

# The Presence Of Spanish Digital Animation In The Art World

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The present paper is an exhibition of the recent animation, which offers the digital art by the Spanish production, inside the artistic world, in the museum and cultural institutions.

There has been a considerable increase in animation material in recent times. One only has to look on Internet or go around the festivals to be aware of the large number of Spanish animators working at present. The quality may not always be first class, but some very good work has been done and has been rewarded with space in official exhibitions. However, looking back on the history of animation productions in Spain, we must point out that the situation has not always been so buoyant, as it was not normally given much attention, except for occasional periods in the last century. The present boom in animation is not much more than ten years old.

We shall begin by defining what we understand by Spanish animation, to make our use of the term clear. Considering the creators together with geographical and time factors, we understand Spanish animation to be the work of Spanish animators, even if they happen to live outside Spain. We also include work produced in Spain by foreign directors or producers from about XX to the present time. With the field thus defined, we can identify the vital elements involved in the development and diffusion at present experienced by Spanish animation. On one hand, we have the evolution and training of professionals in the animation field, from individual learning to experimentation with the advanced techniques that emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then we have techniques such as those developed by the animation studios up to those currently taught in faculties, schools and academies. In the 90s, training in animation began to be given in universities and private schools, who offer a variety of programs: from short initial courses to professional courses and a Master's Degree in specialised digital techniques. All these have helped to increase both the number of animators and the quality of the work produced.

Another contribution to this healthy situation in animation has been the spectacular technical advances of the tools used in their creation and in their ever-increasing ease of access, due to new methods of diffusion such as Internet, museums and exhibitions.

All these elements were essential parts in the simple, fast and easy handling which has given rise to the growth of interest and value in the world of animation, and are therefore key elements in our present enjoyment of the boom in Spanish animation productions. We are not surprised by its frequent appearance in art exhibitions and museums or by its increasing acceptance by art critics.

Later, we are going to comment on the evolution that the areas of diffusion have suffered across which we know the animated production, and later, we will indicate some works of digital animation realized by the new generation of Spanish artist, seen in recent exhibitions celebrated in museums and institutions of art in Spain.

As we have said above, the appearance of new diffusion areas increased the volume of animation productions. Until the appearance of TV in Spain (1956) animation was only seen in cinemas and the few festivals held in those times, and on the few occasions when it did appear, it was usually mixed with other media and was therefore not given a specific section. Such was the case of the International San Sebastian Film Festival or the International Film Week of Valladolid. Thanks to TV, the 1950s were one of the most productive in the history of animation in Spain, since it gave a lot of work to the studios and rescued them at a time when there was a shortage of animated films. The excellent quality of the TV advertising of the time was shown in a recent exhibition with the name of *El anuncio de la modernidad: Estudios Moro 1955-1970*, in the MUVIM<sup>1</sup> from 20 December 2007 – 3 February 2008. Visitors could enjoy almost 200 animations on 11 monitors arranged around the exhibition hall.

However, with the passing of time and as animation became ever more popular, it was given its own section in the film festivals. Some examples are: the Sitges Festival, the Festival Internacional de Cine de Cataluña, which began in 1968 and which since 1993 has included “Anima’t”, reserved exclusively for animation. Also, after 1994, they began to feature different internationally recognised animators in special productions of their work. Two years later, a special jury was created to judge the Anima’t section, and a prize was awarded to the best short ex aequo animated film, and after 1997 the best short animated film. In the late 90s, special animated film festivals began to appear, such as Animac, Animadrid, Xinacittà and Animacor, and for digital art, festivals such as Artfutura, Resfest, CiberArt and Mediafest. All have helped to promote animation and at the same time are considered to be meeting places for professionals and the public interested in this artistic discipline.

Animac, the longest running international animated film festival, has been held in Lerida every year since 1996. It is aimed at the public interested in animation. They also produce a magazine with interesting interviews and articles.

Animadrid, the international festival of animated images, began in 2000 in Pozuelo de Alarcón. Besides the film sessions, there are different activities, such as seminars, talks and exhibitions.

