festival in October. My little corpuscles throb with anticipation! A new team is in place, and Ottawa '88 is (as proclaimed in the program book) presented by the Canadian Film Institute, a division of Cinémathèque Canada, in collaboration with the National Arts Centre, the Ottawa Hull Film and Television Association and ASITA-Canada. Sweep aside unhappy memories of past horrors in Toronto and Hamilton, and think positively - as it turned out, that had already been done by the organizers. In eight months they managed to pull together a pleasant, affable event at the National Arts Centre which, while lacking outstanding films, did provide many absorbing and interesting hours of animation.

Day One
It rained all day! But registration at the National Arts Centre was a breeze, the staff helpful, and the media handled smoothly by Alain Garceau and his team. T-shirts for sale, a lot of informational material; flower arrangements incorporating film, and a corporate sponsor, The Upper Canada Brewing Company, displaying tasteful sweaters and beer mugs. Serge Louiche, president of Cinémathèque Canada,

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proving around and smiling a lot.

The Festival kicked off in the afternoon with International Panorama I (films not in competition): a mixed bag from a number of countries. A Czechoslovak puppet film, Lalka Baba, about a mean little village, its rotting inhabitants and Baba in particular, the cranky housekeeper of the village priest, raised one's hopes. But they were dashed by Plunder Dams, an incredibly pretentious set of drawings about the "nature of perception" from Maggie Focke of Australia, and by Birdybird (U.K.), which had some first-rate cut-outs but proceeded to fail badly with a muddy storyline and gruesome attempts at humour.

The official competition got underway in the evening. Introductions, speeches, thanks to everyone (including an impressive number of sponsors), and then the Festival was officially declared open by the Hon. Flora MacDonald, (now former) Minister of Communications. The Ottawa '88 Signal Film started to run. Produced by the NFB English Animation Studio, and animated and directed by Ishu Patel and Les Drew, it featured Patel's hands-parting for bursts of his familiar "Bird of Paradise" showers of colour and shapes, and on to a weird running person on a praxinoscope, who finally reaches a small rocket, lights it and, whirrr, it's up and away in another great shower of colour and stars. (As the official competition evenings went on, the main body of the Signal Film remained the same, but the rocket expanded and the little figure endured a number of problems!)

Sixteen entries were then unreeled, running from one to 14 minutes. Dona Pickova/Welcome (U.S.S.R.) was a wonderfully wry and funny adaptation of a Dr. Seuss story about an elk ambling through the forest who's persuaded to give rides in his wide branching antlers to various small animals encountered en route. They take over - serve afternoon tea, engage in games of dominoes, swing in little hammocks, feed young families, and the elk loses his antlers! Yugoslavia scored twice with the audience - in Lekovica Kid's The Tower of Bokba man falls from the Tower and his life flashes before him, a good idea that ultimately became repetitive - and Tatarkanem gave a new twist to the great Pheroah tale, as the baby raifer teased his guards unmercifully and was soundly thwarted. Pickova (U.K.) presented a chilling, heartless vision where, against a montage of still photographs, menacing black shapes and slashes of colour painted a stark picture of chaos in today's world. In contrast, Jolly the Stork (U.S.A.) tried to explain "body parts" while hampered by the wrong physique - forced to omit legs, and having a bit of trouble with eyebrows! In another downer, the interesting cut-outs in Smallest Squid/A Crushed World (Bulgaria) just about made bearable the story of a poor, put-upon man who learns the true nature of optimism. Canada was represented by Conor Finnegan's I Hey Hoor in which a lonely old bachelor participated in Love-A-Thon, a matchmaking game show, but it went on and on for 14 minutes (and the audience liddged at); and by The Cat Came Back, an audience-pleaser but, after several viewings, its ugly, loud, hit-over-the-head style doesn't fizzle on me at all. And that goes for How to Kiss (U.S.A.) too - which could have been witty, but was definitely not.

