

“Make no mistake, we are part of film history, even if it’s not entirely noticed yet.” – Sally Cruikshank

The ASIFA Central Board

*Volunteers all, gleefully
promoting the best of all possible
worlds while attending to their
gardens:*

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Secretary, Yr Hmb! Typst, and Slightly Less
Perplexed Membership Coordinator

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With Free-Range Board Members

Deanna Morse

(Madame President to All ASIFAnians!)

and

Gretchen Vinnedge

Stephen Leeper

Michael Long

Bob Swieringa

Charles Wilson

Julie Goldstein’s GRAM Exhibition

The Hunting Gallery at the Grand Rapids Art Museum hosted an evocative blend of history and poetry during May and June, created by ASIFA Central President, Julie Goldstein. *Virtual Memory* is a meditation on image-making and its impact on human consciousness, from the physical process of photography and film, to the alternate universes created by computers and virtual reality.



Virtual Memory, film by Julie Goldstein

Filmmaker Julie Goldstein traces the legacy and history of the predominant mediums of the last century – like photography, filmmaking, and the radio – and embraces the freedom offered by the immaterial digital sphere. In *Virtual Memory*, Goldstein presents a vision for a future society that welcomes technological advancement in the name of learning and self-expression. At once a critique and celebration of human interactivity with modern devices, Goldstein offers a reassessment of how the sense of self and our communication with others is dependent on the tools we use while also pondering the increasingly intangible nature of our lives. A farewell to the analog, Goldstein envisages the next phase of humanity as one that expands how people’s experience of their lives is mediated by digital interfaces. In addition to her involvement with ASIFA, Ms. Goldstein is Assistant Professor at Grand Valley State University, instructing film culture, animation, and new media within the Department of Visual and Media Arts – and is a faculty fellow at the GVSU Applied Computing Institute. She was formerly the Academic Director of Media at the Art Institute of Colorado, where she spearheaded the Game Art and Design program. She has produced and directed numerous animated projects, ranging from a feature length children’s character animation to 3D visualizations for the

Grand Rapids Ballet. As if that isn’t amazing enough, Ms. Goldstein is currently Creative Director for GVSU’s Project *Grand Path*, one of the Presidential Initiatives associated with the “Reach Higher: 2025” campaign.

Deanna Morse, AWG Projects and ASIFA International Updates



Children in 11 different countries worked with ASIFA Members who are master-teacher animators, using a wide variety of techniques, to create animations around the theme of solutions to climate change.

The Animation Workshop Group was founded in 1971 as a group of artist teachers who believe that children can use animation to tell their own stories. Each year, all over the world, students create short films based on a common theme, with a variety of viewpoints, multiple techniques, and rich soundtracks.

Nearly 200 students participated in the project, along with over 30

Deanna Morse (con't)

instructors, support staff and musicians from Greece, France, USA, Croatia, Russia, Austria, Israel, Belgium, Ukraine, Norway, and the rainforest in Brazil. The half hour film was compiled and edited by AWG President Christel Degros of Belgium.

"We All Dream of a SUSTAINABLE Future" is on the AWG Youtube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0wYUe8kHaA>

Deanna Continues: ASIFA International Updates

(slightly edited for space and continuity)

It is not quite six months from my last President message. And we are getting ready to connect at two upcoming partner festivals – Zagreb and Annecy. More than 20 board representatives will be at the two events.

A Review of 2023 Activities

In late December, we were dealing with the Stolen Film drama, and what a drama it was. Although has quieted, it is still an issue for us animators. ASIFA was helpful, we were supportive. But it is the age of AI, copyright issues, and easily downloadable files, this issue will not go away.

We have been working on our communication strategies – how to be transparent without too much email clutter.

For ASIFA, in 2023, we approved the proposed budget...past President Nelson Shin volunteered to do an internal audit, something that ... will keep us legal.

AWG completed a sophisticated film on *Sustainability* (also noted above). With a variety of techniques, nearly 200 students in 11 countries participated,

15,820 badgeholders (+19%)	6,410 Mifa badgeholders	102 countries
156 professional events	2023 AWARDS	468 films in official selection
3 575 Student badgeholders	2023 IN PICTURES THE CLOSING CEREMONY	850 contents in the Video Library*

* 665 of them are still available for viewing, depending on your accreditation type, until 31st December 2023

Annecy 2023 was also:

- 345 screenings (WIP and conferences not included)
- Between 4,000 to 8,000 spectators every evening for the open-air screenings on Le Pâquier
- 1,205 Pass grand public
- Le Campus, the brand-new area at the Mifa for students and emerging talent, was a roaring success

including both Ukraine and Russia. I think it is one of the best AWG films, and am proud to be a participant. If you know of festivals or places that might screen it, please advise.

