

FALL 2020

ISSUE NO. 11

# KEYFRAME

THE ANIMATION GUILD QUARTERLY



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OF ANIME

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# CONTENTS



16

## FRAME X FRAME

- 4 FROM THE PRESIDENT**
- 7 EDITOR'S NOTE**
- 9 FACE OFF**  
Couple and collaborators Kristin Donner and Kyle Neswald
- 10 FRAME X FRAME**  
Storyboard artist Zach Smith's graphic novel

- 12 THE CLIMB**  
Writer/Director Latoya Raveneau

- 14 THE LOCAL**  
TAG A to Z explains the contract in common terms

- 16 DIALOGUE**  
Women in adult comedy share experiences
- 42 FINAL NOTE**  
Trailblazing artist Ruthie Tompson turns 110

## FEATURES

- 20 DISCUSSING RACE IN THE WORKPLACE**  
Three distinguished experts in racial equity and education share ways to lay the groundwork for meaningful, action-oriented dialogues. It starts with leadership creating a safe place for conversations.
- 24 THE POSSIBILITY OF THE IMPOSSIBLE**  
Universal themes transcend as the film, *Over the Moon*, honors and adapts a popular Chinese myth with the help of Pearl Studios in Shanghai. For the close-knit crew in LA, Glen Keane's ability to share his vision through drawings and openness to feedback paved the way for a truly collaborative environment.
- 30 THE INFLUENCE OF ANIME**  
Beyond the tropes of big-eyed heroines and hyper violence, Animation Guild artists, writers and creators share how Japanese anime has allowed them to explore deeper themes and multi-layered characters.



# MAKING SPACE



## WHAT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A LABOR UNION?

TRADITIONALLY, A LABOR UNION'S MEMBERS WORK TOGETHER TO NEGOTIATE AND ENFORCE A CONTRACT WITH MANAGEMENT THAT GUARANTEES THE THINGS YOU CARE ABOUT LIKE FAIR RAISES, AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE, JOB SECURITY, AND A STABLE SCHEDULE.

It's a mission that any worker from any field would have an interest in yet union membership has declined over the decades. Anti-labor political forces have succeeded in weakening our ability to act as a counterbalance to corporate demands on workers. Unions are losing their connection to the public at large.

The strength of unions is entirely dependent on the strength of its members and I believe that unions need to reframe what that means now that racial equality is the conversation on everyone's lips. This move is long overdue.

We at The Animation Guild are reflecting on our responsibility to our members, especially our most vulnerable. The fact that there are no black members in leadership roles is evidence enough that we need to make space to encourage more involvement from people of color. Our members need to feel welcome and supported when they need us most.

This is a systematic change I'm proposing and it's going to take some time to take root. We need to be able to track abuses and are moving to put a system in place to report issues.

We need to improve outreach to minority students—from new college graduates to elementary school aged kids—and share that a life in animation is a viable career option. Zoom meetings with schools are in the early stages of planning.

We need to amplify the voices of our black leaders in the workplace, who want to take on the big job of motivating and organizing other black members, to have a unified voice to address their specific needs. Join us in leadership! We need you.

Let's move this ship forward together.

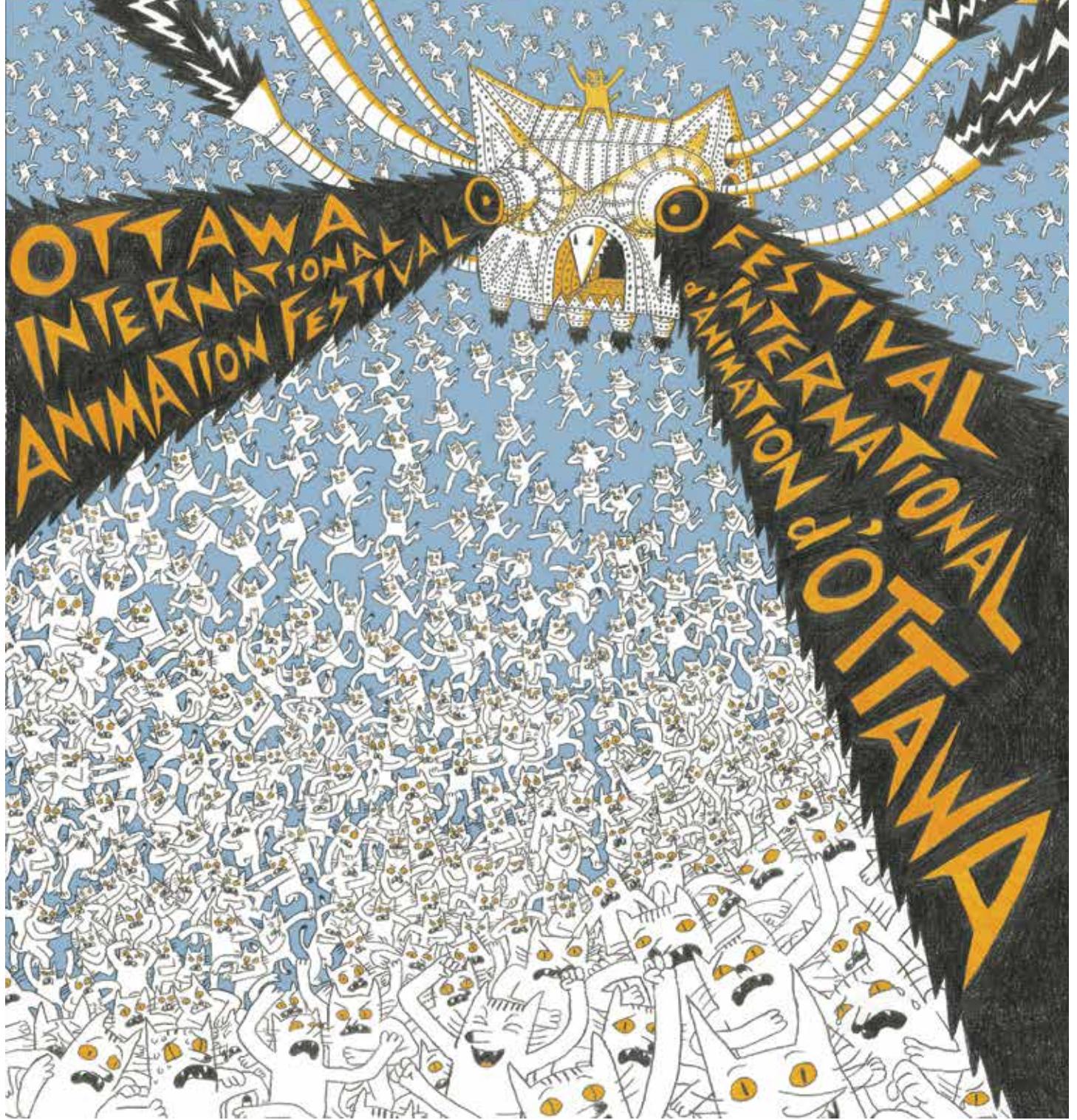
In Solidarity,  
Jeanette Moreno King | President  
The Animation Guild, IATSE Local 839



2020  
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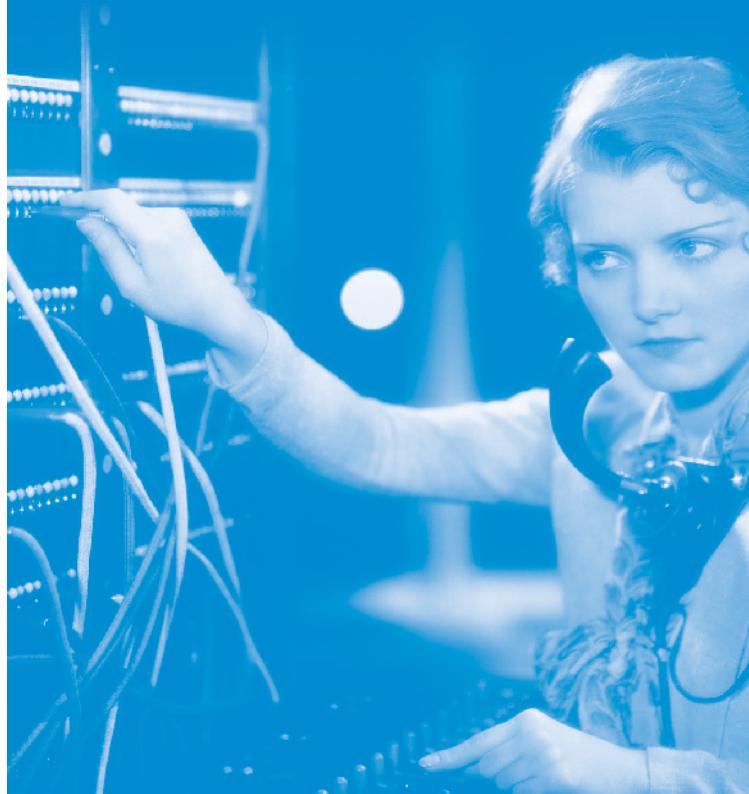
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# KEYFRAME

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 the  
animation  
guild

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# CULTURE CHANGE



## ANIMATION KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES. AS WE ENTER A NEW DECADE IN THE INDUSTRY, THE WORLD SEEMS TO BE A CANVAS FOR ARTISTS.

Whether it's following a hand through the streets of Paris in last year's Academy-nominated *I Lost My Body* to Netflix's upcoming *Mama K's Team 4*, an original African animated series set in a futuristic

Zambia, it's exciting to see how global animation will continue to inspire artists working in the United States.

Of course, as we show in our feature article, "The Influence of Anime (p.30)," drawing inspiration from the works of international artists is not a new concept. The Animation Guild members we interviewed for this piece shared with us why and how this Japanese style has impacted their work in Southern California.

Cultural myths and fairytales have been a source of creativity for decades and continue to inspire today, yet productions have grown more sensitive to the importance of ensuring these stories are told in an authentic way. For example, the production team on *Over the Moon* worked alongside their Chinese colleagues in Shanghai to honor the beloved moon goddess Chang'e in the film. You can read more about both the cultural and universal themes in the film in "The Possibility of the Impossible (p.24)".

