

Stop Motion

Magazine™
Issue #21



FONCO Stop Motion
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Pictured provided by:
Fon Davis
Kathi Zung
Edgar Humberto Alvarez

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Letter From the Editor

Welcome reader to Issue #21 of SMM. In this issue you will find 3 great interviews. The first is with the very talented Fon Davis whom is somewhat of a hero in the small scale model building world. His work has spanned many major feature films and some of which include legendary stop motion features. He gives a unique look at his world and glimpse at some of the production techniques he's used.

Our next interview is with Kathi Zung. Kathi is a master puppet fabricator and one of the nicest individuals you could ever hope to work with. She talks about her career and world of puppet building.

The last interview in this issue is with Edgar Humberto Alvarez. Edgar is currently making a clay animation film in the streets of Los Angeles California. His work will truly inspire you.

Recently there was a major computer crash on our end here at the magazine and its taken a long minute to get everything recovered, but now hopefully we can proceed with the future issues in a timely manner. I am very thankful for your loyalty as a reader and patience with the delay of this issue. We have many great things coming in future issues. There will be an Issue/Interview with Phil Tippett and an issue with Bent Image Lab. We are super excited about these two issues coming soon.

So Stay Tuned & Keep Animating

John Ikuma
Executive Editor
Stop Motion Magazine

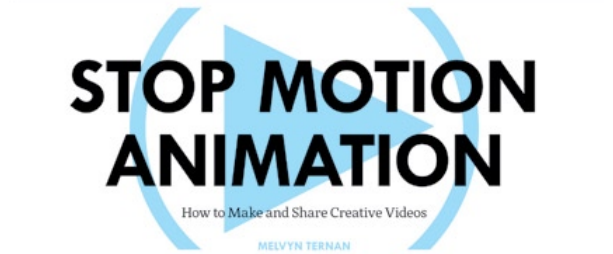


Above Images provided by Kathi Zung

Book Review- Stop Motion Animation

(Author: Melvyn Ternan)

Review by John Ikuma



“Stop Motion Animation — How to Make and Share Creative Videos” is a wonderful book written by Melvyn Ternan and geared towards the beginner animator. Now there are a lot of books currently in print that focus on stop motion and yes this book has much of the same information. What's different about this book is the use of QR codes in the pages so if you have a cellphone handy you can scan the QR code and it will take you to a web page which will give you further information about the subject or video examples.

Another nice feature of the book is that it is probably the most up to date book in terms of technology. The sad fact about writing about stop motion is that the computer and photographic technology often described in past books is either obsolete or bordering on irrelevance. This book however covers Web Cams, DSLRs, and Cellphone photographic techniques and takes into use the most recent versions of frame grabbing software. This is very handy for parents and young adults to decipher and strategically plan out how they would like to proceed with their productions.

There are also many techniques with clay animation, toy animation, and sticky note animation. Though it doesn't cover foam latex and silicone puppet making nor does it go into depth about character animation and performance. Which means this book is essentially a how-to for beginners.

There are many examples of animation methods and many of the examples are professional references like Aardmans “Dot” and “Gulp” animations which are fascinating examples but are extremely advanced animation techniques and are out of the reach of the readers whom this book is geared to. However the majority of animation examples are very much approachable for any level reader, like cutout animation, clay animation, sticky note animation, and toy animation.

It is easy to tell that the author of the book maintained a proper and detailed consideration of his audience and in turn has written a very good book that is worthy of the \$23.99 (U.S. Dollars) retail price. It's a great book for Beginners, Parents, Teens, and Hobbies that would like a book with detailed instruction and helpful examples.

You can find this book which is published by BARRON'S through online retailers using the ISBN: 978-1-4380-0255-2

