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NEWS

# BOARD OF SUPERVISORS VOTE TO CONSIDER NEW GUN LAWS IN L.A.

As a direct response to the Lunar New Year mass shooting in Monterey Park last month, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors have passed a series of motions aimed at new gun regulations.

BY ISAI ROCHA



**T**he Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously passed a set of motions aimed at “strengthening” gun regulations.

The four motions were authored by Board Chair Janice Hahn, Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, and Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath, with the board calling them a direct response to the Lunar New Year mass shooting in Monterey Park.

“We know that blame for the gun vio-

lence epidemic lies with the failure of congressional leaders to pass even the most basic federal gun laws,” Hahn said. “Because they have not acted — we have found actions we can take at the county level to protect lives.”

The first motion, labeled as item 2 during the board meeting and authored by Hahn, seeks an ordinance to stop the sale and possession of .50 caliber guns and ammo in unincorporated regions of L.A.

County. The motion also would create a 1,000-foot gap between gun sellers and “child-sensitive areas,” such as schools and playgrounds.

The second motion, authored by Solis and labeled as item 8 during the board meeting, would support Sen. Dianne Feinstein’s legislation that seeks to raise the minimum age to buy “assault weapons” from 18 to 21.

The third motion, authored by Horvath and labeled as item 15 during the meeting, seeks to draft an ordinance to require guns to be locked by owners and mandate liability insurance.

“We must do absolutely everything in our power to prevent and put an end to gun violence in our community. Today’s motions do exactly that,” Horvath said in a statement Tuesday. “I’m proud to advance common sense gun safety guidelines and to join my board colleagues in our continued demand to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.”

The final gun-related motion, authored by Hahn and labeled as item 56-A, seeks to

support California Senate Bill 2 and Senate Bill 241, which would add requirements to concealed carry weapon laws, as well as require federally licensed firearm dealers to pass an annual training program in conjunction with the Department of Justice.

## LAUSD WORKERS AUTHORIZE A STRIKE, ASK FOR HIGHER WAGES

Workers for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) voted to autho-

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rise a strike as it has asked the district for higher wages.

About 96% of workers who are represented by Service Employees International United, Local 99 (SEIU-99), voted in favor of the strike, with the union giving them a two-week voting period between January 23 and February 10.

“After nearly a year of bargaining, LAUSD has shown no effort to truly move essential workers out of poverty and address dire staffing shortages in our schools. Furthermore, throughout the bargaining process and the strike vote, workers have been subjected to harassment by the school district for speaking out and exercising their rights,” Max Arias, SEIU Local 99 Executive Director said in a statement. “It’s this blatant disrespect that is driving workers to take strong action to improve their livelihoods and conditions for students in our schools.”

SEIU Local 99 represents roughly 30,000 LAUSD employees, consisting of bus drivers, custodial staff, teacher aides, cafeteria workers and after-school workers.

The union representatives have stated that the workers seek not only higher wages across the board, but also increased staffing, factors that they feel are crucial coming out of a pandemic, with children falling behind on curriculum and needing assistance outside of normal school hours.

“There are major issues in LAUSD’s com-

pensation system that are leading to severe staffing shortages for essential student services,” Arias said in a January statement.

United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), who represent LAUSD teachers, have shown support for the employee’s union, as they have had their own issues bargaining with the school district this past school year.

Teachers have also sought a pay increase and have scheduled a rally at Grand Park, on Feb. 15, as they continue to display their demands from the district.

“Our 85 members on our bargaining team have met for the last nine months... and basically, the district has not listened,” Arlene Inouye, UTLA Bargaining Co-Chair said. “They’ve not listened to parents, community and students, as we’ve presented and shared issues and given proposals to address the critical issues facing our schools.”

While not addressing the bargaining directly, on Feb. 10, in the midst of the SEIU Local 99’s last day to vote on a strike, LAUSD Superintendent Alberto Carvalho tweeted that there has been “misinformation” going around about the district.

“If you are a teacher, a leader, a parent, a student, a believer, I say thank you,” Carvalho posted to Twitter. “I find myself reading a great deal of organized misinformation about what we think or do as a school system. Most of it is predictable if one simply looks back and reads past headlines.”

After the strike voting period ended, without specifically calling out the unions, Carvalho tweeted about a “circus” that is being done for “nothing more than an applause, a coin, and a promise of a next show.”

Despite the lack of a specific target in the tweet, the unions saw it as a shot against them and their bargaining demands.

A date for the workers strike has not yet been set, but an SEIU Local 99 meeting is scheduled for Feb. 15, where they will discuss the next steps in the strike process.

### UNEXPLAINED BOOMS BAFFLE SAN GABRIEL VALLEY RESIDENTS

A series of loud, explosive-like booms shook through multiple cities in the San Gabriel Valley on Feb. 6, leaving residents wanting answers.

The consecutive booming sounds were heard from the city of Alhambra all the way down to Pomona, nearly 20 miles away, at approximately 10:25 p.m.

Residents of those areas took to Twitter and community apps such as the Neighborhood app, asking if others heard the thunderous blasts.

At least hundreds affirmed what they heard, with some posting videos from their Ring security cameras, which showed the unusual bangs, followed by flashing lights that illuminated the nearby streets and homes.

“It sounded up by the mountains,” one member of the neighborhood app replied, referring to the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains.

After the booming sounds concluded, a white cloud that looked like a condensation trail was seen in the direction of the foothills, with a trailing tail that appeared to be going westward.

The Los Angeles County Fire Department told L.A. Weekly that it had not received any calls for explosions in the area. Similarly, the San Gabriel Fire Department did not receive calls for possible explosions, adding that the local cities had not scheduled any community events since its weekend Lunar New Year festival in Alhambra, which did not feature fireworks or pyrotechnics.

Similar booming sounds were heard by residents on Wednesday, Feb. 1 at approximately 11:30 p.m., also followed by flashing lights in the sky.

“Something fishy is going on in Baldwin Park,” Twitter user @geoscored said on Jan. 7, with multiple Baldwin Park residents feeling the home-rumbling sounds. “A couple days ago 2 explosions and tonight another 3 explosions.”

The cause of the bursts and lights remain unknown. L.A. Weekly’s attempts to reach L.A. County Supervisor Hilda Solis, who represents the district affected, have gone unreturned. ❏

# THAT RETRO SHOW

The Return of *Velma*, *Willow* and *Hanging Out* in the Basement

BY ERIN MAXWELL



Willow

Streaming services, cable TV and Primetime television are fighting for your viewership now more than ever. Our UNBINGED column is here to help you weed through it all, with reviews of the latest shows that highlight what we love, what we hate and what we love to hate-watch, too. As a new year of entertainment gets underway, TV once again is looking back. Re-vamps, rehashes, and remakes are nothing new, of course. When done right, they're an easy win for networks, streaming services and the audience. But if done wrong, they become the ire of fans who feel like their memories have been toyed with, and they have no qualms sharing these feelings on social media. This month, we review *That '90s Show*, *Velma* and *Willow*, a trio of shows that have had their moments as trending topics bringing back classic characters with very mixed results.

## That '90s Show (Netflix)

Back for more 420 humor, bedroom rock posters of yore and 30-year-old pop culture references, *That* (change decade here) Show returns to the fictional suburb of Point Place, Wisconsin, where the Forman family's basement is once again crawling with stoned teens looking for something to do, now some 20 years after their parents did it.

