

Samantha Moore

Description

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Profession : Director, Animator; Head of Animation at Royal College of Art (London)

Nationality : British

Schooling : Postgraduate diploma (Central St. Martin School of Art, UK), PhD (Loughborough University, UK)

Date and place of interview :

22 March 2024 – Online

Interviewed by:

Eve Benhamou

Samantha Moore is a British independent animator, a researcher with an interest in documentary,

science and art, and practice as research. She is Head of Programme for the Animation MA at the Royal College of Arts (London). She has animated and directed several shorts, including [Visible Mending](#) (2023), which was nominated for a BAFTA in 2024, and [Bloomers](#) (2019), winner of Best British Film at the London International Animation Festival. She is also an Associate Professor in Animation at University College Volda, Norway, and was [co-editor](#) of *Animation Practice, Process & Production* (Intellect Press Journal).

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Eve Benhamou is an Associate Lecturer at Université Paul-Valéry. Her recent publications include the monograph *Contemporary Disney Animation: Genre, Gender and Hollywood* (2022) and chapters for edited collections including *Feminine/Masculine: On Gender in English-language Cinema and Television* (Julie Assouly and Marianne Kac-Vergne, 2024).

Eve Benhamou: Could you first describe your background, education and jobs? Could you also describe a little your approach to your work (practice as research)?

Samantha Moore: Originally, my first degree was in English Literature and Fine Art painting. I went into the world of art as a painter, but I soon became seduced away into moving image. I started putting my paintings under the camera. Then I saw the work of Caroline Leaf, Jan Svankmayer and other filmmakers—but Caroline Leaf specifically because she does paint on glass, and I was really inspired to try it. So I started working paint on glass as well. Then I went to Central St. Martin School of Art where I did a postgraduate diploma in Fine Art and Film; I was one of maybe two animators that were there. I continued with my oil paint on glass, then graduated and began teaching part time. I have always had a teaching practice alongside. Lots of independent animators in the UK have a part-time practice: teaching or commercial work. I think that there are pros and cons to both models. I've always found teaching very nurturing and interesting. I did my PhD in 2015 at Loughborough University [UK], with Paul Wells as my supervisor. My work centers around animated documentary—that was my PhD topic. My contribution to original research was around the methodology that I use, which involves a deep level of collaboration with the interviewees, bringing them into the frame and making sure that they're represented beyond the audio.

Eve Benhamou: Could you tell me about your views on the current state of the industry, the evolution of women's roles? Maybe starting with the independent animation sector in the UK?

Samantha Moore: There are so many different strands there to be uncovered. I think that directing and producing are so very different. You know, traditionally, and perhaps anecdotally, we see that female producers are well-represented, female directors maybe less so. When I got into animation from painting, I saw lots of female role models, directors, women in creative roles. So it's a really important distinction to say "women in creative roles" versus "women in production roles." Not that there's anything wrong with being in either, but they are quite different roles. I think that women in production roles, which tend to be supportive, can often devolve into being "female-inflected," whereas women in creative roles can often get overtaken by, you know, a masculine vibe [*laughs*]. When I first started working in animation, I saw lots of independent female directors who inspired me and whose work I loved, like [Petra Freeman](#) and [Candy Guard](#). So I saw a place for myself. And then the digital revolution occurred and everybody stopped working in analogue.

It was very interesting, because I could see the balance between male and female among my students. (I taught at Newport and then at Wolverhampton for twenty years.) Suddenly, as soon as we were

working digitally, it was immediately skewed very masculine, and for a really long time animation students were overwhelmingly male. I had one class one year in which there were only two part-time female students and everybody else was male; it really changed the dynamic and the feel of the class. I've had experiences of being at the mercy of misogynistic students. I remember once [at Wolverhampton], I had a student who just hated being taught by women. He didn't want to be told what to do by women, and my Dean of school said: "Maybe for his third year, we'll just have him taught by men, so that he won't have to meet any women." And I was like: "Oh, my God!" Can you imagine a racist student saying: "I have a problem with every single black member of staff"; and replying: "Okay, we'll make sure they're taught by white staff." No, this is not acceptable. So it was sometimes tricky, and I think that it was reflected industrially.

I think the pendulum has swung back in more recent years. Now I teach at the Royal College of Art, and the majority of our students are women, and I find that very interesting. I wonder what the gender balance would be in games education, for example, or the games industry. I would be willing to suspect that there would be many more men than women in games.

Eve Benhamou: This is fascinating. How would you explain this evolution? You said that when working in analogue, there were more women, and when shifting to digital, it was male-dominated at first, and then there was a gender balance. Do you have any thoughts on that shift?

Samantha Moore: I think that first of all, digitalization meant that there was an emphasis on the technical, and I think that there's still somehow a feeling, you know, that women aren't at ease with technology. You look at how many women sound engineers there are. I just did a film where every single creative role was a woman, and our sound mix was done by a woman. I realized that I had never worked with a female sound mixer before, even though I try to work with women, just to kind of redress balances.

