

SUMMER 2022

ISSUE NO. 18

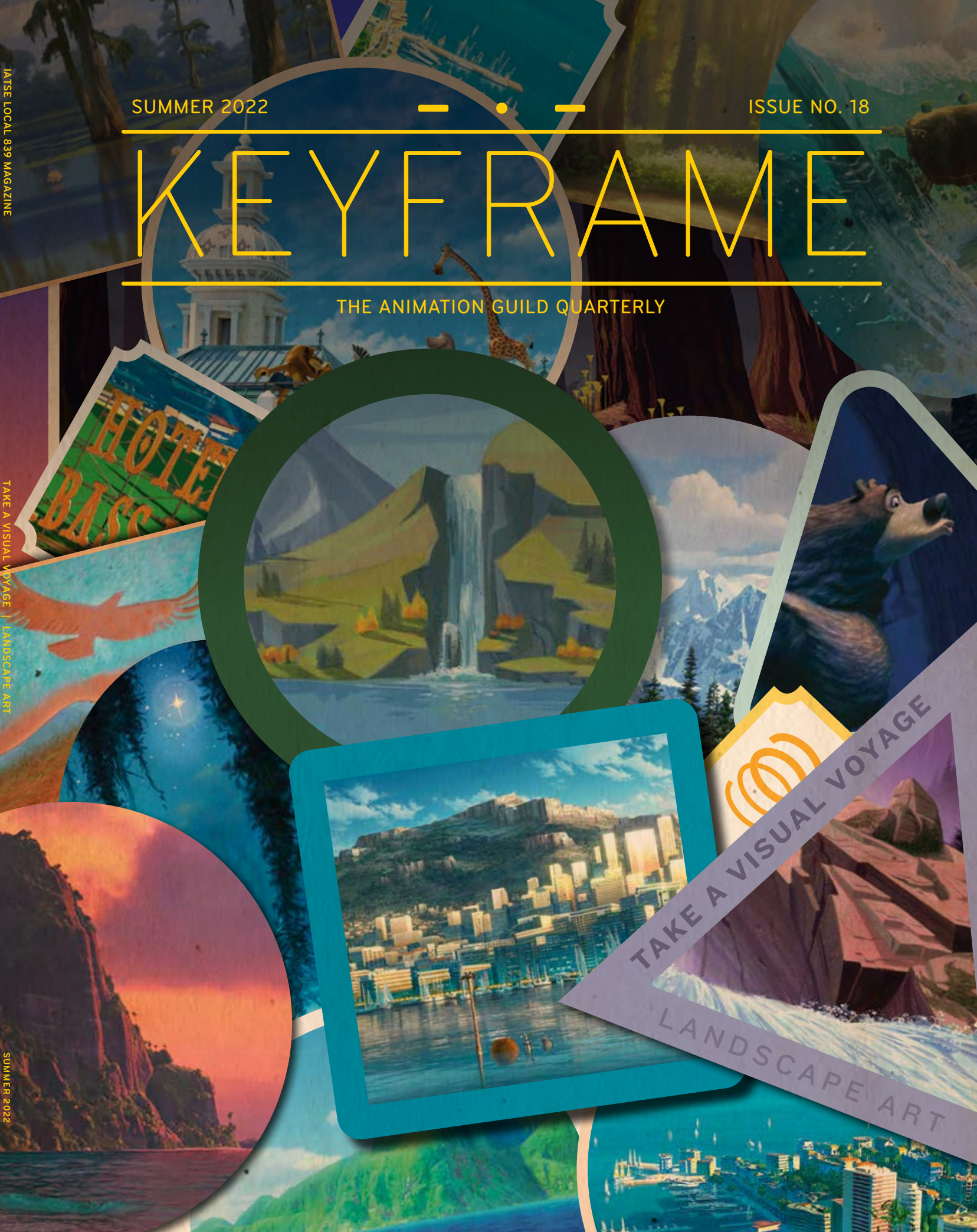
KEYFRAME

THE ANIMATION GUILD QUARTERLY

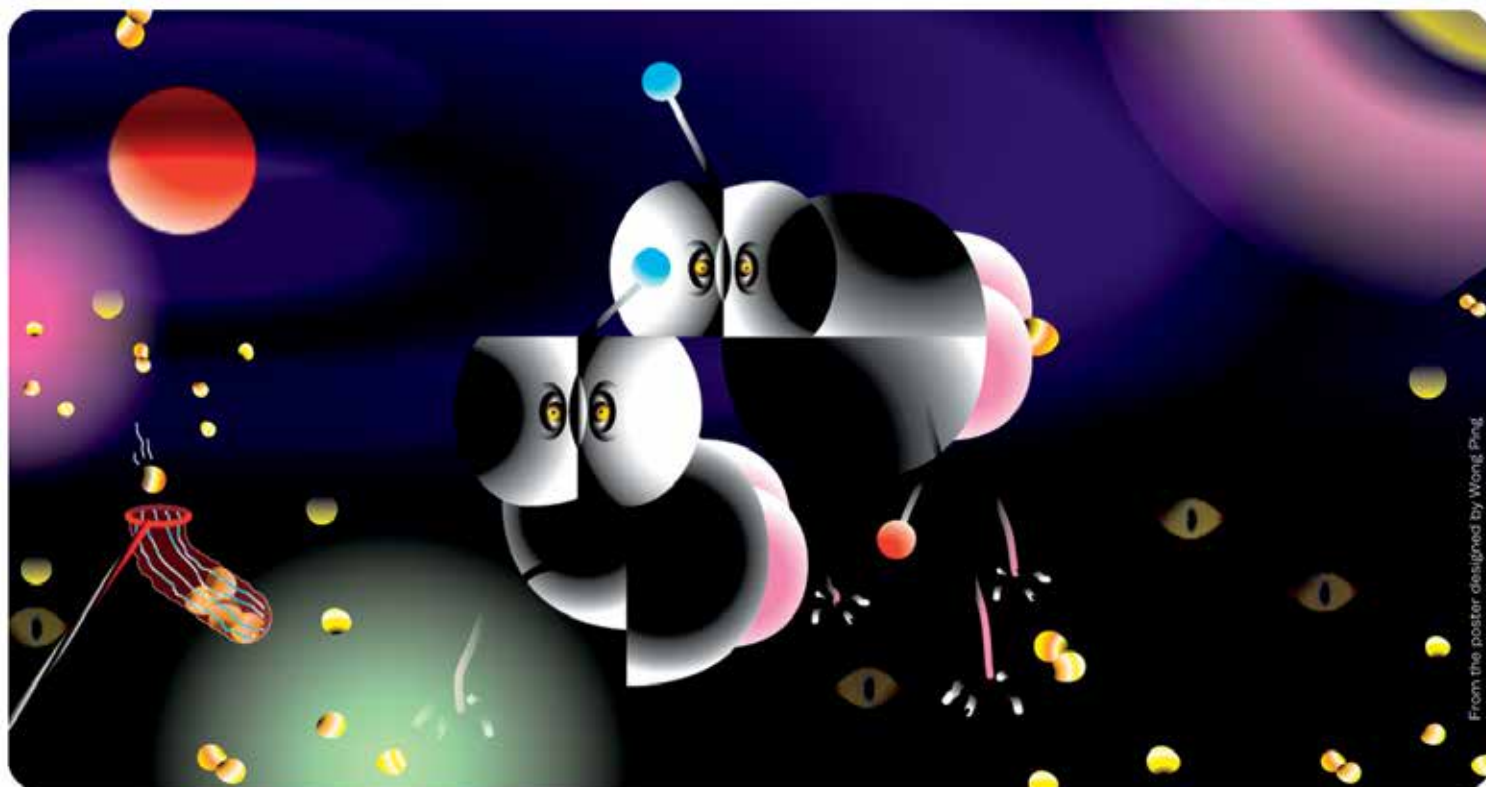
LAITSE LOCAL 839 MAGAZINE

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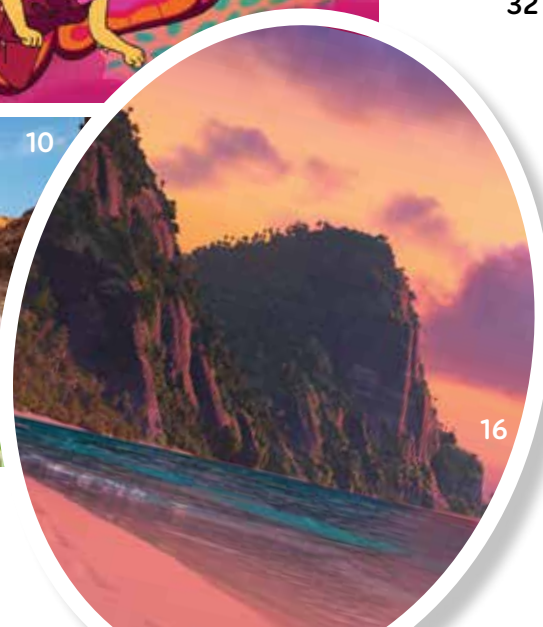


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ON THE COVER

Scenes from *Moana*,
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and *Madagascar 3:
Europe's Most Wanted*.



LOCATION MAGIC



**IT'S HARD TO UNDERSTAND
A PLACE IF YOU'VE NEVER
BEEN THERE, TASTING
ITS FOOD OR WALKING
THROUGH ITS STREETS.**

In animation a designer's job is to build worlds that take viewers into the experience of a location. Many studios send their feature artists and writers on research trips so they can understand the places they're creating. On *Encanto*, for example, an early team traveled to Colombia to explore the culture, architecture, nature, and magic of the movie's location.

Magic. That's what makes animation special.

Capturing the magic of a place is the job of visual development designers and visual development colorists who come up with the rules to communicate it through the landscape (or cityscape or seascape). They are tour guides, taking us on a journey, leading us through the locations.

Locations are important for understanding and connecting with a story. I'm working on a new show, and I know, if the characters and story stayed the same but the backgrounds changed, it would be a completely different experience.

We're so lucky to have artists who can mix reality with imagination to bring animated worlds to life. Whatever movies or series you watch this summer, take time to appreciate the craft that creates a magical sense of place.