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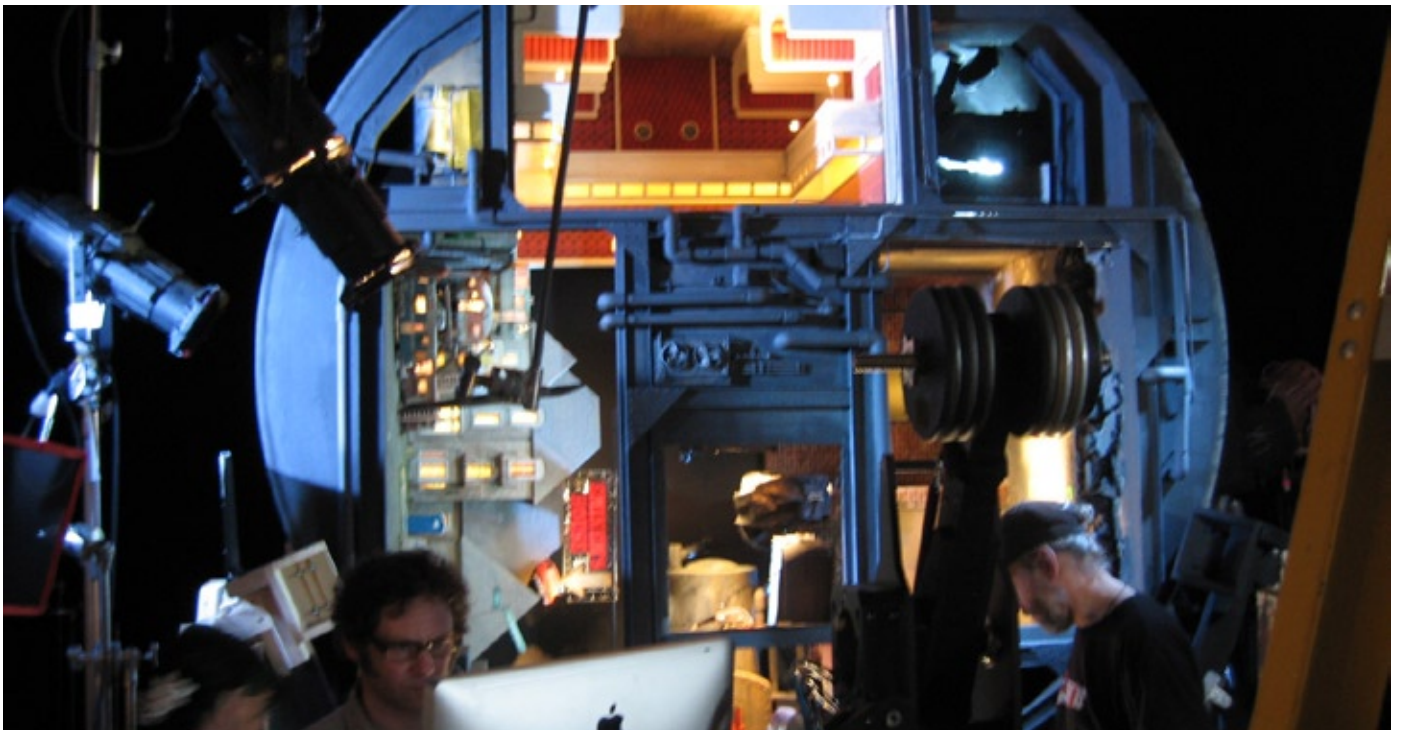
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FON DAVIS

MASTER OF MINIATURES



If you haven't heard of Fon Davis or his company Fonco Creative Services then you have been mission out. Fon Davis is one of a handful of miniature scale artists and model makers that has worked out major feature films, many of which are associated with ground breaking 3D when in fact that have ground breaking miniature effects in them. He has not only contributed to major blockbuster live action films but has also contributed his skills to major stop motion classics like Nightmare Before Christmas, and James and the Giant Peach. We were very lucky to be able to talk to Fon Davis and get an inside look at his career and his production company Fonco.



SMM: How did you start your career?

Fon: I started in stop motion at (Colossal) Pictures where I had the opportunity to work on a lot of Pillsbury Doughboy and Hershey Kiss commercials. Henry Selick was directing stop motion spots at (C)P. When he was brought on by Tim Burton to direct *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and form Skellington Productions, he brought the whole stop motion crew from (C)P with him. *Nightmare* was my first feature film and *James and the Giant Peach* followed. *Nightmare* was incredible! Almost all the visual effects were done in camera. I learned a lot of amazing tricks. On *James* I met one of my childhood heroes, Steve Gawley from Industrial Light and Magic. I had a freak'n trading card with Steve Gawley on it building a *Star Destroyer* when I was eight years old. Steve had become kind of a mentor and essentially got me a job at ILM where I worked for ten years. After ILM I worked at Eon Productions on the *Matrix* series, LAIKA on *Coraline*, ImageMovers Digital on *Christmas Carol* and *Mars Needs Moms* and finally ended up running my own studio Fonco Creative Services.

SMM: Many modern films are touted to be mainly CGI productions when in fact a large number of their environments and props are really scaled miniature sets and elements. What are your feelings about these types of productions and the reputation it gives to the industry?

Fon: I believe there is still an audience for stop motion entertainment because people enjoy the textures and handmade feel you get from using real miniatures. There is a magic there. It's still like your childhood toys have come to life. With that said, you can't ignore the benefits of computer technology in VFX. I am an advocate for a balance use of CG and practical FX. Why work with half a tool box when you have so many amazing tools to choose from? You just have to keep your focus on telling a quality, compelling and visually interesting story, no matter how you approach the effects.

SMM: What are the differences between making models for stop motion animated films and making models for live action special-effects movies?

Fon: The differences between stop motion and special effects model making are significant. Most special-effects shots these days are about quick destruction. So the models you create are made to fly apart in interesting ways. We'll do things like pre-break them and fill them with broken up pieces of spray painted pasta. We're creating a visually spectacular shot. You also go to great lengths to make sure what you are doing is photo real.



