

The European Archive of Short Animation

Film EU RIT Pilot 1



Chromophobia (1965) Raoul Servais, Belgium

Summary

(Not an archive!)

- The purpose of this project is to produce a report on the potential and challenges of creating a research database that records relevant sources for short animated films in selected European countries, taking Belgium, Ireland, and Portugal as exemplars.

Aims

- To understand and map the resources needed for the creation of a relational database containing information on European short animated films as a resource for theoretical and artistic research.
- That such a resource does not exist in an open and accessible format is a bar to basic research in key areas of animated film practice and artistic research, as well as for studies in the history and significance of animated media.

Project Elements

1. Survey of extant archives and places where material is held in each country

2. Survey of funding sources for short animated film in each country

3. Assembling a bibliography of extant sources for animation research in each country

4. Collecting a broadly representative sample database of short animation

5. Creation of a sample searchable relational database with a small sampling from the database

6. Report on our findings

Rationales

Animation is integral to European cinematic culture.

It comprises several impactful global creative industries

It developed side-by-side with live action cinema

European animation does not enjoy the same scholarly attention devoted to other cinematic forms

Often still perceived as a children's medium, obscuring its challenging, mature, and complex thematics and subjects

These conditions are particularly acute in short form animation

Short form animation is the crucible of professional development

Conditions of production and a dearth of sources make short form animation difficult to research

Research in short form animation will offer fresh perspectives and opportunities for assessing themes and practices in national cinema and related creative disciplines

Existing Records and Collections

a wide range of useful
material is available to
researchers

but it is scattered
among various
institutions and
agencies, each with
their own priorities

there are
inconsistencies in the
types of data recorded;
records are partial and
inconsistent

access to material is not
secure; it may change
as online content within
organisations is
refreshed and edited

physical archives are
frequently subject to
restricted access, even
in publicly funded
collections

short animation is often
incorporated into
general collections, in
different ways in each
organisation

Existing Records and Collections

- Portugal
Casa de Animação / Animateca Collection
Instituto de Cinema e Audiovisual
RTP Portuguese Radio and Television archive
- Belgium
Royal Film Archive – Cinematek (films funded by one of the country's agencies are required to be submitted for archiving)
- Ireland
Screen Ireland films funded here are required to be submitted for archiving)
Northern Ireland Screen Digital Film Archive
The Arts Council
Irish Film Institute
Radio Télevis Eireann (RTE)

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Funding Short Animation

- In Belgium, short-form animation is sponsored by regional Film Funds, from the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders, the French-speaking region of Wallonia, and Brussels.
- In Ireland, The Frameworks scheme, co-funded by Screen Ireland and RTE, has been the most influential funder by some distance, and deserves further study in itself as an incubator for the Irish animation sector.
- In Portugal, the Portuguese Short Film Agency and the Portuguese Film Fund support this work.
- Each country also has a patchwork of private grants, artist's residencies and festival prizes that fund short animation; this is a changing and variable landscape.

Creating a Database

- We tested our assumptions about the usefulness of a central database by assembling a small proof-of-concept sample, prioritising the concerns of scholarly and artistic researchers.
- Team members from each of the three countries gathered information on a range of short animated films from extant resources.
- Undertaking this task allowed us to determine shared conditions and categories that would streamline research activity and create common ground for collaboration among colleagues from differing countries.

Creating a Database

We chose 40 films from each country for an initial sample of 120

These were assembled in a pre-alpha test database

Categories chosen for search functions were limited for consistency of information and ease of testing

Additional information may be added via tags, which can also be searched

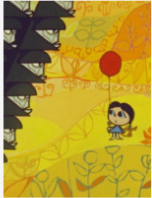
Categories
can
be combined
for directed
searches

The image shows a search interface with several filter categories, each with a dropdown menu:

- Director(s):** Any, Abi Feijó, Adrien Merigeau, Aidan Hickey, Aisling Connolly
- Director's gender:** Any, Unknown, Female, Male, Non-binary
- Production house(s):** Any, Absolon Films, Aidan Hickey, AIM-Estúdios de Animação, Ambianco
- Release year:** From: Any, To: Any
- Duration:** From: Any, To: Any
- Country of production:** Any, Belgium, Canada, France, Ireland
- Language(s):** Any, Dutch, English, French, Irish

**Director: Director's Gender: Production House:
Release Year: Duration:
Country of Production: Languages**

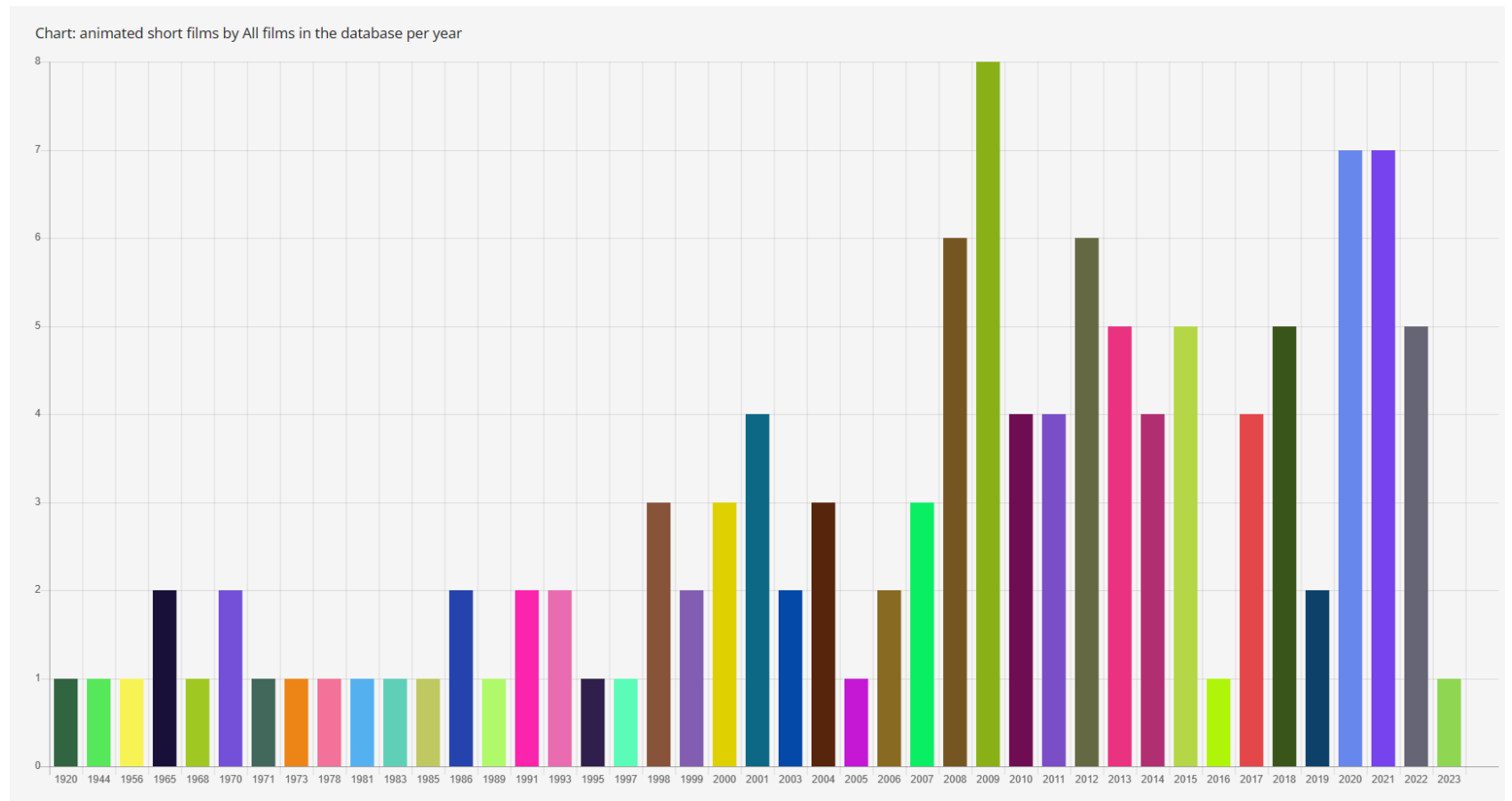
Categories

Title	Release year	Alt. Title	Director(s)	Country(ies)	Language(s)	Production house(s)	Tag(s)
 An Inside Job	1986		Aidan Hickey	Ireland	English	Aidan Hickey	Annecy Animated Film Festival France Cut out
 Chromophobia	1965		Raoul Servais	Belgium	Silent / No dialogs	Ministerie van Nationale Opvoeding en Kultuur	(Germany) Internationale Kurzfilmtage Leipzig (Israel)(Israel) Ramat 'Gan International Film Festival (Russia) International Film Festival - Moscow 2D 2D Cel animation 35mm Anti fascism Anti-war Bilbao (Spain) - International Film Festival Diversity Political commentary Tehran (Iran) - International Film Festival Venice (Italy) - International Film Festival

We provided the option to include:

- a still image for each film
- a link to watch it online (should one exist)
- tags allow adding information such as prizes, festivals, media, etc.

