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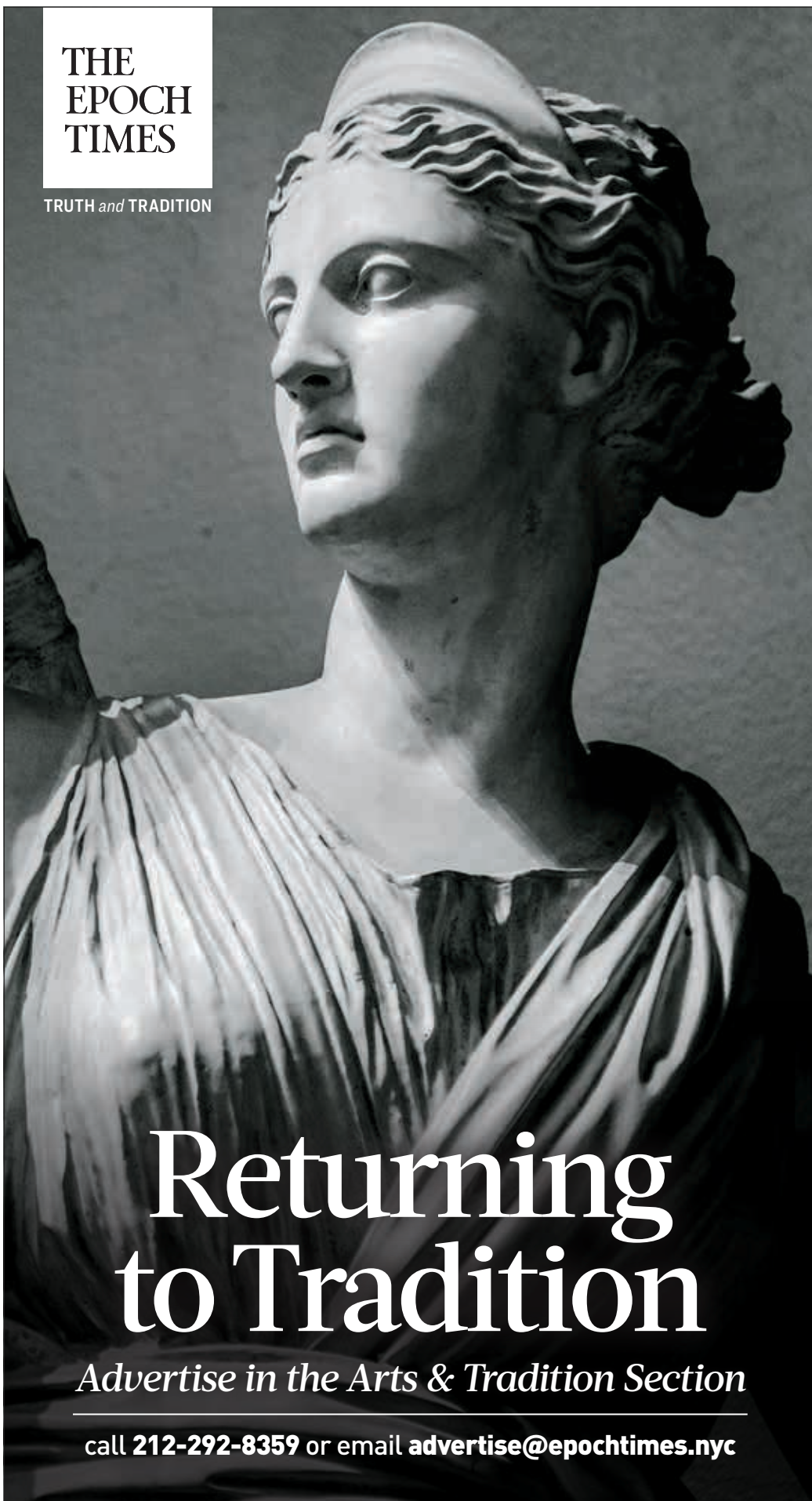
COURTESY OF TOM BOUWKNEGT



"Emerald Jewelry," by Tom Bouwknegt, age 9. Watercolor.

***Far From Childish  
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BEHOLD THE BEAUTY

STILLNESS, BEAUTY, AND TRUTH:

# The Basilica of Saint Lawrence

JEFF MINICK

Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.  
—John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”

When you enter the vestibule of the Basilica of Saint Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr, you’ll pass a sign reading “Reverential Quiet Please.”

Outside the walls of this church are the streets of Asheville, North Carolina. These streets and sidewalks swarm with tourists, locals, hippies, jugglers, guitar players, beggars, and the tattooed and dreadlocked crowd, a stew of humanity that almost 20 years ago inspired Rolling Stone Magazine to dub Asheville “the new freak capital of the U.S.”

A popular bumper sticker declares “Keep Asheville Weird,” and most who live here would agree that weirdness in Asheville seems in little danger of extinction. There’s a guy who dresses like a nun and weaves in and out of traffic on his bicycle; the purple LaZoom Bus rattles past, its guide shouting out a quirky commentary while riders drink beer and wine; some women stage topless rallies; street musicians compete for the tourist dollars; and shops around the city offer services such as palmistry and psychic readings, aromatic cures, yoga, massages, acupuncture, and a host of New Age therapies.

On Friday evenings, drummers, flute players, and dancers gather for the drum circle in Pritchard Park, where the primitive rhythms prompt some to clap and gyrate while tourists snap photographs like anthropologists who have just dis-

covered some heretofore-unknown tribe of the Amazon. Tattoos are as common as shells on a beach.

In recent years, Asheville has also gained a reputation for its restaurants and breweries, drawing even greater numbers of travelers to “The Land of the Sky,” or as some call it, the “San Francisco of the East.”