Maybe more boys were coming to study in those early digital days because there was an emphasis on the technical. Maybe more women were being put off because they thought that it wasn't something they wanted to learn. They were interested in the creative, not the technical, because in those years I saw that illustration degrees and illustration as an area were very female dominant, and yet animation wasn't. Now, the area of animation is not just balanced: I see more women in my institution. But I think that women are well represented in very particular types of animation. So it's easy to be in a kind of silo. You know you can be in a bubble where you think: "Everybody is like this."

The last film I made [*Visible Mending*] was in stop motion; it was the first time that I used this technique. As a digital 2D animator, I'm very familiar with working with women. Working in stop motion and in a commercial studio was fascinating; I suddenly realized that all the women were model-makers and prop-makers, whereas the directors—many, not all of them—and most of the animators were men. There was a different feeling to the studio from what I was used to. It was interesting. I had to kind of impose my leadership style, which is not very masculine. I had to draw on my experience of collaboration because it wasn't designed to be an inclusive collaborative environment. I think some of those commercial studios are designed to be hierarchical, and I have no use for hierarchy in general—I'm not a fan. I don't really find such environments useful; I find them exclusive, and they kind of push people away rather than bringing them into the process.

That's the reason I can think of. But my experience is so singular, I don't know if anybody else would find it the same.

Eve Benhamou: Your stop motion film [*Visible Mending*] was quite recent [2023]. Would you say that, even now, there is still that difference, namely if the studio tends to be male-dominated, there is a rather hierarchical structure, whereas with female directors, it tends to be more collaborative?

Samantha Moore: I don't think you can say it so easily because that's such a simplification. I work at a university which by nature is extremely hierarchical, and I've worked with women who love that hierarchy—you know, the fact that everybody has their place in a pecking order. I don't think that it's necessarily gender that's making a difference. It's an approach to different styles of leadership, working with people collaboratively or hierarchically. They both work, but they are very different. Maybe I made a bubble for myself where I was working, where it felt really collaborative, and then suddenly I was working in a different environment. It felt very hierarchical, but I broke it. I managed to change it while I was there; I didn't change it permanently, though, I think I just changed it superficially for my production. But I would try and always make sure that my production was going to be somewhere where everybody has a voice. That's very important to the way that I work.

Eve Benhamou: You mentioned that you try to have a great number of women in your crews. Has it always been the case? Is it getting easier to do since you started making films, finding women in all these roles, in all the different types of animation you might make? Or are there still roles for which it's very difficult to find women?

Samantha Moore: I think that it's always very difficult to find different people. A lot of the time, filmmaking works by who you know—your network. We go to film schools that might be famous, and then we meet other people who also went there. Networking can be really helpful, but it can also become cliquey, or there can be a subconscious bias towards people who are very much like you. So I'm not necessarily looking for women; it's more that I'm looking for people to be in roles that you might not necessarily expect.

When I met the female sound mixer [for *Visible Mending*], I was really happy because it's such a male-coded job. Sound designer and composer [Hutch Demouilpied](#) came to the ceremony with us when the film was nominated for a BAFTA. We got her a ticket, and when I gave her name, because she has a masculine or neutral sounding name—"Hutch"—they said, "Will he...". And I said: "Actually, she's a woman". They apologized, but I stated: "Oh no, I don't mean to be an asshole, but it's actually really important that people know that all our creative roles were led by women, because it's not necessarily what you expect."

[*Visible Mending*] is about knitting and, originally, everybody who I talked to was female and white, so I made sure that it included some other voices. I widened the debate because I was aware that what I was working with might be most people's experience of knitting, but it wasn't the only experience.

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If that's all you see, and that's all you have reflected back, then it's a sort of micro-aggression: being shown that there is no space for you. So the fact that there's a male knitter [*in the film*] is very important, in a similar way that there is a female sound mixer or a female composer. I think inclusivity includes everybody; it doesn't exclude people. It's not about just making space for women; it's about making space for all genders, as far as you can. If you have any influence, why not use it for something positive?

Eve Benhamou: You talked about “seeing yourself reflected on screen,” but your films are also about “hearing yourself.” In a lot of your films, female voices tend to be central, female experiences as well.

Samantha Moore: I think I'm naturally drawn to this. I grew up in an all-female family. I had a mother and a sister, so the three of us were our family, and I'm used to a female-centric perspective perhaps because of that. Ironically, now I have got a husband and two sons and two male dogs—one exchange to another. I think I'm always interested in women's voices. I'm also a feminist—obviously, like what kind of idiot would not be a feminist, right? So, as a feminist, I'm listening to women's stories because those are often sidelined—like knitting. I made a film called *Bloomers* (2019), which was about the UK garment manufacturing industry. It was really fascinating. The person who owned the factory was a man, and his mother was there, she was also a kind of co-owner, so her voice was in it, too. The person who cuts the patterns was a man, and then everybody else was female, and so there were some beautiful voices, they were just really interesting.

