

TINTYPE

UNSTILLED LIFE: Artist Animations 1980 – 2020

6 August – 3 September

An online exhibition curated by Paul Carey-Kent, Emma Cousin, with Teresa Grimes, co-hosted by Ron Mandos Gallery, Amsterdam, Tintype, London, and Blinkvideo, Hamburg.

PLEASE NOTE: the three galleries have slightly different iterations of this show; the Tintype one is outlined below

<https://ronmandos.nl/>

<https://blinkvideo.de/>

EDWINA ASHTON | RÄ DI MARTINO | GEORGE EKSTS | OONA GRIMES | ANDY HOLDEN | MARY REID KELLEY & PATRICK KELLEY | ERKKA NISSINEN | JACCO OLIVIER | ZBIGNIEW RYBCZYNSKI | JENNET THOMAS & PAUL TARRAGÓ | MARKUS VATER | RUN WRAKE | MADALINA ZAHARIA

Animation is an increasingly vibrant medium for artists, and enlivens a virtual platform. The thirteen films in 'Stilled Life' relate to each other in a space that is activated, immediate and intimate - into people's phones, screens and living rooms – even at a time of distancing.

More fundamentally, digitalisation, post-production and simulation have thoroughly undermined the indexical relationship of film to its origin in time, as a succession of moments preserved. Animation might be seen as more honest. There's no disguising its source in imagination. Artists can create worlds which stem not from representation, but from freely extending their particular languages and concerns.

A considerable formal variety stems from the artists' different underlying languages. Film has its relevance - Zbigniew Rybczynski trained as a painter first but went on to study cinematography at the world-renowned Lodz Film School. We can see the primary influences as painting (Jacco Olivier), drawing (Edwina Ashton, Oona Grimes, Erkkä Nissinen, Markus Vater) or the interaction of painting and drawing in illustration (Run Wrake); digital technology (George Eksts and Madalina Zaharia); a combination of digital and stop frame (Jennet Thomas and Paul Tarragó); theatre (Mary Reid Kelley and Patrick Kelley); and cartoons (Rä di Martino, Andy Holden).

The content of the animations is equally varied, but the themes of time's passage, possible futures, and the contrast between the visceral and the cerebral can be traced. Moreover, the artists typically use humour as a means to address serious issues. The two oldest films – whose creators were not primarily positioning themselves as artists, but whose work is relevant to current art production - set the tone: Rybczynski pushes farce to an extreme which captures how people may not connect in life, and Wrake comically conjoins objects with their words in a

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gleefully dark version of a children's reading book. Social norms are questioned through Nissinen's satire on how reality is depicted in the media, and Kelley & Kelley's jarringly rhymed examination of suicide. Vater, Holden, Thomas and Zaharia take a more quizzically witty approach. Narrative drives the humour in Kelley and Nissinen.

Animation feels particularly appropriate in our current oddly stilled circumstances. Only Grimes' and Zaharia's work was made during the coronavirus lockdown, but the crisis has pointed up various underlying tendencies - so it's not surprising that several of the films can be related to it. Rybczynski's 36 characters are distanced even as they occupy the same small room. Following serial bifurcations, Vater's worm only ever meets itself. Nissinen's question 'What is Community?' takes on a different infection in a virtual context. Covid-19 has challenged the cohesion of our systems. And many of the artists ask - as we all do so urgently in 2020 - where should the world go next?

EDWINA ASHTON – MR PANZ AT LAKE LEMAN

2010, 6 mins

Courtesy the artist and Tintype, London, and with thanks to Animate and Drawing Room, London

Edwina Ashton's hand-drawn, animated films hinge on the mismatch between our intentions and reality, offering narratives that draw on painful observations of everyday behaviour and individual foibles. The film follows the daily habits and explores the memories of Mr Panz, a removed, particular gentleman elephant living in a hotel on Lake Geneva. His diffidence is matched by the sensitive, almost hesitant style of Ashton's animated drawings, which include a remarkably economical differentiation of an elephant and a mole. Life is negotiated not on an epic scale, but through accumulated minor actions. In art, as in life, Ashton may be suggesting, there should be room for the idiosyncratic exploration of small worlds. We are surely intended to be reminded of another privately educated memory-obsessed lepidopterist living in exile on a Swiss lake: in Nabokov's words 'human life is but a series of footnotes to a vast obscure unfinished masterpiece.'

