

## **CRISTIANI AND THE FIRST ANIMATED FEATURE FILMS IN HISTORY- FROM ARGENTINA TO THE WORLD<sup>2</sup>**

***Abstract.** On December 21, 1937, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Hand, Jackson, Pearce, Sharpsteen, Morey, Cottrell, 1937) was released, produced by Walter E. Disney. The press immediately ranked it as the first animated feature film. However, this claim was not true. The Italian-Argentinian animator Quirino Cristiani with his work *El Apóstol* (Cristiani, 1917) was responsible for the first animated feature film in the world twenty years before the North American release. His 1931 film *Peludopolis* (Cristiani, 1931) was also the first animated feature film with synchronised sound recording. Cristiani patented a new and revolutionary system for creating animations using only cardboard cut-outs. The aim of this paper is to give recognition to his work by analyzing his contribution to the seventh art through qualitative documentary research.*

***Keywords:** Argentina; Cartoons; Animation; Historical films; Quirino Cristiani*

### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to make an Italian-Argentinian audiovisual creator widely known, since he has not been awarded any merits for his work. Quirino Cristiani, a creator, designer, researcher, and overall animator developed all his work in Argentina, which did not help the expected diffusion of his work, together with the fact that the theme of his works were local and not developed in the major production centers of the time such as Los Angeles in United States.

The animation film technique is usually associated with animation in the United States of America and specifically the period from 1930 to 1986, its peak period. But animation was produced on all continents, albeit with better distribution.

### **2. Methodology**

The life of the author will be analyzed using qualitative research, particularly his first three films, namely the first film produced in animation, and the first film with a sound component. All of this occurred in a significantly unstable country, mainly due to political changes.

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On November 9, 1917, the feature film by the Italian-Argentinian director Quirino Cristiani, *El Apóstol* (Cristiani, 1917), premiered at the luxurious Select-Suipacha Cinema, located at 482 Suipacha Street in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

This fact was a cause for joy taking in consideration the childhood state in which Argentine cinema was at that time, and in South America in general. But to this we must add something else – that this feature film was unlike any other. It was the first animated feature film in the history of the seventh art. But why has not this work been recognized with the merits it deserves?

This article will explore the causal relationship giving an answer to the proposal presented. Its scope of development will be related to Argentina while attributing influences from other geographies or media. This article intends to study Cristiani's creative evolution, his contribution to the world of cinema and especially to that of animation, the reasons why he remains in oblivion despite his global importance and the key moments of his life and work.

Obtaining information has been very arduous, since on the one hand the laboratories and studies that guarded the material caught fire related to the use of highly flammable nitrate films. On the other hand, there are almost no bibliographic sources for the works – there are only two specific books (one of them is out of print) and some brief reference in a general film encyclopedia.

This qualitative research will analyze all the material that exists about this author. There is a documentary directed by Gabrielle Zucchelli and another by Diego Kartaczewicz, some short interviews with the author that can be found on the YouTube™ platform, as well as communication with his grandson Héctor Cristiani with detailed in-depth interviews. The published book by the Italian author Giannalberto Bendazi together with generalist stories or encyclopedias have been the only means that I have counted on for this research proposal, where the research sources cited are mere copies of one another.

The justification for this research is not just to obtain the greatest amount of information about the work of Quirino, as he required to be called, but rather to place it in a socio-political context that allows us to understand the creative act, why those films were produced, media, technology, reception by the public and dissemination.

The questions that will guide this investigation will be:

- Who was Quirino Cristiani?
- What was Quirino Cristiani's contribution to the seventh art?
- What motivated his work?
- What did it mean for the development of animated cinema?
- What elements influenced the course of his work?

### **3. Quirino Cristiani's Origins**

Cristiani was born in the Italian town of Santa Gioletta, in the province of Pavia on July 2, 1896. He was the fifth and last child of Luigi Cristiani, secretary of the city council and Adele Martinotti, seamstress. He lived a quiet life in the

small town with his siblings Francesco, María, Inés and Ángela, until the father was fired from his job between the end of 1899 and the beginning of 1900, for unknown reasons (Benitez, R. V., personal communication with Hector Cristiani, 2021-31-01).

This forced the family to move to Pavia, as at that time they were residing on a property owned by the town hall. But this would not be for long, as on April 11 of that same year of 1900, the family would embark on the ship *Messapia*, in the port of Genoa, a historic port city in northern Italy, capital of the Liguria region, the birthplace of the navigator Christopher Columbus (1451 - 1506).

Perhaps like the famous sailor, the four-year-old did not understand that this was the beginning of a journey that would lead him to become a pioneer in the art which was being developed at that time with the invention of the cinematograph by the French brothers Lumière, Auguste (1862-1954) and Louis (1864-1948).

Following its independence from Spain in 1810, Argentina began a policy to repopulate the new nation. The emigration of citizens, especially from Spain, Italy and the Middle East, was very high. The Cristiani family members were part of it (Abad de Santillán, 1971).

