

LAWEEKLY

L.A. COUNCILMEMBERS
ARRESTED IN HOSPITALITY
WORKERS STRIKE

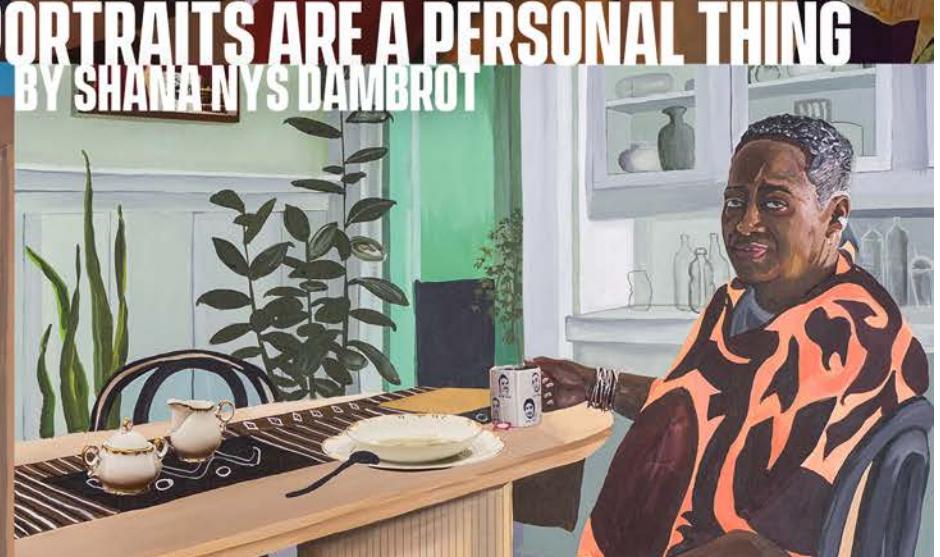
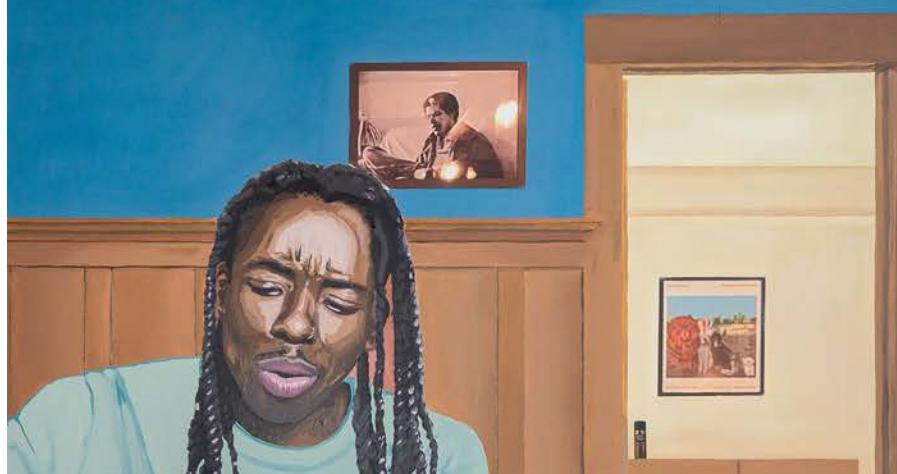
SEARCHING FOR SOUL FOOD
WITH CHEF ALISA REYNOLDS

MAN ON MAN IS HERE
TO PROVOKE

JUNE 30 - JULY 6, 2023 / VOL. 45 / NO. 34
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PAINTER COREY PEMBERTON'S PORTRAITS ARE A PERSONAL THING
BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT



GO EDITORS' PICKS

ARTS

THURSDAY, JUNE 29

Francesca Gabbiani Mutations at Wilding Cran Gallery. Drawing inspiration from her experience living in Los Angeles, Gabbiani has been captivated by the phenomena and mythology of wildfires, returning to them over and over in an effort to dissect their psychological impact upon our social, environmental, and emotional landscapes. In a liminal space between enchantment and trepidation, her intricate collages evoke fragility and beauty, along with the pervasive anxiety of climate disaster. 1700 S. Santa Fe, downtown; Opening reception: *Thursday, June 29, 5-7pm; On view through July 29; free; wildingcran.com.*

Framing Agnes at Philosophical Research Society. Chase Joynt's acclaimed film focuses on a pioneering transgender woman who participated in an infamous gender health study at UCLA in the 1960s. Her clever use of the study to gain access to gender-affirming healthcare made her a fascinating and celebrated figure in trans history. This playful cinematic exercise features an all-star cast of trans performers, artists, and thinkers including Angelica Ross (Pose), Jen Richards (Mrs. Fletcher), and Zackary Drucker (Transparent). 3910 Los Feliz Blvd., Los Feliz; *Thursday, June 29, 7pm; \$10; prs.org.*

FRIDAY, JUNE 30

Glenn Kaino: Aki's Market at Japanese American National Museum. Inspired by Akira and Sachie Shiraishi's small neighborhood market (1957-70) in East Los Angeles, artist Glenn Akira Kaino (Akira's grandson and namesake) creates an exhibition exploring the transgenerational trauma from the World War II Japanese American incarceration experience through the stories of Kaino, his family, and the community. In a virtual reality recreation and a sculptural installation of a contemporary store, Kaino takes up collective memory where the archival bleeds into the imaginary and where the most advanced technology serves the most personal past. 100 N. Central Ave., Little



Tokyo; *On view June 30 - January 28; \$16; janm.org.*

Death of a Salesman at Casa 0101. Arthur Miller's iconic two-act tragedy set in late 1940's Brooklyn is directed by Corky Dominguez in a mostly Latino cast. The central character, Willy Loman, is experiencing an epic battle against time, exhaustion, and encroaching mental and psychological debility. He desperately must find a way to reconcile his life and the deep pain it has caused his family. Winner of the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Tony Award for Best Play, the work's infinitely expandable universe of meaning remains, somewhat tragically, as relevant today as when it was first penned. 2102 E. 1st St., Boyle Heights; *Performances through July 16; \$25; casa0101.org.*

