

molded into armatures with latex coverings.

The earliest surviving use of the technique is *The Sculptor's Nightmare*, a spoof on the 1908 presidential election. In the final reel of the film, a slab of clay on a pedestal comes to life, metamorphosing into a bust of Teddy Roosevelt. Mack Sennet and D.W. Griffith, two important pioneers of early cinema, appear in the live-action portion of the film.

In 1917, the first female animator of any kind, New York's Helena Smith Dayton, used real doll clothes and human hair to add realism to her clay depictions of fairy tales and classic literature, including *Romeo and Juliet*.

The B-Movie Guru

Jump forward a few decades to find another special-effects master interested in fairy tales. Ray Harryhausen made clay dinosaurs as a kid, then got his first job as a model animator on George Pal's *Puppetoons*.

Later, assisting Willis O'Brien (the genius who in 1933 turned an 18-inch-tall cat fur-covered model into *King Kong*), Harryhausen worked on *Mighty Joe Young* in 1949.

In films like 1958's *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* and 1963's *Jason and the Argonauts* (which includes the famous animated skeleton sequence that took 4 1/2 months to create), Harryhausen perfected his craft. In 1992, he received a special Oscar for inspiring an entire generation of animators and special-effects artists.

Harryhausen's first employer, the Hungarian Pal, created the *Puppetoon* series for Paramount. "The NAACP thought they were racist," says Frierson, "and they are. He mistakenly thought he was doing folk tales."

Pal used 100 carved wooden replacement heads to animate the characters. So not only did racial tension ensue, but also a controversy over just what is clay animation: If the heads are carved wood, is it still clay animation?

He's Green, He's Gumby

Meanwhile, with movies being replaced by television throughout the 1950s, Warner Bros. cut back on its cel cartoon output by a third, stopping completely by 1969. A less sophisticated made-for-TV style, by Hanna-Barbera, had taken over. The time was right for

clay's first superstar: Gumby.

"The whole motivation for making Gumby was to give children something of real value," says the green guy's creator, Art Clokey. "Gumby was expressing my love for children by telling stories from the heart."

NBC gave Clokey a contract to produce a series from 1956-1963. Gumby and his orange horse Pokey became icons.

Not many people realize that Clokey was also the creator of another curious series of that era: the moralistic *Davey and Goliath*. "The Lutherans saw Gumby on WPIX in New York and called me," Clokey says. "It was shown more than Gumby, actually. The church gave the films to the stations for free. It was an act of service to society."

Gumby's Long Shadow

Clokey, now 76 years old, is still zealously engaged in clay animation. Gumby has his own personality cult and was immortalized in an Eddie Murphy skit on *Saturday Night Live*. *Davey and Goliath* references



When *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* debuted in early December 1964, few could have predicted that the show would still be broadcast at holiday time three decades later. (rankinbass.com)

and several other holiday classics. Premiering on NBC in December 1964, the *Rudolph* special promoted the appliances of sponsor General Electric with a soundtrack LP featuring narrator Burl Ives. *Rudolph* and *Frosty* were big hits with kids, and the Rankin and Bass specials remain holiday perennials.

have recently popped up everywhere from *The Simpsons* and *Mad TV* to the work of Todd Haines, director of the glam rock choral *The Velvet Goldmine*. (Haines also made the now-banned *Karen Carpenter Story*, a very dark comedy told with hand-held Barbie dolls.)

Finally, the prolific team of Arthur Rankin Jr. and Jules Bass produced *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, *Frosty the Snow Man*

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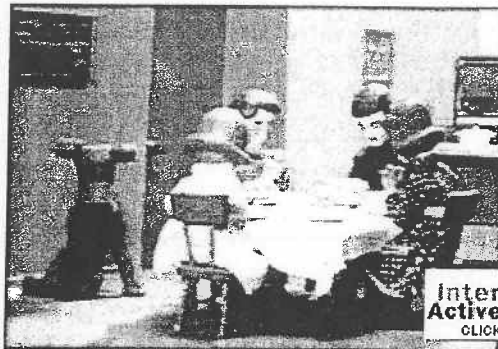
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Clay Has Its Day



A History of Clay Animation: Part 2

The family that clays together, prays together. Art Clokey, creator of *Gumby*, also made *Davey and Goliath* for the Lutheran Church. Click the photo for more on clay animation, from its start to its current incarnation in *Chicken Run*. (Art Clokey)

By Mark Bloch

abc NEWS.com

July 13 — When experimental filmmaking “busted out” in the 1960s and early ’70s, clay animation was not immune to the change. But with the changes came questions about just what constitutes “clay” animation.

