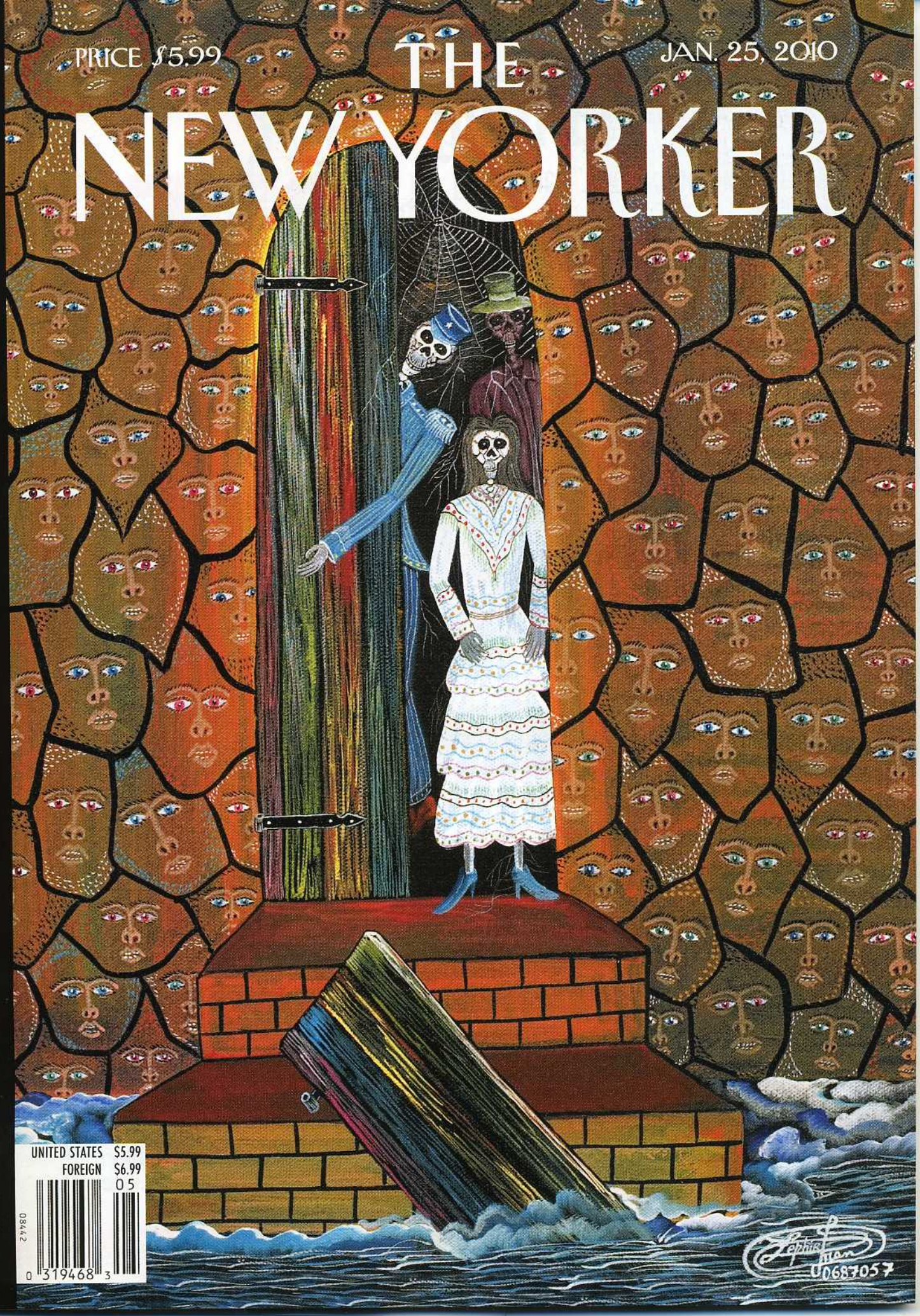


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that he had used steroids, as most people had deduced. He had previously denied this, he said, to stay out of legal trouble. Now he was fessing up to clear the air of controversy in advance of hiring on as a hitting coach for his old team. The pangs, if there were any, had been of self-service, rather than of conscience. Belated acknowledgment only accentuated the bunkum that preceded it. The same day, the former Nets star Jayson Williams finally pleaded guilty to shooting and killing a limousine driver, accidentally, with a shotgun, eight years ago. He, too, had spent the better part of the decade in a state of ludicrous, strategic denial. Meanwhile, there was the sloppy handling of the late-night lineup at NBC: The network, five years ago, had promised Conan O'Brien the "Tonight Show," to keep him from leaving, and then, belatedly, found the arrangement undesirable. So it reneged. Empty promises, like unpayable debts, are exercises in make-believe: you have to pretend that the liability, like that pregnant lady gesticulating in your rearview mirror, isn't real.

