

**Ruth Hayes**  
**Interviewed by Joli Sandoz**  
**The Evergreen State College oral history project**  
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**FINAL**

**Sandoz:** This is Joli Sandoz and I'm here at Evergreen with Ruth Hayes. Ruth, if you'd say your name, and then whatever you want to say about your childhood, if that's where you'd like to start.

**Hayes:** My name is Ruth Hayes. I was writing these notes out this morning, thinking about some major influences on growing up. The outdoors was always really big. All the way up till I went to college, we lived in a rural, semi-rural ex-suburbs, I guess. Not farms, but out there, first in Connecticut, and then in the Bay Area in California.

My father was a pilot for Pan American, so we did a lot of traveling. I remember going to England and France when I was in the first grade, and looking at the Crown Jewels, and skinning my knee in the Kensington Park playground in London, and stuff like that. [laughing] Eating chocolate croissants and hot chocolate in the morning in Paris for breakfast. So, travel was really big.

I have one sister, older sister, Yvonne. She's about two and a half years older than me. I'd say another big influence is that my parents were both fairly liberal Republicans. They were Eisenhower Republicans—and through the '60s, '70s, and '80s, I don't think that they moved left, but everything else moved right, so they became more and more liberal-sounding. My dad joined the Peace and Freedom Party and voted for Dr. Spock. [laughing] My mother joined the Green Party. She became a Democrat, and then she joined the Green Party. They wrote letters to the editor, and they've always been civic-minded and engaged. They always were that.

My sister is very political. She joined the Socialist Workers Party when she was young—and actually met Sarah Ryan through that work, which Sarah and I figured out decades later—and then left, but she's very political. She's done a lot of work in Cuba and is fluent in Spanish and is really super-engaged that way.

That's a big orientation, and then the other thing is that I grew up in relative privilege, upper-middle class. Really comfortable. I went to a private girls' school in high school, which was really small, and that was great. I hated the public school. I went to the public high school for a year and the social scene there was too . . . ugh. I went to Crystal Springs School for Girls, and we had a number of young feminist teachers. That was exciting, in the early '70s.

I guess the other influence that's related to that in my high school years and junior high school years was being part of—I was raised Episcopalian, so I was part of a youth group, and we were involved in the church-based antiwar activities that were happening in the late '60s and early '70s. That also was a big influence.

In my senior year of high school, I was applying to colleges, and we were all pushed toward Ivy League schools, so I applied to Harvard Radcliffe because my dad had gone to Harvard, and Mom had taken me on a trip of East Coast colleges, and I really liked Radcliffe. I thought it was a really great place, so I applied there.

That was before I did my high school senior year project, where I spent a month in San Francisco working with Ruth Asawa<sup>1</sup>, who's an artist, a sculptor, and had done some public artworks, and also was one of the people who initiated the . . . what was it called? . . . neighborhood arts? An artist-in-the-schools program: Neighborhood Arts Council, based in the Mission District and Noe Valley.

That month, I lived with a friend of the family who also lived in Noe Valley, and then I'd go to Mission High School every day to work with Ruth. She was doing art projects with kids. That was an eye-opener, because that school had the most people of color I'd ever seen in one place. I remember very clearly one day, this Black kid came up to me and said, "What are you doing here, Hitler's child?" Oh, wow. None of that stuff had ever—I never felt targeted that way. I had never felt so conscious about being a white girl. Being associated with Hitler was disturbing and confusing. I didn't know how to respond.

**Sandoz:** This was in the mid-'70s?

**Hayes:** This was 1973. I graduated from high school in '73, so it was January '73. But it was really fun being in San Francisco. It was really great being in San Francisco for a few weeks and walking to school every day from the place I was staying and getting to know this little neighborhood. It was really lovely.

Those are major influences, and then I went away to college. I had applied, thinking I was going to major in anthropology and maybe German, because I'd studied German from the sixth grade onwards. But that work with Ruth Asawa made me realize, no, I want to be in the arts.

**Sandoz:** How did you find Asawa? Had you seen her work?

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Asawa, 1926-2013. Asawa helped co-found the Alvarado Arts Workshop for school children in 1968. In the early 1970s, this became the model for the Art Commission's CETA/Neighborhood Arts Program using money from the federal funding program, the [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act](#) (CETA), which became a nationally replicated program [employing artists](#) of all disciplines to do public service work for the city. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth\\_Asawa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth_Asawa))

**Hayes:** The friend of the family that I was staying with was a friend of hers, and she suggested it. Because I was nosing around for some kind of arts-related thing to do that month. She was an artist herself, so in some conversation with my mother, she suggested it, and I thought, yeah, that would be great because I really wanted to also get out of the house, just go somewhere else. [laughter]

She was lovely. I think she died three or four years ago. I ran into her again. When I was teaching at the California State Summer School for the Arts, she came and did an artist-in-residence presentation, so I was happy to reintroduce myself to her. She remembered me, so I was happy about that, too. She was really great.

**Sandoz:** Do you think that your experiences in Europe were an influence on your move toward art?

**Hayes:** Yes, however my father and mother's interests in the arts has always been an influence. Dad was a cartoonist when he was in college and had done a lot of drawing. He loved pictures and looking at things. We had a lot of art books in the house. Mom was also very creative, and crafty. She took a class in bookbinding when she was younger, she sewed, and when my sister and I were little, she made puppets and a puppet theater proscenium for us to play with. Also, when we were still living in Connecticut, we'd go into Manhattan to visit my father's aunt and see the sights. I remember going to museums and the ballet when I was very young.