SATURDAY, JULY 1

Christopher Hartmann, Acaye Kerunen, Matt Saunders at Blum & Poe. In Nightswimming, Hartmann's paintings portray situations imbued with conflicting moods of intimacy and alienation, the indistinct yet persistent feelings of unease latent to our oversaturated media landscape and technology-mediated social connections. Kerunen's immersive, cross-disciplinary practice includes visual art, curation, activism, acting, poetry, writing, and performance emphasizes triumphant noncompliance in a postcolonial world. Exploring the open border between painting and photography, Saunders delves further into his ongoing study of liminal spaces and the divisions among visual art's medium-specificities. 2727 S. La Cienega Blvd., Culver City; *Opening reception: Saturday, July 1, 5-7pm; On view through*

August 12; *free; blumandpoe.com.*

Digital Inventions: Computer Generated Film & Video, 1952-2023 at REDCAT. From before the advent of the personal computer to today, computer generated worlds have been primary to imagination and exploration for artists of the moving image. As access to computer technology expanded, computer hardware and software tools have allowed for a transformation from access alienation and conceptual abstraction to practical, fantastical and accessible world building. Presented in conjunction with the LACMA exhibition Coded: Art Enters the Computer Age, 1952-1982. 631 W. 2nd St., downtown; *Saturday, July 1, 7pm; free w/ rsvp; redcat.org.*

MONDAY, JULY 3

Jazz in the Pines at Idyllwild Arts Academy. The return of the popular annual fundraiser Jazz In The Pines marks its 29th year of live performances on the art school's 205-acre campus of astonishing natural beauty, as well as select historical venues in the town of Idyllwild. This year's festival is curated once again by acclaimed jazz vocalist Rose Colella. Besides the performances, it includes open master classes, book readings/signings and live podcast recordings, where guests are invited to join the conversation. 52500 Temecula Road, Idyllwild; *Performances July 3-15; free-\$500; idyllwildarts.org.*

TUESDAY, JULY 4

4th of July Block Party at Gloria Molina Grand Park. Reinventing DTLA's epic free Fourth of July celebration, for the first time in the park's 10-year history, an innovative drone-based show—not traditional fireworks—will light up the night sky. L.A.'s ultimate July 4th

neighborhood party will be spread across the six city blocks that comprise Grand Park, with gourmet food trucks, music performances (Georgia Anne Muldrow, Cut Chemist, Chali 2na, the Beat Junkies, Maya Jupiter, DJ Ethos, and more) on two stages, and a digital playground by EYEJACK with AR experiences, arts, crafts and games. 135 S. Grand Ave., downtown; *Tuesday, July 4, 4-9:30pm; free; grandparkla.org.*

MUSIC

JUNE 30-JULY 6

Emperor YouTube Theater

Norwegians Emperor are the undisputed kings of black metal. Well, it may be disputed by fellow Norwegians Mayhem, but they're wrong. Since forming in '91, they've released a consistently dazzling string of brutally dark and orchestral albums though the most recent, Prometheus: The Discipline of Fire & Demise, dropped in 2001. It might be time for another, fellas. 7 p.m. on Friday, June 30 at the YouTube Theater, \$28+, youtubetheater.com.

Bebe Rexha The Wiltern

Multi-platinum pop hitmaker Bebe Rexha is now at the level where she can play two nights at not-exactly-small Wiltern, fully confident that her hoards of adoring fans will show up for her. She hasn't been an overnight, writing for Eminem and more before treading her own ground. But new album Bebe, her third, is a pop monster. 7 p.m. on Friday, June 30 and Saturday, July 1 at the Wiltern, \$39.50, livenation.com.

Robby Krieger Whisky A Go Go

It's been ten years since Ray Manzarek left this mortal realm, leaving us with two remaining Doors: John Densmore and Robby Krieger. So look, if you want to hear Doors songs performed by one of the originals, these three shows at the Whisky are one of the least remaining ways to go. If you attend the Monday show, celebrated Doors tribute Wild Child will be opening. Bonus feature! 8 p.m. on Saturday, July 1, Sunday, July 2 and Monday, July 3 at the Whisky A Go Go, \$80+, whiskyagogo.com.

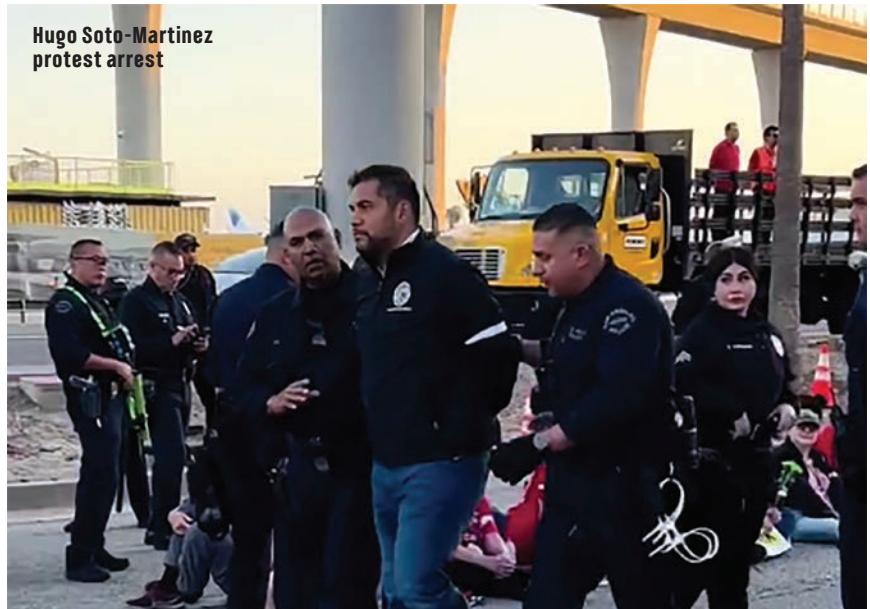
Aqua The Belasco

It seems appropriate that we're seeing the return of Danish Europe band Aqua at the same time that the Barbie movie has been released. It was they, after all, that had a hit with the quirky, catchy and gloriously silly "Barbie Girl." "Come on Barbie, let's go party!" Indeed. 7 p.m. on Thursday, July 6 at the Belasco, \$62.50+, thebelasco.com [LA]

L.A. COUNCILMEMBERS ARRESTED IN HOSPITALITY WORKERS STRIKE

In Support of Hospitality Workers, Councilmembers Nithya Raman, Hugo Soto-Martinez and State Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo Were Arrested Alongside Protesters

BY ISAI ROCHA



City of Los Angeles council members Nithya Raman and Hugo Soto-Martinez were among those arrested after failing to disperse during a hospitality worker protest.

