

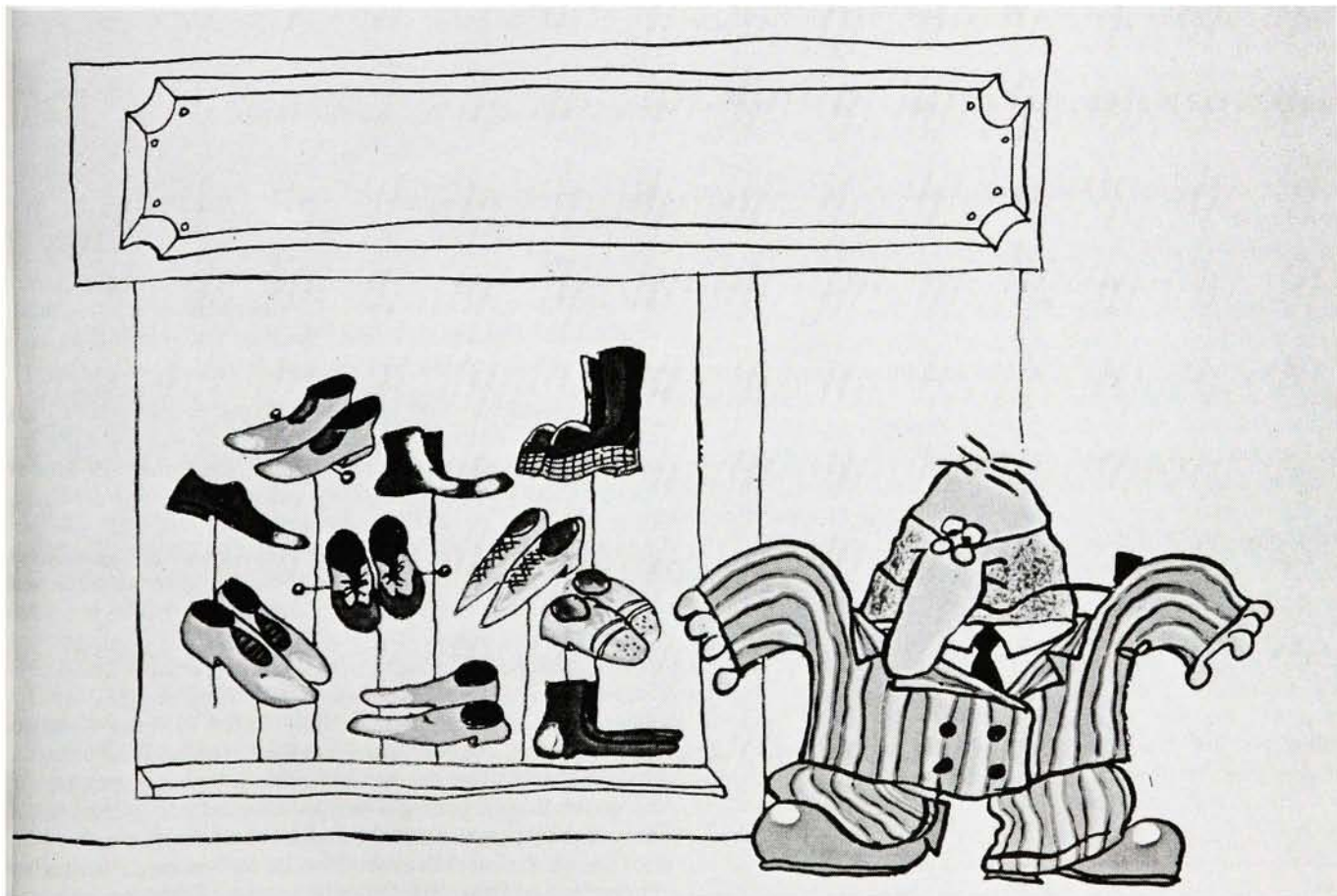
# creative, clever, & competent

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The biannual animated blast has taken place in Ottawa to the joy of animators and their fans. Robert Hookey found substance as well as form in this year's selection.

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by Robert Hookey



Making choices in *When I'm Rich* (New Fields Animation)



Ottawa 78, the International Animated Film Festival, returned to the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Ontario, with an enticing program both in the competition and retrospectives. As in Ottawa 76, the animation techniques were impressive. There was, however an added treat; some of the *concepts* were equally impressive.

One of the recurring communication weaknesses in animated films is the development of an appropriate idea that will lend itself to animated treatment. Perhaps there should be more concentration on creative thinking and story-telling in the education or apprenticeship of the animator. This might help alleviate a recent trend toward self-indulgence in the art of animation. To paraphrase Pablo Picasso on the nature of art and the artist, "The modern artist should be aware of the principles of the artistic tradition and incorporate them into his philosophy so that his art will not become merely self-indulgent, but new artistic speech will be created."

