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WEEKEND JOURNAL.

EUROPE

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spit-roasted claim to fame

Big-time barbecue

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WEEKEND JOURNAL

EUROPE

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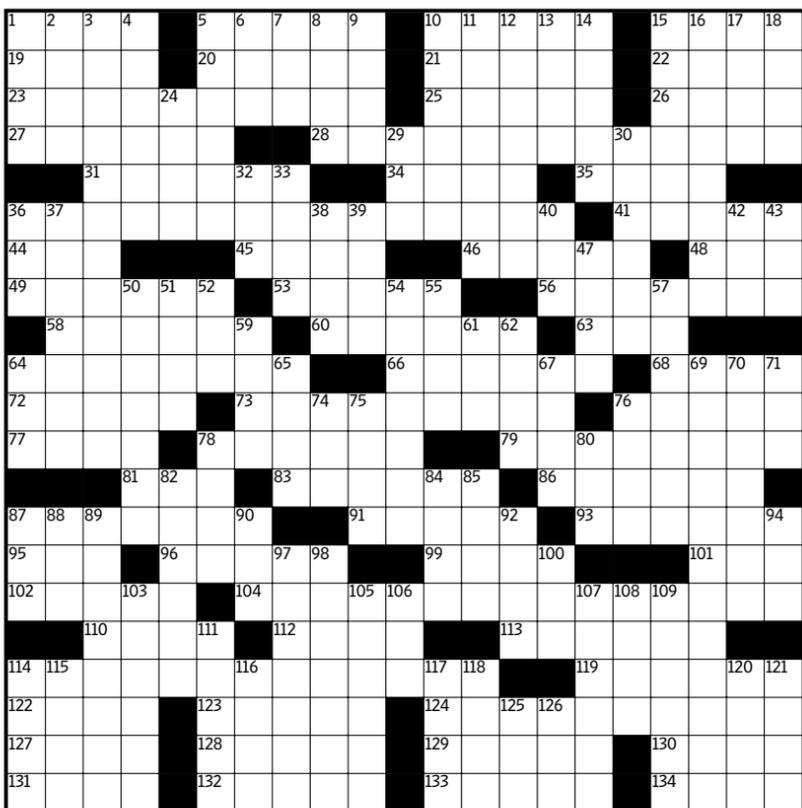
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Luc Tuymans captures the moment

BY J. S. MARCUS

Special to The Wall Street Journal
THE CONTEMPORARY art market may be in freefall, but Belgian painter Luc Tuymans, long regarded as one of the art world's brightest stars, is having a banner year. This spring, he opened a major installation of recent work at the Wiels Contemporary Arts Center in Brussels; later this fall, a full-scale retrospective of his work will begin a 16-month tour of the U.S.

An Antwerp native, Mr. Tuymans, now 51 years old, still lives and works in his hometown. A self-taught student of film and a formally trained artist, Mr. Tuymans first made his mark in the 1980s, when he began to explore Europe's memories of World War II with harsh, elegant paintings like "Gas Chamber" (1986), which depicts the Dachau concentration camp with analytical despair and formal improvisation.

Mr. Tuymans combines a keen knowledge of the Flemish old masters with an instinctively cinematic approach to painting. Though he may apply his paint like an old master, he uses close-ups and framing devices with the skill of a great 20th-century film director. Mr. Tuymans often seems to court controversy. In 2001, he represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale with a controversial installation that investigated Belgium's longstanding taboo about its colonial legacy in the Congo.

Mr. Tuymans current Brussels show, called "Against the Day" (through Aug. 2), draws on a number of sources, like found photographs and images transmitted by cellphone, as the basis for 20 paintings. The title work is a magnificent diptych, which shows a fractured scene staged in Mr. Tuymans's backyard. A gardener is caught in two separate but related moments, turning the viewer into a kind of security camera, impassively and sinisterly registering the movement of time.

We spoke to Mr. Tuymans at his Antwerp home.

Q: Your new show contains 20 recent paintings. Were they created to be exhibited together?

They were. [Originally] Wiels requested to work with loans, which was virtually impossible because the budget didn't allow for that. I was already in the process of thinking up a new body of work, and I proposed to make an entirely new show [spread out] over two levels. The title goes back to the last book of Thomas Pynchon, the inventor of paranoia in American literature, and one of my favorite writers.

Q: The two title paintings, "Against the Day I" and "Against the Day II," show a gardener working at night in your own yard. How are the works related to each other?

Conceptually, like the pause button on a remote control. In the first one, you see the gardener wearing a cap; in the second one, you see he no longer has the cap on his head and he has lost the grip of his shovel. You can clearly see the difference, although the two are equal to each other, which is why I insist on keeping them together as a diptych.

Q: Your work often depicts states of unease. Do you mean to create a feeling of unease in the viewer?



Above, the Belgian artist Luc Tuymans and his 2008 painting 'Foundations'; below, Mr. Tuymans's 2009 work, 'Hair.'

I try to create a feeling of distrust of the image—of every type of imagery, basically—because an image can always be manipulated.

Q: You usually create your paintings in a single day. What does that process entail?

I always build up a painting in the same way the old masters used to do it: I start to paint the lightest color, and paint all over the surface of the canvas. [Though] I don't paint on a canvas that is on a frame, just a piece of canvas put on a wall with nails. Then I paint the surface I think I'm going to need. And then with a pencil I start to draw. Then I paint the pencil lines away a little bit, and then the painting starts. It's really a horror for the first three hours. Although I know what I'm doing, I don't see what I'm doing. Once the painting comes together about halfway through, the real joy kicks in. I paint nearly every painting in a day because I think that's the only way to keep my attention span going. And I think it's the only way to keep intensity within the painting itself.

Q: You have returned again and again to the subject of the Second

World War. What did the war, and the years of German occupation in Belgium, mean to your own family?

My parents were too young to play an active role at the time, but their families did. My mother, whose family was in the Resistance, lost her brother, and my father lost his brother, who was some kind of fanatic, and got killed as a mascot of an SS unit outside Berlin. The marriage was not a happy one. Every time there was a problem, this element of guilt was played out, especially when we were eating. It became a phobia for me; at first, I didn't want to address it at all. I just circled around the subject, until there were some key moments. I visited most of the [concentration] camps, and made one watercolor on the spot in Dachau. I made it on the backside of a calendar from the hotel I was staying at. I just left it on the floor of my studio, and it yellowed naturally, and then years later I made it into ["Gas Chamber"]. It's purely conceptual. Without a title, it would be just a basement.

Q: You are now preparing for a major retrospective, which will

tour the U.S. before coming to Brussels next year. What have you learned about yourself in going back over many decades of work?

First of all, that I am kind of a control freak. I built up all the shows myself until this one. Now I am working with two really intelligent women, and for the first time I have the idea I can actually let them do it. They are going to make a show that is chronological, will place the work in an art historical context for the first time.

Q: A few years ago, you moved into a new studio here in Antwerp. Has this changed the way you work?

It's changed the size of my work, definitely, but not the way I work. I was actually very afraid of that. The first studio, in which I worked for over 30 years, looked like Francis Bacon's. It was a small apartment, with a living room that I worked in. In the beginning, I also lived there, which was horrendous, because of the [paint] smell. I was afraid of moving into this larger space of 460 square meters, with heat, and running water. It went like a jiffy, though. The light is really great. It's a neutral space, but it still has character.

Q: How has the collapse in the art market affected what you do?

For me, it doesn't really matter, because there has been such a large investment in my work. The people who buy my work are part of the 1% who owns everything—they lost something, but they still own a lot. Artistically, though, it can only help. The financial crisis will trigger a more content-driven way of dealing with art. The crap will detach itself from something that is really far more interesting, because people will think twice before they buy. And so I think the level will be heightened. You will have less money but more culture.

Q: A Belgian question. What's your favorite kind of beer?

None, because I'm a bad Belgian. I don't drink beer. I only drink massive amounts of Jack Daniels.



'Portrait of Baron de Robeck Riding a Bay Hunter' (1791), by George Stubbs; estimate: £2 million-£3 million.

Old masters, new interest

OLD MASTER DEALERS and auctioneers have joined forces to launch Master Paintings Week (July 4-10), a new event on London's art-collecting calendar.

Some 23 of the city's top international galleries will stage special painting exhibitions. Auction houses will hold a series of sales featuring works of European art from the 14th to the mid-19th century. Running parallel will be Master Drawings London, now in its ninth

Collecting

MARGARET STUDER

year, where international dealers will offer hundreds of years of art-on-paper up to the present day.

Seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish painting specialist Johnny Van Haeften says that old-master paintings have an image problem in that many people think of them as "dark and dreary, but in fact I think they would be surprised at just how vibrant and fascinating they can be." Among his offerings will be Jan Brueghel the Elder's "Still Life of Flowers in a Blue and White Vase," full of dancing blooms and priced in the region of \$5 million.

Old Bond Street's Colnaghi Gallery will focus on the German Renaissance master Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), an artist who has had tremendous influence into the present day. His milk-white, virtuous-yet-dangerous nudes have inspired everything from German expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's colorful sirens to contemporary American artist John Currin's strangely twisted female portraits. Not least, Cranach's Garden-of-Eden painting "Temptation" became known to global TV viewers as the frontispiece for credit lines in the series "Desperate Housewives."

Among the highlights at Sotheby's evening sale on July 8 will be two major equestrian paintings: Goya's 1794 portrait of Spain's Duke of Alcudia seated on a prancing horse with a threatening sky in the background (estimate: £2.5 million-£3.5 million); and star British equestrian artist George Stubbs's delightful 1791 painting of Baron de Robeck on his proud hunter (estimate: £2 million-£3 million).

