

# SPLICE





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The Filmpool is committed to developing an awareness and appreciation of independent film that reflects the individual and collective cultural expression of Saskatchewan people.

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## A Message from Filmpool Executive Director



Hello all,

As we near the end of 2011, I am pleased to report that the Filmpool had another extremely successful year, and that the organization is growing at a solid and consistent rate. Increased levels in film production and membership signifies success, not just as it relates to the core of our mandate - to produce and promote independent filmmaking - but also, signifies something more - that the Filmpool is a place where members can share their passion, their stories, and their time together 'in person'. And this is what the Filmpool is about - the ability to sustain a sense of community, while at the same time sustaining our mandate.

Recently, the Filmpool has experienced a number of success stories, contributing to this overall feeling of excitement and growth.

This past summer and fall we witnessed record numbers for both the 48 Hour Filmmaking Frenzy (twice the size as last year) and the Filmpool Premiere Screening (we had to create an additional night to accommodate the number of submissions). In addition, we are expanding (literally), as the Filmpool's artist-in-residence, Chrystene Ells, along with Filmpool staff and volunteers, have totally renovated the Filmpool's second-floor space. We now have a complete production facility, with areas for design/sets/props, as well as a small section for shooting. Although, perhaps not quite the size as the Sound Stage, it's perfect for participants of the This Big World workshop program. Chrystene's residency is generating an extra buzz at the Filmpool, and we are extremely fortunate to share her expertise and enthusiasm to the entire Saskatchewan community.

The Filmpool has other good news to report as well. William F. Whites, our local film industry equipment supplier, has graciously donated \$2,500 in annual equipment deferrals, while the National Film Board of Canada also donated a substantial number of equipment items. In addition, the Filmpool has recently purchased a high-end super 8 camera, with crystal sync, a jib arm, a Steadicam and more.

In 2012, the Filmpool will continue to provide a wide array of technical and aesthetic workshops, exhibitions and partnership programs. Please visit our website for information on past or upcoming events ([www.filmpool.ca](http://www.filmpool.ca)). Hope to see you soon!

Gord

## A message from the Splice Editor



There is always something exciting going on at the Filmpool, as this issue of Splice shows. Last year, there was the Godard project. This year it's Chrystene Ells' This Big World project - an exciting initiative that has independent filmmakers exploring Saskatchewan stories. Our Filmpool members are also always coming up with innovative new works; just read what Adrian Dean and Amalie Atkins have been up to lately. There is never a dull moment at the Filmpool.

Kelly

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## SASKATCHEWAN FILMPOOL COOPERATIVE



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# CHRYSTENE ELLS' BIG WORLD

By Tricia Martin

“The Visual Story with Chrystene Ells” was an amazing pre-production course the FilmPool hosted in the spring of 2011. As an organization dedicated to the stories and expression of the collective artists in this province, the Saskatchewan FilmPool Cooperative is always seeking out those who have a unique skill set to contribute to programming. The FilmPool counts itself lucky to have come across the likes of Chrystene.



Photo courtesy of Chrystene Ells.

We first met Chrystene, through another program the FilmPool offers the very popular, twice-annual, event called “A Night of Poetry and Film,” curated by Kelly-Anne Riess. Chrystene was approached by Kelly to participate in the spring 2010 screening, where Chrystene was paired with some wonderful Saskatchewan poets. That calm spring evening the FilmPool opened its doors to share Chrystene’s film *Sisu* with a full house of poetry and film fans, nestled together to share in experiencing the different telling of stories. *Sisu* is a film based on a story that haunted Chrystene for the better part of 20 years, before she finally took the plunge and followed the gravitational pull of that story,

which eventually brought her here to Saskatchewan.

Although she was born in California, Chrystene’s family moved to rural Alberta when she was a toddler, so she grew up in the Canadian school system, spelling ‘colour’ with a ‘u’ and using metric. While at home on the ranch, she broke and rode her own cow-pony, milked, castrated, branded, and proudly identified as a rural Canadian.

California was in her blood, however. And as a self-described bohemian art chick, Chrystene found herself a bit of an unconventional piece in the rural Alberta puzzle.

As a teen, she began to sense a greater calling. Immediately after high school she left the ranch for good.

Her first landing pad was downtown Calgary, where she received her earliest performance training and performed with several edgy theatre companies, including a promising new troupe named One Yellow Rabbit.

From her next-door neighbor, an up-and-coming young puppeteer named Ronnie Burkett, she learned her first puppetry tips and fabrication techniques. She also curated an ongoing 16mm film festival. Back before the miracle of VHS tapes introduced the concept of films on demand into people's homes, Chrystene brought classics and obscure European films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and early films by Werner Herzog to Calgary audiences. Eventually, the open road and adventure called. With the encouragement of her father—who himself had lingering beatnik tendencies—Chrystene gave in to her California restlessness.

At the age of 21, she loaded a dog, a sewing machine, and a backpack into a not-quite-street-legal 1971 Datsun 510, and with \$500 to her name, she set out to see what else life may have in store for her beyond the Alberta she knew and loved. Little did she know, the life of a struggling artist was what she was driving towards. It seemed strangely perfect that this young Canadian artist was seeking something totally different.

When she landed finally in San Francisco, it quickly became apparent that it was mission accomplished. Coming from a relatively stable part of the world, where we have social programs and arts funding, Chrystene was young and slightly naïve about the lack of support in the United States. Coming from Canada where art is generally revered, celebrated and invested in as a cultural commodity by private and public funding, it was an abrupt lesson to learn that artists everywhere do not get the same level of support that we are accustomed to and appreciate in Canada. So, the young girl from Alberta quickly found herself re-identifying as a starving artist.

Literally on skid row, Chrystene took up residence in an abandoned warehouse-style storefront, a former shooting gallery and junkie squat in the most desperate area of downtown, working with a handful of other young artists to set up an art studio and theatre in the main space. Chrystene lived in a small room in the back, which doubled as an office and dressing room for the theatre. Even her new San Francisco friends thought she was crazy, but over the course of the next few years the space, Bindlestiff Studio, named for the hoboes and transients both outside and inside its doors, became a thriving art centre and theatre, still in existence and currently celebrating its 23rd year at the same location, now morphed into the world's only Filipino-American

Performing Arts Centre, under the artistic direction of Chrystene's dear friend, San Francisco comedian and director Allan Manalo. During the five years that she lived on skid row, the Alberta ranch girl found herself growing accustomed to the crack addicts that littered her front step, as well as the crime, shooting and incredible poverty in some pockets of San Francisco. Of course the calls she made back home to her father let him know that everything was just fine, and eventually things in Chrystene's new San Francisco life became just fine, even more than fine really.

Chrystene toyed with ideas of being an actor but she was more of a jack of all trades. She had skills and talent with sewing, portraits, painting, acting, stilt walking, design and directing, not to mention dog training and hair cutting. Her business card at one point attempted to reflect all of her skills, but that got lukewarm responses. People love a modern day Renaissance person, but what people love even more is putting people in a proverbial box. "If I want a haircut, I'll go to a hair dresser; I don't want a painter/seamstress/director cutting my hair." We live in a culture of specialization, so if you are a "slashie" with multiple talents, be wise to the possibility that some people might question the quality of skill of someone with many occupations. Eventually Chrystene went with the more obviously suitable card that stated simply "Chrystene Ells: Mammal."



Chrystene with 'Death the Jester' puppet, from the show *MEMENTO MORI*, Bindlestiff Studio, San Francisco, 1997. Writer, director, performer, puppetry and puppet design by Chrystene Ells. Photo by Rocky Heck.



Chrystene on the cover of the SF Weekly, San Francisco, 1991. Photographer unknown.



Mark Hidzick (Judy), Lorna Aquino Velasco (Punch), with Chrystene as Pasqual the suicidal clown and Baby Pasqual puppet in *MEMENTO MORI*. Written, directed, performed and puppets by Chrystene Ells, Bindlestiff Studio, San Francisco, 1994. Photo by Rocky Heck.

This example is a perfect articulation of what Chrystene went through before she realized that her art practice was interdisciplinary. As an artist in San Francisco, Chrystene felt a little all over the place. She was starting to work on puppets on top of every other facet of her artistic practice, and because she had such a colorful and varied professional resume, she couldn't self identify what kind of artist she was. Not that that ever really bothered her much, or kept her waiting for work.

Shortly after landing in San Francisco, at the age of 23, Chrystene joined forces with another young artist, then 21-year-old San Francisco playwright Cintra Wilson. With Chrystene's knack for puppets and Wilson's talent with scripts, an x-rated late night puppet trilogy called *Bitzy La Fever's Kingdom of Passion* was born. A raunchy midnight show that featured puppets as characters in a soft-core Italian romance novel, rife with gambling, drugs, less-than-celibate priests, and a filthy little clown puppet who did unspeakable things to kittens, the trilogy ran through the summer to sold-out crowds at San Francisco's Climate Theatre.

Critical acclaim and the sheer no-holds-barred unpredictable sexy insanity and comedy of the shows made *Bitzy La Fever* an overnight raging success. Each night at 11 p.m., the queue of hopeful audience members gathered, forming a line around the block in numbers three times the Climate theatre's capacity. The show won Chrystene the Bay Area Critic's Circle Award for puppet design, and led to a full-scale annual international puppet festival, *Festival Fantocchio*, for which she was the first poster child. For the next 20 years, the artistic path

that had enticed Chrystene from an Alberta ranch to sketchy skid row centred largely on puppetry, landing her squarely in her new niche as San Francisco's Puppet Queen.