In contrast, stop motion usually has a more handmade aesthetic and everything built needs to be heavy and strong. Nothing can move during the shot that is not being animated. You also have to design things to be animate with as little rod removal as possible. You have to think about access underneath the sets to screw the puppet's feet down and the photography in stop motion is very slow. It seems like no matter how many stages you have going at one time, you're lucky to get one minute of final footage per week. Personally I like the variety of jumping back and forth between stop motion and visual effects work they both have their own brand of magic when you see the finished result.

SMM: Can you tell us about the film Cicada Princess?

Fon: Cicada princess is about the life of cicadas told as a puppet animation fairy tale with Stephen fry narrating the story. Out of all the projects we have worked on at Fonco, Cicada Princess is probably the most beautifully poetic. When Mauricio Baiocchi came to us with Cicada Princess our entire crew of artists circled around his vision and poured their souls in to that project. I think it really shows in the end result. It's not often you tell a story in this medium so heartfelt people cry watching it.

SMM: Many media outlets believe that model making and stop motion animation are both dead art forms. What are your feelings on this?

Fon: It's easy to think right now that miniatures are dead, because the down economy has affected the practical effects just like every other industry in America. There is simply less money being spent on everything. Having worked in both CG and practical, I can say definitively that practical effects and stop motion can still look a lot more interesting for a lot less money. I think the trick with stop motion is to not overproduce it. The handmade quality popular stop motion projects are what gives stop motion entertainment character and fuels its success.



There is a popular misconception that CG is some kind of shiny red button. It is believed that CG is less work, but in actuality you still need to make 3d models, UV them, texture them, rig them, create a camera move, light them, animate them, and to make them look great, many hours of work. Stop motion still has a solid fan base and rarely loses money. On the practical effects side you are best served combining your work with CG and knowing the strengths and weaknesses of both. You have to have a firm grip on the art of illusion. The Star Destroyer in the first Star wars movie was only three feet long and looked amazing. Why, because the effects crew understood what you can get away with. Practical effects still look real because they are in fact; real.

SMM: What drove you to build Fonco Creative Services?

Fon: We love our work and we do not like being standing idol, so Fonco was created over several decades as a place for motion picture artists to work between feature film projects. As the years have gone by Fonco has grown and diversified its services. We are now a full production studio and attract some of the best artist in Northern California. There is not a day that goes by that I am not humbled by the talent we have working in our studio. Even though the majority of our work is small projects like commercial, indie film and motion picture development, I feel like, with this team we can do anything.

SMM: The Artisana Coconut Butter stop motion commercial is adorable. Could you tell us about it?

Fon: Artisana Foods asked me if we could produce some colorful commercials that would get people's attention and create curiosity to learn more about their product. I, of course, suggested we produce stop motion spots because stop motion is, how do you say, awesome. He loved the idea and was able to scare up a humble budget. We have plans to do more Artisana stop motion spots with other great Artisana themed characters.

<http://youtu.be/p01sVSi3ESs>



SMM: Can you tell us a little bit about working on the Brisk Iced Tea Commercials?

Fon: Oh man! Brisk! Those spots were easily the most fun we have ever had at Fonco. Mekanism director Ian Kovalik approached me with this fantastic vision of the environments being a living character in these commercials. He really wanted to push the “Wow factor”. I designed the Brisk: Machete set first in Foam Core. Animation Supervisor Misha Klein and I shot an iPhone video in the Foam Core model using paper cutouts of the puppets on coffee stir sticks. We dubbed these model-matics. That really sold Ian and Pepsi on the concept of Ian’s living set idea and me as the production designer. The rest was history, as they say. Mekanism put together an incredible team of stop motion veterans for every aspect of the production. It was amazing! After Machete we did a spot called “Ozzy Normal” and a Super Bowl commercial with Eminem, also sticking with the concept of a living set.

SMM: Since Fonco Creative Services is a full service production company. Is it hard juggling so many hats?

Fon: Yes, It gets hard at times, but it’s mostly exhilarating. We really try to focus on doing great work even when we are faced with the difficult budgets everyone seems to be working with these days. I feel like our clients and our studio are all in the same boat, so we just try to give our clients the most bang for the buck we can, short of paying them to do the work. It’s just the way things are for now. Wearing multiple hats on the other hand is fantastic. We really enjoy trouble shooting and being creative. Challenges can be good, especially when matched with success and somehow we always manage to pull through with some great ideas. “Knock on wood”!!! I feel like if we can survive this economy, there is only one way to go, and that’s up. I think our future is filling the schedule between client projects with our own content. We’ve got some pretty good tricks up our sleeve you’ll be seeing soon.



SMM: You've worked on so many legendary films, are you aware of the impact these films will have while you're working on them?

