

LAWEEKLY[®]

CANNABIS TRAVEL
DIARIES: COPENHAGEN

THE STRUTS RAISE HELL
WITH FOURTH ALBUM

UNBINGED REVIEWS
AHSOKA, ONE PIECE,
& FIONNA AND CAKE

SEPTEMBER 29 - OCTOBER 5, 2023 / VOL. 36 / NO. 44
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The Meteoric Metamorphosis of **La Monarca Panaderia**

A Sweet and Savory Evolution

By Michele Stueven



CALENDAR

GO EDITORS' PICKS

ARTS

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

Artists Deana Lawson and Arthur Jafa in conversation at David Kordansky Gallery.

An in-gallery conversation between artists Deana Lawson and Arthur Jafa expands on an ongoing dialogue between the two artists, and explores themes and concepts related to Lawson's new body of work. In *Mind's Eye* (on view through October 21), photographs are conduits into understanding wider interests and themes of geo-mythology and memory, ancestral presence, the physicality of photography and its aberrations, self-possession, and the body that doesn't seek authorization from westernized materialism. 5130 W. Edgewood Pl., Mid-city; Thursday, September 28, 6pm; free w/ rsvp; davidkordanskygallery.com.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

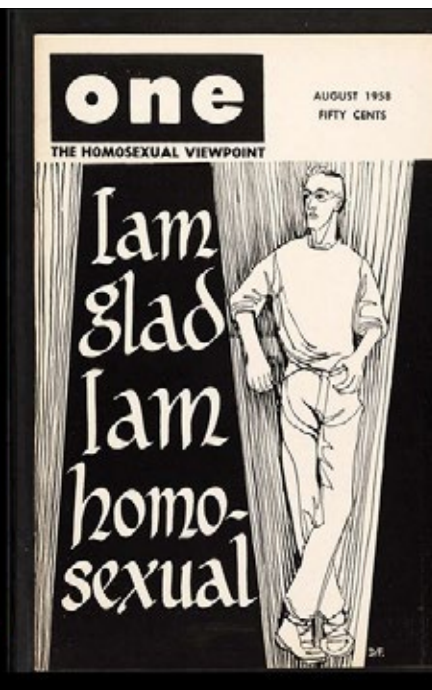
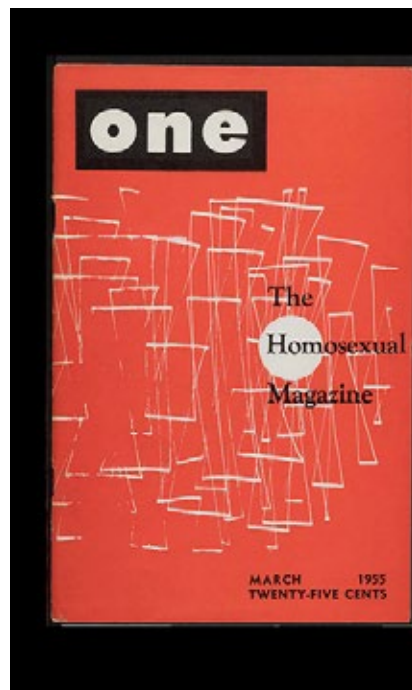
Hubbard Street Dance Chicago at the Music Center.

The storied contemporary dance company will perform a program of mixed repertory including Coltrane's Favorite Things, choreographed by Lar Lubovitch, inspired by and danced to John Coltrane's 1963 Live in Copenhagen interpretation of Richard Rodgers' "My Favorite Things" from *The Sound of Music*—performed against a backdrop of Pollock's painting *Autumn Rhythm*. Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 135 N. Grand Ave., downtown; Friday-Saturday, September 29-30, 7:30pm; Sunday, October 1, 2pm; \$34-\$125; musiccenter.org.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

The Industry: Star Choir at Mt. Wilson Observatory.

Audiences will embark on a cosmic mission, as a starship crew seeks refuge on the hostile Planet 85K: Aurora. Once there, the colonists encounter intelligent life imperceptible to their all-too-human awareness. As the planet defends itself from their invasive presence, the humans evolve to become a part of the Holobiont, a queerly multi-species organism that covers this world. Star Choir offers a meditation on the challenges and pleasures of mutual coexistence, reimagining humanity as a porous category that must transform to sur-



vive. Composed by Malik Gaines, libretto by Alexandro Segade. Saturday-Sunday, September 30 - October 1, 1pm & 4:30pm; \$20-\$70; theindustryla.org.

Made in L.A.: Acts of Living Opening Celebration at the Hammer.

Celebrate the opening of *Made in L.A. 2023: Acts of Living*, the Hammer's biennial exhibition highlighting the practices of artists from across Los Angeles. These practices embrace the value of craft, materiality, performance, and collectivity. The biennial situates art as an expanded field of culture that is entangled with everyday life; community networks; queer affect; and indigenous and diasporic histories. Be among the first to see the exhibition, and dance in the courtyard to music from *Made in L.A.* exhibiting artist collective Mas Exitos. 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Saturday, September 30, 8-11pm; free with rsvp; On view through December 31; free; hammer.ucla.edu.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1

ONE Magazine at Seventy at Los Angeles LGBT Center.

