

# Datebook

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND DATEBOOK.SFCHRONICLE.COM | Saturday, January 5, 2019 | Section E \*\*\*\*\*



Pedro Bernero

## Artist makes big mark with political murals

By Charles Desmarais

The muralist Mona Caron works out of the living room of her small apartment in the Castro. It's a perfectly lovely one-bedroom but an unlikely headquarters for an international career that would be the envy of many who live in more lavish digs. How that came about is a story that still amazes her.

It often surprises people to learn that there is a wide range of artistic communities in the Bay Area that overlap only haphazardly. Caron is known to many in the Bay Area as an illustrator and social activist. Yet she is virtually invisible among curators and dealers in museums and galleries.

Meanwhile, she has been commis-

sioned by a city in Taiwan to paint what is said to be the largest mural in Asia, a healing image of medicinal plants from around the world — metaphorical immigrants — prepared to revitalize the urban jungle. She worked with women of six Amazonian and three Andean indigenous territories to create a 164-foot-high tribute to Our Endangered Habitat. "She was brought in to paint a six-story portrait of 'a tiny Amsinckia Menziesii,' the first wildflower she

found sprouting after reclamation of a polluted site used for affordable housing in Union City.

In a parallel practice of what she calls "artivism," Caron also creates "art for mass street actions," creating banners, posters and street art "used to amplify the visual impact of rallies, while adding the experience of art making and the language of theater to the actions and struggles."

An excellent photographer, she then makes pictures that show people at the events waving her painted banners. "I use my connections with ... journalists on climate issues," she says, "and I pass them photos of all

of the actions. Because I know all the material we made and I know what we want to have in the shot." The pictures have even ended up in such mainstream publications as Newsweek.

If her career has taken her around the world, however, she had her start on the streets of San Francisco, outside the view of art officialdom. For a street-level piece called "Windows Into the Tenderloin," still viewable at Jones Street and Golden Gate Avenue, she worked for months with neighbors to decide details. Roughly 300 "mini-portraits" in the mural are

Caron continues on E2



Courtesy Mona Caron

Above and top: Mona Caron of San Francisco works with her collaborator Raul Ayala on a mural in Quito, Ecuador, last year.

### Best TV shows vie for Golden Globes



Nicole Rivetti / Amazon

Rachel Brosnahan in "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel."

★ "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," "Barry" and "The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story" are among the biggest contenders in television at this year's Golden Globe Awards. Find out who will be going home with a coveted trophy at the 76th awards show, broadcast from the Beverly Hilton in Los Angeles on NBC. The show starts at 5 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 6, with hosts Sandra Oh and Andy Samberg. ★ Don't forget to follow along with The Chronicle online at datebook.sfchronicle.com.

### The nominees for the 76th Golden Globe Awards

#### FILM

**Drama:** "Black Panther," "BlackKkklansman," "Bohemian Rhapsody," "If Beale Street Could Talk," "A Star Is Born."

**Actress, drama:** Glenn Close, "The Wife"; Lady Gaga, "A Star Is Born"; Nicole Kidman, "Destroyer"; Melissa McCarthy, "Can You Ever Forgive Me?"; Rosamund Pike, "A Private War."

**Actor, drama:** Bradley Cooper, "A Star Is Born"; Willem Dafoe, "At Eternity's Gate"; Lucas Hedges, "Boy Erased"; Rami Malek, "Bohemian Rhapsody"; John David Washington, "BlackKkklansman."

**Comedy or musical:** "Crazy Rich Asians," "The Favourite," "Green Book," "Mary Poppins Returns," "Vice."

**Actress, comedy or musical:** Emily Blunt, "Mary Poppins Returns"; Olivia Colman, "The Favourite"; Elsie Fisher, " Eighth Grade"; Charlize Theron, "Tully"; Constance Wu, "Crazy Rich Asians."

**Actor, comedy or musical:** Christian Bale, "Vice"; Lin-Manuel Miranda, "Mary Poppins Returns"; Viggo Mortensen, "Green Book"; Robert Redford, "The Old Man & the Gun"; John C. Reilly, "Stan & Ollie."

**Animated film:** "Incredibles 2," "Isle of Dogs," "Mirai," "Ralph Breaks the Internet," "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse."

**Foreign language:** "Capernaum," "Gili," "Never Look Away," "Roma," "Shoplifters."

**Actress, supporting role:** Amy Adams, "Vice"; Claire Foy, "First Man"; Regina King, "If Beale Street Could Talk"; Emma Stone, "The Favourite"; Rachel Weisz, "The Favourite."

**Actor, supporting role:** Mahershala Ali, "Green Book."

## San Francisco Chronicle

res put PG&E's future in doubt

reports of bold plans to sell natural gas division and even consider film

By JD Morris and Roland Li

The parent company of Pacific Gas and Electric Co. may be considering a bold move in the wake of its natural gas business, which is under fire from environmental groups and investors due to the recent devastating California wildfires.