Another highlight at Sotheby's will be a portrait from 1628 by Dutch master Anthony Van Dyck of his friend Endymion Porter dressed in a rich, satin doublet and a flowing red cap. The work illustrates the artist's incredible ability to capture the essence of his sitter, and has never been offered at auction before (estimate: £1 million-£1.5 million).

A major Van Dyck at Christie's on July 7 will be a portrait of a richly dressed, pregnant "Mrs. Oliver St. John later Lady Poulett" (1636), which was last seen in public at a Detroit Institute of Fine Arts exhibition in 1929 (estimate: £800,000-£1.2 million).



Courtesy David Zwirner, New York and Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp (2)

'Public Enemies' revives the gangland epic

BY JOHN JURGENSEN

GANGSTER FILMS ENDURE because the best of them mirror the essential issues of their time. A depiction of Prohibition-era corruption fueled "The Racket," a Howard Hughes film from 1928 based on a play banned in Chicago. In 1983, Brian De Palma's "Scarface" told a tale of bloody upward mobility among Cuban immigrants in Miami. And in 1991, "New Jack City" tracked the spread of crack cocaine in the black inner city.

Now, Michael Mann, the director of "The Insider" and "Heat," is putting his stamp on the genre with "Public Enemies." The \$100 million production, which opened this week, stars Johnny Depp as John Dillinger, who led a brief but explosive bank-robbing spree during the Great Depression.

"Public Enemies" is arriving in the midst of the biggest economic crisis since that time. As a preamble to the film reminds viewers, resentment of banks was peaking in the 1930s when Dillinger's crime rampage turned him into a media darling and, according to the U.S. government, Public Enemy No. 1.

Christian Bale, who plays Melvin Purvis, the agent who hunts Dillinger down, sees an "uncanny" connection to current events in the movie. "There's the notion of welfare for the rich, none for the poor, fat-cat bankers, and the common man being screwed over, which is mirrored in today's news," Mr. Bale says.

Gangsters are often portrayed as the ultimate sexy bad boys and the promotional campaign for "Public Enemies" can be summarized as Johnny Depp with a Tommy gun. Ads have played up Dillinger's duel with Purvis and his doomed romance with Billie Frechette, played by Oscar-winner Marion Cotillard. And the plot adheres to Hollywood math. "There's three bank robberies, two prison breaks, and two epic gun battles," plus a love story for the ladies, producer Kevin Misher says.

Genre aficionados acknowledge Mr. Depp is a bigger draw than the infamous criminal he portrays. "You're introducing the story of Dillinger to a generation who's never heard of him and may not care," says John McCarty, author of a book about gangster films, "Bullets Over Hollywood."

In its marketing push for "Public Enemies," Universal Pictures isn't featuring any references to the current recession, nor is it aiming to make banks into Public Enemy No. 2. One reason to let viewers draw their own conclusions: the dismal track record for films with weighty topics such as the war in Iraq or the meltdown of Wall Street. Last February, for instance, a thriller about sinister machinations in global finance, "The International," flopped at the box office despite lots of gunplay and a popular lead actor, Clive Owen.

The blueprint for the gangster picture was drawn during the Depression, when criminals of Dillinger's ilk were still running wild. Under the Motion Picture Production Code introduced by studios in 1930, filmmakers couldn't glorify the underworld kingpins they portrayed. Enforcement of that code led to disclaimers and deleted scenes in seminal films such as "Scarface," "Public Enemy" and "Little Caesar," which was inspired by Al Capone.

As he attempts to cut through de-



Top, Johnny Depp and director Michael Mann on the set of 'Public Enemies'; above, Christian Bale as Melvin Purvis, the agent who hunts John Dillinger down.

cadres of lore inspired by Dillinger, including John Huston's classic "High Sierra," Mr. Mann is inviting comparisons with landmark works, from "Public Enemy" to "The Sopranos."

Part of the lasting appeal of gangster films is that even the genre's most savage and debased characters speak to a deep-seated desire among viewers to be powerful and feared. "Wouldn't it be nice to walk into the restaurant and get the best seat in the house, or to snap your fingers and have your gang take care of your problems?" says Mr. McCarty, the author of the book about gangster pictures.

As gangster flicks gradually replaced Westerns as the defining form of American cinema, leading men swapped white hats for black. The stories of these antiheroes, such as the underdog who defies authority to seize his destiny, continue to repeat themselves. As they do, they shape an alternate history of society, told through the skewed lives of its outlaws.

In the movies, gangsters often challenge authorities who are as corrupt as the criminals. Captain Mark McCluskey, a cop on the take in "The Godfather," is more hateful than any of the mobsters. At times when people feel society isn't giving ordinary folks a fair shake, rule-breaking gang-

sters can be powerfully seductive.

While movies let viewers admire gangsters from a safe distance, the reality can be problematic. Dillinger defenders make him out as a Robin Hood, standing up to the rich and powerful. His criminal exploits, they argue, did not include murder. Though Dillinger was accused of killing a police officer, William O'Malley, he broke out of jail before he could be tried. On that score, Jeff Scaf, a great-nephew of the gangster and president of Dillinger LLC, has pursued multiple lawsuits, including one that shut down a Dillinger museum in Hammond, Ind., for five years.

Mr. Mann, who with Mr. Depp paid a visit to Mr. Scaf at the Indiana farmhouse where the gangster grew up, disagrees that murder represents some kind of dividing line in the gangster's legacy. Instead, he was a public hero who straddled good and evil. "Dillinger was assaulting the institutions that made people's lives misery: the banks," the director says, while refusing to whitewash his protagonist. "Do I think Dillinger killed people? Probably. He was a very, very tough guy. We don't shy away from that. In the film, he shoots. And they go down."

Mr. Mann, who grew up in the cradle of gangster history, Chicago, is

counting on verisimilitude to resurrect these characters. He relied on head armorer Harry Lu to procure weapons from the era which had been retrofitted to fire blanks. Mr. Depp, for instance, fired a rare 1921 Thompson submachine gun.

The director shot the film's climax at the Biograph Theater where Dillinger was gunned down. "Johnny's head is falling on the same square of the planet Earth that Dillinger's did," Mr. Mann says, describing his process as a way to "reverse engineer" true events.

However, the director says some of Dillinger's words and deeds were too over the top, even for the movies. In a letter to a girlfriend, according to the director, Dillinger wrote, "Honey, I miss you like nobody's business, and I don't mean maybe!" In a scene where Mr. Depp's character escapes from a prison in Crown Point, Ind., he uses a dummy wooden gun to seize several hostages. "In real life Dillinger took 17 guards hostage. I had no idea how to make that credible," Mr. Mann says.

Dillinger seemed to revel in the gangster mystique and took a hand in shaping his own. He closely followed his portrayal in the press and advised his bank hostages on how to sell their story to newspapers. Holed up in one of his final hideouts, he fielded book deals and other offers, according to former Wall Street Journal reporter Bryan Burrough, author of the book that formed the basis for Mr. Mann's film. On the night he was ambushed by federal agents, Dillinger had just walked out of "Manhattan Melodrama," in which Clark Gable sports a Dillinger-esque mustache.

"He lived a lifetime in 13 months. He was smart, sophisticated and planned his robberies like a Nascar pit crew," Mr. Mann says, describing the allure of Dillinger—and by extension, the gangster genre. "I'm attracted to conflict and lives lived in the extreme. This kind of intensity is timeless."

WSJ.com

Screening room
See a clip from 'Public Enemies' at
WSJ.com/Lifestyle

Gang hits

Whether their stories were fact-based or not, some of the most memorable cinema gangsters mirrored the issues of their day.



Little Caesar ▲

1930

This talkie depicting the rise of ruthless "Rico" Bandello was modeled on the myth of Al Capone, down to the pugnacious look of leading man Edward G. Robinson. Quote: "Listen, you crummy, flatfooted copper, I'll show you whether I've lost my nerve and my brains!"

White Heat

1949

One of the final releases in the run of great gangster cinema from Warner Bros. coincided with James Cagney's last memorable gangster turn. He's Cody Jarrett, a delirious bad guy with an Oedipal complex. He sits on his mother's lap to be soothed, then goes berserk in prison when he learns of her death. Quote: "Made it, Ma! Top of the world!"

The Godfather

1972-74

Ambitious and epic, Francis Ford Coppola's two-movie portrait of the Corleone crime family spanned generations and painted gangsters as nuanced human beings. ("Godfather III" followed in 1990.) As a result it redefined the myth of mafia life for viewers on either side of the law. Quote: "Leave the gun. Take the cannoli."

Infernal Affairs

2002

This Hong Kong film explores the porous divide between cops and criminals. The story follows two moles—a cop embedded in an underworld clique, and a gang initiate who infiltrates the police—as their identities unravel deep under cover. The movie formed the basis of "The Departed," from director Martin Scorsese. Quote: "I just want an identity. I want to be a normal man."

City of God

2002

This Oscar-nominated film tells a timeless crime story of lost innocence from the teeming favela slums of Rio de Janeiro. With an edgy style throbbing with saturated colors, directors Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund follow a group of boys into manhood, where they're divided by turf wars and destiny. Quote: "You need more than guts to be a good gangster, you need ideas."

Anthony Mackie (left) and Jeremy Renner in 'The Hurt Locker'; bottom, one of the robotic stars of 'Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen.'



Shock, awe, brilliance

THE HURT LOCKER states its case with a prefatory quote from the journalist Chris Hedges—"War is a drug"—then makes its case with masterful clarity, mounting intensity and phenomenal force.

