

'THE MISSING LINK' FROM LAIKA OPENS APRIL 12 Laika's *Indiana Jones*-inspired Stop-Motion Adventure Comedy opens April 12. Their fifth feature is an epic globetrotting buddy movie with explorer Sir Lionel Frost (Hugh Jackman) and a Sasquatch named Mr. Link (Zach Galifianakis). They embark on a quest to find the legendary Shangri-La, home of Link's ancestry.

"For a welcome change Laika sticks its neck out and dares to create a film that doesn't star a child hero;" however, its writer and director Chris Butler (*ParaNorman*), says "Link embodies a child-like innocence and the kids in *ParaNorman* acted more adult than the adults in this movie." Let's hope Laika's work pushes stop-motion and storytelling into new areas of exploration as advanced publicity says, *Missing Link* moves in a different direction from its four Oscar-nominated predecessors.

The film is set in the early 20th century. The puppets and sets were built 20 percent smaller than usual so Link can seem enormous. He was 16" tall, a size that was still comfortable for animators to manipulate. The art department made 110 sets at 65 unique locations, the most in a Laika feature. One location is a Yeti temple. One technical breakthrough was using full-color resin 3D-printed faces. The replacement animation faces were created using Stratasys's new J750 printer and Fraunhofer's Cuttlefish software.

FIRST CALL FOR ENTRIES TO OUR 2019 ASIFA SPRING FESTIVAL, WE WANT TO SHOW YOUR FILM Once again ASIFA-SF has teamed up with professor Tim Harrington of SF City College to hold a fun event honoring independent and emerging student animators. The show will be in June at City College and people in the program will once again get a free copy of the program should you want to be included in the DVD.

Send entries as a file or a link to Tim Harrington at: tharring@ccsf.edu or use a Google form at: <https://forms.gle/j24Wd5xU1tay1qWT9>

DID YOU GO TO GLAS 2019?

SEND US YOUR COMMENTS ABOUT IT FOR OUR NEXT NEWSLETTER.

Send to karlcohen@earthlink.net

Crusader Rabbit by Alex Anderson and Jay Ward

A TREASURY OF ANIMATION A current show at the **Cartoon Art Museum in SF is A Treasury of Animation**, from the earliest hand-drawn cartoons to today's blockbuster CGI films. It showcases original production art from the Cartoon Art Museum's permanent collection.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL MUSEUM AND VISIT ANOTHER ON MEMBER'S DAY, SUNDAY, APRIL 14 **Enjoy free admission for Members on Sunday, April 14, 2019 to the following institutions:** Asian Art Museum, BAMPFA, Cartoon Art Museum, Contemporary Jewish Museum, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco—de Young and Legion of Honor (surcharge for special exhibition), Museum of African Diaspora, Museum of Craft and Design, Oakland Museum of California (small surcharge for special exhibition), SFMOMA, UC Botanical Garden at Berkeley, and The Walt Disney Family Museum.

SANTA CRUZ FILM FESTIVAL WANTS TO SHOW YOUR WORK The entry deadline for their 17th annual event on October 9 - 13, 2019 is April 15 for their early deadline, May 15 for an "extended" date and late entry is June 15 <https://www.santacruzfilmfestival.org>

CAPTAIN MARVEL SHOULD IMPROVE GENDER EQUALITY AT THE BOX OFFICE The superhero picture scored the biggest worldwide opening of all time for a female-fronted film, as well as the second-largest for a comic book adaptation. It shattered the glass ceiling in its box office debut with \$455 million in worldwide ticket sales, including \$153 million in North America. **As of March 23 the film had grossed \$950 million worldwide so it's the 21st title in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and Marvel films have grossed more than \$18 billion at the global box office.**

A TRIBUTE TO A STOP-MOTION STAR This is a silly surprise for Wallace and Gromit fans. <https://imour.com/gallery/IIcI.1nY>

ANIMATION AT THE SF INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL The film festival has programs this month that include animation. The program of animation shorts for adults is program number 4 (details about the content follows this paragraph). There is also shorts program 6 of family films (for all ages) that includes animated works, Shorts 7 (Youth Works) that include animation made by teenagers, a program of anime, and three programs of mixed media (**Ask Dr. Ruth** by Ryan White, **The Grand Bizarre** by Jodie Mack and **Moonlight Sonata: Deafness in Three Movements** by Irene Taylor Brodsky). There are also two workshops for kids, **Creative Poetry + Film** and **Stop Motion + LAIKA's Missing Link**.