We travelled in Europe a few times and visited art museums in addition to major landmarks. I remember that on a trip to Spain with my family in 1971, we went to the Prado. I loved looking at the Goyas and Velasquezes especially. That was the same year that I took an art appreciation class at my high school, so those two things did influence me and deepen my interest in visual arts.

What stuck with me from the earlier trips were the landmarks, like the Tower of London and the Eiffel Tower, and I remember the food. And the travel. In those days, we had to dress up to get on the airplane. [laughter]

**Sandoz:** What about Radcliffe? You and I have talked about the fact that I was at Harvard just a little bit later than you, working, not going to school there. What influenced your work at Radcliffe and Harvard? What was it like then?

**Hayes:** Mine was the last year where it wasn't equal access admissions. My first year there, the male-female ratio was four to one. Depending on where you lived—I chose to live up at Radcliffe at North House—that was closer to one to one, but that meant if you lived down in Harvard Yard, it was eight or seven to one. Because I'd gone to a girls' school, I was like, no way am I going to live in a place where the women are so outnumbered. My freshman year I lived in a co-ed dorm, co-ed by room, so I was living

across the hall from guys and down the hall from guys. But it was still weird because of the overall gender imbalance.

But I remember hanging out with these guys, and these were sophomore men mostly. I remember one day one of them barging happily into the room to talk to his buddies. “Hey, let’s all go over to Pine Manor and pick up some chicks.” I’m sitting there going “Whoa! What am I? Chopped liver?” It was so weird, and he did it completely unconsciously. It was this really weird situation.

**Sandoz:** He knew you.

**Hayes:** He did, but still. It was a mixed bag. I was very shy, and I felt like I didn’t have the requisite social skills necessarily, but it was a really interesting environment. I learned a lot by being around all these guys and the other women in the dorm and watching those interactions and finding out who was sleeping with whom and all this kind of stuff. [laughing] I was like, oh, that’s how that works.

There was a lot of drugs. People were tripping and smoking pot regularly. The other part of it that was really fun was that there was this one guy who was a senior who lived in the dorm, Charlie Garlow<sup>2</sup>, and he had started an organization called Harvard Ecology Action. Every week, he would rent a truck and hire a couple of us to go around campus and pick up all the paper. In separate batches, we picked up all the computer paper, which in those days was huge, and all the newspaper, and all of the bond. We kept it segregated and then drove it out to the recycle place in Roxbury and weighed in, and we’d get paid. I was getting paid 10 bucks an hour in 1974 to do that work. It was great. It was just once a week, and you worked super hard all day long. At the end of the day, you were exhausted and sweaty and dirty, but then he’d pay us in cash. That was also really great because it was an early insight into that kind of entrepreneurial—how you just figure out how to do things.

The other thing that was really important my first year there I had signed up for a Freshman Seminar with an artist, Janet Abramowicz<sup>3</sup>. It was printmaking, and the Freshman Seminars were structured so there would be 12 students, and we met in the basement of someplace in the Radcliffe Quad—I can’t remember the name of the building—where there was a printmaking studio, and she taught us woodcutting and etching. We didn’t do any lithography, but she’d teach us these printmaking techniques, and talk to us about art, and then trot us over to the Fogg Art Museum to the print room and look at Rembrandt etchings. We had to wear gloves, but there was no glass between you and the artwork, and it was, Oh!

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<sup>2</sup> Charlie Garlow is now an organizer and advocate for clean energy in Rehoboth Beach, DE.

<sup>3</sup> American artist Janet Abramowicz (1930-2020) taught in the Department of Fine Arts at Harvard from 1971-1991.

The Fogg is a gorgeous museum. I haven't been there in a long time. So, things like that. I would go to the Fogg regularly just to stand in front of this one really beautiful Medieval sculpture of the Virgin. She's really tall and long and thin. I'd just look at her. It was really great. That stuff was really great.

I didn't keep up with Abramowicz. I talked to her once a few years after I graduated and showed her my flipbooks. She was one of the few people who actually said something substantive about them. She'd spent a lot of time in Japan, and she said, "The Japanese understand that art doesn't have to be big to be important," because I was doing these tiny little things. I was like, yeah, you can do small work and it can be valuable.

**Sandoz:** What moved you through college forward in terms of art and animation in particular? How did you get to animation?

**Hayes:** The art department, I think, is still called Visual and Environmental Studies. You don't major in art. You concentrate in Visual and Environmental Studies. In those days, you had to apply to get in. There were very few majors at Harvard that were practical—practice-based majors. For example, the joke among music students was the student who'd gone to his professor to ask him what recording of some sonata was the best one to listen to. The professor said, "Oh, I don't know, I've only read that one." [laughing] It's really removed.

I had to apply, and I got in. That was good. I took some drawing classes and stuff, and then part of the requirements for the major was that you take a photo or film class. Because I was doing drawing and printmaking based on what I'd gotten from Janet, I thought, I really want to do drawing and printmaking. I was taking the foundational drawing class and did some more printmaking on my own.

