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Cover photo by Jen Rosenstein

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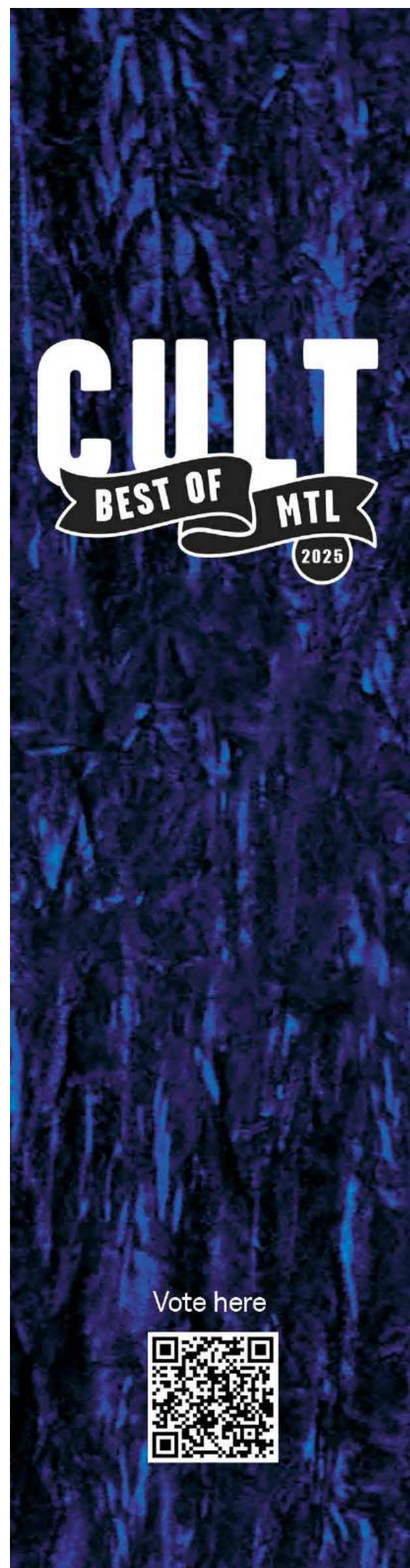
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Disinformation vs. democracy



BY TOULA DRIMONIS

Probably one of the most frustrating things to experience is watching friends or acquaintances sharing obvious misinformation or disinformation online, knowing there's nothing you can do to make them change their minds. Even when it's pointed out that the source is untrustworthy, or the "news" has been refuted with evidence, those who have bought the lie will simply deflect and deny.

As Canadians prepare to cast their vote on April 28, experts have identified both external and internal threats to our democracy. The risks of foreign interference and social media propaganda campaigns are very real, and without the ability to analyze and evaluate information for accuracy and reliability, disinformation can easily distort and divide. The proliferation of artificial intelligence has only made the truth harder to distinguish, which is exactly what fake-news disseminators want.

EKOS president and pollster Frank Graves is absolutely right when he says that we're living in an era that sees "a crisis of both trust and truth."

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE AND HOMEGROWN PROPAGANDA

A healthy democracy depends on people being able to make informed decisions. Disinformation that preyed on people's COVID-induced anxieties — turning them into anger — had a lot to do with the "Freedom" trucker convoy madness and much of the hate targeted at former prime minister Justin

Trudeau. Often, people couldn't even articulate why they "hated" him; they were simply convinced that they did. It would later be revealed that Russian bots and Russian state TV had largely been behind foreign interference that aimed to destabilize our democracy.

Things haven't slowed down since then. In March, Canadian award-winning news organization Press Progress reported that Canada Proud, with close ties to Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, was running attack ads associating Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney with Jeffrey Epstein's "global child sex trafficking ring."

Canada Proud ran 10 separate Facebook ads insinuating vague ties between Carney and "notorious pedophile" Jeffrey Epstein. They spread like wildfire. According to the investigation, Canada Proud spent around \$15,000 on Carney-Epstein ads that were viewed nearly two million times, and has run at least 29 additional ads targeting Carney since late February.

Jeff Ballingall, the founder of Mobilize Media Group and Canada Proud, estimated that Canada Proud has purchased between \$150,000 and \$200,000 in advertising for the campaign, all from donors to the cause.

The only real photo of Carney and his wife standing next to Ghislaine Maxwell is from a public event that took place in 2013, "two years before allegations about the British socialite's role in Epstein's crimes became publicly known," as Press Progress notes.

But that hasn't stopped those eager to spread disinformation.

Among images circulating and being shared abundantly are AI-generated photos of Carney and Maxwell looking extra friendly. If you're AI-savvy, it's easy to spot the fake photos. Most of them bear the telltale Grok seals on the bottom right, indicating the image has been generated. But many people aren't AI savvy.

AI is the perfect weapon for foreign interference and electoral disinformation because too many voters online are not equipped to detect fake news, biased reporting or political propaganda masquerading as facts-based political criticism.

DISINFORMATION IS 'AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT'

In 2023, the Canadian government established the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions. Justice Marie-Josée Hogue, a judge of the Quebec Court of Appeal, was appointed commissioner.

This past February, after the inquiry concluded, Justice Hogue warned Canadians that we must guard against the "existential threat" of disinformation, which can be weaponized through artificial intelligence and spread through social media to undermine democracy."

The report called disinformation "the single biggest risk to our democracy."

The government is so concerned about deliberate disinformation during the electoral campaign that it even published important tips on how to detect and report disinformation that could pose a threat to Canada's electoral process. I would urge everyone to look at them.

In early March, Communications Security Establishment Canada released an update on the cyber threats facing Canada's democratic process and warned of "a surge of use of AI for election interference by China, Russia and Iran," and other hostile foreign actors using AI to "sow division and distrust within democratic societies."

In the meantime, our southern neighbour is now categorically and unequivocally one of those "hostile foreign actors." The Trump administration isn't even subtle about its desire to annex (read: invade and compromise a sovereign country's territory and national interests), both by making outright threats to Canada and its leadership and by openly meddling in our democracy.

Trump's MAGA influencers and grifters have been loudly endorsing Conservative Party of Canada leader Pierre Poilievre in our current electoral campaign, and bot accounts have been busy spreading misinformation and fake support for the party.

Elon Musk has long crossed the line from trying to influence politics to full-on political interference, by amplifying far-right accounts and pundits, and openly supporting far-right political parties and politicians in Brazil, Argentina, Germany and elsewhere.

Musk has openly criticized Trudeau and offered his support to Poilievre and the Conservative Party.

Beware of bots + more media literacy tips

If you spend any amount of time on social media, you'll encounter bots. They're usually accounts that have recently been created, don't have much of an online history and engage with you by saying something outrageous or patently false, which incites you to immediately respond, in turn creating more traction for them and the generation of more posts.

Experts say that the best way to respond to bots is not to. You report them as a fake bot and block them. The less you engage with them, the better. It isn't always easy. Even seasoned journalists will occasionally get suckered into pointless back-and-forth exchanges, only to realize they're not talking to a real person.

Always make sure to read past the headline. Many sensational headlines are often refuted later in the article itself. But how many people furiously sharing it as real news bothered to read the entire article before rushing to share? More importantly, how many of those sharing hoped you wouldn't look past the headline?

When something feels "off" or is too outrageous, question it. Before you share it, thoroughly read it, make sure it's accurate and the source is reliable. There are plenty of reputable fact-checking websites that can help you decipher truths from falsehoods: PolitiFact, Reuters Fact Check, Snopes, FactCheck.org or AP Fact Check.

Elections Canada has also published an extensive guide, helping voters fight disinformation and become better at spotting "fake news." Read it.

While it's getting harder and harder to figure out what's real and what's fake these days, you still owe it to yourself not to become an easy target.

Media literacy and extra caution are essential in this toxic climate — trust me.

Better yet, don't. Do your own homework.

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Loco motives



Josie Desmarais

BY TAYLOR C. NOAKES

Given the federal election and the trade war, it's easy to forget things are still happening in Montreal, particularly on the urban planning front. Makes me wonder whether politicians are aware of that, and are using it to their advantage.

BRIDGE-BONAVENTURE: SO LONG CITÉ-DU-HAVRE

It might have been an April Fool's Day joke had she waited another day, but alas: The City of Montreal promises they've learned their lessons from how Griffintown was developed... by essentially proposing the exact same thing. The mayor's March 31 announcement proposed doubling the number of housing units for the area formerly known as everything but "Bridge-Bonaventure," which isn't bad in and of itself, though the promise that it won't be like Griffintown 2.0 is hard to fathom given similar population density, massing, insufficient affordable or subsidized housing given the ongoing housing crisis, and no firm plans for the necessary infrastructure of communities, such as schools, a library, a CLSC, etc.

Catherine Lussier, the coordinator of the housing rights group FRAPRU, nailed it in her CBC interview by making what ought to be an obvious point: this is all public land, so 100% of it should be reserved for social housing. Perhaps in keeping with her administration's mantra of "lower your expectations," Mayor Plante would only commit to 40% "off-market" housing for the sector, but without specifics about how much would be affordable or socialized.

