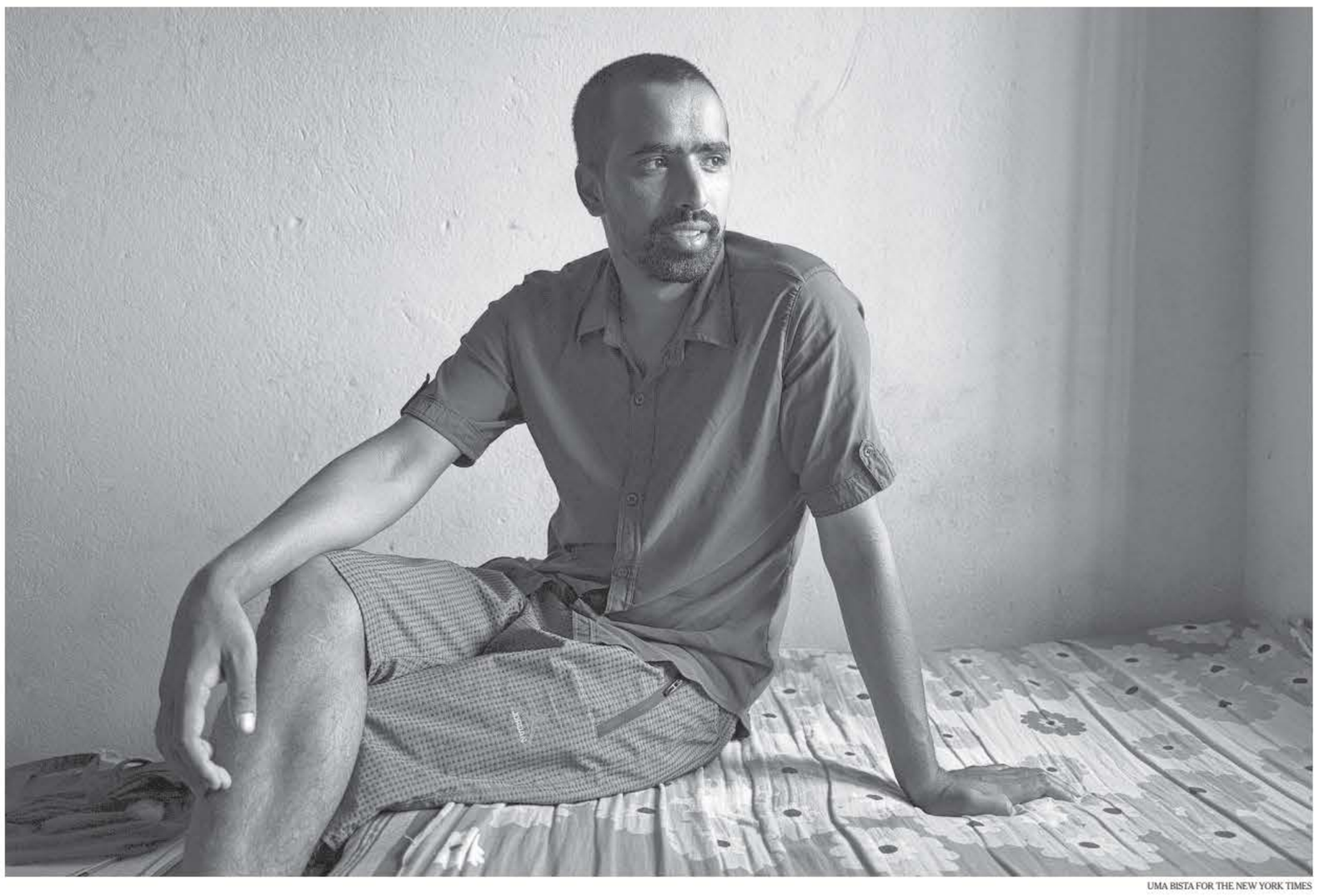
Julian Assange hugging his wife, Stella, in Canberra, Australia, on Wednesday. They had two children while he was hiding out in the Ecuadorean Embassy in London.

Escaping from the Russian Army

ESCAPE, FROM PAGE 1

Mr. Shahi had become ensnared in the shadowy, predatory underworld of human traffickers from Nepal who supply foreign fighters to the Russian Army for its war in Ukraine. The Nepali government has been trying to shut down this pipeline. But the Russian military continues to rely on it, augmenting combat power with impoverished young foreigners even though many, like Mr. Shahi, said they didn't know they would be going into battle.

More and more are trying to get out. Mr. Shahi actually tried to escape twice. The first time he was ratted out by his own smugglers.



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Khakendra Khatri, above, 27, in Kathmandu, Nepal. Mr. Khatri, an agricultural student from Rolpa, in central Nepal, joined the Russian military and escaped after some months. Right, Mr. Khatri showing photos from his time in the military to his sister.

"I WAS A SLAVE"

Mr. Shahi is a thoughtful, talkative, fit 24-year-old civil engineer from a village in the Dailekh area of western Nepal. A university graduate, he faced grim job prospects after finishing a short-term contract building water tanks last year. Nepal is one of the poorest countries in Asia, and his parents, who are millet farmers, have little money.

He joined the Russian Army for one reason, he said: "For the money." The New York Times corroborated Mr. Shahi's story though medical records, photographs, text messages and official government documents.

Former Nepali soldiers in his village introduced him to human traffickers, he said, who quickly arranged for him to fly to Moscow. The deal looked solid. He'd pay the traffickers $5,600. In Russia he'd make $2,200 a month as a contract soldier, working as a guard at a base, he was told, not on the front line. Soon, he would get Russian citizenship as a reward for his service.

As he prepared to leave for Russia, Mr. Shahi was stepping into a well-established web of middlemen and human traffickers that carries thousands of Nepalis each year to wealthier countries to work as maids, prostitutes, guards, nannies, cooks and soldiers.

"It's a massive network," said Kritu Bhandari, an antitrafficking activist in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. She recently started a group called the Campaign to Save the Lives of Nepali Citizens in the Russian Army.

He had become ensnared in the shadowy, predatory underworld of human traffickers from Nepal who supply foreign fighters to Russia for its war in Ukraine.

She said the traffickers falsify education certificates to obtain visas; mislead recruits about what they will actually be doing; and run a wide syndicate of agents and accomplices that stretches from rural mountain villages to foreign capitals and the corridors of their own government.

"The smugglers even have people at immigration in the Kathmandu airport," she said.

The Russian government has not revealed much information about foreigners fighting for its army, but news reports and interviews indicate that Nepal is one of the leading sources. Last year, the Nepali police arrested a dozen people in connection with the illicit trafficking of youths to Russia, but the vast majority are never caught.

Mr. Shahi arrived at a Russian Army base a few hours' drive east of Moscow in late October, he said. He provided photos of himself dressed in crisp camouflage and a hat with earflaps. In one picture, he's holding a snowball.

The base was used for several hundred Nepali and a few Chinese recruits, he said. His first impressions, formed from the uniforms, the weapons, the training and the transport, was that the Russian Army was centralized and organized. That impression would soon change.

After two weeks of basic training — he had been promised three months, he said — he was told that he was going to a frontline position near Donetsk, a Ukrainian city occupied by Russian troops.

Terrified and feeling betrayed, he tried to protest, saying that he wasn't ready, and that he would rather sit in jail. But that wasn't an option.

"Even inmates there are taken to the front line," he said. "I had to go."

His frontline unit was a mix of Russian convicts and his fellow Nepalis. The "inmates," as he called them, were heavy drinkers, coarse, unpredictable and covered in tattoos.

"They were not lovely," he said sardonically.

They constantly abused the Nepalis, he said, slapping them in the helmet, jabbing them with gunbutts and screaming at them in Russian. Mr. Shahi said he learned only a few words, including right and left, but sometimes, during the chaos of combat, he got those confused.

After an artillery barrage in December wiped out three of his friends, he decided to make a break for it. His wife, Alisha, back in Kathmandu, spoke to a Nepali living in Moscow who connected Mr. Shahi to traffickers working inside Russia. They put together a plan: He'd pay 4,000 euros (about $4,275), in installments, and the traffickers would arrange for a car to take him from Donetsk to Mariupol, and then to Moscow.

The traffickers make a cut either way — getting people in and getting them out.

Mr. Shahi and a small group of other Nepali deserters left their positions, linked up with a couple of taxis and made it to a half-destroyed apartment in Mariupol, perhaps the most ruined city in Ukraine and under Russian occupation. "The whole place looked doomed," he said.

They slept on the floor.

But the traffickers, he said, didn't have a good exit plan. Two of their group tried slipping across the border into Russia and were arrested at a checkpoint. When Mr. Shahi and the others hesitated to pay the next installment, "the dispute got nasty," he said.

A few days later, at 4 a.m., a squad of police officers showed up and arrested everybody. The traffickers, Mr. Shahi said, had shared the location of their hide-out and betrayed them.

They were arrested and beaten, he said. Mr. Shahi begged for mercy, saying they were just Nepali students trying to get to Europe. But while they were waiting in a Mariupol jail, the police received an electronic bulletin from the Russian Army that they were looking for some Nepali deserters. The game was up.

Russian soldiers hauled them back to a frontline position in Donetsk, this time a bunker filled with snow. He said they had almost no food or water. They ate ice. And cans of stringy, frozen beef, which was against Mr. Shahi's Hindu religion.

"But what was I supposed to do?" he said.

Mr. Shahi and the half dozen Nepalis with him had no freedom to leave, retreat or do anything but stay in that bunker and fight.

"I was a slave," he said.

A few days later, Mr. Shahi said, the Russian commanders took them out and ordered them to storm a heavily fortified Ukrainian trench line. The Ukrainians saw them coming and lit up the forest with gunfire. Mr. Shahi was shot six times in his left arm and right leg.

UMA BISTA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Disoriented, faint and losing lots of blood, he crawled to a first aid station.

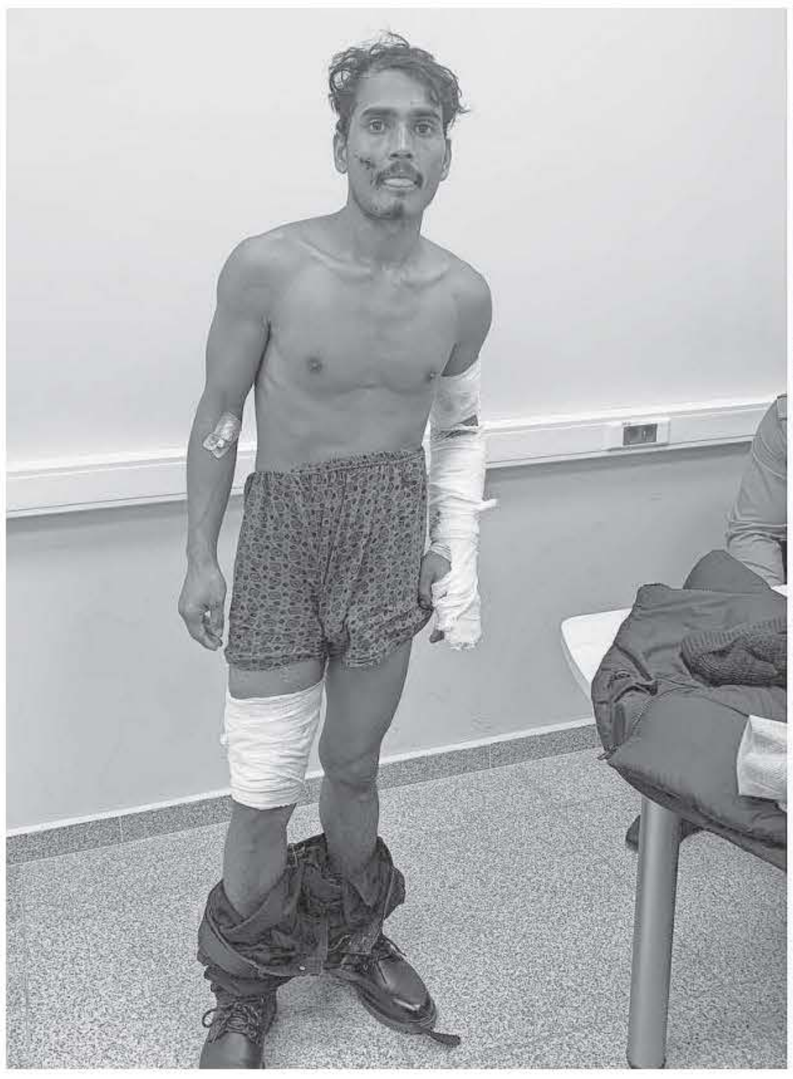
"I thought that was it," he said.

In a haze of pain, he met some other Nepali soldiers and gave them his A.T.M. card and his mobile phone and told them to call his family back home and tell them he was no more.

But the Russians provided decent medical care, he said, and he was flown in an emergency chopper to a hospital in Rostov-on-Don, a Russian city near the Ukrainian border. Surgeons removed the bullets and patched up his wounds. Yet he fell into a depression so deep he contemplated suicide.

"I knew that as soon as I got better, they'd send me back," he said. "And I couldn't face that."

Left, Krishna Bahadur Shahi teaching plumbing to students from the Nepal Deaf Residential Secondary School this month. Below left, Mr. Shahi after he was detained and partially stripped at Domodedovo airport in Moscow in January. Below right, Mr. Shahi in November 2023 on a Russian Army base. He joined Russia's army for one reason, he said: "For the money."



Desperate to talk to his wife, he signaled to a tall, skinny orderly who was cleaning his room that he wanted to use his phone. The Russian man quickly understood and when Mr. Shahi said, "Nepali, Nepali," the cleaner opened a translation app on his phone.

"Get me a cellphone. I pay you later," was Mr. Shahi's message.

The Russian man smiled.

The same day, a new phone appeared.

GOOGLE TRANSLATE

At any given moment, Nepali soldiers are trying to escape the Russian Army. We spoke to 11 who succeeded.

Khakendra Khatri, an agricultural student from Rolpa, in central Nepal, said that in October he flew to Moscow with a planeload of 50 other Nepali recruits. At first, he said, they were all pumped up.

But during training, the recruits began sharing gory videos from the front line in Ukraine.

"That changed my mind," Mr. Khatri said.

He said he bribed his Russian commander 17,000 rubles (about $200) to sneak out of his base, on the outskirts of Moscow, with two other Nepali soldiers. The three soon got lost in a forest.

They began to panic. In Russia, deserters are punished by military courts and can spend years in prison. But then they saw a taxi coming down a road and waved it down. Mr. Khatri said he frantically tapped open Google Translate on his phone and used it to tell the driver they were lost tourists and needed to get to Moscow. The driver took them all the way — 15 hours — and at the end, refused to take a single ruble.

Mr. Khatri worked with intermediaries to get a flight to Kathmandu. Now back home in Rolpa, he said: "Some Russians are quite helpful. I could have died if that driver hadn't helped us."

Mr. Shahi had similar kind words for the Russian orderly. With the new phone, he spoke to his wife. She borrowed heavily from relatives — $8,000 this time — to pay another group of traffickers who said they could get her husband out.

On the morning of Jan. 23, Mr. Shahi gingerly stepped out of the Rostov hospital. He hobbled to a nearby market where a taxi was waiting for him. The driver communicated through a translation app, telling Mr. Shahi: Don't talk. I'll do the talking. If we get stopped, I'll tell them you're sick and headed to the hospital.

They drove all day to the one place that could help with the final stage of the escape: the Embassy of Nepal, in Moscow.

"ARE YOU A SOLDIER?"

For months, the families of missing Nepali soldiers have held protests and hunger strikes in front of the Russian Embassy in Kathmandu. The Nepali government says at least 32 Nepali men have died fighting for Russia; the families of the missing believe there are many more.

In March, Nepal officially requested that Russia repatriate all Nepalis who had joined the Russian Army, compensate any injured Nepali soldiers and send home any remains.

"They listened to our argument carefully," said Amrit Bahadur Rai, a spokesman for Nepal's Foreign Affairs Ministry. But Russia has yet to do anything, he said.

The Russian Embassy in Washington did not respond to emails asking for comment. Early on in the war, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia welcomed foreign fighters in his army saying they were coming on "a voluntary basis, especially not for money" and that it was important to "help them move to the war zone."

Nepal's embassy in Moscow has been trying to help fugitive soldiers move out of the war zone. Many of them, Mr. Rai said, had been tricked by traffickers and were "desperate" to get out of combat.

Prakash Mani Paudel, director general of Nepal's Department of Consular Services, said the embassy has helped 110 Nepalis escape, including Mr. Shahi, who had lost his passport in Donetsk and needed a temporary travel document, which the embassy quickly furnished.

The last step in Mr. Shahi's odyssey was Moscow's Domodedovo airport.

Dressed in black jeans and a black puffy jacket, Mr. Shahi limped into the terminal building around 8 p.m. on Jan. 24. There he met an older Indian gentleman wearing a sports jacket and slacks, who had been hired as part of the $8,000 trafficking package, Mr. Shahi said. He helped with the check-in for the flight to Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, the first leg of the trip back to Kathmandu.

But Mr. Shahi stood out. He had shrapnel scars on his cheek. His left arm and right leg were covered in bandages. He could barely walk. And he was stocky and of military age.

At the immigration desk, four tall Russian border police agents surrounded him. The Indian gentleman disappeared. The police took Mr. Shahi into another room and ordered him to strip to his underwear.

"What battalion are you in?"

"Are you a soldier?"

"Your hand's injured. There are better hospitals in Russia. Why are you returning to Nepal?"

Mr. Shahi said his body began to tremble. "I was thinking I wasn't going to make it."

The Russians were using a phone and translation app and Mr. Shahi pretended that he didn't understand.

With 15 minutes before takeoff, they let him go.

"I think they realized I was no use to them anymore," he said.

He lurched down the jetway, he said, the stress of the moment making his wounds ache even more. He took his seat, a window.

The plane began to hurtle down the runway. The roar of the engines filled his ears. A flood of emotion washed through him.

His right leg throbbed. He couldn't use his left hand. He had put his family thousands of dollars into debt and had no job. But, for the first time since he left home, he felt safe.

"I saved my own life," he said.

As the plane lifted off the runway, tears began to roll down his cheeks.

"People were looking at me," he said. "But I didn't care."

Anatoly Kurmanaev contributed reporting from Berlin.

A fumbling display, and a panicking party

NEWS ANALYSIS

Biden's shaky performance has Democrats discussing replacing him as nominee

BY PETER BAKER

KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A raspy-voiced President Biden struggled to deliver his lines and counter former President Donald J. Trump during the debate on Thursday, which one House Democrat acknowledged was a "disaster" for Mr. Biden.

President Biden hoped to build fresh momentum for his re-election bid by agreeing to debate nearly two months before he is to be formally nominated. Instead, his halting and disjointed performance on Thursday night prompted a wave of panic among Democrats and reopened discussion of whether he should be the nominee at all.

Over the course of 90 minutes, a raspy-voiced Mr. Biden struggled to deliver his lines and counter a sharp though deeply dishonest former President Donald J. Trump, raising doubts about the incumbent president's ability to wage a vigorous and competitive campaign four months before the election. Rather than dispel concerns about his age, Mr. Biden, 81, made it the central issue.

Democrats who have defended the president for months against his doubters — including members of his own administration — traded frenzied phone calls and text messages within minutes of the start of the debate as it became clear that Mr. Biden was not at his sharpest. Practically in despair, some took to social media to express shock, while others privately discussed among themselves whether it was too late to persuade the president to step aside in favor of a younger candidate.

"Biden is about to face a crescendo of calls to step aside," said a veteran Democratic strategist who has staunchly backed Mr. Biden publicly. "Joe had a deep well of affection among Democrats. It has run dry."

"Parties exist to win," this Democrat continued. "The man on the stage with Trump cannot win. The fear of Trump stifled criticism of Biden. Now that same fear is going to fuel calls for him to step down."

A group of House Democrats said they were watching the debate together, and one, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, acknowledged that it was a "disaster" for Mr. Biden. The person said the group was discussing the need for a new presidential nominee.

Mark Buell, a prominent donor for Mr. Biden and the Democratic Party, said after the debate that the president had to strongly consider whether he is the best person to be the nominee. "Do we have time to put somebody else in there?" Mr. Buell said.

He added that he was not yet calling for Mr. Biden to withdraw but that "Democratic leadership has a responsibility to go to the White House and clearly show what America's thinking, because democracy is at stake here and we're all nervous."

Mr. Biden's goal in accepting a general election debate earlier than ever held in presidential history was to recalibrate the contest as a choice between himself and a felon who tried to overturn an election and would in his view destroy American democracy if given the power of the presidency again. Mr. Biden left the CNN studio in Atlanta instead facing a referendum on himself and his capacity that will reverberate for days if not longer.

Mr. Trump, 78, appeared to coast through the debate with little trouble, rattling off one falsehood after another without being effectively challenged. He appeared confident while avoiding the excessively overbearing demeanor that had damaged him during his first debate with Mr. Biden in 2020, seemingly content to let his opponent stew in his own difficulties.

While Mr. Trump at times rambled and offered statements that were convoluted, hard to follow and flatly untrue, he did so with energy and volume that covered up his misstatements, managing to stay on offense even on issues of vulnerability for him like the Jan. 6, 2021, attack and abortion.

Mr. Biden appeared on defense much of the time and either did not use lines teed up for him by his campaign's predebate advertising or mumbled them in passing in such a way that they barely registered.

Speaking with reporters afterward, Mr. Biden indicated that he had been battling a cold. "I have a sore throat," he said. But he expressed satisfaction with his showing. "I think we did well." Asked about Democrats' concerns about his showing and calls for him to consider leaving the race, he said: "No. It's hard to debate a liar."

Mr. Biden's advisers have long dismissed any speculation about him dropping out, rejecting it as unjustified nervousness even as he has trailed Mr. Trump in battleground states needed for victory this fall. Biden aides and allies have repeatedly challenged the polls and pointed out that predictions of Democratic defeats in recent elections have been overblown. One reason they cited for an early debate was to make clear to the public that these are the two choices, and no one else will be nominated.

"Folks, the facts are if Joe Biden was going to step aside, he would have done so a long time ago," said Symone Sanders, a former aide to Vice President Kamala Harris. "That's not my opinion, that's literally the facts. So no, he won't be stepping aside tomorrow morning. He's the nominee, and a number of Dems I suspect will be out defending him over the next few days."

The campaign quickly dispatched Ms. Harris to defend the president on CNN after the debate, although even she acknowledged that "it was a slow start, that's obvious to everyone." Mr. Biden had shown he could handle the job because of his many accomplishments for Americans, she said, and "the Joe Biden I work with every day is someone who has performed in a way that has been about bringing people into the Oval Office."

Gov. Gavin Newsom of California, one of those mentioned as a possible replacement for Mr. Biden other than Ms. Harris, brushed off talk about switching candidates. "I would never turn my back on President Biden's record," he told reporters, serving as an official surrogate for the campaign in the spin room after the debate. "I would never turn my back on President Biden, and I don't know a Democrat in my party who would do so, especially after tonight."

But that did not stop the speculation. "Guys, the Dems should nominate someone else — before it's too late," Andrew Yang, who ran against Mr. Biden for the Democratic nomination in 2020, wrote on social media before the debate had ended, adding a hashtag #swapJoeout.

Former Senator Claire McCaskill, Democrat of Missouri, called it "a crisis," saying that her phone was "blowing up" with senators, operatives, donors and other distraught Democrats doing "more than hand-wringing" about what happens next.

"The fear of Trump stifled criticism of Biden. Now that same fear is going to fuel calls for him to step down."

"Joe Biden had one thing he had to do tonight, and he didn't do it," she said on MSNBC. "He had one thing he had to accomplish, and that was reassure America that he was up to the job at his age, and he failed at that tonight."

That judgment extended beyond the political class. Mr. Biden's perceived odds of winning the nomination plummeted within hours on PredictIt.org, a betting site that takes wagers on political events. His chances of being the party's candidate fell to 60 cents, down 26 cents, meaning that bettors essentially thought there was only a 60 percent chance of him being nominated even though he swept the primaries, has no internal opponent and controls the party apparatus.

No incumbent president has dropped out of the race so late in the campaign cycle, and there was little consensus about what would happen if he were to. On Thursday night, Democrats were imagining scenarios in which party elders like Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, former Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California and Representative James E. Clyburn of South Carolina were to intervene with Mr. Biden.

There was no indication that any of them would agree to do so. Other Democrats said they feared it was too late, noting that Mr. Biden is a proud, stubborn man who has long insisted he is the best equipped to defeat Mr. Trump. Democrats have long fretted that there is no obvious successor, uncertain that Ms. Harris, Mr. Newsom or any other party figure could rise to the challenge.

The verdict from U.S. allies: 'A total shambles'

BY MOTOKO RICH

During Thursday night's debate, President Biden told former President Donald J. Trump that the United States is the "envy of the world."

After watching their performance, many of America's friends in Asia beg to differ.

In Seoul, Singapore, Sydney and beyond, the back-and-forth between the blustering Mr. Trump and the halting Mr. Biden set analysts fretting — and not just about who might win.

"That whole thing was an unmitigated disaster," wrote Simon Canning, a communications manager in Australia, on X. "A total shambles, from both the candidates and the moderators. America is in very, very deep trouble."

Countries that have hoped the United States could balance a rising China and deter North Korea's nuclear ambitions spent the past four years trying to rebuild ties after Mr. Trump's first term deeply rattled alliances in the region. The debate on Thursday night immediately resurfaced serious questions about how U.S. politics might affect stability across Asia.

Chan Heng Chee, who served as Singapore's ambassador to the United States from 1996 to 2012, said the quality of the debates has deteriorated compared with previous ones. Mr. Biden's disjointed performance and Mr. Trump's repeated attacks and factual inaccuracies unsettled those who rely on the U.S. to act as a trusted global partner.

"Now everyone is watching for visuals," Ms. Chan said. "Do the candidates look like they are able to do the job, or is age a problem? Facts do not matter now, and civility has totally gone out of the window."

In Japan and South Korea, analysts detected a shift in the political winds toward Mr. Trump, and it prompted renewed questions about Mr. Biden's age and ability to project strength.

"It was clearly a Trump win and a nail in the coffin for the Biden campaign," said Lee Byong-chul, a professor at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University in Seoul. "Trump looked healthy, compared with Biden, who came across as an old, stammering hard-to-hear grandfather. We must now brace ourselves for a second Trump administration."

In Japan, America's largest ally in Asia, officials have almost always been assiduous about declaring that they are happy working with whomever the United States elects. But Mr. Trump's comments during the debate about how he does not want to spend money on allies are likely to revive anxieties about how his approach to international relationships is transactional rather than enduring.

"My guess is that the Japanese policymakers are thinking, 'OK, it's going to be Trump quite likely, so we have to cement institutional ties as much as possible so he can't undo them,'" said Koichi Nakano, a political scientist at Sophia University in Tokyo. "That is like tying yourself to a mast that may be sinking very soon, so it's a false illusion of security."

If Trump wins, though, Japanese officials may feel less stress about the demands he might make on Tokyo to pay more for its own defense or for the basing of American troops in Japan.

In the past two years, Japan has vowed to increase its defense budget and stretched the limits on what it could do under its pacifist Constitution, including purchasing more fighter jets and Tomahawk missiles, measures that Mr. Trump pushed during his visits to Japan as president.

The increased spending and military purchases "are in line with what he has been thinking," said Ichiro Fujisaki, a former Japanese ambassador to Washington, referring to Mr. Trump. "If we are going in the opposite direction of what he was saying," Mr. Fujisaki said, "we would have to review our position, but we're not."

ERIC LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The presidential debate on a screen at a tavern in Washington. President Biden's performance raised questions about U.S. commitments.

"Trump looked healthy, compared with Biden, who came across as an old, stammering hard-to-hear grandfather."

Across the region, one of the most pressing concerns is how Mr. Trump might exacerbate widening tensions with China or undermine the fragile stability in the region.

If Mr. Trump wins, Washington would most likely pursue a strategy that seeks to elevate U.S. influence in the Indo-Pacific in opposition to China, "but in a way that would prioritize U.S. pre-eminence, and not necessarily the network of alliances and partnerships it has in a collective sense," said Don McLain Gill, a Manila-based international studies lecturer at De La Salle University. "Being a transactional leader, there are concerns that Trump may abandon key areas of U.S. commitment, such as Taiwan."

On social media in China, the presidential debate was a top trending topic on the platform Weibo. Official Chinese media outlets largely played it straight, reporting each candidates' remarks — and their lack of a handshake — without adding much commentary.

But in comments online, some users compared Mr. Trump's red tie to a Communist red scarf, and some social media commentators jokingly called Trump "nation builder" because of how his leadership could accelerate China's global rise.

The stock of Wisesoft Co., a Chinese company whose name in Mandarin translates to "Trump Wins Big," jumped 10 percent in trading on Friday in Shenzhen, according to Bloomberg.

Social media merriment aside, Shen Dingli, a Shanghai-based international relations scholar, said the debate had only reinforced something the Chinese government has long thought: No matter who the next president is, U.S. policy toward China is only likely to harden, if not the same.

The candidates sparred over who had done a better job managing trade with China, Mr. Shen said, when in reality the Biden administration had continued Trump-era tariffs.

"Even if the Democrats urgently choose a new, younger candidate, they will all be set on treating China as a long-term, strategic threat, even more so than Russia," he said. "I believe Chinese leaders don't have any illusions."

What was clear after Thursday's debate was that few in the region feel optimistic about any of the electoral options in the United States.

Kasit Piromya, Thailand's former foreign minister from 2008 to 2011 and a former ambassador to the United States, lamented the state of American politics.

"Where are the good ones? Where are the brave ones?" Mr. Kasit said, adding that it was now incumbent on countries in Southeast Asia to have a foreign policy vision of their own. "Why should I wait for Trump to be bad? I should be able to organize myself and maybe work with other friends."

Ja-Ian Chong, an associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore, said President Biden looked very tired, while former President Trump sounded more unpredictable in terms of what he would expect from other friendly countries and how he would deal with China.

"It creates new problems, for trying to manage the relationship with the U.S.," he said.

"In general," he said, "policymakers want a clear, committed and steady U.S. presence. One that is wavering, weak and uncommitted is as troubling as one that is mercurial and inconsistent."

"You're looking at the two extremes," Mr. Chong added. "It's hard to imagine right now what a more moderate center for the United States looks like."

Reporting was contributed by Damien Cave, Sui-Lee Wee, Choe Sang-Hun, Vivian Wang and Camille Elemia.

Business

Is your driving being secretly scored?

Some carmakers and apps are collecting data and sharing it with insurers

BY KASHMIR HILL

JENN ACKERMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; ILLUSTRATION BY NYT

You know you have a credit score. Did you know that you might also have a driver score?

The score reflects the safety of your driving habits — how often you slam on the brakes, speed, look at your phone or drive late at night.

While you can see your credit score, you will have a harder time finding out what your driving score is. But auto insurance companies can get it — and that could affect the rate you pay.

For the last two decades, auto insurers have been trying to get people to enroll in programs, commonly called usage-based insurance plans, that monitor their day-to-day driving so rates better reflect the actual risk. But privacy-minded consumers have been reluctant to sign up.

So the industry has taken a different tack, getting data about how people drive from automakers or from apps that drivers already have on their phones. Experts say most people have no idea the insurance industry can track them this way.

After The New York Times revealed that General Motors was sharing driving behavior with LexisNexis, customers filed dozens of lawsuits and the carmaker ended its contract with the data broker. But data is still being collected from other automakers and it is still being collected from apps.

Driving behavior analysis, or telematics, as the insurance industry calls it, could be better for consumers, leading to personalized rates that are more fair. Plus, if people have to pay more for their risky driving, they may drive more cautiously, leading to safer roads. But this will happen only if drivers are aware that their behavior is being monitored.

According to the companies collecting and selling the data, consumers agree to share their information with the insurance industry. But the murky consent process means people may not realize what they are opting into.

"Most consumers are put off by the idea of an insurance company riding shotgun," said Michael DeLong of the nonprofit Consumer Federation of America.

SMARTPHONE APPS

The smartphone apps collecting driver data may not be obvious at first glance. One, Life360, is used by parents to keep track of their children. MyRadar offers weather forecasts. GasBuddy helps people save on fuel costs.

All of these apps also have opt-in driving analysis features that rely on sensor and motion data from the phone. You can turn on these features to get notifications if a family member crashes or suggestions for a more fuel-efficient route to work. Those features, though, are provided by an analytics company, Arity, which was founded by Allstate in 2016 and pays for access to the data. What is not made clear when people sign up for the features is that Arity also analyzes how risky their driving is for insurance purposes.

On GasBuddy, for instance, users can turn on a feature that rates the fuel efficiency of their drives, a feature "powered by Arity." Brandon Logsdon, a spokesman for the company, said users "agree to Arity's privacy statement before they opt in to the Drives function."

But this agreement is in small gray font under a big red button labeled "Join Drives." The tiny disclosure says simply that by clicking "Join Drives" you will share "certain information" with Arity and agree to Arity's privacy statement, which is hyperlinked. The language does not explain what Arity is or does.

The company sells access to the driving scores of tens of millions of people. Auto insurance companies can "request a person's individual driving score, which is delivered instantly," according to Allstate's website.

The scores "look at drivers' performance behind the wheel, including how often they brake suddenly, speed or use their phones," according to an Arity blog post aimed at insurance marketers, and can be used to target potential customers based on "10 different risk categories."

Last month, Kathleen Lomax, a New Jersey mother who paid $100 annually for Life360 to track her husband and twin 18-year-old daughters, reached out to the company to ask if it was selling their driving data. An automated response, "crafted with the help of A.I.," told her that Life360 did share driving behavior data with Arity.

"No one who realizes what they're doing would consent," said Ms. Lomax, who canceled her subscription.

A spokeswoman for Life360 wrote in an email that "personally identifiable driving data," for Ms. Lomax and her family, were never shared with an insurance company, that a Life360 member must consent and that Arity was required to "take steps with its partners" to identify Life360 as a data source when it was used to generate insurance quotes.

"Most consumers are put off by the idea of an insurance company riding shotgun."

In a statement, GasBuddy said Arity provides users "who choose to opt in with personalized offerings and enhanced services." MyRadar did not respond to requests for comment.

When a person shops around for auto insurance, the insurer needs to get consent to have access to the driving data collected by these apps, said Arity's spokeswoman, Stacy Silver. But how explicit is that request? A spokesman for CSAA, a regional insurer for AAA members that uses Arity's product in some states, said the consent to use smartphone data happened when it informed consumers that "we may collect third party data and reports." That is standard language that insurers use to view a credit report, for example, and many consumers may click past it without reading closely.