But I thought, I have to do this film or photo class. If I take animation, I won't have to deal with camera equipment as much. I won't have to deal with the technology. [laughter] Famous last words. That's what got me into animation, and then the thing is, once you see your drawings move, there's almost no turning back. I've been drawing my whole life. I've been drawing since I was—I can't remember when I started. But to realize that, oh, these things can move.

I took the animation class, and then I did an independent study. I can't remember what we called it, but basically, it was like a contract. I took a year off between my sophomore and junior year. My junior year, I did the independent study in animation and made my first film that was released<sup>4</sup>. My senior year, I did a thesis in animation<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> *Eggs*, 1977, 3 min, 16mm, <https://vimeo.com/26603149>

<sup>5</sup> *Body Sketches*, 1978, 6 min, 16mm, <https://vimeo.com/26775051>

I had really good teachers. It was a really tiny part of the department; when I graduated, there was only one other person graduating with a thesis in animation. The animation class that I took when I was a sophomore was, I don't know, eight or nine people.

**Sandoz:** You were the people who had foresight. [laughing]

**Hayes:** And also, the thing that was important about that was that my teachers were part of this movement of independent animators that had started up in the late '60s.

My thesis advisor, George Griffin, was based in New York and he would be coming up to Cambridge every week to teach. Through him, I got to know the work of all these different people. One of my first animation teachers, Mary Beams, also was involved, and knew all these different people. They would do collaborative works together, and they would hang out. I wasn't ever able to hang out with them, but I got to know people through them. The Boston area had a very vibrant film and animation scene, and a lot of opportunities to see interesting independent and foreign film and animation.

It was very experimental, and the women animators working at that time were very much expressing feminist concerns in their work, or just personal concerns in their work. It all blended together. It made sense.

**Sandoz:** I'm tempted to say you had great teachers and now you're a good teacher, so how did that happen? But that's too much time at once. I know you did some things before you started teaching.

**Hayes:** Yeah.

**Sandoz:** Are there things you want to say about that period before we talk about teaching at Evergreen?

**Hayes:** Yeah. I graduated in '78. I came back west to my parents' place. I felt like the Bay Area was a little too established or too well known or something. I didn't want to hang out there, and I also had my parents saying things like, "Oh, you should talk to So-and-So and see if they have ideas for a job." I didn't want to go that route.

Meantime, some very good friends of mine were moving to Seattle, this couple. He was going to the UW to get his PhD in zoology, and she was an artist. They got to Seattle and looked around, so I was hearing from her about what the art scene was like in Seattle, and it sounded really great.

I know the economy in the '70s was not that great, but from the arts point of view, things looked really good, because there was an idea that government funding for the arts was a good thing, and that it was good for communities to have a vibrant art culture. In Seattle in the late '70s, there was this thing "The last person to leave Seattle, turn out the lights," so there was a lot of vacant spaces in Seattle in the late '70s. When I got there, there were artists everywhere, all over Belltown. They had

these little storefronts, basically spaces that had been abandoned by everybody else. And people were starting arts organizations, really grassroots arts organizations, so it was a really exciting time.

The other part of it was that during the Nixon administration, the federal government had started the CETA program, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. When Jimmy Carter became President, Joan Mondale talked with whomever it was that she needed to talk to—she was a big arts supporter—and talked them into expanding that program to include artists.

There was a very vibrant Artist-in-the-City program going on in Seattle, and it was run out of the Seattle Arts Commission. Barbara Thomas, whose artwork is that little metal house structure that's out in Evergreen's Red Square, was the staff person who was managing it. I've known Barbara for years. That was really exciting, so I moved to Seattle, and I started to apply for a CETA Artist-in-the-City job. I think I probably would have gotten it, but Reagan was elected, and he canceled the whole program, and it was gone.

There I was, and there was still this energy going on. I got involved with the Fremont Arts Council and did some work with them, and then later I got this job at the Real Comet Press. Meantime, I had been trying to distribute the films that I'd made when I was in college and had not been very successful at that. They'd been through festivals, and they'd gotten some screening, but I wasn't getting income from them.

I thought, I'll borrow George Griffin's idea of publishing flipbooks, because that was what he was doing. I took artwork from my first two films and made flipbooks out of them. Then I started making more flipbooks and I started making money, making enough to pay basic expenses. I wasn't making a lot.

That also got me into working with optical toys, like zoetropes and things like that that were really accessible, didn't involve much equipment, and were pretty immediate, and are also really useful in teaching because of those things.

**Sandoz:** It sounds perfect, knocking around, being entrepreneurial, learning different techniques. It sounds like the perfect preparation for teaching.

**Hayes:** It was great. Obviously, there were struggles. I was waitressing, too. When I got the job at Real Comet, I didn't have to waitress anymore, so that was nice. Everybody that I knew was pretty much scraping together income from different sources.

I got into doing animation workshops in the public schools. I started working with teachers. I actually started working with science teachers in the public schools in Seattle. I worked with this—I can't remember her name—junior high school science teacher and I did two artist residencies with her, which were probably two weeks each. I had the students making animation.

Then I worked with another middle school teacher who was an ESL teacher, and she had kids from all over the place. We had the kids making—we had one film called *Uses of Horses*, and every kid animated a little sequence showing what horses did in their home culture. There were horses plowing a field, there were horses pulling a hearse, there were horses doing all of these different things. That was really fun.

