

January 2023



FOR THE FIRST TIME ANIMATED FEATURES ARE INCLUDE IN 'SIGHT AND SOUND' MAGAZINE'S LIST OF THE TOP 100 FILMS OF ALL TIME The distinguished films are two by Hayao Miyazaki, *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) is number 74 and *Spirited Away* is 75. This is an acknowledgment that animation is an important art. The poll has been conducted since 1952, once a decade by the British film magazine. Roger Ebert once described the survey as “by far the most respected of the countless polls of great movies, the only one most serious movie people take seriously.”



THE COMPETITION FOR THE 2022 BEST ANIMATED FEATURE SHOULD BE A TIGHT AND EXCITING RACE It was an outstanding year for animation and the talent behind the films includes several people who have received Oscars or been nominated in the past. It is also unusual that one producer/distributor, Netflix, received not one, but six nominations for best feature.

Two of Netflix's nominated features, Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio* and Henry Selick's *Wendell & Wild*, are impressive stop-motion works. Both are exceptional surreal features by highly regarded directors and both have had a great deal of

positive press coverage. Several writers believe *Pinocchio* may be the frontrunner. A glowing review of it in the *SF Chronicle* called it “amazing,” at least three times.



Less well publicized is Netflix's *The Sea Beast*, an ambitious action packed sea-adventure using 3D computer animation. It features all kinds of nasty creatures that want to taste human flesh. Chris Williams, who won an Oscar for Disney's *Big Hero 6* directed it with Don Hall. Don Hall also directed Disney's *Strange World*, but it is less likely to get nominated as it didn't get good ratings from either critics or the public. It was inspired by adventure stories including Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth*.

Netflix also produced *My Father's Dragon*, from Oscar-nominated director Nora Twomey (*The Breadwinner*). She works at Cartoon Saloon in Ireland. The studio is known for visually stunning work including four gems that have previously received Oscar nominations (*Wolfwalkers*, *The Breadwinner*, *Song of the Sea* and *Book of Kells*).

Less likely to be nominated is Netflix's rotoscoped feature *Apollo 10 1/2: A Space Age Childhood*. It has an absurd premise of NASA building a lunar lander that is too small for an adult so they send up a kid. It was written and directed by Richard Linklater.

Marcel the Shell with Shoes On was a surprise hit with audiences and critics. The National Board of Review has named it as the Best Animated Feature of 2022. It has won an unusual amounts of

praise and it has also already won other awards, but I hope not for its animation. It has a heart and that resonates with people. I hope it doesn't get an Academy nomination because if it does that suggests you don't need quality artwork to become one of the top five animated features of the year. (KC)



Pixar's *Turning Red* by Domee Shi is another film that touches on the human condition. *Turning Red* follows a 13-year-old Chinese Canadian girl who turns into a giant red panda whenever her emotions get the best of her. Shi won an Oscar in 2019 for her animated short *Bao*.

Universal's DreamWorks Animation has two animated features that will be considered. *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*, was released in December. It is more than a sequel to 2011's Oscar-nominated *Puss in Boots*. Critics are impressed with its unusual script that Puss as having a crisis, fearing old age and death. and death. The character first appeared in *Shrek 2* which was nominated for Best Animated Feature (2002).

Dreamworks' *The Bad Guys*, directed by Pierre Perifel, is a stylish crime comedy based on a book series by Aaron Blabey. The feature took inspiration from the works of other filmmakers including Quentin Tarantino, Steven Soderbergh and Martin Scorsese.



Also in the crowded race for Best Animated Feature is Illumination's recent release *Minions:*

The Rise of Gru, a sequel to *Despicable Me*. This sequel might be considered worthy of a nomination as it has grossed nearly \$935 million at the global box office. Does box office success mean the film is worthy of a nomination?

Apple Original Films and Skydance Animation would love a nomination for *Luck*, but that isn't likely. It is a story about an unlucky orphan who stumbles into the magical Land of Luck. It was directed by Peggy Holmes and produced by John Lasseter. It is his first screen credit since parting ways from Disney/Pixar. Rotten Tomatoes gave it a 48% favorable rating from the critics and 67% from the public.



A serious entry from Canada is the controversial documentary *Eternal Spring*. The story is about an incident in 2002 when members of the outlawed spiritual group Falun Gong hijacked a state run TV station in China. They were trying to counter the government's propaganda against them.

Finally GKIDS, a distributor known for importing several anime titles each year, has one entry in 2022 that might get a spot on the short list is *Inu-Oh*. It is a rock opera from director Masaaki Yuasa (*The Night Is Short, Walk On Girl*).

(NOTE: Netflix entered the animation producing and distribution business in 2019 with the release of their first original animated feature, *Klaus*, and the French film *I Lost My Body* by Jérémy Clapin. Both received Oscar nominations. Since then Netflix has received an Oscar for the animated short *If Anything Happens I Love You* in 2021 and has become a major producer of animation.)

CRITICS CHOICE AWARDS The five nominations for Best Animated are. *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*, *Marcel the Shell with Shoes On*, *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*, *Turning Red* and *Wendel and Wild*. The nominations for Best Score include Alexandre Desplat who did the music for *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*. The ceremony is Jan. 15.

GOLDEN GLOBES NOMINATIONS The five films for Best Animated Motion Picture are *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*, *Inu-Oh*, *Marcel the Shell with Shoes On*, *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* and *Turning Red*. The event is Jan. 10.



DEANNA MORSE'S 'MONKEY'S T-SHIRT' WAS MADE FOR 'SESAME STREET' Deanna, working with a great team of volunteers, has kept ASIFA-Central going for many decades. Now she is also president of ASIFA'S International board.