A simple
query shows
results with
research
potential



A bar graph of short animation production by year across the three countries shows an overall increase since 1998, roughly aligning with advancements in digital technologies such as Multimedia Flash software (1996) and increasingly sophisticated graphics tools such as the Wacom tablet and pen.

There are also significant spikes in 2008/09 and 2020/21, the latter aligning with Covid-19 pandemic.

A simple tool for research criteria

Playlist: animated short films by Gender(s): Female.

Only films with direct links are listed below.

Jeux de mains
Tagada et fugue
Cuilin Dualach
História Trágica com Final Feliz
Bully Beef
The Polish Language
Oh Willy
Heir to the evangelical revival
The Tie
The Bird and the whale



As another use case for such database, it is possible to generate a playlist with films corresponding to a set of selected criteria. All films with a provided external link to a platform such as YouTube or Vimeo can be shown or be exported, and it can provide a useful resource for educators who wish to curate films by specific themes. This image shows a playlist of all films directed by women.

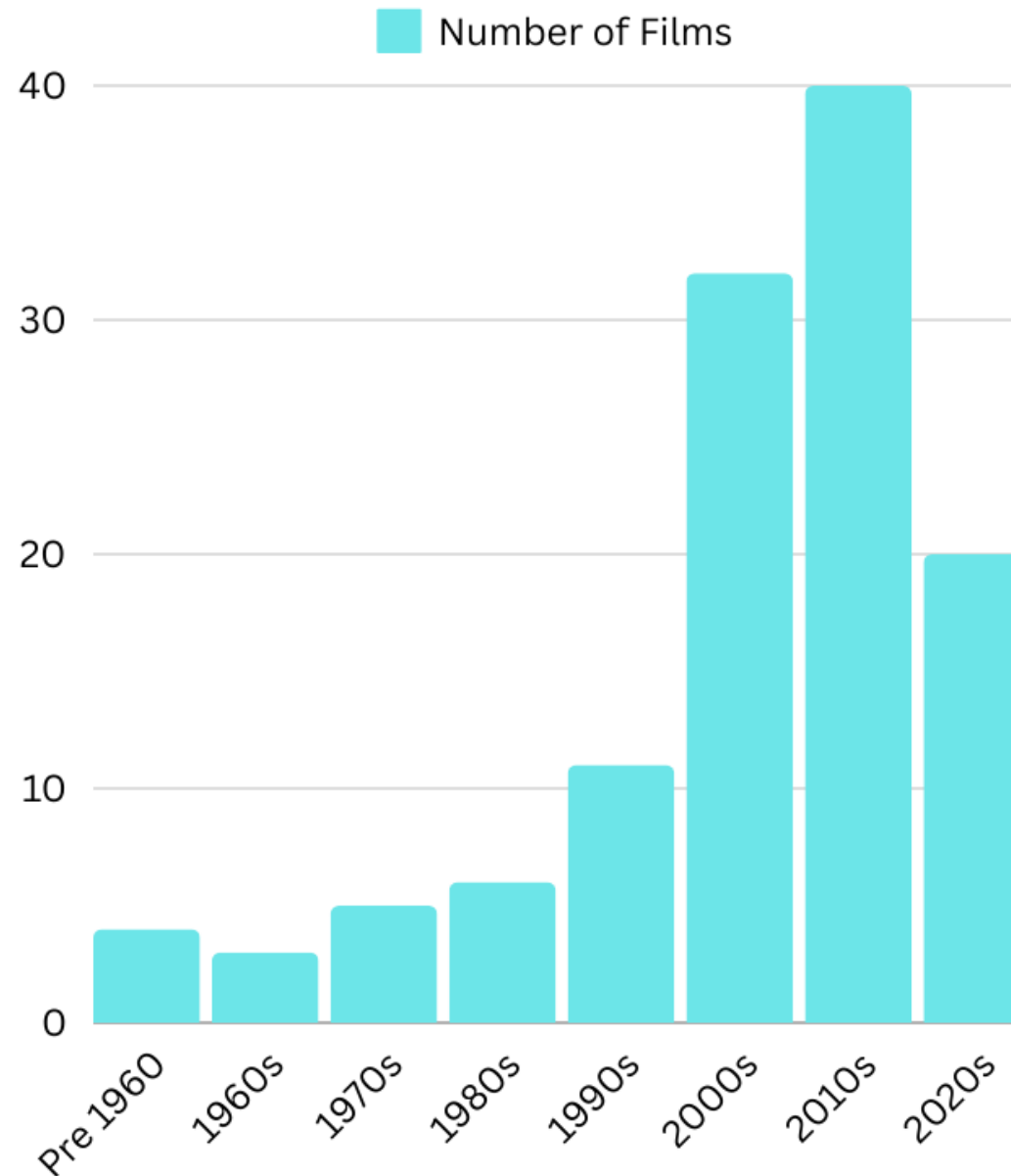
Open source technologies available as a resource to researchers

- The proof of concept database was created as a website using standard, free and open web technologies and languages such as HTML PHP, CSS, JavaScript and MariaDB, and its code is open and publicly hosted on GitHub under the GNU General Public License.
- In order to create an usable system without a large team with specialized technical skills that such a project would normally require, the code for the website was created with the aid of ChatGPT, where the quickly generated code suggestions were modified for the specific goals of the project.

Researcher Use Case: Eilís Nolan

The graph on the right breaks down the films in the database according to the year of production.

What conclusions can we draw from this?



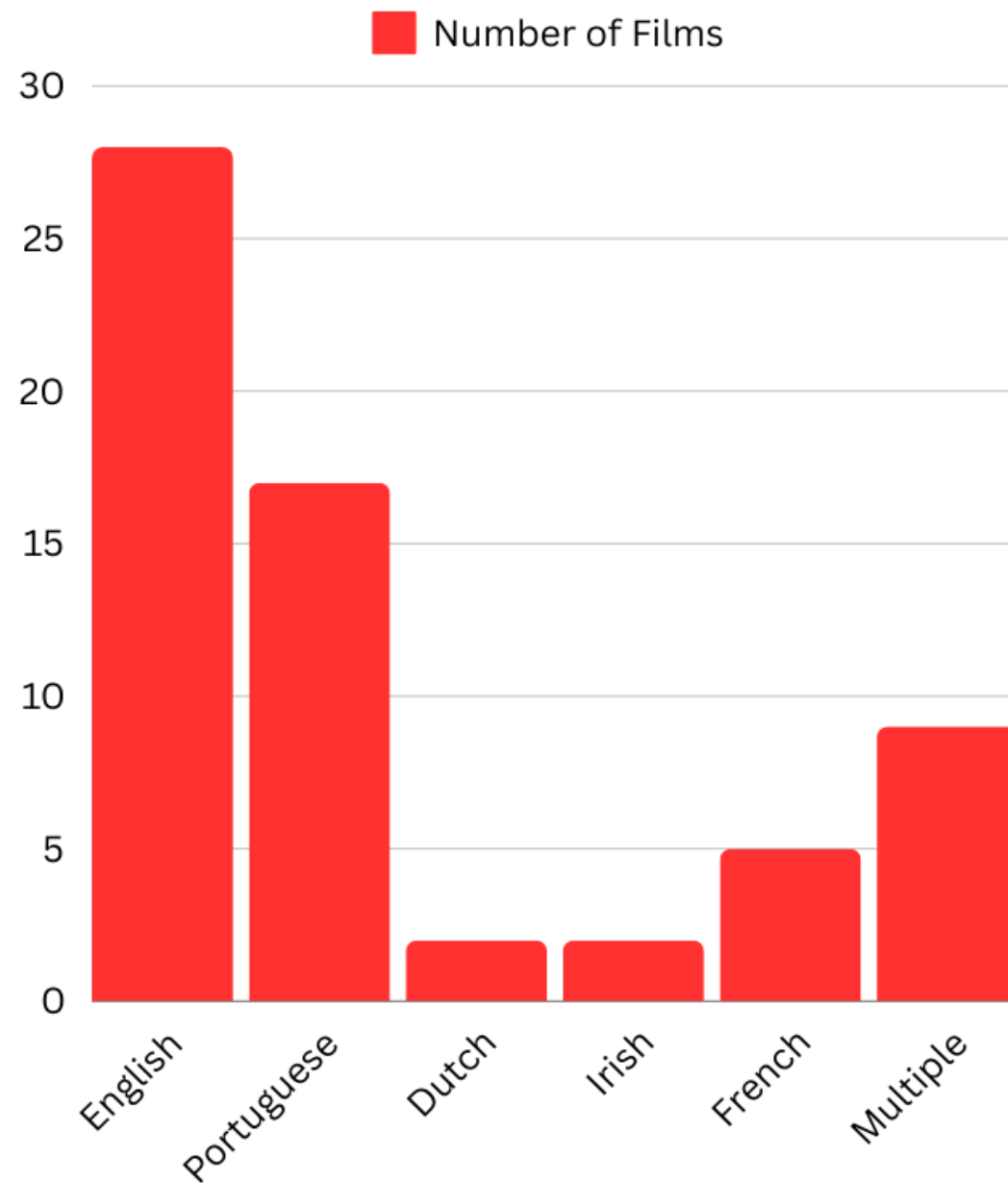
The graph on the right breaks down the films in the database according to the year of production.

