

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

EUROPE

Why the Academy
likes actresses
who play
strippers and
prostitutes

Flirting with Oscar

Fashion Week in New York | The art world's last hurrah?

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WEEKEND JOURNAL

EUROPE

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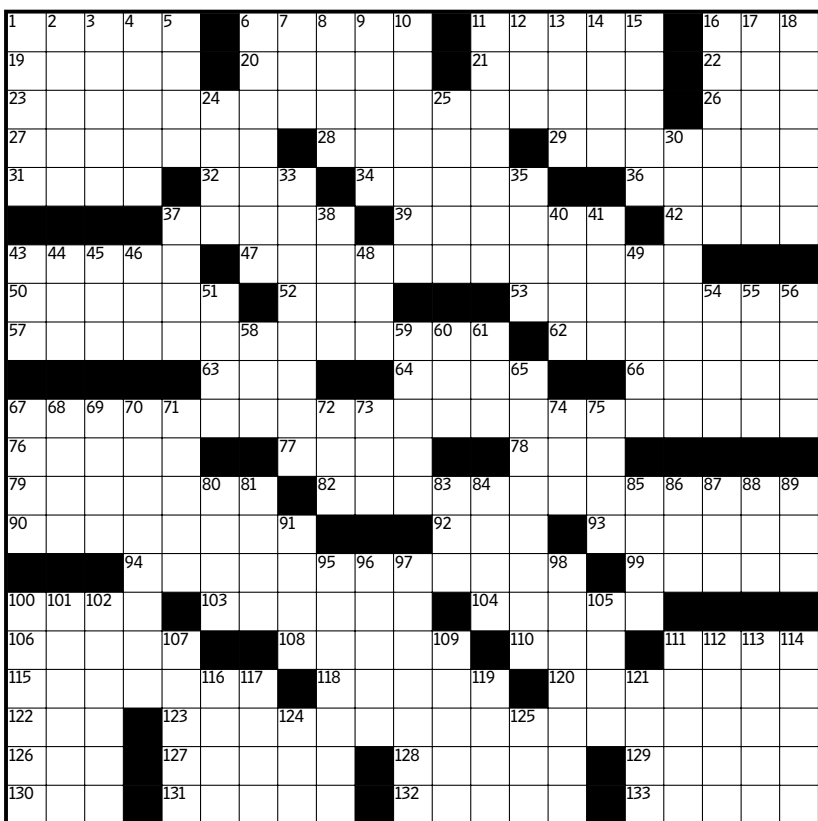
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Down

- Israeli port
- Raised, as an anchor
- Incites
- Singer/songwriter Mann
- Chemist's sprinkle
- Definitive
- Self-indulgent sort
- Mgr.'s subordinate
- Celebrations

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WSJ.com/WeekendJournal

Last Week's Solution





From left, Narciso Rodriguez, Oscar de la Renta and Thakoon showed sleek, authoritative designs this week in New York.

Get-ups for grown-ups

THERE'S BEEN a maturing on New York's fashion runways this season: Pencil skirts skim the knee, blouses aren't transparent, and coats and jackets have understated details that convey authority.

This may be, in part, the Michelle Obama effect at work. Mrs. Obama

on Wednesday.

Designer Narciso Rodriguez presented a collection with all the sexy elements for which he's known—those famous cut-outs and tailored geometry—but nearly every piece could be worn by women of a variety of ages and even shapes.

Mr. Rodriguez had dressed Mrs. Obama in a memorable beige suit that she wore during inauguration weekend at the Lincoln Memorial. His opening look on Tuesday was a sharp beige pantsuit with a sleek, authoritative jacket. There was a neat coat with understated epaulettes that looked more trench-coat than military but would offer that feeling of armor that many executives seek.

For daring color—a hallmark of Mrs. Obama's—there was a series of yellow-green looks, including a brilliant jacket and matching skirt. Then followed a series of dresses built around highly technical fabrics whose colors looked airbrushed—blues washing over black. Still, after his show, Mr. Rodriguez declined to call Mrs. Obama his muse. "I was thinking of all of the beautiful ladies I know," the designer said shyly.

At the Rodriguez show, hip record producer and singer Kanye West excitedly scrutinized every look. That is a key facet of the latest looks for mature women: Not for a moment were they dowdy. Take, for instance, the rich coppery tones and textures of Carolina Herrera's high-waisted pencil skirt, shown with a brown silk blouse. It was sexy. But button that blouse up a notch, and the look could be worn by a bank president.

The cream-colored culottes that Thakoon showed on Monday offered the bit of surprise that makes a woman want to pay up for designer fashion. But they never stepped over the line into frivolity. Paired with a great tailored jacket, they could be worn in a boardroom.

Perhaps it was fitting, then, that Desirée Rogers, the White House social secretary, sat in the seat of honor beside Vogue's Anna Wintour at Thakoon and Carolina Herrera. As an actual customer, she was a welcome contrast to the shows' usual population of fashion editors and starlets.

Mr. de la Renta, who knows his audience like no other, presented richly textured suits and dresses that could dress a female president, let alone a first lady. This was exactly what women turn to Mr. de la Renta for—exquisitely tailored or draped clothes that look like a billion dollars, including flattering pants—not nearly as narrow-legged as most—and a striking gold and black skirt suit.

Michael Kors, dependably the executive woman's champion, sent out a full collection of soft wool flannel suits, trim pants and dresses—updated with, for instance, the coat-jacket silhouette that we've been seeing lately. Mrs. Obama wore one to the inauguration, but Mr. Kors made it businesslike—a jacket that implies clout without looking mannish. There was a singular gray flannel pencil skirt built of horizontal pleats, like skirts built upon one another. It had style without trying too hard. The Kors woman has a job, after all.

Jim Gold, president and chief executive of Bergdorf Goodman, waiting to congratulate the designer, confided, "I loved this show. And I loved Narciso last night." And Mr. Gold was speaking for his income statement, not his wife's closet.

WSJ.com

From the runway
See photos of some of these looks, and complete coverage of New York Fashion Week, at WSJ.com/Fashion

Vogue editor Anna Wintour on fashion's changing mood

BY RACHEL DODES

WHEN THE EDITOR of Vogue rails against consumerism, the economy must be in a tailspin. Before she headed to the New York runway shows, fashion kingmaker Anna Wintour—dressed in taupe Manolo Blahnik boots, a Carolina Herrera sheath dress, and a tweed coat with a large fur collar draped over her shoulders—sat down in her office, with a perfect fresh bouquet on the desk, at Condé Nast's midtown Manhattan headquarters and discussed why "value" is in and "too Dubai" is out.



Q: If fashion is a barometer of the prevailing mood, what can we expect to see for fall 2009?

It is so important for designers not to run scared, and not to be too worried about what's safe and what's commercial.

Right now, what's going to work is something their customer doesn't have in her closet and that has a real intrinsic sense of value... because to be honest there's been too much product, too much copy-cutting, and, probably too much consumerism. I think a sense of clarity, a sense of leveling off, and a sense of reality is needed.

Q: So people want to look understated?

Yes, I don't think anyone is going to want to look overly, flashy, overly glitzy, too Dubai, whatever you want to call it. I just don't think that's the moment. But I do feel an emphasis on quality and longevity and things that really last.

This morning I went to see Ralph Lauren, who designed a tiny but superb collection of watches. You can look at those watches, and you can see if you buy one you will have it for the rest of your life.

Q: During the boom, were people buying too much stuff?

I think it was excessive, and there's a very correct correction going on.

Q: When do you think the consumer will be confident enough to shop like she used to?

I don't think she is going to shop the way she used to in the immediate future.

Q: Will she ever?

I am not saying never. Who

would ever say never? That would be ridiculous. I think what she buys is going to give her more pleasure because it's going to last longer, mean more.

Q: Are you trying to add more moderately priced clothes to fashion spreads?

I think we need to give women the aspirational clothes that can make them dream, and another portfolio that's about mixing high and low, certainly the way the First Lady is dressing. It's about a mix... in the Index pages we are looking more rigorously at price and value and asking, 'Is something worth that particular price tag?'

Q: A thing that wasn't worth it?

Without naming names, we had a little sequined thing that wouldn't come down to here on you [points to chest.] And I said, 'How much is it?' \$25,000. I said, 'No. We're not going to photograph that right now.'

Q: By creating the CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund, you've helped fund and mentor young American designers. How can you support young designers in such a challenging environment?

My editors and staff have to be out there in the next 10 days. We have to be very visible, very supportive... [For designers,] keeping collections extremely focused while maintaining quality is also important. Making everything suddenly inexpensive is not the right way to go.

WSJ.com

Style maven
Read an extended interview
with Anna Wintour, at
WSJ.com/Fashion

Arbitrage

The price of a suntan treatment

City	Local currency	€
Frankfurt	€9	€9
Hong Kong	HK\$100	€10
Tokyo	¥2,667	€23
Paris	€23	€23
New York	\$30	€24
Brussels	€31	€31
London	£30	€34
Rome	€36	€36

Note: For a session on a UV bed of about half an hour except Hong Kong with a 20-minute session; prices, including taxes, as provided by retailers in each city, averaged and converted into euros.