Commemorating its legacy of uplifting LGBTQ+ communities and advancing queer rights and visibility through print, this exhibition chronicles the history of ONE Magazine, from its inaugural issue in January 1953 through its continued publishing until December 1967. The show examines themes that ONE tackled that remain pertinent today, including the fight against police brutality, the importance of building community and cultivating joy, and the protection of free speech. Advocate & Gochis Galleries, 1125 N. McCadden Pl, Hollywood; Opening reception: Sunday, October 1, 3-6pm; On view through November 5; free; circafestival.org.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3

Hadestown at Center Theater Group.

Hadestown intertwines two mythic tales—that of young dreamers Orpheus and Eurydice, and that of King Hades and his wife Persephone—on a hell-raising journey to the underworld and back. Anais Mitchell's beguiling melodies and Rachel Chavkin's poetic imagination set industry against nature, doubt against faith, and fear against love. Performed by a vibrant ensemble of actors, dancers and singers, Hadestown is a haunting and hopeful theatrical experience about a place where a song can change your fate. Ahmanson Theater, 135 N. Grand Ave., downtown; Performances October 3-15; \$40-\$155; centertheatregroup.org.

MUSIC

SEPTEMBER 29-OCTOBER 5

Donnie Vie Whisky A Go-Go

Chicago power-pop/hair metal crossover band Enuff Z'Nuff is still a going concern, with bassist Chip Z'Nuff taking over the vocalist position for the past few years. But classic lineup singer Donnie Vie has left a big hole. The man has a wonderful voice, and it'll be great to hear him rip through the old tunes at the Whisky. Especially because former Enuff Z'Nuff guitarist Alex Kane will be with him. American Superdrive, Cursing Sunday, Sikaflanta, Ritz Vanity, Zoe Kilgren Band, and One Way Sky also plays. 6 p.m. on Friday, September 29 at the Whisky A Go-Go, \$20, whiskyagogo.com.

BoyWithUke Fonda Theatre

Korean-American alt-pop artist BoyWithUke hides his appearance behind a black faceless mask, two glowing hoop eyes the only sign of humanity. He's become extremely popular with the kids on TikTok with the singles "Toxic" and "Understand." His fourth album, *Lucid Dreams*, is out in October, and he's playing two nights at the Fonda. Times are good. Naethan Apollo also plays. 9 p.m. on Saturday, September 30 and Sunday, October 1 at the Fonda Theatre, \$25, fondatheatre.com.

The Pretenders Troubadour

English-American rockers the Pretenders, led by the inimitable Chrissie Hynde, have been playing smaller venues on this recent tour, and they're playing the Regent in L.A. Only Hynde and drummer Martin Chambers remain from the classic lineup, but this year's *Relentless* album, their 12th, is a welcome return to form. 7 p.m. on Monday, October 2 at the Troubadour, \$50, regentdla.com

P!nk SoFi Stadium

Pop icon P!nk released her ninth studio album earlier this year, and *Trustfall* proves that she's still a major creative force. She doesn't get enough credit for the fact that she's been remarkably consistent with the quality over those nine albums, and she has plenty of great material for a big show at SoFi. The bill is great too. Pat Benatar & Neil Geraldo are main support, while Grouplove and DJ Kid Cut Up open. 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 5 at the SoFi Stadium, \$48+, sofistadium.com

HOLLYWOOD WRITERS REVIEW TENTATIVE CONTRACT, ACTORS STILL ON STRIKE

After Nearly Four Months On Strike, Hollywood Writers And Studios Reached A Tentative Contract Agreement While Actors Look To Do The Same.

BY ISAI ROCHA



Hollywood writers and producers have reached a tentative contract agreement after more than 100 days on strike.

The Writers Guild of America (WGA) announced that the agreement was made with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) and is reviewing the final details and language.

“The WGA and AMPTP have reached a tentative agreement,” the WGA said in a brief statement. “This was made possible by the enduring solidarity of WGA members and extraordinary support of our union siblings who stood with us for over 146 days. More details coming after contract language is finalized.”

While the writers strike has seemingly ended, Hollywood actors represented by the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), continue their strike efforts, seeking a contract of their own with the AMPTP.

“To our fellow union siblings who serve on the WGA Negotiating Committee, we extend our heartfelt congratulations on securing a tentative agreement with the AMPTP,” SAG-AFTRA said in a statement. “We applaud your dedication, diligence and unwavering solidarity over the last five months and are proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you as creative partners in the entertainment industry. We look forward to reviewing the terms of the WGA and AMPTP’s tentative agreement and we remain ready to resume our own negotiations with the AMPTP as soon as they are prepared to engage on our proposals in a meaningful way. Until then, we continue to stand strong and unified.”

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, who previously sat with both sides in an attempt to mediate talks, attributed the successful negotiation to union efforts and collaborations.

