

COLUMN ONE

From trash, a family treasure

The portrait had haunted its painter. Five decades later, the artist's son, a famous chef, found closure.

BY DANIEL MILLER

The woman in the brightly colored shawl is beautiful. But she does not look happy. Or, at the very least, she wears a wry expression, one that suggests something in between boredom and belligerence.

Chef Chris Bianco long remembered that look. For years, he wondered what happened to the portrait his father sumptuously rendered in oils over the course of several months starting in late 1969.

Leonard Bianco was an accomplished New York artist who enjoyed a varied career: Barbra Streisand commissioned him to paint her portrait, and he created a depiction of Christ for the historic St. Mary's Basilica in Phoenix. He even painted President Lyndon B. Johnson's two beagles.

But the painting of the 30-something woman in the shawl — that may have been his masterpiece, said Chris, the James Beard Award-winning force behind Pizzeria Bianco and Pane Bianco at Row DTLA, and four Phoenix restaurants.

For Leonard and his family, though, the portrait was a source of pain, and a kind of stubborn psychic baggage that hovered at the edges of his career. This was the case long after the painting disappeared more than 50 years ago amid an acrimonious dissolution. And it remained so after Leonard died in 2021 at 94.

Then something remarkable happened. Sitting in a

[See Portrait, A9]



FATHER Issa Thaljieh, 40, pauses in the Grotto of the Nativity, the place where Jesus is said to have been born, at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, West Bank. "These are very, very sad times," he said.

Photographs by MARCUS YAM Los Angeles Times

This year, a season of grief

Palestinian Christians are marking a somber Christmas in Bethlehem, canceling festivities in solidarity with Gaza

BY LAURA KING

BETHLEHEM, West Bank — It isn't subtle. Nor is it intended to be.

Instead of a pastoral-looking Nativity scene, the creche features baby Jesus wrapped in a checkered Palestinian kaffiyeh, surrounded by jagged chunks of stone — evoking bombed-out buildings in the Gaza Strip and children buried beneath them.

"I see God in the rubble," said Munther Isaac, the Palestinian pastor of a landmark Lutheran church in Bethlehem, the West Bank town revered by Christians as Jesus' birthplace. "And Christ was born under occupation."

Together with parishioners, he created the wartime tableau, which will remain in place at the church through the Christmas season. The image is a jarring one, Isaac acknowledges — but cannot come close to summing up the daily horrors taking place only 45 miles distant, in Gaza.

Palestinian Christians, a fast-

[See Bethlehem, A4]



AT A LUTHERAN church in Bethlehem, the baby Jesus figurine is nestled among jagged stones meant to symbolize the destruction in Gaza.

A fight to move church to right

O.C. layman who supports Trump uses wealth to push vision for more conservative Catholicism.

BY HARRIET RYAN

Two very different versions of Catholicism played out on a Tuesday in October.

In Rome, Pope Francis presided over an unprecedented synod on modernizing the church, inviting not only clergy, but also laypeople from around the world to discuss issues such as the ordination of women, ministry to gay and transgender people, empowerment of Indigenous communities and the rights of the poor.

In New York, meanwhile, a Catholic millionaire from Orange County led an event that seemed a throwback to the church of the 1950s: Priests in ornate vestments marched down Broadway with a police escort, the Eucharist held aloft under a gilded canopy and accompanied by wafting incense, candle bearers and nuns in habits and waist-length veils.

"We can retake the culture of America," declared Tim Busch, an Irvine lawyer and hotelier who organized the procession as part of a Catholic conference aimed at wealthy businesspeople. The gathering's message, as Busch later summarized it, was that "woke ideology won't last."

At the Vatican, a respectful dialogue about reforming the church; in the U.S., a high-profile display of old-school church power.

Among rank-and-file American Catholics, Francis is enormously popular as he enters the second decade of his papacy, with 84% of weekly Massgoers holding a favorable opinion of him. But as he nudges the global church left, an elite group of

[See Busch, A6]



WALLY SKALIJS Los Angeles Times

WESTERN STATES are taking issue with restrictions on clearing homeless encampments. The Supreme Court could take up the matter next year.

In California, rules for clearing homeless camps pose a challenge

BY DAVID G. SAVAGE AND NOAH BIERMAN

WASHINGTON — Blocks from the White House, McPherson Square is a quiet, grassy downtown park where Washingtonians lunch and pigeons perch atop a statue of a Civil War general killed fighting the Confederacy.

A year ago, it became the city's largest homeless encampment, covered by tents and virtually off-limits to pedestrians.

D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser and the

National Park Service have strictly enforced laws against camping on sidewalks and in parks. After posting a two-week notice, police fenced off the area and all tents were removed.

Homeless advocates protested and carried signs saying "Shame" and "Stop the evictions." Two people who refused to leave were handcuffed and taken away. But the fight ended there and today the square remains clear.

It's a scene that has played out repeatedly across the country as homeless rates

[See Homeless, A12]

Pontiff OKs blessings for gay couples

Vatican maintains its strict ban on same-sex marriage, however.

BY NICOLE WINFIELD

ROME — Pope Francis formally approved letting Catholic priests bless same-sex couples, the Vatican announced Monday, a radical shift in policy that aimed at making the church more in-

clusive while maintaining its strict ban on gay marriage.

But although the Vatican statement was heralded by some as a step toward breaking down discrimination in the Catholic Church, some LGBTQ+ advocates warned it underscored the church's idea that gay couples remain inferior to heterosexual partnerships.

The document from the Vatican's doctrine office elaborates on a letter Francis sent to two conservative

cardinals that was published in October. In that preliminary response, Francis suggested such blessings could be offered under some circumstances if they weren't confused with the ritual of marriage.

The new document repeats that condition and elaborates on it, reaffirming that marriage is a lifelong sacrament between a man and a woman. And it stresses that blessings

[See Pope, A4]

Southwest settles with U.S. agency

The airline will pay \$140 million for canceling thousands of flights over the holidays last year. **BUSINESS, A8**

Glasnow happy for homecoming

Dodgers' new pitcher, a Newhall Hart graduate, is excited about the trade that brought him to L.A. **SPORTS, B10**

Weather
A little rain in spots.
L.A. Basin: 63/58. **B6**



SETH WENIG Associated Press

CONVICTED OF ASSAULT

Jonathan Majors faces up to a year in prison after a jury found he assaulted an ex-girlfriend. Marvel has cut ties with the "Kang" actor. **CALENDAR, E1**



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