

ASIFA

THE INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION ASSOCIATION

Sept 2019

ASIFA

THE INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 225263

SF, CA 94122

SEE NEW ANIMATION FROM THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

MEET TWO OF THEIR STAR ANIMATORS, REGINA PESSOA & THEODORE USHEV

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1, 7PM
SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY
COPPOLA THEATRE FINE ARTS BUILDING, ROOM 101, PUBLIC INVITED, FREE



Program

Regina Pessoa's new film, *Uncle Thomas: Accounting for the Days* (Portugal/Canada/France)
When it premiered at Annecy in June, it won the Special Jury Award and the award for Best Original Music (by Normand Roger). The 13 minute film is "a testament to her love for an eccentric relative, who was an artistic inspiration and played a key role in her becoming a filmmaker. A moving tribute to a poet of the everyday." It combines her personal visual engraving style using digital 2D animation with a little stop-motion to animate the mementos she had kept from her uncle.

Regina Pessoa's *Tragic Story with a Happy Ending*

Grand Prix - Annecy, 2006; Special Jury Prize, Hiroshima, 2006 & many more. It is said to be the most awarded Portuguese film ever. Pessoa's drawings were transferred to glossy paper, brushed with India ink, scratched with a knife blade to give the effect of an engraving.

Theodore Ushev's *The Physics of Sorrow*-

(Bulgaria/Canada), it will be released in September after it premieres at the upcoming Toronto International Film Festival. Ushev, director of the Oscar-nominated animated short, *Blind Vaysha*, will share with us a short film that will explain how he used the ancient Egyptian encaustic painting technique to create his new film.

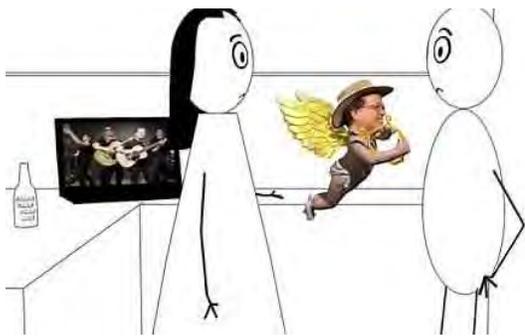
Theodore Ushev's *Towher Bawher*-

A visually exciting, power-packed work that has been called "a whirlwind tour of Russian constructivist art." It won the Special Jury Prize at Cinanima, 2006. It also was an Annecy Cristal nominee in 2006.

Pascal Blanchet & Rodolphe Saint-Gelais, *The Procession*, Canada, 2019

Their much anticipated first film. Blanchet was the graphic designer for last year's Annecy poster.

Screening followed technical presentations by both guest directors plus a Q&A. An additional film may be shown.



DAVID GLADSTEIN IS EMERGING AS A TALENTED ANIMATION DIRECTOR

When David volunteered to help out our ASIFA chapter he told me his most recent work was directing and animating the music video *Issues* by Violent Femmes. He sent an impressive write up about the work from *RollingStone* magazine that said, “Featuring animation by David Gladstein, the darkly humorous black-and-white clip depicts two drawn characters in a relatable relationship, where issues are tearing them apart. ‘You try to tell me about your issues/ I don’t need to know about them anymore/Your issues/ And why you standing in my kitchen door?/ I don’t want to talk about it/ I don’t care,’ Gordon Gano sings on the quirky track.”

“However, it’s those same issues that also spark intrigue and bring the couple together for some inevitable (and funny) stick-figure makeup sex. Violent Femmes make their full-color appearance in the video when the cartoon couple watches the band performing on a screen.” <https://tinyurl.com/Violent-Femmes-Issues> The song *Issues* is part of the album *We Can Do Anything*.

David is pleased that Brian Ritchie, the bassist of the Femmes, told the press, “Video director David Gladstein has distilled the musical and sociological anxiety embodied in the song into a pithy and minimalist stick figure drama... Anyone who has ever been in a problematic relationship will laugh, cry and laugh again. We can’t wait for the nominations to come in.”

David later told me a bit more about himself. “For my midlife crisis, I quit the software business and trained for computer animation at the Ex’pression Center. I wound up working in pipeline development for some years, and then taught college for a few more. I’m blissfully retired now, and finally pursuing a life in independent animation.”

It turned out he was being modest about his career. He helped develop the production infrastructure at The Orphanage in San Francisco on a series of major projects. He jokes his work was somewhat like what Scotty did on Star Trek, including the part about things going terribly wrong all the time. IMDB says he worked on 14 features including *You Don’t Mess with the Zohan* (2008), *Fantastic 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (2007) and *The Host* (2006). He has also helped out on Webster Colcord’s *Welcome to the third world* for the Dandy Warhols.

WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA HAS FOUND A WAY TO CLEAR A PARK OF HOMELESS PEOPLE. PLAYING THE SAME IDIOTIC MUSIC OVER AND OVER. THAT MUSIC WAS ALSO USED IN A FILM IN OUR SPRING SHOW The Florida city is playing the infantile hit song *Baby Sharks* over and over as it drives homeless people out of an area of a city park that they rent occasionally for public functions. Wikipedia says of that song, “All videos related to Pinkfong’s song have garnered around 5 billion views as of July 2019, making it the most-viewed educational video phenomenon of all time.”

At a recent ASIFA-SF Spring Animation Celebration *Baby Sharks* was the soundtrack for a work shown. The 3 minute film repeats most of the same lyrics over and over, just like the song “100 bottles of beer on the wall.” A little bit goes a long way and some people were annoyed, but nobody left as the visuals were delightful. The person who edited the film told us, “boy, after all the times I had to hear it editing that thing together I can empathize with the homeless people.”



‘ANGRY BIRDS 2’ SOUNDS LIKE A SILLY KIDDY FILM

According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, “Propulsively paced, garishly colored and full of haphazard comic energy, *The Angry Birds Movie 2* is a giant splashy bid for the big school summer holiday market. It may lack the refined wit and revered pedigree of blue-chip animation franchises such as *Toy Story*, but it still ticks plenty of lightweight fun boxes for its prime target audience of younger children, with just enough adult humor to keep parents from yawning... a film targeted more at Teletubbies fans than Tarkovsky fans. It may not be the most graceful creature in the skies, but it does have strikingly vivid plumage.”

ENTER ASIFA-HOLLYWOOD’S 47TH ANNUAL ANNIE AWARDS™

There are 10 production categories and 22 achievement categories. Entries submitted for consideration should be works released in the US between January 1, 2019 and December 31. Exceptions are commercials, short subjects, special projects and student films, which can qualify with or without United States releases. **Submissions close on Friday, November 1, 2019 at 5pm PST.** To review the

rules and submit projects, visit the Annie website at <https://submissions.annieawards.org>



RICHARD WILLIAMS, WHO BROUGHT ROGER RABBIT TO LIFE, DIES AT 86 Williams was a distinguished animator, director, producer, author, teacher, winner of 3 Oscars, and 3 BAFTA Awards, plus a very generous friend to ASIFA-SF. When he was living briefly in SF he did a benefit for our chapter at the Balboa Theatre. It sold out and rather than turn people away he told them to come back later for a 2nd show. That money still helps us present visiting guest artists.

Dick amazed the world with his groundbreaking work as the animation director of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* Williams also animated title sequences for some of the *Pink Panther* features, created an exceptional animated adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* in 1971 that won him his first Oscar. He has directed personal award winning animated shorts and he spent over 25 years creating an unfinished masterpiece, *The Thief and the Cobbler*. Williams had at one point studios in LA and London. Among his other creations were hundreds of TV commercials that are distinguished for their craftsmanship, unique looks and in many cases humor.

When he started his first studio in England impressive animation talent wasn't available on that side of the "pond," so he eventually hired several of Disney's best retired animators to teach him and his employees the skills of creating exceptional work. It was that dedication to mastering the art of animation that resulted in his remarkable body of commercial and personal work.

