



## ScreenCraft Works Cross-Border Conversation: Creating Animated Stories

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Drawn from our mentoring community, our speakers were:

[Connor Cook](#), composer, USA

[Tajha Winkle](#), animator, Jamaica

[Munzir Naqvi](#), writer, director, producer, India

[Mariia Shub](#), production designer, artist, Ukraine, UK

[Rodion Shub](#), animation director, producer, Ukraine, Canada

### Elizabeth McIntyre

Welcome to our Cross-Border Conversation: Creating Animated Stories. Thank you to Genelec for supporting our Cross-Border Conversations series of talks, and thank you to Brunel University London for technical delivery. Our brilliant speakers are drawn from the ScreenCraft Works community and are from different countries at different stages of their careers including first-time speakers.

### Connor Cook

Hello everybody. Thank you so much for being here. I'm Connor Cook, she/her pronouns. I'm a white woman with long brownish blondish hair with bangs and I'm wearing a blue and red hand-knit shawl. I'm a composer. I work both in live action and animation but I most love working in animation, so I'm very excited to chat with you all today. I would love to pass it next to Tajha.

**Tajha Winkle**

Hi everyone. My name is Tajha. I am a Black woman with curly hair and I'm wearing a multi-colored shirt, pronouns she/her. I'm a 2D animator from Jamaica and I love animation. I work in it. I mostly do uh digital hand-drawn animation but I also do cutout as well.

**Munzir Naqvi**

I'm Munzir Naqvi. I'm a producer and a director based in Bombay, India.

**Mariia Shub**

My name is Mariia Shub. I'm from Ukraine and actually now in London. I'm a production designer artist, so my role in animation is how to draw and create the characters.

**Rodion Shub**

Hello everybody. My name is Rodion Shub. I'm actually the brother of Mariia. I'm an animation director from Ukraine, now I'm displaced to Montreal, Canada. I've worked and lived here more than a year already. I'm The head and heart of Ridni Animation Studio, it's my company which I've run since 2015. We teach kids how to do stop motion and create commercial content for different purposes like cinema, commercials, music videos, explainers, etc.

**Connor Cook**

How's about we jump into talking about why we do what we do - maybe our origin stories. I knew I wanted to be a composer from a young age. I saw the first Harry Potter film when I was nine and I remember telling my parents, "I'm going to write music for movies one day", and they were like - okay, whatever. But then I kept saying it and saying it, and once you say something so many times, you kind of have to do it! So I have been studying music my whole life, with my ultimate goal to work in experimental animation, composing music, or maybe an A24 film. I really like unique stories with a lot of heart or unique stories that can help change the world. I have big dreams to use my passion to make a good change in the world. It sounds like a huge thing but I really do believe that, if I believe in something, I can make a difference. Another thing that really impacted my story was I got to do the Sundance film music and animation lab in 2020, which was the first time I felt accepted in the animation world. It was a life-changing experience and I loved it and it just furthered my love of experimental animation.

**Tajha Winkle**

I've been animating for a few years now. I would say I was inspired since I was little by a lot of stories and I loved to watch animations on TV, grew up with cartoons, and for a while, before I realized it could be a real job, I always wanted to know how those things worked. I had a little Nintendo DS that had a little app on it that I draw with my finger, and then eventually it blossomed into wanting to do this for a career. That's where I am now, just trying to get there and network with people and work on different shows and stuff. That was my big moment since I was little, I just loved cartoons and now I'm a big girl that loves cartoons.

**Mariia Shub**

My first animation was done in 2006. It was a puppet doll animation. I made all the stage design and worked with puppets and director. It was stop motion so we had three parts of puppet. In my whole life, I worked more in the film industry as production designer, but time and time I come back for animation because it's love and passion, because making

animation you could express only with these different tools and you could choose tools for every story, so all my animation was done with different tools.

