

Dualities abound in spring

MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN
THE WASHINGTON POST

Good and evil, love and hate — these are perennial themes of cinema. But this spring, the dualities seem sharper, at times with literal on-screen twinning. Robert De Niro (“The Alto Knights”) and Michael B. Jordan (“Sinners”) are each playing double roles.

Then there’s the double helix of existence itself, threaded through the fabric of several forthcoming movies: not just life and death, but undead, if you will.

From ghosts and vampires to reincarnation and a sleeplike death — I’m looking at you, “Snow White” — the idea of something beyond the grave, or maybe between this world and the next, pops up again and again. Characters that take a licking and keep on ticking are there too, in “Novocaine” and “Mission: Impossible — The Final Reckoning.”

That last one is arguably the apotheosis of this idea. As hinted at in the film’s subtitle, and a line spoken by Tom Cruise’s character in the trailer — “I need you to trust me — one last time” — this could be the last hurrah for a franchise and a character that just won’t die.

Opening dates are subject to change.

‘My Dead Friend Zoe’

Sonequa Martin-Green plays an Afghanistan war veteran whose grief over the death of a platoon mate (Natalie Morales) is made palpable by her late friend’s haunting presence. The feature directorial debut of Kyle Hausmann-Stokes, the dark dramedy was inspired by the filmmaker’s own experience of loss while serving as a paratrooper in Iraq. Also with Morgan Freeman and Ed Harris. In theaters now.

‘Mickey 17’

“Parasite” writer-director Bong Joon-ho adapts a 2022 sci-fi novel by Edward Ashton about Mickey Barnes (Robert Pattinson), a space colonist whose high-risk job as an “expendable” causes him to experience his own gruesome death, over and over again. After each demise, a fresh copy of Mickey’s body is 3D-printed, with all his memories intact until, by mistake, two versions of him unwittingly come face-to-face with each other. March 7.

‘Black Bag’

Fresh off their ghost story “Presence,” filmmaker Steven Soderbergh and writer David Koepf return to the tone they set with 2022’s cyber-thriller “Kimi.” The new film revolves around married American spooks (Michael Fassbender and Cate Blanchett) who become cat and mouse when the wife is suspected of betraying the nation, with potentially violent consequences, and her husband is assigned to terminate her rogue mission. March 14.

‘Novocaine’

Jack Quaid (“The Boys”) plays Nathan Caine, an average Joe with a congenital insensitivity to pain (yes, it’s a real thing). When his girlfriend (Amber Midthunder) is taken hostage, Nathan attempts to take on the bad guys himself. That and a quippy screenplay position him in superhero territory. Helloo, Deadpool. March 14.

‘Snow White’

Disney continues its string of
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POPNOTES/COLUMN



Jake-ann Jones stars as Cece in Bridgett Davis’ “Naked Acts.” The 1992 film has been digitally restored and remastered by Lightbox Film Center at University of the Arts (Philadelphia) in collaboration with Milestone Film, with support from Ron and Suzanne Naples.

Saved from obscurity

‘Naked Acts’ an excellent example of Independent Black cinema

PHILIP MARTIN
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

When you think about American Black cinema, it’s not just the blockbusters or critical darlings that define its legacy — it’s also the overlooked, the underfunded, and the nearly forgotten. For every “Do the Right Thing” or “Moonlight,” there’s a “Killer of Sheep” or a “Daughters of the Dust,” films that nearly slipped through the cracks, to be rediscovered years later as essential works of Black storytelling.

The latest rediscovery is Bridgett M. Davis’ “Naked Acts” (1996), an introspective exploration of Black female identity, self-image and sexuality. Initially met with little fanfare, it now

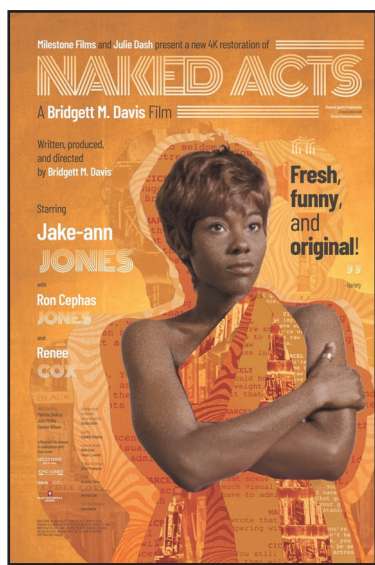
stands among many underappreciated films that challenge industry norms and expand the scope of what Black cinema can be.