If this follows the development pace of other large urban renewal efforts in recent years, it's unlikely that any part of it will actually be shovel-ready within a year, as insinuated. And while I'm not opposed to residential development in a growing city amidst a housing crisis, without strict regulations and controls on home ownership, this whole sector could very easily become just another Griffintown — i.e. a missed opportunity to develop a viable and sustainable urban community. In other words, we need 'balconville' not 'condoville.'

I'm also wondering whether it's really that wise to continue getting rid of all available industrial land near the port. This

is the last part of the 'old' port that's still operational, and there's still some industrial activity in the area. Given the potential mass re-orientation of the Canadian economy away from the United States towards Asia and Europe, it's not unreasonable to think Montreal may yet have need for grain elevators and an industrial harbour.

Unfortunately, that's not the kind of long-term economic planning big city mayors are empowered to do anymore.

Brace yourself for years of renderings of medium-sized ultra-modern branded-living "urban chalets" stacked 10 to 15 stories high by the banks of the canal, all with vaguely Irish names and/or references to the area's working-class or industrial heritage. Le Miller. O'Silo. Vil-Oie. McHarbour.

The most laughable part of the press conference was when Mayor Plante insisted the area would get a REM station. Griffintown was also supposed to get a REM station, and that project — which at one point was supposed to have been completed in 2024 — was only determined to be technically feasible last August. Feasible or not, financing has to be secured from the provincial government, and CDPQ-Infra will likely come back with a very high number given that the REM is operational and they'd have to build one or two new stations without interrupting service.

Mark my words: in a couple of years, CDPQ-Infra will be building these two stations at a cost of \$500-million apiece, construction will take five years, and they'll be running shuttle buses from Brossard while the line is out of service. They'll claim it wouldn't be safe otherwise. This will be about the time CDPQ-Infra sells the naming rights to the REM's stations, so get ready for Station Griffintown-Bernard Landry-Shopify.

PINK LINE DEAD; \$800-MILLION MISSING

It's no surprise that the latest Quebec budget continues the neoliberal assault on public transportation. Premier François Legault is only providing Montreal with about 50% of the money it had access to in 2013 to maintain the STM over the next decade. In other words, a \$258-million drop in public transit infrastructure maintenance funding, at precisely the time we need to be getting more people into public transit.

The budget also kills off what was supposed to be the first part of Mayor Plante's Pink Line. While the Pink Line hasn't officially been abandoned, it appears less likely with every passing day, but that's not the interesting part of this story. Back in 2019, the federal government offered Montreal

\$800-million to spend on transit. The Legault administration leaned heavily on Montreal to transfer the cash to Quebec City so they could build their tramway, a project — it was argued at the time — that was closer to being ready but ineligible for federal funding. Plante agreed to the transfer, and in exchange the Legault administration said they would spend money on improving the Blue Line, adding new security barriers, and — when the Lachine tram project was ready — they'd provide funding to get it off the ground. About \$150-million was transferred initially, but nothing else. In 2022, the security barrier project was shelved.

There is simply no accounting for the remaining \$650-million. According to a recent *Gazette* article, the city of Montreal doesn't appear to have a contract stipulating the details of the agreement, and Municipal Affairs Minister Andrée Laforest and Transport Minister Geneviève Guilbault basically dismissed the question out of hand, opting instead to boast about how much Quebec spends on transit.

Meanwhile, STM chairperson Éric Alan Caldwell is saying Quebec's cuts may force the closure of stations because of the deteriorating infrastructure. If it wasn't completely insane that the Quebec government can just make transit money from the Fed disappear without consequence while the metro is falling apart, consider that the Fed just earmarked an additional \$650-million for the Blue Line extension.

There is a distinct possibility that the Fed will be paying to extend the Blue Line while provincial disinvestment forces the original portion of it to close.

You might call this theft. Or fraud. The problem is that Mayor Plante isn't saying either of those words. You'd figure, with the clock running out on her time in office, she'd go out with a bang.

As far as I can tell, there are three lessons here:

1. François Legault is a crook.
2. Montreal should never, ever, transfer any federal money to anyone else ever again.
3. The next mayor needs to figure out a new way of financing the STM without involving Quebec.

And in case you're wondering, the Quebec City tramway project that was supposed to be done by now is expected to open in 2033. CDPQ-Infra, as you might expect, is involved in the project.

REM'S NON-COMPETE CLAUSE MAY KILL MONTREAL TRANSIT

Not to be overly alarming, but did you know the REM has a non-compete clause with public transit systems?

If the rest of the network becomes operational this year (as it's supposed to), public transit agencies throughout Greater Montreal are going to either have to cancel bus lines or re-route them to serve REM stations.

This was done to ensure the REM's profitability.

Remember, the REM isn't a public transit system (like the STM), but a private, for-profit transit system owned by CDPQ-Infra that the *Autorité régionale de transport métropolitain* (ARTM) pays to use. So Quebec taxpayers paid for the REM's construction upfront (both through provincial and federal taxes), pay for its operations through ongoing provincial taxation and pay again for the abysmal service it provides with fares.

This crucial information notwithstanding, the regular service interruptions and breakdowns that have plagued the system this and every other winter got Brossard Mayor Doreen Assaad thinking that maybe they should resurrect the bus lines that were cancelled to ensure the REM kept sending money to the CDPQ.

While that's an excellent idea (public transit works best when passengers have many options), I doubt the CDPQ will be interested in making this a permanent solution. And the City of Montreal's silence on this issue is deafening — the majority of the REM's users may not be Montreal residents, but the CDPQ has nonetheless seriously undermined public transit in the city and throughout the region. The non-compete clause must be revoked, before it does irrevocable damage.

Elon Höglund, Céline Richard-Robichon, Rahime Gay-Labbé @ Do Phan Hoi

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: best buds



BY DAVE MACINTYRE

Spring is officially springing! Yes, I wrote that on the spot because “spring has sprung” is too boring.

The strain of focus for this month’s column will be Neon Sunshine from Tribal, a brand owned by the Ville Saint-Laurent-based Cannara Biotech. This indoor-grown hybrid clocks in at just a smidge under 30% THC, and those who like their ganja strong will find this stuff a good fit for their increased time spent outdoors as the weather (hopefully) starts consistently improving.

After all, when the Tribal website sells this strain as “a paradise where the beach is always warm, the sunsets paint the sky in neon, and the weed tastes like a tropical margherita,” how could you not be tempted to try it? I bet you probably read that while forgetting that they spelled it “margherita” like the pizza and not “margarita” the drink.

TRIBAL NEON SUNSHINE (HYBRID)

As far as head-concentrated hybrid highs go, this is a very serviceable one. Maybe not outstanding, maybe won’t knock your socks off, but it’ll get the job done for you. The buds aren’t in terrible condition, and the aroma isn’t as pungent as I’d like it to be. That said, its scent leans on the fruity, citrus-y side. Mind you, this strain is a descendant of both the Grapefruit and Grape Ape strains, so take that for what you will.

The high really hits you around your brain and your eyes, and makes me a bit sleepy on a Sunday where I’d already been in and out of consciousness. If nothing else, it alternates between giving you a more uplifting high and a more relaxing one. Of course, I have the great misfortune of writing this column on a day marred by freezing rain, effectively killing my hopes of rolling one of these bad boys up for a Sunday afternoon alleyway walk.

Instead, I’m stuck inside and attempting to cure my boredom — or perhaps more accurately, amplify

it — by watching this year’s Juno Awards. The Junos are an awards show that often leaves me with more questions than answers, and feeling more perplexed than celebratory with regards to our country’s musical culture. Why does the Canadian music machine insist on making Michael Bublé — who seems like an incredibly nice dude, mind you — our national pop culture centrepiece, even if the host city is his hometown of Vancouver? Why is Michael Bublé’s charm doing so much heavy lifting while his music is as bland as an unseasoned chicken breast?

Maybe the Canadian music machine just isn’t propping up the right artists, but I often watch these broadcasts not knowing who many of the nominated acts even are. The artists I do feel are worthy of Juno consideration aren’t even necessarily given a good look, and the nominees for major categories like Group of the Year and Breakthrough Artist/Group of the Year felt quite weak overall. Anyway, this is the kind of weed that can make you start pontificating about the Canadian musical ecosystem. 7/10



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:the 1st half



BY PAUL DESBAILLETS

As the 2025 Major League Soccer (MLS) season unfolds, it has already delivered its fair share of drama. Among the most notable developments is the dismissal of CF Montréal's head coach Laurent Courtois, following the not-so-smooth start to the season on the road.

CF Montréal has endured a winless start, with a record of 0-4-1, placing them at the bottom of the Eastern Conference standings. Their offensive issues have been apparent, as they have failed to score a goal since their season opener against Atlanta United FC on Feb. 22, which ended in a 3-2 defeat. The subsequent matches saw Montreal struggling to find the back of the net, culminating in a 3-0 loss to Nashville SC, which proved to be the final straw for Courtois at the end of March.

Laurent Courtois, who took over as head coach in January 2024, was expected to build on the team's previous season, where they finished eighth in the Eastern Conference and made a playoff appearance. However,

the team's lackluster performances led to his dismissal. Assistant coach Marco Donadel has been appointed as the interim head coach, with his first challenge being an away match against the Chicago Fire FC.

Good luck on your new adventures, Coach Courtois! Montreal will always have a place for you.

