

# IT TIME FOR ASIFA TO WAKE UP FROM THE COVID INDUCED HIBERNATION AND PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE

**By Karl Cohen** I would like your wildest comments on what ASIFA-SF can be in the future. I assume Covid isn't likely to go away or be rendered harmless in the coming months. I need your thoughts on what we might do in a world where zoom events are more likely to replace most in-person gatherings.

## I can imagine:

**Zoom screenings**, both our annual spring festival and special programs like films from the National Film Board of Canada being held online. What about programs from local studios, or others only a zoom click away to other parts of the country or world? Any ideas?

**Discussion groups?** A lot of things can be presented online so why not animation topics from new ways to promote your independent animation or how to design a kick starter campaign to who are the local employers for freelance animator, or companies that have staffs. Might a group want to start a production or a new company and seek ideas, talent and/or advice?

Years ago there was an informal East Bay discussion group that talked about personal projects they were doing. There was also an active group of stop-motion people who gathered a few times a year in a local bar that was run by an animator. Might some people want to form similar groups again (either zoom groups or masked). We can help you find interested members.

**Tours and demonstrations.** I've seen artists (Signe Baumann, Bill Plympton and others) present programs in their studios for festivals. Some of your friends or employers might be interested in showing us what they are doing or have done. Years ago ASIFA members went into studios to see demos of new technology. Why not show us your latest gizmo online?

**Bulletin board** Years ago computer geeks and nerds got a lot done and had fun using an informal virtual bulletin board to communicate and organize things. I wasn't part of that community, but somebody reading this might have a bright idea on what can be done in 2022.

**WE WILL NEED VOLUNTEERS!** It is time for ASIFA-SF to develop new leadership. Can you help make things happen? If not most great ideas will not materialize. Your idea may be a onetime event, an annual program or...

ASIFA-SF has some money for events thanks to Richard Williams. He did a benefit for us at the Balboa in the 1990s and that money isn't completely used up.

But don't dream up a lovely expensive program or we will need to do a kick starter fundraiser.

**LEADERSHIP** At this point I need to focus on the animation book I'm writing that might be finished by next Christmas. Other people have health or other problems. If you have an idea we decide to do, we will try to find the people to do it hopefully. We need both ideas and members to take charge to make things happen. ASIFA-SF has always been run as a collective of volunteers and the older members and supporters have volunteered time to see things happen successfully. That is why our dues are so low.

**SO LETS START 2022 WITH YOUR IDEAS** Get the ball rolling, Send them to [karlcohen@earthlink.net](mailto:karlcohen@earthlink.net)

**SPEAKING OF DUES ASIFA-INTERNATIONAL WOULD LIKE THEIR ANNUAL DUES BY THE END OF FEB.** Our local dues are \$11 this year and if you wish to support the international as well they ask for \$15 so the total for local and international is only \$26. Please send us something if you can afford it this or next month.

The international now runs a college scholarship program and in 2021 they produced a nice color animation magazine for their supporters. They also run a website and do other things. They are good people including Nancy Phelps who does a monthly column in our newsletter and a lot of other things as our international representative on their board.

## TO JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Whatever your connection to the art of animation is, you can be a member of ASIFA-SF. We are the oldest and foremost local animation organization, with members all around the Bay Area, dedicated to providing our members with more opportunities to network, expand their knowledge base, and just have fun.

It's easy to join. Just choose a membership level and click the PayPal 'Pay Now' button. You will get reminders via email when your membership is set to expire. Or, send your name, address and e-mail address with a check payable to **ASIFA-SF, C/O K. COHEN, 478 FREDERICK ST, SF, CA 94117**

**NEED TO CONTACT US?** Drop us a line at: [members@asifa-sf.org](mailto:members@asifa-sf.org)  
[Share on Facebook](#)

**Results of our request will be in the next newsletter** We already have a few positive responses from a short mailing. But more are needed. **PLEASE HELP!**

January 2022



**ERICK OH'S NEW FILM IS 'NAMOO' IT EXPLORES THE TREE OF LIFE USING INNOVATIVE VR** Erick Oh's new Oscar contender is *Namoo*, Korean for tree, and the tree symbolically captures the beautiful and heartbreaking moments of Eric's life. Eric created last year's Oscar nominated *Opera*. He is from Korea and has worked at Pixar. His new film is more personal and intimate than his last work.

Oh was inspired to make *Namoo* while grieving the loss of his grandfather, using his personal life as the centerpiece. "I went on a journey to ask questions," Oh said. "I asked questions. Of course, I document my thoughts and provide a room for the audience to probe it and think about themselves too. That being said, I think I discovered a lot about who I am while making this film."



The film shows the passage of time with changing colors to represent the passing seasons. Oh says, "Tree is a symbol of your self-motivation that drives you internally, or it could be your unconsciousness with the tree and the guy interacting with each other. Sometimes tree gives stuff to him or takes away stuff or reveals something that he has forgotten. Sometimes he does something to the tree. That's who we are. We keep talking or battling with our inner self and constantly making different decisions. That's what makes life at the end of the day and who you are."

"It forms in a heart shape when you meet the love of your life. Sometimes there's a huge hole in the middle that probably represents those moments of emptiness. And then sometimes it goes super distorted and it feels like everything's falling apart, but after so many versions of your tree, you find a balance."

Oh also commented that animating in virtual space and in real time with the Oculus headset was a new experience for him. It saved him a lot of time once he got up to speed. It took him time to learn to work with the "uninterrupted, 360-degree narrative flow of VR," but fortunately he had six experts to assist him.

The project began as a virtual reality experience created using the VR tool Quill, "which made transferring to a short much easier using the same animated workflow. One of the many reasons I was able to do VR was Quill software," he said. "This enables artists to get into virtual space to draw and paint very intuitively. All the layers were done in Quill [modeling, rigging, animating, shading, lighting merged into one]."

While the VR experience consisted of watching the tree grow in front of you, the short naturally contained a narrative flow that escalated with tension. "Thanks to Quill, the painterly, 2D-look was convincingly achievable in CG."



