

= Ralph Bakshi =

Ralph Bakshi (born October 29 , 1938) is an American director of animated and live @-@ action films . In the 1970s , he established an alternative to mainstream animation through independent and adult @-@ oriented productions . Between 1972 and 1992 , he directed nine theatrically released feature films , five of which he wrote . He has been involved in numerous television projects as director , writer , producer and animator .

Beginning his career at the Terrytoons television cartoon studio as a cel polisher , Bakshi was eventually promoted to animator , and then director . He moved to the animation division of Paramount Pictures in 1967 and started his own studio , Bakshi Productions , in 1968 . Through producer Steve Krantz , Bakshi made his debut feature film , Fritz the Cat , released in 1972 . It was the first animated film to receive an X rating from the Motion Picture Association of America , and the most successful independent animated feature of all time .

Over the next eleven years , Bakshi directed seven additional animated features . He is well known for such films as Wizards (1977) , The Lord of the Rings (1978) , American Pop (1981) and Fire and Ice (1983) . In 1987 , Bakshi returned to television work , producing the series Mighty Mouse : The New Adventures , which ran for two years . After a nine @-@ year hiatus from feature films , he directed Cool World (1992) , which was largely rewritten during production and received poor reviews . Bakshi returned to television with the live @-@ action film Cool and the Crazy (1994) and the anthology series Spicy City (1997) .

During the 2000s , he focused largely on fine art and painting and in 2003 co @-@ founded The Bakshi School of Animation with his son Eddie and Jess Gorell . Bakshi has received several awards for his work , including the 1980 Golden Gryphon for The Lord of the Rings at the Giffoni Film Festival , the 1988 Annie Award for Distinguished Contribution to the Art of Animation , and the 2003 Maverick Tribute Award at the Cinequest Film Festival .

= = Early life (1938 ? 1956) = =

Ralph Bakshi was born to a Jewish family on October 29 , 1938 , in Haifa , Mandatory Palestine . In 1939 , his family immigrated to New York City to escape World War II , and he grew up in the Brownsville neighborhood of Brooklyn . The family lived in a low @-@ rent apartment , where Bakshi became fascinated with the urban milieu . As a child , he enjoyed comic books , and often dug through trash cans to find them .

In the spring of 1947 , Bakshi 's father and uncle traveled to Washington , D.C. , in search of business opportunities , and soon moved the family to the black neighborhood of Foggy Bottom . Bakshi recalled , " All my friends were black , everyone we did business with was black , the school across the street was black . It was segregated , so everything was black . I went to see black movies ; black girls sat on my lap . I went to black parties . I was another black kid on the block . No problem ! "

The racial segregation of local schools meant that the nearest white school was several miles away ; Bakshi obtained his mother 's permission to attend the nearby black school with his friends . Bakshi was the only white student in the classroom . Most of the students had no problem with Bakshi 's presence , but a teacher sought advice from the principal , who called the police . Fearing that segregated whites would riot if they learned that a white student was attending a black school , the police removed Bakshi from his classroom . Meanwhile , his father had been suffering from anxiety attacks . Within a few months , the family moved back to Brownsville , where they rarely spoke of these events .

At the age of 15 , after discovering Gene Byrnes ' Complete Guide to Cartooning at the public library , Bakshi took up cartooning to document his experiences and create fantasy @-@ influenced artwork . He stole a copy of the book and learned every lesson in it . During his teenage years , Bakshi took up boxing . While attending Thomas Jefferson High School , he took little interest in academics , spending most of his time focusing on " broads , mouthing off , and doodling " . After participating in a food fight and being caught smoking , Bakshi was sent to the principal 's office .

Believing Bakshi was unlikely to prosper at Thomas Jefferson , the principal transferred him to Manhattan 's School of Industrial Art . In June 1956 , Bakshi graduated from the school with an award in cartooning .

= = Career = =

= = = Early career (1956 ? 1968) = = =

When Bakshi was 18 , his friend Cosmo Anzilotti was hired by the cartoon studio Terrytoons ; Anzilotti recommended Bakshi to the studio 's production manager , Frank Schudde . Bakshi was hired as a cel polisher and commuted four hours each day to the studio , based in suburban New Rochelle . His low @-@ level position required Bakshi to carefully remove dirt and dust from animation cels .

After a few months , Schudde was surprised that Bakshi was still showing up to work , and promoted him to cel painter . Bakshi began to practice animating ; to give himself more time , at one point he slipped ten cels he was supposed to work on into the " to @-@ do " pile of a fellow painter , Leo Giuliani . Bakshi 's deception was not noticed until two days later , when he was called to Schudde 's office because the cels had been painted on the wrong side . When Bakshi explained that Giuliani had made the mistake , an argument ensued between the three . Schudde eventually took Bakshi 's side . By this point , the studio 's employees were aware of Bakshi 's intention to become an animator , and he began to receive help and advice from established animators , including Connie Rasinski , Manny Davis , Jim Tyer , Larry Silverman and Johnnie Gentilella .

Bakshi married his first wife , Elaine , when he was 21 . Their son , Mark , was born when Bakshi was 22 . Elaine disliked his long work hours ; parodying his marital problems , Bakshi drew Dum Dum and Dee Dee , a comic strip about a man determined " to get ? and keep ? the girl " .

As he perfected his animation style , he began to take on more jobs , including creating design tests for the studio 's head director , Gene Deitch . Deitch was not convinced that Bakshi had a modern design sensibility . In response to the period 's political climate and as a form of therapy , Bakshi drew the comic strips Bonefoot and Fudge , which satirized " idiots with an agenda " , and Junktown , which focused on " misfit technology and discarded ideals " .

Bakshi 's frustrations with his failing marriage and the state of the planet further drove his need to animate . In 1959 , he moved his desk to join the rest of the animators ; after asking Rasinski for material to animate , he received layouts of two scenes : a hat floating on water and Deputy Dawg , the lead character of one of Terrytoons ' syndicated television series , running . Despite threats of repercussion from the animators ' union , Rasinski fought to keep Bakshi as a layout artist . Bakshi began to see Rasinski as a father figure ; Rasinski , childless , was happy to serve as Bakshi 's mentor .