IAD unveiled the fabulous poster by Georges Schwizgebel. Chapters can share animations through the Film Freeway portal, for the October 28 celebration. Briana is solidly organizing, as usual.

The 2023 ASIFA Prize will be presented at Ottawa (this) fall.

We are in discussion on how to invest part of the money we have in our financial reserve. Several chapters have suggested ideas, including ASIFA Student Awards, a project piloted during the 60th Anniversary.

We are welcoming new chapter representatives, chapters are paying dues, and, of course, there is lots of energy around the back-to-back top notch European festivals. This comes directly after Xiamen, where several ASIFA board members met in person, this year, and felt connected to our global community. We are looking forward to the fall festivals – Ottawa, Espinho, and others... We are working on updating our festival policies.

One of my personal goals is to encourage entry points for upcoming leaders. If you want to know more about ASIFA, but are not in the loop, please let me know. One of my mandates is to enable new folks to find ways to plug into our leadership team.

I am trying to develop a solid calendar so that we do not miss deadlines for our annual ASIFA activities.

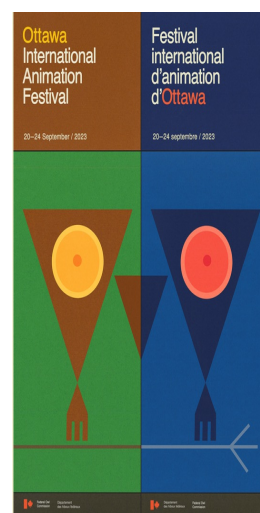
ASIFA.net is constantly being updated. Be sure and log in for new information, and thank you to our communication team. I look forward to seeing you, or hearing from you, and to continuing our journey to strengthen ASIFA, our international animation association, now 63 years old. Or, 63 years young. Going strong.

Join me, as we celebrate our love of together, around the globe.

morsed@gvsu.edu -
president@asifa.net

OIAF Discounted Festival Passes Available for ASIFA Central Members

Ottawa has been provided with the active membership list as of June 1, 2023 for a discount on passes to this fall's OIAF. Yes, Ottawa, the entire city, the destination of destinies, the locus for ketchup chips and poutine, of carved pumpkins and nicely niched nuggets of nonchalant creativity. That Ottawa. However, the OIAF portion of Ottawa is the focus for this discount. Your ASIFA Central membership card, while always an attractive accessory to



Public Service Announcement:
The Ottawa International
Animation Festival will take place
September 20 – 24, 2023.
Attendance is strongly
recommended.

your travel plans, will not necessarily get you a discount for the afore-mentioned ketchup chips, but may get you special attention at customs by **OIAF (con't)** officers who think you might know Seth MacFarlane or would like to hear an impromptu rendition of "Tomorrow" while scanning you for contraband (both experiences of yr hmbl typst).

Oh, what is that secret code to provide you with this bounty of overdue recognition? The magic entry, whose entered presence will give this discount? It is - *ASIFACentralOIAF2023* - but remember, it will be double checked against **the list** at OIAF and yr hmbl typst will get a telegram seeking confirmation (Edmore, being Edmore,

has been slow to embrace technology, but the lad who delivers the telegram is quick to embrace a tip).

So don't be naughty! Save it for the storyboards!

If you haven't made plans for September 20-24, 2023, contact Adam Tremblay at this secret email access (ok, it's not secret) - registration@animationfestival.ca



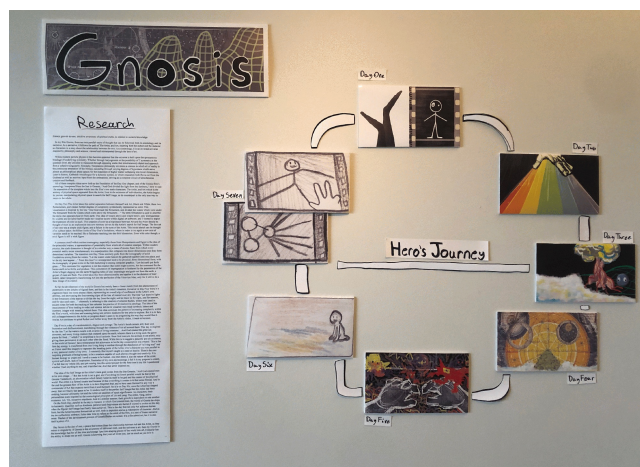
This poor sap didn't use his discount code for the OIAF '23!