As the MLS season progresses, all eyes will be on CF Montréal to see how they respond to their early setbacks. The team's ability to regroup and find their form will be crucial in determining their fate this season. If one thing is for sure, this club can do it.. Montreal can always do it.

Beyond Montreal, the MLS season has been a showcase of emerging talents and strong tactics. Teams like the Philadelphia Union and Inter Miami have been making headlines with their impressive form, while traditional powerhouses like the LA Galaxy and Seattle Sounders are navigating through competitive fixtures. The league continues to grow in stature, attracting international stars and fostering homegrown talents, making each match a spectacle for fans, and helping the league make noise in the sports ecosystem.

The 2025 MLS season is shaping up to be exciting, with teams battling for supremacy and players striving to make their mark. As the drama unfolds, fans can expect more thrilling matches, unexpected twists, and moments of brilliance that define the beautiful game.

Probably a few more pink slips as well.

In international news, the Canadian men's national soccer team made waves by securing a 2-1 victory over the United States in the CONCACAF Nations League third-place match. This victory is particularly significant as it marks the first time since 1985 that Canada has defeated the USA in consecutive meetings. The match, held at SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles, saw Canada take the lead through Tani Oluwaseyi, only for the USA to equalize via Patrick Agyemang. However, Jonathan David's decisive goal ensured Canada's triumph.

The match was not without controversy, as Canada's head coach Jesse Marsch received a red card for protesting refereeing decisions. While his dismissal was a setback, it also highlighted his passionate commitment to the team. Marsch's fiery demeanour and unwavering support for his players have endeared him to fans, who appreciate his dedication and the energy he brings to the sidelines.

The Canadian national team will look to build on their recent success as they prepare for future international competitions, including the 2026 World Cup, which they will co-host. This team won't meet again very often in preparation for summer 2026, so every minute will count to get the balance and chemistry just right. World Cup 2026 or BUST!

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Shadow Play

Nico Williams, *Flamer*, 2022. 11/0 seed beads on thermally-fused/braided polyethylene thread, maple, cottonwood and metal. Courtesy of the artist and Blouin Division. Photo: Paul Litherland.
Lap-See Lam, *Tales of the Altersea*, installation view, Swiss Institute, New York, 2023. Courtesy the artist and Swiss Institute, New York. Photo: Daniel Pérez.

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food

Curiosity and comfort



BY CLAY SANDHU

Panacée, a new fixed-menu restaurant in the Village, opened quietly last fall. Its name — panacea in English — means cure-all, a nod to chef-owner Catherine Couvet Desrosiers's belief that restaurants are spaces for healing and restoration.

Taking over the space formerly home to De farine et d'eau fraîche, this is Desrosiers's first restaurant and her second role as executive chef, following a brief but ultimately very successful tenure at Foxy. (She's also previously worked at Bouillon Bilk and Hotel Herman.) The location itself — an intimate, roughly 30-seat affair — had been coveted by Desrosiers for years. Though a longer stint at Foxy was initially the plan, when this space hit the market, it was a clear sign that it was time to take the leap into ownership.

Whether deliberate or not, the Hotel Herman influence feels abundant here — but in a way I wholeheartedly embrace. That was a restaurant I loved and one that left both a void in, and an indelible mark on, Montreal's restaurant scene. There are a few ways that Hotel Herman's influence manifests here, but the most obvious and most immediate is in Panacée's 18-seat horseshoe-shaped bar, which restaurant sickos like me will remember was a standout feature of Hotel Herman. The room itself is elegant, marrying rich hues of yellow and green in an intimate yet inviting setting. It has a Nordicness to it — wishbone chairs and all — but avoids feeling like cosplay. There's a groundedness to the design that faithfully reflects the experience to come.

Panacée's most intriguing feature might be its menu structure. Guests choose between two fixed menus — three or five courses. Standard enough. But the format operates more like a table d'hôte, offering options for each course. It's a structure that appeals to those who want to try a variety of dishes, while encouraging a return to individually plated meals and away from the shared-plate trend that has dominated Montreal's dining scene for nearly a decade. We

opted for the five-course menu, which includes an amuse-bouche (not counted among the courses), along with an additional savoury and dessert course not offered in the three-course option.

On the beverage side, Panacée maintains a tidy list of simple, mostly classic cocktails, a few beers and some non-alcoholic options. The wine list, put together by sommelière Brigitte Emond Serret, rotates regularly and includes roughly 40 selections, many of which are available by the glass as part of an optional pairing. It's difficult for any new restaurant to build a serious wine list in its first year, but Panacée has acquired some excellent bottles from respected producers, along with a few curiosities for adventurous palates. We selected a bottle of Chenin from Damien Bureau, a celebrated winemaker in the Loire Valley. Vivid with bracing acidity upon opening, the wine mellowed into waxy yellow fruit, flinty minerality and honey, while retaining its brightness.

Like at Foxy, Desrosiers's cooking is vegetable-driven and unconcerned with regionality or stylistic typicity — she lets the ingredient dictate the approach. Our first bite, a buckwheat tartelette filled with a rich, almost cheesy celeriac mousse, pickled celery brunoise and chervil, was light as air and somehow also deeply indulgent. It punched far above its weight — a theme that repeated throughout the meal.

While we tasted the entire menu, I'll stick to describing the standouts. In the first course, that was the trout crudo. Using fish from Kenauk — one of Quebec's best hatcheries — it was sliced raw and served with a piperade-like blend of roasted peppers and ancho chili, dressed in a vinaigrette made from smoky pepper juices. Rather than leaning into the lightness of crudo or the acidity of ceviche, this dish embraced the richness of lake trout, pairing it with the warmth of ancho and the sweet smokiness of roasted bell pepper. Another standout was the inventive beef tartare, flavoured with savoury meringue, cara cara orange and endives. I've had countless tartares, but never one quite like this. Delicious.

Next came the sweet onion — my favourite of the evening. Braised whole, its centre was hollowed and filled with a sauce of Louis d'Or cheese and black truffle. The

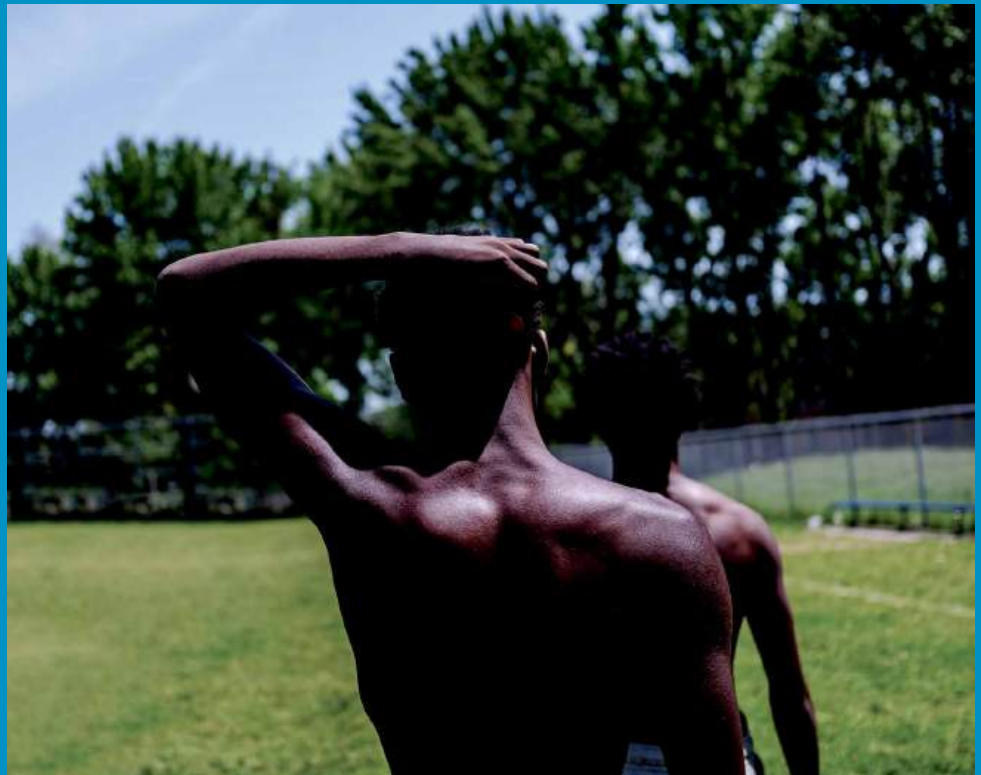
translucent orb sat in a puddle of fragrant onion broth, finished with generous gratings of cheese and truffle. A beautiful, uncomplicated preparation that let the ingredients shine — and tasted like great French onion soup. That's a theme of Desrosiers's food: It's novel, never derivative, yet feels deeply familiar. To me, that's the perfect Venn diagram — food that sparks curiosity and satisfies the craving for comfort.

The third course brought three absolute hits: perfectly grilled walleye with endives, flawless squash agnolotti and my personal favourite: Cornish hen prepared two ways. The breast, roasted skin-side down and served in hen consommé, was a study in poultry purity — confident and precise. Even more impressive was the leg meat: poached in the style of Hainan chicken, pressed and chilled like a terrine. Paired with roasted kale, pistachio and pink peppercorn, it delivered an unexpected, almost Sichuan-like flavour. The two preparations harmonized beautifully, showcasing Desrosiers's deep understanding of the protein.