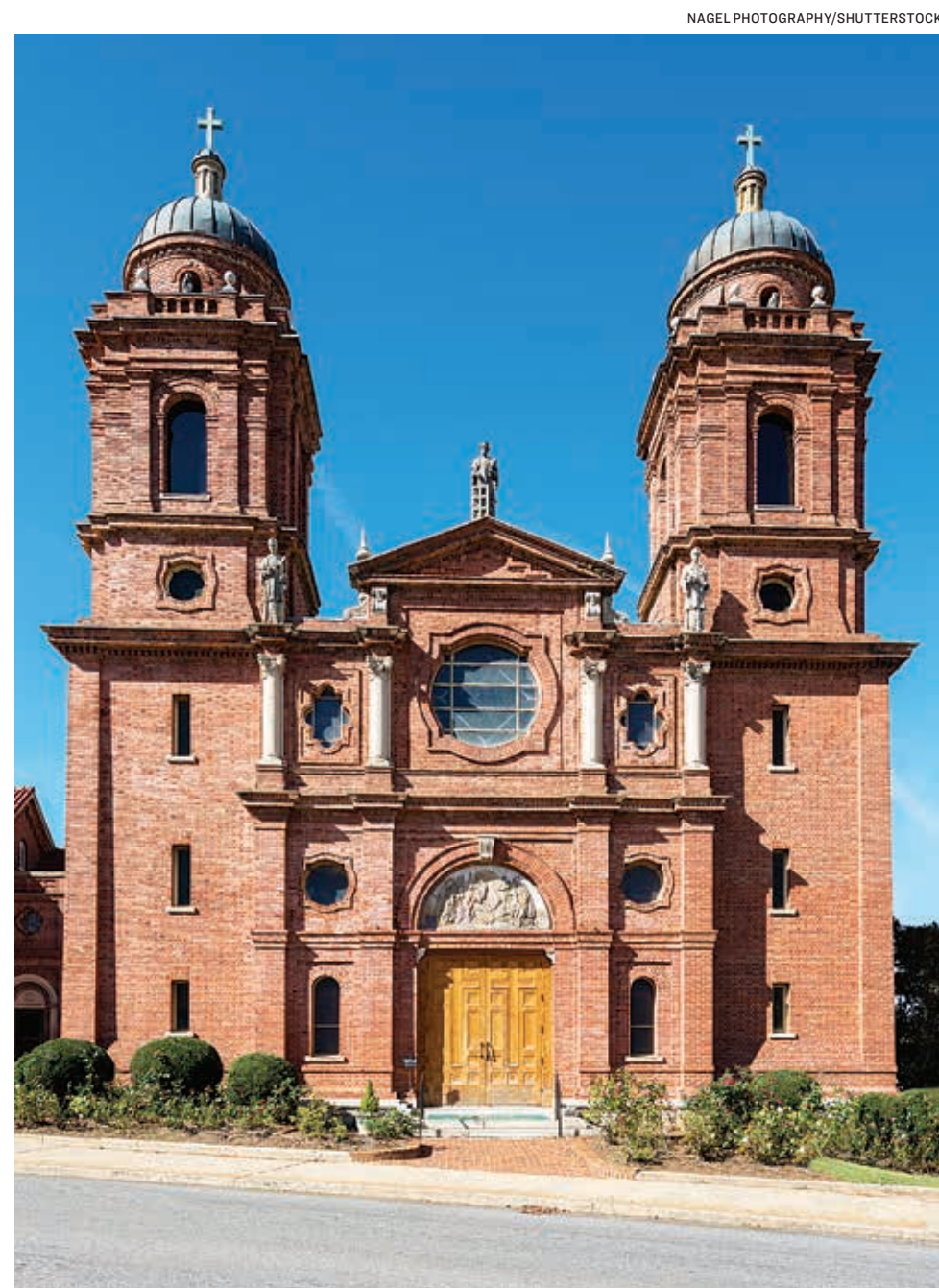
And Then There Is the Basilica

For most visitors, that sign in the vestibule—“Reverential Quiet Please”—is superfluous. Laughing and talking, still one with the commotion and racket of the streets, they push open the heavy door off the courtyard and step inside the church, where they find themselves at once reduced to whispers by this quiet sanctuary with its shadows and guttering candles.

Once their eyes have adjusted to the muted light, these sightseers begin to take in the Basilica’s statuary, paintings, and stained glass. They look upward to the vaulted ceiling, the highest elliptical free-standing dome in North America, and approach the altar, where a near life-size corpus of Christ hangs from his cross, his mother and the Apostle John grieving at his feet.

Behind these figures are terra-cotta panels of the Four Apostles. To the right of the altar is the Chapel of Eucharistic Adoration, where one or more parishioners will be found kneeling in prayer. To the left is the Chapel of Our Lady, with its large statue of the Assumption of Mary and various paintings honoring the mother of Jesus.

Also inside this Marian chapel is the tomb of the man who created this place of beauty, mystery, and stillness.



The Basilica of Saint Lawrence in Asheville, N.C.

The Spanish Architect

The Spanish architect Rafael Guastavino (1842–1908) immigrated to the United States in 1881, bringing with him the ancient art of building with tile and mortar, a method long practiced in his native Catalonia. His tile work graces such places as Grant’s Tomb, Carnegie Hall, the Boston Public Library, New York City’s Grand Central Terminal, and the chapel at West Point.

After coming to Asheville to work on the Biltmore House, Guastavino decided to design and build a church for the city’s Catholics, teaming up with architect R.S. Smith.

Google “Rafael Guastavino St. Lawrence,” and you can read several articles about the artistic importance of this church: Guastavino’s use of terra cotta, the dome, the stairways, and some of the paintings and statues.

But Guastavino did not design his church to draw tourists to Asheville or to impress mankind with his virtuosity. He designed it, instead, as his gift to God and to the human beings who would

worship here. He understood the link between beauty and truth, in this case the truth of his God.

Guastavino also understood the power of beauty to startle us out of the routine of our daily lives. He designed that domed ceiling not as a boast of his artistic prowess, but to draw our eyes heavenward. He laid out the plans for this brick interior, the marble floor, the spectacular natural sound system—you can hear a whisper from the back of the church while standing at the front—to honor his faith and to allow others to share in that homage.