Williams also became dedicated to sharing his animation skills with others who didn't work for him, so he began giving animation masterclasses. In the 1990s he taught that knowledge in many parts of the world. He also published a best-selling book, *The Animator's Survival Kit*, in 2001 and he later created a series of DVDs that preserve him presenting his masterclasses. We hope to present a free tribute to him in the near future.

DISNEY IN THE NEWS

ABC'S 'THE LITTLE MERMAID LIVE!' The Nov. 5 TV special will feature concert performances by Auli'i Cravalho, Queen Latifah and Shaggy with footage from the film.

DISNEY+ TO BEGIN NOV. 12 Their new subscription streaming service will be launched in the US, Canada, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand on that date.



RUSSI TAYLOR, THE VOICE OF MINNIE MOUSE HAS DIED Taylor began her career in 1980 with *The World of Strawberry Shortcake*. Besides voicing Minnie Mouse for over 30 years she voiced characters in *Ducktales*, *The Smurfs*, *Paddington Bear*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and more. She was 75.

DISNEY BREAKS ITS OWN WORLD RECORD It now has released its 5th feature in one year to go over the one billion dollar mark. As of Aug. 14, *Toy Story 4* had grossed \$421.8 million domestically and \$579.9 million internationally for a total of 1,02 billion.

The other 2019 Disney billion-dollar features this year are *Avengers: Endgame*, the top grossing film of all time, with \$2.8 billion globally; *The Lion King* (\$1.5 billion), *Captain Marvel* (\$1.1 billion), *Spider-Man: Far From Home* (\$1.09 billion) and *Aladdin* (\$1.04 billion). Also passing the billion dollar mark this year was Sony's *Spider-Man*.

DISNEY DOES NOT AUTHORIZE COMPANIES MAKING SICK PRODUCTS TO USE DISNEY ART SO THEIR LAWYERS ARE SUING Recent mass shootings have contributed to sales of the **Ballistic Shield bulletproof backpacks** that are decorated with artwork belonging to Disney and Warner Bros. Sales are said to be up thanks to recent gun violence.

Sorry, it is too late to buy a bulletproof backpack with a colorful Avengers or Captain America on it. Other lovely unlicensed bullet proof attire included a Disney princess line featuring Jasmine from *Aladdin*, Cinderella, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* and Rapunzel from *Tangled*. Non-Disney bootleg

bulletproof products included Harry Potter and Major League Baseball items. They retailed for \$129. I guess Disney didn't understand that TuffyPacks supposedly will keep children safe from handgun bullets.

DOES DISNEY LIE? Sandra Kuba, an 18-year veteran at Disney, is a whistleblower. She has filled reports with the SEC accusing Disney of overstating revenue. Other complaints allege that Disney inflated sales numbers and skirted tax payments by reclassifying such items as food and hotel rooms. Disney has fired her. Will there be on an investigation?



WHAT \$ GOING ON?

A STUDY ABOUT GREED AND FLOPS IN THE FILM INDUSTRY by KC

Disney broke a world record when *Lion King* was nearing the billion dollar mark at the box office. The studio announced they had already grossed a record-shattering \$7.67 billion in 2019 from global ticket sales in just seven months! What does this say about our world's culture, the power of advertising and the public's belief in the Disney name? According to Rotten Tomatoes *Lion King* only scored a 53% approval rating from 354 critics, while 88% of the public liked it (almost 50,000 people when I last looked at their website).

So far this year five Disney features have crossed the billion dollar mark, *Avengers: Endgame*, *Captain Marvel*, *Aladdin* and *Lion King*. *Toy Story 4* might reach that mark. The previous industry record of \$7.61 billion was set by Disney in 2016. (The next closest success this year is Warner Bros. grossing less than \$2 billion so far in 2019).

Another record in late July was Disney amassing over \$5 billion overseas. By the end of 2019 those totals will go much higher as *Frozen 2* will be released before Thanksgiving and the year-end holiday offering is *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*. Two years ago, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* earned \$1.33 billion worldwide and in Dec. 2015 *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* grossed \$2.07 billion.

However Disney revenue came in at \$20.3 billion for its fiscal quarter, while analysts expected \$21.4 billion. Adjusted earnings were \$1.35 a share, while analysts predicted \$1.71. That resulted in Disney shares falling more than 4 percent after the closing bell

on the day they presented their quarterly earnings. Why? The entertainment giants quarterly earnings fell short of expectations due in part to difficulties associated with the \$71 billion acquisition of 21st Century Fox.

What about the non-Disney features?

So far over 450 features have been released this year. Fourteen opened in 4000+ theatres and all of them are included in the top 20 highest grossing films of the year. Obviously it helps to have an extra wide release to make mega bucks.

The next 99 films on the list made over a million dollars. I assume not all of those films were successfully financially and to make matters gloomier over 300 features of the 450+ released so far this year have taken in less than \$500,000 at the box office. It generally costs several million dollars to make a low budget film.

Don't assume the filmmakers get to see even half of the box office total. You have to deduct what theatres, distributors, and others get and that is normally well over half of a film's box office gross. You have to deduct the cost of advertising and promotions before you can get a rough idea as to how much income gets back to the production company. The profits, if any, may be generated later by BluRay sales, streaming, etc.

I assume most first run films make little or no profit as the cost of producing and promoting them is extremely high. Rarely are production costs given in the trades, but the numbers we see are generally for films costing millions. We are led to believe name stars make mega-buck salaries (even voice actors), but we don't know much about the financing and true production costs of most features.

What the media tells us is often a misleading fantasy about Hollywood. Fortunately many animated features appear to be profitable, but what about independent animators who produce features that don't adhere to the Hollywood formula for success? Will there ever be much room in the U.S. for people like Bill Plympton, Nina Paley and Signe Baumane who make outstanding animated features that are unique works of art? Probably not.

Should we assume that the public is only interested in seeing the really expensive tent pole productions that are heavily promoted? Do people really believe that the heavily advertised films are better and that Disney is the finest studio in the world? I suspect the answer is that a lot of people do, especially kids who flock in great numbers to most films that are excessively advertised at them.

Will the vast majority of the public ever wake up and discover animation by independent American and foreign artists, or important documentaries? Probably not.

When I asked a retired LA producer if many features make a profit he laughed. He said some do, but too many are financial disasters for the investors. "If

they make only a little over a million dollars, they are major failures, since most low budget features are \$5–10 million, so most films are losses.”



DISNEY TRIVIA Based on the current price of Disney times the number of shares that exist the biggest entertainment company in the world is estimated to be worth over \$260 billion. That fluctuates since in the last 52 weeks the stock has had a high of \$147 a share and a low of \$100. Back in the 1980s there was a time it sold for under \$10 a share.



‘ABOMINABLE’ DreamWorks Animation’s upcoming feature, *Abominable*, is the third yeti film to come out this year. What distinguishes it according to the press is that Jill Culton is the first woman to write and direct a major, original animated film for a major studio. (*Brave* had male co-writers and a male co-director.) “It’s a mini-breakthrough,” she says. Culton came-up with the idea for *Abominable*, about a Chinese teen girl’s relationship with a yeti. She ended up with eight bosses while the film was in production and the project survived the sale of DWA to NBC/Universal. (That suggests the script may be exceptional.) Footage from the film was shown this year at Annecy. It opens in the U.S. on Sept. 27, 2019. (Opening a film in late Sept. has worked for animation including *Hotel Transylvania*, *The Boxtrolls* and *Smallfoot*. The latter stars a yeti.)

LISA HANAWALT, CREATOR OF ‘TUCA AND BERTIE’ AND DESIGNER OF ‘BOJACK HORSEMAN’ GIVES GREAT INTERVIEWS ON THE RADIO If you are curious about the talent behind these hit shows, relax and enjoy several of the interviews with Lisa on NPR (National Public Radio). Although *Bojack* ended and *Tuca and Bertie* won’t have a second season ASIFA-Hollywood just previewed a *Bojack*

feature. An excellent long and often funny interview with Lisa was on NPR’s program *Fresh Air*. Hear it at, <https://www.wunc.org/post/lisa-hanawalt-tuca-bertie-bojack-horseman-and-channeling-anxiety-art> Google her name and you will find other interviews with her.

