



STOP MOTION: CELEBRATING HANDMADE ANIMATION ON THE BIG SCREEN

Isle of Dogs

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Directed by: Wes Anderson

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Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

An American Empirical picture

In association with: Studio Babelsberg Film

Supported by: FFA – Filmförderungsanstalt, MBB –

Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg

Presented by: Fox Searchlight Pictures,

Indian Paintbrush

Executive Producers: Christopher Fisser,

Henning Molfenter, Charlie Woebcken

Produced by: Wes Anderson, Scott Rudin,

Steven Rales, Jeremy Dawson

Co-producer: Octavia Peissel

Production Supervisor: Angela Poschet

Production Co-ordinator: Karen Rodrigues

Financial Controller: Nuala Alen-Buckley

Production Accountant: Fry Martin

Post-production Supervisor: Gisela Evert

1st Assistant Director: James Emmott

2nd Assistant Director: Mark Lacey

3rd Assistant Directors: Emily Stevens,

Francesca Alberigi, Alan Halls, Alex Moffat,

Daniel Parslow

Script Supervisor: J. Caitlin Ringness

Casting by: Douglas Aibel, Kunichi Nomura

Screenplay by: Wes Anderson

Story by: Wes Anderson, Roman Coppola,

Jason Schwartzman, Kunichi Nomura

Director of Photography: Tristan Oliver

Head Camera Operator: Mark Swaffield

Unit Stills Photographers: Ray Lewis,

Valerie Sadoun

Visual Effects Supervisor: Lev Kolobov

Senior Visual Effects Supervisor: Tim Ledbury

Animation Director: Mark Waring

Animation Supervisor: Tobias Fouracre

Hand-drawn Animation and Design by:

Gwenn Germain

Supervising Editor: Andrew Weisblum

Editors: Ralph Foster, Edward Bursch

Production Designers: Adam Stockhausen,

Paul Harrod

Graphic Designer: Annie Atkins

Nutmeg Costume Design by: Juman Malouf

Head of Puppets Department: Andy Gent, Likaon

Titles by: Erica Dorn

Digital Intermediate Colourist: Asa Shoul

Original Music by: Alexandre Desplat

Conductor: Conrad Pope

Orchestrator: Conrad Pope

Music Supervisor: Randall Poster

Re-recording Mixers: Wayne Lemmer,

Chris Scarabosio

Supervising Sound Editors: Wayne Lemmer,

Chris Scarabosio

Digital Intermediate by: Molinare TV & Film

Special Thanks: Brian De Palma

Filmed at: 3 Mills Studio

Voice Cast:

Bryan Cranston (Chief)

Koyu Rankin (Atari Kobayashi)

Edward Norton (Rex)

Bob Balaban (King)

Bill Murray (Boss)

Jeff Goldblum (Duke)

Kunichi Nomura (Mayor Kobayashi)

Akira Takayama (major domo)

Greta Gerwig (Tracy Walker)

Frances McDormand (Interpreter Nelson)

Akira Ito (Professor Watanabe)

Scarlett Johansson (Nutmeg)

Many auteur directors create films that seem to exist in pocket universes as self-contained, circumscribed and minutely thought-through as the virtual-reality environment of a computer game or the fantasy setting of a paperback trilogy. Wes Anderson's early films *Bottle Rocket* (1996) and *Rushmore* (1998) took place in more or less the real world, but concerned fantasists who tried to make their imaginings concrete (or at least papier-mâché) reality. Since then, he has voyaged deeper into the universes created for each of his films and found avatars in visionaries and explorers like Max Fischer (Jason Schwartzman), the schoolboy theatrical impresario of *Rushmore*, and Steve Zissou (Bill Murray), the Jacques Cousteau figure in *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*. *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) was set on an imaginary island and came – like every fantasy trilogy since Tolkien – with an invented map. *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), a Russian doll of shaggy-dog stories, embedded human eccentrics in an imaginary institution (and country) visited over decades. Anderson's secondary worlds aren't permanent idylls but places in the throes of sometimes cataclysmic change. With *Fantastic Mr Fox* (2009), Anderson's earlier venture into stop-motion animation (and his only film based on a pre-existing source), the director was at last able to control all the variables – in this mode, every single throwaway prop has to be made from scratch.

