

WEEK 33, 2019

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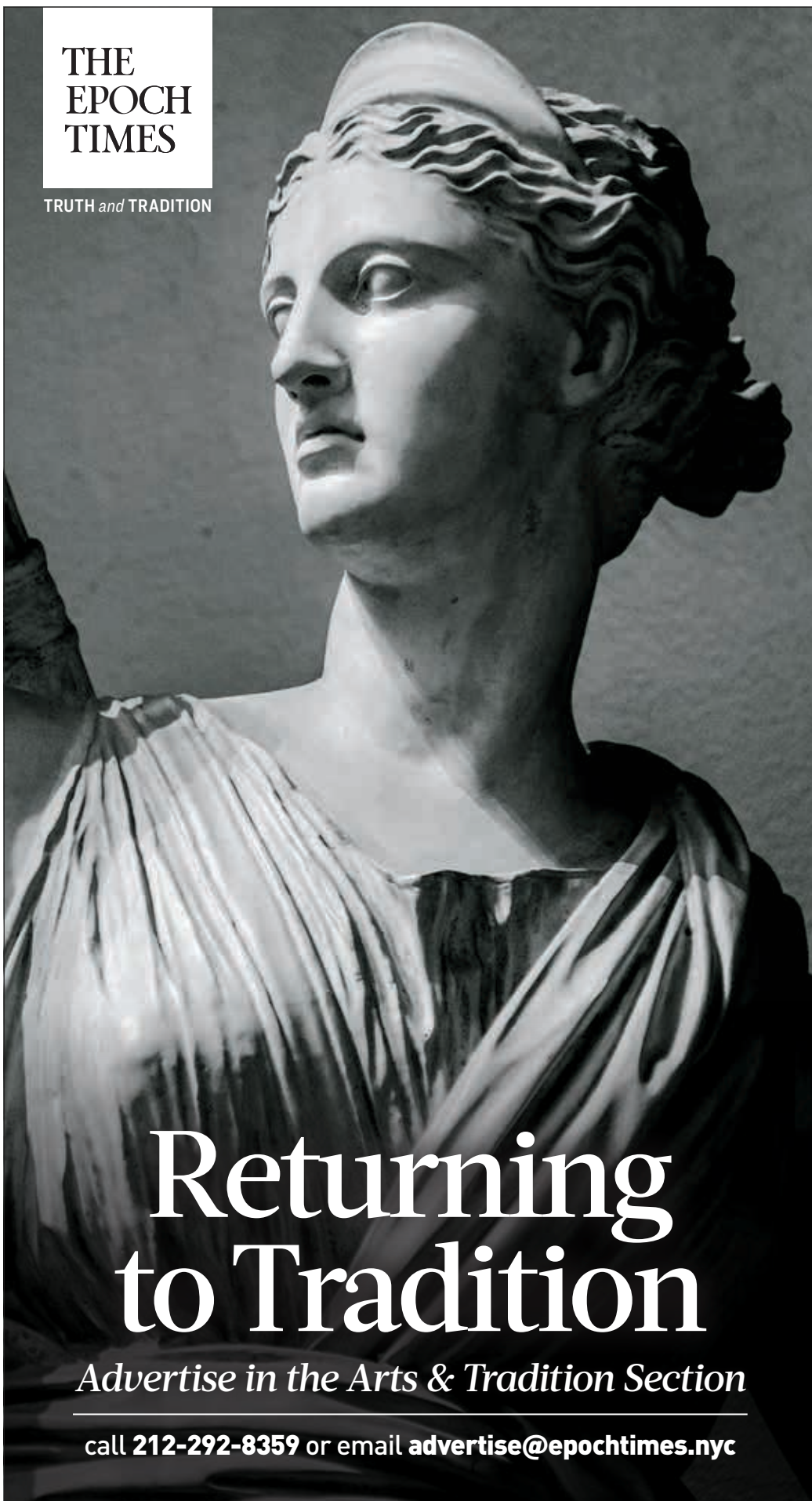


THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

"Saint Michael Triumphant Over the Devil With the Donor Antoni Joan," 1468, by Bartolomé Bermejo. Oil and gold on panel, 70 3/4 inches by 32 1/4 inches.

