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Exceptional Minds with Autism Make the Cut at PSIAF Animation Festival



Sherman Oaks, California – *September 6, 2018* – Four [Exceptional Minds](#) animated shorts made the cut at the recent Palm Springs International Animation Festival (PSIAF), a first for this studio staffed almost exclusively by young professionals with autism.

Exceptional Minds artists with autism joined Oscar, Emmy and Grammy-winning artists from around the world to present four uniquely creative and original animated shorts at this year's PSIAF held at Palm Springs Convention Center, August 22 to 26. The four were among only 250 that made the cut, out of more than 2,700 PSIAF submissions overall.

Originated and animated by Exceptional Minds artists, shorts [Schools Out](#), [Morphing Time](#), [Robot Love](#) and [Special Olympics: Inclusion Revolution](#) were selected for the PSIAF Academy of Dreams, Traditional

and Global Issues/Socially Relevant categories, respectively, based on their cinematic virtues of storytelling, ideas, humor, heart, originality, visual interest, craftsmanship, diversity and gut-level viewing pleasure. “This population seems to be a natural fit for animation. A lot of those with autism understand at a very gut level this idea of a parallel universe that is similar, but quirker, to our reality, and they are able to develop unique animated content based on that imaginary world,” said Howie Hoffman, the creative director for Exceptional Minds animation studio, the first and currently only working studio of its kind in the country.

The Exceptional Minds Studio employs animation and visual effects artists, all of whom have graduated from the Exceptional Minds vocational school. The animation studio has completed 2D animation projects for a number of high profile organizations, including the Los Angeles Zoo, Sesame Street Foundation, NPR composer BJ Leiderman, the Netflix show *Atypical* and Special Olympics, which commissioned the PSIAF-selected *Special Olympics: Inclusion Revolution* for their [2018 Special Olympics inclusive health initiative](#).

“There is a huge renaissance in animation right now, which is ironic because the autism population, often underemployed, is a growing population, and many of these individuals seem to be especially good at it,” said Susan Zwerman, Exceptional Minds Studio Executive Director.

In addition to the working animation studio, Exceptional Minds graduates have gone on to internships and/or employment at Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon and Warner Bros. and to work on visual effects for movies such as *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* and *Black Panther*.

The animation studio has a crew of eleven artists on the autism spectrum and recently added on a 1,561 square foot facility thanks to a grant by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

More than 500,000 U.S. children impacted by autism will enter adulthood during this decade, with one in 59 children to follow. The vast majority of adults with autism are unemployed or underemployed. Young adults with autism have the lowest employment rate of all individuals with disabilities.

Exceptional Minds is the only vocational school and working studio to prepare and successfully place young men and women with autism in careers in the fields of animation and visual effects.

Photo: Shown left to right, Exceptional Minds animators Chris Iddamalgoda (fresh from his Nickelodeon internship!) and Michael Shiu with PSIAF festival director Brian Neil Hoff and autism animator icon Dani Bowman, next to former Exceptional Minds instructor Laura Robinson (now with Dreamworks Animation), Exceptional Minds animator Michael Yochim, Exceptional Minds Animation Creative Director Howie Hoffman and Animation Studio Producer Jon Clark. Four Exceptional Minds animated shorts were presented at this year’s PSIAF by Exceptional Minds staff and artists on the spectrum.

About Exceptional Minds (<http://www.exceptionalmindsstudio.org>): Exceptional Minds is a nonprofit vocational center and working production studio for young adults on the autism spectrum. Exceptional Minds offers technical proficiency and work-readiness training that prepares students for careers in graphic arts, animation, web design and visual effects.