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directors watch

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BY BARRY WALSH

> Life as an in-demand animation/live-action director and stop-motion right-hand man for Michel Gondry isn't all glitz, glamour and a place in the front of the line at the craft services truck. Just ask Peter Sluszka, who, in the course of his directing and animating career, has had to work with some unsavory characters – not the talent necessarily, but the ones he's had to fashion out of, on the odd occasion, meat, yarn and curdling milk.

"There was one job where we had to have real milk on set and that was pretty disgusting," says the 35-year-old New York native, repped worldwide by Hornet since late 2004. "I had to put my hands in the milk to create every frame and so once I got home I just threw out everything I'd been wearing. It'd been soaked with rotting milk."

Still, getting one's hands dirty in the line of work is an occupational hazard in the stop-motion realm, especially if one aims to become an expert. And while Sluszka didn't pursue animation or filmmaking full-time in school (he received his BA in English with

MILK, MICHEL & MONKEYS

STOP-MOTION STAR PETER SLUSZKA COVERS ALL THE BASES

Left: Peter Sluszka at work; Right: A magical cut-out world for Regina Spektor's "Samson".

a minor in visual arts from Columbia), a fascination with the works of the legendary Ray Harryhausen and Russian animation pioneer Ladislav Starevich, as well as recent stars like the Aardman crew, led him to take the odd continuing-education course at New York's School of Visual Arts. Making a few connections, he was able to land a fabrication and rigging gig for a Sci-Fi Channel spot, and the chain of events that led him to stints with Curious Pictures and Brooklyn-based Dancing Diablo was set in motion. In his days at Dancing Diablo, Sluszka began his Gondry affiliation with the wild and wooly "Walkie Talkie Man" promo for Steriogram, featuring a rampaging yarn monster.

Of his working relationship with Gondry (they've since teamed up on spots for EDF and videos for Kanye West and Devendra



Banhart), Sluszka offers, "Maybe it's [our] different temperaments that helps. But I think it's a mutual respect for animation and the idea that you really can experiment and try out new things."

Since coming to Hornet, Sluszka's work has run the gamut from dazzling displays of pop-up cut-outs for Regina Spektor's "Samson" video to the gross-out humor of G4's Midnight Spank broadcast package, featuring a couple of stop-motion monkeys in a variety of crass yet comical situations, shot entirely in-camera.

"The inner eight-year-old did get to come out," he laughs. "And it's rare when you get to push it that far." ●

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