An Eye For

In his first show as curator in charge of the Costume Institute, Andrew Bolton brings his signature insights to couture in the machine age. Nathan Heller meets our man at the Met. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

GRAY AREA

OPPOSITE: Bolton, photographed in the museum's Robert Lehman Wing. FROM NEAR RIGHT: Prada silk-organdy dress, fall 2011; Yohji Yamamoto cotton-muslin wedding dress, spring 2000; Comme des Garçons cotton twill–and–canvas ensemble, spring 2013; Chanel Haute Couture silk tulle–and–organza wedding ensemble, fall 2005; Christian Dior Haute Couture silk taffeta–and–tulle dress, fall 1949. Grooming, Charlie Taylor. Details, see In This Issue. Sittings Editor: Tonne Goodman.

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DETAILS MATTER

Bolton became fascinated by the idea that haute couture came into being during the same decade the modern sewing machine was perfected. On model Rianne Van Rompaey, Dior Haute Couture dress and shoes. Details, see In This Issue. Fashion Editor: Grace Coddington.

Fashion Portfolio Photographed by Steven Meisel

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PERSONAL TOUCH

Bolton adjusts an Alexander McQueen dress in a scene from *The First Monday in May*, a new documentary by Andrew Rossi that chronicles the making of last year's "China: Through the Looking Glass" exhibition.

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A meeting is going on, deep in the bowels of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. On one side of the table, two men sit in silence. Flat foam models set before them show what could be floor plans for a monument, or theater sets, or visions of an urban plaza. The man at the opposite end is wearing a tight-cut dark-gray suit, a tie with a tricolor clip, and a crisp white shirt unbuttoned at the wrists. His hair, chestnut, is neatly parted, and a pair of glasses are perched high on his nose. A giant papier-mâché likeness of Diana Vreeland sits at one wall, peering at the back of his neck as he thinks.

"This is the most coherent," he says suddenly, picking out a model in which mannequins on islands carve a path of movement through the room. "You walk down. You can have the *toiles, tailleur,* and *flou*"—muslins, tailoring, and dressmaking. "It also gives a lot of flexibility."

"We like this," one of the men says. "Our interest is in being able to see everything immediately."

"It's really about process," says the man in the gray suit, growing more animated. He points toward another model. "I like the different levels here. Would you be able to stack them a bit?" He spins out his ideas in succession with a Northern English accent, like a jazz musician riffing on a phrase. "You'd see these different sorts of steps. You'd see three different zones. . . ."

The man speaking is Andrew Bolton, who, after fourteen years as a star curator at the museum's Costume Institute, ascended this winter to replace the retiring Harold Koda as curator in charge. The suit is by Thom Browne, his romantic partner, and the foam models, presented by the elite architecture firm OMA, are gallery renderings of the massive fashion exhibition "Manus x Machina: Fashion in an Age of Technology," which he will unveil this month. The show, made possible by Apple, begins in concert with the Met ball. Through dozens of garments—some eminently wearable, others more flamboyant—it tells a new, surprising story about handcraft and machine work that upends commonplace understandings of the difference between ready-to-wear and couture.

In the museum world, the 49-year-old Bolton is known as a wizard of a curator: a once-in-a-generation talent who can run his eye over 200 years' worth of clothing, pick out 100 pieces, and arrange them in a show that families from Duluth fly in to see and that jaded experts find entirely fresh. "Andrew has a rare ability to bridge intellectual discourse with public appeal," says Thomas P. Campbell, the director of the Met since 2009. "The fashion world is so characterized by promotion and megawatt personalities, but Andrew remains humble and genuine and totally uninterested in all the glamour. He loves costume, and he brings an awareness of artistic, social, economic, and philosophical ideas into play."

