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Newsletter: Essential Arts | MOCA and the Marciano show two ways to handle a museum union drive



Los Angeles Times

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Workers from the Marciano Art Foundation protest the art space's sudden closing last month in the wake of a unionization drive. (Genaro Molina/Los Angeles Times)

By LAURIE OCHOA, CAROLINA A. MIRANDA

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6 AM



Aaaand we're back, with a co-production brought to you by arts and entertainment editor **Laurie Ochoa** and staff writer **Carolina A. Miranda**, featuring all of the week's essential arts news — along with expensive bananas.

One union, two museums

We'll start with **Carolina Miranda**'s report on MOCA: Over the last month, workers at two L.A. museums have announced union drives: the **Marciano Art Foundation** and the **Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles**. The journey [ended very differently at each site](#). On Friday afternoon, the Marciano sent out a statement that it would close permanently, while MOCA

announced that it would voluntarily recognize the new union. “We’re taking this step to come together as one team, one MOCA,” said the museum’s director **Klaus Biesenbach**.



The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. (Francine Orr / Los Angeles Times)

Laurie Ochoa takes it from here, with roundups on music, art, dance and theater:

The power of music

[One of the most emotional moments](#) in Noah Baumbach’s “**Marriage Story**” comes courtesy of musical theater icon **Stephen Sondheim** when **Adam Driver**, as one half of the divorcing couple at the heart of the story, turns to song to tell friends about his breakup experience. “Of all the show tunes in musical theater history,” writes Times reporter **Ashley Lee**, “he sings ‘**Being Alive**’ — a choice that, as most Broadway fans will catch, actually makes the **Netflix** movie even more layered, profound and heartbreaking.” (Bonus: Lee cites the great former Times theater critic **Dan Sullivan**.)



Adam Driver in “Marriage Story” on Netflix. (Netflix)

Times contributor **Tim Greiving** talks with composer **Randy Newman** about his score for “**Toy Story 4**” — and how, “after years of being ignored by directors of live-action dramas, this year he brought his nostalgic pathos to **Baumbach’s ‘Marriage Story.’**” [Newman told Greiving](#): “Both the pictures I did sort of tug at the heartstrings.”



“Marriage Story” director Noah Baumbach works with composer Randy Newman on the score for the film. (Netflix)

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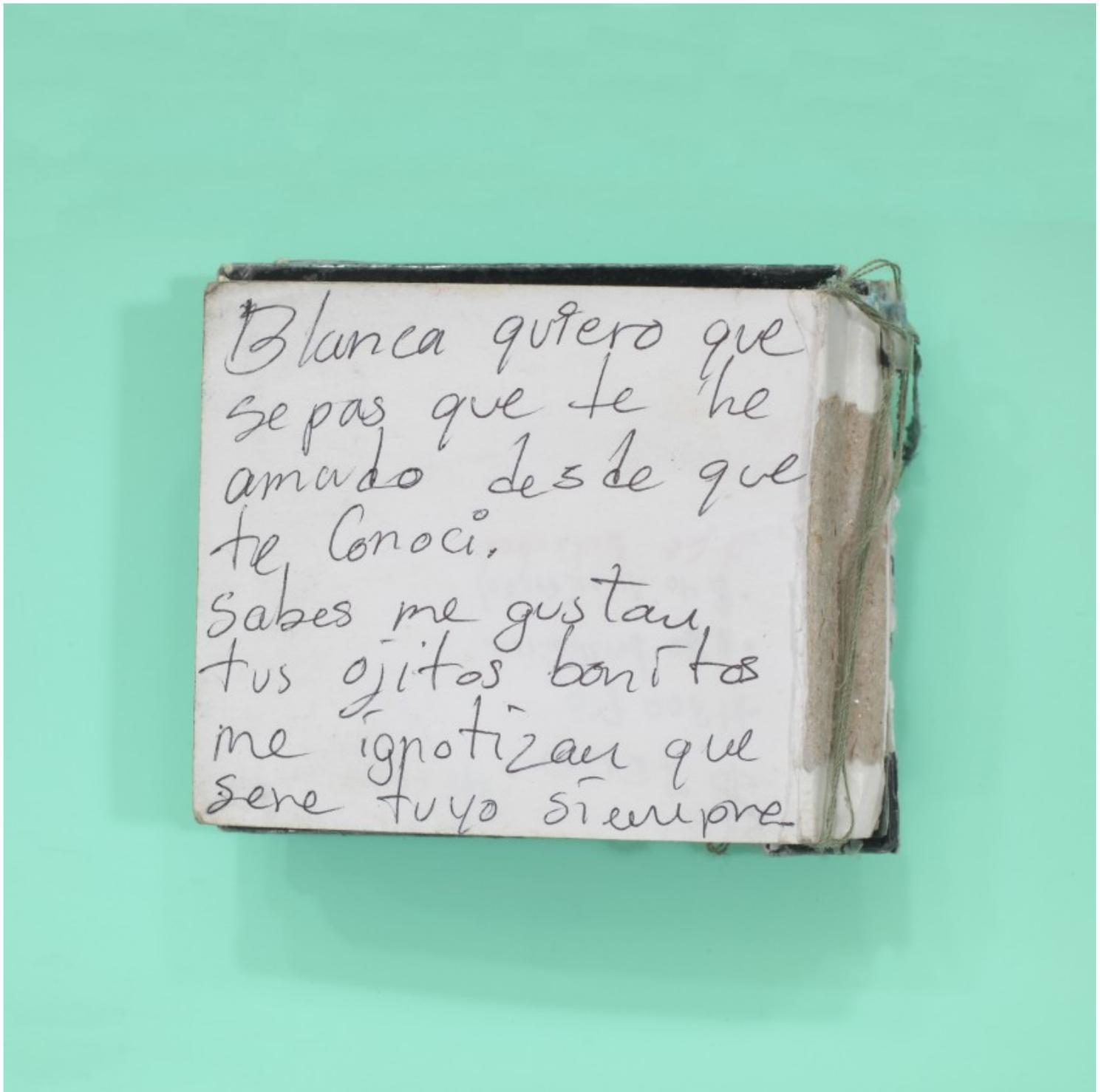