She has a copy of her animated short *Monkey's T-Shirt* created for *Sesame Street* in 1991 on YouTube. Can you spot all six animals embedded in this puzzle? The work was animated by Deanna Morse and Rose Rosely. Billy Vits provided the sound track. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_UA92ow9Do Also www.deannamorse.com and www.moveclickmove.com

ANNAPURNA LAUNCHES THEIR ANIMATION DIVISION Annapurna Pictures, a new animation studio headed by former Disney animation executives Robert Baird and Andrew Millstein, are developing *Nimona* for Netflix. A 2023 release is planned. The film started production at Blue Sky Studios before its parent, Fox, was

acquired by Disney. Disney didn't want to complete it, nor did they need about 500 people who were on Blue Sky's staff. The picture has found a new home at Netflix under the direction of Nick Bruno and Troy Quane. The film follows a knight who is framed for a crime he didn't commit and a shape-shifting teen named Nimona.

Annapurna Pictures is headed by Millstein and Baird who previously headed Fox /Disney's Blue Sky Studios. During Millstein's tenure as president of Walt Disney Animation Studios, the company released *Big Hero 6*, *Zootopia*, *Moana* and *Ralph Breaks the Internet*.



ASIFA IS HELPING NATALIA CHERNYSHEVA TO REGAIN THE RIGHTS TO HER FILM 'SNOWFLAKE'

Natalia's work is lovely, so lovely that somebody took her name off the credits and added their own and a new title, *Away From Home*. Then they had the audacity to enter it into animation festivals! A festival director who has seen copies of both confirms both versions are identical except the noted changes.

ASIFA's international board is helping Natalia unravel this mess and letting festivals know about the situation. The announcement says the version in question "is not original work. It is a plagiarized version of the animation *Snowflake* created by Natalia Chernysheva in 2012."

The good thing to come out of this is it makes us aware of Natalia's lovely work and it is posted online. Enjoy discovering it.

<https://vimeo.com/user13095550>

NANCY PHELPS COMMENTS ABOUT THE FAKE AUTHORSHIP OF ANIMATED FILMS

"A few years ago Hungarian animator Reka Balsiger also had her film stolen. It was not sent to festivals but her name was removed, another name was put on the film and it was posted on YouTube. I wonder if this may not be happening more often than we think."



WILL BOB IGER BE DISNEY'S MR FIX IT?

When the company “retired” its last CEO and brought back Bob Iger, on his first day back (Nov. 28, 2022) he sought to reassure anxious employees by quoting lines from the Broadway show *Hamilton*. He said, “There is no more status quo ... But the sun comes up and the world still spins.” He then said, “That’s how I feel here. The status quo is gone. A lot has changed, but the sun is still shining, and our Disney world is still spinning.”

He acknowledged that austerity would be in order at the company. Disney’s board has giving Iger two years to turn the company into a more profitable enterprise and to find his successor. It isn’t know what Iger’s plans are at this point, but there is a lot of speculation,

When Iger took over as CEO in 2005 he noted that “creative decisions were made by the central oversight group called Strategic Planning,” and that the centralized decision making had a demoralizing effect on the senior leaders of the businesses. His solution then was to give the heads of creative segments of the company greater control. Once again the front office staff has perhaps too much control so Iger may restructure the way things get done and hand power back to the creatives. That might rebuild employee morale.

To build up the theatrical box office returns will Iger focus on longer runs for features before he streams them? Warner Bros. Discovery are now sending fewer films directly to streaming, hoping to recoup more cash from theatrical distribution.

Chapek’s raised prices across the organization including fees at theme parks. In some cases he upgraded attractions to justify the price increases. Domestic parks income rose but how will he deal with employee morale rumored to be being low in the parks division? And how will he restore

the cruise ship business as many people are well aware that Covid spreads quickly on crowded ships. We do know that Iger plans to keep Chapek’s hiring freeze in place. The press also says that the rumors that Disney has secret plans to do something with Apple are unfounded speculations (one rumor has Apple buying Disney). Iger does not expect the company to make any significant acquisitions during his second turn as CEO.

When it comes to the company’s differences with Florida’s governor over the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, he was very vague about that topic. In a town hall meeting with employees he said, “I had no idea what its ramifications are in terms of the business itself... The state of Florida has been very important to us for a long time, and we have been very important to the state of Florida.” He hopes things will stay quieted down,

He does feel technological advancement is important to the company’s future including new technology to tell better stories. That could include artificial intelligence to create drawings and videos, “something that at some point in the future the company will embrace,” but such a move is likely to be “a long way off.”

DISNEY EXPANDS ITS BUSINESS DEALINGS IN JAPAN At an Asia-Pacific conference in Singapore, Disney acknowledged it is expanding its long-running partnership with Japanese publishing powerhouse Kodansha. They have co-produced a growing slate of anime originals for Disney+ including *Tokyo Revengers: Christmas Showdown Arc*, which will launch this month. Disney already has a large library of Japanese anime and Korean dramas including titles like *AKIRA*, *Attack on Titan* and *Ghost in the Shell*.

Disney’s partnerships with the firm stretches back to 1950, when Kodansha first publish a manga art book with Mickey Mouse, and other characters in the “Disney’s *Manga Ehon* series. Kodansha has published the monthly magazine, *Disney Fan* for the last 23 years Disney also consumes other kinds of products for their Asian market including Indonesia romances, comedies, crime fantasy-thrillers and horror products

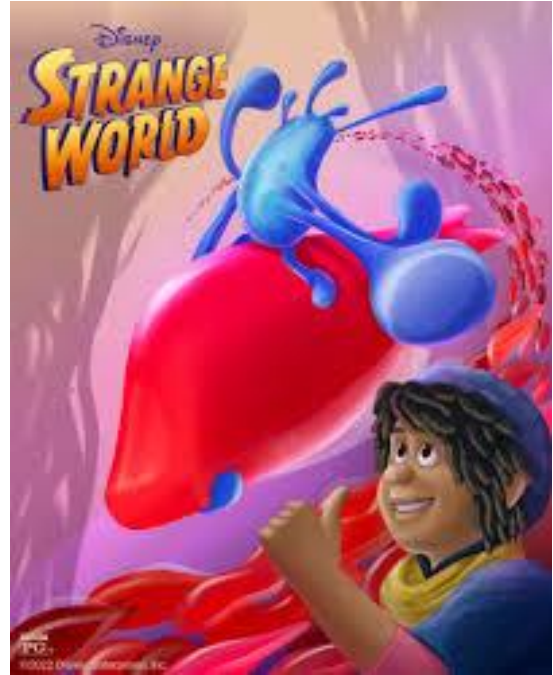
BOB IGER SPOKE OUT ABOUT GUN CONTROL RESPONSIBILITY ON THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF SANDY HOOK

Former President Obama and Bob Iger were guests of honor at a benefit for parents of the Sandy Hook victims and a group that promotes awareness of ways to prevent gun violence. Iger said preventing shootings before they happen should be among our highest priorities. He was being honored for supporting gun reform and the organization's "Start with Hello" initiative, which works to combat social isolation. He also said, "Those of us who are in positions to affect change, whether it's by influencing laws, shaping culture or supporting organizations on the frontlines, I think we have an extra responsibility."

