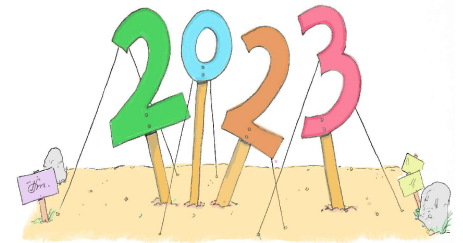




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ASIFA SF Supplement for October 2023

TOO MANY COPIOUS NOTES ABOUT THE OTTAWA INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION FESTIVAL

Jim Middleton, guest columnist



ASIFA members Jim Middleton and Chuck Wilson turned the OIAF into a road trip from mid-Michigan to Ottawa. This is their report:

The Journey, The Experience, The Delicious Distractions:

OIAF is always interesting, always a treat, and in the middle of Ottawa, insanely accessible, to the point where vehicles seem completely superfluous once there.

The delay at the Blue Water Bridge was a brief, a combination of constricted construction and customs, cashless kiosks, and multiple lanes becoming one each way. And getting around Toronto can be just as challenging as getting through Toronto, which is why karaoke was invented (we didn't sing - the moose were nervous enough).

The young agent at the currency exchange was positively joyous at providing currency and coin, tossing in a dark-rimmed *toonie* commemorating the Queen's passing. No King Charles III faces yet for the North American wallet.

A large furry brown mammal scooted across the access route, the first non-automobile presence on the entry to the Canadian Capital.

A street performer, or someone experiencing a psychic break, stopped traffic on the thoroughfare near the windmill-less Moulin Marketplace. The caped, darkly enfolded being angled left, then right, arching upwards to the slight sliver of moon, before swirling to the retort of drivers' horns, drivers growing a bit less patient as evening cemented its presence. Traffic control police inserted themselves to lend guidance. Alleyways seemed plucked from a scene in *Mon Oncle*.

The opening evening party at Pub 101 contained three floors of 19+ year youngs. They appreciated the tickets for a free drink. The bartenders were ocular octopii with their manufactured mixations, and a double payment to the cellular plan eventually greased the access route to telecommunications in Canada, albeit with a proximal preference to the hotel.

Pilar Newton-Katz served as party night ambassador. Chris Robinson sported an elegant beard and watchful eye. Faces were a quick blur at best. Upon others, beards seemed less cosmetic and more functional with the incoming autumn, and short sleeves felt like a lapse in judgement.

The arrival also collided with the Toronto Bluejays smashing the NY Yankees 6-1. And at a nearby Irish pub, site of a personal, inaugural Guinness nearly a generation ago, there enthused a straight-ahead, nearly single breath, rendition of American Pie, introduced as "a timeless classic from a past generation." Was the solicitous performer someone more comfortable with Smash Mouth? Was it a drizzle outside, or tears of joy for the safe arrival to the OIAF?



Free-ranging animators were caught and compelled to consume potato salad. Oh the torture! - all photos from Chuck Wilson or Jim Middleton in this article, unless otherwise noted

A student from Algonquin College was thrilled to see two animators from Michigan; majoring in song, she had gone hoarse practicing her art.

The vagabonds were better dressed than many tourists - "Hello, have you got a dime?" "If I had a penny for every time I was asked that, I'd *have* a dime."

Stores and restaurants shuttered by 10pm, citing staffing. But staff were so polite in letting one know, explaining they have to get home and study for their classes in the morning. (As one becomes old enough to use the pronoun "one," one starts thinking of adopting every person with that level of earnest, kind ambition. Or at least asking to meet one's family.)

And yes - poutine. And yes - shawarma. Toss the keto life out the door in O-town. One order = two meals. Nom nom nom. However, a casual day of footwork was an easy 10,000 steps for those miserable souls keeping track of that sort of thing.

Chris R had to apologize for dropping the f-bomb in a presentation, then apologize for the apology which also used the f-bomb to describe the use of the f-bomb, then say he was through apologizing, at which point, members in the audience dropped the f-bomb to level the field. It was a long day. "Basically," explained Chris, "I watch cartoons for a living." He also described the animators' picnic as "an annual reunion with pumpkins, knives, and alcohol. What could go wrong?" This year at the picnic, a wasp was swallowed, another person stung, and on the way back, someone was hit in the head by a low branch while riding atop the open double decker bus. At least, "The night owl party is still a hoot." In short, A Good Time Was Had By All.