***The Brilliance of 'Bartolomé Bermejo
Master of the Spanish Renaissance'***

An exceptionally rare exhibition of an enigmatic virtuoso...4



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ANCIENT CULTURE

Chinese Architecture, a Miniature of the Cosmos

JUEXIAO ZHANG

Modern architecture juts into the sky, declaring its dominance over us mere humans. It doesn't connect us with the heavens; it seems to challenge heaven for a fight.

Over thousands of years, the Chinese have developed their own architectural style. Based on the tenets of Taoism and Buddhism, it reflects the Chinese understanding that the heavens, the earth, and human beings are intimately connected. Japan, Korea, and much of Asia copied this style.

Harmony Between Heaven and Earth

"I Ching: The Book of Changes" and other writings say that ancient peoples acted according to the laws of heaven, earth, nature, and the time of year. Taoist philosophy was based on the central element, that which gives birth to the heavens, the earth, and humans.

Confucianism ascribed to the principle of harmony between heaven and earth. Nature is the big cosmos, and a human being is a small one. As a miniature of nature, a human being must live and act within the laws of nature and the cosmos.

This traditional view held for all areas of Chinese life, including architecture. More than location and its practical use, a building had to harmonize with nature both inside and out.

Chinese architects designed elements of the cosmos into every structure. From primitive caves and simple buildings to complex construction, one consistently finds the elements of the cosmos embedded in Chinese architecture. In a very real way, architecture was a miniature of the cosmos.

Points of the Compass

All Chinese architecture started with points on the compass—north, south, east, and west. Architects used charts that astrologers specifically prepared beforehand. Unlike today's maps, the south was at the top, north was on the bottom, west on the right, and east on the left.

Based on China's location in the Northern Hemisphere, the Chinese people believed that a pleasant climate—the warmer winters and summer breezes of southern regions—came from heaven. So south was the point of reference for all building.

In general, the architect insulated the walls on the north, west, and east and the entry faced the south. This prevented other weather currents, such as northern winds or other adverse conditions, from affecting the temperature in the home.

To protect against weather disasters, four mythical creatures were placed on the rooftops of houses, as protector spirits of the four cardinal points. The black tortoise was placed at the north, the cinnabar canary (also translated as the Vermillion Bird) at the south, the white tiger at the west, and the green dragon at the east.

Roofing Tiles

The first roof tiles were made of clay around 3,000 years ago. Later ylang-ylang grass and a clay-and-stone mixture covered the roofs of homes. Soon roofs were enhanced with glazes and glosses of various hues.

Roof tiles were held together by nails and often adorned with animal or plant motifs meant to protect against natural catastrophes.

Specific designs were reserved for the emperor's housing, such as splendid yellow roof tiles, which can still be seen today on the buildings in the Forbidden City in Beijing. Roof tiles on Beijing's Temple of Heaven are blue.



Dougong or interlocking brackets are a feature of traditional Chinese building that relied on wood.



Yellow tiles adorn buildings in the Forbidden City in Beijing.



Blue-glazed tiles atop the Temple of Heaven in Beijing.



Wood: The Primary Construction Material

Wood was the primary construction material used by Chinese architects. It could be easily obtained from the many forests in China. Wood was preferred as a natural construction material because it gave off a fragrant, pleasant odor in the interior of a building. Also, its grain and luster brought a natural living atmosphere into the house. For architects, wood was a living building material, which

Ancient Chinese architecture demonstrated the principle of harmony between heaven and earth. A Zen Buddhist temple in the mountains.

breathed, absorbed, and repelled moisture. But it did have its drawbacks, as most houses easily caught fire.

Framing

Chinese architects preferred constructing a house by first building a frame, as it brought a number of advantages to the builder. In contrast to a solid structure (of stone), a frame building has beams and pillars to carry weight at certain pressure points. This construction method allows

The first roof tiles were made of clay around 3,000 years ago.

for wide and open rooms. Chinese architecture provided a smooth transition to the environment and truly harmonized human beings with their world and the heavens.

