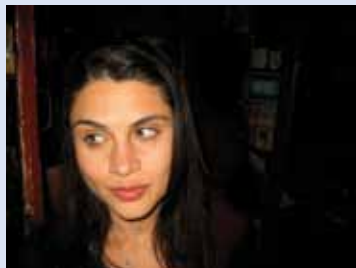


ONCE A HARVARD GRAD, ALWAYS A HARVARD GRAD.

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LAUREN MECHLING '99

Background: Lauren Mechling has worked as a writer and editor at a number of publications, including the *Paris Review* and the *New York Sun*. She is now an editor at the *Wall Street Journal*. Mechling is also an author of fiction for young people, including the *Dream Girl* detective series, *The Rise and Fall of a 10th Grade Social Climber* series, and a novel titled *My Darklyng*, which was published on Slate.com.

A Harvard Grad Is: Says Mechling, "I learned the most from the students surrounding me. There truly is no luxury greater than being in the midst of such inspiring and brilliant and quite often hilarious souls. They shaped who I am, and inspired me to approach my work and life with a sense of fearlessness and playfulness."

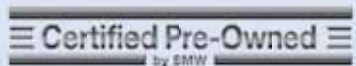
A Harvard Grad Gives Back: Mechling donates to the Harvard Film Center, where she says she spent "...what some might call an unhealthy amount of hours in the dark, being very, very happy." **BMW North America is proud to support Lauren's efforts with a donation to The Harvard Film Center.**

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MONTAGE

Disruptive Creations

Videos and sculptures that challenge perceptions

IN THE VIDEO CALLED *Day Shift*, a security guard sits in a small office, watching a monitor that shows the room she's in. The phone rings. Nobody's there. Again the phone, again no one's on the other end. No matter, it's 5 P.M. The guard walks to her car. Looks back—her rear window is bricked in. Nonetheless, a section of the window slides open. She crawls into the backseat and through the rear window, emerging in the monitor on her office desk. The office is different now—the ceiling's lower. The phone rings. Yet again the caller is silent. And as a small building is slowly pulled backward on the lawn of a country estate, there is applause.

The inspiration for this video might have been the 1999 film *Being John Malkovich*. But that cult favorite would be too direct for Meredith James '04, the artist who also cast herself as the uniformed security guard in her video. Her idea of an inspiration for a video or sculpture is



The main set for Meredith James's video *Day Shift* (above), and one of its scenes (left), starring James



more likely traceable to a Surrealist film by Jean Cocteau or a literary science-fiction novel. Not on her list: ideas that come from drawing, painting, and sculpture. "When I draw," she says, "I feel I'm looking at my own handwriting. The words may surprise me, but it feels familiar."

Her art is anything but familiar. "My intent is to show parallels between the

world you imagine in your mind and the world we inhabit," she says. "I want to level that playing field." So in her large, nearly empty studio in a nondescript section of Brooklyn, James, now 29, makes videos and sculptures (<http://meredith-james.com>) that distort architectural space and play with perception. "My continuing interest," she says, "is disruption."



See-Through (2007)

Photographs courtesy of Meredith James



The humorous *Applause* uses motorized hands to clap for viewers.

A typical piece is *See-Through* (2007), an assembly of salvaged wood and windows, arranged in a kind of cupola. “You look into a window,” she explains, “but instead of seeing inside, you see another window. Soon you’re looking into a tunnel of windows. It’s a formal problem for me now, but it started out as a dream in which I walked up to a house, looked in—and saw out the side window.”

Corridor (2009), created from a dry-cleaner’s conveyer rack, is a distant echo of a shot of the spooky hotel corridor in Stanley Kubrick’s 1980 film *The Shining*. Its intent: “to turn visual imagery into a physical object.” The video *Present Time* (2009) shows what seems like the peeling off of endless layers of lacy fabric as curtains of a proscenium stage are pulled back, only to reveal another curtain.

This is not, for James, art that we should take entirely seriously. In *Applause*, a sculpture she made at Yale, where she earned an M.F.A.

in 2009, two rubber hands, powered by a motorized bicycle chain, sit upon a chair and clap repeatedly. “As an artist, you end up having to be your own audience a lot, because you’re alone so much of the time,” James explains. “But really, the piece is a joke. I’m laughing at myself and my desire for approval. When I showed it to my professors, I started with it switched off. Then



Visit harvardmagazine.com/extras to see additional images and video clips from Meredith James.

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TURN TO PAGE 74

I turned the machine on, because I knew there's no clapping in grad school."

The eldest of three children of economist Annabel (Boyce) James and financier Hamilton James '73, M.B.A. '75, she sewed her first costume when she was seven but didn't read until she was in the second grade. At Harvard, where she concentrated in visual and environmental studies, she was the one in the second row at the Brattle Theatre, lost in the surrealistic special effects, or hunched over a sewing machine at the Loeb Drama Center. The source of her disruptive hopes for her art? In large part, her aesthetic is a reaction to the stability she experienced as a child in New York and a student in Cambridge.

"At Harvard, you're always aware of the history," she explains. "In the bricks, even—the new ones look just like the old

ones. And in New York, there are many different fabrics of reality. They all seem real—but a lot of it is invented. The Cloisters, for example; that medieval structure looks as if it's always been there."