While “Killer of Sheep” was prevented from having a real theatrical release in 1978 by music issue clearance issues — director Charles Burnett did not secure clearances for his soundtrack music because he was a graduate student at UCLA, and “Killer of Sheep” was essentially his thesis film. He didn’t envision the movie being shown outside an academic setting, and even if he had obtained proper licensing for songs from artists such as Dinah Washington, Paul Robeson and Earth, Wind & Fire, using them would have been prohibitively expensive.

On the other hand, Julie Dash’s “Daughters of the Dust” (1991) was the first feature directed by a Black woman to get a theatrical release in the U.S. But its poetic structure and lack of a traditional narrative made it difficult for Hollywood to market, and it only emerged from relative obscurity after Beyoncé alluded to its experimental storytelling in her video album “Lemonade” (2016).

One could program a fine film series featuring movies by Black creators that only found purchase in the culture after years of lying fallow: In addition to “Killer of Sheep” and “Daughters in the Dust,” one could program Cher-

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FILM SCENE/OPINION

Experimental filmmaker brings show to Spa city



Experimental filmmaker Roger Beebe brought his experimental film show to Hot Springs for the Arkansas School of Math, Science and the Arts. It featured several 16 mm projectors. (Special to the Democrat-Gazette/AI Topich)

AT TOPICH

SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

When it comes to movies, I think I’ve seen just about everything the medium has to offer. I’ve seen nearly 6,000 films. I’ve seen features, shorts, experimental cinema. I’ve seen bands perform a concert while a film plays in the background. I’ve seen movies screen while people give lectures over the moving images. I thought I had experienced every possible configuration of sight and sound on celluloid. Or so I thought. Recently, I went to a film screening in Hot Springs and was gobsmacked by what I witnessed. And I’m still having difficulty processing it.

Last month, the Arkansas

School for Mathematics, Science, and the Arts (ASMSA) in Hot Springs invited experimental filmmaker Roger Beebe to perform his traveling 16 mm, multi-projector showcase. The event was sponsored by the school’s art department and hosted by Dan Anderson, a digital arts instructor at the school. Anderson teaches an array of media classes, ranging from film and photography to graphic design. He even lets his students get somewhat experimental by letting them shoot on Super 8 movie cameras.

Anderson explains how this event, which was free to the pub-

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EXHIBIT/OPINION

‘Rivera’s Paris’ shows his, compatriots’ works abroad

SEAN CLANCY
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

“Rivera’s Paris,” the new exhibit at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, does a remarkable job of telling the story of the time when Diego Rivera was laying the groundwork that would turn him into a star and one of Mexico’s most beloved artists.

The exhibit places works by Rivera in conversation with pieces by his friends Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani and Tsuguharu Foujita. There are also works by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, Paul Cézanne, Dario de Regoyos and others who were influential in Rivera’s development.

‘Rivera’s Paris’

When: Through May 18
Where: Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, 501 East Ninth St., Little Rock
Hours: Tuesday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Wednesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m.
Admission: Free (501) 372-4000
arkmfa.org

The show, assembled with works from the museum’s stash along with those on loan from 12

other museums and private collections, features 45 paintings, drawings and a few photographs. The centerpiece is “Dos Mujeres (Two Women),” the 1914 cubist masterpiece Rivera painted while living in Paris. It was donated to the museum 70 years ago by Abby Rockefeller Mauzé, daughter of John D. Rockefeller Jr., and sister to future Arkansas Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller. The painting, one of 13 works by Rivera in the show, has been a jewel in the museum’s crown ever since.

