A Maximalist Fairy Tale

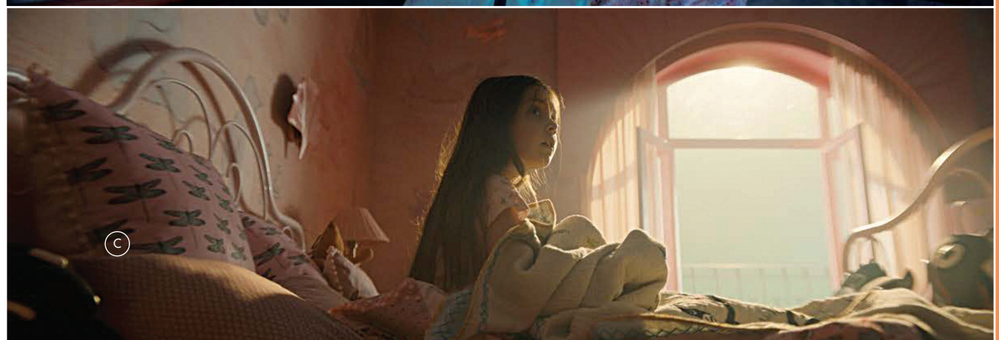
DUST BUNNY

BY JEREMY REED, PRODUCTION DESIGNER

If there is a message of any kind with this movie, it is listen to and believe in children. Children often have their beliefs or perceptions of what is happening dismissed because they are just a child. There is something about a child's point of view that can teach us so much about our adult perspectives.

A. AURORA'S BEDROOM. ILLUSTRATION BY GERGELY FODOR. BUILT AT ASTRA STAGES.





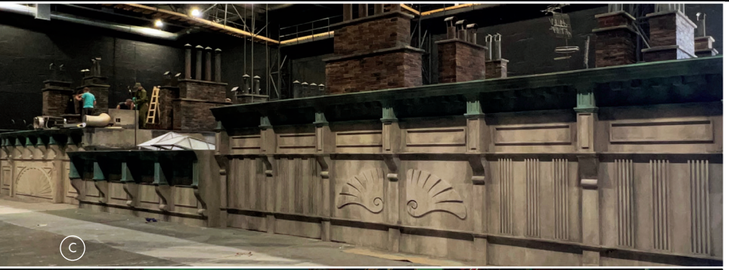
B. & C. AURORA'S BEDROOM. BUILT ON STAGE AT ASTRA STUDIOS FILM STILLS.



A



B



C



D

The script for *Dust Bunny*, written by Bryan Fuller, turns his anarchic sense of humor into a bedtime story aimed at younger audiences with often dangerous characters that challenge even adult viewers. The Production Design needed to go into some delightfully dark places, and *Dust Bunny* needed to have twists to spare. The design needed to make sense in a child's dreamlike way. It needed to explore some unexpectedly dark places, involving trauma, parenthood and loneliness. A lot of *Dust Bunny* is told in metaphor, which can make it a little elusive in its delivery.

The premise of *Dust Bunny* is simple yet fantastical: Aurora has a monster living under her bed—a malevolent, gargantuan dust bunny lives beneath the floorboards, eats her parents and threatens to come for her next. Desperate, Aurora asks her intriguing neighbor, a hitman for hire, to kill it for her. To say more would be a disservice to a touching, mysterious and bonkers script.



E



F

The production built nearly all of the interior sets on three soundstages outside Budapest and also built at three amazing locations which we were able to enhance dramatically, in order to propel our narrative and meet our budgetary constraints. Budapest's Tropicarium shark tank enabled us to build a dim sum restaurant directly onto the windows of the aquarium. This meant that the director, Bryan, was able to reveal the story's intriguing neighbor, who is a highly trained assassin, as the predator that he is. As he sits in the booth of the restaurant, and the shark circles behind him on the other side of the glass, the similarities between both species become abundantly clear. We built our tearoom set directly under the beautiful ceiling of the Kalenföld Power Station, a leftover reminder of the Cold War. Chinatown was built onto an existing art community's labyrinthian maze of structures, a very useful foundation to build upon.

The production scouted rooftops in Budapest for the scene where Aurora tracks her intriguing neighbor from high above at the beginning of *Dust Bunny*. The prevailing danger of shooting with a crew and a young actor, along with the intensive labor and time needed, made it an obstacle to build and modify a set so many floors up from the ground. We finally simplified our approach and built the rooftop safely on one of our stages.

