

# Assignments for Arts 391: Stop-Motion Animation

Stop Motion: n. a *cinematic technique whereby the camera is stopped and started (still images), with the animator manipulating an object or image in a physical setting to create an illusion of motion.*

*It is different than*

- *live-motion which uses continuous movement in a shot*
- *cell animation which utilizes a series of completely separate drawings*
- *computer generated animation (Flash, AfterEffects, Maya)*

*All of the work you do in this class will fit into the category of art that would interest a gallery going populace, not just children or young adults. To that end you can always consider using methods and materials that might also be seen in still art work that is either sculptural or flat. You will always follow the conceptual and formal goals of a visual artist.*

## 1 Structure and Surprise

**Pixilation or Human animation:** using teams of two or three, make a 60 sec piece that uses humans as the subject with 12-15 fps (720-900 frames). Use a prompt from the action menu, or pick a word that is less used like “fenestrate”. Decide on a time structure. Have a beginning, middle and end to the action. Use unusual costume, context, camera angle. Make the movements symbolic but not clichéd or obvious.

*Take advantage of the fact that you can stop the action perhaps using that as a surprise element rather than simply recreating what you can do in live-motion. Because we can start and stop the camera, we can change out elements, make them disappear or disconnect (Méliès), enlarge or shrink (Svankmeyer stones, King Kong) fly (Doyle, Kinsley) it's a sort of magic.*

*Aesthetic Goals:*

- To create a structure of time,
- To develop a piece that is compelling, sustaining and surprising.
- To imagine a new “look” or formal qualities.
- To Make use of the specific qualities of stop motion.

*Technical goals:*

- To determine how much to move an element for a sense of continuous movement.
- To master the use of a still camera with proper exposure, lighting, etc.
- To import an image sequence in Premiere
- To learn basic editing in Premiere
- To make sound: ambient, field, foley, simple.

*Artist Examples:* Oliver Herring

<http://www.artbabble.org/video/art21/oliver-herring-legacy>,

Brent Green, Ben Kinsley, Chris Doyle, Michael Langan, Norman McLaren

## 2 Reinterpreting a Cultural Myth

**2D stop motion:** working alone, using a two-dimensional (flat) method from the following list, create a short (1-2 minute) piece that allows you to *explore a cultural myth* in a subtle, non-cliched way. First choose a topic/ myth. It can be as old as Sisyphus or as contemporary as a social situation today. Then gather and prepare two-dimensional materials, bringing them to your editing station where you will work with them to create a piece. Your idea may develop as you gather materials, but don't demand that the piece remain with your initial idea...instead respond to what you find and have a dialog between the myth and the materials.

Then bring your piece into PremierePro to add filters, sound and edit. The Sound can be simple, appropriated if it amplifies or layers content...\*not just a music video\*. The sound can be made by you or a friend, with foley sound effects if desired, based on your level of experience.

Use one of the following two-dimensional methods for imaging including:

- collage (old magazines, books, printed photos,
- torn or cut paper, hinged parts)
- sand, coffee grounds, particulates on light table

*Aesthetic Goals:*

- To work intuitively more than rationally.
- To discover the voice of the piece within the process
- Possibly deconstruct some element of popular culture or history
- To find some unity in diverse materials

*Technical Goals:*

- To learn Dragon Stop Motion Software
- To control exposure, focus, lighting with still cameras
- To use copy stands
- To edit effectively in Premiere Pro
- To use Sound: simple, possibly appropriated

**Artist Examples:** (collage) Lewis Khlar, Kelly Sears, Virgil Widrich (Fast Film)

Drawn: Wm Kentridge, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/specials/anythingispossible/watch-now/>  
Daniel Sousa, Cocina/Leon/Atallah,

# 3

## the non-quotidian quote: 3D stop motion:

The content of this piece will be prompted by a book title or quote from another class or personal reading (see examples below). The set and elements you use will evoke meaning but not directly illustrate the initial prompt. You can choose not to include the prompt in the end, but just let it guide you. The 3D elements you use can come from goodwill, antique stores, home, but not just your dorm room. You should show some initiative in gathering them and they should not be human representations. The 3D quality of the set should be evident in your shooting, considering depth of field, lighting control, perspective, with the camera on a tripod. Plan a progression before you start. To show us your plan, make a storyboard using index cards. Complete one “scene” at a time in one “take” if at all possible. If you decide to appropriate sound, you can find sound from the era of your objects, or counter it with opposite sound. You can work in teams of two if you wish, but your work will need to exhibit this concentrated effort.

### *Aesthetic Goals:*

- To work back and forth from intuition and chance to reason and planning.
- To create a unified look to your piece with interesting objects, textures, colors
- To develop non-human characterizations
- To amplify or juxtapose visuals with appropriate and creative sound.

### *Technical Goals:*

- To use lighting to enhance the quality of your image
- To explore the camera options available for three dimensions
- To use Dragon, Premiere Pro and sound software effectively
- To make your set with good skills, appropriate to your object and style
- To improve your understanding of audio possibilities

“Holding hands, for example is a way to remember how it feels to say nothing together.” from the age of silence Nicole Krauss

“The rust-colored earth was covered with a threadbare, meager tablecloth of snow full of holes.” “My father would walk along the shelves, dressed in a green baize apron, like a gardener in a hothouse of cacti, and conjure up from nothingness these blind bubbles, pulsating with life, these important bellies receiving the outside world only in the form of food, these growths on the surface of life, climbing blindfold toward the light.” Bruno Schultz The street of Crocodiles

“she heard the muffled jingle of coins in his trouser pockets.” From Manhattan Beach by Jennifer Egan

“No one likes flies,” Mrs. Kelly said, “especially on a Sunday.” From Brooklyn by Colm Tobin

A Map of the World by Jane Hamilton

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep by Philip K Dick

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time by Mark Haddon

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close by Jonathan Safran Foer

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

My Year of Meats by Ruth Ozeki

The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat by Oliver Sacks

## **4** FINAL PROJECT: begin with an autobiographical fact

For the final / major project of the semester, you will build upon what you have learned from the initial projects, choosing to go into more depth with either a 2D or 3D approach. Your piece will be built in reaction to a prompt based on some event in your own life or family history, though it can be either narrative or relatively abstract. You might remember something personally or you might ask your family about stories they might not have told you.