But let us not only focus on the influence of different cultures. We must pay tribute to all kinds of lived experiences in the U.S. as well, something that we have not always been successful in doing. Director and Writer Latoya Raveneau shares her career journey in "Breaking Archetypes (p.12)". As a black woman in the industry, she strives to create opportunities for all voices to be heard and to provide a space for open discussions on her crew. In fact, the importance of a top down approach to address challenging questions about race is imperative if we hope to engage more people of color in leadership positions. We reached out to three distinguished experts in the field of racial equity to learn more about "Discussing Race in the Workplace (p.20)". The article shares insight into this difficult subject while also providing resources.

Let's start learning together.



Alexandra Drosu  
editor@tag839.org

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Alexandra Drosu  
editor@tag839.org

## CONTRIBUTORS



**KAREN BRINER** (*Fast Food Inspiration*) is the author of two middle-grade children's novels and is busy working on a third involving time travel, while also ghostwriting a biography. Her work as a scriptwriter includes the animated South African television series *Magic Cellar* that aired on HBO.



LA based photographer **TIM SULLENS** has one wife, two daughters and six cameras. Over the years, he has captured images of musicians and performers, political rallies and weddings. In this issue, he snapped a few social-distanced portraits of Ashley Long and Yvette Kaplan for "Breaking the Mold."



**KIM FAY** (*Discussing Race in the Workplace*) is the author of *The Map of Lost Memories*, an Edgar Award Finalist for Best First Novel, and the food memoir, *Communion: A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam*. She has worked as a journalist for more than 20 years, and lives in Los Angeles.



**EVAN HENDERSON**'s (*The Influence of Anime*) career spans journalism and nonprofit communication. His work has appeared in *Orange Coast Magazine*, *TV Guide* and *Los Angeles Daily News* where he was a staff writer and critic. While earning his Master's Degree from USC, Evan walked the entire length of Ventura Boulevard.

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# IN THE SAME BOAT



## COUPLE AND COLLABORATORS KRISTIN DONNER AND KYLE NESWALD PUT THEIR OWN SPIN ON DRAWING ONE ANOTHER

The couple first met 15 years ago while working on *Wow! Wow! Wubbzy!* Storyboard Artist Kyle Neswald wooed Color Designer Kristin Donner with funny caricatures of Wubbzy as iconic Arnold Schwarzenegger film characters—imagine *Terminator* Wubbzy battling foes and spouting catch phrases.

"We've been co-workers, art directed each other, and have been co-creators on development projects. When you have such a close relationship with someone, it can be difficult to separate the private from the professional," says Neswald. When they do shift to professional mode, though, they announce "it's Pro Tip Time!" to avoid hurt feelings. "Kyle and I truly value each other's observations and creative solutions. That said, we've also realized that our critiques are not for the faint of heart," adds Donner. "Our critiques morph into cartoon battlegrounds with stylus and pencil substituting for swords. Although we sometimes emerge from battle a little worse for wear, we agree that both sides are victorious, because our feedback always results in stronger work."

Their ability to offer constructive feedback to one another is rooted in a mutual admiration. "Kristin's artwork extends into her perceptions of the world around her; being able to pick out the small moments of beauty in a world of chaos and the ability to turn a critical eye on non-verbal means of information sharing," says Neswald. While Donner admires his storytelling prowess that produces rich and thoughtful ideas. "As he creates and populates new worlds, Kyle slips into different roles; he is a magician, a comedian, a counselor, and an engineer," she says. "He can bend reality, push humor, create connection, and invent literally anything. I love to watch Kyle create."

# FAST FOOD INSPIRATION

**STORYBOARD ARTIST ZACH SMITH'S FIRST GRAPHIC NOVEL WAS FINISHED DURING QUARANTINE WITH THE HELP OF LOTS OF COFFEE.**

Zach Smith loves fast food. So much so that he notes it on his website: "When I'm not drawing things for money, my pastimes include but are not limited to: eating fast food alone in my car." Smith confesses that he probably eats way too much of it, but he also loves '90s fast food mascots and '70s McDonaldland collectibles. So it's not surprising that the lead character in his new graphic novel, *Dolphin Girl 1: Trouble in Pizza Paradise*, works with her father in a fast food restaurant that is modeled on a Chuck E Cheese. "I ate

a lot of fast food growing up and it definitely inspired this book," he adds with a laugh.

Smith's first foray into animation began in middle school, creating stop motion videos with his parents' video camera. This youthful hobby led him to the College for Creative Studies in Detroit where he pursued animation. Later, Smith moved to Los Angeles where he worked on the *Mad Magazine* show, creating shorts. More recently, he worked as a storyboard artist on the Netflix series *We lost Our Human* and has started storyboarding on Nick Jr's *Baby Shark*.

Between work and family life, how did he find time to squeeze in a graphic novel? He finished the book during quarantine, so with he and his wife both working, and two small kids, "there was a lot of staying up late and drinking coffee—cranking everything up after hours, basically."

The idea for the *Dolphin Girl* graphic novel began when he heard about the formation of a new publishing company, Pixel + Ink, that was taking pitches from people in the animation industry with the hope of developing graphic novels. "It's something I had always thought about doing... but I didn't really know how to get into it." He pitched five or six ideas, some of which were old TV show pitches that had been sitting

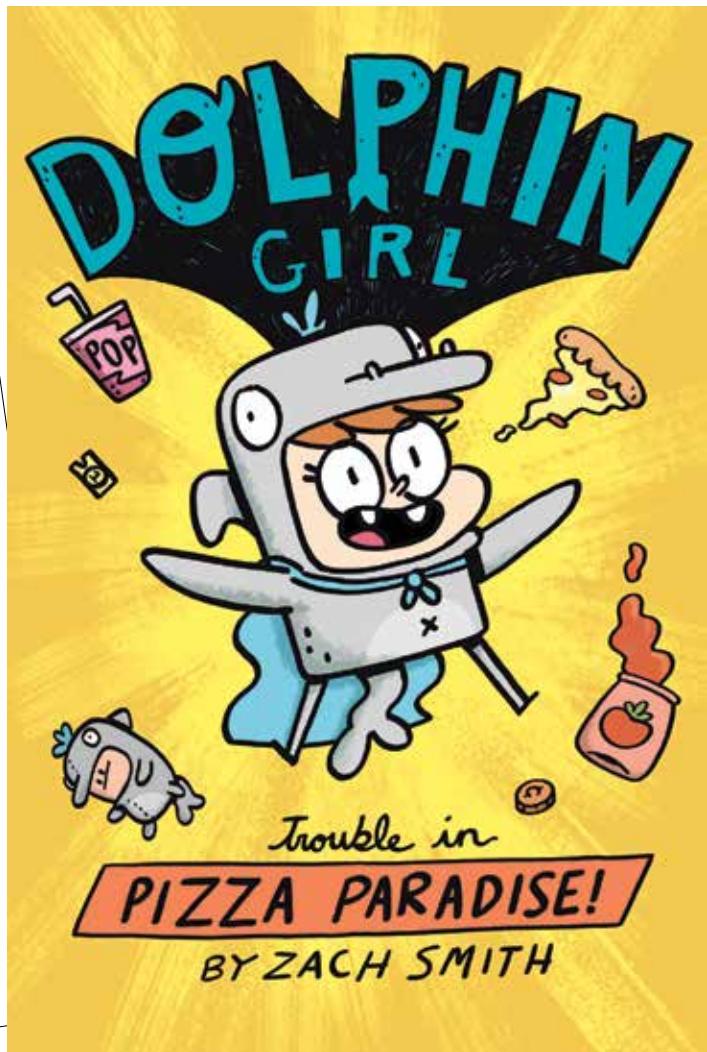
around, and had been rejected by other networks. One of those was *Dolphin Girl*, an idea he'd been sitting on for almost 10 years. Smith retooled it to be more kid-oriented and focused on the relationship between a daughter and her not-so-perfect dad. "They really liked it and decided to let me go for it," he says.

Inspiration for the graphic novel also came from '90s cartoons—highlighting banal suburbia and finding humor in the really mundane. "It's a superhero book, but there's not a lot of action," he explains.

*Dolphin Girl* emerged as a character who was really smart, perhaps smarter than her own dad, who's stuck taking care of her dad and helping to run their fast food restaurant, where they're not only the mascots of the restaurant—hence their costumes—but are also actual superheroes who fight crime. Smith says wryly that the dad is based on people in his own life—including exaggerated aspects of himself. While the dad is goofy and loveable, he's not very aware of what's going on in *Dolphin Girl*'s life, and this dynamic between the two characters provides Smith with plenty of story ideas.

"When I write comedy, I usually just try to make myself laugh, or make my wife or my friends laugh," he says. "I don't really sit down and say: what would a kid like? I think about what would I have





ABOVE: A love of fast food inspired Smith's new middle grade graphic novel, which he finished during quarantine.

liked as a kid—and go from there.” While Smith’s aim is to entertain and amuse kids and avoid any heavy-handed lessons, the first book in the series does have an underlying message, a reminder that you don’t have to do everything by yourself, you can rely on the people around you for help. His wife is an elementary school teacher, so he often uses her as a sounding board to bounce jokes off and to get her opinion on whether kids would find something funny.

“I wrote an outline first and did some character design sketches and rough,

thumbnail drawings—and from there, kind of fleshed out the whole book.” He found the process very similar to storyboarding except, “there wasn’t a huge bureaucracy that I had to go through. It’s basically just you and an editor working together. You have a lot more creative control over it.” Smith says the project has given him a creative outlet outside of work where he can express a more authentic version of his voice.

Smith advises creators to hold on to their original tone and voice. He recalls

how early on in his career he thought he had to draw in a certain style in order fit into the industry. “Sometimes that can make you lose your authenticity,” he says, adding: “Even if you learn a new way to draw, try to hold on to that original tone and the voice before you were in the industry.”

— Karen Briner

*Dolphin Girl 1: Trouble in Pizza Paradise* is available in September and the second book in the series will be released next year.

# BREAKING ARCHETYPES

**DIRECTOR LATOYA RAVENEAU TALKS ABOUT BEING A WRITER AND AN ARTIST, LEVELING UP AND HER ANIMATION SUPERPOWER**



Growing up, Latoya Raveneau loved to draw. "I'd take Movie Maker and scan in drawings, and then I'd scan a bunch of different mouth shapes. I was like, 'I'm going to make this little anime character sing this song I really like!'" she says.

