



Feb. 2025



‘RICHARD WILLIAMS ADVENTURES IN ANIMATION’ My first reaction to the book was “Wow! This is going to be a delightful reading experience and it is profusely illustrated.

The autobiography of Richard Williams, 1933 – 2019 (completed by his wife Mo Sutton after he died) is a wonderful read in which he shares with us both his struggles before he became successful and his many years of being recognized as a remarkable animator (winner of three Oscars, and the author of the seminal book *The Animator’s Survival Kit*).

He tells us how he went from being a kid who loved to draw to winning three Oscars for his work. It is also a tribute to the former Disney and Warner Bros. artists who were his mentors.

Richard took after his father, a successful illustrator. Both loved to draw. His father arranged for him to obtain his first commercial work when he was 15, drawing print ads for a pet food company. At 16 he traveled from his home in Canada to Miami and then to Los Angeles where he toured the Disney studio and actually met Walt.

After he completed his studies at the Ontario College of Art, he decided to go to Europe. While living on the island of Ibiza off the coast of Spain he realized his love of drawing figures in motion could be used in an animated film. That dream would become a reality, but it took him several years to complete *The Little Island*, 1958.



Moving to London he struggled to find work while working on his first film. At that

time the animation industry in England was just getting started so it was hard to find work. Some of his income came from his creating a needed service. He developed a paint service as he figured out how to make a water-based paint that would adhere to acetate animation cels. He also picked up gigs playing in local bands and Bob Godfrey hired him for his first job in an animation studio. He says that when his first film was finally completed, “I was 25, broke, in debt, and exhausted from three and a half years effort to make my first film.”

At the time British animated shorts were mostly light entertainment. Williams had instead created “a half-hour, allegorical, philosophic satire on idealists, with no spoken words.” It premiered at the Venice Film Festival where it won first prize in the experimental category. It went on to win other honors including a coveted BAFTA for Best Animated Film (the British Film and Television Arts version of our Oscar).

He had hopes for a lucrative distribution contract, but the film only had “a very limited art house release.” Instead, he gained international recognition as a remarkable young talent and he had become employable as an animator. Williams says he was “a lone worker who had made it to the top.” Disney director Dick Humer (*Dumbo*) wrote him the film was “the first poetic cartoon.”



His next film *Love Me, Love Me, Love Me, A Moral Tale*, 1962, received international distribution by British Lion and was written about by the press. It even was discussed in *Playboy*. He writes, “Guess what came through the door, checks! My God, there was a market for my work.”

The financial success of the film resulted an unusual accounting problem. Williams had overpaid his taxes to the tune of 5,000 pounds. As a foreigner he was told that in order to get a refund he had to live in this country for five years. He decided to get the money owed him, so he opened his own studio. He wrote that is why “I started a studio and ended up in animation.”

The really exciting part of his auto-biography is the second half of the book. It covers his professional career after 1962. It includes work on well-known features, shorts and exceptional award-winning commercials. He also became friends with, and sometimes hired retired animation directors, writers and others from Disney and Warner Bros. Williams discusses the contributions that these mentors made to animation, as well as their teaching him and his staff what they needed to know to become better artists. Many people say learning animation is a lifelong commitment.

On the book’s cover it says it is about “How I learned, who I learned from, and what I did with it.” Williams goes out of his way to share with us what his mentors taught him and what these pioneers were like as artists/teachers. It was their contributions to his education that made his career exceptional.

RICHARD WILLIAMS

ADVENTURES IN ANIMATION

HOW I LEARNED
WHO I LEARNED FROM
AND WHAT I DID WITH IT



Some of the films Williams produced and/or directed that are discussed in the book are *What's New Pussycat?* *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *A Christmas Carol* (Oscar for Best Short) *The Pink Panther*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (two Oscars), *The Thief and the Cobbler* (his unfinished masterpiece) and *Prologue* (Oscar nominated).

Richard Williams Adventures in Animation by Richard Williams and Imogen Sutton, published by Faber & Faber, hardbound, 240 pages, profusely illustrated, retails for \$55, Amazon sells it for \$37.15. All of the films mentioned in this review should be available online (complete shorts, trailers for features and his unfinished masterpiece can also be seen).

SCREENINGS IN THE BAY AREA IN FEBURARY
MEMOIR OF A SNAIL will be playing at the Vogue's Mostly British Film Festival on Saturday, Feb. 8 at 10:30am





'MAXXIE LAWOW: DRAG SUPER-SHERO' BY ANTHONY HAND

Maxxie Lawow: Drag Super-Shero is by director Anthony Hand from San Jose. His animated feature takes place at a time when drag queens start disappearing. A shy young barista must summon his inner super-shero to rescue them from an ambitious evil drag queen bent on harvesting their magical anti-aging tears in this animated feature featuring SF's Drag Laureate Darcy Drollinger and other local drag luminaries.