Companies that create consumer reports are required by the Fair Credit Reporting Act to provide them upon request. Not all of the millions of people in Arity's database can get their individual driving report, though; the company provides a report to a driver only if an insurance company has requested it as part of a quote.

Not all insurers are using Arity's driving data. Spokesmen for GEICO and USAA said they collected driving behavior only from people who downloaded a dedicated smartphone app to track how they drove.

Allstate said it planned to "soon offer consumers the choice to get a personalized rate based on their driving history," as collected by Arity.

A NEW METRIC

Auto insurance pricing is complicated. A number of factors go into determining it, including credit history, gender, marital status, age, what car you drive and where you live, said Dale Porfilio of the Insurance Information Institute, a trade group.

"We are trying to predict the future, which, of course, nobody can know with certainty," Mr. Porfilio said. "It's a core tenet of insurance that the price of the policy should reflect the risk of the policy."

He said the insurance industry had access to lots of data, and he described telematics, when drivers granted access to it, as "just one of the most recent variables that has come into play as a tool to align price to risk."

One reason it may be particularly appealing right now, Mr. Porfilio said, is that traffic citation data, which insurers have long relied on to predict risk, is not as reliable as it once was.

Driving has gotten more dangerous, but the police are giving out fewer tickets, a decline that some attribute to a law enforcement pullback after the pandemic and widespread protests over

DRIVERS, PAGE 9

Trump, the 'tariff man,' vows to ratchet up a trade war

WASHINGTON

Levies during his term reduced imports but raised prices for U.S. consumers

BY ANA SWANSON
AND ALAN RAPPEPORT

JADE GAO/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

The Yantian port in Shenzhen, China. Former President Donald J. Trump has proposed a 60 percent tariff on goods from China.

In March 2018, a day after announcing sweeping tariffs on metals imported from America's allies and adversaries alike, President Donald J. Trump took to social media to share one of his central economic philosophies: "Trade wars are good, and easy to win."

As president, Mr. Trump presided over the biggest increase in U.S. tariffs since the Great Depression, hitting China, Canada, the European Union, Mexico, India and other governments with stiff levies. They hit back, imposing tariffs on American soybeans, whiskey, orange juice and motorcycles. U.S. agricultural exports plummeted, prompting Mr. Trump to send $23 billion to farmers to help offset losses.

Now, as he runs for president again, Mr. Trump is promising to ratchet up his trade war to a much greater degree. He has proposed "universal base-line tariffs on most foreign products," including higher levies on certain countries that devalue their currency. In interviews, he has floated plans for a 10 percent tariff on most imports and a tariff of 60 percent or more on Chinese goods. He has also posited cutting the federal income tax and relying on tariffs for revenue instead.

Mr. Trump, who once proclaimed himself "Tariff Man," has long argued that tariffs would help American factories, end the gap between what America imported and what it exported and increase American jobs.

His first round of levies hit more than $400 billion worth of imports, including steel, solar panels, washing machines and Chinese goods like smart watches, chemicals, bicycle helmets and motors. His rationale was that import taxes would revive American manufacturing, reduce reliance on foreign goods and allow U.S. companies to better compete against cheap products from China and other countries.

Economists say the tariffs did reduce imports and encouraged U.S. factory production for certain industries, including steel, semiconductors and computer equipment. But that came at a very high cost, one that most likely offset any overall gains. Studies show that the tariffs resulted in higher prices for American consumers and factories that depend on foreign inputs, and reduced U.S. exports for certain goods that were subject to retaliation.

Mr. Trump is now envisioning taxing perhaps 10 times as many imports as he did during his first term, an approach that economists say could trigger a trade war that drives up already high prices and plunges the U.S. into a recession.

David Autor, an economics professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said the proposals would have "a very large effect on prices almost immediately."

"I don't think they'll do it," Mr. Autor said. "It could easily cause a recession."

In a recent letter, 16 Nobel Prize-winning economists wrote that they were "deeply concerned" about the risks a second Trump administration posed to the economy, inflation and the rule of law.

"We believe that a second Trump term would have a negative impact on the U.S.'s economic standing in the world and a destabilizing effect on the U.S.'s domestic economy," they wrote.

Mr. Trump and his supporters have a much more positive view of tariffs, arguing that they serve as leverage with foreign governments, reduce the trade deficit with China and result in the growth of U.S. manufacturing jobs.

"A second Trump term would have a negative impact on the U.S.'s economic standing."

"I happen to be a big believer in tariffs because I think tariffs give you two things: They give you economic gain, but they also give you political gain," Mr. Trump said on a recent podcast.

Karoline Leavitt, the Trump campaign national press secretary, said in a statement that "the American people don't need worthless out-of-touch Nobel Prize winners to tell them which president put more money in their pockets."

"President Trump built the strongest economy in American history," she said. "In just three years, Joe Biden's out-of-control spending created the worst inflation crisis in generations."

Jamieson L. Greer, a partner in the international trade team at the King & Spalding law firm, who was involved with China trade negotiations during the Trump administration, said the view of Trump officials was that tariffs "can help support U.S. manufacturing jobs in particular, especially to the extent that they're remediating an unfair trade practice."

China has long engaged in policies that disadvantage American workers, but other countries also have unfair trade and tax policies or misaligned currencies, Mr. Greer said.

"If you level out that playing field, it makes it so that Americans don't have to compete unfairly," he said.

Mr. Trump's tariffs have domestic supporters among the industries that have benefited from them. And President Biden gave them his own stamp of approval by choosing to keep Mr. Trump's China tariffs in place while adding some of his own, including on electric cars, steel and semiconductors.

But some of the industries that were hit hardest by Mr. Trump's trade wars are not looking forward to a sequel. Executives in sectors like retail and spirits worry that another round of tariffs could reignite tensions, raise their costs and again close off critical markets abroad.

Spirit exports to Europe declined by 20 percent after the European Union imposed a 25 percent retaliatory tariff on American whiskey in response to the Trump administration's tariffs on steel and aluminum. And the China tariffs increased the prices that retailers had to pay for their products, forcing them to either raise prices for their customers or cut into their profits.

"We need a trade policy, not just more tariffs," said David French, executive vice president of government relations at the National Retail Federation. His group, which represents department stores, e-commerce sites and grocers, ran a television ad campaign opposing the Trump tariffs in 2018. "All they've done is add friction to the supply chain and cost consumers $220 billion."

"Former President Trump looks at trade as some sort of zero-sum game — if you win, I lose and vice versa," Mr. French said. "That's really not the way trade works."

The power of tariffs to help or hinder exports is clear in industries that eventually won a reprieve. In 2021, whiskey tariffs were temporarily suspended as part of a deal the Biden administration made with the European Union. American whiskey exports to the bloc rose from $439 million in 2021 to $705 million last year.

Chris Swonger, the chief executive of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, said he was hopeful that, if re-elected, Mr. Trump would appreciate that strong exports of American spirits would help reduce the trade deficit. The lobbying group wants the E.U. tariff suspension, which expires next March, to be extended.

"For President Trump, obviously we appreciate and respect his efforts to reduce the trade deficit," said Mr. Swonger, who has made his case to Trump campaign officials. "Imposing tariffs on distilled spirits would be counter to reducing the trade deficit."

Research suggests that the tariffs did accomplish their goal of increasing domestic production in the industries they protected, but did so by imposing other costs on the U.S. economy.

One nonpartisan government study found that the tariffs on foreign steel and aluminum increased U.S. production of those metals by $2.2 billion in 2021. But American factories that use steel and aluminum to make other things, like cars, tin cans and appliances, had to pay higher costs for their materials, and that reduced the output of those factories by $3.5 billion in the same year.

Studies suggest that the tariffs also had a mixed record on jobs. In a recent paper, Mr. Autor and other economists found that the cumulative effect of Mr. Trump's trade policies and other countries' retaliation was slightly negative for American jobs, or at best a wash.

In terms of inflation, studies have estimated that American households faced higher prices as a result of the tariffs — from several hundred dollars to more than $1,000 annually.

But economists say consumers probably did not associate the higher prices they paid with the tariffs, given that inflation was low throughout Mr. Trump's tenure and the economy was strong.

While the economy remains robust, prices have spiked since 2021, and inflation remains elevated. That could make tariff-induced price increases more obvious and more painful this time around.

A recent analysis by the Peterson Institute of International Economics found that if Mr. Trump did impose a 10 percent tariff on all goods and a 60 percent tariff on China, it would cost a typical household in the middle of the income distribution about $1,700 in increased expenses each year.

Another analysis, by the right-leaning American Action Forum, estimated that a 10 percent tariff could impose additional annual costs of up to $2,350 per American household. Adding a 60 percent tariff on China would add another $1,950 to U.S. household costs.

The burden of those tariffs would fall more heavily on poorer households, because they spend a larger share of their income on everyday products.

That could ultimately backfire on Mr. Trump, given that voter concerns about inflation are top of mind.

As he waited in line to attend Mr. Trump's rally last Saturday in Philadelphia, Paul Rozick, an electrical warehouse manager from Bensalem, Pa., said high grocery and gas prices had outpaced his pay raises.

"Inflation is going up like 20 percent, but our paychecks go up like 2 percent," Mr. Rozick said. "I've got less money in the bank because I'm spending more money when I walk out the door."

BUSINESS

In one building, solutions to two civic problems

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

New York neighborhood wanted a library; it got affordable housing, too

BY MICHAEL KIMMELMAN

Why can't we do more of this more easily?

A handsome library branch in Inwood, at the northern tip of Manhattan, had its unofficial opening on June 20. It's the second library in New York during the past year or so to try something clever and innovative: partnership with a 100 percent affordable housing development. New subsidized apartments occupy a 12-floor tower above the library.

These days, the not-in-my-backyard types in the United States are always fighting affordable housing projects. And communities are increasingly desperate for libraries. One obvious solution is the twofer — building housing and a library together — because there's strength in numbers.

A few years ago I wrote about several of these library/housing combos in Chicago ("co-location" is the lingo developers use), some of them designed by top-flight architects there like John Ronan and Brian Lee. Boston is trying this out. New York is just the latest to road-test what seems like a no-brainer.

The financial logic is simple. Libraries pairing with housing developers can trim construction costs. Developers can leverage city-owned property to finesse both the not-in-my-backyard types and the byzantine economics of affordable development.

But getting these projects built is a slog.

That earlier branch I mentioned belongs to the Brooklyn Public Library in New York. With a fine, sunny, three-story design by Carol Loewenson, a partner at Mitchell Giurgola Architects, it opened late last year in the Sunset Park neighborhood beneath 49 affordable units on six upper floors. Inwood is bigger: 174 new subsidized apartments.

But that's only half the Inwood project. In addition to the library and apartment tower, which has its own entrance and name, The Eliza, the development also includes a pre-K (prekindergarten), a study center, a teaching kitchen and community spaces.

Andrew Berman, a gifted veteran of New York public architecture and its crazy bureaucracy, is the library architect. Chris Fogarty of Fogarty/Finger is the lead architect for the whole development. Fogarty clads The Eliza in beige bricks and fluted terra-cotta panels and manages a number of other civic-minded upgrades, like adding a terrace to the pre-K and bringing light into some of the big underground community rooms, which are still under construction.

He and Berman also synced the layouts so that the upstairs apartments accommodate the concrete columns and beams that support the library's open plan reading room, guaranteeing that the library's architecture, which serves the widest public, remained a priority.

AMIR HAMJA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The new library branch in northern Manhattan, which also has 174 subsidized apartments, a teaching kitchen and community spaces.

Alas, both Inwood and Sunset Park took longer than they should have because they had to run the usual gantlets of public reviews and community protests.

What was there to complain about?

In Inwood's case, community outreach efforts by library officials and the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development began seven years ago. Local objections weren't to features of the project like the pre-K or study center, which responded to community asks. They resulted from a larger issue.

The development relied on an upzoning of the neighborhood that was first proposed more than a decade ago by the de Blasio administration. Upzoning meant that taller buildings could be built than Inwood had previously permitted, to encourage the addition of more, and in particular affordable, housing. As part of the rezoning, City Hall committed to adding some 1,600 subsidized homes on public sites, "expanding Inwood's affordable housing stock for the first time in decades," according to a study released by the New York City Economic Development Corporation.

Inwood certainly could use more affordable apartments. A 2023 study by the Furman Center at New York University counted fewer than 160 affordable apartments built in Inwood and neighboring Washington Heights during the previous decade. It is home to a smaller share of public housing than most city neighborhoods.

For years, tenant advocates there fought the upzoning, arguing that taller buildings would not just destroy the area's historic midrise character but also bring in a flood of market-rate development, accelerating gentrification.

The Eliza is 14 stories. Many older apartment buildings around it are six stories. Inwood is hilly, so buildings appear taller on the skyline from some angles, lower from others. The tallest new buildings that are going up in Inwood because of the rezoning include both subsidized developments and mixed-income apartment towers, several of them more than 20 stories high, mostly nearer the Hudson and East rivers, where the island declines.

I detect a growing frustration with regulations that thwart efforts to keep pace with emergencies.

I leave it to residents to decide whether 14 stories along a commercial stretch of upper Broadway is egregious.

Of course it was really fear of market-rate development and displacement that energized much of the opposition to the rezoning. Even a single new market-rate apartment posed "an existential threat to our homes and our community," protesters argued back in 2015 when one developer proposed a 15-story building just a few blocks south of the new library on the site of a long-derelict garage. It would have included 355 rental apartments, half of them subsidized.

Aside from a satellite swath of Columbia University's campus, Inwood remains largely a middle- and working-class enclave with a significant Dominican population. One-fifth of children in the district live below the poverty line. So fears of displacement are real.

But does every development these days have to turn into the Battle of the Somme?

In the middle of the last century, New Yorkers had had enough of politicians and power brokers tearing down Penn Station and bulldozing the South Bronx. Community groups began demanding more seats at the decision-making table. They opened top-down government to bottom-up perspectives around environmental, social justice and other concerns.

Since then, however, more laws and regulations passed to enshrine community feedback, preserve landmarks and compel environmental review have increasingly been weaponized by not-in-my-backyard people of all stripes. An alliance has emerged between these well-connected, well-to-do people and tenant advocates in neighborhoods like Inwood, both of whom, for very different reasons, see nearly every change as a threat.

They are now frequently the loudest voices, if not a majority. Even projects like Brooklyn Bridge Park, one of the most transformative public-private urban renewal efforts in generations, salvaging a declining swath of industrial waterfront, faced decades of reviews, cutbacks and protests, with opponents predicting financial calamity.

When such projects work out, there is little accounting for the public costs of this process, notwithstanding that accountability was the original, driving argument behind expanding the regulatory system and participatory rules.

Maybe it's wishful thinking, but I detect a growing public frustration, across the political spectrum, with regulations and processes that thwart efforts to keep pace with "existential" emergencies like climate change and the housing crisis.

Something has to give.

I suggest looking at the modest but uplifting Inwood library, if only to be reminded of what we can accomplish with excellent architecture at a neighborhood scale.

Berman is a refined modernist with a discreet feel for simple materials, an understanding of classic forms and a deep love of the city. He knows that good design, attuned to place, conveys respect and becomes a source of pride and distinction in a neighborhood. He has designed branch libraries in Staten Island, the Bronx and elsewhere. They are all different and wonderful.

With Inwood, there is a monumentality to the reading room that can remind you of an earlier era in New York's civic architecture. You might not register at first some of the architectural decisions that make the library uplifting, but you feel it: a low entrance to the side that sets up the turn into the tall reading room as a drama of compression and release; a ceiling of striated, white oak strips that warm cold surfaces and unify a snaking layout.

And loads of light. A lighted screen at one end of the reading room contains a staircase to a mezzanine where sun filters through a skylight that is the architecture's signature feature. Light pours, as well, through IMAX-size windows along Broadway.

The view out those windows from the mezzanine takes in a slice of Fort Tryon Park, a storefront orthodontist and several midcentury apartment blocks. It's classic, neighborhood New York, and a reminder.

The city can be impossible sometimes.

But it can still do great things, when we let it.

Insurance firms can easily get access to your driving data

DRIVERS, FROM PAGE 8

George Floyd's death four years ago.

But the bigger appeal of telematics is that it could more accurately predict risk for individual drivers and be a fairer way to set rates.

Most insurers will charge a 24-year-old man who lives in a busy city more than a 50-year-old woman who lives in the suburbs, an Arity promotional document states, but what if this particular man is a cautious driver who rarely uses his car while the woman is a road-rager who racks up the miles?

Alan Demers, founder of InsurTech Consulting, predicted that everyone would eventually have a driving score, and that good drivers — which most people think they are — might well prefer it.

"Don't judge me based on everyone else," Mr. Demers said. "Judge me based on me."

On this point, advocates for consumers agree with the industry.

"There's a lot of unfair discrimination in auto insurance," Mr. DeLong of the Consumer Federation of America said. "Auto insurance companies use a lot of socioeconomic factors, like your credit score or your job or your education level, like whether you went to high school or to college or whether you're married."

People with poor credit scores pay much more for auto insurance even if they have clean driving records, Mr. DeLong has found.

"Telematics has substantial promise for consumers, and it could be a way to better price auto insurance," he said. Still, he had concerns that insurance companies could become overly invasive or use data in ways that lead to new forms of discrimination.

What time of day someone drives, for example, can be tracked. Significant time spent driving at night hurts a person's score because of poorer visibility and drivers on the road who are more likely to be tired or inebriated. But that, Mr. DeLong pointed out, penalizes people who work the night shift and are more likely to be lower-income workers, such as janitors.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDRES KUDACKI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A safety feature of the Life360 app, above, tracked the driving habits of Kathleen Lomax and her two 18-year-old daughters, right. "No one who realizes what they're doing would consent," said Ms. Lomax, who ended up canceling her $100 annual subscription.

Mr. DeLong also objects to consumers' being "unknowingly or unwillingly enrolled in these programs."

Chi Chi Wu, a lawyer at the National Consumer Law Center, raised another concern: The law requires consumer reporting agencies such as Arity to make efforts to ensure that their data is accurate.

"They need to have procedures to figure out when the app is collecting data about you as the driver versus the passenger," she said.

Ms. Silver, Arity's spokeswoman, said Arity "uses advanced technology to determine if a person is driving or riding as a passenger."

Last year, Rob Leathern, a tech executive in Texas, got a seemingly innocuous email from Toyota: "Good news, Robert! You've been identified by Toyota Insurance as a safe driver."

The email promised "big savings" from Progressive and invited him to get a quote for his 2023 Sequoia sport utility vehicle. When Mr. Leathern clicked the link in the email, it took him to a Toyota Insurance website that told him to enter his ZIP code and "get a quote."

If he clicked the quote button, the website informed him, he would authorize a company called Connected Analytic Services to send his contact information, vehicle identification number and "certain vehicle driving data" to Progressive.

Mr. Leathern wanted to know what information was being collected about him.

After a month of phone calls, emails and data privacy requests to Toyota and Connected Analytic Services — which turned out to be an insurance data broker — he got a report in January from Connected Analytic Services that detailed the previous six months of driving in his S.U.V. (Corey Proffitt, a Toyota spokesman, said that Connected Analytic Services is a Toyota affiliate that anonymously shares location and driving data with partner insurers, and that customers can manage what is shared about them in the data privacy portal of the Toyota/Lexus app.)

What you can do

- Check the privacy settings on your car's dashboard system and in smartphone apps.
- If an app connects to your car, or gives you feedback about your driving, that's a good place to start.
- In some apps, such as Life360 and MyRadar, you can select this option: "Do not sell my personal information."
- Two apps you don't have to worry about: Google Maps and Waze. Google, which owns both apps, said it doesn't provide driving data that's linked to individuals to third parties.

The report had two parts. A driving summary included Mr. Leathern's mileage, how many times his car's safety systems had been engaged and the number of times he had braked and accelerated at a rate "that insurers view as harder than necessary for defensive driving."

There was also a Microsoft Excel file with time-stamped lists of his every offending event and the latitude and longitude for where they occurred. In the speeding tab, for example, there were more than 200 second-by-second entries for the handful of drives during which Mr. Leathern had exceeded 85 miles (137 kilometers) per hour.

"I had no idea they'd be collecting this data, let alone using it this way," he said.

Ronald Davis, a spokesman for Progressive, said the insurer got identified driving data from a carmaker only when customers provided explicit consent to use that data to determine their rate.

In a presentation for investors in 2022, Progressive said data about how people drove was improving its pricing accuracy. It included a screen that a potential customer would see when seeking a quote. "Get a personalized rate based on your driving behavior," the screen read, with a yes-or-no option to "use my existing driving data."

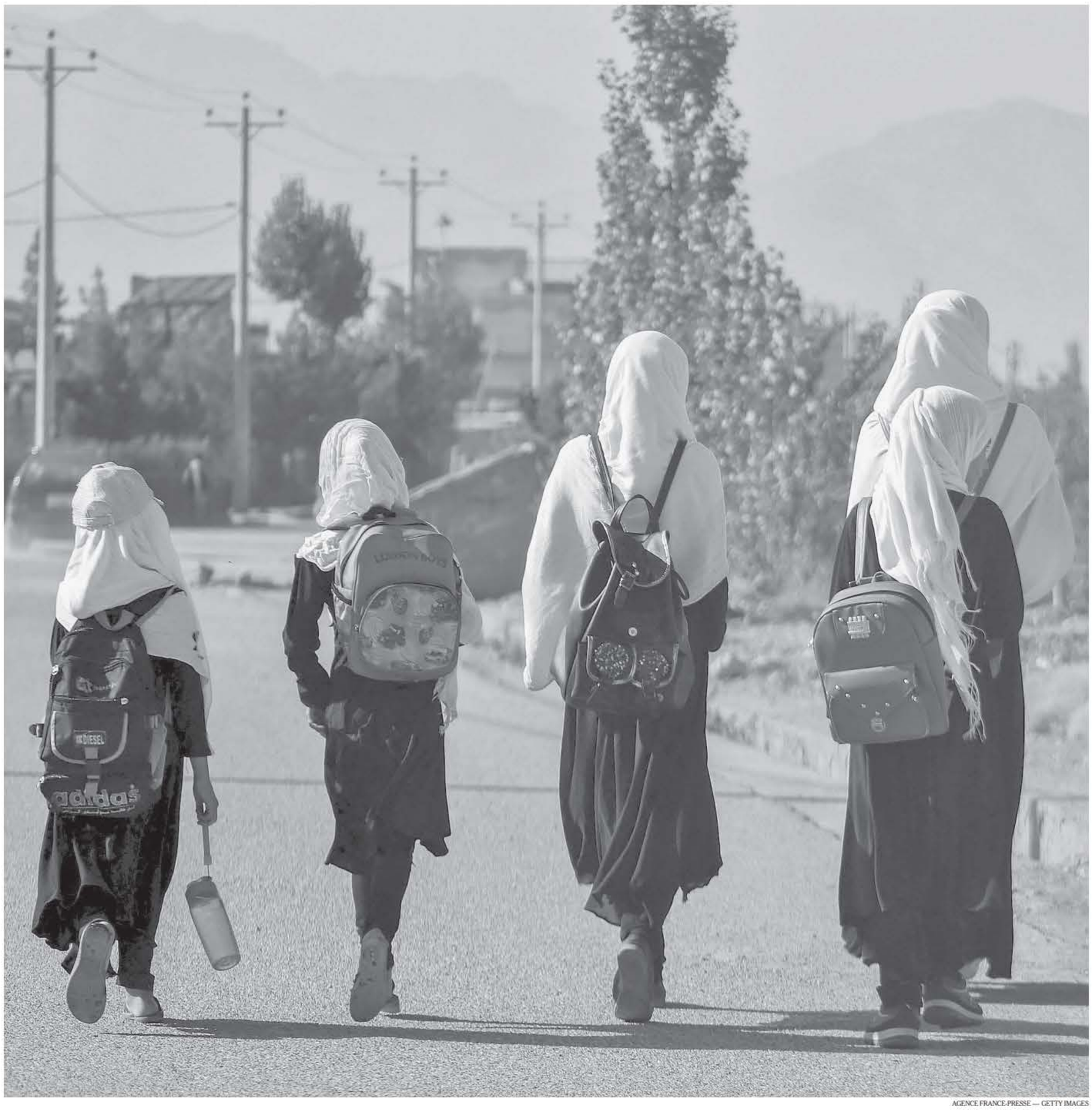
"When quoting a new policy with Progressive, we specifically inform eligible customers that driving data is available from their vehicle manufacturer and ask them if they would like us to use that data in determining their rate," Mr. Davis said. He noted that 70 percent of people who had chosen to share their behavior had gotten a discount.

Opinion

Women must be invited to debate the future of Afghanistan

The international community must insist on reversing the restriction of Afghan women's and girls' rights and on women's meaningful participation in decision making.

Richard Bennett



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

In May 2022, nine months after the Taliban retook power in Afghanistan, I visited a girls' secondary school that was still open in the north in spite of a ban on education for girls above sixth grade. Communities in the area, which has a long history of valuing education, had refused to comply. I met with a group of 11th-grade math students who told me about their hopes for the future. "I don't want to end up trapped at home and condemned to a domestic life," one female student told me. "I want to finish school and become a teacher so that I can help my family and others."

I ended that visit to Afghanistan with hope that perhaps the situation would not become as dire as I — and many Afghans — feared. But when I returned a year later, everything had changed. The school was closed. Instead of attending lessons, the student and her classmates were forced to stay at home, their teachers transferred to a primary school. Now, among the many other challenges facing girls and women under the Taliban's rule, a mental health crisis has gripped the country. Girls report anxiety, depression and hopelessness, and there have been reports showing an alarming surge in suicides.

It is against this backdrop that the United Nations will convene a third meeting of international special envoys in Doha, Qatar on June 30 and July 1 to discuss a political path forward for Afghanistan. The Taliban have accepted the U.N.'s invitation to join. (They declined to attend February's meeting.) After discussions with the Taliban, the meeting's agenda will focus on fighting narcotics and helping the private sector — and does not include human rights or women's issues, and neither women nor Afghan civil society representatives will be included.

The focus on politically neutral topics at the meeting in Doha, Qatar, was designed to entice the Taliban to the table. A formal discussion of human rights will be missing.

If these exclusions are the price of the Taliban's presence in Doha, the cost is too high.

When the Taliban retook power in August 2021, its leaders initially said that education for girls above the sixth grade would be suspended until conditions were suitable under Islamic rules. Now, more than 1,000 days later, school remains off limits for girls older than 12, and restrictions on education have expanded to universities. The Taliban now say education is "an internal matter," and it remains unclear when — or if — schools will reopen to girls.

Denial of education is just one of many Taliban decrees against women. Female civil servants were instructed not to report to work when the Taliban retook power. Women are now barred from working at nongovernmental organizations and humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations. Some female-owned businesses, like beauty salons, have been shuttered. Women and girls need to be accompanied by a male relative to travel.

The net result is that today, women and girls have been virtually erased from public life, deprived of their most basic rights. Afghan women began describing the Taliban's policies as gender apartheid in the 1990s, and they and many others, including me, want such policies to be criminalized under international law.

Boys, raised in a system that legitimizes the dehumanization of women and girls, may follow their leaders' example and continue to treat women badly, and they are vulnerable to radicalization, sowing seeds for security concerns that extend beyond Afghanistan's borders. The crippling gender policies and their violent enforcement are also severely depriving L.G.B.T.Q. people of their fundamental rights.

Despite all of this, Afghan women and girls are pushing back. Some have protested in the streets to demand the restoration of their rights, risking arrest, detention and violence. In the face of shuttered schools, girls with access to the internet, who are a minority, are taking classes in English, math and science, and female entrepreneurs are moving online, finding creative ways to circumvent restrictions on their movement. "We did not create the Taliban, but we are the ones who have to live with them in control," one woman told me. "There is no other choice than to find ways to survive and learn."

It would be easy to leave these women to carry on their struggle alone, citing the excuse that the international community has done enough damage in Afghanistan and should stay out of the nation's affairs. But that would be a grave disservice both to those women and girls showing defiance and to many others who do not have the economic capacity to fight back. We have an obligation to meet their bravery with increased protection, support and solidarity.

The focus on politically neutral topics at the meeting in Doha was designed to entice the Taliban to the table. A formal discussion of human rights will be missing, despite the fact that Afghans who disagree with the Taliban's ideology have made clear that respect for human rights, especially the rights of women and girls, must be a prerequisite for any engagement with the Taliban. This is happening despite the fact that an independent assessment requested by the Security Council last year advised any road map for Afghanistan's reintegration into the international community should include measurable improvements in human rights.

Afghanistan has suffered more than four decades of conflict and had a questionable human rights record during the 20 years of the Islamic republic. But since retaking power, the Taliban has not only attacked the rights of women and girls; they have been responsible for wide-ranging violations and abuses — including killings, disappearances and arbitrary detentions — as well as a campaign of retaliation against former enemies, despite their claim of an amnesty. People from minority communities are especially at risk.

Also conspicuously absent at the main Doha meeting will be any representation of non-Taliban Afghans. Though some civil society and women's groups will be included in meetings on the sidelines, this representation appears to have come only after significant external pressure, but it should have been baked in from the beginning. This is not the first time non-Taliban Afghans have been sidelined from political discussions, though history has repeatedly shown that failure to include all Afghans in political processes undermines their credibility and sustainability.

The Taliban are not recognized by the United Nations as a government and should not be treated as such. They must not be allowed to use the threat of backing out of the talks to dictate the terms of this conference or any future international process. It is a mistake to measure the success of this meeting by whether the Taliban show up.

The bravery, dignity and perseverance of millions of Afghans in the face of such gross injustice must be matched by strong, principled and effective international leadership. Afghan women and girls have often said to me that their greatest fear used to be that the Taliban would return to power. Now they say that they fear the Taliban will be recognized simply because of their power, in disregard of their cruel policies and practices.

The international community must insist on reversing the restriction of Afghan women's and girls' rights, on women's meaningful participation in decision making and on accountability. Having these issues explicitly on the agenda in Doha would still be an important first step.

DENIS BALIBOUSE/REUTERS

The U.N. will convene a meeting of international special envoys in Qatar on June 30 and July 1 to discuss a path forward for Afghanistan. The Taliban have accepted the U.N.'s invitation to join. (They declined to attend February's meeting.) The meeting's agenda does not include human rights or women's issues, and neither women nor Afghan civil society representatives will be included.

RICHARD BENNETT *was appointed by the U.N. Human Rights Council as special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan in April 2022. He was the head of the human rights component of the U.N. assistance mission in Afghanistan and a long-term adviser to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission beginning in 2003.*

OPINION

The New York Times
INTERNATIONAL EDITION

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It's clear that Biden can't go on like this

Frank Bruni
Contributing Writer

I'm not sure I'd ever watched Donald Trump lie so incessantly, extravagantly and unabashedly, and that's saying something. On Thursday night he lied about the attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. He lied about the violence in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017. He lied about his relationship with the military, about his concern for the environment — about pretty much any and every subject that came up. He lied with a smile. He lied with a shrug. He lied with a sneer.

That should have been the main, maybe even the only, story of the debate, and it should have made him easy, pitiable prey for his opponent. But President Biden failed to take advantage of it. He seemed — there's no getting around this — incapable of doing so. And that's its own big story, one that will only grow over the hours and days ahead.

Biden, 81, came into his face-off with Trump knowing that many voters were concerned about his age and had doubts about his sharpness. His aides knew that, too. And he and they spent much of the past week devoted to preparation, preparation, preparation, pausing occasionally to assure nervous Democrats that Biden had this thing under control.

Democrats must grapple with his disastrous debate.

But from the moment the debate began, he seemed unsteady. Off. His expression was often frozen. His voice was often flat. He garbled words. He corrected himself midsentence, over and over again. He'd clearly memorized key talking points — key phrases — but he repeatedly used them without providing adequate context, swerved from one to another without any transition, halted sentences before they reached their destination, started sentences without giving them any bearings.

Ten minutes in, I had a knot in my stomach. Twenty minutes in, the knot was so tight, it hurt. "We finally beat Medicare," he said early on, and I had no idea what he was talking about.

He got somewhat clearer as the night wore on. He found more animation. But the damage was done, and it may be significant. I shudder to type that, but there's no sense in pretending. That's perhaps what too many of his advisers have been doing up until now — ignoring or wishing away the obvious.

Then again, maybe Biden just had an uncharacteristically bad night. It's possible. And even if this is now the diminished truth of him, it's still preferable to the Big Lie of Trump, whose own sentences can be (and on Thursday frequently were) inscrutable, whose behavior is reliably unscrupulous and whose second administration would be stocked with corrupt, vengeful lackeys and would sully our democracy in ways from which we might never recover. As I've written before about the signs that Biden is past his peak, the presidency is more than the president: It's the crew that the president assembles, the culture that the president creates. Biden at his least focused would establish a better crew and culture than Trump at his most.

But can Biden beat Trump? That question predated the debate and will be asked with even more urgency and panic in its aftermath. As will this one: Is it really too late for another Democrat to take Biden's place? With stakes this high, mustn't that be discussed one more time before the convention?

Again, I feel a bit sick saying that, because I believe that Biden is a decent man who, as president, has done a better than decent job. In both of those respects, he outpaces Trump by many miles, and if Republican politicians and voters had any decency of their own, they would have sidelined Trump long ago. (They had their chance. He was impeached twice, after all.)

But I'm not weighing in on Biden's record. I'm evaluating his prospects. And I'm acknowledging that performances as shaky as the one he delivered on Thursday may hurt him badly with the small group of uncommitted voters who will decide what is almost guaranteed to be a very close election. Anyone and everyone who correctly understands the stakes of a Trump victory must grapple with that — and fast.

The best measure of Biden's ineffectiveness on Thursday night was the dormant Vesuvius of Trump. He never even came close to erupting. Just as many people tuned in to the debate to see how much command Biden could muster and how much confidence he could project, many were curious about Trump's degree of control. Would he rant, rave and remind voters of how dangerously erratic and fundamentally unpresidential he is?

He didn't, at least not to the extent that he might have. Sure, he was pouty, petty and promiscuous with superlatives: Everything about him was the very best ever, while everything about Biden was the very worst. It was wholly unnuanced and utterly absurd. But he didn't interrupt Biden. Didn't shout. Didn't scale the pinnacles of nastiness and mockery that he did in past debates.

