# THE EPOCH TIMES ARTS CULTURES CULTURES



British artist Paula Wilson models for finalists of the 5th NTD International Figure Painting Competition in New York in 2019.

FINE ART

## PAINTING THE TRUTH

On the road to mastery at the 5th NTD International Figure Painting Competition

## LORRAINE FERRIER

An international painting competition is more than a place for storied artists to win prizes; it's one where artists can gain valuable insight from their peers, in an atelier-like setting, just like the old masters once did.

For artists Haiyan Kong and Paula Wilson, the NTD International Figure Painting Competition was also a place to present the truth. For Kong, joining the competition was the culmination of a five-year-long process of de-

picting a monumental event in her life and for her home country. For Wilson, learning from artists that came before, like Kong, gave her the insight to further hone her craft so that one day she can similarly paint the truth.

In 2019, Kong won first place at the 5th NTD International Figure Painting Competition with her monumental 14-foot painting titled "April 25, 1999." That was the day 24 years ago when around 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners made a peaceful protest calling for the release of 45 practitioners who had been arrested in

Tianjin, a city near Beijing.

The spiritual practice Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, was introduced to the public in China in 1992, and taught people to follow the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance. Amid the repressive environment under the Chinese communist regime, these simple but powerful principles flourished, and an estimated 70 million people took up the practice by 1999.

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**HISTORY** 

## Red Flags, Bright Hopes

**JEFF MINICK** 

n his article "Presidential Farewell Addresses," Gleaves Whitney notes that before Harry Truman only three presidents had composed formal farewell addresses to the nation.

As Whitney tells us, three factors likely account for this circumstance. First, some of the early chief executives held George Washington and his farewell address in such esteem that they deemed it improper to deliver one of their own. Then, too, eight of our 45 presidents have died in office. Finally, a president's last Annual Message toCongress, today called the State of the Union Address, falls near his final days in office, causing some chief executives to combine a farewell with that report.

Of those presidents who have used this occasion to reflect on their time in office and what the future may hold, four of them in particular—George Washington, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, and Ronald Reagan—have given us some warnings that even today we ignore at our peril.

Some Fatherly Advice

Of the four, Washington's formal farewell to the nation was by far the longest and was delivered in print rather than from a podium. Moreover, the two men who helped him prepare his remarks—James Madison and Alexander Hamilton—were undoubtedly better speechwriters than any of the men and women available to other presidents. address, warned against

In his address, Washington celebrated American successes and praised the cause of liberty. In his conclusion, he accepted as well responsibility for any wrongs or mistakes

he had committed during his eight years But he also warned the young country of present and future dangers. Best known of these are his cautions about "entangling alliances" with foreign powers, fearing that our country might be sucked into foreign wars or otherwise abused by treaties favoring one nation over another. Even today, some politicians and commenta-

our commitments to other nations might bring harm to our country. We hear less often of some of Washington's other caveats. The diminishment of religion and morality, he wrote, would destroy the republic. Some people, he feared, might seek to assail the Constitution through change, "alterations which will impair the energy of the system and

tors wave this cautionary flag whenever

thus to undermine what cannot be directly overthrown." He also roundly condemned political parties and partisanship, urging all to work together for the common good of the nation.

The eloquent language of this "Father of His Country," his clear love for the republic, and his concerns for its preservation are why we still consider his advice important today.

Our Ideals Will Prevail

Harry Truman bade goodbye to the American people via a broadcast from the Oval Office. His remarks are typical of the man—candid and clear—and

convey his great affection for his country. Truman begins by relating in some detail his ascension to the presidency. Later in the speech, he mirrors the modesty of George Washington when he notes: "When Franklin Roosevelt died, I felt there must be a million men better qualified than I, to take up the Presidential task. But the work was mine to do, and I had to do it. And I have tried to give it everything that was in me."

Concerned with troubles around the globe—the tensions with the Soviet Union, the war in Korea—Truman then devotes considerable time to foreign affairs. Of the Soviet Union, he exudes a confidence that America will eventually triumph in its confrontations with communism, concluding that "in the long run the strength of our free society, and our ideals, will prevail over a system that has respect for neither God nor man."

Immediately before that remark, he comments on a question asked him by some of his fellow citizens: "Why don't we issue an ultimatum, make all-out war, drop the atomic bomb?" Truman responds that this course of action is not the American way, adding words that some of our present-day leaders might take to heart: "Starting an atomic war is totally unthinkable for rational men."

Near the end, Truman says "I can't help but dream out loud just a little here," and shares with his listeners a vision of a world at peace with abundant food for all. He speaks of this dream in simple, unsentimental language, characteristics of the man himself.

## The General's Last Salute

President Dwight D.

Eisenhower, in his

televised farewell

the "the military-

industrial complex."

In a recent interview with Jan Jekielek of The Epoch Times, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. says, "President Eisenhower made what I look at today as the most important speech in American history. It was his farewell speech to the nation." While some may quarrel with Kennedy's claim, certainly Eisenhower's departing remarks in a speech lasting less than 10 minutes

> contain some excellent advice, warnings even more pertinent to our day than they were 60 years ago.

Like his predecessor, Harry Truman, Eisenhower spends a significant part of his address commenting on foreign affairs. Of communism, he says: "We face a hostile ideology—global in scope, atheistic in character, ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method. Unhappily the danger it poses promises to be of indefinite duration." He then

reminds fellow Americans "to carry forward steadily, surely, and without complaint the burdens of a prolonged and complex struggle—with liberty at stake." Today, such plain language regarding communist ideology and its assaults on American values is rarely heard from our politicians.

One phrase, "the military-industrial complex," is perhaps the best remem bered part of this speech and is still commonly employed today. Here is Eisenhower's famous warning: "In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

Less well remembered, but of tremendous importance, is another admonition.

Speaking of the enormous changes underway in technology, the words of the outgoing president are prophetic:

> "The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present and is gravely to be regarded.