The myth of Bolton began largely with his 2011 show "Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty," a blockbuster of a sort

the Costume Institute had never seen (661,509 visitors in three months, lines down the street). In casting McQueen not only as a designer but as a world-class creative artist, it redefined the institute's relationship with the museum as a whole. In the past, Koda liked to say, the Costume Institute had been a girl who got all the dates but none of the respect. After McQueen, it was undeniably an artistic force within the Met.

Bolton's struggle to match his McQueen success in the institute's show last year, "China: Through the Looking Glass"—a nuanced exploration of tradition and transcendence in fashion—is the subject of a buoyant new documentary by Andrew Rossi, *The First Monday in May,* appearing this spring. Weaving between preparations for the 2015 Met ball and the creation of the China show, the film illuminates Bolton's months of preparation, from conception to his final, moving walk through the completed exhibition. (Spoiler: Attendance topped out at an astonishing 815,992 visitors; both it and the McQueen show now stand among the ten most popular exhibitions in the Met's entire history.) In "Manus x Machina," Bolton's challenge is not just to sustain this hot hand but to use it as a template. "We've experimented with levels of theatricality and audience engagement and technology that have redefined the potential of exhibition display," Campbell says. "It will have repercussions far beyond the world of costume."

Bolton—the man in the unusual gray suit—appears to fit within the ashy traditionalism of the Met both entirely and not at all: a key, perhaps, to how he's modernized the Costume Institute's shows without stepping on the institution's toes. One day in midwinter, we meet for lunch in the Members Dining Room, an in-house restaurant with a giant wedge of window looking out over the trees of Central Park. The first time Bolton saw the place, he mistook it for the "staff canteen" and thought that he had landed in the fanciest workplace in the world. A while back, he recalls, the restaurant closed for remodeling, and when it reopened, the staff was puzzled to find it looking exactly the same, down to the crinkled, scalloped-top curtains known in Britain as "tarts' knickers." The invisible remod stands as a fond reminder of the stolid continuity of the museum: an institution that often embraces its past even in moments of change.

Bolton is again wearing Thom Browne gray this afternoon, a trim cardigan buttoned professorially beneath his coat. If the quintessential Browne man is pole-backed and square-jawed—a businessman strapped in his daring flannel like a paratrooper in a harness—Bolton comes across as his arty, bendy cousin, chatty and inveterately self-effacing. The metal taps on the soles of his Browne wingtips patter on the museum's floors as he walks. That, plus a slight woodiness at the knees (Bolton and Browne recently cut back on their beloved Central Park jogs, in deference to their middle-aged joints), gives him the aspect of a stringless marionette, a figure who might not exit the museum each evening so much as vanish into it, retreating to a hook somewhere among the mannequins to sleep.

As it happens, Bolton *didn't* leave the Met last night. He pulled an all-nighter at his desk, departed at 5:30 A.M., and stopped at the gym, as he does every morning. Then he returned to work. The deadline for the "Manus x Machina" catalog text is less than half a month away, and he has barely started. Bolton is a procrastinator both by temperament and by method, and there were recently "raised voices" at the museum, he says, about how far behind things seemed to be: "Everything is always in my head, and sometimes I leave it in there too long. Once you put it down on paper, it's always a relief, but I hate committing unless I really, really have to."

For a man who's had no sleep, Bolton is in surprisingly fizzy humor. He orders a green juice and an appetizer of tuna tartare, followed by his usual, the Gruyère soufflé. "I tend to be a creature of habit," he says; soufflés are his weakness. Sweets, too: Colleagues have noticed that chocolates have a way of disappearing around the office when Bolton works late. "Manus x Machina" began with a discovery he made a while ago, while studying Yves Saint Laurent's original Mondrian dress up close, and took shape as an idea when he saw a long-train wedding dress, by Karl Lagerfeld, from Chanel's fall 2014 couture collection. He had always assumed that the Mondrian dress was hand-sewn, and was shocked to find that it was made almost entirely by machine.

GLOW IN THE DARK
Dolce & Gabbana evening dresses from 2008 on display in "Punk: Chaos to Couture," 2013.

