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WEEKEND JOURNAL.

EUROPE



An enduring love affair

Why Venice continues to inspire and enchant us

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WEEKEND JOURNAL

EUROPE

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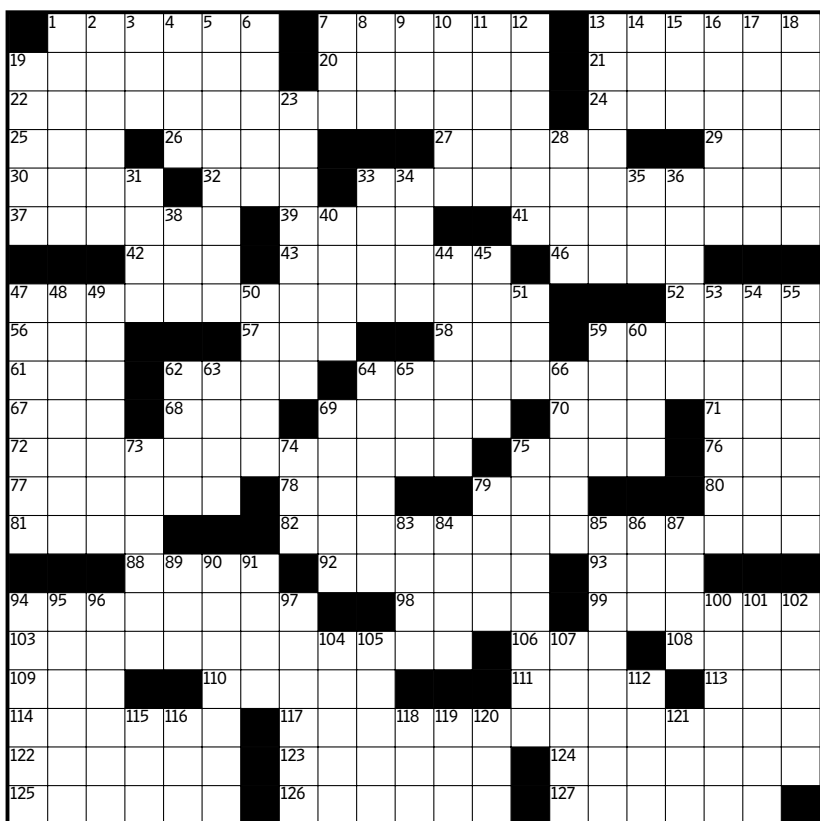
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Adapting financial tragedy to the stage

BY JEANNE WHALEN

AT THE CLIMAX of "Enron," a new play at London's Royal Court Theatre, former Enron Corp. President Jeffrey Skilling, clad in an orange jumpsuit as he is dragged off to prison, refuses to repent for the iconic collapse of the disgraced energy giant.

"All our creations are here," he says, pointing to a giant chart of the stock market's rallies and crashes. "There's greed, there's fear, joy, faith...hope...And the greatest of these...is money."

The financial and corporate crises of the past decade have produced some truly Shakespearean characters and tragedies. Now, some—like Mr. Skilling and former Enron Chairman Kenneth Lay—are finding dramatic form on the stages of London's theaters.

The character of Mr. Skilling is at the heart of "Enron," a tragicomic exploration of the energy trader's notorious rise and fall. The play depicts Mr. Skilling as the evil genius of the Enron fraud, from his bravado-fueled speeches about mark-to-market accounting to his 2006 conviction for fraud and conspiracy arising from Enron's 2001 collapse into bankruptcy court. Enron Chairman Lay—who died a few weeks after being convicted alongside Mr. Skilling—is portrayed as an affable but clueless executive more interested in golfing and hobnobbing with politicians than in overseeing the company.

Written by 28-year-old British playwright Lucy Prebble and opening this month in London to strong reviews, "Enron" is just one of several new U.K. productions that tap the dramatic potential of financial tumult.

In October, London's National Theatre will stage "The Power of Yes" by David Hare, which is billed as a dramatist's attempt to understand the financial crisis. Mr. Hare, the British playwright known for his political works, says he has interviewed dozens of bankers, regulators and others to try to come to grips with the crash.

Smaller theaters are getting in on the act, too. Soho Theatre staged a production in June that combined 10 short works about the credit crunch, each penned by a different writer.

"It's the biggest economic crisis for 50 years. If we hadn't commented on it, we would have emphasized that separation people think is there between theater and society. We would have abrogated our responsibility," Lisa Goldman, artistic

director at the theater, said in an interview.

The wave of financial-crisis theater underscores London's commitment to deciphering the tumult of modern times. Other productions in recent years have tackled George W. Bush and Tony Blair, and the war in Iraq ("Stuff Happens," by Mr. Hare); the use of torture in the war on terror ("Complicit," by the American playwright Joe Sutton); and several plays by the British journalist Richard Norton-Taylor that examine everything from the Iraq War to the infamous stabbing of a black teenager in 1990s London.

"Enron" moved to London from a small theater in southern England, and is already plotting a transfer to Broadway next spring. The play is based on the real-world events, but adds fictitious elements for dramatic effect.

The play, originally meant to be a musical, also contains a few song and dance numbers. In one scene, Enron traders break into song and dance around the stage as they call out the prices of commodities from silver to pork bellies. In another, obsequious stock analysts eager to outdo each other with strong ratings on Enron stock sing a cheery song about Mr. Skilling.

Some of the most powerful scenes pair Mr. Skilling with Andy Fastow, the chief financial officer who swells with pride as he describes the special purpose vehicles he has created to hide Enron's debt. The shell companies are represented on stage by a clutch of scaly raptors, who gradually become more menacing as they spin out of Mr. Fastow's control.

Directing "Enron" is Rupert Goold, artistic director of the theater company Headlong. He uses colorful visual tricks to make finance come alive, including a chorus of electricity traders who dance in the dark with green light sabers.

Mr. Goold, 37, said he went to the London Metal Exchange for inspiration. "We watched through the glass viewing room with the sound off, and it was like watching a ballet," he said in an interview.

"I think what attracts me in the play is saying, there are two sides of what is wonderful about America. One is Barack Obama and everything that is true about the opportunities and the land of the free and the libertarian ideals that America was built on," he said. "And the other side is Jeffrey Skilling, which is ruthless, rapacious, very aggressive, but also kind of impressive for being so. And you can't have one



Catherine Ashmore



Manuel Harlan

A rehearsal for the National Theatre's 'The Power of Yes' (left). Samuel West plays Jeffrey Skilling in 'Enron' at London's Royal Court Theatre (above).

without the other."

The National Theatre, widely considered to be Britain's premiere theater, says it asked Mr. Hare this spring to write an "urgent and immediate work" that would explain the financial crisis. Mr. Hare, who is still working on the final draft, was reluctant to discuss the work in an interview. One of the characters is based

on himself—a writer interviewing others as he tries to figure out what happened.

Mr. Hare said he feels "very well qualified" to put the crisis into simple language for a confused public because he is "completely ignorant" about finance.

Bankers "want to talk in terms the general public don't understand

because it suits them that we don't understand what they did," he said. "When you get to CDOs and CDOs squared and mezzanine products, then you really do feel, ok, this is like talking about transubstantiation—this is just a priesthood protecting its rite. My job is putting it in language that everybody will understand."

Arbitrage

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❖ Interview

Ricky Gervais changes his routine

BY JOHN JURGENSEN

COMEDIAN RICKY GERVAIS had a happy childhood in small-town England. He lives with the same woman—novelist Jane Fallon—he started dating in college 27 years ago. The television series he co-created, “The Office,” redefined the TV sitcom, made him rich and catapulted him into the company of comedy moguls like Matt Groening of “The Simpsons” and Larry David of “Seinfeld.”

So why can't he stop abusing himself on screen?

During scriptwriting sessions for his new movie “The Invention of Lying,” Mr. Gervais worked himself into red-faced rants as he invented insults to hurl at his character's fat stomach, pug nose and sexual failings. “Kind of like a frog,” as another character describes him.

