

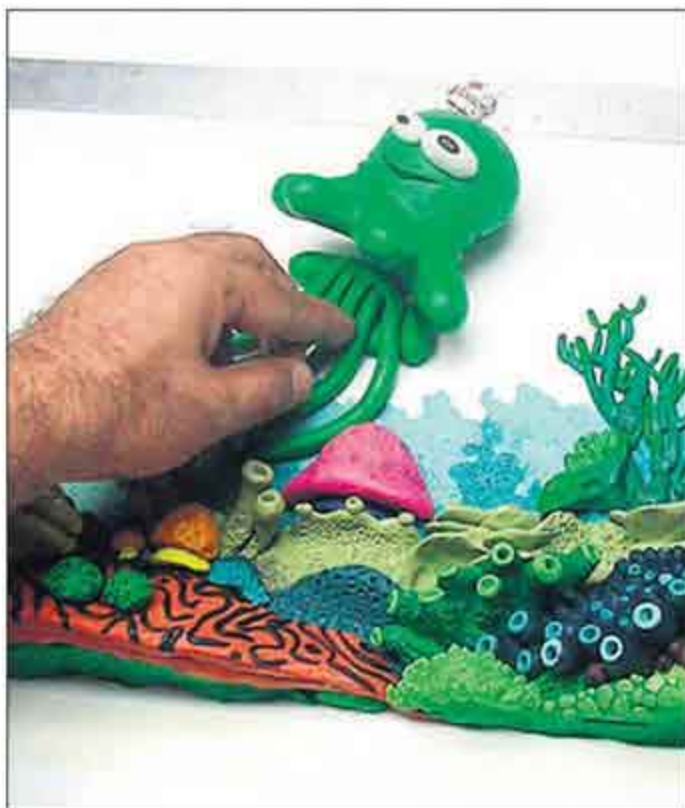
MUMBAI MIRROR

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52 MUMBAI MIRROR MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2008

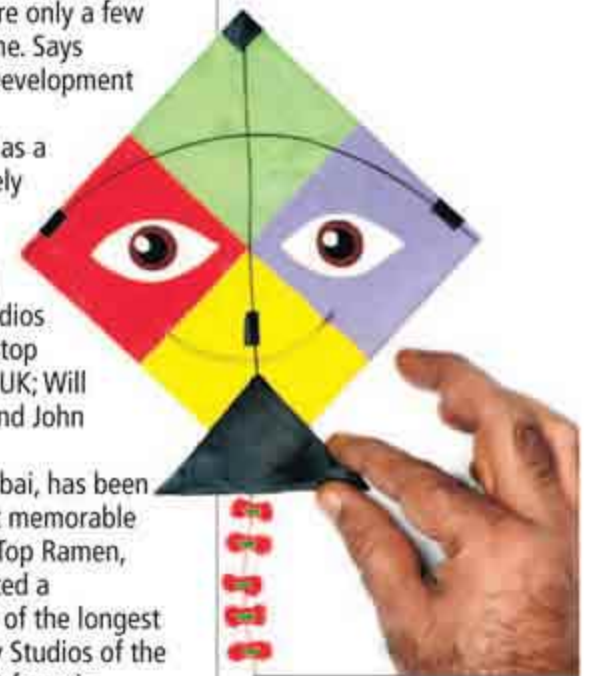
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FINDING WORK

Considering that the Indian claymation scene is only gradually picking up, there are only a few studios who are doing this big time. Says Thomas Jacob, Head of Content Development and New Business, Corner Shop Entertainment, "Clay animation has a big market. But because it is hugely expensive to execute, fewer players go for it." Dhimant too feels that there is ample demand for this medium; there are big studios around the world which do only stop motion, such as Aardman Studio, UK; Will Vinton Studios (now Laika), US; and John Lemmon Films, Charlotte, NC.

In India, Famous Studios, Mumbai, has been associated with some of the most memorable television commercials (Amaron, Top Ramen, Chintamani). They have also created a claymation title sequence for one of the longest running television series. Vaibhav Studios of the Pandu Mangal (Amaron batteries) fame is another major clay animation studio in Mumbai.