The five-course option ends with two desserts by pastry chef Jessy Farrar. First, a light, palate-refreshing Beurasse cheese with a Honeycrisp apple ice cream and almond crumble — a smart transition from savoury to sweet. Then, a brilliant citrus dessert featuring Opalys white chocolate, clementine, burnt lemon sorbet and tarragon. Like all the desserts we tried (and we tried them all), it was exquisitely presented — reminiscent of Olive Park's work at Franquette — and balanced sweet and savoury in perfect proportion. While my tastes tend toward more traditional desserts, Farrar offers plenty to please most palates.

Panacée, in my view, has tremendous potential. At just over 30 herself, Desrosiers and her team are among the youngest in town, and talented beyond their years. Where most new restaurants are revivals of bistros, diners and osterias, Panacée is trying something unique. With a debut this strong, there's real staying power.

As the team continues to explore their capabilities — and the bounty of the upcoming seasons — I'm confident the best is yet to come. At the time of writing, Desrosiers and sous-chef Vincent Beauseigle have just launched their first spring menu, which, while untested by me, promises to be excellent.



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music

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Adem Boutidja

BY DAVE MACINTYRE

High Klassified isn't afraid to take calculated risks.

The veteran local producer has given us his newest project, *Ravaru*, an album where all vocals are performed in French, highlighting talent from Quebec (Hubert Lenoir, St-Prince), France (Ateyaba, Tuerie, Dau, Tsew the Kid, Karmen) and Switzerland (Arma Jackson, as well as the Swiss-born French-Malagasy rappeuse Chilla).

Released via Montreal's own Courage Holdings, *Ravaru* was "four years of hard labour," as he describes it, following his last release, 2021's *Law of Automata: Valid*.

Not only is this album his first in a hot minute, but his last one was released during peak COVID times — in other words, it's been a long time coming. While he always has his next project in the back of his mind, he never feels married to a specific type of beat-making.

"I keep changing my sound and discovering new stuff musically so I never make peace with a certain sound," says High Klassified. "It took me four years to make peace with what I have, because I always want to do something new. I always want to try new styles."

"Sometimes you just have to humble up, back off and give yourself a break, too. A lot of songs had been scrapped or changed, and a lot of features had been cancelled."

Born Kevin Vincent, High Klassified grew up in Laval and still lives there, repping his hometown at every opportunity. In fact, the title *Ravaru* is the romanized Japanese spelling of Laval.

Upon its release, he wrote on Instagram that the album is «a fictional interpretation of my city," paying tribute to Japanese culture as well as sci-fi and video games, being driven by nostalgia. He added that it was not High Klassified, but rather Kevin Vincent, "the child within me," who was the album's creative director.

"Laval really turned me into a homebody," he says when asked how he thinks his hometown shaped him. "I couldn't easily get to downtown Montreal, so I feel like I had to learn how to enjoy staying home and working. I think this is where my producer side came from, always staying home on the computer and wanting to try new stuff."

Having first gained recognition locally in the early 2010s as one of the faces of Montreal's beat scene, High Klassified later scored a deal with Fools Gold Records — the Brooklyn-based label run by Montreal production legend A-Trak. Eventually, he built up a portfolio that now includes Future and the Weeknd, whom he collaborated with on their 2017 track "Comin Out Strong."

Having gone around the world and back for years now as a producer, it's curious that High Klassified would make an album featuring exclusively francophone artists. But this is basically by design, given he'd mostly worked with English-language artists previously, and pivoting fully to

the francophone market — at least for this go-round — is admittedly a left turn for him.

"It's a whole other crowd," he continues. "I kind of feel sorry for my usual fans, but I feel like it's still accessible to everyone, even though there's mostly French lyrics."

Making a project specifically for the francophone market was an endeavour born from feeling like he needed to "do something more" for his fans in Quebec and the Francophonie in general.

"Throughout my whole career, I was mostly working with American and English-speaking artists," he adds. "I really wanted to combine my American flavour with my French connections."

High Klassified believes France's musical ecosystem is increasingly turning its attention to the French-Canadian market. "I feel like French artists see Montreal as a Las Vegas-type city," he says. "I kind of turned it to my advantage, knowing that every time a French artist would come perform in Montreal, I'd make sure to get a studio session with them."

Although his style has traditionally had trap and hip hop as its musical bedrock, *Ravaru* leans into R&B, funk and even hints of gospel. "I love listening to R&B music, I love the soulful gospel chord progressions," he says.

"You kind of feel it in some songs. Like 'Lifestyle', you can hear those chord progressions. I always try to add some musicality to everything. Even 'LomeLaval' is pretty much the darkest song on the album, but in the intro, there's a more cinematic chord progression to it."

The track featuring Hubert Lenoir, "Rouge blanc," with drums evoking High Klassified's trap stylings and a guitar-driven sound adapted for the indie crowd — complete with an ambulance siren (Hubert's idea, mind you).

It's a more rock-oriented tune than High Klassified's other material, but he and Hubert have been frequent collaborators — most recently on the Quebec City artist's last album, 2021's *PICTURA DE IPSE: musique directe*.

"We have a good musical chemistry," says High Klassified. "I really wanted a song with Hubert on this project. I had a vision of an Afro-punk type beat. We mixed up both of our worlds in a song, and we made 'Rouge blanc'. It has a soul touch, but also a rock touch. This is exactly what I wanted — the best of both worlds."

Perhaps the trickiest feature to secure was French rapper Ateyaba, who features on "LomeLaval," the album's opener. "I've been wanting him (as a feature) on my past two projects," says High Klassified. "I finally got him."

Another track, "Besoin d'amour" (featuring Tsew the Kid and Dau), is the album's most upbeat and danceable tune, one conceived during a writing camp with Pierre-Luc Rioux, guitarist for the Montreal band Chiild, and Charlotte Cardin collaborator Marc-André Gilbert, aka MAG. High Klassified fleshed out the track during a studio session with Tsew the Kid.

"(He's) mostly known to do more sad music with guitar and stuff," he says. "We wanted to do something different and more bouncy. I just came up with this fun melody, then the guys started playing guitar and drums around it. It came to life in Montreal."

Touring is the biggest item on High Klassified's agenda for the remainder of 2025, while also working on *Ravaru*'s deluxe edition and a more R&B-focused project with Zach Zoya. He'll be off to Europe for a run of dates from late April to early June before returning to Quebec for several festivals.

But even if his music career has taken him around the world and back again over the years, it doesn't take long for him to start missing Montreal (and Laval) whenever he's away.

"I get homesick a lot," he says. "I wouldn't move away for anything in the world. I could be the biggest producer and make millions, and I would still live in Montreal."

"I love this city. I have my friends here, I'm comfortable, I know everything about this city. I would picture myself living somewhere else for a couple months and shit. But having a whole house and staying there forever? I wouldn't leave Laval or the Montreal area."



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BY JOHNSON CUMMINS

Now that we're finally (hopefully?) past our snowy slump for gigs, the wind is at our backs as we gear up for a well-deserved spring. Due to the sheer wealth of killer gigs to hip you to, and a limited amount of ink to spill on it, I will put a sock in my intro this month and just plow through it.

April 11

After a bit of a dry spell as Cult MTL hits the pavement this week, we finally get moving in the second week of April when spooky-ooky black metal legends Belphegor let their furnace-fueled blast beats do all of the talking at the very un-black metal monikered venue Théâtre Beanfield. Helping to make your blood run cold are openers Arkona and Vale of Pnath. 2490 Notre-Dame W., 7 p.m., \$45-\$57

April 13

If not for the crusher happening at the end of the month, Mogwai's return to Montreal would certainly be my big pick of the month. For my duckets, there is

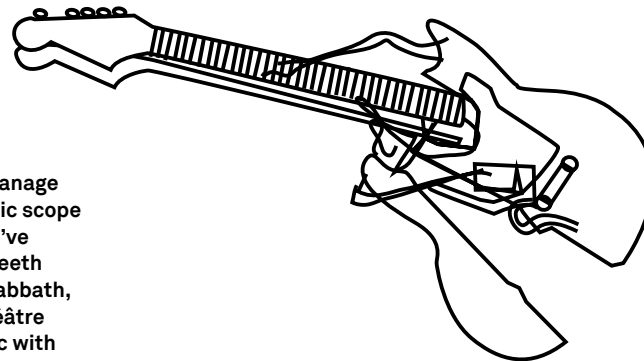
nothing less sexy than "post-rock," but Mogwai manage to beat the odds and bring ballast to their cinematic scope while sneaking a bit of swagger into the mix. If you've never had the pleasure of Mogwai liquifying your teeth fillings live, you HAVE to see this show — on the sabbath, no less. Openers for this show, which is also at Théâtre Beanfield, are Brainiac (the Touch and Go Brainiac with a new singer?) and Ye Gods. 2490 Notre-Dame W., 7:30 p.m., \$84-\$179 at press time (almost sold out!)