Building puppets for dozens of live theatre productions, as well as writing, directing, performing and producing for live theatre shows all over the San Francisco Bay Area, Chrystene recognized that puppetry and theatre were almost a complete synthesis of her varied skills and interest, giving her the first hint that her practice could be contained within some sort of holistic, interdisciplinary framework, but there was still something missing: film.

Chrystene had always wanted to animate and make films, having grown up watching NFB animations and appreciating the edgy, indie Canadian film scene, but she was daunted by the cost and exclusivity of film school. Not to mention the expense of indie filmmaking in California, where funding was slim, competition was intense, and non-commercial film work was not in vogue.

It was around this time that Chrystene learned of a new tax incentives program for corporations in San Francisco that sponsored after-school jobs at non-profit organizations for 'at-risk' youth. Under the program, teens were paid to learn janitorial skills and other such jobs, so Chrystene initiated a partnership with the non-profit San Francisco Women's Building. In the summer of 1994 she hired 12 students but instead of putting them to work cleaning toilets and mopping floors, she developed a crazy Grotowski-style theatre lab made up of these multi-cultural 'at-risk' teens, called Riot Act Theatre Company, or r.a.t.co.

There students learned physical theatre, acrobatics, mask making, puppetry, circus skills, stilt walking, and most importantly the fine art of collaborative creation. r.a.t.co.'s shows were incredibly edgy and unusual for teen theatre, and soon the company was invited to be in residence at Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco's enormous new arts complex that includes the SF Museum of Modern Art as well as dozens of other galleries and performance spaces. However there was no money for the program outside of what the students were being paid directly.

For four years Chrystene volunteered as the mentor and director for the r.a.t.co. youth in her spare time, while funding all of their programming with her own salary. Her dilemma was, at the time, her special effects skills came to be less in demand; digital effects were taking over the traditional effects industry. Luckily Chrystene landed a gig at *George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic* as a concept artist and storyboard artist, but even that field was trading in its graphite and art markers for computers, digital stylus tablets and Photoshop.

It soon became clear to Chrystene that she needed to upgrade her skills. While still at ILM she was recruited to develop and then direct the Fine Arts Department at Expression College for Digital Arts in Emeryville- just across the Bay from San Francisco. There Chrystene spent five years teaching art history, traditional drawing, painting, sculpture and design. In the evenings she concentrated on completing digital arts and computer animation courses at the college, eventually earning a Bachelor's degree in Animation and Visual Effects.

### So life was good.

Chrystene was evolving and growing settling into her multifaceted life in San Francisco. Still, there was something in the back of her increasingly creative mind that was calling her back to Canada. It wasn't the open sky and the life on the ranch in Alberta, but a simple campfire story told to her one time when she was back home, that was picking at her brain from the inside. Over the flicker of fire one fine country evening, a friend of the family had told Chrystene a story of a Canadian immigrant man who built a ship in the middle of the prairies during the Depression, with plans to sail it home to Europe. A man that nobody would help, who was determined to, on his own, build a boat and sail it home to Finland from landlocked Prairies.

The idea of this unnamed man of mystery was something that Chrystene had thought about for the better part of a decade. She imagined who he might be and dreamt about his story, wondering so many things about his life. She did not know his name or where he was from, and there was no real way for her to find out about him. There was no Internet then. Through the years she could not shake this man, so she started writing a fictitious screenplay about him.

It was over a period of 10 years and Chrystene was on the third draft of that script when she happened to be catching up over coffee with an old friend, J. Kevin Dunn, a professional photographer who had spent the summer of 2003 in southern Saskatchewan, documenting his walk along abandoned railroads and through the lonely towns strung along them in southern Saskatchewan for a *Canadian Geographic* article called 'Trek by Track'.

There was a moment in the telling of his adventure that really made Chrystene sit up and take notice.



Lorna Aquino Velasco (top) as 'Balut' and Michell Arellano (bottom) as 'Lumpia' in *DIRTY LAUNDRY* by Michell Arellano, dramaturgy and direction by Chrystene Ells, Bindlestiff Studio, San Francisco, 1998. Graduates of r.a.t.co. - Chrystene's theatre program for 'at-risk' youth in San Francisco. Photo by Rocky Heck.



Lorna Aquino Velasco (top) and Michell Arellano in *DIRTY LAUNDRY* by Michell Arellano, dramaturgy and direction by Chrystene Ells (Bindlestiff Studio, San Francisco, 1998). Graduates of r.a.t.co. - Chrystene's theatre program for 'at-risk' youth in San Francisco. Photo by Rocky Heck.

It was the energy that surrounded his words: “Oh and there is this one guy—you are going to just love his story—he built this ship on the prairies, back during the Depression,” and he handed her a picture of the ship itself, with the name ‘Sontiainen’ clearly painted on the hull. It was him. It was the man that Chrystene had been consumed with for nearly 15 years now. Searching the word ‘Sontiainen’ online, Chrystene was rewarded with finally being given his name -Tom Sukanen, where he had lived—Macrorie, Saskatchewan—along with photos of the still extant ship preserved at a museum south of Moose Jaw. Finally, there was a real connection to the facts and story of this man’s life. This is where Chrystene would once again feel an uncontrollable force pulling her to something different and somewhere else. The Puppet Queen was shedding that skin and was embarking on the pursuit of a new dream that would become the reality that is her film *Sisu*.

Chrystene found herself compelled while on a road trip back to Alberta to drive just a little further to Macrorie, Saskatchewan.



Don Wood as Tom Sukanen in this still from *Sisu* (2007). Photo by Andrew Schlusset.

She wasn’t sure what she would find, if anything, but she needed to go and go she did. The funny thing about history in Saskatchewan, that we native Saskatchewanians might take for granted is the accessibility we have to our collective history. Chrystene was blown away when she pulled into the more or less abandoned town, and found a building with a sign that said Macrorie Museum. There was a little handwritten note taped to the door that said: “If you want to visit the museum, just call one of the following few ladies and they will show you around and let you in.” Of course it just so happened that while Chrystene was reading this note, two lovely elderly ladies, Marj Ingolls and Shirley Shetterley, just happened to be driving by. They were the same ladies named in the note. And better yet, they knew about Tom, and told her that their brother Lloyd Redden would be more than happy to hop in this pick up and take Chrystene down to Tom’s homestead. The phrase it’s a small world never rings more true than when you say it in Saskatchewan.

The hairs standing up on the back of one’s neck have got nothing on the sensation Chrystene felt as she finally set eyes and landed foot on Tom’s homestead. She was there, on his land, right where it all happened. It was a bizarre and exhilarating experience. Chrystene was there experiencing Tom’s world with her own eyes.

The folks in Macrorie shared with Chrystene the stories they knew of Tom and his unrelenting dedication to realize his dream, to build and sail his boat back home to Finland. This was a life changing experience for Chrystene and it was surreal. Her trip there allowed her to touch the same stones that Tom had touched and see ruins where Tom’s homestead once stood. The fine people of Macrorie also gave Chrystene another gift—a book, *Prairie Progress: Commemorating the Macrorie District*, at the very reasonable price of 10 dollars, which Chrystene gladly paid. It was an enormous book assembled by the town’s people containing stories, poems, documents, and photographs from the memories and personal collections of the people in the community and surrounding area.

Chrystene had been haunted by Tom, and he was still with her, but she found herself blown away by the number and diversity – not to mention the bizarreness – of the deeply personal stories related in this incredibly dense small town journal. In addition to feeding her already burning desire to connect with Sukanen’s story, this tome of basically unedited personal narratives of crazy experiences on the prairies planted another, unexpected seed, which is taking root now in the form of Chrystene’s current project: **This Big World**.





Chrystene directs extras and Brian Dueck as Vic Markkula in the threshing machine scene for *SISU - THE DEATH OF TOM SUKANEN* (Saskatchewan, 2010). Photo by Raul Vicerat.

While buried in her research for *Sisu*, Chrystene came across another of these community memoir books from another Saskatchewan community. To her amazement, she eventually discovered that nearly every township and district in Saskatchewan has published their own collection of memoirs, and in fact there are well over a thousand volumes of these Saskatchewan community history books from all over the province, stored in personal collections, as well as in archival resource centres, including the Prairie History Room at the Regina Public Library. Mesmerized by the personal narratives of memorable moments in the lives of Saskatchewan residents from the 19th and early 20th centuries, Chrystene struggled at times to keep on track with her Sukanen research.

When I asked Chrystene to tell me in her own words how she felt about her discovery of the plethora of community history books in existence she paused, reflected for just a moment, and sighed, as she often does in a way that is not related to any emotional state. “It just feels good,” she assured me. “I constantly found myself being swept up in the peculiarly ‘tragi-comic’ stories, such as excerpts from a Norwegian immigrant child’s 1906 homestead diary, or from the comically bizarre memoirs of mysterious characters like ‘Lefty the Sodbuster’. There were stories of newcomers wandering lost on the stark and lonely prairie before it was crisscrossed by grid roads, following stars they mistook for lanterns in their own homestead windows.”