“A comedian must get beaten up for your viewing pleasure,” Mr. Gervais explains in an interview. “Now you're rooting for the underdog.”

Mr. Gervais had been a little-known radio host when “The Office,” a faux documentary in which he played a socially tone-deaf office manager, began its run eight years ago. The show currently airs in 80 countries, has spawned seven remakes (including versions in the U.S., Israel and Russia) and has inspired imitators with its awkward realism and attacks on commonplace fools.

“People say I created the comedy of embarrassment,” says Mr. Gervais. “There's a reason for that. I'm a white, middle-class, middle-aged man. What happens to me? Nothing, but a bit of rudeness. What am I afraid of? Embarrassing myself socially.”

Now, the 48-year-old comic is moving away from the painful, ironic satire of “The Office” as he tries to launch the next phase of his career with three coming movies and a new TV show. Opening next Friday, “The Invention of Lying” is the first movie written and directed by Mr. Gervais (with co-writer and co-director Matthew Robinson). It's set in an alternate reality where people tell only the truth and Mr. Gervais's character is the first to learn how to fib.

Early next year, HBO will unveil an animated series adapted from “The Ricky Gervais Show,” a hit podcast in which the comedian and two friends bantered about monkeys, naughty puns and other pet topics. Mr. Gervais is adapting his series of children's books, “Flanimals,” into an animated feature film. In April, he'll release “Cemetery Junction,” written, produced and directed with Stephen Merchant, co-creator of “The Office.” A coming-of-age story set in 1970s England, “Cemetery Junction” draws on Mr. Gervais's personal experiences and marks a departure in tone. Instead of underdogs and losers, the movie focuses on suave young men in their prime. The film also stars Oscar nominees Ralph Fiennes and Emily Watson.

Mr. Merchant said via email that they've tried to inject “Cemetery Junction” with “pathos, drama, romance, intrigue and humor...and at least one trademark awkward moment.”

Mr. Gervais attributes the crossover appeal of his humor to his affinity with American comedians, especially Jewish acts such as Groucho Marx and Woody Allen. He says, “I feel that I do Jewish comedy, in a



way. That self deprecation. Being a pseudo intellectual in a room full of idiots but it does you no good. I'm selling back to America what I stole, but with a big lump of what they didn't have. That is, the sheer pessimism of being British.”

When he's not on location or doing a stand-up tour, Mr. Gervais is a homebody with a small orbit. In New York, where he has an apartment east of Central Park, he regularly walks the few blocks to his favorite restaurant, Park Avenue Autumn. (The restaurant's name, along with its menu and décor change with the seasons.) Recently, the manager unlocked the door before opening hours so Mr. Gervais could have coffee and do an interview. Leaving, the comedian confirmed he'd be back for dinner that evening.

Wearing his usual black v-neck T-shirt, his hair slicked back and a reddish stubble on his cheeks, Mr. Gervais was more reflective than madcap as he talked about religion or the influence of Laurel and Hardy. But some topics, such as how

he'd botch Shakespeare or his odd-looking friends—“squeezing their little round baldy heads is just an excuse to show them affection”—elicit some recognizable laughs: a girlish titter, a guffaw that strangles in his throat, a flat-out cackle.

By choice, Messrs. Gervais and Merchant made only two seasons (plus a Christmas special) of “The Office” for BBC. They own the format, according to Mr. Gervais's manager, allowing them to license it for remakes in other territories. The U.S. version premiered on NBC in 2005. Set in Scranton, Penn., the series recently hit 100 episodes. Not counting what they earn from the original “Office” and remakes in other territories, Messrs. Gervais and Merchant are paid about \$50,000 combined for each episode of the U.S. version, according to a person familiar with the matter. They also receive about 10% of that show's “back end,” which includes syndication fees and revenue from DVD sales, after some expenses.

In the comedy world, the impact of the “The Office” was seismic. It



Clockwise from far left: Ricky Gervais; BBC comedy ‘The Office’ (2001); Steve Carell in the U.S. version of ‘The Office.’

prone to distractions, such as forcing cast and crew members to choose between two preposterous (and R-rated) superpowers to have. “The amount of time we spent talking about that stuff was just crazy,” Mr. C.K. says.

Mr. Robinson had Mr. Gervais in mind when he first wrote the part of Mark Bellison, a sadsack screenwriter who (because there's no such thing as fiction in a world without lying) creates dull historical documentaries. After the comedian signed on to the project, he spent about a year rewriting the script with Mr. Robinson, dialing down the cynicism and expanding the odd-couple romance. Mr. Robinson says, “His main goal was to make a classic Billy Wilder love story,” in part to make the movie more accessible. In the movie, Mark's fabrications spin out of control when he makes up a story about a “the man in the sky.” As crowds clamor for details, he delivers an ersatz Ten Commandments that he has scribbled on two pizza boxes. One of his prophecies: Good people are given mansions to live in after they die.

An atheist, Mr. Gervais studied philosophy in University College London and says he's always been preoccupied with morality. “The Invention of Lying” isn't “atheist propaganda,” he says. “I can look at the Bible and say, ‘oh, some good points there.’ I like do-as-you-would-be done-by. I like being a Good Samaritan—I just don't think I'm going to be rewarded for it in heaven.”

The comedian grew up in a working-class family in Reading, 50 miles west of London. He was the youngest of four children, separated by 11 years from his next-oldest sibling. He drew on happy memories of that time for “Cemetery Junction.” One goal was to upend the image of a dreary oppressive England as it's typically portrayed in films set in the 1960s and '70s. Mr. Gervais, whose father was a laborer and mother was a housewife, also wanted to convey the innocence of growing up in a small town. “When I wanted to go to Paris when I was 17, my mom said, ‘Why go to France when there are parts of Reading you haven't seen?’”

In the coming film, Mr. Gervais appears only briefly as a henpecked husband and father. But he has set aside a plum role for himself in “Flanimals,” the planned animated film about imaginary creatures. He says, “I play Puddy, a fat sweaty blob. Amazing.”



Rob Lowe and Ricky Gervais in ‘The Invention of Lying.’

New cyclist styles pedal their way into Paris

BY CHRISTINA PASSARIELLO

Paris
BIKER SHORTS AND Lycra are having their moment again on New York runways, in a 1980s revival, but in Paris, two-wheeled fashion has nothing to do with athletic gear.

When Paris fashion week starts next week, fashion editors are likely to be pedaling to palatial venues in stilettos and skirts, large leather bags dangling off handlebars.

An upright bike beats a tinted-window sedan for showing off an outfit any day. A new generation of cyclists, influenced by icons such as supermodels Elle Macpherson and Agyness Deyn, have turned biking from a sport into a fashion statement. Cycle Chic, a popular blog whose motto is “style over speed,” snaps photos of urban riders in Paris and Copenhagen.

Yet the basic bicyclist still is trying to cruise out from under Lance Armstrong’s shadow. “People think they need to put on a uniform like they’re going to battle,” says Amy Fleuriot, whose Cyclodelic label of accessories and apparel was sold in Topshop last spring. “You don’t have to wear all fluorescent.”

Now, cycling is providing inspiration for fashion. Labels such as Louis Vuitton and Celine have worked the bike’s sporty attitude into their collections. Earlier this year, Paris’s trendsetting Colette boutique hosted an exhibition using recycled bicycle parts in art works.

European riders have unchained new, cyclable fashions. On Paris’s wide avenues, feminine gear is de rigueur: high-heels or ballerina shoes, wool dresses and a scarf around the neck. Some riders say it is easier to cycle in stilettos than to walk in them.

Businessmen tuck their briefcases into wire baskets.

In France’s *Elle* magazine earlier this month, a fashion spread of fall’s hottest accessories featured three models racing city bikes—one wearing a mustard-colored Marc by Marc Jacobs dress and purple tights, another with a leopard-print bag in her basket.

