

Septmeber 2026

aNYmator

THE ASIFA-EAST NEWSLETTER



Mira Seeba receives the Out of this World Award, hand-made by HVFF alum and fellow animator Michael Dondero.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello and welcome back as we begin, if my math is correct, our 61st year!

Last year we had some great in-person events at our local libraries, interviewed some wonderful animators for the aNYmator, hosted the second NYC Animation Weekend to celebrate International Animation Day, expanded our figure drawing sessions, and, thanks to SVA and The New School, brought our festival back to Manhattan.

I hope you enjoyed some of what we offered. I have to say, 60 is going to be hard to beat.

But the board is already planning on doing just that. We've got some ideas in the works and look forward to sharing them with you in the near future.

Since we're on the subject: do you have any ideas that we can help you with? The aNYmator is always open to submissions. An event that needs publicity? A panel you think would be interesting? Let us know.

This month's issue is a festival review. Members Chris Sullivan and Chanee Choi attended Annecy and have written about their experiences. And our friend, in fact every animator's friend, India Lombrardi-Bello, wraps up the Hudson Valley Film Festival.

Speaking of, I'll be attending the Ottawa Animation Festival, probably wearing an ASIFA-East tshirt, show please come over and say hello. Next it's off to the National Film Board to discuss possible future collaborations.

Did you see any animations this summer? I saw a few. GOAT was surprisingly not bad, especially for a sports film. Not worth a second viewing but not bad. The main character in Hoppers is just never not annoying. You know when you're watching a Miyazaki film and there's a point where you just lose yourself and become immersed in the experience. That never happened and I couldn't get over it. I tried to watch One Punch Man and The Digital Circus, both extraordinarily popular IPs, but they're just not engaging and I couldn't get through one episode. I'll be cancelling my Netflix subscription because, as for me as an animator, it's just not worth it. I much prefer the offerings on HBO Max, like Scavengers Reign, Primal and Common Side Effects.

I did like the films from Annecy that were available through The Animation Showcase. Also the films that were shown by Animation Speak/Easy and Animation Nights New York were very enjoyable.

Ok, lots to do. So let's get to it. Looking forward to seeing you soon. Maybe at MoMA for their It's Alive exhibit (see last aNYmator). I'll definitely be there a bunch of times.

MY ANNECY EXPERIENCE

Chris Sullivan



**Chris has been making animated films since 1980, and feature animations since 1995.
He also teach animation.**

This year I had the honor and pleasure of screening my second animated feature, *The Orbit of Minor Satellites*, in the Contrechamp (Art House feature) category at Annecy as its world premiere. I screened my first feature *Consuming Spirits* there in 2012.

Contrechamp included high-and-low budget films from around the world. What was most pleasurable, and harrowing, was that this was my first time sitting in a theater and feeling the audience's reaction to this film I have been making since 2014. My work is narratively experimental, and, in ways, a challenge to smooth viewing. I introduced the film by saying that audience members should carry a basket and put the elements of the film in it. I promised it would make a strange sense at the film's conclusion. I use strange language, parallel narratives, many animation methods, and live action as well, so piecing it all together, as a reviewer said, "is not for the faint of heart". As a citizen of my section, I took in as many features as I could, seeing Peleliu-Guernica of Paradise, Tangles, Muiy, Space Chronicles, Chimney Town, and Nobody, as well as 10 shorts programs.

I got a lot from all the films I saw, but I did also have an affirmation: that the film I made is in fact the thing I meant to make. It made me appreciate and accept my strange voice, and I know that I am a lover of strange voices. My favorite feature animation films are not blockbusters—they are *Alios Nebel*, *No. 7 Cherry Lane*, *Our Sound (On-Gaku)*, *Kill It and Leave Town*—and my favorite Mamoru Oshii film is not *Ghost in the Shell*, but *Sky Crawlers*.



When you share your work to a global room of strangers, it is a great opportunity, but it is also a great leap of faith that some part of you believes you will be understood, and that your film will even get into the hearts of some people. I saw so many animators at Annecy—dear friends, historically important animators that I am in awe of (who I find, by the way, to be quite friendly).

But I must confess that what touches me most, and makes creating a film over 12 years worth it, is a stranger coming up to you and telling you that they loved your film, or that it touched them on a personal level. It is the closest a filmmaker can get to some sense of objective worth. There were people that walked out the theater during my screening (not many, but it still hurts), and I must muster all my strength not to say, “They are the truthful ones.” Someone came up to me in line, put their hands on my shoulders, and said, “I saw your film; it was so emotional for me, thank you.” This erases the walkouts (and the film’s not winning awards).





So, in some ways, being in the losers' circle felt like good company. We are all different voices that will find our people who we touch with our films, and savor that connection.

Chris Sullivan lives in Chicago and Pawling, New York.

Trailer

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/273238245>

AI AND THE DESTRUCTION OF HUMANITY: WHAT SHOULD WE REALLY BE WORRYING ABOUT?

