



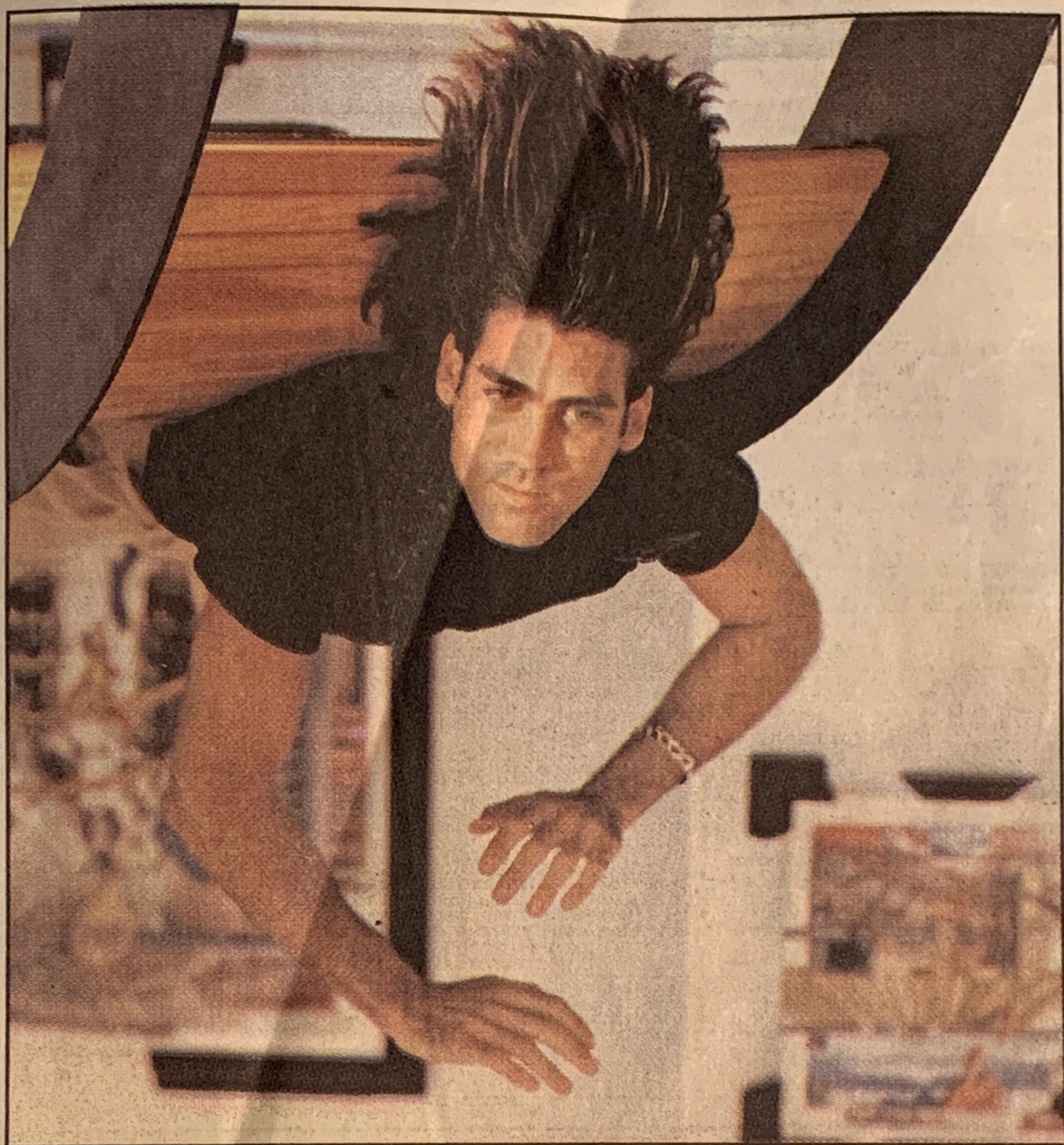
QUICK READ

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# Living & arts

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# the TV



JEFFERY A. SALTER / Herald Staff

**AT IMPERFECT UTOPIA:** Carlos Betancourt's new exhibition, *Fracturism*, is inspired by a 'broken-up images,' which explains the upside-down photograph.

