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 US 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 Americas.

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November 2025

aNYmator

THE ASIFA-EAST NEWSLETTER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Not that I didn't love it but I'm glad October is over because it was a lot. On the calendar on the wall next to my desk has an event written down for every Saturday.

The first Saturday was the Women In Animation New York Chapter's festival screening.

The next was our panel discussion on AI and Animation at the Hudson Park Library. Thanks to our panelists for an educational, enlightening and entertaining time.
If you missed it, you can see it here: https://youtu.be/xqpf69ETo58

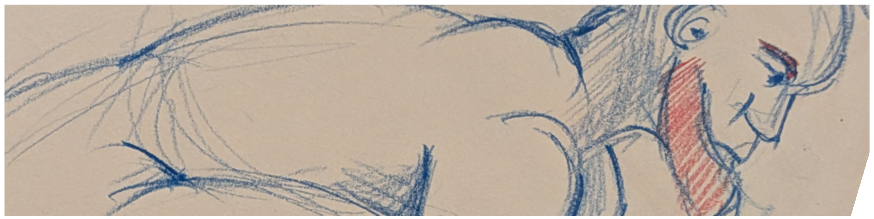
Next was a trip up to the Woodstock Film Festival for a brunch hosted by Ace & Son Moving Picture Company's Richard O'Connor and then off to the animation screening at the Woodstock Film Festival, curated by Joy Buran and Noelle Melody. The Saturday night screening was attended by a slew of stalwart NYC animators like Mike Enright, Jeremiah Dickey, Candy Kugel, Peter Ahern, Andy and Carolyn London, John W. Lustig and more. Luckily there was a bar within walking distance with an outside space large enough for all of us to hang out and talk animation with a beer or two in the crisp autumn air after the Saturday show.

On the last Saturday we hosted our second NYC Animation Weekend at Hostos Community College, sponsored by their Media Design department. We screened the winners from our festival, the winners from WIA/NYC's festival, shout out to Ash Suh for being represented in both, and a selection of indie animations from ASIFA International, curated by Ryan Castrillo. We also talked to Josué Advincola about how he is creating his web series, ***Work 'Buddies'*** and Robby Gilbert on his amazing (see a review in this very issue) book ***New York Animation 1966-199, A City in Motion.*** Many thanks to Emily Compton, Zaira Ramos-Barreto and Ashley Gerst for their invaluable help.

Whew.
And that doesn't even count the live drawing events at Hornet and Titmouse.

Except for life drawing, we're taking a bit of a break from live events for now because we're planning more for next year. So we're looking forward to seeing you in '26.

A big thanks to J.J. Sedelmaier for interviewing Aaron Augenblick. Aaron has been a mainstay in the NYC animation scene for decades and I hope you enjoy this great interview.

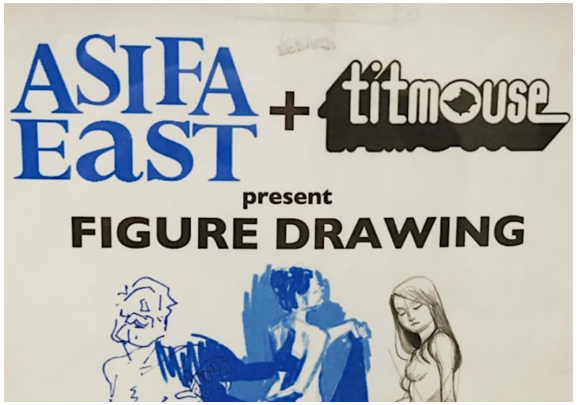


Then there are the profiles of the animators themselves. Robby profiles the early independents like George Griffin, Frank Mouris and others who expanded the definition of what animation could be. The contributions of Black animators to the art form in such spaces as advertising and Sesame Street. The genius of Jim Henson. There are mentions of those among us who are more experimental, daring or just crazy, like Fred Mogubgub, Harry Smith, and Ralph Bakshi.