Luigi Cristiani had two letters of recommendation for the search for sustenance. One was for the Domingo Tomba Winery in San Rafael, in the southern part of the Mendoza province, located at the base of the Andes Mountains, which is the longest continental mountain range in the world.

Luigi visited this area of excellent wines with the aim of potentially settling there, but during his stay frequent seismic movements happened in the area. After falling from the cot because of these, he decided to move to Buenos Aires, the capital city, where he would finally settle permanently.

To do this, he would use the second reference letter to work at the Italian Hospital as an administrator. Once he got the job, he bought a house near the hospital, in the Almagro neighborhood. The Cristiani family grew up in a calm and comfortable environment (Bendazzi, 2016).

Cristiani had a passion for art and illustration. His father, however, wanted him to be a doctor and work with him in the hospital and tried to persuade him to give up his hobby. During high school, he would sneak out to take drawing classes with teachers like Lorenzo Gigli, Alfredo Guido, and Ángel Vena (Grupo6ilusroldan, 2018).

His father first got him a job as a shoemaker's assistant and then he worked in an insurance company. His father finally resigned and allowed him to enter a course at the Academy of Fine Arts at the age of sixteen, where he would meet great future artists such as Lino Enea Spilimbergo (1896-1964). He only stayed there for a few months, since the young man's emerging personality invited him to act in a rather free and bohemian way – in fact, this would become a constant feature in his life. At the age of fifteen he became a vegetarian and in 1920 he founded the first nudist camp on an island in the delta of the Rio de la Plata which he called *Heliópolis*, a great advancement at this time. To continue his learning on Sundays, he used to go to the city zoo where he drew the animals, while observing the work of other artists, especially Italians (Bendazzi, 2016).

In this historical period, two significant events occurred in the Southern part of the country. On the one hand, the first democratic plebiscite occurred in 1916 and the proliferation of high-quality publications, such as the newspapers *La Nación* and *La*

*Prensa* and others with a less intellectual and more cartoonish tone, such as the weekly *Caras y Caretas*, with names and inspiration coming from a publication in Montevideo, Uruguay from 1890. The latter published the first comic *Viruta y Chicharrón* (1912) in 1912 whose author was not disclosed; it was attributed either to the Spanish author Juan Sanuy – the pseudonym of Octavio Juan Bellver (1856 - 1908), or rather Manuel Redondo (1863 -1928). Alternatively, it could have been a copy of the United States cartoon *Spareribs and Gravy*, by George McManus (1884-1954). Later on, Redondo published the cartoons describing the life of a Spanish emigrant under the title *Goyo Sarrasqueta* (1913) with great success (DLLACS, n. d.).

There were also other less prominent publications that also published cartoons and drawings such as *Sucesos* magazine or *La Gaceta de Buenos Aires*.

In this mixture of more democratic political activity and the publication of cartoons, the appearances of politicians of the time as objects of mockery increased in cartoons, such as the cartoon related to the newly elected president, Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen (1852 - 1933).

In this environment, Cristiani, still underage, began to publish his illustrations in the magazine *Sucesos* and later in *La Gaceta de Buenos Aires*, where he attracted the attention of another Italian emigrant, Federico Valle (1880–1960) (Bendazzi, 2016).



**Fig. 1.** Font: *La Vida Moderna*, 271, June 19, 1912. Collaboration by Quirino Cristiani

#### 4. Cristiani's Work

Valle already had a long history in the nascent film industry, having trained in Italy as a camera operator and director, at the Société Lumière branch. He worked at the Parisian Urban Trading & Co., which in 1906 changed its name to Société Générale des Cinématographes Eclipse, and this work led him to travel mainly through Asia and the American continent.

The first aerial shot made from an airplane stands out from this period, when the American aviation pioneer Wilbur Wright (1867-1912) flew over the outskirts of Rome from Centocelle airport on April 24, 1909. The three-minute, twenty-eight-second short film was released under the title *Wilbur Wright und seine Flugmaschine* (Valley, 1909) (Wilbur Wright and his flying machine), the restored version of which can be viewed at Filmarchiv Austria. With his adventurous spirit he arrived in Argentina in 1910 to shoot images of the centenary commemoration of the nation's independence, settling permanently in this South American country in 1911.