The June 22 protest near LAX saw hundreds of demonstrators sitting on Century Boulevard and holding signs that read, "I have the right to live where I work," and "One job should be enough."

LAPD gave a dispersal order, but many of the protesters stayed put, along with Councilmembers Raman, Soto-Martinez and Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo.

"People are being priced out of their homes and have to commute for hours to work," Soto-Martinez said in a state-

ment. "A single mother who works as a housekeeper has to work 17 hours a day to afford housing in this city. I'm proud to stand in solidarity with UNITE HERE Local 11 and tourism workers across the city because people who work in LA should be able to afford to live in LA."

At least 200 who stayed were arrested, cited and released by LAPD.

Unite Here Local 11 represents about 15,000 hospitality workers who are seeking higher wages, healthcare benefits, pension and adjusted workloads.

The protest came after 96% of the workers voted to authorize a strike if deemed necessary by the union representatives.

"I risked arrest for the future of my kids, my coworkers and myself," Martha

Esquivel, Holiday Inn LAX worker said. "The companies have taken advantage of the pandemic to get richer, while we struggle to stay housed. I am fighting for that change, and ready to strike."

The union said it polled its workers and learned that 53% of them moved away from Los Angeles due to the increased cost of living. Instead, the workers have opted to live in areas outside L.A. County, such as Apple Valley, Victorville and California City, then commute to their jobs in Los Angeles.

"In a show of strength and solidarity hundreds of workers were arrested for the right to live near where they work," Unite Here Local 11 Kurt Peterson said in a statement. "Corporations have offered pennies, so today we risked arrest, and we are ready to go on strike to get the wage they deserve."

The contract between the union workers and hotels such as Hyatt, InterContinental Hotels Group, Hilton and Marriott, expires on June 30, after which the workers can officially opt to strike as early as July 4.

METRO BUS DRIVER STABBED IN BACK, SUSPECT ARRESTED

For the second time in less than a month, a Metro bus driver was stabbed in Los Angeles.

The June 22 incident occurred on the 1700 block of Main Street in Venice, with the driver stabbed in the back while checking the exterior of the bus.

LAPD identified the suspect as 60-year-old Mark Charbonneau and made an arrest on-scene for assault with a deadly weapon.

The driver was transported to a local hospital and reportedly in stable condition for what police called an unprovoked attack with a 4-inch folding knife that was found and recovered by police.

On Monday, LAPD released a bulletin regarding Metro safety, saying it increased patrol car visibility near Metro properties over the years and focused on partnerships with mental health professionals.

"The Department remains dedicated to the safety and welfare of all MTA passengers and employees," the bulletin said. "The goal of the LAPD is to deter criminal activity, maintain order, and enhance the safety and security on the system, while simultaneously addressing complex and challenging social issues by providing support and services to those in need within the transit environment."

The stabbing occurred less than a month after a Metro bus driver was repeatedly stabbed in the chest by a 17-year-old rider in Woodland Hills. The driver was in critical condition and the suspect was arrested two days later.

After the May stabbing, LAPD Chief Michel Moore said he feared the possibility of copycat incidents.

"We're always concerned that when you have an extraordinary event like this, that there may be others that may feel that it's open season, or that there's somehow an allowance for this," Moore said in a statement. "I can only assure those that would feel that this is an opportunity for them, that there's no such opportunity. There is zero tolerance for violence on a bus."

In April, 25-year-old Luis Fernando Polita was stabbed to death outside a Metro Blue Line in Long Beach, with a third and final suspect arrested at LAX on June 20.

HARRIS-DAWSON REPLACES PRICE AS COUNCIL PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The Los Angeles City Council Unanimously voted in favor of Councilman Marquee Harris-Dawson to replace Councilman Curren Price as president pro tempore.

Harris-Dawson takes over as Price faces corruption charges announced by the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office last week.

Immediately after the vote, council president Paul Krekorian let Harris-Dawson lead the remainder of the council meeting.

Price was previously the president pro tempore, but sent a letter of resignation from the position, as well as his council committee roles, soon after the allegations presented against him.

Price allegedly failed to disclose his now wife's business dealings, which were allegedly connected to business projects he voted on in the council. Additionally, Price is also being accused of using \$33,000 worth of medical coverage for his wife before they were married.

Harris-Dawson said the allegations against Price "leaves me curious," as he feels they are typically centered as ethical issues, not legal ones.

"I've not seen a felony charge for this type of activity," Harris-Dawson said. "I've seen ethics violations for this type of activity."

As of this writing, the council has not voted on a suspension of Price, although Councilman Krekorian has suggested it be an option.

The 10 counts of embezzlement, three counts of perjury and two counts of conflict of interest came after a "thorough investigation" according to L.A. County District Attorney George Gascón.

"This alleged conduct undermines the integrity of our government and erodes the public's trust in our elected officials," Gascón said after presenting the charges. "We will continue to work tirelessly to root out corruption at all levels and hold accountable those who betray the public's trust."

Price still sits as the council representative of Los Angeles' 9th district and an arraignment date has not yet been set. ■

TV WATCH: SEARCHING FOR SOUL FOOD WITH CHEF ALISA REYNOLDS

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

www.laweekly.com | June 30 - July 6, 2023 | LA WEEKLY



COURTESY HULU

Chef Alisa Reynolds' definition of soul food is love — love that is found in every culture and every country around the world, dating back to before recipes were even written down. In her new Hulu series, *Searching for Soul Food*, the Black chef travels around the globe exploring stories, the people and traditions in the culinary worlds of Mississippi, Oklahoma, Appalachia, South Africa, Italy, Jamaica, Peru and her hometown of Los Angeles.