Finally there is, as my generation of working animators called it, the circuit. The many studios that started and soon ended who employed a rotating cast of artists in the freelance, permalance and staff positions. Sure, some of them lasted 10-20+ years, like the Ink Tank, Michael Sporn, J.J. Sedelmaier and Buzzco but many of them who had a noticeable effect at their time, though now long gone, are dutifully noted. And those are the boutique studios. Robby's profiles of the major NYC studios, like Broadcast Arts, Curious Pictures, MTV, Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network are beautifully remembered.

The book concludes with a ray of hope. Now the animation industry is in a paradigm shifting era with the two main engines of this change are remote work and Artificial Intelligence there is still considerable talent in the NYC animation community that are not only teaching at one of the many excellent animation programs here but are also producing their own work. At the most recent visit to the Woodstock Film Festival, many of them were in competition and in attendance. I was lucky enough to spend some time with many of these filmmakers like Mike Enright, Andy and Carolyn London, Jeremiah Dickey, Peter Ahern, John Lustig, Joy Buran, Noelle Melody, and Emmett Goodman. How will these animators who both work in the industry and continuously create their own personal work influence the next generation? Have animators like Patrick Smith, JavaDoodles and Nate Ziller, whose millions of YouTube subscribers and billions of views, cracked the code? Is the fall of the in-person studio system a positive or negative?

FIGURE DRAWING



Last Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm

Titmouse Studios

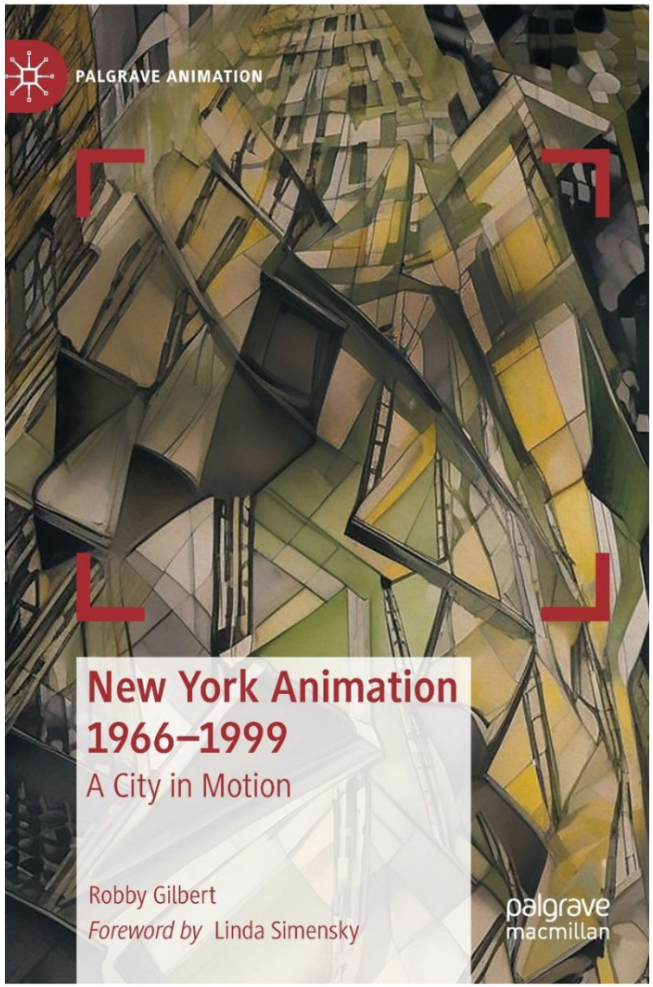
150 W 30th St.
between 6th and 7th.
10th floor

Figure drawing sessions are offered to members first by email.
If all the spots aren't filled close to the date, the sign up will opened to the public on our socials.

It's a monster of a book.

As the title states, it recounts the animation industry from 1966-1999 in NYC. It was a turbulent era, made clear in the first chapters opening words;s "The Industry Is In Trouble". Luckily many of the major players discussed are still around and Robby, being the excellent interviewer he is (read his many articles for the aNYmator), has talked to a multitude of our industry's stalwarts like Candy Kugel, John Canemaker, J.J. Sedelmaier and the invaluable Howard Beckerman.