The evening was rounded out by a reception where opinions on the first competition films varied from "pretentious, self-indulgent and boring" (so there!) to "not bad, but nothing stood out." There was lots more to come - 77 films and videos in competition.

Day Two
The pace heated up. "Storytelling in Animation," the first of four workshops during the Festival, opened with a morning panel discussion. A Tribute to Evelyn Lambart, the Festival's honorary president and longtime Norman McLaren collaborator, followed. She was interviewed in the auditorium by Grant Munro, an animation colleague at the NFB for many years, (he also wrote a graceful, personal tribute in the Festival's official program). One of Lambart's earliest films, The Impossible Map (1947), showed the difficulties of depicting the world flat when it is round. She painted it on a grapefruit, and sliced the peel in various ways to demonstrate the problem. Lambart's cut-outs are unique, in both wonderful shapes and colours - the bright pastels (not really a contradiction!) and the images of fruit. Bowers and all nature are marvellous to behold in The Lion and the Mouse and Mr. Frog Went A-Courtin'. It was also revealing to find out how much she contributed to McLaren's work. A Chiring Tale, Lines - Vertical/Lines - Horizontal, Regine Doll

Sciany/Walls: (Poland) Man and his imagination enclosed

L'Homme qui plantait des arbres reaped the grand prize
Then came International Panorama II and some goodies including the first-class George and Rosamund (Canada), which was nominated for an Oscar in 1985 but couldn't get past the selection committee here and into competition...very strange. Bat & Duck (The Netherlands), featured continually shifting pairs of celebrities dancing together including Miss Piggy, Astaire, Bartan, van Gogh, and was a good idea that worked. And two from the U.S.A., Come Back Little Shikka, a live-action/dramatization segment for the TV series Moonlighting, with Bruce Willis coming off hilariously as a pliable horny toad, and A Warm Reception in L.A. (from the team that brought us Jole the Snake in competition) featuring some brightly-coloured drawings accompanying a witty, upbeat song about rejection in L.A. and showbiz.

Two Canadian commercials were also in the program, Oedipus III and Fantasy Friends.

The evening competition started with Wendy Tilly's charming Tales of Content (Canada), which has been nicely reviewed just about everywhere. Canada was well represented this night; if Only, two beery bums drinking and dreaming of a paradise which is just outside their door, was a not very new story from the NFB—greatly admired by some, but not by me. That's Not Cricket, featured a bewildled Englishman trying to visualize a baseball game heard over a taxi radio, may have been funny but the sound was extremely fuzzy; and Corporate Blues presented an executive interview that was sharp, loud and nasty—perhaps true to life? The rest of the program contained some rich which has been nicely reviewed just about everywhere. The competition films were followed by a program devoted to Daffy Duck, introduced by Mark Langer, associate professor of Film Studies at Carlton University, Ottawa, who read a telegram from Dee Dee. After the beginning, with Porky's Duck Hunt (1937), through such remembered titles like Wise Quarters (1949), Duck Amuck (1953) and Robin Hood Daffy (1958), and up to the recent revival with The Donor (1987) and The Night of the Living Duck (1988), I decided that my funnybone had re-formed and that Dee Dee wasn't as hilarious as I remembered, and Porky Pig was der-der-der-downright irritating.

Day Three

The second storytelling workshop in the program was followed by the NFB 50th Anniversary Animation Program I, featuring the early favourites—V for Victory, How Hop, Cadeau Rose, Romance of Transportation, and others. Since I had seen all of them many times, I tested my eyes and derrine. At noon came THE PICNIC—the sun was shining, the boxes filled up with animators for the tiny trip from the NAC along Wellington and over the bridge to Victoria Island with its great view of downtown Ottawa. Upper Canada beer flowed, six neat step-dancers tapped away like mad (they must retire at 12!), and the folkloric twanged and sang. After a nourishing lunch, served in a large marquee, came the great Pumpkin Carving Contest. Some worked with a helper, or in a team, or hunched alone over an emerging masterpiece, and when the judging was done the winners were—Most Beautiful: the Canadian team of Jacques Drouin, Sylvie Page and Malcolm Ceci (who had Come Across—Dizzy Do in competition) and Weirdest: a two-tier edifice from the team of Bulgarian animators, who utilized paint (always in their pockets), a handy rake, and some of the yellow and black balloons used to decorate the site. (All the pumpkins later took up residence in Chez Ari, the Festival meeting place and, at night, with candles lit inside them, the faces flowered in the dimness.)

