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BEHIND THE SMILE:

MAKING THE MONSTER IN 'SMILE 2'

SPOILER ALERT SPOILER ALERT SPOILER ALERT SPOILER ALERT SPOILER ALERT

MUSIC

SHOWER CURTAIN TAKES THE CHERRY

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



COURTESY NICOLE MILLER

Victoria Winter of New York indie-rock four-piece Shower Curtain got a new perspective from Cherry Glazerr.

Victoria Winter: One of my most memorable concerts was when I was 16 and saw Cherry Glazerr. I was on my summer break from my high school in Curitiba, Brazil and I was visiting my sister Samira in L.A., and taking a photography course. She told me about this all-ages festival that was going on called Penniback Fest.

After seeing a couple of sets, I stumbled upon the Cherry Glazerr set on the stage

downstairs. The room was absolutely packed, and filled with energy. A mosh pit started and I was seeing these kids going into the pit, and wondered how it would feel to go in. Well, I tested it and it felt awesome, my first-ever mosh pit. I was in shock, it wasn't as painful as it looked from the outside.

I think that night was also memorable because I hadn't really seen a frontwoman like Clem [Clementine Creevy] before. At 16, I had hardly gone to concerts and when I did, they were not like rock concerts in the U.S. They were in very shitty venues in Brazil and there were no other

teens my age around, so it was so beautiful to see the community of young kids active in the L.A. scene.

Later that night, I met my now friends Siena and Miranda, who are still my friends to this day. Meeting other cool 16-year-olds who at the time had their own band really changed my perspective. I truly feel like I went back home to Brazil, I started feeling more autonomy regarding my self-expression and what I could allow myself to make and be interested in.

Shower Curtain's album *Words from a Wishing Well* and single "You're Like Me" are out now. 

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LA WEEKLY

PRODUCTION AND DESIGN
LAURA E. WHITE FOR STREET MEDIA



SATIRE HITS THE CANVAS: WARD SUTTON'S 'STAN KELLY' DOESN'T KNOW HOW FUNNY HE REALLY IS

BY DARRICK RAINEY

Amid one of the most divisive and chaotic election years in recent history, Ward Sutton brings his diamond-edged satire — often targeting conservative and right-wing politics — to the Subliminal Projects Gallery, in Los Angeles. The four-artist exhibition, *American Punchline*, running through November 9, features Sutton under his nom de cartoon, “Stan Kelly,” alongside other contemporary artists — including Shepard Fairey, the gallery’s owner and creator of the Obama “Hope” poster — who use humor and unconventional styles to confront and critique America’s current political climate.

Sutton, a Minneapolis native now residing in Fort Collins, Colorado, is perhaps best known for his comic strip “Sutton Im-

pact,” which ran in the *Village Voice* from 1995 to 2007. In recent years he has continued to contribute sardonic broadsides to the *Voice*, as well as doing caustically funny illustrations for such publications as *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *Time*, and *The New Yorker*. He has also developed a divided online following for his alter ego, “Stan Kelly,” who appears in Sutton’s political parody cartoons for the *Onion*. (Some followers do not perceive Kelly’s views as satirical.) These comics present a caricature of a misguided, bombastic, ultraconservative cartoonist whose takes are intentionally absurd, and yet — amid the swamp gas of QAnon and X conspiracy posts — often eerily familiar.

Sutton’s comic-strip illustration style consists of a clean and precise ink line in

highly detailed panels filled with quirky characters and satirical in-jokes, reminiscent of vintage comics, but with his own personal approach. If you haven’t seen Sutton’s work before, it might still feel familiar through his extensive body of print work, as well as animation projects for HBO, VH-1, and TV Land.