As a "by the way" about the picnic - Access was either via a crowded bus or as a pleasant 15 minute walk. The weather was absolutely perfect. The walk passes embassies and homes which opted for elaborate wildflower arrangements instead of a typical mown front yard. The bees were ecstatic as mentioned, if somewhat overstimulated (the potato salad was a hit among several species present).

In addition to the films, there were several symposia during the festival, requiring unavailable cloning for complete attendance - however, here are some samples of those activities:

Jobs, Employment, and the Amorphous Fortunes of the Future

A prelude to OIAF was TAC ("The Animation Conference"), a business forum designed for professionals creating content, or working within development, production, distribution and marketing fields. Running in tandem with the OIAF, the assemblies presented suggestions on how best to handle the current "slump" in the industrial fortunes of animation.

(Aeons ago, at an early 2000's gathering of the short-lived KAFI festival in Michigan, Brian Lemay of the Animated Cartoon Factory told us, essentially, "a best gig will possibly get you three years of steady employment, so keep your portfolio fresh." It seems the wheel has made a familiar rotation.)

Craving some notes on

How to Thrive During Downturns and Survival in Slow Times Department - TAC meets OIAF?

The adventure continues on page THREE!!! ●●●●●●



The aforementioned Mon Oncle moment - alley near Les Suites, Ottawa



Chris Robinson drawing the line somewhere at the picnic



Chris Robinson and Brooke Keesling both feigning annoyance with the paparazzi

CAST FOR DISCUSSION ON HOW TO SURVIVE THE CURRENT ANIMATION SLUMP:

GENERAL TRANSLATION FROM SCRIBBLED NOTES THAT WOULD HAVE BENEFITTED FROM A WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF SHORTHAND:

- After the recent Netflix decimations, the pendulum will swing back, but some caveats and cautions - mostly, it will swing back, slowly, and not necessarily following any Galileo-based calculation; Bradley Cayford began with having everyone repeat, "I Got This. WE Got This!"

- *Semper Gumby* - flexibility is an essential asset - don't just animate - learn to storyboard, build animatics, edit, write scripts - consider the benefits of working at home and being your own slave - at least you know who ate the leftover pizza - build flexible, multiple, current, and targeted portfolios. As Brooke Keesling added, "Be ready to ride the wave." ANIMATORS ARE 99.9% INTROVERTS.

- *Canada is trying to help (per TAC)* - and being flexible in Canada helps too - they have benefits, so working for the US and living in Canada can be a useful option - the "C-11 Online streaming act" may get the major players to contribute to creation and promotion of Canadian content. But that's a *may*, because of the international traffic involved in the process, and the ultimate payer of the program likely being the consumer, not the streamer



Ottawa's perpetual Penny Farthing

ONCE A SEED.

- *Semper Gumby corollary #1* - creativity is an animator's best asset - but don't kill yourself - don't take the challenge, "I need this bus full of tourists to Chicago in an hour and here's your unicycle with a flat tire - you're supposed to be creative, figure it out!" Keep your neural hemispheres in communication with each other. Guard your mental health! "Learn to say NO, because NO is the most powerful word in Hollywood, but don't let your fierce tiger sauce burn your bridges." NETWORK. If you can monetize TikTok or YouTube, do so (and please oh please share your secrets with your starving digital comrades) - and know your audience (ie, will they pay for your creativity or just forward it as a meme?)

- *Always look on the bright side of life* - corollary #1 - animation is expanding. Everything in a modern motion picture has a surprising amount of animation (*A Man Named Otto* had NINE production companies doing the graphics - in addition to the production staff - of what would seem to be a minimal graphic-need motion picture). EAT REJECTION. GNAW IT TO BITS. DIGEST IT. When there is another pandemic, there'll be more eyes on home screens, so entertain the shut-ins as they scramble for TP, tuna, and Kleenex. Go for the deeper, resonant material. Remember that the job you ultimately want may not exist yet; Emmanuelle Gignac related that her dream job of storyboarding wasn't what she ultimately wanted to do. When climbing the

For TAC:

- Archita Gosh - moderator
- Jennifer Twiner McCarron of Thunderbird
- Frank Falcone, Guru studio president
- Athena Georgaklis - Nelvana
- Francois Houde - Squeeze Studio CFO
- Tori Coulthart - Jam Filled Entertainment