Roxie Theater. Feb. 8, 9 PM, House #1. Filmmaker and special guests in attendance, SF IndieFest

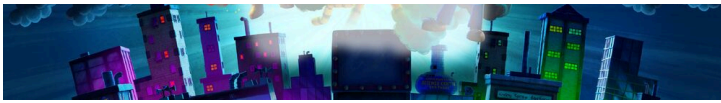


AMONG NEIGHBORS

Among Neighbors, Director Yoav Potash's documentary feature combines "evocative hand-drawn animation with 'revelatory' interviews and verite footage. *Among Neighbors* investigates the story of a small, rural town where the longstanding peace between Jewish and Polish neighbors was shattered by World War II. The film focuses on the only living Holocaust survivor from a small town, and an aging eyewitness who saw Jews murdered there — six months after the Nazis were defeated. Produced and directed by award-winning Bay Area filmmaker Yoav Potash (*Crime Ater Crime*), *Among Neighbors* is an evocative and heart-pounding murder mystery with urgent political relevance.

At the Vogue Theater, Tues., Feb. 18, 6 PM, the filmmaking team will attend. This is the Bay Area Premiere of *Among Neighbors*. It is the Closing Night film of the 27th annual SF IndieFest and is co-presented by the Jewish Film Institute where it will be the Opening Night feature of their 12th annual WinterFest.





'DOG MAN,' THE MOVIE, OPENS IN THEATERS SATURDAY, JANUARY 31

Dreamworks Animation brings *Dog Man* to the big screen to unleash this hilarious adaption of Dav Pilkey's New York Times bestselling literary creation. *Dog Man* trailer www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaJbAennB_Q



'PADDINGTON IN PERU' OPENS FEB. 14, PLUS SNEAK PREVIEW AT THE VOGUE, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13 AT 5:30 PM

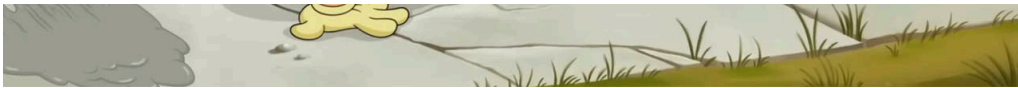
When Paddington discovers his beloved aunt has gone missing from the Home for Retired Bears, he and the Brown family head to the jungles of Peru to find her. Determined to solve the mystery, they soon stumble across a legendary treasure as they make their way through the rainforests of the Amazon. It has a 92 rating from Rotten Tomatoes. www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTvudSGfHRI

Note: Paddington 2 (2017) claims to have gotten more positive reviews than Orson Will's *Citizen Kane*, a film many critics say is a masterpiece, one of cinema's high points. The third entry in the Paddington series is said to be "better than 90% of children's films." To distinguish it from the previous hit, *Paddington in Peru* doesn't stay in London for long... "It makes sense that the Brown family's destination should be the country where the marmalade-loving bear was born, so the rainy streets of England are soon swapped for the sun-dappled, jungle-clad mountains and valleys of the Amazon. It's a clever way of taking the series somewhere new while sticking to its established lore."

Top of Form

Bottom of Form





ON FEB 28 ALL HELL MAY BE LET LOOSE WHEN PORKY AND DAFFY COME TO TOWN IN ‘THE DAY THE EARTH BLEW UP’ The plot suggests this is a crazy screwball comedy. It opens with the classic odd couple working at a bubble gum factory. They “uncover a secret alien mind control plot. Against all odds, the two are determined to save their town (and the world!)...that is if they don’t drive each other crazy in the process.” I’ve also learned that beside there being an alien invasion there is a romantic subplot with Porky and Petunia.

I’ve been trying to find reviews of the film as it has been shown at Annecy and at special screenings including one in LA. Wikipedia wrote “Upon its respective premieres in Annecy and Los Angeles, *The Day the Earth Blew Up: A Looney Tunes Movie* received overwhelmingly positive reactions from attendees. On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 92% of 13 critics’ reviews are positive, with an average rating of 8.4/10.”

Unfortunately, two people in the animation community who saw it wrote me about how awful it is. One said, “This richly-crafted, hand-drawn adventure marks the first fully-animated feature-length film in Looney Tunes history, told on a scope and scale that’s truly out of this world. It has gorgeous animation and character design, but the story is awful and I see why Warners didn’t want to distribute it. I have no idea who, besides animation geeks, would watch this movie.”