The books tell tales with descriptions of strange pastimes like “badger betting” where a gopher was pitted against two badgers in a pen. Chrystene told me of disastrous

narratives—like the team of horses who drowned in October while their master was in a desperate midnight pursuit of a few sticks of firewood from across a lake skimmed with thin ice. There were stories of prairie fires with flames fifty feet high, racing unstoppable through the night, sweeping the land clean.

“There are literally thousands of tales of death, awe, laughter and heartbreak, describing the experiences of lost, stubborn and often baffled immigrants who were at first simply trying to locate, on the harsh and treeless wild prairies of unbroken Saskatchewan, the utopian farm life they had been sold, and who transformed their initial bewilderment into a stubborn, steely insistence on simply surviving.”

Chrystene obviously feels a deep connection to these stories.

“All of these stories, remembered by those who lived them, were dutifully collected and recorded and published by their neighbours, folks from down the road or across the valley, and now are resting, waiting, sleeping in these community history books, many long unopened, many stories long unread – just begging for someone to come along and discover them once more, and bring them to life for a new audience,” said Chrystene.

Chrystene speaks often that her goal with her current project “is not a search for truth or identity or to prove a point or to make a statement or even an attempt to piece together actual



history that intrigues me in these stories.

“Mostly, I find the stories infinitely compelling, surprising, funny, tragic, incomplete and odd, just like humans in general,” she said. “In reading these stories, I find myself enjoying the universal yet infinitely varied experience of human beings, exploring the baffling and remarkable state of being human.”

These books are not officially recorded historians’ interpretations, government-sanctioned versions, or elementary school lessons of Saskatchewan history. Chrystene is interested in these particular stories because they are memories of the actual individuals who lived them. The stories are remarkable, deeply personal narratives that are woven together in the larger tapestry that is the human experience of this part of the world. That is why Chrystene is wrapped up in these stories. It is the undeniably tangible human connection. The concept of combining these stories with a return to her roots as a puppet artist, layered over her new interest in experimental modes of filmmaking and a desire to connect with the greater arts community of Saskatchewan culminated in Chrystene’s concept for *This Big World*.

The concept for *This Big World* was partially inspired by a blossoming genre known as ‘animated objects’ films, focusing on live-action puppetry in film, celebrated by various festivals, such as the International Festival of Animated Objects in Calgary, and the *Handmade Puppet Dreams* project curated by Jim Hensen’s daughter Heather Hensen in New York. Chrystene recognized the inherent potential in an online film festival, featuring animated objects films based on stories drawn from Saskatchewan archival sources.

The relationships we build in our lives, both professionally and personally, provide us with opportunities to learn, grow and a chance to change. As an interdisciplinary artist, Chrystene takes full advantage of her creative relationships and immerses herself into the world of people she collaborates with. The Filmpool was happy to come together with such an artist, to help expand the options for creative approaches to filmmaking in the province.

It was through a Saskatchewan Arts Board Creative Partnerships grant, which emphasizes community involvement as well as personal artistic practice, that the Filmpool and Chrystene got the funding and support to present *This Big World*.



Chrystene with a puppet created for a commercial for *Final Fantasy II*. Colossal Pictures Model Shop, San Francisco, 1992. Photo by Michael Wick.

“It seems like a perfect match between my own creative yen, which was to work in an interdisciplinary way, and I want to meet more local artists with different types of practices,” she said.

The FilmPool and Chrystene, in presenting This Big World, are experimenting with exposure to a new way of looking at independent visionary filmmaking in Saskatchewan.

“We were ecstatic to learn that our application had been successful, and immediately began planning for the expansion of the FilmPool, creating the Underground Puppet Works, a fabrication studio and miniature shoot stage downstairs from the FilmPool office, and hammering out the concept for the program,” said Chrystene.

This Big World really is not a small project; hence its title and its scope. Artists from all fields are invited to join Chrystene in the Underground Puppet Works for three four-month workshops which will parallel her own process as she makes three animated objects films over the course of the year.

Chrystene explains how each workshop will include a seminar on preproduction, puppet and miniature set fabrication, puppeteering and basic digital filmmaking, and post production. “Participants will have access to the fabrication studio and shoot stage throughout each workshop, as well as to the FilmPool’s editing facilities upstairs.”

Workshop participants will be encouraged to make any puppet film they like; however, if they are interested in gearing their project towards the This Big World festival website, they will be invited to spend an afternoon with a book or two in the Community History Collection at the RPL Prairie History Room, learning about complete strangers living a century ago in a Saskatchewan community they have never heard of, and developing a puppet film based on the story that most intrigues them. Artists, of course, do not have to take the workshop in order to submit a film for the festival.

This Big World is a playground for creative minds, with a combination of experimental contemporary filmmaking, elements of puppetry, miniatures and models, performance, moving image storytelling, historical explorations, and finally interactive online delivery. In addition, it is a community engagement that will inevitably result in the showcasing of short puppet films created by Saskatchewan artists, based on personal narratives drawn from the community history books. What This Big World is, is a perfect personification of all of the many, nearly countless skills of Chrystene. She is artistically exceptional, an open-minded, not too old of a soul, who has the right mix of talent, skill and determination to be the one to be presenting This Big World. Please stay tuned to [filmPool.ca](http://filmPool.ca) for more information in the months to come, as This Big World starts to present itself to us all.



Miniature cardboard grain elevator against a tissue paper sunset from the set of *It was a Circus* by Chrystene Ells (in production as part of This Big World). Photo by Amy Mantyka, 2011.



Chrystene on the miniature paper set of *It was a Circus*. Photo by Sarah Huber, 2011.

# White Crow Artist: Josie Pelly

By Janine Windolph

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I am grateful to be sharing the story of Josie Pelly, who is currently residing on the Cumberland House Cree Nation in northern Saskatchewan.

When I met her through my mom, I was seventeen-years-old, and she was known as Josie Forest of La Ronge Saskatchewan, my birthplace.

My mom, Marian Otter, remembered her when she was younger. She described her as creative, funny and wise. She admired her and I quickly did too. I was inspired to see her and my mom paint, sculpt, and bead among other art forms. They were always ready to take on new creative tasks.

It was years later, during my time in university that the dream of White Crow began and represented our journey as artists. It was born from the witnessing of a white crow with Josie, my mom and myself.

Today Josie is a teacher at Nisto Awasisak Memorial School (NAMS) and has her Bachelor of Indian Art History and a Bachelor of Education in art education.

Josie found herself in Cumberland House with her husband Ronald Pelly who is from the community. She has fallen in love with the place she now calls home, and is happy to raise her growing family on the small island.

As an artist she continues to paint, bead, birch bark bite and sculpt. She has also reignited her passion and love for

writing.

Josie had always experimented with making videos with her students and her children. She had worked on stop-motion animation with her students in La Ronge and later at Nisto Awasisak Memorial School in Cumberland House.

She has seen how working with video created excitement and sparked creativity within her students. That was what triggered her to come up with a project that could take this a step further. She wanted them to learn more and grow from the experience of learning more about the industry. That was when she invited me to work with her school and community of Cumberland House Cree Nation. Her successful application for the ArtsSmarts made possible her vision.

Recently, Josie coordinated the program that resulted in *the CNCH Video Project*, which included the teachers and 56 students of NAMS. The teachers who participated and supported the project were Richard Davey (Grade 7), Ryan Chaboyer (Grade 8), George Laliberte (Grade 9), Ryan Carriere (high school) and Josie Pelly (high school).

The principal Marguerite Allard was a great supporter of the goals of the project. In the scope of the project, this was a large collaboration that brought together two communities: Regina and Cumberland House Cree Nation.

I worked as the production coordinator and editor for the project with this collaborative multimedia project. The goals were to inspire and allow the students to have a hands-on experience with animation, documentary and video production. We also introduced music, photography and Photoshop. This allowed the students to contribute in a variety of ways to the final video project, both off and on screen.

The project premiered on June 17 at Cumberland House to coincide with the graduation celebration that was supported by the group mission: A Celebration of Indigenous Filmmaking Inc.

Stuck in Prince Albert, nothing less than a 4x4 truck could have gotten down that road on a rainy day. Thus, I was disappointed that I was unable to travel to my destination.



Josie Pelly.



Josie Pelly and student Alayna Laliberte.

But Josie was tremendously pleased with the outcome of the screening.

“It had been a long arduous day and there was talk of cancelling grad due to the terrible road conditions,” she said. “What I remember most was the laughter from the audience and the principal. I was overcome with pride for my students and the school as a whole.

“I was reminded once again how important the arts are to a community and how creating together can bring a community closer.

“I was touched by the pride shown by the students in attendance. I could really see how intrinsically motivated they were and how empowered they felt by their own creation.

“The loud round of applause after the screening was a validating experience for the project and a fitting culmination to the project and to the school year as well.”

The project was made possible by the Saskatchewan Arts Board and Saskatchewan Lotteries, Cumberland House, Cree Nation, the Saskatchewan FilmPool, mispon and NAMS.

For the graduation and in honour of this invitation, my family via Soulful of Mother Nature gifted the staff and students to thank them for this honour, because, not only did they welcome me, they welcomed my family.

“My goals are to continue on the artistic journey as a teacher, parent and artist,” said Josie. “I am hoping to build upon the skills that the students learned this year with the ArtsSmarts project by doing music videos.

“Our school and community has a rich culture and incredibly talented young people. Music videos could tap into all the areas of arts education: music, dance, theatre and visual arts.

“I am hoping to involve the younger students in the next project as well.

