

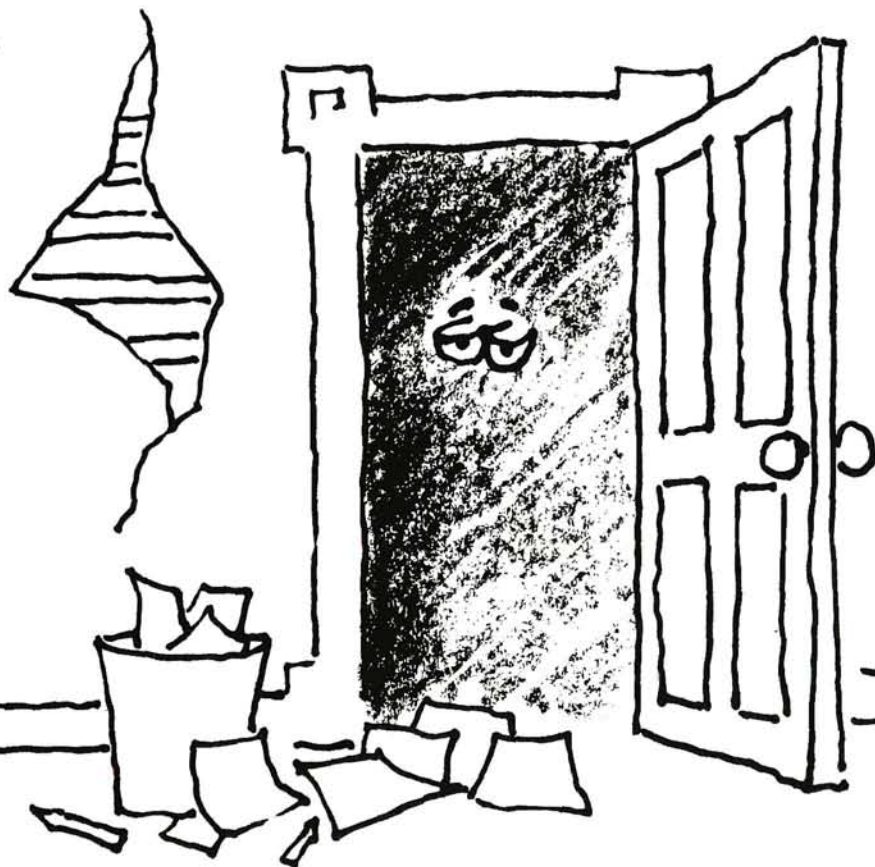
1980 ottawa international animation festival

gathering of the clan

by robert james hookey

In the field of animation, Canada has a solid reputation. Certainly, no festival could hold a candle to this year's Ottawa fest. It brought animators out of many closets and many countries; and a fine international time was had by all.

Cinema Canada asked five animators from across the country to describe what it is to be an animator. The following illustrations tell it like it is.



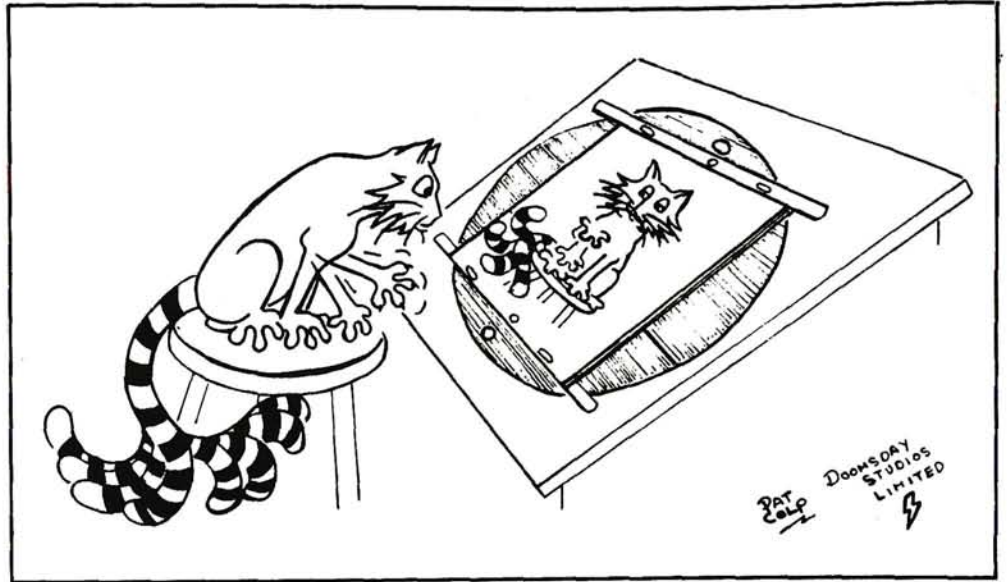
A GOOD ANIMATOR
IS.....
A CLOSET ACTOR
VISIONARY
POET ☘
ARTIST
MISUNDERSTOOD
AND RARELY SEEN
IN PUBLIC

