



PIXAR MUSEUM

STORIES AND ART FROM THE ANIMATION STUDIO



IN THE BEGINNING

Pixar Animation Studios' origins start as far back as the 1970s, when computer animation was in its infancy. In 1979, *Star Wars* director George Lucas hired Ed Catmull to create a Computer Division at Lucasfilm.¹ Catmull had graduated from the University of Utah in Computer Science and, after graduation, he worked as the director of the Computer Graphics Laboratory at the New York Institute of Technology. At Lucasfilm, Catmull ran the entire Computer Division, which created computer-animated elements for some live-action films, such as *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* and *Star Wars: Episode VI — Return of the Jedi*.

In 1984, Catmull hired John Lasseter, who shared Catmull's belief that computer animation had a future. Lasseter and Alvy Ray Smith, along with a small team in the Computer Division, created Lucasfilm's first piece of character-based computer animation, a short called *The Adventures of André & Wally B.* The story follows a bee named Wally B. as he chases after a character named André. The story ends with both a sting and a bent stinger. Though about six seconds of the film was incomplete, it premiered in July in Minneapolis at SIGGRAPH, an annual computer graphics conference. The final version released in August at Toronto's International Animation Festival.

In 1986, the co-founder of Apple Computer Company, Steve Jobs, acquired Lucasfilm's Computer Division, which was renamed Pixar after its most well-known product: a high-end computer called the Pixar Image Computer, which the team had developed a few years earlier. Initially, Pixar focused on selling the Pixar Image Computer to specialised businesses such as medical research firms, intelligence agencies, and graphic arts companies, including Walt Disney Studios.



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KEY TO PLATE

1: The three founders

Pixar was founded by three men with different, but highly complementary, talents: Ed Catmull, a computer scientist; Steve Jobs, an entrepreneur; and John Lasseter, a Disney-trained animator. Depicted here in sketches by Teddy Newton.

2: *The Adventures of André & Wally B.*

This short film was the first 3D animated film to feature simulated motion blur—the slight blurring of objects in movement—adding to the feeling of realistic motion. Concept/direction by Alvy Ray Smith, character

design and animation by John Lasseter.

3: *Red's Dream*

Pixar's second animated short film, which was released in 1987, was a moody atmospheric piece about an unloved unicycle who dreams of a better life.

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TOY STORY

Work on Pixar's first feature film began in 1991, and the result, *Toy Story*, was released in November 1995. John Lasseter was already working closely with Andrew Stanton and Pete Docter when he asked them to help him to develop a story for an animated feature. They had mainly been working on the TV commercials that paid Pixar's bills. Stanton confirmed, "A large portion of us had never worked on a movie at all!" Joe Ranft had worked on films at Disney, such as *The Lion King* and *Beauty and the Beast*, and he and Lasseter had been talking about working together. In fact, the idea of doing more with the world of *Tin Toy* was one of Ranft's ideas, and he joined Pixar to work on *Toy Story* once the film was a go.

The story they started with was an adaptation of the unfinished *Tin Toy* Christmas TV special, with one-man band toy Tinny as the hero. But soon a new idea emerged: to contrast a new toy with a child's favourite old toy. They wanted to make a "buddy picture" where two conflicting characters would be forced to put aside their differences and work together. Eventually Buzz Lightyear replaced Tinny, and Woody became a cowboy – he had originally been a ventriloquist doll.

Several years into the process, in 1993, Pixar organised a work-in-progress screening for Disney executives. It wasn't a success; watching the reels with an objective eye, the Pixar team realised that they had lost sight of the story. Faced with the possibility that Disney would take the film away from them to finish it, Pixar made a huge gamble. "Just give us two weeks," Lasseter told Disney. Joe Ranft said, "I think that's where Andrew, John, Pete, and I really bonded as a group. It was do or die time."