"I asked myself what soul food really is and what does it really mean?" the owner of My 2 Cents LA, celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, tells *LA Weekly*. "Not only for my people, but for America and the world. Do these same elements happen in other cultures — the love and sense of home and comfort? So I went out to search for it in other places and found that it's centered in tradition. Some of these recipes were never actually written down and the things that

grandmothers hold in their hands that are taught through legacy and lineage, through generations that stay the same. Some of these things started even before anyone could read, let alone write down a recipe. I wanted to know how this existed around the world."

Classically trained chef sets out to taste the soul of the rest of the world in the eight-part series, which includes exploring the 8,000-year-old tradition of Pachamanca in Peru and the history of jerk cooking that evolved out of social circumstances.

"What really blew my mind was how the Native Americans shared some of their techniques with the Africans and we, as Black Americans thinking these soul food dishes came from us, when in fact they are Native American like hush puppies and hot water cornbread," says the classically trained chef.

For the L.A. episode, Reynolds taps into her own fondest Angeleno memories, like Woody's Barbecue, her Kore-

Woody's BBQ pork ribs



COURTESY HULU

famous for smoke — if it's not marijuana, then it's a barbecue pit somewhere. I remember when I was younger, going by Woody's and smelling that beautiful barbecue. There are legacy vendors like Woody's with a fascinating story. It was a personal choice for me because my parents have been going there since I was born. A lot of kids don't go into the family business, but Woody's kids are dedicated to keeping their dad's legacy alive. My parents and I all grew up near Koreatown and people don't realize just how much they actually barbecue inside their homes all the time. And of course, you can't do an L.A. story without the tacos."

In 2017 Reynolds, who started out as a personal chef for Common, nearly lost her business as the result of a lawsuit. Her community and celebrity fans including Solange helped to raise funds to save her soul food restaurant.

A descendant of Dutch and African roots, Reynolds takes a different look at what's on the plate and how various cultures around the world are connected.

"Because food is my love language, I wanted a show that would tie us all together," she says.

Searching for Soul Food is now streaming on Hulu. **LA**

Cooking stew in South Africa



COURTESY HULU

In a market where truly exceptional cannabis is a rarity, *The Ten Co.*'s combination of premium quality and remarkable branding remains unrivaled.

Our last conversation with *The Ten Co.* came on the heels of their monumental success in 2021, when they claimed top honors at the inaugural *Zalympix* event. The competition scene reached new heights after *Green-wolf*, Los Angeles' premier heat retailer, stormed out the gates with their top-shelf box contest.

Now, two years later, *Zushi* has once again emerged victorious. During its initial triumph, some skeptics attributed the win to mere hype. Yet, the myth and allure surrounding *Zushi* were proven to be well-deserved, evident in the four-hour-long queue that formed at their booth during the recent *Zalympix* ceremony. However, the mystique surrounding *Zushi* was even more pronounced two years ago, causing people to fall into various camps of belief. Some staunchly reaffirmed their faith in *Zushi* after the W, while others criticized the influence of hype. There were also those who may not have personally favored *Zushi* but acknowledged why it emerged as the winner.

This time, subjectivity was eliminated through blind entries. *Zushi* had to withstand the scrutiny of over 120 entries just to secure a place in the final. Once there, it faced fierce competition within the most challenging *Zalympix* box to date, alongside a plethora of exceptional terpenes, as we previously highlighted when reviewing the entries. Undoubtedly, this victory was well-deserved.

We reached out to Staks, the founder of *The Ten Co.*, to inquire if he ever felt concerned about the abundance of exceptional *Zkittenz* flavors in this year's competition.

"Absolutely. Z has held the championship title for quite some time now. There were numerous entries that were just as impressive as mine, which was fantastic to witness. It's about time the industry started emphasizing light green cannabis again," Staks candidly shared with *L.A. Weekly*.

Staks acknowledged that the game has significantly evolved since the first *Zalympix*. He believes that people are actively searching for new and unique offerings that can compete, hence the outstanding quality of this year's entries. However, until proven otherwise, *Zushi* remains the reigning king. Staks appreciates the competitive environment within which *The Ten Co.* operates, considering it beneficial for their business.

Now, the focus is on delivering the hype directly to consumers.

CANNABIS

ZUSHI CONTINUES TO DOMINATE

The hype surrounding *The Ten Co.* shows no signs of waning.

BY JIMI DEVINE



"We are currently directing more attention towards the direct-to-consumer approach," Staks revealed. "We previ-

ously launched but decided to take a step back and now we're in the process of building up our online delivery ca-

pabilities."

The direct-to-consumer format will enable *Zushi* to reach consumers as quickly as possible. Given the premium price that people are willing to pay for this product, Staks wants to ensure that the experience is preserved for every individual fortunate enough to acquire one of their bags.

"We have a specific timeframe during which our products can remain on the shelves. If it exceeds this four-week period, or even three weeks, it is promptly removed, making room for a fresh batch. This way, we can maintain stringent quality control," Staks explained.

While *Zushi* continues to steal the spotlight, *The Ten Co.* currently boasts around ten strains in rotation. Additionally, Staks recently cultivated a variety of seeds he acquired from Europe, embarking on a search for the exceptional flavors of his youth, such as Cheese and Sour Diesel. In the coming month, he will undertake a meticulous selection process to identify standout winners worthy of joining their award-winning catalog.

We asked Staks if, when participating in a contest like *Zalympix*, he meticulously examines every batch or simply puts all his chips down on *Zushi*.

"I felt compelled to carry on the *Zushi* legacy for as long as possible. Personally, I believe this strain has so much to offer, and it continues to exceed our expectations," Staks explained. "We conduct numerous tests with *Zushi*, and she never fails to impress us. With each batch, we aim for better quality and more pronounced flavors. Our use of live-soil facilities contributes to preserving those unique characteristics. Our plan is to explore different mediums and light spectrums to ascertain what *Zushi* prefers to express."

Naturally, we couldn't overlook the recent *Zushi* rosin craze. Two-gram jars of their limited release in collaboration with West Coast Alchemy were fetching a staggering \$1000 each. This price tag represents the highest ever seen for rosin, yet demand remained strong. The remarkable hype surrounding *Zushi* flavors seamlessly transferred to their terpene-rich products.

