

Vinton's "Festival of Claymation" is inventive animated film



By Chris McCubbin
Staff Reporter

It's not really a movie, exactly. It's more of a sampler. "Will Vinton's Festival of Claymation" is an amusing overview of the state of an emerging art form.

Claymation involves building a clay figurine over a jointed armature. The figure is photographed, minute changes are made in the figure, and it's photographed again, and so on. Eventually the illusion of motion is created. It takes 24 stills to create one second of finished film.

Because the figure is three-dimensional, camera angles and lighting effects can be used that could never be simulated in traditional two-dimensional animation. Because the figure is clay it can be molded, melded and mutated like no model ever could.

Will Vinton is the undisputed master of the art of claymation. He's best known to the public for the conga-line

of California raisins kicking their way through the commercial to the tune of "I Heard It Through The Grapevine." Vinton has also created a feature length Claymation film: "The Adventures of Mark Twain."

It's a shame the Sheldon isn't showing "The Adventures of Mark Twain" along with — or instead of — "Festival of Claymation." "Adventures" shows the potential of the medium as well as "Festival," and it's also a wonderfully inspired fantasy, innocent and educational, but with enough wit and sophistication to charm any literate viewer.

But "Festival" is what we've got, and it's still a lot of fun. "Festival" is an anthology of Vinton's shorts and commercials from 1978 to the present. It's all strung together (sort of) by "Freak Previews," a fairly amusing parody of those TV critic teams, starring Rex and Herb, two bickering dinosaurs.

Despite the jumble, some of the individual subjects are nothing short of

brilliant. In addition to their skills as animators, Vinton's crew are also visual artists of remarkable emotional impact. The melodramatic "A Christmas Gift" packs an emotional wallop far beyond what the corny plot (based on a rather mawkish Peter, Paul and Mary song) deserves.

There's familiar stuff; Vinton's commercials, including the raisins and the Domino's Pizza "Noid." The excellent video to John Fogerty's "Vanz Kant Danz."

There's first-rate visual humor in "Calaveras County" from the "Adventures of Mark Twain," and in "Dinosaurs" and "The Great Cognito."

"Will Vinton's Festival of Claymation" is a lot of fun for animation aficionados and the young at heart. It plays Thursday through Sunday at the Sheldon Film Theatre. Screenings are at 7 and 9 p.m., with matinees at 1 and 3 p.m. Saturday and 3 and 5 p.m. Sunday. Admission is \$4.

Glassy Eye (continued)

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Also featuring Evelyn Ankers, the queen of screamers, Dwight Frye (Fritz the hunchback in "Frankenstein") and the legendary Olaf Hyten. 68 minutes of bliss. So why's it on at 4:50 a.m.? Somebody at Universal needs a brain transplant cuz this sucker still isn't out on video. Sigh. Stoke up the VCR.

Sunday 1 p.m. WGN Ch. 2.
"Abbott and Costello meet Frankenstein," (1948) Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney, Glenn

Strange.

Don't get me wrong here. Ole Bud and Lou, Slim and Tubby, Chick and Wilbur . . . whatever, never really made me bust a gut but this is actually pretty funny. Incredible as it may sound, Bud and Lou helped Universal pictures stay afloat and if anything, kept audiences interested in monsters till the next cycle of spook films cranked up in the '50s. This flick is a nice contrast to Saturday morning's "Ghost of Frankenstein." Lon Chaney had fallen on hard times and was no longer Univer-

sal's star. Here he plays the Wolfman for the zillionth time aided by his hip flask of fire water. Bela plays Dracula for the first time since '31 and was grateful since he'd been grinding out cheapies since '41. At 64, he wears lots of rouge, lipstick and whiteface. The Frankenstein monster is played by Glenn Strange (Sam the bartender from "Gunsmoke"). It's considered by many to be one of the best horror parodies ever made. Best Line: (Bela to Lou) "Vut ve need today is young blood and brains."

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