Debuting here as a fine artist, Sutton presents the “Stan Kelly” artworks as a MAGA conservative’s fever dream, each canvas depicting absurd and satirical visions from a right-wing perspective. Most pieces are accompanied by commentary from a small self-portrait of Kelly in the bottom-right corner, adding an extra layer of irony. One personal favorite, titled “America the Barbarian” and reminiscent of a vintage *Savage Sword of Conan* comic-book cover, depicts a burly Uncle Sam wielding giant axes labeled “Exceptionalism” and “Military Might” while confronting parodies of America’s virtues. Another

piece, which distinguishes itself from the satirical works, is an abstract take on Lady Liberty, showcasing Sutton’s intricate line work in black and white acrylic on canvas. It’s visually complex, witty, and stands out as a strong, surreal painting.

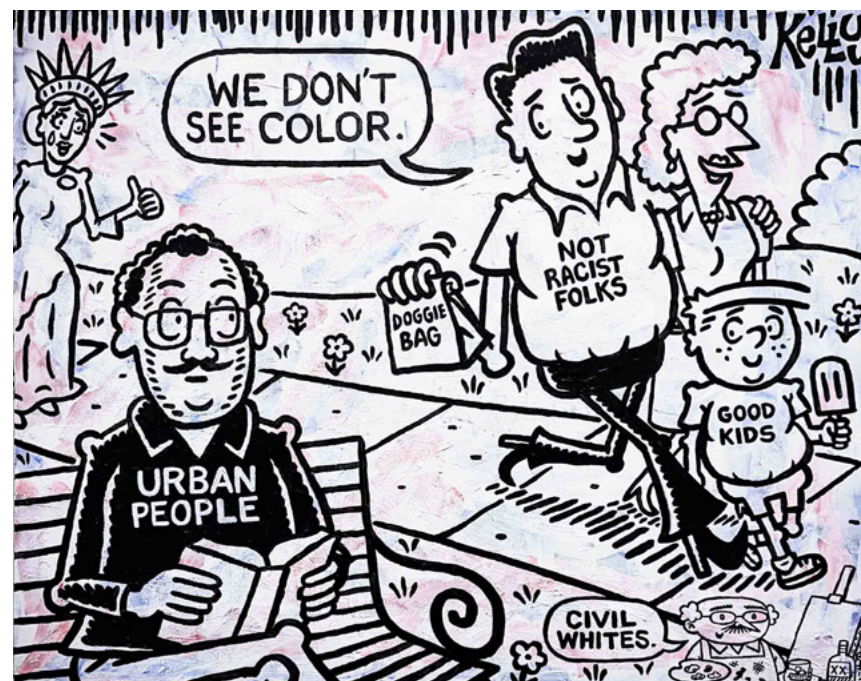
American Punchline, curated by Sara Lois Kaplan, marks a significant moment of reflection in American art and politics. With the unpredictable nature of the 2024 presidential election as a backdrop, the exhibition explores the well-trod line between satire and reality. Sutton’s contribution as his satirical alter ego provides a complex perspective — a balancing act between outrage and self-aware irony. Joining Sutton in the show are Fairey, guerrilla poster artist Robbie Conal, and Nadya Tolokonnikova, of Pussy Riot — figures renowned for turning activism into artistic expression. Sutton’s work fits seamlessly alongside these fellow artist-activists, each of whom brings a distinctive graphic approach to addressing the volatile climate of American politics.

Subliminal Projects Gallery, located on Sunset Boulevard in Echo Park, near Dodger Stadium, has long been a haven for marginalized artists and art that embraces confrontation. Founded by Fairey and skateboarder Blaize Blouin, it was established originally, in 1995, as a way to introduce skateboard culture and design to the art world, evolving into a vital platform for those who push the boundaries of mainstream art and activism. With *American Punchline*, the gallery continues its tradition of providing a space for artists to engage critically with pressing social issues, at the intersection of culture, politics, and creativity. [A]



Sutton’s visions of the Statue of Liberty capture the angst — and absurdity — of our times (installation view)