Isle of Dogs – set in a near-future Japan, where the mayor of Megasaki has ordered that all the city's dogs be exiled to an offshore refuse dump – shows the influence of everyone in the field from Jan Svankmajer to Nick Park, and makes extensive use of a quirk discovered by Willis H. O'Brien on *King Kong* (1933) – that the animators' fingers cause furry puppets to ripple in a manner approximating a constant light breeze. Even more than most of Anderson's films, *Isle of Dogs* will attract repeat viewings because it is so densely packed with sly visual gags and quietly hilarious minor characters (such as Tilda Swinton's Oracle Dog, whose mystic reputation is down to quoting TV news headlines as if they were prophecies) that a single watch won't pick up half the prizes. Many one-off images are startlingly beautiful, yet oddly melancholy, often finding fascinating things to see in literal detritus – the aftermath of a plane crash on a sea of waste paper, with the wreck at the centre of a burned circle... or the clouds of dust kicked up whenever animals or humans need to have an old-fashioned cartoon-style mêlée.

Like Guy Maddin (*The Forbidden Room*) and Anna Biller (*The Love Witch*), Anderson often looks to an eclectic variety of film sources, making collages out of unlikely bits and pieces of popular and high culture. Here, the dominant influence is Japanese cinema, with explicit nods to Kurosawa (music stings and *bushido* cool from *Seven Samurai* and echoes of the rubbish-dump community of *Dodes'ka-den*) and the science-fiction films of Honda Ishiro (with the space-suited boy pilot and steel-frilled mecha-dogs). But in having dogs as most of the main (and anglophone) characters, Anderson can't avoid evoking *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) and *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1960), albeit with the analogues of show dog Lady and street dog Tramp – voiced by Scarlett Johansson and Bryan Cranston – conducting themselves like the mysterious, slightly fey outlaws of Seijun Suzuki's films. A supporting pack of wry, chatty cast-off dogs (voiced by Anderson regulars Murray, Ed Norton, Bob Balaban and Jeff Goldblum) come across as canine versions of the crews of mostly merry misfits of *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and *The Life Aquatic*.

Like many Anderson films, *Isle of Dogs* has a non-linear story, an omniscient narrator (Courtney B. Vance), onscreen chapter headings and an array of distancing devices – all the Japanese characters speak mostly in unsubtitled Japanese, but translators and translation devices pop up to keep the audience up to date – which theoretically draw attention to the packaging rather than the contents. However, this is such a labour of love, drawing so much from its

Harvey Keitel (*Gondo*)
F. Murray Abraham (*Jupiter*)
Yoko Ono (*Assistant-Scientist Yoko-Ono*)
Tilda Swinton (*Oracle*)
Ken Watanabe (*head surgeon*)
Mari Natsuki (*Auntie*)
Fisher Stevens (*Scrap*)
Murakami Nijiro (*Editor Hiroshi*)
Liev Schreiber (*Spots*)
Courtney B. Vance (*the narrator*)
USA/Germany 2018©
101 mins

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Isle of Dogs Wed 7 Aug 12:10; Sat 10 Aug 20:30;
Sun 25 Aug 18:30
Kubo and the Two Strings Thu 8 Aug 12:20; Sat
10 Aug 18:15 (+ Q&A with Travis Knight, director
and President & CEO of LAIKA); Fri 30 Aug 12:20
Missing Link Fri 9 Aug 12:30; Mon 26 Aug 15:20
Frankenweenie Sun 11 Aug 14:30 BFI IMAX; Fri 30
Aug 20:30
The Boxtrolls Mon 12 Aug 14:10; Sat 17 Aug 12:00
The Emperor's Nightingale Cisaruv slavik
Tue 13 Aug 18:20
Jason and the Argonauts Wed 14 Aug 18:00
The Golden Voyage of Sinbad Wed 14 Aug 20:30
ParaNorman Thu 15 Aug 12:10; Wed 28 Aug 12:20
Coraline Fri 16 Aug 12:30; Sat 17 Aug 15:30; Wed
21 Aug 12:15; Thu 22 Aug 14:20
Stop-Motion Shorts Scene – BFI Backed + Q&A
Fri 16 Aug 18:10
Funday: Stop-Motion Children's Favourites
Sun 18 Aug 12:20
Stopmotion + Q&A with director Robert Morgan
Wed 21 Aug 20:40
Journey to the Beginning of Time Cesta do
praveku Thu 22 Aug 18:30
Chicken Run Sat 24 Aug 11:40
Aardman Shorts Sat 24 Aug 14:30
Tim Burton's Corpse Bride
Sun 25 Aug 14:30 BFI IMAX; Fri 30 Aug 18:20
Fantastic Mr Fox Sun 25 Aug 16:15
Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio Tue 27 Aug 20:40
Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas
Thu 29 Aug 20:50

