

Moving homage to birth of cinema

Sonia Harford

Published: April 19, 2013 - 3:00AM

The technical leap from Eadweard Muybridge's iconic galloping horse images of 1878 to the sophisticated animation of 2013 is a phenomenal advance. Yet many artists still spark off the earliest film techniques.

Advertisement

A new exhibition at Monash University's MADA Gallery traces the increasing use of animation among contemporary artists. In *971 horses and 4 zebras*, leading international artists experiment with labour-intensive cinema basics such as stop-frame, time-lapse, in-camera editing and multiple exposure.

In the films screened, clouds race across the skies and a flower bud unfurls petal by petal. By the time we reach Chris Shepherd's witty animation *World Stareout Competition*, movement is desperately minimal.

"In the history of cinema, animation was the forerunner of the invention of cinematography," says Kit Wise, a Monash University lecturer and artist who was invited to take part. Originally screened at London's Tate Gallery, the exhibition was co-curated by influential artist-filmmakers Jordan Baseman and Gary Thomas.

Wise sees the exhibition as a homage and it takes its title from a work by Japanese artist Yu Araki whose film *971 horses and 4 zebras* uses archival images of animals, and refers to Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion*.

"Modern digital technologies borrow a huge amount from pre-camera, hand-made moving image technology," Wise says.

"Things like cut and paste which we use every day on our computers are at the centre of digital media and were also central to hand-made cartoons and zoetropes."

Wise's work in the exhibition is *Explosion (Geranium), 2010* which combines found footage of a military test explosion in the Arizona desert with a moving image of a flower blossoming.

"It's like a macro and a micro explosion," Wise says. "I have a long-running interest in how disaster events are represented in popular culture as spectacle, to try to get viewers to re-look at those events with more attention."

MADA is hosting the show as an exhibition over a longer period, with installations and objects, while the Tate hosted it as a one-off screening. These contexts raise questions about where film and art meet. Is there a key difference between a film and an artwork, and is it due to whether a work has a narrative to drive its flow?

In a long and complex history of the interweaving of artists' videos - and video artists - figures such as Andy Warhol and Bill Viola demanded a lot from the viewer in a gallery environment.

In the Monash show, the films' lengths range between one and eight minutes, and several are shot quite conventionally, panning across bleak landscapes with seagull cries as a soundtrack.

Yet others feature computer-modelled figures, and James Lowne steers us towards a narrative in *Our relationships will become radiant*.

We're definitely in CGI territory with the listless characters who despair, fall, moonwalk and get nowhere in a remote landscape, while pixelated blood bubbles from a dead bird at their feet.

Of the idea of artists as directors, Wise says: "Film arguably always has a narrative and art doesn't necessarily, and animation is absolutely in the middle of the extremes of being narrative driven or, for want of a better term, visually driven. Even in the last three or four years there's been a real fluidity between what is art, film cinema and animation. It's incredibly exciting."

The lengthening list of credits on many artworks attests to the growing role of collaborators - camera operators, sound recordists and all those with the technical expertise to help an artist realise an idea.

Keeping the technical side in service to the conceptual art poses no problem for Wise who sees a two-way street. "Often artists ask questions that generate new solutions or even new software and there's an interesting feedback process where artists can be like a test ground and be innovators. We like to use and abuse!"

971 horses and 4 zebras is at MADA Gallery, Monash University, Caulfield Campus, April 24-May 16.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/moving-homage-to-birth-of-cinema-20130418-2i2rr.html>