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FINE ARTS

The Brilliance of 'Bartolomé Bermejo':

Master of the Spanish Renaissance

An exceptionally rare exhibition of an enigmatic virtuoso

LORRAINE FERRIER

LONDON—Once in a while, a painting moves me to such an extent that it takes my breath away. Each of the seven rare masterpieces in “Bartolomé Bermejo: Master of the Spanish Renaissance,” at the National Gallery in London, had this effect.

Around one-third (seven) of Bartolomé Bermejo’s paintings are in the exhibition, six of which have never before left Spain. All can be seen until Sept. 29. Included in the exhibition are his first and last documented paintings, “Saint Michael Triumphant Over the Devil With the Donor Antoni Joan” (1468) and the “Desplà Pietà” (1490), along with an exquisite manuscript that details payment of the Saint Michael painting.

Each of the seven paintings is astonishing: It is like discovering a lost treasure.

Indeed, entering the small exhibi-

tion space feels like being inside a treasure chest. The deep purple walls in the dimly lit gallery evoke an intimate experience, setting the scene for the seven paintings to sparkle like jewels.

Each devotional painting conveys the minutest of details, from rich velvets, silks, and chainmail to shimmering pearls, gems, and armor. Look closely at “Saint Michael Triumphant Over the Devil With the Donor Antoni Joan.” You can even see the weave of the fabric, and on Saint Michael’s golden breastplate, a reflection of Jerusalem.

“He’s just so wonderful as a painter technically. I think that really does come out from this exhibition that has just very few works but all of a very high quality,” said the exhibition’s curator, Letizia Treves, in a phone interview.

The aim of the exhibition, Treves said, was to put “our picture [‘Saint Michael Triumphant Over the Devil With the Donor Antoni Joan,’] in context.” Even though the National Gallery’s Bermejo is lauded as the best example of early Spanish painting in Britain, Treves said that it has no real context in the collection.

The exhibition also allows us to meet one of Spain’s lesser-known painters. It was only at the end of the 19th century that Bermejo’s “Desplà Pietà” and the stained-glass window designs of the baptismal chapel in Barcelona Cathedral were attributed to him. Most of Bermejo’s work was rediscovered in the early 20th century. Born in Cordoba, he worked mainly in the towns and cities of Tous, Valencia, Daroca, Zaragoza, and Barcelona.

Treves reveals more of this great yet little-known Spanish painter. **THE EPOCH TIMES:** Please tell us about Bartolomé Bermejo.

LETIZIA TREVES: What’s interesting about Bermejo is that we know very little about him. We don’t even know when he was born or when he died. He’s really a mystery. He’s extremely enigmatic.

I suspect there are other paintings by him out there, probably not attributed, thought to be anonymous,

and Netherlandish because it’s clear that he’s strongly influenced by this in his work. I hope more will be discovered. At the moment, there are fewer than 20.

Of the little we know and of the few paintings we have, it seems he had quite an itinerant career. He moved around a great deal, perhaps more so than most artists. It was hard for artists at that time to relocate because they could only really practice their art in the city in which they were permanent residents.

The moment Bermejo traveled to another town, he had to team up with a local painter, so effectively that local painter would be a sort of guarantor for him.

There is this thought that he may have been a “converso,” a Jew who converted to Christianity, and that his itinerant career is in some way linked to the Inquisition that was persecuting Jews and conversos during precisely this period. He may not have been a first-generation converso; it may have been his parent or even grandparent.

The reason we think that he may be a converso is not just his itinerant career, but he is linked quite strongly to known conversos; one was his wife. From one of the few documents we have relating to his life, we know that his wife was brought before the Inquisition and put on trial, if you like, for not knowing her creed beyond the second line. At that time, they wouldn’t have had mixed marriages, so it seems very likely that Bermejo himself was a converso too.

In Bermejo’s last documented painting, “Desplà Pietà” (1490) from the Barcelona Cathedral, the archdeacon in the painting is Lluís Desplà, the donor who commissioned the work. He was based in Barcelona and was a staunch opponent of the Inquisition, so it is thought that he may have provided Bermejo with some sort of protection in Barcelona and also certainly gave him other commissions, including stained-glass window design.