“After a nearly five-month long strike, I am grateful that the Writers Guild of

America and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers have reached a fair agreement and I’m hopeful that the same can happen soon with the Screen Actors Guild,” Bass said in a statement. “This historic strike impacted so many across Los Angeles and across the nation. Now, we must focus on getting the entertainment industry, and all the small businesses that depend on it, back on their feet and stronger than ever before.”

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who also made multiple efforts to mediate talks between the Hollywood writers, actors and studios, and said he looked forward to the moving forward economically.

“California’s entertainment industry would not be what it is today without our world class writers,” Newsom said in a statement. “For over 100 days, 11,000 writers went on strike over existential threats to their careers and livelihoods — expressing real concerns over the stress and anxiety workers are feeling. I am grateful that the two sides have come together to reach an agreement that benefits all parties involved, and can put a major piece of California’s economy back to work.”

The AMPTP represents major movie and TV studios such as Disney, Netflix and NBC-Universal.

Among the reported initial demands from the writers were focused on AI use, as an increase in AI popularity has shown an alternative way to write prompts for storytelling in several mediums, including film and TV writing.

With the writers strike set to end upon a finalized contract, calls for a new strike from within the industry have been approved by SAG-AFTRA members in the videogame industry.

On Monday, members authorized a strike if contract talks fall apart in the coming Interactive Media Agreement.

SUSPECT IN DEPUTY KILLING CHARGED WITH MURDER

Murder charges have been filed against Kevin Cataneo Salazar in the killing of Los Angeles Sheriff’s (LASD) Deputy Ryan Clinkunbroomer.

Salazar, 29, entered a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity, with the following court date scheduled for Tuesday, November 7.

“My heart is broken during this incredibly difficult time for the family of Deputy Clinkunbroomer and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department,” Los Angeles District Attorney George Gascón said in a statement. “This senseless act of violence is an affront to the values of justice and peace that we hold dear in our community. Our law enforcement partners worked tirelessly to

investigate and find the alleged individual responsible for murdering Deputy Clinkunbroomer. I want to assure you that my office’s Crimes Against Peace Officer’s Division is committed to bringing to justice the person responsible for this heinous crime.”

It is alleged that Salazar shot into a police vehicle outside of the Palmdale Sheriff’s station while at a red light. Clinkunbroomer was found shot inside the vehicle and rushed to a local hospital before being pronounced dead.

A manhunt for the suspect ensued, which led investigators to the 37700 block of Barrinson Street in Palmdale, where a gray Toyota Corolla was seen, matching the description of the car at the scene of the crime. Salazar was taken into custody without further incident.

It is alleged that Salazar used a .22-caliber revolver and was lying in wait.

He is being held without bail and facing life in prison without parole.

FREE COVID TESTS AND UPDATED VACCINES NOW AVAILABLE

Free COVID-19 tests and updated vaccines are now available nationwide in anticipation of a winter surge in transmission.

The U.S. saw an increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations through the summer, although not enough to cause concern for a return to lockdown measures.

Public health officials from the CDC, FDA and locally believe that between the access to rapid testing, updated vaccines and therapeutics, there is enough to effectively fight COVID-19 better than at the opening stages of the pandemic.

“I think it’s important for people who are high-risk to, older people, people who are immunocompromised, people living with people who are at higher risk, pregnant women, people caring for infants—we need to get ourselves boosted,” Ferrer said. “We really can’t afford to take the risk of getting infected. I know for some younger, healthy adults, they’re thinking ‘Well, this doesn’t really apply to me.’ I’d like to say we have not figured out who gets long COVID and who doesn’t and we have not figured out necessarily who for sure isn’t doing to experience severe illness.”

The FDA approved updated vaccines from both Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, effective for the currently dominant Omicron variants such as Eg.5 and XBB.1.5. Those boosters have become widely available, with pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreens offering them for free.

As of Sept. 25, free rapid at-home COVID-19 tests can be ordered through covidtests.gov, with up to four years delivered per household. [A]



FOOD

THE METEORIC METAMORPHOSIS OF LA MONARCA PANADERIA

A Sweet and Savory Evolution

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

When Alfredo Livas and Ricardo Cervantes were little boys growing up in Monterrey, Mexico, they never ran into each other after school when they indulged in hot chocolate and pastries in the region's many panaderias. It wasn't

until 20 years later that they met in California and memories of that afternoon ritual would metamorphosize into La Monarca, a chain of 12 bakeries celebrating their Mexican heritage.

The pair met while studying at Stanford Business school and spent nights reminiscing about the bakeries in

Monterrey. The 20-somethings noticed that the hispanic market was a woefully underserved sleeping giant.

"If you went to a Mexican neighborhood 20 years ago in LA or the Bay Area, there were no Starbucks or In & Out," Livas tells *L.A. Weekly*, up to his elbows in conchas, cakes and orejitas

in his Highland Park store. "We started comparing that to how things were in Mexico and wanted to recreate that community. We knew we wanted to do a brand that resonated with the next generation of Latinos. We looked at the demographics and how the market was changing and becoming more enculturated. People were trying to reconnect with their roots, not necessarily based on nostalgia, but based on pride and being Latino. They grew up here and were educated here, becoming professionals like doctors, lawyers and businessmen and were eager to reconnect with their heritage."

