

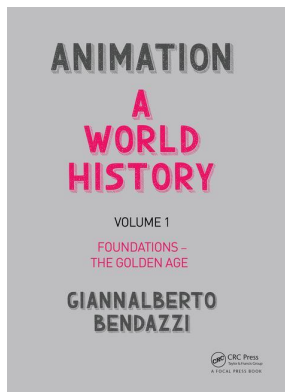
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## **Animation: A World History Volume I: Foundations—The Golden Age**

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### **Africa**

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## AFRICA

### Egypt

The small Egyptian animated production industry was mainly due to the Frenkel brothers. Born into a Jewish family in Jaffa, Palestine, Herschel, Salomon, and David Frenkel later established their lacquered wood furniture business in Cairo. Fascinated by animation after viewing the films of Felix the Cat, the three brothers began studying the frame-by-frame technique. In 1936, they released *Mafish Fayda* (Nothing to Do), featuring the character of Mish-Mish, an Egyptian youngster wearing a fez. Other productions based on the same character followed, including the good war propaganda film *Al difaw'al watani* (National Defence, 1940) and *Enjoy Your Food* (1947). When the political environment in Egypt became too turbulent, the Frenkels left the country. The younger brother, David, moved to France, where he revived Mish-Mish by substituting his fez with a very French *casquette* and renaming him Mimiche. These films were not distributed in theatres but instead were sold for home use. In 1964, he made *Le rêve du beau Danube bleu* (The Dream of the Beautiful Blue Danube), the only major creation in his European production.

Another Egyptian pioneer was Antoine Selim Ibrahim (Cairo, 11 November 1911), whose *Aziza and Youness in El Sheik Barakat's Book* (1938) was the first animated film with an Arabic sound track. Ibrahim made more films in the

1940s (including *Dokdok*, 1940) and then made commercials and titles for live-action films. In 1972, he went to the United States and worked for Hanna-Barbera; then, from 1976 to 1980, he worked for DePatie-Freleng Enterprises. He later retired and devoted himself to painting.

### Union of South Africa<sup>1</sup>

During the 1940s, the South African animation industry was divided in two directions: on the one hand, special effects animation from Killarney Film Studios (the new name for Schlesinger's previous company, African Film Productions), including optical effects and titling;<sup>2</sup> on the other hand, traditional hand-drawn cel animation from Alpha Film Studios.

Killarney Film Studios, which continued to be a major producer of local films and newsreels for the two decades to come,<sup>3</sup> created and maintained a separate animation and optical department, run by James Reindorp. The bulk of the department's work consisted of titles for film studios and live projects, as well as long-running weekly programming.

Partly due to the archaic facilities and technology available and largely due to the improvisatory methodology they employed while working, the staff at the Killarney studios gained ingenuity in the field of special effects. However,

<sup>1</sup> By Shanaz Shapurjee Hampson.

<sup>2</sup> According to Trevor Moses, senior industrial technician at the National Film, Video and Sound Archives in Pretoria, special effects animation was usually done for the opening titles or end credits sequences in live-action features or shorts. Some of these title sequences were complex, involved, and displayed a lot of sophistication.

<sup>3</sup> Newsreels and animation distribution were synonymous with theatre complexes, and these animated films and newsreels were used as fillers – precursors to the 'main attraction'. This phenomenon happened across the globe, with audiences being able to enjoy an entire evening's worth of entertainment (Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons*, New American Library, New York, 1980, p. 2).

for economic reasons, innovation and experimentation were suppressed, and instead artists were encouraged to follow the client's brief in order to meet the high output demand.<sup>4</sup>

James Reindorp was a highly talented and competent cameraman. He had a fixed camera that was supported on four wooden poles (thereby allowing a tabletop to be winched up and down). In 1946, Reindorp left Killarney Film Studios to join the newly formed Alpha Film Studios as an animation cameraman, leaving Benny Mechanik, his assistant, to run the animation and optical department.

Mechanik continued to produce titles for the studio's live projects and long-running weekly news program *African Mirror*, as well as optical special effects and transitions. He created his own mattes for transitions by shooting them in black and white on high-contrast film stock. Vaseline was applied to the camera lens in patterns to create filters. Fades were created manually by dipping the actual film negative in a tray of ferrocyanide and counting off the exposure time of each frame, then fixing the film in sodium thiosulfate, a photographic fixing agent, and hanging it on wash lines to dry.<sup>5</sup> In 1955, 20th Century Fox bought the studio out; this year finally saw the arrival of a proper animation stand, with an adjustable camera for zooms and pans and portable lights.

It was Alpha Film Studios, Africa's largest studio, which produced traditional hand-drawn animation. When James Reindorp joined the newly established studio, Alpha Film Studios ultimately gained full momentum. In 1947, the owner, Bill Boxer, persuaded Denis Purchase, an English animator, to relocate to South Africa to produce animated commercials for the studio. American and European modes of animation production – and even socio-political ideologies – greatly influenced the manner in which South African artists approached their work during the 1940s and for decades to come, as the professionals training and advising South African animators were predominantly foreigners.

Because professional animation equipment was not available in South Africa, conditions at Alpha Film Studios were largely improvised: The animators used cellophane in place of traditional cels; a laborious spring system had to be created and set up to flatten the wrinkles out of each sheet before every frame was shot.

In addition to these challenges, the studio desperately needed to purchase both a new animation stand and a new optical printer; however, there was not enough money in the budget.

Reindorp then began a lengthy process of innovation, which would eventually culminate in a technological marvel. For two years, he was engaged in intense negotiations with Oxberry, the American manufacturer of the finest animation stands in the world, and initiated a design experiment process with the famous company to devise one stand that served both functions. Finally, after years of perseverance, Mr. Oxberry himself came out to South Africa in 1956 to install at Alpha Film Studios the first animation stand in the world with an aerial image feature for superimposition on live film. This dual-function animation stand allowed Reindorp and the staff at the studio to streamline their workflow and production pipeline, thereby increasing their output.

Alpha Film Studios specialized in animated commercials and the popular limited animation form known as the 'drawtoon', which echoed the work of the old lighting sketchers: The scene was first drawn in pencil and then erased so that only the animator could see the faint guidelines. The animator could then begin inking the sketch, once placed on the animation stand, a section at a time, pausing briefly for the cameraman to shoot the images in succession. Quite a few cartoonists passed through the studio's doors as 'drawtoonists', but it was Denis Purchase who created the bulk of the animation at the studio.<sup>6</sup>

During its prime, Alpha Film Studios was believed to have produced sixty seconds of cartoon animation per week, as well as a plethora of 'drawtoons', all of which were completed by a dedicated team of twelve skilled colourists. It is remarkable that such an understaffed studio was capable of such a feat.

During the first four decades of the twentieth century, South African animation was directed towards an adult, cinema-going audience as opposed to the later shift to children's programming in the television era. The affinity between animation and advertising emerged as early as 1916, and this economically driven partnership seems to have remained.

<sup>4</sup> As a result, South African animation slowly began to forge a niche for itself in the commercial market, culminating in the art form being very successful in the advertising industry after television was introduced to the country in 1976.

<sup>5</sup> Sarienne Kersh, 'History of South African Animation', *Screen Africa*, 20 November 1996, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Purchase was later joined by Stanley Pearsall, who had previously worked with David Hand (the director of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Bambi*) in England. Other notable, local 'drawtoons' artists from that time were Keith Stevens and John Garling.