The films in **Animation, Program #4** are: **Bless You!** by Paulina Ziolkowska, Poland 2018, 5 min., is a whimsical short depicting a world where sneezing and the spread of germs transform and mutate in surprising ways. **Cold Pudding Settles Love** by Urszula Palusińska, Poland 2018, 19 min., is “an abstract animated short that uses multiple styles of animation and an elliptical narrative to tell a vividly imagined story about order and disorder.” **Confidence Game** by Kathleen Quillian, a Bay Area experimental filmmaker, 2018, 6 min., “artfully examines the art of deception for personal gain.” **Don't You Forget About Me** by Lydia Ricci, USA 2018, 4 min., is described as “amazing miniatures of vintage appliances and discarded objects made from scrap materials are celebrated in this delightful tribute to the mundane.” **Fest** by Nikita Diakur, Germany 2018, 3 min., is “An ingenious and audacious short featuring a cacophony of sound, imagery, and outrageous abandon that takes us to the site of a wild festival.” **From Under Which Rock Did They Crawl Out** by Daniel Šuljić, Croatia 2018, 6 min., is a striking black-and-white animation that traces the expansion of creatures from land, sea, and air. **I'm OK** by Elizabeth Hobbs, Canada 2018, 6 min., uses “bold colors, broad painterly brushstrokes, and a dramatic operatic score to accentuate this historical romance between Alma Mahler and Expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka.” **Maniac Landscapes** by Matthew Wade, USA 2018, 8 min., includes flowers that are reanimated “in this hypnotic, surreal work set within an environment saturated in varying shades of red and blue.” **Mitya's Love** by Svetlana Filippova, Russian Federation 2018, 14 min., “is an impressionistic, romantic tale of fleeting love using images by Russian avant-garde artists.” **Selfies** by Claudius Gentinetta, Switzerland 2018, 4 min., is a “hysterical lampoon and pointed critique of our overwhelming obsession with selfies.”

DISNEY NOW OWNS BART SIMPSON! WILL THEY TAME HIM? What did they really get for their \$73.1 billion dollars that they spent buying the assets of Fox? Sure they bought the rights to characters from **The Simpsons, Avatar, Deadpool** and **Atlanta**, and some other things for that absurd amount, but is spending that much to control more of the market worth it? Iger said, "We are rapidly transforming our company to take full advantage of evolving consumer trends and emerging technology in order to thrive in this new and exciting time... What lies ahead is the challenging work of uniting our businesses to create a dynamic, global entertainment company." That sounds like the voice of greed.

Frankly I'd be more excited if they cared more about our world and were spending that money trying to tame global warming, to end world hunger or to bring peace to the world. I'm tired of hearing about exciting plans for corporations to increase profits. NPR just had an hour discussion on how tech corporations will create so many new millionaires in the Bay Area by going public (only the upper level of employees will benefit by stock offers), that the cheapest single family homes in San Francisco will sell for four to five million bucks within the next five years. Yes, that will eventually make it impossible for anybody who isn't a millionaire to live in SF. And what will Rupert do with his additional billions that he gets for selling some of his holdings? And who will hire all the employees of Disney and Fox that are being laid off? KC

CHRISTMAS 2021 WILL BE A HOT TIME FOR ANIMATED FEATURES Sony's *Hotel Transylvania 4* will open Dec. 22, 2021 opposite Universal's *Wicked* and less than a week after *Avatar 3* unfurls on Dec. 17. The *Hotel Transylvania* franchise has earned more than \$1.3 billion at the worldwide box office.

TIM BURTON'S LIVE ACTION RETELLING OF DISNEY'S DUMBO is now in local theatres. The trailer looks impressive, but the reviews are quite mixed. One calls it "weirdly watchable." https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dumbo_2019

MEMORIES OF MICHAEL JACKSON ARE BEING CENSORED A *Simpsons* episode in which he was the guest star has been pulled from circulation. Executive producer James L. Brooks, creator Matt Groening and showrunner Al Jean collectively made the decision to pull it after watching the documentary *Leaving Neverland*. The episode first aired in 1991 and it features Jackson playing Leon Kompowsky, a man in a mental institution who believes he is Michael Jackson. When Homer returns home with his new friend, all of Springfield shows up to see the pop star. Jackson, a fan of the show, offered to be guest star. He was originally credited under the pseudonym "John Jay Smith." Jackson spoke his character's lines; however, a voice double sang for him. The episode is still online on the FXX streaming platform, but it is no longer available to networks that want to rerun it. It will also be dropped from a box set of past shows that was scheduled to come out. Canadian radio stations have removed Jackson songs from their playlists and a Michael Jackson statue was removed from Britain's National Football Museum. Is hearing his voice that upsetting or should we hear it and be confronted with thoughts about what a horrible jerk he was at times and how many kids did he screw up mentally?

CAN YOU GUESS WHO HAD HIS BASE SALARY CUT BY \$500,000? Don't worry, the total possible annual compensation for Disney's chairman and CEO Bob Iger could still be as much as \$13.5 million. Disney will also be eliminating his annual \$8 million increase in his annual "target bonus." Instead they will give him the same lousy bonus of just \$12 million a year. Still, he told the press, "I am proud to be leading the Walt Disney Company through this important time and believe the changes I, with the board, have made are in the best interest of the company." He really isn't going to be as well-off in the future considering Iger's total salary jumped 80 percent for the latest fiscal year to \$65.6 million and he earned \$36.3 million in 2017 and \$43.9 million in 2016. I guess making only \$12 million a year is better than getting food stamps.

EMMA THOMPSON IS NOT A JOHN LASSETER FAN She explained why she decided to exit *Luck* when John Lasseter took the helm at Skydance Animation. In a letter obtained by the *Los Angeles Times* she wrote Skydance, "It feels very odd to me that you and your company would consider hiring someone with Mr. Lasseter's pattern of misconduct given the present climate in which people with the kind of power that you have can reasonably be expected to step up to the plate. If a man has been touching women inappropriately for decades, why would a woman want to work for him if the only reason he's not touching them inappropriately now is that it says in his contract that he must behave 'professionally'?"

"If a man has made women at his companies feel undervalued and disrespected for decades, why should the women at his new company think that any respect he shows them is anything other than an act that he's required to perform by his coach, his therapist and his employment agreement?"