RÄ DI MARTINO – POOR, POOR JERRY

2017, 6.50 mins

Courtesy of the artist and Cøpperfield, London & Snaporazverein, CH

Italian artist and film-maker R  di Martino, who deals principally with our perceptions of reality and fiction, sets the iconic American cartoon mouse on the stripped-back stage of Lanzarote. She imagines 'an old and tired version of Jerry... a sort of angel lost in a limbo' who mopes around and gyrates somewhat arthritically. When Jerry speaks, we hear cinematic lines, from 'I hate the way I don't hate you' to 'so you want to go back to your wife you don't love'. He becomes the conduit for quotations which set up a loop which intrigues di Martino: 'how much all these films and TV shows inform us, but also how similar the lines and things we say when we are in love are—and still they seem original when we feel them.' As Davide Giannella has put it, the association of such memories may equally become 'an instrument to better arrange emotions and build personal maps with which to move inside reality' or else 'a burden from which it's impossible to get free, a dead weight hindering new thoughts and original visions.'

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GEORGE EKSTS – REHEARSAL

2017, 7.34 mins

Courtesy the artist and Tintype, London

George Eksts worked on a project with Animate in 2015 which opened up the possibilities of using digital space. Working with with a choreographer and dancer to perform, record and then animate the human body, Eksts chose to place this figure within a digitally created 'white cube' gallery. As one of the selected artists for the 2018 Whitechapel Open, Eksts invited other artists in the Open to position their work in the digital gallery 'set'. The completed video, 'Rehearsal' was then shown as part of Eksts's installation in the Whitechapel Open. An appropriate gesture for an artist whose practice is based on the possibility for infinite extension. Structures that loop and circle back, that have no beginning or end, have been a constant in his work. This process subverts what we think of as linear narration; instead of moving towards completion or resolution, he proposes that we can be drawn into boundless potential.

OONA GRIMES – murd : pagina quattro

2020, 2.28 mins

Courtesy of the artist and Danielle Arnaud gallery, London

Fellini's *La Strada* [1954] mis-remembered and re-invented... Rapid fire images and action notations create unplanned collisions... Flashes of accidental animation. Gelsomina is a naif from the margins who has fallen through the cracks. She retains her innocence despite being sold to the brutal travelling performer, Zampano. Her drum playing gives her a job and a voice, a starring role loved by children and therefore a means of survival in the ruins of post-war Italy. In 2018, Oona Grimes spent six months on the Bridget Riley Fellowship at the British School at Rome. As she worked her thoughts kept returning to Italian Cinema - from the Neorealists to late Pasolini. Grimes began to make i-phone rushes, not acting she says, but 'drawing the moment.' In Lockdown Grimes returned to making drawings akin to storyboards but for films already made, scenes recollected and re-imagined – culminating in these vivid, poignant animations.

ANDY HOLDEN – WOULDN'T DREAM OF IT

2017, 8.35 mins

Courtesy of the artist

Andy Holden's most famous work, the hour-long animation 'Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape, 2011–16', posits that the capitalism has reached a state in which an equivalent of the illogical physics of the cartoon world can be held to apply. Taking its cue from that migration from cartoon to real, the ten minutes of 'Wouldn't Dream of It' see the animated Holden wandering through Scooby Doo's haunted house. We hear 'the real Holden' discussing the occurrence of dreams with his partner, while his on-screen avatar explains matters using Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* as a guide. How, for example, can disagreeable dreams be explained as wish fulfilment? Art is not mentioned, but we come to suspect that its making is the real subject: one thing stands for another, memory feeds in unpredictably, interpretation is uncertain and, as the animated Holden concludes, 'that which is central to the dream thought need not be represented at all'.