“As for writing, I am just continuing on that journey and seeing where it leads. At times stories tumble out of me and I am quick to write them down in my notebook. At other times they sit below the surface as I wait for the right time to write them or paint them or sculpt them. Art is and always will be a part of me. I just want to keep sharing it with my family, friends, students and community.”

In conclusion, I appreciate the vision Josie shared with me and for her personal support in my own journey.

It was an honour to work with her on this community video project. As a host to this community, Josie and her family opened my eyes to the beauty of the land, the history and the people.

# The Long and the Tall of It:

By Gerald Saul

Carefully carefree, Amalie Atkins' cloth-tale films

With her two recent films, *Three Minute Miracle* (2008) and *Scenes from a Secret World* (2009), Saskatoon-based artist and filmmaker Amalie Atkins has woven together a fantastic world from fiber and sky.

On the surface, these are prairie fairy tales featuring unrealistic costumed animals shot in faux silent film style. While the initial impression of them is frivolity, a closer examination reveals a multitude of discrete layers. Far from simple costume play, Atkins' films are a sophisticated blend of art forms, all in service of a singular filmic vision.

My initial impulse when seeing projects in this style is to consider them to be based more in performance, design, or visual art than in film. However, with these works, I do not believe this to be the case. To begin with, by using title

cards and old-fashioned music, Atkins clearly wishes to call to mind early naïve cinema. *Three Minute Miracle* even contains purposeful flaws: jump cuts, continuity breaks, flash frames, missing frames and other imperfections, evoking film damage and the early days of motion pictures. Her films exhibit a strong clarity of vision, pulling together these cinematic tropes and using them with purpose and consistency. Her shooting style is minimalist, using few camera movements, natural lighting from available sources, straightforward editing, and a soundtrack of music and occasional sound effects. The song "I've got a new set of teeth" is a welcome earworm. These films are lusciously colourful and a delight to listen to. The medium of film gives Atkins the ability to mix the intimacy of small sewn objects with the epic grandeur of the prairie sky; contrasts that reinforce her stories in a way impossible in other artistic forms.

A dominant characteristic of Atkins' films is the use of cloth in her costumes and props. They have a roughly made quality that constantly reminds the spectator of the disconnect film has from reality; the simple fact that what we are watching is not real. However, by *rough* I do not mean to suggest *crudity*, for in fact the objects Atkins presents have a bold and vibrant aesthetic that pulls us into a realm of the most delicious children's storybooks. The designs impress their images onto the viewer's eye, becoming iconic during the course of their own film.

Allegorical elements abound. Many characters and images are highly familiar, such as the lone girl in red traveling through the woods, witches and wolves, the actions of crossing bridges and rivers, and picking ripe fruit. This iconography creates an initial comfort as we view the films. We feel certain that we will be capable of easily decoding them.

Again, first impressions of Atkins' films can be deceiving. The structure seems more a dreamlike random stream of consciousness than a tight narrative.



*Scenes from a Secret World* (2009).



Scenes from a Secret World, Amalie Atkins: "Wolf on Bike", 2009.

Atkins takes liberty with traditional tales, sampling where she wants. Notions of good and evil are displaced by connection versus indifference, isolation versus community, and generosity versus greed.

In *Scenes from a Secret World*, the lone wolf in the woods—one of the most traditional folklore monsters—is not fearsome but is, instead, victimized. The girl must step out from her role of inactive spectator to being an active participant, literally taking the place of the wolf to avenge and eventually resuscitate him.

Even though we want to read these broad graphic strokes as easy signifiers of good and evil, protagonist and antagonist, prowler and prey, we quickly discover complexity. Atkins shapes a world that does not conform to the storybook or the art gallery or the stage conventions but is, instead, postmodern in both form and content. She requires that we understand and move beyond our preconceived notions of what a fairy tale is.

One thing that does remain from the traditional tales is the sense that our actions and activities have meaning. For example, a recurring motif is the gift. The importance of an unsolicited gift is central in *Three Minute Miracle*. The witch gives a tooth to the girl which later allows her to unlock the music. Other gifts, notable for their lack of motivation or reciprocity, are the girl giving icing to the birds, a cake to the wolf, and water to the tree.

This journey/encounter structure also suggests further allegories with each event representing a challenge in life and an important choice. Simplified to one-on-one encounters, the choices of the character, and by virtue the filmmaker, are opened up to endless interpretations by the viewer.



Scenes from a Secret World (2009).



*Scenes from a Secret World (2009).*

Contrary to the binary separations present in these films, there also exists a fluidity of the social order. In *Three Minute Miracle*, the girl is able to enter the cultural group of animals inside the church and, while obviously an outsider, interact with them as an equal and leave again without hindrance. While the wolf does not reciprocate with gift giving, in *Three Minute Miracle* no resentment is held towards him. The wolf and the girl live peacefully near each other in *Scenes from a Secret World*, with her watering the trees and him attaching the apples.

At first, these two films by Amalie Atkins appear straightforward and undemanding. With closer examination,

they are increasingly intriguing and reveal multiple layers of subtext that challenge audience expectations. Atkins' unpredictable story structure, combined with her use of simple graphic design and filmmaking style, creates a dialectic that stretches the viewers' notion of "fairy tale" innocence. The prairie landscape seems ironically lush as she populates it with characters and objects sewn from boldly coloured cloth. Perhaps it is this open air that keeps the characters true; they are masked but lack deception, utterly fabricated but somehow maintaining a balance of truth and idealism.

The films are structured around journeys, a familiar trope in Canadian cinema. However, the road leads from encounter to encounter rather than from place to place. Within *Three Minute Miracle*, the girl's walk through the landscape is punctuated by encounters with a wolf, a witch, a bird and a community. These encounters not only emphasize the recurring dualities and binaries we see throughout the films, and the differences between individuals, but also suggest the possibilities for connections.

The girl cannot see into the windows of the church but then crosses into the building and sees everyone from inside. The girl sees the wolf through the bushes and, when he is decapitated, puts on his head and fights his enemies with the combination of his strength and her wits.



*Scenes from a Secret World (2009).*





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# SHUYA SHOW: A SHORT FILM REVIEW

By Lowell Dean

There are many reasons to make a short film. Some do it for money. Others are making a calling card for their style or looking for festival recognition. And then there is Jon Tewksbury and Jason Shabatoski.

Their short film *Shuya Show*, now available on DVD, seems to be constructed for one sole purpose - to make people laugh, uncomfortably.

*Shuya Show* is an odd short in many respects. Firstly, it's too long to be a short film. (It's over 30 minutes). All the dialogue is presented with odd overdubbing to make it seem like a foreign film.

Though the narrative is the standard "man on a quest," everything else seems to be a little left of centre. Well, even the narrative is a bit odd since the man's quest is to track down his schoolyard crush and impress her by kidnapping a retired Polka legend. The characters are all a bit twisted and sadistic. *Shuya Show* is the brainchild of University of Regina film grads Tewksbury and Shabatoski, and their sometimes collaborator actor Dave Stefanyshyn. Though I'm sure the

actual back story is far more complex, the apparent genesis for the project was Dave's ability to grow a "really impressive moustache". The actual story centres on a factory worker in an unnamed communist country who kidnaps a polka legend to impress his childhood sweetheart. So yes, your garden variety "boy meets girl, boy spends decades working in a headcheese factory, boy kidnaps Polka legend" type of yarn.

The main character is the masterfully moustached Provar, the aimless factory worker who decides to make something of his life, or at least pretend to, by tracking down at gun point the nation's polka legend, Marty Shuya, to impress the girl of his dreams.

Along the way there are shootouts, chase scenes, gypsy betrayals, some very questionable moments of sexuality, and some even more questionable moments of violence (a man dies at the hand of a drunken rooster). In fact, animals seem to play an interesting role in this film. There are wolves, pigs, cows and a rooster. Wait . . . where did they get the budget for all these animals?



From *Shuya Show*.

Even with the weird plot and characters, what truly sets *Shuya Show* apart is its style. The film is presented as a ‘found film’ from a communist country, now available (presumably after years of gathering dust in a vault) for North American audiences to enjoy. It is for this reason that the whole film is purposely poorly overdubbed in English from some other foreign tongue. I imagine Jon and Jason thought they were pretty smart when they decided to make a silent film and overdub the dialogue in postproduction. Actually, after spending a few days on their set, I can say it was downright genius to worry about sound in postproduction.

Granted, their postproduction may have been a nightmare (it was), but they were able to move very quickly and efficiently during production. They didn’t even have audio gear on set!

What money they saved on their sound, I’m sure they poured into the film stock. A rarity in the last few years, *Shuya Show* was shot on actual film, 16mm, which only adds to the beautiful outdated aesthetic.

I feel a bit torn reviewing *Shuya Show* because I was a part of the production. I was a helper on a few of the (many) days that stretched out over the course of a year. Hey, making an independent film isn’t easy. Sometimes it takes a month just to get your cast and crew in the same room when they all have busy schedules. Personally, I love the film. It’s a twisted example of the mayhem and goofiness that exists deep within the brains of Tewksbury, Shabatoski and Stefanyshyn.



David Stefanyshyn as Provar Parpüppoff in *Shuya Show*.

## Would I recommend it?

If you have an open mind, **yes**; if you are a little bit twisted, **yes**.  
If you don’t have a heart condition, **yes**.

