FRANCE/SPECIAL EFFECTS

FIGHTER SPIDER

When French filmmakers Anita Assal and John Hudson needed an electronic robot/spider for their five-minute short *Cyclope,* they turned to Sylvain Nibart, a specialist in unusual special effects. "I work mostly for television spots," says Nibart, "because the financial situation in France doesn't allow for many special effects in the cinema." For *Cyclope,* Nibart was commissioned to create a mobile spider robot with a video camera for its head. The process of designing and building the two spider robots used in the production spanned a two-month period. "I worked from designs drawn by a graphic artist," comments Nibart, who designed the robots to move either independently by remote control or pulled by strings. Nibart built two different robots since the spider is involved in a one-on-one battle with the actor. The robot motivated by remote control has six different motors, and was considered too expensive to risk in a battle that might injure its moving parts, so a second one was built for the attack scene. "The only thing the remote control robot couldn't do was actually descend the wall," says Nibart, in describing the movement of his creation, "and since we couldn't afford animation, that scene was cut." The second robot, with two motors, is held on strings, like a puppet, "in order to give it life." The limbs on this model are more articulated and better defined in their design as the camera comes in for extreme close-ups during the attack.

The more complicated robot spider is built from a mechanical base which allows for the synchronization of its walk. The legs are made of jointed aluminum tubing, and connect to an armour-like body with a stomach of soft mousse-like polyurethane. Attached to the back of this sci-fi creature are its lungs. The head/camera has a styrofoam shell covering a motor which allows the head to turn from side to side, and little lights which blink electronically for eyes, while another motor is concealed in the neck allowing it to move up and down. The beast is decorated with electronic elements giving it an extra-terrestrial quality. "We wanted the mix of a mechanical robot and an organic spider," says Nibart, whose spider has only six legs instead of nature's eight. In this case, Nibart's robots were a gift to the filmmakers, but had they been commissioned for a television commercial they should have been priced at 50,000 francs (UK £5,000; US $8,500). *Cyclope* was made as part of a 90-minute series for the French cable television Canal +, with images by Bernard Cavalie and sets by Jean-Pierre Camus.

ELLEN LAMPERT

PHILLIPPE GABEL

■ For the film short *Cyclope,* special effects designer Sylvain Nibart created a remote-controlled mobile spider robot with a video camera for its head. The six legs are made of jointed aluminum tubing, and connect to an armour-like body with a stomach of soft mousse-life polyurethane. There are six motors in the creature, allowing the head, neck, and legs to move independently of one another.

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFS

MOVERS & SHAKERS

Lawrie Taylor-Duncan, currently director of Light Force, is leaving the United States and returning to the UK to form a new company, Jem Theatrical & Special Effects Ltd. Taylor-Duncan and Nigel Moris of Jem Smoke Machine Co., will start the new company to handle a new range of Jem manufactured products, mainly for theatrical application. The company plans to begin trading by January 1990...Under the auspices of OISTAT, 16 British theatre designers, led by John Bury, visited Mexico for three weeks in October, visiting archeological sites and local theatres. The tour group was organised by Ariane Gastambide of the UK and Antonio Lopez Mancera of Mexico.

UK/ARCHITECTURE

YORK'S GRAND OPERA REOPENS

Thirty-three years ago the curtain went down at the Grand Opera House in York, plunging the theatre into a prolonged 'dark' period. During those 33 years it followed the fate of many regional theatres in the 1950s, gradually resorting to a life of wrestling and bingo, saved only by periodic one-night appearances in the 1960s by such groups as the Beatles and the Animals.

In 1985 the theatre was up for sale. York City Council decided against the purchase because of the enormous cost of repairing and restoring the building and it fell to a private company to take on the £4 million (US $6.8 million) restoration work.

Developers India-Pru have turned the decaying theatre into a turn-of-the-century copy of the 1902 original, complete with art deco furnishings, art nouveau light fittings, plus state-of-the-art theatre technology. It's grand re-opening was 26 September with *Macbeth.*

The theatre seats 1,028, including 269 in the dress circle 320 in the upper circle. The 12.75m wide by 10.2m deep by 13.25m high stage is flanked by 4.8m wide wings and equipped with a white cyclorama. There are 33 hemp sets with 12 speed control 500 kg. motorised bars. An unusual feature is the paint bridge which still links the two sides of the stage at the rear.

Front-of-house is lit with 24 1.2kw Rank Strand Cantatas 11/26. Stage lighting consists of Cantata 11/26, 18/32, Cantata fresnels, and Punchlites. There are 96 Rank Strand Permus dimmers controlled by a 96 channel Rank Lightboard M.

The sound system is made up of various TOA speakers throughout the house, including the upper and dress circles. The house is amplified with Shure and AKG microphones.

On top of all this, the Grand Opera distinguishes itself by receiving no grant support or subsidies, hoping to be self-financed through box office revenue and a range of enterprising commercial ventures.