"The only presence of the hand was the hem and part of the lining, and the zipper," he says. "I began thinking that, in actual fact, the gap between high-end ready-to-wear and couture is getting smaller." Lagerfeld's wedding dress confirmed that belief. "When the model walked down the runway, it looked like a neoprene wedding dress, without any seams at all, and then she turned around, and there was a fourteen-foot train, all embroidered." The pattern was computer-generated, but the embroidery was done by hand—450 hours of workmanship. For the May exhibition, Lagerfeld agreed to make an even longer version of the train, a breathtaking 20 feet, to be displayed in the museum's majestic Medieval Sculpture Hall. ("It has to be reproportioned," says

Lagerfeld. "It is laser cut, printed, hand painted, repainted, and embroidered.") When Bolton realized that haute couture officially came into being during the exact decade when the modern sewing machine was perfected, he began to understand that hand work and machine work had been playing off each other from the start. It wasn't a case of two distinct traditions but a single one that, like twin ribbons spiraling around and against each other in a double helix, formed the DNA of modern fashion.

That sort of revelation, scholarly in its nuance but fundamental in its implications, has become the mark of Bolton's mind. He believes that every exhibition should be driven by the visual: You should be able to walk quickly through a show, reading nothing, and understand what the central argument is. For "Manus x Machina," he took his organizing structure from Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopedia, or Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts,* published from 1751 to 1772. When it appeared, the encyclopedia was scandalous.

ON WITH THE SHOW

FROM LEFT: Ensembles embroidered with gold bullion and military braids from McQueen's fall 2001 and fall 1994 collections, as seen in "Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty," 2011; a 1998 Christian Dior Haute Couture dress by John Galliano in a gallery from "AngloMania," 2006.

"But the métiers that were in existence in the eighteenth century still define the haute couture today: embroidery, featherwork, tailoring, and so forth." The book suggested a schema for the exhibition—and a path toward the future of the craft.

"Technology could enable us to radicalize the definition of what fashion means," Bolton says, picking at his soufflé, which looks to have wilted under the force of his enthusiasm. In Rossi's film, he emerges as a dexterous collaborator, able to advance and enhance his own ideas through negotiations with artists and institutions on three continents. In the Members Dining Room, he begins talking about other exhibitions he'd like to do. One idea is "Fear and Clothing," an examination of how fashion answers its era's lambent cultural anxieties. There aren't many designers whose work could sustain a monographic exhibition, he thinks, but he'd love to do one focused on John Galliano. Then there's the psyche itself.

"Something I've always wanted to do very much is 'Freud and Fashion.' I would want to do it as a series of dreamscapes, based on his book of dreams. There have been so many models of fashion: sociological, literary. But there hasn't really been one based on psychoanalysis." The idea would be to explore a connection between materiality and one's psychological state. "Volume, shape," he says, eyes dancing. "I'd want it to be very Dalí-esque."

When Bolton was a child and had a fever, his nightmares were always about texture: rough, smooth. He grew up in Lancashire, a place where exquisite pastoral vistas abutted gritty Northern industrialism. He was a fearful boy, frightened of other people and, perhaps, of life itself. He was shy. Bolton still considers the social aspect of his job the hardest part; he is, he thinks, a voyeur at his core, a man who'd rather study what is happening from a corner than find himself an actor on the stage.

Bolton remembers his childhood as quiet, long, Catholic, and innocent. His father worked on the publishing side of a newspaper, while his mother was a homemaker; his older brother was thought to be brilliant at math (he's now a banker), and his older sister was excellent at languages (she's now a teacher). Bolton was dismal at both—his French teacher once told him that he had the worst accent she had ever heard, and he's been mortified to speak the language since—but he developed other fascinations. As a teenager, he read Salinger, Forster, Woolf, Auden, Spender. He did not consider himself wildly literary;

"PUNK" AND "MCQUEEN": ERIO BOMAN. "ANGLOMANIA": ROBERT FAIRER.