The follow-up series to *That '70s Show* follows the exploits of Leia Forman (Callie Haverda), daughter of Eric and Donna, as she spends the summer with her grandparents Kitty (Debra Jo Rupp) and Red (Kurt-

wood Smith). She quickly gathers a group of confidants that include Gwen (Ashley Aufderheide), Ozzie (Reyn Doi), couple Nikki (Sam Morelos) and Nate (Maxwell Acee Donovan), and even a Kelso of her very own (Mace Coronel). Soon enough, they are going to raves, wearing flannels, and doing all the things writers born in 1989 think '90s kids did.

Most of the gags come from fatigued retro references – one after another after another. Yeah, the original show followed much of the same format, but there was a hilarity in the writing and delivery that's notably lacking here. Maybe it's because '70s wasn't aiming for a family friendly audience the way this Netflix series seems to be. In the original series, the writing took more risks, so the banter felt less forced.

Though lacking the sharp wit of the original, this one is still a fun binge, mostly due to the efforts of the original cast. It's nice to catch up with most of the gang again. Seeing Eric (Topher Grace) and Donna (Laura Prepon) married with child, Kelso (Ashton Kutcher) and Jackie (Mila Kunis) become bickering yuppie scum, and Fez and Leo (Tommy Chong) still doing their thang, will take fans to a happy place. And, Kitty (Debra Jo Rupp) and Red (Kurtwood Smith) steal the show, reprising the chemistry and quirks of old, and keeping things interesting even when the grandkids' storylines get tedious.

At times, *That '90s Show* is reminiscent

of a Disney+ series. It doesn't live up to the standards of its predecessor, but the PG-rated antics might be amusing to younger audiences, unaware of the salacious humor its forebear did so well. Fans of the original will want to tune in to see what happened to old friends, and the answer is simple: they grew up. By the way, so did we – don't be surprised to find yourself relating a bit too much to ol' Red's point of view about the kids these days.

## Velma (HBO Max)

*Velma* is yet another update to the Scooby-Doo gang, only this time sans the talking Great Dane, the Mystery Machine, or anything remotely charming, interesting or humorous about it. In the '70s cartoon's place, we are left with a mean-spirited, deplorable attempt to modernize a beloved property for an adult audience that fails on every level.

There are porn parodies featuring the Scooby Gang that are funnier than *Velma*. There are inadvertent cellphone videos inside

of purses and pockets that are funnier than *Velma*. There are traffic accident videos that are funnier than *Velma*. Yes, the only thing actually comical about *Velma* is that someone thought it would be enjoyed by others.

When a serial killer runs amok thru Crystal Cove High School, *Velma* (voiced by exec producer Mindy Kaling) must prove her innocence against incompetent cops, accusations by former bestie Daphne (Constance Wu) and Daph's boytoy, high-brow snob Fred (Glenn Howerton). Unlike early remakes of *Scooby-Doo*, which kept the crux of the characters intact, *Velma* completely eradicates everything familiar and endearing about the Scooby Gang. Brilliant *Velma* is now an oversexed basket case, Daphne is a drug-dealing mean girl, Fred is a teenage manbaby, and Norville (the "new and improved" Shaggy) borders on incel mentality.

*Velma* begs the question: Who is this for? The answer is no one. This is for no one. It isn't for Scooby-Doo fans (who wants to see their Saturday morning superstars broken down into lecherous assholes?) It's not for animation fans, as the style is a lazy man's version of the classic cartoons that once flooded Nickelodeon and Disney Channel in the early aughts. If the gratuitous sex jokes (involving minors, no less) and violence don't keep the kids away, the atrocious writing will definitely keep grown-ups at a distance.

Poking fun at cherished characters and their tropes, the show fails so spectacularly hard that it is difficult to watch. Thanks to the craven actions of all its characters, there is nothing appealing about *Velma* for fans of Scooby or otherwise. It's an empty shell of a farce that's not clever or engrossing. Just gross. How Kaling thought she could get away with a remake minus the sleuthing, silliness, ghouls and "meddling kids" that made it a joy really is a mystery.

## Willow (Disney+)

Disney once again attempts to capture the hearts and minds of '80s kids looking to relive their childhood by capitalizing on a title that gives 'em the warm fuzzies. It worked with *Mandalorian* and *Hocus Pocus*, but sadly, with *Willow* the magic is lacking.

Originally directed by Ron Howard and starring Warwick Davis, Val Kilmer and Joanne Whalley, *Willow* was the story of a powerful wizard who attempted to save his world by rescuing its savior, a baby named Elora Danan. Though it's remembered fondly by some, *Willow* didn't leave a big impact on pop culture. It lacked the kind of poignant moments and humorous references that people like to relive on Twitter these days. There were no moments of Ar-tax sinking in the swamp to rally behind.

Howard's films were never edgy enough to create long-lasting childhood trauma or inspirations, unless you count *Cocoon*. Regardless, the film was sort of sweet, and it found a fan base over the years. The new version bears little resemblance to the film beyond the general aesthetic and a handful of characters, and that doesn't help matters.

Evil forces have kidnapped Queen Sorsha's (Whalley) son, Airk (Dempsey Bryk), and it's up to his sister Kit (Ruby Cruz) and her ragtag group of misfits (Erin Kellyman, Tony Revolori, Amar Chadha-Patel), including a grown up Elora (Ellie Bamber), to get him back. They go on a journey, fight evil, encounter old friends, and meet new foes.

Much of the story and the characters within it are a jumbled mess of ancient lore and modern themes with a tone that can only be described as chaotic. Little of this world makes any sense. Though the story itself is somewhat sound in its structure, the dialogue is often dreadful with jarring tonal shifts. Some actors speak in a modern dialect while others seem to have gotten different production notes. Meanwhile, characters use little logic in their decision-making process and magic itself seems to come and go, regardless of experience or ability.

*Willow's* fantasy realm is filled with disproportionate contemporary sensibilities and inconsistent rules, and its Spotify '80s hits playlist only makes things worse. Ultimately, the heart of the original movie is missing, which wasn't strong enough to give it lasting appeal to begin with. [D]

ENTERTAINMENT

# FRAN LEBOWITZ ON THE INTERNET, COVID, THE KARDASHIANS AND HER PAL MARTY

BY LINA LECARO



**F**ran Lebowitz is one of American culture's true humorist geniuses. Her dry wit and sage perspective on life, politics, people and really, everything, has made her a living legend, especially to older audiences who've read her essays or seen her appearances on late night TV over the decades. With the success of the Netflix series *Pretend It's a City*—directed and co-starring by her longtime comrade Martin Scorsese—during the height of the pandemic, a whole new generation has discovered her brand of satiric social commentary and more so, her inimitable spirit. Sharing her fierce point of view and laugh out loud funny takes on the world, both random and significant, Lebowitz's speaking engagements are can't miss events and the closest thing to actually getting the privilege of a one-on-one conversation. We still can't believe we actually got to have one, but we did.

**LA WEEKLY:** It's an honor to chat with you Fran. So what made you decide to do this speaking engagement tour?

**FRAN LEBOWITZ:** You know, I've always done this. I've done this since 1978. I've always done these kinds of speaking dates. Since the Netflix series, I do them more often. I used to do like, maybe 15, now I'm doing like 100 million a year. That has everything to do with the Netflix show.

**That show was so good. I assume the interest level for you has just exploded since it aired.**

There's no comparison. I mean, I personally do not have a cell phone. Right now, I'm speaking on someone else's phone. I don't have a computer. I've never seen Netflix so I never saw it. Netflix kept postponing it and so, because it was postponed so many times, it ended up coming out during the height of a lockdown. Apparently everyone in the entire world except me was watching Netflix. So, you know, I mean, I'm not saying COVID was a good thing. It was a horrible, tragic thing. It still is. But it was very helpful to my series.

