

# Animation, stopmotion y LEGO®

By Pablo Llorens

Lately we find that in the world of LEGO®, more and more animations and creations are being made by employing the technique of stop motion. To learn a little bit more about this ever growing world, we have interviewed Pablo Llorens, a specialist in the area.

**HispaBrick Magazine:** Tell us a little bit about yourself and stop motion.

**Pablo Llorens:** I've spent my whole life working with stop motion, a technique that simulates movement and emotions in real life objects. Generally it is done using puppets created specifically for animation, built with various materials, the most popular being our old friend clay. I have carried out all kinds of responsibilities (in 2001 I directed was director of animation for "Los Garcia", an animation for an information campaign that explained the change from Peseta to Euros with ) and I have created my own short films, some of which have earned me recognition in the Goya awards, like "Caracol ,col col" in 1995 and "El enigma del chico croqueta" in 2005. You can see both of them, as well as most of my other work in my YouTube channel™ "PLASTIANIMATION" to which I have recently uploaded a specific LEGO animation channel for children called "PLASTILEGO" and its English language version LEGO,CLAY AND FUN!

**HBM:** Why did you decide to use LEGO in your stop motion?

**PL:** During the last few years I have primarily worked for the MEGABLOK company, animating, directing, and producing animated shorts for their products (especially within the Halo line with series like "Assault on squad 45" and "thrill squad") because of that, I discovered and got up to speed on the world of brick films. I accumulated a lot experience and knowledge, specifically with giving life to these small figures. This, together with the me wanting to explore creating my own online content, brought me to want to create my own LEGO channel.

Having such a large variety of LEGO figures, vehicles, and customizable settings at my disposal has given me a certain freedom that would be unimaginable within the traditional world of claymation. Within said world I build everything from scratch, which as you can imagine is a huge consumption of time and effort. All the designing, modeling, sculpting, creation of costumes, scenery, and miniature objects that would normally have to be done can be skipped when using LEGO, something which saves me a lot of time.

Furthermore, the quality and accuracy with which Lego manufactures its products makes them ideal for stop-motion, all of the joints have the necessary friction and all the elements also have perfect stability.

**HBM:** Beyond it being a tool for you to create stop motion videos, have you gotten involved in the world of LEGO building?



**PL:** No, I'm neither a collector nor a builder unless the end result will have a part to play in a video. Even if I play around building quirky characters or vehicles, it's so that they may have a role later on. The less official LEGO they look the better. That's the great thing about LEGO, its pieces are so versatile that you can build things that not even the original designer would have imagined.



I love the world of LEGO as a tool to make videos, but I don't see myself building sets by following the instructions, dedicating time to obtain something that has already been thought up by a designer and that many people will go on to create, which is not original and unique. It doesn't motivate me much, unless they are required for a specific video.



Let's say I use LEGO for my videos because of its characteristics and popularity among fans, but I'm not a purist. In fact my creative philosophy is to mix elements, in the same way that my childhood toys all lived together in the same drawer, coming from the same world (ignoring trademarks), and interacting in games with my brothers (LEGO, Playmobil, Madelman, or any soft toy could be friends without any problem).



I basically give life to Minifigures and clay elements, plus whatever else I can think of, looking to differentiate myself from other styles already used in Brickfilms. Given that YouTube is full of animations faithful to the plot and assembly of each LEGO reference, especially franchise based (LOTR™, Star Wars™, Marvel™, etc..), I try to set myself apart from all that and offer something original. I find it more fun to transform and personalize the LEGO product, adapting it to the story I want to tell, in a free and creative way.



And so far my work has been well received among several brickfilmmers, including: Fancy Pants, Brotherhood Workshop, and Titan Pictures.

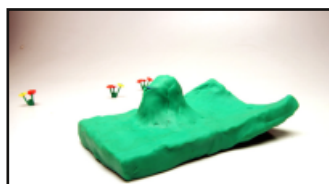


**HBM:** What differences are there between working with LEGO and working with clay?

**PL:** One of the main differences is that clay is soft and delicate, easy to get dirty, can crack, but at the same time is alive and tremendously expressive. LEGO, on the other hand, is clean, stable, reliable, but not as organic...something that makes it a challenge when trying to bring it to life using animation and sound.



However, as a shortcut to making movies without spending hours or having a large budget, LEGO is a perfect tool. The limitation of the minifigures' articulation is evident, as they have no joints in their knees, elbows, or waist, but it is these limitations which allow you to animate easily and quickly; not to mention the size, which lets you create your studio shoot on a small table, and its weight as well, which tremendously facilitates actions such as flying or jumping.



**HBM:** In the process of shooting, what are some of the biggest challenges you face?

**PL:** Honestly for me, coming from the complex world of clay, most issues I face are easy. But if there's one particularly difficult area, it's facial expression. It's very common to see brickfilms where the characters are either angry or scared, but they still have a smile on their face. Although there are many reversible heads available, there is not enough of a variety to apply to the particular desired facial expression.

There is always the option to animate the faces in post production using video digital tools, but for me it's too much work. I won't rule out the potential collaboration with a digital artist, but for now I choose to fix it via my artesian solution, this involves drawing on my own expression using a fine point pen, fighting to make it so the original expression can't be seen. I believe you can get blank LEGO® heads, but I've yet to find them at a cheaper price in the quantity that I need.

**HBM:** What advice would you give to someone who wanted to get started in making their own LEGO stopmotion?

**PL:** First, that they should have clear that animation, as easy as it may be or seem, requires that you be disciplined, calm, concentrated, and dedicated. You are going to spend a lot of time enclosed with your minifigures.

You should also have a stable work area that you can call your own, somewhere children, mother, and pets are not allowed.

