

The Monthly Squeak

AUG 25

SUMMER
EDITION

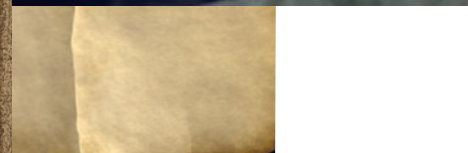


MONTSERRAT IN NIIGATA

2025: A DAY BY MAGGIE BARRETT

Breakfast includes a huge array of options provided by the hotel, so many that I only take a couple bites of each. My tray holds salad, orange slices, tofu, salmon, dumplings, miso soup, noodles, rice, a croissant, tea, and a glass of water, sometimes even more. As if that wasn't enough, there's at least ten more options to choose from, and others that will switch out from day to day. Once I feel like I might roll out the hotel door instead of walk, I start getting ready for class. There's a bus that I could take, but if I walk, I can wander up and down the streets. I leave early so I have time to stray from the main road a bit and stand on the bridge to watch the birds and the fish in the river below. I take time to sift through the internet identifying each one. The usual visitors are great crested grebes, grey herons, spot-billed ducks, and carp. Fifteen minutes watching them is starting to cut it close though, so I move on.

My morning class is focused on woodblock printmaking. The concepts of layers and registration aren't new to me, but the wood and the type of ink we're using are. The illustration class is on the other side of the room,





so after hunching over my block for about an hour, I stretch out by walking over to see what they're working on if they're not too busy. Then it's back to carving. After class finishes up, we break for lunch. If I'm quick enough, I can buy a homemade bento box from a woman downstairs, but since she usually sells out in minutes, I'll probably head to the 7-Eleven across the street, where a hot meal is guaranteed. The Arts and Culture class sometimes meets in the classroom, but just as often we take field trips to different places around Niigata such as Hakusan shrine, the Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, and the Niigata Saito Villa.

By the time classes end, it's about 4:30pm, which means there's plenty of time left in the day. I usually just pick a direction and start walking. A seven mile walk brings me down the Shinano River, underneath a series of bridges. Most of them are for cars and pedestrians, but my favorite is for the trains that run almost every fifteen minutes. There are a variety of places to sit along the river, so I relax by the bridge with a book and listen to the trains running overhead. After a couple hours, the sun begins to go down. It's a bit of a trek, but by crossing the river, going past Hakusan shrine, heading through Furumachi Dori, and reaching the beach, I make it to an observation tower right as the sun begins to touch the horizon. The sun disappearing behind Sado Island is a sight to behold, and I'm joined

by a couple strangers bringing cameras to capture the view. In the other direction lies the entire city of Niigata framed by mountains in the distance. It's getting dark, so I decide it's time to head back to the hotel, and I have the pleasant surprise of encountering bats as I cross back over the river. Not everyone's cup of tea, but I was happy to see them.

The last thing before crashing for the night is dinner. The hotel is right in the middle of the city, so there's food in every direction. I never get tired of conveyer belt sushi, so it's worth stopping by again. The closest one features a gatcha game based on how many plates you finish, and a rotating selection of desserts such as an octopus-shaped jelly. I'm already looking forward to breakfast again on the return trip to the hotel.



The Elves of Amaranth



As a college senior majoring in animation, I've made a habit of following the current state of the animation industry. In the last four years I've watched the public shift their attention to independently animated content, and the tides are turning in ways never seen before. Applying my observations as both a consumer and creator has allowed me to speculate the direction animation is heading in. I firmly believe that independent animation is an art movement in the making, and we are living through art history that may be studied at this very school in a few more decades.

At this point, it's no secret that independent animation can be just as (if not more) successful than the stories being made through big studios like Disney and Warner Brothers. But indie creators juggle both the creative and business operations all on their own, and not every pilot episode can win against social media algorithms. This column of The Monthly Squeak aims to introduce readers to less well-known indie animated projects, because even

INDIE ANIMATION OBSCURA

Art History is in the Making, and Free to Watch on YouTube

By R.G. Bunny

hidden gems still shine under a spotlight.

