

Stop Motion

Magazine™

December 2009 Issue #3



BUDDY SYSTEM STUDIOS

MEET THE BUDDIES

Plus Much More!!!

Stop Motion Magazine™

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Publisher: John Ikuma
Executive Editor: John Ikuma
Assistant Editor: Melissa Piekaar
Layout Design: John Ikuma

Writers: Melissa Piekaar
Andrew Racho
Pike Baker
Erik Goulet
Emma Burch
John Ikuma

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Letter from the Editor:

It's that time of year again where everything goes completely crazy before it goes quiet. The Industry takes a break and we all get together with our friends and families to say good by to the old year and hello to the new year.

The biggest challenge I personally faced this year was creating this magazine while trying to maintain a family and video marketing business. Talk about work. The truth is the magazine has been great to run and a lot more fun than I had planned for. I'm hooked..... Many have sent me emails wondering "is there enough content to write about?", and my response is "far more than you can even imagine!".

So what will the New Year bring in the way of content? Well I have to keep things under wraps for now, but I can let you know that February is our Gumby Tribute issue and that we are planning on running a Stop Motion Film Festival August 2010 in Los Angeles. All exciting stuff.

I wanted to also take this time to thank those that have recently joined our team in making this magazine possible as well as thank Buddy Systems for an awesome interview.

To All Our Readers, Happy Holidays and Happy New Year

-John Ikuma, Executive Editor

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The Fantastic Mr. Fox

Review By Pike Baker

The Fantastic Mr. Fox was released with little fan fair this past Thanksgiving Weekend in the U.S. It's lack luster commercials and sneak peaks didn't do the film any justice when it came to the film itself. What was witnessed by the few audiences' members that made the trek to the theaters was a work of brilliance. A captivating tale of a Fox suffering through a midlife crisis all the while bringing his friends and family down with him. The best part of the film was the old school style of Stop Motion Animation that really gave this film a classic feel. Wes Anderson (Director) has really made a classic book into a classic film that will most likely become a cult favorite to future generations. By far one of the best films released this year.

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BARRY PURVES

“SEE WHAT MANCHESTER’S MADE OF”

COMMERCIAL

by Emma Burch





World-renowned animator Barry Purves has returned to directing commercials with ‘See What Manchester’s Made Of’, the first ever TV advertising campaign for Manchester commissioned by Cityco, Manchester’s City Centre Management company. The commercial produced by Loose Moose Productions was shown on November 12th on Granada TV, to tie in with the Christmas light switch-on. It features over 200 objects borrowed and bought from Manchester stores including a designer handbag, jelly beans, toy train, cocktails, a designer shoe and a hot water bottle capturing the diversity of the Christmas experience in Manchester city centre. The products come to life, dancing around on the screen to a catchy guitar-based tune, forming images and shapes to represent shopping, food, culture and transport.



Barry Purves painstakingly worked on the animation for two weeks in a studio located in an industrial unit on a business park in Altrincham, where Bob the Builder was filmed. The backbreaking work involved making 750 individual frames using 200 objects to create the fast-moving 30 second film. It was shot with a digital still camera using a combination of multiplane and table top setups. In true Barry Purves style, all effects were shot in-camera with very little post production.

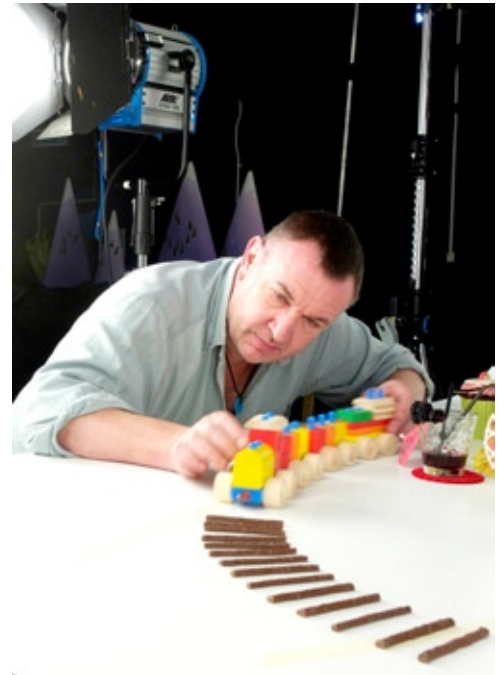


Speaking at the launch of the commercial, Barry Purves said: “I was thrilled to be asked to do this. I loved the concept straight away. It’s a nice funky ad and it was great to do something hands on and play around with over 200 props with no special effects and very limited technology. We’ve been allowed to go back to basics in animation terms, which is rare these days and this has allowed us to come up with something rather special. Manchester was always a centre of animation and there are so many talented animators here that I hope this high profile commercial sparks a revival.”

Barry has made over 50 commercials in his 35 year career, but this is the first he has made for Manchester since co-directing the award-winning Manchester Evening News TV advertisement with Peter Lord some 20 years ago. And although ‘See What Manchester’s Made Of’ sees the return of Barry Purves to commercials after a 7 year break, this is not to say Barry hasn’t been busy. The Oscar and BAFTA nominated director has been involved with series such as Bob the Builder and other animation classics including as Postman Pat, Wind in the Willows and Rupert Bear, as well as his own films and features such as Peter Jackson’s King Kong. He’s written two books and released a retrospective DVD of his work. All this alongside his theatre work, as well as continuing to be a well known and active figure on the international animation film festival and lecture circuits.

The advertisement was commissioned by Cityco, the organisation responsible for managing the city centre in partnership with Manchester City Council and Marketing Manchester and was created by Amaze advertising agency and produced by Loose Moose Productions.

Kate Harrison, Cityco’s chief executive added: Kate Harrison, Cityco’s chief executive said: “This recession-busting campaign is exactly what’s needed to keep us ahead of the game in these challenging times. The marketing initiative allows us to tackle the competition head on, ensuring city centre businesses get the most out of the crucial Christmas period. Dinosaur came up with the concept with an eye-catching poster and press campaign and Amaze using Loose Moose Productions and Barry Purves’ talents have done an incredible job bringing it to life. Made in Manchester by a Manchester crew, with edgy urban music and an original modern feel, we are very proud of the end result and believe we have created something very special for our city.”



Links

‘See What Manchester’s Made Of’ Commercial:
<http://www.youtube.com/user/LooseMooseProds#p/u/0/n5e4dj6ti6Y>

Shoot Timelapse:
<http://www.youtube.com/user/LooseMooseProds#p/u/2/G2w2xvxHCk4>

Barry Purves’ Commercial Show Reel:
<http://reels.sohosoho.tv/xhtmll=6A1X0TDS>



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by John Ikuma

One of the best things about the field of animation is that now, more than ever, it is accessible to almost everyone. But what sets the professionals apart from the hobbyist is the level of talent and fine touch that an animator brings to a production. Buddy Systems is a independent studio located in Studio City (Southern California) with a growing reputation as an extremely talented group of animators. The name itself explains their philosophy, and the studio's founders, John Harvatine IV and Eric Towner, are both true-blue hardcore stop-motion geniuses. I don't say this lightly. After getting a peek at some of their top secret work, I was astonished by the level of production value and expertise flowing through these two individuals. But let's not stop there. They embrace the ideal that you can't do it alone, that you must help others, and that it doesn't hurt to have a little fun along the way.



I first found out about Buddy Systems through a friend I worked with at Shadow Machine. He mentioned them briefly in a conversation and I instantly perked my ears up. With a name like Buddy Systems, I was sure there was something special about this studio. So I made some phone calls and arranged to meet the Buddies and check out what they had going on. The studio is surprisingly big for an independent studio. With six stages, four editing bays, a building dedicated to puppet fabrication, a set building workshop, and a converted '73 Winnebago office, Buddy Systems is an indie animator's dream. John and Eric both are some of the coolest people you could meet in this industry, and it shows in this interview. So sit back and enjoy this fun conversation.

SMM: How did you each get started in stop-motion?

John: I guess I got started as a kid, like most people, with the Star Wars figures I had lying around. I was probably about 12 or 13. I guess I didn't have enough friends (Eric laughs) so I would use all the toys I had laying around. I started with that and then continued up to until college, where I was finally introduced to a Bolex camera. I was able to (animate) frame-by-frame instead of every five seconds or whatever it was! I kept doing that and got a job right out of school at Wreckless Abandon Studios.

End of story (John and Eric laugh).



Eric: Yeah, I was pretty similar with Harv. Just started as a kid, making stop-motion movies with my brother in the basement, animating clay figures and animating toys. Anything we could get our hands on, and it was all VHS. You had to have a pre-roll sometimes it would be real smooth and sometimes you'd get a second long chunk. Then I went to film school in San Francisco, and was studying live-action but was able to get access to a Bolex as well. I didn't want to go through casting one of my films, so I decided to make a stop-motion film. You know, puppets are your friends (laughter).

SMM: How did Buddy Systems get started?