Replay

Speaking of **Newman**, his “**I Love L.A.**” has long been the first title people bring up when they talk about songs about Los Angeles. But in a months-long project, Times music writer **Randall Roberts** analyzed hundreds of songs about our city to come up with [50 Songs for a New L.A.](#), music that maps Los Angeles for a new generation. And because we don’t want to forget our roots, Roberts also put together a list of [25 sure-fire L.A. classics](#).

In the galleries

A shoe, a love letter, multiple combs and hair brushes arranged on a backdrop. We’ve seen a cataloging of such items before in Holocaust museums, but now the confiscated items are being trashed at the U.S.-Mexico border. Photographer **Tom Kiefer** worked as a janitor at a **U.S. Customs and Border Protection** facility in Arizona for more than a decade, [secretly collecting immigrant belongings and taking pictures](#). As Times reporter **Makeda Easter** writes, many of the images are on view in the exhibition “**El Sueño Americano | The American Dream: Photographs by Tom Kiefer**” at the **Skirball Cultural Center**.



Tom Kiefer's "Diary," 2018. The note starts, "Blanca I want you to know that I have loved you since I met you" and ends with "I will be yours forever." (Tom Kiefer / Redux Pictures)

Times art critic **Christopher Knight** took in the more than 200 largely black-and-white photographs and videos by artist **Shirin Neshat** at the **Broad**. He found power in the neutral palette. "Her photographs, mostly portraits, are formal, sober and considered, [contrary to the topical flow of most photojournalism](#)," he writes. "The image of **Iran** that an American carries in his mind is almost exclusively crafted by mass-culture pictures. Neshat's say: Reconsider."



Large-format photographs alternate with films and videos in Shirin Neshat's retrospective exhibition at the Broad. (Joshua White / JWPicture)



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Leah Ollman [wrote about the first L.A. show](#) from Paris artist **Tatiana Trouvé**, whose staged “architectural interventions” are at **Gagosian** in Beverly Hills through Jan. 11.

Times contributing reviewer **David Pagel** also made the gallery rounds: “No people appear in **Peter Holzhauer**’s 16 photographs at **Gallery Luisotti**, but you feel as if you’re looking at portraits,” he wrote of [the artist’s landscape images of Iceland](#). Of the new **Gilbert & George** show, [Pagel says](#), they “transform **Sprüth Magers** gallery into a giddy, head-spinning extravaganza.”

As the owner of a couple of **Laura Owens** books (she was a favorite of my late husband, Jonathan Gold), I was especially interested to see that the artist's new show at **Matthew Marks Gallery** is [devoted to handmade books and the custom-made tables on which they rest](#). "Her quiet, bookstore-style installation," Pagel writes of "**Books and Tables**," "turns its back on the eye-grabbing dynamics of social media — and the heavyweight expectations of mural-scaled paintings — to make room for experiences that unfold slowly and subtly, gently and freely."