IMAGE COURTESY DARRICK RAINEY



“Civil Whites,” 2024, acrylic on canvas, 26x30

IMAGE COURTESY DARRICK RAINEY

WHAT'S POPPING UP

SusieCakes Gets Wicked And Barrilitos Is Back

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

The Coca-Cola Company has re-launched [Barrilitos](#), the historic Mexican soft drink brand that debuted in Monterrey, México, in 1938. A new addition to Coca-

Cola's imports portfolio, Barrilitos is introducing four flavors produced and imported from Mexico using cane sugar, available in two sizes: a 12oz glass bottle and a 1.5L PET multi-serve bottle. There's Mandarin (man-

darin), Manzana (apple), Piña (pineapple), and Ponche de Frutas (fruit punch), and all come in their original twist-top glass bottles.

Also new on the thirst-quenching market with a little more kick is [Lipton Hard Iced Tea](#) (5% ABV), which is now available in natural fruit flavors. It has a triple-filtered, premium malt base and real brewed Lipton tea. Five flavors include lemon, peach, strawberry, and citrus green tea and are available in 12-can variety packs and cans.

The Los Angeles Vintners Association will celebrate L.A. area-grown wine at [Angeleno Wine Company](#) on Friday, Nov. 15, from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. and will feature winemakers from 11 different wineries with unlimited tastings of more than 30 different types and styles of L.A. wine representing vineyards from Malibu, Bel-Air, Santa Clarita, Antelope Valley, San Bernardino and more. Tickets are \$65 per person, which includes unlimited tastings. Early Birds will receive a special

edition stemless "L.A. Vintners" branded wine glass. Must be 21 and up. Participants include Moraga Estates, NABU Wines, Warson, Byron Blatty Wines, Cavaletti Vineyards, and Friendly Noise. Get tickets on [Eventbrite](#).

To celebrate the highly anticipated Friday, Nov. 22 premiere of Wicked in theaters, SusieCakes is offering a magical pre or post-viewing experience with a limited-time offer. The [Wickedly Popular Cake](#) will also be available to order online or in-store at SusieCakes' 29 locations. The classic vanilla celebration cake has gotten a wicked makeover, featuring a green ombre design topped with playful pink swirls and white and silver sprinkles, finished with a green witch hat and pink witch wand. The Wickedly Popular Cupcake 4-Box includes two pink vanilla cupcakes and two rich green chocolate cupcakes, each topped with matching sanding sugar.

[Family Style Food Festival](#), the first-



SusieCakes Gets Wicke

COURTESY SUSIECAKES



COURTESY BARRILITOS

ever festival at the intersection of food and streetwear with a stellar lineup of the best chefs, restaurants and entertainment will arrive in Las Vegas for the first time at [ComplexCon](#) on Saturday, Nov. 16 and Sunday, Nov. 17. Participants include Lotus of Siam, One Piece Cafe, Milpa, Pink Box Doughnuts, Tiger Sugar, Naked City, Mama Nena's and Max's Chicken as well as out-of-state legends like Boiling Crab, African Chop House, Mr. Charlie's, Trill Burgers, Camel Coffee, Veggie Fam, Sorry Not Sorry Ice Cream, Brique, Irv's Burgers, Saint Honoré, Café Lola, Supino Pizzeria x Mom's Spaghetti, Big B's Texas BBQ and L.A.'s Howlin' Rays.

Food influencer and critic, [Keith Lee](#), will curate a special picks section of the festival, featuring some of his favorite Las Vegas eateries, including Frankensons Pizzeria, Bulldogis, and Lefty-J's Island Favorites.

On Sunday, Nov. 10, at [Spago Beverly Hills](#), Wolfgang Puck and Adam Perry Lang will team up for a one-day-only BBQ Brunch collaboration. Tickets are \$150 and include bottomless bubbles as well as honey Jidori chicken with Calabrian chili, colossal smoked beef short ribs, sweet and sticky pork ribs, buttermilk biscuits with black truffle honey, and house-cured smoked fish mousse with caviar. A portion of the event proceeds will support the Dream For Future Africa Foundation; tickets are available on [SEVENROOMS](#). 



