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Reversing a fresh start for Germany

Lukas Hermsmeier

OPINION

Friedrich Merz didn't waste time. Having led his party, the Christian Democrats, to first place in Germany's election last month, Mr. Merz swiftly assumed the mantle of chancellor-in-waiting. He urged the country to move quickly to address the challenges, both domestic and foreign, that threaten to overwhelm it. "The world," he said, "is not waiting for us."

He's not wrong. Germany needs to get its act together, fast. The far-right Alternative for Germany, exploiting a shrinking economy and a widespread sense of malaise, came in second, winning 20 percent of the vote. The extreme right is now the strongest it has been since the end of World War II. President Trump's rapprochement with Russia and castigation of Europe, meanwhile, threatens to upend the international

order and Germany's place in it. In the face of both tests, the country must at once renew and reorient itself. The task calls for a leader with a fresh vision of the

future. Unfortunately, that's not Mr. Merz. Committed to tax breaks for the wealthy, harsh restrictions for migrants and cuts for welfare recipients, he is a throwback figure. His program amounts to an effort to turn back the clock to a time when the country could depend on cheap energy and plentiful exports to propel it on the world stage. Today, Germany is in urgent need of change. Instead it's getting Mr. Merz: yesterday's man, with yesterday's ideas.

Born in 1955, Mr. Merz grew up in a Catholic family in the Sauerland, a staunchly conservative region in western Germany. As a teenager, he thought the '68 generation of leftist activists were "crazy." He worried, too, that the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany would make it into Parliament. By the time he joined the Christian Democrats' youth organization at age 17, it was clear politics was his future. In 1989, after law school and a spell in the profession, he was elected to the European Parliament; five years later, he sat in the German Parliament.

He enjoyed a steady rise there, notably popularizing the concept of Leitkultur, a set of norms to which every immigrant should submit. But the top prize was blocked by his longstanding rival, Angela Merkel. After losing the leadership to her in a bitter power struggle in the early 2000s, he gradually shifted

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



Clockwise from top: investigators collecting evidence at a crime scene in a residential neighborhood of Culiacán, Mexico; a cell leader from the Sinaloa Cartel in hiding in a house in Culiacán; and tools needed to produce fentanyl lying in a house belonging to a drug cartel. "Every day there have been arrests and seizures," Mexico's security minister said.

Fear finds a new foothold

CULIACÁN, MEXICO

BY NATALIE KITROEFF
AND PAULINA VILLEGAS

One cartel leader says he's trying to figure out how to protect his family in case the American military strikes inside Mexico. Another says he's already gone into hiding, rarely leaving his home. Two young men who produce fentanyl for the cartel say they have shut down all their drug labs.

A barrage of arrests, drug seizures

and lab busts by the Mexican authorities in recent months has struck the behemoth Sinaloa Cartel, according to Mexican officials and interviews with six cartel operatives, forcing some of its leaders to scale back on fentanyl production in Sinaloa state.

The cartels have sown terror across Mexico and caused untold damage in the United States. But in Culiacán, the state capital, the dynamic seems to be shifting, at least for now. Cartel operatives say they've had to move labs to other areas of the country or temporarily shut down production.

"You can't be calm, you can't even sleep, because you don't know when they'll catch you," said one high-ranking member of the Sinaloa Cartel who, like other cartel operatives, spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of capture.

"The most important thing now is to survive," he added, his hands trembling. The government crackdown on organized crime intensified after the Trump administration threatened retribution unless Mexico halted the supply of fentanyl into the United States, vowing high tariffs if the flow of migrants and drugs continued.

President Trump began floating the possibility of tariffs soon after his election in November, and soon after taking office announced 25 percent levies on Mexican goods if the country didn't act on border security and drug trafficking. The president gave Mexico a month to deliver results.

Facing economic chaos, the Mexican government went on the offensive. President Claudia Sheinbaum dispatched 10,000 national guard troops to the border and hundreds more soldiers to Sinaloa state, a major hub of fentanyl

MEXICO, PAGE 4

Europe tries to muster a coalition to aid Ukraine

LONDON

As U.S. suspends support
other nations step in, but
they face political hurdles

BY MARK LANDLER
AND JEANNA SMIALEK

With the United States pulling back its support for Ukraine, Britain and France have promised to muster a "coalition of the willing" to secure a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia. Now comes the acid test for Europe: How many countries will step up, and does that even matter, given Russia's rejection of such a coalition as part of any settlement?

Prime Minister Keir Starmer of Britain left those questions unanswered as he bade farewell to fellow leaders after a summit meeting in London on Sunday. He conceded that "not every nation will feel able to contribute," though he expressed optimism that several would, and that this would send a signal to President Trump that Europe was ready to "do the heavy lifting."

The next day, Mr. Trump sent a signal of his own, temporarily suspending the delivery of all U.S. military aid to Ukraine, according to senior administration and military officials. The order, which took effect immediately, affects more than \$1 billion worth of arms and ammunition in the pipeline and on order. Mr. Trump's directive also halts hundreds of millions of dollars in aid that Kyiv could use only to buy new military hardware directly from U.S. defense companies.

For Europe, drawing Mr. Trump back into the process of supporting Ukraine is as important as the mission and scope of a European coalition, analysts say. For the moment, the United States appears determined to strike a deal with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia over the heads of Europe and Ukraine, without any security guarantees for Ukraine.

Mr. Starmer presented his coalition of the willing as one of multiple steps that are to include continued military aid for Ukraine to improve its position on the battlefield, a seat at the table for Kyiv in any peace negotiation and further help with its defensive capabilities after a settlement. That is where the coalition would come in.

In addition to Britain and France, northern European countries like Denmark and the Netherlands seem obvious candidates to take part. Both have been strong financial supporters of Ukraine's war effort and are NATO members that contributed to other security campaigns, like that in Afghanistan.

UKRAINE, PAGE 4

'TIME RIFE' TO DEPLOY FROZEN ASSETS
Momentum is building in Europe to release \$300 billion from Russia's central bank for Ukraine. PAGE 6

As Musk's power grows, his mother is in demand



Maye Musk speaking in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in October. Ethics groups say her activities raise the possibility that foreign governments could see her as a conduit to her son.

Maye Musk takes on work in China and other nations with cases to press in U.S.

BY MARA HVISTENDAHL
AND JOY DONG

In the past six months, Maye Musk, the mother of Elon Musk, has been to China, Kazakhstan and the United Arab Emirates, visits that come as foreign leaders are jockeying for influence over the Trump administration.

Ms. Musk, 76, has for years traveled the world to model, speak and promote her memoir. But lately she seems to be even more in demand, especially outside the United States. And her celebrity has taken on greater significance now that Mr. Musk has considerable influence over how billions of dollars in military spending and foreign aid will get paid out.

In late 2024, she visited China at least four times to endorse or model for seven brands there, including makeup prod-

ucts, down jackets and massage devices. Her visits were promoted by state media outlets, which in the past have quoted her when she called for improved ties between the United States and China.

In October, three weeks before the U.S. presidential election, she headlined a forum on women in Kazakhstan, where she spoke about her son's success, according to Kazinform, a state news agency there.

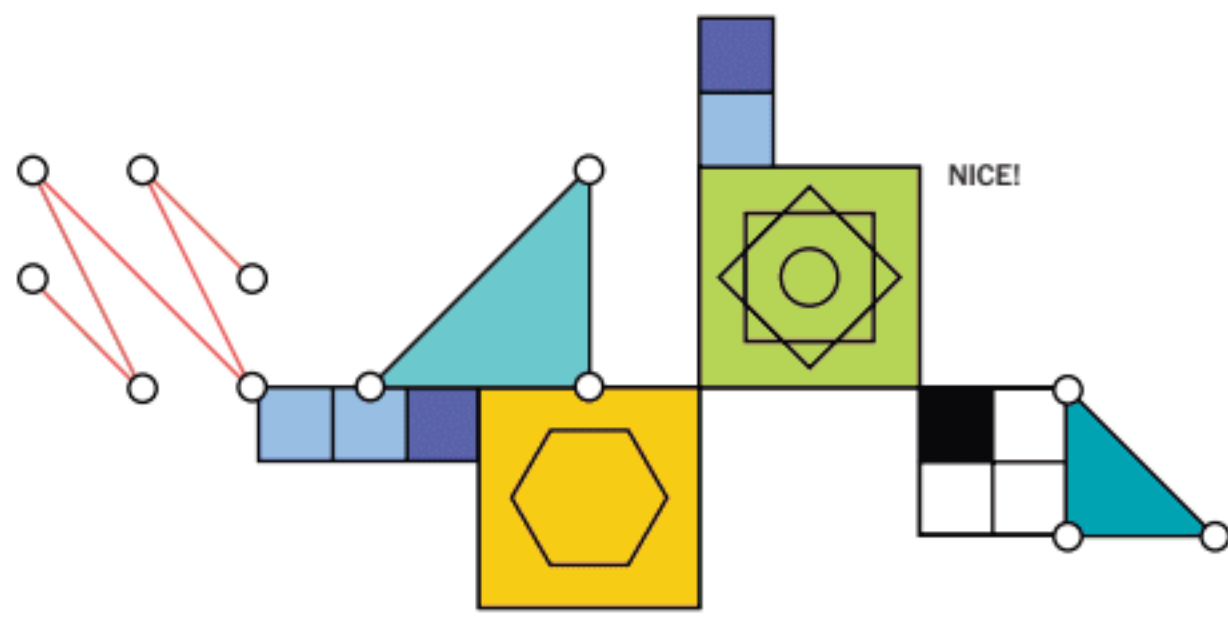
And in January, the week before Donald J. Trump's second inauguration, she was in Dubai, speaking at a government conference on influencers with the former Fox News personality Tucker Carlson. Her talk was titled, "How I Raised Three Amazing Children, Including the Richest Man in the World," according to the state-run Emirates News Agency.

All of these trips were taken after Mr. Musk, PAGE 2

BILLIONAIRE'S VIEWS ARE LAID BARE

A three-hour interview offers a window into Elon Musk's worldview. It was by turns crude and contradictory. PAGE 5

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PAGE TWO



Maye Musk modeling for the Chinese brand Juzui at New York Fashion Week in February. In China, her image “carries an element of successful parenting,” one researcher said.

Musk’s mother is in demand

MUSK, FROM PAGE 1

Musk became a staunch supporter of Mr. Trump’s campaign, and on several of them, she waded into U.S. politics.

Several of the countries where she recently appeared have concerns to press in Washington.

Beijing opposes newly announced U.S. tariffs on its goods, and the country’s leaders appear to see Mr. Musk, who himself has extensive business interests in China, as a potential ally. Kazakhstan is hoping that the Trump administration will end restrictions on trade. And the United Arab Emirates buys weapons from Washington and has spent hundreds of millions on lobbyists and donations to think tanks.

Ms. Musk has long traveled extensively for work, both within the United States and overseas. But her activities in China have intensified in recent months, a review of her social media posts over the past four years by The New York Times found. She endorsed five Chinese brands last year, while the year before, she traveled to China mostly to promote her book and for modeling work, appearing in one ad.

The Times could not confirm how much Ms. Musk has earned overseas in recent months. Although in her endorsements and speeches she often emphasizes her connection to Mr. Musk, there is no evidence that she has sought to influence U.S. government policy. Nor is there evidence that she has taken work linked to China’s government.

Ms. Musk’s agency, the Los Angeles-based Creative Artists Agency; her manager, Anna Sherman; and a lawyer who has recently worked for Ms. Musk, Doreen Small, did not respond to questions about her international engagements, including how much she has earned for speaking and endorsing products. The five Chinese brands she endorsed last year did not reply to questions about how much she was paid.

Her activities raise the possibility that foreign governments could see her as a conduit to Mr. Musk, said Scott Amey, the general counsel for the Project on Government Oversight, a watchdog group. “The fear is,” he said, “would people be using her to get one degree of separation from her son and two degrees of separation from the Oval Office?”

Mr. Musk is already facing scrutiny over ethical concerns stemming from his businesses such as SpaceX, which has billions of dollars in Pentagon contracts. “We don’t need other potential conflicts of interest that involve his family to be added to his long list that already exists,” Mr. Amey said.

Maye Musk has amassed 1.2 million followers on Chinese social media. She is often asked questions about her son, Elon.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation normally scrutinizes the foreign contacts of presidential advisers and their family members before granting security clearances. Contacts from countries seen as potential U.S. adversaries, like China, typically receive more scrutiny.

It is unclear if Ms. Musk or her contacts have been vetted. The White House has said that her son is a “special government employee,” a short-term adviser who is subject to federal ethics law, but it has not disclosed his security clearance status. Before joining the U.S. government, he had skirted reporting requirements as a federal contractor.

Mr. Musk and his lawyer, Alex Spiro, did not respond to questions about his clearance status or his mother’s work overseas. He said on X on Feb. 14 that he has had a “top secret clearance for many years.”

It is notable that both Mr. Musk and his mother have interests in China, said

Norman Eisen, a former White House ethics counsel in the Obama administration and a founder of the State Democracy Defenders Fund, which is suing Mr. Musk and his team on behalf of current and recently laid-off federal workers. (Mr. Musk’s company, Tesla, makes half its cars in China, for instance.)

But Ms. Musk’s business trips to China and other countries independently deserve attention, Mr. Eisen said. “Given the exceptionally powerful role of Mr. Musk, who may be the single most influential person in the executive branch, even beyond Trump himself, these foreign entanglements are a cause for concern,” he said.

Mr. Musk often appears in public with his mother and, before becoming a government adviser, brought her to business meetings at X, the social media company he owns, according to the book “Character Limit,” by Kate Conger and Ryan Mac, both reporters for The Times. Since the election, she has accompanied him to social events at Mr. Trump’s Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida and defended her son on Fox News.

Ms. Musk, who was born in Canada but raised Mr. Musk and his two younger siblings in South Africa, has modeled for decades. In recent years, however, her career took off in parallel with that of Mr. Musk. Her rise also reflected an effort in fashion to work with models of varying ages and body types.

Ms. Musk, who has an apartment in New York, has modeled for American and European brands, appearing on the cover of Sports Illustrated’s swimsuit edition in 2022.

Recently she has developed a large following in China, where some of her success is tied to being the mother of Mr. Musk, who has star status there. Fans and businesspeople closely track developments in his tech empire and pore over biographies of him, hoping to gain insights.

His mother’s popularity in China comes amid strained relations with the United States, as the threat of still more tariffs and other tensions hang over the relationship.

She has signed copies of her memoir, in which she writes about raising her three children as a single mother, and of surviving domestic abuse (which her former husband has denied). She opened accounts on Chinese social media and has amassed 1.2 million followers across multiple platforms, where fans thank her for being a role model and ask questions about Mr. Musk.

Ms. Musk has visited more than a dozen Chinese cities, graced billboards and magazine covers, and is often invited to speak (in English) at events geared toward women there. Her image “carries an element of successful parenting, attracting a significant number of mothers among her followers,” said Yang Hu, an expert on China’s beauty industry with Euromonitor International, a market research firm.

One of Ms. Musk’s Chinese ad campaigns centers on her being Mr. Musk’s mother. The ad, for a baby care line, shows her encouraging disobedient children, over the text, “No leading figure of our time is raised following rules.”

Three days after the U.S. presidential election, she spoke about her son’s coming government role at an event in Shanghai to promote a mattress brand, saying, “He is definitely going to work on efficiency, but he really likes rockets and cars,” according to a clip posted by a state media outlet.

At New York Fashion Week in February, Ms. Musk modeled for the Chinese brand Juzui. Before taking to the runway, she told Women’s Wear Daily that she wants to explore work in new countries this year.

Eric Lipton contributed reporting. Susan C. Beachy contributed research.

Holocaust survivor who embraced life

ROSE GIRONE
1912-2025

BY REMY TUMIN

Rose Girone was eight months pregnant and living in Breslau, Germany, in 1938 when her husband was sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp. She secured passage to Shanghai, only to be forced to live in a bathroom in a Jewish ghetto for seven years. Once settled in the United States, she rented whatever she could find while supporting her daughter with knitting.

Despite the hardships, including two pandemics, Ms. Girone embraced life with urgent positivity and common sense. “Aren’t we lucky?” she would often say.

Ms. Girone was believed to be the oldest survivor of the Holocaust. She died at a nursing home in North Bellmore on Long Island, N.Y., on Feb. 24, her daughter and fellow survivor, Reha Bennicasa, said. She was 113.

Her secret to longevity was simple, she would say: dark chocolate and good children.

There are about 245,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors alive around the world, according to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which supports survivors.

“This passing reminds us of the urgency of sharing the lessons of the Holocaust while we still have firsthand witnesses with us,” said Greg Schneider, the organization’s executive vice president. “The Holocaust is slipping from memory to history, and its lessons are too important, especially in today’s world, to be forgotten.”

“Rose was an example of fortitude,” he said, “but now we are obligated to carry on in her memory.”

Rose Raubvogel was born on Jan. 13, 1912, in Janow, Poland, to Klara Aschkenase and Jacob Raubvogel. The family later settled in Hamburg, Germany, and started a costume business.

She married Julius Mannheim in 1938 in an arranged marriage. The couple moved to Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland) that year, not long before Mr. Mannheim and his father were arrested and sent to Buchenwald.

A year later, now with an infant, Ms. Girone received a document written in Chinese from family members who had escaped to England. It appeared to be a visa for safe passage to Shanghai, but “it could have been anything,” Ms. Bennicasa said; the family later learned, she

explained, that it could have been a fake document.

Mr. Mannheim’s father agreed to hand over his shipping business plus a payment to the Nazis in exchange for their release from the concentration camp. With the visa, Ms. Girone, her husband and 6-month-old Reha set sail for Japanese-occupied Shanghai along with 20,000 other refugees.

Mr. Mannheim had a small taxi business at first, while Ms. Girone made money by knitting clothes. But once Japan declared war in 1941, Jews were rounded up into a ghetto. Ms. Girone had to beg the ghetto’s overseer for a place for her family to live, and the only arrangement they could manage was an unfinished, rat-infested bathroom in a house. The family of three would live there for seven years.

Mr. Mannheim had to abandon his taxi business and turned to hunting and fishing, while Ms. Girone continued to sell her knitwear. She eventually made friends with other refugees, including a Viennese Jewish businessman who helped her turn her knitting into a business. It would be a lifeline for decades to come.

By 1947, Ms. Girone’s mother and grandmother had already made it to the United States, and they sponsored the family to join them. Ms. Girone secretly stashed \$80, and the family set off that year for San Francisco, where they lived for about a month before taking a train to New York.

Within a few years, Ms. Girone had divorced Mr. Mannheim, and she and Reha bounced from furnished room to furnished room around Manhattan, where she “scrimped and saved” while working at knitting stores, Ms. Bennicasa said.

Ms. Girone eventually saved enough to open a knitting store with a partner in Rego Park, Queens, and she opened a second store in Forest Hills, where “we actually had a real apartment, not just a furnished room,” Ms. Bennicasa recalled. Ms. Girone would continue to work and teach knitting until she was 102.

In 1968, Ms. Girone married Jack Girone, who died in 1990. In addition to her daughter, Ms. Bennicasa, she is survived by a granddaughter, Gina Bennicasa.

Gina Bennicasa remembered her grandmother’s frequent sayings, including “Growing old is fun, but being old is not fun.” One stood out among the rest: “You have to wake up and have a purpose.”



Rose Girone, above right, secured passage to Shanghai in 1939. She traveled on a Nazi passport, above left, with her husband and their 6-month-old daughter. Ms. Girone, who died at 113, said the secret to longevity was simple: dark chocolate and good children.



Scottish painter beloved by enthusiasts, if not by critics

JACK VETTRIANO
1951-2025

BY SOPAN DEB

Jack Vettriano, a self-taught Scottish painter best known for “The Singing Butler,” who overcame critical derision to become one of the best selling painters in Europe, has died. He was 73.

His death was announced in a statement on his website, which did not cite a cause or say when or where he died.

Mr. Vettriano, a Neorealist painter with a penchant for eroticism, often depicted ordinary people, particularly glamorous women, in intimate situations with Scotland as the backdrop. Fans of his work included the actor Jack Nicholson and the songwriter Tim Rice, but critics savaged his art as lowbrow and, at times, chauvinistic.

“The Singing Butler” was one of the first paintings Mr. Vettriano sold after he became a professional artist. In 1992, it sold — by his account — for 3,000 pounds, or about \$3,800 at today’s exchange rate. “A thousand went to the auction house, a thousand to the taxman and I was left with £1,000,” he told The Sunday Post in 2021.

This was early in Mr. Vettriano’s career, though he was already in his 40s. He had sold only a few paintings by then. “The Singing Butler” was sold again at auction in 2004, this time for around £750,000. That made it the most valuable work of art to have emerged



“The Singing Butler,” above left, was one of the first paintings sold by the Scottish artist Jack Vettriano. “I think it’s just escapism,” he said when asked about the work’s popularity. “It’s where we’d all like to be at some point in our lives.” Right, Mr. Vettriano in 2017.



from Scotland at the time.

It depicts a couple dancing under a cloudy sky on what appears to be a beach. A man and a woman stand nearby holding umbrellas. All four of the people in the painting have their heads turned away from the viewer. The painting evokes a sense of nostalgia that often permeates Vettriano’s paintings.

“I think it’s just escapism,” Mr. Vettriano told “CBS Sunday Morning” in 2004 by way of explaining the popularity of the painting. “It’s where we’d all like to be at some point in our lives, and when you’re sitting on a sort of cold, wet, damp Tuesday afternoon and you’ve got that on your wall, I think it’s uplifting. It sort of enriches your spirit.”

The man on the right is a butler and, according to Mr. Vettriano, he is definitely singing. But what?

“Fly me to the moon, let me sing among those stars, a Sinatra classic,” Mr. Vettriano told the newspaper Scotland on Sunday in 2004, referring to “Fly Me to the Moon (In Other Words),” as performed by Frank Sinatra.

Largely on the basis of “The Singing Butler,” Mr. Vettriano would become one of the most popular artists in the world. Reproductions of his paintings, which have appeared on everyday items such as mugs and mouse pads dating back decades, number in the millions.

Mr. Vettriano was never a critical darling, nor a favorite of the art establishment. It was a sore point for Mr. Vettriano, who once displayed a 1989 rejection letter from the Edinburgh College of Art as part of an exhibition in 2022.

Duncan Macmillan, an art historian who wrote a book that covered more than 500 years of Scottish art, barely mentioned Mr. Vettriano at the height of his fame, a snub that Mr. Vettriano called a “verbal violence” in his CBS interview.

The critic Jonathan Jones, writing in The Guardian in 2011, described Mr. Vettriano’s paintings as “emotionally trite and technically drab.” Museums, particularly the most famous ones in Britain, have not typically shown his paintings.

“They don’t like an artist who is as popular as me because it takes away part of their authority,” Mr. Vettriano once told Radio Times. “If they want to ignore me, let them.”

The British street artist Banksy reproduced Mr. Vettriano’s most famous painting, but replaced the woman with the umbrella with two people in hazmat suits carrying a drum of toxic waste onto the beach. Titled “Crude Oil (Vettriano),” it was first displayed in 2005 and was eventually purchased by Mark

Hoppus, a founder of the pop-punk band Blink-182.

Banksy’s version was scheduled to go to auction on Tuesday, when it was expected to fetch a minimum of £3 million, or about \$3.8 million.

Born Jack Hoggan in the eastern county of Fife, Scotland, on Nov. 17, 1951, Mr. Vettriano left school at around 16 to follow in his father’s footsteps as a coal miner.

When he turned 21, his girlfriend gave him a set of watercolors, and he spent his 20s and 30s painting, often copying the pieces of famous artists to hone his technique, under the name Hoggan. He eventually adopted a version of his mother’s maiden name, Vettrino, as his surname.

“I did that to distinguish between what I could see was my own style developing,” Mr. Vettriano told The Courier and Advertiser in 2022. “I didn’t want to get contaminated by the copies.”

His big break would come more than two decades later, in the late 1980s. Around the time he was rejected by the Edinburgh College of Art, Mr. Vettriano submitted two paintings to the Royal Scottish Academy’s annual exhibition. They sold within minutes; they were his first professional sales, ones that Mr. Vettriano later said “marked my arrival.”

“If you put some of the Impressionists, some of the old masters, Cézanne, Degas, a few Scottish artists and you mix it up,” Mr. Vettriano told The Courier and Advertiser, “what comes out is me.”

World

A harsh reality behind Greenland’s minerals

NUUK, GREENLAND

Lucrative resources attract global investors, but mining challenges temper hopes

BY JEFFREY GETTLEMAN, MAYA TEKELI AND CHRIS BUCKLEY

More than a decade ago, Canadian miners prospecting for diamonds in western Greenland saw on the horizon a huge white hump.

They called it White Mountain and soon discovered it was a deposit of anorthosite, a salt-and-pepper color mineral used in paints, glass fibers, flame retardants and other industries. The same mineral creates a ghostly glow on the moon’s surface.

The White Mountain deposit proved to be several miles long and several miles wide, and “only God knows how deep it goes,” said Bent Olsvig Jensen, the managing director of Lumina Sustainable Materials, the company mining the area.

Lumina is backed by European and Canadian investors, but Mr. Jensen said it wasn’t easy to turn the deposit into a mountain of cash.

“You cannot do exploration all year round; you are in the Arctic,” he explained.

He told of fierce winds grounding helicopters and knocking out communications, pack ice blocking ships and temperatures dropping to such a dreadful low — sometimes minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 40 degrees Celsius) — that the hydraulic fluid powering the company’s digging machines “becomes like butter.”

Sitting in Lumina’s humble offices in Nuuk, Greenland’s capital, with wet snowflakes scissoring down outside the windows, Mr. Jensen brought a dose of sobriety to all the talk of Greenland as the land of incalculable mineral riches. He noted that though the island has dozens of exploratory projects, there are only two active mines: his and a small gold operation.

The gigantic semiautonomous island in the Arctic has seized the world’s attention since President Trump insisted in January that the United States take it over. Part of the attraction is its rare earths minerals, which are vital to high-tech industries and a source of competition across the world.

China dominates in the world’s critical minerals, and has severely restricted the export of certain minerals to the United States. The Trump administration, determined to secure mineral assets overseas, has turned to high-



Greenland has seized the world’s attention after President Trump insisted in January that the United States take it over.

pressure tactics. The natural resources agreement that Ukraine was all set to sign with the administration until the talks spectacularly blew up on Friday was focused on critical minerals.

The European Union is just as fixated. It recently signed a strategic minerals deal with Rwanda, which is suspected of fomenting instability in mineral-rich Congo next door.

It should be no surprise, then, that Mr. Trump and his allies are excited about Greenland’s mineral scene. Vice President JD Vance has spoken of Greenland’s “incredible natural resources,” and Republican senators recently held a hearing on “Greenland’s Geostrategic Importance,” highlighting its rare earths.

Tech giants like Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos, along with some of Mr. Trump’s allies, including Howard Lutnick, his commerce secretary, have invested in companies prospecting here. According to a recent Danish study, 31 of 34 materials defined as critical by the European Union, like lithium and titanium, are found on the island.

But for every square on the periodic table that Greenland can fill, there’s an even longer list of challenges.

Besides the extreme weather, the island has fewer than 100 miles (160 kilo-

meters) of roads, only 56,000 residents (which means a tiny labor pool) and a few small ports.

Equally daunting for miners is Greenland’s environmentalist lobby. Many Greenlanders say they need more mining to become economically and politically independent of Denmark, which keeps it afloat with hundreds of millions of dollars in annual subsidies.

But Greenlanders have also expressed caution about new heavy industry. They are protective of their environment, which is being shaken up by climate change: The Arctic is warming nearly four times as fast as the rest of the world, which will most likely make the mineral resources more accessible.

The island’s governing political party swept into office four years ago on an environmentalist platform and shut down one of the most promising mining projects. The next elections are on March 11; along with independence from Denmark and closer relations with the United States, safeguarding the environment is at the top of the agenda.

For many Greenlanders, nature is a part of their identity and something they connect to through fishing, hunting, hiking and spending time outdoors.

“We have lived with nature for as long as we have been here, in sustainable

ways,” said Ellen Kristensen, an environmentalist in South Greenland.

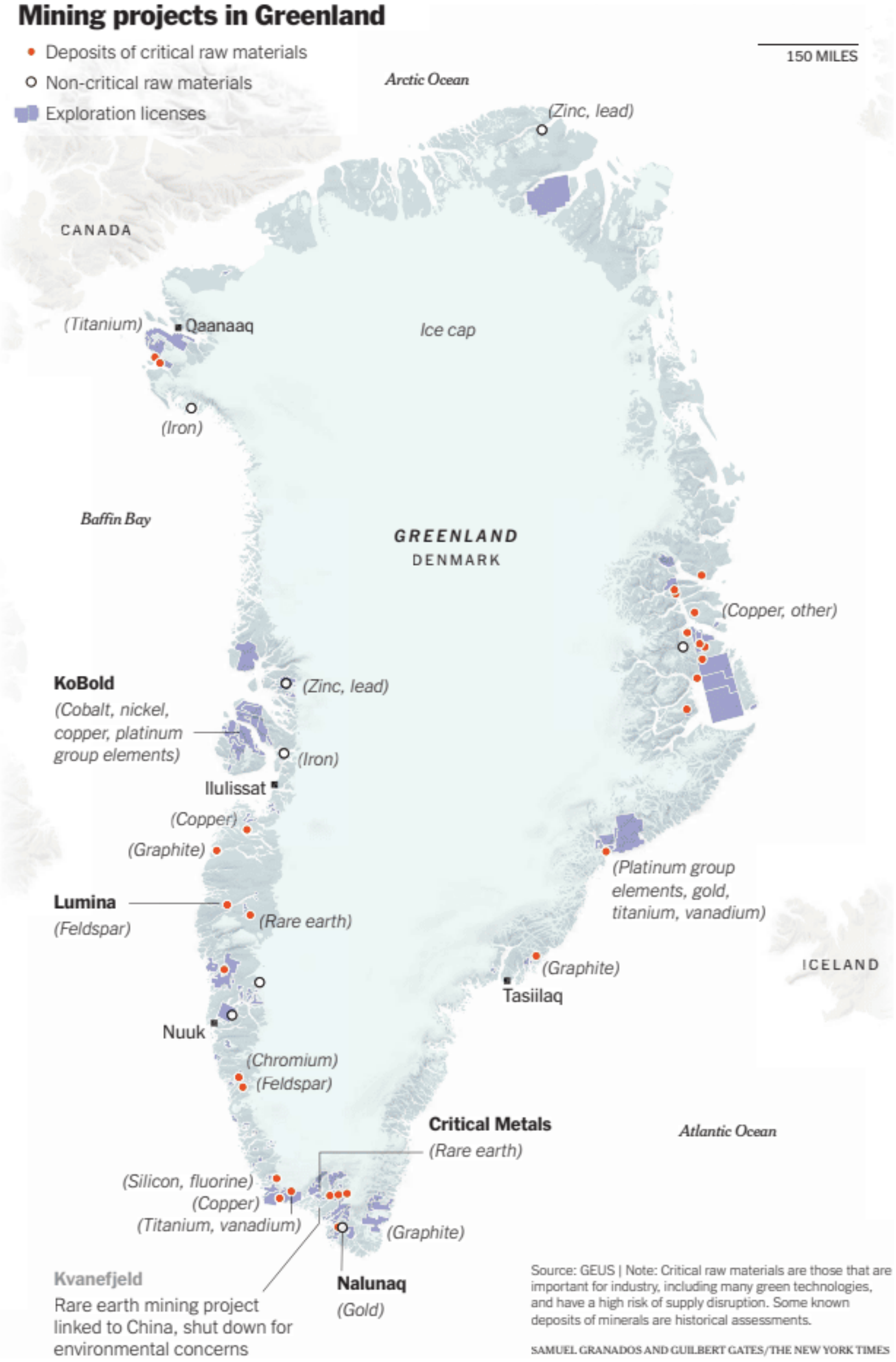
Not far from her community is the small gold mine, Amaroq Minerals, which is backed by Icelandic, Canadian and other Western investors, extracted its first gold in November. Its chief executive, Eldur Olafsson, says the remoteness of his mine means the company has to be self-sufficient in energy, supplies and transportation — just about everything.

“Operating in Greenland is unlike anything else,” he said.

The Danes, who have controlled Greenland for more than 300 years, have had mixed success. Danish engineers discovered a huge supply of cryolite in the late 18th century. Cryolite used to be a component of aluminum production, and Danish operators mined it until the 1980s, when synthetic alternatives became widely available.

The Danes made billions, and many Greenlanders say they were exploited. The same complaints have been lodged against a large coal mine that Denmark developed last century, though it closed in the 1970s.

Greenland is littered with shuttered projects and abandoned sites. A ruby mine near the east coast closed in 2022 amid soaring debts. Around the same



time, Greenland’s government formally abandoned its oil ambitions, citing the lack of commercial viability and the unacceptable environmental risks.

Even the search for diamonds has yet to lead to a commercially viable mine.

These days, much of the interest lies in rare earths, but a big rare earth mine in southern Greenland remains a cautionary tale.

Energy Transition Minerals, an Australian mining enterprise with a sizable investment from a Chinese company, claims its site in Greenland has one of the world’s largest deposits of rare earth oxides. The company spent more than \$100 million developing it, only to have Greenland’s governing party, Inuit Ataqatigiit, which had campaigned on killing the project, do exactly that.

