

## Panel H3

Sala Emiciclo

### Discourses on Animation Authors

Trixy Wattenbarger

Helen Hill, Handmade Animation from the Heart



January 4, 2017 marks the tenth anniversary of the untimely death of filmmaker Helen Hill (1970-2007). Helen's films are handmade little gems filled with humor, playfulness, social activism and poetry. Using cut-outs, stop motion, watercolors, hand processed 16mm and Super 8 film, cel animation and photography, she created unique fun filled worlds that analyzed the complexities of the human condition in an accessible, endearing and lovely way. Born in South Carolina, Helen studied at Harvard University and California Institute of the Arts before spending her time as an independent filmmaker and educator in Halifax, Nova Scotia and New Orleans, Louisiana. Prolific and driven with a love for the medium, Helen made over a dozen short films in her 36 years. Her film "Scratch and Crow" was named to the United States National Film Registry in 2009. In 2001 she published "Recipes for Disaster- a Handcrafted Film cookbooklet", a compilation of tips, tricks and techniques for creating hand-made film submitted by filmmakers across North America. Her award winning 1999 film, "Mouseholes" used audio she recorded of her grandfather in his last days to weave a story about love, loss and death. At the time of her death, Helen was working on "The Florestine Collection", a tale of race, class and the south spurred by a discovery of a trove of handmade dresses. The film, originally funded through a Rockefeller Foundation Media Arts Grant, was completed posthumously by her widowed husband, Paul Gailiunas.

Like her films, Helen Hill was a unique, playful and endearing person. She was known to many by her nickname, Chicken. She was a caring friend and generous teacher with a knack for being quite the little rascal. I once witnessed her put ten pieces of bright blue hubba bubba bubblegum in her mouth while smoking a cigar in the park on Easter Sunday. She liked borrowing friends' cars and having them watch in disbelief as she drove in tight circles around the parking lot or jumped weed choked desert ravines. If you knew her for more than a few days, chances are she'd invite you over for some homemade pickle biscuits and a visit with her pet potbellied pig, Rosie.

She loved enabling people to tell their stories through animation. Helen taught students of all ages and backgrounds through workshops and classes at places like the Nova Scotia College for Arts and Design, the California State Summer School for the Arts, the Atlantic Filmmaker's Cooperative and the New Orleans Video Access Center to name a few. She was involved in the Food Not Bombs movement in both Halifax and New Orleans and continued advocating for social justice and animal rights up until her death.

Helen Hill died after returning to New Orleans post the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. She had returned to the city with a resolve to help rebuild the artistic, eclectic and diverse community that she loved. On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Helen was shot and killed by an unknown assailant in her home leaving behind a two-year old son, a grieving husband and family, and a large community of friends, colleagues and acquaintances stunned by the loss.

In my presentation, I will discuss several of Helen's animated films including "Mouseholes", "Scratch and Crow" and "Madam Winger Makes a Film" examining the process and

concepts of the pieces as well as how they relate to her life and legacy. Sourcing former students, family, colleagues and friends I will draw a parallel between the works themselves and Helen's life as a unique personality. Weaving anecdotes of her personal interactions with her animation techniques and content inspirations, I will demonstrate how interconnected her work was with her life.

## Biography

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As an Associate Professor of Practice at the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts Division of Animation and Digital Arts, Trixy Wattenbarger has over twelve years experience teaching animation to university students and over twenty years experience teaching K-12 students through working with non-profit youth arts organizations. Screenings of her films "La Mujer Lagartija", "Mermaids and Pickles" and "Dream Lover Fondue" include the Ann Arbor Film Festival, the Holland Animation Festival and the SXSW film festival. Her one-woman puppet show "Pudinella Parsnip" was showcased in the 1998 Jim Henson International Puppetry Festival. Her professional experience includes serving as animation director for Nickelodeon's "Blue's Clues".

With an art practice that includes animation, puppetry, ceramic sculpture and painting, Trixy art practice allows for experimentation with technology, chemical processes and media. Currently, she is working on creating digital plein air animation using mobile digital tools to animate the environment. Her specialty is animating 2D digital puppets using After Effects and IK plug ins such as DUIK. Since 2012, she has served as an Adobe Education Leader. For the past two years, she has been a weekly contributor to the Daily Psychedelic Video blog.