

Prayers for Peace  
2009  
7:38 minutes  
dir. Dustin Grella  
Synopsis

Logline:

Pastels on a slate chalkboard underscore life's impermanence as the artist confronts the memory of his younger brother killed in Iraq.

Des pastels sur une ardoise soulignée par l'impermanence de la vie tel un artiste qui confronte sa mémoire à la mort de son jeune frère tué en Iraq .

50 Word:

Prayers for Peace is a narrative stop-motion animation confronting the memory of the artist's younger brother killed in the current conflict in Iraq. Drawn entirely with pastels on a slate chalkboard, the materials used to create the animation become a metaphor for the impermanence of life.

French:

Prières pour la paix

Prières pour la paix est un récit d'animation en mode d'image par image confrontant la mémoire du jeune frère de l'artiste tué dans le conflit en Iraq qui s'est produit dernièrement. Dessinée entièrement avec des pastels sur une ardoise noire, les matériaux utilisés pour créer l'animation deviennent une métaphore de l'impermanence de la vie.

Portuguese:

A Fita Amarela

Animação stop-motion narrativa que confronta a memória de um irmão mais novo morto no actual conflito no Iraque. Desenhada inteiramente com pastéis num quadro de ardósia, os materiais usados tornam-se eles próprios, numa metáfora para a impermanência da vida.

Italian:

Preghiera per la Pace

Un film d'animazione a passo uno in cui l'autore affronta la memoria del fratello più giovane ucciso durante la guerra in Iraq. Il film è realizzato interamente con pastelli su una lavagna di ardesia: il materiale usato per l'animazione diventa una metafora della caducità della vita.

Spanish:

A Fita Amarela

Animación realizada a través de la técnica Stop-Motion, esta narración enfrenta la memoria de un hermano menor muerto en el conflicto actual con Iraq. Dibujado completamente al pastel en una pizarra, los materiales usados para esta animación se convierten en una metáfora para la transitoriedad de la vida.

German:

Gebete für Frieden

Die Animation erzählt mittels Stop-Motion-Technik von den Erinnerungen an einen jüngeren Bruder, der im aktuellen Irakkrieg ums Leben kam. Das gesamte Werk wurde mit Kreide auf einer Wandtafel dargestellt und wird damit zur Metapher für die Unbeständigkeit des Lebens.

Korean:

평화를 위한 기도문은 철판에다 파스텔을 이용한 Stop Motion으로 아티스트의 어린 동생이 이라크에서 죽음을 당한 기억을 묘사한 작품이다. 아티스트는 이 작품에서 삶은 항상 일정치 않고 뭐든지 오고 갈 수 있다는 뜻에서 파스텔로만 이용해 자기의 심경을 표현했다.

200 Words:

Prayers for Peace is a narrative stop-motion animation confronting the memory of the artist's younger brother killed in the current conflict in Iraq. Four years have passed since his brother was killed when an IED was detonated beneath his diesel tanker while on a convoy to the active combat area of Fallujah. In this animation the writer/ animator stops to think about who his brother was, how he identified him, as well as work through issues of guilt for not thinking about him as often as he feels that maybe he should. The piece reflects back on the days of the funeral and tries to recall what those days were like for him and his family. An introspective journey, through the heart and soul of a difficult experience, the artist's conclusion proves very different from his original hypothesis.

Drawn using pastels on a slate chalkboard, the entire film is shot in two continuous scenes, with the current image drawn directly on top of the previous, leaving the memory of the previous drawings to continue into the present. Much of the footage was borrowed directly from images off of the soldier's laptop that was returned to the family. Also taken off of the laptop was an audio file recorded in the active combat area of Najaf, where the young man expresses his feelings on the experience.

French:

Prières pour la paix est un récit d'animation en mode image par image confrontant la mémoire du frère de l'artiste disparu lors du conflit en Iraq qui s'est déroulé dernièrement. 4 ans se sont écoulés depuis que son frère soit mort lorsqu'un IED a explosé en dessous de son tank diesel lors d'un convoi situé dans une zone de combat active à Fallujah.

