



K.C. ALFRED U-T

A HATS-OFF VICTORY

Luke List celebrates after edging out Will Zalatoris with a birdie on the first playoff hole to win the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines on Saturday. It's the golfer's first PGA Tour victory. For more coverage, see Sports, D1.

PRESS SLAYINGS HIGHLIGHT ELUSIVE JUSTICE

Expectations low though Mexico vows answers in journalists' killings

BY WENDY FRY, ALEXANDRA MENDOZA & TANIA NAVARRO

Even as journalists in dozens of cities across Mexico held vigils and demonstrations this past week to protest vicious killings of two of their colleagues, the threats against local Tijuana reporters continued to pour in on social media and in person.

"I know where this reporter lives. I know where his whole family lives," posted one Facebook commenter on a screengrab from a video from the scene of photojournalist Margarito Martínez Esquivel's Jan. 17 murder. The comment was about one of the reporters who had rushed to cover the fatal shooting of his colleague.

The siege of violence against local journalists — two of whom were fatally shot in front of their homes just days apart in Tijuana — has underscored the fragility of Mexico's democracy. It has also prompted widespread outrage and journalist-led protests against the impotency of the country's justice system and its longstanding cycle of brutality and impunity.

"The level of involvement by journalists all across the country this week is really something that I SEE SLAYINGS • A10

■ A10 • Reporter remembered for insightfulness, unique style.

SDSU DEAN'S TWEET RAISES DEBATE OVER ACADEMIC FREE SPEECH

BY GARY ROBBINS

In a 2016 essay about life in academia, Monica Casper said that "in a shallow Twitter zeitgeist" you need to speak in a nuanced way when talking to the public about hot-button issues.

She recently learned how ugly things can get if you choose to do otherwise.

Casper, dean of the College of Arts and Letters at San Diego State University, went on Twitter in December and made statements about conservatives that were anything but nuanced, leading to an angry backlash that included threats of violence against the campus.

She said: "Just so we're clear on the Right's agenda: racism good, abortion bad, money good, women bad, capitalism good, sustainability bad, stupidity good, science bad, power good, equality bad, white people good, nonwhite people bad." SEE SPEECH • A18

CALIF. TO PAY UP TO \$40,000 PER HOME FOR WILDFIRE RETROFITS

Three communities in East County selected by state for pilot project

BY JOSHUA EMERSON SMITH

Fearing wildfire, Jack Dillender has been doing everything within his budget to harden his three-bedroom house, which is nestled between the windswept, boulder-strewn hillsides of Dulzura. The rural hamlet, within 10 miles of the Mexico border, is among several nearby communities along state Route 94 routinely blasted by flames and dangerously intrusive embers.

The 42-year-old, who lives with his fiancée and her two children, said he's been slowly installing double-paned windows, as well as relentlessly chopping back vegetation on the 47-acre property.

The process has proven tremendously expensive and time consuming. However, he said, he's better off than many of his neighbors.

"A lot of the people are lower income; the houses are older, and



U-T FILE

Firefighters work to put out the Harris fire in Dulzura in October 2007. The 90,440-acre blaze killed eight people.

the properties are large," said Dillender, who somewhat ironically, works as a technician for Seamans servicing fire alarms and sprinkler systems in office buildings.

Now help could be on the way. California recently launched a novel \$100 million pilot program in collaboration with the Federal

Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, to pay for home retrofits in high-fire areas.

San Diego County has been chosen by state officials to spearhead the new initiative — doling out up to \$40,000 per home across 500 backcountry residences from Dulzura to Campo. Firefighting SEE WILDFIRES • A16

FINDING SCAMMERS OF JOBLESS BENEFITS IS CHALLENGE

California defrauded out of at least \$20B with little hope to recover it

BY GREG MORAN

It was a three-person operation based out of a compact, single-story home on Windsong Lane in Escondido — just one small piece of the massive fraud that scammed at least \$20 billion dollars in unemployment benefits intended for California workers who lost jobs because of the coronavirus pandemic.

