

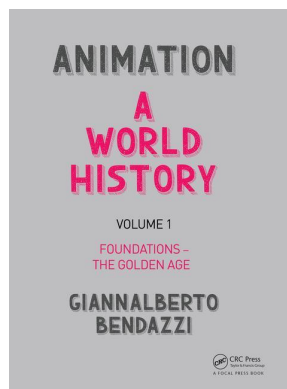
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## **Animation: A World History Volume I: Foundations—The Golden Age**

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### **Latin America**

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# 16

## LATIN AMERICA

### Mexico

New momentum was given to Mexican animation by Alfonso Vergara Andrade. In 1934, this otolaryngologist, enamoured of animated cartoons, founded AVA Studios in Mexico City along with two partners, Antonio Chavira and Francisco Gómez. The studio lasted three years and produced eight shorts.

*Paco Perico en première* (Paco Perico's Premiere, 1935) was basically a gag film according to the American model.<sup>1</sup> *Los cinco cabritos* (The Five Little Goats, 1936), directed by Bismarck Mier (the only old-timer who hadn't given up after the Pruneda studio had flopped), was the Mexican version of Disney's *Three Little Pigs* (1933). This is worth mentioning because it was the first Mexican colour animated film. The system used was the bichromic Cinecolor or bicolor, inferior to three-strip Technicolor. The next film was *Noche Mexicana* (Mexican Night, 1937), where the Holy Night party is unexpectedly ruined by obnoxious hosts.

In 1939, AVA (now Ava Color) went out of business. Doctor Vergara retired from cinema, and among the members of his group only Bismarck Mier and Carlos Sandoval (1917–2005) remained.

The 1940s and early 1950s were the Golden Age of Mexican live-action cinema, with such directors as Emilio Fernandez and Julio Bracho and such stars as Pedro Armendáriz, Jorge Negrete, Dolores del Río, and María Félix. Americanization was accentuated for both political (during World War II, even many communists accepted

the United States, encouraged by the Stalin-Roosevelt alliance) and economic reasons (Hollywood producers started runaway production companies in cheaper countries).

In 1941, Walt Disney, his wife, and a group of fifteen top studio artists embarked on a famous goodwill tour in South America, visiting Mexico in 1942 and 1943. Two Mexican immigrants crossed the southern border along with the Disney 'grupo': Ernesto 'Ernie' Terrazas and Edmundo Santos.

This visit produced *The Three Caballeros* (which had its world premiere on 21 December 1944 at Cine Alameda in Mexico City). The film was praised and made money, but the Mexican animators who had worked on it received no screen credit and, furthermore, Mexican filmgoers were unhappy with the touristic and stereotyped image it depicted of their country. Story man 'Ernie' Terrazas invented the main Mexican character, the rooster Pancho Pistolas.<sup>2</sup>

Thereafter, most of Mexican animation history can be considered a continuation of the momentum given by the North American 'spiritual invasion' commenced by Disney. However, the rest of it can be considered the counterthrust given by some Mexican artists to this cultural colonization.<sup>3</sup>

Santiago Reachí – an advertising agent who, at the end of the 1930s, had founded the prosperous Publicidad Organizada S.A. and, above all, was the man who had brought Cantinflas<sup>4</sup> to work for the movies – founded the Caricolor studio, hiring four Californian animators:

<sup>1</sup> Manuel Rodríguez Bermúdez, *Animación: Una perspectiva desde México*, Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos, Mexico City, 2007, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Juan Manuel Aurrecochea, *El episodio perdido: Historia del cine mexicano de animación*, Cineteca Nacional, Mexico City, 2004, pp. 31–39.

<sup>3</sup> The feelings that Mexicans harboured (and harbour) towards the United States are more contradictory and conflictual than those of any other people. It all goes back to the American-Mexican War of 1848, when the conquered Mexicans lost 52 per cent of their territory.

<sup>4</sup> Real name: Mario Moreno (1911–1993); he would become one of the greatest comic stars of world cinema.

