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KNOCKOUT

MICHAEL B. JORDAN STEPS INTO THE RING
AS DIRECTOR AND STAR OF CREED III

BY LINA LECARO





CALIFORNIA PROUD

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GO EDITORS' PICKS

ARTS

THURSDAY, MARCH 9

Robert Russell: Porzellan Manufaktur Allach at Anat Ebgi. Russell is a conceptual painter whose work returns to ideas of memory, iconography, and mortality in a personal painting language that is attentive to beauty, the history of art, and the role of photography. His newest series depicts Allach porcelain figurines produced by forced labor in Nazi concentration camps and factories. On the surface the beautiful imagery provides viewers with the opportunity for quiet reflection, while the reality of their origin turns thoughts to the nature of evil. *6150 Wilshire Blvd., Miracle Mile; Opening reception: Thursday, March 9, 5-8pm; On view through April 22; free; anatebgi.com.*

Cauleen Smith: Black Utopia LP at the Hammer Museum. In its first L.A. presentation since 2013, *Black Utopia LP* combines 35mm slide projection with the artist's own vinyl LP into a 90-minute "film without film" that is both a passionate reflection and a mashup of contemporary African diaspora culture. The performance involves history, music, outer space and African divination, and it especially serves as an homage to the great avant-garde jazz musician Sun Ra. Each time the piece is performed Smith creates new slides pertaining to the political moment and current locale, including material recorded in Los Angeles. *10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Thursday, March 9, 7:30pm; free; hammer.ucla.edu.*

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

Facing the Giant—Three Decades of Dissent: Shepard Fairey at the Laguna Art Museum. The exhibition features a selection of key works culled from thirty years that highlight how Fairey has developed an intentionally accessible visual style that speaks broadly by pulling from visual history to address critical issues. Many of the works depict the struggle against oppression as an endemic human experience. The title *Facing the Giant* references Fairey's insanely popular early stickers of Andre the Giant, which generated more than a million copies



LA Theater Week
Cirque du Soleil

distributed around the world—but also the scale of very real social imbalances the work has gone on to confront. *307 Cliff Dr., Laguna Beach; On view March 11 - June 4; \$12; lagunaartmuseum.org.*

Asuka Anastacia Ogawa: pedra at Blum & Poe. This exhibition finds Ogawa diving further into her ongoing investigations of the spirituality that pulses through the natural world, the artist's studies in ikebana, and the foremost religions in Japan. In the works presented here, Ogawa deploys her signature, childlike figures, depicting them in scenes of quiet meditation or rituals centered around natural talismans. Drawing on her knowledge of polytheist and animist practices in Japan and Brazil—where Ogawa spent her formative years—the artist paints a hyperbolized magical world filled with spiritual guides and plants with supernatural powers. *2727 S. La Cienega Blvd., Culver City; Opening reception: Saturday, March 11, 5-7pm; On view through April 15; free; blumandpoe.com.*

Pat Phillips: Strange Suburb at M+B. "I often

use painting as a way to unpack memories, past traumas, and experiences that seemed pretty normal by 90's/early 2000's standards," writes the artist. "From assimilation to retaliation, this series depicts a body as it navigates through a hospitable, yet hostile environment of the American South. Permeated with cultural iconography, cartoon characters, and personal imagery...these paintings create a hypertension of cultural clashes." Phillips also organized the group show *Drop-In*, featuring six artists exploring identity, power dynamics, and societal constructs, reframing symbols and imagery to unveil new perspectives. *612 N. Almont Dr., West Hollywood; Opening reception: Saturday, March 11, 6-8pm; On view through April 15; free; mbart.com.*

MONDAY, MARCH 13

Greater L.A. Theater Week. Thirty performing arts organizations and venues in Los Angeles, Orange County, and the Inland Valley—including Center Theatre Group, Broadway in Hollywood, Segerstrom Center for the Arts, Pasadena Playhouse, Geffen Playhouse, La Mirada Theatre, East West

Players, A Noise Within, and BroadStage—come together to create affordable access to over 75 productions. Increasing access to the performing arts and cultivating a new generation of theatergoers, 25 of the shows are priced at \$20 or under, with many more under \$50 on everything from comedies to dramas, musicals, secret gardens, and even the circus. *More than 75 productions offer special and discount tickets between March 13-26; theatweek.com/los-angeles.*

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

Karla Klarin: L.A. Painter: The City I Know / The City I See at Book Soup. L.A. Painter (Angel City Press) is an autobiographical exploration of works by acclaimed artist Karla Klarin. The book is a full-color exploration of Klarin's abstract and modern landscapes of L.A., where she was born, raised, watched four decades of change, and became one of the city's most influential painters. This first full monograph of her work is accompanied by ten essays that define her hometown—a city of moving parts and people that exist within a geometry of impressive expanse and beauty. *8818 Sunset Blvd., West Hol-*

lywood; Wednesday, March 15, 7pm; free/
book \$40; booksoup.com.