Kathryn Bigelow's film, which was written by Mark Boal, manages

Film

JOE MORGENSTERN

to be many things at once—a first-rate action thriller, a vivid evocation of urban warfare in Iraq, a penetrating study of heroism and a showcase for austere technique, terse writing and a trio of brilliant performances. Most of all, though, it's an instant classic that demonstrates, in a brutally hot and dusty laboratory setting, how the drug of war hooks its victims and why they can't kick the habit.

The focal point is a three-man bomb squad working bravely and meticulously, on the streets of Baghdad in 2004, to disarm a succession of the improvised explosive devices that are killing civilians and soldiers alike. While all members of the squad are skilled professionals, one of them, Staff Sgt. William James (Jeremy Renner), has a special relationship with bombs. He loves the circuits that must be decoded, the detonators that must be disconnected. He loves the challenge presented by each bomb, the chance to taunt fate and come up a winner or go up in flames; it's the ultimate form of a gambler's high. (In military parlance, bombs send their victims to the locker of the title.)

At various points in their collaboration, the other two men—they're played by Anthony Mackie and Brian Geraghty—call James reckless, a rowdy boy and a wild man. But is he crazy as well, or courageous beyond the call of duty, or both? Although that's the key question, the movie, wisely, doesn't insist on a clear answer. Its immediate concerns are more concrete—the intricacies of the dismantling process, studied up close; the second-by-second choices that must be made in the explosive environment of terrorist turf. Yet those concerns are dramatized so astutely, and balanced so adroitly—the tone is nei-

ther militarist nor pacifist—that "The Hurt Locker" takes on the dimensions of a meditation on war and human nature.

The director, Ms. Bigelow, has made supercharged films before—most notably the action thriller "K-11: The Widowmaker" and the fevered sci-fi epic "Strange Days." This one, though, is both a departure and a breakthrough, an almost flawless piece of filmmaking that avoids familiar tropes—no beads of sweat in close-up, no heartbeats thumping on the sound track—yet vibrates with suspense and passion. The cast includes Ralph Fiennes and Guy Pearce. Barry Ackroyd did the stunning cinematography.

'Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen'

In "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen," a national security adviser confronts the leader of the Autobots, Optimus Prime—he's a good robot, trying to help us foolish humans defend ourselves against an army of bad Decepticons—and says,

angrily, "Who are you to pass judgment on us?" During the course of this appalling film, I asked myself the same question. Who am I to pass judgment on a vast industrial enterprise that cost, and will earn, countless kings' ransoms? What words of wisdom can a movie critic offer in the face of an antimovie that will give its many fans the pleasure of watching machines battling machines without the distraction of coherence or humanity? Then a word did come to me: MaxLite. It's the brand of ear plugs I've found best for defense against deafening movies, and the brand I used to protect my tympanic membranes against "Revenge of the Fallen." If only I'd had protection for my brain.

Compared to this sequel, the first "Transformers," released two years ago, ranks right up there with Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason." The new one is impressive for what it is, glittering pieces of computer-generated machinery that gyrate, undulate, somersault and explode. At 150 minutes, though, Michael Bay's production is like a July 4th fireworks display that doesn't end until July 8th and makes you swear off Roman candles for life.

There is a plot, of sorts, one that centers yet again on young Sam Witwicky (Shia LaBeouf) and his nubile girlfriend Mikaela Banes (Megan Fox). Having saved the human race in the previous installment, Sam goes off to college, but not for long. This time he must save the whole planet. A few bright spots relieve the sustained-release idiocy. Henry Ford's Model T was, it turns out, a Decepticon in disguise. The ranks of the Autobots are rife with General Motors product placements: In the current climate anything that may sell a GM car can only be seen as a plus.

The "Transformers" movies certainly strike a nerve. These days, when technology drives so many human choices, it really does seem like us against the machines. But it's also us against the machine-made movies that are transforming the realm of entertainment. Kids will embrace this one, just as they've been conditioned to do by their love of Transformer toys and by the implacable forces of global marketing. Still, that doesn't change the nature of the mechanical beast. This "Transformers" is a pile of glittering junk.

Master of machines: Michael Bay's oeuvre

BY LAUREN A. E. SCHUKER

MICHAEL BAY'S latest release, the \$200 million action-adventure movie "Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen," has just scored the second-biggest five-day opening in Hollywood history after last summer's "The Dark Knight," grossing \$201.2 million by Sunday's end. But the 44-year-old director behind the big-budget epics "Armageddon" and "Pearl Harbor," who has a predilection for massive budgets and pyrotechnic explosions, has already set his sights on a radically new goal: making an art film.

Q: This film features even more talking robots—based on the Hasbro toy line—than the first "Transformers." Why add in more robots rather than humans?

That's what fans wanted. The first film was really about us setting up the situation, and this movie is about us discovering what we could do better with that situation, how to make this most out of these special effects and these characters.

Q: Did Hasbro force you to conform the aesthetics of the robots to match the style of its toy line? Did you have to make any compromises on characters for the sake of promoting Hasbro's stable of pre-existing Transformers characters?

Not at all. I told [Hasbro] that I was going to do my own thing, and they really let me go off on the designs. They gave me carte blanche—it was pretty phenomenal. But I still listened to people who were in that world when they asked things like, "Can we make Optimus's ears a little longer so he appears more in character?" That's easy to do.

Q: Did you add testicles to the robots, too?

No, those are construction balls.

Q: Uh-huh. So, now that you've finished the sequel of "Transformers," are you ready to direct the third installment of the franchise?

I just want to take some time off. It's been almost three years that I've devoted myself entirely to this world of robots. At some point, enough is enough—and I literally carried this movie on my back. I only finished it in the last week. It was a tough movie for me to finish—especially with the writers strike, the possible SAG strike. At one point, we were the only union movie

in America shooting—Hollywood was so messed up from those two events.

Q: So you don't want to do another sequel?

I don't know who [would] want to take on my shoes with this franchise. We might just take a year down.

Q: What's next for you, then?

I've been talking to some big actors right now about something that is totally different. A small dark comedy, a true story, with actors just acting, no effects. I'm done with effects movies for now. When you do a movie like "Transformers," it can feel like you're doing three movies at once—which is tiring.

Q: It's interesting that you want to focus on acting. Megan Fox, one of the leads in "Transformers," has criticized your films for being special-effects-driven and not offering so many acting opportunities. Do you agree?

Well, that's Megan Fox for you. She says some very ridiculous things because she's 23 years old and she still has a lot of growing to do. You roll your eyes when you see statements like that and think, "Okay Megan, you can do whatever you want. I got it." But I 100% disagree with her. Nick Cage wasn't a big actor when I cast him, nor was Ben Affleck before I put him in "Armageddon." Shia LaBeouf wasn't a big movie star before he did "Transformers"—and then he exploded. Not to mention Will Smith and Martin Lawrence, from "Bad Boys." Nobody in the world knew about Megan Fox until I found her and put her in "Transformers." I like to think that I've had some luck in building actors' careers with my films.

Q: You really shot all those scenes in ["Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen"] at the real pyramids?

One of the things that I pride myself on is that in situations where people say, "You can't do that," somehow I am always able to pull it off. I did it with "Pearl Harbor" and I did it with "Armageddon," with the space shuttle, and luckily [Secretary General of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities] Dr. Zahi Hawass, who runs the pyramids, was a fan of the first "Transformers"—so he let us film there, even though we're the first film to do so in 30 years.



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Opening this week in Europe

- Adventureland Italy, Romania
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- Hannah Montana: The Movie Belgium
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- The Wrestler Czech Republic
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Source: IMDb

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'Revenge of the Fallen' star Shia LaBeouf (left) with director Michael Bay.

Big-time barbecue

MOST Portuguese towns are graced with monuments honoring local heroes. Mealhada is a bit different. There's no stony faced navigator or dreamy bronze poet to greet visitors here. Instead, there's a three-meter monolith topped with an oversized limestone piglet, its snout pointed skyward in an expression of civic pride in its inhabitants' prowess in the arts of porcine cuisine.

Mealhada is Portugal's suckling pig central.

The town of 5,000 is renowned the length and breadth of the land for serving up spit-roasted, crispy skinned and pepper-spiced piglets to thousands of visitors who flock here to scoff platefuls of a cherished recipe known as leitão da Bairrada.

"On peak days we have some restaurants that are serving 800 suckling pigs a day," says António Duque, founder and president of the Gastronomic Brotherhood of the Bairrada Suckling Pig.

"There's no gastronomic delicacy in Portugal that's consumed in such huge quantities," he says between forkfuls of tender pink flesh. "Do you know how many leitões are eaten in the Bairrada each day? I'll tell you: 3,000. That's 15 tons a day."

A few definitions: Leitão is a Portuguese word for a suckling pig—a piglet in the first weeks of life still feeding on its mother's milk; leitões is the plural. The Bairrada is a loosely defined region of central Portugal, famed for its wines and piglets. It's roughly situated between the ancient university city of Coimbra and the watery horizons of the Ria de Aveiro, one of western Europe's largest saltwater lagoons. To the east, it's bordered by the lush Serra do Buçaco mountains and on the west, by an unbroken string of Atlantic beaches. Leitão da Bairrada is a vegetarian's nightmare that involves basting the little porkys in a garlic and pepper sauce, then slow roasting them in a wood oven to obtain a satisfying mix of crunchy golden rind and soft, fat-infused meat.

Pigs are raised and consumed all over Portugal, from the semi-wild black hogs that root for acorns in the cork-oak forest in the southern Alentejo, to the home-reared swine whose blood and innards contribute to unctuous northern specialties like papas de sarabulho. Quite why the Bairrada became specialized in the mini version of the beast is the subject of some speculation. Mr. Duque says the origins are tied up with the region's wine industry, since vine cuttings were always used to fire up the brick ovens in which leitões are roasted. Some say the local pigs thrived on acorns and chestnuts fallen in the Buçaco forest, giving a particular flavor to their offspring. An 18th-century cookbook found in a local convent gives a recipe remarkably similar to the garlic, lard and black pepper mix that is used to season the piglets today.

