

the village **VOICE** **FREE**

VOL. LXIV | NO. 3 SPRING, 2022

**Where's the snow?
Michael Schwarz checks
out ski resorts battling
climate change**

**From Rikers to politics:
Assembly Member Eddie
Gibbs tells his story to
Natasha Ishak**

**Stephen Mooallem tunes
into the AI channeling Andy
Warhol's diaries**

Caught in War's Web

**"To see my family that I love deeply suffer for these
basic things, freedom, the thing that's being taken
away from my family in Crimea, my family in Ukraine,
and my family in Russia."**

War Stories, by Anna Conkling



AT PIER 57 AT HUDSON RIVER PARK

LIVE MUSIC | URBAN WINERY | RESTAURANT | BAR | PRIVATE EVENTS

NEW YORK • CHICAGO • NASHVILLE • ATLANTA • BOSTON
WASHINGTON DC • PHILADELPHIA • HUDSON VALLEY

4.12

4.13

COLIN HAY



4.20

4.21

4.22

MARTIN SEXTON



4.24

4.25

SHAWN COLVIN

STEADY ON 32ND ANNIVERSARY TOUR



5.17

5.18

5.18

5.19

LYLE LOVETT
& HIS LARGE BAND

5.30

5.31

6.02

6.03

MELISSA ETHERIDGE
ONE WOMAN BAND

6.05

6.07

6.08

6.10

RUFUS DOES JUDY
AT CITY WINERY

3.27 NICK WATERHOUSE

3.28 LAUREL CANYON

3.29 ELLE VARNER
W/ DJ AKTIVE

3.31 BOB SCHNEIDER

4.3 AL STEWART
& THE EMPTY POCKETS

4.4 MARC BROUSSARD

4.6 DAKHABRAKHA

4.7 SPECIAL JAMES BROWN
60 PROJECT
WITH VERNON REID,
JOHN MEDESKI,
NICOLE ATKINS,
CATHERINE RUSSELL
AND MORE!

4.10 MS. LISA FISCHER

4.14 MIKI HOWARD

4.15 THRU AIMEE MANN
4.18

4.23 ROY AYERS

4.23 MY EMO ROMANCE
(LATE SHOW)4.29 SE REGALAN DUDAS
LOVE TOUR5.1 SHELBY LYNNE
& ALLISON MOORER

THE LOFT

3.31 SCOTT METZGER

4.1 SOUTHERN AVENUE

4.2 KYLE GORDON

4.4 JULIE KLAUSNER:
MEDLEYS AND
OTHER VARIANTS
4.54.7 ALYSSA AMORO:
TEA WITH PUBLYSSITY

4.8 UPDATING

4.10 LISA BELLO & MIKEMRF

BECOME A
VINOFILEEXCLUSIVE PRESALE
ACCESS, NO TICKETING
FEES, & MORE!4.12 MAGIC IN A BOTTLE
WITH MARK ZACHARIA
& GUESTS

4.14 UPDATING

4.17 TOMMY PRINE

4.18 RODNEY ATKINS
& ROSE FALCON:
ROD + ROSE TOUR4.19 MALINDA:
4.20 FOLKS I LOVE TOUR4.21 PAULY SHORE:
STICK WITH THE DANCING
FUNNY STORIES
FROM MY CHILDHOOD4.22 JEN FULWILER:
MINIVAN FABULOUS TOUR

VIEW FULL CALENDAR



25 11TH AVE AT HUDSON RIVER PARK, NEW YORK, NY 10011



@CITYWINERYNYC / CITYWINERY.COM / 646.751.6033

American Airlines



CONTENTS

VOL. LXIV | NO. 3
SPRING, 2022

the village **VOICE**

Editorial

EDITOR IN CHIEF **R.C. Baker**
ART DIRECTOR **Darrick Rainey**
PUBLISHER **Brian Calle**

Contributors

Michael Atkinson, Ross Barkan, Anna Conkling,
Daniel Felsenthal, Jonathan Goldman, Natasha Ishak,
Mary Lyn Maiscott, Eileen Markey, Stephen Mooallem,
C.S. Muncy, Michael Musto, Brittany Natale, Peter Noel,
Frank Pizzoli, Sarah Ratliff, Matt Rogers, Michael Schwarz,
Ali Smith, Ward Sutton, Katherine Turman, Vincent Velotta,
Christian Viveros-Fauné, Elizabeth Zimmer
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Laura Bell

Advertising

CHIEF REVENUE OFFICER **Steven McKenna**
VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES **Ron Troxell**
SALES MANAGER **Dan Flynn**
LIVE MUSIC & CLUB CATEGORY DIRECTOR **Andrew Gyger**
SALES DIRECTOR **Christopher Hubbert**
SENIOR MEDIA ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE **Jeannie Johnson**
MEDIA ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE **Craig Fralick**
MEDIA ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE **Beth Kurup**
MEDIA ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE **Jade Freeman**
MEDIA ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE **Jim Burns**

Corporate

CEO **Brian Calle**
CHIEF OF STAFF AND EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT **Trevor Smith**
VP, EVENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS **Erin Domash**
CONTROLLER **Ryan Stoll**
CREATIVE DIRECTOR **Darrick Rainey**

Cover photo by Conor Cunningham



From Crimea to this apartment on the Upper West Side to a family member in Moscow to a professor preparing to fight in Odesa—what Putin has wrought. **11**

FEATURES

Our TV, phone, and computer screens are bringing home pictures of the horrors of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. **Anna Conkling** spoke with New Yorkers with family in the war zone and in Russia, and communicated with a Moscow resident opposed to the war and a professor in Ukraine preparing to defend his homeland. **11**

Climate change and corporate takeovers have threatened the world of small ski mountains. **Michael Schwarz** talks with local owners about the necessity of snowmaking, and keeping the atmosphere communal. See page **16**

Inside

4 The Front

Former ACLU head Ira Glasser talks with **Frank Pizzoli** about Skokie, the difference between Democracy and Liberty, ballot box battles, and the kidnapping of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

6 CityState

Eddie Gibbs is a member of the New York State Assembly; he is also a former felon who spent time at Rikers. **Natasha Ishak** talks with Gibbs about his unusual journey, and the importance of the prison classroom.

7 La Dolce Musto

When it comes to chain stores, does NYC have Stockholm Syndrome? **Michael Musto** travels the route from Woolworths to Trader Joe's.

9 New York Mirror

Artist and architect Rafael Herrin-Ferri's photographic survey, *All the Queens Houses*, explores the bright, idiosyncratic architecture of "The World's Borough." **Brittany Natale** talks with him about how architecture reflects culture in the city's largest and most diverse borough.

14 Environment

Kurt Vonnegut-Space-Wanderer communes with **Ali Smith** about the first Earth Day, in 1970, and our continuing destruction of "this sweet life-supporting planet."

19 Reel Time

Did cinema hit a cultural peak in 1972? **Michael Atkinson** runs down the list of great films that illuminated the mess the patriarchy had wrought.

21 Decades of Riffs

Rickie Lee Jones has been there and back. **Mary Lyn Maiscott** talks with the singer-songwriter about the journey, her memoir, and making eye contact during the pandemic.



Jones and Maiscott talking all that jazz a decade ago.

23 Art Diary

Andy Warhol was an enigma—purposefully, many think. **Stephen Mooallem** looks at Warhol's exceptional, unknowable life, explored in *The Andy Warhol Diaries* and narrated by an AI version of Andy himself. **+ VOICE CHOICE:** The Pope of Pop was always full of surprises. **R.C. Baker** seeks some illumination at the Brooklyn Museum exhibition *Andy Warhol: Revelation*.

26 Voice Lit

Claire-Louise Bennett writes about writing, and the vagaries of the human condition. **Daniel Felsenthal** takes the pulse of her second novel, *Checkout 19*.

The Front

FREE SPEECH—IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK

Former ACLU head Ira Glasser talks about Skokie and Charlottesville, battling at the ballot box, and the Brooklyn Dodgers

By Frank Pizzoli



Ira Glasser returns to the scene of the crime.

Foundation for Individual Rights in Education

Ira Glasser, national American Civil Liberties Union executive director from 1978 to 2001 and the subject of the biopic *Mighty Ira* (2020), remains passionate about free speech and baseball. As head of the New York Civil Liberties Union, he joined with the ACLU of Illinois in 1977 to defend the rights of American neo-Nazis to march through the Chicago suburb of Skokie, where about half the residents were Jewish, many of them Holocaust survivors. (The group won the case on First Amendment grounds, but 30,000 ACLU members quit in protest.) Glasser spoke with the *Voice* by phone about what's the same, what's different, and what he believes will and will not work in today's hypercharged political environment. (This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)

Frank Pizzoli: How was *Mighty Ira* received?

Ira Glasser: Most responses were very good. People liked that we went over both social justice history with Skokie and my Brooklyn Dodgers. They were kidnapped to the West Coast, you know.

Do you feel our collective understanding of free speech is being kidnapped?

The film portrays what is the most important, often misunderstood, aspect of free speech. When we protect speech with which we disagree, we're also protecting our own right to say what we want. Our speech is protected if all speech is protected. We don't want to let the government

exclusively decide speech issues.

That's the lesson of Skokie back then, but what about now, what about Charlottesville in 2017?

In Skokie, we had a dozen or two protesters who were crazy and dysfunctional, upset about racial matters and expressing their anti-Semitism. By then, the KKK was dismantled. What they represented was a discredited fringe element. In Charlottesville's "Unite the Right" rally, we saw thousands protest who now comprise a full-fledged movement, and they were being cheered on as "fine people" by then-President Trump. What we have now is a seriously dangerous political mainstream movement.

So how does one engage with this movement? Talk across a table?

No. There are certain people you cannot talk to because they're outside the realm of normal discourse, like the January 6 protesters. Whatever your standard is, there's no way to change Trump, Rudy Giuliani, or Mitch McConnell.

How, then?

We must beat these opponents at the ballot box. It's electoral politics in the raw, with all the restrictive voting laws passed or underway. Just like in the days of Jim Crow, when voting rights were all but nonexistent, we have the same impulses today, to restrict voting behavior in favor of those in power staying in power.

So as nice as "talking it through" might seem, our current situation needs more?

There are two things about "dialogue" we need to acknowledge. One—sometimes you have to write off people. They can't be reached. Second—voting them out through a fair and honest election system is like a national dialogue with folks for whom it isn't at all about talking through differences or reaching compromises. This is why paying attention to redistricting that is dangerously lopsided is so important. We don't want a second round of Jim Crow.

If some people can't be reached, then sue them, like Dominion Voting Systems has done with Rudy Giuliani over his false election fraud claims?

Sometimes that's what is needed. That's what courts are for, to determine the rules of the game. We need to remember that Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote that it is not free speech to *false*ly yell fire in a crowded theater. The "false" part is often dropped off of his most famous declaration. If there's no fire, that's misinformation.

Political dialogue is difficult enough without intentionally being misinforming....

Look, in the realm of politics, what's true and false isn't always clear or easy to determine. But, consistently, the courts at all levels have determined that there was no whole-scale fraud on any meaningful level in the 2020 election. In this instance, our system has so far worked.

How do we accomplish a more honest political discussion when we all live in self-imposed media bubbles?

Free speech is an acquired taste. By that I mean there's more to it than we often realize. We need to teach around the issue.

Teach what?

The difference between Democracy and Liberty. We don't make a clear enough distinction these days, if we ever did. Democracy means that people ought to be able to vote for public officials in fair elections and make most political decisions by majority rule. Liberty, on the other hand, means that even in a democracy, individuals have rights that no majority should be able to take away. Therefore, if barred from full voting rights by a majority, then the minority's rights are diminished. So is their free speech, when held back from voting as we see in state-level laws designed to do just that, especially targeted at minority voters.

The Bill of Rights says: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech." So, if the system works, and states or Congress pass laws perceived as limiting free speech, the Supreme Court can review and decide. Not even Congress can abridge freedom of speech?

That's the way it's supposed to work. But we must consider our history. Women weren't given the right to vote until 1920, or 129 years after the passage of the Bill of Rights guaranteeing free speech. The Bill of Rights was in force for nearly 135 years before Congress granted Native Americans U.S. citizenship.

So, we do not have as illustrious a history around free speech as we may think?

We do not. Most of our "rights" were granted by the Supreme Court between 1954, with *Brown v. Board of Education* banning school segregation, and 1973, when *Roe v. Wade* allowed women legal access to abortion. In this period, we also established Miranda Rights when arrested, banned school-sponsored prayer, and established other standards of equality.

“There are certain people you cannot talk to because they're outside the realm of normal discourse, like the January 6 protesters.”

Joyce Carol Oates, in a tweet in January, wrote: "Today issues are not debated, just deleted." How do we work ourselves out of a canceling culture into something sustainable?

By renewing our commitment to teaching history, civics, critical-thinking skills, so that up-and-coming generations are better equipped to understand how our system was and is intended to work. That's for a better future. In the meantime, as I've said, we must beat our opponents at the ballot box.

What's the difference between "hate" speech, that openly calls for, let's say, white supremacy or denigrates some group—and "demagoguery," which can have the same deleterious effects if individuals, pumped by lies and misinformation, storm the Capitol?

That's the wrong question. It's always a mistake to focus on the content of the speech. We should focus on who is going to be in the position of power to decide what we can say. You want Rudy Giuliani making that decision, or Donald Trump, Mitch McConnell? In that scenario, the ones making free speech decisions will not be you or me or people who are powerless, who are persecuted, who are discriminated against.

Finally, your beloved Brooklyn Dodgers....

Once, long ago, I was interested in joining a movement to bring the Dodgers back to Brooklyn and build a new Ebbets Field. But my Dodgers are now frozen in time, today's Dodgers aren't mine, and the new Mets stadium looks like Ebbets Field. ▮

Frank Pizzoli is a journalist who has been covering politics, queer issues, health-care, and literary celebrities for the past 25 years.



JOIN NYC'S FIRST AND ONLY LIFE PLAN COMMUNITY*



R
E

RIVER'S
EDGE

Your Plan for *Life*

Located on 32-acres, in a protected natural district on the Hudson River and just 20 minutes from Grand Central Station, River's Edge is New York City's first and only Life Plan Community. It has been designed to provide peace of mind, financial security, and a cosmopolitan lifestyle for adults over 62 while offering seamless access to future care options, if needed, right on the River's Edge campus. With elegant independent living apartments, a host of luxurious amenities, and exclusive cultural and wellness programming, residents will enjoy life in a truly vibrant, social community.

RSVP to get an exclusive sneak peek!

Learn more & RSVP! 718-540-4430 | RiversEdge.org/VV
One River's Edge, Riverdale, NY 10471

*Also known as a Continuing Care Retirement Community, or CCRC. For a full disclaimer, visit RiversEdge.org



CityState

FROM RIKERS TO ALBANY, EDDIE GIBBS IS MAKING HISTORY

The lawmaker opens up about moving from incarceration to the State Assembly, and how he plans to use that journey for the public good

By Natasha Ishak



Mayor Eric Adams swears in Eddie Gibbs in February. Will His Honor's endorsement help Gibbs this coming November?

City of New York's official Twitter @nycgov

Edward Gibbs is not your cookie-cutter politician. Before being elected to the State Assembly, in January, Gibbs served time in New York's correctional facilities, making him the first formerly incarcerated person elected to the state legislature.

The distinction has made Gibbs, who goes by "Eddie," stand out in Albany. Many of his new colleagues have eagerly sought his support on a bevy of criminal justice bills since his February inauguration. "The members will walk up to you and say 'Hey... welcome! You have a unique story, unique background. Can we put you on this bill?' And they drive George crazy," Gibbs tells the *Voice* over Zoom from his office (referring to legislative director George Espinal). "But it shows you how important my election is to the body, because we can share this experience."

The 54-year-old represents New York's 68th District, which covers Spanish Harlem, parts of Central Harlem, Randall's Island, and parts of the Upper East Side. The seat was vacated last year when former assembly member Robert Rodriguez was appointed by Governor Kathy Hochul as secretary of state. Gibbs, then a district

leader, quickly secured the Democratic nomination, and won 81% of the votes in a sleepy special election.

But his political journey was unusual, to say the least. After his prison release, Gibbs was hired as a chauffeur by Murray Richman, the celebrity criminal defense attorney who has represented everyone from rappers Jay-Z and DMX to the city's Mob families, including the Gambinos and Genoveses. The eccentric attorney took Gibbs under his wing, introducing him to a powerful environment of lawyers, prosecutors, and judges. Eventually, Richman encouraged Gibbs to go into politics.

"We said to him 'Hey, if that's what you want to do, you can't go forward without taking these steps,'" recalls Stacey Richman, Murray's daughter, also a lawyer. (Stacey and Murray Richman spoke to the *Voice* by phone.) The father-daughter team helped Gibbs compile his application to secure a Certificate of Good Conduct (New York prohibits some individuals with a record of felony convictions or misdemeanors from holding public office; to be eligible they must obtain this certificate), which cleared a legal path allowing the former felon to run.

Backed by the Richmans, Gibbs ran for the Assembly seat in 2006 against incumbent Adam Clayton Powell IV, son of the late political powerhouse Adam Clayton Powell Jr. According to Board of Elections records, Gibbs lost the primary but made a respectable showing, winning 18% of the vote share. That experience further ignited his ambitions for public office, and pushed him into more community organizing. "I realized, Oh, people kind of gravitated toward me and voted for me," Gibbs says of his first campaign. "I was excited." He became an activist, participating in political rallies and organizing charity events focused on children and senior citizens, before being elected as a district leader.

Gibbs holds a special connection to his constituency. As the second-eldest of four, he was raised by a single mother in East Harlem's projects. His family survived on welfare, but Gibbs recalls his childhood like many others': He played hooky with friends, chased after girls, and ran errands for neighbors with his older brother for pocket money. But as the brothers grew up, they began dealing drugs. They started with marijuana, and by age 17, Gibbs was hustling cocaine. The teenager's rap sheet included pleading guilty to a violation in a domestic violence case and a drug conviction.

Then, as Gibbs tells it, in 1987 an older dealer just out of prison showed up at the family's front door, expecting to rob money from Gibbs. A fight broke out, ending with a knife wound in Gibbs's leg and the other guy shot dead. Afterward, Gibbs walked with his mother, who was present at the time of the incident, to the nearby precinct and turned himself in. He spent 17 months on Rikers Island before accepting a plea bargain on the advice of a public defense attorney. "I wasn't a tough guy," Gibbs says of entering Rikers as a teenager. "And so going into this other world... it was like, so foreign, and I was really afraid." The city's jail was, and still is, notoriously violent (Gibbs calls it "gladiator school"). He eventually served four and a half years in correctional facilities upstate.