Furthermore, if there was an Obama effect, it wasn't limited to the clothes. A season ago, it was hard to find models of color on any runway. We've seen a big change this season. Seven black models walked Oscar de la Renta's runway

Hungering for tranquility

A war correspondent recalls her most memorable getaway meals

BY FARNAZ FASSIHI

AS A FOOD PERSON by nature and upbringing, it's no wonder that when I packed for the war zones as a reporter, in addition to the emergency supply of Cipro, flak jacket and sleeping bag, I stocked up on luxury local delicacies. I hand-carried crab sticks to Baghdad and asked the flight attendants on an Iranian airline from Tehran to Kabul to store my Persian caviar in the plane's fridge.

Over the past eight years, my partner and I have hopped from one hot spot to the next—Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. And in between, each time we searched for a vacation destination, we searched for new cuisines. Trips to St. Lucia, Croatia, Malta, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka uncovered meals of crab, still in its shell and eaten on the beach, or lavender-tinged vanilla ice cream on a terrace overlooking the Adriatic Sea.

It all offered a break from the food in the Middle East, which, with the exception of the Iranian food I grew up eating and Lebanese, can be bland and boring. Grilled meat skewers, broiled chicken and rice.

I was 10 years old when my family left Iran for the U.S. shortly after the revolution, and as a parting token from my grandmother, I asked for her recipes. In Portland, Ore., where my family settled, my mother's carefully prepared Persian meals became a form of homage to the homeland we had left behind.

These days, whenever we traveled, my partner Babak Dehghanpishch and I sought out restaurants where locals liked to eat based on the recommendations of friends or local taxi drivers. Often, we stumbled on a place while sight-seeing or walking on the beach by detecting a mouth-watering aroma of a new spice from the kitchen.

In April 2004, on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia, we drove around the ring road that circles the island in a jeep exploring banana plantations and tropical gardens at the foothills of the majestic volcanic Pitons. Night had fallen when we reached Marigot Bay, a picturesque secluded lagoon with fishing boats and pastel-colored houses. A little ferry whisked us across the bay to reach the Rainforest Hideaway, one of the Caribbean's finest dining spots.

The restaurant is perched on a dock, with both indoor and outdoor seating, and lush with tropical trees and flower pots. We lucked out with a table under the stars at the edge of the water. The menu, which changes regularly according to season and fresh market availability, offered what the restaurant calls fusion cuisine. It draws on Asian, Creole and European fare. The chili-infused prawns were grilled and topped with a tangy sauce of mango and pineapple. We scraped off every bite of the rum-sautéed banana dessert that came with a butter-scotch sauce and ice cream.

In late August 2005, it took us five airplane connections from Iraq to reach the medieval city of Dubrovnik, nestled on the hilly coast of the Adriatic Sea in

Croatia. The old town has been restored since the Balkan wars of the 1990s and looks as it did when first completed in the 13th century. One of the most stunning sights is a two-hour walk on top of the city walls where orange roof tiles stretch endlessly into the turquoise water beneath. On an afternoon stroll, we stumbled on then-named Labirint (the restaurant is now named Gil's), the only restaurant back then with tables perched on the city's walls. We decided to return that evening for dinner.

The tables were scattered far apart, giving an air of deliberate intimacy and exclusivity. We dined on lobster salad marinated in olive oil, capers and red chili and scallops slowly simmered in a sauce of lemon, black olives and local herbs. The desert was vanilla ice cream with a touch of lavender, which can be found on the rolling hills nearby.

Since our visit, the restaurant has changed its name and gotten a sleeker, trendier look, with more lounge seats scattered on the wall. But the menu's selection remains as we remember.

In June 2007, we flipped through the pages of our Malta guidebook searching for a special place to dine on the tiny Mediterranean island south of Sicily. We had picked Malta on a whim, not wanting to travel far from Beirut while craving sufficient cultural distance from the East. Malta charms with its open-air cafés in squares surrounded by Baroque churches, stone-paved curvy roads with cute shops selling handmade lace, and the mythical caves of Ca-

lyпсо. Local legend has it that the nymph Calypso imprisoned Odysseus in the caves for seven years.

On that particular afternoon, we were lounging in our hotel room's balcony over afternoon gin and tonics, overlooking Spinola Bay in the resort town of St. Julians. We noticed an old, waterfront stone mansion with a sign that said "Barracuda Restaurant."

The interior of the restaurant, which is housed in the drawing room of an 18th-century Maltese mansion, was furnished with slightly grandiose and stuffy furniture when we visited, but has since gotten a modern refurbishing. The restaurant has balconies, including one with a small table just for two. It is possibly one of the most romantic spots for a dinner for two.

The menu is Mediterranean with a wide selection of seafood dishes. We ordered barbuljata, a traditional Maltese appetizer made with onion, tomato, eggs and goat-cheese salsa. We shared grilled lobster as a main course, which came with a simple but perfect Thermidor sauce. The desert, my favorite, was pear and ginger crème brûlée.

I can safely say that the most beautiful place I have ever seen in the world is the Seychelles, a tiny dot in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Africa. The idyllic white sandy beaches are interrupted with dramatic rocks and cliff formations and dotted with palm trees. We were snorkeling in Anse Royal, on the east coast of Mahe Island, when we noticed a small beach shack serving lunch on wooden tables on the sand.

Kaz Kreol specializes in seafood curry. The décor is funky and kitschy, one side of the wall is a fish and palm-tree mural. One young diner had pushed his plate aside and broken out his guitar, entertaining us with local songs. The crab curry stew served in its shell and a coconut fish were so delightful that I chewed every bite slowly, savoring the flavors that burst into my mouth and not wanting the meal to end.

A few months later, we traveled to Sri Lanka in September. The food at Taprobana, a small boutique hotel with nine rooms in the coastal town of Bentota, was so supreme that I begged the chef for a cooking lesson one morning. Taprobana is one of five luxury properties that belong to Sri Lanka's most-famous fashion designer, Taru Bana. The restaurant uses vegetables from its organic garden and is open only to guests. Every morning at breakfast, the staff details a few dishes and guests pick what they'll have for lunch and dinner. There is no menu. Local fishermen arrive by noon with their catch of the day, and the garden provides the rest.

Babak and I helped cook a lunch spread that included fish baked in banana leaf marinated with spices, ginger green beans flavored with black pepper, red curried cauliflower, and a coconut and papaya salad.

I have cooked the dishes at home in Beirut where I now live and for friends at dinner parties. Mixing the spices, marinating the meat and watching over the pot as it slowly simmers satisfy both our palates as well as our wanderlust.



Leslie Lammie

Dining by the sea



Rainforest Hideaway

Marigot Bay, St. Lucia

The restaurant is perched on a dock and surrounded by tropical trees. The menu changes daily based on fresh seasonal ingredients. Ask for a table outside.

☎ 758-451-4485 or 758-286-0511
www.rainforesthideawaystlucia.com

Gil's Cuisine and Pop Lounge

Dubrovnik, Croatia

The restaurant is located on the old city walls, with a spectacular view of the city and the water.

☎ 385-20-322-222
www.gilsdubrovnik.com



Barracuda Restaurant

St. Julians, Malta

The menu has new items but the traditional seafood and Maltese dishes haven't changed.

For an especially romantic night, reserve the side balcony with just one table for two.

☎ 356-21-331817
www.wgc-group.com/barracuda/

Kaz Kreol

Mahé Island, Seychelles

This beach shack with simple wooden tables specializes in curry dishes.

☎ 248-37-16-80
(No Web site)



Taru Villas Taprobana

Bentota, Sri Lanka

The chef cooks each meal from fresh catches daily.

Its Web site is under construction.
www.taruvillas.com

Book at www.boutiquesrilanka.com

Photos: Karay Media Prods.; Dominik Sansoni for The Wall Street Journal; The Barracuda Restaurant

Top resorts offer deals amid the distress

IF DICK CHENEY is looking for employment, he might consider organizing corporate golf outings. His familiarity with secure, undisclosed locations would come in handy. What company these days wouldn't want to hold its annual executive retreat or employee-recognition event at one of those?

Since October, when American International Group was put in the

Golf Journal

JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

stocks for staging a luxurious \$400,000 weeklong retreat at a resort in California, one week after receiving \$85 billion in federal bailout funds, corporations have been slithering under rocks when it comes to golf-related activities.

Goldman Sachs, for example, two weeks ago canceled its big annual hedge-fund conference, scheduled for March, at the Fairmont Turnberry Isle resort in Miami. A company spokesman cited "the current environment." The Ritz-Carlton resort at Half Moon Bay, Calif., said more than 30 business groups have canceled retreats there since last fall, at a loss of more than \$2 million in revenue. Wells Fargo took out a full-page ad in several newspapers two weeks ago to defend its practice of rewarding employees with outings—it called such events "the heart of our culture because our product is service"—but nevertheless canceled all of its major employee-recognition events for 2009.