At the age of 25 , Bakshi was promoted to director . His first assignment was the series Sad Cat . Bakshi and his wife had separated by then , giving him the time to animate each short alone . Bakshi was dissatisfied with the traditional role of a Terrytoons director : " We didn 't really ' direct ' like you 'd think . We were ' animation directors , ' because the story department controlled the storyboards . We couldn 't affect anything , but I still tried . I 'd re @-@ time , mix up soundtracks ? I 'd fuck with it so I could make it my own . "

Independent animation studios such as Hanna @-@ Barbera were selling shows to the networks , even as the series produced by Terrytoons (which was owned by CBS) were declining in popularity . In 1966 , Bill Weiss asked Bakshi to help him carry presentation boards to Manhattan for a meeting with CBS . The network executives rejected all of Weiss 's proposals as " too sophisticated " , " too corny " , or " too old @-@ timey " .

As Fred Silverman , CBS 's daytime programming chief , began to leave the office , an unprepared Bakshi pitched a superhero parody called The Mighty Heroes . He described the series ' characters , including Strong Man , Tornado Man , Rope Man , Cuckoo Man and Diaper Man : " They fought evil wherever they could and the villains were stupider than they were . "

The executives loved the idea , and while Silverman required a few drawings before committing , Weiss immediately put Bakshi to work on the series ' development . Once Silverman saw the character designs , he confirmed that CBS would greenlight the show , on the condition that Bakshi serve as its creative director . It would appear as a segment of Mighty Mouse Playhouse on the network 's 1966 ? 67 Saturday morning schedule ; the series was renamed Mighty Mouse and the Mighty Heroes in recognition of the new segment .

Bakshi received a pay raise , but was not as satisfied with his career advancement as he had anticipated ; Rasinski had died in 1965 , Bakshi did not have creative control over The Mighty Heroes , and he was unhappy with the quality of the animation , writing , timing and voice acting . Although the series ' first 20 segments were successful , Bakshi wanted to leave Terrytoons to form his own company . In 1967 , he drew up presentation pieces for a fantasy series called Tee @-@ Witt , with help from Anzilotti , Johnnie Zago and Bill Foucht .

On the way to the CBS offices to make his pitch , he was involved in a car accident . At the auto body shop , he met Liz , who later became his second wife . Though CBS passed on Tee @-@ Witt , its designs served as the basis for Bakshi 's 1977 film Wizards . While leaving the network offices , he learned that Paramount Pictures had recently fired Shamus Culhane , the head of its animation division . Bakshi met with Burt Hampft , a lawyer for the studio , and was hired to replace Culhane .

Bakshi enlisted comic book and pulp fiction artists and writers Harvey Kurtzman , Lin Carter , Gray Morrow , Archie Goodwin , Wally Wood and Jim Steranko to work at the studio . After finishing Culhane 's uncompleted shorts , he directed , produced , wrote and designed four short films at Paramount : The Fuz , Mini @-@ Squirts , Marvin Digs and Mouse Trek .

Marvin Digs , which Bakshi conceived as a " flower child picture " , was not completed the way he had intended : It " was going to have curse words and sex scenes , and a lot more than that . [...] Of course , they wouldn 't let me do that . " He described the disappointing result as a " typical 1967 limited @-@ animation theatrical " . Animation historian Michael Barrier called the film " an offensively bad picture , the kind that makes people who love animation get up and leave the theater in disgust " . Production of Mighty Heroes ended when Bakshi left Terrytoons .

Bakshi served as head of the studio for eight months before Paramount closed its animation division on December 1 , 1967 . He learned that his position was always intended to be temporary and that Paramount never intended to pick up his pitches . Although Hampft was prepared to offer Bakshi a severance package , Bakshi immediately ripped up the contract .

Hampft suggested that Bakshi work with producer Steve Krantz , who had recently fired Culhane as supervising director on the Canadian science fiction series Rocket Robin Hood . Bakshi and background artist Johnnie Vita soon headed to Toronto , planning to commute between Canada and New York , with artists such as Morrow and Wood working from the United States .

Unknown to Bakshi , Krantz and producer Al Guest were in the middle of a lawsuit . Failing to reach a settlement with Guest , Krantz told Bakshi to grab the series ' model sheets and return to the United States . When the studio found out , a warrant for Bakshi 's arrest was issued by the Toronto police . He narrowly avoided capture before being stopped by an American border guard who asked him what he was doing . Bakshi responded , " All of these guys are heading into Canada to dodge the draft and I 'm running back into the States . What the fuck is wrong with that ! ? " The guard laughed , and let Bakshi through . Vita was detained at the airport ; he was searched and interrogated for six hours .

Bakshi soon founded his own studio , Bakshi Productions , in the Garment District of Manhattan , where his mother used to work and which Bakshi described as " the worst neighborhood in the world " . Bakshi Productions paid its employees higher salaries than other studios and expanded opportunities for female and minority animators . The studio began work on Rocket Robin Hood , and later took over the Spider @-@ Man television series . Bakshi married Liz in August 1968 . His second child , Preston , was born in June 1970 .

== = Fritz the Cat (1969 ? 1972) == =

In 1969 , Ralph 's Spot was founded as a division of Bakshi Productions to produce commercials for

Coca @-@ Cola and Max , the 2000 @-@ Year @-@ Old Mouse , a series of educational shorts paid for by Encyclopædia Britannica . Bakshi was uninterested in the kind of animation the studio was turning out , and wanted to produce something personal . He soon developed Heavy Traffic , a tale of inner @-@ city street life . Krantz told Bakshi that Hollywood studio executives would be unwilling to fund the film because of its content and Bakshi 's lack of film experience . While browsing the East Side Book Store on St. Mark 's Place , Bakshi came across a copy of Robert Crumb 's Fritz the Cat . Impressed by Crumb 's sharp satire , Bakshi purchased the book and suggested to Krantz that it would work as a film . Krantz arranged a meeting with Crumb , during which Bakshi presented the drawings he had created while learning the artist 's distinctive style to prove that he could adapt Crumb 's artwork to animation . Impressed by Bakshi 's tenacity , Crumb lent him one of his sketchbooks for reference .

