

# UP FRONT

RYAN LEE



# Digital Artistry



Time magazine used a digital composite to create a metaphor for this fall 1993 cover.

## DIGITAL FACTS:

IN 1972, TEXAS INSTRUMENTS PATENTED A FILM-LESS ELECTRONIC CAMERA.

IN 1994-95, KODAK AND APPLE SOLD THE FIRST CONSUMER DIGITAL CAMERAS.

IN 2003, U.S. SALES OF DIGITAL CAMERAS EXCEEDED THOSE OF FILM CAMERAS.

A 3-MEGAPIXEL CAMERA WILL TAKE HIGHER-RESOLUTION PICTURES THAN MOST COMPUTER MONITORS CAN DISPLAY.

Now that photography has gone digital, do we take pictures or make them?

Photographer Jonathan Lipkin '91 posed that question when he visited campus in October as a guest of the Center for the Humanities. Lipkin is professor of digital media at Ramapo College of New Jersey, and he is particularly interested in exploring how digital photography has severed the link between photography and the world it once represented.

Photographers have always had the ability to transform images, but changing the medium from exposed film to data on a chip has so enhanced the capacity of anyone to do this with ease that all contemporary images become suspect. It is literally no longer possible to know, simply by looking, whether an image is strictly representational or constructed in the "dim room" (the digital equivalent of a dark room).

Assigning full responsibility for changes in photography to new technology would nonetheless be a mistake, in Lipkin's view. Picasso didn't need a new paint technology to change how artists looked at the world, and the current revolution in the way that images represent or subvert reality owes much to a profound shift in attitude and culture.

"Digital photography is at once a new attitude and a new technology," Lipkin says.

The new attitude spills across the full range of digital media. Lonelygirl15, a young woman who captivated YouTube viewers with a series of videoblogs depicting a home-schooled, shy girl named "Bree," turned out to be a fiction orchestrated by filmmakers and Jessica Lee Rose, a 19-year-old actress. Most surprising, says

Lipkin, is that many fans were not even slightly put off by the widely publicized revelation.

"YouTube is a new narrative form," he says, "and fake videoblogs may be the new novel."

Digital information is malleable, easily distributed on the Internet, and often costs nothing to produce beyond the initial investment in equipment and software. It's an environment ripe for remixing—whether it's an individual creating his iPod playlist by picking and choosing songs among albums or, much to the consternation of the Recording Industry Association of America, digital outlaws remixing the Sex Pistols and Madonna to create an entirely new work for instant, albeit illicit, distribution across the world.

It's a short step from altering images to creating images from a digital palette that is completely severed from any external connection. The ability of digital artists to "draw" humans who spring to life convincingly on the screen still falls short of real actors, but progress has been impressive and augurs a time not long off when the digital and analog worlds will be indistinguishable. In some respects, that point of convergence hardly matters. In 1996, computer scientists in Japan introduced Kyoto Date, a virtual pop star or *idoru*. She quickly became a sensation, appearing in music videos. Her popularity faded just as quickly, but the phenomenon suggests that people are ready to be entertained and instructed by digital avatars. Whether they are ready to be led by avatars, says Lipkin, is "a chilling question."

Another unsettling question is whether audiences who are increasingly accustomed to the world of digital manipulation will continue to expect photojournalists to abide by a different set of rules—rules that preserve the link between the image and the reality it purports to represent. The National Press Photographers Association has strongly affirmed its commitment to accurate representation, yet *Newsweek* caused a stir in 2005 when its cover photo of Martha Stewart ("Thinner and Ready for Prime Time") turned out to be a photoillustration with Stewart's head placed on someone else's body. Readers had to examine the magazine's fine print to learn that fact.

"Digital photography," says Lipkin, "is photography reborn," the title of his recent book (2005). Some digital images are clearly descended from their film forebears, but others rendered on a computer have more in common, conceptually, with paintings. Like the artist with a brush, digital photographers can mix elements from different scenes, alter perspective, or create *de novo*.

