

MoMA Audio

Guillermo del Toro: Crafting Pinocchio

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345 [Introduction to Guillermo del Toro: Crafting Pinocchio](#)

Director, Guillermo del Toro: I am Guillermo del Toro, co-writer, co-director, and co-producer of *Pinocchio*.

This is a fable very close to my heart, and one that I think has lived in many incarnations. And I trust the one we're offering to you is a particularly beautiful one. This is a tale about becoming who you are, not transforming yourself for others, which goes counter to the traditional take on *Pinocchio*.

I think animation is coming to a crucial point in which we have to push it into being an art form that is recognized as cinema and not just a genre for a family audience. Animation, to me, has to break that barrier by being a little more daring technically, a little more daring thematically. No matter what audience ends up watching it.

So I thought it would be beautiful to make a heartfelt movie that would take stop motion animation, and push it as much as possible—visually trying to establish it firmly as the beautiful handcrafted thing it is.

342 [Pinocchio faces. 2019](#)

Narrator: Welcome to *Guillermo del Toro: Crafting Pinocchio*, an exhibition dedicated to the craft, process, and collaboration behind *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*. On this audio playlist, you'll hear from some of the many people who brought this film to life.

Director, Mark Gustafson: When you look at this film, you can see the people who made it.

Co-Production Manager, Curt Enderle: Everything has to be built. That's the blessing and the curse of stop motion. You fully create a world and a world that's unlike any other. And that's really powerful.

Puppet Production Manager, Jennifer Hammontree: These are complicated puppets. They're each a tiny work of art and engineering.

Narrator: The faces you see here are used in a technique called replacement animation.

Puppet Creative Supervisor, Georgina Hayns: Replacement is every mouth shape and every expression being the separate face mask that sits on the puppet's face.

Facial Animator, Kim Slate: We had roughly 870 different mouths that we could use. So, a range of happy, sad, neutral, fearful. We tried to really build out his kit so that we could hit any emotional beat in the story.

We design the facial performance for every shot prior to the animator starting. So, I will animate the shot using the storyboards, using cues from the voice actors. And then the animator will get basically a pizza box full of 3D printed faces, and an X-sheet that tells them which frame to put which face on.

Georgina Hayns: One of the challenges with *Pinocchio* is "how do we make the viewer believe that he's wood?" That's why we went replacement faces on him because using a hard material for his face made perfect sense.

356 [Gris Grimly. *Pinocchio*, by Carlo Collodi. 2002](#)

Director, Guillermo del Toro: Gris Grimly designed an amazing Pinocchio—to me the best Pinocchio I've seen because it's basically so simple and it has an innocence and a purity to its expressions and the ungainliness of his body, which is very, very childlike, you know? And that was a lynchpin. That was a cornerstone.

Illustrator, Gris Grimly: Tor is a publishing house and they wanted me to do a cover of Pinocchio and then I read the book and I was like, "This is such a rich story." So I did a fully illustrated chapter book for it.

After the book was published, me and some friends started to develop how this could be a movie. And we came up with a list of directors, and Guillermo was top on the list. Shortly after that, I got a call from a gallery that was selling my artwork, and they said that Guillermo came in and bought a piece of my Pinocchio artwork. And I said, "You've got to be kidding me!"

They called him up and we had lunch. And this was 2004, I think. It's been a long time coming. This has been like 20 some years.

347 [Re-education camp M gate. 2021](#)

Narrator: *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio* is set in Italy in the 1930s, when the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini was in power. To arrive at the design for the town and different buildings, the film's designers conducted a great deal of historical research.

Director, Guillermo del Toro: Even the most stylized building in the movie, which is the Fascist Recruitment and Training Center, was from a photograph of a real place that had the giant M at the entrance for Mussolini.

Director, Mark Gustafson: The design of it is very stark, very cold, very intimidating.

Guillermo has a fascination with fascism, with the way that it distorts society. I think everybody thinks they know the story of Pinocchio. But what appealed to me about this particular version was that it really turned the original material on its head. That material suggested that obedience was really important—"be a good little boy and everything will be okay."