Preparation began on a studio pitch that included a poster @-@ sized cel featuring the comic 's cast against a traced photo background ? as Bakshi intended the film to appear . Despite Crumb 's enthusiasm , the artist refused to sign the contract Krantz drew up . Artist Vaughn Bodé warned Bakshi against working with Crumb , describing him as " slick " . Bakshi later agreed with Bodé 's assessment , calling Crumb " one of the slickest hustlers you 'll ever see in your life " . Krantz sent Bakshi to San Francisco , where he stayed with Crumb and his wife , Dana , in an attempt to persuade Crumb to sign the contract . After a week , Crumb left , leaving the film 's production status uncertain . Two weeks after Bakshi returned to New York , Krantz entered his office and told Bakshi that he had acquired the film rights through Dana , who had Crumb 's power of attorney and signed the contract .

After Bakshi pitched the project to every major Hollywood studio , Warner Bros. bought it and promised an \$ 850 @,@ 000 budget . Bakshi hired animators he had worked with in the past , including Vita , Tyer , Anzilotti and Nick Tafuri , and began the layouts and animation . The first completed sequence was a junkyard scene in Harlem , in which Fritz smokes marijuana , has sex and incites a revolution . Krantz intended to release the sequence as a 15 @-@ minute short in case the picture 's financing fell through ; Bakshi , however , was determined to complete the film as a feature . They screened the sequence for Warner Bros. executives , who wanted the sexual content toned down and celebrities cast for the voice parts . Bakshi refused , and Warner Bros. pulled out , leading Krantz to seek funds elsewhere . He eventually made a deal with Jerry Gross , the owner of Cinemation Industries , a distributor specializing in exploitation films . Although Bakshi did not have enough time to pitch the film , Gross agreed to fund its production and distribute it , believing that it would fit in with his grindhouse slate .

Despite receiving financing from other sources , including Saul Zaentz (who agreed to distribute the soundtrack album on his Fantasy Records label) , the budget was tight enough to exclude pencil tests , so Bakshi had to test the animation by flipping an animator 's drawings in his hand before they were inked and painted . When a cameraman realized that the cels for the desert scenes were not wide enough and revealed the transparency , Bakshi painted a cactus to cover the mistake . Very few storyboards were used . Bakshi and Vita walked around the Lower East Side , Washington Square Park , Chinatown and Harlem , taking moody snapshots . Artist Ira Turek inked the outlines of these photographs onto cels with a Rapidograph , the technical pen preferred by Crumb , giving the film 's backgrounds a stylized realism virtually unprecedented in animation . The tones of the watercolor backgrounds were influenced by the work of Ashcan School painters such as George Luks and John French Sloan . Among other unusual techniques , bent and fisheye camera perspectives were used to portray the way the film 's hippies and hoodlums viewed the city . Many scenes featured documentary recordings of real conversations in place of scripted dialogue ? this too would become a signature of Bakshi 's .

In May 1971 , Bakshi moved his studio to Los Angeles to hire additional animators . Some , including Rod Scribner , Dick Lundy , Virgil Walter Ross , Norman McCabe and John Sparey , welcomed Bakshi and felt that Fritz the Cat would bring diversity to the animation industry . Other animators were less pleased by Bakshi 's arrival and placed an advertisement in The Hollywood Reporter , stating that his " filth " was unwelcome in California . By the time production wrapped , Cinemation had released Melvin Van Peebles ' Sweet Sweetback 's Baadasssss Song to

considerable success , despite the X rating it had received . When the Motion Picture Association of America gave Bakshi 's film an X rating as well , Cinemation exploited it for promotional purposes , advertising Fritz the Cat as " 90 minutes of violence , excitement , and SEX ... he 's X @-@ rated and animated ! " Variety called it an " amusing , diverting , handsomely executed poke at youthful attitudes " . John Grant writes in his book Masters of Animation that Fritz the Cat was " the breakthrough movie that opened brand new vistas to the commercial animator in the United States " , presenting an " almost disturbingly accurate " portrayal " of a particular stratum of Western society during a particular era , [...] as such it has dated very well . " Fritz the Cat was released on April 12 , 1972 , opening in Hollywood and Washington , D.C. A major hit , it became the most successful independent animated feature of all time . The same month as the film 's release , Bakshi 's daughter , Victoria , was born .

= = = Heavy Traffic (1972 ? 1973) = = =

By the time Fritz the Cat was released , Bakshi had become a celebrity , but his reputation was primarily based upon his having directed the first " dirty " animated film . Facing criticism of his work on publicity tours and in trade publications , he began writing poetry to express his emotions . This became a tradition , and Bakshi wrote poems before beginning production on each of his films . The first of these poems was " Street Arabs " , which preceded the production of Heavy Traffic in 1972 . Inspiration for the film came from penny arcades , where Bakshi often played pinball , sometimes accompanied by his 12 @-@ year @-@ old son , Mark . Bakshi pitched Heavy Traffic to Samuel Z. Arkoff , who expressed interest in his take on the " tortured underground cartoonist " and agreed to back the film . Krantz had not compensated Bakshi for his work on Fritz the Cat , and halfway through the production of Heavy Traffic , Bakshi asked when he would be paid . Krantz responded , " The picture didn 't make any money , Ralph . It 's just a lot of noise . " Bakshi found Krantz 's claims dubious , as the producer had recently purchased a new BMW and a mansion in Beverly Hills . Bakshi did not have a lawyer , so he sought advice from fellow directors with whom he had become friendly , including Martin Scorsese , Francis Ford Coppola and Steven Spielberg . He soon accused Krantz of ripping him off , which the producer denied .