- Create a set/space with appropriate detail.
- Choose human-like characters or not.
- Add narration if desired, but do not try to lip-sync dialog. If you include text, write experimentally or poetically or use text from a family member. Your text and image may even contrast if this adds mystery or complexity to the piece.
- Sound may be constructed by you or a friend, or appropriated if necessary (and following the rules of appropriation.) You should edit relating to the sound.

Consider the ways in which contemporary art often deconstructs the artifice of its approach or content, or parodies historical or contemporary culture. Make sure your piece has a self-awareness of its place in the art world today.

*Process will involve:*

- deciding on an autobiographical fact
- writing about it, even if you do not plan narration
- creating a “set” and “elements” or characters for the set/scene
- taking test shots to make an “animatic” (photographic storyboard)
- capturing in Dragon Frame
- editing in Premiere Pro
- doing research on an artist that works in a way you admire  
(though you don’t need to work that way)

*Aesthetic Goals:*

- To develop a longer, richer, more complex and complete project
- To show an understanding of how the forms (materials, style, textures, composition, etc) are appropriate for the content or meaning of your work.

*Technical Goals:*

- To show good attention to detail in physical structures
- To show excellence in photographing, editing and sound construction
- To research technical needs that are specific to your piece and accomplish them.

**Animation Artists:**

*Chris Doyle, Ladislaw Starewicz, the Quay Brothers, Jan Svankmajer, Lewis Klahr, Kelly Sears, Erin cosgrove, William Kentridge, Janie Geiser, Marina Zurkow, Rose Bond, Gregory Barsamian, Jenette Thomas, Photographers: Patrick Nagatani, Gregory Crewdson, etc.*

### **Methods Artists have used for Animation: (from the Animation Bible?)**

Visual Tricks: Because we can start and stop the camera, we can change out elements, make them disappear or disconnect (Melies), enlarge or shrink (svankmeyer stones, King Kong) fly (Doyle, Kinsley) it's a sort of magic.

Use elements that could not act if alive (insects: Starevicz, letters helena)

To help fool the eye we can use these techniques:

A static counterpoint. If the rest of the set remains still while the character is moving we will see the movement more clearly (or at least gentler motion to contrast wild motion).

At the same time, detailed movement throughout lends believability to the set.

Use motion like a dancer would showing counterbalance and weight in your manipulations.

Texture: the size of the set often requires miniaturized textures, but these catch the light and make the 3D form more interesting.

Lighting: can emphasize volume, just like lighting for live video, a three-point system of varied lights can give an object volume and pull it out of the background. Of course, the lights should be smaller too.

Detail can make something more interesting and even in drawn animation, the extent of detail should be considered.

What the surface of the drawing material can contribute, frosted mylar or vellum with charcoal or graphite/ cutting / layering/ transparencies.

Keying out with Green or Blue screen areas of the scene to later drop in another scene or live action or texture in (see Japanese academy award piece)

Smooth vs. Jerky...how many shots per second and how far each one moves.

Set: Proscenium or real/round? Change camera angle?

Building sets with foamcore, or real world elements.

Chris Doyle's themes are drawn from the psychology of everyday life. By using only the most low-tech special effects, he transforms everyday images into short films that are magical and moving.

Doyle is perhaps best known for *Leap*, a public artwork sponsored by Creative Time in April, 2000, for New York City's 2 Columbus Circle. A celebration of hope, *Leap*, showed moving images projected onto a tall building of various New Yorkers from all five boroughs jumping skyward. Beginning at dusk, depictions of a continuous stream of New Yorkers appeared at the base of the building, and one by one, four hundred and twenty jumpers soared up the height of the facade, slipping into the night sky.

In recent years, Doyle has worked less in the public sphere, and more in the private fictional spaces he creates in his videos. This selection of videos shows a wide range of Doyle's interests, but each manifests a dreamlike vision in which the quotidian becomes extraordinary. Doyle likens his practice to a "Pathetic Magician, a sad sack trying to make magic out of what is at hand."\* Writing in *Art News* magazine Linda Yablonsky said "(Doyle) has cast hot dogs, red bricks, and lawn chairs as human surrogates in videos that constantly mix storytelling with abstraction." \*\*

#### **Flight (2005)**

*Flight (2005)* shows the artist doing aerial circuits in a Superman pose around his Brooklyn studio before heading out the window. Today, when even amateurs have access to Hollywood-quality special effects, the artist's goal is clearly not a seamless effect. The jerky motion is left as a clue to his methodology, in which the artist performed 230 individual leaps and then sequenced the still photographs to depict flight.

#### **Tower (2005)**

*Tower (2005)* uses an animation technique known as "claymation". Doyle has turned the descriptive form upside down; and we see the effects of unseen artist's hands on the tower, wounding and suturing the form, and twisting it like taffy.