Cinematography and visual effects played a huge part and were instrumental in breathing life into both the Chinatown exterior and rooftop. The fifth floor of Aurora's apartment building, where most the action in the film occurs, was built on stage. This allowed us to cheat the entrance into Aurora's building's ground floor and then take an elaborately ornate elevator to the fifth floor. The design of the vestibule, along with the staircase and elevator, were inspired by the incredible design of Hungarian architect Odon Lechner's Hungarian Government Treasury. The immensely

A. CHINATOWN STREET FILM STILL.

B. CHINATOWN ROOFTOPS. BUILT ON STAGE AT ASTRA FILM STILL.

C. CHINATOWN ROOFTOPS. SET PHOTO.

D. CHINATOWN DRAGON PARADE. ILLUSTRATION.BY SAMUEL MICHLAP.

E. DIM SUM RESTAURANT. BUILT ON LOCATION, RIGHT NEXT TO THE BUDAPEST AQUARIUM'S VIEWING WINDOW FOR THE SHARK TANK. FILM STILL.

F. TEAROOM. BUILT INTO AN EXISTING LOCATION. FILM STILL.

A. AURORA'S APARTMENT AND HALLWAY. STAGE PLAN.

B. AURORA'S APARTMENT SET EXTERIOR. ILLUSTRATION BY ZOLTÁN VIRÁNYI-FONTAN.

C. AURORA'S BUILDING EXTERIOR.ILLUSTRATION BY JONATHAN MCGONNELL.

D. AURORA'S BEDROOM WALLPAPER. COLOR ELEVATION CREATED BY ZOLTÁN RÉCZEY AND THEIR TEAM.

E. AURORA'S KITCHEN. IKSEL WALLPAPER PATTERN FOUND IN PARIS.

F. APARTMENT HALLWAY WALLPAPER.

G. AURORA'S LIVING ROOM. IKSEL WALLPAPER PATTERN.

H. AURORA'S APARTMENT HALLWAY. ILLUSTRATION. BY GERGELY FODOR. TRACERY SCREENS INISPIRED BY STRAWBERRY HILL HOUSE.

I. AURORA'S KITCHEN. ILLUSTRATION. BY GERGELY FODOR.

J. AURORA'S LIVING ROOM. ILLUSTRATION. BY GERGELY FODOR.

K. AURORA'S BATHROOM. ILLUSTRATION.BY GERGELY FODOR.

talented local artists and artisans in Budapest are completely responsible and must be congratulated on bringing the vision of the director and all the department heads to fruition. All the department heads should be congratulated on helping to breathe life into the *Dust Bunny* sets.

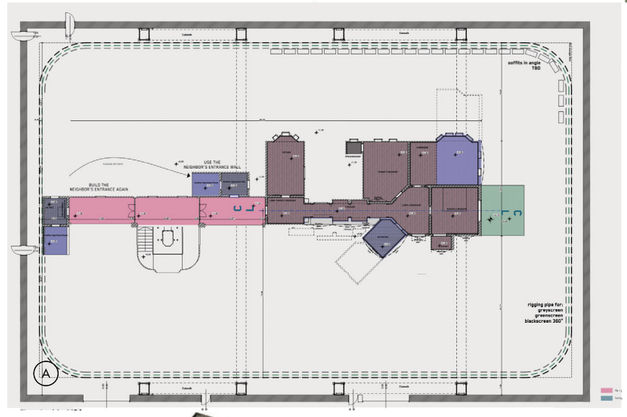
I realized very quickly that I was collaborating with a director who had an imagination that was never going to be contained by boundaries, and that Bryan was obsessed with film history. A slightly different point of view from mine for setting the scene, but a different point of view can help change your world for the best. *Dust Bunny*'s most whimsical of worlds are revealed to be contrasting, Aurora's sweet against the sour of the hitman. Even so, the world created is a maximalist endeavor and contains many architectural references that I have been dying to get into a film. The Art Nouveau of Victor Horta's Hotel Tassel in Brussels, the Gothic Revival of Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill house in Twickenham, London, and last, but not least, The Dakota Building on New York's Upper West Side. Films by Peter Greenaway, Terry Gilliam and John Boorman from the 1980s, and the French maximalism of Jeunet and Caro in the 1990s, very much helped inform my choices.

The world of the film is timeless, so we were able to be anachronistic in our choices of design and architecture. But all the periods revealed are based in reality and therefore could exist together. The final words uttered by Oscar Wilde on his deathbed were that he felt he was in a duel to the death with the wallpaper in his Parisian hotel room, and one or the other had to go. We took advantage of incredible wallpaper from various destinations in Europe, including Iksel in Paris. I took a most enjoyable trip to the City of Light to do the research. I can honestly remark that no wallpaper was harmed in the making of this film.