And Speaking of Membership, Welcome This New Member - Peaches Wilczak - Recent CMU Grad

In the thesis film *Gnosis*, Peaches Wilczak professes, "If *Gnosis* is the awareness of universal truth, and the universe is art, then my *Gnosis* is the knowledge that for all the time and energy I put into shaping pieces of the world into art, it equally has the ability to shape me as well. *Gnosis* is



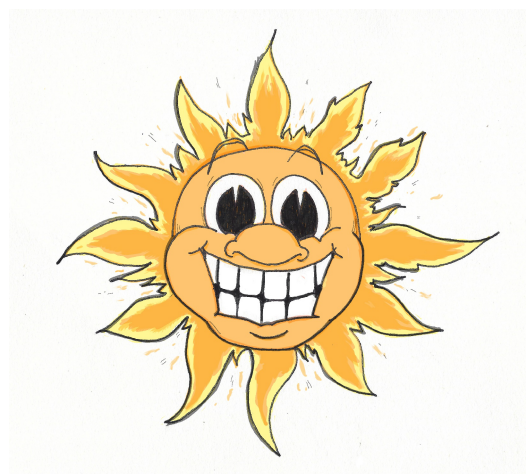
Peaches Wilczak, animator, with the storyboard to prove it!



knowing that your art loves you, just as much as you love it." Peaches trained at CMU under the guidance of ASIFA Central member and dapper dresser Stephen Leeper.

Portions of Peaches' earlier exercises appeared in last year's ASIFA Central/CMU IAD reel, and *Gnosis* is set for inclusion in this October's compilation. The film is broken into seven philosophically structured days and its hero's journey can be viewed in its entirety at -

<https://peacheswilczak.art/pages/gnosis>



Membership Renewal Process

Those members set for renewal through June of this year should have, by now, received an invitation to re-enlist with ASIFA Central. Students get a discount and may appeal even that to assure a proper diet of ramen and rice paper (also useful for drawing!) while maintaining membership. Renewed members should have received an updated membership card good for a year. If you haven't received yours, drop the membership coordinator a note and we'll fire up the linotype and get things updated!

IAD Approacheth

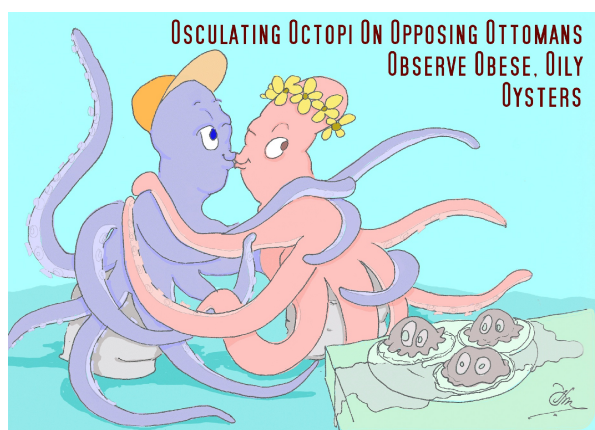
FilmFreeway will remain the designated and preferred broker for the films provided for inclusion, so feel free to upload. Specifics will follow the basic formats from the last two years, with instruction and submission guidelines coming soon in a newsletter near you!



Late Breaking News - more from Deanna!

Just received word that Nelson Shin was accepted to the Academy - AMPAS. I am excited, as I nominated him with the support of Steve Segal. I am proud of the production of his animated feature film, *Empress Chung*, which he made in North Korea and South Korea. *And he did the original Light Saber animation! And*, he was President of ASIFA International. And now he is in the Academy. Well deserved!

Pen and AI Challenge - Osculating Octopi



The Original Drawing by Yr Hmbl Typst

And requesting the same from an AI generator with the tongue-twister input - after several re-iterations, Night Café produced this:



OK, the lighting is better, but I couldn't make it give me oysters.

SAS and Unassigned Seating Department



Yr hmbl typst was late to the SAS gathering celebrating the life and achievements of Howard Beckerman on June 15, and with the random nature of Zoom, wound up in a virtual chair next to Tom Sato and John Canemaker. ASIFA Central member Orrin Scott was actually in attendance, and he brought the receipts:



Public Domain Corner

This June's ANNY program included the earliest soundtrack ever recorded within the short film, *What is Design*, by Mark Franz.

Interesting as the combination was, it also set off a flurry of questions about ownership of recorded sound and performances (in the skewed mindscape of *Yr Hmbl Typst*, anyway).

First, about the film, from its website - "*What is Design?* explores the aspects of Form, Structure, and Movement through cutout style animation derived from imagery from *The Last Whole Earth Catalog* (1971-75).

"The cutout technique and style of *What is Design?* draws inspiration from such work as Harry Smith's *Heaven and Earth Magic* (1962).

"In keeping with the exploratory scientific feel of aspects of the catalog, all of the

individual frames in the film were captured with a digital microscope. This technique was also chosen in order to preserve the textures and details of the original printed material.

