

December 2023



WARNER BROS. SHELVES JOHN CENA'S 'COYOTE VS. ACME' FEATURE, AFTER IT WAS COMPLETED

The *Hollywood Reporter* says “A previous Warners administration greenlit the movie in December 2020 as a production for HBO Max, its fledgling streaming service. It later announced that *Coyote* would get a release on July 21, 2023. No trailer was ever released for the film, leading to questions about the studio’s intentions for the project. In April 2022, Warners removed the feature from its release calendar, putting *Barbie* on its July 21 release date.”

The move to scrap the project occurred after veteran animation executive Bill Damaschke took over Warner Animation Group early this year. Years ago I was told that was a dangerous moment for works in production as the new boss will be disliked if a work in the pipeline fails. He will get the blame for the failure and if the work is later released and is successful, the old administrators will claim credit the production, so it can be a lose/lose situation for the new administrator.

It isn’t clear what kind a film it is but one person told me it is rumored to be more of a *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* kind of film than a cartoon. David Green, a filmmaker who worked on the production said, “I was surrounded by a brilliant team, who poured their souls into this project. ... Along the ride, we were embraced by test audiences who rewarded us with fantastic scores.” The press also reports the project had key Warner’s talent involved in front of the camera and behind the scenes. About \$72 million may have been spent on the project.

Killing a feature after it is in the can but before it is released, is not an unheard of occurrence. Warners shelved the \$90 million *Batgirl* and the \$40 million animated feature *Scoob! Holiday Haunt* in August 2022 as a tax write-down.



A GRASSROOT ATTEMPT TO SAVE THE FILM

Can a grassroots protest save a fun sounding feature from oblivion? A petition was created by an extra who is in the live action footage of the film. When his petition "Release the Completed and Highly Anticipated

Movie *Coyote vs Acme*" started to get publicity, Warner Bros. reacted, perhaps fearing the campaign to gather signatures might prove embarrassing negative publicity. Then they announced that they would be willing to sell the film. The petition website said they expected there would be several offers, but will they be big enough to buy it, or will WB simply go for a substantial tax write-off? Remember, they made an enormous profit on *Barbie* so they might want to claim a multi-million-dollar write-off on their taxes. Amazon is said to be interested in buying it. One friend wrote me, "The Warner's story is so utterly maddening - to think they have something that has a market and they degenerate creativity for a tax write off."

WILL CONGRESS OR THE JUSTICE DEPT. INVESTIGATE WB TO SEE IF THEY ARE USING A TAX SCAM?

Texas Representative Joaquín Castro is asking the Justice Department and the FTC to look into the matter, comparing WB - Discovery's "tactic to burning down a building for the insurance money." "The WBD tactic of scrapping fully made films for tax breaks is predatory and anti-competitive," Castro tweeted. "As the Justice Department and FTC revise their antitrust guidelines, they should review this conduct."

The *Hollywood Reporter* says this isn't the first time Castro has gone after WB Discovery for what he calls "anticompetitive practices." In an April 7th letter signed by Castor and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, which was a follow-up to a 2021 letter of the initial merger between Warner Bros. and Discovery, the two senators accused WBD of "hollowing out an iconic American studio" by canceling *Batgirl*, *Scoob! Holiday Haunt*, and the HBO series *Whistleblower*, which WB purchased following an intense bidding war and canceled after the merger.



SPIKE AND MIKE TYPE OF PROGRAMS MAY BE REVISED BY A NEW COMPANY

Skybound Entertainment, the company behind the animated TV series *Invincible*, has acquired the old Spike & Mike's animation shows, with plans for a revival. Spike & Mike began in the 1970s as a curator of programs of animated shorts. Their *Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation* is known today for helping launch gross out animation, while their traditional animation celebrations help promote the early work of Pete Docter, Matt Stone and Trey Parker and John Lasseter.

Skybound has acquired the Spike and Mike library and plans to "honor the treasured brand by relaunching the animation events, making animated shorts available digitally, highlighting current talent in the animation industry through collaborations and reintroducing the Spike & Mike library." They say they will distribute three kinds of shorts, the well-made *Spike & Mike's Festival of Animation*, *Spike & Mike's Sick & Twisted* (with lots of juvenile adult content no doubt) and what they are calling *Spike & Mike's Arty Farty*.

Craig "Spike" Decker, co-founder of Spike & Mike, told the press, "I'm incredibly appreciative of Skybound's respect and understanding of what the Spike & Mike brand has accomplished, and what we can continue to offer. I'm excited to see what they're able to do for existing Spike & Mike work and look forward to developing a new chapter with them."