She allowed that Lasseter's defenders insisted he deserved a second chance. "But he is presumably being paid millions of dollars to receive that second chance. How much money are the employees at Skydance being paid to give him that second chance? ...Given all the abuse that's been heaped on women who have come forward to make accusations against powerful men, do we really think that no settlements means that there was no harassment or no hostile work environment? Are we supposed to feel comforted that women who feel that their careers were derailed by working for Lasseter didn't receive money?"

"I am well aware that centuries of entitlement to women's bodies whether they like it or not is not going to change overnight. Or in a year. But I am also aware that if people who have spoken out — like me — do not take this sort of a stand then things are very unlikely to change at anything like the pace required to protect my daughter's generation."

'Wonder Park' Cameron "June" Bailey is a 10 year old girl who mentally designs an amusement park that

Disney's Imagineers would envy. Her Mom whispers June's suggestions into the ear of Peanut (a monkey with a magic pencil) and a magical ride appears in June's imaginary "Wonderland." Unfortunately Mom becomes seriously ill, daughter becomes despondent and dismantles her model and burns the blueprints. A fragment escapes the flames and leads June to the ruins of the Park, now in the process of being dismantled by an evil cloud called "the Darkness." Somehow the Nickelodeon film will have a happy ending. It was animated in Spain, has a director who once worked at Pixar and got a glowing plug in IndieWire.

A SIX MINUTE ANIMATED VIDEO ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT FEATURING SIX "NERDY CARTOONIST GIRLS" The women work in the animation industry. It was featured on Samantha Bee's TV program. It is now online at: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/samantha-bee-shares-take-metoo-movement-lens-female-animators-1194658>

GOOGLE'S EXCELLENT SPOTLIGHT SERIES HAS ENDED AFTER 6 YEARS OF PRODUCING EXCELLENT VR SHORTS In a short 6 year period they produced several outstanding VR shorts showing us the storytelling potential of the new medium. Links to several of the films are at <https://www.awn.com/news/rip-google-spotlight-stories-2013-2019>

A Feast for the Eyes and the Stomach: 2018 Thessaloniki Animation Festival By Nancy Denney-Phelps | The 4th Thessaloniki Animation Festival ran October 18-21, 2018 in a beautiful Greek city full of ancient architecture and delicious food. It is the perfect place for an animation festival. Dimitris Savvaidis, the festival's founder and director, not only knows how to program excellent films, he is also a most gracious host. The three days of screenings, special presentations and workshops resulted in an ideal event. The fact that all screenings and presentations were free for everyone was the icing on the cake.

Each of the festival guests gave a special presentation or master class that was aimed at the Greek professional animation community. Independent Greek animator Irida Zhonga is a stop-motion animation director and she comes by her talent naturally. Her father is the award-winning Greek animator Joan Zhonga, and Irida helped him in his studio from a very early age. Her current project is a short stop-motion film titled *Man Wanted*. The film is set in a 1950's New York subway station. As a young man enters the station full of ads with beautiful women on them, the women come to life and begin to chase him. As he tries to get away from the women he realizes that what he is really running away from is his fear of commitment.

In her presentation, the audience was taken step by step through all of the production stages, from concept and design to pitching as well as how to fund the film. *Man Wanted* is the first Greek/Estonian co-production so Irida talked about the difficulties encountered in an international co-production and how she made it all work to end up with a successful film.

I first saw *Man Wanted* when Irida presented it at the Anima Syros pitching competition and then again at *Animarkt 2017* when the project was further along. Now that the film is almost completed I am looking forward to seeing it at festivals. <https://timallenanimation.co.uk/manwanted/> Clips of commercial work is at: <https://vimeo.com/iridazhonga>

Nick Deligaris, a Thessaloniki native, is an illustrator, 3D artist and graphic designer. In 2010 he was nominated for an Emmy for his work on the documentary *Death Masks* for the History Channel. His workshop *Visual Language – Color and Composition* analyzed elements that are part of the visual language and demonstrated the psychology of visual communication. He also showed the audience how to use the tools to create a beautifully balanced composition.

Mavka, the Forest Song is a Ukrainian feature film currently in release. Directed by Aleksandra Ruban, the film is set in a vast Ukrainian forest which is home to mythological creatures. Mavka is the soul of the forest and its guardian. When she falls in love with a mortal their romance faces numerous challenges.

Oleksandra Lutsenko, line producer of *Mavka, the Forest Song*, represented Animagrad Animation Studio. She told her audience about the film's plot in detail and screened the trailer. I liked the background designs and the costumes which beautifully represented traditional Ukrainian culture. Unfortunately, the character designs left a lot to be desired for me. The world just doesn't need another snub-nosed, big-eyed heroine. The entire film was screened in the festival cinema followed by a question & answer session with Oleksandra. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVWiKsDlyxw>

Illustrator Aristarchos Papadaniél is a co-founder of Studio Syllipsis. His illustrations have graced magazines and television shows. During his presentation at the festival, he talked about his work as co-creator of the educational animated series *A Letter – A Story* which is designed to teach Greek primarily to young people. It can also be used as a digital interactive learning tool by anyone of any age who wants to learn the language.

