

Drawing Characters 1

UNIT 28

A GOOD LINE OF ACTORS

Despite the advances made in 3D animation by the likes of Pixar, hand-drawn characters are still the basis of the majority of animation – cartoons. Even where major feature-length animations are filled with computer-generated images, the main characters are still painstakingly created with pencil and paper. Why?

Apart from almost 100 years of tradition that makes us expect animation to be drawn, there is the magic that comes from seeing the drawings move. Couple this with the limitless diversity of the human imagination and artistic style, and we end up with the fantastic range of cartoons we see today.

Most artists develop their own style as they mature, whether it be derived originally from imitation or inspiration. This style is a combination of the linework and their perception of the world. No one is going to deny that most cartoonists have quite a different view of the world than the average person. You presumably fit into this category and have already discovered your talent for drawing.

MODEL BEHAVIOUR

When you start to draw your characters, you must have their characteristics firmly established in your mind, just as an actor does when playing a role, because you will be acting out that role with your drawings. The personality of

Making model sheets is a vital part of the line animator's work. They establish the characters' proportions as well as defining their overall shapes. These three examples show three different character styles and presentations. The first one (**fig 01**) shows the artist's construction lines and some annotations, which can be a useful guide to other artists who may work on the project.

the character will go a long way towards determining its physical attributes (**fig 09**). Although it is best to avoid stereotypes wherever possible, certain body shapes will help convey the character's personality to the audience in the quickest way. For example, heroes have triangular-shaped bodies with broad shoulders, very active people tend to be thin, jolly people are plump and so on. As discussed earlier, people-watching is an important part of the animator's work.

Once you have got past the initial sketch stages and have a firm idea

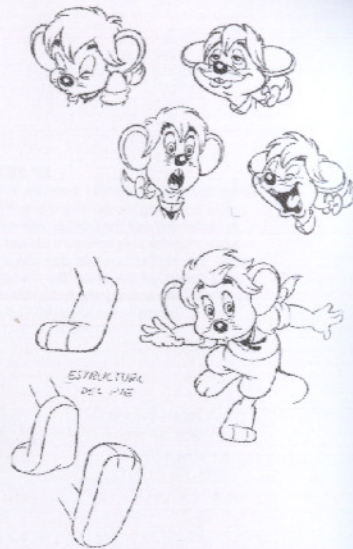


FIG01

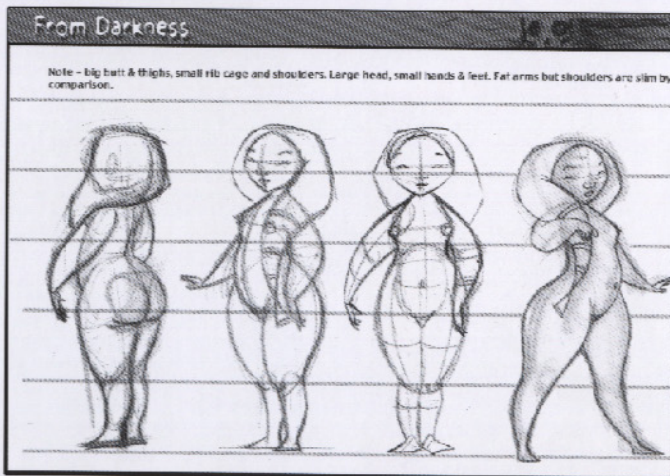


FIG02



FIG03





Spanish animation studio Accio produced a comprehensive range of model sheets for the characters they developed for a children's cartoon. Not only did they create the standard proportions sheet (fig 03) but also ones showing facial expressions and body movements. These are just a small selection of those developed for one of the characters.

FIG05



of how the character will look, you need to make some model sheets (figs 01–03). These are the blueprints from which you'll be working. They show the character from different angles – front, back, sides, three-quarter view, top – with clearly marked proportion guides. You'll also need to produce a sheet of facial expressions portraying a full range of emotions (fig 04). Don't limit yourself to drawing those needed in your film. The more you create, the more alive the character becomes in your own mind, and the practice can be helpful when you are developing other characters.

your model sheets, or conversely you can use the model sheet as a guide for the sculpture.

Once you have established the form of your character, you will need to work on how it is going to move. This is covered on the following page.