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To find out more about the animation schools in India and abroad check out the website <http://www.designinindia.net/erywhere/disciplines/animation/institutions/schools.html#a7>

The tortoise and the hare play see-saw on a slice of watermelon, the tortoise rides on the moon, and the peacock turns into a flower. If you have seen *Taare Zameen Par*, it won't take you long to recollect where you have seen these scenes. You couldn't have missed the dream sequence animation right at the beginning of the movie, while the credits run. This is an excellent example of clay animation. Other examples include *Chicken Run* (a full-length clay animation movie released in 2000) and *Bob the Builder*, a television series for children.

In India 'claymation' has mostly been used for television shows and advertisements. Some of the most memorable clay animation sequences in Indian television are Poga, a series on MTV that spoofed alternative healing therapies and Professor Sodhi (Simpoo), the Channel V Mascot. The commercials for Amaron Batteries, Nissin Top Ramen, and Chintamani (ICICI bank) have also made quite an impact on the viewers' minds.

WHEN IT ALL STARTED

Clay animation is not a new technique; it began with the invention of a substance called plasticine in 1897. The first step in using clay in films was in 1902 when a 'lightning sculpting' sequence was used for the movie *Fun in a Bakery Shop*. Then, in 1908, the movie *A Sculptor's Welsh Rarebit Nightmare* made use of clay animated sculptures.

After many small and obscure works and almost 70 years later, clay animation started gaining a little popularity in the 80's. One of the most memorable clay animated characters has been Gumby, the subject of a 223-episode series of an American television show, created by Art Clokey. In the 1980s, the most popular clay animation studio was the Will Vinton Studios which created characters like the California Raisins and Dominos Pizza Noid.

In India, animation has been considered interesting only for children. The adult population has fought shy of

BREATHING LIFE INTO CLAY

Captivated by the animation sequence in a recent Bollywood blockbuster, Sherin Mammen takes a look at the curious world of clay animation

expressing their excitement for this medium. However, the animation industry is gradually receiving a favourable response from all over. And, clay animation has received more prominence and acceptance by the audience, as the characters look more lifelike and lovable than other forms of animation. Going by the rare reviews that Dhimant Vyas—a renowned stop motion animation expert and the brain behind the dream sequence in *Taare Zameen Par*—has received, clay animation is all set to take off in India.

GETTING IT DONE

Clay animation, which uses objects or characters sculpted from clay, is exciting and requires a lot of patience. These models are based on a storyboard—an illustrated frame by frame description of the plot or theme, with rough character sketches. After the models are made according to the storyboard sequence, one takes a series of still pictures that are replayed in rapid succession to create the

illusion of movement. Each second of a film may take around 24 different frames of film and the work could last for months at a stretch. However, if you enjoy working with clay and making interesting characters out of it, no other job could be more satisfying.

"The challenge in clay animation is that once you shoot footage, you cannot go back and change anything. So, you should be very clear in your head about timing, movements, etc. Whereas in 2D or 3D animation, you can edit the frames in the middle of a sequence, at any time," says Vyas. Clay animation shooting is like live action shooting but in a miniature way. The animator sets up camera, lights, set, and characters; animates each sequence, frame by frame; and grabs images.

Clay animation can be used in various fields like feature films, TV series, TV commercials, eLearning projects as well as in web applications. Clay animation is a sub-set of stop motion, an animation technique that makes a physically manipulated object appear to move.

Toonz Animation, Trivandrum, with branches in many other Indian cities offers specialised service in stop motion animation. Pulp State, a start-up, in clay animation also hopes to strike it big considering the promise clay animation holds.

LEARNING THE ROPES

"The current workforce in the field has an art or sculpture background. They have mostly learnt on the job. Anyone with a talent for sculpture or miniature modelling can break into the field," says Thomas.

National Institute of Design (NID) has the facility to do stop motion, but there is no special course in clay animation.

Vyas says, "I was lucky to get a chance to learn stop motion when Prof Joan Ashworth (Head of The Animation Department, Royal College of Arts, UK) and Catherine Greenhalgh conducted a stop motion workshop at NID in 1988. It was the beginning of stop motion in India." Professionals like Vyas also conduct a few clay animation workshops in cities like Bangalore, Mumbai, and Hyderabad, where it is not difficult to spot a bunch of enthusiastic students eager to learn this classic technique.

The kind of money one can make in this field depends on one's talent. Thomas feels "The remuneration varies depending on seniority. Since there isn't a fixed market, there are no standard rates."