Dust Bunny very much resides on the eye level of Aurora, so the Production Design has a psychological approach to creating the world, and in this case, a fairy tale world. This is helpful in the storyline because we wanted the audience to never be completely sure if they should trust Aurora's point of view of what is happening, whether she is a reliable narrator in that regard. Or should they believe the intriguing neighbor and his perception of events. If there is a message of any kind with this movie, it is listen to and believe in children. Children often have their beliefs or perceptions of what is happening dismissed, because they are just a child. There is something about a child's point of view that can teach us so much about our adult perspectives. We need to embrace that leap of faith and fancy found in children when critical thinking is low and absorption of all material is high. That is why fairy tales are wonderful ways to tell a story, and adults experiencing the movie are going to be reminded of a freedom of thought and belief that they need to reconnect with.

The film was shot in a 3:1 aspect ratio, and I have heard it is the widest since Abel Gance's *Napoleon*, made in 1927. (Of course, I am happy to be corrected.) All I could think of was *Lawrence of Arabia*. The wide aspect ratio was employed to increase Aurora's isolation and anxiety. It is also similar to being a living triptych, and the camera never seems to stop moving. It is like you made a flip-book out of three horizontal domino-sized Post-it notepads. The wide frame acts like a mural, often isolating the characters within the expansive, detailed environments.

Supervising Art Director Ador Portik headed up the wonderful Art Department assembled













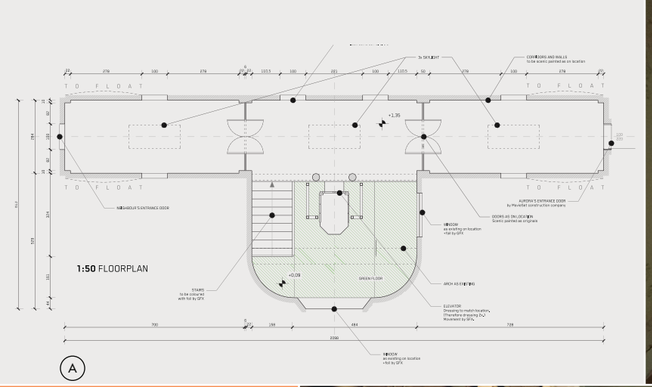






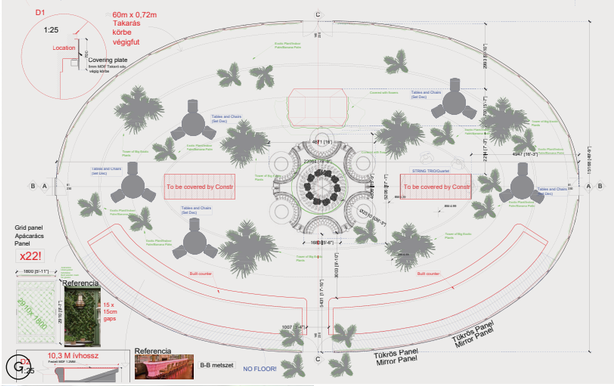












A. AURORA'S VESTIBULE. PLAN.

B. FIFTH FLOOR HALLWAY OF AURORA'S BUILDING. BUILT ON STAGE AT ASTRA. SET PHOTO.

C. AURORA'S HALLWAY. FILM STILL.







D. DIM SUM RESTAURANT. ILLUSTRATION BY JONATHAN MCGONNELL.

E. DIM SUM RESTAURANT. FIOM STILL.

F. KALENFÖLD POWER STATION. LOCATION PHOTO

G. DIM SUM RESTAURANT. PLAN.

H. DIM SUM RESTAURANT. SET PHOTO.

I. INTRIGUING NEIGHBOR'S APARTMENT. ILLUSTRATION BY GERGELY FODOR.

in Budapest. His contribution to all the Art Department achieved was absolutely priceless. The set dec team was led by sisters Dorka and Kata Kiss. Both the prep time and shoot had been truncated from the original schedule in order to bring down costs for the studio. Nothing new, and familiar news to everyone these days, but nonetheless, still a large obstacle that needed to be overcome. Our first set to be shot was Chinatown and the set dec team created countless graphics from scratch to fill up the location and form what was a totally believable environment. VFX enhanced this environment immeasurably, to transport the set piece beyond the realms of expectation. VFX also enhanced the nearby set, where the intriguing neighbor reveals his excellent martial arts skills, taking down a dragon, piloted by would-be assassins. The set built for the fight was decorated with murals by King Freak, a talented Hungarian artist.

The dim sum restaurant's interior, located in Chinatown in the story, was built onto one the viewing windows of the largest aquarium in Budapest. The tank was home to a couple of sharks, which as predators of the deep, helped to propel the narrative of the film. *Dust Bunny* is not only about a monster living under the floorboards, but human monsters also, namely the cold-blooded assassins who viewers meet later in the story. The amazing food seen in this scene was designed by world-renowned food stylist, Janice Poon.