> "Yet, in holding scientific research and discovery in respect, as we should, we must also be alert to the equal and opposite danger that public policy could itself become the captive of a scientific-

technological elite.'

In his farewell address,

George Washington

celebrated American

successes and praised

the cause of liberty.

"George Washington,"

1769, by Gilbert Stuart.

In these few words, Eisenhower capsulizes our government's recent response to the COVID pandemic, when Americans found themselves "captive of a scientifictechnological elite."

## The Great Communicator

Like the other three presidents mentioned here, Ronald Reagan speaks of his administration's accomplishments both domestically and overseas, items like the changes in the Soviet Union, which would lead to its collapse shortly after Reagan's departure from the White House, and the revival of the American economy. Like George Washington, he also owns up to failure, particularly regarding the deficit.

In this address, Reagan's sunny disposition and his knack for storytelling come offloud and strong, yet like his predeces-



President Ronald Reagan, at his desk in the Oval Office, delivers his televised farewell address to the nation in 1989.

sors he voices concerns about the future. "Finally," he says, "there is a great tradition of warnings in Presidential farewells, and I've got one that's been on my mind for some time."

He then shares his deep concern about the loss of "well-grounded patriotism," pointing out that Americans lack the culturally built-in love of country of his youth. He takes pride in the "resurgence of national pride" that has occurred during his administration, but fears that "it won't last unless it's grounded in thoughtfulness and knowledge. ... I'm warning of an eradication of the American memory that could result, ultimately, in an erosion of the American spirit."

To thwart that erosion, the president urges our schools and teachers to "teach history based not on what's in fashion but what's important" and to place "a greater emphasis on civic ritual." Here is where **These** presidents shared a deep and abiding affection for liberty and their country.

we find his frequently cited remark that "all great change in America begins at the dinner table" as he encourages parents and children to discuss politics, history, and culture in their homes.

## **Listen and Learn**

These four presidents differed in their backgrounds, but they all shared one thing in common: a deep and abiding affection for liberty and their country. With wisdom gained from experience, they warned present and future generations of possible pitfalls: foreign alliances, partisan politics, the threat of communism, the dangers presented by the alliance of industry and technology with government, and the dire consequences stemming from ignorance about our past and our civic duties.

The dangers they described have not disappeared. To the contrary, they have in-

tensified and even now plague our nation. Yet here is some good news. When we revisit the advice left to us by these presidents, we note that each of them offered encouragement and hope. "I have a deep and abiding faith in the destiny of free men," President Truman said, and the others expressed that same sentiment in their own way.

To remain free: That is the greatest task they set before us.

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, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of nonfiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.

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Petr Svab Reporter

## The World Through a Journalist's Eyes

Dear Epoch VIP,

Thank you for your continuing support—we are at your service. My name is Petr Svab and I've been covering politics, courts, police, immigration, economy, and other topics during my 16 years at The Epoch Times.

## It is my pleasure to work for a newspaper that stands for values I can wholeheartedly endorse and fittingly summed up in our motto of Truth and Tradition.

I believe that truth is the living world, and an infinite journey of exploration. The more topics I tackle, the more issues I delve into, the more I realize how complex, multifaceted, and enormous the world truly is. We can never dream of grasping it all, but, with diligent effort, a journalist can map a part of the journey and present it to

readers, hoping to help them navigate their own realities. Moreover, I've found, a journalist can open doors closed to others, give readers the facts of the story, the context that enlightens them, as well as the insights of the participants.

I remember walking the streets of West Baltimore a few years ago. My plan was just to interview some local business owners to see what the city was doing about some of its issues—from piles of trash and abandoned houses to homelessness and crime.

Within five minutes of my arrival, a man on the street noticed me and started to shout: "Guy with a camera! There's a guy with a camera here!"

as I approached. "Are you a cop?" asked one of them. He was a young man with wide eyes that looked like they'd already seen

A group of young men further up the street took notice

more than their share I introduced myself and my business of the day, handing the gentleman my card. The young man's expression softened as he realized I was here to report on

a story—the story of his home. As it turned out, the young man was not only ready to share with me his insights on the local issues, but also to offer advice on where to find what I was looking for. We parted ways with a handshake.

In all my experience talking directly to the people

involved in various events, the truth seldom (if ever) favors partisan narratives—it's much more colorful: sometimes humorous, other times tragic.

Consider the story, for example, of Trayvon Martin. According to some, an innocent child killed by a racist man. According to others, a thug killed in self-defense. But after filmmaker Joel Gilbert retraced Martin's last moments, weeks, and months, it turned out neither narrative was quite true. Gilbert told a story of a young man whose life was falling apart and ultimately plunged into a tragedy that nobody wanted.

So if that's truth, what is tradition, then? For me, it is the lessons of history. It's the distilled universal wisdom collected by our ancestors over millennia—the timeless lessons of the enlightened, the sages, and the saints. This treasure chest of the past is where we can turn to help us better understand the truth at present.

My work is to safeguard this treasure, let it live through the pages of The Epoch Times and the hearts of our readers. While it may seem the foundations of the civilization

itself are now under attack, I truly believe our readers will be best equipped to withstand the storm—through clarity and peace of heart. For whatever the future holds, I believe the path will be less treacherous for those who walk it steadily, making choices informed both by truth and tradition.

What I pledge to you is yet more meticulous research, analysis, and fact-finding. I'll do the digging for you, while letting you make up your own mind. Furthermore, I'll also hone my wit to give you an ever-better read along the way.

Yes, we strive to be an influential media in the world, but I believe that our true success is measured in minds sharpened, hearts uplifted, and lives improved.

Once again, thank you for joining us on this journey. We do live in truly epochal times, wouldn't you say?

In Truth and Tradition,

Petr Svab The Epoch Times



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"April 25, 1999" by Haiyan Kong. Oil on canvas; 13 feet, 11 1/2 inches by 2 feet, 10 inches. Kong won the 5th NTD International Figure Painting Competition in 2019.

