

A Visit With Peter Jackson at Weta, His Wonder Factory

By Joe Morgenstern

WELLINGTON, New Zealand—This fall Peter Jackson will be in Pennsylvania directing “The Lovely Bones,” his screen version of the haunting Alice Sebold novel that inhabits both heaven and earth. For now, though, he’s still working on preparations for the film at Weta, his production facility in the modest Wellington suburb of Miramar. On a New Zealand winter’s day of brisk breezes and heavenly sunshine I visited him at Weta, which was named after a giant insect endemic to this country and has been fed by giant revenues from “The Lord of the Rings.”

I’d been told by his people that it was to be a social visit. Freely translated, that meant he didn’t want to sit still for yet another interview or profile, and understandably so. Translating more freely, I took it to mean he also didn’t want to discuss his legal disputes with New Line, the Hollywood studio that produced the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy. All of that was fine with me, since I had no agenda, apart from hearing what the reigning master of fantasy might have to say about the movie business and its foreseeable future—maybe even its unforeseeable fu-

ture—and getting some idea of the scope of Weta, which has become a one-of-a-kind cauldron of creativity, as well as raw computing power.

I’d been told by other people that Mr. Jackson was sociable and a gracious host. So he proved

to be as he greeted me in a quietly sumptuous office where lunch had been set out in front of a fire in a Mission-style fireplace. He expressed concern about my state of

body—I was hobbling in the realm of the Hobbits because I’d injured my leg the night before—though not about my state of mind, despite my mixed review of his “King Kong.” He spoke with easy enthusiasm of movies he’d loved: the original “King Kong,” of course, the 1933 spectacular that had famously inspired him, at the age of nine, to be a filmmaker, but also 1950s Hitchcock films including “Vertigo,” “Rear Window” and the color remake of “The Man Who Knew Too Much.”

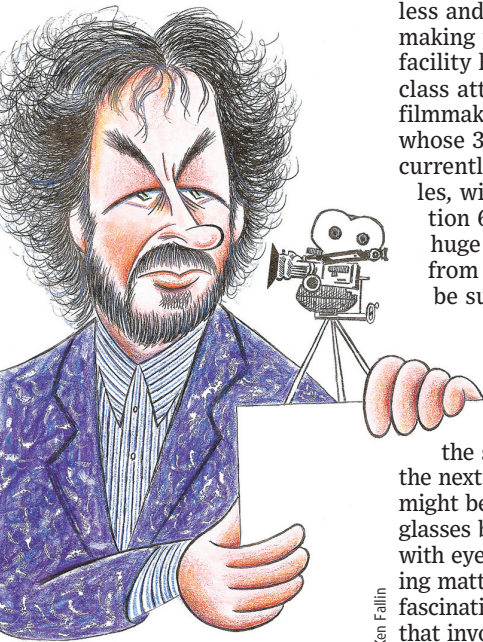
When I asked him how he directed actors, he replied with disarming candor. “I was terrified at first. I assumed that other people, film-school graduates and the like, knew things I didn’t. But I don’t tell the actors how to act, only what their part of the whole is at a specific moment.” He went beyond that, though, at one point

in “The Lord of the Rings” when he was directing a scene with Ian McKellen as the wizard Gandalf. “I wasn’t making myself clear, so he finally said, ‘Why don’t you show me what you want? Act it yourself.’ ” And how was the director’s performance? Mr. Jackson deflected the question with a cheerful shrug. His story was only about Sir Ian’s good humor and serene self-confidence; most actors won’t countenance a director giving them a hint of a line reading, let alone showing them how to act a scene.

Every production facility has its screening rooms, but Weta has something special—a theater that Mr. Jackson designed to evoke the movie palaces of his childhood: Hacienda décor, stars on the ceiling, statues of women in the style of Hearst’s San Simeon. It isn’t grandiose, as if decreed by a latter-day Kubla Khan, but quite cozy, the statuary notwithstanding, a pleasure dome built by a man who retains—and on a global scale shares—his sense of wonder.

That sense seems to be the uncommon currency of all the enterprises that carry the Weta name. At Weta Workshop, where the creatures, miniatures, chain mail and weaponry in “The Lord of the Rings” were designed and created, Mr. Jackson’s longtime friend and one of his business partners, Richard Taylor, showed me some of the stunning—and

stunningly expensive—collectible figures his shop was turning out. He spoke of the need for a moral component in entertainment at a time when satellite TV was commercializing whole nations. He mentioned a children’s TV series



in production, and a new venture that manufactures chain mail for world-wide sale.

