

Latvian Animation



National
Film Centre of Latvia



Latvian Animation Association

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Photo: Agnese Zeltiņa

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Latvian Animation Takes the Spotlight

Options at the world premiere of the Cannes Film Festival, Latvia's first Oscar as well as the European Film Academy Award and the Golden Globe for Best Animated Film, BAFTA and Best International Feature Film Oscar nominations, more than half a hundred awards at festivals around the world in 45 countries – all this has been and is now engraved in the history of Latvian animation. For now, it is the achievement of one incredibly successful and powerful film – *Flow* by director Gints Zilbalodis and producer Matīss Kaža, which has been noticed everywhere in the world with its triumphal march. But the overall picture and background of Latvian animation shows that we can expand our reach because the tradition is strong and there is plenty of young talent.

Two-dimensional cut-out animation as well as spatial puppet animation emerged in Latvia at almost the same time – namely, in the 1960s – and, by continuing to evolve and branching out, both of these traditions have since been taken up by new generations of promising, serious filmmakers, who have brought deserved praise and acclaim to Latvia on the global animation stage. Latvia's animation

power is rooted in a strong and growing tradition of auteur short films, but especially in the last decade, the number of feature-length animated films in Latvia has been steadily growing, and we started to dare to call ourselves an animation superpower back when *Flow* was just in development – even though Latvia is still “the place where there isn't a big film industry”, as Gints Zilbalodis said in his famous Golden Globe speech. But let's not forget that he said it from a stage in Los Angeles, at the very epicentre of a huge film industry, which at that time had the eyes of the whole world – and this is a wonderfully hopeful message for all independent animation, which makes its films not with big money, but with big talent and with all its heart.



Kristīne Matīsa
National Film Centre of Latvia

Latvian Animation Association

Latvian Animation Association (LAA) was founded in 2016 with the aim of maintaining the continuity of animation tradition through contemporary education, international and national visibility of Latvian animation, and engagement of audiences of all age groups.

Today, Latvian animation is a booming industry, with films premiering at Annecy, Berlinale, and Cannes.

LAA represents all active animation studios in Latvia, as well as independent directors, producers, artists, and critics.

Its primary activities include promoting and representing Latvian animation both nationally and internationally. At the national level, LAA encourages the development of the animation industry by contributing to the development and implementation of the film industry's cultural policy. LAA members are also nominated to serve on expert commissions at the National Film Centre of Latvia and the Latvian State Culture Capital Foundation. Internationally, the Latvian Animation Association, in close collaboration with the National Film Centre of Latvia, organizes an annual Latvian animation representation at the Annecy International Animation Film Market (MIFA)

and is also responsible for organising focus and spotlight on Latvian animation in different industry events, such as Cartoon Movie (2025). Additionally, LAA has established partnerships with leading European animation organizations, including European Animation Association, CEE Animation, and the European Animation Awards Association.



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National
Film Centre of Latvia

Support for Animation

The National Film Centre of Latvia

The National Film Centre of Latvia (NFC) is a public institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, and is responsible for the implementation of state cultural policy in the field of cinematography.

The main functions of NFC include: facilitation of Latvian film and film culture development; increasing the accessibility of Latvian film culture in Latvia; promotion of Latvian film abroad; participation in international film events; and collaborating with international film funding bodies and policy organisations.

NFC is funded by the State budget and reports to the Minister of Culture. NFC grants public support to Latvian films and is keen on attracting film and television productions to Latvia, stimulating inward investment, and creating employment opportunities for creative staff, technicians and production companies.



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Minority Coproduction Scheme of NFC

- Budget 2024: € 400,000
- For producers from all over the world (except for projects whose delegate producer is a company registered in the Russian Federation or Belorussian Republic or who has received or has planned to have funding from the public sources in either country). The participation of Latvian coproducer is necessary. The bilateral contract is not required.
- Supported films: fiction features (over 65 min), documentaries and animation films of any length. The film must comply with the terms and conditions for a Latvian film (according to the Film Law, a Latvian film is a film, which is produced by a Latvian film producer registered in the National Film Centre producers' register, and in the key creative team at least one member (director, scriptwriter, composer, set designer, animation artist or cinematographer) is a citizen of Latvia.
- The project can only be submitted by a production company registered in the producers' register in Latvia and the planned budget from Latvia is at least 20% for bilateral coproduction, and 10% in multilateral coproduction, or, if applicable, complies with the Council of Europe Convention on Cinematographic Coproduction.
- The film's delegate producer must be able to prove at least 50% of financing in place from their own country.
- 80% of the subsidy must be spent in Latvia.
- Call once a year, application deadline: March / April.
- Decision: 1 month.

State Culture Capital Foundation of Latvia

A public agency that supports different strands of culture, including the audiovisual sector (various kinds of projects: film productions, development, research projects, festivals, etc.).

- Supports documentaries of any length, fiction shorts and animation films.
- Applicant for film projects – Latvian producer.
- Funding for audiovisual sector in 2024: € 1 391 806 (no specific amounts indicated for film productions, depends on the competition and available funding).
- Three application deadlines: January, May, September.
- Decision: 1 month.

Gita Krātiņa
Film Curator

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Public Broadcaster

Latvian Television (LTV) is the state-owned public service television company in Latvia. LTV operates two linear channels, LTV1 and LTV7. LTV is part of Public Broadcasting of Latvia, consisting of LTV and radio (6 stations), joint news content and digital access is provided on the broadcaster's site www.lsm.lv.

LTV acquires Free TV and Free VOD rights to drama series, fiction features, documentaries, children's content, live events, etc. LTV mainly acquires completed films but is also open to considering projects in production if LOC is needed.

Zane Valeniece

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Film Producers Association of Latvia

Founded in 1993, the Film Producers Association of Latvia (FPA) joins and represents all of the major film and TV production companies in Latvia. It contributes to the elaboration and implementation of the cultural policy of the industry. The members of FPA participate in the Latvian Film Council – a consultative body at the Latvian Ministry of Culture – and act on behalf of the film producers at the commissions of experts formed by the National Film Centre of Latvia and the State Culture Capital Foundation. FPA also designates a representative to the jury panel of the National Film Award Lielais Kristaps.

Since 2012, FPA, together with the National Film Centre of Latvia and the Riga City Council, ensures the activities of Latvia's exhibition stand at the film markets of the Berlin International Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival. FPA is a member of FIAPF (International Federation of Film Producers Associations).

Gints Grūbe

Head of the Board

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Investment and Development Agency of Latvia

Cash rebate scheme Latvia Co-financing programme for foreign productions.

The programme is a production incentive supporting the incoming productions of fiction feature films, documentaries and animation films, TV films. An application can be made for international production service or coproduction to receive a cash rebate of 20–30% on eligible production costs. The support can be combined with other public funding sources in Latvia in case the Co-financing programme's support together with other funding sources does not exceed 50% of the film's total expenses in Latvia.

- Agreement with the local production company of the collaboration is required.
- Support intensity: 20–30% of eligible costs depending on different criteria.
- Deadlines: open call twice a year.
- Applicant: a company registered in Latvia.
- 2024 cofinanced foreign film productions with the total of € 1 658 118.
- Decision: 1 month.
- The film's delegate producer must confirm that at least 50% of financing is in place at the time of submission of the application.
- The scheme is open for fiction features and animation films with a budget of at least € 711 436.

Lita Gavare

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Facts & Figures

- **Political System:** Republic, parliamentary democracy. Member of the EU, Schengen Area and NATO.
- **Currency:** Euro
- **Time Zone:** GMT +2 (winter), GMT +3 (summer)
- **Official Language:** Latvian
- **Population:** 1.8 million
- **Land Area:** 64,589 km² with 54% forested area, over 12,000 rivers, over 3,000 lakes, and the widest waterfall in Europe – Ventas Rumba.
- **Locations:** Latvia and its capital Riga offer a wide variety of locations. Riga city has Northern charm, Medieval, Art Nouveau and industrial architecture, as well as Soviet modernism heritage. The most beautiful Art Nouveau buildings in Riga were built by Mihail Eisenstein, the father of the iconic filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. Throughout Latvia there is a wide range of castles, palaces, ancient fortresses and manor houses. The most popular shooting location is Rundale – a baroque palace built in the 18th century, 100 km from Riga.
- **Pristine nature:** There are four distinct seasons in Latvia. Over 500 km long white sand beaches – the coastline of the Baltic sea. Abundance of rivers and forests, lakes and swamps.
- **Riga International Airport:** The largest air traffic hub in the Baltic region just 20 min drive from the city center. There are more than 100 direct flight destinations.
- **Advantages of filming in Latvia:** Internationally experienced technical crews, strong art department and construction teams, competitive costs, stages and backlots, wide range of extras.
- Annual State Support for film industry 2024 (from all 4 key funding bodies) – € 11 349 382.
- Number of film productions supported by the National Film Centre of Latvia in 2024 – 38 films.