If not, I’m sure there is a more mainstream comedy you can find in your local theatre, one that doesn’t involve someone getting peed on. (Yes, that happens in *Shuya Show* too).

For more on *Shuya Show* visit [www.shuyashow.com](http://www.shuyashow.com)

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# LESSONS

## IN SHORT FILMMAKING

By Lowell Dean

**I've made my fair share of short films. Some are good, some are bad, and, yes, some are quite ugly. Here are some of the biggest lessons I've learned from a decade of short film making . . .**

### 1. Have a goal

It doesn't have to be a lofty one, but it's important to have a goal. It can be as serious as winning an Oscar and as simple as having fun or choreographing a crazy fight scene. Knowing your "goal" will help inform every detail of your shoot—from how much time and money you are going to put into the project to what actors you will cast in it. For example, if you're just making the film for fun on a weekend, you probably won't want to attempt casting Dame Judi Dench. One of your friends will probably suffice. You can't afford her anyway, trust me, I've tried.

### 2. Keep it short

Sometimes making a short film is so much fun, you want to drag the process out. Fight the urge. It's important to keep your projects brisk and focused. Having made more than one excessively long indie short film, I can attest to the fact that quality is directly proportional to quantity. Unless your goal is to torture those you love, try to keep it less than 10 minutes. Your audience will thank you for it. Heck, if you make a short film and you really love it, then make a sequel. Turn it into a trilogy. Make a prequel? Reboot it. Just hone your craft.



Victor Lam and Nelson W. Mitchell at work.

### 3. Seek out production value

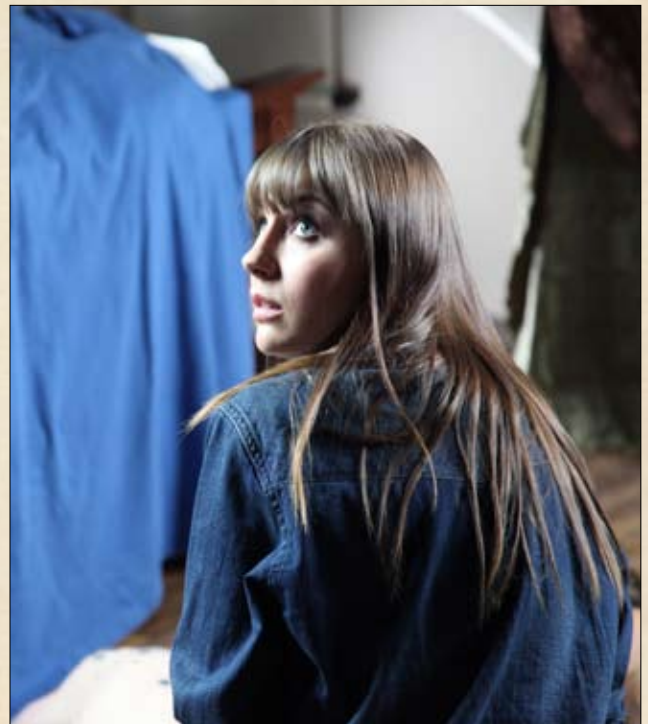
Like those cheeky kids in the movie *Super 8* know, a good film is all about production value. Production value doesn't have to mean money though. If you can get a grant or some funding (through a rich uncle) for your short, then by all means go for it. But if not, think about the people and the places and the props in your life. If you have access to something cool that no one else does—an abandoned old warehouse, vintage 1950s wardrobe, friends with weird talents or natural acting chops—then use what you've got. If you don't have access to any of those things, see point number four below.

### 4. Involve fellow filmmakers

You know who will work hard on an indie short film, and most likely show up? Other aspiring filmmakers—university film students, Filmpool members or just film hobbyists—people with a marked interest are a short film's best friend. They will also improve the quality of your project with their knowledge of video equipment and professional lighting and sound techniques. So find these people at social gatherings, through Facebook or just by wandering around and shouting downtown and figure out what their area of expertise. Is it costuming, acting or cinematography? Get these people involved. If you can't pay them, then promise to return the favour on their projects. And actually do it. Nobody likes a deadbeat.

### 5. Involve your family & friends

If you don't have a lot of "film friends" then just surround yourself with family and friends—people you know won't let you down. Your mom might be an amazing caterer. Your dad might make a good interim financier or executive producer. Just always try to remember that if you are going to ask people to participate, they need to get something out of the process too. So, make sure they are getting to work in an area they enjoy, or at the very least make sure the atmosphere on your set is a fun one.



Mandy Harle in Rob Hillstead's (top) film as the titular character, Chelsea.



Corey Sawchyn (left) and Victor Lam, working together on a short film.

## 6. **Be on time. Better yet . . . be early**

If you are the driving force behind your short film as producer, director and/or writer then you really need to lead by example. You have to prepare yourself days or weeks in advance, and know the answer to every question. And no matter what, be at your shoot on time. Actually, plan to be early because without fail you will get a last minute panicked phone call from someone who forgot something or who needs a ride. Being early will also give you a few peaceful moments to yourself to plan the day and be ready for all the questions that are coming your way. I've been on sets where the director or producer is late. It's never a good thing. Remember, everyone is there because you asked them to be.

## 7. **Feed people well**

You probably don't have money. Or if you do, it's probably very little. So spend it wisely, and no matter what, make sure people are fed. There are a lot of people who love working on independent film shoots, even if you don't pay them. If you don't feed them, then you'll never see them again. Bonus points if you're catering and meals are extra delicious; your set will feel more like a party than actual work.

## 8. **Don't film against white walls**

This is a pretty simple and straightforward suggestion, but it needs to be said. Nothing screams "no budget, lame-o short film" than actors against boring white walls. Trust me, I've done it myself. You might as well just film on VHS-Cam. Be mindful of where you are placing the camera, and of what you are looking at. If it's boring in real life, it will be boring on film or video.

## 9. **Finish It**

If I had a nickel for every person I know who shot a short film but never completed it, I'd have at least 35 cents. This, to me, is one of the biggest "crimes against short films," especially if you involved a lot of people in your production. They helped you. They poured their money, sweat and maybe blood into your silly idea. Now help them in return: finish the film. I know editing is sometimes hard, but in our modern world of computers and software finishing a film has never been easier. So no excuses; let them watch it. Let them love it, or laugh at it if it's bad. I've made my fair share of bad short films. But every single one has taught me a lesson - a lesson I needed to learn from completing the process from start to finish. No regrets.

## 10. **Get it seen**

Whether you are sending it off to festivals, booking out your local theatre, posting it online, or packing your cast and crew into a living room - screening is an important step. It will teach you what you are doing wrong and what you are doing right. You will hear laughter, or dead silence. It will give you an ego boost and make you hungry to try again. This is easily my favourite part of making a short film, because at the end of the day you are making this film to be seen. You have something you want to say, or you have an emotional response you want to elicit. Either way, a short film unseen is not a short film - it's just a file sitting on a computer somewhere.

**Enough reading, go make something.**



*Véronique à vélo* by Berny Hi and Chystene Ells.

## IN THE SPIRIT OF JLG: NOTES ON THE FILMPOOL GODARD PROJECT

By Christina Stojanova

*The cinema is not an art which films life: the cinema is something between art and life. Unlike painting and literature, the cinema both gives to life and takes from it, and I try to render this concept in my films. Literature and painting both exist as art from the very start; the cinema doesn't.*

Jean-Luc Godard

*Empires crumble, my friend, republics founder and fools survive.*

*Bande à part / Band of Outsiders (1964)*

The Regina-wide celebrations of Jean-Luc Godard's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday last year were launched by the conference *Sonimage: The Legacies of Jean-Luc Godard*, organized by and held at the University of Regina (Sept. 16-18, 2010), and went through to the end of December, featuring various related festivities. Indeed, Regina artistic intelligentsia should congratulate itself on the tenacity with which each and every of these multidisciplinary projects – involving dance, photography, installation art, discussions – flaunted its inspired take on the spirit and letter of JLG's legacy. The unequivocal crown jewel of this unique undertaking is – the Filmpool International Godard Project, which resulted in thirteen short films made by JLG film buffs from around the world.

## Godard and New Media

Indeed, Godard is one of the few film masters whose unique film style is so tempting – and readily yielding – to witty recreations, imitations, parodies, and pastiches. It seems that generations of film buffs cannot have enough of his early, mostly black and white films – eleven features and ten shorts made between 1955 and 1966. Understandably, the ones associated with the so-called anarchic period of the French New Wave – from *À bout de souffle / Breathless* (1960) to *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965) and *Masculin Féminin* (1966), before Godard seriously embarked on his ‘revolutionary’ and politically conscious phase with *Made in USA* (1966) – have invigorated most of the Godard Project participants. Yet the three shorts, inspired by his revolutionary films, represent witty – albeit uneven – tributes to the revolutionary films Godard produced under the auspices of Dziga Vertov Groupe between 1970 and 1972, which I have described elsewhere as “amongst the most radical attempts to problematize not only the aesthetic and ideological aspects of the interaction between image, sound and text, but also the technology behind them.”<sup>1</sup>

*Action* (1.08) by Slovakian Jan Adamove, for example, could be traced to *Tout va bien* (1972), where the expensive broadcast equipment in the Parisian studio of the American network Jane Fonda’s character works for, is shown as intellectually stifling as the brightly coloured TV studio, cluttered with expensive electronic equipment, where Adamove’s audio-visual experiment is shot. The creative impotence of contemporary media is emphasized by the audio track, which consists only of edited moments of silence and gasps of the three participants – one man and two women – whose body language further reveals infinite boredom and intellectual helplessness.