ANIMATION SCOOP GAVE A FAVORABLE REVIEW OF ‘ANGRY BIRDS 2’ *Angry Birds 2* manages to be an endearing, goofy romp that gets a kick out of its improbability and contradictions, and then plays them for laughs. Every moment played for drama or sentimentality gets demolished in the next few lines; one almost gets the sense that the characters are giggling at the audience behind their backs while laying the next eggs to toss in their faces. Few animated films have approached this Monty Pythonesque level; while the sophistication of that group is lacking, there are silly verbal sight gags and lines at every turn, several running gags that pop up unexpectedly in sudden cutbacks to earlier scenes, and lines taken literally to ridiculous effect... It is a refreshing antidote to the recent stench of *The Lion King*, and the heads at Disney would do well to pay attention, or better yet, try something similar.”



THE LATEST ADDAMS FAMILY FEATURE OPENS OCT. 11 Oscar Isaac, Charlize Theron, Chloe Grace Moretz, Finn Wolfhard, Nick Kroll, Bette Midler, Elsie Fisher and Aimee Garcia make up the voice cast. Conrad Vernon and Greg Tiernan co-directed the movie, which was written by Matt Lieberman. The first full-length trailer at <https://www.awn.com/news/watch-mgm-drops-addams-family-official-trailer>



WILL 'CHARMING' BE THE DUMBEST ANIMATED FEATURE OF THE DECADE? A

review of it in the *Guardian* calls it “a badly botched attempt at fixing fairytale sexism.” It said Prince Charming is “an irredeemably dull character” and the three fair maidens to whom he is engaged, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella, are “brainless bridezillas who swish about like beauty-pageant contestants, hands on jutting hips. Sure, they’re supposed to be under a spell, but they act like they’ve been lobotomized.” The reviewer quoted one princess explaining “My prince found me passed out on the floor. He did what anyone else would do. He kissed me. In five seconds we were engaged.” The review noted one of Cinderella’s fine lines is, “Oooh, I like shoes.” A British reviewer in the *Times* said, “It’s mostly moronic and lazy, but some of the pop ditties are nice.” The *Guardian* gave it two stars out of five. After numerous production changes (see Wikipedia) the film was completed by a new studio in Montreal in 2018. It has opened in parts of Africa and Europe; most recently in the UK. See the trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRykPQQ7QF0>

'MS. MARVEL' SERIES in the Works for Disney+. She is quite thin with giant fists.



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'THE UNEXPURGATED, MAGNIFICENT, SPECTACULAR BOOK OF HALE' is a fascinating selection of images by the animation director and illustrator Jeffrey Hale. Jeff's mind was brilliant whether he was creating work for *Sesame Street*, the National Film Board of Canada, or animating the controversial Lenny Bruce film *Thank You Masked Man*. Jeff was also a co-founder of ASIFA-SF.

His daughter Margot has assembled a handsome selection of his drawings and paintings (about 150 of them) in a 124 page book in color and b/w, available from the book's FaceBook Page. It can be purchased through the below PayPal Account. The book cost is now \$28.00 which includes shipping in the US. **ASIFA DISCOUNT!** ASIFA discount \$24.00 including shipping. Just mention that you are an ASIFA member on the PayPal order.

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FOX CORP. BUYS BENTO BOX, THE ANIMATION COMPANY BEHIND 'BOB'S BURGERS' Bento Box Entertainment, founded in 2009, produces *Bob's Burgers* for Fox, *Glove & Boots* on YouTube and *Paradise PD* for Netflix. Bento is also producing two new series, *The Great North* and *Duncanville* for Fox. *Bob's Burgers* returns in September for its tenth season.



HAIR LOVE IS PLAYING IN FRONT OF 'ANGRY BIRDS MOVIE' *Hair Love*, by Matthew A. Cherry depicts the relationship between an African-American father, his daughter Zuri, and the most daunting task a father could ever come across, doing his daughter's hair.



ELVIS PRESLEY ANIMATED SPY SERIES IS A GO AT NETFLIX Anything is possible in animation so why not *Agent King*? "Elvis Presley trades his white jumpsuit for a jet pack as he is inducted into a secret government spy program to help battle dark forces that threaten the country he loves — all while holding down his day job as most famous rock 'n' roll star on the planet."

Priscilla Presley, his wife from 1967-73, will be a cowriter and adviser and serve as showrunner. She says, "From the time Elvis was a young boy he always dreamed of being the superhero fighting crime and saving the world!"



JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA'S TRADE WAR HAS JUST ESCALATED – S. Korea is now boycotting the anime series *Doraemon*. The conflict is said to stem from the age old social and political spat between the two nations. It involves products ranging from beer, cars and to movies. S. Korea has postponed the release of the 39th *Doraemon* feature indefinitely. The films are said to be Japan's biggest anime product

and it is worth billions. *Doraemon: Nobita's Chronicle of the Moon Exploration*, stars a blue, "cat-type robot" and his human sidekick, schoolboy Nobita.

The current row started when Japan announced July 1 that it was placing export restrictions on South Korea materials used in manufacturing semiconductors, a major Korean industry. Tokyo accused Seoul of breaking sanctions on North Korea, but the move was widely seen as retaliation for a Korean court ruling that Mitsubishi Heavy Industries has to pay compensation to Koreans forced to work for the company during World War II.

In response, some South Koreans have boycotted Japanese stores, canceled trips to Japan, and a number of gas stations are reportedly refusing to fill up Japanese cars. Japanese food and beer sales have dropped sharply and a plastic surgery clinic is offering discounts to those who can prove they have canceled a vacation to Japan.

The manga *Doraemon* debuted in 1970. A short-lived anime series aired a few years later. A new series, beginning in 1979, ran for nearly 1,800 episodes. The theatrical anime film series overtook *Godzilla* to become the most watched movie in Japanese cinematic history, with a total of more than 125 million admissions.



NICKELODEON TO BEGIN A NEW TV SERIES OF GARFIELD SHOWS Nickelodeon will also develop new Garfield products and will manage existing global merchandising. Jim Davis will continue drawing the comic strip that he created starting in 1978. *Garfield* is the most widely syndicated strip in the world.

AN IMPORTANT ARTICLE *Art Spiegelman: Golden age superheroes were shaped by the rise of fascism* <https://portside.org/2019-08-18/art-spiegelman-golden-age-superheroes-were-anti-fascists>

LOCAL NEWS



9TH ANNUAL SAN FRANCISCO GREEN FILM FESTIVAL runs from September 24th - 29th at the Castro, Roxie and other theatres. The animated shorts being show are:

AIRPORT directed by Michaela Muller. It explores the borders between the right to freedom of movement and the restrictions security put on society. In an airport, the flow of passengers is broken by sudden irregularities. Security forces try to get to the cause of the disruption, the atmosphere turns menacing at the slightest anomaly. Tragedy and panic are always just one step away.

<https://vimeo.com/216051945>, **Swissmix program, 9/26**

IN A NUTSHELL directed by Fabio Friedli. From a seed to war, from meat to love, from indifference to apocalypse. An attempt to capture the world in a nutshell.

<https://vimeo.com/202918457> **Swissmix program, 9/26**

SWISS MADE Directed by Sophie Wietlisbach. When you think of Switzerland do you picture glorious mountain views and endless meadows with no one in sight? This animated short will make you think again. **Swissmix program**

THE FLOOD IS COMING, directed by Gabriel Böhmer is about a forest hermit that tries to prepare for a flood, but he becomes distracted by his noisy neighbor who happens to be the hermit's left eye. *The Flood is Coming* explores the growing anxiety about the state of nature, and our place in it.

<https://vimeo.com/299184106> **Swissmix program, 9/26**

CHIRIPAJAS, Directed by Jaume Quilas and Olgie Poliektova. An ecological film about a big adventure of a small turtle who is trying to find his family when faced with a polluted ocean.

