

# BOB GODFREY

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Bob Godfrey was born in Horse Shoe Bend, West Maitland, Australia, January 27 1921, but moved to England shortly after with his British parents. He was first introduced to animation as a background artist whilst working for W.M Larkins Studio in 1950. He participated in founding the Grasshoppers group, a semi-professional distribution company, where he directed, wrote and animated his first cartoons, *The Big Parade* (1952) and *Watch the Birdie* (1954) with Keith Learner. Godfrey was a founding member of Biographic Films - a production company that thrived on producing television, advertising and public relations works from 1954 to 1965. He began to make his own personal films, starting with *Polygamous*



*Bob Godfrey at work in his studio*  
© Bob Godfrey Collection  
Courtesy of the ARC archive

*Polonius* (1959), *The Rise and Fall of Emily Sprod* (1964) and collaborated on others, including *Do It Yourself Cartoon Kit* (1961). Having established his reputation as an animator with unique and unconventional mixes of techniques used to produce fast-paced, sometimes satirical, energetic films, in 1965 Godfrey established Bob Godfrey's Movie Emporium, later renamed Bob Godfrey Films. Godfrey continued to work and teach long past retirement, and his current project in development is based on Shakespeare.

Godfrey's films are more often than not the product of long-term collaborations: he invited 11 other animators to work on *Kama Sutra Rides Again*, allocating a different sexual position to each. Other collaborators include scriptwriters Stan Hayward and Colin Pearson, producer and filmmaker John Halas, cartoonist Gray Joliffe, author Daniel Postgate and artist Jeremy Banx. Godfrey's signature artistic style established in his first films continued: he was often an animator on many of the films he directed as part of a team of many young animators and artists who worked with him in his studio, and who then went on to become new talents in British animation. Their stylistic diversity and contribution to Godfrey's success is apparent in artworks on

display. Besides directing and animating, Godfrey is 'present' in many of the films through a range of self-figurations. Rotoscope silhouettes and character design

bear a marked resemblance to the man himself, and the unmistakable and wide-ranging qualities of his voice add personal qualities to characters and narration.

Godfrey has won dozens of international awards for his films, notably an Oscar and three BAFTAs; he was nominated for many others, including for two more Oscars. He received a range of prestigious awards for his life's work: the ASIFA Prize (1990), the Zagreb Festival's Life Achievement Award (1992) and an Honorary Doctorate (1998). His contribution to Britain's creative industries was recognised with an MBE (Member of the British Empire) in 1986. His films continue to be screened around the world, and as these are becoming increasingly available on DVD, his films will reach even wider audiences in future.

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# SEX

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Many of Bob Godfrey's films were made in the 70s and 80s when the sexual revolution was underway, and at the time some of the depictions of women were critiqued as being slightly misogynist, bawdy comedies. Today, Bob's contribution can be considered from a different perspective, and there are new ways of looking at the stylised female figures, such as the life drawing-based *Bio Woman* that Godfrey's fantasy propels on screen. These buxom babes and superwomen, nagging wives and pneumatic blow-up toys are observed through a humanist optic that Godfrey's films usually employ.

Godfrey's erotic, fanciful artistic depictions of women are always accompanied by a, small, sexually frustrated 'Everyman' in quest of sensual enlightenment. There is a sense of erotic play, a critique of bumbling, inhibited men and their confusion in face of their objects of desire. This quest is sometimes based on the character's fantasies of increased sexual prowess and delusions of grandeur. Yet more often than not we see a funny, often hapless little man trying to come to terms with the contexts of increased expectations of men that the shifting sexual attitudes of the times also implied. This stylistically varying

'Everyman' protagonist in the Oscar-nominated *Dream Doll* (co-directed with Zlatko Grgić), *Bio Woman* and *Dear Marjorie Boobs* is even on his own in *Instant Sex*. He finds gratification not with fantasies of women, but, echoing Woody Allen's futuristic 'orgasmatron' in *Sleeper* (that replaces sex in 2173), behind closed doors with the contents of a tin instead, via a cartoon commodification of sex.

The female figure is prominent in an abundance of graphic styles in many films. The sketches and cels on display from *Bio Woman* excel at nuances of the female form in movement, literally bubbling with sensuality, grace and attitude. This excess and objectification of female form is counter-pointed in *Kama Sutra Rides Again* with a woman who is obviously a sexual equal to the 'Everyman', thoroughly enjoying their shared escapades. And because of their gentle design, rigidity and lack of character, *Dream Doll's* more discreet identical multiple blow-up dolls allow us to think more about the man who would buy and be made happy by their proliferation. Taken with the above points in mind, Godfrey's supposed exploitation of women can also be understood as a satirical critique of sexual clichés and of male and female sexuality.

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# SURREALISM

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Many of Bob Godfrey's films contain visual elements of surprise, unexpected stylistic combination and non sequitur, all qualities attributed to surrealism, which was described by Antonin Artaud as, above all, a state of mind. Surrealist imagery aims to express the workings of the subconscious and is characterized by fantastic imagery and incongruous or irrational juxtaposition of subject matter. In some of Godfrey's films, the surrealist gesture dominates. *Revolution – La Belle France's dancing Eiffel towers* or Margaret Thatcher as French *belle dame* are collaged in the traditions of Polish animator Jan Lenica and of his admirer Terry Gilliam (who, as a young animator, Godfrey didn't hire because he was "too good"! ). In others, it is more subtle and bordering on the absurd, as in Norman Spittal's dilemma.