John: We both were animating on different jobs, at Shadow or at Xow!, and both getting work on the side on weekends and stuff. We had some pretty big projects we were working on and we started to pool our resources so we could get those things done. As you know, in stop-motion it's hard to do everything yourself. So having a "Buddy" (Eric laughs) really helps a lot. We got to the point where the jobs we got we couldn't do them on the weekend. We actually had to commit to doing it. So we started up our studio and we started out in my garage with this Winnebago. So we started there with very humble beginnings.

Eric: We always liked the idea of starting a studio that was founded on passion, by (stop-motion) animators. The “Buddy System” is about working with as many talented people as you can. So if you’re able to have like-minded people, that are interested in doing new stuff with stop-motion...that’s really what we were interested in. It’s our independent studio that since we started two years ago hasn’t had a dull moment. We’ve been very fortunate to be busy!

John: I guess it’s with the name too, “Buddy Systems Studios”...we always looked at it like a collective; it’s about the Buddies, it’s about working with your friends and doing things together. Not like one person, one director, one producer. We collaborate on everything. There’s no egos. It’s not that we check them at the door, it’s that we never let them in I guess (laughter).

It really is our thinking of the studio. You don’t get pigeon-holed into one area, you’re able to play around and do things you’re passionate about. We want to get projects because we enjoy doing them. It’s not really to say “conquer the world”, just the Valley (laughter).

SMM: Was it a major leap of faith to start such a studio?

Eric: Absolutely!

John: Yeah, scary!



Eric: This studio was founded with our own resources and with our own money. It really was a leap of faith. It was something we really believed in ...so it was putting together the things that we had and just going for it. If we're going to do this then let's go all the way, let's not do this as a part-time thing.

John: We just did it and it's like you don't really look back, you just go go go. It is kind of scary to think about starting a studio, especially during the recession that we are in. Stop-motion isn't necessarily a cash cow. It's not like people are clamoring to start studios to make tons of money. It's a bit of a risk, but one that we were willing to take.



Eric: It really was as humble of beginnings as you can imagine. The first incarnation of the studio was a garage... and the great thing about stop-motion is you don't often need more room than that!

John: Yeah, you can do a lot in there.

Eric: We quickly outgrew the garage space. The first expansion was the Winnebago (office). Gutting the inside, putting down the hardwood floor.

SMM: Did you have a stage in here?!?!

Eric: No no, it was always meant to be an office space. It was all shag carpet, vintage early 70's interior. One of our Buddies that we were working with at the time took an axe to this thing and just gutted it (the Winnebago). So that was our first expansion, and it was really just a few months after that that we needed a new space. So we found the studio that we are in now, and we've been here for over a year now.



John: You can kind of see the timeline if you look at the employees of the month (John points to certificates lining the Winnebago). It kind of goes through people and projects. In the beginning it's the garage, and then we introduce the Winnebago, then eventually we get our air conditioner (laughter).

Eric: Here's our real estate guy who found our studio for us. So we thought he deserved an employee of the month.

SMM: The Winnebago got one in March 2009!!!

Eric: The 'bago needed one. That was a longtime coming.

SMM: What was this studio before you acquired the space?

John: It was a school for the blind.

Eric: Yeah, it was a seeing eye dog school back in the 50's. So there's dog kennels out there that we use for storage now. (laughter)



SMM: Are you serious?

Eric: Absolutely! They actually had blind kids housed here to help train the dogs. I guess you can still feel some of the good vibes.

John: Ethan's office I feel was the super attendants'. It seems very '50's principle's office.

Eric: After that it was Ray Johnson's studio, which was a printing and design company. This worked out great because there was a spray booth here. So it's where we build puppets.

SMM: Do you take your inspiration from the past or do you take from present day stuff?

Eric: I think it's a big mix of the two. I love the Harryhausen stuff, which was a blend of live-action and stop-motion, that we still take as inspiration. I think that we also gravitate towards more contemporary things as well. Taking stop-motion, which is this incredibly old form of animation, and putting a new spin on it is something that we really enjoy doing.



John: I feel like we are nerds that actually walk around the world. We love stop-motion and all that kind of nerdy stuff, but I feel like we peek our heads out to see what is modern and what the kids like these days. We try to let that rub off on us a little bit, without getting too dirty. We try to be aware of what's going on in the world without getting too lost in our dark little shadows!

SMM: Do you have any personal loves and passions that have been integrated into the Buddy System? Like being a “cheesehead” (Green Bay Packers Football fan)?

John: It seems like every year I got to find a reason to do animation with the Packers. So much inspiration can be drawn from that!

Eric: I think we both have similar outside tastes of being video game nerds and loving football and stuff.

John: Some 80's shows too.

Eric: We've got a great picture hanging above our sink of Rambo riding a unicorn with a machine gun. What else do you need for inspiration other than that?

John: What's funny is we don't really like wizards and fantasy stuff, but we've been collecting these wizard pictures in the bathroom. I'm not really into that stuff, I don't know if you are (to Eric)?

Eric: More and more so every time I walk into the bathroom. (laughter)

SMM: What kind of entertainment does Buddy Systems work in? (Commercials, television, film, etc.)

Eric: I think we've been able to find a really cool balance. We've been doing a lot of commercial work and music video work that continues to keep the studio going, and always on our mind is the creative aspect of developing our own projects. So we've got a television project that's in development right now. We got feature ideas that we're continuing to develop. The commercial and music video stuff is great... it's almost like a playground for animation where you can get away with doing so much stuff and being really inventive. With television and features, it's so much about character driven content, which we love. We love telling strong stories, and if we can harness the power of stop-motion to do something unique and original, it's what we are really excited about.

John: I think it's luck that we are not just pigeon-holed into one thing. Cause it's always about the characters, the visuals and stuff. It's nice to be able to dabble.

SMM: You guys are a full production studio. So you make your own puppets and sets?

John: Yeah, I guess we are the one-stop "Stop-Motion Shop". We do it all.

SMM: What kind of materials do you use when making puppets? What kind of puppets do you make? Ball-in-socket or wire?



John: We do wire, we do ball-in-socket. It all depends on the project and the budget. Most of the stuff we've done has been ball-in-socket because it's a little easier on the animators, and we'd like to make their lives as easy as possible.

Eric: If it's a lower budget commercial thing, we've been doing wire armatures. One of the projects we are developing now is actually completely made of cardboard!

John: Not so friendly for animators. (laughter)

Eric: And then another project that we are developing, we've been using rapid prototyping with replacement faces and ball-in-socket armatures. Working with some of the best people that we can get together to build these really great puppets.

SMM: Are you printing your rapid prototyping outside of house?

Eric: Yeah, we are. We do all our 3d modeling in-house and then there's a couple of different vendors that we go out to as far as doing the actual printing.



SMM: Any “speed bumps” you’ve come across while trying to create Buddy Systems?

Eric: It was throwing caution to the wind in the beginning, while having a passion for animation and continuing to do it. Along the way we've learned so much about the business side, continuing to keep projects flowing, and the importance of promoting ourselves and the things that we want to do.

John: (jokingly) The money doesn't stop rolling in, so it's picking out what color Ferrari. We keep fighting over “red or yellow” every day, it's tough. (laughter)

SMM: No Lamborghini?

John: No, not yet.

Eric: I think Harv dreams of a gold plated Jeep Wrangler, and I've got my sights set on platinum DeLorean.

John: And we'll race. (laughter)

SMM: I'm looking for a bio-fuel Millennium Falcon, myself.

Eric: It's gone green. (Spaceballs the movie reference)

(laughter)

SMM: How many Buddies are there? How many people have you connected into this whole system?

Eric: It depends on the project really. We definitely want to keep it a close-knit team. But we're definitely looking to recruit top-tier Buddies around every corner! But even trickling down to our internship program, it's really important to bring in young talent and show them what we are doing.

SMM: Are there any people that you've worked with that you'd like to do a shout out to?

Eric: Ethan Marak is one of the closer Buddies that's been with us since very early on, and a very talented director. John Sumner, also an extremely talented fabricator. He's been a part of a lot of projects we've worked on. My sister Jenny was a big help early on, and Mario De Jesus has been a fantastic addition to our team.

John: I think your pal B-Dogg (Brian Kokoszka). And of course to my wife (Liz Harvatine).

Eric: Yeah, she just co-directed a project with Harv, a "Yo Gabba Gabba" music video, which turned out absolutely awesome. We've got friends that worked on "Coraline" that work with us all the time. Shea Bordo, Jeremy Spake, David Candelaria, Bartek.

John: Can't forget Bryan Garver, Sarah de Gaudemar , David Brooks, Joe Mello, Rick O'Brien, just to name a few!

SMM: What is unique about what Buddy Systems offers in production?

John: I guess it's a couple of things. Our sensibility with stories, our humor or flavor is different then other studios. Visually we tend to like different things, we like playing in all sorts of aspects of stop-motion. The CG side of it or the peanuts side of it.

Eric: Keeping it rooted in something that has the tangible quality of stop-motion, but giving it a new spin with either CG or digital compositing. There's just so much that hasn't been done with stop-motion and it's really limitless what can be done now.

SMM: Is there a direction you'd love to see Buddy Systems go in?