Family Style Food Festival

COURTESY COMPLEXCON

ENTERTAINMENT

BEHIND THE SMILE: EFFECTS ARTIST ALEC GILLIS ON MAKING THE MONSTER IN 'SMILE 2'

BY KALYN CORRIGAN

Editor's note — this article contains spoilers for the new film *Smile 2*.

Toward the end of Parker Finn's *Smile 2*, the entity that's been taunting mega-famous pop star Skye Riley (Naomi Scott) finally reveals its true face. As she walks onstage for the very first concert of her brand new tour, her nervous eyes scan the room as sweaty hands raise a trembling microphone to shaky lips and the crowd screams with delight. The lights dim and the entity appears: another Skye Riley.

Staring back at her twin-self in horror, Skye stands frozen to the spot, paralyzed with fear as she watches her doppelganger being unzipped like a costume, while a monster frees itself from her flaccid skin. A massive entanglement of legs and arms, the creature stretching its way out from inside of Skye's double is wreathed in smiles, rows and rows of teeth piled on top of each other, rippling down into a Frankenstein-ed quadruped body. The monster snaps open her sutures and claws its way out of her midsection, an embryonic sac spilling fluid all over the stage. Bloody limbs stalk forward under the spotlight, rising and expanding until it towers over the singer like a beast turned inside out. The real Skye falls under the demon's thrall and her screams grow silent. Leaning down to meet her face, the grinning giant blocks out the world and claims its prey.

Internationally known for his timeless contributions to cinema, legendary special makeup and effects artist Alec Gillis knows a thing or two about crafting a wicked smile. The icon, who now runs his own Studio Gillis, and who is responsible for helping bring such toothy characters as Pennywise in Andy Muschietti's *It* and the Xenomorph in James Cameron's *Aliens* to the big screen, has some theories about why exactly a franchise built around an eerie grin seems to resonate so deeply with

audiences.

"I think what Parker Finn has landed on here, that is so brilliant, is he's tapped into the utter simplicity of a smile," Gillis tells me as we sit down to talk about his work on *Smile 2*. "He puts a twist on it and makes it an ominous and evil smile.

It's very involved in the lower face, but not involved in the eyes. Subconsciously, we register that as an insincere smile. It's not a warm, loving, emotional smile. It's an evil, wicked, plotting smile. It's a mask that's hiding something far more sinister. It's a movie that doesn't need to have a whole lot of trappings other than the emotion behind this, and I'm just extremely pleased with Parker, both as a writer and as the visual storyteller."

Originally hired by director Finn to create the monstrosity effects for the first film, a strong bond quickly developed between Gillis and the *Smile* franchise helmer. "I'm on Parker's second film now, but I just really enjoy supporting a director who has a specific vision and is very excited about it," says Gillis. "I think, a few more Parker Finn movies down the line, we're going to start seeing him as a style master in the way that David Fincher is,

or Wes Anderson or Tim Burton. I think we're going to see that in Parker as his vision coalesces. There will be an unmistakable visual thumbprint that's a Parker Finn movie, and I'm happy to be supporting that."

The sequel to the 2022 sleeper hit *Smile*, *Smile 2* follows the story of Skye Riley as



Above: Alice Rijn, monstrosity teeth painter; Charles Wills, monstrosity head and body painter
 Right: Finished Monstrosity puppet head

ALL IMAGES COURTESY STUDIO GILLIS



she re-enters the public eye after a year spent hiding out in rehab and recovering from the injuries she obtained in a horrific car accident. Covered in scars both literally and figuratively, Skye finds herself at the center of another tragedy when a late-night visit to a friend puts her in the position to witness his untimely death.

