

A Workshopper's Diary:

"Animator Jutra" ("Animators of Tomorrow")

Poznan, Poland
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By

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*"Druciany Ogród" ("The Wire Garden")
Title frame from our movie.*

"The Wire Garden"

Our team:

Artistic direction: Frances Østerfelt
Technical direction: Miłosz Margański, Paulina Wyrz
Music: Rafał Włodimirski

Little did I know that when my short debut film *"The Fantastic Flowershop"* kickstarted the *"Ale Kino!" film festival for children and youth*, in Poznan, Poland, my life would get a new dimension. It was my first film festival – I had a ball – and it showed. The film was awarded special mention for its combination of music and animation. Not bad for a start ... Then the surprise: the festival's dynamic leader, Mr. Jerzy Moszkowicz, asked me if I'd like to be their guest the following year. Would I ever!



That was in 2001; and every year since, *"Ale Kino!"* has been a delightful part of my life. More than that, *"The Fantastic Flowershop"* has travelled, won prizes and has formed the basis for many workshops for children and adults.

Then last year, 2013, at the festival, I met the warmly quiet Mrs. Agnieszka Krajewska, coordinator of *"Animator Jutra"* – a workshop for children 7-12 years of age. The workshop is a part of a larger international

film festival **“Festiwal Animator”**, with very exciting and different animated films for all age groups held in the summer, also in the city of Poznan.

We talked about the joy of working with children. Our dinner table discussion planted the seed. Spring 2014, an invitation to be part of the workshop ticked in on my mail. I’d previously held puppet workshops in Denmark: “Puppets from scrap” (“*Dukker I Skrot*”) at the Puppet Theatre Festival in Ringsted, at BUSTER film festivals in Copenhagen, and at the Odense Film Festival on the island of Fynen. Common for all of these was their brevity: a couple of hours with a group of youngsters to make the puppets and then a very short animated sequence. Kids had a chance to dip their toes in the exciting waters of film animation, but not much more.

In Poznan, the challenge was that there would be two groups – morning and afternoon – 15 children (7-12 years of age) in each group, two hours, four days – time enough to plunge in and really tell a story or two. What fun!

Mails flew back and forth, between Copenhagen-Poznan. Materials to be bought there or brought by me from Copenhagen.

Sunday, Day 0: Finally, my flight to Poznan, via Frankfurt. *“To travel is to live”*, wrote Hans Christian Andersen. Despite a rude awakening at 4 AM to make my 6:20 flight to Frankfurt and then to Poznan, my suitcase and extra baggage with workshop materials hadn’t had enough – they kept on going. So armed only with my carry-on case, I arrived at Zamek, Poznan’s cultural center, for an abbreviated set-up of the workshop. Without all my material, set-up plans had to be modified. Two work stations were assembled: table tops covered in Styrofoam and artificial grass. Good work by Miłosz, Ula and Anja.

The Old Square re-visited, check in at Hotel Rzymiski, back to Zamek, pizza with all of the workshop teams.



Miłosz, Ula and Anja
(Inset) Setting up a work station



Screening Sunday afternoon. Festival director Jerzy Moszkowicz presenting "The Fantastic Flowershop" and its creator. (Inset) Frances with one of her wire puppets.

(photo by Piotr Bedlinski)

These workshops have been held along with the film festival for the past 7 years, at no cost for the participating children and were very popular. Some of the children have returned year after year. This year was no exception – all places were taken. Tomorrow should be great fun.

Monday, Day 1: My prodigal baggage arrived late yesterday afternoon. A bit before 9 AM, I arrived at Zamek with all my wires, pliers and flowers. My two trusty sidekicks – Miłosz and Paulina – helped me get everything ready for the kids. We talked strategy for the day. Flowers were "arranged" in the center of our work table, chairs in their place for the work shoppers. Computer set up. First priority: Not everyone was at yesterday's screening; so kids would see "Flowershop" to understand the exercise.



Paulina at the "flower table"
(photo by Piotr Bedlinski)

Five o'clock screening of workshop leaders' films – an introduction to the coming week and promotion for the five groups. I was warned that Jerzy wanted us to have "one sentence" ready to pitch our workshops. They say that a picture is worth 10,000 words. So my "one sentence" was one of my wire puppets hanging from the spool.