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Bloomers (Samantha Moore, 2019)

I'm also interested in the kind of social currency those skills and crafts have. Maybe they are not so valued because they are seen to be traditionally female, like knitting for example. It is seen to be a female craft industry, and yet I always feel that, if you called it "textile engineering," it would have so much kudos. I knit a little, while I'm traveling. I'm on the train a lot, and if I'm knitting, people always say, "You're so clever knitting that." But they don't really think it's clever; rather, that this is something on the peripheries of society. I believe that animation and knitting have a lot in common. People think you're clever to do them, but at the same time they don't really value them very much. They would say: "Oh, you're so clever to have made that film. Can you make me a little film? Can you make me a 10 minute film?" No, because that film was 8 minutes, it took me five years. "Can you knit me something?" No, because that took me a really long time [*laughs*]. There is a lot of skill, but because the skill isn't valued, the time isn't valued either. I think that's truer for women in society generally than it is for men. There's the expectation that our labour will be less valued, and therefore easier to get.

Eve Benhamou: To go back to what you were saying about the positives and the negatives of networking, you are a member of Animated Women UK. Can you talk about your experiences within this group and the way it works?

Samantha Moore: I joined [Animated Women UK](#) as soon as it began. I think it's really important to support, and to be there for each other. Having women in independent animation is not exactly groundbreaking; there are plenty of them. It's really badly paid, it's really hard to do, and it tends to be a cottage industry—of course, women are brilliant at it! But when you look at commercials, directing, where it starts to get bigger and there's more money involved, women kind of disappear a little bit. Animated Women UK has done some great statistics and really interesting research about the ways in which, similar to science, lots of women enter the industry, but then they kind of fall off as they go through, when they get to sort of thirty, forty or fifty years old. Suddenly there are fewer and fewer women in those key roles; these tend to be more powerful the longer you've been in them. Maybe women run out of energy, or they don't get promoted, or they struggle, and then they just end up leaving and doing something else. So I think Animated Women UK is a really brilliant organization. I really support them and I continue to be a member. They do networking events and things that I think are really helpful and really useful.

Eve Benhamou: You mentioned that you see less and less women in the industry as they grow older, even today. How could this be explained? Would it be the lack of job opportunities, funding or discrimination? What are your thoughts on this?

Samantha Moore: I don't know. I think it's hard for me because I come from the independent sector, so I don't have very big budgets but I can work at my own pace.

I made a film about having my twin sons called [Doubled Up](#) (2004), and that was great because I could make it at home. I literally switched to digital from analog because of my children. If I do oil on glass under the camera and I have to stop to take care of a baby, then the paint dries off and the shot's ruined. But if I do it digitally, then I can just "pause" or "save project," and then I can go away. So the reason why I switched to digital was to allow me to have more flexibility. If I had to be in a studio every

day, in the center of London, Birmingham, Manchester or Bristol, and I was working really long hours, that might be difficult, but that assumes that all childcare is a woman's responsibility, and I absolutely refute that. My husband was the main carer for our children when they reached school age because his job allowed it. I don't consider myself lucky. This is sensible: there are two people having a child. You organize the time so both of you can still manage, and that's what we did.

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[Doubled Up](#) (Samantha Moore, 2004)

There is no need to pat myself on the back or, even worse, pat my husband on the back for being a dad; he chose it. I'm always wary about putting too much onus on the lack of childcare provisions to explain why women drop out, because loads of women choose not to have children or aren't able to have them. I think that it reduces us to being the child bearers, whereas there are sometimes other more complex reasons.

It's a combination of things. Some of it, I'm sure, has to do with women's caring responsibilities, but there might also be some sexism, a more passive sort, as in: "I expect your composer to be a man, so I assume it's a man." What I hear is: "Composers are men." Rather than saying she or he, rather than allowing the option for the door to be open, you're closing the door. That's a kind of passive sexism as opposed to "Only a man should do that job!" Obviously, that's actively sexist and misogynistic. So I think the reasons are really subtle. Animated Women UK did some good research into it. They've got all the figures, and they did interviews with women and animation, so it would definitely be worth looking at.

I think that you're right in questioning why people don't hang around long enough to really hone their skills, and there are definitely questions to be asked around that.

I think the reasons often come down to money. There's a big thing in the UK (I don't know if it's the same in France) but arts education is becoming less and less valued by our right-wing government, and so the kind of people that can follow their heart are rich people—those who already have money can become an actor, a singer, an animator, because they are independently wealthy; they can do a free internship, and they can ask their dad or mom if they can get them a job somewhere. To me, that inequity is just as insidious as sexism, racism, homophobia or gender discrimination, because it excludes so many, and we don't see it. So I think it should be our job, if we've managed to stay in animation long enough, particularly as a director, to try and make the environment we work in as inclusive as we can.