Skybound will be seeking submissions for future programs. No details have been announced. I suggest you check their website for details and to see if your work might fit in. Their existing line of products suggests their taste in shorts is rather raw. And what is "arty farty animation"??? It sounds like they have no respect for it. skybound.com/.



I HOPE YOU GET A CHANCE TO SEE ‘THEY SHOT THE PIANO PLAYER’

It is a well-made hand-animated feature with an excellent soundtrack that includes excellent jazz and Bossa Nova music. It also has crystal-clear recordings of all the voices (it is in both English and Spanish with subtitles). It is a fascinating story about a fictional writer from New York searching to find out why a piano player known as Tenório (a real person) disappeared in Argentina in 1976. He was in a jazz combo on tour in South America and was there to perform. He was not a political person, but he may have been mistaken for somebody who was, and he might have been the wrong person at the wrong time. It was a time in history when anti-communist dictators were coming to power in Latin America and death squads and our CIA did their best to rid nations of people they considered undesirables.

The film is not a gripping “who done it” mystery, but an intelligent education about the dangers of right-wing politics. The story unfolds as the writer searches for information about Tenório, a jazz/bossa nova musician he admired (voiced by Jeff Goldblum). Sony, the film’s distributor, says the film is largely based on real interviews with people who knew Tenório and the adventure is accompanied by the music that he performed. (His full name was Francisco Tenório Júnior, but in the film his friends make a point that he was only known as Tenório.)

The film was directed by Fernando Trueba (Oscar for Best Foreign Film, 1992, for *Belle Époque*) and Javier Mariscal. Like their Oscar nominated *Chico and Rita* (2010) the animation is rough around the edges, but pleasing (not polished like a Disney film). At times it feels like a nicely filmed animated storyboard rather than an attempt to create smooth flowing movements, but for me the look is quite appropriate for a film about a jazz artist.

The moving figures were drawn as simple as possible to limit the amount of time animators needed to spend on each frame. To make each sequence more visually interesting for our eyes, the backgrounds are full of details including posters and photographs on the walls and objects on tables. The rooms look very lived in, not cleaned up like when some parents were expecting company.

The most memorable visuals for me were the music sequences where the colors were not confined by the dark lines that defined people and objects. The art seems fresh and improvisational. The artistic style reminds me of the attractive style used successfully by the French painter Raoul Dufy (1877 – 1953).

The pacing of the film is designed so we move quickly from one interview to the next as the writer seeks information about Tenório. To keep the film from just being a series of talking heads, the interviews often flow into musical sequences set in different locations (different clubs, recording sessions, jams with friends, practicing alone, etc.) What we learn is that Tenório was a nice soft-spoken and well-educated musician, that he was not involved with politics, that he had been married more than once and that (spoiler alert) he most likely was tortured and then killed by a “death squad.”

Trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOwajCDIwcg>

Note: the film raises questions about what is an animated film as there are no cartoony elements or surreal sequences in it. While animation was established and is still primarily used to depict imaginary stories, Winsor McCay found another exciting use for animation. His short the *Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918) was the screen's first animated documentary. Today, animated documentaries have proven to be quite successful in educating while entertaining audiences about social and political issues (*Persepolis*, *Waltz With Bashir* and others).



‘THE PEASANTS’ BY DOROTA KOBIELA & HUGH WELCHMAN IS MISTAKENLY CALLED AN ANIMATED FILM

If you read the excerpts of reviews on *Rotten Tomatoes* you will find a lot of misinformation. While it is a lovely looking film, several reviews praise the non-existent animation. I read, “The groundbreaking, hand-painted animation style of *Loving Vincent* is back.” Another review says it is “gorgeously animated but deeply depressing,” and a third proclaims “the Welchmans have made one of the most impressive animated films of the year.”

Look at the trailer and what you see is a lovely looking achievement, but adding areas of color over live action film isn’t animation. A basic definition of animation is bringing something to life and what the Welchmans are doing is just enhancing live action footage. The action was created by the live actors, not by the artists who made the footage more attractive.

I ask a filmmaker who attended a press screening of the film if there was any animation in it. He replied, “I don’t think they used animation. But the effects were impressive.” *Variety* said “hand-painting over live-action frames ... is a film that impresses in its painstaking, years-long construction, without ever really supplying a reason (beyond prettiness) for such a laborious aesthetic.”

Now parts of *Loving Vincent*, 2017, were animated. They had artist recreate several of his painting and the process was filmed a frame at a time as the painting grew. That technique was not used in the present film.

JEFFREY KATZENBERG IS LOOKING FORWARD TO USING AI TO CREATE ANIMATED MOVIES. HE SAYS IT WILL DRASTICALLY CUT THE NUMBER OF WORKERS NEEDED!