In Solidarity,
Jeanette Moreno King | President
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OH, THE PLACES YOU'LL GO!



SUMMERTIME BRINGS WITH IT A SENSE OF FREEDOM. NAT KING COLE CROONED ABOUT SUMMER'S LAZY, HAZY, CRAZY DAYS, AND OLIVIA NEWTON JOHN SANG ABOUT OH, THOSE SUMMER NIGHTS. IT'S A SCHOOL'S-OUT FEELING THAT LINGERS LONG AFTER WE'VE MOVED ON INTO OUR ADULT LIVES.

But this year that feeling is even stronger. After two years of hunkering in place, people are itching to roam. The pandemic is still with us, and the rules of the road have changed, but planes, trains, and automobiles are back in motion.

To celebrate the opportunity to travel once again, we're featuring some of our favorite animation destinations for your vacation-planning inspiration, from national parks to tropical isles (p.16). As well, we shine a light on TAG members who have created a group that combines day-tripping with plein air painting (p.10). And for those who aren't ready to venture out yet, animation in and of itself provides some of entertainment's greatest escapes. You might find yourself strolling the streets of Belle Époque Paris (p.38) or journeying through one of the many TV series or movies spinning off from beloved shows (p.24).

In this issue we also explore some figurative landscapes and how they relate to TAG and the industry we work in. In the realm of social media, our communications team, committees, and members have upped their game (p.14), garnering unprecedented media attention for TAG, not to mention drawing historic numbers to our March rally. And in the land of streaming data, it's easy to get lost. So we've talked with experts and triangulated some coordinates to create a basic map to help you find your way (p.32).

Bon Voyage!

Kim Fay

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ARTIST: Victoria Orolfo

TITLE: *Aloe Bot*

MEDIUM: Digital

SIZE: 6" x 6"



THE ART OF OPTIMISM



Victoria Orolfo enjoys her job as a background painter—currently on *We Baby Bears*—but her artistic heart has also led her down a more unusual path to

the Solar Punk movement. Anchored at the intersection of environmental, social, and economic sustainability, this science fiction sub-genre “feels like a refreshing perspective on humanity and the Earth’s future,” she says. “With current world events unfolding every day, it’s good to have a genre of media that tackles

multiple issues while remaining both optimistic and realistic.”

Painted in Photoshop, *Aloe Bot* reflects Orolfo’s love of the way vegetation contrasts against minimalistic hard-surface design. It is the first of her many terrarium-bot pieces using robots as incubators for vegetation while collecting the oxygen they release. “If at some point the air quality becomes unbreathable and the soil becomes infertile, we will need to find other means of supplying oxygen and growing food,” she explains.

While Orolfo wanted *Aloe Bot* to be funny-cute, it is also a serious personal commentary. Growing up as the child of immigrants of limited means—shopping in second-hand stores, fixing things rather than replacing them—she finds that her own life experiences inform her Solar Punk pieces. Along with exploring solutions, she loves that she can use her art to educate others about environmental issues and various forms of sustainability, and their impact on different economic classes.

More of Orolfo’s work can be found at her website, victoriaorolfo.wixsite.com/portfolio.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

"When you're painting en plein air, it's like building a library in your mind of how things actually look... It reinforces simple techniques like 'this is how you paint trees and how you paint clouds or buildings.' It's so beneficial for any artist." —Michelle Lin



PAINTING OUTDOORS PROVIDES A BONDING EXPERIENCE, AS WELL AS SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION, FOR TAG ARTISTS AND FRIENDS.

Animation traditionally has been an indoor medium, with artists hunched over drawing tables or computer screens. But a trio of Los Angeles-based animation pros is breathing fresh air into the industry by telling their colleagues to go outside. With the creation of Warrior Painters, Assistant Art Director Michelle Lin, Art Director Angela Sung, and Production Coordinator Kayleigh Ma promote *en plein air*, the act of painting outdoors.

Founded in 2016, Warrior Painters has grown a loyal following of those working both in and out of the animation industry. The group bonds during weekend painting sessions in Los Angeles and San Francisco with a rotating roster of hosts choosing locations. Sung's interest in fishing has led them on an oceanside excursion, for example. Another outing, organized by Lin, took the group to Downey, Calif. and the oldest remaining McDonald's.

The pandemic couldn't stop the warriors. When the rest of life went virtual, so did the group with members sharing their work on Discord and gathering for digital paint sessions. Even as outdoor events resumed, Ma says their page on the chat platform continues to be an active





OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT:
Angela Sung; a gathering
of Warrior Painters in Red
Rock Canyon State Park.
THIS PAGE: The PleinAirpril
Showcase at Gallery
Nucleus in 2021.

online community with membership nearing 7,000. The amount of international artists joining the forum also means setting up sessions in an array of time zones, and some of these creatives have even managed to make it to the U.S. to join in-real-life sessions.

Sung says the ferocious-sounding name came from the idea that she and other members are physically active and “pretty badass for painting every weekend.” The group utilizes the hashtag #NoPleinNoGain, a *jeu de mots* on a phrase popular with personal trainers everywhere.

Most people who come to the events create with gouache, oils, acrylics, or watercolors because, says Ma, they prefer to use traditional media after spending their day jobs creating with technological tools. But some do show up with digital devices. And while Sung stresses that the main purpose of the group is to “unplug” from desk life and “hang out with friends and just paint,” Warrior Painters is also an off-hours activity that can benefit the work animators do.

Creating while outside, Sung says, means “you can definitely see more colors, and the lighting is different because cameras tend to compress values and colors.” Plus,

she adds, this art form requires you to use your reflexes because nature doesn’t wait for a boss to sign off on a project. “You have to make a decision on the spot, and you’re designing with a limited amount of time because the lighting usually changes within 15 minutes,” she says.

For Lin, it’s boosted her confidence as a designer because “color and painting weren’t things that I felt I was very good at. Going out and painting really helped me improve my color sense. When you’re painting *en plein air*, it’s like building a library in your mind of how things actually look,” she says. It reinforces simple techniques like “this is how you paint trees and how you paint clouds or buildings. It’s so beneficial for any artist.”

Warrior Painters also serves as a networking group for animators and other artists. All three of its organizers are women of color, which itself can be a support system in an industry known for its diversity challenges. Lin and Sung both say they’ve hired, or shared the resumes of, artists they’ve met in the group.

“I think people actually feel more welcomed by the fact that we’re all women in the

leadership roles,” Sung says of Warrior Painters’ popularity, noting that a lot of younger women and girls have come to events and spoken of how relieved they were to find it wasn’t male-led. “It’s rare to see women teaching, so it’s good we’re inspiring more younger kids to want to teach and share knowledge.”

They’ve also set up the Warrior Art Camp, a training camp with the mission “to pave the way for your art journey.” Ma says there is an objective to get more women and minorities involved in teaching the courses. There have also been gallery showings of work created during Warrior Painters weekend events.

Ma says they hope to do more of those, as well as rent space for their own exhibitions that may feature more up-and-comers because these warriors know that there is power in numbers. “If we make this group more popular, we provide more opportunities,” Ma says.

No plein, no gain indeed.

Learn more about Warrior Painters at warriorpainters.com.

– Whitney Friedlander

A HUMBLE HEART

A DEDICATION TO ART AND THE EXPLORATION OF HIS CHIRICAHUA APACHE ROOTS HAS SHAPED CHRIS AGUIRRE'S RICH ANIMATION CAREER.

In his early twenties, Chris Aguirre was a boot designer for Tony Lama, a blue jeans designer for Jordache, and a political cartoonist at his hometown *El Paso Times*. But a major life shift moved him to San Jose, where he decided to chase his childhood dream. Back when he was a kid he had loved watching cartoons, and at the end of each show, he read the credits. When he saw a Spanish surname like his—Peter Alvarado, Bill Melendez—he would think: There's hope!

One day, unemployed, drawing cartoons in the family garage, he read in the *San Jose Mercury* that Joe Hanna and William Barbera were going to be at a gallery in San Francisco signing books. "I thought, man, I'm gonna go there and show them my work," Aguirre recalls. Standing in front of the two animation legends, he asked, "What does it take to be in animation?"

Barbera replied, "Well, you just gotta draw good. Use your imagination."

Aguirre told Barbera that he had a portfolio, and could he show it to him? Barbera rolled his eyes but said, "Okay, go ahead kid, go get it. I'll take a look." Aguirre raced outside to the parking garage up the street. It was pouring rain, and when he returned he was soaking wet. Looking as if he felt sorry for Aguirre, Barbera said, "I gotta go

kid. I'm sorry. Why don't you just show me your first drawing?"

But instead of leaving, Barbera ended up calling for Hanna and they examined Aguirre's entire portfolio, laughing at the cartoons. "In the end, Mr. Barbera took out his wallet and gave me his card. He said, you give me a call when you're in town, kid," Aguirre says.

Aguirre moved down to the L.A. area, and Barbera connected him to Bob Singer who became his mentor. "I was in awe. The way he drew, so beautiful," Aguirre says. "Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm. Tom and Jerry. All the great characters." When Singer felt Aguirre was ready, he sent him to Art Leonardi at Warner Bros. The very day Aguirre went in and drew a few practice sketches from *Tiny Toon* model sheets, Leonardi introduced Aguirre to a group of artists, saying: "Chris, welcome to the crew. These people are now your teachers. These are journeymen, and you're going to learn from each and every one of them."

Aguirre did just that, studying background, tonals, layout, mechanics, storyboarding, and more from some of the best artists in the industry. He went on to work with Friz Freleng and Virgil Ross. "It was a blessing," Aguirre says of this journey. But it was not the only journey he was on. Running parallel to his pursuit of animation was his search for his roots.

"All [my mom] said once was, yes, we're Indian, but she didn't want to talk about it. Because it was shameful. Very shameful," Aguirre explains.