Some works display affinities with Rene Magritte and Salvador Dalí, verist (truth-based) Surrealists whose paintings involve transformations of the real world. The two frames from *Millennium – The Musical* on display show the production process of the transformation from a pencil sketch based on photorealism and the final production artwork depicting a nightmarish battlefield

dreamscape that links abstract perceptual realities with a (wartime) naturalistic context. In *Bio Woman*, the Kafka-esque lightning sequence in the film is a combination of both surreal and expressionistic styles, whilst the organic, or automatist, Surrealist tradition, best known from the works of Jean Arp and Max Ernst, is evident in the hyperbolic, amorphic sketches and cels of the Bio Woman figure.

Other artefacts in the exhibition contain elements of both kinds of surrealism. For instance, obviously referencing Michelangelo's 'The Creation of Adam' (circa 1511) the drawing of God lighting a cigarette from *Know Your Europeans: The United Kingdom* is in the best verist tradition. Bob Godfrey's surrealist talents are not only in the artwork he and his studio artists created; they also find expression in the film scripts and ideas of collaborators including Stan Hayward and Colin Pearson. From the *Roobarb* and *Norman Spittal series* to the sexual romps and satires, in many of his other films characters often find themselves pulled into surreal escapades. The films screened in the exhibition also offer many examples of this favoured mode of expression that runs through Godfrey's films.

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# SATIRE

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Whilst traditional cel and drawn animation are the basis of most of Bob Godfrey's films, many of them are embellished with cut-outs, magazine and newspaper clippings, adulterated photographs, live action film and found footage. Steve Bell, who collaborated with Godfrey on one of the most biting animated satires of the Thatcher period, describes Godfrey's work as "deceptively simple...one of the things you learn working with Bob is how to avoid animation. He uses a lot of cut-outs and newsreel footage, and he's always wanting to pare everything down to the bone. He's a minimalist." These are not only a 'cheap and cheerful' way to avoid the high production costs of pure animation. They also are what made Godfrey's films political, and often satirical, records of the times over four decades of radical changes in animation and (British) society.

The realism of the times implicit in photographs of British political events and personalities – from Isambard Kingdom Brunel (*Great*) to Queen Victoria, from Margaret Thatcher (a favourite target across films) to Tony Blair – are often cheekily juxtaposed with images of the bleaker side of what these agendas caused: poverty, class conflict, racism and undercurrents of despair. But, with occasional Swiftian brilliance,

these are both softened and sharpened by Godfrey's humorous narratives and comic timing. His contribution to graphic satire's role lies in literally illustrating anomalies between policy and reality, between politics and daily life. *Know Your Europeans* caricatures Britishness, from figures of power (including God, Royal family members and politicians) to everyday life at the pub around the corner. Thatcher is rampant: Godfrey uses irony, burlesque and caricature to humorously critique her regime's vices, abuses and shortcomings in *Polygamous Polonius Revisited*, *Maggie Thatcher: Where Am I Now?* and she even has a cameo in a film on the French Revolution.

In his films, like in all good satire, Godfrey is not just funny. Using the time-tested weapon of wit, his attacks are meant to point out uncomfortable truths and also contribute to effecting change for the better. In gentler form, satire is also evident in Godfrey's erotic films: *Kama Sutra Rides Again* and *Dear Marjorie Boobs* both critique British Victorian attitudes and offer solutions towards improving their character's sexual constraints. Perhaps a reason that Godfrey manages to imbue his films with this special quality is his own sense of self-irony, evident in self-depictions in many of the films.

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# ARC ARCHIVE

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Animation has a long-standing tradition at the University College for the Creative Arts, Farnham College. The Animation Department was originally established by Bob Godfrey, and over the years it has developed into one of the outstanding UK animation programmes.

Established in 2000, the UCCA's Animation Research Centre promotes, contributes to and supports both animation studies and exploratory research practice. Engaging with relationships between animation,

## The ARC Archive

The ARC Archive is both a major UK landmark archive and one of the few media archives in the world dedicated to the animated form. An invaluable teaching, learning and research resource for students, scholars and external researchers from many disciplines, its research holdings are also a place of discovery for those curious about animation. It currently houses the Halas & Batchelor Collection, the Bob Godfrey Studio Collection, a National Film Board of



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*ARC archive workspace  
with Steenbecks  
Courtesy ARC Archive*

Canada collection and the Channel 4 Animation productions, and negotiations with other collections are in progress.

The ARC Archive has over 2 million para-filmic artefacts that reveal the multidisciplinary nature of animation filmmaking including: 6,000 16mm and 35mm films, VHS, DVD, Beta,

visual and film theories, architecture and the fine arts it promotes the highest level of academic activity in the interdisciplinary field of animation studies. The ARC engages in four interrelated areas: the ARC Archive; conferences and events; research projects and publications. Recent projects include the *Trickraum: Spacetricks* Exhibition at the Zurich Museum of Design (international tour 2005-2007) and the Pervasive Animation symposium at Tate Modern. Its Director is Editor of the peer-reviewed *animation: an interdisciplinary journal*.

U-Matic, 1-inch broadcast tapes, 200,000 drawings, 60,000 original cels, artwork, scripts and photographs, musical scores, interviews, correspondence, interviews, articles and publications, awards, technical equipment and related ephemera. Unique to the ARC Archive is its dual potential: as an extensive and accessible UK resource for researchers, and as a source of high-quality visual materials of a popular nature that can be utilised for education, exhibitions and film screenings.

([www.ucreative.ac.uk/arc](http://www.ucreative.ac.uk/arc))

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