

run wrake



Famously inspired by Art of Noise’s Close to the Edit promo, Wrake has been consumed by animation linked to musical structures ever since. He has an explosive imagination and he has used this in a deliberate non-linear and anti-narrative way for years, preferring to produce his ideas as visual samples with cut and paste loops. His method of production has been very instinctual and freeform, challenging the need for conventional storytelling by replacing it with visual experimentation influenced by Dada and Pop Art. Despite this, Wrake’s distinctive style has been very much in demand – whether it is delivering visuals for landmark live concerts for U2, or commercial projects, or his long running relationship with Howie B, as only he could. When he finally came to making Rabbit, a more traditional story-driven short, he unleashed a masterful quirky award-winner that was a liberation, and which points to a whole new world of possibilities for his work.

01-19 Jukebox. 1994 short film. Employing a montage of Xeroxed images, paintings and found sound, Jukebox is a personal journey through fragmented experiences. The Meathead – ‘a metaphor for fear’ – makes his first appearance.

01-16 overleaf Rabbit. Short film. A selection of 1950s educational stickers, found in a provincial junkshop twenty years ago, provide the ingredients for this adult fairytale. When a boy and girl find an idol in the stomach of a rabbit, its magical abilities lead to riches, but for how long? An Animate! Scheme commission, BAFTA nominee, and multi-award winner.

How did you get started in moving image?
I started experimenting with animation while studying Graphic Design at Chelsea School of Art in the second half of the Eighties. Initially using a Super8 camera with macro lens and stop-frame ability, filming artwork created from printers off-cut pads and marker pens stuck aon the wall with Blu-Tack. This developed into painted and collaged artwork when I learnt about the tools of the trade at RCA.

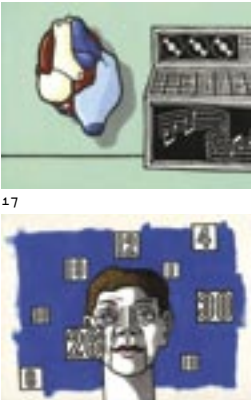
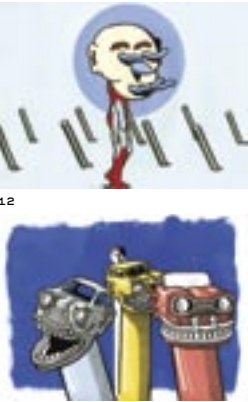
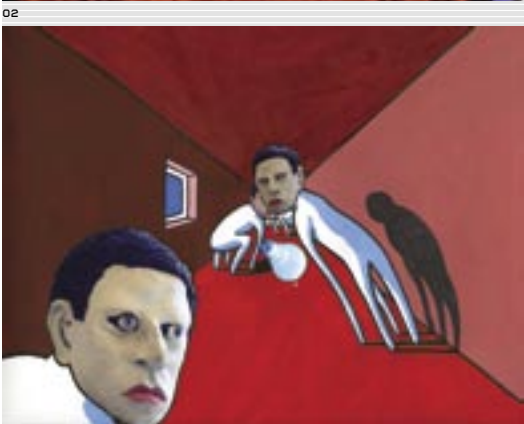
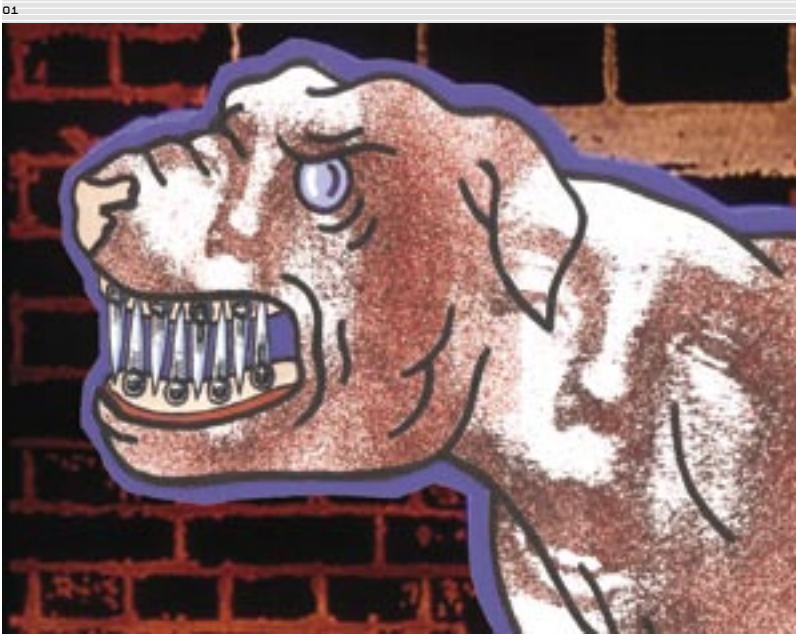
Where did your names Run and your production company Sclah originate?
The name Run is a nickname picked up whilst wicket-keeping very badly in a game of cricket whilst at primary school in Sussex, circa 1974. It was for the early years Runnee, which obviously had the requisite snigger factor. Sclah was a word that a bunch of friends and myself used to describe the feeling that followed a particularly extended night out. See also; Bleh, Fleh and various others that I can’t remember.