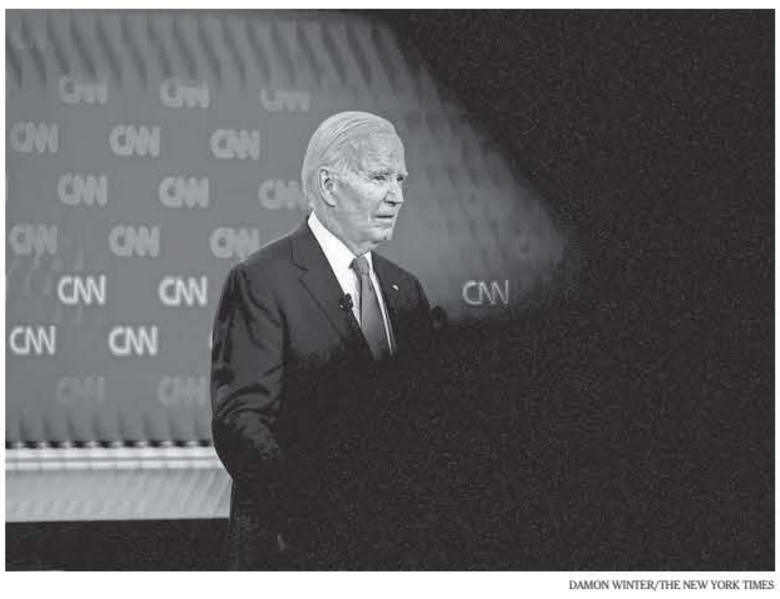
And the reason was obvious in his bemused, pleased expression as Biden staggered through more than a few of his remarks. Trump realized that Biden was sabotaging himself. Trump reveled in that, at one point expressing puzzlement over some assertion that Biden had just made. "I really don't know what he said at the end of that sentence," Trump scoffed. "I don't think he knows what he said, either."

The astounding part was that Trump didn't revel even more. The heartbreaking part was how Biden bungled what were clearly intended to be devastating lines. He connected the death of his son Beau, who did duty in Iraq as a major in the Delaware National Guard, to derogatory comments that Trump reportedly made about Americans who'd served in the military.

"My son was not a loser, not a sucker," Biden proclaimed, but words that should have been immeasurably poignant just sort of hung there. "You're the sucker," Biden added. "You're the loser." I cringed. That's Trump talk, not Biden talk, and its delivery was disjointed, unsettling, odd.

For most of the mere 90 minutes of the debate, Biden seemed to be grasping for something he couldn't reach. I fear that's a metaphor. I'm sure it's a warning.

FRANK BRUNI *is a professor of journalism and public policy at Duke University, the author of the book "The Beauty of Dusk."*



DAMON WINTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Sean Penn, rebel with many causes

Maureen Dowd

Don't mellow my harsh, dude.

I was coming to talk to Sean Penn, the notorious Hollywood hothead who helped launch the word "dude" into the American bloodstream when he played stoner surfer Jeff Spicoli in the 1982 classic "Fast Times at Ridgemont High."

I was nervous because the Times photographer was already inside the Spanish-style ranch house with Penn, who has a history of throwing punches at paparazzi. I hurried past Penn's three surfboards and silver Airstream in the front yard, half expecting to see the un-pacific denizen of the Pacific Coast wrestling on the floor with the photographer.

Nah. Penn, in dark T-shirt, Columbia utility pants and sneakers, was charming, trailed by his adoring dogs, a golden retriever and a German shepherd rescue puppy.

When I joked that I was relieved to see him treating the photographer sweetly, he laughed. "When I did my 23andMe," he said, "I thought I might be part Hopi because they don't like to be photographed."

Penn, a lifelong Malibu resident, pointed in the direction of his old grade school in the days of a more rural Malibu. He said he gets up at 5:30 a.m. and goes, barefoot, out to his wood shop. "I even forget to smoke for five hours."

As it turns out, Penn has finally mellowed.

At 63, the weathered, tattooed rebel with many causes is a certified humanitarian — riding the crest into dangerous crises around the globe and saving lives in New Orleans and Haiti after disasters — and a crusading documentarian. He started out making the documentary "Superpower," thinking it would be a story of how Volodymyr Zelensky, a comedian, ascended to Ukraine's presidency. But then Vladimir Putin pounced.

Penn ignored the warning of his friend Robert O'Brien, a national security adviser for former President Donald Trump, to "get the heck out of there," and interviewed Zelensky in his bunker, hours after the invasion started. He also went to the front lines to dramatize for Americans the story of a young country protecting its democracy against an oppressor, to persuade them to help.

In 2013, Penn executed a rescue of Jacob Ostreicher, an American businessman rotting in a Bolivian prison after what Penn called a "corrupt prosecution."

He went all Batman again when the Covid vaccines became available. His organization, CORE (Community Organized Relief Effort), set up a huge vaccine administration site outside Dodger Stadium.

Penn, still wiry but now sporting a shock of natural white hair with the sides shaved — a do he has for a Paul Thomas Anderson movie with Leonardo DiCaprio — took me on a tour of his house. On prominent display is a painting by Hunter Biden called "The Map," the black outline of a head with colorful, detailed brushstrokes all around it. It's a gift from the president's son. Hunter, his wife, Melissa, and their son, Beau, had been over the night before.

Hunter painted it, Penn said, when he was "in pieces" and trying "to put the pieces back together." Penn could relate.

He said the two met in 2022 when Penn gave a speech in honor of U2 at the Kennedy Center Honors. He had read an interview with Hunter, the first "since the chips were rolling down, and I was really taken with him and I told him." Then last fall, after a screening of his Ukraine film with big shots on Capitol Hill, Penn had dinner with his friend Representative Eric Swalwell of California, who suggested he look up Hunter in Malibu.

"I had no idea he lived down here," said Penn, adding dryly: "I thought he was off in some judicial-focused place that we see on TV." He called Hunter "a very, very insightful guy."

Penn also showed me the pump and hoses he keeps next to the pool. He has been en garde since the Malibu house he had shared with Madonna burned down in 1993.

We did the interview in his man cave, where he likes to serve vodka and talk about the world with his friends. There's a cozy circle of blue chairs and a sofa and a plywood coffee table Penn made. The walls are chockablock with pictures and letters, including one from his friend Marlon Brando. There's also a photo of Brando marching for civil rights.

The beach house is not your typical professionally decorated movie star manse. Penn has hung up photos of friends and his kids, actors Dylan, 33, and Hopper, 30, with his ex-wife Robin Wright; watercolors by Jack Nicholson; medals that belonged to his dad, Leo Penn, who flew 37 missions in World War II and got shot down twice; and paintings by his mother, Eileen, an artist and actress, and Hopper. He has a series of head shots above the fireplace of his brother Chris Penn, the actor, who died in 2006. There are vintage posters of the movies of his father, an actor and director who was blacklisted (turned in by Clifford Odets).

And there's a picture of Andriy Pilshchikov, known as "Juice" and the "Ghost of Kyiv," a member of a unit defending Ukraine from the air. The charismatic pilot, who was killed in a training accident, was featured in Penn's documentary.

There are several clocks set to different times around the world, including Ukrainian time.

The room is wreathed in smoke, as Penn alternates between chain-smoking American Spirits and noodling around his mouth with a dental pick. In the bathroom, he displays pictures of his friends smoking, including Dennis Hopper and Harry Dean Stanton and, justifying his cigarette addiction, the Charles Bukowski quote "Find what you love and let it kill you."

The peppery Penn knows a lot of people don't like him "out of the gate." He also knows people do not want to be lectured on global ills — and hectored for donations — by celebrities. He knows a lot of fans and fellow artists think he's a showoff and he should just focus on fulfilling his early promise as one of the great American actors and hone his talent as a director, and stop dancing on the world stage with leaders, dictators (Hugo Chávez and Raúl Castro) and even one infamous drug lord (El Chapo, whom he interviewed for Rolling Stone in a wild adventure Penn later conceded was a failure because it failed to spark a conversation on America's drug policies).

Penn has been mocked and satirized for some of his escapades, but his friend Bill Maher says he's the "real deal" in a town full of "phonies."

"Sean could search the rest of his life for a script that was even half as interesting as his real life and he'd never find it," Maher told me. "The rowboat during Katrina, the political prisoners he's gotten sprung from jail, the years of personally going to Haiti and unloading the food and supplies and getting it to the people. John and Yoko were 'activists'? Why, they spent a week in bed once? Please, if you look up 'walking the walk' in the dictionary, it's Sean's picture.

"I didn't want to get the Covid vaccine, but when I did, it was Sean's organization that had the whole city coming to the parking lot at Dodger Stadium!"

On humanitarian missions to Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti and elsewhere, the always-intense actor is still "shaking the rafters on behalf of the underdog."

Doug Brinkley, the presidential historian who worked side by side with Penn during Katrina and went on humanitarian missions to Venezuela, Cuba and Haiti, called his friend "the rebel shaking the rafters on behalf of the underdog."

He added that what's easy to forget about Penn, given how serious his pursuits are, is how much fun he can be. "There is no better raconteur around," Brinkley said. "There is never a dull moment around Sean. He is all forward motion."

Penn wasn't at the splashy Hollywood fund-raiser for President Biden, hosted by George Clooney, Julia Roberts and Jimmy Kimmel. But he was photographed walking barefoot out of the White House state dinner for President William Ruto of Kenya last month. (He's not a tuxedo type, and his dress shoes pinched.)

"Hunter invited me," Penn said, noting that he was happy for the chance to talk to Ruto about how Kenyan peacekeeping troops could combat the gangs that have overrun Haiti. He told me that violence-ravaged Sudan will be the next country his organization tries to help.

But Penn did not press the president on any of his causes.

"I left the president alone because there were opportunities for that when everyone is not tapping his shoulder," the actor said. He thinks Biden should "take it slow" in the campaign, leaning into an elder statesman role, doing fireside-chat kind of talks, not getting into nasty spats with Trump but giving the nation a sense that red and blue can be united.

He showed me a medallion with the CORE motto: "Slow is smooth, smooth is fast, and blood is slippery."

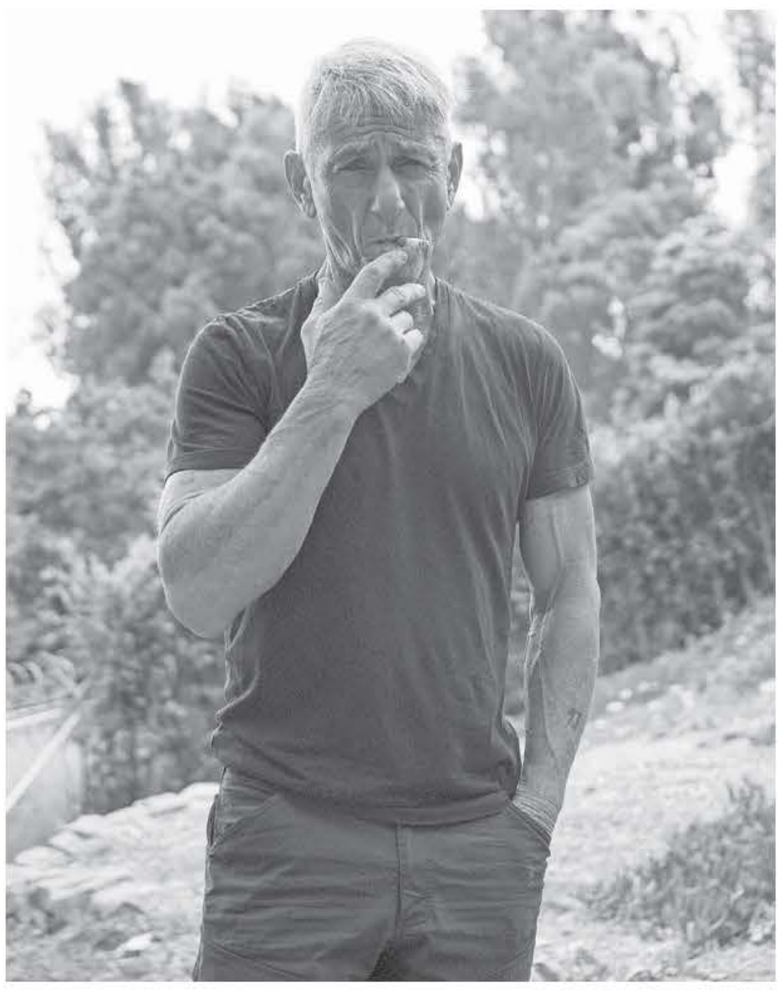
Of Trump, he said dismissively: "He's shameful as an art and as a way of life."

Penn said that the more time he spent in Ukraine, the more he was able to accept people with different political views in our fractured country. He went on Sean Hannity's show in 2022 to push support of Ukraine, even though Hannity had named him an "enemy of the state" in 2007, back when Penn was lambasting the Bush administration for its Iraq debacle. Penn also did a panel in 2022 with the Fox News anchor Bret Baier and O'Brien at the Nixon Library in Yorba Linda, Calif.

Ukrainians also have political divisions, Penn told me, but he was blown away by their "unbreakable" unity in the face of tragedy.

"It's like breathing a different kind of air there," he said. "I really had a sensation of what I've been missing here. It's really abnormal what we're doing."

Penn escaped more and more into his gonzo journalism and global swashbuckling because he was disillusioned with Hollywood.



BALAZS GARDI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"I went 15 years miserable on sets," he said. "'Milk' was the last time I had a good time." That 2008 movie about the murder of Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected public official in California, earned Penn his second Oscar. (His first was for "Mystic River" in 2003.)

At the time, he got credit for being a straight man playing a gay one; but now there is sometimes an outcry when straight actors get cast as gay characters. I wondered if he could even play Milk now.

"No," he replied. "It could not happen in a time like this. It's a time of tremendous overreach. It's a timid and artless policy toward the human imagination."

He vigorously rubbed his face to show how he felt on sets, even with good actors and producers, as if he was trying to rub out the experience.

"I feel like an actor who is playing a leading role and is a known actor and is being paid well has a leadership position on a film and you've got to show up with energy and be a bodyguard for the director in some way," he said. "I was faking my way through that stuff and that was exhausting. Mostly what I thought was just, 'What time is it? When are we going to get off?'

"I was sure it was done, but I didn't know how I was going to keep my house running or travel freely or things like that if I stopped."

Then his friend and neighbor (and fellow talented nepo baby) Dakota Johnson dropped by with an indie script, "Daddio," by Christy Hall, who was also going to direct. It featured only two actors, an enigmatic young woman who gets in a cab at J.F.K. Airport with a driver who's a street philosopher raised in a hardscrabble Hell's Kitchen.

"I felt like this could be a pleasant experience and that's gonna matter to me now, maybe more than in the past," Penn said.

The first-time director recalled on the third day of shooting that she got a message Penn wanted to see her. "My heart was pounding," she said. "He just looked at me and said, 'Am I giving you everything that you're looking for?' I was so blown away by it. For someone of his caliber to care so much about a tiny, little indie two-hander."

"He's quite known for being tough and intimidating," Johnson said, "but there's a sweet boy in there."

"There's a real tenderness in him," she added.

The driver and passenger engage in erotic taxicab confessions about their personal lives, with Penn's character sharing some blunt observations. He warns Johnson's character, a computer programmer coming back from a visit to her small hometown in Oklahoma, sexting with her famous, married boyfriend, that men don't like to hear the word "love" from their mistresses because the L-word is "not their function." He notes that "men, we want to look good for other men" and that, for men, "looking like a family man is more important than being one."

Penn said that when guys come over to his man cave, they make the same sort of blunt judgments about relationships with women that Hall's cabdriver does. Penn's own feeling is that some feminists still want to be feminine, and some men are "getting feminized." He thinks dating is getting more transactional for both men and women.

I wondered if Penn, who has been formally coupled and uncoupled with three women — first Madonna, then Robin Wright and, briefly, the Australian actress Leila George, the daughter of Greta Scacchi and Vincent D'Onofrio — and dated several other celebrities, had improvised from his own vivid experiences. (Jewel, an ex girlfriend, called him "a fantastic flirt.")

He said he just said the dialogue as it was written.

He said that he once loved drama in romance. But now, even if he's madly in love with someone, he said, if there's any unnecessary drama and visits from "the trauma gods," his feelings evaporate, like they never existed.

"I look at my dogs and say, 'Hey, it's us again.'"

He has experienced a fair number of relationships where "the first thing I see in the morning are eyes wondering what I'm going to do to make them happy that day. Rarely reciprocated," he said.

He's not in a serious relationship now and feels "thrilled every day."

"I'm just free," he said. "If I'm going to be in a relationship, I'm still going to be free, or I'm not going to be in it, and I'm not going to be hurting. I don't sense I'll have my heart broken by romance again."

Speaking of which, I wondered, what was the truth about the epic fights that devoured his turbulent marriage to Madonna?

"I had a freaking SWAT team come into my house," he said, sipping his Diet Coke. Madonna told the police she was worried because there were guns in the house. "I said: 'I'm not coming out. I'm going to finish my breakfast.' The next thing I knew, windows were being broken all around the house and they came in." Then, he added, "they had me in handcuffs."

He said he belatedly realized there were stories circulating that he had "trussed her up like a turkey. I didn't know what 'trussed up' meant, first." He said he was dating one woman who confronted him the morning after "a lovely night" when he was on the back porch smoking a cigarette. "She's looking at me like I killed her dog," he said, asking him "about this hitting Madonna in the head with a baseball bat."

"I didn't know what the hell she was talking about," he said. "Now I think it's fair to say that I'm not the biggest guy in the world. But if I hit Mike Tyson in the head with a baseball bat, he's going to the hospital."

Madonna herself cleared up the matter in 2015. When the director Lee Daniels defended the star of his show "Empire," Terrence Howard, saying that Howard's admission that he had hit his wife was no different from what Penn had done, Penn sued Daniels for $10 million, charging defamation.

Madonna provided an affidavit, saying that the baseball-bat and "tied me up" rumors were false and that Penn had never struck her.

"Not only did we win the case," Penn said about the settlement, "but Daniels wrote a public letter and he had to contribute to CORE."

About Madonna, Penn says simply: "She's someone I love." He said he worked with her on raising funds for Haiti and she recently agreed to do "a really terrific" video for a peace summit about Ukraine.

"It turns out it's a lot quicker to repair a friendship after divorce if there are not kids involved," he said. "It took Robin and I quite a while. There was a lot of drama." He added: "Much more important to repair it if there are kids involved, but no easy swing, right?"

Given how much time he spends helping humans, he once told The Times: "I don't like humans. I don't get along well with people."

When I asked him about that quote, he chuckled and said of people, "They should suck less."

Despite the encounter with a dread journalist, Penn was in a good mood as I left.

"Happy hour starts at 5:30," he said with a grin.

ACPM Printed in Athens, Beijing, Beringen, Dubai, Frankfurt, Gallargues, Hong Kong, Islamabad, Istanbul, Karachi, Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur, Lahore, London, Madrid, Milan, Nagoya, Osaka, Rome, Seoul, Taipei, Tel Aviv, Tokyo.
The New York Times Company 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018-1405, NYTCo.com; The New York Times International Edition (ISSN: 2474-7149) is published six days per week. A.G. SULZBERGER, Publisher
To submit an opinion article, email: opinion@nytimes.com. **Subscriptions:** Subscribe.INYT.com, nytisubs@nytimes.com, Tel. +33 1 41 43 93 61. **Advertising:** advertising.nytimes.com, internationaladinquiries@nytimes.com.
Regional Offices: U.K. 18 Museum Street, London WC1A 1JN, U.K.; **Hong Kong** 1201 K.Wah Centre, 191 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong; **France** 2, rue Favart, 75002 Paris, France. Printed in France by Midi Print ZAC du Pôle Actif. 18 Allée Piot 30660 Gallargues le Montueux.

OPINION

‘The Bear’ understands our twisted love affair with chefs

Aaron Timms

FX

Some time over the past few decades, a strange thing happened: We started treating chefs as temperamental rock stars and restaurants as a barometer of cultural vitality. While pursuits like fashion, music, art and film all seemed to stagnate, retreating into repetition and nostalgia as the economics of these industries cratered, food surged ahead, becoming a rare bright spot in a culture stuck for new ideas. Seasonal, showy, produce-driven cooking was everywhere, and every medium-sized city throughout the country had its artisanal pizza place, its special occasion farm-to-table restaurant, its ramen spot with big ideas about broth.

But with growing cultural importance came heightened scrutiny of the restaurant industry’s failings: poor pay, punishing hours, a toxic culture of macho aggression and brutality. From the reported bullying and violence at Mission Chinese Food in New York to allegations of chronic mold at the Los Angeles jam destination Sqirl, the restaurant business suddenly seemed like a problem industry, just like aviation, fashion or finance, where the catalog of abuses was as long as any tally of creative accomplishments.

The celebrated TV show is both a product of our unhealthy obsession with toxic restaurant culture and a potential remedy for it.

Into this environment in 2022 came “The Bear,” a show that seemed both forged in the fire of the food world’s worst excesses and determined to seek a way out of the inferno. Through its first two seasons (the third dropped last night), it follows Carmen Berzatto, known to everyone as Carmy, a hotshot chef called back to Chicago after his brother dies by suicide and leaves him the family restaurant. “The Bear” is both the culmination of two decades of chef veneration and a case for an improved version of it; a plea not to break from the religion of food altogether but to reform it, and in doing so create a new culture that’s truly worthy of veneration. In the real world of professional kitchens — with their prosciutto-thin financial margins, boilingly stressful working conditions and entrenched hierarchies of abuse — “The Bear” might seem like a flimsy case for change. But the televised fantasy of a better, more moral restaurant culture — with better, more moral chefs — is part of what makes the show such intoxicating entertainment.

Carmy exhibits both the worst and the best elements of the tortured chef-genius archetype. For centuries the glory of art excused the sins of the artist, and people happily appreciated the work of Céline, Picasso, Beethoven and all the rest despite the monstrousness of their personalities. Our culture started venerating chefs who exhibited this kind of creative callousness: David Chang, Marco Pierre White, Mario Batali and even Anthony Bourdain were all, in their different ways, avatars of the bawdy, abusive world of the male-dominated kitchen, and their accounts of culinary life glorified the notion that conflict is endemic to gastronomic invention.

We had a tendency to forgive, or at least ignore, those traits, since witnessing Mr. Bourdain’s journeys into the global culinary wonderland, or the spectacle of Guy Fieri racing toward another diner in his convertible through an eternal American summer, created a pervasive sense of excitement around food and all its possibilities. On the plate, if nowhere else, things in America seemed to be getting better.

In recent years there’s been a profound and important shift in public attitudes. “The Bear” is perhaps best appreciated as a kind of real-time metabolizing of the tension between temperament and creation. The show presents us with a tortured genius but it helps us understand why he’s tortured and emphasizes — most importantly to the narrative’s moral scheme — that he wants to get better. Ultimately, the show grapples with the question: Can our love affair with restaurant culture be redeemed?

Carmy’s overlapping emotional struggles are at the core of the action: his struggle to keep the restaurant afloat; the struggle to honor the memory of his brother, an addict who had become emotionally distant and destructive; the struggle to push the boundaries of culinary invention, to keep high standards, to make good food, to be a good boss, to be a good person. Among the most powerful emotional reference points is a flashback to Carmy’s time working as the chef de cuisine at a fine dining restaurant in New York. Played with a pleading droopiness by Jeremy Allen White, Carmy struggles to stay on top of tickets during a service push as the restaurant’s head chef approaches and whispers a string of demoralizing invective in his ear: “You’re terrible at this. You’re no good at it. Go faster,” adding, “you are talentless,” and “you should be dead.”

On one level, Carmy agrees. But the show insists that we keep faith in him, and the pursuit to which he’s dedicated his life. The backbone to the narrative is his quest to renovate his brother’s beloved greasy spoon into an inventive, professional, “elevated” neo-bistro — the type of destination restaurant where the menu includes adventurous wines and savory cannoli, the service exudes casual culinary authority, and a wide variety of staff members refer to each other “chef.” If Season 1 threw us headlong into the chaos of a restaurant on the brink of both obliteration and rebirth, and Season 2 gave us a glimpse into the characters’ back stories and motivations, then Season 3 promises a different kind of progress and even a sense of emotional resolution. The show’s power lies in grappling with the industry’s most important dilemmas — such as whether something better, healthier and more stable can emerge from modern kitchen culture, and whether it’s possible to be artistic, original and aesthetically radical, and produce interesting work — while also maintaining emotional equilibrium.

Through it all, “The Bear” has understood and portrayed the restaurant business in all its ugliness. But it doesn’t ask us to move on from worshiping chefs. It simply asks for better chefs, nicer chefs, chefs who are more in touch with their emotional triggers and blind spots — who win Michelin stars, yes, but who also know when they’ve done something wrong, and have the maturity to apologize afterward.

For now, a restaurant like the one on “The Bear” feels like it’s only possible on TV. As the show matures, though, it can move us beyond the simplistic narratives of good and evil, genius and tyranny, and inspiration and devastation that marked the first stage of our collective obsession with food, which long since became a cultural issue along with a nutritional one. Chefs already made for a good antiheroes; now maybe they can be a worthy heroes.

AARON TIMMS *is a cultural critic working on a book about modern food culture.*

Tiny words often create big uproars

MCWHORTER, FROM PAGE 1

gender-neutral pronouns, however, render a different objection: They claim that allowing people to choose their own pronouns is a gateway to things like gender-affirming surgery, gender-neutral bathrooms and trans women on women’s sports teams. People who regard such things as dangerous write me to tell me this all the time.

I’m not here to engage in a debate about those outcomes, and I’ll leave biology to the experts. But this idea — that pronouns can encourage people to become trans — reflects a grave misunderstanding of how language works.

You can see what I mean if you look at other cultures. Gender in the Thai language is entirely binary — “he” and “she” — yet the people known as kathoey, sometimes described as a third sex, have an established place in Thai culture. In fact, the five countries that U.C.L.A.’s Williams Institute has determined to be the most accepting of L.G.B.T.I. people speak languages that distinguish “he” from “she.” On the other hand, spoken Mandarin Chinese has only nongendered pronouns, yet China has no high-profile transgender community.

The lesson from these other languages applies to English, too: New pronouns arise in the wake of new identities. They are not the causes of new identities.

In the English language, gender works in idiosyncratic ways. Its third-person singular pronouns are gendered, but its nouns and verbs do not get assigned to random genders the way they do in so many other languages. The way that plays out can be fascinating to witness. Especially when it’s in flux, which language always is.

“They” is but one facet of a broader current trend toward gender neutrality. Think about how ordinary it is to hear English-speaking women address one another as “dude” and “you guys,” with no specific masculine meaning intended. A great many other languages are creating gender-neutral pronouns: French has combined “il” and “elle” into “iel,” and Portuguese’s “elu” is so pretty, I wish we could use it just because. Languages in the Balkans region, such as Bulgarian and Romanian, are also experimenting with gender-neutral options.

Fig 1. They/Them

Fig 2. She/Her

PABLO DELCAN

Meanwhile, in English language slang, people gender objects as if the language were Spanish or German, with things being marked as “she” to convey admiration, warning or judgment: of a burrito “Whoa, she’s spicy!” or of a hill “Watch out, she’s steep!” This usage, which some of my students alerted me to, began as gay slang but is becoming ever more common.

Each of these changes is sure to infuriate someone. If the sound of the singular “they” works on you like nails on a chalkboard, well, you won’t have to look far before finding someone to commiserate with. And when it comes to debates over “he” and “she” and “they,” plenty of people pile on who couldn’t care less about apostrophe placement or the order of tenses, because gender is more than grammar; it’s part of the way we see ourselves. When the rules change, it can seem that the ground is shifting beneath us.

The solution is not, however, to try to stop people from using pronouns in new ways. That effort will never achieve what the sticklers want it to. It can’t stop social change, but perhaps more to the point, it can’t even stop linguistic change. People, in the end, are going to talk more or less the way they want to, and poxes on what to say will only spark ways to get around it. I’d rather take an interest in the possibilities of the new than scowl about the loss of the old and the familiar.

Of course, another person might see things differently, and that’s . . . *their* prerogative.

JOHN MCWHORTER *is an associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University and the author of “Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America.”*

FROM READERS

Hiking in hot weather

Re “In Greece, another tourist found dead amid heat wave” (nytimes.com, June 24): The tragedy of those hikers in Greece should be a lesson to us all about the dangers of hiking in hot weather (anything above the mid-80s).

I lived in the California desert for 50 years and belonged (with my late husband) to the local hiking club and went on many hikes — but never in hot weather. Too many times, hikers who believed themselves invulnerable had to be rescued from trails because they didn’t listen to warnings.

So, people, please don’t go hiking alone. Always carry your mobile phone and enough water. Let your family or friends know exactly where you will be and what time you plan to return. And, above all, stay on marked trails, and think of the lives of search-and-rescue teams that will be put in danger if they have to hike out to rescue you.

ROSEMARY FLETCHER-JONES, *NEW MILTON, ENGLAND*

INTERNATIONAL HOMES

Mansion built for a showman

The former home of a circus impresario is undergoing a monumental restoration

BY JOHN FREEMAN GILL

Passion project The 1888 James A. Bailey mansion in Harlem, New York, had fallen into great disrepair before Martin Spollen and Chen Jie, right, bought the house for $1.4 million in 2009 and began a restoration that continues today. The interior, left, showcases a range of architectural styles; above, a view of the building.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The James A. Bailey residence at St. Nicholas Place and 150th Street in the Harlem area of New York City, built in 1888 for the less flamboyant partner of the Barnum & Bailey team, is a three-ring circus of architectural elements: a Romanesque Revival tower, curvilinear Flemish gables, a high chimney adorned with Tudor roses, even a heraldic carving of a medieval knight's helmet over the front door.

A show house for a showman, the limestone mansion is an unlikely survivor of the apartment house construction that swept away other Gilded Age residences on St. Nicholas Place, a spur of St. Nicholas Avenue that stretches many blocks north of 148th Street like a railroad siding. By the early 2000s, however, the mansion was in dire distress, its elegant interior ravaged by a pack of inbred dogs and one of its four chimneys tilting perilously.

Though the building was designated a city landmark in 1974, preservationists worried that an unscrupulous investor would buy it and hire lawyers and engineers to persuade the city it needed to be demolished. Instead, the leak-plagued structure was saved by an enterprising couple who scraped together $1.4 million to buy it in 2009.

Martin Spollen, 63, and Chen Jie, 59, natives of New Jersey and Shanghai, have been restoring it ever since, often with their own hands. It has been a monumental effort driven by love and obsession.

"Our main talent is we're not in a hurry," Mr. Spollen, a physical therapist, said of the restoration. "So that goes along with not being really rich." Even with the cash raised from renting out the mansion as a location for television shows like "Law & Order" and "Boardwalk Empire," the couple expects the project to take another five to 10 years to complete.

James A. Bailey was born James McGinnis in Detroit in 1847. After being orphaned as a child, he landed a job with a traveling circus managed by Frederick Bailey, whose last name he adopted. By the 1870s he co-owned a circus, which he boldly took on a pioneering tour of Australia before combining it with a London circus. His dash and ambition frequently brought him into bitter competition with P.T. Barnum, until the two rivals joined forces in the early 1880s as "the Greatest Show on Earth."

But Bailey's health failed, and he made plans to retire in the St. Nicholas Place mansion, filling its 25 rooms with curios from his world travels. In 1886, ground was broken. An avid horseman, Bailey also commissioned a terra-cotta-ornamented stable down 150th Street near Convent Avenue.

Bailey's residence, the vision of the architect Samuel B. Reed, who later designed a mirror-image sister house in Cortland, N.Y., was featured on the cover of Scientific American in 1890. The magazine extolled the house's "harmony of design" and its wealth of mosaic-like stained-glass windows, created through an innovative process patented by Henry F. Belcher.

Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, a curator of American decorative arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, said she was "flabbergasted and overwhelmed by seeing so many Belcher windows in one site and in their original setting" when she visited the Bailey house around 2009.

Of the home's 100 windows, some 70 include vivid stained glass.

"It's completely special," Ms. Frelinghuysen said. She surmised that the Baileys, "like many people who could afford a proper decorative interior, were trying to work toward a 'gesamtkunstwerk'" — a total artwork, in which all the decorative elements worked together toward "making the whole house a work of art."

By the early 2000s, the building was in dire distress, its elegant interior ravaged by a pack of inbred dogs.

But no house could contain the indefatigable Bailey for long. He rejected retirement and rejoined Barnum under the big top by 1888, "trotting around," The Times reported, "giving directions in a calm voice that permits no dispute."

As apartment house development encroached upon the neighborhood, Bailey and his wife, Ruth, decamped to Mount Vernon, N.Y. The Harlem house was sold in 1904, and Bailey died two years later, at 58.

In 1951, Marguerite Blake, who grew up in the neighborhood, realized her childhood dream by buying the Bailey mansion with her husband, Warren.

The Blakes were such conscientious stewards of the house that in 1981 they were honored for its restoration at a ceremony at the Urban Center on Madison Avenue.

But things took a dark turn. Mrs. Blake was robbed at gunpoint in the mansion, the thieves making off with the myriad gold bangles she wore from wrist to elbow. For security, the Blakes adopted German shepherds, which the childless couple loved like family.

In time, "the Blakes got older and the dogs got more inbred and uncontrollable," chewing through balusters, clawing at the inside of the front door and relieving themselves in the home, said Michael Henry Adams, a Harlem preservationist and longtime friend of the couple. "It was very disturbing."

In 2000, a fire ignited on an upper floor. The damage was limited, but windows were knocked out by firefighters, and the house deteriorated further.

In 2008, at age 87, Mrs. Blake put the mansion up for sale for $10 million. But no one would touch it at that price, as the house had more than 30 active leaks and reeked horribly from years of dog waste.

Mr. Spollen and Ms. Chen, who goes by Jenny, were undeterred. Though the basement floor was riddled with holes large enough to fall through, they observed that the house's bones — including 21-inch-thick (53 centimeters) internal supporting masonry walls — were remarkably solid.

The mansion's lack of a certificate of occupancy meant that no bank would lend them a nickel, so the couple assembled a patchwork of loans from friends and family to help buy the place.

When their veteran stonemason returned to England before completing restoration of the troubled perimeter wall, Ms. Chen and a cousin, Xu Haihua, known as Jim, took up the cause.

On the first day, despite working for hours, they managed to install just one stone.

"On the second day, three stones," Ms. Chen said. "On the third day, I got seven stones, and then we got going."

For the first couple of years, she watched and learned as their carpenter repaired window sashes and other details. When he left their employ, they replaced him with Mr. Xu, who had recently immigrated from China, where he assembled televisions in a factory.

"Jim had no background in carpentry ever," Mr. Spollen recalled. "We said, 'We expect greatness.'"

Mr. Xu has indeed become skilled, working in the home's basement wood shop to replicate the intricate profiles and mortise-and-tenon joinery of the mansion's original windows.

WHAT YOU GET | JOANN PLOCKOVA

Homes in Prague for $1.5 million

VANGUARD PRAGUE

SVOBODA & WILLIAMS/CHRISTIE'S INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE

ENGEL & VOLKERS PRAGUE

Modrany

$1.5 MILLION

A three-bedroom loft with designated children's areas in a reimagined aircraft parts factory

This three-bedroom loft-style apartment is on the ninth floor of a 14-story former aircraft parts factory built in 1925. The industrial building, in Prague's southern Modrany district, has been renovated and transformed into the Vanguard, a luxury loft complex with a car lift, concierge services, a rooftop terrace with a sauna, and a wellness center with a glass pool in a revamped nuclear bunker.