I was told I was getting a review copy of the film, but it hasn’t arrived. See the trailer at: *The Day the Earth Blew Up*.

BOX OFFICE REPORTS



THE BIG RACE, LIONS VRS THE HEDGEHOGS, TURNED OUT TO BE A DUD AT THE BOX OFFICE

Disney’s *Mufasa: The Lion King* won the top spot the first weekend of the new year with a \$23.8million gross in the US the first week, Then the film’s domestic total climbed to \$168.6 million after week two. With overseas income, it raced past the \$300m the first week and then after the second week it had a global total of \$476.4m. That made it the 10th top-grossing title of films that were released in 2024. On Jan. 23 *Mufasa* had “a global total of \$601,230,938. The *Hollywood Reporter* wrote, “While there’s no chance it will ever match 2019’s *The Lion King* (\$1.66 billion), it’s staying power hasn’t gone unnoticed.”

Sonic 3 opened the same weekend as *Mufusa* and was in second place with a \$21.2m domestic gross. On January 23 it had a worldwide gross that was still under \$500 million.

‘MOANA 2’ CROSSED THE BILLION DOLLAR MARK IN JUST EIGHT WEEKS The animated sequel has generated \$445 million domestically and \$567 million internationally, bringing its grand total to \$1.02 billion globally after eight weekends of release. *Moana 2*, which was originally planned as a streaming production, is Disney’s third feature in 2024 to join the billion-dollar club. *Inside Out 2* and *Deadpool & Wolverine* were the first two to cross that line. No other studio released a feature in 2024 that has grossed a billion dollars, but Universal’s *Despicable Me 4* came close (\$969 million). On Jan. 27 *Monna 2* had grossed \$1,026,655,808.

THE TOP BOX OFFICE FILMS OF 2024

- 1st place, *Inside Out 2*, \$1,698,778,437
- 2, *Deadpool & Wolverine*, \$1,338,073,645
- 3, *Moana 2*, \$1,026,655,808
- 4, *Despicable Me 4*, \$969,126,452
- 5, *Dune Part Two*, \$714,444,358
- 6, *Wicked*, \$680,582,220
- 7, *Godzilla x Kong, The New Empire*, \$571,750,016
- 8, *Kung Fu Panda*, \$547,689,492
- 9, *Venom: The Last Dance*, \$476,881,770
- 10, *Mufasa: The Lion King*, \$476,169,282
- 11, *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice*, \$451,100,435
- 12, *Gladiators II*, \$449,615,790
- 13, *Bad Boys: Ride or Die*, \$404,547,819
- 14, *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes*, \$397,378,150
- 15, *Twisters*, \$370,962,265
- 18, *Sonic the Hedgehog 3*, \$336,466,642
- 19, *The Wild Robot*, \$324,345,760
- 21, *The Garfield Movie*, \$234,572,723
- 31, *Transformers One*, \$129,364,14155

55, *Coraline 15th Anniversary*, \$52,371,887

56, *Paddington in Peru*, \$51,197,067 (not yet released in the US)

81, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, \$32,227,291

109, *The Lord of the Rings: The war of the Rohirrim*, \$19,880,072

111, *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace*, rerelease, \$19,429,994

THE AWARD SEASON - WINNERS

THE GOLDEN GLOBE BEST ANIMATED FILM AWARD WENT TO ‘FLOW’
The other nominated films were *Inside Out 2*, *Memoir of a Snail*, *Moana 2*, *Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl* and *The Wild Robot*

THE AWARD SEASON - NOMINATIONS ACADEMY AWARDS

The awards ceremony will be telecast live on
Sunday, March 2 on ABC at 7 p.m. ET/ 4 p.m. PT.

Oscar for Best Animated Feature Film

Flow (Nominees to be determined)

Inside Out 2 (Kelsey Mann and Mark Nielsen)

Memoir of a Snail (Adam Elliot and Liz Kearney)

Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl (Nominees to be determined)

The Wild Robot (Chris Sanders and Jeff Hermann)

Music for *The Wild Robot* by (Kris Bowers has been nominated for **Best Original Score**)

Oscar for Animated Short Film

Beautiful Men (Nicolas Keppens and Brecht Van Elslande)

In the Shadow of the Cypress (Shirin Sohani and Hossein Molayemi)

Magic Candies (Daisuke Nishio and Takashi Washio)

Wander to Wonder (Nina Gantz and Stienette Bosklopper)

Yuck! (Loïc Espuche and Juliette Marquet)

ACADEMY AWARDS, SHORT LIST FOR BEST ANIMATED SHORT

(THERE WERE 15 SHORTS BEING CONSIDERED)

Au Revoir Mon Monde (France, CG, directed by Estelle Bonnardel, Quentin Devred, Baptiste Duchamps, Maxime Foltzer, Florian Maurice, and Astrid Novais): The Student Academy Awards gold medal winner is about a meteor crash and a sushi restaurant mascot dressed as a fish who frantically rushes to a clock tower before the end of the world.