Xinacittà, the independent international animated film festival of original versions, in Barcelona. Started in 2002 by the APQR animation producer and helped by the collaboration of Xina A.R.T., a group of artists based in the Xina Gallery, in the Raval of Barcelona. It later became a street exhibition in the city centre. Their interest is in the “bravest and riskiest animation in the world” that explores new avenues, new methods and eliminates prejudices. In other words, quality productions that have not been shown in the usual circuits. Their idea is to encourage innovate projects in this medium by both artists and the animation industry.

Animacor, the Association for the Development of the Animation Industry, was born in 2005 with the aim of starting, impelling and developing the animation industry in Cordoba and Andalusia, with the aid of public organisations (Delegation of Cordoba, the City Council of Cordoba, Provincial Consortium of Economic Development and the University

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<sup>1</sup> The Valencia Museum of Illustration and Modernism (Spain).

of Cordoba) and Animation Producer Milímetros S.A. However, the history of Animacor goes back to 1999, when the tenth Córdoba Cartoon Forum was held by European animated film producers, under the auspices of the EU's MEDIA program. It attracts members of the general public, is internationally recognised and includes extra activities and displays. It is based on the joint development of three important areas in the audio-visual sector: training, production and promotion.

Artfutura has been in existence since 1997 and is involved with digital technology applied to art. Each year it attracts the best 3D animation work from all over the world. The festival is held simultaneously in 10 Spanish cities. Barcelona, Granada, Madrid, Murcia, Palma de Mallorca, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Vigo, Vitoria, Astillero and Zaragoza. Since its beginnings, it has included a section on computer graphics in Spain, which features the best 3D and special effects work carried out in this country, and awards the Infografía Prize to the best work from Spanish companies, students and independent artists.

Resfest. Under the organisation of ArtFutura, Resfest is a world festival of videoclips, film credits, documentaries, short films, animation and graphic design in movement. It visits forty cities in six continents. Since its beginnings in 1996, it has dealt exclusively with showing the work of digital film-makers all over the world.

CiberArt<sup>2</sup>. A Festival of Art, Science and New technologies, created in 1995, it is held every two years in a different place. It can be described as a debate and reflection on new art productions that use digital technology. Its aim is to keep up to date with new forms of creation by digital media; it not only shows digitally produced art works, but also tries to foment investigation and new approaches. The festival includes an interdisciplinary congress that analyses culture in general terms and considers the effect of technology on different social areas.

Mediafest, the bi-annual International Video and Multimedia Festival of the Canaries, was founded in 1988. It includes competition categories such as audio-visuals for mobile phone screens, installations and projects, video-creation, animation and artistic-documentary. These interesting topics establish a cohesion between the event's activities and form the backbone of the International Symposium and the exhibition. Besides the festival catalogue, a book is published with contributions from recognised authors and thinkers on a proposed subject.

Still in the decade of the 90s, the importance of the change from the analogue to digital system must be emphasised, since the changeover offered new opportunities to transform images, sounds and texts, etc. Thus, when we speak of animated digital art, we may find either material created directly by computer (images from synthesis) or captured by a camera and later modified, or a hybrid of both types. In all cases, the result is achieved by digital techniques which can be distributed and enjoyed online. Without any doubt, the creation of Internet has enormously increased the chances for animators to make their work known, when previously they only had the limited opportunities of art and film festivals, congresses and competitions, which were all attended only by professionals and the few interested members of the public. This usually meant that few animation productions became known to the public, apart from super-productions, such as those of Walt Disney.

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<sup>2</sup> Last held in 2004.

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We therefore consider that Internet has opened up the possibilities for independent creators to make their work known, without intermediaries, to the world at large. It now contains many individual or collective web sites that can be considered as small art galleries, many of which contain animation productions. It has also provided new animation festivals and competitions, e.g. Notodofilmfest, the International Compressed Film Festival for Internet, created in 2000 by Notodo.com. Visitors can download from this page the short films entered for the competitions chosen by the jury and guests. Among the awards made are: Prize for the best flash film made since 2001, the special “+ te vale” prize for the best animated film since 2002 and the prize awarded by the jury to the best animated film since 2005. Visitors to the web page can also participate by voting for the films. Notodofilmfest is, in short, a brilliant opportunity to see the latest work of the new creators.

There are also web sites that help to publicise the world of animation in the form of news, criticism, competitions, sound tracks, forums, etc., e.g. [www.cinemaniam.net](http://www.cinemaniam.net), [www.cinemagazine.com](http://www.cinemagazine.com), [www.cortometrajes.info](http://www.cortometrajes.info), [www.solocortos.com](http://www.solocortos.com), etc.

