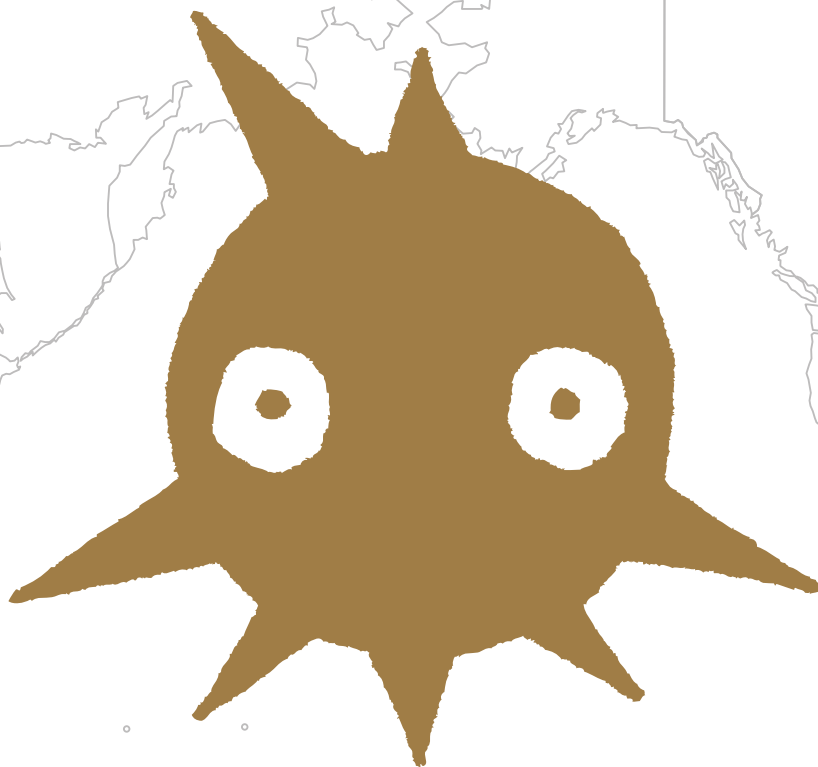


環太平洋・アジアの  
アニメーション界の達成  
Animation Scenes in  
Pan-Pacific and Asia



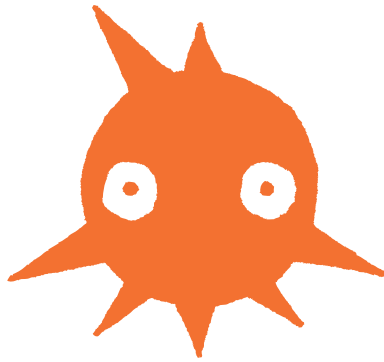
**G O L D E N**  
**C A R P S T A R**  
ゴールデン・カープスター  
**2020—2021**



HIROSHIMA ANIMATION SEASON 2022



環太平洋・アジアの  
アニメーション界の達成  
Animation Scenes in  
Pan-Pacific and Asia



G O L D E N  
C A R P S T A R  
ゴールデン・カープスター  
2020—2021

 HIROSHIMA ANIMATION SEASON 2022

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## About the Golden Carpstar

The “Golden Carpster” is an award established by the new animation film festival “Hiroshima Animation Season”. The award will be presented to an individual, group, or organization in the Pan-Pacific and Asia region that has made significant achievements during the two-year period from 2020 to 2021, and will be selected based on their past career and other factors.

Carpstar: The mascot character of the Hiroshima Animation Season, designed by Koji Yamamura, one of the artistic directors of the Festival. The character is a combination of the “carp,” which is familiar to Hiroshima citizens, and a twinkling star.

## Selection Criteria

Individuals or organizations that, through their activities (mainly from 2020 to 2021, but also including activities before that date), will make a significant contribution to the animation community and have a social impact (or can be considered as a model for the realization of a peaceful society). The overall evaluation will be made with particular emphasis on innovation, internationality, diversity, pioneering spirit, and continuity.

## Selection Process

Based on over 60 pages of recommendation documents compiled by a research team of experts in various fields organized by the Hiroshima Animation Season and a list of recommendations from recommendation committee members in the Pan-Pacific and Asia region, the selection committee decides multiple winners.

## Golden Carpstar Selection Committee

**Nobuaki Doi**

Producer, Hiroshima Animation Season

**Koji Yamamura**

Artistic Director, Hiroshima Animation Season

**Shizuka Miyazaki**

Artistic Director, Hiroshima Animation Season

**Koji Takase**

Animation Critic *"Only for the Japanese winners"*

## Research Team (Japan)

Team reader, in charge of Feature, Series, Staff, Online

**Koji Takase**

Animation Studies

In charge of short films

**Daisuke Tanaka**

Editor-in-Chief of [tampen.jp](http://tampen.jp)

In charge of academics

**Masashi Koide**

Professor at Tokyo Zokei University

In charge of business

**Tadashi Sudo**

Journalist

In charge of exhibitions

**Mederu Kiritori**

Art critic

## Research Cooperation

**Akiko Sugawa**

Professor, Yokohama National University / President, Japanese Society for Animation Studies

**Mitsuko Okamoto**

Professor, Graduate School of Film and New Media, Tokyo University of the Arts

**Kensuke Ohno**

GIFMAGAZINE

**Takashi Ohashi**

Motionographer

**Emiko Ogawa**

Head of Prix Ars Electronica

**Kenichi Kutsuna**

Animator

**Yusuke Shono**

Editor

**Aki Yamada**

TBS, DigiCon6 ASIA Festival Director

**Shota Umehara**

CloverWorks

**Yoichi Senzui**

Director of Photography

**Koichi Noguchi**

Toei Animation

**Ryohei Miyamoto**

Animation exhibition – archivist

## Recommendion Members (International)

### East Asia

In charge of Korea

**Yu-jin Choi**

Secretary General of Korea Independent Animation Association, General manager, Indie Ani-fest

In charge of China

**Yantong Zhu**

Artistic Director, Feinaki Beijing Animation Week

In charge of Taiwan

**Chi-Sui Wang**

Taichung International Animation Festival / Associate Professor, National Taipei University of the Arts

### Southeast Asia

In charge of all Southeast Asia countries

**Leong Puiyee**

Senior Manager, Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film

### South Asia

In charge of India

**Sekhar Mukherjee**

Professor, National Institute of Design, India

### West Asia

In charge of Iran

**Amir Houshang Moein**

Animation Artist

### Oceania

In charge of Australia

**Malcolm Turner**

Director, Melbourne International Animation Festival

### North America

In charge of Canada

**Marco de Blois**

Curator of Animation, Cinematheque Quebecois

In charge of USA

**Alex Dudok de Wit**

Journalist / Translator

### Latin America

In charge of all Latin American countries

**Alejandro R. González**

Director of ANIMA - Córdoba International Animation Festival

**G o l d e n   C a r p s t a r**  
**2 0 2 0 ——— 2 0 2 1**  
**A w a r d   W i n n e r s**



President, Sony Pictures Animation

# Kristine Belson

USA



## Biography

As President of Sony Pictures Animation, Kristine Belson oversees the development and production of all theatrical features, shorts, and series produced by the company and is responsible for the studio's overall strategy and growth. "Spider-Man: Spider-Verse" won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. "The Mitchells vs the Machine" also won numerous awards. Prior to joining Sony Pictures Animation in 2015, Belson spent nearly a decade at DreamWorks Animation. She served as executive producer on "How to Train Your Dragon." Prior to that, she spent more than 15 years developing and producing live-action and animation for The Jim Henson Company, Columbia Pictures, Turner Pictures, and 20th Century Fox.

## Award motivation

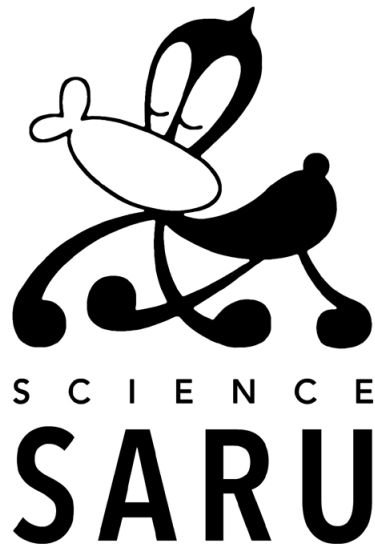
"Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse" and "The Mitchells vs the Machines" reminded the world that not all Hollywood animated features need to look alike, thanks to their bold and unique visual styles. Belson believes that we will see more adult-oriented animation in the near future, as viewers' attitudes become more open to a wider range of animated expression in the wake of the Corona disaster. If that trend does come, Sony Pictures Animation would lead.

Hollywood animation continues to occupy the number one position in the world in terms of size and influence. While many new trends are emerging in the industry, Sony Pictures Animation's practices are providing

guidance to many creators by showing that animation can be more diverse.

"Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse" and "The Mitchells vs the Machines" are examples of the rich storytelling that visual innovation can enable. The films, which also have a popular appeal, contribute to nurturing the rich sensitivities of children around the world.





#### Production Company

# Science SARU

Japan

#### Award motivation

"Keep Your Hands Off Eizouken!", "Japan Sinks: 2020", "Inu-oh" and "The Heike Story"... All of their works have been highly acclaimed and talked about worldwide. Since the studio's establishment, it has continued to renew and present new possibilities for Japanese animation.

Science SARU, headed by Korean-born producer Choi Eunyoung, is a very unique "multinational" production studio in the Japanese animation industry, with staff from Europe and other countries. The studio also pursues unique visual expression by building a production system that utilizes Adobe Flash (now Animate), which is not common in Japan and is also working to improve

the working environment.

The projects "The Heike Story" and "Inu-Oh" are based on the Japanese classic novel Tale of the Heike (and related works), but present a new form of "historical" animation. This approach encourages viewers to focus on what has been obscured by the larger history and broadens their perspectives.

#### Brief History

Science SARU is an animation studio established in 2013. With a diverse and flexible style, they challenge new expressions through unique stories and plan and produce works that are loved around the world.

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Animation Artist

# Joe Hsieh

Taiwan

## Award motivation

Joe Hsieh is a filmmaker who has been continuously creating and presenting works in the "horror" genre. 2020's "Night Bus" is his masterpiece and has been extremely well received at film festivals around the world.

Joe Hsieh's films are not only horror as a form of entertainment, but also offer a deeper look into the darker desires hidden in human beings and the social structures that create such emotions. While there are few artists who continue to create horror works in animation, and it is not a flourishing genre, Joe Hsieh's work expands the possibilities of animation expression.

## Outline

Taiwanese independent animation director who pursues the dark side of human nature and produces many works filled with horror and suspense. His "Meat Days" (2006) was nominated for the Pusan International Film Festival, and "The Present" (2014) was nominated for the Sundance Film Festival and won the Best Animated Short Film Award at the San Diego Asian Film Festival. "Night Bus" (2020) won Best Animated Short Film at the Taipei Golden Horse Awards, the Grand Prix at the Zagreb International Animated Film Festival, and the Short Film Jury Animation Award of the Sundance Film Festival.

Joe Hsieh is a representative of Taiwan's animation scene, which has been on the rise in recent years. In particular, his continuous production of high-quality works in the unique genre of horror animation may serve as a model for future generations of animators.

Although horror is often seen as a B movie, the horror element in Joe Hsieh's films is an excellent commentary on the dark emotions that we all have, the social systems that create those emotions, and the universal nature of human beings themselves.



Institute Festival

# Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC)

IRAN



## Award motivation

DEFC has contributed to the diversification of the film industry in Iran through its continuous involvement in the production of art films, animations, documentaries, and experimental films. The continuous activity over the past 30 years has provided an extremely useful model not only in Iran but also internationally.

## Brief History

The Documentary and Experimental Film Center was established in 1984 as the center for experimental and semi-professional films. Initially producing 16mm films to entice young people to become filmmakers, the center has produced over 1000 professional documentaries, films, and animations to date. It has also become one of the most notable production companies in the area. The center has also been organizing a prestigious "Cinema Vérité" Iran International Documentary Film Festival, one of the most influential Iranian film festivals. DEFC also publishes two quarterly magazines, "Cinema Verite" and "Cinema Animation," organizes weekly screenings, and holds workshops on documentary film and animation.

The Center's work is not limited to film production, but also includes the organization of film festivals and the production of publications, thereby preserving the local film culture and promoting it into the future.

The Fourth Wall (2021, animated short film), produced by the Center, won the Grand Prix in the Animation Division of the Japan Media Arts Festival, as well as numerous other awards at film festivals around the world. It is a notable achievement in discovering new Iranian talent and connecting them to the world. Director Mahboobeh Kalee was also selected as an invitee for the "H-AIR Hiroshima Artist-in-Residence," a project within the Hiroshima Animation Season 2022.

The Center's production of "The Fourth Wall" has become one of the most important short animation films of the past few years, not only in Iran but also internationally. The technique of telling a family story by moving an entire kitchen room expands the range of stories that can be depicted only by animation.



Animation Event

# Feinaki Beijing Animation Week

China



## Award motivation

Currently, China's animation industry is enjoying a great deal of momentum and is gradually gaining recognition worldwide. On the other hand, the presence of Chinese artists who produce works on an individual basis is also increasing day by day. The animation event Feinaki, which started in 2019, keeps promoting the international momentum of the animation situation in China. It provides an opportunity to showcase a variety of animation in China and serves as a venue for Chinese artists to present their work. It also serves as a showcase for outstanding works made in China to promote the international film festival scene.

It also provides commercial exposure for animators of various styles through its involvement in the production of the children's animated feature film "To the Bright Side".

The festival also promotes international exchange by increasing the possibility of showing foreign films in China, as well as by spreading the work of Chinese artists internationally as much as possible and making it accessible to people from different cultures.

In addition to holding events in Beijing, the festival actively conducts screening tours in various locations in China, providing opportunities for people to experience a wide variety of animated films.

Through its international network, the festival has shown young filmmakers that they can build their careers not only in China but also abroad, thereby broadening their range of options.

## Overview

Feinaki Beijing Animation Week, first held in 2019 (and annually thereafter), is an animation event curated in collaboration with internationally connected Chinese animation artists, researchers, and curators who frequently travel to animation festivals around the world. The event inspires, encourages, and provides ongoing opportunities for the presentation of diverse expressions of animation, thereby supporting a greater international acceptance of their work. As a result, the event seeks to encourage the creation of a richer ecosystem for animation filmmakers in China.



#### Award motivation

In 2020-21, two of her films won international acclaim: the VR animation “Otawamure” won Best VR Film at the 2021 Zagreb International Animation Film Festival, and the animated short “Anxious Bodies” won more than 10 awards worldwide including Best Non-Narrative Film at the Ottawa International Animation Film Festival, and has been selected for numerous other festivals. The overwhelming recognition in the field of short films during the period under review contributed to the promotion of animation in Japan.

While the development of hardware and software has led to an increase in the number of artists producing animation on an individual basis here in Japan, few are able to continue to do so on an ongoing basis. Under such circumstances, Mizushiri’s career serves as an ideal form of activity for the construction of the career of an individual artist in Japan.

The unique focus on “the everyday body and the restoration of its senses” has a message that leads to “the maintenance of (physical and mental) health,” an important aspect of the human condition.

#### Animation Artist

# Yoriko Mizushiri

Japan

#### Biography

Born in 1984 in Towada City, Aomori Prefecture, Japan. She creates sensuous animations using body parts and familiar objects as motifs. Her works have been screened and awarded at numerous film festivals in Japan and abroad, including the Japan Media Arts Festival’s Animation Division New Face Award (“Futon”) and Cannes Film Festival’s selection (Director’s Fortnight) for the Short Film Competition (“Anxious Body”).



# 日本

Japan

## Recommended by Koji Takase and Research Team

Animation Critic

### Director

#### Hideaki Anno

Reason for recommendation

After over 25 years, when the original series became a phenomenon in 1995, the series came to a thrilling end with *Evangelion: 3.0+1.01 Thrice Upon a Time* in 2021. As the chief director, he founded the studio to create the *Rebuild of Evangelion* series, created a new type of workflow, and produced animated films from his independent mind that grossed over 10 billion yen in the domestic box office. Additionally, as the chairman of the Anime Tokusatsu Archive Centre (ATAC), he is very involved in the preservation of culture and passing it down to the next generation. In 2021, the Hideaki Anno Exhibition, a retrospective history on his work with animation and special effects, was held.

### Music Animation Music Videos

#### Eve

Reason for recommendation

As a singer-songwriter whose work has been featured in anime such as *Jujutsu Kaisen* (2020–2021) and *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* (2020), many of his songs have been accompanied by animation music videos which are released on his YouTube channel. The project features a new generation of young animators from the Niconico and Vocaloid cultural sphere, a variety of directors that were selected for each song, and Eve's presence which—unexpectedly—act as the showcase for animation expression.

### Studio

#### WIT STUDIO

Reason for recommendation

Some of their accomplishments include ambitious series such as *Ranking of Kings* (2021) and *GREAT PRETENDER* (2020), the latter of which was written by live-action screenwriter Ryota Furusawa; production of *The Girl from the Other Side: Siúil, a Rún* (2019, 2021), directed by independent artists Yutaro Kubo and Satomi Maiya;

promotional video for "Candy Caries" (2021), directed by Tomoki Misato, which was the studio's first step into stop motion; and the launch of WIT Animator Academy, a collaboration with animation school Sasayuri and Netflix. WIT STUDIO continues to announce ambitious strides, distinctive from existing studios.

### Music

#### Kensuke Ushio

Reason for recommendation

In addition to his work as a musician under the moniker *agraph* and composing for live action films, he has worked on music for animated films such as *Japan Sinks: 2020* (2020), *Words Bubble Up Like Soda Pop* (2021), and *The Heike Story* (advanced streaming release 2021). His unique collaboration with director Naoko Yamada goes beyond accompaniment and into a realm of directing that is worthy of recognition.

### Voice Acting

#### Megumi Ogata

Reason for recommendation

She starred in two hit films in 2021, as Shinji Ikari in *Evangelion: 3.0 + 1.01 Thrice Upon a Time* and Yuta Okkotsu in *Jujutsu Kaisen 0: The Movie*. Her accomplishments also go beyond voice acting, such as the publication of her autobiography, *Saisei (Kari)*—which translates to *Rebirth (Tentative)*—published by Kadokawa in 2021, and opening the school Team BareboAt with her agency Breathe Arts.

### Studio

#### Science SARU

Reason for recommendation

With South Korea-born Eunyong Choi as the Representative Director and its Europe-born staff, this international studio has introduced a French production style using Adobe Flash (now Adobe Animate) to the Japanese scene. In 2020 to 2021 alone, they have produced works such as the TV series *Keep Your Hands off*



*Eizouken!* (2020), streaming series and feature length film *Japan Sinks:2020* (2020), feature length film *INU-OH* (film festival world premiere 2021), streaming and TV series *The Heike Story* (advanced streaming release 2021). Science SARU continues to create unique films, regardless of what platform it may be released on, and have received awards and accolades from film festivals, both domestic and international, for it.

#### Director

### Jonathan Hagard

Reason for recommendation

His VR animation, *Replacements* (2020), was awarded in the Cristal of the Best VR Work at the Anney International Animation Film Festival. This work received other accolades, such as being nominated in the Venice VR Expanded section of the Venice International Film Festival and has received recognition beyond the animation industry as an innovative expression of VR films.

#### Studio

### THINKR

Reason for recommendation

A creative studio that also owns KAMITSUBAKI STUDIO and FLAT STUDIO. They employ many young motion graphic artists from the Niconico and Vocaloid cultural sphere for stage direction of virtual artists such as KAF (signed under KAMITSUBAKI STUDIO). The studio continues to work with newcomers, such as the medium length film *Summer Ghost* (2021) directed by illustrator *loundraw* (signed under FLAT STUDIO).

#### CGI Compositing (Cinematography)

### khara, inc., Digital Team

Reason for recommendation

With a unique production style that differs from the industry's standard workflow and the creativity and ingenuity that can only come from independent artists, this department actualized the visual beauty of the definitive *Rebuild of Evangelion* series. Together with Project Studio Q, an affiliate in Fukuoka prefecture, they are taking on the innovative challenge of finding practical uses for Blender.

#### Director

### Haruo Sotozaki

Reason for recommendation

As the director of the *Demon Slayer* (2019-present) series, which shattered records in Japanese animation and film history, he is responsible for the various action sequences and direction that did not betray the expectation of the fans of the original manga series. For that alone, he deserves more recognition for his work as an artist.

#### Educational Institution

### Tokyo University of the Arts, Graduate School of Film and New Media, Department of Animation

Reason for recommendation

As the leading force in animation education in Japan, they've produced many young and mid-career animators that are now gathering attention around the world. 2020 and 2021 in particular has brought the international acclaim of Honami Yano and the success of Tomoki Misato's *Pui Pui Molcar* (2021) which became a phenomenon. Such successful graduates only further demonstrate the high level of their education standards.

#### Screenwriting

### Kazuki Nakashima

Reason for recommendation

He pioneered the recent trend of live action screenwriters and playwrights writing original works after he wrote for renowned works such as *Gurren Lagann* (2007) and *Promare* (2019). In 2020 and 2021, he worked on the story structure for *BNA: Brand New Animal* (2020) and *Back Arrow* (2021) and strengthened his presence by publishing *Kazuki Nakashima and the Actor* (2020, Kadokawa).

#### Director

### Shoko Hara

Reason for recommendation

Not only was her animated documentary *Just a Guy* (2020) nominated in multiple international film festivals, but it brought home the Grand Prix for the Short Film section at the Animafest Zagreb, which was the first time in 16 years that a Japanese artist

won the award. Some could say that she is the leading figure in successful Japanese female artists in recent years.

#### Director

### Mamoru Hosoda

Reason for recommendation

He has collaborated with international artists, such as working on CG character design with Jin Kim, a South Korean animator and character designer at Disney; concept art for a virtual world with Eric Wong, a British architect; and working on various scenes with Cartoon Saloon and its co-founder Tomm Moore, an Irish filmmaker. While doing all of these, he continues to produce hit films in the domestic market, breaking his own personal records.

#### Director

### Yoriko Mizushiri

Reason for recommendation

Her directorial work, *Anxious Body* (2021), was not only selected as the Best Non-Narrative Short at the 2021 Ottawa International Animation Festival but was also nominated for the Directors' Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival and has earned her recognition beyond the animation film festival circuit. Additionally, her first step into VR animation, *Otawamura* (2019) was selected as the Best VR Project at the 2021 Animafest Zagreb. With numerous films under her belt, all with awards and nominations from major animation film festivals, she has established her presence as an international artist.

#### Director

### Honami Yano

Reason for recommendation

Her film, *A Bite of Bone* (2021), has been nominated for multiple animation film festivals. The film earned her the Grand Prize for Short Animation at the Ottawa International Animation Festival, which was the first time in six years that a Japanese filmmaker had received the award. In addition to her film work, she discusses "queer animation," which is still relatively new in Japan, in her article titled "The Potential of Queer Animation" in *Queer Cinema Studies* (2021, Koyo Shobo), compiled by Yuka Kanno.



## Director

### Naoko Yamada

Reason for recommendation

She directed *The Heike Story*, a classic novel the late Isao Takahata dreamed animated adaptation, as lyrical story with the small group, the director's favorite way of story telling. With the team that is surprising, which comprised of Fumiko Takano for character design, Reiko Yoshida for the screenplay, and Science SARU for the production studio, this series demonstrated her true ability to weave a film deeply engraved with her own style, even after leaving the familiarity of her old home, Kyoto Animation.

## CGI Compositing (Cinematography)

### ufotable Digital Team

Reason for recommendation

With Yuichi Terao, director of compositing, at the helm, the studio has solidified a distinct as a leader visual style through works such as *Gakuen Utopia Manabi Straight!* (2007), *The Garden of Sinners* (2007-2013), *Fate/Zero* (2011-2012). The studio has established a strong visual identity and led the way in cinematographic expression in Japanese animation for the last 15 years. It can be said that the many years of team building within the studio has led to the signature visual style of the *Demon Slayer* series (2019-present).

## Animation Trailers Music Videos

### Nobutaka Yoda

Reason for recommendation

In 2020 and 2021 alone, he has directed four animation music videos (mixed with live action), including Eve's "Heart Forecast" (2020), Ging Nang Boyz's "Shonen Shojo" (2021), and nine opening/ending sequences, including the ending sequence for *Kakushigoto* (2020) and the opening sequence for *Lupin the 3rd Part 6*. He's worked on numerous trailers and promotional videos on top of that, all of which have a certain sense of artistry to them. He is a filmmaker unlike any other currently working in the animation industry today.

(Alphabetical order in Japanese)

## Recommended by

# Alex Dudok de Wit

Journalist / Translator

## Director

### Honami Yano

Reason for recommendation

Yano's *A Bite of Bone* is a beautiful short. Its narrative is structured in an elegantly free-flowing way that captures the way memory operates, and its pointillist technique shows a lot of technical and artistic talent. For me, *A Bite of Bone* combines the familiar and the strange: I had never heard of the funeral rite that gives the film its name, but I did recognise the Inland Sea landscapes (which I associate with my past trips to Hiroshima!). I can't wait to see what Yano does next.