Everybody tried to talk them out of it. "Don't spend a lot of money on it," contemporaries would tell them. "Latinos just want something cheap, they don't want anything nice, just cheap stuff."

"People told us we were crazy," says Livas. "When we opened our first bak-

ery in Huntington Park, there were 12 bakeries within a mile radius of where we were, but that was a good sign for us. There was a demand there. All we ever heard was, ‘Don’t spend a lot of money.’ Our philosophy from the beginning was that’s just not true, nobody likes cheap stuff. People like the best they can afford. If I’m going to bring you a cake, I’m going to buy you the nicest I can afford for my budget. Why should Latinos get pegged for that and the rest of the world deserves something nice? So that was a little chip on our shoulders that we always had. We’re not trying to go for a place that’s upscale, just welcoming to everyone, even if you’ve never been in a panaderia before.”

After opening the first retail store in 2006, they went on to open almost a store a year, often in historically working-class Hispanic neighborhoods like Boyle Heights, Plco Rivera, East L.A., Whittier and Lincoln Heights. The brand’s focus is to build a bridge between culture in America and Mexico by protecting and preserving historic food traditions for a younger, more ingredient-forward audience.

“We were told the place was too nice, which I found insulting,” says the father of three whose wife grew up in Boyle Heights. “What do you mean, it’s too nice for Mexicans? Like they don’t deserve it?” Well, when we opened, there were lines down the street. Latinos were ready for something new and updated and that store was a success from the very first day and still does well. It took us three years to build it because we had no idea what we were doing. If we knew then what we know now, we may not have signed that corner because the building had so many issues. But hey, ignorance is bliss.”

Since then, the La Monarca brand can be found in Costco, which will begin carrying wedding cookies, Albertsons and Cost Plus World Market, which will feature a hot chocolate and molinillo gift box for the holidays. All the bakery items are made from scratch, with no artificial ingredients and made mostly by hand in the Gardena commissary they bought in 2017. Costco called on Livas and Cervantes when the behemoth saw the hispanic demographic was shifting. A community proud of its heritage had more disposable income and was looking for updated products, something the partners had been preaching for 15 years.

“In L.A., people aren’t intimidated by Latino products anymore, but it’s exciting to go into other areas that aren’t as familiar and watch them get discovered and see them resonate,” says Livas, whose products can now be found in



Costcos from Central California to the border, as well as Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. “It’s about celebrating and meeting new friends. That’s the difference between a Latino bakery and other bakeries, it’s all about celebration. Everybody’s in a good mood. You come in on a Saturday or Sunday morning and you’ll see a table with grandma and generations of her whole family.”

In addition to packaged cookies, coffee, granola, honey and delicacies like guava marmalade, the stores carry seasonal items like pan de muerto starting next week, which is available through November, and hot chocolate for the holidays, as well as Rosca de Reyes for

Three Kings day in January. Items can be found at their online store as well.

Named after the Monarch butterfly, La Monarca is an homage to immigration.

“There are a few things behind the significance of the monarch butterfly, after which the brand was named,” says Livas. “When we were thinking of the concept of the brand, we wanted something that makes you think pan dulce — warm, airy, light, delicate and carefree. That’s how you would describe a butterfly. Orange is the happiest color in the spectrum and we realized there weren’t any brands out there that had orange. Starbucks has their green, the purple coffee bean, we claimed orange



— just like the monarch. Orange is a happy color and bakeries are happy places. That butterfly resonates with Mexicans because they fly all the way from the U.S. and migrate to a national park in Central Mexico to breed. There’s even a soccer team named after them. They are as dear to us as the American eagle is here. Migration is the story of Latinos in the US, immigrating back and forth. We donate 1% of our sales to ECOLife Conservation’s efforts for the monarch population — not our profits, our sales.”

It started with two young guys working seven days a week, 20 hours a day and sleeping in the back office. They’d start baking at 2 in the morning, close at night and clean the place, learning the ropes as they went along. At first it was just pastries and cakes, no seating or coffee in the beginning, everything to go. Now all stores have seating and espresso bars where you can open up your laptop and work.

“In Latino families, there’s always a party going on — baptisms, quinceanera, weddings, first communions,” says Livas. “They are traditionally big families. Going to the bakery to get a cake or a box of pastries is what you do. Every weekend. We wanted to make that connection.”

So what’s the secret to an immigrant’s success at making that connection?

“We’re very grateful to the LA community for embracing us and allowing us to share The Sweet Flavor of Mexico across our 12 stores, and now with our Mexican Cookies, Café de Olla and Mexican Chocolate at Costco, Albertsons, Vons, Pavilions and World Market stores,” says Cervantes. “Our guiding purpose at La Monarca Bakery is making life sweeter, which drives us to show up every day for our customers, our team members, our communities and our planet. To any entrepreneur, I’d suggest having a clear purpose for your organization is vital for staying focused and energized on what really matters.” ■

ENTERTAINMENT - UNBINGED

GEEK CHIC

UNBINGED reviews *Ahsoka*, *One Piece*, & *Fionna and Cake*

BY ERIN MAXWELL



Streaming services, cable TV and Primetime television are fighting for your viewership now more than ever. UNBINGED is here to help you weed through it all, with reviews of the latest shows that highlight what we love, what we hate and what we love to hate-watch, too.