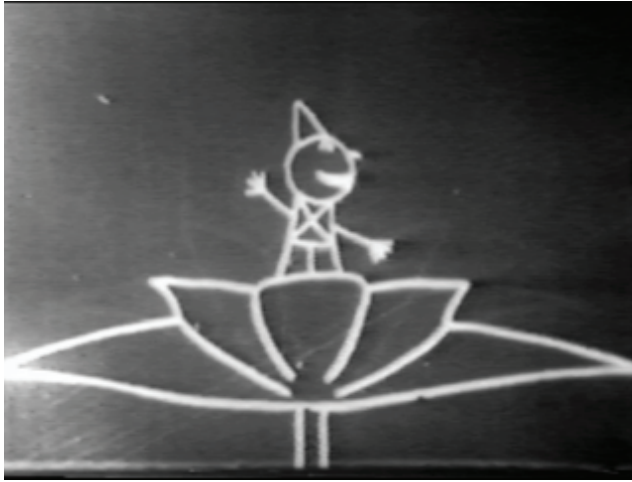
Already on May 24, 1908, what was considered the country's first plot film *El Fusilamiento de Dorrego* (Gallo, 1908) was released in Buenos Aires and little by little the industry was beginning to establish itself. It was debated whether the film *La Revolución de Mayo* by the same director, which premiered on May 22, 1909, at the Ateneo theater, was released earlier and whether the dates were mistaken. In this open terrain for exploration, Valle would develop his film career, opening in 1914 a laboratory with the titles and posters of the films displayed in Spanish. Not staying there, he began to make short educational commercials with great success with the help of the Peruvian José Bustamante y Ballivián. One of Valle's most important productions was the newscasts that were shown before the movies. These so-called *Actualidades Valle*, were shown until 1930 and he produced a total of 657 short films. With the intention of giving these a different nuance and aesthetic, he communicated with Cristiani, proposing to make some cartoons, not animations, about the story. The shooting would be simple, conducted by placing the illustrator's hand under the camera while he was drawing. This technique was not new since it had previously been used in the United Kingdom, under the name of lightning sketch.

A few years earlier in Paris on August 17, 1908, a short film called *Fantasmagorie* (Cohl, 1908) by Émile Eugène Jean Louis Courtet (1857–1938), known by his stage name Émile Cohl, was released, using 700 double exposure designs. The less than two-minute play featured a man made of matchsticks who moved and encountered various objects that were modified.

Intrigued by the new technique and aiming to improve and give something different to his audience, Valle proposed to Cristiani to analyze the technique to be used in his newscasts. The new technique was broken down by the Pavia native, who began to experiment with it.

Faced with the work proposal, the young cartoonist presented him with a series of drawings to which Valle, as Cristiani himself recalled a long time later, told him:

“The drawing is very good. You will be successful. But cinema is movement, you have to move that!”. “And how is it done?” Replied the artist. “And? Study it!” Said the businessman (Quirino Cristiani, before Mickey Mouse, 2018).



**Fig. 2** Font: Fantasmagorie (1908) Émile Cohl

Cristiani studied the problem and solved it: he drew on cardboard that he later cut out and created mobile silhouettes, flat and articulated puppets. With this simple and laborious way of generating movements in the drawn figures, they began to produce short films.

Thus, on the roof of his house, in the open air, he began to work on what would be his first cinematographic work, *La intervención en la provincia de Buenos Aires* (Cristiani, 1916). Carrying this out was incredibly tedious.

He was located on the roof to be able to use the sunlight, since at that time there was no advanced lighting equipment, developing his own technique. This consisted of creating characters or objects on cardboard and then cutting them out. The figures were sewn at the joints which allowed their movement. They were placed under the focus of the camera and shot frame by frame making slight movements between them which created the sensation of movement. To carry out the movement of the cardboard, the director had to be kneeling or squatting and getting up to turn the camera handle. In addition, he had many conditions against him, the meteorological vicissitudes, change of lighting due to the earth's movement, winds, or rains.

The resulting short film showed the figure of the governor of the province of Buenos Aires between 1914-1917, Marcelino Ugarte (1855-1929) wearing his traditional top hat. You could see how he received hammer blows on the handle of which the word *Intervención* was read and how the hat was gradually swallowing it until it completely covered the controversial politician.

The short film was successful and caught the attention of Guillermo Franchini, a settled businessman, who owned the hotel which opened on December 1, 1908, *Sierras Hotel* in Alta Gracia, Córdoba province, where the most special guests stayed

and where the Spanish musician Manuel de Falla y Matheu (1876 - 1946) died; the hotel also had several cinemas and confectionery rooms. Franchini proposed to Valle to finance a new work of a political and satirical nature, but with greater footage. “During this time, Cristiani patented his invention under Number 15,498 of Argentine Patents in 1917 with a scope of 10 years as it appears in the National Registries of Patents and Trademarks” (Kartaczewicz, 2015).

The parties got to work and called their film *The Apostle*. Valle hired Alfonso de Laferrère (1893 - 1978), writer and politician, to work on the script. Quirino was also in charge of the direction. The French-Argentinian architect and set designer Andrés Ducaud was hired to create the models of the city of Buenos Aires, especially models of certain buildings, as well as José Bustamante y Ballivián, who had already collaborated with Valle on his short educational films.

Due to Franchini’s insistence, they also had the well-known illustrator Diógenes ‘El Mono’ Taborda (1890-1926), as a character designer. The ‘El Mono’ or monkey nickname was apparently given to him due to his physical appearance. His influence on the elaboration of vignettes was such that in Argentina and other areas of South America these illustrations were called *monos* or *pintamonos*. This time the filming took place inside the Valle Cinematographic Workshops, located at 452 Reconquista Street, in a more controlled and comfortable environment (Benitez, R. V., personal communication with Hector Cristiani, 2021-31-01).