Air Productions



The Swan Maiden / Secrets of the Great Bog / Confessions of My Childhood Body

A female-led studio with a focus on children's and youth content, female-centric stories both behind and in front of the camera, and stories with social impact.



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RECENTLY RELEASED

Confessions of My Childhood Body
Mana bērnības ķermeņa atzišanās

2023

Director Emīlija Karetņikova

■ A timid 17-year-old at summer camp finds solace in a group leader's friendship, but soon realizes his intentions are not innocent.

Live Action / Short / Drama

COMING UP

Secrets of the Great Bog
Kad Tīne un Bīne satika Juhanu

2026

Director Linda Olte

■ A friendship between adopted twin sisters and a boy whom no one else can see leads them into a parallel universe where the secret of the twins' family is revealed.

Live Action / Adventure

HALLMARK

The Swan Maiden
Gulbju jaunava

2020

Director Kārlis Vītols

■ A stolen secret binds a swan maiden to earth and sacrifice, but when she rediscovers her wings, she must choose between her family and the call of the sky.

Animation

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Atom Art



Born in the Jungle / Freeride in C / Kafka. In Love

Animation studio **Atom Art** is active in two main directions – developing and producing quality children's content in different formats and producing artistic short films in diverse animation techniques.



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RECENTLY RELEASED

Freeride in C
Brīvais nobrauciens

2024

Director Edmunds Jansons

■ The short film is an audiovisual experience, an abstract dance of freedom that reflects the joy and fragility of being.

Short / Non-narrative Musical Comedy

Kafka. In Love
Kafka. Iemīlējies

2024

Director Zane Oborenko

■ "I was obsessed with your letters – in agony, in love, in worry, and in an utterly indefinite fear of the indefinite." Franz Kafka

Short / Poetic Drama

COMING UP

Born in the Jungle
Laimīgie

2025

Director Edmunds Jansons

■ During the late 1950s in Venezuela, nine-year-old Elizabeth's summer break takes a wild turn when her little brother Leo vanishes into the jungle.

Adventure

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Dream Well Studio



HALLMARK

Flow
Straume

2024
Director Gints Zilbalodis

■ After a terrible flood wreaks havoc on the world, a stubbornly independent Cat is forced to share a small boat with a group of other animals. Getting along with them turns out to be an even greater challenge for him than surviving the flood.

Animation



Away
Projām

2019
Director Gints Zilbalodis

■ A boy and a little bird are traveling across an island on a motorcycle trying to escape a dark spirit and get back home.

Animation

Flow / Away

Dream Well Studio is an independent animation production company based in Riga, Latvia. It was founded by Gints Zilbalodis whose film *Away* (2019) was selected in more than 90 festivals and won 13 awards including the *Contrechamp* award in Annecy. Dream Well's latest film *Flow* (2024) by Gints Zilbalodis premiered in the *Un Certain Regard* section at Cannes and since then has received numerous awards, including at the European Film Awards and the 82nd Golden Globes. It made history by earning Latvia's first Oscar in the Animated Feature Film category at the 97th Academy Awards while it was also nominated for Best International Feature Film.



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Ego Media



RECENTLY RELEASED

My Favorite War
Mans mīlākais karš

2020
Director Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen

■ The director's childhood memories from the Cold War Soviet Latvia. An anti-war film, about escaping an authoritarian regime's brainwashing, and the importance of an individual's freedom – a democratic society's fundamental right.

Animation

COMING UP

Death of the Death
Frankenšteins 2.0

2024
Director Davis Simanis

■ Author who desperately holds to his life starts the existential yet hysterical journey to uncover the business of eternal life in the world of today.

Documentary

Roachcoach
Trakmakāns

2027
Director Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen
Co-director animation Trond Jacobsen

■ The adventurous storyteller Viga meets her secret insect friend, the roach Taro, making her perfectionist classmate Sana jealous. Taro and Sana's mum get in big trouble, and the two very different girls must team up to rescue their loved ones.

Animation



Roachcoach / Death of the Death / My Favorite War

The Riga-based production company **Ego Media** was established in 2005 by the experienced Latvian producer Guntis Trekteris to produce animation, documentaries and fiction films for local and international audiences.



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Film Studio Animācijas brigāde Ltd.



The Odd Carrot / Mushroom's Life / Upside Down

Founded in 1966 by Arnolds Burovs, Latvian Puppet Animation Studio, later rebranded to **Animācijas Brigāde**, has crafted over 120 classically styled stop-motion puppet animations for TV and film.



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RECENTLY RELEASED

The Odd Carrot Burkāns neparastais

2024
Director Inese Pavēne

■ Two bunnies find a precious thin carrot, only to have it stolen by an angry badger. But things don't stay that way for long.

Short / Family

Mushroom's Life Sēnes dzīve

2024
Director Ēvalds Lācis

■ Sweet story about a family of mushroom flies who try to keep their mushroom from ending up in a hunter's basket.

Short / Family

HALLMARK

Upside Down Kājām gaisā

2023
Director Dace Rīdūze

■ Andulis, a curious bat, wakes up at the wrong time and discovers that he, unlike his fellow bats, loves being outside in the sunlight.

Short / Family

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Leschiov



Wings and Oars / Comeback

Leschiov (ex. LUNOHOD Animation Studio) was established in 2007. It specializes in the production of animated short films, many of which have received awards at various film festivals around the world.



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RECENTLY RELEASED

Comeback Atgriešanās

2021
Director Vladimir Leschiov

■ When you desperately miss it, the long-forgotten childhood vehemence may come back...

Animation / Drama

HALLMARK

Spārni un airi Wings and Oars

2009
Director Vladimir Leschiov

■ A former pilot looks back over his life – the Earth, the Sky, the Woman – everything that took place on the journey from an air strip to an abandoned boat house.

Animation / Drama

COMING UP

Steinort

2026
Director Vladimir Leschiov

■ One day after a storm, the lighthouse keeper finds an old sea mine on the shore. Having received no help, he decides to return it to the sea.

Animation / Drama

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Rija Films



Thelma's Perfect Birthday / A Greyhound of a Girl / Lotte and the Lost Dragons

Rija Films was established in 1995. Its main activities are film production, dubbing of animated films and film distribution. Rija Films has had many highlights which were premiered at the prestigious Cannes and Berlin film festivals and also won awards at several other international festivals. For many years now, Rija Films has been actively participating in coproductions.



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RECENTLY RELEASED

A Greyhound of a Girl A Greyhound of a Girl

2023
Director Enzo D'alo

■ Mary is 11 years old and has an insuppressible passion for cooking: she dreams of becoming a great chef. Her grandmother Emer, with whom she has a very special relationship, encourages her to make this dream come true.

Animation

Thelma's Perfect Birthday Telmas ideālā dzimēnīte

2024
Director Reinis Kalnaellis

■ Little penguin girl Thelma from the Land of Ice is eager to celebrate her fifth birthday together with her friends. A colourful, exciting and unexpected journey is about to happen.

Animation / Fantasy

HALLMARK

Lotte and the Lost Dragons Lote un pazudušie pūķi

2019
Directors Janno Poldma, Heiki Ernits

■ The scientists Karl the Raccoon and Victor the Fish arrive in Gadgetville. Lotte and her little sister Roosi decide to go find the mythical fire-breathing dragons that these scientists are looking for.

Animation / Adventure

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Studija Kokles



The Northern Star / The Nature of Tide / The End

Studija Kokles was established in 2019 to create films that inspire to rise above the everyday and discover the world's diversity and cultural-historical heritage.



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RECENTLY RELEASED

The End Beigas

2019
Director Kārlis Vītols

■ The heavenly Count Pīlādzis sees a younger version of himself reflected in the water. Being a slave to vanity, he must now observe his own withering away and turn to various clichéd survival strategies: the breasts and legs of pretty girls, a house with a pool, a fancy car and endless sleepless nights.

Short / Arthouse

COMING UP

The Nature of Tide Paisuma daba

2026
Director Ella Mežule

■ When a young woman crosses paths with a charismatic stranger at a bar, her longing for connection collides with her distorted perception of relationships.

Short / Drama

The Northern Star Ziemeļu zvaigzne

2026
Director Kārlis Vītols

■ An aspiring nobleman's journey through Italy becomes transformative when he rebels against tradition to pursue his true passions, encountering diverse cultures and remarkable individuals along the way.

18th Century Road Movie

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Studio Locomotive



Rule of the Heart / Karmic Knot / My Love Affair with Marriage

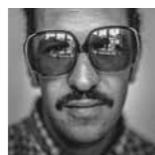
Studio Locomotive produces fiction, creative documentaries and animation, mostly focusing on feature length projects. We cherish creative ideas that combine dedication, persistence and aim for quality.