Though the strikes and strife within the industry appear to be potentially ending with recent WGA announcements, sci-fi and fantasy nerds had seemed to be heading for a content famine as the year comes to a close. Luckily, there's still been a few big shows to offer anime, cartoons and comics geeks something to obsess over the past several weeks.

From the continuing tales of *Adventure Time* favorites to live-action versions of beloved previously-drawn characters in *One Piece* and *Ahsoka*, here's what to watch this week.

One Piece (Netflix)

Netflix doesn't have the greatest track record when it comes to adapting beloved anime series into live action. Cowboy Bebop left a lot to be desired while *Death Note* practically spit on the source material (with the exception of *Ryuk*, of course). So *One Piece* fans have every right to be apprehensive about the new show. Adapting a 1,000+ episode series with a complicated lore, evolving characters, and multifarious storylines that go on for years is not an easy task. But breathe easy, folks. The Straw Hat Pirates are safe, sound, and apparently in good hands with the streaming service.

Based on the beloved manga and its anime adaptation, *One Piece* is a fantasy series that follows wannabe pirate Monkey D. Luffy (Iñaki Godoy) — a young

lad with stretching abilities thanks to his poor choice in snacks. Luffy and his misfit crew that make up the Straw Hat Pirates — along with every buccaneer, thief and plunderer with a ship — are on the hunt for the lost treasure of Gold Roger, the former King of the Pirates. At his execution, he challenged the world to find “his treasure,” the mythical “One Piece” and be named the new Pirate King. His final words inspired a new age of piracy, thus beginning our tale.

With each episode, we learn more of this water-laden world and Luffy himself, as the story alternates from the formation of the Straw Hat crew to young Luffy and his mentor, the pirate Shanks. The colorful world of *One Piece* is on full display in this series, from the outrageously designed Buggy the Clown and Arlong the Saw, to the horrific cryptids and creatures that lurk deep below the water. Despite the caricatures, the ruthlessness and perils of the sea stay on the forefront, with thrills and chills galore.

One Piece shines in casting, too. Godoy as the rubbery, constantly chipper Luffy is a delight in the role, while his crew would make any die-hard fan happy. Emily Rudd as Numi and Mackenyu (son of actor Sonny Chiba) as Zoro help bring 2D versions of their counterparts to life with their portrayals, which still come off as animated, but never cartoonish.

Though it doesn't follow the story exactly, *One Piece* manages to capture the crux of the source's tempestuous tales. The well-adapted narrative fits the live-action medium nicely and the cast brings it all to life in a likable way. The result is a family friendly swashbuckling adventure that shows Netflix noted its past fol-

lies when it comes to playing with fan-favorite material, and decided to sail in an inspired new direction.

Adventure Time: Fionna and Cake (MAX)

Several years ago, fans said farewell to white-eared hat-wearing Finn and his bestie dog Jake as Cartoon Network's *Adventure Time* went off the air after nearly a decade. But the goodbye was only temporary, as the residents of the Land of Ooo returned for a handful of HBO/MAX specials. Thanks to the streaming wars and nostalgia-seeking viewers, more was to come. We return once again to the world Pendleton Ward created, or rather, the fan fiction world created by the fictional characters Ward created that somehow got a life of their own.

In the original *Adventure Time*, the Ice King (back when he was completely unhinged due to his sanity-depleting crown) wrote a series of fanfics titled “Fionna and Cake.” Presented as the ramblings of a madman and based on his frenemies Finn and Jake, the gender-swapped duo featured tomboy Fionna (voiced by Madeline Martin) and her anthropomorphic cat starring in offshoot episodes within the episodes.

Now Fionna and her feline BFF have their own show. And things are not as sunny as they once were. Fionna Campbell is a twenty-something slacker living a paycheck-to-paycheck existence in menial jobs that barely cover her rent. She has a handful of good, yet oddly familiar friends, but she wishes for a more magical life. Meanwhile, former Ice King Simon Petrikov isn't quite adjusting to life in Ooo without his magic. In his depressed state, he attempts to bring back his former sweetie/current god Betty, which ends up conjuring Fionna and Cake, and brings them to Ooo.

For fans of the original series, Fionna and Cake is a dream come true. It's an honest-to-goodness continuation of *Adventure Time*, complete with grown-up Finn, now beefy with age and sporting a full beard and many of the original's most beloved characters. And the core vibe of the original show is intact — the melancholy and surreality, the colorful art, etc. — which made it a hit with audiences of all ages.

Adventure Time: Fionna and Cake feels like the original, even as it tackles more adult themes such as despondency and apathy. Ward's creation once again reaches above and beyond its animated cells to grip at the heartstrings of viewers, creating a whimsical and ludicrous world that is still captivating. And with that, we welcome back Fionna and Cake. And Prismo and Simon and Finn and all the inhabitants of Ooo. Their absurd yet emotive comedic antics are exactly what we need in these unsteady times. Like a

hug from fantastical old friends.