As he continued to work on Heavy Traffic , Bakshi began pitching his next project , Harlem Nights , a film loosely based on the Uncle Remus story books . The idea interested producer Albert S. Ruddy , whom Bakshi encountered at a screening of The Godfather . Bakshi received a call from Krantz , who questioned him about Harlem Nights . Bakshi said , " I can 't talk about that " , and hung up . After locking Bakshi out of the studio the next day , Krantz called several directors , including Chuck Jones , in search of a replacement . Arkoff threatened to withdraw his financial backing unless Krantz rehired Bakshi , who returned a week later .

Bakshi wanted the voices to sound organic , so he experimented with improvisation , allowing his actors to ad lib during the recording sessions . Several animation sequences appear as rough sketchbook pages . The film also incorporated live @-@ action footage and photographs . Although Krantz , in an attempt to get the film an R rating , prepared different versions of scenes involving sex and violence , Heavy Traffic was rated X. However , due to the success of Fritz the Cat , many theaters were willing to book adult @-@ oriented animation , and the film did well at the box office . Bakshi became the first person in the animation industry since Walt Disney to have two financially successful movies released consecutively . Heavy Traffic was very well received by critics . Newsweek applauded its " black humor , powerful grotesquerie and peculiar raw beauty . " The Hollywood Reporter called it " shocking , outrageous , offensive , sometimes incoherent , occasionally unintelligent . However , it is also an authentic work of movie art and Bakshi is certainly the most creative American animator since Disney . " Vincent Canby of The New York Times ranked Heavy Traffic among his " Ten Best Films of 1973 " . Upon release , the movie was banned by the Film Censorship Board in the province of Alberta , Canada .

= = = Coonskin (1973 ? 1975) = = =

In 1973 , Bakshi and Ruddy began the production of Harlem Nights , which Paramount was originally contracted to distribute . While Fritz the Cat and Heavy Traffic proved that adult @-@ oriented animation could be financially successful , animated films were still not respected , and Bakshi 's pictures were considered to be " dirty Disney flicks " that were " mature " only for depicting sex , drugs and profanity . Harlem Nights , based on Bakshi 's firsthand experiences with racism , was an attack on racist prejudices and stereotypes . Bakshi cast Scatman Crothers , Philip Michael Thomas , Barry White and Charles Gordone in live @-@ action and voice roles , cutting in and out of animation abruptly rather than seamlessly because he wanted to prove that the two mediums could " coexist with neither excuse nor apology " . He wrote a song for Crothers to sing during the opening title sequence : " Ah 'm a Niggerman " . Its structure was rooted in the history of the slave plantation : slaves would " shout " lines from poems and stories great distances across fields in unison , creating a natural beat . Bakshi has described its vocal style , backed by fast guitar licks , as an " early version of rap " .

Bakshi intended to attack stereotypes by portraying them directly , culling imagery from blackface iconography . Early designs in which the main characters (Brother Rabbit , Brother Bear and Preacher Fox) resembled figures from The Wind in the Willows were rejected . Bakshi juxtaposed stereotypical designs of blacks with even more negative depictions of white racists , but the film 's strongest criticism is directed at the Mafia . Bakshi said , " I was sick of all the hero worship these guys got because of The Godfather . " Production concluded in 1973 . During editing , the title was changed to Coonskin No More ... , and finally to Coonskin . Bakshi hired several African American animators to work on Coonskin , including Brenda Banks , the first African American female animator . Bakshi also hired graffiti artists and trained them to work as animators . The film 's release was delayed by protests from the Congress of Racial Equality , which called Bakshi and his film racist . After its distribution was contracted to the Bryanston Distributing Company , Paramount canceled a project that Bakshi and Ruddy were developing , The American Chronicles .

Coonskin , advertised as an exploitation film , was given limited distribution and soon disappeared from theaters . Initial reviews were negative ; Playboy commented that " Bakshi seems to throw in a little of everything and he can 't quite pull it together . " Eventually , positive reviews appeared in The Hollywood Reporter , New York Amsterdam News (an African American newspaper) and elsewhere . The New York Times ' Richard Eder said the film " could be [Bakshi 's] masterpiece [...] a shattering successful effort to use an uncommon form ? cartoons and live action combined to convey the hallucinatory violence and frustration of American city life , specifically black city life [...] lyrically violent , yet in no way [does it] exploit violence " . Variety called it a " brutal satire from the streets " . A reviewer for the Los Angeles Herald @-@ Examiner wrote , " Certainly , it will outrage some and , indeed , it 's not Disney . [...] The dialog it has obviously generated ? if not the box office obstacles ? seems joltingly healthy . " Bakshi called Coonskin his best film .

= = = Hey Good Lookin ' (1973 ? 1975 / 1982) = = =

After production concluded on Harlem Nights , Bakshi wanted to distinguish himself artistically by producing a film in which live action and animated characters would interact . Bakshi said , " The illusion I attempted to create was that of a completely live @-@ action film . Making it work almost drove us crazy . " Hey Good Lookin ' is set in Brooklyn during the 1950s ; its lead characters are Vinnie , the leader of a gang named " The Stompers " , his friend Crazy Shapiro and their girlfriends , Roz and Eva . Vinnie and Crazy Shapiro were based on Bakshi 's high school friends Norman Darrer and Allen Schechterman . Warner Bros. optioned the screenplay and greenlit the film in 1973 .

An initial version of Hey Good Lookin ' was completed in 1975 . A three @-@ minute promo of this version was screened at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival , and the film was scheduled for a Christmas 1975 release , but was moved to the summers of 1976 and later 1977 , before ultimately being postponed indefinitely . Warner Bros. was concerned about any controversy the film would encounter as a result of the backlash over the film Coonskin , and felt that the film was " unreleasable " because of its mix of live action and animation , and it would not spend further money

on the project . Bakshi financed the film 's completion himself from the director 's fees for other projects such as Wizards , The Lord of the Rings and American Pop . The live @-@ action sequences of Hey Good Lookin ' were gradually replaced by animation ; among the eliminated live @-@ action sequences was one featuring the glam punk band New York Dolls . Singer Dan Hicks worked on the initial musical score , but the final version was scored by John Madara .