## PAINTING THE TRUTH

## Continued from Page 1

The 45 Tianjin practitioners had been arrested while appealing to a magazine publisher who had published an article slandering their faith.

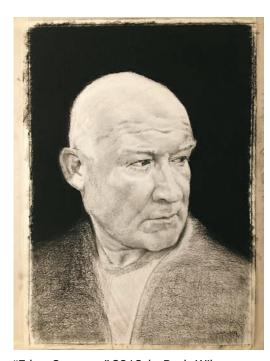
Kong was one of the 10,000 practitioners at the protest that day. She'd agonized about making the trip to Beijing. "It would be safe if I stayed home. But if everybody thought this way, then who would take a stand and set things right? If everyone thought only about themselves, what would the world become?" she told NTD, a sister media outlet of The Epoch Times.

A few of the petitioners were called on to meet with Chinese premier Zhu Rongji and his staff, and the peaceful protest ended with the release of the detained practitioners.

Just a few months later, on July 20, 1999, Chinese Communist Party leader Jiang Zemin ordered police to arrest practitioners across China. Some were beaten and tortured. On July 22, Jiang officially banned Falun Gong and later started a systematic campaign of persecution 

Painting the Truth heinous act of state-sanctioned organ

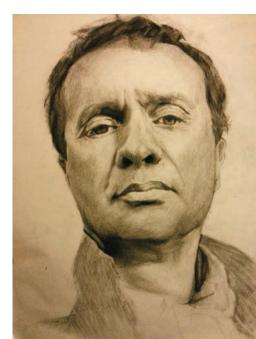
Kong decided to let her art tell the world the truth: that the practice was peaceful and the persecution was wrong. "Information is censored in mainland China," she said, "but a picture needs no words. The power of art can reach everyone, regardless of your nationality."



"Ethan Gutmann," 2019, by Paula Wilson. Conté on hot pressed paper

against practitioners, including the In Kong's award-winning painting, hundreds of practitioners form an orderly line outside the central appeals office in Beijing, waiting to be heard. Kong had wanted to paint the people who were there that day, but the available photographs were of a low resolution.

> Instead, she met practitioners outside of mainland China and painted each person as an individual portrait. "I tried to bring



"Louis Smith," 2016, by Paula Wilson. Conté on newsprint paper. Wilson drew a classical portrait of her teacher Louis Smith as part of her study with him.

to life their actual personalities, facial expressions, and inner spirit," she said. She made a complex composition with multiple perspectives so that any part of the painting could be viewed as if you were looking straight at it.

She took more than five years to complete the painting, often spending 16 hours a day

Kong's horizontal composition mirrors a traditional Chinese handscroll, a format she's familiar with, having been taught traditional Chinese art from the age of 10.

## **Painting Like the Old Masters**

Wilson first met Kong in New York during the NTD competition. As a Falun Gong practitioner, Wilson felt deeply moved by Kong's painting and her personal story. Their shared faith and spiritual understanding transcended their language barrier. Both sought to paint the truth.

Wilson's art training happened later in life than Kong's. When Wilson's twin boys started school, she joined a local art class that her mother attended. At one of the classes, they explored chiaroscuro, the technique that 17th-century Italian artist Caravaggio loved, whereby dramatic light and shade define a composition. Wilson copied an old family photograph by drawing a grid on a photocopy of the scene to recreate the light and shadow. The teacher and her classmates were impressed with her drawing. The class chatted about how the old masters painted, using red chalk or charcoal preparatory drawings and then underpainting their work, for instance. Wilson knew from then on that that's what she wanted to do: paint like the old masters once had, using the same methods, techniques, and recipes for making paints, mediums, and glues.

A series of serendipitous events propelled Wilson on her path to learn those age old traditions. Around the time that she learned chiaroscuro, her mother's copy of Artists & Illustrators magazine featured traditional artists from Manchester, not far from where she lives. That's how she first heard of Louis Smith, who taught part-time classes in classical portraiture. Wilson was a full-time caretaker for her partner who had just had a stroke, so she wasn't in a position to learn with Smith at the time.

Two years later, Wilson contacted Smith

to do paid modeling. Smith had now established a two-year course on the traditional methods of painting he had learned at the Angel Academy of Art in Florence, Italy. Smith needed administrative help, and Wilson wanted to learn from him but couldn't afford the tuition. It seemed like a perfect arrangement, so they exchanged skills for six months.

## The Value of Traditional Art

Knowing artistic traditions gives the artist a framework to work within. Wilson recalls reading that Leonardo da Vinci taught his students and then encouraged them to develop their own style. She likens that process to being taught handwriting. We are all taught how to form letters and words, and then we develop our personal handwriting style.

Wilson finds the classical painting process beautiful and rewarding. It's a very technical process, using centuries-old recipes and methods passed down from master to apprentice, generation after generation. She enjoys the expressive nature of the

classical art tradition. "It allows for movement, feeling, and emotion," Wilson told The Epoch Times. She explained that when painting in the classical style, the artist achieves movement in the painting by choosing what part to focus on and what to slightly blur. A hyperrealist artist, how-rights investigator Ethan Gutmann. She's part of artistic development. ever, concentrates on giving clarity to the happy with the effect. "It feels like he's comwhole composition, often resulting in a lack ing out of the darkness," she said. of depth in a work.

She likens applying the paint to sculpting. "You're actually sculpting and molding [oil paint] with a fine brush, with no brush marks in it whatsoever." she said.

## **Painting With Purpose**

Every artist has an Achilles's heel. At the moment, Wilson struggles with the initial construction phase, when she has to draft the composition using straight lines and apexes. It's the foundation of a whole painting. If the elements of the construction drawing—the measurements, proportion, and perspective—aren't right, then the composition collapses later in the process. The more you practice, the better your brain becomes at recognizing the right angles to draw, she explained.

When Wilson puts her paintbrush to canvas, she often feels a divine presence guiding her. She once read it described as "having the stroke of gods."