De Laferrère began with the script in which Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen was lying on a cot. He was known for his sober and modest lifestyle – here he turned around without being able to sleep, worried about the moral decline in Argentina. After falling asleep, his spirit left his body, reaching the Olympus of the gods dressed as an apostle. With great fury, he communicated to the gods, with various examples, the chaotic situation of the country.

With the desire to change the situation Yrigoyen asked Jupiter to give him the ability to throw lightning at the corrupt. His wish was granted and by throwing them at the main buildings in the city he set the entire metropolitan capital on fire. The city had to be rebuilt from its ashes, becoming a new homeland. But of course, this was a dream. The sleeper woke up. It would be his job to create that new country.

Taborda for his part began to work on the character designs, which proved to be very complicated to animate, so that Cristiani redefined and simplified them for the animated technique with the author’s permission.

With the models of sixteen blocks designed by Ducaud, the sequences related to the Buenos Aires fire marked a narrative before and after in the incipient art, since this great representation was designed with all kinds of details to which photographic effects were added, so as to represent fire and flood of the capital, giving an unparalleled sense of reality.



**Fig. 3** Font: Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen by Diógenes “El Mono” Taborda.



**Fig. 4** Font: Model of Buenos Aires built by Andrés Ducaud.

The cinema where the film premiered, the Select-Suipacha owned by Franchini, determined the cost of admission of two pesos. The premiere of the film was a complete success; the critics and the Buenos Aires audience received it with great enthusiasm. Initially, the projection was part of the so-called unique program. This consisted of the projection of the main work and several pieces of lesser categories, which had to be replaced by the so-called cyclical program in which the same main work was screened several times without any other. It ran for six months, which was a milestone, even under current standards. “El Apóstol, an animated film using cardboard cut-outs said to be composed of 58,000 individually drawn frames and boasting a runtime of an hour and ten minutes, to glowing reviews” (Maher, 2020).

The film did not go beyond the capital city and was not shown in other areas of the country. However, the screening produced huge profits for Valle and Franchini, which would encourage them to continue with their film production. It was not like that for Cristiani, who only received a salary of a thousand pesos and an appearance in the credit titles in lowercase for a ten-month job of shooting 1,700 meters of film, with 58,000 animation positions for a production of sixty to seventy minutes.

The film was destroyed in a 1926 fire at Valle Studios. In this period, this film was made using nitrate negative, a highly flammable element. With a lot of humidity, it decomposes and with too much heat (temperature of more than 38 degrees Celsius), it can cause self-combustion.



Such was the problem with this material that the Health and Safety Executive, a British health organization, made a report to treat films, photos or other materials that used this system without risk.

“Ducaud continued his collaboration with the producer Federico Valle. In 1918, I directed *Abajo la careta* or *La República de Jauja* [...], a satiric feature film on the old conservative oligarchy.” (Bendazzi, 1996).

The Argentinian artist encountered another unexpected obstacle. On the one hand, Cristiani was not entirely satisfied with his collaboration with Valle – not only with his salary, but with the creative interference in the productive artistic process of *El Apóstol*. He needed to express himself freely.

On the other hand, the so-called Great War, also known as the First World War (1914-1918) was starting, not exclusively, on the European continent. This forced most of the countries to take sides indirectly. The so-called central powers were formed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, German Empire, Ottoman Empire and Kingdom of Bulgaria, and on the allied side there were Kingdom of Belgium and colonies, Kingdom of Serbia, French Third Republic and colonies, Russian Empire, British Empire and colonies, Kingdom of Italy with its colonies, United States of America, and Puerto Rico.

On July 28, 1914, hostilities began. In a quick reaction, the Argentine vice president Victorino de la Plaza y Palacios (1840-1919), who replaced the ill President Roque Sáenz Peña (1851 -1914) in office, declared Argentina neutral in the race on August 5 of that same year. Argentina had strategically remained neutral in the contest, owing to its new president Yrigoyen, who knew how to satisfy most of the citizens close to the allies and the military estates that embraced the position of the central presentations.

On April 4, 1917, there was an event that could have caused a loss of balance. The merchant ship *Monte Protegido* was attacked and sunk by a submarine of unknown origin off the Scilly Isles, also called the Scillonian Islands, located at the western end of the English Channel, and flagged by the United Kingdom.

The Argentine-flagged schooner had a Norwegian crew; Norway remained neutral in the great war. The schooner was carrying a cargo of flax bound for Rotterdam and was torpedoed by a German submarine. This fact provoked the fury of the Argentines who organized demonstrations and acted against German interests in the country. The Argentine government made a claim to the German government directed by the Argentine chancellor Honorio Pueyrredón to the Argentine minister in Berlin, Luis B. Molina, April 22, 1917, that read:

It is evidently contrary to the principles of International Law enshrined, to the neutrality strictly observed at all times by the Argentine Republic, and to the cordial relations between this country and that Empire. (...)