Hey Good Lookin ' opened in New York City on October 1 , 1982 , and was released in Los Angeles in January 1983 . The film 's release was limited , and went largely unnoticed in the United States , although it garnered respectable business in foreign markets . In a brief review , Vincent Canby wrote that it was " not exactly incoherent , but whatever it originally had on its mind seems to have slipped away " . Animation historian Jerry Beck wrote , " the beginning of the film is quite promising , with a garbage can discussing life on the streets with some garbage . This is an example of what Bakshi did best ? using the medium of animation to comment on society . Unfortunately , he doesn 't do it enough in this film . There is a wildly imaginative fantasy sequence during the climax , when the character named Crazy starts hallucinating during a rooftop shooting spree . This scene almost justifies the whole film . But otherwise , this is a rehash of ideas better explored in Coonskin , Heavy Traffic , and Fritz the Cat . " The film has since gained a cult following through cable television and home video . Quentin Tarantino stated that he preferred Hey Good Lookin ' to Martin Scorsese 's Mean Streets .

= = = Shift to fantasy film (1976 ? 1978) = = =

In 1976 , Bakshi pitched War Wizards to 20th Century Fox . Returning to the fantasy drawings he had created in high school for inspiration , Bakshi intended to prove that he could produce a " family picture " that had the same impact as his adult @-@ oriented films . British illustrator Ian Miller and comic book artist Mike Ploog were hired to contribute backgrounds and designs . The crew included Vita , Turek , Sparey , Vitello and Spence , who had become comfortable with Bakshi 's limited storyboarding and lack of pencil tests . As the production costs increased , Fox president Alan Ladd , Jr. declined Bakshi 's requests for salary increases , and refused to give him \$ 50 @,@ 000 to complete the film . At the same time , Ladd was dealing with similar budget problems on George Lucas 's Star Wars . Bakshi and Lucas had negotiated contracts entitling them to franchise ownership , merchandising and back @-@ end payment , so Ladd suggested that they fund the completion of their films themselves .

Bakshi chose rotoscoping as a cost @-@ effective way to complete the movie 's battle scenes with his own finances . Because he could not afford to hire a film crew or actors , or develop 35mm stock , Bakshi requested prints of films that contained the type of large battle scenes needed , including Sergei Eisenstein 's Alexander Nevsky , and spliced together the footage he needed . However , the cost of printing photographs of each frame would have cost \$ 3 million . Learning that IBM had introduced an industrial @-@ sized photocopier , Bakshi asked one of the company 's technical experts if he would be able to feed 35mm reels into the machine to produce enlarged copies of each frame . The experiment worked , and Bakshi got the pages he needed for a penny per copy .

As War Wizards neared completion , Lucas requested that Bakshi change the title of his film to Wizards to avoid conflict with Star Wars ; Bakshi agreed because Lucas had allowed Mark Hamill to take time off from Star Wars to record a voice for Wizards . Although Wizards received a limited release , it was successful in the theaters that showed it and developed a worldwide audience . Dave Kehr of The Chicago Reader saw it as " marred by cut @-@ rate techniques and a shapeless screenplay " . In the view of film historian Jerry Beck , the lead character , an aging sorcerer , " clearly owes much to cartoonist Vaughn Bodé 's Cheech Wizard character . [...] The film has a few interesting moments , particularly in a series of still illustrations by Marvel comic artist Mike Ploog , but is perhaps most notable as a turning point , not necessarily a positive one , in Bakshi 's film career . "

In late 1976 , Bakshi learned that John Boorman was contracted to direct an adaptation of The Lord of the Rings , in which J. R. R. Tolkien 's three @-@ volume novel would be condensed into a single film . Bakshi arranged a meeting with Mike Medavoy , United Artists ' head of production , who

agreed to let Bakshi direct in exchange for the \$ 3 million that had been spent on Boorman 's screenplay . Down the hall from Medavoy was Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer president Dan Melnick , who interrupted a meeting with Peter Bogdanovich when he learned that Bakshi wanted to discuss acquiring the rights to The Lord of the Rings . Melnick agreed to pay United Artists \$ 3 million , but was soon fired ; the project was canceled by his replacement , Dick Shepherd . Bakshi contacted Saul Zaentz , who wrote a check to cover MGM 's debt and agreed to fund the \$ 8 million budget for the first of what was initially planned as a series of three films , and later negotiated down to two . Before production began , Bakshi and Zaentz insisted that the Tolkien estate receive residuals from the film .

Bakshi did not want to produce a broad cartoon version of the tale , so he planned to shoot the entire film in live action and animate the footage with rotoscoping . The film also incorporated brief cel animation and straightforward live @-@ action footage . Production of the live @-@ action sequences took place in Spain . During the middle of a large shoot , union bosses called for a lunch break , and Bakshi secretly shot footage of actors in Orc costumes moving toward the craft service table , and used the footage in the film . Jerry Beck later wrote that , while he found the rotoscoped animation " beautiful " , he felt that it was unclear whether the use of live action was an artistic choice or due to budgetary constraints .

After the Spanish film development lab discovered that telephone lines , helicopters and cars were visible in the footage , they tried to incinerate it , telling Bakshi 's first assistant director , " if that kind of sloppy cinematography got out , no one from Hollywood would ever come back to Spain to shoot again . " When Bakshi returned to the United States , he learned that the cost of developing blown @-@ up prints of each frame had risen . He did not want to repeat the process that had been used on Wizards , which was unsuitable for the level of detail he intended for The Lord of the Rings , so Bakshi and camera technician Ted Bemiller created their own photographic enlarger to process the footage cheaply . Live @-@ action special effects and analog optics were used in place of animation to keep the visual effects budget low and give the film a more realistic look . Among the voice actors was the well @-@ regarded John Hurt , who performed the role of Aragorn . The project 's high profile brought heavy trade journal coverage , and fans such as Mick Jagger visited the studio for the chance to play a role . Animator Carl Bell loved drawing Aragorn so much that Bakshi gave Bell the live @-@ action costume , which he wore while animating .