Obama recalled Dec. 14, 2012 as the "single darkest day" of his presidency and spoke of his despair at the lack of congressional action that followed. "The closest I came to being cynical, was the utter failure of Congress to respond in the immediate aftermath of the Sandy Hook shootings. To see almost the entire GOP, but also a decent number of Democrats equivocate and hem and haw and filibuster and ultimately bend yet again to pressure from the gun lobby."

He then went on to decry the continuation of gun violence in the country, noting that there has not been a week in 2022 without a mass shooting in the U.S. "We are unique among nations in tolerating the proliferation of guns on our streets and allowing civilians to routinely purchase high-powered weapons of war. Nobody else does this. Those who profit from this know how to feed our fear and exploit our divisions and distract us to specious arguments that carnage and mayhem are somehow the price of our freedom. And even though most of us know better, even though not just the majority of Americans, but the majority of responsible gun owners understand that something fundamental needs to change, collectively we still refuse to act on what the data and common sense tell us."

While saying that he has hope for a cessation in violence, thanks to the work of organizations such as the Sandy Hook Promise, as well as the passage of President Joe Biden's recent gun violence legislation, Obama still finds himself getting angry and he urged others to use that anger to act. He also recited the names of those killed.



DISNEY'S 'STRANGE WORLD.' WAS A BOX OFFICE DISASTER

While *Black Panther* was a smash hit, *Strange World* was called a failure that would lose millions. The press lost no time in proclaiming it a disaster as it had the worst Thanksgiving opening in modern times in the US. It also bombed overseas. In the first five days it only brought in \$28 million for a film that cost \$180 million before marketing. The 2nd weekend it only grossed about \$5 million. It could lose over \$100 million.



While films with great reviews are beginning to do well, it got mixed reviews. Why risk Covid or pay top dollar for something that will be streaming within a few weeks in living room? Of course opening it right after the release of *Black Panther* might have been a major mistake. Also adventure film are sometimes seen as old hat. The film also lost its market in the Middle East when Disney refused to cut out sequences where a teenage boy develops a crush on another boy.

IS THE CONCEPT OF 'STRANGE WORLDS' TOO ABSTRACT OR SOPHISTICATED???

The characters in the Disney film learn their world is a living thing and that its plant-based power source is fading. To fix it they go on a fantastic adventure into a colorful world to find the root of the problem. The strange world includes a colorful forest of blue trees that light up; and other unique plant life.

Don Hall, the director says that when the truth about this world is revealed "it's a profound discovery and realization for our characters to know that their future, their lives, are linked to this living thing. In order for them to have longevity, this creature has to have longevity. They are symbiotically linked. We wanted to tell a story that speaks to human beings' relationship to our living world, but do it through the lens of an allegory."

Hall says the project involved research with climatologists, paleontologists and biologists. This research is reflected not just in the film's setting, but in its inhabitants. "The idea that the immune system could be the monsters in a monster movie, that was a really cool idea," He adds that the creatures that the characters meet in this world "are all based on real immune system cells and their functions within that system and how they react to antigens."

See the trailer if you are curious. The science fiction, fantasy world is quite imaginative looking, but I suspect that having a fully integrated cast, a character who is fascinated with someone of the same sex, and having a somewhat intellectual premise might keep people from buying tickets.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKh2G73gCCs>

The film was directed by Don Hall who won an Oscar for Disney's *Big Hero 6*. Rotten Tomatoes says the cumulative rating from critics is **73%** favorable and 66% from the public.

WILL THE NEW AVATAR BE A HIT? *Avatar: The Way of Water* only has a **77%** rating from the critics based on 315 reviews, but fans gave it a 93% rating. It made \$441 million worldwide the opening weekend, but that was less than predicted.

A 27 MINIUTE INTERVIEW WITH DEL TORO IS POSTED ON CARTOON BREW It is worth watching. Google '**Pinocchio**' Director **Guillermo Del Toro** On The Boundaries North American Animation Should Be Pushing



GUILLERMO DEL TORO HAS A USEFUL TIP ON CREATING MORE NATURALISTIC ACTING

In a recent article in *Indiewire* he notes that to make a character more naturalistic he has asked animators to add small mistakes and then have the puppet correct his or her action and continue. Those unnecessary movements/mistakes in a character's performance makes him/her seem more alive and less driven by pantomime. He used this technique in *Pinocchio* to give the characters a layer of credibility. The audience may or may not notice these small things "like Toby struggling to close a microwave and having to try again and really push it hard. It makes a drawing appear more human."

He feels part of the appeal of stop-motion is it "is the only animation technique that I fell head over heels for and tends to attract weirdness in a weird way." There's a practical motivation: longevity. "It's the only technique that a young animator can do with very few resources on their own." In Latin America, cinema tends to be closely tied to government financing, and the tools needed to make animation are not of the caliber of those used by DreamWorks or Pixar. "But if you want to compete in stop-motion, you need lights, artistry, and a camera, that's it...It's a really great tool to foster individual expression in animation."

In another interview with Frank Passingham, del Toro's cinematographer, he discusses moving a light slightly in a sequence to suggest it was shot out of doors and the sunlight has changed slightly. Another subtle trick, in the sequence when Pinocchio goes to town for the first time he added some blue light to suggest tension.



