

Stephen Irwin

Director/Animator, *The Black Dog's Progress*

The haunting story playing out in endless flipbook scenes in Stephen Irwin's short, *The Black Dog's Progress*, was inspired by a news item the 29-year-old London-based animator saw some years ago: After several attempts to get rid of the family dog, a woman sets the creature on fire, only for it to set the house ablaze, killing her children. "I wanted an original way of telling the story, and came up with the idea of laying the entire narrative out on the screen all at once," Irwin explains, "I love the repetition of optical toys such as zoetropes and flipbooks ... I also wanted the violence to be very cartoon-like and made up of as few frames as possible."

Black Dog was created for Channel 4's Animate Projects program in 2008. Irwin has previously been commissioned by the BBC and U.K. Film Council (*Dry Lips, Bows & Arrows*), receiving commendation for these as well as his graduate film *Dialog*. He says he is inspired

by many different creative icons, from director Stanley Kubrick, to Russian animator Yuri Norstein (*Hedgehog in the Fog*), to comic book creator Chris Ware, to iconic movie title designer Saul Bass.

Irwin's success in the animation scene comes with a surprising side note: Although he studied at Central St. Martin's College of Art and Design, his toon technique is self-taught—using hand drawings manipulated in Adobe After Effects. "I experimented with live-action shorts at university, but preferred the greater control I had over the animations I was making," Irwin says, "With a fairly basic computer and a few pieces of software I was able to make some rudimentary Gilliam-esque cut-out animations. From

there, my interest developed and I began to experiment with different techniques, and continue to do so."

While he continues to pursue commercial projects, Irwin has two new shorts in the works. "One of them is much bigger in scale and ambition than any of my previous works ... it will be shot in pixilation with actors and sets, as well as 2D drawn animation, so I need to find funding before I can start production," he shares, "The other is an animated double bill, but with the two films playing simultaneously on top of each other." This inventive Brit surely has plenty of animated twists up his sleeve! ■



Stephen Irwin
as drawn by the artist

