



Fig 6.3.00

6.3 How to create a short animation film

Letting a good story find you



Fig. 6.3.01

Creative directions are spurred by two very different approaches – one requires an active immersion with the task at hand; the other a total distancing from the problem to be solved.

This is possibly the most difficult hurdle. There has to be a story or an idea that first animates the animator and it has been aptly remarked that animation is as much the art of moving people as the art of making things move. Where does one find a good story? And how does one know that a story that you find, is a good story? There are no easy answers to these and someone has said that like a farmer who tills the land; sows the seed and waits for the rain, an animator has to doodle, read and listen. In other words if the animator is constantly preparing the ground then the chances are that a good story shall find the animator. It is useful to develop the practice of putting down half-formed ideas that can later germinate into saplings and trees. It helps to see and read a lot, as

this charges the tips of the neurons and enables creative synapses. When all else fails, one may choose a story that has substance and appeal.



Fig. 6.3.02

As the story idea begins to sink in, it might be useful to start experimenting with approaches that seem promising. The drawing board almost equals the morning throne as the catalyst for carrying half-formed ideas further.

Getting Into the groove

Once a story has found you (or you have found a story), it is time to set-up your workspace and sharpen your pencils. Digital tablets are the sketchbooks of many contemporary animators, though some still prefer the tactility of paper and graphite. Visualizing the story through drawings may suggest interpretations and ideas for handling various sequences.



Fig. 6.3.03

As the story gets internalized, it is useful to draw up character studies for all the different characters in the story. How do characters carry themselves? How does each one talk and walk? How do they react to a situation?

Character studies

Typically character studies require an understanding of the character(s) in the story and drawing them as they would appear from different angles. It would be worthwhile to understand how a director for a live-action film, goes about choosing the actors. For instance, the process of character study could include observing people in real life and then attempting to distill essences of traits that could infuse the character with authenticity. What if one of the characters in the story is a prisoner? Or a sailor? It would also be useful to understand how an actor prepares for a particular role. Watching plays and participating in theatre workshops can help an animator understand ways of infusing character study with a vitality that comes from a close identification with the character(s). To borrow an analogy from the game of cricket, you might have noticed bowlers rubbing the ball on their trousers. It is believed that this enables the bowler to internalize the ball and deliver it with a charge that adds to the physical force of delivering the ball. A similar process of getting under the skin of the character(s) would add much to the animation.

Storyboarding

Storyboards are a set of snapshots that capture the narrative in a sequence of frames that indicate the action and the possible camera angles for the animation. Breaking down the narrative into such a sequence (or a set of sequences) helps get a better grip on the pace and the telling of the story. It also allows ensures that members of a team of animators have a shared vision of the animation.



Fig. 6.3.04
 A storyboard for an animation short about an idea that suggests that though we all are very different individuals when we are awake, in our sleep we are all alike.

Visual Design and Concept Art



Fig.6.3.05

For a 'story idea' to find a match in an appropriate visual design requires a fine sense of the visual language. Concept artists come up with 'mood-boards' and concept art for possible visual treatments.

The 'look and feel' of the animation is a role associated with the art director or the visual designer. It is possible that a certain story requires a visual treatment that is suggested by the story. If the story is located in a particular place or time, it would help to build a reference library of images that throw light on the specifics of costumes, colours, gestures and mannerisms of the characters. A visual artist may be called upon to integrate inputs drawn from research into a coherent visual treatment – often called as 'concept art'.

Sound track

Sound, musicians believe is primal. Instead of regarding the sound track as something that is somehow-put-together from stock sounds and music, it would definitely help the animation, if attention is paid to the design of the sound track. A good way to create an original sound track is to befriend a musician. If one is musically gifted, one may indicate a framework to the musician who can direct and design the sound track. Often animators work closely with musicians while creating music and effects for their films.

Animatic

An animatic is created by putting together line drawings of key actions and events that are displayed in sequence with basic camera movements and a suggestive sound track. It may be regarded as a step from the storyboarding stage towards the final animation. An animatic can communicate an approximate sense of the final work, including the pace, probable camera movements and a tentative soundscape.

The final film

The animatic provides a sense of the pace of the film and the key points of inflexion in the storytelling. With the help of the storyboard, the character studies, the concept art and the animatic, work towards the final film can begin. Depending on the nature of the animation, a choice of some appropriate software has to be made. From the animatic stage to the final film is a giant step and is time consuming.

References

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Exercises



Fig 6.3.99

1. Cut two circular disc about 3" in diameter. Draw two eyes on one of them and a face without eyes on the other. Arrange the discs, back to back and place a thin stick between them. Glue the disks together, with the stick in the middle. Once it dries, twirl the stick to understand how some of the early animators used the thaumatrope.
2. Create a flip book to animate a person yawning.