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MARY REID KELLEY & PATRICK KELLEY – THIS IS OFFAL

2019, 13 mins

Courtesy of the artist and Pilar Corrias, London

Mary Reid Kelley plays all the roles in the tragic-comic versified films devised together with her husband, Patrick Kelley, using multiple green screen shots, layering and animation. 'This is Offal' takes its cues from Thomas Hood's 1844 poem 'The Bridge of Sighs', which speculates on a young woman drowned in the Thames; and Artaud's influential concept of a 'body without organs' as one which will set us free of automatic reactions. A pathologist uncovers and examines the body of a woman, whose own organs try to 'solve' the mystery of the suicide of the woman to whom they belong. The leg complains that 'the frontal cortex shared a wish / A conspiracy to feed the fish / With me!' According to Reid Kelley, 'the liver, stomach, intestines and other organs signify the 'offal' of the film's title and the 'awful' irrevocability of the act, which they protest'. This, she says, enacts Camus' philosophy of the absurd as a counter to suicide, yet as the corpse's own organs 'argue over what happened, they also deny the hope of a rational, scientific explanation for the most tragic and motivationally complex of human actions'

ERKKA NISSINEN – WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

2016, 13mins

Courtesy of the artist and Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam

Existentialism meets reality TV as Erkkka Nissinen starts by questioning whether his own hand is connected to his body when his arm is behind a tree, then draws himself – literally - into an imaginary community in which truth and fiction no longer seem distinguishable. Immediately there is trouble as the typical resident he selects demands considerable cash to have his home life filmed, but proves so dull the artist hires an actor to kill him to spice up the footage. Soon enough, as the wry voice-over explains in an attractively thick Finish accent, another resident has fallen in love with a pothole – a tent is built over it to afford them some privacy – and a meatmaster finds it necessary to impersonate the newly-dead cheesemaster who was his business and sparring partner, only to fall out with both wives as he takes on fresh conjugal duties for the sake of authenticity. All four, we are told, are played by the same actor... As matters conclude in naked rituals and an all-consuming fire, we're left none the wiser about just what community is, but considerably entertained.

JACCO OLIVIER – TERRA INCOGNITO

2019, 4.10mins

Courtesy of the artist and Ron Mandos gallery, Amsterdam

Jacco Olivier is a painter who has made an artistic journey to the new world of animating his practice. Just so, perhaps, Terra Incognita enacts a journey to an unknown land: to the sounds of water, wind, creaking ropes, then birds and insects, we sail to the coast and over hills and meadows until we arrive at the spectacular statues which indicate that Olivier's inspiration is the Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen. Three hundred years ago, he set out to find the South Land - only to discover instead the mysterious unknown territory of Easter Island. Olivier photographs each iteration and brushstroke, combining and layering the various compositional stages so that, at times, we seem to be looking more at the paint than at what it represents. We end up halfway between figuration and abstraction, halfway between a story and a painting. Like

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Roggeveen, we don't know quite where we've arrived, but are drawn into the epiphany of a new land which takes on a life beyond what we can rationally explain.

ZBIGNIEW RYBCZNSKI – TANGO

1981, 8 mins

Courtesy of the artist

Soviet era apartments were notoriously down at heel and crowded – none more so, it would seem, than the Polish one in which a diverse set of characters come and go in Zbigniew Rybczynski's Oscar-winning short film. The tango of the soundtrack remains steady for eight minutes while the action grows to a frenetic but controlled frenzy as more and more characters pass through to perform their characteristic actions: a boy pursues a ball, a traveller lugs a case, a gymnast does a headstand. A thief, a breast-feeding mother and a nude appear. A man even falls regularly from the ceiling to a repeating cry. Eventually there are 36 people present – yet so choreographed that they never collide. Indeed, they don't even notice each other. It's a compulsively absurd dance of isolation which we can take to represent human fate: we all enter and exit this world, but how often do we make a genuine connection? And how many of us are really missed when we've gone?

