



behind,
beside,
and beyond
the animated image

of a
Shadow
Mouse

behind,
beside,
and beyond
the animated image





The artists exhibiting here are lecturers, teachers, and alumni of the Griffith Film School, Queensland College of Art. Their work displayed is produced in their time away from the animation class in order to experience the joy of hanging their art on a wall instead of viewing on the motion screen. The artists wish to express their gratitude for the support of Griffith Film School.

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INTRODUCTION

Dr Kay Kane

President of RQAS, Petrie Terrace Gallery

As President of the Royal Queensland Art Society (RQAS), the oldest art society in Queensland, it gives me great pleasure that we are hosting such an exhibition in our new Petrie Terrace Gallery. It is, in fact, doubly a pleasure as I am also a lecturer in Griffith Film School's (GFS) Animation Department.

Animation is, in the long perspective of history, a relatively new art form, but one that has already accumulated its own honourable and varied pedigree. Moreover, this form has become increasingly accessible to practitioners due to the rapid development of affordable technology. Indeed, contemporary animation techniques seem to present limitless possibilities for application and creation at more than one level of art practice. While we may think of animated features as traditionally distinct from other film productions, there is scarcely a single big-budget movie produced today that is not significantly, even predominantly, dependent on the skills of animators.

We at the RQAS therefore welcome this opportunity to engage with this exciting field by exhibiting works from the GFS's Animation Department.

When most of us watch an animated film, we generally have little idea about what goes into its creation from original concept to final product, nor of the person or people behind it. Animating is an extremely labour-intensive activity, meaning that most animated films today are collaborations of some kind. The distinctive 'signature' of a piece may therefore be the result of a unique blending or synthesis of many creative talents.

This exhibition, *Shadow of a Mouse*, sets out to expose the behind-the-scenes of this art form and to reveal the great variety of education, talent, skill, and creative inventiveness that is required to be an animator. The artists who have created the films here have generally worked collaboratively, but each continues to teach and work within their own personal art practice, which may or may not involve animation. The variety of their productions is on display in this exhibition.

The work varies from swift drawings and sketches made in situ of people and scenarios on the street to intensive studies of models executed in the life-drawing studio, to studies showing necessary translations from three-dimensional to two-dimensional images. '3D' computer-generated images stand alongside works achieved through more traditional drawing media. Animation has a long and continuing association with what I call 'hard core' drawing, which we here at the Petrie Terrace Gallery also value deeply. Thus, while the majority of artists represented here are animators, there is also work by non-animators, such as myself, who contribute to the skill sets of animation students in the department.

I am therefore immensely happy to commend this revealing and entertaining collection to the general public and to wish the exhibition every success in its season.

MICE AND ELEPHANTS

Dr Peter Moyes

Curator and Lecturer, Griffith Film School

Animation has never just been about animation. The cave wall sequential etchings of prehistory, of human in pursuit of beast, spears suspended mid-flight, were perhaps as much about ritual and social cohesion—a talisman for future success and group survival—as they were about ‘story’ and the illusion of life. Eadward Muybridge’s human and animal locomotion studies, the photographic origins of the moving image, are as much about zoology, physics, and anatomy, as they are about a travelling show and that legendary wager regarding the cadence of a horse’s trot. The thaumatrope, praxinoscope, zoetrope, etc. doubled as middle-class toys of enchantment as well as devices of inquiry into human perception; in offering a contemplative distance on the illusion of life, they were sometimes labelled “philosopher’s toys”.¹ Animation arose out of these inquiries and pursuits: the pointy bit, the tip of an iceberg, a mouse atop an elephant.

Evolving from the printed comic and the vaudeville stage, animation connects with slapstick via Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck; with the printed panel through motion comics, superheroes, and the “flash aesthetic”²; with live action via “Disney realism”,³ 3D features, and special effects; with the television sit-com through

The Simpsons and *Family Guy*; and with music through Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong,⁴ and Gorillaz.⁵ Animation draws on sculpture through claymation (think Aardman and *Gumby*) and on puppetry via Henry Sellick, Jiri Trnka, and George Pal. Design, illustration, painting, photography, fashion, architecture, and theatre—both east and west—are integrated into, and have empathies with, the animated image. No man is an island, no medium, nor no mouse.