Star Wars: Ahsoka (Disney+)

Over the last few years, *Star Wars* fans have developed a complicated relationship with the franchise. On one hand, enthusiasts have been feasting on movies, shows, cartoons and theme park attractions that cost a year's salary to experience. Disney's greed quickly saw an oversaturated market and so we got some lackluster entries, shitty hotels, and Porg plushies, causing the desire for more galactic adventures to diminish.

The galaxy is in desperate need of a savior that makes sense and gives new life to the lore, but will it be *Star Wars: Ahsoka*?

Ahsoka is a Togrutu (sentient humanoid with cone-like horns and white facial pigments), which fans were first introduced to as a preteen training under Anakin Skywalker in the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* back in 2008. She returned in animated form in *Star Wars Rebels* in 2014, before she finally made the leap to flesh and blood in *The Mandalorian* and *The Book of Boba Fett*. Now in her own series, *Ahsoka* (played by Rosario Dawson) follows the former Jedi after the fall of the Galactic Empire as she hunts for old adversaries and lost friends with the help of her former Padawan, Sabine Wren (Natasha Liu Bordizzo).

Written and co-directed by *Star Wars* messiah Dave Filoni, *Ahsoka* sees him doing what he does best: bridging the gap between feature films and the extended universe. But this time around, there is a distinct focus on female empowerment and leadership thanks to the femme-led cast. But the world of *Ahsoka* isn't an easy romp. The show will be quite complicated for most newbies, especially those who only have the movies under their belt and a Grogu T-shirt. Those who skipped out on *Rebels* and *Clone Wars* might be a bit lost in space when it comes to these characters, politics and past narratives.

To understand the show, *Ahsoka* asks its audience to do a lot of homework, and there's much to cover. Hardcore fans will appreciate the poignant relationships that have been carefully cultivated since they were in toon form, but others will find the show slow-moving and bogged down in politics. Still, the essence of good vs. bad is at the forefront of any great hero saga and it deserves to be explored.

Breathing new life into a galaxy far, far away is difficult, especially when the fan base seems to want familiarity — *Ahsoka* is basically a live-action version of *Rebels*: Season 5. Still, like the Disney hit *Andor*, *Ahsoka* has enough going for it to help steer it in a fresh direction, setting it apart from Indiana Jones, recent Marvel movies, and a few previous *Star Wars* outings that failed to do so. [E]

BRIT VICIOUS!

The Struts Raise Hell With Fourth Album

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



British rock ‘n’ rollers the Struts have been based here in Los Angeles since the tail end of 2019 and, even accounting for the fact that COVID put a stop to everything shortly after that, it’s clear when speaking to the four chaps over Zoom that they’re thriving. The Southern Californian sun suits them, as they gush about being able to drive with the top down (a novelty in England) and wild nights out.

“It was my friend Taylor Hawkins who really pushed the idea, for at least me anyway, to make the initial move, at a Thanksgiving that he was kind enough to invite me to,” says frontman Luke Spiller. “I think we all saw ourselves as very much a British-based band for quite some time. Taylor explained to me that this is a great time for me to be in the thick of it and we could be doing so much more. It was a little lightbulb moment basically. I remember I was at the Rainbow with the rest of the guys, and I said, ‘Hey, I’m re-

ally considering a move to L.A. I think it would be really, really good just to do it now.’ Everyone was like, ‘OK. Let’s go.’ Things have really changed a lot for us, mostly for the better.”

The reality of day-to-day life in Los Angeles is always going to be different to the myth that Brits (this writer included) build up across the pond. Different, but no less wonderful.

“I think we’re all really benefiting from it,” says Spiller. “We’ve made great relationships. Jed (Elliot, bass) got married to an American lady, and it’s very much a mixture between our predominant home and kinda like a second. It really is great though, let’s be real. When I take my car out with the roof off and I’m driving around the Valley listening to music, just feeling like the sun hit you – as an English person, I don’t think that will ever get old.”

“I came from a small town in Wales where there’s not a lot of choice to do

anything,” adds drummer Gethin Davies. “So being here, you can go out and have a crazy night, or you can find an event. Bands come through and you can go and see gigs. It’s honestly endless, what you can do here. Also, we were touring for so long, this is the first time I’ve paid rent somewhere since I joined the band. We’d just been living out of suitcases for a while. So it’s nice to be able to settle down

live sounding, but then it has the quality of the songwriting of the first and possibly the second, because we didn’t spend seven days on it to write and record like we did on the third one. We took almost 18 months, maybe a little bit more.”

The album was recorded between Nashville and Los Angeles, and it features horns and strings because the Struts ain’t fucking around. After all, the themes on there include the hopes and dreams of the musicians involved, and they’re not to be fucked around with.

“It still feels like a pursuit of rock ‘n’ roll bliss at points, and there’s definitely a lot of truth in the record as well,” Spiller says. “There’s certain points on the record where I think lyrically I’m being a lot more vulnerable than I have on previous material. The truth is, early on in those first records, a lot of the tracks were written within a character, rather than me taking things directly from my day-to-day life and things I’d experienced. But *Pretty Vicious*, on the whole, is really written about actual experiences, things that I had done and things that I’d hear people say, and it’s a collection of true stories mixed with a little rock ‘n’ roll fantasy.”