Viewing The Lord of the Rings as a holiday film , United Artists pressured Bakshi to complete it on schedule for its intended November 15 , 1978 , release . Once it was finished , Bakshi was told that audiences would not pay to see an incomplete story ; over his objections , The Lord of the Rings was marketed with no indication that a second part would follow . Reviews of the film were mixed , but it was generally seen as a " flawed but inspired interpretation " . Newsday 's Joseph Gelmis wrote that " the film 's principal reward is a visual experience unlike anything that other animated features are doing at the moment " . Roger Ebert called Bakshi 's effort a " mixed blessing " and " an entirely respectable , occasionally impressive job [which] still falls far short of the charm and sweep of the original story " . Vincent Canby found it " both numbing and impressive " . David Denby of New York felt that the film would not make sense to viewers who had not read the book . He wrote that it was too dark and lacked humor , concluding , " The lurid , meaningless violence of this movie left me exhausted and sickened by the end . " The film , which cost \$ 4 million to produce , grossed \$ 30 @. @ 5 million . The studio refused to fund the sequel , which would have adapted the remainder of the story . The Lord of the Rings won the Golden Gryphon at the 1980 Giffoni Film Festival .

= = = American Pop and Fire and Ice (1979 ? 1983) = = =

Following the production struggles of The Lord of the Rings , Bakshi decided to work on something more personal . He pitched American Pop to Columbia Pictures president Dan Melnick . Bakshi wanted to produce a film in which songs would be given a new context in juxtaposition to the visuals . American Pop follows four generations of a Russian Jewish immigrant family of musicians , whose careers parallel the history of American pop and starred actor Ron Thompson in a dual lead role .

While the film does not reflect Bakshi 's own experiences , its themes were strongly influenced by people he had encountered in Brownsville . The film 's crew included character layout and design artist Louise Zingarelli , Vita , Barry E. Jackson , and Marcia Adams . Bakshi again used rotoscoping , in an attempt to capture the range of emotions and movement required for the film 's story . According to Bakshi , " Rotoscoping is terrible for subtleties , so it was tough to get facial performances to match the stage ones . " Bakshi was able to acquire the rights to an extensive soundtrack ? including songs by Janis Joplin , The Doors , George Gershwin , The Mamas & the Papas , Herbie Hancock , Lou Reed , and Louis Prima ? for under \$ 1 million . Released on February 12 , 1981 , the film was a financial success . The New York Times ' Vincent Canby wrote , " I 'm amazed at the success that Mr. Bakshi has in turning animated characters into figures of real feelings . " Jerry Beck called it " one of Bakshi 's best films " . Due to music clearance issues , it was not released on home video until 1998 .

By 1982 , fantasy films such as *The Beastmaster* and *Conan the Barbarian* had proven successful at the box office , and Bakshi wanted to work with his long @-@ time friend , the fantasy illustrator Frank Frazetta . *Fire and Ice* was financed by some of American Pop 's investors for \$ 1 @.@ 2 million , while 20th Century Fox agreed to distribute . *Fire and Ice* was the most action @-@ oriented story Bakshi had directed , so he again used rotoscoping ; the realism of the design and rotoscoped animation replicated Frazetta 's artwork . Bakshi and Frazetta were heavily involved in the production of the live @-@ action sequences , from casting sessions to the final shoot . The film 's crew included background artists James Gurney and Thomas Kinkade , layout artist Peter Chung , and established Bakshi Productions artists Sparey , Steve Gordon , Bell and Banks . Chung greatly admired Bakshi 's and Frazetta 's work , and animated his sequences while working for The Walt Disney Company . The film was given a limited release , and was financially unsuccessful . Andrew Leal wrote , " The plot is standard [...] recalling nothing so much as a more graphic episode of *Filmation* 's He @-@ Man series . [...] *Fire and Ice* essentially stands as a footnote to the spate of barbarian films that followed in the wake of Arnold Schwarzenegger 's appearance as Conan . "

= = = Unproduced projects and temporary retirement (1983 ? 1986) = = =

After production of *Fire and Ice* wrapped , Bakshi attempted several projects that fell through , including adaptations of Hunter S. Thompson 's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* , William Kotzwinkle 's *The Fan Man* , Eric Rücker Eddison 's *The Worm Ouroboros* , Stephen Crane 's *Maggie : A Girl of the Streets* , Mickey Spillane 's Mike Hammer novels and an anthropomorphic depiction of Sherlock Holmes . He turned down offers to direct Ray Bradbury 's *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and Philip K. Dick 's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* ? He passed the latter to Ridley Scott , who adapted it into the 1982 film *Blade Runner* .

During this period , Bakshi reread J. D. Salinger 's *The Catcher in the Rye* , which he had first read in high school , and saw parallels between his situation and that of the book 's protagonist , Holden Caulfield . Inspired to seek the film rights , he intended to shoot the story 's bracketing sequences in live action and to animate the core flashback scenes . Salinger had rejected previous offers to adapt the novel , and had not made a public appearance since 1965 or granted an interview since 1980 . Bakshi sent Salinger a letter explaining why he should be allowed to adapt the novel ; the writer responded by thanking Bakshi and asserting that the novel was unfit for any medium other than its original form .

Prompted in part by Salinger 's letter , Bakshi briefly retired to focus on painting . During this time he completed the screenplay for *If I Catch Her , I 'll Kill Her* , a live @-@ action feature he had been developing since the late 1960s . United Artists and Paramount Pictures each paid Bakshi to develop the film in the 1970s , but were unwilling to produce it , as were the studios he pitched the film to in the 1980s . According to Bakshi , " They thought that no one was going to admit that women can ? and do ? cheat on their husbands . They thought it was too hot , which made no sense . " In 1985 , he received a phone call from The Rolling Stones ' manager , Tony King , who told Bakshi that the band had recorded a cover of Bob & Earl 's " Harlem Shuffle " , and wanted Bakshi to direct the music video . He was told that the live @-@ action shoot needed to be

completed within one day (January 28 , 1986) for it to be shown at the Grammy Awards . Production designer Wolf Kroeger was forced to drastically compact his sets , and animation director and designer John Kricfalusi had to push his team , including Lynne Naylor , Jim Smith and Bob Jaques , to complete the animation within a few weeks . The band 's arrival at the set was delayed by a snowstorm and several takes were ruined when the cameras crossed paths . Bakshi was forced to pay the union wages out of his own fees , and the continuity between Kricfalusi 's animation and the live @-@ action footage did not match ; however , the video was completed on time .