On the stage

People were outraged when choreographer **Matthew Bourne** put **male swans** in a 1995 production of "**Swan Lake**." But as **Lewis Segal writes**, "what had been a shocking sideshow in 20th century dance is now a kind of mainstream monument." Is the production — [which just landed at the Ahmanson](#) — still relevant? Segal points out that "given our culture's evolved discussions about portrayals of women, you could argue that the treatment of the prince's mother and girlfriend should be more nuanced and sympathetic." Yet Segal finds Bourne's staging "still gloriously pertinent and impertinent," and a work that continues to "speak to the homophobic violence that still exists almost everywhere."



Will Bozier is the Swan in Matthew Bourne's "Swan Lake," back at the Ahmanson Theatre in L.A. (Craig Schwartz)

Another alternative casting decision — this time over the series of black actresses playing **Hermione Granger** in “**Harry Potter and the Cursed Child**” — is leading some observers to ask: [“Has blackwashing become the new whitewashing?”](#) Many are thrilled that **Yanna McIntosh**, at the **Curran** theater in San Francisco, is about to become the eighth black actress to play Hermione since the play’s first staging in 2016. But as contributor **Erika Milvy** writes: “Critics worry this presto-chango switcheroo is a mere bandage that masks the persistent lack of authentically diverse characters and stories making it to stage and screen.”

Composer **Lei Liang** [was named the 2020 winner](#) of the **Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition**, “sometimes referred to as the Nobel Prize for music,” as San Diego Union-Tribune pop music critic **George Varga** reports.

On the stage 2.0

And now the newsletter baton goes back to **Carolina**, bringing you news from the stage, as well as the weekly news roundup and novel-reading pitbulls:

Ashley Lee reports on the new “**Frozen**” song [you can find only on stage](#) — a duet between sisters **Elsa** and **Anna**. Co-composer **Kristin Anderson-Lopez** says they “had been itching to write the sisters a song like this. It was like a spare firework, and all we had to do was light it.”

Cellist **Sheku Kanneh-Mason** was all set to make his L.A. debut when he got called away for a last-minute gig: **Meghan Markle**’s wedding to **Prince Harry**. [He finally made it back](#) for a performance at the **Colburn School**, a co-presentation with the **Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra**. He chats with contributor **Tom Jacobs**.



Cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason performed with his pianist sister, Isata, at the Colburn School on Tuesday. (Dania Maxwell / Los Angeles Times)

Ready for the weekend

Matthew Cooper picks the best of the week ahead in [dance](#) and [art](#), and he rounds up the [10 best things to do in L.A. right now](#), including the ongoing production of “Frozen” at the **Hollywood Pantages**.



Caroline Bowman and Caroline Innerbichler debut a new duet between Elsa and Anna in the national tour of “Frozen.” (Deen van Meer)

ICYMI

Our newsletter was dark over the holidays, but I wanted to highlight some great pieces that appeared while everyone was stuck at an airport or on [the 405](#). These includes [a review](#) of **Nayland Blake**’s solo show at the **ICA LA**, which exudes a “mordant humor of layered depth,” by Times art critic **Christopher Knight**; a look at how the **Monday Evening Concerts** series at

Zipper Hall [remains full of surprises](#) by Times classical music critic **Mark Swed**; and [a great profile](#) of “**Slave Play**” playwright **Jeremy O. Harris** by Times theater critic **Charles McNulty**.



“Slave Play” writer Jeremy O. Harris. (Jenny Anderson)

And because I have the keyboards — *bwahahaha* — I’ll add to the pile the bit I wrote about [a pair of very striking shows](#) at MASS MoCA by **Rafa Esparza** and **Marcos Ramirez**, who is known as **ERRE**.