For OIAF:

- Bradley Cayford - storyboards, Industrial Brothers, moderator
- Brooke Keesling - Bento Box
- Jose Pou - independent storyboard artist
- Emmanuelle Gignac - supervising director, Mercury Filmworks

- *Always look on the bright side of life* - sharing content on different platforms helps increase the eyeballs on your productions, but it could also become a source of that tired phrase, "but think of the exposure!" Jose Pou suggested that down time lets "you continue playing, like a child. Don't worry about things that haven't happened yet." THE SEQUOIA WAS



Once a Gaol, now a Hostel, soon to be a Stephen King novel

stairs, with each stumble you gain wisdom. BREATHE. Mobilize your metaphor (to paraphrase Mr. Falcone's conclusion at the TAC gathering).

(And still the notes continue! What is this guy doing, getting paid by the word? If he's getting paid, he could at least use some better words, not the same old typety type type clackety clack collection of syllables, but no.. oh, sorry, the coffee just kicked in)

- And finally, **FINISH YOUR FILM**. Show that you can complete even your deferred personal projects. It is your calling card, it shows your personality, especially if you want to share your point of view.

Cosplay, Drink and Draw, and Animating Ink

The CBC arts reporter was present for the first cosplay model drawing exercise, offering suggestions for poses, keeping the timing going for the artistic aspirants, and providing a running commentary on the progress, or lack thereof (one sketcher was focused on the triangular floor tiles instead of Erebus and Peter Pan, confessing he spends more than "enough time on floors" and "can appreciate the intricate design and texture" used by the NAC for theirs).



The CBC investigates cosplay - He and Erebus cannot agree on a number between three and six.

The films in the overview of "Dots, Lines, and Washes: Animating Ink" with Alla Gadassik began with the "cameo appearance" of ink barrels in Winsor McCay's "Little Nemo" from 1911 (with "the original drink-and-draw" 4000 drawing bet) and tracked its way through the stylish whims of change where pens slid into stylii and then re-emerged in the quest for a more organic connection to the animated page. The "legions of young princesses" who served as inkers in the "air-conditioned" Fleischer studios were shown alongside the artisanal ink-on-film productions by McLaren, to Ryan Larkin's "Walking," to the beautiful ink markers in Honami Yano's "A Bite of Bone" (with the memorable observations that "the burned bone smelled like crayons" and "when you bite the bone, you can be with your father forever." Xi Chen's "Fly in the Restaurant" was equally peppered with memorable quotes, seeming to drift along with the continual 360 degree sweep of a Chinese eatery ("You are only an illusion. The revolution is not a dinner party!"). Not much mindless consumption going on in that restaurant!



Erebus held this pose for seven minutes - Erebus doesn't get paid enough

"Only You" Compilation

A year-long search for "under-represented artists" by HBO Max and Warner resulted in eight short films that began streaming in early 2023. Following an education on budgets, training, and tools, the assembled teams created the five to seven minute animated films targeting an adult audience.

The results were variable. Some of the films showed a lot of energy and fast pacing, but were muddled in the story: "Burning Rubber" was certainly dynamic, but some of the motivation was counter-intuitive, even if the ending was rather realistic, in an O. Henry sort of way. "Welcome to 8th Street" showed that urban challenges blurred cultural stereotypes, "Kent Hammer" had the art-design of 1990s CGI while trying to document organizational pressures leading to schizophrenia, with "Yellowbird" providing a sobering choice pushed upon a foreign worker stuck between bureaucrazies and familial bonds. "Leech" provided a metaphor for self-serving enablers with its antagonist vampire coaching and creating healthy prospective victims to feed upon.



Cosplay or Halloween Costume? Peter Pan held this pose for four minutes, and his breath for seven. It was impressive. We are still looking for his legs.

The Competition Showcases

Each program began with a now-common acknowledgment of the original inhabitants of the space where OIAF was conducting its annual gathering; some of the entries made specific use of this information as part of their storylines:

"The Ottawa International Animation Festival operates on traditional unceded Algonquin Anishinabeg territory. Since time immemorial, the Algonquin Anishinabeg peoples have stewarded the lands, waters, and rich cultural life of this region. As



With perfect posture, Brooke Keesling photobombs the Ottawa morning weather - Bento Box RULES!

part of honouring this territory, we encourage attendees to seek out the work of Indigenous filmmakers, learn about the territories that we each occupy, and take action in support of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty."



