

August, 2024



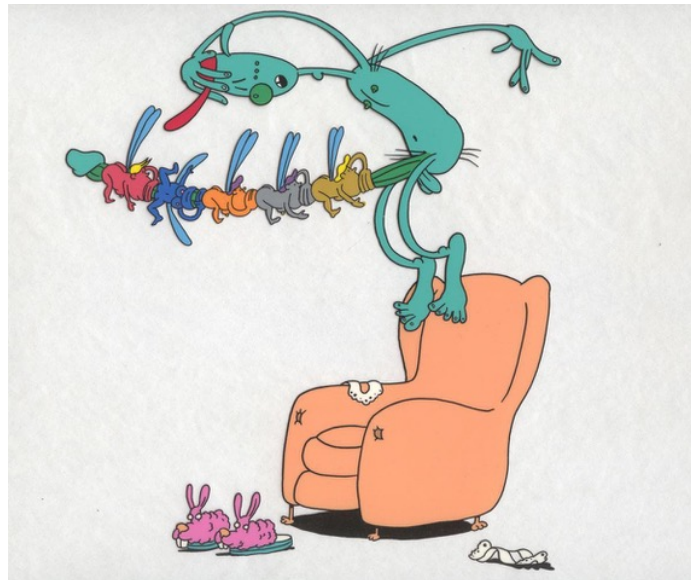
'INSIDE OUT 2' HAS BECOME THE WORLD'S TOP GROSSING ANIMATED FEATURE - ON JULY 25 IT GROSSED OVER \$1.46 BILLION WORLDWIDE, SURPASSING 'FROZEN II' AS THE TOP ANIMATED FILM EVER. On July 10 it had passed *Incredibles 2* (\$1.242 billion) to become the top-grossing Pixar feature of all time worldwide. On the 10th it was \$1,267,918,459 globally which made it **the highest grossing film of 2024**. It was the 4th highest grossing animated film, and it was closing in on *Frozen* (2013) \$1,285,048,126. Then it sailed past what had been the 2nd highest grossing animated film, *The Super Mario Bros. Movie* (2023 at \$1,361,992,475). Now it has passed *Frozen II* (2019) at \$1,453,683,476 and it is still going strong.



YES, IT IS WEIRD! – SEE "WEIRD AL" YANKOVIC'S ANIMATED 'POLKAMANIA!' MUSIC VIDEO *Polkamania!* is an animated music video featuring a medley of 15 of his previous polka tunes plus his new one *Polkamania*. The 12 animation artists/studios who created the music video images include Bill Plympton (using hand-drawn pencil animation) and Ghostbot, a Bay Area studio. The animation credits are:

Cyriak – *Helena Polka (Al's Version)*
 David Wachtenheim & W/M Animation – *Bad Guy*” & *“Shake It Off (pt. 2)*
 Augenblick Studios – *Hello*
 Ghostbot / Alan Lau, Roque Ballesteros, and Roman Laney – *Flowers*
 Jack D. Evans – *We Don't Talk About Bruno*
 Vivienne Medrano/Spindlehorse – *Vampire*
 Liam Lynch – *“Old Town Road”*
 Jarrett Heather –*Despacito & WAP*
 Bill Plympton – *Shape of You*
 Ryan Krzak – *Uptown Funk*
 KukoMitzu – *Thank U, Next*
 Victor Yerrid & Melanie Mandl – *Shake It Off (pt. 1)*

https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-iba-3&ei=UTF-8&hsimp=yhs-3&hspart=iba&p=YANKOVIC%E2%80%99S+POLKAMANIA%21&type=smff_10230_FFW_ZZ#id=2&vid=b02a896dd3e5fd089e00239c25ee13a2&action=click



ENJOY MORE FILMS WITH ANIMATED SEGMENTS CONTRIBUTED BY SEVERAL ARTISTS *Pink Komkomer*, 1991, produced by Marv Newland is a delightful film to some and a shocking, disgusting work to others. It features a soundtrack created by Marv, who made *Bambi Meets Godzilla*, and Dutch animator Paul Driessen. The naughty segments are by Marv, Paul, abstract animator Sara Petty, Academy Award nominee Janet Perlman, Alison Snowden and David Fine who are Oscar winners, Bulgarian animator Stoyan Dukov, and Craig Bartlett. https://www.filmaffinity.com/us/evidoes.php?movie_id=362271
 In **Volume 3: 1987-1993 of International Animation Collaborations**, Co-directed and Produced by David Ehrlich, it includes *Animated Self Portraits*, *Academy Leader Variations*, *Dance of Nature* and *Genghis Khan* <https://www.ehrlichanim.com/vol-3>



SF STATE'S ANIMATION PROGRAM IS WELL REPRESENTED ON A WEBSITE THAT FEATURES SHORTS CREATED AT OVER 30 COLLEGES FROM AROUND THE WORLD. This website, supported by ASIFA-Hollywood, gives kids thinking about going to college to study animation, a chance to compare the quality of what students at different schools are producing. Films come from around the world. It includes several films by recent graduates from SF State. See the 2024 ASIFA-Hollywood Student Showcase <https://studentanimationshowcase.com>



SEE A DELIGHTFUL PROMOTION FOR A MAJOR ART EXHIBIT. 'WHAT, ME WORRY?' HONORS THE ART AND HUMOR OF 'MAD' MAGAZINE It is a traveling show that is at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass. until Oct. 27, 2024. If you grew up enjoying *Mad*, it is hard to believe it is no longer in print. <https://www.nrm.org/2023/11/mad/>

THE OTTAWA INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL, North America's largest animation festival, has chosen a total of 124 projects across all categories, including shorts, features, and series. The selections were made from a total of 2,308 entries, representing 93 countries. About twenty of the films are from the U.S. OIAF 2024 will take place from September 25-29 in Ottawa, Canada. For details on how to attend, visit animationfestival.ca.



DC'S 'WATCHMEN CHAPTER I,' THE ANIMATED FEATURE DEBUTS AUGUST 13 FOR DIGITAL PURCHASE, AND AUGUST 27 ON 4K ULTRA HD AND BLU-RAY The film takes place in an alternate world, where the murder of a government sponsored superhero draws his outlawed colleagues out of retirement, into a mystery that threatens their lives and the world itself. It is based on a graphic novel by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons.

MARVEL'S 'CAPTAIN AMERICA: BRAVE NEW WORLD' TEASER TRAILER It looks like it will deliver lots of the action that fans want to see it. Harrison Ford looks ancient. It opens Feb. 14, 2025. <https://www.avn.com/news/marvel-drops-captain-america-brave-new-world-teaser-trailer>

DREAMWORKS' 'SHREK 5' SET TO OPEN JULY 1, 2026 Same basic cast and lots more farts.



THE LAS VEGAS SPHERE IS A NEW KIND OF THEATER DESIGNED TO DAZZLE THE PUBLIC WITH ANIMATED “EYE CANDY” The company MSG Sphere Venues (owned by Madison Square Garden Entertainment) is behind this giant dome theatre in Las Vegas. It is the largest spherical structure in the world, at 336 feet tall and 516 feet wide. It is being used to present “radical new forms of entertainment” and it can accommodate up to 20,000 spectators at once. It opened in 2023.

Construction costs were estimated at \$1.826 billion at one point according to the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, but I also read, “It has also developed the world’s largest construction budget overrun, ballooning from an initial projection of \$1.2 to \$2.2 billion and counting.” “The dome is covered both inside and out with high-definition LED material. The Las Vegas Sphere has a record 160,000-square-foot wraparound LED display on the interior, while the exterior is coated with a record 580,000-square-foot LED display. Both screens can present 16K-by-16K picture resolution. It turns out former Obscura Digital employees, an innovative San Francisco company that was bought out by MSG, helped create this mammoth space. MSG has also constructed a smaller prototype, the Burbank Dome, that is just under 100 feet high. The company has announced they are developing plans for a London site.



Tickets for their film *The Sphere Experience - Postcard from Earth* range in price from \$86 to \$99. Tickets for their live concerts with **Dead and Company** range in price from \$195 to astronomical prices (over \$2,000 on some nights). See lots of videos and still images at: <https://www.bing.com/search?q=las+vegas+dome+sphere&pc=GD08&form=GDCCSB&ptag=12065>



THE NETFLIX SERIES 'EXPLODING KITTENS' WAS BASED IN PART ON A CAT EXORCISM Netflix 9-part series *Exploding Kittens* was partly based on “an old girlfriend’s schizophrenic cat, who got so disturbing that a priest was called to exorcise its demons.” The premise is “the ultimate fight between good and evil.” Somehow two deities are trapped inside the bodies of two chubby house cats. There is a God cat that is tasked with turning around a dysfunctional family through empathy, and a Devil cat, a destructive anti-Christ, that stirs up trouble as the destructive anti-Christ. In episode 5 the family gets

to go back in time and undo their most regrettable moment. The executive producers are Mike Judge of *Beavis and Butthead* and Greg Daniels of *King of the Hill*. <https://www.awn.com/animationworld/divine-purr-suasion-exploding-kittens-turns-feline-deities-comedy-stars>

ABIGAIL DISNEY IS A PERSON THAT THE NATIONAL PRESS LIKES TO QUOTE Abigail Disney, one of the heirs to the Disney family fortune and a major Democratic party donor, announced she would withhold donations unless Biden dropped out of the race. “This is realism, not disrespect,” She told CNBC, “If Biden does not step down the Democrats will lose. Of that I am absolutely certain. The consequences for the loss will be genuinely dire.” Earlier this year the national press quoted her several times as the Disney family fought off a hostile attempt by two billionaires to win seats on the Disney Corporation’s board.



