

ARTE Y DISEÑO



PHOTOGRAPHS BY J.M. COETZEE

Coetzee's Boyhood, in Black and White

By JASON FARAGO

In 2014, years after he moved from South Africa to Australia, the novelist J.M. Coetzee finally sold his apartment in Cape Town. Soon after, a researcher went through a cardboard box left behind, and inside, he discovered a welter of remarkable unpublished materials by the taciturn Nobel laureate. But they were not manuscripts. They were photographs: sheafs of yellowing prints that depicted "scenes from provincial life," as his three volumes of autobiography are subtitled, as well as undeveloped negatives.

Before he turned to literature, it turns out, Mr. Coetzee was a committed teenage photographer—and his black-and-white impressions of his family, his school and daily life on his uncle's farm were on view for the first time in a recent exhibition at the Irma Stern Museum in Cape Town.

Mr. Coetzee had never showed the photographs to anyone; he was suspicious, when the exhibition was proposed, whether a writer's early experiments with the camera had any importance at all. But the images, shot in 1955 and 1956, when the author was 15 and 16 years old, offer a crucial vista onto the formation of an author as restrained in his personal disclosures as in his prose. More than that, they give a new depth to his fiction, which owes as much to the arts of the lens as of the page.

Mr. Coetzee was born in Cape Town in 1940. His family was not wealthy, and it would have been a considerable expense for young John to acquire his 35-millimeter Wega.

He set up a darkroom in his family home. His mother, Vera, was a schoolteacher; John loved her deeply, and photographed her outside their tidy house, or reading with his younger brother, David.



John felt alienated from his father, Zacharias (known as Jack or Zac), as the author elaborated in "Summertime" (2009), the third and most fictionalized of his autobiographical books. Jack appears in just one photograph.

Though the Coetzees were Afrikaners, they spoke English. Mr. Coetzee attended an English-language school, St. Joseph's Marist College. In "Boyhood" (1997), the author describes the school as "a shrunken little world."

If the writer-to-be found Cape Town stultifying, he was enraptured by the Karoo, the arid interior region of South Africa where his uncle had a farm, called Voëlfontein (or "Bird Fountain," in Af-

rikaans). The pockmarked landscape of the Karoo played a central role in the young writer's perceptions of nature, family and colonization. In "Boyhood" he writes: "He knows Voëlfontein best in summer, when it lies flattened under an even, blinding light that pours down from the sky."

Mr. Coetzee's photographs of Voëlfontein exhibit the ambivalent stance toward the South African countryside that would animate his later fiction — one trapped between love for its expanses and shame at its historical inheritance. The most remarkable images depict two farmhands at Voëlfontein, named Ros and Freek, whom Mr. Coetzee describes in "Boyhood"

Clockwise from top: A tiekiedraai, or dance party, on New Year's Eve; a self-portrait of J.M. Coetzee as a teenager; his father, Zacharias, and aunt Annie; rugby at his school in Cape Town.

with rapt admiration. The laborers are "coloured" — an apartheid-era designation for people of mixed African, European and Asian background — and as a child he struggles with the rules that keep them apart. One day in 1955 or 1956 the Coetzees traveled to the beach with Ros and Freek, who had never seen the sea before. Mr. Coetzee does not mention this trip in "Boyhood," but his numerous shots of the farmhands reflect the momentousness of the day for the men and the boy alike.

In one self-portrait, the adolescent John wears a wool vest and open-necked shirt, cheeks ruddy, eyes soulful and sad. Yet he stares forth with an assurance beyond his years.

Soon, he will put down the camera; it will be two decades before he publishes a book. Every novel he will write will be a self-portrait.

On the Charts, Facing Charges

In Hollywood and in the media, 2017 was a year of reckoning — powerful men brought down under the weight of their own misdeeds. But the opposite happened in hip-hop:

JON CARAMANICA

ESSAY

Many of the genre's most promising talent arrived with troubling back stories, speeding onto the Billboard charts while operating under the cloud of criminal accusations or convictions.

XXXTentacion has been charged with the assault of a pregnant woman and with witness tampering; he pleaded not guilty to all charges. Tay-K is facing a pair of murder charges, for which he maintains his innocence. Kodak Black has had a string of arrests and is facing trial for criminal sexual conduct; his lawyers say he is innocent. And 6ix9ine pleaded guilty in 2015 to the use of a child in a sexual performance.

