ABOUT

ASIFA was founded in 1960 in Annecy, France by a group of international animators to increase world-wide visibility of animated film. ASIFA's membership includes animation professionals and fans from more than 50 countries.

ASIFA-East, based in New York City, is the Northeast chapter. We host screenings, workshops, and panel discussions on all things animation, and our film festival, which debuted in 1969, is the oldest animation-only festival in the US.

BOARD MEMBERS

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from The Wild-Tempered Clavier by Anna Samo

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The plans for our 55th festival are well underway.

We've had the in-person jury screenings, a big thanks to Terrence Masson, the chair of SVA's MFA Computer Arts program, for helping find us screening rooms when we were unable to use the one we originally booked. And now all the films, including students, are available to watch on our Vimeo channel. Please keep an eye out for the email with the link to the ballot so you can cast your vote.

Emily Compton and new festival co chair David Eisman have been working incredibly hard to make this happen. Along with Candy Kugel, Josué Advincola and myself, we've all been pitching in to make this a success.

And all of this had me thinking about festivals and their worth and purpose. Personally I've never thought that the success of art needs to be justified by awards but there is something about them that seems necessary. As it happens, one of our members, Anna Samo, who made it to this year's short list of the Academy Awards for the Best Animated Short Film category, was nice enough to talk to us about her experiences and thoughts in this area.

I also had a conversation with 3D computer artist Stephen Mann about why so few CG artists/animators join ASIFA.

Lastly, we hosted a memorial for Tony Eastman, a hub of the NYC animation community for decades, that was attended by family, friends and colleagues and followed by a wonderful reception. You can see some pictures of the event and Tony's life on the History of Animation Facebook page. We'll post them on our website in the near future.

Speaking of our website, we have a treat for all you animation historians: A Virtual History of New York's Animation History! Created by board member Hugo Segal, who spent months researching, writing and mapping out all the animation studios in NY state, beginning with Vitagraph in 1890 to the present day.
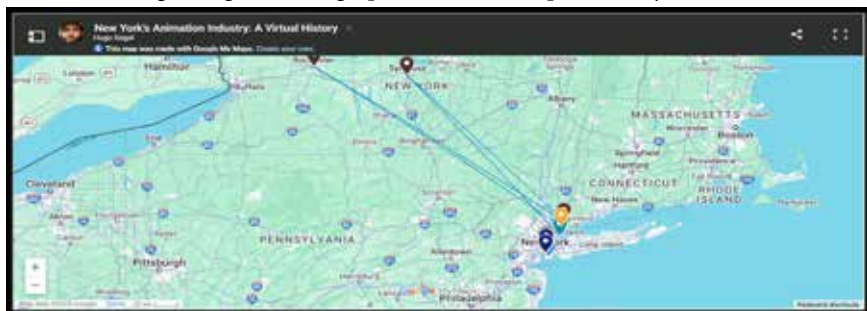
The great thing about this is that it is easily updated so if you have any suggestions, please forward them. With this map and our downloadable aNYmators, we're hoping to be a source for anyone interested in animation based in NY and soon our region.

INTERNATIONAL UPDATE

This year ASIFA is celebrating their 65th anniversary with a variety of exciting initiatives throughout the year. ASIFA's mission has always been to connect animators worldwide and promote the art of animation. As a global umbrella organization, ASIFA supports unique regional groups and chapters across the world.

Chapters are hosting a range of vibrant local and national activities, including film festivals, workshops, screenings, and celebratory events. The spring celebration has already kicked off with retrospective screenings, awards, and seminars at notable festivals, including the Cairo Animatex Festival (Egypt), and the Monstra Animation Festival (Portugal). Summer brings the Zagreb International Animation Festival (Croatia), and the Annecy International Animation Festival (France), with even more activities planned for the rest of the year.