The suckling pig business really took off in the early 20th century, when posh hotels



Assador de leitões Urbano Duarte roasts a pig at the restaurant; below, Heleno Cadete, a waiter at Pedro dos Leitões restaurant.



BY PAUL AMES
Special to The Wall Street Journal

opened up in the Bairrada spa towns of Luso and Curia, attracting a big-city clientele who were quickly seduced by the local delicacy. The motor age brought the highway from Lisbon and Porto through the Bairrada and pausing to pig out on a Mealhada roast became de rigueur for drivers traveling between the capital and the second city.

To cope with demand, a string of over 30 restaurants sprung up shoulder-to-shoulder for several kilometers along the EN1 road that runs through the town. Many have grown to

an industrial scale with vast car parks, ovens able to hold 30 piglets at a time and capacity to serve hundreds of customers hungry for a tray of moist piglet pieces, usually served with sliced orange, green salad, fried potatoes and a chilled bottle of the region's sparkling red wine, espumante tinto de bairrada.

No one expects fancy surroundings. These are big, bright places more suited to boisterous family lunches than tête-à-tête dining.

Locals all have their favorites. Pedro dos Leitões, set up by Álvaro Pedro in 1949, is the

oldest and best-known, with space for 430 diners. Its neighbor and competitor, A Meta dos Leitões, is of similar dimensions and boasts its own vineyards. The Churrasqueira Rocha is illuminated by a neon sign showing a happy piglet rolling back on a plate of fries and salad. Then there's O Picnic, Azevedo dos Leitões, Floresta dos Leitões, Basílio dos Leitões and so on. British food writer Nicholas Lander gave up trying to make a choice, and included the whole town on his list of the world's 25 best restaurants.

Suckling pig snobs may, however, prefer to sidestep the mass pig fests of Mealhada and set off along the byways of the Bairrada in search of a more intimate encounter with leitão, in places like the Mugasa in Sangalhos, or Manuel Júlio in Barcouço. One of the most renowned is Casa Vidal, a discreet place with space for a mere 120 diners in the village of Aguada de Cima. Behind its uncomplicated dining rooms decorated with typical Portuguese ceramic tiles, the whole process of preparing leitão unfolds.

Amid a warren of spotless white-tiled rooms are two spacious pens, one containing a squealing throng of about two dozen of the cutest little piggies, all disturbingly reminiscent of the star of the movie "Babe." Rural Portugal is, however, no place for sentimentality about farm animals and a kitchen assistant casually points out that the smaller group in the neighboring pen are tomorrow's lunch. The ideal Portuguese suckling pig is between four and six weeks old when it reaches the oven and weighs between seven and eight kilos.

Mealhada's great rival for the title of Europe's suckling pig capital is the Spanish city of Segovia, but there are key differences in the preparation. The Castilians prefer their pig even younger, just a couple of weeks old and weighing in at around four-and-a-half kilos. Rather than roasting them on a spit, the Spanish pigs are splayed, spatchcock style, and baked in clay dishes. Needless to say, Iberian rivalry is intense. (See related article on page W8.)

"The Spanish who come here have a problem, because they walk in full of their own product, but when they walk out they don't know what to say anymore," Mr. Duque boasts.

Between the sty and the dining rooms are a series of antiseptic chambers where the nasty stuff goes on. The piglets are brought one-by-one into the slaughterhouse and knocked out by electric shock before the coup-de-grâce. There is little waste in this process; the blood is used along with the heart, lungs and liver to concoct a rich stew with red wine and onion, traditionally baked in the oven with the suckling pig. After the hair and innards are removed, the animal is basted with a paste made of precise measures of garlic, pepper, salt and pig fat, to which some cooks add olive oil, parsley or bay leaf. Sauced-up, the leitão is then impaled on a stainless steel pole, two-and-a-half-meters long, and maneuvered into a wood-fired oven for around two hours.

"It's an art," says restaurant owner José Vidal. "The timing is critical and it varies de-



A roasted suckling pig at Manuel Júlio restaurant.

Photos: Gerard Hancock for The Wall Street Journal

A Portuguese town's spit-roasted claim to fame

pending on the breed, the size and how much fat the suckling pig has. Get it wrong and it's dried out, ruined."

In the Bairrada, roasting pigs is man's work typically carried out by beefy chaps with strong nerves and muscular forearms. Known as *assadores*, they are depicted in heroic style in glazed tile panels in restaurants around the region.

"These days people like to talk about the chefs of fancy restaurants," Mr. Duque says with a hint of a sneer. "A chef is a guy who lives in an air-conditioned world, with the ingredients all prepared for him in advance. An assador is a man who gets up at 6 in the morning, kills the piglets, goes through the whole process of preparation and does all his own work."

It's a job requiring brains as well as brawn, says Mr. Duque. The size of the piglet, the breed, the type of wood used in the oven can all alter the way the beast is cooked. The mustachioed director of a local plastic packaging firm, Mr. Duque set up the brotherhood in 1995, to protect the *leitão* from "attempts to make easy money while failing to respect the quality of the product."

The members dress in black-trimmed-orange robes embroidered with a stylized piglet for their regular celebrations of all things suckling pig. They are not always popular with the region's restaurants.

"They don't like us because we defend a traditional product. We don't support the commercial option," he says. "We want the most

traditional product as possible."

That means they prefer their *leitões* to come from the local *bisaro* pig breed, which is tricky for the *assadores* because its low fat level means it requires extra attention to prevent it drying out in the oven. While most restaurants serve *leitão* with fries, the brotherhood wants only boiled potatoes.

"Do you want to mix one fat with another? It doesn't make sense," Mr. Duque insists, pointing with scorn to the pan of fries bubbling away in the Casa Vidal kitchens. "We are eating natural fat, why would you want to mix it with that stuff?"

In a concession to commercial modernity, he does acknowledge that hygiene and time concerns mean the suckling pigs are roasted on metal stakes rather than the traditional laurel branches and that the sauce is made in electric blenders instead of being slowly ground by mortar and pestle. His accompaniment of choice is a bottle of the local sparkling white wine, *espumante da Bairrada*.

The *leitão* should be carved into pieces as small as possible to ensure diners get a good mixture of meat from the legs, ribs and neck. Even better, if there are enough diners around the table, the beast should be brought in whole from head-to-tail on a porcelain tray, like in the old days when the head would be ceremonially severed with the edge of a plate to show the *leitão* had been cooked to perfection, Mr. Duque recalls with relish.

"This is a noble product. The *leitão* needs to be treated with care, treated with respect."



Above, the Curia Palace hotel; below, Casa Vidal waitress Cilia Fernandes holds a roasted pig.

Touring Portugal's pig country

Where to stay

While the neo-Gothic was all the rage in the rest of 19th-century Europe, Portugal was building in neo-Manueline, an exuberant architectural tribute to the Age of Discoveries. The Bussaco Palace Hotel is one of the most spectacular examples of the style. Built as a royal residence amid the exotic gardens of the Buçaco hills, the fall of the monarchy in 1910 meant it was soon turned into a luxury hotel. Supremely romantic, it has a wonderful location and a legendary wine cellar. Doubles from €153; ☎ 351-231-937-970; www.almeidahotels.com.

The Quinta do Louredo is a cool, modern design hotel in the heart of the Bairrada offering extensive views over the Cétima river valley and surrounding countryside. It was built by a famed *leitão*-roasting family, with the crispy piglets featuring high on the menu. There's a panoramic bar and outdoor pool. Doubles from €60; ☎ 351-234-690-070; www.quintadolouredo.com.

Recently restored to its original 1920s glory, the Curia Palace is the pick of a bunch of grand hotels in the spa town of Curia. The Art Deco gem is under the same management as the Bussaco Palace. Swans glide on ornamental pools, the elegant ballroom evokes the Charleston and flappers in cloche hats, and the spacious rooms offer views of the surrounding gardens and parks. The large pool was inspired by the Golden Age of ocean liners. Doubles from €110; ☎ 351-231-510-300; www.almeidahotels.com.

With its hilltop university dating back to the Renaissance and a bustling old town, Coimbra makes an excellent base for exploring the Bairrada. The core of the luxurious Quinta das Lagrimas is an 18th-century manor that once played host to the Duke of Wellington. The restaurant and modern spa are highly rated. Inês de Castro, medieval heroine of Portugal's great royal love story, reputedly met her tragic end in the garden. Doubles from €153. ☎ 351-239-441-695; www.quintadaslagrimas.pt.

Where to eat

Take your pick from the dozens of restaurants offering roast suckling pig along the EN1 road running through Mealhada. Among the biggest, brashest and most popular are



Pedro dos Leitões, ☎ 351-231-209-950; and A Meta dos Leitões, ☎ 351-231-209-540, or Rocha, ☎ 351-231-202-357. Elsewhere, try the Casa Vidal in Aguada de Cima, ☎ 351-234-666-353; Manuel Júlio in Barcouço, ☎ 351-239-913-512, or Mugaça, in Sangalhos, ☎ 351-234-741-061. Eating out remains an affordable pleasure for visitors to rural Portugal. You're unlikely to pay more than €20 for a big plate of *leitão* washed down with the excellent local wine. If baby pig is not your thing, eels from the Aveiro lagoon are the other big local speciality, but that's another story.