**Yeah, absolutely. So are you saying that**

**you never actually saw the show?**

I saw in Marty's screening room. I saw it many times. But I never saw it on Netflix the way most people watched it.

**And you're still not a Netflix subscriber even now?**

No, I've never been because you need a WiFi connection.

**You don't have WiFi?**

No.

**That's so interesting. Is there a reason that you don't want that technology even to this day, or even since the special?**

You know, the initial reason is, I don't know how to type. And so when they first invented this stuff, even now you're typing all the time, or texting, whatever. I have a tremendous antipathy to machines, not just modern technology. I never had a typewriter. I'm the sort of person if a machine breaks, I hit it,

and then I beg not to break. So I didn't want all these machines in my life. I'm just not interested in this. I don't hate it. I don't think it's terrible. People seem to think I'm not aware of it. I think I'm as aware of it as you could possibly be. Because people talk about it all the time. You know, people say to me, 'Twitter- do you know what that is?' Yes. I do. Also, people are constantly showing you their phones. Even people you don't know on the street. I feel that I have enough of this in my life.

**I hear that. There's definitely positives and negatives, too. As a journalist it's a necessary evil on some level. As a speaker I guess not as much. For these engagements, what is the structure? At the Ace Hotel in L.A., you'll have a moderator, but will it be as conversational as the Scorsese show? Will audience participation be an element?**

Yes, it's always the same no matter where I am in the world. The difference is the person who interviews me. So in L.A., it's John Brion, who you surely know is a fantastic musician. Also a friend of mine. They interview me on the stage for 30 minutes, then they leave the stage. Then I go to a lectern and I answer questions from the audience for an hour. The audience questions to me are the most fun. I love doing this and I do it all over the world. It is actually something that I would consider to be a recreational activity for me.

**Do you ever get nervous or feel pressure to be funny or profound?**

Never ever. I actually just enjoy it. I have

never felt nervous. Once 100 years ago, I fell asleep in the Letterman green room. I don't feel nervous in any public appearance. I just don't. It's a lucky thing. It always surprises me that actors, a lot of actors have horrible stage fright. I always think like, why are you an actor if you're terrified of it. But to me, it's just enjoyable.

**Well, I'm sure it's going to be really enjoyable for your fans. Advancing the L.A. show, I'm wondering about your thoughts and perspective on Los Angeles. Obviously, you're known for being New York royalty. But in terms of L.A., and your take on it, what can you share?**

You know, the thing is I don't hate L.A., I just prefer New York, because I prefer cities and L.A., I know, it's a city in some official way. But most people live in houses and drive in a cars. To me that's not a city. There's many very good things about L.A., I'm not saying there aren't. I'm simply saying, I choose to live in New York. It used to be truly just the movie business and the television business. And it seems more varied. So it is more interesting to me.

**When's the last time you came here for a visit?**

Well, I don't visit, I work. For my vacations, I stay in my apartment. I was in L.A. -I don't remember- less than one year ago. I did these speaking engagements, seven at a small theater in Santa Monica.

**Well I'm sure when you come back, one thing you'll notice is that the homeless problem has worsened.**

That's everywhere, by the way. That's everywhere. In the United States. It is worse in some places than others. No question. It's really bad in L.A. It's horrible in San Francisco.

**What about New York? What's it like there?**

It's not delightful here. There's tons of homeless people everywhere. But you don't see it very much in Europe, I can tell you that. And you don't see it very much in Scandinavia. It's not bad certainly in socialist countries. They provide for people. This country, you are on your own.

**The weather here is obviously nice so it just facilitates more people being unhoused, whereas in New York, I can't imagine being outside in the winter.**

There's actually a law here. I don't see it being enforced too much. There's some kind of law here when the temperature goes below a certain number, they go around forcing people to go into shelters. The homeless shelters must be so horrible that people prefer to freeze outside. In Berkeley where I was for a week, half the town is in tents.

**It's a real problem everywhere, especially in Downtown L.A. Speaking of cities and the challenges of living in them, the thrust of *Pretend It's a City* was really diving into the nuances of urban life. When people think of New York, they think of**

you. I wonder, you know, you mentioned the car culture here in L.A. versus New York. That's one of the biggest differences, you're just in the streets more there. Do you still enjoy being in the streets with all that humanity? These days, are you constantly recognized and how do you interact? What is your daily life?

Well, yes, I'm much more recognized since the Netflix series than I was before. You know, I've been recognized for quite a long time, but there's no comparison. I don't know how many millions of people watch Netflix, and watch it all over the world. A lot of people who stop me in the streets in New York are not from New York. Sometimes people say to me, 'I knew I would see you when I came to New York.' And I think it's just not logical. But I am in the street a lot because I walk a lot, it's a good form of transportation because you don't have to actually be in a subway, car or a cab. So I'm in the street a lot. Lately, several people from China have stopped me and told me, 'we're not allowed to watch you, but we do.'

**Are you noticing multi-generational recognition? Younger adults probably weren't aware of your work before the series, right?**

There's lots of kids. I think that it's a little hard for me to tell. I always had quite a few kids. When I do these speaking dates, I would say, you know, depending upon where I am, but in general, the audience is at least 25% people in their 20s. And I know that because during the questions, they always tell me how old they are.

**Everyone was home and looking for unique entertainment and a lot of the conversations between you and Marty were timeless. So it wasn't planned to be sort of be a COVID times thing?**

No one knew about COVID or that it was coming, not even Netflix.

**[Laughs] What's really interesting is that especially these days where television seems like it's made for people with ADHD, and attention spans reared on computers— we just want to see quick, fast, colorful entertainment. So just seeing two people sitting down and having a conversation, even brilliant people like you and Marty, on paper it doesn't seem like it would be this big hit. But it really was. Why was it the right show for the right time?**

Marty's really coming along, don't you think?

**[Laughs] Yes he's got a bright future. [Laughs]**

I mean, he's a great, great filmmaker. So one of the weird things was before we started doing it, Marty said 'I don't know how to this,' which is very chilling, because of course, I certainly don't. I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'I never did this before. I never made a series.' So I said, well just make a movie and cut into seven

**“PEOPLE ARE MEAN IN LIFE. A HUMAN BEING IS PART OF A HORRIBLE SPECIES. SO PEOPLE ARE MEAN. AND THE THING THAT STRIKES ME ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA IS IT CAUSES EVERYONE TO SPEND THE REST OF THEIR LIVES LIKE THEY'RE IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL. YOU DON'T HAVE TO PARTICIPATE. YOU KNOW, PEOPLE ASK ME, 'ARE YOU AFRAID OF BEING CANCELED?' AND I WAS THINKING, I COULD BE CANCELED AND I WOULDN'T EVEN KNOW IT. IF I'M CANCELED, DON'T TELL ME.”**

pieces, which of course is not what you do. But it turned out that he knew how to do it very well.

**So you were happy with how each episode was edited? Was there anything that you two disagreed on? Like, 'Oh, I really don't want that in or I do want that in?'**

He actually had already made a movie about me for HBO about 10 or 12 years ago, called Public Speaking and I didn't have any control over. This I did. And you know the truth is, I asked him to take something out, he did, I don't remember what it was. Editing for Marty is an endless thing. I mean, I truly believe if they had not taken say, Mean Streets, away from him, he's still doing editing it. I saw it I don't know how many times, but every time I saw it, it was different. Every episode was different. Finally, when he said, it's all done, all seven episodes, I saw them all at once so I could get more of a sense of it. Then they were going to show it to me with the color correction and I said, 'No, You're not,' because I really don't like to watch myself at all. I said they could tell me what the color was and I was going to imagine it.