The multi-talented Aristarchos also co-edited *70 Years of Greek Animation* which ASIFA Hellas published to celebrate the occasion. The first Greek animated film is *Duce Narrates* by Stamatis Polenakis. Stamatis began making the film on the isle of Sifnos in 1942, during the heart of the Italian occupation. The antifascist satire film was completed in Athens in 1945.

Nik Phelps opened his Master Class series talking about the history of animation through music. He then transitioned into talking about his process of composing music for animation. During his lecture, he showed numerous film clips to illustrate his points.

I presented a talk on *The Unsung Women in Animation*. I began by talking about Lillian Friedman Astor who was hired in 1933 by the Fleisher Brothers Studio and became the first female studio animator to receive a screen credit for *Pudgy and the Lost Kitten*, a 1938 Betty Boop film. The body of my talk focused on Joy Batchlor, half of the legendary British animation studio Halas & Batchelor Cartoon Films.

After spending the previous week together at ANIMARKT in Lodz, Poland it seemed only natural that Tim Allen would be in Thessaloniki so we could continue having fun together. Tim gave an intensive stop-motion workshop. He has worked in stop-motion for over 18 years with film credits on such classics as *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie* and *Corpse Bride*. He also animated on the Oscar-winning *Peter & the Wolf* and his latest project was as a key animator on Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs*. Along with Tim's hands-on workshop, he gave a Master Class to a packed audience. Tim took us through his early career sharing behind-the-scenes clips of his work on *Corpse Bride* as well as puppets he has created for such popular television shows as *Postman Pat* and *Shaun the Sheep*.

Tim is a naturally funny person so his Master Class provided much laughter along with a lot of serious knowledge. He talked about the part that he played in *Isle of Dogs* where he animated many of the primary human characters in the film such as Mayor Kobayashi, Major Domo, and Atari. Tim said that "The Wes style is direct and clear. I take the old stop-motion phrase 'Less is More' and embrace it".

Toon Boom is a leading Canadian supplier of animation and storyboard software for animation studios and media production houses. Toon Boom regional sales manager Frederico Vallarino demonstrated the various applications of the products as well as giving us a peek at some of the new innovations that we will see in the future. He also held a drawing and gave away a package of Toon Boom software to one lucky audience member.

Running concurrently with the talks and demonstrations, the library was screening programs. For the first time the festival hosted a special program on the environment, *Animearth: Animation for Environmental Education*. The 10 films in the program ranged from tales of environmental disasters to possible solutions to earth's global warming problem.

Nurton is a hand-drawn animation by Aris Apartian and Sofia Avramidou, Graphic Design students at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design in Athens. The 6-minute film takes the viewer into a world where nature can't take the destruction of the earth any longer. A flock of revolutionary flamingos decides to take matters into their own "feathers" to deal with the threat to their habitat. The film is inspired by the real environmental threats to Lake Natron in Tanzania.

With so many people in the world living under oppressive conditions and attempting to migrate to countries where they hope to find a better life, the topic of human rights is very fertile ground for animators. The festival's *Human Rights Animated* program covered topics ranging from children sold into slavery to the fate of Holocaust survivors.

Yasmin Mistry is an American Emmy Award-nominated animator. *For a Better Life* tackles the issue of child trafficking. The 9 ½ minute documentary tells the story of Fekri who was sold for 100 dollars at the age of 5. He suffered through years of abuse before his plight was discovered. After almost a year of hospitalization and therapy, Fekri was finally able to move into a group home where he found support, mentorship, and eventual forgiveness towards his family that sold him.

Noch Am Leben (Still Alive) by Australian animator Anita Lester is an extremely haunting film. It is the story of a woman's memories of her great aunt Eva Nagler who went mad surviving the Holocaust. Her horror included time in the ghetto, cradling her dying sister, and losing her mind on the beaches of the Baltic Sea during one of the largest death marches of World War II. Being only one of a handful of survivors out of tens of thousands of Jews, the film is told from Eva's perspective which is often distorted, romantic, and affected by her warped memories. *Still Alive* captures a snapshot of the cold reality of war and its terrible aftermath. The film is narrated by Eva's niece with additional narration by Eva Nagler herself taken from the Spielberg Holocaust Archives and funded by the International Jewish Film Festival in Australia.

Gaia In (Stop) Motion is the extremely creative project by the Belgian/French duo of Chloe Alliez and Violette Delvoye. With a desire to travel throughout Europe in their van named Kevin, the pair spent 9 months touring with their puppet Gaia creating 10 short stop-motion episodes of Gaia's travel adventures at children's and adult workshops.

The first episode *Ruined Picture* was created in a 2-day workshop at the 2017 Thessaloniki Animation Festival so it was only fitting that they returned to the festival in 2018 for the world premiere of *Gaia in (Stop) Motion*. It is a delightful project, full of wit and humor. It is also a tribute to what can be accomplished in a 2-day workshop with talented teachers.

Nik and Nancy with Violette Delvoye and Chloé Alliez

Story Telling without Borders is a creative partnership between 5 creative organizations in Sweden, Greece, and Denmark. The project's aim is to reach as many refugee children and youths as possible to help them express themselves and make sure that their stories reach the public. Animation makes it possible to communicate despite language barriers. The workshops are held at refugee housing and camps. The festival screened a selection of stop-motion films created by the young refugees and although the works were primitive, they presented loud and clear messages about what war and famine have done to these young lives.

