Digitalis: Heart medicine for the mind

Emma Geliot

There is something special about moving image presented for the intimacy of online viewing. In the cinema or gallery there’s an emotional shared experience. But squinting over the computer screen, pupils dilating into your eyes, and your eyes only, it seems there’s a direct one-to-one conversation.

And the selected entries for the Animate OPEN. Digitalis exhibition have resulted in some surprising dialogue.

The call for works wasn’t restricted by theme, simply inviting submissions that were designed to embrace or challenge digital technologies. This made for a richly diverse selection of offerings. From Heaven and Hell to a sensuous leap, from stop-frame to 3D and rendering, in-tech, to-tech, gentle observation to full-on multidisciplinary; glass and glass; poetry and prose; sonic thrum to stretched cassette frame to 3D and 3D rendering; hi-tech, diverse selection of offerings. From Heaven digital technologies. This made for a richly diverse collection of submissions that were designed to embrace or challenge digital technologies, this made for an impressive collection of offerings.

There are some surprising dialogues.

Lilo, the Universe and Everything

The beginning of the world and subsequent universe, in various superimposed composition of image, poetry and narrative. In words without narrative. In words: 2D rendering Lilo deliberately subverts the potential perfection of that process, introducing a drawn element that matches the dream-like sequences and music.

The past, the future

A 15 minute animation of a cassette player, running on a stretched tape of organ music, doesn’t sound promising. But Josh Hardy’s Cassette Tape: Side A is strangely compelling as the animating tape counter rolls in real time. Background, domestic noises add to the sense that this is a real experience. Hand-drawn in loving monochromatric detail, it provides wonderful detail. (though not as stunningly as the previous film,

The Good, the Bad and the Digital

Now, one of the above works strays into this category too – both Lilo and Choi’s films feature music – but the weasyness isn’t welcome. Nor is it in AI, and AI’s 3D Analog Artwork Aloop loops, where guns and gendies spit harmlessly, gloomily, lone cars careen at a motor show, while a skeletal lip is shown by pink triangles. So far, this move away from computer game gore feels, however, for the squishmass and easily-upsettable, Kristian de Le Rona’s CUT is probably the most disturbing of all. At the time, un-reviewed before we watched, it’s just a line, it’s just a line! It carries out acts of extreme self-harm, a feeling of distaste at this dispassionate damage translates into the unpalatable question: Why?

And what does this Animate OPEN selection tell us about the current state of animation in a digital age? That the hand-drawn/hand-made is still alive and well, and that digital technologies can be exploited and subverted to make creative conversations. And that these conversations can happen online.

Digitalis: Ubiquitous?


Max Hattler

Max Hattler is a moving image artist. His films 1923 aka Heaven and 1925 aka Hell were selected for the Animate OPEN Digitalis exhibition, and won the Animate OPEN Audience Prize.

To write about the digital space as a site for animation in the 21st century is a bit like writing about the analogue space as a site for animation in the 19th century: it’s a no-brainer. Or is it? Today, the digital is dominant, it’s ubiquitous. Your dad is on Facebook, your mum is on eBay, and gaming is checking out UnderecoverLovers.com. Smartphones and social media are all-pervasive. Revolution might not be televised, but are tweeted instead – at least for now. When viewing art galleries, it is easy to forget which decade, or indeed which century we live in. In the twenty-first century contemporary art still revolves around painting and sculpture – formats that sell. Video art, whether analogue or digital, is twitching, half-alive, an in amongst the corner. Most art that truly embraces the digital undoubtedly remains confined to the fringes.

Digital technology has always played a pivotal role in my own artistic development. Getting my first computer in the early 1990s, I saw the technology mature as I myself was coming of age. Games such as ‘Grand Theft Auto’ and ‘Silent Hill’ were a first attraction, quickly complemented by RPGs with pornographic images purveyed on 3½-inch floppy disks with a nasty case of fit in my elder cousin. But soon, paint and animation programs, sound and music production packages started emerging on those dinky PCs. And it wasn’t before long I found myself opening pages on end trying to figure out these new arrivals. Soon, the computer had taken over as a tool from all other artistic pursuits, replacing pencil and brush, pen and paper, camera, violin, guitar and drum set. I was growing up a digital native.