April 17

If you like healthy doses of psych and prog in your metal, you'll want to check out Elder at Théâtre Fairmount as they revisit their seminal 2015 record *Lore* in its entirety. Along for the nerd trip are Sacri Monti and Moon Destroys. Count how many pedal dorks are craning their necks over the monitor to look at their pedalboards. Fun times! But for seerz though, *Lore* is a barnstormer and could be considered a high water mark for these fellas, so this should prove to be a major rager.....oh no! Now I'm the nerd! 5240 Parc, 7 p.m., \$40.96

April 22

Okay, if not for the Mogwai gig and the show happening at the end of the month, surely Gang of Four's final tour would be a shoo-in for gig of the month. Now 1979's *Entertainment* is one of post punk's true masterpieces, and recently having Slint's David Pajo filling in the slash and bash of dearly departed Andy Gill was rad, but things are getting a bit ropey at this juncture with only tub-



smasher Hugo Burnham and sophistic singer Jon King left in the current line-up. Jon King will also be around signing his memoir *To Hell With Poverty* after the gig, a book I would loooove to crack the spine of. No openers, so settle in for an expanded set-list. 2490 Notre-Dame W., 8 p.m., \$51

April 30

Okay, as promised, the big pick for gig of the month is conveniently situated at the end of the month, as to give my column some much needed suspense. Just when you thought stages were getting a bit overpopulated with horror-movie composers playing live to projections, Frizzi 2 Fulci is sure to blow yer puny mind to bits. Composer extraordinaire Fabio Frizzi will show you why he is the greatest giallo tunesmith when he joins forces with a small "rock" ensemble as he hits all the cues to Lucio Fulci's spine tingler *Zombie*. The Rialto would've been nice but this is happening at Théâtre Fairmount. 5240 Parc, 8 p.m., \$46.08, all ages

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Pictured: Emmanuel Schwartz, Ellen David



Album reviews



ART d'Ecco, *Serene Demon* (Paper Bag)
Art d'Ecco is somewhat of a shapeshifter from album to album, so I had no idea what to expect going into his latest, *Serene Demon*. The result is a boiling affair of catchy dance punk and disco glam rock that brings to mind the work of artists like T-Rex and Boney M. The highlight of this album has to be its variety of instruments: congas, synths, steel drums, marimbas, horns and basslines that get the feet moving. I felt like dancing along the street, as if in a musical, while tracks like "True Believer" and "Cooler Than This" blasted over my headphones. 9/10 Trial Track: "True Believer" (Stephan Boissonneault)

Backwash, *Only Dust Remains* (Ugly Hag)

Where does an avant-garde hip hop artist head after successfully breaking through with an LP trilogy of deep, dark, uneasy pieces? Sometimes it can be difficult to recognize the delineation when an artist claims to be putting a musical chapter behind them. Not so for Backwash. Exporting the creativity, introspection and unique lyrical and compositional phrasing with which she created an uncomfortable but safe space for herself and the audience she found, *Only Dust Remains* lets a little extra little light in, thus widening the expanse on which her brutal brilliance radiates. 9/10 Trial Track: "Undesirable" (Darcy MacDonald)



Rebelmatic, *Black Hole Eats The Tornado* (Say-10)
Right on time for a revolution of the mind, body and spirit, the NYC riff crunchers return with a fourth full-length that drips with the paranoid sweat of early '80s punk and hardcore, soaked deep into the metal, soul and groove its members also bring to the killing floor. Step-children of the NYHC movement, students of hip hop and Black music, and map-keepers of their city's underground, Creature, Karnage, Alkatraz and Ramsey Jones leave no meat on the bone with 11 hard cuts of catchy, dizzying aggression made for the moment. 8.5/10 Trial Track: "Walls Have Ears" (Darcy MacDonald)



Choses Sauvages, *Choses Sauvages III* (Audiogram)
Are many other cities producing danceable post-punk like Montreal these days? Not likely — and the third album by Choses Sauvages is further proof. The five-piece have been making funky, psychedelic-leaning tunes for years now, even as members have found recognition via other projects (singer/bassist Félix Belisle is also in La Sécurité). Collaborations with fellow franco acts like comment

debord ("Level up à l'intérieur") and Lysandre ("Chaos initial") are high points, but the biggest standouts are "Cours toujours" and the Talking Heads-esque "Faux départ." *Choses Sauvages III* sees the band sounding as confident and comfortable as ever, while maintaining a sense of rawness and adventure. 8/10 Trial Track: "Cours toujours" (Dave MacIntyre)



N NAO, *Nouveau Langage* (Mothland)
There's nothing simple about the experimental pop music of N NAO. Even an oscillating synth number like "Fleuron," mixed with ethereal, hard to decipher vocals, has a thematic drive to it. N NAO and her band dive into the concepts of fire and love on this album, creating songs that feel like snapshots of a strange universe, one ruled by combustion and attraction. "Corps" urges you to dance, while "Pleine Lune" is more about looking up at the stars. As with all of N NAO's work, it's hard to separate the themes you hear from the whirlwind of themes. 8/10 Trial Track "Corps" (Stephan Boissonneault)

Lucy Dacus, *Forever Is a Feeling* (Geffen)

After she reached new commercial heights with *Boygenius* in 2023, Lucy Dacus's fourth album *Forever Is a Feeling* comes complete with a Hozier duet ("Bullseye") and themes about her feelings for *Boygenius*'s Julien Baker. Some songs are more potent than others, but "Ankles," "Best Guess" and closer "Lost Time" are all sterling examples of her effortless knack for frank, earnest storytelling. *Forever Is a Feeling* ultimately is a couple songs away from rivalling Dacus's best work (*Historian* and *Home Video* are a hell of an act to follow), but it's still a solid entry in her discography. 7.5/10 Trial Track: "Best Guess" (Dave MacIntyre)

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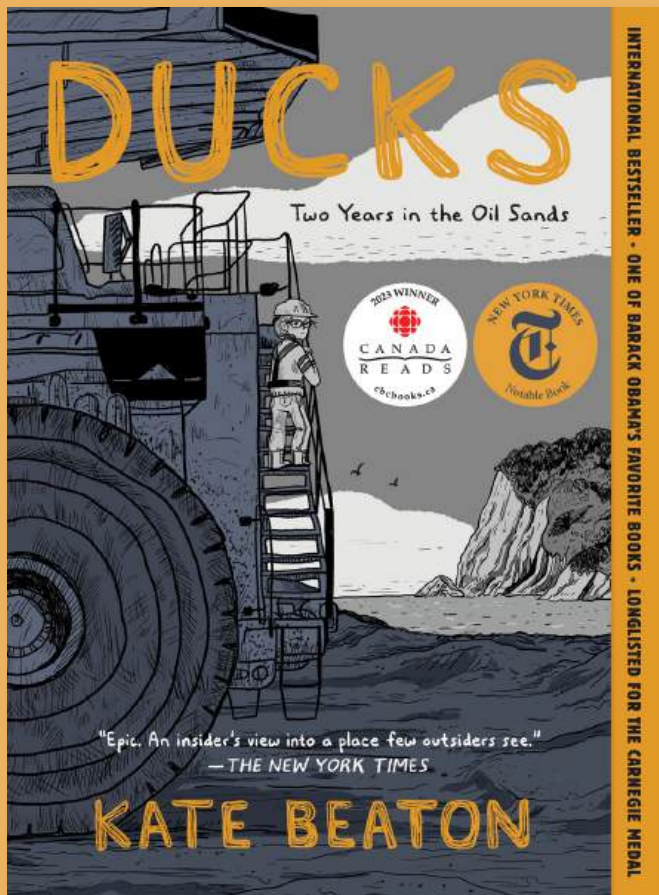
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Death, desire and conspiracies



BY JUSTINE SMITH

In David Cronenberg's latest film, *The Shrouds*, a prominent businessman named Karsh invents a revolutionary and controversial technology that enables the living to monitor their dearly departed in their shrouds.

Starring Vincent Cassell, Guy Pearce and Diane Kruger, the film defies easy categorization — in typical Cronenbergian fashion. With elements of body horror injected with humour and pathos, *The Shrouds* emerges as an ode to desire and grief. Made in the aftermath of the death of Cronenberg's wife, Carolyn Zeifman (who died in 2017), the film expounds on the transformative nature of illness and death, and the ways in which it reshapes our relationship to love.

With a twisting and paranoid storyline, the film finds itself grounded by dreamlike memories of Karsh's dead wife, her body slowly deteriorating. Like a spectre, she emerges at night in their bedroom, her body slowly torn apart by both disease and treatment. Despite this, her beauty remains; an intimate and poetic gesture by the filmmaker that underlines the depths of love intertwined with desire. While lifelong romantic relationships are often flightily depicted as spiritual bonds, Cronenberg unearths the erotic physicality of eternal love. As Karsh struggles with his loss, any proximity to his wife, even if it's her corpse, brings him fleeting comfort.

David Cronenberg spoke with us after the film's premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival last fall.

Justine Smith: In André Bazin's first book, he writes that if the plastic arts were psychoanalyzed, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be the final factor of their creation. And I'm wondering if that's something that's ever occurred to you in your filmmaking and your artistic practice.