A special detail for me: All the workshop masters were given flowers on stage – carnations (the best flowers available under communism in Poland). The story for "Flowershop" was born on a visit to Casablanca, when I was alone in our hotel room and dressed one of my wire puppets in carnations. The story had come full circle.



Miłosz & co. building a tree. (photo by Piotr Bedlinski)

In 2000, when “The Fantastic Flowershop” was filmed, my storyboard was in words. I wrote what I wanted and my very talented animators brought my puppets to life; and from their hands came beautiful surprises.

My strategy with the workshop was the same: My start and end of the story was the skeleton. The kids would put flesh on the bones through their imaginations.

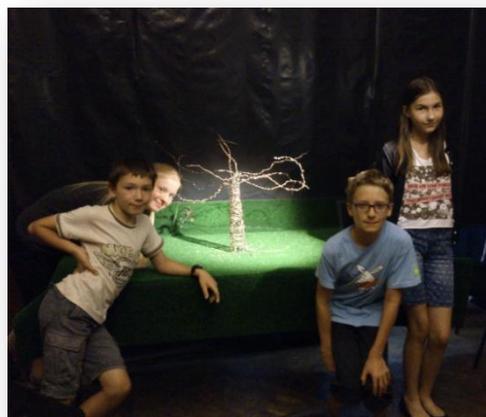
There was plenty of room for them to play.

Paulina translated the main story and my instructions to Polish for the kids seated around the “flower table”; and helped around the table as the puppets took form. Miłosz got a group with him to build the film’s decoration: the tree. After that, he had charge of the computer for filming the animation. Where there’s a will, there’s a way; and through a Babel of Polish and English, we all made ourselves understood.

To avoid the complicated transformations in “Flowershop”, I decided to start with a naked tree in the bright light of a full moon. One by one, bright “fruits” of shiny copper wire would appear on the branches. One by one they would drop to the ground. A second set of “fruits” – a bit larger, more transparent and with a core of dark wire would take their place. Then, a very transparent “fruit” with the skeleton of a figure – this last shape would open up. The figure would awake, stretching out from its sleep. As it arose, it would be replaced by a full figure. That’s when the kids’ story would take over.

At 10 o’clock, the kids, some with parents, dribbled in. “Flowershop” was screened in the darkened room. Lights back on, we got to work.

My original plan was that the tree would be constructed by me in Copenhagen. But Agnieszka asked me not to – it should be done by the kids here. Good that I didn’t make my pre-fabricated version. Miłosz teaches at the Art University in Poznan; he had his kids in the palm of his hand. Everyone was busy. Then came what was to be the first of many “magic moments”: the tree was finished and anchored to the stage and a spot light shot on it. The kids were so proud. There it stood, shining against its black background – just as I’d imagined. They’d created a beautiful tree of iron and copper wire that really glowed in the moonlight.



From left to right: Kosma Kasprzak, Basia Wisniewska, Filip Pędowski, Tosia Kasprzak and the tree.

The kids (7-12 years old) sat around the table and under Paulina and my direction made puppets. Small fingers doing something new for the first time. For all of us, an exciting beginning. The room was quiet, intense concentration, in sharp contrast to children’s noise coming from some of the other rooms. Only my instructions to Paulina and sometimes a few words in my very limited Polish to the kids. The tree-builders joined the others and got winding the wire for their own puppets.

Time flew. The first two hours of the morning group wound to an end. We had not planned how to make sure that the puppets landed in their maker's hands the next day. So the kids gathered their things and took them home. These wire puppets are special: they have no faces, which means that the animator is totally dependent upon body language for expression. The kids were instructed to practice in front of a mirror how to express various emotions. But they were given strict instructions NOT to start animating the puppets to show their parents, lest the wires snapped.

Sixty minutes' break – a much needed breather – although exciting and fun, a start can be – and was – exhausting.

One o'clock – Team B arrived. The kids seemed older – at least by their size. Miłosz was determined that tree number 2 would be even better. Four kids joined his group.