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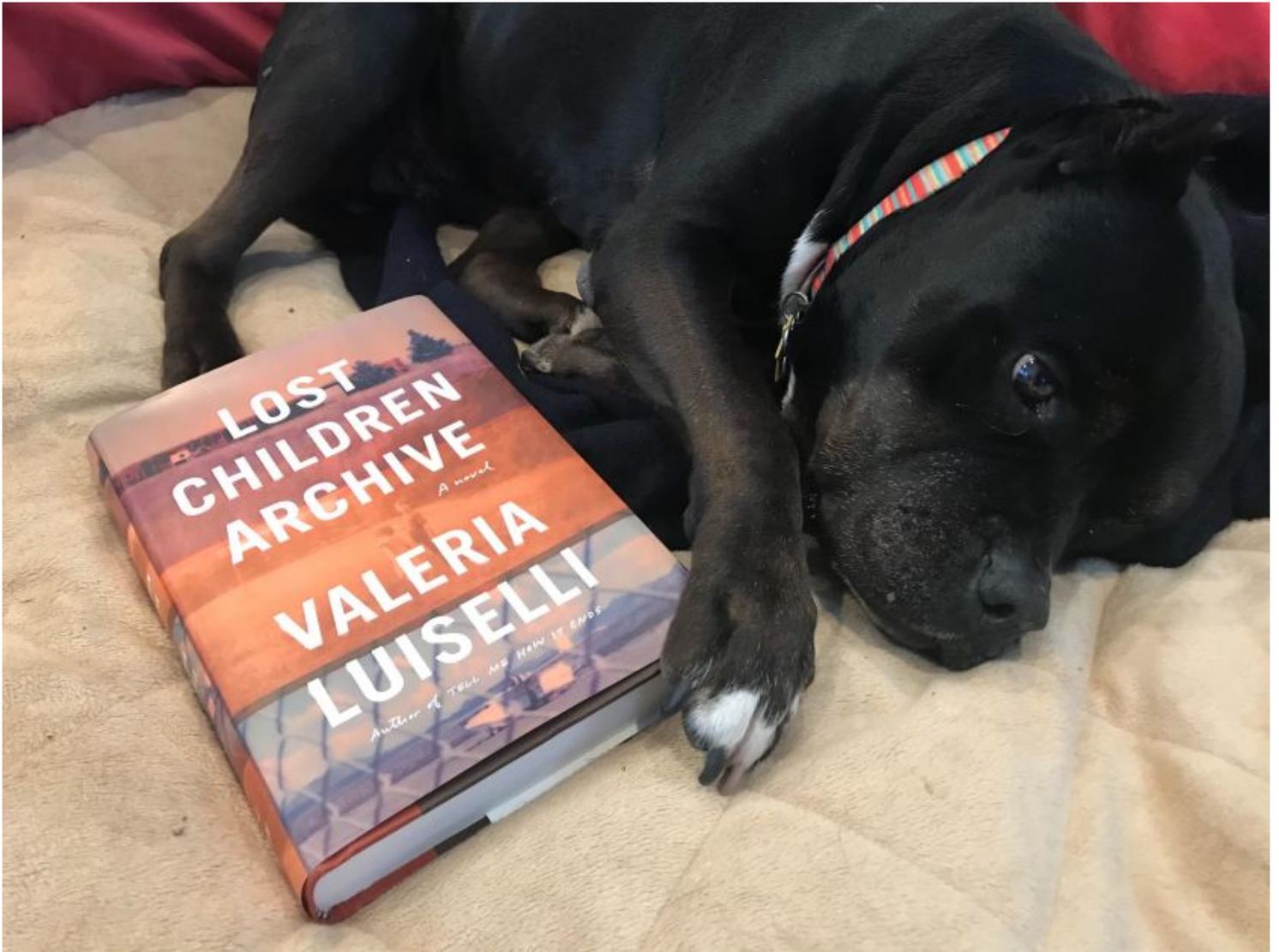
In other news...

- [The story](#) of the **\$120,000 banana** is the story of **Art Basel Miami Beach**.
- For a profile in the New Yorker, **Beck** takes [a tour](#) of **LACMA**.
- Rather than giving the prize to a single artist, Britain's **Turner Prize** has been awarded to [all four finalists](#) after they asked to be treated as a collective.
- The **Dialogues podcast** has [an interesting interview](#) with curator **Flavin Judd** and poet **Eileen Myles**.
- **Stephen Garrett**, the architect who helped **J. Paul Getty** build the Roman-style **Getty Villa** and would later serve as the museum's first director, has [died at the age of 96](#).
- The Broadway-bound musical "**The Devil Wears Prada**" [has announced casting](#).
- **SF Opera's Eun Sun Kim** has become the first Asian woman to [lead an American opera company](#).
- Composer on composer: I enjoyed [this essay](#) that **John Adams** wrote about **Pierre Boulez**.

And last but not least...

While I was on vacation, I dug into **Valeria Luiselli's** latest novel "**Lost Children Archive**," which pits a failing marriage against a backdrop of political crisis — namely, the child detention crisis at the border. "They call them the 'lost children,'" Luiselli writes. "I suppose the word 'refugee' is more precise ... in a way, I guess they are lost children. They are children who have lost the right to a childhood." The book is [poignant and exquisite](#).

Pairs well with [this essay](#) **Luiselli** wrote on **Wild West** reenactments in Tombstone, Az.



Bonnie, the world's worst research assistant, curls up with Valeria Luiselli's "Lost Children Archive." Smart move, dog. Smart move. (Carolina A. Miranda / Los Angeles Times)

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