Stuff like that introduced me to a lot of different ways of thinking about communicating with these kids, and also not prejudging them, not making the assumption, for example, that these Somali girls who looked very demure and had their heads covered, were sweet and well behaved because they weren't. [laughter] That was a good experience.

I was also starting to look around for more animation opportunities. I heard about this animation screening at Foster White Gallery. It was works by Jules Engel, who had started the Department in Experimental Animation at CalArts, so I went to that. I'd never seen any of his films before. I took one of my flipbooks and I went up to him afterwards and showed him my flipbook, and told him that I was an animator, too. He shook his finger at me, and he said, "You must go to graduate school. You do it now while you're young." "Yes, sir." He died when he was in his nineties, so he was in his seventies when I met him. I also met Marge Brown at that screening.

I applied to CalArts and got in. I went there in 1989. I completely uprooted myself to go there. I had to get rid of almost everything, and all I was left with was my 1970 Datsun 510 and stuff, including my drawing table. I did maintain my teaching contacts so I could come back up in the spring to do Artist in Residency work in the schools and I did some Centrum stuff.

Because of being at CalArts, I eventually got work in the California State Summer School for the Arts, which was in residence at CalArts in the summertime. I think I did that for seven or eight years. That's a high school program, but the students earn college credits. It's like a Running Start for artists. That was really great. The Animation Department of the Summer School, I think we'd have 50 students, and then there would be three faculty and three TAs. It was a good ratio.

The kids were great. They'd come from all over the state. The kids coming from certain places were pretty well heeled, and then other kids who were coming from turkey farms out in the Valley somewhere. They were the only kid in their legislative district or their school district who was interested in art. They felt weird until they got there, and then suddenly, they were like "Oh, wow! I'm not weird anymore!" There were also a lot of students coming from lower-income and underserved communities in Oakland, L.A., etc.. It was a very diverse group.

**Sandoz:** I bet it was great for you, too. Everybody was interested in animation.



**Hayes:** Yeah, it was really fun, and we did some really fun projects. We'd take them on fieldtrips to the zoo and give them a really substantial drawing assignment: "Go draw three pages of primates." "Go draw 14 reptiles." All that kind of stuff.

We would go to the Getty or the LA County Museum of Art. LA is so amazing culturally. There's so much going on there, that was really fun.

The students did really fabulous work, and a couple of them became very well-known animators in their own right. That's also been satisfying, too, to hear from them now and then.

**Sandoz:** Was there a turning point, Ruth, where you said, I really need to be teaching fulltime?

**Hayes:** Oh, yeah. I knew, I think, toward the end of grad school. And I kind of had my eye on Evergreen, partly because I knew Marge, but also because I knew Caryn Cline and Caryn got her job here in 1990, I think. Her descriptions of the pedagogy and the ethics and everything really intrigued me. I knew I didn't want to stay in Los Angeles, and I knew I had to have a fulltime job because I was running on empty at that point, and I was tired of being a poor artist, scraping by. Fortunately, I had gotten a fellowship in grad school, so I didn't have much debt when I got out of graduate school. That was easy to pay that off.

So, I had my eye on Evergreen. I had this interesting conversation with one of my teachers at CalArts. He asked me what I was thinking about doing and I said, "I'm thinking about teaching, and I'm looking at trying to get a job at Evergreen. It's a public college in Washington State." He's like "The problem with public colleges is that you don't have much choice about the students that you get to teach."

His attitude was that the students at the private colleges were better educated so they were easier to teach. I thought, well, that is a really weird attitude. CalArts is private and it didn't seem to me that the fairly well-heeled, for the most part, students there were all that much better educated.

[laughing]

**Sandoz:** Did you have the opportunity to visit Evergreen before you actually applied?

**Hayes:** Yeah, in the '80s, I was invited to come down and show my films. I can't remember who invited me. I think it might have been Barbara Hammer. Barbara was here for a couple years. I showed my films. I also taught as an adjunct for two quarters before applying. I stepped in to teach Marge Brown's EWS animation class in winter and spring 1994 when she took a leave to teach a quarter at Cal Arts.

Also, another important thing that I was doing in Seattle in the mid-'80s was that I was involved in a collective of women pulling together a festival of films by women directors. It was called Cinematrix. We got together and we formed a study group, so we were reading all of this very recent feminist film theory, educating ourselves, and then looking at films. We were getting films from Women Make

Movies (a distributor back East) and other places because in those days, not much was on video. It was all on film. Some of it was on video. But we were looking at things and talking about them, and then programming it.

I got to know Sally Cloninger through that because we invited her to screen films at one of the festivals. I also had gotten to know Caryn a little bit better. She called me up one day and said, “You should invite Ruby Rich—B. Ruby Rich, the feminist film theorist—to come talk at the festival.” “Oh, okay, sounds good.” Ruby had done a lot of work around Latin American women filmmakers. That was also one of my interests. I was taking Spanish, and I was going to film screenings of Latin American work.

I had met Sally through the Women Directors Festival, so it might have been that Sally invited me. I can’t remember. I think it was in 1986 when I came down. I heard a little bit about Evergreen, but I really didn’t know that much. But what I did know—what was important to me—was about the interdisciplinary teaching. That, from my point of view as an animation person, was perfect because animation, I think, is the most interdisciplinary art form, and the media arts are highly interdisciplinary in so many ways, not the least of which is that you have to be saying something, so you have to know something about what it is that you’re making media about. You have to educate yourself. You have to do the research. You have to talk to people. You have to find things out.

