October 2026

aNYmator

THE ASIFA-EAST NEWSLETTER



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- President's Message
- Dustin Grella Interview
- Figure Drawing
- International Report
- Local Festivals

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Sorry about the late issue but I've been very busy, mostly my 5th (I think) trip to the Ottawa International Animation Festival and the National Film Board of Canada. Four days of films, animators, animation talk and lots of travel and then right back to work.

It seems that this time of year has plenty to offer. The Bushwick Film Festival with animation curated by Peter Ahern, the Woodstock Film Festival with programs by Joy Buran & Noelle Melody are both coming up in the next few weeks. And soon after that is the WIA NYC Animation Festival.

And allllll of October, in Times Square, this month's interviewee Dustin Grella will be showing his animation, "Sunday Morning" at Midnight Moment from 11:57pm to 12:00am. It's the world's largest and longest-running digital public art program where most of the signage in Times Square is given over to an artist for them to display their work.

Being a public school teacher, staying up til midnight is not easy but, with coffee in hand, I'm going to do it. Hope to see you there.

Ok, quick review of Ottawa. Amazing. I saw lots of people from our area, including fellow board members Dave Eisman and Candy Kugel. Being there only for 2 screening days, the first day was for the picnic. I packed it in, seeing most of the shorts in competition and 3 features. I got to see Brad Bird, one of my animation heroes, and met plenty of folks at the parties.

The best film I saw was "We Are Aliens" written and directed by Kōhei Kadowaki. Being a father of 2 boys and a middle school teacher, this film hit hard, in the best of ways.

In my program I jotted down some thoughts on each film after viewing. "Weird", "Strange", and "Wild", were the most common adjectives. I don't remember so much 3D computer animation in the past at festivals but with the availability of Blender, it seems that artists are not only using a sophisticated program to animate and tell stories but also to explore new (and see adjectives above) visual directions.

Finally I hopped the train to Montreal to tour the NFB. What a thrill. Met some wonderful people, like Torril Kove.

Then it was back to the grind where I'm reworking old lesson plans because the NYC DoE has banned the use of generative AI for students K-8. While I agree with the decision, it's a lot of extra work that I was not planning on.

And that's why this issue is late.
See you soon.

DUSTIN GRELLA

I loved animation, as, I thought, every kid did.



Dustin Grella is an animator whose work attempts to glean glimpses of colorful insight into the seemingly mundane. His films have screened at Cannes, Sundance, MoMA, and have been published in The New York Times Op-docs. His film "Prayers for Peace" screened at almost two hundred festivals worldwide and won over forty awards internationally. He has written and mailed himself a letter every day for the past twenty years and has over 7,000 sealed letters neatly filed and categorized. He is currently in production for the "Animation Hotline," a series of micro-animations where he uses crowd-sourced voicemail messages for content.

A Conversation with Douglas Vitarelli

Doug
So, can you tell us about yourself?

Dusty
I grew up in Medina, Ohio and moved to New York in '93. Then I moved to California for a while and then I moved back here to Ohio in 2007 for COVID and I just haven't come back. I teach at Queen's College and commute to teach some classes, and then I come back here.

Doug
Wait, wait, wait, you commute every week.

Dusty
It's really not as hard as people think. It's a direct flight, like an hour and 15 minutes. I got tenure about two or three years ago.

Doug
That's fantastic!

Dusty
Thank you! I had no idea what I was getting into because when my studio was in the Bronx they asked me to do it to teach a class.

I never say no to an opportunity and when they asked: "Do you want to teach a second class?" I said sure. And then, once I started teaching, I got hired by Pratt and then I got hired by City College.

I was teaching a lot and then also running the studio. And then, Queens asked me to go full time, and I loved the administration and the staff and, then they asked me if I wanted to apply for tenure. I put in my application, and didn't get the job.

My friends asked: "So are you gonna quit?" I said, "I don't know, it's a side job. The studio is full-time." I liked it. Later they had another tenure track position open up, and asked if I wanted to apply? And I said, "Sure", and just reprinted the application.

So I got tenure in 2024.