He told a Bloomberg conference in Singapore "It took 500 artists five years to make a world-class animated movie... but I don't think it will take 10 percent of that [with AI]." He predicts that generative artificial intelligence will cut the cost of animated films by 90 percent.



OF MICE AND MEN (AND CATS AND CLOWNS) ON DEC. 2 AT THE CASTRO

The San Francisco Silent Film Festival is presenting a full day of silent film programs. At the Castro Theatre, Sunday, Dec 2, 10 AM. Live music by Wayne Barker on piano and Nicholas White creating the sound effects for this 62 minute program. \$18 general, \$16 member, children under 12 free.

Program

- Fantasmagorie** (1908, Émile Cohl)
- How a Mosquito Operates** (1912, Winsor McKay)
- Adam Raises Cain** (1922, Tony Sarg)
- Amateur Night on the Ark** (1923, Paul Terry)
- Bed Time** (1923, Dave and Max Fleischer)
- Felix Grabs His Grub** (1924, Pat Sullivan)
- A Trip to Mars** (1924, Dave and Max Fleischer)
- Vacation** (1924, Dave and Max Fleischer)
- Alice's Balloon Race** (1926, Walt Disney)
- Felix the Cat in Sure Locked Homes** (1928, Pat Sullivan)

PS, whomever wrote up the above program was unaware of Otto Messmer's role working with Pat Sullivan. Otto, not Pat created, animated, and directed the Felix the Cat cartoons. Pat Sullivan was the producer, not the director, and spent much of his time traveling and promoting the Felix series. John Canemaker's book *Felix: The Twisted Tale of the World's Most Famous Cat* (NY, Pantheon, 1991) is well researched book on the subject and his documentary film *Otto Messmer and Felix the Cat*, 1977, 24 minutes also sets the record straight (It includes interview footage of Otto talking about his career). *Of Mice and Magic* by Leonard Maltin and other books also discuss Messmer letting Sullivan take the credit in exchange for a steady, comfortable income.

Similarly, Walt Disney stopped animating cartoons about 1924, but unlike Sullivan, Walt played an important role in script development and in other aspects of the studio's work.



CHICKEN RUN: DAWN OF THE NUGGET, a sequel to *Chicken Run*, (2000) is set to be released on Netflix on Dec. 15, and the studio will also release a new Wallace & Gromit film in 2024, premiering on Netflix and the BBC. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icfv_T5pkdI



**YOU MIGHT WANT TO SEE THIS ANIMATED PROGRAM ON DEC. 9
CALLED 'STRANGERS WITH CANDY'**

Saturday, December 9, 1:30 pm at the 4 Star Theater. 2200 Clement, SF. It is a program of unusual, bizarre experiences.

Deadline, Idan Gilboa, Israel, 13 min. A black comedy that explores the power balance between bureaucracy, death and feline devotion of the elderly. A brave friendship between two senior ladies sickened by society's disregard and disrespect.

Demi-Gods, Martin Gerigk, Germany, 6 min. A visual essay of war, narcissism and ecological destruction.

Edward Takes a Lover, Tom E. Brown, 4 min, In the not-too-distant future, a marionette copes with the never-ending pandemic by actively participating in the circle of life.

Evil Weeds, Cristina Merino, Spain, 5 min, An adorable grandmother lives with her grandchildren on a farm. Every night the grandmother plays with the kids, but later she arms herself to defend the farm house from a horde of zombies.

Forlorn, Alex St. Pierre, 12 min. A mercenary treasure hunter breaks into an ancient forgotten city, and encounters an entity she did not expect.

Night-Gaunts, by Monstark, 3 min. A traveler is snatched away on a monstrous voyage in this handmade puppet horror film. It is based on the poem by H.P. Lovecraft.

Oyster Bay Rebellion, Larry Guernsey, 4 min. Oysters rebel and attack their oppressors with sad results. An attempted parody of the *Walrus and the Carpenter* with a non-human cast.

Perfect City: The Mother, Shengwei Zhou, China, 7 min. A wooden mother decides to carve her root baby into a human form, due to the loss of her flesh body.

Stairwell, David Britton, 3 min. A young woman notices a troubling pattern in her building's stairwell.

The Dark Odyssey 2 - Ice Nexus, Michael Lavine, 12 min, A skeptical astronaut discovers a lost spaceship and enters a mythical space-time portal, the Ice Nexus, in search of the Inventory of the Mind.

The Golden Egg, Anneli Nilsen, 4 min, A thief is forced by a King to steal a dragon egg, but when the egg hatches...