Business



Trade hopes, jobs report spark global stock market rally. B1

PG&E's board and management are assessing the company's potential liabilities as a result of the wildfires and the options.

Andy Cragg/Reuters

National Public Radio reports that PG&E is considering a bold move in the wake of its natural gas business, which is under fire from environmental groups and investors due to the recent devastating California wildfires.

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Business

Trade hopes, jobs report spark global stock market rally. **D1**

Bruce Jenkins on the suddenly vulnerable Warriors. **B2**

Don't venture out this weekend without your bumbershoot. **C1**

# San Francisco Chronicle

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## DATEBOOK



Mona Caron's "Taking Root" mural in Union City commemorates the first wildflower she found on the site.

## Caron's murals reach great heights

Caron from page E1

based on people who watched the work and wanted to be included.

"I designed my very first mural in San Francisco, which is the 'Duboce Bikeway Mural,' she says. Seated in her home studio, she speaks with just a hint of an accent from her native Switzerland.

"It came about really by chance. I was just barely out of art school at all. At the time, I wanted to be an illustrator of books and magazines — that's kind of what I was imagining for myself — and I got recruited by someone at the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition. I turned it down, saying, like, 'Well that's great. I don't know how to do that. I learned how to do watercolors, printmaking. I don't know how to do something big.'"

And they said, 'Well, figure it out. Learn it! Just do what you do small, we love it, make it big!' That was my learning on that wall because I just tried all the techniques."

One San Franciscan who took note was the author Rebecca Solnit. "I met her through osmosis in the bicycling and protesting community as she was working on her first mural," Solnit said. "Mona is a magician who makes grow up the walls of high-rise buildings — and the huge tiny, local history into murals around the world, notably in Latin America, and who has her own style that stands out as a different strand in the political mural tradition."

The two worked together, Solnit as author, Caron as illustrator, on "A California Bestiary," published in 2010 by

Heyday Books. That year, UC Press published Solnit's "Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas." The author named one of the book's streets Mona Caron Boulevard, she said, "when I noticed that from her Safeway mural at Market and 15th Street mural to the big Church Street to her farmers' market mural on 24th she nearly had a straight line of four murals."

Caron is aware of precedents for her work. She also has strong opinions about her art. "Selling these? But this is not good art," she says. "This is propaganda."

"I guess my complex is that (my work) is not formally that interesting," she continues. "It has a function. I want to talk."

Caron talks about a recent project, a collaboration with the Spanish street artist Ligen. "It's a new direction, and yet, 'I'm still doing flowers.'"

"The cool thing about plants is the transformation from down under to rising above... vas," say, to really play with the problems we face, and the threats we face. And then state that these small actions by individuals done here will actually cause these healing enormity of our challenges and get to a better place in the future."

Does she have this actual hope, or is this a fantasy? "I don't think there is a choice," she says. "If we lose hope, we're done for."

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The artist stands on Church Street in the Mission District next to one of her murals.

LEE SUZUKI / THE CHRONICLE



Mona Caron

"Duboce Bikeway Mural," Caron's first, was celebrated on the 20th anniversary of its unveiling.

## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

### Singer

Young from page E1

Moon."

"She used to work in a diner. Never saw a woman look finer! I used to order just to watch her float across the floor," he sings in the opening stanza of the song.

They were eventually married and had two children, first a son, Ben, born with cerebral palsy, and a daughter, Amber Jean. Neil already had a son, Zeke, also diagnosed with cerebral palsy, from an earlier relationship with actress Carrie Snodgrass. Raising two children with disabilities gave Pegi her life's work. She co-founded the Bridge School, a private facility for youth with severe speech and physical impairments.

To fund it, she and her husband threw the annual Bridge School Benefit Concert, which came to an end in 2017 after more than three decades at Shoreline Amphitheatre in Mountain View. Neil was able to lure the top acts in rock and pop to come play acoustic sets at the all-day concert, from Paul McCartney to Bruce Springsteen, David Bowie to Don Henley, Pearl Jam to Metallica.

"My favorite moments are seeing the artists develop a rapport with the kids," she told The Chronicle in 2011. "Everybody gets a close and personal look at what this whole thing is about. They are the real stars of the show. The artists really get that. It's a life-altering experience."

The hallmark of the concert was to put the Bridge School students onstage in their wheelchairs. During Neil's set, Pegi would come out to harmonize on "Comes a Time." She began to tour with Neil and started working on her own material in the studio at the ranch. She slowly developed her own act, known as Pegi Young and the Survivors, and released several albums. The band performed in the Bay Area, including at Hardly Strictly Bluegrass, as well as touring internationally.

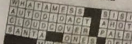
In addition to being a singer, Pegi was a photographer and had just started working on a memoir about her life with Neil. When the couple divorced in 2014, Pegi stayed at the ranch on the Peninsula, while Neil moved on with his current wife, actress Daryl

## Podcasts

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## PUZZLE ANSWERS

Crossword Puzzle



New York Times Crossword