All these elements have contributed to making animation more frequently seen in art galleries and museums. Its growing importance in contemporary art is connected to the fact that our society is dominated by a visual culture and also to the popularity of computerised animation programs, used by an ever-increasing numbers of artists. The viewer can often interact with these immaterial works and even modify them.

Thanks to these exhibitions we get to know the leading artists in these media, sometimes used alone and sometimes combined with other techniques. With the growing interest in animation, exhibitions started to be held around the late 80s with animated art works throughout Spain. Their numbers are continually increasing, and include: *Procesos*, an exhibition in the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Reina Sofía in 1986, where visitors could see *Menina* (1986), by Juan Carlos Eguillor<sup>3</sup>, a computer-generated work and considered to be the pioneer of virtual or digital art in Spain. It consists of a recreation of the painting the *Infanta Margarita*, attributed to Diego Velázquez de Silva. The artist presents a study of the image of a girl dressed like the Meninas with a three-dimensional effect and references to the measurement of perspective. Juan Carlos Eguillor tries to recreate the profundity of the Meninas and relate it to the work of other artists like Durero and Dali.

Later exhibitions to include animation were: *Arte electrónico en España, Bienal Imagen y movimiento 90'*, *Bienal Imagen y movimiento 92': visionarios españoles* or *Señales de vídeo*: an exhibition held in 1995 which showed examples of recent Spanish video creations. Participating artists included Isabel Herguera with her oil painting on glass, entitled *Cante de Ida y vuelta*. She has a degree in Fine Arts from the Universidad del País Vasco (1985), and continued her studies in Germany and the United States. She has also explored various animation techniques, such as cutouts, oil on glass, chalk on board, sand, digital animation and the incorporation of real images.

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<sup>3</sup> Painter, illustrator and engraver, who became interested in experimental video in 1980, uses laser and works on synthetic backgrounds and virtual reality.

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After the year 2000, exhibitions including animations with a wider variety of formats and types became more frequent. Some examples are: *Monocana*<sup>4</sup> in el 2003, *Sesiones Animadas*<sup>5</sup> in 2005, *Històries Animades*<sup>6</sup> in 2006, *Fantasmagoría. Dibujo en movimiento*<sup>7</sup>, *Geopolíticas de la animación*<sup>8</sup>, the two last were held in 2007. Naturally, the animation also has functioned in the different editions of ARCO<sup>9</sup>. International appointment of the contemporary art, where there get together important representatives of museums and cultural institutions, collectors and artists of the world. The works stand out for their ultramodern and experimental offers. Besides, the admirers of the new trends of the art can be present at the tables of debate that are organized.

Thanks to these exhibitions, many international artists have been able to show their digitally animated work, including Spaniards: Manu Arregui, Jordi Moragues, Ruth Gómez, Cristina Lucas, Sara Serrano, Eduardo Balanza, Vicente Blanco and Juan Zamora. Most of these are young artists with degrees in Fine Arts and training in the complicated software programs which provide them with infinite possibilities of widening their horizons. Their work shows evidence of belonging to the audiovisual generation of the cinema, television and video games, also of the comic, design and advertising, and shares a common theme of concern for the present reality by which they are surrounded. It is a criticism of the hypocritical, established and superficial society tending to isolation, competition and violence, but always under an ironic vision and, despite everything, a sense of humour. These are digital animations that combine aspects of a fantasy world in which things are not always what they seem.

One of these pieces is *Coreografía para cinco travestís* (2001) by Manu Arregui (Santander, España, 1970), which breaks with the accepted concepts of society regarding gender as an identifying element. The artist, a graduate of Fine Arts, uses 3D computer technique as his only tool to create a sequence based on early Hollywood musicals. In fact, the references that have influenced his work are: Esther Williams and her films about "schools for sirens", Aubrey Beardsley, Gilbert and George, Horst P. Horst, Herney Gearon, Pierre Moliner and Regina Relang. It consists of a series of images of feminine hands, arms and legs that entwine in a rhythmical choreography similar to that used by synchronised swimming teams. However, at the end, we discover that the dancers are male.