Another odd thing about Bermejo, from the little we know, it does look like he worked predominantly for a private clientele, not for monaster-

ies or major churches. Perhaps that is also a sign that he was a converso. I also think his very unique style of painting probably appealed to individuals.

THE EPOCH TIMES: I read that he was one of the best portrait painters in Spain. Can you please tell us about that?

MS. TREVES: Portraiture wasn’t something that 15th-century Spanish artists specialized in. I think there’s a document that said that the king and queen of Spain were complaining that they couldn’t find any decent portrait painters in Spain. They had to bring them in from elsewhere in Europe.

I think what’s so astonishing about Bermejo is that his characterizations and portraits are exceptional. These are integrated within a devotional work. When you blow them up as details, they work as standalone portraits, but they also function very importantly in each of these three masterpieces: the “Desplà Pietà,” the “Triptych of the Virgin of Montserrat,” and “Saint Michael Triumphant Over the Devil With the Donor Antoni Joan.” The donor is very physically present before the religious figure to whom the altarpiece or painting was dedicated to.

The “Triptych of the Virgin of Montserrat” (probably 1470–75) was specifically painted for the Italian cloth-merchant Francesco della Chiesa, seen kneeling in the picture. The painting was hung in Valencia, but on his death at the beginning of the 16th century, the picture was sent back to his family in Northern Italy in Acqui Terme, where the picture has been ever since.

In fact, what’s so lovely is that one of the wings in that triptych is actually damaged by candle flames. I don’t know if you noticed, but on the left-hand wing there’s an area where it has been burned by the flames of the candles burning in front of the picture. But it reminds you that these objects were devotional objects; they were used. The donors would’ve knelt before them and prayed.

Similarly, the “Desplà Pietà,” from the Barcelona Cathedral, was painted for Desplà’s chapel within his home attached to the cathedral.



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It now hangs within the cathedral itself in the room where Desplà’s tomb is, so it is still very much connected to the place for which it was painted. I have to say, it took quite a bit of convincing for Barcelona Cathedral to send it to London. It had never been sent abroad.

Both the “Desplà Pietà” and the “Triptych of the Virgin of Montserrat” have never been seen in the UK.

I feel personally that one of the most successful things of the show, and one of the things I am most proud of, is that sometimes less is more. You can say so much with three great masterpieces. I think with those three pictures (the “Desplà Pietà,” the “Triptych of the Virgin

MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA 2019

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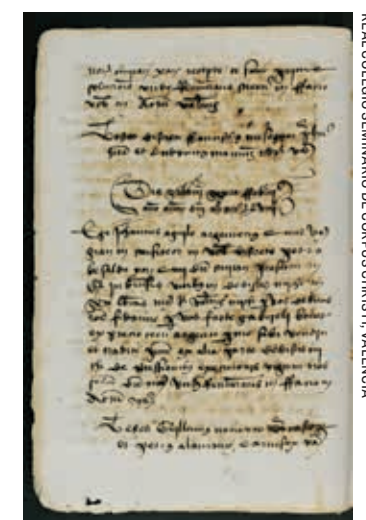
“These objects were devotional objects; they were used. The donors would’ve knelt before them and prayed.”

Letizia Treves, exhibition curator

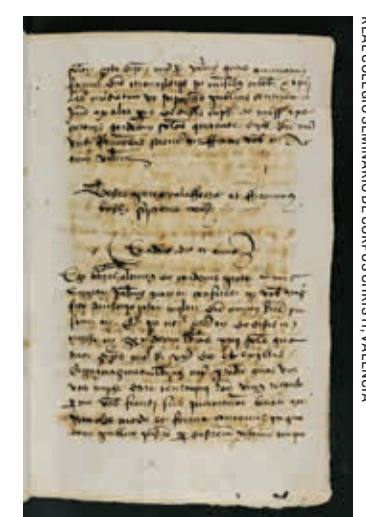
of Montserrat,” and “Saint Michael Triumphant Over the Devil”), you really see a trajectory in the artist’s works, but you can also see what he’s trying to achieve in each picture. I think he’s someone who is very singular in Spain. He’s extremely difficult to pigeonhole. I did find it fascinating working on Bermejo because I realized there isn’t anyone really like him in Spain at that time.