Canadian studio Atomic Cartoons created some unusual characters for its series *Dirty Lil Baster*. Gil is an alligator 'raised in the Bayou by human kin', Ma Gil and Pa Gil Richards. Pencil drawings were used to develop character expressions. The coloured character studies were done in Flash, the program used for the final animation, thereby reducing the need to redraw Gil for each wardrobe test.

FIG06



HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU, KID

Another useful aid, especially when you come to working on the final animation, is a maquette. This is a three-dimensional sculpture of the character, usually made from clay, which is the easiest medium to work in. You may prefer to make this 3D model before you start on

FIG07

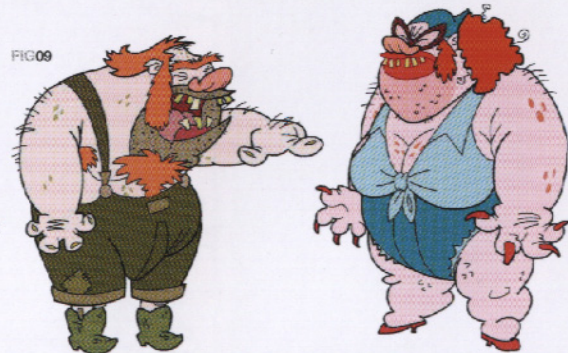


While the story is still the most important aspect of any film, animated or not, television cartoon series rely more heavily on the characters. There are many artists, such as Tim Beaumont, who specialise in creating and developing characters and an animation's style. Once created these characters can be sold to studios for further development and animation.

FIG08



FIG09



OVER TO YOU

CITY 01

Always keep a small drawing pad with you and sketch down different expressions that catch your eye. Try to exaggerate them as you draw.

CITY 02

Take life drawing classes. There are many art clubs and community colleges that offer these at very reasonable costs. Even if you already know how to draw, it's a very cheap way to get a variety of models and also to see other people's drawing styles. It may be an idea to make it clear to the tutor that you are working in animation and are not necessarily interested in following the class' prescribed format.

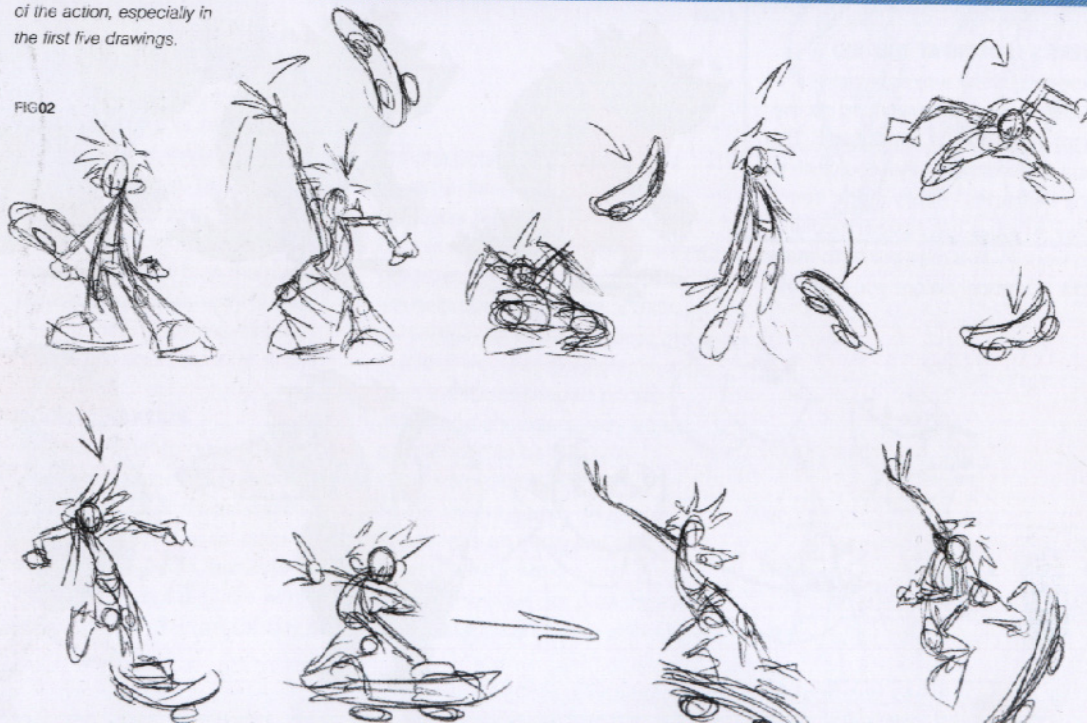
FIG01



▣ The movement of the girl's pony tail and shoulder bag is an example of secondary action. It also helps convey the idea of how a follow-through action could be portrayed.