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RECENTLY RELEASED

Rule of the Heart / Sirds likums

2024

Director Roze Stiebra

■ In a remote kingdom life was calm until one night the Princess met a Stranger bearing an unusual gift, and everything changed. The Princess runs away from home, her groom the Prince and friend the Cat embark on an adventure.

Animation / Fantasy

COMING UP

Karmic Knot / Karmiskais Mezgls

2028

Director Signe Baumane

■ In 1971, amidst Soviet occupation, a struggling family of four, including an engineer, a schoolteacher, and their daughters, move into an unaffordable house. To secure it, they start an underground business growing and selling roses. Initially successful, wealth brings arrogance. Amidst the Soviet collapse, they face threats, which make family's ties grow tighter and tighter until one of them starts to suffocate.

Adult Animation

HALLMARK

My Love Affair with Marriage Mans laulību projekts

2023

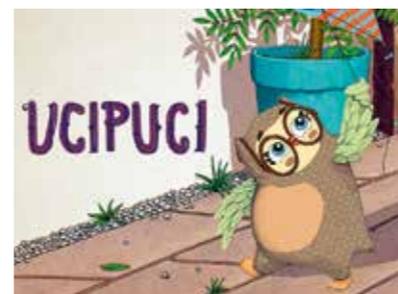
Director Signe Baumane

■ A young spirited woman, Zelma, is determined to conform to the pressures of singing Mythology Sirens in order to be loved, but the more she conforms, the more her body resists. A story of inner female rebellion.

Adult Animation

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Sunday Rebel Films



Urga, Jo & Po / Ucipuci / Distortion

Every man who has shown the world the way to beauty and true culture, has been a Rebel & this is our core mindset even on open-minded Sundays! We believe in creative diversity and we like to give the voice to emerging talents.



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COMING UP

Urga, Jo & Po

2025

Director Ilze Lasmane-Brože, Raitis Kalnins

■ A Superdog, gifted with universal weaknesses, and his mischievous sidekicks Jo & Po take on daring missions to rescue baby animals. But suddenly, they find themselves in some serious trouble...

Short animated series / Pre-school / Short

Ucipuci

2026/2027

Director Una Lorenzen

■ Ucipuci is an intelligent toy owl who, after being left behind in an Italian villa, needs to find her way back home with the help of unlikely new friends.

Short animated series / Pre-school / Short

Distortion

2026/2027

Director TBC

■ In a future where AI controls every aspect of life, two detectives investigate a series of crimes caused by a mysterious virus, diving into distorted virtual realities of famous artworks to solve the puzzle left by a brilliant villain playing with their minds.

Animated series / for Adults

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Tritone Studio



Dog of God / Troubled Minds / The True Shape of the Earth

Established in 2009, **Tritone Studio** began as an artist collective. Initially experimenting with animation and innovative concepts, the studio quickly transitioned into feature film and documentary production, expanding into international coproductions.



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COMING UP

Dog of God Dieva suns

2025

Directors Raitis Ābele, Lauris Ābele

■ In a 17th-century Swedish Livonian village, constant rain and drunkenness prevail. When a stolen relic sparks witchcraft accusations, an 80-year-old self-proclaimed werewolf named the Dog of God arrives with a mysterious gift: The Devil's Balls.

Animation / Adult Folk Tale

The True Shape of the Earth Zeme nav apaļa (working title)

2027

Directors Raitis Ābele, Lauris Ābele

■ "INDIANA JONES MEETS MONTY PYTHON" – an adventure story about four 17th-century expeditions measuring the shape of the Earth – from Peru to Everest to the North Pole – where serious scientific missions spiral into epic mishaps and bizarre discoveries.

Animation / Adventure (young adults)

HALLMARK

Troubled Minds Nemierīgie prāti

2021

Directors Raitis Ābele, Lauris Ābele

■ Troubled Minds is a psychedelic ego trip in the best possible way, as two modern artists venture above the Arctic circle and inside the darkness of their own minds, hunting for the borders and boundaries of normality.

Live Action / Drama

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VFS Films



Nesting / The Magic Wardrobe / The Nap

VFS Films is a production company that has been active in the world of cinema for over 25 years. Known for its award-winning coproductions, VFS also has cosy post-production facilities in Riga, including the 5.1 sound studio.



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RECENTLY RELEASED

The Magic Wardrobe Brīnumskapis

2024

Director Krista Burāne

■ In an ordinary house, in an ordinary nursery, there is an extraordinary wardrobe. The children play a game of hide-and-seek, open the door of the Wonder Closet and find themselves in a forest full of surprises, inhabited by all kinds of unusual creatures.

Animation short film series / Children / Music

COMING UP

Nesting / Ligzda

2026

Director Anna Zača

■ Woman lives with a Man, their life has a pleasant routine and rituals. One day the couple decides to become parents. They bring home the Bed, which slowly grows and takes over the apartment. Woman grows both physically and emotionally, experiencing unprecedented feelings. The Man tries to be by her side, but he cannot get into the Woman's skin.

Animation short / Society / Parenthood

HALLMARK

The Nap / Diendusa

2022

Director Nils Skapāns

■ Mother takes her eight-year-old daughter Antonia to a children's creativity camp. On their way, she spots a sign saying 'The Robots Have Escaped!' This sign unleashes Antonia's imagination and grows into a fantasy of how exciting her stay in the camp might turn out to be.

Animation

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Signe Baumanė



My Love Affair with Marriage

Signe Baumanė is a Latvian-born, Brooklyn-based independent filmmaker, artist, writer, and animator known for her bold and deeply personal storytelling, complemented by a distinctive hand-drawn animation style. Baumanė has created 17 award-winning animated shorts and two critically acclaimed animated feature films. Her work explores themes such as psychology, relationships, and societal norms, using expressive visual metaphors.

Her first feature, *Rocks in My Pockets* (2014), addresses themes of mental health and resilience. The film screened at over 130 international festivals and had a U.S. theatrical release through Zeitgeist Films.

Baumanė's second feature, *My Love Affair with Marriage* (2022), tells the story of a young woman's quest for love and self-identity, blending animation, music, and science. Combining personal storytelling with a scientific exploration of love, gender, and societal expectations, the film features voice talent from Matthew Modine, and has been praised for its depth, humor, and innovative narrative style. The film premiered in competition at the Tribeca Film Festival and the Annecy International Film Festival, screening at over 100 festivals and winning 25 awards. It was theatrically released in the U.S. by 8Above. Notably, *My Love Affair with Marriage*: qualified for consideration as Best Feature at the



Karmic Knot

Academy Awards (2024), making it the first Latvian-American coproduction to achieve this distinction, alongside major contenders like *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie*. It also qualified for consideration for the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature (2024), was nominated for Best European Animated Feature at the 2023 European Film Awards and was recognized at the Annie Awards, one of the top honors in the animation industry.

Critics have lauded *My Love Affair with Marriage* for its unique mix of humor and emotional depth. *The New York Times* called the film “a deeply affecting, visually inventive exploration of love, identity, and gender,” praising its emotional resonance and artistic ambition.

A Guggenheim Fellow, Baumanė holds a degree in Philosophy from Moscow State University. Her innovative approach to filmmaking and fearless storytelling continue to push the boundaries of independent animation, cementing her as a leading voice in the field.

HALLMARK

My Love Affair with Marriage / Mans laulību projekts

Stopmotion papier mâché, drawn animation, 107 min, 2022, Latvia / United States / Luxembourg, adults, dialogues in English and Latvian

■ From childhood, Zelma was enchanted by songs and fairytales that promised Love would solve all her problems – as long as she conformed to society's expectations of how a girl should behave. But as she grew older, the idealized vision of love she had been taught began to feel increasingly out of place. The more she tried to conform to these expectations, the more her body and mind resisted.

COMING UP

Karmic Knot / Karmiskais Mezgls

Stop-motion papier-mâché, drawn animation, 90 min, 2028, Latvia / USA / Luxembourg, adults, dialogues in English and Latvian

■ In 1971, amidst the heavy grip of Soviet occupation, a family of four – an engineer, a schoolteacher, and their two daughters – move into a house they can't afford. Desperate to make ends meet, they start an underground business growing and selling roses. What begins as a modest, successful venture soon brings them wealth – and with it, arrogance. As the Soviet Union unravels, their newfound prosperity becomes a double-edged sword, attracting danger from all sides. The family's bonds tighten as they fight to protect each other, but as the pressure mounts, the very ties that once held them together begin to suffocate one of them. *Karmic Knot* is an intricate and intense tale of ambition, loyalty, and the consequences of choices that bind lives together and pull them apart in unexpected ways.