Chanee Choi



Chanee Choi is a new media artist and researcher merging engineering-based bio-feedback, AI art, and gamified performance.

She currently serves as an Assistant Professor at the University at Albany (SUNY) and is a 2026 Game Developers Conference (GDC) Scholar. She holds a Ph.D. from the University at Washington (DXARTS) and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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Director Hisko Hulsing stood up after the premiere of his new work *Danse Macabre* as the audience hissed and shouted at him. ‘This is the end of art!’ a voice screamed from the crowd. He responded by flipping them off with both hands.

This moment of defiance starkly captured the raw tension at the 2026 Annecy International Animation Film Festival—a cold atmosphere among attendees that acted as an extension of the anti-artificial intelligence (AI) protests seen at last year’s 2025 festival, unfolding even as pro-AI industry sessions dominated MIFA. Ironically, this took place in the homeland of Marcel Duchamp, whose Readymades once challenged the very definition of art. If shifting an object’s context could once provoke a radical redefinition of creation, today’s friction over controlled AI workflows illustrates the painful growing pains of negotiating where artistic agency begins in an algorithmic medium.



Fig 1. An anti-generative AI patch spotted on an attendee’s backpack during the 2026 Annecy International Animation Film Festival.

The tension inside the screening room stemmed from Hulsing's candid disclosure that he utilized tools like ComfyUI and Stable Diffusion as controlled, artist-driven workflow tools rather than fully automated generators. While legitimate ethical criticisms persist regarding base models and scraped training data, many reactions remained detached from his actual workflow. Rather than engaging with the artwork's core depiction of the tragic horrors of war, critics endlessly circled back to a rigid stance: that AI is fundamentally unethical. This hostility is not an isolated incident; director Jorge R. Gutiérrez had to cancel his GenAI project with Amazon after receiving intense personal threats from anti-AI activists.

It is an indisputable fact that animators fear losing their livelihood. Unlike industries reliant solely on rapid iteration, animation is built on meticulous visual craftsmanship, akin to a woodcarver shaping timber. To these creators, a machine that appears to spit out artwork with a mere mouse click, trained on what they view as stolen labor, feels profoundly unfair and repulsive. It is entirely understandable that they feel a sense of duty to build a dam against this rising flood.

Yet, we must ask: Is AI technology itself destroying our future, or is it the binary, partisan logic surrounding it? The real threat lies in corporations replacing human labor without safety nets, and governments failing to enact policy protections in service to special interests.

When corporate logic and public policy abandon creators, higher education can no longer remain a passive observer. It must become an active battleground for structural reform and technological autonomy. As educators and practitioners, our mission is to move beyond abstract moralizing and equip emerging artists with both the critical rigor and technical command needed to reclaim their labor. Because today's AI relies on humanity's vast artistic legacy, education must anchor creators in this historical lineage, guiding them toward an ethical compromise that protects original rights without halting innovation. Crucially, we must teach future artists to cultivate firm convictions regarding creation, rather than reducing ethics to a posture of moral superiority or swaying to polarizing rage.

The humanistic value of artistic creation remains irreplaceable, as any artwork is the culmination of its creator's lived experience and knowledge. If a piece were entirely generated by AI, it would fall into the very pitfalls critics point out. However, when AI serves as a tool to heighten an artist's own expression, it opens a new realm of media created by humans, for humans. Even as technical skill becomes accessible and affordable, the mastery of the tool rests with the artist, the nuanced interpretation remains with the viewer, and critique must never be reduced to a catalyst for division.

When technology handles repetitive execution, narrative vision and essential conceptual frameworks become paramount. The utility of AI can empower independent solo artists and amplify individual voices. Paradoxically, amidst this flood of automated media, the intrinsic value of human mastery, artistic intent, and craftsmanship will shine brighter than ever before.

The record-breaking heatwave at Annecy 2026 was so oppressive that escaping into the chilly waters of Lake Annecy felt like a necessity for survival. Yet, the hostility surrounding AI across the festival grounds proved far more intense than the sweltering weather. As Annecy Artistic Director Marcel Jean later pointed out, when transparent and honest experimentation with AI be protected by a “witch hunt,” it forces creators into secrecy rather than encouraging healthy, ethical practices. However, this hostile reaction does not exist in a vacuum; it is the direct symptom of an industry that offers no protections. Yet crucially, sessions or events dedicated to protecting workers at risk of displacement were noticeably difficult to find throughout the festival. Stepping out of the heated screening rooms and into the packed MIFA exhibition halls, where crowded AI-related vendor booths buzzed with activity, one could not help but wonder if the industry is indifferent to this growing unrest. Annecy 2026 left attendees with a great deal of curiosity about how the festival’s stance on AI will evolve by 2027.

As the festival concluded under the sweltering skies, a fundamental question felt inescapable: How will we, as animators, educators, and an industry, choose to define our creative authority in a rapidly changing world?