### **Rodion Shub**

This movie that Maria mentioned, a play for three actors, is a stop-motion movie back in 2006, you say, or 05 or 04, a long time ago. As Mariia is my sister and was a production designer there, she invited me to the studio to see what's going on and I saw this magic - stop motion - fell in love with it completely, and understand that there is no reason to do something else in this world! So there I met in a next room where was in production movie of my future master and my teacher, I met him, and the next year I finished school and I entered the University of Screen Arts and received a master's degree in director of animation movies, and I started my company, Ridni Animation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26xtyrE1KSY>

In Ukrainian, Ridni means first one people, family related, so whatever I do, it's important for me to feel like a family with my clients, with my colleagues, with my illustrators, with my animators, with everybody. I really value human relationships, it's important for me, it's my main value, and I teach people - I call it I make people fall in love with animation. I like to introduce them to stop motion in festivals, schools. Also an important value for me, it's art. I'm most excited and most happy when I can combine education, art and creating professional commercial content.

### **Munzir Naqvi**

I was born in Lucknow in North India and I moved to Bombay in 2006, then I worked for the 10 years till 2016 for different TV channels as a promo editor. Then in 2017 I made a short film, The Stain, which was screened at New York Indian Film Festival, Indian Film Festival Stuttgart, Germany, and a few other festivals in India. Then I made a feature film as a director and as a writer in 2020, which was screened in Asian Film Festival Barcelona, Dhaka International Film Festival, and few festivals in India in 2021 and '22. Then I got a chance to produce an animation series, Akul Nakul, in 2022, and we are going to produce the second season I think in the next year. It's a 20-episode series, the duration of the episode ranging from 15 minutes to 25 minutes. In 2020 I made a feature film as a writer and director and then in '22 the Akul Nakul series. It's about two - the Asuras are the demons in Sanskrit language -the two demons, the child demons, which came to came back to the Earth and fought a bigger demon. It's an animation series which is very good for us, and working on the second season and other projects also.

### **Connor Cook**

How do we create rounded characters and enhancing emotion with our characters?

### **Tajha Winkle**

I'm going to use the story of The Black Girl in the Ring. If I'm telling a story about a woman who had to run away from slavery and then meet up with a group of other people who used to be enslaved and band together to fight for their freedom, I think, Okay, what does this feel like? How would I approach this emotionally? Then I tried to put myself in that character's head space. Then I animate that way.

<https://ahjat1.wixsite.com/tajhawinkleportfolio/general-8>

This was done as an introduction to a movie about Nanny of the Maroons. She is a national hero in Jamaica, because during the period of slavery in Jamaica as a colony, she helped

the enslaved people to move off the plantations into the hills and she fought back against the colonists that were trying to get them back into bondage and slavery. It tells her story.

### **Rodion Shub**

Excuse me. It's like a feature movie filmed with actors or it's a documentary?

### **Tajha Winkle**

It's a feature movie with actors but it's based on a true story. The rest of the film is in live action, but when I was speaking with the director he specifically wanted an animated intro because he wanted it to feel immersive like a story. That's also why the drawings don't move a whole lot. I wanted it to feel like it's a moving picture, and I wanted to encapsulate that and to also make it feel like you could see it still in a story book but also you could see it moving on screen. When I was looking at it and delved into the idea of the character, when you think of Nanny of the Maroons, because she would have been living in the hills of Jamaica on their own off-grid village, usually her depictions she is wiry, she has her hair tied up in a similar African style, and because that image of her is so iconic, I wanted to put that back. She's supposed to be very strong, she's not someone who would cry, she is not somebody who shows emotions outwardly like that. A lot of her expressions that I have animated would be fairly stoic, and that's something that I had to think about as well when I was crafting that in, because knowing what you want to say and then adjusting the writing and then the animating on top of that to make sure that the vision is cohesive is extremely important, and because as well the Maroon people would have been enslaved and wearing clothes that aren't native to them, I put them in a kind of mish-mash of I'd say 1500s to 1600s clothing as well. So there was a lot of research that went into it too, and because of that research and the idea of making it like a moving picture as opposed to a fully fluid animation, I wanted to make sure that we got all those cultures in, with the colors as well as the animation movements that I put in there. It's based off an image that we have, because her story was mostly told orally through the traditions of the Maroon people, which still exist to this day in Jamaica and they're still living in the hills. So the the story was told mostly orally, and then through that we got an artist rendition of what she might have looked like, so I based it off of that, but also mixed in with the actress as well in the live action version, because I also got the pleasure of watching some of the film and her acting, and I got to mix in that personality as well to my design of her. That was really important to me to mix in both the live action as well as the iconic image that we have of her as well.