The Old Young Crow, Liam LoPinto, Japan, 12 min, An Iranian boy befriends an old Japanese woman at a graveyard in Tokyo.

This Is Where We'll Build the Labyrinth, Greg Roensch, 7 min. the narrator ponders the news of the day, from the climate crisis to the first images from the Webb telescope.

Today, I Will Be The Bread, Andy Cahill, 10 min. A naked boy, an orange, a loaf of bread, a clock, a pair of hands, a cigarette, and a cloud of smoke are some of the things we will encounter.

Walla, Jamie Gower, 4 min. Why is the apartment downstairs so noisy? Maybe you don't want to know...

Xtemplar, Paul Furminger, Canada, 7 min. It takes place in a future universe in which humans are battling against a hostile alien race.

<https://holehead2023.eventive.org/schedule/65477a10f0f3d0005f5d8ae6>



JOANNA PRIESTLEY'S FILMS WERE ONCE AGAIN HONORED AT A MAJOR MUSEUM

To celebrate the creativity of the famous Burning Man festival in northern Nevada, award-winning Portland filmmaker Joanna Priestley presented in November *The Art of Burning Man*. It features sculptures, architecture, installations, and mutant vehicles made from 2002 to 2022.

“Burning Man has such a powerful impact on our culture and art. To have a local artist bring the visual and creative splendor of the festival to us on the big screen is an honor and a thrill.” -Melony Beard, Director of Events at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry.

In addition, Priestley presented the Portland Premiere of her new animated short film, *Jung & Restless*, with music by Seth Norman, sound design by Chris Barber and compositing and effects by Brian Kinkley. Special thanks to the Playa Foundation, Ford Family Foundation and Clatter and Din for their support. Plus the World Premiere of *Fleeting Marvels*, a short live action film about Burning Man by Priestley and Zak Margolis, with music by Seth Norman and sound design by Zak Margolis. An audience question and answer session with Priestley and film crew members followed the presentation.



APPLE+ IS STREAMING PEANUTS AND IS PRODUCING NEW SHOWS

Apple TV+ has chosen Wild Brain to create a new animated Peanuts feature and is giving non-subscribers a chance to see some of the classics. The streamer is now the exclusive home of all classic Peanuts specials, as well as new original series and specials. Apple+ will allow non-subscribers to watch Snoopy and Charlie Brown in their next adventure for free through the TV app for a limited time, *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* will stream free on the TV app on November 18 and 19, and *A Charlie Brown Christmas* is streaming free December 16, and December 17. These titles and the rest of the Peanuts catalog are available to stream year-round by Apple TV+ subscribers. Apple+ has already produced this year a new special, *One of a Kind Marcie*, and a new season of *The Snoopy Show*. In 2024, Apple says they will release another new series, *Camp Snoopy*, and a new special *Welcome Home, Franklin*.



PIXAR'S 'INSIDE OUT 2' IS IN THE WORKS

The Pixar sequel, which personifies the emotions of a teenager's mind as animated characters, will open in theaters in summer 2024. It includes a new emotion, anxiety, as Riley moves into her teens. The first film grossed \$857.6 million globally. The first teaser trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWavstJydZU>



SHANGHAI DISNEYLAND IS OPENING ZOOTOPOLIA THIS MONTH

It will be the eighth land within the seven-year-old theme park. It will be based on the animated film *Zootopia*, which was released in 2016 and will include the attraction Hot Pursuit, where guests can hop on an all-terrain cruiser powered by a trackless ride system in an action-filled chase through different parts of Zootopialand.

Another entertainment experience will be the Zootopia Park Apartments, where a lineup of animal residents will interact with each other and guests throughout the day. To give people a chance to buy something special guests can explore the store featuring Fashions by Fru Fru. There will also be several "casual walk-up dining options."

WALT DISNEY ANIMATION STUDIO PRODUCTION WORKERS VOTE TO UNIONIZE

Although one paper said Disney animators voted to unionize, that was in 1941. Now Disney production coordinators, production managers and production supervisors who were hired as non-union employees at the Wish Studio have voted to join the Animation Guild.

The Animation Guild has recently been making inroads with production workers at other animation studios including Nickelodeon, ShadowMachine, Titmouse New York and Titmouse Los Angeles.

DISNEY IS BUYING FULL CONTROL OF HULU

Disney has agreed to take full control of Hulu in a deal with Comcast, which has owned a third of the streamer ever since Disney purchased 21st Century Fox's entertainment assets. Disney will have to pay at least \$8.61 billion for the 33 percent stake in the streamer, and the deal is expected to be close in 2024.