JENNET THOMAS with PAUL TARRAGÓ – A TALE I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT

2016, 10 mins

Courtesy of the artists and Tintype, London

Often darkly comic, Jennet Thomas's films tell warped folk-tale narratives that mix elements of the banal and the bizarre. 'A Tale I Know Nothing About' features themes of resurrection, entertainment and death. Inspired by the fantastical Neo-Egyptian Art Deco cinema on Essex Road, the video weaves a visual poem of pigeon-gods, roving eyeballs, and a dead policeman through verses animated by Paul Tarragó of a Dada-esque nonsense rhyme – a mysterious folk memory that has passed through generations of London playgrounds. The film was originally made for Tintype's annual moving image series, Essex Road. Re-showing it now, Thomas wanted to give more equal billing to the collaborative input of artist Paul Tarragó. "With the animation of the texts I knew that I wanted Paul's scrolling time lapse technique that he'd invented/used in one of his films before, but he came up with the idea of the cards animated on a little wheeled cart thing, and I think we both came up with the burning text idea at the end. So it was very much a collaborative process."

MARKUS VATER – WORLDS DON'T COME EASY

2020, 10 mins

Courtesy of the artist

It comes as no surprise to learn that the German artist Markus Vater studied Philosophy and Art History at the University of Trier: his knowingly-informed painting and drawing style feeds into the metaphysical wit of 'Worlds don't come easy'. A tear finds happiness in the first of nine film vignettes packed into ten minutes: a mountain top rescue has an unexpected outcome; a chameleon gets confused matching its own reflection; God loses an eye; dandelion fairies commit mass suicide; a gun barrel proves a sub-optimal choice of home... There's a dark twist to many of these tales, but belied by the jaunty and diverse range of accompanying music, candy colour combinations and absurd humour. Vaterland operates through its own paradoxical rules

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– its generator recently gave a talk entitled ‘Things that are there because they are not there, like a shadow, or death...’ – and although worlds may not come easy, Vater’s films certainly go down readily enough.

RUN WRAKE – RABBIT

2005, 8.40 mins

Courtesy of Lisa Wrake

Run Wrake (1965-2012) had a wide-ranging career using animation for commercials and in collaborations with leading bands on music videos, designing album covers and tour visuals. Rabbit, though, is a bizarre animation made using his signature combination of collage with a solid looping soundtrack. Wrake found a series of 1950’s learn-to-read stickers illustrated by Geoffrey Higham in the naively idealistic style he brought to the Dick and Jane books. He disorientates them to make a tale in which the children take disturbingly easily to violence, slicing open a rabbit in which they find an idol with the super-power of turning flies into jewels. Greed gets the better of them, and it ends badly. The key, said Wrake, was the idol sticker. He thought that ‘was an odd choice to illustrate the letter ‘i’ for children, it stuck out from the rest... I wanted to incorporate some drawn morphs into the film, and this led to the idea of the idol having magical powers of transformation’. That triggers the darkly surreal clash between the innocent simple world which Higham depicts and the harsher realities of human nature.

MADALINA ZAHARIA – THE 6 BASIC RULES OF (UN)TIDYING

2020, 2.19 mins

Courtesy of the artist and Tintype, London

‘The 6 Basic Rules of (un)Tidying’ is a new work made in Lockdown by Madalina Zaharia. This short animation addresses the anxiety and nervousness that often accompany our relationship with a domestic environment which can only exist as a territory for order and unquestionable joy. By refusing to comply with a strict orthodoxy of tidying we finally free ourselves from the pressures and demands generated by the upkeep of a so-called perfect home or life. One by one, each rule pops up across the chaotic layout of a computer screen in order to remind us that ‘mess’ is not just something that constantly needs sorting out but rather a comforting force that might be easily overlooked by a Marie Kondo type of philosophy. Zaharia focuses on theatrical moments in time and popular culture: memories and gestures that illuminate the effect of politics on everyday life.

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