To find out more about “Bartolomé Bermejo: Master of the Spanish Renaissance” at the National Gallery, London, visit NationalGallery.org.uk

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.



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1. “Triptych of the Virgin of Montserrat,” probably 1483–4, by Bartolomé Bermejo. Oil on oak panel.

2. “Desplà Pietà,” 1490, by Bartolomé Bermejo. Oil on poplar panel, 68 7/8 inches by 74 7/16 inches (with frame).

3. “Resurrection,” about 1470–5 by Bartolomé Bermejo. Oil and gold on pine panel, 35 1/2 inches by 27 3/16 inches.

4. “Ascension,” about 1470–5, by Bartolomé Bermejo. Oil and gold on pine panel, 41 1/16 inches by 27 3/16 inches.

5.–6. Archival document recording partial payment on account to Bermejo for the painting “Saint Michael Triumphant Over the Devil With the Donor Antoni Joan.”

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON

Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

Bad Guys VERSUS Bald Guys

Baldness is apparently the result of testosterone overabundance. Which is why four hulking, behind-kicking, bald, bad boys (Dwayne Johnson, Vin Diesel, Jason Statham, and Tyrese Gibson) proved to be too much baldness and ego for one franchise ("Fast & Furious") to handle.

The franchise was split neatly in half, so everyone could remain alive. Then again, maybe the alleged bad blood on previous bald-bad-boy movie sets was just controversy and publicity. I mean publicity.

Whatever. Johnson and Statham jumped cars, er, ship, and the result is "Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw," and it's pretty good! Of course, it's pretty much just more of the same, but the same means good—if you like car carnage—because the Furious-verse now boasts eight of these ridiculous blockbusters. (That's nearly 20 years' worth.)

Well, OK, it's the same yet different. "Hobbs & Shaw" is missing the sexy American muscle-car porn. (It does have Statham's European, classy, high-performance McLaren, along with Johnson's Harley-Davidson.) It does have muscle trucks. It's also missing the endless

'Hobbs & Shaw' is pretty much just more of the same, but the same means good.

(Top) Dwayne Johnson (L) and Jason Statham team up in "Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw."

(Right) Jason Statham (L) and Dwayne Johnson contemplate a snagged chopper in "Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw."



'Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw'

Director
David Leitch

Starring
Dwayne Johnson, Jason Statham, Idris Elba, Vanessa Kirby, Helen Mirren, Eiza González

Running Time
2 hours, 17 minutes

Rated
PG-13

Release Date
Aug. 2

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

supply of Brazilian-girls-in-thong-bikinis soft porn. Many men (and boys) will miss that, even though Harvard studies say it's not good for them.

"Hobbs & Shaw" keeps the third "F" of the "Fast and Furious" franchise, which has long been known to be "family," but now family becomes Dwayne Johnson's giant, fictitious Samoan family.

What Goes On

He of (now widely known) Samoan heritage, Dwayne Johnson, is that self-same, self-described, "brown, tattooed ... mountain of a man," Defense Security Service agent Hobbs, he's always been.

Jason Statham plays Deckard Shaw, the British driving-specialist mercenary he was in his other franchise, before it synced

up with the F&F. That introduction of Shaw to F&F was one of the highlights of the franchise, causing great, whooping elation in theaters around the world, so beloved was his bald, British cheekiness, and outstanding behind-kickingness.

Vanessa Kirby plays Shaw's sister, M16 agent Hattie Shaw. Idris Elba plays the bad guy Brixton, who's a techno-enhanced, super-soldier/agent for an underground military organization called Eteon.

Well, Shaw was originally a very bad guy, a killer in the previous car movie franchise, and the whole family is pretty much con-artist-y. Helen Mirren plays their mother and she's in jail, but she breaks out of jail when the feuding siblings reunite. Hattie is on the good-guy side.

What does Eteon do? In Bond-villain-like fashion, it's intent on world domination via the spreading of a deadly virus. But whoa! Hattie absconds with this virus. And to save humanity, she injects herself with all the bio-hazardous evil while in the back of a fleeing enemy truck—and then she jumps off the truck! Now, there's only days left before she becomes toxic and deadly! Aaaaannd scene.

