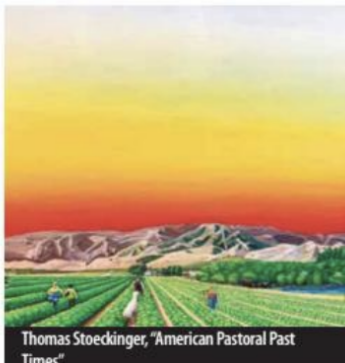


AN **UNENDING** COMMENCEMENT

UCSB MFA'S SHOW AT THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART SANTA BARBARA

**U**nending, on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara (MCASB) through Sunday, September 12, expresses the thoughts and emotions of the participating artists about the state of contemporary culture, and those feelings are often derived from their personal struggles. Though largely of unconventional inspiration, some works draw from more traditional forms, such as the landscape painting "American Pastoral Past Times" by Thomas Stoeckinger. This picture heavily exaggerates certain features, such as the vividly red sky, breaking the mold of typically unobtrusive landscape paintings and underscoring how shifting emphasis and focus can reflect the artist's values. On a shelf next to the painting, Stoeckinger exhibits a series of statuettes titled "Duck-Rabbit-Person" that represent a diversity of human perspectives drawn from personal experiences; each statuette can be viewed either innocuously, as an animal in profile, or more confrontationally, as a human in a submissive posture.

To the right of the gallery entrance, "Such Strange Weather" by Marshall Sharpe shows the artist's parents in a sitting room. On the surface level, the painting reflects a sense of familial longing, but Sharpe imbues the work with other meanings as well. For all the homeliness of the scene, it is set in a rarely used formal room with the furniture arranged artificially, demonstrating the often-superfluous nature of some living areas. In another acrylic painting titled "Broken," Sharpe depicts himself after injuring his collarbone. "Broken" uses reddish hues to evoke his physical trauma and casts a penetrating light that seems to expose the outlines of his injured rib cage. The injury, Sharpe explained, gave him another sense of longing, this time for good health.



Thomas Stoeckinger, "American Pastoral Past Times"

Megan Koth's art focuses on personal grooming and the anxieties born from imperfect skin. Like Sharpe, Koth draws on personal experience—in her case, an internal abscess. She uses the theme of imperfect skin as the basis for various artistic applications. Her painting "Ablution" mirrors the pose typical of models in skin-care advertisements—splashing water on one's face in profile—but the inclusion of bright, prominent pustules on the face underscores how advertising varnishes over the reality of human skin conditions. In another series of paintings called "Dermascapes," skin conditions are incorporated into landscape paintings, and their distinguishing features read as rugged terrain or natural landmarks.

After passing through a charred door, visitors to David Wesley White's portion of *Unending* see "White Inferno, The Burning of Washington," a model of the White House's damaged shell in the aftermath of the British attack in 1814. White confirms that this subject intentionally parallels the damage wrought by pro-Trump insurrectionists on January 6, 2021. Though most of his fire is trained on the former president, White also scorns current neoliberal discourse, representing its inanity by highlighting similarities between such discourse and



Megan Koth, "Cleansing"

Republican anti-New Deal propaganda in the form of two posters shaped like dollar bills and titled "Altered Anti-Populist Propaganda."

A chastity belt made of paper cell phones stands on a pedestal in "Rose Gold I-phone Chastity Belt Pareidolia" by Serene Blumenthal. The work represents the tendency of popular media to parrot "bad history" for dramatic effect—such as the falsehood that chastity belts were commonly used in medieval times. In another three-dimensional work, Blumenthal shapes a series of clay masks into different expressions. In her video "Trust Clinic," these masks influence her choreography much in the way one's personality can be consumed by a projected facade.