This is one time when I wish I had a computer that would do the writing for me. It's not that my appetite for writing has been ruined, but how does one begin to write about a festival that was so rich in its programming and so challenging in its content? Perhaps, by focussing on the festival's two main ingredients. The first, most provocative one, was its attempt to help animators stop worrying and learn to love computer animation. The second, was its demonstration of the superb marriage between imagination and technique that is the crux of animation magic.

Artists have always had ambivalent feelings towards new technology. Since the nature of the artistic process is to seek new mediums of expression, computer animation would seem to be another tool to explore ideas and feelings. On the other hand, an aura of coldness and impersonality has clouded the computer's acceptability. This attitude has been fostered by science fiction and doomsday literature predicting the demise of man's freedom in the computer age.

Among the many talented animators drawn to Ottawa '80, the same ambivalence was evident. Judson Rosebush and Guy Nouri conducted seminars and workshops to help animators feel more comfortable with the new technology. Judson Rosebush is the president of Digital Effects Inc., New York City, author of *Computer Animation* and a former teacher of computer graphics at Syracuse University. His task was to create analogies in modern animation that would explain the roots of computer animation graphics. He told the animators that the traditional functions of exposing a frame of film allowed the animator to behave like a computer. The routine functions of calculating, moving to a position, exposing the film and determining whether or not the function is complete, is the way the computer could be programmed to function. The implication was that the computer could free the animator from the repetitive drudgery of this function. Judson screened the films of McLaren, Whitney and Alexeieff to illustrate visual styles that were similar to computer-assisted and generated images. The message was loud and clear throughout

Robert James Hookey is a free-lance writer and a teacher of communications, film history, scriptwriting and Canadian Cinema at Sheridan College. He is also secretary-treasurer of the Film Studies Association of Canada, and has been a judge for the Canadian National Exhibition student film festival for three years.



Pat Colp Doomsday Studios Ltd. (Halifax)

Judson's lecture. In short, the computer could offer the animator time saved, and freedom from the repetitive aspects of animation.

Judson Rosebush's lecture set the stage for Guy Nouri, author of the *Backstage* magazine series on "High Tech in the '80s," and a clever computer consultant. Nouri introduced himself and then proceeded to explain the purpose of his talk. "I'm here because a contract has been put out on your fear of computers." He emphasized that the computer is a dumb machine that needs the human brain to make it work in a useful and creative way. There are two types of systems available to the animator: computer assisted and computer generated. The computer assisted system could be wedded to the traditional animation system to improve the quality of the animation. Nouri envisions a time when the technician and the artist will collaborate to explore the artistic possibilities of a technology that is ripe for exploration and innovation. He mentioned the group CAF/CAN, that is interested in non-commercial and non-competitive explorations of computer graphics and the exciting potential of networking. Nouri sees Canada as the centre for animation innovation in North America and he encouraged the animators to embrace computer animation for both artistic and business reasons.

Reacting to the concept of computer animation, most of the animators I talked to were fascinated by the possibilities of this new electronic intruder, but were quick to underline its limitations from a human and artistic perspective. Jean Philippe Fauteux, a freelance animator living in Hull, Quebec, saw the

advantage in the speed of the animation function. However, he thought it lacked animation feeling. It was too perfect; mathematically perfect. It lacked the individual character that can be present in traditional animation.