WEDDING BELLE
The pattern on the train was digitally generated and then embroidered by hand, which took 450 hours. A longer version—20 feet—will be a centerpiece of the new exhibition. Chanel Haute Couture dress and hat.

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BACK TO THE FUTURE

A Victorian silhouette features a white silk-elastene knit screen-printed with black geometric motifs transfer-printed with silver and black metal and acrylic discs and teardrops. Louis Vuitton dress and belt. Hair, Guido for Redken; makeup, Pat McGrath. Set design, Mary Howard. Produced by PRODn at Art + Commerce. Details, see In This Issue.

poetry not by Auden troubled him in its irresolution. Much more often, he read magazines.

He had no interest in the motions of high fashion. He loved youth culture, music culture, publications such as *i-D* and *Arena* and *The Face*. The fashion crept in sideways, from their coverage of the street. He admired the New Romantics (a.k.a. the Blitz Kids), who used their clothes to make a statement. On visits to London, he would watch the style punks parading on King's Road, "warriors and dandies at the same time." Catalogs of museum fashion crossed his path in late high school. Everyone was asking what he hoped to do. "I remember saying, 'Oh, I'd like to work in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute,' " Bolton recalls. He hadn't visited America.

He ended up at the University of East Anglia, in Norwich—not exactly London, where he'd hoped to land, but a place he grew to love. "East Anglia is not too dissimilar to Lancashire," he says. "It's very flat, so the light is very beautiful. It's a strange, slightly otherworldly place." Once, drinking at a pub with friends, he watched a farmer purchase a pint with a cabbage. A big lure was the Sainsbury collection, a compilation of art available for research by students, like him, pursuing an anthropology degree. He stayed on for a master's.

"He was someone you could talk to for hours and hours," says Rachel Spence, a close friend at school who is now a poet and *Financial Times* art critic. She remembers a dispute about the erotic drama *9½ Weeks*. Spence hated the film—despite never having seen it—but Bolton persuaded her that it deserved a closer look. "He would never take anything at face value. He was always questioning: Where does it come from, what are the politics that produce it?"

As Bolton began his Ph.D., though, he began to have misgivings. "I thought, Four more years!" A friend of his came back from a research trip to Africa and extolled the joys of fieldwork. It sounded awful to Bolton. "He was very *earthy*. I thought, I've never been earthy. I never will be," he says. "I'm a little bit too bourgeois to be an anthropologist, basically." A curatorial-assistant job opened at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and Bolton applied, thinking he could work there for a year before finishing his Ph.D. He never returned to school.

Bolton's job was in the Far Eastern Department, a natural extension of his studies in non-Western art. "He was like a breath of fresh air because he was such a creative, innovative thinker," says his V&A supervisor and mentor, Anna Jackson, now the keeper of the Asian Department. "Although we might have been able to teach him how to be a curator, he was full of amazing ideas. . . . I don't think he realized how brilliant he was." He focused on Chinese dress and costume and, for the next nine years, learned to curate, finagling a jump into the museum's fashion department through a research post during his last year and a half. "All we had to do was write books and do shows," he says. "It was just idyllic." During a visit to New York, he met Harold Koda, who soon invited him to join the Costume Institute as an associate curator.

On his second day in New York, in 2002, Bolton heard what sounded like a cap gun while walking to work. "I was tying my shoelace, and all of a sudden everyone came running past," he says. "I looked up and there were these guys with guns. People were running toward this fancy building for cover, and—typical New York—the doorman wouldn't let them in. I thought, Oh, my goodness! That was my introduction to the city." He was 35, and he had been an actual fashion curator less than two years. He worried about being too inexperienced to perform on his vocation's main stage.