The mining company says that its operations are safe and that it has completed copious environmental studies proving so. It is fighting the decision, and the dispute is tied up in arbitration and court cases.

Part of the reason Mr. Trump is so covetous of Greenland is he wants to box out China. He said that China has “boats all over the place.”

One Greenlander working to help Mr. Trump is Jorgen Boassen, a bricklayer who says he has followed American politics since he was a teenager and was drawn to Mr. Trump. Mr. Boassen campaigned door to door for him in the United States’ last election and was invited to inauguration activities.

Mr. Trump, Mr. Boassen says, is “a man worth betting on.”

Gaza blockade drives prices

JERUSALEM

Palestinians struggle to buy essential goods as Israel cuts off supplies

BY HIBA YAZBEK

One day after Israel began halting the entry of all goods and humanitarian assistance into the Gaza Strip, Palestinians there were already feeling the effects of the sweeping measure, with prices of essential goods on the rise.

“It was a complete shock,” Iman Saber, a 24-year-old nurse from northern Gaza, said of Israel’s decision on Sunday to block aid and commercial shipments.

Already, said Ms. Saber, who has been living in a tent with her father, a cancer patient, and her mother and sister, prices for sugar, oil and chicken have gone up, and hopes raised by the cease-fire between Israel and Hamas have proved fleeting.

“We couldn’t wait for shops to reopen and prices to drop, to feel some relief,” Ms. Saber said in a phone interview. “But now everything is becoming expensive again.”

Israel’s halt on goods and aid, including fuel, was aimed at pressuring Hamas into accepting its new proposal for extending the cease-fire, which paused the war in Gaza after 15 months of fighting and has since expired. Hours before the border closure was announced, Israel proposed a seven-week extension, during which Hamas would have to release half the remaining hostages seized during the Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel that set off the war.

The renewed aid blockade affected not just humanitarian aid, which is distributed free, but also commercial goods, and the effect on prices in the devastated enclave was almost immediate, Gazans said. The ban on shipments came as many were already struggling to observe the holy month of Ramadan, usually a festive time of fasting and worship.

“We were able to breathe for a bit and feel some hope again,” said Ms. Saber. “But now, we’re feeling depressed again,” she said.

The United Nations and several aid groups sounded the alarm over Israel’s decision to block the supply shipments.



Food aid being carried to a tent in Gaza City. Israel has blocked all goods from entering Gaza with the aim of pushing Hamas to accept its new cease-fire proposal.

“Humanitarian aid is not a bargaining chip for applying pressure on parties,” the aid group Oxfam said in a statement, calling Israel’s decision “a reckless act of collective punishment, explicitly prohibited under international humanitarian law.”

Doctors Without Borders, too, declared that “humanitarian aid should never be used as a tool of war.” Doing so, it said, will “have devastating consequences” in Gaza, where it has “created uncertainty and fear, causing food prices to spike.”

The U.N. under secretary general for humanitarian affairs, Tom Fletcher, condemned Israel’s action. “International humanitarian law is clear: We must be allowed access to deliver vital lifesaving aid,” he said on Sunday. And Hamas denounced the Israeli move as “black-mail.”

Israeli officials have said that the government believes that the aid and goods that have entered Gaza in recent months and during the cease-fire provide enough supplies for several more months.

But in Israel, five nonprofit organizations filed a motion to the High Court of Justice calling for an interim order barring the government from cutting off the supply of aid to Gaza. Gisha, a human rights group leading the motion, argued that halting the provision of aid was illegal, even if, as Israel maintains, there is

enough aid already there.

And even if food is available, it may now be even further out of reach for many Gazans.

“A kilogram of sugar was six shekels yesterday, but now, after Netanyahu said he will not allow anything to enter, its price has already risen to 10 shekels,” said one 30-year-old Palestinian, Amani Aata, who is from Beit Hanoun, in northern Gaza. (One shekel is worth 28 U.S. cents.)

And it is not only sugar, Ms. Aata said in a voice message on Sunday. “Everything, everything will become expensive again,” she said.

On Monday, the Gazan Interior Ministry urged people to report price increases in markets and shops.

The aid halt came after a dramatic surge in humanitarian supplies entering Gaza during the first phase of the cease-fire that brought temporary relief to the enclave amid warnings of a looming famine.

When the fighting was underway, fewer than 100 trucks a day were entering the enclave, and even those deliveries were at times suspended. Relief agencies accused Israel of overly restricting deliveries with stringent inspections and the closure of border crossings. Israel denied those claims.

Ameera Harouda contributed reporting from Doha, Qatar.

Workers told to get married or get out

China’s government gets more aggressive as concern grows over falling birthrate

BY VIVIAN WANG

The ideal worker at the Chinese chemical manufacturer, according to the internal memo, is hardworking, virtuous and loyal. And — perhaps most important — willing to have children for the good of the country.

That was the message that the company, Shandong Shuntian Chemical Group, sent to unmarried employees recently, in a notice that spread widely on social media. It instructed them to start families by Sept. 30, or else.

“If you cannot get married and start a family within three quarters, the company will terminate your labor contract,” the memo said.

Shandong Shuntian was not the first company to try to dictate its employees’ personal lives amid rising concern about China’s plummeting marriage and birthrates. Weeks earlier, a popular supermarket chain had told its staff not to ask for wedding gifts, to lower the cost of marriages.

Both orders were widely criticized, for many of the same reasons that people are refusing to start families in the first place. Besides the economic cost of having children, many young Chinese cite a desire for personal autonomy. They reject the traditional idea that their families should direct their lives, and they certainly aren’t inclined to let their employers have a say.

Last year, 6.1 million Chinese couples got married — a 20 percent decline from a year earlier, and the fewest since the government began releasing statistics in 1986. China’s population has fallen for three straight years.

The authorities have been trying to reverse those trends. Officials have visited women at home to ask whether they plan to get pregnant; published propaganda claiming that pregnancy can make women smarter; and called for creating a “fertility-friendly social atmosphere,” including in workplaces.

Some companies seem eager to comply.

The notice from the chemical company, which began circulating online last month, was directed at unmarried employees between the ages of 28 and

58, including divorced workers.

“Not responding to the call of the country, not marrying and having children, is disloyal,” the memo said.

As online ridicule grew, the company quickly backtracked. Reached by phone, a woman at its headquarters said the notice had been retracted and that the local government had ordered the company to undergo “rectification.” She refused to answer further questions. Local labor officials could not be reached for comment.

Years ago, when the Chinese authorities wanted to limit births, they resorted to coercive measures like forced abortions and sterilizations. (The city where the chemical company is based, Linyi, was particularly notorious for such tactics.) Now that Beijing is trying to do the opposite, it is taking a softer approach, perhaps to avoid setting off large-scale resistance. But officials have signaled support for some companies’ meddling, as in the case of the supermarket chain Pangdonglai.

The chain’s founder, Yu Donglai, wrote on social media in November that he would soon forbid employees to exchange “bride prices” — payments, sometimes amounting to tens of thousands of dollars, that a man traditionally gives to his future wife’s family. Critics of the practice, including the government, have argued that it makes marriage unaffordable for many men.

Employees would also not be allowed

to invite more than five tables of guests to their weddings, Mr. Yu said. Some commentators have accused him of overstepping. But People’s Daily, the ruling Communist Party’s official mouthpiece, defended him.

The rules were “intended to promote a new trend of civilized marriage,” it said in a commentary. “Its guiding significance is worth paying attention to.”

Pangdonglai formalized the new rules in January. Employees who don’t comply will retain basic benefits but they will be ineligible for additional ones, like extended leave.

Some social media users speculated that the recent announcements were disguised cost-cutting measures, or dismissed them as the whims of entrepreneurs. Both Pangdonglai and the chemical company are private, not state-owned.

But the fact that companies felt comfortable issuing such edicts reflected the broader social environment, suggesting that they thought the orders would be well received, said Lu Pin, a Chinese feminist scholar and activist.

Rather than issue its own orders, the government might prefer to create social pressure to have children, Ms. Lu said. If people fear being excluded from their communities or losing their jobs, they might be more likely to comply, she said.

Siyi Zhao contributed research.



Last year, only 6.1 million Chinese couples got married — a 20 percent decline from a year earlier and the fewest since the government began releasing statistics in 1986.

WORLD



At a summit meeting in London on Sunday, European leaders pledged to form a “coalition of the willing” as one of multiple steps to support Ukraine, including military aid.

Europe tries to fill gap in aid

UKRAINE, FROM PAGE 1
Germany is the second-largest contributor of military and other aid to Ukraine, after the United States.

But each country faces political and economic hurdles, such as the need to pass specific parliamentary measures in the Netherlands and the lack of a new government in Germany after recent elections. Denmark’s prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, said she had an “open mind.” Dick Schoof, prime minister of the Netherlands, said he had not yet made concrete commitments.

“We will renegotiate precisely these issues,” the departing German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, said after Sunday’s meeting, in what sounded like something less than a stirring call to arms. Ramping up military spending, he added, “will require an effort that many are not yet really sufficiently prepared for.”

Mr. Scholz’s likely successor, Friedrich Merz, is scrambling to obtain a huge amount of funding for defense — potentially at least 200 billion euros, about \$207 billion — in the current German Parliament because he faces the prospect of an opposition minority in the next that is big enough to block additional spending.

President Emmanuel Macron of France said the nascent British-French plan would begin with a one-month truce between Ukraine and Russia. Any deployment of peacekeeping troops would come only after that, he said in an interview with the French paper Le Fi-

garo on Sunday evening. “There will be no European troops on Ukrainian soil in the coming weeks,” Mr. Macron said, noting the need for negotiations first. “The question is how we use this time to try and obtain an accessible truce, with negotiations that will take several weeks, and then, once peace has been signed, a deployment.”

“We want peace,” Mr. Macron said. “We don’t want it at any price, without guarantees.”

France’s prime minister, François Bayrou, took a harder line on Monday night, telling lawmakers during a debate on Ukraine that “what we have brutally discovered over the past few weeks” was a “stunning reality” that the international rule of law was broken.

“They want to encircle us, to subjugate us, to bend us, too, to the law of the strongest — and this on the part of our allies,” Mr. Bayrou said, who plays little role in France’s foreign policy.

Mr. Bayrou insisted that “we Europeans are stronger than we believe,” as he called for increased military spending around the continent. “On this point, France is for once in agreement with Mr. Trump,” he said. “If we are strong, we can’t ask others to defend us over the long term.”

Italy’s prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, who has cultivated friendly ties with the Trump administration, remains skeptical about a peacekeeping force. On Sunday, she noted that deploying Italian troops “has never been on the table” and

added that such an operation would run the risk of being “highly complex and less effective.”

There are also openly unwilling countries, notably Hungary, which has in the past tried to hold up additional European aid to Ukraine. Hungary’s prime minister, Viktor Orban, thanked Mr. Trump for his hostile treatment of President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine during their Oval Office meeting last week.

Mr. Orban and Robert Fico, Slovakia’s prime minister, have demanded that the European Union push for an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine. Both have threatened to block statements of support for Ukraine at an E.U. summit meeting this week. Neither leader was invited to the gathering in London.

European leaders fear that Mr. Orban could also hold up efforts to keep about \$200 billion in Russian assets frozen when the decision to keep them locked up is up for renewal this summer. London just lent Ukraine 2.26 billion pounds, about \$2.8 billion, that it says will be paid back with the interest on frozen Russian assets held in Britain.

“This requires unanimity,” Prime Minister Donald Tusk of Poland said of the vote to keep the assets frozen. “We know what Hungary’s position is, what it may be.”

European leaders will gather on Thursday for a specially planned European Council meeting at which officials are expected to discuss support for

Ukraine and how to build up defense capabilities across the European Union.

The point is to “approve concrete decisions,” Antonio Costa, president of the Council, said during a news conference on Monday.

Even if Europe marshals a robust coalition, it is not clear that will satisfy Mr. Trump.

In addition to shutting down military aid, a directive that U.S. officials said would be in effect until Mr. Trump determined that Ukraine had demonstrated a good-faith commitment to peace negotiations with Russia, Mr. Trump could also decide to pull back on intelligence sharing and training for Ukrainian troops and pilots, as well as on U.S. management of an office that coordinates international aid at an American military base in Germany, according to an administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

For Mr. Starmer, who has cast himself as a bridge between Europe and the United States, the diplomatic risks are high. Mr. Starmer has also rejected calls for Europe to distance itself from Mr. Trump, who he said was committed to a “durable peace.”

He said he had discussed Europe’s plans by phone with the American president on Saturday evening.

Steven Erlanger contributed reporting from Berlin, Aurelien Breeden from Paris and Eric Schmitt from Washington.

Ukrainian leader turns to diplomacy

KYIV, UKRAINE

President aims to repair U.S. relations and shore up support among Europeans

BY MARC SANTORA

President Volodymyr Zelensky returned to Ukraine on Monday after a whirlwind diplomatic mission that included both humiliation, by President Trump, and a warm embrace, from European leaders. He vowed to use all diplomatic avenues to pursue an end to Ukraine’s war with Russia, but acknowledged there was “a long way to go.”

Russia has given no indication that it will accept any terms other than Ukrainian capitulation and permanent conquest of a large swath of Ukraine — and Mr. Trump makes clearer by the day that his intent is to stand with Moscow. Ukrainians have insisted that they will not lay down their arms unless they receive security guarantees, supported by the United States, that would prevent the Kremlin from regrouping and attacking again.

After a disastrous meeting with Mr. Trump on Friday, in which the American president and Vice President JD Vance berated him as being ungrateful, Mr. Zelensky received a show of support from Europe’s democracies on Sunday, which pledged to work with Ukraine to come up with a peace plan that it could then present to the United States.

Mr. Zelensky himself said American buy-in for a peace plan was important and seemed to go further in his efforts to smooth things over with the White House. “We are grateful for all the support we have received from the United States,” he said in his address to the nation Sunday night. “There hasn’t been a single day when we haven’t felt grateful.”



Demonstrators in London rallied in support of Ukraine on Sunday following a clash between President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine and President Trump.

“There will be diplomacy for peace,” Mr. Zelensky said. “And for the sake of all of us standing together — Ukraine, the whole of Europe, and necessarily America.”

But the Ukrainian leader still faces a monumental challenge in repairing his relationship with Mr. Trump and his advisers, as the American president made clear in a scathing social media post Monday afternoon.

Seizing on Mr. Zelensky’s suggestion that the path to peace would be long and difficult, Mr. Trump wrote on Truth Social: “America will not put up with it for much longer!” He added: “It is what I was saying, this guy doesn’t want there to be Peace as long as he has America’s backing.”

Later that day, a senior U.S. administration official said that the United States was temporarily suspending all military aid to Ukraine. The official said the aid would not resume until Mr. Trump determined that Ukraine had

demonstrated a commitment to peace negotiations with Russia.

Once again, Mr. Trump seemed to be placing the burden of ending the war on Ukraine while saying he believes President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia wants peace despite Moscow’s continuing aggression.

On Sunday, in a series of coordinated interviews on American television, top Trump administration officials assailed the Ukrainian leader, often in remarkably personal terms.

Mike Waltz, the national security adviser, compared Mr. Zelensky to “an ex-girlfriend that wants to argue everything that you said nine years ago, rather than moving the relationship forward.”

The Oval Office meeting on Friday fed into propaganda from the Kremlin, which added to the pile-on on Monday.

The meeting showed that “the Kyiv regime and Zelensky don’t want peace, they want continuation of the war,” the

Kremlin spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, told reporters on Monday. His comments connoted a tightening bond between Moscow and Washington as they falsely portray Ukraine as the aggressor, unwilling to make peace. Attempts by Washington and Moscow “will clearly not be enough” to end the fighting, Mr. Peskov said. “An important element is missing.”

He implied that Russia could now push for a harder bargain than it did during the failed peace talks at the start of the war, given Russia’s military gains. “Since then, 2½ years later, the situation has changed,” Mr. Peskov said. “Only the blind can’t see that or the deaf not wanting to hear that.”

Mr. Zelensky sought to defend himself from being painted as the obstacle to peace — a criticism many Ukrainians find hard to understand given that their country has been under fierce attack for three years.

Ukrainians almost universally want peace, just not peace at any cost. “We need peace, not endless war,” Mr. Zelensky said once again as he returned to Ukraine.

But bitter experience has Ukrainians worried that a cease-fire without security guarantees would only provide a brief respite for Russian forces to regroup and attack again.

They point to the fact that Ukraine has been fighting Russia in the eastern Donbas region since 2014 and that Mr. Putin has violated multiple peace accords aimed at ending the violence there.

The Russian leader also claimed he had no intention of mounting a broader invasion of Ukraine right up until his tanks rolled across the border three years ago. Mr. Zelensky’s insistence on pushing for security guarantees was one of the things that apparently angered Mr. Trump.

Anatoly Kurmanaev contributed reporting from Berlin.

Fear finds footing in drug cartels

MEXICO, FROM PAGE 1

trafficking where a cartel war has caused turmoil for months.

“Every day there have been arrests and seizures,” said Omar Harfuch, the Mexican security minister, at a recent news conference after returning from Sinaloa. The detentions have led to “a constant weakening” of the cartel, he said.

The country’s law enforcement seized nearly as much fentanyl in the last five months as it did in the previous year. Ms. Sheinbaum’s administration says it has made nearly 900 arrests in Sinaloa alone since October.

Then, last week, the Mexican government said it had begun sending to the United States more than two dozen cartel operatives wanted by the American authorities.

It was a clear signal to the Trump administration that Mexico was eager to fight the cartels, though Mr. Trump said on the same day that he was still not satisfied with the government’s efforts. The planned tariffs went into effect on Tuesday.

“Criminal groups have not felt this level of pressure in such a long time,” said Jaime López, a security analyst based in Mexico City.

In interviews, cartel operatives agreed. Some said they were selling off property and firing unessential personnel to make up for lost income from the dent in the fentanyl trade. Others said they were investing money in advanced equipment to detect American government drones, which the United States also flew into Mexico during the Biden and Obama administrations.

Criminal organizations in Mexico have a long history of surviving efforts to dismantle them, or simply splintering off into new groups. But several operatives said that for the first time in years, they genuinely feared arrest or death at the hands of the authorities.

Experts noted that a decline in production in Culiacán wouldn’t necessarily affect the flow of fentanyl to the north, since the drug is easy to make and the cartel can move its labs elsewhere. And it isn’t clear how long any disruption in Culiacán would last. Cooks and experts said they expected that the cartel would restart labs in the city if the pressure subsided or if the group needed an influx of cash.

But the crackdown has had an immediate impact, they said, and some cited the newfound pressure from Mr. Trump.

“Trump established a deadline, and we are seeing the results of everything we could have seen in years being done in a month,” Mr. López said. “The government is sending a message that when it really wants to, it can exert that kind of pressure.”

Even before tariff threats intensified, Ms. Sheinbaum had shown her willingness to take on the cartels as soon as she took office on Oct. 1.

Her predecessor and political ally, former president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, had pursued a strategy he called “hugs not bullets,” focusing on the root causes of crime and generally avoiding violent confrontations with criminals.

While she pledged allegiance to her mentor’s vision, Ms. Sheinbaum made headlines with a rash of battles between soldiers and cartel gunmen that left dozens dead earlier in her presidency.

In 2021, Mexico sued U.S. gun makers and one distributor, arguing that the companies fueled the violence across the border by sending an “iron river” of military-style weapons to cartels.

The U.S. Supreme Court was scheduled to hear arguments on Tuesday to determine whether the Mexican government can proceed with that \$10 billion lawsuit.

Inside the Trump administration, there is still some division over whether the United States should take unilateral military action in Mexico against the cartels, or whether it should work more closely with the Mexican government to combat the drug trade.

Mexico’s cartels are known for amassing military-grade weapons, including I.E.D.s and land mines, yet the operatives acknowledged in interviews that they could scarcely compete with the American military’s arsenal. Even so, one high-level operative said the cartel would be prepared to respond if raids or strikes were carried out.

“If a helicopter comes here and soldiers drop out, 20 or 30 of them,” the operative said, “there’s no way we’d just sit here with our arms crossed.”

One cartel fentanyl cook, speaking from jail, said he was actually in favor of stepped up enforcement by the Mexican government, because he believed that curbing cartel violence could prevent the “deaths of innocents.”



Last month, Mexican forces arrested two big players within the Sinaloa Cartel who were close associates of Iván Archivaldo Guzmán Salazar, the most powerful son of the drug lord known as El Chapo.

After news of the captures spread, the Mexican military deployed a surge of soldiers throughout the city, setting up checkpoints and blocking off entire blocks.

Ms. Sheinbaum has defended her record on fighting the cartels and hit back hard against the Trump White House’s accusation that the Mexican government has “an intolerable alliance” with drug traffickers.

“We are combating organized crime groups, there can be no doubt about this,” she said at a news conference last month, adding, “We are going after organized crime.”

But few dispute that corruption is rampant in Mexico. The last major crackdown on organized crime was led by a security chief who was later convicted in U.S. federal court of taking bribes from the Sinaloa Cartel.

Cartel members said the only reason the government hadn’t really fought them until recently was because they’d bought off enough officials. One cartel cell leader said he doubted that this new effort would seriously damage the cartel because the group could ensure its survival by bribing key officials.

“There are always weak points,” he said, “there are always loose ends we can get to.”



Above, a crime scene in Culiacán, where many Sinaloa Cartel fentanyl labs were located before a crackdown forced production to be scaled back. Below, soldiers from the Mexican Army, which deployed in the city last month after the arrest of two major cartel members.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIELE VOLPE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



Scores of languages other than English are spoken in American communities with many immigrants. Among them is the borough of Queens in New York City.

350 tongues, but one’s official

PHOENIX

Trump order on English may have muted effect in a diverse population

BY JACK HEALY

President Trump’s executive order making English the official language of the United States reached into history to argue its case, noting that the country’s founding documents were written in English.

But not only in English. After the U.S. Constitution was drafted in 1787, supporters of ratification printed translations for Dutch speakers in New York and German speakers in Pennsylvania, so they could understand the arguments for a “vollkommenere Vereinigung” — a more perfect union.

The push and pull over whether America should have one national lan-

guage or embrace its polyglot spirit has generated fierce debate for more than a century, raising deeper questions about belonging and assimilation in a country whose people speak more than 350 languages.

Now, Mr. Trump’s executive order puts an “America first” stamp onto the nation’s speech.

His order gave a long-sought victory to the English-only movement, which has ties to efforts to curb immigration and bilingual education. Supporters said it recognized the reality of English’s primacy in American life. Nearly 80 percent of the population speaks only English, and immigrants have long been required to demonstrate English proficiency before becoming citizens.

Senator Eric Schmitt, Republican of Missouri, called it a “long, long overdue” official acknowledgment that “in this country, we speak English.” Senator Mike Lee, Republican of Utah, wrote a social media post in Spanish saying that English should be the country’s “idioma oficial.”

But immigrant-rights groups and congressional Democrats warned that the order could alienate immigrants and make it harder for non-English speakers to get government services, fill out health care forms or vote. The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus called it a “thinly veiled attempt to allow federal agencies to discriminate against immigrants.”

Some critics compared Mr. Trump’s order to Indian boarding schools that forbade Native languages, World War I laws that banned the German language and state-level efforts to outlaw bilingual education.

Legal experts said the order’s effects might be muted at first.

Unlike some restrictive English-only state restrictions that have been struck down by courts, Mr. Trump’s order does not require agencies to operate solely in English. They can offer documents and services in other languages. “It’s not nearly as punitive as it could be,” said Mary Carol Combs, an education professor at the University of Arizona.

Early American history is full of examples of bilingual government, experts said. In the 19th century, Midwestern states translated laws and messages from their governors into Norwegian, German and Welsh. California’s 1849 Constitution required laws and decrees to be published in both English and Spanish.

An influx of immigrants from Asia and Latin America in the second half of the 20th century helped galvanize the modern English-only movement. More than 30 states have designated English as their official language, including heavily Democratic California.

During his campaign last year, Mr. Trump said American classrooms were being overwhelmed by students “from countries where they don’t even know what the language is.”

His executive order said that designating English as the official language would streamline communication, “reinforce shared national values, and create a more cohesive and efficient society.”

Musk laid bare: Crude and contradictory

In interview, he attacks Social Security but plays down his government role

BY JESS BIDGOOD AND NICHOLAS NEHAMAS

As President Trump sets about shrinking the U.S. government, he has repeatedly claimed that popular safety net programs, including Social Security and Medicaid, are off the table, and spoken about them delicately.

During a three-hour interview with the podcast host Joe Rogan on Friday, it seemed as if Elon Musk hadn’t gotten that memo.

“Social Security is the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time,” Musk declared.

The moment offered an immediate opening for Democrats, who accused Musk of looking to cut benefits for older and disabled people.

And it created a fresh headache for Republicans who have labored to explain how they plan to cut the budget drastically without slashing popular programs like Medicaid.

These are the remarkable and at times surreal risks inherent in Trump’s decision to turn his presidency into a kind of co-production with a world-famous, often undisciplined billionaire. And the interview laid them bare.

The appearance — Musk’s most extensive solo interview since the beginning of Trump’s second administration — offered a window into his worldview that was by turns crude and contradictory. Musk defended his efforts with his Department of Government Efficiency, alternatively casting it as existential and downplaying its scope, while expounding on not-safe-for-work matters like A.I. sex robots.

Here are some takeaways from the conversation.

FAR-REACHING GOALS

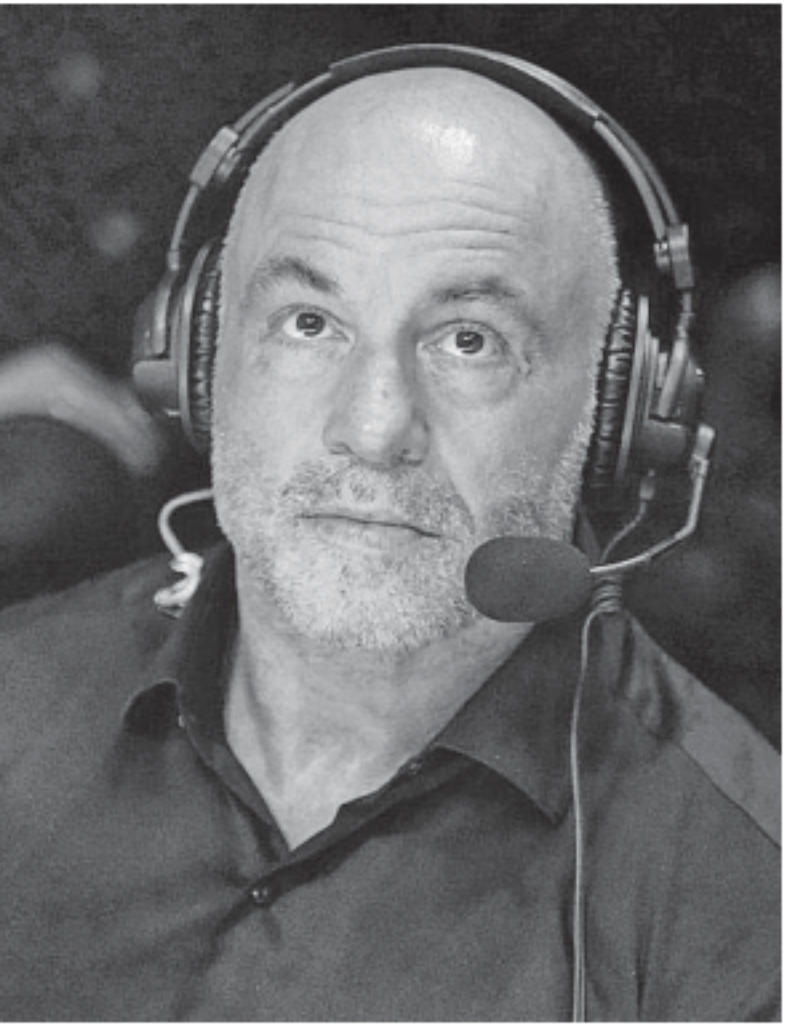
Musk repeatedly acknowledged just how radical his aims are, calling his project of slashing the government work force, cutting contracts and eliminating regulations a “revolution” against the federal bureaucracy.

“Normally, the bureaucracy eats revolutions for breakfast,” he said. “This is the first time that they’re not, that the revolution might actually succeed.”

It is, he admitted, very different from



Elon Musk, above left, recently gave his most extensive solo interview since the beginning of the new Trump administration to the podcast host Joe Rogan, above right.



Jeff Bottari/Zuffa LLC via Getty Images

the slower pace of change during Trump’s first administration.

“This is nothing like the first term,” Rogan later agreed.

“Yeah, this is a revolutionary cabinet,” the billionaire said, “and maybe the most revolutionary cabinet since the first revolution.”

JUST AN ADVISER

Musk described artificial intelligence as “something we should be worried about,” but suggested he had gotten involved in the technology to develop a system that “doesn’t tell you that misgendering is worse than nuclear war.”

Musk said he believed A.I. would be smarter than any individual human in

the next year or two and predicted that A.I. would be smarter than all humans combined by 2029 or 2030. He said he thought there was an 80 percent chance that A.I. would have a “good outcome,” and that there was a 20 percent chance of “annihilation.”

He also talked about his long-held dream of populating Mars, which he described as “incredibly important in ensuring the long-term survival of civilization.”

He characterized it as a race against time. “Can we make Mars self-sufficient before civilization has some sort of future fork in the road where there’s either, like, a war, nuclear war?”

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

At one point, Musk seemingly referred to a tenet of the so-called great replacement theory, which holds that Western elites want to “replace” white Americans with immigrants.

“The more illegals that the Democrats can bring in, the more likely they are to win, so that’s what they’re going to do,” he said.

He then described a conspiracy theory that liberals were planning to turn swing states into Democratic territory by legalizing undocumented immigrants, calling it “an attempt to destroy democracy in America” and saying that preventing that outcome had been the “fork in the road” moment that led him to support Trump.

During the interview, Musk also suggested that the government was keeping secret “a mountain of evidence,” including videos and recordings, made by the sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, who was linked to many prominent figures; speculated that federal government programs to prevent the spread of Ebola were actually involved in creating new strains of the virus; and claimed without evidence that “a bunch of really good, talented old white guys” had been pushed out of the Federal Aviation Administration as air traffic controllers to make room for less qualified women and people of color.

“We should not put the public safety at risk because of some demented philosophy,” he said.

“NOT A NAZI”

At one point, Rogan asked Musk what it was like to have purchased Twitter. “And then people call you a Nazi on that same thing you bought?”

Musk seemed to respond with puns. “I did not see it coming,” he said, seemingly pronouncing the word “Nazi” in the middle of the sentence, a joke he has also made in writing. “It’s classic,” he said.

“People will Goebbels anything down,” he said, seeming to pronounce the last name of Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi politician, instead of the word “gobble.”

“Hopefully, people realize I am not a Nazi,” Musk said, adding that one would have to be invading Poland, committing genocide and starting wars to be considered a Nazi. “The war and genocide is the bad part,” he said, “not their mannerisms and their dress code.”

SEX ROBOTS

Improbably, the opening minutes of the interview featured Rogan and Musk, who is a special adviser to the president and who has an office in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, discussing how quickly sex robots powered by A.I. technology could be brought to market.

“Probably not long,” said Musk, who recently unveiled his own A.I. software. “Less than five years probably.”

“Really?” Rogan asked. “Will it be warm?”

“You can probably have whatever you want,” Musk replied, before the two men discussed the possibility of having sex with a “furry lady” or an alien from the movie “Avatar.”

Scarred candidate attacks his party

POLITICAL MEMO

A former governor running for New York mayor offers a message to Democrats

BY LISA LERER

In declaring his candidacy for mayor of New York, former Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo painted a picture of a city in trouble, besieged by crime, homelessness and menace, above and below ground. For all these problems, he blamed a central culprit: the failed leadership of the Democratic Party, of which he has been a fixture for most of his adult life.

As he assailed the party’s progressive wing for calling for the defunding of police departments, and Democrats generally for failing to curb homelessness, it was clear that Mr. Cuomo had a wider audience in mind than voters in the city’s mayoral primary election in June.

In a 17-minute video posted on Saturday, Mr. Cuomo invoked a long list of Democratic presidents — along with one famous Democrat who never sought the White House himself but offered a forceful defense of liberalism at the height of Reagan Republicanism.

“F.D.R., John Kennedy, L.B.J., Mario Cuomo, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama taught us what it meant to have a true progressive government: It wasn’t about rhetoric, but results,” Mr. Cuomo said. “They focused on issues that mattered to people in their day-to-day lives, issues that were relevant to them, and then they actually made life better for people. And that is what Democrats must do once again.”

Offering himself up as the latest in a line of long-admired leaders of the party, including his father, the three-term governor, is part of Mr. Cuomo’s effort to redeem his own reputation. His standing was battered by accusations of sexual harassment that forced him from office and by questions about his management of New York State during the coronavirus pandemic.

The personal hurdles that Mr. Cuomo faces might prove to be insurmountable: The state attorney general concluded that he sexually harassed nearly a dozen women, allegations that he denies. New Yorkers could deny him a second chance.

But as he kicked off his bid, the digs against the leadership of his party amounted to an effort to insert himself into a more abstract but nonetheless urgent debate over the future of the national Democratic Party.

It’s a battle that has been bubbling beneath the surface since Donald J. Trump won the White House last fall and Democrats found themselves powerless in Washington.