**Directed, Produced and Animated by Christine Panushka**  
**CHRISTINE PANUSHKA TALKS ABOUT HER LATEST FILM** Christine tells us, "*Blood of the Family Tree* is an experimental animated film that explores questions of connections, hidden family history, disease, and our ties to the past. My objective was to create a work of animation that uses complex cinematic structures to tell a personal story, illustrating the connective tissue that binds humanity to history.

The film is a struggle to understand the past and its effect on the present. Recent research suggests that trauma is genetically passed down through generations. Issues of inheritance, physical and cultural mores and traumas sited within the body are represented by images

of grandmothers, keepers, ancestors, watchers, blood cells, bones, knots, lace, trees, and roots. Can we escape our history? Probably not, but we can recognize it and make peace with it.”

Christine Panushka teaches at USC and previously worked as the Associate Director of the Experimental Animation Program at the California Institute of the Arts. She was there for fourteen years.



### **‘FLEE,’ A REFUGEE’S HARROWING STORY, IS GAINING TRACTION AS AN IMPORTANT ANIMATED DOCUMENTARY**

Jonas Poher Rasmussen’s childhood friend kept his flight from Afghanistan secret for 20 years. Now, Rasmussen has told his story through the award-winning film *Flee*. The true story tells how Amin, Rasmussen’s close friend since high school, fled Kabul as a child in the 1980s with his family. Amin kept the specifics of this perilous five-year journey a secret, and in this emotionally nuanced documentary, we discover the story’s twists and turns much as Rasmussen did. The trailer is posted at <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2021/12/02/flee-sundance-winning-animated-refugee-documentary-finally-hits-europe-s-screens>

Over the last year, the documentary has been honored with several awards, including at the Sundance Film Festival. It has opened in New York and Los Angeles in order to qualify it for an Oscar nomination. It will open in more theaters this year, presumably after it gets nominated for an Academy Award.

The director is from Denmark where the film has gotten a lot of positive attention. Denmark is a country that has taken a comparatively hard line on refugees in recent years so there are hopes things may change attitudes if the film makes a positive difference on the issue of migration.

### **‘FLEE’ WON 3 PRIZES AT THE 34<sup>TH</sup> EUROPEAN FILM AWARDS**

Danish director Jonas Poher Rasmussen’s *Flee*, a Danish-French-Swedish-Norwegian co-production, is probably going to get an Oscar nomination. At the European Film Award the other animated contenders were *The Ape Star*, *Even Mice Belong in Heaven*, *Where is Anne Frank*, and *Wolfwalkers*.

*Flee* surprised people when it also won the prize for Best European Documentary. It was up against four live-action features. Its third honor was winning the European University Film Awards, a prize that is voted

for by college students. The other nominees in the latter category were live action films.

### **THE GOLDEN GLOBE NOMINATIONS FOR BEST ANIMATED FEATURE HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED**

The five choices are *Encanto*, *Flee*, *Luca*, *My Sunny Maad* and *Raya and the Last Dragon*. The Golden Globes are presented by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.



### **‘FLEE’ ART DIRECTOR JESS NICHOLLS ON ANIMATION VERSUS LIVE ACTION**

Jess told *Variety*, ‘There’s a lot to learn from each other.’ While working on the animated documentary *Flee* she spent a lot of time thinking about camera placement and what lens to theoretically use to capture the kinds of scenes they were animating. She fixated on the point of view in each frame of the film, keeping a close eye on the angles and lighting and whether they made sense in the context of the film being a real documentary about a man actually fleeing Afghanistan.

The film, directed by Jonas Poher Rasmussen, is the story of a gay Afghan refugee known as Amin Nawabi. Rasmussen is a live action director so that influenced much of the film’s look. Apparently “the use of animation only entered the equation when Rasmussen realized it was necessary to keep Nawabi’s identity anonymous,” Nicholls told *Variety*.

She found animation allowed her to create a very “loose” look in several places. The scenes in the forest at night for example did not need to be that realistic. She found the storyboard art was too vague to use as a guide so she had the freedom to be creative. She knew one concern was to make the background look authentic, and the cinematography should make the film feel like a documentary, but animation didn’t have to limit the look to live-action rules.

It turned out where she found the freedom to break from a strict documentary look was “when Amin is either in a circumstance like the forest scene, where he has struggled with his memory around the trauma aspect of it or if he wasn’t there himself, like when the sisters are in the cargo container and it’s more like him imagining someone else retelling the story. Those were the limitations. So every time one of those things happened, it was a very concrete decision to put in one of those sequences. Because it would feel a little bit

disingenuous if we had done a realistic version of the sisters in the cargo because Amin wasn't there to see it."

She also found artistic freedom when there were birds-eye view shots, in three-quarter close-ups and in mood moment shots when the focus is on a gun or some other static object. She found in the end they wanted all their shots to look like they belonged in the film and not like this was going to be an overly dramatic Indiana Jones adventure.

Jess ended by saying, "We always get asked, 'Why do *Flee* in animation?' And as soon as we say for anonymity's sake, everyone's like, 'Oh, yeah, of course.' But for me, I think it comes down to the difference between a photograph and a painting. Photography can of course show a bunch of things in a lot of different ways. But at the end of the day, it's still going to have this very concrete realism to it, which animation can abstract from. Not even that it needs to be very abstract, moody stuff, but it can show an opinion, a point of view that I think photography and live-action can't do in the exact same way. So I'd love to see [animated documentaries] go further."

She added, "Animation often gets seen as a kid's media, and I don't think it necessarily is. A lot of grown-up animation is put aside into the violent anime section or something like that. It's very pigeon-holed. And I think that's a shame. There's a lot to learn from each other in the two disciplines if it's more often just viewed as filmmaking, and not so much as a novelty."