A Few Highlights:
• International Animation Day: ASIFA has issued a call for very short films about peace to be streamed on October 28, 2025, in celebration of the birthday of animation. https://asifa.net/asifa-peace-for-the-planet/
• Special Anniversary Cash Award: ASIFA will sponsor a special cash award at select festivals to recognize the anniversary.
• ASIFA Student Award and ASIFA Member's Postcard Gallery: These popular initiatives are underway, celebrating the talent and creativity of the animation community.
• ASIFA Prize Retrospective Screenings: Curated screenings of ASIFA Prize winners will be showcased at several major festivals.
• Zagreb Animation Festival: ASIFA will host a General Assembly meeting, and animator Sayoko Kinoshita will be honored with the prestigious ASIFA Prize for Lifetime Achievement.
• Annecy Animation Festival: A major gathering is being organized by ASIFA Hellas, Hollywood, China, and others to celebrate the milestone anniversary.

In addition, ASIFA Magazine and the ASIFA Academic Journal will highlight the organization's history, achievements, and future directions.

So maybe we can team up someday?
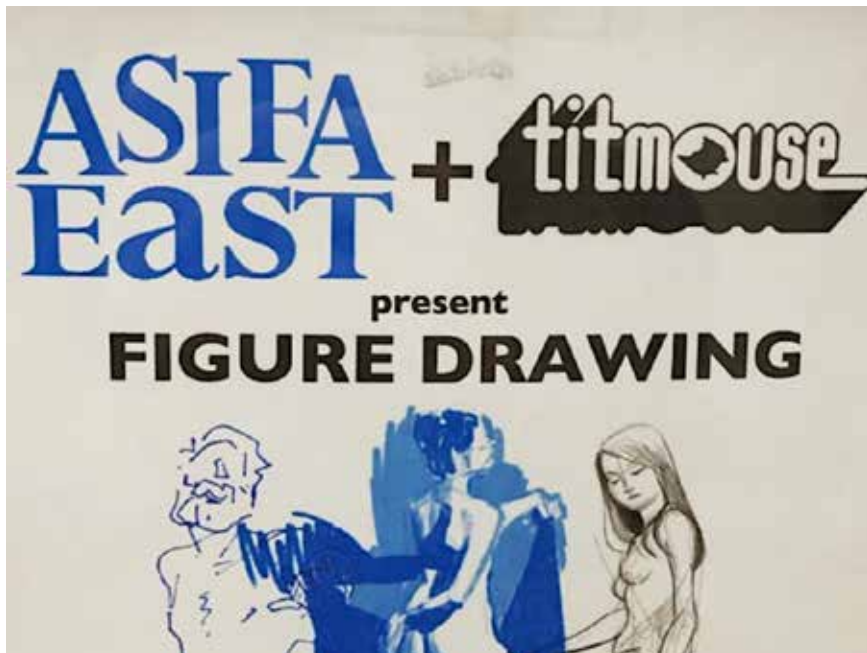
Yeah. I would love that.

To be continued...

You can find out more about Steve at his links:

https://smannimation.blogspot.com/

https://www.facebook.com/groups/nymayaUsersGroup

His YouTube channel, "Everyday Maya" for 3D tutorials and ponderings -->
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2jQHsCj-DBZOHwKGjzNGIw

FIGURE DRAWING

Thursday, April 24 at 7:30 pm
Titmouse Studios
150 W 30th St, between 6th and 7th. 10th floor

ANNA SAMO

ON FESTIVALS
A conversation with Doug Vitarelli

Anna Samo is a NYC-based animator, teacher and one of the founders of Animation Speak/Easy.

Anna's films have been screened and won awards at highly acclaimed festivals around the globe such as Berlin Film Festival - Berlinale, Annecy Film Festival, Stuttgart International Festival of Animated Films, Animafest Zagreb, Aspen Shortsfest, Sundance and Palm Springs, among others.

Her most recent film, **The Wild-Tempered Clavier***, made it to the Academy Awards short list and we had a few questions.*

This conversation was done by email.

Hi, Anna.
For this interview I'd like to talk about the process of getting your film out there.
Were festivals the first step in showing your film to the public, getting a distributor, or just putting it up on a streaming service like YouTube?

I studied animation in Germany and I still have access to some of the funding opportunities there. Most of my films are produced by a production company that is based in Germany. Germany has a wonderful federal funding system that rewards previous successes. So when one of my films screens at certain festivals or wins certain awards, I will qualify for some automatic funding for my next project. It is never a large sum of money, but it is enough to get a new film started. Once the film is done, festivals are always the first step to get my films out into the world. Usually I also have a sales agent who generates some sales of the film. In this case the film will not be online on free platforms for some time. Now that so many films are easily available, it is very hard to reach your audience if you just release the film online. It is helpful if the film has already been on the festival circuit and potentially even won some awards before it is released online. Besides, my films are made for a big screen and are much better to be seen in a theater than on a laptop or phone.