Air Age Blueprint: A sonic experience by K Allado-McDowell, presented by Berggruen Institute at NeueHouse Bradbury. An immersive sonic experience and live gong-piano performance by K Allado-McDowell (along with their AI writing partner Chat GPT-3) weaving fiction, memoir, theory, and travelog into animist cybernetics. A young filmmaker's life is disrupted by a fateful encounter with a Peruvian healer. Called to twin paths of artistic creation and mystic truth-seeking, they set out on a transcontinental journey. They meet K, a double agent working between art and technology, who invites them to test a secret program called Shaman.AI. This human-machine experiment, rooted in magic, produces a key to rewriting reality. **304 S. Broadway, downtown; Wednesday, March 15, 6:30pm; free; rsvp.neuehouse.com/berggrueninstituteandneuehouse.**

MUSIC

MARCH 10-16

Leyla Blue
The Moroccan Lounge

New York buzzing singer and songwriter Leyla Blue put out the "Jane Doe" single at the tail end of last year, the follow up to "What a Shame," and it kinda exploded. 2

M+B
Karla Ekatherine Canseco
corazón enredado, colas atadas, 2022



million TikTok impressions wasn't a band start, and it are from there. Hear that song and more at the Moroccan. **6:30 p.m. on**



M+B, Pat Phillips, Sundown Town, 2022

Friday, March 10 at the Moroccan Lounge, \$17, themoroccan.com.

Savannah Pope
Redwood Bar & Grill

Charismatic, enigmatic and eminently watchable glam-pop artist Savannah Pope performs at the nautical Redwood on Friday, on a bill with the Poppy Seeds. "The culture now is stuck in kind of a shallow mode," Pope told Falling James in 2019. "I think that [rock] is going to come back up. People want substance." We sure do. **9 p.m. on Friday, March 10 at the Redwood, theredwoodbar.com.**

Cradle of Filth / DevilDriver
The Observatory

This is a fascinating double bill in the OC, as British black metal-influenced antiheroes Cradle of Filth join forces with fellow extreme metal band DevilDriver. To be fair, Dez Farara hasn't plastered himself in makeup since his Coalchamber days, but we're still sure they'll be able to go toe-to-toe. Black Satellite

and One also perform. **6 p.m. on Saturday, March 11 at the Observatory, \$37.50, observatoryoc.com.**

Tank & the Bangas
The Teragram Ballroom

Genre-defying band Tank & the Bangas have just dropped new single "DM Pretty," of which singer Tank Ball says, "I wrote 'DM Pretty' so that women could know that they are beautiful, dope, sexy, smart and obviously pretty. I also love when people really listen to the poem in its entirety to see why he's sliding into her DM's." They're keeping it real, then. McKinley Dixon also performs. **7 p.m. on Wednesday, March 15 at the Teragram Ballroom, \$29.50, teragramballroom.com.** [A]



FRIDAY, MARCH 10
6-10 PM

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- Limited shuttle service due to regional bus and driver shortages.
- Free shuttles run 6-10 p.m., with stops at each venue.

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KNOCKOUT

MICHAEL B. JORDAN STEPS INTO THE RING AS DIRECTOR AND STAR OF *CREED III*

BY LINA LECARO

If the *Rocky* franchise was the ultimate underdog tale that taught us about believing in yourself against all odds, then the *Creed* series attempts to take these ideas and add new nuances concerning social inequity and overcoming personal demons, which is sadly more relevant than ever. No matter where you come from or what your circumstances might have been growing up, with hard work and the support of others, you can do anything – from becoming the heavyweight boxing champion of the world to directing a big Hollywood movie for the very first time.

With *Creed III*, Michael B. Jordan returns as Adonis Creed, the son of *Rocky* Balboa foe-turned-best friend Apollo Creed. With the help of the Italian Stallion in the first two *Creed* films, Adonis followed in his father's footsteps to become a sports legend in his own right, and his journey largely lived up to the classics it was inspired by. In the new film, the titular character retires a champion until he forges a comeback driven by his painful past.

Beyond fighting adversity as lead narrative, an additional parallel here is that with the third *Creed* film, Jordan himself is sort of following a path set by Sylvester Stallone, who wrote, starred in and directed himself in four of the six *Rocky* films. Jordan is known as both a serious actor and a heartthrob (he won *People* magazine's "Sexiest Man Alive" title in 2020), but in terms of behind the camerawork, directing seemed to come out of the blue. Apparently it wasn't, though. At *Creed III*'s press conference in West Hollywood last week, Jordan explained that the first *Creed* film's writer and director, Ryan Coogler, who also directed the actor in one of his early films, 2013's *Fruitvale Station* and in 2018's *Black Panther*, encouraged him to make this pivot a long time ago.

"He definitely had a lot to do with it. You know, I think he first told me that I could direct....I was in awe of what he was doing, seeing a black man, my age, somebody I knew well, getting to command a set and show me what was possible," Jordan shared. "I think for me, him telling me, like, 'Mike, you can do this, too,' was kind of that first seed that got planted in my head, that maybe I could direct. I didn't know what it was gonna be. I didn't know what movie I was gonna step behind the camera [for]. But we did *Creed* and then *Creed II* came along and Steven [Capple, Jr.] jumped into the director's chair. And as we kind of grew, the third one just seemed like it was the perfect time for me to step behind the camera."