## ANIMATE YOUR KID'S DRAWING WITH META

**AI** Meta AI has created a new tool to animate simple drawings. It figures out what the figure is from the background and then figures out what the movable appendages are. It can then, if the drawing can be understood by the program, automatically animate the figure to walk or run. "The software is designed to identify the figure, isolate it from the wider drawing, rig it, and make it dance about" according to **Alex Dudok de Wit** who writes for AWN.com. To try it out visit <https://sketch.metademolab.com/>

Alex writes, "I tried Animated Drawings with a doodle of my own — I draw like a child anyway — and it worked: the tool correctly identified the character and its joints (although I had the option to tweak the rigging manually). Twenty seconds after I'd uploaded it, my doodle was hopping and moonwalking with abandon."

## TOM SITO SENT US A WEIRD HISTORIC FACT

On "Dec. 14, 1983, Disney Studio released the short film *Frankenweenie*, done by a weird young artist named Tim Burton. He was promptly fired upon its completion for wasting company resources."

**HAYAO MIYAZAKI IS COMING OUT OF RETIREMENT!!!** If all goes well we will get to see

another work by Japan's legendary master of animation. He is 80 and he's coming out of retirement to do another movie. To honor the news the *NY Times* published a feature article about him in late November.

<https://www.nytimes.com> > [hayao-miyazaki-studio-ghibli](#)



## FAMED HISTORIAN GIANNALBERTO BENDAZZI PASSES AT 75

The prolific author of more than 30 books, including must-haves *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* and the three-volume *Animation – A World History*, passed away on Monday, December 13 at the age of 75. Arrivederci Giannalberto Bendazzi.

**Nancy Denney-Phelps** writes us the animation world has lost our beloved historian and the world has lost a gentle man who loved life and lived it to the fullest. Born in Ravenna, Italy on 17 July 1946, Giannalberto studied law at the University of Milan before moving to Genova, Italy. At the age of 21 he became the youngest Italian daily film critic, but soon became dissatisfied with journalism and turned to essays and books on animation and live action film. In the mid 1980's he decided to concentrate completely on the study of animation.

He is the author of over 30 books in various areas of animation as well as numerous essays. You can find his numerous articles at

<https://www.awn.com/users/giannalberto-bendazzi>



Nancy Denney-Phelps with Giannalberto.

His studies led him to becoming the foremost authority on animation in non-western countries such as Latin and South America and the Caribbean. In 1983 he published *Due volte l'oceano – Vita di Quirino Cristiani, pioniere del cinema d'animazione* (English title *Twice the First – The Life of Quirino Cristiani, Pioneer of Animation*). Reprinted in Spanish in 2008, the book was finally published in English in 2017. It details the life of the Italian born Argentine animation director, Quirino Cristiani, who made the world's first two animated feature films, *El Apóstol* which premiered in 1917 and *Leaving No Trace* (1918). A firm believer that to understand one art form you must appreciate others, he also authored books on Mel Brooks and Woody Allen.

Giannalberto taught at the Università degli Studi di Milano from 2002 to 2009. From January 2013 to January 2015, he was a visiting professor at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Starting in 2001 he had been an adjunct professor at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia.

He was a founding member of the Society for Animation Studies, an international organization dedicated to the study of animation history and theory that began in 1987. In 2002 Giannalberto received the Award for Outstanding Achievement in Animation Theory from the Zagreb Animation Festival. ASIFA (Association internationale du Film d'animation) awarded him the Lifetime Achievement Award which I had the honor to present to him in 2016. He also received an Honorary Doctorate from the Portuguese ULHT - Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias during the XXXI Conference of the Society for Animation Studies in 2019.

One of the things that endeared Giannalberto to so many people was that he was never too busy to share his vast knowledge, listen to an animator talk about a new project, or give advice. I will miss being able to email him to check a fact or ask about something that I can't remember.

Far from being a dry academic, Giannalberto had a wickedly funny sense of humor and an impish twinkle in his eye. He loved to laugh and was wonderful company.

I join his family and many friends around the world to mourn his passing. I will miss his smile, his wit, and his wonderful hugs. I like to think of you sitting up there smiling down on all the animators, young and old, that you have helped throughout your long career. Rest in peace my friend.

**Dab Sarto**, editor of AWN.COM : The animation community has lost a humble, gentle soul, passionate about everything animated, always pushing to bring attention to artists largely unknown in the West that without his voice, and pen, of admiration, might remain a mere footnote in history. Giannalberto was one

of the nicest people I've met on my journey through the world of animation, and his wit, knowledge, and friendship, will be missed.

**Marv Banbi Meets Godzilla Newland** told us, "So sorry to learn of Giannalberto's passing. He made animation and animators important by way of his erudition, passion and devotion to our craft. He interviewed me at Annecy back in the 1980s. He had notes, information which he must have extracted from my mother and thoughtful theories more insightful and complex than the movies at which his attention was aimed. Is there any way to get him back?"

**20 MILLION PEOPLE RISKED OMICRON IN THE US AND CANADA TO SEE SPIDERMAN IN 'NO WAY HOME' ON THE OPENING WEEKEND** Ever since the pandemic brought movie going to a halt Hollywood has been consumed with fear of the demise of the mega blockbuster industry. With the arrival of *No Way Home* there is hope for the future, at least if a film is so colossal that the public will risk seeing it.

*No Way Home* took in an estimated \$253 million over the weekend according to Comscore. That means about 20 million tickets were sold. It was the highest opening-weekend in the 19-year history of the eight-film, live-action Spider-Man franchise. It was also the third highest weekend ever in Hollywood records. The top weekends were *Avengers: Endgame* bringing in \$357 million and *Avengers: Infinity War* doing \$258 million.

*No Way Home's* big weekend gross is impressive, but the film will need more weekends to break even. The film probably cost Sony and Disney at least \$200 million to make, plus there was an enormously expensive marketing campaign. Will Covid 19 ruins the film's success?

Unfortunately the weekend was not good news for other big productions. Guillermo del Toro's *Nightmare Alley*, a lavish noir thriller with an all-star cast, opened in 2,145 North American theaters. It bombed and it probably cost Disney about \$60 million to make. Finally let's hope Dec. 17-20 doesn't turn out to be a super-spreader disaster.