Growing up Aguirre had identified with his Hispanic origins, but he wanted to know more about his Native American background. He started researching his ancestry. But just when he thought he was on the right path, he would discover he was following the wrong family line. A stroke of luck came when a man contacted him through Ancestry.com. He turned out to be a cousin and informed Aguirre that on his paternal grandmother's side he is Chiricahua Apache, a tribe whose ancestral lands stretch from New Mexico to Chihuahua, Mexico. From there, Aguirre was able to make the connections he needed, eventually tracing a part of his family back to 1765 in a tribe that includes such legends as Geronimo and Cochise. "I wanted to tell the world, I was so excited about it," he says.

In 2019, Aguirre enrolled in his tribe. To express the pride he felt, he turned to his art. Using a reference photo of Geronimo during his last years in captivity in Oklahoma, he painted the shaman looking out toward the silhouette of a red-tail hawk "because I was imagining that was his last wish," he says. "To be free. To be like that hawk flying through the sky



in the desert." *The Last Wish* reflects the influence of his two favorite fine artists, Claude Monet and Vincent Van Gogh, and contains traces of his vocation, as well. Along with chalk pastels and colored pencils, he used a type of gouache. "It's a cel paint, actually," he says. Years ago, DreamWorks was getting rid of it. Aguirre rescued it and eventually incorporated it into his own art.

These days, Aguirre's passions merge in a more substantial way. He is doing visual development and background design on *Spirit Rangers*, a forthcoming Netflix show for preschoolers about three

Native American siblings. He also helps with historical accuracy and loves the opportunity to learn about other tribes.

Currently he's pitching his own Native American show in the hope of giving back to his community, and he continues to follow the philosophy set out for him by his first mentor, Bob Singer. "Keep a humble heart and an open mind, and the doors will open," Singer told him. "The day you think you know everything; the doors will close. And whatever you do, pass it on."

– Kim Fay

ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: Aguirre's first official Native American art show in downtown Los Angeles with (L to R) tribal member Gilbert Flores, Aguirre, his mom, dad, and niece, and Councilmember Mitch O'Farrell; With *The Last Wish* Aguirre imagines the end of Geronimo's life in captivity; Aguirre is thankful for all of his mentors and the opportunities he's had to learn from animation greats like (LEFT) Art Leonardi; Aguirre with his first mentor, Bob Singer (RIGHT)

#UNIONSTRONG

WHEN UNIONS UP THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA GAME, THEY INSPIRE NEW LEVELS OF MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AND SOLIDARITY.

Social media is a powerful tool, and in recent years labor unions around the country have harnessed its energy. TAG is no exception. With the creation of a TAG Communications Department, and various craft committees launching online campaigns, Local 839 has used social media to capture attention, empower members, and grow the Union in a variety of significant ways.

EDUCATING FELLOW UNION MEMBERS

During the 2018 negotiations, when the Color Stylists Committee (as it was then called) released its #ColorIsDesign social media campaign, the goal was simple: education. They needed their fellow TAG members to know what they were fighting for: as designers they wanted pay equity with comparable design crafts. “This was before the Guild even had a communications department,” says Color Designers Committee Co-Chair Teri Hendrich Cusumano, who led the effort. Along with their campaign they circulated a petition asking for support, and by the time negotiations started, the petition had more than 2,600 signatures that included show creators such as Rebecca Sugar, Lauren Faust, Craig McCracken, Ian Jones-Quartey, Niki López, and Jorge R. Gutiérrez, to name a few.

This high-profile support drew the attention of *Deadline* and other media, and Hendrich Cusumano believes these efforts helped with contract gains such as Color Stylists being recognized as Color Designers. “The producers’ first responded to the Color Designer proposal in 2018 with no interest to move on the issue,” she says. “I then made my presentation to them which highlighted aspects of the #ColorIsDesign campaign—primarily the petition. Immediately after that presentation, the AMPTP responded with the two gains we won that year: a title change and a shortened wage schedule equal to other design crafts.”

Extending beyond contract negotiations, educating membership via social media

efforts has addressed various learning topics, both craft-specific and broader subjects like the importance of a union. The Storyboard Committee produced a series of comics and videos aimed at informing Animation Guild members about important issues like how to run for TAG office, breaking down the MPI pension and 401(k) plans, the role of shop stewards, and more. These visually appealing graphics posted on social media helped expand the reach of the Union and engage more members.

The Testing Committee was also able to effectively leverage social media to increase dialogue about their efforts to address abusive testing in the industry. The committee created a web page (animationguild.org/testing-is-a-choice) and asked TAG members to submit all tests for review in order to help change the industry’s abusive culture of testing. They promoted this effort through a series of educational comics illustrated by Kris Mukai. One comic on getting ghosted after taking an animation test garnered more than 700,000 Twitter impressions. “The value of these posts going semi-viral is that it generates a lot of discussion and spurs artists to question the practice of testing in the first place, rather than just accepting it as the norm,” says Testing Committee Co-Chair and Executive Board member Danny Ducker. “The ‘baked-in’ nature of testing has been one of the biggest hurdles, so open and public questioning really helps with our efforts.”

CAPTURING MEDIA ATTENTION

In the summer of 2021, with TAG’s delayed negotiations looming, a graphic containing inaccurate data about WGA’s live-action writers and TAG’s animation writers circulated on Twitter. In response, Janis Robertson, a member of the Writers Craft Committee, suggested they create their own graphic to highlight pay disparities.

A subcommittee made up of Robertson, Joey Clift, Greg Hahn, and Cassie Soliday



ABOVE, FROM TOP: Social media campaigns from the Color Designers Committee, Testing Committee, and Writers Craft Committee boosted TAG’s presence online and led to significant media attention. OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP: The #NewDeal4Animation hashtag and graphic anchored TAG’s social media campaigns; The Production Strong graphic gave TAG members a way to support production crews in their organizing efforts.

spent evenings and weekends creating hashtags, graphics, memes, and GIFs, ultimately releasing about 40 pieces of unique content over the course of 14 days as the start of a progressive campaign. The WCC subcommittee aspired to do more than educate TAG members about the pay disparity between live-action and animation writers; they wanted to educate the entire entertainment industry and hoped that the media would highlight their campaign.

The hashtag #PayAnimationWriters trended number one in Los Angeles and California during the first week of TAG negotiations in November 2021, catapulting onto the pages of animation industry and entertainment media outlets. The media attention drove the committee to raise the stakes for the second round of negotiations in February of 2022.

"If we wanted to get the same level of news coverage that we got on our first round, we couldn't do that with the same strategies," says Clift.

With about a dozen people now on the subcommittee, the writers produced approximately 100 pieces of content, supporting a video campaign featuring showrunners, high-profile writers, and even local politicians such as L.A. City Councilmember Nithya Raman. The #PayAnimationWriters campaign has received tens of millions of unique impressions across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter since its start; the first video alone had more than 100,000 Twitter views in its first 24 hours.

"Twitter is a very effective way to attract media attention to Union issues," says Alexandra Drosu, TAG's Director of Communication and Content. "We have spent the last couple of years engaging with media to cultivate a following, and now many press outlets are paying attention to what we're doing."

Twitter has been used strategically to support organizing efforts and engage with the media. One example is when production crews at *Rick and Morty* and *Solar Opposites* began organizing in January 2021. With just 15 people in the two bargaining units, efforts accelerated quickly. Shop stewards Teddy O'Connor, Jack Cusumano, and Elisa Phillips realized that one of the most significant things they and their TAG colleagues could

do to help was to show solidarity through memes and GIFs on social media.

Drawing inspiration from the Epic Handshake meme, Cusumano created a Production Strong graphic of Rick and Korvo—two of the main characters from each production's show—shaking hands in solidarity. O'Connor later adapted that image into an animated GIF. When the production crews went public with signing their cards, the eye-grabbing image was put to use, most notably on Twitter. And when the crews weren't voluntarily recognized, the artists produced a second social media push to show their support. "Even though there are specific fights, it's all unified as one effort for our Union," O'Connor says. "We hoped the artwork would help the production crews feel confident, not only in their own solidarity as a bargaining unit, but also in the support and solidarity of their TAG colleagues. We wanted to let them know, loud and clear, we've got your back."

Another result was that it grabbed the attention of the media. *The Hollywood Reporter* reached out, yet another case of TAG organizing efforts and wins being in the news because of our social media.



INSPIRING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

It wasn't by happenstance that hundreds of TAG members and their allies showed up on March 20th in a parking lot in Burbank for a historic public rally in support of the Union's ongoing negotiations with the AMPTP. The rally owes much of its success to a snowballing social media campaign anchored by the hashtag #NewDeal4Animation.



In anticipation of the 2021 negotiations, "I predicted that we needed a unifying message that everyone can get behind," says Hendrich Cusumano, a member of the Negotiations Committee group that worked together to finalize that message. As #NewDeal4Animation was used in TAG's overall messaging and incorporated into the social media campaigns of various craft committees, the effects were multi-pronged.

The hashtag's prolific use drew attention from big names like comedian Adam Conover and *Trollhunters'* creator Guillermo del Toro, who in turn posted their support to their massive followings. And under the all-inclusive umbrella of #NewDeal4Animation, TAG members from different crafts came together for a collective cause. "It felt like we were all lifting each other up in a way that was really cool to see," says Clift. "We've got the animation writers hashtag, but we're also boosting #NewDeal4Animation. Color Design will release a petition that includes Color Designers deserving fair rates, but they also include our hashtag and messaging, as well. We're all working together."

Craft committees continued to share the #NewDeal4Animation hashtag with both their individual and other craft campaigns, and by the time it was attached to social media promotions for the rally, the committees were working to keep their social media in sync, enabling them to attract consequential numbers.

As TAG's social media campaigns gained public momentum, Hahn notes that every day or so when the Writers Craft Committee checked, they would see hundreds of new #NewDeal4Animation hashtags with an even more expanded reach: "It's not just the people in L.A. It's not just the people who work [in animation]. It's the fans of all the different shows and movies that we've worked on."



THIS PAGE: In *Open Season*, classic 2D techniques were blended with CG to create landscapes with an old-fashioned, painterly look. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Attention to detail and overlapping shapes helped establish a sense of atmosphere.



VISUAL VOYAGE

By Karen Briner

Animation can be a mesmerizing means of escape, and as thoughts turn toward summer travel, we turn our attention to some of our favorite destinations in animated movies. From America's national parks to Europe's grand cities, TAG artists share how they were inspired by nature, architecture, culture, and the past work of animation legends to create memorable settings we'd love to visit in real life.