In the independent sphere, where the personal is given free flight, there is ample evidence of animation as a means to, and expression of, something else. Godhead of all things animated, Norman McLaren was fascinated by movement, dance, abstraction, and music. His stylus was paint, pixilation, printed visual data, and hand-drawn sound. The animation was not the objective—not the drawings but the drawn movement (to paraphrase his famous quote)⁶—the research, not the outcome, was the key motivation. John and James Whitney used animation to explore mathematics, music, the numinous—all abstract principles for which animation was a viable method—which fortunately benefitted the evolution of computer graphics. Oskar Fischinger explored synaesthesia through his colour music

kompositions, studies, and poems; according to William Moritz, Fischinger's ruminations on music took him so far afield as to posit that the "inherent sound" of objects, if photographed on the soundtrack of analogue film, might be "released to speak".⁷ Fischinger's wax-slicing machine evidences an interest, shared with the surrealists, in the revelations of chance. Jan Svankmajer's celebrated animation oeuvre also results from a sustained interest in the surrealist project. His puppets, unsettling objects and juxtapositions evoke the unconscious, and childhood; they challenge certainties and the status quo. Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling's seminal visual music *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924) eventuated from a journey in the depiction of musical concepts that began with single-frame paintings and traversed horizontal scrolls to find full expression in consecutive images in time.

The accommodating nature of animation, its embrace of many techniques, goes some way towards accounting for the dexterity of its practitioners. Talented artists already working in the handmade, the drawn, the sutured, have extended their

inquires into movement and sound. Others, finding favour in a particular animation technique, have gone on to explore its possibilities more intently outside of the animated frame. Lotte Reiniger's famous silhouettes (populating the first feature-length animation) had their origins in the theatrical wings as Reiniger caricatured her actor friends with paper and scissor. Caroline Leaf has pursued painting and drawing "to explore complex pictorial structures that are not possible with images designed to move",⁸ since her wonderful animations in sand, paint and scratched celluloid. Works in rice, coffee, ink, puppet, person, pin-screen, and all manner of media and things, have both serviced the varied interests of animation practitioners and inspired the pursuit of tangential endeavours.

The mouse, a small creature, looms large in a history of animation; the computer mouse, another small thing, clicks away at the heart of all digital animation workflows. These ironies of scale are not lost on the animation enthusiast; often overlooked, however, are the many and varied pursuits undertaken in the shadow cast by these prominent meeces—a shadow that is not only lengthy but wide ...

wide and elephant-shaped. If the Disney mouse is acknowledged as the symbol of the animation industry, of big-business entertainment, and the computer mouse is appreciated as the ubiquitous tool of animators, teachers, and academics—meeting deadlines and ticking boxes—then what is of interest to this exhibition is the work that is undertaken unbidden, downtime, for love and not for money, which springs out from the shadows of capital 'A' animation.

*Shadow of a Mouse*⁹ brings to light artistry and expression that has until now been eclipsed by cartoon characters—the extroverted alter-egos of often shy and retiring animator personalities—or just kept in the dark for want of an occasion and deserved recognition. *Shadow of a Mouse* speaks to the creative artistry behind, beyond, inside, or beside the animated image. It presents the work of artists who happen to have an interest in animation, in its breadth of accommodations. The artists represented here work in ink, pencil, paint, porcelain, 3D software, digital ink and paint, and scissors and paper. Female identity is teased out via 'babes, broads, biddies' and 'beautiful useless women'. The eroticism of the nude amid the traditional landscape nudges work that pitches beauty against suffering in surreal gothic environments.

Autobiography features strongly in this exhibition—importantly, this forum provides opportunity for personal stories to be brought to light. Teapots reflect home and conceptions of self, interiors speak of the experience of migration and inner journeys, visual diaries explore the blurred distinctions between 'truth' and subjective experience. Sufi ideals fostering tolerance and respect meet political commentary, while Indonesian shadow puppets, superhero comics, Persian carpets, and the satirical cartoon form a backdrop to, and inspiration for, this breadth of conceptions. While these works may have informed or grown out of the animated image, they now stand alone as unique and holistic expressions contributing to the breadth of medium and styles reaching beyond animation and cartoon preconceptions.