Beginning with the downfall of the union and the Oxtoby-Smith Report, the book then proceeds to the rise of the independents. Along the way he writes about the many business and technological milestones that, just when it seemed animation would disappear from NYC, revived the industry. Events like The Children's Television Workshop, NYIT and new technologies like the Lyon Lamb system. Of course, computer animation has its own chapter.



AARON AUGENBLICK

I Don't Remember a Time I Wasn't a Cartoonist

Interview with J.J. Sedelmaier

Why don't you tell me about your background? Were your parents in the same kind of creative mold as you became? What got you inspired?

I grew up with a father who was a mechanical engineer at Hewlett-Packard and a mother who was an art teacher. I was big on Saturday-morning cartoons and devoured any comic book I could find. A lot of superhero stuff at first, then underground comics. All of that together made me want to be an animator very early on.

People ask me when I started drawing. I don't remember a time when I wasn't a cartoonist. I was always drawing cartoons. Even before I could write, I made comic books and told my mother what to write in the bubbles. So literally, at age one or two, I was making comic books.

My mother always tells the story that the first animated movie she took me to, probably a Disney film in the late '70s, I was tracing the screen in the air with my finger.

And my father was always technologically obsessed. He taught me project management, spreadsheets, and how to use computers. Early on, I respected the integration of fine art and technology.

I've always loved making stuff and I've always been ambitious about it. When I was in high school, I started my own comic-book company. My dad and I would sneak into his office to photocopy the comics I was drawing. We made about ten issues that we used to sell at my local comic store on consignment.

And you were doing this all out of the Wilmington area?

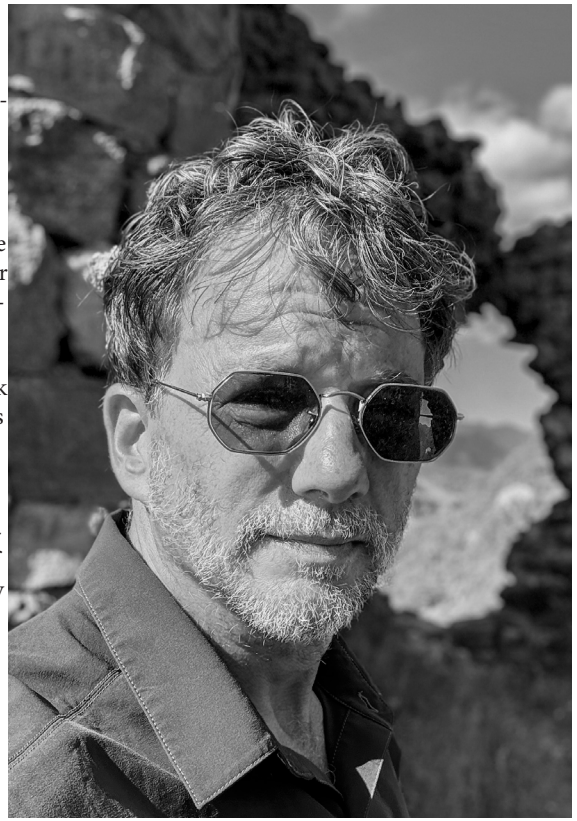
In my bedroom in Wilmington, Delaware. Wilmington is sort of a cultural desert, so luckily we were near Philly. My dad's from Philly, so we went to art museums and experienced culture. The comic stores on South Street were always way cooler.
There wasn't much of an arts program in my high school, so I was mostly alone in my bedroom cooking up crazy schemes. In addition to comics, I made my own animated shorts—claymations with the family video camera. This was in the late '80s.
Because of my dad, we rigged our VHS machine so I could add music to my animation. He hooked it up to our hi-fi, and I overdubbed sound effects and music. Then I got my own computer with rudimentary animation programs, I think it was Autodesk. I graduated from claymation to drawing on a computer with a mouse.
I made a series with this blob character called Schmoo, in a bunch of different genres. I did an episode called Space Schmoo, where he launched into space, and Cowboy Schmoo, a Western. By the time I graduated high school, I had VHS tapes filled with animated shows and piles of homemade comic books. Then I applied to SVA.
I still wasn't sure if I should be doing comics or animation. They checked out my comics and said, "These are cool." Then I pulled out a stack of VHS tapes and said, "I make cartoons too."
They said, "Look, if you want to be a comic artist, we have one of the most renowned comics programs in the world. But if you want to do animation, we've got this new animation major, and we think you have an aptitude for it. We'll give you a significant scholarship." And I was like, "Okay, that makes my decision right there." It definitely made the decision for my parents (laughs).

