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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 squatting over the computer screen, pixels dancing 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 dialogues.

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 lemon with legs; from stop-frame to 3D and 3D rendering; hi-tech, lo-tech; gentle observation to full-on mutilation; gloss and grain; poetry and prose; sonic thrum to stretched cassette tape organ playing. It's all in the mix of this baker's dozen (well...11 and a diptych).

An Open exhibition is, by definition, not a curated selection, but in watching this selection with a view to try to assess what they might say about animation, they can be clustered into loose thematic bundles.

Dreams; memory; streams of consciousness; flights of fancy

Dreams - the subconscious and "what if?"s - are fertile ground for the animator. Edwin Rostron's Visions of the Invertebrate falls into the stream-of-consciousness camp. A deceptively simple line and colour animation, with a muted voiceover, it's like snatches of a dream. Noriko Okaku's Allegory of Mrs Triangle nods to Max Ernst and to Terry Gilliam's early Monty Python animations, on its strange and colourful story-less journey. Someone behind the door knocks at irregular intervals, by James Lowne conversely creates threads of narrative without words. In using 3D rendering Lowne 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 a stretched tape of organ music, doesn't sound promising. But Joe Hardy's Cassette Tape: Side A is strangely compelling as the animated tape counter rolls in real time. Background, domestic noises add to the sense that this is a real experience. Hand-drawn in loving monochromatic detail, it provokes wistfulness. David Theobold's Workers' Playtime, featuring the BBC tune used to galvanise the factory workforces of the 40s and 50s, rethinks the world of work.

Theobold has re-imagined those 1950s factory workers as a solitary robot, playing keepy-uppy with three balloons (keep an eye on the blue one).

Life, the Universe and Everything
The beginning of the World and subsequent events, is told in a perfect conjunction of image, poetry and music in Tony Comley's 'VERSE. And at the end of the world, a lemon with legs, half a cat and a short-lived onion are the survivors of Armageddon in Rob Munday's Teddy Goldblatt. Their increasingly bizarre story is narrated in a reassuring voice that is somewhere between Oliver Postgate and a 1970s public information film.

Max Hattler goes beyond the world with twin pieces, 1923 aka Heaven and 1925 aka Hell, using outsider artist Augustin Lesage's paintings A symbolic Composition of the Spiritual World,(1923 and 1925) as their starting point. However, the technically polished, mirror animations seem worlds away from the visionary artist's obsessively detailed paintings. On the small screen 1925 aka Hell seems to be more Dante's circles of Hell-ish, than 1923 aka Heaven is Heavenly, but a big screen might change this. Phil Coy's eleven seconds of paradise (2010) is a re-examination of the images thrown up in a web search of the term

'paradise', first explored in 2000. 275 images flash by at 25fps, creating a strange subliminal after burn.

Guns and Gore
Now, some of the above works stray into this category too - both Lowne and Okaku's films feature axes - but the weaponry isn't wielded. Nor is it in AL and AL's 3D Anaglyph Avatar loops, where guns and grenades spin harmlessly, glossily, like new cars at a motor show, while a skeletal biped is showered by pink triangles. So far, so miles away from computer game gore fests. However, for the squeamish and easily-upsettable, Kristian de la Riva's CUT is possibly the most disturbing of all. As the lone, line-drawn character (repeat while watching: 'it's just a line, it's just a line') carries out acts of extreme self-harm, a feeling of distress at this dispassionate damage translates into the unanswerable question: Why?

And what does this Animation 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? Ramblings of a self-confessed digital native

Max Hattler

To write about the digital space as a site for artistic production in the 21st century is a bit like writing about the analogue space as a site for artistic production 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 granny is checking out UndercoverLovers.com. Smartphones and social media are all-pervasive. Revolutions might not be televised, but are tweeted instead - at least for now. When visiting art galleries, it is easy to forget which decade, or indeed which century we live in. Most contemporary art still revolves around painting and sculpture - formats that sell. Video art, whether analogue or digital, is twitching, half-alive, on a monitor in the corner. Most art that truly embraces the digital largely 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 Great Giana Sisters and Leisure Suit Larry were a first attraction, quickly complemented by 8-bit soft pornographic images purveyed on 3½-inch floppy disks by a sweaty classmate

of my elder cousin. But soon, paint and animation programs, sound editing software and music production packages started arriving on those disks too. And it wasn't before long I found myself spending days 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.

Software tends to be based on analogue equivalents. Video editing software resembles a Steenbeck film editing table; paint packages emulate paints, brushes and paper types; music programs emulate analogue instruments, synths, and sequencers, and so on. But software is also always ordered by the logic of the code, and by the thinking of software developers whose medium is code. The computer itself, of course, doesn't distinguish between media. It processes and applies its calculations according to whatever it is being fed.

It is this underlying equality of media that excites me about making work in the 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, keyframing, effects and transitions, additions and multiplications. All media can be worked with simultaneously, equally, as they are essentially reduced to maths. There's an almost spiritual quality to it, as all becomes zeroes and ones. Pure data.

The immaterial nature of the digital realm, importantly, allows for endless nonlinear editing and experimentation without signal loss or cost implications. Digital, therefore, ultimately also contains an element of democratisation. I'm not sure if Marx would agree, but I think it is fair to say that through computing, access to the means of production has opened up. Almost anyone, at least in the so-called developed world, can buy a computer and find the software powerful enough to create moving image works, which previously would have required roomfuls of prohibitively expensive film stock, assistants and equipment. All hail to computers, then, as I am fairly certain that I would not have taken up film in Oskar Fischinger's time.