‘PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH’ A nice review in the *Hollywood Reporter* of *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* focused on voice actor Antonio Banderas. He apparently does an impressive job as an aging cat who is dealing with a mid-life crisis plus his mortality. Apparently Puss feels he has used up eight of his nine lives. He also says, “*Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* looks great, but what really makes it work is Banderas’ silky-voiced turn, conveying all of the character’s over-the-top feline suavity while making it clear that he’s very much in on the joke. Too often, animated films feature supremely overpaid and overqualified voice casts whom children, and most adults, couldn’t care less about. Banderas, on the other hand, is worth every penny.”

The film has a 93% rating from the critics and a 98% from the audience on Rotten Tomatoes. Expect the usual fast pace humor that includes lots of lines to appeal to the juveniles. I found it interesting that the *Variety* review notes at the end that “It’s alarming how quickly computer-animated toons start to look dated. Most audiences won’t pick up on it, but the character rigs are vastly improved here.”

NETFLIX TO PRODUCE A HORROR FILM WITH BAMBI SEEKING REVENGE FOR THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER The adorable deer apparently will go on a murderous rampage in the upcoming horror movie *Bambi: The Reckoning*, according to the website Dread Central. Filmmaker Scott Jeffrey said the upcoming movie will be gruesome and that work on it is about to begin. No details were given, but I guess the death of mom traumatized and unhinged the deer. But doesn’t the filmmaker know Bambi died when *Bambi Meets*

Godzilla in Marv Newland’s film of that name? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERBH1yUZaMU>

I wondered about Bambi’s sex as I am aware of a woman called Bambi. When I asked Gary Meyer about the deer’s sex he sent me a Snoops essay on the subject. It ends, “To conclude, if you are still wondering is Bambi a boy or girl deer? The answer is a boy deer. A boy deer is called a fawn in the earlier stage, and later one will be called a buck, stag, bull, or hart.”

WARNING: ‘WINNIE THE POOH: BLOOD AND HONEY’ ISN’T A CUTE ANIMATED FEATURE This isn’t the beloved bear, but a noisy, low budget, live action; horror film full of screaming women. Opens on Valentine Day. in 2023.



DREAMWORKS HAS A NEW 32-SECOND “CURTAIN RAISER” TO SHOW BEFORE THEIR FEATURES *Moon Child* took eight months to create. It flies past moments of their better known features before it gets to their signature logo. . **DreamWorks Animation Unveils New Moon Child Curtain Raiser – The Hollywood Reporter**

NICKELODEON PRODUCTION WORKERS HAVE VOTED TO JOIN THE ANIMATION GUILD Nickelodeon has refused to recognize their vote so one run by the National Labor Relations Board will be held soon. Animation artists are already represented by the union, but not production managers, production coordinators, and other staff workers. Nickelodeon’s lawyers apparently want to challenge who is and who isn’t qualified to be in the union. From my own experience years ago, if you were not part of the management/administrative staff you could vote and join the union if you won the election. For recognition.



Crowds watch characters parade at Magic Kingdom in Lake Buena Vista, Florida.

WORKERS AT THE HAPPIEST PLACE ON EARTH ARE ONCE AGAIN COMPLAINING THEY ARE GROSSLY UNDER PAID There are about 70,000 employees at Disney World, the largest single site employer in the US. It is also the world's largest theme park. Workers are pushing for better wages in the contract that is up for renewal.

Earl Penson has worked for 11 years as a food handler, at the Disney World in Florida. He only makes 50 cents more an hour than a new employee starting at Disney's current minimum wage of \$15 an hour. He works over 40 hours a week and he starts his job around 2 AM. He works eight to ten hour shifts and he does odd jobs as an electrician to make enough extra money to survive.

He says, "We're grossly, grossly underpaid for the hours that we work and the heavy lifting, it's like warehouse and driver work. A lot of us have the same story in not being able to afford the cost of living on the pay that we make. A lot of Disney workers are barely squeaking by. You have workers with families sleeping in their car."

Workers at the park are represented by The Services Trades Council Union (STCU), a coalition of six unions that represents 42,000 workers. The current contract that recently expired includes a no strike clause that remains in effect until a new contract is signed. The just expired contract established a \$15 minimum wage that finally went into effect late last year.

Bernie Sanders says, "Disneyland workers face ruthless exploitation. Their fight is our fight."

See Abigail Disney's film *The American Dream and Other Fairy Tales*. It is online at <https://americandreamdoc.com/>



A LOVING TRIBUTE TO NICK BOSUSTOW

Nick had a rich and colorful life. Highlights include working in Hollywood for 20 years, getting two Oscar nominations (*Is It Always Right to Be Right?* (1970) with the voice of Orson Welles won), chucking Hollywood to spend two years in Guatemala, and working as President of ASIFA-Hollywood including helping June Foray establish the Annie Awards.

There is a fun interview with him about his Orson Welles soundtrack at "**Orson Welles on one**": **An Interview with Nick Bosustow · Bosustow Family Film Collection · Indiana University Libraries Moving Image Archive**

The family website is

https://www.forevermissed.com/nick-onslow-bosustow/about?invitation_code=feeacdafab&utm_source=fm_emails&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=memorialInvitation&utm_content=visit_memorial

THE GLAS ANIMATION FESTIVAL IS MOVING TO SANTA CRUZ

They wrote "we have come to the difficult conclusion that we can no longer host the festival in Berkeley... We are happy to announce that our next festival edition will be taking place in beautiful Santa Cruz, California in 2024."

DISNEY+ IS PRODUCING 'STANDING BY'

Standing By will be an animated comedy about the embarrassments and melodrama of everyday life as observed by a team of judgmental, gossip-starved guardian angels. It is being co-created by Levy and Ally Pankiw (*The Great, Feel Good*), who worked together on the Emmy-winning *Schitt's Creek*. Bento Box Entertainment is the animation studio.



INTRODUCING BESSIE MAE KELLEY, A FORGOTTEN ANIMATION PIONEER

Mindy Johnson, who teaches animation history at CAL Arts, is researching Bessie Mae Kelley, who she believes started her career in 1917. In December Johnson presented her findings at the Academy's museum where they showed two newly restored films by Kelley.