Individual golf travel has been hammered, too. PerryGolf, which specializes in arranging high-end vacations for small groups, particularly to the British Isles, has seen its advance bookings decline 50% so far this year, compared to 2008. "Finding eight guys who aren't affected by the economy and can commit to a trip six months off is not easy," said Gordon Dalglish, the company's president. "Maybe six guys can go, but if Billy and Joe can't, the others say they don't want to go, either."

Luckily, there are ways to take advantage of the industry's distress. "If somebody has the resources and confidence to travel, I guarantee there's never been a better time in the last 10 years," Mr. Dalglish said.

There are many deals to be had. Playing the Stadium course at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., site of the Players Championship, can cost \$398 in high season. But a package available through the end of this month will get you on the course for much less. For \$224 per night, double occupancy, players get three nights at the nearby Sawgrass Marriott Resort, two breakfasts and three rounds of golf, including one on the Stadium course. The resorts at Sea Island, Ga., and Pinehurst, N.C., have specials for unlimited golf going on. In Scottsdale, Ariz., deals offering three or even four nights' accommodation for the price of two are ubiquitous, with deeply discounted golf thrown in.

"It's everywhere. This is the golf version of walking through a mall where every store has dis-



More than 30 business groups have canceled retreats at the Ritz-Carlton resort at California's Half Moon Bay since last fall.

count signs in the window," said David Baum, editor-in-chief of Golf Odyssey, a \$97-a-year, ad-free newsletter that focuses on high-quality destinations.

Courses and hotels may be in the mood to negotiate. The falloff in corporate events, which are usually booked months in advance, has dramatically changed the dynamics. "Some of our facilities are booking 30% to 40% of their tee times in the last few days," said Dana Garmany, chairman and chief executive of Troon Golf, the largest manager of resort golf courses in the U.S.

Normally, in places like Scottsdale, almost all of the desirable tee times are booked weeks in advance during the high season. These days, calling the head pro or course manager with polite requests for lower rates at the last minute, especially if you are

armed with information about offers at competing courses, can be surprisingly effective, says Mr. Baum at Golf Odyssey.

But the smartest value strategy, given that the hardest-hit courses are often the most expensive, may be to negotiate an upgrade in the courses included in the golf package you buy, rather than seeking discounts. "The key is educating yourself about the courses in the market you want to visit," says Linda Pierson, of the Longitudes Group, an Omaha, Neb.-based consulting firm with expertise in golf travel.

After "secret shopping" for deals in the Southeast recently, Ms. Pierson says she learned that golf-trip packagers such as Golf Zoo and Golfpac Travel are often able to accommodate requests for upgrades to the best, five-star courses in an area, sometimes for

little additional cost, if you specify the courses you want and are persistent.

Other perks to ask for include extra room nights, additional meals and free or cheap replay rates. "You can't get something for nothing," says Ms. Pierson's boss, Sara Killeen, "but you can negotiate for real value."

Not all areas are equally discounted. Myrtle Beach, S.C., for instance, appears to be weathering the storm better than more exotic and expensive locations like Hawaii and the desert Southwest. Its mix of affordable and upscale courses and driving proximity to East Coast population centers has kept advance bookings from slipping more than 10% to 20% at many facilities, says Steve Mays, director of marketing for the area's golf-promotion cooperative. Available offers tend to be more

of the midweek-discount variety.

By contrast, the British Isles are more affordable than they've been for years, primarily thanks to a slide in the value of the pound. The more-adventurous might want to try South Africa, where golf suppliers are just emerging from possibly their worst summer ever and are making some "extremely aggressive offers" to attract business, says Mr. Dalglish of PerryGolf. One example: a 10-night, 11-day package including three-day safari for less than \$3,000, which is half what it went for a year ago.

The trick is getting the nerve to leave home. "Even if you give somebody a trip for free," Mr. Dalglish says, "he's not going to take it if he's not sure he'll have a job when he comes back."

Email me at golfjournal@wsj.com

An emerging art market: Turkish contemporary

AT A TIME of economic uncertainty Sotheby's is betting that international collectors are still looking for new markets: The auction house on March 4 will offer the first major sale in London totally dedicated to contemporary Turkish artists.

Collecting MARGARET STUDER

"The art scene in Turkey is very vibrant and we felt the time had come for us to act," says Sotheby's senior specialist Dalya Islam.

The sale will offer some 73 works by 53 artists including paintings, photo art, sculptures and installations—all at prices unaffected by the art-market boom years. The artists use international techniques (abstract, figurative, conceptual), and they deal with universal themes based on their Turkish political, social and aesthetic experiences as well as

the country's Ottoman past.

Here, some highlights from the sale, which Sotheby's plans to turn into an annual event:

Mehmet Güleriyüz's 2007 sculpture "Crated Monkey" shows a monkey looking helpless and very alone, symbolizing the plight of the suppressed and ostracized in the world. It is a striking work, estimated at £40,000-£60,000.

Multimedia artist Hale Tenger plays on the Hollywood film "Raiders of the Lost Ark" in a sculpture from 1992 with small, He-Man wrestlers sliding down a metal conveyer belt into a void, losing all sense of power, violence or aggressive masculinity (estimate: £30,000-£50,000).

Elif Uras takes a look at the world's exotic perception of the Orient in her sculpture from 2008, "Earth Mother Belly," a work inspired by traditional ceramics but depicting the curvaceous body of a woman in a

belly-dancing costume that looks like a bikini (estimate: £6,000-£8,000).

"Niagara" (2007), a photographic collage by Kezban Arca Batibeki, shows an alluring, doll-like Lolita smoking a cigarette and surrounded by kitsch objects (estimate: £5,000-£7,000). A contrasting piece is the heartwarming picture "My Mother and Me" (1974), by Turkey's late opera singer/artist Semiha Berksoy (estimate: £12,000-£18,000).

Among the most fascinating pieces in the sale are Nazif Topcuoglu's digital C-print photographs mounted on board. These prints are based on old master paintings showing saints and prophets, but instead the artist features beautiful women in the same poses. "Lamentations" (2007) is estimated at £6,000-£8,000.



Above, 'My Mother and Me' (1974), by Semiha Berksoy; estimate: £12,000-£18,000. Left, Earth Mother Belly (2008) by Elif Uras; estimate: £6,000-£8,000.

Photos: Sotheby's

The Yves Saint Laurent auction:

By Kelly Crow

AS THE FINANCIAL crisis pummels the art market, Christie's is about to throw the most lavish party in auction history.

On Feb. 23, auction house Christie's International will begin a three-day sale of up to \$425 million worth of art collected by the late fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent and his partner, industrialist Pierre Bergé. The sale of nearly 700 artworks—from Roman antiquities to paintings by Mondrian and Picasso—will feature a celebrity-studded red carpet, \$400 souvenir catalogs and a 4,100 square-meter salesroom built into the Grand Palais, Paris's glass-domed exposition hall near the Champs-Élysées.

Critics say the event epitomizes the excesses of the art world in an age that is no longer gilded, a Titanic-size sale designed to wow its audience into exuberant spending despite the global economic meltdown. Others say a collection of this quality surfaces only once in a generation and merits the extra attention.

The sale arrives at one of the art industry's bleakest moments. Galleries around the world are closing, and museums are struggling with dwindling endowments. Christie's is in the process of cutting 300 jobs, or about 14%, of its staff. Its auction sales fell last year to \$4.6 billion, down 20% from 2007, trailing chief rival Sotheby's \$4.9 billion auction total for the same period. Bidders were also wary during Christie's \$12.1 million contemporary sale in London last week, where works by Francis Bacon and Mark Rothko went unsold. As for Sotheby's, its shares have fallen 85% since their October 2007 peak, and its credit rating may soon be cut to junk, according to Standard & Poor's.

Christie's went to extraordinary lengths to secure the Saint Laurent/Bergé consignment, loaning over \$60 million to the designer's charitable foundation, which is managed by Mr. Bergé.

"Christie's wouldn't be loaning out so much money for this sale unless they thought they were in a really fierce fight, which maybe they are," says Richard Feigen, a longtime dealer in New York. "If it's a flop, it'll affect people's willingness to put money in all sorts of art. But if the sale goes wild, it'll prove the point that art is still a safe place to store your money."

Even for nonbidders, the sale is shaping up to be a big cultural event in Paris. Officials at the Grand Palais expect up to 50,000 people to visit the free exhibit of the collection this weekend, an attendance that would rival Art Basel Miami Beach, one of the art world's biggest fairs. Christie's is expecting closer to 30,000. Likely attendees for the sale include actress Catherine Deneuve, actor Alain Delon and France's cultural

Paris



Above, Gustave Miklos's 'Paire de Banquettes' (circa 1928-29), estimate: €2 million-€3 million; below, the collectors' first big purchase: Constantin Brancusi's wooden sculpture 'Madame L.R. (Portrait de Mme. L.R.)' from circa 1914-17, estimated at €15 million-€20 million.

minister, Christine Albanel. Mick Jagger got an early peek by touring the collection at Mr. Saint Laurent's former apartment.