DREAMWORKS PUTS A FEATURETTE FOR ‘WILD ROBOT’ ONLINE Universal’s new feature opens Sept. 28. It’s a world full of cute lovable animals, but does the lifeless looking robot appeal to you? <https://www.awn.com/news/dreamworks-animation-drops-wild-robot-featurette>

WHAT YOU CAN BUY WITH A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR CEO’S INCOME “Willow Bay and her husband, Disney CEO Bob Iger, have entered into a definitive agreement to acquire the Angel City Football Club for \$250m. The purchase makes the L.A.-based soccer team the most valuable women’s sports team in the world. The couple will invest an additional \$50m to support the club’s future growth. Bay, who is the dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, will serve on and have full control of the ACFC Board of Directors.”

IT MAY NOT BE YOUR FAVORITE ANIMATED SERIES, BUT ‘DESPICABLE ME’ IS THE HIGHEST GROSSING ANIMATED FRANCHISE OF ALL TIME The new sequel is off with a strong start. Illumination and Universal’s *Despicable Me 4*, opened in theaters across the U.S. on the five-day 4th of July holiday weekend and grossed around \$120m. It is the sixth film in the *Despicable Me/Minions* series, which combined ranks as the top-grossing animated franchise of all time. The critics at *Rotten Tomatoes* gave the latest feature it a 53%, but the audience poll was a 90%.

SAG-AFTRA STRIKE AGAINST MAJOR VIDEO GAME STUDIOS SETTLED For close to two years, SAG-AFTRA has been in talks with major video game companies on a new contract agreement that would cover voice and performance capture workers on titles from Disney Character Voices, Activision Blizzard, Electronic Arts, Warner Bros. Games, Insomniac Games and other companies. After a strike vote was called the companies saw the wisdom of settling.



SKYDANCE IS ACQUIRING PARAMOUNT The company is run by David Ellison, chairman and chief executive officer and Jeff Shell, president. Ellison is the son of Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison, the fifth-richest person on the planet. His current net worth is \$180 billion. Skydance’s animation unit is run by former Disney and Pixar chief creative officer John Lasseter, who is likely to take on a more significant role in Paramount’s animation operations if the deal is finalized. Paramount owns Nickelodeon Animation Studios, Paramount Animation, and CBS Eye Animation Productions. Paramount owns major cartoon and comic characters including *Spongebob Squarepants*, *Garfield*, *Beavis & Butt-head*, *Ren & Stimpy*, *Fairly Oddparents*, *Daria*, *Dora the Explorer*, *Doug*, and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. It also owns the Terrytoons library, which includes characters like *Mighty Mouse*, *Heckle and Jeckle*, *Gandy Goose* and *Sourpuss*, *Deputy Dawg*, *Flebus*, and *Tom Terrific*.

IS THIS TYPICAL OF WHAT SKYDANCE IS GOING TO OFFER? <https://www.awn.com/news/netflix-drops-terminator-zero-anime-series-teaser-trailer>

AWFUL GROAN OF THE MONTH: Did you hear that the Secret Service yelled to Trump “Donald Duck?”

A FEW FESTIVALS IN THE US ARE OUTRAGEOUSLY EXPENSIVE, BUT THEY ARE DESIGNED TO HAND MOST PEOPLE WHO ENTER PRIZES (BUT AWARD STATUES ARE EXTRA) The Collision Award, a new festival, handed out over 150 awards in July. Submissions costs between \$125 – 275. What is the importance of winning a Collision Award? And winners have to pay an additional cost to receive physical awards. The group dishing out these awards also runs the long-running Telly Awards. In Europe almost all animation festivals are free to enter and they present only a few top prizes but the prizes include generous sums of cash, services and software.



'BOOP! THE MUSICAL' IS A BOUND FOR BROADWAY It had a pre-Broadway run in Chicago in last December and revisions are being made. I'm told it was over three hours long and evidently had too many subplots. It starts in a black and white world where Betty is tired of making cartoons. Grampy puts her in a time machine and sends her to a present day Comicon in NY City. She ends up traveling back and forth between the cartoon world and real world.

No NY cast has been announced. Jerry Beck wrote me, "I'm moderating a panel about this and Boop in general with Mark Fleischer and other Fleischer relatives at the San Diego Comic Con next week." (His talk was on July 27th). Previews begin in NYC March 11, 2025. The average customer

review of the Chicago production was: ★★★★★ (4.4 Stars). See a trailer and interview https://playbill.com/article/boop-the-betty-boop-musical-dates-broadway-bow?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=PlaybillPost_Fringeship



'HANNA AND BARBERA CONVERSATIONS' IS AN IMPORTANT COLLECTION OF HISTORIC ARTICLES ABOUT THE TEAM THAT CHANGED THE HISTORY OF ANIMATION Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera are important to the history of animation, but they are not personally that well known. The public mainly knows their TV cartoon series but very little about the men that created those entertaining works. This book goes behind the scenes to explore what happened when Joe, a talented animation script and gag writer, and Bill, a brilliant animation director teamed up in 1939 and created what became 60 years of extremely popular family entertainment.

'Hanna and Barbara Conversations' is a collection of over 40 articles dealing with different phases in Hanna's and Barbera's long career in animation. Among the entries are short publicity items that were written to promote their animated products to the public and a lovingly written appreciation of Joseph Barbera's life. Then there are meaty articles that tell how Hanna and Barbera's work developed over the years. Michael Barrier's highly informative account of their becoming a team and creating the Tom and Jerry series (114 cartoons, 14 Oscar nominations and 7 wins), plus appearances in three features (*Anchors Aweigh* (1945) and *Invitation to Dance* (1956) with Gene Kelly, and *Dangerous When Wet* (1953) with Ester Williams. This is just one of the articles covering their accomplishment prior to MGM terminating the animation department without giving advanced notice in 1957.

The conversation with Mike Lah details his entering the animation industry in 1924 and joining Harman-Ising to produced their cartoons for MGM. In 1937 MGM opened their own studio. Lah work with Hanna-Barbera's unit until Tex Avery joins the studio in 1941. He loved working with Tex, who made things more exciting by speeding up the timing between gags. Tex's more rapid timing also shows up in the Tom and Jerry series.

The book includes lots of other first-person accounts about the ways of how other important people contributed to Bill and Joe's careers. Ed Benedict talks about simply being asked to design a dog and a cat for a cartoon. This vague idea turned out to become *Ruff and Ready* (156 episodes made between 1957 - 1960), their first limited-animation made for TV. Their first TV contract was for five five-minute cartoons, they were paid \$3,000 for each one. That meant they had to develop their version of limited animation. Mike Lah joined them as they were developing *Ruff and Ready* resulting in his playing a key role in the development of their cost-cutting limited animation technique.

The book goes on to discuss the series of hits that came after *Ruff and Ready*: *Huckleberry Hound Show*, 1958 - 1961; *The Quick Draw McGraw Show*, 1959 - 1961; *The Flintstones*, 1960 - 1966; *The Yogi Bear Show*, 1961 - 1962; and *Top Cat*, 1961 - 1962. Dozens of other cartoon series followed including *The Jetsons*, *Johnny Quest*, *Scooby-Doo*, *Where Are You!* and *The Smurf*. (Wikipedia lists 175 series plus several kinds specials and other projects.)

The collections contributors talk about Hanna and Barbera's approach to animated content made for TV, a philosophy that came to dominate TV cartoons for kids/families in the final third of the 20th Century. In an article in their studio's short-lived newsletter, Bill and Joe say their work aims to "project warmth and good feeling. We spoof lots of things, Hollywood, cars, television and even our television commercials. However, we don't see anything funny in violence or sin. Even our villains are nice guys. We have never attempted to educate youngsters nor preach to them. We have just tried to entertain."

What this implies is polite a rejection of some of the humor that made their work for MGM so successful, cartoon violence and social commentary (such as their racially tinged cartoon *The Zoot Cat*, 1944), . That use of violence would make their Tom and Jerry cartoons controversial once parents began to complain about violent cartoons on TV. They also avoided what might be controversial subject matter to some people, such as Jay Ward's Rocky and Bullwinkle spoofing cold war politics (for example, having characters like Boris and Natasha). Once the Hanna-Barbera's approach to TV cartoons was established, advertiser played it safe and no longer hired the Jay Ward studio to make animated series for children. (Ward stayed in business doing profitable TV commercial.)

One of the unexpected insights I got from reading the book is how different the quality of writing is depending on whom they are writing for. There is critical writing, factual content by people who worked on the films, publicity statements, and gushing fans. Together the pieces give rare glimpses into the careers of Bill (William) Hanna and Joseph Barbera.

