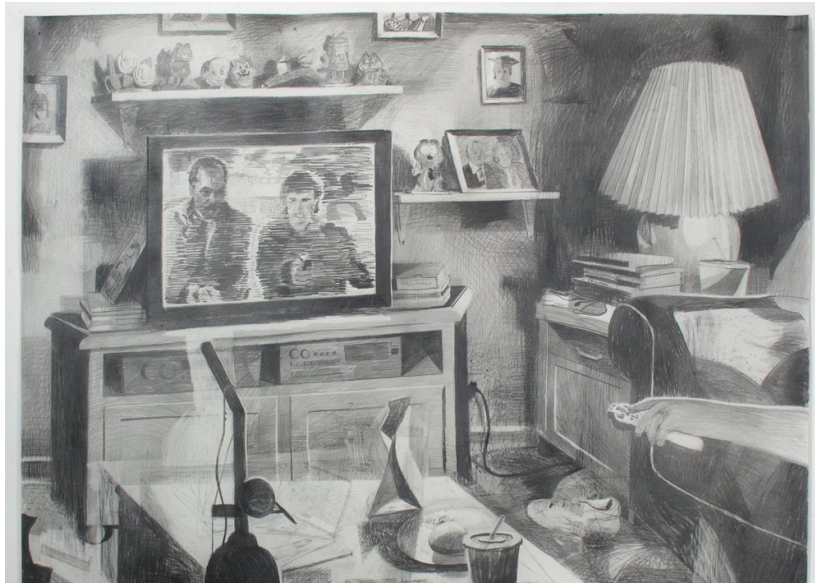


Sasha Bogojev, *In Conversation: Matt Bollinger on his Hand-Painted Animations*, Juxtapoz Magazine, 28 July 2020

**JUXTAPOZ**  
Art & Culture

## In Conversation: Matt Bollinger on his Hand-Painted Animations

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To label **Matt Bollinger** a polymath might be hyperbole. His paintings and animations bear architectural precision, philosophical studies of time, insinuating musicality and the visual drama of the best short stories. So, maybe we'll compare him to the inscrutable Stanley Kubrick, who, in harnessing the powers of coloration, shading and aural soundtrack, could create visual impact in the smallest detail or most humble scene, while addressing big ideas in a single frame or panorama of sequences.

With M.F.A. in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design and B.F.A. in painting and creative writing from the Kansas City Art Institute, he primarily works with graphite on paper and acrylic and flashe on canvas, in addition to and often concert with the world of animation. In fact, two of his most recent animations, *Three Rooms* (2018) and *Between the Days* (2017), are currently being presented at the Project Room of The South Bend Museum of Art in Indiana. Painted by hand in acrylic and flashe, an extremely time-consuming process, these animations create a voyeuristic ambiance in which the fragmentary traces of images remain visible through the story. This effect in which the past drifts into the present, slows the passage of time and suffuses the moment in a stealthy invitation to pause, observe, and maybe realize that you too have been there before.

We were mesmerized by these creations, so reached out to Bollinger, curious about a process that produces such an engrossing, thought provoking experiences.

**Sasha Bogojev:** Which came first, a love for animation or a love for painting, and how did one lead to the other?

**Matt Bollinger:** Actually it's my love of drawing and narrative that drives my paintings and animations. About 12 years ago, I stopped using photography in a direct way to make my work, and instead, everything emerged from my sketchbook. I started working out compositions on pages that I would grid out. This naturally looked like storyboarding and made it easy to develop the narrative ideas that I had. My first animations were inspired by a zine I

made and seemed like a logical step to allow my narratives to unfold in time. So painting came first for me but drawing before that.

### **What do you like about animation that you don't feel you can achieve with drawing or painting?**

Animation opened up the narrative aspect of my work but also freed my paintings to address the narrative differently. In animation, I'm constantly aware of how time becomes a spatial element - seconds subdivided into fractions of inches on a surface. In my works on canvas, I often think of time as almost geological, strata, and layers of paint that can be seen in the visible texture.



### **Can you elaborate on the relationship between your painterly and animation practice and the results you get?**

Now painting and animation are in constant dialog in my studio and the relationship keeps evolving. In the two videos at the South Bend Museum of Art, I made paintings on canvas that were exhibited alongside the animations. Some were large, six, and seven feet. I used these to make the animations, painting, and repainting the canvases with hundreds of changes to create the illusion of movement.