Footnotes

- 1 Alan Cholodenko takes this label as a cue to declaring that "what is at stake in animation and in the thinking of it are not only matters putatively 'intrinsic' to Film Studies but bearing upon the whole history of ideas, including the history of thinking what life and movement are". Alan Cholodenko, ed., *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation* (Sydney: Power Publications/Australian Film Commission, 1991), 44.
- 2 In 2001, Ross Olson identified a number of aesthetic elements associated with animations created with Macromedia (now Adobe) Flash, including a 2-D style with heavy outlines. This aesthetic can be found in still-frame illustration, television commercials, and music videos. It is also reminiscent of the bold graphics of comics past and present. Ross Olson, "The Flash Aesthetic," *A List Apart*, 12 October 2001, <http://alistapart.com/article/flashaesthetic>.
- 3 Ellen Besen argues that in order to sustain audience interest across his feature-length films, Walt Disney sought believable performances based on the study of real movement. The cost of this pursuit was that "When he moved to realism, he also adopted, almost wholesale, the film language and performance standards of live-action film." Ellen Besen, "The Drive to Realism: From Disney to Harryhausen to Landreth—Part 1," *Animation World*, 14 August 2004, <http://www.awn.com/articles/drive-realism-disney-harryhausen-landreth-part-1>.
- 4 Cab Calloway and his orchestra provide the scores and feature in the live-action introductions to the Fleischer Studios's Betty Boop cartoons *Minnie the Moocher* (1932) and *The Old Man of the Mountain* (1933). Calloway sings "St. James Infirmary Blues" and voices Koko the Clown for Fleischer's *Snow White* (1933). Calloway's signature dance routine is rotoscoped for character performances in both *The Old Man of the Mountain* and *Snow White*. Louis Armstrong and his orchestra provide the live-action bookends to Fleischer's *I'll be Glad When You're Dead You Rascal You* (1933); in a climactic chase sequence, Armstrong's singing face is matted into the action in pursuit of Betty Boop and Koko the Clown.
- 5 Gorillaz is a contemporary music and visual project created by Jamie Hewlett and Damon Albarn featuring a virtual band of animated characters.
- 6 "Animation is not the art of drawings-that-move, but rather the art of movements-that-are-drawn" - Norman McLaren cited in Charles Solomon, ed., "Animation: Notes on a Definition," *The Art of the Animated Image* (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1987), 11.
- 7 William Moritz, "The Private World of Oskar Fischinger," 1988, Centre for Visual Music, <http://www.centerforvisualmusic.org/MoritzPrivateWorld.htm>.
- 8 Caroline Leaf, "Work Biography", http://www.carolineleaf.com/work_biography.php, accessed 5 September, 2013.
- 9 Acknowledgment should be made of other publications sharing this title: Donald Crafton examines the notion of performance as underlying the construction, execution, and reception of cartoons in *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-making in Animation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); J.B. Kaufman explores the many silent films leading up to *Steamboat Willie* (1928) in "The Shadow of the Mouse", *Film Comment* 28, no. 5 (September 1992): 68.



HADIEH AFSHANI

Finding one's real self may take a lifetime of experimentation through a variety of experiences and mediums. Parallels to this can be found in the creation of any work of art.

Reflection on self is something I have always found valuable and has produced, in my practice, something akin to a visual diary. My visually recorded stories are influenced by my position as a woman with an eastern-poetic view.

My recent work is focused on new experiences that reflect on immigration/transplantation and the subsequent absence/presence of people, places and emotions.

My work is based on this emotional journey that an immigrant takes—and one that I have experienced. This journey is not just from one place to another, but a journey of identity, of replacement, and the process of becoming familiar with, and a finding of one's self, in a new and



unknown place. I am particularly interested in the psychological elements of immigration—one may experience depression and a similar sense of loss as to that experienced during a period of war or the death of a loved one, or one may feel hopeful.

Since I have chosen to be a representational artist, I have had to undergo a rigorous journey myself—of learning all the fundamental skills of drawing and art-making. Over the years, I have worked under many skilful

teachers, and have practiced my own skills for many years. Today, I share my knowledge with students from a range of disciplines—from Animation to Games to Fine Art.



JOHN EYLEY

As a departure from a career grounded in animation production, the works here display my developing interest in illustration, caricature, and digital painting. With the present level of technology available to artists—in terms of hardware and software development—I find it satisfying to explore digital illustration processes.

While I may not be a skilled caricaturist, I enjoy the inventiveness of the process and find it illuminating to closely

research the physical (and psychological) characteristics of a subject. Caricature and animation are closely related in terms of process, by way of the artist having to choose to exaggerate notable physiological features or characteristics of movement, and immersion in the surreal.