(...) the sinking of the Protected Mount (...) constitutes an offense to Argentine sovereignty, which puts the government of the Republic in the case of formulating the just protest and the claim of the consequent explanations. The Argentine government hopes that the German imperial government (...) will give it due satisfaction, repairing the flag, and agree to repair the material damage (...) (The sinking of the schooner *Monte Protegido*, 2021-04-04)

The German response was immediate and in a soft tone, basically conciliatory, giving clumsy excuses on April 28, 1917; the government of the last German Kaiser of William II (1859 – 1941) through the German Secretary of State Arthur Zimmermann (1864 – 1940) offered apologies and financial compensation for the injury. Several telegrams were subsequently discovered in the correspondence of Karl Ludwig Graf von Luxburg (1872–1956), who held the post of German Ambassador to Argentina, where there was a clear recognition of authorship.

In this volatile environment, Cristiani was approached by the president of the large shopping center Gath y Chaves, Della Valle and Fauvety, the *porteños* called it *gatichaves*, a well-known anti-German who proposed to make a film about the sinking of the ship. Cristiani, who had total creative control, called the film *Sin Dejar Rastros*, (Without a trace) (Cristiani, 1918), coming from one of the phrases that the German ambassador sent in his telegrams in which he encouraged the sinking *spurlos versenkt* (sunk without leaving trail). José Bayoni was hired as a scriptwriter.

The work was finished in mid-1918. Once it was done, it suffered a severe blow from censorship by the government, which did not want to stir consciences about the incident, seizing the copies and negatives of the film only one day after its premiere in the Select-Lavalle cinema. (Beckerman, 2012, p. 25).

That title does not say anything to today's viewers – comments Quirino Cristiani – but it was very clear to viewers back then. Everyone knew that the Earl of Luxburg had been the one with that idea of the sinking maneuver. He had given instructions by telegram to the German naval commanders. I wanted them to act perfectly hidden, “without leaving traces.” The textual phrase was ‘spurlos versenkt’, which was immediately translated, precisely, as ‘without leaving traces’ (to tell the truth, the phrase, more precisely, is translated as “sunk without a trace”, or “sunk without a trace”). In short, ‘without leaving a trace’ became a way of saying, almost a proverb. However, things did not take the right course: the sinking did not claim victims, and the survivors gave sufficient testimony to make it possible to conclude that, in fact, it was the Prussian Navy that had operated (Grupo6ilusroldan, 2018).

At the end of this film, the small Argentine animation industry began to develop with two feature films by Andrés Ducaud, the most prominent being *La Carmen Criolla* (Ducaud, 1918) made with puppets.

Quirino, who had already become commercially independent, founded a small studio on Calle Lavalle, before embarking on his next full-length project. It was his transitional period in a way. Thus, in the 1920s he made several animated short films, including *Los que ligan* (Cristiani, 1919), *Firpo-Dempsey* (Cristiani, 1923), *Firpo-Brennan* (Cristiani, 1923), *Uruguayos Forever* (Cristiani, 1924), *Humbertito de Garufa* (Cristiani, 1924), *Gastrotomía* (Cristiani, 1925) y *Rinoplastía* (Cristiani, 1925).

Likewise, he developed a kind of cinema on wheels in this period that consisted of a van fitted out on its back to project cinematographic images. Using this medium primarily for publicity purposes, he would later enhance it by showing comedy films of the time that were stockpiled by distributors and which he rented at a minimal price.

The success of this proposal generated traffic problems as people crowded the streets to see the images. The police had to intervene and prohibited him from doing so. But his restless spirit led him to propose to the owners of cinemas to put animated advertising in the intermission of the films. This was also a success until competition arose with the Emelco company.

In 1927, he was hired by Metro Goldwyn Mayer as the designer of the advertising posters for the new films that came to the country. During this period, he set up his studio in the garden of his house at Avenida Cabildo 1518, although he soon realized the need for more space by moving Estudios Cristiani to Calle Sarmiento 2121. During the development of the feature film *Peludópolis* (Cristiani, 1931) he returned to move his studio to José Evaristo Uriburu 460 (Benitez, R. V., personal communication with Hector Cristiani, 2021-31-01).

But the convulsed Argentina, politically speaking, was divided between supporters and opponents of Yrigoyen. When he was re-elected in 1928, he seemed to be dominated by his colleagues from the Radical Party, which led the Argentinian poet from Santander, Eduardo González Lanuza (1900 -1984) to write the text *Peludopolis* (González, 1928), or city of the hairy, alluded to the nickname that had been given to President Yrigoyen, the hairy, which would serve as the basis for the Cristiani's film.

Likewise, the disk recording system was used, where the dialogues were recorded and included some songs. He used the same technique similar to his previous works, but this time the aesthetic was much more like that of the comics he published, and people were used to seeing. (Grupo6ilusroldan, 2018).

“In 1929 Cristiani began to work on the idea of the film, which would change the script on several occasions reflecting political changes, always full of great symbolism” (Bendazzi, 2016, p. 191).