Manuel Pérez, Rudy Zamora, Pete Burness, and Carl Urbano. The project was torpedoed by the war itself: The four Americans had to go back to serve their country, and only a short was completed – *Me voy de cacería* (I Go Hunting), a sort of homage to tequila.<sup>5</sup>

In 1947, Claudio Baña, Leobardo Galicia, and Jesús Sanchez Rolón established Caricaturas Animadas de México, but the peak of their production was just an animated sequence of a fly in *El diablo no es tan diablo* (The Devil Is Not So Devil, 1949), the first Mexican feature film that combined live-action and animation sequences.<sup>6</sup>

## Colombia<sup>7</sup>

Around 1930, the Acevedo brothers from the city of Medellín gave birth to the first animation productions, but they never became famous. In their documentary *Colombia Victorious*, produced in 1933, we can see animated military ships sailing on the Putumayo River. The Acevedo brothers chose animation to show routes, tracks, or interesting spots on maps in various installments of their newsreel *Noticiero Nacional*, in which they showed the national aristocracy participating in everyday life during sports celebrations, bullfights, plays, ballets, processions, and even student demonstrations. Afterwards, there were some scarce attempts to build up a proper animation industry, but for about thirty years this was not possible.

## Venezuela<sup>8</sup>

The first documented animation work realized in Venezuela, *La Danza de los Esqueletos* (The Skeleton Dance), dates back to 1934. It is a funny film in which some cannibals persecute three men, made by an (as of this writing) unidentified German technician at the request of then-President Juan Vicente Gómez. It lasts four minutes, eleven seconds and, though silent, it is likely that it was meant to be a musical, considering that the main characters dance and move as if following the rhythm of some music.

The next steps date back to the early 1940s, when the Department of Health backed a short film series to improve the Venezuelan people's health education, emphasizing, for instance, the use of the toothbrush for proper dental hygiene.

In 1942 and 1943, Fernando Álvarez and Luís Mejías produced *Tío Tigre y Tío Conejo* (Uncle Tiger and Uncle Rabbit), starring Potoco the monkey, created by the artist Carlos Cruz Diez; despite dire financial straits, it was fairly successful.

Álvarez and Mejías had gained the support of Rafael Rivero Oramas, founder of *Tricolor* magazine and considered to be the actual screenwriter of the film. Oramas offered them the opportunity to use Studios El Ávila, the property of his friend Rómulo Gallegos.

After achieving this goal, Álvarez travelled across Argentina with the purpose of improving his knowledge about local animation and the animation industry, while Luís Mejías went on working for ARS Publicidad and Bolívar Films. Three years later, Álvarez was back in Venezuela, and he and Mejías decided to open their own animation studio in El Conde.

They started a project oriented towards a Latin American audience called *El Arepón*. Its indisputable protagonist should have been the *arepa* (a dish made of ground corn dough or cooked flour, popular in Colombia, Venezuela, and other Spanish-speaking countries). Ultimately, the two partners stopped getting along, ending the company and the film.

Álvarez stopped working in this field, while Mejías became the leader of the animation department of Radio Caracas Televisión (currently known as TVes).

During the 1940s, the Department of Agriculture hired the Colombian Vargas Codazzi as a producer of short films promoting the Department's messages. Codazzi, to reduce expenses and working hours, chose to utilize the technique of cut-outs.

Codazzi paved the way for many foreign animators, who took their first steps in the country between 1945 and 1950, including the Ukrainian Halyna Mazepa de Koval; the Spaniards Juan Queralta and Arturo Moreno, director of *Garbancito de la Mancha* (Garbancito from La Mancha, 1945); and the Frenchman Georges (Jorge) Lebel, among others.

<sup>5</sup> Juan Manuel Aurrecochea, *El episodio perdido: Historia del cine mexicano de animación*, Cineteca Nacional, Mexico City, 2004, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Manuel Rodríguez Bermúdez, *Animación: Una perspectiva desde México*, Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos, Mexico City, 2007, p. 131.

<sup>7</sup> By Francesca Guatteri.

<sup>8</sup> By Francesca Guatteri.

## Brazil

In 1933, João Stamato, a collaborator of Seth, co-directed *Macaco feio, macaco bonito* (Ugly Monkey, Pretty Monkey) with Luiz Seel.<sup>9</sup> In 1938, caricaturist Luiz Sá released the short *Avénturas de Virgolino* (The Adventures of Virgolino) and, a year later, *Virgolino apánha* (Virgolino's Troubles). In the 1940s, Humberto Mauro (1897–1983), one of the founding fathers of Brazilian cinema, worked briefly with animation. His eighteen-minute *O dragãozinho manso* (The Good Little Dragon) introduced the country to the use of animated puppets.