Regarding the price, Staks clarified, "The price point was determined by the market; it had nothing to do with us. The exclusivity and rarity of our collaboration with West Coast Alchemy played a significant role. We never produced these in large quantities; a few batches were exclusively reserved for family and friends."

Keep a close eye on *The Ten Co.*'s website for upcoming flavor releases and merchandise drops. **[A]**



Corey Pemberton
Girlfriends
Acrylic, inkjet prints, and
graphite on canvas, 96 x 72 in
(Courtesy of UNREPD)



Corey Pemberton
I used to cook more
Acrylic, inkjet prints, and
graphite on canvas, 60 x 48
(Courtesy of UNREPD)

ART

PAINTER COREY PEMBERTON'S PORTRAITS ARE A PERSONAL THING

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

In *Person, place, thing*, artist Corey Pemberton's embrace of classical genres are anything but classical. His disarming portraits and still life paintings both build on and subvert expectations for such traditional categories, infusing wholesome scenes of ordinary life with a lexicon of layered patterns, intimate daily rituals, intimated emotions, hinted-at histories, and an ir-

resistibly lively palette.

An expansive suite of these paintings—most so large as to be all but life-size—is currently installed, along with luxe and jaunty pieces of design furniture in domestic vignettes and a host of Pemberton's hand-blown glass objects, at UNREPD's sunny and welcoming downtown space. The overall effect of the exhibition is a fantastic feedback loop in which

paintings ennobling the narrative potential of the domestic sphere are set in domestic vignettes, intentionally paired with expressive examples of a sofa, some fantastic chairs, dining room set, cozy bedroom, and a host of superlative sideboards.

Certain individual pieces (retro oyster plates, a Coke 2-liter, a particular vase, the contents of a cabinet of ceramics in

one scene's background, etc.) and also bold textile patterns from within the paintings' compositions are replicated in freestanding sculptures displayed on that furniture. It's not quite immersive, but it is holistic, and its solipsistic array offers viewers a somatic empathy response that further highlights the intentional placement of every single object depicted in the paintings. Several images have no fi -

Corey Pemberton

*Next lifetime*Acrylic, inkjet prints, and graphite
on canvas, 60 x 72 in (Courtesy of
UNREPD)

Corey Pemberton

*Time to break out Daddy's plates*Acrylic, inkjet prints, and graphite on
canvas, 48 x 72 in (Courtesy of UNREPD)

ures at all, underscoring the potential for true portraiture to be accomplished by another means—by an inventory of the things which surround us. This dynamic

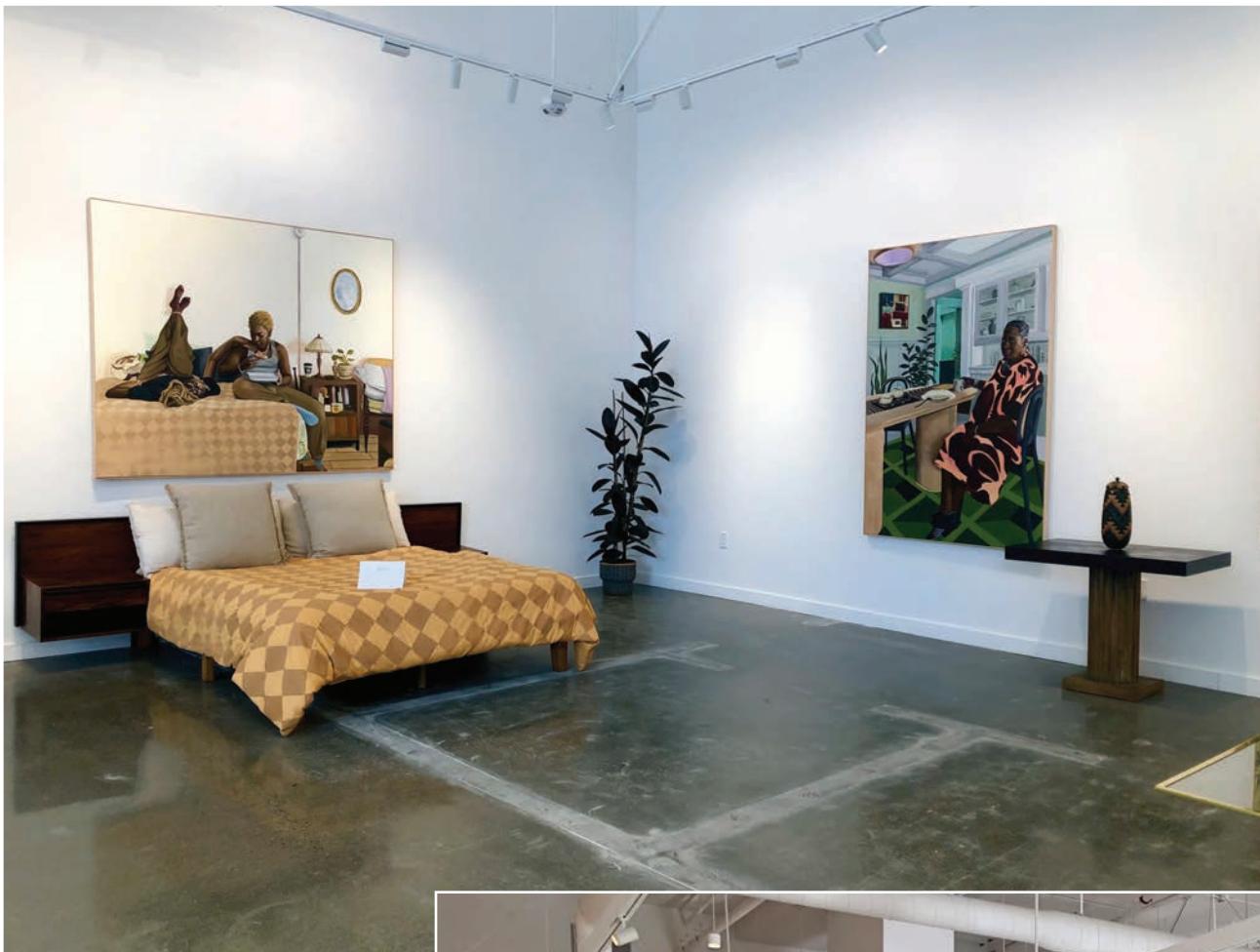
reinforces both the “place” and “thing” elements of Pemberton’s project—elevating ordinary and heirloom objects equally to a level of value that has more to do

with what they mean than what they’re “worth,” viewing them as artifacts of important life events, significances of personal identity, and personal and family talismans.