The bike itself is less important than the attitude and attire of the person on it. “We don’t notice the bicycle, it’s just a tool,” says Mikael Colville-Andersen, the Copenhagen-based founder of Cycle Chic. “Cycling can be gorgeous. It shouldn’t be dominated by bike freaks.”

Still, luxury brands have kicked into high gear to produce fancy tools. Hermes, Chanel and Gucci have all recently come out with bicycles, costing as much as \$6,000.

Yet most riders stick to more mundane wheels. The resurgence of the city bicycle seems like the perfect hybrid response to the economic crisis and climate change. But it predates last year’s spending hiatus, the spike in oil prices and the collapse of the automobile industry.

Many European and American cities have become more cycle-friendly. Paris introduced its inexpensive bike-share program, Velib’ (for “vélo” and “liberté,” cycling freedom), two years ago, planting 20,000 heavy three-speed machines at stations around the city.

Other metropolises including Washington, D.C.; Dublin; Barcelona and Montreal have rolled out similar programs. London has paved special bike lanes and will unveil a bike-share program next year. Casual riders



Lisa Henderling

say it’s a handy way to keep in shape.

Not long after Velib’ hit Paris, Agyness Deyn, fashion’s “it” girl, made headlines by cruising to her runway-modeling gigs on the city’s mushroom-colored rental bikes.

Dressed in a Balenciaga top and shorts, and towering Givenchy heels, Vogue snapped the pixie-faced model in the saddle on the Place de la Concorde, one long bare

leg keeping her steady. Biking made her happy, she said, adding that she cycled to parties in ball gowns.

Ms. Deyn unleashed the bike’s new status as a top fashion accessory, but its association with spandex and neon persisted.

During Paris’s men’s fashion week in June, Louis Vuitton menswear designer Paul Helbers turned that to his advantage when he glamorized New York’s bike messen-

gers—or “gentlemen butterflies” as he dubbed them. He flicked bright yellow and black nylon through his spring collection of rolled-up trousers and pinched jackets.

Several fashion labels have tried to suppress cycling’s fashion faux pas—all while keeping the gear practical. French fashion house Celine’s Bicyclette collection of sophisticated city clothes for riders—in stores this past spring and summer—

consisted of items such as flowing shorts that appeared to be a skirt, and strappy heels with sturdy rubber soles. Ms. Fleuriot has worked reflective details into the bright blue and purple jackets in her Cyclodelic line.

Yet many fashion icons don’t sacrifice any style for their two wheels. Flame-haired designer Vivienne Westwood, a veteran rider, pedals around London in her usual eclectic fashions—often a patterned dress and tights—only bowing to common sense by throwing a pair of heels in her basket.

Mr. Colville-Andersen has compiled a style guide on his Cycle Chic blog. He keeps his guidance simple. “Just open your closet and it’s filled with cycling clothes!” he exclaims. “Anything you can walk in, you can ride your bike in.”

He recalls the shocked feedback from American and British readers when he posted a photo of a girl riding her bike in stilettos and a short skirt, or another of a drag queen in full guise.

Take tips from a professional. Evelyn Hamilton, one of the first female cycling champions, doles out advice with wry British humor in a 1936 video. She demonstrates fixing her hair back with a braid. Her “practical winter kit” consists of a beret and an ordinary wool coat.

Casual Parisian riders would agree. Gwenaëlle Brand, a 29-year-old mother of two on maternity leave, hiked up her denim skirt to hoist herself up on to a Velib’ near Paris’s chic Parc Monceau earlier this week. Her favorite cycling gear wasn’t designed for a bike: leather gloves she splurged on to keep her fingers warm in winter, and high heels.

“I’ve ruined all the heels on my pumps,” she says, “but it’s much faster than walking.”

London fashion week at a turning point

BY BETH SCHEPENS

LONDON FASHION WEEK went out with a bang Tuesday night, with a celebrity-packed Burberry Prorsum show and after-party at the brand’s plaid-infused headquarters.

It was a homecoming for this most British of British brands, which has shown at Milan fashion week since 2001. It was also a coup for London fashion week, which was expanded and hyped up this year in celebration of its 25th anniversary. Other highlights included the presence of Vogue editor Anna Wintour, a Brit, in the front row after a two-year absence, as well as the return of designers Pringle of Scotland and Matthew Williamson from the New York and Milan runways.

Still, it was hard to say whether the shows will fulfill organizers’ hopes of putting London back on the fashion map. In recent years, promising designers like Giles Deacon have departed and buyer attendance has slumped, leaving the event a mere sideshow—complete with often outlandish designs—to the big fashion circuses of New York, Milan and Paris.

The main shows this week, however, served as a reminder of the

reach of U.K. fashion. At Burberry (pictured right), creative director Christopher Bailey took the label’s classic trench coats and pulled, knotted and looped the fabric into swirling layers that oozed luxury.

Pringle, like Burberry, has remained true to its British roots despite its Italian home away from home. And designer Clare Waight Keller’s spring collection was no exception. She updated the luxury brand’s iconic knitwear by shrinking it into delicate lace-like layers and enlarging it into chunky, 3-D cable knits.

Matthew Williamson, known for his brightly colored prints, showed a more structured collection that moved his aesthetic and brand forward. The designer drew on Glaswegian artist Jim Lambie’s synthetic colors and graphic lines to create eye-catching pieces that Mr. Williamson hopes will entice recession-wary shoppers to take out their pocketbooks.

Smaller brands, the bread and butter—or, rather, the beans on toast—of London fashion, benefited from the hype brought by the return of the bigger labels, with Ms. Wintour attending the shows of emerging designers Meadham Kirchoff and Marios Schwab. The

British Fashion Council, which organizes the event, says far more buyers attended the shows than in years past, though data weren’t available. But the question on most people’s minds was whether the heavy hitters would remain past this jubilee season.

“Showing in London has been incredibly exciting,” said Pringle Chief Executive Mary-Adair Macaire. “We will take a decision on our main runway show later this year, but have no immediate plans to move away from London.” In coming weeks, Pringle will have showroom presentations in both Paris and Milan, where key buyers will get a chance to see the full collection.

Matthew Williamson said he was waiting to see reaction from the show. “You take each season as it comes,” said Joseph Velosa, the label’s chief executive as well as a member of the British Fashion Council’s board. He added that the

label would also be doing presentations in Paris and Milan, because “that’s still where most of the buyers are.”

Burberry is also awaiting reactions. “We haven’t made any firm decisions concerning next year’s venue yet,” Burberry said. But a person familiar with the matter said the company would likely move its show back to Milan next season.

Even as it seeks to compete on par with New York, Milan and Paris, London still holds a unique position in the world of fashion. Precisely because of the dearth of strong commercial interests at the shows, freedom of design has flourished.

London will have to find a balance between its commercial ambitions and its creative freedom—something the fashion industry has struggled with for years—if it is to move forward. But this week, the city was able to show off both strengths to an attentive fashion audience.



Associated Press

City of light, water and b

A new book reminds us why Venice continues to inspire and enchant

By Bruce Anderson

VENICE IS LIGHT. Her finest painters have tried to capture it, yet the victor ludorum was not Venetian. The city inspired the greatest of the Impressionists, Turner. In his canvases, water and stone are sublimated into air and fire. As Peter Ackroyd reminds us in his new work on the city, "Venice: Pure City," (Chatto and Windus, £25), the English essayist Walter Pater wrote that "all art constantly aspires to the condition of music." Venetian artists often painted musicians; Bellini's sublime altarpiece in San Zacharia is only one example. But Turner achieves the fusion. His brush is the conductor's baton—he is Dionysus—as the whole city is swept up in Terpsichorean ecstasy, dancing to the music of the spheres.

Venice is water, which by no means always obeys the dance-master. Every year, the doge would throw a gold ring into the waters of the lagoon, to renew the city's marriage with the sea. But the sea was never a contented bride. One late February, on the far side of the Dorsoduro, Venice's second-largest island, I am the only tourist in sight. The others have too much sense to watch a black-grey sky allying with a green-grey sea to fill the air with damp and rain: to probe and menace the stone embankment. Well-wrapped, Venetians scurry by, seeking refuge, thus reminding us of their city's origins.