### **Mariia Shub**

It's very interesting that you're talking about research. We really need so much research before, because our films are always shorter than feature films but we need to make the same big process to make previous mood board, research, everything - color, traditions, history, images. The question how we draw the characters - It's really because of research and the big, big previous work that we have done before. I could understand that you need to combine the specific history, fairytale, oral story, real research about historical costumes, and how it will be suitable to the real film for another work for directing, so it's complicated. I really respect you.

### **Munzir Naqvi**

I just want to add something. One of Ray's films, *The Chess Players*, *Shatranj Ke Khilari*, 1978, has a small one-minute animation sequence in 1978 and in India, and this is Satyajit Ray's only non-Bengali film. I think it will be very difficult to put animation in a live-action feature film at that time. Now I think it's much easier for directors to use animation. In the

1970s it's very difficult and it's not a thing that you put animation in a feature film at that time. And if you see the films of Abbas Kiarostami, the Iranian filmmaker, most of his images look like a painting and it will be part of the animation. I think he does not use animation in his films but it looks like a painting and an animator is like a digital painter.

### **Connor Cook**

From a composer's standpoint, the first thing I talk about usually with the director is the emotional arc of the story. I mostly work in film, so I do a lot of feature and short film, and it's different - you know, a short film, the narrative arc is much shorter, but then feature film, there might be one grand narrative arc and there might be smaller ones too. I literally draw a graph of what the story arc is and the plot points, and then under that I have all my - I'm not even very organized so this is big for me to be able to do this - I write where all the big emotional points are. So I guess that's my own way of animation, however I cannot draw and it doesn't look good, but it serves the purpose, so I know what the film on a grand scale is going to be. Probably for animators too, there's a lot of minutiae you deal with in composing, where it's like sometimes you're scoring 20 seconds and it might be action or whatever and it might be a really packed 20 seconds, but on the whole you want your whole film score to be cohesive and to bring a whole rounded sound. You don't want it to be like random things throughout the whole film, you want to have a whole overarching tone or collection of instruments or whatever the through line may be.

[Film clip]

Thanks. I love this animator. She was actually my Sundance animation partner and when we watched through the film - this is actually a great segue, because I have a question for all of you - when we watched through the film the first time together, the scene that struck me was the shot of the chest and it's like bony and sunken, so even if you only saw that frame, you'd be like: oh, that guy's sick. The other thing that struck me was the sound design, the rattly breath, so when I started composing, the first thing I wanted to do was to highlight the idea that the breathing is really important, it's like its own character almost, and so with the music I thought I could make a sighing vocal thing that would feel really like breathing and it would feel a little bit desperate. The movie is about obviously a kid who's trying to understand his dad is sick and dealing with the emotions, and so most of the movie is pretty sad, but then the play scene, the director and I went back and forth a lot about how do we score this? My gut instinct was to score it like the kid's perspective, like kids playing, kind of joyful, and the kid is pounding the ball, so the music is from the child's perspective.

What I like about that clip is you kind of are with the child for the first time. Throughout the rest of the movie you're watching everybody, but in that scene I feel like you're really with the child and he's a little mischievous and the whole movie is incredibly heavy. I like that that provides a breath and also the animation style was really inspiring to me. She actually took film paper, like what you would take a photograph on, and she scratched it and then painted it. It was very tedious. I don't know how she did it. She's an amazing artist, and actually she's doing some art for my next project that I'm releasing, because I just was so enthralled by her work. I'm enthralled by all of your work by the way. I'm curious how you all, when you're starting with your collaborators, how do you get started on talking about character?

### **Mariia Shub**

It's easy to answer because I in the animation that we will see soon, I was a scriptwriter, artist who drew the characters, and making the mood board, so I collaborated just with

myself. We have a great team with my beautiful brother. It was easy and I brought some sketches to show how it was.

