

Course outline: Directing Animation

The MA in Directing Animation is a specialisation within the broader **MA in Film and Television**.

This programme covers two years and is designed for students who demonstrate an ability to animate and have an interest in storytelling. All teaching staff are practising filmmakers using a variety of animated techniques. The department offers the opportunity to use: traditional 2D and 3D animation as well as a variety of current digital techniques.

Foundation Course - duration 3 weeks

We run an introductory course before the beginning of the first term. In a relaxed atmosphere, students are introduced to the diverse world of animation through screenings and group discussions. They will carry out short exercises to help explore storytelling through sound, framing and lighting, characters and documentary interviewing.

Year One

“Springboard”. A Cross Specialisation Introductory Workshop - duration 1 week

- an introduction to film and television, looking at cinematic and televisual language through the prism of storytelling
- it investigates how the main crafts of cinema and television, screenwriting, cinematography, visualisation, editing, sound and music relate to the way filmmaking puts across narrative ideas

Animation Modules for the 1st Year

‘Ingredients for an animated film’

The first year consists of specialist Animation modules plus several Cross-Specialist modules. Each basic unit will require the students to create their own answers and to build up a showreel which records the work process.

Overview

Students will be expected to attend a range of workshops and programmes addressing specific issues. Attendance and punctuality are an essential part of the course, especially as you’ll be working closely with other departments and your actions might affect their work.

The students will add the filmed outcome of each project to their showreels. This would include: finished films, storyboards, animatics, and animation fragments to record the range of their film-making practice during their first year. The emphasis is on excitement, discovery, risk and curiosity, and above all exploration through practical work.

End of Year Assessment will partially consist of a review of this showreel with your Industry Reviewer. We will be looking for variety, passion and promising fragments.

Modules will include some or all of the following:

Research and Culture - across the year as a part of Screen Arts

Aims

- to introduce students to major archives and libraries which may be useful sources of information and inspiration
- to introduce students to a variety of practitioners currently working in the industry
- to introduce students to the basics of other specialisations within the production process
- to encourage students to widen the scope of their cultural activities by visiting exhibitions, theatre and performances.

Animating with Sand - duration 2 weeks

Aims

- to provide a short practical, animation exercise in a medium students don't normally use
- to free up the process of animating, with this liberating technique
- to discover storytelling through the morphing and transition of images
- to learn how a musical soundtrack created by the Composing students can increase the emotions and understanding of their work.

Project 1: Pre-Production: From Ideas to Animatics - duration 4 weeks

Cross Specialisation with Screenwriting and Editing

Aims

- to find new and original stories/ideas, that can be told through animation
- to articulate the idea through a Mission Statement
- to have a better understanding of film language and film structure
- to create more dramatic and emotional storyboards through framing and editing
- to produce clearer storyboards with the aid of floor plans and viewfinders
- to produce animatics with appropriate timings including character's movement and thoughts
- to professionally pitch your ideas through a formal presentation
- to develop collaboration skills with the Screenwriters and Editors.

Animation Skills: Line and Movement Workshop and Stop Frame Workshop - duration 2 weeks

Aims

- improve animation skills in both drawn and stop motion animation
- help research and record character movement
- understanding character movement better through a 2-day acting workshop

Animated Campaign – duration 2 days

Cross Specialisation with Producing

Aims

- understand how animated GIFs can be used for an online campaign
- direct someone else to animate the work
- develop relationships with the Producers and introduce them to the many techniques found in animation

Character of Place – duration 2 weeks

Cross Specialisation with Production Design and Cinematography

Aims

- to create a sense of character of place within defined and limited means
- to explore the use of lighting and set dressing to achieve this in a single frame
- the frame should inspire the other participating students to recognise a 'story'
- to use pixilation to explore and give further clues to the 'story'
- Develop a working relationship with Production Design and Cinematography

Project 2: Character Film – duration 11 weeks

Cross Specialisation with Screenwriting, Editing and Sound Design

Aims

- to create a 'rounded' character using personality traits as the starting point
- to understand the importance of having thinking characters that can express real emotions
- to develop more sophisticated gesturing and body language for your character
- to understand lip-syncing and develop more advanced facial animation
- to write and produce an animated film with two well developed and dynamic characters
- to write dialogue for the film, and then direct and record actors delivering them
- to direct the Sound Designers to create a more emotional soundtrack

Project 3: Animation Technique and Sound - duration 7 weeks

Cross Specialisation with Sound Design and Editing

Aims

- to explore new animation techniques and styles
- to have a better understanding of the relationship between sound and picture
- to generate an idea from a given soundtrack produced by the Sound Design students.