Anastasiya Verlinska, program director of Linoleum Animation Festival in Kyiv, Ukraine presented a screening of films from Linoleum's past festivals. Linoleum showcases short independent animation as well as offering workshops and lectures by such well-known names in the animation world as Ulo Pikkov and Mauro Carraro. There are also opportunities for children to create clay stop-motion characters and make them come alive. You can learn more about the festival which will be held 6-9 September 2019 on their website: linoleumfest.com

As a member of the short film jury, I got to watch 135 films at the festival. My fellow jurors were Festival Director Dimitris Savvaiddis, Tim Allen, Irida Zhonga, Aristarchos Papadaniel, and Nik.

The official jury portrait with Nancy even wearing a skirt!

Some very interesting puppet animation is coming out of Mexico. I thought that Mexican director Sofia Carrillo's 13-minute film *Cerulia* was the strongest film that I saw at the festival. The film tells the story of a girl who sets off to say goodbye to her childhood home which is for sale. Once there her repressed memories and the presence of her dead grandparents won't let her leave the house again.

Sofia said that the idea for the film came to her several years ago when she was 15 or 16 and her grandfather passed away. Our jury

appreciated the evocative story as well as the intricate sets and puppets. The film was awarded the first prize in the Short Film Competition.

In the Student Film Category, the 4-minute film *Mutuem* by Aggie Park Yee Lee caught my attention immediately. The humorous film has a group of young students being taken through an art museum by their very prim and proper teacher. No matter how hard their teacher tries to ride herd on them and enforce “proper” museum behaviors, the students still find chances to make fun of the paintings behind her back.

Aggie is originally from Hong Kong and is now studying in Estonia under Priit Parn. She says that the film is “a reflection of the atmosphere of my school in childhood – the ridiculous control to maintain silence, the traditional way of art education and how students learn to play inside the system”.

Mutuem by Aggie Pak Yee Lee

Anyone who is familiar with well-known paintings will particularly enjoy Aggie’s portrayal of such familiar works as Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* and Matisse’s *The Dance*. The jury selected *Muteum* as the Best Student Film.

Along with the standard festival awards, the Thessaloniki Animation Festival also gives The Selected Respect Award for the Outstanding Human Rights Animation, an Anima Earth Award, and an audience award for Storytelling.

Thessaloniki Animation Festival was established in 2015, and last year more than 1,400 short animated films were submitted. It is organized by Add Art, a non-profit organization which promotes culture in Thessaloniki. Along with the festival, Add Art organizes exhibitions, performances, and festivals focusing on the visual, audiovisual, and digital arts.

Festival Director Dimitris Savvaidis is a most gracious host. Lunch every day was delicious but dinner each evening was a special event which I will long remember. Dimitris and his brother Stavros, festival Production Manager, were born and raised in Thessaloniki and know everyone in town. When Dimitris took us out to dinner each evening no menus were ever in sight, Dimitris would order and sumptuous dishes of fried calamari, whole fish, and a seemingly endless variety of delicious plates of food that would begin to arrive at our long table for all to share along with pitchers of delicious Greek wine. I gained far too much weight while I was there, but the pleasure gained was worth every pound.

Thessaloniki is the second largest Greek city. It is a port city located on the Thermaic Gulf of the Aegean in Northern Greece. It has a rich history with Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman ruins. Everywhere we walked we found evidence of the ancient civilizations that once lived there.

One morning Stavros took Tim Allen, Nik, and I to the Museum of Byzantine Culture. The museum is well worth a visit with displays of ancient pottery, tiles, and intricately woven gold jewelry. The numerous jewel-encrusted gold tiaras were especially impressive. Each exhibit is clearly labeled and every room has extensive written texts explaining the contents of the room. I could easily have stayed there all day.

Thessaloniki also has a rich Sephardic heritage. Nik and I made it a point to visit the city’s Jewish Museum. Not long after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 some 20,000 Jewish asylum seekers were settled in Thessaloniki as part of an official Ottoman program to invigorate key cities that had been depopulated by invasions, dynastic wars, and pestilence that occurred in the Balkans up to the 12th Century.

The Jewish community thrived until 1941 when the city was occupied by the Nazis. By the end of 1945, only a handful of Jewish residents remained there, 96.5% of the Jewish community was exterminated in the death camps. The museum’s 3 floors of exhibits give a clear picture of Jewish life in the city until the community was deported.

On our last day in the city, Stavros and photographer extraordinaire (and my red-head-sister) Nopi Ranti took us to the Lagada Baths. Of Byzantine origin, the thermal baths were beautiful inside and the grounds were lovely to walk around. Soaking in hot water was exactly what we all needed after several days of eating, drinking, and watching film.

Ruins of the castle and old North wall of the city

After the baths, Nopi and Stavros took us to visit the castle and old walls of the city where we had a gorgeous view of the entire city, the port, and the bay. The walls of the castle date from the 4th century AD. It was built on the spot of the ancient Acropolis founded in 316 BC. In more modern times the castle was turned into a prison which was known as a place of torture. Many political prisoners were lead there never to be seen again during the Metaxas Regium (1936-1941), the Axis of Occupation, the Greek Civil War (1946-1949), and the Regime of the Colonels (1967-1974). Today the castle and main gate to the city are undergoing renovations. Our final stop for drinks and a bit of lunch was at a restaurant far up in the Pangaion Hills with a breathtaking view of the city.