## CGI

### Tatsuya Akagi

Reason for recommendation

Many classic 2D-animated franchises have been given 3D CG updates over the years. It's hard to do this without losing the charm of the original style; at worst, the results can be hideous. An exception is *Lupin III: The First*, which I think preserves the slapstick cartoonishness that makes the classic Lupin series such fun. The models and animation are faithful to the franchise – credit to Marza Animation Planet, which handled a lot of the production – but so is the rigging, a crucial part of CG production that often gets overlooked. Akagi, the film's rigging supervisor, and his team clearly paid close attention to how the characters move in the 2D instalments.

## Director

### Shingo Tamagawa

Reason for recommendation

Tamagawa is a former animator at Sunrise who left the industry, disillusioned by the way he was being made to work, then spent a year and a half "doing nothing" (his words) before creating the short film *Puparia* on his own. I respect him for taking this unusual path and speaking publicly about it. At a time of growing concern about labour practices in the anime

industry, his story suggests an alternative model for being an artist, even if it won't work for everyone. I also think *Puparia* is a striking film, which plays with framing and eyelines in interesting ways.

## Director

### Kenji Iwaisawa

Reason for recommendation

Like Tamagawa, Iwaisawa does things his own way. He made his debut feature *On-Gaku: Our Sound* outside the industry, crowdfunding part of the budget and working with a small team of artists, some of whom were as inexperienced as the punk musicians in the movie. I hope more filmmakers can follow his example, although none will manage to create something exactly like *On-Gaku*: this is a unique comedy with a sharp sense of timing and wonderfully deadpan tone. I found it hilarious.

## Director

### Mamoru Hosoda

Reason for recommendation

I don't think *Belle* is Hosoda's best film, but I admire his attempt to address an important and very complex social theme – the rise of digital networking – and the thoughtfulness with which he does it. Also interesting is the way he decided to collaborate with artists from abroad, such as the Korean character designer Jin Kim and the Irish studio Cartoon Saloon. I believe he worked with them completely remotely during the pandemic. This set-up echoes the core message of *Belle*: connecting with others virtually can lead to good things.

## The “De-Autonomization” of Animated Films and the Era of Worldbuilding

The most significant trend in Japan in 2020-21 with regard to feature-length films is the “de-autonomization” of animated films.

During the 2010s, the box-office was dominated by stand-alone, original works by directors with strong auteuristic sensibilities, such as Hayao Miyazaki, Mamoru Hosoda, and Makoto Shinkai [\*1]. In contrast, in the box-office rankings for 2020 and 2021, the thing that stands out is the presence of non-autonomous works that are not bound by cinematic norms such as purity as a medium or completeness as a work [\*2]. Starting with the smash hit *Demon Slayer: Mugen Train* (Haruo Sotozaki, 2020), which broke the record for the highest box-office grossing film of all time in Japan, and followed by *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (Hideaki Anno, 2021), and *Jujutsu Kaisen 0* (Sunghoon Park, 21), these works have each grossed more than 10 billion yen in box-office revenue. Other similar titles worth mentioning are *Violet Evergarden: The Movie* (Taichi Ishidate, 2020), *Detective Conan: The Scarlet Bullet* (Chika Nagaoka, 2021), *Mobile Suit Gundam: Hathaway's Flash* (Shuko Murase, 2021), and *My Hero Academia: Heroes Rising* (Kenji Nagasaki, 2021) [\*3].

The success of these works can be attributed to a number of factors, including the fact that stay-at-home orders during the Covid-19 pandemic encouraged people to watch the original works and TV series that form the premise for the films, the rise of distribution platforms that support the diffusion and popularity of the works among the general public, and the increasing cost of going to movie theaters, which is reflected in a tendency for consumers to gravitate toward titles they are already familiar with. This trend of de-autonomization can be seen as a parallel phenomenon to the rise of “worldbuilding” [\*4] such as with the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) in live-action films.

## Rebooting TV Manga

In terms of individual trends, *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* is representative of some of these. First is the “mixing of tokusatsu and animation”. The box-office success of the tokusatsu film *Shin Godzilla* (2016), directed by Hideaki Anno, has encouraged the release of a number of tokusatsu-inspired works in recent years. Among these, *Thrice Upon a Time* was a work that showed the forefront of the current technological maturity of previsualization and 3DCG and can be considered as the fruit of the activities of the generation born around 1960 who are rebooting their own culture of TV manga [\*5] with anime and tokusatsu. This movement is symbolized by the Hideaki Anno Exhibition held at the National Art Center, Tokyo in

2021.

Also related to this is the revival of mecha anime, which had been on the wane in the 2010s. Here it is worth mentioning *Thrice Upon a Time*, of course, but also *Hathaway's Flash*, which is a reboot of the mecha anime *Gundam* in much the same way that *Shin Godzilla* is a reboot of *Godzilla*.

Another important feature when looking back at the 2020/21 period is that Jump anime (anime based on the Weekly Shonen Jump publication), which has had a significant international presence since *Dragon Ball* and *Naruto*, has made major moves. The success of not only Shueisha's domestic e-book platform Shonen Jump +, but also the free international manga distribution service Manga Plus, where translations of works are provided for overseas viewers at almost the same time as their release in Japan, are significant accomplishments that have been happening in the background and Shueisha's momentum shows no signs of slowing down.

## Trends in Animation Films by Auteurs

On the other hand, one of the autonomous animated films that became a big hit in 2020/21 was *Belle* (Mamoru Hosoda, 2021). This film is based on *Beauty and the Beast* and encouraged the use of international talent including Jin Kim, a Korean animator and character designer who worked for Disney, for the CG character design; the British architect Eric Wong for the concept art for the film's virtual world, and the Irish animation studio Cartoon Saloon, led by Tom Moore, for some scenes.

Also in the independent scene, there were a number of feature-length films such as *On-Gaku: Our Sound* (Kenji Iwaisawa, 2020) and *Dozens of Norths* (Koji Yamamura, 2021), which were nominated for and won awards at film festivals in Japan and abroad, a trend that cannot be overlooked when considering animation films in the 2020s.

## Empowering Women to Live Life on Their Own Terms

In recent years, there has been an increasing number of works that support the empowerment of women, in which the main character or main target are women, and which present alternative ways of life that are not limited to marriage and love. *Looking for Magical Doremi* (Junichi Sato/Haruka Kamatani, 2020), which won the Animation Film Award at the 75th Mainichi Film Awards, straightforwardly depicts women who cannot live freely in love and work through the viewpoints of characters who were children when the *Ojamajo Doremi* anime series (1999-2003) was broadcast.

Similarly, in BL (boys' love) works, love supremacist style in which the characters seek to be loved is on the decline and works such as *Twittering Birds Never Fly* (Kaori Makita, 2020), which focuses on the way the characters deal with themselves and their traumas, have become hits [\*6].

### Notes

\*1 In the feature-length animation scene of the 2010s, the rise of animated film series such as the *One Piece* and *Doraemon* series, led by the *Detective Conan* series, which has already established itself as a nationally popular anime, was a significant trend. However, in this section, I will focus on the major trends of 2020-21.

\*2 For example, *Demon Slayer: Mugen Train* is a pure sequel to the TV anime *Demon Slayer*, which is based on the popular manga series in Weekly Shonen Jump (Shueisha). *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* is the final part of a four-part *Rebuild of Evangelion* series, which is based on the original 1995 TV series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. And *Mobile Suit Gundam: Hathaway's Flash* is based on the premise of *Mobile Suit Gundam: Char's Counterattack* (1988), a continuation of the *Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam* (1985-86) that followed *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979).

\*3: See the 2021 National Film Report published by the Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan: [http://www.eiren.org/toukei/img/eiren\\_kosyu/data\\_2021.pdf](http://www.eiren.org/toukei/img/eiren_kosyu/data_2021.pdf) (accessed July 1, 2022). In the box-office revenue ranking of Japanese films in 2021, *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time*, *Detective Conan: The Scarlet Bullet*, and *Belle* occupied the top three positions, meanwhile live-action films based on manga came in fifth and sixth, and 10 out of the top 20 works overall were animation films.

\*4 A method of creation popularized after *Star Wars* (1977), in which a global worldview is established at the outset and individual works are created based on that worldview. Eiji Otsuka pioneered the discussion of Japanese subculture abroad as "story consumption" (or "worldview consumption" as described by Hiroki Azuma).

\*5 In the 1960s, when *Astro Boy* (1963-66) and *Ultra Q* (1966) began to be broadcast, children's TV programs such as animated TV shows, tokusatsu, and puppet shows were generally called "TV manga", in contrast to the "manga films" shown in theaters, yet without any clear distinction between these.

\*6 I interviewed Akiko Sugawa, an animation scholar, about feature-length films with a female target audience and obtained a great deal of insights from her. Sugawa pointed out that it has become increasingly difficult to clearly distinguish "female-oriented" content since the 2000s. The next step in this process is to take a more critical viewpoint based on the assumption that there is a broadening audience that enjoys a cross section of genres, including the *yuri* and BL genres.

## The Challenge to Revive the Tokusatsu and Mecha Anime Genres and the Development of New 3DCG Animation Techniques

In Japan, trends in TV series and feature-length theatrical films are in principle linked to each other at least in part because the two domains share the same directors, staff, studios, and so on [\*1]. For this reason, many of the trends in feature-length films can also be recognized in (and often precede) TV series.

In 2020-21, the series *SSSS.Dynazenon* (Akira Amemiya, 2021), based on the tokusatsu drama *Gridman the Hyper Agent* (1993-94); as well as *Godzilla Singular Point* (Atsushi Takahashi, 2021), part of the *Godzilla* series, which is representative of the tokusatsu genre; were hot topics in line with the current trends in feature films, such as the “mixing of tokusatsu and animation” and the “revival of mecha anime”.

It is also worth mentioning here that 3DCG animation, which is utilized in these works, has entered into a new phase since 2013-14 [\*2]. While *SSSS. Dynazenon* (CG production: Graphinica), *Godzilla Singular Point* (CG production: Orange), and *Dorohedoro* (CG production: Mappa, 2020) pursued ambitious artistic expression, such as exploring the combination of drawing and 3DCG and developing texture; Polygon Pictures, Sanzigen, and Sola Digital Arts have established a system of producing at least one new series a year. A new era of the mass production of CG animation has arrived. Along with the increasing production of 3DCG animation, the emergence of animation directors from CG studios, which has long been regarded as an issue, is another trend that cannot be ignored [\*3].

## The Polarization of Major and Independent Sales

The era of Jump anime (anime that first appeared in the publication Weekly Shonen Jump) is a trend that was first seen in TV series and later in feature-length films. And while package sales such as Blu-ray and DVDs have become less effective as an indicator of popularity since the rise of online streaming, both *Demon Slayer* (Haruo Sotozaki, 2019) and *Jujutsu Kaisen* (Park Sunghoo, 2020-21) had achieved a significant presence even before their theatrical versions were released. The subsequent adaptations of *Demon Slayer* such as *Demon Slayer: Mugen Train* (2021) and *Demon Slayer: Yukaku Hen* (2021-22), have also managed to maintain their popularity.

However, the most significant title of 2021 in terms of TV series sales is *Uma Musume: Pretty Derby Season 2* (Kei Oikawa, 2021) [\*4]. Starting with this work, which set a new record for sales, the high sales of works related to social video games, especially the *Zombie*

*Land Saga* series (Munehisa Sakai, 2018/21) and *Princess Connect! Re:Dive* series (Takaomi Kanasaki, 2020/22) and other TV series related to Cygames [\*5] have represented sales trends in recent years.

The smash hits of the puppet animation *Pui Pui Molcar* (Tomoki Misato, 2021) and *Odd Taxi* (Baku Kinoshita, 2021), planned and produced by P.I.C.S. (co-produced by OLM), were also interesting phenomena from 2021. Along with huge IP holders such as Jump and social gaming companies, artists and studios from outside the existing animation industry have also been making headlines in 2021, and this is one of the symbolic examples of the liquefaction of commercial and independent anime that has been so prominent in the Japanese animation scene in recent years.

On the other hand, in the film festival scene, there are still few opportunities for series works to be evaluated. However, under such circumstances, Masaaki Yuasa's TV anime *Keep Your Hands Off Eizouken!* (2020) won the Grand Prize in the Animation Division of the 24th Japan Media Arts Festival, and his online streaming series *Japan Sinks: 2020* (2020) won the Jury Award in the TV Series Division at the 45th Annecy International Animation Film Festival 2021. Yuasa is also internationally well known as a director who is ambitiously working on series in addition to directing feature-length films [\*6].

## Expanding Character Diversity in Children's Anime

In recent years, gender-neutral messages have become more foregrounded not only in feature-length films but also in the realm of children's anime, which are often long running series. Idol anime such as the *Pretty* series (2011-) and the *Aikatsu!* series (2012-), have shown awareness regarding character diversity since the beginning, with tomboy characters being included in the cast and idol characters being portrayed without being restricted by age or looks. On the other hand, in the *Pretty Cure* series (2004-), there have been many expressions based on traditional gender perspectives, such as the use of magical motifs to symbolize girlhood. In recent years, however, a trend has emerged in the *Pretty Cure* series in which there is a more varied range of main characters who are chosen regardless of gender or race. These include a young male *Pretty Cure* in *Hug! Pretty Cure* (Junichi Sato, Akifumi Zako, 2018-19), a humanoid alien *Pretty Cure* in *Star Twinkle Pretty Cure* (Hiroaki Miyamoto, 19-20) and a mermaid *Pretty Cure* in *Tropical-Rouge! Pretty Cure* (Yutaka Tsuchida, 2021-22) [\*7].

### Notes

\*1 Although TV series may either precede feature-length theatrical films or follow up on hit films, the inability to draw a line between and clearly separate the two domains is one of the major characteristics of Japanese animation, commonly known as "anime".

\*2 One of the epochal developments that occurred around the 2013-14 period was the spread of character expression using cell-style 3DCG (cell-look 3DCG). *Arpeggio of Blue Steel - Ars Nova* (CG production: Sanzigen, 2013), *Knights of Sidonia* (CG production: Polygon Pictures, 2014), and *Expelled from Paradise* (CG production: Graphinica, 2014) are representative examples of this technique. The use of cell-style 3DCG in the models of anthropomorphic characters such as vessels, clones, and other non-human characters was widely accepted by anime fans, who had previously tended to show resistance to 3DCG characters.

\*3 Studio Ghibli's first foray into 3DCG animation *Earwig and the Witch* (Goro Miyazaki, 2020) is also significant in terms of anime history. In addition, I received many insights into the historical transition of CG/VFX scenes from Koichi Noguchi of Toei Animation whom I interviewed for the Staff section.

\*4 Although there are pros and cons to the sales boost from enclosed extras, this work has gained a lot of fans as a stand-alone work. See: Oricon chart for the first half of 2021: Uma Musume BD box set ranked first among anime video works as an exceptionally large hit, <https://www.oricon.co.jp/news/2198384/> (Accessed July 1, 2022).

\*5 In addition to the three series mentioned in the main text, Cygames also has a number of other in-house productions that have sold well and received favorable reviews including the *Rage of Bahamut* series (Keiichi Sato, 2014/17), the *Granblue Fantasy: The Animation* series (Yuki Ito/Yui Umemoto, 2017/19), and more.

\*6 In the past, there were many filmmakers who shifted their focus to animation films after their success with feature-length films, but one director who is currently in a similar position is Ayumu Watanabe. Watanabe gained rapid international attention with his work *Children of the Sea* (2019), produced at Studio 4°C. In 2020-21, Watanabe continued to receive domestic and international acclaim for his feature film *Fortune Favors Lady Nikuko* (2021), while also serving as general director for the TV series *Komi Can't Communicate* (2021-22). Like Yuasa, Watanabe continues to be active across both formats.

\*7 I interviewed animation scholar Akiko Sugawa as part of the Feature-Length Films section and obtained a great deal of insights from her about anime series with a female target audience. In addition, regarding the roles of female characters, Sugawa pointed out that in recent Jump anime series such as *The Promised Neverland* (Mamoru Kobe, 2019/21), *Demon Slayer*, and *Jujutsu Kaisen*, there are relationships between female and male characters that are not a love interest, and roles in which female characters do not play a supporting role but rather take an equal position to the male characters.

## A stronger presence of animated documentaries and female animators

A list of animations in the short film category in 2020 and 2021 suggests a substantial presence of animated documentaries. Having emerged in the mid-2000s, more animated documentary films have been produced in recent years. Notably, in 2020 and 2021, many films were created in relation to the global pandemic of Covid-19 and restrictions [\*1].

The stronger presence of animated documentaries can also be seen in animation film festivals. In addition, a list of awarded or nominated works in short film categories at major film festivals in 2020 and 2021 indicates that Japanese female animators performed exceptionally well.

For example, Shoko Hara, based in Germany, was nominated for awards at several film festivals, including the four major international animation film festivals, for her animated documentary *Just a Guy* (2020), which won the Grand Prix in the short films category at the World Festival of Animated Film—Animafest Zagreb. It was the first time since Koji Yamamura's *Mt. Head* (2002) in 2004 that a Japanese creator won the Grand Prix.

Tokyo University of the Arts graduates Honami Yano was also nominated at various animation film festivals in Japan and overseas, including the Annecy International Film Festival, for her pointillist-style animated documentary *A Bite of Bone* (2021). It won the Grand Prize for Short Animation at the Ottawa International Animation Festival. This was also the first time since Sarina Nihei's *Small People with Hats* won the Grand Prix in 2015.

Although it is not an animated documentary, Yoriko Mizushiri's *Anxious Body* (2021) also made a notable achievement. It was selected for screening in the Directors' Fortnight (short and medium-length films section) of the Cannes Film Festival and won the Best Non-Narrative award at the Ottawa International Animation Festival. Several works of Mizushiri have been praised at the film festivals in 2020 and 2021, including her VR work *Otawamure* (2019), which won the Best VR Project at the World Festival of Animated Film – Animafest Zagreb, establishing Mizushiri's position as a world-class animator.

Other notable works that were nominated at various film festivals include Sawako Kabuki's *Kuricorder Quartet / Southpaw MV* (2019), Yoko Yuki's *Bonnou Shimizu-ShalaBonBon MV* (2019), and Sarina Nihei's *Polka-Dot Boy* (2020), which proved Japanese female animators' strong performances during the past two years [\*2].



## A sign of more domestic production companies supporting short animation films

*A Bite of Bone* was produced by Au Praxinoscope, a private gallery of the animation filmmaker Koji Yamamura, and *Anxious Body* by New Deer, an independent animation distributor [\*3]. Both Au Praxinoscope and New Deer have already announced that they have more works in progress and will continue actively supporting individual animators.

In Japan, there has historically been a lack of system of organizational support for producing short animation films that can be commended at film festivals, relying mainly on independent production and on educational institutions. However, this trend seems to be changing [\*4].

*The Girl from the Other Side* (2019), an OAD by Yutaro Kubo and Satomi Maiya, is a good example. WIT STUDIO, one of the leading animation production companies, appointed these animators, who are graduates of the Tokyo University of the Arts, as directors to produce the film. In 2020, the film received worldwide acclaims and was nominated at the Ottawa International Animation Film Festival and the Stuttgart International Festival of Animated Film.

## Film festivals held online due to the pandemic, and Japanese animators in the VR film category

In 2020 and 2021, film festivals quickly shifted online due to the global pandemic of Covid-19. As a result, VR (virtual reality) showed a strong presence in film festivals.

Since the mid-2010s, many film festivals have opened their doors to VR films and offered programs in VR. However, participants were expected to experience them on-site at the festivals. In 2020 and 2021, film festivals had to find their way online due to the pandemic, and the VR section was no exception. Prestigious festivals such as the Cannes Film Festival and the Venice Film Festival also introduced VR programs that can be experienced on VR platforms online.

Among the three major international film festivals, the Venice Film Festival was the earliest to introduce a competition for VR films [\*5]. Although Japanese films did not see nominations until 2018, several works have been nominated yearly since 2019. This proves that Japanese VR films have been steadily moving onto higher levels.

Keisuke Itoh, a CG and VR artist, was nominated for two consecutive years, with his *Beat* (2020) at the 77th Festival and *Clap* (2021) at the 78th [\*6], for the first time for a Japanese artist in the VR category.

Jonathan Hagard's *Replacements* (2020) is a VR

animation that shows how a fictional city modeled after Jakarta gradually changes its views. This work took the film festivals by storm. It was nominated at the Venice Film Festival, received the Cristal for the Best VR Work at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, and was awarded the jury's special mention in the VR category at the Ottawa International Animation Film Festival.

Other Japanese animators who showed their presence in the VR division include Kazuki Yuhara with his *Shugo Tokumaru - Canaria MV* (2020), which was nominated for the VR category at the Ottawa International Animation Film Festival, and previously mentioned Yoriko Mizushiri with her *Otawamure*.

### Notes

\*1 However, if confined to nominated films at the film festivals, there are not many animations based on the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions. Moreover, the films on such topics were of rough quality, if produced at all, possibly because animation production is a time-consuming task and incorporating current issues requires completing work in a short time span. This is probably why these topics were rarely represented at film festivals. More polished works would appear in upcoming years.

\*2 Our research collaborator Mitsuko Okamoto, a producer and a professor at Tokyo University of the Arts, Graduate School of Film and New Media, remarked that female artists performed exceptionally well in 2020 and 2021 while emphasizing they had been producing steady results in the short animation film category in the past years.

\*3 New Deer also has produced *My Exercise* (2020) by Atsushi Wada, which was highly acclaimed worldwide and received the Special Award at the discretion of the Short Film Jury at the World Festival of Animated Film - Animafest Zagreb.

\*4 The organizations that have continuously supported the production of short animation films that would be commended at the film festivals include NHK and CALF. NHK has produced short animations to elaborate on individual artists' creativity in programs such as the educational *TECHNE* (since 2012). CALF (since 2010) is an animation production company headed by the animator Kei Oyama. In 2020 and 2021, more organizations emerged to follow NHK and CALF all at once. Mitsuko Okamoto, who also acts as a producer of *TECHNE*, remarked that while organizational support to produce short animation films is still insufficient, the years 2020 and 2021 have seen a favorable trend.

\*5 The Venice Film Festival has already announced that it will continue to show VR programs regardless of whether the festival is held offline or online. The Venice Film Festival's official site "SELECTION COMPLETE FOR THE WORKS OF VENICE VR EXPANDED" <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/selection-complete-works-venice-vr-expanded-0> (Accessed: on July 1, 2022).

\*6 Although it was not selected for a competition, *Feather* (2019) was also screened at the 76th Festival, meaning it was screened for three consecutive years.

### Scope of Survey

This document is a list of nominees [\*1] and winners by filmmaker for Japanese “feature films,” “series,” and “short films” at film festivals, and winners at awards festivals. The “film festivals” surveyed included those accredited by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and those were cooperated with ASIFA, as well as emerging animation film festivals and media art festivals. The producer of Hiroshima Animation Season and the research team selected the awards based on their influence on the animation industry from among international awards for film, TV and distribution programs, domestic and international awards specializing in animation, and film awards in Japan. The survey covered film festivals and awards whose results were announced between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2021 [\*2].

### Notes

\*1 In the list, “total nominations” are listed by auteur and “nominations” are listed by film.

\*2 For example, film festivals and awards that announced nominations in 2019 and award results in 2020 are counted as 2020.