What conclusions can we draw from this?

- There is an uptick in films produced in the 2000s, coinciding both with the expansion of animation programmes and the wider availability of animation software, such as Flash (now Adobe Animate)
- One can predict an uptick in films produced during the 2020s again, showing that the pandemic did not cause a decrease in short film production—and may have caused an increase.
- Due to limitations in archival research and not being digitised, otherwise noteworthy animated films of the 20th century may be missing from this database.

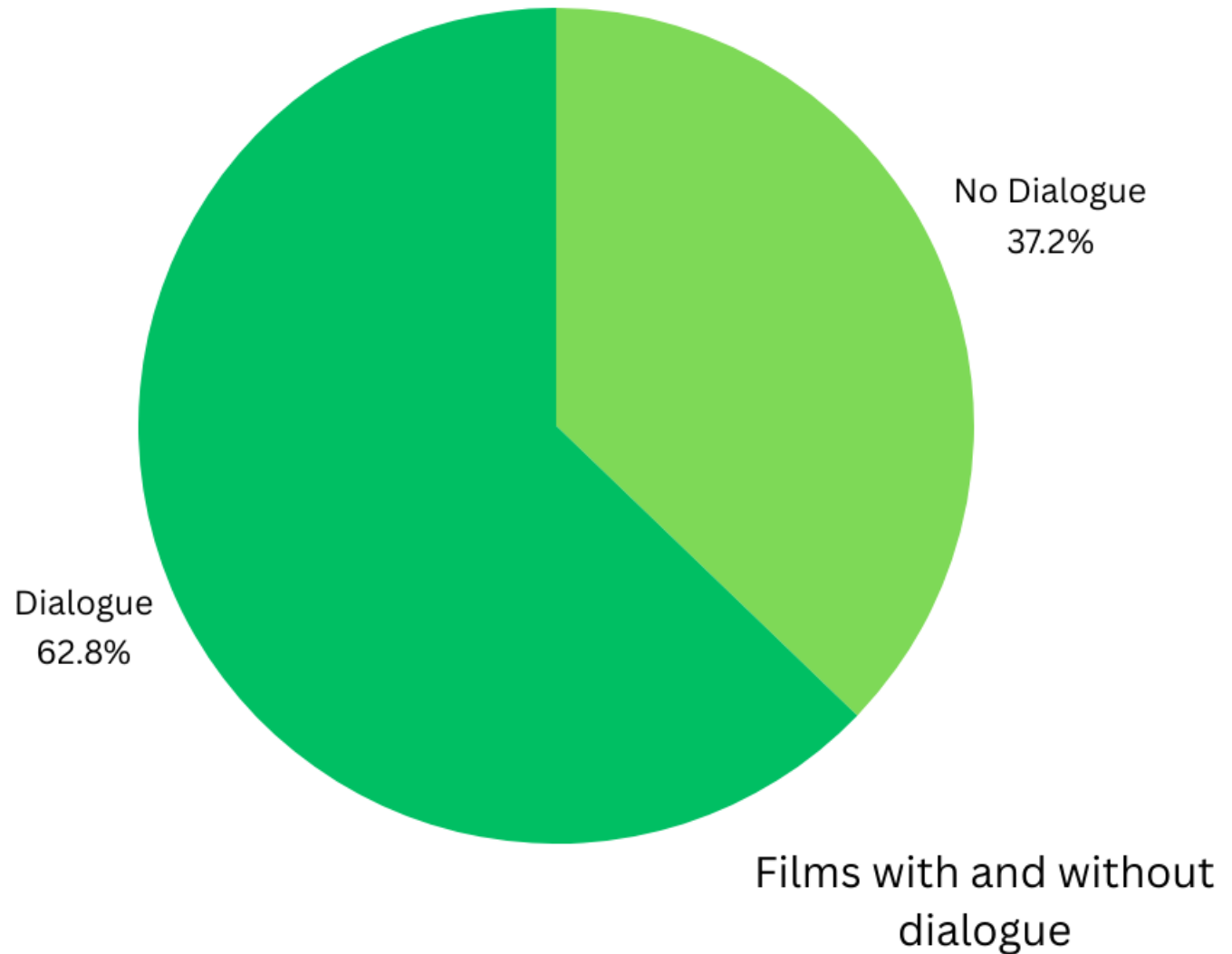
The graph on the right shows the range of languages represented in the films in the database.

It should be noted that this is based off incomplete information, as not all films in the database are digitised.



The graph here shows the breakdown of how many films include dialogue (or any spoken language element) and how many do not.

Similarly, this is based on the information available from the database's current form.