When your film has been selected, how do you decide if you're going to attend the festival?

It is always a tricky thing between finding the time and the resources to attend festivals: Some festivals provide accommodation and cover at least part of the travel expenses; in which case I would make an effort to go. I try especially hard to attend the festivals that I have a long-standing relationship with, like Annecy, Stuttgart and some others. My current film played in over 30 festivals in the past year and I only went to four. It used to be different when I was still based in Europe (and did not have children) and I really miss attending more festivals, because often it is the only way for me to interact with the audience and to meet old friends and colleagues.

That's SIGGRAPH.

I found that to be probably the event that gets a lot of attention nowadays, at least for my interest. Outside of that, I don't even really know. It sucks. The last five years I've been living in this room to work. That networking thing is just gone.

I feel that meeting people and that type of mentorship of doing like the render walk, when there was such a thing, and looking over someone's shoulder and asking "How did you do that?" is completely gone. You know, one of the things I want to talk to you about is having 3D artists come to some events. It might get you energized.
Are the 3D/VFX artists interested in creating their own work?

I think that percentage has gotten smaller. I think originally it was very large but we're talking 15 years ago. But I think it's gotten smaller. I always want to do my own work, I just never have time to.

With the Maya Users Group thing, part of what has happened is we haven't really added any new members, but a lot of the people who have similar mindset to me about being interested in this still are the ones that are all there. So I find that I'm always, "Hey, SVA! Send me your kids. We'll add them to the group." And they're not all that excited to join for whatever reason.

Have you noticed any other organizations that are picking up those newer people?

I really haven't. That's the thing. So I'm actually part of a group and I've been part of it for a really long time called 3dpro.com. It's just an email server that's been around well before I even got into the industry. It's been my most active group and it's all old-timers. A lot of people who aren't even in the industry anymore, but they're still on there. So, yeah, I always want something.

And did you expand that animation community by joining any other organizations, like SIGGRAPH?

I never actually joined SIGGRAPH, but I did do a lot with them, a lot of talks and presentations. Stuff like that.

The other thing at the time was (longtime 3D person in NYC, now a professor at RIT) Dave Halbstein was running the Maya users group, he also taught at SVA. And so SVA was a good reaching output point for everybody because they had (SVA Instructor) Danny Williams who worked for Blue Sky, and then there was a couple of people who worked for Framestore, couple who were at the Mill. So it's actually through SVA that I met a lot of other professionals in the area.
I actually started teaching first before I had my first full-time gig. I was doing a lot of freelance work, but it was through SVA that I sort of started networking out a little bit and meeting people.

Would you say most 3D animators would probably prefer SIGGRAPH over ASIFA and why?

I actually don't know the answer because one of the things I noticed was when I was in LA, I actually started to try and teach for Gnomon. And the environment there, everybody was super excited to talk about animation, work on animation. And "Oh, did you see this film?" and talk about that and I had the same expectations that I'd get to New York and would have that same sort of energy and it did not. Most people I worked with were "The minute I've done with work. I don't want to talk about this at all. I'm done. I'm gonna go do my own thing."
So, for a little while, I tried to talk to somebody to start a Gnomon here, as well, which didn't really pan out. I honestly don't know. I forget, who does **Bring Your Own Animation**?

The Oscar is the most well-known film award in the world. How did you find out about making the Short List, what type of emotions, I'm sure they ranged from euphoria to dread, did you feel?
And what did you do to make it to the next step? Did you seek out advice from past nominees/winners?