Venice was a refuge. In the early sixth century, as the Italian peninsula was constantly expiring toward the condition of barbarism, refugees from the chaos of the mainland found their way to a shelter which seemed likely to remain inviolate, since no-one would covet it. Amid a lagoon, on muddy, marshy islands, the first Venetians built their humble dwellings.

Then—as so often in early eras of Northern civilization—hardship and danger stimulated effort and creativity. To survive the perils of the sea and repel the ones from the mainland, the Venetians had to become the masters of the water. To rise above brutish subsistence, they had to turn their mudflats into fields and a city. They did both. They also established links with Byzantium, where Roman culture was preserved and enhanced. By the ninth century, Venice was becoming a regional superpower, its strength resting on ships and on gold.

Venice was money. However grand it became, it could never be self-sufficient, and its inhabitants had greater ambitions than that. They achieved them, by brains and trade. Venice became one of the greatest entrepôts in history. When the Mediterranean was still the cen-



Venice's grand canal; below, J.M.W. Turner's painting, 'The Grand Canal—Venice,' (circa

ter of the earth, Venice was that sea's commercial capital. From all over the known world, goods and merchants found their way to the lagoon. Out of the splendour of the markets grew the splendour of the buildings, and of their inhabitants.

But the Venetians remained true to their mercantile origins. Although the city's riches financed an aristocracy, it was a bourgeois aristocracy. His sexual ambivalence apart, Shakespeare's Antonio was typical. However much he was accepted as a grandee, his wealth, his status—and his life—depended on the fate of his argosies.

Venice was civic patriotism and civic obedience. That is unusual. A cooped-up populace, the ever-visible contrast between poverty and abundance, the easy transmission of excitement and anger: cities encourage political turbulence. Not Venice. Although the authorities had teeth, they could also rely on consent. From earliest times, and despite an oligarchic constitution, Ven-

ice had little difficulty in commanding the allegiance of its citizens. As in Periclean Athens, a man found fulfilment in the service of his city.

Venice is the truculent uncertainty of the human condition. Venetians were often accused of impiety. By the standards of their time, they certainly practised religious tolerance, and they did not take much notice of the pope. Indeed, they were happy to wage war on the papal dominions. The city was regularly excommunicated and never seemed to care. Like the pope, its cardinal archbishop was a patriarch. Rome had Peter. But Venice had Mark. Why should an Evangelist defer to a fisherman?

Yet Venice was often at war and sometimes in danger of losing. Fed on human waste, the stagnant waters of the lagoon bred plagues. When they were threatened by defeat or disease, the Venetians would embellish old churches or build new ones. In prosperous times, religion was just another sumptuary dis-

play. But when death crept across the waters, pride turned to fear; Venice turned to prayer.

In recent decades, those who adore Venice have joined in the prayers. The city is in peril. The foundations are sinking, the sea has never been subdued and industries on the mainland pollute the air with acids which attack the stone-work. The young are leaving the city. Today, the population has shrunk below 70,000; less than a quarter of the 15th-century figure. In decline, Venice is as beautiful as ever, but it has taken on the fragility and pathos of old age. Giorgione's "La Vecchia" has come to symbolize the modern city.

This is all captured in Peter Ackroyd's pages. There are some factual errors (such as the date of Suleiman the Magnificent's death and the Christian name of the protagonist in Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice"), and the lack of footnotes is irritating. One would wish to know more about some of the incidents that Mr.



Beauty

1835).

Ackroyd describes. But those are mere cavils. Our author's love of Venice has lent wings to his prose, and he passes the essential test. To work, any book on Venice must fill the reader with an overwhelming desire to drop whatever he is doing, rush to the nearest airport and arrive in the city full of joyous expectation, to wander and wonder and worship.

Venice is beauty. Set off from St. Mark's Square, and get lost. That is surprisingly easy, however well you think you know the city. As you meander, you will come across vistas which will make you gasp with delight. That is surprisingly easy, however often you have visited the city.

Gradually guide yourself to the Church of the Frari, on the Dorsoduro. On arrival, walk to the west end. Go back four-and-a-half centuries. It is a feast day. The patriarch is there, as is the doge and everyone who is anyone. The church is filled with incense and music. Process down the nave, in reverend step with the ghosts of the great ones. With them, raise your eyes to the church's most exalted treasure, Titian's "Assumption of the Virgin."

There is no finer portrait of a female. In the hour of her death, divested of ailments and frailty, the Virgin is once again the tremulous young girl of the Annunciation. As she received Gabriel with fear and awe, so she greets her Son, who is calling her home to be Queen of Heaven. The Frari's full name is Santa Maria Gloriosa Dei Frari. Titian's painting justifies every syllable of that Gloriosa.

Just around the corner is the Scuola Di San Rocco, where Tintoretto established his claim to rank with the greatest. The English critic John Ruskin thought that the "Crucifixion" in the Scuola was the greatest painting of all. The concept may



be absurd. In that context, the judgment seems plausible.

It is now time for refreshment. Venice has never been famous for its cuisine. One might have thought that some of the world's greatest chefs would have brought their skillsets to this unparalleled location, but that has not happened. As a result it is easy to be disappointed. Harry's Bar is only the worst example of a restaurant which trades on its fame. It will produce a perfectly competent dinner, which would be dear at half the price. It is not one-third as good as Harry's Bar in London.

Just off St. Mark's Square is Do Forni, famous for seafood. It never turns down a booking. With luck, you will sit down only three-quarters of an hour after the time of your booking. Once, arriving, I met the then British Ambassador Sir Tom Richardson, who was leaving. We had a chat. As soon as he departed, the bowing and scraping began. Suddenly, my table was not good enough. A free glass of prosecco accompanied me to the better one. The ensuing meal was superb: the best food I have eaten in Venice. It is so irritating. They can do it if they try. But why bother, when the supply of tourists is endless?

There is at least one restaurant which never fails. Stand in front of the Accademia gallery. Turn left, then right, then first left. You will come across Ai Cugnai. It is run by tiny old girls with arms like chicken bones. Despite all evidence to the

contrary, they are convinced that any man who crosses their threshold must be a starveling in desperate need of sustenance. They will provide it. They do not have much English, but if you manage to explain that you want to eat local specialties that are particularly good today, you will not be disappointed.

There is so much to see. But try not to miss Torcello. Eleven kilometers from San Marco, it was the original settlement. Fourteen hundred years later, it retains some of the spirit of that fearful, dark-age frontier, as if the inhabitants are still straining their eyes for an early warning of the Lombards' galleys. From the Campanile, you can just pick out the dim shadowy towers of the main city. That is a good view for a wintry day, when the lagoon is at its bleakest. It brings home, as no amount of reading can, the implausibility—the absurdity—of the lagoon as a site for a great city.

Finally, Venice is enchantment. She may no longer hold the gorgeous East in fee, but in this city, East and West have made music together—made love together—to create a unique aesthetic, a unique harmony. Sit in St. Mark's Square and contemplate the Basilica. To paraphrase Pater, all Venetian architecture constantly aspires toward the condition of champagne. In St. Mark's, aspiration is transcended into triumph.

Go enjoy it while it lasts.

—Bruce Anderson is a writer based in London.

Above, the Italian Renaissance painter Giovanni Bellini's 'San Zaccaria Altarpiece' (1505); below, a photograph of children playing inside Venice's Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari.



Trouble brews for wine; cheese chooses beer

BY DAVIDE BERRETTA

Bra, Italy
AFTER WRESTLING FOR a spot on the gourmet drink list, beer is trying to push deeper into wine territory: right by the cheese platter.

"Some cheeses are considered to be jewels. And for now wine is a more prestigious partner," says Leonardo Di Vincenzo, owner of Birra del Borgo, a young Italian artisanal brewery that has recently begun exporting to the U.S. But once they try beer with cheese, he says, "People are struck by how easily the two go together."