“Rivera’s Paris” brings the viewer into the fertile world the ambitious Rivera encountered

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Installation view of “Rivera’s Paris” at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, which is on display through May 18. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Sean Clancy)

Baby Blues

Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

HOROSCOPES BY HOLIDAY

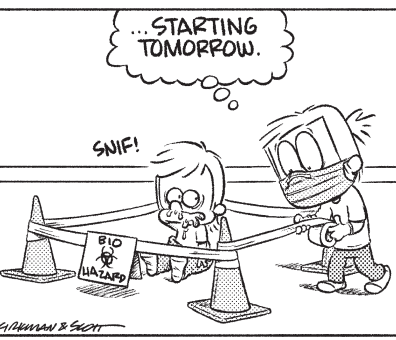
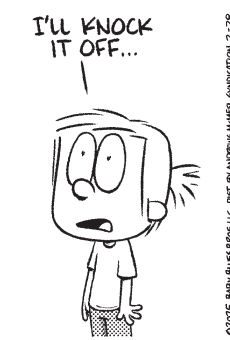
OPINION



HOLIDAY MATHIS

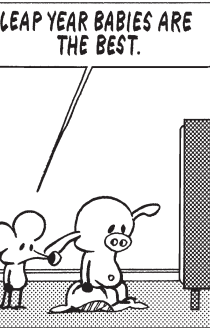
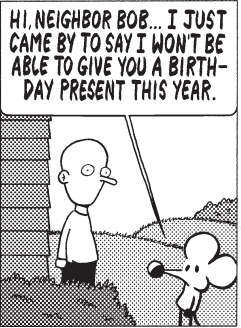
nancial constraints. But fresh creative influences will shift your perspective, revealing a new approach. LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23): You're not someone who coasts on easy contentment, and that's OK. Happiness isn't always the goal. You feel things deeply. You care. It doesn't exactly feel buoyant, but it's a valid way of being. SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21): What matters is the task at hand. Finish what you need to finish. It doesn't have to happen perfectly or beautifully, but it has to happen. Breathe and take the next small step. You don't have to solve everything, just this one thing. SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): One moment isn't the whole story. You might be stressed for a beat, but there are many more beats in the song. If you're the stressed person, you're also the person who dreams, who loves deeply, who pushes forward even when it's hard. CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Sometimes it seems like only you know how to best serve. Those close may not be aware of the nuances you deliver for maximum comfort and support. The pride you take in caregiving is one of the many wonderful things about you. AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Sometimes you have the stuff first and you look for the right container to keep it in. Today the container will come first. The empty box, the blank page ... decide how to fill it before the world decides for you. PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): The world offers itself to your imagination. Your inner world is a place where you can make anything happen. As for the other realities that are harder to change, take charge where you can, and while you're at it, customize it to you. Why shouldn't it be?

Happy birthday. A year when you'll do as the poet Mary Oliver suggest: "You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves." ARIES (March 21-April 19): Shadows aren't objects themselves; they're evidence of what exists. You can't change a shadow by shifting it, only by moving the light or the matter. Today, you'll bring clarity by focusing on what is, not the illusion it creates. TAURUS (April 20-May 20): Consistency doesn't have to mean perfection or intensity. Adjust to solve the problem at hand. Flip the rigid "grind-it-out" mindset and think in more fluid and forgiving terms. Emphasize adaptability. GEMINI (May 21-June 21): The logical options presented to you each have merit, to the extent that none is better than the last, only different. Let this free you. It doesn't matter what you choose today; it only matters that you do. CANCER (June 22-July 22): You'll have the challenge that excites your mind and engages your heart, pulling out your best ideas and sharpest instincts. The satisfaction will come not just from succeeding but from knowing you're working in harmony with your unique strengths. LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): The same words delivered with warmth and sincerity can build bridges, but spoken with coldness or impatience, they can burn them. Your tone, pacing and presence have the power to make a simple message feel like an invitation or a dismissal. VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): What you want to create or accomplish may feel out of reach, especially with your fi-



Pearls Before Swine

Stephan Pastis



Dustin

Steve Kelley & Jeff Parker



Arkansas postcard past

By Ray Hanley

Jonesboro, circa 1900: John W. Roy built his dry goods and grocery store in front of the railroad tracks in Nettleton outside Jonesboro. Roy was born in 1856 and died in 1925. Today, Nettleton is part of Jonesboro.