John: I guess it's taking our little studio that we have here and growing it to where we can work on more projects and develop more things. In our growth we want to be slow and steady, but as the projects come up we want to be creating more content. I think that's ultimately where we are headed. It's not 300,000 square feet, but it is to have enough room to do all the projects we're working on. If that's a garage, then it's a garage.

Eric: I think we'd like to think of this as a really fun place to work. Where you can flex your creative muscles and be proud of the work you're doing.

Eric: That's the thing about having a small studio, everybody wears multiple hats. Depending on the project we'll get hands-on, or if we're too busy overseeing the project, we'll bring in people to help take on tasks.

SMM: You're a tag team of stop-motion.

Eric+John: Yeah, that's the Buddy System! (laughter)

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a TOWN called PANIC

THE MOVIE





by John Ikuma

The collective genius of Stephane Aubier and Vincent Patar bring their hit animated television series “A Town Called Panic” to the big screen. The feature length film released in the U.S. and Canada takes place in a world of cardboard and plastic toys, filled with chaos and mayhem. Horse, Indian, and Cowboy (the main characters) are reminiscent of toy action figures from the past. These three friends constantly find ways of making the most innocent of tasks turn into a total disaster.

Zeitgeist Films released the film this fall to select theaters and in 2010 will be making its way through the U.S. (theater dates found at www.atoencalledpanic.com)



From the look of the trailer and all the little bits of media surrounding the film, this has got to be one of the funniest animated features released this year. So what's the story? Well, Horse falls in love with his music teacher an Cowboy and Indian realize that it's Horse's birthday. So they decide to make him a BBQ as a present. But end up ordering enough bricks to make "the Tower of Babel". This somehow leads them on a crazy adventure, while Horse struggles to get back to his music lesson on time. The trio end up everywhere from the Arctic to an Underwater Town located beneath their home.

The film holds the honor of a coveted slot in the "Official Selection" at the Cannes Film Festival. This is very rare for a feature length animated film, and can only be a sign of how magical this picture truly is.

Zeitgeist Films is including a Stop Motion Contest as part of its promotion for the film. The entry's have to be no longer then three minutes in length, and have use the them "Panic". The winning film film will be included on the U.S. release of the DVD slotted for sometime in 2010. This is exciting for any stop motion enthusiast and should be fun to see all the runners up on Zeitgeists YouTube channel.

If you'd like to read more about the film and the contest, along with the theater locations, times and dates. Go to: www.atowncalledpanic.com



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stop-motion animation

noun [usu. as adj.]
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More Stop than Motion: A visit to the Harryhausen's exhibition in Spain

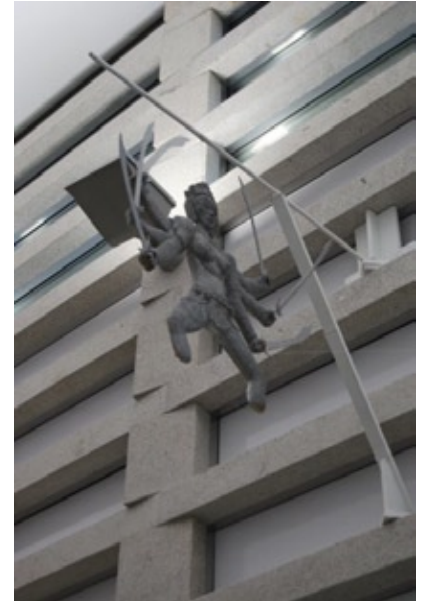
By Adrian Encinas (www.puppetsandclay.blogspot.com)

Located in La Coruna, this fantastic place in northern Spain where the octopus is a delicacy for both humans and monsters, is now privileged to have the magic of the greatest master of stop-motion animation of all time: Ray Harryhausen

“Ray Harryhausen: Maker of Monsters” is the title of the exhibition seated in the Luis Seoane Foundation since October 28th and which will continue until January 10th, which includes video footage, pictures and original drawings by Ray and his Spanish collaborators with those involved with the films shot in Spain.



My adventure began on a rainy and windy November day, when this humble servant took a break from his schedule to leave in search of adventures and extraordinary creatures of fantasy worlds, magic and science fiction that this exhibition promised to provide. Once I was in front of the building of the Luis Seoane Foundation, I was impressed to see how the exterior walls were decorated with giant posters depicting the creatures of Ray, but the heavy rain did not allow me to look closely at the posters and I had to run to the shelter of the building. Once in the hallway, soaked and exhausted, the magic began.



On the right side of the first floor, was a giant pair of legs of the goddess Kali with a television screen. As I approached the legs and watching the screen I was surprised to see me behind a huge Kali. It was a device made by artists and Domingo Lizcano and Antonio Garcinuño for the exhibition, which consisted of placing a legless Kali near a camera and by an optical effect taking the real size leg. One trick that Ray himself employed as a great admirer of the optical effects, I was excited.

Wood stairs led me to the second floor where the exhibition itself was located. At the center of the first room called Mythologies and legends, was an impressive Talos of 7.22 feet, made by Domingo and Antonio to give more atmosphere and guided me to the first figure made by the hands of Harryhausen: The Hydra, the majestic piece of 7 heads. That figure perhaps took him the most work to animate. Beside her, were film projected unpublished tests on models used in The Golden Voyage of Sinbad. Following the wall, passing through beautiful drawings of Ray like the Kraken or Sinbad fighting with a skeleton on a broken stair, I reached a window divided into three: In the first part was Bubo, the size of a real owl, and Dioskilos, his two jaws bared teeth at the strange visitors; in the second showcase, the wonder of Medusa with an impressive level of detail and eyes that leave you petrified, she accompanies the Kraken sea beast; and finally, after the third display, I looked at the Griffin and the Centaur-Cyclops, although enemies in the film it does not seem to bother them being together in the exhibition. I moved forward seeing pictures of Jason and the Argonauts, reaching a cabinet with two skeletons fighting each other, in the absence of Argonauts that were near. Minaton suddenly received me, with its golden majesty and the details; you can still see the rough edges from the mold, amazing. The room was closed with the figures of the Figurehead from The Golden Voyage of Sinbad, which greets us from above, and the superb Pegasus, being for those who believe it to be the best figure of the exhibition. Undoubtedly mythological.





Following a corridor full of previously unpublished photographs, magazine clippings and unpublished original layouts of the ships of Jason and the Argonauts and Sinbad and the Eye of the tiger, among others, made by the Spanish artists who worked with Harryhausen: Gil Parrondo, Fernando Gonzalez and Luis Gasca, I entered the room that was entitled Prehistory. Here I met with the projection of Gwangi, Evolution and One Million Years B.C., while drawings and more drawings are showing in the room. The figures were all together in a huge vitrine, like protecting each other: The Mammoth made by Ray from his mother's coat when he had not reached twenty years yet, the Sabre-toothed Tiger from Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger, a model of Gwangi, a Stegosaurus that never came to be used in any movie, and the figures of Triceratops and Pterodactyl that carried Rachel Welch to its nest in the movie One Million Years B.C.

After that, I prepared to move to a small room adorned with a picture of the dinosaurs from Animal World that occupied a half wall and a set of animation tools to make the scene with a toy dinosaur and image capture devices needed to recreate the motion picture photo in stop-motion. This device was developed by Domingo, who told me via e-mail that “The dinosaur model was made in Super Sculpy and is not articulated. There was no time or money. Anyway enough for the public to move a bit and makes the idea of the frame by frame animation. I did a little demonstration on the first day. The animation software is very simple and used a webcam to capture the frames. Unfortunately, since the first day a boy broke a couple of plates to Stegosaurus; I warned Asier, the commissioner of the exhibition, that if the dinosaur was going to be in public hands, it probably will not last long. Probably end up replacing it with a toy. “ In fact, when I arrived it was no longer Domingo’s Stegosaurus, and instead it was the toy stegosaur he predicted.





Nearing the end of the visit, I found the last room, Extraterrestrials, where I could appreciate the art of science fiction films of Ray, like *First Men in the Moon* or *20 Million Miles to Earth*. Here stood a recreation of the Ymir figure with a great level of detail and the strong eyes of life that all creatures made by the masters hand, and Ray's drawings for his never-ending version of *The War of the Worlds*.

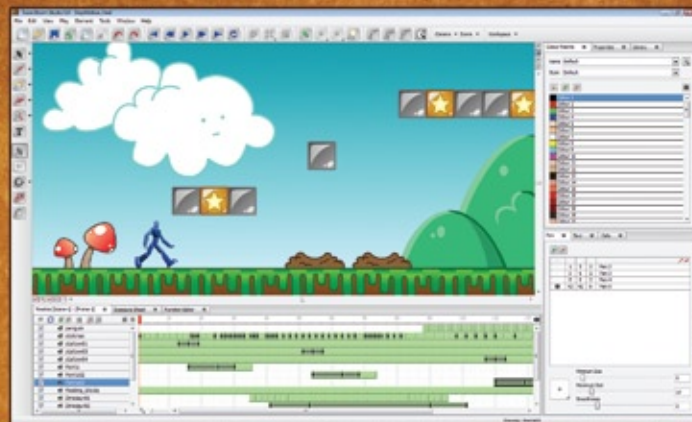
To round off this event, the Luis Seoane Foundation has published an interesting book that contains all the Spanish material and unpublished information about the artists who worked with Ray in Spain. A wonderful volume that will be a delight to any fan.