Eve Benhamou: Talking about misogyny, what are your thoughts on the impact of #MeToo on the industry generally, and specifically in the animation sector?

Samantha Moore: The impact of #MeToo has been really fascinating because everybody has their stories. Everybody has their stories. Generally, animation is seen as a really friendly place because everybody knows everybody else. But that friendliness isn't without a flip side: everybody knows everybody, so you have to be nice to everybody, because if you're not, then you won't be able to work. You can't just be dismissive of people or tell them to get lost. Because it's so small, even globally, you can't afford to annoy anybody. So there is a self-interest in that friendliness; it's not all done with the best intentions. Networking represents the other side of that friendliness. As I said before, it can rely on a subconscious bias where you end up being attracted to people who are the same as you. If you don't interrogate it in yourself, you may think that someone seems brilliant for the job, and they turn out to be exactly like a version of you ten, fifteen or twenty years ago. You're kind of replicating yourself, which is not a healthy thing to do.

I've got plenty of #MeToo examples, but none of them has to do with animation, really, except maybe

just that feeling of... animation in relation to live action. Quite often, animation is kind of downplayed. In 2003, I was making [Success with Sweet Peas](#). I remember trying to get money for it and I couldn't get any funding at all. One of the reasons was: "It's animated. It's too twee. It's too silly." It wasn't called "feminine," but that was the implication. Actually, I was having a conversation with someone in the Film Commissioning Lab, who mainly commissioned live action. He said: "If you aren't going to do live action, why can't you make it more like the Gorillaz video, like a sort of music video?" Just, you know, masculine, funky, trendy and cool. I was like: "But I don't want to make the Gorillaz video. Someone's already making it. I'm making what I'm making".

I think that independent animation is a good place to hide from sexism and misogyny, because you can choose exactly who you work with. No one's saying you have to work with such and such. And then you can choose who you employ as well.

There was a student I taught in Manchester, who I work with now. He was a single dad, and he left animation because he was bullied. They thought he was too feminine, too delicate in his animation style. He was really good, but he just got picked on a lot, and he was really unhappy. He ended up having a kid, and his wife wasn't able to take care of the child, and then she left, she had some issues. So he was a single dad, took twelve years off animation, and then came back. I was able to pay him to work on *Visible Mending*; we brought him in as an intern, and now he works for that animation company, which is brilliant. I consider that to be really inclusive: he's not a woman, but his experience has been the same as many women—him being sidelined. You know, he's a working-class white man, so you could say "He's kind of okay". Well, he wasn't okay. There are lots of people who get left behind.

So I think that there are good and bad things about animation's friendliness. We shouldn't forget that sometimes it can hide slightly toxic environments of just employing people who are like you, or maybe just not wanting to offend anybody because you might need to work with them again. But I think, at its best, it allows for a really inclusive environment where you can just get people on board because they have amazing skills.

Eve Benhamou: Talking about money, throughout your career, what are the funding opportunities you may or may not have had? Were there some types of funding that were easier to obtain than others?

Samantha Moore: Looking for money is really hard, and it keeps getting harder. You probably spend a third of your time just looking for money, a third of your time researching and preparing, and then only a third actually making the work. I was lucky in the sense that my education was paid for because I came from a low-income family, and then I had studentships to do my postgraduate qualifications. I had a full scholarship to do my PhD, which isn't always the case. Then, with my filmmaking, I rarely looked at "normal places" to get funding because it's not available, and the competition is really stiff. So I quite often looked to different places.

I took *Success with Sweet Peas* to Channel 4 with a budget of £20,000, and they said "No." Then I took it to Arts Council England with a budget of £10,000, and they said: "We don't do animation at the moment." I eventually got £3,000 pounds from the Shropshire Tourist Board, and also from an arts

center in Shrewsbury, where I live: places that no sensible filmmaker would go to for funding, but they would fund me. So with £1,500 I bought a new computer, with the other £1,500 I paid the composer to make the soundtrack, and I did everything else for free. I was lucky. That was a privilege of mine because, even though I'm from a low-income family originally, I did a teaching job that allowed me to subsidize my filmmaking. I think that happens a lot with commercial directors as well. They make commercials during the day, so that they can spend time doing their passion projects on weekends or their days off. I think that's a really hard deal to make. I was lucky I had a partner who was supportive, and we were able to manage financially, but I can totally see that it's not always the case. So I think money is really important. I know, this is amazing insight [*laughs*], but it's really, really important to look for funding.

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Success with Sweet Peas (Samantha Moore, 2003)

I got funding from the Wellcome Trust quite a lot. They're a science organization, so my work has been a lot about science. I really love working with scientists; I find it really fascinating. Also, as an artist working in the science realm, what you do is instantly unusual. As an animator working in the animation world, it's like, "Yeah, okay, we've seen ten like you today," whereas if you're working in science and ask for money; it's like "Oh, interesting! This is unusual." I do think there is a strength in looking to different places for funding, because if you all look to the same place, then competition just gets crazy, crazy busy.