I didn't really understand what the job was when I first got started, and now I feel like I'm pretty good at it.

Doug
Looking at your website, I was very impressed with the amount of work you've done. To start, talk about the success of "Prayers for Peace", which, I believe, was your thesis at SVA.

How did that come about because you're at SVA, a school with a great reputation and access to so many different technologies and equipment. How did you decide to do a very simple type of animation?

Dusty
I wanted to do animation all the time. I loved animation, as, I thought, every kid did. I didn't go to an art school like Pratt or a SVA or one of these that have an animation program. I kind of made my own degree at the Myers School of Art in Akron, Ohio . I did interdisciplinary studies. It was in Humanities, English philosophy, some writing classes, anthropology, and some computer science. I didn't get that heavy dose of the foundational art skills you get in an animation program?

And I was also kind of making it up as I was going along. It was in the era of Pixar's Luxo Jr. and I think they had done Bug's Life, and so everything was 3D.

So I was learning 3D, Maya, in school because that was what you did if you wanted to go into animation? And so you keyframe and then you hit render. And in those days, you went home, and you came back the next day to see how it turned out.

But what I really wanted to be was the renderer. I want to be the physical guy that gets in there and does that. So I was talking to my friend about this and he said there's a camera that takes a photograph every every minute, every five minutes, every 30 minutes. It's called an intervalometer and so I set up this camera. and then I did I think the first one. It was a 30 frame test.

I took it to the school and had my professor look at it. I didn't understand how cameras worked and the exposure was just pitch black and (it was a digital camera) and he got in there, pulled the exposure up, so that we could see the grainy images of what I had drawn. It was just black and white and I loved it. I thought that was so much more fun physically to do it. I liked the organic, fluid animation. It was just an eye blinking, but it was enough to get me, you know, to get me excited.

Eventually, I got like a big sheet of slate and pastels. I started learning about material and I like using the slate because it erases a lot better than a chalkboard.

And I got better with the camera. So, by the time I got to SVA, I'd already been doing this chalkboard 2D stop motion technique.

I had a story that I'd done in one of my other classes. It was formatted just like a story for the radio show This American Life.

I've already done the audio, so I used that as the jumping off point. The story-boarding took, I don't know, like 6 minutes or something. It was just like, so obvious, it was like, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. I knew exactly what it's gonna look like

When I finished Prayers For Peace, one of my professors had me cat sit for four years at her studio.



Doug
Wait, she gave you an apartment for four years as long as you watch her cat?

Dusty
Yes, a Tribeca loft.

Doug
Wow.

Dusty
Yeah, the people were like, who did you have to kill?

Doug
No one likes you anymore.

Dusty
Right? I loved living downtown but then I moved to the Bronx, and I loved living there. A great space and super creative but harder to get people to visit.

That was where a lot of the work that you see on the website happened, like Animation Hotline.

Dusty
Micro animations based on voicemail messages. They're 20 to 40 seconds long. People would call and leave a message on my voicemail, and I would animate that voicemail. The idea was to do one a day and just kind of pop them out, like a comic strip, I was thinking this could be like Charles Schultz sitting down at his desk, and he does one comic every day and kind of moves on with this day.

And that was what my vision was, do it daily and have it be a conversation. Start having the same people calling, get some themes going on, like exciting love stories, and then have the arc of it and then the breakup at the end you have a whole story.

They were easy to digest and you could send them around but there was no money and I had to pay rent.

Doug
You did over 200 of them?



Doug
You did over 200 of them?

Dusty
Yes. So because I wasn't able to get income solely from that, I started doing commercial work.

When I'm doing commercial work, I feel like it's just as creative for me. I love working with the team. You're getting feedback, trying to communicate a vision with someone, whether it's your vision or theirs, trying to tell them what's possible.

Doug
How many people were at the studio?

Dusty
Up to nine. It was usually two to three people. My brother was working with me for a while.

That was amazing because he's an illustrator. Kind of kept the place up and running.

Every job was different, so we were always reinventing the wheel. Trying to figure out, like, how to navigate it and what it would look like. The chalkboard was pretty much the bread and butter.

