

# Broken Narratives

Interview with Luca Dipierro by Tess Martin

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**1. Your new compilation film Paper Circus also has a live score aspect to it, and you have a long relationship with the band, Father Murphy. Where did this collaboration start? Why did you start working with them?**

I met Father Murphy more than ten years ago, when I was still living in Italy, and we have been collaborating since. I have made artworks for their old record label, and animated videos for their songs. And they have composed and recorded the soundtrack for many of my animations. We have also worked together on a few literary projects: an anthology of fiction and several art booklets. I've always admired Father Murphy for their approach to music – they don't just write songs, they build these entire narratives, working around a vision.

Our collaboration really came into its own in 2014. I had a retrospective screening of my shorts at the Clinton Street Theatre in Portland. Around that time, Father Murphy were touring the U.S., and since I knew they were going to be in Portland, I asked if they wanted to play a live soundtrack to the screening. They accepted, and proposed that I joined them on stage. I am not a musician, but I used to play drums in bands when I was younger, and I am really interested in music for film. We rehearsed in my studio for a week and then did the show. It was an incredibly visceral experience. I felt that Father Murphy made my characters come to life on the screen. Their music has a raw, emotional quality that can be almost unbearable at times, it's elementary and unadorned, and also has a delicacy that is rare to find in rock music.

## **2. Where are they based, and how does the collaboration work practically?**

Father Murphy is a duo from Italy. Freddie and Chiara are currently based in Torino, in the northwest of Italy, but they often spend time in New York and San Francisco, and are constantly touring. They are generally associated with a scene known as “Italian occult psychedelia,” but they don’t really belong to any genre. Our collaborative method is pretty much straightforward. I send them footage (and sometimes ideas about what emotional tones to enhance), and they come up with something and record it and send it back to me, and 99% of the time it’s already perfect. A lot of musicians would try to just make their own music, rather than build a narrative made of image and sound, but with Father Murphy it’s different: they know that their music exists in a different way when paired with animation. They don’t try to make the piece exist in an abstract, purely musical dimension. I occasionally send them sounds that I’ve recorded myself—ambient sounds, or noises made with toy instruments that I borrow from my son—and the band mixes them onto the track.

## **3. After so many years making short films why did you decide to compile them into a feature and add the live score component?**

My desire to put the shorts together comes from the fact that they are already segments of a wider, fragmented narrative. Time-wise, *Paper Circus* represents only a small fraction of my work, from 2012 until 2014. That was a very important period for me, because I moved from a paper-based type of animation to a more textural way of working, using fabric and other materials (wood, moss, stones, found objects, etc.). If you watch the shorts together, in that particular order, with a single uninterrupted soundtrack, they almost seem to be chapters of the same story. It’s a non-consecutive story, full of contradictions, holes, unanswered questions, where similar characters and situations keep showing up in different form. The live-score component, when possible, adds an element of one-of-a-kind experience, of epiphany, of hidden and dusty and unused things, that all of a sudden, for a brief time, have some light shine through them.

**4. Perhaps related - Where do you normally push your short films to be seen (film festivals? the internet? art galleries?) and has that changed with Paper Circus?**

I used to show my work mostly in galleries, and in festivals, and of course, on the internet. The internet is great for sparking people's curiosity, but it's not a good way to fully experience films, especially for an artwork-based type of animation. Definitely *Paper Circus* has opened up the possibility for my work to be screened in movie theaters, as part of their regular programming.

**5. Where have you presented Paper Circus so far, and what are the plans for its future?**

*Paper Circus* started as a one-time performance, but we realized immediately that we wanted to do more shows. We have embarked on three film tours in the past few years, on the West and East Coasts of the U.S. and in Italy, performing mostly in movie theaters and in a few galleries. It has been strange and exciting for me, because I am not a performer, I am used to working in the quiet, almost underwater atmosphere of my studio, but Father Murphy has so much experience in touring—and in solving technical and logistical problems on-the-go—that everything went smoothly. I don't think we'll do more *Paper Circus* shows in the future, though, because it's an experience that has gone full circle, and now we are immersed in our next project together. But apart from the live performances, *Paper Circus* could have a longer life. It recently aired on Italian television (the first TV appearance of my work) and there are plans for a DVD/Blu-Ray release.