Eve Benhamou: You mentioned it a little already, in relation to teaching notably, but are there any instances of discrimination that you may have encountered or witnessed throughout the years, specifically working in animation?

Samantha Moore: I don't know. I mean, I talk about this with my friends in animation. We deliberately design our lives so that we won't have to come across assholes who are going to be sexist and, you know, difficult. So if you make sure to work with a producer who you know and trust, and you're looking for assistant animators and interesting filmmakers who quite often are women, you know who you work with. Then, you don't necessarily have that "to your face" kind of example, where you can say "No, you're being sexist!" But I'm sure there have been times. There have been times where I've been made to feel stupid for having a female-centric perspective, or made to feel irrelevant, silly, not important, not meaningful—you know, not proper, without enough gravitas.

I went to the Society for Animation Studies Conference. We were having breakfast with several people whom I've known for years, and one of my colleagues has grown a big beard. I said: "Gosh! That looks amazing. You know you have such gravitas with that beard." Suddenly, he looks like a really serious man. I said to a female colleague, "You know, I wonder, how do women gain gravitas like that? How do we instantly gain it?" She's maybe fifteen years younger than me, and she said: "Grey hair. Grey hair is how women get gravitas." I was like "Fuck!" because I've got grey hair, but I'm fifty-four, you know; I shouldn't have to wait until I am fifty-four to gain my gravitas! This guy wasn't fifty-four. But he can just grow a beard at any point in his life and just immediately gain gravitas. Whereas if I want to get it, I have to wait until I'm actually decrepit. You know, that's bullshit; it's not good enough. That annoys me.

Actually, I can think of another good example; again, it's an academic one. I used to work at a different university, and before that I worked at another university. I taught there for twenty years. I was making films the whole time; I was having my kids, and I wasn't climbing up the ladder because I wasn't interested in the hierarchy. But at some point, I realized that I wanted to become a Reader, which is a sort of Assistant Professor. I applied three times and I didn't get it. I was really fed up, wondering why they were not even putting me forward: maybe because I'm an animator, maybe because I'm a woman, I don't know. I can't put my finger on it, I've got no evidence. So I thought: "Okay, fine." I left and went to a different institution and, during my interview, they asked why I wasn't a Reader. I replied: "Oh, I'd love to be a Reader." They said: "We can make you a Reader." I was like: "Fantastic!" So I went to them. I applied for a Readership. They said "no." I was like, "oh, for God's sake!" So then I went to a different job, and now I teach at the Royal College of Art. I'm still not a Reader, but I am Head of Animation, right? So that's all great. Then I was at the Society for Animation Studies conference again, and I saw this guy who's a professor, and he is probably ten years younger than me.

I said: “Oh, congratulations! You’re a professor, that’s amazing.” And he said that he was really surprised how easy it was. He asked me: “Didn’t you find it easy when you became a Reader?” And I replied, “No, because I’m not a Reader. I found it really hard. I’ve applied four times now and I’ve always been rejected.” I also had conversations that day with two other women, whose names you would recognize as being world leaders in their field, who could also not get Readerships—not even Professorships, just Readerships. We were talking about how hard it was and we thought: “It must be hard *because* it’s hard to get them.” And this man—who had a beard—was telling me that it was really easy: everybody helped him so much throughout the process; it was super straightforward. So I told him about the conversation I’d have, me and these two other academics—all leaders you know, people have heard of us in other countries, and definitely of them if not of me. He was really shocked that they hadn’t found it as easy as he had.

So I think that sometimes it’s like that benign, that passive: “You know, I can’t quite see you as a Reader yet. Maybe in a few years, when your hair has gone even grayer; maybe then I can see that you would be ready. But you’re not really there for me yet, you know?” How do you call that out? If you said “You’re being sexist,” they’d be like, “Oh, no, no, no, no. I’m not being sexist. I love women. My mother was a woman, you know. How could I be?” But instead, that’s kind of coming out a different way.

Eve Benhamou: I’d like to know more about your status as an independent animator within academia, and independent filmmakers in academia more generally. You mentioned at the beginning that they either teach or do commercial work because they need that financial support. How do these two roles impact each other?

Samantha Moore: You’re touching on something really interesting because I think that, generally, “practice as research” is not considered to be as serious in academia. You kind of have a double whammy, which is: you might not be as serious because you’re lacking the beard, but also you might not be as serious because you’re a practitioner/researcher. That’s not considered quite as serious as a writing researcher. So I’m a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and I got it on my third try—you know, I will not stay down. When they were rejecting me the first two times, one of the things they said was: “Can you not talk about your film so much? Can you talk about the paper you wrote for this conference?” But the paper I wrote was about my films! So my practice is central to my research: my PhD was a practice-based PhD. For the REF (Research Excellence Framework), which is how the UK rates the research that’s being done in its universities, I’m a “four-star” researcher, which is the top. My work has been consistently rated “four star” because of my practice-based research. I’m able to take the practice and filter it through a research lens in order to make it make sense. But filtering it through a research lens requires extra work. You know, if I just wrote the article, I would be done. I’m not saying writing an article is easy because clearly it’s not—it’s very tricky—but it’s not quite as time-consuming, perhaps, as making a film and then writing an article about the film you just made. You know, you’ve got two impossible things that you’re doing already.