### Festival

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Animac International Animation Film Festival  
 Animateka International Animation Festival  
 Ann Arbor Film Festival  
 Annecy International Animation Film Festival  
 Inide-AniFest  
 Venice International Film Festival  
 The International Short Film Festival Oberhausen  
 Ottawa International Animation Festival  
 Cannes International Film Festival  
 GLAS Animation Festival  
 Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival  
 The World Festival of Animated Film Animafest Zagreb  
 Sundance Film Festival  
 SIGGRAPH  
 SIGGRAPH Asia  
 Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film  
 Short Shorts Film Festival  
 New Chitose Airport International Animation Festival  
 Tokyo Anime Award Festival  
 International Animation Festival Hiroshima  
 Fantoche International Animation Festival  
 Bucheon International Animation Festival  
 Prix Ars Electronica  
 Japan Media Arts Festival  
 Berlin International Film Festival  
 Melbourne International Film Festival  
 European Media Art Festival  
 International Leipzig Festival for Documentary and Animated Film  
 London International Animation Festival

### Awards

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Academy Awards  
 Annie Awards  
 British Academy Film Awards  
 The Kinema Junpo magazine Top-ten  
 Crunchyroll Anime Awards  
 Golden Globe Awards  
 The Cesar Awards  
 Tokyo Anime Award Festival (Anime of the Year)  
 Japan Academy Film Prize  
 The Newtype magazine Anime Awards  
 Critics' Choice Movie Awards  
 Blue Ribbon Awards  
 Hochi Film Awards  
 Mainichi Film Awards



## Feature Films | Nomination at Film Festivals

Director	Title	Country	Production	Year of release	Nominations	Total nominations
Masaaki Yuasa	Ride Your Wave	Japan	Science SARU	2019	2	4
	INU-OH	Japan	Science SARU	2021	2	
Ayumu Watanabe	Children of the Sea	Japan	STUDIO4°C	2019	2	4
	Gyoko no Nikuko-chan	Japan	STUDIO4°C	2021	2	
Eiji Han Shimizu	True North	Japan, Indonesia	Studio Raboon, Sumimasem Pte	2020	3	3
Hiroyuki Imaishi	PROMARE	Japan	TRIGGER	2019	2	2
Kenji Iwaisawa	On-Gaku: Our Sound	Japan	ROCK'N ROLL MOUTAIN	2019	2	2
Kotaro Tamura	Josee to Tora to Sakanatachi	Japan	bones	2020	2	2
Tetsuro Araki	Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress: The Battle of Unato	Japan	WIT STUDIO	2019	1	1
Masashi Ando, Masayuki Miyaji	The Deer King	Japan	Production I.G	2020	1	1
Taichi Ishidate	Violet Evergarden: The Movie	Japan	Kyoto Animation	2020	1	1
Junichi Sato, Tomotaka Shibayama	A Whisker Away	Japan	STUDIO COLORIDO	2020	1	1
Naoyoshi Shiotani	PSYCHO-PASS 3 FIRST INSPECTOR	Japan	Production I.G	2020	1	1
Makoto Shinkai	Weathering With You	Japan	Comix Wave Films	2019	1	1
Tatsuyuki Nagai	Her Blue Sk	Japan	CloverWorks	2019	1	1
Shojiro Nishimi, Guillaume "Run" Renard	Mutafukaz	Japan, France	STUDIO4°C	2017	1	1
Yuta Murano	7 Days War	Japan	AJIADO	2019	1	1
Junichi Fujisaku (General Director)	DEEMO Memorial Keys	Japan	SIGNAL.MD, Production I.G	2021	1	1
Yusuke Hirota	Poupelle of Chimney Town	Japan	STUDIO4°C	2020	1	1
Mamoru Hosoda	Belle	Japan	CHIZU	2021	1	1
Koji Yamamura	Dozens of Norths	Japan, France	Yamamura Animation, Miyu Productions	2021	1	1
Takayuki Hirao	Pompo: The Cinephile	Japan	CLAP	2021	1	1

## Feature Films | Awards at Film Festivals

Director	Title	Prize
Taichi Ishidate	Violet Evergarden: The Movie	Japan Media Arts Festival Animation Division Excellence Award (2021)
Hirofumi Imaishi	PROMARE	Bucheon International Animation Festival Audience Prize (2020)
Kenji Iwaisawa	OnGaku: Our Sound	Anneky International Animation Film Festival Best Original Music Award for feature films (2020), Japan Media Arts Festival Entertainment Division Grand Prize (2021)
Junichi Sato, Tomotaka Shibayama	A Whisker Away	Japan Media Arts Festival Animation Division Excellence Award (2021)
Koji Yamamura	Dozens of Norths	New Chitose Airport International Animation Festival Special Jury Award for the Feature Films (2021)
Masaaki Yuasa	INU-OH	Bucheon International Animation Festival International Competition Feature Film Special Distinction Prize
Ayumu Watanabe	Children of the Sea	Japan Media Arts Festival Animation Division Grand Prize (2020), Bucheon International Animation Festival International Competition Feature Film (2020)

## Feature Films | Award Winners

Award	Director	Title	Country	Production	Year of release	Prize
Tokyo Anime Award Festival (Anime of the Year)	Makoto Shinkai	Weathering With You	Japan	Comix Wave Films	2019	Best Film Feature Film (2020)
	Joji Furuta	Uta no Prince Sama the Movie: Maji Love Kigdom	Japan	A1 Pictures	2019	Best Film Anime Fan Award (2020)
	Taichi Ishidate	Violet Evergarden: The Movie	Japan	Kyoto Animation	2020	Best Film Feature Film (2021)
Japan Academy Film Prize	Makoto Shinkai	Weathering With You	Japan	Comix Wave Films	2019	Best Animation Film Prize (2020)
	Haruo Sotozaki	Demon Slayer the Movie: Mugen Train	Japan	ufotable	2020	Best Animation Film Prize (2021)
Hochi Film Awards	Haruo Sotozaki	Demon Slayer the Movie: Mugen Train	Japan	ufotable	2020	Anime Film Award (2020)
	Ayumu Watanabe	Gyoko no Nikukochan	Japan	STUDIO4°C	2021	Anime Film Award (2021)
Mainichi Film Awards	Ayumu Watanabe	Children of the Sea	Japan	STUDIO4°C	2019	Animation Film Award (2020)
	Junichi Sato, Haruka Kamatani	Looking for Magical Doremi	Japan	Toei Animation	2020	Animation Film Award (2021)
	Kenji Iwaisawa	OnGaku: Our Sound	Japan	ROCK'N ROLL MOUNTAIN	2019	Noburo Ofuji Award (2021)
The Newtype magazine Anime Awards	Takaomi Kanasaki	KonoSuba: God's Blessing on this Wonderful World! Legend of Crimson	Japan	J.C.STAFF	2019	Best Film Feature Film first place (2020)
	Haruo Sotozaki	Demon Slayer the Movie: Mugen Train	Japan	ufotable	2020	Best Film Feature Film first place (2021)

## Series | Nomination at Film Festivals

Director	Title	Country	Production	Year of release	Nominations	Total nominations
Mari Miyazawa	Konigiri-kun "Concert"	Japan	-	2020	3	3
Masaaki Yuasa	Japan Sinks:2020	Japan	Science SARU	2020	2	3
	Keep Your Hands Off Eizouken!	Japan	Science SARU	2020	1	
Hiroyuki Mizoguchi	Fuwa Fuwa Hour: PuiPui & MuuMuu "Fushigi na Tane"	Japan	Studio Placebo	2019	2	2
Akira Amemiya	SSSS.GRIDMAN	Japan	TRIGGER	2018	1	1
Yutaro Sawada, Taketo Shinkai	B RAPPERS STREET	Japan	Pie in the sky	2019	1	1
Taketo Shinkai	Aware! Meisaku-Kun	Japan	Pie in the sky	2016-	1	1
Hiroshi Hamasaki	Blade of the Immortal	Japan	LIDENFILMS	2019	1	1
Kazuhiro Furuhashi	DORORO	Japan	MAPPA, TEZUKA PRODUCTIONS	2019	1	1
Shinichi Matsumi	BEASTARS	Japan	Orange	2019	1	1
Ai Yoshimura	Case File n°221:Kabukicho	Japan	Production I.G	2019	1	1

## Series | Awards at Film Festivals

Director	Title	Prize
Masaaki Yuasa	Keep Your Hands Off Eizouken!	Japan Media Arts Festival Animation Division Grand Prize (2021)
	Japan Sinks:2020	Anecny International Animation Film Festival Jury Award for a TV Series (2021)

## Series | Award Winners

Award	Director	Title	Country	Production	Year of release	Prize
Crunchyroll Anime Awards	Haruo Sotozaki	Demon Slayer	Japan	ufotable	2019	ANIME OF THE YEAR WINNER (2020)
	Sunghoo Park	Jujutsu Kaisen	Japan	MAPPA	2020	ANIME OF THE YEAR WINNER (2021)
Tokyo Anime Award Festival (Anime of the Year)	Haruo Sotozaki	Demon Slayer	Japan	ufotable	2019	Best Film TV Series (2020)
	Masaaki Yuasa	Keep Your Hands Off Eizouken!	Japan	Science SARU	2020	Best Film TV Series (2021)
	Makoto Bessho	IDOLiSH7: Second BEAT!	Japan	TROYCA	2021	Best Film Anime Fan Award (2021)
The Newtype magazine Anime Awards	Mamorn Hatakeyama	Kaguya-sama: Love Is War	Japan	A-1 Pictures	2019	Best Film TV Series first place (2020)
	Sunghoo Park	Jujutsu Kaisen	Japan	MAPPA	2020	Best Film TV Series first place (2021)

## Short Films | Nomination at Film Festivals

Director	Title	Country	Year of release	Nominations	Total nominations
Shoko Hara	Just a Guy	Germany	2020	12	12
Yoriko Mizushiri	Anxious Body	Japan, France	2021	8	11
	Otawamure	Japan	2019	1	
	Animafest Zagreb 2020 Festival Trailer	Croatia	2020	1	
	My Luxury Night	Japan	2019	1	
Atsushi Wada	My Exercise	Japan	2020	10	11
	Autumn	Japan	2017	1	
Sarina Nihei	Polka-Dot Boy	France	2020	6	7
	Photay - Villain	Japan, USA	2021	1	
Jonathan Hagard	Replacements (Penggantian)	Germany, Indonesia, Japan	2020	6	6
Isaku Kaneko	The Balloon Catcher	Japan	2020	4	5
	LOCOMOTOR	Japan	2019	1	
Takeshi Yashiro	Gon, The Little Fox	Japan	2019	4	5
	Pukklapottas and Hors in the Forest	Japan	2021	1	
Honami Yano	Honekami (A Bite of Bone)	Japan	2021	5	5
Koji Yamamura	Dreams Into Drawing	Japan	2019	4	5
	Polar Bear Bears Boredom	Japan	2021	1	
Kazuki Yuhara	Canaria	Japan	2020	5	5
Sawako Kabuki	Kuricorder Quartet - Southpaw	Japan	2019	3	4
	1980YEN - Takoyaki Story	Japan	2018	1	
Masa Kudo	Difference and Repetition and Coffee	Japan	2020	3	4
	Still Life	Japan	2021	1	
Xiaolin Zhou	Half of an Apple	Japan, China	2020	3	4
	Pieces of April	Japan, China	2019	1	
Shunsaku Hayashi	Leaking Life	Japan	2019	4	4
Hirotoishi Iwasaki	On Time Off Time	Japan	2020	3	3
Yutaro Kubo, Satomi Maiya	The Girl from the Other Side	Japan	2019	3	3
Momoka Furukawahara	Kata no Ato	Japan	2020	3	3
Patrick Smith, Kaori Ishida	Beyond Noh	USA, Japan	2020	3	3
Yoko Yuki	Shimizu Bonnou - ShalaBonBon	Japan	2019	3	3
Keisuke Itoh	BEAT	Japan	2020	1	2
	Clap	Japan	2021	1	
Mizuki Ito	Takano Intersection	Japan	2021	2	2
Keita Onishi	Eiichi Otaki - Rock 'N' Roll March	Japan	2019	1	2
	14 Canons, BWV 1078	Japan	2019	1	
Mizuki Kiyama	Kujiranoyu	Japan	2019	2	2
Tetsuro Kodama	PIANOMAN	Japan	2020	2	2
Hiroshi Seo	Anipulatio	Japan	2020	2	2
Akihito Nonoue	Above the Brain	Japan	2019	1	2
	Above the Brain 2	Japan	2021	1	

Director	Title	Country	Year of release	Nominations	Total nominations
Heihachi	Kitsune-Kanseikai	Japan	2018	2	2
Shin Hosokawa	Dino!	Japan	2020	2	2
Yuta Masuda	Dreaming Away	Japan	2019	1	2
	Long Live the Cat	Japan	2020	1	
Minoru Matsuoka	Turtle's Stroll	Japan	2019	2	2
Aiko Mikami	Waves and Shapes	Japan	2020	1	2
	Composition	Japan	2021	1	
Mirai Mizue	Maison book girl - Kanashimi no Kodomotachi	Japan	2020	2	2
Yuta Miyoshi	Oasis	Japan, Germany	2019	2	2
Shuqin Li	So I Picked Up the Worm	Japan, China	2020	2	2
Nianze Li	Strawberry Candy	Japan	2020	2	2
Onesal Studio	Visual ASMR	Japan	2020	2	2
Hiroaki Higashi	Ghost in the Shell: Ghost Chaser	Japan	2018	1	1
Masanao Kawajiri	A Japanese Boy Who Draws	Japan	2018	1	1

In addition to the above, 90 directors nominated for only one works.

## Short Films | Awards at Film Festivals

Director	Title	Prize
Masanao Kawajiri	A Japanese Boy Who Draws	Japan Media Arts Festival Animation Division Excellence Award (2021)
Isaku Kaneko	The Balloon Catcher	Tokyo Anime Award Festival Best Student Film (2021)
Mizuki Kiyama	Kujiranoyu	Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film Winner Lotte Reiniger Promotion Award (2020)
Jonathan Hagard	Replacements (Penggantian)	Anney International Animation Film Festival Cristal for the Best VR Work (2021), The World Festival of Animated Film Animafest Zagreb Special mention at the discretion of the VR Animation Competition Jury (2021), Japan Media Arts Festival Entertainment Division Excellence Award (2021), New Chitose Airport International Animation Festival Japan Grand Prix (2021)
Sarina Nihei	Polka-Dot Boy	Bucheon International Animation Festival Special Distinction Prize (2020)
Shoko Hara	Just a Guy	The World Festival of Animated Film Animafest Zagreb Grand Prix-Best short film (2020)
Hiroaki Higashi	Ghost in the Shell: Ghost Chaser	Bucheon International Animation Festival VR Special Prize (2020)
Yoriko Mizushiri	Otawamure	The World Festival of Animated Film Animafest Zagreb Best VR Project (2020)
	Anxious Body	Ottawa International Animation Festival Best Non-Narrative (2021), Fantoche International Animation Festival Best Sound (2021), London International Animation Festival Best Sound Award & Audience Voting (2021)
Takeshi Yashiro	Gon, The Little Fox	Japan Media Arts Festival Animation Division Excellence Award (2021), New Chitose Airport International Animation Festival Audience Award (2020)
Honami Yano	Honekami (A Bite of Bone)	Ottawa International Animation Festival Grand Prize for Short Animation (2021), Inide-AniFest Asia Road Audience Choice (2021), New Chitose Airport International Animation Festival Special Jury Award the Short Films (2021)
Atsushi Wada	My Exercise	The World Festival of Animated Film Animafest Zagreb Special Award at the discretion of the Short Film Jury (2021).

## Short Films | Award Winners

Award	Director	Title	Country	Year of release	Prize
Mainichi Film Awards	Masanao Kawajiri	A Japanese Boy Who Draws	Japan	2018	Noburo Ofuji Award (2020)

In recent years, there has been a growing perception of the internet as a marginal space where traditional boundaries in animation such as individual/group production and art/entertainment are blurred or even dissolved. On the other hand, the scene is so vast and amorphous that one cannot take in everything at once. For this article, we asked a range of specialists with different areas of expertise to take part in a survey, in the hope that at least a broad outline of the current situation would emerge.

We asked the respondents to select three or four works produced in Japan or by Japanese creators that were released online in 2020 or 2021 and which represent the current scene, based on their own specialist perspectives. We also asked them to provide an explanation of their choices in 300 words or fewer.

## Kensuke Ono

representing GIFMAGAZINE

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[yAG7hp1EEloNDxw - "Light and Trees" \(2020\)](#)

[Taro Oono - "Stop the bear being forced by somebody to do the Comaneci pose! \(GIF game\)" \(2020\)](#)

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[HattoriGraphics - "City of human" \(2020\)](#)

I selected three of the prizewinners from the GIFs 2020. Every year, the GIFs receives submissions from creators in a variety of different countries. The COVID-19 crisis changed our sense of what is normal. As a result, we can also see various changes in the motifs used to express ideas. More creators made works using masks as a motif, or portrayed humanity as connected even when physically separated. Moreover, the growth of social media led to a rise in representations only possible online, including the development of interactive animations such as "GIF games" where tapping the image causes it to stop. There were also more works that one can enjoy displaying, due to the spread of things like digital signage. I find that in response to developments in both devices and media, online animation is continuing to evolve to entertain all viewers.

## Takashi Ohashi

Motion designer, movie director

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[OTP \(teaser movie for 100 Motion Designers in Japan 2021\) \(2021\)](#)

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[Shun Yamaguchi - "META-morphose" \(2021\)](#)

[Suguru Asakura - Video production for the "declaration of war" for KAF's live show "Fukakai \(Sai\)" \(among other production for the live show\) \(2020\)](#)

OTP: This used the unique production method of creating motion graphics in Cinema4D, printing out every frame using a lithograph, and then scanning them again. The deterioration of the visual data fitted well with the recent popularity of lo-fi culture. This

experiment also offers a counter to the idea that anyone can recreate the same representation.

**Yamaguchi:** An art installation-style music video based around the theme of transforming computer graphics and related communication methods. The output format for low-bit animation is cathode ray tube television, while for low-polygon games, the screen ratio is 4:3, and the outputs for high-end computer graphics and emojis are HD monitors and smartphones.

**KAF:** Many music producers for virtual artists emerged from the cultural sphere of Nico Nico Douga and Hatsune Miku. A number of young motion designers and graphic designers adroitly combined this with kinetic typography.

## Emiko Ogawa

Head of Prix Ars Electronica

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**Daito Manabe and Kenichiro Shimizu - music video for "Terminal Slam" by Squarepusher (2020)**

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**Tomo Kihara - "TheirTube" (2021)**

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**MIKIKO, ELEVENPLAY, Daito Manabe, Motoi Ishibashi, Rhizomatiks, Takayuki Fujimoto, evala - Digest of ELEVENPLAY x Rhizomatiks "border 2021" (2021)**

I selected from recent prizewinners of the Prix Ars Electronica and STARTS Prize sponsored by Ars Electronica. Each of these artists expressed their own idea of "reality", and in particular they showed that there is no one shared reality for everyone. In today's world where there are so many methods of disseminating and editing information, as well as sources and media forms, we must develop an instinct to question that which seems instinctual according to our own realities.

## Kenichi Kutsuna

Animator and director

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**KOMUGIKO2000 - music video for "Fukakumei zenya" by NEE (2020)**

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**Shingo Tamagawa - "Puparia" (2020)**

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**Glens sou - music video for "Aisai" by Eve (2021)**

I selected works by three independent animators connected to the field of commercial animation. KOMUGIKO2000's use of motifs and eye for editing has continued since working with Waboku, while the action scenes stand out and show a real grasp of the anime context. As the person who initiated the #indie\_anime hashtag campaign on social media, KOMUGIKO2000 also had a major influence in shaping the new scene. Among the many animated music videos for Eve, Glens sou stands out as an up-and-coming young creator for his striking key sequences. This offers a glimpse at the state of the art when it comes to key sequence animation. Tamagawa's ability with respect to individual images drawn with colored pencils is undeniable. The

flawless, intricate animation breezes past all else in the commercial animation field.

## Yusuke Shono

100 Motion Designers in Japan, MASSAGE MAGAZINE

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**JACKSON kaki - "DIO C'E" at Ultrastudio.sexy (2020)**

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**Asako Fujikura - music video for "Umetatechi" by ermhoi (2021)**

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**Densuke28 - music video for "M" by OKAMOTO'S (2021)**

There is no clearly defined "online" category in visual expression, but online culture has had a profound effect. The expansion of smartphones and social media, as well as the arrival of a range of services like YouTube, has brought about a whole new cycle of production and consumption. Various communities forming their own spaces produce ideas, and just like living organisms, these ideas pass on their genes to growing numbers of descendants. Originating in post-internet aesthetics living between reality and the internet, inspirations from the likes of gaming and the metaverse, and various online creative movements, they pass along a continuous line of derivative works. This diverse ecosystem that lives and breathes online is sure to go on producing surprising new creations in the future.

## Aki Yamada

TBS, DigiCon6 ASIA Festival Director

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**Isaku Kaneko - "The Balloon Catcher" (2020)**

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**Sorao Sakimura - "The Sound of Cicada, Touch the Wind" (2020)**

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**Mizuki Ito - "Takano Intersection" (2021)**

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**Ryuya Suzuki - "MAHORоба" (2021)**

I selected four works from the prizewinners at DigiCon6 ASIA. If anything, the two years of questioning the meaning of "creation" during the COVID-19 crisis caused an increase in the number of entries. There was a tendency towards introspective works, and isolation was a representative theme. In Isaku Kaneko's "The Balloon Catcher", the distinctive artistic use of pen and ink channels discrimination and violence into fantasy. Sorao Sakimura's "The Sound of Cicada, Touch the Wind" depicts the inner turmoil of a high school student in a vivid way that only an artist with personal experience of school refusal can. The delicate touch and frequent use of empty white space in Mizuki Ito's "Takano Intersection" takes a sparse script and turns it into a simple dramatic story. I was astounded by the passion and the entertaining portrayal of harsh situations in Ryuya Suzuki's "MAHORоба", which was completed under the adverse circumstances of the artist's restaurant having to suspend business.

## Entry of Artists Active in Other Media into the Production of Original Anime Works

Direction, scriptwriting, design, animation, art, visualization, CG, editing, music, voice acting, production, studios... Every detail of an animated work is the result of collaboration between a team of artists that cannot simply be reduced to either the director or the production staff. In order to unravel and understand Japanese anime works, it is essential to look at such collective creativity.

In the context of looking at the processes that go into producing anime works, a key feature of the 2020/21 period was the entry of artists with established backgrounds in other media into the field of anime production.

This is most noticeable in the field of original anime works. Some examples of this are Ryota Furusawa, who was well-known for his live-action movies and dramas such as the *Legal High* series (2012-14), who worked on the TV anime *Great Pretender* (Hiro Kaburagi, 2020); Shinji Nojima, widely known for his TV dramas such as *High School Teacher* (1993) and *Bara no nai Hanaya* (2008), who worked on the TV anime *Wonder Egg Priority* (Shin Wakabayashi, 2021); Kazuya Konomoto, who gained attention for his work on the manga *Setoutsumi* (2013-17) and who also worked on live-action dramas, with the TV animation *Odd Taxi* (Baku Kinoshita, 2021); Akiko Nogi, who has been famous for her TV drama *The Full-Time Wife Escapist* (2016/21), who was involved in the feature film *Inu-Oh* (Masaaki Yuasa, 21 [film festival world premiere]). These are the examples of the entry of scriptwriters active in other media, including the field of live-action works, into anime [\*1].

Furthermore, the significance of the role of artists other than animators in concept art has been reexamined in recent years. For example, in the original web series *Pokemon: Twilight Wings* (Shingo Yamashita, 2020) [\*2], which originated from the video game *Pokemon: Sword and Shield* (2019), the concept art and color scripts created by illustrator Higashi Mizutamari were heavily utilized in producing and his distinctive visual image of the work were impressive [\*3].

## Artistic Groups at the Forefront of Digital Expression

Artistic expression can be found not only with individuals, but also with groups and organizations. This is evident not only in the fields of drawing and art, but also in the digital processing of imagery and CG, in which there were major innovations in expression in the 2000s and early 2010s.

As an example, the digital department at Studio

Report | Koji Takase

Research cooperation | Shota Umehara,

Kenichi Kutsuna, Yoichi Senzui, and Koichi Noguchi



Khara, led by Hiroyasu Kobayashi, deviated from the industry's standard workflow to create a unique, independent production style that incorporated the tokusatsu style from the past. The result was to achieve the unique visual beauty of the *Rebuild of Evangelion* series (Hideaki Anno, 2007-21).

In a similar way, the digital imaging department at Ufotable, led by Yuichi Terao, has been leading the industry for many years with its distinctive visual style that combines high-density film processing and photorealistic 3DCG. This is the process that has led to the overall picture making, including the flame and water effects, in the *Demon Slayer* series (Haruo Sotozaki, 2019-) [\*4].

On the studio level, Wit Studio has not only produced ambitious TV series such as *Ranking of Kings* (Yosuke Hatta, 2021), but has also been involved in a number of projects, including the appointment of independent artists as directors for *The Girl from the Other Side* (Yutaro Kubo/Satomi Maiya, 2019/22), the establishment of a stop-motion production line culminating in the release of *Candy Caries* (Tomoki Misato, 2021), and the launch of the animator training program Wit Animator Juku. In this way, the studio attracted attention with a range of activities and projects that were different from those of existing production companies.

## The Expanding Range of Artists Playing with Sound

As for the voice actors who support the characters along with the images, it is worth mentioning that Megumi Ogata, who played the leading roles of Shinji Ikari in *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (Hideaki Anno, 2021) and Yuta Okkotsu in the movie *Jujutsu Kaisen 0* (Sunghoon Park, 2021), both of which were hits in 2021. Ogata's presence was also noteworthy in terms of her attitude, as evidenced by the publication of her autobiography *Rebirth* (Kadokawa, 2021) and her acceptance speech for the Best Voice Actress Award at the 16th Seiyu Awards.

Kensuke Ushio has created the musical accompaniments for the series *Japan Sinks: 2020* (Masaaki Yuasa, 2020), the feature film *Words Bubble Up Like Soda Pop* (Kyouhei Ishiguro, 2020), and the series *The Heike Story* (Naoko Yamada, 2021 [advance distribution]), among other works. He has also worked on several original works, most notably his collaboration with director Naoko Yamada, in which Ushio went beyond the mere production of dramatic accompaniments and delved into the realm of direction.