INTO THE WILD

OPEN SEASON

Sony Pictures Animation

Landscape: Forest

Production Designer: Michael Humphries

In *Open Season*, Sony Pictures' first animated feature film, Timberline National Forest is the fictional backdrop for the comedic adventures of a domesticated grizzly bear named Boog, who's been returned to the wild just before hunting season. Its unique but familiar look was created by Production Designer Michael Humphries.

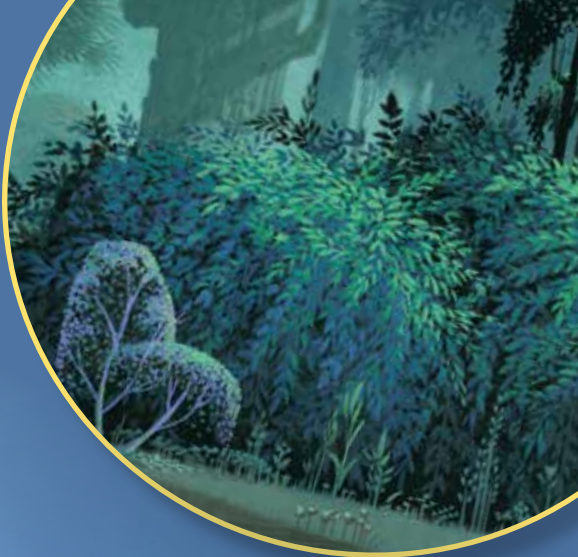
Humphries recalls that when he met with the film's directors, he was asked, "Do you like Eyvind Earle?" Not only is Earle—the man behind *Sleeping Beauty*'s aesthetic—one of his artistic inspirations, but he had just finished working on *Home on the Range* based on Earle's style. He was hired immediately and given artistic freedom as long as he kept to Earle's spirit. To do this, Humphries says he tried to put himself in the head of Earle while he worked.

A large part of the visual development process involved doing an enormous amount of research. Humphries and his colleagues flew up to the Muir Woods in Northern California. "We spent an entire day just photographing the forest and sketching," he says. They observed the shapes, taking note of anything that would

give them a sense of the environment within a forest. Very early on in his process, he started the design in a traditional way with acrylic paint on paper. "Once I got the look that I wanted, then I translated everything into Photoshop so I could share all of the files with the other artists," he says.

Humphries designed several trees, many of which were based on pine trees and their triangular shape, playing around with different versions and making his own interpretations. "You translate the real tree into a graphic design," he says, "and then, when you build the CGI model, you can also do different positions of the tree [and] different heights and sizes." He adds that if they're placed properly in the environment, you don't really notice that it's the same tree over and over again.

The big challenge was to make a 2D style work in a 3D CGI movie. All of the CGI elements, he explains, make everything look extremely real, yet the idea was to continuously maintain the overall 2D look. To achieve this, he would make brushes that were 2D flat shapes and incorporate their brushstrokes in the distant mountains and trees. Anything in the distance was kept almost entirely in 2D, "and then we'd put 3D elements in front of that based on what we needed to do," he says. Finding a balance was challenging, and he had to remind the CG artists not to let everything get super real or over-rendered, but to rather try to keep the imaginative cartoon feel.



It was also essential to maintain the continuity of the style throughout. In terms of landscape painting, he says, a lot of it has to do with overlapping shapes, creating a scale and an atmospheric perspective, and looking at how you can push something back in terms of color. He points out that color is an important design element, one that is not used arbitrarily. Like music, color evokes an emotional reaction in the audience and for that reason, he adds, "We always control the palette as much as we can."

Then, of course, there is the issue of characters. Humphries worked with Character Designer Carter Goodrich, experimenting with placing the characters in the environment as part of the visual development process. "That way we could see how the characters married into the scene and the overall environment," ensuring that the landscape felt organic to the emotional arc of the characters and story.

TRAVEL TIP

TIMBERLINE NATIONAL FOREST may be fictional, but its inspirations are real. Using *Open Season* as a guide for your summer getaway, head to the nearest national park forest and discover for yourself the unique shapes and colors to be found in our woodland landscapes.



ISLAND TIME

MOANA

Walt Disney Animation Studios

Landscape: Pacific Island

Production Designer: Ian Gooding

Set on the fictional island of Motunui, *Moana* captures the lush beauty of the Pacific Islands and the ocean that surrounds them. Originally from Jamaica, the film's Production Designer Ian Gooding thought that being from a small island in the tropics would be beneficial to his job. "But it turned out to be helpful in the opposite direction, which was that I wanted it to not look like it could be in Jamaica," he says.

Gooding points out that the islands in the Pacific are formed differently due to the nature of their volcanic eruptions. As a result, they tend to have reefs going all the way around which give them "a very specific look and a very specific kind of

wave action." Because of this, he learned about how islands differ geologically so that he and his crew would be able to highlight these differences.

The ocean is an integral part of the film, and much of the action takes place on the water as Moana sets out on her voyage. At the start, Gooding and his team "looked into a lot of ... methods of stylizing the water so that it looked like tattoos and all sorts of interesting things," he says. But ultimately, they felt it would be better to try and capture what was so spectacular about these places in real life. One example is the way that light interacts with clear water and the white coral sand beneath it, or what he calls "the spectacular dance of light."

Gooding explains that the whole movie got a color script to show how color would be used in any given sequence. When the action took place far out to sea, the ocean was given deep ultramarine colors as opposed to the shades of turquoise you get closer to the shore where the white

sand is visible beneath. The ocean itself is a character in the film, choosing Moana to return the heart to the mythical mother island, Te Fiti. When the ocean became a sentient creature, the artists reserved a very specific blue-green color for those scenes. The intention was to help cue the audience that the "ocean is going to do something magical now," says Gooding. At the same time the challenge was not to make it so obvious that it would take viewers out of the movie.

The fictional Motunui, says Gooding, "was inspired by the three islands that were where anthropologists believe initial [Polynesian] migrations ended: Tonga, Fiji, and Samoa." For research, he and his team visited Samoa, Bora Bora, Tetiaroa Atoll, and the tiny island of Manana, to drink in the experience of the quieter pace of life and immerse themselves in the ancient culture. When Gooding first landed in Samoa, he was surprised to find it looked exactly like Jamaica. He learned the flora

OPPOSITE PAGE: Intensive research into the natural environment was essential for designing Moana's authentic landscape. **THIS PAGE:** The color of water in different circumstances helped develop the mood of various scenes.

Moana images courtesy of Walt Disney Animation Studios.

TRAVEL TIP

The world of **MOANA** is enticing with its idyllic island setting. While Gooding found Bora Bora gorgeous, the holiday splurge he'd recommend for those with infinite funds is the exclusive, pristine Tetiaroa Atoll.

"[Motunui] was inspired by the three islands that were where anthropologists believe initial [Polynesian] migrations ended: Tonga, Fiji, and Samoa" – IAN GOODING

was similar because of the way people had moved plants around the world over time.

A botanist, Frank Murphy—who is married to Hinano Murphy, the film's Tahitian cultural consultant on the Oceanic Story Trust—helped map out which plants would have been on the islands 2,000 years ago, information gleaned from pollen samples taken from drill cores. Gooding says that in a flashback scene they were able to show the island before the Polynesians arrived and how the vegetation differed. That said, the plants at that time had chiefly yellow and white flowers, so

they did take creative license in order to have a broader range of colors.

Gooding points out that while the rest of the world might find it confining to live on a small island, "the Polynesians see the ocean ... like connective tissue, the thing that joins the islands together, as opposed to the thing that separates them." He adds that they "were navigating the world's largest ocean reliably, hundreds of years before the Vikings." This was why it felt so important to depict the ocean with such accuracy, to convey the courage and strength required to venture out across its vast waters.



CITY GETAWAY

**MADAGASCAR 3:
EUROPE'S MOST WANTED**
DreamWorks Animation
Production Designer: Kendal Cronkhite
Landscape: European Cities

In the third installment of the *Madagascar* franchise, the zoo animals leave Africa for New York via a sweeping tour of Europe including stops in Monte Carlo, Rome, Switzerland, and London. Production Designer Kendal Cronkhite calls it “a huge travel film.”

This meant a 10-day research trip to shoot reference material, with the first stop being Monte Carlo. “When the main characters [arrive] up out of the water, that’s where ... we get a view of the whole of Monte Carlo,” Cronkhite says, describing how she and her colleagues went out on a dock that extended far into the water. From there they were able to get a complete view of the Bay of Monte Carlo, a reference they used often.

Because this was the third *Madagascar* film, the design for the “cartoony stylized look” was already locked in. “Although for each one, we tried to adjust it slightly to be even better,” says Cronkhite. “There’s a lot more of a hand-drawn line in *Madagascar 3*.”

When it came to the cityscapes, they were looking for authenticity. Along with the team’s reference footage, Cronkhite says that travel and Grand Prix posters from the 1950s and ‘60s were a source of inspiration. They were also influenced

and inspired by the work of Japanese illustrator Tadahiro Uesugi because they loved his beautiful cityscapes, and by illustrator Miroslav Šašek who created the *This is...* series of books featuring cities around the world.

While researching in Monte Carlo “we knew there was going to be this rooftop chase,” says Cronkhite, revealing that she and her team were actually allowed up onto the roof of the famous casino where not many people have access. “We walked all over that thing. It was its own landscape, and it was really fascinating,” she says. They used what they found there pretty much verbatim in the movie. In fact, the glass skylight that the animals crash through and the casino room they fall into below is based closely on reality.