Koda helped Bolton adapt his V&A skill set to the Met. "The American audience is very different than British and European audiences," Koda explains. European audiences tend to self-select into museums. A huge, iconic museum like the Met functions as an entry gate for everyone who passes through New York. How could you design an exhibition that would draw those visitors in without losing intellectual edge? Koda taught Bolton to think of mannequins not as hangers but as proxies for the body. And he insisted on treating garments not as artifacts but as artworks. "At the V&A, fashion was a design discipline, very much steeped in cultural theory. The Met was about fashion being an art form," Bolton says. "That was something really freeing."

"At the V&A, fashion was a design discipline," says Bolton. "The Met was about fashion being an art form. That was really freeing"

Bolton internalized the lessons in a series of shows that he and Koda did together: "Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century," "Chanel," "Poiret: King of Fashion." Koda realized that his protégé had reached a special kind of curatorial maturity when Bolton called him in, as usual, for final adjustments to the McQueen-show displays, which presented the designer as a modern heir to nineteenth-century Romanticism. There was the wide-hipped raven-black feather ensemble, the cascading razor-clam dress. "I thought, He's already nailed it," Koda says. "The exhibitions he was responsible for after that? Those were Andrew Bolton exhibitions."

Not long after Bolton had begun to find a place at the Met, he was asked to interview Thom Browne at a conference. Bolton had been following Browne's work and admired his narrow silhouettes. "I thought he was saying something new about menswear," he says. Hedi Slimane introduced his ultra-slim suits at Dior, and between the two of them, men's relationship to their clothes was starting to change. "Often, an ideal body can be made through fashion, but with these, you really had to have an ideal body to get into the clothes," Bolton explains. "There was a rigor to the physical side, in terms of exercise and dieting. I liked that." He did the interview with interest but felt he never drew his subject out successfully. "Thom isn't the most accessible of people," he says. "You got a strong sense of his aesthetic. You got a strong sense of his critical process. But you didn't get a sense of him."

Still, they became friends, and, in 2012, the friendship jolted into a romance. "I'm still surprised by it," Bolton says. "I never thought I'd date somebody in my field. But at the same time it makes sense. I'm so passionate about it. I can't bear those people who say, 'Oh, I want to switch my job.' I don't want to switch—at all."

Late one afternoon in winter, I meet Bolton in the couple's parkside apartment, near Columbus Circle. He is in casual mode—his white shirt is tucked into jeans, CONTINUED ON PAGE 258

HIGH DEFINITION
This dress's cotton-sateen and nude nylon mesh were machine- and hand-embroidered with laser-cut plastic strips hand-printed with black lines. Iris van Herpen Couture dress. United Nude x Iris van Herpen shoes. Details, see In This Issue.

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Z IS FOR ZIKA

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not pregnant, I was shaken on a recent reporting trip along the southern Amazon when the fixer I was traveling with, a woman in her 50s, came down with the telltale signs: red, itchy spots and light fever. We went to a local pharmacy, and she was told to take ibuprofen and rest, the only treatment on offer. The symptoms cleared up within a week.

Zika was first discovered in the 1940s, in Uganda's forest of the same name. Confirmed cases were rare and limited to parts of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific islands until 2014, when an infected carrier visited Brazil. One mosquito bite was all it took to start an epidemic in which, scientists believe, the virus enters a pregnant woman's placenta and damages the developing brain. The Zika-carrying mosquito thrives in the tropics and subtropics, including Florida's Gulf Coast. It has even been found breeding in the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Washington, D.C. The Pan American Health Organization predicts that Zika will spread to every country in the Americas except the inhospitable terrains of Canada and Chile.

Where does this leave women who are pregnant or hoping to become so? Self-detection is near impossible; only about a fifth of carriers develop symptoms. Tests are available, though they are elaborate and not entirely reliable. Doctors can use ultrasound imaging to determine if a fetus has microcephaly, but not until the end of the second trimester.