In addition to Coogler, Jordan says that he sought advice from others he respected in Hollywood, particularly actor-directors like Jon Favreau, Bradley



ELI ADE/COURTESY MGM



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Cooper and Denzel Washington. “People who had been behind and in front of the camera, simultaneously,” he added. “Those people have had success at doing it, sometimes the first project as well. That really helped inform me on what to expect, even though there was nothing that anybody could really tell me to prepare me for what the journey was gonna be like. It was one of those things, you just have to live it and get through it. And it was the hardest thing I’ve had to do so far, but at the same time, I felt the most alive doing it. So it was rewarding.”

Notably, Jordan does not mention Stallone. Last year, as the film was in production, Sly admitted to *Variety* that he didn’t like the direction the third installment was taking and that it had a “different philosophy” than he would’ve featured. Though he wished the filmmakers well, he opted not to appear in it (he’s still listed as a producer). The gist of his issues with *Creed III* seemed to be about its lack of “sentimentality” and the “darkness” that it sought to explore.

But the film isn’t really all that dark. In fact, it’s very much in the tradition of I and II, which of course, took cues from the original *Rocky* movies. Following the tried-and-true formula of spotlighting two opponents (one who has more to overcome than the other), both looking for redemption for their own reasons, the spinoff packs the same basic emotional punches. And we’re not spoiling anything to say that it ends exactly the way you think it will, with an uplifting message about transcending trauma and appreciating blessings like family and friends. With an 87% positive score among critics and a 96% with audiences on Rotten Tomatoes as of this writing, the consensus on Jordan as a director has been very good, and with lots of buzz (especially in L.A., where the movie is set) and strong

“HE [RYAN COOGLER] DEFINITELY HAD A LOT TO DO WITH IT. YOU KNOW, I THINK HE FIRST TOLD ME THAT I COULD DIRECT.... I WAS IN AWE OF WHAT HE WAS DOING, SEEING A BLACK MAN, MY AGE, SOMEBODY I KNEW WELL, GETTING TO COMMAND A SET AND SHOW ME WHAT WAS POSSIBLE” – MICHAEL B. JORDAN

box office numbers, it’s a bona fide hit one week in.

A *Creed* refresher: Adonis was the product of an affair Apollo (played by Carl Weathers in the *Rocky* movies) had just before he died. His mother also passed away when he was a baby, so he ended up in an L.A. orphanage. Apollo’s widow Mary Anne (Phylicia Rashad) found him and adopted him as a child, but never encouraged him to box due

to the danger. But Adonis was a fighter like his father, and after quitting his safe desk job, he goes to Philadelphia to look up his dad’s old friend *Rocky*, convincing him to come out of retirement and train him, ultimately getting him a championship bout. Creed doesn’t win the final fight in the first film, but he proves himself a world class opponent with a bright future. More importantly, he comes to terms with the legacy of his father, don-

ning American flag shorts just like dad. In the second film, Adonis battles the son of Ivan Drago (Dolph Lundgren), the Russian boxer who killed his father in the ring. If that’s not a dark setup, what is?

Coogler wrote and produced this time around and the new story centers around Adonis Creed’s childhood friendship with up and coming boxer “Diamond” Damian Anderson (Jonathan Majors), whom he met while in the foster care system. Using flashbacks at the top of the film to illustrate the pair’s bond, and slowly revisiting and unraveling an incident that ended up putting Anderson in prison, the third installment takes a turn around the second act that’s decidedly different from previous films that focus more on the mentor/mentee relationship. We all know who to root for in *Rocky* films, and this one is no exception, but there is a more complex dynamic at play here, too. *Creed III* clearly aims to explore how opportunity (or lack thereof) can factor into one’s success, how where we come from can shape who we are and how one terrible incident can change everything. For this installment, Los Angeles is central to the storyline. The climactic final fight of the film even takes place at Dodger Stadium, dubbed “the Battle of Los Angeles,” which is not a *Rage Against the Machine* reference, but does seek to highlight how Creed (and Anderson)’s Angeleno pride is a big part of who they are.

We asked Jordan, who was born in Santa Ana, California, raised in New Jersey and currently lives in L.A., about the significance of Los Angeles as a backdrop for the film in terms of growing up in the city and how it shaped the main characters as people.

“Okay, there’s a lot in that. I think for first and foremost, from a franchise perspective, you’ve seen Adonis start in L.A., and then end up in Philly in search of this



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teacher, this mentor, that's going to help him achieve the things that he needs to achieve," he tells LA Weekly. "Having the second film be mostly in Philly and then you know, a little bit in Los Angeles, and then we end up in Russia. We'd never really had a chance to really establish Adonis' home – what's his home base? What really shaped him?" And since we were treating this like an origin story and a sequel in a trilogy all in one, we thought it was important to make L.A. a character and make it a homecoming of sorts."

