

THE AFRICAN ANIMATION

Mohamed Ghazala

Minia University, Egipto.

Trabaja en Fine Art Faculty, Minia University. Egipto, como profesor asistente en Animación. Conferencista de Animación en Minia University. Director de ASIFA Egipto.

WHAT IS THE AFRICAN ANIMATION?

Is it the animation which is done in Africa? Or done by Africans? Or which was done by African budgets? Or which was done for African audiences?

This is an important question to answer before to speak about *African animation*, because it differs from the title like *Animation in Africa*.

I speak about consideration of an animated film as an African one.

To be more clear, if to speak about animation in Africa, they will be the films done by foreigners and colonizers in Africa, such as animated works done by white people in South Africa, like “The Artist’s Dream” by the American Harold Shaw which was created in 1916 and considered as the first animated film made in Africa.

They will be also films done by some non-African investors and producers like the Canadian Firdaus Kharas who directed “Magic Cellar”, 2006, the first animated series to be based on African culture, which was acquired for broadcast in the United States. Kharas has his own organization which can fund any of his co-production works with other countries, like this series which are co-produced with South Africa

But on the other hand, if to speak about “African Animation”, I believe that the African film should be done or by African people or by African funding.

For these reasons, the historical researching about African animation will change its target and its way.

If to consider the first animated film which was done by an African artist there will be considered animated shorts in 60s which were done by *Mustafa Alassane* from Niger as first African animation.

But if to consider the nationality of the producers, there will be considered “Mish Mish Efendi” films which were done by Belarusian Frenkel brothers but produced and funded by the Egyptian government as propaganda films for mobilization of the Egyptian army during the World War II in late 1930s, these films of “Mish Mish”, 1935, can be accounted as the REAL first African animated films.

THE EGYPTIAN ANIMATION

The first Egyptian animation studio established by Frenkel brothers in early 1935 which produced the first Egyptian and African Animation films under the title of the hero “Mish Mish” during 30s and 40s, and then Frenkel brothers immigrated to France in 1951.

Some of the oldest studios were under supervision of artists like Ali Moheeb, Hasseb, and Abdel Aleem Zaki in 60s and 70s.

When Egyptian TV appeared in the middle of the 60th there was an animation department for producing titles of films and ads.

Some of the great artists worked hardly in this department to make the revolution of animation in Egypt with short films and titles of films like Noshi Iskander, Redha Goubran, Ahmed Saad and in another generation there was Shwekar Khalifa .

In late 80s Mona Abu Alnasr established her own studio after she came back from studying animation in the USA, and started her own projects with cooperation with Egyptian TV. And she continued to make series for the TV for years later.

Right now in Egypt there are more than 50 animation studios which vary between big, medium and small size studios, there are round 10 big studios which provide more than 100 animated hours yearly, between series, episodes, ads and short films.

“Al Sahar studio”, one of the biggest studios in Egypt, established by the Saudi investor in early 90s, which started to work in the first Egyptian feature animated film “The Knight and the Princess” in 1998 and until now it is not finished yet according to the fund.

Some of the studios really dominated the market, not only in Egypt, but also in Arab countries round Egypt. Some of studios monopoly the market of Egyptian TV completely and sometimes no way for small studios to enter to this place.

But for some small studios, there are some chances through joining the work and cooperating with huge studios in their own projects or by getting funds from other Arabian countries to make Arabian series or ads.

You can say that Egypt makes animation in behalf of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Libya, Yemen, and Kuwait ...etc

The work primarily is 2d and clay animations in addition to new studios work with 3d and flash.

There are some studios specialists in 3D like "Tarek Rashed" which started in early 2000s in making ads and then worked in co-predictions with Arabian countries in local series.

Studio "Zamzam" specializes in Islamic series in clay animation. And with the same technique there are projects under supervision of Eid Abdel Latif which recently got an award from CHINH, the Indian children festival.

There are medium studios which use the new techniques of flash like A+ Cartoon which uses and produces many works for the Egyptian TV.

In addition to the specialist studios, there are a lot of freelancers who work individually or part-time, or sometimes get their own projects to do like Hussain Nembr, Hazem Gooda, Ahmed Fathi and Mohamed Ghazala who done many awarded works.

According to the educational level of artists, there are a lot of projects come for Egyptian TV and Arab states. And the 90s and 2000s can be considered as the golden age of the Egyptian animation, after opening many studios and a lot of graduated students from academies providing animation classes like Cinema Institute, Helwan University and Minia University where I teach.

Every year there is more than 200 new graduated students who studied animation for at least 2 years, and at least 100 of them continue in working in animation as career.

Speaking about festivals concerning to animation in Egypt, there are only 2 international festivals have animation category in their competitions, Cairo International Cinema Festival for Children and Ismailia International Film Festival for Documentary and Short films. But there are some local festivals such as Al Sakia Animation festival.

ASIFA EGYPT

In September 2008, the first chapter of its kind in Africa and the Arab world was approved by the international board of ASIFA (International Animated Film Association), to become the connection between the international network of animators and the African and Arabian ones, and to be an powerful player in the animation field in the region by activities held, such as workshops, screenings, panels, and festivals .

One of the first activities of ASIFA Egypt is celebrating IAD (The International Animation Day) which is yearly held in 28th of October , commemorating the first public performance of animation in 1892. The first Egyptian celebration of this event was held in Alexandria with collaboration with Al Rasheed foundation for cultural development in 28th October 2008.

The coming plans of ASIFA Egypt is to promote the art of animation, not only in Egypt, but also in the whole region by promoting networking activities and participating in the international events.

What concerns the rest of Africa, there is no real animation industry but only in Egypt and South Africa, and, probably, a young animated movement for making ads is working in Morocco and Tunisia with French developers.

Glints of hope come from European countries and their cultural centers providing financial support to animators and their projects. For example the “Africa Animated” project in Kenya which was initiated by UNESCO when its adviser in Nairobi Alonso Aznar established it in order to build on the unique case of African art. He invited professional academic animators to teach artists from Africa through participation in workshop projects. In the last 3 years 3 projects were held which gathered animators from more than 10 African countries who brought with them their folk stories and motives and tried to mix pure African arts with the techniques of modern animation. The 3 projects resulted in more than 20 short films and animators after returning home had the chance to use their experience in their native countries.

This ongoing project is good news for the industry. Despite an abundance of talent, African animation faces many challenges. Production studios, equipment and financing are in short supply and distribution is limited.

I myself participated in the last project of “Africa animated” in Nairobi (the previous one was in South Africa and the first one in Kenya and Tanzania). Though these films are very unique, they are made with the best techniques and by the best professionals of animation in Africa

(and that is why they cannot give you the complete image of African animation- in reality there is a shortage of equipment and professionals ultimately resulting in animation with a different quality and style.) The current support is still not enough and does not provide fully for the needs of African animation. Almost all financial support for cultural purposes in Africa is intended for cinema or classical arts. But despite the obstacles, African directors continue to produce innovative animated films that are winning over international audiences.

The most positive signs that there is a group of creative hands which comes from Kenya, Ghana, Morocco, Algeria, Zimbabwe in addition to Egyptian and South African artists with their own creative abilities which show somehow that there is a hope in a future. Some of them got famous awards around the world like *The Blackheart Gang* from South Africa who got a great reception in many international festivals, and as well the results of UNESCO's workshops, *Africa Animated*, which produced many animated films with full African taste.

In fact, I'm optimistic!