SIX FLAGS HAS MERGED WITH CEDAR FAIR CREATING AN \$8 BILLION THEME PARK GIANT

The two companies will feature DC Comics and the Peanuts characters. Their park at Six Flags Great America features the ride Goliath, the world's tallest, steepest and fastest wooden roller coaster. The merger gives them a better chance to compete with parks run by Walt Disney Co. and Comcast's NBCUniversal. They will own 27 theme parks, 15 water parks, 9 hotels and resorts as well as safaris, marinas and other properties across the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

Six Flags has a deal with Warner Bros. Discovery for rights to characters from DC Comics and *Looney Tunes*, while Cedar Fair holds the rights to the *Peanuts* comic universe. The combined company will operate under the Six Flags name and will trade under the ticker symbol FUN.

The merger comes as both NBC Universal and Disney are expanding their respective theme parks' business lines. Disney is committing \$60 billion to grow its theme parks in California, Florida and around the world. Universal is developing a new theme park in Texas and a live Halloween Horror Nights attraction in Las Vegas.



'FUTURAMA' HAS A CHARMED LIFE

Hulu has extended the show's life for a second time. Hulu has ordered two more seasons (20 episodes) of the animated series from creators Matt Groening and David X. Cohen. Hulu picked up the show in 2022 and produced two seasons (20 episodes). The new shows will premiere in 2024.



IF YOU MISSED SEEING 'THE INVENTOR' IN THEATERS, IT IS NOW STREAMING ON VIDEO ON DEMAND

He inventing flying contraptions, war machines and studied cadavers. Now Leonardo da Vinci tackles the meaning of life itself with the help of French princess Marguerite de Nevarre. "This playful movie uses stop-motion and hand-drawn animation to pay homage to Leonardo as a thinker and tinkerer." *NY Times*
Trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ez1NHnJrk2Y>



Hungarian Oscar Entry 'Four Souls of Coyote' Animates Native American Creation Myth to Reframe Story of Climate Crisis

Anecy Cristal Prize winner Aron Gauder, who won the festival's top prize in 2005 for his time-traveling love story *The District!*, returned to Anecy this year to again win the top with the feature *Four Souls of Coyote*. It is an epic adventure inspired by a Native American myth about the creation of the universe. It is a warning that mankind is facing increasing dangers caused by climate change, global warming and other man-made problems and that we must learn to live in harmony with the natural world before it's too late. It will represent Hungary in the 96th Academy Award competition for best foreign feature.

The film begins in the present day with a group of Native American teenagers confronting a crew working on an oil pipeline project, something that threatens the land of their ancestors. It then introduces a Native American creation myth and the theme that humans and animals need to coexist.

The film was made with members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes as consultants and the soundtrack features music by several Native American artists. It has gone on to other festivals, winning the best picture award at the Shanghai International Film Festival, The full feature is on several websites. Trailer at <https://www.netflixmovies.com/four-souls-of-coyote-2023>



THE RUMOR IS FALSE, AARDMAN WILL NOT RUN OUT OF CLAY

The supplier that they have used for many years has shut down, but Aardman has found another company that has plenty of clay. The rumor was started when *The Telegraph* reported that the studio would be facing its “hour of knead” after the only manufacturer of Plasticine, the special clay used in their work, had closed its doors.

The studio had purchased just enough for one more film.

The studio had to issue a press release assuring fans they had no need to worry. Plasticine, beloved by animators, is malleable enough to mold but strong enough to keep its shape during filming, is still available.

TIM BURTON SAYS HE HAS NO INTEREST IN DOING ANOTHER FILM BASED ON 'NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS' He recently told *Empire Magazine* that he has no interest in doing a sequel, prequel or reboot of it. It is a classic and he wants to leave it alone.

AN EXCELLENT ARTICLE ABOUT HAYAO MIYAZAKI Google "Bill Desowitz, *The Boy and the Heron* is so personal." The article covers his coming out of retirement to make his new film, his friendship at Ghibli with the late co-founder/director Takahata, his needing a year to grieve before pivoting in a new direction, and other information not normally discussed by writers about animation.



'BLUE EYED SAMURAI' IS A SERIES ON NETFLIX, DEALS WITH MIXED RACE IDENTITY AND OTHER ISSUES

This is an adult animated tale of revenge set in a 17th century Japan. It stars a mixed-race master of the sword and the plot involves Mizu. Who was born from sexual violence that was committed by one of four white men. Now an adult, she has disguised herself as a man in order to seek her revenge, an act women are not culturally permitted to engage in. Mizu sets out to kill these men, including the one who is her father, all while keeping her blue eyes hidden.