The album’s acerbic title comes from one of the tracks – a song that Spiller describes as one of the most exciting things the band has done in a while.

“It’s not the Struts trying to be super anthemic and rewriting a song like ‘Could Have Been Me,’” the frontman says. “A lot of bands go through a process of unconsciously ripping themselves off, trying to get that same thing. But ‘*Pretty Vicious*’ is equally as strong but in a different way. I loved the double entendre in the title.”

Meanwhile, the lead single is the rock ‘n’ roll riot that is “Too Good at Raising Hell,” the perfect way to introduce the world to their new chapter.

“I think it showcases a lot of what the record’s about,” says Spiller. “Sonically, it’s exciting and explosive at times. It’s got a lot of great guitar work in it. It has something of an anthemic-y chorus, but it also has approaches to the melody in the vocal that we hadn’t done before. It proved to be a good song to show everyone that we’re back. It’s quite cheeky. It’s a little bit fun as well, and also a little bit expected, but not completely.”

November also will see the band out on tour promoting *Pretty Vicious*, and preparations start now.

“We’re all on very L.A. carrot juice diets, and going for our daily Botox,” says Davis. “No emotion on the stage and no sweat whatsoever.”

Raising hell indeed!

The Struts’ *Pretty Vicious* is out Nov. 3. They end the tour at the Wiltern on Dec. 10. **[A]**

CANNABIS

CANNABIS TRAVEL DIARIES: COPENHAGEN

We Dove Into The Scene As Hard As We Could While
Hosting Scandinavia's Biggest Weed Expo

BY JIMI DEVINE



After spending 10 days in and around Copenhagen, I'm a total believer that Denmark may be the next country in Europe to legalize cannabis.

Cannabis in Denmark is nothing new. Some of Europe's most prolific smugglers and enthusiasts walk the streets of Copenhagen. Most of them learned the game on Pusher Street in their youth and either stuck around or went on to do crazy weed stuff all over the world. But the heart of Danish cannabis distribution's days may be numbered.

Christiania vs The Gangs

For decades, Pusher Street has served as one of the main hubs of Danish cannabis. You could head there to score a personal-size bag or a ton of hash. It's located a few hundred meters past the front gate of Christiania, the socialist commune squatters started on a retired Danish military base in 1971. At any given time roughly 1,000 adults call Christiania home and it's one of the most pro-cannabis places on the planet.

But regardless of how much they love weed, the Christiansians' relationship with Pusher Street has changed a lot over the years. While many of them grew up there buying and selling cannabis, in recent years it's become a lot more violent. In one of the world's friendliest cities, everyone is pissed. Even dudes who were selling 20 pounds a day through their stalls at one point are saying things have to change.

They aren't mad at the weed though. They are mad at the gangs that have chopped up Pusher Street into its current format of about 10 booths where you can buy flowers or hash and a strict no-photography policy. Hell, they'll even yell at you for talking on your phone without holding your hand over the camera.

Will Violence Lead to Reform?

After a recent shooting on Pusher Street, Christiania called on the authorities to come in and shut down the marketplace that was estimated to have done a million in revenue daily at its peak. But that number is way down. With the kind of violence that Pusher Street has seen recently since the murder, people want nothing to do with it.

One former dealer who was raised on the street said he wouldn't even visit anymore.

"It's like a powder keg," he told LA Weekly, "You have these guys in the middle of a gang war standing a few meters from each other. Tensions are very high at the moment. If someone just looks at someone the wrong way or feels disrespected, it could go down."



It was kind of sad to see the heart of one of the fastest developing scenes in Europe in such turmoil. The OGs sit



at the cafe next door and reminisce about the good times. While I was sitting there listening to the tales, I saw all the people that had just tried to sell

me hash and flower, one successfully, scurry around the corner. Next thing you know, a few cops are walking down the street.

It was more of a show of force than anything. The cops have had a unique relationship with the dealers of Pusher Street for decades. Every now and then they would come clean house and rip down all the stands. The next day everyone would walk up to Christiania's lumber and recycling yard and hire a crew to come rebuild their booth. One recent attempt saw authorities try to close Pusher Street by putting up giant concrete blocks at all the entrances. The blocks were knocked over as fast as they were put up.

The light at the end of the tunnel? The violence on Pusher Street may end up being a vital catalyst for legalization in Denmark. The pragmatic Danes are looking at it from a very public safety perspective. Many believe the only way to stop the violence is to legalize cannabis. [L]

ART

KARA WALKER'S MULTIPLES OF SINGULAR VISION

The Fisher Museum's New Exhibition Highlights The Power Of Prints

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT



Kara Walker's art draws its power from her unconventional fusion of vintage Antebellum aesthetics with emotionally and politically charged imagery. In her skillful recreation of the genteel parlor style of scenic cameo silhouettes, she evokes a whimsical, even nostalgic decorative sensibility—only to employ that visual language to convey the profoundly unsettling symbolism that carries recovered histories and their insufficiently addressed legacies. Despite the antiquity of the idiom,

the confrontation is very much about the present day. Ultimately, the black-and-white world that Walker conjures is anything but.