“The soundtrack is based on audio from the Dickson Experimental Sound Film

(1894), chosen by Franz for the sonic textures of the earliest recording medium.”

Second, *The Whole Earth Catalog* is a prized artifact in the archives at The Animating Apothecary. “I cured my warts with voo-doo and a Swiss Army knife” and other essays helped *yr hmbly typst* survive the 70s.

Third, and this is where copyright questions start percolating, the violin extract is the song, “The Cabin Boy,” from the light opera *The Chimes of Normandy*, composed in 1877 by Robert Planquette. That takes the composition over the 95 year time limit, and the recording, while originally from an 1894 performance, would be under any normal circumstance within the public domain (past the 100 year time frame for performances).

HOWEVER, it was pieced together from its broken wax cylinder components, digitized *and then publicly paired and presented for the first time in 2002* (while the separate components had existed for some time, Edison could never get the two to synchronize properly). Further complicating the process is that this production was assembled by restoration expert Walter Murch under contract from the Library of Congress, with some input from ILM. So many hands, from public to private!

The question that can emerge - does this



First sound film, first artist-director-performer “auteur” film, first film musical, and possibly first gender-bender film experience

40 second bit of sound copyright get set in 1894, where it was never publicly performed, or in 2002, when it was finally repaired and re-assembled for an actual presentation, and if it’s in 2002, is it owned by Mr. Murch, ILM, the Edison Labs, or the Library of Congress (who

currently curates the Edison recorded archives, but is extremely vague about their copyright status).

It is doubtful that anyone would ever litigate ownership of this rendition of “The Cabin Boy,” but it just shows how some recording copyright performances can get very complicated to sort out. The general consensus now is that Edison recordings are in the public domain, leaving copyright issues to those compositions written between 1923 and 1929, when Edison personally pulled the plug on his recording division.

The Dickson film, representing about a million “firsts” is available at -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4iDmA1seBk> (It gets played twice)

What is Design can be experienced at:

<https://markfranz.org/project/whatisdesign>

“Home” Premiere in Muskegon

The first director’s cut of Jim Schaub’s documentary, *Home*, presenting Buster Keaton’s teen years in Muskegon had its first semi-public showing May 21. The animated sequences featured the work of ASIFA Central member Jim Middleton. Further trimming and shuffling will continue this summer with a release to the festival circuits expected later this year.

Analytical and Articulatory Animation Analyses

A Special Supplement for the ASIFA Central Newsletter - July 2023

Karl Cohen's Second Draft Essay on Animatory Activities - Musings on the Film Festival Conundrum

Why is the Nature of Animation in Europe Quite Different than Creations from the US?



You may not pay much attention to what animation festivals in

Europe are currently showcasing, but it is worth noting that only a few films from hundreds of entries received from the US are being selected for screening. I became curious why prestigious festivals like Annecy 2023 and the Zagreb Animation Festival are featuring only a limited number of US works in their competition programs. In the past, these festivals used to showcase a significant number of entries from the US, as they were considered cutting-edge.

This recognition played a crucial role in advancing the careers of independent US animators. I wanted to investigate why so many US films are now being overlooked abroad. Through my research, I discovered that people attribute this trend to differences in budgets, technical perfection, and content between European and American animation.

My third (upcoming in August in this newsletter) article, "Insights by People from the Animation Community," includes some comments that form the basis of this article. After analyzing what I've learned, I now argue that animation in the US started evolving in different directions from Europe during the second half of the twentieth century. These changes ultimately shaped the type of animation produced by US animators.

A simple way to illustrate this divide is by comparing works made in the US, primarily following what can be called the "Hollywood Formula," with European features. European artists

Karl Cohen is the editor of the meatiest newsletter about animation on the planet and author of *Forbidden Animation* and many articles on many platforms - an appreciative examination of his life and times is at https://cinesourcemagazine.com/index.php?/site/comments/the_cartoon_king

Mr. Cohen is also seeking feedback and questions about this series of essays and can be reached at <https://www.karlcohen@earthlink.net>

Under Eisner's leadership, a Disney subsidiary called Touchstone produced *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* in 1988, with animation directed by Richard Williams. The film demonstrated that

employ approaches that are considerably different.



The Rise of the Hollywood Animated Feature: A Remarkable Business Product



Although you might not be comfortable with this notion, many in the business world view animated features as products. Walt Disney demonstrated from his own experiences that features could be profitable, but they also carried a high risk of financial loss. While *Snow White* (1937) was a great success, along with Disney's films from the 1950s, other films disappointed at the box office. If *The Jungle Book* (1967) hadn't been successful, the studio might have ceased production not taken the risk of producing *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (with a budget of \$4 million, *The Jungle Book* grossed \$13 million in the US and \$23.8 million worldwide).