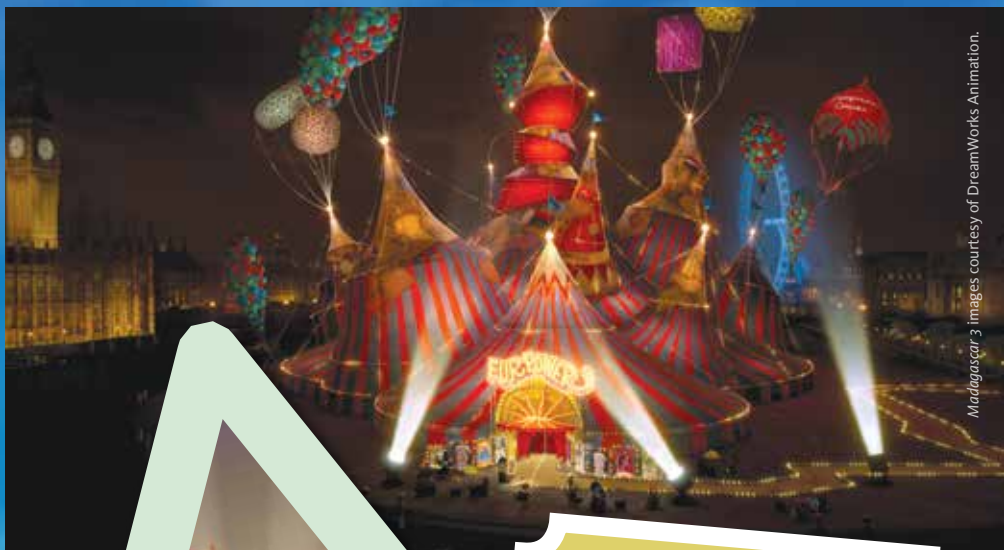
“Because [the animals] were traveling so much and so quickly over the course of the film, it was super important for our audience to get, ‘Okay, we’re here now.’” — KENDAL CRONKHITE



One of the hardest parts of capturing the cities, Cronkhite shares, was the establishing shots. "Because [the animals] were traveling so much and so quickly over the course of the film, it was super important for our audience to get, 'Okay, we're here now,'" she says. It was a challenge to find dramatic establishing shots that were unique but also completely recognizable. With London, she explains they did the establishing shot from the London Eye. "Luckily, being there helped because we could move to those places, shoot lots of photos and video, and try to get [what we needed]," she says.

Another challenge was just how much had to be designed with so many different locations and chase scenes. There was also the issue of how different the light is in each of the cities. "Monte Carlo is so crisp, white and blue," says Cronkhite. Everything seemed brightly lit, which influenced the design. It was a contrast to then go to London where "everything felt sort of tall and narrow" with spaces more enclosed.

Cronkhite also enjoyed working the characters into the landscapes. She loved the scenes with King Julien, the lemur, who falls for a circus bear, Sonya. The couple tour the streets of Rome, stopping at the Vatican, the Spanish Steps, and Trevi Fountain. "To travel to those places and to be able to try to represent them in the film," she says, "was so, so fun."



Madagascar 3 images courtesy of DreamWorks Animation.

TRAVEL TIP

After two years of shutdowns, European cities are beckoning travelers with history, culture, and cuisine. Pick London, Rome, Monte Carlo—or all three. A whirlwind tour of Europe might be just what the doctor ordered to heal the pandemic blues.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The rooftop of the Monte Carlo Casino was just one of many real-life sites used in Madagascar 3. **THIS PAGE:** The use of light was one of the ways to establish visual differences between destinations.



BAYOU BLISS

THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG

Walt Disney Animation Studios

Production Designer: James A. Finch

Landscape: The Bayou

Set in Jazz Age New Orleans, *The Princess and the Frog* offers inventive twists on a classic fairytale. When Tiana, the titular princess, turns into a frog, she and her love interest find themselves navigating the wonders and hazards of the bayou in a quest to regain their human forms.

Working under the direction of Art Director Ian Gooding, the film's Production Designer James A. Finch notes that he and his team used several locations: the Garden District, the French Quarter, and the bayou. "What was interesting," he says, "was when we went to New Orleans, it was the year after Katrina, and a lot of the trees had been stripped of all their leaves." Finch and Layout Supervisor Rasoul Azadani realized that none of the trees they saw on that trip really reflected the Deep South bayou. So they went to South Carolina where they found a river that had "very unique pockets of combinations of vegetation coming together, and we could see where this would be special and isolated from the rest of the world," says Finch.

Finch grew up in Florida, so he was already familiar with the swampy landscape of the Everglades, which he cites as one of the reasons he was given the

opportunity to work on some of the bayou designs. "It was fun to dive into that and explore," he says. "[The bayou] is a special place. It has its own unique elements. It's a harsh place to live in for any animal, but it also has its romantic flavors." To achieve these variable qualities, his team brightened up the palette in the daytime "so it had a lot of airy quality to it ... a lot of natural light quality [that] made it fun and inviting." For nighttime and the movie's heavier moments, "We were just drying out the color," he says, to give the landscape a more monochromatic feel. He also notes the importance of small details, such as the poetic look of hanging moss versus the typical small leaves on the oak trees. "It's fun to think about all those elements that make something romantic, versus eerie, versus mysterious," he says.

In the bayou Finch was excited by the size of the cypresses, with branches so heavy they touched the river bed before growing back up and tangling in the "elbows" that are part of the root system. But when it came to dimensions like this, he notes the difficulties. "When you're looking at the scale of the [small] animals compared to the trees, you're really looking at [just a section] of the tree." How do you incorporate these shots with the bigger perspective so viewers can fully appreciate the grandeur of the bayou setting? One example is the character of Ray, a tiny firefly with a big heart and an extended family that magically lights up the swamp. Tackling the challenge of

making such a tiny creature visible in a massive setting, Ray was like "a pretty big lightbulb flying around," Finch says.

He also explains that it was difficult because the environment is all water. Often the characters were traveling through the bayou on the back of Louis, the trumpet playing alligator, but at other times, they needed a sand embankment or something else solid to stand on. One such place belonged to a voodoo priestess, Mama Odie, deep in the bayou. She lives in a shrimping boat lodged in a majestic tree. Finch says there were a lot of ideas about her abode, to make her space fantastical and different, and more than just a little hut in the woods. They had many iterations and artists elaborating on an initial design, and it felt so charming that they didn't want to move away from it.

Mama Odie's home also showcased something unique about the New Orleans area: the shrimping boats. This was just one way to satisfy Finch's belief that in every film that looks at a specific culture, it's necessary "to give accolades to particular aspects that are important to that world." ☺

THIS PAGE: Celebrating the magic of the bayou was one of the chief design goals in *The Princess and the Frog*.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Scope and scale were captured through the use of light and perspective.

“[The bayou] is a special place. It has its own unique elements. It’s a harsh place to live in for any animal, but it also has its romantic flavors.”

— JAMES A. FINCH



TRAVEL TIP

THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG offers more than just inspiration for where to travel this summer. It also offers suggestions for what to do while there—eat! First up are gumbo or red beans with rice, followed by a plate of Tiana’s Famous Beignets.

SPINNING

Patrick Star broadcasts to his neighbors from a giant TV set-bedroom.

OUT

BY EVAN HENERSON

Spin-offs breathe new life into established franchises with fresh characters and original storylines.

To a certain extent, any decision to spin off from a successful animated franchise feels like a no-brainer. You have an established brand with characters, stories, and sensibilities that have proven popular with audiences, sometimes for years on end. With fans expecting new content, why *wouldn't* you shake things up by telling a longer story, adding new characters, or building a separate series around supporting characters from the same universe?

On the other hand, cynical viewers have been known to sneer at any attempt to capitalize on an established franchise. "Spin-offs kind of get a bad rap," says Steven Knudsen, a former Background Artist with the Netflix series *Big Mouth* who is now the Art Director of its spin-off, *Human Resources*. "Either it's too much the same as the original, so it feels like a bit of a cash grab, or it's too different and it doesn't feel like it should be connected."

Fresh approaches can lead to new characters and storylines that, if they prove popular, help energize an original show. Look no further than the TV universes generated out of one of Nickelodeon's most iconic franchises. In the prequel spin-off *Kamp Koral: SpongeBob's Under Years*, a 10-year-old SpongeBob SquarePants and his underseas pals get the CG treatment and head for summer camp, while the weirdness quotient is ratcheted up in *The Patrick Star Show*, in which a younger version of SpongeBob's best friend Patrick hosts his own freeform "TV show" from a television-turned-bedroom attached to his family home.

Co-Executive Producer Marc Ceccarelli points to Nobby and Narlene, breakout

characters created for *Kamp Koral*. Narlene has appeared on *SpongeBob SquarePants*, and "the cross-pollination has actually made the classic show more interesting and given the writers more tools to play with," he says. "Any new hook you can have to come up with new ideas, it's embraced, and it's great that Nickelodeon allows us to expand this universe and not have it be hermetically sealed. We can try new things with it."

Narrative structures, for example. The traditional structure of a show like *SpongeBob* has been jettisoned for *The Patrick Star Show*. Since the "show" of the title is the product of Patrick's off-beat brain, writers can mess with the format and play around with different styles of animation.

"The lid is off with that one," says Co-Executive Producer Vince Waller. "With [Patrick's show] being more of a variety show, the structure allows us to pivot quickly from one idea to the next. It's kind of liberating."

Then there's the possibilities for a new look. Although *Kamp Koral* isn't the first time that SpongeBob, Squidward, Patrick, and Co. have been rendered in CG, the notion of building a continuously running series in CG still filled Ceccarelli and Waller with "nothing but trepidation" because, as they noted, "we knew all the limits that were there." They worried they might get stuck trying to bring life to characters who often look like they're standing robotically and communicating with tiny mouth movements before they walk to a new place.

Instead, they got the opposite. In a CG show, the producers note, collaboration with the animation team is even closer than it is with traditional 2D board artists. The characters created out of polygons with voices coming out of them go through multiple iterations until they emerge beautifully rendered. "It's literally like opening a Christmas present," says Waller. "You just don't realize how in-depth the look is. Everything is so tactile and so beautiful."



Summertime at *Kamp Koral* includes underwater campfires, catching wild jellyfish, and swimming in Lake Yucky-muck.



The panda Po (above center) has not changed from film to TV (opposite, bottom).