The party’s approval ratings are the lowest recorded by pollsters in nearly two decades, with more Democratic voters saying they disapprove of the job congressional Democrats are doing than approve. The national party lacks a galvanizing leader and is divided over ideology, strategy and tactics. And while Mr. Trump’s arrival in Washington in 2017 was met with mass protests, signs of opposition this time have been slower to arrive, flickering back to life at fiery town-hall meetings.

In his opening video, Mr. Cuomo addressed the uncertain political climate and suggested that the country look to its largest city — and his leadership — for answers.

“At this time, when the nation is searching for its soul, divided as never before, questioning our democratic values, questioning the very role of government and the balance of power, New York must show the way forward and remind the nation of who we are,” Mr. Cuomo said in the video.

“New York says that we can’t run from each other,” he added, “but rather we must turn towards each other.”

Mr. Cuomo, 67, has never been short of ego or ambition. Before he was derailed by scandal, he planned on seeking a fourth term as governor, an achievement that had eluded his father, and he faced perennial questions about his oft-denied presidential ambitions.

While his campaign is new, Mr. Cuomo’s message about failed progressive leadership is not. He spent much of his third term as governor casting his party’s energized left flank as a political foil

— when he wasn’t trying to claim credit for its gains. “I am the left,” he said in 2019, after attacking progressive lawmakers in his state.

In the new video, Mr. Cuomo’s critique focused on what he said was the Democratic Party’s failure to solve people’s most pressing problems — affordability and public safety chief among them.

A victory in the New York mayor’s race would probably catapult Mr. Cuomo back to national prominence. Some of his supporters say they could see him even using it as a springboard to national office.

Other Democrats find that laughable. They highlight Mr. Cuomo’s selective retelling of his own political history, which omitted the investigations of his administration’s apparent efforts to conceal Covid deaths at nursing homes and his elimination as governor of cash bail for many crimes, which some Democrats argue contributed to a rise in crime.

“The idea that he is the competent adult in the room who will run on center-left policies — there’s a lot to be desired there,” said Lauren Hitt, a spokeswoman for New Yorkers for Better Leadership, a super PAC set up to oppose Mr. Cuomo. “He offers a template for politicians trying to overcome scandal, but I don’t think a party in search of a message can look to Andrew Cuomo.”

Mr. Cuomo also offered himself up as an experienced executive who could show New Yorkers that government “can actually work and get things done — big, hard, important things — and get them done well.”

It’s an argument that echoes the ambition, if not the delivery, of former President Joseph R. Biden Jr., who hoped to restore faith in government by enacting policies that improved Americans’ lives.

Of course, during Mr. Biden’s tenure, Democrats were able to maintain a delicate peace between their centrist and left-wing factions for the sake of passing an ambitious legislative agenda. Now that they are locked out of federal power, everything from their policy positions to their political strategy is suddenly up for debate.

“The idea that he is the competent adult in the room who will run on center-left policies — there’s a lot to be desired there.”

In addressing policing, housing prices and homelessness, Mr. Cuomo sided decisively with Democratic moderates who would like the party to emphasize law and order.

“To me, the founding premise of a progressive Democratic Party is all about serving working men and women, but the cruel irony is they are the ones now paying the highest price for New York’s failed Democratic leadership,” he said.

As the new Trump administration pushes a right-wing agenda at head-spinning speed, Democrats have quarreled over how aggressively they should fight back. While some have argued to pick their shots or even, as the strategist James Carville suggested, to “roll over and play dead,” younger, more liberal lawmakers are pushing the party to oppose the president’s entire agenda.

“A lot of Democrats think maybe you should fight every third day, you should reserve your power and jump out of the bushes at the right moment,” Senator Chris Murphy, the Connecticut Democrat who has emerged as a leading exponent of fierce Democratic pushback, said Sunday on CNN’s “State of the Union,” mocking that cautious approach. “We have to be on the offensive 24-7.”

Mr. Cuomo, by contrast, has notably declined to criticize Mr. Trump — a “conspicuous silence,” according to State Senator Zellnor Myrie, one of his opponents, that is notably different from the tough tone he took against the president during the pandemic. In his video, he struck a note almost of collegiality.

“I will cooperate and collaborate on any and every level,” he said in his announcement video. “I have worked with President Trump in many different situations. And I hope President Trump remembers his hometown, and works with us to make it better.”

When it comes to New York City, Mr. Cuomo seemed to hope that the president would let bygones be bygones to form a new relationship.

He is clearly hoping that the city’s voters will do the same.



Former Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York is running for mayor of New York City. He has assailed the Democratic Party while trying to rebuild his scandal-hit reputation.

Business



Many homes in the city of Kharkiv, northern Ukraine, have been abandoned after months of Russian shelling. The cost of repairing damage in Ukraine is estimated at \$524 billion.

‘Time ripe’ to use frozen assets

LONDON

Trump’s halt on Ukraine aid adds urgency to calls for Russian cash to go to Kyiv

BY PATRICIA COHEN

President Trump’s rancorous threat to abandon Ukraine is stoking support for a long-debated proposal to use billions of dollars in frozen Russian assets to buy weapons for Ukraine and finance its reconstruction.

The money — roughly \$300 billion owned by Russia’s central bank — was frozen by the United States, the European Union, Britain and others after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The aim was to punish President Vladimir V. Putin for his unprovoked attack and to cut off funds he could use to wage war.

As the war grinds on into its fourth year, a growing number of officials in Europe and elsewhere have been calling for the money to be released to directly compensate Ukraine.

The idea has picked up momentum recently, as President Trump vowed to quickly broker a deal to end the war and, on Monday, temporarily suspended the delivery of all U.S. military aid to Ukraine.

“Enough talking, it’s time to act!” Donald Tusk, the prime minister of Poland, posted on X last month. “Let’s finance our aid for Ukraine from the Russian frozen assets.”

Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia have joined the call. “The time is ripe now to take the next step,” Margus Tsahkna, the foreign minister of Estonia, said last month, after sending a discussion paper on the subject to the European Union.

Philip D. Zelikow, a senior fellow at

the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in California and a former diplomat who has been studying how to transfer the assets to Ukraine, said, “This issue is now front and center.”

He pointed out that American banks held only a small fraction of the frozen assets. The bulk of the funds — about \$250 billion — are in financial institutions in the European Union, Canada, Britain, Australia, Japan and Singapore, according to an analysis by Mr. Zelikow. That means a bloc of nations could move to use them even if the United States did not go along with the plan, he said.

After the invasion, the United States and its allies quickly took advantage of their dominance of the global financial system and froze Russian assets held by their financial institutions. Later, the industrialized democracies that make up

“This money can be used to ensure that the country cannot only recover from the war, but also prevent a repeat of it.”

the Group of 7 pledged to hold on to the funds “until Russia pays for the damage it has caused to Ukraine.”

The latest estimate to repair that damage is \$524 billion over 10 years, according to an update released last week by the World Bank.

Whether to turn over the Kremlin’s money to Ukraine instead of just barring Russia’s access to it, though, has remained contentious. Legal experts and government officials — including some who worked for President Joseph R. Biden Jr. — warned that confiscating the money could violate international law and undermine confidence in Western financial institutions. And there was concern that American and European assets held elsewhere might be more at risk in the future if a dispute arose.

France, Belgium and Germany have resisted the idea in the past.

When President Emmanuel Macron of France visited the White House last month, he reiterated that Russia’s assets “are not our belongings, so they are frozen.” And Belgium, which is holding the biggest single chunk of Russian money, is worried about the potential legal and financial fallout of transferring the funds to Ukraine.

Under pressure from supporters, though, the European Union convened a working group to study the proposal. And last summer, Europe and the United States agreed to issue a roughly \$50 billion loan to Ukraine that would be repaid by interest and profits from the frozen Russian assets.

Last week, Rishi Sunak, a British lawmaker and the former prime minister, weighed in to support a full transfer. “We must find ways to get more resources to Ukraine,” he wrote in an essay published in *The Economist*, arguing that frozen Russian assets should be used to rebuild Ukraine and establish armed forces that can deter Russia.

“Once transferred to Ukraine, this money can be used to ensure that the country cannot only recover from the war, but also prevent a repeat of it.”

The disastrous meeting on Friday during which Mr. Trump scolded President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine only underscored the urgent need for Kyiv to find new sources of funding, experts said.

Before the blowup, Mr. Trump was pushing Mr. Zelensky to sign a minerals deal that would have established a Reconstruction Investment Fund jointly owned by Ukraine and the United States. Some of the money that could eventually be earned from developing government-owned mineral, oil and gas deposits was earmarked for the fund.

Now that Mr. Trump has temporarily withdrawn all aid for Ukraine, while not

assuring the country’s security from Russian aggression, the scramble in Europe to figure out ways to increase support for Ukraine has intensified.

This past weekend, Prime Minister Keir Starmer of Britain and Mr. Zelensky agreed to a \$2.8 billion loan for Ukrainian military equipment that would be paid back using profits from the frozen Russian assets. On Thursday, leaders of European Union nations are to meet in Brussels for a special summit on defense and Ukraine.

The United States has “zero desire to give any money,” said Tymofiy Mylovanov, president of the Kyiv School of Economics and a former Ukrainian minister. “At the end of the day, Russian assets will be used one way or another,” he said, because there are few other options. If the war drags on, they will be used to buy weapons, he said; and if it ends soon, then for reconstruction.

Several legal experts and former government officials, including Lawrence H. Summers, a former Treasury secretary; Robert B. Zoellick, a former president of the World Bank and U.S. trade representative; and Laurence Tribe, a law professor at Harvard, have argued that both the legal and financial hurdles of transferring the Russian funds to Ukraine could be overcome.

Then there is Mr. Trump’s unpredictability. Even if the minerals deal is resuscitated, there is still the issue of security for Ukraine.

No one is going to invest in Ukraine until a peace deal is signed and security guarantees are in place, said Ryan O’Keeffe, a managing director and communications executive at BlackRock. The financial firm previously advised Ukraine on how to set up a development fund, but while investors have made pledges, none have yet put up money.

Jeanna Smialek contributed reporting from Brussels.

An interest rate falls amid growth unease

Gloomy economic outlook appears to be driving down the 10-year Treasury yield

BY JOE RENNISON AND COLBY SMITH

President Trump campaigned on a promise to bring down interest rates. And he has fulfilled that pledge in one key way, with U.S. government bond yields falling sharply.

But the reason for the drop is an unnerving one: Investors appear to be more on edge about the outlook for the economy.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has said the Trump administration considers the 10-year Treasury yield a benchmark of its success in lowering rates. The yield tracks the rate of interest the government pays to borrow from investors over 10 years and has dropped since mid-January, to around 4.2 percent from 4.8 percent. The decline in February was the steepest in several months.

The administration is targeting the 10-year yield because it underpins borrowing costs on mortgages, credit cards, corporate debt and a host of other rates, making it arguably the most important interest rate in the world. As it drops, that should filter through the economy, making many types of debt cheaper.

Unlike the short-term interest rate that is set by the Federal Reserve, the 10-year yield is a market rate, meaning that nobody has direct control over it.

Instead, it reflects investors’ views on the economy, inflation, the government’s borrowing needs and changes the Fed may make to its rate in the years ahead. That’s why the drop in February is troubling, analysts say. It shows, at least in part, that bond investors are growing gloomy about the economic outlook — and quickly.

“The market is pricing a growth scare,” said Blerina Uruci, chief U.S. economist at T. Rowe Price.

A better outcome would be for the declining 10-year yield to reflect slowing inflation, the prospect of more Fed rate cuts and a shrinking deficit that would require less government borrowing — all while the economy remained strong.

Instead, inflation expectations have risen this year amid worries that Mr. Trump’s tariff plans, alongside mass deportations, could reignite price increases throughout the economy. Inflation means the interest rates controlled by the Fed are likely to stay elevated for longer. Some analysts and investors fear that this could weigh on the economy until it cracks and the central bank is pushed into rapidly lowering rates.

Expectations about growth have already begun to sour. On Friday, data from the Commerce Department

showed consumer spending falling sharply in January, adding to angst about the economy’s prospects.

The “decidedly downbeat” consumer confidence figures raise questions about whether Mr. Trump’s second term will continue to see a “Goldilocks economy” with solid growth and job gains, “or if there is a reckoning in the making,” said Ian Lyngen, an interest rate strategist at BMO Capital Markets.

Mr. Lyngen also highlighted the government’s cost-cutting drive as a factor in the growth worries, should the escalating layoffs of federal government workers spread to other sectors, pushing up unemployment.

“It’s the risk that the official data eventually reflects the upheaval in Washington, D.C.,” he said.

Mr. Bessent, the Treasury secretary, put it differently. Asked about the drop in 10-year yields last week, he sought to credit the Trump administration.

“I’d like to think that some of it’s not luck,” he told Fox Business. “It’s the bond market starting to understand the power of what we are doing here in terms of cutting waste, fraud and abuse in the government.”

“The market is pricing a growth scare.”

Falling rates, whatever the reason for the drop, will help borrowers and tend to support the stock market. But other factors matter, too, and if consumers and businesses are worried about the economy, lower rates alone won’t necessarily lead to more spending.

Right now, the Fed is in a holding pattern, signaling that it will keep interest rates steady until either it sees real progress that inflation is in retreat or the labor market weakens significantly.

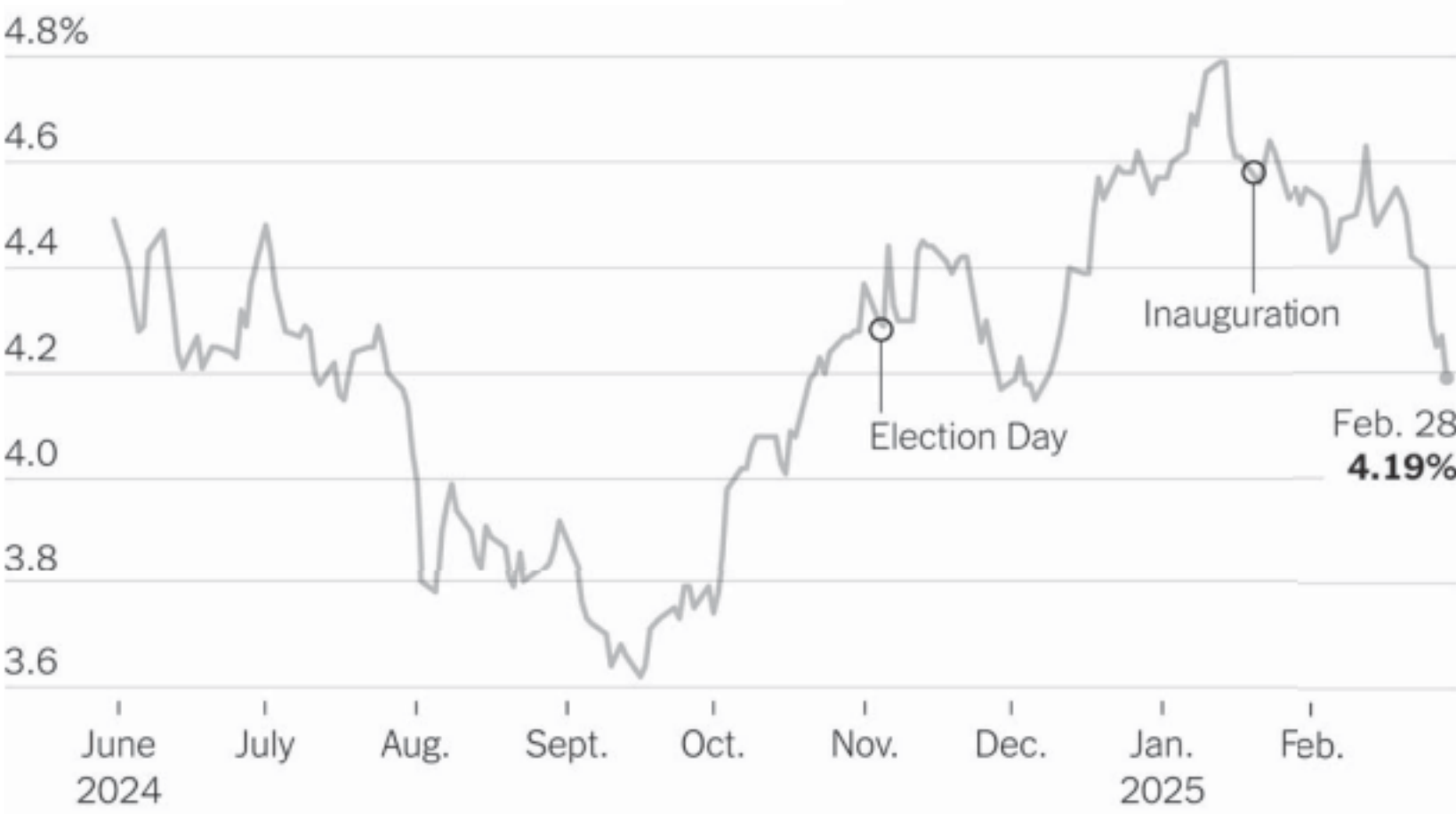
Benson Durham, head of global policy at Piper Sandler and a former senior staff member at the Fed, said the central bank might be inclined to keep rates elevated as inflation concerns remained dominant before eventually responding to lower growth by resuming rate cuts.

Economists fear a situation in which the Fed is forced to keep its short-term rates higher for longer as it seeks to tame inflation, in part because of Mr. Trump’s policies, even if the economy is looking as if it may be about to buckle.

The central bank will either do “almost nothing” as inflationary pressures persist and the economy remains resilient, said Ajay Rajadhyaksha, global chair of research at Barclays, or cut rates by at least a full percentage point as it races to react to softening growth.

“The U.S. will almost certainly grow at a slower pace in 2025 than 2024,” he said.

10-year U.S. Treasury yield



Source: FactSet

THE NEW YORK TIMES

U.S. regulators reverse course on crypto crackdown

Industry counts victories as major lawsuits paused and investigations halted

BY DAVID YAFFE-BELLANY

Federal officials declared that so-called memecoins would not be subject to strict oversight.

A series of investigations into major cryptocurrency firms were halted.

And the Securities and Exchange Commission agreed to pause a fraud case against a top crypto entrepreneur.

In the six weeks since President Trump’s inauguration, U.S. regulators have almost entirely dismantled a yearslong government crackdown on the crypto industry, a volatile sector rife with fraud, scams and theft.

Regulators are following through on campaign promises that Mr. Trump made last year, as he courted donations from deep-pocketed crypto investors and marketed his own digital currency to the public.

But few in the crypto industry expected to notch so many victories so quickly.

Last month, the S.E.C. agreed to drop its lawsuit against Coinbase, the largest crypto company in the United States. Then, in rapid succession, top execu-

tives at the crypto firms Gemini, OpenSea and Uniswap Labs announced that the agency had halted its investigations into their companies. An executive at another major crypto firm, Consensys, said on Thursday that the S.E.C. had agreed to withdraw a lawsuit targeting one of the company’s products.

“This marks another milestone to the end of the war on crypto,” said Cameron Winklevoss, a Gemini founder, in a post on X last week.

The rapid-fire legal moves amounted to an astonishing reversal by regulators who usually move with caution, reluctant to abandon ongoing litigation. Case by case, the S.E.C. is backing away from an ambitious legal campaign, led by the Biden administration, to classify nearly all digital coins as securities and subject them to the same rules that govern stocks and bonds traded on Wall Street.

The reversal “shreds the S.E.C.’s credibility, integrity and reputation, and sends the message that it’s a political organization that acts based on the most recent election,” said Dennis Kelleher, the president of Better Markets, a non-profit that pushes for strong regulation.

Some of the agency’s actions are poised to directly benefit Mr. Trump or his business partners, creating conflicts of interest with little precedent in American history, according to government ethics experts.



A federal judge has agreed to pause a major fraud case against Justin Sun, second from left, a crypto entrepreneur who is among the most colorful figures in the industry.

That was evident on Thursday when the S.E.C. said it would not exercise any regulatory authority over memecoins, a risky type of cryptocurrency linked to a celebrity or an online joke. Days before his inauguration, Mr. Trump had created his own memecoin, \$Trump, which generated tens of millions of dollars for

his family and its partners.

Last week, the S.E.C. also asked a federal judge to pause a major fraud case against the crypto entrepreneur Justin Sun, who invested tens of millions of dollars in another of the Trump family’s crypto ventures, World Liberty Financial. The judge authorized the request.

A representative for Mr. Sun declined to comment. Mark Uyeda, the S.E.C.’s acting chairman, said in a statement on Thursday that the agency needed to “rectify its approach and develop crypto policy in a more transparent manner.”

Under the Biden administration, the S.E.C.’s enforcement campaign was led by its chair, Gary Gensler, who became an enemy of the crypto industry. Mr. Gensler filed lawsuits against a slew of top companies, including the crypto exchanges Coinbase, Binance and Kraken.

Mr. Trump vowed to end that crackdown. To replace Mr. Gensler at the S.E.C., he nominated Paul Atkins, a securities lawyer with close ties to the crypto industry. He also tapped David Sacks, a venture investor and crypto enthusiast, to serve as “White House A.I. and Crypto Czar.”

In his first week in office, Mr. Trump signed an executive order that laid the groundwork for an overhaul to federal crypto regulation. Then the S.E.C. started acting.

Last month, the agency agreed to drop its lawsuit against Coinbase — a case arguing that the exchange was marketing unregistered securities — without imposing any financial penalty, in a total victory for the company.

In its lawsuit against Binance, the S.E.C. requested a 60-day pause, citing efforts to “facilitate the potential resolu-

tion of this case.” The agency took even more definitive steps in several other cases, ending investigations into high-profile companies including Gemini, the crypto exchange founded by Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss.

Arguably the agency’s most significant recent action concerned Mr. Sun.

The founder of a crypto platform called Tron, Mr. Sun, who was born in China, is among the most colorful figures in the crypto world. Last year, he spent \$6.2 million on an experimental artwork — a banana taped to a wall. He proceeded to eat the banana.

In 2023, the S.E.C. filed a lawsuit against Mr. Sun, accusing him of fraudulently manipulating the price of his cryptocurrency. “Sun and others used an age-old playbook to mislead and harm investors,” an agency official said at the time. Mr. Sun denied the allegations.

Mr. Sun has become close to Mr. Trump’s inner circle. He spent \$30 million last year to buy a cryptocurrency released by World Liberty Financial, which Mr. Trump and his sons have heavily promoted.

Now Mr. Sun appears close to resolving his legal problems in the United States. In a court filing last week, the S.E.C. requested a pause in the case as both sides “consider a potential resolution.”

Small U.S. operations are pinched by tariffs

Companies’ costs rise and uncertainty makes it hard to chart a course

BY DAISUKE WAKABAYASHI, ALEXANDRA STEVENSON, DANIELLE KAYE AND ELI TAN

From her home in Phoenix, Erica Campbell is waiting for a cargo vessel from China to deliver a shipment of thousands of Jesus rattle dolls, tin Easter eggs, religious-themed baby swaddle blankets and 15,000 packages of Jesus Heals bandages.

Ms. Campbell, 36, the owner of Be a Heart, a Catholic goods business, paid the Chinese factories that manufacture the items months ago. The boxes were loaded into a container before President Trump imposed a new 10 percent tariff on all Chinese imports on Feb. 1. She said she probably avoided paying an additional duty as a result, but she was worried there would be more U.S. tariffs to come.

“I can’t figure out what is going to happen,” Ms. Campbell said. “I am on high alert.”

Mr. Trump’s focus on China has thrown millions of small businesses into turmoil. For decades, American businesses have designed products in the United States and turned to Chinese factories to produce the goods efficiently and inexpensively. It is how Apple produces iPhones and how an entrepreneur like Ms. Campbell, a mother of three, operates a business that she said generates \$2 million a year in sales from her kitchen.

The New York Times has heard from nearly 100 companies that import from China about how the president’s tariffs were affecting them. They are a cross-section of striving enterprises stitched into the global economy: companies that make greeting cards, board games, outdoor footwear, hangers, digital picture frames, coffee equipment, toys, stained-glass windows and custom electronics.

Several themes emerged. American businesses, not Chinese suppliers, were shouldering the cost of tariffs. Many companies said they would have to raise prices to offset the expense, if they had not already. Some spoke of a feeling of business paralysis: They were afraid to make plans amid the unpredictable stream of new tariffs, fearing the risk of moving production out of China since no country seemed immune.

Turning to domestic alternatives was usually not viable, because they were more expensive, the quality was inferior and there were fewer options. Finally, completely reinventing their supply chains would be a huge undertaking for the companies, requiring time and expense they cannot easily spare.

At a minimum, business owners are facing a 10 percent cost increase in the goods that they bring in from China — whether components for items assembled in the United States or finished products made in Chinese facilities. They may receive a bill when the goods arrive at the port, or the additional expense may be bundled into shipment costs. Either way, the entrepreneurs said, in many cases it would be money out of their pockets.

And that might be just the beginning. Mr. Trump promised to put another 10



TAG CHRISTOF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

“I can’t figure out what is going to happen.”

Erica Campbell, a seller of religious goods, who worries about even higher Chinese import tariffs



DAVID DEGENER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Juli Lee and Bill Keefe are scrambling to deal with tariffs that increase the costs for the inventory they import from China for their Massachusetts sleepwear company, Julianna Rae.



KAYANA SZYMCAK FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Shawn Ernst diversified suppliers for Snap Supply, but now faces tariffs of two varieties: on products imported from Mexico and on the foreign steel and aluminum they are made of.



TAG CHRISTOF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



TAG CHRISTOF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

percent tax on all Chinese imports. That took effect on Tuesday, the same day that tariffs on goods from Mexico and Canada began. China responded moments after the tariffs kicked in by announcing 15 percent tariffs on imports of chicken, wheat, corn and cotton from the United States, as well as 10 percent tariffs on imports of “sorghum, soybeans, pork, beef, aquatic products, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products.” The Chinese government also singled out 15 companies from the United States, including the drone maker Skydio, for punitive trade measures to “safeguard national security and interests.”

Mexico and Canada have yet to respond. The status of both countries as important way stations for Chinese goods and the prospect of retaliation give small-business owners another thing to worry about. Starting March 12, there will be a 25 percent duty on imported steel and aluminum — two metals whose production China dominates. U.S. trade officials are proposing to impose fees on Chinese vessels entering U.S. ports, potentially increasing shipping costs from China.

Mr. Trump has said the 10 percent tariff — now increased to 20 percent — was “an opening salvo.” Last year on the campaign trail, he pledged a tariff of up to 60 percent.

Even at 10 percent, the tariff is a heavy blow to Julianna Rae, a company that sells high-end silk sleepwear, because all of its products are made in China. Based in Burlington, Mass., the company designs silk robes, pajamas and nightgowns that are produced in China. It imports the goods into the United States and sells them on its website and on Amazon.

The company’s proprietors, Bill Keefe and Juli Lee, said they were scrambling to deal with the cost increases that Mr. Trump’s import taxes were imposing on them. They imported a lot of inventory before the tariffs took effect, in anticipation of seasonal Christmas and Valentine’s Day demand. Ms. Lee is also exploring whether to delay some shipments, in hopes that Mr. Trump might reverse course on his tariffs.

Pushing off orders is a risk. Ms. Lee, 56, worries about not having products available for customers. Her Chinese suppliers, already feeling the pinch from a sluggish domestic economy, will be strained from holding inventory for longer periods.

“How much of a bet can you push onto them?” Ms. Lee said, referring to her suppliers, whom she had grown close to after working together for more than a decade. “The uncertainty is really hard on both sides.”

Ultimately, the additional expense might have to be passed on to the consumer. Mr. Keefe, 71, said the price of a popular silk pajama set, which retails for \$300, might increase \$15.

However, the 20-year-old company has little choice but to stay in China.

Silk manufacturing facilities exist in other countries, such as Sri Lanka, India, South Korea and Thailand, but “the best machinery, the best expertise, the ability to produce quality goods at a good price is located in China,” Mr. Keefe said.

For companies open to moving manufacturing to the United States, the challenge is finding a factory.

For 18 years, Chris Miksovsky’s San Francisco-based company, Humangear,

has designed its outdoor and travel products in the United States and produced them in Chinese factories.

But remembering the sting of tariffs during the first Trump presidency, Mr. Miksovsky, 56, wanted to see if domestic manufacturing made more sense now. He wanted to start simply with Humangear’s best-selling but easiest-to-make product: a plastic utensil with a fork on one end and a spoon on the other for camping. He emailed six companies, four of which never responded. The two that did express an interest asked a lot of questions about product specifications. Then one company stopped answering his emails, and the other replied weeks later apologizing but did not provide a quote.

“It’s very fine to say we’re going to put these tariffs in place to bring jobs back to America,” he said. “That assumes that America has the capability to make your product, and, more important, it assumes that it has the interest in making that product.”

Mr. Miksovsky said that he was looking at new manufacturing locations, possibly in Thailand or Vietnam, but that it was hard to predict the countries Mr. Trump would focus on next.

Many American businesses design products and rely on Chinese factories to make them.

“Let’s say you spend all this time, effort and money to move your production to another country — who’s to say Trump wakes up and that morning he says, ‘We’re going to put 60 percent tariffs on Vietnam, Cambodia, South Africa or pick your country?’” he said.

Shawn Ernst, 39, diversified the suppliers for his family’s appliance repair parts business, Snap Supply, during the first Trump presidency to a place he thought would be safe from the rising costs of a trade war with Beijing: Mexico.

But now the 45-year-old family business, based in St. Charles, Ill., is reeling from the prospect of a double tariff. The company’s repair parts are made of foreign steel and aluminum, so it faces higher costs from a new 25 percent tariff on those materials.

On top of that, he may have to start paying an additional tariff when he imports his products from Mexico. He said it was not clear whether he would be taxed twice, but the possibility of it “keeps me up at night.”

Mr. Ernst, who runs the business with his brother, said his Mexican suppliers were willing to absorb a 5 percent cost increase. However, Snap Supply will have to pass on the rest of the cost spike to customers.

Ms. Campbell, the seller of religious goods, said she was contemplating passing some of the additional costs from tariffs on to her customers. However, she is reluctant, because her products are not essential and her customers are families like hers who are already dealing with higher costs for groceries and gas.

The specter of even higher Chinese import tariffs has her feeling panicked.

“I don’t think people understand what that looks like,” she said. “Not just for my business but in life — how are we going to afford this since everything comes from China?”

Attacks on Canada generate consternation and speculation

Theories emerge to explain Trump’s aggression toward neighbor and close ally

BY ALAN RAPPEPORT AND IAN AUSTEN

There is the theory that President Trump is still bitter about his Canadian hotel ventures that went bust.

Some, on social media, have speculated that a 2019 photograph in which Justin Trudeau appeared poised to kiss Melania Trump, the first lady, at a Group of 7 gathering in France, left Mr. Trump with a grudge against the dashing Canadian prime minister.

And then there is the transactional view, that Mr. Trump sees the acquisition of Canada as the 51st state as the ultimate real estate deal that would seal his presidential legacy.

As Mr. Trump pushes ahead with a new round of tariffs on the United States’ neighbors to the north and south, he has expressed a special brand of loathing for Canada. The bullying of a country whose most prominent stereotype is that its people are “nice” has led to political upheaval in Canada and created both consternation and speculation about why Mr. Trump wants to engage in a trade war with one of America’s biggest trading partners.

“I can’t quite figure it out,” said Stephen Moore, the Heritage Foundation economist and former adviser to Mr. Trump. “Whether it’s some kind of strategic leverage, I don’t know.”

Noting that there is “no love lost” between the president and Mr. Trudeau, Mr. Moore added: “With Trump, politics is personal.”

On Saturday, the president picked a trade fight with Canada, this time over lumber. And on Tuesday, Mr. Trump’s threatened 25 percent tariffs on all imports from Canada and Mexico went

into effect, after the countries seemingly failed to satisfy his demands that they do more to prevent migrants and drugs from flowing into the United States.

Intrigue abounds in Canada about why Mr. Trump has repeatedly belittled a neighbor and threatened to destabilize its economy with tariffs, a process that has brought relations between the two countries to a low point not seen in decades.

In contrast to the close and supportive relationship that Mr. Trudeau, who is entering his final week in office, enjoyed with another U.S. president, Barack Obama, his relationship with Mr. Trump has been fractious.

In 2018, following the Group of 7 summit meeting in Charlevoix, Quebec, Mr.

Discussing the president’s reasoning, one of his former advisers said, “With Trump, politics is personal.”

Trump heckled Mr. Trudeau on social media, accusing him of being “very dishonest and weak” and of making up “false statements,” while suggesting that he might impose tariffs on Canadian-made autos.

While Mr. Trudeau was generally circumspect in his public remarks about Mr. Trump during the president’s first administration, the two men have dramatically different personal and political styles. Mr. Trump bombastically denigrates people he perceives as opponents, whereas Mr. Trudeau often speaks about the value of bringing people together, what he once called a “sunny ways” approach to political life.

In candid remarks to a group of business leaders last month that was captured by a microphone, Mr. Trudeau offered a theory for Mr. Trump’s Canada obsession that is widely shared in the country.

“Not only does the Trump administration know how many critical minerals we have, but that may be even why they keep talking about absorbing us and making us the 51st state,” Mr. Trudeau told the gathering in Toronto.

“They’re very aware of our resources,” Mr. Trudeau said, “of what we have, and they very much want to be able to benefit from those.”

He added: “But Mr. Trump has it in mind that one of the easiest ways of doing that is absorbing our country. And it is a real thing.”

Mr. Trump does have a particular affinity for minerals. He has been pushing to broker a deal to secure access to Ukraine’s supply of rare earths as he has sought to broker an agreement to end its war with Russia.