"Then you break it down further," he continues. "Okay, cool, what childhood trauma did [Adonis and Dameon] share? It was his first protector, and you know, we're products of our environments. So we leaned into the reality of those environments. Being from Crenshaw, and then living in Baldwin Hills, this Beverly Bel Air-ish type of area where Black families lived and thrived and had money. You know, where would Apollo Creed be? We talked to those things. And then we started thinking about what iconic environments do we want to put these two guys in – in the form of montages, or you know, when driving down the street. What familiar places can we show that aren't oversaturated, when you think of L.A. and Hollywood? Sometimes those can be a little bit cheesy when it comes to films. I mean, like, we're not going down to the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Certain areas are very familiar in L.A., but what hasn't been photographed before? What are the parts of L.A. that you don't really see on film and television? So that was a challenge to kind of find those places. Ultimately, we ended up at one of the more iconic places: the Hollywood sign. So there's certain things you can't get away from, and I think it served as a final kind of nail I felt that Adonis needed, that I think the audience needed. Hollywood was first the nickname they gave him when he went to Philly. So it felt very poetic to kind of come back around to that."

Jordan also says that they wanted to show new places in L.A., like Sixth Street Bridge. "It was a new place that was starting to become very, very popular. People were drag-racing down there and walking on the bridge," he notes. "It's very visual, and we wanted to kind of just take things to new places."

Speaking of the Walk of Fame, *Creed III* may have avoided a cliché stroll down Hollywood Boulevard, but Jordan didn't stay away from the street in real life. Timed to coincide with the third film's release, the actor got his own star there just last week. During the ceremony, Majors and Coogler paid tribute and clearly, there's a lot of love between all three.

"First, I love my brother," said Majors, who like Jordan, also stars in a Marvel movie (he's the villain in the latest Ant



Man). "When I move around Mike – or Creed or Donnie or Michael B. Hand-some or Sexiest Man Alive– Adonis, I'm reminded of the tale of Hercules. The story of a young man who was born as a mortal. Michael, to me, represents a mythical character. I don't think it's an act of luck or an act of chance that so many people see him as Adonis. Today, brother, you go from man to god. You sit amongst Olympus and ... no man on the planet I know deserves it more."

Coogler also had heartfelt sentiments for Jordan at the induction. "It's been the ride of a lifetime, man — this decade working with this guy and watching him blossom into the phenomenal global talent that he is, the filmmaker that he is," he gushed. "And knowing that our relationship can maybe be a blueprint for more relationships for the next folks that's coming up, it's exhilarating. It's humbling."

It's obviously not a coincidence that



Creed III's promo blitz started during Black History Month. Jordan kicked off media appearances with a stint on Saturday Night Live in early February, proving his comic dexterity and his self-deprecating side (his high-profile relationship with model Lori Harvey had just ended months prior and he had no problem addressing it). From there, he started touting the technical aspects of the project (it was the first sports movie to be shot on IMAX cameras) and did interviews that seemed to focus on inspiring others.

To this end, he also partnered with Hennessy – a brand that not surprisingly has an important product placement moment between the two leads in the movie – to champion emerging Black filmmakers, launching a program they call the Legacy Makers Initiative. MJB, MGM and Hennessy handpicked three up-and-coming directors and provided resources for them to make film shorts

celebrating prominent Black creators in Hollywood, tied to the film release. The launch party for the project took place at a pop-up modeled after Creed's gym in the movie last week. It had boxing exhibitions, and a screening room with appearances by the filmmakers themselves. Over some signature Henn-tails, we chatted with them.

"They reached out to me and it sounded like a cool project," says Diana Ali Chire, who made her film about *Creed III* costume supervisor Ngina Bowen. "They allowed me to be as creative and go as weird as possible. A lot of my work is about Black female identity. This piece is eclectic and fun."

Bowen says that being a part of the new movie was a dream come true. "I manifested this job," she says. "To see Michael in both roles – we shot the boxing first, for like two weeks – so to see him be that fit, but also stepping back and directing at the same time, it was really amazing. I got to see the whole process, when you watch it and see what the boxers are wearing, the designers had a whole thought process behind it... it's all so great."

Walter Thompson-Hernandez, who says his films "deal with questions about longing, family and hope," covered Gavin "Mizzle" Matheiu, who was the creative director of YG's 4Hunnid label and heads his own clothing brand, called Supervsn Studios. As an MJB fan, he was excited to be part of the project, too. "Yeah I think we're all aligned here and I think we have a similar vision and it feels really good," he says. "And I've drank some Hennessy in my life – it tastes great and it's important for the culture."

Filmmaker Tevin J Tavares filmed Chad Easterling, CEO of Obsidianworks, a "culture-powered" marketing agency co-founded by Michael B. Jordan himself. Bowen says Obsidian reached out to her initially about being involved and giving others a chance to learn about what she does and sharing what she learned on set, was key. "They had laser focus on this project," she says of everyone involved. "You have to have that to be in that kind of physical and mental shape, and you kind of have to have that for life in general."

Clearly, *Creed III's* success serves as inspiration in more ways than one. Beyond its star/director, a lot of Black talent was behind every aspect of the film, from production and execution to promotion. It's been a busy week for Michael B. Jordan (whom by the way, no one confuses with the basketball legend anymore). He's been involved in every aspect of this one, rolled with every punch, made every appearance and surely inspired others to take a swing and fight for their dreams in the process. [E]

FOOD

VENTURA COUNTY'S DIRTY LITTLE SECRET IS THE SUBJECT OF *REGENERATE OJAI*

Documentary is a toxic wakeup call

BY MICHELE STUEVEN



The serene Ojai Valley at the foot of the Topatopa Mountains in Ventura County is famous for its idyllic rolling hills and farmland, orange groves, zen-like boutique hotels and swanky new age shops in its charming village center. The Ojai Music Festival attracts hundreds to the four-day event in June each year, as does the Sunday farmers market.

