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WEEKEND JOURNAL.

EUROPE

Back on stage

Liv Ullmann returns to acting after 20 years

Wine: A volcanic vintage in Italy | Fashion: Twenty8Twelve's quirky style

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Actress Liv Ullmann.

COVER, Liv Ullmann photographed by Kjerand Nesvik.

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Bottle, Syria (13 Century) on show in Berlin.

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

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THE JOURNAL CROSSWORD / Edited by Mike Shenk

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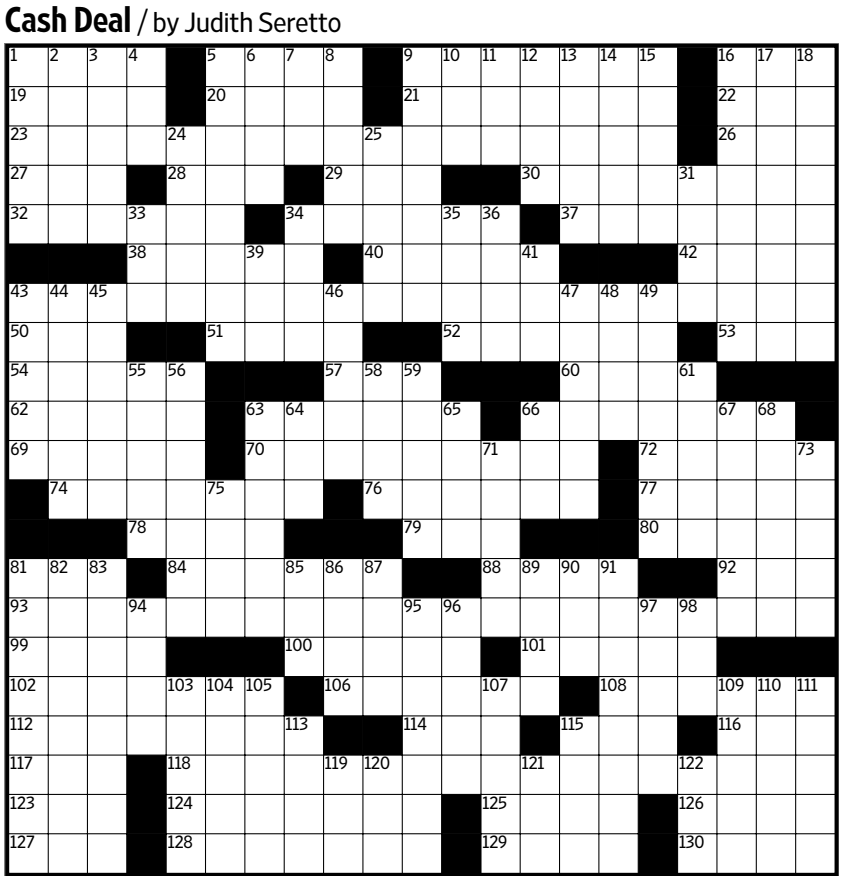
Cash Deal / by Judith Seretto



Last Week's Solution

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A new display of art

A British museum director in Boston reflects on his American wing

By Judith H. Dobrzynski

Boston

MALCOLM A. ROGERS, the director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is remarkably relaxed, considering. In November, in one of autumn's biggest cultural events, the museum will open an "Art of the Americas" wing, which not only expands its space by 28% and raises its profile exponentially, but which also, as Mr. Rogers puts it, is "central to my career."

Mr. Rogers, a Briton who, hired by the MFA in 1994, raised $504 million for the whole revamp, considers it so meaningful, in fact, that he changed his nationality: "When I embarked on this wing, I became an American citizen, because how could I expect people to invest in it if I did not have a stake in it?"

That was in 2003, but the venture's roots go back to at least 1999, when he controversially sacked a few veteran curators and merged several departments. He also began to hint that his new "Art of the Americas" megadepartment—which brought together paintings, decorative arts and antiquities from North, South and Central America—would one day fill a new building.

But Mr. Rogers took his time. "One lesson I learned from going around to other museums is that if you add a wing thoughtlessly, you can mess up the flow of the whole museum," he says. He cites the MFA's 1981 addition, designed by I.M. Pei for special exhibitions and contemporary art, as "way too successful. People didn't go to the rest of the museum."

To counter that, Mr. Rogers restored and reopened the museum's historical entrances on the Fenway and on Huntington Avenue, which had been closed. And he hired London-based Foster + Partners to develop a master plan and design a new wing. "The brief was to complete the historical building and not upstage it," he says. He did not want "a showy outside."

Well, there were other parts of the brief, too. For one, Mr. Rogers wanted the new wing, which projects from the museum's northeast side, to be transparent, and it is largely made of glass. That's "so people outside can see people inside and know you don't have to wear black tie to come in," he explains. "I want us to be more approachable."

The four-floor expansion, designed with the MFA's 15,000-item Americas collection in mind, travels through time, from art dating to the first millennium B.C. on the lower-ground floor up to art through the 20th century on the top.

That chronological arrangement is conservative; thematic groupings are today considered more visitor friendly. Yet Mr. Rogers has mixed in a dose of iconoclasm, a tactic he has used before. In 1996, he gave celebrity photographer Herb Ritts his first museum show; the pictures of scantily clad Hollywood stars and models drew both thousands of people and buckets of criticism about dumbing down. "I wanted the controversy on purpose," Mr. Rogers says, explaining it as outreach to younger generations even as he defended the artistry of the photographs. (Similar statements via exhibitions include "Dangerous Curves: The Art of the Guitar" in 2000 and "Speed, Style and Beauty: Cars From the Ralph Lauren Collection" in 2005.)

"I don't feel the need to be controversial anymore," he says with a smile, "but I want to do new things."

With the Americas wing, his unorthodoxy is somewhat retro. It will contain more than 5,000 works of art, compared with 2,500 on display before. "The sheer profusion of what we are showing" sends a message, he believes. In general, American art (which for the MFA stops, and turns into contemporary art, around 1955) is not a big draw. Yet it is popular among Boston's collectors, and represents a strategic choice for the MFA. "I wanted to do something that would express what an extraordinary country this was," Mr. Rogers explains. "And I wanted to represent the whole of the Americas."

> 'I don't feel the need to be controversial anymore,' says Malcolm Rogers, 'but I want to do new things.'

The museum's chestnuts—like John Singleton Copley's "Paul Revere" and Joseph Stella's "Old Brooklyn Bridge"—will still be on view. But the MFA has added to its trove and, more important, has gone into its rich storerooms.

One such glorious work plucked from storage is Thomas Sully's "The Passage of the Delaware," a view of George Washington, on a white horse, at the famous military turning point. Benjamin West's "King Lear" and Copley's "George IV When Prince of Wales" were likewise hidden away for lack of large-scale space. Two Victorian period rooms, acquired in 1977, are also making their debut, as are new items like a David Smith sculpture and a ceramic bowl painted by Jackson Pollock.

The galleries themselves vary, with wall colors shifting from light gray to deep blue to a flocked, red-and-gold wallpaper that re-creates a pattern from a home of John Hancock. Walking with me through them, Mr. Rogers comments: "It's important to create a stage setting, and to do things differently in different galleries."

Many—22 of 46 (there are also four "behind the scenes" galleries and three for rotating exhibits)—are what he calls "3-D," meaning a mix of paintings, sculpture, decorative art, textiles, costumes and musical instruments. In the past, MFA segregated its galleries by media.

There are other statements as well. Mr. Rogers, who was deeply involved in the planning with Elliot Bostwick Davis, the wing's curator, singles out a gallery for American Renaissance works by such artists as Abbott Thayer, Frank Duveneck and Edwin Austin Abbey. That's an "in-your-face" move: "These are largely unfashionable works that I want to be fashionable again."

Mr. Rogers also decreed that John Singer Sargent have a room of his own, filled with 28 works from all periods of his career, in all media, including his masterpiece "The Daughters of Edward Darley Boit." "Sargent is so central to Boston, I wanted a 'destination gallery' for him," he says.

Around the corner is an inspiration of Ms. Davis: a gallery devoted to works chronicling Americans on the Grand Tour and hung salon-style, covering the crimson cotton damask walls top to bottom. Others include a gallery that pits Winslow Homer against Thomas Eakins, one for Copley, one for abstract works and another for American Modernism.

Though hardly anything seems "missing" from the American art narrative, Mr. Rogers concedes that some parts are sketchy: "There are still collections out there that could still come and help us tell the story," he says. And he'll no doubt be wooing the owners. As he sees it, running a museum is like maintaining a monumental bridge: As soon as you finish painting it, you start all over at the opposite end.

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

Malcolm A. Rogers.

Christopher Serra

William Widmer for The Wall Street Journal, below, Twenty8Twelve

Twenty8Twelve showcases British style

Savannah and Sienna Miller's whimsical and bohemian brand shirks celebrity appeal, relying on design to power the label

By Cecilie Rohwedder

London

MANY OF Twenty8Twelve's clothes—like ripped jeans, oversize tops and scarves—faintly evoke the style of its famous backer: actress, model and paparazzi-magnet Sienna Miller. But, shhh, the brand isn't advertising that Miller sister's connection.