**6. Your work has a beautiful aesthetic, often dark themes, and not necessarily traditional or clear narratives. Where do you think your work is appreciated most? In what type of context, or even physical locations?**

I like narratives that are not clear, as you say, that are broken. The fascination with storytelling, for me, is mostly in the voice of the narrator, in its modulations, and from the

choices he makes of what to tell and what not to tell. Literature and film are full of unreliable narrators. And I think that a lot of people are open to suspended, contradictory storylines, more than the entertainment industry seems to believe. I find the idea that a story has to have a steady line—a beginning, a middle, and an end—incredibly boring. In this sense, I think that my work can mostly appeal to the curious, to the open-minded, or just to anybody who wants to spend one hour in the darkness of a theatre and be surprised. Of course, “my” work is also an array of themes and stories and figurative obsessions passed on to me through the place where I grew up, at the border between Italy and Austria: Italian folklore, Catholic imagery, the theatre of marionettes, German children’s literature, Eastern European illustration. My hometown, Merano, used to belong to a world (the Austro-Hungarian empire) that vanished into thin air between the First and Second World Wars. I think that there are echoes of that world in my animations, the melancholy of its disappearance. But I don’t think that because of this substrate, my work can be appreciated more in Europe than in other countries. Images have the power of being immediately understandable, on a visceral level, by anybody.

**7. Portland has a thriving animation scene of independent animators like Joan Gratz, Joanna Priestley, Laura Heit, Kurtis Hough, but it also has a fairly studio-oriented history and scene, with Will Vinton, LAIKA, and smaller studios like Bent Image Lab. How do you observe the scene in Portland, and your place in it?**

I love living in Portland. I don’t go out much, I am not very social, so I don’t participate a lot in the animation scene, but I love the fact that it exists. Just to be surrounded by it, by all these efforts and energy, makes a huge difference for an artist, even for a reclusive one like me. It’s almost like the air you breathe.

**8. Where did this obsession with book cover texture come from, and where do you find your materials?**

I have been in love with books since I was a child. The act of reading, of holding a book in my hands, of flipping through the pages, has always been an experience both

reassuring and revealing for me. My background is literary, and books are still my main source of inspiration. I think that I learned how to edit my animations more by reading the stories of Jules Renard than by watching films. I think about the figures I draw and cut as words that can be weaved into a visual syntax. I find it strange that there are plenty of dictionaries for words, and very few for images.

I love to go to used bookstores and find old hardcover volumes to tear apart. The use of book cloth is not only an homage, but it brings into my animations a sense of worn intimacy, of objects resisting the passing of time. Books have a very complex structure, both bi- and tridimensional. The moveable books of 19<sup>th</sup>-century illustrator Lothar Meggendorfer take this play with dimensions to extreme consequences, by unfolding into a theatre stage and literally having the pages become floors, walls, sky, mountains. I am absolutely in love with Meggendorfer's pop-ups, they string together different worlds: books, marionettes, cinema, optical toys.

**9. I hear you're working on a new long-form work - what is it, and how does it differ from *Paper Circus*?**

My first animated feature is called *The Cadence*, and I have been working on it for almost two years. I am hoping to finish it by the end of 2017. It's different from *Paper Circus* in the sense that there is a main narrative arc (five seasons in the life of a child), and the viewer will spend more time with the characters, whereas in *Paper Circus* the characters appear and disappear very quickly. There is also a more elaborate use of space, more depth to the scenes, which are often filmed through the branches of trees. I have made all these intricate trees, cutting and gluing together pieces of real bark, and cut hundred of leaves out of book cloth. It took me two months to do. Father Murphy, again, is working on the soundtrack. Since there's no dialogue, the music will carry much more than it did in the shorts. There will be recurrent elements, themes, reprises, variations, and so on.

**10. Where can we hear about your upcoming screenings/live events, or see how your**

**projects develop?**

My website: [www.lucadipierro.com](http://www.lucadipierro.com)