**I wanted to know about your thoughts on COVID. What have we learned since going through it? Did you ever get it?**

You know, I actually thought I'd hadn't had COVID. But I was in the UK last year for like nine days. I was supposed to have eye surgery, not cosmetic surgery! And I

had to get a COVID test at the hospital. And I was positive and they postponed my surgery. So I must have had COVID when I was in London without realizing it.

I think what we could have learned was that it could be over. What we did learn was that something like 50% of the population of the United States are morons. The idea that someone says here's a vaccine and you say anything, but thank you, is psychotic to me. If everyone had taken the vaccine, then there'd be no COVID. But now, this will never end. That is very clear to me and to anyone else, it's totally clear that it will never end. It keeps changing and it's just never gonna end now. There was a real chance at ending it. If 100% of the population or the vast majority of the population had gotten the vaccine, it would have ended, but now, it never will.

**That brings me to my next question. Disinformation. The internet is filled with it. You don't do social media or have WiFi but you seem very aware of what it's all about. Specifically Twitter is very much known for this. As someone respected for your opinions, your wise opinions, what do you think about people sharing there's online? Everyone has an opinion but they only share "facts" that support their point of view. Do you think that it's a good thing that there's a forum for everyone to share opinions? Or not?**

I think that if people say 'this is my opinion,' then who cares? Fine. But that's not what they say. They say things, and give information that is lying. It is lying to say that these vaccines, for instance are anything but incredibly beneficial. They are not dangerous. They are not some sort of democratic plot. They are incredibly beneficial and we should thank these brilliant scientists who invented them. It is a lie to say that Donald Trump won the last election. That's not an opinion, that's a lie. In your own life, if you know someone who lies, you just don't talk to them anymore. I hate lying. It's the thing that I actually hate the most. And political lying is incredibly dangerous. We live in a world where no evidence is evidence. Everyone in the country saw what happened at the Capitol. Everyone saw it. Many who saw it said, 'this is just political discourse.' No, this is violence. But it is absolutely true that the internet allows these things to be incredibly contagious, because nothing spreads faster than a bad idea, and that has always been true.

**Disinformation is out of control, but what I hate just as much is just how mean people are on the internet.**

People are mean in life. A human being is part of a horrible species. So people are mean. And the thing that strikes me about social media is it causes everyone to spend the rest of their lives like they're in junior high school. You don't have to participate. You know, people ask me, 'Are you afraid

of being canceled?' And I was thinking, I could be canceled and I wouldn't even know it. If I'm canceled, don't tell me.

**[Laughs] I love that. I know you don't have Wi Fi so you're not watching a lot of TV but do you still read newspapers? Weeklies, dailies, magazines? Where do you get the bulk of your news?**

I get the Sunday New York Times. It takes me the whole weekend to read. I do not know how people read newspapers every day. Newspapers are the thing that's disappeared the most as far as I can see. It used to be, you know, the city used to be knee deep in newsprint, covered, and every subway had them. If you sat down in the subway, you got to pick up the newspaper first. The trash cans were full of newspapers. It was just a sea of newsprint. It's very rare to see someone reading a newspaper now. Most people read the Times online. They don't read a paper- paper. I don't think it makes a big difference except that, obviously, what's online changes all the time. They keep it more up to date.

I also listen to the radio. Whenever I say this on a speaking date, and I look at the kids in the audience; I always like say, 'I listen to the radio. Look it up.' New York has an all news station. I turn it on and off a 1000 times a day when I'm doing chores. I'm very up to date on local crime. I feel that I am as informed of the news as anyone who has all the modern devices.

**Do you keep abreast of pop culture and who is the hot famous person of the moment? Do you know about the Kardashians and Elon Musk or any hot topic water cooler gossip at any given time?**

Don't keep track of it or follow it. But I feel like it follows me, because people talk about it all the time. I was once in a restaurant in New York a couple years ago and I was sitting at a table with several people and someone at the table, who I have to say is from L.A., recognized one of the Kardashians coming into the restaurant. 'I don't remember which one,' she said. And then she's like, 'where's the other one?' 'Where's her boyfriend?' I'm like how do you know that? How do you know which is her boyfriend? And then another Kardashian came in and that's her boyfriend. 'No, no, no, that's the other one.' I said if you know this stuff, you should keep it yourself.

So, I know there are Kardashians. I don't really remember how many Kardashians there are. But truthfully, I know people who not only know which Kardashian is which, but know the names of their many children. There's nothing immoral about this. But frankly, it just seems kind of dopey to me. I don't care. I don't think the Kardashians are a danger to the United States. Kevin McCarthy is a much greater danger than the Kardashians.

**Fran Lebowitz is touring across the United States. See her engagement schedule here.**

Yinka  
Cover and all photos by  
Lindsey Childs



## MUSIC

# YINKA GETS ROMANTIC

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

**T**he journey from Nigeria to Los Angeles via New York is a long one, but for singer and songwriter Yinka, the whole adventure has proven to be fuel for her music. The blend of culture, the multitude of experiences, it's all part of her evolution as a person and as an artist.

Yinka started singing when she was in

school in Nigeria. A school talent show provided the spark, as well as a heads-up to the adults around her.

"I decided to go ahead and give it a shot, and sing in the talent show," Yinka says. "I did it, and everyone was like, 'Wow, I can't believe you did that.' I didn't know it was serious until my principal came to my house and was telling my parents, 'Did you

guys know that she could do this?' My parents were just like, what? I knew I wanted to sing, but I would do it in my own little world. I was trying to teach myself certain things and I would mimic certain things. That was the first moment of, I want to do this and I can do this. I've been singing ever since."

She's been writing her own songs since she was about seven, and it was when she dropped her own original song onto the major online platforms a couple of years ago that she realized, 'Ok, I'm an artist now.'" She's not looked back since.

Yinka arrived in the States at the age of 10, with her parents. At the time, her only exposure to U.S. culture had been Barney.

"I would only watch it for the music, so I was like 'oh, maybe they do a lot of crazy things,'" she says. "When I got here, it's a real place where people do real life stuff. But it was very interesting. When I started school, I didn't really do much but creative things. I joined every art thing, every

after-school program I could, because that was the only thing that made me feel sane. Coming from another country, everything feels overwhelming. But I think music and art was the calm to the madness."

Her move from NYC to L.A. four years ago was music-driven, and she feels like it's one of the best decisions she ever made. What was originally intended to be temporary had turned into something more permanent, and she feels at home in the City of Angels now.

"I love it because I've experienced so many different phases of my life," she says. "It affects my music, how I view things and how I create. I have the New York in me. A New York love story is different to an L.A. love story, and they're definitely different from a Nigerian love story. When I think about that, it all inspires my experience and how I was to portray and share my love stories to people. So I definitely think it's made an impact on my music."

Yinka describes her sound as multi-

mensional, and says that she doesn't feel a need to box herself in. Sure, there are elements of R&B, pop, and contemporary soul in there. But she's no cookie-cutter artist.

"I think my music is something that is unexpected, it's new, it's interesting to the ear, and it's exciting," she says. "It's more like an experience rather than just a sound."

Her latest release is her debut EP, *Let's Get Romantic*. The record is an attempt by Yinka to start a movement loving love, rather than abandoning the concept in a wave of cynicism and bad experiences.

