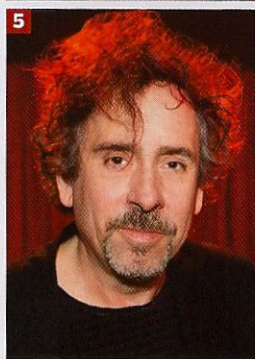
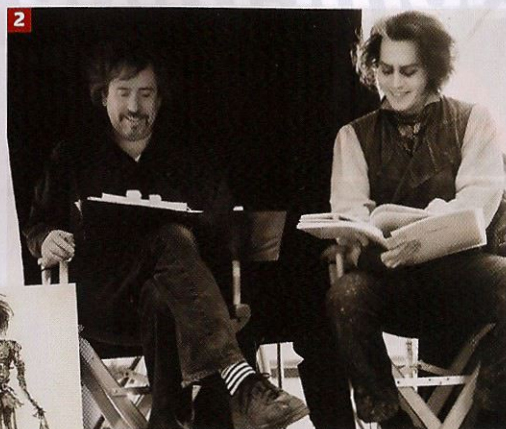
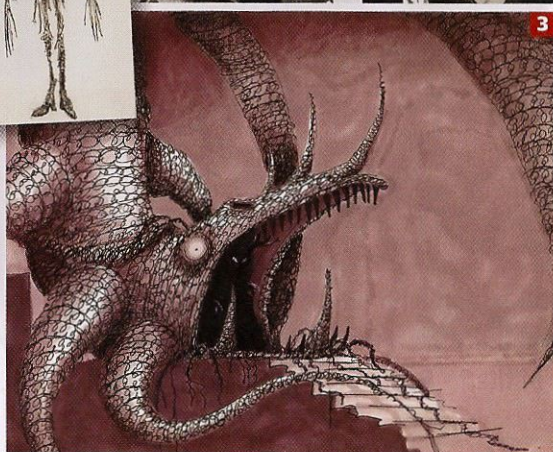
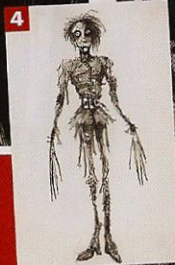


EXHIBITION



Handle With Scare

(1) Burton's 1993 classic *Nightmare Before Christmas*. (2) With Johnny Depp on *Sweeney Todd*. (3) One of Burton's sketches. (4) An early drawing of Edward Scissorhands. (5) The man behind the imagination.



The Surreal Life of Tim Burton

Melbourne's ACMI is hosting a career retrospective of the eccentric filmmaker

IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT, AS A CHILD, TIM BURTON was not afraid of the dark. Growing up in the cookie-cutter suburb of Burbank, California, Burton was always an outsider. The cult filmmaker embraced monsters and ghouls from horror flicks and created creatures in sketch pads. He made animated films instead of doing his homework.

"I grew up watching monster movies and playing in the local cemetery and so I was used to that kind of stuff," Burton says. "To me, I never saw it as dark. Those kinds of feelings and drawings were kind of cathartic. It was to get things out of my system and help me therapeutically in a certain way."

That therapy has become a career spanning 30 years, in which he gave Batman a gothic edge and made strange pumpkin-headed creatures sing. In that time, Burton has churned out more than 700 sketches, costumes and clay models from his childhood through to *Alice in Wonderland*, many of which are currently on display in *Tim Burton: The Exhibition* at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne.

Inside the interview room, Burton is wearing his usual purple-tinted glasses and his black hair is springing around his face. He gives a steady smile, but there is a sense that his characters stem from this initial uneasiness, something Burton has expressed throughout his career, and perhaps most memorably in *Edward Scissorhands*.

"I always try to find aspects that I relate to with my characters," he explains. "Aspects that are not necessarily me, but I have to feel them. Especially

early on, I was not a good communicator, and so I always felt that I really had to 'feel' the character, so in some way, I could impart that to whomever."

It's this feeling – or intuition – that Burton takes from his sketches to the screen. His fascination with twisting fairytales and re-telling stories does have its limits: The London-based director says he wouldn't remake a classic such as *The Wizard of Oz*.

"With *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, I like Roald Dahl and I feel close to his work, and I feel that there's a similarity to what I like to do.

"I grew up watching monster movies and playing in the local cemetery . . . I never saw it as dark."

"I felt comfortable doing *Alice in Wonderland* because there was no movie version of it that I really loved. So I think if you're going to remake a movie, it's best to remake a crappy movie" he laughs. "As opposed to remaking something that's already deep-rooted in people's minds."

Burton has been hired and fired from Disney five times through his career but there's no stopping his relationship with the studio; his next project is a stop-motion animation remake of his 1984 short film *Frankenweenie*. "You always need to take time to feel what the next project is," Burton says. "The most important time is when you're seemingly doing nothing. That's where the most important work gets done. Just staring at the clouds or looking at a tree or whatever."

ANGELA ALLAN