Our version questions that. Should we be completely obedient? Should we always do everything that people tell us to do?

Guillermo del Toro: We wanted to create a story about a world that behaves like a puppet and obeys everything they're told. And a puppet that chooses to be disobedient and finds his own morality, his own soul, and his own humanity by that disobedience.

348 [Death Puppet. 2019–20](#)

Co-Production Designer, Guy Davis: Death was an early concept that I worked on with Guillermo. She became almost like a sphynx. And that was all through lots of iterations.

Puppet Creative Supervisor, Georgina Hayns: These inanimate objects, which start out as a line drawing of a character. They then go into an inanimate sculpture of a character, which is the maquette. That's the first time we see all these characters in three- dimension.

Senior Sculptor & Fabricator, Toby Froud: But then we have to plan out what it needs to do within its story. We all know what a human looks like and also how they move to some degree. But a creature, it could actually move in many different ways—especially Death. It has the back legs of a lion and the front legs of a bird with human hands, the tail of a snake, as well as a mane and massive horns and wings.

We actually built several different types of wings because we have to consider how many feathers have to move when the wings perform. So we did a lot of tests for that.

Georgina Hayns: They were the challenge because they have eyes all over them. The backs of her wings we wanted to have as a fur texture. So we actually got fur fabric, which we painted silicone into and then sculpted with scissors to look like the sculpted fur on her hip area. And it worked amazingly!

349 [Puppet Construction and Molds](#)

Puppet Production Manager, Jennifer Hammontree: The puppet-making department is responsible for creating all the characters you see on set.

Co-Production Designer, Curt Enderle: You have molders and casters and people building armatures and people building hair and people building costumes.

Jennifer Hammontree: These are complicated puppets. It takes lots more time than people realize.

They have skeleton bodies that we build out of steel and ball-and-socket joints. And then over that we cast a layer of foam for squishiness and flexibility, and then a layer of silicone to give it a more skin-like appearance when it moves.

Puppet Maker, Peter Saunders: You create a skull for the character and then build into the skull various mechanics that will allow the face to create expressions.

Jennifer Hammontree: Tiny gears and wires and paddles. If we're going to see the body parts at all, we have to paint those, just like a makeup artist. Costume, hair, fur, feathers.

Peter Saunders: The puppet gets tested. The animator comes back with a whole sheet of complaints and saying, "Can it do this? Can it do that?"

Jennifer Hammontree: We just really need everything to be able to be controlled by the animators. So a full puppet timeline—about six months to a year.

Puppet Creative Supervisor, Georgina Hayns: But a puppet is never finished until the last day of filming because if an animator comes to us and says, "Look for this shot, I really need this emotion. And I can't get the brows up in the middle." "Okay. Let's see what we can do."

350 [Dogfish Puppet. 2020–21](#)

Director, Mark Gustafson: The Dogfish is an ancient creature. So part of our task was to see that history living in its surface—all the scars and the welts, and all that deep texture.

Co-Production Designer, Guy Davis: The silhouette was based on old maps of sea serpents. So I used that as a basis, and then of course, would bring that to Guillermo and he would have input of different details to make it fully formed.

Puppet Production Manager, Jennifer Hammontree: The underbelly of the Dogfish is quite beautiful. It's a repetition of a pine cone motif.

And another one of my favorite Dogfish secrets is one of our costumes is a master weaver. So in the Dogfish fins, we have all of these woven ribbons that she made cast into the silicone to give this bone-like cartilage appearance.

Narrator: Around the Dogfish puppet, you can see the kinds of the reference materials that the designers and puppet makers used.

Look Development Artist, Caitlin Pashalek: Look development, which is my favorite part of film, because it's all blue sky and concept art and experimentation. We kind of knew broadly what world we were in because we're working from the artwork but also just from a ton of reference. It's fairly naturalistic, it's organic, it's charming and handmade. It's not overly stylized.

Jennifer Hammontree: It's not a perfect, beautiful world. It's kind of a dirty world and it has some unsightliness to it. And Rob DeSue said "it's perfectly imperfect." And that became our design touchstone. And every time we would get bogged down in some detail, we'd say, "Well, you know, is it perfectly imperfect?" Great.

