



SIGNE BAUMANE HAS COMPLETED THE ANIMATION FOR HER 2ND FEATURE by Karl Cohen Work on *My Love Affair with Marriage* began in 2015 when she considered applying for a grant for a film about the biology of love and relationships. In May she completed the last of 40,000 drawings of the film that evolved, and used up 662 pencils in the process.

To celebrate that achievement Signe held a zoom gathering in late May to show off clips from her work in progress and to talk about the production's history. She invited her friends in the worldwide animation community and her supporters to hear her talk about her six year struggle to try and complete her film. The focus of her talk at the event was to disclose some of the pitfalls and insanity she went through to get to the point where she can feel the end is in sight.

Although I haven't seen enough of the film to comment on the story, I do know it is going to be a visually exciting work. It has a unique look that combines excellent looking miniature 3D sets and 2D drawn animation. The footage shown in May included drawn modeling in light and shadows, dramatic lighting and camerawork that produces a shallow depth of field to create the illusion of 3D depth. Like Disney's multiplane work she animated the characters that are seen in the foreground in sharp focus and things further away, like the back of her sets, are seen in soft focus. The illusion of depth makes the photography look impressive.

She showed photos of some of her voice actors and it turns out she used a large cast. The film's soundtrack includes 23 "songs," but it is not like a Broadway musical. Instead some of the voices are for mythological spirits. They function somewhat like a Greek chorus.

In 2015 Signe took on a really complicated production and unfortunately for her it turned out the complications resulted in unexpected major expenses. She found out about one unexpected expense when she talked with SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists). She was shocked to discover that while the union accommodates low budget live action productions by letting producers pay actors less than if the

performance is in a major big budget feature, for animation that is going to be released theatrically in America there is only one pay rate, what Disney or Pixar pays. To raise the money needed she turned to Kickstarter and kept her fingers crossed. Unfortunately, halfway through the campaign the chances of it succeeding looked dim. She hired a fund raising consultant who suggested several things including improving her messaging and advising her to be relentless in her Facebook postings. By doing that and other things she raised \$132,737.00, more than what was needed.

Signe also needed several additional grants. Eventually she obtained help from the Guggenheim Foundation, and government agencies in Latvia and Luxembourg. (She grew up in Latvia.) Of course there were major requirements she had to meet to get those funds. She had to produce a version of the film to be released in Latvia in that country's language. That meant having to hire a second voice cast to create another soundtrack. Luxembourg also required the post-production work they were funding to be done there.



Signe also found out that when you make a film that will take over six years to complete, there might just be other unexpected problems. Unanticipated labor needs were solved by taking on college interns. That meant she had to learn how to set up and run intern programs with two NY area colleges. Sturgis Warner, Signe's co-producer told me later that their biggest problem was that once you trained an intern and they get good at what they were doing the internship would be over. In one case they found funds to hire a really talented intern.

Another unexpected headache for Signe was dealing with a sprained ankle. That was a minor nightmare compared with figuring out how to keep the production on track during a pandemic.

So when Signe held a zoom gathering in late May there was much to celebrate. There were over 100 people at her gathering including a who's who of independent animation. Among the artists present were Bill Plympton, who helped Signe get her feet wet in the New York animation world when she moved here from Latvia

almost 30 years ago. There were also several other animators present whose work I have long admired. They included Deborah Solomon, Ruth Lingford, Candy Kugel, and Joanna Quinn. Nik and Nancy Phelps were also there as was Yvette Kaplin (she produced *Beavis and Butthead*).

It really was a lovely event and I look forward to reporting news of the film's local, national, and European premieres. Hopefully I will also be writing about the film receiving numerous festival honors and other accolades.

<https://www.myloveaffairwithmarriagemovie.com/>



'RUGRATS' HAS RETURNED, BUT THE NEW 3D ANIMATED VERSION MAY BE HARD TO WATCH IF YOU GREW UP WATCHING THE ORIGINAL 2D SHOWS *The Guardian* warned it has “a new look that has been unsettling to faithful fans.” The content apparently is similar to the original series and new viewers aren't bothered by the new look. [the-guardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/may/27/the-return-of-rugrats-reboot-animated-classic?utm_term=342973347ab88fd52c7bffa0bfb4da20&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=GTUS_email](https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2021/may/27/the-return-of-rugrats-reboot-animated-classic?utm_term=342973347ab88fd52c7bffa0bfb4da20&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&utm_source=esp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=GTUS_email)



'US AGAIN' IS DISNEY ANIMATION'S NEW MUSICAL DANCE SHORT The elderly stars discover

the fountain of youth and go on to having a wonderful time dancing in the rain. It was shown theatrically before *Raya and the Last Dragon* and in June it began streaming on Disney+.

The seven-minute short starts with grumpy Art and young-at-heart Dot discovering the joys of being young again in rainy New York City. The animation was based on video reference footage that was turned into an animatic. The animation was key framed; the rain was simulated in Houdini. To make the work more joyful “a crowd team populated the cityscape with background dancing characters and cars.” Disney hopes it is a delightful film to celebrate (hopefully) the end of the pandemic.

DISNEY FANS WANT DISNEY+ TO SHOW A NEVER-RELEASED DOCUMENTARY STARRING STING WORKING ON 'THE EMPEROR'S NEW GROOVE' Footage from *The Sweatbox*, directed by John-Paul Davidson and Trudie Styler, wife of musician Sting, was included in *The Emperor's New Groove*, but Disney decided not to release the completed documentary after “doubt-filled meetings and catastrophic screenings and arguments.”

A promotional documentary about the making of *The Emperor's New Groove* called *The Sweatbox* was shelved after it was shown in 2002 at festivals. Apparently parts of it were too revealing about production problems. It went from being a nice promotional “making of” film to “a riveting, no-holds-barred, occasionally funny, often heartbreaking look at how the Disney sausage is made, and sometimes unmade.” Apparently unauthorized copies have appeared and then were taken down from YouTube and torrent sites.

Davidson, who directed the short, says “I think people are fascinated by *The Sweatbox* because it's not your saccharine making-of documentary. It gets into the sweat and the grit of it all. Disney owns the thing. We don't have any clout in terms of releasing it ourselves. I would love to have released it. It pops up online now and then, and the lawyers take it back immediately.”