### **Tell us a bit about the storyline and technical aspects of how those are made.**

In *Three Rooms* I embedded a narrative within the larger structure—a sci-fi story called 4036. For this, I painted in watercolor and ink on a film called Duralar. These were the first animation-paintings I made that weren't intended for anything but making the video. I found the process liberating. Since then I've created three related animations all called *Holmes, MO*, that use a similar method, gouache on Duralar. With the gouache, I can create highly resolved paintings but also incredibly fluid passages, like those in 4036.

### **How difficult is it to decide on how refined the movie imagery will be compared to your paintings?**

Because animation takes so much time, I can get restless. I don't think this is a bad thing because I start coming up with surprising solutions to advance the film. Sometimes these are more painterly or abstract, while other times they become slow, subtle, or almost still. Because all of the different types of resolution occur in one timeline, the video holds everything together. Video is an amazing glue that connects lots of elements that excite me: painting, film, music, and sound.

### **How is your way of thinking or planning paintings different from working on animations?**

I feel that when I make paintings for a gallery show, I'm thinking about stillness and presence - the narrative that I'm often interested in becomes embedded in the surface in marks, textures, and suggestions. I'm always looking for a moment when all of the elements find a balance within the rectangle where if anything were to be removed, the whole image would fall apart.

### **Do you ever exhibit the stills you've used for animation and how do they resonate as single pieces?**

My animations *Between the Days* and *Three Rooms*, each formed the centerpiece of a solo show at Zürcher Gallery in NYC. After I finished those films, I continued to work on the animation-paintings until they felt resolved and I exhibited the paintings alongside the videos. More recently I've been painting on Duralar to make the animations, and those wouldn't be works I'd show in a typical exhibition. Some are interesting as paintings while with others there isn't much

left, just a few smears!

**Do you also make the storyline and the sounds for the animations, and how challenging is that part?**

I write the stories, record and edit the sounds, compose and perform all of the music. I even voice the characters with some help from my family. Writing forms the foundation of all of my work. It's important to me that the figures and places I paint exist in a world and have a life, at least for me, outside of the frame. It's always a challenge to find the right stories—I react to art, films, and TV, fiction and the news, personal stories and interviews I conduct with my family. Usually when I'm working on a body of work, new ideas start to percolate. Because a project might take me a year or more, the new narrative has time to gestate. If the story isn't good, it doesn't stay in my head.

**Wow, I didn't realize music was such an important element in your work. How did that relationship come about?**

I grew up playing cello in the school orchestra and playing guitar on my own and in a "band" (not a great experience). I picked up my guitar again after a long hiatus when I needed something meditative to occupy me while going through a particularly stressful time in my life. I began to play everyday and quickly surpassed what I could do when I was 19 and rarely practiced. When I started making the animations, I suddenly could roll this obsessive hobby into my studio practice. It's grown since then beyond simple guitar to more involved effects, piano, banjo, and synths. The score and foley work (sound effects in movies) in the projects really completes the movements that I animate. While I spend far more time writing and creating the footage, the sound always takes an equal footing with the visuals when I finish a project.



**What are you currently working on and what shows do you have planned in the foreseeable future?**

I'm working on a large group of paintings set in a town I invented near the Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri. These relate to an ongoing series of shorts that I mentioned, called Holmes, MO. The first three offer glimpses into the lives of a number of characters on a morning when there is a shooting at the high school. Many of the paintings are like portraits or character studies, all of white, working class people. I see the series as a way to tell many different types of stories while the town itself is the thread that holds the pieces together.

I'm also in the middle of a long-term animation project about a young woman who lives in her car while working at a CVS. The narrative encapsulates a single day in her life, but I've designed a computer program that will alter the loop based on chain reactions from single events. For example, one day she locks herself out of her car in the morning, on another she listens to a particular song on the way to work, and on another she has a conversation with a friend who has the money to quit work at the store to pursue her art career.

Currently, I have an animation in a show at Anna Zorina gallery in NYC and I'm in a group show called Melancholympics at Plus 1 Gallery in Antwerp in September. I'm also going to show a handful of the smaller paintings I've been making at a show at Zürcher Gallery in the fall. I have a solo show planned with Zürcher as well, but we're waiting right now because of the pandemic.

Follow Matt at @mattbollinger