Instead, Twenty8Twelve relies mainly on Savannah Miller, a fashion designer whose styles are grabbing shelf space in high-end department stores from Seattle-based Nordstrom Inc. to London's Liberty PLC. The brand also has secured a regular slot at London Fashion Week, set to begin in the British capital on Friday.

Savannah and Sienna Miller launched the Twenty8Twelve line in 2007, a time of looming financial crisis when even die-hard shoppers were rethinking their spending habits. The brand has had to struggle through the slump, expanding only cautiously, refraining from opening the stores it covets in the U.S. and suspending an unprofitable accessories range. Helping it through the tough times has been the financial and logistical support of its owner, Barcelona-based denim maker Pepe Group.

But Twenty8Twelve has mostly avoided relying on Sienna Miller's fame, despite the fact the line is named for her birthday, Dec. 28. Although Sienna Miller does model the brand's clothes, she doesn't appear in ad campaigns and neither are there pictures of her in Twenty8Twelve's two London stores.

"We wanted it to be a proper label, with its own identity, rather than just emptying out Sienna's cupboard and recycling her vintage skirts," said Savannah Miller, who trained at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design and previously worked for the late Alexander McQueen.

London Fashion Week has long been known for edgy and unconventional looks. It has brought out talents such as Mr. McQueen, John Galliano and Stella McCartney, but most of those designers moved on, leaving London with small, eclectic brands such as Betty Jackson, Antonio Berardi and Twenty8Twelve, which all feature on this weekend's catwalk calendar. Though more vulnerable to economic hardship than brands owned by the powerhouses of Paris or Milan, observers say quirky labels such as the Millers' appeal to shoppers tired of the polished, homogenized look churned out by large conglomerates. Burberry Group PLC, the biggest brand showing at London Fashion Week, recently returned here after staging its shows in Milan.

'We wanted it to be a proper label, with its own identity...,' says designer Savannah Miller.

Buyers for stores say Twenty8Twelve showcases a uniquely British style that is more whimsical and bohemian than the more polished and sportier looks popular in New York, or the perfectly matched outfits worn in Milan. But the line also features, for example, a sharply tailored black coat for £500, some classic cocktail dresses and a short, boxy, office-appropriate jacket for £245. "Twenty8Twelve offers a nice range of styles that appeal to a variety of girls, which is why it's perfect for Shopbop," said Kate Ciepluch, fashion director at online retailer Shopbop.com.

Twenty8Twelve's annual sales now total $13 million, of which $1.5 million come from its two London stores and the rest from wholesale accounts. The company makes money "depending on the year, and the month," said Nish Soneji, managing director of Pepe Jeans. Last year, it lost money.

Sienna Miller wears Twenty8Twelve; top, creative director Savannah Miller.

If Twenty8Twelve made full use of Sienna Miller's star power, industry consultants say, it would become part of her extensive global media presence and lose its individualistic edge. One of the few celebrity brands currently succeeding, the Elizabeth and James line by Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, also plays down the personalities of its creators.

In addition, the turns of Sienna Miller's career and personal life would overshadow the brand's design qualities and could serve as a double-edged sword, consultants say. On one hand, she has been a successful model, appearing on the cover of Vogue that was featured in the documentary "The September Issue." But her film career has never fully taken off, and her on-and-off relationship with actor Jude Law, for example, has at times generated unflattering tabloid coverage. Sienna Miller declined to comment for this article.

In 2006, two years after starring in the movie "Alfie" with future boyfriend Mr. Law, Sienna Miller signed a two-year contract to become the face of Pepe Jeans. As her relationship with Mr. Law and her own quirky style made her one of the world's most photographed women, Pepe owner Carlos Ortega approached the sisters about starting a brand. Their first collection came out in 2007; the inaugural catwalk show two years later.

"What distinguishes Twenty8Twelve from a celebrity line is that it is actually designed, season after season," said Ed Burstell, managing director of London department store Liberty, which says the line is continuously among its 10 top-selling brands. "It sits side-by-side with other collections and holds its own. It's not a capsule collection that comes and goes."

A taste for the exotic

Chef Richard Ekkebus in Hong Kong seeks out unusual ingredients

By Amy Ma

CHEF RICHARD EKKEBUS is a regular visitor to Hong Kong's wet markets, where he samples vegetables harvested in the city's green hinterland and buys fresh seafood plucked straight from the South China Sea. But you won't find many of these ingredients in the dishes he cooks at Amber, the two-Michelin-starred restaurant at the city's The Landmark Mandarin Oriental hotel.

A self-proclaimed fan of Hong Kong's local produce, Mr. Ekkebus says the diners at his French restaurant prefer a menu littered with "exotic ingredients."

Always on the lookout for new foods, the Dutch-born chef offers his top picks for the most exciting imports to land in Hong Kong in recent months.

Amadai fish
This Japanese fish comes in two varieties—the red amadai is available year-round, but the higher-premium white amadai is available only during the autumn and winter. It is served with its scales intact and the skin fried to a crisp. "The texture of the scales when fried in olive oil is a perfect accompaniment to the high intramuscular fat content of the fish," says Mr. Ekkebus. "Think of this fish as a well-marbled 'Wagyu' of seafood." It tastes like the lightest coating of crunchy bread crumbs over a buttery cod-like fish.

Greffeuile 'Triple A' lamb
The Greffeuile family from France are so obsessed with quality control that restaurants must be certified before they can even buy the meat. The family's "Triple A" lamb gets its name from the three French words *agneau* (lamb), *allaitont* (milk-fed) and *d'Aveyron* (a region in France near Roquefort). The animals are fed only on their mother's milk, so the cuts are extremely delicate and never gamey in taste.

'Le Mans' poulard
Supplied by Hugo Denoyer, aka the "butcher of the stars" ("stars" refers to Michelin-starred restaurants and also to Paris celebrities), a *poulard* is a young hen that has been spayed. The meat has a thicker layer of fat, which melts away when fried and helps produce a crispier skin.

Kegani crab
The Hokkaido crab is ugly in appearance—picture a massive hairy crab—but divine in flavor. Its specialty lies in the texture of its meat, which Mr. Ekkebus likens to "the flesh of pomelos or grapefruit" because it flakes into miniature segments. It is traditionally served raw.

Les Vergers St. Eustache fruits and vegetables
The fruits and vegetables grown in this particular garden in southern France are raised on calcium grounds and harvested only from heirloom seeds. As a result, the "carrots really taste like carrots, not a bland, mass-produced version people have gotten used to," says Mr. Ekkebus.

Above, Amber Executive Chef Richard Ekkebus; below, white amadai; bottom, Brittany blue lobster with vegetables.

From the top, Amber, The Landmark Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong (2)

In Italy, a volcanic vintage

"DO YOU DRINK wines from Italy?" asked my French companion on a recent visit to Burgundy. "Sure," I replied. "I drink wines from Italy—from Piedmont, Tuscany, the Veneto, Campania—yes, all the time. Why? You?" The answer confused him; in France, it seems they rarely drink wine from the neighboring village, let alone another country.

Wine
WILL LYONS

In fact, a quick flick through the diary shows that in the past month, for pleasure as opposed to formal tastings, I have enjoyed wines from France (Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne), California, Canada (my brother-in-law is from Toronto; we drink Canadian wine together), Australia, Portugal, South Africa and, yes, Italy.

"They're really very good," I went on. "You should try them when you get the chance. Start with Valpolicella. It's nice and fruity, with an overpowering cherry flavor. It's great at lunchtime with a big bowl of pasta." Intrigued, he promised to taste some Italian wine the next time he visited the country, which suggested that he had been to Italy before but had never tried its wines. I probed no further.

But those who know Italian wines well would have deplored my choice. I should have suggested my French companion try the wines from Sicily, in particular the wines from Mount Etna, especially those grown from vines on the lower slopes of the volcanic mountain. For it is here, amid the high altitude and volcanic soils, that some of Italy's most exciting wines are being produced.

At Tenuta delle Terre Nere, near Randazzo, the red wines have an ethereal quality—high in acidity, with a delicate, herbaceous character that is reminiscent of Burgundian Pinot Noir. In short, they are quite unlike what one would imagine wines from Sicily to taste like: They are texturally light and retain a purity and freshness.

I haven't been to Sicily. My introduction to the island came via the big screen when a young Al Pacino, playing the iconic mafia villain Michael Corleone in "The Godfather," wandered the arresting rural landscapes, having been exiled for murdering the drug lord Virgil Sollozzo. That, and the old bottle of Marsala my parents kept at the back of the drinks cabinet.

For those who haven't enjoyed the privilege, Marsala is rather like an Italian sherry. The Marsala industry was started by an Englishman, John Woodhouse, in the late 18th century; its popularity during the Napoleonic wars was helped by the fact that the British admiral, Lord Nelson, kept his fleet well stocked with bottles of it. These days, Marsala gets a bit of a bad press; yes, the cheap versions can be exceptionally nasty, but chilled down, especially with Christmas pudding, it can be delicious.

My third introduction to Sicily came a few years ago, when I discovered the wines of Planeta, which began producing in the mid-1990s. Planeta is one of a handful of Sicilian producers such as Firriato, Morgante and Spadafora that are putting this small, mountainous island back on the wine-producing map. I was impressed by their Chardonnay and Merlot, which had notes of oregano and stewed fruit. They also produce a spicy, complex white wine made from the Fiano grape.