Another important step was a student film I made that was seen by Linda Simensky, who was then ASIFA-East president and working at Cartoon Network. She told me, "I really like this film—it's interesting." The piece was influenced by Fleischer and German Expressionism, which she appreciated. She asked if she could include it in A Night of Independent Cartoons, a Cartoon Network program where she showcased her favorite festival films, many from ASIFA-East. So at 19, I was on TV.
After graduation, I moved to Virginia and worked as a motel night clerk because I had no idea what to do with my life. I worked 9pm to 9am with a sketchbook, drawing all night. Then I got a call—someone from MTV had tracked me down through one of my SVA roommates. They said, "We saw your thesis film and love it. We're doing a pilot based on Peter Bagge's Hate." They offered me a job and I asked when it started. "Monday." It was Friday. The next day I moved, drove back to New York, crashed with friends, and by Monday I was at MTV. That was my first animation job.
The best thing about MTV was all the people I met.

ROBBY GILBERT

New York Animation 1966-1999, A City in Motion

Book Review by Douglas Vitarelli



Robby Gilbert is an American animator, illustrator, and cartoonist best known for work in educational and interactive media. He illustrated the monthly comic strip, "The Adventures of Ranger Rick," and worked on animation for MTV's "Liquid Television". Additionally, he served as an animation director on early projects for Disney Interactive and as senior animator for Broderbund Software's "Living Books" series. His work often explores the relationships and interconnectivity of many artistic disciplines. Gilbert has taught animation, illustration, and game design at several colleges is currently a professor of animation at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey.
from Wikipedia.

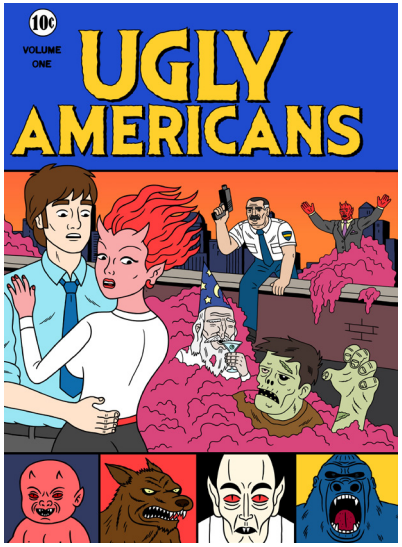
Robby is also an active board member of ASIFA-East

Like many animators, I have a decent collection of books on animation, cartoons and graphic novels.

Like many animators, my top two books are Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life and The Animator's Survival Kit. If you're reading this, you know who the authors are.

Then there are your personal essentials. For me it's Moomin, The Dam Keeper, Bone and Dick Tracy. Miyasaki's Starting Point, McClouds Understanding Comics and Of Mice and Magic by Maltin are some of my more historical favorites. And then there are the ones you wished someone had written. For instance, I really hope someone writes one on Frédéric Back.

Luckily for us, the first definitive book on NYC and animation has just been published: Robby Gilbert's New York Animation 1966-1999, A City in Motion.

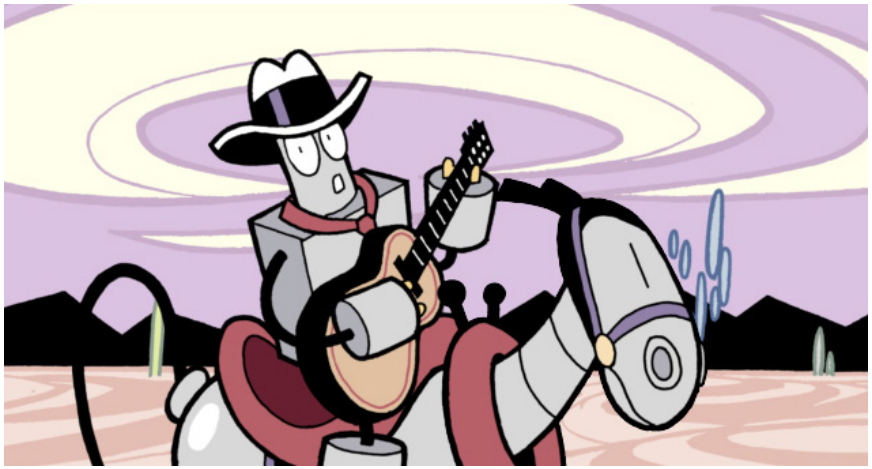


What if somebody wants to work with you on a project?