Fon: Wow, thanks! I am truly flattered. It's actually very easy to forget what these movies mean to people because we just jump from project to project without really stopping to reflect. We do our best and hope our work is well received. All that said, I am aware at a very personal level what kind of impact these movies can have. When I was young, I had a special place in my heart for all those stop motion television specials and movies like Star Wars, but what really cemented it for me was my seeing behind the scenes articles in magazines. As soon as new you could work in miniatures for a living I knew what I wanted to do.

SMM: Were there any differences that you noticed working on the two films Nightmare Before Christmas and James and the Giant Peach?

Fon: Oh yes, definitely. When we did Nightmare all the visual effects were in camera and the entire project was stop motion. On Peach we used a lot of blue screen compositing and combined the movie with live action. It changed the feel of the entire production. It's just my opinion, but I would have loved to see Peach done entirely with stop motion. Nightmare was also a lot more interesting because there were so many cool environments and worlds. We created a set and a half per week for over two years on Nightmare. On James and the Giant Peach we made 64 peach sections and a few other environments, but nothing like we did on Nightmare.





SMM: What is your all-time favorite memory of working on a film?

Fon: This is one of those really hard questions to answer. There were so many amazing moments and my favorites change depending on my mood. I can't even narrow it down to a single film. They were all important for different reasons. Working on the Star Wars, Matrix, and Terminator series were fun because I was a fan of the original movies. Though I would have to say, working for Disney would rank pretty high in my favorite memories, both times. Skellington Productions and ImageMover Digital were both Disney run studios. It really felt as if I had joined a family. The bonds between the artists at those studios have been unbreakable. I have often said, if you ever get a chance to work for Disney, do it! Maybe because they have been around for so long, they really know how to give the artist what they need to do their best work. Don't get me wrong, working at Industrial Light and Magic was dream come true, I've gained some family there too, but the short term nature of the projects there made things more competitive.

SMM: Do you have any opinion about the advancement of 3-D printing and the ability to rapid prototype almost any object?

Fon: I love 3D printing and all the technology that were seeing today, I don't see it as a replacement for traditional techniques at all. They are another tool in the toolbox. There is no arguing, in certain circumstances the 3d printer with the 3D scanner is the best tool for the job, especially in printing replacement series animation faces or characters. You can create key-frame animation and print each frame, much faster than you can sculpt multiple heads. It's pretty amazing!

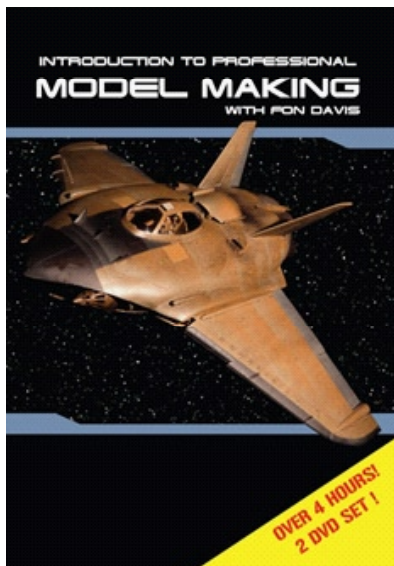


SMM: Are there any plans for future films on the horizon that you can talk about?

Fon: It's an exciting time there is a lot happening! Fonco is producing a live action sci-fi about a giant robot crew on deployment in WWII with an embedded reporter, using miniature effects, called MORAV. We're also developing comedy television show called Lee's Chinese Robot Shop. Fonco has also been brought in to help on the development of several stop motion features including stop motion features including a holiday movie called Special Delivery, an historic American story taking place in the wild west called Into the New World, an adaptation of the popular comic book Usagi Yojimbo an adaptation of the award winning children's book Auntie Claus. There are many projects in the pipe for stop motion fans to look forward to.

SMM: Your recent instructional DVD for model making is very informative, are there plans to make more videos?

Fon: We just completed a second DVD will be unveiled at the San Francisco Bay Area Maker Faire 2013 and will be on Foam Core mock-up model making. A third and fourth DVD is in the works. The third will be on advance model making. It will focus on creating large reality based models. The fourth will be geared toward sharing classic practical effects techniques that big features and indie film makers alike could use. I'm really looking forward to getting seeing what people are inspired to do with the information we share.



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KATHI ZUNG

MASTER FABRICATOR OF PUPPETS



Kathi Zung is one of the sought after independent puppet fabricators in the business. Her skills at molding and casting are at a master craftsman level and her attitude, dedication, and attitude towards her art is inspiring. We were thrilled to get an interview with this busy lady and see what she's been up to and have a behind the scenes look at her world.



SMM – Can you tell us how you started your career in puppet fabrication?