"It started as an internal movement," Yinka says. "Dating has been a bit crazy, everyone is saying 'fuck love.' You know what? I don't think we hate love, I just think we've had bad experiences. Instead of seeing it as 'fuck everyone,' there's more ways to express love. I started talking about what I wanted in a partner, what I wanted my romantic journey to be, and I think it just blew up into the whole EP where I tell different stories about love and real experiences, how it can be a short amount of time, but feel like forever and be a great experience. That's what inspired the EP. Let's get romantic again, let's love love again. Even though we've had some challenges, let's do it as a movement and do it together. Build from there."

The artist says that the EP is definitely representative of her journey, her career, so far. The evolution is evident as she explores different directions, subtle ideas, on the actual EP.

"I write differently and I tell stories differently, so I think it's a representation of my evolution as an artist, and also the stories I'm telling," she says. "It tells stories as I evolved as a person. From, 'I don't know about romance,' to 'let's get romantic.'"

It's fitting that an EP called *Let's Get Romantic* is dropping around Valentine's Day. While currently single, Yinka has big plans for a holiday that she loves.

"I'm actually excited for Valentine's Day, because I feel like I want to be everyone's valentine," she says. "I want to send my friends flowers, go out and celebrate it. I feel like we always get stuck on, 'I'm single so I can't celebrate Valentine's Day.' It's not specific that you have to be with an intimate partner, a boyfriend or girlfriend. It's a day for love, so do whatever you want to do, whether you want to celebrate your dog or friends. So I have plans like that with my friends. Send them flowers and their favorite books, and I'm really excited for that. Also the EP. This is an exciting Valentine's Day for me, so I plan to go all out."

Her favorite slow jam, she tells us, is Rosalia's "HENTAI," which is a great one, though her own new EP is equally beautiful and expressive. As for the rest of 2023, Yinka plans to release more music, some visuals, and to tour in the summertime.

You'll be seeing plenty of her.

Yinka's *Let's Get Romantic* EP is out now. 



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ART

# CITY OF ART FAIRS

Arts Calendar: February 16-22

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT



**Spring Break Art Show**  
David Howe  
*Young People Follow the Beloved Leader*, oil on canvas, 2022  
Curated by Jac Lahav

ies, museums, and non-profits from around the world exhibiting painting, sculpture, works on paper, installation, photography, design, video, performance, and special programs—like the perennially acclaimed DIVERSEartLA projects bringing international issues-based institutions into the conversation. Thursday-Sunday, February 16-19; \$30-\$250. laartshow.com

**SPRING/BREAK ART SHOW, SKYLIGHT CULVER CITY.** Hyper-indie, curator-helmed, local and nationally sourced, artist-focused fair; heavy on interdisciplinary engagement and experiential booth and built-out installations, surprise discoveries, fanciful materials, and pointed social experiments. Consistently the

programs, and popups across the West Side and beyond. *Friday-Sunday, February 17-19; \$56-\$152; and there are a good number of off-site projects, many of which are free.* frieze.com.

**PHOTO FORWARD, BERGAMOT STATION.** The inaugural fair by the Photographic Arts Council features photography and lens-based art from the vintage to the contemporary, installed at many of the galleries throughout the sprawling site—including dedicated lens-forward galleries and those who don't regularly show photography—with diverse curatorial focuses alongside the galleries' regularly scheduled programming. *Saturday-Sunday, February 18-19; free.* photoforwardla.com

**NOT THE ART FAIRS: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16**

**ALEX KATZ: SUNRISE AT MAK CENTER.** Acclaimed for his iconic portraits and impressionistic landscape depictions, the now 95-year-old Katz has inspired generations of painters. Fresh off his triumphant presentation at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City, MAK Center fills the historic architectural landmark Schindler House with the latest iteration of artist's ongoing series of paintings he refers to as "splits," in which he uses a cut-up technique that blends inspiration from Manet's pictures of women in hats in the sun, the fractured imagery from early cubism, and "the 'cheap' quality in Fassbinder's *Beware of a Holy Whore*." These large-scale immersive portraits of Sunrise Coigney encapsulate the fleeting nature of the gaze inside everyday life. *835 N. Kings Rd., West Hollywood; Opening reception: Wednesday, February 15, 7-9pm; On view February 16 - March 12; free; makcenter.org.*

**PAUL MCCARTHY: WS WHITE SNOW PRESENTED BY LAND, THE BOX & HAUSER & WIRTH.**

The legendary artist's largest single work in the US, WS White Snow is an 8,800-square-foot artificial forest and a faithful replica of the artist's family home that have stood fully installed in a warehouse in East LA for over a decade. An accompanying 7-hour four-channel video projection, edited by Damon McCarthy and taken from 350 hours of recordings from the 30 days of the original 2012-13 performance, will be projected alongside the installation. *WS White Snow* is an explicit confrontation with American consumerism and grandiosity, reckoning with economic, social, and climate breakdown. This will be the first and possibly only time audiences in Los Angeles will be able to experience the piece in situ, with the future of the work uncertain. *February 16-19, timed entry tickets 11am-6pm; free; location provided with rsvp; nomadicdivision.org.*

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17**  
**CHARLES ARNOLD: DEEP CUTS AT PRAZ**

**W**ith the armada of art fairs in full citywide stationing this week, expect a tidal wave of big ticket intentionally timed local gallery openings, as well as a host of satellite projects, book releases, studio parties, design events, branded cocktail hours, and all the buzz—with the theater, performance art, musical, cinematic, technological, and modern dance worlds offering compelling alternatives to the white box blizzard in case you need that. We've rounded up a quick guide to the five fairs at the heart of Art Week LA—LA Art Week? Frieze Week? Art Fair Week?—highlighting some of the most intriguing coinciding projects. Fair thee well, art lovers!

**THE ART FAIRS**  
**FELIX ART FAIR, HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT HOTEL.**

An extremely Los Angeles, old-school classic style hotel fair, with a range of gallery exhibitors set up in the poolside cabanas and upper floor suites (the room loos make great project spaces). A savvy mix of contemporary galleries with a penchant for the on-trend and urbane; plus festive poolside hangs with possible day-drinking. *Thursday-Sunday, February 16-19; \$40-\$80. felixfair.com*

**LA ART SHOW, CONVENTION CENTER DOWNTOWN.**

The city's longest-running, most eclectic fair is back with something like 120 galler-

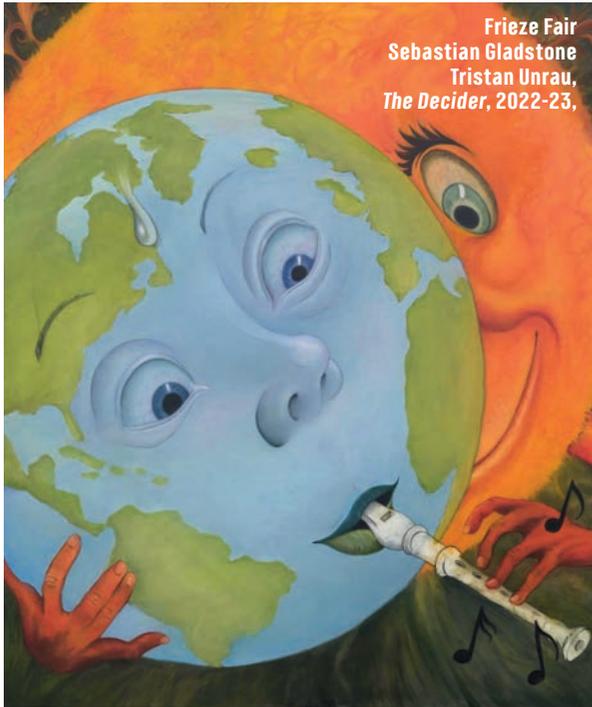
weirdest and most extraordinarily memorable of the art fair crop. *Thursday-Sunday, February 16-19; \$30-\$100. springbreakartshow.com*