Inside the system, Gibbs's only focus was to get out. He enrolled in a prison education program while serving time at Cayuga Correctional, and earned his associate's degree in business administration. He was released in 1991. "He wanted to be someone who was effective," says Murray Richman, who Gibbs considers his mentor. "He wanted to be taken seriously. And the fact that he got elected, he can be taken seriously."

Despite the painful ordeal, Gibbs credits his rehabilitation to his time hitting the books while behind bars. "I think if I beat the case in 1988... I woulda came right back home to the streets," he states. "Staying in prison helped me out because it gave me an opportunity to get my GED, followed by a college degree." Gibbs's experience confirms what we already know from research: Prison education programs and other training reduce the likelihood that an individual will return to prison after their release. One of the largest studies ever done on correctional education, by the U.S. Department of Justice and the RAND Corporation, found

"Staying in prison helped me out because it gave me an opportunity to get my GED, followed by a college degree."

that incarcerated individuals involved in such programs were 43% less likely to be reincarcerated.

As someone who personally understands the challenges former felons face when reentering society, Gibbs offers singular insight as an elected official—and his colleagues recognize that. While serving on the Assembly's Corrections Committee, he has co-sponsored several criminal justice reform bills, including legislation to repeal the ban preventing incarcerated individuals from receiving financial aid for higher-education learning through the state's Tuition Assistance Program, and the "Clean Slate" bill, which would seal most misdemeanor and felony records several years after an individual's release from prison. Notably, Gibbs is also the only Black legislator on that committee, despite wide recognition that criminal justice systems have a disproportionate impact on Black communities.

However, on the heavily politicized topic of bail reform, Gibbs—who spent more than a year at Rikers without a conviction before his plea deal—has refrained from taking an official position. His policy team is studying the issue, and he plans to hold a town hall on it, but he says his constituents are more concerned with other things, adding, "Gun violence is out of control in our district." He is working on a number of initiatives, including Mayor Eric Adams's "Blueprint to End Gun Violence" and a guns-to-jobs program that will hopefully go a step beyond gun-buyback incentives. "As opposed to paying kids to give up their weapons, we want to give them a career, something that's sustainable," Gibbs explains.

Gibbs's election to New York's State Assembly is certainly one for the books, but it could be short-lived if he does not win reelection to a full two-year term this coming November. He has already received an endorsement from Adams, the mayor's first endorsement of a campaign for state legislature in the 2022 cycle. Yet Gibbs is more focused on what he feels is important: serving the community he grew up in. "Certainly we are petitioning and we are preparing for a primary in June, but we are not going crazy with it," he says about the upcoming election. The paycheck and privileges of his new job are just temporary perks, because, as Gibbs puts it, regardless of the outcome he will continue serving the community one way or another "until I die." ■

Natasha Ishak is a freelance journalist covering politics in New York City.

NYC HAS BECOME SUBURBIA—AND I'M SUBMITTING!

From Woolworths and Bag Man to Trader Joe's and H&M: NYC's love/hate history with chain stores

By Michael Musto



Must have . . . microwavable . . . burritos . . .

In the mid-'90s, when a Kmart opened on West 34th Street, followed by one on Astor Place, in the East Village, there were citywide cries of "Gentrification! New York is over! The sky is falling!" Jump ahead to 2020, when word got out that both Kmart stores were set to shutter and people were sobbing all over again and screaming, "What??? How can this be? The city's finished!"

Yikes. What could have happened in the intervening 25 years to cause this tumultuous flip-flop? Well, Stockholm Syndrome had clearly set in, and we had become numb to the influx of chain stores while also realizing that if one of them closed, it was a dramatic economic sign that things were worse than we thought. An outpost of something so large and generic was supposed to at least guarantee stability for any location. And so, we bizarrely wept for the fallen Kmart. (Besides, I actually have to admit that I enjoyed going there. More on that later.)

What a change in the climate! In the '80s, Manhattan chain stores and restaurants

were almost as scarce as bike lanes and cauliflower crust pizzas. Naturally, there were fast food spots like McDonald's and Burger King, and grocery chains like D'Agostino (still there) and A&P (not), as well as the variety store Woolworths, where I got paintings on black velvet and also enjoyed hamming it up in the photo booth. But in 1994, the first NYC Starbucks opened and my head spun from seeing all the sheep lining up for Seattle-based lattes that didn't taste nearly as good to me as plain old deli coffee. That same year, Rudy Giuliani began the first of his two mayoral terms, and seemed hungry to sanitize the city in order to bring in more tourist dollars. Rudy fostered an environment where big money would be kowtowed to, as Times Square became a place with way more superstores than porn palaces.

In 1997, the first NYC Target debuted (in Brooklyn), selling everything from throw rugs to board games. At the same time, we saw the continued expansion of all-purpose pharmaceutical stores—a seemingly endless

array of places to get headache pills, suppositories, and cereal. Not to be topped, in 2000 H&M started selling jazzy, low-priced designer collaborations at its very first U.S. store, on Fifth Avenue. More than a dozen NYC H&Ms later, it's pretty easy to find that place—or a Gap or an Old Navy—but don't stop at the multitude of fast food options along the way or that cute onesie you had your eye on might not fit by the time you get there.

NYC is now one big chain of chains, to the point where a mom-and-pop store like the Round the Clock deli on my corner is shocking to behold. I support it like crazy—though I have to admit I've also shown up for the big-budget competition. I've traipsed around my neighborhood Trader Joe's for five years now, looking for microwavable burritos and peaches-and-cream-flavored

rbfmr / Shutterstock

yogurt, then schmoozing with the refreshingly offbeat help at the register. Against all odds, this place has become my new Studio 54. The workers seem well treated, so they radiate a friendly glow and will gladly have an insouciant conversation, if you're up to it. (One joked with me about my very large cucumber, while another regaled me with the story of his grandfather's love of iodized salt.) Checkout lines usually snake all around the Murray Hill store, but seeing as there are no fewer than 30 cashiers on duty, you're out of there

faster than you can say "peppercorn-garlic boneless pork tenderloin."

I'll also put on my boogie shoes to venture over to the Soho branch (it has extra-spacious aisles and I keep hoping the cute worker who knew all about pasta comes back), as well as to the Chelsea location—though I poignantly remember when that space was a Barnes & Noble where I once had a reading and signing. I went from selling books about bohemia to buying Citrus Shrimp Bowls! I guess it's gentrification either way. And I also remember that the people who mourned the closing of a couple of Barnes & Nobles were the same ones who had plotzed when B&N first came to the city, insisting that this signaled the end of independent bookstores. (Shades of the Kmart trajectory.) New Yorkers apparently love to chant "Everything used to be better" no matter what, and I've certainly been guilty of that broken record myself. (God, weren't records better than downloads?)

But one chain store replacing another has become an all too NYC phenomenon. We've

dangerously become like virtually any other American metropolis, in that we have the same chains offering the same merch to similar types of people. Fortunately, the chains have been stymied in their attempt to reach complete dominance. Amazon and other online shopping destinations have cut into their ka-ching (though it's hard to celebrate that too enthusiastically, considering Amazon's record of staff oppression. Are they really any better than Walmart?). Also, there was a sense that some of those megapharmacies had overshot and opened too many locations; you'd need to have an outlandish number of health and beauty concerns to require more than one big drug store per two-block radius.

Furthermore, in 2020 Covid-19 lockdowns added to the chain store crisis, and we saw some very large spaces sitting empty as if in a Wes Craven film. But corporation fetishists needn't worry—the chains have been slowly rebounding and are still everywhere, like crabgrass, with no dearth of Best Buys, Party Citys, Dunkin' Donuts, and 7-Elevens in the five boroughs. Any day of the week, I can tumble out my door and nab software, a tinsel wig, and a Slurpee, and be home in time to order a Popeye's delivery.

I guess all these stores do serve some kind of purpose, whether it be specific (like LensCrafters, which in 2020 converted two Manhattan outlets into expanded "flagship stores") or general (the 27 Rite Aids in NYC offer everything from hair conditioner to vaccines). And yes, I was one of the sobbers when Kmart closed, even though it was already a ghost of its former self. At its peak, Kmart was a place I could wander around and find cheap pants (as my waistline expanded, they miraculously still had my size), great gifts for Mommy (she loved the Jaclyn Smith collection of patterned blouses, and I tried a few on myself), and impossibly cute knick-knacks, often involving Snoopy or Disney characters. Best of all was the post-Christmas sale, when the leftover yuletide decorations and candies were marked down to as much as 80% off. It was a great deal—and the candy tasted exactly the same a year later.

You could never seem to find anyone who worked there and might give you needed information, but I must say the customer service department was great—they would generally take stuff back and give you a refund, no questions asked (which might be one reason they went kaput). The customers themselves could be cute, too: In this soulless but distracting theme park, I would run into punk rockers, editors, and Minnie Driver, and there was also quality alone time when I'd sit at the short-lived second-floor K Café for a nasty grilled cheese sandwich.

The truth is, all these years I've been making up for the childhood and adolescence I never got to enjoy, because in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, all we had was a Korvettes, and it was a 40-minute walk for little, pre-bicycle Mikey! I didn't have the shopping mall experience growing up, where you could spend a whole day hanging with friends and just being young and silly amidst a backdrop of glitzy commerce. But now, I can treat these places like free entertainment attractions and bounce around

them in search of a giddy escape from the isolation of writing all day.

I can easily spend hours at the 620 Sixth Avenue complex that contains Bed, Bath and Beyond, Marshalls, and TJ Maxx—all under one roof! This isn't exactly a downtown Lincoln Center, but it is some sort of one-stop shopping destination for festive crap to spruce up your home. Whether I'm perusing pillowcases, spice racks, mugs, or jumpsuits, this triplex of crass yet affordable capitalism always amuses, and though Bed, Bath is famous for sending so many "20% off" coupons in the mail that you can just stay home and do your walls with them, most people would rather go there to actually use them on purchases.

It's a far cry from when I used to go to marches and rallies against gentrification, but I've found that no landlord has ever looked out the window at screaming protesters and said, "Aww! These New Yorkers don't want trendy stores to replace art galleries! Cancel everything! Rip up the contracts!" It's hard to keep screeching about gentrification when you don't see any results from the resistance, and it's extra-challenging to stay focused when we're nowadays battling an attempt to overturn democracy, not just open a cupcake shop. So I've sort of lost my will to fight chain stores, though I'm determined to keep both my spunk and my sense of humor about them. I'll gladly sign up for a CVS rewards card just to get three bags of jelly beans for the price of two, but then I'll block them when they start emailing me



Kmart on Astor Place: We hated it and then we loved it. And now it's gone.

RCB

about sale offers, so I can convince myself that I've maintained some level of high-toned dignity.

Through it all, I will always miss those old-school one-offs like Bag Man—a three-floor West 34th Street value center that featured light-up Jesus portraits, panting dog statues, and other irresistible kitsch. (The store closed in 2015, and the space is now the "For Lease" lobby of a high-rise.) With that gem and the nearby

Weber's discount store gone, I've been relying heavily on the Lot Less and Jack's 99 Cent Store chains to satisfy my questionable taste, but, as quirky as they are, they will never be Bag Man.

And so, the bigger, slicker chain establishments beckon and I robotically yield, if only as a fascinated observer. It turns out that acting like a tourist in your own town is sometimes the only way to get by. Sprawling entities like Hudson Yards and, to a lesser extent, Chelsea Food Market, string a lot of chains together into a relentless experience that it's better to react to with an "Oh, wow!" than an "Oy, vey!" just for sanity's sake. I treat these retail monoliths as if they were in another city—which they might as well be—so I feel like I've really traveled when I get there. I practically send postcards.

On the way back home, I realize that I certainly don't need a Chase Bank every three blocks, especially since they keep hounding me to refinance but would never approve me if I did. But I do like having a 24-hour Duane Reade a block away from my building; those 5 a.m. suppositories might come in handy some morning. Besides, when I came down with restless leg syndrome in 2018, the store saved me because I would spend late nights angsty pacing up and down the aisles just to pass the time. They looked at me weirdly, but, marvelously, they let me keep pacing.

And stores or no stores, I just can't exist anywhere but New York. I don't drive—and my fruity persona would not exactly be celebrated in Oshkosh—so I've had to succumb to NYC as suburbia, trying to make the best of the fact that nothing stays the same. Adding to the appeal, we still have the finest museums, bars, theater, queer representation, and mouthy populace of anywhere I've ever been, so I'm not going anywhere else. I think we even have the best chain stores! And when the city was awash in the sounds of the clanking pots and pans of everyone leaning out their windows to thank medical workers at the height of the pandemic, in '20, I was

reminded that this is my eternal home. The Trader Joe's-like lines for early voting to put Biden/Harris in office and the dancing in the streets when they won underlined all of that with a bodega-bought Sharpie.

And just like reality TV stars don't detract from Meryl Streep—there's room for both—cheesy chain stores can never completely take away actual culture. There will always be gentrification, but you simply have to find the culture you want by searching a little harder for it. (Whatever borough you're in, perhaps try some of the other boroughs! Just a thought.) I remember the 1980s, when Alphabetland—the fabled far stretch of the East Village—was a territory you'd be crazy to venture into without a Sherman tank. Well, though that area has been gentrified with octopus-taco-serving restaurants and such, I recently moseyed around Avenue B and passed by people dancing salsa in a storefront, a diverse crowd intently watching a poetry reading in another, and other distinct signs of creative life. It's not as simple as "The East Village is over!"

Ugh. Am I becoming an apologist for urban displacement? It's that Stockholm Syndrome thing again. But "making lemonade" is the reality of what NYC has been for years, even if the lemonade might now be the same organic, artisanal stuff you get in Sacramento. A particularly dark side to that reality is that Chick-fil-A—which unapologetically gives big donations to anti-queer causes—opened here in 2015 and not only didn't flop, it's expanded to 10 Gotham locations. I guess the chicken is so delicious that some New Yorkers don't mind killing queers with every bite. I avoid their establishments, proving once and for all that I will only support corporate greed, not crimes against humanity. That's a tough high-wire act to pull off, but I manage it, and the best thing about it is I'm so cheap that I'm not really paying all that much into the corporate greed either. I've never actually bought anything at Hudson Yards except for a snack at Citarella; I usually just go for the free Chinese New Year festivities and the chance to feel like a teen for the first time. At TJ Maxx's recently, I was captivated by a \$16 vase that was cleverly shaped like a man's head, complete with eyeglasses, probably from LensCrafters. It was almost like an old Bag Man item, if at double the price. But en route to the register, I convinced myself not to go through with the purchase ("It will grow tiresome") and put it right back on the shelf. I'd like to also put Manhattan back to where it was, but I can't, so here I am. See you at Trader Joe's, by the cauliflower crust pizzas. 🍷

Michael Musto is best known for his outspoken Village Voice column "La Dolce Musto," which began in 1984. (With the Voice's return, he is delighted to be back as a contributor.) He writes a gossip column for Queerty, has penned four books, found himself on the Out100 list of the most influential LGBTQs, and is streaming in docs on Netflix, Hulu, Vice, and Showtime.

**EVERY SUNDAY
ULTIMATE
BEATLES BRUNCH**

**STRAWBERRY
FIELDS**

**LIVE IN CONCERT
FROM BROADWAY'S BEATLEMANIA**

ALL AGES • BRUNCH BUFFET • BOTTOMLESS DRINK PACKAGES • GROUP PACKAGES

CITY WINERY
NEW YORK CITY

PRESENTED BY
THE VILLAGE VOICE

25 11TH AVE AT HUDSON RIVER PARK • CITYWINERY.COM/NEWYORK

Gilded splendor in Rego Park.



Rafael Herrin-Ferri

Green day in Ozone Park.



Rafael Herrin-Ferri

ARCHITECTURE WORTHY OF 'THE WORLD'S BOROUGH'

Rafael Herrin-Ferri's *All the Queens Houses* reveals how architecture reflects culture in the city's most diverse neighborhoods

By Brittany Natale

For the better part of a decade, Queens-based architect and artist Rafael Herrin-Ferri traversed Queens with his camera, taking photos of its unique housing stock. Week after week, he crisscrossed the city's largest borough, capturing the bright-blue beach bungalows of the Rockaways, the reimagined Tudors of Auburndale, and the pastel-colored Queen Annes of Woodside. The project, which slowly grew in scope over time, eventually became known as "All the Queens Houses," with an eponymously titled book released in October 2021.

Similar to the work of German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher, who get a shout-out in the book's foreword, Herrin-Ferri's photos derive from a systematic approach. Each shot follows a template—clean, straight lines paired with consistent lighting (achieved partly by shooting on cloudy days, which evens out the daylight) and framing. However, dissimilar to the Bechers' stark black and white images, Herrin-Ferri's are exuberantly colorful, both literally and figuratively. The shots shine a light on details that are often ignored in formal architectural surveys. John Hill, architect and author of the architecture-book-review blog Archidose, wrote that

Herrin-Ferri's project is reminiscent of the guidebooks created by Tokyo-based architecture firm Atelier Bow-Wow, in that Herrin-Ferri's book also focuses on the often overlooked built environment. Indeed, Herrin-Ferri's work captures the unbridled expression that is so particular to Queens, something I know well as a Queens native. I can still vividly recall the summer weekend in 2001 when my mother decided to paint the metal door of our bone-white Queens home a bright cherry red. In Queens, any given house's designs and details are just as diverse as its residents.

Perhaps the melange of Queens was written in the stars—after all, Flushing Meadows was the site of the World's Fair in both 1939 and 1964. The motto of the 1939 fair, "The World of Tomorrow," feels like foreshadowing now: Today, nearly half of the borough's 2.3 million residents are foreign-born and over 100 different languages are spoken here; Guinness World Records has called it "the most diverse urban place on the planet."

The *Voice* spoke with Herrin-Ferri about his exploration of the many different pockets of Queens, the artists he finds inspirational, and what it was like photographing "The World's Borough." (This interview has

been edited for length and clarity.)

Brittany Natale: *How did the project come about? Did you know from the beginning just how large it was going to be?*

Rafael Herrin-Ferri: I've always been interested in photographing the vernacular of things, the overlooked built environment. I had a blog before this [project] called "Architecture Happens," and the subtitle was "Modern moments in everyday building." It was vignettes of things and vernacular structures that looked unintentionally modern. That was the sort of overarching theme. That became kind of a landing page for a lot of different thoughts. Once [my family and I] moved to Queens, from Manhattan, I started seeing a lot of this stuff all over my neighborhood. As I'd go into different neighborhoods it would just start creeping up out there, in the periphery, these interesting moments in vernacular architecture. Slowly I started adding those [photos] into the website.