Two chalkboards with workstations and the cameras were matching with all the computers. All the software was matching, so was the lighting so that you could draw on one and draw on another and have the two meet.

Doug
Cool.

Dusty
And it was really, really super fun. It was also exhausting. I would work an eight to ten hour day with them, and then they would go home and then I'd work an eight-hour day by myself to prep for the next day. I'd drive home and go to sleep in my clothes fully dressed on the top of the sheets and then I'd wake up, and I would go directly back. Sometimes I would sleep at the studio because it was just a lot of work. I loved doing it, so it didn't feel wrong.

Then my brother and sister-in-law had moved to Brooklyn, which was really beautiful and brand new and great, but now that suddenly turned into a two-hour commute. Plus, I was teaching on a full-time tenure track, so I'm supposed to be doing a bunch of work for that.



Then COVID happened and it was a no-brainer to close the studio and go back to Ohio.

I set up a small chalkboard studio out here, it's the same setup however it's free! There's tons of space, there's no overhead whereas in the Bronx, I had to hustle every month for that overhead.

When I was younger, it was awesome, because at two o'clock in the afternoon when that silence went over the room and everyone was doing their thing, and it was just that feeling of being in that room with all creativity happening. It was palatable and that moment was what made it all worth it.



Doug
I want to talk about the bus first. How did the idea come about?

Dusty goes outside to give me a tour of the bus during the interview.

Dusty
I was a hippie when I was younger. I did Grateful Dead shows and all that, so I always wanted a bus.

It's a medium length school bus. Seven windows and then it's got the chalkboards on the sides. The idea was, I was gonna do an animation studio in a bus.

The studio was going to be inside and then people could go and watch the animation.

And then the idea stopped, because people aren't really going to watch animation. It isn't that exciting, somebody sitting there on a computer. It's such a slow process so I decided to put the chalkboards on the outside. So that, um, it could be like more of an outside studio.

Doug
Tell me about your 2024 tour.

Dusty
I didn't get very far on that one. Started in Ohio, then I went up to Vermont. Toyed around in New York a little bit and then down to Asheville, North Carolina and the exhaust system blew.

The conversation veers off to the local art scene, bus customization, the hurricane, ex-girlfriends and moonshine.

Doug
What is Midnight Moment, and how did it come about?

Dusty
So 12 artists a year get to play on the screens of Times Square. You're playing on over 100 screens in Times Square, which is almost all of them and you get three minutes from 11: 57 to midnight, thus Midnight Moment.

Doug
How did you get picked?

Dusty
It was a submission through their website, I found out about it through a friend, and they they were "Oh Dusty, you gotta do this. This is your thing."

Doug
What can we expect?

Dusty
It's very nostalgic, New York and love. There's different types of love and it covers all of those.

There's no sound, so it's just a visual. It's called Sunday Morning. You know, Sunday mornings are great in New York City.

Doug
Oh my gosh, they're the best, right? I love them.

Dusty
So quiet and just maybe a newspaper. I don't know if newspaper trucks still drive around the city, but that kind of thing. It's like a light rain on the ground and the newspaper truck, you know, driving through an empty city.

Doug
It's on the chalkboard?

Dusty
I think every shot is done on the chalkboard. It's very simple, so I built a little app that you can download on your phone. It's just one button right now and it downloads a song to your phone,.

So, there's a page on the website and you click on the button and it downloads a song to your phone, okay. A timer that syncs up with the screens, and when the screens start, the song starts.

Doug
Awesome.

Dusty
Don't put this in, but I'm doing...
(ed. not: I'll guess you'll just have to see it to find out).

Doug
Are you coming to NYC to see it?

Dusty
Yeah, I'm gonna be there the whole month of October.

Doug
Are you doing anything else?

Dusty
I'm promoting the Notes to Self. It's what I'm doing right now. I've been making these letters that I've written myself for the past 25 years, well it'll be 25 in April. And it's very simple, I write and mail one to myself everyday.

And potentially. I'll do a 25th anniversary show. That's really what I love about this project, because it's been going on for 25 years.