Her *Flower Fairies*, 1921, combines drawn animation and live action footage. The article in the *NY Times* says it includes "sweet-natured, human-looking creatures with wings (that) awaken flowers and dance among them. Kelley completed *Flower Fairies* through the Brinner Film Co., a small Chicago studio that became known for newsreels."

"Kelley's second film had a Christmas theme and was made in 1922. It includes stop-motion animation and finds a girl reading a book beside a crackling fire, a stocking dangling from the mantel. Santa climbs out of the book and sets about his duties."

Johnson located a great-nephew of Kelly living in San Diego. He inherited rice paper drawings used in animation, "copper prints," a journal and scrapbooks; and photos with notations by Kelley. One of the cans of film he has included a badly damaged animated short that Kelley directed with characters from *Gasoline Alley*, the comic strip that debuted in 1918.

Johnson also discovered that Kelley worked on Fleisher's *Out of the Inkwell* series and helped

design and animate a mouse couple for a Paul Terry Aesop's Fables cartoon. (**note:** There were lots of mice cartoons made before Mickey and Minnie, but Walt's had great personality and character.)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/13/movies/animation-bessie-mae-kelley.html>

An NPR interview is also posted online. It mentions Kelley also worked as a quick sketch artist on the vaudeville stage. <https://www.apr.org/2022-12-19/bessie-mae-kelley-is-one-of-the-earliest-known-women-to-hand-draw-animated-films>

The article also briefly mentions two other female pioneers of animation. Tissa David was one of the earliest woman to direct hand-drawn work. She was credited as the animation director of the feature *Bonjour Paris*, produced by Jean Image in 1953 in France.. She moved to NY City in 1955 and worked on films produced by UPA, John Hubley, Michael Sporn and others.

There is a show reel of her work at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Agcgs7TfMZ0>, and Google her name to see a long interview with clips of her work in an event John Canemaker presented at NYU and other films that honor her.

Johnson also acknowledged Lotte Reiniger's *The Ornament of the Lovestruck Heart*, 1919, as an early animated short. It was made using silhouette animation, https://youtu.be/l_azNAkssVY?t=21



MARK Fiore

NEW MARK_FORE ANIMATION IS ONLINE In early December his socially responsible shorts addressed the exploitation of railroad workers by corporations, corporations trying to pay zero taxes and there was more noise from his ugly caricature of Trump. <https://www.markfiorey.com>



**15TH ANIMASYROS AND AGORA
AN ANIMATED ISLAND IN THE SUN
20 – 25 September 2022
Syros Island, Cyclades, Greece
By Nancy Denny Phelps**

Syros is a magical island any time of the year, and for six days every September AnimaSyros and the Agora transforms it into a wonderland of animation. This year the themes of the festival were equality, diversity, solidarity, and acceptance. In keeping with the themes, the opening night film was Jonas Poher Rasmussen's *Flee*. The animated documentary tells the true story Amin Nawabi who was forced to flee Afghanistan at a young age with his mother and siblings when the Mujahedeen took over Kabul. Now 36 years old, living in Denmark, and an academic with an impending marriage to his longtime partner, Kasper, Amin must confront a painful secret that he has kept hidden for 20 years. The story in *Flee* is true although Amin is not his real name for reasons that become obvious when you watch the film.



This year *Flee* made history when it was nominated in three separate categories at the Academy Awards: Best Documentary, Best International Film, and Best Feature Film. It won the

Grand Jury Prize at Sundance and Best Animated Feature Film at Annecy, to name just two of the many awards the film has received.

The ten films in the Anima Pride Competition covered a wide range of important aspects of the LGBTQ+ community. In *Eyes and Horns*, Marta Kai Kepata from South Korea wages a violent struggle between being male and female. Her exploration of masculinity begins with the Minotaur. It goes through a violent conflict between being male and female as lines blur and boundaries between the sexes merge.



Romanian animator Serghei Chiviriga tells the story of teenage boy who is confused by the entire world and his own body. In *Sasha* he is forced to discover, in a strange manner, the truth about his sexual identity by confronting his "other half". The jury awarded *Sasha* top honors in the Anima Pride category.



The film that stood out for me in the Anima Pride Competition was the historical animated documentary *Butterflies in Berlin – Diary of a Soul Split in Two*. Director Monica Manganelli uses a stunning Art Deco style of animation to tell the story of Alex who feels like a girl trapped in a man's body. In 1933 he/she moves to Berlin, then the capitol of sexual freedom, looking for a place to discover his sexual identity.

Thanks to an encounter with eminent sexologist Doctor Mangus Hirschfeld, Alex became the first transsexual in history to undergo surgery. Unfortunately, that happened at the same time as the rise to power of Adolph Hitler and the National Socialists which turned the capitol of sexual freedom into the most repressed city of all times.

The Italian/German 30-minute coproduction uses a mix of 2D animation, motion graphics, cut outs, computer animation, old photos, collage/pastiche, and matte paint – concept art. The director conceived each shot as a painting, each an homage to a different artist. Based on actual events, anyone interested in history will find *Butterflies in Berlin* a fascinating film.

In the past few years the Greek animation industry has grown in size and quality as evidenced by the 20 films from Greece, Cyprus, and the Diaspora in the Greek Hellenic Competition which has become an important part of the festival. The record number of films ranged from topics about Greece to a poignant story about a man facing financial ruin.

Aoos/Vjosa: Source of Life For Nature and Anthropolos, created for the Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropolos by Theodoros Vakrinou, Dimitrios Gazis, and Ioannis Skouras follows a maple leaf as it travels on the Aoos/Vjosa River from its source in Greece to Albania where it flows into the Adriatic Sea. It is considered to be one of the last free flowing rivers in Europe. Except for a hydroelectric dam at its springs, it flows for 272 kilometers without any artificial obstructions.

In *Christmas Present* Konstantinos P. Kakarountas poses a problem all too many people throughout the world are facing. When the financial crisis destroys your life and your only goal is to save your family, what drastic measures will you resort to?