The book was compiled by Tyler Solon Williams an assistant professor in the Department of Media Studies at the University of Virginia, and Kevin Sandler is associate professor in the Film and Media Studies Program at Arizona State University. Tyler's doctoral dissertation, available online, is "Understanding the Early Television Cartoon." Kevin is editor of *Reading the Rabbit: Explorations in Warner Bros. Animation*. *Hanna Barbera Conversations* is published by the University Press of Mississippi (April 23, 2024) and it retails for \$30.



I'VE BEEN ASKED TO LET PEOPLE WHO KNEW TONY REVEAUX THAT HE DIED IN MID-JULY Tony came to the Bay Area to do graduate work at the SF Art Institute (MFA) and went on to teach at UC Santa Cruz where he initiated film studies program. He also taught at SF State, Sonoma State and the SF Art Institute. He was also an early member of our ASIFA chapter.

Reveaux wrote for a lot of publications including *Artweek*, *Microtimes*, *Computer Currents*, *Visions*, *Newmedia*, *MediaDirect CD-ROM (Japan)*, *Film Quarterly*, *TV Technology*, *Entertainment Design*, *Virtual Reality World*, *Computer Gaming World* and *Film/Tape World*. He reviewed lots of computer books, he loved writing reviews of cutting-edge theatre productions, and he authored two books, *Cool Mac Clip Art Plus!* and with co-author Gene Steinberg, *How to do Everything with iMovie*.

Tony was a socially concerned independent filmmaker whose work included the short *Peace March*, 1976. A feature film he was proud to have been part of is Chris Marker's *San Soliel*, 1983. He helped Marker as an assistant and location scout when he was filming in the Bay Area. He also worked on numerous multimedia design and production projects for the Oakland Museum, SF Conservatory of Music, IATSE, SSU, SFSU Multimedia Studies Program, University Art Museum Berkeley and the Cinnabar Theater. He helped develop websites at StudioFX.

I can't remember how we first met, but we both were involved with Canyon Cinema and ASIFA-SF (the Bay Area's chapter of ASIFA, the International Animation Association). He came to a few of the shows I presented at Intersection for the Arts when it was in North Beach. We both enjoyed unusual adventures from spending a hot day at a waterslide park to outrageous Suicide Club outings including a giant party in an abandoned factory on one occasion and a party in an abandoned government warehouse on another evening. He also enjoyed discovering unusual restaurants and frequented a wonderful Burmese restaurant several times a year with friends (long before it received its present honors).

Several years ago, he began to have health problems so he retired and moved into an independent living complex in San Rafael. He had a cancer that spread slowly... His friend Jeanne Thomas flew in from Montana to help. Since she had met me years ago, she asked me to contact people. Tony is survived by a brother who lives in Connecticut.

If you wish to share a memory or two about tony, please send it to me. I'll run it in the Sept. newsletter and pass it on to Jeanne Thomas who will write an official obit for the press in late Aug. when she returns from a tour as a performance artist.



Death March by Jan Hartman, 1926 – 2009 (Czech) Jan began a series of paintings which reflected his experience in Nazi concentration camp soon after he was liberated. "I think it was in '45, I must have done them as quickly as I possibly could, because it was my way of expressing what I had seen."

HOLOCAUST ANIMATION UPDATE, PART 2 BY KARL COHEN Last month's newsletter discussed the first appearances of animated Holocaust films. They are from Poland and are intense at times, but since they are not photographic images, they are easier to look at. It wasn't until the end of the 20th Century animated Holocaust films began to appear in other countries. At least two films explored Holocaust related subject matter without the anger and harshness found in the Polish works, which makes them more appealing to the public.

The *Diary of Anne Frank*, directed by Akinori Nagaoka, 1995, is a family film that used rotoscoping, tracing over live action footage to draw the characters in the film. The film depicts Anne's life up until the family is escorted away at gun point to concentration camps. That is followed by a title card that says she died of typhus shortly before the camp was liberated. The film won an award at the Chicago International Children's Festival. Both the trailer and complete feature are on YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vByfXI_fYJ4

Silence, by Sylvie Bringas and Orly Yadin, 1998, UK, 19 minutes is also a gentle work that honors a woman who didn't survive. The short was shown on Channel 4 TV in the UK. The story was inspired by the life of Tana Ross' mother before she was taken to Auschwitz in 1942. It is on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQcJfUyo1R4>

At the turn of the new century, it appears there wasn't much interest in animated films referring to the Holocaust. I couldn't find any references to examples that were released between 1999 and 2009. Perhaps the world's attention was too concerned with the new military conflicts that sprang up in the Middle East, Africa and around Afghanistan. I suspect that as those conflicts dragged on and on, people began to get disgusted and frustrated with hearing about "forever wars." The old adage that the last justifiable war was WWII reemerged, perhaps rekindling an interest in the atrocity known as the Holocaust.

Since 2009 there have been over 40 films that have been made, with over 20 of them being released in the last five years. Many were adequately funded by well-established institutions which shows that there is an audience for serious animated films for adults. Many were produced to be shown on TV in several countries including the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, Israel and Italy. Most are educational and are visually quite creative. Some have won awards at major film festivals.

You can't stereotype animated Holocaust films. Most are based on factual accounts and are made to educate the public. As for the stories, some are firsthand accounts by either those who were interned and survived, or by people who discussed loved ones who were taken away and were never heard from again. Other films depict specific events or places including the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the wretched "death trains." There are also unique sophisticated, impressive works of art with messages woven into them. Discovering these films can be fascinating including those with unusual plot twists and other surprises.

The films are entertaining stories about human rights, social injustices and other issues that may make you reflect upon and confront your own beliefs and values. As a result, non-profit foundations, TV networks and other groups have supported the production of these films, making it possible for the genre to flourish. These are defiantly socially significant films.

The personal stories

The largest category of animated Holocaust films are personal stories.



Ruth: A Little Girl's Big Journey, by Eyal Resh, 2021, USC Shoah Foundation. This award-winning animated short is narrated by the late Dr. Ruth Westheimer (1928 – 2024) who tells how she, as a young Jewish child, escaped Nazi Germany and survived the Holocaust. Her family sent her to live and to be educated in a Catholic boarding school in Switzerland. She lived on, but her parent, who stayed behind to care for her ailing grandmother, died in a concentration camp. Ruth became a famous sex therapist, TV talk show host, author and professor. The short is online at <https://sfi.usc.edu/ruth>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5RVBCAX6IE>

Charlotte. 2021. Tahir Rana, Éric Warin, France, Canada. An independently produced biography of German-Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon (1917-1943). The feature length biography ends with her death in Auschwitz. A trailer is posted online. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2vxfqi_o

Numbers on Great-Grandpa's Arm, directed by Amy Schatz. 2017, rotoscoped animation by Jeff Scher, produced for HBO, 2017. This film is a conversation between a boy and his great-grandfather, an Auschwitz survivor. He recalls an enjoyable childhood in Poland until the Nazis took control of the country. First, the Jews were forced to wear yellow stars. Then they were confined into crowded ghettos. Ultimately families were separated and sent to Auschwitz and other camps. He also mentions a notorious death march* and that vast numbers of people didn't survive the ordeal. It ends with his starting a new life in America. It was made to introduce a new generation to the Holocaust. The opening sequence is online for free and it can be rented online or purchased.

(*Note: Death marches were forced evacuations of concentration camps that happened as the allied forces advanced. Some writers speculate the Nazis didn't want the world to know about the deplorable treatment of prisoners, that they wanted to retain prisoners to continue production of war materials and/or they may have thought the prisoners could be used later as hostages to trade for their safe passage.)



The Star of Andra and Tati, 2019, produced by Rai Ragazzi and Larcadarte, directed by Rosalba Vitellaro and Alessandro Belli with drawings by Annalisa Corsi, it tells the story of two Italian sisters, Andra and Tatiana Bucci, ages 4 and 6, who survived Auschwitz. An article about the film online said of the 200,000 children taken there, only 50 returned home alive. The 26-minute film also includes recent footage of kids visiting Auschwitz with their teacher. It aired on TV in Italy and Israel and has been used in schools. It is not online.

Eva Kor: The Holocaust Survivor who Forgave the Nazis, BBC, ca 2018, 7 minutes. Kor's family was arrested in 1944 and she and her twin sister were subjected to medical experiments by the notorious Dr. Mengele. Both sisters were eventually freed from Auschwitz by the allies, while Dr. Mengele became a hunted war criminal who eluded being captured. He died in Brazil in 1979. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1vHQKc_Jim



My Father's Secrets, 2023, directed by Véra Belmont, France, Belgium, 74 minutes. "A heartrending yet deeply uplifting tale of remembrance, love and the triumph of the human spirit." Described as "an intimate, thought-provoking feature that focuses on a family's journey to reconciliation after facing the trauma of the Holocaust." Michel's father survived Auschwitz and returned to his native Belgium where he married and raised four children. The story focuses on his family learning to understand their father's past as they grow up. Elliott Gould is one of the voice actors. It is based on the autobiographical novel by author/cartoonist Michel Kichka. 74 min. Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yzLBR_wjR4



Traces: Portraits of Resistance, Survival and Resolve was a BBC program that aired in 2022. It featured three animated films: *Voices in the Void*, *Two Trees in Jerusalem*, and *My Father's War*. They are first-hand testimonies from the Holocaust, "stories and lessons learned during one of humanity's darkest chapters and to demonstrate their relevance to the present." The films were produced by Humanity in Action.