The tearoom scene was shot in another location, which was a reminder from the rigors of the Cold War, the Kelenföld Power Station. This has been the largest electrical generation plant in the world since 1912. We went there primarily for the glass ceiling, with the intention of building our own set over the existing power station's industrial walls, and underneath the











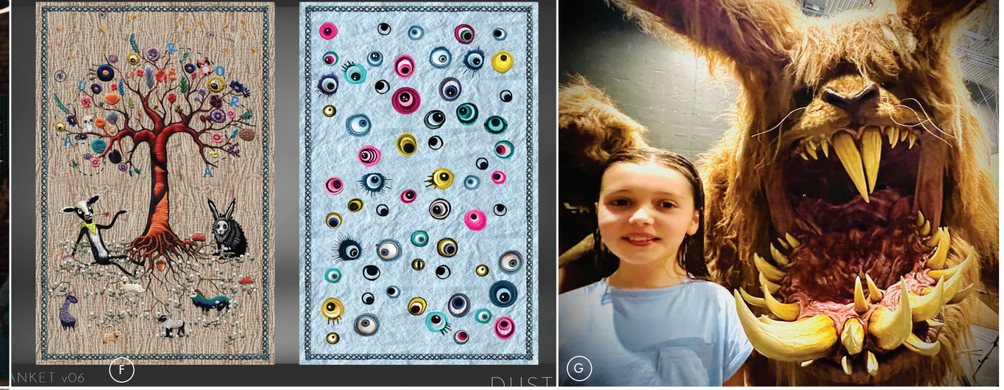
A. SANDWICH BAR. BUILT ON LOCATION. FILM STILL.

B. PUPPET TOYS MADE BY ZOLTAN LENKER.

C. HIPPO ROLLING OTTOMAN. DIGITAL MODEL VIEWS.

D. HIPPO ROLLING OTTOMAN IN PROCESS.

E. AURORA'S HALLWAY. FILM STILL.



F. AURORA'S BLANKET. COSTUME DESIGNER OLIVIER BERIOT WORKED WITH PROPERTY MASTER GABOR KOVAKS.

G. AURORA (SOPHIE SLOAN) WITH DUST BUNNY CREATURE DESIGNED BY JON WAYSHAK.

H. INTRIGUING NEIGHBOR'S APARTMENT. FILM STILL.

I. CHICKEN LIGHT.BUILT BY PROPS WITH A TAXADERMY CHICKEN AND LIGHT BULB.

tremendous glass ceiling. The Crystal Palace, built in Victorian London, but which was sadly destroyed by fire, was a big inspiration, and so were the greenhouses from Victorian England. Kew Gardens, which with all its plants, would have been a perfect place for this scene to play out. Set walls were built to hide all the industrial walls, and the crew built a pink counter to hide the huge, arced control console that was impossible to budge. There was something very *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* about the finished room and its expressionistic visual style. Incredible flowers and plants were arranged on view around the set pieces, all resting on a hand-painted pink and blue tartan floor. Marci from locations kept up the great work and found a wonderful location with groin vault arched ceilings. This became a sandwich bar. Only in Budapest!

The greatest find by locations was the Hungarian Government Treasury, designed by the great Hungarian architect, Odon Lechner. We shot one of the floors for a couple of days, and I can honestly say that no film had the pleasure of shooting there before. We were able to shoot on one of the floors and use its elevator. The details evident in this beautiful building really inspired the visual appearance for the lobby of Aurora's building entrance, and also the floor outside both her apartment and the neighbor's apartment.

Aurora's apartment is the sweet to the sour of the neighbor's apartment, and it is a mixture of Art Deco, Art Nouveau and Gothic Revival. These timeless details really helped create the whimsical world.

The most talked about and cherished items from the film would seem to be the taxidermy chicken light, with a light bulb growing from it posterior, and the leather hippopotamus Aurora rides around the apartment, so her feet will not touch the floorboards, both courtesy of property master Gabor Kovacs and his props team.

Dust Bunny is whimsical and tender, the film explores trauma and recovery through its beautifully realized images and characters, while delivering a surprisingly fun, dark urban fairy tale. **ADG**

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Zoltán Virányi-Fontan,
Miklos Selmeczy (Standby),
Art Directors
Anna Rózsa,
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Jonathan McGonnell,
Ricardo Contreras,
Concept Artists
Zoltán Réczey (Lead),
Lili Horvath, Lilla Molnár,
Laura Csóka,
Graphic Artists
Dorka Kiss, Kata Kiss,
Set Decorators