Send questions or comments to Arkansas Postcard Past, P.O. Box 2221, Little Rock, AR 72203

Notes

Continued from Page 1E yl Dunye's "The Watermelon Woman" (1996), about a Black lesbian filmmaker researching a forgotten Black actress; Bill Gunn's 1973 avant-garde horror film "Ganja & Hess," remade by Spike Lee as "Da Sweet Blood of Jesus" in 2014; Melvin Van Peebles' political Blaxploitation film "Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song" (1971); Leslie Harris' feature about a young woman navigating life in Brooklyn, "Just Another Girl on the I.R.T." (1992); Marlon Rigg's fierce documentary about Black gay identity "Tongues Untied" (1989) and Kathleen Collins' semi-autobiographical "Losing Ground" (1982), about a philosophy professor unhappily married to a struggling (and maybe second-rate) painter (not coincidentally, Gunn, the playwright, novelist, screenwriter, actor and filmmaker, who was one of the most important and most overlooked figures in Black cinema) who becomes entangled with an actor/theologian she meets while while researching a paper on aesthetic experiences. Like Collins, Davis is an academic, and when she first conceived of "Naked Acts" in the early '90s, she took Collins' film as an inspiration, as she set out to craft a film from the perspective of a middle class, intellectual Black woman. Both films center on a Black woman's gaze — that is, they aren't about how others see Black women, but about how Black women see themselves. Sara, the protagonist of "Losing Ground," grapples with existential questions about pleasure and passion. Cece (Jake-ann Jones) in "Naked Acts" is a film actress, navigating her relationship with her body and the pressures of the film industry. She is the daughter of former Blaxploitation star Lydia Love (Patricia DeArcy) and the granddaughter of a revered theatre actress (Maranantha Quick). She has been estranged from her mother for years, burdened by childhood trauma and body image struggles. The film begins as Cece with confronting Lydia about their past, attempting to reconcile years of pain and neglect. Meanwhile, Cece is set to make her acting debut in an ultra-low-budget independent film, marking her somewhat reluctant entry into the family tradition. Her anxieties increase as she's forced to deal with the domineering producer Marcel (John McKie), and her on-again, off-again boyfriend Joel (Ron Cephas Jones), a stage director who is also making his debut as a film director. The film within the film is about a Black male artist and his female models. Cece plays one of the models and the script requires her to pose nude, something she is deeply uncomfortable with. Her body image issues are complicated by the fact she has recently lost 57 pounds. Still, instead of walking away from the production, Cece attempts to negotiate



Jake-ann Jones is Cece and Ron Cephas Jones is Joel in Bridgett Davis' "Naked Acts." The 1992 film has been digitally restored and remastered by Lightbox Film Center at University of the Arts (Philadelphia) in collaboration with Milestone Film, with support from Ron and Suzanne Naples.

her boundaries, revealing more significant questions about agency, exploitation and artistic power dynamics. Having recently lost 57 pounds, Cece hopes for newfound confidence, only to discover that her more profound struggle is not with her appearance but with the control others seek to exert over her body. Like "Losing Ground," "Naked Acts" is a naturalistic movie that operates on a symbolic level, with dialogue that occasionally runs to emphatic declarations and each major character representing a rand archetype. Cece's family history is steeped in generational conflict over Black artistry and respectability. Her grandmother disapproved of Lydia's sexually provocative roles, insisting on artistic "integrity" as a counter to racist stereotypes. Free-thinking Lydia rejected those constraints, seeing the demand for "respectability" as just another form of oppression. This ideological clash has left Cece with a fractured sense of self. In one pivotal flashback, a young Cece, having been taken from her grandmother's care, is sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. This event deepens her unease with her body and its representation. Meanwhile the film's male characters reinforce themes of exploitation and control. Cece's father is absent; her abuser is a reminder of past trauma; Marcel is an authoritarian, using his power as a producer to manipulate Cece's vulnerability; while Joel, despite his artistic intentions, still expects his girl Cece to submit to his vision. Each man, in his own way, seeks to define her, mold her, possess her — forcing Cece into a battle over who gets to control the narrative of her body and identity. As she fights to reclaim herself, we see the weight of history pressing against her, the suffocating lineage of men and expectations that have dictated her life. It is in this confrontation — between self-possession and submission, between past trauma and future possibility — that Cece pushes back, questioning whether directors and actresses function