But it is the wines from Sicily's fast-growing Etna wine region that are without a doubt the most exciting on the island. Sicily has one of the oldest wine-making lineages in the world, tracing its viticulture roots to the settlement of the Greeks in the eighth century B.C. Etna DOC really came alive in the mid-90s, when a small group of winemakers stunned the international market with the flavors they achieved.

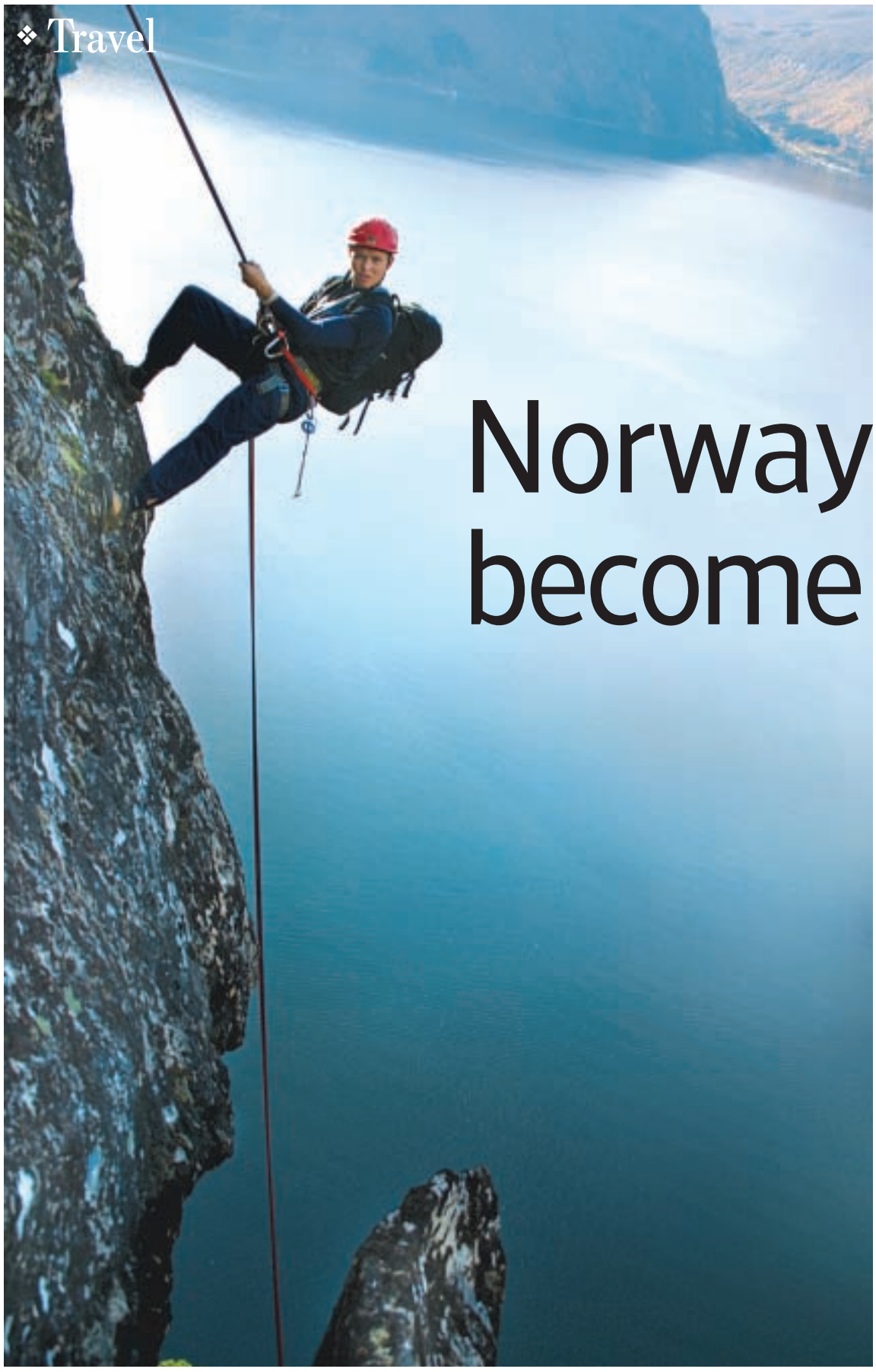
One of those winemakers was Marc de Grazia, who owns Tenuta delle Terre Nere wine estate. I recently had the chance to taste their range and was impressed with the 2008 vintage. The estate is made up of around 30 hectares, planted at an altitude of between 600 and 900 meters above sea level—just about the highest a vine can be planted in the Old World. The soil is mostly made up of volcanic ash and sand, but years of eruptions have led to myriad different soil types. The weather also plays an important factor, being both unpredictable and what the estate describes as "airy"; The vineyard, which isn't enclosed by hills, sits exposed to the elements.

The principal grape variety is Nerello Mascalese, which is indigenous to Sicily. Tasting these wines, one can feel the power and intensity; you can almost taste the volcanic ash. I just hope Mount Etna doesn't erupt anytime soon.

DRINKING NOW

Etna Rosso Calderara Sottana
Tenuta delle Terre Nere, Sicily
Vintage: **2008**
Price: **about £20 or €24**
Alcohol content: **14%**

Planted at around 700 meters above sea level, the vines on this vineyard are pre-phylloxera. Made from the indigenous Nerello Mascalese, this is an impressive wine, with deep autumnal notes, such as spice, dark fruits and sloe.



Norway's glaciers become a hot spot

From kayaking to riverboarding and riding, new adventure activities are turning Nordic ice masses into a natural playground

By J. S. Marcus

GLACIERS MADE WESTERN Norway's landscape: Their Ice Age predecessors dug its fjords over hundreds of thousands of years. Though they've left their impact everywhere, when viewed from a cruise ship or a trail, the great ice masses can look impossibly far away.

Remote they are no longer. A young generation of adventure-sports lovers is turning the glaciers of Norway's fjord country into a vast natural playground. Although organized glacier hikes, usually lasting a couple of hours, have gone on for decades in this region about 240 kilometers northeast of Bergen, wilderness activities have increased sharply in the last few years—everything from a kayak cruise on a glacier-filled lake to a tour on horseback across an expansive glacial flood plain.

Some of these new activities are for experienced athletes, like "riverboarding," or putting on a wet suit and crash helmet, and riding down river rapids on a small flotation device. But most others "look like extreme sports, but they're really not," says Peder Kjaervik, director of the visitors' center near the Nigardsbreen, the area's most approachable glacier, of the many activities now on offer. Andy Cullens, a native New Zealander, whose Jostedal Valley company Ice Troll specializes in kayak and rafting trips for the whole family, says his customers range in age from two to 87.

Other than warm clothing, the local guides will provide all necessary equipment, including ice axes and crampons (the jagged skate-like shoe attachments necessary for walking on a glacier), and even hiking boots, if any last-minute arrivals are wearing tennis shoes or sandals. "People turn up with their lunch and a camera," says Mr. Cullens, of his kayak tours of a remote, high-altitude lake called Styggevatnet, which culminates in a hike onto a nearby glacier.

A good first stop for a glacier jaunt is the Norwegian Glacier Museum, on the southern edge of continental Europe's largest glacier, the Jostedalsbreen. (At 487 square kilometers, it's technically an ice cap and contains some 25 named glaciers that sweep down into surrounding valleys.) In this idyllic fjord-side resort, called Fjaerland, two glaciers nearly come down all the way into the fjord.

At the museum, a panoramic film displays the area's lunar-like moraines, polar ice fields and steep, green valleys, giving airborne views of many major glaciers in the neighborhood. "Each glacier has its own beauty," says the 36-year-old Mr. Cullens. A veteran glacier guide who has worked in Iceland and New Zealand, he likes the accessibility and variety of the Jostedalsbreen.

> Close-up, the glacier is an eerie blue mountain of ice, winding its way down to a milky-green glacial lake with hardly a plant in sight.

The glacier museum encourages visitors to touch hunks of glacial ice, streaked with crystals formed over hundreds of years. The late Sverre Fehn, who won architecture's prestigious Pritzker Prize, designed the museum—made from textured concrete, slate and wood—as a kind of celestial bunker. The austere building "communicates like a poem with its surroundings," says Norwegian architect Kjetil Trædal Thorsen, a partner in the Oslo firm Snohetta.

Before roads were built, farmers sometimes crossed the ice cap on foot to visit relatives in a neighboring valley. These days, a winding road network, much of it constructed in the last few decades, makes getting around much easier.

The Nigardsbreen glacier, part of the Jostedalsbreen, is about a three-hour ride from Fjaerland.

Ice Troll, top, Stein Inge Rem

Left page, top, climbing a mountain over the Norddalsfjord; bottom, kayakers on Styggevatnet Lake.
This page, above, a view of Styggevatnet Lake; right, one of the rooms at the Juvet Landscape Hotel.

The trip goes through hills and, toward the end, up the narrow Jostedal valley, which has an almost tropical lushness in summer, enriched by glacier runoff.