You produced many illustrations for NME over a long period, did you enjoy that time and how did it fit into the motion work?
The NME illustrations were great. The brief was to illustrate the artist in question, using the name of their album being reviewed as a theme. It started in

1988 and they were a regular monthly-ish commission until they stopped using illustrators in about 2000. I was already animating at this point and one of the best things about doing them was it was a chance to concentrate on one image rather than the piles required for animation, plus free records!

You have spent many years visualising music in your career – how important is music to you and your work?
It was the reason I started animating. I was making mixed media collages and listening to music endlessly. A visiting lecturer on my foundation course showed us the video for ‘Close to the Edit’ by Art of Noise, and the tightly synced juxtaposition of beats and cut and paste images set off a little explosion in my head.

Howie B’s Music with Babies prompted a long running creative relationship [he even did the sound on your latest film Rabbit]. Can you talk us through this?
I first worked with Howie’s music on a promotional film for the release of his album ‘Music For Babies’ in 1996. This came about after a copy of ‘Jukebox’ found its way to him through his brother in law. The process of making this, and its subsequent reception, was a real buzz and it lead to a string of promos and record sleeves, often one reflecting the other. These



were mostly for the tracks released from ‘Turn The Dark Off’, including the artwork for the album itself. There were also more experimental pieces for tracks from the LP ‘Snatch’, released through Howie’s own label, Pussyfoot Records and most recently the music on the soundtrack of ‘Rabbit’. We share a belief in the importance of creative freedom, and the love of a good loop.

Why is Howie so good for you to work with?
Most importantly, he would never try to influence what I wanted to do, and made sure that the record company did the same. For ‘Music for Babies’ for example, he presented me with a copy of the album and said that I could choose any track, or tracks, and cut them up and rearrange them if I felt that it would help the finished film, which was exceptional really. Bono once described him as “light bulb of a man”, and that positive energy was always there encouraging the work process.

Your work has a very distinctive aesthetic that is unmistakably yours – where does your influences and/or points of reference come from?
Pretty random really: early influences were the Dada movement, particularly the collages of Kurt Schwitters and John Heartfield, Graphics and packaging from the 1930s, rare record labels, Rodchenko, American pop art, early animation by the Fleischer brothers, works by Len Lye, Oscar Fischinger, Python animations by Terry Gilliam... I collect ephemera, old magazines, books, records, and often use elements from these either directly or as reference points in creating work.