To start the school year off properly, we should first understand why indie animation is so popular all of a sudden. Independent animation has been present throughout the years, and any of us students who had unrestricted access to the internet growing up have likely stumbled across indie animation. That's right, the whacky and frequently disturbing cartoons that defined us as a generation count as indie animation. Web series like *Happy Tree Friends*, *Lamas with Hats*, and even *asdfmovie* were all animated independently from the big studios. Indie animation has always been around, it just didn't get the same attention as cartoons made by large companies until the companies began to fumble.

I'm sure anyone who has watched anything released in this decade has noticed that most of the new animated films in theaters, and cartoon shows on streaming, use the established characters and/or worldbuilding of popular franchises. It is rare to see cartoon shows with no traces of pre-existing IP that are allowed to last more than 16 episodes before being canceled and, in several cases, erased off

streaming. Companies are afraid to risk failure, and instead decide to ensure a profit by clinging to what they know worked in the past. They don't seem to care if the majority of viewers leave the movie theater disappointed and regretting their purchase. The money has been made, and it seems that's all that matters to the company. So what entertainment platform do people go to in order to find animated content that's actually new and exciting to watch? The internet, of course!

The indie animation movement's rise to popularity began in October of 2019 when the highly anticipated pilot episode of Vivienne Medrano's *Hazbin Hotel* took the internet by storm. Although the show went on to be funded by Amazon as a Prime exclusive show, and remains a permanent topic of online controversy, the success of the pilot sent a message to artists everywhere: If you share your ideas directly to audiences, success will find the path to you.

Hazbin Hotel had drawn enough attention to the movement that when *The Amazing Digital Circus* premiered on YouTube in October of 2023 it gained over 150 million views before November came to an end. Created by Gooseworx in collaboration with Glitch Productions, the show has become a pop culture phenomenon. As of August 15th, the show has 6 episodes and is free to watch on Glitch's YouTube Channel.

Previously known for shows like *Meta Runner* and *Murder Drones*, Glitch Productions has cemented itself as the pioneer of independent animation. Through its actions, the company has shown to value well crafted entertainment over quick and easy profit. The annual livestream called GlitchX aims to showcase the projects of smaller indie creators every November.

So with the history lesson

over, how about some show recommendations? I'll keep my first recommendation brief since I already talked about it in a past issue, but I will never pass up a chance to talk about *Atlas and the Stars*. With the exception of the voice cast, the show is being made entirely by Miranda Toney. With the first episode up on YouTube, and the second episode in production, this show is criminally underrated. If you enjoy works that blend sci-fi and fantasy together, this one's worth a watch.

Apartment D brings the element of nostalgia to the movement with *Ruff Ruff Danger Dogs*. Created as an homage to Saturday morning cartoons, the webseries is essentially *Power Rangers* but with dogs. Blending stop motion, live action, and 2D effects, Apartment D has made a series that feels like it's promoting a topline that, unfortunately, does not currently exist. While the first episode focuses on providing an introduction to both the audience and main protagonist, the second episode seems to be establishing the formula for future episodes. Packed with references to a wide variety of



Saturday morning cartoons (even including English dubs of anime), *Ruff Ruff Danger Dogs* brings an upbeat attitude to the scene that's perfect for introducing a parent or younger sibling to indie animation.

Though it's still in the production phase, Dragon Fly Creations may end up making the next big step for indie animation with *The Elves of Amaranth*. Inspired by the success of their favorite indie cartoons, reaction youtubers Elija (Not-So-Average-Fangirl) and Mosco (Wee Lass Reacts) secretly began writing a high fantasy story that drew influence from the animated shows they enjoyed watching the most. Both women bring a level of engagement and artistic critique to their reactions that highlights the effectiveness, or lack thereof, in the choices made by a show's directors. These two knew what they wanted to see as an audience, so they began to write the kind of show they wanted to see. Dragon Fly Creations and *The Elves of Amaranth* remained a secret, only referred to as Project TEA in the short time leading up to its official reveal.



