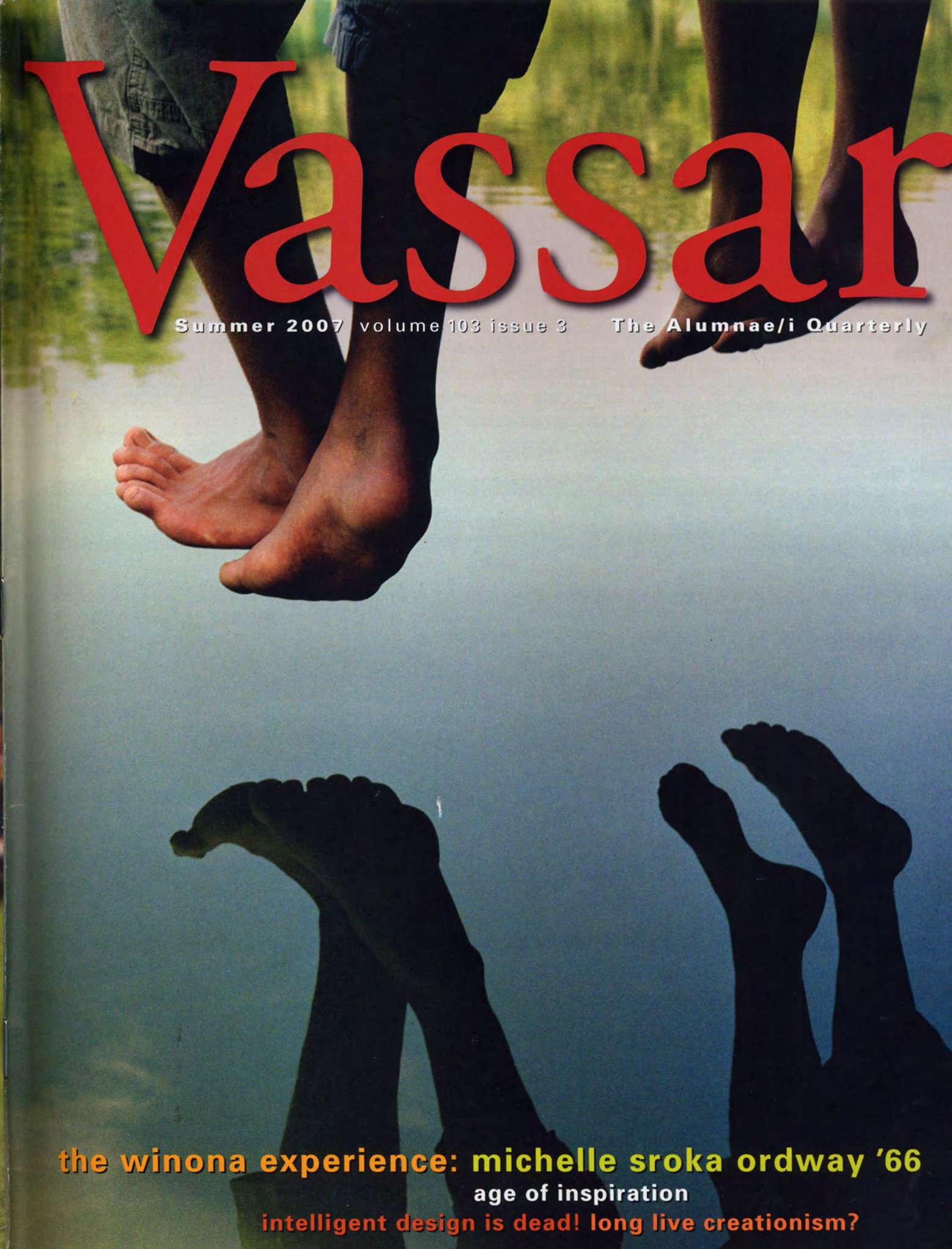

Vassar

Summer 2007 volume 103 issue 3 The Alumnae/i Quarterly

the winona experience: michelle sroka ordway '66

age of inspiration

intelligent design is dead! long live creationism?

For Art, Of Course

In July 2006, Professor of Drama and Film Jim Steerman and a cast and crew of current students, Vassar alumnae/i, and professionals spent sometimes up to 20 hours a day working intensely in the sweltering heat of Raymond House's fourth floor. All for the sake of art.

The team collaborated on producing *Ms. Julia*, a 40-minute original film about a young professor at a small liberal arts college who becomes involved in an obsessive and messy affair with her student assistant while working on an adaptation of August Strindberg's play *Miss Julie*. According to Steerman, "This was the first time Vassar had ever tried to do [a film] on this scale."

The creation of *Ms. Julia* began in Fall 2005 when Rebecca Holderness '79, a professor of acting and directing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, received a grant from her theater company, Holderness Theater Company, to write an adaptation of *Miss Julie*. The following spring Holderness received a teaching position at Vassar and approached Steerman about writing a script. Steerman agreed that the project could be an exciting opportunity for students. He recruited writers Jack Lienke '05 and Kelsey Egan '05, and a story emerged that related the inescapable affair of an aristocrat and her footman to the more current and palpable context of film professor and student. After the script's positive reception at a film festival in North Carolina, Holderness and Steerman decided to make *Ms. Julia* a film.

They recruited Tony Adler '80, a successful first assistant director in Hollywood, to oversee the shoot. Actress Katy Selverstone (pictured above right), who had a role in the movie *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, and cinematographer Joe Foley also agreed to participate in producing *Ms. Julia*. Additional students were involved to act and assist in all aspects of the production. For Holderness, who directed, "One of my favorite

things about the project was all the different Vassar generations working together."

Filming took the crew beyond various locations on the Vassar campus, to the streets of TriBeCa in New York City. Students had the opportunity to work with set design and building when they created a kitchen at the sound stage in the Vogelstein Center for Drama and Film and transformed the interior of a Town House. After filming was completed Steerman and students edited the film. For Sam Newman '08, who worked as unit production manager during the filming and later as Steerman's editorial assistant, "There is really no replacement in terms of experience for working on an actual film. Being the unit production manager on *Ms. Julia* taught me a lot about how to organize people, how to schedule and run a production calendar, and especially about how difficult it can be to get a film made."

Besides gaining technical experience students also established close friendships while working on the film. Brian Paccione '09, an assistant in prop styling and set design, said: "Film is an intensively collaborative process. No matter what the project is that you are working on, you form friendships and bonds with the people around you that never go away. You are all working together for the same exact goal, which is (or should be) a piece of art."

Plans for the completed *Ms. Julia* include a screening at Vassar in the spring and later at the Vassar Clubs in Los Angeles and Washington, DC. Holderness is also adapting *Ms. Julia* to be a multimedia play that would include an installation of the film. The play will debut in Fall 2008 at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

— Kate Conlow '09

Night Vision

One evening last year, neuroscience major Sasha Litwin '07—assisted by the residents of Noyes House—arranged illuminated windows to create a pattern of "repeating units and modules" for Professor of Art Harry Roseman's Sculpture I class.

"This project was about taking one unit and repeating it to explore the concept of patterns," explained Litwin. "I wanted to make something big, so I decided to use a building. I organized the Noyes residents, getting each room either to turn their lights on or off, which created a wave pattern with the lights in all the windows facing Noyes circle."

Roseman had praise for his student's work. "Specific restrictive parameters put onto an undertaking, notwithstanding assumptions to the contrary, can open up practically inexhaustible conceptual and formal possibilities. Litwin's excellent solution to this modular assignment is a good example of this premise."

— Emery Bernhard

oyes House. Sasha Litwin '07