

Music

>>> Now, with four successful EPs, writing credits for Rihanna (“Cheers”), Katy Perry and Brandy, Grammy nominations, fence riders may still wonder about her true gift. “Honesty,” she says, “I speak from a place where every person has been. Wanting to be wanted, not just in a relationship, and not wanting to be overlooked, and it helped me.” Her latest EP, *P.S. I Love You*, features the thoughtful single, “Hell Yeah!” (think a 21st century “The Message” featuring Rick Ross instead of Grandmaster Flash). “I write my truths and they shouldn’t offend anybody. That’s my message and my motivation.”

In preparation for her upcoming as-yet-untitled fall debut album, the performer, who once wore a size 26 and is now a proud 10, has placed herself in what she calls her “cocoon phase.” “I’m incubating to become a butterfly. There are no two identical butterflies and that’s how I describe myself, and the evolution of my music.”

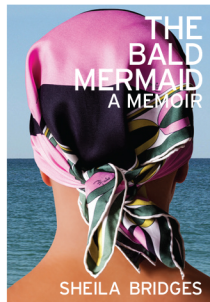
Books

Head Strong

Celebrity interior designer Sheila Bridges shares her story of glamour, hairloss and ultimate gain.

BY CHLOÉ BENNINGTON

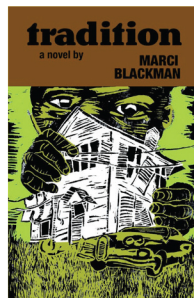
“America’s Best Interior Designer,” proclaimed both CNN and *Time* magazine of Philadelphia native Sheila Bridges. After earning degrees from both Brown University and Parsons School of Design, she eventually reached the pinnacle of interior design success: from outfitting President Bill Clinton’s Harlem offices to starring in her own television show, Bridges had it all. Then, shockingly, a bout with alopecia caused sudden baldness and she almost lost everything. *The Bald Mermaid: A Memoir* (\$22, Pointed Leaf Press) is a poignant telling of the now Harlem resident’s fall from grace and the difficult but revealing climb back. With behind-the-velvet-ropes stories about her celeb clients, gorgeous pictures of the properties she has transformed, and a raw honesty about her struggles and choices, this story is a must read.



He stands with his back to her. Stooped. Head bent. Staring at the light. Pale and flickering in an otherwise empty refrigerator, save the half stick of butter and the moldy loaf of bread hiding the stale box of baking soda in the back. The same hungry position he assumed sixty years before, the morning he left.

It had been full then. The refrigerator. No light nor state of the art cooling system. Just a box and a block of ice. Melting on a tray on the bottom. And he was scared. Rummaging through the dark as if he were robbing the place. He is still scared, and you were robbing the place, he thinks.

—from Marci Blackman’s novel *Tradition* (\$9, Water Street Press), the story of Gus Weesfree, who, as a 21-year-old, witnessed a crime, then lives his life on the run only to return home 40 years later to confront the evils of his past.



Art



God Shed His Grace on Thee

30 Americans presents controversial views of race, religion, sexuality and identity.

BY URI YAKNIN

Even if you’ve seen *30 Americans* before at its three previous showings at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., its latest showing at the Milwaukee Art Museum (MAM), which opened June 14 and runs to September 8, is still a must-see. Housed in the Quadracci Pavilion, which MAM opened in 2001, *30 Americans* is a provocative and challenging exhibition showcasing the work of a hit list of contemporary African American artists.

Drawn from the Rubell Family Collection, one of the world’s largest privately owned contemporary art collections, MAM Curator of American Art and Decorative Arts William Keyse Rudolph says “*30 Americans* is fascinating because of the range of artists represented. The show takes you from Barkley L. Hendricks to Jean-Michel Basquiat to Kehinde Wiley. The exhibition shows how different artists of color view the world in which they live.”

The show is expansive, but not without caveats. “It’s not meant to be the definitive exhibition of contemporary African American artists,” Rudolph emphasizes. According to him, Donald (whose brother Steve co-owned the famed Studio 54) and Mera Rubell, who created the Rubell Family Collection in 1964 “did not set out to acquire works by artists of color.”

“Since we started collecting in the 1960s,” the couple has said, “we have always collected [works by] African American artists as a part of our broader mission to collect the most



Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2008, Rubell Family Collection, Miami

interesting art of our time.”

Some of that in this exhibit includes Gary Simmons’ controversial “Duck, Duck, Noose” (1992), a provocative and perversely disturbing installation of the homonymous children’s game prominently featuring Ku Klux Klan hoods and Jean-Michel Basquiat’s “Bird on Money,” an homage to jazz great Charlie “Bird” Parker.

In fact, the Rubells have shared that they chose “Americans” for the exhibition title instead of “African Americans” because “nationality is a statement of fact, while racial identity is a question each artist answers in his or her own way, or not at all.”

Ultimately, Rudolph says, those who attend MAM’s presentation of *30 Americans* “will be amazed by the range of art in the exhibition—painting, installation, sculpture, works on paper, photography and new media.” Still, his greatest wish is that, with our nation being in Obama’s second term, “people will see the art as more about the work and less about the identities of the makers.” mam.org