

“FACE OFF”: Conor McCullagh Speaks! Part Two

Written by Sean Abley
Thursday, 02 June 2011 20:52



Continuing our chat with FACE OFF winner Conor McCullagh, begun [here](#) ...

FANGORIA: When you finished shooting the show what work did you go back to?

CONOR McCULLAGH: I immediately came back to Orlando where I had a class that was on hold. It was funny, because we were debating whether to line up another teacher to replace me while I was on the show, and the students didn't want it. The students wanted to wait until I came back. That was really flattering. So I came back and finished off the class, and stayed at the Joe Blasco Makeup Center. I was working there steadily right up until the end of February.

FANG: What's coming up next for you?



McCULLAGH: Right now I have a number of people expressing interest. I have not been offered anything solid at the moment. I'm not teaching any more. I'm not sitting around—I've talked to a few people, and I'm waiting to see which possible project happens. I hate to say it,

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but right now it's a little iffy. I'm not sure where I'm going next.

FANG: Did any of the judges express interest in working with you down the line?

McCULLAGH: Yes, actually, I spoke to Ve Neill recently, and she did express interest in working with me in the future, and I have every intention of following up on that, because I'd love to work with her. And I got to speak to Glenn Hetrick last night, and he said definitely get in touch, let's have lunch and come by the shop and so on. It's all pretty positive so far.

FANG: What did you think of the judging? When I spoke to Gage, he said at least in the first episodes, the judges were being really, really harsh.

McCULLAGH: I'm not saying he's wrong, but I thought that was their job—they did need to be harsh. There were occasionally comments I wasn't too thrilled about, but I want to know what they're thinking. And that was the thing—when you go through challenge after challenge, I was listening. I wanted to know exactly what it is I need to show them in the next challenge to show that I can do this, I can paint better, I can come up with something more imaginative, and so on. That was really the key to winning this—knowing exactly what they wanted to see from me next.

FANG: Maybe you can explain this to me and other people watching. In the last episode there was a lot made of imagination, or thinking outside of the box, that kind of the thing, and how they were pushing you to do that. But honestly, to a layman's eye, that just didn't make sense to me. I didn't understand how they could look at your work and say you didn't have creativity and imagination. Did you understand why they were giving you that criticism?

McCULLAGH: I do. I absolutely do. If you look at my body of work, there is certainly—and I suppose any artist who is constantly trying to improve will probably echo my sentiments on this—there's always room for improvement. And when I look at my own work, I've always felt like, well, it might be realistic, it might be camera ready. But is it crazy? Is it going to knock people's socks off? That's where Tate and I had so much contrast. He was always pushing the envelope on design and concept. Whereas I was always concentrating on the execution of the makeup more than anything else, and that's where my experience lies. Clean sculpture, good molds, good prosthetic pieces, clean glue-downs, seamless edges—that's always been my

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focus. I should say, that's *often* been my focus.

FANG: If you had your druthers, what would you be doing most of as far as FX are concerned?



McCULLAGH: If I had my way, I'd be doing a lot more creature feature type work. Too often in my business, so much of the work out there for effects artists is gore and slasher films and that kind of stuff. That's where I've made a lot of my money—I've made a lot of money slashing people's throats and making dead bodies, which is fine. But I really miss doing just creature suits and creature puppets, and I really don't feel like I get to do enough of that stuff.

FANG: I talked to Sam Cobb today, and Jo seems to feel the same way about this subject, they seem to feel like there's a place for CG and practical FX together. Do you have any interest in the CG world?

McCULLAGH: I would have to say personally I don't actually ever see myself becoming a CGI animator. I did look into it for a time. And when I started reading the credits on these big CGI-based films, the animated features and so on, and seeing how many people and how many different departments are involved in creating a character in CGI, I kind of lost interest because I don't want to be a texture guy, or the hair movement guy, or the wire-frame guy. I really like to be an integral part of the entire process, and I don't think that's possible doing computer animation.

FANG: I was really struck by SURVIVAL OF THE DEAD where most of the zombie hits were CGI. Do you feel that CGI will push out practical FX? That it will be a fight to keep the practical side of things viable? Or do you feel that practical FX will always have a place in film?

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McCULLAGH: That has been the question we've all been asking ourselves for about 20 years now. There's no question that there are things that are being done more and more often with CGI that are replacing what used to be makeup. I had to go through a lot of it myself on *VAMPIRE DIARIES* when the production found it actually cheaper in the end to do their vamping CGI rather than as a physical makeup just because it was only a few seconds on film. It was less time wasted by doing that in postproduction than doing it on the set. So CGI is definitely a force to be reckoned with. But having said that I do believe there will always be a need for prosthetics people. It just doesn't always make sense to do something CGI when someone is cut up or you've got a zombie makeup, or just a character makeup. When it's more than just a morph shot, it ends up being more practical making it a physical prosthetic makeup.

FANG: When I talked with the other contestants, many of them said their takeaway from the show was what they learned, and most of them credited you specifically with teaching them new stuff. Besides the \$100,000, what's your takeaway from *FACE OFF*?

McCULLAGH: Once again, I learned, just out of sheer necessity, I learned that there's some things I actually can do faster than I once thought just by altering a few methods and so on. But moreover, one thing I really learned was to push my limits as far as creativity. I knew, after the seventh episode, that if I was going to win this, I had to come up with something crazy. I had to come up with something where the judges were going to say, "Wow, he really is"—again, not to overuse the quote—"he is thinking out of the box. Finally."