

March 2025



SAN FRANCISCO STATE ANIMATION STUDENTS AND ALUMNI HELPED CREATE THE ANIMATED OPERA 'A POCKET MAGIC FLUTE'

This unusual cultural experience is a 45-minute animated/live action film adaptation of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Once again Tamino and Pamina will brave dangers and trials to find true love and enlightenment. A world-class cast of singers and actors unite in this groundbreaking take on Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Students will learn about African culture, Mozart, The Age of Enlightenment, singing, and careers in opera, theater, music, film, and animation. This ambitious project took three years to complete.

Martha Gorzycki, who heads the animation program at SFSU, supervised a team of animation students to do research and create script breakdowns, character turnaround sheets, storyboards, animatics, and backgrounds and prop design. The pre-production and production work was organized using a digital studio pipeline system with assignments and deadlines.

The lead producers, screenwriters and animation directors are twin sisters from Oakland and SFSU cinema alumnae, Shawneé Gibbs (B.A., '02) and Shawnelle Gibbs (B.A., '02). The student production team consisted of: Estrella Torres (B.A., '21), Jaqueline Rosie Nares (B.A., '22), Alex Wood (B.A., '22), Madeline Ko (B.A., '23), and Jessie Plascencia (B.A., '23). The lead costumer was Miriam Lewis (Theater MFA, '12).

The project was produced by San Francisco's Pocket Opera in partnership with the Lorraine Hansberry Theater, School of Cinema at

San Francisco State University, Sirnare Animation Studio in Kenya, the Oakland Symphony Youth Orchestra and Sacramento Youth Symphony.

The opera had its world premiere in SF State's August Coppola Theater in Sept. It is now traveling to classrooms of fourth to eighth graders, accompanied by a curriculum and appearances by the artists in person.

It won the Digital Excellence in Opera Award in 2024 from Opera America. To see clips of the animation Google *The Making of A Pocket Magic Flute*.



Directors Shirin Sohani and Hossein Molayemi

STAY TUNED – WE MAY HAVE A LAST- MINUTE

EVENT

A CHANCE TO MEET THE CREATORS OF 'IN THE SHADOW OF THE CYPRESS'

Shirin Sohani and Hossein Molayemi just won the Oscar for Best Animated Short Films. Marty McNamara invited the directors of *In the Shadow of the Cypress* several months ago to San Francisco if they get visas and come to LA. To get the visas they had to fly from Iran to another country as the US doesn't have an embassy there, They got there, but there were problems with the paperwork. That resulted in their getting the visas at the *very* last moment. They arrived after a 22 flight, just a few hours before the ceremony. Well, they won the Oscar!

We're still not sure if they will be in SF, but if they do, we will let you know if there will be an event.



The fresco painted by Diego Rivera in 1931

SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE IS SAVED THANKS TO NEW OWNERS

The San Francisco Art Institute declared bankruptcy in 2014 with debts exceeding \$10 million. Since its closure, a beacon of hope has emerged, Laurene Powell Jobs, widow of Steve Jobs. The school has been purchased and will reopen as a nonprofit art institute. Jobs has provided an endowment of roughly \$30 Million, enough to prevent the

sale of the Diego Rivera's mural that had once been considered to settle the mounting debt.

The new owners of the property have established a nonprofit's advisory committee described as "senior heavy hitters in the SF art arena." They include people who are or had once headed the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, the San Francisco Arts Commission, the California College of the Arts and other non-profits. It will probably take the new owners two to four years of construction and essential maintenance before the school can reopen its doors. . The purchase does not include the Fort Mason Center for Arts and Culture campus (formerly owned by SFAI).

