

Disney's *Paperman*

This year's **Hamptons International Film Festival** has largely been defined by movies that make you want to cry your eyes out. But no movie at the festival has packed quite the emotional punch of the **Disney Animation** short film [Paperman](#). From the opening frame, the film's sweeping Romanticism and groundbreaking visual style proves too much to resist. The fact that this might be the new face of traditional animation isn't something that even registers; it's that involving



The plot of *Paperman* makes it an incredibly charming little film. It also showcases a revolutionary animation technique; for the first time, Disney has merged classic hand-drawn 2D animation with 3D computer-generated (CG) art within the same character in *Paperman*.

The characters are modeled in CG and rendered in high contrast to create the modeling and shading, then merged with hand-drawn linework. It looks like traditional "classic" animation but also has the familiar look that's common to CG films.

Producer, Kristina Reed, had been frustrated at the difficulties faced at Disney Studios trying to balance the new CG technology with the traditional hand-drawn films of

the past. Reed said, "There was this notion of we're the only studio in the world that has this breadth of talent; is there something we can do by actually matching them together? Is there some new place we can go visually that no studio has gone before?" When director, John Kahrs pitched his *Paperman* project, it seemed a natural fit for Reed's ideas.

Reed and Kahrs had "spent over 20 years working in computer graphics [before coming to Disney], and when we both came to this company, we were both blown away by the ability that line artists have to put expression just in a single line; just how by lifting a lip up a little bit or turning an eye, there's so much expression that can be conveyed. And when you're trying to do that in the CG world it's really, really hard. There's a lot of different people left to come in and set up the model and do the rigging inside the model and get her eyelids and her eye lashes right, and it's very intricate and complicated. But in hand drawn work, it's a line. And there's just this beauty to that that neither John nor I have been exposed to." It was this simplicity and expressiveness that they worked to capture in the film.



In an interview, Reed explained how Kahrs came up with the story of *Paperman*. Reed said, “This idea came about early on in his [John’s] career. He was reverse commuting; he lived in New York City and he was working at Blue Sky, which is out in the suburbs of New York, and every day he’d be traveling through Grand Central Station as a single guy in his 20s, and there’d be huge crowds of people moving through the train stations. And he would be thinking to himself, ‘why am I not having a happier life? I’m a single guy in New York City. I should be on top of the world. And yet I feel really rather lonely.’ And every once in awhile, he’d make a connection with somebody, eye contact in the station and think ‘is that the girl of my dreams?’ And then she’d be gone.” The idea for *Paperman* came from this.



The story involves a couple who meet by chance on a train platform (it looks like sometime after World War II). He’s some kind of office drone and is carrying a stack of papers with him. When a single sheet blows into her face, it leaves an impression of her red lipstick on the page (the red is the single dab of color in the entire black-and-white short). They go about their separate ways but the man is haunted by the encounter. Looking up from his desk he notices the woman in a neighboring building. He then takes a stack of papers and starts folding them into sharp paper airplanes; hang-gliding origami love letters. He shoots paper airplane after paper airplane across from one building to another; always missing her attention, all the while trying to avoid detection from his angry boss and fellow coworkers. Dejected, he leaves the

office building, convinced that they were never meant to be. But fate has other plans.

One of the artistic choices John Kahrs made was to make it in black and white; Reed explains, “He knew from the very beginning that he wanted it to be in black and white, and he was very entranced by the black and white photography of New York,” Reed explains, pointing out that the cityscape serves as a visual metaphor for the lead character’s isolation, “the idea of these skyscrapers as sort of canyons and valleys and that you as a human being are just sort of working your way across this sort of unfriendly landscape, surrounded by lots of people but very much alone, unless you find someone in the world that you can connect with.

Compiled and edited from the following resources -

Taylor, Drew. *HIFF Review: Disney’s 2D & 3D Animated ‘Paperman’ A Romantic & Inventive Short*, IndieWire, Oct. 8, 2012.

MacQuarrie, Jim, *Disney’s Paperman is a Perfect Short Film*, Wired, Nov. 2, 2012.