The combination has long been a staple in Belgian cuisine, but in recent years, the pairing of beer and cheese has gained legitimacy even in wine-obsessed Italy—where beer is hardly the default drink to accompany fine dining. Similarly, in New York, at gourmet beer spots such as the Beer Table, serving cheese with a \$10 brew no longer raises eyebrows.

For brewers, teaming up with cheese is part of a campaign to show that beer is as sophisticated as Bordeaux, not just a tippable associated with student parties and sports bars. The idea is to "bring it up at the same level as wine," says Marc Stroobandt, a master beer sommelier and consultant at U.K.-based F&B Partnership, a company that trains restaurateurs on the best way to pair beer with food. Mr. Stroobandt says he sees "a lot of interest in experimenting" with pairing beer and cheese across Europe and in the U.S.

Slow Food, for one, is putting its clout behind the beer-and-cheese combo. At the nonprofit group's Cheese 2009—a biannual international fair held last week in Piedmont, the northern Italian region that shares a border with another cheese superpower, France—cheese lovers and producers from around the world tasted dozens of varieties, with beer helping wash down the food in addition to the usual wine.

Alberto Farinasso, events coordinator for the fair, says Slow Food is eager to give more attention to artisanal brews, and has elevated beer's role from bit player to supporting actor. In previous editions of the fair, beer was present, but wine was recognized as the default partner for cheese tasting.

This time, the fair's program and the crowds around the beer stands made it clear that beer no longer plays second fiddle to wine. Of 37 "taste workshops," six were dedicated to pairing beer with cheeses. On Monday, the last day of the fair, one section dedicated to artisanal beers had to shut down because it had run out of beer to sell.

"It is a very valid union, both in terms of sensory experience and in terms of stories it can narrate," says Mr. Farinasso.

At the fair, Parmigiano Reggiano, known in Italy as the "king of cheeses," was paired with Italian artisanal beers. In other workshops, American and Italian microbrews accompanied U.S. cheeses such as Pleasant Ridge Reserve from Wisconsin and Rogue River Blue from Oregon. At another session, 39 people sat for more than an hour, tasting five raw-milk cheeses from central Italy paired with four unpasteurized Italian beers, guided by the cheese and beer producers.

Mr. Di Vincenzo, who led two of



Dave Vander for The Wall Street Journal (3)



Italian beer maker Teo Musso (left) and stacked cheese at the Cheese 2009 fair in Bra, Italy (above).

the beer workshops, says pairing beer and cheese is a no-brainer—"like bread and cheese. Beer is a bit like liquid bread."

"The bitter note of hops gives a skimming strength that allows to cleanse the mouth from the fat" in cheeses, allowing for a better savoring of the flavors, he says.

Part of the appeal comes from the fact that beer and cheese are part of a common farm cycle. In the 19th century, Belgian monks would brew beer, feeding their cows the leftover barley husks. The cows' milk yielded cheese that the monks—many of them vegetarians—liked to munch while enjoying their beers.

"You will often hear the argu-

ment that cows don't eat grapes," says Justin Philips, owner of New York's Beer Table, a gourmet beer bar in Brooklyn's Park Slope neighborhood. Mr. Philips, who has been serving beer and cheese since opening the bar a year and a half ago, says palates have warmed quickly to the pairing, such as his proposed meeting of Swiss cheese with Swiss Rebetez beer.

"A year ago, it was a new experience for everybody we presented it to," Mr. Philips says. "Now just one in 10 are surprised."

But beer fans still have a long way to go if they want to convince the public that suds are a worthy partner for cheese, especially in

France.

"Have you ever seen anyone drink beer in Bordeaux?" asks Emeric Sauty de Chalon, president of 1855, France's largest online wine shop. Mr. Sauty de Chalon agrees that the most flavorful cheeses have

a flavor that is too strong for some red wines, but doesn't think beer and cheese is necessarily the right alternative.

"With some lower quality cheese, why not?" he says. "But with the most high-quality cheeses from Italy or from France I really would not recommend it. Try something else."

Mr. Stroobandt, though, thinks consumers just need a little hand-holding. "So far, wine people have been so much better at education and marketing," he says. "They give people the confidence to try new things, telling them this is how you taste it and appreciate it."



A beer-and-cheese pairing class at the Slow Food association's Cheese 2009 festival, which took place in Bra, Italy, last week.

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❖ Top Picks



Ugo Rabec (left) and Franck Ferrari (right) perform in 'Mireille' in Paris.

In Paris, lackluster 'Mireille' fails to dazzle crowds

PARIS: It was daring for Nicolas Joel, the new head of the Paris Opera, to program Charles Gounod's "Mireille" as the first production of the new season, and moreover to stage it himself. It's the first time the little-known opera has been performed at the Paris Opera, and it's also a statement of intent: Mr. Joel's way of marking a complete turn-around from the over-the-top and highly Germanic "director's-theater" programming of his predecessor Gérard Mortier.

First produced in 1864, the opera is based on the 1859 epic poem "Mirèio" written by Frédéric Mistral, the great defender of the Provençal language. A lyrical Romeo-and-Juliet tragedy of ill-fated young love (Mireille's wealthy farmer father won't let her marry Vincent, the son of a basket weaver), the libretto of "Mireille" is slight, the action almost nonexistent, and, though the music is lovely, it's definitely opera in a minor key.

There was hope for a vibrant production that would demonstrate why it isn't necessary to "update" 19th-century operas by setting them in Latin American prisons or Eastern European auto-repair shops. But this production is so old-fashioned it often verges on kitsch. The acting is of the hand-on-heart, full frontal delivery sort; Franca Squarciapino's costumes are little more than sweetly innocuous; the sets by Ezio Frigerio—an anonymous wheatfield, a big stone wall—are lacking in stagecraft magic; and the faux-farandole folk dancing provides some unintended comic relief.

It's a shame, because "Mireille" should and could be charming, and there are moments of real musical emotion. Albanian soprano Inva Mula sings the title role extremely well, though she misses the radiant innocence that is the essence of the character. American tenor Charles Castronovo is an ideal Vincent, with a pleasing timbre aided by excellent phrasing and diction. The rest of the cast is mostly in good form, notably young Belgian soprano Anne-Catherine Gillet, outstanding in the small role of Vincenette.

Mr. Joel, walking with difficulty after a stroke last year, was both applauded and booed during his opening-night curtain call, which he took solo, as if to shoulder full responsibility, acknowledging the mixed reaction with a gracious, gentlemanly, unapologetic salute. —*Judy Fayard*

Until Oct. 14.
www.operadeparis.fr



Photo: Ogawa Tadahiro

An ancient Japanese dogu statue of a wild boar (circa 1,500-1,000 B.C.).

Go figure: relics of old Japan

LONDON: Dogu are abstract clay figures with recognizably human or animal features. They are also the first dated pottery figures in the continuous tradition of making such artifacts, stretching back to 12,500 B.C. And they are very spooky, which is why the British Museum's stunning exhibition of 67 of these enigmatic objects is called "The Power of Dogu: Ceramic Figures from Ancient Japan."

The purpose or use of these mostly small pieces is hotly debated. Curator Simon Kaner told me Japanese scholars only fairly recently have accepted there may be a connection between the culture of the present-day Japanese and the Jomon people, prehistoric foragers who lived from about 12,500 B.C. to 300 B.C. in the temperate forests that covered the Japanese archipelago. This new appreciation of dogu is highlighted by the fact that three have been designated national trea-

sures of Japan, including the "Venus" from Tanabatake, Nagano prefecture, and the "Dogu with palms pressed together" from Aomori prefecture. A further 25 examples rank as "Important Cultural Properties and Important Art Objects," and the British Museum says this is "the first time that such a wide range of the finest dogu have been brought together in a single exhibition."