**FRIEZE LOS ANGELES, BARKER HANGAR SANTA MONICA.**

The fancy one that movie stars go to, the center of gravity for Art Week LA (LA Art Week?), and the manifestation of a dominant global brand unfolds at an unremarkable location which they promise to transform and activate with scores of the world's most impressive galleries, curated rising-star perspectives, sprawling outdoor installations, and eclectic programs and performances. The (don't call it) Frieze Week momentum also gives rise to a host of related shows,



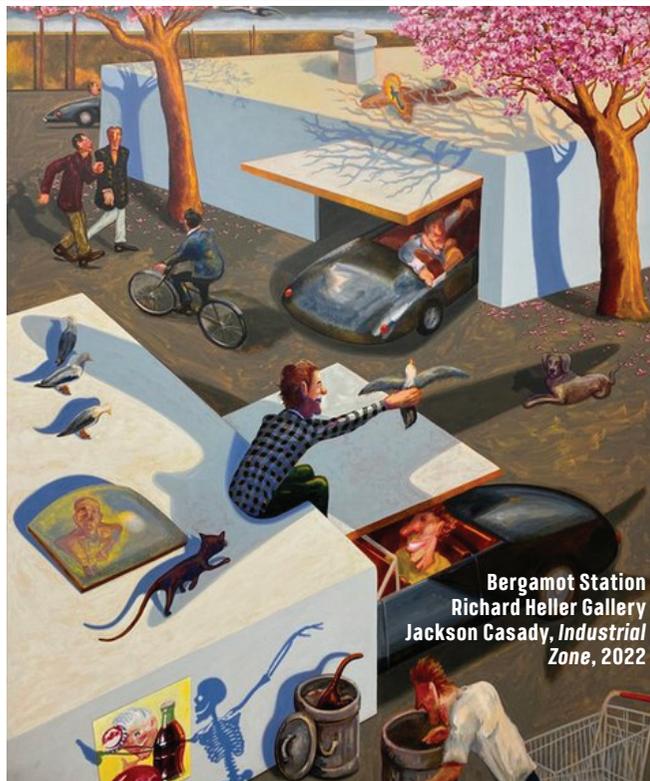
Frieze Fair  
GAGA  
Julien Ceccaldi,  
Beauty Room Secrets, 2023,



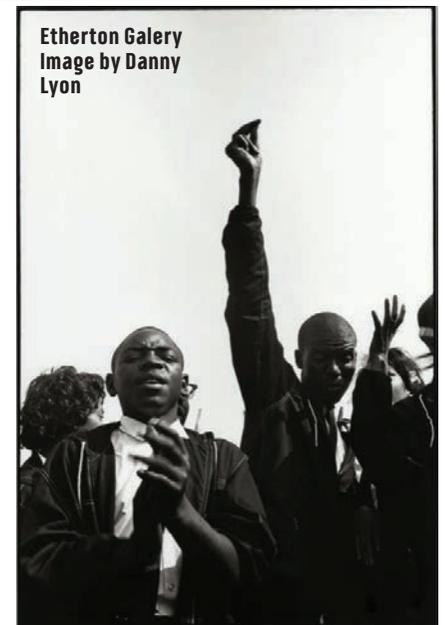
Frieze Fair  
Sebastian Gladstone  
Tristan Unrau,  
The Decider, 2022-23,



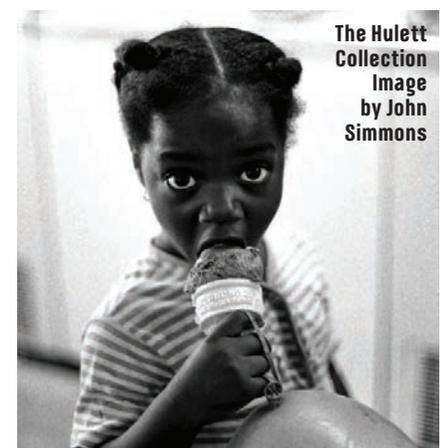
Bergamot Station  
Andy Burgess  
The Sicilian Hat Shop  
2022



Bergamot Station  
Richard Heller Gallery  
Jackson Casady, Industrial  
Zone, 2022



Etherton Galery  
Image by Danny  
Lyon



The Hulett  
Collection  
Image  
by John  
Simmons

**DELAVALLADE.**

Chuck Arnoldi's long and storied career as a visual artist has led him, across the years, to an eclectic panoply of visual cues, formal experiments, mechanisms of gesture, evocations of experience, and evidence of process. But despite an array of abstract styles from the muscular and rough-hewn to the delicate, pensive, ecstatic, puzzle-solved, color-theorized, and occasionally narrative, Arnoldi's throughline has always been elemental. Specifically, stone, water, air, fire, and wood—especially wood. For the past several years, he's remained captivated by the

curious and intuitive strength of the epic stone walls that endure at Peru's majestic Indigenous cultural sites, even as his immediate attention has returned to the fate of trees on fire-ravaged hills much closer to home. Along the way, a series of hefty, chunky, dimensional paintings and assertive sculptures have curiously married these forms, in chainsaw-chiseled carved compositions that reflect the operations of material, action, and color. As always with Arnoldi, ideas may float freely between mediums and idioms, and remain perennially susceptible to unexpected experiences and experiments—but the results are somehow always instantly recognizable

as his. *6150 Wilshire Blvd., Miracle Mile; Opening reception: Friday, February 17, 3-6pm; On view through March 25; free; praz-delavallade.com.*

**FRIDOM DUNN: BLACK HÖMER AT WACO THEATER CENTER.**

Homer was a legendary Greek author said to have been "the greatest poet of all time," but by whose standard? Dancer and movement composer Friidom Dunn presents an original work in progress exploring an alternative window on this foundational story of Western cultural identity, through his Epic style of poetry in motion, dance, music, speech, and soulful connection. We all individually hold our own personal Odys-

sey within our lives on this Earth, says Dunn, and just as Ulysses sailed the seas, dove the caves, confronted the oracles, challenged his own desires, and relentlessly pursued his foretold fate, this will be a fantastical telling of Friidom's own journey as an artist, a man, and a citizen. *5144 Lankershim Blvd.,*



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BTT  
Edgar Arceneaux

*N. Hollywood; Friday-Saturday, February 17-18; \$15; [thefriidom.com](http://thefriidom.com).*

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18  
ART + SOUL AT BERGAMOT STATION ARTS  
CENTER.**

With Frieze Los Angeles installed mere steps from LA's favorite train depot turned gallery complex, it would be impossible not to throw a party. In addition to the regularly scheduled new and recently opened exhibitions at the site's more than 20 contemporary art venues, and the inaugural Photo Forward art fair, the galleries, creative businesses, Birdie's restaurant mixologists, and even a comedy club, offer specials, tours, performances, books, talks, and surprises. *2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica; Saturday, February 18, 5-8pm; free; [bergamotstation.com](http://bergamotstation.com).*