Peter Schneider, who served as president of Walt Disney's feature animation department at the time says, “I'm disappointed *The Sweatbox* didn't come out. No matter how good or bad we all come off in it. I think it's an interesting movie. Disney+ is just gobbling things up. So why not just put it out?”

The Emperor's New Groove assistant production manager Tracey Miller-Zarneke says around 150 hours of footage was shot for *The Sweatbox*, but “Disney was mortified. So they pretty much buried it. They did let us do the Academy run.”

The full story about the documentary is posted at <https://www.vulture.com/article/an-oral-history-of-disney-the-emperors-new-groove.html>



COMING IN AUGUST, 'PAW PATROL' This looks like a wholesome animated comedy for a nice family desperate to find a way to entertain the kids as summer nears its end. It is a feature based on a long running TV series for young kids. Opens August 20. If you know someone that loves it, a line of overly cute stuffed animals is available at your favorite toy store.



DREAMWORKS' 'BOSS BABY: FAMILY BUSINESS' OPENS JULY 2 IN THEATRES AND ON PEACOCK On Jerry Beck's website there are links to 25 minutes of Boss Baby footage. It includes lots of noise and fast paced action that includes stupid humor. I assume it is designed to keep kids amused, but some adults may leave with a headache. See if you can stomach the clips before you commit to paying to see the latest from DreamWorks.

[tps://www.animationscoop.com/trailer-the-boss-baby-family-business](https://www.animationscoop.com/trailer-the-boss-baby-family-business)



HOW MANY TIMES CAN A FILM ARTIST BLOW YOUR MIND IN A SHORT WORK? VIRGIL WIDRICH MAY HOLD THAT RECORD... Widrich is a brilliant experimental filmmaker from Austria who

specializes in creating cinema that no one has seen before. I first discovered his talent for creating the impossible in *Copy Shop* from 2001. It received 35 international awards and was nominated for an Oscar. That was followed by *Fast Film* in 2003. Since then he has gone on to create a large body of work that consistently includes numerous moments that amaze people. His success has resulted in his being honored with over 150 festival awards.

In June the Brainwash Film Festival had a major online event that included Widrich's *Vienna Table Trip*, 2015. Once again he has created a unique work of art. vimeo.com/324619345

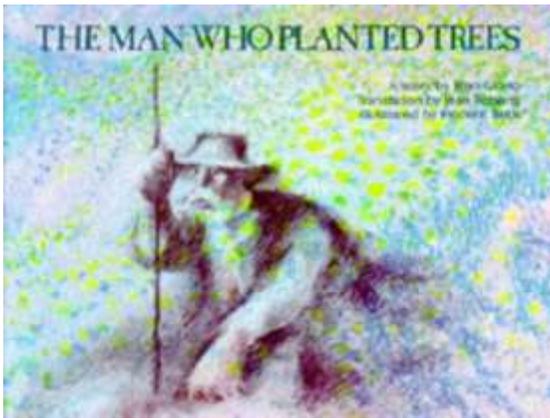
They also showed his *tx-reverse*, **Virgil Widrich** <https://www.widrichfilm.com/en/projekte/tx-reverse>

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ASK YOUR COLLEGE CLASS TO JUDGE THE FILMS SHOWN DURING THE SEMESTER? by Karl Cohen In 2021 I taught my spring animation history class at SF State online using zoom. All the films were posted for free on the internet, so if you want to see any of the films discussed in this article use your computer's search engine to see what impressed my upper division class of 76 students.

The class saw over 100 years of excellent films. Most were made to entertain the public, but others were propaganda to influence how Americans should think. Instead of giving the class a traditional final exam, I asked them to judge the several hundred films shown as if it was a film festival. They were asked to pick their top four films in nine categories and to explain why they picked their top choice in each category as the winner. I also asked them to pick their choice for the best in show work.

In most categories there were clear winners, but in two cases there were not enough votes for a single title to be declared the winner. In the best in show category there were over 50 titles mentioned by the students so only a few films were mentioned twice and none more than three times. That suggests the class members had a wide ranges of opinions. We are individuals with distinct tastes, so I wonder how realistic it is to believe the Best in Show award at most festivals is really the finest film. Most major animation festivals get around 2,000 entries each year, so can anybody pick the absolute best work a festival presents?

One fact I found interesting about the best of show category was there were only eight features picked. That says to me that the judges recognized that a short can be just as impressive and important as a feature. Also six of the eight features chosen were not from LA (*Earnest and Celestine*, *Prince and Princess*, *Grave of the Fireflies*, *Akira*, *Wolf Walkers*, and *Rango*). The two from LA were *Snow White* and *Fantasia*.



The closest we came to a clear winner in the “festival” was in the Humanitarian category. *The Man Who Planted Trees* got about twice as many votes as the 2nd place winner in that category. The competition for second would have been a tight race if I had kept a really accurate record. It would have been between *Peace on Earth, Brotherhood of Man*, Bill Plympton’s *Catalyst for Change*, Martha Gorzycki’s *Voices from Kaw Thoo Lei, Fired Up* (Obama giving an emotional speech), *Grave of the Fireflies* and *Lost Things*. All have strong, bold messages. There were over 40 titles that people voted for in that category, but while over half the class voted for *Man that Planted Trees*, the second place contestants had far fewer votes, and the remaining films only got 1 or 2 votes each.

In Best Film Directed by a Woman there was a very close race for the best film. It was between Deborah Solomon’s *My Kingdom* and Joanna Quinn’s *Body Beautiful*. Not far behind them were Sally Cruickshank’s *Quasi at the Quackadero*, Regina Pessoa’s *Tragic Story with a Happy Ending* and Michaela Pavlatova’s *Carnival of the Animals*. A smaller number of votes went to Nina Paley’s *Sita Sings the Blues*, Signe Baumann’s *Rocks in My Pocket* and Lotte Reiniger’s *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*. There were 28 films people voted for in this category and most of the films were noticeable for their bold statements. They were not cute, sweet, lovely works.



Turning to Best Comedy made before 1970, there was a close tie for first place between Chuck

Jones’ *Duck Dodgers* and Tex Avery’s *Red Hot Riding Hood*. Right behind them were *Duck Amuck*, and *What’s Opera Doc* by Jones and *Who Killed Who* and *Happy Go Nutty* by Avery. Getting smaller numbers of votes were *The Zoot Suit* (Tom and Jerry), *Goonland* (Popeye) and *The Rabbit of Seville*, and *Rabbit Seasoning* by Jones. I noted that most of the films that got votes were outrageous color classics, not black and white shorts.