Amber Noizumi, co-creator of *Blue Eye Samurai* with Mickael Green, says "we wanted it to break all of the boxes. Mizu isn't Japanese or white, she's not female or a male, and this show is not like anything anybody's ever seen. It's not a cartoon, it's not anime and it's not live action. See a full episode at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cm73ma6Ibcs>

DISNEY'S 'WISH' COMBINED 2D WATERCOLOR BACKGROUNDS WITH CG FIGURES *Wish*

combines state of the art CG figures with the traditional 2D watercolor art creates a “retro aesthetic.” By using lovely hand painted backgrounds with machine animated figures, the style enhances the fairytale quality of the work.

It was a challenge for the artists to use this combination as Disney artists had to discover once again some of the techniques of the past. For example, to render depth they studied the look of sequences shot on the multiplane camera stand. The background was in layers and if the camera focused on a figure in the foreground the focus gets more and more blurry or soft the further back you go. To address this look figures close to the camera have sharp details and edges, often stated with colored lines. The further back in space you go the sharpness softens, details begin to disappear and the edge lines may blur.

An interesting technique they developed was adding in the computer an overall look that everything was painted on watercolor paper. To do that they figured out how to add the texture of paper. They named the software used it “Dynamic Screen Space Texturing.”

As lovely as *Wish* may be in terms of its looks, the critics were not enamored by the film's déjà vu feeling that evokes some of the qualities of Disney's masterworks from the past. They looked past the film's charm and wanted more excitement of the action packed, hard-edge qualities that are found in the recent billion dollar mega hits. With 147 reviews from critics, they gave it a 50% rating; however, the public score was 81.



4 to 8 October 2023, Łódź , Poland

THE ART OF PITCHING

By Nancy Denney-Phelps

Every year I look forward to Animarkt. It is the only international industry event that is dedicated solely to stop-motion animation project pitching. Expert consultations, networking and pitching are key features of this event that attracts people worldwide.

The main goal of Animarkt is to create a forum where stop motion filmmakers, distributors, broadcasters, producers, animation service providers and industry representatives can network, foster international co-productions and attend masterclasses and workshops given by top professionals in their field.

Since 2017 I have been the pitching coach at Animarkt; it is very rewarding and I love doing it. Over the last seven years, pitching at Animarkt has grown from just being for short film projects to one that includes feature films, television series and specials.

Although I do not see the animators in person until we all get to Łódź in October, I actually begin working with them individually in August via Zoom. Initially, I assess where they are as far as developing their pitch, which is often nowhere, and assure them that by October they will give an excellent pitch. I then figure out who is going to need extra time with me. Most animators are not public speakers; they work in a room, often by themselves. Then I try to calm their nerves and assure them that by the time they get to Łódź, they will be fine.

Naturally, some people need a lot more work than others. That is especially true if their English language skills are poor. I explain to them that they must not be self-conscious about their language abilities and

tell them that Nik and I will probably be the only two native English speakers in the room so they should not talk too fast or use words that they don't understand. With people from Latin or South America, there is also the vast time difference to take into account when scheduling Zoom meetings.

Over the next month and a half, I spend a lot of time reassuring every one of the 20 project pitchers that they will be fine and help them put together a solid pitch. I also let them know that I am available at any time to meet with them over zoom as many as five times. My goal is to have everyone well prepared so that when we finally meet in Łódź. At that time all we have to do is a practice run-through and a little fine-tuning. Each pitcher also gets a session with my husband, Nik. He teaches them stage presence and microphone technique.

There is always a big diversity of subject matter in the pitches. From a tap-dancing ovary to Dust Bowl despair, there was something for everyone this year. Animated westerns seem to be popular right now. Bill Plympton's latest feature film, *Slide*, is a musical comedy western, and two of the projects pitched at Animarkt were also set in the West. One is a feature film from the UK aimed at young adults and adults and the other is a French television series for children.



Joseph Wallace from the United Kingdom with *THE VANDENBERG SISTERS*

Every year someone will ask me which one is my favorite project and my answer is always the same. After spending so much time with all of the people pitching and their projects, I love them all. I want everyone to succeed and I look forward to seeing all of the projects finished and shown on the small or big screen. Pitching at Animarkt is a serious matter. The directors of short film projects are vying for large awards including the top prize for short films WHICH is 40,000 and 20,000 PLN which is approximately €13,500. There is also Industry accreditation to MIFA at Annecy, and the Animond Award for marketing, audience and financing (given by The Animond Investment Fund for the Development and Production of Animation). There is also a post-production award funded by Polar Studio. There are other awards including in-kind services from the Audio-Visual Technology Center in Warsaw.

