



Sarah Liss—music

Jay-Z, Kanye West and the art of anticipation

At long last, the Jay-Z/Kanye West project *Watch the Throne* has been released to the public. Did you hear? Of course you did. It seems like this thing has been in the works forever, don't you think? No? That's strange, since nearly every review I've read of the album, whether good or bad, has invoked the seemingly endless series of delays that have interfered with *Watch the Throne*'s release. Nevermind that the zygotic notion of the project was only planted in our collective consciousness last August, when West tweeted about a potential joint EP with his friend and mentor.

That makes it about a year from the time we first conceived of a JaYeezy mega-jam to its symbolic birth. It's worth noting that 12(ish) months isn't a very long gestation period for a collaboration of this magnitude—especially considering both artists are in the habit of releasing at least one album every couple of years. And yet, blame it on the zeitgeist, blame it on a failure of imagination or blame it on fuzzy facts, the cacophony of media hype around *Watch the Throne* can be distilled into a simple concept: We've been waiting for this.

The axiom "good things come to those who wait" is something we introduce to children at a very young age. As a guiding principle, it privileges patience and quality over instant gratification, values that, in our current age of immediacy, seem like rare and precious relics. It's just vague enough to function as a hollow bribe: The trick of the line is that the open-ended "good things" are a blank canvas onto which the waiter in question can project any number of desires.

Some folks make a career out of delayed gratification. It's why throngs are eagerly awaiting the release of Lil Wayne's *Tha Carter IV*, which will supposedly drop at the end of August, after years of anticipation. The MC could easily have followed up 2008's massively successful *Tha Carter III* with a proper sequel. Instead, he bought time and built hype by sprinkling a trail of recordings that, by virtue of not being called *Tha Carter IV*, functioned as palate cleansers and amuse-bouches. Wayne has proven to be both prolific and inconsistent enough that one can only assume he's saving the good stuff. But he has also used time and distance as a strategy: When the main event happens, three (or however many) years after the first fanfare, the most recent taste in listeners' mouths won't be spectacular; it'll just be okay.

Endless delays don't always work, of course. Especially when they're not gimmicks. Case in point: Guns N' Roses' legendary *Chinese Democracy*, which was in the works for over a decade and had become a terrible punchline long before it was released to a resounding chorus of "meh." Aside from the qualitative shortcomings, Axl Rose's protracted efforts suffered from an unfortunate side effect: When you wait too long to deliver something to your fans, many of them will just stop caring about you.

The trick, I think, lies in being able to figure out how to capitalize on anticipation without becoming a bad pop-music joke. West and Jay-Z almost pulled off this kind of coup with *Watch the Throne*. The duo refused to give fans a specific release date until several weeks before the album dropped—we knew it was on its way, but we didn't know how long we would have to hold out. A tight leash helped combat potential pre-release leaks, and it also helped protect the blank-canvas quality. In that contained space of waiting, we were still able to project our wildest dreams about the final product without having them sullied by speculation and rumour.

I did say they almost pulled off a coup. If the hip-hop demigods had truly wanted to blow minds without any chance of falling short of our collective expectations, they should've taken a page from the book of Radiohead and unleashed *Watch the Throne* as a total surprise attack, under complete secrecy—*King of Limbs* style. Any efforts to split hairs over the quality and relevance of the work would have been drowned out; the album itself would exist in its own vacuum of "Holy shit, Jay-Z and Kanye made a record together." Granted, it's hard to imagine the personalities at hand mustering the resolve to launch a total stealth attack—egos this big seldom keep their idle thoughts to themselves, let alone their unprecedented accomplishments. I'm still waiting for that kind of feat, but I won't hold my breath.



Axl Rose's *Chinese Democracy* was all delay and no gratification.

—LINER NOTES

Walk this way

Ruth Orkin's *American Girl in Italy* is one of the most famous photographs anyone has ever taken, according to gallery owner Stephen Bulger. Which is why, to celebrate the picture's 60th anniversary this week, Bulger's Queen West gallery has the work on view, along with other images by the American photographer. The exhibition's arrival in Toronto is particularly relevant since Orkin's subject in *American Girl*, Ninalee Craig, lives here. Craig gave us the low-down on how *American Girl in Italy* came to be. **BY SARA ANGEL**

i "American Girl in Italy" at Stephen Bulger Gallery (1026 Queen St. W.) runs until Aug. 27. Reception: Aug. 20, 2–5 p.m.



1.

It was 1951 when Orkin and Craig met in Florence at the American Express office, a spot where ex-pats could collect mail while abroad. Both women were 23. Orkin was making her way back to the U.S. after shooting an assignment in Israel for *Life*. Craig had journeyed solo to Italy for "Dante, drawing, painting." Orkin asked the statuesque, 6-foot-tall Craig if she could take pictures of her, to show what it was really like for a young woman to travel alone.

2.

"Women's groups want to use the photograph as an image of harassment," says Craig. But according to her, despite being leered and whistled at, she was having "the time of my life." Craig says the expression on her face is "one of being above it all. You would never walk—even today—through a bunch on men on a road, making eye contact. I was walking with confidence in Florence, a city I knew and loved."

3.

For many years the photograph was considered obscene because of this bent-over whistling man. He holds an umbrella in one hand and his crotch in the other. Craig says that, for years, when the picture was published the man's hand was airbrushed out.

4.

Orkin took her photograph at 10:30 a.m., but according to Craig the street is packed with loitering men because work was scarce in Italy after the Second World War. "The country had been bombed and you could still see the destruction in Florence." As for why the men look so well turned out, Craig says, "Many were living at home with their parents. Their mothers pressed and ironed their clothes."

5.

"I had a small suitcase and didn't have a lot of clothes with me," says Craig, whose Italian sojourn was part of a six-month visit to Europe. Over a black cotton dress, Craig is wearing a brilliant orange shawl that she had bought on a trip to Mexico. Her purse was a horse's feedbag she picked up in Spain. Her necklace is her grandmother's locket. In her arms she's holding material for sketching and drawing.

6.

Today, a vintage print of *American Girl in Italy* is worth \$50,000 (though contemporary copies of the work can be purchased for about \$2,500 from the Stephen Bulger Gallery). As for Craig, she says, "I was never paid a cent for it. It never occurred to me to ask for money.... I never signed a release."