Without doubt the trip was worth it, to see the Harryhausen's figures face to face is a wonderful experience that every movie fan should be able to perform. Therefore, if the exhibition will go to your country, take your golden fleece, your spear of silex and your x-ray gun and dive into the adventure. Long live to Harryhausen and all his fantastic creatures!

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INTERVIEW WITH JOHN BROWN MASTER SCULPTOR

By John Ikuma

The art of sculpting is one that has existed since the beginning of civilization and has been refined to a skill that few other art forms can equal. To be a master sculptor may not be everyone's goal in life, but yet we all marvel at the workmanship of those whom have become legend. If you're not aware of who John Brown is or his contribution to the motion picture industry, then be prepared to be amazed. His skill and finesse at sculpting is shadowed only by his great talent and eye for making stunning works of art.

Many of us Stop Motion Animators dive right into making puppets without much thought in regards to what makes a truly beautiful design. Or how the bodies shape reflex's its balance and movement. This is something that we can all improve upon in our industry. What John Brown's work reflects is a still movement, the human form caught in time, beautifully preserved in sculpture.

I first learned about John Brown when I stumbled upon a set of sculpting DVD's while in college. They stood out from all the other art instructional videos for two good reasons. First, John's artwork was stunning and he produces it right in front of you. Second, the amount of knowledge that pours out of each video was so massive that I often found myself watching the same videos over and over just in case I missed something. What I mean from this is that John breaks everything into simple terms but yet over the course of one DVD he presents knowledge that many other instructional videos either skip or never cover. With every viewing and with each DVD you will find yourself in awe of both his knowledge and skill at sculpting

We asked John if he would be so kind to answer some of our questions and allow us to get a small look into whom this master sculptor is.



SMM: Who is John Brown and where did you originate from?

John Brown: I'm a sculptor from Toronto. I currently live in Hollywood. I used to work in the movie biz and now I'm a Fine Art figure sculptor and educator & author.

SMM: How did you get into sculpting?

John Brown: I got into it because I was really fascinated with fantasy characters & movie monsters and sculpture was an integral part of it. Much the same way anyone who does this got started.

SMM: What was the most valuable lesson you've learned in your journeys?

John Brown: I've learned many lessons but with regards to sculpture it's the importance of developing a narrative and communicating beyond aesthetics....not to sculpt for the sake of sculpting.

SMM: When you sculpt do you focus on the anatomy of your figures or has it become second nature?

John Brown: Mostly second nature....I tend to think more on the peripheral and ancillary because sculpture is about so much more than anatomy and the surface. If I were focusing on my anatomy alone, after 23 years of doing this, something would be wrong.

SMM: What is your favorite Medium to use?

John Brown: I really only use plasteline oil based clay. I used to work with WED clay (water based) back when I worked in the film biz. It has some great qualities to it...unfortunately, my schedule doesn't afford me the babysitting time it requires.



SMM: Does your inspiration come from an inner source or an external source?

John Brown: Both...though I tend to internalize the external...which is the job of an artist anyway.

SMM: Your DVD's are truly inspirational and educational. What drove you to make such an informative series of videos?

John Brown: I was working at Gnomon when the "The Gnomon Workshop" first started and they asked me to do one. The response, appreciation & demand was so tremendous that more was inevitable. The training material out there seemed to focus on learning how to copy someone else's style or over analytical and never really taught the student how to see & think for themselves. I teach how to simplify a very complicated medium with very good results for first time sculptors. My first sculptures were nowhere near as good as what I'm getting from my students all over the world. I found a way to speed up the learning curve and I think that's why the DVDs are really appreciated and do so well.

SMM: Do you teach sculpting and where?

John Brown: I teach at Gnomon and privately in my studio. I also go around to some of the animation studios and teach their employees.



SMM: You've done many sculptures for film and television. What drove you to venture from it and become a Fine Art Sculptor?

John Brown: Many things...mostly lack of work and disenchantment...it was time to move on...I was very passionate about sculpture and showbiz wasn't nourishing it...sometimes you have to acknowledge the train coming and know when to get off the tracks.

SMM: Have you ever had any difficulty with molding one of your sculptures or are you at a stage where the problem solving is no longer necessary?

John Brown: No...I get a little rusty though. I usually make molds when the sculptures start piling up to make room or to get ready for a show. So I'll have a designated week or two to concentrate on that alone. It's laborious for me and I really don't enjoy it and neither does my wife. She claims I turn into Mr. Hyde when I make molds.

SMM: What was the size of the largest piece you have ever sculpted?

John Brown: I sculpted a slightly larger than life monument called "SURRENDER" for a private community in South Carolina. They saw a smaller version of it at an art show and asked if I would enlarge it for them. I won that commission by committee...a big deal for me because the "committee" mentality has never served me well...there was a lot of artists in the running....not to mention the cost.





SMM: Your figure sculpting DVD's like the Femme Fatale, and sculpting Comic Book Style are very close to what many Stop Motion Animators strive for in the detail of their puppets? How many years did it take you reach this level of detail and beauty?

John Brown: Not really sure...I've been there for a while...I just do it a little faster now.

SMM: Do you have a favorite piece that you've worked on in the past?

John Brown: Oh...you mean which is my favorite child? Whatever I'm currently working on. Out with the old, in with the new....keep moving forward. I like the rougher stuff though...the less perfect the better...sculpting with restraint.

SMM: The head sizes in relation to the over all size of the actual figure was an amazing piece of information I had discovered in your Comic Book Style DVD. Each time I watch your videos I learn something new. Are there anymore video's in the works? You mentioned painting the plastic model in the Molding and Casting DVD, Do you plan to make one on this subject in the future?

John Brown: I've got "Volume 8 Sculpting Expression & Fantasy characters" recently released. I teach how to paint in Photoshop from a traditional aspect. That's a topic that I get a lot of requests for...I'll be coming out with a tutorial on air brushing soon and other topics. Volume 8 though has some really cool things on it dealing with expression & character and clay casting.

SMM: Where can someone see your work in person?

John Brown: Internet's the best place. There has been gallery & art festival shows but I'm currently on hiatus with the current state of affairs.

SMM: Do you have a website where others can see your work and get updated information about your work?

John Brown: www.figuresandfocus.com



New
John Brown
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Now Available
at
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Volume 8

SCULPTING

EXPRESSION & FANTASY CHARACTERS



WITH JOHN BROWN

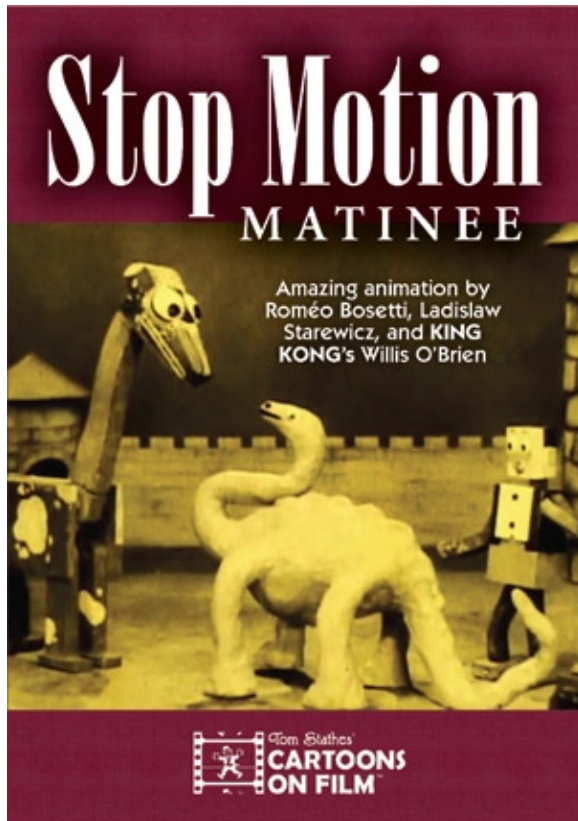


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Animated Classics

an Interview with Tom Stathed

by Melissa Piekaar



SMM: Describe your fascination with early animated film.

TS: My fascination with early animated films is not a simple one. It grew out of an innate love for all filmic things since I was practically born; animation being one of the main forms of media I responded to well as a baby. Coincidentally, my mother had purchased a book on a particular well-known animation studio's history which I discovered on one of my shelves at around the age of 5. At first I was attracted to the pictures in this book, but eventually I was able to read about this studios' historic films. I began to understand that there was a historic aspect to film, especially animation, and one that was not easily discovered in the mainstream media. This curiosity compounded with the fact that I could not view the films I was reading about is what helped start my quest to do more research and to find these films, all at a very young age.



SMM: Tell us about your DVD, “Stop Motion Matinee”.