Production Design Workshop - duration 1 week

Cross Specialisation with Production Design

Aims

- to realise the value of quickly developing different visual ideas and how these can support the story.
- to engage in visual research, referencing, concepts and scale model making.
- to be able to use lo-fi techniques to create and animate your invented worlds.

Graduation Film Development - duration 5 weeks

Cross Specialisation with Producers and Screenwriting.

Through a series of short workshops, students develop three ideas, one of which will become their graduation film.

Aims

- to present yourself and your work to the Producers and Writers
- to develop stories, narratives and concepts through objects, metaphors and materials
- to educate the Producers and Writers on how animators develop ideas and the various animation techniques that can be used
- to form a relationships with a Producer and Writer(s) which will become the core of your graduation film production team.

Year Two

The second year of the MA is almost entirely taken up with the development and production of a short-animated film which will be an important part of the graduation process and a calling card for students' further employment in the animation industry.

Students return at the start of Year Two with three embryonic ideas. Through discussion with writing, producing and directing tutors the final film is chosen. This should be approximately 6 minutes long but may vary according to the technique.

The first four months are spent developing the project and assembling a crew. The directors will work closely with writers and producers to produce a treatment and script for the film. They will team up with cinematographers and production designers and work on storyboards, character and production design with the help of the model makers. The last stage of development will be the making of the final animatic with editors, composers and sound designers. Other members of the team who contribute to the production are digital effects students who will help to prepare and test the production pipeline, Production managers who will work with producers to coordinate the smooth running of each production.

The Production will be supervised by producers who will coordinate with the directors to schedule the production within the time framework, budget and the School's limited space and resources.

There will be regular presentation of the work as it develops to groups of tutors and students for review and critical advice. At the end of this period of development, the films will be greenlit on the strength of the animatic, designs, test where necessary, and budget and schedule. At the beginning of May, the films will go into production.

The films will be animated between May and October under the supervision of directing and producing tutors. Each film will be planned to suit the technique and style of the director, and specialist help will be brought in where required. Directing students will be expected to lead the animation and usually work with a few assistants and volunteers, for which there is a small budget. There will be periodic reviews by tutors and other students of the work in progress.

Editing, sound design and music composing take place in the autumn and each film will have seven days allocated for sound mixing in a Dolby dubbing theatre. Sound and music are supervised by professional film composers and sound designers as well as the animation directing tutors.

The films are presented at the end of the School year in Central London to an invited audience of film professionals. The School enters the films in the major festivals to give the work as much exposure as possible.

The aim of the graduation films is for students to take part in all aspects of professional animation production, most particularly the collaborative aspect, and gain confidence in storytelling, directing and animation skills, and most importantly in the presentation of ideas and the leadership of a film production team.

Festival Visits – duration variable

Attendance of a UK or overseas Animation Festival

This is dependent on the government guidelines at the time of booking for the Animation Festival, whether the festival is running and if the location is allowing visitors from the UK to enter without quarantining

Aims

- to expose the student to a wide range of new film work across a variety of genres
- to hone critical and analytical skills
- to find ways of feeding and informing the student's own work by watching a variety of work
- to gain networking skills in the Film Industry

Business Skills

Aim

To prepare students for the business practicalities needed for a freelance animator – tax, accounting, legal issues, contracts, copyright, how to quote for a job, current studio practice

Learning Outcomes

Students should have a framework of knowledge, and useful notes on basic freelance business issues They will be brought up to date on the industry they are about to enter

Content

- Setting up a company, tax, accounting
- Quoting, pitching workshop
- Legal issues, contracts, Non-broadcast outlets,
- What you need to know to step outside

An experienced advisor to the film industry on business practise delivers this module. On a different occasion we invite recent graduates to come and discuss what they feel they have needed to know to work in the industry. These may be things not necessarily covered elsewhere in the course. It brings right up to date and gives a personal emphasis to what graduates need to know.