A Bear Named Wojtek (U.K., Poland, 2D, directed by Iain Gardner): An orphaned brown bear, previously adopted by Polish soldiers during World War II, is brought to Scotland, where he becomes Edinburgh Zoo's famous bear, Wojtek.

Beautiful Men (Belgium, France, Netherlands, stop-motion, directed by Nicolas Keppens): Melding Fellini-esque reality and fantasy, it tells the story of three bald brothers on a trip to Istanbul for hair transplant surgery and their fears about aging.

Bottle George (Japan, stop-motion, directed by Dice Tsutsumi): Tonko House co-founder Tsutsumi (best known for ***The Dam Keeper*** nominated short) explores the relationship between a young girl struggling with her fear of her alcoholic father and a small creature trapped inside a bottle (voiced by Japanese comedian Akihiro Nishino).

A Crab in the Pool (Canada, 2D, directed by Alexandra Myotte and Jean-Sébastien Hamel): A coming-of-age story about a teenage girl who is annoyed by having to look after her younger brother but must find a way to heal their relationship.

In the Shadow of the Cypress (Iran, 2D, directed by Hossein Molayemi & Shirin Sohani): A former captain with PTSD, who lives with his daughter, is pulled out of his isolation by the unexpected arrival of a stranded whale.

Magic Candies (Japan, CG, directed by Daisuke Nishio): When a boy buys a bag of colorful, marble-shaped candies, he gains the ability to hear voices.

Maybe Elephants (Canada, Norway, 2D, directed by Torill Kove): Oscar winner Kove (***The Danish Poet***) offers an autobiographical ode to family from the National Film Board of Canada. It's about a family trip to Nairobi in the '70s with three rebellious teenage daughters, a restless mother, a father struggling with potatoes, and a confusing memory about a herd of elephants.

Me (U.S., 2D, directed by Don Hertzfeldt): Indie Oscar-nominated legend Hertzfeldt salvaged an unrealized musical project (rumored to be with Arcade Fire) and turned it into a musical odyssey about humanity's retreat inward as a way of dealing with trauma.

Origami (Japan, CG, directed by Kei Kanamori): The Student Academy Awards silver medal winner is about a magical character that transforms folded sheets of CG-animated paper into living plants and creatures.

Percebes (Portugal, France, 2D, directed by Alexandra Ramires & Laura Gonçalves): Winner of the Annecy Cristal for Best Short, this animated documentary explores the weird-looking barnacle known as percebes in Portugal.

The 21 (Egypt, U.S., U.K., 2D, directed by Tod Polson): Mixing live-action footage with animation in the style of Coptic iconography, the film pays tribute to the 21 Coptic men murdered by ISIS in Libya in 2015.

Wander to Wonder (Netherlands, stop-motion, directed by Nina Gantz): When the creator of an '80s children's TV series dies, the three tiny stars are all alone in the studio. They struggle to find enough to eat while continuing to make strange episodes for the fans.

The Wild-Tempered Clavier (Germany, stop-motion, pixilation, 2D, directed by Anna Samo): This is an experimental short inspired by the prelude to J.S. Bach's "The Well-Tempered Clavier" and a tribute to the technique of painting directly on 35mm by painting on rolls of toilet paper.

Yuck! (France, 2D, directed by Loïc Espuche): A group of kids at their holiday camp

freak out when they witness adults of all ages kissing in public.

The films on the short list come from represents 13 countries (two are from the U.S.), with a preponderance of 2D and stop-motion over CG. There is also some unique experimentation (such as painting on rolls of toilet paper). There is one Oscar-winning director and two nominees, and two Student Academy Award winners from 2024. Surprisingly, no American studio works made the cut (Disney).

ART DIRECTORS GUILD AWARDS – NOMINATED FOR BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

- ***Flow***
Art Director: Gints Zilbalodis
- ***Inside Out 2***
Production Designer: Jason Deamer
- ***Moana 2***
Production Designer: Ian Gooding
- ***Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl***
Production Designer: Matt Perry
- ***The Wild Robot***
Production Designer: Raymond Zibac

WILL POPEYE AND TINTIN BECOME HOLLYWOOD’S NEXT HORROR MOVIE STARS?

