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Kawamoto: The Puppet Master A Masterclass in Animation On Tour

At Watershed from Sat 15 - Fri 21 March



Dojoji Temple



Little Dark Poet

Spring sees the arrival of a playful celebration of animation as a retrospective of the work of Japanese filmmaker Kihachiro Kawamoto hits the big screen in a national tour that opens at Watershed on Sat 15 March.

Considered a living treasure in his home country, Kawamoto is one of the most influential figures in the field of stop-motion animation, the art of physically manipulating real world objects to create the illusion of movement by photographing them one frame of film at a time. Programmed by Japanese film expert Jasper Sharp (co-founder of the specialist Japanese film website www.midnighteye.com), the season offers a rare chance to discover Kawamoto's unique body of work that spans over three decades.

The programme features the UK premiere of Kawamoto's latest feature, **The Book of the Dead (2005)**, a Shakespearian tale of mistaken identities, which tells the story of a battle fought between the spiritual and material world. A hand-picked selection of Kawamoto's finest short films will provide the background to this more recent work, including the haunting ghost story **The Demon (1970)** and the surreal collage animation **The Trip (1973)**, in which a young girl embarks on a spiritual journey within an anonymous Western city that resembles a bizarre dream world.

Kawamoto and his one time Czech tutor, Jirí Trnka, described as the 'Walt Disney of the East', have had a lasting influence on British animation, and the season will look at their work in context with the UK's top talent, including Suzie Templeton, winner of this year's Oscar® for Best Animated Short, Dave Borthwick of Bolex Brothers and Peter Lord of Aardman Animations, alongside rising new stars such as Joe Tucker and Chris Randall. Aardman Animation's internationally cherished plasticine heroes, **Wallace and Gromit**, will also make an appearance as Bristol's role in popularising this unique art form is celebrated.

This season is a reminder of the magic of stop-motion animation, which brings characters lovingly to life by human hand, a refreshing alternative in an era of CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) creations such as Shrek and Beowulf. With an amazing ability to assume an identity of their own, these puppets and models appeal to all ages and have the power to transcend nationality, race and religion.

In the words of Kihachiro Kawamoto:

'Dolls are children's toys, or things you dress up and display. Puppets, or marionettes, are things that act, they make their own story.'

British animator Barry Purves, whose work on **Dangermouse** and **The Wind in the Willows** is also highlighted in the season, stated:

'I'm very much looking forward to seeing Kawamoto's stunning films on the big screen. To describe these films as 'exquisite' is an understatement. Do not miss this rare chance to see these masterpieces'.

Barry will be present at Watershed to introduce a screening of his work and will be signing copies of his latest book, **Stop Motion: Passion, Process and Performance**, on Sun 16 March.

Following the screenings at Watershed (Sat 15 – Fri 21 March), the season will go on a national tour, visiting venues in Newcastle, Edinburgh, Manchester, Sheffield, London and Bradford between March and May 2008. The tour forms part of Watershed's wider ambition to reach new audiences, by developing links with the country's major arts organisations through a series of touring programmes and exhibitions.

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Notes to editors:

- For any further information and/or images please contact Jenny Crook jenny.crook@watershed.co.uk or Louise Gardner louise@watershed.co.uk or call (0117) 927 6444.
- To book tickets for Watershed films and events, please call Box Office on 0117 927 5100.
- See below for details of all screenings and tour venues, or visit www.watershed.co.uk/kawamoto
- For further information about Japanese cinema, please see www.midnighteye.com
- For interview requests with Jaspar Sharpe or Barry Purves please contact Jenny Crook jenny.crook@watershed.co.uk.

Venues included in the tour:

Screening the full programme:

Watershed Media Centre

From Sat 15 – Fri 21 March
1 Canon's Road, Harbourside, Bristol, BS1 5TX
Box Office: 0117 9275100
www.watershed.co.uk

Showroom Cinema

Fri 25 April – Thu 1 May
Paternoster Row, Sheffield, S1 2BX
Box Office: 0114 275 7727
www.showroom.org.uk

Screening Kawamoto Programmes 1, 2 and 3:

Tyneside Cinema

From Fri 28 - Sun 30 March
Old Town Hall, West Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HE
Box Office: 0191 232 8289
www.tynecine.org

Cornerhouse

From Sat 5 - Mon 7 April
70 Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 5NH
Box Office: 0161 200 1500
www.cornerhouse.org

Barbican

From Sat 3 May
Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London, EC2Y 8DS
Box Office: 020 7638 8891
www.barbican.org.uk

National Media Museum

From Fri 9 - Thu 15 May
Bradford, West Yorkshire BD1 1NQ
Box Office: 0870 70 10 200
www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk

Screening selected works from Kawamoto Programmes 1 and 2:

Filmhouse Cinema

From Fri 11 – Thu 17 April
88 Lothian Road, Edinburgh, EH3 9BZ
Box Office: 0131 228 2688
www.filmhousecinema.com

A Watershed season, programmed by Japanese film expert Jasper Sharp (www.midnighteye.com). With support from The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and The Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation.