George Griffin, a prolific and profound animator from the USA, thought that computers had a future, which warranted exploration by the animator. One of the limitations he saw was that the "final result would be a small image for a small box." Griffin still liked the idea of working one to one with the material that constitutes traditional animation graphics.

Michel Ocelot, a talented and innovative animator from Paris, France, was very enthusiastic about the possibilities of computer animation. Presently working in cut-out animation, he is open to all kinds of new techniques. Animators are by nature very creative people who are open to new ideas. No doubt, once they have stopped worrying about the computer, they will learn how to use it to their advantage, without letting it use them.

In closing the festival, John Halas, president of ASIFA International summed up the impact of the festival's computer animation seminars by stating that, "The computer is a friend opening up new horizons for animation. It is here to stay. Use it to enhance the art of animation."

A smooth combination of imagination and technique was evident in the majority of films screened during the festival. There was a sense that the animators had rediscovered the art of the story, well conceived and told. The jury must be commended for their labour of love, that at times must have been difficult

considering the quality of the animation. To come away from a festival feeling that many of the films deserved to be winners is a unique experience. But not only the winners warrant highlighting, some of the other films also deserve special mention.

In category "A" (films longer than three minutes), first prize went to Russian animator Yuri Norstein for **Skazka Skazok (Tale of Tales)**. This is a tour de force in animation technique. It was a dream about the horror of war through the loss of loved ones, the joy of birth and the vitality and beauty of youth. He creates an endearing creature that looks like a cute cartoonlike dog to escort us through the logic of his dream. The genius of Norstein's style is his depiction of images that are so human and sensitive. The dog becomes more than a cardboard cut-out; he is a sensitive and witty observer of the dream elements. The range of techniques used, such as cut-out, pencil drawing, collage, and watercolour, is carefully orchestrated to involve one in the reality of the dream. It is a complex and beautiful film that words cannot adequately describe; it certainly is one of the most evocative animated films I have ever seen.

The Sweater, an NFB film made by

Sheldon Cohen, is a charming film set in a small Quebec village of the late forties and early fifties. This film won second prize in category "A." There is only one hockey hero in the village. He is Rocket Richard who plays for the Montreal Canadiens. All the boys in the village wear the Montreal sweater with Rocket Richard's number on it, almost religiously. When one boy in the village is forced to wear a Toronto Maple Leaf sweater, because his mother ordered the wrong sweater from the Eaton's catalogue, the boy is personally ashamed and consequently held up to ridicule by his friend and the local priest.

Michael Mills won first prize in category "B" (films shorter than three minutes) for his film **The History of the World in Three Minutes Flat**. The film is a witty and compressed history of the world from creation to the present day.

Second prize in category "B" went to a magical film entitled **A Bogar (The Bug)** made by Ferenc Rofusz from Hungary. His film was also given the award for the most popular audience film of the festival. His film proves that a simple idea developed with superb technique can make for a compelling film. It is simply a film about the flight of a fly through the fields and into a house.

The camera gives us a fly's eye-view of the fly's meandering journey until its life is terminated by a fly swatter. When I interviewed Rofusz, he claimed that the idea for the film came from listening to a Pink Floyd Album. Apparently this famous rock group experiments with a variety of sounds that reflect the environment.

Eugene Fedorenko, after receiving the Oscar for **Every Child**, was once again given commendation. His film won first prize in category "E" (First film). **Every Child** (sponsored by UNICEF for the year of the child), in a comic and compelling fashion shows the need for child rights in a world that is rapidly losing the security of family life and the desire to care. It is a story about an unwanted baby who is passed from house to house and finally ends up being cared for by some poor pan-handlers in a junkyard.

Paul Fierlinger, of the USA received a well-deserved first prize in category "F" (Films for Children), for **It's So Nice To Have A Wolf Around The House**. It deals with prejudice, and a caring for others, in an entertaining way. A very old man lives with a very old cat, goldfish, and dog. Since they are unable to take care of themselves, they advertise in the



Marv Newland International Rocketship Ltd. (Vancouver)



Brad Caslor Credo Group Ltd. (Winnipeg)



Chuck Gammage Nelvana Ltd. (Toronto)

newspaper for someone to do the household chores. The ad is responded to by a wolf who claims he is a dog, since no one likes wolves. In the end, the charming wolf influences this household for the better.