In terms of theme songs, Eve, who sang the opening song for the TV anime *Jujutsu Kaisen* (Sunghoon Park, 2020-21) and for the feature film *Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* (Kotaro Tamura, 2020), has released animated music videos on YouTube for many of his songs,

in addition to his work as a musician. Eve is a symbol of the 2020-21 period and the way that this functions as a crossroads between individual and collective production, and as a place of experimentation and opportunity for young animation artists [\*5].

Nobutaka Yoda, from the production company 10 Gauge, who directed several of Eve's animated music videos, is also involved in the field of anime film production although he focuses on subsidiary productions such as promotional videos and trailers rather than on the main work. While supporting the main work's success through promotional videos, Yoda's signature montages and the nuanced rhythm of his work also showcase his directorial skill.

### Notes

\*1 Playwright Kazuki Nakajima, one of the pioneers of this trend in recent years, continued to make his presence felt in 2020/21 as the series director for several TV anime series as well as publishing a collection of conversations entitled *Nakajima Kazuki to Yakusha-hito* (Kadokawa, 2020).

\*2 In an interview with animator and director Kenichi Kutsuna, it was revealed that the original drawing of the fiery Charizard in the arena at the end of episode 7 of *Pokemon: Twilight Wings* was done by the animator Weilin Zhang (<https://twitter.com/studiocolorido/status/1291556045454635008>, accessed July 1, 2022). Since *Black Clover* (Tatsuya Yoshihara/Ayataka Tanemura, 2017-21) and *Boruto: Naruto Next Generations* (Hiroyuki Yamashita/Toshiro Fujii/Masayuki Koda, 2017-), the arrival of foreign animators who can draw high quality Japanese-style action drawings has continued. Weilin Zhang, a young American animator born in 2001, is but one representative of this trend. Kutsuna, among others, was in charge of the below scene from *Fate/Grand Order The Movie: Divine Realm of the Round Table, Camelot Paladin, Agateram* (Kazuto Arai, 2021), and spoke of his amazement at the freedom of the camera work in maintaining a sense of space and three-dimensionality, and the drawing perfection of the curtains, cloaks, and other fabrics that move naturally (<https://twitter.com/Xenophoss/status/1543719342910541824>, accessed July 1, 2022).

\*3 The production of still images is not normally the domain of animators, whose job is to create moving images. In an interview, Shota Umehara of Clover Works emphasized the importance of using professionals to create the visuals for his work, including inviting the illustrator taracod to produce the concept art for his production *Wonder Egg Priority*. In addition, Umehara also spoke about *Pokemon: Twilight Wings* as a clear example of the effectiveness of concept art, and also drew attention to the innovative work of Shingo Yamashita, who controls the visual image by handling the filming and processing himself.

\*4 In the interview period, cinematographer Yoichi Sensui and Toei Animation's Koichi Noguchi both acknowledged the historical importance and expressive achievements of the digital imaging department at Ufotable. We also discussed the topic of digital expression with Sensui speaking about the vintage lens effect employed by Kyoto Animation's cinematography department in *Violet Evergarden: The Movie* (Taichi Ishidate, 2020). While Noguchi referenced the TV anime *Dorohedoro* (Yuichiro Hayashi, 2020), in which Mappa's CGI department created 3DCG expressions with delicate gradations that blended well with the drawings.

\*5 Although anonymity was a condition of the interviews, I gained many insights into the music and sound scene through interviews with music producers.

## Online Communication Overcoming COVID-19

For the past 10 years, distance between different entities and places has become shorter, such as Japan and the rest of the world, independent creators and large-scale studios, analog and digital, the city and the countryside. The 2020's have brought a remarkable change in this borderless world.

At the beginning of 2020 when COVID-19 began its spread across the world, film festivals, markets, fan events inevitably cancelled their activities, one after another. Many studio operations were hurt during this time, with domestic productions and releases being delayed. The necessary communications for planning, producing and distribution also suffered some damage. It seems like such happenings have obstructed the goals of becoming borderless.

However, the animation industry has shown its resilience in hard times. The key to this was using the internet. Many events were moved online, such as from Annecy International Animation Film Festival in France to the live stage business market of AnimeJapan within the country. While real life meetings were restricted by COVID-19, the online world made it easier for people to connect with events they would have never gone to; it made new global connections. These online events overcame international borders, which were originally obstacles.

The digitalization of productions, which had been delayed in Japan, has progressed. Animation studios have launched themselves outside the big cities with their digital infrastructure and remote work has been actively promoted as a new way of working. [\*1] Using online infrastructure has made people realize that there are business opportunities even when not located in the big cities. As COVID-19 calms down after 2022, online communication will still be important and provide a change to the world in many ways.

## The Wave of the Digitalization and the Changing Production System

Online streaming platforms have further pushed working online and contributed to the recognition of more works. There are many users now globally using online streaming during the pandemic. Many popular shows on these platforms are animated, with animation films and series going into intense planning and production across the world.

Japanese animation shows and films are very popular there. In 2017, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video made their way to Japan and in 2021, Disney+ embarked on acquiring Japanese works. With this, the demand for domestic production has rapidly increased. [\*2] This is where foreign platforms become

the main players in the industry, but Japanese companies are starting to become more proactive as well. In August 2021, Sony Group acquired the world's largest Japanese animation streaming platform Crunchyroll from the US at the cost of around 130 billion yen [\*3]. They're aiming for growth by putting themselves into the foreign streaming service industry.

The market for Japanese animation has grown 1.8 times in size in the past 10 years [\*4]. Video game companies, movie distribution companies and talent agencies continue to participate in the market. Adding on the needs of video streaming companies, production continues to increase in number [\*5]. As the number of productions go up, new studios and young talent are being offered new opportunities, which means a lack of enough human resources is becoming a concern. Sharp rises in production budgets from digital investment for the next generation and the rising cost of human resources continues to this day. There is an increase of studios that are working on improving the conditions of the industry and training human resources due to the lack of staff [\*6]. While it is a good that hiring conditions are improving for the industry, which was very difficult at times, it does put a lot of pressure on studios' operations in the short term.

Becoming more efficient in production is one method to address the lack of human resources. There's continual research and development of decreasing the number of manual things to do like making some hand drawn animation parts such as background art production and the in-between automatic [\*7]. Using digital production tools such as Unreal Engine and Blender are becoming more popular.

## Creativity Knows No Boundaries

One major issue is the sharp rise in costs for productions despite making business plans ahead of time. Domestic business and consumption are simply not enough to recover the cost of production [\*8]. Japanese animation production is not viable without the overseas market. Foreign investment, selling shows and licenses to foreign companies, these are all things that point to Japanese animation production becoming part of the global network.

Business relationships between Japan and the outside world have widen their reach beyond just investment, production orders, deliverables and licensing. It is not just putting pictures together and placing an order. Nowadays, there are many international staff who work in the Japanese animation industry [\*9] as well as Japanese creators working on international projects. One such example of this is popular Director Kamiyama Kenji being appointed to work on Hollywood's *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim* as the director [\*10].

There is an increasing amount of cases where works that have received foreign investment are being nominated at film festivals. Netflix invested in *B: The Beginning* in 2018, *Dino Girl Gauko* in 2019, *Japan Sinks: 2020* in 2021. These were put into competition as Netflix works. "What country is this film or animation from?" may no longer be the right question to ask.

The industry will continue to become more globalized as the world frees itself from COVID-19 in the 2020's. Animation creators will need to be able to adapt to these kinds of situations as time passes.

### Notes

\*1 2020 TSUMUGI AKITA ANIMATION LAB Co.,Ltd. in Akita City, Akita prefecture, establishment. (Official website: <https://www.tsumu-sakuga.com/>), in July 2021, Studio Eight Colors was established in Kochi City, Kochi prefecture. (Official website: <https://eightcolors.jp/>) It was remarkable that they moved to a large city known for its shrinking population. Studios with rising influence outside large cities such as MAPPA in Sendai (established in 2020) and Tsukuba's WIT STUDIO (established in 2018) are notable for their locations.

\*2 Disney+ unveiled an ambitious contents line up for the Asia-Pacific region. (October 14th, 2021: <https://disneyplus.disney.co.jp/news/2021/content-showcase.html>) In addition to launching the Star brand in Japan at the same time, Disney announced Japanese animation titles available only on Disney+ such as *Black Rock Shooter DAWN FALL*, *Summer Time Rendering* and *Yojoan Time Machine Blues*.

\*3 "Information regarding the completed acquisition of Ellation Holdings, Inc. which operated the animation streaming site Crunchyroll by Sony Pictures Entertainment." (August 10th, 2021: [https://www.sony.com/ja/SonyInfo/IR/news/20210810\\_J.pdf](https://www.sony.com/ja/SonyInfo/IR/news/20210810_J.pdf))

\*4, \*5 "Animation Industry Report (2021)" (November 4th, 2021 written and edited by The Association of Japanese Animations)

\*6 Previously, there were human resource training programs such as Sunrise's "Picture Drawing" or Kyoto Animation's "Pro School" but in April 2021 WIT STUDIO launched "WIT Animator School" in collaboration with Sasayuri Video Training and Netflix (<https://www.witstudio.co.jp/news/2021/02/574.html>). In September of 2022, Studio Ponoc, Inc. will launch PPAP, "Ponoc's Principles of Animation Program." (<https://www.ponoc.jp/recruit/ppap/>) Up and coming studios and established studios are starting to invest in education.

\*7 Experimental initiatives on efficiency for animation production via AI technologies by Toei Animation and PFN. (March 12th, 2021, [https://corp.toei-anim.co.jp/ja/ir/news/auto\\_20210311477158/pdfFile.pdf](https://corp.toei-anim.co.jp/ja/ir/news/auto_20210311477158/pdfFile.pdf)) Automatic inbetween software "CACANI" (<https://cacani.info/>), automatic animation coloring technology development by OLM Digital, Inc. and Nara Institute of Science and Technology (November 28th, 2018 <https://www.imagicagroup.co.jp/news/2018/2018112802>).

\*8 According to "[Chart 2.12] Animation Video Package Sales" on page 54 of the Animation Industry Report 2021, animation video package sales, which have traditionally been the core of the production committee type business, will decline from 138.7 billion yen in 2005 to 46.5 billion yen by 2020.

\*9 The director of the 2021 blockbuster *Jujutsu Kaisen* is Park Seo-Ah, from South Korea, and Science SARU president Choi Eun-Young, who produced *Keep Your Hands Off Eizouken!* (2020) and *The Heike Story* (2021), is also from South Korea and studied animation at a British university.

\*10 "New Line Cinema Joins Forces with Warner Bros. Animation to Sweep Fans Back to Middle-Earth with the Standalone Anime Feature "The Lord of the Rings: The War of Rohirrim" (June 10th, 2021) WarnerMedia (<https://pressroom.warnermedia.com/ca/media-release/warner-bros/new-line-cinema-joins-forces-warner-bros-animation-sweep-fans-back-middle-earth>)

## 2020

- January • The Winsor McCay Award is presented to the late Satoshi Kon posthumously at the Annie Awards in the United States.
- March • AnimeJapan 2020 and Tokyo Anime Award Festival (TAAF) 2020 are canceled due to Covid-19.
- April • Japan Educational Network of Animation (JENA) is founded.
- Covid-19 continues to cause multiple postponements in TV broadcasting and film releases.
- June • The Annecy International Animation Film Festival becomes an online event.
- *A Whisker Away* (produced by Studio Colorid) is switched from its planned theater release all over Japan to exclusive streaming on Netflix worldwide.
- July • AnimeExpo (the United States) and Japan Expo (France) are canceled due to Covid-19.
- August • Manga Toshi (city) Tokyo Exhibit: Japanese manga, anime, games, and tokusatsu (SFX films) opens at the National Art Center, Tokyo.
- The 18th HIROSHIMA International Animation Festival is held online only.
- Asahi Broadcasting Group gains full ownership of SILVER LINK., an animation production company.
- A General Incorporated Association, the Association of Japanese Animations, makes public “A Manual for TV Anime Series Production Assistants.”
- October • *Children of the Sea* (produced by STUDIO4°C) wins the Grand Prize in the feature film competition at Bucheon International Animation Festival.
- Netflix signs a comprehensive business partnership agreement with four studios (ANIMA&COMPANY, MAPPA, and SCIENCE SARU of Japan and Studio Mir Co., Ltd. of Korea).
- *Seven Days War* (produced by AJIADO CO., LTD.) wins the best feature length film award in the anime section at The Sitges–International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia in Spain.
- *Demon Slayer-Kimetsu no Yaiba-The Movie: Mugen Train* (produced by Ufotable) is released. It grosses the biggest in Japan’s history, over 40 billion yen at the box office in May 2021.
- November • TIFFCOM, an international trade fair at Tokyo International Film Festival, hosts Tokyo Gap-Financing Market (TGFM).
- CG Anime Contest is held as part of Kyoto International Manga Anime Award.
- The Japanese dubbed version of *The Legend of Hei*, a Chinese animation film, is co-distributed by Aniplex Inc. and released in Japan.
- EJ ANIME MUSEUM opens in Kadokawa Culture Museum in Tokorozawa, Tokyo.
- December • Sales of animation software, CLIP STUDIO PAINT, developed by Celsys, Inc., exceed 10 million copies worldwide.
- Disney cancels its theater release of *Soul*, a new feature film created by Pixar Animation Studio, and starts exclusive streaming on Disney+.

## 2021

- January • Director Tomoki Misato’s stop motion animation, *PUI PUI MOLCAR*, produced by Shin-Ei Animation, starts TV broadcasting.
- March • Yasuo Otsuka, an animator, dies.
- Toei Animation and Preferred Networks jointly conduct trials on the use of AI technologies for background images to streamline anime production.
- *Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* (produced by Studio Khara Inc.) is released as the final chapter of

- the series. Total box office revenue reaches 10.2 billion yen.
- April**
- China makes stricter rules for pre-screening of streaming programs. Consequently, delays become frequent in the distribution and broadcasting of Japanese animation programs in China.
  - WIT Animator School opens. WIT STUDIO, Netflix, and Sasayuri Training Center collaborate to raise and develop human resources.
  - Studio Ponoc launches Ponoc's "Principles of Animation" Program to raise and train animators.
  - ODDTAXI*, planned and original by P.I.C.S., starts broadcasting.
  - DETECTIVE CONAN "The Scarlet Bullet"* (produced by TMS ENTERTAINMENT CO., LTD.) is released in 22 countries and territories simultaneously worldwide.
  - Demon Slayer-Kimetsu no Yaiba-The Movie: Mugen Train* hits No.1 on the weekend at the U.S. box office.
  - Japan's BIGWEST CO., LTD., STUDIO NUE, INC., and HARMONY GOLD U.S.A. announce expansive agreement for the future of MACROSS and ROBOTECH projects.
- May**
- The Journey* produced by Saudi Arabia's Manga Productions and Toei Animation is released in the Middle East and North Africa. The release in Japan is scheduled for June 2021.
- June**
- Otawamure* (directed by Yoriko Mizushiri) wins the Best VR Project award in Animafest Zagreb 2021 in Zagreb.
  - Josee, the Tiger and the Fish* (produced by bones inc.) is selected as the opening film at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival.
  - WarnerMedia chooses Kenji Kamiyama as director of the animation film, *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim*.
  - KADODAWA founds Studio KADAN, a new 3D CG animation and visual effects anime studio.
  - Chris Meledandri (CEO of Illumination Entertainment) is appointed Outside Director at Nintendo Co., Ltd.
- July**
- TMS ENTERTAINMENT CO., LTD. announces its UNLIMITED PRODUCE project.
  - Studio Ponoc and the Olympic Foundation for Culture and Heritage co-produce and release a short film, *Tomorrow's Leaves*.
  - Seven studios in Japan produce Star Wars omnibus animation for exclusive streaming on Disney+.
- August**
- Sony's Funimation Global Group completes its acquisition of Crunchyroll, a streaming service for Japanese anime.
  - Tencent, a Chinese entertainment conglomerate invests 30 billion yen (6.86%) in KADOKAWA.
  - The live-action adaptation of a Japanese anime, *Cowboy Bebop*, is released on Netflix simultaneously worldwide.
  - Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time* becomes available exclusively on Amazon Prime Video worldwide.
  - Polygon Pictures founds a CG studio in India, as a wholly-owned subsidiary.
- September**
- Fuji Television and Crunchyroll announce a partnership in the co-development and co-production of anime series.
  - INU-OH*, an animated feature film, (produced by Science SARU INC.), has its world premiere in the Orizzonti competition section at the 78th Venice Film Festival.
  - Academy Museum of Motion Pictures opens in Los Angeles, the United States with its inaugural exhibition, Hayao Miyazaki.
- October**
- Disney+ announces its licensing of three Japanese animation titles for exclusive streaming worldwide.
  - HIDEAKI ANNO EXHIBITION starts at THE NATIONAL ART CENTER, TOKYO.
  - Toei Animation and Korea's CJ ENM Co., Ltd sign a strategic partnership agreement to produce content targeting global markets.
  - Honekami* (A Bite of Bone) (directed by Honami Yano) wins the Grand Prize for the Short Animation section at the Ottawa International Animation Festival.
- November**
- The Association of Japanese Animations announces in its "Anime Industry Report 2021" that the global market surpassed the Japanese market for Japanese animation.
- December**
- A Japanese animation film, *JUJUTSU KAISEN 0: The Movie* (produced by MAPPA), is released. It grosses over 12 billion yen at the box office.
  - From the Fragments of Tezuka Osamu, the digital NFT art project based on numerous manga manuscripts by Tezuka Osamu, starts its auction sales. Animation-related NFT businesses begin to thrive.

## The Ecosystem of Anime in Exhibitions

What is an “anime exhibition”? We can start by saying that it should include (1) works such as drawings, scripts and model sheets related to the production of an animation work, (2) materials such as videotapes, film prints and DVDs related to the work, (3) distribution-related materials such as data provided by experts and magazines, (4) other exhibition-related materials including derivative works such as screenshots, clippings and life-size cardboards, dioramas, VR, AR, etc., and (5) exhibitions that focus on animation forms and works across a variety of genres and issues. We could also say that an anime exhibition is an ensemble of all the points mentioned above.

However, when we think of the exhibitions held in 2020 or 2021, we wonder where these took place. Anime exhibitions are strongly geared toward fans of titles that have already aired or original mangas that will be adapted to movies [\*1]. They are primarily a form of promotion or pop-up stores held at commercial facilities, mainly in department stores’ event halls [\*2]. Still, in recent years, different anime exhibitions have been organized in national and public museums.

## Opportunities for Projects Diversification as seen in Travelling Anime Exhibitions

A good starting point to get an idea of the opportunities for diversification of anime exhibitions is to look at the number of travelling ones. According to the author’s survey, the most prominent travelling anime exhibition, including those held in 2020 and 2021, is the *Evangelion Exhibition* (Evangelion-ten) (22 venues), followed by the *Sazae-san Exhibition* (Sazae-san-ten) (13 venues), which signed the 50th broadcast anniversary of the anime of the homonymous name and the *Ghibli Expo* held in 12 venues, finishing with the exhibition of the movie directed by Makoto Shinkai *Weathering With You*. A special mention goes to the *Ghibli Expo* ranked 9th for the number of visitors to exhibitions in the FY2019 [\*3]. Moreover, the *Hideaki Anno Exhibition* (The National Art Center, Tokyo), which exposes many of Hideaki Anno’s works from childhood to the present day, has attracted more than 140,000 visitors, making animation a significant genre for exhibitions in Japan.

During the last decade, public art museums started to generate revenues from exhibitions about a wide range of contemporary culture topics, such as animation and manga, as in the *Evangelion Exhibition* and the *Makoto Shinkai Exhibition*, which are just two of the many supported by media. This shows how museums already deal with subcultures and, at the same time, need to purchase bundles to attract fans of the



works to anime and original exhibitions while proactively planning for a general public [\*4]. National and public museums, operated by public funds, should not only expose manga and anime works and their artists to their fans but also to a broader public, presenting these works and authors as social and historical events or animation itself as an object that can be critically analyzed. In particular, the *Tomino Exhibition* was planned and prepared by seven curators of six different museums; the utilized space in each museum and the presented works were the same. It was an exhibition launched with the awareness of how exhibition on Anime could be bundled together [\*5].

Another problem in planning anime-related exhibitions today is the trend toward single-artist exhibitions due to the complexity related to rights [\*6]: an example that meets these difficulties is *MANGA ⇔ TOKYO*. For this exhibition, a visiting researcher was invited for each genre, and a curatorial team worked around the National Art Center, Tokyo, to provide their high expertise and to create a foundation for an inexhaustible comparative study of Japanese pop culture in relation to the city of Tokyo, as the title suggests. It has become a reference point for anime and pop culture exhibitions.

## Animation as a Method or Means in Contemporary Art Exhibitions

A special mention goes to Masaharu Sato's rotoscope work *Masaharu Sato Trace – Absence of Presence/Presence of Absence*, in which he produced a variety of works with the rotoscope technique and Ho Tzu Nyen's solo exhibition *Night March of a Hundred Monsters*, which effectively used animation as a means to clear copyrights on documentary footage about the integration of *yokai* images in East Asia and Japanese national politics during the war. Akihiko Taniguchi's "softplay", which premiered in the 2019 edition of *Festival/Tokyo*, is a video work that mixes 3DCG animation and live action. It was created with the game engine Unity and it is a brilliant example of the present sameness between animation and car accidents, making it a clever work that contains the merge of fantasy into reality.

## Anime Exhibitions and Covid-19

In 2020, many museums were hit by the effects of Covid-19, and the number of visitors decreased [\*7]. Domestic anime exhibitions were no exception, being postponed or cancelled as a result. This situation, however, brought encouragement towards exhibitions in VR. In particular, *Sword Art Online – Ex Chronicles* which was held in Tokyo and Kyoto in 2020 and 2021, saw a VR edition in 2021 in the wake of Covid-19 and

included VR-specific content created by reinterpreting the animation of the film [\*8]. Tokorozawa Sakura Town, which opened in 2020 to become Japan's largest pop culture destination, has also been influenced by Covid-19 and is exploring options between hosting local exhibitions and online events with VR [\*9].

### Notes

\*1 The abundance of information on the products for sale on the exhibition's official website is proof of this.

\*2 The "Anime and Voice Actors Event Calendar" of the website "Anime.Eiga (*Anime Hakku* in Japanese)" is probably one of the most convenient sources to get information about anime-related exhibitions in Japan. (<https://anime.eiga.com/>, last access: July 1st, 2022)

\*3 BEST 30 Exhibitions Attendances in 2019, Top's "The Dinosaur Expo 2019" with 680,000 visitors, Art News Online 2019, (<http://www.art-annual.jp/news-exhibition/news/74458/>, last access: July 1st, 2022)

\*4 Takeshi Kudo "A Study of Manga and Anime Exhibitions at Public Museums" *Tomino Exhibition* and *Syd Mead: PROGRESSIONS TYO 2019* by Artscape 2019 ([https://artscape.jp/report/curator/10156250\\_1634.html](https://artscape.jp/report/curator/10156250_1634.html), Last access: July 1st, 2022)

\*5 Takeshi Kudo, one of the organizers of the *Tomino Exhibition*, cites *Motoi Wakamatsu* for the *Tohl Narita: Art/Special Effects/Monsters* exhibition, *Yuri Kawanishi* and Takashi Murakami from the Torimega Lab. for the *Young Pretty Girls in Art History* exhibition and Tadashi Kobayashi and Koki Okamoto for *Ogawara Kunio: legend of mechanical design* exhibition as examples of the accumulation of exhibitions at public museums and their lineages (Takeshi Kudo, after the *Tomino Exhibition*, a talk by the Curator in Charge of the Aomori Venue, artscape, 2021 [https://artscape.jp/report/curator/10168685\\_1634.html](https://artscape.jp/report/curator/10168685_1634.html), last access: July 1st, 2022)

\*6 Ryuhei Miyamoto and Koichi Inoue point out the difficulties in anime exhibitions and other pop culture exhibitions below. Koji Takase (ed.), "Cultural Resource Content Creation Project with the Japan Expo in 2019 (Organized and Co-sponsored)" *MANGA ⇔ TOKYO* "Exhibition Interim Report," The National Art Center, Tokyo, 2020 ([https://www.nact.jp/exhibition\\_special/2020/manga-toshi-tokyo/pdf/manga-toshi-tokyo\\_report.pdf](https://www.nact.jp/exhibition_special/2020/manga-toshi-tokyo/pdf/manga-toshi-tokyo_report.pdf), last access: July 1st, 2022)

\*7 "Visitor Figures 2020: top 100 art museums revealed as attendance drops by 77% worldwide", The Art Newspaper, 2021 (<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/03/30/visitor-figures-2020-top-100-art-museums-revealed-as-attendance-drops-by-77percent-worldwide>, last access: July 1st, 2022)

\*8 *Keiro*, "Sony and Kayak teamed up to realize the SAO VR event, and those involved talk about behind-the-scenes details", *MoguLive*. (<https://www.moguravr.com/sao-ex-chronicle-interview/> last access: July 1st, 2022)

\*9 For example, the exhibition *Isekai Museum*, held July 17-September 26, 2021, was also held in parallel with the EJ Anime Museum in Tokorozawa Sakura Town Kadokawa Culture Museum and online venues.