Same procedure as the morning. But maybe we were more prepared. Anyway, things started happening. The kids made puppets – even with wonderful hair and some with boobs. I'd showed them pictures of some of the animals I'd made with wire. That was all that it took – they, too, began experimenting with animals. (This is great fun!) What stories they'll make.

Miłosz' tree is a masterpiece! A real piece of Polish art. The branches – sinewy and glowing – even equipped with a swing!

First animation trial – a huge breasted babe with copper hair is placed on the swing. The black backdrop is a sinister, stormy sky. She's swinging – even her hair ... Another really magnificent magic moment. I can't wait for tomorrow!

Tuesday, Day 2: Team A (morning group) Another great day. Happy surprises. The kids returned each with a plastic bag with their name on it – now we could store their work here and make sure each artist worked with their own production from one day to the next. But more than that – at home, the night before, their imaginations took flight. Kids returned to Zamek with madonna and child in wire, cats, mice, dogs, giraffes, horses. No one had to show them how – the photos from the day before were enough. Working with wire is like sketching on paper, but even better – there's no limit. A father came asking where to buy more wire. The kids want more – what better sign of success?

Animation trials – fruits falling from the tree, a girl swinging and a better backdrop. Everything's moving as it should.

No longer bashful, the kids are opening up and actively participating in all phases of production. Paulina and Miłosz are my two right hands – I feel like I'm the left one.

Team B (the afternoon group) came with their surprises as well: a bird flying, a donkey, a camel. Scene by scene, the energy's mounting.

Wednesday/Thursday, Days 3 and 4: At home in the evenings, the kids can't stop. We even got the gift of a magnificent dragon: one of the mothers was so inspired by her daughter's work that she fashioned the dragon while sitting in a bus! There are so many puppets now that we have to ask the kids to choose their favorite one for animation. There's not room for so many puppets on the set.

Also a change in plans: at the start, two stories were planned. But as work progressed, we were using both work stations (each with its own tree). The story is now one. Where we stop in the morning, the afternoon group takes over; and when we stop in the afternoon, the morning group continues. Somehow we could still make sure that the kids got their own puppets at the end. But the story grew: the tree's memory of good times past.

The kids were inspired. No one needed to be asked to do anything. They all took part. Parents started coming early to pick up children. They, too, were excited to see what was going on.

Thursday, Day 4: Three PM, the last animated scene was filmed. My plan for film credits was that we showed a photo of each of our kids, with their hand-made name signs. The kids eagerly took on the task of sign-making and photos were taken – even of Miłosz, Paulina and me.

Very fond good-byes from our young work shoppers and their parents. We'd all meet again on Saturday for screening of the films. Now it's time to clean up and pack up. Our magical trees were unharnessed from the work stations. One would come home with me; one would stay at Zamek with Agnieszka.

Grass and Styrofoam had to be removed from the tables.

Our black backdrops and black-out curtains taken down. As in Denmark, Poland, too, was experiencing a heat wave.

Finally fresh air flowed through the open windows.



Name signs ready for the photographer ...



(photos by Piotr Bedlinski)

Post-workshop – editing and music: Kids now gone, our serious work had to begin. The scenes had to be edited and woven together into a meaningful story and music had to be created. For that purpose, a pair of talented composers were called in: Rafał Włodimirski and Damian Czajka. They now had the daunting task of composing music to all of the workshop films in the five groups. This meant long hours and immense concentration. Musical instruments, mattresses, tea pot, everything necessary for an all-night shift were installed in one of the offices near ours for their work. Rafał was “our” composer. It’s really a privilege to be able to say to a composer, “I want this, this and this for this, that or the other scene,” and to get it.



Our musicians, Rafal (left) and Damian (right), before the storm.

When workshop clean-up/clear-up was complete, the sun was still shining over Zamek’s rooftop. We enjoyed the quiet of the moment – and another lovely surprise. Apparently residing in the old castle’s towers were two lovely owls. They entertained us with their acrobatics and hunts for prey in the crevices between the buildings. A real privilege witnessing these beauties at such close hand.

Editing with Miłosz and Paulina started after workshop clear-away and continued until early evening, to be continued the next day – or so I thought.