Where the technology will lead as modeling software improves is hard to say, except to note, as Lipkin does, that ultimately it will serve artistic vision and ideas, not the other way around. **UPFRONT**



## Benefit Album

The Wesleyan undergraduates who produced the wildly successful *ASAP: the Afrobeat Sudan Aid Project* are producing a new album, this time as new alumni.

Eric Herman '05, a founder and president of Modiba Productions, stopped by Wesleyan recently to promote *Vieux Farka Touré—the Debut Album*. Launched in November on Modiba's Web site and available commercially in February, the album stars the son of two-time Grammy-award winner Ali Farka Touré and features Grammy-award winners Toumani Diabaté and Ali Farka Touré.

Herman says that 10 percent of the proceeds will go to fight malaria in Africa. To promote awareness of the threat from malaria and to boost album sales, he and classmate Jesse Brenner are organizing "The Fight Malaria Tour" with college appearances in February and March. Classmates Dave Ahl and Adam Tuck, as well as Brenner, contributed to production of the album.

Their first album, *ASAP*, has been featured widely on independent and college radio stations. It raised more than \$130,000 to fund humanitarian groups working in Darfur. See [modiba.net](http://modiba.net) and [vieuxfarkatoure.com](http://vieuxfarkatoure.com).

# Blood, Sweat, and Books

Every year people in business write books about the services they provide in hopes of becoming better known in markets crowded by competitors. Since writing a book, finding a publisher, and assisting in its marketing are laborious tasks that consume huge amounts of time with no guarantee of success, the question arises: Are these books worth the effort?

The answer is yes, with some caveats, according to **Rebecca Gould '05**, editor of *RainToday.com*, a Web site for professional service providers who want to improve their marketing. She and colleagues at the parent consulting firm, Wellesley Hills Group,

conducted a study, "The Business Impact of Writing a Book: Data, Analysis, and Lessons from Professional Service Providers Who Have Done It," published in 2006.

Their principal finding, based on a survey of 200 authors, is that the blood, sweat, and tears required to write a book often do pay off in better branding, the ability to charge higher fees, more speaking engagements, and other business-enhancing results. The principal caveat is the best outcomes accrue to those who are able to find agents and acquire contracts with well-known publishers. Those who self-publish without the backing of agents and the marketing apparatus of a major publisher are, not surprisingly, far less likely to be happy with the outcome.

*PRNews, Publishers Weekly, Black Enterprise,* and *Business Week* (online) have carried stories about this project.

## How does Wesleyan Fare? Participation in Annual Giving



63%	Amherst
61%	Davidson
61%	Williams
58%	Bowdoin
55%	Middlebury
54%	Colgate
54%	Wesleyan
52%	Carleton
51%	Haverford
51%	Swarthmore
41%	Bates

# Mind Matters

*Mind Matters*, a new Wesleyan journal of psychology, offers topics ranging from senior citizens' perception of their age to the correlation between early parental loss and adulthood depression—and all the content is student research.

Steven Wengrovitz '06 and Sam Duncan '05, a Ford Fellow on campus at the time, were founding editors in 2006. Both were research assistants in Assistant Professor of Psychology Andrea Patalano's lab, studying human decision-making. They knew that while many student research papers were published in professional journals, many more of equal caliber did not make it into print. Deciding that Wesleyan could sustain its own psychology journal, they began soliciting manuscripts.

"As much as we loved our research, we knew that students across the hall were just as excited about their work," recalls Wengrovitz.

They were rewarded with more than a dozen manuscripts, from which they chose five to showcase. Additionally, they signed on four more editors for the labor-intensive review process, polishing each paper with line-by-line evaluation.

"This is an opportunity for students to learn about the submission process—and also, unfortunately, the rejection process," notes Wengrovitz.

The editors, who are soliciting manuscripts for the second volume to be published in May, are selling journal subscriptions. They are also mentoring upcoming editorial board members, now student reviewers, who will carry this new tradition past Commencement '07.

(See [www.wesleyan.edu/psyc/mindmatters/](http://www.wesleyan.edu/psyc/mindmatters/) for further information.)

Do you have an opinion about our new **UPFRONT** section? Please write us at [letters@wesleyan.edu](mailto:letters@wesleyan.edu).