"Personal thoughts come out that you can't even conceive with your conscious mind," she said.

## Wilson wants her art to help people know the truth and to guide people to goodness.

Smith taught Wilson the classical drawing method using conté, a crayon made from compressed charcoal or graphite and clay that is slightly oilier than charcoal. She enjoys the dramatic lighting effects that conté allows, like in her portrait of human

## The Importance of Peer Support

Wilson took months to complete Gutmann's portrait because of her family commitments. A competition deadline and a gentle nudge from a fellow artist helped her focus on completing the drawing and letting go of perfection.

After completing the portrait, Wilson gained the confidence to enter the competition for the prestigious BP Portrait Award, held at the National Portrait Gallery in London. She entered a self-portrait that she'd completed in an intense six days of her almost an atelier experience, where painting in front of the mirror. The painting hangs on her wall. She sees it as a record of her artistic progress, and now views it as more of an underpainting needing refinement. Every piece she creates is a stepping NTD International Figure Painting Comstone to mastery.

Wilson entered the 5th NTD International Figure Painting Competition with a composition she'd seen while meditating. She worked alone creating the piece, using figures from her imagination rather than drawing from models. At this point, she wanted to stay true to her vision. "I wanted to prove myself," she said. "I didn't want any interference from anyone telling me it should be like this or that."

Although Wilson's competition entry wasn't accepted, she won valuable insights from the process and an invitation to New York to accompany the competition finalists on expert talks and tours to museums.

Staying at the same hotel as Kong gave Wilson the opportunity to learn about Kong's life and her painting technique. She took onboard this guidance, and that of other painters, soaking everything up like that they can't create representational art. a sponge; in her view, accepting peer help "It is very difficult. But try and see what and constructive criticism is an important happens—put your heart into it," she said.

wrong with her competition entry—she art teachers, and students can register for had been trying to make the perfect painting without having the right tools or skills. Great artists such as 19th-century painter William-Adolphe Bouguereau used models, using the same model in different positions for a painting. She also realized that the finalists' works weren't perfect, but they accepted imperfections as part of their painting process.

Since the last NTD competition in 2019,

Wilson is approaching her painting differently. While Wilson had previously worked alone, the competition environment gave peers bounced their creative ideas off one another. She learned from observing other artists to keep her painting process simple, following a definite tradition. For the 6th petition, she's creating her composition using the golden ratio—an ancient geometric calculation that replicates nature and results in the most harmonious compositions—just like Leonardo da Vinci once did. She's also using a model, preparing her canvas using rabbit skin, making a proper underdrawing, and asking for advice along

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Just like Kong, Wilson wants her art to help people know the truth and to guide people to goodness. "What I'm doing is definitely about awakening from this world," she said. For Wilson, that means not only showing the goodness of humanity, but also reminding people that we have to face divine consequences if our thinking isn't

Wilson hopes that her story helps aspiring artists who may be afraid to try, or think

She soon realized where she'd gone Professional representational artists, fine the 6th NTD International Figure Painting Competition through June 15. The exhibition and award ceremony will be held in New York in November. (The date and venue will be announced on the competition website.) To find out more, visit OilPainting.NTDTV.com

> To learn more about artist Paula Wilson, visit WilsonPaula.com



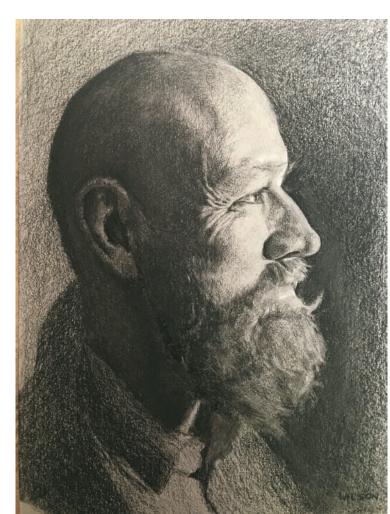


Haiyan Kong (L) with Paula Wilson at the Salmagundi Club in New York in 2019.

Haiyan Kong won the Gold Award at the 5th NTD International Figure Painting Competition with her work "April 25, 1999" at the Salmagundi Club in New York on Nov. 26, 2019.



British artist Paula Wilson with her portrait sketch by New York-based artist Ken Goshen.



"The Beard," 2018, by Paula Wilson. Conté and charcoal on toned paper.



Wilson paints in the classical tradition, laboriously building her work up layer by layer. Pictured on her easel here is an underpainting of her brother.

Artist Paula



As this painting takes shape, we can see how artist Paula Wilson builds up the different layers and expression of her subject.

ing school in Costa Rica. But Mr. Murphy,

exemplar of the Law of Chaos, is hanging

This farce has its characters working at cross-

purposes across the board. Mobster Pauly

is not happy with henchman Dom (George

Carroll) for putting stupid Jackie on the job.

Dom, who came up in the juvenile deten-

tion system with Jackie, is not happy with

Jackie for Jackie's raging ineptitude, but also

because Dom has been messing around with

The plot, while twisty, is not all that intrigu-

ing. It's really more the fun the actors have

with their roles, along with slightly outland-

ish costume choices—like J.K. Simmons as

a thoroughly unflappable rancher dressed

shamelessly like a Manhattan West Village-

style Halloween parade cowboy (but who

takes it very seriously) and, as mentioned,

rides his trusty steed to the local diner to get

Then there's Madsen as the perennially

peevish mother in her hospital bed in full

makeup with a headful of 1950s-style curl-

ers in her hair. And Rendón as the grumpy,

disgusted rich girl working for tips in a greasy

spoon, with a classic Gen Z understanding

of what it means to be gainfully employed.

Grillo is fairly funny as the former Brooklyn

mob wise guy, who's semi-retired to Tulsa

and feels himself becoming in effectual when

Caan, a former Hollywood brat, seems to

now have finally come into his own and is at

long last escaping his father's long shadow.