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<sup>4</sup> It was shown in MNCARS (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía), Madrid (Spain); Casa Díaz Cassou (Murcia, Spain); Centro Gallego de Arte Contemporáneo de Santiago de Compostela (Spain) and Museo Patio Herreriano de Valladolid (Spain).

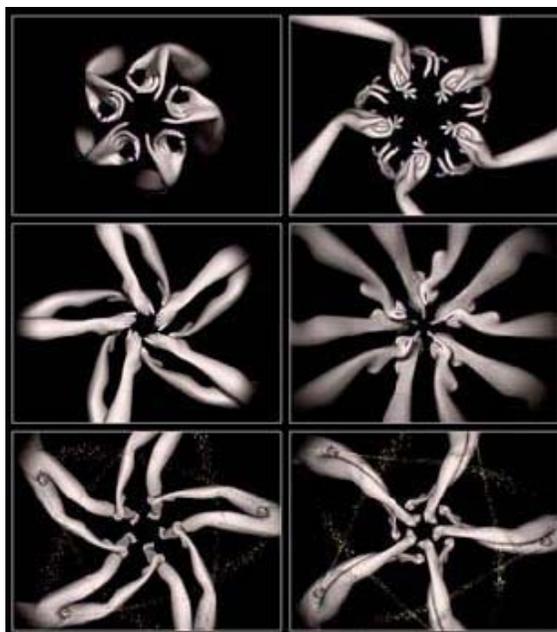
<sup>5</sup> It was shown in CAAM (Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno), Las Palmas (Spain) and MNCARS (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía), Madrid (Spain).

<sup>6</sup> It was shown in Caixaforum, Barcelona (Spain), Sala Rekalde, Bilbao and Le Fresnoy, Tourcoing (France), 2006-2007.

<sup>7</sup> It was shown in Fundación ICO, Madrid (Spain).

<sup>8</sup> It was shown in Centro Andalúz de Arte contemporáneo, Sevilla (Spain).

<sup>9</sup> ARCO (Internacional Contemporary art fair), Madrid (Spain).



*Coreografía para cinco travestís*, 2001. 3D animation 2' 46".

In his latest film, *Irresistiblemente Bonito*<sup>10</sup> (2007), Manu Arregui explores the physical and psychological transformation of Vanesa Jimenez, Known as "The glass girl" due to a degenerative illness, to question the concept of hyper-reality and the ethics of TV reporting. In this animation, the artist plays with real images of woman and with others in that she appears as a personage of cartoon in 3D. At the same time, it recites a text that one speaks about personal overcoming.

Other animation pieces by Manu Arregui, such as *Final Feliz*, 2001, 1'; *Sticky bacon*, 2002, 2'49"; *On my own*, 2003, 2'31"; *Bonjour baudrillard*, 2004, 2'8"; *Adiós*, 2004, 3'38"; *Berne Argia*, 2004, 20".

Another of the new creators whose work can be seen in Spanish galleries is Ruth Gómez (Valladolid, Spain, 1976). With a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Salamanca, specialising in Graphic Design and Audiovisuals, she has worked for the Agencia de Publicidad Virtual Creativos, and as Director of Publicity and Design in Localia Televisión (León). Her drawings and animations are autobiographical and reflect the artist's vision of her world and everyday life, which draws the viewer to question the reality around him. Her characters are taken from the world of comics, advertising and video clips, depicted in clear lines and a colour range limited to green, grey and a predominant pink. The artist always uses the same technique; digitally altered real video images animated by computer program. In the piece entitled *Made in Musac* we can see how she plays with her own image in multiple forms, expressing the struggle she has with herself in her attempts to get back on her feet after a fall. This is a metaphor for the fears experienced and changing moods she passed through while creating the work in the year when she was able to enjoy a grant from MUSAC<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Actually It's showed in a exhibition *Chacun à son gout* in The Museum Guggenheim Bilbao (Spain).

<sup>11</sup> Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León.



*Made in Musac*, 2004. Animation in colour and sound, 60”.

In another work entitled *Animales de compañía*, Ruth Gómez shows us the reality of everyday life with a jungle for scenery, in which different human beings fight with each other to survive under social rules. As in the piece described above, among the characters we recognise the author. There are violent actions, escapes, chases, fights and even human cannibalism. The author attempts to reflect on the nature of human beings as persons and as social animals, in a reflection of a system where individuals are at the same time victims and murderers, with little chance of exercising individual liberty. The actions in the video succeed each other at top speed and include a frightening chase of a group of individuals by a member of their own species. All the characters are dressed in ordinary clothes in the inappropriate background of a jungle. Only the gestures change.