Elija's annual Truth or Dare Charity Livestream takes place at the end of June, and aims to raise money for The Trevor Project by letting fans donate to ask truths or give dares to Elija, Mosco, and their small friend group of other reaction YouTubers. This year, Project TEA was "spilled" when the final milestone goal of \$12,000 was reached. Throughout the rest of the livestream, celebrity guest stars Katy Townsend (voice of Maddie in season 2 of *Arcane*) and Amanda Hufford (voice of Ragatha in *The Amazing Digital Circus*) each made comments that hinted towards potential involvement in *The Elves of Amaranth*. By the end of the livestream, over \$25,000 was raised for The Trevor Project. Elija and Mosco's videos recorded after the events of the livestream now include a brief promotion of the show within the "usual YouTube bullshittery" (1:33) before the reaction begins. If you enjoy shows where worldbuilding is rich with its own history, and characters can be unapologetically queer without justifying themselves, I would suggest you stay updated on this project.

Toon in next month for a spooky speedround edition of Indie Animation Obscura! Among other works, we'll cover seasonal classics, mysterious music videos, and a frightened little black cat who made history earlier this year.





Field Mouse Summer Special

Elliot MacDonald

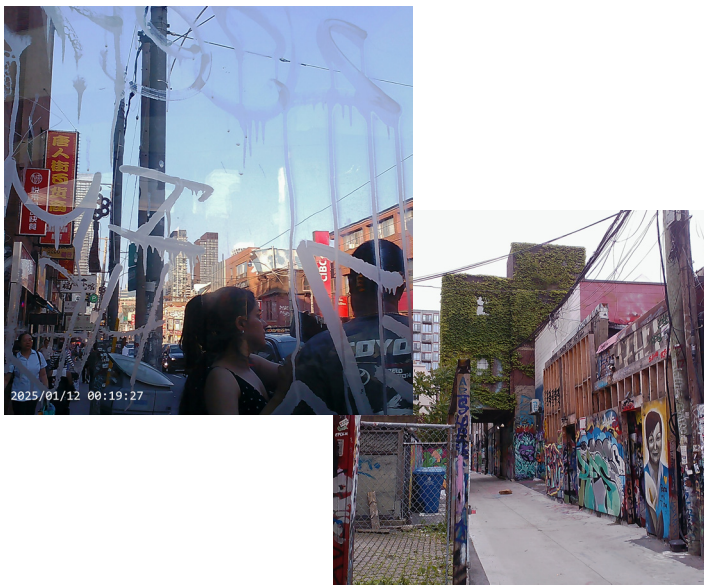
This summer, my parents and I spent a month in Toronto in Canada. It's one of the few cities I've been to that neither of my parents had visited before, and that we have zero social connection to. We rented an Airbnb apartment for the month, and without getting international data, flew by the seat of our pants. Toronto is definitely a place I'd consider moving to in the future. As the largest Canadian city, with a population of seven million including the wider metro area, it has an interesting identity that feels different from travelling in America or even Europe. Anyone who's been a road

trip kid for most of their life can agree that there's something magical about staying in a location for more than a few days and actually memorizing your little sliver of the map.

The main cultural difference between where I grew up and Toronto is that there is an overwhelming amount of things going on. In summer, the city hosts free festivals, and is known for its bustling food, music, and arts scene. It has extensive transportation as well, through its above ground tram system, combined with buses and subways. In South Florida, and many places in the US, taking the bus takes about ten times as long as trekking there by foot, so if you don't have a license you spend your time mostly alone. The city has a lot of small neighborhood pockets that house smaller interesting places.