The three films are:

Voices in the Void, 2022, 18 min. As a teenager, Rabbi Bent Melchior went into hiding with his family to escape Nazi deportation. The rabbi's story is about heroism, survival, and the Danish citizens who took exceptional steps to save their neighbors. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZy1U2zybechr>

Two Trees in Jerusalem 2022, 27 min. An animated documentary that profiles the remarkable history of Eberhard and Donata Helmrich, who together saved the lives of countless Jews during the Holocaust. The trailer and the complete TV film are posted online. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQ3Npe6T_Sw

My Father's War, 2022, 26 min. It focuses on the lives of Peter Hein and his son David. As a Jewish toddler in the Netherlands in the 1940s, Peter was separated from his parents, Jewish refugees from Germany. They moved from hiding place to hiding place to escape deportation and death. They were lucky, but of the 25,000 Jews who hid in the Netherlands, about a third were eventually betrayed by Nazi collaborators.

Decades later, after David's father's mental health buckled under the weight of his memories, David attempted to forge his own path fighting genocide in the Balkans. The film reveals the hereditary trauma of the Holocaust: the deep emotional wounds of forefathers passed on to their children and grandchildren. Narrated by both Peter and David, the film depicts an inter-generational conversation, reverberating across the decades. Trailer: [My Father's War \(2022\) – Official Trailer – Holocaust Documentary Short Film \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My_Father's_War_(2022)_-Official_Trailer_-_Holocaust_Documentary_Short_Film)



Children of the Holocaust: Drawn from Memory, 2023, made for BBC 2, shown by PBS in the US. The production used live action, photos, drawn art, and

minimal movement. Meet Susan, Manfred and Ivor, some of the Holocaust's last living survivors. When they were young, they were among the millions of people sent to labor and concentration camps. The film includes insights into one of the darkest periods in world history and how they escaped to Britain. Google: [FRONTLINE | Children of the Holocaust: Drawn from Memory | PBS](#)

Why This Soldier Actually Volunteered for Auschwitz, 2020, 6 minutes. Produced for *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The soldier volunteered to get arrested so he could be sent to a camp and send intelligence reports back to the allies. The artwork is quite simple and it isn't clear when the story took place. Auschwitz opened in 1940 as a forced labor camp and the extermination facilities went into service in 1942. Google: [Why This Soldier Actually Volunteered For Auschwitz - YouTube](#)

I was a Child of Holocaust Survivors, 2010, by Ann Marie Fleming, was produced by the National Film Board of Canada, 15 minutes. It is set after the war and Fleming's father has died. It reflects on her parent's life during the war and how after the war their experiences influenced Ann's later life. There are wonderful moments in it when her parents get together and celebrate with fellow survivors. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDr434wxb90>

The ghettos

A Jewish Girl in Shanghai, 2010, written by Wu Lin and based on her graphic novel of the same name. The feature explores living in the Shanghai Ghetto in Japanese-occupied Shanghai during WWII. It tells the story of two Jewish refugees, who escaped Europe without their parents, and how A-Gen, a Chinese orphan boy, helps them survive. The film is posted on YouTube <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/ajewishgirlinshanghai>. (Note: About 20,000 to 30,000 Jewish refugees, who escaping the Nazis, lived in a crowded section of the city before and during WWII. It was called both the Shanghai Ghetto and Shanghai's Little Vienna.)



Seven Minutes in the Warsaw Ghetto by John Oettinger, 2012, Denmark, 8 min. This stop-motion puppet film is set in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942. In the film the boy peeks through a hole in the ghetto wall and sees a carrot lying on the sidewalk just on the other side. He tries to pull the carrot through the hole, unaware that two SS men are following his every move.

The dark gothic tones and the cracked skin of the puppet symbolize his hardship and suffering. The film is based on an actual event and captures the harsh reality of ghetto life without offering a feeling of relief at the end. It has been in over 120 international film festivals, has won several awards and a clip is on Vimeo. It can be rented online for \$2.



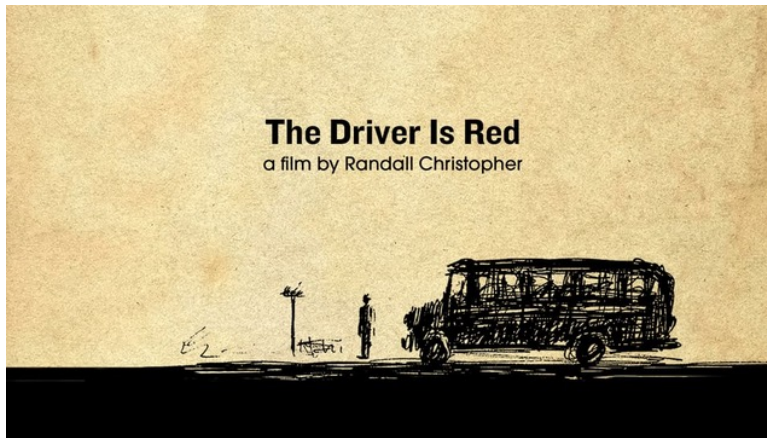
The Sleeplessness of Jutka, Maria Görlich-Opyd, 2023, Poland, 17 minutes. Jutka is a rebellious seven-year-old who assumed she was just visiting her grandparents in Łódź; however, she isn't able to leave. She is in the Łódź Ghetto and she has no idea where her parents are. Her grandfather tries to explain the world to her by comparing it to the story of Minotaur. In his version Łódź becomes the ancient labyrinth and the Nazis are the monster. When they begin to hunt children in her neighborhood, she must follow the advice of her grandfather in order to escape. See clips at <https://egofilm.pl/en/projects/the-sleeplessness-of-jutka/>

Kristallnacht (the night of broken glass) and its aftermath

Brutus by Svetlana Filippova, 2014, made at the Shar school-studio in Russia, 13 minutes. Before the film's title appears, we see newsreel footage of a Jew being chased by a crowd while a policeman seems to pay no attention. The shot of a store with a smashed glass window is a reference to Kristallnacht, an organized night where thugs were told to smash glass windows of stores run by Jew and to raise hell to demonstrate their hatred of them. It was a major escalation of the Nazi anti-Jewish campaign and it foreshadowed things to come.

The animator used dogs in the film to remind people what happened after **Kristallnacht**. Jewish people were forced to give up all their beloved pets as a not-so-subtle act of cruelty. The film that follows after the title is an animated work that is open for interpretation. Nancy Denney-Phelps, the friend who told me about this film, said, "I think that it is a powerful holocaust film because it shows how the Nazi's were able to turn a nation into a group of haters. Brutus, the dog, is a symbol of how a nation was brain washed." The bleak mood of the film is enhanced by Svetlana using charcoal on tracing paper. It gives the characters and space a coarse rough look. **Brutus+by+Svetlana+Filippova.&sca_esv=4f51d50d19ec06b0&source**

Dramas



An impressive dramatic experience is *The Red Driver* by Randall Christopher, 2017, U.S. 14 minutes. It is an excellent animated true-crime drama set in Argentina in 1960. It follows an Israeli secret agent, Zvi Aharoni, as he hunts for one of the highest-ranking Nazi war criminals on the run. Whom did he discover living in a remote shack in the outskirts of Buenos Aires? He claimed his name was Ricardo Klement. When Ricardo's true identity was revealed, the capture of Adolph Eichmann made headline news around the world. This suspenseful work can be seen for free online. It has been shown by over 100 film festivals including Sundance 2018, and it has won 41 awards. <https://vimeo.com/373035834>

Aufseherin by Wilbert van Veldhuizen, 2016, 5.5 minutes. This drama is based on a true story about a young woman in the Dutch resistance who was arrested by the Nazi police in 1944. It was made as a graduation film at HKU University for the Arts, Utrecht, and it has an unexpected ending, <https://vimeo.com/193062408?>



Where is Anne Frank, Ari Folman. Belgium, 2021, 99 min. Kitty, the imaginary girl that Anne wrote to in her diary, seeks out the deceased Anne. That results in Kitty inspiring the public to demand social justice reforms for refugees. "Folman uses a well-known story from a fresh angle while powerfully placing it in the context of the horrific tragedy that surrounds it." (from IMDB). *Variety* said, "The *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) director examines the Jewish author's legacy, speculating on how Anne Frank might feel about the mistreatment of refugees in Europe today." It was previewed at the Cannes Film Festival. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3454424/>

A handsome educational film for kids



[The Tattooed Torah](#) by Marc Bennett, narrated by Ed Asner, 2019, 21 minutes. This is a lovely animated short based on a popular book for young children. The story is about a child who lovingly made his own personal copy of the *Torah*, but the Nazis confiscate it. It has a happy ending of course. Publicity for the film says it is used to teach the importance of the *Torah* and about the Holocaust “without frightening kids.” The artwork is quite attractive and the film has won several festival awards. Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6botlbi1xIQ>

Creating serious works of animation as a fine art

Strings, 2017, Erin Morris, 2017, Falmouth University, UK. 3 minutes. The film was inspired by the work of Amnon Weinstein, a restorer of violins from the Holocaust. Musicians who use them today are honoring the memory of the artists who created moments of pleasure in those troubled times.