Christie's has made the unlikely decision to entrust the leadership of the sale, on owner François Pinault's home turf, to François de Ricqlès, the little-known vice president of its Paris office. Mr. de Ricqlès, 50 years old, has never worked outside Paris or organized an auction valued at more than \$11.8 million, but he is better than Balzac at navigating France's most exclusive art circles. Mr. Bergé says he was on the verge of signing the collection over to Sotheby's until Mr. de Ricqlès persuaded him otherwise. Now, the auctioneer faces the challenge of his career in locking down bidders for hundreds of objects across an eclectic array of styles and price points.

"The whole art world will want to be seen at the sale," says Thierry Millerand, a New York adviser who specializes in French furniture, "but will people with

huge amounts of money want to spend? Christie's must be full of question marks."

Company cutbacks are already taking a toll at the auction house: Nearly a fifth of the 120 workers in the Christie's Paris office have been earmarked to lose their jobs once the sale is over. Sonja Ganne, a senior international specialist, says she is dealing with the stress by studying the collection. "It's strange to have this fantastic sale, yet we have colleagues losing their jobs," Ms. Ganne says. "We aren't apart from the world, only the collection is."

Ed Dolman, Christie's chief executive, says the market has "obviously changed a great deal" since the deal was inked, but he remains "confident that prices for top artworks will stay high, even in this climate."

Two pieces in the collection are already causing international controversy. For several weeks, Chinese government officials have been lobbying Christie's to withdraw a pair of 18th-century

bronze animal heads from the sale, saying the heads were looted from a fountain in Beijing's Old Summer Palace in 1860 by British and French forces during the Opium Wars. Christie's doesn't dispute the historical events but says the sale is legal under French law. The heads are priced to sell for up to \$13 million apiece.

Mr. Saint Laurent was an Algerian-born French couturier who transformed the fashion world in the 1960s and 1970s by popularizing beatnik turtlenecks, safari jackets, trouser suits and Le Smoking, his tuxedo for women. He and Mr. Bergé, his onetime lover and lifelong business partner, kept separate homes but spent much of their shared fortune on art. Mr. Saint Laurent's tastes ran to Art Deco furniture, French painters such as Léger and Matisse, and objects depicting snakes and sheaves of wheat.

Mr. Bergé's medieval eye preferred Old Master drawings, 17th-century goblets and German silver-gilt figurines. Paris dealer Alexis Kugel says they bought art "like little boys in a bakery. Their emotions were immediate and intense."

By the 1990s, the pair had slowed their collecting and began selling off the YSL brands to Gucci and the pharmaceutical company Sanofi. The designer became increasingly reclusive, rarely leaving his garden-level duplex at 55 Rue de Babylone in the Seventh Arrondissement. He died of brain cancer on June 1 at age 71.

Now, Christie's is marketing the collection Messrs. Saint Laurent and Bergé built like it's a trove of once-hidden treasures. Specialists working in the Babylone apartment earlier this year

kept the heater high and the lights low, as the designer used to, in part to maintain the aura for visiting collectors. More than 300 top clients got private tours. To fit them all in, some were only given 20 minutes apiece to walk around the mirrored music room; the airy Grand Salon with its oak-paneled walls papered in paintings; and the downstairs library, a low-ceilinged space stuffed with so many objects that the designer hung a Matisse on the back of a door.

Throughout the apartment, shiny pieces popped from every coffee table, sideboard and mantelpiece. Even the salon's fireplace was filled with a chunky arrangement of white quartz and amethyst crystals. The effect is sumptuous to the point of saturation.

Highlights of the collection include Pablo Picasso's "Instruments de musique sur un guéridon," a blue-gray Cubist work painted just after the outbreak of World War I that is estimated to sell for at least \$38.8 million. The collectors' first major purchase, a wooden totem by Constantin Brancusi, "Madame L.R. (Portrait de Mme. L.R.)," was previously owned by Fernand Léger and is priced at up to \$25.8 million.

One of the top Art Deco pieces in the collection is Eileen Gray's chocolate-leather "dragon" chair from 1917-1919, featuring wooden arms carved to look like monsters. It's estimated to sell for up to \$3.8 million.

When Mr. de Ricqlès visited the designer's apartment in early July, he says, "I got goose bumps."

Christie's decided it was futile to try and recreate this moveable feast in the Grand Palais, the immense Beaux-Arts building designed for the 1900 World's Fair where the collection is being exhibited before the auction. Instead, Mr. de Ricqlès says Christie's is spending more than \$1 million to transform the build-



Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé in the designer's apartment at Rue de Babylone; above, the Grand Salon.

Photos: Christie's

The art world's last hurrah?



ing's main floor into a miniature museum exhibit, with a warren of galleries displaying objects by their eras or styles. A covered area at the southern end will screen an eight-minute documentary about the life of the designer and Mr. Bergé. A salesroom will also be set up with 1,100 chairs, staggered patio heaters and free red blankets for bidders who get chilly in the unheated hall.

The scale of the undertaking has placed a strain on Christie's staff in Paris, where the company's salesroom rarely gets a crowd of more than 150 people. Anika Guntrum, the head of Impressionist and modern art in Paris, says her team has been working 14-hour days to find multiple bidders for the collection's 61 top artworks, which have a combined high estimate of \$232 million, more than Christie's Paris sold all last year.

Last month, the mood was mixed when Christie's held a cocktail reception at its Paris headquarters to preview a few collection highlights. Guests were clearly charmed by Moujik, the designer's French bulldog, who wandered freely among the rooms. Henri Matisse's grandson, Claude Duthuit-Matisse, also came by and praised the collection's "masculine taste and strong colors." He particularly liked his grandfather's "Nu au bord de la mer," a Fauve-like nude woman priced at up to \$7.7 million.

Yet collector Anne-Cécile Sourisseau, a former banker, said she was puzzled by the "high" estimates and the "wide range of objects that don't have any obvious connection to each other."

Her husband, Alain Sourisseau, a business strategist, said he thought Christie's was launching its most extravagant sale during an economic freefall because "It's the ultimate challenge."

Mr. de Ricqlès says the story of how Christie's won the consignment began over a decade ago in



Above, Fernand Léger's 1921 painting 'La tasse de thé' (estimate: €10 million-€15 million); below, Pablo Picasso's 'Instruments de musique sur un guéridon,' circa 1914-15 (estimate: €25 million-€30 million).

Tangiers, where he used to rent a vacation home. Messrs. Bergé and Saint Laurent also had a home in Morocco. The three men were introduced in Paris but became acquainted on the Moroccan dinner-party circuit.

At the time, Mr. de Ricqlès was one of France's top *commissaires-priseurs*, a society of nearly 400 auctioneers who organize estate sales on their own and rent communal salesroom space in Paris's oldest auction venue, the Hotel Drouot. Mr. de Ricqlès' name was recognizable because his ancestors had created an eponymous and popular brand of mint alcohol in 1838.

He gained a reputation for go-



ing all out to promote his sales at a time in the late 1990s when French auctioneers still distributed catalogs without many images or alluring descriptions. The French auction system was closed to foreign auctioneers until Sotheby's successfully lobbied the French government and the European Commission to open the playing field in 2001. The auctioneer joined Christie's in Paris as its vice president early the next year.

Once at Christie's, Mr. de Ricqlès' ties to YSL's creators remained cordial even though Mr. Bergé and Mr. Saint Laurent openly criticized Christie's owner, Mr. Pinault, for buying their classy ready-to-wear label in 1999, only to give it over to the sexier stylings of designer Tom Ford. Mr. Pinault also owns Gucci, Balenciaga and Puma.

Then in October 2007, Mr. de Ricqlès heard a rumor that Mr. Saint Laurent was ill. Moreover, Mr. Bergé was about to sign a deal with Sotheby's to sell off their art upon the designer's death to raise funds for the Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent Foundation, which supports cultural groups. Mr. Bergé also wanted to create a non-profit to fund AIDS research. Mr. Bergé and Sotheby's hadn't settled on a sale venue yet, but Mr. Bergé did ask for a single-digit share of some auction proceeds to go to his new Paris-based art auction house, Pierre Bergé & Associés.

Mr. de Ricqlès figured he was

too late, but he invited Mr. Bergé over to his apartment. Over lunch, they discussed Mr. Bergé's ideas for a possible auction and Mr. de Ricqlès pledged to "grant all his wishes." Terms of a possible deal began to surface in subsequent conversations. French law forbids auction houses from giving sellers guaranteed prices or taking ownership stakes in the artworks they sell, but art-related loans are legal. When Mr. Bergé said he wanted to sell his art in part because his foundation had "no money," Mr. de Ricqlès said his superiors might be willing to give him a loan valued at around a quarter of the collection's minimum estimated value, or just over \$60 million. Because of a provision in Mr. Laurent's estate, some proceeds from the sale of Mr. Saint Laurent's art would need to go to the foundation anyway, so Mr. Bergé would not need to repay the loan if the designer's collection sold as well as he expected. Mr. Bergé says he "liked François and decided to think it over."