About a 45-minute hike from a parking lot, the Nigardsbreen is particularly accessible and beautiful, says German geologist and glacier expert Anne Hormes, who is an associate professor at UNIS, a university in Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago east of Greenland. (It is one of the most northerly universities in the world.) In photographs, the glacier looks like a sooty snowbank; close-up, it is an eerie blue mountain of ice, winding its way down to a milky-green glacial lake with hardly a plant in sight.

"I like the area because of the contrast" between the all-white, treeless top of the glaciers and the rich green valleys, says Martin Alex Nielsen, a young Oslo-based events coordinator and glacier guide for DNT, Norway's national trekking association. DNT has boosted its seasonal activities on the Jostedalsbreen, from a two-day ski trip in spring, when participants ski up and across the whole of the ice cap, camping out overnight on the surface, to advanced "glacier workshops" in August, when summer melting opens up dangerous gaps, or crevasses, that participants are taught to master.

Ice Troll's kayak trips on the high glacial lake of Styggevatnet and hikes on the adjoining Austdalsbreen glacier generally start in early July and last through September. Mr. Cullens started organizing kayak trips here in 2002. More recently, he added white-water rafting in the Jostedal valley's river, and this year, he introduced riverboarding.

Early this summer, Mr. Cullens and some friends crossed a lake by kayak and then came down a glacier arm that they believe hadn't been walked on in decades. Last month, together with the six-year-old Jostedal company that organizes summer horseback rides, he turned that experience into a guided tour.

J. S. Marcus is a writer based in Berlin.

Per Eide Studio, top, Muchalla

TRIP PLANNER

Getting There
Sogndal is the Jostedal area's transportation hub. Wideroe, the Norwegian regional airline owned by SAS Group, offers regular turboprop service from Oslo. More-scenic options: a five-hour fjord cruise from Bergen to Fjaerland or a surprisingly enjoyable bus ride from Oslo or Bergen to Sogndal. From there, since public transportation is infrequent and often costly, it makes most sense to rent a car.

Where to Stay
In Fjaerland, the Hotel Mundal (opened in 1891) is full of rustic Victorian charm, the kind of place where you want to linger in the public rooms and browse the ample library. At its cafe, try the locally caught smoked trout with potato salad. Open May 1-Sept. 30, and by request the rest of the year. About $330 for a large double room, including breakfast. ☎ +47 5769-3101; www.hotelmundal.no

Near Valldal, about 115 kilometers north of Stryn, at the Jostedalsbreen's northern edge, the Juvet Landscape Hotel, opened this May, is an experiment in designer luxury. Made up of seven guest houses, the hotel offers customized packages for exploring the region. June, July and August start at about $380 for a double. Off-season rates, including full board, are around $320 per person. ☎ +47 9503-2010; www.juvet.com

For Guided Tours
For activities in and around the Nigardsbreen glacier and the Jostedal valley, contact the Breheimsenteret. Telephone: ☎ +47 5768-3250; www.jostedal.com

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Oakland, California

Editor **Marisa Wong** counsels travelers on what to do, where to eat and where to stay in revitalized Oakland, Calif., near San Francisco.

What to do
Oakland is going through a revival. A civic push in recent years to revitalize the city has resulted in the opening of new restaurants and bars, shopping centers and tourist attractions. The city's focal point, Lake Merritt, has benefited from this activity. Improvements, such as additional bike paths and park space, have been going on since 2002. In 2008, the Municipal Boat House was renovated and a new restaurant, the Lake Chalet Seafood Bar & Grill, opened there (1520 Lakeside Dr.; ☎ 510-208-5253; thelakechalet.com). Visitors to the lake can rent pedal boats or kayaks, or stroll around its 5.5-kilometer circumference. Stop by the Cathedral of Christ the Light, an awe-inspiring contemporary wood-and-glass structure that opened in 2008 (2121 Harrison St.; ctlcathedral.org). The nearby Oakland Museum of California has art, history and natural-history exhibits. It reopened in May after a $58 million rehabilitation (1000 Oak St.; 510-238-2200; museumca.org). Old Oakland—the historic downtown area—has been restored to highlight its brick sidewalks lined with trees and Victorian apartments. New galleries, shops and restaurants have made their debut alongside longtime favorites, such as Ratto's Market & Deli, a 113-year-old deli and specialty shop (821 Washington St.; ☎ 510-832-6503; rattos.com). In the Uptown neighborhood, last year's reopening of the historic Fox Theater (1807 Telegraph Ave.; thefoxoakland.com) as a music venue has helped spearhead the development of the area, which has taken on a decidedly art-deco-meets-funk look.

Where to eat
Oakland has drawn a lot of attention recently for its burgeoning food scene, especially after Commis (3859 Piedmont Ave., ☎ 510-653-3902; commisrestaurant.com) garnered the city's first and only Michelin star this year. But there are many local favorites that haven't received as much national attention. Brown Sugar Kitchen puts an organic spin on soul food and is known for its fried chicken and cornmeal waffles (2534 Mandela Parkway; ☎ 510-839-7685; brownsugarkitchen.com). Champa Garden, a Lao restaurant near Lake Merritt, consistently draws crowds for its stir fries, curries and noodle soups. Try the appetizer sampler of Lao sausage, fried rice-ball salad and spring rolls (2102 Eighth Ave.; ☎ 510-238-8819; champagarden.com). More upscale, Wood Tavern is a go-to for fresh California cuisine (6317 College Ave.; ☎ 510-654-6607; woodtavern.net).

Where to stay
The Claremont Hotel Club & Spa is a white-walled oasis that straddles the Oakland-Berkeley city line. The sprawling 95-year-old complex was renovated earlier this year and features tennis courts and a pool. Room rates range from $209 to $389 a night (41 Tunnel Rd., Berkeley; ☎ 510-843-3000; claremontresort.com). The Oakland Marriott City Center, located downtown, was also refurbished this year and is continuing renovation projects into 2011. Rooms here start at $120 and rise to $220 a night (1001 Broadway; ☎ 510-451-4000; marriott.com/hotels/travel/oakdt-oakland-marriott-city-center). In Jack London Square, the Waterfront Hotel is a modest option that was renovated in 2008. Rooms start at $109 a night, and top out at $389 (10 Washington St.; ☎ 510-836-3800; jdvhotels.com/hotels/sanfranciscoeastbay/waterfront).

Marisa Wong/The Wall Street Journal

The Cathedral of Christ the Light was completed in 2008.

Religion and the Ryder Cup

U.S. team captain Corey Pavin and some of his players are devout Christians—Does it matter?

IN 2006, WHEN a U.S. Ryder Cup team rich in born-again Christians descended on the K Club in Ireland for the biennial matches, the British press published several reports about the team's conservative leanings, both religious and political. One headline referred to "Saint Tom" in reference to Tom Lehman, the team captain, who wore a bracelet inscribed with the letters W.W.J.D. ("What would Jesus do?"). Another, written by a liberal American journalist, Bruce Selcraig, quoted commentator David Feherty saying: "I think a lot of Europeans find that conservative Christian thing as frightening as conservative Muslims."

Getty Images

Corey Pavin in action during the second round of the Senior Open Championship at Carnoustie in Angus, Scotland, in July.

Golf Journal
JOHN PAUL NEWPORT

European attitudes toward America have improved slightly since 2006, but this year's Ryder Cup team, which travels to Celtic Manor in Wales for the Oct. 1-3 event, is no less religious than its predecessor. The captain, Corey Pavin, and several of the players (not to mention Mr. Lehman, who returns as an assistant captain) are born-again Christians. Three of Mr. Pavin's four discretionary "captain's picks"—Stewart Cink, Zach Johnson and Rickie Fowler—are regulars at the PGA Tour's weekly Bible-study sessions. Messrs. Pavin and Lehman are also frequent attendees, along with team members Bubba Watson and Matt Kuchar. (The fourth pick, Tiger Woods, claims Buddhism as his religion.)

No one but stray bloggers has alleged that Mr. Pavin made his decisions based on religion—as golf picks they're fairly unassailable. But the subject is close to the surface.

"It's going to be an issue, for sure. The British tabloids will hop on it and hit it hard," predicted Paul Azinger, the 2008 U.S. Ryder Cup captain and himself a born-again Christian.

Mr. Pavin declined to comment about how or whether his religious beliefs will be a factor in how he captains the team. Through a spokesman, he said it was a private matter.

The Ryder Cup never fails to waken fierce emotions among athletes unaccustomed to being part of a team. The Europeans, who hail from many different nations, have dominated lately. Wounds still fester over an incident which some European players saw as rude and jingoistic: At the 1999 matches at the Country Club in Brookline, Mass., the U.S. team stormed the 17th green after Justin Leonard dramatically holed a 45-foot putt in his singles match against José Maria Olazabal, even though Mr. Olazabal still had a putt to tie the match. Mr. Leonard and others apologized, saying they got carried away.