I've always kind of had an interest in geographies and territories—what comprises self-described neighborhoods, or cities, or countries, you know? These kinds of notions of identity and place. So I thought I would keep exploring because there seems to be a very different attitude here in Queens. After living in Manhattan for 10 years, especially with the space constraints and the density, there isn't too much of an opportunity to be so individualistic and expressive with the housing stock. But I sensed in Queens there was. So slowly, [photographing homes in Queens] became a kind of a routine, a kind of full-body experience. It was just taking these little bites out of the Queens apple, as it were, for a long time.

What did a typical shoot day look like for you?

There were a lot of constraints once I re-

alized, "Okay, I need an evenly lit photograph with cloud cover." It became a very analytical thing, it was almost done in a scientific manner, to get each of these houses together in the same format. The first step was basically to see that there were going to be clouds—I was cross-referencing three different weather apps to be as sure as I could. Even today, I'm seeing the cloud cover and I'm getting a bit antsy, like, "I need to be out there." It became very psychological. So that was step one. I also had to see what kind of time availability I had. So if I had an hour I would obviously do something quick nearby, and just look at the express trains. I had to get to know the system very intimately. What I found, in the end, is that every neighborhood, actually every block, has some interesting houses.

Do you know how many houses you photographed?

It's in the thousands, maybe three or four thousand. Most of these photos are of a house's facade ... a house portrait. But then in a lot of cases, it would be a detail, an ornament, the front area or the front yard area. Those front yard spaces are some of my favorites. There's a whole combination of this sort of suburban garden and urban quality of the front yard space. It's very unique in Queens.

In the book, you mentioned that you spoke to some of the residents of these homes. Can you talk a little bit about some of these exchanges, and what you learned from them?

Most general interactions were, "Why are you photographing my house?" And I would respond, "Well, I really like what you've done here, it's very interesting and unorthodox and personal. It just brings a sense of sort of participating in the public realm that you normally don't get in a lot of places in New York." But, you know, with the help of my Spanish, in a lot of cases I was



South Ozone Park's stacked zigzags.

Rafael Herrin-Ferri



Rectangles and peaks in Laurelton.

Rafael Herrin-Ferri

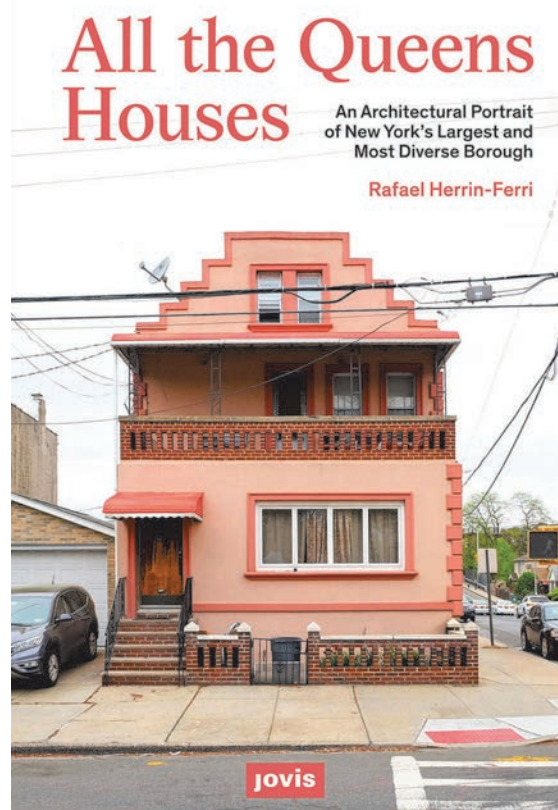
able to talk to people. I would sometimes ask a neighbor if they were outside what they thought of their neighbor's home. "Es su casa, they can do what they want with it," they'd say. There is this very tolerant attitude, there's a lot of respect. But I think behind it is this tolerance, like, "Look we're all immigrants here, we all want to do our thing and be expressive and whatever property we have is ours to do as we please," you know?

I really enjoyed talking to people and seeing that they are trying in many cases to bring something from "home." A great majority of [these houses] have been transformed. Like I mentioned in the intro, people putting Spanish tile on Tudor houses—it's one layer on top of another. There's this guy in Richmond Hill, who is Guyanese, and he painted his Queen Anne house completely turquoise. Monochromatic, no trim, nothing, all turquoise. He was there in front of his house and I managed to talk to him. He even invited me into his backyard, which was also all turquoise. He said he wanted to be reminded of the Caribbean Sea, and that's the kind of color that makes things feel alive. In most places in the world, the building stock is a lot more colorful than it is here. Here, people come and things look really drab. For instance, it's rough coming back and going home after our trips. You notice all the gray and brown, and a kind of hermetic, box-like feel. Whereas you go to other places and it's open and colorful.

In the foreword of the book you mentioned Bernd and Hilla Becher, and how you tried to shoot on overcast days like they did. Did you look to any other photographers or artists for inspiration along the way?

The Bechers started the Dusseldorf School, in Germany—maybe you've seen this guy, [Andreas] Gursky, who does these super-large photographs that are panoramas of supermarkets in China. It's a lot of density and small variety. He had a MoMA show that was pretty popular 10 or 15 years

ago. Anyhow, there's a bunch of photographers that came out of [that school]. There are also some photographers in Hong Kong that are some of my favorites. Michael Wolf



is one of the photographers that really looked at the built environment of Hong Kong in a similar way.

I like to describe my project as a mix between architectural photography, which normally prioritizes the structure and doesn't have people too prominently in the photographs, and street photography. [Street photography] is a lot more personal and focuses more on the happy accidents

and life moving around you—that's an element of Queens. A street photographer I like a lot is Saul Leiter. There's also a current street photographer, David Rothenberg,

and he's photographed in Queens. He just put out an amazing book about the Jackson Heights 7 train station, *Roosevelt Station*, it's called. It's mostly people and light coming through. There's another with airplanes flying over East Elmhurst, called *Landing Lights Park*. Those [images] feature planes mixing with the architecture—a lot of times you're looking at the idiosyncrasies of the architecture and then a plane is added into the mix. I find his work so fresh and so reflective of what present-day Queens is. In some ways, those elements kind of are solidified into an architectural form, in the houses that I have photographed and featured. I follow a few photographers, although I try not to distract myself too much with other people's projects.

How do you think having a dual perspective, as both a photographer and an architect, has informed this project?

I'm aware of all the "rules" people are "breaking" and the historical styles and traditions—for me that's the humor of it a little bit. These structures where people just do what they will with historical forms, and then in a lot of cases modernize them, just by stripping away stuff or flattening them. That was very interesting. What I am really reflecting on as an architect is the rules of architecture in residential architecture, because in a way it's just like cooking or dressing or anything else—it's personal. People kind of do their own thing and have

"I would sometimes ask a neighbor if they were outside what they thought of their neighbor's home. 'Es su casa, they can do what they want with it,' they'd say."

to DIY it for the most part. It doesn't need to be so high design.

This kind of aspirational [idea] of having a high design product, a living product, I think is just the wrong attitude—it's kind of a consumerist attitude. It's, in the end, very inflexible, because you can't just add or slap on things. You need something that is not as precious that you can grow with. I think that's what I love about Queens. What people here are adding to their houses isn't for the purpose of the market. It's more that they are going to enjoy their house, they are going to represent their house, it is their ancestral home. There is that sense that this is the home base, kind of what you may feel when you go back to your family's home in Queens. And people in Queens don't want to sacrifice that. ▮

Brittany Natale, a born-and-raised New Yorker, is a freelance writer who often writes about the city's vibrant history and culture. Her work has appeared in the Village Voice, i-D, and Teen Vogue, among other publications.

FAMILIES CAUGHT IN RUSSIA'S WAR ON UKRAINE

From Odesa to Moscow to the Upper West Side via Crimea, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has hit home on many fronts

By Anna Conkling



Conor Cunningham

Walking in Central Park, but thinking about Ukraine and Russia: Far from war, but not from its pain.

A border on a map is all that separates eastern Ukraine from Russia. Across that boundary exist similar cultures, and citizens who have referred to each other as close kin. Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, has destroyed all of that in a month, by invading Ukraine. He has set the two nations against each other for Russia's political gain and territorial expansion. The attack has resulted, so far (though these numbers are constantly changing), in over three million refugees fleeing Ukraine to Poland and other countries, more than 900 civilian deaths, \$100 billion and climbing in damages, and an alleged assassination attempt on Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The invasion is the largest war on the ground in Europe since World War II.

As the world watches, all those with family members in Ukraine try every day to communicate with their loved ones, who are caught in the crossfire of bombs and tanks. At the same time, people who grew up in the era of the Soviet Union are reminded of what it was like to live in a time when total government control and propaganda were all they knew.

"Elya" grew up in Crimea, in the 1980s, not long before the breakup of the Soviet

Union. At the time, Crimea was still considered a part of Ukraine, until Russia annexed the peninsula in 2014. She asked that the *Voice* withhold her real name, as she is afraid she could be traced back to her family in Russia, who Putin could harm if they were found to have contributed to spreading opposition to the war. Now in her 30s, Elya lives on the Upper West Side. She spoke to the *Voice* about her upbringing in the Soviet Union.

Elya's father, Sergey, is a classically trained painter from Siberia who grew up in the Soviet Union in the decades following World War II. At the time, the damages wreaked by Joseph Stalin, then the leader of the Soviet Union, were still felt daily. Sergey said that both of his grandfathers were murdered by Stalin, and he believes others in his family were as well.

Despite growing up at a time in Siberia when there wasn't enough food and people were living in extreme poverty, Sergey remained optimistic. His artwork was not dark, reflecting a childhood in an impoverished country, but colorful and full of life. Sergey remained hopeful that he would be able to travel outside the Soviet Union and see the world one day. His family moved to

Kyrgyzstan when he was 10, where, he said, life was easier and there was more food. Sergey met his wife, Alfya, in art school in Kyrgyzstan; the couple married in 1980 and moved to Crimea, where Alfya had lived since she was 4. Elya and her older sister, Margarita, were born in the 1980s and grew up in Crimea.

The family remembers that, before the end of the Soviet Union, they lived in a sort of ignorant bliss. They had a good family life, and they stayed out of politics. However, when Ukraine declared independence in August of 1991 and the Soviet Union fell four months later, life in Ukraine became harder. "I remember life revolved around the government," recalled Elya.

"My childhood was very happy. But, looking back as an adult, you know there's certain things that weren't right, that the government shouldn't have been doing." For Elya, this included stores carrying only one brand of shampoo throughout the entire country, from one state-sanctioned supplier, in limited quantities. Or parents having to trade with other parents pairs of children's shoes, because many sizes weren't carried, in the hopes of finding a pair that fit their growing children's feet.

"If you run your people down, and all they think about is survival day to day, they're not gonna have time to organize themselves and overthrow the government," Elya observed.

A deep recession in the early post-Soviet era led to economic and infrastructure problems. Sometimes the family would be out of water for hours, and the electricity would cut out. Margarita recalled that around this time, crime was high in Ukraine,

as the new state was being established. However, back in 1989 the family had finally been able to travel outside of the Soviet Union, and Sergey and Alfya had visited her family in Connecticut. "I saw the country. I saw people, and I felt like I could live here," said Sergey. When they returned to Ukraine, Sergey had decided he had to move his family to America. In 1995, the family packed up and moved to Connecticut, with the goal of finding "the American Dream" and living a truly free life. "You don't know it's weird until you're out of there," said Elya. "When we came to the United States, it was a shocking experience in a great way as well, because it felt like you're liberated."

Just two weeks after their move, even though neither Margarita nor Elya spoke English, they were enrolled in school (and in an English as a Second Language program). Sergey continued his career in art and has since worked as a painter and muralist throughout New York City and Connecticut. Alfya now owns a spa, and both Margarita and Elya attended Parsons School of Design. Elya remained in the city and works as an art director; Margarita moved back to Connecticut, where she is an

"If you run your people down, and all they think about is survival day to day, they're not gonna have time to organize themselves and overthrow the government."

interior designer. The family has been in America for 27 years, nearly as long as Ukraine has been an independent country. They still have ties to loved ones in Ukraine and Russia. The war has caused them to fear for their family and friends back home—Sergey and Alfya try to speak to family in Ukraine as often as they can, keeping in touch while towns are bombed and thousands seek refuge in Poland every day.

Alfya's nephew moved with his family to Lviv, a major city close to Ukraine's western border with Poland, which they hoped would be safer—along with more than 200,000 internally displaced people, according to Lviv's mayor. However, on March 18, Russian missiles struck an aircraft repair facility near an airport in Lviv, the first strike on the city since the invasion began. Alfya's nephew and his son are within the 18-to-60-year-old age range of men who must stay in Ukraine in case they are needed for the military. The rest of his family is staying behind with him; his wife doesn't want to leave him alone.

"It's heartbreaking, because my parents moved us to the United States with this idea of 'American Dream' freedom, to give your children a better life," said Elya. "To see my family that I love deeply suffer for these basic things, freedom, the thing that's being taken away from my family in Crimea, my family in Ukraine, and my family in Russia. It's unbelievable to watch."

While the world rallies in support of Ukraine, the treatment of people from Russia has been different. On February 22, President Biden began to impose sanctions on Russia to freeze support to Putin and his regime; as a result, many companies have stopped doing business in Russia. In New York, some people have refused to support Russian businesses, boycotting restaurants and any company having to do with Russia. This tactic has gotten so extreme that Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine has spoken up: "We need to take on Putin and his inner circle while continuing to embrace our many Russian-speaking neighbors. Unacceptable that these businesses are suffering," wrote Levine on Twitter.

The website of the iconic Russian Tea Room, in Midtown, has a message on its home-page that reads, in part, "The Rus-

sian Tea Room renounces Russia's unprovoked acts of war in the strongest possible terms. Just as the original founders, Soviet defectors who were displaced by the revolution, stood against Stalin's Soviet Union, we stand against Putin and with the people of Ukraine."

While Russian Americans can use their voices to speak out against the war, any act of opposition in Russia could result in a 15-year prison sentence. For Elya's cousin in Moscow, there is fear and uncertainty about what Putin will do next, and if he will inflict harm on his own citizens. Her cousin, who will be referred to as "Dmitri," has requested that his real name be withheld for his safety; he spoke to the *Voice* through a secure app. He claimed that most Russians were not prepared for the war until it happened, not really believing it would go that far, and that when reality set in, people ran to the banks, hoping to change their money for dollars in case of an economic collapse. They stocked up on products before things became more expensive (Dmitri said many things cost three to four times more now than before) or unavailable. As businesses like McDonald's and Netflix pull out of Russia, Dmitri, who owns a business that helps restaurants open, feels sure that the hospitality industry will suffer, with businesses closing up.

"We are feeling this emotional depression and stress. You can feel it walking along the streets," Dmitri told the *Voice*, explaining that in Russia, there is a fear that the country will revert to a Soviet Union-style regime, or something similar to North Korea. A large percentage of people he knows are opposed to the war, he told us, but many are too afraid to protest. In Moscow, for instance, where Dmitri said the majority does not support the war, police patrol the city, looking for protesters to arrest. Dmitri is also afraid that the war in Ukraine will result in a civil war in Russia, and the deaths of Russian citizens. Many of those who oppose the war are frantically trying to escape Putin's grasp. Some are fleeing Russia without any plan of where to go or with any ties to other countries.

"In my opinion, many people are just fleeing without a plan or any financial backup," Dmitri explained. "That's not a great solution, they didn't think things through. Just to flee without family or friends in another country. What would they do there? They are not really wanted there. I just don't think it's the right decision."

Dmitri spoke about how his fears center on "the unknown"—the uncertainty of what Putin will do. He believes that Putin is mentally unstable, having isolated himself for years, cut off ties with other countries, and surrounded himself with a circle that tells him only what he wants to hear. "He was confident that the Russian army would reach Kyiv and occupy it within 90 hours. Convinced that Ukrainians will welcome them and greet them with flowers," said Dmitri. "He thinks the same thing about our country. He thinks everyone agrees with him and supports him. That everyone is happy. Instead, he and the people around him hold absolute power." However, Dmitri

added, "I think even his circle can't understand or predict his actions."

He then said, "And that's how we've been living. Propaganda is working well."

Now, Dmitri has made the decision to try to leave Russia. "I cannot be on the same territory as the people who are supporting this war. I have nothing in common with them. These are not my people. A true Russian is against this. If things change, I will gladly return and live in Russia." Dmitri is also worried about what future generations of Russians will have to go through because

Sergey put up an Instagram post supporting Ukraine. A friend who is opening a museum in Russia commented in support of Russia's invasion.

The spread of disinformation is so ingrained in human history that it can be traced back to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, in which a prisoner who broke free tries to explain to his fellow prisoners, who have spent their lives in the cave, that they are being lied to about what reality is. The other prisoners tell him they don't believe him, and remain in the cave.



Sunflowers in "Elya"'s apartment in NYC. The national flower of Ukraine, it has become a global symbol of solidarity.

Conor Cunningham

of this war. "I'm afraid in our country, if you know its history, changes only happened when there was blood and war. I'm afraid that my generation, and generations to follow, will spend their lives convincing the world that Russians are not fascists."

If Putin does turn his wrath on Russian citizens, Dmitri is certain that no one will come to help them. "Just like no one is coming to help Ukraine," he said. "Ukraine is fighting on its own, no one is sending troops. No one is going to interfere because they are afraid of World War III."

While Dmitri and his inner circle are not in support of the war, it's unclear exactly how many people in Russia do agree with it. In some parts of the country, Dmitri said, a rural or older population does not have access to the Internet or know how to get around the government's Internet block, and many watch the government-controlled TV channels daily and don't question what they hear there. A few days ago,

Similarly, Margarita spoke about how Russian propaganda is so embedded in the lives of Russian citizens that some people are "brainwashed," advocating for the war or turning a blind eye, supporting Putin every step of the way. "It's so incomputable to me that now Russians and Ukrainians, which are so close, literally brother nations, that someone would do something like this," she said. "It's really very difficult for me to wrap my head around it. There are so many intermarriages, people don't look at Russia and Ukraine as different nationalities. It's almost part of the same culture, the same people." ■

For more of the conversation with Dmitri, visit villagevoice.com

WAITING FOR WAR IN ODESA

In Odesa, Ukraine's third-largest city, citizens are reminded every second of

the day that their port city is on the brink of being attacked by Russian forces, by land, sea, or air, and that their lives are always at risk. Oleg Rubel, professor of public administration at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, is ready to defend his home: "From the first days of the war, I was struck by the mood and willingness to defend my homeland [among] literally everyone," he said in an email to the *Voice*. Below is our interview with Rubel, which has been edited for length and clarity.