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creator's enthusiasm for all manner of things – not least, of course, dogs – that it avoids disappearing inside its magnificent artifice. A speech that Cranston's stray Chief gives about literally biting the hand that fed him when he muffed a chance at a good home is among the most perfectly written, staged and played scenes in recent cinema – it would be a surefire Oscar clip if awards had categories that could encompass achievements in this byway of cinema, where great acting is as much down to the hands of animators as the dialogue delivery. The trick of absurdist comedy is often to know when to take an element (here emotional, but elsewhere in the film political) so seriously that it hits home without even abandoning a fundamental ridiculousness – which turns out to be a profound reaction to the state of the real world.

Kim Newman, *Sight and Sound*, April 2018

With its semi-fictional Japanese setting, its construction out of comic book-like chapters and its intercut themes of nature, heroism, technology, rescue and honour, perhaps it was only natural that the film would also reverberate with echoes of Japanese pop culture and some of Japan's greatest film directors, from Yasujiro Ozu to Kurosawa to Seijun Suzuki, as well as the Japanese monster films of the 50s and 60s, with their climactic disasters. 'We think of it as referring to a whole range of Japanese filmmakers and Japanese culture, but Kurosawa is the main movie influence,' says Wes Anderson.

It's hard to even quantify Kurosawa's impact on cinema because he arced so gracefully through a huge pendulum of genres from noir, to Samurai, to Shakespeare, to melodrama. But for *Isle of Dogs*, Anderson was mostly focused on Kurosawa's contemporary (for their time), city-based movies: *Drunken Angel*, *Stray Dog*, *High and Low* and *The Bad Sleep Well*. Each of these kinetically charged films unfolds in gritty domains of crime and corruption. Each seems to transcend the dark side of the modern world with characters of the utmost honesty and humanity. And seen in each is the legendary Toshiro Mifune, whose expressive countenance inspires the look of Mayor Kobayashi.

Another branch of inspiration came from two 19th century, Edo-period woodblock print masters: Hiroshige and Hokusai, whose emphasis on colour and line deeply influenced European Impressionists. Their *ukiyo-e* (translates to 'pictures of the floating world') artworks capture fleeting moments of pleasure focusing on natural landscapes, far-flung travels, flora and fauna, geishas and kabuki actors. In preparation for the film, Anderson collected a wide swath of woodblock print images and the storyboard artists trawled through the extensive collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Then, by osmosis, the folkloric Japanese style began to merge with the tactile, handmade feel of stop-motion.

Recalls animatic editor Edward Bursch: 'The first thing I received on this film, on 12 April 2015, was the script from Wes, along with several reference images and a video. The reference images were just a few Japanese woodblock prints, a picture of a dog and a picture of a dog statue in Japan. The video was of three taiko drummers drumming this ferocious beat, and that set the mood.'

For all the Japanese (and other) influences one might joyfully trace in the film, the world it conjures is decidedly like no other. Says the film's titles designer Erica Dorn, who grew up in Japan, of how it all comes together: 'The world of *Isle of Dogs* is kind of an alternative reality. It looks and feels like Japan, but it's a slightly dreamier version, a slightly more Wes Anderson version. That is the beauty of setting the film in a made-up city, in a made-up time: you get a certain amount of artistic license. The blending of old and new is very common in Japan. There are scenes in the film that are very minimalist and *wabi-sabi*; but then you switch over to the city, which is maximalist and very intense. So, there's that feeling of Japan but it's all filtered through Wes's own way of seeing.'

Production notes