Modrany, a Prague suburb on the banks of the Vltava river, has been undergoing a revival in recent years with new development and planned transport links. Public transportation, including bus and tram lines, carries commuters to downtown Prague in around 30 minutes.

SIZE 1,022 square feet (95 square meters)

PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT $1,467

INDOORS The apartment, one of 150 spaces in this building of custom lofts, offers privacy while maintaining the open concept of loft design. The unit was designed to be adaptable to a family's changing needs. It can be sold furnished.

A large door opens into the entrance hall, which has a terrazzo floor with large chunks of marble. On the left is a hidden door that opens into a walk-in closet and an adjoined home office with a washing machine. The adjacent kitchen blends into the open dining room and living area with tall concrete ceilings and a wall of glass that opens onto a terrace.

This three-bedroom loft-style apartment was renovated and transformed into a luxury complex with a car lift, concierge services, a rooftop terrace and wellness center.

A floating staircase with a netted railing has a children's slide to its right and a hidden area for playing underneath. A study and play area is also on the lower level, with a glass partition leading to a bathroom on one end and the terrace on the other.

OUTDOOR SPACE A spacious terrace is off the living room and the children's bedroom. The building also offers a shared rooftop terrace.

COSTS Annual property taxes of about $215, plus a monthly maintenance fee of about $765.

CONTACT Jiri Caudr, PSN s.r.o, Jiri.caudr@psn.cz | Vanguard Prague

Mala Strana

$1.64 MILLION

A two-bedroom apartment near the city center in a six-story house from the 16th century

This two-bedroom, two-and-half-bath apartment is steps from Prague Castle, in the heart of the city's historic Mala Strana district. The second-floor unit is one of 17 homes inside a reimagined six-level Renaissance burgher house from the 16th century, built on the site of a famed brewery, then rebuilt in its Classicist style in the early 19th century. The apartment was designed by the Prague architectural studio Formafatal.

Mala Strana, or Lesser Town, is a picturesque district known for its narrow windy lanes and Baroque facades including the dominant St. Nicholas Church.

Located on the district's Valdstejnske Square, the building is near the Czech Senate and Chamber of Deputies, Prague Castle and its palace gardens, and to Charles Bridge, Kampa Park and Petrin Gardens. The Malostranska metro station and tram stops are also a short walk away.

SIZE 1,263 square feet (117 square meters)

PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT $1,297

INDOORS The apartment opens into an entrance hall with chevron patterned oak floors that run throughout. There is a bathroom on the left and a bedroom with a bathroom on the right.

This is followed by a walk-in closet or dressing room that leads into the primary bathroom, adjoined to the primary bedroom on the apartment's north side.

This two-bedroom, two-and-half-bath unit is one of 17 homes inside a reimagined Renaissance burgher house from the 16th century, built on the site of a famed brewery.

A doorway at the end of the entry hall is framed in a light-colored sandstone sourced from a quarry in Bozanov, on the Czech-Poland border. The framed entry leads into the spacious open living room and alcove kitchen area, with direct views of Prague Castle.

OUTDOOR SPACE A private inner courtyard includes a stone fountain and greenery. The original paving, including tiles, has been preserved.

COSTS Property taxes are about $200 a year, plus monthly fees of about $400.

CONTACT Tomas Blahuta, Svoboda & Williams/Christie's, +420 257-328-281

Liben

$1.53 MILLION

A nine-room detached house set on 0.2 acres in a leafy residential area

This detached villa, built in 1929 for a renowned psychologist and his wife, is spread across three floors with a separate apartment on the ground floor. Located in Prague's Liben district, the property sits on a gentle slope in a leafy residential area.

Liben is home to plenty of green spaces including Bila Skala, a protected area that sits along the right bank of the river. It is across the river from the arts district of Holesovice, and to the east of Troja, home to the Prague Zoo and the Baroque Troja Château. There are several public transportation options, including the Okrouhlicka tram stop and two metro lines. The trip from the villa to Prague's historic center is around 30 minutes.

SIZE 3,530 square feet (328 square meters)

PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT $433

INDOORS The house is separated from the street by a brick privacy wall. Through the entry gate, a set of stairs leads down to the main entrance. The first floor has a kitchen, dining room and light-filled living room with access to one of the home's two balconies. The second floor has three bedrooms, storage rooms and a bathroom. One of the bedrooms has French doors leading to the second balcony. A staircase leads up to the rooftop terrace.

This detached villa, built in 1929, is spread across three floors with a separate apartment on the ground floor. It sits on a gentle slope in a leafy residential area.

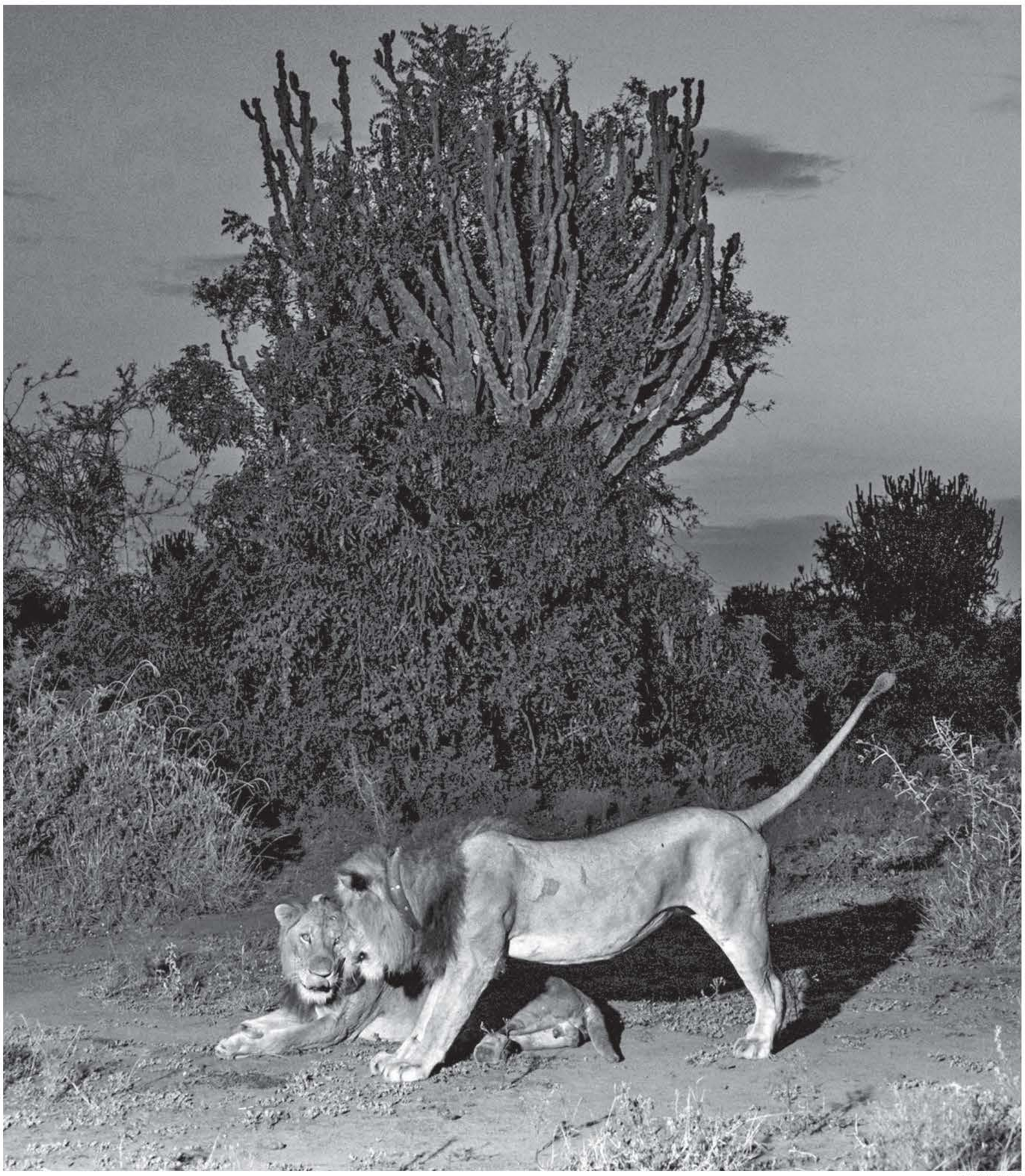
The ground-floor apartment, equivalent to a one-bedroom, can be reached by a set of stairs from the main house, or through a separate entrance. While well maintained, the house could benefit from a renovation. The floors are parquet and tile. There are two separate garages.

OUTDOOR SPACE The villa, set on a fifth of an acre, has a garden with mature trees. Hanging vines grow on the railings of outdoor staircases and the home's privacy wall, giving the property a lush feel. In addition to the two small balconies, there is a 667-square-foot rooftop terrace with views that include Liben Château.

COSTS Annual property taxes are around $200.

CONTACT Alzbeta Dlouha, Engel & Volkers Prague, +420 233-091-011

SCIENCE LAB



ALEX BRACZKOWSKI

DESPERATE JOURNEY

What roars and has 7 legs? Two lions who swam a mile.

On a dark night in February, two male lions stood in the shallows of the Kazinga Channel in Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda and looked across the water.

The opposite shore was nearly a mile away (1.6 kilometers). Hippos and crocodiles inhabit the channel, which can be 20 feet (six meters) deep in places.

Barely 12 hours earlier, the two males had lost a battle for territory; they were lucky to still be alive. Remaining on this side of the channel, which cuts the park in two, would be dangerous.

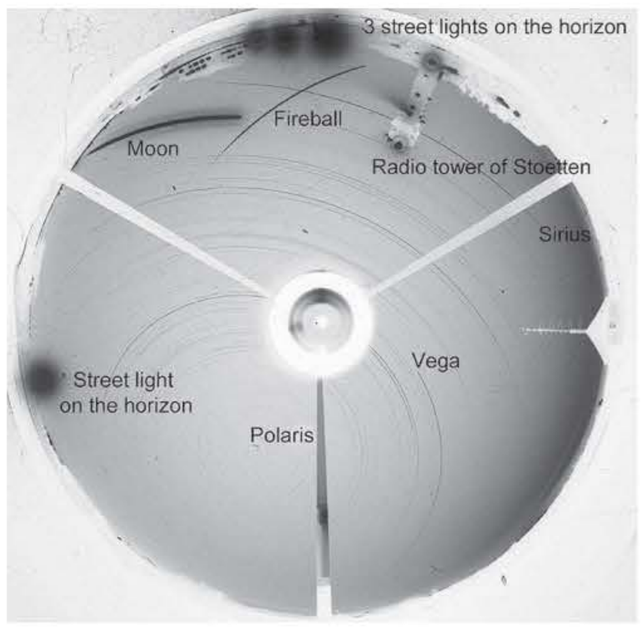
Like many other big cat species, lions don't like to swim. And one of these, known as Jacob by researchers, has only three legs, having lost a limb in a poacher's trap in 2020. But neither Jacob nor his brother, Tibu, was deterred. The two set out for what the researchers say is the longest-recorded swim ever taken by lions. The scientists describe their findings in a paper that has been accepted for publication in Ecology and Evolution.

The lions struggled on their first efforts to cross. During the second attempt, a drone that was tracking them picked up a large thermal signature that may have been a crocodile or a hippo in pursuit; the two male lions split up and hurried back to shore.

Less than an hour after their first attempt, the two set out for a third time. The path seemed clear and they kept going until they crossed the channel.

"It was pretty dramatic," said Alexander Braczkowski, a conservation biologist working with Griffith University in Australia and Northern Arizona University who has been studying the lions since 2017. "It looks like two tiny little heat signatures crossing an ocean."

According to Dr. Braczkowski, the park's lion population has fallen to around 40 today from 71 in 2018, with at least 17, mostly females, poisoned by nearby residents aiming to protect their livestock. The losses have driven male lions into intense competition over females. *ANTHONY HAM*



GRITSEVICH ET AL., METEORITICS AND PLANETARY SCIENCE 2024

NEW LOOK AT OLD DATA

How a little rock in a box was linked to a shooting star

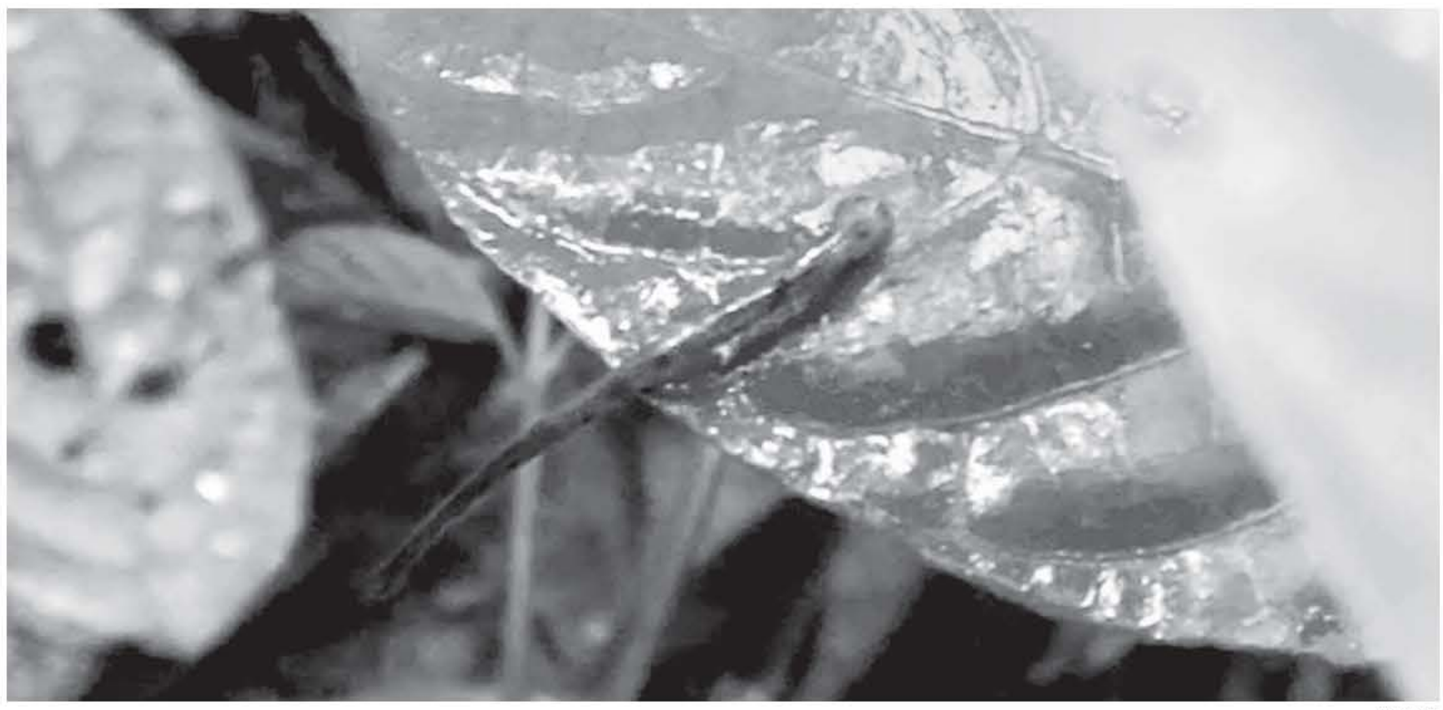
Tens of thousands of meteorites have been found on Earth, but the vast majority remain shrouded in mystery. These rocks come from space, of course, but pinning down their exact origins, in the solar system or even beyond, is difficult without knowing their flight paths. But now, researchers believe they have connected a meteorite discovered in the Austrian Alps decades ago with bright flashes of light from a space rock that hurtled through our planet's atmosphere. Their findings were published in the journal Meteoritics & Planetary Science.

In 1976, Josef Pfefferle, a forest ranger, was clearing the remnants of an avalanche near the Austrian village of Ischgl when he noticed an odd-looking rock. He took the fist-size black stone back to his house and put it in a box.

Thirty-two years later, Mr. Pfefferle heard about a meteorite discovered in Austria, and he decided to take his rock to a university to be analyzed. Mr. Pfefferle's find did turn out to be a meteorite, and its unweathered exterior suggested that it had fallen to Earth only shortly before he picked it up.

Maria Gritsevich, a planetary scientist at the University of Helsinki in Finland who led the recent study, surmised with her colleagues that if the Ischgl meteorite had fallen to Earth relatively recently, perhaps its arrival had been captured on film. A network of 25 sky-viewing cameras spread across southern Germany had been collecting long-exposure images of the night sky since 1966. (The network ceased operations in 2022; it had recorded more than 2,000 fireballs.)

After reviewing negatives of images containing fireballs and using data on the angle of entry and other factors, there was just one incident (recorded in the annotated image above) that led to the location of the Ischgl meteorite's recovery. This led the researchers to conclude that a fireball that was photographed while arcing low across the horizon in the early morning of Nov. 24, 1970, had produced the Ischgl meteorite. *KATHERINE KORNEI*



MAI FAHMY

JUMPING TO A CONCLUSION

With leech video, researcher ends a debate she didn't know had started

Land-dwelling leeches can seem like placid creatures. But when they're on the hunt for blood, look out.

An appetite for blood may have provoked acts of startling athleticism, documented in a pair of videos released on June 20 by two scientists alongside a study in the journal Biotropica.

In each, a brown pillar of flesh and muscle, standing atop a green leaf, waves back and forth on its quest for blood.

Then, it coils itself into a comma, bunching up its lower half.

Finally, the leech leaps, flying through the air with a kind of wild abandon.

Lean closer, cup your ear: You can almost imagine you hear a tiny "Yahooooooo!"

Mai Fahmy, a postdoctoral researcher at Fordham University and a visiting scientist at the American Museum of Natural History, took the first video in Madagascar in 2017. At the time, she had never heard of the long-running debate among scientists about whether leeches could jump.

"It takes a few years of leech study before you learn about the great debate," reflected Michael Tessler, a specialist in leech biology at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York and a research associate at the natural history museum. He is Dr. Fahmy's co-author.

Her 10 second clip, taken on a whim, turned out to be the first recorded visual evidence known to science of leeches jumping.

There had been other claims of leaping leeches. In 1881, the biologist Ernst Haeckel visited Sri Lanka and described the behavior: Not only did they crawl on the ground, he wrote, but they could also "spring to reach their victim."

Scientists have long been skeptical of such anecdotal evidence. In tropical forests, it is common to discover leeches unexpectedly high up on one's body, on the arms, neck, shoulder, or even in one's eyes.

Were observers finding leeches that had dropped from vegetation and just assuming that the creatures could jump? After Dr. Fahmy shared her first springing leech video, most people recognized the jump immediately. *VERONIQUE GREENWOOD*

"P.B.M.s save money off bogus inflated prices that should not exist in the first place. They are the arsonist and firefighter of high drug prices."

Antonio Ciaccia, a consultant hired by Ohio and other U.S. states that are investigating pharmaceutical benefit managers, the middlemen companies that oversee prescriptions for more than 200 million Americans.

Sports

Black shirts and banned flags at Euro 2024

COLOGNE, GERMANY

Fan groups embracing strong nationalist streaks provoke the authorities

BY RORY SMITH
AND CHRISTOPHER F. SCHUETZE

OLIVIER MATTHYS/EPA, VIA SHUTTERSTOCK

The Carpathian Brigade, a Hungarian ultra group, at a match between Hungary and Switzerland. The group echoes the rhetoric of its country's prime minister, Viktor Orban.

The instructions were concise and clear.

Those hoping to march to the stadium with Hungary's fans for their soccer team's first game of the European Championship were expected to report by 10 a.m. sharp, five hours before kickoff.

A strict dress code would apply. Some could wear black. Others were to stick with red, white and green, the colors of the country's flag. Under no circumstances was there to be any flashiness. "Gaudy colors, clown hats and bagpipes" were all prohibited. They were, prospective marchers were reminded, "going to a soccer stadium, not a circus."

The hectoring and slightly priggish tone felt jarring, considering the source of the orders: the official Facebook page of the Carpathian Brigade, a virulently nationalistic faction of hard-core fans — ultras, as such groups are known — that provides the Hungarian national team with its vociferous and volatile backing.

The Carpathian Brigade has, in recent years, become perhaps Europe's most notorious ultra group, its reputation forged by clashing with the police, showering opponents with racist abuse and displaying homophobic banners. In 2021, during the last European Championship, it had to remind members to cover up any Nazi-related tattoos so as not to contravene German law.

None of that has stopped its growth. If anything, it has accelerated it. Drawn by the Carpathian Brigade's voluble Hungarian patriotism and unabashed right-wing values — an ideology that both echoes and trumpets the populist rhetoric of Viktor Orban, the country's prime minister — the group may now be able to call on as many as 15,000 members.

It is also not alone. Black-clad ultras have been a fixture at Euro 2024 this month, with detachments — sometimes numbering a few hundred, sometimes a little larger — visible across Germany and at games involving Albania, Croatia, Romania and Slovakia, among others.

Though some of those groups were formed as a response to the Carpathian Brigade, in most cases they do not share either its motivations or its precise political agenda, and none carries quite the same air of menace.

Their presence, though, is an issue for UEFA, European soccer's governing body, which has levied fines on a number of countries during the tournament, including multiple punishments for "transmitting provocative messages not fit for a sports event." The groups do not just provide a soundtrack and a visual spectacle for games, they also hint at the rising tide of nationalism across Europe.

"It is contagious," said Piara Powar, the executive director of Fare, an anti-discrimination network that monitors extremism within soccer. "For a lot of them, it is theater, more than anything. But you have to be careful playing with this stuff, because the Hungarians are playing for real."

The Carpathian Brigade's power is, certainly, unrivaled. In Cologne, as the group had demanded, the march to the stadium this month was an orderly affair. There was no violence; there were no bagpipes.

A few days later, when Hungary faced Germany in Stuttgart, the group pushed the boundaries a little. On that day's march, the crowd sang the melody of Gigi D'Agostino's "L'Amour Toujours," a song banned in Germany because its lyrics are often twisted to "Ausländer raus," or "Out with the foreigners."

Such messaging, of course, fits with Orban's worldview.

Soccer has long been a central plank of his politics: Under his leadership, many of Hungary's stadiums have been rebuilt, millions of dollars have been invested in clubs in Hungarian-majority areas in neighboring countries, and many of the country's professional teams have been taken over by oligarchs close to his governing party, Fidesz.

The groups do not just provide a visual spectacle for games, they also hint at the rising tide of nationalism across Europe.

Orban has also frequently offered his approval, tacit or otherwise, to the activities of the Carpathian Brigade, even as its actions have drawn fines and punishments. The Hungarian authorities have, for example, persistently lobbied UEFA to stop Fare, the anti-discrimination group, from monitoring the national team's games and attempted to have some of the Carpathian Brigade's preferred symbols removed from Fare's guide on ultranationalist imagery.

A spokesman for Szubjektiv, one of the few organizations in Hungary that work to promote diversity, suggested in an interview that the Carpathian Brigade's actions — even when they draw sanctions — benefit Orban because they feed into his sense that "Hungary is being oppressed by the rest of Europe," as well as providing a window into what Orban sees as the "brutal true nature" of Hungary.

The spokesman asked that his name not be published because of the fear of reprisals from the Carpathian Brigade.

That political backing is what differentiates the Carpathian Brigade from its rivals and imitators. The ultra groups that have coalesced around Albania, Croatia, Romania and the rest wear black shirts, too, but only because ultra groups all over Europe do. "It is a way of separating themselves from ordinary fans," said Juraj Vrdoljak, a Croatian writer and former ultra.

While Vrdoljak acknowledged that most ultras leaned to the right, politically — "We cannot pretend otherwise," he said — few are as willing as the Carpathian Brigade is to express such a noxious blend of racism, antisemitism and homophobia.

Vrdoljak said that most ultras rejected all forms of authority and oversight and saw their country's soccer authorities, and frequently their governments, as "the main enemy." Last year, Croatia's largest ultra groups, which follow various club teams, came together and decided to allow their members to attend national team games for the first time since 2016. "They wanted a way to be visible, to make their message heard," Vrdoljak said.

The same is true for Romania: During the country's first game in Euro 2024, its ultras unveiled a banner claiming they were persecuted. Ultras who for years disdained the national team are present in Germany to "show people we need to be against the police and against the federation," said Cosmin, a Romanian ultra interviewed before that game in Munich who would give only his first name for fear of attracting the attention of the authorities.

While Romania's ultra factions have resisted the attempts of the far-right presidential candidate George Simion to associate himself with them — "Maybe he went to a few games, but he is not an ultra," Cosmin said — they have a defined nationalistic streak.

This year, a game against Kosovo was almost abandoned because of persistent chants from Romania's ultras asserting that Kosovo belonged to Serbia and that "Bessarabia" — its eastern neighbor Moldova — belonged to Romania.

In Germany, Romanian supporters have displayed the flag of Greater Romania, a geographic construct that denies neighboring Moldova its sovereignty. At other matches, that sense of grievance over history or geography has emerged via standards championing Greater Albania, Greater Serbia and, of course, Greater Hungary.

Those motifs have caused a headache for UEFA, which has spent much of the first two weeks of the tournament handing out fines to participating soccer federations as punishment for nationalist displays by their fans. (The bill for Albania's federation, for example, could soon surpass $100,000 after its supporters — already accused of nationalist chanting in two previous games — pushed the limits for the third straight match on Monday.)

Powar said the surge in provocative expressions of nationalism was probably not an issue that the soccer authorities would be able to solve with financial penalties alone.

"Russia's war in Ukraine has created a real sense of jeopardy" for countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Powar said. But just as significant, he said, is that it has offered encouragement, too, to those — like Orban's unofficial foot soldiers in the Carpathian Brigade — who see in it an opening to express their own territorial ambitions.

"For a long time, this 'Greater Hungary' was something that even Orban did not talk about," said the spokesman for Szubjektiv. "Now it is a bumper sticker you see on maybe one in every five cars. It is on the wall in lots of offices."

"The ultras allow you to put on a black T-shirt and feel part of something," he added. "We will see it more and more."

Rory Smith reported from Cologne, Germany, and Christopher F. Schuetze from Stuttgart, Germany. Andrew Das contributed reporting from Düsseldorf, Germany.

The Mini Crossword

6/29/2024 BY JOEL FAGLIANO
EDITED BY SAM EZERSKY

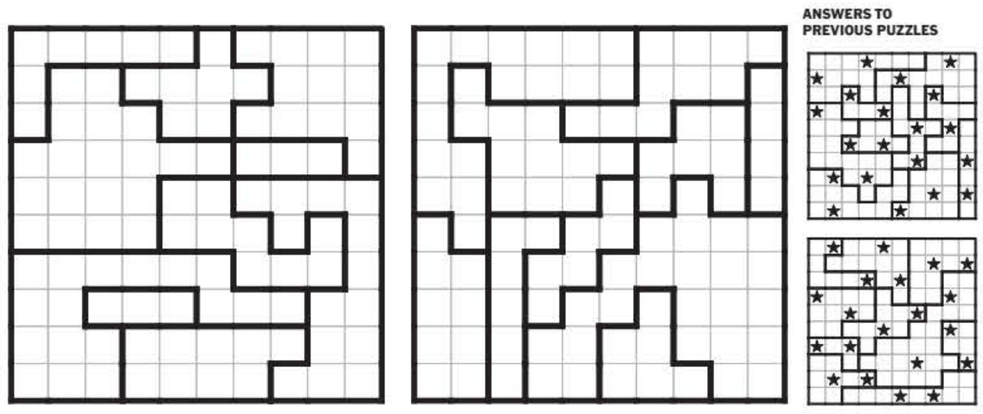
ACROSS
1 Thermometer reading, for short
5 What the letters of ROY G. BIV stand for
7 Totally rad
9 Equivalent of 165 bottles of beer
10 Spanish for "aunt"
11 Pink Pearls are classic ones
13 Devious
14 Male cats or turkeys

DOWN
1 "The Two ___," second volume of the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy
2 Gracefully stylish
3 Jun., Jul., Aug., etc.
4 The 76ers or the 49ers
5 Serving at a birthday party
6 Self-satisfied smiles
8 "Piece of 5-Down!"
12 Improvement of a web page's visibility, for short

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

■	B	A	S	S
F	I	S	H	Y
O	R	S	O	N
A	D	O	U	T
M	I	R	T	H
S	E	T	S	■

Two Not Touch



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

Wit Twister

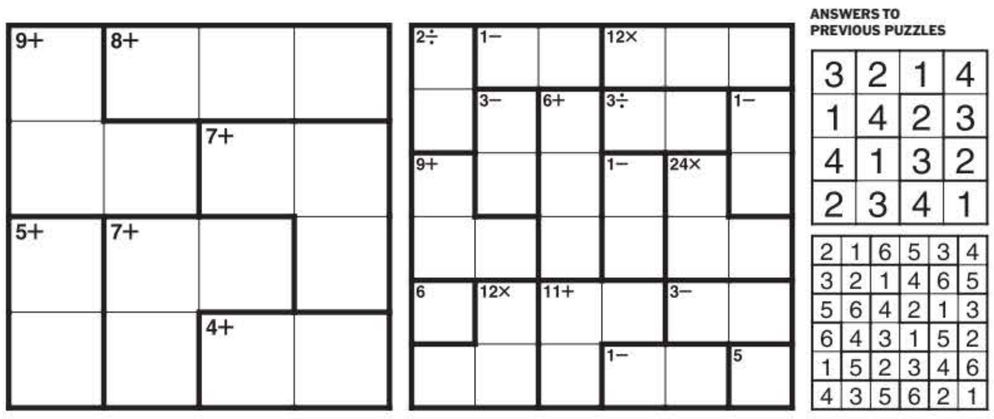
With Jefferson its chief, the _ _ _ _ _'_ work was soon afoot:
To pen a declaration for the delegates to sign.
They all risked death. Yet none were _ _ _ _ _ _, but resolutely put
Their lives, their fortunes and their _ _ _ _ _ _ honor on the line.

Complete the verse with words that are anagrams of each other. Each underline represents a letter.

PUZZLE BY STUART CLELAND

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER "Les Misérables"

KenKen



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

3	2	1	4
1	4	2	3
4	1	3	2
2	3	4	1

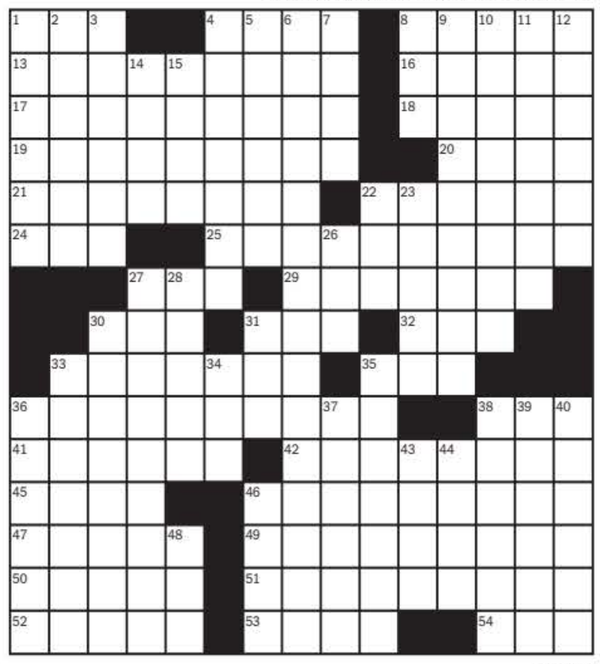
2	1	6	5	3	4
3	2	1	4	6	5
5	6	4	2	1	3
6	4	3	1	5	2
1	5	2	3	4	6
4	3	5	6	2	1

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For more games: www.nytimes.com/games

Crossword | Edited by Joel Fagliano

PUZZLE BY ADRIAN JOHNSON AND RAFAEL MUSA



6/29/24

ACROSS
1 Sound from a kid
4 Condo no-nos, at times
8 Member of a historic trio
13 Islam's feast of sacrifice
16 "I need to speak with you"
17 Something that's made lying down
18 Lugged
19 Down during difficult times?
20 Titular character in the best-selling DVD of all time
21 No longer surprised
22 Noted "Jeopardy!" contestant of 2011
24 Exploding part of a touch-me-not
25 Women's gymnastics event
27 Online chatter?
29 Chewy barbecue bits
30 Really stand out
31 1990 civil rights legislation, for short
32 Brand seen at AutoZone
33 "In case it's of interest ..."
35 Solution for many cleaning problems
36 Red plant?
38 Marble, e.g.
41 Readily available
42 Magazine with a "Skater of the Year" award
45 Singer whose name becomes a place in Hawaii if the first letter moves to the end
46 What a speaker might do if nobody is listening to them
47 Relish
49 Operator of Maple Leaf Lounges
50 Touristy district of Rome
51 Sight in suburbia
52 Band for guitarists
53 Citation abbreviation
54 Something seen in a demo, for short

DOWN
1 Bungle
2 "You're lyin'!"
3 Ate up
4 Goes as planned
5 Enter hesitantly
6 Play area
7 Kitchen staple that's gone missing in the song "Margaritaville"
8 Rehearsed, say
9 "Don't worry, you can come closer ..."
10 Modern medium for jotting things down
11 Some seismic activity
12 Sprinkles and fudge at an ice cream parlor, e.g.
14 Overcome, in a way
15 Have legs
22 Liar's concoction
23 Like many kids on the night before Christmas
26 Word on Italian street signs
27 Music style whose name literally means "new trend"
28 Accept cookies, say
30 One who's unlikely to negotiate well
31 Robbins who co-wrote the "Rocky" theme "Gonna Fly Now"
33 Creative use for recyclable materials
34 It won't be around for long
35 Like some poetry
36 Does a takedown of
37 Big ___
38 "Hang on ..."
39 Turn the page, say
40 "Saturday Night Live" cast member from 2012 to 2022
43 Parsons who worked on "Abbey Road" and "The Dark Side of the Moon"
44 Lacking
46 Suitable for family movie night, in a way
48 Make rent

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

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

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Weekend

MARISSA LESHNOV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Kara Walker is no one's robot

The artist offers a parable about trauma, healing and loss in a work for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

DAMON WINTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above, Kara Walker's "Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Left, the sphinx-like centerpiece of Walker's exhibit at the Domino Sugar Refinery in Brooklyn in 2014, titled "A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby."

BY HILARIE M. SHEETS

The raised right arm of a 7-foot-tall Black automaton in a somber Victorian dress came swinging down toward an approaching visitor, who had unknowingly triggered a motion sensor.