Kathi Zung – I started out making models in NYC for TV commercial spots, driving up from NC for jobs where there was something that needed to be sewn – my specific skill at the time – and working a couple weeks here and there through the first couple years. Two of my four brothers were also working in the industry – a model maker and a storyboard artist. There were often times where all three of us were working on the same project, unbeknownst to the others at first! Having worked with my hands all my life, this was clearly the right path for me, and being from a family of artists, there was a ton of support for my choice. In 1998, my brother Patrick was the Art Director for MTV’s new weekly show, “Celebrity Deathmatch”, and they were using clay at the time for some of the characters. He asked me to figure out how to make 300 foam latex puppets to be the audience, which was falling apart under the hot lights. I learned very quickly and turned out all 300 puppets in two months. From that crash course in foam latex and moldmaking, I went on to help set up a shop in NYC, hire a team, and make the main characters for the show.

SMM - Your sculpting skills are amazing. Are you self-taught or have you had formal training?

Kathi Zung – Thank you! My brother does all my sculpting! But he has taught me a lot about smoothing. He studied at RISD and also in Italy, and has an amazing collection of his own work. Sculptures of characters are made from a client’s puppet design, then we make a mold of it and cast it in plastic so that it can be fine-tuned, sanding it completely smooth before we make the final mold for casting. Bondo, an auto bodywork material, and Sculpey really come into play for this process.



SMM – On *Celebrity Deathmatch* you made a lot of characters in such a small studio in New York. How tough was it to maintain order and sanity in such a small space?

Kathi Zung – The shop in Manhattan was about 1500 square feet, which felt quite luxurious! We had a dedicated puppet lab, so the team could foam, bake, seam and paint in one room, and then make molds and armatures in another space. Keeping the fumes contained and vented was a must. We had lots of different music and constant snacks to keep us sane. The shop was close to Times Square, and Little Korea town, so there was no shortage of good places to eat, and of course to do that in New York City, you have to walk every day. Forced exercise definitely helped with morale.

If you're wondering about the puppet-making room and the five people who worked in it, we did arrange our storage upwards to save space. Mold shelves went all the way up to the ceiling, and squaring off our mold edges made it easier to stack them. Also, at each modelmaker's station, we allowed for personal tool arrangements, labeled everything with names to keep tools from walking off, and took inventory on supplies regularly. The real sanity saver was working with people who specialized at their tasks and became so confident and efficient that they worked independently, and rarely moved from their seats. The production line was always moving and everyone had a clear timeline to follow. There were also many, many pranks played on each other to keep it lively.

SMM – What is your favorite medium to sculpt in?

Kathi Zung – My favorite sculpting medium is Chavant clay, an oil-based hard clay that melts so well, you can almost paint with it, but when it's in a hardened state, it will stand up to almost any molding material – concrete, resins, epoxies, and rarely needs touching up as you make a mold around it.



SMM – With the new advent of BJB’s 1630 and other Urethane products being the new mold making materials on the market. What has been the result of these new materials in your puppet making and fabrication process?

Kathi Zung – Using TC-1630 considerably cuts down on the time it takes to make a mold, so the turnaround time is much quicker. Unfortunately, the working time is also short, so you have to make smaller batches to fill your mold box. But that gives you time to take as much air out of it as you can with a degasser. The surfaces of the mold are smooth and easy to clean. And they’re versatile in that I can use the same mold for foam and silicone over and over without it breaking down.

A silicone mold can only be foamed so many times before it gives up. There is also the benefit of being able to etch helpful words/labels/directions on your mold so easily. Oftentimes I’ll have four or more molds that look exactly alike, with many removable keys inside that get loose and mixed up. Being able to quickly Dremel a name or number anywhere I like is helpful. That might seem minor, but I’m appreciative of efficient systems that cut down on time spent looking for things.





SMM – Where is your production studio located? How does it feel to be able to go outside and ride motorcycles and shoot bow and arrows on your studio property during lunch breaks?

Kathi Zung – Our shop is located in the countryside of Graham, NC. It's on ten acres, mostly wooded, but we've cut some trails in the grass for my dirtbike and we do like to practice our archery when energy gets low from the hours of sitting, hunched over tiny models. It's great to be able to wake yourself up that way instead of throwing back some coffee, since the nearest java shop is fifteen minutes away. I admit, it is hard to roll the bike back inside and get back to work sometimes, but getting away from the fumes and stepping out into fresh air is super important! You might be thinking, well okay, our hobbies are not uncommon in our rural setting, but really we're just readying ourselves for a zombie apocalypse.





SMM – Your brother Patrick Zung has made a name for himself in the industry as an armature designer and head mechanics designer. How is it working with him side by side in the same industry?

Kathi Zung –First of all, Patrick and I are only a year apart in age and were very close growing up. We’ve been working together for 15 years now, and see no distinction between our work relationship and our sibling relationship. We treat each other very well, realizing that our individual talents, put together, make us one superpower. It is beyond words how well we operate together side by side, and what a joy it has been over the years to see him succeed, and create, and problem-solve. I take great pride in my family and it’s just as fun now working together, as it was when we were twenty-somethings. After all these years, there is a level of mastery in what we’re doing that allows us to really enjoy our projects without the stress of the unknown. There’s no guessing at what our results are going to be – we’ve already mapped out and traveled the hundred steps it takes to make a puppet, and that’s a very good feeling. In a way, we’re each other’s safety net and it’s great to have that in life.