## Argentina<sup>10</sup>

In 1928, after the six-year interval required by the Constitution, Yrigoyen ran again for president and was re-elected. When the president's senility and the dishonesty of his collaborators became objects of ridicule for the country, Cristiani could not resist the temptation to make fun of him once again. In 1929, he began filming

*Peludópolis* from the newly founded Estudios Cristiani. (The title of the film, 'City of Peludo', referred to the radical president's nickname.)<sup>11</sup>

The film took two years to complete and was shown at Cine Renacimiento on 16 September 1931. The final edition, however, had undergone radical changes from the original project; history had forced Cristiani to re-edit. One year before the film was released, a coup by General José Félix Uriburu on 6 September overthrew the democracy. Cristiani hurried to modify the film in an attempt to save whatever sequences he could, but the result was not well received by the public.<sup>12</sup> More favourably disposed, critics encouragingly praised the artist. As the world's first *sound* animated feature film, *Peludópolis* was further proof of Cristiani's precociousness.

After suffering an economic loss from this project, Cristiani took a more careful approach to cinema, limiting his production to advertising. In 1938, he made a brief comeback to entertainment when writer and editor Constancio C. Vigil asked him to make a film from one of his short stories, 'El mono relojero' (The Monkey Watchmaker). For this short film, Cristiani used the North American



Figure 16.1 Quirino Cristiani making *Peludópolis*, 1931.

<sup>9</sup>This American producer was previously introduced at work in Germany and Austria.

<sup>10</sup> By Giannalberto Bendazzi and Francesca Guatteri.

<sup>11</sup> 'Peludo' in Argentinean-Castilian is the name of the little animal usually called an armadillo. The armadillo's behaviour is very shy and aloof – like the aloof president, who dominated through inscrutability.

<sup>12</sup> Very briefly, this is the plot: The state ship falls into the hands of the pirate El Peludo, who lands with his crew in the Quesolandina Republic. After several adventures, a boat appears on the horizon, carrying General Provisional (Uriburu) and Juan Pueblo (the people), who intend to remedy the troubles of Quesolandina. The name Quesolandina (Argentina) derives from the idiom 'le gusta el queso' (he likes cheese), referring to the greediness of corrupt officials.

technique of cel animation<sup>13</sup> and a style influenced by the cinema of the United States. The film was not successful with audiences. Of average quality, it suffered from the contrast between the filmmaker's comical, playful inspiration and the writer's strictly educational intent. A planned screen adaptation of Vigil's other stories did not take off, particularly because of the difficulty in finding a market. For this same reason, Cristiani gradually abandoned his advertising activity and focused on developing, printing, and sound recording in the new studio bearing his name. He returned twice to the creation of comic shorts, working on *Entre pítos y flautas* (Between the Pipes and Flutes, 1941) and *Carbonada* (1943); afterwards, he retired permanently from the field.

After Quirino Cristiani, animators in Argentina were not able to complete major projects. Juan Oliva, a painter and comic strip artist (Barcelona, August 1910–July 1975) emigrated to Argentina in 1930 and apprenticed with Cristiani for a few years. In 1937, he began animating his own productions. These were brief comic episodes about Julián Centella, a little gaucho, for insertion in the newsreel *Sucesos Argentinos* (Events in Argentina). In 1939, he founded the *Compañía Argentina de Dibujos Animados* (The Argentinean Company of Animated Drawings), with the intention of producing animated shorts that could compete with their American counterparts.

After his trial production *Desplumando avestruces* (Plucking Ostriches), Oliva released *La caza del puma* (Hunting the Puma, 1940). The movie features the child Rejucilo and his horse Ciclón. They succeed in their hunt for the puma by getting the animal drunk. Despite good-quality animation and drawings, at least for the standards of the time, the film didn't have much of an audience, and Oliva was forced to dissolve the company. He worked for a time in advertising before producing two shorts, *Filipito el pistolero* (Filipito the Gunslinger, 1942) and *Noche de sustos* (Night of Fright, 1942). Oliva then retired to drawing, painting, and teaching animation. Plagued by poor health (for many years, he was almost blind), he died on 3 July 1975.