There were two big surprises in this category, that *Hitler Dances the Lambeth Walk* (WWII, British propaganda) was recognized as an important humorous work. Also that Disney only got a few votes in this comedy category for *Modern Invention, Thru the Mirror, Band Concerts, Lonesome Ghosts* and *Steamboat Willie*. All the Disney shorts are wonderful, but the class favored works from Warner Bros. and MGM. Films from UPA, Fleischer, Iwerks and Sullivan (Otto Messmer’s *Felix the Cat*) also made it onto the list, but none got a lot of votes. The pre-1970 list of comedies had 60 or 70 titles on it, most only got one or two votes.

Turning to more recent comedies, *Logorama* was the winner followed by *Rango, Who Framed Roger Rabbit, Cat Came Back, Guard Dog* and *Octapodi*. Several people also voted for David Chai’s *Enrique Wrecks the World, My Kingdom* and George Griffin’s *You’re Outa Here*. Over 50 films got votes and since you could vote for 4 films in each category there were a lot of votes to be counted.



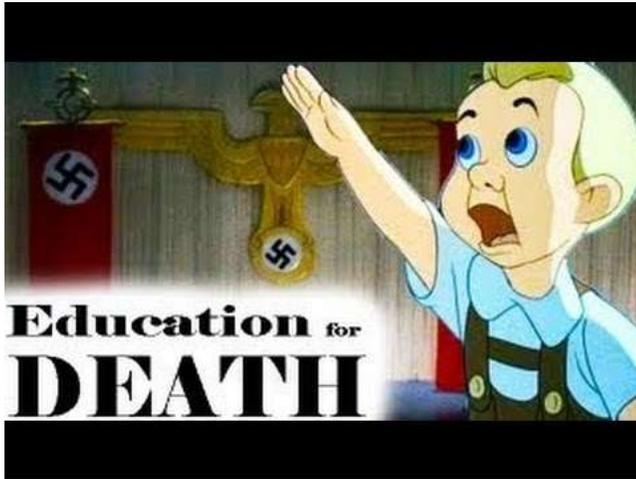
Life in Transition

In the Most Outrageous category *Logorama* was the top winner followed by Vince Collin’s *Malice in Wonderland*. Behind them were *Fritz the Cat, Cat Came Back, Carnival of the Animals, Morning Stroll* and *The Centrifuge Brain Project*. Frankly all of these picks are wonderful and outrageous.

Turning to Abstract Art, the clear winner was Oskar Fischinger’s *Optical Poem*. Coming in behind that were Ben Ridgway’s *Cosmic Flower Unfolding, Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* from *Yellow Submarine, Malice in Wonderland*, George Griffin’s *Ko-ko* and *The Dot and the Line* by Chuck Jones. Ben

Ridgway's *Formless Form* and *Frank Film* also got several votes.

The best use of surrealism award would have gone to either Ub Iwerk's *Balloonland*, *Malice in Wonderland* or John Dilworth's *Life in Transition*. Right behind them were Harman Ising's *The Milky Way*, Jan Svankmajer's *Dimensions of Dialog*, Bill Plympton's *Cheatin'*, Disney's *Pink Elephants on Parade*, UPA's *Tell Tale Heart* and Ub Iwerk's *Merry Mannequins*. I was surprised that films by Bob Clampett didn't get a lot of votes as several were shown.



Finally, The Tallest Tale winner was a Disney WWII propaganda film, *Education for Death*. Disney's *Spirit of '43* and Roy Disney's *Ike for President* also made the list along with a clip from *South Park* about hunting and *The Centrifuge Brain Project*.

The reason I asked students to act like judges and to pick winners was to let them write about films they were enthusiastic about. Their grade was based on how well and intelligently they wrote about the films. It appears most had fun recalling some of the films they liked.

CORRIE FRANCIS PARKS HAS JUST PUT HER VISUALLY EXCITING 'FOREIGN EXCHANGE' ONLINE Her Vimeo Staff Pick film is an impressive experimental work of art that she made with a lot of imagination, technical skill, unconventional materials and money.

<https://vimeo.com/cfparks/foreignexchange>

Corrie teaches at the University of Maryland campus in Baltimore and she has a MFA from the University of Southern California. Her films have been shown at Hiroshima, Annecy, Zagreb, Ottawa and other major animation festivals around the world. She is the author of the book *Fluid Frames: Experimental Animation with Sand, Clay, Paint and Pixels*. www.corrieparks.com

ENJOY SEEING A BEAUTIFULLY RESTORED PRINT OF 'KO-KO'S QUEEN,' 1924, This rare

Max Fleischer cartoon includes several unusual twists. It is a delightful work from the roaring '20s that hints at the way some men viewed women almost 100 years ago. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aa9ucylaH9s>

'OUT OF THE INKWELL: THE FLEISCHER STORY' honors some of the major artistic and technical accomplishments of Max and Dave. This 47 minute documentary from 2008 includes lots of fun film clips and experts from the LA and NY animation world explaining what the brothers' contributions to animation were and their historical importance. I think it tries too hard to get the message across that the studio was just as important as Disney. It was, but all they really needed to say is that both excelled, but in different ways. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xemq4sNfMf8>

'GREAT BIG BEAUTIFUL TOMORROW: THE FUTURISM OF WALT DISNEY' This is a 100 minute documentary on Walt Disney and his search for innovation and growth. The first half is on his work as a producer of animation, live action films, and the TV series. The 2nd half of the film focuses on his creation of Disneyland, Disneyworld and his plans for Epcot.

I hadn't seen it before and enjoyed seeing a positive, upbeat documentary that avoids being critical. I also enjoyed seeing two old friends, Maureen Furness who teaches at CAL Arts and author Jim Korkis, discussing Walt's career. It gives a really nice history of the man's many achievements and is full of excellent historical clips. Jim Korkis wrote me it's "an excellent documentary, but to the best of my knowledge it never aired on television. It has been shown at several events and was the basis for a book by the same title that is available from Amazon."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwLznNpJz2I>



WHAT DOES AN OBITUARY REALLY TELL US ABOUT A PERSON? Regarding the passing of Don Duga, an animation artist I was unfamiliar with, IMDB tells us, "Don Duga was born on January 1, 1934 in Hollywood, California, USA as Donald Jerome Duga. He is known for his work on *The Last Unicorn* (1982), *Beyond the Stars: A Space Story* (1981) and *Good Night, Gorilla* (1998). He was married to Irva Verbitsky.