The aura of the past and the solidity of objects unsettle her, which is why, she says, she's so enamored of video. "It's a medium that lets you easily dissolve what is concrete and real. In the world, I find that scary—I used to think an ashtray suddenly flying off a table would be the most terrifying thing in the world. Now I see how video can record a play that only exists from the point of view of the camera. Through the lens, you see a complete world. As soon as the camera moves, that world falls apart. And then you can put it back together."

As an illusionist, she works in the tradition of Penn and Teller, who show the



Meredith James in her studio, with props for a work in progress

audience how they do their tricks—and yet still deceive and dazzle. For James, her favorite moment is when the viewer recognizes the physical impossibility of what she depicts, yet still finds the piece compelling. "I like making art that's like the funhouse at an amusement park," she says. "It may be stupid, but it still scares you."

—JESSE KORNBLUTH

On Discovering Drugs

New approaches to crossing the pharmaceutical "Valley of Death"

by DAVID G. NATHAN

DESPITE ENORMOUS GAINS in understanding of the mechanisms of disease, we are at a near impasse in new drug development. Most good drug ideas fail at the stage between successful experiments in test tubes and cell culture plates and the attempt to translate the results to intact experimental animals. The failure rate at this stage is so high that some call it the "Valley of Death." This collapse after much expenditure of time and treasure is hard enough to accept, but loss of a drug in the clinical-trial stage is depressingly common as well, and our clinical-trial system is so encrusted with

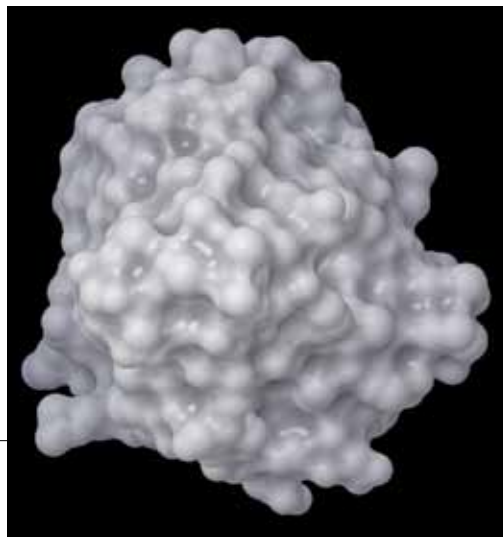
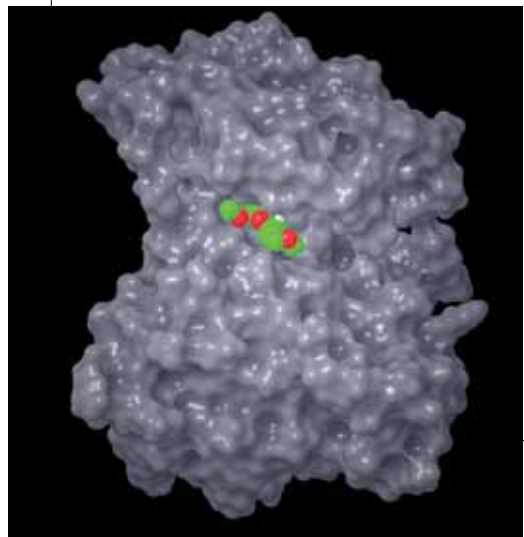
regulatory impedimenta that enormous amounts of time and money are required to learn that a drug is either a clinical failure or produces only a very small advance. It is very easy to spend a billion dollars to find out that there is very little to show for the effort. In a market-based system such as ours, such losses are nearly impossible to accept because we depend on pharmaceutical company profits and the incredible generosity of donors and taxpayers (who support the National Institutes of Health) to fund the discoveries.

Brent R. Stockwell, Ph.D. '99, is an associate professor of biological sciences

and chemistry at Columbia and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Early Career Scientist. His scientific pedigree places him in the top echelon of promising chemists, particularly those with a bent to break the worldwide logjam in drug development, the hoped-for end product of the science of pharmacology. In addition to his practical knowledge of and experience with organic chemistry and drug design, Stockwell is a teacher who has produced a very useful small volume, *The Quest for the Cure: The Science and Stories Behind the Next Generation of Medicine*.

Stockwell begins with a clear statement of the scientific and fiscal challenge that faces patients with severe acute and chronic diseases, the physicians and nurses who care for them, the grantors who support biomedical research, and the pharmaceutical industry. His early chapters explain that much of the reason for the

Brent R. Stockwell, Ph.D. '99 *The Quest for the Cure: The Science and Stories Behind the Next Generation of Medicine* (Columbia, \$27.95)



Left: The cancer drug gefitinib (also known as Iressa) is shown bound to the druggable protein EGFR. Gefitinib is used to treat non-small cell lung cancer. **Right:** The undruggable protein KRAS, found mutated in a high percentage of pancreatic, colon, and lung cancers, among others. No drugs have yet been found that can block the cancer-causing effects of mutant KRAS—the problem that concerns Brent Stockwell and other pharmaceutical researchers.

Images courtesy of Brent R. Stockwell