As a businessman, Mr. Trump had two dealings with Canada that, while relatively limited, were both failures. A Toronto hotel and condominium project, owned by a Toronto investor who licensed the Trump name and hired a Trump company to manage it, went into receivership in 2016.

The following year, a hotel owned by Malaysian investors bearing the Trump name, again under license and with a similar management contract, opened in Vancouver, British Columbia. (Promotional material exaggerated the building’s height.) It failed, as well.

Both hotels, which now operate under different names and management, were magnets for protesters in a country where Mr. Trump has long been unpopular for his “America First” views and disparagement of Canada. Before the Vancouver opening, the city’s mayor at the time, Gregor Robertson, wrote to the building’s owners asking that they not use the Trump name on it.

“Trump’s name and brand have no more place on Vancouver’s skyline than his ignorant ideas have in the modern world,” Mr. Robertson wrote.

Before delving into politics, Mr.



AL DRAGO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada and President Trump in 2019. Mr. Trump’s plan to impose a 25 percent tariff on all imports from Canada took effect on Tuesday.

Trump expressed little ill will toward Canada.

In 2012, when the Obama administration was delaying a decision on approving the Keystone XL Pipeline, which would have transported oil from Canada to the United States, Mr. Trump declared on social media that the project must move forward.

“We need to use our resources and support allies like Canada,” he said.

But by 2015, his perception of failings of the North American Free Trade Agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico became a central issue of Mr. Trump’s first presidential campaign. Mr. Trump routinely called the deal a “disaster” for American workers and prioritized scrapping the pact as a first order of business, if he won the election.

of new tariffs on Canada over the last month, his tone toward the departing prime minister has been even more derisive. He has nicknamed Mr. Trudeau “governor” amid persistent suggestions that the United States might annex Canada.

Mr. Trump even called for the former Canadian hockey player Wayne Gretzky to run for prime minister, suggesting late last year that he would “win easily.” Mr. Gretzky, who does not support Canada’s joining the United States, has faced backlash at home from citizens who view him as a traitor because of his association with Mr. Trump.

The president’s insults have led to a boom in nationalism in Canada, including “Made in Canada” Facebook groups. In one group, which has more than a million members, Canadians compared notes on pancake mixes that are made in Canada and offered recommendations on flavors of Cove Soda, a potential alternative to Coca-Cola.

“There’s a generalized sense of patriotism that has not been evident in Canada in many years in response to Trump and Trump’s hostility,” said Ira Wells, a professor at the University of Toronto’s Victoria College.

But Mr. Trump appears unfazed by Canada’s declarations of independence. He indicated last week that the United States was also prepared to sever ties with Canada without changes to the trade relationship between the two countries.

The United States, Mr. Trump said, has no need for Canadian products such as lumber, and he asserted that Canada could not survive without American military protection and favorable trade terms.

“I love Canada, I love the people of Canada,” Mr. Trump said at a cabinet meeting at the White House. “It’s not fair for us to be supporting Canada. If we don’t support them, they don’t subsist as a nation.”

Opinion

A bad plan to make America Argentina again

It should give us pause that the U.S. is borrowing government reform techniques from Argentina.

Gregory Makoff

President Trump, Elon Musk and President Javier Milei of Argentina have formed a special bond. Mr. Milei was the first foreign leader to meet with Mr. Trump days after he won the U.S. presidential election. Mr. Trump has called Mr. Milei his “favorite president.” And Mr. Musk has been in close contact with Mr. Milei’s government reform team since the U.S. election in November, if not before. So it was no surprise to Argentina watchers that Mr. Trump began his term by blocking government cash flows and firing workers, exactly as Mr. Milei’s government started doing a year ago.

In recent months, Mr. Milei has been bragging about the “export” of his reform model. Governments should no doubt borrow good practices from one another. But it should give us pause that the United States, the world’s leading economy, is borrowing government reform techniques from Argentina, a nine-time serial defaulter and 100-year economic laggard. Mr. Trump, Mr. Musk and Mr. Milei may share the same anti-state rhetoric and use the same techniques, but they are taking their countries in very different directions.

Mr. Milei’s administration is restructuring Argentina’s government for good reason: failure. In the early 1900s, people used the expression “as rich as an Argentine,” and millions of Italians and Spaniards immigrated there in hopes of a better life. But soon after, populist, nationalist politics took hold. In 1946, the strongman Juan Domingo Perón took control and his party perfected the art of channeling government cash flows to its supporters. This game ended badly for Argentina, with the political machine demanding more and more money before every election, which led to overspending and a repeat cycle of boom, bust, devaluation and default — all the way until 2020. Argentina’s G.D.P. per capita, once among the world’s highest, is now a small fraction of Italy’s and of Spain’s.

This is the backdrop against which Mr. Milei ran for president, gleefully waving a chain saw at crowds of supporters. Unlike his Peronist predecessors, Mr. Milei didn’t blame aging generals and foreign lenders for the country’s ills. Instead, he told the truth. He said that Argentina’s government spent too much, forcing it to print more money, which in turn led to inflation and ultimately default. His solution was to cut the budget, and that is what he has done since coming into office, backed by a team of seasoned technocrats. He has earned many critics from his aggressive style of governance — often using decrees — but the same was done by the Peronists before him.

The centerpiece of Mr. Milei’s program has been to use his figurative chain saw to cut the budget by 5 percent of G.D.P. He achieved this by



DAMON WINTER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

changing the pension payments formula, bringing cuts to public works and reducing utility and transport subsidies, among other measures. He brought down the government head count by about 35,000 jobs in 2024, cutting the work force by about 7 percent.

His fiscally laudable reforms have hurt. In February 2024, Mr. Milei more than doubled the price of bus and train ticket prices, while a utility price reform in June was estimated to hit middle-class families with a 155 percent rise in power bills. Unemployment rose from 5.7 percent to 6.9 percent between the third quarter of 2023 and the third quarter of 2024, and the percentage of the Argentine population living in poverty jumped 11 percentage points, peaking at over 50 percent in the first half of 2024.

But so far, Argentines are sticking with Mr. Milei. Recent polls show his approval rating hovering near 50 percent. Many see no alternative — and the economy is showing glimmers of hope. When he took office in December 2023, consumer price inflation was running at a 25.5 percent monthly rate.

Now the economy is normalizing and consumer prices rose by only 2.2 percent in January 2025. Mr. Milei has recently announced a string of other triumphs, too, including a fiscal surplus for 2024 and a seasonally adjusted G.D.P. expansion in the third quarter. With strong support from Mr. Trump, Argentina appears poised to win a new program from the International Monetary Fund, while Mr. Milei made the case for a U.S.-Argentina free trade agreement at CPAC last month, an event at which he also presented Mr. Musk with a glittering chain saw.

There are dividends to being Mr. Trump’s favorite president. The question is what Mr. Trump — and the American people — get out of this special relationship. Unfortunately, the answer seems to be Mr. Milei’s anti-state political theatrics and not his technocratic way of governing.

Like Mr. Milei, Mr. Trump started his term by ordering mass firings and the end of telework in the federal work force. But instead of extracting party hacks from the government, Mr. Trump is firing career civil servants

and top military officers and inserting MAGA party loyalists. He has fired inspector generals, whose job is to keep an eye out for federal mismanagement, while letting loose Mr. Musk’s 20-something programmers to suck information out of the nation’s most closely guarded computer systems.

Unlike Mr. Milei — who brought out the chain saw to reach a specific budget target to stabilize his economy — Mr. Trump has been celebrating the use of his power to eliminate D.E.I. programs and to kill the “deep state.” In short, Mr. Trump’s team so far is generating more headlines than budget savings, and doing substantial harm along the way.

After moving to dismantle the United States Agency for International Development, Mr. Musk crowed on X, “We spent the weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper. Could gone to some great parties. Did that instead.” This shameful and illegal act immediately put untold lives at risk and degraded America’s standing in the world, while cost savings may be less than advertised because various

U.S.A.I.D. programs may be restored by the courts or moved to the State Department.

For America, acting Argentine is not a good look. Argentina is a failing country that is just now turning the corner after carrying out painful reforms. If Mr. Trump were a true reformer, he would have presented specific budget goals, put seasoned technocrats in leading positions and focused on providing value-added technical innovation. Instead, he’s taking us on the Peronist path where power politics matters more than good policy. As Argentina teaches us, 100 years of misery could follow if the rule of law is replaced by the rule of one.

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President Javier Milei of Argentina made the case for a U.S.-Argentina free trade agreement at CPAC last month, an event at which he also presented Elon Musk with a glittering chain saw.

What big-business leaders say privately about the president

Behind closed doors, many top executives voice support for the administration.

Steven Rattner
Contributing Writer

Over lunch last week with a friend of mine — a major technology investor who has been an ardent Democrat — the talk quickly turned to politics. Like many businessmen, he refuses to air his views publicly to avoid drawing fire. In private, he’s more forthcoming.

“I’m willing to sacrifice small things for larger gains,” he told me, referring to President Trump. “I’m a fan of the ideas; I’m not always a fan of the execution.” For him, the “macro trumps the micro.”

The “macro” was a reference to the main factor that drove centrist businessmen toward Mr. Trump in 2024: a belief that both the spending and the regulatory tilt of the Biden administration were out of control. And they resented how Joe Biden kept bashing big companies. This animus was so intense that even the strong economic gains of the past four years couldn’t get most of them to back Kamala Harris.

While very few businessmen have been publicly praising the president and his actions, in private, many of them voice support for him. I thought the chaos of the past month — the unqualified cabinet appointments, the cozying up to Russia, and perhaps most of all, the tariffs — might cause regret in the business community. I’ve certainly seen concerns.

But many, maybe even most, of the people I’m talking to in private are still quietly cheering his move-fast-and-break-things approach — even if they are starting to feel doubts about specific issues, particularly Ukraine and tariffs.

One Wall Street executive told me that Mr. Trump remains better than

any of the alternatives. Another — citing Elon Musk’s government shake-up — said he likes what he sees so much, he now regrets voting for Ms. Harris.

It wasn’t just that this group resented Mr. Biden’s intrusive regulatory policies. They didn’t like diversity, equity and inclusion policies either — or anything they derisively described to me as “woke stuff.” Now executives and bankers alike (my circles tilt a bit toward Wall Street) are celebrating early signs of a reversal.

The business community is also heartened by the number of corporate executives who have been brought into the administration, in stark contrast to the Biden team, which was almost bereft of such individuals. That includes Mr. Musk, one of the most successful entrepreneurs in history (although his personal qualities, like Mr. Trump’s, are often considered distasteful). Of course, for some, like the crypto crowd, there’s a lot of money at stake.

To be clear, many of these businessmen’s move to Mr. Trump is more out of unhappiness with his predecessor than enthusiasm for him. A number reluctantly chose him after championing other candidates, such as Nikki Haley, and Mr. Trump’s continued flood of appalling actions, like his abrupt firing of several top military officers or embrace of Vladimir Putin of Russia, may well undermine approval of the administration in the business community. Among some prominent chief executives, it already has.

But at least so far, my anecdotal



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ROB FROGOSO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

reporting about Mr. Trump’s enduring support is matched with broader gleanings. For one thing, despite recent lurches, the stock market notched another record just over a week ago, and is still above its level on Election Day, reflecting general investor optimism about America’s economic future. For another, the Conference Board just reported that confidence among chief executives has reached its highest level in three years.

I could not disagree more strongly with my circle. I’m sympathetic to the criticisms of the Biden-Harris administration for missing the boat on infla-

tion, for interfering with business too much and for pushing some social issues that were way out of step with the country. But under no circumstances could I have voted for Mr. Trump, who is bent on dismantling the government while favoring the rich, and who is imbued with despicable personal attributes.

Even if you focus on only the economy, Mr. Trump’s circus of commotion may collide with worrying signs.

While the economy continues to grow, inflation in January came in above expectations and remains stubbornly at 3 percent, higher than the Federal Reserve’s target of 2 percent. That has caused central bank leaders to suggest that further interest rate decreases will have to wait.

Mr. Trump’s key policies, such as his oft-threatened tariffs, could drive inflation higher still. As the cost of imported goods rise, domestic producers of similar items may take advantage of the opportunity and raise their prices, too.

Many in the business community shrug this off. Noting that Mr. Trump has already suspended his last attempt to impose tariffs, they argue that these moves are mostly negotiating ploys. I’m not so sure. The rapidity and ferocity with which Mr. Trump is issuing his threats makes me worry that a substantial portion of those tariffs will be instituted (as he insisted last week would be the case with levies on imports from Mexico and Canada. On Tuesday, 25 percent tariffs were imposed on the two countries).

Meanwhile, restricting immigration

and deporting millions of immigrants would tighten an already tight labor market, pushing up wages — which also pushes up prices.

Mr. Trump’s huge fiscal package, which has begun its journey through Congress, could juice inflation even more. In its current form, his budget would add \$2.8 trillion to the national debt over the next 10 years on top of the more than \$20 trillion of new debt already projected. Higher deficits put upward pressure on prices and interest rates.

I believe the business community may also be disappointed on other fronts. For example, Andrew Ferguson, Mr. Trump’s new head of the Federal Trade Commission, recently suggested that the Biden-era clampdown on mergers and acquisitions may not ease as much as business hopes.

Unlike business, consumers may already be grasping the import of these issues. While business optimism has been rising, the mood of consumers has been darkening. Consumer confidence dropped in February at its fastest pace in three and a half years, to its lowest level since June 2024, and expectations for inflation over the coming 12 months rose to 6 percent, the highest level since May 2023.

Mr. Trump has also begun to slide in the polls and is now underwater, with more Americans expressing disapproval than approval.

We are in an economic tug of war between the optimism felt by investors and executives and the worrisome potentialities of Mr. Trump’s incoherent policies. My business friends may yet come to regret their support for the president.

STEVEN RATTNER served as counselor to the Treasury secretary in the Obama administration.

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Trump’s stripping away of foreign policy illusions



Ross Douthat

Donald Trump, Henry Kissinger remarked in 2018, “may be one of those figures in history who appears from time to time to mark the end of an era and to force it to give up its old pretenses.”

That general first-term comment might as well be marching orders for Trump’s second-term foreign policy. From policy and speeches to Friday’s blowup in the Oval Office with the president of Ukraine to Trump’s pausing of U.S. military aid to the country, everything he is doing and saying, and everything his vice president is saying and doing, is ruthlessly stripping away pretenses around the United States, its alliances and the situation in the world.

A pretense: The United States is capable of playing the hegemonic role it played 20 years ago, fully supporting democratic allies in every region,

To work, realism about Ukraine and the world requires more diplomacy.

standing ready to fight wars across multiple theaters, refusing any compromise with authoritarianism. The reality: America is overstretched, a more multipolar world requires making deals with unpleasant regimes, and we need to recalibrate and retrench in ways that will require much more of our allies.

A pretense: America’s European allies are strong nations and equal partners in protecting the security of the world. The reality: Europe has been badly misgoverned by its establishment, once-lionized figures like Angela Merkel above all. Its economic position is parlous, its demographic situation is miserable and its military capacities have atrophied, and most of the chest-thumping about a revival of European power is empty talk and fantasy politics.

A pretense: With enough military aid and moral support, the Ukrainians can roll back the Russians, secure their prewar borders and eventually join NATO. The reality: The war is stalemated, there is no path to Ukrainian victory short of a direct American intervention, some kind of negotiated settlement is inevitable, and NATO membership was never realistically in the cards.

Many of these realities have been understood by American policymakers in both parties for some time. It’s why Barack Obama sought a “pivot to Asia” and proceeded cautiously when Vladimir Putin seized Crimea. It’s why Joe Biden pulled out of Afghanistan. And it’s why the Biden team supported

Ukraine but with limits, and why it was clashing with Volodymyr Zelensky behind the scenes even in the first year of war.

And there is value in speaking more openly about uncomfortable realities. People need to know that the world is not what it was in 2000 or 2012. They need to understand the kind of issues that JD Vance raised in his controversial speech in Munich criticizing Europe’s failed approach to immigration, its traduccements of free speech, its deficit of democratic legitimacy.

They need to understand that the armistice that the Trump administration seems to want to negotiate with Russia may not look all that different from the endgame that would have developed under a Democratic president.

And they need to grasp why, exactly, Vance snapped at Zelensky in the Oval Office on Friday after the Ukrainian president began lecturing his hosts on why it’s impossible to negotiate with Putin — because the world is what it is, and right now negotiating with untrustworthy rivals is a necessity that can’t be wished away.

However: Pretense in foreign policy is not always the same thing as self-deception. It’s also just a form of politesse, of circling uncomfortable subjects and making countries that are in your debt or whom you need to strong-arm feel like they’re friends and not just subjects. It’s a way to give foreign leaders space to do what you want while also handling their own domestic audiences, making sure that you aren’t accidentally empowering parties hostile to your policies (as may happen in our northern neighbor if Trump’s war of words with Justin Trudeau saves the Liberal Party in the next election), and generally draping power politics in the garments of idealism.

Most of the foreign policy team around Trump, so far as I can tell, imagines itself doing what realist Republican presidents like Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon have done in the past — matching means and ends, accepting lesser evils to avoid greater ones, and delivering necessary shock therapy for a system of alliances that needs it.

But those realist presidents were also extremely fluent in the language of diplomacy — they could wax idealistic when the situation called for it, speak smoothly even when they were acting ruthlessly, and settle allies down as well as trigger them.

Trump doesn’t speak diplomatically and never will. But his first-term foreign policy succeeded with the president playing the heavy while his appointees offered normalcy, and his second term to date needs more of that balance — someone to twist arms and someone to smooth feathers, someone to speak frankly and someone to keep the frankest truth-telling off-camera.

And someone — and this applies to the administration’s domestic policy as well — to make sure that when you’re doing shock therapy, there’s a quick way to turn the electricity back down.



BRIAN SNYDER/REUTERS

Native stories deserve more recognition

Julian Brave NoiseCat

Four years ago, a ground-penetrating radar study commissioned by the Tk’emlups to Secwépemc First Nation identified evidence of about 200 child-size graves on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia.

After the discovery, I received a phone call. It was from a friend and former colleague, Emily Kassie, asking if I’d be open to being adirector of a documentary about the legacy of the 139 government-funded and church-run boarding schools that operated across Canada and forcibly separated six generations of Indigenous children from their families.

The idea behind the schools, in the words of one of their administrators, was to “get rid of the Indian problem.” In 2008, the Canadian government established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to document their destructive legacy, and the commission concluded that these institutions committed a “cultural genocide” against the country’s First Peoples.

The news of the grim discovery in Kamloops hit close to home. All my adult life, I’d heard rumors that my father was born at or near one of those residential schools and that he’d been found, just minutes after his birth, abandoned in a dumpster. Those few details were all he or I knew. The silence, shame and guilt that hid this history from broader society rippled across generations of Indigenous families like my own. Our communities continue to suffer from cycles of suicide, addiction and violence, instigated by the experience at these schools.

When Emily, a filmmaker and tenacious investigative journalist who’s covered human rights abuses from Afghanistan to Niger, asked me about joining her in documenting the legacy of these schools — a system that most likely nearly took my father’s life and remained an unspoken horror for my family — I agonized over the decision.

While I stewed, Emily forged ahead. She’d found an article in The Williams Lake Tribune about Chief Willie Sellars and the Williams Lake First Nation, whose community was about to embark on its own inquiry into a former school down the road from the Sugarcane Indian reserve. Emily wrote the chief an email and the next day he called her back. “The creator has always had great timing,” Chief Sellars said. “Just yesterday our council said we needed to document our search.”

Two weeks later, I told her I was open to directing alongside her. That’s when she let me know she’d identified a First Nation that was opening its own investigation and that the investigation was happening at St. Joseph’s Mission.

There was a long pause on my end of the line. “That’s crazy,” I said. I told her that St. Joseph’s was the school where my family was sent and where my father was born nearby and abandoned in a dumpster. “And that’s all I’ve ever known,” I said.

Out of 139 Indian residential schools across Canada, Emily happened to choose to focus our documentary on the one school my family was taken



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY FILMS, VIA EVERETT COLLECTION

An image from “Sugarcane,” directed by the first Indigenous filmmaker from North America to be nominated for an Academy Award.

away to and where my father’s life began.

Four years later, that documentary, “Sugarcane,” was nominated for an Oscar this year. The investigation at the heart of our film found evidence that babies born to Native girls, including some fathered by priests, had been

“Sugarcane” is a documentary about abuse at Native residential schools. It’s just one of many stories that demand to be told.

adopted or even put in the incinerator at St. Joseph’s Mission to be burned with the trash. “Sugarcane” is, to our knowledge, the first work in any medium to uncover evidence of infanticide at an Indian residential or boarding school in North America. In addition, we

learned this was, in part, my father’s story. Born to Native parents and found by a night watchman after his birth, he is the only known survivor of infanticide at the school.

The findings in our film raise a question: If such things were covered up at one school, what might be true at the other 138 Indian residential schools across Canada? And what remains

hidden at the hundreds of Native American boarding schools that operated across the United States — where, unlike in Canada, there has been scant inquiry and even less reckoning with this history?

It was an honor to be the first Indigenous filmmaker from North America to be nominated for an Academy Award. But I better not be the only one for long. Some might have seen this nomination as proof that Hollywood has come a long way from the time when studios portrayed Indians dying at the hands of swaggering cowboys. That era of westerns coincided with the heyday of the residential schools, which were designed to kill off Indigenous cultures and which led, in some cases, to the death of children themselves.

These foundational chapters in North American history — a cultural genocide that spanned more than 150 years — have remained largely obscured and suppressed. Right-wing parties in both Canada and the United States are trying to shroud the historical record. We must redouble our efforts to collect and preserve the memories of the elderly survivors of this system and tell their stories before they’re gone and it’s too late. Because it is happening again.

Policies like the separation of fam-

ilies, many of them Indigenous, at the southern American border, along with the return of explicit calls for land grabs and ethnic cleansing, are not imported — they’re homegrown. Hollywood, like so many industries, appears on the brink of bowing to revanchist attacks on pluralism and difference.

Indigenous peoples long lived under a devastating form of authoritarianism, confined to impoverished reservations and denigrated as inferior outsiders in the only place we’ve ever known as home. Through the residential schools, we were even deprived of the right to raise our own children.

But those schools failed. And Indigenous peoples are still here. “Sugarcane” is a testament to the stories yet to be told — stories of a people who survived a genocide, who have urgent things to say and unique stories to tell. We maintain a way of seeing the world that is deeply familial, communal, spiritual, rooted in place and tradition, and in that sense, human and universal. And we’ve only begun to tell our stories.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT is an author and filmmaker and, alongside Emily Kassie, the director of the documentary “Sugarcane,” which was nominated for an Academy Award.

Germany’s next chancellor is yesterday’s man

HERMSMEIER, FROM PAGE 1
into the private sector, amassing a sizable fortune in the process. But Ms. Merkel’s departure from the party leadership gave him a chance at a comeback. On his third attempt, promising a much tougher line on crime and migration, he finally took control of the party in early 2022.

His tenure has been uneven. Jutta Falke-Ischinger, a co-author of an unofficial biography of Mr. Merz, describes him as someone who lacks “impulse control,” and it’s possible to see that waywardness in his leadership. He has made headlines with insults to minority groups, including Ukrainian refugees and Muslim children, resulting in more than one public apology. His sometimes absurd, baseless comments — claiming, for example, that rejected asylum seekers were taking all of the country’s dental appointments, leaving none for Germans — suggest someone happy to play into right-wing talking points.

His biggest gamble, however, came during the election campaign. In January, after an asylum seeker stabbed several people in Bavaria, killing two, Mr. Merz brought a draconian anti-migrant proposal to Parliament, relying on votes from Alternative for Germany to pass it. This collaboration not only broke his own promise not to work with the party but also shattered the postwar firewall blocking the far right. Criticism was loud and immediate. Coming when he was cruising toward victory, it seemed like a strange step.

Since then, Mr. Merz has cast himself as a bulwark against autocracy, shielding Europe from the authoritarian depredations of America and Russia alike. There is no imposture here: An old-school institutionalist and lifelong trans-Atlanticist, Mr. Merz strongly

believes in both the European Union and NATO. For him, German support for Ukraine is not up for debate and the emerging alliance between America and Russia is an indefensible affront. On election night, he said that Europe — where it was “five minutes to midnight” — must prepare to become independent from the United States.

These are strong words, to be sure. But it’s a move Germany has seen before. In the early 2000s, then-chancellor Gerhard Schröder also distanced the country from America, in that case over its war in Iraq, and energetically drove European integration. That’s not all Mr. Merz has borrowed from Mr. Schröder. His set of proposals, labeled Agenda 2030, bears more than a passing resemblance to a series of reforms enacted by the Schröder government, known as Agenda 2010. As with those earlier policies, the focus is on reducing social security payments, cutting regulations for companies and offering tax breaks to corporations. The aim, Mr. Merz has said, is to “restore the competitiveness of this country.”

The problem is that the conditions for Germany’s past competitive edge — cheap Russian gas, a huge low-wage sector and booming exports — no longer exist. There are things Mr. Merz could do to recharge the economy: back renewable energy; make targeted investments in public infrastructure, the care sector and technology; and, above all, bring about a comprehensive investment push. But he remains committed to Germany’s debt brake, which ensures strict limits on spending, and refuses to tax large fortunes and inheritances more heavily. The result is a program both inadequate and underfunded.

It’s not just the economy Mr. Merz



POOL PHOTO BY STEFANIE LOS

Friedrich Merz, the chancellor-in-waiting and a throwback figure, is committed to tax breaks for the wealthy, harsh restrictions for migrants and cuts for welfare recipients.

would like to take back to the past. He plans to undo the few moderate social reforms of the previous government — for example, on cannabis legalization and legislation enabling easier gender self-identification — and to intensify the hostile environment for migrants. He won’t entirely get his own way, of course. He’s likely to form a coalition with the Social Democrats, another throwback to the so-called grand coalitions that dominated the country’s politics for much of the Merkel era. How much they challenge him is another question.

In many ways, Mr. Merz embodies the dilemma of contemporary conserva-

tism. He maintains a professed opposition to far-right parties and autocratic regimes while engaging in the anti-migrant fearmongering favored by the far right. He wants to restore a bygone social and economic order but refuses to countenance the progressive reforms that might achieve a better settlement. The Christian Democrats’ campaign slogan was “forward again.” But under Mr. Merz, they’re just looking backward.

LUKAS HERMSMEIER is a journalist based in New York and Berlin who writes for Zeit Online, Die Wochenzeitung and The Nation.

SCIENCE

He showed that germs floated in the air

Louis Pasteur discovered hidden world in plain sight that is still being mapped

BY CARL ZIMMER

Louis Pasteur was at his most comfortable when working in his Paris laboratory. It was there that he had some of his greatest scientific triumphs, including experiments that helped confirm germs can cause disease. “Everything gets complicated away from the laboratory,” he once complained to a friend.

But in 1860, years before he became famous for developing vaccines and heating milk to kill pathogens, Pasteur ventured to the top of a glacier, on a remarkable quest for invisible life.

He and a guide began at the base of Mont Blanc in the Alps, hiking through dark stands of pines. Behind them, a mule carried baskets of long-necked glass chambers that sloshed with broth. They ascended a steep trail until they reached Mer de Glace, the sea of ice.

The wind blew briskly over the glacier, and the vale echoed with the sound of frozen boulders crashing down the slopes. Pasteur struggled to make out the path in the glare of sunlight bouncing off the ice.

When the scientist reached an altitude of 2,000 meters (6,500 feet), he finally stopped. He removed one of the glass chambers from the mule’s pack and raised it over his head. With his free hand, he grabbed a pair of tongs and used them to snap off the end of the neck. The cold air rushed inside the container.

The sight of Pasteur holding a globe of broth over his head would have baffled other travelers visiting Mer de Glace that day. If they had asked him what he was doing, his answer might have seemed mad. Pasteur was on a hunt, he later wrote, for “the floating germs of the air.”

Now, 165 years later, scientists around the world hunt for floating germs. Some study how coronaviruses wafting through buses and restaurants spread Covid. Spores of fungi can travel thousands of miles, infecting people and plants. Oceans deliver microbes into the air with every crashing wave. Even clouds, scientists now recognize, are alive with microbes.

The sky’s ecosystem is known as the aerobiome. In Pasteur’s day, it had no name. The very idea of living things drifting through the air was too strange to imagine.

But Pasteur began to wonder about the possibility of airborne life when he was a little-known chemist teaching at the University of Lille in France. There, the father of one of his students approached him for help. The man owned a distillery where he used yeast to turn beet juice into alcohol. But the juice had inexplicably turned rancid.

Inspecting the liquid under a microscope, Pasteur discovered dark rods — bacteria rather than yeast — in the sour vats. The discovery helped him work out a theory of fermentation: Microorganisms absorbed nutrients and then produced new compounds. Depending on the species, they could turn butter rancid or grape juice into wine.

The discovery won Pasteur a prestigious new post in Paris. In his account of the discovery, Pasteur suggested in passing that the bacteria might have floated through the air and settled into the vats. That notion earned him an angry letter from Félix-Archimède Pouchet, one of France’s leading naturalists.

Pouchet informed Pasteur that the microorganisms Pasteur discovered had not dropped into the vats from the air. Instead, the beet juice had spontaneously generated them. “Spontaneous generation is the production of a new organized being that lacks parents and all of whose primordial elements have been

Pasteur’s hunt for floating germs elevated him to the highest ranks of French science.

drawn from ambient matter,” Pouchet had written earlier.

Pasteur coolly replied that Pouchet’s spontaneous generation experiments were fatally flawed. The conflict between Pasteur and Pouchet prompted the French Academy of Sciences to announce a contest for the best study addressing whether spontaneous generation was real or not. What started as a private spat had turned into a public spectacle. Pasteur and Pouchet both signed up to compete for the prize of 2,500 francs.

The public eagerly followed the competition, struggling to imagine either view of life. Spontaneous generation had the whiff of blasphemy: If life could spring into existence, it did not require

divine intervention. But Pasteur’s claim that the atmosphere teemed with germs also strained the 19th-century mind. A French journalist informed Pasteur that he was going to lose the contest. “The world into which you wish to take us is really too fantastic,” he said.

To prove that his world was real, Pasteur set out to pluck germs from the air. Working with glassblowers, he created flasks with narrow openings that stretched for several inches. He filled them with sterile broth and waited to see if anything would grow inside. If the necks were pointed straight up, the broth often turned cloudy with microorganisms. But if he sloped the necks so that the openings pointed down, the broth stayed clear. Pasteur argued that

germs in the air could drift down into the flasks, but could not propel themselves up a rising path.

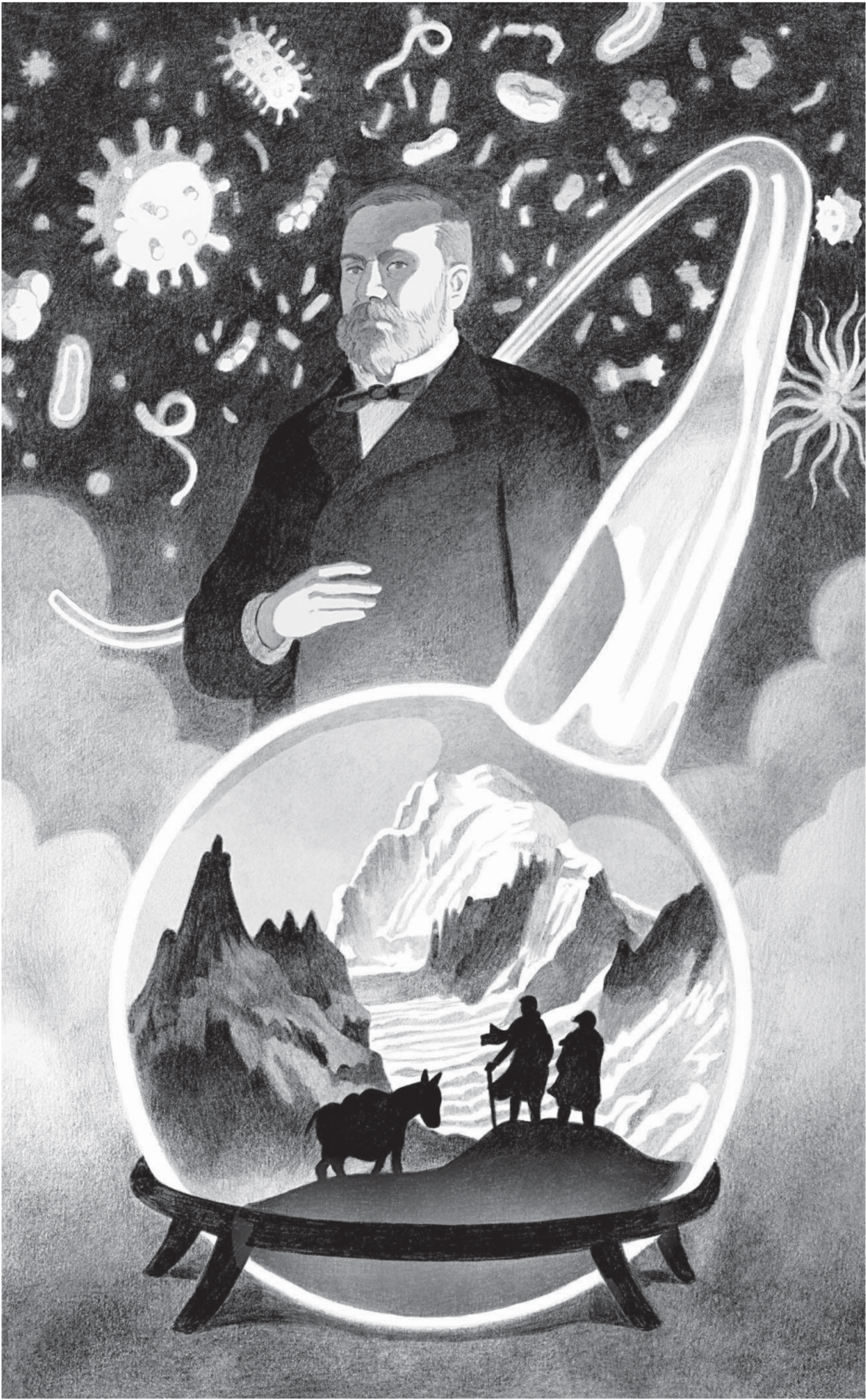
When Pouchet heard about Pasteur’s experiments, he sneered. Did Pasteur really believe that every germ in decaying organic matter came from the air? If that were true, every cubic millimeter of air would have been packed with more germs than all the people on Earth. “The air in which we live would almost have the density of iron,” Pouchet said.