*ECM 55B* (5.27) by the Saskatoon filmmaker Ian Campbell delves further in the absurdities of contemporary technology and its formidable power to turn humans in its mere accessories. It is a meta-cinematic commendation of Sony’s eponymous multipurpose mic by a Godard look-alike, shot in black and white from a moving camera while roaming through the mysterious-looking streets of Saskatoon and extolling enthusiastically on equipment that allow for making of low-budget films, like Godard’s most recent, *Film Socialisme* (2010), for example.

*Rant* (1.30) by Winnipegger Andreas M. Goldfuss, on the other hand, is only tenuously related to the project by way of linking this all-purpose black and white sketch – which ironizes the clash between self-important (political?) orators

and their audiences, whose off-screen jeers dominate the sound track – to Godardian experiments in shocking discrepancies between sound and image.

## Interlude: Decoupage

For the most part, Godard’s early film has been described recently by Michael Marie (*The French New Wave: An Aesthetic School*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2002) and Ginette Vincendau (*The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, BFI, 2009) as an *avant la lettre* exercise in post-modern genre collage and thematic intertextuality, steeped in aesthetic eclecticism. A tendency shared by his closest rival, Francois Truffaut, and very well exposed through decoupage in the eponymous short by Halifax director Claire Hodge *Decoupage* (5’15’)<sup>2</sup>. Although the rationale for its inclusion in the Godard Project remains ambiguous – it is the only one unrelated to Godard – it ‘decoupages’ analytically a scene from Truffaut’s 1966 cult homage to American gangster genre, *Tirez sur le pianiste / Shoot the Piano Player*. By alternating images of two characters moving alternatively backward or forward on a loop, first within twelve and then within six frames of a split screen, the filmmaker does a good job highlighting the accidental, even chaotic nature of both narrative and style, also typical of Godard’s contemporaneous oeuvre.

## Love and Sex According to Godard

Yet Godard’s substantial contribution from the period is not only in the sphere of cinematic artistry but also in his bold plunge into the uncharted territory of the radical psychological and social changes, brought on by growing consumerism and the overall Americanization of French society and culture, and the ensuing crisis in human relations. Godard – like his New Wave colleagues Truffaut and Rohmer – is therefore intently interested in the looming gender clash, whose early signs he captures in the endemic estrangement, confused communication and inevitable loneliness that plague his romantic couples, and captured with dramatic eloquence by his 1963 masterpiece *Le mépris/Contempt. Breathless* (1.40’) by the Bulgarian-Canadian artist Bilian Velkova (Saskatoon), *La manière que nous disons au revoir / The Way We Say Good-bye* (9.18’) by Californien filmmaker Rory Dean Smith and the Spanish entry *Numen* (6.56’) by Alba Curos are steeped in the sexual tension and transcendental longings that have made

1 Christina Stojanova, “Jean-Luc Godard and Ludwig Wittgenstein in New Contexts,” in *The Legacies of Jean-Luc Godard*, edited by Douglas Morrey, Christina Stojanova and Nicole Cote (WLUP, forthcoming).

2 A term, closely associated with the French New Wave filmmaking practice, coined by Andre Bazin and explained by Noel Burch in his *Theory of Film Practice* (Princeton UP, 1981) as “the practical breakdown of the film’s construction into separate shots/sequences” -- pre- or postproduction.



*Contempt*— along with its antecedents *Breathless* (1960), *Une femme est une femme/ Woman Is a Woman* (1961), and especially *Vivre Sa Vie/ My Life to Live* (1962) — a lasting symbol of the confused modern sensuality. *Breathless* is a visual impromptu on Serge Gainsbourg and Anna Karina haunting duet *Ne dis rien* from 1967, revealing via changes in colour regime the overwhelming power of a fleeting exchange of glances between a boy and a girl, riding on the opposite stairs of metro escalators.

A curious attempt at balancing out Godard's intense heterosexual romances, *La manière . . .* is a pastiche with a homosexual bend, inspired by the botched relationships and visual style of — among others — Godard's *Bande à part / Band of Outsiders* (1964). It tells the story of two men, living together as roommates, who have come to the critical juncture when they should either admit their homosexual attraction or part. As it happens, the underemployed artist-photographer Eddie is quite comfortable with his sexuality, while Jerrie, the down-to-earth breadwinner, lives in denial, nursing memories of his previous girlfriend Becky. It is not difficult to discern here allusions to the extant potential for such a development in the complicated emotional relations between Franz, Arthur and Odile, the famous trio from *Bande à part*, were it not for its definitive finale, which leaves Arthur dead during the aborted robbery of Odile's aunt money. As for Franz and Odile, they disappear with the money in question on a phantasmagorical trip as Godard's unreliable voice over narration reports on a backdrop of exotic still images.

In any case, Rory Dean's tribute to Godard does an excellent job in emulating Raoul Coutard's signature camera angles from behind the characters, indoor panoramas and plain-air portraits, like the ones framing a beautiful girl on the beach through the lens of Eddie's camera. What makes this film truly Godardian, however, is the postproduction intervention in its black and white colour regime (amounting to what the director calls a "whimsical palate") and in its sound design. It is its dubbing in formal French, articulated with deliberate indifference which, when juxtaposed with its otherwise simple narrative, creates a third meaning of unexpected existential dimensions and psychological sophistication.

## Godard and the Feminine Mystique

*Numen*, or divine intervention as its title translates, is one of the few films in the project without direct links to Godard's oeuvre. And yet its visually elaborate, black and white style and essayist ambiguity point to one of the prominent motifs in the early Godard poetic: the capricious yet inseparable

nature of love and art, implied here by an *image a clef*: a Zoetrope device, featuring a jumping clown on a string and set in motion by a gorgeous young woman, wearing an iconic little black dress. Her face soon emerges as a superimposed apparition on a glass wall, as if summoned by the brush strokes of a middle-aged artist. The rest of the film shows the artist pursuing his muse — or his elusive love — through a maze of streets, iron grids, and even more walls, only to see her drifting further away. And when he is about to give up, she reappears again superimposed on the glass wall of his longing mind.

Unlike the muses of Truffaut, Rohmer, and Chabrol, Godard's girls have shown a distinct propensity of



From the film *Breathless* by Bilian Velkova.

becoming cultural – and fashion – icons. The disappearance of Marie-Christine Barrault from public imagination could be understood in light of what Alan A. Stone writes in his portrait of the director, republished on the occasion of his death last year. “Rohmer’s actresses,” he says, “are never larger than the women they portray.”<sup>1</sup> While the obliteration of Stephane Audran’s name from the roster of New Wave muses could be explained with her dramatic divorce from Claude Chabrol, who sustained her star reputation, it is much more difficult to explain Jean Moreau’s sinking into oblivion. Her fame as Truffaut’s greatest muse at the time rivalled and even surpassed that of Anna Karina, Godard’s muse and wife from 1961 to 1967. But then no New Wave actress is remembered for her impeccable taste in casual clothes and shoes, including the famous “little black dresses,” as Karina or Jean Seberg are, maybe because elegance is just another attempt at fulfilling their ineffable longing for harmony and beauty.

This important aspect of Godardian feminine dominates the short *Ecole des filles / School for Girls* (3’) and *A Band Apart* (4’). Shot by Jeannie Mah, one of the most ardent Godardian fans in Regina, and inspirational god-mother of the entire Regina Godard season, *Ecole* never shows the face of its heroine, but only her long shapely legs – which we assume belong to Mah’s credited co-author, Cindy Richmond. By just prancing about or walking up and down a staircase in an unnamed location (which insiders would easily identify as the Filmpool’s very own staircase), she showcases various types and colours of beautiful shoes – from casuals to a-la garçon to sandals to ballroom ones. Mah’s *pars pro toto* type of artistic approach is an ingenious way of surmising her reverence to Godardian elegance on a

<sup>1</sup> *Boston Review*, at <http://bostonreview.net/BR24.3/stone.html>

shoe string budget.

The director of *A Band Apart* – yet another tribute to Godard’s 1964 cult *Bande à part* – hails from New York, which features prominently in his black and white film. The famous Madison dance Odile, Franz and Arthur perform at a pub is replicated with gusto here by three contemporary lookalikes, who also dabble as models for a wide variety of elegant casual clothes. Even without the deadpan irony of Godard’s voiceover commentary, the dancing trio mounts a highly entertaining show on various landmark locations throughout New York – at the Flee Market Cafe, at a metro station, in the yard of Lincoln centre – thus offering a playfully delightful, truly Godardian take on the film’s *joie du vivre*. Something Godard would condemn only three years later in his vehemently anti-consumerist *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her / 2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* (1967), where Marina Vlady’s character – an intelligent woman and caring mother – prostitutes herself to be able to afford beautiful clothes. That is why when Arthur’s lookalike takes off Odile’s trademark Fedora to collect some cash from bystanders at the shooting site, one is tempted to paraphrase Mr. Segalet’s infamous remark, made at the beginning of the original Madison dance scene. Indeed, ideologies crumble, economies founder, and only films that celebrate life survive.