It was cut out guys, yes. So I drew everything separately on watercolor papers, and then Rodion just cut out it in after effect. It was a combination between real texture of watercolor paper, because AKQA, my agency who asked me to do this animation, really enjoy - they were happy with old-school tabletop watercolor animation. Could you do this? But we had just three weeks, so we combined our tools. So I made it flat, I made it in watercolor paper, leaving all these not super accurate lines because it is handcraft style. So sometimes the task give us tools, because the main task was how to make really hand-crafted animation. I decided to do it not round, do it flat, do it just simple - but not simple, you understand that it's quite difficult to do. All the characters were drawn separately.

**Rodion Shub**

And I had the pleasure spending a lot of hours in Photoshop to cut out all of it.

**Mariia Shub**

Yes, cut out every little little line. So that is how it was done.

<https://www.akqa.com/work/akqa/little-wings/>

**Tajha Winkle**

That was very beautiful.

**Mariia Shub**

Thank you.

**Connor Cook**

Yeah, very beautiful. Amazing detail.

**Munzir Naqvi**

Which software are used by both of you for that animation?

**Rodion Shub**

Maria uses such software as her hard hands! I prepare all the images in Photoshop and my main tool is After Effects. I assemble and animate all in After Effects with some fake 3D.

**Mariia Shub**

I draw every slide separately. Skies, hills.

**Rodion Shub**

And after, I assembled a 3D village from all these pieces.

**Mariia Shub**

You see it's a portrait and separate eyes, separate blinking for every image. Funny story - when we started and we understood that we had just three weeks to do this, I sat at home and think - Oh my God, I need to start it, because I need to make animatic storyboard to understand how many images I need, how many slices, how many characters. My youngest daughter, she was 12 in that moment, she said, Oh, is it payment work? I said yes. She said, could I help you and you will pay me? I said Okay, and she asked what the problem is. I said I need a storyboard. She said Okay ...

**Rodion Shub**

Oh it's so cute.

**Mariia Shub**

Bring me story board.

**Rodion Shub**

Mariia, you know that in in the UK, child labour is illegal actually!

**Mariia Shub**

Maybe family team. She got money at least. And it was my inspiration how to start, and I just started draw, draw, draw, every day, so it was two days of drawing, one day I scan, scan everything in the biggest quality that we could imagine. Then I sent it to Rodion. He immediately started to cut out all the characters. And big big thanks to our agency that they understood that for animation this was a very very short time to prepare it, so we just made it super quickly. They said yes for every sketch and we started immediately to cut out and prepare for the next steps of animation.

**Rodion Shub**

Also halfway we found another tool. Mariia made some extra stuff on the iPad in Procreate tools, include some animation of a shining star, a few frames and draw with animation, so when I assembled everything and gave a picture to Mariia, she was not satisfied because she's a perfectionist and she likes to do her best stuff and not just in time, so we found a new tool. I gave her back a PSD with all the layers already assembled, and sometimes she made some extra shadows, some reduction or some overdrawing in the iPad to make it better and more ...

**Mariia Shub**

Like fine art painting, it was ...

**Rodion Shub**

Much better, all layers visually, so she added some shadows or repair something or add some highlights.

**Mariia Shub**

Or make some lines softer or really correct them.

**Rodion Shub**

Because when you work in such stuff, completely handmade, if you don't have enough experience, you're kind of blind, because you draw all like - eye here, hand here, leg here, and you don't always know how it will be when I will merge it in one character.

**Mariia Shub**

When you asked how we found the characters, it was a little tribute for our well-known artist, Maria Prymachenko, and we wear with Rodion today our clothes with your images. Because the story was about Ukraine, about how we celebrate Christmas, and how to explain that well-known music, Carol of the Bells. It's specially written by Ukrainian composer Leontovych 100 years ago, and we really wanted to make this tribute to combine all really important artists and music and colors that could express our feeling about our country.

**Tajha Winkle**

Most of my work is centered around children and their stories, so I mostly make child-friendly animations, or family friendly animation, and that's just mostly about me wanting to bring joy, because I know sometimes things can get pretty heavy, but I do enjoy bringing joy with my work and I like making things that are cute and bubbly and friendly, so I really do love

character animation. I love seeing things that pop up on screen, I love things that are very lively and warm and that tell stories between two characters. Like this, for example - that's a Jamaican fruit called a sweetsop, and this is just a story about sharing and just giving whenever you see someone in need. I also like to be stylistically diverse with my work as well, because I really do enjoy seeing that and having that kind of range but also being able to fit it into different types of productions, because I love working with different stories and different people from all over the world. I feel like the best way to do that is to just be pretty flexible with the style that you're able to work in.