Religion and sports are hardly strangers. Christian devotional gatherings are popular in every professional sports league, including the NFL and Nascar. The PGA Tour version, which has no official connection to the Tour itself, usually meets on Wednesday evenings in a hotel banquet room or private home (sometimes the home of a player) and typically attracts 30 to 50 participants, occasionally up to 100 and occasionally fewer than a dozen, such as at limited-field events. For the past 30 years, the sessions have been led by Larry Moody, an Ellicott City, Md.-based minister, or his partner at Search Ministries, Dave Krueger. Rev. Moody, citing a longstanding policy to protect the privacy of those who attend, declined to comment.

"The messages aren't really Bible study so much as inspirational, on topics like courage and patience," said Mr. Azinger. "It's nondenominational, very comfortable, very easy, and anyone is welcome—wives, caddies, media people, guests, anyone who wants to come. One thing it's definitely not is an outreach thing." It's more like a traveling church for Tour participants who hope to be otherwise occupied on Sunday mornings, the traditional time for church, playing in the final round of that week's event.

For most secular outsiders, these private Wednesday devotionals aren't much of an issue. What some find irksome, though, are postvictory comments thanking God or Jesus. After Zach Johnson won the 2007 Masters, he said, "Being Easter, my goal was to glorify God, and hopefully I did that today."

Some European media outlets made cracks. "Another American winner, another sermon," said the Times of London. The Daily Telegraph wrote: "...[S]tatements suggesting Jesus was there at his shoulder and therefore not 'looking after' the other 60 competitors seem a tad presumptuous." The complaint is that Christians consider themselves somehow special.

"I know that's the message that comes across sometimes," said Mr. Lehman by telephone this week. "To be told you're somehow missing something, or inferior, or that somebody else is more favored than you, that can be really aggravating and infuriating. It's perceived as arrogance or pride. But I don't know anybody who intends to make that impression."

From my experience as someone who grew up in an evangelical Christian home but has lived most of his adult life in a secular milieu, one of the most unfathomable parts of born-again Christianity for the uninitiated is often the deeply personal nature of believers' relationship with their God. God is not a vague concept but an everyday, particular presence in their lives. So when a devout Christian athlete thanks God after winning something, it's not so much of a stretch as it might appear to some.

"Players, no matter what the sport, will thank their coach, their sports psychologist, their wife, their nutritionist, but the minute they get to thanking God, it suddenly becomes, 'Uh-oh, that's taboo.' But it shouldn't be, because God is there for them that way," said Mr. Lehman. Nevertheless, it weirds a lot of people out.

As Ryder Cup captain in 2006, Mr. Lehman said he organized no formal Christian activities for the team and avoided expressly religious references in his motivational remarks to the team. "To me, the Ryder Cup is not the time or the place for that kind of thing," he said. Rev. Moody was around and available to individuals, but he didn't address the team. Separately, the late golf legend Byron Nelson, an accomplished woodworker, made a small wooden keepsake for each player with a verse from Psalms on one side. And a few players independently had Christian fish symbols on their bags. The U.S. team lost in 2006, 18 1/2 to 9 1/2.

In 2008, at the Ryder Cup matches at Valhalla in Kentucky, Mr. Azinger similarly didn't invoke religion. "There were no prayers or moments of silence. There was no need for that. That's not the captain's responsibility. He's there to organize things and take the pressure off the players and then to get out of the way," Mr. Azinger said. The pod structure that Mr. Azinger instituted, dividing the team into three four-man groups based on Navy Seal practices, helped produce a 16 1/2-to-11 1/2 American upset win.

Mr. Pavin's captain's picks were logical. Mr. Woods, whose game appears to be coming around despite another over-par round last Friday at the BMW Championship, was a no-brainer. Messrs. Cink and Johnson, both experienced Ryder Cup hands, have been playing superb golf recently and will add stability to a U.S. team with five Ryder Cup rookies (Messrs. Watson, Fowler and Kuchar, Dustin Johnson and Jeff Overton).

The 21-year-old Mr. Fowler, despite ranking only 20th on the Ryder Cup points list, brings enthusiasm, personality and five top-10 finishes this year, as well as a 7-1 match play record in amateur Walker Cup competitions. He also marks his golf balls with "4:13," for a verse in Philippians: : "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."

Arbitrage

Bodum Bistro Toaster

City	Local currency	€
New York	$79	€62
Paris	€99	€99
Frankfurt	€104	€104
Rome	€109	€109
Brussels	€111	€111
London	£99	€120

Note: Prices of a two-slot, matte-steel finish toaster, plus taxes, as provided by retailers in each city, averaged and converted into euros.

© Leif Gabrielsen

Liv Ullmann's big return to the stage

By J. S. Marcus

LIV ULLMANN IS known for her groundbreaking roles in Swedish movies, but she got her start on the Norwegian stage. Born in Tokyo in 1938 to Norwegian parents, she grew up in postwar Trondheim, and by her 20s had become one of Norway's best-known actresses. In the 1960s she began her celebrated collaboration with Swedish director Ingmar Bergman (1918-2007). She acted in 10 of his films, starting in 1966 with "Persona," co-starring her friend, Swedish actress Bibi Andersson; and ending in 2003 with "Saraband," in which she appeared alongside Bergman regular, Erland Josephson.

"Saraband," a made-for-television project, was an exception for Ms. Ullmann. Although one of the world's most admired actresses, she has all but given up acting, turning her talents instead toward directing. Like Bergman, whose scripts she has filmed, she directs both movies and plays, and her second career reached a high point in 2009, when her Sydney Theater Company production of Tennessee Williams's "A Streetcar Named Desire," starring Cate Blanchett as Blanche DuBois, took New York audiences and critics by storm.

Everett Collection / Rex Features

Top, Liv Ullmann in 'Long Day's Journey into Night'; above, the actress in 1973.

This month, Ms. Ullmann, who spends much of her time in the U.S., returns to acting, and to Norway, with a vengeance. Appearing on stage for the first time in 20 years, she has come home to try her hand at one of modern theater's great dramatic roles—Mary Tyrone, the drug-addicted matriarch of Eugene O'Neill's masterpiece "Long Day's Journey into Night." A dark, riveting, heartfelt portrait of a doomed theater clan, the play, set in early 20th century New England, is based on O'Neill's own family. Though finished in the early 1940s, it was not published or staged until after the playwright's death in 1953.

The new production—mounted by Norway's traveling repertory company, the Riksteatret, and staged by Norwegian actor and director Stein Winge—will tour some 50 venues across Norway this fall. Fittingly, the run will end in December at Stockholm's Royal Dramatic Theater, Ingmar Bergman's professional home, where the play had its world premier in 1956.

Ms. Ullmann spoke to The Wall Street Journal by telephone from Oslo, a few days after the production's Sept. 1 opening.

Why did you return to acting?
It was so tempting to come back to Norway—to be on the bus and tour the country, which I did in the beginning of my career. I could never forget the beauty of Norway, and it was tempting to be able to see Norway that way again, and then to know in the evening I am going to do my thing.

What is it like to appear in front of an audience after all these years?
Scary. My part, Mary Tyrone, is on morphine. In the beginning, her family doesn't know, but very soon, they know and the audience knows. Then I go into a narcotic way of being. It's a wonder how O'Neill has shown her—the truth comes out of her. Things you don't normally want to say to people, she says. I was nervous to go so far into this most secret place of a human being, and in front of the audience, which I haven't done for so long.

Mary is clearly a victim—of her doctors, of the society she lives in—but is she also a victimizer?
Yes, but we all are sometimes the victim and sometimes the victimizer. She isn't more of a victim than anybody else, but she feels she is a victim because she is always alone. The rest of the family goes out to drink—she feels like a victim because they are always drunk. But Tyrone and his sons would say the same: They feel they are victims, because the woman who is their wife and mother is on morphine. We always find somebody else to blame.

You recently had a great success directing "A Streetcar Named Desire." What was special about that experience?
It was an incredible ensemble, which is what I like—I don't like to be Liv Ullmann, I like to be one of a group. "A Streetcar Named Desire" filled me with a lot of happiness.

What do you remember about Ingmar Bergman's 1988 Stockholm production of "Long Day's Journey into Night"?
I remember that it made a big impression on me. My best friend Bibi Andersson played my part, and I think I remember her the most. I came to Sweden that morning from the United States, and I thought, I don't think I'm going to go see it. But I went, and I was so happy. I came up to Bibi afterward to thank her. I said, "I always knew you were a great actress but I didn't know you were that wonderful."

How did you prepare to play Mary?
I have never worked so hard on any role. She talks and talks and talks, goes from one sentence about one thing to another sentence about something else. Why does she change suddenly? You really need to do a lot of homework to figure that out. You should see my script—I have written so much in it you can hardly read it anymore. The director very often wants me to speak quickly, and I'm a slow person. I come from the north of Norway, and we talk slowly. In the end I did have to make things quick, to shift in a quick way. I didn't understand at first why it had to be like that.

Ingmar Bergman's theater productions are legendary. Why?
I was in one play of Bergman's. He came to Norway to do Pirandello's "Six Characters in Search of an Author." He was incredible—a visionary, who somehow made everyone else want to be a visionary. He couldn't be better than he was on film, but he was an amazing theater director.

James Tyrone, Mary's husband, decided to sell out his talent for commercial success. You have worked with many famous actors. Is there a James Tyrone lurking in each of them?
Yeah, in all men, not just actors—and there is a bit of Mary in all women. Since you mention James Tyrone, I have to say that Bjørn Sundquist, my James Tyrone, is one of the best actors I have ever worked with. Gene Hackman, Peter Finch, Max von Sydow and Erland Josephson—he's right up there for me.