Email me through the website: www.augenblickstudios.com. It's the easiest way. There's a contact page, and it'll get to me. I'm excited about the future and about doing new types of projects.

Well, it sure sounds like it. You and your Type-A personality.

Apparently!



And the exposure to a work environment?

Absolutely. It's so good to meet people more talented than you. In Delaware, I was a big fish in a small pond. At MTV I met some of the most important people in my life: Yvette Kaplan, Christy Karacas, Chris Prynoski, Tunde Adebimpe, Joy Kolitsky. Lifelong friends. I was only there for about two years.
I started very entry-level as a PA, but the pilot didn't get picked up. Another first lesson: just because you make something doesn't mean it gets made (laughs). Then I got hired on the show Daria. That was the first real series I worked on.
Because I've always been the indie guy, I wanted the quickest, most punk-rock way to do everything. In a corporation, you enter that Kafkaesque world where people say, "This is the system. Just do the job." I kept changing jobs. PA to layout to design to storyboards to directing. Within a year and a half, I was directing Daria. I saw the entire pipeline, but I felt creatively unfulfilled.
I kept pitching ideas. I loved the MTV interstitials and Liquid Television. Growing up without access to underground culture, that was huge for me. But MTV said, "We don't do that anymore. We have a successful show called Beavis and Butt-Head. We want more of that." They were already chasing bigger aspirations. I wanted counterculture. So everything I pitched died quickly. I failed miserably at getting anything of my own off the ground, so I felt I had no choice but to start my own studio.

But it sounds to me like you were destined to have your own place because you have a point of view. You have a drive. And is that when you decided this is it?

Yes. In 1999, I'd just finished a season of Daria and decided to start a studio. I didn't come from money. I had maybe ten or twenty grand saved. I had a friend from MTV that invested some money too. That's what I used to open a studio.

You opened it in Brooklyn?

I pulled a couple of friends from MTV who were also like, "let's try something wild," and we found the cheapest rent we could in Brooklyn. No one wanted to be there. Younger

people might not realize Brooklyn wasn't always the coolest place to be.
We ended up in Dumbo, which had just started to gentrify. The Walentas company had bought up the old warehouses and was looking for artists, like most developers do, so they gave us incredibly cheap rent. It was literally just a few hundred bucks a month for a nice-sized space.
I was still finishing up at MTV when my bosses heard I was starting a studio. They called me into the office, and a bunch of producers said, "We heard you're starting your own studio. Ninety-nine percent of studios fail in the first year. So, you'll probably fail. And if you want to come back, you might not have a job here. This could be the end of your career."

In other words, when we heard this, we got so scared that we're going to try to discourage you.

I honestly don't think they were scared of me. I think they were just genuinely annoyed. They liked that I was good at my job, and thought I was making a mistake.

I went home scared. I was 22, convinced my career was over. But when you're young, you're reckless because you have nothing to lose. I thought: If I fail, I'll do something else. I loved comics. Maybe I'd do that. Or something else. The Super 8 motel in Virginia would probably rehire me (laughs). So I did it.

The postscript is important: I started the studio. I struggled more than anything I'd ever done. I had no idea what I was doing. I couldn't find work. It was terrifying. But I made it through the first year. And a year later, MTV closed—not me. They closed.

There was a golden age in New York City with studios like Curious Pictures, Ink Tank, and MTV Animation all hiring and doing cool shows. I never in a million years would have thought that world would go away.