## Overview of academic papers and studies

Academic papers: With research into animation flourishing in recent years, there has likewise been an increase, albeit gradual, in the number of researchers acquiring doctoral degrees in animation research after conducting research into animation during their doctoral programs, having originated from undergraduate or master's programs [\*1]. Aside from research relating to engineering-related aspects and computer graphics (CG), which has hitherto been relatively commoner, there is also considerable research meriting attention in relation to the domains of the humanities and sociology, and growing numbers of such doctoral theses are being commercially published in the same manner as theses in more traditional domains [\*2].

Academic books: As research themes have become increasingly diverse, sociological research and anthologies [\*3] based on "industry"- and "work"-related perspectives are being published in addition to studies of particular authors or works and historical research; this, in addition to a strong showing of works written by mid-career and experienced older researchers, suggests an increasing level of richness and depth in terms of the domains of animation research and generational spread [\*4]. Finally, with more and more papers relating to animation appearing in academic society journals and academic journals in a wide variety of fields and domains, the diversification of themes, fields and domains in animation is also proceeding apace [\*5].

The outcomes [\*7] of the research projects of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, which are considered to be important results in cross-sectoral domains which run through research and criticism in general [\*6], are also drawing attention. "Guidance for animation research" [\*8] was also published as an outcome of a project of the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

Overall, literature relating to animation-related research and papers on animation is flourishing. Meanwhile, although Japanese translations of important literature from overseas on animation have not made significant inroads, literary works which are highly important to animation research from the standpoints of film studies, visual media studies and media research have nevertheless been published in Japan [\*9].

## Overview of general books and magazines

Books: As the "60th anniversary of TV animation" in 2023 draws near, a series of books which look back over the history of Japanese animation have been



published [\*10]. Moreover, with numerous books relating to “contents tourism” being published as before [\*11], it may be said that “contents tourism” has established itself as a sub-genre of animation research- and criticism-related literature.

Magazines and journals: As a result of the historic boom engendered by the hit film *Demon Slayer—Kimetsu no Yaiba—The Movie: Mugen Train* which came out in October 2020, there have been more opportunities for “anime” and “animation” to be discussed in regular newspapers and magazines based on “Demon Slayer,” with a number of special features based on academic papers being compiled in regular magazines, and even in specialist journals which might be considered to have little connection with animation [\*12].

Special features have also been created in *Bijutsu Techo* and *Kinema Junpo*, publications which are in fields connected with anime and animation and similar domains [\*13]. “Special feature: The metamorphosis of the manga market” was also run as a serial in *Tsukuru* [\*14]. *Eureka*, a magazine which had frequently discussed themes relating to anime and animation even before this point, has not only published special features on Satoshi Kon and Akino Kondoh [\*15], but has also published several features which include papers relating to animation [\*16].

These special features include numerous examples of pieces which are interconnected with “Demon Slayer” or which take up the themes of anime/animation [\*17], and may be considered a reflection of the way that animation has permeated Japanese society at large and developed connections with a wide variety of fields and domains, and of the fact that the prejudice formerly seen against manga has faded as a result of manga becoming familiar to a wider spread of generations.

## Trends in the domain of educational research

Academic societies: The conferences (annual workshops) of the Japan Society for Animation Studies (JSAS), the Japan Society of Image Arts and Sciences (JASIAS) and the Japan Society for Cinema Studies (JSCS) were held entirely online over 2020–2021, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the 23rd Annual Conference of JSAS in 2020, Akiko Sugawa-Shimada (professor, Yokohama National University) assumed office as the new president of the organization, while at the 47th Annual Meeting of JASIAS held in the same year, Ayako Saito (professor, Meiji Gakuin University) assumed office as JASIAS’s new president, both women being the first-ever female presidents of their respective organizations.

Twelve research presentations were given at the

22nd Annual Conference of JSAS, while eight research presentations plus three themed panel presentations were given at the 23rd Annual Conference of the same organization. Five research presentations relating to animation were given at the 46th Annual Meeting of JASIAS; similarly, five such presentations were given at the 47th Annual Meeting (at the conferences of JSCS, the number of similar presentations was zero on both years).

Deaths: Yasushi Watanabe, pioneer of research into Japanese animation, passed away on 27 March 2020 at the age of 86 [\*18]. Mikiro Kato, the film critic and film studies expert who founded JSCS, passed away on 26 September 2020 at the age of 63 [\*19], while visual media critic and researcher Tetsuro Hatano who was connected with the founding and administration of all three organizations (JASIAS, JSAS and JSCS) also passed away on 2 October 2020 at the age of 84 [\*20].

Education: The Faculty of Anime and Manga was established in 2021 at Kaishi Professional University (Niigata City), one of the professional and vocational universities (PVUs) that have been set up based on the 2017 Amendment to the School Education Act. In addition, the Inter College Animation Festival 2020 (ICAF2020), the “animation film festival for students” hosted by the ICAF Executive Committee and co-hosted by Japan Animation Association (JAA) and JSAS, was held for the 18th time, with this session being held online in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic [\*21]; following this, the 19th session of this festival (ICAF2021) was held online as well [\*22].

### Notes

\*1 The data for 2020–2021 is taken from Volume 7 of Scholarly and Academic Information Navigator (CiNii) Research.

\*2 Yuko Miyamoto, *Representational orientation in the films of the Fleischer Brothers: Juxtaposing the Real and Animated in Hybrid Space* (Suiseisha, June 2020), and Toshiya Kimura, *The historical study of Toei Animation* (Nippon Hyoron Sha, September 2020), both received the Japan Society for Animation Studies Award.

\*3 Shintaro Matsunaga, *Workplace studies on freelance animators in an animation studio* (Nakanishiya Shuppan, March 2020), and Daisuke Nagata and Shintaro Matsunaga (ed.), *Sociology of anime* (Nakanishiya Shuppan, October 2020), etc.

\*4 Ishida Minori, *Anime and voice actors in media history: Why do women play boys’ parts?* (Seikyusha, December 2020), and Masao Yokota, *Proactive action in animation: psychological analysis of characters* (Kaneko Shobo, March 2021), etc.

Note 5 The publication of 479 papers which include the word “anime” or “animation” in their titles over the 2020–2021 period (including those published in general magazines) suggests this growing diversification (CiNii Research).

\*6 Ryota Fujitsu, *Anime and War* (Nippon Hyoron Sha, February 2021), and (by the same author) *Outline of anime: Looking at subjects, creators and techniques* (Seidosha, October 2021).

\*7 Nichibunken Popular Culture Research Project (ed.), *A History of Popular Culture in Japan* (Kadokawa, September 2020), and Eiji Otsuka (ed.), *Popular culture as a movement: collaboration, fans and cultural production* (Suiseisha, September 2021), etc.

\*8 Nobuaki Doi (ed.), “Media arts and research mapping: Guidance for animation research” (Agency for Cultural Affairs, February 2020).

\*9 Tom Gunning, *When Images Begin to Move: The Archeology of Photography, Film, and Animation*. Translated and localized by Masato Hase (Misuzu Shobo, November 2021).

\*10 Yusuke Nakagawa, *Foundation of the Anime Nation 1963–1973: The Pioneers Who Built TV Anime* (East Press, August 2020), Aritsune Toyota, *Birth of Japanese Anime* (Bensey Publishing, August 2020), and Masatoki Minami, *An account of the fight for Showa era anime: The early careers of legendary animators* (Temjin, June 2021) etc.

\*11 *A journey through the world of Disney movies* (JTB Publishing, August 2020), and *Evangelion and railways: a complementary plan—“Third Impact” from the railways through the world of the “Evas”!* (Temjin, November 2021), etc.

\*12 “Special feature: The French and anime,” *France* (Hakusuisha), September 2020 edition, and “Special feature: Anime/manga and earth science,” *Minna no Chigaku* (Japan Society of Earth Science Education), No. 2 (2021), etc.

\*13 “Special feature: The creativity of animation: What innovations took place in 2010s anime history?” *Bijutsu Techo* (Culture Convenience Club), February 2020 edition, and “Demon Slayer and animation films’ current status and future possibilities,” *Kinema Junpo* (Kinema Junposha), combined early/late January 2021 edition, etc.

\*14 *Tsukuru* (Tsukuru Publishing Co., Ltd.), May 2020 and May 2021 editions.

\*15 “Special feature: The world of Satoshi Kon—*Perfect Blue*, *Millennium Actress*, *Tokyo Godfathers*, *Paprika*...and the next 10 years,” *Eureka* (Seidosha), August 2020 edition, and “Special feature: The elusive ‘girlhood’ theme running through Akino Kondoh’s work—from *The Evening Traveling* and *KiyaKiya to A-ko’s Boyfriends* and *New York de Kangae-chu*,” *Eureka*, March 2021 edition.

\*16 Published on four occasions: “Special feature: The ‘female otaku’ of today: Me and my favorites,” *Eureka* (Seidosha), September 2020 edition; “Special feature: The world of soft toys,” January 2021 edition; “Special feature: Taiwanese cinema today,” August 2021 edition; and “Special feature: The history of special effects in film, marking 120 years since the birth of Eiji Tsuburaya,” October 2021 edition.

\*17 Yasuyuki Echi, “Legal issues connected with ‘characters’ in manga, anime and computer games, taking the ‘MariCar’ case’ as a case study,” (“Special feature: Entertainment law is fascinating!”), *Hogaku Kyoshitsu* (Yuhikaku), August 2020 edition, etc.

\*18 Co-author of *History of Japanese Animation* (Yubunsha, 1978), *The Genesis of Japanese anime* (Shueisha, March 2020), etc.

\*19 Positions held include those of professor at Kyoto University, President of JSCS. He is the author of the following works in relation to animation: *Film Studies of Animation* (Rinsen Book, 2009), and *Representation and criticism: Film, animation and manga* (Iwanami Shoten, 2010).

\*20 Positions previously held include those of professor at Tokyo Zokei University, graduate school professor of Nihon University, president of JASIAS, vice-president of JSAS, honorary consultant to JSCS etc. In addition, Tadasu Oyama, psychologist and first president of JSAS, passed away on 16 December 2019 at the age of 91.

\*21 Held over 19 September~4 October 2020, with a total of 159 works and 22 participating institutions.

\*22 Held over 18 September~3 October 2021, with a total of 190 works and 25 participating institutions.

# 東 ア ジ ア

# 韓 国

## Director

### Minji Kang

Reason for recommendation

Kang Minji is the representative and owner of animation studio, Frame By Frame, where she also directs her works. She started her career in independent animation after creating her graduation piece in 2006. She has created her own unique works of art in her own experimental style, creating her ninth work titled, "Belongings." In addition to directing, Kang Minji also acts as a producer. Her work, "Cookie Coffee Dosirak," planned in 2021, talks about three women writers living in modern society. Other than short films, she has produced commercials, promotional videos, among others, collaborating with other artists and widening her reach as a director and producer.

## Recommended by Yu-jin Choi

Secretary General of Korea Independent Animation Association,  
General manager, Indie Ani-fest

## Director

### Seungbae Jeon

Reason for recommendation

Jeon Seungbae is a stop motion animation director and the representative of animation studio, Toyvill. His presence on the scene in the country is very important as there are not many stop motion animation creators in South Korea. In 2008, he debuted with his work, "What's Wrong" and continues to create stop motion animations to this day. In 2018, his stop motion animation film, "Saturday's Apartment" created from needle felting, earned him praise in South Korea and abroad. His film, "Battery Daddy," created in 2021, was screened more than 30 times at both international and Korean film festivals. Seungbae's talents are not limited to just stop motion animation works. He has also published picture books and finds different ways to meet his audience.

## Director

### Jun-pyo Hong

Reason for recommendation

Hong Jun-pyo is an animation director and the representative of Studio Roomer. He was the director for full-length animation film, *Chun Tae-il*, which was released in 2021. Since his time as a student at the Korea National University of Arts, he has created short films which have been featured and screened at film festivals. Known for his intuitive and stylish short film works, Jun-pyo received great praise for his depiction of Chun Tae-il, a young man who left a huge, historical mark on Korean labor movements, whose legacy continues to breath with us to this day. Branding his unique style of directing on both short and full-length films, many eagerly anticipate Jun-pyo's next move after his debut.

## Music Director

### Dongwook Kim

Reason for recommendation

When discussing Korea's independent animation films, Kim Dongwook is an inseparable part of the industry as a music director. He got his start in the industry in 2003, when he first participated in the production of a short animation film. He has now worked on around 100 short films, with his latest titled "Salvia at Nine," and "The Cave." His work is not limited to short films though, as he has actively worked on full-length animation, *Climbing*, Netflix's drama series, *Hellbound*, among others as a music director. Despite his busy schedule, Dongwook continues to have an unwavering love for independent animation, as he participates in their production. He is a reassuring partner in this industry as he is proactive in joining in animation creator film festival parties and continues to have discussions and consultations about music production.

## Director

### Kyung-hwa (Kaye) Lee

Reason for recommendation

Lee Kyung-hwa is an independent animation creator and the representative of Seoul & Animator. She's the Asian programmer for Indie-AniFest, an animation festival that introduces independent Asian animation to a wider audience. She's a creator known for her enthusiasm and having fun with her work. In 1999 after creating her graduation piece, "Daddy and I," Kyung-hwa worked at animation film festivals for a long time. While working, she created her own individual works, interviewing animators and writing books. In 2021, she participated as a director for "Cookie Coffee Dosirak." The Seoul & Animator web magazine has been reborn, introducing new works and interviews with creators to a larger audience. Full of new ideas and passion for the independent animation industry, Kyung-hwa has vitality for the art as an activist.

## East Asia: South Korea

The years 2020 and 2021 were times that found opportunity in an ever-changing environment and found hope in times of crisis. COVID-19 stopped people in their tracks and the world seemingly became quiet. However, it was also a time where I was much more active than usual.

I have seen an illustration that depicts life before and after COVID-19 on social media. While everyone's lives changed due to the pandemic, there were animation creators whose lifestyle did not change. I believe creators' lifestyles won't really change if they have their own space to make their own creations.

However, these creators did not repeat the same type of work as before the pandemic. Director Kim Jinman, a creator who used experimental methods and objects to create philosophical works, has now started posting cute videos on YouTube. Director Jeon Seungbae is also looking for a new audience as he creates picture books based off his animations. Director Kang Minji established her studio, Frame by Frame, where she plans collaborations with other creators and co-produces work with them. Hong Jun-pyo directed his first full-length work, which was released last year despite having only created short films prior. Music Director Kim Dongwook, having created music for independent animations, is now receiving attention for his work on Netflix's *Hellbound*. Lee Kyung-hwa has interviewed creators and wrote books. She has now changed the book format to a web magazine format, introducing creators from South Korea. Independent animation creators have taken this time to expand their horizons and their areas of expertise.

It is not only the creators themselves that have experienced changed but also the environment for animation creation in the country as well. South Korean animation meant for the masses was mostly aimed at children. However, online platforms such as OTT platforms and YouTube, which grew quickly during the pandemic, started to create content aimed at older demographics. Companies which created children's animation before are now starting to experiment. The success of *Beauty Water*, released in 2020, has significant meaning in comparison to the lack of audiences for children's animation during the pandemic.

Although meeting people has become harder

during the pandemic, people have not stopped working collectively together. In 2020, when it seemed like the laws to safeguard the South Korean animation industry were going to disappear, animation organizations released a statement, which was supported by many people who did animation character challenges on social media. This in turn kept the laws in tact. In the same year, a law to promote animation was announced and the animation promotion committee was started. In addition, there are now opportunities to talk about measures and ideas regarding animation works. A subcommittee for animation was created in the Korean Film Council, where members talk about how to support the industry and what measures should be implemented. They then created a network of companies that distribute short films, solve problems that arise from distributing those short films and safeguard the rights of creators. In addition, film festivals that take place in Seoul come together to propose ideas to the city of Seoul, safeguarding the budgets so that those film festivals can take place. Such activities did not only take place in the animation industry but also with other genres of film and the people involved in those genres as well. It was an active time for everyone involved, much more than usual.

It might have seemed like all activities stopped during the pandemic but the animation industry in South Korea was busier than usual. In addition to continuing those activities, the industry has expanded its reach and adapted to new changes.

# East Asia: China

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## Education Institute

### The Animation Department, School of Film and Animation, China Academy of Art

Reason for recommendation

For the past two years, many students from this school and their works have received positive attention from international animation festivals. The school has actively updated its educational principles to further develop their students' creativity, which includes actively inviting foreign specialists to guide their students. In addition, the school has started the West Lake International Animation Festival, which specializes in animation learning research, in order to fill in the gap that the field currently has.

## Studio

### Benlai Pictures

Reason for recommendation

In order to raise the children of China with heart, tell them stories of love and show what aesthetics are, Benlai Pictures has endeavored in creating animation for children. The studio, uninfluenced by what the market likes or dislikes, takes risks and delves deep in finding out the possibilities of creating high-quality animations with independent animation directors. In 2021, the studio started up plans for and invested in full-length animation film, *To the Bright Side*, showing the world China's independent animation directors.

## Archivist

### Guangchao Fu (Kongzang Animation & Comics Archive)

Reason for recommendation

Guangchao Fu is an archivist who specializes and researches animation history. Over a long period of time, he has collected Chinese animation documents and documents regarding oral traditions, organizing them and putting effort into researching them. He works to revive and restore China's animations from the previous century via interviews with the old generation staff, animation creators and their families. Guangchao is in charge of an oral history program titled, "What It Means To Be an Animator."

Recommended by  
**Yantong Zhu**

Feinaki Beijing Animation Week Artistic Director

What has the animation industry in China been like for the past two years? What sort of effects has the pandemic had on the industry?

I believe the past two years has been a stage of recovery for the Chinese animation industry. The Shanghai Animation Film Studio has been an important center for creation in the country, having opened a time of prosperity for the industry. However, in the 1990's, as the animation industry started to move a market-oriented economy, its development started to plateau. This caused the level of quality in works to decline. There were not any excellent works in comparison to the past. This continued until the second half of the 2000's, accompanying our personal growth the whole time.

In recent years, both industry projects and individual projects have magnificently come a long way, with the industry as a whole having passed the plateau. Industry-wide, there were several high-earning, full-length productions that were produced. At the same time, there have been independent works of animations with a high level of artistry that have been recognized in international specialized fields. One thing that should be noted is, independent animation creators have influenced the progress of the Chinese animation industry in a positive manner.

COVID-19 has greatly affected box-office revenue for screenings and international collaborations. Audiences are now watching these films online. Tickets for online streaming and viewing are cheaper, with the goal of attracting more views than normal. This is indirectly connected with careful investment. Investors are more reliant on big data than unique, innovative works, having a tendency to invest in IP that the public already is familiar with or works that are in a series. This tendency does not bode well for film companies who have found new potential in original Chinese works. We may gradually see the influence of this in the next few years. In addition, COVID-19 has made it difficult to go abroad and collaborate with the international animation industries.

Nevertheless, for independent animation creators who do not follow the market, COVID-19 may not have had such a big influence on their workflow. They produce works on a low budget or produce works

outside of their main job. In comparison to live-action films, COVID-19 has had less of an effect on animation production. On the contrary, animation may have an advantage during the post-pandemic era.

Ever since the release of *The Legend of Hei*, full-length animation films have become more popular in Japan. Many full-length feature animation films are being produced right now. What do you think about the current market for full-length animation films from China, Ms. Zhu? You're currently working on *To The Bright Side*, but do you think independent creators will also be given a chance to feature their films?

It is true that there are many full-length films being released in recent years. In 2019, the film *Ne Zha*, which featured the mythical Ne Zha as the main character, had a box-office revenue of over five billion yuan. Many film companies are continuing the trend, pursuing success with their films. Many animation films are increasingly featuring mythical characters that are widely recognized by the public. However, only a few films have received praised from the same public. In the past two years, realistic films have increased in number in the country, despite being smaller in number in comparison to mythological films. Regardless, this trend shows the increasing diversity of the market.

Independent creators have been given opportunities for their work. Film companies have an increasing need for original content and within this need, some companies do not want to copy Hollywood or anime from Japan. Such companies then turned their focus on independent creators. Society at large has gradually focused their attention on independent creators themselves through animation events including us, Feinaki, and media coverage in recent years. There are some people who believe that the future of trends in animation lie in the independent industry. *To the Bright Side*, based off picture books for children, is one such experiment. Benlai Pictures, a children's animation studio that has invested in film works, offered me a job as an executive producer. They highly evaluate independent creators and believe that we are perfect for creating original children's animation content.

A few years back, one work that exemplified this

was full-length feature *Have a Nice Day*, directed by Liu Jian. Despite the fact that it was aimed toward an older demographic, it also received business investment. Of course at this stage, it cannot be really called a trend but rather an individual case of such happenings. The marketing issues that these works face is still very large and we are still unsure if such productions will be sustainable in the future.

**I believe as a Feinaki director, you are well versed in the current situation for short animation films. Are there any trends you've seen for those films from 2020 to 2021?**

During 2020 to 2021, Chinese short animation films have increased in number, quality and standard. There are several subsidy projects by local governments that have started to help independent creators. Online platforms such as Bilibili have also started investing in short animation films. I believe this has to do with the success that animation films have experienced in the market in the past few years. In addition, many independent creators are getting request to work on commercials and MVs within the past two years. The environment and market for independent animation creators has gradually gotten better as a whole. However, many short animation films are still student projects, with only a few professional projects done after graduation. On the other hand, there are a few international collaborations with other countries (mainly France) among the professional works in the past two years.

**Tell us about student projects. What sort of schools are available in China and what sort of education do they receive? Are there any student projects that we should pay attention to?**

There are many universities that offer a major in animation in China. Art universities or film universities both generally have an animation major, along with general universities too. There are some universities that have had great success in recent years such as: China Academy of Art, Communication University of China, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing Film Academy, East China Normal University and Nanjing Arts Institute. I also teach experimental animation courses at the Communication University of China as a part-time lecturer. Originally, the universities' main purpose was to educate young people to create art for consumption. However, nowadays, they are also starting to focus on educating the artist themselves and not just focusing on the technique. Student work from the China Academy of Art has particularly been

wonderfully successful, with some works being selected for the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, drawing in attention from all over China.

**One trend that we've seen is that there are creators that are active in the modern art domain. It seems to be a peculiar feature of Chinese independent animation. Is that trend still continuing to this day? One trend that we've seen is that there are creators that are active in the modern art domain. It seems to be a peculiar feature of Chinese independent animation. Is that trend still continuing to this day?**

Yes. There's a fixed amount of contemporary art and animation that are mixing together. Feinaki also installed a display in the hall next to where films were being shown. Ten or so years ago, the animation industry plateaued but contemporary art students who graduated from art schools started to create works in animation. I believe well-known William Kentridge had an influence as well. However, this does not mean that contemporary artists would always use animation to create something. They use a variety of mediums in order to create a work of artistic expression. In recent years, there are contemporary art creators who have gradually stopped animation altogether or completely devoted themselves to animated films such as Liu Jian.

**It is not possible to get the whole picture of Chinese creators just looking at what's happening domestically (Ms. Zhu, you have also studied in Japan). What are some popular countries or schools that aspiring animation creators from China would like to attend?**

Before the start of COVID-19, studying abroad was very popular in China. There were many students who studied animation abroad and created wonderful graduation pieces. Although the pieces were created abroad, these pieces had a large influence on animation within the country, particularly in the education sectors. When I graduated in Japan in 2014, there weren't many students from China at the graduate school at the Tokyo University of Arts. However, since that time, there was explosion of students from China. Many students abroad have increasingly come back to China in the recent years. There are many who study animation in France, the USA, the UK, Japan, Germany and the Netherlands. Gobelins in France, California Institute of the Arts in the USA, Royal College of Art in the UK and Japan's Tokyo University of Art are currently popular places to study.



Hiroshima Animation Season is one part of a new event called the Hiroshima Festival. Its aim is to bring peace through culture. Is there something you'd like to specially mention in Chinese animation when thinking about "peace" for the past two years? It's fine to think of "peace" in very broad terms.

I believe the existence of the Hiroshima Animation Season, which calls for peace, is very important for this current world. One horrible thing that war does to people is taking away diversity from those people. War has had a strong effect on the media, making people lose their ability to think independently and dividing people into two groups: friends or enemies. We're starting to lose our ability to empathize with each other people. Independent animations are created by individual creators, which have their own backgrounds and fresh individual perspectives and expressions. They are full of diversity. By expanding our horizons internationally, I believe we're able to understand and empathize with people who are of different cultures and backgrounds. I fully realize the powerlessness of art in face of the harsh realities of the world. However, what we can do while in China is supporting those animation creators' individual ideas and expressions as best we can. While pushing for Chinese films to be screened abroad, we should push for creators to widen their reach internationally with their work. This is so that people from different cultures and backgrounds can see what China has to offer. I hope that these actions we're taking lead to a more peaceful world, even if it's just a little bit.