I found out about the Short List while folding laundry. I received a congratulations text from a friend, who is a member of the Academy and then I googled the results. It was very exciting of course. The next phase was quite stressful, especially since it collided with the end of the year holidays. We had to find financial support for promotion, prepare interviews and materials for social media and so on, all of it during our winter break family vacation. I worked with a wonderful publicist, who guided me through this stage.
While the publicity campaign was in full swing and I was busy, it was very exhilarating. It was also wonderful to see my friends and family being proud of me. Then the wait started and the announcement deadline got pushed several times following the terrible fires that devastated LA. This was probably the most dreadful time, when I just wanted it all to be over. On the morning that the nominations were announced and we discovered, that the film did not make it to the next stage a pipe burst in our house and lots of water run through the floor and rained onto my animation table. That was very cathartic. Luckily, we noticed it soon enough and none of the equipment got seriously damaged.

I noticed on your website that you've been interviewed multiple times. How fun is that?

I like giving interviews, but it is also a lot of work. A few years ago, when "The Opposites Game" qualified for the Oscars, my co-director Lisa LaBracio and me were interviewed for different outlets about the film. It was fun, because often we would talk to the journalists either in person, or on Zoom and there was a kind of conversation going between us and the interviewer. It was also easier, because I knew that if I forgot something, or did not express something clear enough, Lisa would jump in and help me out. With "The Wild-Tempered Clavier" my experience was very different, because most of the interviews were just questions sent over email. This of course has some advantages, because you have more control over what you say and how you organize your thoughts in a written form, but for me it is less enjoyable, because the improvisational aspect and a conversational aspect of giving an interview in person is missing.

What are your feelings on festivals versus awards? Is getting your film seen and meeting people the most rewarding part of authorship? Does winning awards open doors both creatively and professionally that otherwise would not have happened?

For me being able to go to a screening of my film and have some exchange with the audience is the most important part. I spend so much time alone while making the film, that a possibility to talk to people about it feels very rewarding and stimulating. Even just seeing the film in a space filled with other human beings makes it a completely different experience for me. Receiving awards is nice and is definitely helpful for future grants and funding opportunities. As an artist you always have to have some external recognition of the value of your work to be able to secure support for your next projects. So, awards are definitely important, but as a filmmaker I learn much more from having the audience's reaction to a film, than from receiving an award for it.

Where did you go to school? And what did you go there to study?

My undergrad was at University of Vermont, painting sculpture, drawing. Very little of anything on the computers. And then for graduate school, I went to USC film school in the animation department. At that time, it was pretty new. I was in the second class to go through it. And it was not necessarily computer animation, it was everything. Didn't matter. Stop motion or you could do just really weird avant garde experimental work. It was everything. All at the same time

Was Christine Panushka one of your professors?

Yes, yes, she was. She was a professor and then she later became the chair of the department.

She was my professor at CalArts.

Yeah. She's great.

So when you got a job, you were a 3D person, right?

Yes, yeah. Toy Story had just come out and I went to SIGGRAPH and saw some early Toy Story tests and that's what got me going, "Oh my God, I gotta do this."

When you moved to New York, had you ever heard of ASIFA?

I probably did at some point.

But you weren't interested at all.

I was probably more worried about getting a job that I wasn't even reaching out that much, but I definitely know it's always been around.

So you move to New York after grad school. You got a job.

Eventually.

And then your animation community became where you worked.

Absolutely.

That's a great way to segue to what I've originally contacted you. Do you feel that mindset is prevalent in the 3-D computer animation world?

For what's happening now, I think less and less. I'm probably completely wrong, but it seems like a lot of people are just, "I just want to give them a final content move on, do my two second thing, throw it on Instagram, move to the next one." I don't know if people still enjoy keyframing. I still enjoy keyframing and figuring things out and the acting process and all that sort of stuff.

I feel like there's definitely a bit of a pretty big shift and that people don't necessarily have that excitement as much? I don't know. I could be wrong since I'm not teaching, it's hard to know what the students are thinking. But it just seems it gets less and less that the craft of doing it and solving this, like even sometimes some of the people I've worked with, they'll come up against the roadblock and they'll say "Oh, I'll just watch a YouTube thing or whatever on how to do this" and then forget that information and move on. Where I'm still somehow still interested in learning new techniques and learning how to do things. And I think maybe that's not the case anymore.

Maybe that's a generational thing, too. People are so used to just looking it up on the internet real quick to get the answer and they don't need to retain that information or build on information.

They could always look it up on YouTube at the next gig.