Dante Quintero (San Vicente, 26 October 1909–Buenos Aires, 14 May 2003) was a comic strip artist, publisher, and creator of the famous Indian Patoruzú, a sort of Argentinean Don Quixote. A man of vast financial means, in 1939, he planned a feature film based on his

own comic strip character. After visiting the Fleischer and Disney studios in the United States, he assembled a good team, managed by his closest comic strip collaborators. For various reasons (such as the choice of the German colour film system Gasparcolor, which became unavailable after the outbreak of the war), the piece was reduced to eighteen minutes. It was released unsuccessfully in 1942 with the title *Upa en apuros* (Upa in Trouble). This was the first Argentinean colour animated film and for a long time was considered an example of good animation at the international level.

In the meantime, a new generation of animators was born, including Tulio Lobato and Oscar Blotta (assisted by Victor A. Iturralde Rúa), Alberto del Castillo, and Joseph Gallo. Veteran animator and writer Oscar Desplats explains: 'They were already very skilled artists, capable of tackling any kind of design.'<sup>14</sup>

José María Burone Bruché, Juan Oliva's follower, went through a couple of very different stages during two decades of work throughout Argentinean animation history to achieve, in his projects, the combination of the smooth and bohemian style of his previous independent works and the orderliness of professional television advertisement work. He began his activities in 1942, when he replaced Juan Oliva as director of the Emelco Animation Department for the production of commercial shorts. As Oscar Desplats recalled, 'Bruché stood out because his drawings, characters and creations reflected authentic national expression'. Precisely where his predecessor had found little opportunity to produce his art shorts, José Burone Bruché was able to film *Los consejos del viejo vizcacha* (The Old Viscacha's Advice, 1945), a three-minute free adaptation of José Hernández's famous book of gaucho poems, *Martín Fierro*, written in 1872. *The Old Viscacha's Advice* is about a miserable old gaucho who gives politically incorrect advice.

Bruché collaborated with Francisco Blanco for the creation of the backgrounds and Ubaldo Galuppo for the creation of the animation for the film, which was shot in Ferraniacolor.<sup>15</sup> Afterwards, with the same work team, Bruché involved himself in a very ambitious project: the modern rearrangement of *Fausto*, based on the text by Estanislao del Campo, and a series of one-minute films in black and white, for the producer Cinepa, entitled El

<sup>13</sup> For his previous film, Cristiani had used an original technique for animating cut-out figures, which he patented in 1917. *El Apóstol*, *Sin dejar rastros*, and *Peludópolis* were filmed with this method, which was used in other films as well until the early 1930s.

<sup>14</sup> Oscar Desplats, personal communication to Francesca Guatteri, October 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Ferraniacolor was a short-lived Italian colour stock system.

refrán animado or Refranes populares (Popular Sayings, 1947).

In 1950, he formed his own company, Burone Bruché Productions. He brought about a number of animated characters in many comedy shorts and custom advertising and educational films before devoting himself exclusively to commercials.

José Burone Bruché died at the early age of fifty-one while still hard at work, so his projects were carried out by the animators who had worked with him, Ubaldo Galuppo and Jorge Caro, who would later open their own studios.

In 1949, Enrique de Rosas founded Cinepa, a distributor and Argentina's first producer of short black-and-white 16-mm films intended for exhibition in homes and cinema clubs (he also manufactured 16-mm film projectors for his market under the brand name 'Hollywood'). Cinepa's animators were Galuppo, Jorge Caro, and Dante Pettenon.

In the years defined by Walt Disney's monopoly, Jorge Caro chose to draw inspiration instead from the style of

Warner Bros. and MGM, two studios that, in the 1940s, maintained very high levels of creative standards and productivity.

At that time, amateur screenings were very fashionable, so selling material for such distribution turned out to be a big source of wealth. Even some of Oliva's old productions, such as *El refrán animado* or *La caza del puma*, began to be distributed in that form. The great success of this business led to the production of various short films in black and white.

Jorge Caro, a José Burone Bruché alumnus, started his profession right in his master's studio in 1950 with an animated series developed from an original character: a cheerful rabbit named Plácido that became very successful, particularly in *Puños de campeón* (Fists of Champion), which was released in cinemas in the early 1950s. Plácido is a humanized, two-legged rabbit, reminiscent of the American model of anthropomorphized animal characters. After several similar shorts, Caro moved to Peru, where he founded an animation studio.