He's delightful as the clueless loser with the

shockingly dedicated sense of responsibil-

ity for his son, who also surprises with a

faced with a highly determined cowpoke.

Jackie's ex, Taylor (Taryn Manning).

around ...

Screenplay

a cup of coffee.

The Battle of Gettysburg is discussed in "100 Greatest Battles." Print of the painting "Hancock at Gettysburg" by Thure de Thulstrup, showing Pickett's Charge.

## **BOOK REVIEW**

## '100 Greatest Battles'

A race through history and civilization by means of military conflict

## **DUSTIN BASS**

What are history's greatest battles? Angus Konstam, author of more than 100 history books, tackles that question with his latest book, "100 Greatest Battles." The author begins his selection in the fifth century B.C. with the battles of the Greco-Persian Wars, and then moves through the next 2,500 years to the battles that made up the 20th century.

Each two-page section has artwork provided by Osprey Publishing artists along with a description of the image, often dem-story of the 300 Spartans, though the result onstrating a significant moment in a specific ultimately led to the destruction of Athens. battle. The book is more a collector's item Another example is the Battle of the Alamo for history or military history enthusiasts. In that same vein, it is a great book for introducing young readers to the world of military history, which also proves to be a fine introduction to geopolitical history.

What is fascinating about Konstam's work is how much he is able to discuss in such a short amount of space. He is able to introduce historical figures, the battle and its outcome, and how that gave way to other battles or ended the conflict between two nations, cultures, religions, or ideologies. This book is ideal for receiving a crash course in military history and how it affected the world through the centuries. Each battle hints at how empires rose and fell, how religion played a role in combat, and how strategic blunders in singular battles could quickly change the course of history.

Konstam demonstrates in several instances that victory isn't necessarily a requisite for being considered a great battle. Examples are the Battle of Thermopylae, which makes the list because of the legend created by the Although the heavily outnumbered Texans were defeated by the Mexicans, the battle became a rallying cry for the Battle of San Jacinto, which resulted in Texas becoming its own republic.

## A great book for introducing young readers to military history.

'100 GREATEST By Angus Konstam Osprey Publishing April 25, 2023 Hardcover 224 pages

## A Resource for Research

With information ranging from historical leaders to battle locations and strategies, readers are introduced to people like Darius the Great, Julius Caesar, and Napoleon Bonaparte, and even some more obscure names like Duke Odo, Prince Alexander Nevsky of Novgorod, and Francisco Pizarro. These 100 battles take place across the globe, from South America to Africa to Europe to Asia, and strategic methods—like the double envelopment, the feigned retreat, and the long siege—are discussed. The book is a testament that one event, and even one man, can change the course of history.

Reading through the book, one is reminded how superior numbers, though important, aren't always necessary. There are numerous times in the book where strategy and the evolution of firepower become the equalizer when troops are outnumbered. The book also pays compliment to the genius of some of the past military leaders, like Genghis Khan, Horatio Nelson, and Douglas MacArthur.

## **How We Got Here**

Military history enthusiasts understand the impact that warfare has on geography. For modern times, one only needs to look at the results of World War I to understand how nations were created, how new national boundaries were drawn, and how empires were either strengthened or dismantled.

As powers rise and fall, the ages come and go. Konstam breaks up his book into nine eras: the Ancient World (490 B.C.-A.D. 451), the Medieval World (718-1485), the Renaissance (1521-1690), the Age of Reason (1704–1781), the Napoleonic Era (1793–1815), the Age of Empires (1836–1905), World War I (1914–1920), World War II (1940–1945), and the Modern Age (1950–1991).

Although the battles are centered on specific locations and times, Konstam often provides background as to why these battles take place, discussing years if not decades of prior military conflicts or power struggles.

## A Fun Run Through History

There is no drama like military drama. Konstam's fun and engaging book solidifies the fact that warfare is part of human nature, even when we try to avoid it. It's a reminder that wars start for countless reasons, and one of the reasons is because of past wars.

The book lists the battles in chronological order rather than in order of importance. Indeed, that is part of the enjoyment of reading the book and possibly having a discussion with family, friends, or students—a discussion about which battles were the most important. The author leaves this conversational window wide open. He has simply done the service of providing readers and history enthusiasts with the material to appraise according to their own views. It makes a fun book even

Dustin Bass is an author and co-host of *The Sons of History podcast.* 

"Canterbury Tales," and one of the few char-

acters not described ironically. Instead, the

narrator truly admires him and describes

him as a "most distinguished man," with an

impressive military career in the Crusades,

whose ideals are "truth, honor, generousness

The Knight is modest and humble, his tem-

per is "meek as a maid," and he is courteous

in his manners, polite in his speech, and he-

roic in battles. However, he never talks about

his brave deeds, and he fights for truth rather

than for glory. Despite his noble stature, his

physical appearance is understated. He trav-

els in his stained uniform, never drawing at-

tention to his social class: "He wore a fustian

All the pilgrims admire the Knight. In

the prologue to "The Nun's Priest's Tale,"

the Knight asks to hear something more

lighthearted, as "tragic falls" upset him. He

wants to hear about men who start off low

on the social scale and climb their way up

instead, reinforcing his romantic charac-

ter. The Knight also serves as a peacemaker

at the end of "The Pardoner's Tale," when

he breaks up a fight between the Host and

Overall, the Knight represents ideal noble

tunic stained and dark."

and courtesy."

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

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 17, 2023

## Scott Caan Finally Steps Out of His Dad's Long Shadow

## **MARK JACKSON**

Written by and starring Scott Caan, son of the great James Caan who played Sonny in "The Godfather," "One Day as a Lion" is a fun, laconic, low-budget ensemble crime comedy wherein everything is highly subject to multiple attacks of Murphy's Law. Caan wrote a nice part for himself. This is Caan's fourth-produced screenplay.

