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

ASIFA East

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December 2025

aNYmator

THE ASIFA-EAST NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

One of the things I was hoping to do when I re/started the President's Message was to bring the knowledge, passion and outrage that my first animation boss, Michael Sporn, https://www.awn.com/animationworld/tributes-michael-sporn
did in his Splog. Well that, obviously, hasn't happened.

So it was refreshing to hear that a bit of righteous indignation is still out there. I found it last week while listening to India Lombardi-Bello's podcast, The Animator's Friend. In Episode 7, where she talks to Jasper Lin, he recounts an encounter with someone who won the Oscar for animation. It's well worth the trip. The story begins at 48:00.

Speaking of indignation, myself and a couple executive board members were at the latest Animation Speak/East (Candy Kugel was one of the guests!) talking about a recent screening of the animated feature, "Arco", we attended at MoMA. It was a packed house with some of NYC's biggest talents like John Canemaker, Bill Plympton and Signe Baumane in attendance and was followed by a reception at Il Gattopardo afterwards. All that for a film that lost the plot about 3 minutes into it. The same affliction happened during the first few minutes of "In Your Dreams", now on Netflix. In both films the directors are forcing the audience to feel a certain way and, for me, it's just bad filmmaking. It's just depressing knowing that with all the talent, time and money invested in a project that it's just ruined from the very beginning.

Speaking of bad filmmaking, I finished something. For some reason the stars aligned and I had a weekend with no commitments and the desire to animate. Sitting down in front of my computer I wondered what I could do and found "The Village Blacksmith", a 3D animation that I was never able to complete due to various factors, one of which was that I don't have a Maya license any more. Knowing that I only had that one free weekend, I downloaded the free 30-day trial, drastically lowered all expectations, set my mindset to "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good" and finished it! I have to say, it's nice that even a bit of my original vision was realized.

Lastly, it was so nice to see so many people at Animation Speak/Easy because that night there were 3 other animated related events in the area. I know that things are a bit crazy in the industry at the moment but our community is very active.

Many thanks to Mark Stansberry and Daniel Garcia for their fantastic interviews.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WE'RE NOW THRILLED TO ANNOUNCE THE 56TH ANNUAL ASIFA-EAST ANIMATION FESTIVAL.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

SUBMISSIONS OPEN: **DECEMBER 14, 2025**
SUBMISSIONS CLOSE: **FEBRUARY 22, 2026**

BILL PLYMPTON'S SCHOOL OF ANIMATION 2026 ENROLLMENT OPEN!

A unique holiday gift for the animation lover in your life - Starting Jan. 5th!

With attendance options for learning both online and in-person at Plymptoons Studio in NYC, anyone can get the chance to study with the Two-Time Academy Nominated Animator himself - "The King of Indie Animation" - Bill Plympton.

The course includes 8 sessions once per week, breaking down what it takes to create your own short film, starting from story concepts & character design, then moving through the production pipeline to editing , music, sound, and of course, selling the final film at festivals and to distributors.

Contact **studio@plymptoons.com** for more inforation.

Oftentimes you have to generate a shot 20 - 30 times to get it something usable so editing becomes important...much like in a live action shoot. The difference is that if you dont have all the shots you need, or if you need additional footage you can simply generate more instead of having a reshoot.

What do you think about the future of AI in animation? Will it become just another tool in the toolset? Will it replace artists? Will it replace studios?

Artists (from production designers to animators) are irreplaceable. Many AI forward agencies and studios are starting to find that out. If you know your craft you can guide the process and create a cohesive story that's just as good as anything made by traditional means. Although at AI's current state it might require just as much work.

The iphone did not replace SLRs but it did change photography. And it changed the world! I do see it as a tool...much like your phone is a multifaceted tool. AI has changed the industry and will continue to do so. We are just at the beginning

INTERNATIONAL UPDATE

During the month of November , ASIFA INTERNATIONAL had some exciting updates.

ASIFA Korea's IAD screenings are set for November 31st and December 1st as well as a panel about the future of animation with AI. We also got an Armenia chapter of ASIFA created and established thanks to the numerous chapters globally that voted and set a new path forward for another addition to the ASIFA family.

We look forward to seeing what the end of 2025 brings and into 2026.