Like those tourists leaving the hubbub of the streets and entering the Basilica, all of us are in need of the solace of beauty. We get so caught up in the swirl of life, so immersed in our triumphs and defeats, that we forget how much our souls yearn for the higher uplands of existence: beauty, truth, peace, a vision of a greater love than we can know on this earth.

That sign in the church—“Reverential Quiet Please”—might well serve as more than a request for respect from tourists and other visitors to the Basilica. It is an



NAIL PHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK

Rafael Guastavino’s tile work graces such places as Grant’s Tomb, Carnegie Hall, and the Boston Public Library.

The architect designed the Basilica as his gift to God and to the human beings who would worship here.

(Left) The interior of the Basilica of St. Lawrence, with architect Rafael Guastavino’s spectacular tiled dome.

(Right) A stained glass window of Jesus healing the afflicted, in the Basilica of St. Lawrence.

apt piece of advice to all of us, a reminder that in stillness, beauty and truth reveal themselves to us.

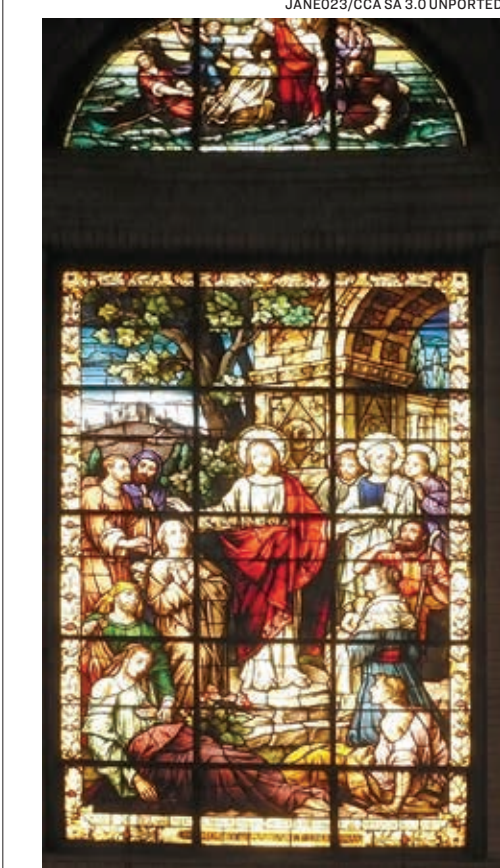
Rafael Guastavino died before the completion of his masterpiece. No matter. The monument to beauty he left behind reinforces the faith of believers and produces in even casual visitors a sense of awe and reverence.

In “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” cited above, John Keats also writes these lines: “When old age shall this generation waste, / Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe / Than ours, a friend to man.”

In Guastavino’s Basilica of Saint Lawrence, we find both a friend to man and a fitting temple for God.

For more details on the Basilica’s artwork, see [bit.ly/BasilicaArt](http://bit.ly/BasilicaArt)

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, North Carolina. Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Virginia. See [JeffMinick.com](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.



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## ART EDUCATION

# Far From Childish Children's Art

The Royal Academy of Arts, London: Young Artists' Summer Show



Children enjoy viewing art by their peers at the Young Artists' Summer Show at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

JUSTINE TRICKETT/ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS

## LORRAINE FERRIER

Every year since 1768, the Summer Exhibition has been held at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. But any artist from around the world can submit his or her art to the prestigious exhibition in the hope of having it exhibited.

J.M.W. Turner, John Constable, and even Winston Churchill, to name a few, have had their art included in past summer exhibitions.

Now, after 251 years of the Summer Exhibition, the Academy has decided to give young artists, from 7 to 19 years old, the chance to exhibit at the Academy in an annual exhibition of their own: the Young Artists' Summer Show. The show is sponsored by philanthropist Robin Hambro, who initiated the show.

More than 6,200 young hopefuls submitted their art, in any media they chose, and the judges whittled the entries down to just 329. "We were pleasantly surprised by the standard of the work because it's so high," said Mary Ealden in a recent phone interview. Ealden is the Academy's project manager for young people and teachers.

The Academy's new Clore Learning Center recently exhibited 139 of the artworks on-site. Ealden stressed that the on-site show was handled in the same way any of the Academy's world-class exhibitions would be, by experts who handle some of the world's most precious art.

The Young Artists' Summer Show can be seen online through Dec. 31.

## Art in Education Versus Art

The Young Artists' Summer Show is one of a number of the Academy's learning programs to engage and inspire young artists and to support teachers.

Ealden explained that in the UK, art is being pushed out of the classroom because art isn't seen as important as science, math, or English. As a consequence, "teachers don't have the support that they need to engage young people in art. It's become a bit of a crisis at this point in time," she said.

The Young Artists' Summer Show seems to be having a positive impact. Teachers often told Ealden how some of their less academic students, who were unable to engage with math and the sciences, had gained a newfound confidence after they'd won a place in the show. They even became more popular at school as they'd won something "cool."

Through the exhibition, teachers learned new ideas for their classes and said that a lot of the art they saw had been created outside of the curriculum and without the teacher's provisions, Ealden said.

