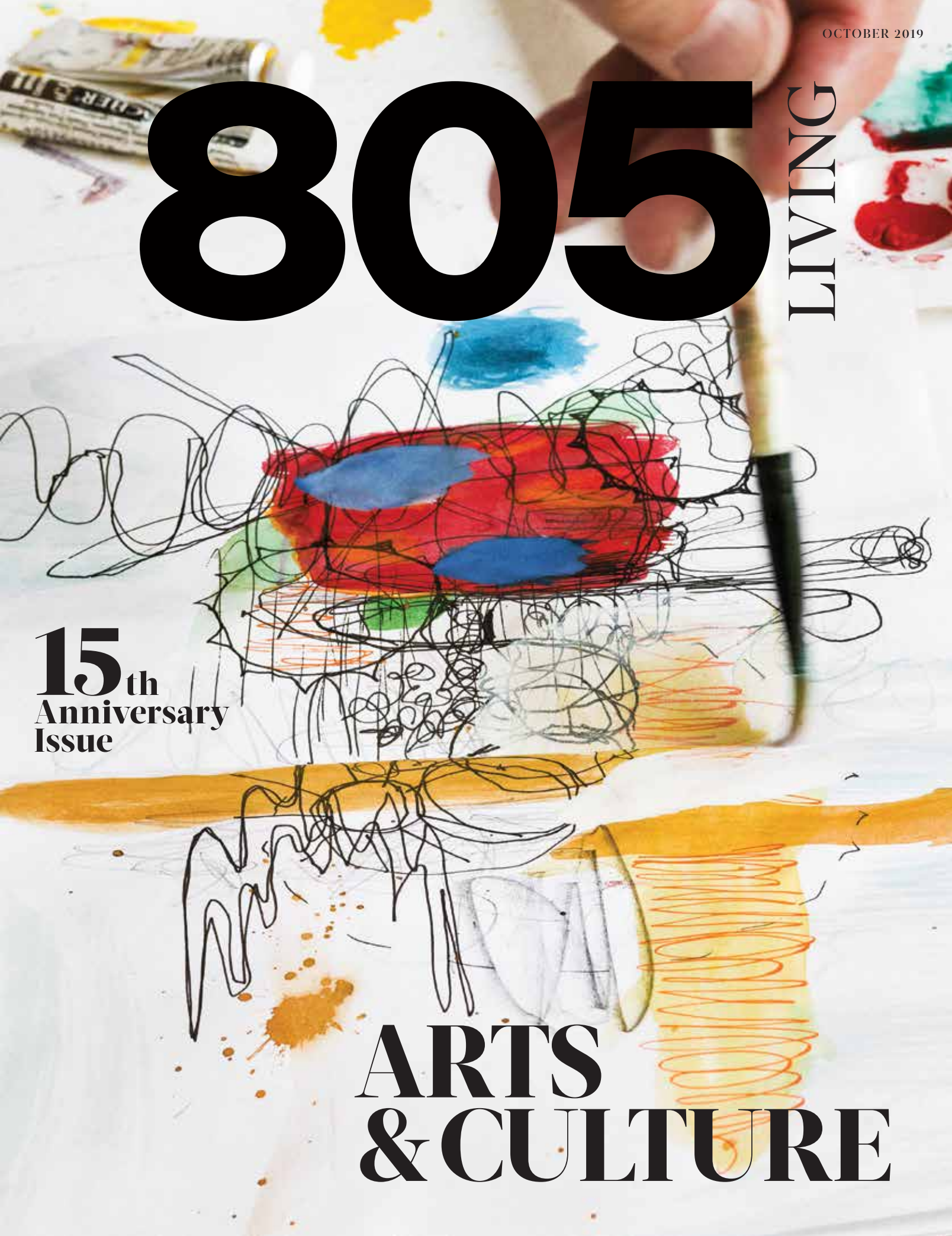


805

LIVING

15th
Anniversary
Issue

**ARTS
& CULTURE**



The 805's Got Talent

Given our proximity to Los Angeles, it's certainly no surprise to find such an enormous amount of culture and artistic achievement throughout the Central Coast. But it's not like we import all that talent: We produce it. The stars of tomorrow are right here, right now. Check out these emerging creative individuals of today who are ready to break through and be the headliners of tomorrow.