In the key image *I used to cook more*, a young man serves take-out salads to his companion, whose POV the viewer assumes, as the front edge is their plate and the man is across the table from us. The warm wood and deep blue of the room suggests a kitchen, a slightly open door behind leads to a bedroom. The art on the walls tells its own story; a deliberately placed can of spray paint on the headboard also exists as a glass sculpture. The checkerboard tablecloth that fills the lower third finds its mate in an architectural glass piece which gathers all the color permutations of the pattern from

across this show; and a pair of luminous glass *Oyster plates* are taken straight from the scene and placed on a low pedestal facing it. And that’s where the “person” comes in. In Pemberton’s work, a certain thing in a certain place gives candid and profound insight into its custodian. The painting, with the casual sweetness of the title and the combination of fancy dish and take-out styrofoam gives the energy of a man impressing a date, his gaze gently averted from them, and therefore from us.

This formula is replicated to great effect in works like *Sunday at Aunt Niccy’s*, as a maternal scene plays out in a deep pink living room containing among its treasures a blue and white porcelain vase that also stands nearby. As with all the paint-



ings, Pemberton's gift for chromatic and pattern-based problem solving creates a puzzle-like space in which the painted surface itself is rich and textured enough to hold it all together. Here, the figures demonstrate an ease and confidence with each other and with whomever is "taking the photograph." Their posture and eye contact suggest a cozy afternoon *en famille* briefly interrupted by a relative saying, "hang on, let me take a picture," suggesting that this private and probably ordinary moment is also one worth preserving in memory. *Girlfriends and I love us* have this same sense of capturing the beauty in the ephemeral moment, of noticing every detail of that moment and giving it weight as the site and setting of a life, whether its friends and lovers in quirky pajamas or a gathering on what looks like game day, celebrating togetherness and trying not to take it for granted.

There is a lot of work in the space, and the furnishings fill out a plentiful optical experience that might threaten overload were it not for the enchanting game of finding corresponding objects and recurring motifs across mediums and across individual works. The way the casual



snapshot energy in the scenes intersects with the proliferation of ennobled detail and the ambitious scale and masterful technique of history painting is both impressive and affecting, leaving the viewer with a sense of involvement and emotional investment along with the many magnificient visual delights of Pemberton's authentic aesthetic vision.

Person, place, thing is on view at UNREPD, 100 S. Grand Ave., downtown, through July 15. For more information, visit: unrepd.com. □

MAN ALIVE!

Man on Man is here to provoke

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



PHOTO BY A.F. CORTÉS

Roddy Bottum and Joey Holman, collectively the magnificently queer rock duo MAN ON MAN, want to ruffle feathers and get a reaction. These proud gay men are on the same page when it comes to their own romantic relationship and their musical venture - they're here to provoke and to hell with anyone that doesn't like it.

Bottum is, of course, best known for playing keyboards with the always glorious Faith No More. Alongside Mike Patton and the rest of that dazzlingly eclectic band, Bottum was able to confuse and dumbfound the people who wanted more versions of the same early singles, again and again. No FNM album was like the last, and not everyone liked that. Bottum's alt-pop troupe Imperial Teen likely confused people further. But by god, what a band that was and is.

Enter MAN ON MAN! Bottum and Holman formed the project out of necessity - a need to be creative during the COVID lockdown.

"We had no idea we were making a band when we first started making the record," says Holman. "We were just passing the time, and we were just writing music together. It was Roddy's idea. We were driving from New York to L.A. and we had musical instruments. We knew we had to be stuck inside for a while, and we were just like, 'Yeah, let's make music.' We didn't have any concept of the future at all. It was just, 'Let's pass the time and let's just survive and have some sort of a creative outlet.' So we were very surprised and felt very lucky to be able to be here three years later at this point, and still doing it."

The self-titled debut full-length appeared in 2021 kinda out of the blue - a

heartfelt, poetic but eminently danceable slab of work, and evidence that the pair were fortunate to be locked in with each other.

"It was double-sided," says Bottum. "Fortunate in one way, that we're boyfriends and we love each other, but also this thing opened up where, 'oh we can create together.' That is very rare. Also, we're in an age right now where making a record in a house where you're quarantin-

rules but there was a very natural direction that our band took us. The real thing that informed it was playing shows and knowing the style of music that we want to play."

Bottum says that one of the themes that kept organically raising its head during writing and recording is that of cross-generational referencing - younger queer people being interested in older queer culture, and vice versa. "The transference of knowledge in both regards is super important," he says.

The album is dropping right in the middle of Pride Month, which Holman says is an accident but it's a happy accident all the same.

"In every sense, it's the best way you can celebrate Pride, by sharing your art with people," Holman says. "We're very over these clever gay comedians who are trivializing the importance of Pride. It seems very niche right now to talk about Pride as this very irrelevant thing. I feel very lucky to be talking about our music in the middle of Pride, because it focuses us to the reality that we're not living in a world where everybody has the luxury of having the safety and comfort of a community. So to be able to talk about our music in this month, in a way that we're wrestling and understanding our world or queerness, it feels natural and good."

This year's Pride does feel like it's particularly weighty, with state after state passing draconian laws, clearly aimed at restricting the rights of LGBTQ+ people. That said, the feeling of paranoia is nothing new for queer people.