Over the next few months, Mr. de Ricqlès called Mr. Bergé often, and other deal points fell into place: Christie's agreed to conduct the sale in the Grand Palais. It would also shop collection highlights in New York, London and Brussels, where a branch of Mr. Bergé's auction house had recently opened. Christie's would also give a single-digit percentage of auction proceeds to Mr. Bergé's auction house. In January 2008, the offer was greenlit by Mr. Dolman, and Patricia Barbizet, chief executive of Mr. Pinault's private investment group, Artemis Holding.

Two days after Easter, Mr. de Ricqlès called Mr. Bergé. The industrialist said, "I promised you an answer so it's 'Yes.' I give you the collection." Mr. Bergé, legally bound to Mr. Saint Laurent in a civil union, says he never had the heart to tell the designer about selling the collection.

A few weeks after the designer's death in June, sale preparations began in earnest. In September—the same month that Lehman Brothers Holding filed for bankruptcy protection and Sotheby's sold \$200 million worth of Damien Hirst artworks—Christie's and Mr. Bergé signed a final contract and Christie's transferred its promised funds to Mr. Bergé's foundation, according to Christie's and a representative for Mr. Bergé.

Mr. Bergé is certainly elated that Christie's is putting all the chips on the table for his sale. The other day in his Paris office, he sat beneath a Warhol portrait of the designer and rifled through his copy of the auction catalog that had just arrived. Christie's printed 6,000 copies, each one weighing 10 kilograms and roughly the size of a microwave. Mr. Bergé initially struggled to lift his copy. Beaming, he said, "Now, that's an auction."

—Max Colchester
contributed to this article.

The Oscar scorecard

Here's how some pros and readers think the races will shake out in five major Oscar categories. Wall Street Journal film critic Joe Morgenstern offers his take on who deserves to win, and who he thinks the Academy will pick.

Readers' choices are from a WSJ.com online poll; odds are offered by British betting and gambling company Ladbrokes, with the favorites in bold.

Best Picture	Image	JOE MORGENSTERN		READER PICKS*	ODDS*	YOUR PICKS	
		SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN			SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN
The Curious Case of Benjamin Button		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Frost/Nixon		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	50:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Milk		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Reader		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	33:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Slumdog Millionaire		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1:8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I've been rooting for "Slumdog Millionaire" from the start, and I mean the start—the film's first public screening, which was at the Telluride Film Festival last August. It's a rare combination of brains and staggering energy.

Best Actor	Image	JOE MORGENSTERN		READER PICKS*	ODDS*	YOUR PICKS	
		SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN			SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN
Richard Jenkins The Visitor		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	50:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Frank Langella Frost/Nixon		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sean Penn Milk Sometimes you can sense how a given actor has managed to turn tics and tricks and canny silences into a believable character. So how does Sean Penn do his superb work in "Milk"? I don't have a clue.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15:8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brad Pitt The Curious Case of Benjamin Button		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	33:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mickey Rourke The Wrestler		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1:2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Supporting Actress	Image	JOE MORGENSTERN		READER PICKS*	ODDS*	YOUR PICKS	
		SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN			SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN
Amy Adams Doubt		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	16:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Penélope Cruz Vicky Cristina Barcelona		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4:7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Viola Davis Doubt		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7:2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taraji P. Henson The Curious Case of Benjamin Button		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marisa Tomei The Wrestler		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Best Actress	Image	JOE MORGENSTERN		READER PICKS*	ODDS*	YOUR PICKS	
		SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN			SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN
Anne Hathaway Rachel Getting Married No one could have predicted it from "The Devil Wears Prada," but that old devil dysfunction has never had a more dazzling embodiment than Anne Hathaway's performance in a little movie that deserves her in a big way.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11:2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Angelina Jolie Changeling		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Melissa Leo Frozen River		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	33:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meryl Streep Doubt		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10:3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kate Winslet The Reader		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2:5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Supporting Actor	Image	JOE MORGENSTERN		READER PICKS*	ODDS*	YOUR PICKS	
		SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN			SHOULD WIN	WILL WIN
Josh Brolin Milk		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	25:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Robert Downey Jr. Tropic Thunder		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Philip Seymour Hoffman Doubt		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heath Ledger The Dark Knight		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1:50	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michael Shannon Revolutionary Road		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	40:1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*As of Thursday morning.

Photos: AFP; Newscom

Flirting with Oscar

BY LAUREN A.E. SCHUKER

ON SUNDAY NIGHT, actress Marisa Tomei could take home an Academy Award for her portrayal of a kind-hearted stripper in this season's critically acclaimed film, "The Wrestler." In a tradition that dates as far back as the Oscar show itself, Ms. Tomei is the latest actress to win Hollywood acclaim for playing a character with a job in the sex industry, such as a striptease artist or streetwalker.

Four years ago, Natalie Portman was nominated for playing a young stripper in Mike Nichols's steamy drama "Closer," and just a year earlier Charlize Theron won an Oscar for her role as a real-life prostitute-turned-serial killer. In the decade before that, Elisabeth Shue, Mira Sorvino and Julia Roberts all became Oscar nominees or winners for playing women who sell their bodies but guard their hearts—one of Hollywood's longtime fascinations.

Taking the "Wrestler" job was a no-brainer for Ms. Tomei, who hopes her performance will help her land leading roles in future films. "When I was offered the part, I was told it was going to be emotionally taxing—but those things to an actor are sweet sounds. I've always felt that there was such strong creative expression in [pole] dancing, even if it's deemed low-brow entertainment," says Ms. Tomei, who wore little more than a G-string in several scenes in the movie.

Many Hollywood experts agree that roles dealing with the sex industry tend to boost actresses' careers, but explanations for why this is the case vary from the clichéd to the academic. Sex sells, some argue, and Hollywood has built an industry marketing actors' appeal. Plus, the world's oldest profession—prostitution—offered a natural female corollary to another time-tested role, the male criminal. Another reason industry insiders give: Inherently flawed characters, who possess what some might see as mental, moral, or physical imperfections, make for more courageous acting performances.

Others argue that ladies of the evening who make good represent the universal rags to riches story. "You can't help but root for the girl—it's about wish fulfillment," says Garry Marshall, who directed Hollywood's iconic film about one harlot's attempt at upward mobility that landed Ms. Roberts an Oscar nod, "Pretty Woman." "[Best-picture nominee] 'Slumdog Millionaire' has a lot of the same things going for it."

The very first actress to win an Oscar from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences played a woman reduced to prostitution. In 1929, the Academy awarded its highest acting accolade to Janet Gaynor for roles in three different films, including a sympathetic woman imprisoned on a one-time charge while out streetwalking in Frank Borzage's "Street Angel." The Academy also nominated Gloria Swanson that same year for playing a woman of loose morals in "Sadie Thompson," based on the Somerset Maugham story.

During the following decades, the Academy would nominate dozens of actresses for playing prostitutes, call girls and courtesans of



Marisa Tomei and Mickey Rourke in 'The Wrestler'; right, Natalie Portman in 'Closer'; below Elisabeth Shue (left) in 'Leaving Las Vegas' and Mira Sorvino in 'Mighty Aphrodite.'



United Artists/Courtesy Everett Collection



AFP

The Academy likes actresses as strippers and prostitutes

one sort or another, including Greta Garbo twice (for "Anna Christie" and "Camille"), Jodie Foster ("Taxi Driver"), Nicole Kidman ("Moulin Rouge") and, of course, Julia Roberts ("Pretty Woman"). A good many of the nominees would go on to win, including Shirley Jones ("Elmer Gantry"), Donna Reed ("From Here to Eternity"), Susan Hayward ("I Want to Live!"), Elizabeth Taylor ("Butterfield 8"), Jane Fonda ("Kluge") and Kim Basinger ("L.A. Confidential").

Actresses playing sex workers have attracted critical acclaim in part because there are a limited number of edgy roles for women in film today. "There aren't and have never been a lot of great roles for women in Hollywood," says Patty Jenkins, who directed Ms. Theron in her Oscar-winning role as a killer prostitute in "Monster," which first hit theaters at the end of 2003. "Sadly, that creates this cliché that if a woman plays a prostitute, she wins an Oscar."

Roles like the one Ms. Theron played in "Monster" produce standout performances, say Hollywood insiders, because they combine elements of sinner and saint in a way more often embodied in male parts featuring sympathetic gangsters or wayward cops.

Prostitution, in some ways, is

the quintessential female crime—a point that Ms. Theron renders legible in "Monster" when the abuse she experiences as a highway prostitute transforms her into a crazed killer of the very clients she serviced. "It's much like the reason that there are a disproportionate number of hit men in movies," says Ms. Jenkins. "Anything exotic and dynamic is going to be overrepresented."

Avoiding the middle on the spectrum from saint to sinner is precisely what helps top actresses score those accolades, film industry experts contend. "It's about going to extremes," says Jeanine Basinger, who heads Wesleyan University's Film Studies department and has written a book on how Hollywood films portrayed women during the middle of the 20th century. "The way to land an Oscar as a woman is either to take off your makeup or put on a lot more. You're either a prostitute/stripper or you're a mother/nun." (As if to underline the point, Meryl Streep is up for an Oscar this year for her role as a nun in "Doubt.")