There is no way that I can possibly thank Dimitris Savvaidis enough for all of his hospitality. While handling all of the problems a Festival Director has to deal with he found time to be the perfect host and a very fun person to be with. He even had one last surprise for all of the guests at the closing night of the festival where he presented each of us with a glass award with our name engraved on it. A very special remembrance of our time at the Thessaloniki Animation Festival.

If you are ever invited to the Thessaloniki Animation Festival I urge you to attend because it is an experience that you will never forget. You can read more about the festival and how you can submit your film at: tafestival.gr

THE PLACE TO SEE NORDIC AND BALTIC ANIMATION WAS THE FREDRIKSTAD ANIMATION FESTIVAL, 25 – 28 October 2018, Fredrikstad, Norway By Nancy Denney-Phelps

For 4 days the city of Fredrikstad, located 1 ½ hours south of Oslo, becomes the mecca of Nordic/Baltic animation. The Fredrikstad Animation Festival is the only opportunity to see a wide variety of Nordic/Baltic animation that does not often get shown at other festivals, meet the people that create it, and learn about what is new in the region’s animation community.

The Nordic/Baltic competitions were very strong. The 19 films in the 2 programs were from Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. All of the films in this category were eligible for Golden Gunnar Awards for Best Nordic/Baltic short animated film as well as the Grand Prix, Best Short Film, and the Audience Award.

I appreciate the surreal humor of Estonian films and *Strawberry Eaters* by Mattias Malk caught my attention right away. It is the story of 2 strawberry farmers whose field is destroyed by ravenous snails. When the couple try to start a new life in the city, the woman announces that they are expecting a baby. Her paranoid husband can still only see snails everywhere and suspects that they are responsible for her pregnancy rather than him and from there things can only go from bad to worse for the couple. The quirky story is enhanced by a color palette of shades of strawberry red and black. See it: <https://www.zippyframes.com/index.php/shorts/strawberry-eaters-by-mattias-maelk>

Åsa Sandzen is a Swedish documentary maker who pulls no punches in her films. Her 2014 film *Still Born* explored the emotions of mothers whose children were dead at birth. Her current animated documentary *The Second Shore* deals with people who have undergone a near death experience.

Three people tell their own stories of close encounters with their own mortality and try to delve into what happens when the body undergoes a trauma and death approaches. I found the film difficult to watch and yet so fascinating that I could not take my eyes off the screen for the full 15 minutes of the film.

The experimental film *Little Boy* by Norwegian director Kirstian Pedersen is a 5 minute interpretation of the moment that the atomic bomb was detonated over Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. Pedersen tells us in the film that there were 2 suns over the city that morning. One was the dawn of the new day and the other sun was the atomic bomb code named *Little Boy*.

Using time lapse digital 2D animation the film presents images that are startlingly beautiful until you gradually realize what they are. The sound design and noise of cicadas created by Svenn Jakobsen add an eerie dimension to the film.

Lest you think that all of the films in this category were intensely serious there was room for humor. The 4 ½ minute *A Most Precise and Nuanced Look into the Life of the Man, Legend, and Visionary – Martin Luther* has a title almost as long as the film. It is a very silly film full of offbeat humor but it is also a completely, utterly accurate history lesson about Martin Luther. Danish director Mangus Iglund Møller used 2D and 3D animation to delve into this piece of history. The film was produced for the 500 year anniversary of the church reformation. The film took home the Best Achievement in a Commissioned Film award at the 2018 Emile Awards. See it at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYcrY71G6KY>

In the Nordic/Baltic competition *Vermin* stood out for me. Jeremie Becquer's 6 minute film used 3D animation to confront racial prejudice. In the film a rat, who is a sensitive poet, is confronted with the harshness of a society where mice rule. When he is brutally beaten in a subway station by the mice police for just existing, all of the other mice passengers turn a blind eye to his plight. Jeremie completed *Vermin*, his graduation film, at the Animation workshop in Viborg, Denmark. The film has also been selected for the Graduation Short Film category at Annecy this year.

The opening night film was *The Tower*, Norwegian filmmaker Mats Grorud's first feature film. The film depicts the painful history of Palestinian refugees through the eyes of an 11 year old girl, Wardi, who lives with her family, including her grandfather Sidi, in a 4 story tall tower in a refugee camp in Beirut, Lebanon.

Fleeing his homeland during the first Israeli-Arab conflict in 1948, he has never stopped dreaming about returning to his homeland. Sadly, Sidi realizes that he is old and will never see his beloved homeland again. At the same time Wardi is becoming more aware of her family's history through stories told to her by the generations of her relatives that live in the tower. As she listens to their stories Wardi begins to search for her own place in the world.

The Tower is a very personal film for Mats. The story takes place in the same refugee camp (Burjal Barjaneh in Lebanon) where he spent time teaching refugee children in the early 2000's. During his childhood his mother used to work as a nurse in refugee camps in Lebanon. The filmmaker said "When she came back to Norway, she told us about how the kids in the camps were growing up, and that one day there would be peace and we would go there together". Unfortunately that day has still not come.

The film's message is very important. Unfortunately I did not like the puppets and their movements kept distracting me from the story, but that said the film is worth seeing for the story it tells. The cardboard sets suit the story perfectly. They were on display in the festival theatre lobby and seeing them first hand made me appreciate their intricate detailing and the work that went into making them. <https://www.dragonframe.com/blog/the-tower-by-mats-grorud/>

Each year the festival gives a Golden Gunnar Life Time Achievement Award to honor a Nordic/Baltic animator who has made an outstanding contribution to the world of animation. This year the award went to Latvian animator Roze Stiebra. I was particularly excited to be there to see Roze receive her award because we have been friends for a long time. Some years ago I had the privilege of visiting Roze in her studio in Riga, Latvia.