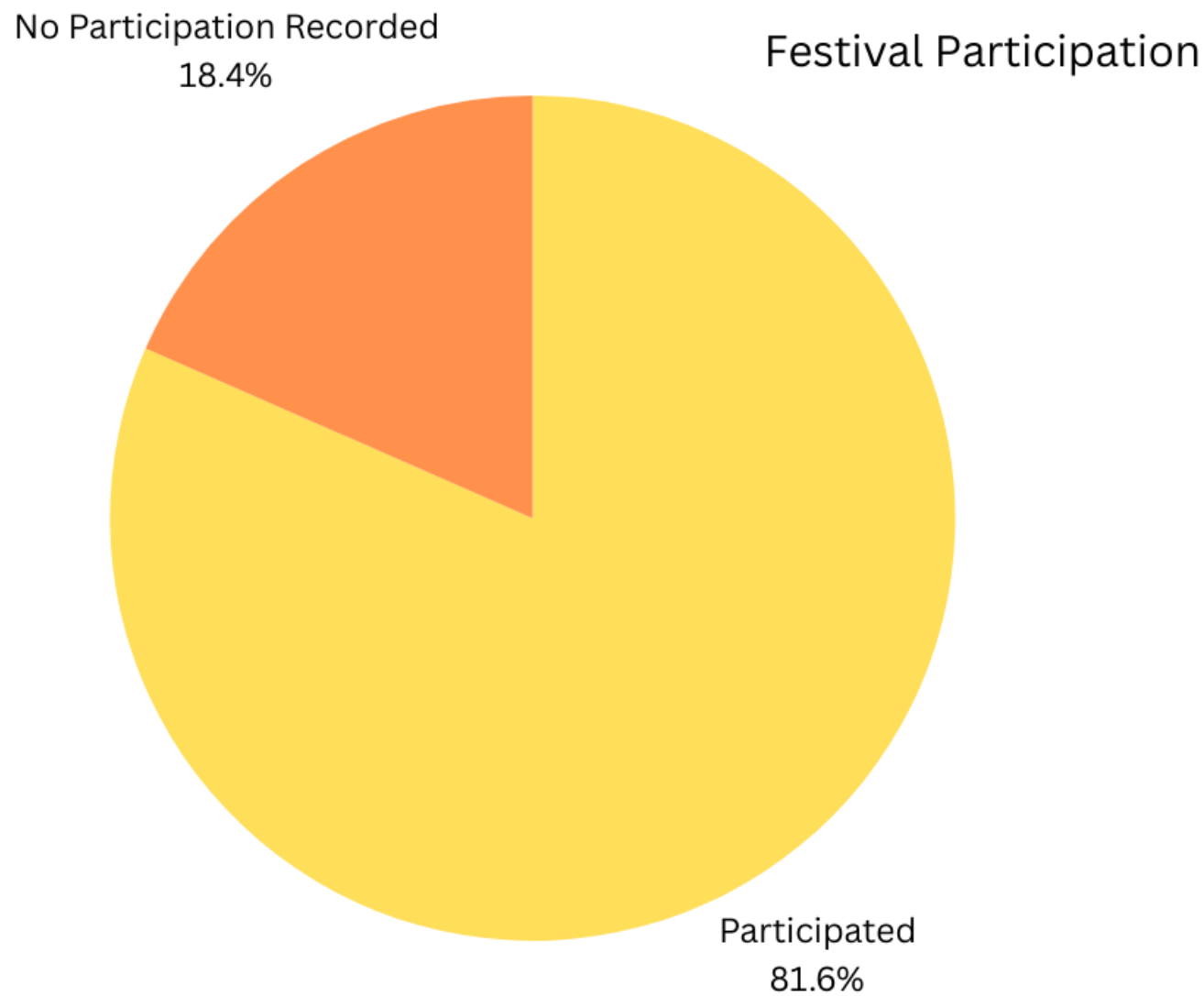


The representation of language in short film

- Over a third of films listed in this archive do not contain any spoken language elements. This shows that this is a common approach for the short film medium.
- Just over 44% of films with a language element are in English, making it the dominant language represented in films in this archive. Portuguese is the second most represented.
- There is scope for further consideration with regards to language and the accessibility of research. There could be discussions on the merit of translation were the database to become an accessible archive for researchers. Closed captioning and subtitles would also be beneficial accessibility features, and there is scope to research the prevalence of these features in privately hosted short films from the database too.

The graph here shows the breakdown of films from Ireland, as noted in the database, on their participation in the festival circuit.

Out of all the films that participated in the festival circuit included, two were not recorded to have won in their selected category.

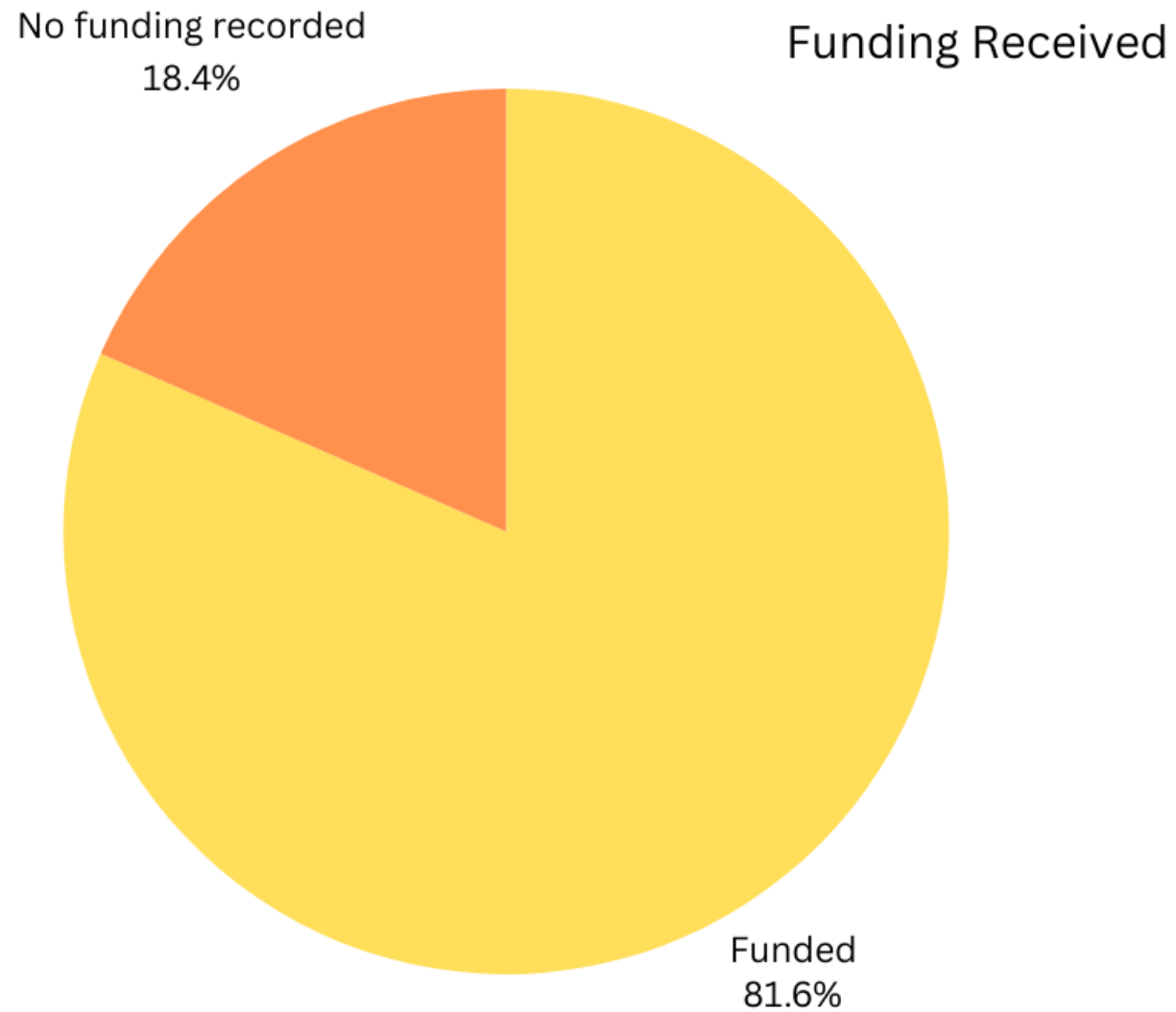


Festival Representation

- Out of the Irish films selected for festival participation, two are not recorded to have placed in their categories.
- This shows that the festival circuit, and success in it, was one of the deciding factors when selecting short films for admission into this database.
- It shows the continued importance of the festival circuit in the distribution of short film and the reception of short film within the industry and research.

The graph here shows the breakdown of films from Ireland, as noted in the database, on their funding status.

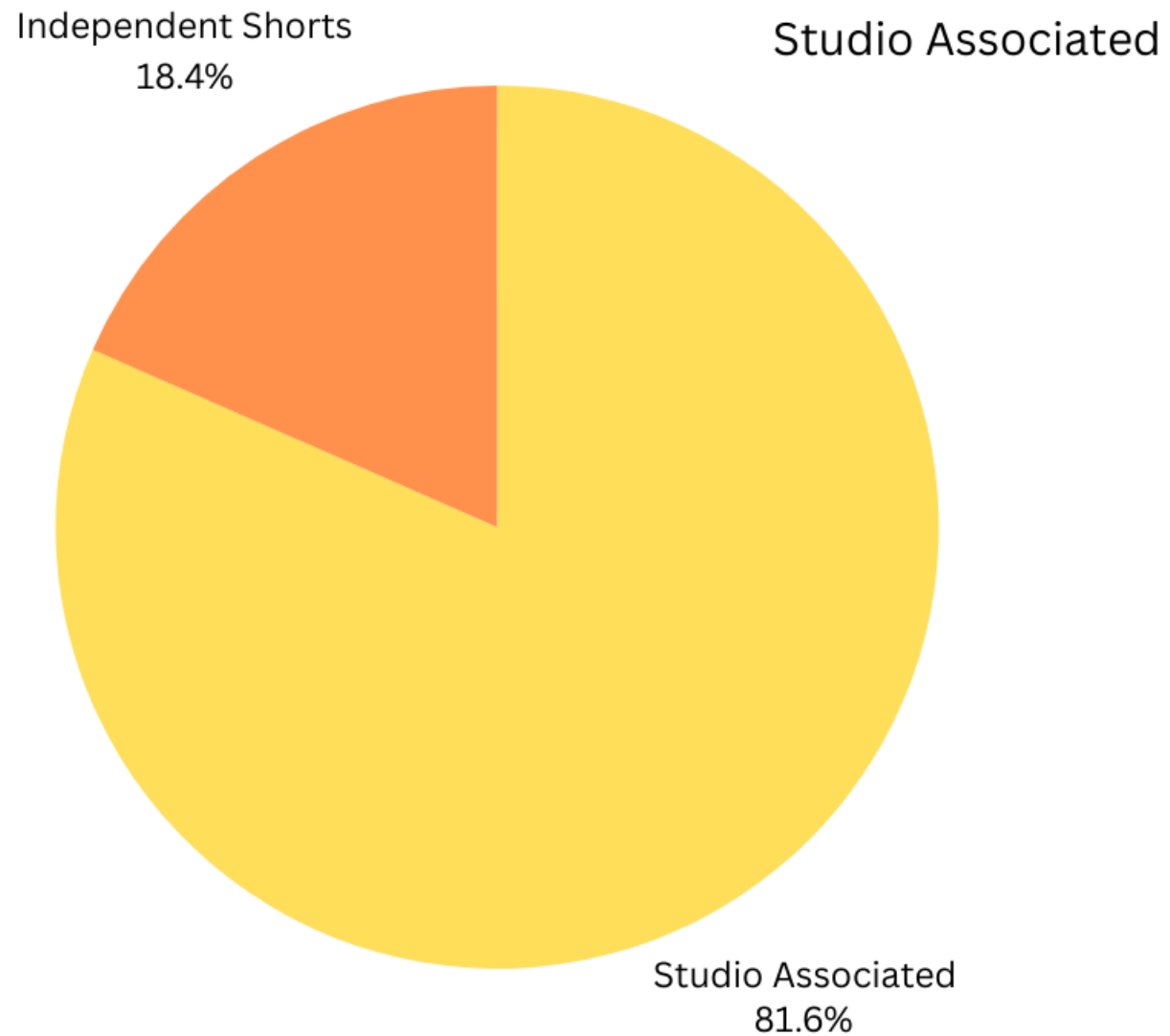
Student films have been classed as unfunded for the sake of this graph.