That question was asked by Zara Irshad, a staff writer for the *SF Chronicle* on Jan 2, 2025. It turns out that Popeye and Tintin had just entered the public domain on Wednesday, Jan. 1. That raised up creative possibilities for anyone who wanted to use to use the character in future projects. Public domain means that the use of the characters is no longer protected by copyright.

It turns out there are already three slasher films planned that star Popeye. One, *Popeye the Slayer Man*, has already released a bloody trailer. The plot has a film crew being terrorized by a live action Popeye as they film a documentary about the abandoned spinach factory he is said to haunt. [POPEYE THE SLAYER MAN | Official Trailer \(2025\)](#)





VARIETY'S NEW INTERVIEW WITH ADAM ELLIOT PROVIDES A WEALTH OF INFORMATION ABOUT HIS STOP MOTION TECHNIQUE *Memoir of a Snail* was made with help from the Australian government's arts funding so he had to find techniques that would allow him to tell the story within the budget available.

"The film has these four basic elements, which is paper, clay, wire and paint," says Elliot. "Everything we do is it's an attempt to make the puppets look a certain way — we're celebrating the imperfect. Inside the head [of the puppet] is an armature, so we can move it around. There are also magnets everywhere — that's how we attach the eyes. But the majority of the film is made from paper, clay, wire and paint. All the sets are all cardboard. We don't use any fabric, so it's all about celebrating the textures and the brush strokes, fingerprints and the wire is always hair. We never do molded hair. And that's because I found a lot of stop motion was getting very slick. I didn't want an over-reliance on things like 3D printers."

There's also a large amount of fire and water in Elliot's film. But the constraints of his budget meant that he couldn't consider even a small amount of CG. He had to look for other solutions. "We used cellophane to create the look of fire. This film is about imperfection, accepting imperfection in yourself, in others and in life. The look of the cellophane fits with what we were doing but it did make things a lot harder. I've always had to find ways of doing more with less and small budgets, but in a way, you're forced to be inventive and innovative. We had to come up with the magnetic eyeballs we use on the puppets to save time, and just being forced to use voice over."

Unlike so much animation today that is focused on talking heads, Adam says, "the voiceover is paired right back and distilled to its bare essence, so that every word is only there because it needs to be. The rule is show it, don't say it. I worked hard to make sure my narration isn't too overbearing... these limitations have forced me to come up with solutions that have then led to my style and esthetic and way of telling stories. Made with a tiny crew, *Memoir of a Snail*, used voiceover in favor of having the characters move their mouths so that the movements of the characters could be done more quickly."



AN AMAZING TECHNIQUE THAT CREATES ANIMATED IMAGES IN THE

NIGHT SKY

NIGHT SKY Perhaps the most amazing new form of animation is seeing glowing light in the evening sky that are flying in various formations through space. The technique can create wonderful waves of color and lovely patterns that can turn into animated people or things. It can also spell out messages.

The magic behind these sightings isn't controlled by aliens, just teams of computer artists using drones outfitted with colored lights. Drone light show companies are a recent development. They are trying to make a living creating performances for county and state fairs, for sporting events and other outdoor gatherings. Some are trying hard to gain recognition by doing unusual events such as who can fly the most drones in the air at one time.

To celebrate the 2024 holiday season, Sky Elements Drone Shows of Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, was presented a Guinness World Record prize for flying 5,000 Drones to create a Christmas Light Show on 12/12.2024 See highlights of the show

www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxIc969qtYo

PUNTO y RAYA ACADEMY 2024
JORNADAS INTERNACIONALES D'ART ABSTRACTE EN MOVIMENT
15-18 OCTUBRE 2024
MACBA / ESPAI F. BONNEMAISON / BAU · BARCELONA (ES)



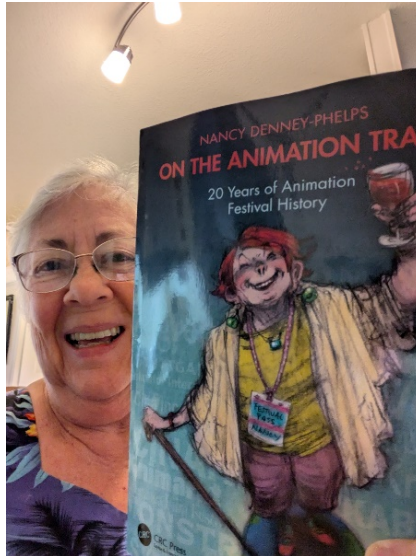
EXPLORE A WEBSITE CELEBRATING ABSTRACT ANIMATION The event is PyR **ACADEMY 2024**, the international symposium on Abstract Art in Motion, Punto y Raya Festival held in Barcelona. <https://vimeo.com/1042129794> If abstract animation interests you Google Punto y Rata Festival for videos of past events, master classes, etc.