"Oh, watch your head!" the artist Kara Walker called out. She was standing just outside the wingspan of her creation, called Fortuna, as it sputtered to life in a cavernous hangar at the Brooklyn Navy Yard this spring. The robot, named for a prophetess, began to spit out printed fortunes from its mouth; they fluttered to the floor for the audience to contemplate.

"The paradox of Being Black is the condition of Not-being," one read.

"Your last shred of dignity is often your best."

"Loss is a heady thing our hearts cannot comprehend."

Fortuna is one of eight robots Walker produced in a groundbreaking collaboration merging art and technology for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The kinetic ensemble will begin its marathon performance on Monday in the museum's free, first-floor gallery and run for almost two years.

At the Brooklyn Navy Yard, Walker and her team of engineers, fabricators and designers were in the throes of staging and testing the weathered-looking figures. The artist's commission bears one of her poetically complex titles: "Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine) / A Respite for the Weary Time-Traveler. / Featuring a Rite of Ancient Intelligence Carried out by The Gardeners / Toward the Continued Improvement of the Human Specious / by Kara E-Walker."

In San Francisco, Fortuna will be elevated on a pedestal so her mechanical arm doesn't clobber fortune-seeking visitors. She could be considered a stand-in for Walker, 54, who is celebrated for her unsparing and haunting installations that explore collective racial trauma and systems of power. The best-known, "A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby," at the Domino Sugar Refinery on the edge of the East River, in Brooklyn — a massive sugarcoated female sphinx for Creative Time — was in 2014; the current show brings a new level of showmanship, and, like "Sugar Baby," is open to myriad interpretations.

The automatons nod to the displaced and dispossessed Black population in America across time, its presence now felt acutely in San Francisco's city center. Seven figures will be rooted on two platforms in a field of black obsidian rocks, which are long associated with healing properties. The figures enact a ritualized dance, their motions centered on a figure called Levitator, a flailing girl who rises and falls on her back in an endless cycle.

"There's something operatic about their interaction and the suggestion of an allegorical tale," said Eungie Joo, curator of contemporary art at SFMOMA, who first approached Walker in 2018 to consider a project. It ultimately had a long gestation period: Covid struck, and the work became informed by Walker's thoughts of death and dying, the pandemic's disproportionate effect on Black lives, and the loss of her father, who passed away on Christmas.

"Kara wanted to address the trauma of experiencing Covid as a society, where so many everyday lives lost their meaning and so many people were anonymously taken," Joo said. At the same time, she added, Walker also wanted "to think about how art could offer wonderment and transformation."

Walker's foray into robotics is new but perhaps not surprising. The automatons are instantly recognizable as a product of her hand and imagination, reminiscent of her signature silhouettes — a technique that had roots in the Victorian art of shadow puppets. It's as though they've now materialized in three dimensions, with motors and electronics and a few extra bells and whistles.

Her early interest in puppets emerged some 30 years back, when Walker made her huge splash in the art world right out of the Rhode Island School of Design's M.F.A. program, in a 1994 show at the Drawing Center in New York. There, she constructed her first panorama using black paper cutout sil-

WALKER, PAGE 21

MARISSA LESHNOV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Left, a robot girl rising up on her own, as though ascending to heaven, in the San Francisco work. Below, an installation view of Walker's 2007-8 retrospective at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York.

RUTH FREMSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Fashion

PARIS

BY GUY TREBAY

The runways as a playlist

Our critic imagines his own compilation as he watches the clothes go by in Paris

If fashion is a storytelling business, it should follow that runway shows are narratives.

Yet they can't be. For starters, they lack plots. True, designers can be relied upon to spiel about inspirations, travels or philosophies as listeners' eyeballs roll back in their heads. The truth is that most fashion shows are best consumed, as everything else now is, in fragments. They are elements of an ongoing internal scroll, as continuous, algorithmic and addictive as Instagram reels.

That, anyway, is how this critic began viewing the collections in Milan and Paris this season, with the result that the following is best thought of as a mixtape, not anchored to specific nationality or geography or context, random and in some sense impressionistic and probably also solipsistic in the way everything is fundamentally forced to be in an attention economy.

Take Hermès. The designer Véronique Nichanian is anything but a household name, probably not even among those in the economic stratosphere that this label was created to serve. So what? She's as consistently fine as — and in many ways better than — other fixtures in the pantheon of men's wear, people such as Giorgio Armani or Helmut Lang. There is a reason you don't know her.

"We don't do marketing," Axel Dumas, the Hermès chief executive, said at the company's show. "We don't even have a marketing department."

Why bother when you are producing jaunty collections for those people whose own initials are enough, as the old Bottega Veneta tagline once held. So-called quiet luxury generally tends to make a racket. Ms. Nichanian's is a muffled version and whispers wealth.

If money were no object, and if this were some fantasy exercise in personal consumption, I would readily click on one of her feather-light leather field jackets in pale lavender, possibly also a pale pink varsity jacket or definitely the cardigan with subtle color blocking at the hem.

Despite the prevalent horrors of the world, the season just past was one in which designers leaned on the poetic. Maybe it is precisely because things are so ugly that beauty has become a haven. You would think so, based on the collection the designer Satoshi Kondo created for Homme Plissé Issey Miyake. Notes from the show pointed out various tricky harness details that would allow a wearer to slip off a coat in one of the house's proprietary pleated fabrics and roll it into a little carry pack.

What this viewer took away from the collection was a fervent wish to have been invited to the Ambani wedding in India — the July nuptials that are to link two fantastically wealthy families — just for the opportunity to wear a Miyake cargo shorts outfit in sea-foam green or a jacket cape over lilac pleated trousers.

If Indian wedding fantasies became a kind of subconscious leitmotif this season, it could be because designers such as Junya Watanabe and Rei Kawakubo at Comme des Garçons Homme Plus riffed so wonderfully on formal wear. Mr. Watanabe did it by radically recasting tuxedos as patchwork suits of frayed black or blue denim, then ornamenting them with white-thread machine patches and scraps of tartan. Memo to celebrity stylists — and also groomsmen — everywhere.

Ms. Kawakubo delved into formal frock coats, by no means for the first time. Hers were ruffled at sleeves and hem and tails and were shown during a soundtrack featuring Erik Satie's music for the Massine ballet "Parade." Cue sirens, typewriter clatter and gunshots. Gruesome headlines came to mind.

Yet such is Ms. Kawakubo's elegance of thought that the designs also evoked an era different from our own, that of post-Edo Japan: formal, courtly, simultaneously stylized and yet naturalistic.

Rick Owens also hearkened to what was essentially the same period — 1920s and '30s — though as embodied by Hollywood. The show, held on the steps and plaza of the glorious Art Deco Trocadéro complex in Paris, was monumental, fantastic and one of this observer's highlights. It was also bombastic and utterly camp.

Possibly only an oddball kid growing up with no television in Porterville, Calif., in the 1960s could arrive at the affection Mr. Owens feels for the sword and sandal spectacles of Cecil B. DeMille. Why else would anyone stage a fashion show featuring 10 looks repeated 20 times, each on phalanxes of models, more than 200 in all. Against the booming cadences of the allegretto of Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, the models marched out in battalions: four models, five lines, dressed in wrapped knit shirts, side-split shorts and Geobasket sneakers, almost all of it uniformly white.

The show was epic as intended. Yet, putting aside the theatrics, the clothes themselves were commercial: biker jackets with a variety of coated treatments, drifty cowled chiffon coats, hooded capes and boiler suits. Even a deflated leather version of the pumped-up knee boots that he showed last season looked less freaky, now that the eye has gotten used to them.

The designs Pharrell Williams showed at Louis Vuitton — a show with universalized "It's a Small World (After All)" thematics that, one could be forgiven for thinking, looked a bit like a market play dressed up as inclusivity — were more assured and commercial than his last foray, into the cliché American West. We accept that Mr. Williams isn't his predecessor, Virgil Abloh, whose design explorations, though sometimes nutty, were always approached in earnest. Still, Mr. Williams's Vuitton merits a spot on my mental shopping list, if only because many of the looks featured a style of luggage created for the pan-continental airline Air Afrique in the 1960s.

Lately the look — a multicolor check pattern — has been repopularized by creative types such as Lamine Diaoune, Amadou-Bamba Thiam and Jeremy Konko, each of whom collaborated with Mr. Williams on the collection. Seldom do I come away from a Vuitton show with an itch to buy anything. Yet this time I could indulge a fantasy of strolling through an airport concourse with one of those bags, perhaps on my way to a seminar on Aimé Césaire of Martinique, the poet, author, and politician.

In a personal playlist for the season, mellow grooves would be the conclusion. And top among them would be a slow jam of Grace Wales Bonner's tailored and elevated take on Afro-Caribbean streetwear. I would take a "tuxedo" that appeared near the finale. Its top was a patterned hoodie based on the archive of the Afro-Caribbean artist Althea McNish, elegantly paired with dark trousers and a cummerbund. Funnily, the throwback qualities of Ms. Wales Bonner's collection unexpectedly called to mind that of Giorgio Armani, who also evoked tropical atmospheres in what was something like his 350th collection in 50 years.

Sometimes it is fun to play human resources games while watching the clothes go by on a runway. Mr. Armani turns 90 in a couple of weeks, and in a wild-card imaginary succession scenario, it is wonderful to think what Ms. Wales Bonner would do with a global behemoth whose design codes — think suede blouson bombers, rib-knit sweaters; stuff that still resembles the '80s men's wear pictorials that the photographer Peter Lindbergh shot and that have influenced designers ever since — are fundamentally close to her own.

A shrunken version of similar looks from the '80s turned up at Prada, where the designers Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons share a taste for torquing retro references and making stodginess look cool. Here it took the form of V-neck knits, cardigans, super-snug crew necks and high-waist trousers with trompe l'oeil belts, worn on the requisite starvelings. Those same clothes on men with average waistlines would look pretty different and a whole lot more conventional.

On the other hand, the printed tops — the ones featuring sad faces drawn by the execrable French painter Bernard Buffet — would be really punk if worn unironically by some skate rat barely old enough to shave.

RICK OWENS

VALERIO MEZZANOTTI/OWENSCORP

PRADA

MONIC

GRACE WALES BONNER

WALES BONNER

COMME DES GARÇONS HOMME PLUS

COMME DES GARÇONS HOMME PLUS

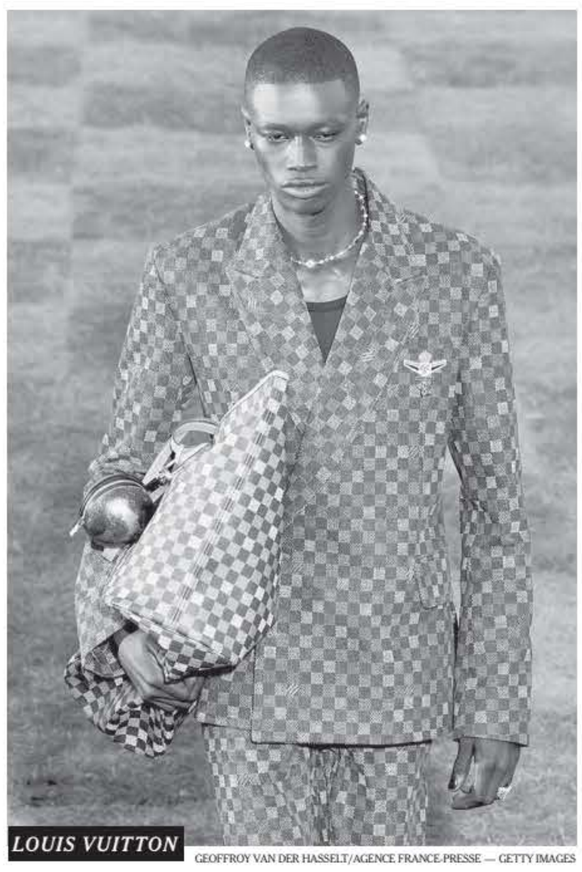
HERMÈS

VIANNEY LE CAER/INVISION, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

It is best thought of as a mixtape, random and in some sense impressionistic.

JUNYA WATANABE

JUNYA WATANABE



LOUIS VUITTON

GEOFFROY VAN DER HASSELT/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Finding Harriet Tubman

BOOK REVIEW

Night Flyer:
Harriet Tubman and the Faith Dreams of a Free People
By Tiya Miles. *Penguin Press. 336 pp. $30.*

BY JENNIFER SZALAI

Harriet Tubman led such an eventful life — so filled with hardship, extreme peril and close calls — that even an atheist might find it hard to deny that her nine decades of survival on this earth were nothing short of miraculous.

Tubman herself credited God with guiding her dangerous work as a conductor on the Underground Railroad during the 1850s; she made an estimated 13 trips below the Mason-Dixon line and spirited as many as 80 souls north, often all the way to Canada. Tubman's own escape in 1849 was legendary. After a first attempt with her brothers, who were so frightened that they insisted on turning back to their enslaver's estate near the Chesapeake Bay, an undaunted Tubman made the treacherous 90-mile journey from Maryland to Pennsylvania, about 145 kilometers, on her own.

"Where others saw shut doors and unscalable brick walls, she dreamed into being tunnels and ladders," the historian Tiya Miles writes in "Night Flyer," a short biography of Tubman that is the first in a new series, called Significations and edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr., about notable Black figures. For decades after her death in 1913, Tubman's extraordinary life was mostly relegated to books for children and young adults. Thorough, probing biographies by the historians Catherine Clinton and Kate Clifford Larson were published two decades ago. More recently, Tubman was the subject of a Hollywood biopic and "She Came to Slay," an illustrated volume by the historian Erica Armstrong Dunbar, featuring a drawing of a pistol-toting Tubman on the cover.

Perhaps inevitably, all the pop-cultural attention has been double-edged, commemorating Tubman's formidable accomplishments while also making it harder to discern who she actually was. Miles admits that before she started this project, Tubman "had become a stock figure in my imagination, a known hero in the cast of characters that we might call the abolitionist avengers." Recognizing Tubman's idiosyncrasies and physical ailments "resizes Tubman the cultural icon to human scale."

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Harriet Tubman around 1885. Pop-cultural attention to her extraordinary life has been double-edged, commemorating her accomplishments while also making it harder to discern who she actually was.

Miles calls "Night Flyer" a "faith biography," emphasizing Tubman's spirituality along with her ecological awareness, expressed as a profound attentiveness to the natural world. Miles also draws on the life stories of "similar women," such as the preachers Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw, to try to illuminate some of the more interior experiences that Tubman took care to keep hidden.

Such gaps in the historical record are familiar to Miles. Having written about Indigenous people and African Americans, including in the National Book Award-winning "All That She Carried," she frequently faces what she has called "the conundrum of the archives." Tubman did not read or write; she dictated her life story to "typically white, middle-class, antislavery women," like her first biographer, Sarah Bradford. Although usually "well-meaning," Tubman's amanuenses sometimes "demeaned" her, casting her as an exotic, almost otherworldly figure.

Not to mention that Tubman herself was a skillful performer, someone whose feats of bravery were made possible by guardedness and caution. "She wanted to control the narrative," Miles writes.

By the end of the 1850s, Tubman was actively shaping her persona in spoken-word performances, "understanding that if she did not, others would make a character of her for their own ends."

"Night Flyer" briskly narrates the major events of Tubman's early life. She was born Araminta "Minty" Ross sometime around 1822, to Rit Green and Ben Ross on the eastern shore of Dorchester County, Md. After sustaining a severe head injury at 12 or 13, when she stepped between an enslaved boy in a shop and a two-pound weight that was lobbed by his overseer, Tubman began to have seizures that she associated with religious visions. She changed her name after marrying John Tubman, a free Black man, around 1844. By then, having seen two of her sisters "carried away" to the Deep South on a chain gang, Tubman was already asking herself a question that would animate the rest of her long life: "Why should such things be?"

Using these facts as a trellis, Miles tries to coax out Tubman's personality. Tubman had always preferred being outside. As a child, in an effort to escape a beating for sneaking a lump of sugar, she hid for five days in a pigpen. In the 1830s, her enslaver hired her out to heavy, outdoor labor — driving oxen, cutting wood and hauling logs. Tubman deemed such work preferable to the domestic chores she hated (even though, after her escape, she would take on domestic work in order to help fund her rescue missions). Recreating the scene of Tubman's eventual escape from slavery, Miles imagines the spongy soil of the wetland woods and the swamp blackberry she may have eaten.

But it wasn't all about survival in the woods. Tubman also had a refined sense of style, Miles says — and a sense of humor about it, too. During the Civil War, she worked as a military scout and spy, and accompanied a regiment on the Combahee River Raid in South Carolina. Tubman recalled how her finery was not quite suitable for the occasion: "I started to run, stepped on my dress, it being rather long, and fell and tore it almost off, so that when I got on board the boat there was hardly anything left of it but shreds. I made up my mind then that I would never wear a long dress on another expedition of the kind, but would have a bloomer as soon as I could get it."

She made some 13 trips south and spirited as many as 80 souls north.

"Night Flyer" includes an insert of color photographs by Amani Willett, of sites connected to the Underground Railroad. The last one shows a marker for the Mason-Dixon line. What's especially striking is how ordinary it looks — a worn stub of stone, surrounded by overgrown greenery, that once marked an existential division between slavery and freedom.

Tubman lived for nearly half a century after the Civil War ended, sheltering people in her home in Auburn, N.Y., and establishing a care center for the elderly and disabled. Toward the end of "Night Flyer," Miles admits to struggling with her project — trying to get closer to someone who left such a "murky paper trail." She derides the as-told-to biographies, explaining that the white women who wrote them, despite their good intentions, "could not have told Tubman's story with the fullness, clarity and philosophical depth that Tubman would have, had she written it herself."

The claim is banal in one sense, and unsupported in another. Miles tells us that Tubman always took care not to expose "her own private feelings"; there's little reason to think that she would have wanted to reveal more of herself to a hungry public. The Tubman who emerges from "Night Flyer" is still extraordinary, and still elusive. As one colleague put it to Miles: "No one could catch her then. It's going to be hard to catch her now."

By the Book
Gabrielle Zevin

When did the author of "Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow," just out in paperback, realize she had a crossover hit? It was an answer on "Jeopardy!" — "the $1,000 question," she says, "not an easy one."

REBECCA CLARKE

What books are on your night stand?
A terribly personal question! As an author, I've brazenly talked about books for years, but I still feel like reading should be a little private. But, OK. For my night stand, I prefer a paperback, though at the moment I'm reading something as heavy as a textbook, a terrifically smart graphic novel called "Acting Class," by Nick Drnaso. I also have two hardcovers in my stack: "Enter Ghost," by Isabella Hammad, and "The Fraud," by Zadie Smith.

Describe your ideal reading experience (when, where, what, how).
I'm 8. No one wants anything from me, and I have nothing to do except read. Maybe I'm reading "Anne of Green Gables." Time stretches out forever.

What moves you most in a work of literature?
Character. When a writer reveals a person in all their complexity. I am moved by what time does to characters, and the ways in which characters, like humans, misunderstand themselves and their motivations.

Disappointing, overrated, just not good: What book did you feel as if you were supposed to like, and didn't?
I adore Edith Wharton; "The Age of Innocence" and "The House of Mirth" are favorites. I hadn't read "Ethan Frome" until a few months ago. With all due respect to the ghost of Edith Wharton, "Ethan Frome" is pretty dreadful. It doesn't make me esteem her less. If anything, I take comfort in it, as a novelist.

Do you remember the last book you put down without finishing?
I frequently don't finish books. I like to dip in and out of things. It isn't necessarily the book's fault. That said, I will never criticize publicly a book that I didn't finish. It's part of my moral code.

What book has had the greatest impact on you?
I read "Song of Solomon" and "Invisible Man" in succession when I was a high school junior. Judith Beiner, my English teacher, had great taste. Both of those novels opened me up to the possibilities of what a novel might do.

Have you ever gotten in trouble for reading a book?
I was caught reading my parents' copy of "Hollywood Wives" at school, and my teacher said he thought it was below me. The next week, I read "Portnoy's Complaint," and the teacher objected to that, too. He mentioned my reading selections at a parent-teacher conference, and my parents said they didn't censor what I read. I am grateful these are my parents, because if they hadn't been, I might not have become a novelist.

What's the most novelistic video game you've ever played?
I like games because they are games. I don't want them to be novels. Not too long ago, though, I was playing a series of casual simulation games called "Hungry Hearts Diner." The gameplay and graphics are quite simple. It's about an older woman who runs a diner in Japan, and I did have the thought that it reminded me a bit of Yasunari Kawabata's "Thousand Cranes."

When did you realize that "Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow" was a success of a different magnitude for you?
Maybe when "Tomorrow" was on "Jeopardy!"? It was the $1,000 question, so not an easy one. The contestant didn't get it right, though she came close. She missed an "and" in the title.

On the other hand, sometimes strangers will now insist that I said, did, or believe things that I didn't say, do, or believe. With a certain level of success, one has a stronger awareness that the internet is full of nonsense.

What kind of reader were you as a child?
When I came across a novel I really liked, I would read it repeatedly, obsessively. I liked trying to figure it out. I still do that now when I have the time. I don't think you can truly know a book until you've read it at least twice.

What's the last book you read that made you laugh?
"The Appeal," by Janice Hallett, is great fun if you're into community theater and sociopaths. I flew through "Good Material," by Dolly Alderton. Obviously, "Grief Is for People" is about grief, but Sloane Crosley can't help being funny.

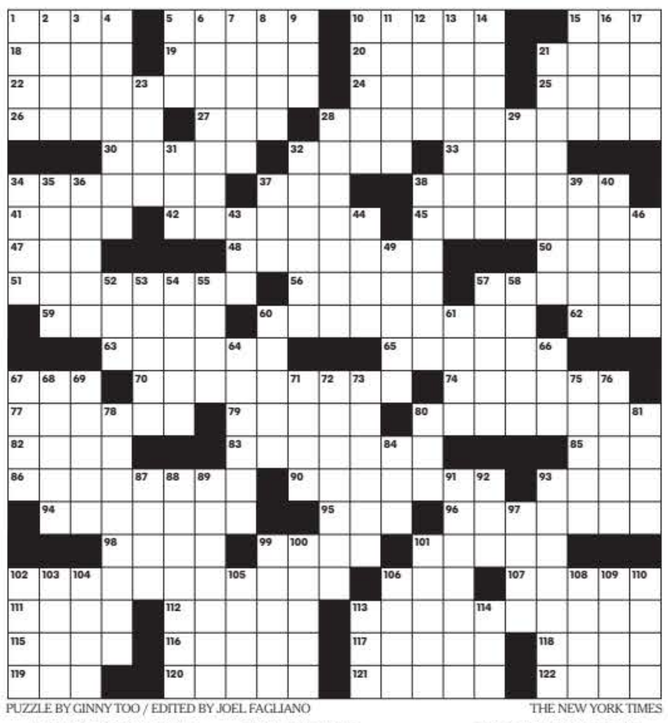
The last book that made you furious?
Plenty of things make me furious, but books are rarely one of them. I think of the virtuosic chapter in Nathan Hill's "Wellness" that's about the way the internet fosters outrage and division.

You're organizing a literary dinner party. Which three writers, dead or alive, do you invite?
I assume the dead ones are being reanimated for this party. It's not, I hope, a "Weekend at Bernie's" situation. It's not living Celeste Ng, living Emma Straub, living Tayari Jones and the exhumed body of Edith Wharton. "Guess what, friends? We'll be dining with a very literary corpse tonight." No one tell Edith what I said about "Ethan Frome."

THE SUNDAY CROSSWORD
Misstated
Edited by Joel Fagliano

Across
1 Say "Another great thing about me ...," say
5 Baltimore squad, casually
10 Turkic tongue
15 "I'll return shortly," in shorthand
18 Experience
19 Shapeshift
20 Emirati's neighbor
21 Feast often concluded with haupia (coconut pudding)
22 *Getaway driver's plan, obviously?*
24 Desires
25 Octopus's octet
26 Staple of '80s pop
27 Graphing calculator button
28 *"She sure runs fast!"?*
30 "Human beef" and "Chicken pox pie" on a menu, one hopes
32 Preps for framing, as a photo
33 Where fairy tale creatures often live
34 *Captain and nine crew members?*
37 Bust
38 Ones living a lavish lifestyle, in slang
41 Film unit
42 Like braids and some breads
45 *Jaded miner's remark?*
47 Preferring platonic relationships, informally
48 Words after "Mamma mia!" in "Bohemian Rhapsody"
50 Bhagavad ___ (Hindu scripture)
51 *Coke-ette?*
56 Sandy springs
57 "What a pity"
59 Real ___
60 *Actress Kendrick, when appearing in smaller films?*
62 Time of one's life
63 Perform better than
65 Like yesterday's bread, compared with today's
67 Core components
70 *PC-sensitive, in a way?*
74 Day before domingo
77 One of several named in a will
79 The same
80 *"You realize this is a silent meditation, right?"*
82 Cornucopia, essentially
83 Floral brew
85 Ring call, for short
86 *Considered buying that garden tool?*
90 Subject of a common phobia
93 Taiwanese tech company
94 Unswayable
95 Obvious name for a pet lion
96 *"Wait ... can we not play this in F sharp instead?"*
98 River in a classic dad joke
99 Landlocked African country
101 Quick-cooking noodles
102 *"Mm-hmm, get a little nearer"?*
106 When doubled, a rebuke
107 Spanish wine region
111 "Got it"
112 What a glass of cold water forms on a hot day
113 *Parent's encouragement to a budding chef?*
115 Box
116 Inspiration for the jokes in this puzzle's theme
117 Ancient region bordering the Aegean Sea
118 Excess
119 Sassy retort
120 Rulers used to make many crosswords?
121 Like a good day for kite-flying
122 Miffed

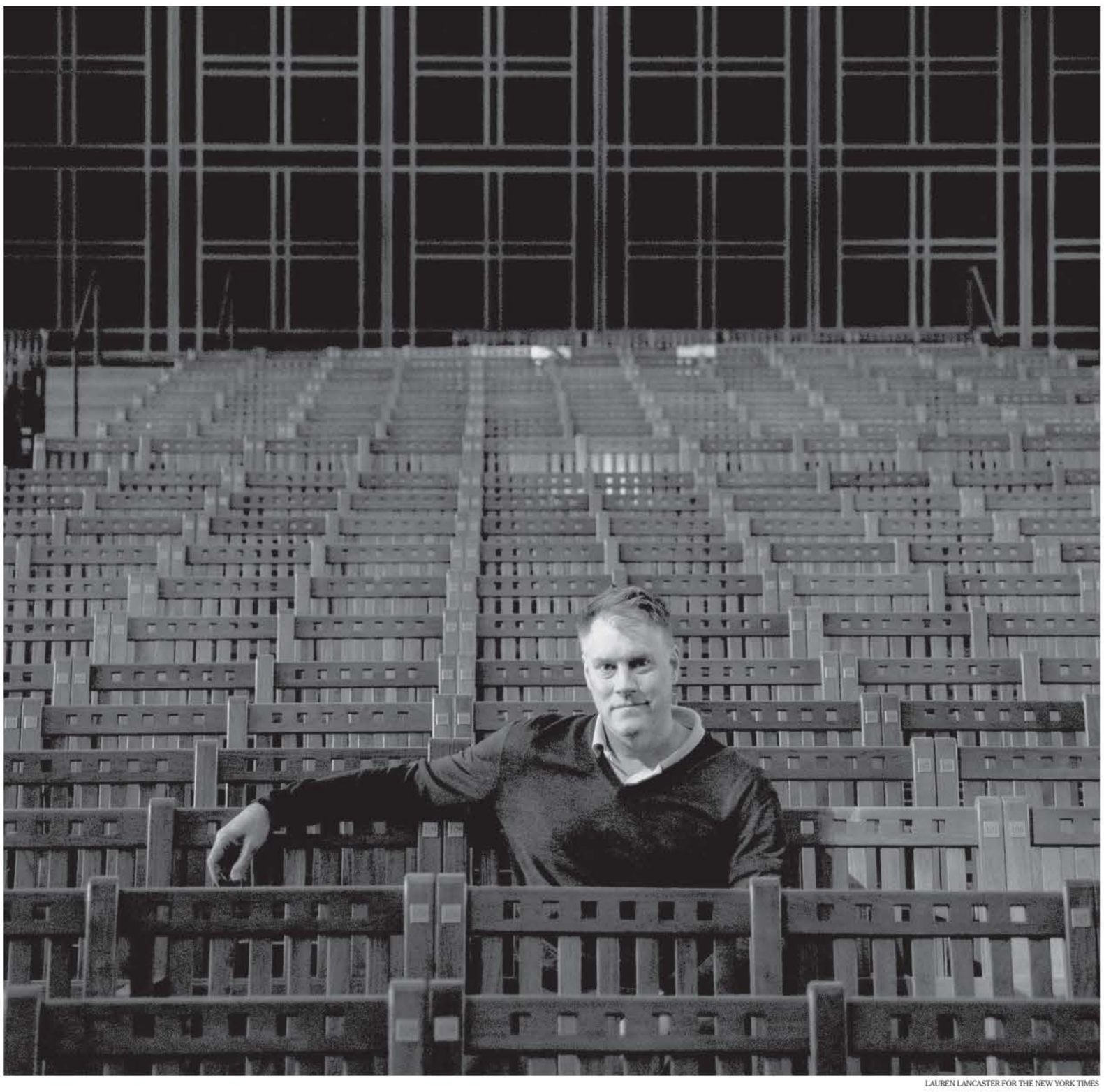
Down
1 Two halves of a platonic whole
2 Depend
3 Immeasurably long time
4 Like the "h" in "hat," to a linguist
5 Response to hearing all the gory details
6 Campfire remnant
7 Paul ___, Hungarian mathematician with over 1,500 published papers
8 Composer's numbered piece
9 "This is a library!"
10 Specifically
11 Hoard
12 Black and ___ (beer cocktails)
13 Like Gandhi
14 Meat-filled puff
15 Frowned-upon sound
16 Way up
17 Word with body or work
21 Successfully nested, say
23 Actor Matthew of "The Americans"
28 Ticked off
29 Author Émile
31 Zip
32 Sheep product
34 Public transportation option around Hong Kong
35 Haunting
36 Eye-catching shades
37 German article
38 Heckles, in a way
39 Poker action
40 Long-necked instrument
43 In the style of
44 South Asian
46 Zip
49 V-six or V-twelve?
52 Figure skater Midori
53 Like Mecca and Medina
54 Pride : lion :: raft : ___
55 Poker action
57 Cloisonné technique
58 1990s fitness craze
60 "Invisible Cities" author Calvino
61 Poet who wrote "Behold the duck / It does not cluck"
64 Bordeaux red
66 Zodiac animal that spells another if you change its last letter to "t"
67 Long
68 Gloating winner's exclamation
69 What surfers and guitarists can do, in slang
71 Genie's gift
72 "___ and the Bee" (2006 film)
73 Double-knotted, say
75 Leave behind
76 Harmonious, in a way
78 Put in harm's way
80 Sad trombone sound
81 Reason for an R rating
84 Source of confidence
87 Certain camarade
88 Fish whose left eye migrates to its right side as it ages (!?)
89 Unity
91 "Eureka!"
92 Total
93 They may be striped at ice cream shops
97 Sub
99 Chest material
100 Padlock parts
101 What's left of the Colosseum
102 A tourist may have one
103 "Sunday NFL Countdown" airer
104 Assessment of a situation
105 Hindu god of death
106 10 hundos
108 Where the Nobel Peace Prize is presented
109 "Belle de ___," 1967 Catherine Deneuve film
110 Poker action
113 Freak (out)
114 Elided agreement



PUZZLE BY GINNY TOO / EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO — THE NEW YORK TIMES

Solution to puzzle of June 22-23

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



LAUREN LANCASTER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

He has a long to-do list for the Boston Symphony

LENOX, MASS.

The new chief executive, Chad Smith, embraces tradition and innovation

BY JOSHUA BARONE

"I'm going to sound like such a dork," Chad Smith said as he drove a golf cart around the grounds of Tanglewood, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's pastoral summer home in the Berkshires. "I love Tanglewood *so* much."

He stopped the cart and looked out beyond the manicured campus to rolling, tree-covered hills and the still waters of Stockbridge Bowl. It reminded him, he said, of the environment at the prestigious Salzburg Festival in Austria. But Salzburg isn't attached to an orchestra and a music institute in the way Tanglewood has been since its founding in 1940.

"This is the sense of innovation that is at the core of the B.S.O.," said Smith, who became the Boston Symphony's president and chief executive in the fall. "The orchestra was not yet 60 years old, and it changed its identity again by becoming a symphony orchestra, a pops orchestra *and* an educational institution."

Gesturing to Stockbridge Bowl, he added: "And it has a beach. What other orchestra has a beach?"

ROBERT TORRES

Top and below, Chad Smith at Tanglewood, the site of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's summer season, which begins on Friday. Left, Thomas Wilkins conducting the orchestra in Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Violin Concerto with Nathan Amaral. Bottom left, the Concert for the City at Symphony Hall in May.

Smith has big plans for Tanglewood, whose Boston Symphony season begins on Friday, just as he has a long to-do list for the ensemble at home. History would suggest that he isn't just dreaming: He came to Boston from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where for two decades he played a crucial role in building the orchestra's reputation as one of the most innovative, important ensembles in the country.

Smith, 52, had risen through the ranks of the Philharmonic to became its chief executive in 2019. His departure was a shock to Angelenos, and to some it signaled a crisis for the Philharmonic, which shortly before had found out that it was losing its starry maestro, Gustavo Dudamel, to the New York Philharmonic.

The Boston Symphony was also in a state of crisis. It had seen a period of comfortable stability, even complacency, under Mark Volpe's leadership for 23 years. When he retired, in 2021, he was succeeded by Gail Samuel, another Los Angeles Philharmonic veteran, who resigned after 18 months.

"We had gone through a lot of tumult," said Barbara W. Hostetter, the chair of the Boston Symphony's board. "So we decided that we no longer had the opportunity to look outside the box. We needed an experienced orchestra C.E.O."

Hostetter knew Smith and was encouraged to see his name on a search firm's short list of candidates. The Boston Symphony may have once shaped American classical music, but it had become old-fashioned compared with the country's other top ensembles. She thought that he might be exactly what it needed to recover, if not thrive.

"More recently there's been an emphasis on tradition," Smith said, "but innovation was the founding principle. In the first part of the 20th century, I don't know that there was an orchestra that commissioned a body of work as enduring as the B.S.O.'s."

Smith visited Boston and met with Andris Nelsons, the orchestra's music director. They spoke "about the necessity and the mission to embrace the tradition," Nelsons said, "and to continue that, but bring it forward."