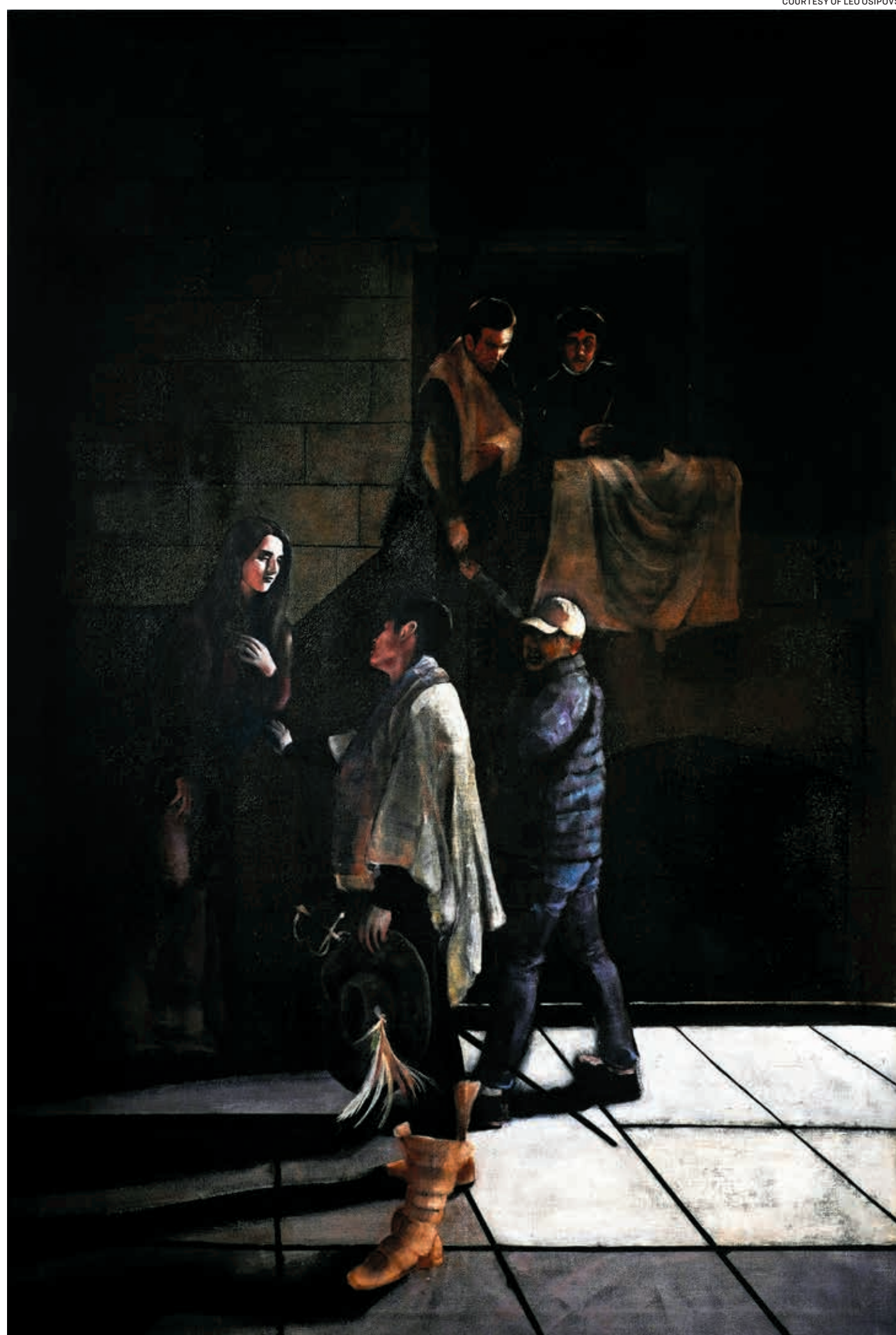
The experience of making such unconditional art is invaluable. Especially as children are facing an enormous amount of pressure at school in terms of tests and performance evaluations, Ealden explained.

"The majority of these artworks that have been submitted aren't artworks that would be in a final exam; these are artworks that these young people have created because they love art," she said.

## Unbelievable Children's Art

The 329 artworks in the online exhibition offer an interesting window into the lives of young artists. Many adults can't believe the art has been made by children, Ealden said.

The judges even had to double-check the age of Tom Bouwknecht, who painted "Emerald Jewelry." They couldn't quite believe a 9-year-old had made the astonishingly



COURTESY OF LEO OSIPOVS

detailed piece; they thought his mom had made a mistake on the application form. She hadn't.

Clearly, the show has some outstanding artwork by overtly talented young artists. Then there's "other artwork that is just so wonderful, joyful, and innocent that it almost doesn't matter what the quality is like. It's more about just the experience of seeing that [artwork] having been made. It's just wonderful, really wonderful," she said.

But make no mistake; the art in this young artists' show is "not kids with crayons coloring in between the lines," Ealden said. "These are really powerful images that they're making without any need of

a prompt or anything. It's just coming out of their own mind. It's wonderful. It's really lovely."

Because the work has all been made by young people, "there's an element of innocence there which doesn't exist in the adult world; there's no agenda," Ealden said.

Perhaps this is because the young artists' works aren't made for personal gain, employment, or publicity, as may be the case in the art submitted to the Summer Exhibition. The art in the Young Artists' Summer Show is, mainly, art made purely for the love of it.

## Pure Art by Young Artists

(Above) "The Time Traveler," by Leo Osipovs, age 18. Acrylic on canvas, oil varnish.

(Right) A detail of "Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes," circa 1623, by Artemisia Gentileschi. Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts. The painting showcases the use of light and shade (chiaroscuro) for dramatic effect.



COURTESY OF ANNIE KING

Some of the younger artists captured the joy of beauty.

## 'My Cat,' by Virginia Greco, age 11

"My cat is so beautiful and so I wanted to paint a picture of her," Greco wrote in her artist statement.

## 'Emerald Jewelry,' by Tom Bouwknecht, age 9

"This is a piece of emerald jewelry painted with watercolors. Tom loves painting and tried different media, watercolor being one of the most difficult. Tom loves green color, he loves crystals and he got attracted to this piece of jewelry due to its beauty. It took Tom lots of hours to complete this piece of artwork, so he is full of determination too!" wrote Bouwknecht's mom in his artist statement.

Tom's artwork is the piece that perplexed the judges, leading them to double-check his age. (See page 1 for the painting.)

## Reflective Art

Some of the older students' pieces were inspired by Renaissance art.

## 'Me and My Sister,' by Annie King, age 15

"This is a painting of my twin sister, Holly, and myself. In preparation for this piece, I researched the work of artists who had made double portraits during the Renaissance," wrote King in her artist statement.