Her mother, a nurse, and her father, a contractor, hailed from the Caribbean island of Santa Lucia, and though they didn't work in creative fields, they always shared stories or read to Raveneau and her sister, Megan. Raised in a West Indian/Puerto Rican neighborhood in Brooklyn, she was surrounded by other immigrant families who sought the best for their children in a new country. "You go home, you do your homework, work hard and get good grades because school is the most important thing," she explains. She considered going into medicine, joking that she was interested in forensic pathology because she "couldn't kill a corpse." Instead, she decided to pursue a passion for creative writing and fine arts at UCLA.

"I was doing a cartoon-like style in this fine arts space in very bizarre and surreal ways," she says. "I remember, I took an etching class and I was like, 'I'm going to try to make an intaglio etching move.'"

Towards the end of her undergrad years, she discovered UCLA's animation department by accident after enrolling in a class titled, Writing for Animation. "It was not a writing class; it was a storyboarding class," she says. "I was like, 'Oh, this is the

thing [I'm searching for]. This is drawing and writing at the same time.'" She applied to UCLA's MFA in Animation program and pursued this new career direction.

"I feel like a lot of film schools leave you in the space where you've done all the pieces of the production pipeline, but you don't know which part of it you actually want to do professionally," she says. She applied for many jobs and was eventually hired as a PA at Wild Canary. She says the experience taught her everyone's role on a production: "In a weird way, I feel like the PA job informed me more about the things I'd be doing as a director."



One day while sitting at lunch drawing, a newly hired Supervising Director commented on her work. "He said, 'Oh, are you a board artist?'. I was like, 'Oh, no, I'm a PA,' and he gave me this look like, 'What are you talking about? You're a board artist.'" The vote of confidence inspired Raveneau to focus and pursue storyboarding. Shortly thereafter a job opening for a storyboard revisionist on *Puppy Dog Pals* became available and Raveneau was hired: "The track became very clear, and it was like everything else

just fell away after that point. I was like, 'This is the road we're going down.'"

When the show wrapped, she was offered a storyboard artist position at ShadowMachine working on *Final Space*, a far cry from a preschool show. "I feel like the extreme served a purpose in that I got to learn a different style of drawing and of storytelling that forced me to become better at boarding," she says. She was able to draw on her love of anime to board dramatic tournament battles and stretch the way she used camera angles.

While she was working on *Final Space*, her UCLA screenwriting professor reached out to her. A script she had written in college had stayed with him and he asked her, "Do you still write?" "It was the weirdest, most loaded question, because I was like, 'Do I still write?'" She said "yes" and was hired to write for the Netflix show *Super Monsters*. "I'd never written young content before, and I didn't want to write things in a way that was talking down to kids," she adds. Story editor Kaaren Lee Brown gave her the freedom to lean into this idea, allowing her to tackle complicated emotions like envy.

Over the next few years, she toggled between *Final Space* and *Puppy Dog Pals*, writing freelance scripts on the side, and bringing sincerity to the adult content while infusing the preschool show with more dynamic cinematography, like doing GoPro-like footage during a chase scene, as if the preschool characters were on snowboards. "The adult show taught me there's something to being really in a moment, even if it's a super difficult way to board," she says.

While working on the first season of *Final Space*, Raveneau was given more responsibility so when work started on season two, they offered her a role as an assistant director to the supervising director—"like a director with training wheels," she laughs. "I was working with the board artists and launching them on shots, but if I had questions, there was a point person. I feel like the jump from boarding to directing is not a native one, [going from] a solo artist to this multitasking juggler, responsible for three episodes at the same time at varying stages."

The experience provided her a framework to grow and learn and by the end of the season she was able to own her ideas and opinions. She was then offered a job directing at Octopie on a new show. It wasn't smooth sailing, but she feels the experience helped her develop further in the new leadership role. "I learned a lot about how to direct under very fluid conditions—scripts changing, deadlines changing, stories changing. If this was a video game, I leveled up three levels."

It wasn't until *The Proud Family* reached out to her that she was overwhelmed with a feeling of finding the perfect career fit. "I think this is all I've ever wanted to do," she says. As a child, she and her friends played games based on cartoons, and inevitably the characters were chosen around racial lines. She still gets emotional when she remembers being told to play the "archetypical" black girl, whose personality didn't necessarily reflect her own. Even though the original *The Proud Family* was featuring characters not defined by their skin tone, it wasn't a show that her friends were watching. That has changed today. "We're breaking archetypes so now I'm like, let's break everything. I just want to see everyone's lived experience," she says.

When asked if her race has impacted her career, she says "on a psychological level, a hundred percent." It wasn't until working on *The Proud Family* that she met another female black director, Tara Nicole

Whitaker. "It sounds silly as I'm saying it, but I think I weirdly believed I couldn't do it because I'd never seen it done. And then I was like, screw it, I'm just going to do it," says Raveneau. "I feel like I out-energized any racism. I told a friend, this is not a way to live by, but it's the way I think I've gotten through a lot of the harder parts of life. I blame weaponized optimism."

In turn, while she's directing, she strives to create an open space where everybody feels like they can talk honestly, and she credits show creator Bruce W. Smith with establishing a welcoming and safe environment for all voices. "It comes from the top down and I want to reinforce that. I think everybody has blind sides even if you're a part of a POC community. And so I've been extremely vocal [that] if there's something in a script or something in a board or something I'm asking for that is rubbing you the wrong way—even if you don't know why—let's talk about it because that's coming from somewhere."

Raveneau also strives to find ways to make the experience more inclusive, not just superficially. "That's one shining beacon from the dumpster fire that has been 2020, we're all talking about it and nothing is off the table right now."

She also sees another kind of opportunity: "When the world got extremely real, after George Floyd, I felt very helpless. And I was like, what can I do? There's nothing I can do. I call my mom and she's like, 'Well, you can reach the next generation.' It is a singularly huge, superpower that animators seem to have. We can literally shape the way a whole generation of people sees reality. You can give them a world that is different from the world that they're landing in. Now, you can build a world that is better."

— Alexandra Drosu



# TAG A to Z

Earlier this year, the Animation Guild Communications Committee launched a learning campaign called **TAG A to Z**. The project aims to inform members and the public of commonly used terms in the industry and our master agreement using language that's easy to understand. So far, the committee has released letters A through H and actively working on the rest of the alphabet. You can find more information about each term including additional links at [animationguild.org/tagatoz](http://animationguild.org/tagatoz) or follow on the Instagram page @tagatoz. Also, if you're interested in volunteering to illustrate a letter, email [committee-comms@tag839.org](mailto:committee-comms@tag839.org).

**ADVOCACY**

The Animation Guild advocates on behalf of its members; addresses disputes between employees and employers, champions organizing efforts to improve working conditions and supports workers' rights.

**AFL-CIO**

The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations is the largest federation of unions in the United States, and includes the IATSE, Local 839's parent organization.

**ANIMATION GUILD**

Also known as IATSE Local 839, The Animation Guild (TAG) is a labor union that represents artists, technicians and writers in the animation industry to improve wages and working conditions and provide a strong, collective voice for its members.

**b**

Bank of Hours

For each qualifying period following initial eligibility, hours earned in excess of 400 will be stored in your Bank of Hours, up to a maximum of 450 hours. This means that, you may be able to extend benefit coverage if you've stopped working for a union studio and no longer accrue hours.

**b**

Better Terms & Conditions

Any individual is free to try to negotiate better terms and conditions than those in the Collective Bargaining Agreement but they can't be less than the minimums described. The terms and conditions in the CBA are fixed, not negotiable.

**b**

Business Representative

A member elected position of the Executive Board, the Business Rep oversees all collective bargaining agreement negotiations committees, addresses contract grievances, and supervises the business affairs and management of TAG.

**Contracts**

TAG negotiates on behalf of its members on contracts to establish wage minimums, working conditions, pension and health benefits (through MPI Plans). **Collective Bargaining Agreement** is an official term for a labor contract.

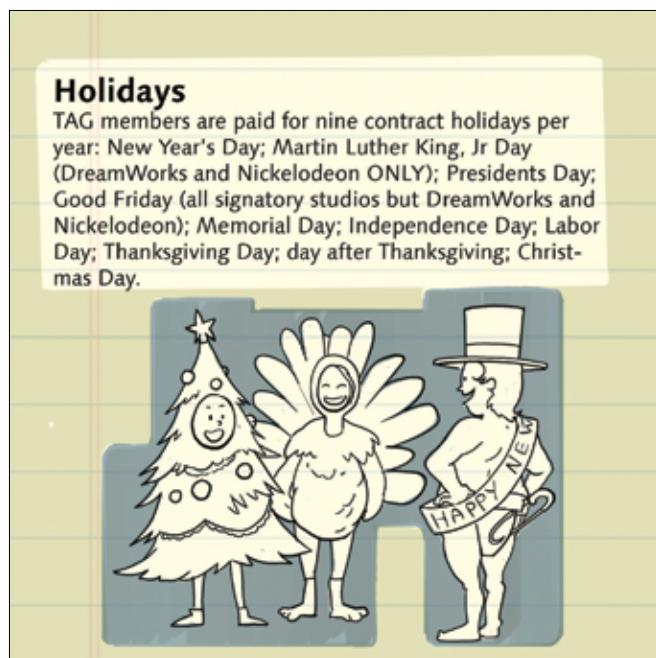
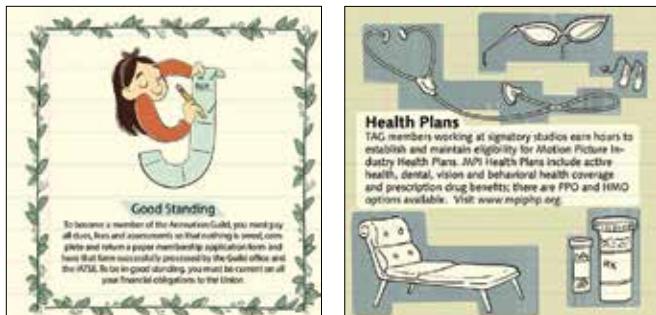
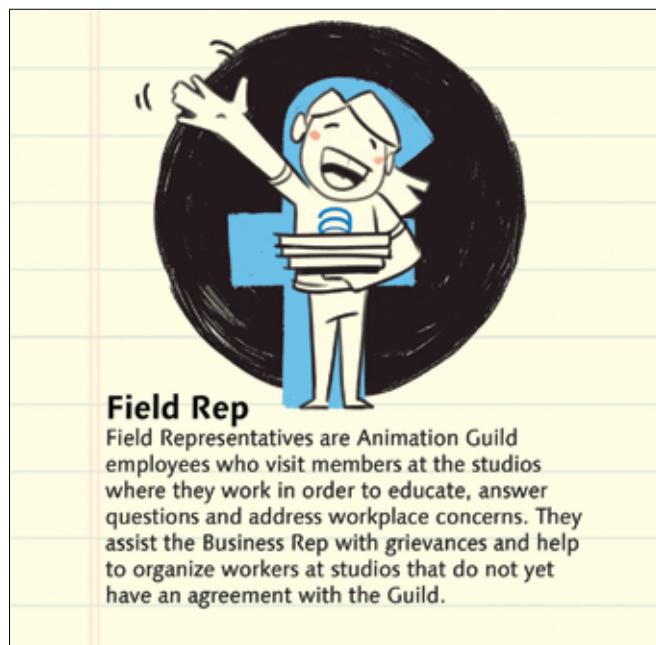
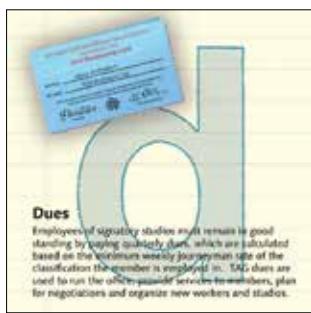
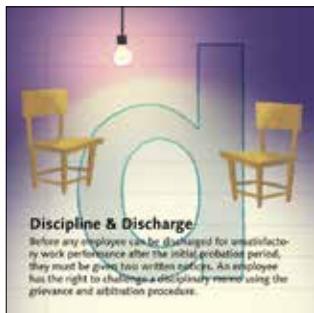
**Committees**