These days many studio films, cluttered with cheesy computer-generated images, suggest that an obsession with digital effects will be the monster that devours the movie medium. Mr. Jackson

is optimistic on this count, and with reason. He and his collaborators, like their soul mates at Pixar, use computers to serve art, not degrade it. And he sees the studios functioning more and more as banks, while becoming less and less central to the filmmaking process. Indeed, his own facility has become such a world-class attraction that no less a filmmaker than James Cameron, whose 3-D spectacular “Avatar” is currently shooting in Los Angeles, will soon move his production 6,700 miles south to a huge sound stage a few blocks from Weta Digital, which will be supervising the effects.

In referring to “Avatar,” Mr. Jackson used the term “stereo,” rather than “3-D.” When I realized that he didn’t mean the sound track, I joked that the next step in 3-D projection might be banishing those familiar glasses by providing moviegoers with eye surgery. It was no laughing matter for him; he spoke with fascination of military experiments that involve projecting laser images directly on the retina. But that’s the thing about talking with Peter Jackson, even in the course of a social visit. You get the feeling anything is possible in motion pictures, and that his part of the movies’ future is in good hands.

Mr. Morgenstern is the Journal’s film critic.

Eastern Medicine Goes West

HONG KONG—I wasn’t sure what to expect from a conference promoting the “Modernization of Chinese Medicine and Health Products,” but it surely wasn’t this. Sitting at a small table amid throngs of international vendors in the Hong Kong convention center, I winced at the pain jolting through my hand. The woman who sat across from me nodded wisely: “You get migraines I see.” She gestured to a picture of a hand dotted with pressure points and their associated organs while sliding an electromagnetic stylus across my palm. “Lower back pain.” Another jolt of pain, “... and you didn’t sleep very well last night.”

The cause of my discomfort—a pocket-sized needle-less acupuncture device called the “Aculife Magnetic Wave Therapist”—is just one of hundreds of revamped, “traditional” medicinal products geared towards the modern consumer. By directing electromagnetic waves at pressure points on my palm, I can give myself acupuncture treatment without the unpleasantness of becoming a human pin cushion, explained Diana Lee, a manager at Trend Links International, Ltd. Ms. Lee claims the pocket-sized device is already selling in the United States, Ireland, Pakistan, Indonesia and the United Kingdom.

Hong Kong is on the cutting edge of the movement to modernize traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), a practice which dates back thousands of years, and ranges from herbal medicine to acupuncture, massage and Qigong. Underlying the philosophy is the idea that good health is inexorably related to balance

and harmony—to Yin and Yang, the human meridian system, the five elements, and the Zang Fu organ theory system.

Raised in the heart of Silicon Valley amid a burgeoning Chinese population, I already had some experience with TCM: My family had tried it when my brother developed an assortment of health problems, baffling Western doctors. I once accompanied him to a little herb shop in downtown San Jose run by a traditional Chinese doctor; walls lined with glass jars full of herbs, barks, dried berries and leaves of every shape and color. The practitioner did a “pulse diagnosis” on my brother and prescribed a half-dozen ingredients that simmered on the stove for hours into a foul-smelling, bitter-tasting brew. My brother drank it dutifully—with ambiguous results.

The TCM showcased at this year’s conference bore little likeness to the dusty herb shop of my childhood memories—still ubiquitous throughout the mainland. Gone are the jars of roots, dried berries and musty-smelling tree bark. In their place are neatly packaged pills—ginkgo, herbal remedies, ginseng—aimed at a burgeoning western market.

Interest in complementary and alternative medicine is on the rise

worldwide, and China is eager to partake in the growing market. In the U.S. alone, sales of alternative remedies reached approximately \$5 billion in 2005, according to a market study by Mintel research. Nearly 62% of American adults have used some sort of alternative medicine, which respondents “felt



Traditional Chinese herbs may be going out of fashion.

to overall be safer and have fewer side effects than pharmaceuticals,” according to the study.