At the end of its 2<sup>nd</sup> week in theaters the box office growth had risen to \$495.8 million. As for *Nightmare Alley* after two weeks it had grossed only \$5.6 million.

**FIRST TRAILER TO SONY'S FIRST ANIMATED SEQUEL, 'SPIDER-MAN-ACROSS-THE-SPIDER-VERSE' IS NOW ONLINE** It comes out In 2022. [https://www.indiewire.com/2021/12/spider-man-across-the-spider-verse-trailer-sony-part-one-1234683483/#recipient\\_hashed=c200e535ea1b4889a91658650c9f5e143b812067c1f26cfe20556dc647b46f50](https://www.indiewire.com/2021/12/spider-man-across-the-spider-verse-trailer-sony-part-one-1234683483/#recipient_hashed=c200e535ea1b4889a91658650c9f5e143b812067c1f26cfe20556dc647b46f50)



## START THE NEW YEAR WITH LAUGHTER A VIRTUAL TRIBUTE TO NICK PARK

Nick Park has directed three features and worked as a producer on six. He has also produced and directed six shorts and has worked on lots of other projects including music videos, TV series, TV commercials, a Wallace and Gromit video game and other things.



Nick Park, *Creature Comforts*, 1989, U.K., Oscar for Best Animated Short, clay animation. The same year he was also nominated for a second short in the same category for Wallace and Gromit in *A Grand Day Out*, 1989. Park has been nominated six times for Academy Awards and has won four Oscars. He has also won five BAFTA, the British equivalent of the Academy Award.

One of the unusual things about *Creature Comforts* is the voice actors who read the lines were not told what animals they would be voicing. Also note that there is limited movement in this film as not much was needed (nobody walks).

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmNymPocKro](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmNymPocKro)

Nick Park, *A Grand Day Out*, 1989, began as his graduation film at the National Film and Television School in 1985. After he graduated Aardman Films helped him develop a highly polished version of the film and it was given an Oscar nomination in 1989. The film

stars Wallace and his dog Gromit on an unusual quest for a nice cheese to enjoy with their afternoon tea. It is a wonderful British comedy.

As for it getting an Oscar nomination, that ceremony is so unfair. *Grand Day* lost to Nick's *Creature Comforts*. It should have been a tie. Please note Parks puppets are built on armatures with ball joints so Wallace can walk up and down stairs, and move his fingers and arms smoothly.

<https://vimeo.com/38091345>

Nick Park, *The Wrong Trousers*, 1993, Oscar winner, the Grand Prize at the Zagreb Animation Festival and other honors. The second Wallace and Gromit film is more outrageous and wonderful than a *Grand Day Out*. Wallace has a spare bedroom in his house so he takes a penguin in as a border. There is friction between the penguin and Gromit, so Gromit moves out into his doghouse. Meanwhile the penguin takes an interest in Wallace's "techno-trousers," his latest invention. The film twists and turns into one of the greatest and most amazing jewelry heist ever filmed. Could it be the work of that great criminal Feathers McGraw? If you haven't seen *The Wrong Trousers* you are about to discover one of the funniest films ever made.

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/467016426>

Nick Park, *A Close Shave*, 1995. His third Oscar winner. It stars his Shaun, a wonderful intelligent sheep, who would go on to head his own TV series and to be the main character in two features. Shaun gets his name in this film as Wallace introduces his sheep to his Knit-o-Matic machine and he comes out of the experience too squeaky clean. The film has a screwball plot that involves an evil dog named Preston and a Mutton-O-Matic machine that might turn Shaun and Wallace into dog food.

<https://vimeo.com/467012877>

In 2000 Nick wrote, directed, and produced *Chicken Run*. It is a dramatic comedy about a group of chickens attempting to escape a farm when the farmer decides to go into the backed chicken pie business. It was made on a \$45 million budget, and it grossed \$224+ gross worldwide, making it the all-time highest grossing stop-motion feature. It won the BAFTA award for Best Animated Feature. (the British equivalent of an Oscar).

*Chicken Run*, 2000

trailer <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120630/>

clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQf0jUHQJYw>

clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTj4aSPwTBk>

*Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were Rabbit*

It is a delightful parody of classic monster films. A deadly serious situation arises when a giant monster appears when the moon is full. Oh no! It turns out to be a giant rabbit that could wreck-havoc on the village and even ruin the annual giant vegetable growing contest.

The situation is bound to result in lots of destruction and even deaths. Can Wallace and Gromit, who are the town's pest control agents, save the day? The film is a lot of silly fun.

Nick Park carries on the tradition of intelligent and witty British comedy and he doesn't try to surprise us with scatological, vulgar material or lots of farts and belches. His humor is delightful and wholesome, something people of all ages can love.

***Curse of the Were-Rabbit,***

It was made on a \$30 million budget and it grossed \$192 million worldwide (\$56.1 million in the US). It won an Oscar, a BAFTA, 10 Annie awards and lots of other honors. Trailer at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcli2yz8o1s>

Clip [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nk6Gs6Z\\_Bo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nk6Gs6Z_Bo)

***Shaun the Sheep* 2015,**

Nick was executive producer, trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQvwiOWpj7o>