Pasteur responded by changing his hypothesis. Germs were not everywhere, he said. Instead, they drifted in clouds that were more common in some places than others.

To prove his claim, Pasteur took his straight-necked flasks out of his lab and

began collecting germs. In the courtyard of the Paris Observatory, all 11 of his flasks turned cloudy with multiplying germs. But when he traveled to the countryside and ran his experiment again, more of his flasks stayed sterile. The farther Pasteur got from human settlements, the sparser airborne life became. To put that idea to an extreme test, Pasteur decided to climb Mer de Glace.

His first foray to the glacier ended in failure. After holding up a flask, he tried using the flame from a lamp to seal its neck shut, but the glare of the sun made the flame invisible. As Pasteur fumbled with the lamp, he worried that he might be contaminating the broth with germs he carried on his skin or his tools. He



ANTOINE MAILLARD

Scientists now know that life infuses the entire atmosphere, all the way to the stratosphere.

gave up and trudged to a tiny mountain lodge for the night.

He left his flasks open as he slept. In the morning they were rife with microorganisms. Pasteur concluded that the lodge was packed with airborne germs that travelers had brought from around the world.

Later that day, Pasteur modified his lamp so that the flame would burn bright enough for him to see it under the glacier-reflected sun. When he climbed back up Mer de Glace, the experiment worked flawlessly. Only one of the flasks turned cloudy with germs. The other 19 remained sterile.

In November 1860, Pasteur arrived at the Academy of Sciences in Paris with the 73 flasks he had used on his travels. He entered the domed auditorium, walked up to the table where the prize committee sat, and laid out the flasks. The judges peered at the broth as Pasteur described his evidence, saying it gave “indubitable proof” of floating germs in inhabited places.

Pouchet refused to accept the evidence, but nevertheless withdrew from the contest. Pasteur was awarded the prize.

Still, the two continued to spar. The rivalry remained so intense that the Academy set up a new commission to evaluate their latest experiments. Pouchet dragged out the proceedings, demanding more time for his research.

Pasteur decided to seize public opinion and put on a spectacle. On the evening of April 7, 1864, in an amphitheater filled with Parisian elites, Pasteur stood surrounded by lab equipment and a lamp to project images on a screen. He told the audience it would not leave the soiree without recognizing that the air was rife with invisible germs. “We can’t see them now, for the same reason that, in broad daylight, we can’t see the stars,” he said.

At Pasteur’s command, the lights went out, save for a cone of light that revealed floating motes of dust. Pasteur asked the audience to picture a rain of dust falling on every surface in the amphitheater. That dust, he said, was alive.

Pasteur then used a pump to drive air through a sterile piece of cotton. After soaking the cotton in water, he put a drop under a microscope. He projected its image on a screen for the audience to see. Alongside soot and bits of plaster, they could make out squirming corpuscles. “These, gentlemen, are the germs of microscopic beings,” Pasteur said.

Germs were everywhere in the air, he said — kicked up in dust, taking flights of unknown distances and then settling back to the ground, where they worked their magic of fermentation. Germs broke down “everything on the surface of this globe which once had life, in the general economy of creation,” Pasteur said.

“This role is immense, marvelous, positively moving,” he added.

The lecture ended with a standing ovation. Pasteur’s hunt for floating germs elevated him to the highest ranks of French science.

By the time he died 31 years later, Pasteur had made so many world-changing discoveries that his many eulogies and obituaries did not mention his trip to Mer de Glace.

But scientists today recognize that Pasteur got the first glimpse of a world that they are only starting to understand. They now know that life infuses the atmosphere far more than he had imagined, all the way to the stratosphere. Our thriving aerobiome has led some scientists to argue that alien aerobomes may float in the clouds of other planets. Ours is not the only world that seems too fantastic to believe.

Carl Zimmer writes the Origins column for The New York Times and is the author of “Air-Borne: The Hidden History of the Life We Breathe,” from which this article is adapted.

Savanna, rainforest: It all felt like home to early humans

Jungle finding overturns theory that homo sapiens had to stick to grasslands

BY CARL ZIMMER

For generations, scientists looked to the East African savanna as the birthplace of our species. But recently some researchers have put forward a different history: Homo sapiens evolved across the entire continent over the past several hundred thousand years.

If this Africa-wide theory were true, then early humans must have figured out how to live in many environments beyond grasslands. A study published last week shows that as early as 150,000 years ago, some of them lived deep in a West African rainforest.

“What we’re seeing is that, from a very early stage, ecological diversification is at the heart of our species,” said Eleanor Scerri, an evolutionary archaeologist at the Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology in Jena, Germany, and an author of the study.

In the 20th century, after scientists found fossils and stone tools in East African savannas, many researchers concluded that our species was especially adapted to life in grasslands and open woodlands, where humans could hunt great herds of mammals.

Only much later, the theory went, did our species become versatile enough to survive in tougher environments. Tropical rainforests appeared to be the toughest of them all. It can be hard to find enough food in jungles, and they offer lots of places for predators to lurk.

“You can’t see what to hunt,” Dr. Scerri said, “and you can’t see what’s coming for you.”

But in 2018, Dr. Scerri and her colleagues challenged the idea that East African grasslands were the single cradle of humanity. The abundance of stone tools and fossils found there, they argued, might have meant simply that the region had the right conditions for preserving those traces of history.

The scientists pointed to other fossils and stone tools discovered in southern and northern Africa. Those artifacts had often been dismissed as the products of extinct human relatives, rather than our own species.

Dr. Scerri and her colleagues suggested that for hundreds of thousands of years, our forerunners lived in isolated populations across Africa, periodically mixing their DNA when they came into contact.

If that were true, then early humans should have also been present in West and Central Africa, where rainforests were common. The oldest firm evidence of humans in African rainforests dated back just 18,000 years. But the acidic



JOANNA LISOWEC

A study published last week shows that as early as 150,000 years ago, humans lived deep in a West African rainforest, one of the toughest of environments.

soils in tropical forests could have destroyed the bones before they turned to fossils, and tools could have been washed away.

Dr. Scerri came across an older report about a site in the Ivory Coast. The researchers dug a large trench in a hillside called Anyama. In the hard, sandy sediment, they discovered bits of plant matter, as well as some stone tools, though they could not determine their age.

In March 2020, Dr. Scerri and her colleagues traveled to Anyama and excavated a fresh face of sediment, where they found more stone tools. But they worked for only a few days before the Covid pandemic forced them home. They returned to the site in November 2021, only to discover that it had been illegally quarried for road building.

“It was absolutely heartbreaking,” said Eslem Ben Arous, a member of the team now at the National Center for Research on Human Evolution in Burgos, Spain. She and her colleagues discovered a small area not far from the original dig where they found more tools. But the new site has been destroyed as well.

Still, the researchers managed to gather a lot of clues. Dr. Ben Arous, an expert on geochronology, used new methods to estimate the age of the sediment layers. The oldest layer in which the researchers found stone tools formed 150,000 years ago.

The sediment also preserved wax

from the surface of ancient leaves. Analyzing the chemistry of the leaf wax revealed that Anyama had been a dense rainforest throughout its history. Even in the ice age, when the cool, dry climate shrank jungles across Africa, Anyama remained a tropical refuge.

Cecilia Padilla-Iglesias, an anthropologist at the University of Cambridge who was not involved in the new study, said that the work offered clear proof that people were living in those jungles — and that they were living there very early in the history of our species.

“It’s important, because it confirms what other research predicted,” Dr. Padilla-Iglesias said.

Khady Niang, an archaeologist at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal and an author of the study, noted that many of the oldest artifacts discovered were big chopping tools crafted from quartz.

She speculated that the Anyama people had used them to dig up food or hack their way through the rainforest.

“If you move a lot, you need tools to cut the trees that hinder your path,” Dr. Niang said.

The distinctive tool kit makes Dr. Scerri suspect that the Anyama people had already lived in the rainforest long before 150,000 years ago. “They’re not people who have just arrived,” she said. “These are people who had the time to adjust to their living conditions.”

Fashion



Chemena Kamali, the creative director of Chloé, at home with some of the more than 1,500 blouses she has collected over 25 years. Several are vintage lacy designs, below.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MAXIME LA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The queen of the blouses

PARIS

BY VANESSA FRIEDMAN

On the second floor of a 19th-century villa near the Bois de Boulogne, overlooking a garden housing a child's trampoline and various plastic scooters, there is a room filled with blouses. Hundreds of blouses.

Lace blouses from the Victorian era and big-shouldered blouses from the 1980s. Blouses in paisley and leopard print. Blouses with familiar pedigrees — Ungaro, Yves Saint Laurent, Giorgio di Sant' Angelo — and blouses with no pedigree at all. A rainbow of blouses arranged according to color on six clothing racks.

It is the mind — or, rather, the home office — of Chemena Kamali, the creative director of Chloé.

If you want to understand how, in only two seasons, she has transformed Chloé from an earnest but increasingly minor women's wear house into one of fashion's hottest labels, not to mention the uniform of cool girls such as Suki Waterhouse and Sienna Miller (and Kamala Harris during her run for president), you have to understand Ms. Kamali's obsession with the blouse.

She has been collecting them for 25 years and has more than 1,500 blouses: at her parents' home in Germany; in storage in France; almost 500 in her house alone. For her, the blouse — that relatively unappreciated top, redolent of school uniforms, Edwardian nannies and 1970s career girls that lost its primacy in women's wardrobes to the T-shirt decades ago — is actually the Platonic ideal of a garment.

"The evolution of the blouse is the evolution of femininity in a way, and the evolution of fashion," Ms. Kamali said recently, tucked into one of the two giant leather chairs in her office. Aside from the blouses, a big modular desk from the 1980s and some pottery and family tchotchkes are the only objects in the room. She and her husband, Konstantin Wehrum, and their two sons, ages 3 and 5, moved into the house after she got the job at Chloé — they had been on their way to California — and she has not had a lot of time to unpack.

"Historically, the blouse was a man's undergarment," she said. When she talks about something she loves, you can hear her working through her ideas in real time: "Then, in Victorian times, the blouse became feminized. Postwar, it got more tailored. In the 1970s, again, more fluid, and in the '80s, more powerful. It can be formal and strict or playful and romantic. It reflects personalities. It reflects all of the things that make us who we are as women."

That is a lot of meaning to load onto a garment, but to Ms. Kamali, the blouse is not just a bit of fabric with buttons.

THE SHIRT ON HER BACK

No one wears a blouse better than Ms. Kamali, not even converts such as Karl Lagerfeld and Liya Kebede, who have begun to line the Chloé front rows in her lacy tops and wooden platform shoes. Ms. Kamali's typical uniform starts with a Chloé blouse of her own design or one



from her collection, often in an aged ivory with a touch of embroidery to lend it a vaguely bohemian air.

"A blouse is so much easier than a dress," she said.

She pairs them with high-waist Chloé jeans, shredded at the hem, white Chloé high-top sneakers and a tangle of necklaces, some new, some sourced at the same vintage markets where she finds her blouses. With waist-length brown hair parted in the center and framing a face that seems makeup free, it creates a vibe that is both Venice Beach hippie — even though Ms. Kamali grew up mostly in Dortmund, Germany — and efficient. If Stevie Nicks had a day job at a venture capital fund, she might look like this.

"She's aspirational," said the actress Rashida Jones, who met Ms. Kamali a year ago. "But it doesn't feel unattainable. It feels grounded."

Kaia Gerber, who has modeled for Ms. Kamali and wears her clothes off the runway, put it this way: "Chemena herself is a testament to holding your power without having to adhere to the judgments society makes about women based on the way they dress."

Ms. Kamali, 43, started collecting blouses in 2003, which was around the time she got her first job at Chloé. She knew she wanted to be a designer when she was a child, and in Germany, she said, that meant being like Karl Lagerfeld, the most famous German designer, who was then at Chloé. She went to the University of Applied Sciences in



Trier, Germany, and talked her way into Chloé as an intern during the Phoebe Philo era.

"The first designer piece I ever bought, actually, was at the company's employee sale for 50 euros," she said, pointing to a white T-shirt with a "necklace" of silver teardrops woven into the front. "That's when my vintage obses-



Clockwise from top left, the first blouse-like piece Ms. Kamali bought was this T-shirt with a silver teardrop motif; the kind of decorative detail that inspires Ms. Kamali; and that vintage blouse in full.

sion started, because I remember members of the team coming back from trips with big duffel bags and unpacking treasures they'd found. I realized how certain source pieces can trigger a creative process that can flow into the concept of a collection."

She got a degree from Central Saint Martins in London, worked at Alberta Ferretti; Chloé again, under Clare Waight Keller; and then Saint Laurent before returning to Chloé in the top job. But wherever she went, Ms. Kamali kept buying blouses. She does not buy, as many collectors do, for historic or material value but rather according to details that catch her eye — "the volume or the construction of the sleeve or yoke."

As a result, her pieces are not forbiddingly expensive. They range from "super cheap to maybe \$700," she said, though the average is about \$300. She sources them from eBay, vintage markets including A Current Affair in Los Angeles and what has turned into an extended network of vintage dealers.

"You go to a store, you go to a market and you meet this person who says, 'OK, you want more of this, I have some stuff in my basement,'" she said. "Then, connecting to this community, this group of obsessive people all about the rare find, becomes an addiction." It also made her perfect for Chloé.

ALL BLOUSES ALL THE TIME

The blouse is such an important part of the Chloé aesthetic that when the Jewish Museum in New York held the first major retrospective devoted to Chloé in 2023, it dedicated an entire room to the blouse. As a garment, it encapsulates the easy-breezy-feminine tone set in 1952 by the brand's founder, Gaby Aghion, and was replicated to varying extents by those who came after, including Mr. Lagerfeld, Stella McCartney, Ms. Keller and Gabriela Hearst.

But while they all made blouses, none made them as central to their aesthetic as Ms. Kamali had. It is the way "she connects to the fundamental values of the house," said Philippe Fortunato, the chief executive of the fashion and accessories maisons at Richemont, the Swiss conglomerate that owns Chloé.

Indeed, Ms. Kamali's first collection for Chloé was built around a blouse. Specifically, a piece that Mr. Lagerfeld designed for Chloé with a black capelet of sorts built into the top. The blouse, she said, got her "thinking about how the cape is an iconic piece in Chloé's history."

Just as the lace in a Victorian blouse had inspired the lacy tiers of the most recent collection, which were visible not just in actual blouses, but also in playsuits with the affect of blouses and dresses that looked like longer versions of the blouses.

And just as, for her third collection, to be unveiled Thursday, Ms. Kamali was thinking about something Mr. Lagerfeld once said about "the basic idea being the simplest of all: a blouse and a skirt."

"That kind of triggered in me the idea of really looking at the blouse not as a component of a look, but as the main component," she said. That in turn led her to the idea of the blouse as a container of historical fragments: a dolman sleeve, say, or an exaggerated collar or shoulder. All of which made their way into the collection.

"It's not about copying," she said. "It's about using the blouse as a way to root things in the past or in tradition." And signal that it has a place in the future.

And as Lauren Santo Domingo, a founder of Moda Operandi, reports, it is working. Chloé is "one of our fastest sell-out designers," Ms. Santo Domingo said, noting that sales of Chloé tops had grown 138 percent since Ms. Kamali's first collections appeared.

For the photographer David Sims, who shoots the Chloé campaigns, Ms. Kamali has essentially created "the representation of a new French kind of woman, with a play around nudity and embroidery that suggests ownership over a sexual energy and power that feels like an answer to so many of the questions that have sprung up recently." Questions about gender and stereotype; questions about the male gaze. Doing that through the prism of a garment that was essentially relegated to the dustbin of fashion and old rock stars is, he said, kind of "radical."

But that tension is actually the point of Ms. Kamali's Chloé, which has made the Chloé girl into a woman.

"The term 'Chloé girl' is so connected to how the world perceived the house in the first place," Ms. Kamali said. "But the word 'girl' is reductive. I never want the Chloé woman to be only one thing. No woman is. She has shifting moods and feelings. Ease and optimism always exists with tension. These contrasts and these opposites are what makes everything interesting."

Including, maybe especially, the shirt on your back.

From near right, Ms. Kamali's first Chloé collection was built around a blouse with a capelet that Karl Lagerfeld designed for Chloé; a 1980s blouse from her collection.



Culture

Beats that link jazz’s past and future

Billy Hart, with credits on more than 600 LPs, adds one with his quartet

BY HANK SHTEAMER

Onstage at the New York jazz club Smoke in late January, the members of the all-star septet the Cookers were surging into high gear. The catalyst: their drummer, Billy Hart, who stirred up rhythmic eddies and punched out stinging cymbal accents while fixing the saxophonist Azar Lawrence with an eager, heat-of-battle grin.

On “Just,” a new album by Hart’s own long-running quartet, released on Friday, he reveals some of that intensity in a more understated guise, playing alongside vanguard musicians a quarter-century or more younger — the saxophonist Mark Turner, the pianist Ethan Iverson and the bassist Ben Street — and pulling off what has become, across his six-decade-plus career, a trademark Billy Hart feat: sounding effortlessly and perpetually contemporary.

“He’s a continual, consummate student of the music,” Turner said of Hart, 84, in a phone interview. While Hart’s style draws on the many eras in which he has been active, he continued, “he hasn’t changed his language into something that is based in a period.”

The bassist Buster Williams has worked with Hart since the early ’60s, first meeting him on a gig with the vocalist Betty Carter and later aligning with him in many other contexts, including the Mwandishi band, Herbie Hancock’s trailblazing electric-jazz sextet of the early ’70s. “He’s got that fresh understanding of things,” Williams said in a phone interview. “His vision is always looking forward.”

Outside the jazz world, Hart is largely unknown. But within the genre — where peers and fans refer to him as Jabali, or “rock,” one of the Swahili monikers bestowed on the members of the Mwandishi band by their associate James Mtume — his esteem is near-universal, a status reflected in a 2022 National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master designation and his staggeringly broad discography, encompassing more than 600 albums.

Most of these are sideman appearances, some alongside major names such as Miles Davis, Stan Getz, Pharoah Sanders, Wayne Shorter and McCoy Tyner. But his catalog as a leader is robust, stretching back to 1977, when he channeled his love of the avant-garde into “Enchance,” recorded during the same period when he was playing far more accessible material with Getz. A tour of Hart’s recorded legacy — early ’60s work with the soul-jazz organ great Jimmy Smith; the alternately funky and free-form Mwandishi sessions; the incendiary post-bop of the collective band Quest; and the moody and probing sounds of his current quartet, intact for more than 20 years — doubles as a vivid portrait of the evolution of modern jazz.

Could the young Billy Hart, growing up in Washington, have envisioned such a long and thriving career? “Of course not,” he said with an incredulous laugh on a Saturday afternoon in January, sitting on a couch in the basement of his home in Montclair, N.J. He wore jeans and a blue sweater, and was surrounded by shelves filled with books, LPs, cassettes and CDs, with his drums set up steps away. In conversation, he falls into an almost reflexive habit of minimizing the scope of his achievements, which also includes decades of teaching at institutions like Oberlin and the New England Conservatory.

“However I started playing, I’m still doing it,” he said. “I’m still doing exactly



VINCENT TULLO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

“He will look you in the eye and tell you some truths to the music that it’s very hard to learn in any other way.”

what I did, what — 60 years ago?”

Hart got his start in drum and bugle corps and played in a doo-wop group. But a pair of Charlie Parker 78s, passed to him by Buck Hill, a local saxophonist, reoriented him toward jazz. (In “Oceans of Time,” an illuminating memoir penned with Iverson and due out this summer, Hart recounts that epiphanic exposure to Parker: “There was no contest, no argument, nothing. This was it.”)

After paying his dues in Washington clubs, he toured with the pianist-singer Shirley Horn, who would remain a friend and collaborator. Steady gigs with Smith and the guitarist Wes Montgomery followed, giving Hart a firm grounding in the bedrock of mainstream jazz.

Steve Jordan, the widely traveled drummer who now plays with the Rolling Stones, has known and admired Hart since high school. In a phone interview, he praised Hart’s 1964 Newport Jazz Festival appearance with Smith as “some of the best trio playing, of any kind of trio, ever.”

“The way that he played, how he complemented Jimmy Smith — not only with his dynamics, but the groove — was



TOM COP/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES, VIA GETTY IMAGES

so intense,” Jordan said.

While Hart has always minded the rhythmic imperatives of the music, his appreciation of what he prefers to call American classical music is a holistic one. In Montclair, the conversation gradually made its way to John Coltrane, whom Hart considers “my prime inspiration.” The two never played together, but they chatted on a few occasions during a period when, Hart estimates, he saw the saxophonist’s epochal ’60s quartet “at least 50

times.” Once, Coltrane called and asked him to sit in as a second drummer for a performance in Washington; not having his kit on hand and not feeling up to the task, Hart declined. His later work with Sanders, Coltrane’s close collaborator, was, Hart said, “me getting a second chance to play with John.”

Hart requested to hear one of his favorite Coltrane recordings, a 1965 live version of “I Want to Talk About You,” the Billy Eckstine ballad, released only as a bootleg. As it played, he moved his

arms like a conductor, delineating the song form (“So here we go again to the top . . .”) and singing the lyrics to “Misty,” an Erroll Garner and Johnny Burke standard with similar chords. As Coltrane unleashed his trademark impassioned cries, Hart smiled and said, “It’s like an opera singer.” He credited his paternal grandmother, a concert pianist who accompanied the pioneering Black contralto Marian Anderson, with developing his ear.

“I can’t find middle C on the piano,” he said with a laugh, “but, you see, I can hear.”

A prolific composer with a strong, exacting melodic sense, Hart conveys his ideas to his collaborators orally. According to Williams, the drummer is “always singing something.”

“He’s always got musical ideas in his head,” he added.

Also in his head, as detailed in “Oceans of Time,” is a kind of Rosetta stone of drumming: how the Afro-Cuban clave rhythm informed what became the rock ‘n’ roll backbeat; how lesser-known players such as Edgar Bateman and Donald Bailey did as much to advance modern jazz percussion as the more famous Elvin Jones; how he learned, through the Brazilian bossa nova great João Gilberto, to “play like the rain.”

Iverson has treasured such lore ever since meeting Hart in the ’90s at a rehearsal led by the trombonist Christophe Schweizer. “I just always felt Billy Hart was telling me secrets,” he said. “If you can get past the first line of defense,” he added, “and actually have a conversation with Billy Hart, he will look you in the eye and tell you some truths to the music that it’s very hard to learn in any other way.”

At home, Hart gamely spoke for several hours and sat with a satisfied smile as he listened back to some of his favorite original pieces, including two versions of the dramatic “Teulé’s Redemption,” recorded close to 30 years apart. But when it was all over, he seemed perplexed as to why he was worthy of any kind of spotlight. “There’s got to be some other drummers of my age that you should deal with,” he said.

Then he started naming off younger drummers he admires, like Brian Blade, Eric Harland, Justin Brown and Justin Tyson, and speculating about the skill set of what he called “the drummer of the future.”

The way he played down his own achievements in favor of a more evolutionary view exemplified another point made by his old friend Buster Williams. Hart, he noted admiringly, “will be young until the day he dies.”

Schiele set for auction being treated as Nazi loot

Proceeds from sale would be shared with heirs of murdered collector

BY CATHERINE HICKLEY

A watercolor by Egon Schiele, “Boy in a Sailor Suit,” is to be sold on Wednesday in London at Christie’s after that auction house brokered a settlement between the consignor and the heirs of a Viennese cabaret performer who owned the work before he was killed in a Nazi concentration camp.

The 1914 portrait, with a low estimate of \$1.3 million, is one of about 80 works by Schiele, the Austrian Expressionist, that the cabaret performer, Fritz Grünbaum, possessed. An outspoken critic of the Nazis, Grünbaum was arrested by the Gestapo in 1938 and imprisoned in two concentration camps, including Dachau, where he died in 1941.

After decades of working to trace and reclaim Grünbaum’s collection, his heirs, Timothy Reif and David Fraenkel, have recovered or reached settlements on a number of Schiele works on paper in recent years. Christie’s has auctioned 12 of the recovered works.

The heirs, with support from investigators from the Manhattan district at-

torney’s office, have said that Grünbaum’s wife, Elisabeth, was forced to hand over the art collection to Nazi officials. Elisabeth was deported to a concentration camp in 1942 and murdered.

But the Art Institute of Chicago, which has a Schiele watercolor once owned by Grünbaum, has cited evidence that it says disputes that the collection was ever taken by the Nazis and is fighting the seizure of the work, called “Russian War Prisoner,” by investigators. The institute argues that the work was not looted, but remained in Grünbaum’s family until it was sold to the art dealer Eberhard Kornfeld by Grünbaum’s sister-in-law, Mathilde Lukacs, in 1956.

A New York Supreme Court judge, who held several days of hearings on the dispute last fall, is scheduled to issue a ruling in the case in coming weeks.

In its materials associated with the sale of the watercolor, Christie’s, which has its own provenance department that researches restitution issues, has embraced the position held by the heirs, who are seeking the restitution of hundreds of works once held by Grünbaum.

“Fritz Grünbaum’s art collection was confiscated by the Nazis in post-Anschluss Austria,” Richard Aronowitz,



VIA CHRISTIE’S

“Boy in a Sailor Suit” (1914) by Egon Schiele.

head of restitution at the auction house, said in a statement.

The efforts to settle the provenance and ownership of the Grünbaum works have led to multiple court cases.

In 2018, the New York Supreme Court ruled that Grünbaum never sold or voluntarily relinquished any works before his death and that the heirs were the rightful owners of two Schiele drawings in the collection of the art dealer Richard Nagy. In 2019, that ruling was upheld by a New York appeals court.

Manhattan investigators have cited those rulings in the seizure of a number of Schiele works in U.S. museums and private collections. In 2023 and 2024, for example, five museums restituted works to the heirs, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Carnegie Museum of Art.

But in two other civil cases — one directly involving the Art Institute’s “Russian War Prisoner” — federal courts have ruled on procedural grounds that the Grünbaum heirs came forward too late to claim the works. One of the federal judges also described Kornfeld’s account that he purchased the works from Lukacs as credible.

Separately, two museums in Vienna — the Albertina and the Leopold Museum — are also fighting the heirs’ claims for Schiele works in their col-

lections on the grounds that Austria’s sovereign immunity protects them from U.S. lawsuits.

The consignor of “Boy in a Sailor Suit” is a German woman who had purchased the watercolor at Sotheby’s in 1992, according to Dirk Boll, managing director of Christie’s in Germany.

Michelle McMullan, who is running the Christie’s evening sale of 20th- and 21st-century art at which the Schiele will be featured, described it as “one of the best watercolors I have handled” and said it showed the artist — whose art the Nazis deemed “degenerate” — “at the very height of his powers.” Unfinished elements, such as the missing left hand, “evoke movement and spontaneity,” she said.

The consignor, apprised of the Grünbaum provenance, asked Christie’s to help mediate an agreement with Grünbaum’s heirs, according to Boll. He said that she planned to donate her proceeds from the sale to a kindergarten in Munich. The sale will also raise funds for the heirs’ Grünbaum Fischer Foundation for performing artists, according to Christie’s.

“This is another moment to celebrate the memory of our family member, who was a brave artist, art collector and opponent of Fascism,” Reif said in a press statement.

Unreadable, and that’s the point

ESSAY

An exhibition features items like radios and flasks designed to look like books

BY MOLLY YOUNG

A benign quirk of humanity is that we are delighted by things designed to look like other things. A bed shaped like a swan. A sauna shaped like a garlic bulb. A toilet brush shaped like a cherry. The designer Elsa Schiaparelli made fashion history with her acts of surreal mimicry, creating buttons in the form of crickets, a compact that looks like a rotary phone dial, a belt buckle of manicured hands.

The trick is hardly new. Medieval cooks molded pork meatloaf to look like pea pods and massaged sweet almond paste into hedgehogs. No matter the scale or edibility of the object, we’ve always relished a material plot twist — a one-liner in three dimensions.

Inclusion in the category requires design intention, so the “night stand” that is actually a pile of unread books by your bed doesn’t count, no matter how nicely it accommodates a pair of reading glasses and a jar of melatonin gummies. But how about a transistor radio painstakingly designed to mimic a leather-bound book? Or a hand-held lantern shaped like an open volume, complete with marbled exterior and gilt-stamped spine? Or a tiny dust-jacketed “book” with a functional cigarette lighter where the pages ought to be? Yes, yes and yes.

The above are three of roughly 70 objects on display in “The Best Kept Secret: 200 Years of Blook,” a show at the Center for Book Arts in New York running through May 10. “Blook” is a contraction of “book-look,” according to the curator of the show, Mindell Dubansky, from whose collection most of the items are drawn. Much like a book itself, the enchanting exhibit packs a lot into a space of modest dimensions.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRAHAM DICKE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The relics are divided into categories including “Remembrance & Commemoration,” “Faith & Religion” and “Love & Friendship.” Cards attending each object do more than identify a date and a provenance; they brim with ebullient detail. Did you know, for example, that book-shaped love tokens were crafted by 19th-century lumbermen in the logging regions of the United States and Canada? And that the boxes were filled with raw spruce gum, which is

apparently a substance that every young lady would have been ecstatic to receive? And — now we move into the zone of entreaty — why oh why has this form of vernacular art faded into oblivion, when it’s so clear that anyone’s heart would melt at receiving an intricately carved faux book constructed from a single piece of wood and featuring slide lids at both ends? Lumberjacks: The ball is in your court.

Instead of conveying affection, a blook may transmit contraband. A book-shaped lunchbox from 1874 includes a flask that glides snugly into the box’s “spine” — the flask sized to hold liquor sufficient for intoxicating two grown men or at least six children. A daintier perspective on drinking can be inferred from a stack of 18th-century blooks that opens to reveal a carafe of liquor and four gilt-rimmed glasses.

With its plain cover and brown trade binding, “Milady’s Fancy Vol. XVII” looks like a slog. Open it and you’ll find a 14-piece vanity set nestled in grass-green silk, complete with manicure tools and an embedded mirror. The concretely excellent craftsmanship of the set — each celluloid comb and file held in place by a sewn ribbon — stands in contrast to the nebulous rationale for its existence. What situation might require a lady to smuggle a salon’s worth of beauty tools inside a book? Date night at the public library?

So far we’ve seen blooks deployed in the service of lust, gluttony and pride. That’s three of the seven deadly sins. Next up: wrath.

The Chef-an-ette was a container for recipe cards designed to imitate a shelf of books, with compartments cheekily titled “Cakes Cookies Doughnuts: Vol. 2” and “Candies Fritters Sandwiches: Vol. 6.” The Chef-an-ette on view is from the 1950s and still contains its original recipe cards. In a curatorial note, Dubansky explains that a startling item was unearthed among the cards: an anonymous letter admonishing the cook, a Mrs. Schultz, for alleged inappropriate conduct.

That letter is affixed to the gallery wall for visitors to read. “You make your own laws concerning your love and dealings with your fellow men, don’t you Mrs. Schultz?” the letter-writer seethes. “The old Bible admonition ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ does not apply to you does it Mrs. Schultz?” It is signed “A interested party.” Little did the

unnamed writer know that the “interested party” would expand to include hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of 21st-century gallerygoers.

The mischief continues with an exploding book from the early 20th century. The fad for so-called “loud books” has, mercifully, abated — but around the time of World War I an unsuspecting bookworm may have opened a gift to receive a heart-stopping CRACK! instead of a tranquil reading experience.

Objects from the past may alienate us from our ancestors just as often as they connect us. This was true of sev-



Mindell Dubansky, the curator of “The Best Kept Secret: 200 Years of Blook,” coined the term “blook” to describe book-esque objects. Above is a Chef-an-ette, a container for recipe cards shaped like a row of cookbooks, and at left is a French cordial set.

eral lighters disguised as books, with flame-producing mechanisms tucked into a spine or pivoting out from a corner. I tried to imagine myself in the position of a smoker who so intensely fantasized about using a book as ignition that he or she was moved to commission a pansy-ornamented copper-and-brass book-shaped lighter engraved with an alligator-skin pattern. I failed. It doesn’t matter; the result is pretty enough to justify itself.

All manner of toys and games have been disguised as books. A James Bond-inspired fad for espionage toys in the 1960s led to the invention of Secret Sam’s Spy Dictionary, an “exciting secret weapon” featuring a 16-exposure camera with a lens peeking out of a hole in an index tab. The book also shoots plastic bullets, and features a mirror for observing enemies. Parents: Fire up your eBay alerts now and you might snag one in time for Christmas.

