

Interview
Stop Mo Monsters

Emilie Kadhim



Artist: Valentín Falconí



Artist: Toni Alarco

Apart, but United. #StopMoMonsters

The COVID-19 pandemic had an incredible impact on the stop motion community worldwide, both negative and positive. Many artists found the travel restrictions to be a barrier to work in studios, and instead found themselves in their home studios creating independently.

From political protest to remote global capacity building, stop motion artists Valentín Falconí and Toni Alarco use plasticine to share their spin on the pandemic. Together they started a hashtag movement called #StopMoMonsters with over 20 different 84-frame animations with participation from artists all over the world. Toni and Valentin used the pandemic as an opportunity to host work-

shop video calls with new stop motion animators to build their capacity with the medium. The hashtag challenge quickly became a global community with a profoundly positive impact.

Interview with the Creators

Emilie Kadhim (EK): Why #StopMoMonsters? What inspired this idea?

Toni Alarco (TA): Valentín and I wanted to focus on something more worldwide. COVID-19 is something that we can talk about and everyone understands and relates to it. We decided to use COVID-19 as a main theme because that is what connected us. It was because of COVID-19 that we became comfortable with video calls and it made us able to communicate in the first place. Without COVID-19, I would never think to get in contact with Valentin, a person in Peru, while I am in Barcelona. So I thought, okay, COVID is the thing that divides us, but also unites us.

EK: You mentioned that opening it up to the public opens it up to the larger stop motion community and creators. Why a public challenge and hashtag? Was there a global reach?

TA: We decided to make it public because we know that many people have studios at home and are able to do it. Why not unite and work together? The hashtag was created to help share the work that all “stop mo” animators are doing at home. Basically, we wanted to create a community. We wanted to have our community of monsters, united for stop motion, against COVID-19. We thought it would be nice to open this idea to more people as all these people have the same situation as us, and we can all

do something together. We hoped to find the “positive parts” of COVID-19 that can connect people. Also, we find that more people are getting into stop motion, and we want to support that. We wanted to show that many people are doing it and that anyone can join stop motion.

Valentin Falconi (VF): We thought it would be better to invite more artists. Stop motion is a very collaborative technique that allows for connections between many artists. COVID-19 is the thing that started it. We didn’t know it [the hashtag] was global at first. We shared it with our followers and they shared it with other people. So many people from other countries participated. Toni actually had the idea to have a call with those who wanted to participate in the hashtag challenge. They make stop motion animations, but had questions about their techniques.

TA: Yes, we decided to do a video call with people who wanted to make stop motion animation, but needed some help and advice. There aren’t many people doing this and we wanted to support them. We gave them some advice and did a private video call with people trying to participate in the challenge. There was one person from Mexico, one from Chile, really all around the world. COVID-19 made us more able to be united because before I couldn’t see myself video calling people from all over the world. It’s something positive that came from this situation.

EK: Has COVID impacted your art? How?

VF: Well, COVID-19 and politics in my country are very related. In the last four years we have had four different presidents. I use my art to protest. The politics surrounding COVID-19 have been

very, very bad, particularly the decisions [regarding COVID] against the people. Perú is one of the worst countries with COVID. I use plasticine and my figures to talk about these things.

EK: What can this hashtag contribute to the dialogue surrounding COVID-19?

VF: I think the challenge helps with mental health because we are all locked up. We have the opportunity to physically strike the virus. It is liberating in a way.

TA: Many people [involved in making] the videos chose to destroy the virus although we didn't require that. Valentin's animation [the clay monster] eats the virus to destroy it. Interestingly, many people eat it or throw it. It's kind of a way to characterize this hate and struggle with the virus. We used COVID-19 as an opportunity for creativity. Valentin and I are positive people and we wanted to cultivate positive things from the COVID-19 experience. We created a little thing that connects people from around the world in a creative and positive way.

Website

Alarco, Toni. (2021). *StopMoMonsters*. [Home studio].
<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cl5Fid2iaXz/>

About the Artists

Valentín Falconí is a Perú-based director and animator Valentín Falconí (@valentinfalconi) who has dedicated his latest years to the development of stop motion animation projects. In 2020, he released the short film *198451*, a work about the degradation of social behavior and excessive consumerism, which earned him an award from the Peruvian Ministry of Culture.



Toni Alarco (@tonialarco) is a director and stop motion animator, born in Tarragona, Spain. He studied Fine Arts at Barcelona University, where he specialized in sculpture, but discovered stop motion in 2011. Since 2019, he has worked on animation productions like *Hiru Animation* (Valencia), *Kiwin* for XBo Films (Toulouse, France), and collaborated on *One Liner*, directed by Matthew Lee (NFTS, England).



About the Interviewer

Emilie Kadhim is a research coordinator at the University of California, San Francisco and an editorial board member for *Ars Medica*.
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