

Stefán Jörgen

I am in a dark castle cellar. The only thing lighting up my surroundings is the candle in the candlestick I hold in my hand. The candle light casts long shadows from the columns all around me, painting the walls with dancing figures that I mistook for a moment as something moving in the distant. There is a strange sound, like something just fell on there floor. "Hello, is there anyone here?" I ask. There's no reply. I seem to be all alone down here. Suddenly a swift wind blows out my candle light. All goes black, I can't see a thing. There is another sound, like something is moving in the dark. In my panic I drop the candlestick as I desperately search for my matches. I finally find them and light a match only to reveal the Frankenstein monster standing right next to me. I let out a scream of terror as the monster tackles me. All goes black again, but judging from the monster's grunts, my characters role in this film is probably over.

I'm sorry for the cheese intro, but I thought it would be appropriate, this time we visit a man who is largely responsible for the success of film scenes similar to the hypothetical monster attack above. If filmmakers want to successfully scare the audience with scenes like these now a days the monsters have to look truly horrifying. That's where our man steps in, Stefán Jörgen, monster maker.



What is it called that you do?

It's called special make-up effects in American, Icelanders would call this *leikgervi*.

“I just started experimenting. Wax, silicon sealant products...”

When was it and why did you start out in special make-up effects?

I have been doing it since I was about thirteen years old. I just started fooling around. I was a big fan of *Star Wars*, *Labyrinth*, *Dark Chrystal* and science fiction in general. I guess I wanted to own my own masks and my own science fiction stuff. So one day I decided to try to make stuff like that on my own. I started to experiment with different ingredience and managed to make something that looked ok. I have been teaching myself the craft ever since, trial and error. *You didn't study at school?* No I never went to school.

So how did you know how to start?

I just started experimenting with whatever I could get my hands on. Wax, silicon sealant products, it's the stuff you use for isolation when installing a new window. Later I acquired some latex with a little help from my grandfather, the kind you normally use for carpet glue. Then I could make latex dolls.



Do you remember the first thing you made?

I made a short film when I was in Hjallaskóli (primary school), which featured my first dolls. They were mechanical dolls. I disassembled some remote controlled toy cars, took out the motors and used them to make these dolls that could move their eyes. This was when I was thirteen years old. But the silicon materials I was using at the time were so inflexible that the motors weren't powerful enough to move the dolls. I had to change methods, I ribbed out a transmission hose out of an old Skoda's heating system to use to control the dolls. That's stronger and it worked.

What kind of a film was this?

It was called *Gufurnar* and featured these silicon puppets that I and some friends of mine made. I had little experience at the time but we did our best. It was just a short comedy, a little puppet film.

How did you decide to make this a career?

I don't know if it was a conscious decision. I just started to make these figures and soon people heard of me and started to ask me to work for them. Things escalated very quickly. I have never had to apply for a job doing this, people are always calling me and asking me to work for them.





Is there plenty of work to be had doing this in Iceland?

Yes, at least these days. I'm working for Þjóðleikhúsið (National Theater) right now.

“it's about 50% theater and 50% films”

So you also work in theater as well as in films?

Yeah, it's about 50% theater and 50% films for me. The theater people usually call me when they need disposable facial hair, long noses or if they need to change the appearance of an actor drastically.

Is there something that you have done that you are more proud of than the other stuff?

I don't know. I am proud of everything I have done I think. But for example I was very proud of my work in the film *The Good Heart*. I got the Edda award for that (The Icelandic Film Awards). I was also very proud of what I did for the film *Last Winter*. That is the naked corps you can see there, hanging on the wall. So I guess there are some projects that are more memorable than others.



clip from the movie "The last winter"

Isn't the work time consuming?

Yes it is. It can take me about a month to make one mask. The naked corpse took me about a month and a half to make, working almost 24 hours a day.

Could you maybe tell us about some of your projects?

Sure. For example I went to London in 2009 to work for the film *Wolf Man* where my job was to do the Wolf Man makeup. I made a torso for *The Good Heart*, a frozen corpse for *Last Winter* and I worked on *Mýrin (Jar City)*, there's another corpse hanging on my wall that is from that film. *Köld slóð (Cold Trail)* is another film and I also worked on the newest *Sveppi* film (*Algjör Sveppi og töfraskápurinn a.k.a. The Magic Wardrobe*), I did some characters for that one. Some projects are more difficult than others, but the work is always fun. You sometimes have to do a lot of research. Study anatomy for example. Look at stuff from the inside out.





Have you been teaching?

Yes. I have been teaching some of the techniques used for makeup effects here in Iceland at Förlunarskólinn (The Makeup school), how to make fake pieces for faces and that kind of stuff. *How do you like teaching?*

I like it. It is fun to teach, though I wouldn't want to make it into a career. I prefer to work in the field.

Are you the only one in Iceland that has made this into a career?

I've met people who have talked about it, but insofar as I know I am the only one.

Would you consider taking an apprentice if the opportunity came up?

Sure if conditions were right I would be willing to teach someone the ropes. It would also benefit me to have some colleagues that I could call on for help when working on big projects. I've often felt that there is a lack of people in Iceland who know the craft.





We thank Stefán Jörgen for letting us visit him in his little workshop of horrors. It has been very interesting to say the least. Who knows, maybe he'll end up getting an apprentice out of this.