The original idea of the concept that Cristiani presented to the public in 1931 read like this:

The government ship sails through a rough sea full of sharks, there are also some pirates around whose leader, the furry one, assaults the ship, making its captain, the bald one, flee, name by which President Máximo Marcelo Torcuato de Alvear Pacheco (1868 - 1942) was popularly known, due to his baldness. He presided over the country from 1922 to 1928. Once at the helm, the pirates sail to an appealing island called the Quesolandina Republic. The filibusters settle there and have various adventures, until a paper boat approaches the coast on the horizon, with General José Félix Benito Uriburu (1868-1932) on board, together with Juan Pueblo (it is a generalist name that is used to designate the Argentine people), who begin to work immediately to restore order on the island (Bendazzi, 2018, p. 76).

It appreciated various symbolic references, such as calling the island Quesolandina, a term used in the Rio de la Plata to define the politicians who reached into the public coffers with the expression like cheese. Likewise, the name itself rhymes with the word Argentina.

Certain characters were also portrayed in an unflattering way. President Alvear appears lying on a deck chair in a bathing suit with a *galerita*, a top hat that was usually used by radicals from wealthy families. The one that later would become the minister of interior in the government of General Uriburu, Matías Guillermo Sánchez Sorondo (1880 - 1959) was portrayed in a haughty way. Major General Agustín Pedro Justo (1876-1943), future Argentine president between 1932 and 1938, with the nickname of *paracaidista*, was also portrayed. This name was used to refer to an opportunistic person with social ambitions. Other politicians of the time were also lampooned, with funny names like El Pelado Baibiene, Calafate Per'es el Colmo, O.K. Rina, Contra maestre Sancho and Tamborcito.



Fig. 5 Font Peludopolis (1931), Quirino Cristiani.

The 180-minute film premiered at the Renacimiento Cinema in September 1931. It was not certain whether it occurred on the 16th or the 18th. Authorities such as General Uriburu and his family were in the box (Benitez, R. V., personal communication with Hector Cristiani, 2021-31-01).

Before starting the film, a six-minute short film called *A visit to Cristiani Studios* was shown, which showed the process used, as well as the new sound synchronized with a musical band created by the Galician José Vázquez Vigo (1898- 1955). For

this purpose, the Vitaphone system was used, pioneered in Argentina by the SIDE (Sociedad Impresora de Discos electrophónicos).

In the first images of the film, we could read a poster of Cristiani to the public:

Impartial viewer:

You will not find in this view

Neither partisan preaching

Nor insults to this or that.

It is joyful, spiritual,

And if he catches the Dotor

It is without hatred or rancor.

Do not look at her with suspicion,

Tease the hairy guy

It's almost doing him a favor.

Peludópolis (Cristiani, 1931)

The reviews were excellent, recognizing the great work of the director. Even the president of the country praised the work saying: “great work of satire and a noteworthy acclamation of the Argentinean armed forces” (Bendazzi, 2018, p. 80).



Fig. 6 Font: Peludopolis (1931), Quirino Cristiani.

However, political life in Argentina was still very unstable, which meant that within a few months it had a new president of the government, Major General Agustín Pedro Justo. Because of this, the film ceased to be relevant. After the death of the former president Juan Hipólito Yrigoyen on July 3, 1933, Cristiani withdrew all copies of the film in circulation as a show of respect.

After these feature films, Cristiani continued working in advertising and in the field of distribution. His next most outstanding production would be *El Mono Relojero* (Cristiani, 1938), based on the text of the Uruguayan writer and editor Constancio Carlos Vigil (1876–1954) which premiered at the Monumental Cinema on February 10th, 1938. Vigil had the intention of doing more projects with Cristiani

such as *La hormiga viajera* and *La familia Conejola*, but for unknown reasons the collaboration did not continue.

In 1941 Walt E. Disney (1901-1966) traveled to South America on a mission of brotherhood promoted by the 32nd President of the United States Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882 - 1945) to mitigate possible fascist and Nazi influences in the south of the continent, since the Second World War had broken out (1939 - 1945) in Europe.

During that trip, Disney offered Cristiani to work with him. This job proposal was rejected. "Working on what I want makes me immensely happy. This, and the freedom to be able to do it the way I like is something I would not change, not even for all the gold in the world" (Cristiani, 2014, p. 56).

Instead, Cristiani introduced him to the illustrator Florencio Molina Campos (1891 –1959), who would establish a great friendship with Disney and collaborate with him in various productions such as the animated film *Bambi* (Hand, 1942) where he was involved in the design of animals and trees on Victoria Island in Lake Nahuel Huapi, in Argentine Patagonia. He also collaborated in shorts and in the feature films *Saludos Amigos* (Ferguson et al, 1942), *The Three Caballeros* (Ferguson et al, 1945), *Fun and Fancy Free* (Luske et al, 1947) and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Geronimi et al, 1951).

Federico Valle's newsreel archive burned down in 1926, and the Laboratorios Cristiani burned down twice, in 1958 and 1961, so all Cristiani's film work was assumed to have been destroyed. However, Constancio C. Vigil, the author of the children's book on which *El Mono Relojero* was based, had kept his own copy of the film, and then miraculously, two short films, a satirical sketch from 1919 and a *Making-of Peludopolis* from 1931, were discovered during the production of the 2007 documentary (Rist, 2014, p. 194).