What has the role of Mary Tyrone taught you about yourself?
I have learned that I also have secrets that I don't want to show. I am like Nora [in Ibsen's "A Doll's House"]—I'm always smiling, want things to be easy for everybody. Underneath, there is anger, and a feeling of being victimized. I see that more clearly—because he is a great playwright, O'Neill has shown this to me. I am now discussing with myself how not to be Nora so much of the time.

J. S. Marcus is a writer based in Berlin.

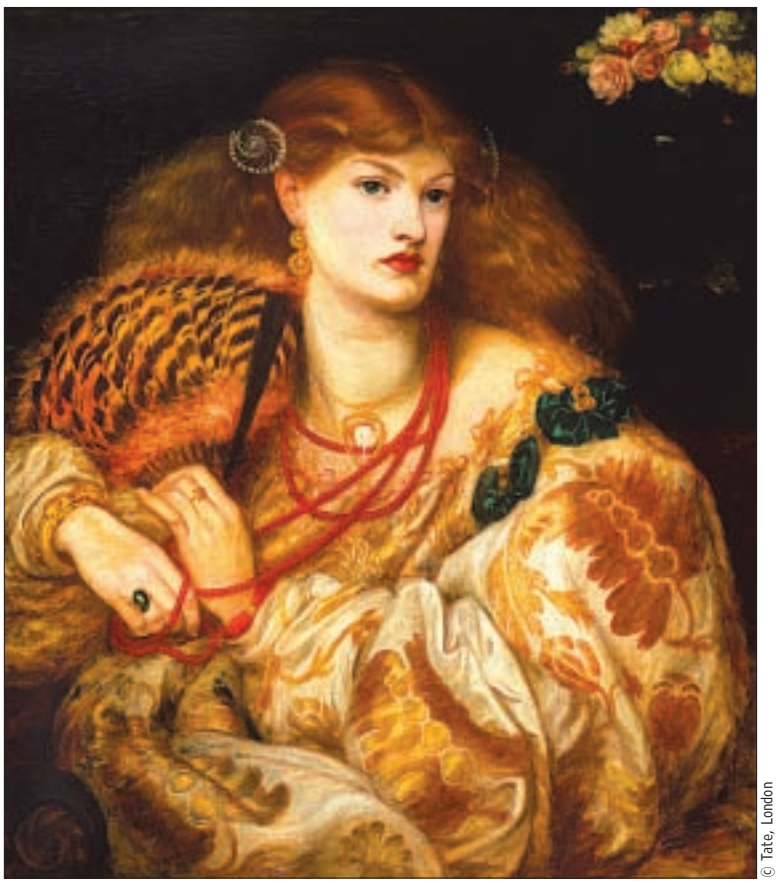
The diverging tastes of Pre-Raphaelites

OXFORD: For the Ashmolean Museum's first major exhibition in its new building, the title "The Pre-Raphaelites and Italy" sounds a bit self-evident. In what other country would you expect to find the antecedents of an Italian painter who was emblematic of the High Renaissance?

In fact, despite rearranging his given names from "Gabriel Charles Dante" to "Dante Gabriel," Rossetti (1828-82), the most influential member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, or PRB, never set foot in Italy. Of the other two founders, says curator Colin Harrison in his gripping catalog essay, John Everett Millais (1829-96) only finally visited as a tourist with his wife in 1885. And though William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) was in Florence and Naples a great deal between 1866 and 1868, he only went because his plans to go to the Middle East had fallen through.

On the other hand, their mentor and champion, John Ruskin (1819-1900), spent much time in Italy studying its art and architecture. Of course, there were many other artists involved with the movement, most notably Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98) and Frederic Leighton (1830-96), but plenty of other nonhousehold names.

One reason this show is so pleasingly unpredictable is that there was no PRB manifesto, or even organization, and ultimately their tastes and views diverged. Ruskin veered away from the austerity of the early Florentines toward the sensuous qualities of the Venetian painters of the High Renaissance—contradicting the movement's original aims.



© Tate, London

'Monna Vanna' (1866) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Initially, the "Brotherhood" was opposed to what they thought of as Renaissance practice in favor of an earlier, more spiritual Gothic style, and Rossetti in particular drew on Italian literary sources for his subjects.

Holman Hunt, on the other hand, remained so true to the ideal of painting only what you could see in front of you, that though he had completed painting his subject in the foreground, he couldn't finish the 1863 painting of a kneeling woman ("Past and Present") until he made a second trip to Naples in 1868, when he got yet another woman to pose for the background. It's next to an 1864 portrait of the same woman by Robert Braithwaite Martineau(1826-69)—a recent discovery, and one of the quirky joys of this exhibition.

The recent British TV series "Desperate Romantics" encouraged speculation about the PRB's sexuality. Here, an array of PRB lily-pad ladies, made androgynous by their prominent chins, surrounds Holman Hunt's "Il Dolce far Niente"—his wife's features, but surely a drag queen. *—Paul Levy*

Until Dec. 5
www.ashmolean.org

Alexander the Great, illustrated and uncovered

AMSTERDAM: Great figures in history always leave in their wake a changed world and a legacy mixed of myth and reality. And perhaps no figure in classical history left a bigger stamp than Alexander the Great. His 11-year, 23,480-kilometer military campaign in the fourth century B.C. established Hellenistic values and aesthetics across a huge swath of the known world. In the centuries following, kings and generals sought to emulate Alexander, and his legend grew apace.

The latest exhibition at the year-old Hermitage Amsterdam sifts through the legend and tries to reach the real man. "The Immortal Alexander the Great" mirrors an exhibition held at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg in 2007, and takes advantage of the building's sheer size to illustrate the myth, the legend and the cultural influence of Alexander.

The show is a lot to take in, so curators have broken the exhibition space into a number of sections. The first section is built around the "myth" surrounding Alexander, so the pieces on display are of relatively recent vintage. A wall-sized painting by Pietro Antonio Rotari from 1756 depicts "Alexander the Great and Roxanne," while a series of boxwood reliefs by Antoine Marie Melotte, dated 1777-80, shows the traits ascribed to Alexander—military prowess, political shrewdness and the ability to inspire armies and conquered peoples alike—that the rulers of the courts of Europe sought to emulate, centuries after Alexander's time.

The remaining sections—"reality," "journey" and "heritage"—are most compelling, as they include relics, drawn from the collections of the Hermitage, that hail both from the time of Alexander's upbringing in the court of his father, King Philip II of Macedonia, and a treasure trove of ancient coins, columns, sculptures and ceremonial items, from as far away as India, that demonstrate Alexander's successful export of Hellenism.

The "reality" section is of particular note for its juxtaposition of relics from Macedonia—at the time largely a culture of hunters and peasants—with the physical and intellectual heritage of the Greeks that Alexander was raised to appreciate.

—Joel Weickgenant

Until March 18
www.hermitage.nl

© State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

Cuirass breastplate, Italy (late 16th century).

Director Sir Jonathan Miller's 'Don Pasquale' delivers and delights

LONDON: With budget cuts looming, both the Royal Opera and English National Opera are relying this season on their one sure-fire hit director, Sir Jonathan Miller. From October to January, the ENO will give no fewer than 13 performances of his 1930s-Paris "La Bohème." The ROH opened its season with his "Cosí Fan Tutte" and a couple of days later, revived his rollicking "Don Pasquale."

© The Royal Opera/ Catherine Ashmore

Íride Martínez as Norina and Jacques Imbrailo as Doctor Malatesta.

Staged in Isabella Bywater's gasp-provoking, fullsize, three-storey set based on a mid-19th century doll's house, the current production has the inestimable advantage of a wonderful cast and conductor. Evelino Pidò is completely at home with Donizetti's demanding score, and apart from the brass section needing a little warming-up, his orchestra gave its considerable all.

Sir Jonathan uses Ms. Bywater's cut-away house to show business going on, for example, in the kitchen, while the principal singers are in the bedroom or salon; and this is occasionally distracting. But the wisp of a plot needs to be attached to something to keep our attention—and this is as good a solution as any I've seen.

And it works brilliantly for the superb Paolo Gavanelli in the rapid-fire patter arias that make up so much of the title role. His physical presence is so commanding that it makes no difference what floor he is on; and, though he's much slimmer, the same is true of the other baritone role, Doctor Malatesta, sung warmly and acted hilariously by rising South African star Jacques Imbrailo.

The soprano who conspires with Malatesta to defraud Don Pasquale (so that she can marry his feckless nephew, sung by Barry Banks) is winningly and accurately sung by Costa Rican Íride Martínez, who has no difficulty with her showy coloratura passages. But the evening belongs to the director and designer.

—Paul Levy

Sept. 18, 20, 21
www.roh.org.uk/pasquale

Courtesy of Sotheby's

Palm tree leaf with fossilized fish from 50 million years ago. Estimate: €80,000-€100,000.

Prehistoric creatures come to life

Collecting
MARGARET STUDER

A GIANT, CARNIVOROUS dinosaur will lead Sotheby's first auction in Paris devoted entirely to natural history, on Oct. 5.