## Les état des choses hétérosexuelle according to Godard and Saul

The participants in the Godard Project have rightfully grasped the fact that Godard’s complex female characters were the first to intuit the benefits but also the disadvantages of dismantling traditional gender roles, and the ensuing responsibilities they would have to shoulder for the social and emotional survival of

heterosexual coupledness. There is something irresistibly innocent, yet rife with melancholic longing and existential angst in these heroines, sharply contrasted with the boyish naiveté of their charmingly immature partners—elusive and shrewd, fragile and resilient, sexually tempting and intellectually provocative. Godard’s heroines linger much longer in the viewer’s mind than their men, still stuck in their old world fantasies.

Although related mostly to the statuesque figure and sad eyes of Anna Karina – the star of six out of his ten early features – Godard’s unique take on modern femininity radically subverts the coetaneous canon – especially the Hollywood one – by introducing Jean Seberg as the tom-boyish *femme fatale* (*Breathless*) and Brigitte Bardot as an equally reluctant sex symbol (*Contempt*). It is probably the much lesser known, but exquisitely magnetic Anne Collette, who articulated Godardian vision of the new woman in the famous shorts *Charlotte et Véronique, ou Tous les garçons s’appellent Patrick* (1955) and *Charlotte et son Jules* (1960), where she initiates the archetype of the cool (post) modern seductress, whose mind and perennial smile are equally *fatale* for her infantile peers of the opposite sex. It is probably the quite common social and emotional gap between the intellectual, but lonely Charlotte, and the charming, but irresponsible Patrick that has attracted Gerald Saul (Regina) to pay homage to Godard’s famous short.

*Tout les garçons s’appellent William / All Boys are Called William* stands out thanks mostly to its *clin d’œil* approach to the world of Godard, thrown in high relief by Saul’s signature deadpan humour. By pushing the limits of self-reflexivity *ad absurdum* – Saul re-acts Godard’s original short *Tous les garçons s’appellent Patrick* to accommodate



*Vivre Sa Vie* by Jean-Luc Godard (1962).

his nine-year-old son William as the title character – the film makes a startling revelation about the current *état des choses* of heterosexual relations. Like his prototype Patrick (Jean-Claude Brialy), William idles around, trying to make the acquaintance of Charlotte, a nine-year-old version of the original one, whom he chances upon on the terrace of U of R’s Education building (and not, as Godard’s short has it, on a Jardin du Luxembourg terrace in Paris). Along with following almost verbatim Godard’s narrative development and mise-en-scene with its black and white colour regime, the film pays meticulous attention to its dialogue. Translated from the original French, it is spoken in English and re-translated back into French for

the subtitles, which in itself is yet another source of comic discrepancy. After having exhausted his arsenal of platitudes about Charlotte’s beautiful eyes, the colour of her coat and such, William (William Bessai-Saul) finally succeeds in wooing Charlotte (Teagan Kaldor-Mair) away from reading a monograph on Orson Welles, but not before she delivers her long, feminist-inspired monologue. Contrary to the overly sexualized claims of the “bourgeois misogynist Freud,” Charlotte explains her change of heart by referring to the “seminal text by Laura Mulvey on Visual Pleasures,” according to which women should counter the dangers of becoming “objects of the gaze, symptomatic of heterosexuality in crisis” by returning that gaze. Far from being perturbed

by this intellectual out pour, however, William interjects with another battery of well-worn *ancien* phrases like “all girls say that,” “I have not picked up a girl in nine years” (sic) and “what about an ice-cream.” His outdated strategy seems to work quite well in the situation at hand as we watch the two of them disappearing together towards the ice-cream joint under the playful sounds of Beethoven’s *Rondo a Capriccio*, delivered – in a much lighter manner than the uncredited pianist featured in Godard’s original – by the U of R Department of Cinema’s very own Erik Sirke. Thus by seriously blurring the boundaries between Godardian pastiche, intellectual satire and self-irony, *Tout les garçons* delicately suggest that – in art as well as in life

– plus ça change, the more things stay the same.

## A Woman On Her Own

With *Vivre ma vie* (4'), Dave Turcotte from Saskatoon deconstructs Godard's 1962 original *Vivre sa vie* not only by replacing *sa* with *ma* and thus emphasizing the agency of his heroine *vis-a-vis* Karina/ Nana's existential defeatism. He features her as a wholesome and self-sufficient young woman on the backdrop of flowers and vegetable gardens in bloom, thus mitigating the dramatic tension of her monologue. And reminding us, by way of contrast, about Nana's entrapment within ugly urban landmarks like that infamous whitewashed wall, occupying the whole screen...

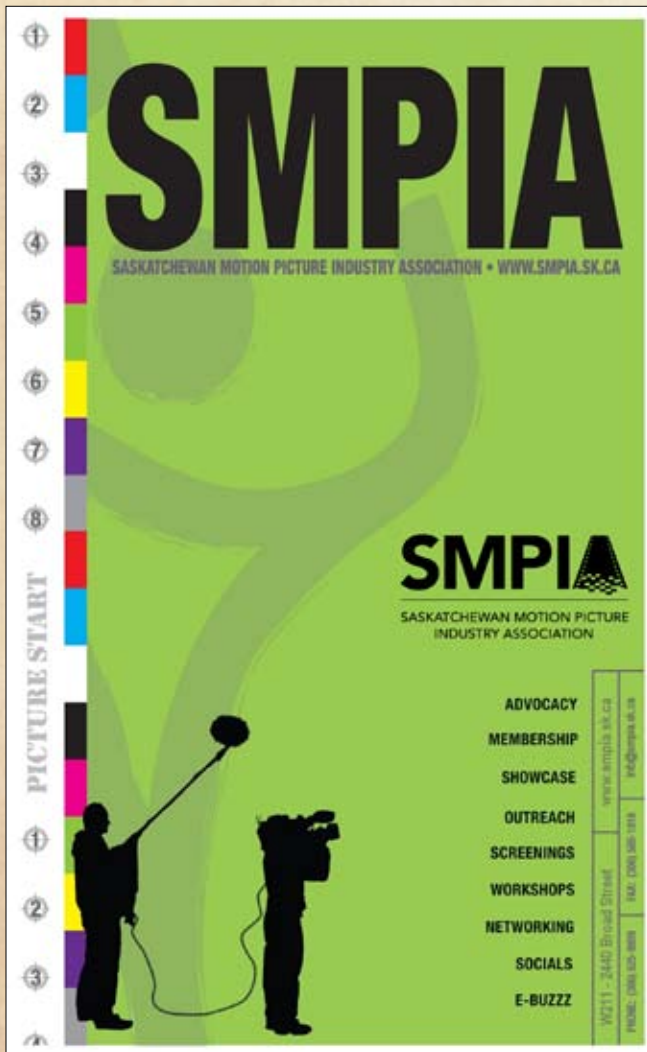
The film *Véronique à vélo* (10') by Chrystene Ells and Berny Hi (Regina) opens with its eponymous heroine growing restless and peeking every so often out of her

romantic arbour, tucked under a lace-like cascade of leaves, and under the sounds of Debussy's *Clair de lune*. She is anxiously anticipating, as the female French voiceover and the English subtitles diligently inform us, a meeting with a certain Richard, who has given her a pair of earrings, which unfortunately do not go well with any of her clothes. In tune with Godardian concept of beauty, Elizabeth Malnyk's Véronique is statuesque, almost translucent, and obviously dresses well so it is a pleasure to watch her trying on piece after piece – including a Fedora hat – from her diverse wardrobe. Unable to find the right match for the earrings, and disappointed with Richard's failure to show up, Véronique gets on her bike and heads off towards Wascana Lake to throw the earrings out as in the meantime she has also decided she does not love Richard anymore.

What follows is one of the most poetic rides through Regina streets and parks ever seen on film, exquisitely revealing what the French Impressionists call the city's "visual rhythm," based on the heroine's emotions, emphasizing its "mystical, photogenic aspect," which "gives us access to a realm beyond our everyday experience."<sup>1</sup> On her way, Véronique first meets Hal the Clown, flying his balloons against a dull brick wall to no cheerful avail. Later she chances upon yet another, considerably more upbeat, surrealist encounter, with four female dancers, dressed in black, who make their way in and out of the frame following a rhythm, vaguely remindful of the Madison dance in *Bande à part*. The second meeting with the dancers is of particular interest here as it brings together in a sumptuous whole all styles that have influenced the filmmakers thus far. Véronique, on her bike, occupies the lower right corner of the frame, drenched in the crispy, early autumn light so typical of Claude Monet's painting. Behind her, in the middle ground, a wooden bridge over the Wascana Lake is seen, which the dancers mount performing their absurdly ritualistic dance, while Véronique turns to the camera with a smile and a wink in a truly Godardian manner. The film ends with a close up of Véronique on her bike, still wearing the earrings.

Like *Je rêve de Paris / I Dream of Paris* (4') by Regina filmmaker Yvonne Abusow, which sees Regina's Scarth Street as a sun-lit Parisian street, harbouring female street clowns, accordion players, flirtation, jealousy and all the trappings we have come to associate – rightly or wrongly – with France, *Véronique à vélo* has no immediate prototype in Godard's oeuvre and does not even pretend to have one, a laudable *tour de force*, bearing in mind how exclusive French culture in general and Godard's cinema in particular could be.

<sup>1</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, McGraw & Hill, 2010, p.77.