I don’t know what it’s like where you are, but in the UK, if you want a job in academia, if you want to teach at university, you really need to have a PhD now. If you want a permanent job, it benefits you in so many ways. In order to have a PhD and be a practitioner, you need to really be able to do those two things, you know, pat your head and rub your tummy at the same time.

I think that it’s very subtle, nuanced and layered. When these things cumulatively come together, you

wonder why you even bother! I could just be an illustrator. I could be an editorial illustrator, and I'd get paid the same money for doing one drawing as I do for doing twenty-five frames a second and making a three-minute film. Of course, why not make my life easier? Why make it harder? [laughs]

Eve Benhamou: Your work is mostly non-fiction. From a wider perspective, what are your views on the new roles that can be invented for women on screen? What do you think about these new kinds of representations, especially over the last few years?

Samantha Moore: I'm very interested. One of the reasons why I love animated documentary is because you're able to kind of like—[Annabelle Honess Roe](#) talks about the “evoking”—evoking a brain state or evoking the inside of someone's experience.

There was a myth that I've heard so many times about children's TV series. I've actually worked with an animator who told me that she had this experience. She had a children's TV series that had a female protagonist, and the television company said: “If you want to get this commissioned, it has to be a boy at the center because girls don't have problems having a boy as a protagonist, but boys have problems having girls as a protagonist.” Now this was based on a piece of research that was entirely erroneous. But for years it was like an urban myth around commissioners that this was the case—I think you'll find some writing on it—and they use this to justify why there should always be a boy protagonist.

I think, that with animated documentary, you're able to kind of sidestep the whole thing. I've got the mice from my film [*Visible Mending*] in my studio. I don't know if you can see but they're sitting on the desk in the background and they're wearing dresses. But twice, I've had people say: “Who's this little man? Who's this little guy?” And I just find it fascinating. People default to that [the male gender]. I love the idea that in an animated documentary, you can kind of be—I'm not saying gender neutral, but you don't have to necessarily engage with it; you can use animation as a Trojan horse, as a way of kind of smuggling in ideas. These older women in my film, *Visible Mending*, are talking about their experience of loss, terminal illness, their lack of power, all sorts of things—about learning to kind of repair yourself when you've had a stroke. You know, women who are at the margins because they're women, because they're old, because they're retired, because they're not functional in society. You can use animation as a way of amplifying their voices and making them the center of a film. I love that. I want to amplify all different kinds of voices, but that's one that really makes sense to me.

I think that animation can do that, so you can give voices to women. I would love to make a film about abortion. I would love to make a film about abortion. I keep saying it in the hope that somebody will one day give me some money for it, you know, because I feel like the normality of abortion as a women's healthcare issue is being eroded, starting in the USA, but also in other European countries. Our rights are being eroded, and I think it's important to make it the center of a film. I know there are other films being made, but you see it in the way that menopause is being dealt with. People talk about menopause, periods, as “just women's experiences.” You know, this is most people's experiences, and yet somehow this is thought to be niche because it's not yours. I accept that there are plenty of experiences that I won't have, but I'm really interested in hearing about them, even if they don't relate to my experience specifically. I think that the same thing has to be true for other people. Animation is definitely a space where you can amplify voices. You can do it in a way that you can smuggle through, so people don't really realize.

I made a film about HIV Aids in Uganda [[The Beloved Ones](#), 2007], and it was really interesting because people may not choose to watch a short film about this subject. But they thought that because it was animated, it wouldn't be painful to watch, or it wouldn't hit home in the same way. And so they were like, "Oh, cool! This is such a cute animation." And I had this woman crying in a festival in the USA, saying: "How could you do that to me? I thought it was going to be a really cute film, and then you've just broken my heart." And I was like: "Ha, ha! Excellent!" Because that was kind of the point. If you don't choose to listen to these stories, then they won't get heard. So our job as filmmakers, I think, has to be telling amazing stories that you perhaps wouldn't necessarily listen to as your first choice.

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The Beloved Ones (Samantha Moore, 2007)

Eve Benhamou: People’s comments on the mice in *Visible Mending* are particularly striking because not all characters are mice. There is a Teddy Bear, for example.