We live in an increasingly digital age. It relates directly to my own artistic practice, rooted in the experience of growing up with computers and exploring different software packages – playing with them as if they were games – irrespective of medium. Sound, music, still and moving image - all media are interacted with through a series of similar interfaces and operations: cutting and slicing, copy-paste, layering, keystraining, algorithms and transformations, additions and multiplications. All media can be worked with simultaneously, equally, as they are essentially rendered to maths. There’s an almost spiritual quality to it, as all becomes zeroes and ones. Pure data.

The immaterial nature of the digital medium, namely the internet, is how I was more than ever for artists to promote and distribute their digital artworks. There’s an endless Euros vs. eyeballs debate going on about the merits of artists putting their work online, and artists I’m undecided. I am putting my work up until I’ve made up my mind. So far, this has helped me to generate new commissions, exhibitions and invitations. But then again, I need not sell online. Which brings us back to the gallery. After all, it’s the who like good old material objects.
Someone behind the door knocks at irregular intervals

James Lowne

James Lowne is an artist based in London. He completed a BA in Fine Art at Central Saint Martins in 2000. After this he focused on making music in solo projects and collaboratively with other musicians, recording and occasionally performing live. During this period he also continued drawing as his main artistic practice. He has worked commercially in post-production, learning about editing, computer animation and 3D modelling. James has exhibited drawings as well as animation and films in London.

Jury statement:
‘It is a film that directly addresses the strangeness of the digital – it defies the pursuit of shiny perfection, and revels in the failings of its own digitally crafted construction. It’s also beautifully, cinematically composed and engaging.’

* Jury Prize Winner

1923 aka Heaven and 1925 aka Hell

Max Hattler

Max Hattler was educated at Goldsmiths College and the Royal College of Art in London, graduating with an MA (RCA) in Animation in 2005. To date, he has made over 20 moving image works, the most well-known of which are Collision, Spin, Anamn, 1923 aka Heaven and 1925 aka Hell. His works have been shown at exhibitions and film festivals worldwide, winning awards at 700IS; Eksjo; KLIK; LIAF; SLIFF; Skepto; Videofestival Bochum; Videologia; the Visual Music Award, and others. Max is also active in the fields of audiovisual performance and has worked with a wide range of music acts including Basement Jaxx, Diplo, Jemapur, Jovanotti and The Egg. Max currently teaches animation at Goldsmiths, while working towards a Professional Doctorate in Fine Art at University of East London. He is represented by Partizan for commercial projects and Cimatics agency for audiovisual performances.

Jury statement:
‘It is a film that directly addresses the strangeness of the digital – it defies the pursuit of shiny perfection, and revels in the failings of its own digitally crafted construction. It’s also beautifully, cinematically composed and engaging.’

* Audience Prize Winner
Animate Projects

About

Animate Projects is the only agency in the UK dedicated to supporting experimental animation and advocating for the recognition of animation as an artform. We have an international reputation for the artistic quality of the work we support, and as the premier online resource of experimental animation.

We promote public engagement with art and creativity, we nurture the talents of cutting edge artists, we aim to educate, and to inspire discussion and appreciation of contemporary animation practice. The Animate Collection is a unique resource of films, background materials, artist interviews and writing.

Animate Projects is a space for creative risk, and where to encounter fresh narrative and aesthetic possibilities. A space for artists that explore new forms, tools and processes, creating spirited, radical art, and refreshing, extending and redefining animation.

If you are interested in our work, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please email us at info@animateprojects.org.

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Online

Our website is our primary exhibition space and has an international reputation as a place to encounter outstanding work by British artists.

It is a curated space, presenting artists’ work in an illuminating context, and is a unique and substantial educational resource, providing background and contextual materials that offer an insight into the creative processes and how artists work. We offer production materials such as storyboards, test footage, project updates, interviews with artists, and commissioned essays for our audience to enjoy.

animateprojects.org

Thanks

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A limited edition print of Sebastian Buerkner’s Digitalis is available to buy from animateprojects.org/shop

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The Jerwood Charitable Foundation is dedicated to imaginative and responsible revenue funding of the arts, supporting emerging artists to develop and grow at important stages in their careers. The Foundation works with artists across art forms, from dance and theatre to literature and music. It also supports and manages Jerwood Visual Arts; a year round contemporary gallery programme of awards, exhibitions and events at Jerwood Space which then tours nationally.

Digitalis

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