'LESBIAN SPACE PRINCESS' will have its world premiere in the panorama section of the Berlin Film Festival this month. *Variety* says, "The plot has a sheltered space princess embarking on a mission to rescue her bounty hunter ex-girlfriend from the Straight White Malians. The film, which blends sci-fi and comedy elements, puts queer women of color front and center in its narrative."

THE FILM INDUSTRY IS HELPING LA FIRE VICTIMS The studios and other groups are pitching in to help wildfires response efforts. SAG donated a million dollars, Disney is committing \$15m to various relief efforts. Funds are going to the American Red Cross, the Los Angeles Fire Department Foundation, the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank and other organizations. The music world has scheduled a major concert to benefit the victims.

organizations. The music world has scheduled a major concert to benefit the victims.



DOT JANSON COMMENTS ON “ON THE ANIMATION TRAIL: 20 YEARS OF ANIMATION FESTIVAL HISTORY” BY NANCY DENNEY-PHELPS

This wonderful book starts with Nancy’s memories of some of the earliest festivals she attended. They are still among her most favorites. Her memories of KROK will always be high on her list due to the small number of participants on the boat. That created an environment for work and play, like entertaining each other with skits.

She has fond memories of Annecy including the ever-growing picnics and boat races in addition to the broad range of animation she saw there. Her memories of KLIK/Kaboom festival in Amsterdam was obviously my favorite chapter since thanks to Nancy I was the token American volunteer for several years. From there the chapters highlight all kinds of festivals, old and new, across eastern Europe, China, Greece, Norway and back to Portugal and England.

It’s a wonderful read for all the exciting news of festivals to add to your go-to-visit list. But don’t forget to take notes on the travel experiences for sightseeing and restaurants along the way. You get two books in one!!



TEACHING THE ART OF PITCHING

9th Animarkt and Momakin Stop Motion Forum

13-17 October 2024 Lodz, Poland

By Nancy Denney-PHELPS

One of the most rewarding things that I do each year is to coach pitching at

Animarkt in Lodz Poland. Animarkt is unique because it focuses exclusively on stop-motion animation projects.

My part of Animarkt as the pitching coach begins six weeks to a month before I meet any participants in person with one-on-one Zoom calls. The first Zoom meeting is to let each person know what information they need to be sure is included in their pitch. Also to get to know them and to assess how much work we are going to have to do to have them ready for their appearance on stage in Lodz.

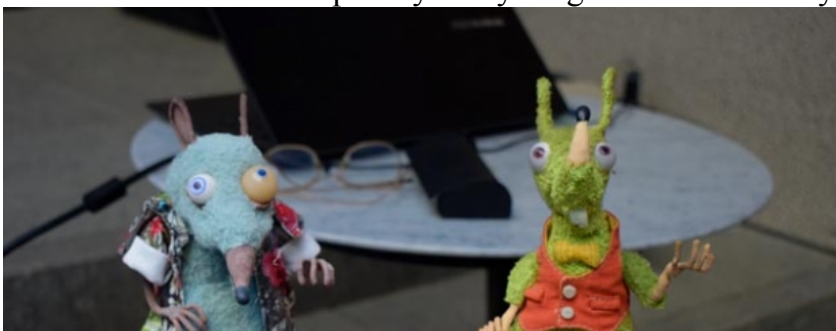


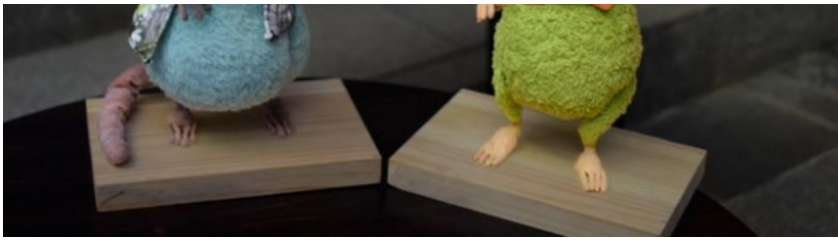
Pitching participants with Nick and Nancy

The initial Zoom is followed by two or three more Zoom meetings depending upon how much help they need. By the time the participants get to Lodz, if all has gone as planned, their pitches are well-written and rehearsed. All we have to do is do a bit of fine-tuning and practicing. Each project then gets an hour-long meeting with me. I also give extra sessions to anyone who needs it. A lot of my time in Lodz is spent reassuring them and helping people get over their nervousness.