Dans cette animation l'écrivain/animateur a arrêté de penser à comment son petit frère était, comment il l'identifiait, il a du passer certaines étapes à travers lesquelles certains problèmes sont subvenus, puis à un sentiment de culpabilité du fait de ne pas penser à lui aussi souvent qu'il devrait peut-être le faire.

Cette pièce reflète, certains jours anciens comme ceux des funérailles et l'artiste essaie de souvenir de comment étaient ces jours avec lui et sa famille. Un chemin d'introspection à travers le cœur et l'âme de cette expérience difficile, la conclusion de l'artiste prouve de façon différente par rapport à l'hypothèse d'origine.

Utilisés les pastels pour le coloriage sur une ardoise, le film en entier a été shooté en 2 scènes continus, avec la dernière image dessinée directement au dessus de la première, laissant transparaitre la mémoire du dessin précédent afin de continuer dans le présent. La plupart de la pellicule a directement été empruntée d'images d'ordinateur portable de soldats qui sont retournés dans leur famille. Aussi pris d'un des ordinateurs portable, un document audio a été enregistré dans le combat actif de Najaf, ou le jeune homme explique son ressenti de cette expérience.

600 Words:

Prayers for Peace is a narrative stop-motion animation confronting

the memory of the artist's younger brother killed in the current conflict in Iraq. Four years have passed since his brother was killed when an IED was detonated beneath his diesel tanker while on a convoy to the active combat area of Fallujah. In this animation the writer/ animator stops to think about who his brother was, how he identified him, as well as work through issues of guilt for not thinking about him as often as he feels that maybe he should. The piece reflects back on the days of the funeral and tries to recall what those days were like for him and his family. An introspective journey, through the heart and soul of a difficult experience, the artist's conclusion proves very different from his original hypothesis.

Dustin Grella created a stop-motion animation by drawing with soft pastels on slate, and recording the image once every sixty-seconds. He used a technique similar to rotoscoping, where each frame was projected onto the slate, drawn on top of, the projection was removed then the image recorded. The final product is a compilation of the hand drawn images. He decided on rotoscoping because he wanted the visual imagery to be easy to digest in order for the storyline to be the primary focus. The narrative stems from a letter the animator wrote on December 7, 2007, as part of an ongoing letter-writing project titled 'notes to self', involving over two thousand letters, written by and mailed to himself. The story is about the artist's younger brother, Devin Grella, who was killed in Iraq on a convoy to deliver a diesel tanker of fuel to the active combat area of Najaf when an improvised explosive device was detonated beneath his tanker and was killed instantly. He chose the materials of the pastels, with its impermanence, drawing and erasing, overdrawing, and final erasure, to represent the temporality of the physical body. The voiceover was the foundation for the project and was originally designed as a stand alone piece. The animator gathered most of the original footage from videos and still images off of the laptop that belonged to Devin. The images are relatively simple so the viewer can focus on the progression of the drawing and follow the narrative, rather than the using the images to tell the story. After the artist was comfortable with the shots and the movement of the piece in video, he took it into the animation studio to start rotoscoping using iStopMotion and a custom camera system that he had designed. The software has the capability to project one frame at a time, giving him the opportunity to sketch over the marks that helped to tell the story. He simultaneously set the intervalometer on a Canon G5 digital still camera for sixty-seconds per frame, recording whatever was in the frame at that time. This process forced the artist to continue drawing,

and not get distracted by operating the camera, nor deciding when the next frame was finished.

Compared to Grella's previous film, *Glimpse*, completed in 2007, this process was very different than anything he had done in the past. The entire project had to be planned out and each shot was thought through, where as *Glimpse* was more of a free flowing, stream of consciousness exploration. He did this because he was hoping that the finished piece would be easier to follow in a traditional narrative structure.

Voice Over Narrator (Dustin Grella):

This morning I walked past a church with a sign out front that read, "Prayers for Peace." Stretching the entire length of the church was a wrought iron fence with long thin yellow ribbons draped across. They looked like ties on a clearance rack.

