



Introduction

Welcome to *Tim Burton: The Exhibition*, at ACMI, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image.

The exhibition is made up of three major sections, each of them relating to a key phase in Tim Burton's creative life. The first section, 'Surviving Burbank', looks at Burton's childhood and the early part of his career.

The second section, 'Beautifying Burbank', explores Burton's development as an artist, particularly during his time as an apprentice animator with Walt Disney Studios. The third section, 'Beyond Burbank', celebrates the darkly comic, strange and beautiful world of Burton's feature films and other related works.

As you go through the gallery, you'll see an audio tour symbol on the wall beside various displays. The number displayed beneath each symbol corresponds to a selection on your audio tour track list.

We hope that you enjoy your journey through the art and imagination of one of Hollywood's most unique and exciting filmmakers: Tim Burton.

Surviving Burbank

1. Horror and Humour

Tim Burton grew up in suburban Burbank in California. He always felt at odds with the ordinariness of the world of his youth, and was conscious of the weirdness that lay just beneath the surface of everyday life. From an early age, Burton became intrigued by the contradictory nature of human experience.

Alienated by the bland environment of his youth, Burton fuelled his highly visual imagination with a large and diverse range of pop culture texts, toys and children's books. He drew constantly, and both his drawings and his teenage films reveal the significance of these early influences. As well as enjoying TV cartoon animations, Burton admired and emulated the drawing styles of popular newspaper and magazine cartoonists. He matched his love of comics and humour with the darker pleasures of British Hammer horror films, Japanese monster movies and B-Grade science fiction films.

Burton's films are marked by his fascination with outsiders, a fascination that is connected with his life-long affinity with monsters like King Kong, Frankenstein, Godzilla and the creature from the Black Lagoon and his sense that the creatures from these films had 'much more heartfelt souls than the human characters around them'. This childhood identification with the dark side of the human imagination is the basis for Burton's love of German Expressionist cinema.

[Video clip: Burton talks about German Expressionism]

The distinctiveness and originality of Burton's creative vision is connected to the diversity of his early interests and his passion for the most visually energetic styles and forms of pop culture. Burton's childhood obsessions are a constant reference point and source of inspiration in his work the stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Burton's love of actor Vincent Price inspired the short film *Vincent*. An enthusiasm for B-Grade science fiction films underpins biopic *Ed Wood*. Hammer horror movies influenced *Sleepy Hollow*. And Burton's fascination with the carnival emerges in many films including *Beetlejuice*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Big Fish*. Burton is also indebted to the weird and funny worldview of children's author Dr Seuss. He specifically draws on Dr Seuss's

rhythmical language for *Vincent* and referred to *The Nightmare Before Christmas* as 'German Expressionism combined with Dr Seuss'.

[Video clip: Burton talks about TV and Dr Seuss as early influences]

2. Mothera

For Tim Burton, as for many people, drawing is a way to express emotions and feelings that can be hard to articulate. In *Mothera*, a cartoon drawing from the 1980's, Burton parodies both suburban life and the drudgery of domesticity.

Although informed by his own experience of alienation, this piece demonstrates Burton's affinity with both the monstrous and the outsider.

The figure depicted here has been subsumed by the routines and responsibilities of everyday life and transformed into a creature deformed by symbols of home and family. Domestic items such as a television, broom and vacuum cleaner have become attached to the creature's body while pieces of cutlery adhere to its back. Overwhelmed by these objects and what they represent, the creature howls either with despair or in frustration. As this wretched monster tried to carry out its duties, the loneliness of its plight is emphasised by the mocking figures attached to its multiple tails.

[Audio clip: Curator Jenny He talks about Director Ishiro Honda and Mothera]

Beautifying Burbank

3. Couples

Much is made – quite rightly – of Tim Burton's ability to create distinctive imaginative universes. However, these worlds are also defined by the characters who inhabit them, and the preoccupations that inform their development. Burton's fascination with characters and human nature is worked through in his character studies of men, women, girls, boys and, in this series, couples.

The dynamic partnership is an intriguing aspect of the human condition and, in his drawings, Burton relishes the incongruities and variations produced when people pair up with each other.

As well as playing with the idea of couples who are a mirror-image of each other, he is particularly diverted by bizarre and grotesque pairings. Burton's couples are often presented in opposition: short and tall, fat and thin and, even dead and alive. In exploring this theme, Burton gives free rein to his delight in the macabre and carnivalesque aspects of human experience. These drawings are, for the most part, darkly funny, and anticipate many of Burton's film portrayals of couples. Think, for instance, about the images of Ed Wood in the film of the same name wearing his girlfriend's angora pullovers, or the hilarious visual incongruity of *Corpse Bride's* Lord and Lady Everglot and Mr and Mrs Van Dort.