Now, with the start of her comeback tour looming just overhead like a storm on the horizon, her agent mother (played by Rosemarie DeWitt) penciling in appointments for every second of her life, and her newfound sobriety on the brink of collapse, Skye begins to suspect that there's something at work here that's far more sinister than stress from the pressures of fame. It's in the way she feels as though she's always being watched — the hallucinations that prove so palpable, they manifest with the ferocity of a drunken celebrity trashing a dressing room. It's the text messages she doesn't remember sending, the violence she can't seem to recall committing, the way everyone just won't stop smiling at her. Even the dead still smile at her.

After consulting with a previous victim named Morris (Peter Jacobson), Skye learns the truth about the dark entity that's been passed on to her through the curse of her friend's demise. With the clock counting down to the hour when Skye must perform in front of a packed auditorium, filled to the brim with thousands of her screaming fans, and even more devotees on her team behind the scenes dedicating years of their lives to the singer's success, her affliction only worsens. Skye needs to figure out how to rid herself of the treacherous spirit possessing her thoughts before it stretches its jaws wide and swallows her soul.

Bringing a Monster to Life

The "Smile Monster" was initially conceived by brilliant concept artist Vincent Proce for Finn's initial entry two years prior. As Gillis puts it, the creature designer is, "not well in the head," a description, he assures me, is meant to be taken as a compliment. "His work is excellent," Gillis happily reports, "So I didn't really feel the need, either on this film or on the first

film, to try to subvert any of the designs that he came up with, because they all lent themselves very well."

What he did do is collaborate with designer Proce and director Finn to up the ante on an already impressively daunting monster from the first movie, starting with taking their rendition of the beast and making it much, much bigger for the sequel. As Gillis explains, "Scale is a big part of it. It seemed big in the first film because they built miniature hallways for the 'Mother Monster' to run down, which was a performer in makeup. He's in half-scale or quarter-scale sets, but this one, in reality, did stand about seven feet tall, and about twelve feet long. The arms were each 6 feet long. So, the scale of it was really quite massive."

The brute grew to such a substantial size, in fact, that it became the largest creature Gillis has helped bring to life since building the Alien Queen for director Cameron's 1986 knockout sci-fi thriller. In a manner not far from how he and the rest of the team under Stan Winston animated their giant otherworldly empress back in

1985, so, too, did the Studio Gillis crew operate their monstrosity through a combination of puppetry, limbs coated in green cloth (to be digitally removed later), a head mechanism that moves independently of its body and a suit performer by the name of Trevor Newlin donning the mammoth-sized monster costume in all its bloody glory.

"It actually was a fairly simple head mechanism," recalls Gillis about the construction of their creature. "The head was able to move independently from the neck of the suit performer, and it would look up and look around, and scrunched down a little bit, because it closed its mouth. And then as it would come out, it could throw its head back and open up all these multiple mouths. There wasn't a lot of facial articulation, nor was there in the first film, because Parker wanted the frozen grimace, and he didn't want it to be knocked out of that zone by adding brow movement or eye blanks. It's just staring, like headlights, into your soul."

Studio Gillis built mechanical hands for the creature that were cable-operated through 3D-printed mechanisms.

When maneuvered in tandem with a creature actor wearing a suit, the visual appears to the human eye as one big, cohesive entity. "If you imagine a suit performer, and he's standing with his arms straight

out in front of him, and holding ski poles, and that's the elbow, where his fist is, is the elbow of the creature, and then the rest of it is the elbow to the hands," Gillis explains. "So, it was a very long, spindly, thin creature. You don't look at it and think there could be a person in it, because of how spindly it was."

The suit performer Newlin (who also made an appearance as a creature on another Gillis production earlier this year, *Alien: Romulus*) had his legs covered in green cloth because they exited the suit right about where the belly of the beast would be. Newlin's legs were later digitally removed by VFX supervisor Robert Bock, whose work is so seamless that the actor's legs completely disappear on screen, leaving the audience with only the image of a colossal monster standing tall over a tiny pop star.

