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Into the Mircoworld Uses New Technique

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Birmingham's Second Home Productions has developed an innovative new animation technique for its latest animated sequence "Into The Microworld."

The film brings together the digital domain of computer generated images, stop-motion animation and technology developed for producing engineering prototypes, moving Second Home to the forefront of new animation production.

The two-minute sequence was produced as part of preparatory work for a forthcoming film by BAFTA-winning director Michael Baig-Clifford on the life and work of Wolverhampton-born artist Willard Wigan -- the world's first "micro-sculptor."

Second Home's co-founder and director of the sequence, Chris Randall, said, "This particular project involves the use of replacement puppets for each frame of action -- a variant of stop-motion animation. By combining technology normally used in engineering with traditional model-making techniques, we've brought together old and new to create a new animation style and workflow."

The process of producing the animation answered a specific creative brief and continues the company's commitment to produce interesting and beautiful work.

First, a CGI animation was produced featuring a walking and breathing cycle of an animated character -- one of the young Willard's sculptures that magically comes to life in the script. From that CGI sequence, individual frames were exported and printed in 3-dimensions using a Z Corporation ZPrinter. The printer, normally used to produce 3-dimensional prototypes for the engineering industry, prints in layers using an inert starch-based material as the principal component.

Once printed, the 18 models and their 35 removable heads were worked into by hand by Second Home's team of model-makers. This resulted in each model having a unique hand-finished quality, emulating Wigan's unique craft. Second Home then built a large-scale set of floorboards, a metal ruler, dressmaking pin and countersunk screw -- all approximately 40 times actual size to give a sense of relative scale.

The sequence was shot and post-produced in Second Home's studio in central Birmingham over a period of six weeks. It is now available to view on the company's website and YouTube channel.

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