Samantha Moore: Every person in the film was asked which pattern they wanted to represent themselves. That was part of my collaborative methodology. I thought they would all choose really different ones, but three of the women chose mice because they had some mice that had been donated to their crafting group. And then Mike chose the Teddy Bear because it was the thing that he’d knitted the most often for his grandchildren, he really liked it, and he thought it looked like him. But then Carmel chose a hat, Lynn chose a jumper—they all chose different things, so that was part of bringing them into the frame. They chose the pattern, and I knitted them, but if they wanted to they could knit their own, and some of them did. So Lorna knitted her tension birds.

Eve Benhamou: To circle back to what you said at the very beginning about the difference between producing and directing in animation: is that something that you would be interested in doing one day, handling the production aspect? Or do you think you will continue mostly directing and animating?

Samantha Moore: I will only direct. I’m happy not to animate. *Visible Mending* was the first film that I didn’t animate. I’ve always worked with assistant animators, but with this I was just directing animators, so I didn’t have a hand on it. I knitted the puppets, but I didn’t make them move. That was fascinating because I realized what a live-action director must feel like if you haven’t given birth to all the actors yourself . . . It forces you to communicate in a different way, and I do think maybe that’s why, in animation, there are more female directors: because in animation we conflate animation and direction as being the same job. Most animation directors are animators, whereas not every live-action director is a camera operator or a cinematographer or a director of photography. Not every live-action director knows how to use a camera, whereas I think that you would be very hard pushed to find an animation director who didn’t know how to animate. Most of them do. So I think that’s really interesting because it puts craft at the heart of it. It means that you kind of need to prove yourself.

In animation, women are as well represented as animators, but they’re not well represented as directors. They’re just not. The [Women in Animation](#) statistics will be able to give you more figures on that, and they would be a little bit out of date. I think they’re a super interesting place to look at, because if you look at the number of directors overall compared to male directors versus female, it was always like 90/10 or 93% versus 7%. It’s ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. I do think that comes down to a subtle, passive form of sexism, which is: “I can’t quite see you in the role, you know. I can’t quite see you being director. I don’t really see you as having the authority. I don’t really see you as having the gravitas.” And it does come back down to the beard and the gray hair thing—one of them you can just choose to do at any stage in your life.

I don’t have problems with that anymore because I’m older. But I absolutely did. I feel like independent animation was somewhere I could go and hide because I didn’t need to come up against people’s expectations—because I was the driver—so I could continue to make the films that interest me without having to deal with the bullshit. I haven’t got time for that, you know. If I want to direct a film, I don’t have time to convince you; I just want to direct a film. So I’m just going to do it. And then people are

like: “You’ve made a few films!” Yeah, but I had to make them below the radar in order to make sure that I didn’t get derailed by you coming in and kind of giving me your weird expectations: “Oh, it just didn’t really seem quite right, you know. Seemed a bit niche, you know.”

Eve Benhamou: It seems to tie back to what you were saying about the impact of #MeToo today, seven years on, because you were describing how you and your colleagues are making sure to avoid certain people and choose the people you work with. And now you’re saying, “I work in independent animation because I know I’m going to be the drive.” It feels like, instead of having changes in terms of structures, policies or peoples’ behaviours, women are the ones who have to find strategies or have to be proactive to avoid finding themselves in a critical situation. It still feels that it falls on women, if I understand correctly.

Samantha Moore: You do understand. I think that’s exactly true. I’ve been congratulated so many times on how creative I am at finding funding in a sort of slightly annoyed way. I had a male director the other day telling me: “I was talking to someone about you and we were saying how amazing you are finding funding.” And he said it like, “How do you find all this funding? How are you constantly being funded?” For God’s sake, I put so much energy into it and I never go to the obvious places because I know I’m wasting my time there, so I’m constantly trying to find a backdoor hack—how to present my work in a way that will fulfill this criteria, constantly trying to squeeze in the gaps. It’s like water: you just have to find the chink in the armour. I think that there is energy, emotional labour found in doing that, in just not being able to say “Oh, well, I know that if I go to the BFI they’ll automatically give me money.” I think that it’s true for lots of independent filmmakers. That’s the reason why there are lots of independent directors who don’t make work. Not because they don’t want to but because there’s no money. This is a very negative environment for finding funding at the moment.

Eve Benhamou: You’ve done a few films working with the [Wellcome Trust](#) and focusing on science, synesthesia, etc. If you think about the content of your films, do you feel that some were slightly easier to pitch or to fund? Or was it difficult, regardless of the content?

Samantha Moore: I don’t know. For every time you pitch something, or for every time you go for funding, there are at least three or four other ones that you didn’t get. So, even though I’ve had funding from Wellcome Trust five times, I think I’ve had ten or twelve rejections—recent ones. There’s that kind of veneer of successful funding bids. From the outside, it always looks inevitable: “She got funding, and then she got that funding.” No, I’ve got loads of projects on the go. At any one time, I’ve got like three film ideas that I can pitch for different situations. At the moment, I’ve got one that nobody’s interested in. This is about a female botanical illustrator from the seventeenth century, and she didn’t start her career until she was seventy-two. Now her work is in the British Museum, and it is beautiful, I’d love to make a film about her. No one’s interested. So that’s just on the back burner. You hear of anything, let me know.