XXXTentacion's first album, "17," debuted at Number 2 on the Billboard album chart, and his breakthrough single "Look at Me," which began as a SoundCloud loonie, made it to Number 34 on the Hot 100. Tay-K's "The Race" went to Number 44 on the Hot 100. 6ix9ine has two songs on the Hot 100, "Gummo" at Number 14 and "Kooda" at Number 54. Kodak Black's first album, "Painting Pictures," debuted at Number 3 on the charts, and was certified gold. "Tunnel Vision," a single from that album, went to Number 6 on the Hot 100.

Those are metrics of popularity, not ethics. But they tell us something about how artists with pockmarked personal histories are received in the current climate. And they indicate that a chasm persists between moral and aesthetic calculus.

These artists are thriving, and their renown is growing for inventive and compelling music. But knowing the accusations against them makes listening a charged act.

Outlaw appeal has long been integral to hip-hop — think Tupac Shakur, 50 Cent, Chief Keef and many more — and rappers from this new generation with difficult back stories are in the early stages of their careers, in a genre in which tolerance of complicated histories tends to be high, and in which skepticism about institutions like law enforcement can reframe someone accused of a crime as an anti-authoritarian folk hero.

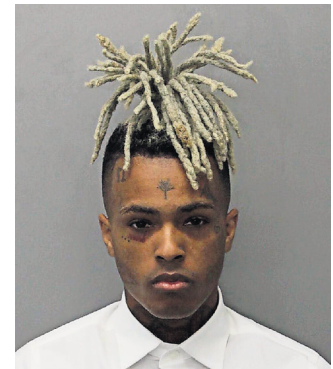
Kodak Black's story is familiar. He sometimes raps about the heavy weight of morality in an amoral world. "I was already sentenced, before I came up out the womb/Streets done already sentenced me, before no cracker could," he raps on "Day for Day."

In the past two years, Kodak

has been in and out of jail on a variety of charges, including first-degree criminal sexual conduct. On "Versatile," from his "Project Baby 2: All Grown Up" mixtape, he insists he's leaving his demons in the past: "When I took rapping serious I threw the towel in/But Lord you say you gonna forgive me so forgive me too."

There is a similar tension underscoring the work of XXXTentacion, whose music began to seep out from the SoundCloud rap underground this year when he was in jail on harrowing charges of assaulting a pregnant woman, reported to be his girlfriend. (He has yet to stand trial.) He named a song on "17" after the woman he is accused of assaulting.

The literalism of "17" is both its most attractive quality and also its most worrisome — any attempt to separate the art from the artist is impossible. That's similar to Tay-K's "The



GETTY IMAGES

XXXTentacion has been charged with the assault of a pregnant woman.

Race," a song about being on the run recorded while the rapper was in fact on the run.

This wave of artists has been buttressed by a range of institutions, many of which benefit from asking few questions. These artists have received placement on key playlists on streaming services like Spotify, and in some cases, they play on major radio stations.

And that's saying nothing of companies like Atlantic Records, Empire Distribution and RCA Records that support these artists financially.

Other artists have attempted to capitalize on the viral notoriety of these rappers by working with them. XXXTentacion's first high-profile mainstream collaboration was with Noah Cyrus, Miley's 17-year-old younger sister.

A final part of the pattern that emerged with last year's high-profile abusers was contrition, ostensibly as a table setting for rehabilitation. But that hasn't happened with this crop of rappers. Instead, the accused artists are finding listeners long before they find resolution, legal or moral.

In other industries, conversations are just now beginning about whether those who have been accused of terrible acts

Are Models Of a Wall Art Worth

By MICHAEL WALKER

TIJUANA, Mexico — Is Donald J. Trump a conceptual artist?

That's the intriguing possibility put forth in an online petition posted on January 2 that seeks to have the group of eight prototypes for Mr. Trump's controversial Mexican border wall designated a national monument.

The prototypes were built at a cost of \$3.3 million and unveiled in October along the United States border near San Diego. The petition, sponsored by the pockishly named nonprofit, MAGA (the acronym recalls the president's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again"), seeks to protect them from demolition by invoking the Antiquities Act of 1906 and characterizes the structures as "a major Land Art exhibition" of "significant cultural value."

The prototypes were designed to United States Customs and Border Protection specifications, built to withstand a 30-minute assault



JOSH HANER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

An arts group wants eight border wall models to be kept as a national monument.

from sledgehammers and acetylene torches, and to be difficult to scale or tunnel beneath. Aesthetic considerations are largely secondary to brute strength, but when viewed up close the walls have the undeniable majesty of minimalist sculpture.

Mr. Trump dramatically reduced the size of two national monuments under federal protection in December. He would need to issue a presidential proclamation to establish the group as a monument.