I'm convinced that you can find anything on planet Earth in Toronto. While walking back from Graffiti Alley, which is two or three blocks long, and in the same neighborhood as Chinatown and a few

tram stops from the University, we passed a store with a hundred different types of beads and a large fabric warehouse that was really three storefronts in one. Any fruit, vegetable, starch product, and somewhat local fish can be purchased in Chinatown and it's probably less than five dollars. All of the international hole-in-the-wall shops we managed to find tasted amazing. There's tons of Halal food places, which are also typically vegan and vegetarian. Every hobby seems so accessible here. There's plenty of free museum events, sports repair shops, festivals, and plantlife. There are many small ethnic neighborhoods, like Boston's Italian block or New York's general block structure, but times ten, and they flow into each other well. Even within places like Chinatown, which is at the center of a lot of activity, there are stores from many other ethnic backgrounds mixed in. Toronto is billed as a food city due to the uncountable number of Ma and Pa shops of different kinds, and personally, food factors in my opinion on places.



The music and arts scene here is also fantastic. Due to the fact that my dad has been a professional musician most of his life and can't go a month without playing, we attended numerous open mic nights, with the classic two song sign-up structure. One was more folky in nature with a mix of generations. They had slam poetry, standup, and different musicians in multiple languages. There was an older woman there that read poems from her poetry book that were deeply vulnerable and yet hopeful, and she clearly knew everyone there and had garnered a lot of respect from them. My dad made a good handful of acquaintances there and the people, at least at that place, were pretty welcoming. It was interesting every time (and the fact

that the drinking age is 19 didn't hurt). The house bass player and host was a younger man and very talented, who a lot of the older, experienced players, like my dad, brought on stage to improvise with. One of the players the second night we went was a talented violinist we'd seen busking just an hour earlier, so I suppose even the big city world is small. You feel how many talented people with rich inner worlds are living in a city like Toronto and attend small pockets of social scenes. We attended the Toronto jazz fest for a day, and the free public performances at the small park were at a professional level that would usually have paid tickets. Before that we attended a festival for Canada's National Indigenous Peoples Day, which had traditional dancers and modern musicians, including country-leaning rock and a pair of energetic young rappers that miraculously managed to make the elders dance. There was an Afrofest, and a Salsa festival that we missed but I'm sure would have been just as interesting.

Admittedly, my family is very focused on live music anytime we go to a new place, but I think the arts are always a good representation of how involved the city population is and what the city funds. In terms of visual art we attended the Toronto Art Fair, which is the largest art fair in Canada. The museums also have free entry days throughout the year, and sometimes week, and Canada's largest art school is in Toronto as well. The Art Gallery of Ontario was enormous and had many famous classics and interesting contemporary exhibits. Joyce Wieland had the rotating exhibit, which included textiles, animated short films, paintings, and dream-like pencil drawings.