FIGURE DRAWING

Thursday, Nov. 21 at 7:30 pm
Titmouse Studios
150 W 30th St, between 6th and 7th. 10th floor

MARK STANSBERRY

You know, you can still do this, even if somebody closes the door in your face

Interview with Douglas Vitarelli

Mark Stansberry, the owner of Screen Arts Institute, has been producing traditional 2d animation for over 25 years and has worked on everything from network animated series to television commercials to music videos. He has also pitched his own show ideas face to face with major network execs several times. But he is done with hearing "no". So with the help of wife and kids, he decided to put out a series on his own and skip the Hollywood game.

I first met Mark when he was selling his animation on DVDs on the 3 train back in the early 2000s. Loving his entrepreneurial spirit I bought one for $1. It contained a bunch of shorts starring his character Puddin'. Soon after we connected on LinkedIn and I've been following his progress since then. Like many animators who live outside NYC and its immediate areas, Mark's been up to some very interesting things. As you'll see...

Doug
Hi, Mark! Nice to meet you again.

Mark
I think you said you bought a DVD. I hope it doesn't offend you but I only remember the celebrities who bought the DVDs. But other than that literally thousands of thousands of *people.*

Doug
I was on the 2 or the 3 or the A.

Mark
Yeah, those were my trains.

Doug
Where'd you live when you were up here? Just curious.

[Lots of talking about where we lived. Turns out, in the same neighborhood.]

Doug
Lots of changes, although Sunday morning I heard gunshots just down the block.

Mark
Being born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland gunshots were weekly things.

Doug
So we met on the subway. So did you know of ASIFA-East?

Mark
No, because I've always considered myself to kind of be a B or C level animator, and to me, ASIFA was more artistic and foreign. I've never seen myself as that type of artist, let alone an animator. It seemed kind of high falutin. That's the reason I never joined it

I didn't have a lot to go on to make that assumption, but I just that's just what I thought.

Doug
Boy, I have to say in the scope of society and the fact that animators have a, b, and c levels is kind of frightening because we were all the nerds of the playground in third grade.

Mark
There's still different levels of people's artistic ability and I've never met too many artists that didn't have an air of insecurity. So I can be pretty insecure about my art. And then, when I see what other people do, I'm glad that people are at that level. But yeah, it can be intimidating sometimes.

Doug
I have also experienced that, and I don't know anyone who hasn't. There's always someone who could draw better. There's always someone who has a better idea. It's always someone who works harder or whatever. You could always compare yourself to Bill Plimpton and we all kind of fall short.

Mark
Yeah, he's what I would consider a great draftsman.

Doug
Tell us about your career. How did you get started?

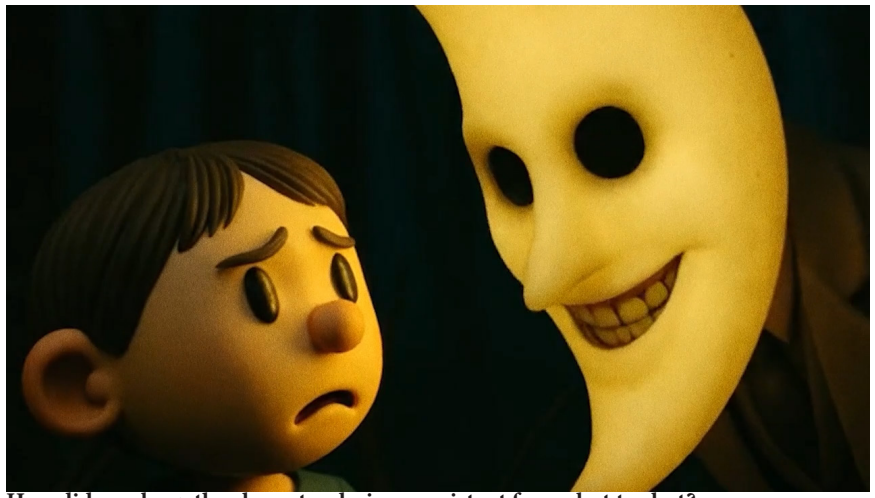
using the various video generators. It wasn't my intention to make the film in AI. The generation was simply a low cost visualization tool. I'm happy with the results but nothing beats actually shooting and animating the project. Some sections are still rough but I decided to call it done. It's basically a snapshot of where the technology was in August 2025

During the panel discussion, you talked about using many different AI LLMs, or are they called models, during production. Can you give us some details on why and the pros and cons of each.

Each AI model has it's unique characteristics. That's why we've seen companies including Adobe and Runway aggregating different models into their services. Veo,for example,-tends to do better with Live Action. Sora and Luma do better with animation. Midjourney is tops in terms of getting cinematic images because it's trained on high quality material.