[Video clip: Burton talks about the dynamics of coupling]

4. Creatures

Creatures are an ongoing preoccupation in Burton's work. He confesses to feeling 'much more connected to creatures than people' and associates them with a particular purity of response. In his art and films, they often represent external manifestations of intense emotions or feelings.

The aliens, robots, puppets and monsters that appear with such frequency hark back to his childhood interest in monster and science fiction movies. Because of their shape and form and the intricacy of their design, the creatures and characters that Burton creates can be very challenging to make in a three-dimensional sculptural form. Many of his creatures have large heads, long limbs and necks, and various bizarre appendages that are tricky to attach and keep in place.

These three sculptures are based on three of Burton's early sketches and were made especially for the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

Burton collaborator Albert Cuellar worked with Burton to construct these sculptures, using an array of materials designed to give the sculptures strength and stability but that would in no way detract from the grace of the original pictures.

5. Hansel and Gretel

When he was still employed at Disney, Burton directed a made-for-TV version of *Hansel and Gretel*. This short film was one of a series of fairy tales produced for the newly launched Disney Channel and was only screened once late at night on Halloween. Fairy tales have a particular appeal for Burton, particularly ones like Hansel and Gretel that deal with such dark themes.

[Video clip: Burton talks about the frightening side of fairytales]

Directing Hansel and Gretel gave Burton his first experience of working with actors and the film is distinctively Japanese-themed, responding to Burton's fascination with Japanese monster movies and their particular sense of design. Although remaining quite faithful to the narrative of the original fairy tale, Burton embellished his version of *Hansel and Gretel* with a number of distinctively Burtonesque touches including stop motion sequences, a host of transformer toys and a kung fu fight sequence at the end. Made for only \$116,000 and soon forgotten, the film was thought to be lost, but the curators at the Museum of Modern Art discovered a copy while preparing for this exhibition. The entire 35 minute film is presented here, accompanied by a range of connected artworks including storyboards and concept drawings.

[Audio clip: Curator Ron Magliozzi discusses Burton's early projects]

6. The Black Cauldron

During his apprenticeship at Disney in the early 1980s, Burton worked as an artist on a variety of different projects. He worked as a concept artist on the 1985 animated feature *The Black Cauldron*, directed by Ted Berman and Richard Rich. The film is a medieval fantasy involving a magical cauldron with the power to create armies of undead warriors. The film's hero has the task of finding the cauldron before it falls into the hands of an evil tyrant.

Burton worked on this project for some months and produced nearly 200 concept artworks. In his work for this film, Burton emphasised the dark and monstrous elements of the story but gave them a humorous twist. *The Black Cauldron* pictures contain some extraordinary and memorable concepts but, sadly, not a single one of them was used in the final film. Burton has since commented that he exhausted about ten years' worth of creative ideas on this project.

[Audio clip: Curator Ron Magliozzi on Burton's concept work for *The Black Cauldron*].

7. Clowns

Burton's fascination with the carnival and the grotesque come to the fore in his depictions of clowns. Unlike Burton's soulful and heartfelt creatures and monsters, his clowns are often predatory and menacing. In his drawings, the clown's painted face becomes a mask of exaggerated joviality that hints at something much more sinister. Clowns are supposed to bring laughter and smiles, but in Burton's world they are more likely to maim and torture. For Burton, they are symbols of adult duplicity that bear with them a kind of twisted and misplaced authority.

[Video clip: Burton's thoughts on Clowns and Clown policemen]

In his films, clowns, circus and carnival imagery demonstrate Burton's fascination with the way that the dark and light aspects of life are intertwined. In *Beetlejuice*, this imagery contributes to the film's playful grotesqueness, with the bio-exorcist Beetlejuice functioning as a kind of decaying, clown-like ringmaster, while in *Batman*, Jack Nicholson's Joker is both clown and freak.

In *Alice in Wonderland*, the clown-like Mad Hatter brings to mind the archetypal sad clown; a portrayal that complicates Burton's professed hatred of clowns.