*Animales de compañía*, 2005. Digital animation in colour and sound, 2´ 50”

However, the character featured in *Bubble bobble* imperturbably chews gum while listening to music. The surprise arrives when we realise that human figures are trapped inside the bubbles he is making with the chewing gum.

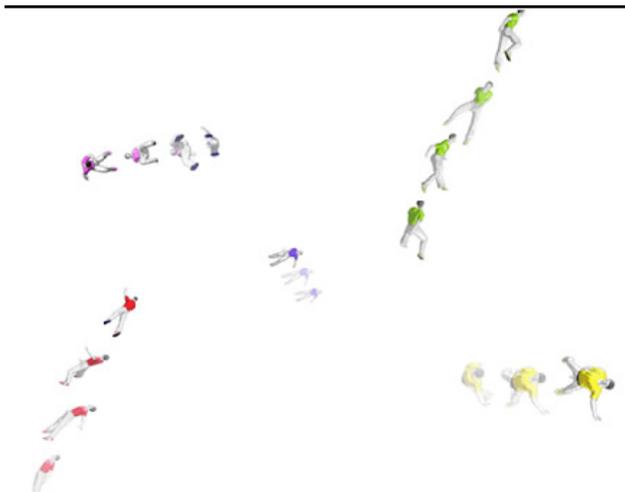


*Bubble bobble*, 2005. Digital animation in colour and sound.

Other animation pieces by the same artist, such as *El asesino de su persona* (2003) or *Te sobrealimentas* (2003) continue to explore human relationships and behaviour in a world full of inequalities.

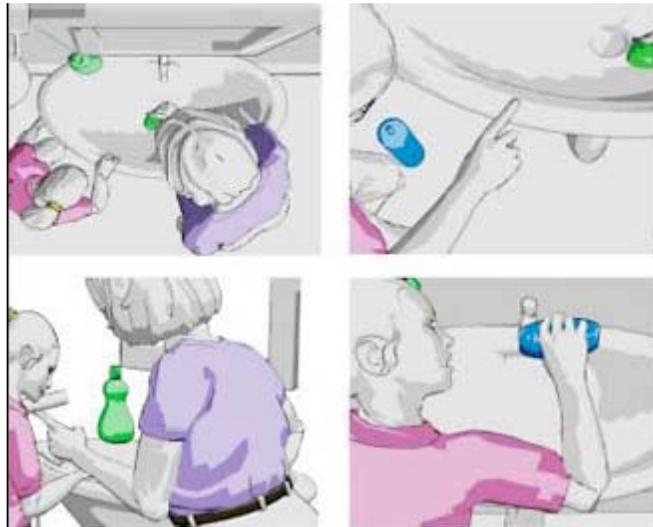
The work of Cristina Lucas (1973, Jaén, Spain) uses methods such as installation, photography, video and drawings to investigate power structures from the point of view of culture and gender criticism. The apparently innocent aesthetics of her pieces are used to make ironical and critical comments on controversial matters such as the ideas of power and supremacy of those who support patriarchal systems, man's obsession with dominating Nature and the consideration of the human being as the highest point of evolution.

In the *Flying Boys* video, five youths fly happily through the air using their penises as propellers. In this piece, Cristina Lucas questions the young generation with a fear of growing up, affected by the Peter Pan Syndrome. Each one tries to find his own way, in search of himself, as he flies through the air.



