

ANIMATE TV ART FELT ADVENTURES

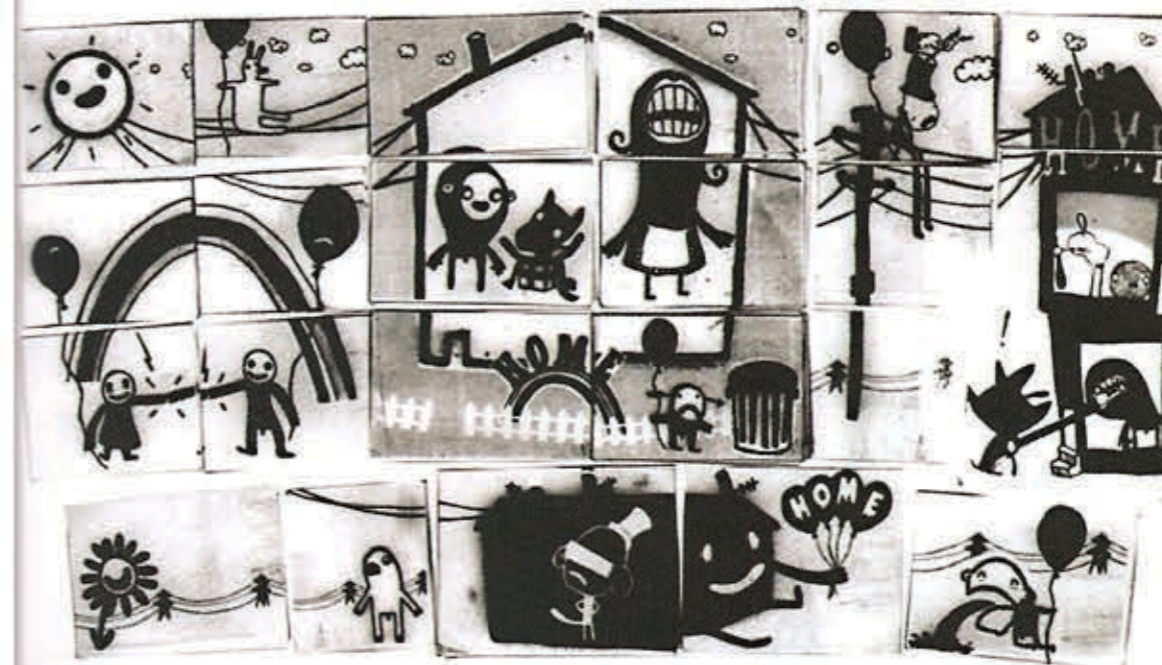
Rachel Hodges talks to the folk at Animate Projects who are giving hot new talents the freedom to explore

When searching for animation by contemporary artists you'll probably think of the internet and festivals long before turning on your TV. But since 1991, Channel 4 has screened more than 90 films demonstrating innovative techniques and challenging themes during its annual AnimateTV season.

Today, AnimateTV is the longest running project of its kind supported by Arts Council England. It's also a clear statement of Channel 4's commitment to the independent production of experimental artists' work. Artists are given a unique space to create and develop ideas without many of the constraints of the commercial world. Jacqui Davies and Gary Thomas, co-directors at Animate Projects, produce and direct the AnimateTV programme. Their role is to support

the artists as they undertake their voyages of animation discovery. Davies explains: "We are all about exploring the relationship between art and animation and offer our artists room to create work they really want to. It's also gives them the opportunity to animate on a non-commercial venture and these opportunities are quite rare." The experience can be really life changing for the artists. They may never have had a commission with such freedom or had the time to develop and master new techniques. Commissioned for AnimateTV 2009, Tom Hicks' Unicycle Film is in essence a love story. In a dark forest, unicyclists pass each other revealing their personalities and sometimes colliding to become joined as bicycles. Hicks says: "It's exciting to be working outside my comfort zone. I work big with life-size models and by using lots of plaster of Paris, wood and paint I'm learning new skills with the time to examine and play with my work." Davies and Thomas are usually working with

people who see themselves as artists not animators. "We all have our own definitions of ourselves and our work and Animate Projects is here to help with any necessary transitions," says Thomas. "It's our role to bring the work out of them and show them how they could produce it if they employ techniques they've not handled before," he adds. In response to the annual open call for submissions Animate Projects really wants to see what the artists are capable of from their written proposals and storyboards. Davies explains: "We choose ideas that we love but we need to feel we're not taking risks with our artists. Whatever their artistic background they need to convince us they can produce the work before we commission. We want the technique to be of interest, but it's not just technique for technique's sake. We want a sense of style; a strong idea." Thomas adds: "What we're really looking for is a mix of talent. We want something that we've not



(Above) *The Black Dog's Progress*

seen before, experimental contemporary art that can be thought of in terms of animation and brings a challenge with it. Working with Channel 4 the artists have a huge amount of freedom as there is no house style to conform to." Innovative ideas and techniques coming together can be seen in Stephen Irwin's sad story *The Black Dog's Progress*. Irwin reveals: "This is the first work I've done that puts contemporary art before narrative animation. Both have a design base that is how I see my work so it wasn't a huge leap. I hand drew 50 flipbooks on paper with ink. Each book had about 30 separate frames that I scanned into Photoshop and then added the after effects." His piece tells the story of a dog that is thrown out of home. Its life and the film become increasingly darker as the tale unfolds. The film references the 'black dog' of depression but that theme is not a major part of it. It's more about designing the narrative so that the story can be

told in one shot with a number of the flipbooks in view at one time. Old-style animators and George Herriman's comic strips with their downbeat stories inspire Irwin's technique. "I've followed AnimateTV for many years and always been impressed by the range of work it commissions. There just aren't many opportunities like this around that allow you to work in this way. I was given a real chance to explore exactly what I wanted to do." Many filmmakers use the freedom that AnimateTV affords them to make films with very personal messages. Manu Luksch's *Make it Snow! Make it Snow!* is a short meditation on how we're changing winter landscapes for the sake of tourism. Luksch filmed the footage in the Dolomites. "I know the area well as some of my family is from there and the skiing culture is very much part of our lives. In spite of this, for a long time

I've felt extremely negative about the snow canons they use, so this has been very important to me as well as a message to others," she says. With a background working with technologies and data networks, Luksch found it exciting to leave the gallery art concept behind her. She revelled in the experimental experience and didn't really know what outcome to expect before she started. "I guess I took a low-tech approach to animation and created the effect of the broken snow globe at the end of the film with blue screen. It was so interesting to leave the restrictions of the laws of nature behind me." Davies and Thomas feel that there have been real shifts in animation in recent years. Now there is far more crossover within the different forms of art and a lot of the snobbery has gone. "Everything is animated now; there are online graphics and visual graphics all in our visual culture. With so many new techniques out there animation is no longer subservient to film. People don't want to uphold the divisions any more but are far more interested in making connections." Thomas believes art consumers are far more interested and experienced now. It's no longer an 'us and them' culture. Audiences are sophisticated and interested and that's what Channel 4 are seeing. That's why they've been interested in animation for so long and it's hoped it will continue for a long time to come.

You can view all AnimateTV films that have been commissioned since 1991 and find out more about the talented artists behind them at <http://www.animateprojects.org/films>



(Left and below) *Unfolding the Ayran Papers*



(Above) *The Life Size Zoetrope*



(Above) *Unicycle Film*



(Left) *Make It Snow! Make It Snow! Make It Snow!*



(Above) *Magnetic Movie*