Feature Films and Television Series compete for such awards as the Kids Kino Award, which qualifies a project to Kids Kino Industry, Dragon Frame 5 Software which is the Audience Award. ORKA Studio, one of Poland's largest production and post-production houses provides post-production funding for all of the winning pitches. The prize winners are listed at the end of the article.

Unlike most pitching forums, the winning projects are selected by the company or organization that donates the prize instead of by a jury of industry people. This enables the donor to take into account what stage a project is at and who will most benefit from working with them.

Animation projects that are 80% or more stop motion are eligible to apply for a place in the pitching program. The short film projects can be in any stage of development or production but they must have at least the first draft of the script and be no longer than 25 minutes.

Feature films, television series and television specials can be in different stages of realization. Because Animarkt is aware of how challenging film production activities are for the environment, a new criterion in the application is an obligatory plan for sustainable green film production. A special presentation, open to all guests at Animarkt is held on how to make film production more green.

During Animarkt there are many workshops, lectures, and opportunities for one-on-one meetings. Unfortunately, I am in a lovely large room from 9 in the morning til 6 at night with people coming in to me every hour. I do get an hour for lunch. There are lots of other things going on at ANIMARKT and the StopMoLab but I never get to see them.



Tim Allen (Left) awarding the Young Horizons Industry prize to French Director Sylvain Delcourt and Producer Xavier Truchon for their TV series pitch of WELCOME TO VEGETOWN.

I am honored to be a member of the Animarkt Program Board along with puppet maker Tim Allen, producer and distributor at Miyu Distribution Luce Grosjean and Zofia Jaroazuk, who is a production manager and producer at Animoon. We help the Animarkt staff with programming and suggest people who might be available to be guest lecturers.

Animarkt Stop Motion Forum is co-financed from the funds of the International Visegrad Fund, and co-financed by the Polish Film Institute. Creative Europe Desk Polska is a partner of the event. The main partners of Animarkt Stop Motion Forum 2023 are EC1 Łódź – the City of Culture, Łódź Film Commission, Dirección General de Promoción de Exportaciones Chile, Instituto do Cinema e do Audiovisual I.P. / ICA and the Centre for the Development of Creative Industries plus the Loom Hotel.

To learn more about pitching a project at Animarkt 20 24 go to: animarkt.pl (Go to the bottom of the page and click on Regulations. Animarkt is open to projects from anywhere in the world.)

The StopMoLab

Now In its second year, the StopMoLab is presided over by Paulina Zacharek. It is a passport to a career in the stop motion industry. The seven-month program, beginning in July, is a unique training opportunity with workshops and lectures led by internationally known professionals.

Professional skills, business rules for working in the animation industry, building confidence in one's own abilities, and developing a career path are just a few of the skills that are gained by StopMoLab participants. During the seven months, all participants are mentored by a leading professional in the world of animation.

This year twenty-one people were selected for the program; seven people from each of three professions: animators, production managers, and art directors. The mentors were Tim Allen and Francesca Maxwell. Tim is a puppet maker known for his work on such films as Tim Burton's *Corpse Bride* and *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio* to name just two of the many films that he has worked on. As well as mentoring the animators and production managers, Tim also gave forty-four hours of workshops. In his step-by-step development for animating a stop-motion puppet ready for storytelling, the participants got hands-on experience.

The mentor for the seven art director participants was Francesca Maxwell. She has worked on numerous films including *The Corpse Bride*, *ParaNorman*, and *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*. She taught her group the fundamental aspects of design and art direction in stop-motion animation.

Along with forty-five hours of career mentoring and the two workshops, participants received thirty-two hours of coaching and an additional forty-two hours of lectures on various aspects of working in the animation industry to help them understand not only their chosen field but how it all fits together.

Most animation schools only teach animating and directing. Many graduates will not end up animating or directing, but in one of the many other areas that go into making a film. To this end, StopMoLab aims to bridge the gap between what is taught in schools and the realities of working in the professional world of animation.

Lectures were given by senior line producer Simon Quinn, producer Melanie Coombs, line producer Angela Poschet and Tobiac Fouracre, stop motion director and animator. They are just a few of the noted people who participated in the program.

Although the sessions were primarily conducted online, the StopMoLab participants did come to Łódź during Animarkt, where they had group classes and lectures and the opportunity to meet representatives from stop motion studios from around the world in person. I had the honor of giving the group a lunchtime motivational talk.

The cost of the entire seven-month program is €3,000. Pauline Zacharek said, "We want to give participants in StopMoLab not only professional competence but also help with discovering their individual strengths". The StopMoLab is open to applicants from anywhere in the world.

To learn more about the StopMoLab and how to apply for the 2024 session go to momakin.pl and click on education.