The team worked day and night coming up with a new take on the story, completely remaking the first third of the film. The gamble paid off. Disney executives approved the sequences and the Pixar team could continue. Even so, getting to the finish line was hard for many reasons. They had never before completed a project of this scope and scale, nor in this medium. But at least now they were making the film they wanted to make. "To this day, *Toy Story* is the hardest, most exhausting, and still the most fun thing I've ever done at Pixar," said Bill Reeves, the film's supervising technical director.

When *Toy Story* was released, the response exceeded anyone's expectations. It was the best reviewed and top grossing film of the year. At the Academy Awards, Lasseter received a Special Achievement Award and the film's screenplay and score were nominated.

KEY TO PLATE

I: "Colorscript"

Art director Ralph Eggleston's pastel colour script for *Toy Story* was a tool

that conveyed the desired feeling for the film – expressed through colour and lighting – which the digital artist

then used to communicate the mood of each sequence. This "colorscript" was created in about a week.



COCO

After directing *Toy Story 3*, Lee Unkrich pitched the idea of *Coco*, which centres around the Day of the Dead – the vibrant holiday celebrated in Mexico to honour those who have passed away. It would be Pixar's first film to feature a Latinx character in the lead role, and would release in 2017. For Unkrich, the film was rooted in a universal theme: the importance of family. He and co-director and writer Adrian Molina, producer Darla Anderson, production designer Harley Jessup, and other members of the team, made several trips to Mexico.¹³ They witnessed how local families taught cultural practices to the next generation. They also collected the personal stories of Latinx team members and brought in Latinx cultural consultants to suggest ideas.

Coco is the story of 12-year-old Miguel Rivera who dreams of becoming a successful musician like his idol, Ernesto de la Cruz – a guitar hero and movie star inspired by stars of the golden age of Mexican cinema in the 1930s. Miguel's family has banned music, which leads to a momentous act of rebellion on Day of the Dead. This propels him into the glowing, colourful world of walking skeletons, winged spirits, and long-buried family secrets.

The filmmakers styled Miguel's village of Santa Cecilia – named by the filmmakers for the patron saint of music – with a sun-baked, daytime palette to contrast spectacularly with the vibrant, nocturnal explosion of colour in the Land of the Dead. The film also includes influences from everyday life in Mexico, including a floppy-tongued Xolo – the national dog of Mexico – as Miguel's loyal friend, and a two-dimensional prologue animated to look like *papel picado*, which is traditional tissue-paper art. Throughout the film, several main characters, voiced by a nearly all-Latinx cast, slip in and out of untranslated Spanish.

The film opened in Mexico on 20 October 2017, during the Morelia International Film Festival, the week before Day of the Dead. It became the highest-grossing animated film in Mexico's history. In the US, it released on 22 November 2017. The film won two Academy Awards, for Best Animated Feature and Best Original Song for Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez's "Remember Me."

KEY TO PLATE

1: Vibrant backdrop

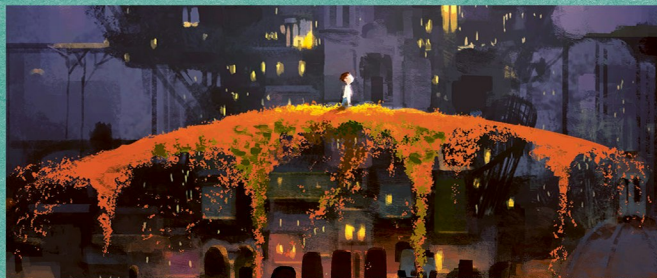
"The bold and expressive sense of colour in Mexico is really unique," observed production designer Harley Jessup. Digital painting of a backdrop for a performance by Ernesto de la Cruz by Robert Kondo.

2: La ofrenda

Miguel at the *ofrenda*, or altar, where his family remembers their loved ones. Objects, such as food or photographs, are placed on the *ofrenda* to evoke the memory of the deceased. Digital art by Shelley Wan.

3: Dreamer

Miguel staring at the stars. "We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us," says Director Lee Unkrich. Digital art by Ernesto Nemesio, layout by Robert Kondo.