SMM – Since you manufacture your own Ball and Socket armatures at your studio, have you had to deploy a more computerized CNC method to keep the manufacturing and fabrication time down?

Kathi Zung – Yes, our last job needed 28 ball and socket armatures, so the majority of the parts were milled on the CNC machine. It took minutes to make a row of parts, where a machinist might’ve taken a couple days cutting, calibrating, and changing drill bits. Milling our own parts for armatures with a computer program makes a huge difference, timewise. It just requires a lot of setting up in the beginning.





SMM – What is your favorite casting material to work with?

Kathi Zung – My favorite is definitely silicone. It’s so easy to tint, and mix, and pour, and even patch if it doesn’t come out perfectly, and it’s easy to control and alter as far as working/curing time. Because it catalyzes chemically, I don’t have to rely on temperature and weather conditions for it to work properly as I do with foam latex, and it fuses nicely to itself. Silicone is also soft, but strong, and I can relate to that!

SMM – Are there any techniques that you are planning of exploring in the future that you haven’t already tried?

Kathi Zung – I would love to figure out a way to create a mold for clothes that would be cast in silicone, then turned inside-out to be seamless – with an armature inside. I’m also really interested in prosthetics and the possibility of creating facial applications for burn victims, and creating a silicone skin for some of the new 3D-printed mechanical hands.

SMM – What projects are you currently working on that you can talk about?

Kathi Zung – Right now we are working on two jobs. The first one is for a “huge online company” that wants to create its own stop-mo series. I think that’s all I’m allowed to say there. The other job that just wrapped up was for Laika in Portland, OR. We made a few puppets that will appear in their next film, “The Boxtrolls”. The puppets had fiberglass supports on them for elaborate clothing that has to move in a certain way. I really enjoyed the process of applying layers of fiberglass into a resin, even though I had to dedicate a special shirt just for grinding the fiberglass. The next job on the horizon is another commercial for McDonald’s UK – they’re making a TV spot starring Tom and Jerry. Seeing these iconic characters of my childhood turned into 3D models is really cool.



SMM – Anything coming up in the future that you are excited about?

Kathi Zung - Yes! I'm going to be traveling to Trinidad and then Barbados this Fall, for the Anime Caribe 2013 Animation Festival. The Caribbean has built an animation industry for themselves, with career-path education in animation at the university level. It's very impressive how they've already brought work there with their talents! I'm going to be conducting a workshop in puppet fabrication and sharing some of the newer methods for making built-up foam puppets.

I'd love to be able to set up a puppet lab for the school in Trinidad someday, as it's amazing to see Caribbean students inspired to look beyond conventional careers and be working artists. Also, I'm joining a team of people in NC who are establishing a local chapter of Hacker Scouts. It's a group of mentors, parents and teachers who, through a series of workshops, get children interested in applying arts, science, technology and engineering to create or alter things that make life better for everyone.

-End



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The Invisibles



A Behind the Scenes Interview with

Edgar Humberto Alvarez



SMM – What is this current project you are working?

Edgar – I am currently working in a short film titled “The Invisibles” a project where the streets of the city of LA have served as the scenery. By introducing different characters it intends to embrace one whole day in the lives of homeless people. It has been quite a crazy project, since it was animated entirely on the streets without adding any type of Special effects, without budget but with a lot of self driven motivation, it is one of those projects that one most do for the simple love of art.

SMM – Why did you pick this subject matter as the bases of your film?

Edgar – I Personally think I didn’t find this project but on the contrary the project found me, as I frequently walked down the streets of LA where I got to observe a different reality from a different perspective. It is The city of LA where walking with a bag pack on your shoulder or shopping bags is a sign of poverty, where a shopping cart becomes a symbol of consumism and at the same time it is the mobile home of many, where solitude becomes your only friend when you have nothing left.

I’ve lived in many different parts of LA including Downtown where I’ve lived the longest and I was surprised at first to see so many people living and wondering the streets as a result their mental illness as it is in many cases, people without their families, victims of an economic or emotional crisis, war veterans, drug addicts and youngsters with a shattered American Dream. People that would become part of the scenery and imperceptible, invisible to the rest of us, some would always be located at the same spot, on a bus stop, on the corner asking for money trying to overcome our indifference, or wanting to become invisible from a society that inflicts shame on failure.



I really like documentary, to step out of traditional spaces, the direct contact with people and in this particular case with people that live on the streets and some have become friends that have allowed me to enter their lives, I sometimes feel that as animators we forget about reality because we spend most of the time at a studio or in front of a computer, it is important to have something to say and not only be good technicians with character animation.





SMM – How long have you been working on this film?