For me, I was always trying to improve myself to some degree and that's why I keep doing it
I relate it to sports. I do a lot of snowboarding, windsurfing, mountain biking, stuff like that. And I fear the day when I stop improving in those things because I don't think they'll be interesting anymore. If I'm not getting better and I'm just going to go through the motions, I don't think I'll be as excited about it but if I can learn a new trick or learn a new thing or feel like I did that just a little bit better, that's exciting for me. That's the same thing I feel with animation and rigging.

STEPHEN MANN
WHERE ARE THE 3D ARTISTS?

A conversation with Doug Vitarelli

ASIFA-East is mostly comprised of 2D animators and, being pirmarily a 3D animator, I've always wondered why there aren't more of us in our organization.
Steve Mann is also a 3D computer artist and has been working the staff/permalance/freelance circuit in NYC for over 20 years. While we never crossed paths at a studio, he's the head of the Facebook, NYC Maya Users Group, an open group for the NY Maya users group to discuss all things CG in the NYC area, of which I am a member.
Being the head of a 3D group, I invited him to talk about what it would take to attract more 3D artists.

Have I ever met you?
I think we've met in person. Maybe once at a SIGGRAPH thing, like eons ago.

I can't recall running into you on the circuit because I have a feeling you were a Charlex (www.chrlx.com/) guy?
Yep, for like 14 or 15 years.

So you know I'm a 3D animator, started in 1995 at this little place called Image Design, but always considered myself an animator. You're the head of the Facebook group, NYC Maya Users Group.

Yeah. Which used to be a physical thing. We had meetings and I had a lot of good support from Autodesk but at some point, they just stopped supporting users groups. I think people shuffled around and everyone I knew disappeared from Autodesk and went to other companies. And then with COVID I started working from home and actually doing a meeting in the city became a lot more work.

That's something I'm doing with ASIFA right now. just getting people together. I find nothing more enjoyable than working with and hanging out with people who have the same similar interests.
One thing that always got me was I always felt like I was an outlier in ASIFA because I was primarily a 3D animator, it's mainly 2D. And one of the things I really want to do is to tell people that we're an umbrella organization for animators.

I like Golden Wolf and Psyop. It's the only place I know that's in the city.
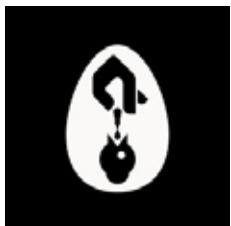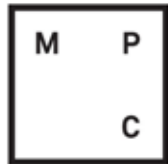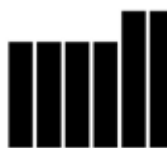
There's Titmouse, Augenblick, Buck. And there are some littler places, like Mighty Oak, they do a bit everything studio. But since the 90s there's been more 3D. I don't know Golden Wolf.

They were connected with Psyop and then they left New York.

Wait, Psyop isn't in New York anymore?

To my knowledge they're all remote. There's not much of an office left in New York. All the people I knew in New York left for L.A. or are working remotely for L.A.
And just recently Method is now gone. The Mill. MPC. Technicolor went bankrupt, which is just insane. So, it's a little scary time right now (nervous laughter). [note: Pysop does still have an office in NY with Goldenwolf]

That's why I'm now a middle school teacher in the New York City public school system, making more money than I would as a tenure track professor and it's a 10 minute bike ride from home.

I taught at SVA for close to 15 years. Working at Blue Sky and commuting to the city, and then I started working for Charlex.

I'd already been seeing some layoffs and then I remember I saw this video by an early AI company (Runway) it blew my mind, I'm like, oh f*, this is going to destroy the industry. This was a paradigm shift.**

Yeah, in my school I was one of the only people using Maya. It just came out right and they were just like, "No that's just you shouldn't be doing that." And then it became like a huge thing, right? So even with Unreal and Cinema4D and all that sort of stuff, AI just takes it to a whole other destruction level, if you want to say. You have people who have no idea even what animation is creating stuff that you're like, "All right, well I can't really compete with whatever that is."

And I'm like "Are you getting anything out of it when you do that?" I mean, if you don't know how to do anything? You know I worked on a bunch of movies, commercials, things like that and there comes a time when what you really enjoy is the making of it, the process. It may sound sad but I just really enjoyed doing it, the physicality or process of what I'm doing, more than the result.