

## Panel E1

Auditorium

### Making Animated Films

**Amy Lee Ketchum**

#### **Art at the Speed of Production: a conceptual animation performance**



I propose to present a talk about my project, “Art at the Speed of Production.” I will elaborate the various components of the project and the concepts that inform it. The film itself is a meditation on process, reaching beyond the illusion of motion to include the audience in the real time experience of animating. In this project I perform before an audience the act of animating a feature film of indefinite length. The film is an adaptation of artist Henry Darger’s sprawling visual narrative, *The Story of the Vivian Girls*. Each performance is a successive moment in the narrative, and is captured on digital video. The project is an animation, within a theater performance, within a film, that is essentially impossible to complete. For the conference presentation to be clear, I will not be performing the project. Instead, I will show documentation of the events, theater bills, and excerpts of the animation in progress.

Henry Darger’s 15,145 page story and accompanying painted scrolls were created over the span of six decades and were never shown to the public in his lifetime. By choosing to adapt Darger’s epic, which is an accumulation of a lifetime of artmaking, I underscore the value of making art that is process oriented. Asking the viewer to watch a story unfold over the pace of production rather than at the typical animation rate of 12 frames per second forces them to draw their own connections and drift into their own thoughts in the quiet (even boring) space between captured frames. This elongated period and refusal to entertain resists the low-attention span flashiness of much of current film, the internet age, and commercial productions.

I will also address my project in relation to Walter Benjamin’s essay, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Because my project is not simply a film that is reproducible and easily consumed, I hope to explore the complexities and nuances of what it means to experience art in various forms and environments.

Additionally, I will discuss Karl Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism in which goods are perceived to have an intrinsic economic value with the consumers divorced from the producer and the processes involved in making the product. I will connect this theory with my project in the sense that the consumer, producer, and the product will be merged. The project’s refusal to hide the labor of its production destroys the illusionism in filmmaking, and instead asks the viewer to drift into their own associations. The project does not serve the traditional storytelling purpose that theater, animation, and film typically do. The purpose of the project is more conceptual: it is meant to stimulate thought about process versus product based art-making.

Lastly, I will talk about my motivation to create this project. As an individual living in a Western capitalist environment, I have experienced the drive to want be part of this all-encompassing system in order to feel that I have value in my society. As an artist, I observe the pressure by academia and other fine art institutions to produce a product and

brand oneself in a way that echoes the demands of a capitalist market. This project, “Art at the Speed of Production” serves as a reminder to myself not to lose sight of the importance of the process of making.

## Biography

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Amy Lee Ketchum fuses sculpture, dance, and mythology in her films which grasp at comprehending the unknowable aspects of life and death. Her work which is informed by both the spectacle of Busby Berkeley as well as the quiet cinematic poetry of Andrei Tarkovsky, seeks to provoke a non-verbal and intuitive response from the viewer. She holds an MFA in Animation from the University of Southern California and a double BA in Art and Architecture from the University of California, Berkeley. Her films have screened internationally and won awards at festivals such as Animasivo, the Los Angeles Animation Festival, and the ASIFA-East Awards. Recently she wrote and directed an animated documentary for the Public Broadcasting Station KCET series *Lost LA*. In addition to filmmaking, she is engaged in critical writing about visual culture on topics such as the Situationists, the Internet, and avant-garde animation. She is currently working on an experimental animation of paper sculptures and teaching animation at the University of Pennsylvania.