The Funding of Short Film in Ireland

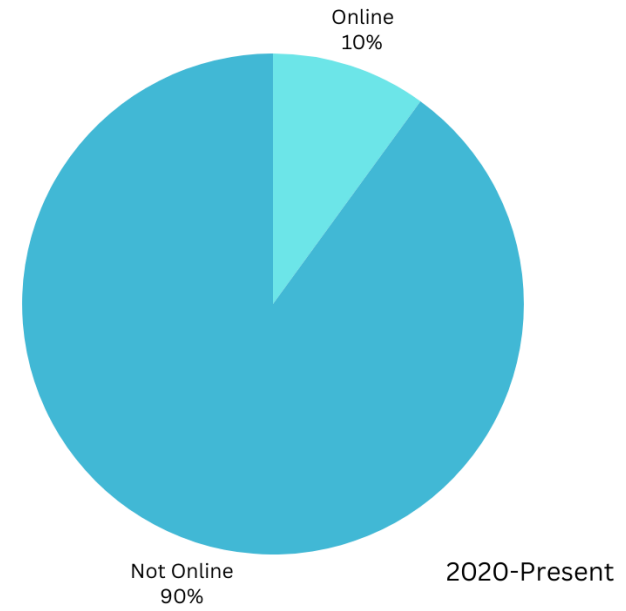
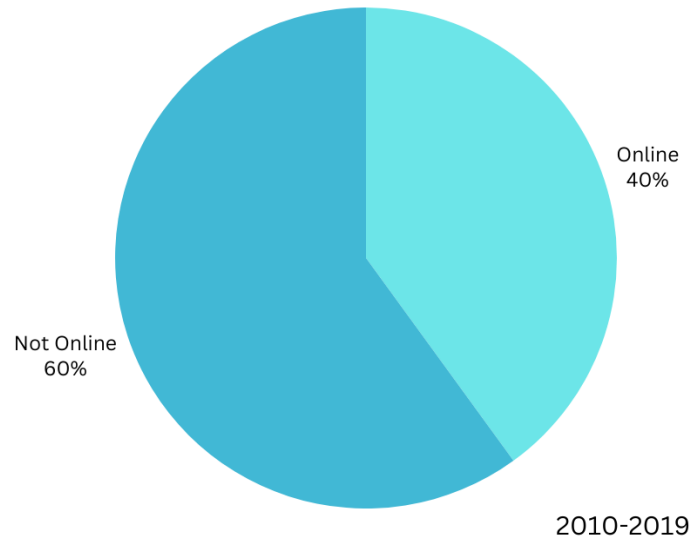
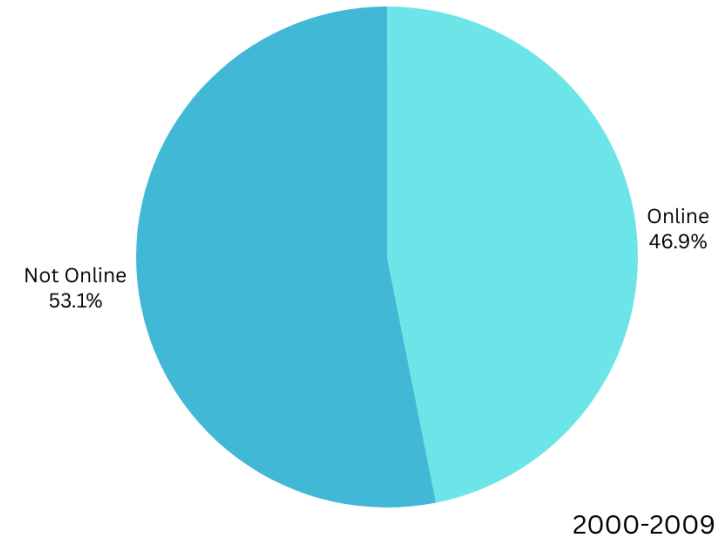
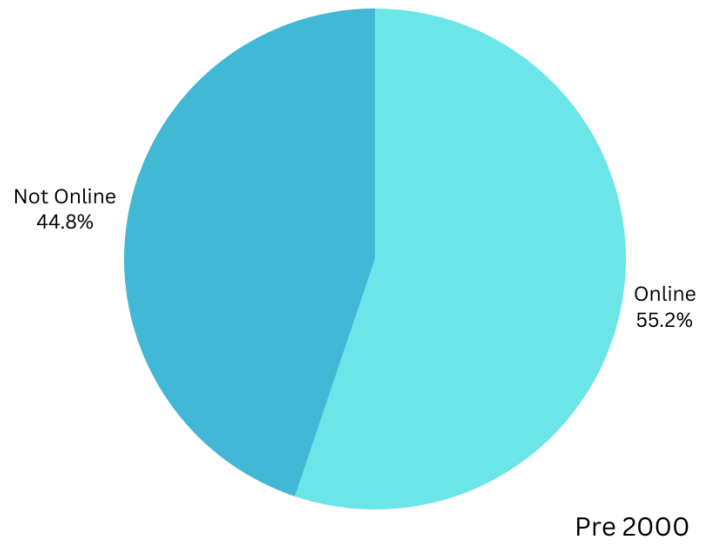
- The primary funding body for short film in Ireland is Screen Ireland/ Fís Éireann- formerly Bord Scannán na hÉireann / the Irish Film Board
- Out of the Irish films selected in this database that received funding, all bar four received funding from Screen Ireland.
- This shows that Screen Ireland is the dominating influence in the short film produced in Ireland and has been over several decades.
- Other funding initiatives, such as animation residencies, are becoming more accessible- while avenues such as incidental government funding and interest group funding are less common now.

The graph here shows the breakdown of films from Ireland, as noted in the database, on whether they were created by, or in association with, a studio.