Going to those extremes of femininity can also help strengthen the roles of actresses' male counterparts—which is why the introduction of a streetwalker character can make for a successful film, says

noted feminist writer Rebecca Walker (who, incidentally, played a small role in Mike Nichols's "Primary Colors"). "The more naked you have the feminine, the more easily the male can assume the traditional masculine role," she argues.

Many contemporary actresses consider themselves lucky to land roles as strippers or prostitutes after what seems like decades of a drought for tough female parts in films. That kind of opportunity for advancement inspired Ms. Tomei to take on the risky role of a stripper in "The Wrestler," which hit theaters late last year, around the time she celebrated her 44th birthday.

Ms. Tomei had only six weeks to prepare for the nude pole dancing that her character Cassidy performs throughout the film. A mother by day and stripper by night, Cassidy's sense of professionalism spurs her to resist romance with Randy, the wrestler. "The lines are so blurred between client and lover, wanting a lover and being independent, earning your own money and needing to be taken care of, servicing men and losing your own center," Ms. Tomei says. "The lines are crazy jangly."

Navigating those borders—while wearing nothing more than skimpy lingerie—will help her land major parts in future films, Ms. Tomei believes. "I'm hoping that with my role in 'The Wrestler,' I have identified myself as a character actress who can play complex roles and a variety of roles," she says.

Playing a striptease artist re-



AFP

quires a certain nimbleness that generally results in a standout acting performance, asserts director Michael Radford, who was nominated for an Oscar for his film "Il Postino." "The fallen woman is always a fascinating character for an actress to play" so naturally it produces a performance worthy of an Academy Award, says Mr. Radford, who also directed "Dancing at the Blue Iguana," a 2001 film about five dancers who work at a Los Angeles strip club. The film, which starred Daryl Hannah, Jennifer Tilly and Sandra Oh, didn't have a fixed story, but was constructed through improvisation, says Mr. Radford, who let his cast choose what kind of roles they wanted to play.

And what roles did they choose?

Strippers, naturally. Mr. Radford says that his actresses were attracted by the edginess of that occupation as well as the ways that stripper roles deviated from the "vacant romantic roles" so often offered to women in Hollywood.

Like Mr. Radford's cast, Ms. Tomei was interested in exploring what real-life strippers experienced for her on-screen role. "When I was offered the part," she says, "I told [director] Darren [Aronofsky], 'I simply don't have the knockers for the job.' He replied, 'If you think that, you haven't been to enough strip clubs.' Before filming, she and Mr. Aronofsky visited a dozen strip clubs in New York and Los Angeles to research her role, talking with real women who danced for a living.

"The main thing I got out of those visits was the variety of women who dance—there isn't just one type of stripper or even a body type. That helped me break open the cliché of the hooker with a heart of gold kind of thing," says Ms. Tomei. "My aim in the film was to honor the women I met and to represent them in a meaningful way. I wish there was a movie called 'The Stripper' because I found out so much about these women, like the physical toll that dancing takes on a stripper's body, and on her feet, that we couldn't fit into the movie."

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Gwyneth Paltrow and Joaquin Phoenix in 'Two Lovers.'

Magnolia Pictures

A broken love triangle

JOAQUIN PHOENIX has been saying that "Two Lovers" will be his last film; he plans to quit acting and devote himself to his music career. Here's hoping for a change of heart. This is an inspired performance by a superb actor in an elegantly grave romantic drama.

James Gray's fourth feature takes the form of a love triangle with a broken line on one side. Mr. Phoenix's Leonard Kraditor lives

Film

JOE MORGENSTERN

with his parents in the Brighton Beach section of Brooklyn. Leonard, in his 30s, can be charming enough to pass himself off as an integrated personality, and his dilemma would seem to be a familiar one—how to choose between an alluring neurotic with a drug habit (Gwyneth Paltrow's Michelle, who lives in his building), and an attractive, earnest yearner (Vinessa Shaw's Sandra) who thinks she loves him. But Leonard isn't close enough to himself to make choices. He can hardly find a coherent self in the fragments of his fractured psyche, so he darts and lurches from one woman to the other, enamored and unmoored. (In a film distinguished by dense texture and smart casting, Isabella Rossellini plays Leonard's mother, Moni Monoshev is his father and Elias Koteas is Michelle's icy lover.)

For a filmmaker who has made his reputation with such crime thrillers as "Little Odessa" and "The Yards," James Gray reveals an unexpected gift for the mysteries of romance. He and his co-writer, Richard Menello, set up an unlikely coupling—gorgeous Gwyneth living in Leonard's musty apartment house?—that becomes, in the course of the film, not just plausible but fatefully obsessive. (In one marvelous, silent moment, Leonard leans over Michelle as she sleeps and inhales her breath.) Ms. Paltrow has never been more intriguing on screen, or more audacious. She plays Michelle as a radiant child with thwarted ambitions and insatiable needs; it's perfectly clear why Leonard can't resist her. On his side, though, nothing is clear, and that's the genius of Joaquin Phoenix's performance. Rather than familiar

symptoms of diagnosable distress (someone whispers a superfluous whisper about bipolar disease) Leonard presents eerie furtiveness, sporadic charisma, body language with scrambled syntax and broadband passion that can't be channeled. It's a fearsome spectacle.

'The International'

"You need to relax," someone says to a driver in the opening scene of "The International." The driver replies, "I'm more comfortable tense." It's a good line in a bad picture filled with cryptic someones going through the motions of a spy thriller. Motion is in copious supply—a frenzied shootout at Manhattan's Guggenheim Museum grows interminable—but the workings of the abstract plot are unfathomable, the characters are unpleasant and a couple of assassinations leave us as cold as the corpses. Instead of "The Parallax View" it's The Jaundiced View, occasionally relieved by striking views of Berlin, Milan and Istanbul.

The director was Tom Tykwer, who has done two very fine films, "Run, Lola, Run" and "Heaven"; he's the sole reason I'm going on about this hollow new charade. (Like those two, "The International" was shot by the splendid cinematographer Frank Griebe, but his work was sabotaged by a washed-out print at the screening I attended.) Clive

Owen, gimlet-eyed and angry from start to finish, is an Interpol agent who joins forces with a Manhattan D.A. played doggedly by Naomi Watts—the D.A. is happily married, so forces are all they ever join—to defeat a multinational bank that's killing people and stirring up trouble around the world by financing the sale of arms. The skeletal script, by Eric Warren Singer, is prescient, if nothing else, in its depiction of a financial institution that's dangerously leveraged and out of control. We hear a lot about bad banks these days, but this is a really baaad bank.

'Under the Sea 3D'

Every time I see an underwater IMAX film in 3D, I'm astounded—a big word, but the only right word—by the intimacy of the experience. With the Polaroid glasses off, the screen is huge, far away and all aswirl with fuzzy pictures. With them on, brilliantly sharp images sit inches from your face, and the oyster is your world. "Under the Sea 3D" is one of the best of the genre. If it doesn't serve oysters, per se, this submarine wonder offers marvels in abundance. A swarm of catfish rolls to and fro in unison, like a liquid tumbleweed. A formation of eels, standing upright in a sandy bottom, waves in unison like pencil-slender sirens. Giant cuttlefish change color as readily as politicians. Jellyfish pulsate erotically, reef squid roam translucently, great white sharks drift ominously and a huge potato cod barely misses bumping into my nose.

Something is different, however, and it takes a while to realize what it is. "Under the Sea 3D" doesn't exult in the ocean's extraplanetary extravagance as previous films have. Plenty of fish are in evidence, no worry about that, and not just fish but baby sea lions and leafy sea dragons, plus intermittent showers of plankton. But there's a tincture of solemnity to the narration, delivered by Jim Carrey, a bringing of news about how global warming may be raising the oceans' acidity, and thereby threatening such undersea life as the Great Barrier Reef, the largest living structure on earth. This is a 4D film, really, the fourth dimension being education. It targets young audiences, in particular, with the message that our planet is in trouble from top to bottom.

WSJ.com

Opening this week in Europe

- **Bedtime Stories** Denmark, Portugal
- **Bride Wars** Netherlands
- **Confessions of a Shopaholic** Iceland, Italy, Turkey, U.K.
- **Defiance** Estonia, Slovakia
- **Doubt** Estonia, Slovakia, Turkey
- **He's Just Not That Into You** Hungary, Norway
- **Milk** Belgium
- **New in Town** U.K.
- **Slumdog Millionaire** Czech Republic, Poland, Turkey
- **The Class** U.K.
- **The International** Croatia, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Turkey, U.K.
- **The Pink Panther 2** Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Spain
- **The Wrestler** Germany, Portugal

Source: IMDb

WSJ.com subscribers can read reviews of these films and others at WSJ.com/FilmReview

Inspired by an outburst

Christian Bale's on-set tantrum sparks a wave of parodies



Lions Gate/Everett Collection

Actor Christian Bale's profanity-laced tirade aimed at his director of photography on the set of "Terminator Salvation" has made its way across the Web and added the phrase "Are you professional?" to the public lexicon. The four-minute audio clip, which began drawing widespread attention online a couple of weeks ago, features Mr. Bale complaining about how the lights were being adjusted for the film, which will be released this May. Mr. Bale, star of such films as "American Psycho" (pictured in the film at left), has since apologized. On-set tantrums are not unusual (director David O. Russell's excoriation of actress Lily

Tomlin on the set of "I Heart Huckabees" famously made the rounds), but Mr. Bale's rant—which wags labeled a "Baleout"—has sparked an explosion of creativity. Comics and actors have staged their own variations on the meltdown. Others have remixed the leaked audio for parodic purposes. Below, some of the best adaptations.

