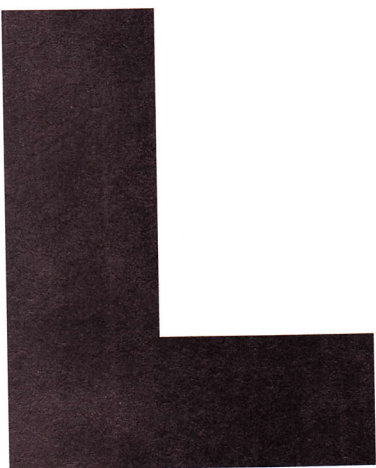




LEONARDO WILHELM DICAPRIO'S parents hung a painting above his crib in the grotty 1970s East Hollywood neighborhood of Los Angeles when he was a baby. The painting wasn't an ac-

tion shot of Peter Rabbit or Curious George. No, it was a reproduction of Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch's three-paneled "Garden of Earthly Delights," a dystopian visual description of Eden being found and lost. It is one of DiCaprio's earliest memories. ¶ "You literally see Adam and Eve being given paradise," says DiCaprio, his blue eyes peering above sunglasses in

a Miami Beach restaurant that has somehow worked "SoHo" into its name. Underneath the table he fidgets his feet in and out of canvas loafers. He drifts away for a moment. DiCaprio just finished shooting an interview for a climate-change film he's making. (Original working title: *Are We Fucked?*) He's already been to India flood plains and the Antarctica polar cap, and now he's not far from Miami playgrounds where he once reputedly left a nightclub with every woman from his VIP section. All, according to DiCaprio, could be washed away.

He snaps back to the painting. "Then you see in the middle this overpopulation and excess, people enjoying the fruits of what this environment's given us," he says. He laughs a sad laugh punctuated by the DiCaprio smile that can be mistaken for a sneer. "Then the last panel is just charred, black skies with a burnt-down apocalypse." He stops for a second before shrugging. "That was my favorite painting."

Halfway between mother and maker, Leonardo DiCaprio is not unhappily marooned between the bright light of his own life – a looming Oscar, a personal fossil collection, a chauffeured rental Tesla – and the bleakness of the overheated world he inhabits with denialist Republicans and a Bangladesh coastline that could be nearly a quarter underwater by 2050. He wants us to move off fossil fuels entirely and wonders where we would be if we had spent billions on finding renewable energy sources rather than on the Iraq War.

"He has an intellectual restlessness," says longtime collaborator Martin Scorsese. "He devours books and texts and information."

Contributing editor STEPHEN RODRICK profiled Martin O'Malley in November.

A friend might tell DiCaprio to lighten up, but that's not going to happen. "There are very few civilians who have the same understanding that this guy has of climate change. Leo's a wonk," says Mark Ruffalo, who has just combined forces with DiCaprio on the Solutions Project, a group of scientists and stars hoping to move America toward full renewable-energy use. "He's putting his ass on the line."

DiCaprio's life-is-brutish-and-short worldview has permeated his post-*Titanic* film choices, especially his work with Scorsese, from *Gangs of New York* to *The Wolf of Wall Street*. He is now starring in *The Revenant*, the bleak tale of trapper Hugh Glass, whose body is demolished by a very angry grizzly, and who loses his family to the viciousness of the White Man. (Making matters worse, he must drag around Moses' neck beard.)

"We went with the purpose of seeing what nature was saying," says DiCaprio of shooting "The Revenant." The response? "This crazy, insane message that stopped production."

Eventually, Glass is double-crossed by a man with half a scalp. He is left for dead, rides a horse off a cliff, sleeps in its carcass and chews on a bison liver. He remains mute for weeks. These are the lighter moments between arrows exploding arteries and knives removing testicles. During the *Fitzcarraldo*-esque shoot in the Canadian Rockies and Argentina, director Alejandro González Iñárritu burned through crew members. Iñárritu says that in their downtime he and DiCaprio would chew their own facial hair to pass the hours.

After that experience, maybe a *Catch Me If You Can*-style light comedy for DiCaprio? Not bloody likely.

"I would love to do something even darker," says DiCaprio with a devious smile. He knows he sounds slightly mad. "I don't know, like how would you penetrate the mind of somebody like Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*? There's a word in German that they don't have in the English language that's called *schadenfreude*. It means humiliation for somebody else." He smirks. "It's what I see sometimes when I watch certain politicians, but it can be done in movies, like when Travis Bickle takes [Cybill Shepherd] to the porno theater for his first date. You're like, 'Oh, God, please don't do this!'"

Not everything is so dark. There are still starlets, scuba diving and industrialist friends named Vlad with giant yachts. I ask him later if he's afraid of slipping down into the gloaming like some character from a movie about a doomed 1912 cruise ship.

"I work hard at trying to create a balance."

Successful?

"We'll see."

He makes his excuses and stands up. It's time to jump into a helicopter and check out the suburban sprawl that threatens the Everglades. He takes a puff on a vaping device, exuding a maple-syrup smell that makes me want pancakes. He pulls a watch cap over his eyes and ducks out through the restaurant's service alley. His chauffeured Tesla peels out for the heliport. A man left behind speaks into a wrist device, inadvertently proving that Leonardo DiCaprio is not just a man but also an organic commodity that can be used for good or evil.

"The package has left the building. I repeat: The package has left the building."

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