under the same hierarchical dynamic. A turning point in Cece's journey is her friendship with Diana (Renee Cox), a feminist photographer hired to take stills for movie. Diana introduces Cece to a new way of thinking about representation — one rooted in collaboration and empowerment rather than objectification. Cece initially balks at Diana's seminude portraits of Black women, but through their conversations, she begins to reclaim agency over her body and its image. Diana's statement, "The camera knows when you're faking it," resonates deeply with Cece, prompting her to rethink her role in the film and the broader context of her life. "Naked Acts" is ultimately about self-definition in a world that seeks to impose identities on Black women. Cece's journey is one of reclaiming ownership — not just over her body, but over her story. Davis, one of the few Black female filmmakers of her time, uses Cece's narrative to advocate for a cinema where Black women control their representation. The film's meta-commentary on power, image-making, and agency remains strikingly relevant today, making "Naked Acts" a pioneering work in independent Black cinema. And it went virtually unseen when it was released. The movie industry's narrow view of what Black films could be — favoring narratives that catered to white audiences or aligned with commercial trends — kept Davis from securing distribution. So she distributed the film herself, ensuring it reached audiences through alternate channels. It played festivals, had a brief theatrical run, and then disappeared, a casualty of a system uninterested in preserving Black women's artistic contributions. So this layered, introspective examination of body image, artistic agency and the politics of representation, was almost lost to history — until now. Last year, "Naked Acts" has truly had a second life: a theatrical run in 25 U.S. cities including New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, and a dozen screenings in festivals and venues throughout Europe and Canada. Thanks to

the efforts of Milestone Film and Video in collaboration with Kino Lorber, "Naked Acts" was released on DVD and Blu-Ray on Feb. 18. The rediscovery and restoration of "Naked Acts" speaks to the shift in how Black cinema is valued. Milestone Film and Video, co-founded by Dennis Doros and Amy Heller, has a long history of rescuing marginalized films from oblivion. Their work in restoring and distributing classics like Burnett's "Killer of Sheep" and Kent Mackenzie's "The Exiles" demonstrates their commitment to expanding the cinematic canon beyond the narrow confines of Hollywood's dominant narratives. Their collaboration with Kino Lorber, another powerhouse in independent film distribution, has made "Naked Acts" accessible to a new generation of viewers who may never have had the chance to experience its brilliance. "Naked Acts" is available in the usual places, and here: kinolorber.com/product/naked-acts-1). The rediscovery of "Naked Acts" is more than just a long-overdue recognition of Davis' work — it's a testament to the resilience of Black female filmmakers who have been overlooked, underfunded, and yet still persist. Like "Losing Ground," "Daughters of the Dust," and "Killer of Sheep," "Naked Acts" was nearly lost to history, its absence a reminder of how many stories have been silenced by an industry that dictates which narratives deserve preservation. But not all great films are rediscovered. Some remain lost, their reels gathering dust in forgotten archives, their voices unheard. The fact that "Naked Acts" has resurfaced speaks to a shift in how we value Black cinema, but it also serves as a reminder of the many films that may never get a second chance. The work of rescuing and amplifying these films is far from over, and if history has taught us anything, it's that we cannot wait for the industry to recognize their worth — sometimes we have to do it ourselves. Email: pmartin@adgnewsroom.com