**"FRIEZE WEEK" AT SANTA MONICA ART MUSEUM.**

The West Side's newest public culture venue hosts a full weekend of talks, shows, panels, and programs pegged to nearby Frieze Fair. As their new exhibition *Looking West* unfolds a thoughtful vision of the promise and pitfalls of Westward expansions, the

weekend conversations center around the increasing role of VR and related technologies in redefining the immersive museum experience, the unlikely but perfect confluence of NFT and physical artistic practices, the urgency of feminist thought and conscious community in the web3 space, and the very future of art museums themselves. Saturday night's opening reception for *Looking West* is followed by a nearby afterparty, and it all coincides with digital curatorial and experiential activities at the site and in the metaverse. *1219 Third Street Promenade, Santa Monica; Special events Friday-Saturday, February 17-18; Looking West opening reception: Saturday, February 18, 5-9pm; free; [santamonicaartmuseum.com](http://santamonicaartmuseum.com).*

**THE LIFESPAN OF A FACT AT FOUNTAIN THEATER.**

What's more important: writing the truth, or telling a good story? Based on the eponymous nonfiction book, this highly entertaining, very funny new play follows young intern Jim Fingal, whose first assignment at an elite New York magazine is to fact check an essay written by a highly celebrated and cantankerous author. What Jim finds turns his world upside down. Thought-provoking,



LA Art Show  
Falling Angeles, LP Gallery

with zinging one-liners, *The Lifespan of a Fact* explodes into a hilarious slugfest between "facts," and "truth," making it hard to imagine a play ever being more timely. *5060 Fountain Ave., Hollywood; Performances February 18-April 2; \$25-\$45; [fountain-theatre.com](http://fountain-theatre.com).*

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19  
TRULEE HALL: LADIES' LAIR LAKE AT REDCAT.**

LAND, OUTFEST, LACMA, and Rusha & Co. present the premiere screening and live performance of *Ladies' Lair Lake*, reflecting Hall's feminist-oriented and richly imaginative art practice. The mythological narrative takes place in an edenic forest setting, beside a lake inhabited by a sorority of nymphs overseen by a benevolent yet mischievous goddess. With 16 original songs, Hall immerses viewers in her mythical, choral, and playful world, narrating a creation myth that begins not with man but with woman, and explores themes of disobedience and loss of innocence; the clash between patriarchal religion and matriarchal goddess worship; the

complexities and loss of autonomy that accompany motherhood; and the interplay of free will and fate, of human desire and divine intervention. *631 W. 2nd St., downtown; Sunday, February 19, Reception: 4pm, Program: 5pm; free; [nomadicdivision.org](http://nomadicdivision.org).*

**BENDING THE RIVER: LAUREN BON AND EMMA ROBBINS AT BOIL, TOIL & TROUBLE.**

The special traveling exhibition includes 50 contemporary artists working in a range of media, who each explore mystical, mythological, or spiritual frameworks and practices as they pertain to the history, power, and contentions around water. Artists selected have created works that deal with magic, ritual, the alchemy of water and the role of the witch and other spirit channelers and guides in contemporary art. A series of events and conversations happens through the exhibition, such as this afternoon's presentation by Los Angeles' favorite river-bending multidisciplinary artist Lauren Bon and Emma Robbins, a Diné artist with a passion for empowering Indigenous



BTT  
Marina Abramović

women. 708 N. Manhattan Pl., Melrose Hill; Sunday, February 19, 2-4pm; Exhibition continues through February 26; free; [art-incommon.art](http://art-incommon.art).

**GLENN KAINO AND DAVE SITEK: HIGH SEAS AT AF PROJECTS.**

The Invisible Embrace exhibition by Glenn Kaino and David Sitek—aka the interdisciplinary art and sound crew High Seas—officially ended in January, but the artists will stage a one time performance with special guest Danielle Agami inside the installation before it's actually taken down. At the intersection of art and music, High Seas was born of a fanciful yet absolutely epic collaboration that was part of last year's Forest for the Trees immersion, and has continued to bear creative fruit as the pair explores the magnetism of humanity's collective compass, sailing the sea of language but trapped in the time machine of a palindrome. 7503



BTT  
Wangechi Mutu

Sunset Blvd., Hollywood; Sunday, February 19, 2pm; free; [instagram.com/afprojectsla](https://www.instagram.com/afprojectsla).

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21  
LUCY MCRAE AT USC ROSKI TALKS.**

Artist Lucy McRae leads a multi disciplinary, art-research studio investigating the impact future technologies have on hu-

man evolution. In parallel to her gallery and museum-focused art practice, she thrives as a director and a maker, in the writer's room and in the lab. Boldly staring down the status quo, Lucy pioneers a new story for how future technologies will fundamentally alter human intimacy, reproduction, spirituality, biology, and wellness culture—shining light on the ethical implications of genetic engineering. Her prophetic aesthetic is flung far from archetypal tropes, creating nostalgia for a future about to happen. Lucy's work diversifies

the predictive voices we traditionally call 'science' and 'technology', through designing hypothetical worlds that use speculation as a tool to provoke an exploration of ideologies and ethics about who we are, and where we are headed. USC Harris Hall, downtown; Tuesday, February 21, 7pm; free; [roski.usc.edu](http://roski.usc.edu).

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22  
CAMILLA TAYLOR: DRY TREE AT TRACK 16.**

Presenting a new body of work, the show includes sculptures, prints, and textiles which evoke multilayered conceptual themes stemming from one idea: a tree. Taking the concept of a tree, both "tree of life" and also the genealogical "family tree," Taylor creates quiet, vulnerable work. A genealogical tree does not necessarily matter in everyday life, but family lineage is quietly present; this theme of a past presence is demonstrated through the materials, as nearly all of the materials for the artworks are salvaged. The past life of the materials, which existed in other places and were touched by other hands, is not apparent, yet there is a sense of haunting, or hiddenness in them. Bendix Building, 1206 Maple, downtown; Wednesday, February 22, 7pm; Exhibition on view through February 25; free; [track16.com](http://track16.com). [A]

# A DACHI NOOK POPS UP AT UCLA

Asian Treats For The AAPI Community

BY MICHELE STUEVEN



The UCLA Student Association's newest addition of dachi products is diversifying the available snack and beverage options on campus with a variety of Asian snack selections. The dachi nook is located in Ackerman Union with offerings representative of more than five Asian nationalities.

Dachi — short for friend in Japanese — is an Asian-inspired treat and beverage company founded in 2022 by UCLA Anderson School of Management alumni Kelsey Kawana, Eric Luo and Anne Marie Bessacini.

“The heart of dachi has always been at UCLA where the company first came together,” co-founder and CEO Kawana said in a statement. “We are thrilled to be partnering with the Associated Students of UCLA for the grand opening of our very first storefront, and we are excited to make Asian snacks and beverages more accessible to UCLA’s diverse student body.”

The inspiration behind the former students’ snack and beverage nook is to broaden student exposure to other cultures and foster a sense of belonging for the Asian

American Pacific Islander populations through Japanese classics of Pocky and Ito En Tea, Korean Chapaggetti instant noodles, and dachi-original offerings like Tomo’s Golden Almond Cookie.

This installation is the first collaboration with dachi. The UCLA alumni founded-company installed its first offering on the UCLA campus near the Anderson School of Management in 2022 as a part of the Venture Accelerator at UCLA Anderson — a six-month program that utilizes UCLA resources to help startup founders launch

their businesses.”

The spirit of the dachi brand is represented by its round mascot, a Japanese red racoon named Tomo, who, according to the dachi website, “adores the simple pleasures of life: eating, napping and being with friends.” To date, dachi has served over 4,500 customers and offered over 60 unique Asian snacks and beverages.

The dachi nook is open in Ackerman Union between 8 a.m. – 11 p.m. Monday-Friday; 8 a.m.- 9 p.m. on Saturday; and 8 a.m.-8 p.m. on Sunday. 📍



## CANNABIS

# CALIFORNIA'S MOST FAMOUS MEDICAL CANNABIS PRISONER RETURNS HOME

Luke Scarmazzo's release marks the start of the closing chapter in the federal war against medical cannabis

BY JIMI DEVINE

**L**uke Scarmazzo was California's most prominent medical cannabis operator serving federal time for nearly 15 years until his release on Feb. 3.