TS: My new DVD, Stop Motion Matinee, represents two key themes. First and foremost, it is a celebration of the stop-motion field of animation and contains a potpourri of historic examples. For the past several years we’ve been living in an age when computers aid, or are completely responsible for, the production of animated films. This collection shows the very advanced techniques that a few early animators were able to achieve up to 97 years ago by hand, physical materials, and celluloid film. No digital aspect was necessary to create these films, and they are quite stunning for that simple reason. The collection also marks an important milestone in my own career. I’ve been offering DVD compilations to the public since the summer of 2005 in a very home-brewed, casual manner. Stop Motion Matinee is the first of my collections to feature professional packaging designed by animation and comic historian David Gerstein and I’m quite pleased to have collaborated with Ray Pointer of Inkwell Images, Inc., in producing this collection. The overall presentation, down to the very important aspect of image quality, exceeds what I’ve been offering fans and historians in the past.

SMM: How do you go about searching for the films on your “16mm Silent Cartoons Wanted List”?

TS: My 16mm cartoon want list targets a variety of internet surfers. In some ways, it is a reference tool for fellow collectors. One important thing to understand is the history of 16mm film. It was introduced as an amateur format in 1923 and for a couple decades served not only amateur filmmakers; but also movie studios and distributors which started offering their backlogs of old film on the new format for home rentals. 16mm also became very prevalent with the inception of television, as it was considerably more affordable and easier to store than 35mm film. This format was in some ways the forerunner to VHS and your local video store. My main ‘target audience’ are ordinary people out there who have had 16mm films in their families for the past few decades, much in the same way that many people still have VHS tapes laying around the house. However, film prints are not quite as common, so it takes a bit of work to locate things. The beauty of collecting early films is the aspect of never-ending surprises. “Lost” films do surface and more frequently than one would think.

SMM: When you obtain a film, how do you archive/preserve it?

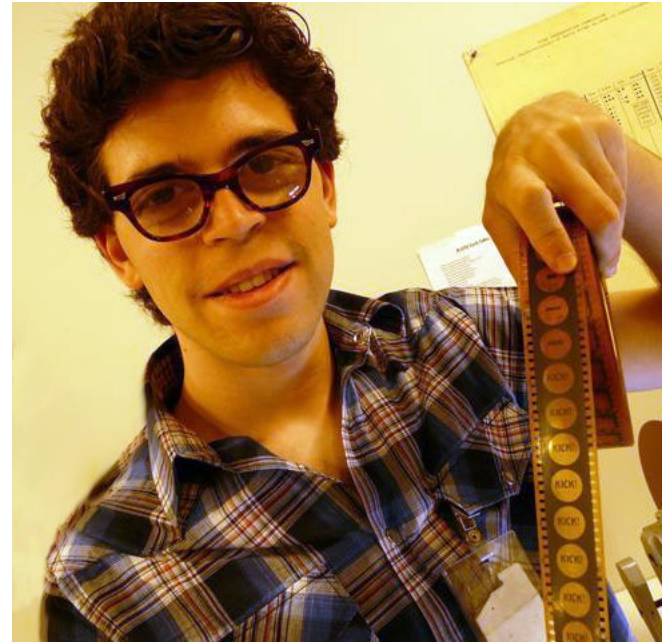
TS: I'll do basic maintenance work on it, such as cleaning and repairing. If the film is actively decomposing and a rare title, I'll work with an archive such as the Library of Congress or UCLA so the film can be copied properly and archivally for future generations to enjoy.

SMM: How has the public reception been to your work in archiving cartoons?

TS: Public reception to my work has been mostly positive. This is an extremely niche field of interest, so it may not be more than a mere curiosity to the general public. The most appreciation is gleaned from individuals and organizations generally dealing with film, history, and pop culture nostalgia

SMM: Tell us about “Cartoon Carnival”.

TS: Early on in my days of collecting these films, I've had a burning desire to share my enjoyment of them with the public. I felt then and still feel that the entities who have material like this are not doing much to keep it alive in the public eye. This past summer in 2009 I was finally able to sit down and plan out a generic theme, the “Cartoon Carnival” title, and began approaching various venues in the New York City area where I live. Actual 16mm projection is a major part of the presentation because as I say, “This is how these films were meant to be seen. Not on television screens or via digital projectors”. I've put on four shows so far and am looking to do more of them, especially if I can find a regular location.



SMM: Any personal favorites in animation?

TS: It is hard for me to choose a favorite animation. I have more of an acquired taste for various things; not always based on content quality but sometimes purely the historical value of a film. My main interest is in the Bray Studios, the first major animation studio which was housed in Manhattan. I've spent considerable time and resources finding their films and viewing them in other private collections and archives. It's my belief that the output of such a studio should not be overlooked and scattered around so I'm intent on gathering as many of them as possible and making all of the films available after locating a good percentage.

SMM: What is it about early animation (1910s to 1930s) that draws you to this period?

TS: That which lures me to early animation is a bit of a mystery; I haven't been able to fully analyze or quantify it yet. Sometimes I make the comparison to contemporary limited 2D animation as being similar to early animation, both having very little fluidity in many cases. Despite my interest in the Bray Studios as previously mentioned, you could say that a modern cartoon like Family Guy has no more visual depth or complexity than a jerky, assembly-line-produced Bray cartoon. The obvious difference here is the presence of color, which is a moot point. However, individuals like Winsor McCay and J.R. Bray were the pioneers of this field; they invented it as they went along. The public tastes and complexity of animation evolved at the same speed, again, with no digital crutches to aid this progression. It's interesting to me that while the nature of today's mainstream is more 'commercial' than it was in the early days, we have almost come full circle in terms of what the public is willing to visually digest.

SMM: Have any notable figures come forward to help you in your cause?

TS: I've had email correspondence with one well-known film historian who has written on the subject of animation and praised my efforts in our correspondence. I've yet to see much mainstream support as the majority of it tends to come from individuals in the animation field who are not so much in the public eye. I always welcome support from the 'big fish' and will say that it's about time this period of film history was better recognized. In the past, lack of film availability daunted researchers. The same barriers no longer exist as I've seen firsthand through my own discoveries.

SMM: According to your blog, you are just 20 years old. What are your aspirations for the future?

TS: Yes, it is true that I'm 20 years old. An obvious goal of mine is to keep promoting the importance of researching early animation history by making more of the films available on DVD and I also hope to write professionally on the subject. In terms of employment, I would enjoy being a film history professor and an archivist in one of the various museums or archives.

Thomas Stathes is a film archivist and collector specializing in early animated films. Based in New York, Stathes holds occasional screenings of his treasures. His new DVD, "Stop Motion Matinee" is available for purchase through his website: <http://www.cartoonsonfilm.com/dvd.html>

Stop Motion Magazine conducted a cyber interview with Stathes on November 24, 2009.

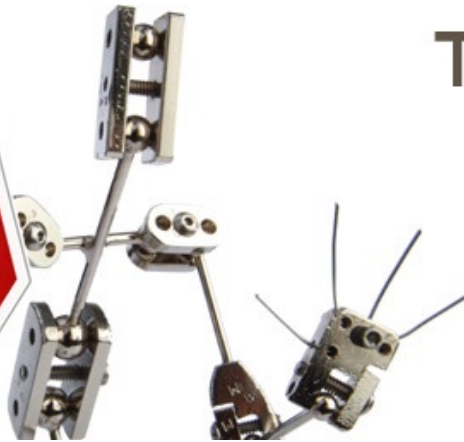


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THE MONTREAL STOP MOTION FILM FESTIVAL 2009

The Birth of a Festival!

by Erik Goulet

Where can I see puppet animated films? Where could I indulge my craving for this technique I love so much? Those were the questions running through my mind in 2007.

Of course we all know there are film festivals around the world focusing on animation, but every time I was attending I was going through programs with a mix of different technique from traditional drawing, cut-out, pixilation, computer and puppet animation.

As I was working away at my desk doing customer support for Softimage, a crazy idea went through my mind. If I wanted to see a concentrated event where puppet animation would be shown on the big screen, I would need to organise it!

My name is Erik Goulet, I graduated from Concordia University in 1990. This is where I discovered Stop Motion animation and my life would never be the same. I always felt this technique was a hybrid between animation and live action. A perfect blend for any filmmaker who loves animation, with a tactile feel to it.

In 2001 I went back to Concordia University as a part-time teacher. I wanted to give the Stop Motion Class I always dreamed of having. My enthusiasm being very contagious, my students were thrilled to learn all the basic and clever tricks of Stop Motion that had been discovered by the likes of George Pal, Willis O'Brien, Ray Harryhausen and many others.



In November of 2008 a twist of fate would give me the opportunity to revisit my original idea of the festival. The company I was working for got purchased by another one and a certain percentage of the work force was let go. I was one of those unlucky (or should I say fortunate) person. I would finally have the time available to organise the festival.

Can it be done?

Fast forward to July 2009. I organised a meeting with some of my good friends to share my ideas and get their feedback on this. I always had a reputation for doing things out of the ordinary and this was no exception. The first question that came up was “when” would this take place. When I mentioned the 24 and 25 of October...2009 everybody started laughing thinking I was joking, but I was quick to reply that it had to happen this year. I didn’t know why but a little voice was telling me it had to be done now. After all, I didn’t know what 2010 had in store for me “work” wise. Of course people told me it was a bit crazy and all. But one of the team members said: “Erik, nothing is impossible”. So there you have it. The decisive moment that makes you step up to the plate and put things in motion.