A lot of your work has it’s own non-linear and visual looping narrative structures – can you explain a bit about your ideas on storytelling?
A piece of instrumental music has a narrative that is not a story, but keeps us listening in a similar way that characters and plot do in a feature. Most of my work has a musical soundtrack and I tried to create the animation with a similar flowing and evolving rhythm. The discipline that a story requires was what always put me off the more traditional story based films, I preferred the freedom to go visually, anywhere, at any stage of the production, and the musical approach allowed this.
More recently, namely with ‘Rabbit’, I have used a more traditional approach, a process that I found very satisfying, and really enjoyed the challenge of telling a story, from writing and storyboarding through to working with a sound designer and musician, adding audio to the completed animation. This opens up the possibilities for longer films, which is where I want to go next, adding dialogue into the mix.

Can you outline your method of creating the animation you produce?
Depends on the project really, but generally first base is writing in the sketchbook, preferably after a few days to mull over ideas. This tends to result in pages of scrawled words liberally sprinkled with question marks and crossings out, which will then develop into very rough sketches. Usually at this stage I’ll root through archive of ephemera, books and photos selecting anything that may feel relevant, get scanning and start to build from there on the Mac, making visuals, creating drawn black and white artwork if necessary, and starting to put the whole thing together.

01-03
Music For Babies. Howie B music video. A seminal work with long-term musical collaborator and Glaswegian ambient producer, Howie B.

04-05
Butt Meat. Howie B music video and another appearance for Meathead.

06-07
Take Your Partner By The Hand. Howie B music video.

08-15
Album review illustrations for NME.

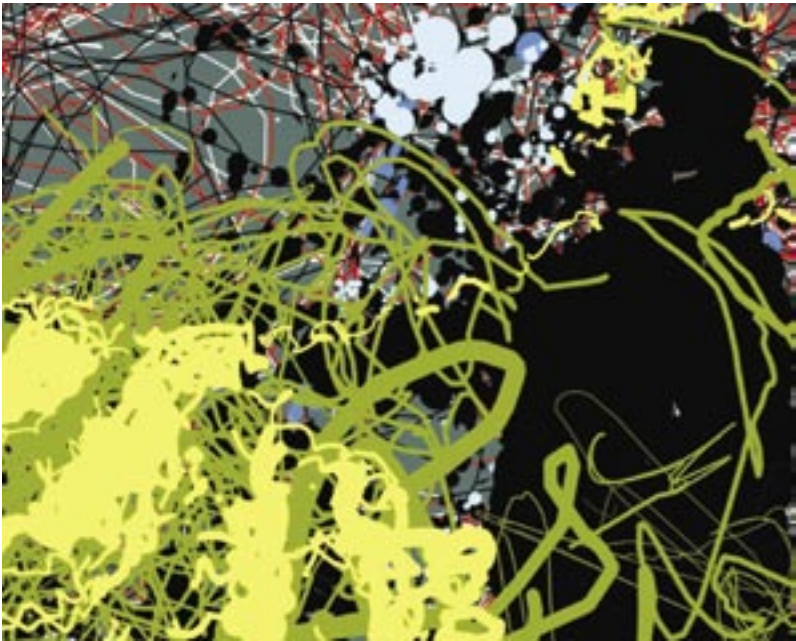
You have worked across titles, live visuals, music promos, to your own shorts. Is the approach to all these forms similar?
What determines the enjoyment of a project for me is the freedom I have in creating the work, and to some extent the time that I have to do it. Though a deadline, whilst sometimes seeming a burden, is essential. Most jobs begin the same, as pitches and you can be as loose as you want. The differences tend to happen once a pitch is won, and various people start to manipulate your ideas, and the process becomes more of a chore as the decision making is taken out of your hands. As a result, for me it is the personal projects that are most enjoyable, and as a result, are the most interesting pieces of work I think. There are exceptions to this of course, as the projects with Howie B prove, but generally “Too many cooks spoil the broth” applies.