—Paul Ames

Segovia aims for the small-dish big-league

BY KATI KRAUSE

Special to *The Wall Street Journal*

IN 1931, A MAN named Cándido López Sanz took over a small restaurant in Segovia, a town located 90 kilometers north of Madrid. He soon proved to be as good a showman as he was a cook: Cutting tender morsels of pork with the edge of a plate, he turned that method into a tradition, his restaurant into a hangout for the rich and famous, and the suckling pig into Segovia's signature dish.

Now, however, an effort is under way to remake Segovia's gastronomic image into something that is closer to locals' everyday reality. Since 2003, the Unesco World Heritage town has staged an annual tapas competition, coinciding with its popular June festivals. The contest attracts tens of thousands of visitors and, in the span of one week, has restaurants selling approximately 55,000 small gourmet dishes priced at €1.50—on top of the tapas they give out for free with every drink.

The idea that tapas, rather than suckling pig, are representative of Segovian cuisine is not far off. (For a look at Portugal's take on the suckling pig, see page W6.) Together with Granada, Segovia is the only major Spanish city where the tradition of serving a complimentary snack with every drink is still widely upheld (other, smaller towns include Ávila and León).

The origin of that tradition is the source of many legends. One claims that the small plate prevented insects from flying into glasses ("tapa" means lid), although using a piece of sausage somewhat defeats that purpose. The other, more widespread legend says that it was King Charles III who, faced with an undernourished populace that spent most of its income on alcohol, made it compulsory for caterers to serve food with every drink.

Its current population may be in good health, but Segovia proudly upholds its tapas cuisine. "Cándido [López Sanz] was a pioneer of the Segovian catering trade," explains Miguel Ángel Hernández, head of the business organization De Calles and the mind behind the tapas competition. "But the city has a strong gastronomic tradition by itself."

The architect Alberto Sanz can confirm this. "When I moved to Segovia to start my degree, I weighed 65 kilograms," he recalls. "When I finished, I was up to 113 kilograms." (He has since lost weight.) Having worked as the restaurant critic of a



Kati Krause for The Wall Street Journal (2)



Clockwise from above: Minced lamb millefeuille with leeks and Syrian sauce from La Judería; a waiter at José María, famous for its house red wine; chefs (top right) and tasters (below) at this year's Segovia tapas competition preview.

local paper for years, Mr. Sanz knows every restaurant's star tapa and guides visitors through Segovia's small historic center.

Full of crowded restaurants spilling diners out on the street, the old town resembles a food theme park offering something for every taste, except tranquility. Patrons order their drink by shouting over the bar and pick their complimentary tapa

from a display (nowadays, even non-alcoholic drinks come with a snack). People usually eat standing up, in lively conversation with friends and strangers and, once done, throw napkins on the floor and money on the bar before moving on to the next restaurant.

On one of his usual tours, Mr. Sanz would order *papas al ajillo*, potatoes fried in garlic oil, at Santana

(c/Infanta Isabel, 18); the egg in béchamel sauce at As de Picas (c/Infanta Isabel, 14); at La Concepción (Plaza Mayor, 15), a former meeting point of intellectuals, he would go for the extraordinarily thick tortilla; and at La Cueva de San Esteban (c/Valdeláguila, 15), the *lomo escabechado*, a strip of pork marinated in vinegar with a red pepper on top. Ordering beer or wine, the bill would add up to about €6.

Despite its down-to-earth atmosphere, La Cueva is owned by one of Spain's most renowned sommeliers, Lucio del Campo. Yolanda Moreno, Mr. del Campo's wife, explains that the tapas competition is a lot of work with no immediate economic benefit. "We don't lose money with the competition, as some restaurants claim, but we don't earn much either," she laughs. In order to create the competition tapa, the kitchen has trials all year round. This year, Las Cuevas entered a confit of duck with a mushroom spread and red pepper syrup.

Mr. Hernández concedes that the competition is a marketing tool that serves smaller restaurants better than well-established ones. Consisting of a professional award handed out by five local experts, and another prize determined by popular vote, the sheer amount of diners (and voters) overwhelms some kitchens. "But you know that, if you do well, people will come back," he adds.



Top tapas in town

El Duque

One of the city's best-known restaurants, El Duque won the professional award in the tapas competition in 2007 and 2008 with lavish concoctions like last year's Iberian pork tenderloin with sun-dried apricots and foie gras. The everyday tapas are much less impressive, however (c/Cervantes, 12; ☎ 34-921-462-486).

El Fogón Sefardi

Winner of the popular award in 2007 and 2008, this new restaurant, located in a beautifully restored 15th-century building, specializes in Sephardic cuisine and is a top contender again this year with a tapa of potato, pumpkin and apple on homemade raisin bread with leek and muscatel sauce (c/Judería Vieja, 17-19; ☎ 34-921-466-250).

La Judería

This small bar filled with cushions and the smell of hookahs and tea came second in last year's popular vote. For this year's competition, the Syrian owners have prepared a millefeuille of minced lamb and fried leek with a sauce typical of their homeland (c/Judería Vieja, 5; ☎ 34-921-461-234).

José María

One of Segovia's more traditional restaurants, José María has its own winery. Even during the competition, a simple tapa of mature cheese together with a glass of the excellent house red is the best choice (c/Cronista Lecea, 11; ☎ 34-921-461-111).

Di Vino

The flagship restaurant of famous sommelier Lucio del Campo adds a modern touch to traditional Segovian (and usually meat-based) cuisine, such as this year's tapa of thick gazpacho soup, sardines and bread crumbs. The wine is, of course, outstanding (c/Valdeáguila, 7; ☎ 34-921-461-650).



Arbitrage

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New York	\$47	€33
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London	£40	€47
Brussels	€62	€62
Frankfurt	€65	€65

Note: By hand; prices, including taxes, as provided by retailers in each city, averaged and converted into euros.

Courtship on the court

BY HANNAH KARP

IN THE TENNIS world, Fernando Verdasco is on a tear. Not only has the 25-year-old Spaniard shot up to No. 8 in the world rankings, he has already dated two of the most sought-after bachelorettes on the women's tour, Ana Ivanovic and Gisela Dulko. Recently he has become close with Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki, though she says they're just friends.

Defending the title of ATP playboy, though, is Czech Radek Stepanek. He was engaged to Martina Hingis, is dating Nicole Vaidisova and is known for charming ladies with his sense of humor and a victory dance he calls "the worm," which he debuted at a player party in the Austrian Alps several years ago after a big win and a little too much schnapps.

"Everyone was very impressed," recalls Mr. Stepanek, adding that he hopes his popularity with beautiful women, a subject of much speculation on tennis forums, is "because of who I am as a person."

Wimbledon kicked off last week without Rafael Nadal, the world's No. 1 player, but there's still plenty of heated competition behind the scenes as players battle to win mates as well as matches. With the advent of text-messaging and social networking, a bevy of new co-ed tournaments, parties and training centers and a growing disparity between the salaries of players and their hangers-on, the lives of men's and women's tennis players are more intertwined than ever. Adding to the excitement, there are 10-times more female players on the tour than there were 30 years ago and many of them are now being marketed for their good looks as much as their skill.

The bump in romance—and the possibility of romance affecting play—has put British bookmakers on guard. "If we heard that Roger or Andy were having relationship problems, we would factor it in," says Rupert Adams of the London-based bookmaker William Hill.

Among this summer's love matches: Igor Andrejev, who lost a fourth-round match this week at Wimbledon, is inseparable from Maria Kirilenko. Dominika Cibulkova, the 20-year-old Slovakian who lost a third-round match, recently split from her second ATP beau, Austria's Jürgen Melzer. (Her first, France's Gael Monfils, was charming at dinner parties but wasn't "a relationship guy," says Ms. Cibulkova's coach, Vladimir Platenik.)

Much to the dismay of many female players, Mr. Federer married one of their own in April, former pro Mirka Vavrinec, and is officially off the market. "He was great eye candy," says France's Marion Bartoli, who took his picture off her wall after she heard the news.

Love on the tour is hardly new, of course, and Wimbledon has always been the one tournament where players can field more nosy questions about their personal lives, thanks to Britain's tabloid circus, than they do about tennis. In 1974, Chris Evert was engaged to Jimmy Connors when they both won singles titles at Wimbledon, and the couple was dubbed "the Love Match," though they later broke off the engagement. Andre Agassi married Steffi Graf in 2001, though Ms. Graf retired after Wimbledon in 1999, soon after they started dating.

Anna Kournikova, who made her much-hyped Wimbledon debut 12 years ago at the age of 16, says the tour social life was relatively boring compared to nowadays—there were far fewer player parties and her mother didn't let her stay late at the ones she went to.

Thirty years ago, just catching a glimpse of players of the opposite sex at the four Grand Slams each year was a thrill. Leslie Allen, a former WTA player who joined the tour in 1977, recalls an early WTA ritual: ranking the male tennis players based on their looks. "We'd choose a captain and a co-captain—we had a whole ranking system," says Ms. Allen, now a coach at Riverdale Country School in New York.

In recent years, growing prize money, the growing system of specialized junior tennis academies and a new alignment of the men's and women's tours have changed things. Today, the ATP World Tour and WTA Tour share 16 combined events a year, up from seven 20 years ago. Each one has its own player kickoff party, regular co-ed marketing events and social perks that include concert tickets and movie passes.

Meanwhile, insiders say the extra cash sloshing around on the tour allows players to visit their significant others on the tour more frequently between tournaments—and has also made players more wary of groupies or outsiders who may only be interested in their money.