DAVID CRONENBERG: I recently said that cinema is a cemetery. As soon as it's been encoded and recorded, it becomes the past. During the pandemic, I spent a lot of time watching old movies and I thought, "These are all dead people. Everybody who made this movie is long dead." So, I was thinking that the history of cinema is in its own way, a cemetery. Not in a bad way, because it's also very delightful

and charming. I would say that I relate to that approach to art and film.

JS: Another thing that Bazin wrote about is this paradox that you can't depict death or desire, even though it underlines all of cinema. Since both death and desire are so present in *The Shrouds* and your other work, how do you feel about this idea that you can't hold death or desire in your hands, so to speak?

DC: I dispute that. If you can't depict those things in as dynamic an art form as cinema, is there any art form where you can? I think you can hold desire in your hands. If you've experienced sexual desire and you're seeing it on screen, does that not ignite in you your own memories of the experience of it? It becomes a very metaphysical and abstract concept.

JS: One of the things I love about *The Shrouds* — and a lot of your work, really — is the way you depict cities. Toronto has appeared in many of your films. You also live there. How do you choose how you shoot a city?

DC: I'm very sensitized to architecture in general. I've always lived in Toronto and all my marital experiences have been in Toronto, so it has a huge resonance to me. The last film I made (*Crimes of the Future*), I shot in Athens and I really did take advantage of what Athens had to offer. I didn't fight the city, I went right into it in great depth and detail. The environment that the characters live in is hugely important to a movie. I shot many films here, *Crash* takes place in Toronto, *Dead Ringers* does, and *EXistenZ* too. It's physically, compositionally and cinematically really important.

For me, cinema is bodies. The thing we photograph most is the human body, as we are looking at it right now. So, bodies, where are they? What is their environment? What does the environment have on the physicality of the characters? That's extremely important.

JS: I've been reading some disability studies and one of the throughlines is the idea that we think of the "default," we think of a healthy body, when the default in actuality is that we will all inevitably become disabled. The film deals with a lot of bodies deconstructed. How do you feel about depicting disability and sickness on screen?

DC: As you know, in this movie, there's someone who is sick, who has undergone a lot of surgery that might involve amputations and organ removal. It's kind of an accelerated version of what happens with aging in general, and is a precursor to the idea of what might happen after burial as a body gradually disintegrates. It's a very potent metaphor

for what is inevitable in everybody's life and something that is so difficult to accept. How do we accept non-existence? It resonates on many levels. There's the general social element, which is how do people survive in a world — or a culture or a city — that isn't designed for them; sometimes designed against them. It's a very forceful dynamic that is intriguing to explore and it's something I've done in many of my movies.

JS: Many of your films deal with technology. What is the relationship between technology and conspiracy?

DC: It's one thing to think of, you know, the KGB and the Russian conspiracies that they might create to destabilize democratic states and so on, but what is much closer to most people is the technology that they have now that 20 years ago didn't exist. I played with some of that in *Videodrome*, a film I made in 1982, in which my invented version of interactive television became the basis of conspiracy. Now the technology of the telephone, the advance of Artificial Intelligence, means that everybody can create a conspiracy and disseminate it in a way that was not possible before the internet, or before TikTok and Facebook.

Everybody can be a conspiracy theorist now in a way that they couldn't before. It's one thing to talk to your friends about the government, but it's another thing to have two million followers who believe you. It's a way of being creative. It's a way of pretending that you have some control and some special knowledge, as if you know what's really going on. That gives you a lot of power.

A lot of personal neurosis is involved, but also a lot of desperation for meaning. Humans need meaning. What do you do when something happens that is meaningless, like death? Why did this person's genetic makeup mean they die at the age of 50 instead of 90? It's random. You might want to find a reason for that — it was a doctor secretly experimenting on their body, slipping them some drugs, for some arcane reason. Even if you're positing that something evil and destructive is going on, it provides a sense of meaning. That's the creative aspect of conspiracy.

There's a bizarre competition to come up with the most outrageous theory. When it comes to Trump, the alt right and so on in the U.S., they come up with some pretty bizarre stuff. You get the feeling that, however serious that might be, behind that is a competitive attempt to come up with the most outrageous theory that is somehow sort of plausible, even though it's ridiculous. It's a communal boxing match.

→ *The Shrouds* opens in Montreal theatres on April 25.

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On Screen



The Legend of Ochi



Le temps



The Accountant 2



From Ground Zero

BY JUSTINE SMITH

Lots of cinematic thrills in store for April, starting with *Drop* (April 11), a high-concept thriller starring Meghann Fahy as Violet, a widowed mother who goes on her first date in years. Things are going well until she's bombarded with anonymous threatening messages on her phone during their upscale dinner, leaving her questioning whether her charming date is behind the harassment.

Rami Malek, Michael Stuhlbarg and Laurence Fishburne star in *The Amateur* (April 11), a thriller about an introverted CIA decoder whose life turns upside down when his wife is killed in a London terrorist attack. When his supervisors refuse to take action, he decides to take matters into his own hands.

In his first post-*Black Panther* project, director Ryan Coogler reunites with Michael B. Jordan for *Sinners* (April 18). The horror-thriller follows twin brothers who return to their hometown to start again, only to discover that an even

greater evil is waiting to welcome them back. Set in the Jim-Crow era South, the original film has surprising supernatural elements. It co-stars Delroy Lindo, Lola Kirke, Hailee Steinfeld and Jack O'Connell.

Ben Affleck returns as Christian Wolff in *The Accountant 2* (April 25), a crime action-thriller co-starring Jon Bernthal and J.K. Simmons. The sequel finds Wolff applying his brilliant mind and illegal methods to reconstruct the unsolved puzzle of a Treasury chief's murder.

From Ground Zero (April 14) is a compelling project that brings together 22 short films created by talented filmmakers from Gaza. Launched by Rashid Masharawi, a notable Palestinian filmmaker, the initiative emerged amid the backdrop of conflict, aiming to provide a platform for young artists to express themselves through their craft. An ambitious and raw anthology project, most of the filmmakers involved have no prior filmmaking experience, but that does little to diminish the film's enormous impact.

The Ballad of Wallis Island (April 4) is a musical comedy about an eccentric lottery winner, Charles, who lives alone on a remote island. He dreams of hiring his favourite musician, Herb McGwyer, to play an exclusive, private gig. Unbeknownst

to Herb, Charles has also hired Herb's ex-bandmate and ex-girlfriend, Nell, with her new husband in tow, to perform the old favourites. As tempers flare and old tensions resurface, the stormy weather traps them all on the island and Charles desperately looks for a way to salvage his dream gig. The film stars Carey Mulligan, Tom Basden and Tim Key.

Using puppetry rather than CGI, *The Legend of Ochi* (April 25) is a family fantasy film set

in a remote village on the island of Carpathia, where a shy farm girl named Yuri is raised to fear an elusive animal species known as ochi. But when Yuri discovers a wounded baby ochi has been left behind, she escapes on a quest to bring him home.

A man (Bill Murray), a woman (Naomi Watts) and a Great Dane come together in *The Friend* (April 4), a story about a writer who adopts a dog that belonged to a late friend and mentor.

The latest film by great Québécois filmmaker François Delisle, *Le temps* (April 18), is a drama that unfolds across various timelines and locations, where the fates of four characters intertwine as they struggle to find connections and meaning in a world transformed by climate change.

A photograph of three shirtless men in a locker room. The man in the center is a Black man with dark, wavy hair and a serious expression, looking directly at the camera. He has several tattoos on his chest and arms. To his left is a white man with a goatee, looking towards the center. To his right is a young white man with short brown hair, looking towards the center. The background consists of red lockers.

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Firestarter

BY LORRAINE CARPENTER

Roast mistress, stand-up queen and Golden Globes host Nikki Glaser may be effortlessly vulgar and caustic on stage, but in another professional mode — during an interview — she’s not what you might expect.

For the uninitiated, Glaser is renowned — infamous, even — for her roasting skills, most recently bringing it in full force at *The Roast of Tom Brady*, and previously at the Comedy Central roasts of Rob Lowe, Bruce Willis and Alec Baldwin between 2016 and 2019.

Glaser describes herself as someone who prefers to follow the rules and doesn’t like getting in trouble, adding that she’s very aware of her place in the Hollywood hierarchy — which is not that high up, apparently. This might explain why Glaser — who did a great job hosting the Golden Globes on Jan. 5 — held back her acerbic side at the awards show. Not surprisingly, some Glaser gems were rejected prior to the ceremony, only to be revealed on Howard Stern’s SiriusXM the next day — including a Luigi Mangione joke that really ought to have been left in.

“For the Golden Globes, none of these people are signing up to be roasted,” Glaser says. “I don’t want to ruin anyone’s night and I certainly don’t want to ruin my reputation. I already feel like an outsider as a comedian and I don’t want to ostracize myself even more by being a villainess who’s calling them out. Also, for me to make fun of them is almost hypocritical because I’d kill to be in their shoes and be a respected actor — but instead, I’m like a clown on stage. Although I love my job, it’s the thing I fell into because I’m never going to be taken seriously.

“I don’t want to make enemies. I still want to work in this town! When I’m [former Golden Globes host] Ricky Gervais and I’m on my last awards show and I’ve made my hundreds of millions of dollars, maybe that’s a different story. Maybe I will have some bridges to burn and some behavior to call out. I’m definitely collecting that kind of stuff right now for when I get into a power position where I have a right to call things out — when I’m untouchable. For now, I have to kind of play the game a little bit. But I’m still having fun.”