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# Miami Beach artist's 'splintered vision' at core of *Fracturism*

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**T**here's a blue tattoo on Carlos Betancourt's tanned, freckled shoulder, something curling, arching, even beckoning. A mermaid? A scorpion? The Miami Beach artist laughs.

"It's an angel," he says. "An angel looking over my shoulder."

It's not as if Betancourt, 28, *needs* a guardian angel. His paintings and award-winning furniture designs have caught the attention of The New York Times, Elle, House and Garden and a slew of other publications. He designed the interiors for area clubs like Boomerang and the Butter Club. Sylvester Stallone recently commissioned Betancourt and artist Miguel Delgado to paint murals for his Miami home, among them a 20- by 5-foot replica of Michelangelo's *Expulsion of Eve from Paradise* scene in the Sistine Chapel.

"It was a fantastic experience because I was able to try to paint like Michelangelo," says Betancourt, reverence in his voice.

It's a curious switch: Warhol and Lichtenstein, not the

Renaissance master, have been a strong influence on much of Betancourt's paintings, which include enormous Pop-style, ultracamp portraits of Celia Cruz and Beach diva Tara Solomon.

On a sun-blazing Saturday afternoon, in the 90-degree heat outside his Lincoln Road gallery, Imperfect Utopia, the artist is *up*, radiant with energy. He's lithe and loose in tank top, shorts and Birkenstocks. Slipping in and out of a shoulder-shuddering salsa, he describes how he danced with actress Marisa Tomei at Stallone's recent Planet Hollywood bash. Now he shifts lightly from one foot to the other, takes a drag on a cigarette and smiles broadly. He's excited about his show of new work, which will open that evening.

Sheets of white paper cover the storefront window, veiling the new works until nighttime, but a poem Betancourt scrawled across the glass offers some cryptic hints about what's inside. The language is dense, the meter indecipherable, but the last line strikes a chord on this multilingual island of tropical kitsch and thrift-shop glitz:

PLEASE SEE BETANCOURT, 6E

# Fracturism exemplifies artist's work

BETANCOURT, FROM 1E

"I long to assemble the splintered vision of all that I know."

"Splintered vision" dovetails neatly with the title of Betancourt's new show, *Fracturism*. The paintings — layered with a noisy web of shattered, broken-up images — were inspired by the multicultural sensory overload the artist sees as a condition of our lives on the edge of the millenium. Of a recent trip to Buenos Aires, for example, he says, "You listen to the music there, and it's a mixture of every thing — flamenco-bossa nova, tango-jazz, salsa-flamenco."

His mixed-media paintings feature photo-silkscreened portraits of such varied icons as Audrey Hepburn, male models in Banana Republic shorts, the patron saint of Cuba and dissident Cuban poet Maria Elena Cruz Varela. They are interceded with dreamy blue skies, organic forms, some dripping and bloody, some tender and and futuristic drawings reflecting the artist's sinuous chair-lounges. The works are embedded in black fragments or mismatched frames, a device that adds to their chaotic energy.

"My works let me express things visually at the same time," Betancourt says.

"They scream at you," says John Casey, who included Betancourt in a show of Miami artists that he curated for a Sarasota gallery in March. "He travels on the edge of this cleft between cultures," Casey says, comparing Betancourt's art to his habit of switching back and forth between Spanish and English. On the one hand, "he's got that very heavy religious element, with a lot of blood and suffering," while other images suggest the inclusive Pop sensibility of Robert Rauschenberg.