Personally I'm a fan of the Chinese models like Wan and Seeddance. They are well rounded, and are a fraction of the cost.

This all changes weekly so there's no true "guide" to go by. You just have to play with it and keep up with the tech



How did you keep the character design consistent from shot to shot?

Most models have solved the consistency problem. You can get fairly good results through a reference, and descriptive prompt. Lora's are no longer needed. It helps if your character has certain distinguishing characteristics like "red glasses" or "yellow boots" . These will go a long way in establishing visual throughlines even if the render falls a little short.

Usually in animation we have very little outtakes because of the amount of planning. I'm guessing that's not the case when using AI.

In AI you can make make blooper reels.

QUESTIONS FOR DANIEL GARCIA

How he created his AI animation, “The Moon’s Tooth”

A lot of artists are exploring AI and posting their results all over social media but very few are creating complete pieces.

I’ve been following longtime NYC Creative Director’s (https://www.kingboss.tv/) posts on LinkedIn about the progress of his all-AI animated short, The Moon’s Tooth. Being a fan of his work since we worked together at the now defunct Post Perfect, I asked him to be a panelist on our AI and Animation panel last month. His insights on the process were both edifying and fascinating.

In case you didn’t make it to the panel, we’ve asked him to answer a few questions about the AI process, the various large language models, and the pros and cons, for our newsletter.

This Q&A was conducted via email

Congratulations on finishing your first AI animation. Can you tell us a bit about how it came to be and why you chose AI to bring it to life?

I wrote “The Moon’s Tooth” over 10 years ago with the intention of filming it in stop motion. At the time I was working with Bent Image Lab in Portland OR, and was very inspired by their process and artists. My friend Jenna Rose Roberts helped me translate the story to a working screenplay, and artists Odessa Sawyer and Nico Teitel provided the initial concept designs for the characters.

I’ve self funded a number of films, but never got around to making this one. The script sat in my doom pile for years until I decided to try and visualize a few scenes

Mark
Initially, I started out as a photographer. And high school just happened to see a few books on animation and always wanted to do animation.

Doug
You remember which books? Preston Blair?

Mark
It was those two but The Animation Book by Kit Layborne was probably the one in the beginning because it was in the vo-tech (vocational-technical school) library. Once I graduated high school I studied photography for a year in community college, and wasn’t impressed with the instructor. They didn’t inspire me to really pursue it.

Switched over. I took a couple of Super 8 film classes and I didn’t do that well, but that was closer to what I wanted to do as far as to physically manipulate artwork and drawings. So I dropped out of community college after a year but I kept the animation bug. Eventually I asked my dad to lend me the money to buy animation equipment with no real knowledge of animation at all. I was just totally flying by the seat of my pants. He didn’t want to do it, cuz you know most people. Being old school, dad didn’t see artists that, you know, you can’t make money doing this. But my mom persuaded him and he gave it to me. She forced him to give me $900. This was in ‘89 or’ 89, and I bought two animation tables, the standing upright ones with a flat wooden cover, and two animation discs, the black ones that were from Korea. And I bought all these books and a blue field guide, which I still have, from Cartoon Colour, and so I set up a small studio in my apartment with my wife and my two-year-old son. And just started animating.

And then, being the person that I am, I just decided I wanted to start making animated commercials. So I talked to a couple art schools in the area and said, “Can you give me some interns to let me train them on how to do animation?” and I didn’t really have any experience but it was just in me that what I did or taught them was right. And I did two animated TV commercials in Baltimore City with the help of interns from the Maryland Institute College of Art. And after that it’s, like, “Oh, I can. I can do this and I can make some money at it.” Because I was paid for both of the TV commercials.

And from there, I said, well, I’m good enough to do this, let me see if I can step up to the big leagues. So I applied to Disney and Warner Brothers. But I definitely was not on that level.

I got two rejection letters back, which I still have right now in my studio downstairs up on the wall. Even for the students to come here now, it’s like, ““You know, you can still do this, even if somebody closes the door in your face.”

I cherish those two letters,but when that happened, I said, okay, let me try New York City. So I borrowed some bus fare from my mom, caught the bus to New York City just for like a day trip type thing. While I was still in Baltimore, I went to the library, a big reference library in Maryland and back then, when they still had Yellow Pages, the thick Yellow Pages. I found the Yellow Pages book for New York City. And looked up film Animation Studios. It was almost like a page and a half, and I just ripped it out and took that page to New York City and literally knocked on the doors of a whole bunch of studios.