And then on Wednesday the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission convened in Washington, D.C., ostensibly to get to the bottom of the economic meltdown—a hit-and-run of forty-mile-pileup proportions. The fugitive drivers, in this scenario, were the C.E.O.s of Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, and Bank of America, who testified before the commission on its first day. The roles played by these firms, and by the men who ran them, in the recent crash were murky and complex enough that they have been able, so far, to pretend they didn't hear that thud on the rear of the car—to say nothing of the passenger shouting in their ears.

At the hearings, Phil Angelides, the head of the commission, repeatedly bemoaned the bankers' failure to apologize or take responsibility for anything. Consider the expression "Own it," a slangy command that means "Take credit or blame for your virtues or failings." The bankers were not owning it. At one point, Angelides said, "Maybe this is like the 'Murder on the Orient Express': everyone did it." Everyone may as well be no one.

—Nick Paumgarten

FACE-LIFT DEPT. SHE DOES WINDOWS



The art of designing rose windows, those enormous circles of stained glass that punctuate the façades of Gothic cathedrals, is generally considered to have peaked in the thirteenth century, which is why it could seem a bit odd that the artist Kiki Smith has been working on one for several months. Smith, who is known for her sculptures of human figures and body parts, animals, and characters from fairy tales, was raised Catholic. Her rose window is not destined for a cathedral, however, but for a synagogue on the Lower East Side, not far from where she lives and works.

Smith's rose window, which consists of several hundred five-pointed stars swirling randomly about, will be fabricated this spring and installed on the eastern wall of the Eldridge Street Synagogue, an ornate, Moorish-style structure. The synagogue was designed by the architects Peter and Francis Herter and constructed in 1887 by Eastern European Jews who wanted it to have the grandeur of an established house of worship, and so the Herters included not one but two rose windows. One faces the street, and the other is on the rear wall of the building, positioned over the ark containing the Torah scrolls. The front window survived years of neglect that nearly caused the building to crumble, but the rear one disappeared more than half a century ago, replaced by glass blocks arranged to resemble four ancient tablets.

When the synagogue was restored—a project that took more than twenty years and turned the building into a combination museum and synagogue—the quasi-modern, industrial-looking window was left as it was. But it was always something of an embarrassment. "When my daughter's class came to tour the synagogue, one of the boys looked up and said, 'Oh, that looks like the windows in my bathroom,'" Amy Stein-Milford, the deputy director of the Museum at Eldridge Street, said. "So much for the feeling of inspiration."

At that point, in 2007, what Milford referred to as "the great Talmudic debate" began, pitting members of the board who wanted to keep the glass-block window

against those who wanted to re-create the original 1887 window, and both groups against a third that thought the synagogue should have something altogether new.

"It was an impassioned debate," Milford said. "There were no pictures of the window as it had been originally, and, because we liked the fact that the whole purpose of this building is to tell a story, we realized that a new window would be a way of continuing the story."

Roberta Brandes Gratz, who founded the preservation group that started the restoration, said, "I was skeptical, because I've never seen a modern stained-glass window that I like." But eventually the advocates of a brand-new rose window won out. The museum asked a few artists if they would submit plans, and it ended up with a dozen designs for a new window. One was the proposal from Smith, who had joined forces with a friend, the architect Deborah Gans. Smith came up with the idea of using five-pointed stars, which appear in several dark-blue domes inside the synagogue.

"This building has a tremendous number of decorative elements already, and it seemed prudent and respectful to use images that were already here," Smith said, sitting beside Gans on a wooden pew in the balcony. The pair designed a center of yellow glass with blue stars, surrounded by a field of blue glass with yellow stars. She and Gans were excited that they could have the window fabricated in pieces of glass that are set together with joints that will appear as thin lines, instead of the heavy lines of lead in traditional stained-glass windows. The effect replaces the jigsaw-puzzle look of old stained glass with something that feels more like the brushwork of an Impressionist painting.

Smith likes that the synagogue already contains five-pointed stars, as well as the six-pointed Star of David. "The five-pointed star is an American invention," she said. "The people who built this were seeking their identity as Eastern European immigrants, but they were also conscious of being in the New World." And the stars have further cultural significance: "This is a Moorish-style building, and Islam uses a lot of geometric imagery." She looked up at the glass blocks. "We will make the window a picture of the sky. It will subtly give out energy and liveliness and unpredictability. It will be a rupture."

—Paul Goldberger