351 [Church Set. 2019](#)

Director, Guillermo del Toro: The church is one of the central sets on the movie. We wanted to do a church that felt handmade by members of the town. But also, you're going to see little details on the stained glass windows from *Pan's Labyrinth*.

Co-Production Manager, Curt Enderle: For me, it's always reference-based. And you know, we found these images from medieval churches that had essentially monsters in the stained glass, and they were *this* close to something that Guillermo would do anyway. I was like, "What if we just incorporated some of his monsters?"

Art Director, Rob DeSue: We had to put something in the window. This just helped us solve that in a subtle way and so the pale man is up there.

Curt Enderle: We very much wanted everything to feel like it's all part of a cohesive world. And so we had developed color palettes in terms of how, not necessarily different sets would feel, but definitely elements of our world.

Guillermo del Toro: Most of the movie is imbued with the greens, very saturated golds. We wanted it to feel very candle-lit, very fire-lit. It's a very warm movie.

Director of Photography, Frank Passingham: With something like the church, you're really looking at creating an environment that is real. So, a lot of the lighting is naturalistic. But then we sort of boost the colors, just to convey the emotion and to help to tell a story.

353 [Time-lapse: Spazzatura runs through carnival grounds. 2019](#)

Director, Mark Gustafson: Stop motion involves taking an object or a puppet and moving it slightly and shooting a frame, moving it a little bit more, shooting another frame.

Narrator: These frames are like still photographs. When you arrange them in a sequence and play them back at a certain speed, it creates the illusion of a moving image.

Every object and character in a scene is moved and controlled by an animator.

Mark Gustafson: One of the founding principles that Guillermo and I came up with when we started this was, we're going to give the performance back to the animators as much as possible.

Producer, Alex Bulkeley: The animators were moving lights as they felt it was important for that shot or scene. They were putting all the props where they should be for that particular shot or scene.

Animation Supervisor, Brian Hansen: Most times before you do a shot as an animator, you investigate what kind of shape this shot is going to have, what kind of motion, what kind of speed, and a quick way to do that is just film yourself.

Animator, Chuck Duke: Usually, it's just posing. And then we'll have a review. And we'll go over the emotional side of it: What is this scene about and where is it in the movie?

Guillermo was really stressing the realism of the performances.

Director, Guillermo del Toro: We wanted to shoot characters listening and receiving and thinking. Characters scratching because they're itching, sneezing, looking away when they feel afraid or ashamed or worried. Moments that are normally not shot in animation. We urged the animators to think through the puppet, to avoid pantomime, and to give us real acting.

354 [Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio crew members. 2022](#)

Director, Mark Gustafson: One of the things I'm most proud of in this whole production is the chemistry of the team.

Puppet Creative Supervisor, Georgina Hayns: It's been the most wonderful experience of all my movie career. Everybody's heart and soul was in it.

Puppet Production Manager, Jennifer Hammontree: We built this project during a pandemic and that has been an intense emotional experience for everyone.

Art Production Manager, Whitney Schmerber: But everybody loved having a distraction and something beautiful to make while everything around you felt like it was collapsing.

Editor, Holly Klein: I don't know if I'm going to have the opportunity to be a witness to this many people doing this amount of extensive work on such a project.

Puppet Maker, Ian McKinnon: The UK team were producing all the Pinocchio puppets and then working with the American team up in Portland.

Puppet Maker, Peter Saunders: There was also a Mexican team of puppet makers and they had their own characters to make and to animate. You have three teams separated by thousands of miles, but collaborating like we were next door to each other.

Production Manager, Sara Crowley: In stop motion, you blend all of those people together and you collaborate. And it really is a special, special way to make a film.

Senior Sculptor & Fabricator, Toby Froud: It truly is rewarding to create something and then see it come to life on screen and know that we were a part of making that.

355 [Carlo's tree. 2020; Geppetto's headstone. 2020; Spazzatura's headstone. 2021](#)

Director, Guillermo del Toro: Pinocchio is a character thrown into the world with a blank slate to find out who he is, what he's doing in this world, and why was he born? And it's a very existential tale.