For those many years, Scarmazzo served

as the face of the worst case scenario for state's medical cannabis operators. He was walking proof that even if you were operating in full compliance with state law, the feds could come rip you away from your family at any moment.

There is a fair argument to be made that of the cannabis offenders released in recent years to much deserved excitement, Scarmazzo was the most connected to the industry. Modesto, the home of California Healthcare Collective (CHC) for its year

in operation, is now riding its own cannabis wave that hit the shore a bit later than coastal California. We even covered cannabis sales at the Modesto Reservoir during Dirtybird Campout.

After giving him some room to catch up with family and friends, we caught up with Scarmazzo last weekend.

The conversation would start with the fact he'd been the main face of California medical cannabis prisoners since the release of Eddy Lepp in 2016. But the two were on very different boats. Scarmazzo operated a nonprofit collective while Eddy grew some legendary massive for the time "smell it from the highway crops." Eddy pushed the limits and many of his peers up north weren't as surprised. Scarmazzo on the other hand represented a lot more people doing exactly what he was doing that didn't want to end up in similar circumstances. As such, he's had a lot of different people and organizations advocating for his release through his whole incarceration.

So with all that, when did Scarmazzo



know this time it was real? The day he was released.

“I woke up, kind of just did the normal prison routine,” Scarmazzo told L.A. Weekly. “I gotta make coffee, getting ready to work out. And I just kind of go jump on the email to check the day’s emails.”

When he logged in there were significantly more emails in there than usual.

“So I knew something was up,” Scarmazzo said. “So I was like, OK, so I open it up. And the first email I see is from my attorney, and the subject line says, ‘you’re a free man.’ So I just stared at the computer for a few minutes.”

Things got a bit more obvious in 2017 that Scarmazzo was getting targeted for more time over his music career. In January of that year, Scarmazzo’s co-defendant, Ricardo Montes, had his sentence commuted by President Obama on his way out the door. Scarmazzo, who also applied, wasn’t as lucky. And given the nature of how clemency works he never found out why, but to onlookers it seemed pretty obvious.

The pair had worked on their clemency petitions in an informal clemency clinic in the prison library where Scarmazzo and Mission Green founder Weldon Angelos would help guys file their petitions and stuff like that for free. Scarmazzo had wrapped his head around legal forms and paperwork over the first five years of his sentence on the hunt to find a way out. He was essentially offering up the skill set he’d built in that time to other prisoners free of charge.

“So we did this kind of clemency clinic, and then we, when it came to our turn to file, Weldon and I worked on both mine and Ricardo’s clemency petition,” Scarmazzo said. “They’re basically identical peti-

tions. I mean, we were sitting together, we were charged the same. We were both co-founders of CHC. So it was like, our conduct and all the circumstances of our case were pretty much the same.”

Scarmazzo noted the petitions were identical to the point all he had to do was swap out his name and personal information.

Scarmazzo would see Montes’ name among those granted clemency, but not his own. That was seemingly the point it felt the most personal.

“I knew something like this has to be something personal, I mean, this has to be an issue that’s directed directly at me, rather than us because the president obviously granted his and then called his sentence outdated and unjust. And I’m like, well, hello, my sentence is the same. So if you think this is outdated, adjust my findings, too.”

Scarmazzo reiterated he was happy to see Montes walk. The pair had been friends for many years before their ordeal. But he remembers one of the low points of the moment being having to explain the situation to his daughter.

“I was really happy to see him get out though,” Scarmazzo said. “He’s my brother. I’ve known Ricardo since we were kids. So, but you know, it was bittersweet. Like it was hard to kind of, I guess the hardest part was calling my family and my daughter and just telling them, hey it didn’t come through for us, but it came through for Ricardo. I want everybody to be happy for him.”

He knew regardless of his own circumstances, the moment had to be treated like it was a big win, because it was.

Most of the federal actions that followed what happened to Scarmazzo felt targeted. The last major federal action on a canna-

bis retailer operating in compliance with state law was 11 years ago during the Oakerdam raids. Its founder, Richard Lee, bankrolled Proposition 19 in 2010 with legalization, only losing by a few points. The feds got their revenge on him a couple years later.

One of the things Scarmazzo is most thankful for is the 29-page opinion the

judge wrote when granting a five-year supervised release for the rest of his sentence. The long document articulates the changing of the times and other people will be able to use it as case law in their own quests for freedom.

The team at the nation’s oldest cannabis law reform group, The National Organization for The Reform of Marijuana Laws, was happy for what Scarmazzo’s freedom meant in the continued wave of cannabis prisoners getting out in recent years.

“I think it definitely sets a fantastic precedent that we’re starting to see federal judges reexamine the sentences that have been handed out by other judges, or sometimes even by themselves,” NORML Political Director Morgan Fox told L.A. Weekly. “When they start to look at changes of both state and federal policy and as well as the length of sentences that had been handed down for violations of federal infractions over the years since national attitudes have been changing.”

Fox noted there’s a lot of people out there that don’t have the connections and resources that might get lost in the shuffle here.

“And at the same time, there’s also just the opinion of one judge in one particular case,” Fox said. “It’s really going to take a change in federal law in order to start providing relief on a massive scale for not only people at the federal level, but people at the state level.”

California NORML called Scarmazzo the last known federal medical marijuana prisoner, following his release. ■

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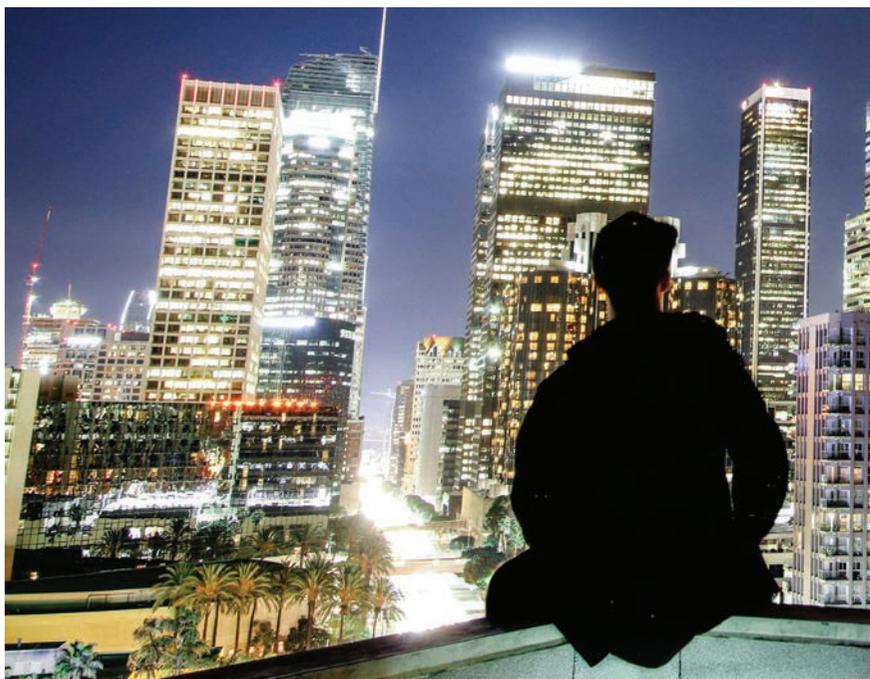
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