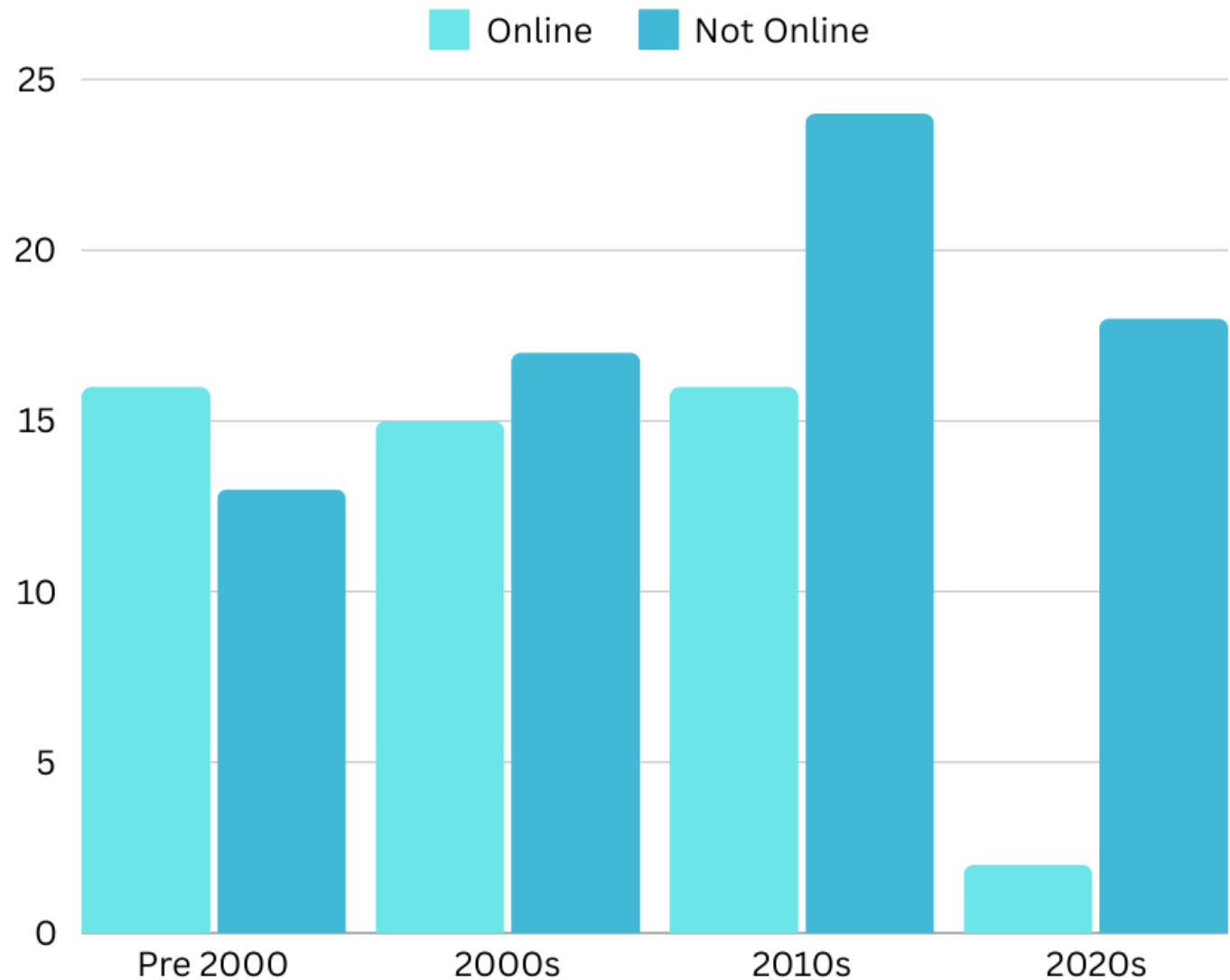
The Role of Studios in Short Film Production

- A studio has been associated with most of the short films from Ireland included in this database.
- Screen Ireland requires a studio to be associated with a project in order to receive funding, which makes financing inaccessible to filmmakers who do not either associate with a known studio or start their own in order to receive funding.
- Studio association lends legitimacy to short films produced, and there is a correlation between shorts produced by studios, their ability to access funding, and their placement on the festival circuit.
- Out of films in this database, over half (55%) placed in festival, were funded by Screen Ireland, and were studio produced. Out of the six films that placed on the circuit with no studio associated, two were student films (and placed in student awards) and two were from Offline's Film Residency (which provides funding for independent directors)



The graph here shows the same information, regarding the availability of films in the database online.

We can determine that films made prior to 2000 are slightly more likely to be available online, with a steady decrease in availability until a sharp decrease with regards to films from the 2020s



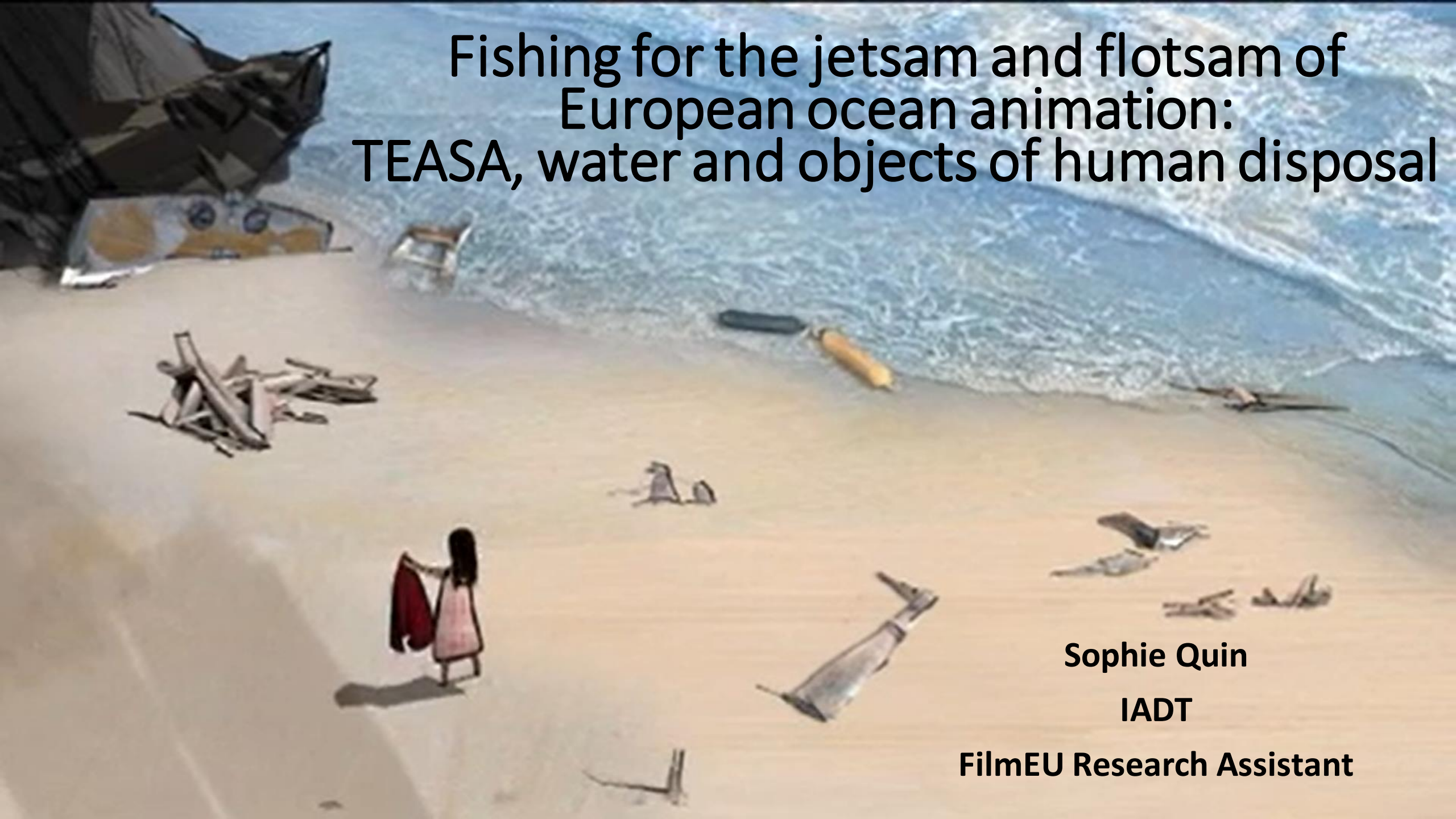
Interpreting the Data

- 20th century films chosen for inclusion in this database are more likely to be films previously chosen for archiving, including digitisation. This leads to a slight increase in their availability online.
- The initial hypothesis of gathering this data was that the Covid-19 pandemic would lead to an uptick short films being immediately hosted online, due to a decline or halting of film festivals. The opposite has proven to be true- potentially the interruption of the usual film circuit has instead led to filmmakers keeping their films offline longer to complete the circuit.
- In the process of collecting this data, two films were taken offline by their respective hosts. For the full research potential of the database to be realised, we would have to have a means of archiving the films in it to ensure continued access for researchers.

Interpreting the Data

- My research thus far has concerned the reflexive relationship between visual media and the perception of disease.
- This database, in its current form, provides some insight into the short films produced both in the preceding years to and the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. It provides a useful guide for both the number and type of films being created, and details about them.
- Further research would rely on access to the films themselves, so research could be conducted on how the pandemic affected the films people made, what stories they told, and through what mediums.