Read about the school and its history: Google <https://eastofborneo.org/articles/the-rise-fall-and-reinvention-of-the-san-francisco-art-institute/>

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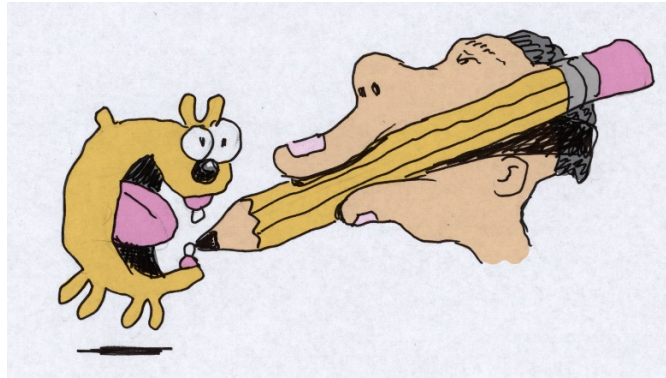
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THE KING OF INDEPENDENT ANIMATORS HAS NEW WAYS TO KEEP US UP TO DATE ABOUT WITH HIS PAST AND PRESENT OUTRAGEOUS FIGMENTS OF HIS IMAGINATION

You can spend hours exploring his Plymptoons YouTube channel. It is loaded with all kinds of amazing treats. <https://www.youtube.com/plymptoons>. You can also sign up to get his Scribble Junkies blog and get his musings on the state of his projects, other films he's seen, gag cartoons and other odds and ends. There is a store that sells all kinds of things from original artwork to DVDs and funny stuff printed on paper. People can even commission Bill to create a caricature of yourself, someone you like, or even your pet! <https://www.plymptonstore.com/> You can even subscribe to be a patron [patreon.com/plymptoons](https://www.patreon.com/plymptoons)

There is also his *Shut Eye Hotel*, a really dark film noir work. Not your customary PlymPtoon.



THE PLYMPTON ANIMATION SCHOOL HAS REOPENED FOR A LIMITED TIME!! Bill says, “It was about three years ago when I last offered my super-popular set of Master Classes, but that was during the pandemic.” He just finished his feature *Slide* and has “some free time to get back to teaching, and I hope YOU can join me to learn the secrets of creating animated films. By the end of the course, you should have your very own original animated short, which you can then enter in festivals or post on YouTube.”

He wants to teach both online and live in NYC (March 10 to April 28, eight 90-minute classes). In both cases he will be drawing, showing films, talking about his experiences, answering questions and critiquing your work. The topics covered include:

1. Introduction: concepts, ideas, influences, financing
2. Creating an outline & characters
3. Fundraising, budget & schedule
4. Storyboarding
5. Layouts & backgrounds
6. Animation & coloring
7. Editing, music & voices
8. Festivals, distribution, contracts, promotion

Tuition is \$1,500 for the eight live classes. So please sign up by sending an e-mail to studio@plymptoons.com All students will receive a diploma from the Bill Plympton’s Animation School.

If you can’t attend the classes in NYC on Monday nights, we will be offering an option to watch videos of all of the classes for just \$1,000.

You can also schedule an individual portfolio review by Bill for \$300. Payment can be made via Zelle or Venmo, please e-mail us for details.

Also, Bill says he will give two signed pieces of his animation art to each student.



'NE ZHA 2' FROM CHINA IS SETTING NEW BOX OFFICE RECORDS WORLDWIDE

Inside Out 2 used to be the highest-grossing animated film of all time. It made almost \$1.7 billion worldwide. Now a film from China has broken that record in just 21 days after was released (Jan. 29, 2025). In less than two weeks after its release, *Ne Zha 2*, broke the billion-dollar mark, becoming the first non-Hollywood film to do that. It is also the highest grossing movie ever shown in China. And it is just getting started.

One online review says, “Its rebellious kid hero goes from slapstick comedy to heartrending tear-jerker.” The film’s story is extremely convoluted. I suggest you go to Wikipedia and try to understand it. It is based loosely on Chinese mythology and a 16th-century novel. **Ne Zha 2 - Wikipedia**



‘ANIMATION ME’ BY TONY WHITE IS AN UNUSUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY, HIS TEACHER WAS RICHARD WILLIAMS

review by Karl Cohen There are several interesting books about the great Hollywood animation directors from the past, but very little has been written about what it was like to work your way up to the top in England. Tony White started his career in London after being trained as an illustrator. His first professional job was at a well-known studio. He was working as a background artist at Halas and Batchelor Studios (H&B) and when he interviewed for the job, he had no idea what the job was. He says he was simply glad to know he would soon have enough money to move out of his parents’ house. He told me they were lovely, but they were poor and I didn’t want them to support me any longer.