OLD MEETS NEW

Familiarity and change are both on the menu for the latest TV spin-off of DreamWorks' *Kung Fu Panda* franchise. In the upcoming *Kung Fu Panda: The Dragon Knight* TV series, show creators expand the realm of 15th century China to introduce characters from different nations. Among them are weasels Klaus and Veruca Dumont and hero Po's quest partner, Wandering Blade, a knight who hails from England. Since Po's journey may ultimately take him far from home, the *Kung Fu Panda* team conducted new research, says series art director Ellen Jin.

"It was an excellent opportunity for us to go beyond China when it comes to character design," says Jin. "We could research other cultures and sort of focus on diversity, in terms of the architecture styles and

the costumes and weapons that come with characters from other countries. In that sense, we were expanding our world. It was really fun to go a little bit further than what we have seen before."

Although *The Dragon Knight* harkens back to the look of the original 2008 film in certain ways, the technology has evolved over the past 14 years in both TV and feature animation. Jin points to the advancements in lighting and the ability to do rendering much more quickly. But even with a new adventure and technology, the franchise's title warrior will not undergo any sort of a visual makeover. "Po hasn't changed at all," says Jin. "He might have a little backpack that he wears, but other than that, it's best to keep his look as original as possible."



Concept art shows the series' aesthetic affinity with the original *Kung Fu Panda* (opposite, top).



The new *Kung Fu Panda* series brought an opportunity to introduce characters from cultures beyond China including (from left) Wandering Blade (England), Rukhmini (India), and Klaus (England).





"I think we just left the door open for our artists to do whatever they want with neighborhoods and some of the apartments. They're pretty wild."

—Steven Knudsen

The look of *Big Mouth* (top left) is more grounded in reality, while the artists creating the settings for the creatures in *Human Resources* had the opportunity to design a weirder, wilder look.

Big Mouth and *Human Resources* images courtesy of Netflix.





GETTING FRESH

Over at Netflix, in an even edgier and adult-ier world, the Lovebugs and Hormone Monsters who have stirred up such trouble among the adolescents of *Big Mouth* turn their attention in *Human Resources* to grown-up issues like birth, death, adult relationships and everything in between. In addition, when they were in *Big Mouth*, the creatures operated in a human world focused on the Bridgeton Middle School kids. In *Human Resources*, the curtain is pulled back on the daily lives of the creatures, and we see these same characters on the job in their creature realm.

This realm, seen only once in season five of *Big Mouth*, has weird-looking streets and office buildings that appear to be melting. For *Human Resources*, “I think we just left the door open for our artists to do whatever they want with neighborhoods and some of the apartments,” says Knudsen. “They’re pretty wild.”

“We always felt that *Human Resources* didn’t feel like a spin-off. It felt like its own entity from the very beginning,” says series co-creator Jennifer Flackett, speaking at an FYC event for both series.

“I don’t think we had any fears like, ‘Oh no, what if we ruin *Big Mouth*?’ I think we only felt like it will be so fun and interesting to delve into all the different parts of life. That was the nice thing about it. It was *Big Mouth*, but it also wasn’t *Big Mouth*. So, we got to enjoy both things completely.”

In her preparation for joining the *Human Resources* team as an Assistant Director, Kelly Turnbull re-watched all the seasons of *Big Mouth*. In a career where she has worked on a number of first season shows, Turnbull found it both exciting and comforting to work on one with the “plug-and-play” of how style conventions are handled already in place.

“I’ve worked on shows where you get three episodes into it and they’re like, ‘We want eyelids to work differently than the eyelids did before,’ so everybody has to change all the eyelids in the last three episodes. There were little things like that that were kind of nice to have already taken care of,” says Turnbull. “And some of my favorite things to draw are monsters and body horror, and with *Human Resources* there was plenty of that.”

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Like most animation pros, Carl Greenblatt loved watching cartoons as a kid. Among his favorites? The classic Hanna-Barbera shows. So it was a dream come true when “Warner Bros. basically came to me and said, ‘We want you to develop something with the Hanna-Barbera library. Here’s all these characters. Figure out what you want to do,’” he says.

As the showrunner for the resulting series *Jellystone*, Greenblatt says his excitement was about more than “getting access to characters I grew up loving. [It was] having the freedom to interpret them in a way that felt personal and important to me.”

Jellystone is an ensemble show uniting numerous characters from the world of Hanna-Barbera. For some, like Yogi, Snagglepuss, and Huckleberry Hound, Greenblatt says it was “very clear on who they were and how they behaved.” For others, there was room for development. This played into the overall challenge, Greenblatt explains: “What do you keep and what do you say, I’m not trying to replicate the exact elements of those shows, I’m trying to replicate the heart of the shows.”

Another important aspect, he says, is that “you have to decide what’s funny to you now. What’s interesting to you now? What works as a character now?” A lot of this has to do with the humor. In the original cartoons, Greenblatt says, the humor was simple and not especially character driven. “It’s just situations, people running, silly things happen. To me a more modern version of that is to say, let’s see funny interactions with other characters and relationships and friendships. That for me was the most appealing aspect of *Jellystone*. Seeing all these characters living and working together and playing off of each other. There’s relationships and history and other things beyond Yogi’s trying to steal a picnic basket.”



Jellystone image courtesy of Warner Bros. Animation.



NEW OPPORTUNITIES

With credits including *Shrek 2*, *Madagascar*, and *Megamind*, Production Designer Ruben Hickman came to *The Bob's Burgers Movie* a professed fan of the original TV series, but he was also a newbie to the franchise. “When they first approached me, I said, ‘Are you sure you want me?’” he says. He had been doing CG for the past 16 years. He had done some 2D and traditional painting, but that was nearly two decades earlier. “But I have a deep love of 2D animation,” he says, “so it kind of just pulled me in.”

With a 102-minute story to tell instead of the traditional 22 minutes of a TV series episode, Hickman suspected he would have some room to play around. He was right. Phil Hayes, Art Director for both the series and the film, made certain of that. “It was more about the whole world, the locations, and the cinematography even—how do you use the camera in a bigger way?” says Hickman. “All these things Phil had wanted to try but did not have time to

The Bob's Burgers Movie images courtesy of 20th Century Studios.



do in the series. So he was excited at the opportunity to do that.”

While the Belcher family doesn’t leave their New Jersey seaside community, thanks to Hickman, Hayes, and the creative team, fans of the series will discover some unique settings in the film. Each of the three children gets a fantasy sequence, and viewers will also delight in Carneyopolis, home to the carnies of Wonder Wharf carnival. In constructing a secret room in Carneyopolis, the animation team went to town with a style that came to be known as carnival baroque.

“It’s sort of this cheap, terrifying version of rococo,” says Hickman. “We had a lot of fun with that. We were able to really draw from that so there’s a lot of cool design work and a lot of cool color and light work in those spaces.”

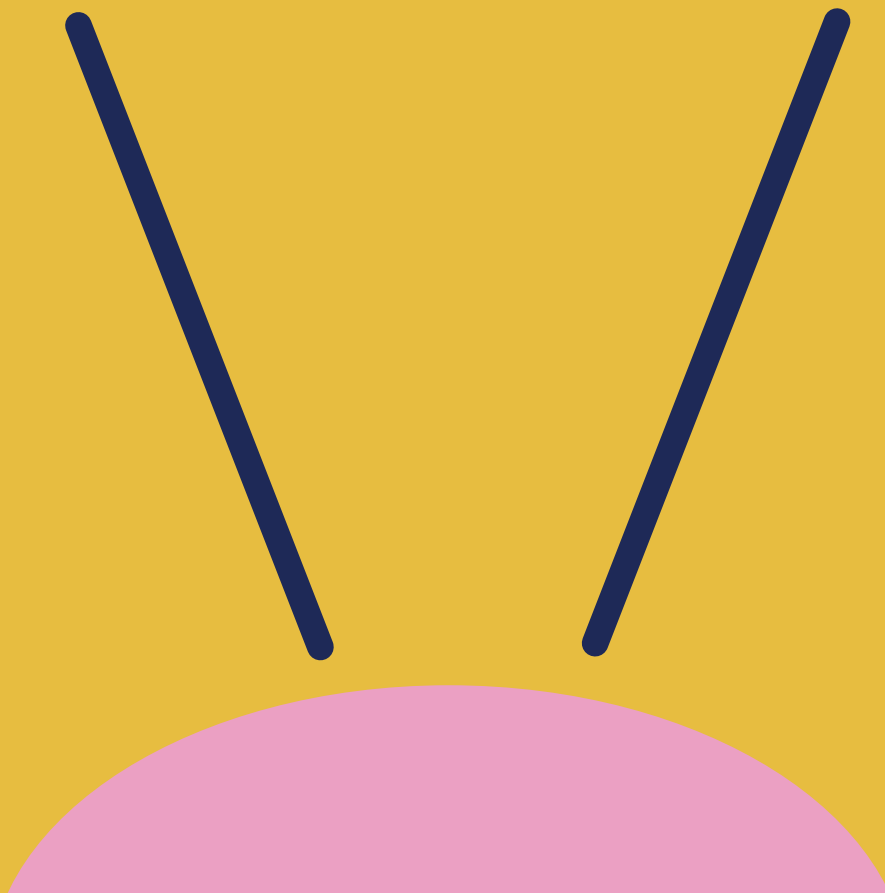
In seeking balance, Hickman says that they didn’t want to alter the style so much “that it didn’t have that iconic, immediately recognizable quality it has, but we wanted it to see if we could add, for lack of a better term, scope and scale.



We wanted to ... give it some theatrical cinematic experience. They also wanted to carry a lot of that back to the series, so that was interesting.”

Does that mean the film will leave a mark on the series? “There’s an ice cream machine in the series with teeth marks from an electric shark that was used in the movie. Those teeth marks will stay,” says Hickman. “I haven’t heard how or why. So, the answer is a big yes.” ☺

The Bob’s Burgers Movie characters look the same as they do in the series, but the overall design benefits from the cinematic scope a movie can provide.



NUMBERS GAMES

When it comes to understanding how streaming is analyzed, the only sure conclusion is that there are a lot of conclusions to be drawn.