Yeah, all diets are OFF in Ottawa

Each showing began with a pair of visual treats - first, the signal film, a peaceful meditation of animal life in an animated world, created by Matthew Rankin, evoked beautiful, earth-toned posters of the past, followed by his far more aggressive Take Your Seats, Balls-to-the-Wall experience with a growling, scowling, mascot gone mad, whose *Federal Bureau of Owls* demanded an *End To Government NOW!* with ancillary sponsorship notes from the *Bureau of Groundhog Acupuncture* and *Circumcision without circumspection*. Both films were funnier and more beautiful with each viewing.

A stated subtext for this year's showing examined "gender-based violence." Hardly a happy invitation to cinematic entertainment; nevertheless, there remained a lot of irony and twisted humor amid the occasional press of Message.



Portfolios! Companies! Colleges! Collages! It was all in OTTAWA at OIAF!

An additional subtext was *Nostalgia For Distressed Film*. If organic 8-35mm footage was not available, film grain, splotches, and disturbed soundtracks continued to be a favorite visual technique. There were also so many film gate ratios at OIAF; it must have been a true challenge for the projectionist. Certainly the framing curtains had their exercise. Wide-screen? 1:1.33? Sfumatoscope?



Timeless Gary Schwartz enjoying the phantom breeze behind him.

And if felt-based character stop-motion is your favorite genre, it was in plentiful supply. Time to recycle the remnants of the lint trap!

OIAF received 2165 entries this year, from which 74 were selected for the official competition and 18 were recognized on the penultimate night, during the awards ceremony. The award statues were designed by Ottawa-based scrap metal artist Tick Tock Tom, representing working phénakisticopes and featuring an animation by New York artistic phenomenon George Griffin.

The ultimate top category winners included (with juror comments in quotations):

Miserable Miracle (dir. Ryo Orikasa) - Grand Prize for Short Animation - "This film embraces animation as an intoxicating cocktail of image, word, and movement. It activates the spectator's hallucinatory and synaesthetic sensibilities." This was a visual feast - the elegant penmanship of a French essay sprang to vivid life with the calm, soothing tone of an English voice-over. No matter how you felt at the beginning, you felt better by the end.

When Adam Changes (dir. Joël Vaudreuil) - Grand Prize for Feature Animation - "This film about an impressionable teenager left an impression on us. For the filmmaker's skillful walk of the delicate line between irony and sincerity; for his mastery of the absurd; for the detail and precision of his artistic approach."

Albums de familles (Families' Albums) (dir. Moïa Jobin-Paré) - Best



Non-Narrative Short. "This film expertly combines a number of animation techniques into a meditation on photographic memory and materiality."

Un trou dans la poitrine (A Crab in the Pool) (dirs. Alexandra Myotte and Jean-Sébastien Hamel), - DGC Award, Best Canadian Animation winner - "dared to show audiences how imagination can transform trauma" The "crab" represents the astrological sign "Cancer," which here retains its title as *The Emperor of All Maladies*. They are all metaphorically and eternally linked concepts, and the animated figures expressed embarrassment, sadness, misunderstanding, and sorrow with warmth and understanding.

Pipes (dirs. Kilian Feusi, Jessica Meier, and Sujanth Ravichandran) - OIAF's award in memory of the late Hélène Tanguay - "Hélène loved to laugh and this award crowns a film whose humour matches her irreverent spirit" The phrase, "Life sucks, but sometimes, it sucks *real good*," could be the subtitle for this unique adventure of an on-call teddy bear turned creative plumber at an S&M bar. One is never too old nor too young to learn new tricks.



Janet Perlman's *Girl with the Red Beret* - image from *Animation Magazine* online (subscribe, ya hosers!)

Electra (dir. Daria Kashcheeva) - Wacom Public Prize - "blending live-action and stop-motion animation" to deconstruct the singular world of ten year-olds and their Barbies, while reconstructing a societal Barbie to please her father, an abusive dentist. When it was on the large screen, it was disturbing. Later, when revisiting it on the streaming Animation Showcase, it was devastating. The attention to detail and the personal, physically altered state of the actress by the end mashes the Stockholm syndrome into mental and physical abuse with a coating of cruelty. The observer suffocates with the abused protagonist.