Researcher Use Case: Sophie Quin



Fishing for the jetsam and flotsam of European ocean animation: TEASA, water and objects of human disposal

Sophie Quin

IADT

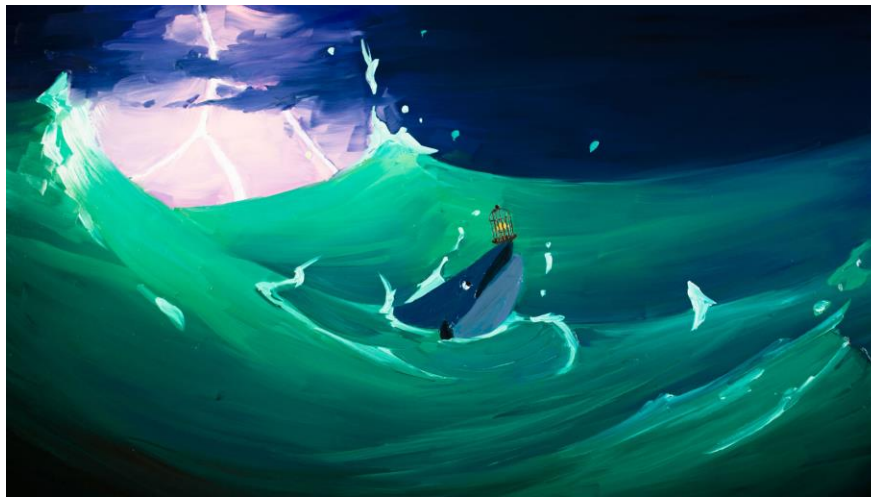
FilmEU Research Assistant



Os Olhos do Farol

(The Eyes of the Lighthouse) Dir. Pedro Serrazina, 2010, Portugal.)

Filmógrafo; Photon; Films Praça; Sardinha em Lata (live-action, 2D digital, CGI) No-dialogue



The Bird and the Whale

(Dir. Carol Freeman, 2018, Ireland)

Paper Panther, Oil paint on Glass, no dialogue, music



Sirene

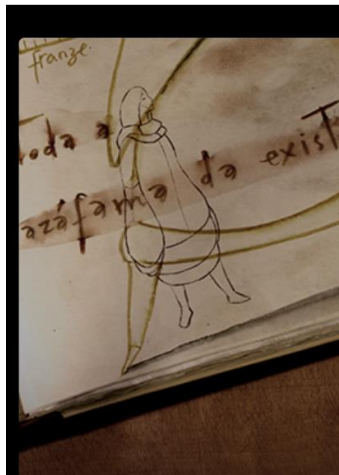
(Dir. Raoul Servais, 1968, Belgium, Absolon Films)

2D / Mermaid / No Dialogue



“There is a lot one could say about animation in Europe. But above all, there is *no consistent European animation.*”

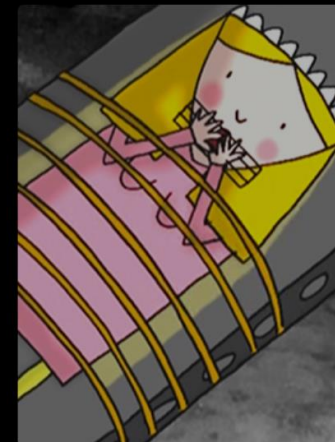
(pp. xiii. Giesen, Rolf. Animation in Europe. CRC Press, 2023.



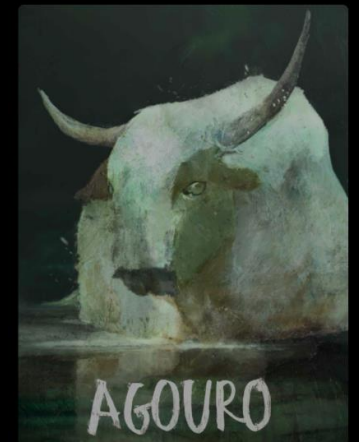
A Tocadora



Cat meets Dog



A Dama da Lapa



Agouro

ELEMENTAL MAGIC

The Art of Special Effects Animation



Joseph Gilland

Foreword by Michel Gagne



“An enormous aspect of learning to be an effects animator has to do with learning how to see, how to observe and soak in the phenomenon or pure energy and life all around us.”

(pp. xix, Gilland, Joseph, Elemental Magic: The Classical Art of Hand-Drawn Special Effects Animation. Oxford: Elsevier, 2009.)

7 PRINCIPLES OF OCEAN LITERACY:

1 Earth has one big ocean with many features.

2 The ocean and life in the ocean shape the features of the Earth

3 The ocean is a major influence on weather and climate

4 The ocean makes Earth habitable

5 The ocean supports a great diversity of life and ecosystems

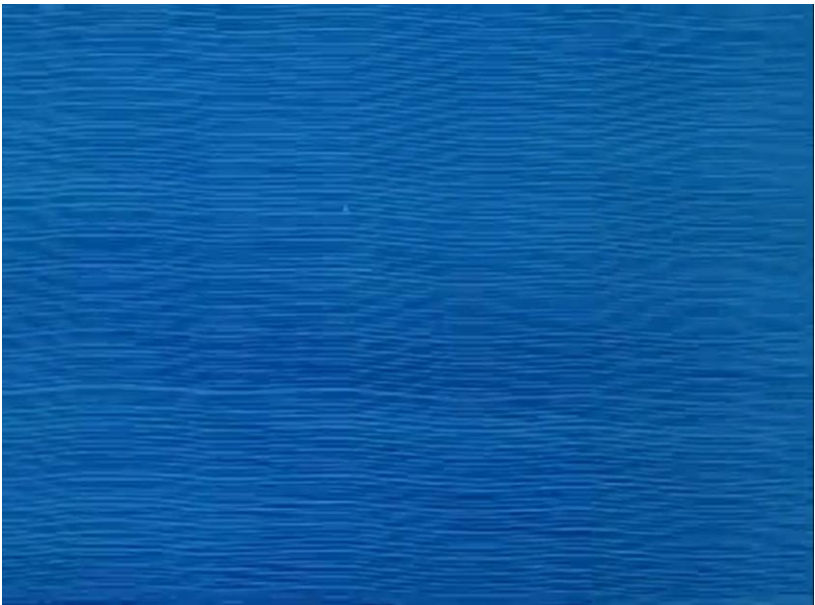
6 The ocean and humans are inextricably interconnected

7 The ocean is largely unexplored

<https://oceanliteracy.unesco.org/principles/>

Santoro, Francesca et al. *Ocean Literacy for All: A toolkit*. UNESCO, 2018.

“We, in Portugal, are acquainted with the evocative power that the sea contains, and animation couldn’t convey its aleatory and organic side.” – Pedro Serrazina (Ana Margarida de Carvalho. “Pedro Serrazina – Olhos de farol”, Visao, 22 April 2010. (Quoted pp. 190, Bendazzi, Giannalberto (2015))





“There is something surreal, something uncanny, about ordinary human objects becoming the stuff of horror and destruction; these effects are magnified by the strange jumbling of scale in which a tiny bit of plastic can wreak havoc on the ecologies of the vast, vast seas.”

pp. 488. Alaimo, Stacy. “States of Suspension: Trans-corporeality at Sea.”
Interdisciplinary studies in Literature and Environment, Summer 2012, Vol. 19. pp. 476-493.