One of the many unknowns is how long after becoming infected a woman should wait until becoming pregnant. While the virus exits the bloodstream after about a week, it has been found to linger in urine for several weeks afterward. "This suggests that your body doesn't completely clear the virus," says Andrew Pekosz, Ph.D., professor of microbiology and immunology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "One of the risks we can't quantify is whether, if you go to Brazil, you get infected, you recover, and then get pregnant a few weeks later, there may be Zika in places like the kidneys and saliva. By that point there's likely a very minor chance of infection, but when we're talking about pregnant women, we want to be as cautious as possible."

Meanwhile, van der Linden continues to see her patients during the day and stay up nights to write up the results of her work. She sees her daughters on Sundays, her only day off; she hasn't exercised in three years, since she gave up the personal trainer with whom she worked out between 11:00 P.M. and midnight. "I miss exercise terribly, especially now that I am in my 40s," she says.

For now she must run on stress and coffee. When this issue went to press, there were 863 confirmed cases of Zika-linked microcephaly in Brazil. Van der Linden's clinic was treating 125 of them.

Back in the waiting room, the mothers look up from their bundled charges, smile, and raise a chorus of "Good morning"s as van der Linden walks in: "Bom dia, doutora." It is for her they save the questions that keep them up at night: Will my child ever walk? Will she raise her head or smile? Will she live to see her first birthday?

One of the mothers follows her into her small, spare office. Swaddled in her arms is the first patient of the day.

"How's our sleepyhead today?" van der Linden says, slipping her fingers around the dozing child and bringing him close for a hug.

The mother's exhaustion is etched into the lines of her face. The baby in the doctor's hands, João Guilherme, is nearly four months old and has the same tiny skull as the babies waiting outside, but he also developed a complication: hydrocephalus. The fluid that normally bathes the brain had begun to build up and inflate his head, requiring surgery. Like so much else regarding this new disease, this development may or may not be related. It is still too early to say.

The doctor examines his faceted skull and gives her approval: The operation had gone well. She hands the baby back to his mother. "How are you?" she asks.

"I am going crazy with worry," the mother says, her voice cracking. "He cries and cries. Yesterday his eyes rolled back into his head. I don't know what to do."

The doctor nods and writes out a prescription for the mother—a tranquilizer to get her through.

Van der Linden, whose own children are fifteen and eleven, lets out a deep breath when the mother and child leave the room. "Patients come in here and ask, 'Will my child walk?' What can I say? 'Forget walking; your child might never learn to swallow'?" she says. "I feel like I owe it to them to tell them the truth, or as much of it as I know." □

AN EYE FOR ALL SEASONS

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though he still wears a clipped Prince of Wales tie—and he is drinking tea from an enormous white cup. The apartment is furnished in a crisp, ascetic version of mid-century masculinity. A small cot, black leather with studs, sits near the window in the living room. A steel rack of Browne suits lines one wall, and on the other is a white folding screen that once belonged to Geoffrey Beene. The office, nearby, offers a small desk pushed against the window, and two angular chairs with an arrangement of metal cocktail goblets. One of the apartment's secret luxuries is the window in its small kitchen, which has a sight line all the way to the fountain in Lincoln Center. If Bolton had been the decorator, he says, the place would be "much fancier."

"I've got very Catholic taste, and Thom has very Calvinist taste—even though he's Catholic," Bolton has explained. "But I don't care as much, and he does, so he tends to win." They are both neat freaks. (Bolton: "I'm a bit less neat than Thom, but that's not hard.") Of late, they have been in a state of high alarm because their miniature wire-haired-dachshund puppy, Hector, named after one of Bolton's favorite childhood cartoons, has taken to urinating on the seagrass rug. "Everything revolves around him," Bolton says mournfully. "He rules the house."