White’s discussion of H&B started by his telling us about occasional two-hour lunches at a pub where a typical meal included two pints of a tasty brew. His job was doing backgrounds by following the instructions and rough drawings sent to him by the layout artists. He never saw the animators at work as he worked in London and the actual animation was produced in Stroud, Gloucester. The London

office was a noisy work environment and while he was glad to have started a career, one he had never imagined existing when was in school. It was “definitely old-school in style for most of the time I was there.”

Near the end of his stay at H&B it was sold to Tyne Tees Television, 1970. The managing director they assigned to run the studio was Jim Nurse, a progressive producer who brought in several young talented artists to create a new and youthful image for the studio.

While at H&B White worked on the TV series *Tom Foolery* and *Jackson Five*. He also created *A Short Tall Story*, 1970, that he wrote, directed and designed. It won awards at festivals and was used by the United Nations to promote peace around the world. He recently published the story as an illustrated children’s book that is available from Amazon.



Note: H&B had created a lot of morale building propaganda cartoons during WWII. In the early 1950s they created a feature length version of *Animal Farm*, 1954, that was secretly financed by the CIA. It was during the Cold War and the script was altered from Orwell’s text to make it into anti-communist propaganda. My most widely read article *The Cartoon that came in from the Cold*, 2003, published by the *Guardian*, is about that film. It was first published by awn.com as *Halas and Batchelor's Animal Farm and the CIA*.

White told me that staying at H&B wasn’t “ultimately the path I wanted to go with my career.” While he was at H&B he became aware of the Richard Williams Studio and their amazing cutting edge work. “Richard Williams was - perhaps, the ONLY person in the world I wanted to work for at that time.”

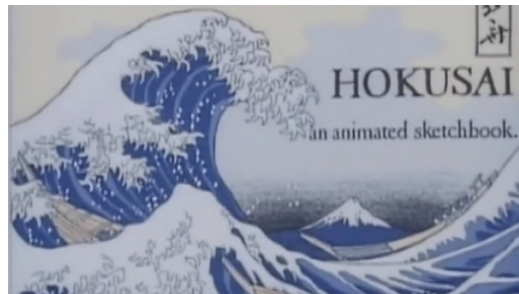
He sent Williams a note, they met, Williams saw Tony's portfolio and told him there were no job openings at that time, but keep in touch. About a year later, when he sent Williams another note, the response was somebody had just quit, want to start working for us? He had been at H&B for about five years.

It turned out he was being offered a remarkable opportunity. He was hired to be trained as William's personal assistant and for the first year and a half his desk was one of three in Williams' office!

What was even more amazing, he was there as Dick's personal assistant on *A Christmas Carol*, 1971, the film that won Williams his first Oscar (Best Animated Short). Williams wanted everyone's work to be exceptional, but nobody in England was producing Disney quality animation at that time, so in the coming months Williams began to invite some of Disney and Warner Bros. greatest retired animation directors to come teach and work at the studio. At one point Williams was so serious about improving the company's work that he closed his studio for a month so his staff and people from other studios could come study the secrets of Disney animation with the legendary director Art Babbit.

He moved out of William's office when he started animating commercials. Later he was directing them. He told me, "I had my own room with good light and an assistant. At one point I was very lucky, I shared a room with Ken Harris. I was his assistant and assigned to pick his brain on how Warner Brothers animation was done."

The book offers a clear contrast between the cultures of the first two studios White worked for. Working for Williams was a dream job come true and he welcomed his artists being free to be improvise in their work. He also encouraged their being creative when they were waiting for their next assignment. He paid his artists their full salary when they were between projects, and his artists could use the company's materials and equipment for use on on personal work. That included White doing personal films while he was working there.



HOKUSAI, An Animated Sketchbook, took White two and a half years to make. That was time well spent as the film won the British Academy Award for Best Short Factual Film in 1978. Winning the award also impressed prospective clients to hire him.