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.

Someone behind the door knocks at irregular intervals

James Lowne

(4'55", 2010)

Julia spends the day at the leisure centre where she slips into a sombre reverie. As her thoughts continue she becomes aware of the possibility that perhaps she never came here at all. Outside in the sun, the stillness changes the road, it's inherent notion of speed has dissipated, allowing the surface to be felt.

The film suggests ideas of non-activity and meditation, memory and perception. It explores the relationship between contemplation and the act of looking.

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 rendering. James has exhibited drawings as well as animation and film 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

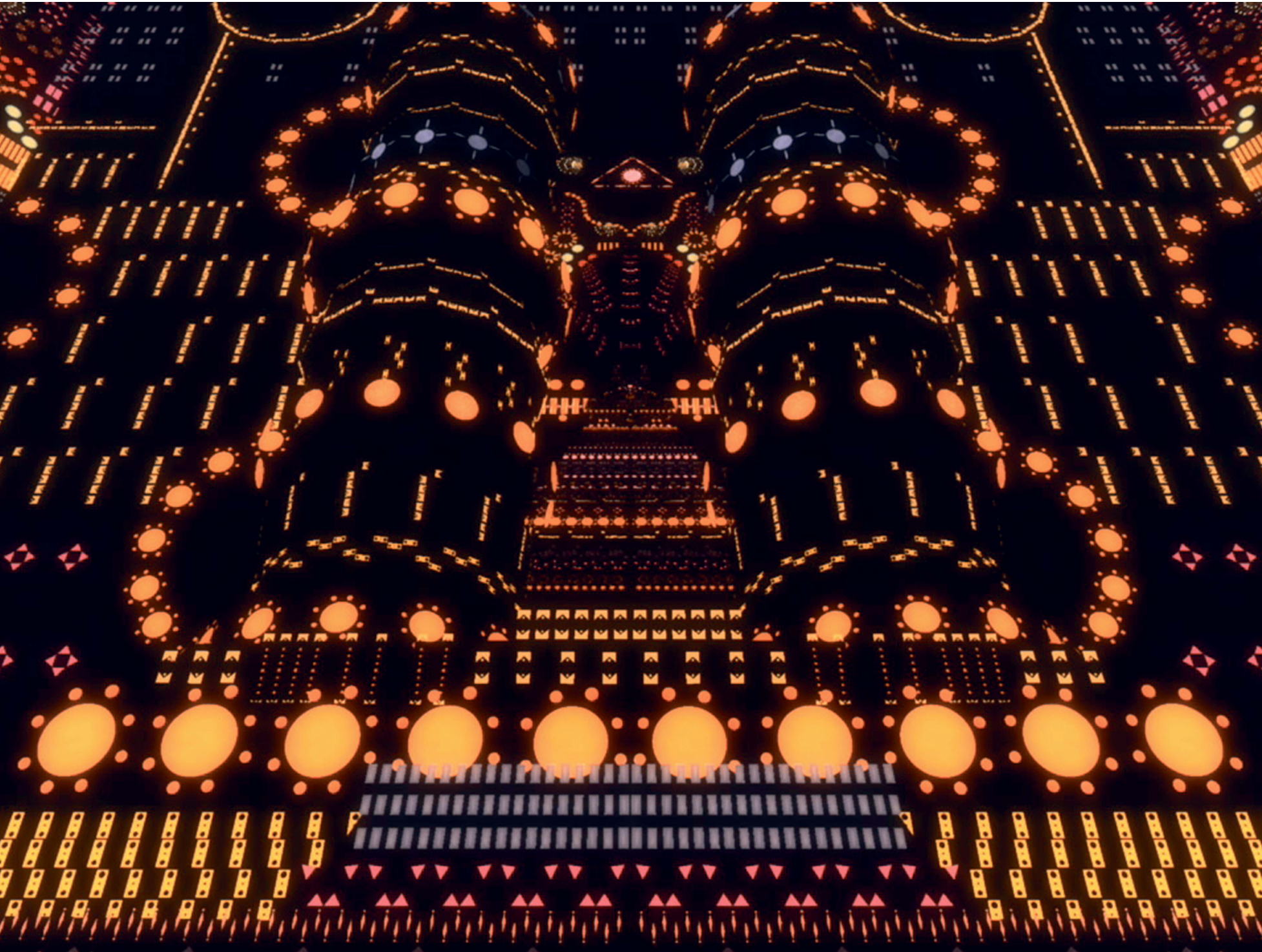
Max Hattler

(1'50", 2010) (1'36", 2010)

1923 aka Heaven and 1925 aka Hell are two animation loops directed by Max Hattler, inspired by the work of French outsider artist Augustin Lesage. The films are based on Lesage's paintings, A symbolic Composition of the Spiritual World, from 1923 and 1925. Both films were created during 5 days in February 2010 with student animators and CG artists at The Animation Workshop in Viborg, Denmark.

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, Aanaatt, 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; LSFF; moves; Skepto; SLIFF; Videofestival Bochum; Videologia; the Visual Music Award, and others. Max is also active in the field 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 studying towards a Professional Doctorate in Fine Art at University of East London. He is represented by Partizan for commercial projects and by Cimatics agency for audiovisual performances.

* 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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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.

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

Support

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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.

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