By Kim Fay



When YouTube and Netflix “video-on-demand” arrived on the scene in the mid-2000s, streaming was entertainment’s new frontier. A quarter of a century later, major traditional players like Disney+ and HBO Max have cemented streaming as an established medium. But when it comes to measuring the success of streamed movies or TV shows with real numbers, that’s still a work in progress.

The historic standard bearer for TV ratings, Nielsen expanded their traditional system in 2014 to include some streaming data. But what worked to create a comprehensive analysis in the Golden Age of television has more than a few obstacles today.

In the past all you needed to know was the number of viewers, says Nielsen’s SVP of Product Strategy, Brian Fuhrer. The goals were black and white: ad revenue and syndication rights. And for feature films it was the box office. That has all changed with some streaming platforms measuring success by number of subscribers, some by ad revenue, some by hybrids of the two—with no way to measure all the numbers available because content is no longer delivered solely to television screens, and no way to truly compare numbers because streaming platforms’ internal analytics are proprietary. On top of these challenges, there is the issue of online activity related to a piece of content—another way to measure viewership.

While viewers—now in the form of subscribers—are still the brass ring, this is an equation in which “no one has all the variables,” says Fuhrer. Streaming may be fairly straightforward—“any content delivered through the internet ... or anything that is app-based,” he says—but the Hulu app on your TV is not the same as the Sling TV app on your iPhone, which is a closed environment, meaning you can’t put a meter on it the way you can on a television set.

In addition, that meter on a TV only gets you so far. “Traditionally we’ve worked closely with all the broadcasters because they’ve worked really hard to make sure everything was always measured,” says Fuhrer. “And all the technology was embedded [right in the television sets]. Now, with streamers, the relationship’s a little different ... they like to control the narrative.”

THE METRICS

“One of the things we try to be transparent about is what is included [in our metrics], and it is TV only. And U.S. only,” says Fuhrer. Nielsen measures TV viewing in more than 40,000 households. About half of these households are equipped with Nielsen’s Streaming Meter which captures streaming happening on television sets. (Laptops, cell phones, and other digital devices are not measured.)

Like the streaming platforms themselves, Nielsen measures minutes viewed and frequency of views, “but [the streaming platforms] don’t know the people,” says Fuhrer. “That’s what we bring to the table. Who is watching. What their age, gender, education are. Their location, race, ethnicity.”

Still, Nielsen crunches numbers, and “this is where it gets complicated,” Fuhrer says. “When we look at a program, we determine the average number of

people viewing throughout each minute of the program. Then we multiply that by the duration of the program, and it gives us the measurement in viewing minutes. The reason we do this is because content durations vary much more on streaming services versus programs on linear television. This equalizes dissimilar durations between the various content like movies, limited series, programs with 300+ episodes, and so on. We look at minutes to say, ‘Of the time people are spending on a streaming service, which programs are making up most of that time?’”

Nielsen has plans to expand its scope, and new companies are entering the marketplace with different ways to analyze viewing. Then there is a company like Parrot Analytics that measures “how much time in totality audiences are engaging with a show or a movie” beyond actually watching that show or movie on its streaming platform, says Renee Engelhardt,

Vice President of Partner Insights. Parrot measures what the company calls “the attention economy.” While this may sound like a slick marketing term, in fact it’s an important indicator of just how dramatically viewing has changed in the way that viewers interact with content.

Based on the premise that time is a finite resource, and that content creators are competing for the finite time of their viewers, Parrot measures the supply (a movie or series) and the demand for it (all of the activity surrounding the supply online). This measurement of demand includes:

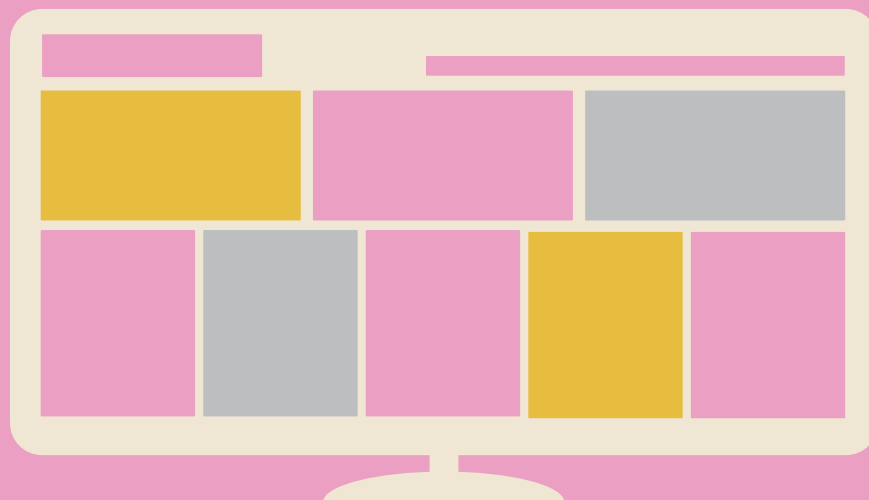
Tracking consumer research of Content X online. This may include Google searches, reading a Wikipedia page, and the like.

Views of trailers or related videos for Content X on sites such as YouTube and Dailymotion.

Social media activity and engaging in conversations about Content X.

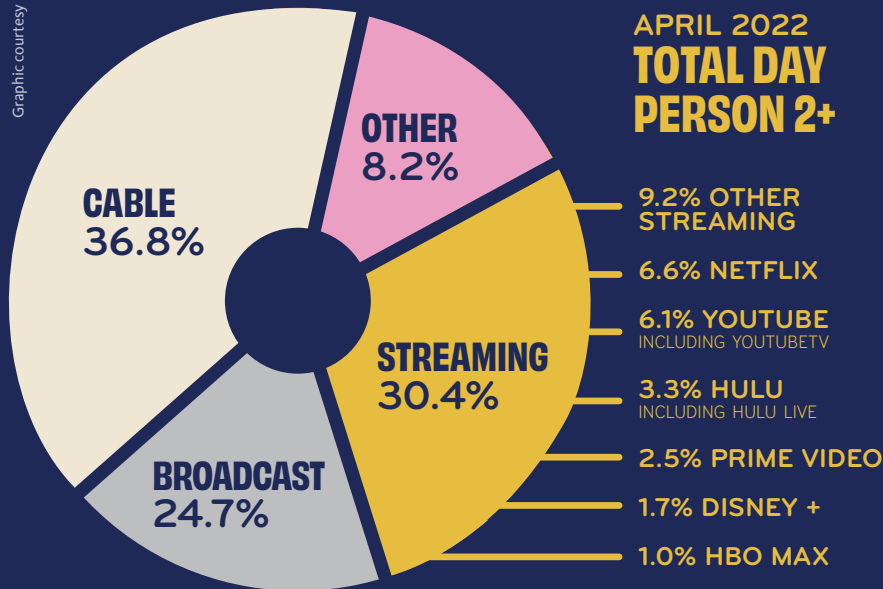
Viewing episodes of Content X on open-source P2P (AKA pirated) streaming.

“... content durations vary much more on streaming services versus programs on linear television.” — BRIAN FUHRER, NIELSEN SVP OF PRODUCT STRATEGY



This begs the question: Why does any of this activity matter?

Parrot calls the above activity “signals,” and the company applies a weight to each of the signals, based on the amount of effort it takes to express that signal. For example, “liking” a social media post requires far less effort than watching a trailer or other long-form content. The weighted signals are then aggregated to arrive at the final demand metric. This metric can be used to address numerous factors, such as determining the potential success of a show, how a show measures up in its market, and a show’s staying power.



IN THE WEEDS

In 2017, Nielsen released its first Subscription Video On-Demand (SVOD) ratings to the public. Then in mid-2021 it introduced The Gauge, a measurement of total TV viewing (broadcast, streaming, cable, etc.) derived from two separately weighted panels:

1. Data for linear sources (broadcast and cable) and usage classified as "other" comes from Nielsen's national TV panel as a whole.

2. Streaming data comes from a subset of TV households in Nielsen's national TV panel that are enabled with the Streaming Meter on their television sets.

For the month of April 2022 (see graphic), The Gauge reported that streaming made up 30.4% of all programs viewed on TV sets in Nielsen households. Cable made up 36.8%, broadcast 24.7%, and other 8.2%. Nielsen measures streaming video usage from any and all streaming video platforms. The Gauge graphic indicates streaming platforms that have surpassed the threshold of 1% share of total TV viewing. Streaming platforms that have not yet reached a 1% or higher share are included in streaming's "other" category.

We know how Nielsen gets its information. Meters attached to TVs. For Parrot, the company collects and analyzes the activities, interactions, and behaviors related to relevant content from over two billion people every day, gathering information from P2P media networks and relevant third-party social networks.

"Demand is calculated on a daily basis," says Engelhardt. "Even if a show isn't currently airing, we measure the demand for that show today, and how audiences are still engaging with that content. This then has multiple applications, for example, with licensing or acquisition strategies."

Another way the demand data is applied is for understanding the market landscape across streaming platforms. "Each platform, such as HBO Max or Netflix, knows the viewership of their shows that are on their platform," Engelhardt says. "But they don't really know how that viewership is performing in relation to shows on other platforms. We're able to provide a macro-level view of the market landscape, of how shows are performing across platforms. Our demand metric is platform-agnostic and market-specific. It's a single metric that we're able to apply consistently across all regions of the world. And because we look at it on a per capita basis, we're able to create an apples-to-apples comparison of how content is performing across different markets."