A newly opened exhibition at the USC Fisher Museum of Art, *Kara Walker: Cut to the Quick: Works from the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation*, explores the several decades of Walker's career, through more than 80 works made between 1994 and 2019. But instead of the attention-grabbing sculptures and architectural installations that have earned Walker well-deserved inter-

national acclaim, this unique exhibition primarily examines her career through the lens of her robust printmaking, drawing, and editioned sculpture practices.

This makes perfect sense, as the Schnitzer collection is one of the country's largest holdings of prints and works on paper—and Jordan himself is known for a charming lowkey obsessive streak that prompts him to favor complete portfolios. He bought his first Kara Walker piece in 1997 (*The Keys to the Coop*, a limited edition print which is in the exhibition). Since then he's acquired a further 125 works, always with set completeness in mind. For example, the exhibition proudly shows off the complete *Porgy & Bess* libretto series, as well as all 27 of the innovative suite of black, white, gray



literary voice, akin to a book, allowing for multiple avenues and entry points into the world of the artist's thoughts. There's room for nuance and contradiction, cognitive dissonance and frictions of recurrence. Walker has often mentioned her literary influences along with the research-based visual culture she taps into. This exhibition demonstrates, among other things, that in printmaking, she doesn't merely find a means of reproduction but a fully developed medium with its own distinct attributes that advance her artistic project.

In Walker's hands, the prints and multiples mediums represent a strong marriage of idea and form, in an expanded field of distilled tropes, fixed narratives, and recontextualized symbolism that can be by turns legible and mysterious, beautiful and uncomfortable, poetic and enraging. For example, *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)*, 2005, is a portfolio in which her work is superimposed onto pages from a predictably stereotyped and one-sided account of war and Reconstruction. By building upon a literal foundation of archival printed pages and all the language they contained, she creates a crystal-clear visual dynamic with a revised perspective on history, challenging the biases of past discourse, with a conceptual and physical framework that is once again an ideal job for printmaking.

The Fisher's installation also includes 2-D and 3-D sculptures and shadow-puppet videos (which make sense because they are made out of drawings). Laser-cut steel works bring the silhouette paper cut-outs off the wall and into the viewer's physical space, providing a heightened sense of intimacy and whimsy that starkly contrasts with the horrid episodes depicted in the large-scale works. If Walker's printmaking is conversation with art history, these pieces appeal more directly to the senses, in dialogue with elements

prints from *Emancipation Approximation* (1999-2000).

Walker's process involves extensive research in history, literature, art history, and popular culture—all of her work is built on a foundation of storytelling. However the sensoria of immersive or monumental works can often land the viewer's focus in the aspects of symbolism and emotional effect—whereas the super power of a print series, especially a complete collection, is the unfolding of serial narratives. This is a much more



of play, domesticity, public space, cinema, spectacle, and even the weird world of problematic collectibles.

Originally co-curated by Frist Art Museum executive director and CEO Dr. Susan H. Edwards and Nashville poet Ciona Rouse, the exhibition debuted at the Frist Museum in Nashville and traveled to the Cincinnati Art Museum, MOCA Jacksonville, and Virginia MOCA en route to its concluding stop at the Fisher. Each location would naturally have impactful involvement from its own staff and community, but at an educational institution like USC, the opportunity for a literal teachable moment was too good to pass up.

Using the occasion as a launchpad for an interdisciplinary augmentation special to USC, three student curators from

the extended campus community were invited to play key roles in the curatorial process. The impressive young women were Daijah Williams, Curatorial and Collections Getty Marrow Intern; Kymia Freeman, Student curator specifically tasked with writing exhibition text; and Amaya Nakpodia, who created the Reflection Room alongside Daijah Williams, and also contributed to the exhibition text.


The Reflection Room is a space connected to one of the main exhibition galleries, offering further resources from Walker's own research processes, as well as a safe, soothing, nurturing environment of quiet contemplation or respite, if they require it, from the work's unflinching tales of violence and racism. Beauty in Walker's work is a visual strategy to de-



liver horrific information, cognitive dissonance is the point. It's upsetting, meant to be so, and it's perfectly okay to take a moment to process.

In honor of this dual spirit of the work, exhibition programs include a shadow-puppet workshop inspired by the fascinating handmade films on view, as well as a pointed conversation, Let's Talk about George Floyd: Systemic Racism in the U.S. Today, between Toluse Olorunnipa, Assistant Professor of Sociology at USC, and Jody David Armour, Croker Professor of Law at USC, moderated by Kymia

Freeman, a Public Relations student at USC Annenberg. Also in the spirit of the exhibition's spirit of community, a Q&A and reception with music, food, and an interactive mural will follow the conversation—because there's nothing more important, to both Walker and to Schnitzer, than art's power to educate and amplify the story of America.

The exhibition is on view at 823 W. Exposition Blvd., downtown, through December 9, free. For more information visit: fisher.usc.edu. 



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