Why the interest? The answer lies in part with demographics, according to Dr. Albert Wong, founding president of the Hong Kong-based Modernized Chinese Medicine International Association. “Wealthy, aging baby-boomers are growing disillusioned with pharmaceuticals,” he says. Advances in Western medicine have increased longevity, so patients are less likely to suffer from specific diseases, and more likely to suffer from chronic conditions like high blood pressure, cholesterol and

metabolic problems. “These are conditions herbal medicines are much more capable to handle than specific synthetic drugs,” Dr. Wong asserts.

A Denver, Colorado practitioner of TCM, Martha Lucas, who has been running a private practice for nearly six years, adds that many of her patients express frustration with the rising cost of medical care, the side effects, the lack of individual care, and are often “disappointed with the outcome” of modern medicine. “People realize a pill doesn’t always cure everything,” she says. Part of the effectiveness of TCM is the approach, according to Ms. Lucas, which focuses on prevention and maintaining good health. TCM “looks for the cause of the pain—and we treat that, not just the symptoms.”

But Western doctors have long viewed the efficacy of TCM with profound skepticism. “There is no evidence that acupuncture influences the course of any disease,” says Stephan Barrett, a retired psychiatrist who operates www.quackwatch.org, a Web site debunking medical fraud. TCM also lacks consistency and proper validation of diagnosis, according to Dr. Barrett.

So why do people go? “Acupuncture is very relaxing,” says Maggie Holben, who first went to Ms. Lucas three years ago for pain in her sciatic nerve. After a

month of treatments, she said, the pain was gone. Is she sure that it was the acupuncture? “I think so,” though she couldn’t say for sure. Such anecdotal evidence is hardly scientific and often unreliable, according to Dr. Barrett, who adds that there are many other factors—including the Western treatments that patients often take congruently with alternative ones—that could contribute to a positive result.

But the Chinese government means to prove the effectiveness of TCM once and for all. In April, Beijing announced an ambitious 15-year plan to standardize and modernize TCM. The plan, released by 16 government agencies, will dedicate nearly \$130 million to improve testing methods, expand clinical research and develop globally recognized standards for TCM treatments, and this funding represents more than five times the previous year’s budget. The project marks a fresh stab at a long-term ambition initiated more than 50 years ago by Chairman Mao Zedong: to integrate Western and Eastern medicine and to build international confidence in TCM.

Whether TCM will ever gain complete acceptance by the Western medical establishment remains to be seen. In the meantime—if the long lines of impatient people waiting to get zapped by needle-less acupuncture devices was any indication—the curative value of TCM, at least, is unlikely to fade any time soon.

Ms. Pulitzer recently completed a Robert L. Bartley fellowship at the Wall Street Journal Asia in Hong Kong.

❖ Collecting

More for less

Prints offer value in an overheated global art market

By MARGARET STUDER

In a market where prices for paintings by big-name artists are soaring beyond most mortals’ budgets, fine prints are an interesting alternative, especially for new buyers. They offer a way to collect quality art at a reasonable price.

“If you can’t afford a Damien Hirst painting, buy a print,” says Bonhams specialist Robert Kennan. “Prints are affordable art.”

Many of the world’s great artists also have been enthusiastic printmakers, appreciating the opportunity to make paper-based masterpieces available to a wider audience, although still in limited editions. It was a chance to increase their fame—as well as their incomes.

Coming print auctions in London will feature an impressive selection of works by leading artists from the 15th century to the present day. The sales include works by old masters such as Albrecht Durer, Rembrandt and Goya through to 20th- and 21st-century stars, including Henri Matisse, Edvard Munch, Picasso, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Donald Judd and David Hockney.

The range of estimated prices also is wide, starting at under \$2,000 and rising to more than \$400,000. With prints, value is determined by rarity (editions vary in number), condition, fame of the artist, technical skill and, of course, the power of the image.

Christie’s will hold its two-day sale Sept. 18 and 19 (www.christies.com); Sotheby’s on Sept. 20 (www.sothebys.com); and Bonhams on Nov. 12 (www.bonhams.com).

The September print sales come at the start of the new auction season, and are a kind of barometer of the overall art market. They should be especially interesting this year, after the recent turbulence in the financial markets.

Christie’s specialist Richard Lloyd believes sales are likely to remain strong. “When there are wobbles in financial markets, money goes into other stores of value like art,” he says. But, he admits, “if huge financial-market bonuses are cut across the board—which is not the case now—there will be an effect.”