But animation draws on all of the arts, so it just seemed perfect. It seemed like a perfect fit. That was one of the things in the California State Summer School of Arts that we were always emphasizing to students. They all wanted to be animators, they all wanted to work at Disney. They all wanted to go straight to some animation school and just learn animation. We were always pushing them, “No, you have to get an education. You have to learn to read. You have to learn to write. You have to learn about the world. You have to be able to say something.” Really pushing them into the liberal arts because that’s just really important.

**Sandoz:** Yeah. A lot of what you said resonates because I know of your work here, and I’ve worked with you here at Evergreen. When you first came, I think you taught with Sally.

**Hayes:** Yeah.

**Sandoz:** Was it what you expected? What was the campus like then?

**Hayes:** Oh, god. It was terrifying. And it was also really fun. Sally was really a great mentor for learning the ropes and understanding what it was possible to do. She’s very playful. Her line was, “If it isn’t fun, it’s not worth doing,” so it was very playful.

My first lecture we collaborated on, and it was a Dada performance. She and I dressed up like Dada Puppen. Hannah Höch, the Berlin Dada artist, had made these little puppets—they were called

Dada Puppen—so we dressed ourselves to look like these puppets. We had our TAs roll us in on dollies. It was in the Recital Hall. We had megaphones and we did a chance lecture, so we had students draw topics out of a hat and we'd have to speak extemporaneously about whatever the topic was. Then we would show films. There were actual 16mm films from the library.

It was really fun. It was hilarious. We have some really great photos of it. There's actually a videotape of it somewhere. That set a tone for, okay, I can do whatever—and I don't think I've done anything as radical as that since. [laughing] That was a high bar.

The other thing that Sally taught me was about collaborating with staff and negotiating. Sally is an amazingly astute political person, and she can talk to people and bring them around to her point of view really skillfully, and not in an intrusive, browbeating way. And she's very persistent. That told me that it was okay for me to open my mouth, it was okay to say stuff. I really took it on faith that we're all equal here. Just because I was not converted or tenured didn't mean that I should keep my mouth shut.

Then watching the dynamics in our little Moving Image Group, the other media faculty and the media staff, and figuring out how to work with people was a learning curve, but it was also really interesting. The part that was really terrifying was working with the students. I think students have changed over the last 24 years or so, because the first batch of students—maybe they were challenging me because I was new, and there were mistakes that I made in seminar, like being too controlling and stuff like that. And also there would be students who were just downright nasty and snide.

Also, because we had this very focused idea about what it means to be teaching media at Evergreen—it's experimental, it's oppositional, we're challenging the hegemonic ways of making media and mainstream culture. It's a heavy non-fiction focus.

It seems like then we were getting a lot more students who wanted to be David Lynch or Steven Spielberg or George Lucas. Any of the big names, and they would come in thinking they knew a lot about film, and they would be resentful—it seemed like they would be resentful of the way that we were teaching. I also think that there was a lot of sexism involved in that because it has been an entirely female media faculty.

**Sandoz:** At Evergreen?

**Hayes:** At Evergreen. There's always been a feminist point of view in it. It's always been oppositional, and contesting dominant forms.

That first year was hugely stressful. It was exhausting. I'd get home and melt for the weekend. [laughing] Then I would spend two days writing up the lecture for the next class—by figuring out what I was teaching next and trying to figure things out.

Evergreen is not an open book. It's a really tricky place to learn.

**Sandoz:** A tricky place to learn how to teach, and also just to learn everything.

**Hayes:** Yeah, everything. To be.

**Sandoz:** I know that you've written and published about interdisciplinary teaching. Are there things you'd like to say about what interdisciplinary teaching has been for you as an artist?

**Hayes:** Yeah. In the animation community, when people say "interdisciplinary," they mean combining ceramics and animation. It's all within the visual arts, or it's all within—it's like animation and live action, or animation and documentary. But broadly interdisciplinary teaching, where you're working with a scientist, or a humanities scholar, is a whole other ball of wax. I felt like every time I've taught with somebody that far outside of my field, I felt like I'd been through another year of graduate school.

Because if you're doing it right—and it's hard to do it right because it takes a lot of time to do it right, and it requires a lot of perusing texts and looking at things and thinking about things, and conversations, and figuring out how things work—you learn a lot more than you end up teaching. That's been really gratifying. It's been really interesting. That's what's kept me going. It's really, really interesting.

Then it's always really challenging trying to figure out, how do I fit this idea into teaching these animation concepts that I think are important to teach? Where do they mesh? What's the vocabulary that they're using for this concept that matches a similar concept in animation, but we have a different vocabulary for it? That kind of stuff was really interesting.

Most of that interdisciplinary teaching I did was with scientists. I did a little bit with humanities people. I didn't really do any with social scientists. The closest to the social sciences I got was teaching with Anne Fischel and Suree Towfighnia and Beatriz Flores Gutiérrez, because they were documentarians, and they were doing more community-based work, so there's more social sciences influence there, but it's not really social science.

**Sandoz:** Even though you were teaching with people in other fields, I assume you had freedom to do what you wanted to do with the animation parts.