TAG Committees are constitutionally-defined groups of members in good standing working together on shared goals.

Committees are formed by TAG's president, who also appoints committee members.

**Dismissal Pay**

Dismissal pay, sometimes called "severance pay," must be paid to you after a layoff of a certain duration from a Guild studio. Contracts vary, but as a general rule the longer you've worked at the employer, the more pay you are entitled to—up to a limit.



Special thanks to all the talented TAG members who have already contributed to the A to Z project, including Emily Walus, Jake Hollander, Eunsoo Jeong, Paula Spence, Kristin Donner, Britney Thoreson, and Roger Oda.

# BREAKING THE MOLD

ASHLEY LONG AND YVETTE KAPLAN BOTH HAVE WORKED AS SUPERVISING DIRECTORS ON ADULT ANIMATED COMEDIES BUT DURING DIFFERENT ERAS—LONG ON *PARADISE PD* AND KAPLAN ON *BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD*. HERE, THEY SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AS WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY, TOILET HUMOR AND ENLIGHTENED CONVERSATION.



Ashley Long



Yvette Kaplan



**ASHLEY:** We bonded instantly over being some of the only female supervising directors to have handled irreverent and offensive adult content, but we've done it in very different eras. What was it like for you as a woman at the helm of *Beavis and Butt-Head*?

**YVETTE:** In the days that I started in my career, it was a rarity to be working in animation at all, so I've never really seen myself as a woman in the industry. Also, I never really saw the show or characters as offensive. Irreverent, yeah. But to me it was just smart and funny. I had been told before I started that it was really offensive, but when I was brought in to have a look, I thought it was adorable and innocent! That might have to do with being brought up in Brooklyn. I had lots of bad boys around!

**ASHLEY:** Similar to your experience, I didn't think of myself as a "female artist" until I started directing. Then, I started getting a sense that other people were viewing me that way. I'm pretty assertive and very comfortable with adult content. I have a great relationship with my showrunners and have never received any doubt in my ability because of gender, because they know I have the brass to do this weird stuff. Even though I'm very comfortable in it, I am also very aware that it's an extremely small club to have supervised a show as a woman and an even smaller club to supervise something meant for adults.

**YVETTE:** A small lucky club. I do remember going for an interview early on, before I was a director, when I was an animator, and I was told by the head animator that he loved my work. He said, "you would've been great for us to have here, except we already have..." and he pointed at a girl. I look around and I see all these young boys, and I'm like, why would I be great to do what

she does? I think I was so in my own head that I thought, she must be the same type of animator I am. It was only later that I was like, duh!

**ASHLEY:** For me, I wouldn't say becoming a supervising director was luck necessarily. I had to make my interests known. Also, convincing a studio that, yes, a woman is ready for this position. I see a lot of female departmental supervisors, but you don't see a woman at the very top very often. I guess that begs the question: Do studios not think a woman can handle the full package? Oops...That sounds like a dirty joke.

**YVETTE:** (Laughs) That's an amazing perception. For me, it was the higher up I got... It was really me going into features and dealing with the male execs. That's where all the trouble started.

**ASHLEY:** I'd like to say that there's more visibility for women in adult content now. A lot of that's thanks to the internet. At the same time, you and I couldn't name many other female supervising directors [in adult animation]. It means they're not getting promoted in press by their studios or by their shows. Growing up, there just wasn't access to as much behind-the-scenes information. If I was lucky, maybe there'd be a making-of feature at the end of a VHS and I'd learn a few names. But I don't remember seeing very many women in powerful positions interviewed. I look back at how furious my mom was when I went to see *Beavis and Butt-Head Do America* in theaters and, I wonder, if she had known that a woman co-directed it, could she have viewed this as more of a role-model situation instead of a bad influence.

**YVETTE:** She never could have known because I was not credited as co-director on the film. My credit was as Animation Director. When I was first approached by

the execs about directing the movie with Mike [Judge], I was told—with apologetic camaraderie—that they wouldn't be able to give me the actual credit because Mike needed the solo credit for his career. I was so delighted with the prospect of directing the movie that I gleefully agreed, "Sure!! I don't care! I just want to do it! Thank you!!" My educated guess is that being a woman had quite a bit to do with both their comfort in asking me to take the role without the credit and definitely with my gleeful affirmative reply. All these decades and challenges later, I am still truly grateful for the opportunity as it was the greatest and most joyous experience of my life but it was not a wise decision for my career. I'd never want that to happen to another woman, though I'm sure it has, many times. Women need to be aware and insist on better for themselves.

**ASHLEY:** That's why I think it's important to publicize women in adult content, because it lets younger people know that it is a viable place for you. So how has your personal experience shaped the way that you approach leadership?

**YVETTE:** Some of the qualities that I know I fell short on are the ones that I'll talk about. Because if I ever was given a chance, I'd hope that I would do better. I wish that I had acknowledged the hard work and dedication of my crew more than I did. I've learned after my leadership position, seeing other really strong leaders or hearing from people who love their showrunners or directors, because of that generosity of gratitude. I was so fixated on the show that I was sometimes flippantly critical and perhaps even hurtful. I had a crew that jumped through hoops for me and yet I often forgot to say, "Thank you." I have regrets about that. I also think a good leader needs to realize they don't have all the answers. Happily, I think I did better at that. I celebrated and gave credit to

many great ideas including one that saved my butt like when I directed the "Cornholio" episode when Beavis eats a lot of candy and turns into this lunatic alter ego, sprouting gibberish, like a kid on a sugar high. We finished the episode; it came back from post and we're screening it for the whole crew. Everyone's hysterically laughing and I'm so proud. I look into the group and there's this one very experienced, grouchy, older guy with his arms crossed. I went, "What, you didn't like it?" He's like, "I'm confused. Why was he going crazy?" And I said, "What are you talking about? He ate all the candy. Don't you realize when he went to the cabinet..." Then all of a sudden, I just stop and realize, "Holy shit!" I never had a close-up of the candy in the cabinet. I yelled, "Stop the presses." And, immediately added a held close up of candy. Marty Polansky saved me and "Cornholio" both.

**ASHLEY:** It's important to be willing and able to admit that you're super busy, you're super tired, and you might have missed something. All of us make mistakes. Even the people at the top. I was determined to be the type of boss who I would have liked to have. The people I respect the most are the ones who invested their time and energy in me, even when they had nothing to gain from it. And so I try to do that. Even if I'm very busy, I try to invest time and energy into my people to help them reach their goals. They can't work for me forever. They need to move forward and up. I think a good supervisor advocates for their people and is willing to get back down in the trenches and work if they need to. Do you think there are ways that women can serve as mentors to one another to help each other succeed?

**YVETTE:** I'm available to be a mentor to anyone who asks. Seriously, though, I noticed something during a meeting with women discussing mentorship that

gave me pause and I think we have to acknowledge, unfortunately, that there is a competitive streak. We've had to fight for attention our whole lives so when we finally get it, we want to hold onto it. I think that it's going to take some really deep self-reflection and honest, brave conversation for women to love and really support each other, you know?

**ASHLEY:** Woman on woman rivalry in the industry is a very real thing and I've had some negative working experiences. I think that insecurity is at the root. I agree that a lot of girls are raised to second guess themselves. How young were you when you first became aware of the idea of being popular or the idea of beauty pageants? Then being in a male-dominated industry, maybe that cranks up the pressure even more. What people have failed to realize is there's room for more than one woman, especially now. My friend, Sidney Clifton, has this saying: "Empowering my sister does not disempower me." If I invest in you, that doesn't take anything away for me. So I am going to encourage the women on my crew to negotiate for higher wages so they can assert some control over their futures. I encourage them to speak up in meetings and I make sure they get identified and heard in those meetings. These are super small things that we can do to be supportive and non-competitive. My work life has become so much richer now that I have a circle of women who I trust.

**YVETTE:** I think irreverent comedy, adult content is the place to shine a spotlight on society and humanity and human weaknesses. So, that's the responsibility. It's a challenge. But I know that the best writers are up to it and we visualize what they've written to help that.

**ASHLEY:** You're right. Good, irreverent comedy reflects the world back at itself,

and that's something you've mentioned to me, that a lot of people didn't get about *Beavis and Butt-Head*. On *Paradise*, we do a lot of jokes about farts and erections. I'm not going to tell you we don't do those, but we do some very smart social commentary too. Come for the toilet humor, stay for the enlightened conversation! And, hopefully, you get some people to think about topics they would not have otherwise. We don't, as supervising directors, have control of the content. But if you're lucky, like I am, you have a relationship where your showrunners are willing to have a dialogue.

**YVETTE:** Geena Davis has an organization. I forgot what it's called now, but it's kind of a watchdog. I've heard her speak about things like making sure your crowd shots are a realistic representation.