***Early Man* 2018,**

Nick wrote, directed and produced it. featurette

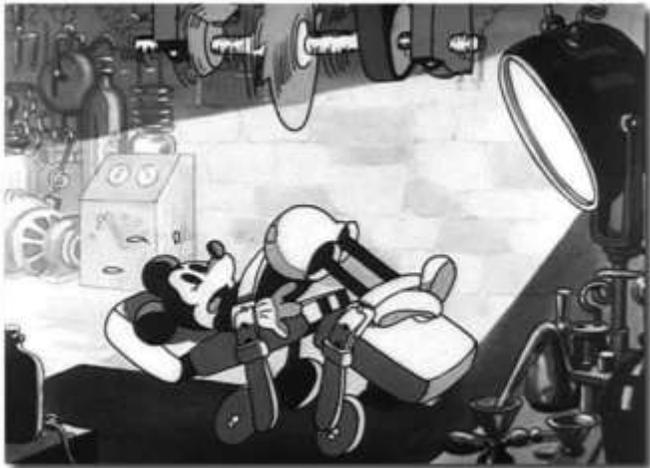
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRIpQ8YNrVs>

trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRIpQ8YNrVs>

***Shaun the Sheep 2 Farmageddon* 2019,**

Nick was executive producer

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



**DARK CARTOONS BLOG - THE HOST DOES A LOT OF RESEARCH** I have no idea who he is but I was impressed with his facts and observations. Much better than what is on most DVDs about cartoons. A friend sent me a link to Disney's *The Mad Doctor* that is online as "The banned Mickey Mouse cartoon." See the discussion at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzNBk22KMjY>

Another intense discussion is about *Ren and Stimpy*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiH7CJILRc8>



**14TH ANIMASYROS & THE 7TH AGORA  
22 – 26 September 2021 Syros, Greece  
By Nancy Denney-Phelps**

For five days each year the beautiful island of Syros Greece becomes the capitol of Greek animation. Along with numerous screenings, the festival also encompasses a Media Literacy program and the Agora which is the market section of the festival.

This year the theme of AnimaSyros was freedom and revolution on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Greek Revolution. Inspiration was drawn from the words of the Greek revolutionary hero Theodoros Kolokotronis, who said "Just like rain, the desire for freedom fell upon us . . . and we started the revolution".



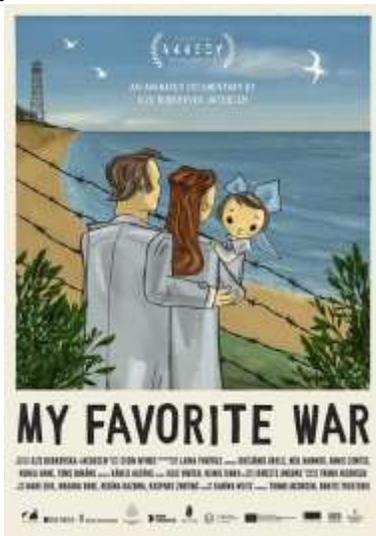
***Body Stranded***

In keeping with the theme two programs of short films were screened under the title *Concepts of Freedom*. They explored freedom in many different guises from revolutionary war and the struggle for human rights to animal liberation and personal freedom. French-born Austrian animator Rebecca Akoun captures the theme perfectly in *Body Stranded*. Based on an interview, this true story is about David who is Jewish and trapped in post-revolutionary Iran. Living in a world of constant fear, censorship, repression, and violence that Akoun represents in black and white drawings, David's only escape into a world of color is through art.

Some people like David, who lives a nightmarish existence, long for freedom while others

don't know when they are well off. In *Kiki The Feather*, Kiki, a little canary, has never known anything but the safety of her cage and the little old lady that feeds her. She sits on her perch all day watching the birds outside her window and dreams of flying with them. One day, with the aid of a cocktail umbrella, Kiki makes her escape to freedom where she learns that the world can be a scary and cruel space. The five-and-a-half-minute film by Julie Rembauville reminded me that I should count my blessings and be happy for what I have.

Along with the many gems in the Concept of Freedom short film screenings, three feature films were also shown. Tomm Moore and Ross Stewart's *Wolfwalkers* is well on its way to joining *The Secret of Kells* and *Song of the Sea* as another classic for Tomm and the crew at Cartoon Saloon. The film is set in 1650 Ireland where the people of Kilkenny are trying to rid the forest outside of the city walls of wolves. Bill Goodfellow arrives from London to hunt the wolves with his daughter, Robin, who learns that there is more to the wolves than meets the eye. Robin, who learns that there is more to the wolves than meets the eye. She also begins to understand how badly the English treat Ireland, its people and its environment and why the Irish are fighting so hard to be free. *Wolfwalkers* has qualified for the Academy Awards.

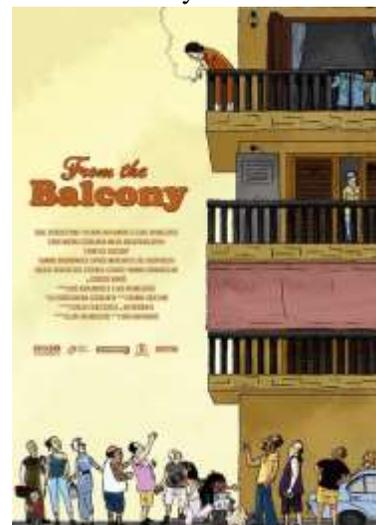


*My Favorite War* is the personal story of director Ilze Burkovska Jacobsen. Ilze grew up in Cold War-era Latvia which was under Soviet control. She believed all of the Soviet propaganda she was brainwashed with at school until the day she discovered the remains of a German soldier buried in a sandbox. Soon she began to discover other buried lies. Ilze attended Anima Syros and gave a presentation at the Agora about animated documentary making. She said that animating a documentary can keep a story true and

poetic at the same time. She was also a member of the International and Hellenic Competition juries.

I have seen *Wolfwalkers* and *My Favorite War* but I was disappointed that I didn't have the opportunity to see *A Colorful Dream* by Czech director Jan Balej because it was screened at the open-air cinema which is a ways away from the Apollon Theatre, the main screening room. I am looking forward to seeing this puppet adventure story which deals with the timeless theme of conflict between unlimited power on the one hand and the desire for freedom, courage, and love on the other. Jan Balej made *Little From the Fish Shop* (2015), a fantasy drama feature which I like a great deal so I am looking forward to seeing his latest feature film.