Momakin

Momakin is the organizer of both Animarkt and the StopMoLab. It was founded by three extremely talented and energetic women, Agnieszka Kowalewska-Skowron, Katarzyna Gromadzka and Paulina Zacharek, who met at university.

Momakin is described on their website as "combining the world of animation filmmaking with international production, distribution, and promotion. It supports animation projects at every stage of their development from planning and financing through production and distribution. It runs a talent agency and initiates and produces film projects in Poland and abroad based on a network of contacts that ensure effective distribution and promotion. Momakin also has an extensive distribution catalog for the cinema, television, and VOD. It is involved in the education and professionalization of the film industry".

While I was writing this article, I received an email from Agnieszka Kowalewska-Skowron saying that "After eight years of an extraordinary experience called Momakin" she will be embarking on a separate professional experience in November. Along with everything else that she does, Agnieszka is a VOD programme specialist in Kino Polska Group and will be working more in that area. Marianna Piskorz, who I have been working with on pitching for the last two years will take over Animarkt along with Paulina Zacharek. I will miss Agnieszka's sense of humor and dedication to Animarkt but I know that she will be successful at whatever she undertakes next. Now I am looking forward to seeing what new film projects Animarkt 2024 will bring me.

WINNING PITCHES SHORT FILMS

40 000 PLN – in the form of in-kind co-production contribution sponsored by Audiovisual Technology Center: **UKA UKA**, Director Henri Veermae, Producer Kadriann Kibus, Rebel Frame, Estonia

20 000 PLN – in the form of in-kind coproduction contribution sponsored by Audiovisual Technology Center: **OVER AND OUT**, Director Gustavo Amaral, Producer Mariana Lopes, Estudio Celestina, Brazil

INDUSTRY ACCREDITATION FOR MIFA 2024: **ENDLESS HOLE**, Director Vassilros Konstantinos, Producer Thomas Konstantinos, Studio Bauhaus, Greece

APA LAB AWARD: **OVER AND OUT**, Director Gustavo Amarral, Producer Mariana Lopez, Estudio Celestina, Brazil

ANIMOND AWARD: **OVARY-ACTING**, Director Ida Melum, Producer Kjersri Greger, Klipp og Lim, Norway, Co-Producers Jante Films, United Kingdom and Apparat Film Sweden

DRAGONFRAME 5 SOFTWARE: **WINTER IN MARCH**, Director Natalia Mirzoyan, Producer Kadriann Kibus, Rebel Frame, Estonia

VISEGRAD AWARD: **OVER AND OUT**, Director Gustavo Amarral, Producer Mariana Lopez, Estudio Celestina, Brazil

CEE ANIMATION FORUM AWARD: **A WHALE? A SUBMARINE? AND THE SOUND IN BETWEEN**, Director/Producer Gali Lea Blay, Germany

RADIATOR IP SALES DISTRIBUTION AWARD: **JOY**, Director Agata Wieczorek, Producer Aymeric Isnard, Futur Antérieur Ptroduction, France

ANIMATOR FESTIVAL AWARD: **WINTER IN MARCH**, Director Natalia Mirzoyan, Producer Kadriann Kibus, Rebel Frame, Estonia

FEATURES AND TELEVISION SERIES

YOUNG HORIZONS INDUSTRY AWARD: **WELCOME TO VEGETOWN**, Director Sylvain Delcourt, Producer Xavier Truchon, Toku Studio, France

INDUSTRY ACCREDITATION FOR MIFA 2024: **THE VANDERBERG SISTERS**, Director Joseph Wallace, Co-producer Delaval Film, United Kingdom

ANIMOND AWARD: **A YEAR OF BIRDS**, Director Isis Leterrier, Producer Marc Faye, Novanima Productions, France

DRAGON FRAME 5 AWARD: **A YEAR OF BIRDS**, Director Isis Leterrier, Producer Marc Faye, Novanima Productions, France

ORKA STUDIO AWARD: **BEA AND THE ISLE OF SPELLS**, Director Dominika Krysiewicz, Animoon, Poland

ANIMATOR FESTIVAL AWARD: **A YEAR OF BIRDS**, Director Isis Leterrier, Producer Marc Faye, Novanima Productions, France

ASIFA-SF IS A VOLUNTEER RUN ASSOCIATION

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ASIFA-SF is a chapter of: Association Internationale du Film d'Animation with over 40 chapters around the world. Membership is normally \$21 a year with the e-mailed newsletter, but right now we have a **COVID 19 SPECIAL OFFER**. We are only asking \$15 a year or \$30 if you wish to help the international association. When will it end?. We want to hold in-person events again.

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