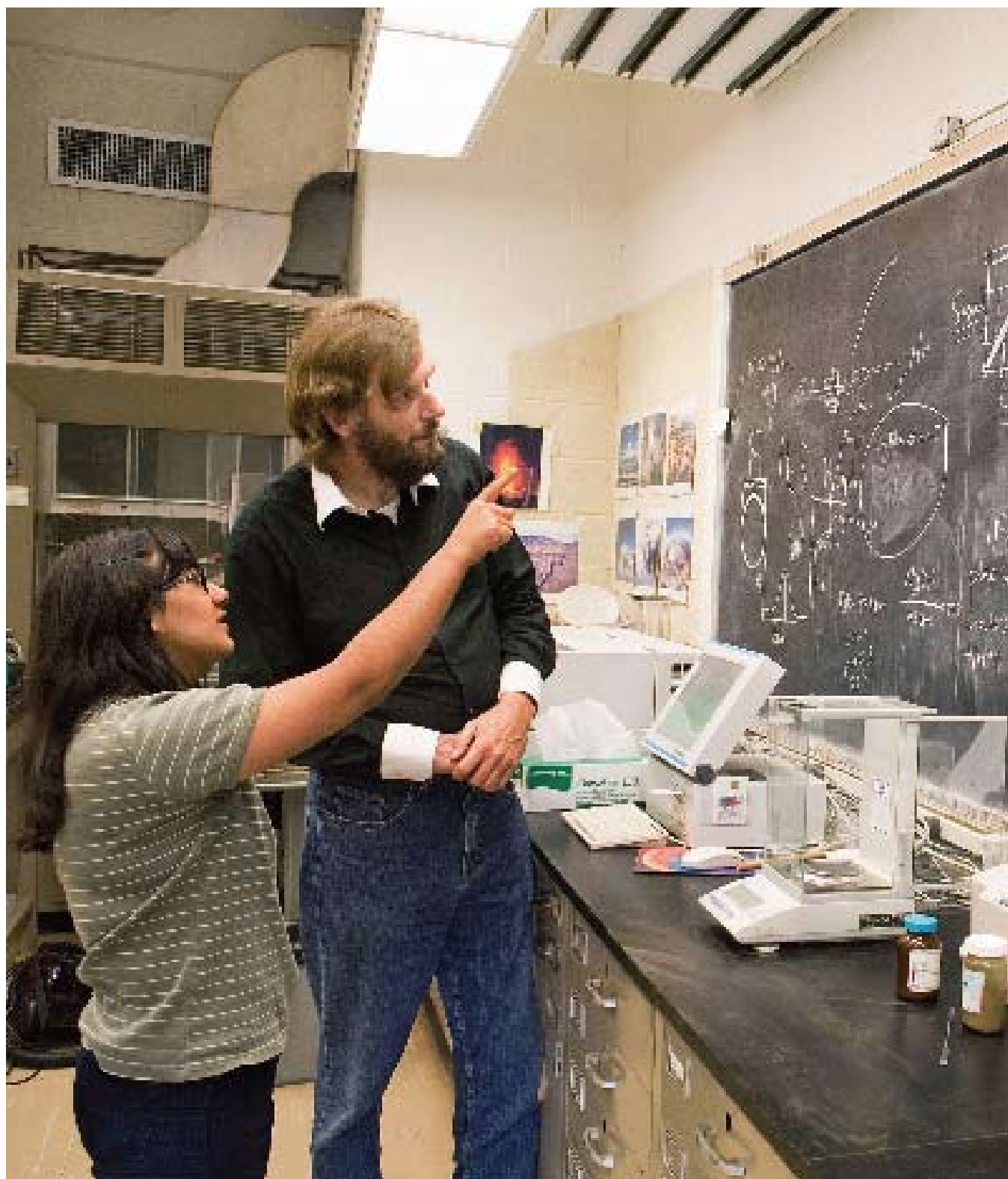
## ART &amp; SCIENCE OF EDUCATION

## Think Twice About Tuna

What could be better than a healthful diet with more fish and less meat?