Betancourt creates just such uncomfortable juxtapositions in *Viaje y destino de Raiza la balsera*, inspired by the wrenching story of a Cuban rafter who sur-

and the sleek furniture he designs. Placed near the center of the gallery is a low-slung wooden chaise, gently recalling the curving facade of Morris Lapidus' Fontainebleau Hotel. Other chairs and sofas, sporting shiny cushions of hot pink or lime green, are crafted from a few airy loops of wrought iron, playful grace notes to his passionate imagination.

Everything at Imperfect Utopia is part of a work in progress for one of Betancourt's biggest fans, Richard Alexander, executive producer of the company that brought *Les Miz*, *Phantom*

of the Opera and *Miss Saigon* to Broadway and on tour. Alexander — who flew to Miami Beach from New York for the opening of *Fracturism*, "even though we were having our opening of *Miss Saigon* that night in Washington with the president" — calls Betancourt "ferociously talented. . . . I think he will be in evolution [throughout] his entire career. He doesn't seem to have any boundaries.

"He has eyeballs that are on fire."

*Fracturism*, through the end of July at Imperfect Utopia, 704 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach. Hours: 1-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday. Call 538-4821.

## "THE FUNNIEST MOVIE OF THE YEAR!"

- Rod Lurie, LOS ANGELES MAGAZINE

BILLY CRYSTAL

DANIEL STERN

JON LOVITZ

JACK PALANCE

# CITY SLICKERS II

"THE LEGEND OF CURLY'S GOLD"

CASTLE ROCK ENTERTAINMENT AND COLUMBIA PICTURES PRESENT A FACE PRODUCTION BILLY CRYSTAL DANIEL STERN JON LOVITZ JACK PALANCE "CITY SLICKERS II: THE LEGEND OF CURLY'S GOLD"

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# NICHOLSON · PFEIFFER

"WOLF" CASTS SUCH A SPELL THAT YOU DON'T WANT

hand, he's got that very heavy religious element, with a lot of blood and suffering," while other images suggest the inclusive Pop sensibility of Robert Rauschenberg.

Betancourt creates just such uncomfortable juxtapositions in *Viaje y destino de Raiza la balsera*, inspired by the wrenching story of a Cuban rafter who survived the perilous crossing with her young son but died shortly after, having given all her drinking water to her child. "It killed me, that story," says Betancourt.

In the painting, a black-and-white silkscreened photo of a child's round face, shaded slightly by a baseball cap, appears several times — floating among blue skies with puffy cumulus clouds, boxed into a radiant orange area near the edge of the canvas (where the artist has written a few lines in his trademark and nearly illegible reverse script). Elsewhere, there is contrasting deep and shallow space, with architectural constructions that seem to begin and end nowhere.

Ready to crush this airy network of sky, faces and spaces is a torrent of dripping red and blue, like great clusters of tears or drooping hearts cut in half. This emotional outpouring of paint, in contrast to the bland architectural fragments, seems to evoke the mother's great sacrifice, which was her son's tremendous loss and gain.

The work reflects another theme in the show: the artist's fascination with women as icons of beauty and suffering, ravaged beacons of hope and desire. In the same conversation he waxes rhapsodic about Audrey Hepburn and Cruz Varela. "She had one of the most honest and beautiful smiles you can imagine," he says of Hepburn, whom he met in Miami several years ago. Of Cruz Varela, who has been persecuted and jailed for her poems in Cuba: "What she is is all in her face. Intense. Angelic."

