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Subterrestrial Energy Creatures

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Still from Substratae. Supplied photo

Margie Kelk's *Substratae* reveals the unknown world of currents that live beneath

Have you ever wondered what subterranean energies live beneath the Earth's surface? We get a glimpse into their odd world with *Substratae*, a stop-motion film exhibit developed by Toronto-based visual artist Margie Kelk.

The film is set in the isolated underground of the rock people. Viewers are quickly introduced to various ceramic rock heads and their interactions with bits of electronic technology like computer chips and wiring. Above them sits the Mound, a monolithic rock sculpture that has organic plant growth permeating out of its crevasses.

Sound bizarre? It is. But, it's also shockingly beautiful.

"There is no actual strict story within the film," Kelk laughs. "I did exactly what you're not supposed to do when making a film. I had no storyboard or script. We just created these little episodes with these characters interacting with each other in a short film."

Substratae was made after Kelk created the ceramic rock heads that were sculpted to look like older people for various art shows.

"These characters looked a bit demented because they have been isolated from society," Kelk says. "They were so full of expression, but not young a lively looking and people would keep saying 'Why don't you animate these?'"

Kelk developed an artistic relationship with animator Lynne Slater, who helped forge a stop-motion story where the characters would live underground and interact with subterranean currents.

“It goes with what I would envision as a child,” Kelk says. “I would lay on the ground and imagine specific energies living underneath me.”

The character’s isolation from society also takes inspiration from the Huldafólk, or “hidden people” of Icelandic folklore.

“The Icelandic people believe in hidden people who live within the country’s landscape,” Kelk says. “Much like the Norwegian’s believe in trolls. You also feel the underground energies there whether it’s volcanic or hot water from the geysers.”

Though *Substratae* has a runtime of only four minutes and 35 seconds, it took a little less than two years to make.

“Stop-motion is a very slow process. Once I made all of the props, we had to move the characters a little bit at a time very slowly. It takes time,” Kelk says.

The film also has a flawless musical accompaniment conceived by sound artist Alan Sondheim. Sondheim used the guqin, an open seven-stringed instrument that is plucked and dates back to the ancient Chinese Confucian era.

The instrumentation works perfectly with the eccentric imagery and eerie tones found in *Substratae*.

“I wanted a sound that would be a little bit strange and unfamiliar to Western ears and Alan made that work very well,” Kelk says.

Kelk’s film has had a tremendous amount of success, being shown at various art galleries around the world as well as 35 individual film festivals.

She’s already working on her next film with Slater which will be titled, “Under See,” another stop-motion film, this time based on the ocean.

“It will be twice as long with similar funny little characters,” Kelk says.

The upcoming film will also tap into those hidden energies Kelk envisioned as a child.

“Whether it’s blowing in the wind or geysers in Iceland, it’s the energies among the Earth,” she says. “There’s no god or religious belief here. I just say ‘It is’ and leave it at that.”

Thu., Aug. 17 – Fri., Sept 22

Substratae

Harcourt House Artist Run Centre

#film #folklore #hidden people #Huldafólk #Iceland #Margie Kelk #stop motion
#Substratae