Beyond Burbank

8. Jack Skellington

Tim Burton first sketched out the story of *The Nightmare Before Christmas* in a poem and began developing it as a stop motion animation while still working for Disney. Although the film did not get made for another decade, Burton describes the satisfaction of working on this quirky personal project as a counter to his work as an animator for the classic Disney film *The Fox and the Hound*. Because many of the characters in the *Nightmare* either had no eyes, or eyelids which were sewn shut, it was challenge to give them life and expression. After having spent so much time drawing the large expressive eyes that are trademark of Disney animated characters, Burton delighted in finding innovative ways of animating his characters. Jack Skellington, with black holes for eyes, was far from the traditional Disney aesthetic, something that Burton both relished and found creatively stimulating. Jack is a delightful and memorable figure. Subtle changes in the shape of his eye sockets, his innocent grin and cute turned-up nose combine with the gangly grace of his long limbs to give him an appealing vulnerability.

[Audio clip: Assistant curator Kate Warren talks about the curatorial issues surrounding the Burton puppets]

9. Stitching

In Tim Burton's films and artworks, the idea of stitching or being stitched together is a recurring motif and evokes feelings of fragmentation, dismemberment, decapitation but also of repair and survival. In films such as *Frankenweenie*, *Edward Scissorhands*, *Sleepy Hollow*, *Mars Attacks!* *Corpse Bride* and, of course, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, the characters are often makeshift, cobbled together constructions that represent feelings of psychological fragmentation, of being pieced together and coming apart at the seams.

In *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Sally's loosely stitched together body explicitly highlights this theme. This character's struggle to escape from the ties that bind her to her creator Dr Finklestein involves unstitching and dismembering herself. She finds herself reluctantly stitching Jack into the Santa suit that represents his mistaken denial of his true identity as the Pumpkin King.

The continuing recurrence of images of fragmentation and temporary connection in Burton's work is one of the key ways that he represents the destructive effects of social conformity. Burton's characters are forced to make their way in an alienating and unsympathetic world and they bear the results of their social disconnection on their bodies.

Stitched-up, pierced and composite bodies, severed heads, mechanical bits, runaway eyeballs, renegade limbs and dancing skeletons fill Burton's films with a monstrous energy that affirms different ways of being in, and part of, the world. However, there is also an optimism associated with this stitching motif, representing the ongoing ability to put yourself back together.

Although inscribed by social dysfunction and psychological disintegration, the bodies of Burton's characters are funny, poignant and captivatingly bizarre. The physical strangeness and grotesque appearance of Burton's misunderstood and sinister characters highlight their humanity. Jack Skellington's long-limbed and freakish emaciation gives him both vulnerability and soulfulness. The temporary, pieced-together quality of Sally's body contrasts with her dream for a better life. In *Edward Scissorhands*, Edward's freakish bondage gear and scissorhands belie a child-like innocence and gentleness.

[Video clip: Burton talks piercings and the symbolism of stitching]

10. Oyster Boy

In 1997, Tim Burton published a collection of short stories called *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*. Written in verse and illustrated with Burton's own drawings, the stories depict a range of sad, disfigured

and unwanted children.

The style of these stories is influenced by Burton's childhood hero, Dr Seuss, but they are written for adults. The rejected and grotesque misfits in these stories remind readers of the pain and awkwardness of childhood and adolescence. Bearing the stamp of Burton's characteristic humour and irreverence, these characters have names like Voodoo Girl, Toxic Boy and Jimmy the Hideous Penguin Boy. A blend of the tragic and the comic, these miserable souls demonstrate Burton's capacity for instilling emotional complexity into often very simple stories. A number of the characters in these stories meet an untimely and gruesome end: Stick Boy is burned alive; Oyster Boy is eaten by his father and Mummy Boy is mistaken for a piñata and whacked to death.

[Audio clip: Assistant Curator Kate Warren talks about *Oyster Boy*]

11. Alice in Wonderland

These maquettes were used during the production of Tim Burton's most recent film, *Alice in Wonderland*. The White Rabbit, Cheshire Cat and March Hare were entirely computer animated, and the maquettes gave the actors participating in the live action sequences a physical impression of the digital characters to be incorporated at a later stage of the production process. The beauty and appeal of these figures attest to the combination of creativity and attention to detail underpinning Burton's portrayal of Wonderland as the much darker world of Underland.

The costumes on display here were produced for *Alice in Wonderland* by Academy Award-winning designer Colleen Atwood, who has worked on many of Burton's films including *Edward Scissorhands*, *Mars Attacks!* and *Sweeney Todd*. Although Atwood often works from Burton's preliminary drawings, she is free to create costumes that expand on Burton's ideas while remaining faithful to the spirit of the character. She has commented that working with Burton is a pleasure because he recognises his colleagues as fellow artists and 'gets very excited and enthusiastic when [they] show him what they have'.