In 1971, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences widened its “Best Short Subject” category from “Cartoon” to “Animated Film,” and that cleared the big clay road.

Three years later, filmmaker Will Vinton, influenced by the flowing clay forms of the Spanish architect Gaudi, won that Oscar, in collaboration with his friend Bob Gardiner, for *Closed Mondays*.

And the plot was certainly not the usual kiddie fare. “It was the story of a wino wandering into an art museum,” says Vinton.

A lot of other animators were taking their cue from cel animation, which used the film frame like a theatrical stage. But filmmaking was evolving, and Vinton decided to take advantage of those changes in *Closed*



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Mondays. “Cuts, extreme close-ups, dramatic camera angles hadn’t been made use of in animation.” He figured it was time.

Vinton soon completed the world’s first feature-length clay animation, *The Adventures of Mark Twain*. He calls the 72-minute film “the zenith of pure clay animation: 100 percent clay. We were purists in

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One of Nick Park's earlier films, besides the popular *Wallace and Gromit* series, was *Creature Comforts* which also won an Oscar for Aardman. Its characters were later used to sell candy in England. (Aardman)

those days.”

But while clay had begun to distinguish itself as more than an expensive cousin of cel animation, Vinton recalls that *Mark Twain* “never found its audience.”

So Much Larger Than Life

While Vinton remains proud of such high-brow fare, his production company is best known for the *California Raisins* commercial, which featured dried fruit grooving to the beat of “I Heard It Through the Grapevine.”

“I knew it would be a great ad campaign, a fun idea, but I had no idea it’d be a *phenomena*,” says Vinton. “I still get introduced as the Raisin King.”

Recent decades have produced an innovative proliferation of pure clay in the service of cutting-edge TV programs as well as commercials and music videos. Frank Zappa’s 1979 *Baby Snakes* capitalized on clay’s inherent characteristics, such as sagging and stretching, which other animators find troubling.

In 1968, Joan Gratz began painting with clay and used her innovative technique in a 1990 United Airlines commercial. In 1992, she won an Oscar for her seven-minute short *Mona Lisa Descending a Staircase*.

Clay had some memorable moments in the ’80s. Vinton Studios won an Emmy in 1987 for clay portraits of stars Cybill Shepherd and Bruce Willis on the hit series *Moonlighting*. *Pee-wee’s Playhouse* commissioned Aardman to create the late 1980s *Penny Cartoon* series, then animator David Daniels in 1987 for a pair of short using his “strata” technique.

Daniels is also known for his 1987 video *Big Time*

for singer Peter Gabriel. Meanwhile, Gabriel (on his award-winning *Sledgehammer* video), Bette Midler and the Spice Girls all utilized clay — and the talents of Aardman — to make their music visually unforgettable.

Even Gumby became a rock star. *Gumby 1* — requiring \$3.2 million and 30 months of shooting, starting in 1989, Art Clokey's 87-minute project is fun and faithful to the original. But the world's second pure clay feature went straight to video.

Heavy-Duty Cheat

The famous *Saturday Night Live* feature *Mr. Bill* does not belong to this survey in a technical sense. But it bears mentioning because it is an extreme example of other changes in the world of clay.

Mr. Bill is made of Play-doh, not clay, and isn't animated. "It's a heavy-duty cheat," says Michael Frierson, author of the 1994 book *Clay Animation: American Highlights, 1908 to the Present*. "It's running the camera in real time. There's no comparison."

But filmmaker Walter Williams says his *Mr. Bill* is relevant because it is a *parody* of animation. "I got the idea while watching one of the newer versions of the *Popeye* cartoons and thinking there was so little movement compared to the original cartoon animation ... next you'll be seeing the hands moving the character around ... then accidentally dropping him."