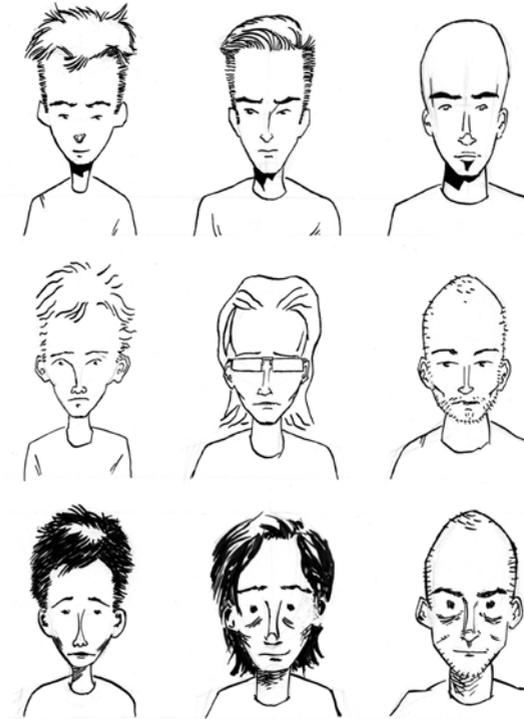
Animation (the 2D form as opposed to the 3D CGI kind), as a process, is a time-pit and requires hundreds or thousands of illustrations to constitute even a short film. To direct this energy



into a single image or even a handful of images of a graphic novel is a liberating experience.

A Matter of Perspective is a graphic novel that I began working on as a way of embracing another narrative form that is closely allied to animation. The graphic novel is essentially a highly stylised and corrupted animation storyboard. The narrative flow is similar to both media, in choosing story beats, but with the advantage of being more adventurous in reader

viewpoints (camera angles), panel sizes (camera position), and design layout (staging). So the tight visual language conventions that govern film or television screen dimensions are removed and in its place is the relative freedom of the illustrator's design tools.



DARREN FISHER

A lifelong doodler and writer, I began creating storylines of superheroes and heroines from an early age in imitation of the mainstream comics I read at the time. Recently, however, it is the autobiography genre that gives me the most satisfaction, both as a reader and as an author. I studied a Bachelor of Animation with the intention of learning how to tell a better story, going on to an Honours year focusing on sequential art, which has always been my preferred medium of

expression. I feel sequential art gives an author the flexibility to tell narratives that can resonate with a reader, while serving as a platform to showcase artistic and storytelling ability. I enjoy the challenge that this mode of storytelling brings; much like an animator, the sequential artist needs to be able to draw everything in life, from every angle. As a sequential artist I need to be able to convey the nuances of human behaviour, including emotion, humour, and



irony. I require the ability to control timing within a scene and the overall pacing of a narrative. I need to be able to choose the right words to complement each image, an inexact science that requires some amount of trial and error.

Artistic freedom goes hand in hand with a strong need for discipline. My inspirations are a motley mixture of cartoonists, painters, comic craftsmen, and contemporary digital artists. From some I take note of style, from

others I observe storytelling and fundamentals of composition. Typical scenes found within my studio work focus on the mundane interwoven with the fantastic, homages to past greats, and explorations into new modes of representation.

CAROLYN GARDINER

I collect teapots and I am particularly fascinated by the reflective quality of the silver teapot; the ability to contain my surroundings in the reflection. In the drawing *The Moment Before Midnight II*, the inside of my house is reflected or 'trapped' in the outside surface, with the house emerging from the teapot.

My work is often autobiographical, and while I sometimes appear in the reflective surfaces I depict, this drawing was produced during a time of grief, and my home is obscuring or 'protecting' my image.

My passion has always been for drawing. I believe that good drawing skills form the foundation of any art form. Working in different media is a way of expressing different ideas and concepts for me. I was lured by animation with its ability to use multiple images, sound, and time to convey a story—a single image seemed so simplistic. However, since returning to drawing after animating, I have relished devoting time to a single image. A single drawing may have such a powerful impact.





LOUISE HARVEY

I refer to my artwork as 'gothicka'. The term 'gothick' was coined in the eighteenth century, to describe an architectural style that was based on the gothic building style, but that was infused with the rococo and other picturesque art forms popular at the time. In a similar manner, I incorporate the gothic architectural style and infuse it with whatever artistic style or random historical elements I require to create the aesthetic I desire. This aesthetic positions

disparate objects and scenarios that deliberately attempt to generate a disquieting sense of the surreal. It frequently plays with the idea of the human experience as containing inevitable suffering and deference despite our efforts to avoid or deny these outcomes.

