What is Claymation

- Claymation® is a registered trademark of Vinton Studios
- call it:
  - Clay Animation, or
  - Model animation, or
  - Dimensional character animation
- Sometimes confused with any 3D stop motion animation
Our Definition

3 dimensional stop motion animation using clay figures
History of Clay Animation

• Attributed to two technological developments:
• Invention of the single frame movie camera
• Invention of plasticine (modeling clay) by William Harbutt, 1890’s, England
Plasticine

- Suspended clay and pigment, in a combination of wax and oil
- Soft, pliable, non-hardening; may be reworked over and over
- Developed as a medium for teaching (ref: publication “Arts of Writing, Drawing and Modeling in Educational Work”)
Plasticine, cont.

Figure 2.6  Plate 6 from Harbutt’s Plastic Method.
First Clay Animation

- 1908, two films, “A Sculptor’s Welsh Rarebit Dream” (Edison, Feb. 1908) and “The Sculptor’s Nightmare” (Biograph, May 1908)
- Both films use clay animation as early “special effect” of clay that magically builds itself into a sculpture.
Clay animation in the early days of Cel (1910 – 1920’s)

- Cel animation becoming dominant mode for creation of animated films
- Cel becoming process oriented; broken down into steps that can be divided among a number of individuals
- Use of transparent overlay’s meant only having to animate the parts that change.
- Cels were washed clean and reused.
- Clay, continues to be a medium that resists division of labor; the set designer, animator and camera operator are usually one individual
So what was happening?

- “Miracles in Mud”, Willie Hopkins (1915).
- “Swat the Fly” (1917)
- A “Topical Caricaturist”
- 1 to 2 minute shorts, included in news reels.
- Produced 100 minutes of screen material over 18 month period
So what was happening?

- “Motion Picture Comedies in Clay”, Helena Smith Dayton (1916)
So what else was happening?

- “Modeling”, Fliescher (1921)
  A series of clay animation gags as part of Ko-Ko the clown “Out of the Inkwell” shorts.

Figure 4.3  Modeling shot 37: Max hits Ko-Ko with a wad of clay. Reproduced from collections of the Library of Congress.
“Monsters of the Past”, Pathe Review (1928)

• Popular film using clay animation of dinosaurs
1930’s and 40’s

[not a whole lot]
1950’s – Experimental Film movement

• “No Credit” (1948) and “Proems” (1949), Leonard Tregillus (PhD, Chemistry, UC Berkeley, 1950)
• Avant-garde …
Clay animation and Television

- 1950’s television brought the growth of children’s programming
- In close relation with toy manufacturers (advertising)
- Recycled studio cartoons – created a market for new children’s programming
- Broadcasters wanted *any* programming provided “cost per thousand” was reasonable (price advertisers paid to buy 1000 viewers)

.... Clay revival
Art Clockey

• As USC film student, created experimental film “Gumbasia” (1955)
• “Geometric and amorphous shapes made from modeling clay”
• Was tutoring child of Sam Engel of 20th Century-Fox who produced the Gumby pilot film (1954-55)
• Gumby was born
Gumby
Gumby …

- First five episodes were aired in rotation on “The Howdy Doody Show”
- Given NBC Saturday morning time slot.
- Budget was $650 per minute of animation (1/2 that of cel based such as Hanna-Barbera - Yogi Bear, Huckleberry Hound)
- Cancelled by NBC – Clockey syndicated the show himself
- Lucrative agreement with Lakeside Toy Company
Gumby Revived

I’m Gumby Dammit!

Clokey Studios contracted to produce 99 new six-minute episodes starting 1987
Diversion into special effects

- Stop Motion Model Animation (started with King Kong)
- Ray Harryhausen - 1950’s
- *It Came From Beneath the Sea* (1955), use of stop motion in movie special effects
Will Vinton

- As UC Berkeley Architectural student, began making experimental films in the 1960’s
- “Closed Mondays” shot by Vinton and Bob Gardiner in a basement over a 14-month period.
- Won Academy Award in 1974 for Best Animated Short.
Will Vinton, cont.

- Developed lip-sync dialogue, using clay “rotoscoping”
- Tended to be realistic, mostly human characters
- Sets constructed in clay, or clay covered
- Started Will Vinton Studios in Portland OR
- First full-length feature – “Traveling with Mark Twain” (1987)
Will Vinton Studios

- 1980’s shifted toward commercial and special effects
- Filmed like “music videos”
- Featured caricatures of stars (Ray Charles, Michael Jackson)
- Claymation® trademarked by Will Vinton Studios
- Fired in 2002 by new owners Nike
Bruce Bickford

- A little less mainstream …
- Experimental (re: drug induced) clay animation in late 60’s and 70’s
- “Baby Snakes” (1979) for Frank Zappa
- “The Amazing Mr. Bickford” (1987)
- “Dubroom Special” (1984)
1990’s to present

- Nick Park, Aardman Animations in U.K.
- “Creature Comforts” (1990) wins Academy Award
- *Wallace and Grommet*” (1990’s, continuing)
More Aardman Animation

• “Chicken Run” (2000), Nick Park, Peter Lord
Others of Note

- *The PJ’s* (Vinton 1999-2001)
- Pingu