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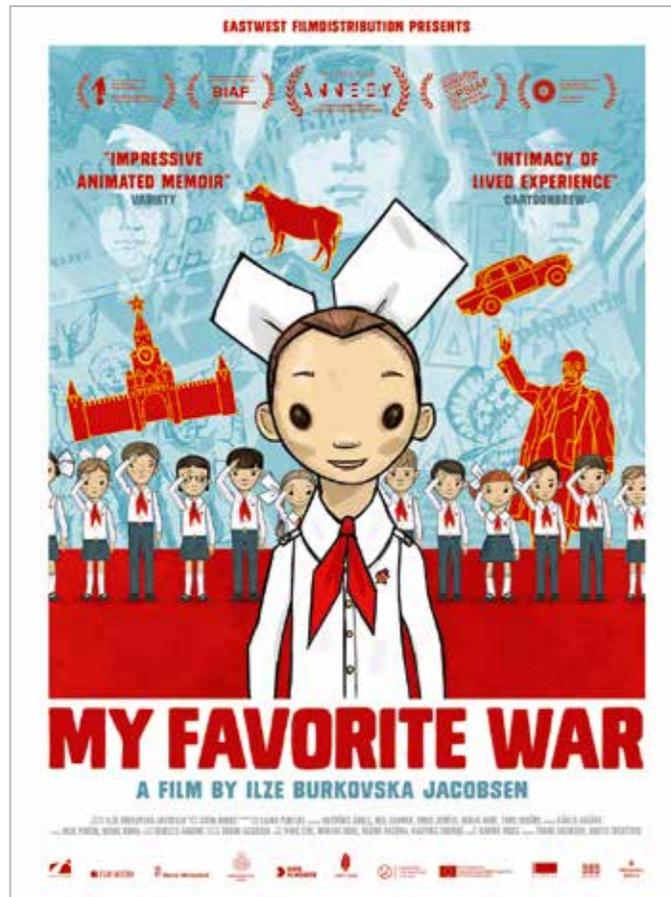
Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen

Ilze Burkovska-Jacobsen is a Latvian who has lived in Norway since the early 1990s. She has created several personal documentary films, the most recent of which is the animated documentary *My Favorite War / Mans mīļākais karš*. The film tells a story of Ilze's childhood and youth in the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Creators admit – they hadn't imagined that it would resonate so much with the nowadays.

The recent film by Burkovska-Jacobsen makes use of both animated and documentary materials: approximately 80% of the film is animated, with the rest consisting of archival materials or contemporary documentary footage. Most of the film is created in a classic cut-out 2D animation style, with some 3D elements.

The film premiered at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival in 2020 becoming the winner of the *Contrechamp* Competition and the jury prize: *SensCritique*. The jury stated: "We were touched by this memoir that is part of a bigger story. It gives a vivid feeling for a young girl growing up and evolving in a small Latvian town during the Soviet occupation. *My Favorite War* teaches the global value of freedom and demonstrates how a very personal story can be of universal interest." Film was also acknowledged as the *Best Animated Film* and Ilze became the *Best Animation Director* at the National Film Awards Lielais Kristaps. In 2020, Palm Springs International Animation Festival & EXPO named her the *Animator of The Year*. Winning several international awards and traveling more than 90 festivals worldwide, Ilze who had previously been working as a motion-picture documentarian has become known by the animation industry. *My Favorite War* is now settling in European cinemas and other viewing platforms through EastWest Filmdistribution GmbH. Head of the Latvian production company Ego Media Guntis Trekteris says that once they have gotten the know-how it is not only pragmatic but also enjoyable to continue working with the animation medium, and the tandem is now developing their next feature-length animation project. The world is to see Ilze's new film *Roach Coach / Trakmakāns* in 2027.

The classic 2D and 3D animation *Roach Coach* will be a story of the adventurous storyteller Viga. She meets her secret insect friend, the roach Taro,



making her perfectionist classmate Sana jealous. When both Taro and Sana's mum get in big trouble the two very different girls must overcome their differences and team up to rescue their loved ones.

Describing working in animation medium, Ilze draws parallels to a conifer forest path hidden behind a thick wall of spruces. Each next step lets her discover something new thus luring her to go even further. "Roach Coach is a truly exciting challenge for me – to change the negative connotation of a cockroach and make it lovable. The insects in my story symbolize all sorts of creativity and its endless expressions. The film is to be a glorification of creativity."

Ilze's Latvian-Norwegian team has worked together for more than ten years on animated children's-TV series like *My Body belongs to Me* and *Classmates* resulting in nominations and awards including an Emmy.

Roach Coach continues the collaboration between the Bivrost Film studio in Norway and the Ego Media studio in Latvia, and the team is open for international partners joining aboard.

HALLMARK

My Favorite War / Mans mīļākais karš

Classic animation with documentary footage, 82 min, 2020, Latvia / Norway, adults, dialogue

- The director's childhood memories from Latvia – Cold War Soviet. An anti-war film, about escaping an authoritarian regime's brainwashing, and the importance of an individual's freedom – a democratic society's fundamental right.

COMING UP

Roach Coach / Trakmakāns

Hand-drawn & cut-out, 2D and 3D animation, 80 min, 2025, Latvia / Norway, children 6–11, family, dialogue

- The adventurous storyteller Viga meets her secret insect friend, the roach Taro, making her perfectionist classmate Sana jealous. Taro and Sana's mum get in big trouble, and the two very different girls must team up to rescue their loved ones.



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Edmunds Jansons

Edmunds Jansons is one of the distinctive animation directors of his generation. He is also an animator, book illustrator, creative producer, and founder of the animation film studio Atom Art. He studied TV directing at the Academy of Culture of Latvia and animation directing at the Estonian Academy of Art, where he graduated with an MA. Recently he obtained a PhD at the Academy of Arts of Latvia.

His filmography notably includes short and feature films awarded in various significant festivals. Since 2015, Edmunds has been teaching animation directing at the Academy of Arts of Latvia and has been a guest tutor at animation film school La Poudriere, France. Since 2007, starting with the animated documentary film *Little Bird's Diary*, which was awarded Best Baltic Animation at IFF

Arsenals and received Grand Prix at Tallinn Graphic Triennial, Edmunds Jansons has been working on his author shorts. He practices not to use scripts in his short films, but to build the whole movie from his own visual thinking. Such type of creative work has successfully realised in animated shorts *Choir Tour* (2012), which received numerous awards, among them Best Animation Award at 29th Interfilm International SFF and Award for Sound and Music at LIAF London IAF, *International Father's Day* (2012), *The Isle of Seals* (2014), screened at Annecy, *Guard of Honour* (2022), screened in festivals like Clermont-Ferrand ISFF, Ottawa IAF, Anifilm, Fantoche, 37th Interfilm SFF, and is his latest film *Freeride in C* (2024) which premiered in Ottawa IAF and won Grand Prix at Fredrikstad AFF.

Edmunds is co-author and director of children's

favorite preschool series, *Shammies* (2015/2020). His Christmas special, *Pigtail and Mr. Sleeplessness* (2017), received the Best Film award at Biennale of Animation Bratislava and has been broadcasted on RAI, Canal +, SVT, RUV, a.o.

His first feature film *Jacob, Mimmi and the Talking Dogs* (2019), had a successful Latvian and international run. It was selected for more than 100 festivals and received many awards. Currently, Edmunds is working on his next feature, *Born In The Jungle*. The new feature is a 2D animation film for 5–8-year-old children and their families that tells the story of family relationships, friendship, nature, adventures, and courage. Edmunds has a positive view on the future of Latvian animation: "I like the diversity of the styles, the talents, and formats. There is no such defined Latvian animation thing. Everything is quite different, and that's good. Like in nature, there is also a big diversity of the species – and that's a sign of a good healthy environment".

HALLMARK

Jacob, Mimmi and the Talking Dogs **Jēkabs, Mimmi un runājošie suņi**

Edmunds Jansons, digital cut-outs, Latvia / Poland, 70 min, 2019, universal, dialogue

■ An adventure story about two children spending summer in an old suburb, where, together with a bunch of talking dogs, they rescue the romantic neighbourhood of wooden houses from destruction.

Choir Tour / Kora turneja

Edmunds Jansons, 2D computer animation, 5 min, 2012, Latvia, universal, no dialogue

■ It's a wild free-for-all when a famous boys' choir breaks away from their conductor while on tour in Seoul and causes mayhem in the hotel

Isle of Seals / Roņu sala

Edmunds Jansons, 2D computer animation, 6 min, 2014, Latvia, universal, no dialogue

■ In the middle of a grey sea there is a grey isle. On this grey island grey hunters live. Life is simple and harsh. Seals and hunters live together in a cruel balance. One day, the Photographer arrives to document this everyday life. For him it turns out to be deadly complicated.



Jacob, Mimmi and the Talking Dogs

RECENTLY RELEASED

Freeride in C / Brīvais nobrauciens

Edmunds Jansons, 2D, 10 min, 2024, universal, no dialogue

■ The white tranquility of mountains is disturbed by colorful winter sports enthusiasts who enjoy downhill skiing. The short film is an audiovisual experience, an abstract dance of freedom that reflects the joy and fragility of being.