With more than five million pounds of agricultural pesticides being sprayed annually in Ventura County, it's also one of Southern California's most toxic sites. More than 50,000 pounds of chemicals are sprayed every year in Ojai alone.

In *Regenerate Ojai*, narrated by Laura Dern, filmmakers Josh and Rebecca Tickell take a shocking and revealing look at the amount of toxic chemicals that are sprayed in the valley and the effects the exposure has had on generations of residents and farmworkers.

The chemicals include Abamectin, Thiamethoxam and Glyphosate (better known as the weedkiller Roundup.) The pesticides

are spread by antiquated fan sprayers and aerial application via helicopter, drifting particles throughout the valley.

According to an Environmental Working Group analysis of pesticide use data for the county from 2015 to 2020, more than a million pounds of pesticides linked to cancer are used in the county each year, on average. Pesticide spray quantities and frequency data come from the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's Office.

The county's farm fields grow a produce-aisle assortment of labor- and pesticide-intensive crops including strawberries, celery, lemons and raspberries. Tens of thousands of farmworkers live and work in the county to support Ventura's annual \$2 billion agriculture economy.

According to the filmmakers, much of the county's population of 846,000 faces the potential health risks associated with pesticides drifting from the fields, whether they work in agriculture-related fields or not. The quiet setting has been a popular retirement community for decades. The film documents cases of breast cancer and



leukemia in children who live and play next to the treated orange groves.

Dern's mother, actress Diane Ladd, an Ojai Valley resident, appears in the film discussing the damaging effects living in the valley have had in her own life. She's worked with fellow community members since 2019 organizing in the Ojai Valley to force a community conversation and action. This includes a petition, and com-

munity town hall meetings in Ojai asking for steps to reduce pesticide spraying in the area. Famed chef Alice Waters and Chumash Tribal Council member Salvador Ambriz also appear in the 30-minute documentary.

"When you're looking out at the beautiful landscape you can't see that there's a toxic chemical drift in the air, but people experience it in the form of asthma, can-

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cer, Parkinson's disease, and ALS," filmmaker and Ojai resident Rebecca tells L.A. Weekly. "Over the last four decades, I have talked to so many people - especially women - who have been bullied for asking questions about health and human rights, realizing that there is a link to cancer clusters we see here in Ojai, as well as greater Ventura County."

According to husband Josh, who together with Rebecca has produced eco documentaries including Kiss The Ground on Netflix and On Sacred Ground, decades of chemical spraying in Ventura County's multimillion dollar agricultural industry is not only crippling its residents, but the very ground they live on.

"The largest crops by revenue are citrus, especially for Ojai," he says. "You've got lemons, which are an incredibly valuable crop, and then all the various forms of oranges. The issue very specific to a tree growing region is that as climate pressure has gone up, and as water prices have gone up, the soil has become more brittle and the trees have become weaker. They aren't native to this region nor is the pest they are actively trying to kill, which is the Asian citrus psyllid. There have been studies done in Florida that the trees can have the bug and the presence of the disease and can still bear fruit and be fine for years. But that requires healthy trees, and healthy trees require healthy soil. You can go to any of the orchards around here, with the exception of a few regenerative and organic farms, and if you're actually able to actually pick up some soil through the hardened surface, you'll pick up dust. There's no soil left. They've destroyed the very thing that keeps the tree healthy. So the only way to prevent those pests en masse is to use neurotoxins similar in chemical structure to what was used in WWII and Vietnam. They function the same way on humans as they do on insects. That's the nature of the neurotoxin. It attacks the brain stem first."

As the climate pressures have increased, people have moved closer to farm fields, resulting in chemical sprays near schools and playgrounds. According to the Tickells, the Ojai spray schedule is 72 times a month. The results can manifest as Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Parkinson's disease and are linked to long-term damage from neurotoxins.

"The final nail in the coffin to this broken system, these folks are the American farmers trying to make a dollar, but the majority of the farm labor are Mexican immigrants," says Rebecca, who with husband Josh have been labeled fear mongers and troublemakers by some legacy farmers, to the extent of having broken concrete dumped in their mailbox. "Those are the people who actually physically mix and administer the chemicals or they're picking the orchards right after the spray. The length of exposure of these people is off the charts.

Blindness is a common problem. There's a saying among that community - 'You go to America to work in the fields, but you go home to Mexico to die.' It's hard to record the results, because people who are affected are too afraid to report it, because if they do, they're either afraid of losing their jobs or getting deported."

So how hard is it to shift a multimillion dollar industry over to regenerative agriculture, a rehabilitative approach on topsoil regeneration, biodiversity and strengthening the health and vitality of farm soil?