He died on May 31, 2021 in Westhampton, New York, USA.”

The New York Times obit began, “Donald ‘Don’ Jerome Duga, renowned animator whose work included iconic favorites such as *Frosty the Snowman*, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*, *Mr. Magoo* and the Emmy-nominated *The Little Drummer Boy*, died May 30th in Westhampton, New York. He was 87.”



The paper went on to say he was “fittingly best known for his work on *Frosty the Snowman*, which debuted on television in 1969.” It also said. “After graduation he worked for United Pictures Association, which produced *Mr. Magoo* for television. Mr. Duga once described his big break into the industry working on *Mr. Magoo*, the creation of legendary John Hubley, who was blacklisted by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. (Note: that is not correct: Hubley was not blacklisted by the senator, it was the House Un-American Activities Committee that investigated and blacklisted 100s of people in the film industry. Also the studio he worked for was United Productions of America, not United Pictures Association. Hubley left UPA in 1952 when *Magoo* was a theatrical, not a TV star. The *Magoo* TV show began in 1960.)

The article continued, “Mr. Duga was called on to replace the head writer and took on all the aspects of creating the animation, including writing the stories, creating the storyboards, layouts and design.” (*The head writer was Bill Scott who quit out of respect for Hubley. Bill later shared screen credit with Jay Ward as co-directing the Rocky and Bullwinkle TV shows.*)



As for Duga’s expertise, a friend told me Duga worked on *Frosty* (1969) as the storyboard artist. I found he also got similar screen credits on the Rankin/Bass *Little Drummer Boy* (1968) and *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* (1970). The films mentioned in the IMDB article are shorts he and his wife co-directed for an educational film distributor.

The *NY Times* had a lot more to say. “Mr. Duga was born on January 1, 1934 in Hollywood, California. After serving in the US Army during the Korean War, he earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Chouinard Art Institute, where he planned to be an abstract artist. His life changed while studying with the famous animator Don Graham, who was hired by Disney to teach the animators how to draw Snow White. ‘I was never going to be in animation,’ Mr. Duga once told *Dan’s Papers*. ‘I was going to be a painter! But my drawing teacher said that you actually get paid if you do animation.’

After graduation he worked for United Pictures Association, which produced *Mr. Magoo* for television. Mr. Duga once described his big break into the industry working on *Mr. Magoo*, the creation of legendary John Hubley, who was blacklisted by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. Mr. Duga was called on to replace the head writer and took on all the aspects of creating the animation, including writing the stories, creating the storyboards, layouts and design.

A few years later, he drove his Volkswagen bus across the country, winding up in New York City. He landed a position as an art director for movies, television and commercials at Pelican Films, an animation studio on Madison Avenue. ‘Animation was hot back then, and it was a whole new experience to work in the New York atmosphere,’ Mr. Duga told *Newsday*. While in New York, he met fellow artist Irra Vertbitsky, whom he later married.

Mr. Duga decided to try a new adventure when he found out he could ship his VW bus to Belgium for only \$200. He and Ms. Vertbitsky traveled around Europe before settling in Rome and then Milan, Italy, creating animation for Olivetti typewriters and other Italian products. They later moved back to Manhattan, married,

and formed their own animation company, Polestar Films and Associated Arts, in 1976.

Mr. Duga's storied career in animation included working with Rankin/Bass Animated Entertainment, Sesame Street and individual animators such as Seamus Culhane and others. His work ran the gamut from the iconic Christmas specials, to Saturday morning cartoon classics such as *The Jackson Five* and *The Osmonds*, educational triumphs such as *Owen* (narrated by Sarah Jessica Parker) and *Goodnight, Gorilla*, as well as pop culture favorites like *Mad Monster Party* (with Phyllis Diller and Boris Karloff) and *The Last Unicorn* (featuring Mia Farrow and Jeff Bridges). Mr. Duga and partner Verbitsky won several awards including the prestigious Carnegie Medal for Best Children's film of the year and the ASIFA East Award for their work on *Owen*.

Mr. Duga firmly believed in the artistic underpinnings of animation. 'I learned Renaissance techniques in art school that have helped me with animation,' he once enthusiastically told a reporter. 'Animation should have started in the Renaissance. Only the camera hadn't been invented yet.' Much of Mr. Duga's work was in continuity design, essentially giving the characters life. 'I work out the whole sequence, the continuity, the shot plot, I bring the emotion to it. The board is the key that makes the whole film work,' Mr. Duga was once quoted as saying.

Mr. Duga was a mentor to up-and-coming animators, teaching for 50 years at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. Much-loved by his students, Mr. Duga formed lifelong bonds with many of them as they pursued their own careers in the 'art of animation' as Mr. Duga always referred to it. He taught his students classical animation techniques including hand-drawn storyboards and individually painted backgrounds.

Mr. Duga lived much of his life with his family in Greenwich Village, in New York City. In his later years he spent most of his time in the family summer home in Baiting Hollow, New York, where he enjoyed kayaking and socializing on his beloved beach. He was a staple of the East End arts community, hosting annual art shows and crafting several special covers for *Dan's Papers*, considered the Bible of the Hamptons."

Hi Karl,

I always appreciate your newsletter. Thanks for publishing the notice about Don Duga. We all knew him here in New York.

He taught animation classes at The School of Visual arts for many years. He and his wife, Irra, operated their own studio for several years turning out commercials, children's films and information productions. He was a member of ASIFA-East and did independent films. Unfortunately the *Times* printed the incorrect name of UPA and probably confused some other facts.

As you mentioned, you never heard of him. The thing about knowing who did what in animation has always been a problem. In the early days, little credit was given to anyone who did any work on animated films except the name of the producer. The Disney features mentioned some of the crew. Now every person's name is scrolled on film credits.

Certain animators became celebrities, while so many others just did their jobs and, at the end of the day, went home to mow the lawn. I wrote an article a few years ago and made the mistake of repeating the names of the artists that were usually afforded recognition and got a reprimand from Willy Pyle for not mentioning him and other stalwarts who were often overlooked. We must remember that no matter how much we know about the world we still have to respect those quiet folks who do their work and shy away from the spotlight.

