

Jan Švankmajer

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Jan Švankmajer (born 4 September 1934 in Prague) is a Czech surrealist artist. His work spans several media. He is known for his surreal animations and features, which have greatly influenced other artists such as Tim Burton, Terry Gilliam, The Brothers Quay and many others.

Švankmajer has gained a reputation over several decades for his distinctive use of stop-motion technique, and his ability to make surreal, nightmarish and yet somehow funny pictures. He is still making films in Prague at the time of writing.

Švankmajer's trademarks include very exaggerated sounds, often creating a very strange effect in all eating scenes. He often uses very sped-up sequences when people walk and interact. His movies often involve inanimate objects coming

alive and being brought to life through stop-motion. Food is a favourite subject and medium. Stop-motion features in most of his work, though his feature films also include live action to varying degrees.

A lot of his movies, like the short film *Down to the Cellar*, are made from a child's perspective, while at the same time often having a truly disturbing and even aggressive nature. In 1972 the communist authorities banned him from making films, and many of his later films were banned. He was almost unknown in the West until the early 1980s.

Today he is one of the most celebrated animators in the world. His best known works are probably the feature films *Alice* (1988), *Faust* (1994), *Conspirators of Pleasure* (1996), *Little Otik* (2000) and *Lunacy* (2005), a surreal comic horror based on the work of Edgar Allan Poe and the Marquis de Sade. Also famous (and much imitated) is the short *Dimensions of Dialogue* (1982), which shows Arcimboldo-like heads gradually reducing each other to bland copies ("exhaustive discussion"); a clay man and woman who dissolve into one another sexually, then quarrel and reduce themselves to a frenzied, boiling pulp ("passionate discourse"); and two elderly clay heads who extrude various objects on their tongues (toothbrush and toothpaste; shoe and shoelaces, etc.) and use them in every possible combination, sane or otherwise ("factual conversation"). His films have been called "as emotionally haunting as Kafka's stories[1]

(<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9901E2D7103EF930A25757C0A962958260&sec=&pagewanted=print>) ."

He was married to Eva Švankmajerová, an internationally known surrealist painter, ceramicist and writer until her death in October of 2005. She collaborated on several of his movies including *Faust*, *Otesánek* and *Alice*. They had two children, Veronika and Václav.

Jan Švankmajer



Still from *Dimensions of Dialogue*, 1982

Born	4 September 1934 Prague, Czechoslovakia
Occupation	Animator
Spouse(s)	Eva Švankmajerová

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Filmography

Feature-length films

- *Alice (Něco z Alenky)* (1988)
- *Faust (Lekce Faust)* (1994)
- *Conspirators of Pleasure (Spiklenci slasti)* (1996)
- *Little Otik (Otesánek)* (2000)
- *Lunacy (Šílení)* (2005)
- *Surviving Life (Theory and Practice)* (2008)

Short films

- *The Last Trick (Poslední trik pana Schwarcewalldea a pana Edgara)* (1964)
- *A Game with Stones (Hra s kameny)* (1965)
- *Johann Sebastian Bach: Fantasy in G minor (Johann Sebastian Bach: Fantasia G-moll)* (1965)
- *Punch and Judy*, also known as *The Coffin Factory* and *The Lynch House (Rakvičkárna)* (1966)
- *Et Cetera* (1966)
- *Historia Naturae, Suita* (1967)
- *The Garden (Zahrada)* (1968)
- *The Flat (Byt)* (1968)
- *Picnic with Weissmann (Picknick mit Weissmann)* (1968)
- *A Quiet Week in the House (Tichý týden v domě)* (1969)
- *Don Juan (Don Šajn)* (1969)
- *The Ossuary (Kostnice)* (1970)
- *Jabberwocky (Žvahlav aneb šatičky slaměného Huberta)* (1971)
- *Leonardo's Diary (Leonardův deník)* (1972)
- *Castle of Otranto (Otrantský zámek)* (1979)
- *The Fall of the House of Usher (Zánik domu Usherů)* (1980)
- *Dimensions of Dialogue (Možnosti dialogu)* (1982)
- *Down to the Cellar (Do pivnice)* (1983)
- *The Pendulum, the Pit and Hope (Kyvadlo, jáma a naděje)* (1983)
- *The Male Game*, also known as *Virile Games (Mužné hry)* (1988)
- *Another Kind of Love* (1988) - music video for Hugh Cornwell
- *Meat Love (Zamilované maso)* (1988)
- *Darkness/Light/Darkness (Tma, světlo, tma)* (1989)



Animation: Dimensions of Dialogue

- *Flora* (1989)
- *Animated Self-Portraits* (1989) - Švankmajer was one of 27 filmmakers who contributed to this portmanteau work
- *The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia (Konec stalinismu v Čechách)* (1990)
- *Food (Jídlo)* (1992)

External links

- Jan Švankmajer (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0840905/>) at the Internet Movie Database
- *The Animation of Jan Svankmajer* (http://www.keyframeonline.com/CastCrew/Jan_Svankmajer/4297/) at Keyframe - the Animation Resource
- Overview of his work (http://www.awn.com/heaven_and_hell/svank/svank1.htm)
- Jan Švankmajer - PL (<http://www.jansvankmajer.art.pl>)
- Svankmajer in conversation at BFI London (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxBEyz9vgYs>)

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