They're probably now in existence anymore. Each one, either they weren't hiring, or they could probably see I was really green or wasn't good enough. Or they would point you to another Studio. And I remember the studio that did give me sort of a break, which is now out of business: Broadcast Arts. And they had Adele Solomon and she let me come in and attempt to learn or do animation. I didn't really do anything, but I got to look over the shoulders of a lot of other people, and I learned from just doing that. I remember when I initially got into animation, I didn't know that you drew the line work on a cell on one side, and you painted on the back. I didn't realize that until I got the Broadcast Arts and saw them doing it. That was a game changer for me, so I would run back and forth to New York City maybe once or twice a month and check in with Adele to see if there's anything that I could do. There usually wasn't but she was very accommodating.

After Adele left I didn't kind of have that open door. And then, not long after that, Broadcast Arts closed. So, I just said, "Well, I'm gonna stay in Maryland and just start my own studio". I had recently gotten hired at General Motors in Maryland so I had a full-time job, too. A lot of times, I would take off to make these runs to New York City. I would take a day off from General Motors. And so I had a good paying job which afforded me to buy tons and tons of animation, equipment, books, paper, cels, paint. I probably had one of the best animation studios ever for somebody who was just a really green rookie.

And I brought in a team of six or seven adults. All people who were just like me, wanted to learn animation and by now, I knew a little bit more. I made a couple short films of my own. I had even showcased a couple films at the Baltimore Museum of Art and different things, so I had a little bit more experience, so I started teaching again. And I wanted to come up with one direct product or vehicle, and that ended up being the character Puddin'. The one that is my mainstay now.

Doug
That's amazing. Just have two more questions. What are your thoughts on animation today?

Mark
Animation, to me today, I was telling my son, I'm gonna take it from the mainstream networks, maybe Disney, Nickelodeon, Netflix, and I've seen this when I've dealt with a lot of interns from college and people sending me portfolios or seeing portfolios, I don't see a lot of originality in the way a lot of the shows look.

I'm talking about TV, not animation as a whole. When it comes to TV and streaming there's nothing original or nothing new, which is why I've always stayed, and I respect independent people. Independent animators because they usually think outside the box, and they're going to do stuff that's not cookie cutter.

Doug
Your influences?

Mark
John Dilworth.

Doug
Great, one!

Mark
Robert Clampett. Fleischer Brothers. But anybody who deals in simplicity. You know, Puddin is very simple, very simplistic. So I love simplicity and story.

access channels in Erie Pa., York Pa., Greenbelt Md., Auburn Hills Mi., Berkeley Ca., and sometimes in Tampa Bay Fl.....The show was on in Stockholm Sweden for about a year and a half (that was harder to keep up with because they wanted it weekly..lol..)

Doug
I'm looking at your website. Do you own that building too?

Mark
Yes, when we got the federal grant, we bought the building. It's also paid for completely and it's only two blocks away from my house.

So we have a Saturday class teaching high schoolers animation. I also air animation from another NYC animator, "Amir Diop" . He found me by way of his grandfather seeing the show on public access, he then saw it and reached out to me. He's an elementary school teacher in the Bronx I believe. He does cut out paper animation. When I saw it , I loved it and asked him to let me air it on my series, and I've shown 2 of his short films. The kids in his class help him do all the cut outs..lol.. and then I said, if I'm already teaching this stuff, let me make it legit and get something out of it. So I decided to form a non-profit and began to look for funding after I had my 501c3 status. That's when we came into the arena of the federal grant, which actually was the idea of one of the people, I'm in a lot of community groups here, who wanted me to work with the high school.

So we put in for some grants, two or three times, and didn't get them. I was about done but said, let me just try for one more, let me swing for the fences. So we put in for this Appalachian Regional Commission Grant. The total is actually $800,000 and I had to find the other 4 on my own.

Found another two hundred thousand. Then with what they call in-kind labor, it was worth $200,000,, which made it a total of eight.

So with that we bought the building, all of the computers, display tablets, 24 inch screen, 16 inch screens, computers, smart boards. 3D printer.

And that was the beginning of those DVDs. So a lot of that animation was made by the help of these other people but a lot of it was made by me alone. From there, I just kept producing the animated shorts and then I decided I wanted to really put it out there, on TV,

While I was still at General Motors I reached out to a couple major networks. And the first one to even give me any feedback was BET, and this was in '99, maybe 2000, but the only caveat was. It was too family and it didn't really aim at one direct demographic. They wanted something specifically aimed at a group of people and I could never fit that box. But the Senior VP of development was a very accommodating person and gave me a lot of advice

Mark
But, I just decided that I can't deal with the big networks. I'll take this very grassroots, which also set the stage for the subway trains later.