All the best to you.

Howard Beckerman



NETFLIX'S 'AMERICA: THE MOTION PICTURE' The trailer suggests to me that this film is awful. Gosh, it features George Washington and other founding fathers dressed as super heroes and uttering the "f" word several times. Not a good reason to subscribe to Netflix.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hu00-q7Kf2k&list=RDCMUCW0A1ZGywLbqmigxE4Qlvuw>

THE STORY OF JOHN LASSETER'S NEW BOSS: 'DUMB MONEY NO MORE: HOW DAVID ELLISON BECAME A HOLLYWOOD HIGH FLIER.' When the young Oracle heir entered the entertainment industry, no one expected much. Instead, he's built the rarest of businesses — a thriving, all-audiences, independent studio. Read it at:

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/20/business/media/david-ellison-skydance.html?campaign_id=2&emc=edit_th_20210620&instance_id=33461&nl=todaysheadlines®i_id=60800013&segment_id=61221&user_id=2e5819310ee55c8db3ab14e24bbb9f79



WORTH READING – ‘COTTON PLANTATIONS AND NON-CONSENSUAL KISSES: HOW DISNEY BECAME EMBROILED IN THE CULTURE WARS’ This is an up to date report on Disney’s history of including and deleting racism, sexism, adding disclaimers to films, altering theme-park rides and doing other controversial things.

https://www.theguardian.com/film/2021/jun/16/how-disney-became-embroiled-in-the-culture-wars?utm_term=.305adc569fa9e03a0f15d35f65cbe399&utm_campaign=GuardianTodayUS&utm_source=sp&utm_medium=Email&CMP=GTUS_email



L'Hesitance PSA
By John Jota Leaños

NON-SEQUITUR ANIMATION John Jota Leanos has created a remix of an old animation by a friend called “Conspirabee,” a surrealist who created the original over 10 years ago. They saw a potential relation between that work and being in quarantine. They were surrounded by screens and conspiracies so they created this work called *L'Hesitance*. :) It is inspired by the French sci-fi film, *La Jetee* and - even though it seems very serious - the animation is quite ridiculous. We are calling it a PSA, but it is probably one of the most incomprehensible PSAs ever produced. He says, “Either way, we had a great time animating and writing it!”

<https://vimeo.com/565816469/10fedd27bb>
John, who teaches at UC Santa Cruz, say he is presently working on a political cartoon called “White History Month” and another about California Indian histories.



DISNEY+ TO AIR ‘MONSTERS AT WORK’ STARTING JULY 7 Laughter replaces scares in Disney’s sequel to Pixar’s *Monsters, Inc.* Produced entirely by Disney Television Animation, it picks up where the original Pete Docter-feature left off. It explores the difficult transition, with Mike (Billy Crystal) and Sulley (John Goodman) learning to run a power plant.



THE LEGEND OF WONDER WOMAN EXHIBIT OPENS JULY 1, 2021 The Cartoon Art Museum proudly presents *The Legend of Wonder Woman*, an exhibition celebrating 80 years of DC Comics’ iconic Amazon.



INTERNATIONAL TRICKFILM FESTIVAL (ITFS) ON LINE AND FMX

**4-9 May 2021, Stuttgart, Germany
Animation and Human Rights**

By Nancy Denney-Phelps

Last year ITFS was one of the first festivals to go totally on line. With a year to perfect the system the 2021 edition worked seemingly flawlessly to the home viewer. Nothing can replace the things that make the festival so much fun as the big outdoor screen and hanging out with friends in the beer garden, but the two hundred twenty page catalogue was chock full of more excellent films than anyone could see, even if they watched films 24 hours a day.



The International Short Film Competition was particularly strong this year, but one film stood out and made a deep impact on me. *Have A Nice Dog!* by Jalal Maghout gets inside the head of a young man who has no chance of getting a visa out of war-torn Damascus. Trapped in a disintegrating city where a bomb may destroy his home at any time, he becomes increasingly lost in his fantasies of leaving. His only companion is his dog, Baroud, with whom he carries on an increasingly delusional dialogue as Baroud's erratic behavior begins to mirror his master's inner life. The mixed media film is in black, white, and gray to heighten the sense of hopelessness. Touches of brilliant red for the character's nose and lips lend an eerie effect. Jamal left Damascus in 2013 to peruse a Master's Degree. He was sponsored by the Goethe Institute.

ITFS does not shy away from taking a political stance on such issues as war, migration, the environment, or any other social issue. It was very fitting that *Have A Nice Dog!* won the prestigious Lotte Reiniger Award. The prize is given annually to the best graduation film. It comes with a cash prize of 10,000 Euros and is sponsored by MFG Filmfunding Baden-Wurttemberg.

Have A Nice Dog! Also received the Young Animation Award for the Best Student Film. The award is accompanied by a cash prize of 2,500 Euros sponsored by LFK Ladesanstalt fur Kommunikation Baden-Wurttemberg and MFG Film Funding Baden-Wurttemberg.



Another chilling, though provoking film was Taiwanese animator Joe Hsich's *Night Bus*. Hsich used cut out animation for his crime thriller which has plenty of plot twists and turns. "Fasten your seat belts,

it's going to be a bumpy ride" applies to this film even more aptly than when the words were first spoken in the 1950 film *All About Eve*, as a group of travelers board a night bus.

Revenge, murder and romance play out under the backdrop of a tropical moon lit sky as the bus speeds along a coastal highway. All 20 minutes of the film just keep getting bloodier and bloodier as the suspense builds. In his director's chat, Hsich said that he enjoys traveling on night buses and his travels were the inspiration for *Night Bus*. I thoroughly enjoyed watching the film, but this is one bus that I do not want to be on.



French animator Paul Mas used puppets in his film *Precious* to tell the story of Julie and Emile, two young school students. Julie has been ostracized by her fellow students and Emile, who is autistic, is made fun of by his school mates. When Julie and Emile become friends, their fellow students' cruelty and the adults' inability to understand the situation leads to an outcome that is all too prevalent in real life.

Upon awarding *Precious* the Grand Prix, the jury said "Tackling subjects familiar to all of us, that of being othered and misunderstood, of bullying and of friendship, *Precious* skillfully handles the sensitive narrative with subtlety and a gentleness of expression."

