

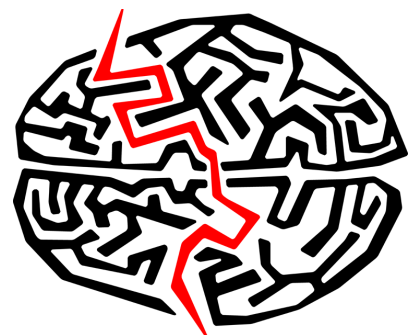
BRICKS IN MOTION

A film by Philip Heinrich



PRESS NOTES

Runtime: 01:27:28:04
Shooting format: Digital
Screening ratio: 2:1



MINDGAME STUDIOS

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

BRICKS IN MOTION is a feature length documentary that explores the lives of people involved in the hobby of creating stop-motion animated films with LEGO® bricks and other building toys. Filmed in five countries around the world, the film is a journey through the creative life and struggles of a diverse community of storytellers as they bring their spectacular visions to life.

LONG SYNOPSIS

BRICKS IN MOTION takes you into the world of people who create stop-motion animated films with LEGO® bricks and other building toys. In this diverse world of interesting characters ranging from a stay-at-home mom in San Diego, California, to a television director in Halifax, Canada, to a radio DJ in Stuttgart, Germany, the documentary explores not only the hobby itself but the universal need to create that drives artists and storytellers of all kinds.

Fans of LEGO® and stop-motion filmmaking will learn about the creation of these films from some of the world's leading LEGO® animators. Anyone who has ever wanted to tell a story will find common ground with the people they meet in the film, as these hobbyist filmmakers grapple with larger questions about the underlying purpose behind the act of creation, and the difficulties of life that get in the way.

Like the films these animators create, BRICKS IN MOTION is an engaging look into a world not often explored. The interviewees, and ideas they present, will resonate with artists, providing food for thought well after the final frame.

BRICKS IN MOTION

Directed and Edited by
PHILIP HEINRICH

Produced by
PHILIP HEINRICH
ZACH MACIAS
DOUG VANDEGRIFT JR.
NATHAN WELLS

Executive Producers
VINNIE GARTLAND
DOUG & LARISSA HEINRICH
CHAD W. KING
CHARLES LEE MUDD JR.

Executive Producers
AL NICKELS
DAVID PAGANO
JOHN SOMMERS
ADAM ZANER

Associate Producers
ZACHRY KARISCH
MICHAEL MACASA

Composers
PHILIP HEINRICH
JOSEPH FRANK

Directors of Photography
PHILIP HEINRICH
MICHAEL MACASA

Assistant Editor
SEÁN WILLIS

Production Audio Mixers
ZACHRY KARISCH
ZACH MACIAS

Ergo Possum presents

In Association with
One Brick Studios

In Association with
MindGame Studios

An Ergo Possum production
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BIOGRAPHIES

PHILIP HEINRICH (Director, Producer, Editor)

Philip Heinrich is an independent director and producer. He received his bachelor and masters degrees studying film at Baylor University, and his films have succeeded in festivals worldwide. He previously directed the independent feature *In Paradise*, and makes his documentary debut with *Bricks in Motion*. Heinrich's animated shorts have won the FilmClick, Black Glasses, and Nickelodeon Animation Festivals, and his work was selected as a finalist in competition at the 2010 Cannes Lions festival. He also operates an online community devoted to the art of stop motion animation with LEGO bricks, BricksInMotion.com.

ZACH MACIAS (Producer)

Zach Macias is a freelance animator and filmmaker in Novato, California who also has worked in video game cinematics. He graduated from UCLA in 2013 with a degree in Design Media Arts. He has accumulated over 36,000 subscribers on YouTube, and his animated shorts have been featured in the Wall Street Journal as well as the inaugural Platform International Animation Festival in 2007. He has also won awards at UCLA's Campus Moviefest and Shorttakes Film Festival.