Phase 1!

Of course, I knew we had to go for the bare essential with the first edition, we would do it small and in accordance with the means we had. The first step was to make a web site and a call of entries. No point in advertising a festival if we had no films. The entire month of August was dedicated to those 2 items. The web site went live on the 26th of August 2009 at 10h30 pm, things were starting to shape up. The call for entries was really short, from the 1st to the 30th of September. I spent the beginning of September on the internet, communicating with all the contacts and web site I knew related to Stop Motion.

The community was very helpful and very open to this new event. I got a lot of reply to my emails telling me it was about time somebody put something like this together. With a little luck, contact and good hearted feeling we received close to 120 films from all over the world: Australia, Spain, England, Argentina, Mexico, the U.S, Canada and more. Every trip to the mail box during that month saw more and more films coming in, so much that at some point the mail man had to put the envelope in a bigger postal box! Awesome!

October is coming fast!

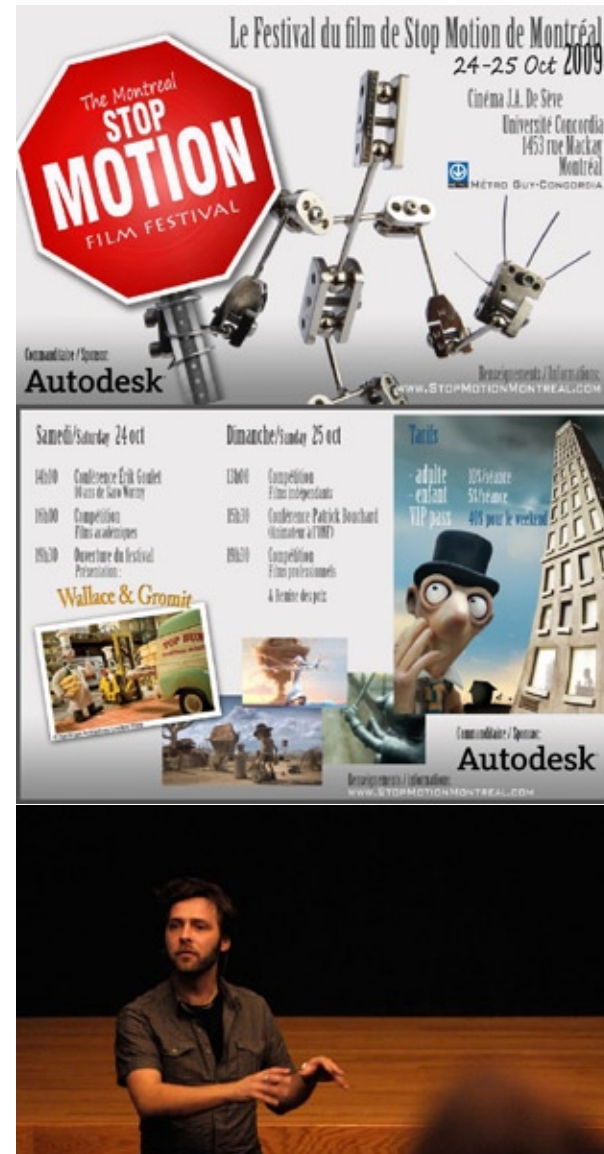
When I realised that we were receiving all these movies, I was able to move forward and book a theatre. Since I am teaching at Concordia University they were able to help us out in booking the J.A. de Sève theater. It is a nice place that can hold 173 attendees for watching either film presentations or conferences.

With only a couple of days left all other aspect of the festival came rushing through the door: Posters, promo cards, permit for public viewing, cake and more.

Since the event was competitive, I had to come up with a special award to be given to the winners. I had been doing a lot of ball and socket armatures recently and it came naturally that it should be the official award of the festival. I spend 3 days fabricating the armatures and then they were sent to a plating company to get nickel plated for maximum protection against rust. The name of the award became “The little Henry”, taken from the name of the first character I ever made an armature for.

A Jury had to be found as well, time being so short, I activated my contacts and got professional from the field of animation

With close to 60 films in competition during this first edition of the festival, the jury had the difficult task of selecting a winner at the end of the festival. Our jury committee this year was composed of:



Co Hoedeman:

Worldly known Stop Motion animator who received an Oscar for his film “The Sand Castle” in 1977, M. Hoedeman has an impressive list of more than 20 animated short films he directed at the famous animation studio of the National Film Board located in Montreal. In recent years he directed the adventures of Ludovic and is currently working on a new production.

Denis Roy

Offering an impressive list of productions he directed over a period of 2 decades, Mr Roy has worked for numerous studio in the Montreal landscape. From Production Pascal Blais where he was assistant director on “The old lady and the pigeon” and later animation director for Spectra Animation on the children series “Toupie et Binou”. He is currently teaching animation at the Cegep du Vieux-Montreal.

Stéphane Lauzon

With 12 years of teaching Plastic Arts and Multimedia at Montreal’s Marie-Clarac High School, Mr Lauzon is able to pass along his passion for animation via orientated class that immerse the student in this field. He is also the founding member of “Kino Jeunesse” (www.kinoj.com), an association that promotes the work of young filmmakers by giving film productions public visibility.

The Main Event

The festival was stretched out over 2 days (originally it was supposed to be only 1 day). Here is a break down of all the presentation:

Saturday, 24th of October

14h00 Conference with Erik Goulet, 10 years of Saro Wormy

(Yeah I know, it’s me :-) I though I should break the ice, then I could concentrate on the rest of the event. I did a recap of the 9 movies that were made of the life of Saro Wormy, a little plasticine worm that always gets into trouble. I presented the films and talked about the challenges and problems I had to resolve during the production. This was very informative since I talked about some of the material I used during the creation process as well.



16h00 Academic Films Competition

An 1h40 minutes of pure entertainment, 24 movies from animation school that blew everybody away with the visual quality, animation and story telling.

19h30 The Festival's official opening.

This was a cool evening. The official historical start of a new festival;

I started with a small speech about the idea behind the festival and what was planned for the evening.

We started with a 45 minutes presentation of specially selected Stop Motion movies made by Concordia's University Student who had received the Concordia University Stop Motion award since its debut in 2005.

We followed with a presentation of our team of judges, a preview of Fantastic Mr Fox (along with a draw for some passes to the premiere of the movie)

We continued with a special presentation of Wallace and Gromit's: A matter of Loaf and death. I want to say a special thank you to Aardman Animation (especially Mr David Sproxton) , who gave us permission to do a public presentation. Afterward the attendees were invited to come and mingle in the foyer of the theater where we served specially made cake with images of Wallace and Gromit and the festival logo. A lot of animators were able to connect and talk about Stop Motion, it was really fantastic.

Sunday, 25th of October

13h00 Independent Films Competition

The silent army of this art form, 17 independent films were featured from all over the world.

15h30 Conference with NFB's animator Patrick Bouchard for a retrospective and technical discussion on his films.

Patrick has made numerous Stop Motion film at the National Film Board and had agreed to come and share his knowledge with us! He presented some of his masterpieces and reveal secrets of the trade!

19h30 Professional Films Competition, followed by the award ceremony.

A solid 1h30 (14 films) of pure delight from the pros

We followed the projection immediately with the award ceremony, the suspense grew until the Jury announced the winner in each category.

In conclusion,

For an event organize in such a short period of time we did extremely well. 60 films presented over 2 days. Everything worked out well with the movies, projections, and attendance. The fans were really happy and it ended on a very positive note.

Since I was single handling all aspect of the festival, some part of it suffered. The email blast to let everybody know about acceptance of the productions was long overdue and I must say I am sorry for the lengthy delay. Secondly, like any festival, we should have had a program and listing of the movies, again the sheer amount of work to organize everything kept me from doing a program. But here is the good news; I am committed to making one. Even if the program is “post” festival, I think it is a nice souvenir for everybody who participated and to have a record of the participant in the festival along with the films.

And finally, the good news is that we will be back next year. With one full year ahead of me I will be able to better pace myself, get some helpers and make this even better this time around. So I encourage you to spread the word, prepare a movie and be part of the magic of the second edition, I can already tell you that we got a lot of attention from the international community and some big names approached us to participate the next time around. This is such good news!

I want to thank every filmmaker who sent in a film to participate in the Stop Motion Film Festival. You are the reason why this crazy idea I had in 2007 actually worked. The festival turned out very well, with 3 competitive programs, 2 conferences and an official opening, we were truly blessed by the Stop Motion Gods!

Being a Stop Motion animator and a teacher of that art form, I feel connected with each and every one of you that is part of this wonderful community. Thank you so much to everybody who contributed to the success of the first edition, your generosity made this dream come true!