A few days earlier, Bolton presented the "Manus x Machina" exhibition to the press in the Met's entrance hall. Being in the spotlight is not something he looks forward to—he shied from watching Rossi's documentary until the final days before its premiere—but he was interested in how the crowd reacted to ten sample garments flanking his talk. He'd planned to feature only four: an original Chanel suit; a Lagerfeld echo that combined 3-D printed elements with hand stitching; one Iris van Herpen piece; and an Yves Saint Laurent dress hand-finished with feathers. But because there'd been concern that these were visually too, well, *beige,* he'd added six more, including a wowie-zowie hand-pleated Raf Simons skirt and a color-blocked "flying-saucer" garment by Issey Miyake. He'd been pleased to note, with the faintest hint of smugness, that his original selections were, in fact, drawing more smartphone shots. From an academic anthropologist buried deep in a museum, he'd become a curator with a haunting sixth sense for the interests of the crowd.

In his apartment, Bolton is trying to explain the mission for the Costume Institute that he hopes will come through in the show. "When I see what's going on in the world, fashion-wise, everything is going so fast that you almost don't have time to appreciate what you're seeing," he says. "So I think that by trying to focus on process, trying to focus on techniques, on the actual making of fashion, it's a way of trying to make people look at it . . . This idea of fashion 24/7—it's not a good thing, I think. It doesn't encourage designers to step back and have original thoughts."

In order to tell the fashion world to slow down, ironically, Bolton has had to speed up. He is now past his catalog deadline by two weeks—a delay so dire that the parts of the books that don't contain outstanding pages are already printing. Bolton has

lately managed to squeeze in time to read Hanya Yanagihara's tour de force *A Little Life,* but his schedule doesn't leave time for much else—including his upcoming move into a new apartment. Ostensibly, Bolton is packing, though he never fully unpacked in the first place. (He never does; the finality of it all makes him nervous.) He and Browne are currently refurbishing a larger place a few floors down and plan to make the move in late spring. Would I like to see it?

"I'm always late every morning," Bolton says as we pass a Linus bike, in the elevator bay, that is his primary transportation. He makes a point of visiting the Villa d'Este at Lake Como each July and hopes also to go on a safari in Tanzania, but he and Browne otherwise work away in the city. Downstairs, he unlocks the door of his new place. The main draw was the long, wrap-around balcony deck, looking out over the park. (The main fear is that Hector may be carried off by urban birds of prey.) Inside, there is a large, L-shaped living room, with a wet bar; an office with a magisterial bookshelf; and a pleasant kitchen. Bolton rushes around, opening closets and pointing out views. He and Browne will reface the master bath in marble. They'll put exercise equipment in the extra bedroom and avoid the gym. As the plans accumulate, he gains excitement, until he simply stops and looks around with wonderment, caught in his dreams for a home that, like the empty galleries to which he gives his life, must be made entirely anew. □

BRAND-NEW SONG AND DANCE

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success it found there, starting with a meeting between the two creative teams behind it, Sissle (Henry) and Blake (Dixon) and Miller (Mitchell) and Lyles (Porter), all of them vaudeville stars with a shared dream to write, direct, produce, and star in their own show. After their down-on-his luck manager persuades a down-on-his luck producer to invest some money in the enterprise (all the white roles are played, hilariously, by Brooks Ashmanskas), they cast the show, with the commanding soprano Lottie Gee (McDonald) as the female lead. Then they hit the road playing one-night stands in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and throughout Pennsylvania, sharing beds in fleabag rooms and hocking their personal possessions to pay their train fare. Lottie Gee and the married Eubie Blake start a passionate romance, and by the time the show reaches New York, the company is $18,000 in debt. The first act ends with the show's triumphant opening night, and in the second act we see the aftermath of success, complete with professional ruptures, personal unhappiness, and, over the decades, a relegation of *Shuffle Along* to the status of footnote to history.

This tale of showbiz paradise found and lost is, of course, helped along not just by Glover's showstopping dance numbers but by Sissle and Blake's glorious score—and a stellar cast of singers, including McDonald (whose six Tony awards include those for her performances in *Porgy and Bess* and, as Billie Holiday, in *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*), Billy Porter (who won a Tony for his turn as the drag queen Lola in *Kinky Boots*), the great Brian Stokes Mitchell, and, in what should be a star-making performance, Adrienne Warren (last seen on the New York stage in *Bring It On*).

