

## Charlex Nabs Best Of Show At Siggraph

By Carolyn Giardina

NEW YORK --- *One Rat Short*—an animated short written and directed by Alex Weil, executive creative director at New York-based Charlex, which produced the work—will receive the Best of Show Award for the ACM Siggraph Computer Animation Festival at Siggraph 2006, the 33rd International Conference and Exhibition on Computer Graphics and Interactive Techniques, which is scheduled to take place July 30-Aug. 3 in Boston.

This prestigious honor was selected by the Computer Animation Festival jury from 726 entries for exemplary use of CG imagery and animation, and compelling storytelling. With this recognition, *One Rat Short* also becomes an automatic qualifier for Academy Award consideration in next year's best animated short category. Historically, these Siggraph shorts have performed well; last year's Best of Show selection 9 received an Oscar nomination. And in '04, Electronic Theater honoree Ryan went on to win the category.

With this announcement, Siggraph also released its complete list of selections for its annual Computer Animation Festival, which include the choices for its prestigious Electronic Theater presentation that this year embraces an unusually high number of commercials.

Recognized spot work includes visual effects from: London and New York-based Framestore-CFC; Sydney and Venice, Calif.-based Animal Logic; Method Studios in Santa Monica; and Passion Pictures in London. The Electronic Theater also features the Best Of Show honoree and a second recognition, Special Jury Honors, which this year salutes 458nm from Jan Bitzer, Ilija Brunck, and Tom Weber of Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg in Germany.

### ONE RAT SHORT

*One Rat Short* follows a New York City rat from his gritty world to the interior of a futuristic laboratory. Along this journey the main character discovers love, danger, and his fate.

"We decided it would take place in two worlds: One so gritty, grimy and dark that the viewer needs to peer into the screen in order to make out the images; the other a sterile, white world so brightly lit that you feel the need to turn your head away from the screen," Weil explained. "It was also important to me to keep the film looking as real as possible. One of the techniques we used was to give a lot of the camera work a hand-held feel and to keep it a little behind the action so that the scenes didn't seem staged. Lastly and most importantly, I kept the story simple and tried to give it heart. One of my favorite short films, which I saw as a child, was *The Red Balloon*. I think the melancholic and innocent spirit of that film inhabits *One Rat Short*."

Weil also created this inventive short with characters that do not act like people, and without dialogue. Instead, the story is told through action, music, sound design, cinematography and lighting. "That was very challenging," Weil related. "I didn't want dialogue ... Once we got the gritty look, the idea of them talking seemed absurd."

Another storytelling challenge, he explained, was "to mix a feeling of repulsion with the feeling of romantic love ... the rat is the ultimate anti-hero. He is so down and out and dirty, but you can still identify with him. He is still the protagonist."

"This piece immediately stood out to the Jury," said Terrence Masson, Siggraph '06 Computer Animation Festival chair. "The film's emotional tone, cinematography, and technical realization all melded wonderfully into a simple yet touching short film."

Weil related that the team was humbled, proud, and jubilant when it received the news. He said, "We would have felt good even if we just did a film that we loved, and it's extra when other people feel the same way." Interestingly, the film began as an exercise to help grow Charlex's CG department. Originally titled Labratz, the short became a multi-year, on-and-off project during which the CG team moved into new space, added equipment and expanded from 8 to 35 people. During this time, the team broke ground in the commercial space with such work as the lauded M&M's "Color My World" for BBDO New York. Charlex remains committed to the commercial business; it employs 110 and inhabits four floors in its Midtown Manhattan building.

"Charlex is better for having done the film," said Charlex president Chris Byrnes, who served as executive producer, with Bryan Godwin producing. "We have more talent and a better process and we invested in technology to make the job more doable... This sharpened our creative skills in many ways; it brought ideas to life in a different way..."