You have gone through the transitions of graphic designer to animator and then traditional animation to computer animation – how has this affected your work?
I don’t see myself as going through this progression. I still produce Illustration, Graphics alongside animation, and still utilise old school techniques alongside more recent technological developments.
I don’t want to pigeon-hole myself as an animator, working in such and such a style. I enjoy making pictures, sometimes moving, sometimes not, sometimes with words, sometimes not. These different styles of work feed off each other in random ways, so there is not really a process involved, except that to be

open to having no process, and being open to going off on tangents. It’s like the difference between using Google and a pile of books. Google will give you pages of images of exactly what you ask for. While looking for those images in a book, you will stumble across seemingly unrelated images that can often feed into the idea, or even change its direction. Give me the books every time.

You have worked in hand drawn, painting onto film, using scalpels cutting and pasting – getting your hands dirty – how different for you is it now in today’s after effects driven world of motion?
After Effects is such a perfect medium for me, as it allows for the slightly rough round the edges look that I favour, with all the benefits of desktop animation. I still create the drawn animation in my work in the traditional way, using punched paper and a peg-bar, though this now scanned and coloured digitally. This process of working with PhotoShop and After Effects allows the digital creation of animation retaining the personality of traditional techniques. Having said that, I often miss the absence of complete physical artwork, and only time will tell how reliant computers are at storing media, but overall the lack of spray mount in my lungs, and the ability to make a film without need to hire rostrum cameras and edit suites far outweigh the absence of stacks of punched paper and cell.





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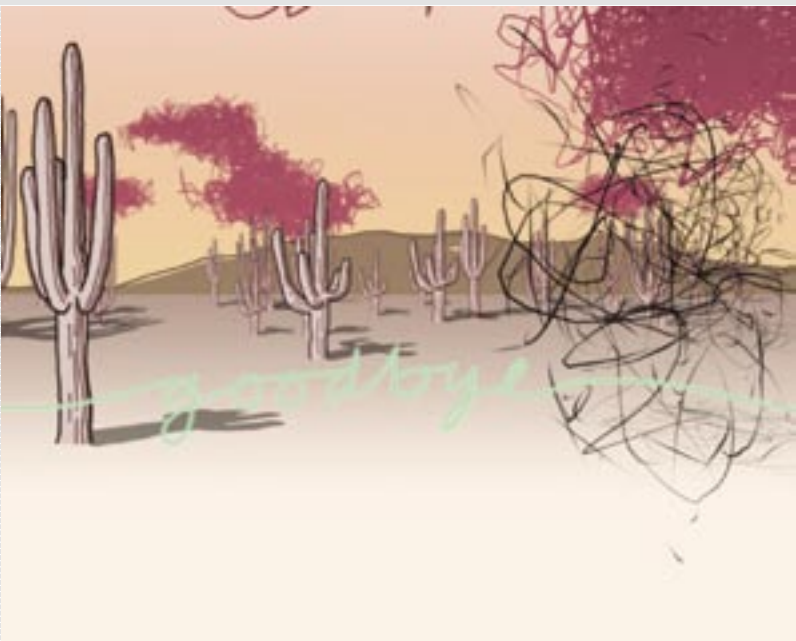
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01-06
Try Again Today. The Charlatans music video. When given a week to pitch the idea, Wrake filled pages of scribbles and submitted those as the basis for a treatment. The song is called Try Again... and a scribble is kind of trying again.'

How do you handle the ups and downs as an artist and commercial director for hire?

It's a funny thing, but often when things are going 'badly' on the commercial front, it provides the time to concentrate on personal projects. This was the case with probably the two most pivotal films I have made, 'Jukebox' and 'Rabbit', which both came about after a period of unemployment. Without question, I enjoy working on these personal projects more than the often 'design-by-committee' nature of most current commercial jobs.

Where did the idea for Rabbit come from?