In 1961 the creator sold his studio and retired, receiving some mentions and even a life pension granted by General Jorge Rafael Videla Redondo (1925 –2013). Cristiani died in his sleep on August 2, 1984, in Bernal, Quilmes, Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

Analyzing the questions that guided this investigation, we can answer as follows:

- Who was Quirino Cristiani?

Cristiani was a researcher and animator who developed the cut-out technique that he patented, an animation film pioneer that directed several films that had been destroyed due to fire circumstances.

- What was Quirino Cristiani's contribution to the seventh art? What did it mean for the development of animated cinema?

Cristiani's contribution was essential for understanding the evolution of the animated film industry as his production procedures and methods are still in use

in the cut-out technique. He produced films that had the cult following during his time not only due to their animation quality but due to the film as a whole. His characteristic designs and themes make them invaluable to understand Argentina's history.

- What motivated his work?

During the conversation with his grandson, he confirmed that he was a free spirit and as such found a way of expressing his personal and political views in animation. His final goal was to keep the spectators aware of the Argentinean political circumstances with some quality cinematographic work.

- What elements influenced the course of his work?

Thus, I propose and develop the following key points:

- Ignorance of the animated technique
- Adaptation to the new environment
- Innovative work technique
- Production time
- Character of the author
- Production theme
- Geographical location of the work development and presentation
- Poor international distribution
- Original language of the work
- External influence
- Job material

### **5.1. Ignorance of the animated technique**

The study of movement initiated the development of the technology showing animations such as the zoetrope, thaumatrope, and the like, before the concept of cinema per se, as scientific developments at first and later as fairground entertainment.

Since its inception, cinema focused on real characterization, with very few studying or developing animated techniques. Cristiani himself had to study Émile Cohl's procedure intensively to understand the technique and reproduce it with his own ideas.

The great advantage that this technique had in this period was the interest in developing it by pioneers who understood the possibilities and its complexity.

The first viewers preferred to see real images rather than objects or animated characters in motion. Despite everything, animation was able to find a place in the hearts of the viewers.

### **5.2. Adaptation to the new environment**

The new medium implied a new narrative development, the need to learn from scratch, developing new ways of telling stories and understanding what the viewer was transmitting. For instance, the spectators of the first projections of the Lumière brothers left the rooms terrified when they saw a train approaching them.

In this period everything was learning; from the technique, the narrative, the creation of specialized spaces in the projection of the works, the constant changes in the advances, but especially one of the great problems was the geographical remoteness of the developers. In this way we find how different developments arose almost simultaneously in various parts of the world.

At that time the communications were not as fast and instantaneous as today and it was very difficult to know what the others were doing.

### **5.3. Novel working technique**

Each new development implies the need to learn not only the new language to be used but also to train professionals who can work in the new technique. Initially, the first directors and animators were illustrators, masters in their field, but not for the reason of knowing how to recreate the movement.

If we look at the first animations in history, we can see their elaborate work, but also their rudimentary movement on many occasions. In this sense, Cristiani's new technique, which did not require cartoon animation but clippings, ensured not only more autonomy but also the possibility of learning more quickly. This technique was also very conducive to solo work.

### **5.4. Production time**

The animated production process is much greater than that of a conventional film. At that time, making a movie with actors could take a couple of months at the most. In animation, it involved at least a year-long process, although Cristiani took only ten months with his first film.

The animated process is such that a stage cannot be developed if the previous step has not been completed, while in cinema one can do several tasks at the same time, divide teams, and shoot in parallel. For example, this can be seen in *Peludopolis*, which required script changes as the film evolved due to changes in Argentina's hectic political life.

### **5.5. Author's character**

Cristiani was a calm, bohemian man who, although he loved his art and work, had clear priorities. He was not obsessed with his job or income. The author understood from the beginning what it meant to be an inventor and what the English call an entrepreneur, a businessman, who did not stop until he achieved his goal no matter how much it cost.

He was an inventive man, as reflected in all the contributions he made not only to animated cinema, but also by inventing objects for everyday use, such as a system to prepare coffee with milk and heat it at the same time.

### **5.6. Production theme**

Obviously, the theme chosen for his feature films, although very popular among *porteños*, was not transferable to other areas of the country. Political issues in the capital city were not so interesting in rural areas, in a growing Argentina.



Perhaps if he had chosen other types of themes, he would have had more media exposure; simultaneously, there were not many cinemas at the time outside the capital where most of them were located.

### **5.7. Geographical location of the development and presentation of the work**

This comes to the fore in the previous section, since we not only have to talk about thematic or cinematographic development, but also about the fact that within the city of Buenos Aires itself there was a great rivalry between the owners of the cinemas. Distribution was not done like today where distribution companies can place the same title in different cinemas.

At that time, in most cases the exhibition centers were owned by magnates who sometimes acted as producers, with which the profit cycle for them was round to the detriment of an exhibition in the competition.

### **5.8. Poor International distribution**

As much as what Cristiani narrated was important for the period, this was not a topic of international interest. It was a very local and even partisan theme, although the author tried to be neutral.