Studies last spring by a Wesleyan undergraduate suggest that eating lots of fish might not be so desirable, after all. **Asia Neupane '09**, a University Scholar, worked with Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences Joop Varekamp to assess mercury levels in hair samples submitted by 104 faculty, staff, and students. Mercury in hair is known to be strongly correlated with daily fish intake.

The results showed a wide variation—from five parts per billion to 8,500 ppb, with a geometric mean of 540 ppb. The EPA has set the action level at 1,000 ppb of mercury in hair, suggesting that the 35 percent of Wesleyan participants above this level might want to think twice about ordering tuna salad instead of chicken salad. One participant in the study did cut way back on fish intake, and an analysis several months later revealed reduced hair levels of mercury.



CLOONEY

## ENGAGED WITH THE WORLD

## Leaves Tell the Story of Climate Change

**M**any scientists have long believed that a treasure trove of information about global warming is locked in leaf fossils that are millions of years old. Dana Royer, assistant professor of earth and environmental science, has just found a key.

Royer and colleagues have generated a reliable method to ascertain from fossils of the Eocene period—34 million to 56 million years ago—data related to “leaf economics.” His findings were highlighted at the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America (GSA), which was held in Philadelphia from October 22–25.

“The early Eocene was a period when the planet experienced intense warming,” Royer says. “Quantifying the leaf economics of that time allows us to see how plants and the environment around them responded to a warm-up and compare that with what’s happening now.”

Which brings us back to leaf economics, or more precisely, what kind of leaves the plants had and how quickly they grew. In essence, plants tend to be either relatively quick or slow growing. While there are a number of variables involved in the growth rates, quick-growing plants found in warmer temperatures tend to have a low leaf mass area, defined as leaf mass divided by its area. They are typified by thinner leaves, a higher photosynthetic rate, and use more nutrients. They also tend to have faster lifecycles and be more susceptible to wind and insect damage.

Plants in cooler climates tend to have high leaf mass area. They are slow-growing and have thicker leaves that are more resistant to wind and insect damage. They also display slower photosynthetic rates, use fewer nutrients, and have longer lifecycles.

Obtaining these types of measurements is simple enough in the present day. In all but a few examples, however, this data has been difficult to extract from the fossil record.

Royer and his co-investigators were able to solve this puzzle by



OLIVIA BARTLETT

relating leaf mass to the width of the petiole, the thin stalk that connects the leaf to the branch. Heavier leaves require thicker petioles for support. In fossils, petiole width and leaf area can therefore be measured to estimate leaf mass per area. They tested their methods on Eocene fossils from sites in Washington and Utah.

Royer hopes that this method will open up a new area of inquiry into the fossil record that can provide important data for helping us understand the earmarks and effects of climate change today.

“We’re not saying that how plants responded during a significant warming, such as in the Eocene, translates directly to what may be on the horizon for us if global warming continues,” Royer says. “However, by examining leaf economics from the fossil record we can also examine parallels and, at the very least, see if what happened then is applicable to what we may be experiencing.”

“It’s always a best case scenario when you can find something from the geological record that helps us learn something new and useful about our own world,” Royer says. **UPFRONT**



## LETTER HOME

# Failed Plan Leads to New Life

Catesby Holmes '05  
writes about slowing it  
down, smoothing it out



## ZIHUATANEJO, MEXICO

**T**hey say it floods here in the winter, but I'm certain that even wading through sewage-tainted water would be better than enduring this searing heat. The locals, though, don't seem bothered. They sit in hammock chairs at midday, leisurely fanning themselves or slowly sipping drinks. They look—to my eyes, at least—comfortable and dry. Meanwhile, distastefully sodden, I tromp determinedly down the streets, keeping to the shady side and stepping off the sidewalk to dodge the town's more relaxed strollers. My way of moving—passing people left and right, darting in and out of crowds—is so American that if my appearance didn't do the trick, I'd still stick out like a sore thumb. As Nicole, my companion here in heat and adventure, recently noted, it's not that the Mexicans don't sweat like we do, it's that they don't walk like we do.