▣ Despite their simplicity, these drawings are clearly the key frames of a pose-to-pose action where each action anticipates the next one. Each frame's movement is exaggerated, as is the arc of the action, especially in the first five drawings.

FIG02



Drawing Characters 2

UNIT 33

MOVING ACTION

Once you have your character designed, you'll want to get it moving; after all, that's what animation is all about – acting out a story by giving life to your drawings. The style of your animation will determine how you approach the task of creating the action. If you're making a humorous toon, in the *Looney Tunes* tradition, the action is going to be fast and exaggerated, whereas if you're making something atmospheric, as in a Manga style, movement will sometimes be minimal and subtle.

No matter what style you are working in, it's vital to keep the movement fluid and realistic, even when the character is being crushed under a ten-ton weight. This is achieved by using squash and stretch and is probably the most important technique you'll need to master. Almost all physical movement involves some squash and stretch, whether it be leg muscles and torso during a walk or a ball bouncing off the ground.

Squash and stretch is the first of twelve basic principles of animation outlined in what most animators consider to be the bible of the craft, *Illusion of Life* by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston. These twelve principles are listed here:

FIG03

☑ The exaggerated physique of Kev the skateboarder is shown here in more detail. His board has visibly taken on the arcs of the action.



☑ Eyes popping and jaws dropping are commonly used exaggerated expressions. Combined with the explosion of colour, they bring this still image (right) to life.

FIG04



TWELVE PRINCIPLES OF ANIMATION

1. SQUASH AND STRETCH

2. ANTICIPATION This is setting up the action before it happens, usually with a slight movement in the opposite direction to the main one (fig 01).

3. STAGING This is related to the way the film, as a whole is 'shot', considering angles, framing and scene length.

4. STRAIGHT-AHEAD ACTION AND POSE-TO-POSE Straight-ahead action starts at one point and finishes at another in a single continuous movement, such as running (fig 01) whereas pose-to-pose is a variety of actions in one scene requiring clearly delineated key frames to mark the action's extreme point (fig 02). How the in-betweens are executed can alter the whole rhythm of the action.

5. FOLLOW-THROUGH AND OVERLAPPING ACTION Follow-through is the opposite of anticipation. When a character stops, certain parts remain in motion, such as hair or clothes (fig 02). Overlapping action is where the follow-

through of one action becomes the anticipation of the next one (fig 02).

6. SLOW IN - SLOW OUT This means using more drawings at the beginning and end of an action and fewer in the middle. This creates a more lifelike feeling to the movement.

7. ARCS These are used to describe natural movement. All actions create circular movements because they usually pivot around a central point, usually a joint. Arcs are also used to describe a line of action through a character (fig 03).

8. SECONDARY ACTION Is just that, another action that takes place at the same time as the main one. This may be something as simple as turning the head from side to side during a walk sequence.

9. TIMING This is something that can't be taught. In the same way that comedians who rely on it to get the most from their gags have to learn it through experience, you too will get it right only through practice. Timing is how

you get characters to interact naturally. Timing also has to do with the technical side of deciding how many drawings are used to portray an action.

10. EXAGGERATION This is the enhancement of a physical attribute or movement, but don't make the mistake of exaggerating the exaggeration (fig 04).

11. SOLID DRAWING This conveys a sense of three-dimensionality through linework, colour and shading (fig 04).

12. APPEAL This is giving personality to the characters you draw. If you can convey it without the sound track, you know you are on the right track.

These are not hard and fast rules, but they have been found to work since the early days of animation. Bear them in mind at the storyboard stage and your animation will definitely have more fluidity and believability.

OVER TO YOU

011 01

Study films and videos of movement. Watch how everything moves – especially hair and clothes, in relation to the body. Study single frames of cartoons and see if you can find the arcs of movement and lines of action. Place some tracing paper or col over the screen and draw the arcs.