Some of the "new artistic speech" was present in **La-byrinth**, the winner in the First Film category. In this cleverly conceived film the remark "It's a dog's life?," takes on new meaning. The dog's life seems like heaven in contrast to the hell that man has made in his preoccupation with his own neurotic reaching after the meaning of existence and happiness. A masterful use of geometrics and perspective creates the illusion of the labyrinth in this exquisite film, produced independently by Shelly McIntosh of Vancouver.

**When I'm Rich**, a film from Great Britain, deals with a dream that everyone has had about what one would do if he suddenly won a fortune. The character in the film lives in a modest apartment and tries to make his dull life more glamorous by day-dreaming about how he would react to his new-found largesse. He dreams about buying the apartment building in which he lives and forcing out his neighbor, whom he dislikes. The tables are turned on him when his neighbor suddenly becomes rich and begins to force *him* out. A clever idea combined with superb technique makes this a witty and meaningful film.

Another significant film **Why Me?**, is concerned with how a person reacts to news of his imminent death. Janet Perlman and Derek Lamb of the National Film Board approach this delicate subject in satiric fashion, but with the aim to educate us about the value of life. A man is informed by his doctor that he has a few minutes to live. We see him go through the phases of shock, utter disbelief and finally resignation. After he plays out these phases in the office, the doctor indicates that he has a few precious moments left. Both Lamb and Perlman are to be commended for being daring enough to deal with a difficult subject in a unique and memorable style. Janet Perlman's delicious film, **Lady Fishbourne's Complete Guide to Better Table Manners**, the first prize winner in the Instructional Film category, is a delightfully disarming film. Lady Fishbourne is an authority on table etiquette and, as she comments on the subject, her talk is illustrated by a group of most unmannerly table guests. They show the "how-not-to" aspect of fine dining. This film is both humorous and educational, combining concept and technique to communicate creatively and clearly.

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Some films failed to achieve this happy artistic marriage between concept and technique. Although an international jury chose to honor a film by Kathy Rose called **Pencil Bookings**, with first prize in category A, Films Longer than Three Minutes, the film is self-indulgent. Even though Kathy Rose is a competent animator, the concept of the film is weakly developed; it becomes rambling and boring. If her purpose was to show the symbiotic relationship between the animator and her animated characters, that goal was achieved very early in the film. She animated herself creating her characters.

A French film entitled **La traversée de l'Atlantique à la rame**, by Jean François Laquionie, won the Grand Prix Award. This captivating film that takes newlyweds on a treacherous journey by rowboat across the Atlantic Ocean, is a parable about the need for love as a binding force in marriage's sometimes turbulent sea. Laquionie's skillful use of his colored cut-out technique, using pastels to create a romantic setting and mood, is a fine example of the artistic marriage between concept and technique. One hopes this film points to a trend in animation that considers the importance of the relationship between concept and technique and discourages a trend towards self-indulgence.