I noticed that some of the ribbons had nametags attached. As I walked down the sidewalk I thought the ribbons must be for donors or sponsors or patrons of the church. It was one of those beautiful old stone churches on Fifth Avenue.

The front of the church was long and the ribbons were many and bright and dancing in the December wind, so they easily kept my attention. I read another nametag. This one was of a soldier; the third, also of a soldier. That was when I realized that these must all be names of soldiers; soldiers who had died in Iraq. Thus the yellow ribbons; thus the prayers for peace. I stopped. I started searching for PFC Devin J. Grella.

There were thousands of ribbons. I wasn't going to be able to just randomly find his, but then I saw that they were in a sort of ad hoc alphabetical order Greka, Gonzalez, and after a long while,

Grella. A heavy cold wind blew through me, tossing the ribbons high off of the fence. I don't think of him that often anymore, even though it has only been three years. Even though someone in Iraq was just killed yesterday, someone's son, someone's father, someone's husband, someone's friend. I miss him. I wish I could say I think of him more than I do.

I wiped the tears from my face and started walking back down Fifth Avenue, crossing through Madison Square Park. I thought immediately of the sound byte on the laptop when his clothes and personal belongings were returned. I thought about that sound file, guns firing in the background, his innocent twenty-one year old voice, oddly more mature since he'd left for Iraq, three months ago. An IED, or improvised explosive device, would be detonated beneath his diesel tanker days later, killing him instantly.

I can remember when our family got the laptop out of his personal effects. We were in the funeral home, closed casket wrapped with a flag on the other side of the room. We all huddled around the monitor, as if we were looking into the eye of an oracle that could deliver a message from beyond the grave. There they were, pictures of Devin and his friends, videos of soldiers in a

sporting boxing match, and a sound file of him delivering a tanker of fuel across a Persian desert. We listened to it over and over. We wanted to know, to be a part of, experience what his life (a life that we all knew so well before he'd left for Iraq) was like those last few months.

We knew that he was somewhere, but it wasn't until we heard the machine gun fire in the background that we realized he had been off in a very foreign place. Maybe before that we didn't want to know. Maybe we were in denial. It definitely made it easier to sleep at night. At that moment, gathered around, listening to his voice, I tried to imagine Devin as something I'd never considered him, a soldier. I knew him as a little brother, an athlete and a sports fanatic, a musician, slightly girl crazed and able to spend hours gaming, but never as a soldier. He'd only been there three months, hardly enough time to write back home. He'd only been in the army for six months, and honestly, I'd never really spoken to him about it. It wasn't how I identified him. But here, at the funeral were hundreds of men, dressed in uniforms, straightening collars, and saying what a brave soldier my brother was. And there I was, keeping my mouth shut, for fear of dishonoring him.

Take a minute to listen to this sound file, the last known recording of my brother Devin, before he was killed...

Original Sound File (Devin Grella):

...I don't know if you can hear this or not, but I'm on top of my truck, we're in Najaf. It's just crazy over here. If you can hear it in the background, we're not far from that at all. When we first got here there were bombs and stuff going off, they were shooting tracer rounds right over our heads. We were parked here. We were just looking for somewhere to drop this trailer. Looks like it slowed down over there. I was hoping we could hear some more bombs. They were just shooting off a bunch of missiles. Now it's a fifty cal, a couple of fifty cals, it's pretty much stopped though. It's real crazy over here. It's pretty exciting though, uh, big mission. I don' know, I'm just excited to be a part of it, I guess...