"It's inevitable," says Rebecca. "The farmers are having to pay an increased price for input costs, water, the chemicals, they're getting lower yields and the soil is degrading. The profit margin is drastically dwindling. We sat down with some of the most profitable legacy farmers families in the Ojai valley seven years ago and they told us then that they estimated they only had about 10 years left to farm and would go bankrupt after that. In the east end of Ojai where the orchards are, you can see now - as opposed to five years ago - many of the plots where orchards used to be are now just dirt.

"We're starting to see younger people coming in wanting to buy property and turn it into regenerative farms," she says. "The days of mono crop citrus are done. In a regenerative system, there's biodiversity with over crops; healthy soil that has a huge microbiome is communicating from one type of tree to another to a shrub to a tall grass. Within that network, it's able to deliver nutrients where they are needed. The intelligence of a biodiverse ecosystem knows how to protect itself. It's resilient in its design."

The idea is to fix the old agricultural model to mimic the way nature intended, by integrating life into the farms. That helps with clearing weeds and creates a biodiverse ecosystem that includes owls and hawks and birds that eat the bugs, which creates the fertilizer that goes back into the ground.

With continued opposition, it's an uphill battle, but the Tickells are relentless in making the valley a safe and healthy place for their children and their llamas.

"When people come to Ojai looking to move here, locals whisper to them, 'just don't move to the east end, its a breast cancer cluster.'" Rebecca says from their Big Picture Ranch in Ojai. "But they don't want to say it too loudly because of the fear it will affect the property values and hurt the farmers. I don't think the farmers want to hurt anybody, but so much misinformation has been propagated by the chemical companies. We're getting the kind of science that money can buy."

We reached out to some of the farmers but have not heard back by presstime. You can watch the documentary at www.regenerateojai.com [📺]



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MAKING A SPLASH!

The Aquadolls are living a charmed life

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



LA treasures the *Aquadolls* as a glorious mass of contradictions. A walking dichotomy, covered in glass and glitter. On one hand, perhaps the most overt and obvious hand, they're a joyful exercise in melodic pop-rock, kitted out in sparkles and mermaid tails. But life has a habit of reminding us that it's not all sunshine, puppy dogs and rainbows, and *the Aquadolls* encapsulate that majestically. Their counter, the yin to the happy yang, is their ability to capture life's angst with oft-caustic but never hopeless lyrics. And of course, they can ferociously hammer their instruments between more delicate moments.

Singer and guitarist Melissa Brooks started the band a decade ago with an entirely different lineup, chopping and changing until she eventually linked up with bassist Keilah Nina and drummer Jacqueline Proctor in 2018. The band's third album, *Charmed*, will be released this summer

and it's this trio's first together. New single "Sneaky" is, literally, a sneak peek at what we can expect. It's immediately apparent that the three musicians have impressive chemistry, five years in the making.

"I'd been going to shows for quite some time and I always went to all of the *Aquadolls* shows," says Nina. "So one day I just asked Mel for a ride home because we had been to so many shows together that I knew she lived a street away from mine. She gave me a ride home, and then we ended up hanging out every single day. I think it was a really natural connection. That's how I ended up meeting Jackie as well. We were hanging out at Jackie's house one day and it kind of clicked. Our personalities blended well together."

Considering the fact that only Brooks remains from the early days of the *Aquadolls*, it makes sense that the sound has evolved considerably over the 10 years.

"It kinda started off with not the best

quality of recordings," says Brooks. "I was just recording in my ex-boyfriend's bedroom, and then eventually got to go to a studio and make it sound a little better. Definitely more of that surf rock sound to it, that California sound. The last record, *The Dream and the Deception*, had more electronic elements sprinkled in. The new record, *Charmed*, goes back to our roots. But it has a new twist, because it has a little

work with the *Goo Goo Dolls*, at his home studio.

"I really feel like this is our dreamiest," says Nina. "Even though the last album was called *The Dream and the Deception*, I feel like every time I re-listen to this album, it feels sparkly. It's very dreamy. The way that I describe it is, it's just every form of love that there is. Platonic, romantic, sisterly – it's like a blessing. Very nostalgic and very rose-tinted. It's very happy, magical and sparkly, and I think it really hones in on the human connection and being there for each other, especially after dark times. I like the whimsical-ness of it. I want people, even when you're screaming your heart out, to feel warmth and radiate positivity."

Those "dark times," of course, include the recent pandemic and lockdowns. There are songs on *Charmed* that were written before COVID changed everything, and some that were written after/during.

"There were demos that we hung onto for so long, that we really, really believed in," says Nina. "The rest were written after. I feel like, when you listen to the album, you can hear us find our sound just a little bit more. I think those demos were really great jumping off points to shape the sound and the feeling of the album. One of the first songs that we wrote I believe was 'Far Far Away,' and it's very daydreamy, thinking about the future and how sometimes you are your own hero. That's a common theme on the album – depending on yourself, self-love, and knowing that's OK. That's where the album is mostly positive, obviously, but realistically, life is not all sparkle and sunshine. But I definitely think it's helped us really hone in on what we wanted to say and how we wanted to say it, especially after such a long break that everyone was forced to take."

The Aquadolls chose "Sneaky" for the first single because it was such a blast to play live, says Proctor.