"Just because there are laws created doesn't introduce a new form of paranoia, but it certainly adds weight to the existing paranoia," Holman says. "Even in liberal cities like L.A. or New York, it's cute to pretend that we're all good and safe, but we're not. People are still targeted in these bigger cities. To present that part of yourself to the world is dangerous. It wasn't safe for me as a teenager to be gay. It just wasn't. It wasn't safe for Roddy either, and we grew up in very different places. Roddy grew up in L.A., and I grew up in the middle of nowhere in Georgia. And still, it's not safe for kids in Georgia to come out when they're 14 years old or however old they are. It's a lot heavier right now, because people are emboldened to speak very clearly. Mike Pence on the CNN town hall doubled down on these disgusting views of trans people. Man, he's so blatant about it. There's no shame. It made us both mad and disgusted."

"That's why conversations like this one, and why bands like MAN ON MAN, are so important. We all learn and grow when we can all be open. Thankfully, Provincetown is as open as you can get."

MAN ON MAN's album Provincetown is out July 16. [L]

LA WEEKLY MOVIE REVIEWS

No Hard Feelings Brings Back Raunch Comedy, *The Flash* Runs Late to the Multiverse, and *Asteroid City* is A Theme Park Cinematic Experience

LA WEEKLY

No Hard Feelings (Sony Pictures)



Starring a fearless Jennifer Lawrence, *No Hard Feelings*, features a healthy budget, a unique location (Montauk, New York), discernible characters, a plotline in which said characters learn something about themselves, and it takes place on planet Earth. This is what theatrical films used to look like before we lost them to the malaise of streaming and the Marvel/DC takeover. Gene Stupnitsky's comedy is only sporadically funny and you wish he pushed the envelope a little further instead of being satisfied with a sluggish third act, but like hungry dogs in a kettle, the audience chews on every savory human moment, even if there isn't enough meat on the bone.

Lawrence, who also produced the Sony Pictures-backed vehicle, plays Maddie, an embittered bartender and Uber-driver who pours every cent she makes into the house her mother left her after she died. She could care less about cultivating a relationship with anyone, especially men, who she basically uses for libidinous purposes. She only cares about keeping her house, which becomes an albatross around her neck.

Broke, tired, and pissed off that her livelihood depends on rich, douchey tourists who spend their summers in Montauk, Maddie discovers a Craigslist ad which could be her saving grace. A wealthy couple (Laura Benanti and Matthew Broderick) are offering their family Buick to a young woman who can "date" their introverted, awkward 19-year-old son, Percy (Andrew Barth Feldman), in order to pull him out of his shell before he attends Princeton. Although Maddie is a little older than they hoped, she gets the job and before you can say "slightly creepy," she slips on her tight-

est dress and heads to the local animal shelter where Percy holds a summer job.

Maddie has her work cut out for her. Percy not only looks every inch his age (perhaps younger), he's also more ungainly and graceless than she imagined. As a Gen-Zer who's spent his life playing video games, staring at his phone, and watching porn, Percy is all paranoid tics and gloom-laden vulnerability.

The movie's premise, as silly as it is, gives these characters room to blossom and mature. As Maddie and Percy grow closer, they realize they have more in common than they thought. Primarily, they're both scared of the world at large. For Maddie, she's a townie who's never left Montauk, while Percy is terrified of going to Princeton after enduring a lifetime of bullying. These scenes have an emotional resonance you don't expect from a raunchy romp.

There's no doubt that the director's latest possesses a fun, laidback quality, but for a comedy that tries for a statement about the deep generational chasm between millennials and Gen Zers, it takes the easy way out. Just as we start to invest in Maddie and Percy's inner lives, the filmmakers get cold feet and shoehorn goofball moments (one involving Chinese handcuffs and another with a car driving into the ocean) into the story that are not only far-fetched but feel tossed together. Why not do what forbears like John Hughes and Blake Edwards perfected? Let the characters tell their own story and get out of the way.

No Hard Feelings has a breezy, pleasurable quality, regardless. And let's not forget Jennifer Lawrence, who's as fiery as ever, bringing grit and sass to every vacillating emotion. She proves why she's both a bona fide movie star and a comedic powerhouse. She gives an audacious and sexy performance, including a shocking moment that elicits audible gasps in the theater. Although the movie struggles to shift tones from comedy to drama, at least it's trying, which is more than what Hollywood has been doing lately. (*Chad Byrnes*)

The Flash (Warner Bros.)

After years in development, multiple reshoots, and dealing with a problematic star, *The Flash* achieves final form as the concluding chapter of a soon-to-be by-



gone era. Before James Gunn can take the Batmobile out for a spin, the DC Universe must first bid farewell to Zack Snyder's vision for the Justice League and DC. This film is the Snyderverse's swan song.

A note to fans of the original Flashpoint comic book story: there might be some disappointment as the movie only picks up the essence of the paradigmatic story arc, not much of the actual story. Fans looking for Martha Wayne's Joker or a continent-destroying battle between Aquaman and Wonder Woman, will soon discover that those plot points remain on paper only.

Directed by Andy Muschietti (*It: Chapter One and Two*) and starring Ezra Miller as Barry Allen, the youngest and most grating member of the Justice League, *The Flash* pulls the band back together for one final hurrah, along with a few old-school favorites thanks to Barry's discovery of the Speed Force, which can be used to alter time and space.

Lacking a proper solo outing til now, *The Flash* offers a deeper look into Barry's tragic backstory, usually hidden by his goofy persona. As a child, his father Henry (Ron Livingston) was falsely convicted of murdering his mother (Maribel Verdú). Years later, on the eve of his father's court appeal, Barry goes for a frustration run and discovers that he can outrun time itself, allowing him to change history. So what would it hurt to save his mom? This is just one person, right? Then the real fun begins.

The most amusing parts of *The Flash* come from the Butterfly Effect (the idea that a small change in the past can significantly alter the present). Barry's time travel and the ramifications of his folly through the DC Universe are a big part of the movie. Because of his impulsive decisions, we get Michael Keaton's Batman, a brand new Supergirl (Sasha Calle), the return of General Zod (Michael Shannon), and a whole Wonka factory of DC goodies that will make any fanboy smile from ear to ear. None of these are spoilers as they are in the trailer, by the way.

Aside from clever callbacks and Easter eggs galore, Miller is charming in the dual role of Barry Squared (Barry2). Playing both the somewhat wiser, older and troubled Barry against the young, more impetuous Barry could have been irksome, but his on-screen charisma wins out. Some might be uncomfortable reading praise about Miller due to his recent

slew of charges ranging from disorderly conduct and harassment to burglary and child endangerment, but he does a good job of making us forget.