An uncomfortable revelation that US feature films are not solely created as wonderful expressions of artistic freedom came in 1981 through a statement made by Michael Eisner. At that time, he served as the president of Paramount Pictures (1976 to 1984), before becoming the head of Disney from 1984 to 2005. In 1981, Eisner wrote an infamous internal memo expressing his belief that, "We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. To make money is our only objective."

well-written animated features for an older audience could be profitable. This success led Disney to produce *The Little Mermaid* (1989), followed by *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), and *The Lion King* (1994). It marked a highly profitable period known as the "Disney Renaissance" and ushered in a new era of commercially successful animation, attracting other studios to the industry.

In terms of content, most scripts for US animated features follow what is known as the "Hollywood Formula." The story generally opens with an impressive action sequence to captivate the viewer and generate excitement. Then, just enough information is provided about the hero or protagonist to make us admire them and become emotionally invested. The film gradually reveals the problems the antagonist will create. Throughout the plot, the story presents a series of growing and captivating challenges and resolutions. The filmmakers strive for great twists, exciting action sequences, and clever resolutions before reaching the final act. The final act usually begins at a low point and builds toward a grand climax. After the climax, the film concludes with a resolution, sometimes leaving room for a potential sequel if the film performs well at the box office.

When utilizing the Hollywood Formula, it is crucial to set the plot in a fantasy world to ensure viewers don't identify too closely with the film. The inclusion of numerous surprises is encouraged, but controversial elements that could impact box office revenue are typically avoided. The more appealing and glossy

the product appears, the more the audience is expected to love it.

TV shows for adult audiences also adhere to a somewhat standard format – the situation comedy. The first notable series aimed at adult audiences was *The Simpsons* (1987), created by Matt Groening. Each week, viewers of the animated situation comedy are presented with and limited movements. This approach helps lower production costs, as action sequences require more time and money to create. Situation comedies targeted at adult audiences can result in highly profitable series, making them an attractive option for producers, studios, and networks whose primary objective is to make a profit.

The tremendous financial success of films and TV shows created using these basic approaches has led the public to assume that they are witnessing *great animation*. Consequently, many audiences have become complacent with these standardized approaches to animation, often ignoring or rejecting other styles, including those seen in imported features.

Films that deviate too far from the Hollywood Formula run the risk of failure in the US market. For instance, Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) did not break even financially upon its initial release, but it became profitable upon reissues, particularly in the 1960s. *Fantasia 2000* has yet to recoup its costs. Similarly, *Yellow Submarine* (1968), a production by TVC in the UK, also failed to break even at its initial box office. However, King Features paid TVC a fixed price to produce it, and King Features was already profiting from the Beatles' TV series.



The Challenges and Limited Exposure of Non-Hollywood Animated Features in the US

Animated features from Europe and other parts of the world often deviate from the Hollywood Formula, offering unique and visually stunning storytelling experiences. However, these films face challenges in gaining exposure and generating substantial revenue in the US

market. Limited promotion, distribution, and a lack of media coverage contribute to their under-performance. Here we can examine the struggles faced by non-Hollywood animated films and highlights notable examples.

The Impact of Marketing and Distribution

Unlike major Hollywood studios, distributors of non-Hollywood animated films often operate on smaller budgets, resulting in limited advertising and promotion. As a result, these films do not receive extensive exposure, particularly in rural America. Consequently, the majority of the US audience remains unaware of these films, or if they are aware, they show little interest due to a lack of information and media coverage.

Examples of Non-Hollywood Animated Features

Tomm Moore, an Irish filmmaker, has produced several visually captivating and charming animated films, such as *Secret of Kells* (2000), *Song of the Sea* (2014), and *Wolfwalkers* (2020). Despite their artistic success, these films grossed modest amounts at the US box office, indicating that only a fraction of the potential audience experienced them.

Another notable example is *The Red Turtle* (2016) by Michaël Dudok de Wit from Holland. Premiering at Cannes and backed by Studio Ghibli in Japan, the film received critical acclaim and an Oscar nomination. However, its US box office earnings were relatively low compared to its global performance, suggesting a limited audience reach in the US.

Anime's Limited Success in the US Market

While anime has a dedicated fan base, it has yet to achieve the same level of financial success as films from major US studios like Disney and Pixar. Only a handful of anime features have grossed more than \$30 million at the US box office, with the majority released within the past few years. Despite the popularity of Hayao Miyazaki's films,

they often struggle to secure wide theatrical releases throughout the US, limiting their exposure to a broader audience.¹

The Importance of Media and Theater Bookings

Media outlets play a crucial role in educating the public about the value and diversity of foreign animated features. Unfortunately, many local newspapers and news websites fail to provide adequate coverage or listings for these films, further hindering their visibility.

