

Poetic Imagery in Contemporary Animation

An Overview of the Directorial Style of Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbis

By Mobina Chegini

March 2025

The creative duo of Amanda Forbis and Wendy Tilby has earned a special place in global independent animation over the past three decades by creating poetic, minimalist works filled with human details. By combining both classic and modern techniques, they present a unique narrative of the everyday world—one that is both simple and complex, personal and universal.

Amanda Forbis and Wendy Tilby are recognized as one of the most prominent artistic duos in independent animation. Although each of them had independent experiences before collaborating, their joint works—such as “When the Day Breaks” (1999) and “Wild Life” (2011)—have cemented their global standing.

Poetic Storytelling and Focus on Fleeting Moments

One of the most distinctive features of Tilby and Forbis's work is their poetic approach to everyday life. Rather than focusing on grand, intricate narratives, they concentrate on small, emotional moments: the silences between conversations, the repetitive motions of daily life, and the subtle human emotions. This characteristic makes their works more than just stories—they become a poetic and emotional experience.

Visual Technique: Between Painting and Animation

The visual style of these two directors is always accompanied by a painterly, handcrafted approach. “When the Day Breaks” was created with a pastel-like texture, portraying a warm, misty, and human atmosphere. In “Wild Life”, they used visual techniques resembling hand-drawn designs and postcards to enhance the historical and nostalgic feel of the work. This dedication to the “human touch” in a world increasingly moving toward digital media has given them a unique identity.

Themes: Loneliness, Identity, and Human Connection

Although their visual form is striking, the themes of their works also hold a special place. Tilby and Forbis often address topics such as modern human loneliness, the struggle to find connections, and the contrast between individuality and the collective. Even in simple, short

stories, hidden philosophical and social concerns are expressed with a subtle and indirect approach.

Slowness as Beauty

Another component of the directorial style of these filmmakers is the slow, contemplative rhythm of their works. Instead of the fast-paced tempo commonly seen in many animations, they use silence, pauses, and time in each shot to allow meaning to unfold. This slowness is not a form of dullness but a space for reflection and a better understanding of visual and emotional details.

Global Recognition and Influence

Tilby and Forbis's works have been nominated and won awards at prestigious festivals such as Cannes, Annecy, and the Oscars. They have inspired a new generation of independent filmmakers who seek to tell personal and poetic stories through animation.

The Flying Sailor: A Contemporary and Evolved Experience

The duo's latest work, "The Flying Sailor" (2022), shows how their poetic and visual approach continues to thrive and evolve. Based on a real incident, the film combines hand-drawn designs, minimal imagery, and abstract space creation to craft a visual and sensory experience that moves beyond classical storytelling. The film, rather than presenting a linear story, focuses on the physical and mental experience of the main character in a specific moment, demonstrating once again that for these two artists, animation is a tool for exploring "sensation" and "perception," not just recounting events.

Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbis have shown that animation is not merely a medium for entertainment or childish imagination but can serve as a platform for poetic expression, philosophical reflections, and human narratives. Their directorial style is a unique fusion of painting, poetry, and cinema; a combination that has carved them a distinctive place in the history of contemporary animation.