"Also, it gives Hole vibes a little bit and we love Hole," says the drummer. "That's a huge inspiration for us, throughout this album. That song in particular, I can just remember when we've been driving in the car together and we're so burned out from everything, and then we're screaming Hole songs. For me, when we play that, it's like empowering for us in a way. Even though it's about a sneaky little wink. We're here and we've arrived."

The Aquadolls are heading out on tour in April, through the US (and one Canadian date). More singles and videos will be dropping as the build-up to *Charmed* continues. It certainly appears to be the case that 2023 will be a big one.

"Life is rock, rock is life, keep on rolling," says Proctor in conclusion. "Believe in yourself, dang it!"

The Aquadolls' new single "Sneaky" is out now. The *Charmed* album is due in June. **LA**

bit of everyone's personality in it, and we touch on all sorts of different genres. It's still, at the end of day, alternative rock."

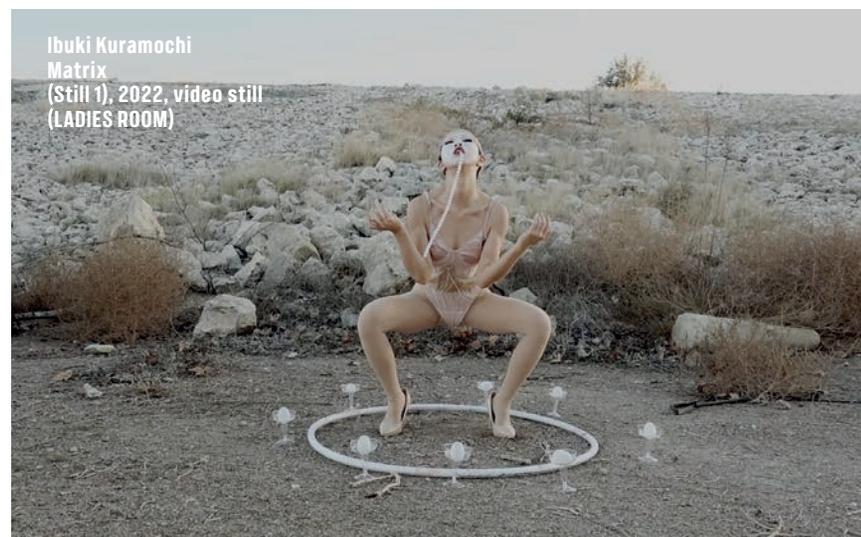
The Aquadolls is very much a Los Angeles band, spread over the region. The wealth of musical excellence here has had a massive impact on the three musicians.

"I know that we're *Aquadolls* and it's all mermaids and fun, but I'm a city girl – I always have been and I always will be," says Nina. "I think the different music scenes that you find in this city and all of the diverse shows that you can go to had a really big impact, at least on the way that I play music, listen to music and write music. I always say that we're so lucky to be from here, because you can really go and see anything. So it's fun because you can go to a punk show one day and then a pop show the next. It definitely helped us creatively and with inspiration."

Charmed was recorded with producer Chris Szczech, perhaps best known for his

IT'S INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY EVERY DAY AT THIS LOS ANGELES GALLERY

Gallerist, curator, consultant, and pillar of progressive platforming Annie Wharton started Ladies' Room — the Los Angeles-based contemporary art gallery where it's always Women's History Month — five years ago, but her vision has never been timelier.



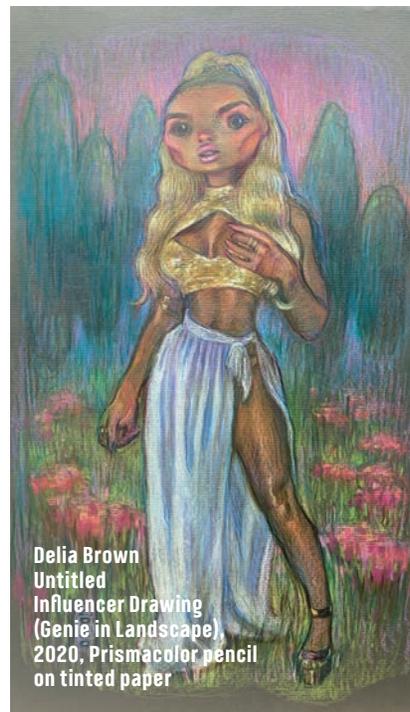
Ibuki Kuramochi
Matrix
(Still 1), 2022, video still
(LADIES ROOM)

“Working in the visual arts for more than 20 years, I have seen firsthand how women and nonbinary artists are not being exhibited, collected, researched or written about like their male counterparts,” Wharton tells the *L.A. Weekly*. “I have conducted over 4,000 studio visits with artists in Los Angeles, a city rich with artistic talent, yet lacking in opportunities for women and nonbinary artists.” In December 2018, Wharton opened Ladies' Room to provide a platform to help counter this disparity.