*Flying Boys*, 2002. Digital animation in sound and colour, 1' 10"

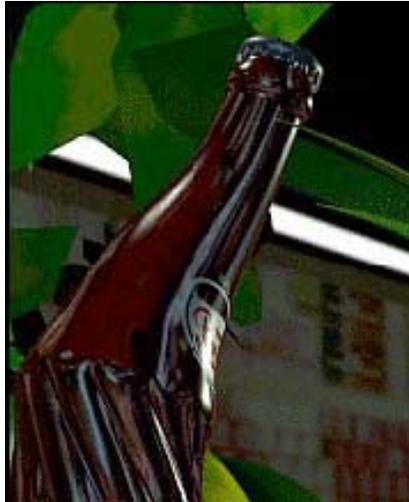
In *El eje del mal*, Cristina Lucas' starting point is a patriarchal society in which women are responsible for domestic chores. A housewife shows her daughter how to rid a bathroom of microbes and bacteria, while in the background we hear a radio report on the Afghan War. The dialogue between mother and daughter emphasises with perverse ingenuity the necessity of killing the germs. A parallel is established between feminine education and the manipulation of global opinion by the media. In this sense, the 3-minute piece using 3D animation techniques, confronts ideas of the public and the private.



*El eje del mal*, 2003. Digital animation in colour and sound, 3"

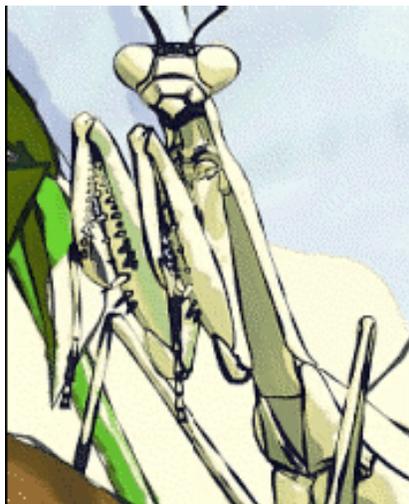
Jordi Moragues (1970, Barcelona, Spain), teacher at the Instituto del Audiovisual de la Universidad Pompeu Fabra, studied at the Instituto Oficial de Radio y Televisión. His first job was in post-production and digital animation. He then did an MA in Computer Image and Animation Synthesis at the Universitat de les Illes Balears (Spain) and achieved international recognition with his first pieces. He is open to new ideas of working and thinking produced by technical advances and explores all possible angles in search of his goal. Imagina, Siggraph, Nicograph, London Effects & Animation Festival, Art Futura, are some of the exhibitions in which he has won awards. He has been Resident Artist in centres such as the Institut Universitari de l'Audiovisual in Barcelona and the Academia Superior de Arte y Medios in Cologne. He has exhibited in the leading international festivals dedicated to new digital techniques, and in Spain took part in Monocanal, an exhibition of the latest video productions in the MNCARS, Madrid.

*One night* is a later work showing greater technical mastery. In this, a Pepsi Cola bottle and a Coca Cola bottle present a sincere personal version of Romeo and Juliet.



*One night*, 1997, 3D animation, 26'9''

His animation entitled *Mantis* presents the life cycle of a praying mantis, who kills the male after mating. It is the vehicle for a poetic meditation on the survival instinct, the urge to reproduce and the life cycle. A strong contribution to this end was given by the visuals, inspired by the ancient oriental painting style.



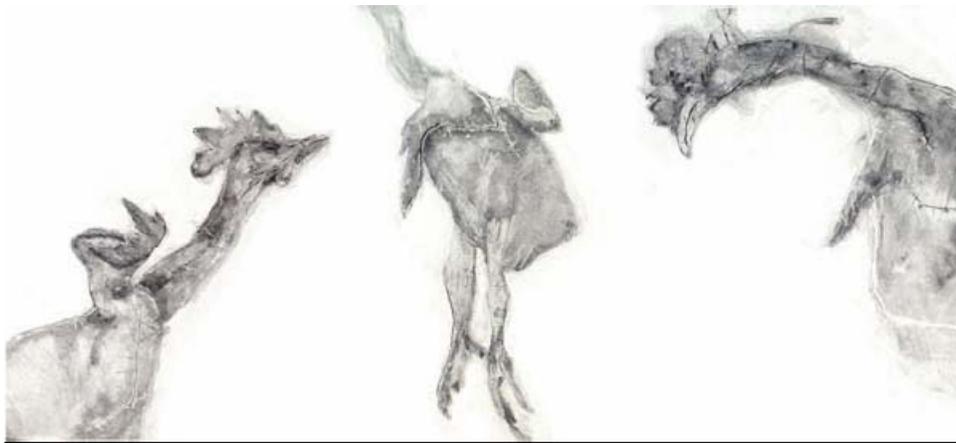
*Mantis*, 2002, Digital animation in colour, 7'44''

The artist's independent short as *Mantis* (2002), *Beetle* (1999), *One night* (1997), *The Hit* (19994), *The Contact* (1993) and *Pacman* (1992).