Oh wait, no, there's more: Brixton is after them, of course, so there are car chases, motorcycles chases, and stuff! There's even a car chase in an armored, dune-buggy-looking contraption in a defunct nuclear power plant right after a neutron bomb blows up! And what else?! Well, you've seen the trailer—Statham deftly drifts the McLaren underneath an 18-wheeler. (Driving hot cars under trucks is an F&F staple.) And he does this two times!

Lastly, there's a finale involving indigenous Samoan weaponry (various ornate staffs and clubs) versus hi-tech firearms! How does that work?! Well! I'm not going to tell you that. You'll have to see for yourself, because it's all very ingenious. It involves hi-tech gone wrong.

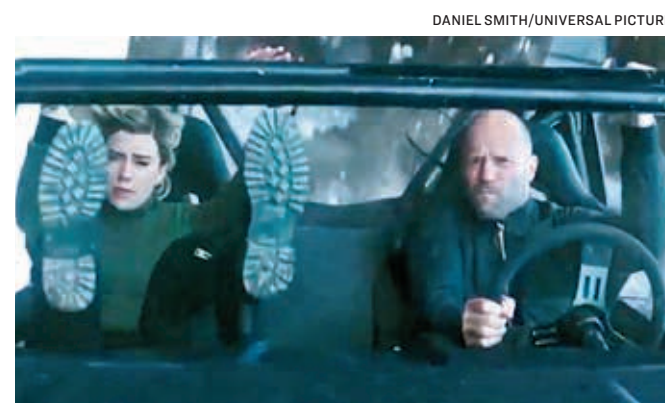
And one more thing—there's a tug of war between a Black Hawk helicopter and a series of linked-together muscle trucks! I strongly suspect it's inferred that Samoan men are simply



Cliff Curtis (2nd L), Dwayne Johnson (C), and Joe Anoa'i (2nd R) in "Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw."



Idris Elba plays the villain in "Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw."



Hattie (Vanessa Kirby) and Deckard Shaw (Jason Statham) are siblings fighting an arch villain.

too mountain-like of stature to tinker with the tiny muscle cars that Vin Diesel likes to drive, in the other bald-headed series. So that's what goes on.

How's the Acting?

What?! Shut up. Acting! Pffft. Actually, the Hobbs-Shaw relationship may constitute the most high-speed ping-pong game of an alpha-male insult fest ever to scorch the big screen. It's non-stop. It requires great cardio, with each volley consisting of full-on verbal smashes; each smash is returned without missing a beat. This actually takes acting ability, and Johnson gets incrementally funnier with each film he does.

Acting-wise, Idris Elba cannot be bad, even when given an empty villain to play. And, as mentioned, while the third F in F&F that stands for "family" is here represented by a giant pack of Samoans, the whole thing, while strong in tribal tats, beards, and primitive weaponry, is a bit family-lite.

It was also shot in Hawaii. That's the homeland of that other behemoth Polynesian movie star—Jason Momoa. The next franchise episode will have Jason and Dwayne play half-brothers, I'm sure of it. And since Johnson hasn't played a superhero yet, this brotherly linking will necessitate that Johnson be the Marvel version of Aquaman: Namor. Cool.

'Luce' Triggers Emotional Knee-Jerk Reactions

MARK JACKSON

Mark Jackson nailed the state of the nation, nay—the world—in 2019, with his description of New York City in the Rolling Stones's 1978 song "Shattered" (my condensing and rearrangement):

Shattered. Life's just a cocktail party on the street. Friends are so alarming; all this chitter-chatter, people dressed in plastic bags, directing traffic, don't you know the crime rate is going up? Rats on the West Side, bed bugs uptown, what a mess, pride and joy and greed and sex and loneliness and sex and sex; my brain's been battered, money grabbers, bite the Big Apple, don't mind the maggots.

America's got so many problems! Racism, sexism, LGBTQ issues, immigration and border wall issues, Navy SEALs partying too much, billionaire pedophiles, #MeToo, antifa, school shootings, Russia collusion, global warming, socialism on the rise ... It's all just so not great. I'm all for making it great again.

