

Hear 'animation' and in all probability you're not likely to think "ah, Lithuania". And you know what? More fool you. While you've had your eyes cast westward over the Nexus mountains to the sea of Psyop, design and animation duo PetPunk, aka Gediminas Šiaulys and Andrius Kirvela, have been slowly expanding their empire on the Eastern fringes of Europe. Toiling away together the pair have unleashed a barmy army of hybrid CG pug-men and homemade origami wolves to stake an aesthetic claim over the burgeoning animation scene emerging from the former satellite states.



(Above) *Carousel*, a limited edition print, and (above right) *Inculto's Welcome to Lithuania* video

cultures left our generation somewhere in the middle, without strong roots in either," he explains. "Living with that sort of confused identity led us both to a deeper exploration of our aesthetic perception and that's where our hybrid approach evolves. We love to mix various techniques, styles and play 'in between' established styles."

Both Kirvela and Šiaulys grew up with artistic parents, variously including sculptors and textile and typeface designers. "My memories are of the smell of Indian ink, gouache and wood shavings," sighs Šiaulys. Kirvela decided to head down a path towards programming, inspired by his father, an electrical engineer. "When the internet came into our home I started experimenting with web design and Flash animation, which was in its infancy and that sort of led to where I am now." Moving into an education system they both describe as "outdated", Kirvela and Šiaulys realised the need to pick up skills relevant to the next stages of their careers. Kirvela decided to ditch Vilnius Art Academy to get more hands-on experience, while Šiaulys finished his graphic design course at Vilnius College of Technologies and Design and went to Denmark's Designskolen

lithuania petpunk animation studio vilnius

Lithuanian animation duo PetPunk tell **Stephen Whelan** about emerging from a pale world, where felt tip pens came in only five colours, to explore the farther reaches of New Europe's new art

Talking about their experience of the transition to national independence, the pair look back at the USSR years with a sort of nostalgia. "It was definitely something very special for both of us," says Šiaulys (right, with pipe). "While we weren't particularly aware of the politics or ideology, our everyday life deeply influenced our aesthetic perception. In our childhood everything looked pale. Books, clothes, toys, even down to the fact that a typical felt-tip pen set consisted of five colours."


Growing up in a world desaturated of colour, the pair say their main visual stimulation came from nightly doses of spooky Soviet animation, beamed into homes on the national TV channel. That was until the country issued a statement of renewed independence in 1990 and a flood of western products washed over the consumer landscape. "From nowhere there were all these unseen products in shops covered in glossy packaging," remembers Kirvela (left, with choirboy's ruff). "Stuff like coloured chewing-gum, sneakers, advertising on TV, MTV and, oh my god! - 36 colour markers!"

Forced to adapt to fast-changing surroundings, Kirvela says a whole generation of Lithuanians were left straddling a divide. "That conflict of two opposite

Kolding to study visual communication.

The pair's paths first crossed while they were working as print and web designers in the early noughties, and it wasn't until they saw the work of MK12 that the possibilities of animation unfurled before them. "Their work was taking design to

another level," recalls Šiaulys. "Back then we didn't even know the term motion graphics. We were totally charmed by the freedom and possibilities of the technique. From that moment we couldn't quietly sit there toiling away at our day jobs. So, in 2005, we quit and joined together under the name PetPunk." Since then they've gone on to craft several cut-and-paste digital decoupage idents for the Culture Live event promoting the capital of Vilnius, an abstract, Magritte-influenced promo for Mario Basanov & Vidis' track Who's Shot the Silence? as well as participating in two rounds of the international Pssst! Collaboration. Oh, and they also produced an installation, Pagan Lullaby, for the 2009 Pictopia Festival held in Berlin back in March. And they've signed to Hornet for representation. So yes, they've been busy.

"We describe our style as 'handmade with computer'," says Kirvela when asked about PetPunk's aesthetic. "It's a hybrid of a warm handmade look and rough computer-generated graphics. We like to experiment and rely upon accident, drawing on the positive results of digital error and human imperfection. Mixing the two techniques allows us to explore ways of reproducing the past using contemporary means. Oh, and humour's really important to us too." 

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