More nefarious, though equally alluring, is a book-shaped trick box. A user who attempted to open this

“book” would have been attacked by a wooden snake contrived to pop out and pierce its victim’s hand. If you wanted to condition a youngster *out* of the desire to read, you might provide them with this evil device at an impressionable age.

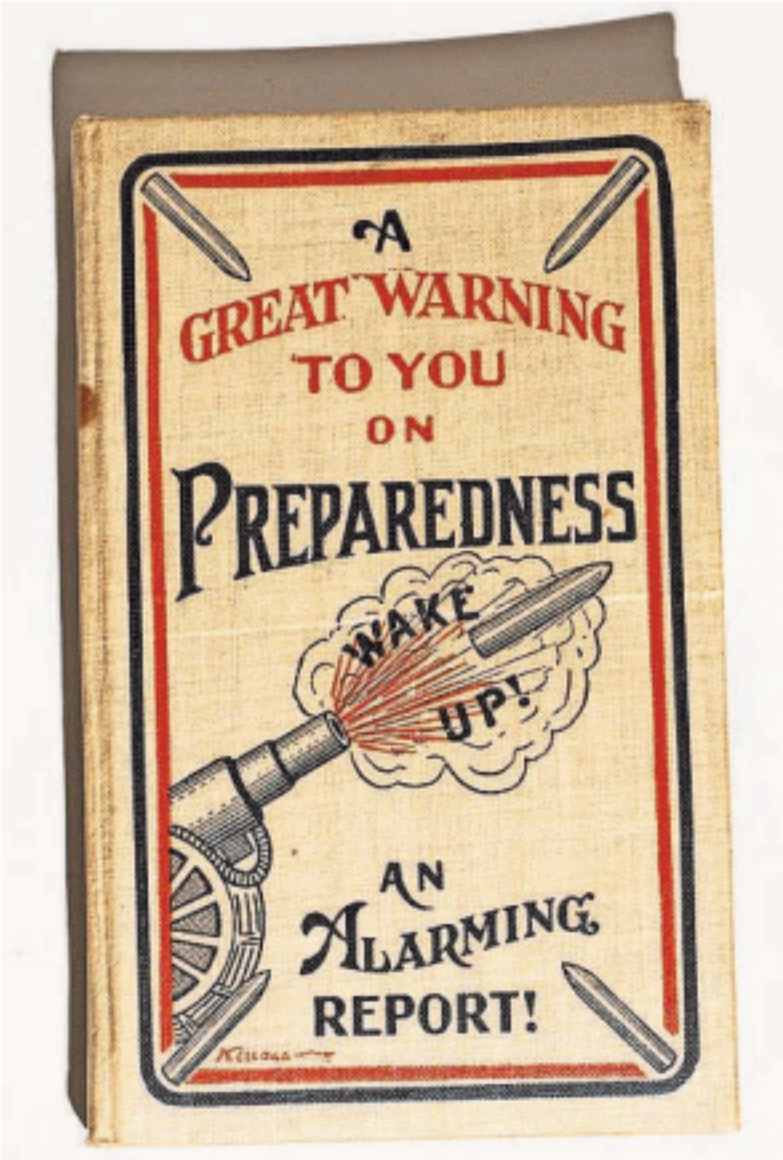
What drives people to create and crave objects that emulate books? For one thing, books have an aura of mystery. One is meant to be alone with a book; it is a technology that neither demands a crowd nor benefits from one. The privacy of reading goes a way toward defining the allure of the vessel and the temptation to repurpose it. It may explain why there is no blook equivalent in the form of a Blu-ray DVD case or television set.

The urge may also be a simple matter of blook-makers wanting to capture and recreate that which is beautiful — an act no different from drawing a flower or painting a sunrise.

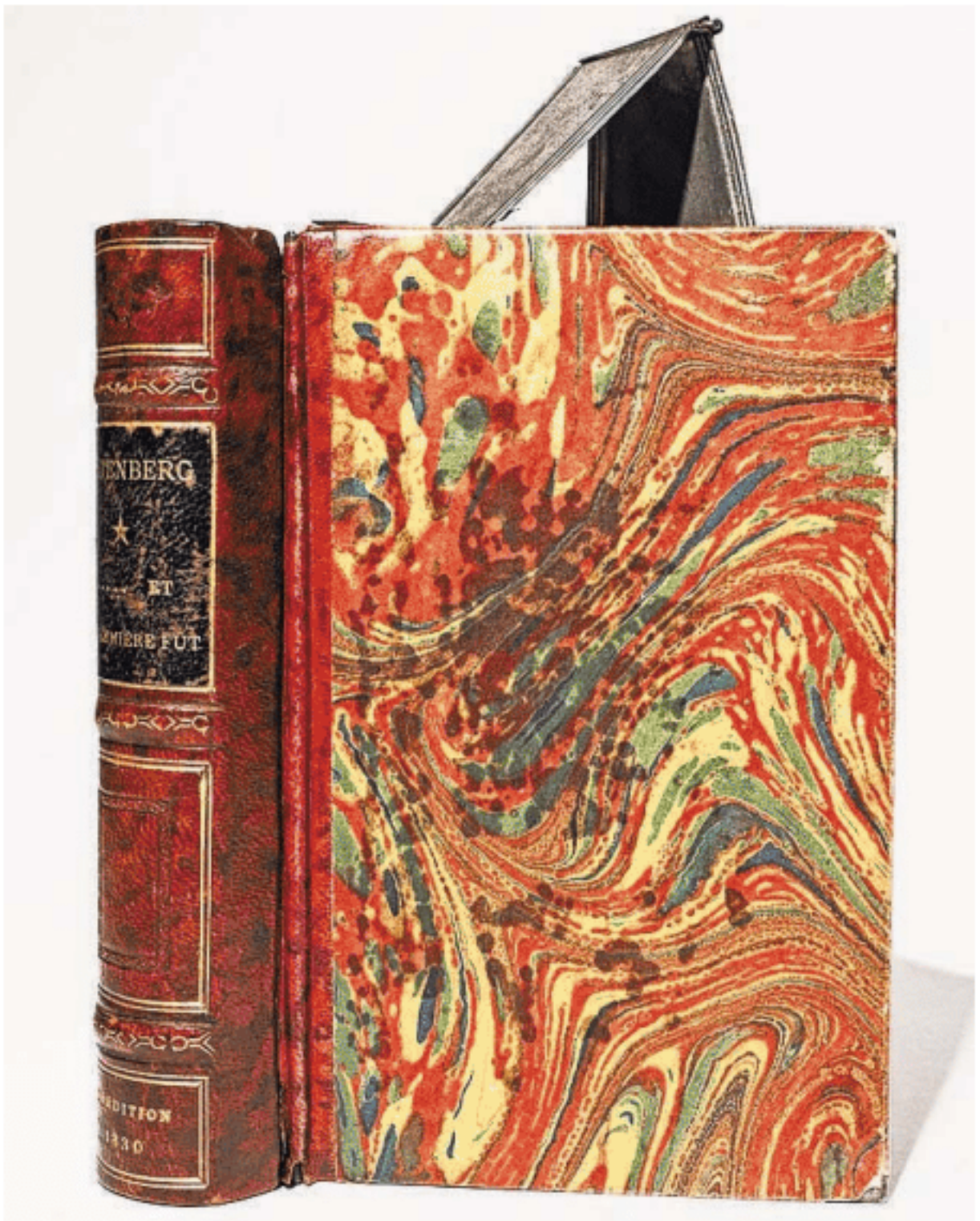
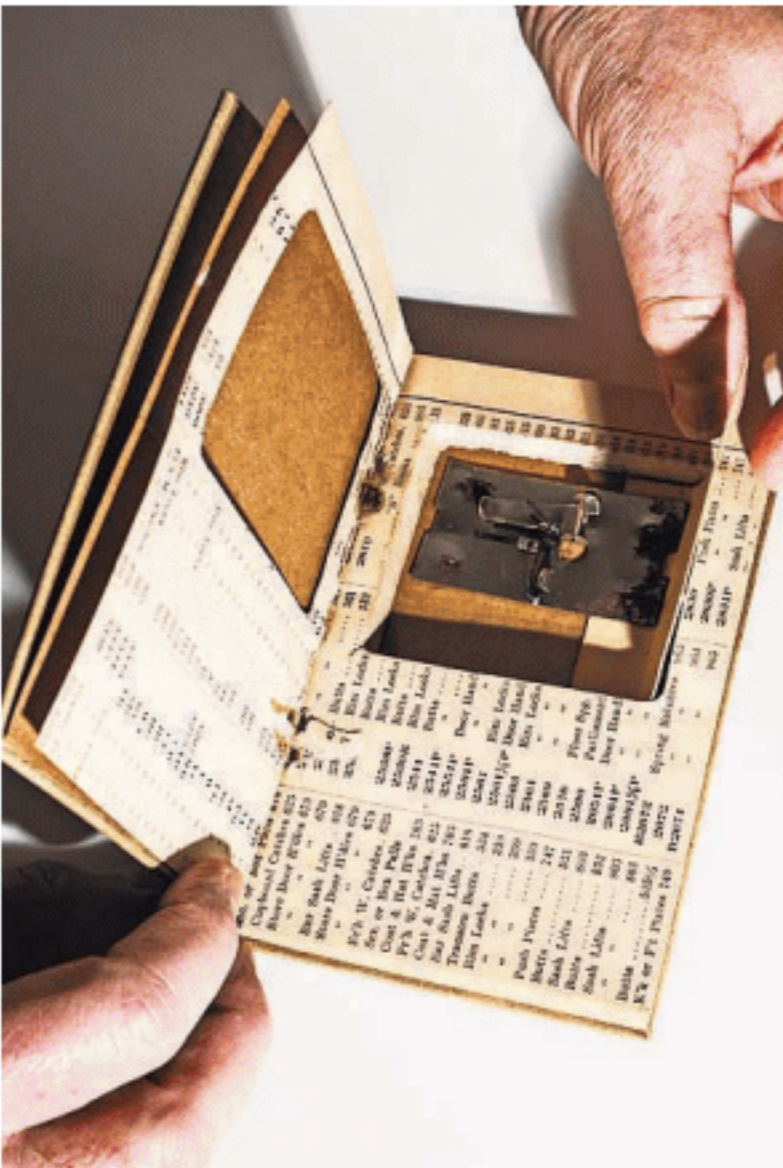
Molly Young is a critic for The New York Times Book Review.



Spruce gum boxes were carved by lumberjacks in the logging regions of North America starting in the 19th century.



“Loud books” became popular around World War I. The gag items were sold in candy shops and joke shops.



Clockwise from middle row left: a vanity set from the 1920s; the interior of a loud book; and two views of a pocket lantern.



DARIA WERBOWY — MIAMI, 01.2025
PHOTOGRAPHED BY TYRONE LEBON
WWW.MASON-ALAI.COM

Sports

On marathon quest, he stretched his limits

Surgeon survived cancer, then took on 7 epic runs on 7 continents in 7 days

BY RUSTIN DODD
THE ATHLETIC

Clark Gamblin, a cancer surgeon in Milwaukee, does not look like an elite distance runner. He is 55, with specks of gray in his hair, and bookish. He listens to classic rock and contemporary Christian, reads books about Theodore Roosevelt and spends a lot of his time thinking about cancers of the liver and bile duct.

But in spring 2023, he got a text message and link from his friend Mark Russell: “Let me know when you’re ready for this. . . .”

The link sent Gamblin to a website for something called the World Marathon Challenge, an eight-year-old event with a tantalizing tagline: “Seven Marathons. Seven Continents. Seven Days.”

Gamblin had one thought: How could anyone do that?

He was a dedicated runner, but more a weekend warrior than a pro. When he ran the Boston Marathon in 2018, it was his first marathon in 21 years. When he was diagnosed with cancer that year, he pushed on, finishing five more marathons in the next six years.

He looked at the link again. The details were staggering, as was the price: \$48,000. Still.

“I couldn’t get it out of my head for some reason,” he said.

“I saw this as something that I thought would change me,” he said. “And change me for the better.”

The first marathon would take place Jan. 31, 2025, in Antarctica. He had 19 months to get ready.

Gamblin has a mantra: The body will do what the mind says it will do.

For years, it applied to his job as a cancer surgeon. It took him three application cycles to be accepted to medical school, and when he started treating cancer patients, he always told them they needed three things on their journey: faith in something, family and friendships.

In 2017, he was sitting in a national board meeting for the American Liver Foundation, a partner of the Boston Marathon, when someone suggested it would be nice if a board member ran. Gamblin had run a few marathons during medical school. But for 20 years, running had been a casual pursuit.

As he looked around the room, he did not see many candidates. The marathon was scheduled for his 49th birthday. So he took the plunge.

It was a brutal day, windy and wet. But when he crossed the finish line after four and a half hours, something clicked. He made plans to run the New York City Marathon that fall.



Clark Gamblin, 55, with a map of the World Marathon Challenge venues. “I saw this as something that I thought would change me,” he said. “And change me for the better.”

Gamblin continued training, but one day in August, he noticed a mass in the left side of his scrotum. At first, he thought it was a blood vessel malformation called a varicocele. But Gamblin had spent his career telling patients to act on abnormalities, so he called his primary care doctor and told him he needed an ultrasound.

“It’s probably nothing,” he said. That same month, Gamblin told his three children that he and their mother were divorcing after 21 years of marriage. Now he was at a hospital, looking at his own ultrasound. It was not a blood vessel malformation.

As a cancer surgeon, Gamblin knew the statistics about testicular cancer: that it is the No. 1 cancer among men ages 14 to 49; that one in 250 men will be affected in their lifetime; that it is close to 95 percent curable when detected early.

Gamblin went to see his colleague Peter Langenstroer, a urologist. They scheduled surgery for the next week.

Next came chemotherapy, which was supposed to cut the chances of a recurrence to 5 percent. The chemo was unpleasant, but one of Gamblin’s big questions was whether it was safe to run the New York Marathon two months later.

“You can do it,” his oncologist told him. “You’ll just feel horrible.”

He finished in 4 hours 51 minutes. For months, Gamblin rarely told his patients about his cancer diagnosis.

He did, however, keep running, turning his focus to completing the six major marathons, the championship-level events that attract dedicated runners from around the globe.

He also heeded a colleague’s advice to put himself out there. Before leaving for the Berlin Marathon in 2019, he went on a date with a school district executive. “I’ll be the tall guy at the bar with the big smile,” he told her.

The relationship flourished. When Gamblin’s cancer returned in 2020 and required another operation, they prayed together. Then he kept running.

The couple married in fall 2022, and when he completed the Tokyo Marathon in 2023, his wife, Jan, thought their biggest running adventures were over.

But later that year, Gamblin told her about the World Marathon Challenge. The event would begin in Antarctica, where he would run 26 miles, or 42 kilometers, at a base near Novo Runway. He and around 60 other runners would then pile into a charter jet and run six more. Among her many concerns, Jan also had a pertinent point.

“You have a day job,” she said.

Another hurdle was the \$48,000 entrance fee. An acquaintance who specialized in fund-raising suggested starting a GoFundMe page. Gamblin laughed. “I’m a doctor,” he said. “Anyone with half a brain will say: Take two years off, save some money and do it.”

Gamblin found support from Roger Magowitz, a former mattress executive and cancer fund-raiser who had lost his daughter Melissa Smith to Covid in 2022 at age 34. Magowitz told Gamblin his

daughter had had a genetic liver disease. When he found out Gamblin treated liver cancer, it seemed like a sign. He pledged \$10,000.

“Take my daughter with you,” he said.

As more corporate backing came in, Gamblin set another goal: He wanted to raise \$250,000 for the Testicular Cancer Awareness Foundation. He hired a coach and used an Instagram account to track his progress.

Now all he had to do was train. Gamblin was never fast. But he is consistent: His splits are almost always negative, meaning he picks up steam as a training run goes on. It happens naturally. His mind calms, his body relaxes and he starts running faster.

On most days, he started at 4:30 a.m. When he thought about his goal all at once — seven marathons in seven days — it felt daunting. But when he broke it down into daily practice, he had a road map to follow. He created a seven-day calendar, filled with commitments and training runs, and then revisited it each

night, updating the eighth day away. “I don’t think about what I’m going to do today and tomorrow,” he said. “I’ve determined that.”

The process built confidence. The task before him would be grueling. After Antarctica, Gamblin would run in Cape Town; Perth, Australia; Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Madrid; Fortaleza, Brazil; and Miami. Sleep would come during long flights. In the decade since the World Marathon Challenge began, hundreds of people have achieved the feat. Some were accomplished marathoners. Others, like Gamblin, just wanted to think bigger.

The first marathon went according to plan. As did the second and the third. His legs felt strong, his mind clear, his spirit carried by a wave of adrenaline.

The pace was staggering. When each race finished, there was time for a shower and a meal, and then people piled into the plane and tried to sleep.

In Dubai, Gamblin finished the fourth race without incident. But when the group arrived in Madrid for Marathon 5, he felt something in his lower back: spasms. It might have been the hours on the plane. Or the pace. Or the course — the fifth race was on a slanted Formula 1 track. But when Gamblin embarked on Marathon 6 in Brazil, he knew for sure that something was wrong.

He was experiencing what some call the ultramarathoner’s lean. His back spasms were so severe that he kept leaning further to the right. Finally, he realized: He had to give in.

He finished a half-marathon in Brazil, picked up a pair of walking sticks, and with his back still ailing, gutted through a final half-marathon in Miami. His family was waiting at the finish line. Jan handed him his medal.

It was not what he had dreamed of, and if the goal was seven marathons in seven days, he had technically come up short. But then he remembered a message he had received from one of his cancer patients: The privileged get to choose their suffering.

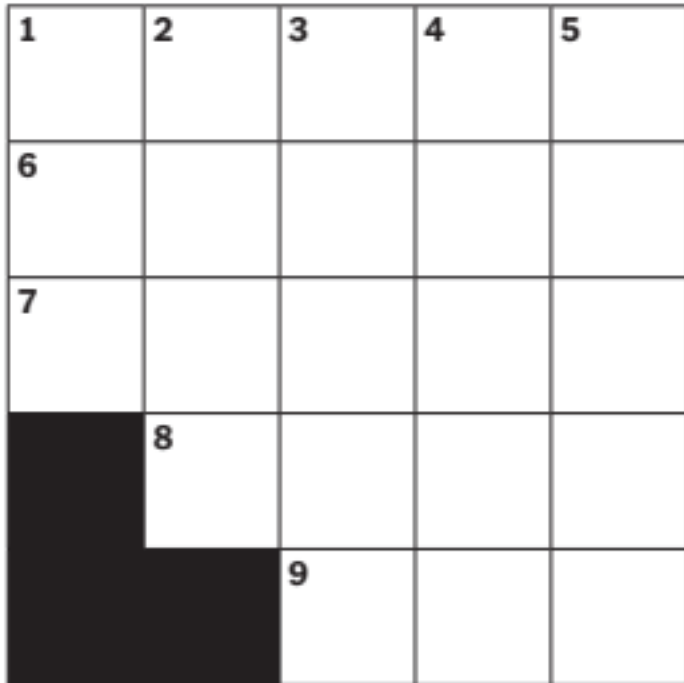
He had wanted to raise money for testicular cancer research, and he had wanted to push people to aim higher, but as he struggled through the final two half-marathons he realized the experience had done what he had hoped. It changed him.

He has become more deliberate in his daily life, more comfortable with failure and more intentional about surrounding himself with what he calls a culture of positivity.

In the days after his final race, he thought back to his own battle with cancer. It was then that he learned to practice what he preached. And now he felt the same sense of peace: The only way to know what you are capable of is to push to the ultimate limit.

“Don’t be afraid to come up short,” he said. “It’ll be much better than if you never set the goal at all.”

The Mini Crossword



3/5/2025
BY TRACY BENNETT
EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

- ACROSS**
- 1 Moon stage, like 8-Across or 2-Down
 - 6 Comedic actor ___ Baron Cohen
 - 7 Change
 - 8 See 1-Across
 - 9 Paper towel layer

- DOWN**
- 1 Educational TV spot, for short
 - 2 See 1-Across
 - 3 Misbehave ... or malfunction
 - 4 Beachcomber’s keepsake
 - 5 How nervous travelers arrive at the airport

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

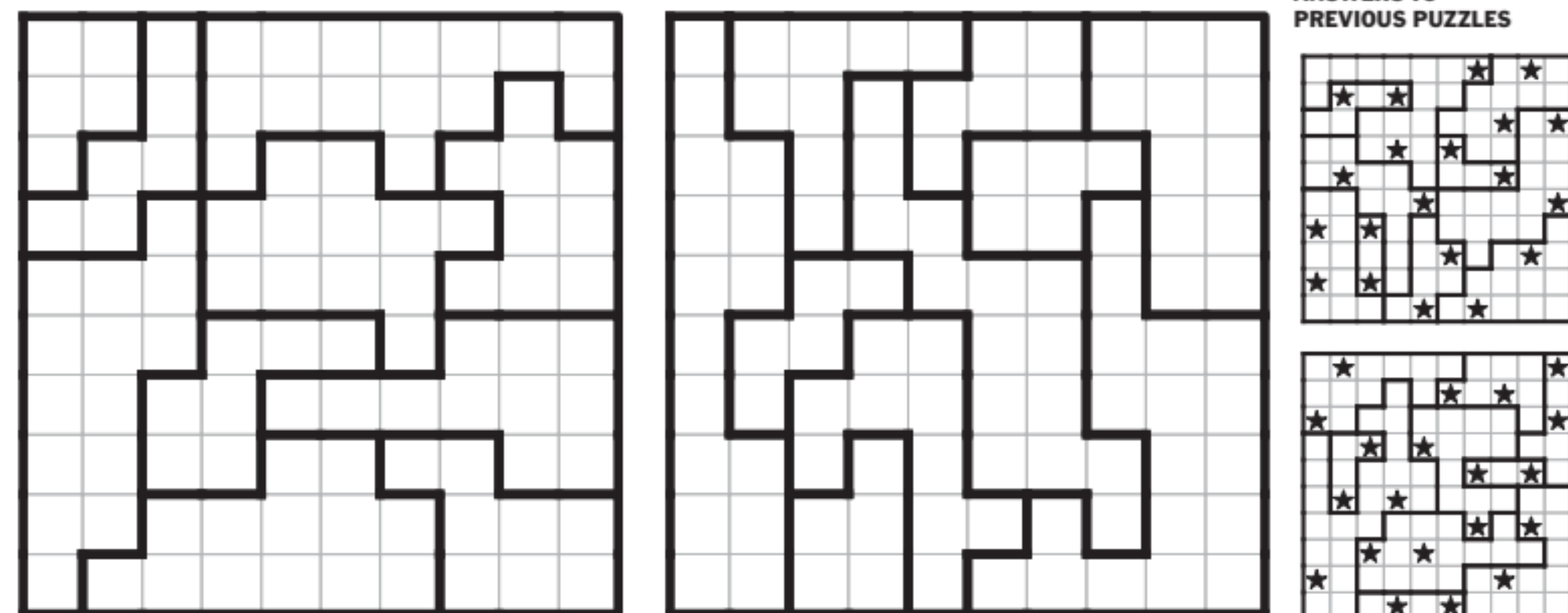


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Two Not Touch



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.
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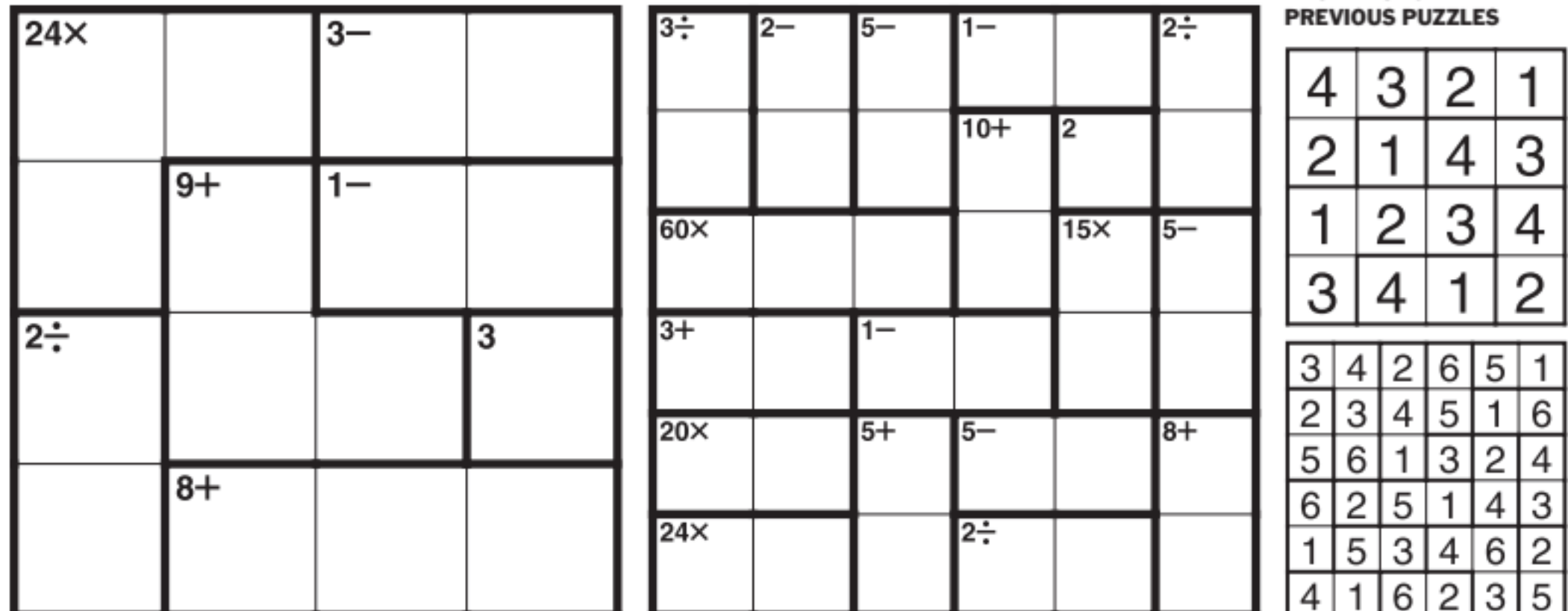
Brain Tickler

The word “dormitory” is commonly shortened by dropping its last five letters. What common words are commonly shortened by dropping these last letters?

1. USINE 2. ENADE 3. AULIN 4. OLINE

PUZZLE BY WILL SHORTZ YESTERDAY’S ANSWER The “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” lyricist claimed to have never actually attended a baseball game.

KenKen



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

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Crossword Edited by Will Shortz



- ACROSS**
- 1 “Adios, ___!”
 - 6 Texter’s “you tell me”
 - 9 Sweet braided bread
 - 14 Source of a pulse
 - 15 Modernizing prefix
 - 16 Ingredient in a Whopper
 - 17 Home of many champion marathoners
 - 18 “And just like THAT!”
 - 19 Small contribution
 - 20 Blowout victory, metaphorically
 - 23 Chichén (Mayan archaeological site)
 - 26 Latin “wolf”
 - 27 Hulking brute
 - 31 Wild backdrop for “Wuthering Heights”
 - 32 Biblical patriarch who begat Methuselah
 - 33 Lead-in to ever
 - 34 Device for taking notes?
 - 35 Verbal facepalm
 - 36 Message meaning “I can’t be reached right now”
 - 37 “Welcome Back, Kotter” role of 1970s TV
 - 39 Yusuf ____, adopted name of singer Cat Stevens
 - 41 Subtle summons
 - 42 Woman’s name that becomes another woman’s name when an “M” is added to the front
 - 44 Missouri tributary
 - 46 One part of a swimming pool
 - 48 Beat rapidly, as eggs
 - 49 Center
 - 50 Something of miner concern?
 - 52 Commotion
 - 53 A little cute?
 - 54 Comedy bit
 - 55 Broadway star LuPone
 - 57 Talent
 - 58 Big softy, perhaps
 - 60 Put through the self-checkout
 - 61 Research campus in upstate N.Y.
 - 62 With 66-Across, spooky property that might include a 20-Across and a 7-, 25- and 28-Down
 - 64 Went underground
 - 65 Exit key
 - 66 See 62-Across
 - 67 Country music’s ___ Young Band
 - 68 Buttonless shirt
 - 69 Carry-___
 - 70 Airport org.
 - 71 Intelligence org.
 - 8 Fermented, sweetened tea drink
 - 9 Dinghy or dory
 - 10 “You said it!”
 - 11 Two hearts, for one
 - 12 Fish in a garden pond
 - 13 “Reggedy” doll
 - 21 Cheer for a fútbol team
 - 22 Fireplace residue
 - 23 Caught on camera, say
 - 24 19:9 event that confirmed the general theory of relativity
 - 25 Commercial property left mostly vacant by hybrid work arrangements
 - 28 Restaurant offering delivery and pickup only
 - 29 Spinning, feathered lures
 - 30 Overplayed on stage
 - 38 Clever wit
 - 39 Actor McKellen
 - 40 Speedometer fig.
 - 41 Rotini and bucatini
 - 43 Detected
 - 45 Speech therapist’s concern
 - 47 Off-leash areas
 - 48 “You don’t have to explain your joke to us”
 - 51 Cloudbursts
 - 53 Scary sight for a red-bellied marsh mouse
 - 56 World’s most populous country as of 2023
 - 58 James of “The Godfather”
 - 59 Speed Wagon and Flying Cloud of old autodom
 - 62 Insurance option, for short
 - 63 Recombinant ___

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE



TRAVEL

Your idea of the ‘perfect’ resort beach is a lie

White sand and palm trees are being traded in for an oasis in a natural state

BY SARAH STODOLA

Let’s buck the trend, a local marine biologist suggested.

In 2018, as the Maldives, a nation of nearly 1,200 islands in the Arabian Sea, continued its transformation into a luxury tourist destination, the country’s handbook for resort developers called sea grass meadows in the country’s shallow lagoons “aesthetically unappealing,” suggesting that it was “very important from the tourist perspective that the growth of sea grasses is eliminated.”

Resorts on the islands were known to smother their meadows with sprawling sheets of plastic laid across the ocean floor in order to offer visitors aquamarine waters with endless sandy bottoms. Never mind that sea grass meadows are vital ecosystems for marine life and nearby coral reefs, or that they capture carbon in significant amounts from the atmosphere.

But at the 94-villa Six Senses Laamu resort, one Maldivian biologist wanted to “make a statement,” as Philippa Roe, the brand’s manager for regenerative impact, recalled.

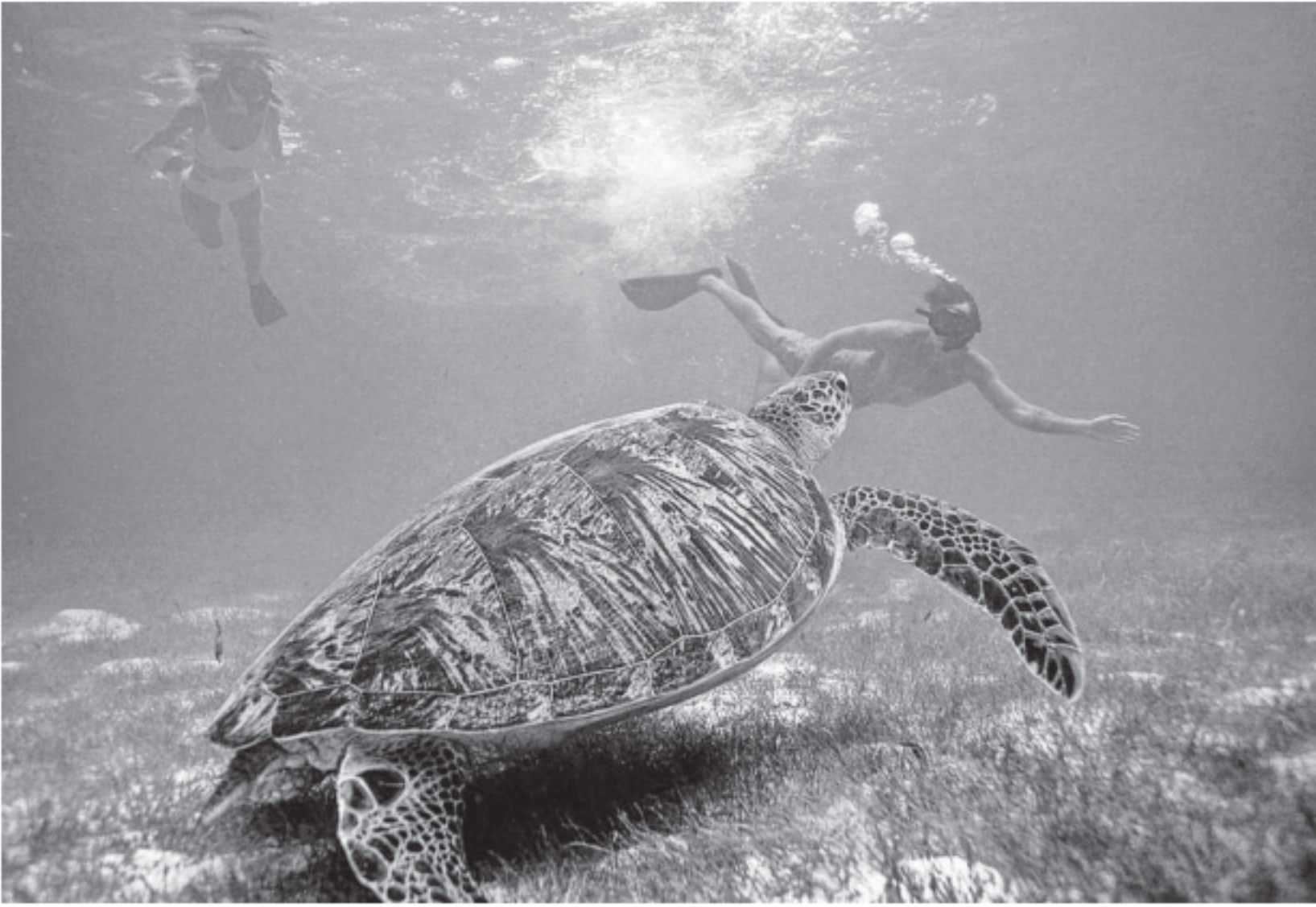
Instead of killing off sea grass, the resort encouraged it to thrive, Ms. Roe said, and now has a lagoon with “different hues of green and dark blue, rather just a plain monotone crystal.” The sea grass has become a draw that gives the resort a leg up over others in the area, she said, as it attracts marine wildlife to the waters surrounding the resort’s over-water bungalows, where guests can see stingrays, sharks and turtles from the sun loungers on their decks.