Another Spanish artist with great talent not mentioned previously but who deserves attention for her excellent work is Blanca Palou, from Catalonia. She studied Fine Arts in Barcelona (Spain) specialising in painting and studied for a year at Bristol University with an Erasmus scholarship, where she came into contact with animation. This artist understands the technique to be a means of artistic expression which combines craftsmanship with digital techniques.

Her first short video was entitled *Chick* and was made shortly after returning to Spain from England in 1997. In this, she used the drawings she had created by engraving techniques, including real chicken feathers that moved slightly when passed through the press. The film is about a love story between two chickens, a faithful reflection of their first meeting, the expression of fear of rejection. The animation used is simple and is based on drawings and engravings by the artist. Part of the animation includes two simple, almost abstract, heads, which correspond to the moment of their first meeting. Then comes the rejection, as if it were an underwater dream, in which the entire chickens appear. The sound track of this short film was composed by Miquel Roger. It was selected for the Ottawa Festival and has received various prizes.

Later, in 2001, Blanca Palou staged a joint exhibition entitled *Garabatos* in the Galería Sicart de Vilafranca del Penadés (Spain), where she showed *Chick* together with the original drawings hanging from the ceiling in a forest of photographs.



*Chick* (1997). Without dialogue. B/W. Indian ink on paper, water and feathers, 4'.

Since 1999 she has been working on another project, *Món desde el porche de mi madre*, in which she tries to explain a type of tale or legend about a lizard and a butterfly, that deals with gods, nature and human beings. It deals with the problem involved in the idea of man as part of nature, but treats nature as if it had nothing to do with men and gods, i.e. the harmony between these elements. The projects consists of three scenes, *Món 01*, *Món 02* and *Món 03*, each of which is represented technically in a different way.

She began making crayon drawings of flowers, butterflies and lizards, which represent man, woman and the house. The pre-production phase of *Món 1* lasted nearly a year during which the artist analysed the movements of the lizard and the camera by means of a documentary. She considered how to get it to the wall and constructed a travelling camera seven metres long with a device to raise and lower the camera through horizontal and vertical axes. She then made maps to indicate where each photo should be placed. She drew on the wall, took a photo, erased it with Tippex, moved the camera and drew it again with Indian ink, using a rotoscope.

In the projection of the fragment entitled *Món 03*, a collage of photos appears in which the butterfly in relation with the woman, its wings are like a woman's eyebrows, metamorphosis, a child's face appears with a woman's eyes, a photo-collage. The men are disguised for the festival with dragon and lizard tattoos while a dragon can be seen to

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climb a wall of the house, through the window the men are seen dressed up for a party, the man becomes a dragon and the woman becomes a butterfly. It shows how men interrelate at the party. The dragon ends up swallowing the butterfly.

A fragment of this project, *Món 01* (with no soundtrack) and *Món 03*, entitled *Món: Work in Progress*, was shown at the second *Garabatos* exhibition in 2003 in Vilafranca del Penades under Jaume Vidal. This was not a collective exhibition and the hall was divided into three sections. In her section, Blanco Palou had one room painted entirely black, on whose walls she projected the video, and hung photos vertically from the wall on luminous optic fibre, in reference to the number of photos necessary for the making of a film. *Món: Work in Progress* was also shown at the Muestra FIB-Art 2004 in Benicasim and has received an honourable mention in the "Ciudad de Palma" awards.

The installation was a success and caused a favourable impression on the public, The installation has also been entered for several competitions, winning one third prize and several mentions.



*Món 3*, 1999, Without dialogue

To conclude, we think we have been able to show that all the works mentioned in this report are clear examples of the successful progress of animation in the artistic world, not only as a tool but also as a language of communication equal in value to other art forms like painting, sculpture, etc. They are also a faithful reflection of our times and show the contemporary reality of our daily lives. The examples of animation shown in museums and galleries are evidence that with the new technologies the artist can achieve whatever he/she wishes to create, without any limits, in a world that, apparently inoffensive and based on fantasy, contains a large amount of criticism and rejection of the present social conditions. And, in fact, the things are changing really in the art.

### **Acknowledgements**

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