—Jamin Brophy-Warren

In this parody posted online, actor Michael Cera, nearly in tears on a movie set, flips out about a slanderous note left for him. Screaming at cast and crew while wearing a bathrobe, he pretends to be in the midst of an emotional breakdown, followed by a cathartic finish.



Comedy Central

During the middle of a critique of the Obama administration on Comedy Central's "Colbert Report," host Stephen Colbert is interrupted as someone wanders on the set. It's actually Steve Martin, who gives a sheepish defense and walks past the live camera again to enrage Mr. Colbert further.

Tracy Morgan, who plays the quixotic Tracy Jordan on NBC's sitcom "30 Rock," released an audio clip that's a Bale takeoff. Mr. Morgan's character becomes enraged when a cameraman points a camera at him. Other people try to explain that the cameraman is only doing his job, but Mr. Morgan is inconsolable.



CollegeHumor.com



Los Angeles music producer Lucian Piane (also known as RevoLucian) created a dance track out of the incident, mixing Bale's rough language with a driving house music track. Mr. Piane has also made humorous clips based on audio from Bill O'Reilly and Sarah Palin.

Talk-show host Jimmy Kimmel mixed the Bale tirade with the air traffic control recording from the US Airways flight that crashed in the Hudson. In the clip, Mr. Bale's words take the place of pilot Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger's responses.



One song posted online gives Mr. Bale's words the big band treatment, an odd counterbalance to the profanity. It is one of many Bale musical spoofs made by amateurs using Microsoft's SongSmith software, which creates a song based on whatever tune you sing into your microphone.

Watch some of these Christian Bale parodies, at WSJ.com/Lifestyle. Also Online: Clive Owen and director Tom Tykwer go to the Guggenheim Museum to talk about their new thriller, 'The International.'

Where's Octodad?

Kay Hymowitz

Nadya Suleman, aka Octomom, is now the mother of 14 children—eight newborns and their six older brothers and sisters. She has also managed to give birth to debate on issues as far ranging as welfare, reproductive technology, health care and celebrity worship (Ms. Suleman is said to have an Angelina Jolie fixation). She has even generated heated discussion about the tort system, since it is assumed that the young mother could have paid for her miracle babies through the \$168,000 awarded for a back injury she suffered a decade ago at a psychiatric hospital where she then worked—an injury, it should be noted, that did not prevent her from delivering more living babies last month than once thought humanly possible.

But in all of this punditry one question goes missing: Where's poppa? Surely Ms. Suleman's babies *have* a father. Yet his role in the baby palooza is barely mentioned. The reaction to Ms. Suleman and her brood typifies our cultural ambivalence about fathers, an ambiva-

lence fed in no small measure by the fertility industry.

On first thought, Americans seem really keen on fathers. We fret about the emotional impact of father absence and insist “that responsibility does not end at conception,” as then-candidate Barack Obama put it in a memorable speech last Father's Day. We excoriate “deadbeat dads” who fail to pay their share of their children's upbringing; in fact, the stimulus bill adds \$1 billion to child-support enforcement. Married fathers who don't step up and share the burdens of diapers and pediatrician appointments are condemned as, in the words on one much-discussed book of essays, “bastards on the couch.” After all, the argument goes, a father is just as much a parent as a mother.

Except when we decide he's not, as did Ms. Suleman and her medical enablers. According to media reports, the male friend who provided the sperm for all of Suleman's 14 children had begged her to stop after the first six—to no

avail. Having consented to the use of his sperm, he evidently also signed away control over the future children created with them. More commonly, sperm banks offer young men who will remain anonymous \$200 for a little R&R that they would happily engage in without pay: as the Fairfax Cryobank in Virginia has advertised:

We have demoted fatherhood.

“Why not do it for money?” Donors—or, more precisely, sellers—sign contracts that assure them, contrary to Father's Day rhetoric, that responsibility really does end at conception.

Sperm banks and fertility doctors hardly bear sole responsibility for defining fathers down to chromosome factories. Clearly, donors themselves happily agree to their downgraded status. Their nonchalance is in line with the widespread assumption that we should expand the rubric of “a woman's right to choose” to include not just abortion—where a woman's decision understandably carries more moral weight than a man's—to the care of and respon-

sibility for actual children, where it's not at all clear why that should be the case.

True, studies of “choice mothers,” as single, financially independent mothers call themselves, suggest that most of them had wanted to find a husband to be father to their kids before they decided to go it alone. But once they do so, they often choose anonymous donors precisely because they don't have to worry about the fathers interfering with their—or is it her?—children. Shortly before Ms. Suleman made headlines, the *New York Times Magazine* published an article, notably titled “2 Kids 0 Husbands Family,” describing a clan of college-educated single mothers, all of whom admitted how they wanted to “make decisions about their kids, from when they are excused from the table to where they go to school, and how hard it would be to share that authority.”

But is our equivocation about paternity tenable? Every week, it seems, science confirms just how much genes matter. Everything from eye color, to propensity to high cholesterol, to a rotten dis-

position, to talent at math or tennis is encoded, at least in part, in the genetic material passed on from our two biological parents.

In Canada, donor children have brought a class-action suit demanding the same right to know their parentage that adoptive children there already have. For the same reason, Norway, the Netherlands and New Zealand have all banned donor anonymity, and Britain now requires donors to agree to be contacted when their children reach 18 (unsurprisingly the country's sperm banks are now as depressed as its financial institutions). In the U.S., some sperm banks have begun to ask donors to volunteer to be identified to their children when they reach adulthood. Some agree; most do not.

For Nadya Suleman's 14 children, fatherlessness may appear to be the least of their problems. But had fatherhood not been demoted, maybe she would never have become the octomom in the first place.

Ms. Hymowitz is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and City Journal contributing editor.

Masterpiece / By Richard B. Woodward

Death Takes No Holiday

“The Triumph of Death” by Pieter Bruegel the Elder is not for the squeamish. Commonly dated circa 1562, it ranks among the most terrifying paintings of the age, and the centuries since have only boosted its fearful currency. Not until Goya's 1810-20 “Disasters of War” was there anything in European art quite like this savage depiction of hell on Earth.

The painting hangs in the Prado in Madrid, directly across from Hieronymus Bosch's “The Garden of Earthly Delights.” As Bruegel was regarded by his contemporaries as a “second Bosch,” they make fitting roommates. Both artists were favorites of Phillip II, who secured multiple works by each for the Hapsburg collections in Spain and elsewhere.

Bosch's large and elaborate triptych attracts the bigger crowds, and it's easy to see why. His naked men and women and fantastic animals can be viewed as drug-addled comedy, more Lewis Carroll than Book of Revelation. Even scholars can't agree if the arcane allegory is a remonstrance about the demons of lust or the

dream of a prelapsarian paradise before sex became sinful.

Bruegel's smaller (46-inch-by-64-inch) single-panel masterpiece has a grimmer message. There is no escape from the scourge of war. The men and women in the fire-strewn landscape try to fend off death's henchmen with sword and spear. But the living are badly outnumbered, their efforts futile. Not only is death inevitable and unsparing

A harrowing depiction of hell on Earth from Pieter Bruegel the Elder, c. 1562.

of society high and low, a lesson Medieval and Renaissance artists never tired of teaching their audiences, but death is perversely creative as well. The variety of tortures in store for the human race during wartime is endless.

The hallucination is as intense and action-packed as Bosch's, but the cold-bloodedness of the violence leaves no room for whimsy.

Given the immense popularity of Bruegel, art historians know amazingly little about his biography. When he was born (c. 1525-30) and where is open to debate. His early training remains a mystery. It's therefore hard to tell whether the scenes in “Triumph of Death” are purely imagined, conventions based on earlier artists' infernal visions, eyewitness observations of war atrocities, or a combination of the three. Philip II's zealous general, the Duke of Alva, did not arrive in the Low Countries until 1567. But a Spanish-directed terror campaign against Protestants and other heretics had already been in effect for decades.

However unknowable many aspects of the painting may be, including the religious sympathies of its author, it presents a virtuosic whirlwind of destruction. As a storyteller, Bruegel tended to fill his canvases with related human and animal actions that un-

fold simultaneously on several planes in undulating landscapes that are more than backdrops.

Every inch of “The Triumph of Death” features chaos on a massive scale. It is as though the artist's brush cannot keep up with the fanatical energy of death's hordes. The realistic details of suffering invite our scrutiny and upon examination turn out to be far more unsettling than in a typical Medieval “Dance of Death.”