Future CEOs at the picnic

Zima (dir. Tomek Popakul and Kasumi Ozeki) - Best Narrative Short - "The jury spent half of the night deliberating and discussing this haunting film. The filmmaker offers a deeply unsettling portrait of a world turned inhospitable and asks what it means to survive such a world physically and spiritually."



More free-range animators on the prowl - including San Jose and David Chai (who created this selfie)

La Fille au Béret Rouge (The Girl with the Red Beret) (dir. Janet Perlman) - Honorable Mention - "playful, joyful, kinetic, irrepressible exploration of Canada's oldest metropolis, Montréal" Painfully underrated, to this observer who, repeatedly, and directly to Ms. Perlman whenever possible, reiterated, "Thank you for all the joy and happiness in your observations of the underpinnings of Montreal. Never have I had so much fun watching two guys try to squeeze a sofa onto a subway." With a shout-out to Frederic Back, no less.

A Bear Named Jesus (dir. Terril Calder) - Honourable Mention - "witty, insightful, and penetrating exploration of the cultural consequences of European Christian colonization on Indigenous people." Imagine if some abducted, brainwashed family member told you about a bear and his buddies trying to save your soul...wouldn't that sound just silly?

Love - 14th Anibar Animation Festival Trailer (dir. Sander Joon) - Best commissioned film - "This commissioned film captures the sense of celebration and communion at the heart of a film festival. For its economic worldbuilding and joyful design" It was a colorful, retro, joyful brief bit of giddy glee. Two flies kiss, two frogs interject, and everyone is joined in a giant group sloppy smooch.

Cyclepaths (dir. Anton Cla) - Bento Box Award for Best Student Animation - "This film takes confident risks with its aesthetic choices and allows for ambiguity. (An) uncanny and foreboding portrait of societal disorder"

Eeva (dirs. Morten Tšinakov and Lucija Mrzljak) - Best Sound Design - "The precise balance of sonic effects and silence was integral to the atmosphere and themes of this film." In an Estonian clean and crisp visual style, it is quietly precise, controlled mayhem, with repressed memories leading to outbursts of emotion, finding solace in incineration. It's a love story. And the poor woodpecker!

Not Everyone Was A "Winner" But Everything Was Worth a Peek

(Often in these notes, the recurring phrase "NTSC - "never the same color" keeps appearing; it may have been an observation, an overheard remark, or a noisy dream. Nonetheless, it seems a Relevant Truth in the filmmaker's world, and one to place in print early and often. So here it is inserted.)



Hand-carved, but no hands

Le salle des refusees absorbed a few that did not make the showings, but finite number of prizes meant some shown entries were passed over, with still a significant amount of effort in their execution.

Madeleine - Raquel Sancinetti - two friends 67 years apart - Using felt stop motion to describe living to 106, from recorded conversations between that woman and a friend 67 years younger. Together, they visit a beach, both in real time, and in felt-puppetry, in a vehicle that hesitates to make the entire trip, creating a new sort of voyage. "You can't die without learning how to swim," says Madeleine, and she carries on through this five year conversation.

Aphasia - NFB - A single paragraph describes the condition, and it is peeled, dissected, torn, and made unintelligible, both visually and audibly to illustrate the challenge of the condition. The shattered soundtrack rumbled a deep bass to shake the floor to personify the patient's frustration.



DRIJF - Levi Stoops, director - One of the more unusual experiences was the tale of two inexplicably naked Belgians adrift on a log, seeking dolphins, getting munched, sunburned, and exploring a poor quality of life within a dead whale.



A final shot of Chris Robinson, getting pretty annoyed with all that camera noise

There were many other astonishing examples of the craft, art, and love for animation during OIAF. It's enough to be inspired to do something, anything, even with the distractions of a return roadtrip and brisk stop at the duty-free store to stock up on Coffee Crisps (why aren't these addicting morsels at every damn convenience store and Dollar General across the US?).

After 3400 words writing about OIAF, it's time to live some of these vicarious experiences on more than an annual basis...gimme some clay...where's that lightbox? Excuse me while I let the world spin on its own for a while.

ASIFA -SF IS A VOLUNTEER-RUN ASSOCIATION

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