Instead of killing off sea grass, the 94-villa Six Senses Laamu resort, above, in the Maldives, allows it to thrive. Sea grasses attract marine wildlife like stingrays and sea turtles, below right. Below left, at the 20-bungalow Playa Viva resort in Mexico, vegetation between bungalows and the beach provides privacy and is a first line of defense during storms.



AVAILU, RYAN FORBES



MOHAMED AHSAN

The “perfect” tropical beach hardly needs to be described; it’s on the Instagram post, in the pages of a travel magazine: Fine white sand, coconut palm trees overhead, a gently sloping beach and unobstructed views out to sea. But in many cases — and especially at tourist destinations — that beach is entirely manufactured.

Now, a number of beach resorts around the world are embracing beach-scapes in their more natural states. Planting or preserving native vegetation, especially between the shoreline and buildings, and focusing on a healthy overall ecosystem, strengthens natural

defenses against the changing climate and provides habitat to native species, all while transforming travelers’ assumptions about what kind of tropical beach is worthy of a week’s vacation.

At the 20-bungalow Playa Viva resort on Mexico’s Pacific Coast, a native beachscape has been part of the property’s ethos since it opened in 2008. The resort has de-emphasized ocean views from the bungalows, instead framing sightlines to the sea with some of the 10 or so native plants that Playa Viva uses as a foundation for its grounds. Among them is the versatile sea grape with its robust root system, twisting branches

and large round leaves that can be pruned as bushes, shrubs or trees. The dose of vegetation between each bungalow and the sand provides privacy and serves as a first line of defense for Playa Viva’s buildings on a coast that sees its share of big storms.

“The conscious design was something I thought added to the experience,” said Alexandra Avila, a 37-year-old marketing executive from Miami who booked a three-night trip specifically because of how Playa Viva had been designed and built.

Two other resorts in development in the region have since hired Amanda

Harris, the permaculture specialist responsible for designing much of Playa Viva’s landscaping, to consult on their own native beachscapes.

“The thing each of these projects have in common is immersing guests in the luxury of nature while creating resilient ecosystems,” Ms. Harris said.

IN THE SEA

In tropical and subtropical climates, seaside developers have been replicating the artificial beach since the European seaside-resort model gave way to a tropical one in the middle of the last century. Out with the intricate ecosystems — mangroves, sea grass and shade-giving trees, especially — and in with the version guests expected: an image brought on by a newfound fascination with Polynesian scenery in the wake of World War II, namely those coconut palms and often, the white sand beach itself.

Across the globe, the result has often been devastating for shorelines’ defenses against the sea. “If you have a beach that was once, let’s say, mangroves and you clear it out, turn it into sand and plant some coconut palms, you’ve lost tons of structure, really complex, interwoven structure,” said Scott F. Jones, a coastal ecologist at the University of North Florida. “Your storm surge protection essentially vanishes, and your resilience to sea level rise goes down a whole lot, too.”

Scientists estimate that 35 percent of the world’s mangrove forests were lost by the end of the 20th century, while its sea grasses have declined by 29 percent. Both ecosystems are sustainability powerhouses; in addition to providing localized protection and biodiversity, they capture carbon in significant amounts from the atmosphere. Mangroves sequester around 10 times more carbon than mature tropical forests, while sea grass can pull in up to 15 times as much. Compared to them, the coconut palm provides little benefit.

The Six Senses Laamu resort in the

Maldives has started a campaign with the Blue Marine Foundation to get other resorts in the country to allow their sea grass to flourish. A quarter of them have since committed to preserving at least 80 percent of their sea grass. In the most recent version of the country’s handbook for resort developers, released in 2023, the language calling sea grass “aesthetically unappealing” has been removed.

ON THE LAND

Onshore, the coconut palm is almost ubiquitous, and it does offer some benefits. Coconuts are exquisite natural containers of water and food, with fibers that can be used for rope and woven goods.

But on modern shorelines, these trees do little to prevent sand erosion or block wind and they provide scant shade, an increasingly valuable commodity in a warming world. They are also nonnative to many of the world’s most popular

Resorts in the Maldives were known to smother their sea grass meadows with sprawling sheets of plastic on the ocean floor.

beach destinations. When Christopher Columbus made his first landfall in the Americas, on an island today that is part of the Bahamas, there were no coconut palms in the Caribbean. Europeans would bring them later.

At the Song Saa Private Island resort in Cambodia, the few palm trees blend into diverse vegetation that has been regenerated from the ground up, after the small island on which it sits was previously cleared for a fishing operation. The resort replanted and regrew everything, including mangroves, using samples from nearby islands. The 24 rooms were then constructed around the regenerated landscape instead of the other way around.

Song Saa’s owner, Melita Koulmandas, is particularly passionate about the area’s mangrove forests. “These forests are vital to the surrounding ecosystems, as they are one of the most effective carbon-capture ecosystems on earth, plus they stop erosion of the coastlines,” she said.

Such efforts can sometimes become part of a larger preservation project. Iberostar, the Spanish hotel brand that runs more than 85 coastal resorts around the world, has since 2017 turned native vegetation into policy. It has planted more than 16,000 mangroves across its properties as part of a larger sustainability project. In one example of many, its Iberostar Selection Albufera Resort on the Spanish island of Mallorca, which opened in 2023, prioritized native vegetation that requires little water, reducing the property’s overall water use.

Other efforts are less voluntary, with some resorts restoring native vegetation not by choice but by law. In early 2024, the Sandpiper Bay Resort in Port St Lucie, Fla., was ordered to plant 2,800 mangrove trees on its property after cutting down nearly 1,000 of them without a permit. Wyndham, which owns the resort, did not return requests for comment.

Ms. Harris, the permaculture specialist at Playa Viva, notes that diverse vegetation can serve multiple purposes in addition to shoreline protection. It creates privacy between the rooms, shade for guests in a hot climate, and a more interesting overall aesthetic, which, as she put it, invites visitors “to step into nature, to flow between the natural and built world.”

The ocean is just part of the equation. “It doesn’t have to be this panoramic view,” she said, adding that it can be “what we call windows of sight onto the beach.”

If you’re paying with American dollars, your trip is on sale

BY ELAINE GLUSAC

Last August, a hotel room in Europe priced at 200 euros was about \$224. Today, travelers spending American dollars would pay only \$208.

On the rise since last autumn, the dollar is strong, compared with a number of other currencies, including the euro, the Japanese yen and the Canadian dollar. And President Trump’s tariff threat is only making it stronger.

For travelers using the dollar, the exchange rate bonus makes trips abroad extra appealing.

“We’ve seen an increase in international bookings as travelers look to maximize the value of their dollar abroad,” said Michael Johnson, the president of Ensemble, a travel agency consortium. “The strength of the U.S. dollar has made destinations in Europe, Asia and South America more attractive, as travelers can get more for their money.”

In these dynamic and unpredictable times, whether the dollar will remain strong is anyone’s guess. To understand the fluctuations of the foreign exchange market and how and where to take advantage of it, we asked travel and financial experts to weigh in.

STRONG NOW, UNCERTAIN FUTURE

A number of factors influence the value of the dollar. Among them, said Michael Melvin, the executive director of the

master of quantitative finance program at the University of California San Diego, are economic growth and geopolitical risk.

In recent years, “The U.S. has had exceptional economic growth, relative to other countries,” Mr. Melvin said, noting that the higher interest rates imposed by the Federal Reserve to combat inflation only made the dollar more attractive to investors.

International conflicts such as those in Ukraine and the Middle East also lead to investments in U.S. Treasury bonds. “The U.S. dollar has a safe-haven role to play in uncertain times,” Mr. Melvin said.

Talk of tariffs has created more volatility. When 25 percent tariffs were recently threatened against Canada and Mexico, their currencies initially plunged against the dollar. They have since recovered after postponements were announced, but they still offer good value.

Alex Cohen, a senior foreign exchange strategist for Bank of America, expects the dollar to remain strong for the first half of the year as the new administration’s policies take effect.

THE OUTLOOK FOR TRAVELERS

The exchange rate benefit largely affects foreign travel purchases like food, gifts and hotel bills, rather than airfare, particularly for those flying on Ameri-



VANNIR SAAL

can carriers, where pricing is in dollars.

Travelers are noticing the potential for savings. Since November, bookings have been up 65 percent, compared with the same period last year at Luxe Voyage Travel, based in Clermont, Fla., according to its owner, Cristina Cunha, a member of the Envoyage global network of advisers.

“Clients are feeling more confident about traveling abroad, thanks to the strengthening U.S. dollar and post-elect-

tion stability,” Ms. Cunha said.

For those who have already booked foreign trips, the dollar bonus is an invitation to indulge, said Peter Vlitass, executive vice president of partner relations for Internova Travel Group, a travel services company with more than 100,000 travel advisers.

“Historically, when the dollar is strong, we have seen travelers who are already committed to their trips try to ‘buy up’ and get better value for their

dollar,” Mr. Vlitass wrote in an email.

Adrian Mooney, the director of sales at the hotel and golf club Kilkea Castle in County Kildare, Ireland, said that for American guests, the exchange benefit is going to extras like spa services and horseback riding.

“The strong dollar is giving guests more spending power on the ground,” Mr. Mooney said.

BENEFIT OF EXCHANGE RATES

If you have funds in dollars, make sure your credit card does not charge a fee for transactions in foreign currencies, advised Kathy McCabe, the host of two public television shows “Dream of Europe” and “Dream of Italy.”

When using the card, pay in the local currency when vendors ask if you want to purchase the transaction in dollars or in foreign currency.

“Always choose the local currency,” Ms. McCabe said. “This will avoid dynamic currency conversion, which is a service that converts the purchase to your home currency at a marked-up exchange rate.”

She pointed to a warning by the European Consumer Organization that called the practice a “scam,” noting that studies had found the practice raised prices between 2.6 and 12 percent for those who chose the converted currency.

When you need foreign cash, with-

draw it from a bank-owned A.T.M., said Laura Lindsay, the global travel trends expert with Skyscanner, a flight comparison site, because bank A.T.M.s offer a better exchange rate and lower fees than private ones.

WHERE TO STRETCH YOUR BUDGET

Among countries where the U.S. dollar goes further, Japan is a particularly good value as the yen — currently going for 152 yen to the dollar — has been declining against the dollar for the past four years, according to Mr. Melvin of U.C.S.D.

“Japan has been on sale for U.S. visitors,” he said. “It costs a third less to go to Japan than just a few years ago.”

Expedia found Osaka to be among the cheapest hotel destinations for April travel, averaging about 26,878 yen a night, or \$175. T.

Last year at this time, a dollar bought about 17 Mexican pesos. Today, it buys more than 20.

The dollar has also been gaining on the Canadian dollar in the past year, going from 1.35 Canadian to 1.42 for \$1.

Keep an eye out for sales. For example, through March 3, the houseboat rental company Le Boat is offering a deal that saves travelers the normal 13 percent tax on weeklong rentals on the Trent-Severn Waterway in Ontario, a 52 Places to Go pick this year. Seven-night trips start at 3,359 dollars (\$2,359).



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THE ART OF COLLECTING

TEFAF Maastricht



COURTESY OF ADAM WILLIAMS FINE ART



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Amid old masters, fare for the young

TEFAF organizers are courting the next cohort of collectors

BY TED LOOS

In the art world, getting younger people to look at very old paintings and sculptures has proved challenging. How can a delicate Renaissance sculpture compete with the immediacy of artists posting on Instagram about work they're doing right now?

The art fair put on by the European Fine Art Foundation in Maastricht, the Netherlands, has taken some concrete steps to attract younger collectors. The latest edition of the fair will run March 15-20 at the Maastricht Exhibition and Conference Center with 273 dealers on hand.

Although the fair is always chockablock with old masters and other artworks made before the 20th century, it has increased the presence of modern and contemporary work over the years — if you can't beat 'em, join 'em — which now comprises around 30 percent of the offerings.

"Because of our participation, and a few other contemporary art dealers, we see more younger collectors at TEFAF every year," said Nathalie Obadia, a Paris dealer who is showing at the fair for the fourth time.

She added that the younger cohort is especially noticeable on the weekend, since those collectors are more likely to have full-time jobs.

The booth of her namesake gallery, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, which also has a branch in Brussels, will feature "Le Dernier Dimanche" ("Last Sunday") (2024), an oil by the French-born painter Johanna Mirabel, and "The Red, the White and the Blue" (1964), an oil by the American abstract artist Shirley Jaffe, among around 30 works by eight artists.

Obadia said that it was precisely the eclectic, centuries-spanning art offered in Maastricht that worked for her, and for younger clients.

"Collectors are really curious to know contemporary art better, and in a way, Art Basel is too specialized," she said. "The mix at TEFAF is a great introduction."

It is also a reassuring context for buyers of any age to branch out, Obadia said. A couple of years ago at Maastricht, she noted, an old master collector who does not frequent contemporary art fairs stopped by her booth and ended up buying a sculpture by Wang Keping, a Chinese-born artist who now works in Paris.

Other contemporary specialists at this year's fair include Marianne Boesky Gallery of New York and Galerie Lelong & Co., which has headquarters in Paris and a branch in New York. Both are among the 37 first-time exhibitors.

As part of the push toward involving younger patrons, fair organizers are emphasizing the pleasures of multigenerational collecting in families with a panel discussion on March 14 featuring Ilone and George Kremer, collectors of Dutch and Flemish old masters, and their son Joël Kremer, who has helped them create a virtual reality museum that allows others to experience their trove of treasures.

"Recently, we launched a web version of the museum on our website, allowing visitors without a VR headset to explore the collection," Joël Kremer said in an email. "In addition, we've opened a new virtual gallery space, where we are currently showcasing the 24 works acquired since the museum's launch in 2017."

Another digital innovation had a test run at last year's Maastricht fair and at last year's New York edition of TEFAF, which takes place in May. A select few collectors were offered a special guide to the fair, the Insider's Guide to Collecting — a "secret map," said Hidde van Seggelen, chairman of TEFAF's executive committee.

Getting access to the digital map — part of TEFAF's Emerging Collector Program, its effort to develop younger buyers — is by invitation only, and galleries decide who can have one.

"The dealers can invite their young clients," said van Seggelen, who is a contemporary art dealer in Hamburg, Germany. "They can explore the fair with something that has been curated with them in mind."

The highlights for the new map were curated by the American decorator Remy Renzullo. Van Seggelen added that the selected works were "at a slightly lower price point" than the most blue-chip pieces, to get across the point of accessibility.

Asked what some of the highlights were, van Seggelen kept mum — the first rule of the secret map is, apparently: Don't talk too much about the secret map.

One dealer of old master paintings, Patrick Williams of Adam Williams Fine Art in New York, said that he was seeing lots of interest from younger collectors even without a special map.

"TEFAF absolutely has more young and interested people attending, especially New Yorkers," said Williams, 36, the son of the gallery's founder.

"We're seeing more action from people," Williams said.

Century spanning
Above, "Portrait of Johan Claesz Loo" (1650) by Frans Hals, among the best-known painters of the Dutch Golden Age, will be brought to TEFAF Maastricht by Adam Williams Fine Art in New York. Above right, "The Red, the White and the Blue" (1964), an oil by the American abstract artist Shirley Jaffe, which will feature at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia booth.

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THE ART OF COLLECTING



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Beneath the city, a hidden history

MAASTRICHT, THE NETHERLANDS

Deep underground lie vast subterranean spaces with colorful pasts

BY A.J. GOLDMANN

Travelers know Maastricht, tucked along the southern border of the Netherlands, for its cobbled streets, stately 17th-century townhouses and the remnants of its fortifications, including bastions, towers and medieval gates. But some of the city's most eye-catching locations are underground.

These subterranean sites are among the roughly 500 quarries scattered throughout Limburg — the hilly region of the Netherlands that's home to Maastricht — and Wallonia, in neighboring Belgium. There is evidence of mining activity here dating to Roman times and the underground limestone quarries

have been in use since around 1300.

Long after limestone ceased to be cost-effective as a building material — the Maastricht quarries were fully abandoned in the 1920s — these sites have taken on new roles. During World War II, some served as air raid shelters for the local population and artistic treasures from Dutch museums.

"The only thing all these structures have in common is that they're underground," explained Jos Notermans, a member of the Menno van Coehoorn Foundation, which helps preserve the Netherlands' old fortification systems. "They each have their own story and characteristics," he added.

Notermans has long been drawn to the world beneath Maastricht and its environs. "Like a lot of youth in Maastricht I was attracted by the dark underground corridors. I didn't do any mischief, but I started studying," he said in a phone interview.

He isn't the only one fascinated by the area's subterranean features. According to the SOK, a study group affiliated with the Royal Society of Natural History in



Limburg, there is evidence of guided excursions through the region's quarries dating back to the 17th century, at least.

Nowadays, most of the caves are off limits, with trespassers subject to hefty fines. However, an official company, Maastricht Underground, offers several tours of these otherwise inaccessible lo-

city's defenses in the wake of the Siege of Maastricht by Louis XIV of France. Recently restored, the fort sits on the St. Pietersberg hill. Beneath it lies a network of tunnels that was the world's largest subterranean complex until the 20th century, according to the SOK.

When the fort was constructed, its gallery walls were whitewashed to reflect the light of lanterns, and they still glow brightly as visitors pass through with modern lamps. The brick fort has an ingenious and efficient system of embrasures, slits in the walls for musketeers to shoot at potential invaders, and its cannons were capable of hitting specific targets up to 1,600 feet away and 10 times that distance to intimidate an enemy that tried to take the hill.

Of the 20,000 tunnels that once made up the limestone quarry beneath the St. Pietersberg hill, roughly half are intact today. The North Caves, beneath Fort Sint Pieter, are filled with charcoal drawings and doodles left by the caves' various workers and visitors throughout the centuries. One of the largest de-

Treasure hunt
Top left, on the southern edge of Maastricht, Fort Sint Pieter sits on St. Pietersberg hill above a network of tunnels. Top right, during World War II, the old Waldeck Casemates tunnels were turned into air raid shelters. Left, among the charcoal drawings in the North Caves is a depiction of the mosasaur, whose skull was discovered there in the late 18th century.

HISTORY, PAGE S3

Artists share their visions for a better world

MAASTRICHT, THE NETHERLANDS

Myths and rituals help address social issues in a Dutch museum's show

BY NINA SIEGAL

A two-legged unicorn pulls a wooden chariot draped in purple velvet. Nearby, a bejeweled gold dog dressed in a purple and pink jacket plays next to a laundry line, where a film is projected onto a dangling sheet, drying in the wind.

This is the utopian vision created by the Sinti artist Morena Bamberger in an art installation she calls "Sonnekaskro Djiephen," or "a life of gold." It imagines a world in which her people, who used to be nomadic, could still travel anywhere on wooden wheels.

Bamberger grew up in a tightknit Sinti community living in a small cluster of trailers in the town of Herkenbosch, in the southeastern Netherlands. "You leave the door open, the coffeepot is always warm," she said. "It's like a family of 35 people."

Today, European laws restrict the Sinti and Roma ethnic groups from continuing their traditional nomadic lifestyle, but Bamberger can still dream of a world where her community can roam free.

Her installation is one of more than 60 artworks featured in the exhibition, "Dream On," on display at the Bonnefanten museum in Maastricht through March 30. The exhibition focuses on a recent trend in contemporary art, said a co-curator, Roxy Jongewaard, in which artists try to imagine a better world.

"Over the past five years, we've acquired a lot of artists that are activists, but in a very hopeful way," she said. "We've come out of a time when institutional criticism and critique was a very big deal, and now we see that there's more artists who change the conversation to say, 'What if?', 'Is this possible?'" and "Can we dream up a better future?"

Often, Jongewaard added, these artists use the languages of fairy tales, myths, folklore and songs to explore their utopian dreams, or other forms of expression that are "very deeply rooted in our collective identity, in the biggest sense of the word," she said. "They use them, and they rephrase them, and it becomes a whole new thing, through which we can see the world of the future."

Celien Govaerts, the other co-curator, said the exhibition's title was a playful reinterpretation of a common expression. "We often use this phrase, 'Dream on,' kind of like, 'You do you,'" she said. "It's a way to put people down a little bit, to say they're crazy. We wanted to re-



PETER COX



ALIA FARID/BONNEFANTEN



COURTESY MALGORZATA MIRGA-TAS; FORSAL GALLERY FOUNDATION, WARSAW; FRITH STREET GALLERY, LONDON; AND KARMA INTERNATIONAL, ZURICH

claim this saying, for a positive reason."

The artworks all come from the museum's permanent collection, and they are by emerging and famous contemporary artists, such as Grayson Perry, Laure Prouvost and Otobong Nkanga.

The oldest artist in the show, Betye

Saar, from Los Angeles, is 98, and the youngest artist is Sofia Dubyna, 24, who moved to the Netherlands to study art from her hometown, Donetsk, Ukraine, before it was seized by Russia in 2022.

Mythical creatures and monsters

play an important role in the exhibition's artworks that also address serious topics like decolonization, climate change and feminism. Humor and fantasy are part of the imagery, but the subject is often social change.

A 2019 video work by the Kuwaiti

Puerto Rican filmmaker Alia Farid, titled "At the Time of the Ebb," for example, captures a longstanding tradition: an annual ritual on Qeshm, a small island off southern Iran, celebrating the arrival of the fishing season. Participants dress up as camels, horses and birds and dance by the sea to honor the gifts of nature and then feast.

"The meaning has changed over time," Jongewaard explained, "but you can see how they're trying to adapt this celebration so that it will last another 1,000 years."

The exhibition presents several intricately detailed textile works in lush colors by the Roma artist Malgorzata Mirga-Tas that were also featured in her solo Bonnefanten show, "This is not the end of the world." Among them is a portrait of the leading Roma activist Lalla Weiss, who has spent years raising public awareness about the genocide of Roma and Sinti people during World War II, a part of the Holocaust that has often been overlooked.

Weiss is presented seated in a proud posture on a mountainside, with the material folds of her glittering gold and pink skirt poking out from the canvas.

By invoking such positive referents of activism, and combining them with bright colors and lighthearted imagery, Jongewaard said, contemporary artists in recent years — instead of "doom-mongering" — have added an element of joy to the way they explore political ideas.

"In a society that is so polarized — people are scared, people feel pressure and negativity all around them — artists are shifting towards a more positive and empathic tone of voice, trying to reach out," she said. "In making a dreamlike narrative, you might think it was a form of escapism, but it's not."

"How they process their feelings about their identity is straying further from reality," she added, "so they're becoming more fanciful."

The Sinti artist, Bamberger, said she had long felt that people in the modern era had become too removed from their more adventurous urges, and that she wanted to use art to provoke a return to the wilder side of our imaginations.

"We were once wolves living in a pack in the forest, howling free; we were free beings, autonomous," she said, employing a fairy-tale metaphor. "But unfortunately, we became these little Chihuahuas, being fed and petted at home, and so we became very lazy."

She wants her art to awaken in viewers a sense of vitality and a connection to their deeper purpose of life.

"I ask people to look past this illusion, and to go into themselves, to think about their gifts, and to ask, what does it mean to truly live?" she said. "How do you know that you're alive right now? How do you know what is real?"

Imagining
Clockwise from top: an installation by Morena Bamberger called "Sonnekaskro Djiephen," or "a life of gold"; a portrait of the Roma activist Lalla Weiss by Malgorzata Mirga-Tas, a Roma artist; and a still image from "At the Time of the Ebb," a video made by Alia Farid, a Kuwaiti-Puerto Rican filmmaker.

THE ART OF COLLECTING

HISTORY, FROM PAGE S2
picts the mosasaur, a prehistoric reptile that went extinct around 66 million years ago, and whose skull was discovered in these caves in the late 18th century.

During World War II roughly 800 artworks were deposited here, protected from bombs by a hundred feet of mountain in a custom-built storage facility that was known as the Kluis, or vault, a concrete bunker with a climate control system. Arguably the most famous painting kept here was Rembrandt's "The Night Watch," which was detached from its canvas, rolled up and stored in the Kluis for three years.

The Zonneberg Caves, part of the same quarry system underneath St. Pietersberg hill, are laid out more regularly than the tortuous North Caves, with some tunnels more than 600 feet long. "It's more like a New York street grid," explained Ed Houben, 55, who has given underground tours in Maastricht since 1995.

The complex also contains the oldest charcoal markings found in Maastricht's quarries. On his tours, Houben points out two pictograms that date from 1551. And during World War II, the Zonneberg Caves were readied for a potential mass evacuation, with a well, a functioning medical center, a bakery, a chapel and enough room for the city's entire population of roughly 50,000.

DEFENSIVE END

At the west end of the city center lies a network of 247 tunnels known as the Waldeck Casemates. This labyrinthine defensive system, built in the late 16th century and enlarged and fortified over the next 200 years, was designed to deter and repel invaders.

Soldiers would sit and observe plates of water or dried peas on a drum skin; if there were vibrations on the water's surface, or the peas started shifting, they could tell the enemy was approaching by burrowing underground. Miners stationed in the casemates then dug new tunnels of their own and filled them with gunpowder to ambush the intruders.

During World War II, many of these tunnels were turned into air raid shel-



JEAN JACQUES SPIJERS

ters. They were outfitted with wooden benches and lit with bicycle lights, with space for up to 25,000 people.

HISTORY, DECLASSIFIED

The strangest and most eerie of Maastricht's underground sites is the former NATO control center located under the Cannerberg, a hill just outside town. "We call it a mountain, but it's obviously not the Himalayas," said Houben of the roughly 350-foot hill on the Dutch-Belgian border.

The NATO Headquarters Cannerberg / Joint Operations Center was a sprawling complex used during the Cold War. From 1954 to 1992, NATO coordinated West German air defense and military operations — the German border lies less than 20 miles from here — from this underground control center whose five

miles of corridors once housed offices, control rooms, two restaurants, a barbershop and a small golf course with artificial grass. "They had everything you need," said Notermans.

Though officially classified as secret, the headquarters' existence was well-known, especially after activities ramped up here in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

"It was probably the most intensely used cave in the whole area because until '92 you had 250 to 300 people working there on a daily basis, 365 days a year," said Notermans.

"People knew soldiers were going there. Occasionally, a helicopter landed there. The secret wasn't that there was a military operation, but what they were doing inside," he added.

Rumors circulated about nuclear war-

heads being stored there. Though untrue, those rumors might have served as deterrence. The NATO caves were also intended to be a shelter in case of a Soviet attack.

"They made preparations to keep people safe against N.B.C. — nuclear, biological and chemical weapons — and all those provisions have been dismantled. You can still see the air locks, but they don't function anymore," Notermans said.

Most of the infrastructure was stripped in the early 1990s, but as you tour the ghostly corridors named for the first seven letters of the NATO alphabet — Alpha Street to Golf Street — you can still view, by the glare of your flashlight, the ruins of the impressive complex, which include the original generator rooms and other areas that have been

partially reconstructed, including control centers, an officer's club called the Flintstones bar and the all-ranks watering hole, the Mushroom Club.

Notermans said that he had noticed a different type of interest in the caves since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. "People are starting to ask: Could this all still be used if necessary in our times?" he said.

"We are lucky in Maastricht that we have underground structures," he said. "You can compare that to the Metro in Kyiv, where people go to be safe against the bombs, but at the same time we don't have any more protection against N.B.C. weapons," he added.

There are tours of all five sites during this year's TEFAF Maastricht. Visit www.exploremaastricht.nl/en for dates and to book tickets.

Protected space
During World War II about 800 artworks were stored in the North Caves, beneath Fort Sint Pieter, including Rembrandt's "The Night Watch," which was detached from its canvas, rolled up and kept there for three years.



BVLGARI
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THE ART OF COLLECTING

Egon Schiele’s art draws new audiences

VIENNA

After a show in Seoul, the Expressionist’s work is part of TEFAF Maastricht

BY REBECCA SCHMID

The explosion of modern art and scientific thought in Vienna at the turn of the 20th century holds an enduring fascination. And perhaps no painter better captures the sense of liberation and latent crisis of that era — the era of Freud and Mahler — than Egon Schiele.

While his self-portraits may be the first works that come to mind, more than half of Schiele’s output on paper are depictions of women.

Drawings and paintings by Schiele have been subject to bitter legal disputes following theft and confiscation from Jewish owners during World War II. But that has not affected interest from collectors and museums, which remains robust, if not on the upswing, as Viennese modernists find an audience in Asia.

Earlier this year, the National Museum of Korea in Seoul presented “Vienna 1900, The Dreaming Artists — From Gustav Klimt to Egon Schiele.” The show, in collaboration with the Leopold Museum in Vienna, drew some 80,000 visitors during its first month. Back at home in Vienna, from March 28 to July 13, the Leopold will present “Changing Times. Egon Schiele’s Last Years: 1914-1918.”

And at this year’s edition of TEFAF Maastricht in the Netherlands, the Vienna gallery Wienerroither & Kohlbacher will include in its booth a drawing of Schiele’s muse and girlfriend, Wally Neuzil, and a watercolor of the artist’s youngest sister, Gertrude. Jane Kallir, the art historian and founder of the Kallir Research Institute will co-curate the upcoming show at the Leopold with Kerstin Jesse, one of the museum’s senior curators. In a video interview from New York, Kallir said that although the artist “doesn’t fit into any predetermined movement, every generation seems to



LEOPOLD MUSEUM, VIENNA



LEOPOLD MUSEUM, VIENNA

Recognition
Above from left, Egon Schiele’s “Portrait of Wally Neuzil” (1912), and the artist’s “Self-Portrait with Chinese Lantern Plant” (1912), both at the Leopold Museum, Vienna.

discover him anew and project onto him their emergent concerns as they enter adulthood.”

The fascination of young viewers with Schiele is not a coincidence, as his best-known work was created at an early age. “People often forget that he wasn’t yet 20 in the beginning of 1910 when he began doing these really radical red nudes,” she said.

His work emerged in the wake of Freud’s theories about sexuality and revolutionary movements not just in visual art but also design and music. Born in 1890 in the state of Lower Austria, Schiele was admitted to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts at age 16. In 1918, having established himself as a leading artist, he died of the Spanish flu.

His penchant for depicting adolescent figures led to friction with the Austrian establishment. In 1912, Schiele was held in prison for almost a month on accusations of having abducted and sexually assaulted the teenage daughter of a retired naval officer who spent the night at his house outside Vienna. While those charges were dropped at trial, he was ultimately sentenced briefly for an offense

against public morality for exposing young visitors in his studio to his sexually explicit drawings.

For Kallir, the artist faced a “double standard” in a society that “on the one hand pretends sex doesn’t exist and on the other has a teeming underworld of prostitution.” By 1914, although Schiele has since been faulted for becoming more bourgeois and conventional, Kallir said that the artist had learned “the rules” that Klimt had more closely respected and was compensated financially “in the manner to which he was always entitled.”

“Suddenly, like Klimt, he has a studio full of models and is dashing off these sheets very quickly,” she said, adding that “there are drawings which are absolutely breathtaking in their perfection.”

The 1912 drawing of a standing, seminude Wally Neuzil that will be on sale in Maastricht most likely emerged after the artist’s imprisonment.

“There is a definite stylistic change in Schiele’s approach between the first months of that year and the second part,” Kallir said. “He becomes more aggressive; he’s using a softer pencil; and

the lines become much firmer and stronger.”

Lui Wienerroither, who together with his business partner Ebi Kohlbacher, has made their gallery a foremost destination for acquiring works by Schiele, Klimt and Oskar Kokoschka, said that the drawing of Wally “reveals a human being as she is, also in her seductive qualities.”

Wienerroither said he saw a connection between the position of her head and her direct gaze in the drawing to the famous oil painting “Portrait of Wally Neuzil” that hangs in the Leopold Museum and was the subject of a protracted legal battle. The painting’s original owner, the art dealer Lea Bondi Jaray, had corresponded extensively with Otto Kallir, Jane Kallir’s grandfather, who introduced the Viennese modernists to New Yorkers.

Otto Kallir’s first show of Schiele at the Gallery St. Etienne in 1941 sold not a single work. He wasn’t able to sell a Schiele painting until a decade later, when the Minneapolis Institute of Art bought a portrait of Albert Paris von Gütersloh it still owns today.

