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Visual Arts

Exclusive: Stacey Steers, Possibly the Most Patient Artist on Earth

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by [Caroline Stanley](#)

When Jonah Samson at Cool Hunting gave us [the head's up](#) on [Stacey Steers](#), a video artist whose latest work was created from over four thousand handmade collages (typically eight hand-painted drawings for every second of animation), we knew we had to talk to her about the labor intensive process. Watch some clips from the piece (which was an official selection at last year's Sundance Film Festival) [here](#), and if you're in New York, check out the animated film at [ClampArt](#) starting tomorrow through February 7.

Flavorwire: Can you tell us a little bit about the real journey that inspired Phantom Canyon?



Stacey Steers: When I was 19 years old I took off for Latin America on what was to be 4-month trip. I met a young Venezuelan there and ended up staying for 7 years. By the time that relationship ended and I returned to the US, I had a 5-year-old daughter. Phantom Canyon is an intuitive excavation of those memories, obviously driven largely by the emotional resonance of the experience, not the facts. The nature of memory interests me a lot.

FW: With such a meticulous process, where do you do most of your work? Have you ever gotten blocked on a frame? How do you know when a piece is done?

SS: I work mostly at home. I have a studio in my house, though it's way too small. I like to go in there at all hours. I wouldn't say I have gotten blocked on a frame, but I have started to work on scenes that just weren't doing what I wanted. It's a drag to throw away even a few seconds of animation, but sometimes you have to do it. Your question about endings is a good one. With intuitive work it can be hard to be sure when a film should end, although I visualized the final scene of this project quite a while before I got there. I have LOTS of time to think about where things are going as I produce my work.

FW: Your work is so intertwined with the idea of memory — did you keep traditional journals when you were growing up?

SS: No, I never kept a journal but I've always liked to think about my dreams. And I turned any assignment I could as a child in school into something with a visual component, cutting the paper into weird shapes, creating comic book like projects or color coding stuff.

FW: What's the best animated feature you saw this year?

SS: I haven't seen it yet, but I already know [Waltz With Bashir](#) is my favorite feature animation of the year. I have always believed that animation was greatly underutilized and ghettoized as a form of mere entertainment. That has been changing recently and I'm thrilled. Any relevant art form can communicate the full range of human experience.