

curious pictures

72andSunny Teams with Curious Pictures' Rohitash Rao for an Out of This World Journey with Zune-Arts.net

"Laika" explores the secret adventures of the first dog in space

New York, NY – January 22, 2008 – Curious Pictures director Rohitash Rao has directed a short film for the new slate of web-based films created by ad agency 72andSunny for Microsoft and its Zune media player. Rao's "Laika" can be seen on a special web site developed by the agency, www.Zune-Arts.net, where artists collaborate on short film and music projects sponsored by Microsoft.

Letting friends share and discover new things is at the heart of each of the films at Zune-Arts.net, and this is expressed to its fullest in the sweet outer-space tale of "Laika." It tells the story of the first dog in space, sent up in a rocket launched by the former Soviet Union on November 3, 1957.

The film begins with archival footage of scrappy young Laika, integrated with Rao's signature graphic style into what appears to be a Russian newspaper. "We liked the idea of using the real story of Laika as a springboard," says 72andSunny writer Charlie Stephenson, "as well as starting at the last documented second of Laika's life—the moment her rocket disappeared into the ether."

Once Laika gets into outer space, however, the imagery shifts from the real to the fantastic. "Getting a photo-realistic version of a dog to convey emotion isn't easy," says 72andSunny designer Katie O'Shea. "But Ro did a beautiful job of establishing both the joy of discovery and sense of loneliness that was crucial to this story."

"We wanted to take the realistic story from the first ten seconds and go into a land of pure fantasy—the idea of the ultimate dog planet," says Rao. Laika lands on a brilliantly colored world filled with everything a dog could want—trees made of meat covered in Spanish moss-like bacon, a river of peanut butter, ferns that toss Frisbees and hands that grow out of the ground at the right angle for easy belly rub action. However, as much fun as Laika has on this ultimate dog planet, she misses home, so she fills her spaceship with treats and heads back.

On the way, however, her mission is thwarted, and Laika makes the selfless decision to make sure her friends back on Earth can share the experience she had in space, and she drops her treats to her friends below.

The short was created with a combination of stop-motion and After Effects work. "We spent a day shooting stills of tons of dogs—every pooch you see in the piece

was shot just for this short. We covered them in various poses, doing a wide range of doggie activities—walking, jumping, running, romping and sitting,” says Rao. “We also used stop motion for the dog biscuit rings around the planet by attaching a dog bone to a drill bit, then shooting it in stop motion to create an organic look.”

The film is set against a rock and roll soundtrack by the band The Aliens. “It’s perfect,” says Rao. “Not only is the track we used melodic and evocative of the mood of the film, the album it’s from is called ‘Astronomy for Dogs.’”

“Ro did a great job of turning a melancholy topic into an inspiring story about sharing and friendship,” says Stephenson. “Plus he’s the first Zune Arts artist to create a tree made entirely out of meat.”

“Laika” Credits:

Client: Microsoft Zune

Agency: 72andSunny (Los Angeles)

Creative Directors: Glen Cole, Bryan Rowles

Executive Producer: Sam Baerwald

Producer: Elisa Orsburn

Designer: Katie O’Shea

Writer: Charlie Stephenson

Production Company: Curious Pictures (New York)

Director: Rohitash Rao

Executive Producer: Mary Knox

Head of Production: Becky Friedman

Producer: Sara Nahas

Editor: Sam Goetz

Animators: Taylor Jordan, Deirdre Merrigan, Helene Park, Luis Aguirre, Yi-Ju Chen, Jess Mireau, Mike Milovsky

Music Artist: The Aliens

Album: Astronomy for Dogs/Astralwerks Records

Track: “I Am the Unknown”

Sound Design: Fred Symansky, Fluid (New York)

Mix: Mark Meyuhus, Lime Studios (Santa Monica, CA)

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About Curious Pictures

Curious Pictures (www.curiouspictures.com) is the largest animation studio in New York and home to award-winning creators of animated TV series, commercials, casual games and celebrated characters in picture books. Curious currently produces the top-rated pre-school series *Little Einsteins* for Playhouse Disney, and has produced such hit shows as *Codename: Kids Next Door* and *Sheep in the Big City* for Cartoon Network, *A Little Curious* for HBO and *Avenue Amy* for Oxygen TV. Most recently, the studio launched its first game, *Out of Your Mind*, produced in collaboration with Gamelab. It also produced thirty minutes of innovative motion-capture animation for the documentary *Chicago 10*, which opened the 2007 Sundance Film Festival and will be distributed in 2008 by Roadside Attractions. The work of Curious Pictures’ directors has been recognized by numerous competitions and festivals, including the Emmy Awards, the Webby Awards, The One Show Interactive awards, the Cannes Lions Festival, the AICP Show and the Caldecott Honors (presented to top illustrators of children’s books), as well as the International Animated Film Festival in France, the Ottawa International Animation Festival in Canada and the Cartoons on the Bay Festival in Italy. Leveraging its multiple strengths in animation, design, production and brand strategy, Curious has created successful branded entertainment for Mattel and AOL, as well as commercials for hundreds of global marketers. Founded in 1993, it is managed by partners Susan Holden, Steve Oakes, Richard Winkler and Jonathan Paley.