

ARTINFO

Michel Gondry

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Director Michel Gondry on the set of "Be Kind Rewind," which hits theaters February 22

NEW YORK—Pioneering director **Michel Gondry** made his name with quirky, lower-budget films that find fans both in and out of the art house. Now, with his latest film about to hit theaters, he's bringing his off-the-wall sensibility to the art gallery again.

This weekend **Deitch Projects**, which bills itself as "active in exploring the new convergence of art, fashion, music, and performance," opens its second collaboration with Gondry. In 2006, the SoHo gallery hosted "*The Science of Sleep: An Exhibition of Sculpture and Creepy Pathological Little Gifts*," a popular exhibition that included eccentric trinkets Gondry had made for his exes and an interactive work with a piano that played video clips of a person hitting the same notes visitors pressed. Next up, from February 16 through March 22, is "*Be Kind Rewind*," an exhibition inspired by Gondry's latest film (in theaters February 22), in which two video-store clerks, played by **Jack Black** and **Mos Def**, re-create

mistakenly erased stock in hilarious home movies.

Starting with his first feature film, 2001's *Human Nature*, Gondry, now 44, has attracted attention for his unorthodox narrative techniques and low-budget special effects. His innovative camera techniques, such as "bullet time"—in which a camera moving at a normal speed slows normally imperceptibly quick events (like moving bullets) to a viewable pace—have become industry standards. He has also won renown for his writing, winning a Best Original Screenplay Oscar in 2005 for *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, co-written with **Charlie Kauffman**.

Gondry began his career as a teen in Versailles, France, creating music videos for his band, **Oui Oui**. His use of stop-motion animation attracted **Björk**, which led to [collaborations with her](#) and other top performers. He also dabbled in advertising, creating one of the most celebrated commercials ever, a 1994 [ad for Levi's](#) that manages to portray wit, heart, and dark comedy in less than two minutes. But advertising didn't hold Gondry's attention for long: As he told the *New York Times* in 2006, the field is "dangerous for a director: The point of view in a commercial has to be expressed in 20 seconds, which is too simplistic for any other form. And the money is too good in commercials—you are always in luxury. I always knew that it wouldn't be wise to get used to those conditions."

ARTINFO talked to Gondry about bringing his particular vision to Deitch.

How did you transition from film to the art world?

I've been tempted by the art world for years, but I didn't know how to approach it. I had some ideas and some concepts and some friends working in art, but my time was more consumed with making movies. Jeffrey Deitch was the first person to approach me with the idea to connect my work in film with a gallery, so we worked with that on *Science of Sleep* and now we continue with *Be Kind Rewind*. I'm not sure my work is really pure art—it would take me maybe years to become a proper professional artist—but there is some element of art in my project that can very much work in the gallery.

How involved were you with the installations at Deitch?

I'm very involved in that I'm the architect, but I have some people building stuff, painting, and making all sorts of decisions as well.

Both the *Science of Sleep* and *Be Kind Rewind* exhibitions involve audience participation. Why is that?

Since I was a kid I've always liked how science museums have very artistic setups but encourage you to participate and learn something. I always

dreamed to create a museum with this element of participation, and in the *Be Kind Rewind* exhibition I've created a mini-set where people can tell their stories and a workshop that helps people write down the stories they want to tell. Then there's the video store, like it is in the movie, for people to store their creations. Within two hours, you come with a group of five to 15 people, make a film, and leave with it sitting in the store for others to watch. You have to schedule the session: You can come as a visitor and have a look around and put your name on a list, or you can reserve a time through the Internet.

What will you do with the videos when the exhibit closes?

They're just going to be part of the exhibition. There will be more and more videos in the video store and visitors can take them off the shelves and watch them in the gallery. Participators will give their addresses and we will send them DVDs with their films when the exhibit closes.

Are you worried the videos won't be as good as Jack Black and Mos Def's?

Well, I'm worried because there is not a set of rules, a minimum of protocol and organization. I've been working for years on the principle, before I did *Be Kind Rewind*, that there should be some rules; for instance, one person shouldn't talk all the time. I have a lot of little rules like that because there will always be some people who are more charismatic than others and I don't want them to take all the power. But, even though people's videos are going to be full of mistakes and maybe not resemble anything, I'm pretty sure it's going to be a fun time for people to make them.

Have you ever thought about creating an exhibit that is independent from a film?

Yeah, I had some ideas but so far Deitch has pushed me to be connected to films. Still, some pieces, like the piano in the *Science of Sleep* exhibition, which was the show's most popular piece, had hardly anything to do with the movie.

Do you consider your movies more visual than narrative?

People tend to believe that of me, but I think all my videos have narrative. You always have to tell a story, even if the story is abstract. I can never extract one image from a video; you need to see it in context.

You went to art school. Did you want to be an artist growing up?

Yeah, sure. I was pretty good at drawing and I wasn't very good at academics

so it was the only way for me to go. I had the choice of majoring in tapestry, ceramics, or advertising. Tapestry seemed the most artistic one. It's like you create a sort of painting with yarn.

Do you consider yourself an artist now?

I think so. But it's not for me to say. It's like, do you consider yourself a poet? It's something very flattering for people to say to you, but if you say it yourself then it sounds very pretentious and it sounds like you're missing the point.

Your son, Paul, who's 16, is an artist. How do you encourage his art?

Well, he gets a lot of reward and satisfaction and I show my appreciation. I pushed him to paint, and he has his paintings all over the apartment. We're going to make a movie together so he has a lot of stimulation. The movie [*Master of Space and Time*] is an animation; Daniel Clowes is writing, and I'm directing with my son.

You always incorporate technology into your films.

My spirit, my work, is very influenced by science in that I get a lot of inspiration by reading stuff about space, the birth of the universe, all the discoveries, the black hole. It's just so counterintuitive and magical at the same time—it's a concentration of ideas for stories.

You got your start in video with stop-motion animation. What's the advantage of creating video effects by hand rather than computers?

I think there is a sense of reward that you can share on the spot with the rest of the crew. There's a sort of democracy because you don't have to have access to great technology to do it. And I think of how many times people have told me that they got inspired to do film and animation when they saw my work, and that's very nice to hear. That's really what I want to do in life, to get people to believe they are more creative than they are.

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