All athletes wrestle with the distractions of romance in their personal lives, but tennis is one of the few professional sports where players must face love interests and old flames on almost a monthly basis on the courts and in player hotels. Dr. John Mayer, a Chicago-based sports psychologist and president of the International Sports Professionals Association who has worked with two dozen professionals on tour, likens tennis to high school or Hollywood. "It's kind of an incestuous world," says Dr. Mayer. When it comes to romance, he says, even the most accomplished male players tend to behave like "neanderthals" and female players like "giggly Jonas Brothers fans." This often results in "very adolescent" relationships, he says, that last an average of three to four months and tend to have noticeable effects on a player's performance at various stages.

In the seduction or "wooing" period, Dr. Mayer says, performance generally peaks. Canada's top player, Frank Dancevic, for example, says he achieved the best result of his life the first time he brought his girlfriend to a tournament in Indianapolis two years ago. "I think I was just trying to show off—I didn't want to look like a wuss," says Mr. Dancevic.

As relationships progress, however, things can get complicated. Dr. Mayer says he watched one tour relationship hit the skids after the male player repackaged a watch given to him by a major tour sponsor and sent it to his girlfriend, another pro player, fibbing that he'd bought the watch in Paris—not knowing that his girlfriend had received the same watch from the same sponsor.

Coach Nick Bollettieri, who runs a famous tennis academy in Florida, says tour relationships are usually counterproductive for young players. He tries to stay out of his students' love lives, but since Mr.



Stepanek and Ms. Vaidisova began dating two years ago, he says he's observed a change: "Stepanek seems to be doing well and Nicole seems to be struggling." Ms. Vaidisova's ranking fell to 67th this week from No. 7 two years ago.

Mr. Stepanek, 30, and Ms. Vaidisova, 20, both Czech, first got acquainted at Mr. Bollettieri's academy in Bradenton, Fla., and also in Prague, and now travel to each other's tournaments during breaks. Mr. Stepanek, who achieved the best results of his 13-year career at Wimbledon in 2006 while he was dating Ms. Hingis, says dating tennis players has been good for his career. "When you have someone next to you who understands the game, it can help in a lot of ways," he says. "I'm doing very well."



Ana Ivanovic, wearing scarf, watches former boyfriend Fernando Verdasco at a tournament last year; above left, Roger Federer and Mirka Vavrinec.

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❖ Top Picks



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'Valadon-Utrillo': the life and work of a mother and son

PARIS: Suzanne Valadon and her son Maurice Utrillo were central figures in the harsh world of bohemian Montmartre at the turn of the 20th century. Valadon, born the illegitimate child of a laundress in 1865, was only 18 when Maurice was born, also illegitimate, in 1883.

Feisty and independent, Valadon worked as a seamstress and circus acrobat before becoming an artists' model and, in many cases, mistress. She is the elegant young woman in Renoir's "Dance in the City" and Toulouse-Lautrec's melancholy "Drinker" at a café table. Degas encouraged her to draw, and bought many of her drawings himself. Young Maurice grew up shy and sad, devoted to his inattentive mother; he became an alcoholic by his early teens and was committed to a psychiatric hospital for the first time at 20, when a doctor suggested to Valadon that she teach him to paint as therapy. "Valadon-Utrillo" at the Pinacothèque de Paris brings together more than 100 of their works.

Valadon's vividly colored, heavily outlined landscapes and figures, mostly nudes and portraits, are realistic, forceful and unsparing of her models, including herself, as she aged from the soft blue-eyed beauty of an 1883 pastel to the haggard and bitter angles of a 1927 self-portrait in oil. There are arresting portraits of her son, too, including a pensive 1911 charcoal sketch on which she wrote "my son, an artist."

Utrillo was obsessed by the streets and façades of Paris and its suburbs, which were his only subjects—empty or animated only by small, remote, barely sketched figures. His work was notoriously erratic, and the show focuses on his best, the "white" period in the years between 1907 and 1914, when he often mixed plaster, sand or glue with his paint to give his silent façades a palpable, chalky reality.

—Judy Fayard

Until Sept. 15

www.pinacothèque.com

Top, Suzanne Valadon's 'Autoportrait,' from 1927, and (below) Maurice Utrillo's 'Rue Norvins à Montmartre,' from about 1911.



Tatzu Nishi's
'Villa cheminée
(in-situ)' (2009).

© Gino Maccarinelli

France's Estuaire 2009 exhibition: A river runs through its art

NANTES/SAINT-NAZAIRE: Estuaire 2009 turns the vast estuary of the Loire River between the French cities of Nantes and Saint Nazaire into an outdoor art gallery. The exhibition spreads out over more than 100 kilometers of river bank on both sides of the Loire, and includes more than 30 artworks, exhibitions and walk-in environments.

In Nantes, French sculptor Vincent Mauger creates a contemporary labyrinth with his untitled work that fills a 1,200-square-meter former factory. The wooden framework of the walk-in sculpture sits on stilts of varied heights forcing visitors to stoop or turn and twist to find their way through the sculpture. It's the 18th-century yew tree labyrinth taken to its ultimate post-industrial extreme.

Corsican filmmaker Ange Lecia projects his work "Nymphaea" onto the surface of the Saint-Felix Canal. The video casts actress and supermodel Laetitia Casta as a contemporary water nymph imprisoned in the brackish canal

that once connected Nantes's Erdre River to the Loire. The work infuses the dead canal with new life, changing its muddy gray surface into turquoise and shimmering light refractions in a silent bow to Monet's famous water lilies.

Brazilian Artist Ernest Neto contributes "Leviathan Thot" (2006), a vast, luminous suspended sculpture made up of organic translucent forms and tiny ships that evoke Nantes's past as a port. The sculpture is at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nantes.

The Chateau des Ducs de Bretagne provides the background for Stéphane Thidet's installation "La Meute," which appeals to the collective subconscious fear of wolves. Six wolves, born in captivity, have been introduced to an enclosed part of the moat, where they find a new natural environment until the end of Estuaire 2009. The work includes six short stories commissioned from various authors and dealing with the myth of wolves in Western society.

On the river bank near Rezé,

Swiss artist Roman Signer turns a derelict cement factory into "Le Pendule," a surrealist clock that evokes the decline of the industrial age. At Indre, another former industrial site, Native American artist Jimmie Durham's untitled installation links the river to the bank with a red PVC snake, a metaphor connecting the site's past and present.

St. Nazaire is a vast harbor whose industrial landscape is dominated by the huge submarine base built by the Germans during World War II. On the roof of the building, which has been abandoned since the end of the war, French landscape artist Gilles Clément has created "Le Jardin du Tiers Paysage" (The Garden of the Third Landscape), a work made up of poplar trees. "I wanted the trees, through the wind, to create the effect of trembling," explains Mr. Clément. "I wanted to make this indestructible building tremble."

—Mariana Schroeder

Until Aug. 16

www.estuaire.info

Helen Mirren breathes passion into boy-toy story

LONDON: Helen Mirren has chosen an ambitious work for her return to the stage after five years: Racine's 17th-century tragedy, "Phèdre," about a middle-aged queen who lusts after her stepson. Only the third play by Racine to have been produced at the National Theatre in its 46-year history (Diana Rigg played the role at the National in 1975), this "Phèdre" is directed by Nicholas Hytner in the Lyttelton (with performances in Epidaurus, Greece, on July 10 and 11, and Washington, D.C. from Sept. 17-26), in Ted Hughes's rumbling, gutsy blank verse translation.

Dame Helen makes it work. For Racine's most famous couplet, "Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée/C'est Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée," Hughes has the less memorable "No longer a fever in my veins, Venus has fastened on me like a tiger." Delivering it here Dame Helen is bent double with a pain in her innards—not a gastric attack, but full-on lust that suddenly makes Hughes's prosaic words poetically expressive. Dressed in purple (the women are in gauzy gowns that could either be ancient Greek or run up from one of Salome's seven veils), her Isadora Duncan-ish postures reflect her character's conviction that she suffers from inherited, seriously perverted passions. (Her mother, Pasiphae, had an unnatural craving for a white bull, the complicated satisfaction of which led to the birth of her half-brother, the Minotaur.)

Wearing modern-day designer gear that makes him look like a well-heeled Greek in his private island holiday home, Dominic Cooper is her Amazon-bred boy-toy, Hippolytus, who at first has nothing much to do but look tasty. Mr. Cooper does rise to the bait when he thinks his father, Theseus, is dead; and he is convincing in his chastity-discarding discovery of heterosexual desire for Aricia (a luscious Ruth Negga), Racine's great addition to the Greek myth of Hippolytus and Phaedra as dramatized by Euripides. Stanley Townsend's Theseus is a disappointingly gruff bear with a sore head; but Margaret Tyzack triumphs terrifically as Oenone, a snake of an old woman whose venomous lies unleash nemesis and tragedy.

—Paul Levy

Until Aug. 27

www.nationaltheatre.org.uk



Catherine Ashmore

Dominic Cooper as Hippolytus and Helen Mirren as the title character in 'Phèdre.'

Who's in Alexander's Sarcophagus?

Sidon, a port city about 25 miles south of Beirut whose rich history dates to 4000 B.C., was among the most successful of the Phoenician city-states. In the fourth century B.C., it fell to Alexander the Great, entering a Hellenistic age that lasted for more than 100 years until the Romans took over. It changed hands several more times before becoming part of the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century.

So it is not surprising that when, in the mid-1800s, archaeologists started exploring Sidon, they found treasures. A Turk named Osman Hamdi Bey, who had studied in Paris, became director of the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul and began

leading his own excavations in Sidon. In 1887, his team hit upon more than two dozen sarcophagi.

The star discovery was clearly a fantastically beautiful burial chamber depicting Alexander in battle and at hunt in high-relief. One glance told the Ottoman archaeologists that it was made for someone special. Given its date—fourth century B.C.—and its Hellenistic style, they proposed that it belonged to Alexander.