**Hayes:** Pretty much. The limiting factor was that I was always teaching beginning animation because I was the only animator, so I couldn't teach a class that assumed any prior knowledge of animation. I always had to scaffold it. I had to learn to design assignments so a student could engage at different levels, depending on their expertise, so if there was a student in the program that I'd had previously who'd been through the beginning stuff, they could step in at a different level and do something a little more ambitious.

The freedom issues mainly had to do with that, with the fact that I always felt like I was having to teach the beginning stuff, I couldn't really go very deep. The thing about animation is, because it is so broad—I'm a 2D animator, I do digital and I do analog, I do drawing, I do direct on-film work, and I do a lot of work in [Adobe] AfterEffects. But I have never really been interested in 3D, I've never really been interested in stop-motion puppet animation, or 3D computer animation. That's an area that students are a lot more familiar with, given their exposure to pop culture when they come in. It's too bad that we haven't ever been able to have a second animator who could teach those things. We have a 3D animation lab where students can go do stop motion, and I can teach them the principles, but it wasn't like I could do it very well myself. It was because it wasn't my interest.

That is another limitation. There's that sense of we could be doing so much more if we had this other capacity. But we didn't.

**Sandoz:** And yet, you've told me in the past that your students have gone on to do all kinds of different things after studying animation at Evergreen.

**Hayes:** Yeah. They're not just animators. They're doing a lot of different things. I was pleased to see one of them—she posted pictures of her taking her oath of office. She just got a job in the State Department, and I can't remember exactly what the job is. She started out with doing some animation. She primarily was interested in documentaries. I think she did an internship with John DeGraff. I wasn't clear on it, but I think she went into working with women immigrants. Just all of these things. She lived in the Middle East for a while and now she's back, and she just joined the State Department. Wow! That's really cool!  
[laughter]

**Sandoz:** And other students of yours have gone into broadcasting.

**Hayes:** Yes, they're in animation studios, they're in video game studios, they're teaching, they're independent artists. It's a really wide range of activities. I didn't want to go into all the detail. I could reel off the names, but . . .

**Sandoz:** That's part of the interdisciplinarity, that students are all over the place.

**Hayes:** Yeah.

**Sandoz:** I think the important thing is they're doing, they're out there.

**Hayes:** Yeah, they're out there, they're doing stuff. Also, I think when you learn to animate, you learn to look at things really closely, because it's very granular. You're looking at things frame by frame. You're learning to notice the nuances of a movement, the tiny little changes. Like the differences between how something slows to a stop versus how it speeds up and then stops, the kind of micro-rhythms. Right now

where we're sitting, there are these rhythms of the shadows of the trees on the wall. That's a very distinctive movement. It's very recognizable.

There are things like that, I think, that you learn. You learn that by learning how to draw, too. You really learn how to look at things when you're learning how to draw.

That's the other thing that I wish I'd been able to do more of, but it was hard to teach both drawing and animation. When I taught with Lisa Sweet and Lucia Harrison, students did a lot of drawing, and that felt really great because Lucia or Lisa—depending on who I was teaching with—did the main drawing classes, but then I could do drawing for animation, and teach them these other skills that had to do with thinking about movement, and how you express things moving through space.

I would have liked to do a lot more of that. Unfortunately, that's the other thing that's a limitation at Evergreen; that the four-credit drawing classes all get filled up, with waitlists, so students don't have the opportunity to just learn to draw, and I think everybody should learn to draw. We should be doing drawing across the curriculum, not just writing across the curriculum. If you know how to sketch out an idea, then you've got this really powerful skill. It doesn't have to be photorealist. It doesn't have to be completely naturalistic, but if you can represent an idea visually, that's a really great skill.

**Sandoz:** Students learn not only observation but working with ideas not in a word way, in a writing way.

**Hayes:** Yeah. One of the foci<sup>6</sup> is theory to practice, but I actually think that most students—or many students—go from practice to theory. If you think about it, theory always comes out of practice. Right? It's like "Oh, I poured water. Oh, look." Newton's sitting under a tree and an apple hits his head. That's like practice, right? And then he's like, "Oh." The light goes on. There's a theory behind that.

That's where I think the arts, in particular, can be really powerful. Anything that you do with your hands, or anything that you do with your body—any kind of performance work, or crafting anything, or even just walking out in the woods and looking at leaves and trying to identify what kind of plant—those are all practical experiences that then lead to theory. Because a lot of times, if you talk to students about theory, or if you give them some theoretical writing, they immediately shut down because it's either too dry or it's too difficult.

**Sandoz:** Or too abstract.

**Hayes:** It's too abstract, or they just have this idea that they won't get it, so they don't try. But if they do the thing and then they write about it and describe their experiences, and describe what they think

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<sup>6</sup> Evergreen's Five Foci of Learning as stated on the college website are: 1. Interdisciplinary study 2. Personal engagement in learning 3. Cooperative learning 4. The connection of theoretical perspectives to practice 5. Learning across significant differences.

about it, and why they think whatever they did worked out the way that it did, and then they read somebody else who had done the same, then they're developing theory. That makes more sense to me.

**Sandoz:** Yeah, that makes a lot of sense to me, too, Ruth. You've mentioned several times the focus on documentary. Was that an unusual emphasis for an animator? I assume you mean non-fiction by saying documentary.