Ladies' Room operates out of a small space in downtown's historic Bendix Building — a hub of artist studios, galleries and creative spaces — but the gal-

lery itself has maintained an online-only presence since 2021, alternating between deep dive solo shows and broader thematic exhibitions, with an ever-growing biennial series called *GARDEN* dedicated to the food justice space. “The gallery was started during a dark political time, where many women were feeling a sort of helplessness and hopelessness,” she says. “I was like, ‘fuck this, let's change the things we can.’”

Wharton set out to champion a project that could really make a difference. To date, the gallery has shown almost 200 artists, placing a number of their works in institutional and private collections, attracting press attention and launching further



Delia Brown
Untitled
Influencer Drawing
(Genie in Landscape),
2020, PrismaColor pencil
on tinted paper

opportunities for them, sometimes in the form of other exhibitions, and sometimes in tandem with her robust [art consulting practice](#). Some of her artists like Felice Grodin and Kristin Posehn pursue practices that include digital artworks or NFTs,

as well as a lot of video and film artists, but at the core of the program you'll find painting and ceramics, textile and sculpture, and an abiding love of texture, color, nature and embodied self-possession.

“I'm not doing this in a vacuum,” says Wharton. “So many people in L.A. have worked to support and champion female and nonbinary artists. Projects like [Micol Hebron's Gallery Tally](#) and Kim Schoenstadt's [NowBeHere](#) directory shine light on the incredible wealth of talent in this realm. I've worked with both of these brilliant artists, and see them continue to bolster the dialogue around women and nonbinary people making art.”

While intentional practices like Wharton's do make a difference, as a newly released Artsy study reveals, there is so much more work to be done — with women artists accounting for just under ten percent of art market sales in 2022, and non-binary artists less than one percent. Those numbers drop to six percent and zero, respectively, in the auction results. And believe it or not, those figures represent an improvement over previous years. “But I am happy to share,” says Wharton, “that with an idea, a lot of research, and a genuine love for art and artists, important progress can transpire for all involved.”

Ladies' Room has two exhibitions currently online through May 27. *WORK* features objects by Becca Van K, Felice

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JOJO ABOT
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 (NGIWUNKULUNKULU),
 2018, Digital Video, Color
 and Sound, 3 minutes 42
 seconds

Grodin, Karen Kuo, Meghann Mccrory, Nicki Voss, Rebecca Kaufman, Renata Daina, Samira Yamin, Shiyuan Xu, Stephanie Robison that, in an array of media and idioms of functionality, elevate labor as a powerful element of both creativity and society. The artists' assertively intensive processes demonstrate an obsessive

dedication to cutting, drawing, carving, stitching, and weaving complex patterns representing qualities of skill, craft and attention.

Meike Legler: *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies) is a solo presentation of hand-sewn compositions that thoughtfully reference tropes of modern abstract



Kat Richards
In the Poppies,
 2022, Monoprint

painting, within an intentional reframing of textile as dismissible "women's work." After moving to Los Angeles from Berlin

and London, with a wealth of education and experience in the garment and couture sector, she began incorporating more unconventional, adventurous materials like automotive tarps and faux fur into her elaborate "paintings," further blurring arbitrary gender-associated categories of materiality and visual language.

"This planet has challenges," says Wharton. "I believe that art, artists, artisans and other creatives will save us all. It's a cultural imperative that artists and artworkers continue to cultivate transformative experiences. We need art to expand consciousness, to heal and to bridge divides across cultures. If my work can open minds and enrich culture while helping artists to attain exposure to curators and collectors who support their practice, I've done my job."

For more information visit ladiesroomla.org, and follow them on IG: [@ladiesroomla](https://www.instagram.com/ladiesroomla). 📸

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LEGAL NOTICES

ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME Case No. 23CHCP00033
Superior Court of California County of Los Angeles located at: 9425 Penfield Avenue, Department F51, Chatsworth, CA 91311. Filed On January 27, 2023 - in the matter of petitioner **JULIA NAVAREZ GARCIA**. It is hereby ordered that all persons interested in the above-entitled matter of change of name appear before the above-entitled court as follows to show cause why the petition for change of name should not be granted. Court Date: APRIL 5, 2023, time: 8:30 a.m., Located at Chatsworth Courthouse 9425 Penfield Avenue, Department F51, Chatsworth, CA 91311. And a petition for change of name having been duly filed with the clerk of this Court, and it appearing from said petition that said petitioner(s) desire(s) to have her name changed from: **JULIA NAVAREZ GARCIA to JULIA GARCIA NEVAREZ**. Now therefore, it is hereby ordered that all persons interested in the said matter of change of name appear as indicated herein above then and there to show cause why the petition for change of name should not be granted. It is further ordered that a copy of this order be published in the LA Weekly, a newspaper of general circulation for the County of Los Angeles, once a week for four (4) successive weeks prior to the date set for hearing of said petition. Set to publish 2.23.23, 3.2.23, 3.9.23, 3.16.23. Dated: February 15, 2023.



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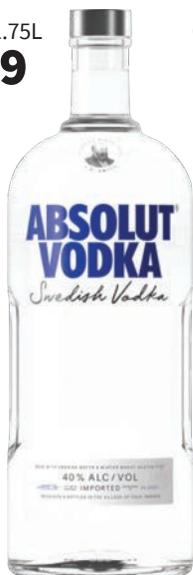
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