Can something that was never alive become human? What makes us human? What makes our span in this world precious and valuable and important? And like any other good Mexican, I came up with one answer: death. (laughs)

Director, Mark Gustafson: Well, you don't have a film about life if you don't have a film about death. And it's showing how completely intertwined those things are. There's some sad things in here, but there's some incredibly happy and incredibly funny things.

It's like life. It's made up of all those elements.

344 [Volpe's living wagon set. 2019](#)

Narrator: Volpe is the owner of a carnival that travels through Italy, including the town where Pinocchio lives.

Director, Mark Gustafson: Volpe is sort of on the downturn when we meet him in the story. He comes in and corrupts Pinocchio. He draws him away from Geppetto and into all the fun and sin of the carnival.

Co-Production Manager, Curt Enderle: Volpe's cart tells us so much about that character. We wanted to have a backstory there. There's wear and tear and dirt. Everything's a little bit more saturated, but it is also sort of a faded glory.

Co-Production Designer, Guy Davis: It started out working with Guillermo, showing him rough sketches and saying, "Here's six designs, which one do you want us to go forward with?"

And then from there, we would hand off stuff to the art team to work up the details of the interior of, let's say, the wagon. Giving them what "this is the character looks like, here's a little bit of a set design." And they would come up with props that fit, exactly, that world.

Art Production Manager, Whitney Schmerber: Art department builds 90% of what you see in each frame. Every little thing in there, someone spent a lot of time on.

Curt Enderle: We have carpenters and sculptors and model builders and painters and then set decorators who put it all together.

A lot of the materials that we use are quite common—plywood and plaster and things like that. Guillermo was very concerned that things feel and look real, and so we do reference a lot of period images. You really do want it to feel lived in, you want it to have a sense of place, a sense of age. We're putting everything there intentionally.

343 [Oversized Pinocchio. 2020; Oversized Cricket puppet, 2020–21](#)

Director, Guillermo del Toro: This is a story about puppets acted by puppets. We wanted the sets and the characters to feel beautifully sculpted and old world. We sculpted the hair, we sculpted the clothes, we sculpted the surroundings. The innocence of Pinocchio, his simplicity, we wanted to do a design that told that story.

Actor, Gregory Mann: He doesn't have any fancy features. He's literally just a carved piece of wood with some things sticking out on the side of him for arms and legs.

Facial Animator, Kim Slate: Our goal was to make him feel like a wooden object, something solid and not something rubbery or flesh-like. So we were conscious of using a lot of straight lines and angles, rather than curves.

Guillermo del Toro: We made him asymmetrical because Gepetto carves him when he's drunk and he starts with the ear and his hair, and he is really, really careful with that. And then, he goes, "Ah," and kind of finishes him quick, you know?

Narrator: For each character, the team built multiple puppets in different sizes. This allowed them to film several scenes simultaneously and to adjust scale, depending on the shot. This was a special challenge with Pinocchio and Sebastian J. Cricket, who lives in a nook inside Pinocchio's chest.

Director, Mark Gustafson: It's a very interesting process trying to figure out the size of the characters. There were probably at least 30 Pinocchios. He goes through a lot in this film. So there are a lot of different versions of him.

Guillermo del Toro: We use different size of puppets for different needs. In very few shots, but necessary shots, we need the Cricket on the shoulder of Pinocchio talking to him, whispering in his ear. And in order for him to be the right size, we use this big Pinocchio, this small Cricket.

357 [Paul Buckley. Design for *Frankenstein x Mary Shelley*. 2013](#)

Director, Guillermo del Toro: The first time I thought about doing *Pinocchio*, I was in my teens and I thought a very intimate relationship between Pinocchio and Frankenstein exists.

Director, Mark Gustafson: There's many similarities between the two stories. A guy creates something and then loses control of it and then he has to deal with the consequences of that.

Senior Sculptor & Fabricator, Toby Froud: The Frankenstein-esque creation of this creature, this monster Pinocchio—and then going through the world and having humans react to that and humanity would do to someone like that.

