

{PROFILE}



Roberto Fino



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Italian born Roberto has a long background working in illustration and animation in across an international environment. This experienced artist shares his experience, the importance of mentorship and the beauty he finds in creating animation

Outline: You have an incredible background with some varied and great projects behind you. Could you share with us some of these key projects over the years, across illustration, direction, layout designing etc?

Roberto: I guess, probably the most important turning point in my professional career, has been London. I moved there from Milano in the early 90's. At the time I was working as Advertising Illustrator in Italy, a very soul-less industry; very good money, but little creativity. London gave me an opening into a different world. I wasn't trained as animator so I used my Illustrative skills to work as Background Artist in Animation. I had to learn a lot. Animation is a very intense and technical affair and at times I found myself struggling but the excitement of being part of such an alive and communal art form, was enough to push me through. London in those days was the center of high-quality, innovative, commercial animation. The most creative animated ads were coming out of some of

the best studios in Soho. I was lucky enough to work for Hibbert & Ralph, Passion Pictures, Pizzas Animation, but most of all for Klacto Animation founded by Oscar Grillo. Once I moved to Melbourne I started working for the TV series "The Silver Brumby" as Head of Layout Dept. and eventually I was the Art Director for the TV Animated series "Ocean Girl". It was an important step because as Art Director you become responsible for the work of a team and not only yourself. In early 2000 I moved back to Milano to work on a couple of Animated Feature Films (Johan Padan and the Discovery of the Americas, Opopomoz) as Head of Background Dept, but finally settled in Melbourne where I kept working on different TV series as Senior Design Artist, Art Director and in 2010 as Director. Over all these years, illustration has been my side gig. In Animation there isn't a continue flow of work. You often find yourself in-between projects and my old trade as illustrator has supported me along the way. I mainly illustrate educational books for kids. It can be a bit dry at



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times but it helps in the down-times.

Outline: What first attracted you to working as an illustrator and animator, and what keeps you going in these industries?

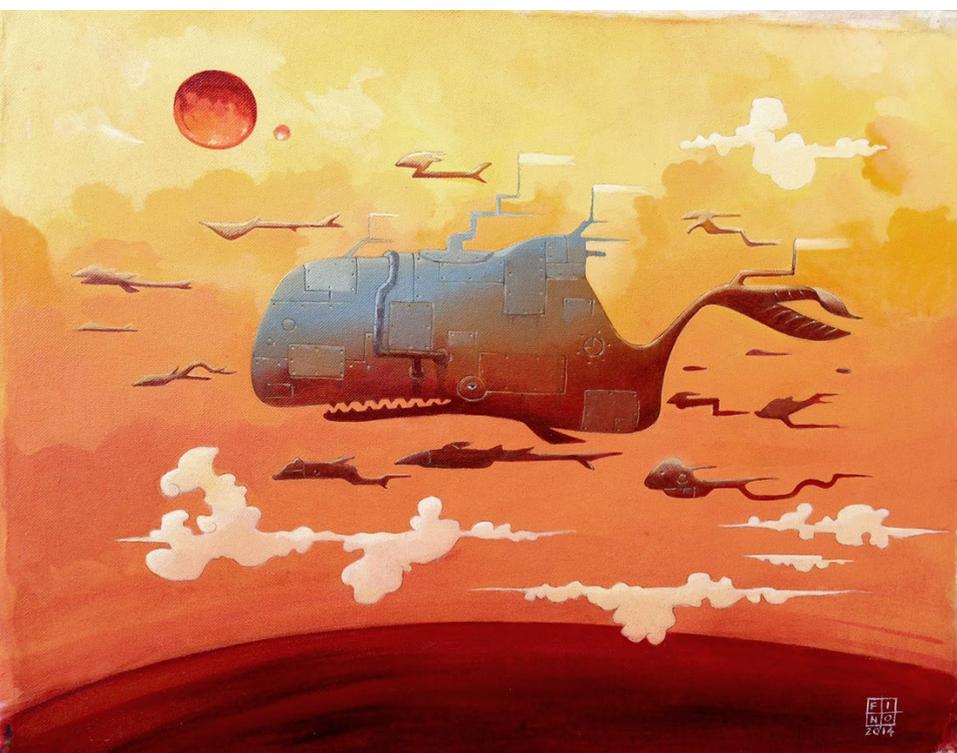
Roberto: I know it sounds a bit of a classic, but I always liked drawing. Since kindergarten people used to tell me I was good at it. It was something that made me happy and I suppose I just kept going. When it was the time to decide what direction to take after high school, I decided I would do a Graphic Design Degree. It was just a very natural choice. Later on I moved more into Illustration. I was one of the first students to join the very new Istituto Europeo di Design in Milano. The school just opened a few months before and they had a specific course on Illustration. It was

a very new concept of teaching in those days. It was and still is, one of the best schools of Design in Europe. Studying Illustration at IED made me realise that I could really earn a living by drawing. So I did. I started working for Advertising and as I explained before, it was only after this time I discovered Animation. What kept me and still keeps me going, is the excitement of a new project. Both in Illustration and Animation you always move from one job to another. Most of the time you won't have the time to get bored of what you do and if it happens, you know it won't be for a long time. Also you constantly develop your style, your skills and you see your work getting better, getting more mature. It's a "growing part" of yourself.

Outline: Within animation, you've worked as a storyboard artist, background artist, character developer and more. Could you tell us about some of the key skills involved in different areas of animation?