[https://vimeo.com/378155933?
cjdata=MXxOfDB8WXww&utm_campaign=5250933&utm_source=affiliate](https://vimeo.com/378155933?cjdata=MXxOfDB8WXww&utm_campaign=5250933&utm_source=affiliate)

As a director/ animator at Williams' studio he worked on many international award-winning commercials and wrote, directed, designed and animated the titles for the movie *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* (winner of the prestigious British *D&AD Silver Award*).

Moral was high at the studio. People were proud to be working there on unique works that advanced the art of animation, and the book discusses some of those films. He told me, "We were so inspired to do great work there, we did it without being asked. and much of the overtime was unpaid."

Although White was now directing major projects, he decided it was time to open Animus Productions, his own studio. The book goes on to cover White's long successful career heading Animus (1978 – 1998) where he directed, animated and produced over 200 theatrical and TV commercials and some of his ads won major awards (Clio, Mobius, and others). He also directed a 10-part live action/CG TV drama series, *The Ink Thief*, starring *Rocky Horror Show* creator, Richard O'Brien. His animated PBS special *Cathedral* was a *Blue Ribbon Award* winner. That production was immediately followed by *Pyramid*.

Unfortunately, in the late 1990s the demand for hand-drawn animation was dwindling as the computer animation business grew. Studios that specialized in hand-drawn animation either had to switch to turning out computer animation or close. White decided to close as he couldn't get a feature production off the ground. He decided to

move to the US.

He moved to Seattle and became an animation teacher. He was also the author of several books and he opened a new studio. His website says he has several projects in various stages of completion.

I was anxious to review *Animation Me* as I have admired Richard Williams' work ever since I saw *Who Killed Roger Rabbit?* I got to know two people who were involved in creating the underground edition of Williams' unfinished *Thief and the Cobbler*, a film cobbled together using workprint and restored footage. I also had the pleasure of spending time with Dick and his wife when they lived in San Francisco.

I believe White's portrait of Richard Williams is quite honest as he was willing to discuss the man's flaws as well as his greatness. I also feel his somewhat colorful depiction of the Halas and Batchelor Studio rings true from stories other people have told me about British animation studios in the late 20th Century.

ANIMATION ME: An illustrated memoir with Pencils, Pixels & Arnie is an enjoyable, fast read, [and its full of unique stories. Its available from Amazon for a limited time at \\$2.99 \(it will go up to \\$7.95 soon\) in Kindle and for \\$17.95 in paperback. It is over 300 pages with lots of b/w illustrations.](#)

**NEW ANIMATED APPROACHES ARE BEING
DEVELOPED TO CONFRONT AND UNDERSTAND THE
HOLOCAUST**



‘The Star of Andra and Tati’ (2019) by Rosalba Vitellaro and Alessandro Belli.

There is a growing movement among animators to explore new ways to introduce to the public the truth of what happened during the Holocaust. It uses art instead of extremely graphic and disturbing documentary footage. This results in films that are less-upsetting reminders about what took place over 80 years ago. In the last 15

years there has been a growing interest for these educational works from TV stations, schools, Holocaust museums and other institutions.

An important essay, “[Honoring Holocaust Victims Using Animation](#),” is now online at Animation World Network ([awn.com](#)). I discuss a wide selection of animated films, from harrowing survivor biographies to inspiring stories of people, and historic events. There are now over 50 of these films, and over 40 were made after 2010. They bring needed awareness to one of the most disturbing subjects in world history.

Most of the films in my article can be seen in their entirety on the internet. The oldest come from Poland, a country that saw some of the worst destruction of the war. It was also the location of several of Hitler’s most infamous death camps. It isn’t surprising that the Polish films express considerable anger, but like some of the paintings of the Spanish painters Goya and Picasso, they are impressive works of art, instead of something too disturbing to look at.

The second part of the essay includes works from other parts of the world that are just as important, but are more gentle and much easier to watch. They include biographies, a dramatic hunt for a war criminal, a comedy about a child meeting a Holocaust denier and other artistic studies. There is even a short, *A Letter to a Pig*, describing a surreal daydream that received an Oscar nomination.