The tools of its construction exist in the virtual toolbox of highly sophisticated 3D modelling and animation software. The beauty of this medium is its ability to bring solidity and reality



to completely unreal imagery. Not only can this imagery be viewed in a two-dimensional printed form, it may also be explored as a virtual 3D space and be populated with animated characters and objects to heighten the illusion of reality even further. There are no limits: what could be more inspiring to an artist?



LEILA HONARI

Fourteen years ago, while in my home country of Iran, I designed and illustrated several Persian carpet images for my Bachelor of Arts project 'Seven Realms of Love'. These seven paintings tell a story of mortal birds looking for a leader.

The story is based on *The Conference of the Birds*, a poem by the great seventh-century Persian poet Attar, in which he expounded the stages in a Sufi's spiritual path allegorically. A group of mortal birds, led by

the Hoopoe bird, embark on a journey to find a phoenix (a symbol of God), and encounter obstacles and difficulties along their way. The stages that the birds travel through to reach their object of adoration are Quest, Love, Mysticism, Deliverance, Oneness, Bewilderment, and Poverty & Annihilation. Thirty birds eventually reach the Ghaf Mountain where they attain the essence of unity with the phoenix. Although they find the phoenix, it actually existed within them.



I am now undertaking a Research Higher Degree, for which I am revisiting the Seven Realms of Love project and will re-tell the story using animation.

In addition to the overarching story, this work is about women, love, and eternity. For the first time, I am free to portray and publicly exhibit the female form without limitation. While the political conditions in Iran required that I not reveal women's faces in my paintings, now, the women in my work proudly meet the gaze of the viewer. The

presence of the Hoopoe bird in the images symbolises women who seek deeper understanding of themselves by embarking on a journey of self-discovery.

While I will use some of the traditional designs and art practices that I used in my BA project in the new project, I will also apply some more contemporary techniques. The artwork will be created traditionally, using pencil, ink, and watercolour, and will then be digitised and animated using software such as Adobe Photoshop and After Effects.



KAY KANE

Being the principal life-drawing teacher for the Griffith Film School's Animation Department for the last seventeen years has inevitably been pivotal in the development of my work. My passion for drawing the human figure flourished through having to instruct animators and gamers, providing them with the necessary knowledge for successfully rendering the human form. The development of my doctoral work *The Restoration of Venus*, which explores the

erotic force of the female nude through imaginatively integrating multiple female figures in the landscape, was deeply enriched by my teaching into these disciplines. These paintings aimed at retrieving an idea of beauty largely eclipsed in contemporary art and allowed me to explore deep visual resonances between human and environmental forms. This honouring of tradition asserts the importance of disciplining the imagination through close observation and



faithful rendering, which has proved immensely valuable for improving the skills and quality of representation of generations of students in animation and games.



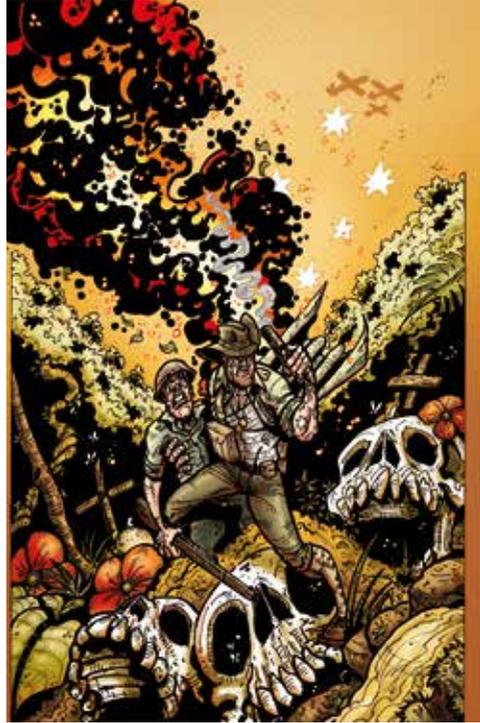
PAUL MASON

The assembly line method of producing comic books has nothing to do at all with the worth and value of the medium. Sequential art and film both run the gamut from the individual auteur to the collective communal effort. There may be questions about the artistic value and potential of monthly comic books but sequential art as a medium without any doubt deserves to be on the same level as all other art forms.