The film is a handsome work of art with curved lines that flow with the music. The images that are briefly formed by the lines, might be visual symbols that the viewer is left to interpret. Some images may suggest concentration camp buildings. Others might refer to violin strings breaking or perhaps to violence or death. This pleasant film was animated using TV Paint software. <https://vimeo.com/220114594>



Humo (Smoke), 2023, directed by Rita Basulyo, Mexico, 12 minutes. A somber, emotionally moving work of art made using puppets. The innocent young boy is in a concentration where people he sees leave, but don't come back. The film is dedicated “to our lost children” and it is an adaptation of the illustrated children's book *Humo* by Antón Fortes. It was nominated for an Annie award for best short and was on the short list of animate shorts that were being considered for Oscar nominations. A trailer is online. <https://www.animationmagazine.net/2023/08/humo-wins-oscar-qualifying-hollyshorts-award/>

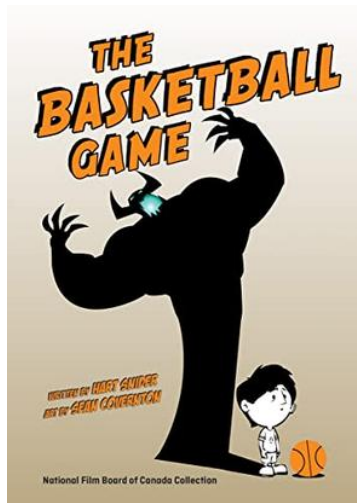


Letter to a Pig images courtesy of Miyu Productions



Letter to a Pig by Tal Kantor from Israel, 2024 Oscar nomination. A Holocaust survivor is telling students in a classroom how a pig saved his life when German soldiers were searching a barn. One girl listening to the man's story sinks into a surreal fantasy while listening. The images become a stunning twisted journey. The film is primarily black and white, with live-action characters seen layered into 2D linework and shading. As memories intensify, details of eyes and skin wrinkles reveal themselves out of the white backgrounds but then fade again into the background. The trailer is online.

Holocaust deniers



The Basketball Game by Hart Snyder, 2012, National Film Board of Canada, 5 minutes, is an excellent film that promotes tolerance using humor to teach kids about antisemitism, Holocaust deniers, and hate speech. The film is based on an actual event in the director's life, his going to Jewish summer camp for the first time. When he volunteered to be on the basketball team, he didn't know the camp was going to play kids from a town where their teacher had been fired for spreading his anti-Semitic misinformation. When he finds out, he is uneasy confronting a team that had been told the Holocaust was a hoax along with other misinformation. Young Hart is terrified with the idea that he is about to meet an evil antisemitic enemy. What transpires is "a poignant tale of the power of community as a means to rise above hatred and bigotry." It is a delightful film and it is posted online. https://www.nfb.ca/film/basketball_game/
Coming next month, films about other Holocausts/Atrocities

ANIFILM 2024 — LIBEREC

7 – 12 May 2024, Liberec, Czech Republic
BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF ANIMATION
 By Nancy Denny-Phelps

I have not visited Anifilm since the festival moved from Trebon to Liberec. When I attended this year, changes were immediately apparent. Trebon is a small spa town with limited screening rooms while Liberec is the fifth largest city in the Czech Republic. Once home to a thriving textile industry, it earned the nickname "the Manchester of Bohemia". This year Anifilm was very spread out with four cinemas and screenings at the Liberec Exhibition and Trade Center.

Puppetry and puppet animation are key pillars of Czech cultural heritage; this year the festival devoted a great deal of screen time to manipulated puppets and films with marionettes controlled by puppeteers. There were two short film programs, eight feature films, and a special program put together by DIAF (German Institute of Animated Films) of films by the DEAF Atelier in Dresden.

The first known example of Czech puppet animation was a 1930 commercial for cast iron enameled bathtubs. In the five-minute film, distributed to theatres, Spejbl forces his son, Hurvinek, to take a bath every Saturday in a wooden trough. His son protests, saying that the trough is unfit for bathing and he might even get a splinter in his body. He also reminds his father that he promised to buy a new bathtub. Spejbl relents and Hurvinek soon bathes in a new modern cast iron bath tub. *Spejbl's Case* was part of the first Manipulated Puppets program.



Also in the screening was Brazilian director Guilherme Marcondes' 2006 puppet animation based on William Blake's poem *The Tyger*. In the film, a

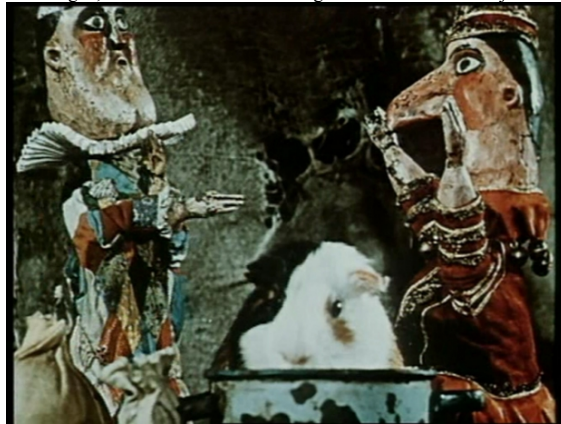
gigantic tiger (a gigantic articulated wooden puppet) mysteriously wanders into a city, revealing hidden secrets of the townspeople in his nocturnal wandering



The last film in the program, *Don Juan*, was Jan Svankmajer's 1969 interpretation of the Don Juan legend. This amazing film is about a man who kills his father, his fiancé's father, and his own brother before meeting his demise. For this thirty-minute masterpiece, he used life-sized puppets wearing full-sized clothes.



I found the second program of short manipulated puppet films even more interesting than the first one. It opened with Emil Radok's 1958 film *Johanes Doctor Faust*. This retelling of the Faust story was the first film that Jan Svankmajer, newly graduated from the puppet department at The Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, worked on. Radok had a big influence on Svankmajer and his later work.



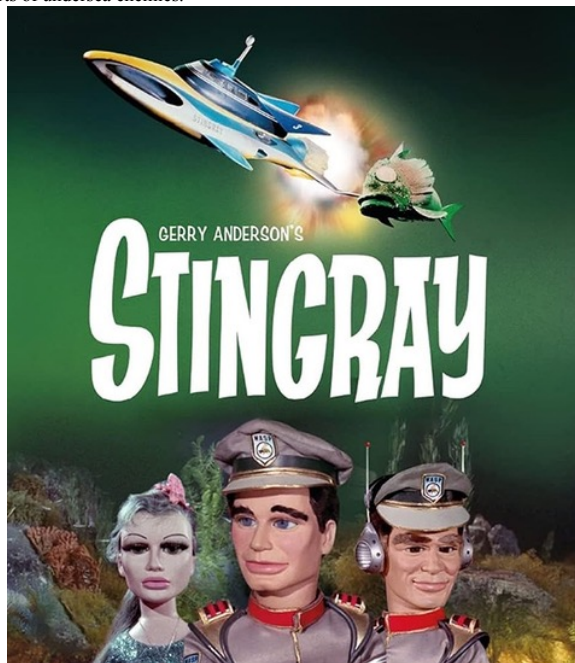
To commemorate Svankmajer's 90th birthday, his 1966 film *Punch and Judy* was included in the program. I especially liked the prologue to the ten-minute film where a band of automaton monkeys introduces the opening titles preceding the action. Starting slowly, we see Mister Punch taking care of his pet guinea pig. His neighbor Joey covets the guinea pig and wants to buy it. Mister Punch refuses to sell it and the violence begins hot and heavy as the two men take turns stuffing each other into a coffin. The film ends with both men dead and the guinea pig strolling away through a hole in the scenery.



Martin Maj - *Punch and Judy*

In an interesting contrast, Czech Republic director Martin Maj's 2013 film *Punch and Judy* was also shown in this program. You can't have a Punch and Judy show without an argument and here the anger is directed toward the puppeteer who forces the puppets to act violently.

The second Manipulated Puppets program sent me out of the theatre with a smile on my face after watching an episode of Sylvia and Gary Anderson's 1964 classic *Stingray* – *SIEI Stingray*. The British series about the crew of an ultra-sophisticated submarine, based off the coast somewhere in the Americas that is never specified, encounters all sorts of undersea enemies.



If *Stingray* -*SIEI* whetted your appetite for more, there was also a special tribute program to Sylvia and Gerry Anderson. During the 1960s into the 1970s, the husband-and-wife duo were a wildly popular force on British television and in the film industry. They devised a process called "supermarionation" involving the construction of marionette puppets with rigid fiberglass heads with a solenoid-based system, allowing the figures to move their mouths in time to a pre-recorded dialogue track. For the tribute screening, the 28-minute pilot episode of *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons* was shown along with the hour-long *Thunderbirds: Trapped in the Sky*. Their work may look a bit outdated and campy now, but it is still pure fun.