But the year-long scheme conducted by the trio of Ryan Kubista, his wife Maereichelle Marquez and Kubista's mother Stacy Wright offers a glimpse into both how easy it was to hijack the funds, and the difficulties investigators face as they continue to pursue swindlers across the state through a network of local, state and federal task forces.

For most of 2020 through February 2021, the three filed at least 64 separate applications for pandemic unemployment benefits with the state. The money came largely from the federal government's coronavirus relief rescue packages that pumped trillions into the economy.

They used the names of in- SEE SCAM • A14

BRYCE MILLER Columnist

Trailblazer Jill Ellis 'weathered ... storms' to reshape American soccer

Anyone motoring north of the English Channel gateway city of Portsmouth reaches the village of Cowplain before the petrol gauge wiggles. It's a safe, understated community of 9,400 with bluish-brick buildings and well-manicured hedges. Streets are lined with pressed school uniforms and corner chip shops.

A girl routinely pierced the comforting calm behind one home, running back and forth with familial vengeance. Young Jillian Ellis, facing off with her

older brother Paul, would zig-zag toward a makeshift soccer goal with no fear.

Time and time again, the fists followed.

"We would play for hours in the backyard with a tennis ball, because sometimes we didn't have a football," Ellis said. "The tree and the flowerpot would be one goal post, a shoe and some-

thing else would be the other one. It invariably ended up in a fight.

"I mean, he's two and a half years older than me. We were (cartoon characters) 'Tom and Jerry.' There was a lot of mutual love and a lot of scraps. I held my own. I knocked a couple of his teeth out."

The story-punctuating laugh of Ellis, 55, underscored the root beginnings of a fiery competitive edge that fueled record-setting, back-to-back women's World Cup championships — in 2015 and '19.

Though the president of San Diego Wave FC grew up in a time and place where girls and women were not allowed to compete in organized soccer, she later became a third-team All-American at William & Mary despite receiving her first formal training at 16.

In spite of stop signs that sprouted like dandelions as a girl in soccer-crazed England, Jill Ellis became the leader who transformed UCLA into a three-time national finalist. SEE MILLER • A21



Jill Ellis



BUSINESS

DEVELOPMENT BATTLE

Five teams trying to wow San Diego leaders with plans to remake 48 acres in Midway District. C1

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ARTS

FORGING AHEAD

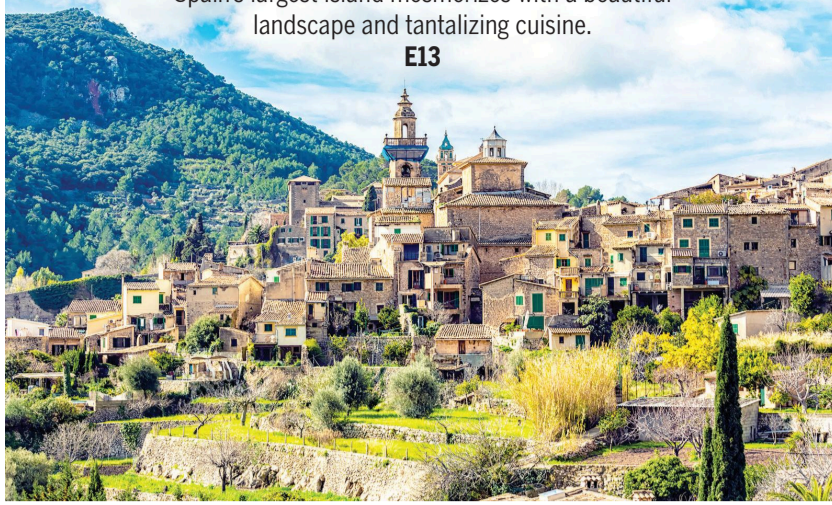
Mainly Mozart looks to the summer with vibrant programming. E2