Edgar – I've been working and learning from this project for about 2 years, it is a project that started with the creation of characters, then photography, experimenting with time laps on the streets, creating props and clothing with different materials other than clay, and then it started to shape after a lot of testing was done, since working on the streets is very different from working at my studio. It has all been a process starting with the story which I initially intended to center in one main character but every day I would see so many different characters with so many different stories that it transformed my initial idea.

I've been interviewing many people that live on the streets, walking a lot, taking pictures, making sketches of ideas, interacting with many people that live on the streets which opened up a whole different world that day to day became more intriguing. All of this with the support of my girlfriend Amanrouge which served as my assistant, taking pictures for the making of, also in charged of making the sound and music and who had to live in an apartment full of homeless characters.





SMM – What do you plan to do with your film when it is done?

Edgar – I intend to send it to some festivals, and share it on the Internet where I'll be more accessible to people, to be able to show through an art form a reality that not many are aware of.

SMM – You chose to use clay as your medium. What are the challenges you faced while shooting out in the open?

Edgar – My first challenge was the weather, reason why I tried to do most of the work during the winter, fall, and spring. During the summer the characters would often melt and I would have to work at a faster pace, I also got sun burned or if it was winter some days were too cold and windy my fingers would get too numb or the wind would move my tripod which meant canceling that shoot.

Feeling Ashamed, working on the streets, sitting on the side walk by myself it's something that you have to consider more than once and forget about the existence of others, in a way it's a performance act, the whole scene becomes a performance and the people that walk by or stand by become the spectators, I was offered food, money, a job, people would come up to me and tell me that with that talent I could be somewhere else.

Variation of light, at the beginning one of the things that took some time to get use to was to the sudden changes of lighting. Someday I would think I had the perfect scene with the perfect lighting and all of a sudden a shadow that I wouldn't expect would appear and everything was ruined. I would have to come back the next day and repeat the scene.

Safety, when you walk around with a portable computer and a 5D and other equipment for certain locations there is a slight fear that maybe you could be robbed. Sometimes overcoming that fear in order to focus was an issue. After a while the fear went away and I realized that it is a lot safer to film on the streets of LA than on the streets of many other countries.



People, interaction with people was something that through me off at first, some would ask random questions of what time is it or do you know this address without noticing that I was filming, do you believe in God? Or can you lend me your laptop really quick to use Internet? Ha-ha it was quite funny but it also interfered with my concentration. On the streets anything could happen, sometimes I would feel uneasy animating characters from the street on the streets where people that live on the streets would come up to me and ask me what was it that I was doing, some sympathize some not so much, some would think it was totally absurd which I could understand why.

On the other hand thinking about this project all the time, became an obsession that had an impact on my life and personal relations. I would dream about homeless, would see them everywhere, had my apartment full of homeless characters, also seen people so beaten by life gave me a desolate feeling of being helpless, there was a point where I seriously thought that I was going to end up on the streets, that it could happen to anyone, it is a thin line almost invisible that divides these two parallel worlds.



Being in Shape, one thing is to animate comfortably on my studio and a different one is to do so on the streets in all sort of uncomfortable positions, specially when I had to position a character on the floor and animate standing up, that meant that I had to do approximately 200 squats which do to my profession would leave me totally exhausted. I do not have a car so I would have to carry all my heavy equipment sometimes with my girlfriend's help. There really was no budget for anything so no way of hiring some assistance.





SMM – Did the cops bother you since you shot your animation out in the open in Downtown Los Angeles, California?

Edgar – This is probably one of the most frequent questions I've been asked, I think it has to do with the fact that there are many regulations when filming on public space. Many cops did approach me frequently with questions about what I was doing, but in general they were nice and even found it funny, I guess it has to do with the fact of a little clay character, some would even talk about animation and mention Gumby or friends they had that would do animation, occasionally they would tell me I could not film here and there, and I would have to stop, but in general they would approach me out of curiosity, and even give me some suggestions about the characters. I got to see the gentle face.





SMM – How did you get into animation?

Edgar –I started with clay modeling since I was a little boy, I’ve done all sort of things that involve clay, from illustrations to publishing 10 books about clay modeling that were distributed all over Latin America, I’ve done caricature, taught workshops and lessons, expositions, I even created my own clay brand for a while. I bumped into animation when I started working at a production company as a messenger for one year where I had the opportunity of making my first animated short film at age 17, using their facility during the night. When I discovered animation it was magical, I could do magic now! I thought that being able to give my puppets movement was incredible, since that moment I started promoting my own work and studying. I studied Art and my thesis was based on the technique of clay painting. I’ve done many animations for kids T.V., commercials, institutional videos, music videos, documentaries and political caricature.

The first clay animation I ever watched in my life was a compilation of Will Vinton that included the Little Prince, Rep Van Wrinkle and “Martin zapater”, after that I started to learn about animation by animating and watching many the work of many animation artists such as Jiri Trnka, Svankmajer, Joan Gratz Webster Colcord, Peter Lord, Joan Gratz, Harryhausen and many others that became my teachers without knowing.