DOUG VANDEGRIFT JR. (Producer)

Doug Vandegrift Jr. is a full-time communications consultant by day and a freelance filmmaker by night, currently living in Salt Lake City, Utah. He graduated from the UCLA School of Film and Television in 2010, and won the MPAA Scholarship for his graduating thesis film. His animated rookie effort, *America: Outlawed*, has been featured on ABC's I-CAUGHT and WSJ Online. He is a member of the Screen Writer's Guild of America, and has worked in several entertainment industries such as feature films, television and video games.

NATHAN WELLS (Producer)

Nathan Wells is a graphic designer and independent animator living in McKinleyville, California. He graduated from San Jose State University in 2011 and currently works as a graphic designer. His films have been featured in the Wall Street Journal, Nerve.com's The Screengrab Blog, WSJ.com's Speakeasy Blog, ABC's I-CAUGHT, and Gizmodo.com. His film *30 Years: The Story of the Minifigure* was commissioned by The LEGO Group and has been routinely featured on Comcast OnDemand.

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Q&A with Director, Producer, and Editor PHILIP HEINRICH

What was your inspiration for the film?

For many years, I have been a big fan of documentary films that focus on character and ideas more than a factual introduction to a topic. Films like Errol Morris's *Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control* or Judy Irving's *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill* work so well as character studies that explore universal human themes, and I wanted to bring something of that approach to a film focused on storytelling and creativity.

Before we began to make this film, I had been the owner and administrator of a online community devoted to stop-motion animation, primarily with LEGO® bricks, called BricksInMotion.com, and in sixteen years of involvement in that community I've met a lot of memorable personalities. I thought these men and women, who generally create their work as a labor of love in their free time, would be a unique lens for exploring what drives creative people.

How did the film come to be made? What was the process of getting to production like?

I had been interested in creating a documentary like this for some years, but it had not occurred to me that the BricksInMotion.com community could serve as the focus until a friend from the community, Joseph Hayden, suggested it. I began discussions with a few filmmakers I've worked with before: Michael Macasa, Nathan Wells, Doug Vandegrift, and Zach Macias. After a few months, we had decided this was something we wanted to go ahead with, and we put together a crowdfunding campaign.

While crowdfunding is never easy, the community surrounding this hobby was very supportive. We raised the necessary funds and then some.

Compared to my previous, fiction feature *In Paradise*, the pre-production process for *Bricks in Motion* was relatively fast. Once we figured out the key crew and subject matter for the documentary, it was a matter of scheduling logistics and making the most of our budget.

How did you find and choose people to interview for the documentary?

Some of the people interviewed were already acquaintances from my time at BricksInMotion.com; others were mentioned to us during the preliminary research process. Fortunately, everyone we asked to be in the documentary obliged.

It was important to me that the film focus on people who create these films as a hobby. We

made sure to include some professional LEGO® animators, such as Paul Hollingsworth, Garrett Barati, and Forrest Whaley, but we wanted to explore what drives somebody, who has no financial reason, to make LEGO® movies in their free time.

Ultimately, we tried to cast as wide a net as we could given our budgetary constraints. We filmed in 17 cities in five countries. This was a relatively modestly budgeted documentary, so that was more than I thought we would be able to do when the project began.

How long did it take to shoot the film?

We had 18 days of live action filming in North America and 18 days of filming in Europe, set a few months apart which gave me some time to evaluate the first half of the shoot. After the film had been completed to a rough cut stage, we began work on the film's animated segments, which took roughly three weeks of animation work to complete, in addition to weeks of preparation by our primary LEGO® model designer, Nathan Wells, who built the variety of expansive sets seen in the film's animated portions.

Of course, we also included footage from dozens of preexisting brick films, some of them dating back decades.

What was the most challenging aspect of shooting the film?

