

LIGHTEN UP

Soap Dome Table Lamp
by Melgranoblu

This lamp gives "inner light" its literal meaning, as the glass bubbles inside the large dome refract and reflect the light, casting shadows in interesting shapes. Available at Sources Unlimited, Delhi; price on request



PLEATS PLEASE

Exaggerated Pleat Fold Long
Jacket by Amaare Couture

This winter, pull off this handsome jacket, constructed with origami pleats and inspired by architecture. Its asymmetrical length, mock layering and lapels give it an East-meets-West aesthetic. Available at Amaare, Delhi; ₹59,900

STREAM OF
STORIES

RAJA SEN

Scorsese's
superheroes

Joe Pesci (left) and Robert De Niro in 'The Irishman'.

When I was young, I thought house-painters painted houses," says Robert De Niro at the start of Martin Scorsese's *The Irishman*. "What did I know?" This is De Niro like we haven't seen him—yet, at least—wizened and wrinkled, an Eli Wallach telling stories. His is a story too good to be (entirely) untrue. The actor plays Frank Sheeran, an Irish hitman whose confessions (which include claiming responsibility for a great unsolved mystery) were collected in the book *I Heard You Paint Houses*, adapted into this Scorsese picture, out on Netflix. You may choose not to believe him, but I dare you to look away.

It's not emulsion. A "house-painter" is code for a killer, one who spills blood on the walls. Despite the care he takes to choose the right gun from a bedspread-full of weapons, Sheeran's paint-jobs are usually so brisk and efficient that Mafioso higher-ups must tell him when not to paint. The words "not that, not that" pointedly come his way from two different bosses. Nobody needs to spell it out.

That suits Frank. He nods and carries on. He agrees with what is said, and even his laughs are tailored to those in charge. "You never reveal how you feel," complains Jimmy Hoffa, played by Al Pacino. Hoffa, a labour union icon once as famous as Elvis Presley, was introduced to Sheeran by mob boss Russell Bufalino, played by Joe Pesci. Here is where things get weird.

The Irishman breaks ground with a tremendous digital de-ageing process, allowing Scorsese to cast not only De Niro as he is (and older) but much younger, and it is unnerving and wondrous to see De Niro in his 30s and 40s again. This obviously allows for epic flashbacks but Scorsese, as ever, goes further, magnificently using this otherworldly technique to twist mafia movie mythology. Pesci—who won an Oscar for playing the bristly sidekick to De Niro in Scorsese's *Goodfellas*—now plays his boss, a much older man. He knows more, says more, decides more. Scorsese is 77, De Niro and Pesci are 76, and Al Pacino is 79. The miracle is not making actors young again, but making age cease to matter.

Legendary sportsmen gifted new limbs, these performers shine. Pesci is glorious as the man who knows too much, and thus must slow down and humour those around him. There is deliberation in every action, from smiling at a little girl to disallowing his wife from smoking in his car, and the actor makes omniscience itself look inevitable. He chews on life, death and ego over wine and bread, all the way till he can't bite bread any more. The deliberations, however, go on.

Pacino is dynamite—volatile, immediate and liable to blow up more than just the bloody doors. Square-shouldered and quick to rage, his Hoffa is so majestic that a sworn enemy describes him—wearing prison denim and eating from a small bowl—as "eating ice cream like a f***ing King". With the snappiest lines and the most bravado, Pacino plays a man who won't accept the truth merely because it's true. There are times Steve Zaillian's stunning script should never work, times when De Niro's voiceover reports something only to have Pacino reiterate it right after, nearly word for word. This only flies because the actors are magic. Magic enough to make you think kings must have eaten ice cream.

I don't remember the first Robert De Niro film I saw, but I know it wasn't *Mean Streets*—I was already devoted to the actor by then. Still, his first scene in that 1973 film, bathed in red, tucking in his shirt and strutting down a bar like he owned the planet, making even the Rolling Stones sound sexier than they were.... There is an actor exploding to life, planting a flag in cinema and saying I am here to stay. *The Irishman* is all of us watching that flag flutter. Old, young, ancient, current. Through every phase of this film, De Niro stays inscrutable, preferring to react and not act... unless he has to paint a house, which he does like a wicketkeeper taking a blinding, one-handed catch. That is reflex. All else is reflection. It is this performance—and the film's unrelenting focus on this performance—that makes *The Irishman* about much more than the mob: This is Scorsese the humanist, riffing on competition, corporate ambition, workplace greed, the nature of buying into a system, and making the choice never to retire. All as De Niro plays a man who grows old while watching the news.