The last part of the study includes comparative material, powerful animated films that refer to mass murders/genocides of civilian populations in other parts of the world (USSR, Burma and Lebanon).

Animation World Network ([AWN.com](#)), founded in 1996, has become one of the leading online portals covering the art, craft and industry of animation, VFX, and related areas of media and entertainment.

GOOGLE: <https://www.awn.com/animationworld/honoring-holocaust-victims-using-animation>



‘FLOW’ WILL JOIN THE CRITERION COLLECTION LATER THIS YEAR WITH A 4K SPECIAL EDITION *Flow* won the Best Animated Feature Oscar and was nominated for Best International Feature Oscar Oscars. It has won two Annie Awards for Best Independent Feature and Best Writing (even though it contains no dialogue). It also has won the Best Animated Feature award at the at the Golden Globes, European Film Awards, National Board of Review, New York Film Critics Circle, the Los Angeles Films Critics Association and from several other groups, On Feb. 13 *Variety* reported the film’s gross had passed \$20 million at the global box office.

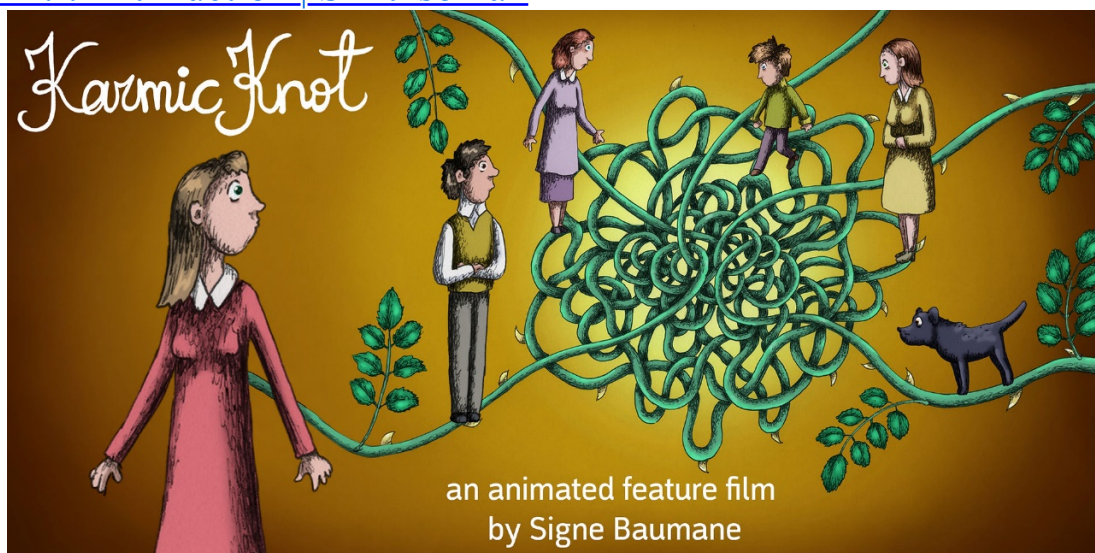


NEW – SEE ‘ROBOT SCHOOL REJECTS’ BY VINCE COLLINS He says, “This has 3D Animation and AI, but not much Mocap.” It is just a wee bit strange. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYTDemcfp20>



ANIMATION STUDIO CLASSES FOR KIDS, TEENS, ADULTS AT THE WALT DISNEY FAMILY MUSEUM Classes have been announced for this spring and summer. For details visit marketing@wdfmuseum.org

ARTISTS HAVE SIGNED OPEN LETTER PROTESTING CHRISTIE'S UPCOMING AUCTION OF A.I. ART Are the prices that these works might sell for impressive, or is this an outrageous rip-off? Google [Artists Sign Open Letter Protesting Christie's Upcoming All-A.I. Art Auction | Smithsonian](#)



DIRECTOR SIGNE BAUMANE ANNOUNCES THAT ' KARMIC KNOT' WILL BE HER THIRD FEATURE *Karmic Knot* will tell the epic tale of a family trying to survive in occupied Latvia from the 1970s to early 1990s. The family bargains, compromises, and ingeniously builds their own world, insulated from the political reality. When the Soviet Union starts to collapse into chaos and violence, and the world

around them shatters, the family aspires to rebuild it even more insular than before. One family member, however, has ambitions.