Jackie Powers (Caan) is an ex-boxer desperately in need of money. He's been given the goon job of debt collecting (or, failing that, killing the debtor) from a curmudgeonly, stubborn old cowboy named Walter Boggs (J.K. Simmons), who owes 100 grand to local crime boss Pauly Russo (Frank Grillo). If Jackie whacks Walter, Pauly will pay for the attorney Jackie needs to help get his 15-year-old son, Billy (Dash Melrose), out of juvenile detention.

So Boggs rides into town on a horse. (This all takes place in Tulsa, Oklahoma.) This confuses Jackie, sitting in his black 1970 GTO, waiting, but who wasn't expecting this mode of transportation from Boggs. Jackie becomes quite rattled. He sniffles a bit in his car due to the immense stress. Then he rousts himself, slaps a huge Yosemite Samstyle fake moustache on his face to conceal his identity, and strides into the roadside diner where Boggs is having coffee.

Things do not go as planned. Jackie botches the job, accidentally shoots the cook in the head, lets Boggs get away, and then decides to kidnap Lola, the sullen, snide waitress who has just surreptitiously spit in the rude Mr. Boggs's coffee (Marianne Rendón).

But Jackie's not talented at kidnapping either, and eventually confesses to Lola that he's doing all this bad stuff because he needs money to hire a lawyer.

Lola's quite resourceful. After her initial eye-rolling disdain for Jackie's ineptness recedes, and she recognizes him for the golden-hearted, hapless buffoon that he is, she suggests that they pose as an engaged couple.

This way, they can possibly convince Lola's cantankerous, wealthy mom, Valerie (Virginia Madsen), who's been dubbed "The Black Widow" because she's outlived four husbands, that they're getting married, and per a particular stipulation in mom's will, they might be able to get their hands on Lola's inheritance early.

And then they'd be able to afford both a lawyer for Jackie and Lola's dream to get back to Costa Rica and reopen her acting school. Yes, you read that right: an act-

## loser.

## 'One Day as a Lion

Director John Swab Starring Madsen, Taryn Carroll, Dash

**Running Time** 1 hour, 27 minutes MPAA Rating

Jackie (Scott Caan) making a call to his

employer to report the fact that his intended target has ridden into town on a horse instead of driving a car, in the crime comedy "One Day as a Lion."

delightful as the clueless

Melrose

April 4, 2023 (limited theater release)

\*\*\*\*



## Caan is

Simmons, Frank Grillo, Marianne Rendón, Virginia Manning, George

**Release Date** 

hilarious ability to charm, schmooze, and manipulate people into doing his bidding while not being fully cognizant of the fact that that's what he's up to. Back when Caan the elder was acting, all you had to do was wait for a phone call from your agent. Now you have to write, produce, and often direct the vehicle that allows you

> You can see "One Day as a Lion" on Apple TV, YouTube, or Vudu.

at this. Hope to see more soon.

Mark Jackson is the senior film critic for The Epoch Times. Mark has 20 years' experience as a professional New York actor, classical theater training, and a BA in philosophy. He recently narrated the Epoch Times audiobook "How the Specter of Communism is Ruling Our World," and has a Rotten Tomatoes author page.

## **FILM REVIEW**

## Ray Romano Achieves a Near-Perfect Comedy

## **MICHAEL CLARK**

For nine seasons (1996–2005), former standup comedian Ray Romano co-produced, occasionally wrote, and played the title lead in "Everybody Loves Raymond" ("Everybody"), a CBS sitcom that enjoyed mammoth viewership and lukewarm critical response while offering ultrasafe content.

From 2009 to 2011, Romano did the same thing on "Men of a Certain Age" ("Certain"), a much edgier comedy with dramatic elements that wowed critics, won a Peabody Award, and pulled in below-modest ratings that led to TNT's canceling it after two seasons.

## **Senior Rookie**

It's too early to say for sure, but the two very different demographics for those two TV shows are likely to find themselves on somewhat favorable common ground with "Somewhere in Queens" ("Queens"), which Queens native Romano co-produced, co-wrote (with "Certain" staff writer Mark Stegemann), and plays the lead. At age 65, Romano directed "Queens," his first feature film as a director, proving that it's never too late to try something new.

From the get-go, it is clear that Romano is quite comfortable behind the camera. Following a video sequence at a wedding, the opening title sequence pans the ground-level Queens landscape and includes landmarks such as White Castle and Citi Field in a manner similar to that seen in "The Sopranos." Throughout the film, Romano also includes

another nod to "The Sopranos" with multiple Sunday night dinners complete with kibitzing, insults, and lots-o-profanity. "Everybody" fans should prepare themselves accordingly; there are dozens and dozens of "F-bombs" dropped for the duration.

## **Family Business** Leo Russo (Romano) works construction

in a family business founded by his father Dominic (Tony Lo Bianco), alongside his brothers Frank (Sebastian Maniscalco) and Petey (Jon Manfrellotti). Frank is also the foreman and relishes in bossing his older brothers around. The crew is currently doing work for Pamela (Jennifer Esposito), a frisky widow who is way too into yoga and is prowling for a new squeeze.

Laurie Metcalf co-stars as Leo's high school sweetheart-wife Angela, a stay-at-home mom with a barely functioning brain-to-mouth filter who pretty much runs the Russo household without, and this is key, ever emasculating Leo. A versatile actress who seems to capture the essence of a role, Metcalf's "New Yawk" accent is dead-on-the-mark without sounding forced, overly broad, or like anything resembling parody.

For very different reasons best explained in the film, Leo and Angela are heavily invested in the future of their only child, Matthew (Jacob Ward), lovingly referred to by everyone as "Sticks." A senior and the best player on his just-average high school basketball team, Sticks is a shy high school senior who says little, emotes less, and is nearly impossible to read.

Sticks is so enigmatic and inscrutable that Leo and Angela have no idea that he has a girlfriend (Sadie Stanley), until Dani introduces herself to them after a season-ending game. Perky, personable, blunt when warranted, and not too gregarious, Dani is from a lesser-affluent part of Forest Hills, which is her way of saying that she's not an elitist snob. Leo immediately likes her; the forever suspicious Angela has her doubts.