King's portraits are in profile view, a style that Italian Renaissance artists favored (whereas artists north of the Alps preferred three-quarter-view portraiture). The profile view can be seen in Fra Filippo Lippi's "Portrait of a Woman With a Man at a Casement." The painting is the earliest surviving double portrait from the Italian Renaissance and the first that depicts a domestic setting.

Lippi painted his two figures face to face, but the King twins are back to back.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

In both paintings, the facial expressions show a similar serene but blank look of contentment. "Me and My Sister" hints at the sisters' identity. They are clearly in their school uniform. One can be seen with a hearing aid, but nothing else gives away who they are. Are their personalities as identical as their appearance?

## 'The Time Traveler,' by Leo Osipovs, age 18

"My main inspiration lies within the Caravaggio movement and chiaroscuro. I am promoting the relevance of classical art in a modern context. People still have passions that someone in the time of Baroque Art would have. They experience affection and jealousy—two of the main emotions showed in this painting, just as a Renaissance person would have: it is for this reason that I feel my title is appropriate," Osipovs wrote in his artist statement.

Caravaggism is the 17th-century movement that emulated Caravaggio's painting style after he died. Known as Caravaggisti, Caravaggio's followers painted in his naturalistic style, using light and shade (chiaroscuro). But for dramatic effect, they created extreme contrasts between light and shade: a technique called tenebrism. Artemisia Gentileschi's painting "Judith and Her Maidservant" at the Detroit Institute of Arts shows the technique well.

In Osipovs's painting, he uses natural light from what looks to be a doorway. The male figure in the foreground makes us wonder if he is from our time or Renaissance times. His feathered hat and cloak could be from either era. Maybe that's the point he's making: The clothes and our environment may differ, but our human nature is eternal.

To find out more about the Royal Academy of Arts Young Artists' Summer Show online exhibition, visit [YoungArtists.RoyalAcademy.org.uk](http://YoungArtists.RoyalAcademy.org.uk)



PUBLIC DOMAIN

(Far left) "Me and My Sister," by Annie King, age 15. Acrylic on board.

(Left) "Portrait of a Woman With a Man at a Casement," circa 1440, by Fra Filippo Lippi (circa 1406–1469). Tempera on wood; 25 1/4 inches by 16 1/2 inches. Marquand Collection, gift of Henry G. Marquand. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



JUSTINE TRICKETT/ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS

Children enjoy viewing art at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

The art in the Young Artists' Summer Show is, mainly, art made purely for the love of it.

“These are really powerful images that they're making without any need of a prompt or anything.”

Mary Ealden, project manager



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COURTESY OF VIRGINIA GRECO

"My Cat," by Virginia Greco, age 11. Oil on board.

## MUSIC

# Leonardo Da Vinci: Portrait of the Artist as a Musician Is Slightly Off Key

TIM SHEPHARD

Leonardo da Vinci has attracted more than his fair share of speculative nonsense in the modern day. Not least several unlikely theories that have taken inspiration from his interest in music. According to one idea, the hands of Jesus and his disciples in Leonardo's famous "Last Supper" should be seen as the note-heads of music notation, producing a hidden melody, although there's no evidence that this is what Leonardo intended.

More musical "compositions" supposedly by Leonardo circulate on YouTube, a situation fueled by the existence of a much later Baroque composer who happens to be called Leonardo Vinci. In 2015, a "portrait" of Leonardo making music was identified, on what I consider to be insufficient evidence, in an engraving at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

So if this is all nonsense, what did Leonardo really have to do with music? As 2019 marks the 500th anniversary of the Renaissance polymath's death, the cupboard of musical myths attached to this cultural icon is in need of a clear-out.

## Music Versus Painting

Leonardo spent a good deal of time in his notebooks discussing the relative merits of painting, poetry, and music. Like many of his contemporaries, he enjoyed using the idea of musical harmony as a metaphor for any complex arrangement of elements that used rational(ish) principles to arrive at an orderly and attractive result.

He argued that a well-composed drawing or painting, or an elegant poem, could be harmonious just like a musical composition. But although he borrowed a musical metaphor, Leonardo wanted to show that painting was the superior art. To do this, he came up with two clever arguments.

First, he pointed out that harmony works best when you can see or hear all of the elements that go together to produce it at the same time. This happens in a painting, which is a harmony of colors, and in a musical chord, a collection of notes, but it doesn't happen in poetry, which is just one voice.

Second, he felt strongly that harmony needs to be appreciated at length, and therefore the best art is one in which the harmony remains available for contemplation indefinitely. A painting presents its harmony forever, but musical sounds come and go in an instant.



Is this engraving really a portrait of Leonardo da Vinci playing an instrument called a lira da braccio? "Orpheus Charming the Animals," circa 1505, by Marcantonio Raimondi. Cleveland Museum of Art, Dudley P. Allen Fund, 1930.

Mission accomplished: Painting is best. The accusation that musical sounds are fleeting and insubstantial would continue to plague music for centuries after. Thanks a bunch, Leonardo.

## The Food of Love

Leonardo's interest in representing the psychology of his portrait subjects is often discussed in relation to Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile. But the "Portrait of a Musician"

attributed to Leonardo in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana in Milan experiments with a different solution.

There's no evidence at all to help identify the sitter, but we can be pretty sure of one thing: He wasn't a professional musician. Around the time this painting was made, it was rapidly becoming very fashionable for rich young Italians to be painted making music.

For them, making music was all about being young, beautiful, and hopelessly in love.

Leonardo's sitter holds up a musical score for us to inspect. Unfortunately, it is no longer legible, but it's a safe bet that it was a love song.

Then, as now, music was thought of as a powerful way of expressing emotions and communicating them to others. Songs were seen as representations of the singer's state of mind.

In this portrait, Leonardo pioneers the representation of music making as an easy way to give the viewer an insight into the sitter's psychology. Over the next couple of decades, this would become a standard approach in Italian portraiture.

Like the man in his portrait, Leonardo was an enthusiastic amateur musician. There's strong evidence that he enjoyed making up poems and singing them to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument called the lira da braccio.