The pitchers range from seasoned veterans to people who have never spoken in public to a large audience before. Also, for the majority of them, English is not their first language. I always remind them that everyone else has the same language problem and that usually Nik and I are the only two native English speakers in the room. Of course, there are always some projects that appeal to me more than others, but it is like asking which of your children do you like the most, I want everyone to succeed. I am proud of them all so there is no way that I can single out one project.

Nik is in charge of teaching stage presence and microphone technique. It helps the participants a great deal to see the stage in advance, to see where they will deliver their pitches and to work with the microphone. They also have a chance to check out their visual material so that hopefully everything will run smoothly during their actual pitch.





Puppets from *Only Rats* project pitched by Paz del Carre and Leticia Montalva of Spain

This year there were ten short film projects and eleven feature film, television series and specials pitched. The competition to be selected to pitch at Animarkt is very stiff, so I consider everyone who is selected to come to Lodz a winner.

This year there were 120 projects submitted from thirty-three countries throughout the world. All projects must have a minimum of 80% stop-motion animation. Short films, up to twenty-five minutes, in development must have at least a first draft of the script. Feature films and television specials and series can be at any stage from early development to in-production. An important component of the selection process is that each project must include a sustainable production plan which is 10% of the entire project's rating.

Along with a 40,000 Polish Zloty (approximately 9,343 Euros) in-kind contribution sponsored by the Wroclaw Feature Film Studio, pitchers vied for such valuable awards as Dragon Frame 5 software and the Animond Award which includes marketing, audience, and financing consultations. A complete list of all of the awarded projects is at the end of this article. Along with representatives from companies who donate services, there are producers, directors, and other people from the film industry so that even if someone doesn't win a prize they still have a chance to be approached by people in the industry.

Along with the pitching Animarkt has Career Days, which features meetings with studios, creators, and professionals. It offers opportunities for participants to establish the all-important contacts, learn about what it is like to work in a film studio, and what requirements need to be met when applying for a job at a studio. The five studios participating were Shadow machine and Laika from the United States, Pangur Animation and Cornelius Films from Spain, and The United Kingdom's Passion Pictures.

Two workshops were offered. In Alice Canovas' three-day Puppet Design workshop participants received a solid understanding of how to construct their own puppet. They focused on the basics of puppet construction, from body proportions to facial expressions. Each participant brought their own puppet design to work on.

Alice Canovas began her professional career as a sculptor and model maker in her native Spain. In 2016 she moved to the UK where she worked on such productions as Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs* and Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio*. In 2022 she moved to Bristol to work at Aardman Animation. Currently, Alice is a lecturer at U-TAD University in Madrid



Director Chris Tichborne has over 25 years of experience of working in stop motion.

After 14 years of animating on such well-known television shows as *Bob the Builder* and *Postman Pat*, he moved on to films such as Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride*, Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* and Netflix's *The House Trilogy*.

His 3-day Character Animation Workshop focused on the core principles of character animation using stop motion techniques. Participants learned how to pose puppets, create simple keyframes, and master basic body movement to convey acting motions and visual storytelling. The important areas of a puppet interacting with props and walk cycles were also covered.

I was kept busy in my room with my one on-one pitching meetings, but I did get out to hear Will Becher speak at his masterclass. As the person responsible for all teaching, learning activities, and development relating to stop motion production, animation production for both internal animation talent and students studying at the prestigious Aardman Academy, Will is a busy person indeed.

He began his career at Aardman Animation, working a summer job (no comma needed) where he made clay wings for the first *Chicken Run*. He later joined Aardman full time as an animator on the award-winning *Curse of the Were Rabbit*. He was the Supervising Animator on Aardman's latest film *Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance Most Foul* which premiered on Christmas Day on BBC One as their Christmas Animation Special. The film is currently running on Netflix.

His Master Class at Animarkt, *Animating The Aard Way: Finding a Voice Whilst Animating A Silent Sheep* was full of humor. Being a big Shaun the Sheep fan, I thoroughly enjoyed Will's presentation which gave the audience a unique behind the scenes look at what it is like to work at Aardman. Besides working at the studio, Will also makes his own independent films, so he talked about the difference between working in a large, legendary studio and developing independent films your own projects.

Each evening social events were planned for all of the participants at local bars. One evening the group was treated to a screening of *Lola and the Sound Piano*. The delightful twenty-eight-minute puppet film is the story of eleven-year-old Lola who is big sister to five-year-old Simon. Her little brother lives in a world of his own, displaying autistic behavior. Through her observations, Lola discovers that Simon is hypersensitive to the little sounds hidden within the surrounding cacophony of everyday life. With the help of her friend Rolih, she decides to build a sound piano to communicate with Simon.