There's yet another contrast to experience at Imperfect Utopia — the clash between Betancourt's "screaming" paintings

## HISPANIC THEATRE

The ninth International Hispanic Theatre Festival runs through Sunday. Performances are at El Carrusel 225 Alcazar Ave

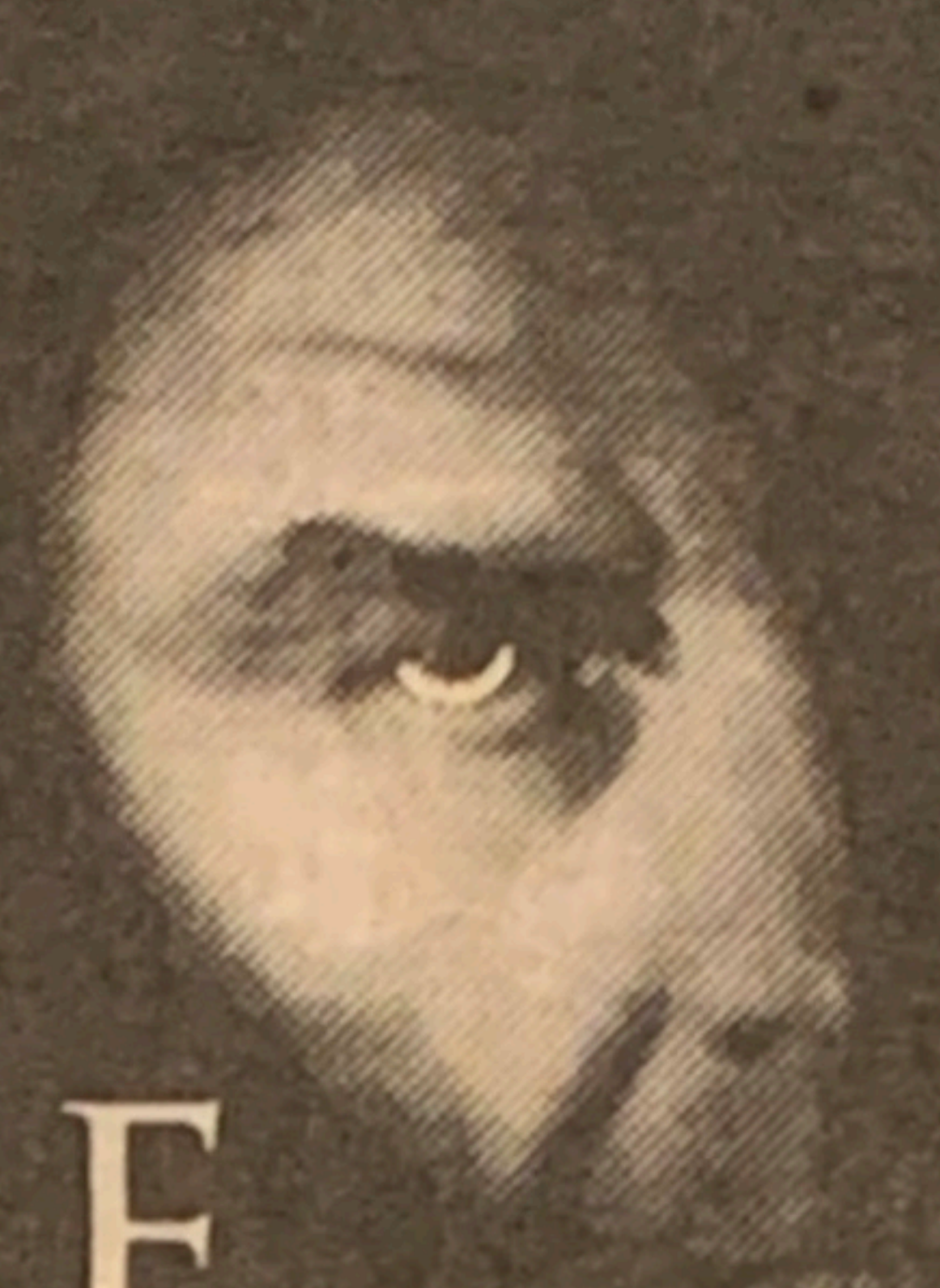
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# NICHOLSON

"'WOLF' CASTS SUCH A SPELL THAT YOU DON'T WANT IT TO END."