So what's this bombastic lead-in have to do with a little movie called "Luce"? This film adaptation of an Off-Broadway play (JC

Just when we think we've got it all figured out and we're comfortable, the film whips the rug out from under us.

'Luce'

Director
Julius Onah

Starring
Naomi Watts, Octavia Spencer, Tim Roth, Kelvin Harrison Jr., Norbert Leo Butz, Andrea Bang, Marsha Stephanie Blake

Running Time
1 hour, 49 minutes

Rated
R

Release Date
Aug. 2

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Lee) puts racism, prejudice, and terrorism in your face and postulates that these are the premier issues that need resolving—before America can become great again.

However, "Luce" does this in a complex and sneaky (but good) way, such that it tempts us down our usual knee-jerk pathways to our particular phobias, notions, and prejudices; and just when we think we've got it all figured out and we're comfortable, it whips the rug out from under us, and exposes all the ways we're biased.

It shows us what we have to work on in order to become great. Because the problem always starts within. At the end of "Platoon," Charlie Sheen's character Chris Taylor says, "I think now, looking back, we did not fight the enemy; we fought ourselves. And the enemy was in us."

Luce

Luce (Kelvin Harrison Jr.) was born in war-torn Eritrea but was adopted by well-to-do white American parents (Naomi Watts and Tim Roth). They couldn't have their own kids, but they wanted kids so badly that they were willing to put in the years of therapy and counseling it took to rehabilitate a massively culture-shocked former child soldier.

Is that premise perhaps a bit extreme? Is it realistic? Who does

that? Suffice it to say, they did, and ostensibly succeeded. Luce is a model student: captain of the track and debate teams, and senior class valedictorian.

However, one day, teacher Harriet Wilson (Octavia Spencer) assigns a writing project. Students are to write in the voice of a chosen author. Luce chooses communist Frantz Fanon and writes some radical, terrorist-sounding stuff. He writes convincingly enough to cause Mrs. Wilson to freak out and search his locker. Eureka—she finds a bag of dangerous illegal fireworks.

So, scary writing, plus scary fireworks, plus a violent youth automatically equals a red flag in this teacher's mind, and she calls in Luce's mom, Amy, for a meeting. It should be noted that both Mrs. Wilson and Luce are black. Is this perhaps some kind of black-on-black ... something-or-other?

So Many Possibilities

It all gets very hypothetical. What do we really know? Are our perceptions accurate? When presented with certain scenarios, what's our go-to interpretation? This is the main message and teaching piece of the film.

Did Mrs. Wilson overstep her bounds? Was she validated in trashing Luce's privacy and invading his locker? As it so happens, she's done this before, confiscating

a bag of weed from black track jock DeShaun Meeks's (Astro) locker, which resulted in DeShaun getting booted from the team along with being divested of his college scholarship. Again, is this black-on-black prejudice?

One thing's for sure: Until you see how Luce deals with the massive controversy swirling about him, you haven't understood the meaning of the phrase "passive aggressive." For example, instead of confronting Mrs. Wilson, he invites her to sit in on one of his debate-team rehearsals, and with a beatific smile on his face, ruthlessly cross-examines her, while other teachers bear witness.

What Mrs. Wilson Didn't Know

All the track-team boys share their lockers. Ooops. Many different possibilities of the actual guilty parties. Maybe the weed wasn't DeShaun's? Maybe the fireworks weren't Luce's? Then again, can we blame Mrs. Wilson for making a pre-emptive move? After all, school shootings are not something to be taken lightly in this day and age.

But the point is not so much what Mrs. Wilson didn't know; it's about what we the audience don't know, because we never get all the pertinent information. It's a barometer on the state of our tendencies to jump to conclusions before getting all the info.



(L-R) Norbert Leo Butz, Tim Roth, Kelvin Harrison Jr., Naomi Watts, and Octavia Spencer in "Luce."

Correction

The Aug. 6 film review: "Classic Tarantino, Pretty Funny" misstated what the Beatles's song "Helter Skelter" was about and when it was written. The song, named after an amusement ride that was used as a symbol, was released in 1968. The Epoch Times regrets the error.