I was unexpectedly delighted by *Little Vampire*, Joann Sfar's adaptation of his own cult graphic novel series. The story centers on the little vampire who has been ten years old for the last three hundred years. He lives in an old haunted mansion with a group of merry monsters, but he is bored to death (pun intended). His



big dream is to go to school to meet other kids, but unfortunately his parents have forbidden him to leave the mansion. His parents tell him that the outside world is too dangerous for them because of their old enemy, The Gibbus. It is still out there and has just been waiting to catch the little vampire and his family for centuries.

One night the little vampire, along with his faithful bull dog, Phantomato, sneak out of the house. He does find a human boy for a friend but he also attracts the attention of The Gibbus. Of course, his parents and family come to the rescue of the captured little vampire.

The film is full of flying chase scenes, a pirate ship, and a sexy ship's figurehead that has been enchanted. Although I assume that the film is aimed at family audiences, I think that any adult would enjoy the humor (some of which will go over the heads of younger children), the warmth of the vampire family, and the cast of loveable ghosts that inhabit the mansion. My husband watched the film with me and we both laughed a lot.

I believe that a well-made children's film should be enjoyable for anyone to watch regardless of age. Every film does not have to have a serious message, sometimes it is enough just to make people smile.



Milen Vitanov's short film that was in the TricksforKids short competition did just that. *Mishou* revolves around four rabbits living in the Arctic region and a Chihuahua who is accidentally left behind by a visiting tourist. The poor little fellow is taken in by the four rabbits who live in an abandoned polar station. All's well that ends well when the tourist hires a helicopter to come back and look for her beloved dog, but his rabbit friends realize that they miss him when he is gone. There are some very sweet scenes with the little dog joining in on a rabbit jam session and the rabbits trying to find suitable food for the little guy among the rabbit's stock of carrots.

The seven-minute film is a mixture of hand drawn 2D and stop motion animation. Vitanov said that he was inspired to make the film after coming across an article about the rising numbers of tourists visiting the Arctic and the bad impact that they are having on the environment, leaving unsightly garbage and disturbing

Arctic wildlife. *Mishou* is definitely not a message film and he has chosen to make it a very humorous film.



Also in the TricksForKids competition, I enjoyed *Lupin*, by French animator Helene Ducrocq. The cut-out animation 2D computer film is about a curious young wolf who ventures out of his burrow for the first time while his mother is out hunting. Being lost and frightened he finds shelter in the garden of a hunter. He is discovered by the hunter's three children who take him back to the woods, safely away from their father's gun, where he finds his den and worried mother again. It is a sweet film about kindness and trust.

Along with the competition programs the festival featured a multitude of special programs and events. One of my favorites was the Best of Animation series curated by Mark Shapiro. Each of the four programs was full of so many of my favorite films like Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbes' beautiful *When the Day Breaks* (1999) and Michael Dudok de Wit's *Father and Daughter* (2000). The list of animated gems goes on and on. All 47 films brought back special memories of when and where I first saw and fell in love with them.

This year French animation was in the spotlight. The pioneering French/Dutch animator Monique Renault was a member of the International Jury and also presented twelve of her films as part of the In Person series.



The theme for the 2021 edition of the festival was Creative Diversity and Monique's work fits this theme perfectly. As one of the first female independent short film animators, her films have been addressing

gender roles, female sexuality, anti-militarism, anti-clericalism, and prejudice as well as cultural topics since the 1970's. *Long Live the Sexual Revolution* (1983) was created for a Dutch television station's program on women and pornography. *Hands Off* (1985) is an educational film, intended to stimulate discussion in the campaign against wife beating. The film incorporates recorded interviews with women living in safe houses. Her technique is very recognizable. A trained painter, she uses colored pencils on paper to create her films.

Three programs curated by Waltraud Grausgruber, Tricky Women Animation Festival director, featured 29 films that have left a deep impression on the animation scene dealing with body awareness, lust, anorexia, and social taboos. The films also spoke out about social and political issues such as war and migration, topics that affect us all.

As part of Tricky Women, Signe Baumann gave us her very funny take on the first kiss, first make out session, and first sex in two minutes of screen time. They were three films from her 15 episode *Teat Beat of Sex* (2007).



Suggestion of Least Resistance

In 2019 Michelle and Uri Kranot created *Suggestion of Least Resistance*, a poetic and political audio-visual trip on the notion of the individual vs the historic for the Economy for the Common Good project initiated by the Vienna Contemporary Music Orchestra. The film is based on archival material from the July 1927 revolt in Austria. Socialist workers from the outskirts of Vienna assembled in front of the Palace of Justice to show their anger over the corrupt judicial system. Eighty-nine people were killed and more than 600 seriously injured by armed policemen on horseback. The angry crowd stormed the Palace of Justice, setting files inside on fire.

Michelle edited the film so that papers flying through the broken windows of the burning building are juxtaposed with images of the crowd as they convene and disperse. This gives the film a very eerie and disturbing feeling.

As much as we all want this terrible pandemic to be over, some filmmakers have put their lockdown time to good use as the 14 films in the Pandemic Animation program proved. From the serious side of the virus Martin Pflanzner's *To: The Doctors and Nurses*, is a

filmmatic thank you to some of the hardest working people during this time of crisis.

In *Anatomy of a World View*, Alexander Fischer pokes fun at one of the hazards that we all have encountered during life on the couch - the weight we have gained. Alexander actually turns his stomach into a giant mouth. No words can adequately describe this



Anatomy of a Worldview

ridiculously silly three-minute film, but you can find an excerpt on YouTube.

ITFS is more than about watching film. At the studio presentations I got to see the different working methods of established animation studios as well as being introduced to the new, young generation of creatives.

The Game Zone is an important component of the festival. It ranges from indie games to VR installations to game jams. The Game Zone Kids featured hands-on activities and workshops for the younger gaming set.

The role of women in the gaming industry has long been undervalued. The Game Zone's special exhibition Wonderwomen – Women in Games took place at the Kunstmuseum, the city's contemporary and modern art museum. The exhibition presented current positions and projects by women in the field of digital media. It also spotlighted the history and development of the female perspective in media arts. Sadly, it also showed that female positions were marginalized in the field of computer games. Along with artwork, the exhibition also featured games designed by women that have expanded the world of computer games with their diversity. It also showed that women have long stood for first class game design.