The main issue with *The Flash* is that it's not only battling superhero fatigue, but a new type of ennui to plague moviegoers: multiverse exhaustion. Back in 2019, when the concept of the multiverse was shiny and new, moviegoers needed a little hand-holding. But now, in the year of our lord 2023, after many, many Marvel movies and the Oscar-winning A24 game changer *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, audiences are more than familiar with the idea of more than one universe or reality. Sadly, the studio did this movie no favors by releasing it hot on the heels of the excellent *Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse*, which follows similar themes in a superior superhero saga. *The Flash* may be fast, but it feels late to the party. (*Erin Maxwell*)



Asteroid City (Universal/Focus)

Wes Anderson is a uniqueness, and we should be thankful he exists. But what is he? With each film, he's doubled down on his particular battery of obsessive ideas (the chockablock dioramas, the loopy yarn-spinning, the deadpan quasi-farce, the overwhelming retro design), so that after a quarter-century of filmmaking, *The French Dispatch* (2021) was so intensely Wes-y, with more twitches and textual jokes than anyone could assimilate in one viewing, it felt almost like an experimental film. You have to salute his sui-generis-ness, his cultural curiosity, his subject-matter wanderlust, his distinctive visual craft, his attention to detail (often it feels like his films are *all detail*), and, honestly, his capacity for indexing some kind of late-Millennial/Gen Z toybox nostalgia, the hermetic pleasure of which, for his legion of devotees, should not be underestimated. If you fit in that pajama-clad army, you don't ask questions, you just go. His newest confabulation, *Asteroid City*, is Wes-ness ascending — plastered with invention and pop-ironic formal beauty, and quirk-inhabited within an inch of its life.

Anderson has made hay of Manhattan, India, New England camping grounds, Japanese islands, and Alpine hotels; now he hits the southern American desert in the idealized '50s, and with more than a

whiff of Wile E. Coyote. The narrative is all set-up, and the set-up is characteristically arch: During the age of apparently ceaseless nuclear testing, a plethora of characters converge on the titular desert burg for the annual Junior Stargazer/Space Cadet convention, including a widowed war photog (Jason Schwartzman) and his "brainiac" son (Jake Ryan), plus three tiny triplet daughters, a famous actress (Scarlett Johansson) and her genius daughter (Grace Edwards), a fresh-faced teacher (Maya Hawke) with a precocious fifth-grade class in tow, a cowboy band (led by Rupert Friend), et cetera.

Already in *Asteroid City* are an administrative general (Jeffrey Wright), a geeky astrophysicist (Tilda Swinton), a store-owner entrepreneur (Steve Carell) who's selling tiny plots of land through a vending machine, a hands-on but clueless mechanic (Matt Dillon), and, you get the idea. (I'd be surprised if there weren't several Acme products in there somewhere, which I'm not surprised I missed.) The cast has over 30 featured speaking parts and at least 10 through lines — including the framing story, presented as a '50s TV show, hosted by period-TV host Bryan Cranston, about the writing and performing of the play *Asteroid City*, involving a brooding playwright (Edward Norton), a headlong director (Adrien Brody), an impassioned

acting teacher (Willem Dafoe), and even the actress who plays Schwartzman's dead wife in *Asteroid City* (the play) via a single photograph (Margot Robbie).

The priority as you will have assumed, is not the movie's people but its stunning formal ravishment, filled with gleaming '50s modernisms set against luridly painted desert mesas and blazing teal skies, every shot an irradiated postcard from a sun-scorched pastel past, or an imaginary travel ad painted by the late Bruce McCall. Anderson structures his action around this design, horizontally, with whole scenes, and much of the comedy, captured in wide-screen swirls and stretch pans that often loop a complete 360 degrees. Some shots suggest a Lego formality, others recall late '60s Godard. As an eye assault, it's a thing of wonder.

But where we are in the film, as in all of Anderson's, is more important than what happens — I kept thinking during *Asteroid City* that he didn't want to make a movie so much as build a theme park. (I'd go, and so would you.) By the end of the film, you could practically draw a map of the place, outline it in chalk like the invisible town in Lars von Trier's *Dogville*. The deft comic rhythms and the robust cast's skill keep the narratives flowing, but, as usual, the humans are overshadowed by the macro-scheme of the piece. (*Michael Atkinson*) ▀

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310-664-9000 x 101 or text 310-849-5679
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Making a false or fraudulent claim is a felony subject up to 5 years in prison or a fine up to \$50,000 or double the value of the fraud whichever is greater, or by both imprisonment or fine

Thank you Saint Jude, Saint of the Impossible, EC

SECURITY GUARDS NEEDED

Rio Gentlemen's Club - 13124 S Figueroa St, Los Angeles, CA 90061 \$18 to \$20 an hour. Outside security needed for patdowns, ID checks and monitoring parking lot of the club. Please contact Dave Carlson at Rmckinney@jjmfir.com

Software Developer, F/T, Bachelor's in information technology, engineering, mathematics, or any related. Salary \$80,122/year. Mail resume: LeadsMarket.com LLC, 21600 Oxnard St., Ste 400, Woodland Hills, CA 91367

Dental Clinic Manager: Req'd: Bachelor's in Pre-Dentistry, Biochemistry or rel. Mail Resume: Dr. Eugene J. Lim, D.D.S., Inc., 680 Wilshire Pl. Suite 411, Los Angeles, CA 90005

Irradiant Partners LP is hiring **Vice President**. Liquid Investments to provide internal guidance reg potential invt decisions& ongoing monitoring& analysis of portfolio invts. Reqs: Bachelor's or foreign equiv in Business, Econ, Fin, or rlted + 3 yrs exp as Financial Analyst or rlted. Exp must incl: dev cash flow model for CLO return; Bloomberg d/b, extraction & monitoring; MS Excel; Intex; Moody's Analytics; Hub Market; Markit IHS; Covenant Review;& stress& scenario analyses. Worksite: Santa Monica, CA. Salary: \$79,789 - 176k. Email resume: hr@irradiantpartners.com. Principals only. EOE

