

EXPERIMENTAL ANIMATION

From Analogue to Digital

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Please give us a brief summary of your work, including, if possible, a description of your creative process (e.g., how your creative ideas first appear and take shape).

My animations study domestic and recycled materials to illuminate the elements shared between fine-art abstraction and mass-produced graphic design. Extending a long tradition of abstract animation – a history shared between, dance, music, film and art – my handmade films use collage to explore the relationship between graphic cinema and storytelling, the tension between form and meaning. Over the past ten years, I have made over 30 animated shorts spanning focused object studies to epic musicals documenting the pitfalls of modern materiality. My work considers the history of experimental animation's various applications – from pre and early cinema through experimental film, contemporary art, video art and motion graphics – to survey trends of ornamental patterns, cycles of industry and material waste.

Ideas definitely sort of spiral outwardly and differently for different projects. For example: What started out as a temporal record of my mother's inventory from her place of work – a warehouse full of movie, music and celebrity imagery – became [*Dusty Stacks of Mom: The Poster Project (2013)*] a project that interwove the forms of personal filmmaking, absolute animation, the rock opera and the musical documentary. A simple examination of the rise and fall of a nearly defunct poster and postcard wholesale business unveiled themes surrounding the changing role of physical objects and virtual data in commerce and the division (or lack of) between abstraction in fine art and psychedelic kitsch. Then other themes and materials extended and complicated themes of inventory, merchandise industries, kitsch, light shows, multiples, appropriation,



obsolescence – with an additional four films: *Undertone Overture* (2013), *New Fancy Foils* (2013), *Glistening Thrills* (2013) and *Let Your Light Shine* (2013). Together, the five films worked like a feature essay film maturing my interests in the ways found materials and decorative detritus can illuminate truths about economic cycling and cultural value. Something large built out from something very little. This is generally the case.

Is material or media a particularly important component of your practice? How does it operate in your work?

My work always starts with a physical material and extracting as many possibilities from it as possible. My formative experience producing cameraless films made by drawing, painting or adhering objects directly to the 16mm filmstrip – *Two Hundred Feet* (2004), *A Joy* (2005), *All Stars* (2005) – ignited interests in abstraction, materials and patterns. The constraints of the miniature 16mm canvas and the ability to view the animations both as moving images and as sculptural objects – filmstrips depicting the temporal scores of movement – grounded my sensibilities within a trajectory of abstract animation cultivated by the approaches of early experimental pioneers relating to the performing and the plastic arts.

I take pride in activating the cosmos from scraps, pieces of trash, tragedies of the physical world. And my work develops exclusively out of studying materials under the animation camera. My material studies target abstract animation's entanglement with the decorative and the modern, asking the questions: What are the tensions between high and low culture revealed by materials? How can these tensions inform an understanding of cinema's branched connection to art and industry? My current filmography possesses formal rigour alongside a fanciful interrogation of contemporary anxieties responding to social and cultural trials and disappointments.

How would you define your animation practice in terms of its relation to fine art traditions, experimental animation or the (historical) avant-garde? Its relation to commercial industry? Who/what are your strongest influences?

I think I am definitely one of many artists in my generation who find hybrid modes from seemingly disparate worlds: High art and low culture and how their tension remains the same, despite infinite technological upgrades and complications. So, my strongest influences come from both A/G circles and the commercial industry: Len Lye, Frank Mouris, Jules Engel, Scott Stark, Robert Breer, Paul Glabicki, Paul Sharits, Motion Graphics for Channel Four, *Grease*, *Tommy*, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, *The Cantor's Son*, Bob Fosse, etc.

I also have a growing sculpture and installation practice fuelled by my interests in materials and newly antiquated technology: *No Kill Shelter*. This growing collection currently features 25 video sculptures, 'screensavers', born from interests in materials, waste and old technology. Animated loops inspired by mesmerising computer graphics play on discarded monitors and computers hand decoupled

with wrapping paper. Highlighting rapid technological obsolescence and the role of abstract animation in everyday life, the screensavers question the preciousness and fetishisation of antiquated technology and the relationship between fine art, design and craft. I see a lot of possibilities for the expansion of my work into sculptural and installation forms. And, to this end, I admire Nam June Paik, Jennifer Steinkamp, Lee Yong-Baek, etc.