In rehearsals, Wolfe provides a voluble, live-wire counterpoint to Glover's laconic, laid-back vibe. During a run-through of an Election Day parade from the show within the show, the 61-year-old director leaps up and announces, "It's got to be chaotic and shit," and then breaks into a mildly demented cakewalk, flinging his arms wildly. "You see?" he shouts. "Don't come at me soft. Come *at* me!"

Underneath the whirlwind, though, Wolfe has a clear vision of what he wants. At one point during the raucous silliness, he stops the proceedings and tells the cast, "It's fun, and you're all cutting loose and acting foolish—but you're voting. You're black people, and you're voting. In 1921."

Throughout the workshop process, Wolfe imbued his team with a sense of history to help them bring the period to life. One morning, he took everyone to the Museum of Modern Art for a special screening of *Lime Kiln Club Field Day*—an unfinished and long-lost 1913 silent film starring the legendary comedian Bert Williams and an all-black cast—and a discussion afterward about, among other things, the meaning of blackface and the debt of this generation to black performers of the past.

If you ask the new cast members what drew them to the show, their first response is invariably the chance to work with Wolfe and Glover. But they are also eager to shine a light on this neglected corner of musical theater—and African-American—history.

"I didn't know anything about *Shuffle Along* and its influence," McDonald says. "Not many people do. That's the reason I signed on before there was even a complete script—I want to be a part of telling that story. It's a way of honoring our ancestors."

"When I stepped onstage and spoke the line 'The ghost of everyone who's come before, who's ever sung a note or danced a routine, you can feel it,' this shudder went through my body," Porter recalls. "Tears flew out of my eyes. To know that there was somebody else who felt the way you felt, who lived the way you lived and wanted to change things, like you do—and did it. Now we're doing it. It was the moment where I realized what I'm here for."

Wolfe, whose accomplishments include directing the New York premiere of *Angels in America* and running the Public Theater for more than a decade, has spent much of his career creating shows that examine the African-American cultural experience, often with scathing acuity, from *The Colored Museum* to *Jelly's Last Jam* to *Bring in 'Da Noise.* On the surface, *Shuffle Along* would seem to be of a piece with those shows, though Wolfe says, "There's an exuberance to them, but it's like an exuberant child playing with an Uzi. There's something more innocent about *Shuffle Along.*"

Ultimately, that innocence is what drew Wolfe to write the show, giving him a chance not just to rediscover a forgotten theatrical origin story but to touch base with his own beginnings as an aspiring playwright from Kentucky newly arrived in New York. "When you're poor and you're struggling and you're trying to stake your claim, a kind of naïveté is essential," Wolfe says. "There's a kind of innocence that's crucial to surviving—you've got to be sort of clueless and determined. I remember coming here and believing that everything was possible—I needed to believe that because I had no money and didn't know anyone. All I had was a blind, wonderful faith. With *Shuffle Along,* I wanted to live inside that open heart." □

RADICAL EQUALS

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through the lens of science, because science is too small to accommodate it."

His grandmother was a "fierce character, an incredibly forceful woman," he says. "You know that book about the Tiger Mom? She was the Tiger Grandmom." Siddhartha describes himself as "a dreamy child, a little lost-ish. But I was a good student. The defining element in my childhood was music." From the age of five, he was trained as a singer of classical Indian music. He took lessons every day when he came home from St. Columba's School. After years of "boring as hell" vocal exercises, he began learning to improvise. "At a certain point," he says, "you figure out that all that training was to give you the self-confidence to make music in your mind. I did lots of other things, and I was good-ish at them, but the two things I had passion for were music and reading." He read Orwell, Primo Levi, Chekhov, and Dostoyevsky. His grandmother's death in 1985, which he describes as having "majesty and elegance" because of her moral control of the process, led him to think about medicine. He began reading books by the handful of doctors who wrote CONTINUED ON PAGE 260