The ferocious creature is an Allosaurus, a Jurassic species with huge jaws and killer teeth that lived around 153 million to 135 million years ago. Giant skeletons of carnivorous dinosaurs rarely come on the market; this will be the first-ever specimen of an Allosaurus to appear at auction (estimate: €800,000).

The 86-lot sale includes an exotic range of legendary beasts, petrified woods, fossilized fauna, translucent crystals and sculpture-like shells. The items come from private collections in Europe and the U.S.

Eric Mickeler, a Sotheby's natural-history consultant, says dinosaur skeletons, fossils and minerals are viewed as "artistic masterpieces or wonders of nature" as they "retrace the saga of evolution." Of the once "mighty terrestrial and marine mammals," only whales still survive, he adds. "Interest in prehistoric remains has undergone a striking resurgence in France over the last few years," Mr. Mickeler notes.

Another rare creature in the sale will be an around 190-million-year-old Plesiosaurus Cryptocleidus, a marine reptile that was an extremely fast predator, preying on fish and squid (estimate: €320,000-€370,000). Mythology has the Loch Ness monster looking like a Plesiosaurus.

The giant Aepyornis maximus of Madagascar, known as the elephant bird, has been extinct since the 17th century, hunted down for its rich meat. Its eggs remain as a reminder that these birds ever existed, and their primal form has inspired the work of modern sculptors such as Alberto Giacometti. Two of these eggs are in the sale, with one estimated at €30,000-€40,000; and the other at €20,000-€30,000.

Some 50 million years ago, the climate in the southwest region of Wyoming was a vegetal and aquatic paradise. From that time comes a monumental, fossilized palm leaf surrounded by swimming fish, estimated at €80,000-€100,000. Few prehistoric palm leaves survive because of their fragility.

A charming pair of fossilized mud crabs, buried around 45 million years ago near Vicenza, Italy, are expected to fetch €14,000-€16,000.

The Fear of a Failure to Communicate

By Alexander Theroux

The year is 1912. Serge Carrefax, the focus of "C," Tom McCarthy's compelling if demanding second novel, is growing up on a pastoral estate in the south of England. There, with his precocious but troubled sister, Sophie, he leads a life of joyous agitation, at least for a while, their days filled with youthful intellectual adventures—botanical, electrical and literary. Although tutors, nannies and gardeners see to the imaginative youngsters, a twilight sense of trouble seems never far away. There are rumors of war. "The Krauts are gearing up to let loose at us, make no mistake," warns a friend of the family. It is the sense of a world on the verge of social upheaval that gives "C" a certain momentous quality, allowing Mr. McCarthy a chance to play with themes of family disaffiliation, sexual relations and, indeed, war.

And yet "C" is not a gloomy novel. Its principal narrative amounts to a biography of Serge, whose short life (1898-1922) and innate interests coincide with a period of technological excitement in the world at large. It is a time of electronic experiment, not only basic Morse Code but the deeper, more complex creative theories, devices and field tests of Marconi and Tesla, along with early radio, encryption and code breaking. Another theme in "C" is the sending and receiving of facts and truths on all sorts of levels, not excluding the many nontechnological ways humans try (and fail) to communicate.

As it happens, Serge and Sophie are the children of an eccentric inventor who, with his drug-addled wife, runs a school for the deaf. ("I am proud to call myself an oralist," says the father in one of his many opinionated speeches.) The patriarch is solipsistically working on electrical devices for deaf children even as his own children seem to be lost in their own subjective dreams. The mystifying bond of the family Carrefax seems to be a tinkering with machinery and an experiment with physical phenomena, including animals and plants.

c
By Tom McCarthy
(Jonathan Cape, 310 pages, £16.99)

Serge, we learn early on, is one of those rare babies (1 in 80,000 births) who are born, like David Copperfield, with a caul—a skin-like membrane covering the head for a brief time after birth. Mr. McCarthy does not make too much of this fact, though it does seem to mark out Serge for a special destiny. Like Dickens's autobiographical novel, "C" is a Bildungsroman. It traces Serge's psychological and moral growth from youth to early adulthood in four c-themed sections: "Caul," adolescence and youth at the estate; "Chute," a wartime spell where, at 19, Serge flies as an observer over enemy lines during World War I; "Crash," a decadent postwar spell in London involving drugs and sexual mouse-hunting; and "Call," a dramatic coda set in Cairo and Alexandria, where Serge, working for the Empire Wireless Chain, descends into the chamber of an archaeological dig and comes face to face with death.

The appeal of "C" depends in part on Serge as a character—a matter rather ambiguous as presented, since he carries the burden less of a moral force than of a groping anti-hero. He can appear uncannily sterile and robotic. We see him as a sort of cubist puzzle. He can only make love from the back, á le chien. He reads Hölderlin in the midst of dangerous aerial combat. He feels bound to lie about the way that his sweet sister died (a truly heart-breaking interval in the first section of the novel). During the wartime flights, he snorts cocaine and seems in a desperate and laughing way to welcome oblivion. ("He likes it when the bullets come close—really close, so that they're almost grazing the machine's side.")

Still, Serge is a seeker—of knowledge and experience—and in that guise a pilgrim we are willing to follow and even to care for. He is often pursuing the interests of his childhood, involving himself with codes and caprices in what can broadly be described as a need to make contact—with his sister, women of all sorts, himself.

And his emotional life? A woman appears in each section


Daniel Pelavín

of the book, several in certain instances, and Serge's relations with them are mostly perfunctory. He looks for love but finds little. His final rapprochement with a knowing archaeologist named Laura proves to be different in crucial ways. Their single fling in an Egyptian burial chamber has the drama of a sudden and surprising excavation. A weirder climax to a book could not be found.

Thus Serge poses a conundrum to the reader. He seems cold, but there is also a wild, romantic depth to him that keeps one interested. At one point we even read, believingly, that Serge feels "an almost sacred tingling, as though he himself had become godlike, elevated by machinery and signal code to a higher post within the overall structure of things."

Mr. McCarthy, the author of two previous books—"Remainder" (2006), a comparatively straightforward novel, and "Tintin and the Secret of Literature" (2006), a work of nonfiction—seems to know everything. The curative powers of mineral water. Wireless transmission and airwave technology. Ciphers. Insect life. There are several splendid descriptions of flying: "The landscape falls away, it flattens, voids itself of depth. Hills lose their height; roads lose their camber, bounce, the texture of their paving, and turn into marks across a map. The greens and browns of field and wood seem artificial and provisional, as though they'd just now fallen from the sky."

The formal difficulty of "C" may go back to the postmodern idea that shifts interest from the "what" to the "how" of art, the game of problematizing. "C" is a novel of cognition. Throughout, Serge probes, explores, investigates, and the reader must likewise tease out the mysteries of both the narrative and its main character.

As to the novel's title, there is a plethora of c-words: codes, calcium, catacomb, cyst, carbon ("the basic element of life"). And, Carrefax. What does it all add up to? It is hard to say, but there is an intrepid attitude to Mr. McCarthy's literary sally that has little to do with pleasing publishers or even an audience. "C" is clever, confident, coy—and cryptic.

Mr. Theroux's latest novel is "Laura Warholic: Or, The Sexual Intellectual" (Fantagraphics).

The 'Why?' Questions, Chapter and Multiverse

By Sean Carroll

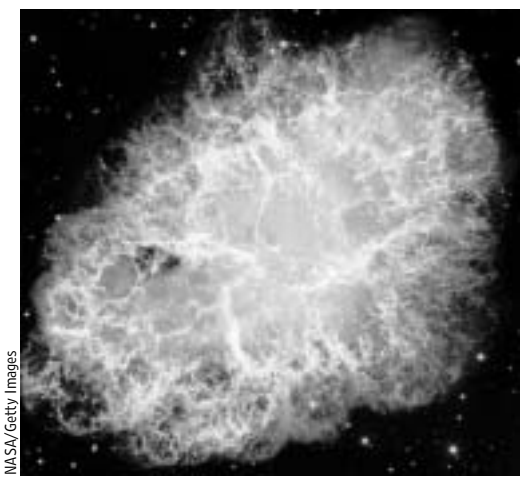
Nobody has ever accused Stephen Hawking of thinking small. His life has been devoted to asking foundational questions about the nature of spacetime and the origin of the universe. In his famous "A Brief History of Time" (1988), he attempted to bring the mysteries of black holes and the early universe to a wide audience.

The Grand Design
By Stephen Hawking
And Leonard Mlodinow
(Bantam, 198 pages, £18.99)

Now Mr. Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow have written "The Grand Design," which addresses some of the biggest questions of all: Why is there something rather than nothing? Why does nature have the laws it does? Why do we exist? These sorts of "Why?" questions are often neglected by most scientific practice, but the recent progress of cosmology and fundamental physics makes this a good time to tackle them in earnest.

Putting the word "design" in the book's title is the kind of cheeky humor that Mr. Hawking has become known for. The authors' answer to the riddle of the universe has nothing to do with intelligent design or with religion generally. "Some would claim the answer to these questions is that there is a God who chose to create the universe that way. . . . We claim, however, that it is possible to answer these questions purely within the realm of science, and without invoking any divine beings."

