

The Influence of German Expressionism: Tim Burton

Tim Burton is the visionary director of Beetlejuice, Edward Scissorhands, Ed Wood, Sleepy Hollow and the first two Batman movies. Burton began his film career as an animator for Disney Studios where he made the animated short film, Vincent in 1982. The horror characters and taste for the macabre that are the hallmark of Burton's later feature films were already present in his early animated short films, Vincent and Frankenweenie (1985).

Clips mentioned in this section are not available to view on the website but are readily available to buy or rent from the usual outlets

As a Hollywood director, Burton is a flamboyant visual stylist who creates fantasy landscapes and characters from a wealth of artistic styles and influences, including German Expressionism. Drawing on a wide range of references spanning decades of the history of film and architecture, Tim Burton operates at the forefront of contemporary culture.

Beetlejuice (1988) The world of spirits: (00:32:06 to 00:32:52)

This room within the world of spirits features the distorted perspectives of Expressionism, with bizarre painted backdrops clearly reminiscent of *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*.

Batman Returns (1992) Gotham City: (00:06:50 to 00:07:50)

The wintry mise-en-scene in *Batman Returns* is like the inside of a giant snowstorm, a fairytale landscape where it is snowing softly. The urban design of Gotham City closely resembles a dream (or nightmare) landscape. The cityscape of *Batman Returns* can be read as a reflection of the schizophrenia of the characters within it. Bo Welch, *Batman Returns*' production designer, was able to borrow from a great variety of architectural styles, from Expressionism and Cubism to Fascist Modernity. Fragments of these styles, reflecting in their variety the characters themselves, are to be encountered everywhere.

Batman Returns (1992) The Birth of Catwoman: (00:22:13 to 00:32:25)

While the rich and powerful like Max Shreck (Christopher Walken), are seen in impressive surroundings – monumental buildings with ornaments in front of them reminiscent of Nazi sculpture – the ordinary people, represented by Selina Kyle (Michelle Pfeiffer), live in an untidy environment, overloaded with scenery. The brilliantly realised barbie-like pop design of Selina's home reflects her dreams of fairytale romance. As she destroys her childhood innocence in a fit of hysteria and transforms herself into Catwoman, Tim Burton once again brings the colourful and the gothic into dramatic confrontation – as in *Edward Scissorhands*.

Batman Returns (1992) In the Penguin's lair: (00:16:47 to 00:17:50)

The Penguin and his carnival of grotesques have stepped straight from the Cabinet of Doctor Caligari. The Penguin's home in a cathedral-like cave under a deserted park called Arctic World, is furnished with elegantly curved Gothic arches and dark vaults. There is a touch of Art Deco in Max Shreck's head office and some hi-tech design in Selina Kyle's pink room.

The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993) Opening Montage Sequence: (00:01:00 to 00:02:40)

The entire design of this animated film is in keeping with Burton's predilection for the distorted perspectives of Expressionist silent films, as indispensable in this instance as the stylistic recourse to the Universal horror films of the 30s and 40s. Almost all the inhabitants of Halloween Town are derived from Burton's singular cabinet of curiosities, from his unmistakable iconography, which is added to and raided again in his later work.

The special edition DVD of the film contains a feature on the conceptual art, storyboards and character designs which demonstrate the strong influence of German Expressionism.