But for other things like *Visible Mending*, people notice the BAFTA nomination and the *New York Times* article and suddenly, they are really interested and ask: “Do you have anything else?” Yeah, absolutely! I think there’s a sleight of hand that goes on with that stuff. Nothing is easy to get funded. But some things are definitely harder. If I go to the BFI, they will support animation but only fiction; they will support documentary but not animated documentaries. So where do I fit? I have got money from BFI, and I’m really grateful. But I kind of had to constantly change the pitch slightly, just inch it to fit because it’s not naturally going to fit in.

Eve Benhamou: Do you already see the impact of the BAFTA nomination? Do you think that it is going to open more doors for you and your collaborators?

Samantha Moore: Yeah, I think that stuff does help. But interestingly, I think that [The New York Times](#) really helped even more, in fact, than the BAFTA. I mean, I’m very grateful for the BAFTA nomination; I would very much like to win it. I’m sure that helps. It’s interesting, the “gravitas” element: getting my PhD was really helpful in some ways. They’re external markers: a BAFTA, a PhD, *The New York Times*—because people recognize them. Whereas my internal markers are: this is a good film or that was a bad film—I didn’t do what I wanted, and although it looks okay, that didn’t manage to do what I needed it to do. As an artist, you have to keep your [own] compass, the external stuff is just external. It’s helpful, but it’s not meaningful in the way that other people find it meaningful. I think my internal compass is: am I making good work? No, why not? That’s it, you know.

Eve Benhamou: You said you’re a feminist. To conclude the interview, could you elaborate a little about that in relation to what it means to you as a person, as an artist, and in your field as well?

Samatha Moore: I think that I was brought up to be a feminist. I do think a feminist is someone who believes in equality between all the genders; that’s why I say you’d have to be an idiot not to be a feminist. Do you believe in inequality? It’s like: are you a racist? No, okay. Well, you know, you don’t need to explain that you’re not a racist. So yeah, I’m a feminist. My mom gave me [The Female Eunuch](#) [1970] by Germaine Greer to read when I was thirteen, and that was a real eye opener. I have sons, and I brought them up to understand feminism, and to be feminists.

For me, I think it means constantly checking, you know, checking myself because I believe that whilst I’m a feminist, I’m also quite sexist, because I think that everybody is. I think that everybody is a bit sexist, a bit racist, a bit homophobic, because we live in a society, a culture that is a bit sexist, homophobic and racist. When we think of a surgeon, we quite often think of a man before we think of a woman; that makes us a bit sexist. I think in order to change that—You know, there’s that stupid thing about wokeness. It’s not about that. It’s just making sure that we’re as inclusive as possible, so the best people can get the jobs, the best people can be in the roles, the best people can be in charge, for example. It’s not to say that women are better or should be more in charge. Clearly, we’ve had some terrible incompetent women. But it’s a good sign, I think, when incompetent, mediocre women rise to positions of leadership because you know that we’re getting a little bit less sexist when that happens. You know, incompetent, mediocre women are just as likely to screw things up as incompetent, mediocre men. Hooray!

For me, being a feminist is just the same as breathing, and I think that we should all aspire to have

equality, but also not become complacent about it. Calling yourself a feminist sounds like the end of the sentence, but it's not. It's a constant journey of you being careful . . . You know, I know plenty of sexist men who claim to be feminist. In fact, it's really important that you're constantly evaluating: Am I being fair here? Am I being thoughtful? It comes back to subconscious bias.

I used to talk to students about this before the John Lasseter thing came out. [*After #Me Too, John Lasseter was accused of sexual misconduct towards employees at Pixar. He was [replaced as Chief Creative Officer](#) of Disney Animation in 2018 by Jennifer Lee.*] I would show them a slide of John Lasseter with one of his storyboard artists. John Lasseter famously always wore Hawaiian shirts, and it was him next to this guy, who was like ten-fifteen years younger than him—also a big white guy. He was a similar size, the same color; he also had big glasses, and was even wearing a brightly patterned shirt. And I was saying to the students: “What do you notice about this picture?” Similarly, I would show them websites from commercial studios, the webpage “About our directors” and ask them: “What do you notice”? Every single one of them is a man, you know, and this guy that John Lasseter has chosen looks exactly like him. He's not thinking, he's not reflecting: “Oh, shit. Yeah, maybe I shouldn't just give a chance to people who look just like me because I feel more comfortable. Maybe I should think less about my comfort and more about, you know, equality, equity of experience, of opportunity.”

I think it's a constant process. I don't think it's a final—it's not like a label you can stick on your forehead and say, “Feminist,” done! You know, I think it's just a constant process.

Eve Benhamou: Thank you so much for your time.

date créée
05/10/2024

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