DAVID ASSEN, NEWSWEEK

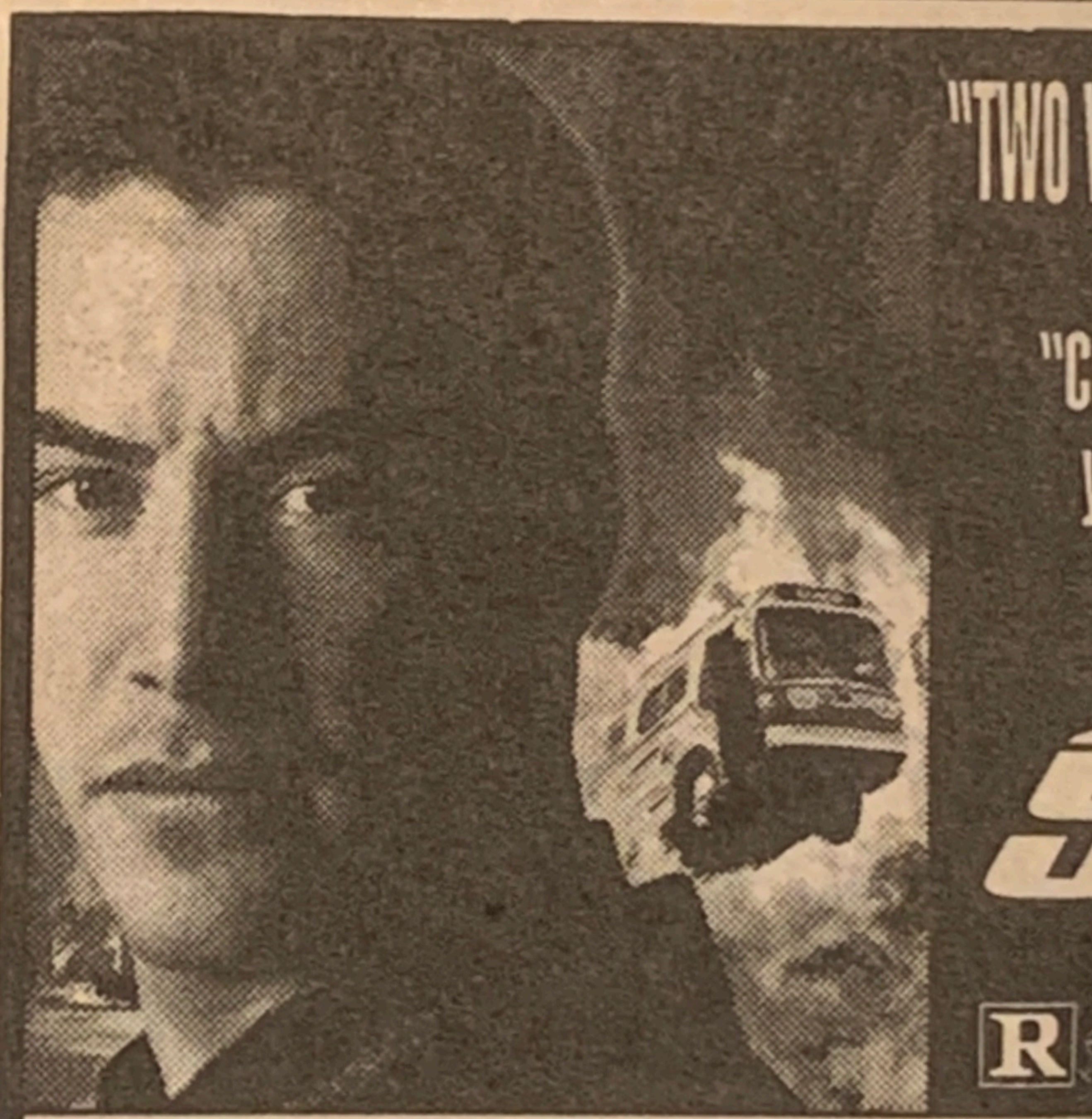
## WOLF



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