### **Rodion Shub**

Tajha, could you tell a little bit about your technical pipeline, so how you do it? It looks all very different in style but I think technically it's similar - so how you work.

### **Tajha Winkle**

Sure. I primarily work digitally but I do love integrating texture. The first thing I will do, of course, is write out a script. Once everything is scripted out I'll do my storyboarding online. I usually do it in Clip Studio Paint. I will board out everything and then move into the digital inking and color. I use Clip Studio Paint primarily, but I also use Photoshop as well and I'm recently getting back into using Toon Boom Harmony to bring everything together too. I also do my compositing in Premiere Pro and sometimes in After Effects, depending on what I want to do or the look that I'm going for. I have worked on, I think, things that ... I haven't worked on anything exceeding four minutes - four minutes is the longest that I've ever animated anything for, and that was for my student film and for that I had to be the writer, I had to do the animating myself, and I also had to be my own sound designer, but thankfully I had gotten music commissioned and I had gotten some friends to do the voice acting for me. It's the first time I had ever worked with a music composer specifically for me as well as voice acting for me, and what I had done is I let them read the script, I gave them their character descriptions, and I showed them the story boards, and then they acted it out, and from that I was able to kind of tweak my animation a little bit to represent how they would sound when they're saying something or how it would fit in with the music.

### **Rodion Shub**

It's always about the network. I want you to tell - you tell that you never made more than four minutes, and I would make a remark, I think everybody can agree with me - you know how people say that there are human years and there are dog years - one dog or cat year is like seven human years. I think there is the same in animation, so one minute of animation is like seven minute of picture film or something like that, because we definitely take a long time to do short stuff. I always call a ten-minute animated movie a feature film already.

### **Connor Cook**

That's a great point. Speaking of music with animation, Munzir, don't you have a clip that is a song with animation?

### **Munzir Naqvi**

Yeah, that's a music video of our series.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCHC0lppbXE>

### **Rodion Shub**

Wow, it's so professional.



**Munzir Naqvi**

Thank you so much.

**Rodion Shub**

A complete animation. I adore your FX animation.

**Munzir Naqvi**

It will take a year to complete everything. The song is written by Sameer, one of the biggest lyricists in Bollywood, the Indian film industry based in Bombay, the lyrics are written by him.

**Connor Cook**

Which came first, the song or the animation?

**Munzir Naqvi**

We made the animation tentatively and then we put the song. We have to edit it according to that. Because we have some of the shots of the other thing, but for the this kind of music video, because the channel needed it, so we had to make some additional animation. We used a lot of instruments - the music director used a lot of musical instruments, because in India there are a lot of different cultures here, so there's a lot of different types of music, there's a lot of similar type of music in India.

**Connor Cook**

And you produced this programme as well?

**Munzir Naqvi**

Yeah, I'm the producer, nothing else, I'm just a producer. One of my partners, Berwin, we are the producers for Gubbare TV. Gubbare means 'balloon'. There's an animation channel, kids' animation channel, in India named Gubbare TV, which we produced that for.

**Mariia Shub**

How many animators made this?

**Munzir Naqvi**

A lot. Because I'm just a producer, I did not know about that. I'm really sorry I do not know about the details. We made the animation in Hyderabad, so there's a team there, there's a team in Bombay, a small team in Bombay, and there's a bigger team in Kolkata, so we just put everything and we edited everything in Bombay, and the music is happening in India. I think it's more than 20 animators because there's a lot of work, and for a larger budget we need more animators. There are a lot of studios and there's a very thriving animation culture in India. It's very professional actually. There are a lot of kids' channels in India, so that's why the animation channel, the kids' animation channel.

**Mariia Shub**

What is the timing?

**Munzir Naqvi**

It's 20 episodes. The first one is 25 minutes and it ranges from 15 minutes to 25 minutes. It's 20 episodes, some are 14, some are 17, but the first one and the last one are, I think, 25 minutes - 24 / 25 minutes.