Gesturing at the prototypes beyond the rusting border fence near the Otay Mesa Port of Entry, south of San Diego, Christoph Büchel, the Swiss-Icelandic artist behind MAGA, said his group endorses the concept that, by electing Mr. Trump, Americans allowed his obsessions to be given form that qualifies as an artistic statement.

The fact that the prototypes were designed and built by private contractors matters less, Mr. Büchel said, than the impression that, upon completion, they constitute an unintended sculpture garden.

But the divisive nature of

the prototypes undermines their aesthetic merit, argued Tom Eccles, the head of curatorial studies at Bard College in New York State.

"History, and thus our landscape, is replete with terrible and terrifying structures," he said in an email. "Sculpture and art should speak to our better selves. Naming the Berlin Wall a Land Art project — or conceptual art — doesn't make it such. These abhorrent things on the border are not art and never will be."

The guidelines for the prototypes stipulated that the side facing the United States be "aesthetically pleasing" but made no provisions for the Mexican side. One prototype presents a pleasant stone facade to the United States and an unsparing concrete wall with razor wire to Mexico.

Mr. Büchel took in the squalor on the Mexican side and the prototypes bathed in flattering sunlight and said: "When you look at it here, and you see everything, it's quite a strong conceptual impact. Visually, it is really striking. That's why this should be preserved, because it talks so

Hollywood Role for Video Games

By LAURA PARKER

When Pete Samuels, a founder and the chief executive of Supermassive Games, began working on a survival horror adventure video game called *Until Dawn* in 2015, he knew he wanted the story to unfold like that of a horror film.

So he turned to Hollywood. Mr. Samuels sought out Larry Fessenden, an American screenwriter and director whose credits include the horror films "Wendigo" and "The Last Winter," and the screenplay for "Orphanage," an in-development English language remake of the Spanish horror film "El Orfanato" from the director Guillermo del Toro.

"The gaming audience is growing, and tastes are broadening," Mr. Samuels said.

In an era of prestige television, high-quality streaming services and indie films that sometimes haul in blockbuster box office receipts, video games are facing stiff narrative competition. So game creators are increasingly turning to film and television writers to help craft their stories.

In 2014, Sledgehammer Games worked with the Hollywood screenwriter Mark Boal (his credits include "The Hurt Locker" and "Zero Dark Thirty") on the story for the first-person shooter *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare*. That same year, the former Pixar writer Stephan Bugaj helped Telltale Games develop a narrative for its adventure game series *Game of Thrones* and

The Walking Dead.

In December, Naughty Dog, the studio behind blockbuster action-adventure franchises like *Uncharted* and *The Last of Us*, announced that Halley Gross, a writer and story editor on HBO's "Westworld," would help write the studio's game *The Last of Us Part II*. The game will follow its two protagonists, Ellie and Joel, as they fight off zombielike monsters in a post-apocalyptic world.

But writing for a video game can present hurdles. That's because unlike film and TV audiences, gaming audiences are not passive spectators.

With *The Last of Us Part II*, Ms. Gross approached that challenge together with Neil Druckmann, Naughty Dog's creative director. Ms. Gross, who is a gamer, said she signed on for the project because it was an opportunity to learn more about making games while working with characters she was already familiar with.

"I believe storytelling in games has the opportunity to create an unmatched level of empathy," Ms. Gross said. "You're not just a spectator. You're experiencing someone's journey firsthand."

Ms. Gross said they approached the game similar to the way they would a season of television, brainstorming the entire story line and figuring out major milestones for the narrative. That's where the similarities between writing for television and games ended.

"In television, you're collab-

orating with other writers," Ms. Gross said, and "only once the script is in a fairly locked form do other departments get involved," she explained. "At Naughty Dog, each narrative beat is infused with not just the ideas of the writers, but also by design, art, and more."

For now, building robust and dynamic stories can still be difficult, especially in games that have several outcomes depending on what each player decides. When developing the story for *Until Dawn*, Mr. Fessenden worked with a collaborator, the writer and director Graham Reznick, whose credits include the 2008 horror feature film "I Can See You." Together, they crafted a creepy cabin-in-the-woods story focused on a group of teenagers.

The game was conceived as a first-person game, which Mr. Reznick said felt "much less cinematic." Supermassive Games then decided to switch to a third-person perspective, and began using techniques usually reserved for films, like fixed camera angles. "This let us actually write dialogue and express ideas closer to how we would in film," he said.

In the final version, players can alternate among characters, making decisions that affect the outcome. The game, with the voices and likenesses of the actors Rami Malek and Hayden Panettiere, was released on the PlayStation 4 in 2015. It won a British Academy of Film and Television Arts award for its originality.