Leonardo's musical hobby was not at all unusual. During his lifetime, writing love poems to sing to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument was the most popular amateur musical pastime for educated Italians.

## Sound and Science

Much more unusual was Leonardo's interest in the science of acoustics. Expert musicians paid little attention to acoustics in this period, focusing instead on the philosophy of music and the rules of musical composition. Leonardo, in contrast, approached music as a scientist interested in natural phenomena.

Using close observation, Leonardo explored how sounds moved through different kinds of materials, as Michael Eisenberg explains in his excellent short essay, "Sonic mapping in Leonardo's 'disegni'." Leonardo used his insights to develop designs for new and improved musical instruments, although, like many of Leonardo's inventions, few of them ever saw the light of day.

Leonardo's innovations and inventions sometimes seem alarmingly prescient, and his practice of mirror-writing gives his notebooks an air of mystique and concealment. But the real Leonardo had no mysterious prophetic messages to pass down the centuries in song. Rather, he was a jobbing artist and engineer, thinking creatively from the real circumstances of the musical culture of his day to push the boundaries of arts' practice and understanding.

*Tim Shephard is a senior lecturer in musicology at the University of Sheffield in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.*

## ALBUM REVIEW

# World Premiere Recording of Leonardo Vinci's 'Siroe'

ROBERT HUGILL

Leonardo Vinci—not to be confused with the iconic painter and inventor—is one of the Italian composers from the generation following Handel who continued the art of Italian opera in Italy. It is only relatively recently that Vinci's operas have appeared on disc, and that performers have grappled with them.

This new album from Dynamic is the first recording of Leonardo Vinci's "Siroe, Re di Persia," which sets a libretto by Pietro Metastasio.

It is also a collaboration between period and modern performance techniques, as it is presented by the Teatro San Carlo in Naples with the orchestra of the theater conducted by Antonio Florio (who created the edition of "Siroe" that is used) and the continuo, the accompanying part that includes a bass line and harmonies, provided by members of Florio's Cappella Neapolitana ensemble.

## Metastasio's 'Siroe'

Vinci's "Siroe, Re di Persia" premiered in 1726 in Venice as an extra at the end of the season—a result of the popularity of his previous opera.

Vinci's was the first setting of Metastasio's libretto, with Giovanni Porta's, Nicola Porpora's, Domenico Sarro's, Antonio Vivaldi's, and George Frideric Handel's following.

We tend to view Metastasio through Handel's eyes. The encounters between Handel and Metastasio do not rank among the greatest of Handel's operas. The sheer length of Metastasio's libretti can be understood when you learn that Handel set half of the 1,284 lines of Metastasio's "Siroe," and still the opera is long by Handelian standards.

The plot involves the complex dynastic and family dynamics of King Cosroe, who has two sons: the noble and moral Siroe, and the less admirable Medarse. Things are complicated by love triangles. Emira, the daughter of one of Siroe's enemies, is at court disguised as a man, Idaspe, plotting revenge on Cosroe but whom Siroe loves and whose identity he does not reveal. Laodice is loved by the king, but she loves Siroe.

## The Disc

The trick in performing this opera is to persuade us that these

rather self-absorbed people actually matter. I don't feel that the cast quite succeeds, though the singing is entirely creditable, even if only some of the arias rise up and capture our attention.

Listening to this disc, you are aware of just how much recitative there is; Winton Dean describes a Metastasio libretto like reading a novel. Thus, having a group of Italian-speaking singers on this recording is a great advantage and the recitative certainly rattles along.

The problem is that the work does not quite have the vividness of the Handel opera—certainly not the stage performances from the Göttingen Handel Festival. (Handel's "Siroe" is available in a 2014 recording.) The drama here never seems to quite grip, and given the complexity and rarified nature of Metastasio's plot that was originally intended for aristocrats, there are a few moments when you think: Why are we bothering with these people?

As for the vocalists, tenor Carlo Alemanno sings music from Monteverdi to Verdi, and his



The cover of a milestone recording of the opera "Siroe, Re di Persia."

voice sounds admirably non-specialist. He has some fine moments as Cosroe, notably in his Act 3 aria when he regrets having Siroe put to death. (Luckily, the order is not carried out.) The treacherous Medarse, played by soprano Leslie Visco, gets the terrific aria that closes Act 1. It's a simile aria about rays of good fortune in a storm and does not say much about the character or plot, but Visco carries it off well.

Soprano Roberta Invernizzi plays Elmira, who is disguised as Idaspe and bent on taking revenge on Cosroe. Her fine aria at the end of Act 2 articulates her dilemma between hating Cosroe and loving his son.

Siroe is impossibly noble and

difficult to bring off, but mezzo-soprano Cristina Alunno does her best. Daniela Salvo plays poor Laodice, who is torn between Cosroe and Siroe. Her powerful Act 3 aria arises when Cosroe refuses to let her plead for Siroe's life.

Tenor Luca Cervoni is General Arasse whose refusal of Cosroe's order to kill Siroe makes you think that he may be the only rational person in the opera.

Of course, the plot wasn't silly to those who first heard it. In fact, as the opera itself was the first setting of this libretto by Metastasio, recording it on disc is a notable milestone. This recording will be of great interest to those keen on Baroque Italian opera, but I'm not sure the performance will seduce or engage the casual listener, nor explain the opera's original success.

*Robert Hugill is a composer, lecturer, journalist, and classical music blogger. He runs the classical music blog Planet Hugill, writes for the Opera Today website, and Opera Today and Opera magazines. This article, edited for clarity and length, is reprinted with permission from Planet Hugill.*



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.

# Behold the Mighty Waves Caused by 'Global Warming'

MARK JACKSON

"Aquarela" is a visual meditation. A filmic poem. An ode to the world's water; a documentary about water's various forms, personalities, and powers. Sans narration and with almost no dialogue.