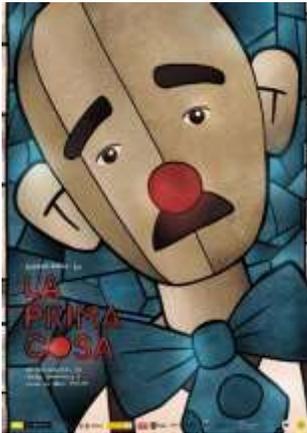
Along with the already established competitions for best International Short Film, Student Film, Feature Film, TV and Commissioned Film, Greek Speaking Film, and the Audience Award two new categories were added this year. The K.ID.S competition comprised of films for the younger audience and Animapride which includes LGBTQI+ animation from around the world have both been side programs in previous years before assuming award status this year.



A very important part of the festival is the Hellenic Competition. It is open to films from Greece, Cypress, and the Diasporas. The fourteen films in the competition ranged from a lockdown lament to a love story in an airport lost luggage room where one suitcase finds his true love. The film that won the competition, *From the Balcony* directed by Aris Kaplanidis, is a slice of life film about a lonely Greek woman who never leaves the balcony of her apartment. She observes and loudly comments on everything that happens within her sight from people in the street below to events in the apartments across the way. The entire neighborhood knows she is watching and has mixed reactions until the day her son is killed in a traffic accident. After the

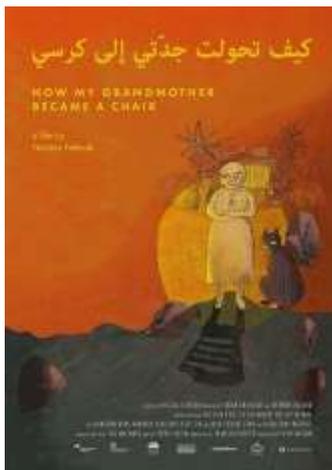
accident, she never goes out on her balcony again and the neighborhood is changed forever.

The twelve-minute comedy/tragedy depicts a neighborhood where 2D traditional animation co-exists with 3D environments. The rich character of the Athens neighborhood is captured in vivid colors and strong lines. According to the director his . . .” goal was to capture crude people in an artful medium and tell this story in high speed achieving impressionism in motion”. He obviously succeeded because *From the Balcony* was selected as the best Hellenic film.



For the third year in a row, the European Values Award was presented by the representative of the European Commission in Greece. The award goes to a film that the jury feels best promotes the values of the European Union. This year’s winning film was *La Prima Cosa (First Thing)* by Spanish animators Omar Al Abdul Razzak and Shira Ukrainitz.

The delightful film is about Kookoo Rikoo, the only Arab Christian Israeli clown. He sings in a Byzantine choir, hunts snakes and works as a hotel receptionist. He also plays numerous instruments, but what he really likes to do the most is to make the Syrian children who have ended up in the hospitals in their neighboring enemy country, Israel, smile. The eighteen-minute film revolves around his friendship with a young female Syrian war survivor.



A special two-part program, MEDAnima, paid tribute to animated films from the wider Mediterranean region. The program screened films from North Africa, Asia, Southern Europe, and the Balkan Peninsula. One of my favorite films in this program was *How My Grandmother Became A Chair* by Lebanese animator Nicholas Fattouh. The 2D drawings from this 2018 film tell the story of a grandmother who is surrounded by what she thinks is her loving family. She doesn’t suspect that her housekeeper, who she sees as a predatory cat, is just waiting for the right moment to pounce on her.

Her family despises the housekeeper and fills their grandmother’s head with reasons why she should not trust the “cat”. It soon becomes apparent that the grandchildren are not acting from honest, caring motives but want all of Grandmother’s money and possessions for themselves. As Grandmother slowly turns into a wooden chair, a metaphor for a march toward death, the relatives turn into loud screeching birds. When a terrible storm washes away the spiteful family, Grandmother is saved by her loyal servant who has turned back into a human form. In the end she realizes that her faithful servant is the only person who really cares about her. Fattouh dedicated the film to his own grandmother and to her housekeeper.



I have never thought about animators Gibraltar but that changed after watching *Shadow of The Rock* by Gibraltarian Krishna Sachanandani. The three shorts that make up the film, each thirty to 40 seconds in length, were part of a marketing campaign for the Gibraltar Literary Festival. The main character is Spike Sanguinetti, a lawyer who wants to be detective. The title of the film is taken from Mogford’s first novel *Shadow of The Rock*. In the book, Sanguinetti enters Chicardo’s Passage and discovers a mysterious man standing outside a door. Chicardo’s Passage is an actual location on Gibraltar. The 3D film uses a variety of shades of dark blacks, blues and plum with bright yellow lights. I not only discovered a short film that I liked, I am also anxious to start reading the Thomas Mogford novels. A good mystery is my favorite form of escape reading.

Opening night guests were treated to the animated documentary *Hellenic Places: Hermoupolis*.

Greek Cypriot director Charalambos Margaritis told the story of the city of Hermoupolis, the capital of Syros Island. Located at the center of the Cyclades Island complex, in the Aegean Sea, the history of the city contains all of the elements that shaped contemporary Greece.

Hermoupolis' classic revival architecture reflects the city's former importance and wealth as the leading commercial and industrial center of Greece as it was its main port. The magnificent Apollon Theatre, home to AnimaSyros, was built between 1862 and 1864 by Italian architect Pietro Sampo. The first work to premiere at the magnificent opera house *Rigoletto* by Giuseppe Verdi.



**The Kois Mansion ceiling**

I was lucky enough to be able to see the interior of one of the stately old homes when the festival held a reception at the Kois Mansion. Built in 1860, the mansion was the residence of the Kois family. The mansion is a perfect example of neo-classical architecture that is prevalent in the stately homes near the waterfront, many of which were built to house a shop on the ground floor and palatial living quarters above. You enter the home up a majestic marble staircase. The crowning glory of the home is the ceiling fresco which represents eight of the gods of ancient Greeks: Zeus, Hermes, Themis, Apollo, Dimitra, Athena, Poseidon, and Artemis and four leading heroes of the Greek Revolution against the Ottomans in 1821. The fresco is completed with a frieze painting and crowned with a brim which leads to a jewel typical of the ionic order.