Art

Continued from Page 1E when he left Mexico for Europe, enthralled by the modernist works of Cézanne and encouraged by Gerardo Murillo, his teacher at Academia San Carlos in Mexico City, who had returned from Europe with reports of the groundbreaking art being made there. Rivera traveled to Spain for the first time in 1907, and Spain is where "Rivera's Paris" begins. The show opens with a bang as viewers are greeted first by two large, eye-popping paintings by Spanish artists. On the left is "Girls of Burriana (Falleras)," a grand oil on canvas from 1910-1911 by Hermengildo Anglada Camarasa that shows three otherworldly, colorfully dressed women and an elaborately adorned horse. On the right is Ignacio Zuloaga y Zabaleta's stunning "Lucienne Bréval as Carmen" from 1908, which shows the opera singer Bréval smiling in a magnificently embroidered shawl. It's the kind of large, figurative painting that can stop someone in their tracks. Also included is Sorolla's "The Blind Man of Toledo," in which the Spanish master captures the light and landscape with loose, beautifully made brushstrokes. Cézanne, the influential French impressionist (Picasso called him "the father of us all") who died three years before Rivera's trip to Europe, was a guiding light for the young artist. There's a story told in one of the texts accompanying the exhibit of Rivera, who arrived in Paris in 1909, standing transfixed in the rain outside a gallery at the sight of several Cézanne paintings in the window. Cézanne is duly represented by four pieces here, including "Farm at Montgerout" from 1898 and the leafy, light "Undergrowth," both of which should be familiar to regular visitors to the museum; and the sparse, abstract watercolor "Rock Profile Near the Caves Above Château Noir." There are several graphite drawings by Rivera, including his 1918 portrait of poet, novelist and filmmaker Jean Cocteau, who Rivera befriended while he and his common-law wife and fellow artist Angelina Beloff visited friends in a village on the Atlantic coast of France. "Montserrat," a bright, pointillist landscape from 1911, is a good example of how Rivera was exploring with paint as he sought his own style. By 1913, he had embraced cubism, and the groundbreaking movement is a crucial part of the exhibit. Rivera's pal Picasso is synonymous with cubism, and the show includes the Spaniard's moody, earthy-toned "Man with a Pipe." There is also Jean Metzinger's blocky "Cubist Landscape," and a hat-tip to the curators for including Beloff's fun, colorful "Still Life with Bottle." Rivera also tackled still



"Dos Mujeres" ("Two Women"), a 1914 Cubist oil-on-canvas painting by Diego Rivera, is spotlighted in "Rivera's Paris," a current exhibit at the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts. (Special to the Democrat-Gazette/Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts)

lives in cubist form, including "Still Life, Mallorca" and "Still Life with Bread Knife," which both have an almost textile appearance even though they are done in oil. "Dos Mujeres," of course, is the exhibit's focal point. In it, Rivera depicts Beloff, who is standing, and their friend Alma Dolores Bastián, a fellow artist who lived with her husband in the same building as Beloff and Rivera in Paris and who is shown seated with a book in hand. You're likely familiar with the painting if you've ever visited the museum. Seeing it in this context, however, invites a closer look. There is a dog at the bottom and the Parisian cityscape can be seen in the background. Rivera's use of planes, sharp lines, angles and color is mesmerizing. By late 1920, Rivera left Paris and returned to Mexico. He became famous for his murals and was married, twice, to artist Frida Kahlo, whose star has probably eclipsed his in recent years (the tagline for the new exhibit is: "Before fame and Frida, there was Paris"). A sub-narrative of the exhibit is Rivera's relationship to the Rockefellers, and the importance of the donation 70 years ago of "Dos Mujeres." The decision to spotlight that painting, along with the assemblage of early works by Rivera and pieces by his cohort and influences, have resulted in an informative and rewarding exhibit, one that connects Arkansas, the museum and the early, formative years of one the 20th century's most important artists. Arkansas Democrat-Gazette Style Mail Arkansas Democrat-Gazette P.O. Box 2221 Little Rock, AR 72203 Style Fax (501) 372-4765

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