KATHERINE COOKSEY | The Beauty of Performance Art

It's difficult to separate Katherine Cooksey—aka Miss Art World—from her art. As a performance artist, she conceptualizes and participates in pieces that focus on pop culture's obsessive, excessive ideas of beauty, and she knows firsthand what she's talking about. "I'm naturally girly and feminine," says the 31-year-old Cooksey, "and I grew up doing beauty pageants." She also earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from CSU Bakersfield and a master of fine arts degree from Pratt Institute in New York, where her work provocatively—and paradoxically—explored feminist themes. She embraced her Miss Art World persona after performing at the Art Basel art show in Miami Beach a couple of years ago and hearing attendees call her the "beauty queen artist."

Cooksey, who now lives in Camarillo, produces sculpture and two-dimensional pieces that incorporate materials commonly used in pageants, such as pantyhose and artificial fingernails. "Most of my work that I'm excited

about is performance pieces," she says. Those include a recent solo pop-up at Studio Channel Islands Art Center that began with a model dressed as Marie Antoinette wearing a towering headdress of Barbie dolls and beauty products that Cooksey proceeded to lop off.

Her work mixes anger and humor. The subject matter—beauty—is serious, she points out. "But in the scheme of things, it's not that important," she says. "Humor makes it lighter but still connects with the outrage."

Cooksey recognizes that conceptual art can seem baffling to an audience, so she has become an advocate for educating people about art. "We need to find time to tell people what they're looking at," she says. "Art isn't just for certain people. It's for everyone!"

—Joan Tapper

Cooksey is slated to present Diversity Walks and Talks, a performance piece, at the LA Art Show, February 5 to 9, at the Los Angeles Convention Center.

LEVI GILBERT | Art Meets Action

Falling down stairs, crashing motorcycles, and taking death-defying leaps off the sides of cliffs are all in a day's work for Levi Gilbert, a 2017 Santa Barbara High School graduate who got his first Hollywood stunt job as soon as he turned 18 and was legally allowed to perform. This might seem like a crazy career choice to some, but stunt performing is in Gilbert's blood. His grandfather Mickey Gilbert's career dates back to the 1969 classic *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and his father, Lance Gilbert, was Mel Gibson's personal stuntman.

"I got started doing stunt work with the guidance of my dad," says the 20-year-old Gilbert, who has already appeared in TV series such as *9-1-1*, *13 Reasons Why*, *Ballers*, *Daybreak*, *Silicon Valley*, and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, as well as the upcoming *Ford v Ferrari* film, which is generating Oscar buzz. "He has always helped me by giving me every opportunity to learn something new and expand my skill sets.

"Directors know exactly what they want from the stunt performers, but it's up to you to make it happen safely," says the youngest of the Gilbert family stunt artists. "The most dangerous stunts I have done so far in my career would probably be stair falls." He starred as a young naval lieutenant who fell to a dramatic death in an *NCIS: New Orleans* episode this year. "Difficulty and danger often go hand in hand," he says. "But for me the hardest stunt isn't a stunt at all—it's acting—which is something I am working on and trying to understand the art of."

— Leslie Dinaberg





CHRIS LAMBERT | Songwriter
Turned Mystery Storyteller

Orcutt's Chris Lambert (yourownbackyardpodcast.com) was only 8 years old when Cal Poly San Luis Obispo student Kristin Smart went missing in May 1996. "Throughout the years it stuck in my head," Lambert says. "I wondered, did they solve this yet?"