<https://vimeo.com/204784637> **plays in a nature short's program at the Exploratorium 9/26**

GOD HAS ALREADY GONE AHEAD Directed by Peter Böving. A centuries-long settlement history is presented from the Egyptian goose's perspective. While the water level in the pond continues to fall, the inhabitants have the water up the neck. In the end, nothing stays as it was and the goose suspects nothing bad.

<https://vimeo.com/312192493> **plays with Anthropocene 9/25**

THE TRASH TASK Directed by Alison Saunders. In this hand-drawn stop motion animated short, a family

of bears shows us you can do your part to help our trash littered shorelines. Middle school student Alison Saunders produced this film to inspire citizens of planet earth to make a positive impact on their local environment.

With *The Woman Who Loves Giraffes* 9/28



SF INDIE SHORT FILM FEST IS SHOWING 4 ANIMATED WORKS The festival is Sept. 13 – 15 at the New People Cinema at 1746 Post in SF. The animated shorts in program #7, “Art for Art’s Sake,” are *Into the Flame* by Sean McClintok, *Okami, Motomichi Nakamura* by Annie Maley and *Tell Tale* by Fu Yang.

SEE A RECENTLY REDISCOVERED MAX FLEISCHER SILENT CARTOON The *Mechanical Doll*, 1922 <https://www.silentfilmmusic.com/fleischer-mechanical-doll/>



DIVERSITY, DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM TAKE CENTER STAGE IN STUTTGART
26th INTERNATIONAL TRICKFILM FESTIVAL,
30 April – 05 May 2019
FMX, 30 April – 03 May 2019, Stuttgart, Germany

The Stuttgart Trickfilm Festival opened with the European elections barely a month away so the topics of diversity, democracy, and freedom were on many people's mind. That made for a thought provoking festival. It was fitting that the 26th edition of the festival was dedicated to Europe.

The Ministry of Justice of the European Union partnered with the festival to launch a festival film competition titled Animation For Europe. The winner, *Ode* by Shadi Adib, was screened at the opening night ceremony. In the film three separate fishermen try to cope and survive on a stormy sea. Finally they realize that if they work together they will be much more successful. The three fishermen make a net out of their fishing lines and throw it out to sea to catch a big fish. *Ode* was an advertising spot for the European elections, describing the moment when the idea of a common Europe emerged.



Shadi was born in Iran and completed her masters' degree at Tehran Art University. She attended Filmakademie Baden-Wuttemberg in Ludwigsburg, Germany where she made her previous film *Fuse*, a hand drawn dark comedy about a group of men in a marketplace who are trying to decide how to kill a little mouse in a box. One after the other they try to top each other's sadistic fantasies. As the macabre game unfolds and spirals out of control, both victim and tormentors suffer the same fate.

The very creative Shadi even managed to get Nick Cave to do one of the voices for her *Fuse*, but since she was not an EU citizen, with only a residents' permit at the time, she could not travel from Germany to London to record his voice herself. She had to send a fellow classmate.



The festival was formally opened by Evelyne Gebhardt, Deputy President of the European Parliament, followed by the screening of the first six competition films that included the film *Roughhouse* by Jonathan

Hodgson. The hand drawn fifteen minute film, set in Liverpool, is an extremely brutal portrayal of bullying that gets completely out of hand. It was one of my favorite films at the festival.

During the director's chat Jonathan said that the film is loosely based on events from his own student days when he shared a flat with friends. One of the students got into financial trouble and couldn't pay his share of the rent. Jonathan said that he and the other guys got angry with him because they were having to pay his share of the rent and he wasn't doing anything in return. It began as playful violence, but then it turned into psychological torture leading to a tragic outcome. *Roughhouse* was the 2019 BAFTA Award winning short animation.

Another film that caught my eye on opening night was *Four Acts For Syria* by Waref Abu Quba and Kevork Mourad. Syrian history has been multicultural for centuries, and this fifteen minute film traces Syrian culture up to today's insanity and sends a message of peace and hope to the Syrian people from the two exiled filmmakers. In 2016 Waref and Kevork won the Robert Bosh Stiftung prize for international co-operation for young filmmakers from Germany and the Arab world which enabled them to make *Four Acts For Syria*.

I am a big fan of Signe Baumann's films so I was delighted to see *Mother's Song* in competition. It is a two and one half minute excerpt from Signe's adult feature work in progress *My Love Affair With Marriage*. Signe said that this first completed segment of the film is self-sufficient and almost a music video. *My Love Affair With Marriage* is Signe's personal story of love, gender, and marriage, infused with songs by mythological sirens as well as the neuroscience of falling in and out of love.

Throughout the feature film the main character, Zelma, gains a growing understanding of her place in the world as a woman. In *Mother's Song* thirteen year old Zelma discovers blood on her bedsheets on the night of the full moon. Her mother and three Mythological Sirens rush to educate her about what it means to be a woman.

You can watch a trailer of *My Love Affair With Marriage* on You Tube at:

<https://youtu.be/qNEL44XuRWQ> or Vimeo at:

<https://vimeo.com/329002938>

Visit Signe's website to get the latest updates on the film's progress and see pictures of what they are working on in the studio. Signe is still seeking funds to complete the film so you can also become a backer of the project. No amount of money is too small to donate. The web site is: myloveaffairwithmarriage.com

At the festival Signe and producer Sturgis Warner gave a presentation about their production to industry professionals at a Work In Progress session. They showed clips from the film, pictures of their studio, and talked about their filmmaking process.

It is not often that a film repulses me, grosses me out and yet at the same time has me laughing so hard, but *Animals*, Tue Sanggaard's six minute graduation film from The Animation Workshop did just that. It is a dark comedy about society at its worst, full of bad taste down to a pregnant woman being punched in the stomach; yet it is an extremely funny movie.

The plot revolves around what happens when nine people are trapped on a speeding train. When the train doors fail to open at a train station the passengers are a little concerned. When it happens again at the next stop and at the stop after that, panic, mayhem, and the worst of human behavior sets in.

This year, instead of the usual five competition programs, there were six. That meant that on Saturday evening there was a 20h (8 PM) screening and then a final competition program at 22h(10 PM). I think that one International Competition program right after the other is too much. I need to have time to think about the films that I have just seen and process them in my head. I watched the sixth program, but I am sorry to say that I couldn't give it the attention that it deserved. I hope that in the future the festival will go back to five competition screenings.

The 2019 edition of the festival spotlighted Hong Kong. The autonomous territory in South Eastern China is not known for its feature films, but they more than make up for that with their rich output of short and experimental animations. The seven films in The Moving Tales of Hong Kong Animation presented glimpses into different aspects of daily life in Hong Kong. The screening began with the 2005 film *The Tired City* by John Chan and Pam Hung who form Hong Kong's Postgal Workshop. The nine minute film portrays life in a big city which is becoming faster and faster at a rapid rate.

I particularly liked *Shear Marks*. The 2015 film by Ho-tak Lam, Man-L Kwok and Kai-chung Ng focuses on the era of resettlement in Hong Kong and memories of the past. When Chi looks at the lines marked on a lamp post where his parents have recorded his height as he was growing up, all of his childhood memories of his life in his former neighborhood come flooding back.

Philip Kwok and Vincent Yip used a graphic novel style for their 2016 *Chill and Shivering* about a boy, Ah Zhai, who thought that his life was complete. He was obsessed with his toys and lived in his own world as a child. When he grows up and moves into his own flat he discovers that he is being haunted by his own late mother. They didn't have a good relationship. At her funeral he was barely present mentally and was on the phone the entire time. Now his mother's spirit has followed him to his new home, asking for a cure for her broken heart. At last Ah Zhai must face his guilt.

A second program, Relentless Melt No. 11: Hong Kong International was curated by Hong Kong based

German video artist and experimental film maker Max Hattler. The films in this program showcased a wide variety of techniques from drawing and stop motion to machinima and machine learning. Topics ranged from social pressures to relationships and the pressures of urban life.