**ASHLEY:** I'm glad you brought up the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media. After attending a discussion about that, I made better onscreen inclusion and representation a real priority in season two of *Paradise*. I thought, well, that's such a simple thing that we can do, because I have absolute control over who my crowds are. That's been a mandate for my designers, my board artists, and my directors. They're all really wonderful at featuring women and people of color in the world of *Paradise* and giving them positive portrayals. There's so much more we can do to change the culture for the better in real life and on the screen. There was an episode where we needed a featured sexy woman, and the director and I were adamant about making sure she wasn't just white and blonde. Breaking that mold is a bigger deal than you would think it should be.

**YVETTE:** Irreverent comedy always breaks the mold.

**ASHLEY:** Well, I'm proud to be a mold breaker with you!



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# DISCUSSING RACE IN THE WORKPLACE

HOW TO LAY  
THE GROUNDWORK  
FOR MEANINGFUL,  
ACTION-ORIENTED  
DIALOGUES

BY KIM FAY

IF YOU ARE A PERSON OF COLOR, YOU MIGHT BE THE GO-TO COLLEAGUE FOR ALL ISSUES RACE-RELATED, OR YOU'RE SUBJECTED TO CONVERSATIONS YOU DON'T HAVE THE TIME, ENERGY OR INTEREST IN HAVING. IF YOU'RE WHITE, YOU MIGHT FEEL AWKWARD ABOUT DISCUSSING RACE OR CONFUSED ABOUT HOW TO BE AN ALLY TO YOUR COLLEAGUES OF COLOR BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START.

Much of the former can be attributed to misguided good intentions, while the latter is the product of a longstanding culture of silence. Both can undermine the potential for meaningful, action-oriented conversations. To explore this, we reached out to three distinguished experts dedicated to anti-racist education and racial equality: Assistant Professor of Management Stephanie Creary, an identity and diversity scholar at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania; Monique Marshall, a career educator with expertise in multicultural and diversity leadership; and Taylor Shaw, the founder of Black Women Animate. Together, they share some ideas to consider when discussing race in the workplace.

## DON'T LET THE BURDEN FALL ON YOUR COLLEAGUES OF COLOR.

Creary says that historically it's not uncommon for companies to leave the responsibility of figuring out what to do or say in regard to issues of race on employees of color. As Marshall adds: "There's a trend of asking the people of color to teach everyone else about race and racism." Not only does this create an extra, unpaid "job" for that person, it also can affect their mental health and productivity. "Creating art is a beautiful, intimate and emotional process," says Shaw, "and creators of color should be able to focus on that."

Focusing on their job can be difficult, Creary explains, when "you have this person who is underrepresented, sitting at work observing all these problems. Or they're thinking, I'm really having a hard time being present at work today because I just spent all this time on social media watching another killing of an unarmed black man, and I have to act like this isn't happening. You've got people who are carrying their internal experiences and the outside experiences, and that's contributing to their own self-questioning around, is this a place for me?"

Wherever the stresses originate, the employee should never feel obligated to talk about them, according to Marshall. At the same time, they should be able to talk about their experiences if they choose. In order for a person to make this choice, they need to feel safe. If a true sense of safety is absent, "you don't get the best out of your talent," Shaw says. "When the onus is on the artist, that's when we start to see burnout. That's when we start to see the retention of people of color within animation drop off. Our

industry has not taken huge collective and actionable steps in response to the conversations that have been happening for quite some time. The next step needs to be a quantum leap."

### LEADERSHIP MUST CREATE A SAFE PLACE FOR CONVERSATIONS.

All three experts firmly believe that the initial responsibility for this quantum leap belongs to those in leadership roles. While this is an excellent goal,



*"In order to create change right now in the animation industry, it's essential to hire experts."*

— TAYLOR SHAW

most studios and production companies are still just out of the starting gate when it comes to racial equity. So when an employee of color mentions their feelings about an issue to a supervisor, the supervisor might not have the resources to know what to do with that kind of information.

"What a company needs to do first is empower managers," Creary advises. "I'm not talking about generic unconscious bias training. I'm talking about helping managers develop the skills to be better listeners and providers of support to employees. How do you do this? The same way that you teach them to do their jobs, period."

With that in mind, Shaw says, "in order to create change right now in the animation industry, it's essential to hire experts."

Creary and Marshall agree that it's necessary to provide specialized

training so that when an employee of color does speak up, there is a meaningful response. Many white people, Marshall explains, are typically limited when it comes to carrying out conversations about race. Unlike most people of color who have been talking about race since childhood, white people generally did not grow up talking regularly about the subject. "Language is really powerful," she says. "If you have words for something, you can change people's thinking."

There are other reasons for outside facilitators, as well. They indicate that leadership believes in the importance and necessity for change, they don't have a personal stake in a specific workplace, and the conversations that take place won't be a threat to them.

One example of how an expert might guide an organization is Creary's RACE framework, which is featured in her article, "How to Begin Talking About Race in the Workplace," published by K@W, The Wharton School's business analysis journal.

Creary's framework begins with R: *Reduce anxiety by talking about race anyway*. She says: "What's important now is that we acknowledge the elephant in the room. The elephant in the room is that the topic of race, and the idea of discussing race, makes people incredibly anxious." Using the first step in the framework, she suggests creating norms such as "practicing respectful engagement" and "listening actively" before the conversations even begin.

Next up is A: *Accept that anything related to race is either going to be visible or invisible*. It is important, Creary writes, to address the following questions: "What do we gain/lose when race is invisible? What do we gain/lose when race is hypervisible?"

Step C advises: *Call on internal and external allies for help*. This can be done by cultivating a network of relationships with people both inside and outside the

workplace "who are invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion."

Finally, E reminds managers: *Expect that you will need to provide some "answers," practical tools, skill-based frameworks, etc.* As for where to find those answers, numerous organizations offer guides and workshops, including Race Forward's Building Racial Equity, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Racial Equity Resource Guide. (Most organizations have shifted to online workshops during the pandemic.)

### DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP.

At this particular time in history, white colleagues are actively seeking ways to be allies. But these efforts to create conversations around diversity can make colleagues of color feel uncomfortable, no matter how good and sincere the intentions are. Rather than tackling a problem head-on or attempting to organize discussion efforts themselves, white colleagues shouldn't be afraid to ask their supervisors for guidance. As they point out a problem, request tools, and strive to create a safer, more inclusive



*"The elephant in the room is that the topic of race, and the idea of discussing race, makes people incredibly anxious."*

— STEPHANIE J. CREARY

environment, they should also feel comfortable doing work on their own.

Marshall recommends the Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere (AWARE-LA), an organization that hosts a



*"More white people need to think about their own white identity and not the identity of the quote-unquote other."*

- MONIQUE MARSHALL

Summer Institute, ongoing workshops in engaging in difficult conversations, regional Saturday Dialogues. This suggestion corresponds with her belief that affinity spaces for dedicated conversations need to be created for more than just the purpose of staff of all races to have conversations together. There need to be spaces where colleagues of color can come together without the burden of educating white people, and just as importantly, for white colleagues to come together and speak freely about their own race and its influence on the construct of racism.

As Shaw points out, "most in the [animation] industry have a singular perspective that is white and male." This makes it difficult "to understand the need to engage in conversations around identity," Marshall explains, "because they see themselves as normal. More white people need to think about their own white identity and not the identity of the quote-unquote other. They need to do their own work first. In our companies and organizations, we need adults relearning and unlearning, but truthfully."

Not only will "brave and uncomfortable conversations" about race—combined with genuine, significant efforts to increase diversity—improve the quality and scope of animation content, according to Shaw, it will make "our art more powerful and expand its reach." ☀

# RESOURCES

## THE ALLIANCE OF WHITE ANTI-RACISTS EVERYWHERE

The goal of this all-volunteer organization is to build white, anti-racist and multiracial alliances that contribute to social justice. They believe that it's essential for white people to take responsibility for learning about racism and white privilege. AWARE-LA is a solidarity partner with numerous organizations, including Black Lives Matter – Los Angeles and The Movement for Black Lives. Along with White People for Black Lives, it is the Los Angeles affiliate of Showing Up for Racial Justice—a national network that uses community organizing, mobilizing, and education—to move white people to act as part of a multiracial majority for justice.

MORE INFORMATION AT: [awarela.org](http://awarela.org) / [showingupforracialjustice.org](http://showingupforracialjustice.org)

## BLACK WOMEN ANIMATE

BWA was created to improve the representation of black women in animation. It hosts the annual Black Women Animate Boot Camp at Cartoon Network, for creatives of color and their allies. It also partners with its sister organization and boot camp sponsor Inspire Justice to provide training sessions on topics such as "Transformational Leadership" and "Avoiding & Erasing Stereotypes in Animation".

MORE INFORMATION AT: [blackwomenanimate.com](http://blackwomenanimate.com) / [weinspirejustice.com](http://weinspirejustice.com)

## RACE FORWARD

Using systemic analysis to approach complex race issues, Race Forward is home to the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, a national network in partnership with the Othering & Belonging Institute that was created to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. Race Forward offers "Building Racial Equity", a series of interactive trainings designed to address structural racism and advance racial equity.

MORE INFORMATION AT: [raceforward.org](http://raceforward.org) / [belonging.berkeley.edu](http://belonging.berkeley.edu) / [racialequityalliance.org](http://racialequityalliance.org)

## W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

WKKF created the America Healing program to contribute to the dismissal of a false human hierarchy based on physical characteristics. It is designed to raise awareness of unconscious biases and inequities. Its comprehensive Racial Equity Resource Guide includes articles, books, media strategies and training curricula compiled to help organizations and individuals achieve racial healing and equity in their communities.