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The Daiwa
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The Great Britain
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Kawamoto: The Puppet Master :**Demons, Poets & Priests PG**

Dir: Kihachiro Kawamoto 1hr 30mins Subtitled

Born in 1925, Kihachiro Kawamoto is considered a living treasure in his home country, with over thirty years spent creating some of the world's most sublime and atmospheric stop motion animation. Having studied in Prague under Czech animator Jiri Trnka, who encouraged him to draw on his own country's rich cultural heritage, Kawamoto returned to Japan to make a series of painstakingly crafted masterpieces with their roots in Japanese legends and the theatrical forms of Kabuki, Noh and Bunraku theatre. This programme of shorts features some of his finest short films, such as the haunting ghost story **The Demon (1970)** and foreign myths and fairytales in **To Shoot Without Shooting (1988)**, adapted from a tale set in ancient China.

Absurdities, Legends and Fairy Tales PG

Dir: Kihachiro Kawamoto 1hr 12mins Subtitled

The second programme of Kawamoto's short films celebrates the fantastic, the mystical and the arcane. In **Breaking of Branches Is Forbidden (1968)**, Kawamoto's first film after returning to Japan, a young acolyte with a fondness for rice wine is instructed to guard a beautiful cherry blossom tree. A young girl embarks on a spiritual journey within an anonymous Western city in the surreal collage animation **The Trip (1973)**, and in the bewitching **Dojoji Temple (1976)** a young pilgrim is pursued by a fair maiden.

The Book of the Dead 12

Dir: Kihachiro Kawamoto Japan 2005 1hr 10mins Subtitled

Set in Japan in the mid-8th century, when Buddhism was introduced from China, this represents the crowning achievement of Kawamoto's artistic vision. Embellished with supernatural elements, it is the story of Iratsume, a devout noblewoman who believes she has received a vision of Buddha himself. Journeying to a distant temple in search of the spectre, she encounters the ghost of Prince Otsu, who mistakes Iratsume for a woman he longs for. He cannot rest while her face haunts his sleep, and a battle of wills ensues.

Britain's Puppet Masters:**Dark Dreams in Plasticine 15**

Dir: Various 1hr 30mins

The ghoulish Grand Guignol grotesquerie of British animation comes up for review in a series of nightmarish visions from the country's top talent, including classics from Oscar® winning filmmaker Suzie Templeton, Peter Lord and Bolex Brothers' Mike Booth and Martin Davies, alongside new works by Joe Tucker, Natalie Ann Hinchley and Chris Randall.

Jason & The Argonauts U

Dir: Don Chaffey UK/USA 1963 1hr 40mins

Ray Harryhausen's special effects wizardry on fantasy epics like **Clash of the Titans**, **The Golden Voyage of Sinbad** and **One Million Years B.C.** made them among the most memorable film experiences of their day. In this film, rightly regarded as his masterpiece, the legendary Greek hero Jason leads the crew members of the Argo on an epic sea voyage in search of the mythical Golden Fleece, battling hordes of stop-motion beasts including harpies, hydras, a skeletal army and a gargantuan bronze giant named Talos on his way.

Barry Purves 15

Dir: Barry Purves 1hr 30mins

In parallel with his career as an actor and stage manager, Barry Purves has worked on such memorable TV series as **Chorton** and **the Wheelies**, **Dangermouse** and **The Wind in the Willows**. Since 1986, Barry has directed and animated some 70 commercials, title sequences, and animation inserts for films and pop promos. His inventive plays on traditional theatrical forms like Greek tragedy, opera and Kabuki draw parallels with Kawamoto's work in Japan, and have won over sixty major international awards, including Grand Prix's, Best Director, Best Film, and Oscar® and BAFTA nominations, making him one of the most highly respected stop-motion animators in the UK.

Panel Discussion: Anima: Expressing the Soul in Stop-Motion

Top UK animators Barry Purves and Peter Lord discuss the potential of puppet animation and claymation to express emotion and character with host Jasper Sharp. **(Watershed only)**

The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb 12A

Dir: Dave Borthwick UK 1999 1hr

David Borthwick of **Bolex Brothers** presents his revolutionary 'pixilation' technique, mixing frame-by-frame animation of live actors with standard stop-motion animated models in his dark, twisted, yet enchanting version of the classic fairytale. Set in a dystopian world of dark and shadowy tenements, shining high-tech labs and hallucinatory landscapes of garbage and ruins, **The Secret Adventures of Tom Thumb** makes a touching hero of the thumb-high child mysteriously born in a lab full of mutant creatures. Tom narrowly escapes into a world in which he finds companionship with people his own size and begins to wage a war against the human 'giants'.

Cinékids: Claymation Classics PG

Cinékids is a Watershed initiative that features monthly events aimed at children between 8 and 12 years old.

As a special part of the **Kawamoto: The Puppet Master** programme, this month's **Cinékids** will present a selection of British animation classics, featuring such lovable Claymation characters as Sludger the Aardvark, who tries to make it as a drummer in the big city in **Hamilton Mattress**, Wallace and Gromit in **The Wrong Trousers** and Morph.