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Interview with Animation Filmmaker Siddharth Maskeri

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BY CHAITRA SHETTY

Sidharth Maskeri started his career in animation back in 1999. In his nearly decade long career in this space he has been animating, conceptualizing, teaching and developing ideas amongst others at known set ups like Vaibhav Studios, Famous House of Animation, Jadooworks and Frameboxx. He established his own brand Void Films in 2007 through which he wishes to come up with new concepts and ideas. The latest to his credit is the short Yama & Moo which was developed in association with Frameboxx.

AnimationXpress.com's Chaitra Shetty caught up with **Siddharth** for an insight into Yama & Moo and his journey in the field of animation.

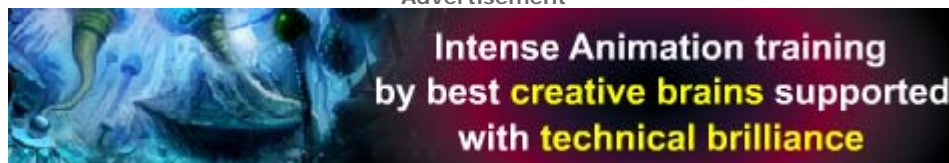


How did you start off in animation?

I have been breathing animation since I was 4. I used to bunk my craft class to watch Disney hour on Doordarshan.

My true journey as a creative conceptualizer began in 6th grade of Delia School of Canada, in Hong Kong where we were taught conceptualizing and expressing it in the form of story and visual. Then in the first year of graduation I saw *Toy Story*. That's when I decided to learn animation as a medium to express my ideas. Never been to any art school. Rebellious after graduation in 1999, I convinced my parents to pay my fees for XIC's animation diploma. XIC and its wonderful guides gave me my first lessons at observing and understanding the cinematic language.

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Since then most of my training has been out of passion, observation, inspiration, hard work and the will to get up there with the rest. Writing stories for animation as a career in India was

thought of as an over ambitious idea. But nothing ever deters me from creating my own path. Just the approach to achieving my goals changed.

The years 2000-2002 at Here-N-Now, a small partnership firm, was enriching. I was a ' fresher ' enthusiastic to learn whatever came my way. I explored the Flash as an animation tool for web and interactive presentations. After learning Maya in 2002, I have been to Jadooworks as an animator, unofficially taught many 2D animators the joys of keyframing in Maya and officially as a visiting faculty in CDAC Pune.

I've had the pleasure of learning and working as Animation Director with Famous House of Animation in 2005 and then with Vaibhav Kumaresh in 2007. Vaibhav Studios was extremely challenging and fun as I had undertaken the task of training the existing team onto Maya and executing commissioned projects like *Ooga Booga* for Neo Sports and *Cadbury Wowie* TVC.



My first break as a writer came in the year 2006. The story Flying Rani was appreciated and bought by Brainwave Productions. In 2008 I established my firm Void Films which is dedicated to telling a good story and entertain audiences. My first project was with Sahara Filmy. Show packaging for "Meri Bhains Ko Anda Kyon Maara?" This project was executed in collaboration with Frameboxx Incubation, after which followed a promo for the same show.

I was appointed as a consulting creative director by Frameboxx Incubation to develop Oink- an animation project. And now for the latest buzz of the month *Yama and Moo*. I developed my concept of Yama and Moo into a short film along with Hormaz Baria and Balmeet Kohli and a flash based game done by Shantanu Maskeri at Frameboxx Incubation.

How did *Yama & Moo* happen?

Rajeshji (Rajesh Turakhia) invited me to develop the film at the Incubation Center.

Initially the concept, characters of *Yama and Moo* and the idea of making it a series of snippets were clear in my mind. Hormaz Baria and Balmeet Kohli (production heads of Frameboxx Incubation) and I brainstormed and refined the concept further and the character of Venu Gopal was added. In the light of the recent IT crash we thought of characterizing Venu Gopal as an IT engineer who has just been given the pink slip.

The short has three main contrasting characters, Yama the god of death, Moo his companion and mode of transport and Venu Gopal a depressed IT engineer who has been hit by recession and has turned suicidal. So Yama is devising different techniques to take Venu Gopal's soul and Venu Gopal also is trying his best to commit suicide and in this whole situation Moo is like the ray of hope who succeeds in saving Venu Gopal. We didn't want to have any dialogues in the short since it would have limited its reach and we wanted it be universal.

We also developed a flash game around *Yama & Moo* with the programming expertise of Shantanu Maskeri. The Sound Design and Background Score given by Aashish Rego added another dimension to the film and the game.

So how did you go about developing the characters?

For Yama we wanted to explore the character in a different light. When we were searching references for Yama, the google search results came up with illustrations of Yama in fierce forms and we didn't want to go with that kind of feel. We wanted to add a funny hint to it and my reference for it were the characters of penguin from Madagascar.

For the character of Moo who is a buffalo my reference was the character of James Sullivan from Monsters Incorporated. We tried a lot of variation for this character, first we thought of making him stupid, but making him stupid would have made him weak, so we added the dimension of compassion to him. This trait of his is established in the opening sequence where Moo is seen playing with a butterfly.

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How was it working at Frameboxx Incubation Center?

The preproduction, character designs, look and feel, art direction, storyboarding, animatics for Yama & Moo have been done by me. Japeth Bautista (preproduction head at Frameboxx Incubation) along with myself had explored the initial designs and contributed to storyboarding panels. Additional help came from my friend Vivek Ram who also enjoyed the characters and the concept.

The production for the same was entirely done at Frameboxx Incubation Centre. And looking at the quality of work that is being done there I can say it has definitely improved. I had worked there prior to this for a TV project called Meri Bhains Ko Anda Kyun Mara for Filmy Channel and seeing the work done for Yama & Moo in comparison to that, I can see a lot of improvement. It can today compete with the work being done for Indian television.

So what are the plans for *Yama & Moo*?

The plan is to find an investor for the same and make a series of shorts or else self fund it and make one short in two to three months. The Yama & Moo game was also showcased at CGTExpo '09. Currently we have developed just one demo level for it but plan to add 2 more main levels and other sublevels.

Tell us about Void Films

I established Void Films in Jan 2008. Void is the space where all ideas exist. Currently it comprises of me and a network of freelancers/interns who associate with Void Films on project basis. I intend to keep my team size cozy and focus mainly on developing original ideas and directing them. The ideation process will continue in Void Films and it doesn't intend to expand into a so called production house in the near future.

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