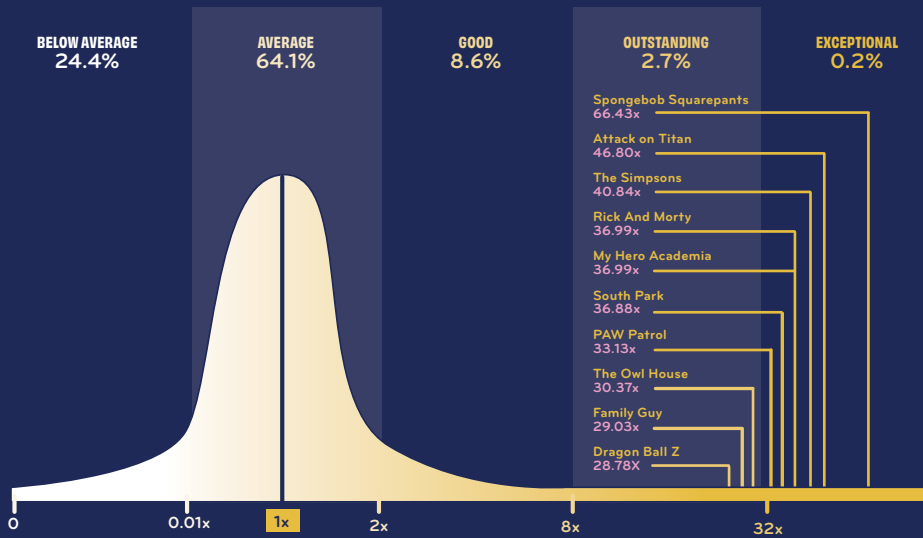
STAYING POWER

"What causes people to stay? Most people talk about the originals," says Fuhrer. "The originals are just a part of the puzzle. It's the acquired content that really keeps people around."

He explains that acquired content like *The Simpsons*—with more than 700 episodes—is more effective for retention than original content. "If somebody starts watching it, they tend to stick around and continue to watch it," he says.

Related to this is repeat viewing, an area where animation, and especially kids animation, excels. It has strong repeat viewing audiences, and repeat viewing heavily influences subscriber retention. "A kid will watch *Moana* an infinite number of times. If you think about it, it's very different than adult movies," Fuhrer says. "I'm not a child psychologist, I'm talking from a viewing perspective. It's very unique."

Top 10 animation shows demand, shown within the demand distribution of all TV shows in the U.S. in April 2022.



Difference from the demand of the average title in the market (1x)

THE SUCCESS FACTOR

When it comes to the question, what is a success, “there are a lot of different ways to answer,” says Fuhrer of Nielsen’s calculations. “One is total volume. I start off every week when I look at the top 10, and I say, okay, what programs were over a billion minutes viewed. That just gives a bit of a seat of the pants. If something’s over a billion minutes, it’s a big deal.”

This, of course, is an obvious determination, and there are always outliers. Noting how the sweet spot for streaming is nabbing the 18-24 audience, Fuhrer says: “My favorite example is when *The Crown* first released. I got the data back from *The Crown*, and I was like, wow, this is a really undesirable audience. Everybody that’s watched *The Crown* is over 55, you know. Then I thought for a second. If this program is reaching out to a completely new audience, isn’t that a success?”

Parrot produces a weekly and monthly ranking of TV shows demand across all

television platforms for the U.S. For the month of April of this year (see graphic), for example, *SpongeBob SquarePants* sat at the top with a number of 66.4x. “It’s no surprise that *SpongeBob* ranks at the top if you think about the ubiquity of all the *SpongeBob* videos and memes,” explains Engelhardt, “and the many more signals such as researching, P2P consumption, social signals, and so on, that audiences can engage with. These expressions of demand, weighted and aggregated, net the total demand for *SpongeBob*, which is then indexed against the average demand for all shows in the market to arrive at the demand score. *SpongeBob*’s score means that it is 66.4 times more in demand than the average show in the U.S. Pretty huge!”

In this particular analysis, shows fall into four buckets: Average, Good, Outstanding, Exceptional. A score of 66.4x is exceptional. This information can be used to measure a show’s performance and ranking relative to other shows, regardless of which platform or network the shows are available on.

INFLUENCING STRATEGIES

The hardest thing for creators is that they, for the most part, create from a place of love and excitement for their subjects. Streaming platforms, on the other hand, acquire and retain content based almost solely on numbers. No calculation is a sure thing, but these numbers determine their decisions. And even when there’s an exception to a rule, that information can be valuable.

It’s possible for content with a lot of demand to not have comparable viewership numbers. People are engaging with it online, but for some reason they’re not watching it. This lets a streaming platform “identify shows that are either being under-monetized or would be better suited for a different strategy,” says Engelhardt. Then there are the exceptions in the other direction. “*Squid Game* did zero advertising,” she says, “and it just blew up the scene.”

She notes that different shows require different strategies, from the way they’re recommended to the way they’re marketed and even to the way they’re released. To binge release, weekly release, or hybrid release—that is the question.

“If you have 20 episodes to release and you decide to do them weekly, what you’ll see in our demand metric are spikes at each new episode’s air date. Then you’ll start to see demand decay. If you have a binge release and you dump all the episodes at once, there’s a huge spike initially, and then it’s interesting,” says Engelhardt. “Does demand decay faster? Do shows stay relevant longer because new audiences can find them all at one time? If you’re ultimately trying to maximize the demand of your show, how do you do that, what’s the best strategy?”

“... data can only get you so far. At the end of the day, [creators] still have to create a good show. That’s where there’s the balance of the arts and the sciences.”

— RENEE ENGELHARDT, VICE PRESIDENT OF PARTNER INSIGHTS,
PARROT ANALYTICS

TO CREATE OR NOT CREATE

So where does this leave creators? How do you stay true to your art when you know it’s going to come up against the numbers game? Nielsen can tell a streaming platform what demographic of people is watching what kind of show, shaping platforms’ decisions about what to acquire. Parrot can leverage characteristics about a show or shows to further analyze demand trends. These characteristics can include the language, country of origin, keywords, themes, and other descriptive factors.

“Let’s say you have two different concepts, Concept A and Concept B,” says Engelhardt, “and you want to know which concept will perform better in the market. We can analyze the characteristics of each of the concepts and model the predicted demand, using the historical demand performance and our vast catalog of titles and their characteristics to inform which show is likely going to be a success.” (When asked for examples, Parrot responded that they cannot be publicly shared.)

Data is also used in a very basic supply-demand equation. Within their sprawling, comprehensive database, Parrot can look at the demand for each genre. “We can

see drama has a really high demand, for example, but it’s completely saturated,” says Engelhardt. “There are just so many drama shows out there. Or let’s say adult animation has a really high demand but a low supply. Platforms can use demand to identify whitespaces in their catalog or at the market level ... and focus their programming strategies on shows in that genre with a high demand and that will benefit their subscriber acquisition and retention strategies.”

In the end, of course, this all comes back to subscribers. How many new subscribers does a streaming platform have? How many subscribers is it retaining and adding?

And while this may make it seem as if originality is doomed, the bottom line, says Engelhardt, “is that data can only get you so far. Demand and other data points can inform what topics, what genres, what key words have been the most successful for certain types of content. But at the end of the day, [creators] still have to create a good show. That’s where there’s the balance of the arts and the sciences. As much as the sciences can help inform these content creators, then we pass the torch to them to create good content.” ☺

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

Fuhrer enjoys looking at the numbers and then going back and trying to determine what influenced them. He shares the example of a popular Selena biopic with a large viewership. “This program, it wasn’t a really well-known program, called *Mariposa of the Barrio*—suddenly it got tremendous [viewership].” He saw significant viewer overlap with the Selena biopic, and “the conjecture is that there was cross-promotion,” he says.

He notes that Netflix is becoming a kingmaker with its recommendation engine and Top 10 list, although that power base “isn’t what it once was when they commanded 99% of the viewing,” he says.

This is where Parrot comes in. “Netflix only knows what I watch on Netflix,” Engelhardt says. “Let’s say I only watch true crime [on that platform], but I love animation, and I love watching that on Paramount+. Netflix is likely going to recommend to me the true crime because it doesn’t have visibility into what else I’m watching. The way that we globally collect our data signals allows us to have that insight into demand and consumption behaviors across platforms. ... We can use demand on a title level to measure the performance of a show relative to other shows that might be on other platforms, as well as what other shows across platforms an audience has a high affinity for. Knowing the affinity of audiences to content across platforms allows platforms to make informed decisions about content acquisitions and even improve their own recommendation engines.”



Singer drew this dancing girl for the Mewlon Rouge scene.

FROM GLENDALE TO PARIS

**ANIMATION LEGEND BOB SINGER TAKES A TRIP
DOWN MEMORY LANE TO HIS WORK ON *GAY PURR-EE*.**



Celebrating its 60th anniversary, *Gay Purr-ee* tells the story of Mewsette, a farm cat who ventures from Provence to seek a more

glamorous life in Paris. When the movie was released, it was advertised as a new type of entertainment, a fully animated feature musical with real stars like Judy Garland providing the characters' voices—a novel concept at the time.

Now 94 and a true animation industry veteran, Bob Singer was brought on as one of the film's layout men. While the legendary Chuck Jones and his wife, Dorothy, collaborated on the story, Singer shares that "there was no script. Jones wrote [out] this whole feature as a storyboard—with pictures and dialogue

underneath the pictures." Singer says that when his team received the storyboards, they had to make changes as they went along. "We had to... reboard it for ourselves with dialogue and sound effects and all that to make it go into a production board."

"The film was made very quickly, in just a few months," Singer says. "Usually, an animated feature takes a lot longer than that." To speed up the process many layout men were hired, and each was given small segments to work on. The challenge for Singer was adapting his style to that of the movie. "One of the best of the layout men was named Vic Haboush. He did a lot of wonderful backgrounds and styling on the show." As the Art Director, Haboush's look set the tone and led the way for others working on the film.

Of the different segments he worked on, Singer remembers the scenes where

Mewsette escapes her evil captor and runs through the streets of Paris. Where did he find inspiration for creating Paris of the 1890s? Since this was pre-Internet days, he took himself off to the Brand Library in Glendale, using its large motion picture image archive for reference. He looked at French films set in that period so that his depictions would be as authentic as possible.

Working on the film was a joy, says Singer. One day, Judy Garland arrived at the studio, and there was great excitement. "She walked into my room, and I was introduced to her," he says. I was dumbfounded. I couldn't do anything but smile." He says it was a thrill to meet her and adds that everyone truly loved working on the film. They were all proud of the final product and especially what they had been able to accomplish in such a short time.

— Karen Briner

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A vibrant, multi-colored collage of various cartoon characters and styles, including Looney Tunes characters like Daffy Duck and Bugs Bunny, and other diverse characters. The text "SVA NYC" is prominently displayed in large, white, bold letters across the center of the collage.