A highlight of the festival for me that I had never seen before was *Little Man*, a 2015 Czech Republic film by Radek Beran, based on the Magmesia Litera Award-nominated children's book *The Great Journey of the Little Man* by Jiri Stach. The Magmesia Litera Award is an annual book award held in The Czech Republic.

Little Man lives in his house in the forest, quite content with a comfortable bed and enough pasta in the cupboard to keep him fed. One night he dreams of a little house with a sign over the door that says "You will find here what you lack".

He wakes up feeling that his life is lacking something and so he sets off on a quest. In the course of his journey, he meets many quirky characters such as the robotic handyman, Little Master and the forest lake monster Great Strat. On our whirlwind adventure with Little Man, we are introduced to interesting, quirky new puppets every few minutes.



Little Man with Captain Beefheart

The film makes no pretense of hiding the strings and rods that control the puppets but I got so involved with the oddball characters and the beautiful scenery that I didn't notice them. The film was primarily shot outside in a forest.

Although the film is a children's movie, there is a lot that will go right over their heads, such as an appearance by a Captain Beefheart puppet who plays the piano, sings, and rides a motorcycle. I saw *Little Man* in a theatre packed with school children and was the only adult there except for the teachers. As the credits rolled at the end of the film the kids were singing along with Little Man and Captain Beefheart. One little boy in an end seat was dancing in the aisle. I later found out that *Little Man* was shown on Czech television and all of the children were familiar with the film.

Radek Beran's sequel to *Little Man*, *Big Man*, premiered at the festival. Many of the same quirky characters and settings from the first film reappear. Little Man is contentedly enjoying life in his forest village, running a shop with his wife Majolenka and playing in a band with friends. The villagers lead a peaceful life until Doctor Zetko, a cunning villain, appears, stirring up fear of the Deerfolk among the forest villagers. Once again Little Man must go on a quest, this time to save his beloved Majolenka, his friends, and his home. While children will enjoy the delightful characters and beautiful backgrounds, *Big Man* has a very clear message. It is about the gradual loss of freedom and the need to resist manipulation and fake news.



Big Man

Along with all of the wonderful puppet films, an exhibition *Beyond the Boundaries of Animation: Manipulated Puppets in Czech Filmmaking* at the North Bohemian Museum allowed me to see many puppets in person for the first time. The exhibition wasn't limited to classic marionettes with strings. It also included hand puppets, glove puppets, rod puppets, and puppets on strings and rods.

The centerpiece of the exhibition was *Little Man* and *Big Man*. Along with puppets from the two films I got to see Tiny's Laboratory, Majolenka's shop,

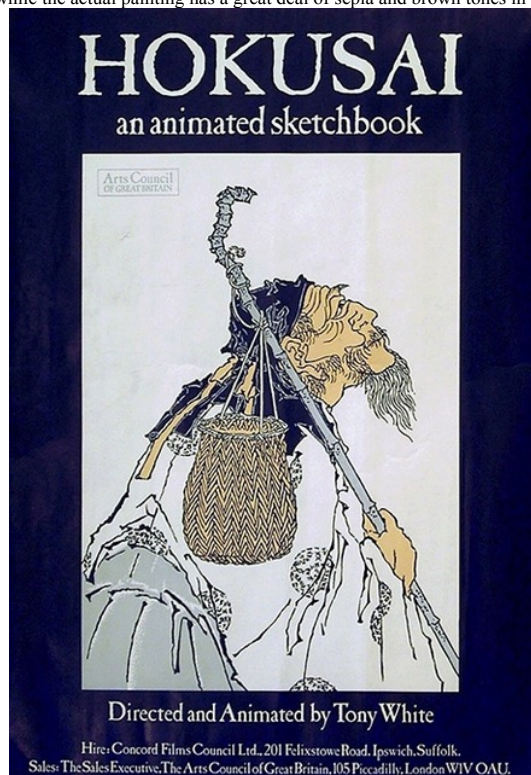
and the library from the films. A scene from Svankmajer's *Punch and Judy* and the Czech muppets, Ju and Hele were on display. The marvelous exhibition also included set designs, graphic designs, artwork, sketches, and film posters. It was a feast for the eyes of anyone who loves puppet animation.



Cyclists

Five separate programs at the festival were devoted to Fine Art Animation. They explored what fine art gives to animation and how animation can enrich works of art and add an extra dimension to it. I had already seen most of the films in the *Paintings Come to Life* screening, but it was a pleasure to watch good prints of such films as *Cyclists* by Veljko Popovic (2018) and Paul Bush's 2015 *The Five Minute Museum*.

There were also some delightful surprises in the program. I had never seen Czech director Martin Kukul's 2014 homage to Vincent van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*. In the film the painter wanders through the landscape of his painting and ends up being invited into the home of the peasant family pictured on his canvas. The film is in black and white while the actual painting has a great deal of sepia and brown tones in it.



I was also pleased to see British animator Tony White's 1978 *Hokusai - An Animated Sketchbook*. Nik and I have a copy of Hokusai's woodblock print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* on our living room wall. The 1978 animated documentary is an overview of the renowned Japanese artist's life, work and philosophy about art. The film won a BAFTA in 1979 in the Best Short Factual Film category.

The *Paintings Come To Life* program was my first opportunity to see Witold Giersz's latest film *Horse Portrait*. The film opens with a totally black screen, then a single brush spot of color appears, then more and more fill the screen to form the outline of a galloping horse. Over the course of the six-minute film, we watch horses gallop in many different techniques from realistic to abstract. Giersz has depicted horses frequently in his painterly films and has said "I love animals in general . . . horses especially, as they were a constant part of my childhood".

Mariam Kandelaki, Republic of Georgia animator, producer and founder of the Georgian Animation Association, was a member of the Anifilm short film jury. She presented a program of Georgian films as part of the *Eastern Promises* series. Debuting three years ago, the program features a group of films from countries located along Europe's Eastern Borders.

Two of Mariam's beautiful films were screened. *The Youth and the Leopard* tells the story of two grieving mothers. One is the mother of the son who kills the leopard and the other is the mother of the leopard who kills the boy. The two mothers end up consoling each other over their losses. The second film, *Abandoned Village* by Mariam, is very moving. As the morning mist slowly clears, we see an abandoned village left with decayed huts, broken fences and caved-in roofs. The 14-minute film looks like an oil painting, a still life which is sometimes delicate and at other times seen with broad brushstrokes and different light depending upon the time of the day. The village is a metaphor for a human being who is ruined if left without love.

I am a fan of Petre Tomadze's films, two of which were screened in the Georgian program. *Night Session* is based on a true story and deals with domestic violence with a macabre humorous twist. *Goderdzi* also has an unexpected twist at the end of the film when a grave digger falls in love with a grieving widow while he is digging her dead husband's grave. Anyone not familiar with Georgian animation was in for a delightful surprise while watching this program. Georgian animation is very much alive and proving to be a strong force on the animation scene.

Polish animator Wiola Sowa was a member of the Abstract and Non-Narrative Animation, Music Video, and VR Film Jury. During her presentation, she talked about her work process and screened three of her films. They included her 2007 *Refreny*, the story of three generations of women, a grandmother, her

daughter, and granddaughter. All three women have a similar experience.

She also showed her latest work *The Tenement House*, a VR piece about a tenement house where the narrator watches from her window. Along with her, the viewer wanders through the apartments which represents an interpretation of the state of mind of their occupants and the way that they communicate with the world.

Steve Woloshen, Canadian experimental filmmaker, was also on the Abstract and Non-Narrative Animation, Music Video, and VR Jury. At his screening he showed 17 of his films which he creates directly on film stock by engraving, scratching, and hand coloring. He also conducted a two-day workshop at the festival.

Belgian animator Emma de Swaef gave a masterclass giving detailed technical information on her craft as an animator creating felt puppets. One half of a team with her husband Marc James Roels, the pair have created *Oh Willy*, *This Magnificent Cake*, and the first segment of the Netflix film *The House*. Emma also brought Mable, her puppet from *The House*, clutching her tiny sister. She began her presentation with a screening of their 16-minute film *Oh Willy*.

Emma told the packed theatre that she and Marc often approach their films from a documentary perspective. As an example, when she was talking about *Oh Willy* on the screen behind her was a photo of a happy, smiling middle-aged nudist couple relaxing in their living room. She also said that she believes that stop motion is the ideal way to make a film about nudity because along with the felt puppets, it adds a layer of softness and poetry which makes the subject matter of the film less awkward for the viewer.

Listening to Emma, the hour-long Masterclass flew by. She concluded her presentation with a screening of the 44 minute *This Magnificent Cake*. Emma was also a member of the Short Film Jury.

This year the festival logo was designed by the young director, graphic artist, and animator Noemi Valentiny. Playing off of this year's theme of manipulated puppets, her artwork alluded to hands controlling puppet strings but the hands also resembled spiders. An exhibition of her work in the foyer of the Liberec Chateau, the festival center, showed the first designs that she made for the logo in dry point.

I was invited to go with the jury members on an excursion to North Bohemia's most prominent landmark, the 1,012 meter high Jested Mountain. The towering peak is topped with a television tower and a hotel. Built between 1966 and 1973, it is a truly remarkable sight and the views from the top of the peak are breathtaking. The interior of the hotel, where we were served a lovely brunch, is also quite remarkable with windows all around and a 1970s futuristic style interior décor.



