

STUDIO AKA Speaks about their Award Winning Lost & Found Short

This CG Creation is a Heart-Warming Story Celebrating the Value of Friendship which has been Awarded the 2009 BAFTA for Children's Animation

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Could you begin by telling us about your company background?

STUDIO AKA was created in 2000 as a production partnership between PAM DENNIS (MD), SUE GOFFE (Head of Production) and PHILIP HUNT (Creative Director). The studio was founded on the existing infrastructure of a 2D animation studio founded in 1984 by Pam with two former partners, and our wish was to explore the potential of a core team of directors in ways that reinvented both how we worked, how the directors worked, and the projects we created together.

Over the last 10 years we have created a much respected studio of some 30 people creating animated commercials and short films under the STUDIO AKA banner and we're now known all over the world for our eclectic and idiosyncratic works. Our approach is simple; to find bespoke creative solutions for each and every creative problem we are faced with, rather than applying a set of repetitive stylistic looks or methods.

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div.overlay { width:1040px; height:640px; } #imgplay { margin:88px 0px 0px 190px; } #player { background:no-repeat url('/videos/news/2009/december/lostfound.jpg') top center; } #splash, #player, #player embed, #player object { width:560px; height:340px; }
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As a result of our desire to keep pushing at expectations (both our own and other peoples) we have developed considerably from our beginnings and have garnered many plaudits and awards - including D&AD, Clio, and BTA's for our ads not to mention over 40 festival awards for our films including two BAFTA's. [Continued on Next Page]

How did you get involved in the making of Lost and Found?

The author of the original picture OLIVER JEFFERS was originally approached by Contender Entertainments' JOAN LOFTS who had the idea to try and create a 30 min TV special from the book. Oliver was a fan of STUDIO AKA and put Joan in touch with us to see if we would be interested in developing the idea. Following some early discussion where we realised we would be able to take the project in an interesting creative direction, we came aboard as 50% production partners with Contender /E1. In our early chats about the project I had quickly realised how I wanted to handle the adaptation of a short picture book into a half hour film in a way that would bring something new to the project - and yet remain a strong counterpoint to the original book without just simply making the pictures move. I took on the projects directorial duties and thereafter it was a blur of activity for 11 months until we delivered the completed film into the hands of channel 4 for its debut transmission on Christmas Eve 2008.

What attracted you to this work in the first place?

I was familiar with the book and all of Oliver's work in my role as a parent to two small children - and had been captivated by Oliver's deceptive simplicity of approach and his way of creating slight yet resonant storylines that hinted at much more than what appeared to reside on the pages of the books themselves. I think overall I recognised an opportunity to create something both gentle and epic in its ambition, as the core story itself has such a great narrative sweep that belies its storybook origins. Perhaps most importantly Oliver trusted us without condition and enabled us to take the project in a largely unexpected direction. Without that I doubt I would have had the interest, as I need the process to be creative and uncharted rather than merely functional in order to get the best out of an opportunity like this.

What kind of software was used for the project?

Imagination & hands ... plus pencils, paper, Photoshop, After Effects, Softimage XSI, Final cut and Avid.

5. Were there any technical challenges you had to overcome?

Where do I begin? From the creation of the bespoke character rigs and sheer scale of modelling and building at one end - to the realisation of an Ocean that could convey a range of emotive set pieces from calm to stormy seas, plus the challenge of 10,000 unruly penguins at the south pole and a unwavering desire to keep the film as tactile as possible in its final look, the film was riddled with challenges that we had not faced before making it that much more interesting to solve of course. In the end the challenges were all subtle creative ones more than technical and despite what's on screen the technology definitely was put to work to solve the story rather than be a means to its own end.

How much planning was needed in order to pull something like Lost and Found off?

This is question for Sue Goffe who produced the film -my methodology was to keep my head down working and trust Sue to make sure the world would still be there when I looked up. The simple answer is "a lot". With such a very tight budget - and the micro-schedule we had in which to produce the film - there was no room for any time wastage or navel contemplation. Once the treatment and animatics had been created and locked - the entire film was dissected into scenes & shots which were carved up according to content among the modellers, and animators in the most efficient order possible. With a very small team working in shifts for 11 months the film simply had to be planned down to the last frame in the most disciplined way we could something constantly being adjusted and reshuffled according to the flow of production as it occurred.

What is your typical production pipeline?

There is no typical pipeline process other than the one that emerges to suit the particular production we are engaged in, you have a basic working method which needs to flex accordingly and what is important are simple things like clear naming structures for file output, a good approvals and adjustment process to share progress & completion - and very open lines of verbal communication between the various creative and technical leads of a project all backed up in a clear project folder & feedback structure so that no one loses sight of the "whole" of what we are creating. Regular production meetings, dailies and endless directors rounds keeping up with everyone in person, complete the picture. The various stages of production, treatment, screenplay, design, storyboarding, layouts, build, animation & compositing are really not so different to any other production really its more important who you've cast to work in these roles, and everything, right up to sound & music creation all requires a structure to its creation so that everything fits together seamlessly.

What are your favourite sources of inspiration?

My inspirations come from a variety of sources, mostly from observing the world around me, and listening ... Always listening ... Aside from that its the usual, books, cinema, theatre and daydreaming in general but mostly is just opening your eyes to what is already going on all around you - often far more interesting and creative than anything you might watch read or listen too via the usual routes.

Can you tell us something about your next projects?

Not really! Partly because its never a good idea to pronounce on what you might, may or hope to be doing (just becomes a lot of hot air in my experience), but also because its quite nice if people take some time to appreciate what we've already done while we quietly get on with what will follow on. I will say that we are making more long form work & Marc Craste is deep into something truly wonderful that will knock your socks off when its done, and I'm currently quietly working on another film. Grant Orchard has a new film out in early 2010 which is looking great, whilst Steve Small, and the other directors continue to create ads and shorter commercial projects whilst we all continue to dream.

More Information at www.studioaka.co.uk. Image and Video Courtesy of STUDIO AKA. Video Encoding: 3Dup.com