

“If you love what you do, you never work a day in your life.”
~John Lasseter.

Preface

I've always been interested in many different artistic media and building skill sets within each. Having experimented with an array of methods, I've discovered hand drawn pieces with individual style personally lead me to the most satisfaction in my work. I've always been in awe of animation, especially hand drawn and Claymation. I hadn't seriously considered this medium until I realized it contained all of my best skill sets; it's fast paced (if you want to get anywhere with it) yet it requires precision; it's meticulous work; it allows style and character design; it tells a story; it's extremely time consuming but rewarding when you finally see your work come to life. I've desired a medium that truly makes me invest one hundred percent and keeps me working rigorously for hours and has such satisfaction at the end. As an artist, I enjoy the process of the work rather than the result. With animation, however, it's a win-win when both the work and the result leave me in awe.

I'm amazed when I watch animated films in theaters these days. The advancements in computer animation since 1995 are remarkable. I'm just as impressed with hand-drawn full-length features as well. The medium is just a vessel, but the ability to tell a great story is key. People can make technically great-animated films, but if the story isn't good and you're divested as a viewer, it's pointless. But when I see a well-crafted film with imagination and a wonderful story, I'm completely amazed. I crave to be part of this storytelling culture.

Introduction:

Storytelling has been an important aspect of cultures for hundreds of years. It can be used as a vessel for passing down myths and legends, teaching life lessons, or keeping traditions alive, and in every case it is a source of entertainment, which builds connections between people. Simple stories like *The Tortoise and The Hare* and *The Ugly Duckling* are examples of classic tales that teach life lessons. In my experience of being raised and taught lessons of sharing and manners, I was read many of these classic stories of actions and consequences. I was also taught many children's biblical stories such as David and Goliath and Noah's Ark, both verbally and through animated Christian shows like *Veggie Tales*. Although I'm not highly religious today, many of those stories taught me a lot about courage and faith.

Considering modern entertainment and American culture today, the means of sharing stories and entertainment is different than it used to be or even how it is in other cultures around the world. Usually, I verbally receive stories in chronological order. I see this just as a quality of our culture, and it's not how everyone gives and receives information. I was mostly raised by a Latino family during elementary and middle school, and they commonly told stories by skipping to different parts of one event while several people shared perspectives, which made up the whole. Just the culture change alone was a big enough difference. These are just some personal observations, but our society as a whole interacts differently with entertainment and storytelling. Other cultures express and share stories more interactively. There's more involvement, movement, and engagement. When we (Americans) engage in entertainment, we're usually passive and merely a viewer of some event and source of entertainment. We sit and watch a movie in the theater, or on the television at home, go to a play, and even just sit through a sports game. Even with pop culture, music, and style, we watch and listen. I'm in no position to say either is better or worse, but a happy medium of formal entertainment with engagement is ideal for me.

Art is a universal form of storytelling and expression. Visual arts, theatre, filmmaking, creative writing, and many other media are expressive and offer something to an audience. Then

there is animation, a more recent art form: from short hand-drawn cartoons and Claymation to Computer Generated Images (CGI) and computer animated full-length movies. Why is it so appealing, using animation as a means for telling stories and creating situations that otherwise wouldn't be expressed? Animation is still a new method of storytelling; anything is possible. Walt Disney said, "Animation can explain whatever the mind can conceive." It allows the impossible to become possible and creativity to be celebrated and pushed to limits unthought-of. It allows us to express a story visually with full control of all environments and situations.

Content & Characters:

Since animation has so many possibilities, where do you even begin? Where any great story does: a strong theme and conflict with infusions of wonder. "Drama is anticipation mingled with uncertainty"(William Archer). When telling a story, ask yourself; have you achieved anticipation? Do you make your audience want to know what's next? Have you made them want to know how it concludes?

Expressing a story though an animated movie (or any entertainment, really), you want your audience to care. You must create something worth their time to watch and care about emotionally, intellectually, or even just aesthetically. It's also important to keep in mind that the audience wants to be engaged and work to make connections in the story. Stanton talks about a personal storytelling rule in animation, The Unifying Theorem of 2+2, meaning giving the audience two and two to make four. Don't give four; engage them and use it to hold their attention. You want them to invest in and connect with it. "We all want affirmations that our lives have meaning. And nothing does a greater affirmation than when we connect through stories. It can cross the barriers of time, past, present and future, and allow us to experience the similarities between ourselves and through others, real and imagined."(Andrew Stanton, Ted Talk). Through this explanation, Stanton considers our interest and need for relatable stories.

For the next component of building a story, let's consider the main character. It has to be likable. That doesn't necessarily mean they have to be completely good (in fact, they might be dull), but they should have a good heart with good intentions and be driven to fulfill some goal. After you meet them, you'll be on their side throughout their journey, rooting for them until the end.

Conflict and change then needs to be introduced. For classic animated Disney stories, for example, this meant a villain against the hero. A Disney classic, *The Little Mermaid*, has Ariel the mermaid innocently wanting to fulfill her dreams and be Part of Your World and Ursula, the villain, coming in and trying to ruin it. *The Lion King* has Simba versus Scar. In *Aladdin*, it's Aladdin versus the villain, Jafar. In 1993, the rebellious young pioneers of Pixar decided that you don't need a villain to have a good story, and they proved it with *Toy Story*, *Wall-e*, *Finding Nemo*, and many other masterpieces. Andrew Stanton, one of Pixar's pioneers, explains in a Ted Talk of their "secret list" of things that animated film were known for up until that point but could be better without. This included: no villain, no "I want" moments, no love, no songs, and no village. This was everything Disney was and they weren't going to be, not just for the sake of change but also for eliminating guidelines and telling more imaginative stories. Pixar is legendary from releasing the first full-length computer animated picture, *Toy Story*. Also, its unique how they came about, with Steve Jobs, an entrepreneur, Ed Catmill, a scientist, and John Lasseter, an artist and former Disney employee.