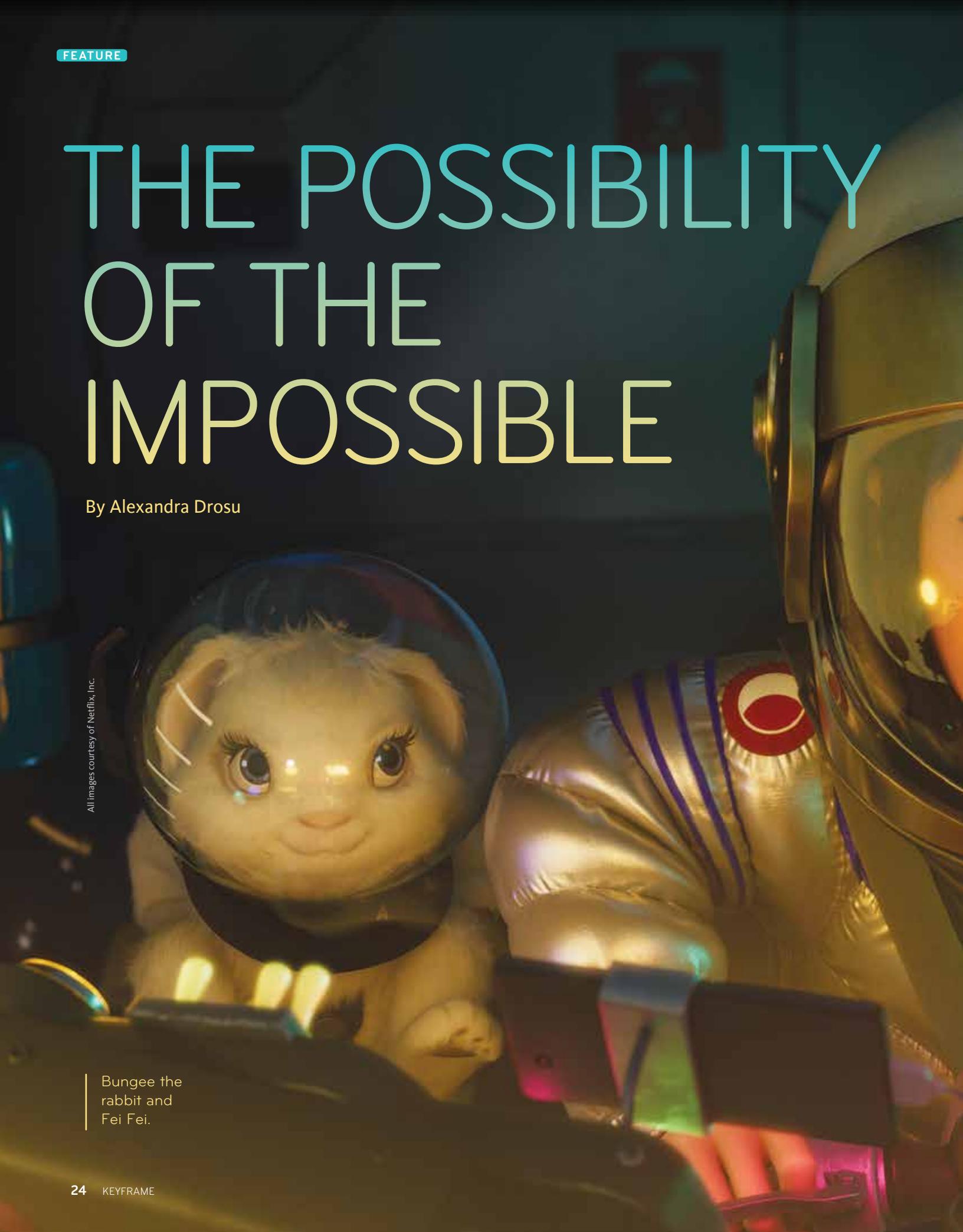
MORE INFORMATION AT: [wkkf.org](http://wkkf.org) / [racialequityresourceguide.org](http://racialequityresourceguide.org)

# THE POSSIBILITY OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

By Alexandra Drosu

All images courtesy of Netflix, Inc.

Bungee the  
rabbit and  
Fei Fei.





## Universal themes transcend as *Over the Moon* honors and adapts a popular Chinese myth

When Glen Keane commented on her Ariel fan art, Character Designer Brittany Myers couldn't believe the man that inspired her path into animation had given her a thumbs up. What happened next, was even more surprising? "The next day, [producer] Gennie Rim reached out to me via Facebook and I got the offer to come onto the project. I was like, is this real?" she says. "He loved that [my designs] had sincerity and felt like living, breathing characters. He liked what I was doing in terms of silhouette and shape."

Myers describes her style as sculpting in paint, stretching and pushing forms to their limits, sometimes pulling back when she's gone too far. "When I draw in pencil, I think there's a subconscious barrier because I know that if I mess up, what if I can't erase this?" she says, adding that she prefers to work in Photoshop, starting with broad strokes and refining as she continues to work.

The character designer's first task on the film was to work on Fei Fei, the film's



THIS PAGE:  
Fei Fei character  
design by Brittany  
Myers (color)  
and sketches  
by Glen Keane  
(black-and-white).

main character—a spunky, motivated dreamer who is grappling with the loss of her mother. Fortunately, Keane already felt very connected to the character, and together he and Myers worked quickly to establish Fei Fei's design, leaving some of the details to be tweaked. "Little things like hair, details on the clothing," says Myers, like "how her sleeves are often covering her palms, almost like a security blanket."

The entire production team quickly fell in love with the character. "Fei Fei goes through this journey of loss and grief," says Steven MacLeod, Head of Story.

"That was what was special to me. I felt like it was a very universal message of healing and learning to love."

This genuine connection to the character helped the board artists in their journey to discover the story. "What would Fei Fei do? What would Fei Fei feel? It was interesting to see that chemistry happening. In the beginning of the production, it's hard to tell who she really is until you live with the character 24/7 for two years. To this day, Fei Fei feels very personal to me," says Story Artist Hikari Toriumi.

"The journey she goes through in the film was something that I can relate to."

This magical tale follows a 13-year-old girl as she seeks to prove that the impossible is possible, building a rocket to travel to the moon in search of Chang'e, the mythological Chinese moon goddess.

"You have this character that is still in their evolution stage, they're still that chrysalis about to emerge as a butterfly—that's always really exciting," says Story Artist Minkyu Lee. Fashion Designer Guo Pei inspired and eventually designed Chang'e's clothes. "It was a

*"Fei Fei goes through this journey of loss and grief. I felt like it was a very universal message of healing and learning to love."* – STEVEN MACLEOD

Depicting Chang'e, a ubiquitous character in the Chinese culture (one that Keane likens to the popularity of Santa Claus), proved more challenging and fodder for lively conversation amongst the Chinese artists working at partner studio, Pearl, in Shanghai.

"There was a debate about the Chang'e story because there's variations in the details," says MacLeod. "You do your homework, research online and in books but then [also] make our own modern interpretation."

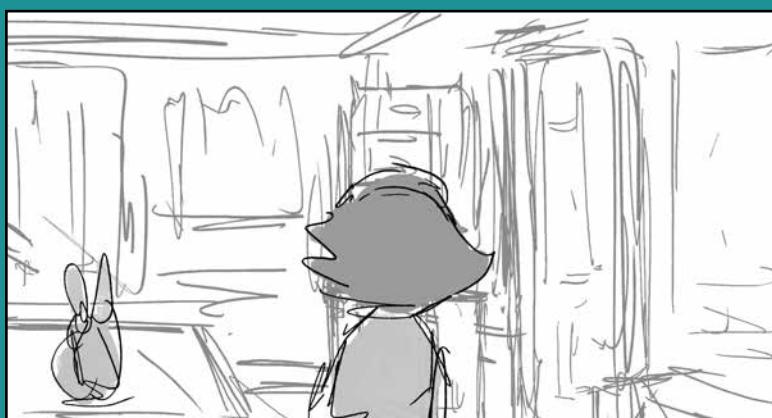
huge reference and inspiration of the goddess-like quality that she brings." Lee says the production team wanted to honor how meaningful this character was to so many people.

"There are so many different interpretations to be had so I kind of researched every avenue, what options there were," says Myers of the character design process for Chang'e. "How we felt Fei Fei would interpret her for this story. How it relates to her losing her mother and how she may have remembered those stories



ABOVE: A storyboard of a musical sequencing with Fei Fei and Bungee by Story Artist Minkyu Lee





ABOVE: Storyboards by Head of Story Steven MacLeod.

from her childhood—how she pictures her and built her up in her own mind.”

This dialogue with Pearl influenced the design and story to ensure it was faithful to Chinese culture. “Our leadership always leaned into that and our collaborators, who came from the authentic background of this story, were always the sounding board,” says Lee.

Though the legend is Chinese, Fei Fei’s story is universal. The groundwork in terms of the theme had been lovingly crafted by screenwriter Audrey Wells, whose script was essentially movie ready and just needed to be refined. “How do we best express this story in terms of these themes, these moments and these emotions?” says Lee of the story process that ensued.

MacLeod’s main concern at the outset was the varied locations and characters. “It can start to feel like a fever dream, a little bit like *Alice in Wonderland*.” He wanted to make sure that the characters continued to grow through every scene. “Each sequence had a purpose to the evolution of the characters,” he adds.

It helped that Keane’s collaborative environment paved the way for a smoother journey of story discovery. “He’ll listen to everybody’s ideas no matter what position they’re in,” notes MacLeod.

“He was always open to new ideas, even from the young artists, and always took time to listen to us and get excited,” says Toriumi. “Glen did this thing [where] he starts making the sound effects. I was pitching and then I start hearing his sound effects coming in. It was very encouraging!”

“It felt very effortless at the time because he was great at describing what it was that he wanted,” adds Myers of Keane’s ability to articulate his ideas artistically, creating a visual shorthand.

“He might draw a little sketch for an expression, then I would take a photo of it and text it to the board artists that [were] at the desks. I’d give them the stats for the scene and which panel and then they would do the fix and process it back to editorial. We’d take an editorial break and they would plug it in and then Glen would



ABOVE: Almost every storyboard artist on the production worked on this pivotal scene.

watch it and say, ‘wow, that was fast,’ and we would lock the scene,” says MacLeod. “It was a really fun process of having him draw whatever specific expression—that helps throughout the pipeline for the animators to understand what he’s after.”

The difficult part for MacLeod? Doing fixes on Keane’s and Lee’s scenes because “they draw at such a high level of draftsmanship.” However, Keane’s openness to change helped lead by example. “We all revisited each other’s scenes. There was one scene in the movie that every board artist worked on, which isn’t totally typical.”

The scene, where the entire extended family is seated around the dinner table, had tricky choreography with dialogue between numerous characters. The story team did several passes on the sequence—one for exposition, another for story and plot purposes, and a third for clarity.

Another unusual aspect of this film—almost every story artist had an opportunity to board a song.