The official competition films at night started off well with Dog Brain (Canada), featuring a dreaming dog with a wonderful score, which had the merit of being funny and short. Canada was also represented by The Man Who Stole Dreams, a dreadful, plodding embarrassment from the NFB, and the comically absurd (and independent) Nice Day In the Country. Other remembrances include Snappy Mr. Dick (Sweden), a snappy ad for condoms; Fit as a Fiddle on the Prize (U.S.A.), an effectively drawn squib depicting civil rights marchers who gradually shift and form into the American flag; State of Belong (France), a slightly hysterical piece of dimensional paper sculpture with punk rock track (mercifully only about two minutes...); and a curious one from Denmark, Flashen/The Bottle, concerning an alcoholic enamoured of a woman shaped like a bottle who regularly removes the cork from the top of her head and leans over to pour him a pacifying drink! This evening produced my personal 'Favourite in Competition': Staini/Wails (Poland). Drawn in stark black, a man is confined within elf-like four walls and imagination plays strange tricks. In his isolation he dreams and fantasizes and listens to noises from outside. Though the theme is familiar, this little gem succeeds superbly because it builds up a truly ferocious tension during its seven minutes.

The second program of the evening was a look at Bulgarian Animation, with a selection of 13 films from 1963 to 1988. I recalled some of the earlier ones—Uomo Solo/The Intelligent Village (1972), a witty folk piece by Donvo Donve telling of a village plagued by snakes, and how the subsequent ‘remedies’ weren’t much good; and Trepuritel/Drum (1973) with the animator’s hands drawing various drums while their rhythms reverberate on the soundtrack. The program left long- and the films have a heaviness and oppression about them, even the supposedly light-hearted ones—it must be tough to live in Bulgaria.
Day Four
All geared-up to slog through a Saturday jam-packed with "something for everyone". The storytelling workshop at 9 a.m. was followed by competition films for children, and the times were out in force, wriggling in anticipation. Canada opened the program with Fear and Loathing in the Big Wide World No. 3, a charming episode in the NFB series featuring Peep the chicken. Chipp the robin and Quack the duck (chronicled in an Animation On Location piece, Cinematheque Canada January 1988), all voiced by Peter Ustinov. And there were also two tiny jolly segments for Sesame Street from CBC Graphics/Toronto: Rainy M. Hungary, with an odominous little bird seething incessantly from the nest, "I ain't Papa!" as his parent brings him all the wrong, non-edible things, and The City which follows a crow visiting a metropolis and explaining the French for "city" and "country". Other kidstuff featured a startlingly coloured fantasy world in Cineiris/Atrakadabra from Hungary; an elephant story from the U.S.A., Mr. Elephant II, where a young girl transformed into a butterfly, Pepperetta/BUTTERFLY (Bulgaria); and a beautiful, but overlong, tale from him of a raven's scheme to come in from the cold and live in a warm cage. Highlights/Bambe. The two bores were one of an old-fashioned puppet series from Hungary, Countdown Tales - The Old Pop, with an awfully arch English voice-over, and a goody-goody piece made for French television, Fleurs - Historien de base-flance/Fleure- A Story of Childhood, about a soppy lad surrounded by invisible elves and spirits...