Angela Russo (Laurie Metcalf) and Leo Russo (Ray Romano), in "Somewhere in Queens."

Director Ray Romano Starring Ray Romano, Laurie Metcalf, Jacob Ward, Jennifer Esposito, Tony Lo Bianco

**Running Time** 1 hour, 46 minutes **MPAA** Rating

**Release Date** April 21, 2023 (wide release in theaters) \*\*\*\*

ROADSIDE ATTRACTION



Matthew Russo (Jacob Ward) is the best player on his basketball team, in "Somewhere in Queens."

To go into further detail regarding the plot would ruin the multitude of twists and turns to come. The writers take extra care not to over-explain the story and count on the audience to be clever enough to piece together what takes place unsaid in between the narrative beats. It is brilliant storytelling, and any aspiring screenwriter should watch the movie multiple times to pick up on its many shorthand nuances.

## Just Like Real Life

The filmmakers pull off a near-impossible feat here. They craft a story that is at once mainstream friendly and smart, but in a not-too-esoteric or condescending manner. Often sticky and complicated issues surrounding first love, elusive love, timetested love, and parent-child love are all given equal play time and none are resolved in pat, safe, only-in-the-movies ways; much of it is complicated and some of it gets messy, just like in real life.

I'm not an "Everybody" fan (I watched two episodes and wasn't wowed) but was slightly impressed with "Certain"—more so with the performances of co-stars Andre Braugher and Scott Bakula. I've seen video clips of Romano's late 1980s to early '90s stand-up stuff and they were good, but not so much that I'd watch them again. I did, however, kind of like Romano's brief turn as a union attorney in Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman." In other words, I never thought much of Romano—until now

"Queens" is a phenomenal first-filmmaking effort, and I can't wait to see what Romano does next. In less than two hours, he completely changed my opinion of his talents and I humbly tip my hat to him.

Way to go, Ray.

chael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries

Originally from Washington, D.C., Mi-

## **LITERATURE**

## The Knight in the 'Canterbury Tales': An Idealized Medieval Figure

## **ARIANE TRIEBSWETTER**

A masterwork of poetic prose and one of the first-ever books written in English, the "Canterbury Tales" displays English cultural history, giving modern readers an insight into medieval society. And what better character to represent the ideal values of 14th-century England than a knight in shining armor?

Written by Geoffrey Chaucer from 1387 until his death in 1400, these 24 tales follow 31 pilgrims from different social classes and occupations on their journey from Southwark, London, to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket in Canterbury. During their pilgrimage, they entertain themselves by telling each other varied tales. Through both their characters and tales, they give readers a glimpse into the different medieval social classes and their values.

## **An Embodiment of Noble Values**

The Knight is the first to share his tale, as he is of the highest social order (nobility) among the pilgrims. Not only is he noble, but he also embodies noble values such as honor throughout his tale, which is in the style of a medieval romance featuring the themes of chivalry and courtly love.

His story is set in ancient Greece. Theseus, duke of Athens, returns home with his wife Hippolyta and her sister Emily. Upon his return, he sees a crowd of women mourning their husbands, killed by Creon. Theseus kills Creon and takes two knights as his prisoners: cousins Arcite and Palamon. After they're imprisoned, they fall in love with Emily from their cell window and argue about who saw her first.

Arcite is released, and after several years, Palamon escapes from prison and challenges his cousin to a duel. Seeing this, Theseus tells the cousins to fight in a tournament for Emily's hand in marriage. In the tournament, Palamon is wounded, and Theseus declares Arcite the winner. However, as Arcite rides towards Emily, his horse throws him and he dies. Theseus, believing in happiness after grief, gives Emily and Palamon his blessings to marry.

medieval romance, encapsulating the ideals of courtly love: Two knights fight for a beautiful and unattainable lady. The characters are idealized through their noble values. Theseus is noble, Emily is gentle, and the knights are chivalrous and ready

The tale perfectly fits the character of the Knight himself. He chooses a story set in ancient times (common in medieval literature) with rules of honor and proper conduct, filled with knights, adventure, chivalry, and love: all knight-related themes.

The Knight's tale is considered a typical

As for the tale's main hero, the Knight chooses Theseus, one of the most respected men in ancient Greek culture. He presents him as an ideal, embodying all ideal human virtues, just like the Knight is an embodiment of the ideal medieval virtues. Both are models for chivalry through values such as

nobility, courage, courtesy, and leadership. This tale gives the readers clues as to the noble values the Knight embodies, further confirmed throughout the narrator's de-

by the narrator.

A section of the "Canterbury Tales" mural, 1939, by Ezra Winter is situated in the North Reading Room in the John Adams Building, Washington. The Knight (2nd L) is followed by his son, the young Squire, on a white palfrey.

scription of the character.

the Pardoner. An Idealized Figure Not only does the Knight convey ideal medieval values through his tale, but he himself values, protecting his people, country, and is also a model medieval figure, as described

He is the most respected character of the

faith. However, this mindset belonged to the past, and chivalry and knighthood had already lost their importance in 14th-century England. Chaucer sensed this shift in society and restored the reputation of knights through this idealized character. Though a figure of the past, the Knight remains one of the most memorable characters of the

Ariane Triebswetter is an international freelance journalist, with a background in modern literature and classical music.

'Canterbury Tales" today.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## A Subtle but Powerful Film About Faith and Redemption

IAN KANE

he world of moving pictures is a vast one, but not always that deep. When you've watched thousands of films, even some of the very good to great ones can get lost in the eddies of time and fading memories.