“A good song will have a strong shape to it already,” adds MacLeod. “Every song has a different scale to it.” He notes that some have multiple characters, some only a couple. Some are really involved like boarding an action sequence while others, like an

intimate duet, have very specific staging and blocking, with characters doing interesting gestures and expressing emotion in their faces. “You try to cast the right board artist for the right song,” he says.

“I definitely like to think about story musically, to think of story structure as [having] different movements,” says Lee,

One of Lee’s highlights while working on the film was boarding a song performed by Phillipa Soo. “I floated this idea of let’s really let her voice soar and kind of pitched a brand-new introduction for the song,” he says. Keane liked Lee’s concept and set up a meeting with the song writers. “And then it hap-

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*“I definitely like to think about story musically, to think of story structure as [having] different movements.”* — MINKYU LEE

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who boarded three songs for the film. “You’re working with creative, inspiring limitations. You have to fit this entire story in the duration of that song. And, oddly that helps, that becomes a really great compass for what the sequence is supposed to be.”

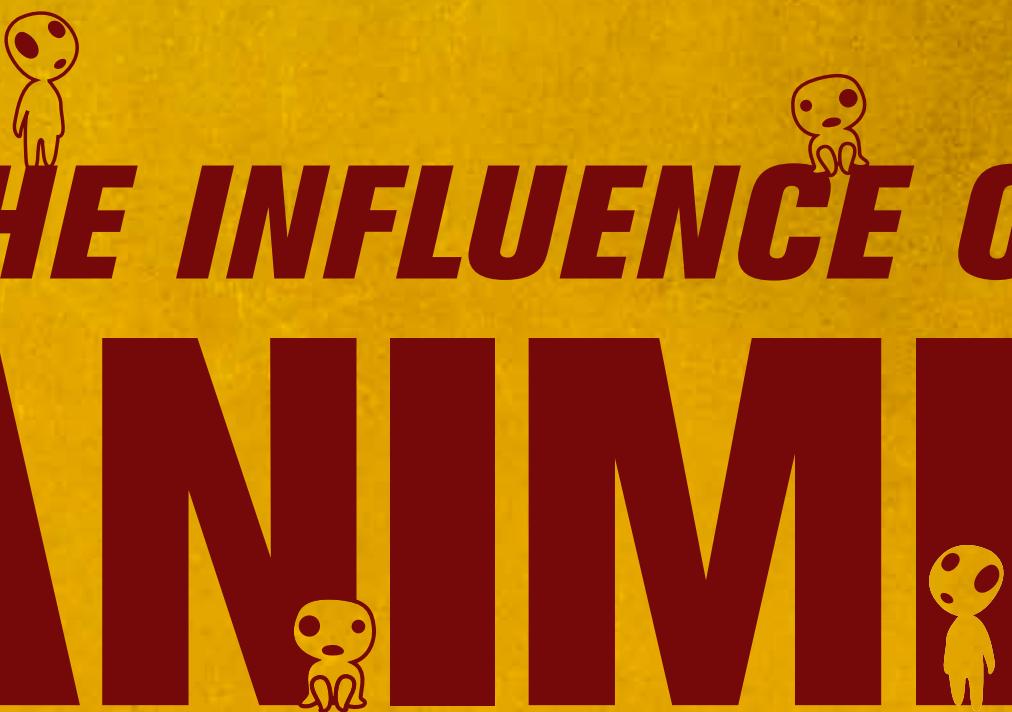
Lee begins with breaking down the lyrics, examining how the structure escalates as the characters figure out their problems and find solutions, while also approaching the process more fluidly, with inspired bursts of unbridled creativity. The balance of the two creating harmony between the music and images.

pened!” enthuses Lee. “I think that just goes to show how gracious, generous, open-minded and open-hearted of a collaborator Glen is. That was a very exciting moment for me.”

The final elements of the film were completed during quarantine but that didn’t dampen the excitement of seeing the sequences come alive through music. “Everybody gets super giddy around the scoring sessions,” says MacLeod, who watched virtually as musicians around the world recorded the final score. “It’s surreal. You get emotional every time.” ☀



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# THE INFLUENCE OF ANIME

By Evan Henerson

Beyond the tropes of big-eyed heroines and hyper-violence, artists, writers and creators share how anime has allowed them to explore deeper themes and multi-layered characters.

WHILE STILL IN HIGH SCHOOL, ANNE WALKER FARRELL RECALLS GOING WITH A FRIEND TO SEE HAYAO MIYAZAKI'S *PRINCESS MONONOKE* AT A SMALL ARTHOUSE THEATER IN SAN FRANCISCO... AND HAVING HER SENSIBILITIES ROCKED.

"It was the first time I realized that animation could be more than just funny. It could be sad. It could be epic; it could be scary and beautiful. I was hooked," says Farrell, who would work on shows including *BoJack Horseman*, *Final Space* and *Duncanville*. "I went home and checked out pretty much everything the 'anime' shelf at Blockbuster had to offer, which wasn't much."

Farrell's story is not unusual among artists who grew up on

*Looney Tunes* and Disney and were told that those styles—and not anything from Japan—would be the roadmap to industry success. It wasn't so long ago that a love of Japanese animation—more familiarly known as anime—was something you kept to yourself. Consequently, a generation of people have passed around VHS tapes, devoured manga and videogames all while hiding their interests for fear of being razed or discouraged from embracing those techniques if they wanted a career.

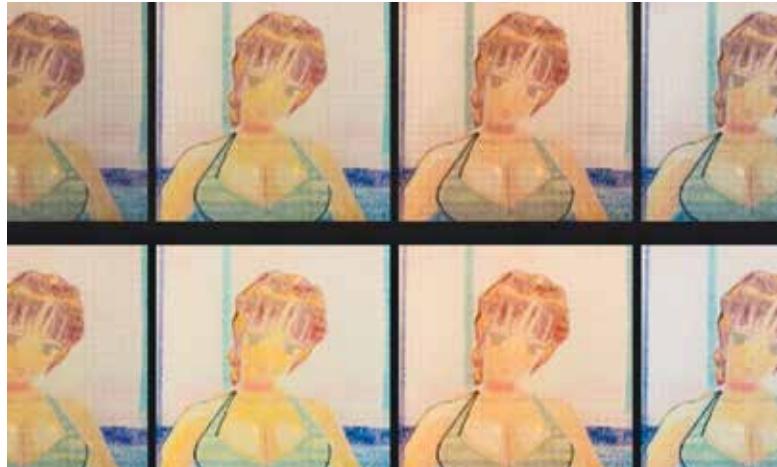


No longer. Those devotees of '80s and '90s anime have grown up, entered the industry and become game-changers. Some of the stereotypes of anime persist, but where one person sees oceans of blood, sexualized pre-teens and cuddly flying creatures, another finds vivid imagery, nuanced characters and deep philosophical themes. Blockbuster may have gone the way of the dinosaurs, but thanks to the Internet and streaming services, the anime "shelf" is loaded. Anyone wanting to binge watch has enough of a supply to outlast even an industry-shuttering pandemic.

Many of the long-running shows that have crossed over are indeed binge-worthy, given their themes, characters and structuring. Even at 22 minutes, a favorite program may leave you hanging off the proverbial cliff, desperately awaiting the next installment, the next season, the next iteration. And, if there is any absolute certainty about the cave of wonders that is anime, it's that there will always be something new, something fresh, something mind-blowing.

Lovers of anime say you can recognize the influence of the style in a *Teen Titan*, a Disney robot or a *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle*. For so many people who work in animation, the progression of anime from its perception as a hallmark of nerd culture to a next frontier is still a work in progress.

**FROM TOP, COUNTER CLOCKWISE:**  
Three anime inspired pieces by Erica Jones: A dramatic pose; a character design; and fan art for the Gallery Nucleus *Naruto: The Tribute Exhibition*. "When you're a kid, there's something for you to imprint on... so you're feeling connected to these characters. And, I think that got a lot of us drawing and excited by the idea of, 'I want to tell a story. I want to explore these emotions'".



## ANIME FOR EVERYONE

But there is anime for every age, every genre, every sensibility—action, sports, drama, comedy, fantasy, science fiction, even cooking.

"There's *Minky Momo*, a magical girl anime that was really influential to me as a child. I still watch it," says Erica Jones, whose work includes *Home: Adventure with Tip & Oh* and *Adventure Time*. "With that one, you could tell that it was just animators having fun animating crazy scenes. And at the center of it, there's this really cute girl

*"[when Ninja Scroll was shown to me], my mind exploded. From the pure 'what are you allowed to do with animation' perspective, it's like 'Holy shit! You can make an old man fire bees out of his back, do kick-ass battles and have interesting adult themes.'"*

– Daniel Dominguez

and she can turn into anyone. She can be anyone."

Lamar Abrams, a writer and storyboard artist who worked on *Craig of the Creek* and *Steven Universe*, remembers seeing *Voltron* as a 5-year-old and then later sampled shows like *Speed Racer* and *Astro Boy*. For an artist who considered himself not especially detail oriented, Abrams found the aesthetics of anime that called for a simpler facial structure in characters appealing.

"I found a lot of designs in Japanese animation to be very exciting," says Abrams, who also created a comic based on the *Dragon Quest* video game. "They felt really fresh to me as an American who grew up on Bugs Bunny and other American cartoons in the '80s, like *ThunderCats*. When I was in school learning animation, they were pushing 3D because they said 2D was going the way of the dinosaur and we were not going to work on paper in the future anymore. I remember

thinking, 'Oh, that can't be because Japanese animation is so good,'" he adds.

There will be detractors—sometimes even those teaching at art schools—who might dismiss popular TV anime as a stew of big-eyed characters, over-the-top emotions, an overindulgence of violence and hot young girls. But to those who have studied the art and artistry, the hallmark of anime is its ability to offer an infinite array of dramatic possibility.

"I wasn't very into Disney. I was like, 'Screw those cute lions,'" says Daniel Dominguez, a writer on *SpongeBob SquarePants* and the Powerhouse Studio-produced *Seis Manos*. "So when *Ninja Scroll* was shown to me, my mind exploded. From the pure 'what are you allowed to do with animation' perspective, it's like 'Holy shit! You can make an old man fire bees out of his back, do kick-ass battles and have interesting adult themes.'"

A still from *Seis Manos*.



## VISUAL TROPS OR A COMPLIMENT?

Depending on who you ask, characterizing a show as being “anime-influenced” is either the highest of praise or an insult. Many assume you’re talking about the style’s visual tropes—the big eyes and hyper-violence—rather than the deeper themes or multi-layered characters.