Joyce Wieland



Royal Ontario Museum

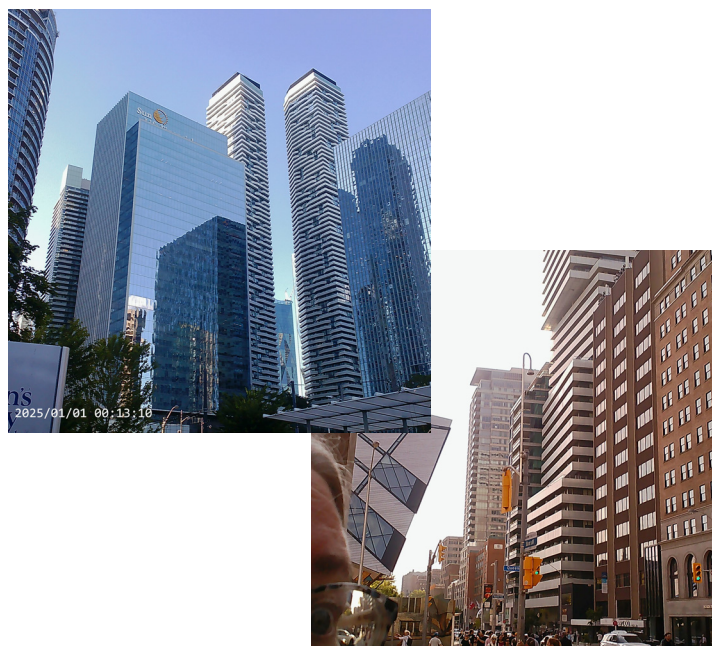
High Park is also enormous, featuring a strip of zoo, a large garden, a long off-leash dog area, and a bunch of sports courts and pools. We were just a couple blocks from the park and, for the first week or two, each time we walked in to kill time we ended up in a mysterious new area. Everyone in our neighborhood seems to be invested in planting flowers in their ten-foot garden. The bay is right nearby, and the islands are covered in beautiful plants and beaches. The lengthy off-leash area in the park makes it feasible to own a dog, without them being stuck inside or on the sidewalk all day. The dogs were also very well behaved, which is very Canadian of them.



We got advice on what to do from random people, our BnB's handyman, and we even met a woman at the open mic who spent a day driving us around. She told us she had been one of the part-native adoptee children that had been essentially kidnapped from her mother, unable to access her records through legal means. She had been a lawyer for years and I learned a lot of eye-opening information about the justice system through her retelling of a dead court case surrounding her situation. While this doesn't seem relevant to travel experience, I do believe that the political state of a place is something that affects your stay there. Anyone either from the South or with relatives from a Southern state will know what I mean. This all reveals another upside to Canada, though, which is that, on the ground level, there's a strong sense of community. The stereotype that Canadians are relatively friendly seems to be true, probably because the quality of living is higher. I definitely felt the lower amounts of animosity amongst

people compared to America despite how diverse the city is. Of course, Canadians are people too, and can still be very rude, snobby, and bad at driving.

I've never rated any of the locations previously, but, so far, I'd give Toronto an eight or nine out of ten. At the risk of stating the obvious, if you're one of those people who's worrying about staying in America for an art career I would like to remind you to try a few long shots. I know a lot of artists feel pressured to move to places like LA or New York City to get higher paying jobs, but I've felt, at least recently, that it's easy to forget how large the world is when everyone is focused on immediate surroundings. While this Field Mouse issue has zero impact on your current day to day, I think it is nice to remember that quality of living is not stagnant. With taking advantage of the right opportunities, where you end up is ultimately your decision and a product of your effort, similar to my hellish senior year of managing to snag an out-of-state tuition I can afford. I have a lot of trouble staying positive about the future for my generation, at least within the US. It often feels to me like I'm subconsciously waiting for the world to suddenly explode. Maybe that's why I was so pleased to see a dense, diverse city that felt like it was generally very happy and earnest. Living in any city is expensive nowadays and getting a visa is complex if you don't have Canadian family or parents, but Toronto is definitely a city that I personally felt very comfortable in and has a lot of great opportunities for careers and housing. I have yet to see it in the strong winter time, but I would be interested in experiencing for myself what it would be like to exit -10 degrees into a bar to someone who still showed up in winter to play the trumpet for me.



The Monthly Squeak

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Note from the Editor

It's a brand new school year! It's also going to be the Monthly Squeaks first full year, and even semester, with its current leadership. Everyone was so supportive from our very first issue, even though it was a surprise. Students have even started responding to my emails! I'm excited to learn more about the staff and students this year, and hopefully collaborate with more clubs and art projects.

Now is a great time to join or meet us at the fresh start fair. Whether you want to write a monthly column, practice your graphic design, or share your projects, you should come to a meeting and try it out! We meet on the second floor of the library every Monday during siesta, and drop-ins are welcome. We're still taking submissions for every issue.

Submission
Form

Discord

