

Bruce Timm

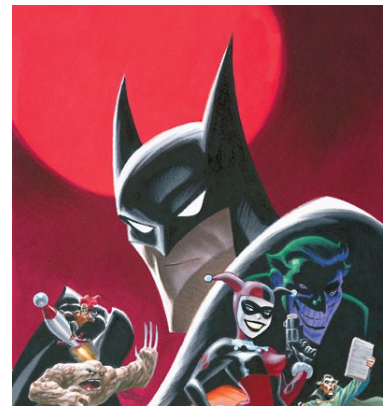
By Matt Bixler

“The first thing I remember drawing was Batman... It certainly wouldn't be the last time I got to draw him.” (Kidd 1998)

Bruce Timm started work in animation at Filmation working on a Saturday morning series called “Blackstar.” (Newsarama) From this and his later experiences, he gained experience which helped refine his sense of design for animation, most often from working with designs that didn't work.

“I was frustrated that the producers and directors always insisted on a design approach that actually worked *against* the strengths of animation: the characters always had to be drawn in “realistically,” with “realistic” facial features and anatomy, too many folds in their clothes, and *way* too much detail overall.” (Kidd 1998)

After the success of 1989's “Batman” film, Warner Brothers looked to create an animated series based on the character. Bruce Timm paired with writer Paul Dini to develop the series. Through the next few years, Timm designed all but a few of the characters featured in the long-running series, which garnered critical acclaim for its intelligent treatment of the characters and brilliant design style. Taking cues from the art deco styling of the Fleischer Superman cartoons with the analytical designs of Alex Toth (of Space Ghost and Birdman), Timm refined a style based on a reduction of forms. This allowed for animation that wasn't overly complex to create twenty-four times for every second, but didn't sacrifice potential for expression or movement, something that wasn't often explored at the time.

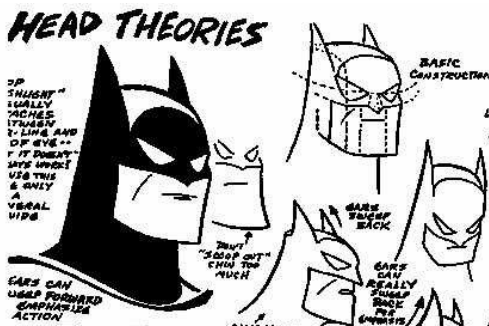


Timm's design-based style was a stark departure from current television animation.

“Every time I'd do a design that even remotely resembled what would

eventually become the 'Batman animated style,' my bosses would say, 'No, that's too flat' or 'too designy' or (my favorite) 'too cartoony.' Hell, and here I thought we were *making* cartoons!" (Kidd, 1998)

Timm was a natural choice for me. I remember summer afternoons spent indoors, entranced by the Batman series. I always had a particular disdain for “serious” shows when I was younger, but something had hooked me about this series that I just couldn't identify at that age. Years later, the series was released on DVD. As I eagerly gobbled them up, I figured out what attracted me. The show's design was so crisp and readable that a child was instantly drawn to it, and anyone else could easily appreciate the depth of the writing and the appeal of this stylized art. It wasn't long before my sights were set on a career of animation.



Creating forms from basic shapes allows artists to turn and move characters easily.

The style of the characters wasn't too difficult to imitate, simply because I've been such a fan of Timm for so long. A breakdown of the human form into basic shapes is the key, in order to simplify the process of turning the shapes for animation. For the image, I chose to do a rendition of a character I'd created for NCSOFT's superhero video game, City of Heroes.

I chose an identifiably Batman pose, with the hero looking over his shoulder as he realizes he's being stalked by the villain and his band of thugs. For the architecture I wanted to cross the game's gleaming futurist skyscraper with the series' dark, brooding atmosphere. The series' background work was made with pastels against dark paper, so since I work in Photoshop, I added a grain texture to the finished background to give it some of the rough authenticity of the show.

For the finished product I wanted to create a sort of “collector's cell.” The show's popularity bred a healthy fan base, and merchandise was created in full force. Among this merchandise is was a series of images created by placing lithographic prints of background art underneath character art

painted on transparency paper, which created the image of traditionally drawn animation.



The “inks” (black outlines) were created digitally in Photoshop, and printed onto transparency paper. This was a common means of production in collector's cells, because it aided in mass production. The characters in the background seem to be floating in the air, but once combined with the painted skyscraper, they'll fit in.



Behind this layer is the cell's color, which is applied with paint.



Underneath that is the background of the image, which was digitally painted in Photoshop. These were often done first, as they proved to be endlessly important to the rest of the piece. After the pieces have been assembled, they're glued together under board which as a color intended to compliment the piece.



This project was a unique opportunity to slip into the skin of another artist. Timm's trademark style went on to many more series in the years to come, but Batman had always had a personal place in my heart; not just because of those lazy summer days in front of the TV, but because it was a new artist who, when left to his own devices, influenced a generation of others.

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Images courtesy the Bruce Timm Gallery. <http://www.popcultureshock.com/timm/>