Lola and the Sound Piano is beautifully animated and tells a very sweet sensitive

Lodz and the Sound Film is beautifully animated and tells a very sweet, sensitive story that the entire family can enjoy. It is an excellent film to make people, especially young people, understand that individuals who are autistic frequently suffer from rejection and exclusion. The film is about inclusion and living together in our world.

The film is directed by Augusto Zanollo. It had its premiere at Annecy 2024 where it was awarded the Jury Prize for a Television Special. The film was co-produced by Momakin with Katarzyna Gromadzka as an Executive Producer. The film was shot in France but the puppets were made in Poland. Lodz is famous for its excellent specialists who create puppets. Momakin, in cooperation with designer Dariusz Kalita, has introduced an innovative system of armatures that allows animators on movie sets to increase the mobility of the puppets and make them last longer. Their particular elements can be removed and replaced without any harm to the rest of the puppet.

Momakin is so much more than just the producer of Animarkt. It was founded by three energetic women who met at university. Paulina Zacharek focuses on animation aspects from a producer's point of view. Prior to Momakin, she managed the Se-Ma-For Studio Museum for five years. She is also the creator of Momakin's StopMoLab training program. During the nine-month training program participants fill in the gaps between knowledge gained at university and the realities of working in a professional setting. She has guest specialists and professionals in various arms of animation present talks on various topics such as line producing, lighting technicians, and puppet making.

Agnieszka Kowalewska-Skowron founded Animarkt. Last year she announced that she was stepping down as its director to peruse other avenues. (Little did I guess that one of her important new projects was to become pregnant.) She left Animarkt in the very capable hands of Marianna Piskorz who did a wonderful job of organizing the entire pitching program for the week. She also made sure that I had everything that I needed and even had lunch brought to my room when I didn't have time for a break between my pitching participants.

The last original member of the trio is Katarzyna Gromadzka. She is an Executive Producer among the many other things that she does at Momakin. She is currently living in Spain but is back in Lodz frequently to continue her work at Momakin.

Lodz is a city that I have grown to love. It is known as "the Hollywood of Poland", having been the center of film production since the beginning of cinematography. The Lodz Film School is one of the most widely recognized film schools in the world. The city is also home to a Cinema Museum, the only one in Poland. I have always wanted to visit it but have never had the chance to because I am always so busy when I am in Lodz.

This year I was invited to give a presentation at Etiuda & Anima in Krakow on my new book, *ON THE ANIMATION TRAIL, 20 Years Of Animation Festival History*. The talk was five days after Animarkt so I finally had the opportunity to spend the entire day at the Cinema Museum.





Puppets from the legendary Se Ma Fore Studio production of *The Moomins* television series

The museum was wonderful! The collection has over 50,000 exhibits that include a wide array of old film equipment, posters, photos, and memorabilia such as dresses worn in well-known films. The most valuable exhibit is a photo-plasticon (stereoscope viewer) built around 1900 in the workshop of the inventor and constructor of the device, August Fuhrmann. It is his only photo-plasticon in Poland and one of five in existence in the world. The museum is housed in the magnificent former palace of Karol Scheibler, known as the King of Cotton.



Puppets from the series Pacyk's *Wonderful World*

Anmarkt provided accommodation for us at the lovely Hotel Pietryna located on Piotrkowska Street. It is 4.2 km long making it the longest promenade in Poland and one of the longest shopping streets in Europe. As you walk along the street there are beautiful old houses and bronze statues honoring famous citizens of Lodz such as Artur Rubinstein seated at his piano, the poet Julian Tuwim sitting on a park bench and Wladyslaw Reymont, the novelist with his notebook sitting on his luggage. Reymont won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1924.

The street also has a Hollywood-style Walk of Fame that pays tribute to Poland's rich cinema history. Gold stars honor such famous names as animator Zbigniew Rybczynski and director Roman Polanski along with actors, scriptwriters, cinematographers, and other people who have contributed to Polish cinema.

If you don't feel like walking the entire street you can also take a bicycle rickshaw. After two relaxing days of adventuring in Lodz, I boarded the train for the three-hour trip to Krakow. It was a beautiful journey through birch forests with all the leaves shimmering gold. I was met in Krakow by my good friend and Etiuda & Anima Guest host Konrad Glabek. I spent a lovely two days with Konrad and his partner Emilia Gondek, but more

about that in my next article.

ASIFA-SF IS A VOLUNTEER RUN ASSOCIATION

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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.

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