The Hawking vs. God debate has featured prominently in the news of late. He and Mr. Mlodinow don't claim to have proved that God doesn't exist; their argument is somewhat more confined, but still important in its implications. We understand enough about the ultimate laws of physics, the authors say, to conclude that we don't need God to understand the universe.


NASA/Getty Images

A mosaic image of the Crab Nebula, a remnant of a supernova explosion, taken by the Hubble Space Telescope.

In this short and sprightly book, Messrs. Hawking and Mlodinow take the reader through a whirlwind tour of fundamental physics and cosmology, concluding with an enthusiastic endorsement of the idea that our observable universe is only a tiny part of a much larger conglomeration, the multiverse. The universe we see is big, featuring over a hundred billion galaxies, but it's still finite. The multiverse idea suggests that there are other regions, equally impressive in size, where conditions might be quite different, right down to different physical laws or different numbers of dimensions of space.

But "The Grand Design" aims beyond simply surveying hot topics in contemporary physics. It has a point—that some of the evergreen "Why?" questions of philosophy may be on the verge of being answered by modern science. Each chapter serves as a step along the path to finding such answers. The key that unlocks the them is not a new idea: It's the "anthropic principle," a subject of considerable controversy among cosmologists.

If there are many different environments in the universe, we should not be surprised to find ourselves living in those environments that are hospitable to our existence. In the solar system, for example, we should not be surprised that life arose on the surface of the Earth rather than on the sun (too hot) or the moon (too dry). Similarly, if there are many different universes, we should not be surprised to find ourselves living in this one. We might hope to explain certain features of our universe simply by insisting that it allow for intelligent life. If the mass of the neutron were smaller than the mass of the proton, for example, chemistry as we know it would be impossible. Perhaps there is some other universe where neutrons are lighter than protons; but we can't live there, since such a universe might not be able to support life.

Messrs. Hawking and Mlodinow trace the logic of quantum mechanics, general relativity and superstring theory, showing how a variety of existing universes isn't merely possible but arguably natural. In string theory, space inevitably has extra curled-up dimensions that we can't see. But there are many ways for dimensions to curl up, and each of them leads to different apparent "laws of physics." Then there's the idea of inflation, which predicts that an extremely tiny region of space can blow up into a universe-sized domain. Modern cosmologists believe that inflation, once it starts, can keep going forever, continually creating new "pocket universes" with different conditions in each one.

This is a picture that has been put together by a number of theoretical physicists over the past couple of decades, although it remains speculative. Mr. Hawking's own major contributions have involved the spontaneous creation of the universe "from nothing." The basic idea comes straight from conventional quantum mechanics: A particle does not have some perfectly well-defined position but rather lives in a superposition of many possible positions. As for particles, the logic goes, so for the entire universe. It exists in a superposition of many possible states, and among those states is utter nothingness. The laws of quantum cosmology purport to show how nothingness can evolve into the universe we see today. Speculative, yes; crazy, not necessarily.

It is unfortunate that Messrs. Hawking and Mlodinow choose to open their book by picking a pointless disciplinary fight: "Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead." The authors nevertheless quote a number of philosophers with apparent approval and engage in more than a bit of armchair philosophizing themselves.

Answers to the great "Why?" questions are going to be subtle and difficult. Our best hope for constructing sensible answers lies with scientists and philosophers working together, not scoring points off one another.

Mr. Carroll is the author of "From Eternity to Here: The Quest for the Ultimate Theory of Time."

time off

'The Pack (das Rudel)' (1969) by Joseph Beuys on show in Düsseldorf; bottom, Jug, Egypt, 11th-12th century, shown in Berlin.

Aachen
architecture
"West Arch—A New Generation in Architecture" presents models, pictures and designs by young Belgian, German and Dutch architecture offices.
Ludwig Forum
für Internationale Kunst
Until Nov. 14
☎ 49-241-1807-104
www.ludwigforum.de

Berlin
art
"Yoko Ono: Das Gift" offers new site-specific contemporary artwork, consisting of sculptural, sound, film and instruction-based participatory elements.
Haunch of Venison
Until Nov. 13
☎ 49-3039-7439-63
www.haunchofvenison.com

art
"Glass, Handle With Care! Fragile Art 700-2010" shows over 60 items from the museum's Isalamic art collection, tracing the history of glassmaking and glass art through the last 2,000 years.
Pergamonmuseum,
Antikensammlung
Until Jan. 9
☎ 49-30-2090-5577
www.smb.museum/smb

Bonn
art
"Vibración: Modern Art From Latin America" presents a European premiere of works from the Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, showing key works of 20th-century Latin American abstract art.
Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der
Bundesrepublik Deutschland
Until Jan. 30
☎ 49-2289-1712-00
www.bundeskunsthalle.de

Dublin
music
MGMT perform their Grammy-Award-winning psychedelic pop in a European tour in support of their latest album "Congratulations."
Sept. 17-18, Olympia
Sept. 20-21 Barrowland Ballroom, Glasgow
Sept. 23 O2 Academy, Birmingham
Sept. 24 O2 Academy, Bournemouth
Sept. 26 Apollo, Manchester
Sept. 27 O2 Academy, Leeds
Sept. 29-Oct. 1 Brixton Academy, London
Oct. 1 Jamm, London
Oct. 3 AB, Brussels
Oct. 4-5 Paradiso, Amsterdam
More European dates at
www.whoismgmt.com/us/home

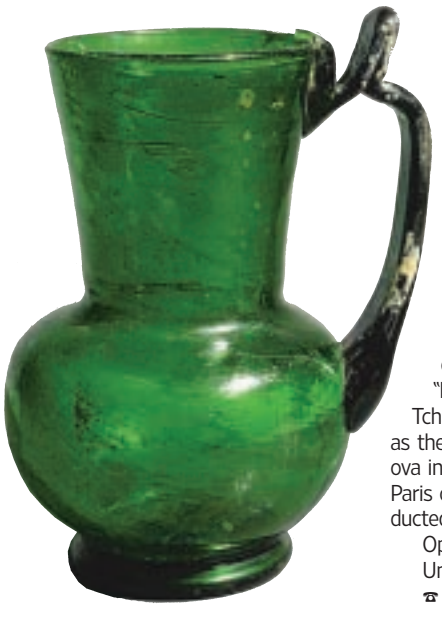
Düsseldorf
art
"Joseph Beuys: Parallelprozesse" showcases 300 works by the German artist, including key installations such as "Show your Wound," "The Pack" and "Fond IV/4."
Kunstsammlung
Nordrhein-Westfalen
Until Jan. 16
☎ 49-211-8381-117
www.kunstsammlung.de

Liverpool
art
"The 6th Liverpool Biennial" is the U.K.'s largest contemporary art show, presenting among others, the Bloomberg New Contemporaries, 40 international new projects and the John Moores Painting Prize 2010.
At various venues
Sept. 18-Nov. 28
☎ 44-151-7097-444
www.biennial.com

London
art
"Salvator Rosa (1615-73): Bandits, Wilderness and Magic" shows paintings by the Italian Baroque artist, poet and printmaker, know for his rebellious attitude and mystical motifs.
Dulwich Picture Gallery
Until Nov. 28
☎ 44-20-8693-5254
www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk

art
"Poussin to Seurat: French Drawings From the National Gallery of Scotland" shows Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works by French artists such as Boucher, Ingres, Corot, Pissarro and Dulac.
The Wallace Collection
Sept. 23-Jan. 3
☎ 44-20-7563-9500
www.wallacecollection.org

Manchester
art
"Recorders: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer" offers seven interactive installations by the Mexican-Canadian electronic artist, including "Pulse Room," shown at the Mexican pavilion for the Venice Biennale in 2007.
Manchester Art Gallery
Sept. 18-Jan. 30
☎ 44-161-2358-888
www.manchestergalleries.org



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Naples
art
"Carl Andre. 9 x 54 Napoli Rectangle" shows sculptural works by the American abstract artist.
Alfonso Artiaco
Until Nov. 6
☎ 39-81-4976-072
www.alfonsoartiaco.com

Paris
opera
"Eugene Onegin: By Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky" premieres Ludovic Tézier as the title character and Olga Guryakova in the role of Tatiana, backed by the Paris opera orchestra and chorus conducted by Vasily Petrenko.
Opera Bastille
Until Oct. 11
☎ 33-89-2899-090
www.operadeparis.fr

art
"Murakami Versailles" places the manga-inspired pop art sculptures of Takashi Murakami among the gardens and gilded halls of Versailles, including some works displayed for the first time.
Château de Versailles
Until Dec. 12
☎ 33-1-3083-7800
www.chateauversailles.fr

Rome
art
"Franz West: Roman Room" shows new sculptural works by the Austrian artist alongside a selection of literary, philosophical and historical texts that inspired him.
Gagosian Gallery Rome
Until Oct. 30
☎ 39-6420-8649-8
www.gagosian.com

Wuppertal
art
"Bonnard: Magician of Colors" offers 180 works, including paintings and photography by the French artist.
Von der Heydt-Museum
Until Jan. 30
☎ 49-2025-6326-26
www.bonnard-ausstellung.de

Source: WSJ research