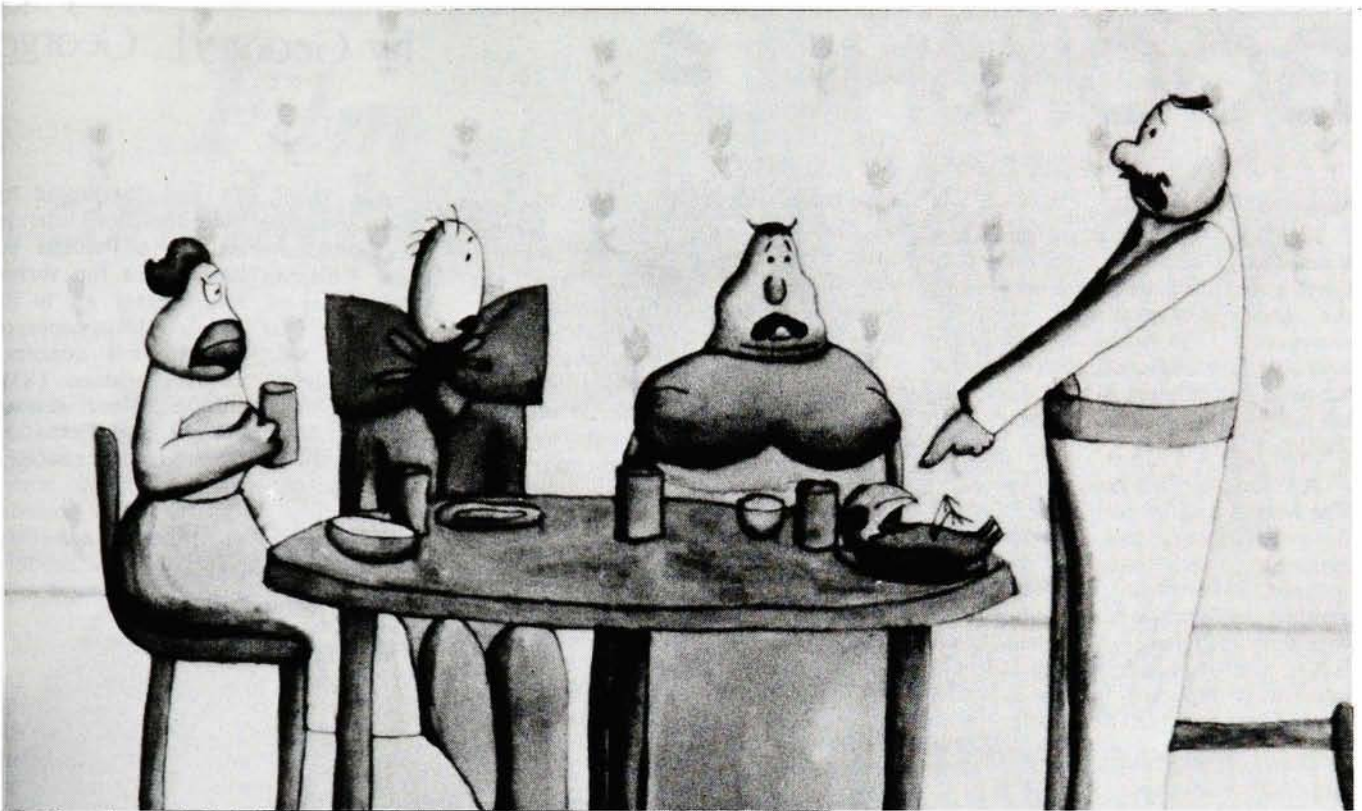


An exercise in might from Richard Williams's *Jovan: The Power*

The informative and interesting retrospectives were a highlight of the festival. They honored Segundo de Chomon, Otto Messmer, George Dunning and Walt Disney, all masters in the field of animation. Segundo de Chomon, a Spanish animator born in 1871, contributed the one turn, one picture technique to the art of film. One day, while Segundo was sub-titling a film, a fly crossed the sub-title unbeknownst to him. When he viewed the film, he saw this fly moving across the screen in a bizarre but entertaining fashion making abrupt and sometimes jumping moves. This experience revealed to Segundo the possibility of animating objects filmically. His most witty and entertaining film is called **El Hotel Electrico**. The owner of a hotel has replaced his staff with an electrical system that fulfills the services offered to his guests. One of his guests is seen getting a shave with the brush lathering and the razor shaving without the assistance of a barber.

One of the world's most familiar and charming animated characters is Felix the Cat. His creator, Otto Messmer, has just recently received credit for the creation of Felix, in





Teaching etiquette in Lady Fishbourne's Complete Guide to Better Table Manners (NFB)

the past the producer, Pat Sullivan — Otto's employer — took all the credit. A sensitive portrait of Otto Messmer was given by Louise Beaudet in a film retrospective that was screened at the festival. George Dunning's retrospective stressed the contribution he had made to the technique of animation. Prescott Wright, International Director of Festival '78, describes the scope of Dunning's contribution in the following observations. "His filmography reveals a creative restlessness with many media; he experimented and set standards with metal cut-outs in *Cadet Rouselle*, experimented in painting on glass under the camera, created imaginative characterizations in *The Yellow Submarine* and developed the structural pencilled dynamics in the split-screen Haiku adaptation, *Damon the Mower* and continues his present work in imaginative television commercials."

Walt Disney, the great wizard of animation, was given a tribute with the special festival screening of *Pinocchio*, a film that still makes magic for young and old audiences wherever it is shown. Ward Kimball, sometimes called Disney's right-hand man due to the trust Disney had in his judgment, was present to introduce the Disney in Space retrospective. It was officially part of a film series called "The Science Factual Film." The films discussed the possibilities of space travel long before the Americans put a man on the moon. *Space Medicine*, *The Man in Space*, *Tomorrow the Moon*, *Mars and Beyond* are some of the titles in the series. Educating and entertaining at the same time, Walt Disney illustrates weightlessness in space by having the average man trying to drink a martini in the state of weightlessness. It is a classic scene in film humor. The man is never able to pour or drink the martini successfully.

Ward Kimball, in introducing the series, shared an interesting anecdote about his former boss. Some representatives of the Russian Government came to the Disney studios to ask if they could borrow some films from the *Man in Space* series. In this situation you would think that Disney would say no to the request since he might be aiding the Communist cause. His reply took the following form. "Hell! no! They borrowed *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and they didn't return it!"

None other than Mickey Mouse was the special guest at the Animator's Picnic. The picnic is always a central feature of the festival. It provides the opportunity for animators from around the world to socialize and exchange ideas. One impression from the picnic was how much the animated characters can resemble their creators. Ward Kimball, for example closely resembles his own animated character, Jiminy Cricket, in the way he talks and through his facial expressions.

ASIFA, The International Animated Film Association, provided a friendly and helpful reception centre, Chez Ani, where one could get a cup of coffee, something to eat and be entertained by animated films not included in the festival program. Co Hoedeman, who did a super job of organizing the previous festival's workshop, showed his talents as organizer of Chez Ani.

Although many people contributed to the success of Festival 78, special kudos are to be given to Frederik Manter, Festival Director; Kelly O'Brien, Assistant Director; Prescott Wright, International Director; and the International Jury: John Canemaker (USA), Paul Dopff (France), Paul Driessen (Holland), Miroslaw Kijowicz (Poland), and Marv Newland (Canada). □