So Williams got his big break via *SNL*'s home movie contest, and kept producing for the show until 1980, when the original cast left. A 15th anniversary *SNL* survey found *Mr. Bill*'s popularity was exceeded only by that of the late John Belushi and Gilda Radner.

The Mr. Bill Collection of videos sold better than any other *SNL* compilation. As Mr. Hands tortured and maimed Mr. Bill throughout the late 1970s, his falsetto cries of "Oh Noooooooo" became a household word.

Certainly *Mr. Bill* is not clay animation, but what about film like 1993's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*? Like the films of Ray Harryhausen, discussed in Part One of this history, Tim Burton's film utilized clay as one of many techniques but was billed as "stop-animation." Like George Pal's *Puppetoons* and even *Chicken Run*, *Nightmare* used molded "replacement parts" that are swapped for others as needed, as opposed to re-shaping plasticine as the action develops in pure clay animation.

“Each frame is sculpted.” Will Vinton explains, “It’s very tedious, very realistic. It is extraordinarily expressive because it doesn’t repeat and recycle mouth shapes, for instance.”

But when a film like *Nightmare* earns \$50 million at the box office and another \$22 million in rentals, with *Chicken Run* gaining fast, Hollywood is taking notice and purity matters less.

Look No Further

Today one does not need to look far to find direct descendants of clay animation. Latex figures of Elvis Presley, Bruce Lee and Frank Sinatra sell Brisk Ice Tea. *The PJs*, created by Vinton Studios, is a current series.

Then there is *Celebrity Deathmatch*. It premiered in the fall of 1997 as a fantasy fight between Charles and Marilyn Manson on MTV, then moved to a Super Bowl halftime special, *Deathbowl 98*. Now, it’s a weekly show on the cable network. Each episode features three bouts of today’s hottest celebrities up against each other in a violent clay slugfest that marries Mr. Bill’s spirit with the technology of *Gumby*.

Still, the ’90s in clay animation belonged to Aardman, which blazes few new trails in terms of technique but delights young and old with its ability to tell a story. That’s the case with Nick Park and Peter Lord’s new film, *Chicken Run*.

“It is the first stop-motion animation movie made in the Aardman style ... which is unique,” says Dreamworks’ Jeffrey Katzenberg, the film’s executive producer. “There’s nothing else like it in the world.”

“I’m happy for Nick and Peter that Dreamworks has gotten behind it,” says Vinton of *Chicken Run*. “*Mark Twain* missed its true market. And animation suffers for that. For a long time Disney was the only one who knew how to market animation. We’ll see what Dreamworks can do.”

Whether Dreamwork’s marketing or just the charm of the Aardman characters, someone is doing something right. And clay animation is ready for its close-up.

On Clay, Computers and *Chicken Run*

The old masters are pleased by the success of *Chicken Run*.

"I'm very happy to see *Chicken Run* come out," says Art Clokey, the creator of *Gumby*. "We've had a struggle to get people to finance our movie because its clay animation and not computer animation."

What is so great about clay? "The heartbeat and imprint of the nervous system of the artist in clay animation is imprinted on the movement," says Clokey. "There are little nicks and indentations that are not noticed but they're there. Every movement by a human is infinitesimally different from any other one."

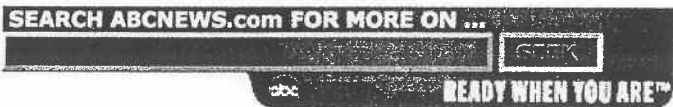
Of Park, Clokey cannot be complimentary enough. "He's really a perfectionist. It's real beautiful animation. I don't think anyone can beat him."

Not even Gumby? "We're more organic type of people. I try to avoid slickness. It tends to be too perfect. I don't mean to imply that's the way I see Nick Park's work. He just takes more pains."

Will Vinton, who created the first clay animation feature in 1985, *The Adventures of Mark Twain*, as well as the famed California Raisins commercials, can't say why clay is so appealing.

"Certain stories really work well in clay. I'm not a good person to ask why people love it so much. I have my theories," says Vinton. "Maybe they relate to the three-dimensional quality of the clay characters. They're tangible and tactile. They really do exist. It is a palpable reality."