Why animation?

I am constantly inspired by animation's ability to create what is not possible in reality and for its potential for the manipulation of time. I often joke that art has an inferiority complex to nature. Imprisoned by nature's perfection we strove to replicate it by hand; we created systems to describe its size, its components. We then built technologies to replicate what we had just perfected manually. We chugged through mechanical technologies, now into digital and virtual means of again replicating and inventorying reality. By virtue of the fact that environments are so often fabricated in animation, we are freed from those authorial arguments about painting vs. photography; we are freed from a diegetic space. Or, rather, we have the potential for freedom of 'reality' as mandated by flow of religion->literature->theatre->cinema->internet->mobile media->self-reflexive positioning of self. To me, animation foregrounds the role of mimicry not only cinema but in all of art, which has made it an infinitely exciting field thus far.

What is your work's relation to experimental form and technique? Is there something you want to articulate with your work that can't be expressed through conventional narrative means?

I'm a pseudo-formalist at my core. Very quickly, I began to question pure formalism's ability to move beyond decoration and started to combine the formal techniques and structures of experimental/abstract animation with those of cinematic genres. I had already developed parallel but separate modes of explorations: Short form abstract studies and long form genre interrogations. (e.g., *Lilly* (2007) pairs cameraless film techniques and alternative darkroom processes with the goals of the documentary form, using photo-negatives to animate a World War II tragedy. *Yard Work is Hard Work* (2008) borrows from tropes of the Hollywood musical to create a critique of contemporary life from discarded magazine cut-outs. I'm interested in the fertile territory for the combination of abstract animation techniques with different cinematic modes and forms. I'm certainly interested more in documentary than I am in narrative. But, I very well know that documentary *is* essentially narrative anyway. So, I welcome the blurring of any and all lines between genres. I think my work is deceptive. It's colour, speed and humour give notes of cuteness and superficially detract from a sense of rigour. Many people see these films as 'abstract films' but I surely see them more as documentaries, something I'd like to call inventory documentary – the temporal record of incomplete archives. I want my work to demand a new

viewing position, not from the position of a spectator who is viewing an 'abstract film' or a 'flicker film' or a 'documentary' or a 'musical' or an 'essay film' but from the position of a spectator who is considering a new mode.

How do you see your work operating culturally? Politically?

I suppose in some ways my work attempts to locate the slippery slope between what is cultural and what is political, this entangled relationship. With my continued questions surrounding the decorative roadblocks plaguing the history of abstract animation as well as my gained knowledge and confidence that material is the message, I re-approached the 'purely' abstract film and focused on the types of objects in question themselves: Ornamental scree. My stroboscopic material studies apply formal principles of abstract cinema while pursuing an interest in found materials, evolving modes of production and forms of labour. Questioning the role of decoration in daily life, my eight fabric studies – *Harlequin* (2009), *Rad Plaid* (2010), *Posthaste Perennial Pattern* (2010), *Point de Gaze* (2012), *Persian Pickles* (2012), *Blanket Statement [s] #1 and #2* (2012 and 2013) and *Razzle Dazzle* (2014) – extend the temporal concerns of the structural film while calling for a critical formalism. These films conceptualise abstraction by reflexively activating the referential properties of objects, foregrounding questions of Romanticism surrounding metaphor and exchanging lyrical and mythopoeic modes for those of economic observation (that examine the commodification of abstraction/the decorative). In my film *Persian Pickles* (2012), a swimming study of paisley patterns traces this motif from its origins in Persian weavings to appearances in Irish quilting and American counterculture. My ongoing *Blanket Statement* series uses quilts to evoke issues of domestic security, citing appearances of quilts in the fine arts from Michelangelo Pistoletto to Beryl Korot. *Point de Gaze* (2012) and *Razzle Dazzle* (2014) feature handmade and machine produced laces, tattings and intricate weavings to meditate upon the industry of desire and the phenomenology of cinema. *Undertone Overture* (2013) uses tie dye – from ancient hand-practiced dyeing techniques to hippie stigma'd gift shop merchandise to amorphous abstract paintings – to locate the tension regarding the aesthetic value of forms of fine art and craft. Most of my work at this point examines the commodification of abstraction, examining it curiously as it pans out through the development of the global economy and the globalised identity.

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