Guard of Honor / Goda sardze

Edmunds Jansons, 2D computer animation, 5 min, 2021, Latvia, universal, no dialogue

■ The guards stand in front of the historical symbol of the state. No matter the season or weather, they fulfil their duty, the obligation of honour. Is there a boundary beyond which this honourable credibility begins to look exaggerated?

COMING UP

Born in the Jungle / Laimīgie

Edmunds Jansons, cut-outs, 2D computer animation, 70 min, 2026, universal, dialogue

■ During the school summer break, nine-year-old Elizabeth joins her family in the rainforest where they live with the Pemón tribe. When, after an accident, Mum needs to fly Dad to a hospital, Elizabeth must look after her three-year-old brother Leo. However, instead of minding her brother, she gets lost in her book. When Elisabeth finally looks up, she discovers that Leo has disappeared, and all signs suggest he wandered into the jungle. Now she must trade her books for bravery not only to find Leo, but also to rescue a mystical furry creature from captivity and return it to its family at the legendary Tepui mountain, all before their parents come back home.



Born in the Jungle



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Jurģis Krāsons

Jurģis Krāsons is a feature-film artist who studied to be a painter and turned his attention to animated films in 2006. He worked with the Rija Films and Kompānija Hargla studios and went on to establish his own animation studio, Krasivo Limited, in 2015.

The studio currently has two employees, including the director, bringing in experienced animators for

individual projects. Each year, the studio has an average of five to seven film projects in addition to its other principal activity of designing costumes for art films made in Latvia and abroad.

To *Swallow a Toad* (2010), a short created by Krāsons at the Rija Films that has gained recognition at several film festivals, including Cannes, was made in the classic 2D technique. At Krasivo Limited, however, he is working on a combination of 2D and 3D computer animation.

Krāsons' latest film *In the Pipe* is made by integrating the 2D technique for character animation and the 3D technique for backgrounds. He used a similar approach in *How I Gave Up Smoking* (2016). *In the Pipe* features a new technical aspect: background animation made possible by 3D technologies.



How I Gave Up Smoking



Black Box



To Swallow a Toad



In the Pipe

RECENTLY RELEASED

In the Pipe / Trubā

3D and 2D animation, 9 min, 2020, adults, no dialogue

■ Since the dawn of animation, there has always remained an empty space for a film using darkness and sound as the main media. Many will follow, because we believe there is plenty of space down there. As a first attempt, we offer a story about an old plumber captured within a system of pipes. He helped to build this system, which has collected all of the bitterness, fear, populism and garbage flushed away by the society above. Now the plumber looks for an exit, creating mayhem and a tribute to extinct professions. Be sure you're not living in a pipe. How long will your profession last?

HALLMARK

How I Gave Up Smoking / Kā es atmetu smēķēšanu

3D computer animation, 11 min, 2016, a film for adults, no dialogue

■ The habit of smoking will truly be broken by the end of this film. At the beginning of the film, however, a Scandinavian woman almost dies because the main character lights a cigarette at an airport.

To Swallow a Toad / Norīt krupi

Classic animation, 9 min, 2010, adults, no dialogue

■ Once upon a time, the rotund intellectuals lived in a small town. They were smart, good-natured, prescient and successful. And this success was based on their ability to...swallow a toad. In other words, to swallow their pride, or overcome offence. The square, practical workers also lived in this same town. They were pragmatic realists who rewarded good with good and evil with evil and did not swallow any toads. A peaceful coexistence. But one day one of the squares inadvertently found out that the rotunds swallowed toads.

Black Box / Melnā kaste

Drawn animation, 16 min, 2006, adults, dialogue

■ In a land untouched by globalisation, all sorts of strange individuals scurry around. One of them, Hoggie, is a creature of particularly unknown origin. The Flying Hedgehog Ball arrives in the land in search of a new brand. After various misunderstandings, Hoggie's image is published on magazine covers all around the world. And it's all because of the Black Box.



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Comeback

Vladimir Leschiov

Vladimir Leschiov makes films in Latvia, where his studio Leschiov (ex Lunohod) is registered. However, the scale he works on is international – for example, he has dedicated a short film to the Japanese (*The Letter from Hibakusha*, produced by the NHK Hiroshima Station and his only film with dialogue) and has collaborated with and coproduced films with Canada and Estonia.

Leschiov animated films are figural; for the most part, they centre around a clear, albeit paradox-rich, fable told in laconic, pictorial form. His topics usually revolve around border situations where opposites meet – sleep and wakefulness, clarity and intoxication, life and death, meeting and parting. Although made in various different techniques, his films share the same tonality – as do the sketches of his travels that he likes to make using coffee and black tea instead of ink. And so is his signature

recognisable from the first glance in his latest film – *Comeback* – that is at the same time very different.

Leschiov reveals that *Comeback* is a 100% personal story that he mostly wanted to tell for himself. It was inspired by his Canadian friends inviting him for a hockey game. Vladimirs, who first picked up a hockey stick at the age of 15, now found himself playing alongside musicians, artists, and other creatives – people who, in Soviet countries, might have been barred from such experiences. There, a rigid stereotype prevailed: children involved in music or the arts were not expected to play sports or spend time outdoors with other kids. They were forced to choose one path, and more often than not, their parents made that choice for them. *Comeback* is a story about early interests, hobbies and childhood dreams that were set aside over time. But the truth is, they usually reappear later in life to help one overcome hardships and difficulties as an adult. It's a story about how, in spite of history, socio-political systems, religions and other circumstances, people have a lot more in common with each other than they think.

More to that, *comeback* is a sports term meaning an unexpected team's win when everything seems to be lost already. Thus, the film's title is preferred not to be translated. Despite the film's intention not to reflect the shades of Vladimir's childhood's – 70ies –



Wings and Oars

political events, it depicts the USSR-Canada hockey super series, which was the first hockey match between the two countries in a series of eight games in Canada and Moscow in 1972. "It was a very special event that was both a political act as well as changed the way many children viewed hockey," he says. "I, myself, drew a little logo of my favourite Canadian hockey team and placed it in my pioneer badge," Vladimirs remembers.

The film is dedicated to his parents, and it is also a story about building and re-building a father-son relationship. *Comeback* premiered at the Krakow Film Festival and has been screened at a handful of other film festivals including Annecy International Animation Film Festival, Ottawa International Animation Festival, Bucheon International Animation Festival and others. Vladimirs has noticed that the story is best received in the Post-Soviet bloc countries with a similar historical background. Yet, much to his surprise, it also received the Audience Award at the International Animation Film Festival ANIMA, Argentina that seems to point to human similarities previously not realized.

RECENTLY RELEASED

Comeback

Classical animation, 8 min, 2021, universal, no dialogue

■ A little boy dreams of becoming a professional hockey player. Unfortunately, one day he is forced to give up on his passion. His love for sports is revived after several decades when he has his own son. While shopping for a Christmas gift for the boy, the man's childhood memories return; the main player in them is his constantly drunk father. In this low-key and minimalist animation the present is intertwined with flashbacks. A hockey game to the rhythm of the Russian "Kalinka" song is not only about dreams but also about building a relationship between a father and a son.

COMING UP

Steinort

2D, drawn animation, 8 min, 2026, young adults, no dialogue

■ One day after a storm, the lighthouse keeper finds an old sea mine on the shore. Having received no help, he decides to return it to the sea.



Lost in Snow

HALLMARK

Electrician's Day / Elektriķa diena

Classical animation, 8 min, 2018, adults, no dialogue

■ An accident happens during repairs at a psychiatric hospital. As a result, an electrician loses consciousness and finds himself on the other side of the wall.

Villa Antropoff

Vladimir Leschiov and Kaspars Jancis, classical animation, 13 min, 2012, adults, no dialogue

■ An ironic story about dreams and losing dreams. Inspired by a real event, when both directors found themselves at a strange wedding celebration in the villa of former USSR leader Yuri Andropov near Pärnu in Estonia.

Wings and Oars / Spārni un airi

Classical animation, 6 min, 2009, adults, no dialogue

■ A former pilot looks back over his life: the Earth, the Sky, the Woman – everything that took place on the journey from an air strip to an abandoned boat house. Memories and flashes of various time periods create a surreal mood in which the present, past and future all exist at the same time.

Lost in Snow / Zuduši sniegā

Classical animation, 8 min, 2007, adults, no dialogue

■ A man goes ice-fishing on a winter day. But he is not alone. And his day on the ice involves more than catching fish.

Insomnia / Bezmiegs

Classical animation, 7 min, 2004, adults, no dialogue

■ She arrives in the night, silent as a cat. She will not let him fall asleep until he feeds her. She wants milk, which he will find between a dream and reality. Her name is Insomnia. The glimmering characters drawn in coloured pencil highlight the turbulent state between sleep and wakefulness.