By the end of his trip, Smith was, to his surprise, open to taking the job. "I was comfortable with the arc of the work I had done in L.A.," he said. "I was excited by the opportunity that this orchestra put in front of me. The B.S.O. is probably the only other orchestra I would have left L.A. for."

It's Smith's job to say things like that, but his feelings about the Boston Symphony come from personal history. Los Angeles may have been his home for more than 20 years, but he grew up in Pennsylvania, before moving to Boston to study voice at the New England Conservatory and Tufts University. The Boston Symphony was the orchestra he heard as a student; he performed at Symphony Hall; he was even a fellow at Tanglewood.

He knows Boston well, and he knows that Boston isn't Los Angeles. Smith isn't looking to replicate his work at the Philharmonic, but elements of its spirit will inform the changes he has planned for the Boston Symphony.

For example, he and his colleagues in Los Angeles tapped into the city's distinction as a creative center. During the pandemic, streamed performance features included a conversation between Dudamel and the film director Alejandro González Iñárritu. With the experimental opera company the Industry, the orchestra presented John Cage's "Europeras 1 & 2" at Sony Pictures Studios. Boston, on the other hand, is an academic center. As the conductor Thomas Wilkins, who holds a conducting post at the Boston Symphony and has worked with Smith at the Hollywood Bowl, said, "He's got the luxury of now living in one of the most intellectual towns in America, if not on the planet."

Smith has already announced plans that tap into the city's concentration of academic institutions. Among them is the creation of the Boston Symphony Orchestra Humanities Institute, an initiative to develop programming with people beyond the walls of Symphony Hall, and beyond music.

"Orchestras aren't just about music," said the cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who lives in the Boston area. "At its best, an orchestra is a meeting place for ideas, for democratic exchange, for creating the shared meaning that makes our communities strong. This belief — that music is service — is in the Boston Symphony Orchestra's founding DNA, and it's a purpose that I see guiding the B.S.O. today."

(The humanities institute was unveiled in a wave of news that included the move of Nelsons's contract to a rolling, evergreen one and his added title as head of conducting at Tanglewood. Smith also founded a composing chair, which will be occupied by Carlos Simon starting this fall.)

Smith's leadership will trickle down to programming; he is especially interested in festivals that, he said, "explore topics and trends in a way that are meaningful, over multiple years." But, because of classical music's long planning cycles, his stamp won't be entirely felt on the orchestra's repertoire until the 2025-26 season. Still, he is already working with the Boston Symphony to shape its ethos and marketing.

"I'm being asked a lot, 'When will we get back to prepandemic?'" Smith said. (In fiscal year 2023, attendance for Boston Symphony concerts was down 23 percent from 2019.) "We'll get there, but I'm aiming for something a lot healthier. We have to re-center audiences in our decision-making, and retool programming."

Part of that work is a fresh look at the subscription model that long provided financial security for orchestras, but which has failed in recent years. "The pandemic just ripped the floor out," he said. "It's a massive impact, financially, but it's also a huge opportunity."

In a subscription model, programs need to have broad appeal, with a trusted formula. But if an orchestra shifts its focus to single-ticket sales, concerts can become "more curated experiences," Smith said. A niche evening that wouldn't sell out three performances might find success as a one-night event, while a Rachmaninoff war horse played by a star virtuoso might receive three or four shows.

"The B.S.O. is probably the only other orchestra I would have left L.A. for."

Targeted programming could allow for the kind of risk-taking that has been somewhat absent at the Boston Symphony. Smith said he hoped it would make for a kind of sandbox that artists could "come and play in": people from the city's various communities, say, or Simon in his composer role.

Gabriela Ortiz, a composer whom Smith and Dudamel championed in Los Angeles, and whose ballet score "Revolución Diamantina" is coming to the Boston Symphony next season, described Smith as a leader who is truly engaged with artists. In Los Angeles, she said, he sat in on as many rehearsals of her new music as he could. And they would talk about how to take classical music out of the concert hall.

"He was very aware that to expand the audience, you had to be open to risks and experiments," Ortiz said. "That's why I believe L.A. is one of the orchestras that looks to the future. I don't know Boston yet, but Chad invited me. He wants to bring new voices."

Ortiz's music was included in the Boston Symphony's Concert for the City in May, a free event that brought in community organizations and young artists to share Symphony Hall's public spaces, and its stage, with the orchestra. (The first Concert for the City, last year, included a piano appearance by Boston's mayor, Michelle Wu.)

Before the concert, Smith ran up and down the stairs of the building to see pop-up performances; in one room, where children were invited to take up instruments themselves, he tried to scratch out some notes on a quarter-size violin.

He posed with Nelsons, Wilkins and Keith Lockhart, the music director of the Boston Pops, along with leaders of local organizations, shouting, "1-2-3, say 'community!'" as their photo was snapped.

During the main performance, he leaned against a wall and listened, as students from Boston Arts Academy's Tina Turner revue sang "Proud Mary" and the Boston Symphony played Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Violin Concerto, with Nathan Amaral, a winner of the Sphinx Competition for young musicians of color.

The next day, Smith was on the road to Tanglewood. During the drive, he said that he hoped for the Boston Symphony to develop a reputation as New England's orchestra; he has ideas to add the region to its touring diet. But he also pointed out that the drive to Tanglewood from Boston was about the same as from New York, where a significant portion of the audience comes from every summer.

"We need to have a presence in both cities," he said. Recently, there have been Tanglewood billboards on the West Side Highway in Manhattan, with a photo of Nelsons and the phrase "Let summer sing."

At Tanglewood, Smith is planning to restore two historical buildings: Seranak, the home of the influential Boston Symphony music director Serge Koussevitzky; and the theater, where Britten's "Peter Grimes" had its American premiere in 1946. Both places have fallen into disrepair, but both have potential for the festival's future.

Seranak, Smith said, will be used for faculty and fellow housing. The theater, once renovated, will provide a proper stage for opera and ballet, whether for new works or visits from international companies. "I want Tanglewood," he said, "to be *the* classical music destination for the world."

The question, though, is when that will happen. Smith said that infrastructure followed mission, and that "the need to renovate the theater is not just about the stewardship of that building but a programmatic dead spot in our work."

On a more practical level, he will work with the orchestra's board to order the list of changes that need to be made, in Boston and the Berkshires. The Humanities Institute will start this fall, but reaching a consensus on other projects, he said, will take about a year.

"Internally, change is hard," Smith said. "But change happens by making change. It's going to take investment, and a lot of listening and experimenting. But now is when we have to take the big swings."

ROBERT TORRES

LAUREN LANCASTER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

OK MCCAUSLAND FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A comedy princess switches gears to take a darker route

Abby Elliott, from a line of funny people, brings unexpected gravity to 'The Bear'

BY ALEXIS SOLOSKI

Abby Elliott knows her way around a comedy. A veteran of the Groundlings and the Upright Citizens Brigade, she joined "Saturday Night Live" at 21 and has since appeared in laugh-track-ready shows like "How I Met Your Mother" and "Odd Mom Out." So in the spring of 2021, when FX approached her about a pilot for a comedy, she was interested.

"I kind of went into it like, Oh, should I do a voice?" Elliott said. "Or I could do a little catchphrase? That could be fun."

That show was "The Bear," which returned for its third season on Thursday, on Hulu. Set largely in the fraught kitchen of a Chicago restaurant, it stars Jeremy Allen White as a troubled chef. Elliott appears as his forbearing sister. "The Bear" is a comedy only in the classical sense, in that it emphasizes human foibles and does not end in disaster. (Is a workplace rife with panic, money trouble and suicidal ideation not a disaster? Take it up with Emmy voters, who in January awarded it best comedy.) Otherwise it is dramatic, frenetic, extremely stressful.

"I didn't really quite understand how high the stakes would be," she said.

For what it's worth, Elliott does consider "The Bear" a comedy. "It's just like real life," she said. "A lot of people find comedy in the darkness and the stress. It's so relatable in that way." But a funny thing happened on the way to the kitchen: "The Bear" made Elliott a dramatic actress. She does not do a voice.

I met Elliott, 37, at an Upper West Side cafe in Manhattan on a summer morning, the sun set to low broil, about a week before the Season 3 premiere. Though she lives in Los Angeles and works in Chicago, she had come to the East Coast for a family wedding and was enjoying a few days in the city afterward.

At breakfast, she was crisply dressed and fresh-faced (she did admit to a thick coat of self-tanner) despite the heat. She has big eyes, a sardonic, closed mouth smile and a talent for instant intimacy, especially when describing how she spent the 2024 Golden Globes pumping breast milk backstage alongside a similarly postpartum Sarah Snook.

If there is an allele for laughs, Elliott has it. Her father is Chris Elliott, a longtime late-night fixture seen more recently in "Schitt's Creek," who spent a season on "S.N.L." His father is Bob Elliott, half of the greatest-generation comedy duo Bob and Ray, who appeared on an "S.N.L." special. (Abby's mother, Paula Niedert Elliott, is a former talent coordinator for David Letterman.)

Elliott doesn't feel that she was pushed into performance. Her father, whom she idolized, showed her that a showbiz life was possible, even desirable. But he never made her watch his appearances on "Late Night With David Letterman," and he encouraged her to go to college.

"I mean, there were options," she said. "I just don't know how to do anything else, and I've never really known."

She dropped out of college after a semester and relocated to Los Angeles, living with relatives and taking improv classes. She was invited to "S.N.L." a few years later. Name recognition, a gentle form of nepotism, probably got her in the door at 30 Rock, but it was a gift for riotous celebrity impressions (Angelina Jolie, Meryl Streep) that kept her there.

She left after four years on the show and worked steadily throughout the subsequent decade, though typically in the kinds of daffy supporting roles that rarely ping the culture radar. She made peace with that.

"I was in such a safe zone of like, OK, well, this is just what I do," she said. "It's like, OK, I'm not going to be able to get these roles or play dramatic parts."

Christopher Storer, the creator of "The Bear," thought differently when he was searching for an actress to play a loving, no-nonsense sister. He had never worked with Elliott before, but he remembered her from "S.N.L." — particularly her impressions.

"There was something just so genuine," he said. "You could feel the affection for the people that she was impersonating."

He wanted that affection for Natalie Berzatto, nicknamed Sugar, the older sister of White's Carmy and clearly the only member of their family who has ever been to therapy. And Storer suspected that Elliott, a trained improv comic, was versed in working very, very quickly, a necessity on a show that values rawness and budgets few takes. She auditioned remotely; Storer was smitten. "She felt very human," he said.

Natalie has a sole scene in the pilot, a moment in which she speaks with Carmy about their older brother, Mikey, who has died by suicide. Though brief, it communicates the love and trauma between the siblings. She and White didn't discuss the scene before they shot it — or before they reshot it, months later. But White remembers feeling an immediate kinship.

CHUCK HODES/FX

Above, Abby Elliott in New York this month. In "The Bear," left, she stars as the older sister of Carmy, the troubled chef played by Jeremy Allen White, far left. Ayo Edebiri, who plays Sydney Adams, is at near left. Below from left, Elliott playing Angelina Jolie with Kristen Wiig as Madonna and Seth Meyers on "Saturday Night Live."

"A lot of people find comedy in the darkness and the stress. It's so relatable in that way."

"Whatever our imaginations had done, we were telling ourselves the same story," White said in a phone interview. He described the scenes between Carmy and Natalie as a respite from the chaos of the kitchen. Other cast members felt similarly.

Ebon Moss-Bachrach, who plays Cousin Richie, said that Elliott "in some ways is the straight man — practical, surrounded by this wildly erratic extended family." If he hadn't known better, he never would have guessed that Elliott did time on "S.N.L."

"Not because she's not funny, but just because she's grounded," he said. "She's not a showboat. She really has so much integrity and rigor."

In the first season, Natalie is siloed from the restaurant, but in Season 2 she comes inside, first as a project manager during a gut renovation and then as the general manager. That was not necessarily what Storer and Joanna Calo, the two showrunners, had planned. But Elliott's performance persuaded them to bring her in.

"I was like, Oh, thank you," Elliott said of finally entering the kitchen. "I had so much FOMO."

As Season 2 was being written, Elliott learned that she was pregnant with her second child. (Her husband is the screenwriter Bill Kennedy.) She told Storer and Calo, and they decided to write a pregnancy for Natalie, too.

Still, Elliott's pregnancy was distinct. She was energetic while Natalie was exhausted. And in a consoling scene in which Ayo Edebiri's Sydney makes Natalie an omelet, Elliott needed a spit bucket — pregnancy had given her an aversion to eggs. By the time filming started on Season 3, which explores the idea of legacy — genetic and otherwise — she had given birth. She had to wear a prosthetic belly and mimic heartburn.

Natalie is the most nuanced character Elliott has ever played. Her scenes involve subtext, a professional first. "My career has been all text," she said. "I've done things where I'm explaining exactly how I'm feeling, like so many times."

Shooting Season 3 while also caring for a baby and a toddler has not made Elliott's schedule any easier. (Her mother accompanies her to Chicago, as does a nanny.) But it has made her into a more centered, more focused actress. Her time on set is, she said, "adult time." Then she goes home and kid time begins.

"I'm so lucky to have these beautiful, wonderful children," she said. "I don't go home and drink a bottle of wine and obsess about that one weird take, like I did in my 20s."

If "The Bear" has made Elliott a better actress, it has not made her a better cook, though the food in the show, prepared by Storer's sister, Courtney Storer, is apparently excellent. (The piccata Natalie makes in the show's second episode? Elliott wrapped it in a plastic bag and ate it in the van on the way home.)

"I would love to cook," Elliott said. "But I'm barely showering every day. It's all air fryer and Target orders."

DANA EDELSON/NBC

Kara Walker is no one's robot

WALKER, FROM PAGE 16
houettes skewering both Black and white racist stereotypes in an epic antebellum plantation scene. It was at once lyrical and lewd, playful and horrific.

Invitations and accolades quickly followed, including the MacArthur "genius" award in 1997. (Walker was one of the youngest recipients.) That same year came hundreds of publicized letters of protest from older members of Walker's own Black community, objecting to her use and the exhibition of degrading imagery of African Americans in museums where they had had little representation to begin with.

Ann Philbin, then the director of the Drawing Center, gave Walker her early break and remembers the very personal and brutal subsequent public takedown. "Kara suffered through it — but she was also undeterred," said Philbin, who went on to become director of the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles for 25 years. "She didn't back down and the work became even stronger and more nuanced but just as unsettling."

Christopher Bedford, SFMOMA's director, described Walker as "this country's most important artist — for her relentless drive to force us as a nation to reckon with our past."

The project costs for the commission were nearly $2 million, supported through grants and private philanthropy. It is the museum's first commission specifically for the Roberts Family Gallery, which has Roman amphitheater steps that provide ample seating and is visible from the street.

Bedford noted the very long shadow that Covid has cast on San Francisco's hard-hit downtown, where the museum is situated, and also the efforts to build back attendance, now hovering around 65 percent of prepandemic levels.

Walker said she initially struggled with doing another commission, having come off a string of major public projects, most recently her 2019 monumental fountain at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in London. "The Tate seemed like it was the culmination," Walker said.

She was at first resistant to the Roberts Family Gallery site in the 2016 addition designed by Snøhetta. "I didn't want to be a lobby decorator," she said. "Sometimes it feels like it's providing a service for the museum, bringing in customers, as opposed to making an artwork."

Then the pandemic happened. "It felt like a good time to rethink and reset," Walker said. She found a direction to explore at the New-York Historical Society's 2022 exhibition, "Black Dolls," many handmade by enslaved women using scraps of cloth; after seeing the show the artist experimented with sewing humble little figures.

But it wasn't until what she called the "fever dream" of her own Covid that year, when she reached into the deepest corner of her closet and pulled out her own childhood doll for comfort, at her loneliest moment, that her vision for the commission began to crystallize.

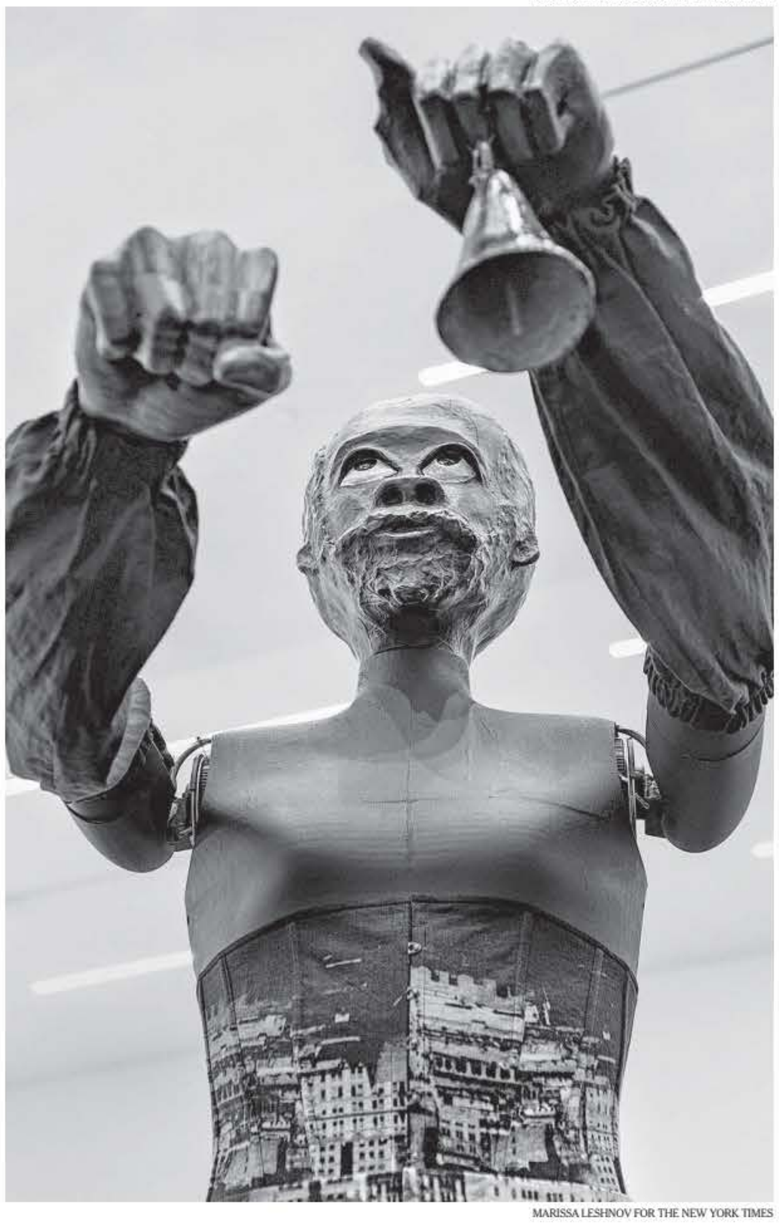
"I thought about dolls as empathy machines, providing a service," she recalled in the Brooklyn hangar, "and as some kind of magic object." Walker decided to embrace the museum's desire for audience engagement, and the architecture of a gallery frequented by families, by constructing her larger-than-life-size avatars of men, women and children that would deliver an experience that she described as part church, part Disneyland and part natural history museum display.

MARISSA LESHNOV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Left, Fortuna, the title figure of Kara Walker's "Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)." She spits out fortunes, below, and could be seen as a stand-in for Walker. At midpage, the artist in Brooklyn during production of the work.

MARISSA LESHNOV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Right, Harpy, who emits dissonant chords from the gaping hole in her abdomen. Below, a robotic "gardener" known as Bell Toller announces the next cycle of the healing ritual.



MARISSA LESHNOV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

ARI MARCOPOLOUS

"I thought about dolls as empathy machines, providing a service, and as some kind of magic object."

"Fortuna and the Immortality Garden (Machine)" could be seen as a diorama of tomorrow, looking back at Black life in America "from the institution of slavery through the eviction of Black populations from inner cities like San Francisco," she suggested.

The setting itself is deeply personal: Until age 13 Walker lived in nearby Stockton, Calif., and frequented San Francisco with her family. In conceptualizing her new project, she thought about the displays she saw at the California Academy of Sciences, which she called, "my favorite place on earth as a kid." She has drawn on other spots from her youth, like the Musée Mécanique on Fisherman's Wharf, which has an entertaining collection of coin-operated fortune tellers, mechanical puppets and animated dioramas.

She dove into Donna Haraway's essay "A Cyborg Manifesto," which contemplates the hybrid of human and machine as a metaphor for women of color. She read Jessica Riskin's essay "Machines in the Garden," illuminating the popularity of automatons in Renaissance Europe on noblemen's estates as amusements, and in church re-enactments of the divine. And she revisited Octavia E. Butler's 1993 novel, "Parable of the Sower," set in a postapocalyptic future of 2024.

"I went down a little sci-fi rabbit hole the last couple years working on this piece," said Walker, who enlisted Noah Feehan as the technical lead to design the software programming; the engineering studio Hypersonic in Brooklyn, led by Bill Washabaugh, to build the robots' bodies; and the couturier Gary Graham to outfit them.

While Walker outsourced the technology, she remained hands-on, modeling each figure's face and hands in clay, which were then 3-D scanned and printed. She drew silhouettes of the body shapes on cardboard, which were translated into aluminum skeletons, wired for motion and covered by exquisitely tailored clothing.

A big challenge was giving the automatons old-fashioned herky-jerky movement while not having them appear to be malfunctioning. "Motors and robotics generally privilege really smooth actions," Feehan said, "exactly the opposite of what Kara wanted."

She showed the team Herbie Hancock's video "Rockit," with spasmodically moving Chuck E. Cheese-style animatronics. She also taped herself pantomiming movements for each character. Her video for Whisperer, another child figure holding her own puppet, with which she appears to gossip, was "10 minutes of haunting conspiratorial eye-acting from Kara," Feehan said. The automatons' moves "will be a mix of chance and choreographed routines," he added.

Harpy, a doll who plucks the strings in the gaping hole in her abdomen, often dances a duet with Water Bearer, who wears a long, elegant skirt printed with a black-and-white image of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake, smoke billowing from the fires.

At periodic intervals, the Bell Toller stiffly chimes, signaling the main event: the rise and fall of Levitator at the bidding of Magician, a kneeling male figure with outstretched arms.

This play of resurrection and dissolution, stuck in a futile loop, evokes religious pageantry.

The tolling bell also summons a stooped figure on his own pedestal, who slowly unbends and comes to attention. His detached arms wriggle on the platform amid the obsidian rocks.

"I was thinking a lot about people I actually witnessed walking on the streets around the museum," Walker said. "It felt very desperate to me — the unhoused population, the drugs, the emptiness."

While working on the commission, she said she felt weighed down by the illness of her father, Larry Walker, a figurative painter and educator, and questions of mortality and memorials.

"Last year he asked me for a new body," Walker said. She was keeping her project a secret and didn't get the chance to share it with him.

"My dad would be wondering why I would do something this far away from two-dimensional work," she said, adding, "I like to think I was his best student, but I also had a mind of my own."

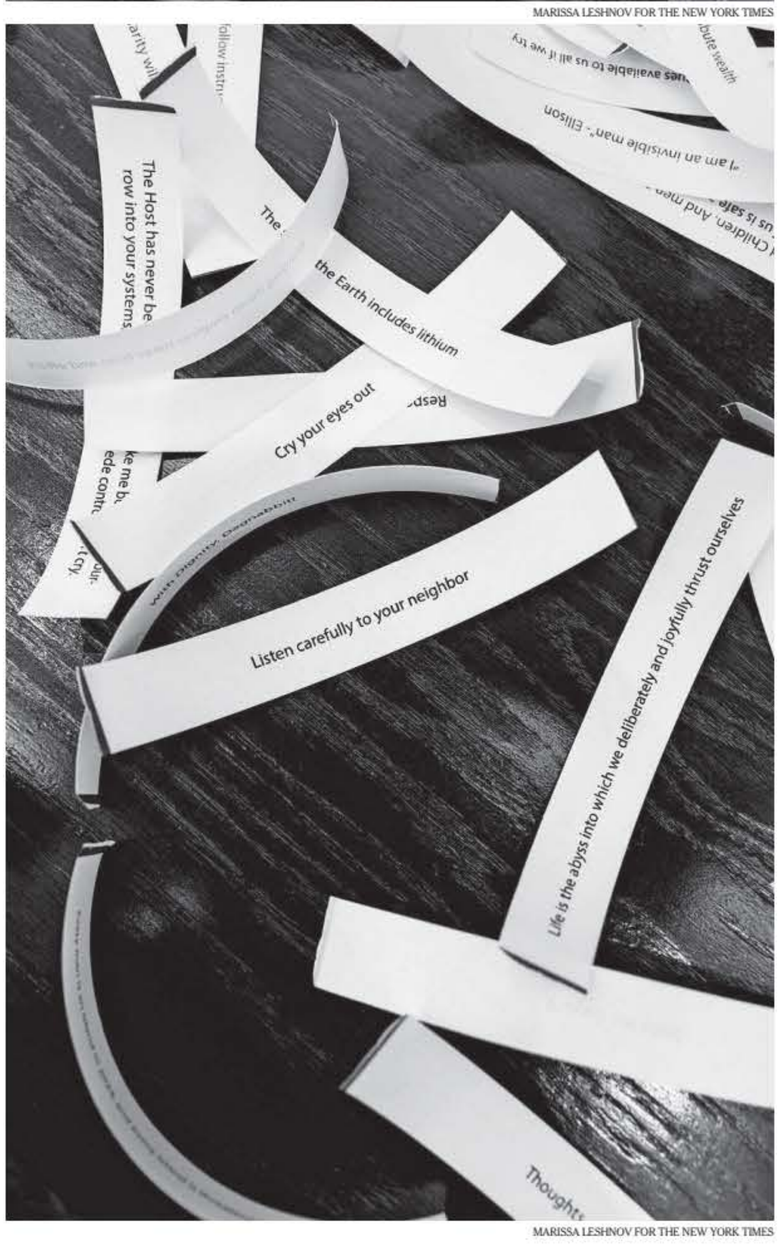
Thelma Golden, director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, has not yet seen the new piece. But looking back across the trajectory of Walker's work, she said, "What I marvel at is the way in which Kara is such a profoundly powerful monument and memorial maker.

"The work exists as a way for us to understand collective memory and moves us through many emotions — beauty, a dystopian sense of the world, a view of the real and the imagined."

David A.M. Goldberg, a lead product designer for Disney, who contributed an essay to the exhibition catalog, said that Walker's automatons "really hark back to harsh truths about plantation relationships that we first understood from her, through the silhouettes." Now, through her work with robotics, he added, "She challenges what makes that so uncomfortable. Is it their Blackness? Is it because they're not fluid, animated figures?"

Walker faced her own fear of technology by enlisting ChatGPT for the first time to write the aphorisms dispensed by Fortuna. She used AI prompts such as "Afro-pessimism" and "liberation struggles." Yet the results sounded trite. "I was like, 'No, it has to have fire! It has to have soul!'" She wound up writing 100-plus fortunes herself, proving that a human sensibility was not yet replaceable.

At the Brooklyn Navy Yard, standing alone, Fortuna straightened up, arms by her sides. In the snowfall of fortunes on the floor, one message stood out: "Artists cannot be expected to follow instructions."

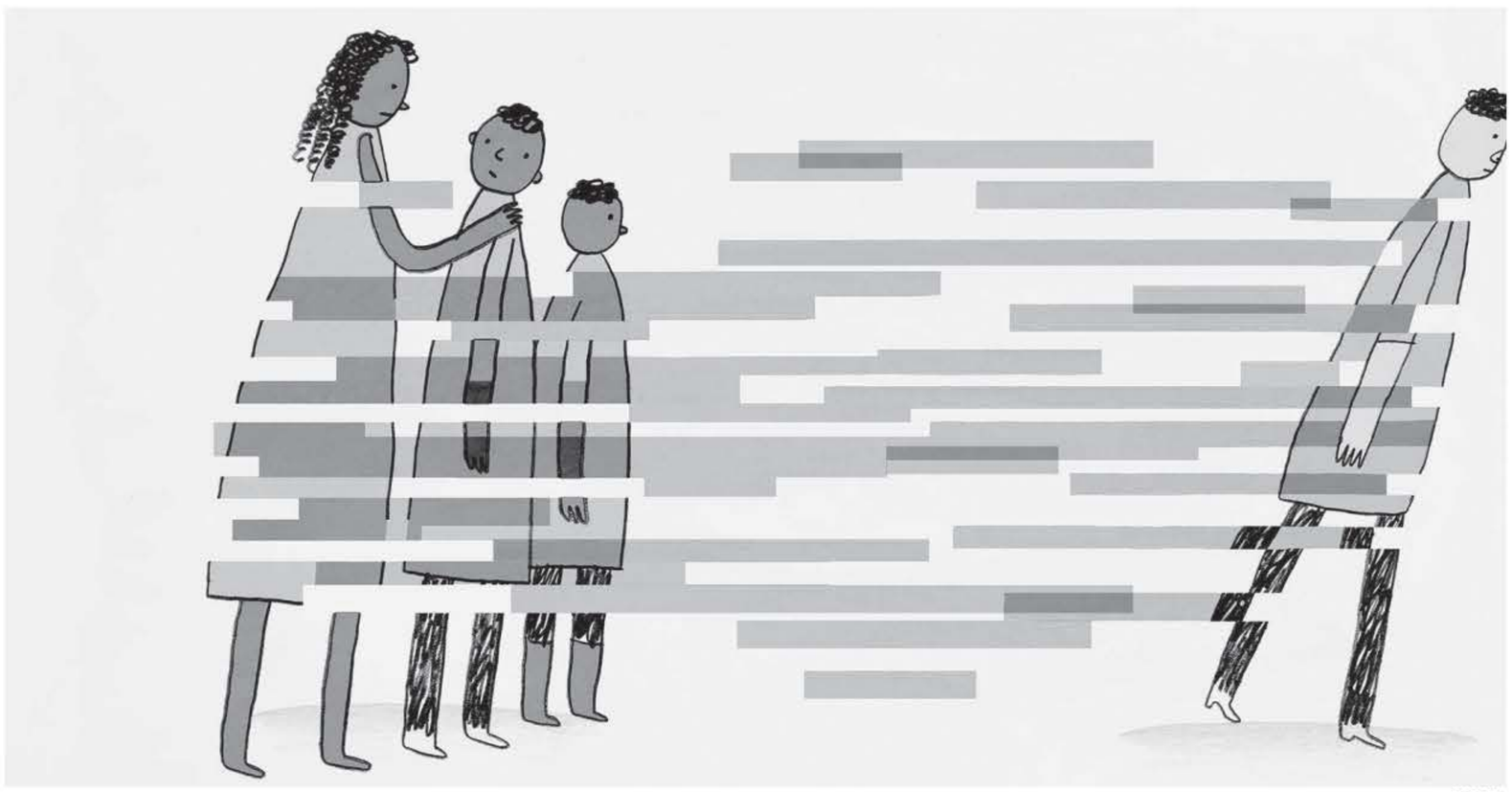


MARISSA LESHNOV FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A union that just might have gone on

My husband and I thought we had put our differences aside, until we couldn't

Modern Love



BRIAN REA

BY MARIÈME DAFF

When he wrote early in our correspondence that he thought his religion wasn't compatible with mine but that mine was compatible with his, I couldn't tell if he was joking or trying to make a philosophical point. I was taken aback by the absurdity of the statement, given that he had no religion, and I was a practicing Muslim.

"I believe in doing good in life," he explained, "which I think is what all religions prescribe. In that sense, I don't see our belief systems as conflicting."

I was in my mid-30s and had recently emerged from a three-year marriage. While there had been a confluence of reasons for my divorce, it came down to deep cultural differences that neither of us was equipped to navigate. My ex-husband was a white, American ethnomusicologist who studied the musical traditions of West Africa, had converted to Islam and quit drinking early in our courtship. He spoke some French, was an Africaphile, and we had similar values, and yet none of that was enough to bridge our cultural gap.

So I was starting over, with my biological clock ticking, convinced that finding someone closer to my own cultural background was the key to a successful relationship.

More than a decade earlier, I had landed in New York City to attend graduate school. As the daughter of Senegalese immigrants in France, I came from a tight-knit community, and my decision to study abroad as a single woman — the bravest thing I'd ever done — broke with tradition. Although my upbringing had been relatively liberal, our African and Muslim identity was our compass, and I felt anchored in my faith.

I came across this new man's profile on OkCupid by accident in my search for a Muslim man who did not drink alcohol. He was a white, atheist, divorced father who also happened to be a nondrinker. I moved quickly past his profile, discouraged by the scarcity of suitable prospects.

The next day, when I received a friendly note from him, I was surprised and decided to give him a second look.

OkCupid had given us a high compatibility rate, with only two areas flagged as conflicting: God and dogs. I had checked religion as "Extremely important," and he had checked "Not important at all." As for dogs, he loved them, and I had grown up in a home where touching a dog required you to immediately wash your hands; to some Muslims, dogs are considered impure.

I wrote back to thank him for messaging me and to say that we were not compatible. That evening, I received another message from him acknowledging our differences. "For what it's worth," he added, "I'm always happy to meet new people and maybe we can be friends."

I went back to his profile again. He was vegetarian, an avid cyclist, and only spoke English. I spoke four languages. Culturally, he seemed so white and American to me.

But we kept writing. He was an extrovert, witty, with a dry sense of humor, and had no filters. I am introverted, levelheaded and value deep connections over small talk.

He was from Seattle and grew up in a somewhat unconventional household, being his parents' only biological child, joined by three adopted siblings from India and a stream of foster children from all over. He had never had alcohol — not for any religious reason, but simply because he never saw the appeal. He didn't drink coffee or tea, and generally avoided stimulants.

I found him fascinating. He was a lawyer, working at a large firm, doing intellectual property litigation. I worked in a global nonprofit, traveling to West and East Africa several times a year. He admired my path and career.

I didn't know anyone like him, and he didn't know anyone like me, yet we shared so many interests and sensitivities. Even though he was a corporate litigator, he was a humanist at heart who lived simply, didn't value material things and aspired to leave the world a better place than he found it. He was a vegetarian for environmental reasons, didn't watch TV and raised his then 12-year-old son with these values.

I found that overwhelmingly endearing. If it wasn't for religion, I thought, we would be quite compatible.

Within two weeks, we spoke on the phone, which felt comfortable and strangely familiar. We agreed to meet a few days later. By then, I was struggling to reconcile my feelings with the elephant in the room: religion. How did I let myself go this far, knowing that we didn't stand a chance? This was supposed to be a fresh start for me on more solid ground. I knew I shouldn't indulge whatever this was turning into. It felt foolish and potentially sinful, yet I wanted to ride this a little longer.

We finally met on a cold Sunday morning at the West 72nd Street subway stop. He looked like a softer and warmer version of his online photos. We had brunch, talked and walked the city streets. I rode the train home with the calm realization that I had liked him more than I wanted to. When I got home, he had sent me a one-line message: "I like you."