I thoroughly enjoyed *Kavapivi (Canary)* by Chrysoula Koroves and Marios Gampierakis. The jury agreed with me and selected it as the Best Greek Film. The film tells the story of a canary born in captivity and a miner born into his fate deep underground. The pair form a special bond of friendship until a violent incident occurs. The story is well written and the use of charcoal on paper gives a gritty feeling to the film that enhances the harsh environment that the film is set in.



AnimaSyros is an extremely all-inclusive festival with many other things going on besides competition screenings. The Media Literacy programs are an important part of the festival. They are designed to give the community an opportunity to participate hands-on in the festival and learn about animation by doing in workshops.

A workshop for people with disabilities, led by Athens animator Elena Pavlaki, worked on films with “Imagine A Better World” as their theme. Inspired by art created by refugees, the filmmakers imagined and interpolated on film what it feels like to be forced to leave your home and go to a country where you are unwanted and feel uncertain about what the next day will bring.

Animator and graphic designer Margarita Simopoulou, in collaboration with the Elderly Care Center of Syros-Hermopolis, worked with senior citizens to create *Letter From the Past*. With the idea of a letter as their starting point, the group used testimonies from the first generation of Asia Minor refugees in Syros to delve into the past. They brought the stories to life using charcoal to create the images for their film.

This year marked the 100th anniversary of the Greco-Turkish War. At the end of the war in 1922 Greece absorbed an estimated 1.2 million Asia Minor Greeks who were forced to flee Turkey. They brought the stories of the refugee’s journeys and lives in their new homeland onto film using charcoal to create the images.

There were also other workshops, two different ones for teenagers, and one for adults. The Media Literacy Program continues throughout the year in both live and online formats. They are held not only in Athens and Syros but throughout Greece.



Daniel Nikolaou and Maria Christos with Nik at the opening night party

In its third year, the animated biopic series *Ninety Seconds* is a joint project of AnimaSyros and radio station 99.2 in Athens. It commemorates on film the lives of Greek song writers and singers who have left their mark on the country's musical history. A song is selected by Radio Station 99.2 and AnimaSyros for which they create a script. With the emblematic song as a starting point, up and coming young directors Maria Christou and Daniel Nikolaou from Cyprus created *Ninety Seconds for Manos Eleftheriou*. Manos was a poet from Syros. The song *Allos gia Chios (Another Fled to Chios)*, based on his words was released in 1972.



Hermoupolis

The festival is based in the beautiful city of Hermoupolis, named after Hermes, the ancient God of Commerce. It is the capitol of Syros Island and the best-preserved neoclassical city in Greece. The heart of the festival is the majestic Apollon Theatre which was built from 1862 to 1864 by Italian architect Pietro Sampo. The theatre is a symbol of the city's wealth and power in the 1800's. Culture and Art are still deeply rooted in the city's history.



As well as screenings in Hermoupolis the festival brings animation to other cities on the island. This year the AnimaSyros team took on a new challenge. They have taken over Hermis, the island's winter cinema, which has been abandoned for many years. They plan to bring this historic cultural space back to life while retaining its nostalgic taste of old Hermoupolis.

An important resident of the island is Animaspyros, the festival mascot. The figure was created for the festival's 10th anniversary in 2017 by participants in Professor George Lappes' Sculpture Workshop. The little fellow with the big glasses and skinny legs permanently lives in the Hall of Syros at Hermoupolis City Hall.

AnimaSyros is not only important to the island but to the entire country. As a mark of the esteem that the festival is held in Katerina Sakellaropoulou, President of Greece, attended the festival's closing night ceremony.

Over the 8 years of its existence the Agora has grown from a two-day event to four very busy days. The Agora is a separate section of the festival devoted to the business wing of Greek and International animation. It features presentations and round table discussions by eminent members of the animation community. It also provides an excellent opportunity for networking, fostering collaborations and synergies between directors, producers, distributors, and other professionals in the world of animation.

Along with all of the other programs at the Agora two Master Classes were held. First animator par excellence Joanna Quinn and her writer/producer husband Les Mills gave the audience a behind the scenes look at how they work together to create their award-winning films. From idea and script development to character development they stressed the importance of acute observation.



Kiki de Montparnasse

Freelance French producer Olivier Catherin took the audience through the ins and outs of international co-producing with France. Using three films that he has produced, *Kiki of Montparnasse* which won the César Award in 2014, *Franzy's Soup Kitchen* which is a French/Republic of Georgia coproduction, and *Granny's Sexual Life* which he co-produced with Slovenia, he covered why you should choose the co-production route. He also outlined what possibilities are specifically available in France for co-productions. Olivier also outlined what challenges and difficulties one should consider when working with France. <https://en.unifrance.org/movie/35470/kiki-of-montparnasse>

I had the honor of interviewing American writer/producer Chris Nee on stage. She is a multi-award-winning creator and executive producer of such animated series as *Doc McStuffins*; *Ada Twist, Scientist*; *The Little Doctor*; and *Vampirina*. Her latest project is the Netflix series *We the People* which she co-produced with Barack and Michelle Obama's Higher Ground Productions.

We the People aims to teach young people the fundamental principles of their civic rights as modern citizens in a new and entertaining way. The 10 three-minute music videos combine songs performed by contemporary artists with lessons on history and democracy. As part of her presentation, Chris screened a short film clip of the Obama's talking about why this project is so important to them. She also showed 10 episodes.

Chris Nee has received a Peabody Award given for distinguished achievement in the field of television production. She has also been awarded the

Humanitas Prize for film and television writing, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Image Award, and an Emmy over the course of her career.

The Agora features many presentations and round tables of particular interest to the Greek animation community. One round table addressed *Institutional Support for Hellenic Animation*. Another session presented seven Greek professors and animators discussing *Animation in Greek Speaking Universities*. They discussed the different applications of the art and techniques of animation across a variety of university disciplines and departments.

For me the heart of the Agora is the Pitching Forum. The event began with a four-day pitching coaching workshop led by Xavier Kawa-Topor and Catherine Totems. Catherine is animation consultant at L'Atelier des Sèvres animation school. Xavier is an educator, author, researcher, and director of NEF animation.