Within the larger context of the Godard Project, with its diverse and bold takes from near and afar on the cinema of JLG, the four Regina shorts are particularly precious as they succeed in capturing the elusive essence of Godardian intellectual, emotional and stylistic universe and in transplanting it to Regina, which I hope makes explicitly clear what Godard meant when he said that cinema, as a “form between art and life . . . both gives to life and takes from it”. And maybe therefore only films that truly celebrate life wherever and whenever it happens – in Paris as well as in Regina – survive the test of time.



Scene from *Véronique à vélo*.



Filmmaker Rory Dean.

ROY  
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# FILMPOOL MEMBERS AT WORK



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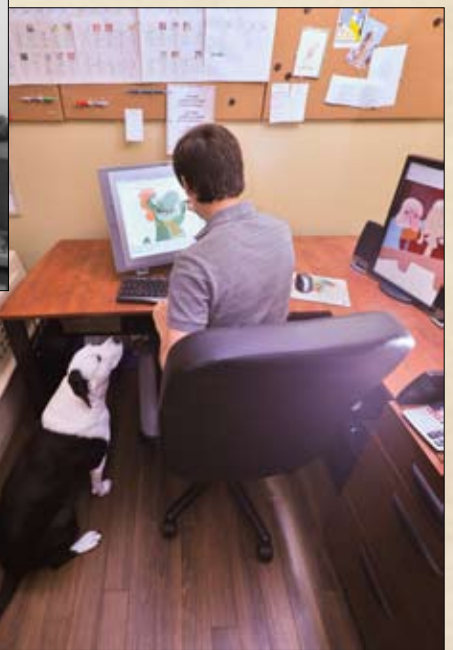
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6

1. Rob Hillstead and crew on the set of his short film *Chelsea*.
2. Lowell Dean's music video "Henry" was made for Regina band Rah Rah. It was #1 on the Much Music viewer's choice program UR11 and one of Exclaim Magazine's top 10 Canadian videos of 2010.
3. Jason Shabatoski and Jon Tewsbury at the Poetry and Film 4 last April.
4. Chrystene Ells on set of *Véronique à vélo*.
5. Lowell Dean's music video "Bargain Shop Panties" featuring Little Miss Higgins.
6. Image from *Ty the T-Rex* by Adrien Dean.
7. Adrian Dean at home in his animation studio.



# FILM RETREAT

At its core, the retreat offers individuals a space to create art. It takes you away from your daily routine and invites you on an a self-driven creative expedition, providing tools, time and freedom to explore your own practice in a variety of natural settings. The Film Retreat offers the right blend of personal time, creative feedback from other artists, and meal-time camaraderie, all revolving around experimentation and art-making with 16mm film.

Waking early in a private log cabin room at the Spring Valley Guest Ranch, one can catch the sunrise over the surrounding rolling hills as it illuminates the woodland valley. The outlining landscape of southwestern Saskatchewan includes the Cypress Hills area, extending the definition of 'prairie' in its varied encapsulation of forests, badlands and outstanding striated eroded hills, reminiscent of classic Spaghetti Western backdrops. In the main building, an Eaton's catalogue home, breakfast provided consists of fresh fruit, granola, eggs from the chickens on site, and hearty Turkish coffee.

The participants of this long weekend retreat shoot and hand process 16mm film. All film-making gear has been generously provided by the Filmpool and consists of many traditional 16mm filmmaking tools, including multiple cameras with a plethora of different mechanical functions, as well as a variety of lenses, tripods, light meters, filters, matte boxes, and other small pieces. From the Bolex line of cameras spring-wound and electric are available. In the Arri line the BL, S and SR ii cameras are available. Kodak Canada provides many different stocks for participants to choose from and in the Spring 2011 retreat, entitled *Rapture*, Kodak donated 1000' of film, or approximately half an hour, to each artist.

Artists are free to develop their own storyboard, types of shots, or experimentation with the medium. Some artists go for day trips to the surrounding beautiful area, while others hang out at the ranch to film the interiors or available subjects such as fellow filmmakers or the residents: horses, cats, or even Bruce the goose. The primary objective is that participants are focused creatively and engaged consistently with their craft.

Hand processing is a key ingredient to achieving a closer connection with one's film. In the darkroom lab it is just your hands and your film.

Agitating one hundred feet of scratchable film as it twists and tangles in a bucket of liquid is invigorating and the process of producing a properly developed result is actually quite forgiving. One way of processing reversal film involves the shamanistic Film Dance [a term coined by mentor Gerald Saul] and the use of the light from our sun to help invert the image to a positive print. Through experimentation at *Rapture* it was found that weaker sources of light, such as a few tubes of fluorescent bulbs, could also be used without too much degradation to the image and at the latest retreat, *Neg*, all film was processed so as to end up with a negative print, saving time spent in the darkroom and eliminating the need to use exceptionally strong bleach. Always striving for ecologically friendly and environmentally conscious ways and processes, in 2012 the retreat will focus on even greener ways of 16mm film-making, such as the use of naturally occurring substances in place of chemistry.

In 2010, at *Cricket*, much of the darkroom experimenting consisted of a technique known as solarization, where the film is exposed to light halfway through the time in the darkroom, but only for a brief moment. Too much of a flash of light and the emulsion will be unanimously activated, causing the image to be altogether stripped, while too little yields only a slight fogging or out-of-focus effect. Get the timing just right and the film can possess an other-worldly quality of pulsing between positive and negative while the image duplicates and casts shadows on the film itself in a non-linear overlap. Such experiments bring a deeper understanding of the celluloid medium and create an opportunity for artists to impact their project on a new, more visceral, level. Participants also bring their own ideas and techniques to try. This is part of what makes the Film Retreat so exciting.

Just upstairs from the basement darkroom laboratory is the screening venue, the Saville Theatre. The theatre is a unique piece of Saskatchewan

history. It is a classic prairie church salvaged and relocated to Spring Valley Guest Ranch by the remarkable prairie visionary Jim Saville, curator of the theatre, owner of the ranch, artisan of Chapel Cheeses, operator of the bed-and-breakfast, and lover of the arts.

It is an amazing sight, watching the raw, hand processed works flicker on a wooden wall in a secluded prairie valley, and a palpable creative excitement is generated by the personal immersion of such a hands-on and immediate approach to experimental filmmaking. From pre-production to screening, the artists have complete creative freedom to explore different styles, different practices, and to play with and better understand 16mm film as a tool of creative expression. In the Autumn of 2011, the technique of long exposure for nighttime time-lapse finally worked and it was found that an exposure time of 8 seconds worked very well to capture the setting moon and moving night clouds. Even the experience of running the sometimes-crumpled celluloid through the projector can lead to an expanded knowledge and appreciation for the medium. On that note, there is even the possibility of experimenting with different ways of projecting the work, perhaps through various lenses or prisms. You never know what the artists will bring to the table.

The Film Retreat bolsters confidence and fosters friendships and insights of the developing artist. One such artist, Sarah Huber, an upcoming graduate of the Film program at the University, describes it as being "a low-stress opportunity to engage with my medium. To a filmmaker I don't know what could be better."

§ Berny Hi

film screenings ~ [bernyhi.ca/filmretreat](http://bernyhi.ca/filmretreat)  
special thanks to the Saskatchewan Arts Board

Retreats and dates:

Film Retreat: Cricket - Autumn 2010

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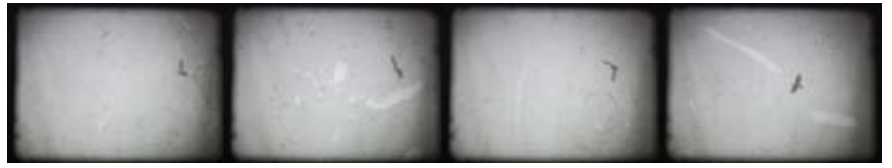


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# For the love of art

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By Kelly-Anne Riess



Adrian Dean wants to put a smile on people's face with his hand-drawn animations, which is why he has started his own independent animation company—Contrapposto.

Coming soon is a new cartoon called *Too Fat for My Cat*, starring a character named Jimmy.

Working on the short has kept Dean busy throughout the summer.

In his office, he has a large corkboard on his wall that holds the panels of every shot from the cartoon.

Every time Dean finishes a shot, he crosses it off the board as a visual indicator of his progress.

"I really want to create work that is compelling and exciting," said Dean. "I want to surprise people."

Currently, Dean is also developing an animated series about a T-rex for SCN, called *Tales of Ty Rex*.

In his free time, he experiments with story structure and has been playing around with different visual styles and trying out animations that have no sound.

"Each new project is better than the one before," Dean said.

He has always loved art and loves bringing pictures to life, which is why he has named his company Contrapposto, after the art term that describes sculptures of human figures where the weight of the body is placed heavily on one foot putting the shoulders and hips off axis.

"It puts the body in motion, makes it dynamic and adds an illusion of weight, and, of course, life," said Dean. "I love this idea. This is what I try to accomplish with my animation."

Growing up Dean spent a lot of time doodling and now, as an animator, he continues to enjoy working with a blank page.



Scene from *Too Fat for My Cat*.

The biggest challenge for Dean is the time it takes to animate a cartoon.

“I try to make it as detailed as I can,” said Dean, who is mostly self-taught. “All I need is my drawing board, and I can draw anywhere.”

To see what Dean’s been working on, visit his website <http://contrapposto.ca/blog/>.



Scene from *Too Fat for My Cat*.



Adrian Dean.



Scene from *Don't Feed the Ducks*.



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