When creating the costumes for *Alice in Wonderland*, Atwood had to meet the challenge of 3D animation technology. A number of the *Alice* costumes were computer animated from the beginning. However, others were created physically in the initial design stage, so that Burton and the animation team were better able to understand and reproduce qualities like depth and texture and the actors could get a better feel for the character they were playing.

In designing the Mad Hatter's costume, Atwood consulted the illustrations drawn by John Tenniel for the original publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and did detailed research on hatmakers in the Victorian era. The final costume relies on an intricacy of design that makes it both visually rich and quirkily distinctive. The Mad Hatter's suit was crafted using layers of silk that were then burnt off in places, partly to give it an aged look but also to create a sense of his changing mood.

Odd socks, mismatched buttons and loose bits of ribbon add to the impression of distractedness, while Atwood imagined that the embroidery on the Mad Hatter's trousers was done to fill in time while he was waiting for Alice to arrive.

[Audio clip: Curator Conrad Bodman discusses exhibiting *Alice*]

12. Corpse Bride

Corpse Bride is based on a nineteenth century European folktale. The story was introduced to Tim Burton by fellow animator Joe Ranft who recognised the macabre story as something Burton might find appealing. From the outset, Burton wanted to animate this story using stop motion, a medium he considers to be particularly effective in communicating emotion. Like so many of Burton's projects, *Corpse Bride* bubbled away on the backburner before there was any serious attempt to make the film. After working to develop a script that would be sufficiently sympathetic to each of the three protagonists, Burton did a series of character drawings, some of which are on display here. These original drawings were refined and developed by Spanish character designer Carlos Grangel, whose work Burton first came across at the studios of puppet maker Mackinnon and Saunders.

Based in Manchester in the UK, Mackinnon and Saunders first collaborated with Burton on *Mars Attacks!* and were delighted when the *Corpse Bride* project finally got off the ground.

Working from the designs produced by Grangel and the other artists contributing to the project, the studio took about a year and a half to craft the *Corpse Bride* puppets. As part of a complex and multi-faceted construction process, animation puppets are built around a stiff armature, or jointed skeleton, that can be moved ever so slightly for each animation frame. The *Corpse Bride* puppets were made larger than usual so their faces could be more subtly expressive.

Each of the characters has a very distinctive body shape and silhouette, as the puppets on display in the exhibition reveal. The *Corpse Bride* characters can be seen as a play on the squash and stretch principle of animation which is used to add both dimensionality and an exaggerated cartoonish effect to animated characters and objects. It is a technique often used in Walt Disney animations and these characters are a nod back to Burton's days as an animator at Disney.

Although Burton relishes the crafted, organic quality of stop motion animation, the production of *Corpse Bride* benefited from the use of the digital camera technology that gives instant feedback and greatly simplifies the editing process.

[Audio clip: Film programmer Robert Ciabarra, talks about Emily from *Corpse Bride*]

13. Edward Scissorhands

The idea for the film *Edward Scissorhands* came from a drawing that Burton had done years earlier as part of an exploration of isolation and disconnection. The image stayed with him and became the basis for this very personal film. A number of Burton's sketches of *Edward Scissorhands* are on display here, with each version conveying the loneliness and tragedy that this character must bear. Burton experienced loneliness and frustration as a child and created Edward as a way of exploring the misery of wanting to connect with the world but not being able to.

In order to realise the character of Edward, Burton worked with special effects artist Stan Winston. Creating the intricate scissor hands was particularly challenged. Burton wanted the hands to be so big that Edward would be both 'beautiful and dangerous'. The hands were the key to the character, so that when actor Johnny Depp put them on, it was as if he *became* Edward Scissorhands.

Stan Winston, who won Oscars for his work on the films *Jurassic Park*, *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* and *Aliens*, is remembered as a perfectionist who strived to make his creations as real as possible by exploring the logic behind the concepts and ideas he was working with. Initially, Winston struggled to understand Burton's vision of Edward Scissorhands. However, Edward is a fairy tale-type character who doesn't need to make logical sense, and once Winston came to terms with this approach he relaxed and delighted Burton with the way he got into the spirit of the project. Winston also worked with Burton on *Big Fish* and on *Batman Returns* where he helped create the grotesque look of the Penguin.

Of all of Burton's characters, Edward is arguably the one that audiences, particularly children and teenagers, find most appealing.

[Audio clip: Vyvyan Stanieri, ACMI youth programmer, discusses the brilliance of Edward Scissorhands].

Credits

Tim Burton: The Exhibition
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