Anna Conkling: I can't imagine what you are going through. Thank you so much for being willing to speak with me and sharing your story. You are a professor—at what school, and what do you teach?

Oleg Rubel: Here I was born and raised. I am a professor of public administration. Now I work in one of the Institutes of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. I am a scientist and I am engaged in the economics of nature management and sustainable development. And now, implementing the Green Course.

Where were you when Russia first invaded Ukraine, on February 24? Do you remember your feelings, or what you were doing at the time?

Yes, I woke up quite early at 5 o'clock with the thought: It happened. The attack on Ukraine did not come as a surprise to me. Because I have been studying this question for many years as a scientist. In 2005 I published the work "Does Ukraine Need NATO?" I wrote positively about the need to work on joining the Alliance.

What were the first signs of war that you saw? And what did you see in the first days of the war?

On the first day, explosions were heard in Odesa and there was an "air alarm." The first thing I did was go to the blood donation point and donate blood. Every day the city changed, anti-tank constructions appeared. The city began to resemble 1941 in the Nazi invasion. We hear air raids every day.

Did you move somewhere to get out of the war zone?

Now I am not far from Odesa with my family. [The family home] in the city is very close to the airport and it is quite vulnerable. In Odesa every day they are waiting for a naval landing, but everyone is ready, and ready to fight to the last.

What do you experience every day? What things do you see, and what do you hear people say?

From the first days of the war, I was struck by the mood and willingness to defend my homeland [among] literally everyone. But sometimes, among the military, I feel like Pierre Bezukhov on the Borodino field [a scene from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*]. The impressive strength of spirit of all those around me. People close to me went to serve in the territorial defense.



Oleg Rubel at a political rally in January 2022, before the Russian invasion.

Courtesy Oleg Rubel

Are you between the ages where you have to stay and fight? If so, how do you feel about that?

I'm ready to join the ranks of the military forces of Ukraine.

Do you have children who will also stay and fight?

My children are quite young, 8 and 12, but they are also ready to defend themselves.

Do you hope to flee the country and look for refuge in Poland?

I do not consider such a possibility.

What would you like readers in New York to know about the war, and what Ukraine needs now?

Today, Ukraine is shielding the whole world from dictatorship and totalitarianism and despotism. In order to protect the Western democratic world from the invasion of the East, it is necessary to make every effort to support Ukraine. Raising aircraft and air defenses is quite an expensive step, but it is necessary to save civilization and Western democracy.

How did you feel watching President Zelenskyy become such an important part of this war? Did you vote for him?

Yes, I felt that President Zelenskyy had become the leader of the entire Ukrainian nation. We feel the plight of our people.

I did not support Zelenskyy in the election. I am a member of the European Solidarity Party, and before the war, we were in opposition to his political party. This is democracy! But it is precisely for democracy that we are fighting. And Ukrainians give their lives on the front and in the rear, all as

one show courage. And Zelenskyy heads the Nation!

Have you talked to any of your students who need to stay in the country? Are there support groups for them?

It's hard for me to say about all the students, but my foreign graduate students from the Middle East are under attack, as we all are.

Do you personally want NATO to intervene? Do you want the West to send soldiers?

We need the maximum possible military assistance: aircraft, air defense, electronic warfare. We have enough specialists in all military specialties.

On the other hand, the real threat to nuclear facilities requires a closure of the skies over Ukraine as soon as possible. So we expect such a step from NATO!

How did the support of the whole world feel in Ukraine? Do people you know talk about how it feels to be supported?

This is great happiness. All my compatriots feel incredible support: technical, financial, information, military. We feel proud and uplifted that the world is with us! Ukrainians are a very freedom-loving and peaceful nation. But when the time came for trials, everyone became a warrior! We are very grateful to the world community for believing in and supporting Ukraine.

And Ukraine does not give up! 🇺🇦

Anna Conkling is a freelance journalist based in New York City whose writing focuses on human interest stories and environmental issues.

New York University Division of Special Studies in Symptom Management

HIV+ and experiencing discomfort related to Peripheral Neuropathy?



You May Be ELIGIBLE
To Participate If You Are:

- HIV+/AIDS
- Experiencing pain, numbness, aching, burning, or "pins and needles" sensation in the lower legs and/or feet for 2 months or greater.
- 18 years of age or older.

The study involves testing the use of Acupuncture/Moxibustion, a traditional Chinese medicine therapy, for the relief of lower extremity neuropathy in persons with HIV/AIDS.

As a participant, you will be asked to attend one baseline session, 12 Acupuncture/Moxibustion sessions & three follow-up sessions, maintain a symptom diary and complete questionnaires.

There is no medication given as part of this study.

Compensation: You will be compensated for your time. If you attend all session you will receive a total of \$220. You will also receive a round trip MetroCard at the end of each session to cover your travel expenses.

CALL (212) 365-0346



USERS WANTED

**PHYSICALLY DEPENDENT HEALTHY OPIOID
USERS ARE NEEDED
FOR AN INPATIENT RESEARCH STUDY AT THE
NEW YORK STATE PSYCHIATRIC INSTITUTE**

EARN UP TO \$10,700

CALL: 646-774-6243

**VISIT: [https://recruit.cumc.columbia.edu/
clinical_trial/2168](https://recruit.cumc.columbia.edu/clinical_trial/2168)**

Environment

KURT VONNEGUT REVISITS EARTH FOR EARTH DAY

We talk with the space-and-time-traveling author about the plight of our planet, and if there is still hope for its rescue

By Ali Smith

“Sea pirates” named this land “America” back in 1492. They then proceeded to plunder, pillage, and poison it in the name of progress, as pirates will do. Four hundred and seventy-eight years later, a large group of these so-called “Americans” gathered in New York City for an event meant to send the message that in regard to all that plundering, pillaging, and poisoning, enough was enough.

On April 22, 1970, Fifth Avenue was shut down to traffic from 59th to 14th streets. Flyers urged “Come on foot, bicycle or roller skates ... but leave your car at home!” People were sincere. They were angry. They were hopeful. They meant it! It was the first (soon to be annual) Earth Day.

At high noon, beloved social satirist, science fiction writer, humanist, and self-proclaimed pessimist Kurt Vonnegut faced the optimistic crowd from a stage at the feet of Patience and Fortitude, the marble lions that guard the New York Public Library, in midtown Manhattan. Mayor Lindsay was there, as were Leonard Bernstein, Paul Newman, Ali MacGraw, and many visionary scientists and pandering politicians. The general sense seemed to be that if corporations and regular people just understood the unprecedented damage we were doing to the planet, they

Cradle). “Everybody knows the answer to that question,” he replied, as Mayo reported in her *Voice* article. “But that’s not for publication.” On the stage on Earth Day, Vonnegut abstractly addressed her question when he used the red-hot tip of his Pall Mall unfiltered cigarette to pop the bubble of optimism the crowd had been bouncing around in: “Now polluters are looked upon as ordinary Joes just doing their jobs. In the future, they will be looked upon as swine.... Will the president do anything about pollution? Probably not.”

He went on deflating the mood before ending with a faint glimmer of encouragement in these words: “Those who try their best to save the planet will find a loose, cheerful, sexy brass band waiting to honor them right outside the Pearly Gates. What will the band be playing? ‘When the Saints Come Marching In.’”

I’ve often wondered why Vonnegut doubled down on pessimism on that monumental day. After all, as he told Mayo back in 1970, “I’m very funny. I’m the funniest writer in America.” And humor always suggests a light at the end of the tunnel. It alleviates the pressure we feel about the things we’re most terrified of, and lets us know we’re not alone.

Vonnegut wrote and spoke for decades about our relentless, merciless destruction of the earth, long before “climate change” was

Page Twenty-two

the village VOICE, April 30, 1970

Vonnegut & Earth Day

Can a Granfalloon Save the Planet?

by Anna Mayo

Revolution, citizens of a nation,

An encounter with Kurt Vonnegut half a century ago.

Village Voice archive

would immediately want to change their behavior. (This was proved wrong.)

The night before, *Village Voice* writer Anna Mayo had asked Vonnegut whether the environmental movement was a “granfalloon” or a “universal karass,” the former being a false and meaningless association of people, the latter a much more sincere group (both terms coined by the author in his 1963 novel *Cat’s*

in common parlance. I was sure a man this dedicated to the subject could offer gleaned knowledge and concrete advice.

So I was thrilled to secure the following interview with Kurt Vonnegut’s ... ghost? ... spirit? ... time-traveling doppelgänger? ...

Ali Smith: What is it you’d like me to call you, Mr. Vonnegut?

the village VOICE, April 16, 1970

Page Twenty-one

New York ... we've had it!

ENOUGH POISONED AIR! ENOUGH POLLUTED WATER! ENOUGH STINKING GARBAGE!

Stop lead-poisoning our children. Stop jamming us in miserable subways. Stop the mind-shattering midtown roar. And stop killing us with those cars, cars, cars!

This city must be made habitable for human beings.

WE START ON EARTH DAY.

ALL TRAFFIC BANNED ON 14TH STREET FROM 2nd AVENUE TO 7th AVENUE FROM NOON TO MIDNIGHT FOR A GIANT STREET EXPOSITION ON NEW YORK'S ENVIRONMENT PROBLEMS

*Pete Seeger * Brother Kirkpatrick * Jerry Orbach * Cast of Hair * Tom Paxton * Mayor Lindsay * Thomas Hoving * Ed Koch * Margaret Mead * Arthur Godfrey * Jerome Kretschmer * Herman Badillo * Bess Myerson Grant Oscar Brown, Jr. * Leonard Bernstein * Paul Newman and many more scientists, government representatives, environmentalists and entertainers in a 12-hour marathon program in Union Square.

Earth Day, April 22. The Beginning of the End of Pollution.

*75 environmental exhibits by over 100 organizations

*Street theater

*Films projected on sides of buildings

*Street sculpture and art events

*Petitions circulated to demand environmental changes now.

NO TRAFFIC DOWN FIFTH AVENUE FROM 59th STREET TO 14th STREET FROM NOON TO 2 P. M. COME AND ENJOY THE WORLD'S NEWEST PEDESTRIAN MALL!

* Kurt Vonnegut at the 42 Street Library * Voices of East Harlem * Baroque Ensemble at St. Patrick's Cathedral * Children's Art Exhibit

COME ON FOOT, BICYCLE OR ROLLER SKATES... BUT LEAVE YOUR CAR AT HOME!

Thousands of volunteers needed before and on Earth Day. The Environmental Action Coalition. Come to 235 East 49th Street, 12th Floor. 486-9550

The Environmental Action Coalition
235 East 49th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017 486-9550

The Environmental Action Coalition is coordinating over 200 organizations for Earth Day activities. But April 22 is only a kick-off for a wide-ranging, hard-hitting program to make New York livable again. We need your help.

Join the fight to save your life today. Please enclose your tax-deductible contribution in any amount you can afford.

I enclose \$10 \$20 \$50 dollars.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Make checks payable to Environmental Action Coalition. Thank you.

It was spring 1970, and in this full-page ad New Yorkers were being encouraged to come to the first Earth Day “on foot, bicycle or roller skates ... but leave your car at home!”

Village Voice archive

Kurt Vonnegut: I am a space wanderer named Kurt who has become unstuck in time.

OK, then. With your permission, I’ll call you Kurt-Vonnegut-Space-Wanderer. I’m not sure where you are right now or how much time we’ll have, so I’ll cut right to it. In your 1970 Earth Day speech, why didn’t you feel compelled to offer positivity to young people about their future on this planet?

Well, young people have been swindled. Persuaded that it is now up to them to save the world. It isn’t up to them. They don’t have the money and the power. They don’t even know how to handle dynamite. It is up to older people to save the world. Young people can help them. I thought somebody ought to tell it to them straight.

Do you believe that we—older people—can still fix the planet?

All that is required is that we become less selfish than we are. The planet is being destroyed by manufacturing processes, and what is being manufactured is lousy, by and large. Something we have never had but desperately need is a Secretary of the Future, who can come up with concrete plans to help my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren. We also have to stop choosing abysmally ignorant optimists for positions of leadership. They were useful only so long as nobody had a clue as to what was really going on—during the past seven million years or so. The sort of leaders we need now are not those who promise ultimate victory over Nature through perseverance in living as we do right now but those with the courage and intelligence to present to the world what appears to be Nature’s stern but reasonable surrender terms.

What are those terms?

Mother Earth hasn’t told me directly—not even on this spectral plane where I currently re-

Young people have been swindled. Persuaded that it is now up to them to save the world. It isn't up to them. They don't have the money and the power.

side. But she's been sending very clear messages to the still-living in the form of hurricanes, sink-holes, failed crops, burnt-to-a-crisp forests, and her continued cosmic joke of producing psychopathic personalities, hell-bent on attaining leadership roles so they can kill as many of us as possible in as many ways as they can dream up.

Here are a few of the things we must do:

- Stop poisoning the air, the water, and the topsoil.
- Teach our kids, and ourselves, how to inhabit a small planet without helping to kill it.
- Stop thinking science can fix anything if you give it a trillion dollars.
- Return all the automobiles to their home planet of Lingo-Three, where they can live and reproduce freely, rather than poisoning our atmosphere.
- If the government is really waging a war on drugs, let them go after petroleum.
- Reduce and stabilize our population.
- Stop thinking our grandchildren will be OK no matter how wasteful or destructive we may be since they can go to a nice new planet on a spaceship.

On that note, did you know that billionaires have recently been hurtling themselves into space inside rocket ships that look like giant penises? What do you think of them for doing that?

Kurt-Vonnegut-Space-Wanderer's translucent hand draws, in glowing light in the air in front of him, his signature symbol—a 12-point asterisk meant to be an asshole.

Don't you agree, though, that Earth Day was a step in the right direction? After all, since the first one, President Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency, the modern versions of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts were enacted, the first U.S. wind farms went up in New Hampshire, New York closed the Indian Point Nuclear Facility, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was established, electric cars were invented, the bald eagle was taken off the endangered species list, Fridays for Future marches have mobilized youth worldwide, and the Green New Deal is being discussed seriously (at least by some) at the highest levels of government. Aren't these reasons to be optimistic?

KVSW's image is glitching wildly now and I sense my time with him is coming to a close.

The desperation in my own voice surprises me: **WAIT! Please don't go. WILL THIS ALL WORK OUT?**

Surely he's learned something out there in the great beyond. Surely, like me, he's only a pessimist because he cares for creation so deeply he can't bear to watch it destroyed. Surely ... there's hope.

But already he's just a floating set of lips, a mustache, and a pair of wire-rimmed glasses obscured by smoke, with a static-laced voice that sounds like it's being transmitted over a thin radio wave from outer space.

There is hope as long as you poison the minds of the young with humanity and encourage them to make a better world. Apologize to future generations for mortally wounding this sweet life-supporting planet. Tell them we were roaring drunk on petroleum. Possessions didn't help alleviate our loneliness as much as advertisers said they would. We were Planet-Gobblers. Hopefully, they will forgive us.

And with a "pop," he's gone, and I'm left feeling abandoned and sad. But wait. Vonnegut's given me all the advice needed for this descendant of what he described as "sea pirates" to stop huffing on the tailpipe of the American dream. Let the billionaires float away in their penis-shaped evacuation zeppelins. I'll stay here, feet rooted firmly to this beautiful, wounded planet, with its mess and suffering, alongside others who aspire to give more than they take. I will work hard to become less selfish.

As for all the obstacles in my way? I can hear his voice now:

So it goes. ☑

• Disclaimer and credits •

For anybody wondering, the Voice did not actually speak with Kurt-Vonnegut-Space-Wanderer anywhere outside of the writer's own mind. Vonnegut's answers above, as well as parts of the intro, were taken directly, closely paraphrased, or imagined from the following sources: *Conversations With Vonnegut*, edited by William Rodney Allen; Vonnegut's 1973 novel, *Breakfast of Champions*; David Brancaccio's 2005 PBS interview; Vonnegut's speech at the first Earth Day; Anna Mayo's 1970 *Village Voice* article; Vonnegut's commencement speeches at Bennington College, 1970, and Hobart and William Smith Colleges, 1974; Vonnegut's 1988 collaboration with Volkswagen on an ad campaign for *Time* magazine, a letter to the future population of humanity in the year AD 2088; Drew DeSimone, 2021 honorary chair, the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library; and Robert B. Weide's documentary *Kurt Vonnegut: Unstuck in Time*.

Native New Yorker Ali Smith is a photographer and writer who focuses on women's lives, human rights, and the environment. Her work has appeared in the *Village Voice*, *The New York Times*, *the Guardian*, and others. Her most recent book is *Momma Love: How the Mother Half Lives*.

RAHMAN LEGAL

Free Consultation
347-433-6139
info@rahmanlegal.com

DEFENDING VICTIMS OF DEBT COLLECTION ABUSE

ARE DEBT COLLECTORS

- Making early morning or late night calls?
- Calling repeatedly during the same day?
- Threatening you with lawsuits?
- Making misrepresentations about a debt?
- Engaging in any other kind of collection harassment?



YOU MAY BE ENTITLED TO DAMAGES

Call us for a free consultation!

Tel. 347-433-6139

43 West 43rd Street, Suite 204, New York, NY 10036

Email : info@rahmanlegal.com website : www.rahmanlegal.com

ATTORNEY ADVERTISING

Have an Opioid Use Disorder?

We need your help for an inpatient clinical research study!

Help New York State Psychiatric Institute research better treatment options for those with opioid use disorder.

