

CYCLES AND SEQUENCES: RESEARCH CURRENTS IN ANIMATION @UCA

Research in animation is an area of rich intellectual and creative endeavour and the Animation Research Centre at UCA has been a key contributor to this field since its inception in 1998. Following numerous UCA Animation hosted events, the focus now turns toward the practice and research-based outputs of the Animation Department's own staff, research students and colleagues. The exhibition title refers to methods of animation production, whereby repeated frames or cels combine to build scenes, and also to broader recurring patterns of innovation and rejection, as advocated by Dick Arnall (whose archive is here unlocked for the first time). Amidst a wave of groundbreaking experiment in UK animation during the 1990s, Arnall called for the 'death' of cartoon production in order to make way for an engagement with animation as a serious and vital art form, a commitment to the medium that is sustained across this exhibition. The work here has been considered under three themes:

MAPPING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Artists have employed the animated medium to visually interpret aspects of their everyday habitat, whether that holds historical or cultural significance or is otherwise quite unremarkable. Vesi Dashinova's *Cosmonauts Like Chewing Gum* (2024) deploys personal archives to examine the impact of former divisions in East and West Europe. The magnitude of space travel is referenced as a means to convey the impact of enforced separation. Manipulation of photographs, letters and found objects depicting past events affects a layering that collapses temporalities, while gestures of touch signify personal connection to these materials. Echoing the magic tradition of earlier animated trips to space, *Voyage à la Lune* (1903) Georges Méliès, Dashinova's cardboard vessel counterpoints the gravity of authentic testimony.

Contrasting with fantasies in flimsy materials embark upon perilous voyages, a challenge throughout animation history, and since dinosaurs were coaxed into dancing, has been to apply animation methods to solid objects thus liberating them to bend or fly. In *Serial Parallels* (2019) Max Hattler's time lapse animation flattens hundreds of Hong Kong skyscrapers into vertical shafts. Taking on the appearance of Lego this spectacle heightens the reality of the crowded living conditions of the island's inhabitants.

With *Porquerolles* (2019) Nicky Hamlyn continues his study of the manufactured features of urban and domestic environments. Deploying the single frame over time in changing light, intransigent stone blocks in an outdoor park become improbably volitional, stretching and bouncing like rubber according to whether the slabs lie in shadow or are illuminated by sunlight. The film presents a phenomenological experience in which appearances of objects are relative to our perception of them. Emmanuelle Waeckerle also responds to the everyday, the immediacy of drawing capturing outlines of features seen from a speeding vehicle. These new works contribute to her ongoing practice of constructing scores from non-typical sources, to be translated into live performance, and relating to the principles of seeing sound.

In contrast to Waeckerle's distant gaze, John Dargan comes into close proximity with his subject, the Churchill Gardens housing estate. The uniformity and latent hostility of this environment, the barred windows and surveillance cameras, is softened by Dargan's colourful drawings that depict the comforting personalisation of these homes. Sequential and directional, as with Waeckerle's scores, these images become animated in the viewing encounter.

On a different register to the examination of home, animators working in CG negotiate the unhomey, constructing a sense of the familiar through the representation of imaginary, virtual new species of flora and fauna. Experimenting with the uncanny, in Jordan Buckner's *Beest series* (2025) an entity composed from digital debris that moves in creaturely ways. Griffin Gu's *#cyber plants#* is a system in which digital data can proliferate to generate and recreate plant biodiversity. Jingyue Chang's interactive project invites viewers into an uncanny realm of virtual choice and identity.

FRAMES, FORMS, SEEING SOUND

A concern of Early Cinema was to make a display of the magic that lay behind its illusion. The following artworks invite close consideration of cinema's mechanisms, laying bare the possibility

of animation itself. The analogue film system in which the soundtrack possesses an optical dimension has given rise to numerous synaesthetic experiments. Known as Visual Music, this phenomenon of seeing sound is explored here through customised machines or actions that enact this close audiovisual relationship. The frequently arbitrary relationship of film sound and image is symbolised in the clapperboard whereupon the separate recordings are briefly brought into sync. Hamlyn's *Clapping* (2024) edits this action to the moment when the hands actually meet, thus mimicking the function of the clapperboard. Further acknowledgement of the role of film technology in the language of cinema is found in Will Bishop-Stephen's *Thrum xiii* (2025). Drawing on vaudeville, the one-man band and proto-cinema technology, where components of projection become objects of display, like a carousel ride this system of projected rotating forms generates perpetual sonic and imagistic revolutions.

