



Forget the Film, Watch the Titles: **Kyle Cooper**

from the catalogue of the *Future Film Festival 2006*

In all probability, there is no movie theatre on Earth that has never shown one of his films, and no moviegoer that does not remember at least a dozen of them. He is unanimously considered the best in his field. He has gathered nominations and awards, and a book has been written about him. But although his works are unmistakable and constantly projected on the screens, his name is not immediately recognized by the public at large. It does not really matter: the art of Kyle Cooper, well known to film enthusiasts and to all professionals as the creator of the best main title sequences of the last two decades, is sophisticated and elusive, and it strikes with more force as it comes unexpectedly. Live-action director, graphic designer, animator, Kyle



employs any technique, any material – for *Dawn of the Dead* he even used actual blood – to attain his goal: to capture the attention of the audience, take it hostage and manipulate its emotions and expectations in order to plunge it in the mood of the motion picture that is going to be shown on the screen.

Kyle attained worldwide recognition in 1995 with the main title sequence for *Se7en*: a small, self-contained movie on its own that opened a door into the mind of a serial killer, and set the tone for the whole feature.

But he has contributed to over 100 films, and has worked with the likes of Martin Scorsese, John Frankenheimer, John Hughes, Barry Levinson, Gregory Hoblitt, Emil Andolino, Robert Redford, Oliver Stone, Brian De Palma, Mike Newell, Barry Sonnenfeld, and Sam Raimi, on motion pictures as different as *Arlington Road*, *Donnie Brasco*, *Flubber*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Identity*, *Sphere*, *True Lies*, *The Horse Whisperer*, *The Mask of Zorro*, *Spawn* and *Braveheart*. Quite often his contribution has been the most memorable moment of the movie.



Kyle follows on the road laid out in the Fifties by such artists as Saul Bass and Maurice Binder, probably the most famous creators of main title sequences in the history of cinema. But he transcends and blends the sophisticated graphic abstractions of Bass and the colourful creativity of Binder's silhouettes in a synthesis of text,

objects, solids and lights: and combines it with a very personal and often disquieting personal vein. From his experience with the great Paul Rand he also gets a sensitivity to graphic design that allows him to bend to his will even type itself, like the etchings of *Se7en*, the sophisticated hieroglyphics of *The Mummy* or the letters imprisoned in the webs of the first Spider-Man. This is his true talent: to be in the service of the film, adapting to it and anticipating its tone, and yet at all times to create individual works that a perceptive mind will recognize as creations of the same artist.



In 1966, Kyle was one of the founders of *Imaginary Forces*, the most celebrated graphic design firm in Hollywood: but his artist's instincts could not easily be constricted in a managerial role, and in 2003 he started a new company, *Prologue Films*, where – together with a small group of collaborators – he works on a few selected projects at the time, concentrating on what he likes best: creating.

It is said that sometimes directors of lesser talent prefer not to hire him, afraid that their own movie will not live up to the expectations built up by his credits; but the best ones search him out and are quite willing to measure themselves against his art. They know that Kyle will imbue himself with the essence of their work, filter and distill it in a handful of seconds, discreet but inexorable, and that after mesmerizing the audience, he will return it to them, ready like a bull waiting for the *muleta* of the *matador*; while Kyle, the clever *picador*, will already be searching for another arena, another bullfight, another movie.

- *Cesare Cioni*
uxbridge@spamcop.net