Additionally, theater bookers may be reluctant to screen foreign films, believing there is insufficient audience demand to justify the costs of running the business. This lack of exposure and distribution contributes to the limited success of non-Hollywood animated features.

Success Stories and Industry Challenges

While non-Hollywood animated films face numerous challenges, a few success stories have emerged. Nick Park's *Chicken Run* (2000), produced in collaboration with DreamWorks and supported by a significant advertising campaign, achieved both critical acclaim and financial success. However, the termination of DreamWorks' partnership with Aardman following the underperformance of *Flushed Away* (2006) highlights the different priorities between artistic vision and financial profitability.

Non-Hollywood animated features offer unique storytelling and artistic experiences that often deviate from the Hollywood Formula. However, their limited exposure, lack of marketing, and distribution challenges hinder their success in the US market. Improved media coverage, increased support from distributors, and a more diverse theater

¹ Studio Ghibli did announce its 2023 film-festival, with all ten of Hayao Miyazaki's films coming to the big screen
<https://www.comingsoon.net/movies/news/1270802-studio-ghibli-fest-2023-dates>

booking approach can help expand the audience for these films, allowing a wider appreciation of their artistic merits.



Divergent Perspectives: US and European Opinions on Animated Films

Over the past few decades, a divide has emerged between US and European producers regarding what constitutes a great animated film. While Hollywood studios have refined their concepts to create billion-dollar releases, European and Middle Eastern films operate on smaller budgets but can still offer visually captivating and compelling content for both adults and children. This article explores the differing opinions of US audiences, anime fans, and international viewers and delves into the factors that shape these perspectives.

US Animation: A Focus on Spectacle and Sequels

In the US, the financing of animated features often involves enormous budgets, which limits the inclination to take major creative risks. Producers tend to believe that pouring more money into production's "bells and whistles" will yield greater profitability. Physical and computer-generated effects, along with renowned actors and composers, are commonly employed to enhance the film's appeal. The prevailing sentiment seems to be a reluctance to risk investments on unknown talents, opting only for what is perceived as the best in terms of talent and resources. Furthermore, directors aim to make the films as entertaining and exciting as possible, often resulting in the creation of numerous sequels that capitalize on established characters and storylines.

European and Middle Eastern Animation: Pragmatic and Thought-Provoking

In contrast, European and Middle Eastern directors approach animation with pragmatism, often working with smaller budgets that limit their access to extensive visual effects. Many of these

films target adult audiences and focus on intelligent scripts that resonate with mature viewers. Some films even tackle real-world situations, offering thought-provoking narratives that explore a range of themes. Examples include *Suicide Shop* (2012) by Patrice Leconte from France, a dark comedy inspired by Charles Adams' style, and *Persepolis* (2003) by Marjane Satrapi from Iran, an Oscar-nominated autobiographical film about growing up in a repressive regime.

The Directors' Intended Messages

When interviewing directors like Marjane Satrapi and Ari Folman, it becomes clear that their films carry specific messages and warnings. Satrapi aimed to shed light on dangerous fanaticism exhibited by political figures, while Folman sought to caution Israeli teens about the consequences of blindly glorifying military service. Despite their intentions, these films often struggle to reach their intended target audiences, with mature adults being the primary viewers instead of the teenagers they hoped to influence.

Divergent Audience Expectations

Research suggests that American and European audience expectations differ significantly. European festival-goers anticipate animated shorts and features catering to adult viewers, including content based on true stories that may not be suitable for children. They do not necessarily seek out films resembling Disney or DreamWorks productions. European audiences look forward to intellectually challenging films, animated documentaries, surreal dramas, and other unconventional approaches to the medium.

Contrasting Approaches to Animation

While some US animation directors produce thought-provoking work, European festivals have expressed disappointment with the majority of American entries in recent years. Unlike in the past, when US directors were well-represented at festivals like Annecy, contemporary American animators often focus on acquiring technical skills for

employment in the animation industry rather than creating groundbreaking films. Furthermore, some US festivals reject provocative European shorts due to concerns about controversy, as they rely on the support of wealthy patrons and tend to favor safer programming choices.

Support for European Film Projects

One significant disparity is the availability of production funding and services for film projects in Europe. Pitching events allow filmmakers to present their proposals, and winning awards can result in generous cash prizes or production support. These competitions often take place alongside festivals, seminars, and other industry events. Consequently, European filmmakers invest considerable effort in developing scripts, character designs, and storyboards that have the potential to secure necessary funds and services.