Today, Smart's unsolved mystery is a cold case that has flummoxed law enforcement, journalists, and her family for more than two decades. When Lambert came across a 2006 *Los Angeles Times* feature about the case in 2018, it caught his interest, too. "Once I read that nobody in the community is actively looking for her anymore, I thought maybe I could get involved somehow," he says.

So began a journey for Lambert, a singer-songwriter by trade, into the darkest corners of the Kristin Smart saga. Walking Smart's path the night she disappeared, researching every media clipping about her, and communicating with authorities and her family, Lambert entertained an idea: "I started thinking, 'I wonder if I could be the person to make a serial podcast out of this?'"

Aside from Smart's parents, Lambert suspects he knows more about her case than anyone else. This month, he releases *Your Own Backyard*, a multi-episode podcast about one of the area's most perplexing mysteries, producing every element of the project himself, including narration, writing, and performing the original score.

"I don't have an investigative background or any sort of training," Lambert says. "In terms of journalism, where you're supposed to remain objective, I've totally failed at that. I'm just somebody who wants to find her."

—Jaime Lewis

KATHERINE HO | Pop Singer and Scientist

Singer Katherine Ho of Thousand Oaks became a worldwide sensation last year when her cover of “Yellow” by the band Coldplay featured prominently in the blockbuster *Crazy Rich Asians*. The Westlake High School graduate had plenty of professional singing and acting experience, but she could never have guessed her rendition of the tune in Mandarin would ascend to No. 1 on the Spotify Viral 50 Global chart, becoming last October’s most popular song in the world.

“That was pretty crazy,” she says. “I’d had so many experiences where my work got cut that I was skeptical it would even make it into the film.” Her vocals did, indeed, make it to the silver screen. Perhaps more notably, the song turned a derogatory term for “Asian” on its head and became an anthem for the modern Asian experience.

“People have told me how much the song has meant to them,” Ho says, “that it makes them proud of their heritage.”

Since the film’s opening, Ho has performed the number for organizations that support Asian-American culture, often to thousands of people. “Definitely the craziest one was the halftime show at the Staples Center for Chinese Heritage Night in January,” she says. “That was something on my bucket list for sure.”

Ho recently released her own original track, “Bellyaches,” on Spotify; in the meantime, she studies biology and songwriting at USC. “I’m still pretty torn whether my end goal is more on the science end or music,” she says. “I’m really passionate about both.” —J.L.





HARRISON GILMAN | From Film to Canvas

"I love all kinds of art," says Harrison Gilman, ticking off a list that includes film and fashion, painting and sculpture. "I was always drawing in notebooks," says the 23-year-old Santa Barbara resident, "and always made films for fun." He attended Santa Barbara High School's Multimedia Arts & Design Academy, won an award for the Santa Barbara International Film Festival's competition for aspiring filmmakers, and entered NYU Tisch School of the Arts, where he earned a bachelor of fine arts degree in film.

Along the way, however, a Christmas present of a set of oil sticks impelled Gilman toward abstract painting. "I started what I call 'hand dancing'—drawing to music," he says. A friend then suggested he work on a larger scale. "I bought some unstretched canvas, nailed it to the wall, and started making big paintings," he says. "They were more immersive, more powerful, and physically engaging." He begins with charcoal and an idea of a color palette, then works free-form, layering on acrylic, oil pastel, and spray paint. "It's a process of blurring and defining my vision," he says. "A lot of the work is textural."

It's also popular. Since graduation, Gilman has participated in a group show in L.A., a solo exhibit in Nashville, and one at the Breakfast Culture Club in Santa Barbara. Five paintings are on view at Jeannine's restaurant in Santa Barbara, and in November his art will be at the Paristexasla gallery in Los Angeles.

There are still other media to explore. Pointing to Jean Dubuffet as an influence, Gilman says, "I identify with the way he took his art into sculpture. I'd love to do bronze casting. And I do intend to return to films." ♦

—J.T.

In winter 2020, Gilman's work will appear in a group show at 10 West Gallery in Santa Barbara.