There are few necessities, a small table where you won't be bothered, un par de flexos, a camera (phone, Ipad, Nintendo DS), and a computer with capture software. The software can range from the free ones available online to the more professional and more expensive ones like Dragon Frame or Stopmotion Pro.

Later, you have to study. On youtube there are many tutorials and a lot of information to get you started. In fact the majority of LEGO animators include their own tutorial on their channel. There has even been a book published on the topic by Sarah Herman called BRICK FILMS which is ideal for those getting started (book is only available in English).

In addition, I feel it is a great system to practice audiovisual skills: narrating, edition, photography, sounds, voices... in an inexpensive and accessible way that allows you get an education in the the world of audiovisuals.

**HBM:** What do you make of all the LEGO movies on YouTube?

**PL:** YouTube has become a perfect place for Brickfilers to show off their latest work, so much so that you can almost consider Brickfilms a genre in and of itself, similar to gamers and vloggers.

On Youtube videos are premiered, tutorials shared, festivals are celebrated, it's a very active community with superstars like "MICHAELHICKOXFilms" who makes ingenious videos for kids, set in a pizza restaurants or mini golf courses, or "forrestfire101" who represents the ultimate superspectacle for teenagers, full of super heroes, special effects and, occasionally, a lot of blood. In Spain the police videos "HarryAndBillyBrick" are a good example; perfectly narrated, photographed and animated, with an elegant adult feel.

There are also many Facebook groups and online communities like "Bricks in Motion" that upload their work and provide feedback to each other :)

I've been studying the brickfilm world for some time, and recently I've written an extensive article about its history and technique, collaborating in the specialised Stop Motion fanzine "Puppets & Clay" published by Adrian Encinas. You could say I'm an expert on the subject:)



**HBM:** Around what age do you think the majority of brick film viewers are?

**PL:** Well, that's an unsolved mystery. The majority of videos that populate YouTube are aimed at teens, but there are a few cases of videos aimed at a younger audience that equally have great success. Ever since I became familiar with your publication I have realized that there is a sector of adult fans that look at LEGO® from an almost scientific or artistic point of view, so it is clear there are different sensitivities regarding LEGO.

**HBM:** What would a fan be able to find on your YouTube channels?

**PL:** On PLASTILEGO or LEGO, CLAY AND FUN! everything revolves around Melvyn, a blue minifig (I believe he was a postman) that was forgotten in my box of memories. With him I try to put myself into the heads of young children and see how they think when playing and developing stories, stories where logic and consistency don't matter so long as the result is funny and hilarious. For example, in the episode MONSTER, Melvyn and his girlfriend Priscilla find themselves with a ball of green clay, which is friendly at first, but it becomes a monstrous evil Cyclops and finally after pursuing them, it is crushed with a giant hammer and the plastic debris becomes ... a kitten!

My intention is that every video is surprising and unexpected so some are recorded in studio on a neutral background with Lego elements like a "LEGO tree" or "LEGO Monster", some on the floor of a room like "LEGO PLASTI SKATE" or even others outdoors like "LEGO JUNGLE ADVENTURE".

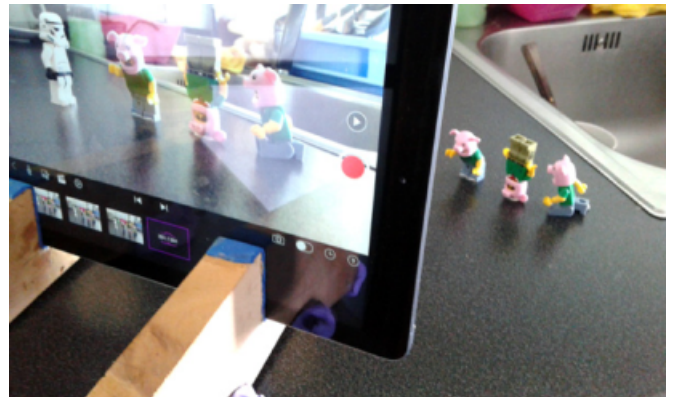
In addition to LEGO videos for kids, I'm also interested in making LEGO videos for teens and adults. Already on my adult channel (PLASTIANIMATION) there is a short called "PSYCHO TROOPER". In it we learn about an evil Stormtrooper who is dedicated to indiscriminately massacring various characters, mixing different licenses in a "tarantino like" environment, a style I like and one with which I have big plans for.

**HBM:** What kind of equipment do you use?

**PL:** PSYCHO TROOPER was shot using an iPhone with the "Stop Motion Studio" application. That is what I usually use when I shoot in, let's say "hostile" environments, or those outside of the controlled studio environment.

In the studio I use a Canon camera connected to a laptop equipped with a capture software, as well as professional lighting.

Using the iPad, I'm given the opportunity to shoot in any place and situation, so if I'm on vacation, I can take advantage of the places I go by creating a new improvised animation, giving it a very unusual setting. Because of that, I always carry a few minifigures and a piece of clay in my suitcase pocket, ready to act.



**HBM:** How many people work on your animations?

**PL:** As of right now it's an experiment, getting the feel of what can be done in this environment, so I'm basically doing this solo. Occasionally I collaborate for an episode's digital postproduction, when my knowledge can be a little lacking.

**HBM:** What plans do you have for the future of your channels?

**PL:** Well, that is something that will depend on the time I have left after my professional animation, but my idea is to create new videos for both children and adults, study which has a greater public acceptance and go from there adapting to this acceptance, and testing different styles.

I have lots of ideas for both PLASTILEGO horror themes or adult humor for Plastianimation that I hope to carry out soon.

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PLASTILEGO:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmNg6jpFaq3frv18LJmInQ>