— Mark Bloch, ABCNEWS.com



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Beetle Bailey's Cartoonist Rehabilitates a Character

Halftrack Gets Overhaul

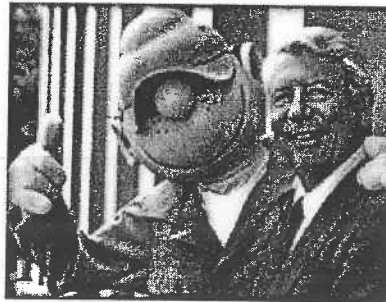


Mort Walker's popular comic strip "Beetle Bailey" features a general who was in dire need of sensitivity training (Reprinted by special permission of King Features)

By *Mark Bloch*
ABCNEWS.com

It's not the first time a comic icon has changed with the times. Blondie the housewife started her own catering business. *Doonesbury's* cast of characters had to grow into adulthood.

And now, with recent headlines exposing the U.S. military's problems with sexual harrassment, the leering and lecherous Gen. Amos Halftrack of the comic strip "Beetle Bailey" is getting rehabilitated. And probably will soon be getting more in touch with his feelings.



Cartoonist Mort Walker poses with his creation Beetle Bailey at a ceremony at the Pentagon in June 1990 (Bob Daughterty/AP Photo)

Gen. Halftrack has been fantasizing about his voluptuous secretary Miss Buxley for decades in the "Beetle Bailey" strip, but the time has come for the bumbling officer to get with the nineties. "It just didn't go over anymore," said the strip's creator, Mort Walker.

Rather than retire the general, Walker decided to send him to a sensitivity training class that began in July. "He's been so much fun. I've only taken away one of his attributes. I don't think we're going to miss anything."

"I'm fighting bureaucracy and defending the American tradition to question authority. It's part and parcel of the American psyche."
—Mort Walker, Creator of Beetle Bailey

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A Symbol of the Human Condition

Walker has used the general for almost 50 years as a symbol of what is wrong with the military and the human condition. "All of the failures of man are embodied in this one, creaky old character," Walker said Friday from his studio in Connecticut. "He is a prime representative of Army foul-ups, of bureaucracy, not to mention bad golf and abusive happy hours."

But after the real-life Tailhook scandal and the recent tribulations of some of the armed forces' highest-ranking enlisted men, Beetle creator Walker used the comic strip to make a statement about turning over a new leaf. "I turned the old goat into a lamb," Walker said.

International
Museum of
Cartoon Art
[http://
www.cartoon.org](http://www.cartoon.org)

The baby boom was just getting underway when Mort Walker, 73, first created Beetle Bailey in 1950. It was the same year a strip called "Lil Folks" was reborn as "Peanuts" and EC Comics launched a "new trend" of horror comics with a title called "Crypt of Terror" that eventually became "Tales From The Crypt."

Cartoonist No Stranger to Military

Though he was later the creator of well-known comics like "Hi and Lois" and "Boner's Ark," it was the military that provided the inevitable biographical setting for Walker's most enduring strip, Beetle Bailey.

After cutting short a career as a designer at Hallmark Cards, 18-year-old Walker embarked on four years of service that reads like an enlistment brochure. "I started in the Air Force," he said, "then went to the Signal Corps to the engineers to the infantry to officers' school and finally the ordnance in Italy." He was then tapped for the Intelligence Investigation Office and finished World War II in charge of the German prisoners of war in Southern Italy. "I repatriated 10,000 Germans to the Red Cross in Switzerland after the war," he said.

"I was 21 years old and they never gave me an instruction book."

According to the International Museum of Comic Art, of which he is a founder, Walker became the top-selling magazine freelance cartoonist in the country by 1948.

"Beetle Bailey" began as a college strip that had nothing to do with the military. But when young Beetle enlisted in the Army in 1951, the strip enjoyed a healthy climb in circulation that outlasted the Cold War.

1,800 newspapers in 38 countries

Beetle Bailey appears, 47 years later, in more than 1,800

newspapers in 38 countries. "My philosophy has always been that I'm there to entertain people and not to offend them," he said in an earlier interview with the Johnson City Press of Johnson City, Tenn.

But Friday he added, "I thought maybe I could teach people what sexual harassment is all about by having him misbehave."