Karmic Knot is a mixture of drama, comedy and horror. "I believe that animation is the best medium to tell this complicated story, where each point of view or character's inner thoughts can be represented in different visual styles." The film will employ a variety of animation techniques including stop-motion. The production has started and the film is scheduled to premiere in 2028. It is a Latvian/USA co-production.

Signe has already raised over a million dollars and a generous foundation has given the film a great gift! **A matching-fund grant has been established, but it ends at the end of March.**

Help finance *Karmic Knot*. Signe writes, "Here is how it works: every donation from \$25 to \$1,000 will be doubled, dollar for dollar, through April 1st. (Limited to donations under \$50,000.) This means that your support will go twice as far to help create *Karmic Knot* animation and CGI 3D."

The budget is about 2.5 million. To join the cause, please go to the *Karmic Knot* website: www.KarmicKnotMovie.com where you can donate via [credit card](#), [PayPal](#) or tax-deductible donations through [Filmmakers Collaborative](#)

Signe's previous works include 17 award winning shorts and the features *My Love Affair with Marriage* (2022) and *Rocks in my Pockets* (2014). Her website is <https://www.signebaumane.com>

THREE SPACED OUT TRAILERS FOR THE UPCOMING STUTTGART FESTIVAL The trailers for the 32nd of the Stuttgart International Animation Festival are weird, wild and crazy surreal trips. The festival puts the best of the current crop of independent shorts in the spotlight. This year the focus is on handmade stop-motion and the artistry of Switzerland. The fest runs from May 6-11.

'THE WILD ROBOT' WINS NINE ANNIES DreamWorks Animation's *The Wild Robot* ran away with the most trophies at the 52nd annual Annie Awards with nine awards, including best feature.

Netflix's video game adaptation "[Arcane](#)" led the TV/Media categories with seven. A full list of winners is at: <https://www.annieawards.org/winners>

WARNER BROS., DC COMICS SUED BY THE ESTATE OF SUPERMAN CO-CREATOR The estate of Joe Shuster, is suing Warner Bros., Discovery and DC Comics over foreign market rights to the iconic alien superhero. The suit aims to block the distribution of the intellectual property without acquiring a license from the estate.



SEE A 7-MINUTE EPISODE OF 'MIGHTY MIKE,' A FUNNY

ROMP WITH AN ALL ANIMAL CAST The first episode on the compilation reel of *Mighty Mike* is delightful, The TV show, made in France in 2019 and created by Guillaume Hellouin, stars “Mike, a refined and sophisticated pug, who is forced to defend his home from critters, including raccoons, turtles and Fluffy the Cat, at the worst possible times.” Unfortunately, the other episodes feature plots and gags that are variations of the first episode that I found funny, so I turned the program off before the reel ended. KC <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkGWz9AzVns>



‘LESBIAN SPACE PRINCESS’ The film was mentioned in last month’s newsletter. Nancy Phelps writes, “I wasn’t expecting much but it turned out to be really good. Good character design animation. The story is good and I laughter a lot. It is also a musical.”

Variety reports, “A fast-paced sci-fi animated comedy, “LSP” features candy-colored aesthetics, upbeat musical numbers and grown-up comedy to tell the story of Princess Saira, an introverted space princess from the planet Clitopolis who embarks on an intergalactic mission to save her ex-girlfriend from the Straight White Maliens — voiced by the popular Australian comedy trio Auntie Donna.”

Trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FaVAEjWoxM>



RIP FUMI KITAHARA She was an animation publicity executive whose clients include Aardman, Works, Aardman, Laika, Netflix and Disney. She also helped independent animator from around the world be

seen in the US including sending me impressive film that I showed at ASIFA events and to my students. She died from complications related to a rare blood cancer. She was 56.