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Anete Melece

Anete Melece was born in Latvia in 1983. She studied visual communication at the Art Academy of Latvia (BA) and animation at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Art (MA). She is an illustrator and animation filmmaker currently based in Zürich, Switzerland.

Melece created her first animated works while still a student at the Art Academy of Latvia, and these revealed the budding director's warm sense of humour and love of cut-out animation. Her graduation film, *Vilma Doesn't Work Today* (2007), was her first short to attract global attention.

After that, Melece headed to Lucerne to finish her studies at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts with her next film *The Kiosk* (2013) to become one of the most popular Latvian animated films of the past decade. Ever since its premiere the story has moved on to live its life also as an internationally renowned picture book translated in 20 languages, and it was interpreted into an opera spectacle at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein and staged at the Latvia Puppet Theatre. Meanwhile, *The Kiosk* was followed by Melece's *Analysis Paralysis* that has also been screened all around the world.

Melece moved to Switzerland for personal reasons and she was soon heartily accepted into the country's small but dynamic animation community. She considers herself an artist with two nationalities: "Switzerland is unique for being a country with four languages and several dialects. So, even if you speak only broken German, no one will look at you askance; it's easy to feel accepted in this diverse environment. At the same time, my cultural baggage is nevertheless a bit different, and that's good, because an artist needs to be a bit peculiar. I can reflect the idiosyncrasies of the Swiss and at the same time notice my own."



The Kiosk

HALLMARK

The Kiosk / Kiosks

Digital cut-out animation, 7 min, 2013, Switzerland, universal audiences, no dialogue

■ For years now, the kiosk has been Olga's little home simply because her sweet tooth and monotonous life have made her bigger than the kiosk's door. To distract herself, she reads travel magazines and dreams of being far away. One day, an absurd incident sets her off on her journey.

Analysis Paralysis / Analyzes Paralyze

Cut-out animation, 2D computer animation, drawing on paper, 10 min, 2016, Switzerland, adults, no dialogue

■ Anton is lost in his own head until one day a yellow boot brings him to an exit.

COMING UP

Sunshine for Everyone / Saule spīd visiem

Application animation, 7 min, 2027, Latvia / Switzerland, for families, no dialogue

■ The daily life of the flat-landers spirals into chaos when someone decides to steal the sun.



Anete Melece

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Although Melece's characters are for the most part cosmopolitan, her work always contains at least a hint of her homeland, often in the form of an architectural gem or hidden corner of Riga. She comments with light irony: "It's easier for me to think about a film's action if I imagine a specific location for it to take place, and yes, that's usually

Riga. For example, Anton from *Analysis Paralysis* walks along a street in central Riga but lives in my cousin's apartment in a high-rise suburb of the city. And actually, if my thoughts are in Riga, but my head is in Zürich, then where are the things that I imagine located? If I think about that for too long, my head starts to swell..."



Sunshine for Everyone



Angry Bag

Dace Rīdūze

Dace Rīdūze has studied theatre arts, theatre directing and pedagogy. She began working with animation in 1998 when she joined the Animācijas Brigāde film studio, where she learned about puppet cinema from the very foundations.

Her film *Up and Down* (2000) received the Latvian National Film Award Lielais Kristaps for best debut, and the experience inspired her to continue creating films. Rīdūze's films *Firefly* (2002), *Acorn Boy* (2010) and *Little Ruddy* (2014) have taken part in the competition at the Berlin Film Festival. Her 15th film, *Angry bag*, was released in 2021.

Much of Rīdūze's work has been inspired by classic Latvian literature, which has not lost its

currency in terms of either content or visual values. The characters created by famous illustrator Margarita Stāraste are particular favourites of hers: "In Stāraste's work I find my Latvian "code", the one I grew up with. Now my children see it as well, and I hope that now in a motion-picture format it will reach yet another generation."

After 20 years in puppet animation, Rīdūze still finds ways to develop her technique and experiment. For example, a real boy appears alongside the puppets in one of her recent films, *Dusty* (2019). "In puppet animation, I can be the director, scenographer, set decorator, actor and tricks master all at the same time," says Rīdūze. "I get excited by the feeling you get when crossing the fragile boundary between the real world and the invisible universe of fantasy."

RECENTLY RELEASED

Upside Down/ Kājām gaisā

Dace Rīdūze, 14 min, 2023, children, no dialogue

■ Andulis, a curious bat, wakes up at the wrong time and discovers that he, unlike his fellow bats, loves being outside in the sunlight.

HALLMARK

Up and Down / Kaimiņu būšana

Puppet animation, 7 min, 2000, children, no dialogue

■ Strange things are happening at the Tiger's garden. Someone has stolen his carrots and some of the carrots are growing "up and down"

Firefly / Jāntārpiņš

Puppet animation, 12 min, 2002, children, no dialogue

■ Otis the Firefly is trying to find a girlfriend, but due to his inability to glow, he is finding this difficult.

Acorn Boy / Ziļuks

Puppet animation, 10 min, 2010, children, no dialogue

■ The adventures of a little acorn boy in the village of stalks where he meets Mrs Bee, Mr Spider, the ants and many other insects.

Little Ruddy / Sārtulis

Puppet animation, 9 min, 2014, children, no dialogue

■ The coloured pencils are a merry lot. One day, red Ruddy comes out of the pencil case too late and unsharpened. An annoying fly causes him to fall out of the window into the garden. Finding himself in a new world, Ruddy tries to make himself useful, but it seems he's not wanted anywhere.

The Dust / Puteklis

Puppet animation, 13 min, 2019, children, no dialogue

■ The story about a piece of dust living in a book shelf and its unusual friendship with a boy.

Pea Children / Zirņa bērni

Puppet animation, 14 min, 2020, children, dialogue, song in Latvian

■ This film is the cinematic continuation of a classic poem by the Latvian poet Rainis. It follows the subsequent adventures of its main heroes – eight peas – and their interactions with the world around them as well as with the cycles and laws of nature. These musical and countable stories tell about the peas' adventures after spilling out of their original home, the pod.



Upside Down



The Dust



Pea Children



Dace Rīdūze

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Indra Sproģe

Indra Sproģe's studio infinityBOX was established in 2012, by three people form the core of the studio: artist Indra Sproģe, camera operator Mārtiņš Veļa and designer/light artist Kaspars Maračkovskis. They base their creative work on various combinations of art, technology and technique and also invite other artists and animators when the pace of work becomes more intense.

The studio usually works on one film at a time, the length of which varies from project to project. Initially, infinityBOX focused on the educational animated films for children *Teach Me, Nose-Bear* (2012), which teaches children the multiplication table, and *Awesome Beetle's Colours* (2016) to help them learn the alphabet. The latter film won an award

at the Annecy International Animation Film festival in the educational film category.

With its first project, *Teach Me, Nose-Bear!*, the studio tried out all possible animation techniques, gradually developing and defining its own specific style: a combination of classic animation, plasticine animation and chiaroscuro on various textured backgrounds. In an effort to find the best combination of these three elements, the filmmakers at infinityBOX continue to fine-tune their style with each new project. To help with this process of discovery, the studio welcomes collaborations involving various animation techniques and has also begun making allegorical short films for adults.



HALLMARK

Introduction to an Epilogue / Ievads epilogam

Plasticine, tracing paper, 9 min, 2018, adults, no dialogue

■ An allegorical animated film about the fear of death, which, it turns out, is in fact a narcissistic emotion. The film reflects man's transformation at truly difficult life moments and his ability to accept the inevitable and understand that life is always just one life long.

Awesome Beetle's Colors

Plasticine, acrylic, pastels, 3 min, 2016, children's film, dialogue

■ A colourful, surreal animated film that presents the English alphabet three times. The film received the Crystal Award at Annecy and has been screened at more than one hundred festivals on five continents.

RECENTLY RELEASED

Where is the Key? / Kur manas atslēgas?

Mixed media, 7 min, 2022, young adults, no dialogue

■ A 2D and 3D allegorical animated film (music by Rihards Zaļupe & Mārtiņš Brauns). The hero of the film tries out the experiences of other characters, but she only finds the key when she looks into herself, starts doing the thing she loves the most – art. Lara begins to love herself, her experiences, connecting with the world she was looking for. When she finds the keys, the world becomes colourful and takes on proper dimensions. This is also reflected in the choice of animation technique. The technique changes, too, to stop-action plasticine animation.



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Lizete Upīte

Lizete Upīte has studied at the Baltic Film and Media School in Estonia, the Escola Superior Artística do Porto in Portugal, La Poudriere in France and the Art Academy of Latvia. She is a European director in the sense that she has made at least one film in every place where she has lived for more than a couple of months. “I always seem to be moving somewhere,” she says. “I was in Estonia, then Portugal, then Latvia, and France, now Latvia again.