Roza studied at the Leningrad State Institute of Theatre, Music, and Cinematography where she graduated in 1964 with a diploma as a director of animation. Her career began at Latvian television with live action puppets but she knew that she really wanted to animate. Roza began creating her beautiful films during the Soviet era when every creative decision had to be cleared with Moscow officials and local censors. Despite the economic and political obstacles, she did start a department of animation and professionally pioneered both cut-out and drawn animation in her home country. During her long career in animation Roze has created more than 30 films and received numerous national and international awards.

A retrospective of 10 of Roza's films was screened at the festival. An exhibition of her art work titled *Recognizing the Miracle, The Amazing Films of Roze Stiebra* was mounted at the Litteraturhus (Library) where several other festival events were held.

The Fredrikstad Animation Festival serves as an important meeting point for the Nordic/Baltic animation industry. The festival kicked off with a breakfast seminar hosted by the city's creative industry and Blender Collective. Located in an industrial building in downtown Fredrikstad, Blender Collective offers reasonably priced temporary and long term workspaces for rent. At the breakfast

presentation Swedish producer/director Petter Lindblad gave a work in progress presentation about his upcoming VR short film *Lifegiver*. Lindblad and co-director Mike Pollack are producing the project with funding from the Swedish Film Institute. *Lifegiver* deals with refugees set in a science fiction format. It tells a story about their fate and the difficult moral decisions people face when placed in extreme situations.

New Nordic Animation gave the hottest directors, producers, and studios from the North Country an opportunity to introduce the audience to their latest projects. First up was Norwegian producer Frank Mosvold, head of the television and film houses Mosvold Studios AS and Kool Productions AS.

The studio's motto is "We Make Children Smile" and their popular preschool television series *Ella Bella Bingo* certainly does that. So far the long running series has 104 seven minute episodes and is still going strong. *Ella Bella Bingo* follows the adventures of 5 year old Ella and her friends. Ella loves adventure but they don't always turn out the way she expects them to. Whenever she finds herself in a sticky situation she exclaims "Oh what a pickle!" Luckily Ella also has a remarkable ability to solve her everyday dilemmas and when she does find the solution she cries out "Bingo!" At the *New Nordic Animation* presentation Frank announced the forthcoming *Ella Bella Bingo* feature movie due out in 2020.

Lana Tankosa Nikolic is a producer and owner of Late Love Production. Based in Viborg, Denmark, the studio produces independent animation, documentaries, shorts, VR projects, and websites. Begun in 2010, Late Love Production produced Italian animator Martina Scarpelli's 12 minute film *Egg*. The film deals with anorexia in a sensitive way with simple strong black and white line drawings. Martina's debut film has won numerous awards including the prestigious *Jean-Luc Xiberras Award for First Film* at Annecy in 2018.

Lana and Martina are now in development on a new ambitious project. *Psychomachia* is going to be an animated opera. Since it is in early development the plot is a bit sketchy but according to Late Love's website it goes something like this, "In a desert wasteland, a group of archetypes, each representing a vice or virtue, are invited to a mysterious dinner at an unknown location and are each asked to bring something. They don't know where they are going or who invited them but they know it is going to be great."

The art work looks like it will have the same bold lines as *Egg* but whereas Martina's first film was in black and white there may be some color in *Psychomachia*. Check out the art work on the Late Love website: www.lateloveproduction.com

From watching these and several other presentations I can see that animation is alive and thriving in the Nordic/Baltic region. In fact the festival has just announced that for the 2019 edition it will add a feature film competition. In making the decision festival director Anders Narverud Moen said "This last year we have seen an increase in releases of animated features from Norway and its neighbor countries. The fact that the films hold a high standard, with highly artistic and technical achievement, is the reason why Fredrikstad Animation Festival chooses to establish an award that tributes the production of animated feature films from the Nordic/Baltic countries".

If you want to learn more about Nordic/Baltic animation check out the new *WeAnimate* magazine at: weanimate.dk. The second issue is out now and it will give you an in depth view of all of the various facets of animation in the region along with a lot of color illustrations and photographs.

Over the years presentations by well-known international figures in the different branches of the animation industry have become an important part of the festival. American Carter Goodrich's presentation on character design was not only informative but extremely entertaining as well.

Carter has a very dry sense of humor and has the distinction of contributing to, and in several cases being lead character designer for *Shrek*, *Finding Nemo*, *Ratatouille*, *Brave*, and *Despicable Me 1 and 2* to name just a few of the films that he has worked on.

He began his presentation by telling the audience that after graduating from the Rhode Island School of Design he began his career as a freelance editorial illustrator in New York City. He has the honor of creating 21 published *New Yorker* covers to date which is quite an achievement in and of itself.

In 1994 he was asked to contribute character designs for Dreamworks' first animated feature *The Prince of Egypt*. That job resulted in a move to Los Angeles where the bulk of his work shifted to freelance character design. During his presentation Carter talked about life as a freelancer where you never know where your next job will come from. His advice to his audience was "give the studio what they want. No matter what character I design, the studio is going to change it and give it big eyes". Carter showed his listeners examples of his character designs along with the character that finally appeared on screen. He also proudly showed us a selection of his *New Yorker* covers.