Tom Riffel, whose most recent work was as a retakes director on *Paradise P.D.*, often finds himself feeling pessimistic about the very perception of something being labeled “anime-influenced.”

“So if someone says to me, ‘Oh, this is anime-influenced,’ the first thing I think of is, ‘Okay, you just want it to look like anime,’ going back to just the visual aspect of the show,” says Riffel. “I think that now that anime’s a little more popular and more mainstream, those kind of negative [characterizations] are going away a little bit because people are seeing more anime that doesn’t have that stuff.”

Another popular term within the industry is “anime-adjacent,” according to storyboard artist Alan Wan. Wan grew up in Hong Kong where he watched a

lot of anime during the ‘80s and ‘90s. He singles out the series *Fooly Cooly (FLCL)* as a show that has particular resonance during his time on *Teen Titans* and also on the Disney co-production *Super Robot Monkey Team Hyperforce Go!*

“Back when I was working on *Teen Titans*, that was actually one of the rare times where we embraced anime a lot,” says Wan. “*FLCL* has everything. Initially, when you watch it, you watch it for the wacky, really crazy action scenes, but once you dive deeper into it, there’s a lot of excellent filmmaking that we don’t really do in the U.S.”

## BRAVERY IN STORYTELLING

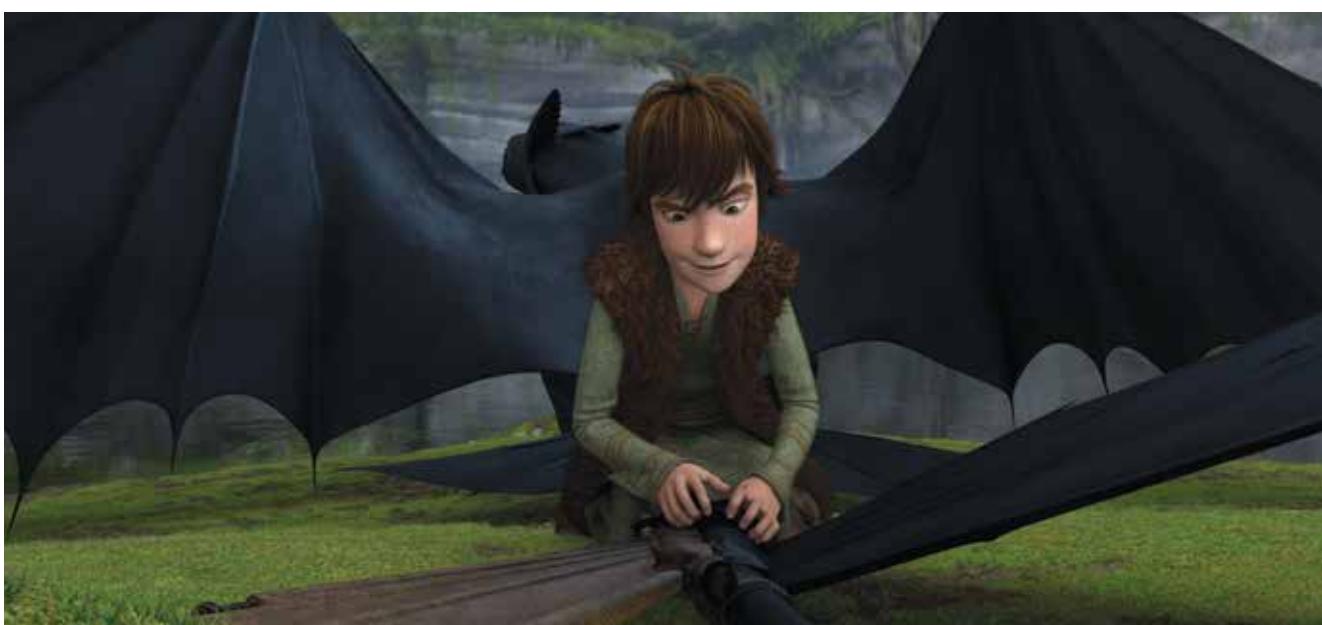
Followers of anime say that drawing a distinction between Disney and the animation of Japan is reductive. Many American artists who have worked for Disney or DreamWorks say they have drawn inspiration from Japan. On the features side, 2008’s *Wall-E*, a film with environmental themes that has no dialog for much of its duration, is the kind of movie that could have come out of Japan. And although it was inspired by a Marvel comic, 2014’s *Big Hero 6* is an homage to Asian culture with its relationship between a boy and his protective robot that is set in the hybridized city of San Fransokyo.

Miyazaki’s influence in U.S. animation is far-reaching. In creating the flying sequences for 2002’s *Lilo & Stitch*, Director Dean DeBlois recalls drawing on influences of films like *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Porco Rosso*. The influence continued several years later as DeBlois and co-director Chris Sanders considered a key element of Toothless, the hero at the heart of *How to Train Your Dragon*.

“When we were starting out, we realized that there had been several movies with a human and a dragon and how were we going to differentiate this from others?” says DeBlois. “It was



**B BELOW:** The da Vinci-like tailfin in *How to Train Your Dragon* was inspired by anime: "This coupling of organic and early mechanics felt very Miyazaki to me without being any specific reference," says Director Dean DeBlois. "When we started investigating the sense of flight and the weightlessness, the freedom and the peril—a lot of those references came directly from some of Miyazaki's films, [like] *Porco Rosso*.



Images courtesy of DreamWorks Animation/Universal.

specifically a very Miyazaki inspiration for me to suggest that maybe the dragon was in some way damaged and the boy would have to create this almost da Vinci-like contraption that would supplement and take the place of the missing tailfin. It just kind of had a visual appeal to me that also injected some wonder into it and some

wish fulfillment."

To DeBlois, the hallmark of anime is its bravery in an approach to storytelling that is not influenced by marketplace considerations.

"There's no overthinking of who the audience is," he says. "It's just about what would be spectacular, what would be emotional and what

would really be resonant. And I think that has defined the audience and the popularity of the anime genre, within animation as a medium. Just because it feels unrestricted in a medium that often is quite restricted, because of the budgets that are required in order to execute them and put them out into the marketplace."



*"It's the core of being an artist  
to see something cool and think,  
'Wow! I want to make something  
like that!' I hope we do."*

– Anne Walker Farrell

**ABOVE:** A still from *Steven Universe*, its big story arcs reminiscent of anime stories. Below: Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* served as inspiration for several U.S. animation shows and films.

## BEYOND LIMITS

Having grown up in Japan, Rie Koga has worked in the animation industries in both countries. When she got satellite TV in 1999, she had access to Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon and shows like *Dexter's Laboratory* and the *Powerpuff Girls*. As her interest in American animation developed, Koga noticed the stylized designs, quick cutting and constant dialog of those shows. "It was almost like I was watching stand-up comedy," she says.

"Japanese animation has a bigger story arc," says Koga. "Sometimes the characters die, even in kids shows. I got so scared by kids shows in Japan, but it's a very normal thing."

After working on multiple action shows in Japan, Koga moved to the United States in 2011 partially with an eye toward seeing how the industry worked. She studied at the Concept Design Academy and was hired as a storyboard artist on the Nickelodeon reboot of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Voltron: Legendary Defender*.

In looking around the industry, Koga has noticed more American animated shows taking on some of the characteristics of anime like continuing storylines and weightier themes.

"An example of that would be *Steven Universe*," she says. "Those designs look cartoony, but it has a big story arc from beginning to end and sometimes it has very heartbreak moments."

Ian Jones-Quartey, a writer who has worked on both the *Steven Universe* series and movie agrees citing 1970s-era anime like *Future Boy Conan* and *Lupin the Third* as part of the influence of the show created by Jones-Quartey's wife, Rebecca Sugar.

"A lot of the visual style was based on classic video games from the 16-bit and 32-bit era," he says. "A lot of the art directors of those games were probably inspired by animation, Japanese and not."

On his show, *O.K. K.O.! Let's be Heroes*, Jones-Quartey says that the creation of a department specifically to bring in animators to do difficult shots is inspired by the model for Japanese cartoons. "I see that trend becoming very normal on a lot of Western shows," he adds. "I think there's a lot to be inspired by."

"Seeing other countries unafraid to explore the limits of what animation can do, and what kinds of stories it can tell, can absolutely inspire us to follow suit," agrees Farrell. "It's the core of being an artist to see something cool and think, 'Wow! I want to make something like that!' I hope we do." ☀

**"There's no overthinking of who the audience is... It's just about what would be spectacular, what would be emotional and what would really be resonant."**

— Dean DeBlois



# REMEMBER ALL THE GOOD THINGS

RUTHIE TOMPSON JUST TURNED 110 YEARS OLD. THAT WOULD BE A MILESTONE IN ANYONE'S LIFE; HOWEVER, THIS SPUNKY, POKER-PLAYING CENTENARIAN IS ALSO A DISNEY LEGEND AND A TRAILBLAZING ARTIST.



**TOP:** Ruthie shares a laugh with Walt Disney;  
**ABOVE:** In front of her Disney Legend plaque.

When she was 8-years-old, Ruthie's family moved down the street from Roy and Walt Disney's uncle's house, where the two brothers were launching a burgeoning studio out of his garage. Ruthie became a regular, sitting on an apple box and watching the birth of animation magic. Years later, while working at a riding school, her path would cross with Walt again and she was hired in the ink and paint department, working on *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the first of many beloved films.

After she retired in 1975, she continued working on her craft and spent countless hours at the MPTF Studios, the television and video production facility on The Wasserman Campus. "Ruthie's love of entertainment and the creation of content did not disappear when she moved onto the Wasserman Campus.

Her curiosity continued and she not only began learning how to edit at MPTF's Channel 22, so also sought and gained an audience with DreamWorks Animators to gain a better understanding of digital animation," says Jennifer Clymer, Director, MPTF Studios. For this reason, MPTF has dedicated and named the Post-Production Suite at MPTF Studios in her honor.

When Ruthie isn't manning the nursing station or tooling around in her electric wheelchair, she looks forward to eating a Dodger Dog and watching her beloved team from the stands. Asked what wisdom she can share with the rest of us, she says: "Have fun. Try to do as much as you can for yourself. Remember all the good things in life."

*Support MPTF and learn more about Ruthie at [mptf.com/ruthie/](http://mptf.com/ruthie/)*

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