Gangster Revenge Flick Fizzles

IAN KANE

Frank (Nicolas Cage) just got released from prison, and he has a lot of catching up to do. The crime? Murder. The punishment? Life in prison. So why is he getting out early, having served only 22 years of his forever sentence? Good behavior? Not quite.

You see, on the day of Frank's release, he visits the doctor, and his health issues are revealed. He's basically dying from a degenerative disease that prevents his brain from resting, rendering him an insomniac of the highest order.

Frank also hates controlled substances, so when the doctor prescribes a medication that can help him with his sleep problems, he's loath to accept it. The alternative to taking the drugs is extreme mental malaise, including bouts of dementia, mania, hallucinations, and more. His condition has progressed so far that he's being released from prison early.

Written by John Newman ("Get Shorty") and directed by Shawn Ku ("Beautiful Boy," "Pretty Dead Girl"), "A Score to Settle" begins with a very interesting dilemma: Should the aging gangster focus on catching up on father-son time and make amends to his son Joey (Noah Le Gros, "Depraved"), or begin to plot his revenge on the men who set him up for the crime he never committed?

The history of the latter is partially articulated by some pretty grisly flashbacks.

The film opens simply enough. Frank, fresh out of the pen, walks up a road in the dead of night to meet up with his now-adult son. They share some quality time—just walking and talking, you know, catch-up chit-chat. And then the partying starts.

The first parts of the film establish Frank's intertwined, yet separate, desires for both revenge and redemption.

'A Score to Settle'

Director
Shawn Ku

Starring
Nicolas Cage, Benjamin Bratt, Noah Le Gros

Running Time
1 hour, 43 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
Aug. 2

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Frank had the foresight to hide a substantial stash of money away during his operations as a mob hit man, but he never got to spend any of it. Desperate for his abandoned son's acceptance, he spends nearly two decades of pent-up rage and regret distilled into a couple of days of high rolling—several scenes of lavish spending and pompous gluttony.

However, all of the time and attention that Frank showers on his son makes it obvious to Joey that his dad disappears during the nocturnal hours, and Frank realizes that he won't be able to hide his extracurricular activities from his son forever.

As the film shifts gears and becomes darker in tone, we see that Frank is meeting up with the one man he can still trust: Q (Benjamin Bratt). Q's an old underworld accomplice who has since gone straight; he even runs an established bar, and his daughter is about to be wed.

But Frank is on the warpath. Any little scraps of information that he can cobble together on the whereabouts of fellow gangsters Jimmy (Mohamed Karim) and Tank (Ian Tracey) will do.

After all, his revenge plans are working against time, since he doesn't know how long he can keep everything from his son. He also doesn't know how much longer he'll be capable of exacting his revenge, due to his failing mental capacities.

A Fatal Mistake (for the Film)

While Frank's affecting and impassioned desire to win the affections of his son could have carried us through the film, a disingenuously "human interest" distraction arrives: a totally jarring subplot involving Frank's



Hit man Frank (Nicolas Cage) has a chance for redemption, in "A Score to Settle."

bizarre affinity for doe-eyed prostitute Simone (Karolina Wydra, "Europa Report").

It's almost as if the producers wanted to shoehorn a female in at the last minute, instead of letting men just be men and solve male problems on their own. It's a grating, incongruous shift.

From there, the film stumbles further. Frank's vendetta cuts a crimson swath through bad people. We're treated to bouts of bloody mayhem that are indistinguishable from other gory B-movie offerings out there. The violence cheapens the film; I almost felt as if I'd just played and been duped by a cinematic shell game. The touching (albeit melancholic) familial tumult was promised as the focal point of the film. Instead, the ol' switcheroo happens.

It's really too bad because somewhere buried underneath this disintegrating mess of a movie, there was a good story in Newman's script. Ku is certainly a very capable director as well. The first parts of the film establish Frank's intertwined, yet separate, desires for both revenge and redemption.

Sticking to a contemplative, family melodrama with a little violence for window dressing would have been best for "A Score to Settle."

Filmmakers today don't need to scramble to out-"John Wick" each other. Just tell us interesting stories.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlight-Ent.com

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