It didn't, everyone now says. Alexander's tomb has never been

found (though a few academics argue that a sarcophagus found in Alexandria and now at the British Museum is his; the British Museum disagrees). The specimen in question, which nevertheless became known as the Alexander Sarcophagus, was likely carved for Abdalonymos, a gardener of royal blood who was made Sidon's king by Alexander in 332 B.C. (some scholars disagree about this, too).

But there is no debate about its status as a masterpiece. The Alexander Sarcophagus sits in a place of honor at the Archaeological Museum and is unmistakably a work of the highest artistic order. It is totally intact. Despite its 2,000-plus years, it bears

traces of the garish reds, yellows and other colors it once wore.

Made of Pentelic marble, the sarcophagus tells a story on each of its four sides. Two are battle scenes; two show hunts. Alexander, with his determined visage and curly cropped hair, is instantly recognizable and decidedly heroic. In fact, the overall result contains more than a dash of propaganda.

The first and perhaps greatest panel depicts the battle of Issus in 333 B.C., the crucial moment

when Alexander of Macedonia defeated Persia for primacy in Asia Minor. The Persian emperor Darius III had expected an invasion and, because Alexander's reputation preceded him, chose to lead his own army. But though Alexander was outnumbered, he outmaneuvered Darius tactically.

On this frieze, Alexander rides a rearing horse, charging a Persian and trampling another one underfoot. The sculpture is so three-dimensional that it practically steps off the stone. Alexander, his face intense, makes eye contact with a Persian he targets with a spear (presumably made of metal, and missing, as are all the spears made for the sarcophagus); the Persian cowers in fear. Nearby, an equally fervent pair of warring foot soldiers are at each other's throats. And so it goes throughout what could be construed as six scenes: Alexander's army shows its muscles, literally, while the Persians are covered in historically accurate trousers and head coverings that conceal theirs. You can read the agony on the face of a dying Persian, one among many scattered on the ground. Alexander's army simply shows determination.

On the opposite long frieze, Alexander is now in control of a uni-

fied country, and the Greeks and the Persians, still easy to discern by their dress (some Greeks are nude, and all are bare-headed), are happily hunting lion and stag together. Again, Alexander rides a rearing horse, his mantle flowing in the wind, a dog near his feet. He encourages the Persian—perhaps Abdalonymos—ahead of him, whose horse encounters a hungry lion. The lion's claws pierce the

figure thought to be Abdalonymos, hunt a panther.

The Alexander sarcophagus is shaped like a temple, with a pitched roof adorned with carved scale-like tiles. Gargoyles sit on the edges. Small friezes have been carved in the pediments. Between the roof and the friezes, and below them, panels are trimmed in vine leaves, Greek labyrinths and egg-and-dart motifs.

No one knows who made this exquisite object. Some experts have suggested that the hand of as many as six sculptors can be detected, but the work is so consistently good that you could have fooled me.

There was a painter, too. Near the sarcophagus in the Archaeological Museum, the Turks have placed a model displaying what one part of the sarcophagus, Alexander on his charging horse, would have looked like had its colors remained. To eyes now expecting Greek artifacts to be white marble, the magenta, red and gold seem to clash. But even then, it's easy to see a jewel of a piece.

Ms. Dobrzynski writes about the arts for The Wall Street Journal and other publications and blogs at www.artsjournal.com/realcleararts.



Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

Not Alexander the Great, though he battles heroically in its high-relief friezes.

How to Sell a Museum Masterpiece

By Daniel Grant

California has a strong tradition of open-air painting in an Impressionist style, dating back over a century and continuing to this day. Perhaps that explains the barrage of criticism that has greeted the Orange County Museum of Art's recent unpublicized sale of 18 of its 20 California Impressionist paintings to an undisclosed Laguna Beach collector for a reported \$963,000. That, and the secrecy of the sale and its relatively small proceeds.

This isn't another story about a museum making a debatable choice about what to pare from its collection. The museum's director, Dennis Szakacs, has made it clear that the 18 paintings no longer serve the institution's mission—which is now focused on postwar art—and he plans to use the money to buy works created since 1950. This story is about how a museum should sell the objects it is deaccessioning.

Mr. Szakacs argued that by selling the works to a single buyer, he was able to make sure that the collection remained together and in California. By contrast, the Wilmington Library in Delaware recently announced its intention to sell at Christie's auction house its portfolio of 14 N.C. Wyeth paintings that illustrated the Daniel Defoe novel "Robinson Crusoe." Maybe one collector will buy all 14 paintings, but that's not likely.

In most cases, museums prefer going to auction. Whatever criticism these institutions receive for selling objects only in-

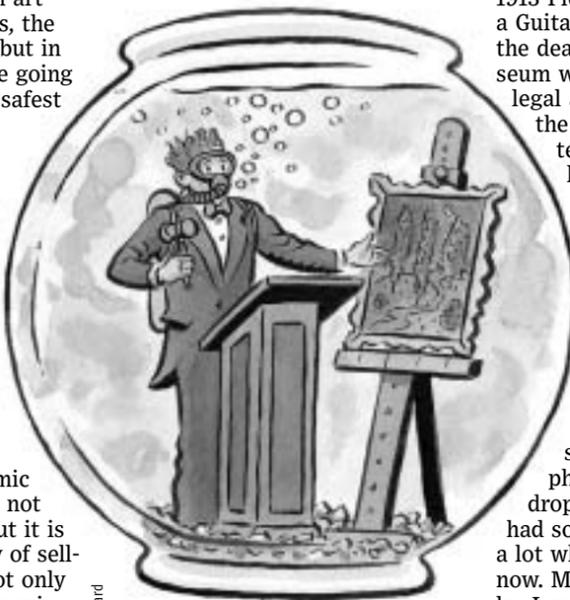
creases if they don't do it that way. Take, for example, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, N.Y., a museum devoted to contemporary art that sold 207 of its older artworks at Sotheby's, raising \$67.2 million. There was some discussion at the board level of selling pieces directly to other museums or through art dealers, said Louis Grachos, the Albright-Knox's director, "but in the end, it just seemed like going the auction route was the safest and wisest choice."

Certainly wise in this case, but why safest? "We were under a microscope, and people were looking for any reason whatsoever to attack us," he said. "Going to public auction made all our actions transparent."

James Snipes, legal counsel to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston described it as an "optics issue, rather than an economic one. Going to auction may not provide the best return, but it is the most transparent" way of selling an object. Museums not only "have a fiduciary duty to maximize value when they deaccession objects, but they have to be seen fulfilling that duty."

There is no rule that museums have to sell deaccessioned objects at auction. The Association of Art Museum Directors' guidebook for members offers the options of "sale through publicly advertised auction, sale to or exchange with another public institution, and sale or exchange

to a reputable, established dealer." But "the prevailing preference is to go to auction," said Dan Monroe, director of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Mass., and chairman of the art issues committee of the association. "It invites problems if you don't go to auction."



David Gothard

When did the art trade become an invitation to problems and hocus pocus? Many museums regularly purchase objects from dealers, so what makes selling so different? Ralph Lerner, a New York lawyer and co-author of "Art Law" (Practicing Law Institute), noted the possibility of favoritism in selecting a gallery through which to sell a work of art. On a museum's board, he said, "everyone knows

somebody," and these contacts raise "questions of a conflict of interest and sweetheart deals."

Such conflicts do arise. In 2000, S.I. Newhouse Jr., chairman of Advance Publications, was forced to resign from the board of New York's Museum of Modern Art after he purchased a 1913 Picasso painting, "Man With a Guitar," for \$10 million from the dealer through whom the museum was selling the work. No legal action was taken against the museum, because no written agreements were violated and the museum received what was seen as a fair price.

If art dealers are hocus-pocus, are auctions so safe? Auctions are one-shot events, affected by everything from electrical storms that knock out cellphone reception (most of the big sales these days are to phone bidders) to a sudden drop in the stock market. "I had someone phone-bidding on a lot who told me, 'I have to go now. My house is on fire,'" Nicholas Lowry, president of New York's Swann Galleries, said. Even in the best of times, it is customary for 20% to 30% of the lots in a given sale to not find buyers, which makes them less apt to be sold in the near future for a good price. If, on the other hand, the artwork had been consigned to a gallery, the object could be shown to prospective buyers over a longer period—and if someone balked at the price, that informa-

tion wouldn't be so publicly available and damaging.

The method of disposing of deaccessioned objects needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and museum directors fearful of public criticism might want to broaden their outlook. The Albright-Knox was probably right to take its disparate objects to auction, picking the right time and the best way to maximize earnings, while artworks that ought to stay together, such as the Wilmington Library's N.C. Wyeths, call for a perhaps less lucrative "friendly" sale to another institution.

It made sense that when Philadelphia-based Thomas Jefferson University sought to raise money by selling its painting "The Gross Clinic" by Thomas Eakins, it gave first dibs to the Philadelphia Museum of Art if it could raise \$68 million in 2008. The subject of the painting, Dr. Samuel Gross, was a renowned Philadelphia physician, and Eakins himself spent most of his life in that city. Raising money and doing well by the art aren't mutually exclusive goals.

And what of the Orange County Museum of Art's recent sale? The ruckus it raised has had less to do with the deaccessioning itself than with the secrecy surrounding it. Much like students writing a high-school term paper, museum directors need to say "this is what I am going to do, this is what I am doing, and this is what I did."

Mr. Grant is the author of "The Business of Being an Artist" (Allworth).

time off

Amsterdam

photography

"Rob Nypels—Only Gaze a While Longer" is a landscape photography series of France's Massif Central by the Dutch visual artist Rob Nypels (born 1951).