If I’ve made a film in Latvia, it’s completely different than if I’d made it in France or Portugal. I really like the fact that these influences are perceptible.” *Night Walks*, Upīte’s first film made in Latvia, premiered in 2017 and earned five nominations for the Latvian national film awards – winning for best artwork and best sound design.

In the film, Upīte invites the viewer on a nighttime walk through the forest: “I try to catch that wonderful and at once terrifying feeling you get when you walk through the forest at night, in total silence and darkness.” Upīte’s work first attracted attention in 2013, with her graduation film *Une nuit sur le lac*, made while she was a student at La Poudriere. Her most recent film *Riga’s Lilac* is a coproduction with the French studio Papy3D Productions, and the Latvian studio Atom Art was the minority partner.

Upīte calls the film a tragicomic work of docufiction. It is based on interviews and, similarly to her other work, focuses on little-discussed corners of our internal world – this time, the realm of smells. She is currently developing her next story, *Perfect Night*, which will be executed in a traditional 2D animation on a police couple’s travel through a snowy road outside the city.



Riga’s Lilac

RECENTLY RELEASED

A Night on the Lake / Une nuit sur le lac

2D digital animation, 4 min, 2013, adults, dialogue

■ Madeleine and Henri have lived deep in the countryside for more than twenty years. One day, their regular daily quarrel takes an unexpected turn.

Night Walks / Nakts pastaigas

2D computer animation, painting on glass, cut-out animation, 6 min, 2018, children / adults, dialogue

■ Tonight Anna and her father have decided to walk home through the forest. Anna takes a torch, and her father lights it for her. The silent forest is as enchanting as it is scary, and the bright flame is as protective as it is blinding.

Riga’s Lilac / Rigas ceriņi

2D computer animation, 14 min, 2019, France / Latvia, universal / adults, dialogue

■ Riga’s Lilac is a tragicomic story about the social impact of a bad smell. In the style of a documentary film, the story is based on real interviews with people who reveal how overwhelmed they can be by the strong smell of another person.



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Perfect Night

COMING UP

Perfect Night / Ceļā

2D computer animation, traditional 2D animation, 13 min, 2026, adults, dialogue

■ One evening, after a tiresome workday, a police couple get in their car to get out of the city. With every minute the snowy road seems more undrivable and the exhaustion more present.

Kārlis Vītols works in two main directions regarding Latvian culture: in the film industry he is known as an animation filmmaker with eleven works to his name, while in the art world he is known as a painter of large-format works that are often exhibited in Latvia and abroad. In fact, his animation work also often balances on the border between the art gallery and cinema, and has been shown at a variety of festivals around the world, including the prestigious Kurzfilmtage Oberhausen and the Annecy International Animation Film Festival. Vītols focuses on mythology, archetypes and their usage as well as the role of consumers in society. Critics describe his work as “light existentialism

with watercolour. He manages to include a variety of materials in his films: photographs, drawings, paintings by himself and other artists, newspaper clippings, posters, quotes from art history. His first animated film, *The Trophy* (2004), was shown at the Arsenāls Film Forum and won the award for best animated film in the Baltic section; it was also nominated for best artwork at the Latvian National Film Awards.

In 2006, Vītols released the first animated film as part of a self-reflective meditation. The animated film trilogy that is made specifically to be shown at an art gallery started with *Garden of Fetish* and was followed by *Eclipse* (2010) and *The End* (2018). The latter started its film life outside the gallery premiering at the Riga International Film Festival in 2019. All three films were made in a relatively short time and without a script or storyboard in its traditional sense. With his auteur form of animation,

Kārlis believes “there is no need for communicative intermediaries between the brain and the hands that execute the work”. Therefore when working alone he has “characters that have been giving me no peace for many years”, and the outlines of the script reveal themselves while working with mise-en-scenes. His most recent film, *The Swan Maiden* captures the uneasiness of love. The story is based on motifs of a classical Latvian fairy-tale and it goes about a woman who has to choose between her freedom and being a loving mother and a wife for her family.

Currently, Kārlis along with his producer Sniedze Kāle are working

on his first feature length animation project that was developed at the CEE Animation Workshop in 2021. It is in the production stage and will be released as the first feature title of their family-based studio Studija Kokles. They describe *The Northern Star* as a

whose pop-like moods are also characteristic of his animated and non-animated projects”. Vītols has experimented with various animation techniques, such as digital cut-out, painting on glass and 3D computer animation in combination

Kārlis Vītols



The End



The Northern Star

family film about daring to follow your own path, which can be reached outside life’s comfort and social pressure. The film can be perceived as an 18th-century road movie, as its story is inspired by a real historical figure – doctor, bibliophile, and collector Nicolas von Himsel (1729–1764), who went on a Grand Tour, an extensive trip around Europe, wrote travel notes, and amassed a collection, which led to the foundation of the first-ever museum in the Baltics. The main purpose of the film is to bring history alive with a catchy story for family audiences, where we can experience dangerous adventures, examine prejudices, fall in love, overcome fear, and find our true interests. The visual style of the movie references 18th-century shadow theater and pleases our senses with visual richness.



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RECENTLY RELEASED

The Swan Maiden / Gulbju jaunava

2D cut-out animation, 15 min, 2020, adults, no dialogue

■ A stolen secret binds a swan maiden to earth and sacrifice, but when she rediscovers her wings, she must choose between her family and the call of the sky.

COMING UP

The Northern Star / Ziemeļu zvaigzne

2D cut-out animation, 72 min, 2026, family, dialogue

■ An aspiring nobleman’s journey through Italy becomes transformative when he rebels against tradition to pursue his true passions, encountering diverse cultures and remarkable individuals along the way.

HALLMARK

Minotaur / Mīnotauris

Oil on glass, 8 min, 2016, adults, no dialogue

■ While Father is at work, little Minotaur looks for playmates. In the endless labyrinth, he finds mythological figures who are occupied with their own ambitions.

Eclipse / Aptumsums

2D cut-out animation, 10 min, 2010, adults, no dialogue

■ As the shadow of the moon covers the earth during a solar eclipse, the twilight creatures come to life, the boundary between the real and the imagined vanishes, and a transcendental ritual takes place in nature.

Devil's Fuji / Velna Fudži

2D cut-out animation, 32 min, 2009, adults, dialogue

■ Mount Fuji is occupied by a Latvian devil, who creates Latvian culture and forces it on the native Japanese people. An ambitious samurai is sent to fight him.

Garden of Fetish / Fetišu dārzs

2D cut-out animation, 10 min, 2006, adults, no dialogue

■ The film analyses the abstract components that make up a work of art as well as the fetishes cultivated by the artist while creating it.

The End / Beigas

2D cut-out animation, 11 min, 2019, adults, no dialogue

■ The heavenly Count Pīlādzis sees a younger version of himself reflected in the water. Being a slave to vanity, he must now observe his own withering away and turn to various clichéd survival strategies: the breasts and legs of pretty girls, a house with a pool, a fancy car and endless sleepless nights.

Gints Zilbalodis

Gints Zilbalodis is a young animator and director who already has considerable experience in the field. After several shorts that gained recognition at film festivals and on the internet, he began an independent feature-length project, the animated film *Away* (2019).

The first part of the project, titled *Oasis*, premiered in 2017 and introduced audiences to the hero of the story whose adventures now continued in the full-length version – and it was created all by himself. After winning the *Contrechamp* Award at the Annecy Festival, *Away* has now been screened at more than 90 film festivals and won 13 awards, and even made it to the Oscars longlist of Animated Feature films in 2020. Ever since the film has been distributed in more than 30 countries all around the world, including on Amazon Prime and other VOD platforms in the United States.



Zilbalodis says that he chose to work alone because he wished to learn all of the aspects of film production; besides, working alone simply seemed easier and cheaper at the time. Asked whether he still believed this to be the case, he says yes.

The lack of a team also allowed him to get by without a storyboard, meetings, obstacles and instructions from others, thus saving time and

giving him more creative freedom, he says. However, after accumulating this experience and establishing various contacts, Zilbalodis made his next project together with a team in Latvia as well as abroad. Producers' load for his latest feature film *Flow* was now shared with the Latvian producer Matiss Kaža at Zilbalodis' own company Dream Well Studio, Ron Dyens of Sacrebleu Productions in France, and Gregory Zalcman of Take Five in Belgium.

Gints admits that the story of *Away* was a metaphor for its creation – his feeling of being alone on an island and trying to reach others for an understanding and togetherness. “It’s similar with *Flow* – it’s a story about a character living alone but finding itself in need to learn working in a team,” says the director. “In *Away*, I knowingly had to avoid time-consuming technical difficulties and the story was centered on subjects that are easier to animate.

A bigger team now allows me to build a denser story environment including more complex elements as well.” The protagonist of the film is a cat who is afraid of water but is forced to live in a world that is rapidly succumbing to floods. One day he is forced to step onto a boat with other animals and to face two of his biggest fears at once – the water and the often ambiguous presence of other beings. Together, they travel through an unusual world into flooded cities and mystical islands, and meet other animals on their way. It is a story of accepting differences and learning to understand and to trust each other. “I find it best to tell the story of my own experience as I live it,” says Gints.