**Hayes:** Yeah, non-fiction, animation. This is the thing about the independent animation movement of the late '60s, early '70s, is that there were a lot of artists who were actually doing nonfiction animation, or essayistic animation, not really documentary animation. I think documentary and nonfiction are different things. But the notion of documentary animation or nonfiction animation in the animation studies world has only begun to be written about in the last 20 years, which is really interesting because it's been there for a long time.

There's an animator, Al Jarnow, who did this amazing film called *Celestial Navigation*. He sets up his camera in his studio and does time-lapse photography of the sun coming through the window projecting a rectangle of light on the wall, and then he draws on the wall at a particular time of the day where the rectangle is. He does this for a full year, and then in the middle of the year, in the summertime, he takes his family to Stonehenge, so they're there for Solstice. He leaves the camera in his studio running on an intervalometer while he's gone.

But the whole film is about tracking where we are in the solar system through animation. It's a really beautiful, nonfiction film. That's like a really untraditional use of animation, but he made it in 1981 or '82. My thesis advisor, George Griffin, did a film called *Lineage* that came out in '77 or '78, so he was working on it while he was my teacher. It's autobiographical, and it's about his relationship to his work. So, it's nonfiction. It's essayistic. It's about real-world things, but it's using animated imagery and techniques to represent more abstract ideas. Also, there's a little puppet character that looks like him, so he's representing himself.

The women animators in the '70s were doing all sorts of self-representation. Nonfiction animation is there, it just didn't surface as an acknowledged genre of animation until relatively recently. I think that that comes out of the British animators. I'd have to check on the scholarship on this, but it seems to me that most of that writing about documentary animation originated in Great Britain and it has evolved and spread that way.

**Sandoz:** I know that you've taught some of that here to your students.

**Hayes:** Yeah.

**Sandoz:** Is there something in particular—this is my training in literature, in creative nonfiction in words. I’m thinking about what I teach, and what I hope students will take away from it. What’s the important thing that your students, whether they go into animation or not, can learn from studying those particular approaches, essayistic and documentary?

**Hayes:** One student said it. I was really pleased when she wrote this in her self-eval that what she had learned by doing animation—this was in the class I taught with Alice Nelson, *Arts of Urgency*—and studying film, she “decolonized” her mind.

**Sandoz:** Wow.

**Hayes:** From mainstream media. That’s what I feel is really important, because they gestated in mainstream media. When I was a little kid, we were only allowed to watch television on weekends, and it was black and white. It was not that interesting. But these kids, and more and more so, they’re saturated. We can show them other ways of thinking, through their own creative practice, and applying their own ideas to film, and just screwing around.

Devon Damonte—who teaches the Visual Music class in the summer, who’s an Evergreen grad and an animator, experimental filmmaker—likes to talk about using film in ways that were not recommended by the manufacturer. Can you dismantle the master’s house using the master’s tools? Well, yeah. If you use this hammer to break a wall down, you actually can. If you use the hammer for a different purpose than hammering a nail, there are things that you could do. Metaphorically.

That’s what I hope, and I have seen students do, is they get this idea of, “Oh, I can do this. I don’t have to follow the straight-and-narrow path to becoming a director or an editor or a producer or whatever.”

**Sandoz:** Another advantage of Evergreen. Learning that you don’t have to follow the path.

**Hayes:** You don’t have to follow the path. Right.

**Sandoz:** Were there specific things in that program you taught with Alice—I know you’ve written about that program—that you feel led to the student’s insight that she had decolonized her mind? Were there certain things the two of you did?

**Hayes:** Yeah. In fall quarter, we focused on Third Cinema<sup>7</sup>, introducing them to Third Cinema and really doing some deep film analysis of a couple of really important works and readings. I was talking to them

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<sup>7</sup> **Third Cinema** (Spanish: *Tercer Cine*) is a [Latin American film movement](#) that started in the 1960s–70s which decries [neocolonialism](#), the [capitalist](#) system, and the [Hollywood](#) model of cinema as mere entertainment to make money. The term was coined in the [manifesto](#) *Hacia un tercer cine (Toward a Third Cinema)*, written in the late 1960s by [Argentine](#) filmmakers [Fernando Solanas](#) and [Octavio Getino](#), members of the [Grupo Cine Liberación](#) and



about experimental animation and the connections that I could see between experimental animation and Third Cinema. They were learning animation skills, and they were doing a lot of writing. They did some creative writing.

In the winter, they could make these animated films. I can't really remember how we worked out, but they could choose a subject. This one student is from Minnesota, and she's very concerned about the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline. She made this work about that, but in her self-eval, talked about that this work that we had done in examining these films—and we read a lot of fiction, because Alice's domain is Latin American literature, really talking about the intersections of the personal and the political, especially in Chile and Argentina, places where they lived through totalitarian regimes. There's been a lot of human rights abuses. But there was a stronger word I wanted to use but I can't think of it right now. From a feminist point of view, too, and from a queer point of view.

So, there were these kind of foregrounding—the work that comes out of those experiences that are really far from the mainstream US way of looking. Also, looking at the relationship of the US with Latin America, and talking about that some.