Auction specialists say they are seeing an influx of new collectors coming into the market. According to Mr. Lloyd, these buyers usually start with familiar images, such as well-known works by famous artists.

Here are some examples from artists whose now-iconic and easily recognizable print images will be on offer in the coming London sales:

The beautiful Henriette Darricarrère, with her heavy brows, inviting mouth and penetrating gaze, was Matisse’s favorite model. The Christie’s sale will include one of the most important prints he made featuring her, half-naked and gazing mysteriously at nothing. The lithograph, “Grande Odalisque a la Culotte Bayadère” (1925), carries an estimate of \$360,000 to \$450,000. More moderately priced Matisse prints in the sale include a seated female nude from 1925 estimated at \$16,000 to \$25,000.

Picasso famously immortalized his lovers through his images. The Sotheby’s sale will feature the artist’s “Figure Stylisée” (1948), a captivating portrait head of Françoise Gilot, his companion at the time (estimate: \$250,000 to \$300,000).

A Picasso highlight of the Christie’s sale is his colorful bust from 1962 of a woman wearing a hat printed in many colors (\$200,000 to \$300,000). Many other Picasso prints are available at more affordable prices. For example, a Spanish bullfight scene with toreadors from 1957 is expected to fetch \$8,000 to \$12,000.

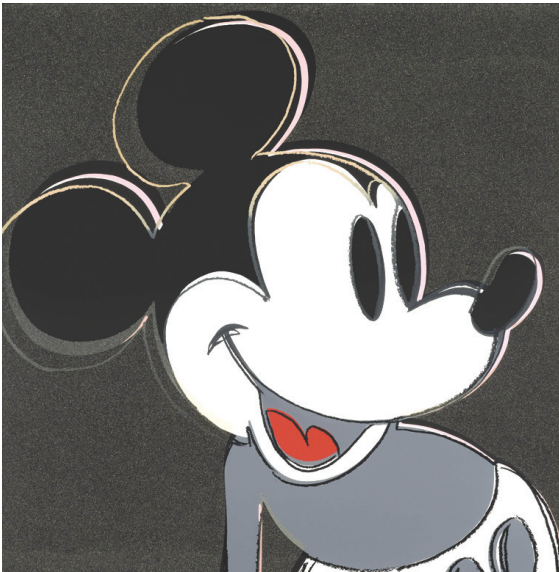
Andy Warhol’s images are probably the most recognizable in the modern-art world. A wealth of them will be on the block in the coming print sales.

Although these prints don’t come cheap, they cost a lot less than his million-dollar canvases that perennially attract the headlines at international contemporary art sales.

Sotheby’s will have one of Warhol’s iconic images



Christie’s ‘Crying Girl,’ Woman Wearing a Hat; Sotheby’s (Mickey Mouse)



Roy Lichtenstein’s ‘Crying Girl’ (top); ‘Mickey Mouse’ by Andy Warhol (above); Picasso’s ‘Woman Wearing a Hat’ (above left)

of Marilyn Monroe at an estimated price of \$60,000 to \$100,000; a Mickey Mouse at \$70,000 to \$90,000; and film star James Dean at \$80,000 to \$125,000. But even a Warhol can be a relative bargain: Christie’s has a limited-edition print of one of his portraits of Elizabeth Taylor for an estimated \$8,000 to \$12,000; or his colorful flowers for \$16,000 to \$25,000.

Even more striking than the Warhol images are those of his fellow pop artist, Roy Lichtenstein. The Christie’s auction has Lichtenstein’s “Crying Girl” (1963), estimated at \$40,000 to \$60,000; and his “Shipboard Girl” (1965) at \$45,000 to \$55,000. Both pictures are superb examples of romantic rivalry between the sexes.

British artist David Hockney’s car broke down on a trip through Mexico in 1984, forcing him to put up for the night in a hotel in Acatlan. The hotel was simple, with an enclosed courtyard that was a peaceful and beautiful haven. This chance encounter inspired a series of colorful, idyllic Hockney prints, one of which is in the Bonhams sale: “Hotel Acatlan: Second Day” (1984-85), estimated at \$60,000 to \$80,000.

Margaret Studer is a Switzerland-based writer.

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