Bakshi recognized Kricfalusi 's talent , and wanted to put him in charge of a project that would showcase the young animator 's skills . Bakshi and Kricfalusi co @-@ wrote the screenplay Bobby 's Girl as a take on the teen films of the era . Jeff Sagansky , president of production at TriStar Pictures , put up \$ 150 @,@ 000 to develop the project , prompting Bakshi to move back to Los Angeles . When Sagansky left TriStar , Bakshi was forced to pitch the film again , but the studio 's new executives did not understand its appeal and cut off financing . Bakshi and Zingarelli began to develop a feature about Hollywood 's Golden Age , and Bakshi Productions crewmembers worked on proposed cartoons influenced by pulp fiction . Bobby 's Girl was reworked as a potential prime time series called Suzy 's in Love , but attracted no serious interest .

= = = Return to television (1987 ? 1989) = = =

In April 1987 , Bakshi set up a meeting with Judy Price , the head of CBS 's Saturday morning block . Three days before the meeting , Bakshi , Kricfalusi , Naylor , Tom Minton , Eddie Fitzgerald and Jim Reardon met to brainstorm . Bakshi remembers , " My car was packed to the windows . Judy was my last stop before driving cross country back to New York to my family . " Price rejected Bakshi 's prepared pitches , but asked what else he had . He told her that he had the rights to Mighty Mouse , and she agreed to purchase the series . However , Bakshi did not own the rights and did not know who did . While researching the rights , he learned that CBS had acquired the entire Terrytoons library in 1955 and forgotten about it . According to Bakshi , " I sold them a show they already owned , so they just gave me the rights for nothin ' ! "

Kricfalusi 's team wrote story outlines for thirteen episodes in a week and pitched them to Price . By the next week , Kricfalusi had hired animators he knew who had been working at other studios . Mighty Mouse : The New Adventures went into production the month it was greenlighted ; it was scheduled to premiere on September 19 , 1987 . This haste required the crew to be split into four teams , led by supervising director Kricfalusi , Fitzgerald , Steve Gordon and Bruce Woodside . Each team was given a handful of episodes , and operated almost entirely independently of the others . Although the scripts required approval by CBS executives , Kricfalusi insisted that the artists add visual gags as they drew . Bruce Timm , Andrew Stanton , Dave Marshall and Jeff Pidgeon were among the artists who worked on the series . Despite the time constraints , CBS was pleased with the way Bakshi Productions addressed the network 's notes .

During the production of the episode " The Littlest Tramp " , editor Tom Klein expressed concern that a sequence showing Mighty Mouse sniffing the remains of a crushed flower resembled cocaine use . Bakshi did not initially view the footage ; he believed that Klein was overreacting , but agreed to let him cut the scene . Kricfalusi expressed disbelief over the cut , insisting that the action was harmless and that the sequence should be restored . Following Kricfalusi 's advice , Bakshi told Klein to restore the scene , which had been approved by network executives and the CBS standards and practices department . The episode aired on October 31 , 1987 , without controversy .

In 1988 , Bakshi received an Annie Award for " Distinguished Contribution to the Art of Animation " . The same year , he began production on a series pilot loosely adapted from his Junktown comic strips . According to Bakshi , the proposed series " was going to be a revitalization of cartoon style from the ' 20s and ' 30s . It was gonna have Duke Ellington and Fats Waller jazzing up the soundtrack . " Nickelodeon was initially willing to greenlight 39 episodes of Junktown .

On June 6 , 1988 , Donald Wildmon , head of the American Family Association (AFA) , alleged that " The Littlest Tramp " depicted cocaine use , instigating a media frenzy . The AFA , during its

incarnation as the National Federation for Decency , had previously targeted CBS as an " accessory to murder " after a mother killed her daughter following an airing of Exorcist II : The Heretic . Concerning Bakshi 's involvement with Mighty Mouse : The New Adventures , the AFA claimed that CBS " intentionally hired a known pornographer to do a cartoon for children , and then allowed him to insert a scene in which the cartoon hero is shown sniffing cocaine . " Bakshi responded , " You could pick a still out of Lady and the Tramp and get the same impression . Fritz the Cat wasn 't pornography . It was social commentary . This all smacks of burning books and the Third Reich . It smacks of McCarthyism . I 'm not going to get into who sniffs what . This is lunacy ! " On CBS 's order , Klein removed the sequence from the master broadcast footage . Wildmon claimed that the edits were " a de facto admission that , indeed , Mighty Mouse was snorting cocaine " . Despite receiving an award from Action for Children 's Television , favorable reviews , and a ranking in Time magazine 's " Best of ' 87 " feature , Mighty Mouse : The New Adventures was canceled by CBS following the controversy .

The incident had a ripple effect , weakening Nickelodeon 's commitment to Junktown . Bakshi has also stated that " we were trying something different [...] but a series didn 't make sense . It just didn 't work " . The series was scrapped , and the completed pilot aired as a special , Christmas in Tattertown , in December 1988 . It was the first original animated special created for Nickelodeon . Bakshi moved into a warehouse loft in downtown Los Angeles to clear his head , and was offered \$ 50 @ , @ 000 to direct a half @ - @ hour live @ - @ action film for PBS 's Imagining America anthology series . Mark Bakshi produced the film , This Ain 't Bebo , his first professional collaboration with his father . Bakshi wrote a poem influenced by Jack Kerouac , jazz , the Beat Generation and Brooklyn that served as the narration , which was spoken by Harvey Keitel . After a car crash , Bakshi completed the post @ - @ production in stitches and casts . Bakshi said of the work , " It 's the most proud I 've been of a picture since Coonskin ? the last real thing I did with total integrity . "

As a result of the film , Bakshi received an offer to adapt Dr. Seuss 's The Butter Battle Book for TNT . Ted Geisel had never been satisfied with the previous screen versions of his Dr. Seuss work . Bakshi wanted to produce an entirely faithful adaptation , and Geisel ? who agreed to storyboard the special himself ? was pleased with the final product . Bakshi next directed the pilot Hound Town for NBC ; he described the result as " an embarrassing piece of shit " .

