

Myriam Thyès' answers (2007) to the questions of Prof. Paul Wells, Director of the Animation Academy at Loughborough University, UK, for the book 'Re-Imaging Animation', published in 2008

How did the 'Flag Metamorphoses' project come about, and what did you want to achieve by using flags as a particular visual stimulus ?

For the last 15 years, my themes deal with symbols, myths and visual signs from architecture, politics, films, or religions. My works are explorations of their meanings, a questioning, reassessments, "destabilisations" and creations of new associations. In order to undermine entrenched representations, I work directly with them, to develop them further, transform them and juxtapose them against new representations. I use animation, abstraction, collage and found footage (video stills) to present critical views of the current political, (psycho-) social, cultural and religious systems. I reconsider abstraction and graphical aesthetics as a means of critique in our over-saturated media culture, proposing that simplicity and imagination can still move us. Flags have become again very significant during the last years - in politics, propaganda, new nationalisms, liberation wars, sports, and fashion. On the other hand, flags received new meanings and became signs of hope or nostalgia / homesickness for the increasing number of global migrants. In 1996 and 1997 I've been working with flags as installations in public areas: I created and painted new designs/symbols on flags and hang them beside / between official flags. In the last four years, I started working again with themes I had used before in painting, drawing and photo assemblies, but this time with animation and digital imagery.

Why did you want to make this a collaborative project, and how did you approach other artists to take part ?

Thanks to the internet, I got the idea and possibility to open the flag animation project to other artists, and so it started growing... Flag Metamorphoses lays stress on the relations between nations as changing ones: Only in the permanent re-creation of values, symbols and ways of life, in mixing with others and differing from others, identities, cultures and societies stay alive. This is one more reason to gather as many individual and international points of view about flags as possible. I approach artists, designers and who ever is interested in contributing to Flag Metamorphoses, through mailing lists, websites, personal invitations, lectures, workshops, presentations of the project in exhibitions and festivals, and every possible way.

Why did you decide to use animation in this project, and what do you feel animation as a language contributes to the creation of art works ?

Animation is a wonderful and perfect way to express transformations and re-creations. The abstract and graphical language of Flash fits with flags and other symbols. When working with flash, I can look at the result immediately (no need to render a lot) and make changes quickly - this resembles drawing or painting or other direct techniques.

Many people still view 'animation' as an innocent medium, or a medium which doesn't support 'art'. What are your responses to these views ?

Some people may think animation doesn't support art, because they only know the commercial use of it, mainly 3D animation, figurative, imitating realistic movements and so on. But already the commercial Japanese anime feature films contain a lot of artistic imagination.

In your own address and metamorphosis of flags, what artistic and political issues did you want to address ?

See: www.flag-metamorphoses.net

About the formal solution of the flag animations: What I have in mind, is generally "one changing image", not a "film" with scenes and cuts: I prefer morphs and transformations, a scene that develops by metamorphoses and replacements of objects and shapes, in order to avoid the change of the complete image at once.

Who has influenced your work? Are there any particular animation artists or directors that you particularly admire?

As I'm a visual artist, it was mainly art and not film or animation which inspired me most - though early experimental films might have had an influence on me as well. But the artistic periods from which I learnt most, might lead directly to animation:

- Russian constructivism (Malevitch, Ljubov Popova,...).
- DADA (collage technique, political satire, Hanna Höch, Francis Picabia, ...)
- Bauhaus and Zürcher Konkrete (Sophie Täuber-Arp, Verena Löwensberg,...)

Directors: I like Pedro Almodovar, among other qualities for his photography/image composition/colours, and for his deep humour. Experimental / rhythmical films: Maya Deren. Animations by Nina Paley, NY. Animes, like Hayao Miyazaki's movie Spirited Away.

What would you say is 'cutting edge' work in animation at this time? Can you give some reasons why you believe this to be so.

For me, many animations I have seen in festivals, cinemas or websites are special and astonishing, especially if they are not merely 3D computer animations and don't try to imitate real life and film camera movements, but show different aesthetics and unusual ways of narrating. I also like mixtures between video and animation. I admire films like "Ants" or "Shrek" as intelligent entertainment, but visually it is not what I'm looking for when it comes to new experiences in animation. I think there is much more to explore and there are many undiscovered possibilities in animation.