**Rodion Shub**

How many people in total are under your control and decisions?

**Munzir Naqvi**

I think overall, not given time, I think more than 80. The voice-over artists, other things, but the animators are not more than 20, but a lot of people - the editors, the lyricist, the musicians - everything is around 80, not at a given time but overall is 80.

**Rodion Shub**

It's crazy! It's hard to manage even eight or ten people, but manage 80, it's wow!

**Munzir Naqvi**

In India labor is very cheap, so we have lot of people in every film set. 100 is normal for a feature film in India.

**Audience question**

How do you all deal with burnout and frustration when your art doesn't come the way it looks in your head on paper or on digital or anything?

**Mariia Shub**

It seems to me it's teamwork and we could help each other. It's not one person inside the project so we could inspire each other and inspiration just come.

**Tajha Winkle**

I agree. Working in a team really helps with burnout, because you can bounce ideas off other people, and it helps relieve you creatively. I would also say to you, sometimes if you're really tired, it's a good idea to take a break. If you really need a break, it's good to relax your mind and go outside, because life is very inspiring and it can really make you feel less overwhelmed when you're able to get into a different environment and you're able to look around and see what's going on outside or in the world around you. Also watching other films or other movies or other people's work can also be really inspiring and can help you overcome your burnout as well. I think if it really is that you're very tired, resting is super important.

**Rodion Shub**

I think what really can help is a good choice of a project, because if by itself it inspires you, it helps you to not burn out much longer than if you work on a project which you hate, do not like your colleagues and stuff like that.

**Audience question**

What advice would you give to freshly graduated animators trying to make it in the industry? What do you all think?

**Tajha Winkle**

I would say sometimes it can depend on where you are. Right now I'm in Jamaica. I'm a little bit away from I would say the major hubs. The best advice I would give is to really talk to people in the industries that you want to work in. A lot of people are very friendly so ask for advice, talk to the people around you as well, because wherever you are in the world, there might be somebody else who's doing the same thing you are, might be a little ahead of you or might be in the exact same place. It's a good idea to talk to them and to get ideas and to just create, and also to really iron out your portfolio as well for the jobs that you want and to send them out. Check out the places too that you're interested in working for as well and see what their work looks like and see if you might be a good fit. Also LinkedIn is really great to

talk to recruiters or to see other people who are in your industry as well and you can send them a message and be polite and ask them questions about their work and how they made it into the industry, if they're in a specific job that you might want to get into.

### **Audience question**

How do you navigate pitfalls during production?

### **Tajha Winkle**

I would say every production has its ups and downs honestly, especially here in Jamaica sometimes things can move a little quickly and on a tight budget. It depends on what the pitfall is. Sometimes it can be on the client side, meaning for example they want a five-minute intense fight scene with different camera angles but they're only giving you one month. Usually it's a good idea to sit them down and try to get a more realistic approach to what they can actually do with the budget and the right time frame. So sometimes it's on that side. Sometimes it can be where you might not be able to find the right artist for the style that you want, and a lot of times that just has to do with doing open calls, so going online and just saying, hey, I'm doing a project about XYZ and I'm looking for artists. A lot of times, especially if it's paid, you'll get a huge number of people just sending in their work. Sometimes it can be within the team as well, where maybe sometimes not everybody is on the same page. It really helps at that point to have a producer or a director who has a solid vision, because a lot of times a solid vision can really help hammer out a lot of the nitty gritty details that are giving you problems, so having a very solid vision helps with the pitfalls so that you can say, okay, I wanted this to be a watercolor romance but right now it's looking more like an acrylic paint action. What can we do to shift it back into perspective? How can we make the style align with our vision? That's how I would or usually how I navigate those pitfalls.

### **Connor Cook**

Thank you, and thank you everyone for being here. This was so fun.

### **Munzir Naqvi**

Thank you so much everyone.

### **Rodion Shub**

Thank you for organizing such a beautiful conversation with our colleagues. It's so nice.

### **Elizabeth McIntyre**

it's just been an extraordinary talk and I've just found it absolutely fascinating. Thank you to everyone, particularly the speakers for coming. Thank you very much.