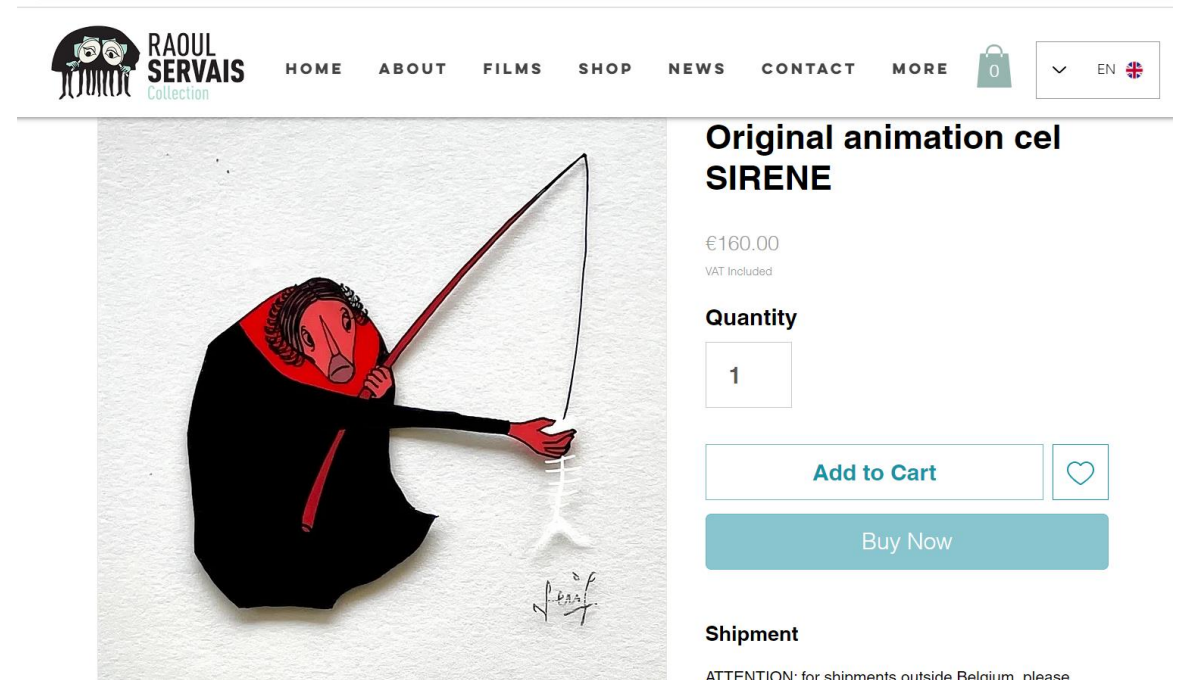




Animation production and material objects – nostalgia, hand-made, more stuff, digital clutter?



The Bird and the Whale – Storm Scene Timelapse
<https://www.thebirdandthewhale.com/>



<https://en.raoulservaiscollection.com/product-page/originele-animatie-cel-sirene-5>

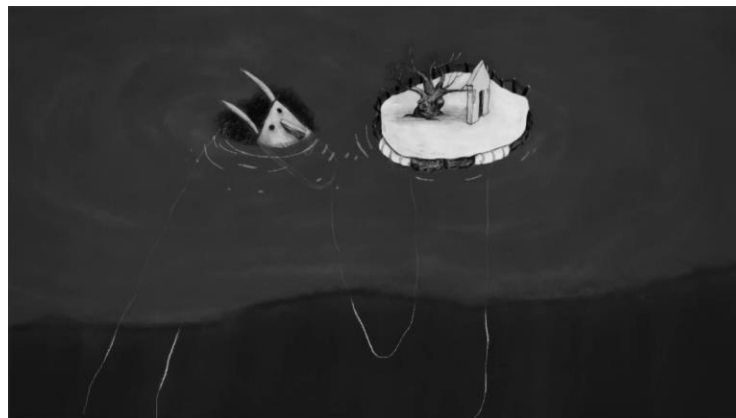
“To be accounted for, objects have to enter into accounts. If no trace is produced, they offer no information to the observer and will have no visible effect on other agents. They remain silent and are no longer actors: they remain, literally, unaccountable.”

pp. 79, Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005

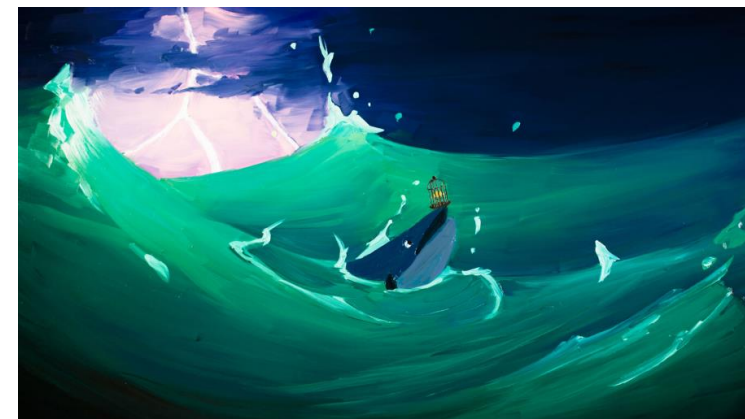
More from The European Archive of Short Animation?



Os Olhos do Farol (The Eyes of the Lighthouse)
Dir. Pedro Serrazina, 2010, Portugal.
Filmógrafo; Photon; Films Praça; Sardinha em Lata (live-action, 2D digital, CGI)
Silent no-dialogue



Água Mole (Trans. Drop by Drop, Dir Alexandra Ramires (Xá) & Laura Gonçalves, 2017, Portugal)
Bando à Parte, Portuguese/
Documentary/Etching



The Bird and the Whale (Dir. Carol Freeman, 2018, Ireland)
Paper Panther, Oil paint on Glass, no dialogue, music



The Rooster, The Crocodile and the Night Sky
(Dir. Pádraig Fagan, 2008, Ireland)
Barley Films, Cut out, ironic fairytale Ireland



De Longues Vacances (Trans. A Long Holiday, Dir, Caroline Nugues-Bourchat, 2015, Belgium) Zorobabel



Sirene (Dir. Raoul Servais, 1968, Belgium, Absolon Films)
2D / Mermaid / No Dialogue



GOING FORWARD:

How can animated film be used to consider Ocean Literacy, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Material culture, tracing of objects, our relationship to the sea in Europe, Green animated (& live-action) film production, animality, nonhuman objects, filmmaking, etc.?

Reflections on This Pilot



- Having achieved most of the core aims outlined in our pilot proposal, we reflected on the implications of what we had learned.
- Although we are still convinced of the relevance of such resource for animation research and the potential of our successful proof-of-concept, going beyond the current state to a larger scale and publicly available database would require conditions that exceed the scope of this pilot as proposed.

Inhibitors

- **Reached our limit** It became clear to us that progressing beyond the stages we had already reached would necessitate a range of skills, infrastructure, and time that we did not have. It would mean moving this into a phase that was no longer an exploratory pilot, one that requires deep support and long-term commitment, particularly in the areas of funding, hosting, and oversight.
- **No easy way to share:** There is currently no mechanism within the consortium for scholars to easily create and share collaborative work in digital formats across the partner institutions. There is no way of efficiently uploading and sharing our reference files and database beyond hosting it on one of the partner institution's proprietary platforms, or without creating an external arrangement that requires oversight across time. This prevented us from easily sharing this resource with potential researchers in a controlled way.

Inhibitors

- **Lack of participation from the wider consortium:** To date there has been no additional interest in our project area from within the consortium partners. It was our expectation that we would be joined by postgraduate scholars or members of staff, but that has not materialised, despite having shared and presented this work in several fora.
- **Transitory funding hinders partnerships:** The national institutions we contacted regarding cooperation with this project each expressed concern about the nature of European projects in general, noting that they tended to fade away when funding ends, leaving partnerships behind.

Key Findings

- That animated short films are a valuable but endangered resource
- That the scholarship of animated film would benefit from such a collection of information
- That there is potential for expansion into student film, live action short film, and more recent uses of animation in the expanded field of immersive and interactive technologies
- That a pilot like this is problematic without more robust participation from across the consortium
- FilmEU_RIT researchers would benefit from a common, easily accessible platform or portal where researchers can centrally deposit and freely share information and resources
- While we continue to champion the relevance of this project, carrying it into the next logical phases is too complex for a pilot context, and the core participants within the pilot group need additional forms of expertise

Future Potential

- **'The present interpretation of any past event is of course only another stage in the perpetuation of the original impulse.'**
George Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, Yale University Press 1962, p, 20
- That this pilot did not generate a robust research cluster may be a matter of timing (it is also in the nature of pilots by definition – they may yield unexpected results)
- With the growth of the consortium, the addition of new partners, and the development of new strands and degrees, the ideas / work it contains may be used in new or different ways in future iterations
- Its mixed results offer opportunities to consider structures for the next round of pilot projects

Thank You



Eabha Bortolozzo and Jack Kirwan, *Her Song* 2019

Reflections

As these pilots are in themselves a pilot phase for FilmEU_RIT, we thought it worth offering our observations as a contribution to future phases

Reflections

- If the work done in a pilot is valuable but finds no purchase as a research cluster, it might be worth establishing a formal mechanism for reviewing and retiring a pilot. This would free researchers to join other elements of FilmEU where their expertise would bear more productive fruit, perhaps with remaining funding re-allocated.

Reflections

- There is clear need to demonstrate outputs for these types of pilots, but results produced are not always going to suit publicity functions. Some kinds of research activity do not produce 'sexy' promotional material, and pressure to produce attractive content for social media channels has potential to be detrimental to research priorities. Some kinds of work take time and need space to develop away from wider public scrutiny.

Reflections

- Given that everyone participating in FilmEU_RIT pilots also have responsibilities in their home institutions, a schedule of dates and expectations, published at the application phase, would be most welcome.