Five projects under development were presented to the jury. Two were from Greece and the other three came from Portugal, France/Greece, and Estonia. The jury was composed of Xavier Kawa-Topor, Catherine Totems, Olivier Catherine, Agora director Marineta Mak Kritikou, and myself.

All five projects were interesting and in the end the jury selected the French/Greek project *Seasons of a Day* by co-directors Mavra Peponi and Vincent Tsuli. The story of the poetic film is told by four young girls. The hand drawn film will be made up of interlinking haiku verses.

Many thanks go to AnimaSyros President Vassilis Karamitsanis, Festival Director Maria Anestropoulou, Agora Coordinator Mak Kritikou and the entire Team AnimaSyros for making me a part of the festival family. I think of you all with fond memories until we are all together again next September on Syros.

BILL PLYMPTON'S 'DEMI'S PANIC' IS BACK ONLINE It wasn't available while it was making the rounds of festivals, where it won four awards. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Er82vz6qJEE> See also his *No Snow for Christmas* at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSG_QIqvmA

THE OSCAR SHORT LIST FOR ANIMATED SHORTS

The shorts eligible for an Oscar nomination are screened by Academy members who vote for their favorites. There were 81 animated shorts that were qualified. Fifteen were selected to be on the shorts list. They will be screened by a wider audience who will pick the five that will get nominations. The list of fifteen was announced December 21. The animated films are listed in alphabetical order: *Black Slide*; *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*; *The Debutante*; *The Flying Sailor*; *The Garbage Man*; *Ice Merchants*; *It's Nice in Here*; *More than I Want to Remember*; *My Year of Dicks*; *New Moon*; *An Ostrich Told Me the World Is Fake and I Think I Believe It*; *Passenger, Save Ralph, Sierra*; and *Steakhouse*. Both a song and the score of *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio* are also on short lists,

In early January a larger body of members can screen the ten films and vote for the five that will get nominations. The five nominated films will be announced January 24 and the awards ceremony will be presented March 12. Once again the main event will take place in the Dolby Theatre in Hollywood.

THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS' NATIONAL FILM REGISTRY HAS ADDED 25 MORE FILMS

They have added to the list Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989) which they call a touchstone film during The Disney Renaissance of the 1980s and '90s. Among the other films added are several off the beaten track reels. They include Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, *Cab Calloway's Home Movies*, (1948-1951) the documentaries *Titicut Follies* (1967) from Frederick Wiseman and *Union Maids* (1976) by Julia Reichert. Also honored is *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982), starring Edward James Olmos, one of the key features in the Chicano film movement.

AUCTIONS GROSSED \$22 MILLION IN 2022 SELLING ANIMATION ART

Much of that total came from Heritage Auction in Texas. Their recent The Art of All Things Disney Animation Art Signature® Auction took in more than \$3.4 million in a four day sale. Hot artists include works from the golden age by Mary Blair, Eyvind Earle, and Carl Barks.

Some of the most memorable and beloved images sold for well above estimates. From the recent Disney Renaissance a cel from the *Little Mermaid* showed Ariel marveling at her new human legs. It sold for \$16,800. The *Lion King's* original storyboards of the opening sequence (by Thom Enriquez and Lorna Cook) sold for \$18,000. A cel from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* of Jessica sold for \$19,200.

Art from other studios is also growing in value. Made for TV material such as Mister Magoo's Christmas specials and Hanna Barbara cels of their well-known stars, Charlie Brown art and a lot of other TV stars have considerable value today. A production cel setup of Mr. Magoo as Ebenezer Scrooge recently sold for \$5,880.

Of course the biggest prices still go for breathtaking art from *Cinderella*, *Pinocchio*, *Snow White*, *Dumbo*, *Bambi* and other classics. An original concept painting from *Peter Pan* by Mary Blair sold for \$33,600 and an *Alice in Wonderland* concept/color key painting by her sold for \$32,400.

WHAT HAPPENED TO ED "ACTING FOR ANIMATORS" HOOKS

He is featured on a segment of a video called *People of Lisbon*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7n7smC4VaYEVER>

ASIFA-SF IS A VOLUNTEER RUN ASSOCIATION

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Special thanks to Nancy Denney-Phelps who has been having a wonderful time once again going to festivals in Europe. She also represents our chapter on the international ASIFA board. Emily Berk is our webmaster, and Eihway Su keeps our email list and does a dozen other things.

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**. As we get back in action we are only asking \$15 a year, or \$30 if you wish to help the international association as well.

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LATE NEWS: AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER crossed the billion dollar mark before New Year'

Eve. A critic on NPR said the motion-capture animation bothered her as it looked like it was stuck in the uncanny valley. Other critics complained of too many violent wars and the film was too long. It has also been accused of being a movie in search of a plot. Everyone seems to agree the special effect are its greatest asset.

Only two other films in 2022 have crossed the billion dollar mark, *Top Gun: Maverick* and *Jurassic World Dominion*. In 2019 nine movies crossed the \$1 billion mark worldwide so while the industry is recovering, it still has a long way to go.



The Flying Sailor

95th Oscar Shortlist Trimmed to 15 Animated Shorts

By Marty McNamara

Assessing the 81 animated short films that had qualified to contend for an Oscar this year, the Motion Picture Academy revealed its shortlist of 15 titles on December 21st. Academy members will further narrow the field to five nominees on January 24 and announce the Oscar winner at their awards ceremony on March 12, 2023.

Like last year's shortlist, this year's selection eschewed lengthy, glossy studio productions and focused on a wide variety of independent artistic statements by women and men of many ethnicities, artistic styles and social visions. Like last year, there will be no more than one (if any) deep-pocketed major studio among the eventual nominees and, if there is one, again it will be British rather than American. This too reflects a healthy movement toward the idiosyncratic over the formulaic. Last year's shortlist had an unusually high concentration of Asian films; this year sees a slight increase in representation of American independent work.

ASIFA-SF members who took part in online international festivals within the last 16 months will remember Ottawa 2021 highlight, *The Flying Sailor*, by Amanda Forbis and Wendy Tilby, whose Oscar nomination track record makes them the animated short's closest equivalent to Meryl Streep. This sensitive portrayal of an incredible historical fact also led off the compelling program of new animation from the NFBC that ASIFA-SF featured last month for members.