Flow is made in a graphically stylised 3D animation technique, and, according to Zilbalodis, the animators had quite a few challenges. Besides most of the story unfolding on the water surface, the film has no dialogue as the characters are four-legged and animal-like. Zilbalodis uses

handheld- like camera movement and long takes where the camera floats through the environment creating a sense of immersion and intimacy with the characters. A large role in *Flow* plays by the music that Gints has partly created himself. The film’s world premiere was in Cannes – *Un Certain Regard* section and was included in the Official Selection of Annecy Festival, where it received four awards. Since then the film has won numerous film and animation awards, including the Best Animated Film award at the 37th European Film Awards, 82nd Golden Globes and it marked a historic milestone for Latvia, winning the country’s first-ever Oscar for Best Animated Feature at the 97th Academy Awards while it was also nominated for Best International Feature Film.

HALLMARK

Flow / *Straume*

3D animation, 75 min, 2024, Latvia / France / Belgium, young adults, no dialogue

■ After a terrible flood wreaks havoc on the world, a stubbornly independent Cat is forced to share a small boat with a group of other animals. Getting along with them turns out to be an even greater challenge for him than surviving the flood.

Away / *Projām*

3D computer animation, 75 min, 2019, young adults, no dialogue

■ A boy and a little bird are traveling across an island on a motorcycle trying to escape a dark spirit and get back home.

Priorities / *Prioritātes*

3D animation, 9 min, 2014, young adults, no dialogue

■ After his plane crashes on a small uninhabited island, a young man and his dog must find a way home.

Aqua

Classic animation, 7 min, 2012, young adults, no dialogue

■ A cat wakes up surrounded by water and must learn to survive.



Gints Zilbalodis

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Flow

Education

The Art Academy of Latvia is the first institution of higher education in Latvia to offer a course in animation technique and direction. In 2013 it established the *Motion. Image. Sound* bachelor's (four years) and master's (two years) programmes within the Faculty of Audio-Visual Media Art. Instructors include Edmunds Jansons, Inga Prauliņa, Dzintars Krūmiņš and other well-known names in Latvian animation. The artist Ojārs Pētersons is the director of the programme.

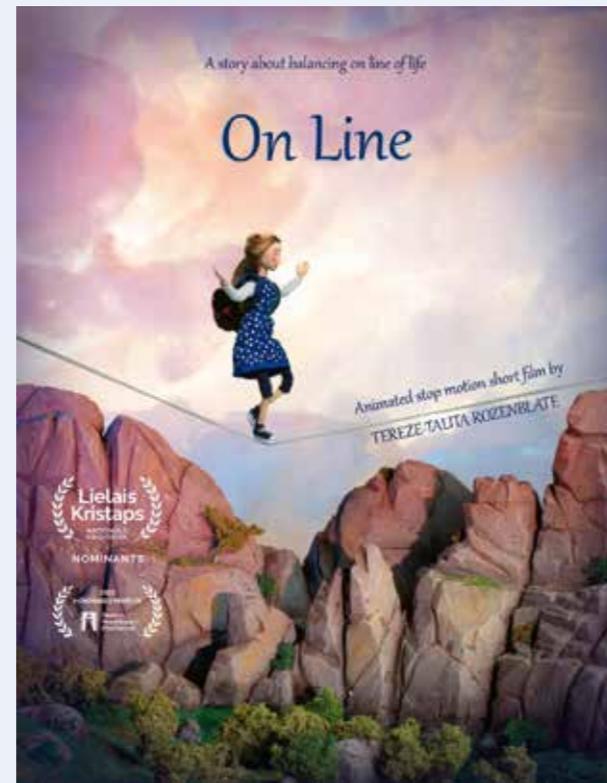
At the secondary level, young animators (nowadays called multimedia design specialists) are being taught in the four-year Visual Communications Art programme at the **Janis Rozentāls Riga Art School**, which begins in the tenth grade. There, students are taught animation by Dzintars Krūmiņš, one of the most experienced 2D animation specialists in Latvia. Gints Zilbalodis is the most known alumni of this school. Elementary-aged students can also participate in afterschool activities in which they learn the foundations of visual art as well as animation.

In Riga students can enrol in the Multimedia Design Specialist – Animation programme at the **Riga Art and Media Technical School**. Upon graduation, they receive a vocational secondary education diploma that allows them to enter tertiary education or employment in their profession. The programme is four years long.

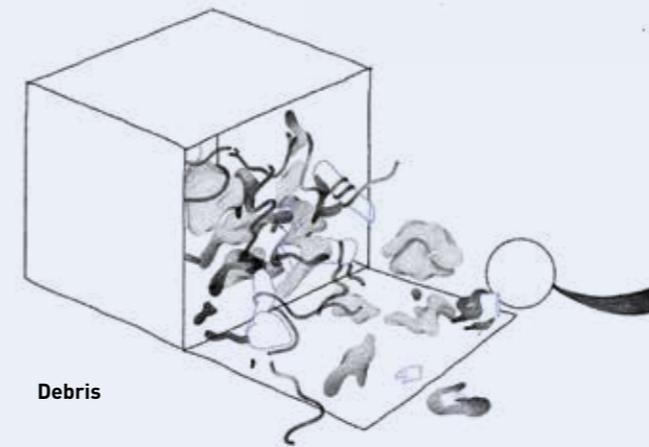
The **Daugavpils Secondary School of Design and Art** offers a Multimedia Design programme directed by artist and animator Vladimir Leschiov. The four-year programme prepares students for employment not only in animation but also video, graphic arts, sound and other media.

Likewise, animation can be studied at the **Liepāja Music, Art and Design Secondary School**. Its Multimedia Design programme teaches the foundations of 2D and 3D animation. If a student enrolls in 10th grade, the programme is four years long; if a student enrolls after 12th grade, the programme is two years long.

Students can also learn animation as a separate course in addition to audio-visual art and multimedia studies at various educational institutions and special interest education programmes outside of regular school programmes. For example, animator Ilze Ruska teaches animation to children and youth ages eight to 25 at the **Annas 2 Centre of Creative Learning**.



In the End



Debris

RECENT FILMS BY STUDENTS

Moon of the Dead or How I Stop Panicking and Avoid Reality Miroņu mēness jeb kā es pārstāju baidīties un izvairo no realitātes

Monta Andžejevska, 2D animation, 5 min, 2023, Latvia, adults, dialogue
 ■ Massive zombie apocalypse surprises online players. The fight appears to be comically difficult, especially if one player is a new member of the game.

Debris / Gruzis

Ilze Ance Kazaka, 2D animation, 4 min, 2023, Latvia, universal, no dialogue
 ■ Attempts at destroying the obstacle turn into acceptance, when the character recognises the obstacle as part of itself.

In the End / Beigu Beigas

Linda Stūre, 2D animation, 5 min, 2023, Latvia, universal, no dialogue
 ■ In the deep countryside of Latgale, relatives and neighbours, near and far, come together to celebrate the last important ritual of human life. A series of events and details reveal a picture in which two different eras overlap.

On Line / On Line

Terēze Talita Rozenblate, stop motion animation, 6 min, 2022, Latvia, universal, no dialogue
 ■ A young girl, balancing on the line of life, enters an endless loop of events which carries with it the heavy bags of the past. The series of events changes in the moment when the girl is falling and sees a person who disappears into the thick fog of gloom. Later, when she sees the person again, the girl is shown a new and beautiful world.



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International Film Festivals

Riga International Film festival

Launched in 2014, the Riga International Film festival (RIGA IFF) has since developed a diverse and multifaceted film programme as well as a growing industry section, networking platforms, and activities for students and families. RIGA IFF takes place annually in October, while various satellite events and engagement in distribution activity take place throughout the year. RIGA IFF features several international competition programmes, the foremost being an annual multi-genre feature film competition in which an international jury selects the winner of the RIGA IFF Award.

RIGA IFF is supported by Creative Europe Media Programme.



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Riga International Short Film Festival 2ANNAS

Since its first edition in 1996, the Riga International Short Film Festival 2ANNAS has gradually turned into one of the leading short and mid-length film festivals in the Baltic countries. This independent film and audio-visual art event seeks out and introduces its audience to innovative modes of audio-visual communication, with the aim of promoting European and World Cinema in Latvia and examining the evolution and trends of Baltic film art from a global perspective.

Next to its ground-breaking content of competitions, programmes, and focus on a specific theme each year, the festival is famous for its wild parties in unusual locations, free-spirited atmosphere, and creativeness.

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Front cover: *Flow* by Gints Zilbalodis

3D animation, 75 min, 2024
Latvia / France / Belgium

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Design and layout: Arnis Grinbergs
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Flow