At first, I thought I was starting a studio to make feature films. I had written a feature script while at MTV. It was the '90s, and the era was all about independence. I was inspired by people like Ralph Bakshi. I wanted to make independent cartoons. I tried for a year and completely failed. Couldn't get a grant, couldn't get investors.

I've always worked for my lunch, so when I started running out of money, I thought: businesses should actually make money (laughs). Yvette Kaplan, who I'd met at MTV, gave me some work. That led to another job, and another—small commercial jobs. This was '99, almost 2000.

We did commercial jobs by day and our own stuff at night. Banner ads, e-cards—anything that paid. And at night we made indie cartoons.

The first was Ramblin' Man, which won an ASIFA-East award for Best Independent Film and took me to Ottawa and Annecy. It was actually a segment from the feature I'd written. It was drawn on paper and scanned.

Around 2001, I started using a Wacom tablet and Flash. It was digital but I was drawing right on the screen. Everyone I idolized thought I was crazy: "That's not real animation. That's computer trickery. The web is just a fad." But I thought: I can draw in Flash the

in Brooklyn. At the premiere, someone asked him how he managed to animate a movie by himself in a year. He said, "I didn't animate any walk cycles! Every time someone moves, they're either on a skateboard or a scooter."
That's the kind of ingenuity I love. That's the stuff.

Our studio is fully virtual now and still making lots of projects. We're also developing more independent productions. We're working on a feature film. We're still producing City Island for PBS Kids. We just got a book deal with HarperCollins for a City Island book series, which is exciting. We also put out two City Island video games this year. Adapting my animation into games has been a lot of fun. The past five years have focused largely on educational animation.

And PBS comes with qualifications you have to fit. You're fine working within that?

Oh, I love it. It's been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

I had just hit my 20th anniversary and thought, okay, what haven't I done yet? I get bored. I had been parodying kids' animation my whole career—He-Man, Looney Tunes, Rocky and Bullwinkle—but I'd never actually made one. That felt interesting.

I talked to one of my best friends, Dan Powell, who was the showrunner of Ugly Americans, and he said, "I have two kids now, and I want to make cartoons for them that are as funny as the adult stuff I do for Comedy Central." So in 2019 we started a studio called Future Brain, an offshoot of Augenblick Studios that focuses only on kids' cartoons.

I asked myself, what's the kids' show I've never seen? We all pitched ideas, and mine was based on my favorite aspect of animation: anthropomorphism. I've always loved cartoons where a trash can talks to you, a window winks, or a taxi cab pulls up and says, "Where you going, bub?" Roger Rabbit, Betty Boop, Sesame Street.

I'd always parodied it, but I'd never made one sincerely. So I wanted to create a show about a living city, inspired by what I love about New York: it's urban, it's chaotic, it's filled with wild personalities that somehow coexist. And the best moments are when everyone comes together for something positive.

and a number of other shows. I just kept hopping from show to show—sometimes two at once—but usually about one a year, straight through for 26 years.
Within five to ten years, I don't think there will be rooms full of people working together anymore: designing, doing layout, animating. That model barely exists today.

Is it possible as a one-person unit?

Most American animation production is already happening in other countries. So instead of sending it overseas, I think it'll eventually just go straight into software that makes the animation. The software will crank it out, and then you'll just go in, revise it, and polish it. I think that's what the future of animation looks like.

The next ten years will be a tough transition. Companies will adapt more and more to AI and fully digital pipelines. Is that scary? Absolutely. Will it change the kind of animation people watch? Definitely. But there's also a possible upside. My studio has always thrived on smaller productions.

It's absolutely better if you can justify a small crew. There's less splitting off into little cliques. And it's really, really important to keep an eye on how people feel about the work they're doing, and how they're doing it.

And now, look at what's in the air. Look at what won Best Animated Feature last year. Flow beat Pixar. I think that's a seismic change in the industry. Flow was made with a dozen people using Blender, a free 3D animation program. Imagine how many people worked on that last Pixar movie? There must have been thousands.

The amount of overhead in a Pixar movie versus some guy with a unique vision for this abstract animal story—poetic, existential, creative—and he made it with just a handful of people, virtually, in Blender, a program anyone can use.