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## East Asia: Taiwan

### Director

#### Wen-Ming (Joe) Hsieh

Reason for recommendation —————

Mr. Hsieh is an independent Taiwan animation director whose works often explore the dark side of human nature and filled with horror and suspense. His films have captured attentions in many international film festivals. Meat Days (2006) was selected in the Pusan International and Hiroshima Animation Film Festivals. The Present (2014)

was nominated in the Sundance Film Festival and was awarded Best Animated Short Film in the San Diego Asian Film Festival. He collaborated in the production of No. 7 Cherry Lane (2019) which won the Best Screenplay in the Venice International Film Festival. Night Bus (2020) was awarded Best Animated Short Film at Sundance Film Festival, Grand Prix Best Short Film at Animafest Zagreb, and received Public Prize at Ottawa International Animation Film Festival, and nominated for Best Short Subject at the Annie Awards.

### Director

#### Den-Yu (Fish) Wang

Reason for recommendation —————

Mr. Wang has been dedicated to animation, script writing and comic creation for decades. His works often reveals the profound meanings behind the scene - sometimes hilarious and sometimes political - which, in long term, built up his influences in the field gradually.

### Educator

#### Chang-Jay (Jay Stone) Shih

Reason for recommendation —————

Prof. Shih is not only a longtime independent animation director with many achievements, he is also a key person to promote in Taiwan contemporary animation developments and a great educator till this day.

Recommended by

**Chi-Sui Wang**

Taichung International Animation Festival / Associate Professor,  
National Taipei University of the Arts

The interview is about the situation of animation in Taiwan in two years (2020-2021) but it may spread to Taiwan's animation history in general. Let me start with student films. In recent years, animation by students is very strong in Taiwan. The driving force should be Taipei National University of the Arts, where you teach. Would you please tell me about your school and why you can keep producing amazing talents?

Thanks for the kind observations. I believe there are many reasons that they eventually presented good quality of productions. I will point out few. Animation Department at TNUA was established in 2011, separated from its original Department of New Media, in expectation to nurture talents in animation. In order to do so, we designed the curriculum not only in basic technical training (2D traditional, CGI and experimental including stop-motion), we do also emphasis on production supervisions individually. Supervision is essentially important and taking up most of our time, as each student would have different take in their creativity as well as skill set. And on top of all these, we had began to hold the KuanDu International Animation Festival (KDIAF) the same year when department was established. As you also familiar with, this festival is a professional international festival, so students not only be able to watch all the latest animated films, but also learning from masters face-to-face in workshops during festival. Other important factors including peer learning, school atmosphere (with all artistic disciplines), guest professor from abroad etc.

I am wondering what animation students do after graduation. They work in the industry in Taiwan or any other countries? or work independently?

Some of them went on develop their independent career in animation, illustration, manga and other related topic with great achievements. Some student went in industry for commissioned projects.

On a professional level, what is the situation of the animation industry in Taiwan? Do you have any trends? For example, we see some unique Taiwanese animated features recently. On Happiness Road was a smash hit in Japan and City of Lost Things was selected at the Tokyo Anime Award Festival.

As at TNUA our education goal is always to educate young artist as well as per-production talents (though they are are also very good at production and post-production), some of them seems to be recruited soon after presenting their graduate works. Position-wise they mostly work on production team first but soon move on to be more pre-production or team leader type of position due to their capability. In fact the feature On Happiness Road had recruited many of our graduates to work for them.

Animation industry in Taiwan will be a long story, from being the factory for Hollywood and Japan in early years, till recent two decades that new talents sprouted due to school education as well as government encouragements (however this has been yet another long story - government did not always get thing right and other complicated struggles). But mostly I would say that individual directors are brave and stubborn enough to pull through the entire project. Not easy at all.

What is the situation of an independent field? Night Bus performs very well in the film festival circuit. The director Joe Hsieh has been making very unique short films for a long time but I am wondering how independent animators like him are surviving in Taiwan.

Again, not easy at all. But as we were trained to believe that if one wants to be successful in his art, one must endure all the difficulties. We have seem all the independent director went through multiple obstacles and struggles. Though in system there might be some supports in place, i.e. funding possibility, awards for independent productions, but it seems the infrastructure of system will always have space (a huge one) to improve. However, on the other hand, we do also have quite a good numbers of unique audience specifically like those independent content. Therefore the importance of film festival for the last few decades is obvious, but the pandemic and online streaming did change the scene a bit.

# Southeast Asia

**Philippines Festival**

## **Animahenasyon Festival**

Reason for recommendation —————

I recommend Animahenasyon Festival from the Philippines because it is one of the few animation film festivals in Southeast Asia that has continued over the years giving animation the platform and focus it needs despite the challenging and tough climate.

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Recommended by

**Leong Puiyee**

Senior Manager, Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film

## Singapore

The Singapore animation industry has a mix of independent works and animation studios specializing in VFX, 2D, 3D animation works. In recent years, a number of young filmmakers' animated works were selected at prestigious animation festivals like Annecy International Animation Film Festival.

### Notable events and works from 2020-2021

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#### Cartoons Underground

An animation festival that started in 2012, with film screenings, talks and panels.

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#### Finding Pictures

An independent animation studio founded by independent filmmakers. They recently created a new television series called Puber Teens for a local television network.

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#### Calleen Koh

An animator and director whose last animated short, To Kill the Birds and the Bees, won 3 awards at the 2021 National Youth Film Awards (NYFA), a local youth film competition.

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#### Tan Wei Keong

Wei Keong is one of Singapore's most prominent animators. His films have been to festivals like Berlin International Film Festival and Annecy International Animation Film Festival. He is an alumnus of Berlinale Talents 2022 and a resident at SFFILM FilmHouse for his next short and feature development.

## Malaysia

The animation hub in Malaysia receives strong support from the government, providing funding and facilities for animation studios. The Malaysia Creative Content Center (MAC3) is one such support. It is an incubation hub for small and medium digital content start-ups. The production of original IP is at a mature stage, which allows the release and exportation of original Malaysian animated works. Most of the

popular animation works are mainly produced by these 3 studios: Les' Copaque, Animonsta Studio and WAY Animation. R&D Studio is an up and coming animation studio, creating works for companies such as Walt Disney Company and Tokyo Broadcasting System.

### Notable events and works from 2020-2021

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#### Upin and Ipin

Upin and Ipin is Malaysia's longest running animation series and it continues to run on television until today. The series is about twins, Upin and Ipin and their adventures in a fictional village in Malaysia.

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#### Ejen Ali (Agent Ali)

A popular animated series and feature film about a boy Ali, who accidentally becomes an agent after using an intelligent system device prototype. The second season of the series ended in 2020 but due to its popularity, a third season will be released exclusively on Disney+ Hotstar for Southeast Asia only in 2022.

## Philippines

The history of the animation scene in the Philippines dates back to the 1980s, with Burbank Animation Studios (Australia) as the first foreign animation company to be established in the country. Studios like Toei Animation (Japan) set up their overseas outpost in the Philippines too and it has been around for more than 35 years. Toei Animation Philippines was involved in the creation of the popular Japanese series Sailor Moon. The first Filipino animation film festival, Animagination was formed in 1995 but it only had 2 editions (1995 and 1997). To foster the identity of Filipino animation, the Animation Council of Philippines was formed in 2000. It runs the Animahenasyon Festival which started in 2007 and continues to this day, celebrating animation from the Philippines. It is the only animation festival to continue over the years.

### Notable events and works from 2020-2021

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#### Trese

Trese is a dark fantasy, horror animated series based

on a Filipino comic series of the same name. It is extremely popular in the Philippines and was one of the top rated shows when it was released on Netflix in 2021.

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### **Barangay 143**

A Japanese-Filipino series about basketball that was first released on local television in 2018.

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### **Hayop Ka! (You Animal!)**

An adult animated romantic comedy film about a perfume sales cat who is torn between her askal boyfriend and a business dog. This film has a limited premiere screening before it was released on Netflix in 2020. It was officially selected at the 2021 Annecy International Animated Film Festival.

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### **Ella Arcangel: Oyayi sa Dilim**

Based on a graphic novel, this animation is set in a strange community called Barangay Masikap where both humans and monsters struggle for survival in a small portion of the big city. The film won a directing award at the Paris International Animation Film Festival (PIAFF) and at local animation festival Animahenasyon in 2020.

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### **Che Tagyamon**

A director, animator and editor based in Manila. She is an alumna of the Berlinale Talents 2019, Busan Film Commission's FLY Film Lab 2019, Docs by The Sea 2020 and ASEAN ROK's FLY where she was given the Best Fellow Award in 2017. Her works often address the subjects of diaspora, class, and memory in relation to women's psyche.

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### **Animahenasyon Festival**

Founded in 2007 the festival celebrates animation from the Philippines. It is the only animation festival to continue over the years.

## **Indonesia**

The first animation series that was broadcasted on television, Si Huma, was produced by the State Film Production Corporation in collaboration with UNICEF in the 90s. With the digital era of the 2000s, although Indonesia has continued to produce animated series for television and films, the progress and development is slow at times. With more animation studios being set up, there is the anticipation that more local works can be shown locally and internationally.

## **Notable events and works from 2020-2021**

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### **Rendang of Death**

Short animation, Rendang of Death, was selected at SXSW 2021 and Sundance Film Festival 2022. This short film is created by creative studio Percolate Galactic.

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### **Lanting Animation**

An animation studio based in Jakarta with more than 10 years of experience.

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### **Nuasa: The Movie**

Based on an animated series, Nuasa the film was released in the cinema in 2021. The film had a good box office run in the theaters.

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### **Si Juki Anak Kosan**

Originally published as a web comic, this is the first Indonesia animated series to be featured on Disney+ Hotstar.

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### **HelloFest**

An animation and short film festival that started in 2004. It is also part of HelloMotion, an educational academy that teaches animation.

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### **Animasi Club**

A forum for animation lovers, with screenings and discussions of animated works. They also organise the CRAFT International Animation Festival, which takes place biannually.

## **Thailand**

The first Thai animation feature film, The Adventure of Sudsakorn, was released in 1979. Khan Kluay, released in 2006, was a popular animation film and it spawned a television series. The Thai animation scene is not as vibrant since then, the market for original animation is still relatively young. The Thai Animation and Computer Graphics Association is a trade association that was set up in 2006, with the aim of developing animation products and collaborating with international partners.

## **Notable events and works from 2020-2021**

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No Thai feature films were released in theaters in 2020-2021

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### **Thanut Rujitanont**

An animator from Thailand. He founded his own

animation studio, Graphy Animation, with the aim of promoting the culture of animation in Thailand.

## Vietnam

The government-run Vietnam Animation Company was established in 1959, tasked with creating educational films for the public. It was the only professional animation studio for a long time until a few animation studios like Colory Animation Studio and Dat Phi Media were set up in recent years, though the industry is still considered young.

### Notable events and works from 2020-2021

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#### Con Chim Go (Wooden Bird)

Vietnamese animated feature that won the Golden Lotus Award and Best First Feature Film Director award at the 22nd Vietnam Film Festival, and the Golden Kite Award and Best Director award Golden Kite Awards 2020.

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#### Golden Kites Festival

An annual awards ceremony that celebrates Vietnamese films and television series, including animation.

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#### Vietnam Film Festival

Founded in 1970, the Vietnam Film Festival is considered a major event for Vietnamese cinema, with award categories ranging from feature films, documentaries to animation.

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#### Diana Cam Van Nguyen

Vietnamese filmmaker and illustrator based in Prague, Czech Republic. Her latest animated short Love, Dad, premiered at the Locarno Film Festival 2021.

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**Director Educator Deceased**

## Raman Lal Mistry

Reason for recommendation

Prof. Raman Lal Mistry fondly known as RLM to many in India specially for the famed National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad students, alumni, and colleagues. He was from a rural Gujarat and after his BFA from Baroda M S University he joined NID as a junior designer in 1969 and worked silently as an animation faculty and produced some of the finest yet unsung work of independent animation shorts. He got National Award for his unique experimental yet thought provoking animation short 'National Highway' on drunk driving and its fate. He mentored several students (including myself) with his smiling face and encouraged them to discover their original style of work. His unique drawing style remains largely unnoticed due to lack of acceptance of a variety of styles in the Indian animation market and is still relevant in today's time. His relevance I feel strongly due to his mentorship ability where students are working today, and their work is the true reflection of RLM magic to slowly growing animation with Indianness from a diverse India! He also designed the first national television of India, The iconic Doordarshan Logo with Ravi Shankar's music in it. In Chitrakatha'15 International Student Animation Festival from NID Ahmedabad we hosted a retrospective exhibition of RLM's work to acknowledge this unsung hero of Indian Indie Animation.

**Director Educator**

## Nina Sabnani

Reason for recommendation

A colorful journey with animation

storytelling from Prof Nina Sabnani is worth recommending I guess as she is perhaps the rare voice of Indian Independent animation scene where largely the nation constantly animates under the mighty influence of Hollywood templates! She is a fine artist from iconic MSU Baroda and then joined NID Ahmedabad in 80's as a young faculty trainee and got trained under Roger Noake, USCAD, UK and more. She also got grants to travel across Europe for a wider exposure of indie animation storytelling as well as more in-depth study of animation academics, research, and experiment. She nurtured & headed the NID Animation department for more than 2 decades and nurtured the curriculum along with her colleagues both from India and abroad. Under her mentorship various independent animation storytellers were born to lead the industry. Name a few are Late Arnab Chowdhury of Arjuna the Warrior Prince feature famed, Dhimant Vyas who worked with Aardman Animation, Shamik Majumder shined with Cartoon Network & Disney to name a few. She was also instrumental in starting the New Media department in NID Ahmedabad and initiated 'Sutra'-Storytelling in the Digital Age festival. She did her Doctoral thesis in traditional form of storytelling from India and kept on making films in collaboration with various folk & tribal communities from India. She taught in IDC Mumbai animation department for some time till she retired. Earned her national award for her film 'Hum Chitra banate Hai'. Currently she is working as an independent educator, researcher and yes still as an indie animation storyteller.

South Asia: India

Recommended by

# Sekhar Mukherjee

Professor, National Institute of Design, India

**Cartoonist** **Journalist**

**Animation Artist** **Deceased**

## Chandi lahiri

Reason for recommendation —————

An unsung firebrand forever young cartoonist, journalist and a self taught animator who was born in pre-partition Bengal and lost one hand in the freedom struggle. With his able hand he started drawing cartoons in a unique style and mostly connecting with people of Bengal region with various socio political issues. His command over bengali language being a student of literature and with an acute sense of local humour he earned household name during his work career in 3 decades from 50's to 80's. He was always a do-gooder and man of ideas. He has taken self initiatives to produce a couple of animated films with a homemade camera stand and with much struggle of self funding made films like 'Biggest Egg' & 'Under The Blue moon' etc based on his own story was broadcasted by National Television in Bengal. He also ran an animation & cartoon drawing session on television for children. However due to lack of distribution, awareness and apathy the films he made could not reach a wider audience nor it got preserved well till Chitrakatha International Students Animation Festival digitized them and also felicitated Mr Lahiri. His contribution needs to be remembered and this platform can be a good one for bringing back his contributions and can be an inspiration for younger generations to recall these unsung gems.

**Director**

## Vaibhav Kumaresh

Reason for recommendation —————

Vaibhav Kumaresh, founder and director of Vaibhav Studio has created some

unique animated characters with Indianness namely simpoo inspired from his school teacher, birthday ghost and more recently a series named Lampoot. Extremely gifted animator with a perfect sense of timing in animation, being a gifted classical vocalist he also at times give voice and sound to his own characters. A graduate from iconic National Institute of Design Ahmedabad this multi talented and humble animator is an inspiration to many younger generations of Indian animation enthusiasts to follow his path. Creator of original IP and use of local humour is worth mentioning. He is one I like to recommend too.

**Director**

## Ghost Animation & Upamanyu Bhattacharya

Reason for recommendation —————

Upamanyu Bhattacharya, a young maverick animation talent who immediately after his graduation from NID Ahmedabad specialised in animation film design went back to his city Kolkata and set up a studio named Ghost Collective with a couple of other young animator friends from NID. They earned a reputation quickly for their various style centric approach in storytelling and made a crowd funded animated short 'Wade' based on the climate refugee topic set up in a dystopian Kolkata which has half submerged in the water due to sea warming where tiger and human habitats got mixed up. This film earned recognition in the Annecy Animation Festival. Young Upamanyu also earned a project from Annecy Project competition for a feature animation written, designed by him titled Heirloom. He is a youth icon for hundreds of animation wannabes from India.



Life is indeed a journey. During this long journey we learn to crawl, walk, and run and duck and take cover and learn to tell wee little lies and the noble truths. Quoting from Joseph Campbell's fantastic book 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces'. Not to mention I mean by gender neutral use of 'Hero', "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man".

Stories of our life are always the same old survival story of individuals as well as in synchronization with the other living & organic beings. Animation or Trick film are one such beautiful medium which is why I feel this task of writing this article is an honor for me as a tried to be an animator then a festival director and now a founding director of new design school of repute, NID Andhra Pradesh!!!

The story I am trying to narrate here is how we learn to cope with the ups and downs and twists and turns of 'Paradoxical Indian Animation'.

Looking back at my journey, way back in 1992, I boarded the train to Ahmadabad, a sleepy western Indian town from my beloved city of Kolkata in search of animation dream and to learn the art of dreaming, to join National Institute of Design where Animation Film Design was the only authentic course in this country which evolved from past with an embedded philosophy rather than as a mere technical training institute. I was in daze, did not really bother to know about the destination as the destiny was overpowered with the urge to animate.

During this time my dream was also to become a satire artist who would survive contributing one's very own stories of life around with funny drawings. 1992 onwards my NID days and nights were like magic and in that journey, I came across many a mad soul, those who came to seek the same knowledge. I got intoxicated and enriched. The learning was always on as the campus was always buzzing with life. We used to publish the student magazine, organize Film Club screening & publicity poster, T-Shirt design, every bit was original idea and we completely got soaked in. After the student days got over, we all moved ahead

with our journey further with a bit unwillingness to leave the institute and join the existing industry that was immature, monotonous, and stifling.

Historically speaking, animation industry in India grew with many hiccups and in a scattered manner due to various reasons. After the initial socio-political turmoil during pre and post Independence era India started seeing the new beginning during Nehruvian era. So, the 1950s and 1960s were the golden period for India to see the establishment of many premiere & national level institutes of professional and doctoral studies along with institutes of performing arts, film, theatre, and design. National Film Archive was set up in Pune along with Films Division and NFDC (National Film Development Corporation) aiming to fund, promote and nurture the great Indian storytelling through the medium of moving image. After few years from that was born the cartoon division of Films Division, aiming to train and promote animation with original content and design from India. During late 60s Clair Weeks came from Disney to train animators at Films Division in Mumbai, those who were supposed to take the subject further across the country...maybe the NFBC, Canada way. But unfortunately, after few initial productions of high-quality animation shorts where early animators like Ram Mohan, Bhimsain, V G Samant, Arabinda Sen and few more worked, the animation culture could not spread across India but largely remained concentrated in Mumbai and Chennai. On the other hand, came the emergence of NID animation where along with Disney we saw the cross influence of many others that made the NID animation more of experimental in nature. During 60s came two Italian Designers Leo Leoni and Gulio Gianni and under their guidance NID produced the first ever animated short named 'Swimmy', which later during the arrival of Television became every household name.

We all grow up seeing those amazing magic of animated storytelling like 'Ek Chidria anek Chidia' (One Bird, Many Birds) by coveted animator late Bhimsen the founder of Climb Film Media, and many of us got hooked to the world of funny crooked lines, which intoxicated our minds in much earlier days. We also got used to seeing some of the animated

commercials, which along with Films Division's documentaries used to be shown before the screening of every film in the Indian theatres then.

But as a student of animation, we could not find much of the written material on Indian animation academics though and it was the time when animation could not spread across the country due to political and social volatility and uneven economical distribution plus added to that was Disney myth which gave many to chase the dream of creating 'Indianess' with crudely copied Disney characters which moved with formula of basic animation. I often encounter the comment that Animation must be smooth and to make it smooth it must be thousands of clinically drawn copied cartoon characters, which again are American characters in Indian costume! Moreover, whatever little efforts were on where in isolated pockets and they failed to connect and evolve the culture for this yet new medium of that time. So, without realizing the hard fact of the economic aspect as well as crunch of trained human resources, many an aspiring ones in the past, from time to time tried to make in scattered manner their home grown animation most of which did not see the light of the day or made a one time appearance on national Television channel and never resurfaced.

So, the first myth was, to become an animator you must know the skill of making 'Disney like' cartoon characters and draw thousand of frames and shoot it frame by frame and add whatever music to make it funny. Then the job market was limited to Mumbai and Chennai. Also, the misconception of copying Disney like huge production lead to crude copy of the west. Then came the poor distribution as well as conservative market of the common mass with uneven economic power. All those were the large issues, which hindered the growth of animation of various kinds across India. However, many unsung from time to time got seduced to this medium and ventured into their very own story of animation.

One such unsung whom I came to know during my Kolkata days is the veteran cartoonist Mr Chandi Lahiri who started working as a journalist and a political cartoonist with some local newspaper in Kolkata during the year 1940s till 1990. While working with the newspaper he and his self-taught techno savvy brother created a home-made stop motion camera and an animation stand. And with the help of one early edition of the book 'Art of Disney' he got into animating one of his own stories 'Under the Blue Moon' in late 80s. While shooting his film, he side by side worked extra for his regular contribution of cartoon

and children book illustration to survive. The film was briefly telecast in a local television channel but completely forgotten thereafter till we acknowledged his work during the 2nd edition of our very own Student Animation & Comics festival named Chitrakatha at NID from October 29 till 31st in 2009. Tis festival I am still curating as a revised version of Student International Festival of Design Stories, which I may talk about it in later occasion.

Here I would love to narrate another story of yet another unsung one who struggled to make animation films. This gritty woman named Late Ms Jayanti Sen is the daughter of a reputed light designer from Calcutta stage theatre Mr. Tapas Sen. She made her living from writing about film and animation in local Bengali magazines and newspapers occasionally till she got a fund from a government run television channel for an animation project she had proposed. She chose a classical children's' story in Bengali, 'Kuji Burir Golpo' (Tale of a Hunchback Woman) by the renowned author Upendra Kishore Roychowdhury, grandfather of the famous World Cinema director from India Satyajit Ray. The film traveled here and there for some time without much monetary gain then it ran out of steam. The technical hiccups and poor design could not make the film stay in our mind map for long. Due to this flop the local funders stepped back from their willingness to invest for further local content These all were happening during the pre-internet era and during the time of mid 80s to mid 90s. These projects are examples of premature deaths due to lack of proper knowhow, fund, skilled professionals, and marketing. The story of funding local content in animation largely remained the same across India during that time.

From here I will try to go to Bombay currently known as Mumbai, the commercial capital of India and all roads of aspiring storytellers from rest of the country aim to go there. It is primarily the fairytale of Bollywood with many success stories which pull the young ones to sail there to chase their dream... animators too are no exception. Narrating this tale in a very linear manner is impossible for me because of the complexities of the scenario and the layers to the reality and thus this tale of mine is like Indian classical music or bit like French New Wave Cinema, where Beginning, Middle and End has no order.

So here goes the story of one bright NID animator and his journey, none other than Dhimant Vyas, known as 'Kaka' amongst close circuit, which means a respectable adult in the Gujarati community as he hails from a stone carver community from Dhangadra, a

western village of Gujarat near Kutch. Dhimant's journey began at NID as a project assistant. Later he got hooked to then evolving animation department under the guidance of the then faculties. In 1989 Dhimant's dedication, hardworking ability, and keenness to learn animation as a student fetched him a seat to a two- and half-year post graduation program of Animation Film Design at NID. He was the third batch of Animation student as NID animation programme was formally launched in 1985. In the first lot, out of seven students who joined the programme, only one sustained the actual hard work of learning animation. During that time access to the rest of the world was limited, resources were hard to get, study material was only few Disney and some other animation films. Luckily NID archive managed to be built around this time due to the blessed history of many great ones coming and contributing their bit of experience like Leo Leoni gave the Italian flavour, Roger Noak came from then West Surrey School of Art and Design, Ishu Patel's NFBC connection gave NID the touch of Norman McLaren way of experimental approach and added to that was the design education's multi disciplinary culture which gave us a unique way of learning the subject. But the work method was still the hard-earned analog way where trial and error were the only hope, and which also was the best way to learn the subject. I was lucky to get Dhimant as one of my seniors when I joined NID as a student in 1992. We all got into the crazy way of working day and night and learned to get soaked into the world of animated story telling. On the other hand, as I mentioned earlier the only close by industry that gave hope to animators to start with was Bombay where the grand father of Indian Animation, Late Ram Mohan Sir was running his classical animation studio named Ram Mohan Biographic. But their method was hardcore commercial animation and the assembly line work. So, after NID dream, when Dhimant sailed to Mumbai like many others, he started his professional animation career with Ram Mohan's studio. The shift from the sleepy town of Ahmadabad where camel cart and nomadic tribes laze around to the big ruthless busy metro like Mumbai gave Dhimant a challenging welcome to face with. Maybe for many more here in vast wide amazing subcontinent named India similar stories need to be addressed.