Last year, Wienerroither & Kohlbacher collaborated with Jane Kallir on a tribute to her grandfather with a show that traveled from Vienna to their partner gallery in New York, Shepherd W&K Galleries. Otto Kallir’s original gallery in Vienna, now the “Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder,” was simultaneously the site of an exhibit that explored the space’s history from 1923 to 1954.

Schiele’s work was declared degenerate by the Nazis, who singled out Expressionist art, and did not reassume his place in Europe until after the war. Rudolf Leopold played a central role, gathering Schiele works for a 1955 show at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and eventually consolidating his collection at the Leopold.

For Mr. Wienerroither, Schiele’s “confrontation with the self” paved the way for contemporary Austrian artists such as Arnulf Rainer and Elke Silvia Krystufek, (both of whom he represents). As the world becomes “increasingly conservative and restrictive,” he said, “Schiele has as much to say today as he did back then.”

Fare for the young



COURTESY VANDERVEN ORIENTAL ART

tor, emphasized how far ahead he worked on fair presentation — he said that he already had some material lined up for the 2026 edition of TEFAF Maastricht.

This time, his booth includes a roughly four-foot-tall bodhisattva figure in limestone made during the Northern Qi dynasty some 1,500 years ago.

“It’s especially rare in this size,” van der Ven said in a phone call during a visit to New York; he was about to look at some similar works at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Van der Ven noted that last year, he sold a comparable piece, also from the Northern Qi dynasty. “It went to a Chinese collector for roughly \$800,000,” he said. “There are not that many Chinese buyers who come to Maastricht, but those who come are highly serious.”

The London gallery Rolleston, which specializes in English furniture and Asian works of art, particularly from China and Japan, may offer traditional art, but at least one of its works may strike a chord with young newlyweds: an elaborately decorated gilt-copper and lacquer norimono made around 1857 in Japan’s Edo period.

A norimono, sometimes known as a palanquin, is a boxlike enclosed chair in which a bride would be carried to the groom’s family home after a wedding. Lifting this norimono, with its 15-foot-long carrying beam, requires several attendants. And its interior has its original wallpaper, according to James Rolleston, the gallery’s director.

Rolleston said that the gallery found the piece at a London auction. “It wasn’t well cared for,” he said. “This is where one’s skills as a dealer come in. We cleaned it up and conserved it.”

Rolleston was founded in 1955 but this is the first year it has participated in TEFAF Maastricht. Among its other offerings are a pair of George I needlework-covered armchairs (circa 1720) known as the Wanstead House Chairs.

Rolleston said that the chairs were from an original set of 12 and that they had an “unbroken provenance,” meaning that there was complete documentation of previous ownership — always a major plus, and sometimes difficult to find with older works.

But the norimono may get a large share of visitor attention just for its size. “It literally doesn’t fit in our gallery,” Rolleston said, adding that before the fair, it was sitting in storage.

It seemed to be an unlikely candidate for a spontaneous purchase for a private collector. “I can’t imagine whose house it would fit into,” Rolleston said. “It’s the size of my first flat.”

Its dimensions may restrict possible buyers, but you never know. “We’re earmarking this for a museum,” he said. “But we don’t rule out a collector buying it.”

Serious buy
Vandervan Oriental Art, a specialist in Chinese works of art in ‘s-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands, will be showing a roughly four-foot-tall bodhisattva figure in limestone made during the Northern Qi dynasty some 1,500 years ago.

BUYERS, FROM PAGE S1
ple under 45 since the pandemic,” he added. The gallery has shown in Maastricht for the better part of 30 years, and this year will show around 20 works.

In his experience, the subject of an old master painting makes a difference for younger buyers. He said that religious scenes did not sell as well. “Part of the job is to find more secular imagery,” Williams said. “Blood, sex and mythology are the themes that are working.”

A measure of sex, or at least of flesh, is found in one of the works Williams is bringing, “Diana and Actaeon” (circa 1615) by the Flemish painter Jacob Jordaens, which depicts a scene of Roman mythology from Ovid’s “Metamorphoses.”

In the story, Diana, goddess of the hunt, and her nymphs are caught bathing in the forest by the mortal hunter Actaeon. Flustered, she splashes water on him and he is turned into a stag. Later, he is preyed upon by his own hounds and killed.

Williams is also bringing “Portrait of Johan Claesz Loo” (1650) by Frans Hals, among the best-known painters of the Dutch Golden Age, and “Portrait of a Young Man” (1775) by Elisabeth Vigée le Brun, one of the handful of women painters from her era to have made it into the historical art canon.

Adam Williams Fine Art has been showing at TEFAF for decades, but a gallery of even longer standing is Vandervan Oriental Art, a specialist in Chinese works of art in ‘s-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands. Vandervan was among the founding galleries of the fair, which held its first edition in 1988.

Floris van der Ven, the gallery’s direc-

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THE ART OF COLLECTING



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COURTESY OF MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY, NEW YORK AND ASPEN / DANIELLE MCKINNEY

Turning from classic to contemporary

TEFAF embraces works by newer, younger and more modern artists

BY FARAH NAYERI

The European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht describes itself as a fair that spans 7,000 years of art history. For a long time, those 7,000 years mainly encompassed pre-20th-century objects: Egyptian figurines, Roman busts, African masks and Rococo clocks.

In the last decade, responding to a major shift in collecting patterns, TEFAF has embraced contemporary art in a big way. This year, a quarter of its more than 270 exhibitors are galleries of 20th- and 21st-century art.

They include the first-time exhibitor Marianne Boesky, a New York-based contemporary-art gallerist whose roster of artists includes Frank Stella, who died last year at 87; the artist and filmmaker John Waters; the Egyptian-born

artist Ghada Amer; and the American painter Suzanne McClelland.

Why TEFAF? “It’s a fair that I’ve always been really intrigued by and heard amazing things about and never attended, so it’s been on my bucket list to get there,” Boesky, the gallery’s founder, said in an interview. “It’s not as big a lift as Art Basel, for example, in terms of expense, and it’s an audience that we wouldn’t otherwise be able to present this work to.”

Boesky said TEFAF’s much broader collector base and its deeply European

identity made it “scary for us,” but added, “I’m in my 29th year of the gallery, and every day has required bold moves to survive in this business.”

Her gallery’s maiden TEFAF booth will feature eight new paintings by the American artist Danielle McKinney. They will be paired with watercolors and etchings by another American painter of atmosphere: Edward Hopper.

Boesky said she chose 43-year-old McKinney — a Black artist who started painting five years ago after beginning her artistic career as a photographer — because of her “reverence” for painting and for European painting.

Showing her alongside Hopper is not to compare the two, but to demonstrate that “these two artists are able to create a mood through color and light,” she said, adding that there were already more interested buyers than there were McKinney paintings headed for TEFAF (their price range: from \$60,000 to \$150,000).

Boesky grew up surrounded by art. Her father, Ivan Boesky — a Wall Street financier who served time in prison for insider trading in the late 1980s — was deeply interested in culture, she recalled: He collected the sculptors Alberto Giacometti (at one point acquiring an edition of the famous “Le Nez”) and Auguste Rodin, as well as the 19th-century painter Édouard Vuillard.

“He responded to very gutturally tough work, so he would come home with a really challenging Giacometti sculpture,” she recalled. “My mother would want to put it in the closet. And that was the only thing that I’d want to look at.”

She became a primary dealer in 1996, with a mission to represent and nurture emerging artists. Today, her clients are wealthy art lovers who will spend the equivalent of “what they might buy a watch for, or a fancy coat” on a work by an emerging artist, she explained.

While some of her artists have stayed with her, Boesky noted, others — such as Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara, and Lisa Yuskavage — have moved on to bigger galleries. A few of her current artists — including McKinney — were being courted by bigger galleries.

One modern and contemporary gallerist who is a TEFAF regular is the French dealer Kamel Mennour. He first exhibited at TEFAF Maastricht in 2019. “It’s the only fair in the world with such an exhaustive offering,” he said, adding that he enjoyed having his stand “positioned across from an exhibitor of antique statuary, or of Japanese porcelain.”

TEFAF collectors spend not just one afternoon, but three or four days at the fair, and have “a much wider spectrum,” he said. “They stroll around and dig into very, very different things.” He noted that Mennour’s sales at TEFAF had “crescendowed” over the years and that the 2023 booth — a face-off between artists Daniel Buren and Anish Kapoor — did very well.

This year at TEFAF, Mennour is showing a small bronze Giacometti figurine, a gouache on paper by the American painter Joan Mitchell, and a sculpture by the Kosovar contemporary artist Petrit Halilaj.

The question is whether TEFAF’s identity — as the only major international fair dedicated to antiquities, old masters and period furniture — is being eroded by its embrace of the contemporary.

Mennour said the transition to newer art was “necessary for the health and survival of the fair, because otherwise, it would have become much too niche.”

Alexander Dorey Flint, a director at the White Cube gallery, concurred.

“I don’t think that one damages the other,” said Dorey Flint, who is oversee-

ing White Cube’s booth at TEFAF Maastricht for the second year in a row.

He said he did not believe that TEFAF’s scholarly profile and the “breadth of knowledge and expertise” of its exhibitors were “affected by the participation of further contemporary galleries.”

White Cube’s booth at TEFAF Maastricht this year will feature paintings by Georg Baselitz and Tracey Emin (priced at about \$1 million each), and a work by the Vietnamese-born artist Danh Vo, which incorporates two fragments of ancient Roman marble statuary (priced at about \$400,000).

TEFAF’s particular appeal is that “we meet a lot of new people,” said Dorey Flint: collectors from Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and other parts of Europe, but also “a large number of American collectors who travel in,” he said. Maastricht is “not geographically convenient for them to attend. The quality of what is there draws Americans to it.”

This is not a particularly prosperous time for the art market, which is in a two-year downturn. Sales at the world’s three biggest auction houses in New York in November were down 40 percent from 2023 and 60 percent from the market peak in 2022.

A number of prominent names have shut down, including the Marlborough Gallery, a postwar art dealer; Cheim & Read; and Simon Lee.

Soaring inflation and operating expenses are very much to blame. Boesky said the cost of crating and shipping artworks had risen 30 percent every year since the start of the pandemic, making participation in art fairs — which typi-

Pairing Above, “Yesterday,” by the American artist Danielle McKinney; far left, “Gloucester Houses (Houses on a Hill),” by Edward Hopper.

His paintings will be paired with works by McKinney at the maiden TEFAF booth of the New York gallerist Marianne Boesky, below.

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cally cost her gallery \$150,000 to \$200,000 each — exorbitant.

Still, statistics show that of the \$65 billion in annual sales generated by the global art market each year, art dealers and galleries account for a 55 percent share. And they happen to do an increasing proportion of their business at art fairs.

Mennour described fairs as “a necessary evil,” because although his gallery was one of Paris’s most visited, there was less visitor traffic at the four physical spaces he runs in the French capital, which host a regular rotation of carefully curated exhibitions.

Boesky had a similar assessment. She explained that in the post-Covid era, travel had certainly resumed, but clients were remote-working and not living in cities full time — so there were fewer New Yorkers going on Saturday afternoon gallery crawls, for example.

At her peak, Boesky recalled, she was doing 12 fairs a year, meaning an average of one a month. Now, she’s doing half as many — including the three Art Basel fairs, and no longer including any of the Frieze fairs.

TEFAF is her newest addition to the mix. “We need to bring the art to people more than ever,” she said.

THE ART OF COLLECTING

How to make sure that art wasn't stolen

AMSTERDAM

Ask lots of questions and do research to ensure an object's authenticity

BY NINA SIEGAL

TEFAF Maastricht, the European Fine Art Foundation's spring fair, is known for the high quality of artworks its dealers display each year, and for its extensive vetting procedure, which ensures that the treasures on offer have been verified as authentic.

That process always includes a check on the work's provenance — the artwork's history of previous ownership. Even so, said Will Korner, TEFAF's head of fairs, there are always things that fall through the cracks. "Objects are removed every year, at basically every fair, regarding issues of provenance," he said.

Any collector who is prepared to spend a considerable sum on a painting, sculpture or artifact should make sure that they do their own independent research, he added.

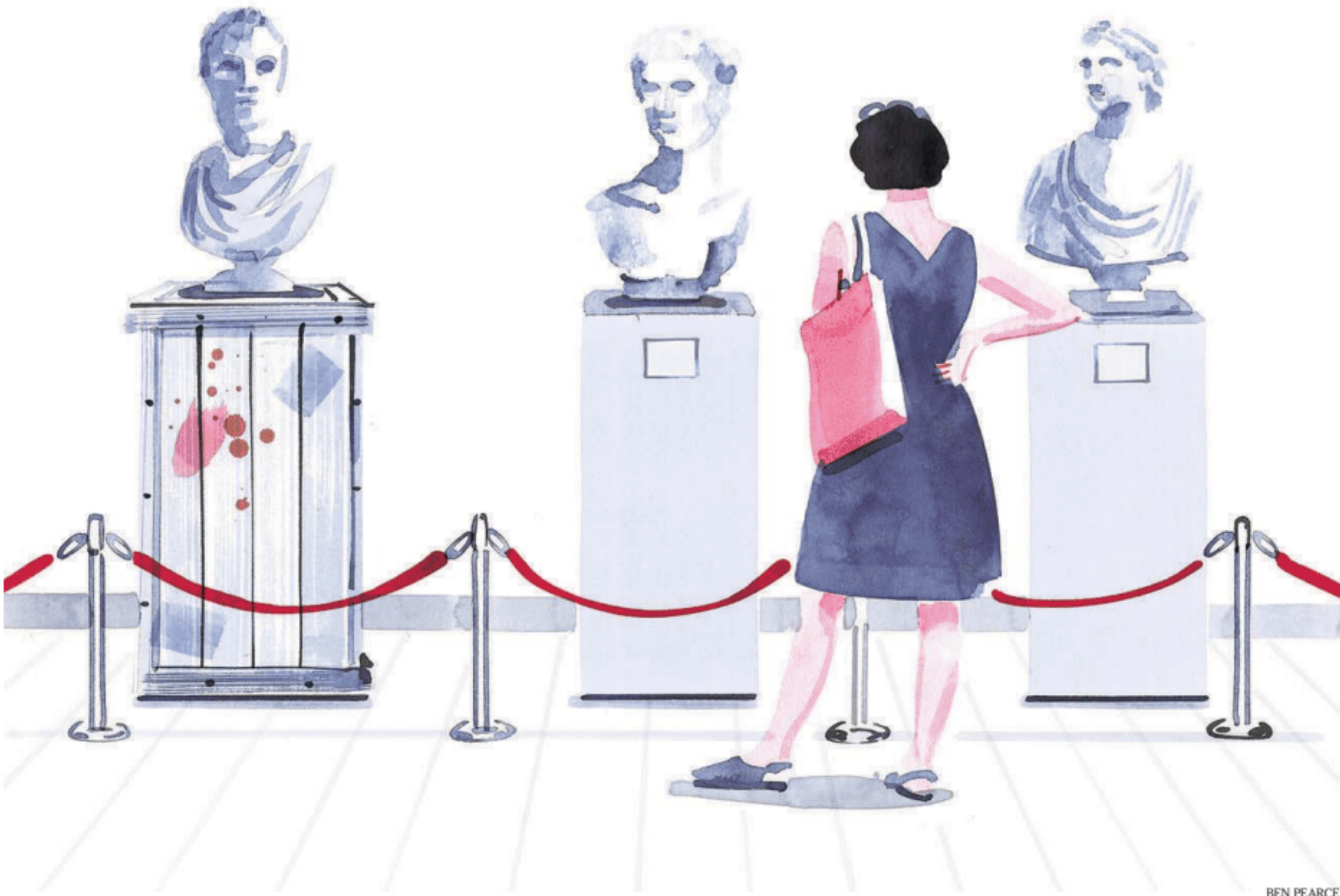
"They can feel confident that a standard has been applied that is leading in the market, but I would always encourage every single buyer to conduct their own checks," he said in a phone interview. "That's something that any art lawyer or art consultant would tell them to do."

TAINTED BEAUTIES

During World War II, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi art agents looted untold millions of artworks and cultural objects. Many artworks still have not found their way back to their rightful owners, or their beauty has been tainted by a history of theft.

Collectors of the type of works that the Nazis favored, particularly old masters and Impressionist paintings, should be aware that what they are buying could have a wartime history. The same is true for artifacts and antiquities that may have been looted or stolen in other global conflicts, as well as ceremonial objects like masks and other heritage from formerly colonized nations.

To avoid buying a work of art with a problematic history, and to guard against potential future claims, art provenance specialists say it is crucial to do some digging before you buy. Although new information comes to light every day, the best way to protect yourself is to ask the right questions, request as much data as possible, and independently verify that the information you get is accurate and up-to-date.



BEN PEARCE

The prospect of trying to discover the entire history of the 350-year old painting you want to buy might seem daunting. But Perry Schrier, a World War II cultural heritage adviser for the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, said collectors do not need to hire a private researcher or an art detective for this work — in most cases.

Provenance research is a fast-growing field within the art world, and today there are many independent experts available for hire. But some preliminary research that you can do on your own might quickly rule out any need for such a specialist, or help you learn what kind of specialist you need.

"There's a fair amount you can already do from your living room, from your laptop," Schrier said. "Later, there may be some things you have to go find in the archives, and that will be a second level, but the websites are very convenient nowadays and a great place to start." Many resources are available to the public for free, or for a small fee.

A basic provenance check may take a couple of hours or about half a day, but it should include a few steps that either put the item in the clear or raise red flags. If anything strikes you as potentially fishy, it is time to engage with additional experts, Schrier said.

If you do engage a provenance researcher, look for one who specializes in the area of research particular to the

work you are buying — for example, Dutch old masters, German Expressionists or Congolese masks — and can speak and read the languages relevant to any archival research.

The important thing is to make sure you do due diligence before you buy, said Amelie Ebbinghaus, a director of the Art Loss Register, a London-based organization that helps the art trade track lost, looted or stolen objects. And make sure you request all the documentation the dealer or owner already has about the artwork, including information about the sources they used, before putting any money on the table.

"That may seem obvious, but quite often people ask for it right after they buy the work," she said, "and that doesn't give them the same protection."

"START WITH THE OBJECT"

The first step will be to have a good look at the piece of art, both front and back. "Always start with the object," advised Richard Aronowitz, global head of restitution for Christie's international auction house.

"The back of the painting, or the stretcher, might bear some indication of its ownership history," he said. "You're looking for labels, stamps, inventory numbers, inscriptions," as well as any sign that such labels have been removed.

Nazi owners sometimes marked their

works with a swastika or an eagle on the back, and that would be an obvious red flag. (Conversely, such signs can be misleading, Aronowitz said, as forgers have also used them to make a fake work seem genuine by suggesting that it has been through many hands.)

More likely, you will find labels of the gallery owners who handled the work in the past. "You're looking for clues, evidence," Aronowitz said, "but deciphering evidence is difficult." If you notice something unusual, you can often look it up on the internet, or consult an expert.

Next, Ebbinghaus recommended plugging a photo of the work into a search engine like TinEye, or an app like Google Lens, which will scour the internet for billions of images to find any potential match. "You'd be surprised by what you can find there from what has recently been sold on the market," she said.

ASK QUESTIONS

Once you have found out what you can, ask the seller, or current owner, for all the information that is currently known about the work's previous owners.

Most sellers at a big fair like TEFAF, or at one of the top auction houses such as Sotheby's and Christie's, can be expected to provide you with a list of all previous owners. Sometimes known as a provenance chain, the list will indicate where the work has been from its cre-

ation to the present, and the dates when it changed hands.

In reality, provenance histories are often incomplete. Ask questions if there is no ownership history between the years 1933 and 1945, if the work changed hands multiple times during that period or if the prewar owners' names are not listed.

If you are buying at a smaller fair, from an auctioneer or at a flea market, you will likely have to do this work yourself. And even if a lengthy provenance history provides you assurance that the seller has done his or her homework, Ebbinghaus said that it is wise to check this material to verify it for yourself.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

You can do this using key databases that list missing or stolen art. The Art Loss Register is the largest, with more than 700,000 items that people have listed as missing or stolen. A search on a single artwork costs \$100, and yearly subscriptions are available for those aiming to check more items.

The German Lost Art Foundation runs two databases that are useful in provenance research: its Lost Art Database lists 126,000 objects that were seized from Jewish citizens between 1933 and 1945; its Proveana database displays the results of its research projects related to Nazi persecution and theft of Jewish property.

The Commission for Looted Art in Europe in London runs the Central Registry of Information on Looted Cultural Property 1933-1945, a website and database, also known as Looted Art, which offers an object search of more than 25,000 pieces.

The ERR Database has an inventory of more than 40,000 art objects taken by Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, the Nazi task force that looted art and archives, then took them to occupied Paris.

And the German Historical Museum in Berlin, a museum devoted to German culture and history that describes provenance research as one of its core tasks, offers three databases focused on Nazi plunder.

If your preliminary research uncovers anything suspicious, alert the seller, said Korner, the TEFAF fairs director. Always keep documentation of your research, because if an unforeseen claim arises in the future, you can demonstrate your due diligence.

"There isn't a register of all the art on the planet," Ebbinghaus said. "There are gaps, and as soon as an artwork has a gap in the provenance, there's a risk that it could be claimed at some point in time."

On the other hand, she added, the chance is not great: "We check more than 400,000 items a year and less than 1 percent of those turn out to be problematic."

Wanting a seat at every table for TEFAF

The new managing director envisions a broad role for the foundation

BY FARAH NAYERI

When more than 270 gallerists convene in Maastricht, the Netherlands, this month for the 38th edition of TEFAF, they will be greeted by a new managing director: Dominique Savelkoul, a seasoned Belgian arts administrator who took the helm in September. It's her first time running an art fair and working in the commercial arts sector.

At the European Fine Art Foundation, she replaces Bart Drenth, who left in May 2023 after his social media posts in Dutch about "woke culture," left-wing politics and Muslims were reported in the international press.

Savelkoul, 61, has run, or helped run, many cultural institutions in her decades-long career. In the late 1990s, she was head of marketing and development for the London Philharmonic Orchestra, which is also the resident orchestra at the Glyndebourne opera festival. As director of communications at the National Gallery in London, she was charged with improving the visitor experience in a museum with more than 2,300 paintings from the 13th to the 19th centuries.

Then came a complete change of scene: the industrial Ruhr region in northwestern Germany. There, in the early 2000s, Savelkoul was part of the team that launched the Ruhrtriennale, now one of Germany's major festivals of performing and visual arts.

Returning to Belgium, she merged the Flemish opera and ballet companies into Opera Ballet Vlaanderen. Belgium was "famous for contemporary dance," but "no one was talking about the Flemish ballet," she recalled in a video interview. Savelkoul convinced the celebrated contemporary choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui to lead the organization's ballet company, which now has an abundant contemporary program. (Cherkaoui left in 2022 to lead the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève.) Savelkoul is best known for her recent



COURTESY OF TEFAF/TITUS SIMOENS

revamp of the Mu.Zee, the museum of Belgian modern and contemporary art in Ostend, where she led the redesign and reopening during the pandemic. (The museum is now closed for a fully funded, three-year redevelopment project.)

The conversation has been edited and condensed.

Why did you accept the TEFAF job? You've never worked for a fair or for the commercial sector in the arts.

What was really attractive to me is that the final F in TEFAF is not for fair, but for foundation. It's the European Fine Art Foundation. So it's not just a commercial fair.

As a foundation, it's a very different way of thinking. You're talking about a community, and you want to serve the

community, make things easier for them.

TEFAF is not for profit. We, of course, have to have sound finances and a buffer, as every commercial organization does. But it also means that as soon as we have money, we want to reinvest it straight away to make TEFAF the best.

As a foundation, I really think we should be sitting at every single table where important decisions are made: whether it's The Hague for discussions around Dutch VAT, or the European Union for E.U. customs discussions, or UNESCO. We have so much knowledge and experience, and this is quite a complicated world, so let's be generous and share this information.

What makes TEFAF so different, as a fair, from Art Basel and Frieze?

It's this diversity that we bring; we al-

ways say 7,000 years of history are exhibited at TEFAF. More and more, people are cross collecting. We have been championing this from the very beginning. We've always had all of these disciplines coming together. That's at the heart of the success of TEFAF.

TEFAF is the only international fair focusing mainly on pre-20th-century art, objects and furniture. Modern and contemporary art now represent a third of all stands. Do you not worry that TEFAF is losing its identity and specificity?

I really do believe in this variety, in this diversity, in people coming in from different angles and starting to discover things. I think we really have to make sure the balance is right and stays right.

Your predecessor left in May 2023 after the publication of controversial remarks. Do you still feel a malaise around his departure, or is that part of the past?

I think every organization has these kinds of periods. I accepted this role being fully aware that, now maybe more than ever, there was a need for stability and continuity. I knew it.

I'm here to talk about the future, and to be empathetic toward what might have gone wrong. I'm happy to listen. But let's move forward.

The art market is in a downturn. What are your thoughts?

The beauty of TEFAF is that we can cater to everyone, and we are not that dependent on what exactly happens in the market. Those extremely high prices are all over the press, and everyone is talking about them, but I think the real market is below those price levels. That's where everything is happening.

Even in the toughest times, quality will always be a major reason to buy or not to buy something. And there again, we at TEFAF happen to be on the right side of the story.

Museum clients and visitors are very important to TEFAF. Why?

If the Metropolitan Museum of Art is at TEFAF and buys, it gives a very strong signal to other museums and to individual collectors. Last year we had more than 650 curators visiting TEFAF Maastricht, and more than 40 groups orga-

nized by museums coming with their trustees or their collectors. That really means a lot to us.

Quality is our main aim. Having so many museums buying at the fair is just a measure that we are able to deliver this quality.

How did you transform the museum in Ostend?

I was there for five years, and came in as a kind of crisis, interim management. I arrived in the building three days before the Covid lockdown. First impressions are really important. I remember thinking, "My God, this building is a nightmare. It's so complicated, and people are lost."

Mu.Zee is the only museum of Belgian art of the last 150 years. But the collection wasn't shown: It was in the cellar, because they were showing eight small exhibitions in the galleries.

We closed the museum, and with the team, we emptied it. We took out the walls, the curtains, the carpets. We did everything ourselves, with our own budget. Working with a fantastic, green and sustainable architect, we were able to strip the building, only have two big exhibitions a year, and put the museum's own collection in the central building — so, at any stage visiting Mu.Zee, you would have a history of Belgian art.

What are the qualities that make a great arts administrator?

It helps not to have a big ego, because we work in a world full of egos. If you look back at what I did and why I was able to succeed, it was never about me. It was about putting the institution or the organization first, when there was a crisis or a challenge.

I prefer to work under the radar and take my time and prepare and listen. Also, you have to dare to question everything — the good things and the bad things. Why are we that successful? Why did that not work out?

When you start somewhere and come from another background, you can ask all of those questions — whereas if you go from one Belgian museum to another Belgian museum, you're supposed to know what you're talking about. You don't have this honeymoon period where you are very free to move.

In charge

Dominique Savelkoul became the new managing director of the European Fine Art Foundation in September last year.

THE ART OF COLLECTING



Liberation “The Eye,” by the surrealist artist Juliana Seraphim, which will be shown at TEFAF Maastricht.



Life's work The installation “Sproutime” by Leslie Labowitz-Starus will be at the West Den Haag museum in The Hague.

The return of ecofeminism

A form of artistic activism is back as an approach to life in the 21st century

BY KERIDWEN CORNELIUS

In 2018, the curator Catherine Taft began researching an exhibition on ecofeminism, assuming it would be a retrospective on a philosophy that had fallen out of fashion. Ecofeminism emerged from environmental, feminist, social justice and antinuclear activism in the 1970s.

The movement resists traditional systems of patriarchy and capitalism that it contends subordinate women and exploit nature. It advocates for embracing collaboration, recognizing humanity's dependence on ecosystems and respecting all life as sacred.

But in the 1990s, critics accused ecofeminism of stereotyping and falsely equating women and nature. The backlash caused the movement to go dormant. Then Taft noticed a shift. The COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests shined a light on social and environmental justice, leading to a re-emergence of ecofeminism.

“People are using the term again and are excited to embrace ecofeminism as an approach,” Taft, deputy director of the Brick gallery in Los Angeles, said in a video interview. Consequently, she focused the show on the present and future, and reframed ecofeminism “as an expansive strategy for survival in 21st century life,” she said.

Taft's exhibition, “Life on Earth,” opened Feb. 28 in The Hague, Netherlands. At the same time, TEFAF Maastricht's Focus initiative is showcasing two historic and contemporary ecofeminist artists. Together, these shows illuminate the many facets of this evolving movement.

JULIANA SERAPHIM

Fresh from bringing an ecofeminist exhibition to Frieze London 2024, Richard Saltoun Gallery is dedicating a TEFAF Maastricht show to the surrealist artist Juliana Seraphim, referred to in their news release as “an early pioneer of contemporary ecofeminist discourse.” Born in 1934 in Jaffa in southern Tel Aviv, Seraphim fled to Lebanon when the 1948 Arab-Israeli War broke out. As a painter, she was criticized by her fellow Palestinian artists for not addressing their cause.

“Juliana was much more focused on women's liberation,” said Niamh Coghlan, director of Richard Saltoun Gallery, in a video interview. “She felt that women were the most beautiful forms and the most sensitive, empathetic creatures on Earth. That was what she wanted to paint.”

Seraphim, who died in 2005, saw a world marred by wars, inequalities, harsh living conditions and heartless social interactions. She wanted to show people what she called “a woman's world,” infused with love, beauty, sensitivity and entanglement with nature.

In her work “The Eye,” Seraphim painted women wearing insect wings and diaphanous dresses laced with capillaries, gliding through buildings resembling stone hoodoos. “Dance of Love” portrays sunken machines and buildings beneath a female form triumphantly springing from a flower amid pink swirls and a stylized snake. In “Flower Woman,” a sphinxlike woman's head envelops petals and a seahorse, while butterfly wings cascade down her back and blossoms fill her breast. All three works are included in the Maastricht show.

“You can see her playing with the way that the environment is the human

body,” Coghlan said. “We've made a divisive point of saying that humans and the natural world are very different. But they're the same thing. Juliana was interested in pulling them back together.”

GJERTRUD HALS

When the Norwegian fiber artist Gjertrud Hals casts about for inspiration, her mind catches elements of women's culture and the environmental destruction she has witnessed. Growing up on the remote island of Finnøya, in the 1950s, she witnessed the overfishing that collapsed the population of fish and whales, forcing many families, including

ses. “Part of my work is to show that working together and finding communities where you can make a change really does make a difference,” she said.

As such, a 24-hour online/in-person symposium on ecofeminist art will accompany the show on March 21. It will follow the sun from the Loop gallery in Seoul to West Den Haag to the Brick, encompassing communities of participants around the globe. At West Den Haag, the exhibition will feature nearly 20 artists from Colombia, Nigeria and other countries, many of whom merge eco-friendly lifestyles with their art.

The art collective Institute of Queer Ecology presents videos of caterpillar chrysalises to envision how capitalist extractivism — depleting nature and exploiting human labor to maximize profit — could be reconstituted, butterflylike, into a regenerative system. The artist Yo-E Ryou created a soundscape and underwater maps that chronicle her experience learning sustainable seafood harvesting from the female free divers of Jeju Island, South Korea.

Leslie Labowitz-Starus's installation grew out of her 40-year art-life ecofeminist project, “Sproutime,” which blends

a sprout-growing business, education at a farmers market, performance art and installations. At West Den Haag, she juxtaposes sprouts, soil and posters from women's peace marches to illustrate how war destroys and contaminates soil, leading to food insecurity.

The show gives viewers “openings to look at the world from a feminist perspective, which is about care, nurturing and not being aggressive,” Labowitz-Starus said in a video interview. “We're saying there's another way to be in the world, and our consciousness has to evolve.”



Captured “After the Storm,” 2024, by Gjertrud Hals, is meant to offer hope.

hers, to leave Finnøya.

While living in the Norwegian fjords, Hals watched as a spectacular nearby waterfall was captured for hydropower. A year later, she and her husband launched a successful campaign to save a watershed from being dammed. Simultaneously, the feminist marches of the 1960s and the related push to elevate women's crafts to fine art motivated Hals to learn weaving and embroider feminist quotes.

Today, Hals said she is less political. But ecofeminist themes will subtly saturate her solo exhibition at TEFAF, presented by Galerie Maria Wettergren. Her fishnetlike paper vessels conjure the shapes of seashells and wombs while honoring the feminine tradition of fiber arts and speaking indirectly of womanhood and nature. “On one hand, they are vulnerable; on the other hand, they are strong,” Hals said in a video interview.

In a nod to humans' interconnectivity with nature, Hals muddles the natural and the human made. She fashioned shoes from roots and molded Japanese mulberry bark paper into small human heads, which she will display among similar-looking mushrooms plucked from trees.

In “Golden,” a copper net weaving has “caught” golden herrings and other animals that Hals cut out from the insides of Norwegian caviar mayonnaise tubes, perhaps questioning the value placed on the living world. In “After the Storm,” shells and pearls seem to have washed up into a wire net, offering a hopeful message. “We are in a political situation more and more, not only in Norway but in Europe and generally,” Hals explained. “And we are hoping that one day there will be a time after the storm.”

LIFE ON EARTH

In curating “Life on Earth: Art and Ecofeminism” — which debuted last fall at the Brick in Los Angeles and is on show at West Den Haag museum in The Hague through July 27 — Taft aimed to portray ecofeminism as an intersectional movement. She also wanted to inspire hope amid multiple planetary cri-

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