Visit: <https://recruit.cumc.columbia.edu/studyinfopage/2303>

You must meet the following:

- Are 18 - 59 years old
- Have opioid use disorder
- Currently taking an oral daily methadone therapy at a dose of 80-100 mg

If you meet the above criteria: Earn up to \$11,817

Call: 646.774.6243



Global Melting

SNOW JOB: CLIMATE CHANGE IS MAKING SKIING AN UPHILL CLIMB

Family-owned resorts north of NYC work on welcoming skiers despite scarcer snow and corporate intrusions

Story and photos by Michael Schwarz

Eight inches of fresh powder blanketed Plattekill Mountain ski resort, in the Catskills, this past Presidents' Day weekend. Less than two days prior, it had been 56 degrees at the summit. Trails were bare, skiers were sparse, and the winter had delivered just 41% of the expected annual snowfall. Since 1970, New York State has warmed at an average rate of 0.6 degrees (all temperatures are in Fahrenheit) per decade, with winters in the northeastern U.S. warming three times faster than summers, according to the New York Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). As of March 24, Plattekill has received 70 inches of recorded snow, or roughly 46% of the annual 150-inch average.

These volatile temperature fluctuations, diminishing snowfall rates, and earlier thaws are a reality that the staff at Plattekill, and the industry as a whole, must learn to adapt to. Pioneering as the only locally owned and operated resort in the Catskills, Plattekill boasts a devout community following. It is positioned in a narrow "box" canyon at the end of a mostly signless winding country road, and is known as the "powder capital of the Catskills." With an average of 150 inches received annually, it receives some of the best snow in the region because of its 3,500-foot elevation and northward-facing slopes. It's not uncommon to find small groups camping in Plattekill's parking lot the night before a big storm. An "off-the-beaten-path" feel and familiar staff are a couple of the reasons skiers want to keep Plattekill a well-kept secret amid a wave of corporate small-resort takeovers. It's the kind of place where everyone knows everyone, and casual conversations with owners Laszlo and Danielle Vajtay are common. "We want skiing the way it used to be," Laszlo tells the *Voice* in an on-site interview. "We limit our tickets each day because we're more focused on the experience people have here than just packing them in and making money."

Laszlo and Danielle grew up skiing on the mountain as children but met later as young adults. Laszlo was recruited as a ski instructor at 15, and promoted to Ski School director by 21; Danielle became an instructor soon after, and the two began dating. They continued to instruct on weekends while juggling full-time jobs in Manhattan, Danielle as a

marketing manager and Laszlo as a packaging engineer. "We were living for the weekends," Laszlo recalls. As winters continued to warm at lower elevations, nearly every ski resort in the Catskills was pushed to use artificial snow. Gary and Bonnie Hinkley, the previous owners of Plattekill, were unable to fund the infrastructure needed to cover the mountain and fell into bankruptcy in 1993, after 35 years of operation. Their son, Allen Hinkley, still comes to the mountain with his family, and often has drinks with Laszlo and the rest of the staff after the slopes close. "In the northeast, there's no way you could be in the ski industry without as much snowmaking as possible," he says. "Laszlo has done a great job of upgrading—and making some major investments in snowmaking and

grooming, which has made the mountain a whole different mountain."

Laszlo and Danielle jumped at the opportunity to purchase the resort from the Hinkleys, leaving their corporate work lives in New York City behind and piecing together just enough to make a down payment. "I sold everything I owned, and gave it a shot," Laszlo recounts. Over the next 29 years, the Vajtays would turn Plattekill into an indie powerhouse. The resort now boasts the ability to cover 75% of its slopes in artificial snow, along with upgraded lifts and energy-efficient snow guns. To stay competitive, Laszlo changed the game in 2008 when he introduced private mountain rentals at an affordable price, a first for the ski industry. This service allows the public to rent out the entire mountain on a weekday for a flat fee.

But despite these upgrades and innovations, Plattekill continues to face ongoing operational issues due to climate changes: Warmer winters, fewer powder days, and earlier thaws threaten the mountain's ability to operate for a full season, which used to last roughly from early December to early April. "I mean, I definitely can say that it's a challenge. When I look back a long time ago, when they ran ski mountains without snowmaking and now we can't operate without snowmaking, it's kind of like, okay, what's going on?" says Danielle.

A 1.7-degree increase in average winter air temperature in New York State from 1940 to 2014 has resulted in the timing of snowmelt-related streamflow (water volume in streams and rivers) beginning an average of 7.7 days earlier, according to the DEC. This winter was no exception. Temperatures were well above average during unexpected thaws

in mid-January and late February 2022. The U.S. average maximum (daytime) temperature from December to February was 46.4 degrees, 3.7 degrees above the 20th-century average, ranking eighth-warmest in the historical record. This midseason melt illustrated just how crucial Plattekill's intricate snowmaking system is for continued business. "What you're looking at right now, the only thing that's open is snowmaking terrain. So without snowmaking, we'd be dead," Laszlo explains, pointing at nearby grass-covered slopes.

The DEC projects that "snowfall in New York is likely to become less frequent, and the combination of less early winter snowfall and earlier snowmelt will lead to a shorter snow season; fewer days with snow on the ground; decreased snow depth; and earlier snowmelt," according to a report released in August 2021. Snowfall across North America has followed the same trend as in the Catskills: The annual average snow cover over the past decade was roughly 77,700 square miles smaller than when the study began, in 1972. That's an area roughly the size of Nebraska.

Ken "Macker" Davie, head of Plattekill's mountain operations, has been at the resort for over 25 years. In addition to overseeing any and all mountain repairs, snow-blowing, and snowmaking, he also manages the Plattekill weather station from his repair shop at the base of the mountain. "The jet stream is all screwed up. It just seems like it's been totally wrong all winter," Davie says. "If the jet stream [flows] in properly, the way it's supposed to, it'll pull those storms right up through us. That's why the Northeast always gets a lot of snow. The last couple of years,



Snow-blowing manager Kevin Davie checks the water pressure in the pump house at the base of Plattekill Mountain. Plattekill has installed more than 28 miles of piping to pump water up the mountain for snowmaking.



Plattekill Mountain on a warm February day with nearly 100% artificial snow covering the slopes, and in the wake of a winter storm that produced over eight inches of fresh powder later that month.

that's not happening." According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center, upstate New York received its second warm wet winter in a row because of a La Niña weather pattern developing in the eastern Pacific Ocean. A La Niña event originates in the Gulf of Mexico and can push the jet stream north of upstate New York, making the difference between rain and snow. This resulted in Syracuse having three months this past winter in which the average temperature was 2.4 degrees warmer and snowfall was three feet below average. Winters out West have also suffered. An Aspen spokeswoman reported that the resort has lost roughly 30 days of winter since 1980. This also comes with a roughly 20% decrease in western U.S. snowpack since 1980, according to the *Washington Post*. In mid-March, the 2022 U.S. Moguls Championship was moved from the Palisades Tahoe ski resort, in California, to Deer Valley, Utah, because of lack of snow. Research conducted by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences observed the jet stream moving north over the past few decades, causing warmer winters in the Northeast. In scenarios projecting the highest greenhouse gas emissions, there could be a move outside the historical recorded zone by 2060.

Manufactured Future

Despite being raised on fresh powder, Laszlo realized, from as far back as his first year at Plattekill, that the future of the resort depended on adequate snowmaking. He immediately began investing in snow-manufacturing infrastructure. Laszlo and Danielle understood that not making the full transition could cause Plattekill to suffer the same fate as the now-abandoned Catskill resort Ski Bobcat, which closed in 2005 because of lack of snow and snowmaking. Cutting-edge equipment at the time was simply unaffordable. That's when the Vajtays started buying used equipment from defunct resorts: first, a batch of snow guns, then a new snow groomer, and finally, a more pow-

erful air compressor. Since taking ownership, in 1993, the Vajtays have installed more than 28 miles of piping to pump water up the slopes for snowmaking. These upgrades proved a wise investment; over 90% of ski areas in the U.S. now have snowmaking capabilities. "When Mother Nature doesn't step up, here's our snowmakers hard at work," Danielle says. "We're making winter happen."

Because of the high density of artificial snow, it takes much longer to melt, is resistant to rain, and makes the perfect packed base for natural snow to fall on. "You can rely on all your fresh snow, but fresh snow is easier to get rid of," Plattekill snow-blowing manager Kevin Davie, Macker's son, explains. "Man-made snow will hold about twice as long." Natural snow is approximately 10% ice mixed with 90% air, while artificial snow is closer to 30% ice and 70% air. This results in natural snow having a pointy composition and fluffy air pockets dispersed throughout each flake; artificial snow has a round composition and significantly fewer air pockets because it's shot out of the snow gun with such force. Kevin has been snow-blowing at Plattekill for the past six seasons, and learned the ropes from his father. Snow guns are checked 12 times a day—on each run, Kevin and his team take the lift to the top of the mountain, walking more than a mile back down and systematically checking each gun along the way. "Snowmaking is not really for the faint of heart. It's hard labor. It takes grit," Kevin says.

Plattekill recently received an 80% rebate on a batch of energy-efficient snow guns, to help modernize their fleet, from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. The upgrade took them from 10,000 cubic feet of air per minute to 2,000 CFM, vastly decreasing the amount of energy each gun uses to cover the same square footage. "Any of these bigger mountains, they're relying on snowmaking too. Like, it's not just little mountains on the East Coast," Kevin explains. "If you don't have snowmaking, you're not having a season anymore. Basically, everything you see here

is man-made snow." All the water utilized for snowmaking at Plattekill comes from two ponds at the base of the mountain, and every drop is sustainably sourced from melting snow and rain. "No water bill!" Plattekill mechanic Robbie Segalla exclaims. The water comes from the mountain and is returned to the mountain. This environmentally friendly method follows a similar trend among small

"When I look back a long time ago, when they ran ski mountains without snowmaking and now we can't operate without snowmaking, it's kind of like, okay, what's going on?"

resorts modernizing in the industry. Jiminy Peak, in western Massachusetts, installed a wind turbine that provides 4.6 million kilowatt-hours of energy—or one-third of the resort's annual energy consumption. Plattekill followed suit with their own upgrade: an adaptive energy-efficient air compressor. The compressor is equipped with a variable speed drive, enabling it to output just the necessary amount of energy needed to power the snow guns.

As the Vajtays continued to upgrade over the past three decades, Macker and his team gradually learned to repair every equipment component needed in the ski industry. Plattekill has now developed a reputation, and other small resorts began using Laszlo and Danielle and the staff as an affordable resource for parts, advice, and repair services. "We always work together. We don't hold secrets from each

other. It's such a small, unique industry, you know. There's very few of us left anymore," says Laszlo. The ability to help other local mountains succeed pushed Laszlo to expand the parts business, and in 2008 he decided to buy out the entire inventory of a snow-blowing company after it shuttered its U.S. facility. Over the next few years, he expanded the repair facility, and Plattekill now services local mountains across North America. Parts for the old and outdated equipment often used at small resorts are becoming increasingly difficult to find. "A lot of it doesn't exist anymore," says Segalla. "The only way to get some of that stuff is to buy a lot of it, or buy an old mountain or a lift in an auction."

Laszlo and his team are ensuring that local ski areas can source those parts at an affordable price. "The fact is, all the smaller mountains kind of embrace the idea that we're a family. You know, we have to help each other. This industry shouldn't be cut-throat," Segalla continues. This allows many local ski areas to stay in business when new equipment costs would have priced them out of the industry, and corporate giants such as Vail, Alterra, and Mountain Capital window-shop for bankruptcy-prone resorts. Each year, more family-owned mountains are purchased by corporate conglomerates, changing the economic landscape of the industry and making it increasingly difficult for smaller operations like Plattekill to keep up without corporate, state, or nonprofit intervention. Many smaller family-owned mountains receive funding from a variety of nonprofits and community organizations. Resorts such as Mount Ashland, in Oregon; Bridger Bowl, in Montana; Mount Ascutney, in Vermont; and Bogus Basin, in Idaho, all operate as nonprofits, supported by donations from their local communities to remain operational. Unlike corporate resorts, nonprofit ski areas can apply for grants, campaign for donations, and offer tax write-offs. With bigger resorts like Hunter being bankrolled by Vail, Belleayre being funded by New York State tax dollars, and Windham receiving a \$4 million snowmak-



Parking manager David Pollack rejoices at the sight of fresh snow and an impending winter storm.

ing facelift, in 2021, Plattekill faces some intimidating rivals just down the road. “We can’t fight off the big corporate guys, you know. Just like we can’t fight off the state of New York,” Laszlo says. “I hope they kind of leave us alone and let us do our thing. This is what we do.” In 2017, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced \$8 million in grant funding for Belleayre Mountain, including a high-speed gondola, trail improvements, and event spaces that will be open year-round. Belleayre is located just 20 minutes away from Plattekill, presenting significant competition for skiers looking for a larger mountain closer to the city.

In 2019, Vail Resorts purchased 17 ski mountains across North America in a landmark acquisition. In September 2021, it announced over \$320 million in upgrades to its 37 properties, including Hunter Mountain, just 45 minutes from Plattekill. “It’s hard, because you have these poor weather spells, you know, and all these big mountains have bottomless pocketbooks. They could just turn all their snow equipment on, fire up, and have a ton of trails open,” says Danielle. According to the National Ski Area Association, 84 resorts closed between the 1991–92 seasons and 2021. Most recently, Toggenburg Mountain ski resort was shuttered by owner Peter Harris, angering many skiers loyal to the small mountain. Harris also owns Song and Labrador mountains, giving him control over three of the four major ski mountains in central New York. Harris cited a lack of business in the area for three resorts (all within a 12-mile radius) and admitted to closing Toggenburg in an effort to lessen competition. He also mentioned labor shortages and Covid-19 as contributing factors in his decision, but many skiers are pointing to poor management after 100 skiers were stranded for more than two hours on a lift at Song Mountain, in early February 2022. Just northeast of Song, Killington’s employment was down 20% to 30% at the start of the 2021 season, Magic Mountain was unable to open for a day because of a lack of ski patrols, and Black Mountain was closed for five days after a Covid outbreak.

#FailVail—Corporate Failures

Corporate resorts out West have also faced backlash for out-of-control lift lines, surprise closings, and operational failures. Vail-owned Stephen’s Pass kicked off the season two weeks late, immensely short-staffed and with over 60% of the resort closed through the holiday season. The state attorney general’s office has received at least 53 consumer complaints against the ski area since the beginning of the 2021 season. In December 2020, two Beaver Creek ski instructors filed a class-action lawsuit against Vail Resorts. The 167-page document filed 22 complaints, including violations of labor laws in a total of nine states. In January 2022, 100 Breckenridge ski instructors signed a petition asking Vail to address safety issues and overcrowding. That same month, Vail released a \$13.1 million offer to settle five California wage and labor lawsuits in one sweeping payout—this could mean payouts for roughly 100,000 Vail employees nationwide. The National Ski Areas Association estimated that 60% of U.S. ski areas were unable to fill all open jobs over the 2020–21 season. Lack of housing, inflation, and a tight labor market are all being blamed for the labor shortage.

Waiting for snow.



Plattekill Mountain owner Laszlo Vajtay and operations manager Sean Zurn discuss snowmaking plans for the week as a winter storm moves in.

With the cost of living on the rise, free season passes and time on the mountain aren’t enough to offset low hourly wages. This issue resulted in corporate conglomerates such as Vail and Boyne raising their minimum wage to \$15 an hour; Vail also announced in January that all employees would receive a \$2-an-hour bonus for every hour worked beginning on January 1.

Plattekill Ski School director Sean Zurn grew up skiing the Catskills, and returned from the West Coast to take a position on his hometown mountain. “I’ve worked for Vail. It’s kind of robotic—you show up—you do your thing,” Zurn says. “It’s made as efficient as possible, but they take the fun and the heart out of the mountain.” Plattekill was able to avoid recent labor shortages by having a small and dedicated staff. “I know if I need anything I can rely on numerous people up here to help pitch in,” Zurn says. “That’s how it is up here. We’ve always got each other’s backs. It’s pretty amazing.” The Vajtays were able to keep on their entire staff throughout the Covid-19 winter seasons, and used their PPP loan to pay employees for any lost wages during their brief closure from March 15 to May 1, 2020, before reopening their summer wedding

venue. “Being not corporate here, it’s just a different kind of feeling, you know,” Plattekill rental shop manager Brian Whitman explains. “It does feel like ownership is trying to take care of us the best they can.” On busy weekends, you can often find Laszlo parking cars in the midst of a blizzard and Danielle managing tickets in the front office of the cozy wooden lodge. “We’re not absentee,” Laszlo says. “And we’re not running this from a central office that’s in Broomfield, Colorado.”

Plattekill has seen an increase in attendance and industry interest since the Covid-19 pandemic began subsiding. “It’s sustainable, and I think we proved something this year,” says Laszlo. “Because this year, with very little snow, we still saw an uptick in skier participation and attendance.” Plattekill was able to capitalize on reinvigorated public interest in outside activities after the restrictions of lockdown, this year’s Winter Olympics, and increased social media exposure for smaller mountains. Its private mountain rentals and attendance saw a roughly 20% increase since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020, according to Laszlo.

It’s going to take all of the above initiatives and upgrades, and more, to secure New York’s ski industry. Since 1901, the average surface temperature across the contiguous 48 states has risen at an average rate of 0.16 degrees per decade, with 2016 being the warmest year on record. Statistics like this are one of many reasons ski communities across the world are stepping up to combat climate change. Despite facing a wide spectrum of challenges—less snow, more rain, equipment upgrades, staff shortages, energy costs, and corporate resort buyouts, Plattekill is out to prove that indie mountains aren’t going anywhere soon. “The staff and people that ski here are really the heart and soul of this mountain,” Segalla concludes. “That’s what makes this place special.” ▮

Michael Schwarz is a photojournalist, writer, and videographer living in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

CINEMA'S CREST: IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR

Nixon and the movies were both riding high in 1972, but history was catching up with them

By Michael Atkinson

Did movies change in 1972? Of course they did, because movies change all the time, every year, every decade, every half-century—in fact, lately you might find more solid footing asking instead, do they change enough?

But did they, 50 years ago, change enough to rationalize a retrospective half-century-anniversary glance backward? Or, if it wasn't change, what was it?

Because, clearly, something was going on. Something pivoted, or peaked, or reached a heated pubertal fever in '72, that year of Tricky Dick's landslide re-election, American war machine apocalypses, and terrorist mayhem at the Olympics and around the world—in what for movies looked like a public aggregation of post-'60s New Wave freedom, booming box-office clout, tense political urgency, and social experimentation. Movies were still our primary art form, and moviegoing an athletically active engagement with the world, but in 1972 the medium, and the culture that surrounded it, seemed to be cresting.