TRAVEL

MAGIC OF MALLORCA

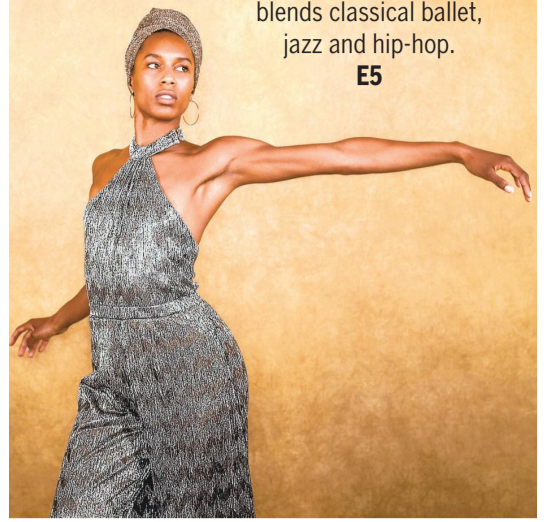
Spain's largest island mesmerizes with a beautiful landscape and tantalizing cuisine. E13



ARTS

MIXING IT UP

Kyle Abraham's A.I.M. blends classical ballet, jazz and hip-hop. E5



SECTION E

The San Diego Union-Tribune

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ART OF THE CITY

An occasional series about San Diego's diverse artistic community

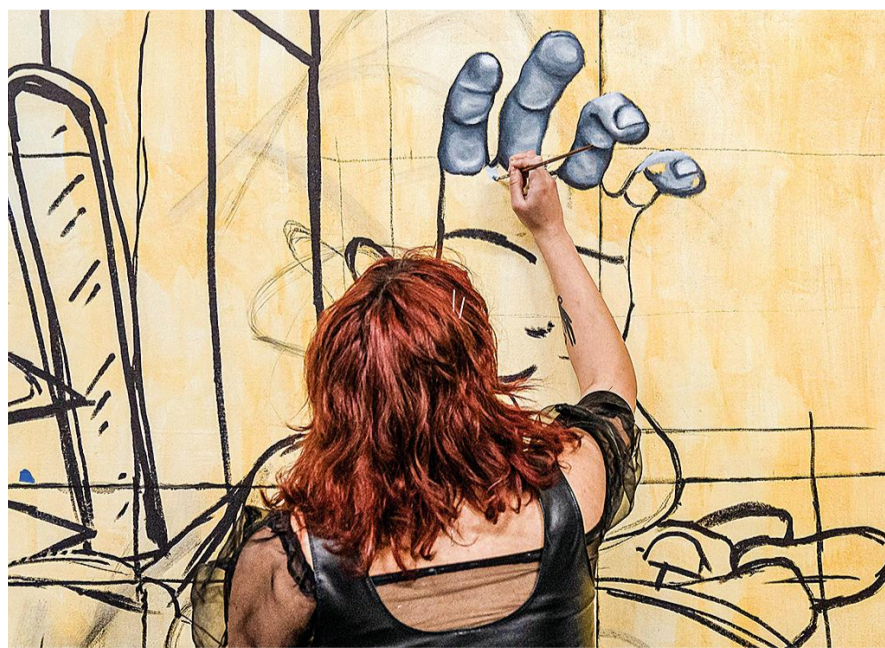


San Ysidro painter **Vanessa Rishel** channels religious iconography and anime influences into a singular style

BY SETH COMBS

For as long as artists have been producing art, religious iconography has been a mainstay. From the prehistoric cave paintings in Lascaux, France, to the contemporary works of artists such as Aleksandar Todorovic and Nadia Waheed, the practice of art as a means of representing spiritual devotion is as old as the practice itself.

Standing in front of one of her paintings, local artist Vanessa Rishel, whose pronouns are she/they, does their best to explain what it was that inspired them to produce it. The painting in question, "Our Actions Are Orchestrated From Above (Our Strings Entwined)," is hanging at their studio space in Bread & Salt, where they just finished a multi-month residency. In stark black-and-white oils and acrylics,



the painting depicts crass marionettes of various religious icons including an angel, a Mexican-inspired calaca and, in the background, what appears to be Joseph speaking to a pregnant Mary.