I also brought Lina Aguirre here, who's a poet and an animation scholar who's been very involved with a couple of other Latin American animators in developing a website around Latin American animation, experimental animation<sup>8</sup>. She came to screen animated films and talk to our students. She actually came twice. She came in 2019, but she also was here in 2017.

Just letting them see a lot of work that is not what they're used to seeing and letting them figure it out. What does it mean? When you look at these films from another culture where you either don't know the language, or there is no language—they're not silent, but there's no spoken word—there are all these cultural references that you miss, so you have to sit and figure it out.

It was really fun working with Alice because there were films that I would show that I had seen before and I thought were really wonderful, and Alice could pick out things. "That's what that reference is, there", "Oh, yeah." That happened when I taught with Pat Krafcik, too. I was showing a lot of Russian and Eastern European stuff and it was like, oh, yeah, here are these images and events that reflect actual experiences that people had.

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published in 1969 in the cinema *journal Tricontinental* by the OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America<sup>[1]</sup>). ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third\\_Cinema](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Cinema))

<sup>8</sup> <https://moebiusanimacion.com/>

**Sandoz:** Ruth, we've been talking for an hour. I don't want to go farther than you want to go. I do want to ask if there are things that we haven't covered that are things you had thought you wanted to say that I haven't asked you about?

**Hayes:** Let me see.

**Sandoz:** We can meet again if you'd rather do it that way, too.

**Hayes:** I just want to say that I think the college should really be reviving arts in a really serious way. I know I'm speaking to the choir. But it just seems to me really sad that we've let that area become so diminished [in terms of numbers of faculty]<sup>9</sup>. We have these amazing facilities, and the students love it. They want to be in these art programs. I was checking the enrollment reports for fall quarter the other day and I was like, yeah, all the art programs are pretty much full. Students like to make things. It gives them a sense of agency. They build skills. They learn executive functioning skills.

I guess I would tell you that anecdote, the light bulb that went off one of the years I taught with Anne Fischel. Anne and I taught together twice. We had a student who was very troublesome, and had a number of accommodations, and was disruptive, not a good collaborator, never handed anything in on time. He was really having problems doing the work and succeeding.

We made an appointment with Meredith Inocencio to talk to her about the student, and we went in, and she said, "Well, this student has got OCD and a number of other things going on." I can't remember all of what they were. "That means that the student has problems with executive functioning skills." I had never heard that term before. I said, "What's executive functioning skills?" She explained what executive functioning skills were, and then she said, "Of course, most people don't really have fully developed executive functioning skills until they're 25 or 26 years old."

I thought, oh, my god, I am at Evergreen teaching executive functioning skills. I'm teaching animation as the spoonful of sugar, but I'm really teaching executive functioning skills because here's this project, here's the timeline. You have to have done this by this date so that you can then do this by this date and then do that by that date, and here's the end goal. It's all about plotting out a course of how you make something.

**Sandoz:** Wow!

**Hayes:** Yeah, it totally blew my mind, and it made me much more conscientious about articulating that to students and saying, "This is a process, and you're going to do this, and then this, and then this. There

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<sup>9</sup> When I was hired as continuing faculty in 1997, there were about 25 in the Expressive Arts Planning Unit: about 10 in the Visual Arts, 10 in the Performing Arts and 5 in Media Arts. When I retired in June 2021, there were maybe half that number. Most of the loss has been in the Performing Arts, but by June 2022, there will be only 2 continuing faculty in media, and 5 or 6 in the Visual Arts.

are going to be times when you need to back away and walk off and go do something else, and then you can come back.” But it’s about self-regulating.

**Sandoz:** Yeah.

**Hayes:** If I were advising any new faculty, I would be saying, think about that. Older students I’ve had never had any of those problems. They always got stuff in on time, unless there was a damn good reason not to. They knew how to organize their time. They knew how to track things. I don’t know how I learned that stuff, but I remember screwing up because I didn’t know it. [laughter]

The other thing that’s really great about Evergreen is that this is a place where students can screw up and it’s okay, and it can be a learning experience. You’re not going to get a failing grade.

**Sandoz:** Part of that is because of narrative evals, isn’t it?

**Hayes:** Yeah.

**Sandoz:** We don’t have a competitive approach to learning. One of the things in game design right now is to think of failure as research.

**Hayes:** Yeah.

**Sandoz:** Eric Zimmerman, who’s written quite a bit about game design, that idea comes from him. It’s iteration as research. It’s not something that means you should stop.

**Hayes:** That’s what experimental animation is. I’m doing these experiments now with film and cyanotype. “Oh! I’m going to try this. What will happen if I slice turmeric root up really thinly and put it on cyanotype film and put it in the sun for an hour? Oh, that’s interesting.” [laughing]

**Sandoz:** And it is interesting. I’ve seen a couple examples of what you’ve done.

**Hayes:** I didn’t know it would look like that. Okay, cool. I don’t know what I’m going to do with it yet. I’ll figure it out, if I figure it out, but now I have that knowledge. It’s like I’ll try this, and I’ll see what happens. It’s not a great masterwork of art, but that’s not the point. It’s just an experiment.

**Sandoz:** Exactly. That sounds like a place to stop, at least for today.

**Hayes:** Yeah, that’s good.

**Sandoz:** Ruth, I always appreciate talking to you. Thank you for being willing to let us take up this time so there’s a record of the conversation.

**Hayes:** It’s been a pleasure. I always love talking to you, too.