And I hope that's the future. Another good example is Boys Go to Jupiter, with Julio Torres, one of the most brilliant comedians working today. He also voices characters on my show City Island. The whole film was animated by the artist Julian Glander

the same way I'd draw on paper. I could board, draw, color, finish, and watch it in one night.

With Ramblin' Man it took a year for three minutes. The next year I could make three minutes in a week. I started churning out indie cartoons—Drunky, Plugs McGinniss, and more. They started getting seen on the web.

Peers warned me: "Don't put things online. Festivals won't accept them. People will steal them." But I liked that I could upload something and people would comment that same night. For once, I was in the right place at the right time: trained traditionally, excited about new tech, embracing the internet while everyone else shunned it.

So you got the studio going. And it follows its course to giving you what you want?

I was getting to make animation in unique styles with an independent approach with my friends, which is what I love to do the most. And immediately that's what I was doing. Now, look, it was hard as Hell.

Especially because you were doing so much of it yourself.

Sure. I was designing, directing, animating—that side of the brain. And then the other side: paying rent, finding jobs, figuring out payroll. I was learning it the hard way. I loved it, but I was terrified every day. Those aren't mutually exclusive: being terrified and having fun.

The first big break for me was a Comedy Central show called Shorties Watchin' Shorties. An animator named Eric Brown pitched the concept: take old stand-up comedy clips and animate them cheaply. He got it greenlit and came to me: "I saw your film Drunky at a festival. Will you be the animation studio?"

We did ten half-hour episodes in a year, never having made a show before. I think we were one of the first, if not the first, animated TV shows made in Flash. I pulled together a bunch of people I knew from MTV and other places. Peter Browngardt, who's now directing Warner Bros. features, came on board. Mike Wartella was someone I knew from the underground comics world. Jeremy Jusay was a friend from SVA. It was just all these really cool people.

We worked our asses off, slept in the studio, pushed through making the show, and a year later we were a television studio.

And this is what year?
Around 2004. Then, that show got seen by the creators of a crazy pilot called Wonder Showzen—a nihilist version of Sesame Street. Through a twist of events, it got picked up by MTV2, which was trying more avant-garde things.

I grew up on shows like Liquid Television, Beavis and Butt-Head, Ren and Stimpy, and a lot of the projects Linda Simensky was doing. All this outsider cartooning that was suddenly showing up on TV. By the time I was starting my career, that aesthetic was everywhere. There was something in the air with shows like Wonder Showzen, Space Ghost, Aqua Teen Hunger Force, Harvey Birdman, and Moral Orel—all these adult,

bizarre cartoons started happening at once. And we were part of that.
Always with a 2D approach, when they said 2D was dead.
Everyone was saying, "What are you going to do when you have to stop making 2D?"
And I was like, "Oh, let's just keep going with this forever." Our segments for Wonder Showzen were mostly parodies. They were really difficult, but we learned a lot about animation by analyzing those old cartoons.

But it's such a great feeling when you pull it off.

When you do, it's real magic. Watching a cartoon, people forget that so much of it is working subconsciously. And when you can genuinely recreate the style you're parodying, your brain immediately goes, "Oh, I know this world."

You see Ambiguously Gay Duo and my brain, as a kid who grew up watching terribly animated Hanna-Barbera superhero cartoons, clicks: "Okay, I'm in this world now. What's this about?" And it's subversive, because I feel the same comfort as Fantastic Four, but now they're doing dirty jokes, phallic imagery, gender bending, all this really avant-garde stuff. So your guard is down, and you're just the perfect audience to be shocked and laugh your ass off.

And that's why South Park is the epitome of the simple, naive, harmless-looking little cartoon that takes no hostages. It works so well because it feels adorable, human, naive, and wonderfully easy to produce.

South Park uses the language of children's cartoons, like construction-paper cutouts you'd see on Sesame Street. Family Guy borrows the language of a schmaltzy sitcom, right down to the theme song.

What I learned from Wonder Showzen was to suppress the ego. Everything doesn't have to be my exact style. I can hire designers who are more talented than me and trust my overall vision for the kind of cartoons I want to make. So, Wonder Showzen begat Superjail!, and Superjail! begat Ugly Americans, and Ugly Americans led to The Jellies,