

## Isaiah Ferguson Personal Artist Statement 2016 (with hyperlinks for substantiation)



Isaiah Ferguson & Britt Allcroft, Creator of Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends Animations, 12/08/2015

### MY INSPIRATION

Nature, music and current events all inspire my creativity and are reflected in my [drawings](#) and [animations](#). The earthly inspiration which influences my art and animation the most, however, is the work of great artists. High on the list of artists who inspire me are Charles Schulz, as well as my mother, [Lili Bernard](#), and her visual artist peers. I am also deeply inspired by personal relationships that I've formed on my own with other great creative minds such as [Britt Allcroft](#), creator of the Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends animated TV series and films. My art and animation instructors, during the five years that I've been a student in [CalArts Community Arts Partnership \(CAP\) Animation Program](#) and the four years in Providence High School's [Cinematic Arts Focus Program](#), also greatly inspire my creativity and nurture my artistic growth. It is my hope to study character animation at CalArts' School of Film and Video, because I believe that the program can best help me to further develop and refine my creativity, and prepare me to navigate a lifelong career as a producer of cutting-edge animation.

Charles Schulz' autobiographical "Peanuts" motivated me, at an early age, to create my own cartoons about contemporary life. Schulz' ability to convey his feelings and complex human emotion through gestures drawn with the simplest of lines, and through dialogue written with minimal words, deeply inspires me. The distinct personality traits of his well-rounded subjects and his comical storytelling provide excellent examples for me in terms of character and script development. I aspire to do what Charles Schulz mastered: to make cartoons that are relevant and relatable to children as well as adults. [Charles Schulz said](#), "Good cartoon drawing is good design." As a current 17 year-old whose mother is an exhibiting artist, I've grown an appreciation for how "good design" can impact an artwork. Since we were toddlers, my mother has taken me and my five siblings to literally hundreds of art exhibitions and has provided us with access to the studios of many famous artists, including Mark Bradford, Henry Taylor and Charles Gaines.

I feel that I was born to be a cinematic cartoonist. I have always also appreciated the craftsmanship of such masterful works of art, like classic Walt Disney movies and shorts, as well as the original Nickelodeon cartoons. My all-time favorite animated series, however, is Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends. At the age of ten, I reached out to the creator of the series and films: Britt Allcroft. I have since enjoyed the privilege of speaking with her in person, and remain

in contact with her and her daughter/manager, graphic artist, Holly Wright. Britt Allcroft's genius, in ascribing human qualities to animated trains, parallels her compassion which is reflected in her work. It is an honor to personally know Britt Allcroft and to be able to benefit from speaking with her and her daughter about their animation work and my own animations.

### MY ANIMATION WORK and HONORS

When I was six, I began making live-action videos with toy trains and action figures as subjects. My siblings assisted as production crew. At the age of ten, I started to teach myself digital video editing. I used Microsoft Paint and Windows Movie Maker to make my first digitally animated videos. By the age of twelve, I made over 50 of these [simple animated short videos](#). Upon turning thirteen in 2012, I was interviewed on [Good Day LA Fox News](#) for my animation in the *BAILA Con Duende* art exhibit at the Watts Towers Art Center. That was the year I enrolled in animation classes at [CalArts CAP](#), in which I have been a student for five years – complimented by my four years as a student in Providence High School's [Cinematic Arts Focus Program](#). Since October 2015, Driver Digital Inc., in New York City, has contracted (paid) me to create original animation and musical content as part of their production team for [Mattel Inc.'s Thomas & Friends Official YouTube Weekly Web Series](#). I normally use Adobe Flash for most of [my animation work](#), however, I have some rudimentary experience producing [stop motion](#). I desire to learn CGI and am confident that CalArts' Character Animation Program can best teach it to me.

Three of my short animations won awards in all three consecutive White House Student Film Festivals: Honorable Mentions in [2014](#) and [2015](#), and Finalist in 2016. The Los Angeles Times featured a [story about me](#) for this accomplishment. As a Finalist in the [2016 White House Student Film Festival](#), I spent two days in the White House during the first week of October 2016 with my parents and brother, who is a Johns Hopkins sophomore. My film was one of 27 films selected out of hundreds of submissions for this year's festival. More exciting than seeing my film displayed in the White House Theater and on a giant screen on the White House Lawn was meeting President Barack Obama up close, in person, inside the White House, and [being photographed with him](#) and the other student filmmaker awardees. I met many other famous people at the White House, including legendary artist Chuck Close, who made a larger-than-life-size [Polaroid portrait of me](#), which he bestowed to me, and which the White House featured on their social media pages. The White House also featured close-ups of me as a finalist in the festival in their [West Wing Week episodic](#) and in the [festival recap video](#).

Other awards that I've won include Best Animation in the [2016 Notre Dame High School Student Film Festival](#); Outstanding Animation and Outstanding Short Film in the [2015 and 2016 Providence Media Showcases](#) screened at Disney Studios Theater; three Official Selections at the [2015 Comic-Con San Diego International Children's Film Festival](#); Official Selection at the [2015 Los Angeles Student Film Festival](#); and screenings in several CalArts CAP film showcases. I also won the Providence 2016 Visual Arts Spirit Award. I am hopeful that these accolades I've earned in my youth, which reflect my passion, are indications of the success that I will reap as an adult producer of original animations. My dream is to become part of the creative team at either Disney Studios or Nickelodeon, as well as produce my own independent work. An animation education at CalArts would help me to form that future. I am sure I would be a perfect fit at CalArts.