

Interview with animator Darcy Prendergast

Darcy Prendergast is a Melbourne-based artist and animator, specialising in claymation. Darcy was a lead sculptor for Adam Elliot's film Mary and Max (2009).

What inspired you to become an animator?

I come from a very animated family. No, my parents aren't bright yellow, they are just ... strong characters that so easily could be. Dad was a zookeeper for 28 years, a man with a million of the most insane stories you will ever hear and Mum is an arts and crafts nut who would have a new favourite medium every week. It was just a very interesting upbringing, where both my artistic and storytelling skills were nurtured. The love for stories and art I guess kind of amalgamated in my later years, and animation became something I really, really loved.



What was your first step to following this pathway?

After I finished uni, I was fortunate enough to score three days a week animating stuff for ABC Kids, then into a lead sculptor role on Adam Elliot's *Mary and Max*. After that finished up, I started my own business. It's been a dream run really ...

What does a typical day in the life of Darcy Prendergast involve?

Waking up well past lunchtime, a healthy dose of sculpting, generally some illustration/character design of some sort, some writing, some chicken, some emailing, some editing and usually a game of in-studio soccer – which usually results in something getting broken. Sometimes I bash on the drums too.

What is your favourite aspect of your job?

The freedom. I usually run half a dozen projects simultaneously, then just work on whatever inspires me that day. If a project (or client) starts annoying me ... then it goes to the bottom of the pile until I become re-energised about it. Clients don't like it when that happens, ha ha!

What is your least favourite aspect?

There really aren't too many aspects of my job I don't like. I enjoy everything about the process, but I guess with a lot of the bigger projects I have going right now, financing them can be a big waiting game. You sit around waiting for a panel to pass judgment, which tests your patience more than the animation process itself – which segues perfectly into ...

Were you a patient person before you became an animator or has it grown with the work?

It's funny ... In all other aspects of life I'm spontaneous, hyperactive and easily distracted. It's only when it comes to animating that I tend to be able to harness all of that energy ... and focus it on the task at hand. I tend to believe that animation isn't so much about patience. It's about concentration and satisfaction. If you concentrate and think about what you're doing ... you'll generally be satisfied with the result. And it's that satisfaction that makes you go back for more – that gets you out of bed after the 16 hours of shooting for another 14. You might only get through five seconds in a day, but man! What a five seconds it was!

What is the hardest medium you've tried to animate?

I've animated with about 20 jars of salsa before, which was challenging. I had nachos on standby. Ha! I think the animated light painting stuff we do is probably the most difficult though. It's the kind of thing that even with experience and practice remains constantly tough. Shooting to camera, dealing with weird perspective shifts, remembering where you painted last frame and where you have to be the next. It doesn't seem to get easier ...

What is one piece of advice you wished you'd had when you started animating?

You've got to find what works for you and stand strong on it. I for example, have never worked well during the day. No one understands it, everyone tries to change it and after years I've come to simply listen to myself. I'll happily work 17–18 hour days if it's on my terms. If it's on my terms, then it doesn't feel like work. The crew and I will have a game of foosball, play video games, watch a movie. Hell – even go for a beer if we're uninspired. Just do what feels right to you, and cut your own path ...

Top five animators and why?

1 Sylvain Chomet. The man created what I believe to be a flawless feature film, *The Triplets of Belleville*. It's simply perfectly balanced, with amazing characters and a beautiful story.

2 Matt Stone and Trey Parker. Two men that illustrate the power of story, writing consistently comedic content that makes you forget all about how god awful *South Park's* visuals are. The emphasis on narrative and hilarity makes them a powerhouse in my eyes.

3 Adam Elliot. A good friend and an inspirational fellow. He's definitely done things the hard way and despite his success, has never sold out. He creates his own opportunities and continues to change the expectations and possibilities of animation.

4 Henry Selick. Director of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, this guy had to make the list. I watch it every Christmas Eve with my sister. We eat snacks and sing every word. His visual direction of *Coraline* was also beautiful.

5 Nick Park. Whilst I'm not too fond of his most recent attempts, the early *Wallace and Gromit* films will always have a special place in my heart. He is another one who really pushed the boundaries of clay animation into unexpected territory.