

Thursday, February 23, 1989

A N I M A T I O N



Graphic by Tim Collier

Cartoons aren't just for children anymore. In Japan and some European countries, animation is hot. A wave of animated movies has landed in prime-time slots on Japanese television. Many people in the States have caught on and are joining in the enthusiasm. Now, Japanese animation has gained a loyal following at Texas A&M as well.

Works of art arise from class doodles

By Cray Pixley

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Tim Collier's class notebooks are 50 percent notes and 50 percent doodles.

However, his are not just the doodles or inept scribbles of a bored student, but the detailed sketches of characters reminiscent of afternoon cartoons.

Collier's drawings have a fantasy appearance, but the characters also look quite human.

"Sometimes people peek over my shoulder while I'm drawing and say, 'That looks like *Robotech*,'" Collier said.

"I guess most Americans are familiar with *Robotech* and associate my drawings with the show."

Robotech, an animated show from Japan, is one of the many Japanese animations that influence Collier's drawings.

Collier, a freshman aerospace engineering major, is both a fan and a collector of Japanese animation.

Japanese animation or "Japanimation," with its distinctive style, has fans all over the United States.

The Panime club in College Station is an organization whose members are devoted fans of collecting and watching animation.

Panime members are fascinated with animation that is not just for children.

The "Japanimation" they enjoy is a highly-developed art form, Collier says.

"Animations in Japan are geared

toward all ages and in some ways take the place of live movies," he said.

"American animation is geared toward little kids, and Japanese animation brought into America is watered down considerably.

"The audience for animation in Japan is from all age groups but in America this is not true."

The characters in Collier's sketches combine the influences of Japanimation and Walt Disney.

The creatures have saucer-shaped eyes and wild, flowing hair. Most have names and different missions that guide Collier in his sketches.

Collier has taken his original characters further than just the pages of his sketch book.

He has experimented with incorporating them into a short animated feature film.

Throughout high school, Collier was interested in Japanimation and drawing versions of its characters. His friends' Japanese pen pals often would send animation videos that kept Collier informed about the shows and styles of the Japanese animators.

"I was influenced by the Japanese and decided to try animating a film on my own," he said.

In his senior year, Collier took the step toward animation.

"I had read some books on the subject of animation, but it was really a lot of guess work," he said.

"I played around with it until it all worked."

The 90-second film took six months to complete, with Collier working about two hours a day.

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Japan leads way to animation innovations

By Thomas Boylan

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

The beginnings of cartoon animation are hard to pin down, but people have been animating drawings for hundreds of years.

John Halas writes in his book, *Masters of Animation*, that an English monk named Roger Bacon outlined the basics of camera operation around the year 1250, using relatively modern optical knowledge.

Six hundred years later, Dr. John Ayrton of Paris put the Thaumatrope on the market, using similar optical knowledge.

The Thaumatrope was an early animation device, simply a disk with a bird drawn on one side and a cage drawn on the other. By spinning the disk with the string attached to each side of it, the bird appeared to be inside the cage.

The art of animation has come a long way since the Thaumatrope, and the industry has been enriched with the addition of computer-generated graphics.

But whether the images are hand-drawn or computer-generated, the basics of animation are the same.

The entire concept is based on the principle of the persistence of vision. When you see an object, it remains imprinted on your eye's visual receptors for a short time. By stringing a series of closely related pictures together and running them past the eye quickly, the picture appears to move.

How Cartoons Work

The easiest demonstration of an-

imation is the flip-book. Any pad of paper can be made into an animated feature.

Simply draw a circle on the back page of the book, and on each succeeding page, draw the circle in a slightly different position, gradually moving the sketch across the page. By flipping through the pages, the circle will appear to move across the page.

Computer graphics and the more familiar hand-drawn cartoons work much the same way. A background

A computer-generated, animated graphic can do almost anything. It can slide and swoop and change shape or color. It can do things that would be physically impossible in reality and do them perfectly, without jerks, slips or bad camera angles.

is drawn and consecutive character drawings are placed on the background and photographed. The photographs are processed into a single piece of running film, and that is the animated feature.

The process of producing a high-quality piece of animation is painstaking and expensive. According to the U.S. News and World Reports article "You ain't seen nothin' yet, Roger Rabbit," a single minute of high-quality animation may require 1,400 or more individual drawings.

Computer-generated graphics, contrary to appearances, do not spontaneously begin moving so smoothly across a computer screen.

Rather, the computer generates each frame of a sequence according to the programmer's specifications, and those frames are photographed

one at a time, just like the hand-drawn frames.

A computer-generated, animated graphic can do almost anything. It can slide and swoop and change shape or color. It can do things that would be physically impossible in reality and do them perfectly, without jerks, slips or bad camera angles.

Bobby Boylan, a pilot for Air Midwest in St. Louis, described the graphics used in flight simulators as "just as good as the real thing and just as scary."

The Cartoon Makers

The most familiar animators aren't machines, however. They're an entourage of dedicated artists that include Walt Disney, Chuck Jones and Ralph Bakshi (the creator of *Mighty Mouse*).

According to Halas' book, it was Walt Disney and films like *Fantasia*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Bambi* and *Peter Pan* that made animation overwhelmingly popular with the public. Disney depicted practically everything with hand-drawn characters and scenes, with a staff of hundreds of artists and painters.

A lesser-known but major artist of the same period of the 1920s through the 1940s is Chuck Jones. Perhaps only few remember his name, but practically everyone re-

members Bugs Bunny, Elmer Fudd, Daffy Duck, Tom and Jerry, and the Road Runner.

"Japanimation"

There are many other, less well-known American animators, but there are vast numbers of Japanese creators that are only recently inundating the American animation market.

Some of Japan's best works are not readily available to the general public, according to Mark Camp, a member of a local animation enthusiasts club.

The organization, called Panime, collects and watches Japanese animations almost exclusively. To the initiated, the films are called "Japanimations."

Camp, a Texas A&M senior history major, said he prefers the Japanese films to American animated features. "They're geared to a higher level of education—teenage and adult, not 4-year-olds," he said.

"Once the U.S. catches up, I'll watch American films, but they're still too busy putting out *Fantasia*, *Oliver and Company*, *The Land Before Time* and the like."

Japanese film aficionados are a dedicated group. A Japanimation room is considered standard fare at any science-fiction/fantasy convention, Camp says. As a member of Panime and E-Tech, a similar organization in Longview, he is well-versed in Japanimation.

Popular Japanese features include *Maison Okoku*, *Warriors of the Wind* and *Robotech*. They are not designed to be Saturday morning

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