"He never did anything. He never pinched her. He never touched her or anything like that." Still, "it looked as if we were playfully condoning such things." Walker knew Halfrack had to change with the times. "I'm from the old school. There was a girl-watching society we all used to belong to."

Inappropriate Office Attire

But those days are over for the General and for cartoonist Walker. "For 10 years I had no real trouble, but then I began to get comments from some of my editors," he said in reference to the leering general. The last political



MORT WALKER

BORN 1923, (ADDISON MORTON WALKER) IN EL DORADO, KS, GREW UP IN KANSAS CITY, MO. PARENTS WERE ARTISTS. SOLD MY FIRST CARTOON

AT 11, AND HAD A WEEKLY COMIC STRIP AT 15. WAS CHIEF DESIGNER AT HALL-MARK CARDS AT 18. SERVED 4 YEARS IN THE ARMY, INTELLIGENCE OFFICER IN ITALY IN CHARGE OF GERMAN POW CAMP.

GRADUATED FROM MO UNIV. 1946. WENT TO NY. WAS EDITOR OF MAGAZINES AND ZIP SELLING GAG CARTOONIST. STARTED BEETLE BAILEY 1950. HIT LOS 1954. SEVEN OTHER STRIPS. HAVE WRITTEN BOOKS, TV AND STAGE SCRIPTS. WON REUBEN AND MANY OTHER AWARDS BUT CONSIDER THE INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM OF CARTOON ART (1974) MY GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT. MARRIED CATHY IN 1965. COMBINED FAMILY OF 10 CHILDREN. 6 WORK WITH ME. HOME? STAMFORD CT. AND BOCA RATON, FL. LOVE GOLF, MY FAMILY, CATHY, MY CARTOONIST FRIENDS AND CARTOONS.

(Source: [International Museum of Cartoon Art](#))

changes in the strip occurred in the eighties but it was the woman in Halfrack's office who changed then. "I did clean up Miss Buxley because she was dressed



inappropriately for the office."

"Several feminists got after me so I lowered her hem line, raised her neckline and eliminated one of her bustlines," he said. "I only

show the outside one now." He added, "I tried to de-emphasize her sexuality." Walker, who has been called "the most prolific newspaper cartoonist of all time," and won the Reuben Award as the best cartoonist of the year 1954, believes his strip should reflect responsible, modern thinking about how women are treated in the military and in the workplace.

“As hard as it is to find anything in the Pentagon, they finally found their sense of humor,” Walker said of a June, 1990, ceremony in his honor in Washington, D.C. The top brass at the Pentagon decided the cartoonist deserved an award, “for morale building or something like that,” he explained. “A general told me, ‘Now I hope you’ll treat us more kindly.’ But I told him, “‘Don’t count on it.’”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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Published on April 17, 1998

Seizure-inducing *Pokemon* Returns, Heads for U.S.



JAPANIMATION



ABCNEWS' Nathan Thomas reports on the Japanese cartoon that sent children to the hospital.

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By Mark Bloch
ABCNEWS.com

APRIL 15 — Like a tamagotchi given an emergency injection of cyber-nutrients, the visually potent Pocket Monsters have returned from the dead.

You remember *Pokemon*, or *Pocket Monsters*, the phenomenally popular Japanese animation series yanked from the air in December after it gave at least 700 people in that country TV-induced seizures? On Thursday, the series goes back on the air in Japan.

And, come Sept. 7, just when American children are putting down their Game Boys to head back to the classroom, the show will flash on to American television, appearing five days a week in about 90 percent of the country, its distributors hope.

Do parents need to be concerned about *Pokemon*? Does the visceral Japanese animation called anime, which has found quite a following in American subculture, prompt violence in viewers? And has television and film ever made anyone physically sick before? Join us for a look at art-induced epilepsy, flickering light and Japanese animation—and how *Pokemon* became the flash point for all three topics.

MARKETING, FLICKERS AND SEIZURES

Have A *Pokemon* Christmas

The marketing whiz behind the Cabbage Patch Kids hopes to unseat Beanie Babies next Christmas by bringing *Pokemon* to America.

The Science of Seizures

How does flickering light affect the brain? Experts are skeptical that the *Pokemon* phenomenon was actually epilepsy induced by flickering TVs, but it's not out of the question.

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