In 1995 when I went to Mumbai to process my final project, as our school does not have the facility, I stayed couple of days with Dhimant and discovered the challenge of a wannabe animation storyteller's survival in Mumbai. I met him in his studio in Mahim in

the evening and from their both of us left for his home in Virar which was a two hour train ride and the train was always choke a block as thousands of wannabes with their very own dream chase, were going back to their shed far away from the work place. As it is the costliest city to live in, most of the dreamers initially must take an affordable place, as the pay packet is a compromising one. Like his stone carver community, Dhimant himself is like a rock from outside and after a year of Mumbai hardship he moved to many places of India to work which ranged from teaching at a privately set up animation school ZICA as senior animator, at an outsourcing animation factory Toonz Animation and few others, then came back to Mumbai to work with e-learning along with another fellow NID animation alumni Manisha Mohan. But Dhimant always remained a solid storehouse of energy and no matter whatever the work, he never compromised on the quality and that took him to Ardman studios to work for a series like Creature Comfort, Shaun the Sheep etc. After Dhimant, there were many others those who followed the path to Bombay and started their professional journey like this. My contemporary E Suresh, who is currently a big name in Mumbai, is the key one to establish Famous House of Animation which became popular for producing original animation with Indian themes and characters as TV commercials and channel series. It is at Famous only where again another animation icon from India today, none other than Vaibhav Kumaresh (currently running his own studio with the same name) started his industry venture and produced many a wonder. After seeing the crazy and scary challenge, I preferred to take another path, one less traveled in India, that of Animation academics. I have high regards for all of them as my good friends and fellow animation film makers as they survived the shock treatment, shown enough grit and convinced a whole lot of investors to invest in better animation. But those are not really a big number compared to the size of the country like India! For me they are always a live example and inspiration to share with my students. Today Vaibhav Kumaresh another gifted animator who became a fond household name for many with his amazing creations of Simpoo, Lampoot etc which needs a mention here.

After my graduation from Master in Animation from NID in 1996 I went back to my hometown Kolkata, hoping to start a small animation studio and produce rich local stories. I tried to survive doing odd jobs and exploring every possible place with my script looking for fund. By the way, during this time the

digital technology had seeped in. So funnily enough many potent investors showed eagerness to fund my project but enquired about what software I will be working with? They flooded me with questions like 'Do you know Computer?' or with propositions like 'I would like to make an Animation feature in 3D!'. Thus, my hope for ideal animation utopia got shattered time and again. Broken hearted I moved out of my city and in 1999 took a job at an outsourcing studio named Millitoon Animation in Chennai where some of my fellow NID friends were already working. Initially I was greatly rejoiced at the sight of the basic animation and light table and punched paper and much to my joy it was a new learning as Millitoon was a franchise of a French Production House named Millimages from Paris and this studio in Chennai fetched good reputation of delivering quality output. So, before every project the animation directors came down from Europe and gave the discreet description of the project to us, the key animators, the local supervisors, and the studio-managing directors, of whom the latter had nothing to do with creativity though. They were only concerned of how may minutes each one was delivering in exchange of money, money and only money!

But after couple of months, I realized that this is going to be a death knell for any animator's original thinking and creative juice will convert into mere fuel for the factory to run. After a year of working, I got tired and one fine day asked the studio owner that what was his plan for the next five years...his answer was to make more money out of this as he failed from previous business ventures like running electronic shop, beauty parlor and what not. I got the message and packed my bag and moved out of it. During this time, I met quite a bit of poorly paid yet ever-smiling, self taught local animators, most of them were from government art colleges and some were from private animation schools. We shared melancholic sessions of world cinema, music, literature and wondered when India will have a room for its original work? Today I wonder where all of them have disappeared!

After Chennai, I sailed again on the unknown river in search of animation and time passed by and today I am working with my Alma Mater, NID for the last seven years and when I see the green horns today, I feel hope is still there. Life is full of anecdotes and the animation anecdote from Indian subcontinent can go on and on. Most of the sensitive animators got tired seeing animation business seep in as the wrong concept of assembly line factory like production, and along with the IT boom the short-sighted investors

hyped the market with glossy cover to sell software giving a completely wrong image of this often-misunderstood subject of storytelling and as a result many students ended up paying hefty but getting bad education in some bogus animation program. A total mess was created out of misleading surveys, reports, statistics, publicity hype and promises. Adding fuel to this fire was the lack of good teachers, investors, producers, counselors, and above all of awareness. One of the crazy examples I want to share here is that of the massive media publicity a couple of years back about o 'India going to produce 100 feature animation in next five years. We saw the frenzy of hyper technology taking over art and storytelling...

Next came the economic slowdown. Many suffered and lost their jobs. The mushroom like shopping malls and parlours here suddenly look deserted. Call centres are getting quieter. But it is in this crisis time in India that we are seeing the hope of revival of good story once again. The spectacle is out, the small is in. The young wannabes are realizing that animation is much more serious subject than drawing superficial monsters or learning software. We are realizing the importance of good education, which forms the backbone of a good animation storyteller to build a better country. The yesteryears mavericks stood firm and tall and due to their rock-solid belief and their pragmatic approach and the never say die spirit we see the message spreading across slowly but surely now. The young ones are looking for better education to be a better animator. We teachers, the endangered ones are keeping our fingers crossed and hoping that this decade will see the beginning of the new era where 'India's animation survival kids' will show us the way to new shining path and teach the young ones the trick to survival of trick film making. And today with the advent of digital technology an IOT and OTT platform it's showing a silver lining for Indian Animation original content a sign of life, a hope.

I know it is not easy to be neutral and write a candid story about anything and everything from India... the country that survived many an invasion and welcomed everyone with a smiling face and accepted new cultures with such warmth. The happier side of the story is India is now a boiling pot of new stories which animation world is yet to see ...some of the glimpses we are seeing from the genius of Vaibhav Kumaresh's commercials and Music television promos and in some of the works of students from NID and few other schools across the country. Vaibhab's characters like Simpoo-a Sikh school teacher or the Birthday Bhoot (Ghost) or the Ooga Booga promo series where a

group of pre-historic cavemen play cricket among the Jurassic predators...speak volumes about his style so uniquely recognizable which perhaps give hope to young ones to feel confident about the future of the animated storytelling from India and to explore their own styles. We saw many studios close down, shove the promising animation projects under the carpet, leaving many heart broken but nevertheless continue their daily mundane work to pay the bills to survive in the big cities and still keep their dream alive.

End of the day I still feel there are lot to learn from the past blunders and hiccups but maybe sooner or later with the emerging new world order we are surely going to see the surprises as the aspiring ones are getting their space...be it virtual like U-Tube or Blog or physical place like TASI (The Animation Society of India) or Chitrakatha-International Student Animation Festival at NID or the promise of International Co-production. The new world order here is also opening the many new project possibilities and already few of the good animators are working with some of the sensible Bollywood Feature directors to do their pre-production works, storyboards etc to help and cut down the shooting cost, character designs, Visual Style & Treatment et al. The Department of education in India is realizing the importance of animation and comic book as a new way of learning serious subjects like History, Science, Geography et al. And now with the paradigm shift of post pandemic world I see a greater hope of young mavericks of Indian graphic storytelling coming out with more daring stories of personal narratives which blur the gender, boundary, border and religion.

I salute those brave-hearts from the near past, those who kept the light of hope alive and showed our younger ones a path to follow. Perhaps the new day will be a better one where many of the unsung whom I know, the ones who pawn their everything to money lenders to learn the art of animated storytelling, live in shanties of the ruthless big cities, travel in crazily jammed crowded local trains for hours to work in some unhealthy poorly lit studio, get poorly paid but never deter from their passion and dedication no matter how many times their talent gets misjudged by the short sighted semi literate bosses whose greed for money rule over the work... They cannot stop the fire inside those unsung and like the phoenix it is now rising from the ashes and is about to take off. There are individuals who are no longer afraid or ashamed to tell their stories, the story of their everyday lives, the story of the real India lived and experienced, not only the myths and the magic, the mighty and the big,

the glossy and the elegant but rather the stories of the struggle and the grit, the everyday and the mundane, the meeting and the separation, of the joy and the euphoria, and above all of hope and aspirations...I am sure soon we will discover our very own icons of animated storytelling from this more than five thousand year young subcontinent!

I feel with the new world order, for animation the newfound land is going to be internet, the liberation or big budget big brother dependence and OTT platform will pave the way for more brave stories of various nature will emerge from India, a great nation or tradition and modernity. By the ay not to forget I was part of coordination lead in making a cultural visit to Tokyo in 2013 with a team of 20 odd Indian representative from animation education, studios, training, and research to attend a 2 weeklong workshop with HIDA, Tokyo as part of bilateral relation between Government of India & japan. The workshop covered the entire ecosystem of Japanese graphic narratives. In this regard as the director of NID Andhra Pradesh and also as an Animation Film Designer my sincere request will be to look into possibilities to various educational and industrial collaborations between two nations, where Buddha plays a crucial role of a catalyst!

I will stop here with a quote from the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore... "If you shut your door to all errors truth will be shut out."

Arigatho...

To be continued.

Recommended by

**Amir Houshang Moein**

Animation Artist

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**Director**

### **Mahboobeh Kalae**

Reason for recommendation —

I recommend Ms Mahboobeh Kalae due to her brilliant film *The Fourth Wall*, I've found this animated short film so deep and impressive. As the first film after graduation, it's a remarkable step forward to find her own world through animation. The film's personal attitude gives us hope to see more exploration in her future films.

**Studio**

### **Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC)**

Reason for recommendation —

I also recommend the Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC) as a center for the production and distribution of documentaries and animations in Iran. In this center has been produced a large number of short animations that have been screened at various animation festivals. In addition, for its noteworthy achievements such as all its support of the Iranian animation community, including producing animation projects, helping to organize events, workshops, as well as supporting the student projects.

**Director Author**

### **Maryam Kashkoolinia**

Reason for recommendation —

I recommend Mrs. Maryam Kashkoolinia because of her activities as an independent animation film director and her educational courses, workshops for teaching traditional animation technics, and due to her tact as a former board member of the Iranian Animated Film Association, Asifa Iran, in 2019-2021.

West Asia: Iran

## A note from Asifa Iran's International Representative by Dr. Fatemeh Hosseini-Shakib

Assistant Professor, Animation Department Faculty of Cinema and Theatre Tehran Art University, ASIFA IRAN Representative

As a state-funded cultural institute responsible for supporting, promoting and funding documentary and experimental film and animation, DEFC (Documentary and Experimental Film Centre) has come a long way since its establishment in 1984, in the early years after the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

Back then, the centre was responsible to serve as a launching pad for creative filmmakers who needed a free space and fund to experiment and establish their career as professional filmmakers. Later an extra attention to less mainstream formats of filmmaking especially documentary and experimental short films (including animation) gradually created what today is a prestigious legacy of national and international award-winning films and filmmakers, a body of more than 1000 films along with many cultural activities such as a well-known documentary festival (Cinéma vérité), two specialist quarterly magazines, one of which dedicated to professional animation subjects (Cinema Animation Quarterly) and sponsoring or holding other cultural events, such as The Second National Animation Conference (2014).

But what prompts this writing, is the distinctly remarkable role the centre has served within the last two decades in endorsing and commissioning experimental animation, in an age where many traditional state-funded institutes around the western world have stopped their support for experimental filmmaking (i.e. the British Channel Four animation commission programme). A supportive and influential role that – honourably and justly – has been acknowledged, recognized and praised by the first edition of the Hiroshima Animation Season Festival, by granting the “Golden Carpster” award.

Traditionally and historically, The Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (briefly referred to as Kanoon in Farsi/The Centre), has been the major supporter and funder of experimental animation in Iran, pre and post revolution [\*]. Although Kanoon is still active, in funding and producing artistic and experimental animation in a limited manner, and importantly holds the TIAF (Tehran International Animation Festival), during the last two decades, DEFC has certainly created a radically vibrant movement within the experimental realm, by contracting and funding first films of promising artists as well as MA final animation films, on top of its mission to fund and produce art animations of high calibre by the established artists and animators. In fact, ever since 2013

when Seyed M.M Tabatabayeenejad took office as part of a deeper structural changes, the centre has gone from strength to strength regarding its ever-expanding support and specialist attention to animation, including a professional animation committee to select the animation proposals and mentor the filmmakers, all along their way of production towards the end game.

The introduction of a specific Animation Deputy within the centre since 2017, who was since then attended by a pioneer animation director and a university lecturer, Amir-Mohammad Dehestani, meant that the Centre's commitment to building bridges with the academic sphere was stronger than ever. As a university lecturer and researcher I have observed how this important move has mobilised our young animation talents to get funds and professional support for their MA animation projects, and how the whole discourse has positively impacted the quality and dynamics of experimental animation in Iran. Luckily, the DEFC's director since 2017 – Mohammad Hamidi Moghaddam – is keeping up with that focused commitment in many ways; the best of which perhaps is the heart-warming act of adjusting the DEFC's title to also include animation, as 'The Documentary, Experimental and Animation Film Centre'.

As Asifa Iran's international representative, I am pleased to say that in the latest version of Tehran International Animation Festival held in May 2022, Asifa Iran's especial prize was granted to Amir-Mohammad Dehestani and the DEFC, for their successful, unflinching and continuous provision for Iranian experimental and artistic animation.

So, it is to our great pleasure and honour that the activities and dedications of (now) DEAFIC to develop and deepen Iranian animation legacy has been recognised by the Hiroshima Animation Season Festival on its very first edition. On behalf of my friends and colleagues in Asifa Iran, the Iranian animation academics and professional animation community, I express our deepest gratitude and respect for your generous and thoughtful act and look forward to more intellectual interactions between the Iranian animation community and the esteemed Hiroshima Festival as well as the Japanese long-standing animation culture at large.

\* For a detailed account of Iranian animation history, including its tradition of experimental animation and its current status in both experimental and professional sector, please see: Hosseini-Shakib, Fatemeh (2015) 'Iranian Animation' in Jahed, Parviz (ed.) *Directory of World Cinema: IRAN*, Volume II, Bristol, UK: Intellect



# オセアニア オーストラリア

## Oceania: Australia

### Director

#### Michael Cusack

Reason for recommendation

Michael Cusack is the rarest of all animators, at least in a place like Australia – over a 30+ year career he has created a wonderful body of superb personal/auteur films whilst at the same time making a wide range of absolutely iconic, much loved and widely recognized commercial work. His commercials include those for “Schmackoes” dog food (probably recognized by everybody in Australia) and the stop-motion variants of the “Louie The Fly” ads, an enduring character that has graced Australian TV screens for many, many years. His auteur films are superb examples of stop-motion animation that truly breathe life into his characters and extract the maximum emotional connection from the stories they portray. He is one of the best stop-motion animators in the world and his films have screened at festivals too numerous to list. He has also been a generous ambassador for stop-motion animation, offering many classes, talks and festival workshops. He has effectively closed his Adelaide studio “Anifex” and is focusing on more personal projects in a home studio but his place and that of Anifex in the history of Australian animation is a remarkable one.

### Director

#### Paul Fletcher

Reason for recommendation

Paul Fletcher’s impact on the Australian animation scene has been profound. For more than 20 years he taught some of the best emerging animators who studied at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne. Over all of these years,

this course focused on animation as an artform and produced animators who went on to make their own independent films, occupy prominent places in the commercial animation sector or take up places within the tertiary animation sector. Paul’s teaching style displays an almost unimaginable depth of patience and combines that with a non-judgmental approach regarding technique and genre – this has allowed several generations of Australian animators to find their own ‘voice’ as animators and contributed in no small way to the diversity of Australian animation. A significant percentage of Australian animators learned their craft and found their feet in Paul’s classes. His teaching methods have also seen him establish a wide range of ‘off-beat’ non-campus animation programs that have seen students crafting animation specifically for planetarium domes, small screens hidden in zoos and VJ projects that have screened in any number of environments and events.

In addition to this, and perhaps all the more surprising, Paul has created one of the most extensive bodies of personal work of any animator working in Australia. Highly experimental, this abstract animation is utterly at odds with virtually everything he teaches his students to create. But this work has screened at numerous specialist festivals all over the world, has been included in exhibitions at a variety of Australian galleries and has been the basis for collaborations with musicians, sound artists, classical music composers and a wide range of experimental arts festivals and events.

Paul retired from teaching at the end of 2020 and with him went an entire history of teaching animation



in Australia. His personal work continues however and his 'semi' retirement promises to give him time to realise ever more complex and interesting personal work.

#### Director

### Annie Murray

Reason for recommendation

Annie is Australia's animator to watch. Originally an adult student studying under Paul Fletcher at VCA (Victorian College of the Arts), her work is developing and diversifying rapidly. Her initial films from the early/middle 2010's were bold, colourful and often wickedly irreverent and were the types of films that would be readily recognizable to any fan of animation festivals. She still makes this kind of work but increasingly she is focusing on pushing animation into spaces such as large screen commissions, multi-artist real-time presentations and connections between animated work and static gallery style artworks, particularly in the VR & AR spaces. As a musician and artist, she brings many of the sensibilities of those artforms to the structure of her animated work and while this can sometimes mean that some of that work struggles to find a natural 'home' or exhibition opportunity, the outcome is usually provocative and challenging to the 'gate-keepers' of those spaces. Annie is also involved in a number of music video and animated documentary projects and the best of those attempt the same boundary-pushing agenda. Annie is one of the true independents most likely to play a major role in defining what animation is in the coming years.

#### Director

### Dennis Tupicoff

Reason for recommendation

In many ways Dennis has been the face of auteur Australian animation at the international animation festival level for decades. Changes in funding for animation in Australia have seen him reduce his output and change his animation style in recent years but the body of work that Dennis has created over the course of his career is arguably the singularly most important and creatively complete one of any Australian animator past or present. He has also been especially adept at bringing an Australian 'tone' and vernacular to many of his films. Two of his films in particular ("The Darra Dogs" [1993] and "His Mother's Voice" [1997]) stand as the absolute equal of any of his international contemporaries. And only Adam Elliot (currently 'locked away' working on a feature film) would come close in terms of the sheer number of screenings his films have achieved over the years; it would literally be in the thousands. But for the lack of profile and appreciation that animation has as an artform within the wider Australian community, Dennis would be regarded by all as a great Australian artist and a national treasure.

Recommended by

**Malcolm Turner**

Director, Melbourne International Animation Festival

What's happening in the Australian animation scene at the moment? It's hard to say – and it probably has a lot to do with which door you look behind. The cogs that make up the Australian animation scene don't usually mesh together very well and in some ways may not even really be part of the same machine. I bring a couple of different perspectives to all of this.

First, some wildly unscientific observations from twenty-plus years sitting atop the often isolated look-out tower wearing the dishevelled uniform of the director of the Melbourne International Animation Festival (MIAF). This role afforded a great view but the job was often to try and spot the very first sparks of a forest fire through binoculars turned around the wrong way. For many months of the year I would be above the clouds anyway and couldn't see the forest, let alone the trees or any fires. Once or twice a year a group of people would swing by and drop off supplies. It used to (and still does) amaze me that so many of the creations these people made bore so little similarity to the terrain I observed below.

OK, sure, a singularly recognisable or immediately identifiable "Australian style" might be a bit much to ask for but where were the films that simply sub-consciously ingested the colours, the light, the heat, the sounds, the rhythms and the landscapes of Australia and turned those raw ingredients into loaves and (magic) puddings that couldn't have been produced anywhere except for this wide burned land? And how come so few of each year's disciples returned the following year with an offering? What was happening out in that forest that chewed so many of them up each year?

None of this is to be confused with a call for 'Australians' to make animated films that reflect indigenous First Nation's stories, culture or rich visual motifs. It's 2022 and if we've learned anything from the couple hundred years since the ragged outcasts aboard the 'First Fleet' looked at Sydney and thought it might be a nice spot for a prolonged picnic and a killing spree, it's dawning on more and more people that First Nation's cultural expression can only – and should only – come from those whose souls are woven together by it. The good news is that IS happening; PAW Media (aka Warlpiri Media) stands

as a remarkable example of Indigenous animating in Australia as are a number of the other members of the Regional Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMO) group. Although currently a trickle, none-the-less each year has seen more Indigenous crafted films dropped off at the base of MIAF's tower.

Hope springs eternal.

But as somebody who has seen probably almost every animated short film made in Australia this century I have long wondered why more of them don't have more of a uniquely Australian look, tone and 'feel'. Perhaps no such things exist; a proposition I'm personally not inclined to accept, at least in a generalist sense. Perhaps not that many animators care; a proposition that, if true, wouldn't be intentional. Perhaps there's no demand for it; there might be a nugget of truth in that.

The one caveat here is ... voice! For decades the Australian mass media insisted that every voice heard should sound quasi-British. This was equally, if not doubly, true of the nascent 20th century Australian live theatre scene. Even TV and radio ads – that most promiscuously adaptive of all media – were voiced by people who sounded like they owned some sort of weekend estate in the British countryside. But Australian animation was an early adopter of the Australian voice, at least on the occasion when a voice was needed. This persists to this day but it is selective – if the film focuses on a story that needs narration the Australian voice is more commonly deployed than if the film focuses on a particular individual, in which case the voice, as often as not, hails from a nether-world of accumulated and blended accents.

When I descended the MIAF watch house tower (apparently burning much of it down in the process) to focus on a sub-career in teaching I was – and remain – mildly fascinated at how often myself and my significantly wiser colleagues had to encourage our students to clearly situate their graduate films in and of Australia. Indeed, when I look back at the three dozen or so graduate films I've watched come to life in the last four years, I can think of only two that are clearly and unequivocally Australian.

Treading the tattered carpet and battling the unpredictable photocopiers of the Australian Ivory Tower

academy hasn't really offered any particular insight into why this should be. But it has provided something of a confirmation that, to a certain extent, the commodification of education and its overwhelming prioritisation as primarily a device for obtaining entrée into an 'industry' does not necessarily impassion every student to devote three years of their life to imagining, writing, planning and crafting a 'whole' film. There is zero demand for that skill in the Australian animation workplace which is OK. But harder to accept is the lack of acceptance for what a potential employer might be able to glean from that project as a hint to a wider skillset; a privileged ringside seat insight into not just the technical skills on offer but also the inherent breadth and depth of the creative reservoir the candidate would arrive with.

Views about the state and the 'accessibility' of the Australian animation industry vary wildly. Rosemary Woodcock, who recently retired after decades as an animation teacher at Melbourne's Deakin University had much to say on the subject when I asked her for her thoughts on the subject.

Her sense that the power and integration of a small number of increasingly dominant 'industry standard' software packages was having a homogenising effect on not just the style of films being produced but the very thought processes behind the creation of those films in the first place was one of her keenest observations. Her concern that, in many instances, course structures and marking rubrics used within the university animation training space forced many of those (us) involved to teach, make and then grade animation more within the confines of live-action filmmaking had a particular resonance for me. She worried, too, about the challenges students face in finding employment in an industry she sees as fragmented to a very significant extent reflecting, probably, a view held by many in Melbourne which despite having large studios such as Marvel and Method is still top (or perhaps bottom) heavy with smaller, more fragile collectives, freelancers and owner-operated facilities.

The sense of having a cohesive, structured and prospering animation industry seems stronger in Sydney. Deb Szapiro lectures at UTS (University of Technology, Sydney), has made a particular study of Indigenous animating and is passionate about supporting and mentoring rising female animation stars. Her pedigree stretches back to an earlier career when she produced a couple of the more iconic series of Australian animated films. She sights Jake

Duczynski as a name to take notice of in the Australian Indigenous animation space and name-checks Bonnie Forsythe, Rosemary Vasquez-Brown, Sara Hirner, Isabelle Coury, Bel Holborow, Jodie Austin, Genevieve Stewart, Jelena Sinik and Nicole Axiak among others as a "posse of great gals" that could collectively "slay the world".

Her views about the current state of independent Australian animated shorts reflects the wider social changes in most (hopefully all) Australian media.

"My main points would be [to note] the rise of strong female and First Nations directors," said Deb recently. "Most of the independent work is coming out of universities these days. A few themes that are dominant at the moment are irreverent female lead characters, ecological concerns, the reframing of First Nations' history in films produced by and for First Nations Australians.

"And although we still have a long way to go, animated shorts are becoming more representative of our population and culture. My students with Asian backgrounds, for example, have Asian protagonists and feature Aussie Asian culture."