Max is the chairman of Relentless Melt, a Hong Kong based experimental moving image society which puts on regular screenings. He was a member of the festival's Young Animation Jury as well as presenting a program of his own work.

Wong Ping and KongKee are two of Hong Kong's most exciting young animators. Wong Ping's animations have been commissioned by M+, Nowness, and Prada. He was also awarded a Prospectives 40 Under 40 Award. His sexually explicit, politically incorrect animations such as *Wong Ping's Fables 1 & 2* take his extremely stylized animal characters through sequences of intense violence and bizarre sexual acts. Inspired by *Aesop's Fables*, each short vignette ends with a moral that is anything but moral.



Wong Ping's fertile mind uses strong, bold colors to introduce us to such characters as a turtle dating a one-eyed elephant. The turtle gets dumped by the elephant when she catches him checking out her younger sister's underwear. Wong Ping was also a member of the festival's Young Animation Jury.

The second part of the screening was devoted to the work of comic book artist and animator KongKee. His publications include the popular comic series *Pandaman* and *Ding Ding*. In 2015 he was asked to create the comic book *Travel To Hong Kong With Blur* for the British band Blur.

Along with Lee Kwok Wai and Tsui Ka Hei Haze, he co-directed *Dragon's Delusion*. The film is an attempt to expand our imagination about the future beyond the limitations of our own times. It won the HK2017 Regional Gold Award and a Gold Mention at Digi Con 6 ASIA. KongKee was a member of the Trickfilm International Jury in Stuttgart.

From opera to science, the Trickfilm Festival had something for everyone. Six programs under the heading of *She Blinded Me With Science* were curated by Dr. Dorothea Kaufmann from the University of Heidelberg and Andre Eckardt of the Max Planck Institute for the Physics of Complex Systems in

Dresden. The five programs of shorts ranged from *The All Seeing Eye* to *Cells, Cells, Cells*.

She Blinded Me With Science also included the 63 minute Max Reichmann gem *Das Blumenwunder*. The German silent film visualized plant movements on a large scale for the first time. The basic material for the time-lapse film made between 1922 and 1925 was to promote the use of fertilizer. In combination with dance acts and allegorical scenes performed by the Berlin State Opera's dance ensemble, the advertising shorts were then turned into a cultural film. Dancers mimed the growth of plants.

The film premiered on the 25th of February 1926 at the Piccadilly Theatre in Berlin. Receiving rave reviews at the time and celebrated by the audience as a huge success, *Das Blumenwunder* is now considered to be a rediscovered gem of silent history.

This year the annual Opera and Animation screening paid homage to Dutch animator Rens Groot and his beautifully drawn 1991 interpretation of *The Magic Flute*. Groot created the film to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Mozart's opera. He single handedly spent four years drawing and animating 165 minutes of film with pastel colors directly under the camera. Along with the two animated acts of the opera, a short documentary about the making of the film by Daan Groot, Rens grandson, was also screened.

Lest you think the festival was getting too serious, there was Chris Shepherd's very humorous *Brexicated – Bye Bye Britain*. Chris is a double BAFTA nominated film and television writer and director. His work fuses comedy with social commentary on the darker side of human nature. His program certainly did that.

The screening led off with Chris' six minute film *Brexicated*. The satirical animation considers why Brexit is happening. The day after the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU a variety of British citizens were interviewed about what motivated them to vote the way they did. The results are funny but also very unsettling.



Joanna Quinn's 1993 *Britannia* gave us the history of the British Empire in six very tongue in cheek minutes. The program would not be complete without one of Phil Malloy's wonderfully dark, wickedly humorous films; in

this case *Thou Shall Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Wife* from his *Ten Commandments* series.

The program ended with the 1993 Oscar winning *Bob's Birthday*. If Britain is going through a crisis so is Bob. When his wife Margaret plans a surprise birthday party for Bob, she underestimates his midlife crisis. Much like Britain and Brexit.

The Game Zone has become an important component of the festival. It was larger than ever this year with 2,000 square meters devoted to computer games, VR experiences, and interactive installations. In the Game Zone Talent area selected universities were invited to showcase their students newly developed games. My favorite project was *Deep Portrait*, an interactive installation created by Ute Orner at Stuttgart Media University (HDM). You could take a picture of yourself with a camera hooked up to a computer. Then you selected a portrait by a famous artist such as Picasso, Munch, or Van Gogh and watched as your image is transformed into a painting in the style of that artist.

Five of the most innovative German games were nominated for the Animated Games Award Germany. As well as being able to play all five games in the Game Zone, each evening of the nominated games was played live at the Games Flash event on the Open Air Screen.



The winning game, *Truberbrook*, developed by Florian Kohne, took home the 5.000 Euro prize. The game is set in the village of Truberbrook, a rundown health resort somewhere in rural Germany. The story that follows may or may not include mad scientists, underground laboratories, dinosaurs, aliens, sea monsters, secret agents, ghosts, and of course a lot of strange villagers, depending upon your choices. Florian said that his game was inspired in part by television series like *The X-Files*, *Twin Peaks*, and *Star Trek*.

This year the renowned Stuttgart animation studio Film Bilder celebrated its thirtieth birthday with three events at the festival. Along with animated shorts, music videos, television series, and features, the studio is known for such successful children's series as *Tom and the Slice of Bread With Strawberry Jam and Honey* directed by Andreas Hykade which ran for several years on German television and their current series for small children *Patchwork Pals* by Angela Steffen. The 26 episodes of Julia Ocker's *Animanimals* have won over

50 awards at festivals as well as the prestigious German television award *Grimme Preis* in the Children and Youth category. *Animanimals* features animals with little quirks such as a zebra who has gotten his stripes all mixed up. While trying to find a solution to their problems each animal learns a little lesson about life. The films are really delightful. At the *Film Bilder for Children* screening episodes of the three series were shown along with other work for young people created by them.



The *Film Bilder For Adults* show featured some of my favorite films such as Andreas Hykade's *The Runt*. The ten minute drawn animation is about a boy who is given a baby rabbit that is the runt of the litter by his rabbit farmer uncle on condition that he takes care of it and then kills it in one year.

Another of my favorites on the program was the 1997 *Rubicon* where Gil Alkabetz tries to solve the age old question "How can you get a wolf, a sheep, and a cabbage across a river one at a time without them eating each other?" The extremely funny film won numerous awards.



Shadi Adib and Nancy

The celebration culminated with a party at a local venue where we enjoyed such drinks as Patchwork Mules and Animanimanhattan along with beer and wine. There was dancing until the wee hours of the morning too.

The festival had so many screenings and events that it is impossible to write about everything. At the press brunch with Managing Directors Dieter Kraub (organization and finance) and Professor Ulrich Wegenast (program) I learned that the 2019 edition of the festival set a new attendance record with over 80,000 people total at all of the events and 15,000 tickets sold for the cinema. I also found out that the 2020 edition of the festival will focus on France as the guest country. It will be held from 5-10 May 2020.

020. Learn more at: www.ITFS.de

Running concurrently with the festival from 30th April until 03 May, the FMX Conference and Forum featured more than 280 presentations, workshops, master classes, and screenings along with a marketplace. This year's theme Bridging the Gap highlighted worldviews and workflows that inspire exchange in the fields of animation, effects, games, and immersive media. According to FMX Conference Chairman Andreas Hykade, "We especially want to explore how to unite artistic expression and technological invention, link human and artificial intelligence, take the leap from indie to IP, create social awareness through popular culture, cross over from education into the industry and bridge the gap between people and projects from around the world".

For me one of the highlights at FMX was John Canemaker's three History of Animation talks. Comic strip and animation pioneer Winsor McCay was the subject of the first session. The second program focused on the work of two masters of the Golden Age American studio animation, Vladimir Tytla and Milt Kahl.