Currently, I try to mix digital composition and clay, working with layers in a similar way to the montage of animated cartoon, but using clay characters instead and green screen.



SMM – What kind of equipment do you use for your shoots?

Edgar – I use a 5D canon camera along with Dragon Stop Motion to capture, a portable Mac and a source of power called Hyperjuice that provides 3 hours of additional power for the Mac. I have a Ditogear Omni-slider to provide camera movement, I used it only in a couple of shots since it was very heavy considering I was the one having to carry it around and also because I didn't want to catch much attention and wanted the production to be almost invisible to go along the concept. I also used a Go Pro to keep track of the making of and sometimes a 7D for this same purpose.



SMM – Are you using any special mixtures for the clay you are animating with?

Edgar – I use regular common plasticine, some of it I brought from Colombia. I buy from all the brands that exist in the market. I use simple structures made out of wire. Something that really served as a learning experience was the use of mixed clay to give a more realistic look to the characters. One of my favorite artists is Caravaggio whom always wanted to show the humane in people, reality at all levels, the wrinkle, dust, the ugly, trash, what's rotten, and that world is fascinating in its own way when you learn from it and shape it, it becomes another type of aesthetics where a finger prints and imperfections become crucial, I don't like to make things seem perfect because I like to take advantage of the material that I work with, If I was looking for something perfect I would make 3D animation.





SMM – Who inspires you and why?

Edgar – I like to work with social environmental and political thematic, to make people reason about certain matters, that is my roll as an artist, and I've been doing this through animation and clay caricature. I have a page with more than 80,000 followers where I publish, illustrate or provide a critical view about subjects that deal with what is currently going on around the world, the name of the page is "Seloexplicoconplastilina.org". The objective is to reach people in a pedagogical and critical manner and bring them closer to social problematic by using animation and clay as medium.

SMM – Any plans for future projects?

Edgar – I hope to find funding and have a budget to turn "The invisibles" into a trilogy, and develop the project in different places, it is a theme that I've become passionate about and from which I've learned a lot as well, not only about animation but also about life, and at the end I don't know if this will make me a better animator but it did make me a better person. Next year I will be working on another animated short about April 9th of 1945 a date that is very relevant in the history of my country, it is the time where history reaches a turning point after the killing of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, a political leader that people had based their hopes upon, and well it was the beginning of violent times that marked a whole generation in Colombia. This project will be a big challenge for it requires a lot of characters, big scenery and a lot of emotional discharge, so I'll need to keep my head on its place.

Recycling Silicone for Moldmaking

If your budget is really small and you've ever been in a spot where you needed to make silicone molds but just couldn't afford to blow vast amounts of money on silicone then you probably need to rethink your production techniques. I've seen many people make silicone molds and for what ever reason they just chuck the defective mold in the trash. To me thats insanity!

You can recycle your silicone and save money on future molds just by following these simple steps. Not only will this save some money and material but will also be better for the environment by keeping your molds out of the landfill.

One quick note: Only use Platinum Silicone with Platinum Silicone and Tin Silicone with Tin Silicone. Mixing Silicones will most likely result in the never curing mass of goop...



Step 1: You will need scissors, a cup, and a chunk of cured silicone. Most likely this silicone chunk is from an old mold or a defective pour that you want to recycle.



Step 2: Cut the silicone into little bits. Making sure they are small enough to mix into your fluid silicone later if desired.



If you desire you can use a cheese grater or a meat grinder to get smaller bits or make the process faster.



Step 3: Mix up a batch of your silicone to pour into your mold. Remember Platinum with Platinum and Tin with Tin.



Step 4: you'll now pour your silicone fluid into the mold. This first layer will NOT contain the recycled silicone. You want this layer not to be chunky since this should be a perfect representation on you sculpture. Let this layer cure for a little bit and get stiff or you can even let it completely cure since silicone likes to stick to itself.



Step 5: Once your silicone has cured a little or completely, you will now mix up your second or final layer. What you need to consider is how thick your mold will be. If your recycled silicone is small enough you can mix it into this fluid stage. If your silicone chunks are large then you will want to pour the fluid into the mold without the chunks which you will add later.



Step 6: Place your chunks of silicone into the second layer of your silicone pour while it is still fluid. Now do not move your mold around and allow the silicone to cure fully.



Step 7: Once your silicone is cured you will want to flip your mold over and repeat the process. This is not only a great way to save money and recycle materials but is a great way to help the environment. Once both sides are cured your mold should be cleaned and prepped for casting.

Now remember to always use proper safety gear when working in your shop. Gloves and safety goggles are a must. If you happen to make a mess and spill silicone everywhere you can always clean it up with a product called Bestine which is a rubber cement thinner. Please be safe and smart when working with materials and always follow proper safety recommendations and instructions for the silicone that you use.

I hope you enjoyed this tutorial. Stay tuned for more fun techniques to use in your stop motion adventures.

-John Ikuma



Albert Eddie