Their power over the viewer is reflected in the debate about what dogu meant to the Jomon people and how they were used. A lot of them seem to have been broken deliberately, before the fragments were scattered or buried. Dogu probably had plural uses: venerated and revered as embodiments of spirits, or sometimes buried with the Jomon's dead to guide them to another world. Quite a few of them seem to have female characteristics and some are in squatting postures, possibly indicating rituals to ensure

safe childbirth. But others seem to wear masks, such as the imposing "Hollow masked dogu" discovered in 2000 in Nagano prefecture.

Dogu come in a variety of shapes; most are highly decorated with geometric designs. Most are small, but some fragments look like they come from meter-high figures. Techniques used by the Jomon included marking by impressing twisted plant fibres ("jomon" means "cord-marked") and burnishing—some have a metallic sheen.

Recently, dogu have become a potent source of inspiration for Japanese artists and have featured in manga comics and Playstation games. The real power of dogu for the Japanese is that they have become symbols of prehistoric Japan, and are viewed as works of art as well as protagonists of some sort in contemporary culture. —*Paul Levy*

Until Nov. 22
www.britishmuseum.org

German photography festival goes beyond mere imagery

MANNHEIM, LUDWIGSHAFEN, HEIDELBERG: "Images Recalled" is Germany's biggest curated photo festival, taking place in three cities of the Rhine-Neckar region with more than 450 works by 60 artists.

At the Heidelberger Kunstverein, seven international artists join in a show called "Absences." In this intriguing collection of works the viewer is called upon to fill in the empty spaces. New Zealand photographer Ann Shelton shows us landscapes that double as crime scenes. The large color prints are mirror images of places where historic crimes took place. In "Doublet" (2001), Ms. Shelton depicts a leaf-strewn unpaved road leading into a forest. It is for the viewer to imagine the violent murder that disturbed the pastoral scene when two teenage girls killed one of their mothers.

The show at the Wilhelm-Hack Museum in Ludwigshafen is called "War of Imagery" and a number of the artists use found photos. Swiss photographer Thomas Hirschhorn's "The Incommensurable Banner" (2008) shows images of mutilated bodies in war zones from many sources mounted on an 18-meter-long cloth banner.

"Collecting Images" at the Kunstverein Ludwigshafen features



Photographer Ann Shelton's 'Trespass (After Monster) Daytona Beach, Florida, USA' (2001), on show in Germany, records the location of a crime.

works that each act as a composite of multiple images. Aurélien Froment from France uses a magician dressed in black for his film "Pocket Theater" (2007). The magician shuffles a stack of photographs bringing back memories of card tricks. He arranges the apparently unrelated images of people, and places on a glass pane, creating a chain of free associations.

"Body Patterns" at the Kunsthalle in Mannheim explores the human body. Yvonne Todd from New Zealand portrays elaborately dressed and wigged young women in glamorous costumes but the subjects grinning into the camera lens reveal the fear, sickness and blasé acquiescence on the fringes of the glamour world, giving the images

a disquieting quality.

The most striking images in the show are not really photographs at all. Spanish artist Joan Fontcuberta's "Landscapes Without Memory" are magnificently detailed pictures of places that don't exist outside of the Reiss-Engelhorn Museums in Mannheim. Mr. Fontcuberta uses a computer program to translate roadmaps into landscape images. But instead of roadmaps he feeds the computer historic photographs or classic landscape paintings. The results are eerie scenes untouched by human beings, landscapes beyond memory of places that seem waiting to be discovered. —*Mariana Schroeder*

Until Oct. 25
www.fotofestival.info

Silver to show at London fair

DESIGNERS ARE EXPLORING the potential of silver at a time when hand-crafted metalwork is attracting an increasing number of contemporary collectors.

"There is a strong move away from the mass-produced luxury item to pieces that are unique, hand-made, design-led and generally

Collecting

MARGARET STUDER

have a story to tell," says U.K.-based, Danish silversmith Ane Christensen.

Ms. Christensen is one of 160 contemporary designers scheduled to display unique and limited-edition silver crafts and jewelry at the Goldsmith's Fair in London from Sept. 28 to Oct. 11.

Organized by the Goldsmiths' Company, a medieval guild that has been responsible for testing the



A carved, wooden handle and silver bowl with scoop by Rajesh Gogna.

quality of precious metals in the U.K. since the year 1300, the fair exhibits both established and emerging silversmiths. The organizers require all designers to attend in person to explain techniques and accept commissions. It's an added treat for buyers, who get to hear the story behind each piece.

According to the guild's information officer, Amanda Stucklin, buyers tend to commission centerpieces and dramatic candlesticks, as well as silver goblets, tumblers and jugs. "Most of the silversmiths do well selling unusual drinking vessels," Ms. Stucklin said, and demand for cruets and large serving spoons is consistent too. But a silver piece does not have to serve a particular function. It can be "purely decorative, like a piece of sculpture," Ms. Christensen says.

For those worried about cleaning silver, there are new silver alloys that don't tarnish as easily, Ms. Stucklin says. There are also numerous products that make cleaning silver easy. A tip: the more often a silver bowl or implement is put to use, the less likely it is to tarnish.

All of the fair's exhibitors work in the U.K., a leading center for contemporary silver design. About a third has come to the U.K. from other countries. Some mould elements of their personal heritage into the metalwork.

Korean silversmith William Lee makes exquisite vessels that suggest the movement of liquids. For instance, Mr. Lee's "Icicle" vase recalls frozen water in the spirit of tranquility and peace (price: £4,000).

Birmingham-based artist Esther Lord creates vessels that play with structure and subtle surface texturing. A "Zigzag" silver vase by Ms. Lord is priced around £600. U.K.-born Rajesh Gogna, who comes from a long line of Indian goldsmiths, offers an intricate salt cellar and silver bowl (price: £855).

'If I Forget Thee, O Jerusalem'

By Bari Weiss

Jews have no history in the city of Jerusalem: They have never lived there, the Temple never existed, and Israeli archaeologists have admitted as much. Those who deny this are simply liars. Or so says Sheik Tayseer Rajab Tamimi, chief Islamic judge of the Palestinian Authority.

His claims, made last month, would be laughable if they weren't so common among Palestinians. Sheik Tamimi is only the latest to insist that the Jewish connection to Jerusalem is fabricated. Or, in his words, that it is solely "an Arab and Islamic city and it has always been so." His recent comments come on the heels of those by Shamekh Alawneh, a lecturer in modern history at Al Quds University. On an Aug. 11 PA television program titled "Jerusalem—History and Culture," Mr. Alawneh argued that the Jews invented their connection to Jerusalem. "It has no historical roots," he said. What's more, he claimed, the Jews are engaging in "an attack on history, theft of culture, falsification of facts, erasure of the truth, and Judaization of the place."

As President Barack Obama and his foreign policy team gear up to propose yet another plan for Israeli-Arab peace, they would do well to focus less on important but secondary issues like settlement growth, and instead notice that top Palestinian intellectual and political leaders deny basic truths about

the region's most important city.

For the record: Jerusalem is the holiest city in Judaism, mentioned more than 600 times in the Hebrew Bible. Three times a day, religious Jews face eastward toward the city when they pray. At Jewish weddings, the joy of the couple is diminished as they shatter a glass and acknowledge Jerusalem's still unfulfilled redemption. It is a widespread custom to recite the 137th psalm ("If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither, let my tongue cleave to my palate if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.")

According to Jewish tradition, Jerusalem's designation as Judaism's most sacred city made it the obvious place for King Solomon to build the Holy Temple following the death of his father, King David. At its heart, according to the Hebrew Bible, was the Ark of the Covenant. After its destruction by the Babylonians, the temple was rebuilt by King Herod before being destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70.

Earlier this month, archaeologists with the Israeli Antiquities Authority discovered a 3,700-year-old Jerusalem wall—the oldest and biggest ever uncovered in the region—that they believe was built by the Canaanites before the First Temple period. It's true: there is

scant archaeological evidence of the First Temple. But not so for the Second Temple, which is accepted as historical fact by most archaeologists. From the Herodian period, aside from dozens of Jewish ritual baths surrounding the temple that have been uncovered, one retaining wall of the temple, the Western Wall, still stands.