Another Ottawa 2021 standout was Špela Čadež's *Steakhouse*, recognized for best technique. Čadež, who made the unforgettable *Nighthawk* in 2016, saw *Steakhouse* win prizes at Annecy, Anima Brussels and the Annies as well.

Another stop-motion master, American Spencer Susser, saw comparable success at Ottawa and Annecy with *Saving Ralph*, earning Best Commissioned film at both. This shocking mockumentary on vivisection for the Humane Society International even received the Cannes Lions' Grand Prix for Good.

If you took part in GLAS 2022 online, you must recall Sander Joon's Audience Award-winning comedy, *Sierra*. This clever and hilarious narrative with its quirky design would have to be the funniest entry on this shortlist.

By contrast, *Passenger*, by Juan Pablo Zaramella of *Luminaris* fame, though equally innovative and humorous, may be unfamiliar to Bay Area online festival participants. Yet his 2.5D cut-paper puppets win audiences over immediately.

Here is the complete Academy Award shortlist for the Animated Short Film category:

- *Black Slide* (Uri Lotan, Israel, U.K.)
- *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* (Peter Baynton, U.K.)
- *The Debutante* (Elizabeth Hobbs, U.K.)
- *The Flying Sailor* (Amanda Forbis, Wendy Tilby, Canada)
- *The Garbage Man* (Laura Gonçalves, Portugal)
- *Ice Merchants* (João Gonzalez, Portugal, France, U.K.)
- *It's Nice in Here* (Robert-Jonathan Koeyers, Netherlands)
- *More than I Want to Remember* (Amy Bench, U.S.)
- *My Year of Dicks* (Sara Gunnarsdóttir, Iceland, U.S.)
- *New Moon* (Jérémie Balais, Jeff Le Bars, Raúl Domingo, France)
- *An Ostrich Told Me the World Is Fake and I Think I Believe It* (Lachlan Pendragon, Australia)
- *Passenger* (Juan Pablo Zaramella, Argentina)
- *Save Ralph* (Spencer Susser, U.S.)
- *Sierra* (Sander Joon, Estonia)
- *Steakhouse* (Špela Čadež, Slovenia, Germany, France)

How to see these films

Unfortunately, hardly any of these finalists can be seen in their entirety online right now. Searching for them will only unearth a trailer (aka spoiler), but most realize that one should NEVER see any trailer or making-of documentary before seeing the actual film, since the mystery, surprise and delight of discovery with fresh eyes and an open mind will often vanish.

ASIFA-SF members can see *The Flying Sailor* again and the Meet the Makers video with Amanda Forbis and Wendy Tilby at <https://vimeo.com/showcase/nfbshorts2023>, password: NFBanimation. A new and

different Meet the Makers is also available and recommended at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mv1DfTwX2o>

The Flying Sailor (with review including the original story) and *The Garbage Man* (with a short review of its own) are both featured on *The New Yorker's* website at: <https://www.newyorker.com/video/watch/the-new-yorker-documentary-flying-sailor> and <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/screening-room/the-power-of-family-memory-in-the-garbage-man> However, it may be difficult to view the entire height of the film image, plus an advertisement will interrupt in the middle of the film and dispel the mood of the narrative, plus one can only view one or two articles before being required to possess a paid subscription.

Save Ralph can be found at no charge on the Humane Society International website at <https://www.hsi.org/saveralphmovie/> and *The Making of Save Ralph* is also free at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dt35WbCEt5U> Evidently **The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse** can be seen on Apple TV+, **More than I Want to Remember** on Paramount+ and **Sierra** on The Criterion Channel, although I cannot verify any of those.

Six of the complete films are currently available at The Animation Showcase, the same website that co-sponsored ASIFA-SF's November NFB panel discussion. This is an outstanding gallery of superb animated films with changing cultural exhibitions for professional animators. It is highly recommended that you join, if qualified, and most of you are. There is no membership fee and it offers a fantastic opportunity to view outstanding and difficult-to-see animation creations.

Contact Benoit Berthe Siward and activate your access at this link: <https://activate.animationshowcase.com/theanimationshowcaseltd/form/IndustryStreaming>

In The Animation Showcase, amidst many other great animated films, are: *The Flying Sailor*, *Passenger*, *Steakhouse*, *Ice Merchants*, *Black Slide*, and *My Year of Dicks*.

Finally, an ideal imminent solution is promised at a brand new, free viewing platform and companion site, developed by the well-established Short of the Week, called Shortverse. This could offer access to as many as the entire shortlist, if all goes according to plan. Here is a quote: From <https://www.shortoftheweek.com/news/oscar-short-films-2023-shortlists/>

“This year all 45 short films contending for Best Animated Short, Best Documentary Short, and Best Live Action Short are available for your perusing on Shortverse as part of our [Oscar 2023 Shortlist Collection](#). There's now one simple place to learn about every short film, watch the available films, and even connect with the filmmakers. Not all are available yet, but with nominations voting coming soon (January 12-17), we expect most films to pop up online over the coming weeks. Check back and we'll keep this list updated.” <https://www.shortverse.com/collections/oscars-2023-shortlist>

ASIFA-SF has not yet been in contact with the good folks at Short of the Week, but, as we go to press, this looks like the most comprehensive viewing opportunity. In the meantime, try to take advantage of the other links and websites listed above. Even the New Yorker links could work for some, and there are plenty of alternative options if they don't.

Important Note: As mentioned above, many of the films will not appear online until sometime in early January, prior to the Academy member voting. However, be aware that once the five nominations have been announced on January 24, many of the films will be pulled back offline, due to pre-existing marketing strategies

and/or agreements with distributors. Some films are still early in their festival exposure period and fear becoming over-exposed and less marketable.

So, please take advantage of what could be a very short window of online availability for certain exceptional films. ASIFA-SF members have a brief opportunity to view a treasure chest of extraordinary animation; we hope you will enjoy these fine works to the fullest!