In 1969, its architect Karel Hubacek became the only Czech in history to receive the prestigious Auguste Perret Prize. Named after Honorary UIA President and eminent twentieth century French architect Auguste Perret, renowned for his pioneering use of reinforced concrete, the prize rewards a body of work characterized by technological excellence.



Interior of the Jested Mountain Top Hotel

Thanks to its original design the building has received numerous accolades. It was declared a National Cultural Monument and holds the title of the most important Czech building of the 20th Century. The drive to the mountain gave me an opportunity to see the beautiful surrounding country side.

There was so much to see and do at this year's Anifilm that it was impossible to see and do everything but I packed as much into 3 ½ days as I could. I want to thank Festival Director Tomas Rychucky and Program Director Pavel Horacek for inviting me. A big thank you also goes to everyone in guest services who went well out of their way to make my visit memorable. If you ever have the good fortune to be invited to Anifilm be sure to go. Anifilm 2025 will take place from May 6 to 11.



Entrance to the festival theater

ANIMAFEST ZAGREB

03 – 08 June 2024 Zagreb, Croatia by Nancy Denny-Phelps

Countering The Dark Clouds Around Us With Humor

I always look forward to Animafest. There are wonderful screenings, excellent exhibitions, interesting guests, and a relaxed atmosphere. For one week Zagreb becomes the international center of animation. I am also very fond of the city.

The theme for this year's festival was humor, humor in all of its forms from laugh out loud funny to dark, dark humor. Each year, at the discretion of the Animafest Council, the festival honors a person who, over the years, has made an outstanding contribution to the world of animation. Given this year's festival theme it is only fitting that the 2024 Life Time Achievement Award went to the master of black humor British animator Phil Mulloy. When a Phil Mulloy film comes up on the screen, it is almost immediately recognizable for its minimalist, grotesque, and very funny style.

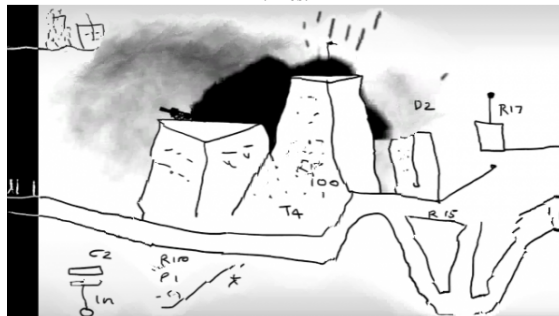


My first encounter with Phil's work was his absurdist dark trilogy *Intolerance* (2000 – 2003). His twelve-part series *The Cristies* is a black comedy. As Phil describes the series on his website, *The Cristies* trilogy is about a family who "live in Wellington Green, a picturesque English village with a church, a pond, and a cricket pitch. Outwardly Mr. Cristie is a perfect gentleman. Inwardly he is a selfish, arrogant monster. When the whole world sees him on television having sex with a French sailor, his life is changed forever. Prepare to be shocked. This film takes you from the leafy green suburbs to hell and beyond".



The Cristies

Phil's films have won numerous awards including the 2016 Animafest Zagreb Grand Prix for *Endgame*. Richard and George like to play war games over the weekend to relax after a tough week at the office. In a dispassionate atmosphere and Phil's characteristic minimalistic style, the growing brutality of the games slowly dawn on the viewer as you began to realize that what started out as a pleasant pastime has become a vicious reality. A fitting film for these turbulent times.



The Endgame

At Animafest Phil gave a Masterclass where he told the packed audience that he takes his work seriously, but he never strives for perfection. I think that it is this lack of perfection, the rough images in his films, that heightens the horrific and grotesque feeling the viewer is left with after watching one of Phil's films. If pretty is what you want, these are not the films for you, but if you enjoy films that you think about long after you have left the theatre then spend some

time watching Mulloy's films.

He also revealed that he doesn't write scripts, which allows him to carry on working without hesitating. The audience was also treated to a screening of his latest work in progress. The yet to be titled film is the story of a family who are trying to survive on the outskirts of London after the apocalypse.

Year after year I find the programming at Animafest to be of exceptionally high quality and thought provoking. This year was no exception as the festival had a number of young female animators/directors who tackled hard hitting subjects with fresh approaches. Finnish director Elli Vuorinen looked at the age-old problem of how society views and treats women in her social commentary *Flower Show*. Just as flowers are cultivated for their beautiful blooms, for generations young girls have been cultivated to be charming, the perfect wife and mother, to know their place and stay silently in it. In many societies, even today, women are not free to make their own choices, travel without a male relative, or even drive a car. Even in so called "enlightened" societies, women are still paid less than their male counterparts for doing the same job.



Flower Show is a story of females confronted with different expectations and demands. Elli uses flowers and gardening as a metaphor for society and how even though many things change, some things stay the same.

Daria Kashcheeva first came to my attention in 2017 with her graduation film *Daughter*. Among its numerous awards the film received were the Anecy Cristal for Best Graduation Film. It was also one of the five final films in the Academy Awards Best Animated Film category. I was very curious to see what Daria would create next and with *Elektra* she has not disappointed me. Blending live action and animation, the film returns to the complex father/daughter relationship that she explored in *Daughter*.



Elektra

This time the Czech film maker introduces us to an adult Elektra who is trying to come to terms with events that occurred on her tenth birthday. Mixing memories with her imagination and hidden fantasy world, she delves deeper and deeper into her childhood memories of her rebellion against her mother and the complex feelings she has for her father. During 26 minutes and 33 seconds Elektra's painful memories that she has suppressed for so long are finally revealed and the audience, along with Elektra, finally discovers what really happened during her tenth birthday.

Normally when I see that a film is over fifteen minutes, I want to run the other way. With *Elektra*, Daria has created a film that is so rich both visually and story wise that the time flew by and I didn't feel like I had watched an almost thirty-minute film. The film does need a couple of viewings to take in all of the complex visuals and story, but it is time well spent. No matter how many awards *Elektra* wins, I don't think it will make it to the Academy's final five films this year.



Wander to Wonder

Nina Gantz's latest stop motion film, *Wander to Wonder*, begins quite pleasantly with three miniature human actors, Mary, Billybud, and Fumbleton, who perform in a 1980's children television series called *Wander to Wonder*. When the creator of the series, a full-sized human who looks after the tiny actors, dies the three small people are left alone in the film studio. Unable to get out of the building, as the actors get hungrier and dirtier, they continue to make episodes of their show for their young audience. The episodes become increasingly more bazaar. The puppets are beautifully crafted and the story is eerie, but it did make me think about how much we are all dependent on other people in our own way.

I was totally charmed by Veljko and Milivoj Popovic's latest film *Zarko, You Will Spoil The Child*. The thirteen-minute film revolves around young Tisja who lives in Split, Croatia, with her parents and grandparents in the 1980's. Croatia was part of Yugoslavia at that time. Using a combination of archival photos and drawings, Tisja takes us back through her memories of the deep love she felt for her grandparents while giving us a picture of what life was like in Tito's Yugoslavia



Zarko, You Will Spoil The Child

One of the things that I love about the film is that it is extremely political without being preachy or trying to cram a serious political message down your throat. The film is full of love, touching memories, and a lot of humor which is always a good thing when you are dealing with politics. Twin brothers, Milivoj and Veljko, live in Split. They grew up there and experienced the 1980's themselves.

Zarko, You Will Spoil The Child is based on the book *U malu je usa dava* (loosely translated by my phone as *It's In A Small Mouth*) by Tisja Kljakovic Braic. Veljko and Braic co-wrote the script for the film together. I was not the only person who liked the film. It received the Best Croatian Film Award as well as the coveted Mister M Audience Award for the best film in the short film competition.

This year there was a strong group of feature films and while I am delighted to see excellent films such as *Chicken For Linda*, *Sirocco and the Kingdom of the Winds*, and *Sultana's Dream* win numerous awards, my feature film discovery at Animafest was *Pelikan Blue*.



Pelikan Blue

Hungarian director Laszlo Csaki's animated documentary is set in 1990's Hungary. That was a period of significant change for the country. It was the end of Communist rule and travel to the rest of the West was finally possible, but unaffordable for most people.

The film is based on interviews with people who traveled to the West on international train tickets forged by three young Hungarians using Pelikan Blue Carbon Ink. At that time Hungarian train tickets were hand written on paper with carbon paper underneath to make copies. The only protection was a stamp. Using imported bleach, indigo paper, and copied stamps the three friends forged tickets first for themselves and then for an ever-widening circle of friends until their lucrative scheme attracted the attention of ticket inspectors and then the police. Full of nostalgia, *Pelikan Blue* is sure to leave you walking out of the theatre with a smile on your face.

A special program that I enjoyed was *That's What She Said*, a collection of short films by women and female identifying filmmakers. The program was comprised of films that were screened at Animation Festival Network member festivals. The Animation Festival Network is comprised of five leading Central and Eastern European festivals: Animafest Zagreb, Anifilm International Festival of Animated Film in the Czech Republic, Fest Anca International Animation Festival in Slovakia, Animaest International Festival in Romania, and Animateka International Animated Film Festival in Slovenia.

