[Note: This, an older entry of my blog, Terrifyingly Gnarly, was posted a good while ago on the previous Fango site. From time to time, I'm going to re-up some of my favorite pieces along with the new ones. Hope you enjoy this revisiting this enhanced version (more videos and pictures) of my interview with Ace Norton.]

“Give me a bucket of blood and a camera and I’m good to go!”

Who is Ace Norton? Someone who truly fits the description of Terrifyingly Gnarly, that’s who.

An interesting and immensely talented music video and commercial director, his work warrants you seeing it, urgently. Norton is currently one of the only people joining the ranks of legends who have pushed the medium of music video to the potential it could be used for. A bit of his résumé includes: two videos for Bloc Party, one featuring a bizarre plot to run the world by a large horse-headed creature (“Mercury”), the other, a classic man-in-suit Monster fight (“Flux”); a beautiful lensed video for Simian Mobile Disco ("Hustler") featuring incredibly hot girls transforming into monsters and vomiting; and the happily macabre “Why Do You Let Me Stay Here,” for Zooey Deschanel’s band She & Him.

Ace and I are also in agreement on the intense level of malevolent and malignant forces inside certain lawn ornaments. “Gnomes are evil dude. They gave me nightmares as a kid,” he says when asked about the sinister hold such a plastic little person has over the proceedings in the video for “Dawn of the Dead,” by Does It Offend You, Yeah. (I can’t help but concur as my lawn gnome phobia wasn’t helped by my mom purchasing mini-ones and hiding them in my bed. True story.)

The last straw, as in “Holy shit, I need to find out who this guy is,” came this past year when I became increasingly obsessed with the video he shot for Aesop Rock’s song, “Coffee.” Already a fan of Aesop, I was excited to see the video perfectly compliments its tone. Hard to describe

without the use of hyperbole, “Coffee” is an insane mix of horrific influences crafting the out of control haunted house movie I’ve been dying to see since I was 10. The best part is, when watching it, you realize he knows his stuff. If you haven’t seen it, do so here and now:

{youtube}KvAJ_s_C1Mw{/youtube}

Thankfully, Ace is as nice as he is rad, and kindly spoke to me about his work and influences. “My grandfather showed me RE-ANIMATOR when I was 10,” he says. “I had nightmares for weeks but for some reason I kept watching them. I think it made me largely desensitized to gore so the more blood there was, the harder I laughed.” Seeming to be a connoisseur of not only terror, Norton adds, “On sick days my parents would rent me GODZILLA and Kurosawa films. I’m half Japanese, so I think it was their way of having me get in touch with my culture.”

Norton helps bring his knowledge and love of the bloody into his videos with a no holds barred attitude, echoing a time when certain music clip directors were praised for their creativity and innovation. That’s no coincidence seeing as how he was in his prime impressionable years watching such classics. “I grew up on MTV and always looked up to the directors who pioneered the genre—Gondry, Romanek, Glazer, Jonze, Fincher, Cunningham, etc. In my mind, they were these renegade rock gods making the most visually interesting and innovative stuff. I liked the way they approached the entire process and I guess I wanted to be regarded in the same way.”

Two visual stamps of Norton’s that just might push him to recognizable status are his extremely lush use of beautiful slow-mo coupled with visceral, often unsettling images. That… and he also likes rubber masks and has a way of making them kind of creepy (Check out the video for “Evil Son” by the Willowz). “Shoot anything in slow motion and it will make your image more poignant,” he notes. “I think I wanted to make these unsettling horrific images seem poetic.” In relation to the appearances of store bought Halloween visages, apparently it’s mainly a budgetary alternative to practical FX. “Ha! If the budgets I work with could only afford prosthetics. Halloween has always been my favorite holiday though, so it's my way of playing dress up.”

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