Indeed, 1972 makes a rousing bid for being the greatest single movie year there ever was, just beginning with *The Godfather*, De-

liverance, *Cabaret*, *Last Tango in Paris*, *The King of Marvin Gardens*, and *Fat City*, but particularly when you look globally, at Herzog's *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*, Costa-Gavras's *State of Siege*, Jancsó's *Red Psalm*, Fassbinder's *The Merchant of Four Seasons* and *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, Rohmer's *Chloe in the Afternoon*, Loach's *Family Life*, Wenders's *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick*, Piatat's *We Won't Grow Old Together*, and so on. Not to mention Godard and Gorin's double-bladed show of *Tout va Bien* and *Letter to Jane*. Not to mention Hitchcock's penultimate film, and best in almost a decade, *Frenzy*.

Not to mention Michael Ritchie's acidic double-header *Prime Cut* and *The Candidate* (released a day apart that June), and Robert Aldrich's *Ulzana's Raid*, and Marcel Ophüls's *A Sense of Loss*, and Perry Henzell's *The Harder They Come*. Not to mention the censored collective-made anti-war doc *Winter Soldier*, and Robert Frank's always unseeable but always magnificent wallow in decadence *Cocksucker Blues*. Do we count the films already a year or two old that we saw here in the states in 1972, thanks to

hardy niche distributors? *The Emigrants*, *Two English Girls*, *The Sorrow and the Pity*, *Trafic*, *Murmur of the Heart*, *Uncle Vanya*....

You could muster a similar pile of evidence for other years, of course (most of those years were in the '60s, not many came later). You could also make the perfectly reasonable case that searching for cultural significance in round-number calendar benchmarks is arbitrary and meaningless. And so it is, technically. But because the '70s were the '70s, we're now in an age in which almost every year's New Wave half-century-earlier precedent could be said to be some kind of world-beater. It's also not hard to see the relevance and perspective that such an epic chunk of history offers, particularly for film. In the rapidly mutative modern era, 50 years is a substantial bite no matter what aspect of culture you're looking at, but cinema (if you peg it to the Lumière brothers projecting moving pictures to a paying Paris audience in 1895) is only eight years older than the oldest living person today, so dialing back the time machine a half-century—39% of movies' entire lifespan—seems salient, a solid Goldilocks marker between long ago and not so long ago at all.

In fact, 1972 can feel like both last week and a century ago. Its significance as a pop culture hinge is suggested by the simple fact of *The Godfather's* overwhelming box office dominance. Previously, the record-holding moneymaker was *The Sound of Music* (1965), an unalloyed family film; before that, it was *Gone With the Wind* (1939), back when all films were intended for general audiences—which is why Rhett Butler's "I don't give a damn" stirred such outrage. Three years after *The Godfather*, *Jaws* ramrodded itself to No. 1—a PG-rated film to which grade-schoolers, along with everyone else, flocked. Of course, in 1977, *Star Wars*, a consciously child-like film, surpassed them all and established the paradigm for Hollywood filmmaking going

forward. It was only in that brief interim, in the years immediately before and after 1972, when adult ticket buyers, and only adult ticket buyers—Coppola's film was and remains a hard R—could catapult a film to the all-time top slot. Imagine it: a moment when the movie-lust of actual grown-ups controlled the conversation and defined the culture. The discourse, textual and visual and otherwise, was not watered down and sparkled up for 13-year-olds. We're not likely to see that dynamic reappear, ever.

The voting-drinking-fucking-with-consent grown-up conversation of 1972 also propelled a die-hard porn film, *Deep Throat*, to No. 7 on the year's box-office champ roster, ahead of *Lady Sings the Blues* and *The Getaway*. All told, it seemed only natural, this focus on authentically adult material and consumption, given the Arctic ice-breaking the films of the "New Hollywood" (many of which were not "Hollywood" at all) had been busy doing for several years, at least since 1967, with *The Graduate*, *David Holzman's Diary*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Cool Hand Luke*, *Targets*, and *Point Blank*. The American New Wave was postwar American movies finally reaching the end of their prolonged puberty, and you could say 1972 was the year the movement lost its virginity, by way of *The Godfather's* money-quaffing juggernaut of mood, menace, and gravitas.

The occasional disaster film aside—and those always seemed to play out like the old Hollywood imagining its own destruction—the American film scene of the Nixon era was suddenly an anti-Dream Factory, fantastically homely, thorny, addicted to discomfiting truths, densely inhabited by lost men, used women, free-roaming damaged goods, and unlovable losers in a dead-real movie-forgotten landscape of junkyards, diners, supermarkets, and empty highways. Like all maturations, it was a coalescence of influences, bearing the DNA not only of the European New Waves but also the Direct Cinema documentary movement; the

Arlen Schumer



The Godfather's conscientious catastrophes; the patriarchy turned upside-down in *The Poseidon Adventure*; occupying the fringes in *Cabaret*; stranded urbanites in *Deliverance*.

grain-loving photography of Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, et al.; the actors-first revolt fueled by John Cassavetes's films and the Actor's Studio; and the proletariat Existentialism of film noir.

What's more vital and surprising was the Wave's enthusiastic exploration of all-American off-road subcultures, something movies had never done before: the "found" sooty wastes of Pennsylvania anthracite country in *Wanda* (1970), the oil fields of *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), the back-roads drag life of *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971), the vanishing cow towns of north Texas in *The Last Picture Show* (1971), the crime-edge of life in Little Italy in *Mean Streets* (1973), the blood-sport backrooms of *Cockfighter* (1974), the private industry of surveillance contractors in *The Conversation* (1974), the various specific geo-cultural arenas of nearly all Robert Altman's '70s films, the dog-eat-dog ghetto grunge of a Blaxploitation film like *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970), and, right in the heart of 1972, the street-wise corruption of *Super Fly*, the dog-shit-eating Baltimore absurdity of *Pink Flamingos*, the down-low rodeo circuit of *Junior Bonner*, the inbred Appalachia of *Deliverance*, and, yes, the huddled Sicilian-American enclaves of Mob families in *The Godfather*. And so on.

It was as though America woke up from a decades-long celluloid opium jag of fantasy, homily, and baloney, looked around, and wondered, This is who we are?

Who we were on top of all that, in the uncase of 1972: the generationally war-torn, the post-assassination/edge-of-Watergate paranoid, the staunchly bigoted, the civil-rights-warrior righteous, the insurrectionary anti-war, the pro-Nixon, the pro-McGovern, the getting-poorer, the ever-richer. Change was the only constant, and it moved slowly in the macro view, like a tanker at sea, but in 1972 you could also see certain vectors of cultural force rise and converge on film.

Mostly, as it looks from the majestic half-century aerial view, you can see the helium finally leak out of the idea of an all-powerful patriarchal hegemony. The actual white-men-in-power hegemony went largely unthreatened after the '60s faded, of course, but in movies the hierarchy was under fire. What we're really talking about when we talk about 1972, in the shadow of both Nixon's blowout reelection in November and Watergate's mind-boggling revelations—wait, the kidnapping, beating, and drugging of Attorney General John Mitchell's wife?—is the cultural sense, aggregated on film over and over, that the white men running everything are incompetent, monstrous, or both.

There's no way to exaggerate how American pop culture, from the 1880s dime novels to the postwar era, relied upon the certainty of white masculinity's moral and institutional authority to craft its stories. It was the Hollywood default, the ideological world in which cinema manifested, from D.W. Griffith's rescue melodramas in the teens to the 1970 Oscar-winning blockbusters *Patton* and *Airport*. There had always been some pushback; before the '70s, particular movies (and novels and plays) tried to dress the paradigm down, in subtexts you

the village VOICE, January 11, 1973

films in focus

by Andrew Sarris

'Tis the season to grind out 10-best lists, and this is certainly not the year to turn one's back on tradition. Still, there is at least one prominent film critic who has never run the gauntlet of outraged readers with a published 10-best list.

We at The Voice have always been made of sterner stuff. Anyway, after being blasted all year, what do we have left to lose by the time another January rolls around? And so without further ado or apologia, here is my 10-best tap-dance for 1972: Luis Buñuel's "THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE," Alfred Hitchcock's "FRENZY," George Cukor's "TRAVELS WITH MY AUNT," Kenji Mizoguchi's "UTAMARO AND HIS FIVE WOMEN," Francois Truffaut's "TWO ENGLISH GIRLS," Joseph Losey's

"THE ASSASSINATION OF TROTSKY," Marcel Ophüls's "THE SORROW AND THE PITY," Robert Aldrich's "ULZANA'S RAID," Sergio Leone's "DUCK, YOU SUCKER," Blake Edwards's "THE CAREY TREATMENT," Claude Jutra's "MON ONCLE ANTOINE," Billy Wilder's "AVANTI!," Robert Benton's "BAD COMPANY," Anthony Friedman's "BARTLEBY," Robert Altman's "IMAGES," Gordon Parks, Jr.'s "SUPER FLY."

If you count carefully, you will see that my 10-best list consists of

Andrew Sarris's 1972 Top 10 (actually 16) list.

Village Voice archive

can read into certain film noirs and Sidney Poitier movies. But by 1972, the reflexive respect for traditional structures was all but gone.

Everywhere you looked, the body of patriarchal dominion was laid out on the table and sliced open. Distractingly seductive, *The Godfather* is virtually a tragic, Dos-toyevskian satire on the systems of masculine power and traditional families: There isn't a single character in its web, save for Diane Keaton's Kay, that isn't a bloodletting perversion. The cunning craft of the film lies in the Corleones' social density and familial allure—you're baited into accepting this fabulous, messy family, and Marlon Brando's moral authority, even as you see the catastrophes they conscientiously create and the throats they blithely slit.

The specter of the middle-class modern Everyman—husband, father, leader, paragon—disarmed and lost and disconnected from his source of power was ubiquitous in the American New Wave, and so it went in 1972: the stranded middle-class urbanites in *Deliverance*, the empty-hearted dick-bully of *Last Tango in Paris*, the going-nowhere brothers of *The King of Marvin Gardens*, the failed punch-drunk drunks of *Fat City*, and the guilt-wracked widower of *Solaris* could all be scanned as explorations of that guy's floundering inadequacy. Certainly, the men in these films all seem surprised when their assumed entitlement does not rescue them, and it's that existential shock that the films are probing as if it were a tumor. Even *The Poseidon Adventure* goes there, compelling its nominal all-white man-heroes (Gene

Hackman's Nietzschean priest, Ernest Borgnine's hen-pecked cop) to climb backward through a world of privilege literally turned upside-down, largely enabled by children and Shelley Winters.

Or, take the complementary tack, in Perry, Dunne, and Didion's *Play It as It Lays*, in which the untethered wanderer is a self-destructive woman, trying and largely failing to escape from one toxic man after another.

If *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* was self-evidently a study of the masculine fascist impulse rising spontaneously from imperialist greed, then *The Candidate*'s cynical, made-for-TV politics; *Ulzana's Raid*'s frontier nihilism; and *Winter Soldier*'s deadpan recitations of Vietnam War atrocities dissected their extant power systems from within, where hypocrisy and brutality are structural factors, not collateral. Other films—often, musicals—happily occupied the fringes of white-male institutional milieus and historical moments (*Cabaret*, *The Harder They Come*, *Lady Sings the Blues*), roaming through demimondes cultivated in opposition to the mainstream order. Sometimes, as in *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* and *The Merchant of Four Seasons*, the protagonist is merely a clueless facet of the dominant culture's tendency to eat its own.

Maybe it was Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* that formed the most uncompromising vision, of a white ruling class of suspect authority figures (diplomats, officers, bishops) whose very reality is an absurdly unstable quantity. (*Slaughterhouse-Five* did something similar.) Or, you

What we're really talking about when we talk about 1972 is the cultural sense, aggregated on film over and over, that the white men running everything are incompetent, monstrous, or both.

may prefer the instances where men in any form are practically elided from the universe: see *Cries and Whispers* and *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*.

Of course, there were always counter-charges advertising for the supremacy of righteous male saviors—this was the general era of Clint Eastwood's "Dirty Harry" Callahan, Charles Bronson's *Death Wish* avenger, and the ongoing James Bond franchise, and '72 did find a hit with Robert Redford's Native-killing mountain man in *Jeremiah Johnson*. But the overall messaging seems clear, a sign of the times: For a moment, movies were looking at the world run by men and seeing little except disaster, failure, and absurdity.

Those were the days.

It did not last, as we know: Cultural pessimism and paranoia always give way to a backlash of bull-headed optimism, narcissism, and patriotism, and on film, the beautiful suspicions and doubt we all shared did not survive the tsunami of wonder hurled by George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, who by decade's end had effectively lobotomized the New Wave spirit and converted a pervasive critical wariness into a sixth-grader's timid embrace of power. Reagan got elected, and the high season of New Wave cynicism came to a close.

In 1972, you couldn't find a buyer for the usual patriarchal bullshit, and it may be that spike in awareness, caught forever in the year's stack of film cans, that makes it leap forward through the decades. And it seems appropriate—only recently has that political qualm become universalized again, far more deeply and consequently this time in the real world, if not necessarily in film (superhero movies, dominated by white dudes saving the day, are nothing if not the Dirty Harry complex writ super-large).

We could hardly do better in the next half-century than to try to retrieve our loss of innocence, and struggle to grow up all over again. ▮

Michael Atkinson has been writing for the Village Voice since 1994. His latest book is the new edition of his BFI tract on David Lynch's Blue Velvet.

RICKIE LEE JONES AND ALL THAT JAZZ

Talking with the singer-songwriter about her breakthrough album in '79, her memoir, touring again, and life in New Orleans

By Mary Lyn Maiscott

Something came over me in the middle of singer-songwriter Rickie Lee Jones's recent concert at City Winery in NYC. At the end of her song "Living It Up," I wrote in my notebook: "Was I the only one who wanted to weep at the presence of this woman, this person, whose mind...." I didn't know how to describe her mind so left it at that. She had moved me beyond words with her performance of this complex song, in which the story of three street-wise but hapless characters evolves into a poetic exploration of what it means to be "living it up."

But I could not have been the only one there stunned by Jones's genius, even though some of us have been experiencing it since 1979, when the catchy, jazzy single "Chuck E.'s in Love" and her self-titled debut album transformed her life—and, some would argue, popular music. To quote myself, in a piece for *Vanity Fair*'s website more than 10 years ago, Jones sang like Billie Holiday on a rock bender. And somehow the world was ready for it: Her album went platinum and she won a Grammy for best new artist. Since then her fame has at times waned, but she's continued to record and tour. And last year her memoir, *Last Chance Texaco: Chronicles of an American Troubadour*—written as carefully and creatively as her lyrics—brought renewed attention.

"These are happy days.... It's a good job and we're happy to have it," Jones told the City Winery audience, referring to herself and her band: Mike Dillon (percussion), John Leftwich (bass), and Kai Welch (keys, guitar, trumpet). She added, "I feel like my only job is to come out here and love you." And so she did, with her stories, witticisms, and of course those remarkable songs—mostly familiar ("Young Blood," "We Belong Together"), but one, about people talking through their pets, composed on the spot.

Over Zoom a couple of weeks before the concert, Jones, 67, spoke to me from her home in New Orleans. When I had interviewed her in 2011, in a Village café, her pink sweats belied a gravitas, even sadness, in her expression—and an edge when she stated, "I am a badass motherfucker." But now she was relaxed yet animated, her face occasionally lighting up when discussing such topics as Van Morrison's "wall," the lasting effects of *West Side Story*, and why you (yes, you) just might have too much money. (This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)



Rickie Lee Jones: From runaway success to a limo ride with Van Morrison to L.A. to "badass motherfucker" to New Orleans to NYC's City Winery.

Mary Lyn Maiscott: I read your memoir and was struck anew by your lyric "I was just a baby / When I fired my gun." You had many harrowing experiences from the time you were 14, when you first started running away. Was writing about all that difficult for you?

Rickie Lee Jones: It wasn't so much emotionally difficult as it was difficult to turn real life into a narrative. This was a story of a family in the 20th century, from vaudeville to the '50s and on to the '70s. It's hard to get readers to go: I really don't care about your childhood but I'll read about your childhood. To get them to even start the journey, it had to read like fiction.

There's a kind of mythology around you. Rolling Stone, when you were first on the cover, had the phrase "runaway success," but I was startled to see what it really meant for you to be a runaway. So I think your book pierces through some ideas people have.

In some ways people thought that not much had happened to me—there was an etherealness about me. On the other hand, I still read vicious comments: "I saw her at Berkeley and she was so high it was disgusting." I never took drugs and performed, ever. There is that one unfortunate tour I drank, and that Janis Joplin image has become part of how people saw me. But, hey,

©AstorMorgan2020

It was but it's not anymore. That was the last of the flirtations with that.

Addiction, you're talking about.

It's gone now. I mean, I shouldn't say that, it might be waiting right outside the door—"You think I'm gone, huh?" But it seems like there's no trace of it. The lure of getting high is that this moment right now is so unbearable you'll take a drug. But I've managed to attach the next hour to that fantasy, where you'll go, what have I done? So that part's over. Can we go down a different road?

Sure. I wanted to ask you about *West Side Story*, because that played such an important part starting from when you were a child.

That's the greatest example of music being the carrier of the seed of identity. My dad read Shakespeare and I knew *Romeo and Juliet*, but I never connected [the actors] to *Romeo and Juliet*; they were living teenagers to me—remember, I was 8 or 9. And the beautiful set, the color of the Coke bottles, the jacket that Riff wore, everything became part of how I would see the whole wide world forever. I'd watch for that jacket, I'd watch for that boy who was so sweet and unassuming who would get on the wrong end of a gun. It's kind of "Skeletons," in my more tragic vocabulary.

Your song "Skeletons," from 1981, about the police killing of a Black man.

Yeah.... The incredible thing is that when I went to do *Saturday Night Live* [in 1979], *West Side Story* was on the television when I got back from the filming. It was as if angels had written the whole thing, said, All right, we're gonna give you this, are you ready? And the hotel room had a balcony, so I went out on the balcony and that movie was playing and the Jets were everywhere!

And *West Side Story* also figured into when you first met Tom Waits, outside the Troubadour with a group of people. Was it you who sang the first line of "Jet Song"?

I think it was, [after my friend] Ivan said, "It's like the Jets and the Sharks out here." But the wonderful thing is that everybody answered each other, it was like the Jets and the Sharks! If somebody sings it back, you know it happened to them too, the magic of the thing happened because they not only saw it but they remembered it. *West Side Story* has been, for so many events, the room from which I came. And others as well, standing in the same waiting room.

You wrote in the book about music bringing you solace in your childhood and beyond. You mentioned the Beatles, Laura Nyro, Van Morrison. Have you met any of them?