As one year of dating turned to two, I never reached a state of certainty about where the relationship was going. I felt constantly conflicted about whether I could share my life with someone who doesn't believe in God. Yet, I was the happiest I had ever been with anyone, although I kept the relationship secret from my family in France. Culturally, dating is taboo for a woman in my community and the mention of a significant other would only be accepted in the same sentence as marriage plans. Marrying a non-Muslim, let alone an atheist, was not on the table.

OkCupid had given us a high compatibility rate, with only two areas flagged as conflicting: God and dogs.

We talked about marriage, but only hypothetically. The fact that he didn't drink or eat meat made it easier to envision merging our lives. He also didn't own a dog then. He had initially not wanted more children, but by then, his son was a teenager and becoming more self-sufficient, and he could see a scenario in which having another child wouldn't conflict with his desire to be the best parent he could be.

I was in my late 30s by then, and one child might be all I could have. Religion being such an integral part of my identity, I would raise my child Muslim, of course. He said he could live with that and even support it.

During that time, he showed great interest in my religious and cultural practices; not as if he could be swayed, but almost like a journalist with genuine curiosity. During Ramadan — the Muslim month of fasting — he fasted alongside me on days when we were together. For him, it was about sharing an experience and learning more about the part of my life that is "extremely important."

When he proposed on New Year's Day, almost exactly two years after our first meeting, I felt as if I was on the edge of a cliff. I looked at him, on one knee with a beaming smile. If I chose to see the humanist who believes in doing good in the world, maybe I could take this leap of faith.

So I did, and we married, moved to the West Coast and had two boys, now 9 and 7. For a long time, I felt immensely proud that their father and I had taken this giant leap of faith and landed where we did, neither of us compromising our beliefs while having a genuine acceptance of each other's.

But as fate would have it, this was not the end of our story.

Our marriage ruptured on the day we celebrated my husband's 50th birthday. In the early morning darkness of our family room, he told me he was not happy and that it would be best if we went our separate ways. While our marriage was not perfect, I never doubted our commitment to each other. But he did, and in the end, he needed to be with someone who brought out his true self in a way our relationship did not allow.

The spiritual part of me sometimes entertains the idea that God didn't want me to be with an atheist. The rational part of me accepts that people fall out of love and grow to want different things. Ultimately, religion was not an issue in our relationship. He supported my desire to raise our children in the Muslim faith and would direct them to me whenever they had a question about religion, saying, "Mommy is the expert on God."

As I navigate my new reality, I find deep comfort in what remains — my pot of gold: two children born out of the most unlikely union, impossible to regret.

Marième Daff is a nonprofit executive who lives in Paris.

Is it OK to secretly medicate a husband who is 'manic'?

The Ethicist

BY KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH

A woman I know often complains about her "manic" husband. He is a war veteran in his late 50s who owns a very successful business and is the primary breadwinner for their family. (They have no children.) The wife, a woman in her early 60s who works part time and is dependent on his income, recently told me she dissolves melatonin in the water he takes with him to work in order to "calm him down." She said, "I told him it was a nutritional supplement, something to help him because he sometimes doesn't eat lunch." I looked a bit shocked at her confession, and she immediately justified her actions by saying: "You don't have to live with him. He doesn't take his medications. Now he's calmer." She did not ask his permission to add melatonin to his drinking water.

Melatonin is not regulated in the United States — though in many countries it is available only by prescription — so legally speaking she is not "drugging" him without his knowledge or consent. And since he is under 65, this would not fall under elder-abuse laws in my state. But I am seriously considering revealing this subterfuge to her husband, whom I know. (She did not swear me to secrecy; in fact, I sensed from the way she told her story that I was not the first to hear of this.) Unfortunately, I have no confidence that confronting her would have an impact; she likes him better now that she's secretly giving him substances with no regard for his long-term health or the deception. If my wife did this to me, I'd be apoplectic. I'd appreciate your counsel. — Name Withheld

FIRST, ANY BENEFITS from this "treatment" could well be a second-order placebo effect. As an expert I conferred with confirmed, there's no serious evidence that melatonin is a useful treatment for mania, and there's no evidence to support this daytime, waking-hours use of melatonin at all. The main thing that melatonin has been shown to do is help induce sleep. Taking it during the day is an especially bad idea, because it can disrupt your body's internal clock, and because daytime sleepiness can lead to accidents. In any case, if your friend's husband is meant to be on other medications, he should consult with a doctor before taking melatonin (or any other drugs) regularly.

But it doesn't matter whether I'm right about any of this. Medicating mentally competent people without their fully informed consent is wrong. Giving drugs to a spouse in this way is an abusive betrayal of marital trust. What you've learned about isn't a past indiscretion; it's a significant and ongoing wrong. He should be told what's happening. Before you take that on yourself, though, do try talking with the woman about the implications of what she's doing, and encourage her to come clean.

TOMI UM

I'm a family physician. A young woman expecting her second child came to me for obstetric care. She had a black eye — not the first one, she told me. She worked as a topless dancer, but her boyfriend was so controlling and abusive that she did not have money of her own; he didn't even let her have much gas in her car. We developed a relationship meaningful to us both.

About a year later, she told me that she was getting breast augmentation, at a cost of thousands of dollars, which she intended to pay for in cash from her earnings. Around the same time, I discovered pre- to early cancer in her reproductive tract, and treatment was imperative to prevent progression of the disease, or risk dire consequences. She was insured by Medicaid, which is paid for with tax dollars. I think she probably didn't report her entire income to the I.R.S. or Medicaid, or she probably would not have been eligible.

I told her I didn't think I could ethically bill Medicaid for the diagnosis and management of the potential cancer while she was paying cash for breast surgery. (I was also not willing to risk my medical license, though I did not say this to her.) I told her we'd need to look at payment options and discuss them at her next appointment.

She never came back. I still wonder what happened to her and pray she found a new, self-respecting way of life. I wonder if I handled it as well as I could have. — Name Withheld

YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH this young woman was not that of an accountant or a tax auditor but that of a health care provider. True, she chose to disclose something that gave you grounds to believe that she had been misreporting her income. But there are people whose job it is to deal with that issue (although fraudulent claims submitted by providers are a bigger problem for Medicaid than ineligible recipients are). You say you didn't want to risk your medical license. Has anyone you know lost a medical license because a patient misrepresented her income to the state Medicaid program? Whatever your personal opinions might be about this woman's livelihood, your job was to keep her healthy, not to keep her honest.

Here's another question. Would society be better off if doctors were known to refuse to process Medicaid claims when patients gave them reason to suspect that they had underreported their earnings to the government? Under those circumstances, surely, such patients would learn to be more discreet around doctors — which might mean refraining from providing medically relevant information. I understand that you didn't want to be a party to fraud. It's still best if doctors aren't in the business of assessing their patients' income tier and policing eligibility. Burdening someone with high out-of-pocket expenses can be just as limiting to patient care as overt refusals to provide treatment.

That's especially true in this case. Because her abusive boyfriend controlled her money, you were leaving it to his discretion whether to pay for her cancer diagnosis and management, and he doesn't sound like someone who could be trusted to look after her best interests. Given your specific duties of care, your priority wasn't to look after the government coffers; it was to look after your vulnerable patient.

Our family partnership owns a farm field that lies diagonally across a road from an electrical substation. Because of its proximity to a power-distribution source, we receive requests to establish a solar-panel power facility on that land.

My son believes we should contract for such a facility because of the need for renewable energy and the income it would provide for our partnership. My daughter is concerned about the impact it would have on wildlife. My concern is about taking the land out of production and the financial impact it would have on the farmer who rents the land.

My husband is deceased, and I control his voting interest. I believe he would side with our son, because of the income prospects. How can we decide this based on the equally important competing interests? — Name Withheld

HERE'S MY ROUGH-AND-READY take on the considerations you've mentioned. As for wildlife protection: You're not proposing to clear a wilderness; the field in question is being used as cropland. I'll assume that it's being conventionally farmed, which normally involves tillage, chemical fertilizers and pesticides — with a net negative impact on the environment. Solar farms can harm some wildlife, too, even as they provide shelter for other wildlife. Would the shift from commercial farming be better or worse for wildlife? Let's call it a wash.

Nor is it obvious that a potential negative financial impact on the farmer — assuming he isn't someone you have a close personal relationship with, and assuming he'll be given proper notice — should outweigh the positive financial impact on the family, and whatever that might enable. (Your daughter, for example, might end up with more money to devote to wildlife conservation.) I don't see that the need for food is a concern: The United States, with its extensive farm subsidies, is already the top exporter of agricultural commodities in the world. That leaves us with the benefits of increasing the supply of renewable energy — and the particular efficiency with which this energy can be distributed to the substation, given that shorter transmission lines involve less energy loss. In this case, what's in your family's interest may also be what's in our collective interest.

Kwame Anthony Appiah teaches philosophy at N.Y.U. His books include "Cosmopolitanism," "The Honor Code" and "The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity."

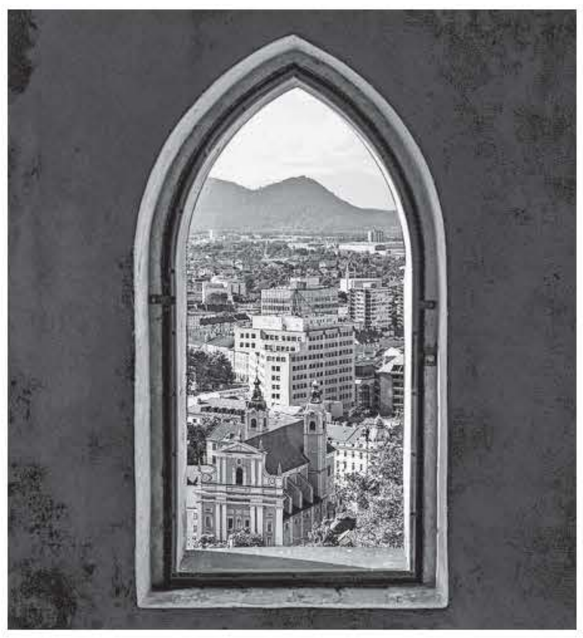
A model to go green in Europe

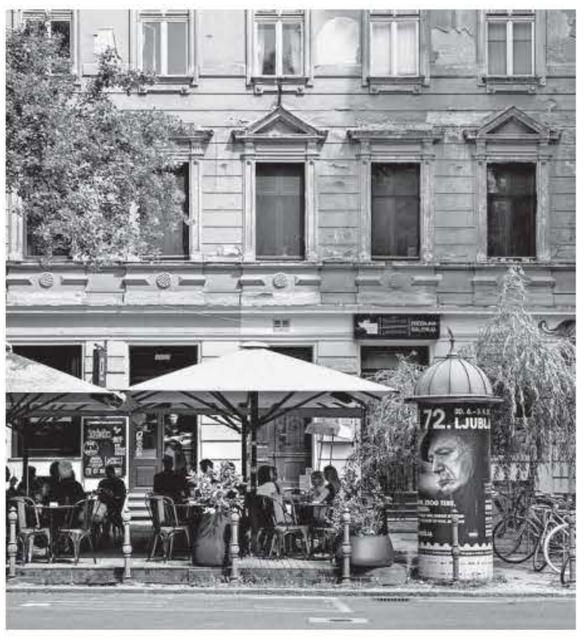
Noted for its urban design, the capital of Slovenia has shared-bike docks, a car-free city center and ample open space

36 Hours in ...
Ljubljana, Slovenia

BY ALEX CREVAR

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUSAN WRIGHT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES





Above, the Ljubljanica River and a view of Ljubljana Castle in the old center of Ljubljana, Slovenia. From far left: Pop's Pizza; the view from a window in Ljubljana Castle; and the Bazilika bistro, in French Revolution Square, which has delicious brunch quiches and homemade cakes.

A lifetime in travel has passed since Ljubljana was named the European Commission's "green capital" for 2016, but philosophically little has changed for the capital of Slovenia. Ljubljana is still an international model for sustainability, with more than 1,600 shared-bicycle docking sites, a car-free urban center and about 5,900 square feet (550 square meters) of green space on average per citizen. It remains quintessentially Central European: Just look to the hilltop castle that guards the cobbled squares straddling the Ljubljanica River. That's not to say this city of nearly 300,000, which is framed by the Julian and Kamnik-Savinja Alps and traces its history back more than 5,000 years, hasn't evolved. In recent years, Ljubljana opened Michelin-starred restaurants, UNESCO recognized the city for its urban design and, in classic Slovene recycle-and-reuse fashion, the city reopened a former bicycle factory last fall as a creative hub with open studios, galleries and shops.

FRIDAY

3 P.M. | OPEN THE KITCHEN

Dive right into Ljubljana's local-first gourmet attitude at the Open Kitchen, a street-food market wedged between the fruit and vegetable vendors of the outdoor Central Market, the Cathedral of St. Nicholas and the Triple Bridge, which anchors the city center. Locals and tourists gather amid more than 50 stands for a wide variety of creations — including Asian delicacies and Slovene fare like baked veal, sausages and pork ribs (dishes average 8 euros, or about $8.50) — each Friday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. (10 p.m. in the summer). The tradition has come to symbolize the country's emergence as one of Europe's most innovative food locales.

4:30 P.M. | RE-CYCLE CREATIVITY

Slovenia is obsessed with two-wheeled locomotion; its pro cyclists have dominated international racing in recent years. Embrace the fanaticism by visiting the nearly 100,000-square-foot Center Rog, where a former bicycle factory once produced Yugoslavia's most famous bike brand, Rog. The building, which reopened last fall and is protected for its national heritage, has been reimagined into a heaven for anyone who creates. Visitors can participate in an array of workshops and peruse studios and production laboratories that specialize in textiles, woodworking, metalwork and more, and that include a FabLab with 3-D printers. The 150-year-old complex also houses a public library, cafes, restaurants and shops, as well as a sprawling park with fig, apple and plum trees.

6 P.M. | STORM THE CASTLE

Ljubljana Castle, a 15th-century fortification atop Castle Hill that is reachable from the city center by a 10-minute trail walk or by funicular (€6 for a return ticket), has played a critical role in life here since the Bronze Age. Today, the castle (base entry, €12) has culinary attractions, events and an arsenal of activities, including an exhibition on Slovene history and an escape-room-inspired adventure game. After exploring, but still within the citadel, find your table at the Michelin-starred Restaurant Strelec, a cylindrical dining room inside the Archers' Tower. Choose from five-, seven- or nine-course menus.

9:30 P.M. | RETREAT TO THE CELLAR

After dinner, stay on Castle Hill for a glass of vino at Grajska Vinoteka. For generations, grapes were grown around the fortress. After a nearly century-long hiatus, vines were replanted in 2016. Taste a castle-grown chardonnay variety called belpin (€5 per glass), or another of some 200 other Slovene wines served with an accompanying prosciutto and cheese plate (from €28). Back in the city center, stop at Dvorni Bar, where revelers sit on the outside steps or riverside tables. In its 20th year, Dvorni serves more than 100 wines by the glass, focusing on the country's nine wine-growing districts. Try the teran (€3.80), a dry red from the Karst region. Reservations are recommended.

SATURDAY

9 A.M. | FUEL UP WITH BRUNCH

Start the day at Bazilika, a bistro spilling onto French Revolution Square. Dishes here are made from family recipes that the owner, Darja Koncarevic (who teaches culinary workshops at Center Rog), has also assembled into cookbooks. Take a spot on the terrace and order the salmon-and-leek quiche (€7), a slice of cranberry-orange cake (€3.20) and a cappuccino (€2.20). Then walk 15 minutes along the river to Cukrarna Gallery (opens at 10 a.m., €8), which shows contemporary art in a former sugar refinery built in 1828.

11:30 A.M. | SHOP ALONG THE RIVER

In a town as sustainability-minded as Ljubljana, details matter. Experience that local-first intentionality at IKA, a boutique near Town Square with products like scarves, handbags, jewelry and day planners by around 100 Slovene artists and designers. A 10-minute walk across the river takes you to Dapper, which sells denim, hemp and linen clothing produced under its own brand, Evio (jeans from €179 to €249), as well as biodynamic and organic regional wines. Reward your discoveries with a prelunch treat at Yauya, a patisserie where single-portion cakes and bite-size chocolates are made on the premises. Try the BB Cloud (€7.20): warm, nutty banana bread topped with cold mascarpone in a crunchy caramel glaze.

1 P.M. | BREAK WITH A SLICE

Stay on the left bank of the Ljubljanica to enjoy results of a reverse-immigrant tale: Greg Yurkovich, a Slovene American, grew up in California and moved to Ljubljana to craft Neapolitan-style pizza made with organic ingredients. His Pop's Pizza, which also serves wine, craft beers and cocktails, makes the Mr. Sinatra (€14.90) with Friulian pancetta, fior di latte mozzarella and sun-dried tomatoes. After, take a stroll along the river to Cacao, a cafe and dessert shop with an outdoor ice-cream stand, where locals line up for scoops (€2.60 for one) in flavors like Madagascar vanilla, Santo Domingo chocolate and salty caramel so delicious it ends conversations.

2 P.M. | WALK WITH THE CREATOR

Take a closer look at the city with a walking tour (run by the city tourism office) of creations by Joze Plecnik, the architect who helped shape the capital during the early 20th century. According to UNESCO, which placed "Plecnik's Ljubljana" on the World Heritage List in 2021, the innovative urban designer changed the identity of Ljubljana "from a provincial city into the symbolic capital of the Slovenian people." The two-hour stroll (€95 for two people) visits designs of his such as the balustraded stone Triple Bridge leading to Prešernov Trg (the main square), the National and University Library with its staggered brick-and-stone facade, the city's porticoed market and the renovated Križanke Summer Theater. End your walk at the tranquil two-story Plecnik House (€8), in the leafy Trnovo neighborhood, where he lived and designed many of his masterpieces.

4:30 P.M. | FLOAT TO HAPPY HOUR

Drift into the evening with a 50-minute boat tour on the Ljubljanica River aboard a 33-foot (10-meter) electric-powered wooden boat, the Barka Ljubljanica. Passing beneath many of the spots where you've shopped, eaten and imbibed, the route goes upriver toward the Ljubljana Marshes — a World Heritage Site dating back millenniums, where the remains of pile dwellings, or prehistoric houses built on stilts, and the world's oldest wheel were found — before turning around. Back on land, duck into Makalonca, a bar on the left bank under Ribja Brv, or the Fish Bridge. Order a bottle of ice-cold Makalonca pale ale (€5.80) at a table on the terrace directly above the rushing water.

6:30 P.M. | TASTE SUSTAINABILITY

Take a taxi to Gric, a decades-old family-run restaurant, 16 miles (25 kilometers) west of Ljubljana, where nearly all ingredients are foraged or grown on-site or within a three-mile radius. The restaurant, now led by the chef Luka Kosir, has a Michelin star and a Michelin green star for sustainable gastronomy. The seven- and 11-course tasting menus (€110 and €150, wine-pairing on request), served in a dining room with views across forested alpine foothills, combine experimentation and tradition. Start with the duck egg served with tomato, pork crackling and radicchio. The dry-aged beef served with pine-needle oil, birch syrup and pears is unforgettable. Finish with a glass of Quinta do Infantado white port and early plums served with almonds and carob ice cream.

9 P.M. | GET INTO FESTIVAL MODE

The Krizanke Summer Theater becomes the city's center of attention during the Ljubljana Festival, running from June to September each year. The building began as a church and monastery for religious military orders like the Knights Templar and the Teutonic Knights, but in the 1950s, it became an open-air theater complex with an atrium, courtyard and arcade of arched windows. The festival annually stages musicals, ballet performances and dramas, as well as jazz, pop and symphonic concerts (tickets range from €29 to €79). After the show, walk three minutes to Kolibri, one of the city's few bars dedicated to cocktails. In the swirl of maximalist aesthetics — floral wallpaper, a marble bar and gilded mirrors atop a weathered wooden-plank floor — try the Porn Star Martini (€11.50), with Ketel One vodka, Galliano vanilla, lemon juice, vanilla syrup and passion fruit purée.

SUNDAY

10 A.M. | RECOVER AND REFLECT

Come full circle by returning to Center Rog and eating breakfast at Kavarna Rog, a cafe with a riverside terrace. Fuel up with poached eggs, foie gras, sautéed spinach, hollandaise and truffles (€17.40). Then walk 10 minutes to the Metelkova district, where former military barracks house some of the city's most dynamic art and history exhibitions. Get a sense of life centuries ago at the National Museum of Slovenia-Metelkova (entry, €8) with furniture, painting and ceramics from the 1300s on. At the Slovene Ethnographic Museum (€4.50), around 3,000 pieces fill permanent exhibitions related to folk music, religious customs and other Slovene traditions. Fast forward to the modern era at the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova (€5), where provocative permanent and rotating installations by international artists fill three floors. On the first Sunday of the month, admission at many Ljubljana museums is free.

12:30 P.M. | CYCLE OUT OF TOWN

Finish strong with a bicycle ride outside town along the Ljubljanica River and then south to the Ljubljana Marshes to get a clearer understanding of how the city's pile-dwelling ancestors lived more than 5,000 years ago (rentals from €12 per day, with Rent a Bike Ljubljana). This flat, up-and-back 15-mile pedal to the marshes — on the edge of the 52-square-mile (135-square-kilometer) Ljubljansko Barje Nature Park — takes you to the Morostig complex (entry, €12) dedicated to the pile dwellings and the environment surrounding them. Within Morostig, you'll find an interpretive center with exhibitions about the unique and rich ecosystem; boardwalks leading over the water and grasses; and reconstructed dwellings, which provide a tangible depiction of life perched above the marshes.

KEY STOPS

Ljubljana Castle, and its Castle Hill, has watched over the capital for millenniums and is the spot for panoramas, wine and dinner in a Michelin-starred restaurant.

Plecnik House, which was the home and studio of the city's chief 20th-century designer, Joze Plecnik, remains as he left it.

Krizanke Summer Theater, which comes alive from June to September during the Ljubljana Festival, stages pop, jazz and symphonic concerts.

Center Rog, a former bicycle factory, opened last year as an art laboratory with workspaces, a public library, cafes and shops.

WHERE TO EAT

Open Kitchen, a weekly outdoor street-food market, takes place on Fridays next to Ljubljana's Central Market.

Restaurant Strelec, in the Ljubljana Castle's Archers' Tower, is a Michelin-starred restaurant.

Grajska Vinoteka, inside the Ljubljana Castle, has a tasting room, shop and bar with about 200 Slovene wine varieties.

Bazilika is a bistro and cafe on French Revolution Square.

Pop's Pizza, opened by a Slovene American, specializes in pizza Napoletana.

Makalonca, a bar under the Fish Bridge, is a perfect spot for a cold beer on the floating terrace directly on the river.

Gric is a Michelin-starred restaurant prioritizing garden-grown and foraged ingredients.

WHERE TO STAY

April 1550, in the Old Town and built in 1550, has eight rooms, each with its own character, all meticulously designed to feel like home — only much nicer and with exceptional service. The owners, who live nearby, are on hand for travel tips, and there's a pastry chef on site for exquisite breakfasts. Rooms start at €260, or about $280.

The **Hotel One66** has something for everyone, with full apartments, spacious standard rooms and glamping units, as well as a gym, a superb pizzeria and its own laundromat. Rooms start at €90, and include breakfast.

Tivoli Boutique Inn has 30 rooms across three floors and is a friendly, well-priced hotel with a gracious staff and proximity to Ljubljana's sprawling Tivoli Park. Rooms start at €80.

Jewelry

A Cut Above

How is the quality, really?

Finding the right piece of fine jewelry online isn't always easy. Experts have tips for shoppers.

BY RACHEL FELDER

Imagine, with a summertime wedding or party in mind, you want to buy a new piece of fine jewelry, the category that includes items made of precious metal and glittering with gems.

Even if you're shopping from your favorite chair at home, finding the right piece isn't always easy. A recent Google search for a diamond solitaire necklace, for example, generated 21.7 million results.

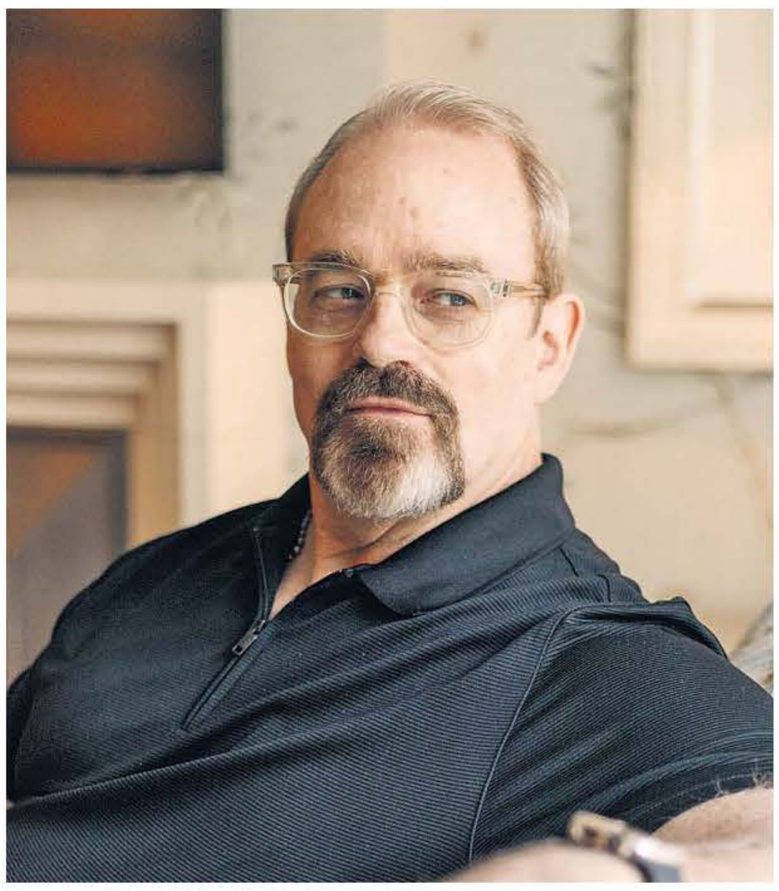
And even when you find a style you like, how can you be sure it was made well and would be good value for the money?

Earlier this month, The New York Times gathered a group of jewelry professionals at the Warren Street Hotel in Manhattan to hear their views on what shoppers should look for when buying fine jewelry, the fact that demi-fine jewelry is sometimes lacking and the challenges of opening certain clasps with long fingernails.

Around the table were Kim Nelson, a jewelry maker and assistant chair of the jewelry design program at the Fashion Institute of Technology; Amber Mitchell, a fine jewelry buyer for the online retailer Moda Operandi; Catherine Sarr, founder of the jewelry brand Almasika and a former De Beers Group communications executive; and Jennifer Shanker, founder of Muse, a jewelry showroom that represents designers such as Bea Bongiasca and Silvia Furmanovich, and also an owner of a jewelry-centric boutique in New York City.

Each arrived wearing jewelry connected with their professional worlds, but pieces that also reflected personal styles. As Ms. Shanker put it, "I don't own as much jewelry as maybe someone who owns a jewelry showroom you would think would own, but I own the pieces that I want to wear every day." Those pieces included a long amber bead necklace by Ileana Makri, a pendant by Anna Maccieri Rossi and stud earrings and a ring by Nikos Koulis.

Ms. Sarr's choices from her own line included 18-karat gold and pavé diamond rings from the Adiré and Universum collections. Half of Mr. Nelson's fingers were adorned with rings he had made, including one with a large Ethiopian opal surrounded by black jade and, on his right pinkie, a 20-karat gold and tanzanite piece.



Industry insiders From far left, Amber Mitchell, a fine jewelry buyer for Moda Operandi, and Kim Nelson, of the jewelry design program at the Fashion Institute of Technology, at the Warren Street Hotel in Manhattan earlier this month.

Founders From far left, Jennifer Shanker, the founder of Muse, a jewelry showroom that represents various designers, and Catherine Sarr, the founder of the brand Almasika, also at the Warren Street Hotel.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEENAH MOON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

And Ms. Mitchell's accessories included a Gemella Jewels 18-karat white and yellow gold ear cuff and multiple pieces from Ippolita, where she worked for about a dozen years. "I feel like I went pretty simple in the jewelry today," she said.

Occasionally, the discussion included trade terminology, such as CAD, or computer-aided design; metal tolerance, the inherent properties of the material and how that impacts the design; and lobster clasp, a popular chain closure that, yes, resembles the claw of a crustacean.

The conversation has been condensed and edited.

Kim, presumably you are working with the jewelers of tomorrow. Is quality part of your students' training?

KIM NELSON Quality is a complicated word, first off, because I view quality in jewelry as being a successful piece at whatever price point it's supposed to be going out at: If it is working, if it's a successful product. I'm speaking from a commercial standpoint here.

As an academic, when I'm talking about quality with my students, it's about being able to work to the specification — which can come across as be-

QUALITY, PAGE S7

SPOTLIGHT

Cracking cases with jewelry

Maria Maclennan examines necklaces, rings and other items to help investigators identify the victims of a variety of catastrophes

EDINBURGH

BY SANDRA JORDAN

In 2013, two years into her doctoral studies on forensic jewelry, Maria Maclennan found herself in a mortuary for the first time. It was in Namibia, and she was there to help identify the victims of a plane crash that had killed everyone on board.

It was the first time she had put her theoretical skills into practice, examining pieces of jewelry found in the wreckage and using her knowledge of designs, materials and the industry to provide investigators with leads.

"Being a forensic jeweler is not really a job that actually exists," Dr. Maclennan, 35, said during a recent interview at her office in Edinburgh. "In some ways, it's something I've made up and am still making up as I go."

Since then she has helped identify the victims of many catastrophes, including building collapses, natural disasters and a terrorist attack. And while the situations can be harrowing — sometimes, she said, the jewelry was all but fused to human remains — she has approached the job as a professional: "You're wearing your forensic gloves and it's all very methodical and detached and disembodied from the person, the human being."

But there is a part of the process that she finds emotionally difficult. "It's at the end, the returning, when you give the belongings back to the family, which really strikes me," she said. "You look at the piece as a sort of a proxy or representation of the individual. Especially, I think, in the absence of the human body."

She pointed at one of her own rings, a stainless-steel band made by her partner, an engineer, as a Christmas present. "Maybe it's because I'm a jeweler," she said, "but I look at a piece like this, recovered in an incident, and it's not quiet. It's not an object sitting silent. It's like it's screaming at me."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT ORMEROD FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The professional
From far left, the forensic jeweler Maria Maclennan, and a close-up of the tattoos on her hands which, she said, unsettled some law enforcement officers who were skeptical of her skills early in her career. "Being a forensic jeweler is not really a job that actually exists," Dr. Maclennan said. "In some ways, it's something I've made up and am still making up as I go."

A DURABLE CLUE

Dr. Maclennan now is a member of a disaster victim identification team for Blake Emergency Services, based in Cheshire, England.

"Maria is the only one who does what she does," said Carole Davenport, the anthropology and archaeology manager at Blake. "She's at the forefront of a field that she invented. She took the skills she learnt as a jeweler and she applied this to the forensics world.

"Jewelry can be particular to areas, and there are certain unique things about jewelry that can help you almost read the life of a person. That's what Maria does."

For almost five years, Dr. Maclennan has also taught three-week-long programs on forensic jewelry at the Edinburgh College of Art, part of the University of Edinburgh, where she is a senior lecturer in jewelry and silver smithing. (She also just completed a Diploma in Diamonds and Diamond Grading from the Gemological Institute of America branch in London.)

Aditi Ranganathan, 22, a final-year student in textile design, attended two of the programs early in her studies. "I still talk about it to this day because I think it shows that as creatives we can exist in lots of different spaces," she said. "A lot of people, when they think jeweler, they think, 'Oh, wedding rings,' but the fact Maria is able to use her craft to help people is something really cool."

The primary tools of victim identification are DNA, fingerprints and dental records, Dr. Maclennan says. And while jewelry alone is not enough to make a scientific forensic identification, it does have a useful place as what she calls a "secondary identifier."

"Jewelry is robust," she said. "It can survive a lot of trauma, and sadly it can outlast the human body."

In addition to obvious connections such as names or dates engraved on wedding rings, "there could be a physical clue or characteristic on the jewelry that tells us when it was made or purchased, or who it was made by or who it was purchased by," she said. (In Britain, for example, some jewelry is stamped by a government assay office with icons called hallmarks, which indicate details such as the type of metal, the date and the maker's mark.)

She also noted that jewelry sometimes could be a repository for DNA, pulling off her own chunky silver-ring set with a large citrine and showing it to a visitor. "If you look through the stone from the front, you can see all kinds of gunk on the back," she said. "The jewelry industry is always telling us to clean our jewelry, but from a forensic perspective, if we don't, it can be a very good vessel for DNA."

INSPIRATION AND EXPERIENCE

Dr. Maclennan was born in Inverness and grew up on the Black Isle, a peninsula in the Scottish Highlands. As a child, she said, she loved rifling through her grandmother's jewelry — "mainly big, elaborate pieces of costume jewelry," she recalled.

She decided to become a jeweler, earning both a Bachelor of Design in jewelry and metal design and a Master of Design in design for services from the University of Dundee.

Her move into forensics began in 2010, during her postgraduate studies, when the university's Centre for Anatomy and Human Identification was working with Interpol and other partners on a database to track missing persons and identify bodies. She answered an appeal to art students to participate and found herself working alongside forensic scientists for a couple of months, an experience that she said inspired her master's project on forensic jewelry as well as her doctoral studies.

In the early stages of her career, Dr. Maclennan recalled, some law enforcement officers were skeptical of her skills, unsettled by her striking eye makeup and myriad tattoos. "Having a young female from an art design background was unusual," she said.

But by now, she added, she has worked with more than 10 enforcement organizations across Britain, including Police Scotland, the British Transport Police and the College of Policing.

She has also worked internationally. In August 2023, for example, she spent a week in Brazil training federal officers who investigate gem trafficking and the illegal mining of precious stones in the Amazon.

"Maria is amazing," said Fernanda Ronchi, 33, a geologist who is a forensics expert with the Federal Police of Brazil, specializing in gold, gems and jewelry. "I did a workshop — something we didn't have in Brazil — on how jewelry can help solve missing-persons cases. They have families, friends, and they need respect. She knows so, so much and she is so dedicated."

During the last couple of years, Dr. Maclennan also has collaborated with Kelly Ross, 57, who spent 24 years with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and is now a consultant specializing in money laundering, fraud and financial crime.

They are developing a course to train jewelers in forensic techniques — something they hope would eventually be offered online, Dr. Maclennan said — and are working on some forensic jewelry techniques to help the police crack cold cases.