### **5.9. Original language of the work**

The third film already had synchronized audio recording, but the first two films had text cards in Spanish. This fact also contributed to his work being forgotten. If Cristiani had been in an English-speaking country, its dissemination and study would have been much greater.

### **5.10. External influence**

Most of the films that came to be screened were foreign, which also made Cristiani prosper with his title laboratory, but certainly put pressure on the development of local cinema that had less means and was in tow of foreign developments, without disparaging the work of some local filmmakers who were trying to produce.

For example, *Peludopolis* caused the creator an enormous economic loss of more than twenty-five thousand pesos of the time. It was simpler and more profitable at that time to project foreign works with which a great economic benefit was achieved just by exhibiting them.

### **5.11. Job material**

The negative used at that time burned very easily, so the works that concern us were lost in different fires.

Finally, to conclude, we must honor the memory of an inventor, creator, artist, a man without limits who in his cinematographic environment left the history of a convulsive period in his country.

## 6. Conclusions

Connoisseurs of cinematographic technique know the great work involved in setting up a project, obtaining financing, executing and distributing it, expecting a positive reception from the public, which determines whether a film becomes triumphant or simply forgotten in time. If this occurs with an actor-led production, it is even more difficult to produce an animated film.

The animated technique is much more complex, the process is much slower and requires arduous training on the part of its participants. Naturally, they must be artists with a great knowledge of movement, proportions, and depth of field. An error in animation can take many hours to solve, while it is always easier to repeat a take due to a failed performance by an actor or a technical problem.

Animation is mistakenly associated almost exclusively with children, as we can see in Cristiani's own films or in other very popular ones, such as Walt E. Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) which were shown in the UK for people over sixteen.

The question posed by this paper relates to the understanding of how some works that have proven to be key to the history, not only of Argentine cinema but for the World, have not been recognized with the status they deserve. Cristiani's influence in the historical perspective of the Argentinian political world during his period allowed many researchers to go deeper and with a different perspective, even when his films were unfortunately destroyed. For example, his film *Sin Dejar Rastros* (1918) was important to show his fellow Argentinians the political situation during the Great War.

For some, his work is not recognized due to the imperialist process called *cultural colonization* and in the excessive love that many countries have for everything that comes from abroad; others believe that due to his political positions some powerful actors in our society *erased* him from history; and there are those who are sure that this oblivion is simply due to the fact that he himself decided to escape fame, secluding himself in a small town in the interior of the country.

Cristiani achieved several records in his life: he made the first animated feature film in the history of cinema (*The Apostle*, 1917), the first sound animated feature film in the world (*Peludópolis*, 1931), he was the author of the first censored animated film in the world (*Without leaving traces*, 1918) and the first Argentine film with optical sound (*The watchmaker monkey*, 1938).

He was a pioneer in animated film and inventor of a particular technique to animate cut-outs made by hand, giving them life in a unique way, and converting them into a moving image with an alternative method to that of celluloid that would be used years later. He was an autodidact with a bohemian education who learned to draw following his instinct and inspiration; one of his first jobs was as a street caricature artist: the challenge was to illustrate his client in less than a minute at the cost of a penny. Those who knew him said that he was a sensitive man, very committed to society, a true entrepreneur who came to have his own animation studio and created a cartoon school by correspondence with training and job opportunities.

This Argentinian artist was a pioneer of his time, an inventor and above all a freethinking man who brought a new technique and a new vision of filmmaking to the seventh art. Quirino Cristiani belonged to a generation of artists who dedicated their lives to art and ideals, committed men who gave everything for their innovative inventions and wanted to change the world through constant work and original ideas.



Fig. 7 Font: Flipmagazine, Interview with Quirino Cristiani.

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## CRISTIANI I PRVI ANIMIRANI DUGOMETRAŽNI FILMOVI U ISTORIJI - OD ARGENTINE DO SVETA

**Apstrakt.** Decembra 21-og 1937 godine, izasao je film *Snežana i sedam patuljaka* (Hand, Jackson, Pearce, Sharpsteen, Morey, Cottrell, 1937), u produkciji Voltera E. Diznija. Odmah su ga svi rangirali kao prvi animirani dugometražni film. Međutim, ova tvrdnja nije tačna. Italijansko-argentinski animator Kvirino Kristijani sa svojim delom *El Apostol* (Cristiani, 1917) dvadeset godina pre severnoameričkog, zaslužan je za prvi animirani igrani film u svetu. Njegov film *Peludopolis* (Cristiani, 1931) iz 1931 je takođe prvi animirani dugometražni film sa sinhronizovanim zvukom. S druge strane, Kristijano je patentirao novi i revolucionarni sistem za kreiranje animacija koristeći samo kartonske isečke. Nažalost, od nekih zaboravljen, a mnogima i nepoznat, kvalitativnim dokumentarnim istraživanjem namera je da se osvetli i afirmiše njegov rad analizirajući njegov doprinos sedmoj umetnosti, od Argentine do sveta.

**Ključne reči:** Argentina; crtani filmovi; animacija; istorijski filmovi; Quirino Cristiani