I haven't met a Beatle, and I had a limo ride with Van, but I don't know if that even counts. Didn't get to meet Laura, though my engineer went to work for her and we passed a couple hellos back and forth.

I saw a post you put up in 2020 criticizing Morrison for his anti-mask extremism.

You know, you can love somebody's music, but in the music community he's always

it's rock 'n' roll. The book wasn't written for redemption or to correct anything. The part I find liberating is that I just don't give a damn what people say. I don't mind that they say I took drugs or take drugs. [They think] that's the most romantic part of Billie Holiday—that's unfortunate for them because a drug has nothing to do with people's spirit and soul. Except it does of course, it's their self-destructiveness.

When I spoke with you 10 years ago, you told me that when you come to New York, because of memories from when you lived here, it's hard for you, like as soon as the plane lands, you feel a heaviness—

been known for being an asshole, it's just understood. And it's almost like a divine spirit takes him when he sings, he just enters people's hearts, and it doesn't have anything to do with his human male behavior, which is kind of crass and unpleasant. He always seems to be behind a wall and he can't even look out, but when he sings he's free. So I always forgave him for that stuff.

You made the comment in the post, "dicks can be great artists."

[Laughs.] Sometimes I say stuff and maybe I should have edited it.

What are your plans after your tour? Are you going to do any recordings?

What happened was—'cause we're going to play some of these festivals here in Louisiana—I decided to bring in my old bass player. With the amount of money I make it's hard to employ more people, but I went ahead and now I have a combo and it's so good, oh my god! I'm so inspired that I think I'm gonna be happy touring more. I have a little collection of songs; I'm working on a jazz record now. I'm gonna do it with my old producer Russ Titelman.

Your producer, co-producer with Lenny Waronker on the first album. I wonder what it was like for you, having had those songs in your head, playing them on your guitar, to hear those recordings for the first time.

In some cases I listened and went, That wasn't how I thought it would be. But then I realized my only relationship to my songs was emotional, a feeling I would have when I heard them. I did not know how to think about what a drum would do, what a bass would do, so I would say every single song



It was 1968. As Jones says in her memoir, "I've been posing with cars for a long, long time."

Courtesy Rickie Lee Jones

was correct. But something like "Danny's All-Star Joint" I probably thought [should be] more Elvis-y, rougher. Everything they did was so perfect, precise. It wasn't really how I heard myself. But it is the way audiences who like my [early] work like to hear me. It's hard to find a fan who loves the whole scope of being precise and perfect and being rough and improvisational. When people like *Ghostlyhead* or *The Sermon* [on Exposition Boulevard], they don't like that first record, and vice-versa. So when I'm writing I think of Tiffany, a great local singer. She said, "I left my home and was living in my car after Katrina, and the only tape I had was *Ghostlyhead*"—sorry, I'm getting tearful—"and I played it over and over and over again.... It saved me." Messages like that say your diversity matters. It's filled me with this confidence I never had, about my work and my place in the world. It could be because I'm approaching 70 and there's

some kind of peace about [heading] there and going, it don't matter what people say about me. I just walk onstage and I know exactly who I am. I'm having fun now because the end is in sight, even if it's in 20 years. And now, we can party!

I felt you were really there for your fans during quarantine. I would see your livestreams and you always looked very serene, always smiling. Was that time hard at all for you?

"I just walk onstage and I know exactly who I am. I'm having fun now because the end is in sight, even if it's in 20 years. And now, we can party!"

For the most part my life didn't change. I did lose the ability to go out and play, but as hard as it was I enjoyed being part of what was happening to everybody. There's some kind of strength in "I hope we all have enough money to pay our rent." Whereas when you have money and you go, "I'm glad I don't have that worry," it sets you apart. I did not have enough money anymore so I had to worry with all of humanity—it's not like I have money in the bank and can sit around here for a year. And that's as wonderful as it was before, when I had money and went, I don't have to work for four or five years. They're both just lessons, and who are you ultimately? In the pandemic, oddly enough, I saw people come out—they have masks on, but they're looking at each other. I wrote a song about it. It's gonna be one of my best songs, about looking at neighbors walking by. If you look 'em in the eye and share their lives with them, I, anyway, found this other strength I've never had.

You did say in your book that money isolates.

I'm thinking of Los Angeles, which is a lifestyle of isolation: If you get some money and you don't have to, why do you want to go out—"I'm just gonna close the gate." If you can have money to know that if the shit hits the fan you won't be in a headline, but no more than that, and keep your feet in the

street and your toes in the lawn, you'll have a better life. Money doesn't give you anything, just isolation and a great big diamond ring.

Did you move from L.A. to New Orleans for that reason?

I moved because I didn't have any friends. It was a bad time and I was struggling, and I just went, How is it that I've lived here for decades and I don't have one fucking friend who's willing to be uncomfortable with me while I go through this hard stuff? It was a metaphorical thing happening—you're either gonna go down or you're gonna become a butterfly. And the thing about [New Orleans] that is life-changing for me is everybody you walk by says hey. Whatever their age, whatever their background, they acknowledge your existence—a 12-year-old on a bike says ma'am, Miz Rickie. It was so healing for me, as if the world was saying, Come out. And I came out, like Boo Radley. It's a celebratory town. And music is intrinsic to the culture.

Do you think of yourself as a jazz singer?

I was looking up jazz singers on Google and I wasn't there. I guess to be called a jazz singer you have to only do jazz. When I began, in '79, I sang jazz ballads onstage. These kids had never heard "My Funny Valentine" or "Lush Life." And I thought, So we're going to show people that they don't have to categorize people. I'm a jazz singer and I write songs and I'm a performer like Mick Jagger. And it seemed like it floated very well for a few years, and then it coagulated again and you have to be [just one thing] because it's easier for them to sell it that way. If we let marketing people tell us how we think of creativity, it's going to become smaller and smaller. So yes, I am a jazz singer!

And it's probably underestimating people. One critic said that your initial smash success was unparalleled because you were not singing in a genre that was popular at that time.

[Actor-writer] John Cameron Mitchell is a friend I've made here in New Orleans, and he said to me, "What I loved about you when I was a kid was that you did every kind of music." A critic would say, The pure purple color of your royalty is diminished because you're too thinned out. But I think my love of radio and all the diversity that came to me as a kid made me kind of the first of a new kind. I went, I'm not a folk-rock revolutionary and I'm not dancing, I am whatever I decided I would be. And for some reason they said, OK, you can come to the party. I hope that impacted what happened afterward. I think it did. ▮

Rickie Lee Jones will perform May 7 at New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Mary Lyn Maiscott, an NYC-based singer-songwriter, has played such clubs as CBGB, Planos, and Bowery Electric. Her latest EP is Dream: Live Recordings from the Map Room. She often writes about female singers, for Vanity Fair and other publications.

Do you use crack or cocaine?

Are you a **Woman** between the ages of **18-64**?

Researchers are recruiting participants for a paid study.

Women who use crack or cocaine are encouraged to call.

Confidentiality maintained. Brain Imaging Study.

Compensation provided (including for **child care**).

This study is for research purposes only.

Study Location: Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai (1450 Madison Ave)

Time Commitment: approximately 3 business days

GCO #18-1360 IRB STUDY-13-00187

Call 1-855-795-4837



Effective Date: 2/3/2022
End Date: 4/13/2022



**Mount
Sinai**

WARHOL TELLS ALL FROM THE GRAVE

The enigmatic pop maestro finally gets real—or, an AI version of him does—in a new Netflix documentary series

By Stephen Mooallem



He and his shadow: Warhol's penchant for doppelgängers comes to the fore in *The Andy Warhol Diaries*.

One day back in 2012, when I was the editor of Andy Warhol's magazine *Interview*, someone from the mailroom appeared at my office door with a box. We were in the process of moving out of the Soho space *Interview* had occupied for the previous 23 years, and the box had been found in the basement. It was filled with papers, pictures, and other items that dated to the mid-1970s. There was an angry letter addressed to *Interview*'s editor at the time, Bob Colacello, who had apparently misdiagnosed a midtown physician and hung up abruptly. There were mock-ups for what looked like a Smokey Bear PSA. There were grease-penciled contact sheets taped to the photographer Ara Gallant's studio letterhead. There were images of Björn Borg, Paloma Picasso, Helmut Newton's passport, and the model Verushka balancing on a chair in the middle of Fifth Avenue, near Central Park. There were sketches for an eerie tableau involving faceless silver mannequins and shopping carts filled with bottles

of ketchup. There was a yellowed clipping from the Friday, February 6, 1976, edition of the *New York Daily News* with Patty Hearst on the cover alongside the headline "Patty Stars in Robbery Film."

The box reminded me of one of Warhol's "Time Capsules," cardboard files and plastic containers he filled, beginning in 1974, with bits of detritus from his life. I recalled seeing the contents of several of them artfully arranged in vitrines at a Warhol show at Dia: Beacon in 2005, inviting viewers to draw connections between an array of pictures, letters, invitations, promotional swag, objects, and receipts. The difference was that this box in my office had not been sealed and stowed in secure storage for posterity. It had made its way through at least two of Warhol's Factories to our basement, where it sat for a near-quarter century, evading the trash, water damage, and even a fire in the building in 2006. It had not been preserved; it had simply survived.

I mention all this because, when it comes

to Andy Warhol, perhaps the most influential American artist of the postwar period, what is art and what is artifact can sometimes be dicey to discern.

It's murky water that executive producer Ryan Murphy and director Andrew Rossi dive into in the new six-part Netflix documentary *The Andy Warhol Diaries*. Mining home movies, archival footage, and interviews with curators, gallerists, fellow artists, and people who knew Warhol, the series endeavors to provide an inside view of Warhol's closely guarded personal life. The action is ostensibly narrated by Warhol himself, using excerpts from the 1989 opus *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, an 800-plus-page tome that was posthumously compiled and edited by his longtime friend and assistant Pat Hackett, who had collaborated with him on the 1980 book *POPism: The Warhol Sixties*.

From November 24, 1976, until just days before his death, at the age of 58 on February 22, 1987, after he was admitted to New York Hospital for gallbladder surgery, Warhol made a routine of calling Hackett each morning to dictate his diary. It was a project he began following an IRS audit in the early 1970s, after which Warhol's business manager, Fred Hughes, instructed him to document all his activities and save his receipts so it was clear what was work and what was personal. Warhol's solution was to try to make everything into work. Paige Powell, *Interview*'s publisher in the 1980s, once told me that Warhol would buy lunch for the staff at the Factory and then photograph everyone's food before they ate, so it could qualify as a business expense.

Warhol's diaries were another way for him to itemize his life. The entries can at times be almost excruciatingly mun-

dane: "Got up at 7 a.m. in Vancouver and cabbied to the airport (\$15 plus \$5 tip, magazines, \$5)," the first one begins. But they can also be extraordinarily revealing, as Warhol drops occasional bombs about art-world and Hollywood figures, his famous friends and contemporaries, and his anxieties about the kind of work he is doing, how others perceive him, and the way the world is changing. (The original printing of the diaries did not include an index, which sent much of New York's chattering class nervously rifling through the text in search of their names.)

To bring the diaries to life, Murphy and Rossi used AI technology to recreate Warhol's voice from snippets of archival audio and readings by the actor Bill Irwin. This "AI Warhol"—an invention that Warhol, who once employed actor Allen Midgett to impersonate him on a 1967 lecture tour, would surely have enjoyed—recites the lines from the diaries (as Hackett presented them) in a pixelated deadpan over a string of blurry vi-

When it comes to Warhol, what is art and what is artifact can sometimes be dicey to discern.

sual reenactments. It's Andy Warhol (sort of) in his own words (sort of).

I never met Andy Warhol. I was still in elementary school when he died. Like most of the world, my understanding of him has been formed largely by interviews, articles, books, movies, and exhibitions, as well as conversations I've had with people who worked with or who hung out with him. But even when Warhol was alive, he had the air of a self-invented figment whose unknowability became a material part of his art.

In the documentary's first episode, Rossi quickly surveys Warhol's early years growing up in Pittsburgh, his rise in the 1950s as a commercial artist doing illustrations for magazines and department stores in New York, and his emergence over the following decade as the fright-wigged Pop hipster-cipher, in a black leather jacket and sunglasses, of the Silver Factory, whose "Campbell's Soup Cans," "Brillo Boxes," "Marilyn" series, and experimental films helped redefine American art and the avant-garde.

But this early Andy isn't the Warhol of *The Andy Warhol Diaries*. The Andy that Rossi takes as his subject is the Warhol of the late 1970s and early '80s, who comes across a bit like a countercultural mashup of Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse: the éminence grise of an underground kingdom of indeterminate magic. This late-period Warhol's most-oft-cited artistic endeavors consist of doing commissioned portraits for a mixed bag of well-paying socialites and celebrities, hosting a show on MTV, and popping up in unexpected places, like *The Love Boat*. He has a contract with the Zoli modeling agency for runway and commercial gigs—a sideline that seems to be approached with a whiff of irony until it becomes apparent just how seriously Warhol takes it. He is in his 40s and 50s but often appears older, bearing both the physical and psychic scars of his 1968 shooting by Valerie Solanas, who played a bit role in one of his movies. The shooting almost killed Warhol—and briefly did: The bullet tore through his chest and abdomen and he had to be revived in the operating room. In the aftermath, he seems to be drifting through life like a wayward specter in search of unfinished business.

How Warhol finds meaning in his last two decades—and how that meaning is connected to his art—are central questions in *The Andy Warhol Diaries*. The middle episodes are structured around three key relationships for Warhol during this time. The first is with Warhol's partner throughout the 1970s, Jed Johnson, a delivery boy from Sacramento who Warhol hired to work in the Factory. After the shooting, Johnson moved into Warhol's townhouse on East 66th Street to help him recover and they re-

maintained together for 12 years, as Johnson became a successful and sought-after interior designer. The second is with Warhol's off-and-on boyfriend in the 1980s, a preppy young Paramount executive named Jon Gould. Gould initially appears as an object of Warhol's infatuation but remains cagey about both their relationship and his sexuality. The third is with the painter Jean-Michel Basquiat, then a newly minted star in the art world. Warhol's relationship with Basquiat wasn't romantic but turned out to be pivotal for each of them, as Warhol struggled to stand up to the long shadow he'd already cast over post-war art and Basquiat grappled with the hype, addiction, and racism, both insidious and overt, that threatened to subsume him and his work. Johnson, Gould, and Basquiat all died young: Johnson at the age of 47, in the explosion of TWA Flight 800 over Long Island Sound, in 1996; Gould at 33, of AIDS, in 1986; and Basquiat at 27, of a drug overdose the year after Warhol's death, in 1988. Johnson and Gould each had twin brothers named Jay, and both Jays speak in the series.

By all accounts, Warhol and Johnson's bond was strong, only undone by what Johnson saw as Warhol's desperation to feel young and relevant, which manifested itself in Warhol going out every night, taking strange combinations of drugs, and running away from the domestic life Johnson was trying to build for them together. The end came when Johnson discovered a set of nude photographs Warhol had taken of men that Victor Hugo—designer Halston's window-dresser boyfriend and Warhol's sometime assistant—had corralled as subjects for Warhol's "Sex Parts" and "Torsos" series. Many in Warhol's circle found Hugo toxic; Warhol referred to the pieces he was making as "landscapes." Johnson had an affair and moved out—on Christmas Eve, no less.

Johnson's departure deeply wounded Warhol. But within days Warhol had set his sights on Gould, a 27-year-old producer who worked under Paramount's then-chairman Barry Diller.

To win over Gould, Warhol showered him with gifts and flowers—grand gestures of affection that initially made Gould uneasy. Though Gould eventually responded to Warhol's overtures, their relationship was always shaded by ambiguity, with Warhol reaching out to Gould and Gould periodically distancing himself from Warhol.

Warhol, Rossi's subjects imply, was enamored with Basquiat. To many, their friendship also appeared transactional. But their connection—which is also explored in the new exhibition *Jean-Michel Basquiat: King Pleasure*, in Chelsea, and in a play, *The Collaboration*, which recently opened on London's West End—seemed based on something more genuine. The work they produced for their 1985 collaborative show, *Warhol, Basquiat*, at the Shafrazi Gallery, with Warhol's return to hand-painting and Basquiat painting over Warhol, represented a singular merging of two gargantuan artistic visions. But the *New York Times* review of the exhibition, which referred to Basquiat as an "art world mascot" and the project as one of Warhol's more cynical "manipula-

tions," hurt Basquiat so profoundly that he, too, pulled away from Warhol.

The exploration of Warhol's love life, in particular, is part of Rossi's larger project: to lean into a relatively recent body of scholarship around Warhol as an LGBTQ+ artist. While it's tempting to view the details about Warhol's relationships with Johnson and Gould as revelations, Warhol never really hid them from the people in his sphere. His romantic partners—Johnson, Gould, the photographer Edward Wallowitch, and the

Andy Warhol Diaries, the gallerist Jeffrey Deitch discusses Warhol's embrace of the "artist as art"—arguing that, in some ways, Warhol's persona was his own greatest work. But adopting different personas might not have always been about art for Warhol. There were times when it may have been more about just finding a way to exist.

Warhol took those feelings of otherness and rendered them in primary colors. He started out as a commercial artist and, in many ways, he also ended up as one: His fi-

Warhol's business manager instructed him to document all his activities and save his receipts so it was clear what was work and what was personal. Warhol's solution was to try to make everything into work.



Warhol holds up a life-size Polaroid portrait of himself holding a Polaroid camera.

NETFLIX © 2022

poet John Giorno among them—often served as his subjects, and he dealt with queerness explicitly even in his early works, such as his 1950s "Boy Book" drawings. In interviews, Warhol could be notoriously obfuscating, but that was all part of his persona—a wry, asexual, apolitical, inscrutable one that he worked to cultivate, which somehow made the notion that he could ever truly love or be loved seem almost inconceivable.

This was likely intentional. Coming of age in Western Pennsylvania in the 1930s and '40s, the child of Slovakian immigrants in a working-class Catholic family, Warhol's identity—as clear as it might have been to him and as undeniable as it is said to have been to those around him—would not have been easily negotiable. At one point in *The*

nal series, "The Last Supper" paintings, completed just weeks before his death, was commissioned by the Greek art dealer Alexander Iolas, who thought the religious imagery would appeal to European collectors and financial institutions. Warhol understood that commercialism was all about packaging, so he went about repackaging everything—consumerism, Catholicism, celebrity, desire, tragedy, himself—as art. He did it almost compulsively, as if his life depended on it, because in some sense, it did. The alternative was an unbearable kind of isolation.