Scorsese sews it up with unhurried style. There are characters we meet as text floating around them tells us who will be shot eight times in the head or thrice in the face. Cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto pays tribute to Scorsese's showmanship of the past, and while the tracking shots are now elegiac, set in nursing homes instead of around the Copacabana nightclub, there is a moment when, as the camera flies from a barbershop to a florist's window, it takes a joyful second to pirouette. Guns are fired quick, while reactions of the crowd are in ultra-slow motion, allowing us to see every contorted grimace.

The film is about the silences—Anna Paquin, playing Sheeran's daughter, says volumes as she totters on her heels, too agitated to speak—yet also holds unforgettably double-barrelled lines. One highlights how all Italians are called Tony. Not that it makes a mob any more of a family.

There are *Goodfellas* references—a scene involving gangsters calling each other "brothers" perfectly mirrors Pesci's "funny how?" moment from the 1990 masterpiece—and the director pays unmistakable tribute to the greatest crime film of all: Welker White, playing Pacino's wife, turns a car key in the ignition and her heart stops in time with ours. This is the history of the movies, and the history of violence. *The Irishman* is a meditation on what matters.

Scorsese leaves the door open, letting us do the thinking. The movie glides along slowly, giving us time to rethink and switch allegiances, time to question our feelings. As always, Martin Scorsese teaches as he entertains: he tells us when to charge a guy (when he attacks with a gun, not a knife), and how the difference between extortion and frauds is making threats. To many of my generation, the cinema of Scorsese is an adulthood. He commandeered our innocence and showed us what guns could do and what film could do, and changed us. Before Scorsese, we were young. We thought house-painters painted houses.

Stream of Stories is a column on what to watch online. Raja Sen is a film critic and the author of *The Best Baker In The World (2017)*, a children's adaptation of *The Godfather*.

@rajasen

Source

A compendium of beautiful and bizarre objects of desire



FACE PLANT

Unwavering Kids Planter by Beruru

Since plants have an important place in our homes, it would be nice to give yours a ceramic face. Available at ThePurpleTurtles.com; ₹1,494



WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE?

Marble Plates by Rooshad Shroff for
The Gyaan Project

Shroff brought together 12 other designers, including Manish Arora, Atul Dodiya and Bijoy Jain, to create inlay marble plates. The proceeds will support Ahmedabad-based Citta Foundation's efforts to build a girls' education centre in Jaisalmer. Available at Citta.org till December 20; ₹1 lakh onwards

STEADY EYES

Laura Handbag by Paul Adams

While the eyes might be the window to the soul, the ones abstractly painted on this black Napa leather give it a quirky look. Inside, it is compartmentalized and spacious, with a gold hardware finish. Available at PaulAdamsWorld.com; ₹22,207

CENTRE STAGE



ON DISPLAY

A shift in style

The lush French landscape, with its churches, mountains and quaint villages, can be seen in S.H. Raza's *Paysage*, a never-before-seen work from 1960. Painted a decade after he moved to France, it showcases a change in the artist's style—a move from gouache and tempera to oils on canvas and a marked shift towards the "gestural". *Paysage* is now up for sale as part of Saffronart's Winter Online Auction featuring modern and contemporary art. The lots include another painting by Raza, titled *La Terre 3*, besides works by Jagdish Swaminathan, Ram Kumar, Bhupen Khakhar, F.N. Souza and installations by L.N. Tallur, Jitish Kallat and Reena Saini Kallat.—AB
Saffronart's Winter Online Auction is from 9-10 December



FLASH SALE

Shop for a good cause

For seven years, Mumbai-based Manorama Pathshala has been providing supplementary and creative education to underprivileged children from Mumbai's Versova. Every year, it hosts "The Good Karma Sale", a fund-raiser for its operations. This time, there is an eclectic selection of brands such as Eka, No Nasties and The Burlap People, all with eco-friendly and organic production models. On sale will be clothes, jewellery, shoes, lifestyle goods and art.—SL

The Good Karma Sale will be held on 7 December, 11am-5pm, at Doolally Taproom, Khar West, Mumbai. Entry is free