Documentary filmmaker Viktor Kossakovsky trotted the globe to capture, at 96 frames-per-second (although played at 48 frames-per-second in movie theaters instead of the conventional 24), a surrealist depiction of a range of the states of water (the most dramatic instances predominating) of all things ice, snow, rain, clouds, and bodies of water.

And all the participles and nouns of those aqua-forms: babbling, cascading, calving, clouding, flowing, foaming, flooding, fluming, fluting. Glaciers. Icebergs. Pouring, misting, Rills. Rivulets. Runoffs. Runnels. Trickling, spouting, spraying, squirting, streaming. Waves. Waterfalls.

"I wanted to film every possible emotion that can be experienced while interacting with water," Kossakovsky says in the press notes. Ultimately, it's a proper placing in perspective of human tiny-ness compared to water's giant presence.

What Am I Looking At? "Aquarela" opens with what appears to be men involved in some kind of tribal prayer ritual. Out on Siberia's massive Lake Baikal, a small group of men (in separate instances)

clouding, flowing, foaming, flooding, fluming, fluting. Glaciers. Icebergs. Pouring, misting, Rills. Rivulets. Runoffs. Runnels. Trickling, spouting, spraying, squirting, streaming. Waves. Waterfalls.

## What Am I Looking At?

"Aquarela" opens with what appears to be men involved in some kind of tribal prayer ritual. Out on Siberia's massive Lake Baikal, a small group of men (in separate instances)



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## FILM REVIEW

# Biopic About John DeLorean: Enough Under the Hood to Intrigue

IAN KANE

Once the ingenious darling of the automotive industry, John DeLorean launched his own commercial auto company, the DeLorean Motor Company (DMC), back in the 1970s. But DMC's first commercial vehicle, the DeLorean, didn't reach the market until the '80s, and by then, the sagging car market meant the demise of his would-be crowning achievement, the gull-winged DeLorean sports car (as seen in "Back to the Future").

All of these rather dry, historical facts can be looked up with a casual internet search, but director Nick Hamm ("The Journey") and fellow filmmaker Colin Bateman, who wrote the screenplay, managed to churn an interesting drama out of the meteoric rise and fall of the man. The filmmakers' depiction of how and why everything happened is fascinating from a purely narrative perspective and is only aided by a stellar cast.

## Meet the Con Man

"Driven" actually starts out like a "Perry Mason" episode. Small-time con man Jim Hoffman (Jason Sudeikis, "Horrible Bosses," "Downsizing") is on a witness stand. As he gives some juicy testimony, things flash back to the late '70s when he is trying to smuggle some drugs, via a small plane, into an airport. FBI Special Agent Benedict Tisa (Corey Stoll, "Midnight in Paris," "Ant-Man") is waiting for him, and Jim's criminal plans are thwarted.

Jim's wife, Ellen (Judy Greer, "The Village"), and their two young kids assumed he was in the import-export business. Well, he was, just not in a legit way. Fortunately for him, Special Agent Tisa makes it possible to keep Jim's criminal life a secret by turning him into a paid FBI informant.

Not long after, Jim and his wife move into a luxury Californian neighborhood—thanks

Lee Pace as John DeLorean in "Driven."



UNIVERSAL PICTURES

## 'Driven'

Director Nick Hamm

Starring Lee Pace, Jason Sudeikis, Judy Greer

Rated R

Running Time 1 hour, 48 minutes

Release Date Aug. 16

★★★★★



VICTOR KOSSAKOVSKY, BEN BERNHARD/SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

## 'Aquarela'

Director Viktor Kossakovsky

Rated PG

Running Time 1 hour, 29 minutes

Release Date Aug. 16

★★★★★

(Above) A shot of Lake Baikal in the environmental film "Aquarela."

(Bottom) Viktor Kossakovsky in Venezuela, for the environmental film "Aquarela."

kneel on the ice and bow down.

But maybe they're just local ice fishermen trying to see fish? It turns out, they are indeed peering through the ice, but not for fish. People drive cars across the lake, and sometimes the cars fall through. And these men winch them back out again.

We see a couple of instances of this, one of which involves two men escaping the submerged car, and one man (not, thankfully, depicted) drowning underneath the ice. But while indeed a tragic occurrence, the instances come across as more of a bad running gag—cars driving about, willy-nilly, on thin ice, and suddenly falling through. It almost needs a cartoon balloon exclaiming Homer Simpson's "Doh!"

But the message is that this lake has thawed much, much earlier than it normally would. Global warming! Don't you see these cars falling through?! But, frankly, it functions as more of a testament to humans getting too attached to routine and not taking precautions.

## Segue

Then comes a Greenland segment involving icebergs. Icebergs calving and cracking and plunging in slo-mo into the ocean, and throwing up gigundous waves. This is always an impressive sight. But 15 or so straight minutes of it, and my slightly ADHD-conditioned mind is prodding me to turn on (strictly verboten) my phone and see how much more movie there is to go. But again, the message: Icebergs are calving! Like, a lot! That can only mean one thing! Global warming!

There's also underwater footage of icebergs, showing how the effects of submergence around the edges and shards produce a sculpted-marble look that's both alien and beautiful.

When thoroughly bored with icebergs, we catch a ride on a large sailboat navigating the Atlantic Ocean, from Portugal to Greenland. And while the giant, slo-mo, 30-foot waves are impressive, and two (male and female) skippers stoically winch sails and steer the boat, this particular stormy-freezing-ocean scenario is much more viscerally displayed

in the recent sailing documentary "Maiden."

Building toward depictions of dangerous-water crescendo, 2017's overflowing of California's Oroville Dam and Hurricane Irma's pummeling of Miami are definitely powerful and unsettling.

All of the above are accompanied by a sudden and shocking booming, groaning, cracking, crashing, gale-force wind noise, sirens/alerts soundtrack, as well as the heavy metal score by Finnish composer Eicca Toppinen of the band Apocalyptica.

## The message is that this lake has thawed much, much earlier than it normally would.

## In Summary

The film purports to say: Look at the terrifying power and the fury of water unleashed (ostensibly by global warming). Do we really want to go there?