Whether any or all of this represents dilemmas, distractions or just a continuum of an ever-changing space is hard to say.

Funding for independent work is precarious – to say the least. Federal funding for shorts is a rare thing indeed and, in any case, criteria explicitly rule out any filmmaker seeking it a second time. That is not the way careers are nourished. Earlier this year, what had been long term funding for the Australia's only international standard animation festival, the Melbourne International Animation Festival, was discontinued bringing to an end a 20 year history of screening international and Australian independent animation in the country.

At the same time, festivals such as VIVID (Sydney) provide a platform for animators to create bold, large-scale animated works that are seen by a large audience. And after a number of Covid-related delays, Australia's Oscar-winning claymation maestro Adam Elliot is about to start shooting his second feature film "Memoir Of A Snail". All hints and sneak peeks suggest that it will be absolutely vintage Adam.

Adelaide based Michael Cusack (inconveniently Australia boasts not one but two world beating animators named Michael Cusack) is busy wrapping up shooting his latest short, a stop-motion film to follow on from his recent award winning films "After All" (2017), "Meanwhile, At The Abandoned Factory..."

(2020) and “The Better Angels” (2021). Michael is probably best known in Australia as the animator behind the utterly iconic Schmackoes dog food commercials, a much beloved series of TV ads that ran for years. He and business/creative partner Richard Chattaway recently closed their Adelaide studio Anifex and Michael relocated much of the equipment to a smaller purpose built facility at his home near South Australia’s legendary Barossa Valley winemaking region. As he points out, the closure of Anifex will leave a rather large hole in the availability of professional stop motion production facilities in Australia but the future looks bright for an increase in his personal film production—and that is a very bright light indeed in the Australian animation scene.

Reports also abound of a new film by master Australian animator, Dennis Tupicoff. It constantly astounds me that I have to introduce class after class of budding Australian animations to his work. Certainly within the realm of festival and independent animation, Dennis would unquestionably be one of Australia’s most renowned, accomplished and acknowledged animation masters. As is so often the case, his name is better known overseas than at home. “The Darra Dogs” (1993) and “His Mother’s Voice” (2009) are among the most important, celebrated animated films ever created in Australia. A new film from Dennis would be something to look forward to but the release of a book covering his life and films this year is a highlight. Check out “Life And Death: My Animated Films 1976-2020” published by Routledge and available on-line... in fact the e-book version is in full colour!

ON the subject of books: Dan and Lienors Torre also released a book detailing the history of the Australian animated feature film “Grendel Grendel Grendel” (1981), a gorgeously designed film by Alex Stitt, the creator of some of Australia’s most enduring and beloved animated ad campaigns including the “Life Be In it” (exercise/health) and “Slip Slop Slap” (anti skin cancer) campaigns of the 1980’s. Their book “Grendel Grendel Grendel: Animating Beowulf” (Bloomsbury) is an engrossing and yet forensically detailed account of how Alex Stitt and a small band of artists created one of the more uniquely styled animated features ever made...anywhere!

And finally, a poignant farewell wave to teaching duo Paul Fletcher and Robert Stephenson. Each has their own personal animation practice, in Paul’s case a particularly prolific output of incredible experimental films that pour forth to this day. But for more years than these two probably care to remember or will

admit to they have been the animation teaching team at Melbourne’s VCA (Victoria College of the Arts): a course with roots that go back to the very earliest days of formal animation education in Australia. Together they have taught successive generations of budding Australians not just how to animate but how to think like animators. The films that poured forth from that course year after year made (and continue to make) the case for the creative firepower of Australian animators. And they did it with a patience and a willingness to coach that many teachers would envy. The likes of them - a “one-two” combo that they refined to an artform in its own right at VCA will likely never be seen again. But the fact they have been replaced by Rosalie Osman and Christie Widiarto says that that torch has been well and truly passed on to a new generation that will carry it far...and I’m not just saying that because they’re both now a couple of my bosses.

Recommended by

**Marco de Blois**

Curator of Animation, Cinematheque Quebecois

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**Director**

### **Terril Calder**

Reason for recommendation

Terrill Calder is an Aboriginal artist based in Toronto. Her latest short film, *Meneath: The Hidden Island of Ethics*, has been a resounding success around the world, including a selection at the Berlinale. It is surprising that this artist, whose work spans almost 15 years, has only recently been discovered by animation specialists. *Meneath* is characteristic of the filmmaker's approach: puppets with strong textures, a staging inspired by the frontality of the theater and a subject matter where personal considerations are intertwined with identity and political aims. Long marginalized in Canada and elsewhere in the world, Aboriginal peoples have found a strong and original voice in Terrill Calder.

**Director**

### **Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbis**

Reason for recommendation

Filmmakers Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbis are well known since their international hit *When the Day Breaks* (1999) was nominated for an Oscar. Both artists are interested in the themes of the moment and the fragility of life. Their most recent short film, which I had the chance to see, *The Flying Sailor*, seems to me to be a masterpiece. Relating the Halifax harbour explosion in 1979, the two directors tell how, in a few seconds, a man's life was turned upside down. With a powerful sense of direction, Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbis create a dizzying and moving story, not without a touch of humour.

North America: Canada

Recommended by  
**Alex Dudok de Wit**  
Journalist / Translator

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#### Designer

### Lindsey Olivares

Reason for recommendation

I didn't love *The Mitchells vs. the Machines*, but I thought it looked great. With its bold shape language, painterly textures, and experimental touches (like the 2D inserts), it reminded us that not all Hollywood animated features have to look alike. The production design was strong, distinguishing nicely between the Mitchells' lived-in home and the aseptic tech world. Credit to Olivares, the young artist responsible for it. This is her first credit as production designer—I think the filmmakers discovered her through her Instagram. I look forward to seeing what she does next.

#### Director

### Elizabeth Ito

Reason for recommendation

*City of Ghosts*, the first show created by veteran industry artist Ito, is unusual in many ways. It was made with children in mind, but instead of condescending to them with poor gags and lazy designs, it takes their perspective on things seriously. We follow a group of kids as they interview residents of Los Angeles, who are depicted as ghosts. There is no action, no wild adventure—just exploration of the city's charms. The characters are largely voiced by non-actors and the character animation is subtle. The show is refreshing, and I'm gutted that Netflix didn't renew it for a second season.

#### Director

### Dash Shaw and Jane Samborski

Reason for recommendation

Shaw and Samborski are the power couple of American arthouse animation. Their second feature, *Cryptozoo*,

is a big step up from their first, both visually and narratively: a delirious mash-up of ancient mythology, blockbuster thrills, 1960s underground art, and much more. It sometimes feels like a darkly funny Disney parody. Shaw directed, wrote and storyboarded; Samborski directed the animation; they both designed the characters. They made the film at their home in Virginia with the help of local students. The US isn't a great place to produce independent animated features, but this duo shows it can be done.

#### Producer Sony Pictures

### Kristine Belson

Reason for recommendation

During Belson's seven-year tenure as president, Sony Pictures Animation has transformed from a second-rate producer to probably the most interesting animation studio in Hollywood, with innovative films like *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* and *The Mitchells vs. the Machines* to its name. Belson is a shrewd executive, and well liked by artists and filmmakers. I think SPA will continue to evolve under her. During the pandemic, she suggested that adult-oriented animated movies will become more common—the studio is already developing a couple, including Genndy Tartakovsky's R-rated comedy *Fixed*.

#### Studio

### Titmouse New York

Reason for recommendation

The New York branch of Titmouse has animated on shows like *Big Mouth* and *Harriet the Spy*, but I'm not mentioning it here for its work. Earlier this year, it became the first studio outside Los Angeles to join the union The Animation Guild. This is a big deal for workers at the studio, which has had poor labor conditions in the past. It could also set a precedent, encouraging other non-LA animation companies to unionise—which is the Guild's goal—and changing the shape of the industry in the US.

North America: USA

I think one of the biggest topics in this period was COVID-19. Due to this, what kind of changes was brought in Hollywood animation?

The most obvious change has been the shift in the power balance from movie theaters to studios. This was happening anyway, but Covid accelerated it by giving the studios a pretext for shortening the window of theatrical exclusivity for films – something they've wanted to do for a long time.

The fact that animation production continued throughout the pandemic also attracted a lot of attention in neighbouring industries. Suddenly writers, producers, and actors from the live-action world were interested in doing animated projects. So far this has mostly been felt in TV, where many live-action series produced animated specials for the first time (and one show, Paramount+'s No Activity, turned entirely animated). But it will probably have implications for how animation in general is viewed. A few months into the pandemic, Kristine Belson, president of Sony Pictures Animation, said she believes there will soon be more R-rated and PG-13 animated movies as a result of a shift in audience attitudes.

This question can be related to the previous one but how influential were the streaming platforms?

Of course, it was a coincidence that so many major streaming platforms launched in the US just before or during the pandemic. But this, combined with the closure of cinemas, is what has given the studios so much power to control how their films are exhibited.

Streaming is now front and centre of the studios' strategies. For example, Disney has been reorganised so that movies are no longer made for theaters by default – they are just made, then a team decides whether to release them in theaters or on streaming. Other studios have struck deals to send their theatrical releases to streaming platforms 45 days after they premiere, which is much faster than in the past.

Animated films have been particularly affected by this shift from theaters to home viewing. Streaming is so beneficial to parents of young children – a family trip to the cinema can get very expensive – and so much Hollywood animation is aimed at children. So I think these films will be more likely to skip theaters

from now on.

Sony is the only major studio that doesn't have its own mainstream streaming platform. So far in the pandemic, Sony Pictures Animation's films have been sold to Netflix or Amazon. I wonder whether it will stick to this strategy. I'm also amazed by how Pixar, the most prestigious animation studio in Hollywood – maybe in the world – before Covid, has been completely sidelined at Disney. All its Covid-era films ended up on Disney+ without a theatrical release, which hasn't been the case for Walt Disney Animation Studios' movies.

Do you have any trends in awards, like Academy and Annie?

Let me mention streaming again. Traditional Hollywood studios, especially Disney, have dominated animation categories in the past, and this year Disney's Encanto is doing very well (bear in mind that I'm answering this question before the Oscar winners have been announced). But Netflix has been catching up. Its most acclaimed animated film yet, The Mitchells vs. the Machines, won eight awards at the Annies this year. Next year it will be in an even stronger position, with films by directors like Guillermo del Toro, Henry Selick and Nora Twomey in the running.

The rise of streaming platforms also poses interesting questions for award categories. At the Annies, films like The Summit of the Gods and Wolfwalkers have been nominated for "Best Indie Feature", even though they are distributed by Netflix and Apple – two huge companies with vast promotional resources. These films are basically indie in production but not in distribution, so what are they? Also, streaming platforms have allowed experimentation with formats: some titles blur the boundaries between film, special and series. This is a good thing, but confusing for awards!

What kind of trend did you see in the realm of technology?

One of the most transformative changes in technology in recent years is the rise of real-time rendering, via game engines like Unreal and Unity. This has already had a big impact on the VFX industry.

Now we're seeing animation studios embrace these tools, which let them produce features and series relatively cheaply. One example is Spire Animation Studios in the U.S. These companies will probably end up pumping out lots of shows for streaming platforms. They present a challenge to the traditional workflows used by Hollywood studios.

Hiroshima Animation Award is a part of Hiroshima Festival, a cultural festival for peace. In terms of "peace", did you see any particular topics in Hollywood animation? You can define "peace" in a broader sense. It can include these concepts like diversity / inclusion / anti-discrimination / anti-harrassment.

I'm glad to see studios gradually start to include more diverse casts of characters in their shows. In 2020, Disney – which once embodied conservative family values – finally allowed queer protagonists in one of its series, *The Owl House*. Katie in Sony's *The Mitchells vs. the Machines* is another example.

The problem is when companies embrace diversity in their productions while undermining it behind the scenes. Look at Disney's clumsy reaction, earlier this year, to Florida's "Don't Say Gay" legislation. In reaction to that, Pixar employees publicly accused Disney executives of censoring "overtly gay affection" in their films.

Did you see any trend setters or influential figures in Hollywood animation in 2020 and 2021? (sorry for this vague question)

I'll mention one person: David Ellison, the super-rich CEO of Skydance Media. The company's animation division, Skydance Animation, has expanded crazily in the past few years – and that's before it has even released a feature. Ellison hired John Lasseter to lead the division shortly after he'd left Disney because of a #MeToo scandal. That understandably angered many people at Skydance and throughout the industry, but Lasseter has stayed in his job. It shows how much money talks in Hollywood.

Since then, other high profile filmmakers have moved from Disney and Pixar to Skydance. Great filmmakers like Rich Moore (*Zootopia*) and Brad Bird (*The Incredibles*) are working on features there. I didn't think much of its first short film *Blush*, but there's no denying that Skydance Animation could be a major challenger to the established studios in the years to come.

Let me know if you have any keywords in mind to summarize the situation of Hollywood animation in

this period?

Two words that I think describe the current state of animation in Hollywood: growth (in large part thanks to streaming) and fear (to try new visual styles, and original stories that aren't based on existing books or franchises).

A buzzword we'll be hearing more and more in our industry: "metaverse". Hollywood animation studios are starting to talk about how they plan to develop their franchises through the metaverse, though what that means in practice remains unclear. What's certain is that people will be able to interact with well-known animated characters in increasingly complex ways, whether at theme parks or through apps and goggles at home.



# Latin America

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**Chile** Director

## Hugo Covarrubias

Reason for recommendation

I recommend Chilean animation director Hugo Covarrubias. He is the director of the short stop motion animation film *BESTIA* (Beast) from 2021, which focuses on events and characters of the Chilean dictatorship regime. The beauty and mastery of the animation serves as a conduit through which we reflect of the atrocities of the past and look forward to building a more diverse and accepting society. This film appears in a historical moment when the Chilean society is wondering how to proceed with those still open wounds from the dictatorship; and helps visualize what needs to change.

**Brazil** Director

## Camila Kater

Reason for recommendation

I recommend Brazilian animation director Camila Kater. She is the director of the short film *CARNE* (Flesh), an animated documentary coproduced by Brazil and Spain. Through the voices of five women, Kater reflects on what it means to be a woman and how a woman deals with the expectations of society. *CARNE* comes to light in a moment where patriarchy is being acknowledged and questioned; and uses a variety of animation techniques to introduce its audience into a personal, intimate space.

**Argentina** Director

## Juan Pablo Zaramella

Reason for recommendation

I recommend Argentinian animation director Juan Pablo Zaramella. His animation work spans over twenty years and has been important into establishing an animation scene in Argentina and all Latin America. Zaramella has been celebrated as a relevant person in the artistic scene worldwide and has recently been incorporated as a member of the Animation Branch in the Hollywood Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences.

Recommended by

**Alejandro R. González**

Director of ANIMA - Córdoba International Animation Festival

It is an enormous feat, and a huge responsibility, to write about the animation scene in Latin America in the 2020-2021 period, since the region spans over twenty countries with interwoven histories and cultures. There is no way that any text would be fair to all its intricacy, acting individuals and networks that are being built and consolidated. Therefore it is our obligation to point this out to you, reader, before you delve into the following paragraphs: please be aware that there are huge omissions on what you are about to read.

Considering just the Pacific Rim region of the Americas, the animation scene roars with intense production in México, Colombia, and Chile.

## México

In México we can find both feature and short animation productions in the selected years. In what respects to features, the production company *Ánima Estudio* had a highly prolific streak and premiered three features: *La liga de los cinco*, directed by Marvick Núñez; *Escuela de Miedo*, a British-Mexican-Canadian coproduction directed by Leopoldo Aguilar; and *El camino de Xico*, directed by Elvin Cabello. Other studios also had feature production, such as Huevocartoon Producciones with *Un rescate de huevitos*, the fourth film of a highly successful Mexican franchise which was directed by the creative team of Gabriel and Rodolfo Riva; Fotosíntesis Media with *Un disfraz para Nicolás*, directed by Eduardo Rivero; and *Koatí*, a Mexican-American co-production directed by Rodrigo Pérez-Castro.

Mexican feature animation of the selected period is heavily family-oriented, with stories that portray characters where you can easily identify both the good and the bad guys, and align with the good ones. All the films have a comedic tone, and the emphasis in co-production brings along some Hollywood muscle to the films, which favors their worldwide acquisition. The animation style is mostly cartoony, using both 2D and 3D-CGI techniques. Most films show little to no reference to Mexico, but those who do emphasize those "Mexico-for-export" traits: *Día de los Muertos* related characters such as *La Catrina*, *Lucha Libre*

fighters, spicy food, etc. Due to the pandemic, many of these films were not released in theaters or had a delayed release. Some of the features mentioned in this list have been acquired for worldwide distribution by VOD platforms such as Netflix or Disney+.

On the other hand, Mexican short film animation of the period that we are dealing with, escapes from those common places and brings personal and unique views of the culture that feel more legit than those of the feature films. *Pixel + Dinamita* (2020) by Fernando Llanos is a pandemic movie, in the sense that it was made because of the pandemic: the director found himself in lockdown with his family, and in the need to keep his family mentally sane in a time of despair, fake news and an overdose of information, he started filming a wholly independent animation to keep all the family focused. Therefore, the stars of the film are the director's children, who were 2 and 4 years old when filming. Through a mix of live action, rotoscope and 2D animation Llanos gives us the story of "Pixel" and "Dynamite", two superhero children whose mission is to fight COVID in a planet where everyone must stay inside. A mix of fiction and documentary, the film expresses the inner life and mixed emotions that children had to overcome amid the lockdown, and thus it helps to exorcise the fear that the pandemic implies.

Another short animation film from Mexico that stands out is *Tío* (2021), by Juan José Medina. A graduate of the Schools of Arts at the University of Guadalajara, Medina has been involved with filmmaking since 1995. *Tío* was produced by Outik with independent financing and received grants from Mexican art-related state institutions. It is possible to link *Tío* to some of Medina's former shorts since they all share the same eerie atmosphere, the use of stop motion as animation technique and a tactile quality in its visuals. *Tío* tells us about an event in the life of Miguel, a cocky teenager who reluctantly goes to work to the same coal mine where his brother formerly died, and where everything is ruled by a devilish creature called *Tío* (Spanish for uncle). Miguel finds himself facing an unnatural fantastic world where dead children are forced to work in the mine, having been robbed of their souls by *Tío*. The beautiful photography of *Tío* is both delicate and theatrical, in opposition to the harsh

events that are related. Before the film credits, Medina includes a title card stating that almost 21000 children and young people have been victims of intentional homicide in Mexico in the last ten years; and that there is an estimation that 30000 children and young people have been recruited by criminal groups. In this light, *Tío* is a desperate cry for reflection on the violence inflicted on children and youth in México, helping to build a culture for peace.

Colombia has been an important animation outlet for some time now, with a huge independent animation scene that deals with topics of representation, nature, society, and violence. José Arboleda's short animation film *El Intronauta* (2020) uses a variety of stop-frame techniques mixed with 2D to tell us the story of an artist that, unable to escape from a society that rejects nature and is saturated with media information, generates their own inner space where they can be free. Arboleda is a visual artist with previous experience in both the artistic scene and in commissioned animation production.

## Colombia

Also, from Colombia we have *Relatos de Reconciliación* (*Reconciliation Stories*, 2020) a feature animation production co-directed by Carlos Santa and Rubén Monroy. Santa is one of Colombia's most relevant independent animators, who has been working with the medium since the '1980s from an entirely artisanal and independent approach. Monroy is an animation educator and researcher who has developed content for both Colombian and Spanish networks. *Relatos de Reconciliación* began as a school project for animation students at Colombia's SENA, a state educational institution that provides tuition-free, vocational training in technological areas. However, the content of the school exercise quickly exceeded the scope of the classroom because of the social nature of the topics that were covered: *Relatos* deals with the memories of people who have lived along violence and war in Colombia. Their stories are documented through interviews and brought to visual form by the many animation students and teachers that were involved in the project. The educational and artistic project that gave life to *Relatos* started in 2015 and finished in 2020, with a feature animation and an online transmedia documentary.

The Colombian armed conflict spans for over fifty years, and *Relatos de Reconciliación* brings the testimony of both victims and perpetrators of such violence: Guerrillas, paramilitaries, social leaders,

students, victims from the LGBTIQ+ community, victims of sexual violence, drug trafficking, etc. In doing so, the film helps exorcise the pain of the Colombian society as a whole and builds a piece of communal, historical memory through animation. As in Santa's former films, *Relatos de Reconciliación* employs a variety of 2D, stop-frame and 3D CGI techniques, and the interweaving of them aesthetically echoes the different voices of the testimonies captured in the audio, making the film alike a patchwork that represents the Colombian society.

Chile is a country where the animation scene has greatly blossomed in the last 15 years. Educational programs in animation in Chile found a place in university and tertiary schools in the first decade of the current century, and in 2011 the Chilemonos Animation Festival was founded. Although other animation festival already existed in the country, Chilemonos was fast to reach prominence and in a few years annexed the MAI (Animation Industry Market), which helped establish links between the Chilean animation community—heavily focused on the artistic side of the craft—and the commercial demands of the industry. Also, the 2010's were a turning point in Chile from another point of view: a huge part of the society was not feeling comfortable with the role of the state and began questioning and manifesting against the order of things. This raised several cultural and political movements, groups, and collectives that aim to make a change in the current situation. These collectives, which exceed and go through the Chilean animation and art communities, expressed the discomfort of a huge part of society, and began to question the role of the state. One of the outcomes of this situation is the recent election of the first left-wing President since 1973.

## Chile

From Chile's recent animation production, the film that stands out the most is Hugo Covarrubias's *Bestia* (*Beast*, 2021), a short film which focuses on real events and characters of the Chilean dictatorship regime that was held in the country from 1973 to 1990. Executive produced by Tevo Díaz and with Cecilia Toro as production manager, the beauty and mastery of the animation in *Bestia* serves as a conduit through which we reflect of the atrocities of the past and look forward to building a more diverse and accepting society. This film appears in this historical moment when the Chilean society is wondering how to proceed with those still open wounds from the dictatorship; and

helps visualize what needs to change.

Although *Bestia* is based on real events, it is not a documentary. Its narrative is centered on the life of a female agent of the secret police in Chile that specialized in torturing women, specifically by training dogs to rape them. The cruelty of the historical events finds in Covarrubias' animation a medium that allows us to witness the horrors that mankind is capable of, and at the same time it establishes a distance that is necessary for reflection. *Bestia* has been screened widely in the festival circuit and has been awarded over 30 prizes worldwide because of Covarrubias's mastery in dealing with such a complicated topic. It was nominated in the 94th Academy Awards in the Animated Short Film category.

## Brazil

Besides the production of these three Latin American countries in the Pacific Rim, there are also relevant productions, people and events that should be noticed when discussing Latin American animation of the 2020–2021 period. Brazil is a huge player in the field. The 2021 feature animation *Bob Cuspe - Nós Não Gostamos de Gente* (Bob Spit – We do not like people) by César Cabral caters on some of the characters created by Brazilian comic illustrator Angeli, and brings them to an irreverent stop motion animation. The film received the *Contrachamp* Award at the Annecy 2021 animation film festival. Also, from Brazil we should mention the wonderful short animation *Carne* (Flesh, 2019) an animated documentary coproduced by Brazil and Spain and directed by Brazilian Camila Kater. Through the voices of five women, Kater reflects on what it means to be a woman and how a woman deals with the expectations of society. *Carne* comes to light in a moment where patriarchy is being acknowledged and questioned; and uses a variety of animation techniques to introduce its audience into a personal, intimate space. On a sadder note, the long-standing international animation festival from Brazil, AnimaMundi, could not go on for the 2020-2021 period, and its continuity in upcoming years is yet to be defined. This is a huge downfall for the Latin American animation scene, since AnimaMundi was one of the very few relevant animation festivals that gave voice to local productions.

## Argentina

Finally, we should mention Argentina, a country with a large animation history and a vibrant animation

scene. ANIMA – Córdoba International Animation Festival, the main animation event in Argentina, turned twenty years old in 2021. This festival is a meeting point for all the Argentinian and Latin American animation community. Also, animator Juan Pablo Zaramella, one of Argentina's animators of relevance, was appointed as a member of the Animation Branch at the Hollywood Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences. Zaramella's career spans over twenty years, and his incorporation into the Academy is a sign of the importance of his animated films in the worldwide animated artistic scene and especially Latin America. Zaramella is currently developing his first animated feature, under the working title *Coda*.

Looking forward, the future seems bright for Latin American animation.

GOLDEN CARPSTAR 2020-2021  
Animation Scenes in Pan-Pacific and Asia

2022.08.17

Production	Hiroshima Animation Season
Editor	Koji Takase
Translation	Japan Visualmedia Translation Academy (Japanese to English), Nobuaki Doi (English to Japanese)
Design	Tetsuo Igarashi

# Hiroshima Animation Season 2022

Organized by

Hiroshima International Peace and Culture Festival  
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Mitsui Fudosan Realty Chugoku

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