"I think the root of all my work is trying to find a sense of reality, so there is a lot of iconography," says Rishel, who says that a lot of their work from the past two years had a lot to do with living in the Church Lofts apartments in downtown San Diego. "It used to be a Baptist church in the early 1900s, so being quarantined there was a really interesting experience."

As is the case with the other pieces in Rishel's studio, "Our Actions Are Orchestrated From Above" is surrounded by a frenzy of notes and doodles written out on crumpled pieces of paper and receipts. Some are conceptual blueprints of the work itself, but some of the notes are broad, existential musings on life itself.

"A flood unleashed by an angry god." "God calls out taken to an extreme"

SEE RISHEL • E10

Artist Vanessa Rishel (pictured at top with her work) paints on a canvas that hangs on a wall at Bread & Salt in Barrio Logan.

ARIANA DREHSLER PHOTOS

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ARTS



La Jolla Playhouse's 2022 Without Walls Festival will feature "La Bulle" from Corpus, featuring the clownlike character Pierrot, a mime, dancer and artist.

ROBERT DELESKIE

THEATER NOTEBOOK

Without Walls Festival returns

La Jolla Playhouse unveils some of the site-specific, immersive and interactive shows that will be part of this April's event

BY PAM KRAGEN

La Jolla Playhouse has announced the first nine of more than 20 international and local shows planned for its 2022 Without Walls Festival this spring.

Here's a look at some of the site-specific, immersive and interactive shows that will be presented in the Arts District at Liberty Station from April 21 to 24. More will be announced in the coming months. Tickets will range from free to \$20. For more details, visit lajollaplayhouse.org/without-walls.

"Ants" from Polyglot Theatre, Australia: Previously featured at the 2015 and 2019 WOW fest with its interactive children's shows "We Built This City" and "Boats," Polyglot returns with "Ants," which brings three giant ants together with children to figure out what to do with a giant trail of breadcrumbs. Children will help the ants transform a public space with lines and patterns. The production will feature Inlet Dance Theatre.

"Ascension" from San Diego Opera: Two female opera singers will sing a cappella choral pieces as they walk through the parks and historic areas of Liberty Station. As they walk, their attire will transform, taking them from early 20th century suffragette to early 21st century modern American women. The songs, written by composer Melissa Dunphy and librettist Jacqueline Goldfinger, include "Halcyon Days," about finding hope in the depth of despair, and "Set Myself Free," about the freedom women found in America, beginning with the right to vote.

"Black Séance" from Blindspot Collective, San Diego: Returning from the 2019 WOW Fest at Liberty Station, this San Diego-based site-specific troupe will perform a show set in a New Orleans-style bar, where a bartender-magician tells his mysterious family history and conjures up images and stories of his Black cultural heroes, including Frederick Douglass, Josephine Baker and James Baldwin, as well as Eartha Kitt and Redd Foxx.

"La Bulle" from Corpus, Canada: Last seen at WOW in 2015 with its amusing show "A Flock of Flyers," Corpus returns with this solo show featuring the clownlike character Pierrot, a mime, dancer and artist, performing a show about solitude, dreams and social distancing inside a giant snow-globe-like bubble.

The Frontera Project from Tijuana Hace Teatro, Mexico, & New Feet Productions, New York City: The Frontera Project is an interactive, bilingual theater experience created and performed by a company of Mexican and U.S. artists. They use theater, music,



WHITE NIGHT

The WOW Festival will feature the nighttime projection mapping show "Monuments" from Craig Walsh.

movement and play to engage the audience in a compassionate conversation about life at the U.S.-Mexico Border. Its mission is to create the possibility for recognition across differences of perspective, identity and experience.

"Lessons in Temperament" from Outside the March, Canada: Writer-performer-musician James Smith will perform this one-man play about four neuro-diverse brothers, told through the art and science of piano tuning. James and his brothers have dealt with obsessive-compulsive disorder, autism, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. He tells their story as he tunes a piano onstage, a metaphor for how all humans are tuned differently.

"Monuments" from Craig Walsh, Australia: This outdoor site-specific nighttime projection installation will transform trees into sculptural monuments as a way of challenging the traditional expectations associated with public monuments and the selective history they represent.