Although the family no longer lives there, the historic house is available to rent for private parties and tours. Stavros Kois, who was raised in the family home and has an upscale optic store on the ground floor, was

on hand to give us a guided tour which concluded in the dining room where a lovely spread of food was laid out.

**Hellenic Places: Hermoupolis** was financed through the special Covid -19 program of the Ministry of Culture and Sports implemented in collaboration with the Greek Film Center to support the film community against the impact of the pandemic.

**Ninety Seconds** is a joint project of AnimaSyros and radio station Melodia 99.2. It was created to honor the lives of much loved Greek songwriters and singers who have left their mark on Greek musical history. Each animated film features one of their most emblematic songs and is created by an up-and-coming director.

The second film in the series, **Attik – Ninety Seconds for Kleon Triantafyllou**, narrates the intense and adventurous life of Triantafyllou who was known as Attik. His famous song *Zitate na sas po* (*You have been asking me to tell you*) can be heard in the film in a new cover by Christina Golia. The film uses rotoscoped images of Attika and his life combined with stock footage. Directed by United Kingdom animator Georgia Burnell, this is her first commissioned film.

The festival believes in giving back to the community that gives them such strong support. To this end, the Media Literacy Programs are designed to reach different age groups and ability levels of residents of the island. Noted Israeli animator Tal Kantor led a workshop for adults titled *Animated Freedom*. Using mixed media techniques the group explored the concept by giving life to a collage inspired by the work of the Italian artist Georgia Fabris whose studio is in Athens.

The workshop for persons with disabilities, led by Greek animator Elena Pavlakis, was based on one of the epic works of the Greek National Poet Dionysios Solomos. **Hymn to Liberty** praises the struggle of the defenders of the city of Messologhi during the Greek Revolution. The words of his poem were later set to music and became the Greek and Cypriot national anthems.

Greek graphic designer and animator Margarita Simopoulous and her group of seniors explored the relationship between watercolors and the famous Delacroix painting *The Slaughter of Chios*. Their two-day workshop attempted to discover if the painting could be brought to life.

The noted cartoonist Giannis Xagoraris aka DoReMi, or Zagor worked with teenagers in a workshop devoted to satire, cartoons, and comics. Romanian animator and artist Paul Muresan led a group of teenagers in a three-day animation workshop dedicated to teaching the basic principles of 2D animation. The theme of the workshop was built around the folk stories

of the *Sons of Samarina/Exodus* and was a fusion between history and animation, bringing the past back to life in the context of the Greek Revolution's 200<sup>TH</sup> anniversary. From December 2020 to July 2021 seven additional workshops were held for young people both in person and online.

Over the past seven years The Agora, under the guidance of Marineta Mak Kritikou, has become an important part of AnimaSyros. As the meeting place for professionals, the Agora hosts presentations by professionals and representatives of organizations and institutions as well as round table discussions. The highlight of the Agora is the Pitching Forum.

This year the Agora came together with Studio Folimage to organize a three-day Pitching Coaching Workshop along with the final presentation of the pitches to the international jury and the public. The Pitching Coaching Workshop was run by production manager Catherine Blanc-Maurizi and director H  l  ne Friren, both representing Studio Folimage.

This year five projects under development have been selected from Greece, France, and Lebanon to be presented. Zacharias Mavroeidis from Greece pitched his feature film *Nine Lives Left*. He notes that anyone who has been to the Greek Islands knows that there are cats everywhere and that tourists love and feed them. Zacharias' film poses the question as to what happens to these cats during the winter when the tourists are gone?

*The Death of the Lustful Paolo and Francesca*, set in Italy in 1285, was presented by Greek animators Nikoletta Chouchouli and Eftychia Maria Kondyli. In their fifteen-minute short film, the story revolves around two adulterous lovers who are murdered and sent to the afterlife to stand trial for their earthly sins. Alban Rodriguez from France pitched his television series *My Granny is a Spy*. According to the plot two kids and their ex-spy granny battle against wrinkly old megalomaniac adversaries to save the world. *Fishbowl* is a short film about a boy typing to help his mother with her work. The film is the idea of Daphne Xourafi from Greece.



***The Little Blue House At The Beach.***

After much deliberation, the project that the pitching jury selected was *The Little Blue House At The Beach*. Director Nicolas Fattouh (*How Grandmother Became A Chair*) from Lebanon did a beautiful job of pitching his short film about two brothers who are fighting over their family home and end up destroying all of the ties that bring them together. The artwork that we were shown was lovely with shades of blue and the design of the two siblings looked like two people who could destroy everything that they loved. The jury stated that "The film touched us on many different levels. The story about families is one that many people can relate to. The visuals were strong, especially the use of salt as a metaphor for the hate eroding the relationship between two brothers."

This year the winner of the Pitching Forum Agora AnimaSyros will be the official guest of the Artist-in-Residence program organized by Studio Folimage for one month to work on his film utilizing their excellent studio facilities. Thank you to Studio Folimage for donating such a lovely prize. The pitching jury was comprised of Catherine Blanc-Maurizi and H  l  ne Friren from Studio



**Agora Director Marineta Mak Kritikou with Joanna Quinn and Nancy**

Folimage, animator Joanna Quinn, Agora Coordinator Marineta Mak Fritikou, and me.

It was also my great pleasure to conduct an on-stage chat with Joanna Quinn at the Agora titled *The Woman Behind Beryl*. During our forty-five-minute conversation, we talked about how Joanna got into animation and about the birth of Beryl. She also introduced us, via a photograph, to Menna Trussler who has been the voice of Beryl in all four of Joanna's hilarious films about her beloved character who throws herself wholeheartedly into every new endeavor she enters into.

Joanna, along with her scriptwriter/producer husband Les Mills, was at Anima Syros with their delightful new film *Affairs of the Art* which was 10 years in the making. The new film not only follows Beryl who has taken up painting but also catches us up with Beverly, Beryl's older sister who we met in *Dreams and Desires: Family Ties*. In *Affairs of the Art* Joanna voices the role of Beverly. We also get to meet Beryl's son Colin who collects screws. Colin was inspired by Les' real-life brother.