Huis Marseille
Until Aug. 30
☎ 31-20-5318-989
www.huismarseille.nl

Athens

photography

"Thomas Struth" presents images by the German photographer (born 1954), ranging from urban settings to landscapes and portraits.

Museum of Cycladic Art
Until Sept. 14
☎ 30-2107-2283-213
www.cycladic.gr

Barcelona

art

"On the Margins of Art—Creation and Political Engagement" shows political art from magazines, books, posters, pamphlets and postcards.

Centre d'Estudis i Documentació MACBA
July 10-Sept. 27
☎ 34-93-4120-810
www.macba.cat

Basel

fashion

"Armour & Evening Dress" shows traditional armor from Graz alongside dresses and "war props" by the Swiss contemporary artists Jean Tinguely (1925-91), Daniel Spoerri (born 1930) and Bernhard Luginbühl (born 1929).

Museum Tinguely
Until Aug. 30
☎ 41-61-6819-320
www.tinguely.ch

Berlin

art

"A Different Approach to the World: The Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace" illustrates the history and process of collecting for museums in Berlin.

Altes Museum
July 9-Jan. 17, 2010
☎ 49-30-2090-5577
www.smb.museum

art

"Emil Nolde: Man—Nature—Myth" exhibits 36 watercolors and 70 etchings by the German Expressionist artist Emil Nolde (1867-1956), including works depicting his journey to the South Seas.

Kupferstichkabinett
Until Oct. 25
☎ 49-30-2664-2304-0
www.smb.museum

Brussels

art

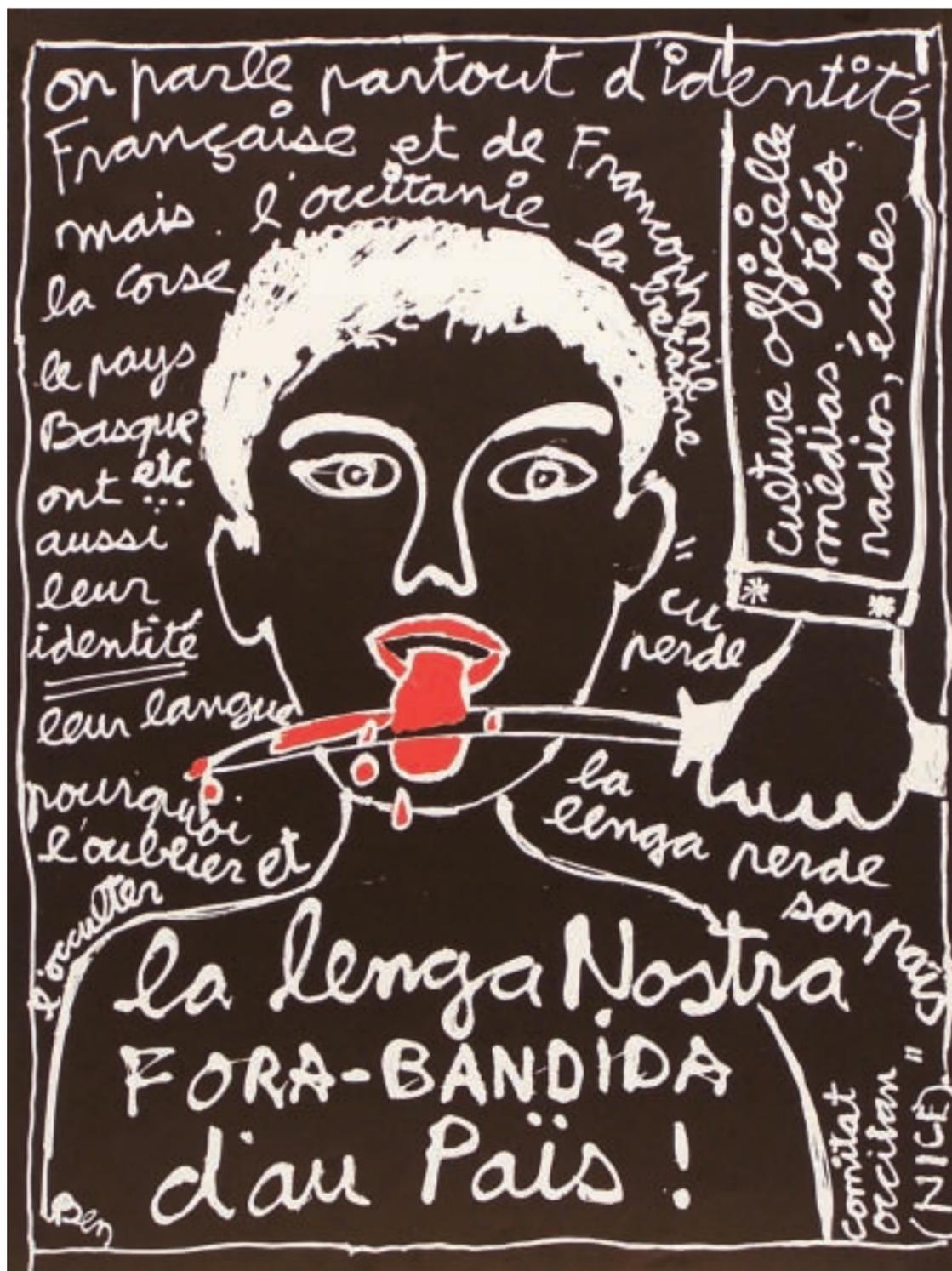
"Rembrandt: Portrait of Nicolaes van Bambeeck" displays the restored "Portrait of Nicolaes van Bambeeck" (1641) alongside the "Portrait of Agatha Bas," Van Bambeeck's wife.

Museum of Ancient and Modern Art
Until Sept. 27
☎ 32-2-508-3211
www.fine-arts-museum.be

Budapest

art

"The Heritage of the Holy Land" pre-



Ben Vautier's 'La lenga nostra fora-bandida d'au País!' in Barcelona; above right, Erwin Wurm's 'Indoor Sculpture, Blast' (2002), in Vienna.

sents 50 works from the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, including a piece of the 2,000-year-old Dead Sea Scrolls.

Museum of Fine Arts
Until Sept. 6
☎ 36-1-4697-100
www.mfab.hu

Geneva

theater

"Calvin: Geneva on Fire" is a theater show by Michel Beretti and François Rochaix, celebrating the 500th birthday of the French theologian John Calvin (1509-64).

Parc des Bastions/Théâtre du Léman, Kempinsky Hotel
Until July 26
☎ 41-22-3112-009
www.calvin09-geneve.ch

Glasgow

art

"Edvard Munch: Prints" shows 40 prints by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863-1944).

Hunterian Art Gallery
Until Sept. 5
☎ 44-141-3304-221
www.hunterian.gla.ac.uk

Kassel

art

"Philips Wouwerman (1619-68): Of Horses and other Pleasures" showcases works by Dutch artist Philips Wouwerman.

Schloss Wilhelmshöhe
Until Oct. 11
☎ 49-561-3168-00
www.museum-kassel.de

Lisbon

design

"Head to Head: Political Portraits" displays 250 historical political posters, including "Under the banner of Lenin for Socialist Construction" (1930), Che Guevara's portrait by Alberto Korda and the "Hope" poster of Barack Obama.

MUDE

Until Sept. 13
☎ 351-21-8886-117
www.mude.pt

London

art

"Corot to Monet: A Fresh Look at Landscape from the Collection" examines the development of open-air landscape painting through a selection of 19th-century French landscapes.

National Gallery
July 8-Sept. 20
☎ 44-20-7747-2885
www.nationalgallery.org.uk

art

"Per Kirkeby" showcases paintings on hardboard and canvas, blackboards, works on paper, small and large-scale bronze sculptures, brick structures and architecture by Danish artist Per Kirkeby (born 1938).

Tate Modern
Until Sept. 6
☎ 44-20-7887-8888
www.tate.org.uk



© Albertina, Peter Ertl

Nice, Biot and Vallauris

"Tell me, Blaise... Léger, Chagall, Picasso and Blaise Cendrars" explores the relationships of the Swiss/French writer Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961) with Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall and Fernand Léger. (The exhibition is divided over three museums.)

Musées nationaux des Alpes-Maritimes
Until Oct. 12
www.musees-nationaux-alpesmaritimes.fr

Paris

ceramics

"Chu Teh-Chun and the Manufacture de Sevres" displays decorative hand-painted Sevres vases by the Chinese born French maestro Chu Teh-Chun (born 1920).

Musée Guimet
Until Sept. 7
☎ 33-1-5652-5300
www.guimet.fr

photography

"Henri Cartier-Bresson: What the Eye Saw" includes 320 images by the photographer.

Maison Européenne de la Photographie
Until Aug. 30
☎ 33-1-4478-7500
www.mep-fr.org

Rome

photography

"Gina Lollobrigida: Photographer" showcases 250 photographs taken by actress Gina Lollobrigida (born 1927), with images of Indira Gandhi, Fidel Castro, Neil Armstrong and others.

Palazzo delle Esposizioni
Until Sept. 13
☎ 39-06 3996-7500
english.palazzo.esposizioni.it

Stockholm

art

"Prince Eugen's Art Gallery 1939" presents works from the collection of Prince Eugen (1865-1947), including art by the De Unga art collective, Leander Engström (1886-1927) and Isaac Grünewald (1889-1946), and Prince Eugen himself.

Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde
Until Aug. 16
☎ 46-08-5458-3700
www.waldemarsudde.se

Vienna

photography

"Body and Language" exhibits contemporary photographs with a focus on the human body.

Albertina
Until Sept. 27
☎ 43-1-5348-30
www.albertina.at

Source: ArtBase Global Arts News Service, WSJE research.