The idea for the chalkboard animations or the idea to do Prayers For Peace was originally written in one of these letters. So, I'm writing every day. Sometimes it's great, I would say, three days out of the year! The others are just waiting to get to one of those moments with the muse.

Doug
Amazing. Thanks for sharing with us.

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

The ASIFA Student Award 2026 the program extended the reach of student animation across ASIFA's international network.

Here are some key achievements:

- 175 submissions
- 21 countries represented
- 11 finalist films
- International jury of three professionals
- Grand Prize awarded to Susurros
- Final screening and award ceremony at Animafest Zagreb
- International screenings across Europe and Asia
- Continued cooperation between ASIFA chapters and international animation organizations
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The Grand Prize was awarded to:
Susurros — France

The ASA 2026 award ceremony and finalist screening took place on 11 June 2026 at MM Centar in Zagreb, Croatia, as part of Animafest Zagreb.
The Grand Prize had a total value of €2,000.

Other Screenings or screening programmes were organized in connection with to date:
Animafest Zagreb — Croatia
ASIFA Lithuania – International Animation Day — Lithuania
CINANIMA — Portugal
ASIFA Japan – International Animation Day — Japan
Chania Film Festival — Greece
Polish Art Universities — ASIFA Poland
Stuttgart International Festival of Animated Film (ITFS) – related screening — Germany

Woodstock FilmFestival

Fiercely Independent

OCT 14-18, 2026

There are several chances for people to catch animation at the fest this year:

Animation programmers Joy + Noelle will be moderating an animated feature this year

TANGLES October 15th at 3:45PM

Don't miss the special event for Bill Plypton's milestone 80th where Signe Baumane will be hosting and grilling him, similar to his summer roast events

GRILLING BILL PLYMPTON - October 16th at 2:30M

Joy + Nolle will be hosting two Animation Blocks

Friday Night Toons - October 16th at 5:30PM
Saturday Evening Cartoons - October 17th at 5:00PM

Also be sure to see some local animated shorts represented in a new Made in the Hudson Valley Block

Made in the Hudson Valley - October 18th at 1:45PM





The Bushwick Film Festival (BFF) today announced a creative partnership with award-winning animator and director Peter Ahern. Ahern will serve on the inaugural Animation Jury for the 19th annual festival, taking place October 7–11, 2026, in Brooklyn, New York. The partnership builds on BFF's commitment to animation through expanded programming at this year's festival.

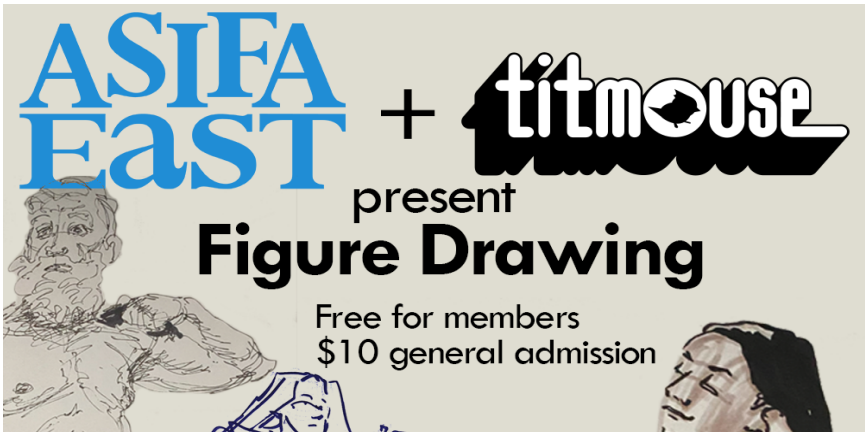


Tickets for the third annual WIA NYC Animation Festival are now live! Come celebrate the incredible animation community of the greater NYC area with an evening showcasing talented animators and storytellers from emerging voices to established creators.

Learn more + purchase tickets using this link: https://lnkd.in/g5wQTHEg

FIGURE DRAWING

3rd Thusday of the month at 7:30 pm
Titmouse Studios
150 W 30th St, between 6th and 7th. 10th floor



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.

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