But Sheik Tamimi doesn't need to take the Jews' word for any of this, or that of legions of world-class scholars. For proof of the Jewish connection to Jerusalem, he need only take a closer look at writings from his own religious tradition.

The Koran, which of course references many biblical stories and claims figures like Abraham as Islamic prophets, also acknowledges the existence of the Jewish temples. The historian Karen Armstrong has written that the Koran refers directly to Solomon's Temple as a "great place of prayer" and that the first Muslims referred to Jerusalem as the "City of the Temple." Martin Kramer, an Israeli historian who has combed through Koranic references to the temples in Arabic, notes surra 34, verse 13, which discusses Solomon's building process: "They worked for him as he desired, (making) arches, Images, basins large as wells, and (cooking) cauldrons fixed (in their places)."

There is still more recent offi-

cial Muslim acknowledgment of Jerusalem's Jewish history—a booklet put out in 1924 by the Supreme Muslim Council called "A brief guide to al-haram al-sharif." Al-haram al-sharif, the Arabic name for the Temple Mount, is currently the site of the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa mosque. It is, according to Islamic tradition, where Muhammad ascended to heaven.

Yet it is also, according to the Supreme Muslim Council, a site of uncontested importance for the Jews. "The site is one of the oldest in the world. Its sanctity dates from the earliest (perhaps from pre-historic) times. Its identity with the site of Solomon's Temple is beyond dispute." And the council booklet quotes the book of Samuel: "This, too, is the spot, according to the universal belief, on which 'David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offering and peace offerings.'" Later, on page 16, the booklet discusses the underground structure known as King Solomon's Stables, saying that they "probably date as far back as the construction of Solomon's Temple." Citing the historian Flavius Josephus, the booklet claims they were likely used as a "place of refuge by the Jews at the time of the conquest of Jerusalem by Titus in the year 70 A.D."

So why do those like Mr. Tamimi deny what their predecessors readily acknowledged? To undermine Israel, which earned statehood in 1948, and—perhaps

more significantly—captured the Old City of Jerusalem during the Six Day War of 1967. Since then, Palestinian leaders have waged a full-scale battle to erase any Jewish connection to sacred places, particularly the Temple Mount.

While Israel has never hesitated to acknowledge Jerusalem's holiness in Islam—albeit saying that it has less importance than Mecca—Palestinian leaders insist that Jews are transplants in the region, nothing more than white European colonialists. This denial has formed the foundation for their argument that Jerusalem should become the capital of Palestine. This is why the mufti of the Palestinian Authority, Sheik Ikrama Sabri, dismisses the Western Wall as "just a fence." Yasser Arafat classified it, bizarrely, as "a Muslim shrine." As Saeb Erekat, Arafat's chief negotiator, said to President Clinton at Camp David in 2000: "I don't believe there was a temple on top of the Haram, I really don't."

These sentiments are echoed in Palestinian primary-school textbooks, preached weekly at mosques, and printed in official newspapers. In other words: The Palestinian leadership isn't belly-aching over borders—it is stating, in full voice, that Israel doesn't have a right to its most basic historical and religious legacy.

This is no foundation for "peace talks."

Ms. Weiss is an assistant editorial features editor at the Journal.

Masterpiece / By Mary Tompkins Lewis

The Power, and Art, of Painting

A picture of an artist's studio is an invitation to enter his private realm, to ponder his perception of the creative process and to marvel at the extent to which art, at its most profound, can transcend the limits of its historic moment and constructed space. Diego Velazquez's "Las Meninas" (1656)—marked by a massive scale, unremitting technical virtuosity and centuries of critical analysis—is a tour-de-force studio painting and one against which legions of later artists, including Goya and Picasso, have measured themselves.

Countless writers have debated the work's seductive visual riddles: its transparent naturalism yet strangely inaccessible subject, its striking combination of a captured moment and staged studio portrait, its meticulously wrought but, in the end, ambiguous perspective. Perhaps the greatest masterpiece of the Golden Age of Spanish art, it has been heralded as a summation of the painter's illustrious career and enduring quest for nobility in an age and culture that did not sufficiently esteem its native artists. In the waning decades of the Hapsburg empire in Spain, Velazquez's "Las Meninas" also offered a telling glimpse of the world of the aging Philip IV, where artifice and illusion often masked, to dazzling effect, an increasingly dismal reality.

Velazquez's first biographer, Palomino, identified the painting's cast of characters, all of them part of the royal household. At center stands the exquisite Infanta Mar-

garita, whose radiant innocence is captured in sheer, scintillating strokes and framed by the solicitous handmaidens (or *meninas*) who attend her. To the right appear two dwarfs who served, in keeping with court custom, as playmates to the princess. Just behind, a lady-in-waiting to the queen chats with an unnamed gentleman, while beyond and silhouetted in a luminous doorway, the queen's chamberlain pauses to look back. And poised at left before his easel, with palette lowered and paintbrush frozen in midair, the artist himself gazes intently out, most likely at Philip IV and his wife, Marianna of Austria, whose likenesses are captured in a shimmering, distant looking glass. It is here that the painter's paradoxes begin.

The royal couple seem to be not only physically present before Velazquez, but to stand on this side of the painting with us, the viewers. And where, we might ask, stands the artist, if he is studying his own visage too in reflection? The towering, unseen canvas at left, its ragged border edged with palpable strokes of paint, draws us further into his elaborate visual conundrum. It may hold a life-size portrait of



Enrich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

the Infanta, or perhaps "Las Meninas" itself—an ingenious conceit that would make the real painting a metaphoric mirror of its own creation—or, more likely, depict the king and queen who have assumed a formal portrait stance beneath a florid red drapery.

Yet if they are posing in the studio, why is their presence only beginning to be acknowledged? The arrested glance of the Infanta, whose head turns left even as she, like the chamberlain, looks back, suggests that they have just arrived. That realization seems to

have a ripple-like effect on her companions across the room. Their captured, candid postures and growing awareness of Philip and Marianna stand in marked contrast to the monarchs' static stares, or to the searching scrutiny of the painter. No mere, teasing narrative, "Las Meninas" encapsulates in magnificent form the power, and art, of painting itself.

Despite its monumental scale and commanding position today in a long, octagonal and often teeming room in the Prado, "Las Meninas" was originally painted for an audience of one. It first hung in the king's private office in his summer apartment, testimony to Velazquez's achievements and to his own munificent patronage, but also a brilliant *divertissement* from the disastrous domestic state and crumbling colonial empire that was Philip IV's late reign.

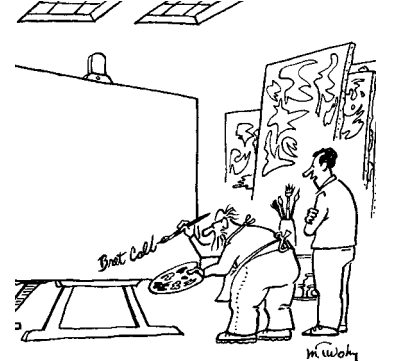
When the 17th century opened, Spain was the greatest power in Europe. By 1656 Philip had watched its Castilian population dwindle, its European holdings diminish, its American colonies erode, its primacy as a monarchy, and even as a people, fall prey to doubt and defeat. In his

art Velazquez toiled to veil that ineffable decline, and his artistic production in these final years contracted under the weight of such an arduous task. Although a few late portraits of Philip IV exist, he was famously reluctant in his world-weary old age to be portrayed by his percipient court painter, something Velazquez may subtly acknowledge here. But even more, in "Las Meninas" Velazquez shares with his greatest patron the mutable stage of his studio, offering him not only immortality but a place and moral lesson in history, where reality could be as fragile, fugitive and illusory as the painting itself.

Ms. Lewis, who writes frequently about the arts, teaches art history at Trinity College, Hartford.