It's a subject broached in the last two episodes of *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, which deal with Gould's death and Warhol during the early height of the AIDS crisis.

In the heady, bacchanalian days of the

Silver Factory, Warhol was given the name "Drella"—an amalgam of Dracula and Cinderella—by the inhabitants of his studio. It was a nod at what some viewed as his apparent blankness or detachment in the face of the self-destructive tendencies he witnessed—and, in some ways, fed—in the people he transformed into Superstars and subsequently discarded in his own warped version of the Hollywood studio system. Questions about Warhol's capacity for empathy are raised by Rossi in relation to "Ladies and Gentlemen," a series of portraits of primarily Black and Latinx trans people that Warhol was commissioned by Italian art dealer Luciano Anselmino to create in 1975—among them, the activist and organizer Marsha P. Johnson. Four years later, the *Village Voice* found Johnson wandering Christopher Street, broke and alone, while Warhol's portrait of her sold for tens of thousands of dollars. (The sitters for the "Ladies and Gentlemen" series were each paid \$50 for their time; most of them were not identified until 2014.) In his diaries, Warhol even says troubling things about Basquiat—some of his quips laced with the kind of racism he knew Basquiat was fighting to overcome—and Rossi delves into some of the experiences in Warhol's childhood that might have informed those comments.

Warhol didn't deal explicitly with issues like race, privilege, or exploitation in his work; it's unclear if he had the ability or self-awareness to deal with those issues in his life or if what some have interpreted as a kind of observational distance or a callous indifference was a burden or a void. But the negative space isn't entirely empty.

In a 1985 diary entry following a trip with Gould to Cape Cod, Warhol laments the state of their relationship: "I thought this trip would bring some progress with Jon, but it didn't," Warhol says. "Oh, but from now on I can't talk personally about Jon to the Diary because when I told him I did, he got mad and told me not to ever do it again, that if I ever put anything personal about him in the Diary he'd stop seeing me. So from now on, it'll just be the business angle

in the Diary—he'll just be a person who works for Paramount Pictures who I'm trying to do scripts and movies with."

It's difficult to know if Warhol's words were meant to be included in his diaries or if they were directed at Hackett, whose job it was to transcribe them (or both). We'll never know, which is part of what makes using the diaries as a primary source so fraught.

Warhol mentions Gould again in the diaries, but he never addresses Gould's death. We find out about it in an editor's note from Hackett, who says that Gould died after "an extended illness," and denied even to close friends that he had AIDS.

In this era of reckoning, it's hard to imagine a moment when silence didn't just equal death, but death could be accompanied by silence. This is where our understanding of Warhol's context matters—of the fear and stigmatization that existed in the 1980s, of what it was like to live inside strained euphemisms. *The New York Times* didn't even identify AIDS as a cause of death in obituaries until May 29, 1987, when actor, playwright, and theater director Charles Ludlam succumbed to the disease. Flipping through issues of *Interview* from back then, the impact of the AIDS crisis can be felt more by an absence. There isn't an avalanche of tributes or rallying cries. The magazine just suddenly sobers up as editors, writers, photographers, actors, models, artists, musicians, and dancers quietly slip away from the world and its pages.

Warhol didn't often talk about AIDS pub-

Warhol understood that commercialism was all about packaging, so he went about repackaging everything—consumerism, Catholicism, celebrity, desire, tragedy, himself—as art.

licly, but it's all over his diaries. He hears rumors that a designer friend has AIDS and panics after the designer kisses him on the cheek at a party. Rock Hudson and Perry Ellis both die of AIDS and Warhol laments how the disease is ravaging the creative community that surrounds him. He is sad—and scared. In another one of Hackett's editor's notes, she recalls instructions he gave to his housekeepers: "From now on, wash

Jon's dishes and clothes separate from mine."

Toward the end of the series, Rossi addresses the long-held perception that Warhol's response to the AIDS crisis was somehow a failure—that he should have been a more vocal advocate for the LG-BTQ+ community at a time when people in his life, like Gould and *Interview* editor Robert Hayes, were dying.

In one sequence, Jessica Beck, a curator at the Andy Warhol Museum who has written extensively about Warhol as a queer artist in the age of AIDS, decodes one of Warhol's last paintings, entitled *The Big C*, which was part of "The Last Supper" series. Among other imagery, it contains pictures of motorcycles and other queer signifiers, Christ figures, the omniscient eye of the Wise potato-chip insignia, the mark of the beast reformatted as a "6.99" price tag, and references to newspaper headlines about AIDS, which was referred to in the media early on as "gay cancer." That's "The Big C," Beck posits: Gould's death, Warhol's spirituality and sexuality, his fears and shames and obsession with mortality, are all right there on the canvas.

It's a poignant reframing of Warhol's art through a personal lens that, whether you agree with Beck's biographical reading or not, casts a glow on his work's startling intimacy.

It's powerful, too, to see both Jay Johnson and Jay Gould discuss their brothers Jed and Jon, looking how Jed and Jon might have looked now. Jay Johnson says he wishes Jed and Warhol had somehow found a way to stay together; we see Jed at Warhol's funeral and Jay commemorating Jed's death on a Long Island beach. Although Warhol never discusses it in his diaries, we learn separately that when Jon Gould was first admitted to the hospital, Warhol—who abhorred hospitals—visited him every day for his entire month-long stay. At an auction in 2017 of the estate of Jon and Jay Gould's mother, we see a trove of poems and letters Warhol wrote to Jon in response to ones that Jon had written to him. Warhol's love was not unrequited.

In the final episode, the artist Glenn Ligon offers that the making of an artwork is often less about expressing who you are than trying to figure out who you are. For Warhol biographers and curators, there's an almost reflexive inclination to try to imagine how he would have embraced this age we're in now, when our notions of identity, celebrity, and reality are so thoroughly Warholian. Rossi does not resist the low-hanging fruit: The prospect that an algorithm could allow someone who has been dead for 35 years to keep talking probably would have intrigued Warhol—as would Instagram, TikTok, the metaverse, vibe shifts, Kim Kardashian, Fox News, and the modern mechanics of propaganda. But more than art, more than media, more than memes, it's the roiling nature of our psyches that Warhol may have been most prescient about. ▮

Stephen Mooallem is editor at large at Harper's Bazaar and the former editor in chief of Interview and the Village Voice.

Voice Choice

GOD LIVED FOR WARHOL

Andy Warhol: Revelation reminds us anew of the Pope of Pop's mass appeal

By R.C. Baker

When Andy Warhol died, in 1987 at age 58, this paper's front page asked, "Is God Dead?" That headline was not as snarky or grandiose as it might have

seemed at first blush. For sure it was acknowledging that one of the most popular, successful, and influential artists in history had passed away unexpectedly after gall bladder surgery. But it also expressed an awareness that throughout his four-decade career, this gay, first-generation American from a blue-collar family in west-

ern Pennsylvania often focused on themes of mortality in general and religion in particular in his paintings, prints, and films.

This open espousing of faith—Warhol's looked to both the rites of Rome and the Byzantine Catholicism his parents brought with them from Eastern Europe—was a rarity among 20th-century artists. The Brooklyn Museum's exhibition showcases vitrines filled with Warhol's prayer cards, crucifixes, and such religious tchotchkes as "Jesus Statue, 1938-41," a small plaster effigy described in a wall label as an early Warhol: "Between the ages of ten and thirteen, he painted the figure, taking care to color the Sacred Heart and Christ's wounds in bright red." After moving to New York, in 1949, Warhol refined such directness into powerfully bold graphic design work that he later transmuted into pop art masterpieces.

In 1966, *Time* magazine's cover famously asked, "Is God Dead?" Two years later, Warhol was shot by a disgruntled actress-playwright who felt disrespected by the famous artist. There had always been a vibrating abstract quality to Warhol's death multiples—the Brooklyn show includes stacks of electric chairs, shifting blue portraits of a mourning Jackie Kennedy, and negative prints of Marilyn Monroe that reverse fair skin and blond hair to dark scrapes and blots. In contrast, Richard Avedon's large black and white photo of Warhol's deeply scarred torso matter-of-factly documents his near-fatal wounds.

Christ's death foretold in Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* is appropriated here, silkscreened onto two massive pink and yellow canvases on either side of one gallery.

© 2021 The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, a museum of Carnegie Institute. All rights reserved. Film still courtesy of The Andy Warhol Museum



Still from *Reel 77**** (Four Stars)*, 1967.

These paintings, from Warhol's 1986 "Last Supper" series, echo the ambiance of Roman churches, where Renaissance paintings and altars bear upon a worshipper like an aesthetic and spiritual vise. In other galleries, Warhol's graphic dexterity and dead-on colors come to the fore in numerous images of skulls, including a small yellow one casting a shadow against a red background, creating an ersatz heart—death as valentine.

The enigma of mortality also hovers over a roughly 12-foot-wide silkscreen painting

Andy Warhol: Revelation
The Brooklyn Museum
200 Eastern Parkway
718.638.5000
brooklynmuseum.org
Through June 19

from Warhol's late-1970s "Shadows" series: A black slab on the left melds mistily with arabesques of white on the right. What form originally cast this abraded portal of darkness? Alert viewers will note that the gallery's ceiling lights, interrupted by a half-wall divider, cast a silvery shade upon the surface, heightening awareness of your own gray ghost falling upon the canvas's ... vision of limbo? ... as you walk past.

It is to Warhol's eternal credit that his stark images so often conjure questions you never before thought of asking. ▮

READING, WRITING, AND LIVING IN *CHECKOUT 19*

Claire-Louise Bennett explores literature's capacity to shape a life, and, at times, replace it

By Daniel Felsenenthal

The distance between writing and the outside world is often enormous. Why are writers bent with mental labor, away from the bustle of society? At their best, authors transform their longing into focus, and make life bloom between laptop keys and notebook spines: On the far side of lonesome toil exists a deeper, strange connection to the experiences of others.

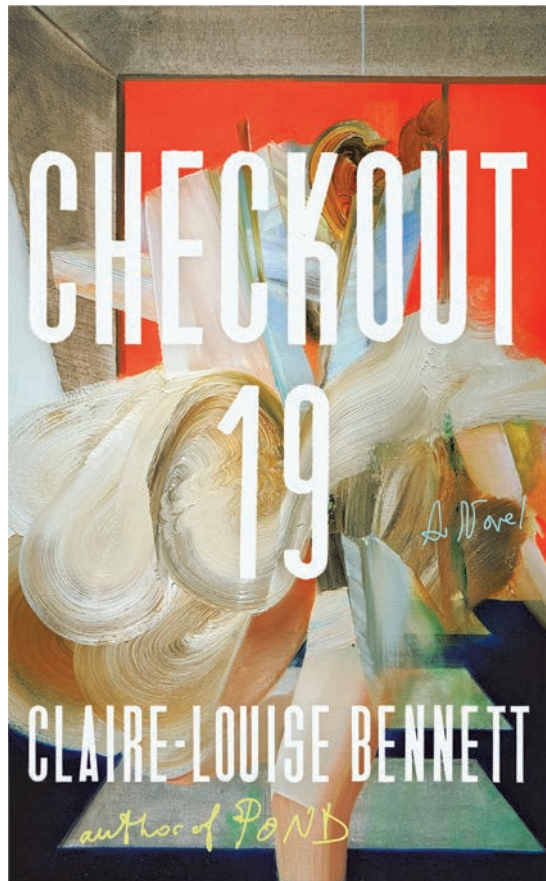
Isolation is hardly an enemy in the work of Claire-Louise Bennett. Her lauded debut, the novel-cum-story-collection *Pond* (2015), elucidates the domestic existence of a woman living alone in rural Ireland, her independence literally verdant with broad beans, spinach, potato plants, and parsley. "... [F]or the first time in my adult life other people knew exactly what I was doing," she narrates about gardening, a female too used to being labeled "eccentric." Through oblique vignettes, *Pond* navigates slippery literary terrain: a character without motivation, and a story without incident. We follow Bennett's avatar through composting rituals, cups of coffee, jaunts about why she needs to be drunk in order to enjoy men's company, and idiosyncratic routines that convey the quiet domestic assuredness available solely to those who manage solo.

Bennett's unhurried first-person is spiked with nervous tics, such as, "That's right" and "Yes," her characters unburdened by information, noise, or busyness; she seems like someone from another century. Computers are conspicuously absent from her masterful second novel, *Checkout 19* (just out from Riverhead), perhaps because analog things are full of memory—and also since she sees them as low-key fetish objects:

At the beginning I wrote on unbound and unlined A4 sheets of paper my father brought home in blocks from work. Although he didn't work in an office, from time to time my father came home from work with office supplies, such as the neatly enveloped blocks of paper I just mentioned, and slender twisty-up stainless steel ballpoint pens—red, black, green, blue—and staplers and staples and paper clips and bulldog clips, and I feel sure there were also small boxes of drawing pins that I liked to

shake back and forth either side of my head.

Bennett's tendency toward repetition echoes Swiss rambler Robert Walser, Austrian malcontent Thomas Bernhard, voicey Brit Ann Quin, and underknown Pole Witold Gombrowicz—though she's often described in terms of suspiciously convenient influences, Joyce and Beckett. Born in southwest England, Bennett has lived in



Riverhead Books

Ireland for virtually the entirety of adulthood, and publishers and critics initially grouped her with a couple of other budding, linguistically gifted writers from her chosen country, Eimear McBride and Colin Barrett. For each of these compatriots, Beckett and Joyce made for compelling marketing boilerplate, and in *Checkout 19*, Bennett plays with perceptions of her nationality, offering up a working-class novel with an English setting and a sweep of sensibility and prose inspired by a larger

swatch of the so-called British Isles. Like one giant, illuminating digression, *Checkout 19* pretends to contemplate novels and writing but actually teaches us about people.

The first two of the book's seven sections, which take place during the protagonist's childhood and adolescence, anchor us. Bennett's expert, concrete specifics allow her to barter with plotlessness, not to mention to shirk paragraph breaks. An ineffectual, calm teacher is marked by his "mellow tweeds" and "peace-seeking palm." She tells us this about her narrator's menstruation: "On the first day the colour is very pretty—it's a shade of red I've been looking for in a lipstick since forever." She has her menses in science class:

I very quietly told the girl beside me I'd leaked and without taking her eyes off the generator's hair-raising dome she gave me something out of her bag which I immediately scrunched up and stuffed into my cardigan sleeve. Then I put up my hand, the hand that had nothing up its sleeve, and asked the teacher for permission to go to the toilet.

A goal of realistic fiction is that details will seem relevant to the lives of an audience—this relies, of course, on the subjective experiences of diverse readers. More interested in patterning language than building familiar environments, Bennett nonetheless has a disarming telepathy. "I'm not long for this world," her protagonist recounts her grandmother saying, and though my grandmother grew up on the other side of the Atlantic, she not only used the same neologism but her grandchildren appreciated it for similar reasons: How the phrase's slanted, odd grammar twists its meaning when repeated, from a statement about imminent death to one of childlike possibility. "I felt noble, mysterious, and independent," Bennett writes about reciting her grandmother's "mantra," "As if I were only visiting this world in any case and had somewhere a million times better to return to."

Even more surprising is her evocation of an instructor at school, Mr. Burton, who manages to match the boisterousness of his charges, earning their elusive respect. Like Bennett's narrator, I fell in unrequited love with a similarly charming teacher when I was 16, attempting to commandeer the attention of a grown heterosexual by writing stories for him.

What leads young people to art are often simple needs they can't yet comprehend. Bennett's log of how subtly such a fledgling crush can come to dominate an adolescent's consciousness is extraordinary. When Mr. Burton offers writerly encouragement, the protagonist learns how literature can become a placebo for affection: "I gave him the stories on a Friday so they were in his home for three nights and two days.... All weekend I felt him with me, wherever I went, all day and at night."

As Bennett's chronological anti-narra-

tive progresses, it spins away from realism. One lengthy section incorporates litanies of authors she'd read at points in her young adulthood, and those she hadn't yet—often, the writers in the latter camp are women. Trying to replace men with books, the narrator finds out how men gatekeep writing: A lover shreds a story she's labor-

Like one giant, illuminating digression, *Checkout 19* pretends to contemplate novels and writing but actually teaches us about people.

ing over, an early work that seems like a shaky maiden voyage into the heart of a male-dominated literary world. A friend, Dale, refuses to lend her his Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton collections, thanks to a belief that females "can't withstand poetry." Later, portended by his paternalism, Dale rapes her. At one point, the narrator describes herself at the Glastonbury music festival, reading Iris Murdoch "lying down in the top field with a paper cup of chai tea," a woman alone yet surrounded by youthful conviviality, unwilling to sacrifice her desire to read for other people, or her life for reading.

Bennett demonstrates how literature provides many kinds of mobility. It leads the narrator out of a class-bound childhood in which the "future was mapped out ... on the smallest scrap of paper." Simultaneously, by casting images like gemstones in streams of prose, Bennett shows how books are portals through which Very Serious Adults inhabit their lust, gender, atavism, silliness, humor, and yearning for freedom. We carry books in jacket pockets to parties, read them on trains back from nights of drinking, lend them to unreliable and ardent acquaintances, need them because of a broken heart or when everyone's busy on a weekend night. Such objects trace lines from person to person, house to apartment, dredging up brutal, gleaming memories. In the future, no doubt, I'll bring up *Checkout 19* at the wrong time, annoying people with my bookishness. This great work draws us out of our solitude and makes us commune with it at the same time. ■

A regular contributor to the Voice since its relaunch, Daniel Felsenenthal also writes frequent criticism for Pitchfork and publishes fiction, essays, and poems in other publications. In 2019, his novella Sex With Andre appeared in The Puritan.



As an essential company, **INTELLI-TEC** has continued to strive through these challenging current events to protect you.



SECURITY SYSTEMS



ACCESS CONTROL



FIRE SYSTEMS



SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS

***Security with a Personal Touch[™]** from Manhattan to Montauk*

"Under the same ownership since 1999!"

Long Island East End • 50 Station Road, Water Mill, NY • 631-500-9111

Main Office • 150 Eileen Way, Syosset, NY • 516-876-2000

Florida • 1200 Clint Moore Road, Boca Raton, FL • 844-767-9922



www.Intelli-Tec.net

Licensed by the State of New York 12000003519

Licensed by the State of Florida EC13009902





Get back to City Winery for
delicious food, award-winning
wines and world class music.

PIER 57 AT HUDSON RIVER PARK • CITYWINERY.COM/NEWYORK

Indulge Your Senses®

