



who is houyhnhnms?/gareth crook

- Who is Gareth Crook?

I'm a filmmaker and commercial motion graphic artist in the UK. I run a small production company by the name of GraphicQuarter, which works as my alter ego for producing experimental short films, that genre hop from comedy and drama, to off beat animations and video art. I have worked commercially for nearly 10 years and have run GraphicQuarter for five of those. The two fractions of my work, although fairly separate in their application, do tend to cross over quite a lot. I'm able to take ideas and skills from one to the other and often the influence I have over my work can be seen in both. I'm interested in making films and animations that people can get lost in, for commercial purposes things need to deliver a clear message and entertain, I like taking these notions into my experimental work and blurring the boundaries, making the viewer work that little bit harder and ask questions of what they're seeing.

- What are your projects?

I'm currently working on an experimental drama called 'The Sky's Gone Out' which is due for release in early 2008. The film is a social commentary on the industrialised world, with the key characters expressing a desire and hope for a more naturalistic environment that they once knew and trusted. With a mix of film montage and graphic overlays, the narrative is controlled by a series of personal voice-overs, speaking of hope, love and warmth in a cold and harsh existence. The film represents my more experimental side of working, allowing the film to take shape as production goes on. When working this way I tend to start with an outline concept of what I want the film to say and the visual style I'd like it to portray. Once in production I see how the individual elements and scenes in the film work together best. Other recent projects have been a world away from this technique. The animation '10 Ways to Sheer a Sheep', is a very structured albeit simple tale and was more concerned with humour than anything else, but it still retains some of my signature styles, despite it's difference to much of my work. I've always liked the idea of each film being radically different from things I've done in the past, I'm not a big fan of repeating themes and this is what led me to produce 'Very Nearly an Armful' which is a traditional documentary about donating blood. It's a fly-on-the-wall styled piece that follows a donor through the process as a positive statement about how easy it is to donate. The film was supported by the National Blood Service in the UK and should begin public screenings in the UK in January 2008. The running of GraphicQuarter in itself is always an on going project, in addition to making films, working independently means you also need to promote them. I'm always looking for new avenues to get GraphicQuarter films to larger audiences. The promotion of the GraphicQuarter website provides me with a hub to focus on, so no matter how far the message spreads, there's always a base to come back to.

- What kind of things inspire you?

Pretty much everything inspires me in one way or another, whether it be positive or negative. The positive gives a more direct inspiration, but the negative can be seen to drive me to produce an antidote. Certainly a love of graphics is evident in much of my work, but themes about life and the things I'm personally exposed to play a large role too. These things control to a certain extent the subjects that I make films about and the way in which they are produced, but I think the reasons for me actually making films at all, is that it provides a forum for me to express my ideas, to entertain and to see what I can achieve. Although many of the themes I explore on the surface may appear to have negative tones, a closer look often reveals elements of hope, love and other positive emotions, the act of making a film or any kind of creation is a positive one and this probably more than anything is what drives me on to my next project.

- What's the future of audiovisual art??

Things are definitely changing and for the better. Artists film and video has always been a contentious subject and an area that often doesn't get the exposure that it deserves. There's a long history about filmmakers having to be proactive in finding outlets for their work and new technology is certainly helping the modern filmmaker to do that. Just as desktop home computer systems have allowed artists the freedom to work at their own pace and in their own surroundings, computers and more importantly the networks that tie them together are now opening doors to worldwide audiences that have previously been closed off. The way that people access film and music is beginning to change, we all still watch TV and listen to songs, but the way that these things come into our homes is shifting away from the traditional broadcast mediums and toward the online revolution provided by the internet. What this means for the independent filmmaker is that the route from themselves to the audience is drastically shortened, the production company and TV executive no longer stands in the way. The path is also open both ways, with the viewer given the opportunity to comment on and influence the things they watch. I think the future of audiovisual art will be extremely healthy and diverse and something to really look forward to and be excited about.

- What's houyhnhnms.tv for you?

Houyhnhnms.tv represents what can be done with these new technologies, as is always the case with new developments, there are those who get it right and those who despite best intentions don't quite hit the nail. There is a mass of websites and online TV outlets now appearing, and in the rush, sometimes the quality and user experience is lost and forgotten. Much as with broadcast TV, there are those stations that people watch a lot more than others, what sets these aside is not just the quality of the programming, but also the way that it's delivered. With online TV, the big thing is the interface provided. Many sites make the mistake of not caring enough about the brand and identity, this for me is where houyhnhnms.tv excels. Not only does it have rich and diverse programming, but the way that's accessed is sleek, professional and friendly. Filmmakers like any other artist, want their work to be shown in the best possible light, to feel that the outlet provided is done so with a shared passion for the content it shows, this is what houyhnhnms.tv represents for me and is why I'm proud to have GraphicQuarter associated with it.

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