Eric Daniels has done it all. Beginning as a traditional pencil and paper animator, he has become a pioneer in the field of computer animation and is currently a computer animator and technical animation director at Disney. After teaching himself to program he has become a master at combining the two disciplines to create new, unique types of visuals. Eric's career spans from working on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* down to the Academy Award winning *Big Hero 6* and *Frozen*.

In his fascinating talk *Disney: How Tech Can Solve Artistic Challenges*, Eric talked his listeners through some of the processes that enabled him to solve some of the more interesting challenges he has faced at Disney as EFX director and emphasized that false starts and dead ends have led him to discover new solutions in art and technology.

In the right hands VR is an exciting art form. It is no longer just the domain of the major companies with animation studios and schools such as The Animation Workshop in Viborg, Denmark creating interesting stories in VR.

Goro Fujita is a pioneer in the VR field. He began his career as a 3D character designer and visual development artist working first in Germany and then at Dreamworks Animation. He left Dreamworks in 2015 to join Oculus Story Studio in San Francisco where he art directed the Emmy Award winning VR experience *Henry*. In 2017 he joined *Facebook Social VR* to continue development on the VR tool Quill and to concentrate on developing VR as a medium for art.

During Goro's presentation he talked about his career path that led to his interest in creating artistic VR content. At the end of his talk he gave a live Quill painting demonstration which was followed by a screening of his short film *Beyond the Fence* which he created using Quill.

Of course there was also time for fun. A special treat was a trip to Old Town for its guests. Located across the river from new Fredrikstad, the fortified town was founded in 1567. Behind Old Town on the rocky outcropping of Galgeberget is Kongsten Fort

which was constructed in 1680 to protect the town from invasion by Sweden, Norway's arch enemy. Although Old Town now boasts numerous gift shops, galleries, and cafés it is well worth a visit not just for the charming architecture but also to visit the historic fort. An added plus is that the short boat trip to and from Fredrikstad is free.

There were also numerous receptions where we had a chance to talk informally. On the first night there was a delicious guest dinner at the Restaurant Fabel located on the bottom floor of the Litteraturhuset overlooking the river. On other nights we enjoyed meals at Fabel at our own leisure which was a good time to catch up with old friends.

The closing ceremony was an event the likes of which I have never seen at an animation festival. Usually they are full of speeches with a film shown before or after the presentations and then the winning films screened for anyone left in the theatre who has not rushed to the closing night party for a drink.

Festival Director Anders Narverud Moen knows how to put on an awards ceremony that was guaranteed to keep the audience wide awake and full of surprises. Of course the most important thing was to award the Golden Gunnar Awards, but our host, or should I say hostess, Remi Johansen Hovda aka Nabi Yeon Geisha, stole the show. He/she is an entertaining drag artist from Oslo. Between awards presentations Nabi sang, danced, told jokes and created a festive atmosphere, not to mention the numerous costume changes that she made.

The festival was packed full of so many screenings and events that it was impossible to see everything but the film programs and presentations that I did get to see were excellent.

The 2019 edition of the Fredrikstad Animation Festival, Oct. 24-27, will be a very special celebration of its 25th anniversary. Submissions for the festival will open 1 May. If you are invited to attend the festival I guarantee that you will have a wonderful time. You can read more about the festival and submission rules at: www.animationfestival.no

A College Chain with a “campus” in sf has Crumbled, BUT FORMER StudentS STILL HAVE Loans to repaY
When the Education Department approved a proposal by Dream Center, a Christian nonprofit with no experience in higher education, to buy a troubled chain of for-profit colleges, skeptics warned that the charity was unlikely to succeed. What they didn't foresee was just how quickly the catastrophe would happen.

Barely a year after the takeover, dozens of campuses are nearly broke, have closed or have been sold. The affected schools were Argosy University, South University and the Art Institutes. The Art Institutes taught computer animation in SF.

The chain once had about 26,000 students in programs spanning associate degrees in dental hygiene and doctoral programs in law and psychology. Fourteen campuses, mostly Art Institute locations, have a new owner after a hastily arranged transfer involving private equity executives. More than 40 others are under the control of a court-appointed receiver who has accused school officials of trying to keep the doors open by taking millions of dollars earmarked for students.

The problems, arising amid the Trump administration's broad efforts to deregulate the for-profit college industry, began almost immediately after Dream Center acquired the schools in 2017. The charity, started 25 years ago and affiliated with a Pentecostal megachurch in Los Angeles, has a nationwide network of outreach programs for problems like homelessness and domestic violence. They saw schools as a way to expand their calling.

Now its students are stuck with credits that can't easily be transferred. In Phoenix, an unpaid landlord locked students out of their classrooms. In California, a dean advised students two months away from graduation not to invite family to attend from out of town. It turns out the US Education Department has cut off federal student loan funds after the court-appointed receiver said school officials had taken about \$13 million owed to students at 22 campuses and used it for expenses like payroll. Students have had to borrow extra money to cover things like rent and groceries.

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Special thanks also to **Nancy Denney-Phelps** for representing our chapter on the international ASIFA board, to **Emily Berk** our webmaster, to **Eihway Su** who keeps our mailing list and other records and to our treasurer **Karen Lithgow**.

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