Composer, Alexandre Desplat: It gives perspective for Pinocchio himself being such a different person and very quickly he's the scapegoat. He's the enemy, because he's a stranger, he's somebody weird.

This stranger that Pinocchio represents is a real inspiration for young kids when they will see the film, because they will see how somebody different can be hated and how somebody different can actually be a very good person and very generous, even give his life for somebody else.

358 [“Opening Pinocchio” score booklet. 2022](#)

Music Supervisor, Steven Gizicki: We like to describe this, not necessarily as a musical. It’s a film with musical moments. Our songs are little character moments, delicate emotional pieces. We had all the visuals and so all of that informed the music tremendously.

Composer, Alexandre Desplat: The singer, the character, tells you what is going on. And the song has this capacity in a few seconds, to explain the life of a character.

For the whole film I’ve chosen to use only wood instruments. There are no cymbals, no brass. You have the guitars, the mandolin, the piano, the harp. And of course all the strings: violins, the violi, celli, bassi. And all the woodwinds: the bassoons, the oboes, the flutes.

I didn’t want the score to be huge and bombastic. It had to belong to Guillermo’s *Pinocchio*, which is little stop motion puppets. And so I wanted the sound to be as if it was made in that village.

360 [Pan's Labyrinth Poster. 2014](#)

Narrator: Guillermo del Toro's earlier films provided inspiration for the cast and crew that worked on *Pinocchio*.

Actor, David Bradley: I think Guillermo's contribution to cinema has been so considerable. The retaining image I have of *Pan's Labyrinth* is the white man with the eyes in the palm of his hands. I thought, "What an extraordinary image."

Actor, Cate Blanchett: Of course there are the fantastical monsters, which he's very well known for. But there's also the kind of the demons within us all that we hide from one another and somehow get released through adventure and adversity.

Co-Production Designer, Curt Enderle: We are all huge fans of Guillermo del Toro. It's one of the things that we did early on, and this was primarily Rob DeSue, our Art Director. He took a look at *Devil's Backbone* and *Crimson Peak* and *Shape of Water* and pulled out iconic colors and came up with a very small, limited 10-color palette for *Pinocchio*.

Seeing how his color works and how he reserves special colors for special meaning, those were all things that he had talked about with us early on that we felt that we really wanted to incorporate in our film.

Co-Production Designer, Guy Davis: Obviously it starts with Guillermo. It's the designs that first he inspires, and then he oversees, and then he nurtures. He's an artist himself so he brings that out in us and he brings that out in the designs.

361 [Older Geppetto puppet. 2019–20](#)

Narrator: *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio* brought together artisans from across the globe. The main characters were built by Mackinnon and Saunders in the United Kingdom. In the United States, Shadow Machine produced the creatures and more than 100 background characters. A team in Mexico produced additional characters.

Puppet Maker, Peter Saunders: Creating a character like Geppetto can take months.

Puppet Production Manager, Jennifer Hammontree: To build a human armature for a hero puppet, we take about three to four weeks. We take another week to cast the foam and silicone over it. If we're going to see the body parts at all, we have to paint those just like a makeup artist. The head mechanics are complicated and those took six months plus to build. Costume-wise, we take about a month to a month and a half, sometimes longer. This includes research time, dying fabrics, selecting fabrics.

Peter Saunders: With Geppetto, one of the things that Guillermo thought would be a nice little characterization would be that if Geppetto's feet could be loose in the clogs. And so one of our armature makers tried all manner of different little mechanical devices that would allow Geppetto's foot to kind of raise up and down in the clog.

Puppet Creative Supervisor, Georgina Hayns: We've got to make these puppets look like they're worn-in as characters.

Geppetto—he's a workman, he's worked all of his life. He's in his older years so he is going to have fingernails like a puppet maker. We all referenced our own fingers for Geppetto, but we looked up woodworker hands. We got lots of reference images of how gnarly hands get when you're older and you're a woodworker. So we do reference a lot of real life photography and historical photography for all of our characters.

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