Roberto: As I mentioned before, I entered the world of Animation from a "side door." Having some experience in illustration, meant that I could work as a Background Artist. The animation process is long, complex and involves many people with different skills. All of them are working for the same final outcome. If you want to expand your experience, an animation studio is the perfect place. With some hard work and a bit of luck you can move between departments.

Background Artists in general need to have a great sense of color, composition and a solid technique. Depending on the project



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you are working on, you will be creating every single location needed to stage every scene. The background needs to support the action, describe the environment and create a mood, without overpowering the animation. It is a fine line between a very beautiful background and a distractive one.

Art Directing covers all aspects of the “look” of a production such as the style, the continuity throughout the film, the character design, the final composition and special effects.

In the last few years I have worked often as Storyboard artist. I consider Storyboarding one of the most enjoyable parts of the process. Starting from a script, effectively you find yourself Directing. You might have an initial brief from the Director but, especially for TV series, you have to set the camera angles, work out the flow of the action and the logistics of location. You are in charge of the “mise en scene” for the show. Good storyboarding means great storytelling, there is no doubt about it. I feel I’m a better storyboard artist now, after many years of experiences in Animation. Storyboard, like filmmaking, has some pretty set rules, if you don’t know them you can’t just improvise. Experience plays a role in all this.

△ Roberto’s Showreel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0q4dKCsc4wY>

Outline: Have you marketed your work as an animator, and if so what have you found have been the most successful campaigns/efforts?

Roberto: No, I’m pretty bad at self-promoting. Besides my personal website (in desperate need of a good revamp), my LinkedIn profile and the IA website, I don’t have much else. In 2006 when Facebook started, I promised I would never open a FB account because I said: It’s a stupid idea, it will last 12 months. I’m still waiting. I guess you can use social media to promote your profession and I’m sure it can be very effective. Maybe not FB, but for example, Vimeo has some of the best short animations I see around. Anyway, the industry in Australia is not that big, if a studio starts a new project, you’ll find out reasonably quick. If you are lucky, the studio will come to you and ask if you are free and interested in the project. I believe your colleagues and co-workers are the best promotion you can have.

Outline: What materials/software do you use for your animation work?

Roberto: Nowadays I work 95% digitally. Sometime I miss the paper and colors but I have little choice. I use Photoshop, Flash, Storyboard Pro (Toon Boom), After Effect. I know and I worked with the Pipeline Workflow of a 3D production, but I don’t work directly on any 3D program. There are way too many (brilliant) 20 years old 3D Artists with more time than me on their hands. I would





never stand a chance. I also work with a Cintiq 22HD. It has been the best piece of equipment I ever bought. I know it costs a lot of money but it's worth every cent. Your production output will increase 40%.

Outline: You mention your teachers and mentors as being an important part of your art career, as well as providing the same opportunities to newer illustrators by being a mentor yourself. Could you expand on this?

Roberto: I'm not genius and there are billions of better artists than me but if I managed to work for over 20 years in the Animation and Illustration industry doing what I like, it's because I was lucky enough to have met a few very special artists along the way. Two above all: Oscar Grillo, a temperamental, passionate Argentinian artist founder of Klacto Animation in London. He was my first "gate" in to the industry. And then, later on, Adelchi Galloni who has been one of the most influential artist in the "Golden Era" of Italian Animation of the 60's and 70's. An anarchic, instinctive genius. His mantra was: "Good Composition and Fierce Energy."

In the last few years I have been teaching Animation and Storyboarding at Swinburne University of Technology and although I'm not Oscar Grillo or Adelchi Galloni, I try to pass on some of what I have learned in all my years of work. Hopefully with some results... definitely with passion.

Outline: For any illustrators hoping to branch into animation, what would you recommend be their first steps?

Roberto: On a simple level, the jump from illustration to animation can be done quite easily. Programs like Flash and Photoshop are great tools to start exploring the medium. With a bit of time and lots of patience, you can produce excellent pieces of animation. You can think of it as another technique. There is Acrylics, Watercolor, Oil... and then, there is Animation.

If we are talking about a full time career in Commercial Animation though, the story is different. You need training;

you need experience in an Animation Production Studio; often there will be a job in Melbourne and the next in Sydney and then Brisbane, so if you are really up for it, you need to be on the move. Overseas experience is a must. Canada, England, France. Lately Spain and Germany have developed a healthy animation industry. Of course the US, if you can work there.

If you want to work in 3D, be prepared to spend triple the time on your computer compared to 2D animation. There is a lot more work especially in the US and around the world and pays double than 2D.

Watch some animation and learn the basics. Don't watch just the blockbuster form Pixar and Disney, actually you can skip those altogether. Have a look at the animation from young, small studios around the globe (as I mention before, Vimeo is a good place to start). Advertising animation (not in Australia) is generally quite on the cutting edge with new styles and trends, especially in places like England.

Music videos have been paring with animation for a long time. Some musicians have done more for animation than many schools in the field. Peter Gabriel in the 90's, an obvious example but even our very own Gotye, right here in Australia has produced some outstanding work. Using a song as base for your first approach with animation is a great little exercise.

Probably the most important thing to remember if you are starting in animation is that it's a very slow process, you have to put the time in, but also it is incredibly rewarding. There is nothing like seeing your work moving and alive. ●

{  **CLICK!** } **Roberto Fino**

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