"At the tail end of the monstrosity creature was the disguised doppelganger, which had opened up, and the creature had



Above: Sara Villarreal sizing up Monstrosity

Below/Right: Monstrosity Digital Sculptors: Hamid Shah, Charles Wills; Clay Sculptors: Michael Rotella, Nick Rinehard, Peter Murphy



come out of her, leaving her torso an empty shell with a frozen smile on her face,” lays out Gillis. “So, that flops over, hanging upside down, blood dripping out. We had a body double who was in Skye’s outfit from the hips down, and then she was clad in green from the waist up, and the top half of her was digitally removed. It looked like a broken in half Skye that could stagger around with this entity coming out of the belly of it.” A stickler for detail, director Parker conveyed to Gillis exactly how he envisioned the big reveal of the monster on stage at the end of the film. “Parker was very specific,” says Gillis. “He wanted to make sure that it looked like it was just an impossibly huge thing that had been crammed down inside her.”

To get to that point, Studio Gillis had to create a few replicas of Scott’s Skye, wearing both her exact facial expression and her costume. Those replicas were used, for instance, when the Skye doppelganger uses her hands to open up the scar stapled across her stomach, so that the monster trapped within her body may make its way out into the world.

“When she first pulls her stomach away, we had a whole fake body with a replica head of Naomi,” states Gillis, “And we had two different puppeteers, two different stand-ins, who were the hand doubles. They were coming in from off-screen and grabbing at the scar, the stomach board, and pulling it open. It was magnetized so that it would re-close up. As they pulled it open, blood started gushing, and then that’s when the hands shoot out — and those hands were creature gloves that were sized to Trevor Newlin. He could wear them so that you got the performance of the hands.”

Once the hands burst through, director Finn shoots the scene at a new angle, then cuts back to Skye and her demon double, before then cutting back to another angle with the monster’s giant arms, propelling themselves out and slamming on the floor. “Those were rod-operated arms that were the full length of the creature with mechanical hands,” the artist remembers. “Then, it was time to push the head through, and we had a birth sack over the creature. As the birth sack pulled back, it revealed the leering, bug-eyed face of the creature. Then, with clever cutting, the Skye torso [appears] upside down, flopping into the shot, with blood pouring. Basically, in between every cut is a different effects piece that built the scene.”

A non-traditional creature design, the entity shocks and surprises viewers in a way that they might not be able to articulate, but still find frightening. “The staring eyes, the multiple mouths and so on — it’s just so gleeful and wacked,” Gillis comments. “You tend to want to make things look real, that’s part of making things believable, the suspension of disbelief. We

like to give it textures that are realistic. This is a different rule here because it’s a subjective creature. It has to function on a psychological level, and be very disturbing and upsetting to look at. There’s an insanity to the design style. It’s super leery, it’s got tattered pieces of flesh hanging off of it. We smeared it with blood so that it would have a very disgusting and wet look to it, so it looks like it came from inside of someone, but it’s also its own anatomical and corporeal entity.”

From Concept to Creature

To take the two-dimensional demon in Proce’s notebooks and transfer it into a fully fleshed out three-dimensional character for the screen, Gillis put his faith in some of the very best artists currently working in the industry, including none other than esteemed sculptor Michael Rotella.

“My lead sculptor on this is Mike Rotella, and he’s awesome,” beams Gillis. “I’ve worked with him for fifteen years or so. He sculpted the head of the creature in the previous film, so I know that he’s familiar with the territory, and he also has a great kind of gleeful sensibility in how he approaches creatures. There’s a way to make these things so insane that they’re fun, and Mike Rotella has a great handle on that.”

To determine exactly how much clay Rotella and the rest of the crew would need to sculpt the creature’s head for the sequel, especially considering that the monstrosity would be larger in the second film and played by performer Newlin, Gillis saved time through the advancement of digital sculpting and 3D printing techniques.