Tytla was an animator at the Disney Studio in the 1930's and '40's. On *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* he and Fred Moore were put in charge of animating the seven dwarfs. He also animated Stromboli in *Pinocchio*, Yen Sid and Chernabog in *Fantasia*, and Dumbo in the film of the same name.

Milt Kahl was one of Disney's Nine Old Men. He was considered the finest draughtsman at the studio. For many years the final look of characters in the studio's films such as Mickey Mouse, Pinocchio, and Peter Pan were designed by Kahl.

In his third session Canemaker referenced his book *The Lost Notebook: Herman Schultheis and the Secrets of Walt Disney's Movie Magic*. Schultheis was a photographer and technician in the Disney Special Effects Department best known for his work on *Fantasia*, *Pinocchio*, *Dumbo*, and *Bambi*. He documented advanced special techniques used in Disney films in a notebook titled Special Effects.

At the other end of the spectrum, Jeanette Bonds, Director of the Glas Animation Festival conducted separate conversation sessions with four different indie animators during her *Wild and Strange* program. First up was Swiss animator and game designer Michael Frei.

With game designer Mario von Rickenbach, he turned his first film *Plug and Play* into a game. Now his latest film *Kids*, an experience about crowds of people and how they coexist, is available on PC, iPhone, and Android. In their conversation Jeanette and Michael talked about what is involved in turning an animated film into a game.

Boris Labbe's film *La Chute (The Fall)* has won numerous awards. If Breughel could see Labbe's version of heaven and hell I am sure that he would relate to it. The film is a jarring experimental vision of the world's order falling apart. At his conversation with Bonds titled *Boris Labbe's Audio Visual Trajectory: Between Animation, Video Art, and Experimental Cinema* he talked about his approach to creating.

British animator Sophie Koko Gate's latest film *Slug Life* has attracted a great deal of attention. The six minute animation follows a day in the life of Tanya, a curious woman who has developed a taste for nonhuman lovers. At FMX Sophie screened *Slug Life*. She also focused on the genesis of the project, how the film was designed and animated, and how she hopes audiences will respond to her self-described "ugly film making style".

Tomek Popakul's *Acid Rain* won the Grand Prix at Glas this year along with numerous awards at other festivals, so it was very fitting that Jeanette Bonds ended with a conversation with the Polish animator. His previous film *Black*, about a pair of astronauts trapped on an orbital space station due to a nuclear war that erupted on earth, has a stark black and white palette. In contrast *Acid Rain* is in vivid colors with basic grungy purple and green very prominent. The story centers on a young girl who has run away from home and meets the wrong sleazy guy. The eerie sound track plays a very important role in the film.

Virtual Reality has come a long way from its beginning as a quirky way to fight battles or climb Mount Everest. It has moved into the realm of serious storytelling. Indian born, Berlin based Gayatri Parameswaran is a VR/360 degree creator, documentary film maker, and journalist who has made a name for herself with such subjects as slavery in Iraq and intimate partner violence in India. At FMX she spoke about her interactive VR experience *Home After War*, the story of an Iraqi father who returns to Fallujah to face the threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Through Gayatr's VR experience you join him in his home and discover the unfolding of a tragic event. It was a very intense experience. You could also try out sixteen other VR projects at the VR Space.

With four days and ten rooms full of speakers it was impossible to see and hear it all but take my word for it, there was something for everyone from Jan Pinkava's keynote speech Bridging the Gap Between Art and Tech to Highlights of Siggraph and four segments on Sound

Design. Along with the speakers, the Marketplace featured over 30 experienced and aspiring hardware and software companies and projects. It was a showcase platform and networking hub to present and discuss current industry trends.



Young as well as experienced professionals had the opportunity to meet employers from throughout the world at the Recruiting Hub. Over two dozen companies from the fields of animation, VFX, design and games were on hand, looking for new talent to work on their latest projects.

During the Recruiting Presentations companies from the Recruiting Hub spoke about their recent and upcoming projects and presented their facilities and work benefits. They also showed excerpts of their work. It was an excellent opportunity for job seekers to get a through overview of a prospective employer.

Media design and technology facilities and programs from throughout the world presented their courses and facilities at the School Corner. Potential students got firsthand information about the various schools from lecturers, alumni, and current students. Young people had the opportunity to learn about jobs in the industry and to talk to universities about training and study opportunities.

You can learn more about FMX at: www.fmx.de

ENTER THE ASIFA-SOUTH ANIMATION FESTIVAL AND CONFERENCE ASIFA-South (Formerly Atlanta) is currently accepting animated film submissions for their 2020 Festival. Deadline is end of September and submission is complimentary extended for ASIFA members as well as discounts for attendance if interested. Your complimentary entry code is ASIFAINTMEM_ <https://filmfreeway.com/asifasouth>



18th ANIFILM INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF ANIMATED FILM, 7 -12 May 2019 Trebon, Czech Republic A Special Celebration of Anidocs by Nancy Denny-Phelps

Anifilm always has strong programming so I was especially happy to be invited for this year's edition as the theme was animated documentaries. Anidocs, the melding of animation and documentaries, is one of my favorite cinema forms.

Anidocs were born in 1918 when Winsor McCay used the medium to recreate the sinking of the Lusitania on film. It has become a powerful way to tell true stories that could not be told in live action. It is the perfect medium for dealing with serious subjects such as war experiences, violence and abuse, disabilities or social or political injustice. In some cases the subject is not willing or able to appear on camera but their voice has been recorded.

For the festival there were three international short Anidoc programs, five feature films, and two Czech Anidoc programs. They were curated by Annegret Richter, German curator and longtime programmer of the Anidoc Festival in Leipzig. She also included one program of short animated mockumentaries or fake Anidocs.

In the Close Up and Personal program, Annegret selected seven films that revealed the personal side of each animator. *Double Up* by British animator Samantha Moore tells of the shock and awe she felt when she learned that she was expecting twins. John Canemaker enters into an imaginary conversation with his father in *The Moon and the Son: An Imagined Conversation*. In *Ryan*, Chris Landreth delves into the life of Canadian animator Ryan Larkin via an animated conversation. Larkin went from being nominated for an Oscar for his film *Walking* to panhandling on the streets of Montreal.

People Are People spotlighted how people deal with difficult circumstances or situations. Tim Webb's 1992 film *A is For Autism* was commissioned by BBC's Channel 4 to provide insight into the lives and experiences of people who suffer from autism. The film was based upon contributions and collaborations with autistic people of all ages and every design in the film originated from a drawing by a person with autism.

Jonas Odell is known for his anidocs as well as music videos. In *Never Like the First Time*, the Swedish animator delves into the first sexual encounter of four different people ranging from a rape victim to a man who, after many years, is still happily married to his first sexual partner. Even though I have seen the film many times I still enjoy watching it as it is one of my favorite anidocs.

The final program of international short Anidoc's, History Repeating, dealt with memory, important social

and political topics and explored how filmmakers get to grips with their own or someone else's history. It was only fitting that the program began with Winsor McCay's *The Sinking of the Lusitania* and ended with French Canadian Marie-Josée Saint-Pierre's 2006 *McLaren's Negatives*. The film is a study of Canadian animator Norman McLaren and his personal view of film making. McLaren was an important historical figure in the history of the animated documentary. (Note: His *Neighbours*, 1952, won the Oscar for Best Documentary short; however *Neighbours*, 1952, is a fictional, experimental film, so it is hard to explain why it is considered a documentary or an anidoc.)

Anidocs in Czech animation started in 1936 with Irena Dodalova and husband Karel Dodal's *The Adventures of a Ubiquitous Fellow*, an explanation of the principals of radio broadcasting. The fellow travels through space until he is attracted to Earth by radio waves. On Earth, he meets the Queen of Radio Waves who explains the principals of radio broadcasting and the distribution of radio waves to him.

The first program of Czech anidocs consisted of films by students at the Tomas Bata University in Zlin. They were given an assignment to visually portray speeches of personalities in the fields of philosophy and art. The second program showcased works by students of the Department of Animation of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.