Erik Goulet

Director of the Montreal Stop Motion Film Festival

The Montreal 2009 Stop Motion Festival winners in each category:

Category: Film professional
The Nose by Neil Burns, Canada

Special honorable mention from the jury
The Necktie by Jean-François Lévesque, Canada

Category: Film independent
Operation Fish by Jeff Riley, USA

Category : Film academic
Spontaneous Generation by Andy Cahill, USA



CTN Animation Expo Review

by Andrew Racho

Friday November 20th through Sunday November 22nd marked three historic days...well, for animation industry nerds and for CTN (The Creative Talent Network), who held their first animation expo and conference. Located at the Burbank Marriott Hotel & Convention Center, the event boasted exhibits, panels, and demonstrations to “[bring] together the many creative elements of the animation art form whether digital or drawn.” Did they deliver?

Yes.

I am a bit of a slacker. Not keeping up on my trades, I only heard about this conference a few days before. So, the only day I was available to go was Sunday. I honestly did not know what to expect. The CTN site took a little time to navigate and get some basic questions answered. Curse my ADD and short attention span! There seemed to be an event floor and some panels. But what did that really mean? So, when Sunday came, I printed out my pass, drove to the convention center, realized I forgot my pass, drove back home, drove to the convention center, and entered. Turns out when I reached the front desk, they had my name on a printed list and I did not even need my pass. Well, it was only an hour lost.

The conference was divided into three areas: the event floor, room 2 for lectures, and room 3 for lectures. The event floor was a lot like a Comic-Con jr. Black-curtain dividers created a small divided maze of booths while long folding tables housed artwork and displays from dozens of artists and studios. The artists and owners were there to talk shop with everyone there as well. Some businesses were there to promote their software and educational services: Cinema 4D, Gnomon, USC, Wacom, and some other drawing software companies. Others were there to be available, like representatives from Sony. Publications like Animation Magazine also made themselves known and gave out free publication samples.

What this event floor had that Comic-Con lacked was a live demonstration from artists. A small elevated area near the middle of the event floor held a spot for featured artists to draw on tablets and talk into microphones. You could see their work on LCD monitors all around, where small crowds consistently gathered.

After a few moments there, I realized that this conference was not really for fans. It was for serious animation people in all areas of animation, effects, drawing, painting, etc. in all stages of their careers. Novices could talk with educational presenters. Working industry professionals could discuss opportunities with other companies. Veterans could learn from the business paths and artistic techniques of other companies big and small. The mission statement clearly was true. They wanted to bring together and elevate the work of everyone around them.

Thankfully, when I walked in, I overheard someone saying that people were lining up a half hour early for panels. That was my cue to keep an eye on the clock. At 1:30 I made my way over to stand in a reasonable line for room 3, which held a panel from independent studio owners about maintaining an independent art/animation business. While waiting in line, two flat screens situated in the lobby displayed what was going on in one of the rooms. This was, in my opinion, one of the most thoughtful and brilliant ideas to the conference. If I missed the panel, which was pretty full, I could still watch it from the outside and not feel like I lost out.

The panels were great. Held Q&A style with a host on a few couches, the indie studio panel I went to featured owners of studios all sizes answering questions and giving great advice. If you couldn't see them in your seat, all you had to do was look up at the giant theater screen to see the video camera's playback. There was even a Q&A with the audience. Afterward, the guys stuck around and answered questions and talked with people outside of the room and at their booths. It goes to show how much the presenters really care about the information they are sharing.

Looking at the schedule, I missed out on some great panels. "How I Sell the Pitch." "Anatomy of a Hit Animated Series." "Who's in the Animation Pipeline." "Directing Animation vs Live Action."

After a day at the event, I left feeling very satisfied. I learned a lot and got to meet some great people. One amazing thing about the animation world is that it is not as unattainable as it seems. Once you make yourself a part of it, everyone recognizes that and you feel like part of a community where you can grow and learn. People genuinely want to help each other out, share information, and continually pay it back. They want to see each other do well, and I think the CTN expo and the attending studios reinforced that to a high degree.

In comparison to Comic-Con: yes, they're similar. Panels. Exhibits. Nerds. But CTN's expo seemed to care about the industry professionals and artists genuinely interested in animation. The panels were focused and specific educational experiences, not gaudy previews for a studio. Panels were meant to be seen by all as they went on, unlike Comic-Con where if you don't wait for two hours you're not getting in. Nobody dressed up there. And the horrific, sweaty, greasy odor, which makes the event floor at Comic Con difficult to walk through, was not present. I think people showed up to be professional, which includes showering. Thank you CTN expo visitors!

I highly recommend, if you are in the animation industry or want to be a part of it, checking out what they come up with next year.

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Acting for Stop Motion

by Melissa Piekaar



Stop-motion animators require skills in just about every art form that exists. Drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, screenwriting, filmmaking, sewing, woodworking, and moldmaking are all very useful talents in stop-motion production. In addition, stop-motion animation requires nearly-infinite patience, along with a good sense of humor, physical stamina, and a love (or at least a very high tolerance!) of problem solving and troubleshooting. But the greatest and most memorable stop-motion films depend on one skill that is often overlooked: the animator's ability to act.

At Pixar Animation Studios, one of the main things recruiters look for when hiring animators is acting ability. It takes precedence, surprisingly, over drawing ability and software skills¹. This is because good acting skills allow the animator to effectively communicate the character's feelings with gestures, expressions, timing, and emotion, so that the audience can empathize and respond. Animation skills, such as walk cycles and other motion mechanics, effectively move the character from here to there, but skilled acting is what brings the story to life. Pixar knows that an animator's ability to touch an audience emotionally is key to the success of a motion picture, and without this ability, his or her technical skills are immaterial.

Often, people think of the voice talent as the main form acting in an animated picture, but voice acting skills are of little use to the animator. In fact, so much of the acting in animation is achieved visually, that animators study silent movies for inspiration. Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were geniuses in physical communication, and they were able to convey their stories solely through gestures, expression and body language.

The art of acting dates all the way back to caveman days, when shamans acted out their lore by the campfire through spoken word². The acting out of stories in this way was one of the first forms of entertainment. Today, in spite of the explosion of media and variety of content, the public appetite for stories persists. There are various theories that provide reasons for this, but it will suffice to say that from prehistory to the present day, audiences dig a good yarn. Perhaps this is why a film tends to flop if the word on the street is that “the story sucks”.

The job of the actor is to bring the story to life, so for the stop motion animator, this is achieved through the puppet. As with any actor, the puppet animator must prepare in advance by studying the character being portrayed. Extensive knowledge of the character’s background provides the animator with the capacity to predict gestures, expressions, and timing for that character. It prepares the animator to be “in character” as he or she animates.

The benefits of strong character development cannot be overstated. Ideally, each character should have a fully fleshed out biography. At a minimum, it should have a long and detailed list of attributes which may include: age, gender, hometown and country of origin, family background, education, hopes and dreams, fears, struggles, favorite food, favorite color, and on and on. These details do not have to be part of the story (often they are not), but they help crystallize the character in the reader’s mind.

The animator takes this extensive character analysis to the performance of the puppet. An evil scientist, for example, might get out of bed differently than the King of Freedonia. A castle-dwelling hermit might react differently to a pie in the face than a midget court jester. Even in cases where the animator’s creative input is limited by the action or dialogue, in-depth knowledge of the character can enhance the animation in subtle but innovative ways.

With the tsunami of technological innovation in animation over the last few decades, audiences have become very demanding. But even a movie with state of the art animation technology will fall flat if it lacks in narrative. On the other hand, audiences are intelligent, and tend to be forgiving when moved by a great story. Skilled acting, more than anything else, makes the story interesting.

¹ http://www.pixar.com/companyinfo/jobs/career_faq.html

² Hooks, Ed: Acting For Animators. Heinemann: 2003

Suggested Reading:

Acting for Animators by Ed Hooks
The Illusion of Life by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston
Creating Unforgettable Characters by Linda Seger

Foam Latex Oven Build

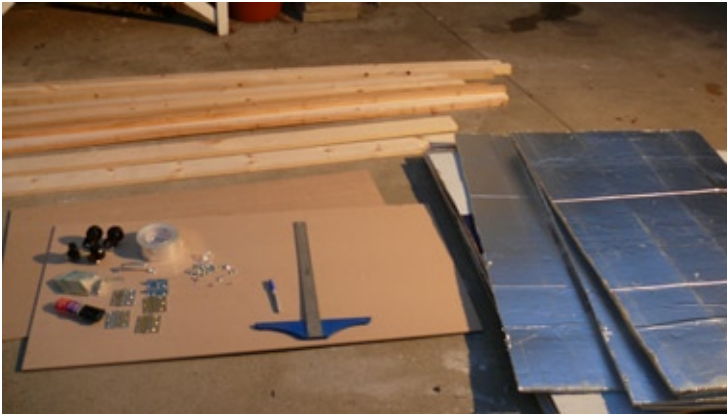
by John Ikuma



One of the biggest challenges when working with foam latex is where to bake it. If you have a small oven and make a large mold that won't fit, you will probably be forced to use your household oven, which isn't healthy for you or your family. There are two solutions to this problem. The first being to go and buy an Electric Oven large enough to bake good sized molds, the second is to just build your own oven and parade your neighbors through your workspace so they can see your completed feat of engineering wonder. Buying an electric oven for most might be the better path and getting a second hand oven in today's market is fairly inexpensive. But if you're like me the molds just keep getting bigger and bigger. Also the amount of molds that need to be baked at one time can get a little out of hand fast when making puppets for a commercial or series.