First prize in the instructional film category was won by Lynn Smith of Canada with the film **This Is Your Museum Speaking**. A night watchman in a museum discovers the wealth of knowledge tucked away in the dusty recesses of the museum. This is an excellent film for introducing children to the treasures hidden away in dusty museums.

Ubu, a British animated film won the Grand Prix for Geoff Dunbar. This unrelenting film about the corruption in high places, has an animation style that is unique. The use of garbled sound, and cartoon balloons, adds to the grossness of the individuals consumed by power. In this film the corrupt survive.

Alexandre Alexeieff and Claire Parker of France were honoured for their pioneering work in pin-screen animation.

Some films did not receive the recognition they deserved. Michel Ocelot made a delicate and beautiful film called **Les trois inventeurs (The Three Inventors)**. The theme of intolerance is sensitively depicted through the lives of three inventors-mother, father and child. The community misunderstands their passion for invention and proceeds to destroy their work and finally their lives. Michel tells a convincing story with his cut-out animation characters which seem to breathe life. When you see the cut-outs burning you have grown so attached to the family that their death is a devastating experience.

An NFB film entitled **A Sufi Tale**, made by Gayle Thomas, is intriguing with its oil on glass technique depicting an old Persian lesson, in which a wise man allays the fear of a town's inhabitants about the unknown. In an interesting merging of vocal, choral sounds, with powerful animation technique, the fears and anxieties of the people are revealed.

Te Land, Ter Zee, En In De Lucht (On Land, At Sea And In The Air), by Paul Driessen of Holland, was an interesting attempt at animating three inter-related stories shown on one screen. He is a master craftsman who is constantly exploring the outer reaches of his craft. His work was given special recognition by Judge Tissa David.

My final commendation goes to Paul Mason of Canada for his film **Dragon Castle**. It is a fantastic fable, in plasticine animation, featuring a dragon, a prince, and moat monsters, and how they keep the king and queen warm. The film is

enhanced by having children do the narration.

Along with the rich animation program and the informative seminars on computer animation, there were enlightening and entertaining retrospectives. I was thoroughly surprised by the Charles R. Bower film fest. This American movie pioneer combined live-action and animation to create a compelling comic virtuosity. A fine comic sense was present in every move he made. In the film, **Egged On**, made in 1926, he portrays an inventor who creates a machine that will make breakable eggs unbreakable. To demonstrate the usefulness of his machine, he steals eggs from various farmers. But he keeps breaking them as he hauls them in his car. Finally, he discovers that the safest place for the eggs is on top of the motor. He gets safely home, only to discover that the eggs are hatching little replicas of the car he is driving! Bower's versatility extended to both puppet and object animation.

An added feature of Ottawa '80 was the Videothèque, a CBC viewing centre for animation on video. With a growing interest in computer animation and the considerable out-put of made-for-television animation, this was a popular and busy spot during the festival.

Both Chez Ani, a place for animators to socialize and show their films, and the traditional picnic, were their usual success.

Ottawa '80 has developed into a world class animation festival. After your third anniversary, Ottawa '80, you're not getting older, you're getting better! Congratulations to Kelly O'Brien and the staff of the Canadian Film Institute.



Post Production Professionals

Editors
Screenings
Neg. Cutters
Sound Transfers
Quality Control

Editing Room Rentals

**Millard
Film Services Ltd.**

425 Adelaide St. W., Toronto, Ont. M5V 1S4
(416) 363-1076

Motion Picture Guarantors Inc.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Guarantor's fees may be included in the 75% "services" category for certification only if the guarantee is provided by individual Canadians.

A guarantee by Motion Picture Guarantors Inc. so qualifies.

Bonding Available for the Largest Features
No-Claim Bonus Always Competitive

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

DOUGLAS LEITERMAN PHILIP S. HOBEL

Motion Picture Guarantors Inc.

43 Britain Street, Toronto, Canada M5A 1R7
Telephone (416) 361-1664 TELEX 065-24697

211 East 43rd Street, New York, N Y 10017
Telephone (212) 682-0730