The daily Filmmaker Chats hosted by Anna Henckel-Donnersmarck gave me an opportunity to meet the filmmakers and ask them questions. I always find these chats very informative and often lead me to look at a film in a different light. The director's chat was followed by an open chat room where we could all meet each other on zoom.

ITFS has always gone out of its way to make me feel welcome and even though it was from a distance it still went the extra mile this year. Each year on the last

day of the festival there is a press brunch where festival Artistic Director Uli Wegenast and Dieter Kraus, managing director give us facts and figures about that year's festival. We also have the opportunity to ask them questions while eating pastry and fruit.

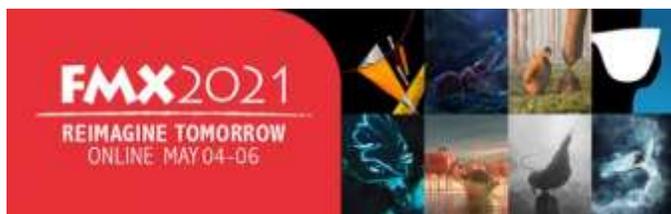
This year my Press Brunch arrived at my door in a box via my postman. When I opened the parcel I discovered a selection of delicious regional delicacies! There was a packet of granola from Die Muesli Manufaktur in Hohenstein, delicious candies courtesy of Sweets in Stuttgart, a large bottle of sparkling grape



My Press Brunch

juice and a nice travel mug for my tea. As I ate brunch with Uli and Dieter that Sunday morning I felt that a little normalcy had returned to my world even if there was no beer garden or big screen on the Schlossplatz.

I look forward to being back at the festival next year in person. I owe a big thank you to Nora Hieronymus, Head of Press and Public Relations and her staff for sending me extremely informative and useful updates throughout the festival and answering all of my questions. Thanks to my press accreditation I had unlimited access to the festival's Media Library where I could watch all of the films as video on demand. All of the winning films are listed at the end of this article. You can learn more about the festival at: www.ITFS.de



THE FMX CONFERENCE

For three days, 4-6 May, Germany became the center of all things technologically new and innovative

in the animation and film industry at the FMX Conference on Animation, Effects, Games, and Immersive Media.

Unfortunately, the 2020 edition of FMX was forced to cancel, but this year they were prepared to present it online. The theme *imagine tomorrow* was appropriate. This year the 178 sessions were all held virtually with over 398 international speakers giving talks and participating in round table discussions. Sixty-six companies and schools also took part in the FMX Forum.

In keeping with this year's theme *legendary visual effects men*, Doug Trumbull speculated about *Cinema of the Future*. Trumbull is noted for creating the special effects for such classic films as *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Blade Runner*.

One of the most fascinating talks that I listened to was *Peter Rabbit 2 – How Animal Logic's Animation and Production Teams Helped to Deliver This Ambitious Sequel*. Ingrid Johnson, Head of Production, and Animation Director Simon Pickard talked about creating the visual effects for the sequel to the 2018 hit live-action/digital *Peter Rabbit*. A big challenge on the film was to make fur look realistic and replicate the same amount of hair that is on a live rabbit as well as structuring it the same way. To create the special effects The Studio in Sidney, Australia employed 600 Animal Logic crew and an additional 150 people from Method Studios in Melbourne.

Peter Rabbit had 4.3 million hairs that needed to be rendered for each shot. Combined with all of the other characters, and it became a very intense process. The cloth for the rabbits' jackets, which were simulated frame by frame, also had to interact with the fur.



Actor and Acting Trainer Ed Hooks gave a live Masterclass on *Acting For Animators*. Ed uses classical techniques to explain everything from character analysis and physical movement to facial expressions and scene structure. Even though an animation voice over artist is never seen on screen, all of the techniques that Ed covers in his sessions are vitally important to give a good, believable performance. Ed has also developed a video

instruction program. To find out more about his video program you can contact Ed at: edhooks@edhooks.com

2021 ANNECY INTL. ANIMATION FILM

FESTIVAL OFFICIAL SELECTION WINNERS

FEATURE FILMS

CRISTAL FOR A FEATURE FILM

“Flee” (Jonas Poher Rasmussen, Denmark, France, Norway, Sweden)

JURY AWARD

“My Sunny Maad” (Michaela Pavlátová, Czech Republic, France, Slovakia)

JURY DISTINCTION

“The Crossing” (Florence Mialhe, Germany, France, Czech Republic)

CONTRECHAMP AWARD

“Bob Spit – We Do Not Like People” (Cesar Cabral, Brazil)

CONTRECHAMP JURY DISTINCTION

“Archipelago” (Félix Dufour-Laperrière, Canada)

SHORT FILMS

CRISTAL FOR A SHORT FILM

“Peel” (Samuel Patthey, Silvain Monney, Switzerland)

JURY AWARD

“Easter Eggs” (Nicolas Keppens, Belgium, France, Netherlands)

JURY DISTINCTION

“Affairs of the Art” (Joanna Quinn, U.K., Canada)

JEAN-LUC XIBERRAS AWARD FOR A FIRST FILM

“Hold Me Tight” (Mélanie Robert-Tourneur, Belgium, France)

OFF-LIMITS AWARD

“Tunable Mimoid” (Vladimir Todorovic, Australia)

TV SERIES AND FILMS

CRISTAL FOR A TV PRODUCTION

“Vanille” (Guillaume Lorin, France, Switzerland)

JURY AWARD FOR A TV SERIES

“Japan Sinks: 2020” “The Beginning of the End” (Masaaki Yuasa, Japan)

JURY AWARD FOR A TV SPECIAL

“Mum Is Pouring Rain” (Hugo de Faucompret, France)

COMMISSIONED FILMS

CRISTAL FOR A COMMISSIONED FILM

“A Little Too Much” (Martina Scarpelli, U.S.)