—Klaus Janson, 1998

For some reason, when I am required to write an artist's statement, my first inclination is to defend my chosen medium of comic-book drawing. Perhaps this

is because I feel some people may still be unfamiliar with it. But then again who didn't read the comic strips in newspapers as a child? Or comic books at home? Heck, *Phantom* comics were everywhere when I was a kid. Or, to go a little further, are the cave paintings on the walls from the earliest human beings not a crude example of sequential art, or "stories told with pictures"? Or the engravings on the tombs of the Pharaohs in Egypt? The Bayeux tapestry? Far smarter men, including Will Eisner and Scott McCloud, have written books about this, and I feel like I'm covering ground in a



battle that has already been fought, and in many respects, won. We see comic book art in art museums across the globe. We see comic books and graphic novels in book stores, online stores, and bestseller lists. *Maus* won a Pulitzer Prize. *Watchmen* won a Hugo Award—awards not traditionally reserved for comic books. We see comic-book art inspiring multi-billion-dollar films and franchises.

In Australia while this big picture stuff may be known, the work of the general day-to-day local comic-book artists and writers, from professionals to hobbyists, remains largely unknown. As comic-book scholar Kevin Patrick rightly puts it, comics are an “invisible

art”. Even comic-book readers here, the *Batman* and *Spider-man* devotees, will perhaps never pick up an Australian comic book. And yet, some of the best and hardworking artists and writers in the field are making inroads in the national and international scene. At a national level, it’s certainly a niche ‘cottage’ industry, and with US comics being owned by multinational entertainment conglomerates, such as Warner Brothers and Disney, who spread the ‘product’ across TV, animation, video games, and Hollywood films, Australian comics are indeed in the shadow of the mouse.

MARIANNA SHEK

Being fascinated by the liminal space between the realistic and the grotesque, my ceramic works always gravitate towards exaggerating the female form. I often find that women in sculptures have unreadable facial expressions. My female forms are not traditionally beautiful. Instead, they try to encapsulate a moment in my characters' lives. Sometimes this makes them a little self-knowing, as if they are cloyingly laughing at the audience, but mostly they are aimed to be cheerful and playful.

I draw inspiration from illustrators who posit different interpretations of the notion of the feminine, such as Audrey Kawasaki and James Jean. I create for the pleasure I receive from creating aesthetic beauty although there may be some aspects of haptic hedonism involved to compensate for my current art practice, which is mainly in the digital space.

My background in animation is essential to my ceramic practice as it provides a solid grounding



in technical life drawing and character design without which, exaggeration of forms would become poorly executed imitations without charm.

ANDI SPARK

I have always been crafty; a maker of marks, a fabricator of things, a synthesiser of stuff. To put myself through my first university degree I made things— heaps of things—to sell in shops, markets and galleries. One of the most memorable series was the 'miniature windows'— small vignettes made with cut and torn paper to represent an elysian scene, a tiny vignette of something beautiful seen through the portal of a window frame. Hanging within a real window, the light streaming

through the various thicknesses of paper created a perception of depth, and the negative/positive space of the cut-outs created a narrative image.

The cutting out and compiling process was painstaking, laborious and precise—similar to what my future as an animator would be—and the repetitive activity of creating numerous versions of the same thing, with slight variations, put me in good stead for the further thirty years associated with the animation world.



This current project is deeply focused on universal experiences of femaleness: the 'Babe', who represents the 'ideal' woman—innocence, ingenuousness, and unfettered sexiness; the 'Broad', who represents birth, motherhood, and adapted identity; and the 'Biddy', who is the crone—all knowledge and wrinkles.

Representing these states in the form of *wayang kulit* is a culmination of my past and present—an old school craft of paper-cutting and shadow play, combined with the high technology of digital-image making that contributes towards my current research project concerning the

representation of adult women in animation.

Kulit refers to the notion of skin or ghost, and *wayang* a type of theatre or shadow; both reference an essence of what it means to be a performative female.

The *wayang* performance commemorates important life cycle ceremonies or social events (weddings, births, funerals, and community, religious or national holidays), and the idea of storytelling using projected light, often from a campfire, represents the shamanistic nature of animation being able to speak universal truths.

Artists

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John Eyley
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Curator

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