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OUT OF THIS WORLD, UNDER THE STARS: THE 2026 HUDSON VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL

by India Lombardi-Bello



India Lombardi-Bello is an educator, podcaster, and artist from rural Upstate New York, currently living in Brooklyn. indialb.me

The Hudson Valley Film Festival in Warwick, NY (a quick trip from NYC) has been operational for 11 years and is co-directed by Hannah Maxwell and Martin Dominguez Ball. They love animation: Martin himself is a stop-motion animator, and both he and Hannah have been active in encouraging a greater animation presence at the festival. Over the last few years they have been enlisting NYC animators to act as ambassadors during the submission window and festival run. It is through this push that I became involved last year, conducting interviews for my podcast *The Animator's Friend* on-site with festival alum and creator of the 2025 signal film Kristie Kish. We were invited back this year as jury members and social programmers in addition to a more robust interview schedule.

We were excited to chat with animators that received awards this year. Kristie and I juried for the inaugural Out of this World Award which we offered to Mira Seeba's film *Heaven's Escape*, a 2D short about a girl dying in a mosh-pit. Alex Greenblatt's *Four Days of Exams*, exploring the horror of midterm week, won the Indie Shoestring Award. The Nectar of the Projector Award was awarded to Sofia Arbaiza Martinez's *Ingrato Sureno Invasor*, a mixed media documentary about their father's experiences emigrating from Peru to Ecuador. The Rising Student Award was given to Jessica Rizk's *Cracked* about the liminal space between routine and horror. All were in attendance at the festival, and I think it's safe to say that they share my sentiments about how special this festival is.

As animators, we are used to atypical festival experiences. Animation festivals are delightfully zanier than their live-action counterparts, but the Hudson Valley Film Festival takes it to new grounds. To start, the three-day festival is located at a drive-in theater. For most of the filmmakers with shorts in this festival, this is their first time ever attending a drive-in. How special to see your own film shown for your first drive-in experience! The programming is inclusive to all crafts and production levels, yet still feels cohesive with a taste that tends towards the quirky, edgy, and surreal. Before the sun goes down, the afternoon pre-parties include Frick Frack Blackjack, a gambling game where you bet with knick-knacks instead of money; vendors selling items as diverse as crock charms and instant poetry; and live music from world-famous acts like The Mystery Lights.



Film Festival Man interrupts our podcast interview with Alex Greenblatt to protect us all from his corporate filmmaking enemies.



Since the festival marches to the beat of its own drum, it doesn't concern itself with typical festival and industry politics. As a result, the films you see don't originate exclusively from your major creative cities. Many of the filmmakers and other participants hail from smaller towns worldwide and their filmmaking perspectives often operate outside of what we are accustomed to seeing from more mainstream taste-makers. To me, this demonstrates the festival's integrity, putting raw creative spirit first and foremost without being prescriptive.

This is only part of what makes this festival so refreshing. The pre-parties I mentioned before turn the film festival into a sort of county fair. In this intimate atmosphere, it's easy to meet everyone attending including filmmakers, fans, and locals. Being at the drive-in doesn't mean you need to enjoy the festival from a car. Many attendees set up a picnic-style viewing experience, using handheld radios to enjoy the full experience and celebrating each film with festival-provided rubber chickens so that applause will travel across the open field. The festival takes further advantage of their location by hosting filmmaker mixers under the lush August greenery of Warwick. Notable this year was the filmmaker panel which featured beloved actor and sponsor of the Dare to Be an Artist Award James Cromwell, who shared moving anecdotes from his storied career as a way to offer advice to filmmakers finding their footing in an industry that doesn't always value original thought. To end this already-retro experience, the closing night party takes place at a bowling alley nearby which doesn't put a pin in it until the wee hours of the morning.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept 18, 2026

Lāhainā Think Space @ NYU

- Hui Mo'olelo Cohort 9
- **Listening Across Oceans** Panel: Story, Memory, and the Making of Memorials | 11 AM
- Hui Mo'olelo: Lāhainā Film Showcase | 6 PM
Featuring a special performance by Leilani Patao

NYU HAWAII CLUB
H18 8

On 9/18, Maui Public Arts Corps is bringing their show, with work from Ace & Son Moving Picture Company, from last year to NYC in collaboration with the 9/11 Museum and NYU. The films in the showcase were all made in response to the burning of Lahaina the year before.

There's a panel in the morning at NYU and a screening at MoMA (educational center on 54th) in the evening.

RSVP will get folks the details:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeGd5LD5IAg-MBY7rtkdDLjPZGdt9Dh_FOvt_TZLAqG9PpOQ/viewform

Event page:

<https://www.mauipublicart.org/nyu.html>

FIGURE DRAWING

3rd Thursday of the Month

Check our socials and member emails for info.

Titmouse Studios

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

ASIFA East + **titmouse**
present
Figure Drawing

Free for members
\$10 general admission



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 US.

BOARD MEMBERS

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