

Alexander Isert about META

"Improvising is not very economical"

How to do an interview about a 3.5 minute short film consisting only of transforming objects, seemingly without logic or structure? Well... by finding someone who can tell fascinating things about a 3.5 minute short film consisting only of transforming objects. Like Alexander Isert. At the Film'on Festival I had only one crucial question on my mind...

Is there a logic in what I saw, or is it all random?

Alexander Isert: The film is about change; nothing stays the same, everything evolves all the time. META stands for metamorphosis; characters and settings are changing into one another. There is a second version of this film with a Buddhist-inspired voice-over about the constant changing of things and how you don't have to be afraid of it but accept it. Everything is connected and will finally go back into one.

Basically it's just objects transforming, 3.5 minutes long.

Isert: At times we improvised, we tried

things out to see what happened. Improvising is not something you'll often hear about in animation; it's not very economical. Animation, as we've learnt, is all about planning, but we made a film like this also for the joy of animation. The questions we asked ourselves in the process were very practical; about form, about lines and about which object could morph into another.

What we see is the combination of animals, fantasy creatures, geometrical forms... Everything can be animated...

Isert: ... and everything can be integrated. The transformation I am most satisfied with is the one from a whale into a swimmer which happens quite organically.

There is also a technical side to the element of transformation. I heard you saying: everything is digital.

Isert: Morphing is a very drawn-animation thing to do. We translate old school drawn animation into the digital realm, frame by frame, while

applying all the classic rules of animation. This film could have been done on paper, but it would have been much more of an effort.

Even if it looks like not much more than an exercise, the ending has kind of an emotion to it.

Isert: If there is a narrative to it, it is that: you go through all these stages, some of them might seem a bit fearsome, but you just have to accept what is happening and in the end it all goes back to the origin. There is an emotional quality to it, as it ends full circle.

You were the animator, not the director. What's the difference, in this case?

Isert: Protoplanet Studio consists of three people at its core, developing projects as a team. Designer Johanna Hochholzer creates the characters and gives our films their particular look. Then there is me as an animator and Antje Heyn as director. The story development is shared between the three of us.



Endless variations are possible in morphing. Could you make 10 more films like this?

Isert: For us and for now, this is our ultimate morphing film. It is very much about rhythm: setting certain accents at the right moment. For me animation is about knowing when what should happen and with which formal qualities. It is like making music, finding the right accents in your improvisations.

So what you've made is a jazz masterpiece!

Isert: Storyboarding is about reducing the efforts. But sometimes results look very much planned, repeating the same recipes, lacking a certain spontaneity. There is another approach to animating which maybe is explored too seldom, but we definitely strove for that and it was a good thing to do!