Pepper . . . and Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"Do you always start with your signature?"

time off

Amsterdam

art

"Jurriaan Andriessen (1742-1819): A Beautiful View" exhibits works by the Dutch 18th-century wall-panelling painter, including paintings for the Dutch royal Drakensteyn Castle.

Museum van Loon
Oct. 2-Jan. 4
☎ 31-20-6245-255
www.musvlooon.box.nl

Barcelona

art

"Modernologies" presents modern works by 33 international artists, including Alice Creischer (born 1960), Louis Lawler (1947) and Dan Graham (1942).

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA)
Until Jan. 17
☎ 34-93-4120-810
www.macba.cat

Bern

art

"Fury and Grace: Guercino" displays 50 works by Italian Baroque painter and draughtsman Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (1591-1666), including figure and compositional studies, and landscape and genre scenes.

Kunstmuseum Bern
Until Nov. 22
☎ 41-31-3280-944
www.kunstmuseumbern.ch

Brussels

comics

"SEXTIES Crepax/Cuvelier/Forest/Peellaert" examines the work of four Belgian authors who in the 1960s developed comic strips as serious art and literature.

Palais des Beaux Arts
Until Jan. 3
☎ 32-2-5078-200
www.bozar.be

music

"Diana Krall—Quiet Nights" brings the Grammy Award-winning Canadian jazz pianist and singer to the Henry Le Boeuf Hall for one night.

Palais des Beaux Arts
Sept. 27
☎ 32-2-5078-200
www.bozar.be

Cologne

art

"Angelika Hoerle: Comet of the Cologne Avant-Garde" explores art and social history through the works of German artist Angelika Fick Hoerle (1899-1923) and her encounters with World War I, the November Revolution and the Dada movement.

Museum Ludwig
Sept. 26-Jan. 17
49-221-2212-3468
www.museum-ludwig.de

Düsseldorf

art

"Wilhelm Sasnal" shows 75 pictures by the Polish artist (born 1972), depicting family, friends and historic figures.

K21 Kunstsammlung
Nordrhein-Westfalen
Until Jan. 10
☎ 49-2118-3816-00
www.kunstsammlung.de

art

"Caspar Wolf—Summiteer between Enlightenment and Romanticism" exhib-



© Guy Peellaert



Whitney Museum of American Art, New York/ Photo: Jerry L. Thompson

Top, 'Pravda' by Guy Peellaert on display in Brussels; bottom, 'Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney' (1916) by Robert Henri at the Kunsthall in Rotterdam.

its the mountain paintings of the Swiss artist (1735-83), focusing on pictures created when he accompanied geographers and geologists on scientific expeditions.

Museum Kunst Palast
Sept. 26-Jan. 10
☎ 49-211-8990-200
www.museum-kunst-palast.de

Florence

art

"Tuscan Landscapes in the Fototeca Italian's Pictures" presents photography of Tuscan landscapes from the early 20th century to 1950 by Italian photographer Nicolò Cipriani (1892-1968).

Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe
Until Oct. 4
☎ 39-055-2948-83
www.polomuseale.firenze.it

jewelry

"Zorzi 1973-2009" showcases colliers, bracelets and earrings by Italian designer and goldsmith Alberto Zorzi (born 1958), combining avant-garde design with traditional techniques.

Museo degli Argenti, Palazzo Pitti
Until Nov. 1
☎ 39-055-2948-83
www.polomuseale.firenze.it

Geneva

art

"Art and its Markets: Flemish and Dutch Painting of the 17th and 18th century" presents newly restored 17th- and 18th-century Flemish and Dutch paintings from the collection of the museum.

Musee d'Art et d'Histoire
Oct. 1-Aug. 29
☎ 41-22-4182-600
www.ville-ge.ch/mah

photography

"Modest" shows portraits and stories of Muslim women in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Jordan, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank by French reporter Alexandra Boulat (1962-2006).

Musee International de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Sept. 23-Jan. 24

☎ 41-22-7489-506
www.micr.org

Ljubljana

art festival

"Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts 2009" is an international arts festival presenting works by contemporary South Korean artists and others.

International Centre of Graphic Arts (MGLC)
Until Oct. 25
386-1-2413-800
www.mglc-lj.si

London

art

"Terra Incognita: Italy's Ceramic Revival" presents a selection of 20th-century Italian ceramic art, including sculptures and vases by Lucio Fontana (1899-1968), Marino Marini (1901-80) and Fausto Melotti (1901-86).

Estorick Collection
Sept. 30-Dec. 20
☎ 44-20-7704-9522
www.estorickcollection.com

art

"Anish Kapoor" is a major solo exhibition of the Indian sculptor and 1991 Turner Prize winner, including "Shooting into the Corner" (2009), a group of early pigment pieces, stainless-steel reflective sculptures and newly created works.

Royal Academy of Arts
Sept. 26-Dec 11
44-20-7300-8000
www.royalacademy.org.uk

art

"Gustav Metzger" showcases works by German-born artist and activist Gustav Metzger (born 1926), including his auto-destructive and auto-creative works of the 1960s.

Serpentine Gallery
Sept. 29-Nov. 8
☎ 44-20-7402-6075
www.serpentinegallery.org

Madrid

art

"Fantin-Latour 1836-1904" presents 70 works by French painter Henri Fantin-Latour known for intricate still-life paintings and captivating group portraits of family and friends in Paris.

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza
Sept. 29-Jan. 10
☎ 34-91-3690-151
www.museothyssen.org

costumes

"The Splendor of Alexandria: Costumes from 'Agora' by Alejandro Amenabar" showcases about 20 costumes designed by Academy Award-winning designer Gabriella Pesucci for the coming film "Agora."

Museo del Traje
Until Oct. 25
☎ 34-91-5504-700
museodeltraje.mcu.es

Münster

art

"Max Ernst sends his regards: Peter Schamoni meets Max Ernst" celebrates the friendship between German filmmaker Peter Schamoni (born 1934) and German artist Max Ernst (1891-1976), with over 200 works by Ernst alongside set designs.

LWL Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte
Sept. 27-Jan. 10
☎ 49-251-5907-01



© Bernd and Eva Hockemeyer Collection

'Vaso' (1953) by Salvatore Meli at the Estorick Collection in London.

www.lwl.org

Paris

art festival

"Festival d'Automne 2009" is a contemporary-arts festival featuring more than 50 events, including new productions by Robert Wilson and Rodrigo Garcia, 12 monumental masks by Ugo Rondinone and dance by Merce Cunningham with Sonic Youth.

Festival d'Automne
Until Dec. 19
☎ 33-1-5345-1700
www.festival-automne.com

art

"Ugo Rondinone: Sunrise East" shows installations by Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone (born 1963), featuring a series of 12 totem-like figures in bronze patinated silver.

Musée du Louvre-Jardin des Tuileries
Until Nov. 15
☎ 33-1-4020-5050
www.louvre.fr

Rotterdam

art

"Modern Life: Edward Hopper and His Time" exhibits eight works by the American painter (1882-1967) alongside works by Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), Charles Sheeler (1883-1965), Man Ray (1890-1976) and others.

Kunsthall
Sept. 26-Jan. 17
☎ 31-10-4400-301
www.kunsthall.nl

boats

"Glamour on the Waves" presents six luxury-ship interiors, designed and constructed in the Netherlands.

Maritiem Museum Rotterdam
Until Sept. 3, 2011
☎ 31-10-4132-680
www.maritiemmuseum.nl

Vienna

design

"Vienna Samplerooms" showcases model rooms by Austrian designers such as Gilbert Bletterbauer, Peter Kogler, Florian Pumhösl and others.

Belvedere-Orangerie
Until Jan. 24
☎ 43-1-7955-70
www.belvedere.at

Zurich

art

"Georges Seurat: Figure in Space" displays over 60 paintings and drawings by the French painter (1859-1891), selected from collections in London, Paris, New York and Washington.

Kunsthaus Zürich
Oct. 2-Jan. 17
☎ 41-44-2538-484
www.kunsthhaus.ch

Source: ArtBase Global Arts News Service, WSJE research.