Through his research into subcultures and collaborative storytelling Jamie Dobson has constructed a series of machines that visualize listening practices. As with Bishop-Stephen's work, these playful assemblages display the aesthetically ignored insides of machines. They celebrate a resistance to consumerism and offer a further instance of seeing sound. Works in this section also reflect upon animation's own history, reappraising the original materials in UCA's animation archives to bring renewed attention to landmark figures of UK animation, such as Dick Arnall. Martin Pickles *I am a Rebel* (2025) adopts a cartoon style through which to reframe the radio recordings of Bob Godfrey.

MINDS AND BODIES

Eisenstein identified as 'plasmatic' the capacity of the animated cartoon to exceed the limitations of given form (Eisenstein, 1986: 32). The representations of malleable anatomies found in this exhibition address the ongoing radical potential of defying the laws of physics, tackling concerns that might ordinarily remain unnoticed such as mental and physical health issues, domestic violence and pollution. Belle Mellor's *Clean Rivers, Clean Ocean* (2019) deploys the elasticity of animation to depict fantastical scenes of more than human bodies and unreachable realms. The pleasure of watching these beautifully drawn and animated mythical and microscopic creatures makes it possible to approach otherwise distressing environmental issues.

Typically, the plasmatic body is represented through drawing or models. Hosea and Smith eliminate these removes, incorporating instead animated principles such as stretch and squash directly through their own bodies. In *WalkCycle*, Hosea investigates the mark making possibilities of chalk for capturing the trace of motion. Embellishing a basic two step sequence of footprints with drawn motifs, she locates an alternative syntax for communicating physical sensations of pressure, energy and gravity. Despite the limitless potential of animation, contemporary animators investigate the form's potential to articulate the experience of restriction. In her ongoing research into self-representation, authorship and the role of the animator's body in film production, Vicky Smith's *Le Corps Morcele* (2025) and *Shedding* (2024) from the *Unlikeness* series, employ multiple superimpositions and pixilation to render suspended actions of inertia and the passage of time.

In Miriam Fox's *Stripes* (2019) geometric lines and barcodes fill the frame, suggesting that overwhelm is an inevitable consequence of the overdevelopment of urban environments. Conversely, and almost as antidote to the enclosures of *Stripes*, the lines that appear in *Root Map* (2021) possess an organic quality achieved through the method known as straight ahead animation. The improvised quality of this approach lends the artwork a vibrancy that represents Fox's journey of growth and learning. A consideration might be whether the graphic method of *Stripes* creates a more oppressive atmosphere than the photographic lines in *Serial Parallels*.

In Ciara Kerr's *Homemaker* (2023) a female character in a coercive relationship is persistently undermined until she morphs into a footstool and other inanimate objects. To escape, the woman has to leave parts of her body behind, but in so doing becomes physically larger, both effects achieved through plasmatic drawing. As with Dashinova's work, the dynamic of female friendship is key to the film's theme of discovery and self-empowerment. Stephen Featherstone's concern with physical, social, psychological and emotional boundaries is manifested in *Stopgap In Stop Motion* (2018) and *Drawings toward Sculpture*. His enquiry into boundaries also extends to trans-disciplinary practice: his artworks reference one medium through another, enhancing both. Hattie Croucher's *100 years of Aldershot FC* also reflects upon physical boundaries, in this case at the

local football club. Her artwork demonstrates that the plasmatic is not limited to cartoons, rather observational drawing can capture the extremity of sporting events: limbs twisted and entangled through physical contact, real bodies seem capable of exceeding their form.