The logistics of filming large numbers of interviews in locations all across North America and Europe made for a challenge. We had enough time to film what we wanted, but we had to be efficient in order to shoot a large amount of content, which would later serve us well in the editing process.

I felt it was important to collect vastly more good interview and b-roll footage than the documentary would require, so that it could be shaped around what best served the film rather than trying to make a limited amount of material work.

Your background is in fictional narrative films. What was it like to move to documentary filmmaking?

In some ways, it was very different. I couldn't script the film fully before filming, and there was a much higher percentage of finding the film during filming and during the edit, in a trial-and-error manner.

On the other hand, I found a lot of common ground with making any other film. You still have to carefully shape how characters are portrayed by choosing what you include, in order to create an honest and rounded portrayal that is compelling and effectively communicated for the audience.

What was the process of creating the film's stop-motion animated segments like?

It was certainly different from the live action portion of filming. Nathan Wells, Zach Macias, and I worked tirelessly together on a tight schedule to complete the animation. We wanted to make something that fit the style of the film but was at the same time impressive and a little beyond the typical LEGO® videos viewers may have seen before on YouTube in terms of its imagery. Striving for a high quality level meant we had to be very particular about getting the details right.

In addition to directing and producing, you also edited the film. What was the editing process like?

Our assistant editor, Seán Willis, cataloged and organized the content of the interview footage quite extensively for me. We knew from the start that because emotions and *how* people said things would be crucial, we didn't want to rely on the traditional approach of editing a film on the basis of words from a transcript. Instead, Seán broke it down on an idea-to-idea basis. There are good reasons for the transcription method, and this alternate approach probably meant watching the footage a larger number of times, but many of the film's transitions and juxtapositions rely on non-verbal nuances of the interviews. This would have been difficult to arrive at if the film were "written" from transcripts before editing.

One of the magical things for me about editing the film was how quickly I lost the sense of my prompts from the original interviews once the footage was organized and cut down to only responses. We wanted it to feel natural, as though these people are talking about these topics to the audience rather than answering prompts, because in the content used in the final edit, they were very good about presenting their own ideas.

Conventional wisdom says that the director should not edit the film. I wanted to edit it myself in order to have the best understanding of how it was constructed and what the options were. Because I was also the director, I made sure to compensate for my own closeness to the subject matter of the film in the editing by getting outside feedback. It was important to have a sense of how people who weren't involved in filming would perceive the interviews.

We went through an extensive revision process over about four months, in which many different cuts of the film were shown to various producers and audiences in order to gauge pacing and clarity. The end product is quite different from my initial attempt at the edit, and I'm grateful for all the outside input that made that possible.

What, to you, is the essence of what this film is about?

The struggle to create, in the face of adversities we all confront in life, and what drives people to go to overcome those adversities in order to create. People can watch the film and draw their own conclusions on that tension. I think the differing, sometimes clashing philosophies and worldviews of the people we interviewed for the film are part of what makes documentary filmmaking compelling.

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DIRECTOR STATEMENT

I have been a part of the stop-motion community highlighted in this film for 16 years. In that time, I've met many interesting people. They aren't just hobbyists playing with toys; they are a community of thoughtful artists creating films in their free time as a labor of love.

What drives somebody who has a busy life to spend their precious little free time hunched over a table moving tiny plastic men for hours on end, year after year? I wanted to explore the underlying motivations and character behind the kind of people driven to create these works, to create a film less in the style of a behind-the-scenes featurette and closer the tradition of character-driven documentaries like Judy Irving's *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill* or Errol Morris's *Gates of Heaven*.

In traveling throughout the world to film interviews for the documentary, I believe we met characters, real people, with creative passion and clashing ideas about storytelling and creativity. I hope that you enjoy this journey through the world of *Bricks in Motion* as much as we have in bringing it to you.

Press Contact

Ergo Possum

Philip Heinrich

Phone: 913-284-1366

philip@philipheinrich.com

website: www.movie.bricksinmotion.com

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