*Affairs of the Art* is co-produced by the National Film Board of Canada. It premiered in January 2021 at the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival in France where it won The Best International Animation Award. The film has been winning awards at festivals around the world, including at AnimaSyros where Joanna was awarded The Grand Prize of the International Competition. It was a unanimous decision by the jury.

The Agora sessions covered topics that are relevant to Greek animation professionals such as Animated Film Production during Covid in Greece and Greek Support Funds For Emerging Authors. I was also very pleased to meet Akindynos Gkikas, the most famous voice-over actor in Greece. I was told that

everyone in the country recognizes his voice. During the Agora he spoke about Dubbing Animation posing such questions as "Does it (dubbing) negatively affect the original version or can it afford the opportunity for an excellent transfer of the original story and characters to the Greek language?"

Nik and I had the opportunity to sit down with him and discuss the terrible situation for Greek voice-over talent who are often paid as little as 10 Euros to dub an entire feature film. The studios have a stranglehold on the voice talent because if they refuse to work for such ridiculously low wages the studios simply go to Cypress where they can get the job done for next to nothing. Gkikas would like to organize a union such as SAG or AFTRA for voice-over talent in Greece but we all know what a difficult uphill battle that is.

I was pleased to finally have the opportunity to meet Ilze Burkovska Jacobsen. I have seen her film *My Favorite War* which is her personal story of growing up in Latvia during the Soviet occupation. During her presentation, she focused on how can animation affect documentary storytelling, relating the answer to her particular film.

At his presentation, Nik spoke about how improvisation can inform the compositional process when he is writing for film. He explained the differences and similarities between the two using examples for music that he composed for Simone Massi's short film *Piccola Mare* and Nina Paley's *Fetch*.

Thank you to Agora Coordinator Marineta Mak Kritikou; Maria Anestopoulou, Festival Director; and AnimaSyros President for inviting Nik and me to be part of AnimaSyros. Next year the festival will be one day longer. I am already looking forward to the 2022 edition of the festival which will take place 20 – 25 September 2022.

You can read more about the 2021 edition of the festival at: [www.animasyros.gr](http://www.animasyros.gr)

**ANIMAION IN THE ACADEMY AWARDS THE SHORT LISTS** These are the 15 finalists from which the 5 nominated films will be chosen in the animation category.

- Affairs of the Art*
- Angakusajaujuq: The Shaman's, Apprentice*
- Bad Seeds*
- Bestia*
- Boxballet*
- Flowing Home*
- Mum Is Pouring Rain*
- The Musician*
- Namoo*
- Only a Child*
- Robin Robin*

*Souvenir Souvenir*  
*Step into the River*  
*Us Again*  
*The Windshield Wiper*

*Flee* from Denmark is being considered in 2 categories. Best Foreign film and Best Documentary feature. The contenders for Best Animated feature have not been announced.

Music from Disney's *Encanto* is being considered for 2 nominations.

The Academy Award nominations will be announced Tues. Feb. 8 and the big night will be Sunday, March 27.

## ANIMATION'S ANNIE AWARDS NOMINATIONS

The Annie Awards will be handed out Feb, 26 at UCLA's Royce Hall.

### Best Feature

*Encanto*, Walt Disney Animation Studios  
*Luca*, Pixar Animation Studios  
*Raya and the Last Dragon*, Disney  
*Sing 2*, Illumination  
*The Mitchells vs. The Machines*

### Best Indie Feature

*Belle*  
*Flee*  
*Fortune Favors Lady Nikuko*  
*Pompo the Cinephile*  
*The Summit of the Gods*

### Best Special Production

*For Auld Lang Syne*  
*La Vie de Château*  
*Mum Is Pouring Rain*  
*Namoo*  
*The Witcher: Nightmare of the Wolf*

### Best Short Subject

*Bestia*  
*Easter Eggs*  
*MAALBEEK*  
*Night Bus*  
*Steakhouse*

### Best TV/Media – Preschool

*Ada Twist, Scientist Episode: Twelve Angry Birds*,  
*MUPPET BABIES Episode: GONZO-RELLA*  
*ODO Episode: Duddle Song*  
*Stillwater Episode: Crossing Over / Kind of Blue*  
*Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum Episode: I am Ella Fitzgerald*,

### Best TV/Media – Children

*Amphibia Episode: True Colors*, Walt Disney  
Television Animation

*Carmen Sandiego Episode: The Himalayan Rescue*  
*Caper*

*Dug Days Episode: Science*, Pixar  
*Maya and the Three Episode: The Sun and the Moon*  
*We the People Episode: Active Citizenship*

### Best TV/Media – General Audience

*Arcane Episode: When These Walls Come Tumbling*  
*Down*  
*Bob's Burgers Episode: Fingers-loose,*  
*Love, Death + Robots Episode: Ice*  
*Star Wars: Visions Episode: The Duel*  
*Tuca & Bertie Episode: The Dance*

### Best Student Film

*A Film About A Pudding* National Film and Television  
School, UK  
*HOPE* from the school: New3dge  
*I Am A Pebble* from the school ESMA  
*Night of the Living Dread* National Film and Television  
School, UK  
*Slouch* from Filmakademie Baden- Württemberg  
GmbH

The Winsor McCay Awards for lifetime achievements will go to Disney animator Ruben Aquino, computer animation pioneer Lillian Schwartz, and Studio Ghibli producer Toshio Suzuki.

## ASIFA-SF IS A VOLUNTEER RUN ASSOCIATION

*Newsletter Editor: Karl Cohen*  
*Contributors include Nancy Denney-Phelps*  
*Proofreaders Pete Davis and David Gladstein*  
*Mailing Crew: Denise McEvoy, Shirley Smith*  
Special thanks to Nancy Denney-Phelps 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** Due to the lockdown we are only asking \$11 a year while the virus lasts. Let's hope it is a limited time offer. We want to hold in-person events again.

*Our website and blog is: [www.asifa-sf.org](http://www.asifa-sf.org)*

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