Being autodidactic, I depended upon Miłosz and Paulina for technical assistance in the editing process. Leaving them to it, I took a break and went down to Zamek’s beautiful courtyard to enjoy the mellow mood of the evening and casual conversation with some of the others from the workshops who also enjoyed a pause in their work. Shadows were getting longer and the reproduction of the Lion Fountain from the Alhambra in Spain and the mysterious headless giants created by Magdalena Abakanowicz added to the mood.

Courtyard of Zamek. The Lion Fountain can be seen in the background behind Magdalena Abakanowicz’s “Agora”. (photo from internet)

Fatigued from the concentrated task of keeping things moving at the flower/figure table and the two work stations as well as the pressing heat, I left Zamek at 7 PM for a rest at the hotel.

Nine AM Friday, we met again – and I was met with yet another surprise.

Audiences take a film’s mood for granted. Images and sound melt together hopefully to give a unified experience. However, by adding unexpected sounds or music, the experience can be completely different.

In my absence, Miłosz and Paulina found music on the internet that was diametrically opposite the poetic image our story should evoke. By playing with color and combining the new visual dimension with heavy metal, the effect was amazing. I insisted that this should be part of our work. “*The Wire Garden*” became

"The Wired Garden: Director's cut" and was added after credits and sponsor logos. A little joke, but a spicy addition to a sweet story.

Editing and music finally came together. Rafał did his job well. Our little film was finished and the remaining films had to be made. Tomorrow (Saturday) was the big day: premiere showing of all films from the week's efforts.

Saturday, 4 PM: The mood was festive and the air vibrated with anticipation. Work shoppers, parents, family and friends met up at the main cinema at Zamek Cultural Centre to see their films on the big screen. We all were there.

Three of the young helpers through the week were the masters of ceremony. They presented the animation masters/teachers and asked questions about their workshop and the techniques they used. There was salt and sand animation, clay-mation (with plasteline), animation with paper cut-outs, pixilation/green screen and of course my wire puppets.

Great fun seeing the kids again; but also a bit sad. Today we'd say good-bye, at least for now. It was a wonderful week, a great experience – working with such talented assistants and such inspired and inspiring children. It was a week as daunting as climbing to the peak of a high mountain. Suddenly we reached the top. Hugs, kisses, beautiful gifts given. Tomorrow, home to Copenhagen with my baggage filled with wonderful memories.

Thanks to everyone who made this all possible.

Francis Osterfelt.



Team A



Team B

Milosz Margański and Paulina Wyrat at work with
Michalina Kwasniewska and Marcel Kwasniewski
(photos by Piotr Bedlinski)

Relevant links:

"The Fantastic Flowershop" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbiuUIPPMy0>)
(<http://www.partyflexsystem.com/dystrybucja/Sklep/sklepan.html>)

"Festiwal Animator"
www.animator-festiwal.com

"Animator Jutra" – Workshop teachers
<http://www.csdpoznan.pl/aktualnosci/animator-jutra-warsztaty>

"Animator Jutra" – Facebook photos
<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.790661047640456.1073741873.282743748432191&type=1>

"The Wire Garden" - youtube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2bBcul43U8&list=PLjl47bYR_bTfPTwXf1MMVqGMYyGF-zyRQ&index=2

"Animator Jutra" – TV interview
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-zJYD37Ux8&list=UUL-Rtyd6vP4P-oXf_bclHog

Links to the other workshop films:

Wilcze jagody ("Wolf Berries")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g9T4Xq1htg&list=PLjl47bYR_bTfPTwXf1MMVqGMYyGF-zyRQ

Solne impresje ("Salt Impressions")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uW1lix5LOWQ&index=3&list=PLjl47bYR_bTfPTwXf1MMVqGMYyGF-zyRQ

Żelazny Marcin ("Iron Martin")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zlyvn4xlCUk&index=4&list=PLjl47bYR_bTfPTwXf1MMVqGMYyGF-zyRQ

Maski, kroki i inne historie ("Masks, Steps and other stories")
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhHZ3QZDNro&list=PLjl47bYR_bTfPTwXf1MMVqGMYyGF-zyRQ&index=5

Zdjęcia ("Photos")
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.790661047640456.1073741873.282743748432191&type=1>