The raging, centerless battle is not a fair fight. In the foreground, a skeleton is cutting a man's throat while not far away a starving dog eats a woman's face. On a hillside further back on the right, a dead man has been skinned and hung from a tree. His head is thrown backward and held in the branches by a metal pin that passes

through his skull. In the vicinity a man hangs from a gallows, watched by onlookers, and a few inches to their right a man on his knees is about to be decapitated. Other victims are impaled on spiked wheels that sit atop poles.

In a ghoulish touch, the dead advance on the outnumbered humans and hold coffin lids as shields, emblazoned with the sign of the cross. The king with his ermine-trimmed robe and buckets of gold is as helpless as everyone else. At the top of the picture ships are aflame or sunk in a harbor while smoke rises from distant towers. This temporal plot

point is especially chilling, for it suggests death has been marauding across the countryside for days, if not weeks, and has nowhere been halted. Indeed, the army appears unstoppable.

Salvation through Christ, a resolution in many other pictures that warn of death's inevitability, is missing here. The resounding overtone is one of mocking nihilism. The pulling on a black bell by a pair of skeletons in the up-

per left corner, instead of ringing out the goodness of the Angelus or the triumph of the Second Coming, seems to announce that humanity is done for.

The brutality of these images has given Bruegel's picture a continual relevance. It seems to anticipate descriptions of the Thirty Years War in the 17th century, the horrors of which Jacques Callot drew and etched. Most disturbing from a 21st-century perspective are what appear on the right of the picture to be rectangular containers where humans are forced inside and sent to their deaths. The devices' similarity to Nazi technol-

ogy of mass extermination has struck many viewers. Such secular readings don't qualify as responsible art history, but they explain the painting's status as a nightmarish icon. Unsigned and undated, it lacks a distinct religious meaning, even in the 16th century of the artist's shadowy life, and whispers insidiously to a world in which ferocious civil wars and graphic video games are daily visual fare. The

first section of Don DeLillo's novel “Underworld” is titled “The Triumph of Death” and includes a fantasy in which J. Edgar Hoover compares Bruegel's painting (“a census-taking of awful ways to die”) to nuclear war. The image was the cover art for Black Sabbath's “Greatest Hits” album, and its disquieting

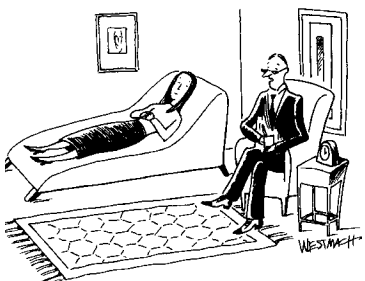
mood permeates the battle scenes in director Peter Jackson's epic “The Lord of the Rings.”

The 19th-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt derided Bruegel as a crude and vulgar painter. It is these same qualities—a willingness to inject barnyard realism and seasonal atmosphere into his moral tales—that make him so beloved today. “The Triumph of Death” may resist interpretation as a Christian allegory. But the burned, dirty, leafless landscape of war is all too familiar.

Mr. Woodward is an arts critic in New York.

Pepper . . . and Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



“No, you're not the first to bring up a particularly traumatic family car trip.”



“Triumph of Death,” with its resounding overtone of mocking nihilism, is not for the squeamish.

time off



© Hamburger Kunsthalle, photo: Elke Walford

Barcelona

art
"Kiki Smith: Her Memory" displays works exploring the life cycle of a woman by American artist Kiki Smith (born 1954).
Foundation Joan Miró
Feb. 20-May 24
☎ 34-9344-3947-0
fundacionmiro-bcn.org

Berlin

history
"Making of...The Men and Women of the Berlin Airlift 1948/49" presents video and audio eyewitness accounts, and photography of the Berlin Airlift.
AlliiertenMuseum
Until Sept. 29
☎ 49-30-8181-990
www.alliiertenmuseum.de

Bonn

art
"Old Age in Antiquity: The Blossom of Old Age is Wisdom" shows rare sculptures and portraits of old people in classical ancient Rome and Greece.
Rheinisches LandesMuseum
Feb. 26-June 7
☎ 49-228-2070-0
www.rlmb.lvr.de

Brussels

photography
"Shadi Ghadirian—A Photographer from Iran" exhibits the photography of Shadi Ghadirian, addressing the diversity of traditional female roles in Iranian society.
Aeroplastics Contemporary
Until April 4
☎ 32-2-5372-202
www.aeroplastics.net

Copenhagen

art
"Max Ernst, Dream and Revolution" showcases 200 works, including paintings, collages, drawings and sculptures by the German artist (1891-1976).
Louisiana Museum of Art
Until June 6
☎ 45-4919-0719
www.louisiana.dk/uk

The Hague

art
"Greetings from Bentheim, Jacob van Ruisdael" exhibits six paintings of the town of Bentheim by Dutch painter Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/29-1682).
Mauritshuis
Feb. 26-May 31
☎ 31-70-3023-456
www.mauritshuis.nl

Hamburg

art
"Edgar Degas: Intimacy and Pose" presents 73 original bronze casts by the French Impressionist (1834-1917), depicting the female body.
Hamburger Kunsthalle
Until May 3
☎ 49-40-4281-3120-0
www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de

Helsinki

art
"Head First" explores designs related to the human head, such as hats, helmets, jewelry, glasses, implants and virtual reality.
Design Museum
Until May 17
☎ 358-9-6220-540
www.designmuseum.fi



Left, 'Melody (Musica),' by Kate Bunce, in Stockholm; above, 'Grande arabesque, deuxième temps,' by Edgar Degas, in Hamburg.

Until April 19
☎ 33-1-5680-2700
www.henricartierbresson.org

archaeology

"Archaeology of the Future" explores the phenomenon of trend-watching through predictions by the Dutch trend forecaster Lidewij Edelkoort.
Institute Neerlandais
Until March 8
☎ 33-1-5359-1240
www.institutneerlandais.com

Ravenna

art
"The Traveling Artist: From Gauguin to Klee, Matisse to Ontani" illustrates the different views of foreign lands explored by Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Gauguin and others.
Museo d'Arte della città di Ravenna
Until June 21
☎ 39-544-4824-77
www.museocitta.ra.it

Stockholm

art
"The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood" shows 200 works, including paintings, photographs, fabrics and glass paintings.
Nationalmuseum
Feb. 26-May 24
☎ 46-8-5195-4300
www.nationalmuseum.se

Turin

archaeology
"Akhenaten: Pharaoh of the Sun" is a collection of about 200 artifacts from the reign of Akhenaten (1353 BC-1336 BC).
Palazzo Bricherasio
Feb. 27-June 14
☎ 39-011-5711-811
www.palazzobricherasio.it

Venice

art
"Masterpieces of Futurism" presents works of the Futurist art movement in the Gianni Mattioli Collection.
Peggy Guggenheim Collection
Until Dec. 31
☎ 39-041-2405-411
www.guggenheim-venice.it

Vienna

art
"Erwin Puls: Phantoms of Desire" exhibits oil paintings, photography and found-footage films by German painter, graphic artist and reproduction photographer Erwin Puls (1939-2003).
Kunsthalle
Until March 29
☎ 43-1-5218-90
www.kunsthallewien.at

Zurich

art
"Hot Spots: Rio de Janeiro/Milano—Torino/Los Angeles" presents works by 40 avant-garde artists of the 1950s and 1960s in Rio de Janeiro, Milan, Turin and Los Angeles.
Kunsthaus Zürich
Until May 3
☎ 41-44-2538-484
www.kunsthau.ch

Source: ArtBase Global Arts News Service, WSJE research.

London

architecture
"Le Corbusier—The Art of Architecture" presents original models, interior settings, drawings, furniture, photographs, films, tapestries, paintings, sculpture and books by the French-Swiss architect.
Barbican Art Gallery
Until May 24
☎ 44-20-7638-4141
www.barbican.org.uk

art

"Picasso: Challenging the Past" exhibits 60 works by the Spanish artist (1881-1973), alongside works by El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, Rembrandt, Delacroix, Ingres, Manet and Cézanne.
The National Gallery
Feb. 25-June 7

☎ 44-20-7747-2885
www.nationalgallery.org.uk

Madrid

art
"Tarsila do Amaral" shows 50 paintings and drawings by Brazilian artist Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973).
Fundación Juan March
Until May 3
☎ 34-9-1435-4240
www.march.es

art

"Paul Thek" is a retrospective featuring over 300 works by the American artist Paul Thek (1933-1988).
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia
Until April 20
☎ 34-91-774-1000

www.museoreinasofia.es

Oslo

art
"Håkon Bleken—Charcoal Drawings 1962-2008" exhibits charcoal drawings by the Norwegian artist Håkon Bleken (born 1929), including a new series of drawings for the exhibition.
Henie Onstad Kunstsenter
Until April 19
☎ 47-67-8048-80
www.hok.no

Paris

photography
"Guy Tillim" presents two series of images by South African photojournalist Guy Tillim (born 1962), "Jo'burg" and the new "Avenue Patrice Lumumba."
Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson