

Milestone Film & Video presents

*“WONDERFUL. Enormously refreshing...because it’s a constant reminder of all the possibilities inherent in the art of animation. John is genuinely one of a kind!”*

— Roy Disney

*“John Canemaker is a man of many talents. Whether as an artist, an author, a teacher, historian or designer, he is an inspiration to us all. His energy and curiosity have opened up new fields for cartoons and animation in general.”*

— Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston,  
pioneer Disney animators (Pinocchio, Bambi, 101 Dalmations)

# JOHN CANEMAKER

Marching to a Different Toon



*“To express admiration and affection for the multi-talented Mr. John Canemaker is, and must be multi-layered too: he is a writer, artist, historian, teacher, and biographer of the good and great in animation; and he is, surprisingly and uniquely, an animator in his own right.”*

— Chuck Jones

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## THE FILMS

1. CONFESSIONS OF A STARDREAMER (1978. 9 minutes.) By special permission of the Phoenix Learning Group, Inc.
2. BRIDGEHAMPTON (1998. 6:15 minutes.)
3. CONFESSIONS OF A STAND-UP (1993. 9 minutes.)
4. BOTTOM'S DREAM (1983. 6:30 minutes.)
5. THE WIZARD'S SON (1981. 10 minutes.) By special permission of The Phoenix Learning Group, Inc.
6. BEHIND THE SCENES (1992. 1 minute.) By special permission of Learning designs.
7. THE CREATIVE SPIRIT (1992. Approximately. 3 minutes.) By special permission of Alvin H. Perlmutter Inc. and IBM.
8. GAY MEN'S HEALTH CRISIS (1991. 3 spots – 90 seconds each.) By special permission of Gay Men's health Crisis, Inc.
9. LAUGHTER IS GOOD MEDICINE (1981. Approximately. 2 minutes.) By special permission of Billy Budd Films, Inc.
10. BREAK THE SILENCE; KIDS AGAINST CHILD ABUSE (1994. Approximately. 3 minutes.) By special permission of Arnold Shapiro Productions.
11. WHAT DO CHILDREN THINK OF WHEN THEY THINK OF THE BOMB? (1983. Approximately. 2 minutes.) By special permission of Elizabeth Swados and Mary Silverman.
12. SCIENCE EXPERIENCES (1992. Approximately. 30 seconds) SCIENCE EXPERIENCES copyright The McGraw-Hill Companies.
13. THE DNA CONCERTO (1983. Approximately. 90 seconds.) 3-2-1 CONTACT excerpt provided by Sesame Workshop.

JOHN CANEMAKER, a key figure in the American independent animation movement, began making films in 1973. His distinctive style emphasizes emotion, personality, and dynamic visual expression. Beginning with *THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARP* (1982), he has communicated sensitive themes through animation.

“No subject matter is off-limits or deemed ‘too difficult’,” wrote Museum of Modern Art film curator Jytte Jensen. “[Canemaker] has extended the vocabulary of the art form way beyond the ‘safe’ cartoon image. Canemaker is an extraordinarily skillful artist whose distinctive style is nevertheless ultimately defined by the subject matter. Canemaker addresses the core of his subject with compassion and fearlessness—the painterly qualities and the accomplished, energetic line movement expressing his artistic vision.”

His films are part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Canemaker’s painterly visions, such as *BOTTOM’S DREAM* (1983) and *BRIDGEHAMPTON* (1998), become a meditation on the medium’s visual possibilities.

As a documentary filmmaker and a writer for The New York Times among other periodicals, Canemaker has known many key figures in animation, from pioneer artists of the 'Golden Age' of cartoons to today's leading computer talents. He is the author of eight acclaimed books on animation history. A full professor and the director of the animation program at New York University Tisch School of the Arts, he inspires new generations through teaching and lectures around the world. — MoMA program notes by Joseph Kennedy

## FILM RETROSPECTIVES

JOHN CANEMAKER: MARCHING TO A DIFFERENT TOON: ANIMATED FILMS 1978–1998. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Friday, 6 November 1998.

THE ANIMATED FILMS OF JOHN CANEMAKER – The American Film Institute, Los Angeles, 24 January, 1987.

FILMS OF JOHN CANEMAKER – Lucca 20, Twentieth Annual Animation/Comic Book — Festival – Lucca, Italy, 26 October – 2 November 1986.

AN EVENING WITH JOHN CANEMAKER – “Cineprobe” – Museum of Modern Art, New York, November 5, 1984.

## JOHN CANEMAKER — Selected Filmography

CONFESSIONS OF MY FATHER. (work-in-progress)

BRIDGEHAMPTON (1998). A lyrical and personal study of Canemaker's Long Island garden through the seasons, based on his paintings, to an original jazz score by Fred Hersch. Hamptons International Film Festival, 1998; International Animation Festival, Baden, Switzerland, 31 Aug - 5 Sept. 1999; 1<sup>st</sup> prize: Soundtrack-ASIFA East Festival.

see also: “Jazztoons: A treat for all ages” by Ellen Keiser. The Southampton [L.I.] Press, 22 October 1998; “BRIDGEHAMPTON - Colorful Art Potpourri in Cinematic Animation” by Ellen Keiser. *The Southampton Press*, 15 October 1998; “An Animated Island,” by Mike Lyons. *Nightlife* magazine, September 1998.

CONFESSIONS OF A STAND-UP (1993). In this animated exploration of life in show business, a comedian (Dennis Blair) literally takes off the clown's mask to deconstruct the comic persona. Rocky Mountain Emmy Award-winner; Chris Award (43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Columbus International Film & Video Festival); Broadcast Education Association Award.

BOTTOM'S DREAM (1983). A multiplicity of animation techniques enlivens this vision of the struggle between Shakespeare's hapless buffoon and the forces of enchantment, set to the Scherzo from A Midsummer Night's Dream by Felix Mendelssohn.

“An astonishing leap of talent and imagination. . . Canemaker shows that he is not only a first-rate artist, but a sensitive reader of our premiere poet.” Donald Spoto, *“The World According to Canemaker”*.

*Animation Newsletter* vol. III #2, June 1984, film review by Bob Kalin: “John Canemaker's monumental BOTTOM'S DREAM, easily the best film in the ASIFA-East festival, reassures one about the possibilities of animation and makes one want to shout from the rooftops about how wonderful it is. . . the most impressively experimental mainstream workout of animation I've seen since Zdenko Gasparovic's SATIEMANIA. Canemaker continues to be the artist to bridge the gap between commercial and independent animators.”

*Cartoons* by Giannalberto Bendazzi: “A sarabande inspired by Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the film is a tour de force—a summary of the lessons of Disney and the post-Disney age, with constant changes of style and colours.”

THE WIZARD'S SON (1981). This personal film was planned as a homage to the Silly Symphonies genre of musical animated shorts. With no spoken dialogue, it tells a story through classic personality animation, complimented by an original musical score by Ross Care. *Animation Newsletter* Vol. I #5 May 1982, review by Bob Kalin: "In his quiet, learned, innovative traditionalist's way Canemaker, more than any other American animator that I know of, is building bridges between the old and new in animation. . . WIZARD, for all its shortcomings, is a key work in recent American animation because it shows us an artist who cares so deeply for his art that he is willing to risk failing in front of his audience, because by taking the risk and by risking displeasure and ignorance, he will have learned a little more about the art and advanced a step. . . This is as deceptively structuralist an animated film as the most intensely reflexive . . . films."

see also: *Sunday News*, Lancaster, Pa. 4 Oct 1981: "Ross Care Making Music to Cartoon By."

CONFESSIONS OF A STARDREAMER (1978). The extemporaneous musings of an actress about her career provide the springboard for an imaginative fantasy on the fragility of fame. 14<sup>th</sup> International Tourney of Animation 1979; Best of World Animation, Seagram International Animation Festival 1980; London Film Festival 13-30 Nov, 1980; Filmed 1980, Los Angeles.

"Only John Canemaker's CONFESSIONS OF A STARDREAMER, funny cartoon-y images over the voice of an actress setting forth her life and hopes, meets the best of the Canadian and European works on their own (and the Tournee's) traditional ground of free form and freewheeling invention." Charles Champion, *Los Angeles Times*, 5 April 1979.

"John Canemaker's CONFESSIONS OF A STARDREAMER has the quick sketch and metamorphosis that keeps the clichés of the jaded actress on the soundtrack alive." *Harvard Crimson Arts Weekly*, 22 February 1979.

"Witty interview with a would-be film star. CONFESSIONS OF A STARDREAMER sent up the myths of the star system, the old one, with cleverly animated drawings and good counterpoint prattle by a would-be star." *Variety*, 1 July 1980; "Nine Shorts Slated for NEA Showcase," *Variety* 6 May 1981.

"Marvelous takeoff." *San Francisco Chronicle*.

"[STARDREAMER] points up Canemaker's importance as an animator [which is] a knowledge and respect for the verities and art of studio and commercial mainstream animation while also having the technical and critical grasp on what is going on in independent animation circles . . . [STARDREAMER is] a work that utilizes the most avant-garde animation techniques and approaches in a film that had more heart and warmth of feeling than most so-called personal animation." *Animation Newsletter*, Vol. I#5, May 1982.

OTTO MESSMER AND FELIX THE CAT (1977). "Outstanding Achievement," 21<sup>st</sup> Annual San Francisco International Film Festival 1977. In this documentary, 84-year old Otto Messier talks about how he developed the famous Felix the Cat and what made the character so popular. Clips from vintage Felix shorts from the 1920s directed by Messmer.

"A tribute to a neglected figure in the world of animation. . . it brings Felix to life again for a new generation." *Film News*, Summer 1977.

REMEMBERING WINSOR McCAY (1976). Certificate of Merit San Francisco Film Festival; Certificate of Merit Chicago Film Festival; award-winner 1979 American Film Festival. The life and career of the great cartoonist Winsor McCay is warmly recalled by his former film assistant, John Fitzsimmons (now 84); clips of classic McCay animated films including Gertie the Dinosaur (1914). "As a biography of a

neglected American genius who profoundly influenced the art of animation, this film should be a 'must.'”  
Film News, Nov/Dec 1976; “Film Tribute to Animator” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 May 1978.

## Filmography



### SELECTED SPONSORED FILMS:

#### ***BREAK THE SILENCE: KIDS AGAINST CHILD ABUSE (1994).***

CBS/Arnold Shapiro Productions. Peabody Award-winner. The effects of child abuse as seen from the child's perspective and in their own words. This CBS special won a Peabody Award.

“While many shows with a similar purpose make the abuse itself sometimes gratuitously graphic, *BREAK THE SILENCE* uses the skills of animator John Canemaker and his crew to demonstrate the abuse in a beautifully touching and compassionate style that both kids and adults will understand without being overwhelmed by apprehension.” — Laurence Vittes, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 24-26 March, 1995

see also: “Animating the Silence,” by Mike Lyons, *Update*, vol.3 #4, 1994; “*Canemaker Animates the Silent Rage Inside Child Abuse Victims*” by Carolyn Giardina. *Backstage*, n.d; *Daily Variety*, 31 May 1994. Full-Page ad, p. 15; *The Hollywood Reporter*, 31 May 1994 review by Rick Sherwood: “*This isn't just another special about child abuse. It is THE special*”; *New York Vue - Daily News*, 29 May - 4 June, 1994 “*Saying 'No' to Abuse*,” *Animation Magazine*, March/April 1994, p. 46.

***ANGELS ON ICE*** (1994). commercial - Gay Men's Health Crisis Milton Glaser's ethereal angels literally take wing in a GMHC promotional film.

***THE CREATIVE SPIRIT*** (1992). IBM/PBS/A.H. Perlmutter Prod. The workings of the imagination and creativity in the arts, education and the workplace were the themes of this IBM-sponsored PBS series. Canemaker transforms an iconic spiral into the personification of the creative spirit. This single-line 'character' stars in several animated sequences exploring abstract concepts, including a jazz fantasy improvisation by saxophonist Benny Godson.

see also: “*Drawing on the Sources of Creativity*,” by Ellen Keiser. The Southampton Press, 2 April 1992; “That Mysterious Something Called Creativity” review by Walter Goodman, *The New York Times*, 2 April 1992; “Inspiration for The Creative Spirit,” *Post Magazine*, March 1992.

**CIRCUS FOR LIFE** (1992). Public service announcement - G.M.H.C. Canemaker brought Folon’s distinctive poster to life in a manner that evoked the painterly style of the original, while using animation to underscore and amplify the urgent message of supporting programs for people with AIDS.

**SCIENCE EXPERIENCES** (1992). MacMillan McGraw-Hill/Terra The title sequence for a children’s science series celebrates the diversity of scientific discovery through rapidly metamorphosing images.

**BEHIND THE SCENES** (1992). Learning Designs/PBS. Discussions of art with Penn & Teller. A meditation on the animated possibilities of a single line, created for a PBS children’s program.

**AIDS DANCE-A-THON** (1991). Public service announcement - G.M.H.C. Keith Haring’s lively creations cavort with real-life dancers in this TV promo for an AIDS fund-raiser, the first authorized use of Haring’s images for commercial purposes.

See also: “Carrying Haring’s Toon,” *New York Magazine*, “Fast Track,” vol. 24 #47, 2 December 1991; “New Yorkers Create AIDS Spot”. Commercial News by Bruce Strockler. *Millimeter*, Dec. 1991; “Dancing Away the Face of Despair” by Brooke Conner. *American Cinematographer*, February 1992.

**YOU DON’T HAVE TO DIE** (1988) - Home Box Office special. Academy Award: Best Documentary Short. For this Oscar-winning documentary, Canemaker illustrated a young boy’s experience with pediatric cancer. 1988 Academy Award - Best Achievement in Documentary Short Subject.

“John Canemaker, an animator whose credits include PEE WEE’SPLAYHOUSE and HBO’s very pleasant adaptation of LYLE LYLE CROCODILE takes the book illustrations by Tim and Adam Gae and expands upon them, adhering to the visual style but incorporating new ideas while fleshing out old ones. Consequently, the animated image of Jason’s heaven is even more reassuring in the TV show than in the book. His self-image as a future doctor is much less formal. Even the concept of chemotherapy is helped greatly by Canemaker’s witty techniques.” *New York Post*, 5 December 1988.

See also: “Serious Fun,” *Millimeter*, February 1989; “Kids With Cancer,” *Post*, Dec. 1988; “John Canemaker Animates for HBO,” *Backstage*, 11 Nov 1988; “Cartoon Verite,” *Advertising Age*, 5 Dec 1988; “Animation Bug Bit Oscar Winner Early,” *Elmira Star-Gazette*, 31 March 1989.

**JOHN LENNON SKETCHBOOK** (1986). Producer: Yoko Ono - This film, commissioned by Yoko Ono, brings to life the imaginative sketches and doodles of John Lennon, set to Lennon and Ono’s music and words. Animation director: John Canemaker.

See also: “The Making of JOHN LENNON SKETCHBOOK,” *How*, Sept/Oct 1987.

**DNA CONCERTO** (1983). 3-2-1 Contact/CTW. Music by Elizabeth Swados. Animation design/direction by John Canemaker

**WHAT DO CHILDREN THINK OF WHEN THEY THINK OF THE BOMB?** (1983). Producer: PBS/The Icarus Company - Children’s imaginings about the end of the world as a theme park provides the

fodder for this animated sequence from a PBS special on young people and nuclear anxiety. Music by Elizabeth Swados, produced by Mary Silverman. Animation design/ direction by John Canemaker.

“Adults and children will probably agree that Swados and Canemaker and Silverman have produced the most attractive, imaginative film ever on a nuclear subject.” *Nuclear Times*, October 1983.

“Clever animation by John Canemaker . . . spooky in the style of Edward Gorey . . . eloquent.” *TV Views*, *Newsday*, 24 June 1984.

“John Canemaker brings life to dark fantasies of devastation and death... His boldly imaginative animation overwhelms the live-action scenes.” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 June 1984.

**THE WORLD ACCORDING TO GARP** (1982). Warner Brothers (Academy Award nominee). Director George Roy Hill commissioned Canemaker to design and direct two sequences for the film adaptation of John Irving’s best-selling novel. Designed in the manner of children’s crayon drawings, they were intended to express the imaginative life of the child Garp. The first sequence, a fantasy of flying, underscores the young Garp’s emotional bond for the father he never knew, an airman shot down in World War II. In the second sequence, Garp overhears his mother, a nurse, explaining how he came to be conceived when she took advantage of the opportunity presented by a dying aviator who could only speak one word, “Garp.” A pencil test of the animation was included in preview screenings but deleted from the final cut because its humor drew attention away from the character of the boy.

“The movie introduces a lighter touch, and there are some expressive pictorial inventions . . . including a brief, deft animated sequence by John Canemaker in which one of Garp’s boyish drawings springs to life.” *The Washington Post*, 23 July 1982.

“Garp’s artistic side, described so overbearingly in the novel, is presented sweetly and playfully; there’s an animated segment of crayon drawings as the child Garp tries to imagine what became of his father . . . it helps make Garp’s much-praised talent seem believable.” *New York Times* film review, 23 July 1982.

See also: “Animated About Part in ‘GARP,’ by Charles Solomon, *Los Angeles Times*, 22 Dec 1982; “Strictly Personal” by Liz Greene, *Elmira Star-Gazette*, 3 May 1982; *Variety*, 21 Oct 1981, “New York Sound Track.”

**LAUGHTER IS GOOD MEDICINE** (1981). Producer: Billy Budd Films. Informational short. Animation design/direction by John Canemaker. Film Retrospective Review - ASIFA EAST NEWSLETTER, Fall 1998,

### **John Canemaker: Marching to a Different Toon - Animated Films 1978-1998**

#### **Museum of Modern Art - 6 Nov 98 by Eugene Salandra**

In the nearly twenty-six years since John Canemaker began his career in animation, he has earned for himself a singular place as the foremost historian of the medium. In animation circles, his books and articles on everyone from Winsor McCay and Oskar Fischinger, to Disney’s *Nine Old Men*, are well known and widely respected. A gifted storyteller, John has a unique ability to illuminate the lives of the individuals who have shaped the art of animation. He makes their stories real, with his profound sense of humanity, and his keen eye for dramatic irony. What is less widely known about John Canemaker is that he has produced and animated an astonishing number of personal films and commissioned works during his career. This may further explain the richness of his historical and critical writings on the subject. Drawing on his decade long experience as an actor, John made a graceful transition from the stage to the pegboard. Furthermore, his strong sense of story and his unique graphic style (think *Mary Blair* meets John Hubley, with a touch of Klee and Miro) create a perfect balance of ingredients that boldly coalesce in his lively works. The Museum of Modern Art paid tribute to John’s animation in a recent film retrospective.

The show opened with an amusing sampling of live-action television commercials in which John was featured. His propensity for broad comic acting, of the sort one might have seen on a vaudeville stage, set the tone for the charming personal animation that would follow. For this actor, the switch to being an ‘actor with a pencil’ was clearly a natural one.

In *CONFESSIONS OF A STARDREAMER* (1978), John begins to explore the use of animation as an editorial tool in documentaries. More effective than talking heads and cutaway shots of old dusty photographs, animation allows the filmmaker to go directly to the heart of the matter at hand. John has taken full advantage of this. His ‘subjects’ subtext’ becomes his visual ‘text,’ and the result is both hilarious and genuinely human. This graphic representation of his subjects’ vulnerabilities and emotions is what allows John to treat sensitive matters with great success. Few other animators could accept the challenge of addressing issues such as nuclear war, terminal illness, or child abuse without sentimentalizing or over-dramatizing. John takes the audience past the cliché’s and puts the viewer in direct contact with the plain truth. Despite the deceptive simplicity of style, John’s films are at their core far more realistic than the most naturalistic animation. They portray powerful inner truths. For example, John’s treatment of a boy’s struggle with cancer in *YOU DON’T HAVE TO DIE* (1988), grabs the viewer by the throat and tugs hard. No other medium or approach could have conveyed the depth and confusion of the child’s experience in the face of a fatal disease.

In the realm of fantasy, John treats subjects as diverse as Mendelssohn’s ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’ in *BOTTOM’S DREAM* (1983), human creativity in *THE CREATIVE SPIRIT* (1992), and the cycle of the seasons in *BRIDGEHAMPTON* (1998). John accomplishes what many concept artists dream of. He brings the rough, painterly vitality of ‘inspirational art’ directly to the film screen. At this he excels. When John attempts to emulate traditional animation techniques and forms in *THE WIZARD’S SON* (1981), he is at his weakest. His talents for free and whimsical expression are stifled beneath layers of rules and conventions, and his spirit is obscured. What does remain is his uncanny sense of timing and performance. These qualities run through all of his work. The two aspects of John Canemaker’s prolific animation career— scholarship and production—have complimented each other beautifully. One has fed and informed the other in a seamless, organic way that has earned John a unique and respected place in the animation pantheon.”

### *THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, 4 April 1997.*

“Designs That Come to Life: ‘the Basic Magic of Animation’” by Zoë Ingalls.

**Master manipulator: John Canemaker, head of the animation program at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, uses his craft to communicate serious matters.**

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John Canemaker relishes the story about a film animator who had a reputation for doing “really zany, crazy, off-the-wall stuff.” After getting a call from a producer who wanted him to do a film, the animator said, “Okay, what’s it about?” The producer said, “Dyslexia.” The animator groaned and said, “Oh, no. You’ve got to call John Canemaker.” Dyslexia, cancer, nuclear war, child abuse - topics that most animators avoid - are topics that Mr. Canemaker embraces. He is a film animator well known for his intelligent handling of serious subject matter. His animated sequences for the Academy Award-winning *YOU DON’T HAVE TO DIE*, a documentary about an 8-year-old boy’s struggle with cancer, were praised by critics.

Mr. Canemaker, a [full] professor and head of the animation program at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, is also a noted historian of animation. He has published six books on the topic and writes regularly about the field for The New York Times. His most recent book, *Before the Animation Begins: The Art and Lives of Disney Inspirational Sketch Artists* (Hyperion) appeared in November

[1997]. Recently, Animation magazine, a trade publication, listed him as one of the most influential people in animation today, along with the likes of Roy E. Disney, Michael D. Eisner, and Steven Spielberg.

Mr. Canemaker refers to himself as a “traditional” animator - “that means I work with a pencil and paper and a light box” - a distinction made necessary because of recent changes in the medium. Animation used to refer to “any object or drawings that is changed frame by frame,” he says. “But now, frames are going away. Videotape has not frames; the computer has no frames. So it’s more the thinking about manipulation of the image. We have so many choices now. And animation is everywhere. It’s pervasive.

“Animation is in titles. It’s in feature-length films, live action as well as animation. Entire films are built around the effects that you see on the screen - TWISTER, for example, or JURASSIC PARK. That’s animation. Disney is animation. The Pillsbury Doughboy is animation.” The computer is a useful tool - like his pencil, he says - but good animation is not just about drawing or the seamless manipulation of an image. “it’s about communicating with an audience,” he explains. He tries to teach his students a “vocabulary of motion.” For example, “if you turn the character’s head this way and leave it for eight frames, it will look like he’s thinking.”

In a recent animation class, Mr. Canemaker reminds students of the importance of “anticipation” - the small, contrary motion a character makes that anticipates a major movement. If the character is going to stand up, he sinks ever so slightly first. If he’s going to jump to the right, he first draws back almost imperceptibly to the left.

One student has prepared a short film that shows a man drinking poison. After he drinks, his head shrinks like a deflating balloon. Good, as far as it goes. “Have some anticipation,” Mr. Canemaker advises. “Have the head go out, swell, before it shrinks.”

Grasping the vocabulary of motion is key, he says. “Drawing is really a secondary ability.” He encourages his students to take acting courses, and he brings actors, mimes, and dancers to class so that students can study live movement. “In the ‘30s at Disney, animators looked at Chaplin films and Keaton films in slow motion. They brought in obese dancers and watched how the flesh moved.”

Disney perfected what is called character or personality animation, which lends a character an “intrinsic individuality that is expressed basically by the way it moves rather than just through dialogue,” says Mr. Canemaker. The seven Dwarfs are good examples,” he says. “Dopey puts on his pajamas differently than Grumpy, and Bashful brushes his teeth differently than Sleepy.”

Disney animators have a “live-action approach” to animation, he continues. “They want to convince you of the reality of their world and their characters. They don’t want you to think it’s a cartoon, so they go to all of these lengths to disguise the cartoony origins of things.” His own work “celebrates the cartoon as cartoon,” he says. “Animation is not live action, so why disguise that fact?” But while celebrating the cartoon, his work is a far cry from what he calls “the cat-chasing-the-mouse type” of animation. “Animation has been ghettoized, for the most part, into a children’s category. I really love the challenge of taking serious subject matter and trying to adapt it to animation. I think animation can do anything. I think it can go anywhere. It can be used for any subject. And it hasn’t.”

In a documentary film, BREAK THE SILENCE: KIDS AGAINST CHILD ABUSE, he used animation to help describe the children’s emotions. In one scene, a child tells her mother that her stepfather has sexually abused her. The mother turns into a brick wall, symbolizing her denial.

In YOU DON’T HAVE TO DIE, animation is used to describe what happens during chemotherapy. A green liquid travels down a tube and into the cartoon child’s arm. The liquid fills up the child’s body as if he were an empty bottle. When it reaches the top of his head, his hair falls out. “He tries as a cartoon to put it back on his head,” Mr. Canemaker says. “And then he just looks aghast and runs into the distance. I thought that that was a perfect way to show emotion in animation that live action couldn’t do.”

As a boy growing up in Elmira, N.Y., he dreamed of working at the Disney studio. (FANTASIA remains his favorite film.) he liked to draw and showed promise as an artist; he made his first animated film -- a

history of animation - at age 15. it was largely based on what he had learned from reading books and watching the "Disneyland" television show and Walter Lantz's "Woody Woodpecker Show," both of which were popular in the 1950s.

After graduating from high school in 1961, Mr. Canemaker says, he had no idea what to do. "Nobody in my family ever went to college." He decided to go to New York and become an actor. He got a job as a doorman at Radio City Music Hall and studied acting at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Soon he began to get work off-Broadway and in television commercials. Tall, thin, and dark, he stunt-doubled for Dick Van Dyke in two movies. [Milestone's note: His other claim to fame is appearing in *The Producers* as an auditioning Hitler.]

He was drafted into the Army during the Vietnam War, served for two years, then returned to New York and resumed his acting career. From 1967 to 1970, he appeared in 35 commercials - "mostly musical ones, acting, singing, dancing," he says - including ones for Camel cigarettes and Foster Grant sunglasses. He did 15 spots for the American Dairy Association. "I was wholesome," he says. "I was white milk."

Wholesomeness paid well. But, one day, a friend said to him, "Well, what are you going to do? You've made this money, but you're uneducated. You never went to college."

He decided to enroll in Marymount Manhattan College, where, from 1971 to 1974, he worked toward a degree in communications. Between classes, he served as the host of "Patchwork Family," a children's show on a local television station, on which he drew cartoons and sang. Much later, when some members of his audience attended N.Y.U., they would "do double takes when I walked down the hall. They'd say, 'Isn't that the guy that used to draw?' Then they'd come into the class room humming the theme song." He sings, "Isn't it fun to scribble?" then groans, "Dreadful. Dreadful."

"School literally opened the world to me," Mr. Canemaker says. A professor who knew of his early interest in animation offered to give him six credits for independent research at the Disney archive, which has just opened in California. It was a turning point in his life. "There I met all these great animators who I had learned about when I was a kid," he says.

That experience sparked an interest in other pioneers of animation, most of whom were by then quite elderly. Casually at first, then more intently, he began conducting and taping interviews with those animators, in an effort to preserve their history. "I'm their Boswell, in a way, if I may be so bold," he says. "That's pretty cheeky, but in a way I'm a conduit for the information about their lives, and how these films were made, that might have been lost otherwise."

The fruits of his research are available to scholars in the John Canemaker Collection in N.Y.U.'s library.

After graduating from Marymount Manhattan, Mr. Canemaker enrolled in the graduate film program at N.Y.U. and continued interviewing pioneers of animation who lived in the area. He did a documentary film on the creator of Felix the Cat, Otto Messmer, who was living in New Jersey. For his master-of-fine-arts thesis, he made a documentary on Winsor McCay, a seminal pre-Disney animator.

"So before I knew it, I started to have this two-track career of historian and animator-film maker," says Mr. Canemaker. He gave up acting altogether. "I was acting through my animation," he says.

When he earned his master's degree from N.Y.U. in 1976, he had a contract for a book, *The Animated Raggedy Ann & Andy*, was working as animation editor for *Millimeter* magazine, and was busy making short animated films that were shown at festivals.

He began teaching at N.Y.U. in 1980 and eight years later became head of the animation program. His work now is divided between personal films on serious subjects and television commercials for products including Huggies, Diet Pepsi, and Raid.

In Mr. Canemaker's office at N.Y.U. is a poster featuring two elderly men surrounded by a horde of Disney-cartoon characters, from Bambi to Pinocchio. The men are Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, two

of the pioneering animators whose histories Mr. Canemaker has preserved. They signed the poster with “Thanks, John.”

Although Disney animators, like Mr. Thomas and Mr. Johnston, helped inspire Mr. Canemaker’s earliest work, other influences moved to the forefront as he learned more about animation: John and Faith Hubley, who took on serious subject matter, and George Dunning, director of *YELLOW SUBMARINE*, who also did a series of short personal films that “played with the medium,” as Mr. Canemaker puts it.

In Mr. Dunning’s *DAMON THE MOWER*, for example, a flip book sits on a table and an unseen hand riffles through a series of drawings. “There was the proof that you could be involved in animation and still be aware of the technique,” Mr. Canemaker says.

In his own films, he makes his audience aware of the technique through the hand-crafted quality of his images, which have a painterly, Impressionistic look. It is not unusual for penciled outlines to show through the paint, and some color is thinly enough applied that the paper underneath is visible. “I’m interested in seeing process on the screen,” he says. “I’m not afraid to see pencil lines and have it be very scribbly or Impressionistic. I like to see texture from paint.

“Oftentimes, I’ll go to a museum and look very closely at the canvases of Matisse or something and see how thin the paint was put on and how much the real canvas shows through. It just fascinates me.” Painters refer to this as seeing the “hand” of the artist. Mr. Canemaker likes to see the hand of the animator: “That’s what interested me about George Dunning’s films, the flip book there in the middle of the table-obviously drawings. And yet the magic was still there, the mystery of inert designs coming to life.

“And they’re not supposed to. How did it happen? That, I think, is the basic magic of animation - to see something you’re not supposed to see. It’s not supposed to come to life. It’s a drawing. But there it is boing!”

*“In addition to being a well-respected animator, John Canemaker is one of the world’s foremost authorities on the history and aesthetics of animation.”*

— THE COMPLETE KODAK ANIMATION BOOK

*“[John] Canemaker is a respected animation historian who has brought a curator’s exactitude and an artist’s insight to books about Little Nemo and Felix the Cat, among other subjects.”*

— ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

*“[John] Canemaker is an extraordinarily skillful artist whose distinctive style is nevertheless ultimately defined by the subject matter. Canemaker addresses the core of his subject with compassion and fearlessness—the painterly qualities and the accomplished, energetic line movement expressing his artistic vision.”*

— Jytte Jensen, Associate Film and Video Curator, MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

*“All these activities have definitely made John Canemaker animation’s number one fan, spokesman and ambassador-at-large.”*

— CONTEMPORARY GRAPHIC ARTISTS

### Milestone Film & Video

*“Since its birth the Milestone Film & Video Co. has steadily become the industry’s foremost boutique distributor of classic and art films — and probably the only distributor in America whose name is actually a guarantee of some quality.”*

— William Arnold, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

Milestone is a boutique distribution company with more than 13 years experience in art-house film distribution. The company has earned an unparalleled reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to Milestone's rediscovery, restoration and release of such important discoveries as Mikhail Kalatozov's award-winning *I am Cuba*, Jane Campion's *Two Friends*, and Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, the company now occupies an honored position as one of the most influential independent distributors in the American film industry. In 1999, the *L.A. Weekly* chose Milestone as "Indie Distributor of the Year."

Amy Heller and Dennis Doros started Milestone in 1990 to bring out the best films of yesterday *and* today. The company has released such remarkable new films as Manoel de Oliveira's *I'm Going Home*, Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?*, Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Maborosi*, and Takeshi Kitano's *Fireworks (Hana-Bi)*.

Milestone's re-releases have included restored versions of Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*, F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Grass and Chang*, Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Mystery of Picasso*, and Marcel Ophuls' *The Sorrow and the Pity* (a Woody Allen presentation). Milestone is also working with the Mary Pickford Foundation on a long-term project to preserve, re-score and release the best films of the legendary silent screen star. In recent years, Milestone has re-released beautifully restored versions of Frank Hurley's *South: Ernest Shackleton and the Endurance Expedition*, Kevin Brownlow's *It Happened Here* and *Winstanley*, Lotte Reiniger's animation masterpiece, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, Michael Powell's *The Edge of the World* (a Martin Scorsese presentation), Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Wide Blue Road* (a Jonathan Demme and Dustin Hoffman presentation), Conrad Rooks' *Siddhartha* and Rolando Klein's Mexican classic, *Chac*.

Since its beginning, Milestone has had a fruitful collaboration with some of the world's major archives including the British Film Institute, UCLA Film & Television Archive, George Eastman House, Museum of Modern Art, Library of Congress, Nederlands Filmmuseum and the Norsk Filmintitutt. In August 2000 the Film Society of Lincoln Center in New York premiered Milestone's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Retrospective. During the New York run and the nationwide tour that followed, all revenues from retrospective screenings were donated to four major archives in the United States and England to help restore films that might otherwise be lost.

In 2003–2004, Milestone will be releasing an important series of great silent films restored by the world's foremost film historians and preservationists, Photoplay Productions. These stunning versions, never before available in the United States, include the horror classic *The Phantom of the Opera*; André Antoine's early neorealist adaptation of Emile Zola's *La Terre*; and an astonishing historical epic of Polish independence by Raymond Bernard, *The Chess Player*. Video highlights for this year also include a special DVD series of incredible animation including *Cut-Up: The Films of Grant Munro*; *Norman McLaren: The Collector's Edition*; and *Winsor McCay: The Master Edition*.

In theaters, Milestone will be releasing Tareque Masud's remarkable *The Clay Bird* from Bangladesh and *The Big Animal*, directed by and starring Jerzy Stuhr, from a script by Krzysztof Kieslowski.

Milestone received a Special Archival Award in 1995 from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I am Cuba*. Eight of the company's films — Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*,

F.W. Murnau's *Tabu*, Edward S. Curtis' *In the Land of the War Canoes*, Mary Pickford's *Poor Little Rich Girl*, Lon Chaney's *The Phantom of the Opera*, Clara Bow's *It*, Winsor McCay's *Gertie the Dinosaur*, and Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack and Marguerite Harrison's *Grass* — are listed on the Library of Congress' National Film Registry.

Cindi Rowell, director of acquisitions, has been with Milestone since 1999. In 2003 Nadja Tennstedt joined the company as director of international sales.

*“Milestone Film & Video is an art-film distributor that has released some of the most distinguished new movies (along with seldom-seen vintage movie classics) of the past decade”*  
— Stephen Holden, *New York Times*

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