The Animated Mockumentary – Fake Anidoc selection was pure fun. Russian director Yulya Aronova's *My Mum is an Airplane* tells the story of mothers from a young boy's point of view. He knows that other people's moms are good but his is the best because she is an airplane and can fly to all sorts of exotic places.

What do museum guards do when no one is around to see them? Austrian animator Alexander Gratzner gives us the answer to this question in his 2016 three minute film *Museum Guard*. British animator Andrew Gordon gave us a glimpse into what it is like to be a loaf of bread. This extremely funny two minute film is about a conversation between two loaves of bread on the conveyor belt of a supermarket checkout counter.

I had already seen many of the films in the International Competition. After a second viewing of *Sister* the film stood out to me. Director Siqi Song from China and the United States set her film in 1990's China where a man remembers his childhood and his annoying younger sister. Or was she really there? The eight minute film is a touchingly poignant reminder of the Chinese one child policy.

I was impressed with Siqi Song's felt puppets. Ever since *Oh Willy* was a big hit I have seen other film makers using felt puppets that look exactly like Willy to varying degrees of success, or more accurately, lack of success. In *Sister* Siqi Song has created felt puppets that have their own character and identity.

Folimage consistently turns out films that entertain me and *The Cat's Regrets* is no exception. Alain Gagnol and Jean-Loup Felicioli deal with family dynamics in a story about a ten year old boy who hates his younger brother. As punishment for his abuse of his brother, the boy is forced by his mother to spend the afternoon with a reclusive old man. When the boy uncovers the old man's terrible secret, the boy learns a lesson about life. The two main characters, the old man and the boy, were drawn in a style that gave me a creepy feeling just to look at them and the background art fit the dark nature of the film.

Anifilm has a separate category for abstract and non-narrative films with its own jury. I think this is an excellent idea because abstract and non-narrative animation often gets lost when put into the international competition. The winning filmmaker in this category was Caibei Cai from the United Kingdom. Her five minute film *Half Asleep* was Caibei's graduation film from the Royal Academy of Art. In it she presents a silent relationship between two half bodies in a room. The film gives off a mysterious atmosphere with the themes of anxiety, pleasure, struggle and endurance subtly presented in a mesmerizing manner.

A Special Mention in the abstract and non-narrative category went to Austrian animator Thomas Renoldner for *Don't Know What*. The film combines what Thomas calls "entertainment cinema" (i.e. commercial cinema) and avant-garde film/video art. Using single frame editing, this realistic film transforms into a slap-stick like comedy with serious intent. The audience is purposely left to weave their own way between seriousness and humor.

The Wolf House is a cross between a fairy tale and a nightmare loosely based on Little Red Riding Hood. Chilean directors Cristobal Leon and Joaquin Cocina begin their seventy-five minute feature film with an actual short publicity film for the Dignity Colony. The isolated colony in Southern Chile was founded by former German Nazi Corporal Paul Schaefer in 1961. Schaefer had fled Germany following accusations of child abuse, where, with many of his followers, he founded the bizarre sect. Initially with the ignorance of the Chilean government and then with the complicity of the Pinochet regime, children were separated from their parents at birth, men and women were often drugged, and Schaefer sexually abused the children. The colony also served as a haven for such Nazi fugitives as Joseph Mengele and Walter Rauff.

In *The Wolf House*, a young girl, Maria, is severely punished for losing three pigs that she is told to watch. She escapes from the Dignity Colony into the woods where she finds a strange house inhabited by two pigs. Then things get very strange as the pigs sprout hands and feet and people dissolve into streaks of paint. Bodies

begin to undergo startling transformations as the papier-mâché they are made from begins to unravel.

The directors used every animation technique imaginable with large scale paintings, human sized puppets, and objects that move between dimensions as 2D interacts with 3D and vice versa. The film is composed as if it were one long take as in Hitchcock's *Rope*. Maria is coming to terms with the reality of her childhood abuse at the colony while the wolf that has followed her through the woods is constantly peering at her through the window calling Ma-ri-a in a soothing, reassuring voice. The award for the best feature film at the festival went to *The Wolf House*.

This disturbing piece of Chilean history takes all of your attention and concentration to watch. The film needs at least two viewings to catch the details but the time and effort that you put into the movie are well worth it.



Each year Anifilm pays tribute to an individual who has made a great contribution to the world of animation. This year the award was presented to Zdenka Deitchova at the opening night ceremony. Zdenka began her long career in 1945 at the Bratri v Triku Studio working her way up from redrawing the drawings on cels to becoming a noted producer. Her first independent production was *Why UNESCO?* by Jiri Trinko in 1958.

Zdenka went on to play an important role in the 1960 Czech-American animated short *Munro* which won an Oscar in 1961. Directed by her future husband Gene Deitch and written by Jules Feiffer, the story is about a four year old boy who is drafted into the U.S. Army by mistake. It was the first short animated film created outside of the United States to win an Academy Award.

Along with a long roster of films, Zdenka also produced several television series that have become classics not just in the Czech Republic but throughout Europe. Among them is my favorite, *The Little Mole*. Created by Czech animator Zdenek Miler, the first Little Mole adventure premiered at the 1957 Venice Film Festival where it was awarded two Golden Lions. The adventurous Little Mole continues to entertain new generations of children because the episodes do not look dated and are still charming. There were two programs of short films that she had worked on. Zedenka also

personally selected films from eight children's series that she worked on for a special screening for young people.

As part of the tribute to this amazing woman who has made such vast contributions to Czech animation there was a showing of the fifty-four minute film *For The Love Of Prague*. The film is based on a book of the same name by Gene Deitch, Zedenka's husband for over 50 years. Coming to what was then Czechoslovakia (which was a communist country at that time) from the United States at the end of the 1950's, Gene had only intended to stay a short time to work on one film project at the studio where Zedenka worked. She was and still is the reason Gene has stayed in Czechoslovakia. The heartwarming film is the story of the trials and tribulations of their romance and attempts to marry. *For The Love Of Prague* gives a very personal glimpse into a beautiful love story as told by both of them.

Created in 2016 to give Czech animation its own platform, the Czech Horizon National Competition has its own separate jury. Three programs spotlighted short Czech animation. Other categories included television and on-line films and series, Music Videos and Commissioned Works.

Midnight Animation has become a tradition at the festival. The three screenings were divided into *From Bohemia* with films that were black, absurd, and totally quirky. *Blood*, as the title implies, was full of horror films of every genre. *Body* focused on horrifying aspects of the body and flesh. These programs were the perfect way to end a night in Bohemia.

If you think that the films in Midnight Animation were festival rejects made by animators no one will ever hear of again you are wrong. The list of filmmakers include such well known directors as Ben Mitchell from the United Kingdom, Pencho Kunev of Bulgaria, and Dutch animator Paul Driessen, all of whom have made at least one film to raise the hairs on the back of your neck.

This year there were two excellent exhibitions. To celebrate the thirtieth birthday of post-revolutionary Czech animation, Ales South Bohemian Gallery in conjunction with the festival mounted an exhibition of the last three decades of Czech animation. After the 1989 revolution, a new era began in Czech cinema and animation went through some difficult times with the changes in the production and distribution systems. The exhibition celebrated the successes of the last thirty years of animation in feature films, television series, shorts, and student films.

I was quite intrigued by the Reinhold Bidner and the Gold Extra exhibition. Reinhold is a Salzburg graphic artist and animator whose focus is on combining animation and electronic media. He works solo as well as a member of the art collective Gold Extra, an Austrian arts collective which celebrated its twentieth anniversary this year.

At the Chateau Gallery, Reinhold presented four of his videos: *Ex-Terrat*, *CONFusions*, *Until We Coleidescape*, and *Impulse*. I especially liked *Ex-Terrat*. This experimental animation is based on Reinhold's urban explorations of Paris. The idea for the piece was inspired by the feeling of beauty the city gave him, but also by its terrifying dark underside. He focused on faces in the city that were on the darker side of the city of lights, collaging the faces and then animating them using different techniques.