"On Her Shoulders We Stand" from TuYo Theatre, San Diego: This walk-through, immersive theatrical installation, which will first be presented in February with Turnkey Theatre in Barrio Logan, tells the story of Latina women in the U.S. during World War II. Audience members will hear the hidden stories of Latina women who, although not accepted as Americans during the 1940s, still joined the war effort at home.

SDUSD 2022 Honors Theatre Devised Project, San Diego: La Jolla Playhouse and visual and performing arts teachers in the San Diego Unified School District are collaborating on an original play that will be devised by 33 high school students.

'Sapience' opening postponed one week

Moxie and TuYo theaters have postponed the opening night of their January production "Sapience." Since early January, local theater companies have postponed six full productions and two new play festivals.

Diana Burbano's "Sapience" was scheduled to make its world premiere on Jan. 26, but due to concerns related to the Omicron surge, the companies decided to push the opening back a week. Performances will run Feb. 3 through 20 at Moxie Theatre.

The company will also offer a filmed version of the play for streaming at scheduled times on Feb. 12, 15, 16 and 19 for ticket buyers who would feel safer watching the show from home. Details on the streaming dates and the play can be found at moxietheatre.com.

San Diego Rep screens 'Picasso'

San Diego Repertory Theatre is hosting an encore presentation of a filmed version of Herbert Siguenza's solo play "A Weekend With Pablo Picasso" through Feb. 6.

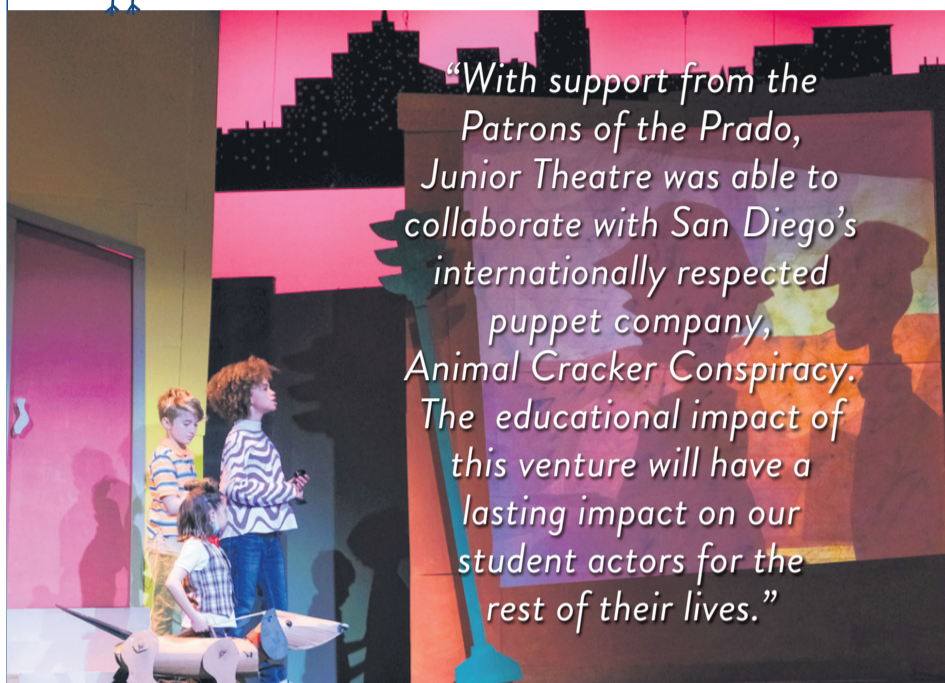
Siguenza's play made its world premiere at the Rep in 2010. In 2020, original stage director Todd Salovey and Tim Powell turned the stage play into a feature-length movie that was filmed in locations around San Diego and presented for on-demand screenings. Siguenza stars as Picasso, who paints, sculpts, tells stories, dances and clowns during a week-end on the southern coast of France in 1957.

Tickets are being sold on a "pay what you can" basis, ranging from \$15 to \$250. To order, visit sdrep.org.

pam.kragen@sduniontribune.com

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