Programmers at these five festivals wanted to spotlight the importance of the female voice in animation. Although in the history of animation in these countries female directors and independent animators were an exception to the rule until the end of the last century, as this program demonstrated women are now at the forefront of Eastern European animated films.

The nine films in the program included Lea Vidakovic's beautiful puppet film *The Family Portrait*. Tolstoy said in *Anna Karenina* "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way". This adage is aptly born out in Lea's film when, on the eve of the Austro-Hungarian collapse, Andras and his daughter receive an unexpected visit from Andras' unpredictable brother Zolton and his entire large family. After totally disrupting the entire household and leaving a path of carnage in their wake, they depart as suddenly as they arrived. Lea's attention to detail, not just with the puppets but down to every little detail like the last cake crumb on a plate is amazing. I have seen the film several times and at each viewing I find something new that I hadn't noticed before.



Her Dress For The Final

Another film in the program, *Her Dress For The Final* was inspired by animator Martina Mestrovic's grandmother who dyed her wedding dress black because she wanted to be buried in it. It is a touching portrait of a person facing the end of their life and taking control of how they want it to end. Martina explained that the character of the grandmother in her film encapsulates all of the women who have affected her life in some way or another.

Animation Festival Network offers several other programs as well as *That's What She Said* for screenings at festivals and events in the five participating countries. You can learn more about Animation Festival Network at: animationfestivalnetwork.eu

All you have to do is turn on the news and hear what is going on all over the globe to realize that the world desperately needs more to laugh at. It was most refreshing to have humor in all of its various forms as this year's festival theme. Program curator Daniel Suljic put together six screenings each one dedicated to a different type of humor. Slapstick or gag humor included such classics as Alexey Alexeev's extremely funny *Log Jam KJFG # 5* and Cordell Baker's toe tapping *The Cat Came Back* which is based on an old folk song of the same name. I was especially happy to see Juan Pablo Zaramella's delightful film *Lapus* on the big screen again. His curious little nun always makes me laugh.



Log Jam KJFG #5

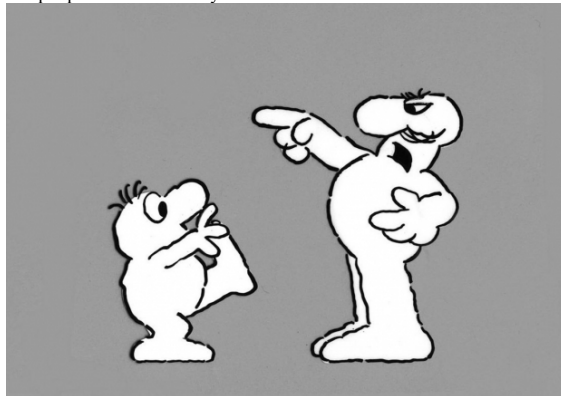
Other screenings featured dark humor, theatre of the absurd, and verbal humor which opened with the 1952 Chuck Jones classic *Rabbit Season* starring Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck. The series was rounded out with satire and a program titled *That's Just Human Nature* which had films that dealt with laughing at ourselves as a specie. It contained such classics as Bill Plympton's *Guard Dog* and *Creature Comforts* by Nick Park.



Artwork at Phil Mulloy's exhibition

Exhibitions are an important part of Animafest. Along with receiving his lifetime achievement award, presenting a masterclass, and introducing a two-part retrospective of his work there was also a solo exhibition of thirty of Phil Mulloy's drawings. His art work is full of dark humor and sarcasm, further proof that Phil goes where few other animators dare to tread.

Even though the beloved Croatian animator and cartoonist Borivoj Dovnikovic, or Bordo as he was known, passed away in 2022 his films and cartoons are a lasting tribute to his great talent, wonderful sense of humor, childlike enthusiasm, and his championship of "the little man". Bordo's tremendous contribution to animation and in particular to the Zagreb school of animation were honored during this year's festival with "Bordo's Day". The festivities began with the naming of a city park after him. The dedication plaque was unveiled by his wife Vesna Dovnikovic.



Learning to Walk

Bordo's Day continued with the opening of an exhibition of sixty-four of Bordo's cartoons at The House of Cartoons. The exhibition opening was followed by a presentation of Jelena Novakkovic's work in progress film *Learning To Walk 2*. It is a tribute to the life and artistic career of Bordo.

The title of Jelena's film comes from Bordo's classic 1978 film *Learning To Walk*. It is the story of Svoislav who always walked the way his mother taught him to walk. Four of his friends take turns trying to teach him their individual styles of walking, convinced that each one's way is the only way to walk. The little man has a difficult time getting away from them, but eventually he does and then he goes back to walking the way he has always walked.



Artwork from Zarko, *You Will Spoil The Child*

An entire room of the Galerija Na Katu was devoted to the original drawings and sketches used in the making of *Zarko, You Will Spoil The Child*. Along with character designs, backgrounds, sketches, and croquis, Milivoj and Veljko Popvic presented two videos showing the making of the film along with its trailer. It was a treat to get to see the original artwork from a film that I like so much.

As well as adding another dimension to the understanding and appreciation of films and film makers at the festival the exhibitions are recognized as important on the international art scene. In 2023 South African animator William Kentridge was the guest of honor at the festival where he was awarded the Animafest Life Time Achievement Award. A special exhibition of his artwork was also presented at the Galerija Kranjcar.

In June of this year the festival was honored by the Croatian Society of Art Historians when it bestowed its annual award on Animafest Zagreb for its Kentridge Project exhibition. The award honored the festival's promotion of interdisciplinary and visual culture. In selecting the project, the Awards Committee said "International Collaboration, networking, and supernatural creativity marked this year's award for the promotion of interdisciplinary and visual culture. . . A high level of professional engagement in the presentation of manifold art forms, marking William Kentridge's creativity and his connection with Croatian art forces firmly placed the award-winning project side to side with similar events on the international scene". High praise indeed for the exhibition which I can confirm was most impressive.

Animafest Scanners, the Symposium for Contemporary Animation Studies, held its eleventh edition this year in conjunction with the festival. Scanners is a platform for the theoretical discourse between filmmakers and animation scholars. Each year at the opening night ceremony the Animafest Council gives an award to a person who has made an outstanding contribution to animation studies. This year's recipient was Ingo Petzko, an internationally acclaimed German expert in film and video art with a focus on experimental film. The person who receives the award also delivers the Scanners keynote address. Ingo delivered his paper on *Tracing Back To Some Basics of Analogue Animation*.

This year's speakers focused on four topics: *Studying Early Animation (Tracing Some Basics)*, *Role of the Editor and Editing In Animated Films*, *Humor In Animation*, and *Authorship In/Of AI Animation*. Sixteen papers were presented during the two-day event.

The festival picnics are legendary and for the last few of years the festival organizers have added a new twist. Instead of putting us all on a bus and driving us out into the hills for a bar-b-que, this year we all walked together to a lovely, large park where members of the Croatian army cooked and served a delicious meal for us. Of course, there was plenty of wine and after lunch a nice green lawn to relax on. It was a lovely afternoon with an opportunity to have relaxed conversations.

At a time when many festivals are no longer printing catalogues, I commend Animafest on their many years of excellent catalogues. I understand the desire to save paper but catalogues are a valuable historical record for animation historians and journalists. They are also a source of memories for festival participants. My twenty some years of KROK catalogues bring back so many memories of a special time that will never happen again with the terrible war in the Ukraine and my Zagreb books are a valuable resource for me as a journalist. The Zagreb catalogues also always have the best covers.

A big thank you to the festival for inviting Nik and me to be part of Animafest again this year. A special thank you goes to the festival producers Paola Orlic and Matea Milic and to artistic director Daniel Suljic as well as the rest of the staff and volunteers for their many acts of kindness to me and for inviting me to host a book chat every year at the festival.

The next edition of Animafest Zagreb will take place 2 – 7 June 2025

You can find out more about the festival at: www.animafest.hr

ASIFA-SF IS A VOLUNTEER RUN ASSOCIATION

Newsletter Editor: Karl Cohen

Contributors include Nancy Denney-Phelps, Jim Middleton and other friends of ASIFA

Special thanks to Tsvika Oren from Tel Aviv for his help in researching the article on the Holocaust

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Special thanks to Nancy Denney-Phelps who represents our chapter on the international ASIFA board. Emily Berk is our webmaster, and Eihway Su keeps our email list and does a dozen other things.

ASIFA-SF is a chapter of Association Internationale du Film d'Animation with over 40 chapters around the world. Now that we are supposedly post-Covid we had hopes for a rebound with live events once more, but that isn't happening yet.

**TO KEEP OUR CHAPTER ALIVE, WE NEED TO FIND VOLUNTEERS TO DEVELOP LIVE AND/OR ONLINE PROGRAMS
UNTIL THAT HAPPENS WE ARE OFFERING
FREE MEMBERSHIPS**

**NEW MEMBERS WANTED, TELL OTHERS TO SIGN UP TO GET FREE ISSUES OF OUR NEWSLETTER
AND WHATEVER SCREENINGS THAT ASIFA-SF MEMBERS GET INVITED TO.**

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