The opinions surrounding what makes a great animated film diverge between US and European perspectives. US animation often focuses on spectacle, financial returns, and a propensity for sequels, while European and Middle Eastern animation embraces pragmatism, thought-provoking narratives, and appeals to adult audiences. European festival-goers anticipate intellectually challenging and unconventional films, contrasting with US festivals' tendency to prioritize more mainstream and commercially safe content. Understanding and appreciating these divergent opinions can enhance cross-cultural appreciation of the diverse approaches to animated storytelling.



Fundraising and Animation Education in the US: Current Realities


In the US, funding for film projects, including animation, is scarce, with only a few state art commissions offering limited funds for worthwhile projects. For example, the New York State film commission provides grants of up to \$10,000. Federal and state funding for films has never fully recovered from the cuts made during the 1980s. However,

internet fundraising platforms have emerged as a successful avenue for filmmakers like Bill Plympton, Don Hertzfeldt, and Signe Baumane, who have raised significant funds (sometimes surpassing \$100,000) for their shorts and feature projects.

Challenges for US Short Filmmakers


 Unfortunately, most digital short filmmakers in the US face limited opportunities to monetize their work through theatrical screenings or television broadcasts. The theater industry prioritizes feature-length films over shorts due to commercial considerations, such as selling concessions. Additionally, the majority of shorts are not in the standard Digital Cinema Package (DCP) format used in movie theaters today, which further limits their exhibition possibilities. Instead, exceptional shorts may find success by winning prize money at film festivals.

Animation Education in the US

 Animation education in the US is often accompanied by high costs, leading many students to seek immediate employment after graduation to repay student loans. State-run colleges offer a more affordable alternative to private institutions and often boast excellent instructors and equipment. However, the objectives of animation students have shifted over time. Instead of aspiring to become outstanding artists creating award-winning shorts, most students focus on honing their craft through exercises in hand-drawn or computer-generated animation.

While some animation programs require students to complete one or more shorts to graduate, not all schools provide robust classes that develop strong storytelling skills. These skills are crucial for creating exceptional works that garner recognition and open doors to more diverse sources of income. Animator Vince Collins has observed that contemporary students study animation primarily to secure jobs, whereas in the past, when jobs were scarce, films were seen as personal expressions of creativity.

Different Values and Challenges

 Many US animation students excel in mastering the technical aspects of animation but struggle with delivering compelling content. They often find it challenging to break away from the idea of literal storytelling, lacking an understanding of how to effectively utilize surrealism. It is crucial for students to expose themselves to a wide range of animations, studying and analyzing works from various artists and eras. Learning from the past and attending festivals to witness the latest works and connect with peers are invaluable aspects of an animator's education.

In the US, fundraising for animation projects faces limitations in public and private funding. Internet fundraising platforms have become a notable avenue for success. Animation education focuses on technical skills, and while many students lack strong storytelling abilities, exposure to diverse animation works and engagement with the industry through festivals can help broaden their perspectives and creative capabilities.

The cost of an animation education today is prohibitively expensive at most schools, forcing many young animators to seek immediate employment after graduation to begin paying off their hefty student loans. State-run colleges offer a more affordable alternative to private institutions, often providing excellent instructors and equipment.

In the United States, the goal of becoming an exceptional artist who creates award-winning shorts is no longer a common objective. Instead, most students primarily focus on mastering the technical aspects of creating hand-drawn or computer-generated animation through exercises. While some animation programs require students to complete one or more shorts as part of their graduation requirements, not all schools offer comprehensive classes that cultivate strong storytelling skills. These skills are crucial for creating outstanding works that can gain recognition and open doors to more lucrative opportunities.

Today, many US students excel in learning the fundamentals but struggle to deliver compelling content. They often find it challenging to break free from the notion that their work must be conveyed literally as a real-life experience, lacking an understanding of how to effectively employ surrealism. I firmly believe that students should expose themselves to a wide range of animation to learn various storytelling techniques. It is essential for animators to study and analyze the works of others, drawing inspiration from the past as an integral part of their education.²

The perception of what constitutes good or great animation for animation students today is largely shaped by the media they have consumed since childhood, consisting primarily of formulaic features and television shows. This highlights the importance of broadening their exposure to different approaches to animation. Personally, when I discovered Norman McLaren's groundbreaking work at the age of 12, it was a revelation. How many animation students today have had the opportunity to witness his incredible contributions or the works of numerous other talented artists funded by the National Film Board of Canada since 1941?

A comprehensive animation education cannot be condensed into quick, intensive courses that are prevalent in our country. While there are schools offering intensive training programs designed to secure entry-level jobs within a few months, many students struggle to keep up with the demanding workload and eventually burn out. These programs tend to be overly intensive.

