

# Womanimation! Celebrates Women Animators from Around the World



Rhode Islanders are privy to many celebrations of the arts, not the least of which is the film festival. We have a growing number of specialized film festivals and one of the more interesting ones is coming up soon. On Sat, Jun 27, Merging Arts will present the seventh incarnation of their **Womanimation!** film festival at As220's Black Box Theater (95 Empire Street, PVD).

The **Womanimation!** festival, which specializes in short animated films by female filmmakers from around the world, will present eight short films carefully selected from hundreds. The selected shorts present a wide range of topics and animation styles and represent artists from North and South America, Europe and the Middle East. I viewed some clips of the chosen shorts and they were definitely impressive. *Khanoom Gol Mikhaki (Lady With The Flower Hair)* uses a playful animation style to tell the story of a 40-year-old woman who struggles with being different. *Carapace* employs a striking painterly style to tell the story of Lili, whose body seems at odds with her heart as she has difficulties with the physical aspect of her relationship. The artwork in this piece is extremely impressive and at times even looks photographic. And *Beach Flags* uses a classic cartoonish style to relay the story of Vida, an Iranian lifeguard training for an international competition even though social and cultural regulations may limit the events in which she can compete. This small sampling I saw proved to me that the folks at **Womanimation!** will present a very entertaining show.

I conducted a short interview with Toni Pennacchia, one of the festival's founders and programmers, to get some more information on the festival.

## **What is the origin of Womanimation?**

It started as part of a collaboration with RI women artists for SWAN Day (Support Women Artists Now) in 2008. Actually, that year, we did two programs of "Fearless Femmes in Film" combining both live-action and animated films by women. Some of our favorite films were the animated ones, and we saw a niche in programming that is pretty rare around the world, though Austria has Tricky Women.

## **Can you give me a little history of the festival?**

Our first **Womanimation!** was a mix of feature film (*Sita Sings The Blues*) and shorts programming. Since then, we've focused more on animated shorts to get the most variety in the shortest amount of time. This year will be our seventh year.

**What are the criteria for the films you choose to screen?**

We consider a good story to be important, along with production value. Some people will pigeonhole the medium of animation into categories like kids' films or trippy experimental films, but it's a diverse medium. We try to capture a little of that diversity in our programs.

**How do you go about finding films to screen?**

Unlike a lot of US festivals, we don't charge submission fees, so we attract a lot more overseas attention since there's less risk. Of course the Internet is a wonderful thing — filmmakers and producers find us just as we find them.

**What do you hope your audience will get out of seeing these films?**

We hope they gain a little appreciation for the many voices and talents of women around the world, as well as the possibilities of animation as a storytelling medium. And of course, just have a good time.

**Do you plan to expand the festival in the future?**

We have traveled with the festival throughout New England before, but we love playing in Providence. We might do some more touring in the future. We might want to add more programming as well. This year was particularly hard to narrow down from our hundreds of submissions — there is some really great stuff out there.

**Which film from this year's festival are you most excited for audiences to see?**

I can't pick which of my children I love the most! One unusual thing this year is that we have two films from Iran — one dealing specifically with women's status in the Middle East, and one more poetic and universal. We hope audiences relate to the organically developed theme this year of self-image and acceptance, through perspectives from childhood to the golden years.

***Womanimation!*** will screen their short film program three times on Jun 27 — 4pm, 6pm and 8pm with a reception to follow the third screening — at the 95 Empire Black Box at 95 Empire St, PVD. For more info, check out [mergingartsproductions.com](http://mergingartsproductions.com).