Well, why do we animate to create these wonderful stories? Aren't live movies with real people are relatable? Entering realms yet unseen and having characters come to life that can't in the real world is so satisfying to me because its unlike anything you've seen in the real world and

it feels like I'm watching someone's imagination at play. Of course I love live action, but again, it's all about the story. Being immersed into a vividly colorful coral reef that's booming with life and telling a story about a fish's honest curiosity and his father's limitless love for him crafted into an intriguing and engaging animated movie is much more relatable compared to many dull, live-action flicks I've seen. That said, I'm not saying there aren't bad animated movies or that live action isn't ever better, but the creativity and imagination poured into great-animated movies that pull on your heartstrings leave me in awe. There are things that can be achieved with animation that can't with live action, and vice versa. The limitless possibilities that animation and CGI (computer generated images) hold are incredibly intriguing.

Artists

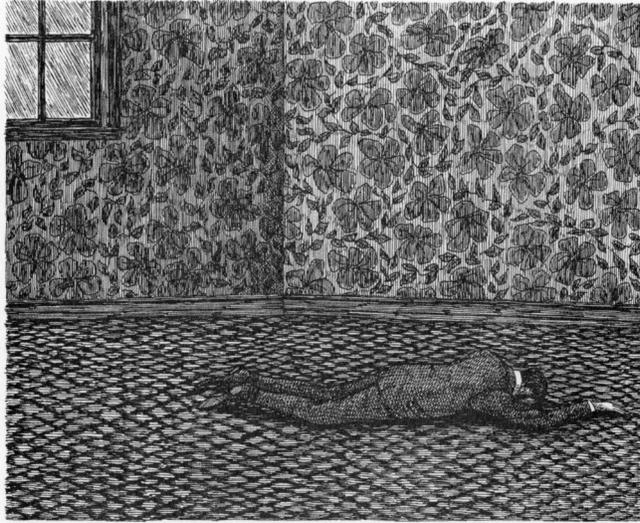
I'm very attracted to creepy/eerie artwork that makes me uncomfortable and catches my attention longer than it should. The style with thin, shaky lines; the content of implied stories and uncomfortable situations, shocking, emotion-evoking art leaves me in wonder. As part of final project, I'm beginning to question why I am so drawn to it. That might be a question I'll always ask myself. What is so visually pleasing and emotionally fulfilling about it? I'll talk about a few artists I find intriguing, some of which employ this style.

I only discovered Henry Darger this summer through a painting teacher I had. I've been interested in little girls doing devious things, and I fell in love when I saw his work as well as his story. The fact that they found his collection of illustrations after his death seems so right. He didn't publish his works during his life but made books of disturbing illustrations for himself, because he needed to. That's beautiful to me. His style is so careful and strange. It consists of many young girls, mostly transgender people (many are nude), in fright or concern (or sometimes just apathetic) usually showing they are in danger or are being harmed by older men or other things. The colors aren't the usual creepy tones (grey, purple, black) but actually washy, colorful pieces. This makes it even more disturbing somehow. Illustration No.1 is one of the few gloomy colored pieces in Darger's collection.



Figure 1 18 at Norma Catherine. But Wild thunderstorm with Cyclone like wind saves them

Edward Gorey has everything I love about pen work. It's very intricate and intentional; it's black and white (in an impactful way), and poses so many questions and assumptions that



make you wonder about how the content got there and what's going to happen next. I can't get enough of it, and when artists leave me in wonder, I want to pass it on through my work so other people can feel the same way I do.

Probably the most popular artist within this genre style of creepiness, the creator of the Claymation classic *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and one of my personal favorites, is Tim Burton. His color schemes are gloomy grays and purples. The entire *Halloween Town* in *The Nightmare Before Christmas* was a limited palette of

variations of orange and black. His characters are awkward, wobbly and un-proportional in the best way. In the animation department at Cal Arts, where he and many other animation legends started their careers, students would describe his style to be spirals and stripes and his storytelling to be whimsical, dark, and funny. His art gives permission to be weird.

Stepping away from my fascination with strange styles, one of the most inspirational artists in the animation business is John Lasseter. He's one of the founders of Pixar and in part revolutionized the animation industry by exploring possibilities within computer animation with a team, which resulted in *Toy Story*. He's very concerned with story and is part of the pioneer artists in Pixar. He's said, "It's not technology that's going to entertain audiences, and it's the story." Although his excitement for this new and exciting medium is lively, in all entertainment it comes down to the story.

Conclusion:

Animation is still a new and exciting vessel of storytelling. It allows us to creatively tell stories that wouldn't be told otherwise. It's also an art form that's personally satisfying on many levels. The possibilities are endless. It plays a key role in entertainment in our society today, and will in future generations. But with time comes change. The rapid changes in CGI and computer animation is remarkable; it has great potential and we could only be exploring parts of its possibilities. It leaves me to wonder, what will come next? Maybe visual holographic viewing rooms where you are virtually immersed IN the story?



Or maybe the artists give audiences the ability to decide what direction the story will go in? I don't know what's going to happen, but I know I want to be part of it. I crave to be part of the entire animation/storytelling environment. "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined"(Thoreau). I will do what I'm passionate about, whatever it is.

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