In contrast, the students I have encountered in Europe and Israel have impressed me, with several of them establishing successful careers as

² Fortunately, there are thousands of excellent shorts available online for free, providing students with ample material to explore. However, they would greatly benefit from a curated guide introducing them to these remarkable works. I am currently working on such a guide, as I firmly believe that animation is not only a great art form but also a lifelong learning experience, echoing the sentiments of Richard Williams and other directors.

teachers. European educational institutions often provide more scholarships, funding, and equipment, reinforcing the importance of a well-rounded liberal arts education. In many European schools, student films that receive acclaim often emerge from collaborative team efforts. By examining the origin of student films showcased at prestigious festivals such as Stuttgart, Annecy, Zagreb, or the Student Academy Awards in the US, one can discern which schools possess the most robust and comprehensive curricula.

The wide variety of films showcased at international festivals is a testament to the sophistication and education level of a society. While I appreciate the emergence of US films tackling controversial topics like climate change, I have long wondered why European artists address other important issues that their American counterparts tend to ignore. I hope this article sheds light on the underlying reasons for these differences.

When I had the opportunity to lecture in China approximately 20 years ago, I encountered students who were markedly different from those I had met in Europe, Israel, or the US. They primarily engaged in classroom exercises with rows of computer stations. During my lecture at the Beijing Film Academy, I addressed a large audience of at least 300 people in an auditorium. The vast scale of the space and the substantial number of attendees seemed to foster a serious and hardworking atmosphere, potentially intensifying competition. Most of those students eventually found employment on animation assembly lines in a rapidly growing industry that prided itself on the sheer volume of animation produced each year.³

Coincidentally, as I was writing this article, I received an email from the Jilin

Animation Institute (JAI) in China, boasting a graduate employment rate of over 90%. Many of their graduates have secured positions in well-known enterprises within the animation, gaming, digital media, and mass media industries, positioning themselves as prominent talents.

In conclusion, I believe that the influence of Hollywood animated features and TV series has shaped the US public's perception, leading them to believe that these shows are so enjoyable and exceptional that there is no need to explore other forms of animation. Furthermore, the lingering perception that animation is primarily for children, albeit with some acknowledgment of adult-oriented content, still persists. Individuals who hold this view are generally content with the current state of mainstream animated entertainment.



Returning to the initial thought that sparked my interest in writing this report, an anonymous source commented, "As for film festivals, the US is being left behind because the US is frankly too busy with its egocentric superiority complex to think anything could possibly be better than these 50 states. I think it is part of the reason international festivals no longer look towards us. They just don't see anything all that interesting anymore."

Initially taken aback by this blunt statement, I began to reflect on the images of people proudly displaying foam rubber hands with a single raised finger, chanting "we're number one" that often populate television screens. It reminded me of the almost fanatical crowds who fervently believed that their leader could make America great again (did he?). I assume there are indeed many individuals who are content with life as it is and have no desire to expand their interests.

What will it take to introduce people to independent animation and allow them to decide for themselves if it can add positive value to their lives? Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio* serves as a film that introduces intelligent ideas without making the audience feel as though they are being preached to. Public television's "Brief but Spectacular

Moments" on the PBS News Hour also subtly introduces viewers to the concept of animated documentaries. Additionally, there are impressive and well-animated segments featured in science programs aired on PBS and other networks. The more exposure the public has to these and other creative uses of animation, the greater the potential for some individuals to develop an interest in non-Hollywood animation. Unfortunately, PBS does not have as many viewers as major networks or Fox.

Perhaps in the future, a cable TV network or internet channel will regularly schedule shows featuring animation for open-minded adults (distinct from Adult Swim content), similar to how FM radio has dedicated stations for jazz, classical music, and other adult-oriented content. I hope that colleges and universities with liberal arts departments will eventually offer classes in animation history and appreciation. One day, we may even witness the emergence of serious courses dedicated to animation literacy and aesthetics.

It is also crucial for our government to reinstate its support for the arts by providing grants and scholarships to artists and artistic projects. Canada's National Film Board serves as an excellent example by producing exceptional films that demonstrate the country's commitment to supporting the arts. In the past, the United States had an active National Endowment for the Arts, which funded a wide range of projects. Other government branches also had discretionary funds available. For instance, during a drought in the 1970s, I assisted a friend in creating a humorous water conservation public service announcement for the government (funded by the Department of the Interior). If political parties genuinely aspire to make America great again, why can't we revise funding for the arts? Supporting the arts resonates with many people far more than investing in an escalating arms race. While a strong military may make us mighty, increasing funding for the arts and humanities is necessary if the US is to be regarded as a truly great nation!

³ I also had the privilege of meeting a class from Taiwan who visited the US for a better understanding of our animation industry. However, our discussion was cut short for a prominent highlight of their US visit - to an out-of-town discount shopping mall, where they intended to take advantage of affordable goods compared to Taiwan.