Incidentally, Glaser’s credits include a number of acting roles, in film and TV, reality TV appearances and, of course, comedy specials, including last year’s stellar *Nikki Glaser: Someday You’ll Die*, which won the Writer’s Guild of America award and was nominated for four other awards, including a Golden Globe.

Last month, the Golden Globes announced that Glaser will be back as host next year, suggesting that she got the balance right by Hollywood standards. At roasts, conversely, there is (almost) unlimited leeway for how personal, raunchy and offensive your jokes can be.

“There have been lines that I found out about later on, after I’d crossed them, or sometimes a producer will say, hey, this person doesn’t want you to say this. But I always start writing like there’s no boundaries because that’s what you sign up for when you’re being roasted,” Glaser explains, noting that celebrity subjects at the Comedy Central roasts were paid millions, and subsequently donated the money to the charities of their choice.

“If any parameters come up, I respect them because I like being the good girl. I want to play by the rules, but I love when the rules can be bent or I can find ways around them without really getting in trouble.



Jen Rosenstein

“There are things that I’ve talked about on certain roasts that I thought were going to be almost hack by the time that I got on stage because it seemed to me like the obvious stance to take on someone, or the thing to poke at. But then I’m the only one who does it and people go, ‘Jesus Nikki, you really went for the jugular!’ and I’m like, ‘That’s what I thought we were supposed to do!’”

Glaser cites the secrecy around everyone’s material as one of the stresses in preparing for a roast. Not knowing what other comics are going to do means there’s no way to tell whether your jokes will be repetitive, whether the tone is too cutting or not mean enough. Then there’s the fact that, as a roaster, you’re also opening yourself up to the same level of nasty takedowns that the star of the night is receiving.

“You have to hear things about yourself that really hurt your feelings, and you have to pretend like they don’t,” she admits. “I’m 40 now. People are just going to call me old and horse-faced and a whore. I don’t need it.”

Between this abuse and the arduous prep involved in celebrity roasts, Glaser was considering hanging up her roasting gloves for good, but the Tom Brady gig was impossible to pass up.

“I only do it now for the exposure, not even the money. It’s just to showcase what I’m good at, which is joke-writing and putting together a set and performing. It’s one place, as a comedian, where all eyes are on you. It’s a big event that is like nothing else. It’s almost similar to Johnny Carson Tonight Show sets in the old days, where that one performance could make or break your whole career.”

Glaser says she doesn’t approach roasts as a forum to “bring truth to power,” and while she loves the thought of skewering prominent narcissists like Kanye West and, yes, Donald Trump (who was already the subject of a Comedy Central roast back in 2011), she points out that even the meanest jokes don’t truly penetrate people like them. Except maybe in the way that triggers their anger.

“I’d love to have Trump sit there and tell it like it is, but I don’t want to be put to death. There’s consequences for

telling narcissists what’s what.”

When I spoke with Glaser in late February, I asked her where she thought the U.S. invasion of Canada would be at by the time this issue came out in April. The St. Louis native (who still lives in her hometown) did not take the question lightly.

“I want to make it clear that most of us down here are completely embarrassed and you have every reason to mock us and be completely horrified at what’s happening. I mean, who the hell knows? I’m scared. It’s gotten out of control. I really feel like America is cooked.

“Just know that I’m coming across your border with my tail between my legs. I might just stay up in Canada forever.”

Glaser has plenty of experience on this side of the border, having been a fixture at Just for Laughs in the 2010s. Her first experience at JFL was way back in 2007, and while she has lots of good memories of this city, that first time was not one of them.

“I shouldn’t have been at the festival. I had a very lackluster performance, and it was devastating. You go to Just for Laughs thinking your life is going to change, and it didn’t. Then I got blackout drunk and slipped on the dancefloor and sprained my wrist. I just embarrassed myself drinking in that town. But coming back to Montreal for years after that was just the best time. Great crowds. Great parties. It’s summer camp for comedians.”

Glaser has been sober since 2012, and she’s also a vegan who’s more into health food than poutine, a dish she’s never tried. “I’ve watched people eat it, and it looks bad,” she says.

“The last time I was in Montreal, I got a ticket for jaywalking — that was memorable. It was right on that main drag where all the shopping is. [Ed.’s note: Ste-Catherine]. I just remember crossing the street and a cop pulled me over with his finger and said, ‘Get over here!’ and wrote me a ticket in front of everyone. It was humiliating, but it was kind of hot to be honest with you.”

→ Nikki Glaser performs at Olympia (1004 Ste-Catherine E.) on May 9, 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., \$66.25



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Spring Arts Calendar



Do Phan Hoi

Tentacle Tribe, Dirt

BY SAVANNAH STEWART

Bad Girls Only

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts presents *Bad Girls Only*, an exhibition exploring how women became linked to sin through iconic prints and drawings from the Early Modern period. Featuring works by Albrecht Dürer, Hendrick Goltzius, Jacob Matham and Hieronymus Wierix, the show critiques the lasting impact of associating women with the Seven Deadly Sins. Interactive features will also invite visitors to consider how notions of sin still influence self-perception and to what extent the seven sins are still tied to womanhood today. *Museum of Fine Arts (1380 Sherbrooke W.) through Aug. 10.*

Jordan

The latest play from Geordie Theatre, directed by Jimmy Blais and written by Yvette Nolan, reimagines Jordan River Anderson as a superhero confronting healthcare challenges that Indigenous children face. The piece highlights the creation of Jordan's Principle and the fight for justice within Indigenous communities. A relaxed performance will take place on Sunday, April 6, at 1 p.m., with reduced sound and lighting effects and freedom of movement for audience members. Suitable for ages six and up, *Jordan* was developed with Playwrights' Workshop Montréal. *At Centaur Theatre (453 St-François-Xavier) April 3–13*

Montreal Clown Fest

Sold-out shows, panel discussions, improv and a talent show MCed by Montreal's drag star Uma Gahd — the eighth edition of the Festival des clowns de Montréal is sure to get you laughing. With a different event scheduled every day, the festival promises variety, including international acts and kid-friendly performances. *Various venues, April 4–12*

DIRT

DIRT pushes the boundaries between street dance and contemporary movement with a distinctive signature style. This striking piece brings together five virtuoso performers in a raw and powerful expression that critiques humanity's conquering relationship with the planet. Blending puppetry with conceptual hip hop, choreographer Elon Höglund creates a profound meditation on our ancestral connection to the earth. The result is an unforgettable fusion of movement and meaning, challenging audiences to rethink their bond with nature. *Agora de la danse's Édifice Wilder (1435 de Bleury #102), April 9–12*

[guāng yīn] The Lightest Dark Is Darker Than the Darkest Light

Nien Tzu Weng's latest creation intertwines movement and memory in a dreamlike, immersive performance. After 15 years in Canada, Weng retraces her past, seeking to understand why she left Taiwan in the first place. Drawing on ancient Taoist concepts of yin and yang, Weng deconstructs her own movement practices, blending inner and outer worlds, and merging physical and virtual spaces. The performance unfolds as a layered dreamscape where dance, gestures, luminous robots and evocative scenery intertwine, inviting audiences to journey through time and identity. *At MAI (3680 Jeanne-Mance), April 9–12*

Triptych

The Belgian company Peeping Tom is staging *Triptych*, a surreal trilogy that blends dance, theatre and cinema in a hyperrealist, genre-defying experience. Directed by Gabriela Carrizo and Franck Chartier, the performance challenges perceptions of time and space, immersing the audience as voyeurs of haunting, intimate dramas. The trilogy unfolds in three confined spaces — a parlor filled with locked doors, a boat cabin and a flooded, abandoned restaurant — where tormented characters grapple with forces beyond their control. Seamless set changes unfold like film scenes, amplifying the eerie, dreamlike atmosphere with unsettling soundscapes. Renowned for its raw physicality and inventive storytelling, *Triptych* pushes the boundaries of contemporary performance art. *At Place des Arts's Théâtre Maisonneuve (260 de Maisonneuve W., 2nd floor), April 16–19*

Pounding the Pavement

Discover Montreal's vibrant history through the lens of local photographers at this captivating street photography exhibition. Featuring over 400 photos from the 19th century to today, the exhibit showcases diverse perspectives on the city's urban fabric, from public arenas and protest sites to local culture and architecture. Hosted at the McCord Stewart Museum, *Pounding the Pavement* brings together established artists, hidden talents and underrepresented voices, offering a rich visual journey through Montreal's complexity, contradictions and charm. *At the McCord Museum (690 Sherbrooke W.), April 18–Oct. 26*

Festival 100Lux

Montreal festival 100Lux celebrates street dance and hip hop culture with a dynamic lineup of local and international talent for its 13th edition. The festival's week-long program features performances, battles, workshops, parties, and conferences,

spotlighting the vibrant intersection of dance and music. Highlights include the Syncopated Rootz workshops and party featuring workshops by Hurrikane (NYC) and Chester Whitmore (NYC), plus a dance night with DJs Namco, Sovann and Blackgold. *Various venues, April 21–27*