We find ourselves on a quest for necessary things. First, a suitable apartment. Then, stuff to make the tiled, colorful space feel more homey: picture frames, a hand-crafted tablecloth, bright curtains, hammocks for siestas, a barrel of potable water. Collecting these various items occupied two hot days. Nicole and I scoured all three *mercados* in town and trudged around the streets carrying such unlikely items as metal poles, trash cans, and a giant foam pad. Passing the same neighbors every day, each time with different strange cargo, we received smiles, greetings, and sometime heckles. They obviously find Nicole and me amusing: the foreign girls who are clumsily furnishing an apartment. The *gringas* who have come to stay.

Nicole and I are 22 and 23 years of age, respectively. We are females, one black and one white. We are college friends, recent Wes grads (class of 2005) who were not quite ready to enter the rat race. The way I see it, I have my whole life to build a career. And I will do so, cheerfully—but not just yet. Right now I am content to take a breather.

Nicole was rather of the same mind (though in her case it was graduate school she was delaying), and so, during our entire senior year, we planned to escape to the south. I saved my money and moved here at summer's end after graduation. The timetable com-  
fortingly echoed the academic calendar that had long prescribed my schedule, except instead of textbooks and falling leaves, autumn this year brought guidebooks and palm trees.

As the daughter of upper-middle-class parents, I always sensed that my future was, to a large extent, preordained. I felt (and indeed

am) fortunate: a plan seemed to be already in motion. Prepared by honors and AP classes in high school, and buoyed by numerous extracurricular activities, I was theoretically bound for an upper echelon liberal arts college. After that, I doubted little that the world of full-time, fast-paced success would welcome me.

Yet not even my privileged upbringing could assure admission, and, of the eight colleges I applied to in the year 2000, none desired my attendance. "The Plan" had failed. I was stunned—for if I wasn't "college-bound," what was I? Yet while my crestfallen parents and helpful teachers suggested a transitional year of community college, I began to imagine other autumn destinations. Envisioning all the mind-boggling prospects, I wondered why I had ever assumed that my education must occur in one, non-stop blitz of academic institutions.

So I worked, saved my money, and moved to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. I learned, with the success that derives from necessity, to speak Spanish and failed miserably in my attempts to learn to sculpt. And several months later, certain now that college represented the future I desired—and not just the one I had presumed—I sent an application, just one application, from the slow Internet cafés in my artsy little desert town.

Last May, as four years at Wesleyan drew to a close, I watched my smart, talented friends frantically seeking jobs. But I knew that for me—for my own present and future happiness—it was time again to take a break. I was in love (deeply), had ambitions in writing (serious ones), and feared that after abandoning my happy life, I might never recoup what I had left behind. I still wonder. I am still down here, and all that is still up there.

I do not consider that in Mexico I am escaping from life, but rather broadening it. Slowing it down, smoothing it out. I am enjoying simply existing. And even routine activities like finding freshly-made tortillas and attempting to tell taxi drivers my address (Huitzilopochtli Street in Cuauhtémoc neighborhood) make existing, quite simply, more interesting.

I will return to the United States eventually. In fact, I have already half-planned a cross-country journey that will take me to colossal Mexico City, head up through the colonial heart of Mexico, traverse the deserts of Chihuahua, and cross the border via Ciudad Juarez. In a few years, the necessities and responsibilities of adulthood will prevent such spontaneous, super-low-budget travel. But when that time comes—when I decide I want a family, or a fast-paced, full-time career—I will be certain that I have chosen that life with eyes wide open and I will live it a million minutes wiser. **UPFRONT**

Catesby Holmes is now participating in a Fulbright English teaching program in Montevideo, Uruguay, where she is pictured (left).

## SCHOLAR-ATHLETES

## #1 is Not a Stretch

Ellen Davis '07 is setting a remarkable pace through Wesleyan. This 2005 All-American from Marshall, N.C., made her fourth trip to the NAAs in cross-country after winning the 2006 New England Division III title. She finished ninth of 279 runners at the nationals—the best by a Wesleyan woman since Allegra Burton '87 came in third in 1986—and again took All-American honors. Davis is a major in feminist, gender, and sexuality studies.