“We did an initial digital head, but it was a very rough scale because we have to put a suit performer inside this creature,” Gillis clarifies. “You have to plot it out to arrive at [the correct] dimensions.” Newlin, who is about 6 foot 8 and 150 pounds, is so thin that Gillis’s team actually used him as their sculpting base. “The reason we did an initial digitally sculpted head was so that we could print it at various sizes to get a feel for how it would fit. Once we had determined that, we started packing our clay onto the body.” First, they built the armature to support all of the clay, and then they started packing the clay onto the body form. “That’s how we started shaping and owning the character,” Gillis discloses.

“Mike Rotella sculpted the head, and then we had Nick Rinehard also working with Mike on the body and the hands. So, we had some really talented sculptors banging away at that. I think the sculpture took about maybe four weeks. Then, from that, we moved into mold making, which is where we make our negative molds, mostly fiberglass and silicone. Out of those negatives, we cast our rubber, and we used foam latex for that, which is the tried-and-true material that’s the lightest weight and most supple and form-fitting. It’s been



Zac Teller (mechanical designer/back left), Tim Leach (puppeteer/front left), Sara Villarreal (artist/back center), Trevor Newlin (Monstrosity), John K. Miller (puppeteer/back right center)

around since *The Wizard of Oz*, so it’s a very reliable standard for us.”

The Psychology of Horror

Still haunted by the car crash that claimed her sanity and the life of her late boyfriend Paul Hudson (played Jack Nicholson’s son, Ray Nicholson), Skye sings about wanting “a new brain,” as her mind plays tricks on her long before the monster sets up shop inside her head. The memories of her misfortune trap her inside a never-ending loop of shame and self-sacrifice in the pursuit of superstardom. In the eyes of the troubled starlet, if she can just stop getting in her own way, then maybe she can finally make everyone around her proud, and maybe even find a way to defeat the demons plaguing her heart once and for all.

“I think Skye is self-loathing because of everything she’s done,” muses Gillis. “So when she sees herself, that’s the threat, that she is about to destroy herself. There’s some really heavy concepts going on in both of these films, and in the guise of a sick and twisted, insane roller coaster ride.” For Gillis, it makes perfect sense that when we finally see the monster, it is brought into our reality through the vessel of Skye’s mirror image. “Because it comes from her evil doppelganger, that is a projection of the entity that is tormenting her and using her sensitivity to her scar like a portal. It’s an insulting portal to open up because it’s a reminder of the crash where she lost her boyfriend that arguably, she had a hand in. She’s living with the shame that that scar represents, and that’s what this entity uses to introduce her final freak out and reveal its true self.” The artist happily welcomes various interpretations of the demon, but is quick to admit that for him, the creature never truly shows its real face. “They’re just designed to torment and make the person break. It feeds off of that.”

Adds Gillis, “You can look at the layers of this film and see what’s destroying her, and that could be the pressures of fame,

and the pressures of her talent, and her own mother. You could definitely make the argument that those are the things that are destroying her, and if not created this creature inside her, called it up. It’s a very literal and physical manifestation of that self-loathing and anxiety, stress-induced cortisol fueled — all that stuff. If you look at it in both films, both lead characters, Rose and Skye, are traumatized people, and it is the trauma that invites this. Both films would be fascinating even if there were no supernatural aspects. I think they are really well done character films. They remind me of older horror films from the 70s, but it’s a mix of that with contemporary modern visual delights in this franchise.”

An enthusiastic supporter as much as he is an eager collaborator, when the celebrated effects artist was asked whether or not he’d be game to team up with director Finn for another possible entry in the series, he replied, “Well, that would certainly put a smile on my face.” 

Monstrosity Effects
Created by Alec Gillis

Studio Gillis Inc. Credits:
Chris Baer
Keaton Blue
Brian Clawson
Tawnya Diaz
Michael Heintzelman
Matt Killen
Tim Leach
Jon K. Miller
Peter Murphy
David Penikas
Nick Reisinger
Alice Rijn
Nick Rinehard
Jennilyn Roomes
Mike Rotella
Zac Teller
Sara Villarreal
Michael West
Charles Wills
Garth Winkless