The idea for Rabbit came from the 1950s educational stickers bought from a junk shop in 1983. Whilst moving studios a couple of years ago, I rediscovered them at the bottom of a drawer, and using the downtime I found myself starting to plot the film. To start with all I knew was that I wanted to create the entire film using the images on the stickers, some drawn morphs and live action skies. The story emerged from the images themselves, most notably the 'idol' sticker, which struck me as odd choice to illustrate the letter I. His ability to transform objects fitted well with the selection of seemingly unrelated images, and a desire to make a film addressing the rampant greed and exploitation of fragile resources that defines our age manifested itself with the insects into jewels theme. The rest of the story unraveled from there.

Rabbit is comparatively more traditional form of narrative was this challenging or liberating experience for you?

It was a conscious decision to attempt a more traditional narrative as the music based films/promos that I am perhaps best known for really only work for 5-6 minutes at the most. I am becoming increasingly interested in making longer format films. As it turned out, I really enjoyed the relatively disciplined approach that I had previously thought a hindrance, knowing what each shot needed to achieve in the process of telling the story, somehow made it easier to concentrate on their aesthetics. Next stop, adding dialogue.

On Rabbit you worked with someone else's illustrations – was this strange for you or give you a form of discipline?

I have always used found material, both 2D and film, and mixed it up with hand drawn animation. What was exceptional was the diversity of images in a cohesive style that the stickers provided. This allowed for the dominant elements in each scene to be someone else's illustration and time lapsed skies, with the drawn animated morphs featuring only now and again, whereas usually it would be the other way around.

You have had work funded with the UK's Animate Scheme in 1994 with Jukebox and recently in 2006 with Rabbit – how important to you are these two works?

For me, the two most important pieces. 'Music for Babies' should be in there too, but as this came about as direct result of Howie B seeing Jukebox it is still these two really. Jukebox was a two year slog, and a real learning curve, but achieved what I had intended at the outset, and it lead to so much. So far, the reception that Rabbit has received has been amazing, and has opened up possibilities for what follows that is very exciting.

With the digital realm's emphasis on the new where does your work fit into this with your references to past times?

As someone in the Dada movement once said, "To acknowledge the past is the best way of meeting the future, which is theirs". I don't think anything is ever really totally new, it's all linked in the unfolding of history. The images in Rabbit have associations of innocence, as the past always does when the future is uncertain, but the time they come from was hardly innocent, 10 years after the Second World War. There is a lot to be said for an emphasis away from the shiny and new, and encouraging recycling.

07-13
We Have Explosive + Papua New Guinea. Future Sound Of London music videos. Pop Art looping mayhem to mystic Indian references in two promos separated by five years.

01-07
Flyover. Asian Dub Foundation music video. The band wanted to move away from the standard performance promos they had been doing. Wrake delivered a live-action/animation combination that morphed the band members into cars speeding around London, intercut with a huge 3D rendering of the city.

08-14
The Beamer. Spacer music video. Wrake's unique collage style is let loose on Pussyfoot Records' act, Spacer. Working with an open brief, he created a looped-up world where Magritte meets Escher by way of MTV.

15-20
What Is That? Short film. Made during the snatches of time between jobs, with his own music as the starting point to a surreal universe, Wrake's trademark Meathead character enters a multi-layered Dadaist universe.



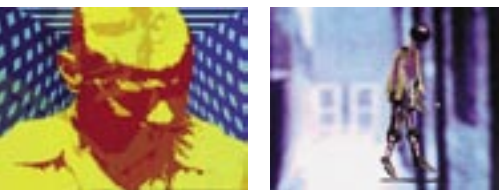
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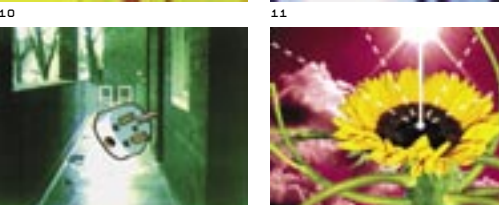
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