JURY AWARD

“Help! We Have a Blind Patient” (Robin Jensen, Norway)

GRADUATION FILMS

CRISTAL FOR A GRADUATION FILM

“Hippocampus” (Zehao Li, China)

JURY AWARD

“Avant” (Marcell Mostoha, Hungary)

JURY DISTINCTION

“Butterfly Jam” (Shih-Yen Huang, France, Taiwan)

VR WORKS

CRISTAL FOR THE BEST VR WORK

“Replacements” (Jonathan Hagar, Germany, Indonesia, Japan)

SPECIAL PRIZES

FESTIVALS CONNEXION

“Beast” (Hugo Covarrubias, Chile)

JUNIOR JURY – SHORT

“People in Motion” (Christoph Lauenstein, Wolfgang Lauenstein, Germany)

JUNIOR JURY – GRADUATION FILM

“My Friend Who Shines in the Night” (Grégoire de Bernouis, Jawed Boudaoud, Simon Cadilhac, Hélène Ledevin)

YOUNG AUDIENCE AWARD

“Kiko and the Animals” (Yawen Zheng, France, Switzerland)

CANAL PLUS JUNIOR JURY

“A Stone in the Shoe” (Éric Montchaud, France, Switzerland)

FIPRESCI – SHORT

“The Shaman’s Apprentice” (Zacharias Kunuk, Canada)

ORIGINAL MUSIC – FEATURE

“Flee” (Uno Helmersson, Denmark, France, Norway, Sweden)

ORIGINAL MUSIC – SHORT

“The Awakening of the Insects” (Denis Vautrin, France)

ANDRÉ-MARTIN AWARD FOR A FRENCH FEATURE

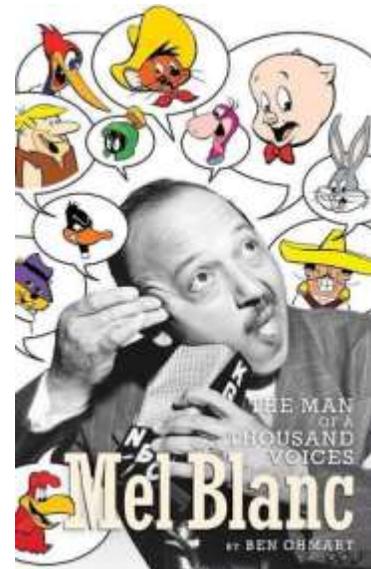
“Marona’s Fantastic Tale” (Anca Damiaa, Romania, France, Belgium)

CITY OF ANNECY AWARD

“Clara with a Mustache” (Ilir Blakcori, Kosovo)

YOUTUBE AWARD

“Postpartum” (Henriette Rietz, Germany)



CARE TO SPEND 11 MINUTES ENJOYING A TRIBUTE TO MEL BLANC and his amazing voices?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9B5d9d10-JU>



DISCOVER WHO MISH-MISH EFFENDI BY THE FRENKEL BROTHERS IS AT THE 2021 JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL They have been called the Walt Disneys of Egypt. The three Egyptian Jewish brothers, Herschel Frenkel (1902-1972), Shlomo (1912-2001), and David (1914-1994), pioneered animated film in Egypt. Their first successful film, *Mafish Fayda* (1936), made Mish-Mish Effendi the first Arab cartoon star. See the trailer for the documentary feature *Mish-Mish* at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPL5oTU9RzM>
The 41st San Francisco Jewish Film Festival runs July 22 to Aug 1. There is also some animation in the feature *A Kaddish for Bernie Madoff* (trailer at <https://vimeo.com/459483146>), in *Tiger Within* and in a couple of shorts. This year the Festival will present over 50 films from over 20 countries with an unprecedented number of shorts and special guests from around the globe. Over 11 days, film-goers will be treated to virtual screenings. There will be in-person screenings at the Castro Theatre on July 24 and 25.

<https://sfjff.org/film-festival>



GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S 'TROLLHUNTERS: RISE OF THE TITANS,' Made with DreamWorks, it premieres July 21 on Netflix. See an action packed trailer:

<https://variety.com/2021/film/news/trollhunters-guillermo-del-toro-dreamworks-netflix-1234996497/>
READ 'VARIETY'S' ARTICLE ON THE WINNERS OF ANNECY 2021

<https://variety.com/2021/film/global/annecy-winners-2021-flee-sunny-maad-1235000829/>



YABBA DABBA DOO! HILLSBOROUGH LOST THEIR SUIT AND AGREES TO PAY \$125,000 THEIR SUIT AGAINST THE OWNER OF THE FLINTSTONE HOUSE The city officials claimed it was a public nuisance. She added more statues without a permit. The house can be seen on a hillside from highway 280. The owner, Florence Fang, has agreed to file for a permit.



Fang is a media tycoon who once owned Chinese newspapers and the *SF Examiner*. She doesn't live in the house, it is her conference center.

LATE NEWS: SIGNE BAUMANE HAS LOCKED THE VISUALS OF HER NEXT FEATURE No further changes will be made to it!

She has also posted a link to an edited video of her May 23 event where she talked about the productions history and showed clips of it. It is the subject of our page one story.

<https://signebaumane.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=fd9be9886b8e0b66b3e7a3b0d&id=9b2834646a&e=1366ec120e>

ARTISTS, SHOW YOUR WORK AT THE DISNEY MUSEUM The Walt Disney Family Museum presents Spirit of the Season: A Community Art Exhibit

“Submissions are now open for their next community exhibition. Adult and teen artists are invited to submit artwork inspired by their own holiday traditions and expressing what the spirit of the season means to them including Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Ōmisoka, Diwali, Las Posadas, Three Kings Day, Toji, seasonal solstices, and New Year’s.

The deadline to submit artwork is Sunday, August 8, 2021 at 11:59pm PT. The juried exhibition, *Spirit of the Season* will be on display in the museum’s Lower Lobby Gallery from November 18, 2021. A full list of terms and requirements, as well as instructions for artwork submission are available at waltdisney.org/spirit. The deadline to submit artwork is Sunday, August 8, 2021 at 11:59pm PT.

ASIFA-SF IS A VOLUNTEER RUN ASSOCIATION

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Special thanks to **Nancy Denney-Phelps** for representing our chapter on the international ASIFA board and her monthly contributions to the newsletter, to **Emily Berk** our webmaster, and to **Eihway Su** who keeps our mailing 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. Membership is normally \$21 a year with the e-mailed newsletter, but right now we have a **COVID 19 SPECIAL OFFER Due to the lockdown we are only asking \$11 a year while the virus lasts. Let’s hope it is a limited time offer. We want to hold in-person events again.**

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