Hocus Pocus

Choreographer Philippe Saire's *Hocus Pocus* promises a whimsical, surreal journey that blurs the line between reality and illusion, presenting a playful spectacle for all ages. Set in a mysterious frame defined by floating neon lights, two dancers, Lucas and Claus, embark on fantastical adventures. As bodies, faces and props appear and vanish like magic, the performance transports audiences from the clouds to the ocean depths. Expect dreamlike scenes and a soundtrack to match, contortionist escapes, wacky flying machines and encounters with fantastical aquatic creatures. *At Place des Arts's Cinquième Salle (175 Ste-Catherine W.), April 22–26*

Chaque jour se tenir entre les trous

Interdisciplinary artist Sylvie Cotton presents a performance that explores breathing as a universal experience. Blending storytelling, imagery, objects and movement, Cotton reimagines respiration as more than just a physical act — it's a shared breath that transcends time and history. Breathing becomes a poetic and political gesture, carrying both nourishment and pollution, kindness and revolt. Through this contemplative piece, Cotton reflects on the interdependence of all living beings and the subtle power of life's continuous flow. *At Agora de la danse's Édifice Wilder (1435 de Bleury #102), April 23–26*

a hole is a hole is a hole is

A tragicomic dance performance that challenges self-perception and societal norms. Set around a lavishly decorated table, guests are drawn into existential musings disguised as small talk: identity, legacy and queerness in a world grappling with global destruction. Inspired by Audre Lorde's concept of "biomythography," the performance weaves personal narratives into myth, blending choreography, confessions and vows. It's an immersive family gathering where stories of coming out are revisited and reframed with humour and reflection. *At MAI (3680 Jeanne-Mance), April 24–26*

Our Little Secret: The 23andMe® Musical

Written by and starring Noam Tomaschoff, this Segal Theatre production tells the wild, true story of Tomaschoff's shocking DNA discovery: he's not an only child, but one of more than 35 siblings scattered around the globe. Blending comedy, drama and a range of musical styles, with music by Ryan Peters and direction by Tracey Erin Smith, the show captures Tomaschoff's journey from disbelief to acceptance, delivering a message about family and identity. *At the Segal Centre (5170 Côte-Ste-Catherine), April 27–May 18*

CARCAÇA

In *CARCAÇA*, choreographer Marco da Silva Ferreira explores the place of dance in contemporary society and in our understanding of the communities we are a part of. Known for his background in urban and club dancing, the self-taught Portuguese artist blends street dance forms of Afro-American heritage like voguing and house dance with the rhythmic traditions of Portuguese folklore. Performed by 10 dancers and two musicians — a percussionist and an electronic musician — *CARCAÇA* is a high-energy performance that reclaims local symbols and challenges the erasure of cultural specificity in an increasingly globalized world. *At Théâtre Maisonneuve (260 de Maisonneuve W.), April 30–May 3*

Tout s'effondre

Helen Simard's *Tout s'effondre* explores the poetry of falling and rebirth. Featuring nine dancers and a musician, Simard's show reflects on both physical and symbolic falls, revealing the raw beauty of collapse while balancing between virtuosity and vulnerability. This piece delves into the human condition — order and chaos, action and inaction, the individual and the collective — and the constant reinvention of humanity. *At Agora de la danse's Édifice Wilder (1435 de Bleury #102), May 7–10*
For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again

A new production of Michel Tremblay's *For the Pleasure of Seeing Her Again, en anglais*, breathes fresh life into a classic of Quebec theatre. Directed by Alice Ronfard and starring Ellen David and Emmanuel Schwartz, this beloved



Peeping Tom, Triptych

play honours Tremblay's mother — the spirited, witty woman who inspired his passion for storytelling. Set in working-class Montreal of the 1950s and '60s, the play blends humour and nostalgia, capturing the complex bond between mother and son. Originally premiering at Centaur in 1998, the English version of the play became a hit across Canada and the U.S. At *Centaur Theatre (453 St-François-Xavier)*, May 13–June 1

Les Nocturnes du MAC

Celebrate the MAC's 60th anniversary in style with the legendary Nocturnes, back in a fresh format with the Société

des arts technologiques (SAT). Enjoy performances, creative workshops, local artists, DJs and a new family-friendly afternoon experience, curated by Mojeanne Behzadi. More details TBA. At *SAT (1201 St-Laurent)* on May 17

Festival TransAmériques

The 19th edition of FTA will showcase the work of 200 choreographers, directors, performers, and designers from 23 countries, presenting "multiple visions of the world through powerful, moving and sometimes disturbing dance and theatre shows." Among the shows is the North American premiere of *danses vagabondes*, a new solo piece

by dance legend Louise Lecavalier; *AUTOGYNEGAMY*, ie. the actual wedding of local artist and LGBTQ2IA+ icon Elle Barbara featuring music, dance, multimedia and revisionist Bible stories amid the architectural splendour of Très-Saint-Rédempteur church; *Taverna Miresia – Mario Bella Anastasia*, a wordless play evoking his father's absence while paying tribute to the women who have shaped his life; and the celebratory *C la vie*, a free closing show in Parc La Fontaine's Théâtre de Verdure by Burkinabè choreographer Serge Aimé Coulibaly. *Various venues, May 22–June 5*

Millepertuis

Choreographer Sovann Rochon-Prom Tep presents a solo performance that blends exuberance with surrender. The work showcases the personality, charisma and overflowing energy of street dance virtuoso Walid Hammani (aka Waldo). A deeply personal creation for his friend and collaborator, *Millepertuis* shifts from euphoria to calm, revealing the contradictions and depths of the self. Walid, a master of popping and electro, moves through poignant trance-like states, with flamboyant costumes, lighting and music crafting a world where his vulnerabilities slowly come to light. Like the St. John's Wort flower — bright yellow with hidden red ink — the performance unveils the complex layers beneath the surface. At *Agora de la danse's Édifice Wilder (1435 de Bleury #102)*, May 23–June 2

drip or drown

Jai Nitai Lotus reimagines the hip hop concert with *drip or drown*, a multidimensional performance blending music, spoken word, dance, visual projections and performance art. Set within a portable studio and multiple stages, the show reflects on the artist's ongoing quest for self-knowledge and individuality. With socially conscious lyrics and introspective themes, Lotus challenges the audience to consider how identity evolves and how fear shapes authenticity. Joined by his mentees, he opens space for reflection on whether we are defined by those around us or by our own journey. A raw, thought-provoking experience that celebrates the fluidity of identity. At *the MAI (3680 Jeanne-Mance)* from May 30–31

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: weird era



BY SRUTI ISLAM AND ALEX NIERENHAUSEN

More about books you should read, and the authors who wrote them, that were recently featured on the Weird Era podcast.

Audition by Katie Kitamura

No one writes interiority better than Katie Kitamura. *Audition* is her third novel, and it's yet another banger. (How many writers can say that? Back-to-back, no misses.) This time, Kitamura takes us inside the mind of an older actress (vaguely defined, but still specified, as is her style). The story begins when this woman meets an unnamed man young enough to be her son. But is he? There's an undeniable, magnetic connection between them. He seems to need some kind of deep validation, and while this confuses her, she, too, feels something in return. The relationship teeters on the edge of eroticism, yet there's something familial about it as well. This tension pulls readers into a unique, almost whodunnit-like mystery. But it's more of a *who's who* mystery.

Kitamura expertly writes from the perspectives of a wife, a son, a lover, a life partner and of an artist. I couldn't put the book down. I still don't have all the answers, but that makes sense — after all, the question of who we really are is one that lingers. (SI)

My Documents by Kevin Nguyen

Years ago, I was fortunate to interview Kevin Nguyen about his debut novel, *New Waves*, so I was thrilled to speak with him again about his follow-up, *My Documents*. What's clearly carried over from then to now is his deep and determined interest in the Asian American experience. His new book, unsettlingly realistic, explores America's response to a series of terrorist attacks through the perspectives of a diverse group of Asian Americans. Drawing on the infamous Japanese internment camps of the 1940s, Nguyen raises an unsettling question: Is a repeat of this history really that far behind us? Or, in fact, is it already happening? Nguyen tells this story through a series of interconnected Vietnamese characters — cousins who, in reality, feel more like siblings — each with their own identities and flaws. In our conversation, Nguyen and I discuss everything from

Google's bylaws (are they more powerful than the government?) to inner conflict, and even Kanye.

Care and Feeding by Laurie Woolever

Laurie Woolever's memoir, *Care and Feeding*, is a fascinating peek behind the curtain of foodie culture, journalism and excess, and globe-trotting with her through the '90s and subsequent decades. The author is, of course, best-known for being the assistant to both Mario Batali and the late Anthony Bourdain (or simply Tony, as she calls him). And of course these men make appearances in *Care and Feeding*, but make no mistake: this is Laurie's life and Laurie's story. Readers will no doubt want the full scoop on Bourdain, especially, but as Laurie says herself in our interview, "I already did a book about Tony. So, buy that book and then buy my book." And believe me, you do want to buy *Care and Feeding*. Laurie doesn't shy away from her own flaws, but instead prepares us a deliciously candid offering of her story. No crumbs left from this reader. (AN)

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