Kio Griffith's "Silence Moves Faster" installation takes up a whole room. Various materials and objects in this elaborate construction can be played with a violin bow or by hand to produce all manner of sounds. A text score is provided for those who can sight-read. For Griffith, even silent moments in this period have been ringing with tinnitus, and thus his installation explores the COVID time-space distortion, acoustics, and the distance between the object and the visitor.

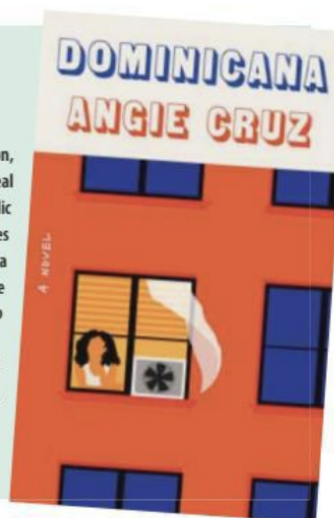
—Nicholas Liu

INDY BOOK CLUB SEPTEMBER SELECTION:  
**DOMINICANA BY ANGIE CRUZ**

Loosely based on her mother's life story, *Dominicana* by Angie Cruz is an engrossing novel about immigration, motherhood, and finding independence. Our protagonist, Ana, is 15 years old when her mother makes a business deal that lands Ana married to Juan Ruiz, who is almost 20 years her senior. She leaves her home in the Dominican Republic to start a new life in New York City with papers that identify her as 19 years old. Once there, Ana knows no one and does not speak English, and Juan turns out to be a possessive, abusive, and disloyal husband. Although her marriage is a symbol of the hope that her family will soon be able to join her in N.Y.C. and escape the political turmoil at home, the life that Ana is now living is not what she had imagined it would be. But when Juan leaves New York for a trip back to the D.R., Ana begins finding herself again.

Set against the backdrop of 1960s New York, an era which is depicted in great detail in the novel, Cruz writes a visceral story that is at once heartbreaking and full of hope. *Dominicana* is both universal and laser-focused on the Dominican immigrant experience. Join the Indy Book Club on Wednesday, October 6, 6 p.m., at Municipal Winemakers (22 Anacapa St.) as we discuss the themes and story behind Angie Cruz's beautiful work of fiction as well as other books written by Latinx authors. Learn more at [independent.com/indybookclub](http://independent.com/indybookclub).

—Caitlin Fitch

JACKSON  
BROWNE'S  
WILD DREAMS

When Jackson Browne takes the stage at the Santa Barbara Bowl on Sunday, September 5, he'll do so on the strength of his majestic back catalog, which contains some of the biggest hits in all of classic rock, and with a great batch of new songs as well. The 10 tracks on his 2021 release, *Downhill From Everywhere*, are as fresh and exciting as anything he's recorded since the 1980s. This concert is special, not only for Browne, but also for the Santa Barbara Bowl, since it will be the first live music performance there since 2019. For Browne, the show represents a break from his demanding (and unusual-for-him) role as a supporting act; he's been opening for James Taylor on one of the season's biggest tours.

Whether you're going to the show or not, you should spend some time with Browne's new album. *Downhill from Everywhere* reveals the ironical perspective of a man entering his eighth decade who still reveres the progressive political principles that have animated him since the 1960s, and who somehow remains committed to living his dreams, even when they take wild directions.

Browne's self-awareness comes with a touch of wry whimsy in the current single, "My Cleveland Heart." In it, the singer hymns the advantages of mechanical tickers over the vulnerable fleshy organs ordinary humans are born with. In the song's darkly hilarious video, Browne undergoes a heart transplant performed by his band, with good pal and sometime collaborator Phoebe Bridgers doing the honors of receiving his old-fashioned human heart when it's removed. Most of us would shy away from dreaming of such a lurid scenario, never mind producing it as a music video, but this self-deprecating brand of courage is a quality Jackson Browne has always had, and it will be on glorious display when he returns to the Santa Barbara Bowl stage on Sunday.

See [sbbowl.com](http://sbbowl.com).

—Charles Donelan