"What's so fantastic about Maria's work is not only the pioneering part in the further development of best practice in her craft, but also the way she shares it with the world," Mr. Ross said. "She doesn't keep it for herself, she publicly gives it away. It's so rare!"

FAMILIAR ITEMS

For a long time, Dr. Maclennan said, she considered how to apply her skills to help identify some of the thousands of migrants who died each year while trying to enter the European Union illegally.

In 2020, she consulted Jan Bikker, a friend who, as a forensic anthropologist, worked with the relatives of migrants who went missing in Greece. He introduced her to Dr. Pavlos Pavlidis, the chief forensic pathologist at the University General Hospital of Alexandroupolis, in Greece.

For two decades Dr. Pavlidis has performed autopsies on migrants — about 500 of whom have been recovered since 2000 from the Evros River, which forms much of the border between Greece and Turkey and is known for its dangerous currents. Others have been found in various locations throughout the region after dying from hypothermia or starvation or as victims of wildfires.

They are buried in migrant cemeteries, but Dr. Pavlidis has been storing their belongings in his mortuary. Dr. Maclennan decided to create a database of those possessions, a project she called Identifying the Displaced, so families seeking missing relatives could search for familiar items.

Funded by four small grants — "a few thousand pounds here, a few thousand there," Dr. Maclennan said — she initially arranged for the translation and recording of police files and analyzed what she described as "hundreds of thousands of autopsy photos" before beginning to examine the belongings.

Though most of the work so far has focused on the database, they have "identified a number of prospective leads, and Jan has followed up with family," she said. As of early June, it listed about 500 objects, including Islamic tawiz amulets, Christian crosses, a signet ring with an image of the Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara, eyeglasses and cellphones.

"At the moment this is limited to one small mortuary in Greece," Dr. Maclennan said. But her dream is to secure enough funding to extend the project throughout the country and later to Italy.

"I hate the word closure, but people's families need to know what's happened," she said. "And everyone has a right to an identity and to be laid to rest."

ANNIVERSARY

A 200-carat occasion

Bulgari celebrates its 140th birthday by creating a diamond necklace that took 2,800 hours to make

ROME

BY KATHLEEN BECKETT

To mark its 140th anniversary, Bulgari has created its most expensive piece of jewelry: a 200-carat diamond necklace priced at 40 million euros.

Jean-Christophe Babin, the house's chief executive, said the necklace, the Serpenti Aeterna, represented the achievement of a significant goal: When he took the reins in 2013, the house's tradition of high jewelry had lost its luster so he decided to "push forward the best of our expertise and our most beautiful gems, to create the jewelry of the century."

The $42.9 million necklace — worn by Priyanka Chopra Jonas, one of the house's celebrity ambassadors — was the star of the 500-piece Aeterna collection of jewelry, watches, perfume and accessories presented in May during a private party at the Baths of Diocletian in Rome. (Bulgari, which was founded and still has its headquarters in the Italian capital, said the Latin word aeterna, or eternal, was chosen as the collection's title to echo Rome's nickname, Eternal City.)

In 2022, the house began considering how it should celebrate its milestone. "I was thinking of producing a piece featuring colored gemstones," something the house has been known for since the 1960s, said Lucia Silvestri, its jewelry creative and gems buying director. But she saw a rough diamond of more than 200 carats during a trip to Hong Kong that year and, she said during a recent interview, "I started to dream."

Ms. Silvestri felt that the diamond, mined in Lesotho, couldn't be set intact. "It would be too big and look too heavy," she said. "It wouldn't look graceful."

LUCAS POSSIEDE/WWD, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Sparkler
The Serpenti Aeterna necklace by Bulgari was worn by Priyanka Chopra Jonas at an event in Rome in May.

The gem was cut into seven stones, which she described as "perfectly pear-shaped diamonds, each D-Flawless, not too big, very elegant." In the gem industry, a diamond must be of exceptional color and clarity to be ranked D-Flawless.

The seven drops — which total 140 carats to match the number of anniversary years — were attached to a platinum choker set with 698 diamond baguettes. A serpent's head, the house's signature motif, formed the necklace's clasp.

Bulgari said it took 2,800 hours, from the initial design work through production, to create the piece. The necklace has been sold, but the brand would not identify the buyer.

Ms. Silvestri said that she sometimes had a client in mind when she created high jewelry designs, but not when it came to the Serpenti Aeterna. "Honestly, we didn't think about it," she noted. "I just wanted to make the most beautiful piece of my life."

ON THE PAGE

A deep dive, in diamonds

A show drawn from Van Cleef & Arpels' archive marks the debut of a book on the house's history

PARIS

BY TINA ISAAC-GOIZÉ

High jewelry houses traditionally have used Couture Week as a time to present their latest creations to some of the wealthiest customers in the world. This week, however, Van Cleef & Arpels took the opposite tack, traveling back in time instead.

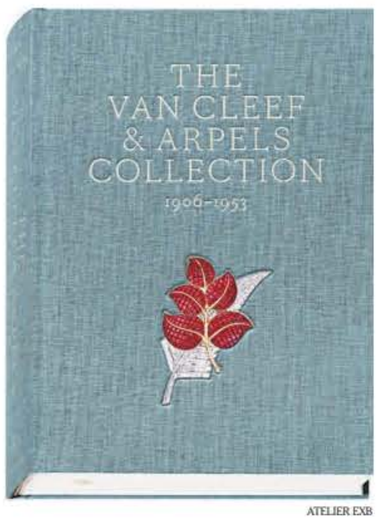
For four days, the Place Vendôme jeweler transformed the salons of the 18th-century Hôtel de Mercy-Argenteau, its jewelry school's newly refurbished annex, into a showcase for some 70 pieces from its own collection. (The house's patrimony department, which began reacquiring some special creations in the 1970s, now holds more than 2,700 pieces.) The glittering showcase was viewable by couture clients and the press by appointment only.

The exhibition was staged to resemble the pages of a new book, "The Van Cleef & Arpels Collection (1906-1953)." The first of two volumes to be published by the French art book specialist Atelier EXB, it includes images of 680 jewels, watches and other precious objects, as well as some archival documents.

Alexandrine Maviel-Sonet, the house's patrimony and exhibitions director, said her team spent more than three years doing research and compiling the book like a catalogue raisonné, a term for a comprehensive, annotated listing of an artist's work.

"The idea was to present a collection that's significant," she said. "We are trying to show, like an artist, that our jewels are art pieces: they are part of the decorative arts, but also art in general."

Important designs from the house's earliest creative boom were on show, including a supple diamond-covered link bracelet with three imposing emerald cabochons, and an articulated cuff bracelet with roses created in diamonds, rubies, emeralds and onyx. Both of those pieces were also presented nearly a century ago, at the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, where Van Cleef & Arpels was awarded the grand prize for jewelry.



ATELIER EXB

Fit for a queen
Left, a platinum and diamond collaret worn by Queen Nazli of Egypt, which appeared this week as part of a showcase focused on Van Cleef & Arpels' history. Below, the new book on which the showcase was based, "The Van Cleef & Arpels Collection (1906-1953)."

The house's signature motifs were represented, too, including ballerinas with gem-encrusted skirts and birds with emerald cabochon bellies, as well as flowers pavéd with precious stones in the Mystery Set technique. That gem-setting method, which renders the metal framework invisible, was invented and patented by the house in 1933.

The show included a couple of royal commissions, such as a platinum and diamond collaret worn in 1939 by Queen Nazli of Egypt, the queen mother. The creation — a big piece, shaped like a bib necklace — was included in a section on the jeweler's overseas expansion, notably to New York, starting in the late 1930s.

Ms. Maviel-Sonet said the deep dives into the house's history had led to some surprises, including information on how the house's artisans used diamonds to mimic shagreen, a natural hide, often from a shark or stingray, which was very popular in the Art Deco period. Those details, however, are being saved for the next volume, which is to cover the second half of the 20th century. It is scheduled for 2026, to coincide with the jeweler's 120th anniversary.

BEHIND THE BRAND

A jewelry line rooted in Qatar

De Trove's locally made designs combine Qatar's cultural heritage and history with a measure of 'contemporary sophistication'

DOHA, QATAR

BY DAVID BELCHER

When Fatma Al-Mohannadi founded De Trove jewelry, it was the fruition of a teenage dream.

"I always had a passion for drawing jewelry, and I thought maybe I should just start my own line," Ms. Al-Mohannadi, 35, said during a recent interview at her boutique in Doha's Pearl neighborhood. "So I pursued my passion and launched my first line in 2018."

That initial collection, called Almahfa, reflected her goal of making jewelry that celebrated Qatari culture and history but with designs that could be worn throughout the day. In Qatar, traditional jewelry such as necklaces, bracelets and face masks, called battoulahs, can be extremely heavy and uncomfortable for extended wear.

"My first idea was to mix the heritage and culture of this region, but with a less heavy gold," she explained. "That way women can wear it as much as they want."

Ms. Al-Mohannadi also noted that some traditional short necklaces — around 30 centimeters, or about 12 inches, long — were obscured by abayas, the long gowns worn here by Muslim women. "My collection includes long necklaces so that women can wear them with an abaya, but outside of the abaya," she said. "It's not too heavy, so it won't scratch. And it looks modern and not too heavy. It's elegant."

"In Qatari fashion," Shaikha Hamad, a Qatari designer of traditional women's clothing, wrote in an email, "a trend has emerged that blends jewelry with abayas and other traditional attire, and Fatma masterfully combines contemporary sophistication with our cultural heritage. I feel like De Trove's pieces transition from day to evening seamlessly."

De Trove was a name that Ms. Al-Mohannadi devised with the help of a branding agency to give the business a French ambience. But it included the English word "trove," which, she said, "means something to me, like you always keep something that has value in a nice place."

In addition to designing for a local audience, Ms. Al-Mohannadi has been focused on ensuring that De Trove's production is done in Qatar. "All of the gold is processed in Qatar," she said. "I go to the Gold Souk here in Doha and give them my design, then we make a 3-D version of it. There are about eight craftsmen in the Gold Souk who I work with on all my pieces."

Her debut line, Almahfa, a regional Arabic word for a type of hand fan, included necklaces, earrings, bracelets and rings in 18-karat gold; turquoise imported mostly from India; and pearls.

"The pearls are all local," Ms. Al-Mohannadi said as she displayed several pieces, including a necklace that linked eight small fan shapes. "This is still my best seller."

The Moon collection, introduced in 2018, incorporates the Islamic imagery of a crescent moon and star found on flags throughout the Muslim world (Turkey, Libya and Algeria, among others). The collection's bracelet has a gap between a star shaped in 18-karat gold with a white enamel center that is produced in the Gold Souk, and a crescent moon accented with a row of 0.36-carat diamonds. The wrist slips through that gap between the star and the moon.

"This is all about Islamic culture and heritage, and the star is also part of Islamic architecture," she explained. "When I designed it, it felt like something new for Ramadan, but not too heavy."

The Moon pendant and ring have sold out every year during the Islamic holy month, so Ms. Al-Mohannadi plans to increase production next year.

De Trove now has 10 collections, with prices from 1,000 Qatari rial, or about $270, to 18,500 rial. In addition to the boutique, the brand is sold through its website and through Instagram and WhatsApp. Ms. Al-Mohannadi declined to disclose the brand's annual sales.

Tamadur Tariq Al Shamlan, a coordinator for the annual celebration Qatar Years of Culture, wrote in an email that she first came across De Trove at a local art fair and that "the brand's focus on craftsmanship was evident in every piece."

"It's refreshing to find a brand that prioritizes quality and style," she added. "I particularly appreciate the varied choice of ring styles because that's my go-to piece of everyday jewelry."

Ms. Al-Mohannadi said she took ideas not only from the imagery of the Muslim world but also from nature.

"The Flower line is my latest collection from 2023, which duplicates the logo of De Trove," she said — the logo, which she designed herself, resembled a cross between a flower and a faceted diamond. "This looks like vintage jewelry, and I added diamonds, rubies and blue sapphires. There is a separate version with just one flower made of jade."

Ms. Al-Mohannadi said that one of her most popular lines was the Letters collection, which had rings and necklaces shaped to look like Arabic letters and numerals, often with several shapes intertwined.

"I always wear two," she said, displaying her hand. "One is the first letter of my name. Another one is 'love' in Arabic. It's good to have something like love or faith near me."

She has done custom designs, and some clients have commissioned their initials or special messages. "I did one for a client for her engagement day," she said. "His name and her name. I joined them. It's a souvenir."

Using letters in jewelry is not an original idea, Ms. Al-Mohannadi said, but she liked to think that she had added her own touch to the swirling beauty of Arabic calligraphy. It was one of her early inspirations as a teenager, sketching ideas at home.

"How I do this differently is the way they can wrap around the finger, plus the addition of diamonds and the engraving on the inside," she said. "Arabic calligraphy is so florid and beautiful, so it lends itself to being designed to move around the finger. It's so open to interpretation."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HEATH HOLDEN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Heritage Clockwise from far left: Fatma Al-Mohannadi, the founder of De Trove jewelry; De Trove's debut collection Almahfa; a bracelet from the Moon collection, which incorporates the Islamic imagery of a crescent moon and star found on flags throughout the Muslim world; and pieces from the Flower line from 2023.

HERITAGE

Where devotion meets beauty

Religious pendants, or relicarios, have a deep, though overlooked, history in Latin America, collectors say

CORRALES, N.M.

BY JANELLE CONAWAY

Martha J. Egan has spent decades rummaging around markets and antique stores across Latin America in search of the rare, carefully crafted devotional pendants called relicarios.

Her hunt has led her to amass more than 400 of the objects — pronounced reh-lee-CAR-yos; in English, reliquaries — and to write two books about what she has come to view as an overlooked genre within the body of religious art created during the Spanish colonization of the New World.

Of course, "there was not much art in the colonial era that was *not* religious," said Ms. Egan, 78, who has a bachelor's degree in Latin American history.

Typically, the pieces (sometimes called medallones or miniaturas) were pendants with painted, carved or printed depictions of favorite saints or the Virgin Mary on both sides, set in metal bezels under glass. Made for people in a range of social and economic classes, some relicarios were plain while others were elaborately decorated; their creators were usually anonymous.

Perhaps because the pieces were worn as personal expressions of devotion, they largely have gone unnoticed, Ms. Egan said.

"Art historians have totally blown them off," she said during an interview at Casa Perea Art Space, a 19th-century adobe event venue that she owns in Corrales, N.M., a village just outside Albuquerque. The building also houses her folk-art store, Pachamama, which opened 50 years ago and sells handmade items from Latin America, primarily Mexico, Peru and Bolivia.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ADRIA MALCOLM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Treasured objects Martha J. Egan, far left, at Casa Perea Art Space in Corrales, N.M., has amassed more than 400 relicarios. She has collected, from top, two gold relicarios, one a 19th-century Bolivian piece depicting the crowning of Virgin Mary and the other an 18th-century Spanish relicario featuring two angels; various depictions of the Virgin Mary; and a relicario in which splinters form a cross centerpiece, with bone and other relics around it.

SMALL BUT IMPORTANT

The word relicario traditionally has been used for any receptacle for relics such as splinters said to be from Jesus's cross or fragments of bone or bits of cloth said to have ties to saints or other religious figures. Such devotional pieces, including lockets, were popular in parts of medieval Europe.

During the Spanish colonial period — which began at the end of the 15th century and lasted for more than 300 years — large quantities of relics were shipped to the Americas. But, Ms. Egan said, most were reserved for the Roman Catholic churches being built as part of the push to convert Indigenous populations to Christianity.

As a result, some in the New World began to create or commission pendants that did not contain relics but were still considered relicarios, as Ms. Egan described in her books "Relicarios: The Forgotten Jewels of Latin America" (2020) and "Relicarios: Devotional Miniatures from the Americas" (1993).

Gabriela Sánchez Reyes, an art historian who has a Ph.D. in social sciences and works at Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History, said in a video interview that research on reliquaries tended to focus on grand objects such as ornate silver vessels from churches. But Ms. Egan's work, she said, "compelled us to turn our eyes to see a small object that has its own important features, its own artistic virtues, and speaks to us of the devotion of an era."

Dr. Sánchez Reyes said that only a handful of researchers in Mexico had written about these pendants — and that Ms. Egan's first relicario book planted the seed of her own interest about 25 years ago, prompting her to include a chapter on them in her master's thesis.

Such pendants, however, are in many of the world's museums. In Mexico City, for example, the National Museum of History in Chapultepec Castle and the Museo Soumaya have two of the country's most noteworthy collections, Dr. Sánchez Reyes said. (A decade ago she was a co-curator of an exhibition at the Museo Soumaya, "Sanctuaries of the Intimate," which included relicarios and miniature portraits from the institution's permanent collection.)

Alfonso Miranda, the director of the Soumaya, said relicarios often did not make it into museums — but that did not mean they have been forgotten. "Families continue to hold on to these relics," he said, noting that often they were passed through generations.

Relicarios also can yield important historical information, he said; for example, the image of a specific saint might indicate that a particular religious order had been in a given geographic area.

Lucía Abramovich Sánchez, an associate curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, made a similar point, noting that the materials used to make relicarios could provide glimpses into their wearer's relative wealth, and the portrayals of saints could shed light on devotional practices. "It enriches our knowledge of what colonial Latin American art is, or Latin American art is," she said. "It adds a personal element."

Dr. Abramovich Sánchez, who has a Ph.D. in art history and Latin American studies, said it was Ms. Egan who introduced her to relicarios. The two met in 2019, when Dr. Abramovich Sánchez worked at the San Antonio Museum of Art, and in 2021, she reviewed Ms. Egan's second relicarios book for a scholarly journal.

THE MATERIALS AT HAND

At Casa Perea, Ms. Egan laid out a sampling of her relicarios, some so finely detailed that the artist would have used something like a horse's eyelash to apply the paint, she said. Several were carved from materials as varied as tagua nut from Ecuador, alabaster from Peru and ivory from Asia.

One of her colonial-era lockets from Spain had a small wooden cross in the center and fragments of material incorporated into the rest of the design. "You can tell those are bits of bone," Ms. Egan said matter-of-factly. "Somebody's bones. Who knows?"

Another pendant, an engraved silver case about 2.2 inches in diameter, can be opened on one side to reveal a gilded bas-relief of the Virgin of Copacabana, one of myriad representations of the Virgin Mary revered in Latin America. Beneath the lid on the reverse is an image of St. Rose of Lima, the first person born in the New World to be canonized as a saint.

Ms. Egan said the piece was made in Peru in the 1600s, its images molded from a homemade paste of mashed potatoes, a sticky liquid such as peach juice, "and probably plaster and who knows what else."

"People are making something that's very important to them," she said, "but out of what they have at hand."

From the early days of the conquest, the Spanish were impressed by the Aztec artisans' craftsmanship. In her "Forgotten Jewels" book, Ms. Egan quoted from a letter that Hernán Cortés wrote to King Charles V of Spain while the conquistador was consolidating control over the Mexica/Aztec empire.

Cortés reported that he had asked Moctezuma, the Aztec emperor, to have his artisans test their skills on Spanish-style art, and the emperor had "ordered them to make in gold such things as holy images, crucifixes, medals, jewelry and necklaces, and many other of our things and they did it as perfectly as we could explain these things to them."

The book included a portrait of Cortés wearing a relicario on his shoulder.

"AN ABIDING INTEREST"

The first time Ms. Egan came across relicarios was in the 1970s in an antique store in Lima, Peru. The dealer, she said, told her she was buying two-sided miniature 18th-century paintings set in silver bezels, but Ms. Egan later learned they were fakes.

Still, she credited the dealer with sparking what she described as "an abiding interest" in relicarios. Once or twice a year, when she went to Latin America on buying trips for her store, Ms. Egan would supplement the long hours of library research she was doing back home by quizzing local artisans, historians, museum curators, dealers and any other experts she could find.

Ms. Egan grew up in a Catholic family in Wisconsin, but she left the church while she was a university student in Mexico City. She still went on to immerse herself in the religious imagery of relicarios "because they're so beautiful," she said, adding that she understood "why they were important to people, why people would put such incredible artistic endeavor into creating them."

For many people, she said, relicarios were amulets protecting them from harm, or comforts in times of difficulty. On a more worldly level, wearing a relicario could be a way to flaunt both faith and success, since religious ornaments were exempt from so-called sumptuary laws, regulating ostentatious displays of wealth.

And in some cases, a relicario may have served as a kind of cover during the Spanish Inquisition, Ms. Egan said.

In her most recent book, she described a relicario (not in her collection) from the Viceroyalty of New Spain — a vast Spanish territory that included modern-day Mexico — that had a card inside "inscribed with signs of the kabbalah and Hebrew writing that may have been deliberately hidden in the space between two Catholic images."

Relicarios began to fall out of favor in Latin America in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Ms. Egan noted, in part because of anticlerical sentiments and a growing independence movement, though, she added, the tradition lasted longer around popular religious pilgrimage sites.

FINE CRAFTSMANSHIP

Bernadette Rodríguez-Caraveo, a silversmith in New Mexico, has long had a front-row seat to Ms. Egan's collection: She worked at Pachamama years ago, before beginning a 30-year career teaching ceramics and jewelry making. She now manages both the store and the event space at Casa Perea.

Many of the old relicarios are examples of meticulous craftsmanship, she said: Without access to modern tools or art supply stores, the artisans often managed to fit pieces together perfectly, with no visible solder lines. "It's amazing to me that they did such beautiful, beautiful work, and such fine work," she said.

Generally, the artisan who did the painting or carving was not the same person who made the bezel, she said, and so "some of the painting isn't that great, but the silver work is — and vice versa."

Ms. Rodríguez-Caraveo, 67, said she had made her own versions of relicarios, inspired in part by Ms. Egan's collection and by her own experience being raised by her paternal grandparents in Santa Fe, N.M.

They had a simple relicario-style pendant, she said — a black-and-white printed image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, set in a small tin frame — which was usually kept in her grandfather's pocket or in the box that held her grandmother's rosary.

Her own relicarios have ranged from the religious to the playful. Most recently, she has custom-made silver pendants that capture figures, scenes or symbols close to the wearer's heart or that tell a story.

"To me, a relicario is something you hold sacred," she said.

As for Ms. Egan, she said she was no longer looking for relicarios, though she immediately added that she would buy one "if it tells me something."

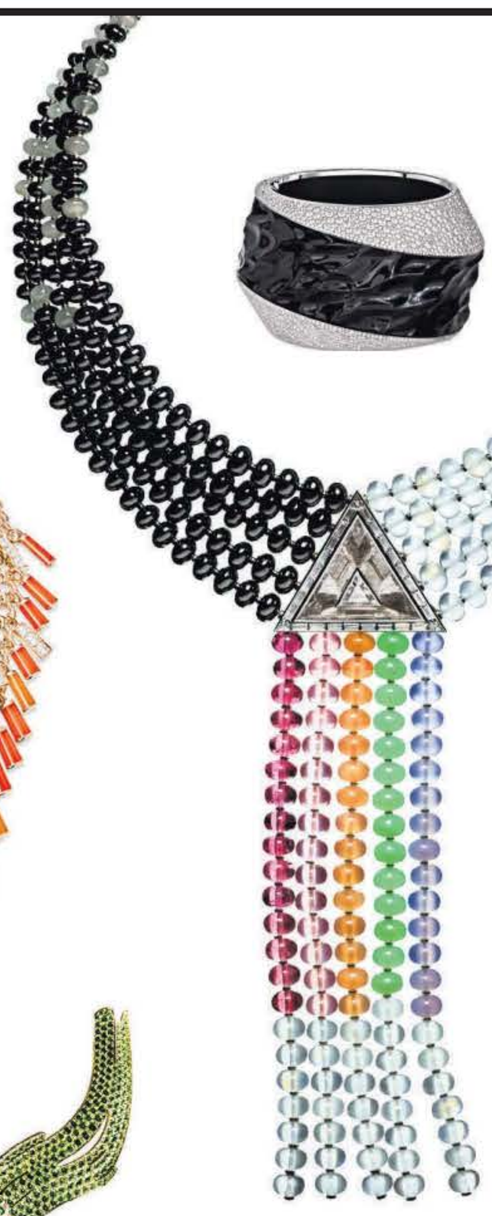
She spoke wistfully about one particularly fine piece she used to have, then seemed to convince herself that she had done the right thing by selling it to a santero, an artisan who crafts images of saints.

"He is serious, a serious Catholic," she said, "so it's in the right place."

COUTURE WEEK

Bright debuts for high jewelry

Presenting new collections, Hermès embraced color, Piaget went for texture and Boucheron used technology to capture ocean waves



PARIS

BY TINA ISAAC-GOIZÉ

The fall couture shows in Paris, which ended Thursday, were held earlier than the usual July dates to avoid clashing with preparations for the Olympic Games, but the season still offered some Parisian high jewelry houses a chance to shine brightly.

Their presentations capped a series of glamorous events around Europe, as several houses continued the trend of taking high jewelry debuts on the road: Bulgari showed in Rome; Cartier in Vienna; Chanel in Monaco; Dior in Florence, Italy; and Louis Vuitton in St.-Tropez, France.

In Paris, the 67-piece Hermès collection, Les Formes de la Couleur (the Shapes of Color), was the largest the house had produced — and arguably its most playful. A freestyle brushstroke, for example, was rendered as a mono-earring called Fresh Paint, with green tsavorite garnets simulating pigment.

And while the house has nearly 75,000 shades in its silk color library, the collection was the first time it had used so many primary colors and rainbow palettes for jewelry.

"It took us a long time to do a lot of diamonds and colored gemstones," said Pierre Hardy, the creative director of Hermès jewelry since 2001 and of high jewelry since its introduction in 2010. "With leather, silk and makeup, one sees how color informs the world of Hermès, but for jewelry we'd never experimented with that kind of mix before."

The designer described his creative process as "liberating color from minerality, cuts and facets to let it be more supple, almost liquid or diffuse, like makeup on the body."

Cultural touchstones provided an unexpected source of inspiration, too. In the Supracolor necklace, for example, five strands of black and gray spinel beads were anchored by a triangular centerpiece featuring a 1.1-carat diamond set in rutilated quartz and surrounded by baguette diamonds, with a cascading, rainbow-like fringe of beads in white, orange and gray moonstone, chalcedony, chrysoprase, rose quartz and pink tourmaline. Mr. Hardy acknowledged that it bore a striking resemblance to the cover artwork of Pink Floyd's 1973 album "The Dark Side of the Moon."

"It's a real exercise to look at pop culture on the one hand, and something scientific on the other, and turn it into something ultra-precious," said Mr. Hardy, who also used color to revisit signatures such as its Kelly bracelet, offered in a white-gold version fully pavéd with gemstones.

Even the house's celebrated Birkin bag was rendered as a small but fully functional jeweled bag in white or yellow gold that had been worked to mimic crocodile leather and then encrusted with nearly 3,000 diamonds, spessartites, aquamarines, amethysts and pink, blue and yellow sapphires.

Ombré colors, couture-inspired techniques and studies in fluidity were also in the spotlight at Piaget. The brand, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary, presented some jewels from its Essence of Extraleganza collection — a word it called a portmanteau of extravagance and elegance — by appointment.

Rather than design jewels to a specific theme, Stéphanie Sivrière, the brand's creative director of jewelry and watches, said she was inspired by the idea of "everyday couture" and using traditional goldsmithing techniques to produce metal mesh as fluid as the fabrics and trims used in high fashion.

"When we use gold, it's never smooth," Ms. Sivrière said. "It's a material that always has character: it's hammered, braided, woven.

"These are pieces that really dress the wearer — they're very second skin — so I wanted to really use color and contrast to bring out a playful side."

The most important piece in the collection, she said, is a cuff watch with a latticework gold bracelet set with baguette-cut Colombian emeralds and diamonds that appear to stretch around its square green enamel dial. There also is a V-shape necklace of tiny, hand-twisted gold links set with a fiery 21.23-carat cushion-cut orange spessartite surrounded by diamonds, yellow sapphires and trapezoid-cut carnelian set to a shimmy-like fringe.

The 40 Piaget jewels shown in Paris represented about half of the entire 90-piece collection, which is to be unveiled in Seoul later this year.

TRAVEL IMPRESSIONS

Claire Choisne, Boucheron's creative director, drew on the rugged aquatic scenes she saw during a spring trip to Iceland for a high jewelry collection called Carte Blanche, Or Bleu (in English, Blue Gold).

But rather than use color, the designer said, she wanted to render water as if "frozen in its rawest state" — for example, cascades of diamonds on a transformable necklace or pools of rock crystal on a double finger ring.

The 26 jewels included a cuff bracelet, called Eau d'Encre, or Ink Water, in titanium and white gold pavéd with calibrated diamonds and bisected by a wide band of polished obsidian sculpted to resemble waves.

Ms. Choisne said that the piece was the first the house had produced using a combination of traditional jewelry-making savoir-faire and technology. A 3-D simulation was used to reproduce the impression of a churning sea, and the glassy rock was cut using specialized machinery to achieve the most natural-looking relief possible.

As for the texture, the designer said, "It's like an ode to the memory of water."

Color stories
Clockwise from far left: an ombré necklace by Piaget including an orange spessartite and yellow sapphires; the Supracolor necklace by Hermès; a Boucheron bracelet with diamonds and obsidian; a Piaget watch with a diamond-and-emerald lattice; a small jeweled Birkin bag by Hermès; and an Hermès mono-earring called Fresh Paint.

FROM THE COVER

How is the quality, really?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEENAH MOON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

QUALITY, FROM PAGE S1

ing a little soulless, because I want them to be able to be given a directive from anybody, including themselves.

Amber, when you're looking at new brands to potentially carry, what are you looking for in terms of quality?

AMBER MITCHELL I look for the weight of the gold, how heavy it is. Sometimes pieces can be too light, so customers are not going to "see" the value they're paying for it because it's so light.

I also look at the back to see if the back is finished, and if you're seeing things like solder marks. I look at how the stones are set — thinking about the prongs, is it going to catch on her clothing? I try to take everything into account.

I know what I like and what I would expect as someone who's paying thousands of dollars for a piece of jewelry, so I try to bring that to our clients as well.

What advice would you give to jewelry shoppers, especially those who are shopping online?

JENNIFER SHANKER Ask whatever you need to ask in order to feel confident to purchase the piece.

CATHERINE SARR People ask us for dimensions, additional dimensions, sometimes gold weight, karat weight, techniques. It really depends, but we are ready to answer any questions on our quality.

NELSON There's a lot of trust. Jewelry is a blind purchase in a lot of ways. People who are buying it, they don't understand how it's valued. They don't understand the difference between buying from somebody like me, who will do a custom-made piece for them, versus buying from a small boutique environment versus buying from a retail storefront — that there is a whole different price structure.

Are there certain jewelry components that tend to have more quality issues than others?

SHANKER Closures, clasps.

MITCHELL I was going to say that, yes.

NELSON Movement, and that's usually a manufacturing issue. For example, the connections you can put in platinum, you could not use in gold, and you could not use the ones used in gold in silver. The metal tolerances and what it'll put up with, there's math and engineering and science behind that, and a lot of folks in our industry don't know that, so you end up with trouble.

Are certain types of clasps or closures more potentially problematic than others?

MITCHELL For necklaces, like on pendant necklaces, lobster clasps are fine. But my thing is some of them can be too small, and I say that because of my nails — it's hard for me to get them on.

SHANKER That's real.

MITCHELL Yeah, exactly. Most women have nails, these days especially, so small lobster clasps are not that functional for a lot of women. With earrings, I like a lever-back post because it just feels more secure. Obviously, you can't do that on all earrings, if the design doesn't support it.

Another thing is with ear cuffs. Everybody's doing ear cuffs these days, and everybody always says, "Oh, it fits every ear — it'll never fall off."

SHANKER [With an emphatically cheerful tone] "It'll never fall off!"

MITCHELL That's not really true, and more and more vendors are starting to do a hinged ear cuff, like the one I have, which fits so much better.

SHANKER It's super-important in a bracelet, as well.

SARR Quality also is the comfort. The piece of jewelry should be comfortable for me. The inspiration is very conceptual in what I do, but you can wear it and feel comfortable in it. I think that's quality, as well.

SHANKER If it doesn't feel good, who's wearing it?

As so many people now do their shopping on the internet, is there a way that you show your jewelry online that spotlights its quality, or ways your online presentation could be improved?

SARR We do a lot of trunk shows, and people are always surprised. They love the design, but they're surprised by the weight of our jewelry and how they like the finish, so there's something happening we need to work on.

MITCHELL I think it's hard to show the quality of a piece online. I know with us, we have clients reaching out all the time. There's an email address on the site that you can email and it comes to us, where they ask for extra content. Even iPhone videos give you a better idea of the quality, so that's a service that we offer to our clients that's been successful for us. But I think we're still trying to get to the point where we can show accurate quality online, because on our side, it's just really still shots.

SHANKER One of the things that is happening in terms of selling online, the higher the quality of the jewelry, the higher quality the presentation needs to be. I think that we might take it for granted, but the more information we can provide to the client without them having to ask questions is super-important. From the materials to the carat weights to the dimensions, what you're talking about in terms of the comfort and how it is worn — I think that the content needs to be better.

On many retail websites, videos of items like clothing and shoes are commonplace. Why is that not as prevalent with fine jewelry?

SHANKER I think it's budget and bandwidth, actually. Also, knowing what is working and figuring out how to prioritize what you can manage as a small brand, and then what you can provide. For instance, I could definitely benefit from more video, but we got to a place where the still-life content that we're creating is so high level that we don't want the video to be beneath that.

NELSON I make my students spend half their lives on 1stDibs.com, because 1stDibs is marvelous in that they show the front and the back of pieces. They regularly have video clips, and you can really get a better sense of the quality of a piece of jewelry if you know what you're looking at.

These days, there's so much demi-fine jewelry — that's a bit more casual and less high-end — available online. Since its quality isn't necessarily the same as fine jewelry, has that muddled people's expectations?

SHANKER Sure. And especially now, with the way people are buying and the way people are being introduced to brands through Instagram, I think that, yeah, even more so it's diluted.

But also, buying it online, there's this huge return rate because once someone receives it, it's not what they expected to receive.

In the United States, the average overall rate for retail online returns is 15 percent. That must be costly for brands.

MITCHELL I know at Moda, we just really started doing fine jewelry returns in the last year or two, and I would say our return rate is probably around for the year 7 percent, which is pretty low.

SHANKER That's pretty great.

Ring bearers
Amber Mitchell, top, wearing rings from Ippolita. Kim Nelson, right, wearing Hanuman and Cumorah rings that he made himself.

Precious pendants
Above left, Jennifer Shanker wearing a beaded necklace from Ileana Makri, an Anna Maccieri Rossi charm and a TenThousandThings charm. Above, Catherine Sarr wearing Universum necklaces and rings from the Adiré and Universum collections.