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2009  
7:38 minutes  
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installations:

Akron Art Museum  
West Side Gallery

Akron, OH  
New York, NY

screenings:

2009

Los Angeles Int'l Shorts Festival	Los Angeles, CA
Sacramento Film + Music Fest	Sacramento, CA
Cinema City Int'l Film Festival	Los Angeles, CA
SF Shorts	San Francisco, CA
Boston Film Festival	Boston, MA
Jersey International Film Festival	Branchage, UK
Royal Flush Film Festival	New York, NY
Utopia Film Festival	Greenbelt, MD
DOK Leipzig	Leipzig, DE
Filmstock Film Festival	Lutton, UK
Greater Reading Film Festival	Reading, PA
Couch Fest	Seattle, WA
Cucalorus Film Festival	Wilmington, NC

2010

London Short Film Festival	London, UK
Standing Rock Film Festival	Kent, OH
Thin Line Film Festival	Denton, TX
ShowBiz Prestige	Longbeach, CA
Sedona International Film Festival	Sedona, AZ
True/False Film Festival	Columbia, MO
Cinequest	San Jose, CA
Sebastopol Documentary Film Fest	Sebastopol, CA
Monstra, Lisbon Animated Film Fest	Lisbon, Portugal
Heart of Gold Film Festival	Gympie, QLD
da Vinci Film Festival	Corvallis, OR
Vineyard Film Festival	Nicosia, Cyprus
San Diego IndieFest	San Diego, CA
Edgemar Short Film Festival	Edgemar, CA
Atlanta Film Festival	Atlanta, GA
Wisconsin Film Festival	Madison, WI
Buffalo Niagra Film Festival	Buffalo, NY
Sehsuechte Film Festival	Potsdam, Germany
Rincon Film Festival	Rincon, Puerto Rico
Rochester Film Festival	Rochester, NY
Newport Beach Film Festival	Newport Beach, CA

BE Film Underground Film Festival	New York, NY
Human Rights Film Festival	Melbourn, Australia
Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film	Stuttgart, Germany
Connecticut Film Festival	Danbury, CT
Annecy Animation Festival	Annecy, France

awards:

Best of Fest - Standing Rock Film Festival  
Audience Choice - Standing Rock Film Festival  
Golden Couch - Couch Fest  
Best Animation - Cinema City Film Festival  
Best Animation - Royal Flush Festival  
Best Animation - da Vinci Film Festival  
Best Animation, Audience Choice - Sedona Film Festival  
Best Animated Film, Juried Selection - Sedona Film Festival  
Best Short Film - Sebastopol Documentary Film Festival  
Best Short Film - Utopia Film Festival  
Best Student Film - MONSTRA Lisboa Film Festival  
Best Student Short Film - Greater Reading Film Festival  
Bronze Jury Award - SF Shorts

Prayers for Peace  
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Film Credits:

Writer/Director:	Dustin Grella
Producer:	Dusty Studio
Editing:	Chu Chi Lin
Sound:	Matt Israel
Music:	Gary Millus
Cinematographer:	Drew Grella
Cast:	Devin Grella Dustin Grella

# Dustin Arthur Grella

## Bio

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email [at] dustingrella [dot] com  
www.dustingrella.com  
59 Franklin Street, #5A  
New York, NY 10013  
917-331-4558  
212-683-2490

**Dustin Arthur Grella** was raised in the rural community of Medina, Ohio, and now resides in New York City. He received his MFA from the School of Visual Arts, being honored with the Paula H. Rhodes Award for Excellence in Computer Art. In 2009 he was nominated for the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant. His animations' accolades include Best of Fest, Best Animation, and Audience Choice and have screened in festivals such as the London Short Film Festival and the prestigious Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film. In early 2010 the Akron Art Museum featured his short film Prayers for Peace in a four-month installation.

# Dustin Arthur Grella

## Artist Statement

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Being obsessive and compulsive in our society often time carries negative connotations, however in my work I prefer to celebrate these traits and often times refer to it as OCC, Obsessive Compulsive Culture. I approach my work as if it were a puzzle, taking an action or an idea and aggressively repeating it, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, until a resolution is found. Often times the journey is more interesting than the destination, and although a singular action is desired and chosen, influences outside of the realm of control help guide the work into new arenas.

One of my major projects is the Notes to Self project, in which I've written and then mailed, myself a letter every day for almost eight years has generated 2828 letters (and counting), which remain meticulously ordered and still sealed to this day. The slight variations in the project, a change of font, the physical location of the cancellation stamp, and of course what is written inside, are nuances that help decipher time's complexities.

