

Peruvian filmmaker at AGB

The Art Gallery of Bancroft is starting its 2017 Artist Talk Series with a focus on animation with artist, curator and filmmaker Madi Piller.

Madi Piller is a filmmaker and the tool she uses to create her work is animation. Growing up in Peru, she watched cartoons the same way Canadian children watched them on Saturday mornings in the '70s, by watching a lot of them. She remembers especially 'The Flintstones' and 'Rocky and Bullwinkle'.

'I had no idea what Bullwinkle was. He was an alien. It wasn't until I moved to Canada that I understood he was a moose. We had no moose in Peru. I liked animation, but I didn't want to be an animator. I wanted to be a filmmaker.'

Peru, for women who wanted to be filmmakers, was like many places in the world in the '80s. Piller said that then her dreams of becoming a filmmaker were not realistic. Women did not get behind the camera; their role in film was primarily in jobs like make-up and production assistants.

'I was never afraid of technology though, and not being able to get behind a camera only made me want to get behind a camera more.'

She studied communications hoping it would mean using cameras, but unfortunately it was all theory with no practical component to the courses. When she moved to work in Columbia, she started to shoot Super 8 film. And with the Super 8 she started to create simple stop animations. An example of stop animation would be to take photographs of someone standing at various points across the room. When you put all those shots together, it is as if the person is moving across the space. This was the inspiration for the beginnings of her work in animation. Animation gave her the control to create films 'she didn't have to worry about things like actors or location. With animation, she could create her own worlds.

When she moved to Canada, she worked directing commercials and editing and continued to experiment in Super 8. She joined and became active in TAIS. (Toronto Animated Image Society), one of Toronto's artist-run centres. This space and others like it gave her access to the equipment and a community. It was at TAIS that she was able to take workshops, master classes and attend artist talks by local and international animators and artists.

Piller had the opportunity to program animation screenings at TAIS and invited international artists to talk and exhibit their work. She has attended and curated work at numerous animation festivals internationally. She says that every festival has prominent artists with recognizable names, but what's exciting about animation is that it is 'always expanding with new schools, festivals, technology and talent.'

Animation is many things that include computer generated images, stop motion and 3D immersive like video games. But one thing Piller wants to make clear is that cartoon animation is a misnomer. She prefers to call it two dimensional (2D) character animation like you see in the Flintstones. This is where the animator creates a character and gives it a personality, a soul. Piller's work is not made up of created characters. She is driven to use real images 'images she can develop from photographs and film. For example, Piller uses rotoscoping, a technique where the image in a photo or film is traced and manipulated to become animated. She enjoys bouncing from one medium to the other as illustrated in the work she will be showing at Saturday's artist talk.

Her Untitled Series is about the filmmaking process with time lapse photography as well as animated pieces of paper that were shot on 70 millimetre film and then shot again on 16 millimetre film. She also used a technique called solarization where the film is exposed to light while being processed.

The film Toro Bravo started from a Super 8 film of a bullfight that was shot by her father in the '70s in Peru. She roto-scoped the bull and the matador and left out the scenery. 'I abstracted the images from their environment and constructed an environment the way I wanted to see it. The film is not really about bullfighting but more about the violence and bloodshed that we live with in our lives.'

Vive Le Film is about the survival of film itself as a medium. She found a bad digital copy of an old Super 8 Film of her father's. She printed out the film frame by frame on paper and shot the printed images on film. She created a film from the remains of what was once a film.

Piller is excited about screening and talking about her work at the first Artist Talk of the 2017 series. That weekend at the gallery promises to be a busy one with Saturday's artist talk which is free and open to the public and Sunday's workshop with artist Laura Culic whose work is currently on exhibit in the gallery in the solo show 'Invocation.' For more information on gallery events call 613-332-1542 and for information about Laura Culic's and other workshops, please contact Ingrid Monteith at 613-334-6965.

Submitted by Roy Mitchell