

Animation is getting gritty and cartoons are no longer just for ch

Through a glass

The time when cartoons were seen as fodder to amuse kids for a couple of hours is officially dead. In the coming months, kids will have to make do with *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* in cinemas, while older audiences will be offered an animated choice of *Fear(s) of the Dark*, *Waltz with Bashir* and *The Spirit*. And on Sunday evening, Channel 4 will also

be showing the latest batch of Animate Projects, films that explore the boundaries between contemporary art and animation. Film-makers have woken up to the fact that you're never too old to enjoy a cartoon.

Ari Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* is being touted as this season's *Persepolis*, Marjane Satrapi's Oscar-nominated Iranian coming-of-age autobiopic. Like *Persepolis*, it

launched at Cannes to glowing reviews and featured the director in the principal role. *Waltz with Bashir* boldly marketed itself as the first animated documentary.

The story recounts the Israeli director's struggle to come to terms with witnessing the Sabra and Shatila massacres of September 1982, as pro-Israeli Lebanese Christian militiamen mete out indiscriminate mass-

murders in two Palestinian refugee camps.

To make the movie, Folman filmed interviews with numerous soldiers and, instead of just making a documentary with what he described as "a bunch of middle-aged men talking", he decided to get a team of animators to draw the interviews. Animation also allowed him to reenact events and add dream sequences. To make the film

s, darkly

that he wanted to, on the budget that he had, the charismatic director argues that, "if you take into consideration all the elements of the film - it's about war, dreams, subconscious, conscious, fear, lost love and memory - I thought the only way to combine all those elements was with animation."

It was a decision made easier by the growing acceptance of animation as a legitimate film-making tool by audiences, film festivals and the Oscars. *Sin City*, *Persepolis* and *Waltz with Bashir* had their world premieres at Cannes. Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* opened in Venice, whose Lido has made a habit of screening the latest work from Japan's Studio Ghibli. This year it was Hayao Miyazaki's childish *Ponyo on the Cliff*.

In many ways, *Waltz with Bashir* benefits greatly from being animated. It gives the story a more universal appeal than a straight documentary on the 1982 invasion would.

But there is a moment in the film where Folman switches from animation to documentary footage to highlight that the events depicted in the film did actually take place - a decision that detracts from the power of the story because it seems overbearing compared to the cartoon images. It also suggests that the unreality of drawn images cannot have the same impact as real footage.

But Folman argues, "I didn't want people to walk out of the film and think that this was a really cool animation story film. I wanted people to know that real people died there, thousands of them, and it puts the film into proportion. So for me, there was no other choice but to include the real footage."

Fear(s) of the Dark is a patchwork of black-and-white animation that sees prominent graphic artists from around the globe investigating their visions of terror. It's a surreal non-narrative collection of stories ranging from the Japanese anime of Marie Caillou to the geometric patterns of Pierre di Sciullo.

The award-winning American cartoonist Charles Burns has contributed a section in his signature high-contrast and creepy style in which an insect lodges itself in the body of a girl, who then brutalises

her boyfriend. The award-winning illustrator argues that the current talk about adult animation films mirrors the trend that caused surprise when he first began creating adult-themed comics.

Suky Best, an artist who has made the short animation *Early Birds* as part of the AnimateTV 2008 slate says: "The non-English-speaking world has always seen animation as a legitimate cinematic technique. In Eastern Europe and Japan particularly, animation has been an adult medium and I think it's just in the English-speaking world, where Walt Disney dominated animation, that it became seen as something for children.

"Walt Disney developed a style that became animation for the English-language world. If we weren't an English-speaking country, we'd have a different relationship to animation. We'd look much



'If we didn't speak English as a country we'd have a different relationship to animation'

more to Czechoslovakia and those sort of countries."

From 1950, animation studios in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Croatia and Russia churned out thousands of feet of footage, winning a plethora of international prizes. France also led the way in forging an adult aesthetic to match the content, highlighted by recent output that includes *BelleVille Rendez-Vous* (2003) and *Renaisance* (2006) as well as *Fear(s) of the Dark* and *Persepolis*. But Japan has culturally been the most open to adult animations. Osamu Tezuka was



Hard cell: scenes from 'Waltz with Bashir' (above) and 'Fear(s) of the Dark' (below left), ju

making groundbreaking animation films in the 1960s.

The change in attitude can also be seen in animations aimed at family audiences and in the success of Pixar, which is now owned by Disney. The emphasis is no longer on

simply amusing children, and these films are full of references aimed at older members of the audience.

It's the adults who take the kids who have become the most important spectators for producers to consider.

AnimateTV is on Channel 4 on Sunday at 11.55pm. Work will also be online at www.4mations.tv. 'Fear(s) of the Dark' opens on 3 October, 'Waltz with Bashir' opens on 21 November, and 'The Spirit' opens on 2 January