Animation is also a natural meditation for me. I set up a camera on a one-minute timer that records the image, and then I allow myself to draw and explore the direction of the next frame, sometimes a narrative emerges and sometimes the path is abstract. The importance is often times not placed on the product, but on the actual event of creation.

# Dustin Arthur Grella

## Curriculum Vitae

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### **Selected Exhibitions:**

- 2009 *Shaw Video Box*, Akron Art Museum, Akron, OH
- 2009 *Mediated Realities*, Visual Arts Gallery, New York, NY
- 2009 *Know Sense*, West Side Gallery, New York, NY
- 2008 *Continuous Current*, West Side Gallery, New York, NY
- 2007 *Rockport Center for the Arts* Rockport, TX
- 2007 *Filmstock*, The Hat Factory, Luton, United Kingdom
- 2007 *Generative Animator*, SPACELab, SPACES, Cleveland, OH
- 2007 *19*, Asterisk Gallery, Cleveland, OH
- 2007 *Dustin Arthur Grella*, Summit ArtSpace, Akron, OH (Solo)

### **Selected Screenings:**

- 2010 Annecy Animation Festival, Annecy, France
- 2010 Cinequest, San Jose, CA
- 2010 Stuttgart Festival of Animation, Stuttgart, Germany
- 2010 London Short Film Festival, London, England
- 2009 *DOK Leipzig*, Leipzig, Germany
- 2009 *Filmstock*, Luton, UK
- 2009 *Boston Film Festival*, Boston, MA
- 2009 *Los Angeles International Short Film Festival*, Los Angeles, CA
- 2008 *Swansea Bay Film Festival*, Swansea Bay, United Kingdom
- 2008 *Newport Beach Film Festival*, Newport Beach, CA
- 2008 *Indianapolis International Film Festival*, Indianapolis
- 2008 *Byron Bay Film Festival*, Byron Bay, Australia
- 2008 *Memphis International Film Festival*, Memphis
- 2008 *Victoria Film Festival*, Victoria, BC, Canada
- 2008 *CINECITY*, Brighton, United Kingdom
- 2007 *Asheville Film Festival\**, Asheville, NC
- 2007 *Planet In Focus*, Toronto, Canada
- 2007 *Raindance Film Festival*, London, England
- 2007 *Everglades Film Festival*, Dargle, South Africa.
- 2007 *SoCal Film Festival*, Huntington Beach, CA
- 2007 *DC Shorts*, Washington DC
- 2007 *SF Shorts*, San Francisco, CA
- 2007 *The Great Artdoors*, MOCA Cleveland. Cleveland, OH
- 2007 *Ohio Filmmakers Showcase*, Wexner Center. Columbus
- 2007 *Standing Rock International Film Festival\**. Kent, OH

# Dustin Arthur Grella

## Curriculum Vitae

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### **Education:**

2009 School of Visual Arts, MFA, Computer Art, New York, NY  
2009 Franklin Furnace Archive, Internship, Brooklyn, NY  
2007 The University of Akron, BA, Interdisciplinary Studies, Akron, OH  
2000 Humboldt State University, Arcata, CA

### **Professional Experience:**

2009 Judson Rosebush, Inc., Grant Research, New York, NY  
2009 School of Visual Arts, Mac Lab Assistant, New York, NY  
2009 The Packard Institute, Inc., Board of Trustees Secretary, Akron, OH  
2008 Computer Art MFACA Library, Database Designer, New York, NY  
2006 The Buchtelite, Arts + Life Staff Writer, Akron, OH  
2004 Emily Davis Gallery, Attendant, Akron, OH