So I went to public access tv in Baltimore and I got a huge response. A lot of people would reach out to my parents and other artistic community events who would come up to me and say they saw the show in the shorts and they loved it. I've never figured out what people see or saw in it because it's always been a general slice of life.

Mark
When the General Motors plant closed I got a huge buyout of $150,000. That was in 2002 or 2004

Doug
Wow! That's not a bad amount of money.

he thought it was a good idea for what they were doing. He said, I'll run it up the flagpole and see what they say upstairs. So I just stopped selling the DVDs and went whole hog on trying to produce all this content to really give them something concrete to look at and hopefully give me some kind of deal.
So that kind of cut my money flow. I'm thinking, okay, it's worth it because I may get a deal with NBC, so let me go ahead and try to do that. Then this person left NBC and went back to their original network. And then, when I went back to NBC, it was: They're not here anymore, so we don't know anything about what you're talking about, so I was left high and dry

And that was the beginning of the end, financially

But the way it came together again was another individual on the subway train, Greg Scholl. I think he went over to Lincoln Center for Jazz [he did] but while he was at NBC for a short while.

Doug
So you, you met these people selling your DVDs on the trains and that's what led to these opportunities?

Mark
Yeah. When Greg bought the DVD he was a senior VP at another big company, The Orchard, and they were, at the time, one of the major online music platforms for musical artists, so he bought the DVD and got me a distribution deal.

So I was with The Orchard for five years. They distributed the cartoons on planes. They gave us a YouTube channel and we got monetization before it changed a few years ago, where you had to have a certain amount of subscribers. That killed it. I was actually getting, every three months, a good little check for the Puddin cartoons. And weirdly enough, the biggest audience was in South America

Because now I was getting paid, and didn't want to get into copyright infringement, I had to redo it all because I was just taking tape and stealing samples to put in the cartoons.

That was a good distribution deal for five years. And we were still doing a show in Baltimore on public access at the same time

In 2013, whereabouts. It wasn't fun anymore. And because jumping on the trains got to be too competitive between, sadly enough, homeless people begging, Mariachi, breakdancing…

It was losing its charm so, in 2013, I just stopped.You cannot imagine how much I loved doing those trains. Because. Even if people you know just enough to trust you to sell a DVD, and it could have been blank.

Doug
How many, let's talk specifics here?
What were the best times to be on the train? How long were you on the train selling?

Mark
It was Monday through Friday, 6 a.m. About 1 pm every day. So it was not really a peak, but I'm on it for the the rush hour at the beginning, And then, usually, it tapers off around lunch, so I was usually stopping around 1:00, 1:30. There were quite a few times I would just be on, and the dollars are flying, and I would go to, like, maybe two o'clock, and those were days that I would sell 200 DVDs.

I was also contacted by a young lady last year, whose grandmother gave her the subway DVD when she was 9 years old in 2013 . She wore the DVD out playing it so much and then wondered how to see more . Fast forward 12 years later, she tracks me down and emails me saying how much she loved the cartoons and had always wanted to find more... lol...SO, I sent her all the newer animation along with some t-shirt, 3d printed figures of Puddin and signed original drawings from cartoons. That definitively let me know my efforts were not in vain..!!

Doug
For a dollar.

Mark
It's a dollar. Yeah, okay, but

Doug
Why did you move from New York? And then I want you to talk about the Screen Arts Institute.

Mark
Okay.

Doug
Then I want you to tell me about that $400,000.

Mark
Well after the trains were no longer fun, I started doing remote work on Fiverr, so I was still able to make some money. And I love New York, but it is expensive. So we saved up some money and I just decided, "Okay, we're gonna move out of the city so we can live a little bit better." So, I looked on the federal government's HUD website where they list foreclosed homes.

The time between 2011, 12 2013, when I started looking, was a window when the houses were so cheap. It was the perfect storm for us. So we found the house in the middle of Pennsylvania. Three beds, an attic, one bath basement.

The only thing that needed work was the plumbing. So we bought the house for $1,500. Total cost at closing was $2400.

After moving, I started airing on public access in NYC in 2018 ; MNN (Manhattan Neighborhood Network) first. I then added "BronxNet" . I kept pursuing public access stations and currently air regularly on MNN, Bronxnet, BRIC in Brooklyn, and regularly on public