Reinhold is also interested in exploring documentary story telling in different mediums. To this end he created *The Fallen*, a computer game exploring the war in Eastern Ukraine. The game gave me a very unsettling feeling. You are being shot at by snipers and the object is for you to kill them before they kill you. Just a bit too close to real life for me.

The Festival Tent and the Castle Park were the sights of several special live puppet presentations for children from three years old all the way up to big kids like me. I especially enjoyed Vitezslav Marcik's one man theatre presentation of *The Little Prince*. Using an old pram with puppets and music he told the story of his encounter with the Little Prince.

There were special screenings of short films and features especially for young people as well as animation workshops. In the evening the large open air screen in Masaryk Square showed free films for the entire family ranging from *Hotel Transylvania 3* to *Spiderman: Into the Spider-Verse*.

The festival tent set in the beautiful Castle Park was the scene of daily director's chats. In the evenings the tent turned into the spot to be for partying with live music, a bar, and room to dance. ANIMARKT is an industry networking event within the festival. For one day professionals and students of animation, VFX, game development, and VR/AR have a chance to meet, present the latest industry trends, and offer job opportunities. As part of the event, Animarket One 2 One organized one on one meetings for filmmakers and authors to meet with producers and studios.

Trebon is a lovely setting for an animation festival. Located in South Bohemia it is nestled in the Trebonska Protected Region which has been designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The twelfth century town is noted for the Regent Brewery which was founded in 1379. There are also numerous spas in the area. The festival even screens films at a cinema located at one of the spas.

Another of Trebon's unique features are the carp ponds which supply carp to much of Europe. The man-made ponds are actually the size of lakes. One day the festival took its guests on a boat ride around one of the beautiful large ponds complete with champagne.

If you love excellent film programs set in a beautiful atmosphere I highly recommend a trip to ANIFILM. The 2020 edition of the festival will be held

from 7 to 12 of May. You can learn more about the festival at: www.anifilm.cz

The CEE Animation Forum was held concurrent to the ANIFILM Festival. CEE is a leading pitching event for animated film in Central and Eastern Europe. I divided my time between CEE and the festival so my next article will be about my adventures at CEE.

7th EDITION OF THE CEE ANIMATION FORUM, In Search of the Perfect Pitch, 6–8 May 2019, Trebno, Czech Republic by Nancy Denny- Phelps

CEE Animation Forum (formally Visegrad Animation Forum) is a leading pitching event for animated films in Central and Eastern Europe. Pitching events are an important way for young professionals to help finance their projects, secure craft services that they need, or network to find a producer or other key member of their team. This year thirty-two projects were selected from eleven different Central and Eastern European countries to be presented at CEE. At the Forum, categories included short films, series/television specials, and feature films. Most of the projects were presented by teams made up of the director and producer. To help the presenters prepare for their presentation to the jury and audience there were tutorial sessions with professionals.

For the short films pitching, participants from each of the thirteen teams received an in-depth forty-five-minute session. The tutors focused on story concept, project development, financial plan, and market or festival strategy. The director and producer could also discuss co-production opportunities. These sessions are invaluable in helping participants structure their presentations. Since these are one on one personal sessions they are not open to the public.

One of my favorite short film projects was *The Family Portrait* directed by Lea Vidakovic and produced by Marko Djeska from Croatia. The project was described as a “poetic, dark, and somewhat humorous social observation, in which family ties and relationships are broken down and dissected into pieces”. The film is now in production with an estimated budget of 150,000 euros.

The film that won the short film pitching competition was *Kafka In Love*, introduced by director Zane Oborenko and producer Sabine Andersone, both from Latvia. Oborenko said that while she was reading Franz Kafka’s *Letters to Milena* she thought that the book would work well as an animated film.

The letters form a little known part of Kafka’s personal life. They were written to Milena Jesenska, a Czech translator and journalist, who was married and living in Vienna. The letters began as a business

correspondence, but soon developed into a passionate but doomed epistolary love affair. In his correspondence to Milena Kafka he revealed his most intimate self.

The film, aimed at an adult audience, will be executed in sand animation and from what the audience was shown of the work in progress this looks like the perfect medium to express Kafka’s emotions and feelings. As the winning short film project, Oborenko and Andersone received 1,000 Euros.

In the distant past, many generations of Europeans grew up on animated series from Central and Eastern Europe. During that era, the governments and public broadcasters fully funded the programs. Following the Velvet Revolution in 1989, this all changed as a free market economy was introduced. Financing an animated series or special has become more difficult, almost an art form in and of itself. Thanks to co-production possibilities, European Union funding, and new distribution platforms this is changing. It is also encouraging to see the number of talented women who have taken on the challenging role of producer.

The 10 projects in the series/television special segment of the pitching forum displayed a wide variety of styles and stories. *The Very Hairy Alphabet* from director Eliza Plocienika and Producer Laura Messner from Germany offered a playful way to learn the English alphabet and language for preschoolers while *Some of Us* was aimed at the adult audience.

Introduced by French producer Laurent Duret, *Some of Us* plans to delve into the darker side of sports. Using black and white line drawings, fifteen different episodes will tell true-life stories of famous professional athletes who have had outstanding careers despite coming face to face with discrimination due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, or physical or mental handicap. The project is planned for viewing on television, along with video, online, and phone versions.

The project that they selected for their top award was *The Cat Princess* from director Ivan Tamas and producer Balint Gelley from Hungary. Their twenty-eight-minute television special for children six to eight years old and their families is adapted from the popular book *The Cat Princess* by Zsuzsa Tamas, the director’s sister.

The book is based on a folk tale. It is the story of a very unhappy prince who lives in a very messy hut in a deep dark forest. One day he is visited by a cat who immediately begins to clean up his hut. Soon more unexpected guests arrive - Brother Moss, a talking tree and Ragdoll Sara. The cat immediately puts them to work cleaning the hut. In the end, after a lot of other things happen in the middle, the hut turns into a castle, the cat turns into a princess, and the sad prince lives happily ever after with his princess. The jury said that they especially liked the naive, retro design of the project which they thought was classic without being old

fashioned. The hand-drawn film is already in production for the first seven minutes of their proposed 28-minute film.

This year nine feature-length projects were presented. The winning project was *Allah Is Not Obligated* from the French team of director Zaven Najjar and Marion Boffelli, head of development. Based on a book by Ivory Coast writer Ahmadou Kourouma, it is the story of Birahima, a ten-year-old Guinean boy. After the death of his mother, he is on his way to Liberia to join his aunt when he gets caught up in rebel fighting.

He ends up with a Kalashnikov in his hand as a child soldier. He is also given minimal food rations, a small supply of dope, and very tiny wages. Fighting in a chaotic civil war alongside many other boys, Birahima sees death, torture, dismemberment, and madness but somehow manages to retain his sanity. It looks like it will be a very strong film told from a young boy's point of view.

Twice Upon A Time won the Nespresso Audience Award – a Nespresso machine which will help keep the filmmakers awake during the many long lonely hours of work ahead of them. George Clooney is not included. The Canadian/Serbian co-production directed by Vojin Vasovic and produced by Milorad Kocic is the story of Princess Nika. She is trying to help her father, the Poet King, to defeat his arch-enemy Warrior King. The only problem is that these two kings are actually the same person. Nika must help her father overcome the death of her mother, the Queen, which was what has caused the King's split personality. The 3D fairytale for all ages is about our own inner conflicts with ourselves.

Twice Upon A Time also won the CEE Anomalia Scholarship. This prize gives the winner a scholarship to Anomalia's Character Design Lab. Since 2008 this professional training program located in Litomysl, Czech Republic has invited professionals from such major studios as Pixar, Disney, Lucas Arts, Aardman Animation, and VALET to give young filmmakers an opportunity to enhance their artistic skills and approaches at the character design lab.

LATE EVENT NEWS: STACY STEERS AT THE PFA IN PERSON Wed. Sept. 11th 7 PM Screening and talk about her creative process.

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