So I present to you the Latex Oven Build:

Foam Latex made by most manufacturers in the US tend to have a baking temperature between 185f and 200f. These temperatures are usually guides and baking at lower temperatures (165f-175f) in the case of silicone or fiberglass molds has been a way for many Latex artists. If you bake over 200f you risk the problem of making your latex brittle. The gas or electric oven in your kitchen will often show a starting reference temperature of 250f. This isn't where your oven turns on but you will have a problem if you want the oven to be at 175f since it probably can't go that low.



Building this oven will give you the flexibility of low temperatures 165F to the 200f range you will most likely need to achieve perfect latex. As well as making you the coolest person on your block for a week or two.

The Materials List:

- 1x4 for base
- 2x2 for frame
- MDF or Plywood for top
- 2 inch and 1 1/2 inch drywall screws
- 4 caster wheels
- Handle Sliding bolt lock
- Foil Tape
- Metal L shaped corner joints.
- Foil sided composite plywood board
- Foil sided foam insulation board (1/2 inch width)
- 115v Fan and cord
- Oven Temperature gauge (the ones that attach to the rack)
- Meat Thermometer
- Duct Tape
- Hinges for door
- Dryer Duct for circulation
- Electric Hot plate
- Oven Rack

Tools Needed:

- Electric Drill with appropriate drill bit sizes
- Screw driver
- Saw
- Skill saw or dremel
- Soldering iron and solder
- Clamps
- Ruler or Measuring Tape

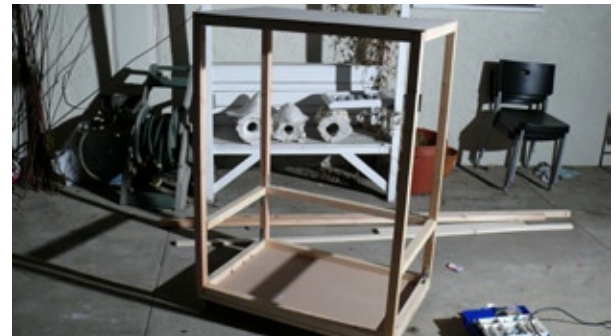
Step One: The Base

Measure out and cut or pre cut your base plywood or mdf to 3 feet x 2 feet. Take the 1x4 pieces of wood and cut them so they measure the length and width of the base. Remember to measure your wood before attaching. Clamp and pre drill holes for securing the base to the 1x4's. You need to pre-drill everything so as not to split the wood in this build. Then screw in drywall screws, this will fasten the boards to the base. I do not suggest gluing any parts in this build. Glue and epoxy used in the wrong way can result in melting and fire. Fasten everything with screws!!!

Then once your boards are in place you can attach your caster wheels. This will allow you the ability to move the base around make the oven mobile.

Step Two: The Frame

The frame is made from 2x2 pieces of wood and “L” shaped corner brackets. Framing brackets that are used in housing can leave gaps in your construction and are not advised. Measure out your 2x2's and cut (four-4x2x2 / six-2'8"x2x2 / six-1'8"x2x2). Check all measurements before cutting so as not to over cut or under cut the length. At this stage it will be helpful to start building the back and front frame structure. Take the 4x2x2 and 2'8"x2x2 pieces and assemble using the “L” shaped brackets to lineup the pieces perfectly. Staggering the brackets is important so you do not run into problems with screws hitting other screws. If this does happen you can make up for this when attaching the top roof of the oven. So don't worry.





Then take the frame and with the help of either a clamp or friend and lineup each half of the frame to the base. Then pre drill and fasten with drywall screws. Once your first half and back half of the oven are done you can attach the side pieces to the two halves. Starting with the top of the oven you will predrill and attach the 1'8"x2x2 between the front and back of the oven. Measurement is crucial for a tight fit. But if you are off, don't worry you can have small gaps. Attach the bottom 1'8"x2x2 to the base and frame. You should have a solid frame for your oven at this point.



Now is the time to decide the height of your oven's rack. You will most likely want it to be 1 foot high from the inside base and from of the oven. Measure and mark the height on all vertical pieces of the frame. Take your remaining 1'8"x2x2 and 2'8"x2x2 and attach them using "L" brackets to the frame at the height you measured. Don't forget to predrill!!!

Step Three: The Roof and Four Walls



Now it's time to assemble the walls of the oven. To keep your heat in the oven and the outside temperature from affecting you inside temp too much, I suggest using an aluminum foil sided plywood or composite wood used in house building. It's cheap and comes in 8'x4' pieces. This makes for the best result. I have the wood precut at the lumber store for easy transport, but you can cut the wood yourself. First I attach the mdf or plywood top to the frame of the oven by predrilling and screwing in drywall screws. The roof should match the size of the base. Then I attach the Aluminum Plywood that measures 4'x3' to the front and back. Now attach only one side of the oven which should measure out 4'x2'. It is crucial to only attach one side so you can install the insulation.

You may want to measure and cut out your door to the oven. This I will leave up to you to decide the size for your own needs. I cut roughly a 1'6"x2'6" door in the front of my oven. Then save the door and move it away from the work area.

Now, measure the inside of your oven, measure and cut the foam insulation board and place it in the ovens four wall spaces. Be careful not to poke holes in the aluminum. You will also notice it will be a tight fit and need adjusting as you insert each piece. If you over cut a little, don't worry, small gaps are to be expected and will be covered with Foil Tape. Once your walls are done you can place the last piece of 4'x2' aluminum sided plywood to the frame of the oven.

Move all pieces of the inner insulation to their respective walls. Use foil tape to hold them in place and cover up any gaps.

Step Four: The FAN!!!

Depending on the size fan you have selected to use you will need to trace the outside diameter of the fan to the rear of the ovens roof. Make sure to keep it a minimum of 4 inches away from all edges. Now trace a circle in the center of the fans trace being sure to leave room for screw holes for the fan. Measure another circle the same size on the opposite end of the roof. Now cut the two holes.

You will now need to measure out the inner roof and lower part of the oven. Measure and cut the foam insulation to match and place into the roof and floor of the oven. You can fasten the roof insulation by using Foil Tape or if you like you can also bolt it using bolts, nuts and washers. You will need to cut the air holes into the foam that are already in the roof.





Should be easy since the roof is already prepped. Attach your fan and then attach your air duct. You can purchase attachment pieces at the hardware store to give it a more sleek look, but using Duct tape is fine and will give you easier access if your fan burns out or doesn't work.

Now attach your Door using the hinges and handle. It should match perfectly. You may need to sand down the edges a little to allow it to open without issue. Also you will want to cut a very small triangle out of the corner edge of the door to allow the heating elements power cord to exit the oven.



Step Five: The RACK!!!

Here's where your early measurements come into use. Taking into consideration the height you installed the rack braces to the frame, you will want to measure and predrill your holes for your "L" Shaped brackets. Now install as many "L" brackets sideways that you feel you need to hold the weight of the molds. I suggest 6 minimum for one 25lb mold. Place the rack in the oven and test, test, test, and test the weight that your rack can hold. You don't want the rack crashing into your heating element. That would be very bad!!! I would highly suggest 8 to 10 brackets supporting your oven. If you feel that you've made a mold that the rack cannot handle an alternative is to use cinderblocks to support the rack. Also, it might be a good idea if you plan on moving your oven around a lot to fasten the oven rack to the back walls "L" supports.



Step Six: The finishing touches.

If you've ordered a fan with a plug already attached you are rocking at this point and have probably already played around with it. If not and you made the mistake of buying a 15volt compared to a 115volt plug you are probably pulling your hair out by now. This is an easy mistake and I made the same one in my first purchase. You can order an 115v entertainment system fan online that already has a cord attached. Or you can purchase one through Radio Shack that you will need to attach a cord to.

Your Heating Element should be controllable by a little dial on the hotplate. This will allow you to adjust your temperature when test and using the oven. Don't use anything under 1000 watts. They just won't generate enough heat. I purchase a single 1000watt Proctor Silex Fifth Burner for \$12 including shipping through a seller on Ebay. It rocks and was cheap.

You will want to place your oven rack temperature gauge on the rack of the oven and drill and place your meat thermometer gauge into the front face of the oven. Can choose to attach a power strip to the outside of the oven to act as an easy on off switch.

Now it's time to party!!! Test your fan first and make sure it works. The fan will circulate the heat generated by the element and distribute it evenly though the oven space. Now plug in your oven and keep an eye on the temperature. Make sure you to not over heat the oven. Your meat thermometer that's poking through to the inside will help you gauge your inside temp. Once the oven has reached 200 degrees reading on the meat thermometer, open the oven and look at the rack thermometer. It should be slightly higher. Now be careful not to burn yourself and adjust the heating element until you've reached your desired steady temperature.

Congratulations!!! You're now ready to back latex!!!

If you'd like to see a time lapse of the oven build process, go to: www.youtube.com/stopmotionmagazine

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