### **Selected Honors and Awards:**

2009 Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant Nominee  
2009 Best Animated Short, Royal Flush Film Festival  
2009 Best Short Film, Utopia Film Festival  
2009 *Best Animation*, Cinema City International Film Festival  
2009 *Bronze Jury Prize*, SF Shorts Film Festival  
2009 Paula Rhodes Award of Excellence in Computer Art  
2009 School of Visual Arts Alumni Scholarship Award  
2008 Best Experimental Film, Oxford Film Festival  
2008 MFA Computer Art Departmental Scholarship  
2007 Drawn To It (Best Animation) Hell's Half Mile Film Festival  
2007 Audience Choice, Asheville Film Festival  
2007 Best Animation, New Jersey International Film Festival  
2007 People's Choice, Standing Rock International Film Festival  
2006 Best of Show, Juried Student Exhibition, Myers School of Art

### **Selected Talks/Performances:**

2009 *Media Modes*, Panelist, New York, NY  
2009 *Prayers for Peace Q+A*, LA Shorts Fest, Los Angeles, CA  
2009 *Thesis Presentation*, School of Visual Arts, New York, NY  
2008 *Cinema Orange*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA  
2008 *Featured Filmmaker*, Standing Rock Film Festival, Kent, OH  
2007 Animation Workshop, *Summit ArtSpace Exhibition*, Akron, OH

# Dustin Arthur Grella

## Curriculum Vitae

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### **Selected Filmography:**

*2009 Prayers for Peace*  
*2008 Letterbox*  
*2008 Consumption*  
*2008 Wanted: NYC Studio*  
*2007 Glimpse*  
*2006 Tests: zero-ten*

### **Selected Press and Reviews:**

2009  
Carney, James. *Brother's film tribute to fallen soldier showing at Museum*, Akron Beacon Journal.

2008  
Washington, Julia. *Filmmaker Grella's work to be showcased at Standing Rock International Short Film Festival in Kent*, Cleveland Plain Dealer

2007  
Sguregian, Elaine. *Screaming With Color*, Akron Beacon Journal  
Shinn, Dorothy. *One-man art show intense, expressive*. Akron Beacon Journal  
Benson, John. *Dustin Grella's art displayed at Summit Artspace*. The Medina Gazette  
Durbin, Rodger. *Conceptual artist featured in Summit Artspace show*. West Side Leader

2005  
Buterbaugh, Chad. *Letters Continue*. The Medina Gazette  
Buterbaugh, Chad. *The Long Road Home*. The Medina Gazette

2004  
Barett, Bob. *Campus Has Three Art Galleries*. The Buchtelite

2003  
Barett, Bob. *Notes to Self*. The Buchtelite

# Dustin Arthur Grella

## Synopses of Major Projects

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**Prayers for Peace** [2009], is a narrative stop-motion animation confronting the memory of the artist's younger brother killed in the current conflict in Iraq. In this animation the writer/ animator stops to think about who his brother was, how he identified him, as well as try to define their relationship. The piece reflects back on the days of the funeral and tries to recall what those days were like for him and his family.

**Glimpse** [2007], a nine minute animated short using stop-motion photography, is both a study of the life of painter Willem de Kooning and a stream of consciousness narrative concerning the impermanence of life. Drawing with soft pastels on slate, the artist creates a dark, uncertain world, sometimes concrete, sometimes abstract. A soundtrack from Lower East Side native Gary Michael Millus and animation by Dustin Grella lend the narrative a dreamlike quality.

**Notes to Self** [2002-present] is an inquiry into the dying art of letter writing, as well as a journal, a stamp collection, and a travel record. Since April 13, 2002, the artist has sent a letter to himself every day. Most of the letters contain an eleven-hundred-word essay, written stream of consciousness, concerning thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the moment. Other letters may contain manual typewritten poetry, pen and ink sketches, or a ticket stub from a concert. All remain sealed to this day. This project is a study into the soul of one person through the passage of time.

**The Quadrangular Chronicle** [2004, 06, 07] is a handcrafted box containing four books. Each of the books is given to a different person, whose two requirements are to get something on the page every day and to have fun. At the end of the year the collected books can be read as separate entities or read as a group, comparing what each of the four different people were thinking or feeling on one particular day. This project is a study of the lives of four people over the span of one year.