SPARKSHORTS

SparkShorts is an experimental storytelling initiative at Pixar that encourages new creative voices at the studio to share their stories. A small team is given just six months and a limited budget to develop a short animated film. "The programme was created to provide opportunities to a wide array of artists – each with something unique to say," said Lindsey Collins, Vice President of Development for Pixar.¹⁵ Jim Morris, President of Pixar Animation Studios, adds, "The SparkShorts programme is designed to discover new storytellers, explore new storytelling techniques and experiment with new production workflows. These films are unlike anything we've ever done at Pixar."

One SparkShort film, *Purl*, directed by Kristen Lester, features a brightly coloured ball of yarn named Purl who gets a job in an office dominated by men. Lester was inspired by her own early experiences in animation. She says, "I was often the only woman on the team I was working with. I just wanted to be one of the guys, so I could have friends and colleagues." At Pixar, however, she learnt "acceptance of myself, and the fact that I was a woman and I work in this business." This epiphany becomes the theme of *Purl*. It was released at SIGGRAPH in 2019, where it was named Best in Show, and then shown at El Capitan Theatre and on YouTube and Disney+.

Smash and Grab is a mini-action adventure about two robots making a daring escape from the engine room of a futuristic locomotive. Under director Brian Larsen, the team experimented with a new production process. For example, animators would wear motion-capture suits to translate real body movements directly into the computer: a new way to conceive of storyboarding and location scouting.

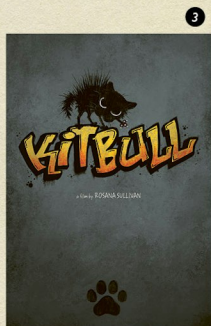
Moving in the opposite direction, *Kitbull*, written and directed by Rosana Sullivan, is all about drawing; unusually for Pixar, it is animated in a 2D style. Set in the Mission district of San Francisco, it follows an unlikely friendship between a stray kitten and an abused pit bull. In common with other SparkShorts, it shows a willingness to look at slightly more



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mature themes than typical Pixar films, and it was nominated for an Academy Award.

Float is a short film directed and written by Bobby Rubio, who said that his autistic son inspired the story. In the film, the son has the ability to float. "Floating, to me, just visually looks beautiful," Rubio said. Producer Krissy Cababa observed, "It's the story of any child's difference, it doesn't necessarily have to be autism." For Rubio, the film becomes about accepting who his son is, not who he wants him to be.

Another highly personal story is told by director Edwin Chang in *Wind*. It was inspired by his grandmother, who fled the Korean War and brought up four boys, making every sacrifice to help them to settle in the US. In the film, the boy and his grandmother are trapped on a floating rock, symbolising "a broken place, a place of lost opportunity," according to Chang, they must build a rocket to escape.

Loop, directed by Erica Milsom, features a non-verbal, autistic girl and a talkative boy who must loop a lake on a canoe together. For Milsom, the film explores "that place between two people who don't share a common language. It's a language you have to feel out and find a means of communicating with each other that's very personal." These inspirational and diverse shorts are just the beginning – additional films in the SparkShorts programme are in production.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Purl* poster

The official poster depicts the moment when Purl first enters the fast-paced, high-energy, male-centric office of B.R.O. Capital.

2: *Smash and Grab* poster

The poster for *Smash and Grab*, a short about two robots who decide to make a break for freedom, reflects the film's distinctive Art Deco sci-fi design.

3: *Kitbull* poster

Graffiti art and a scratchy, hand-drawn aesthetic dominates the poster of *Kitbull*, reflecting the film's gritty urban setting.

4: *Float* poster

The poster for *Float* focuses on the positivity and exuberance of Alex's special ability to float, the moment when his father is no longer ashamed of him for being able to do so.

5: *Wind* poster

In the poster for *Wind*, Ellis, who is tethered to his grandmother, gazes towards the bright light at the top of the mysterious sinkhole in which they live.

6: *Loop* poster

Renee and Marcus take an urban canoe trip where they learn to communicate and understand each other in the poster for *Loop*.