Later, an "Animation in the Marketplace" panel exploring current buying and selling, overlapped with "Cinematique deuxfois 25 years" (and with lunch too), so I opted for the latter. The opening film, Slippers Jim (1989 France), had some wonderful "tricks" and special effects and just zipped along, and there was a vintage Betty Boop, Betty in Blundershata (1939 U.S.A.). The rest of the program was a bit unbearably with some pretty heavy stuff from Japan, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Ottawa - animation capital of Canada - an absolute truth that was celebrated with "Ottawa Showcase" in the afternoon, and featured Norman McLaren's first films made during the 15 years the NFB operated out of Ottawa, early and late Crawford, and up to the present-day Racoons.

Before the final program of competition films came the premiere of Tin Toy (U.S.A.) from Figar, which blends a number of new techniques in computer animation. The story of a wind-up+tin toy and his first encounter with a lively and destructive baby is quite delightful, incredibly polished and in glorious colour. However, this "first work to feature the animation of a human character" delivers a really weird baby, a smooth and creepy Pillsbury Dough Boy-type clad in a hilariously rigid diaper - but the film was received with rapture. Then on to the highs and lows of competition, with Canada represented by Discosential, (I can't remember it at all), three very short commercials, Takes The Heat, A Matter of Opinion and Top of The Hour, which were OK but not soul-shattering; a dreadful yawn-inducing piece, Dreams of a Land, from the NFB. All of these were overshadowed by the much-admired Lhomme qui plantat des arbres(The Man Who Planted Trees with French voice-over by Philippe Noiret. Two other films linger in the memory, Pencil Dance (U.S.A.) an engaging b/w abstract with free-form and angular shapes dancing around to a modern arrangement of a Prokofiev suite, and The Quitter (U.S.A.) spouts out the advantages of not smoking in a witty and laid-back manner helped by some wonderful voices on the track.

Categories: Animation On Location piece, Cinematheque Canada January 1988, Rainy M. Hungary, The City, and The City, with an awfully arch English voice-over, Count}

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Ottawa '88 International Animation Festival Award Winners

Category A - Debut works
First: Table of Content (Canada) Wendy Tibby
Second: Pencil Dance (U.S.A.) Chris Casady

Category B - Educational productions
First: The Quitter (U.S.A.) Paul Fielinger
Second: Snippet (Mr. Dick) (Sweden) Sten Bergqvist

Category C - Children's animated productions not being part of a series
First: Derro Picnicaleux/Picnicaleux (U.S.S.R.) Alexei Karayev
Second: Prepare the Big Wide World No. 3 (Canada) Kaj Pindal

Category D - Promotional works under five minutes
First: My Baby Just Cares for Mr. U. K. (Peter Lord
Second: Eyes on the Prize (U.S.A.) John Hays

Category E - Animated productions especially produced for television
First: Starthropkrok-A Yap (Cupboard Tales) (U.S.A.) Pinky Varga
Second: No award given

Category F - Productions five minutes or less
First: Picnic (U.K.) Peter Vester
Second: Technological Threat (U.S.A.) Brian Kroyer

Category G - Productions more than five minutes up and including 15 minutes
First: Ventilat/ Lady Man (Bulgaria) Ann Kouiev
Second: Scrony Watts (Poland) Fritz Dunamal

Category H - Productions more than 15 minutes and up to and including 30 minutes
No awards given - not enough films in this category

Special Jury Awards
Nice Day in the Country (Canada) Christopher Hinton - for humour
Smachtles Spurt (A Crushed World) (Bulgaria) Boyko Kaneev - for unusual technique
Litaaska Kita (The Tower of Babel) (Yugoslavia) Rasko Cinci
Transatlantique (Transatlantique Lune) (France) Bruce Kretz

The Norman McLaren Heritage Award (established by ASIFA Canada and Guy Glover for the estate of Norman McLaren) To Pierre Hébert - for a body of work

Grand Prix of the Festival and the Public Prize
L'homme qui plantat des arbres(The Man Who Planted Trees) (Canada) Frédéric Back