It ends on a visually soothing note: Venezuela's 3,212-foot-high Angel Falls. If you catch the sun in the right direction on mist, you'll get a rainbow, and the "Aquarela" team manages to capture a couple, reminding us of the beauty of water in benign settings.

There's no question that the environment is changing and being destroyed by modern science. However, it can be argued that the "global warming" narrative is more likely a red-green axis created to push for socialist policies. The fact that the film begins with early thawing is a good hint.

But since this is a visual poem with no words, it can only be inferred that these kinds of messages were the impetus of the film. I'm into environmental health, and art, and movies, and water, but even if I didn't disagree with the inferred message, the film is slightly akin to watching grass grow.

## A Successful Biopic

As with other fictional accounts of factually based, historical events, the success of "Driven" is largely dependent on whether or not audiences find it intriguing enough to suspend their sense of disbelief. Director Hamm oscillates between Jim and John with deftness as each of them peels back the layers of the other's life.

Pace's embodiment of DeLorean is exceptionally nuanced and conveys that the man was not only entranced by his own intelligence, but also charming when he needed to be. Meanwhile, Sudeikis portrays Jim as a lower-tier hoodlum who has his own dilemma: Does he really have to betray his friend, or will he figure out another way to get out of his predicament? Is his self-deprecating persona genuine, or is there some sort of ulterior motive behind it?

Greer, as Ellen, largely plays it straight as Jim's dutiful and affectionate wife. Cudlitz does a great job of bringing a good level of both intimidation and threat to drug lord Hetrick, and Stoll plays his potential foil as an intrepid and determined G-man, Tisa.

In all, the actors' performances, along with the gritty writing and direction, are exceptional and made me want to learn more about the actual events, as well as the tragic downfall of DeLorean's car company. "Driven" is an excellent piece of fact-based, biopic storytelling that shows how drive and passion can quickly dissolve into regret and despair under the wrong circumstances. In a way, it's a cautionary tale of betrayal and self-destruction that stays with you long after you leave the theater.

*Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com*

ESSENCE  
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CHINA

# Two Great Mothers in Chinese History

SU LIN

Our mothers have great influence on us. As our first teachers, they influence us in every way, shaping our personalities and molding our minds.

There were many prominent figures in Chinese history whose mothers played a significant role in their achievements. Two among these mothers were Mencius's mother and Ouyang Xiu's mother. These are two of those revered as the Four Virtuous Mothers of Ancient China, all of whose behavior and character were exemplary.

## Mencius's Mother

Mencius's mother, Zhang, was born in the State of Zou during the Warring States Period (475–221 B.C.). As a widow, she worked hard to raise Mencius (372–289 B.C.) and was very strict with him. That was how Mencius grew up to be a famous philosopher.

## The story of Zhang changing her residence three times for Mencius is known by many.

The story of Zhang changing her residence three times for Mencius is known by many. The mother and son used to live near a cemetery. Mencius mimicked the crying of the people at the funerals. Zhang was concerned and decided to move.

Their new home was next to a marketplace. Mencius, who was good at mimicry, started imitating the touting and shouting of the hawkers and butchers. Believing the environment was a bad influ-

PUBLIC DOMAIN



Did Mencius's mother contribute to the qualities that made him famous? A portrait of Mencius from "Portraits of the Sage, Teacher Exemplar for a Myriad Generations: Confucius in Painting, Calligraphy, and Print Through the Ages" (exhibit). Taipei: National Palace Museum.

ence on Mencius, Zhang moved again, this time to a home next to an imperial ancestral temple.

Mencius started picking up court etiquette from the officials who came and went on the first day of every month. Zhang was very pleased and decided that it was a good place to settle down.

One day, Zhang was weaving on looms when Mencius came back from school. She asked him, "How far did you get in your studies today?"

Mencius answered, "About the same as usual."

Zhang immediately grabbed a pair of scissors and cut the piece of fabric she was weaving in two. Shocked, Mencius asked her why she did that.

Zhang answered: "Neglecting your studies is akin to cutting the fabric I was weaving. A person stud-

ies to establish a reputation and gain knowledge. With knowledge, he can have peace and happiness at home and stay away from trouble when he is away from home. If you neglect your studies, you will not be able to avoid a life of menial service, and you will lack the means to stay away from trouble. It is like weaving for a living. If I gave up halfway, how would I be able to feed our family?"

She believed that a woman who abandons her livelihood, as well as a man who neglects cultivating his virtue, will be reduced to slaves, if not thieves or burglars.

Zhang's admonitions changed Mencius. He studied hard under the guidance of Confucius's grandson, Zisi, and eventually became a famous scholar.

## Ouyang Xiu's Mother

Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) was a great

scholar of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127). His mother, Zheng, was a diligent woman with a lot of determination and knowledge. She became a widow when Ouyang Xiu was 4 and reared him singlehandedly. His father had held a position among the local authorities, but life became hard after his death.

When Ouyang Xiu was 5 years old, his mother taught him to read and write and how to be a good person. They were too poor to afford paper and ink, so Zheng improvised by using a reed to teach her son to write on sand.

Zheng also used Ouyang Xiu's father as an example to teach him to be incorruptible. When Ouyang Xiu became an official, she told him stories of his father's integrity and good deeds.

"As an official, your father often worked late into the night," she recounted. "He paid exceptional attention to cases involving commoners, and he would review those cases in great detail to prevent unjust sentences from being passed. Where possible, he would lighten the sentence. As for those sentences that he could not lighten, he would often sigh in regret."

She added: "Your father was very upright, and he refused to take bribes. He frequently gave money to charity, and although he did not earn much, he kept little for himself, as he did not want his wealth to become a burden. As such, after he died, he left behind no house or land."

When Ouyang Xiu was demoted for supporting Fan Zhongyan in a reform, his mother did not blame him. Instead, she comforted him.

"It is not a disgrace that you were demoted for supporting justice. Poverty is nothing new to us. I am happy so long as you are not disheartened by what happened," she said.

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