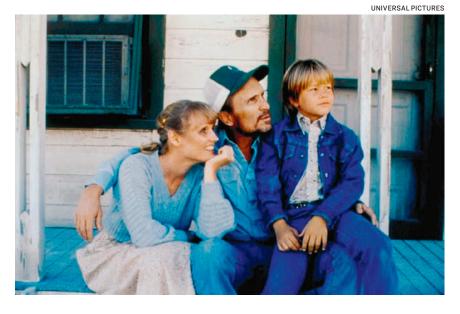
However, there are some gems out there that I can easily count on in terms of being so memorable that they stay with me. "Rear Window;" "12 Angry Men;" "It's a Wonderful Life": These movies will forever stay etched into my gray matter. But there is another film that draws from both the stories of angst and redemption of older country music (mainly from the 1990s and before), and actual biblical trials, tribulations, and eventual redemption.

Produced in 1983 and helmed by Aussie director Bruce Beresford, "Tender Mercies" is one of those films so understated that it slips under many a radar. And yet it's a movie that I'll always refer to when people ask me about my favorites: simply told yet gracefully nuanced, with powerful scenes between superb actors so realistic that incidents like the scenes could happen right next door. Well, maybe not next door in this case.

## 'Tender Mercies' is a simple yet nuanced story.

You see, the tale begins at a shabby Texas roadside motel with an attached gas station, or is it the other way around? Anyway, it's located smack-dab in the middle of nowhere, with nothing but dusty winds blowing tumbleweeds across parched prairies, under wide blue skies.

A fight is going down in one of the rundown rooms over the last swig of liquor.



One of the men, has-been country star Mac Sledge (Robert Duvall), ends up on the losing side of the battle for the bottle and is tossed to the floor. (Talk about falling on hard times!)

All of this hullabaloo has woken up the proprietor of the establishment, widower Rosa Lee (Tess Harper), and her young son Sonny (Allan Hubbard). Not wanting to get involved, mother and son let the tattered screen door shut behind them as they disappear back into the darkness of the motel's environs.

Mac wakes up just where he was put down, face down in the middle of the ransacked motel room, complete with empty beer cans, liquor bottles, and stains of who-knows-what on the carpet. He stumbles outside and meets Rosa, who informs him that he's been in the room (basically unconscious) for two days.

"Lady, I'm broke. I'd be glad to work off what I owe you," Mac says to Rosa. Thus, he starts a slow, inward drifting orbit, first around the motel (having the integrity to work off his past due rent), then gradually descending into Rosa's titular tender mercies.

Soon, Rosa invites Mac in to eat with

A struggle of shared humanity. (L–R) Rosa Lee (Tess Harper), Mac Sledge (Robert Duvall), and Sonny (Allan Hubbard), in 1983's "Tender Mercies."

## **'Tender Mercies'**

**Director** Bruce Beresford

Buckley

**Starring** Robert Duvall, Tess Harper, Betty

Running Time 1 hour, 32 minutes

MPAA Rating

Release Date March 4, 1983 her and her son at the kitchen table. A few days later, she invites him to her local church, where she sings in the choir. As Mac sings the beautiful Christian hymn "Jesus Saves" with little Sonny at his side, everything looks to be going in the right direction, and romance may be on the horizon. But this is all within the first act of the movie; there's plenty of time for things to go askew.

After watching this film for the umpteenth time, I once again realize that I never tire of watching its subtle, brilliant cinematography. Whether it be long shots of the natural world captured in a way that lingers as if not wanting to end our view of such simple splendors, or patiently capturing the moments of human emotion exchanged between the principal characters, this is truly filmmaking at its finest.

Although it also has many faith-based elements, it's relatable to anyone who has struggled in his or her life. As Rosa gradually begins to help Mac heal his broken spirit in the safe, almost convalescent-like environs of the motel, their journey is a very universal one of shared humanity.

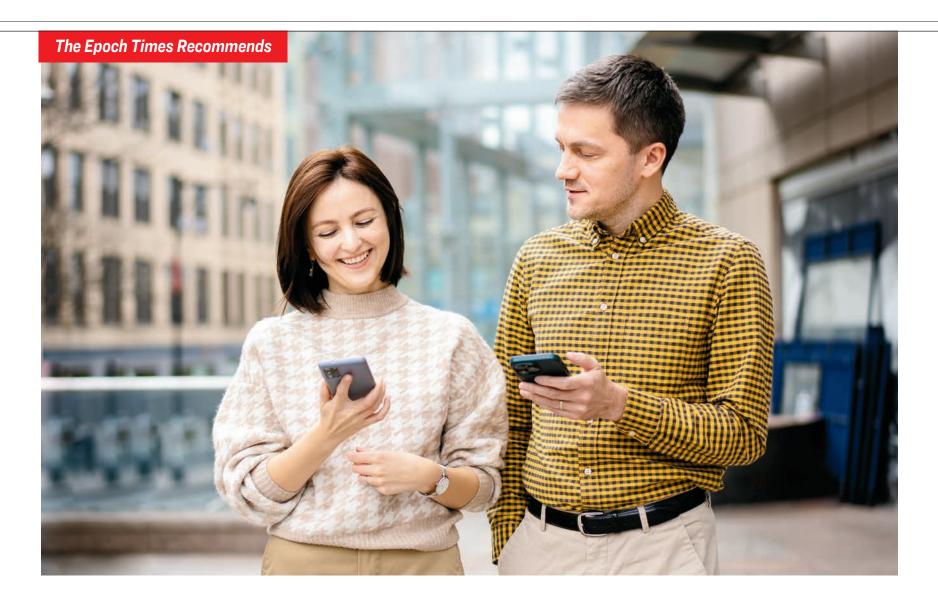
Another thing I enjoy about this film is that it doesn't rely on gushing torrents of dialogue to move its simple-yet-nuanced story along. Rather, everything is edged ever gently forward through low-key acting performances that say more with people's posturing and expressions than with words. This sort of minimalist approach has aged even better when compared to modern cinema filled with empty sound and fury.

If you're looking for an inspiring movie that has an unusual sense of authenticity, heartfelt drama, and a good splash of romance, you can do no better than "Tender Mercies."

As one of the Psalms goes: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

"Tender Mercies" can be seen on VuDu, AppleTV, and Prime Video.

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality.



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