= = = Return to film , continued television projects and retirement (1990 ? 1997) = = =

In 1990 , Bakshi pitched Cool World to Paramount Pictures as a partially animated horror film . The concept involved a cartoon and human having sex and conceiving a hybrid child who visits the real world to murder the father who abandoned him . The live @ - @ action footage was intended to look like " a living , walk @ - @ through painting " , a visual concept Bakshi had long wanted to achieve . Massive sets were constructed on a sound stage in Las Vegas , based on enlargements of designer Barry Jackson 's paintings . The animation was strongly influenced by the house styles of Fleischer Studios and Terrytoons . As the sets were being built , producer Frank Mancuso , Jr . , son of Paramount president Frank Mancuso , Sr . , had the screenplay rewritten in secret ; the new version , by Michael Grais and Mark Victor , was radically different from Bakshi 's original . Paramount threatened to sue Bakshi if he did not complete the film . As Bakshi and Mancuso wrangled over their creative differences , Bakshi and the studio also began to fight over the film 's casting . To keep actor Brad Pitt , Bakshi had to replace Drew Barrymore , his original choice for the character of Holli Would , with Kim Basinger , a bigger box office draw at the time . The film 's animators were never given a screenplay , and were instead told by Bakshi , " Do a scene that 's funny , whatever you want to do ! "

Designer Milton Knight recalled that " audiences actually wanted a wilder , raunchier Cool World . The premiere audience I saw it with certainly did . " The critical reaction to the film was generally negative . Roger Ebert wrote , " The DJ who was hosting the radio station 's free preview of Cool World leaped onto the stage and promised the audience : ' If you liked Roger Rabbit , you 'll love Cool World ! ' He was wrong , but you can 't blame him ? he hadn 't seen the movie . I have , and I will now promise you that if you liked Roger Rabbit , quit while you 're ahead . " The film was a box

@-@ office disappointment . While other film projects followed , Bakshi began to focus more attention on painting .

In 1993 , Lou Arkoff , the son of Samuel Z. Arkoff , approached Bakshi to write and direct a low @-@ budget live @-@ action feature for Showtime 's Rebel Highway series . For the third time , Bakshi revisited his screenplay for If I Catch Her , I 'll Kill Her , which he retitled Cool and the Crazy . The picture , which aired September 16 , 1994 , starred Jared Leto , Alicia Silverstone , Jennifer Blanc and Matthew Flint . Reviewer Todd Everett noted that it had the same " hyperdrive visual sense " of Bakshi 's animated films . He said , " Everything in ' Cool ' [...] seems to exist in pastels and Bakshi shoots from more odd angles than any director since Sidney J. Furie in his heyday . And the closing sequences ably demonstrate how it 's possible to present strong violence without any blood being shed onscreen . Bakshi pulls strong [performances] from a cadre of youngish and largely unknown actors " .

In 1995 , Hanna @-@ Barbera producer Fred Seibert offered Bakshi the chance to create two animated short films for Cartoon Network 's What a Cartoon ! : Malcom and Melvin and Babe , He Calls Me , focusing on a trumpet @-@ playing cockroach named Malcom and his best friend , a clown named Melvin . Both were heavily edited after Bakshi turned them in and he disowned them as a result . Bakshi was subsequently contacted by HBO , which was looking to launch the first animated series specifically for adults , an interest stirred by discussions involving a series based upon Trey Parker and Matt Stone 's video Christmas card , Jesus vs. Santa . Bakshi enlisted a team of writers , including his son Preston , to develop Spicy Detective , later renamed Spicy City , an anthology series set in a noir @-@ ish , technology @-@ driven future . Each episode was narrated by a female host named Raven , voiced by Michelle Phillips . The series premiered in July 1997 ? one month before the debut of Parker and Stone 's South Park ? and thus became the first " adults only " cartoon series . Although critical reaction was largely unfavorable , Spicy City received acceptable ratings . A second season was approved , but the network wanted to fire Bakshi 's writing team and hire professional Los Angeles screenwriters . When Bakshi refused to cooperate , the series was canceled .

= = = Painting , teaching and new animation projects (2000 ? 2013) = = =

Bakshi retired from animation once more , returning to his painting . In 2000 , he began teaching an undergraduate animation class at New York 's School of Visual Arts . In December 14 , 2001 , he did some paintings for the Cameron Crowe film Vanilla Sky . He later became involved in several screen projects , including a development deal with the Sci Fi Channel , In September 2002 , Bakshi , Liz and their dogs moved to New Mexico , where he became more productive than ever in his painting and began development on the Last Days of Coney Island film . In 2003 , he appeared as the Fire Chief in the episode " Fire Dogs 2 " of John Kricfalusi 's Ren & Stimpy " Adult Party Cartoon " ..

In September 2008 , Main Street Pictures announced that it would collaborate with Bakshi on a sequel to Wizards . In 2012 , Bakshi began producing the short film series Bakshi Blues . The first of these shorts , Trickle Dickle Down , contains reused animation from Coonskin and criticizes Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney . The shorts will focus on " old and new characters " and will comment on modern @-@ day America .

= = = Last Days of Coney Island (2013 ? present) = = =

In February 2013 , Bakshi launched a successful Kickstarter campaign to obtain funding for his latest film Last Days of Coney Island .

Actor Matthew Modine was cast in the film in February 2013 after Modine , a longtime Bakshi fan , came across the film 's Kickstarter campaign online .

LDOCI was released on Vimeo in 2015 .

= = Legacy = =

In 2003 , Bakshi received a Maverick Tribute Award at the Cinequest San Jose Film Festival . The same year , he began teaching an animaton class in New Mexico - this became The Bakshi School of Animation and Cartooning , which is run by Ralph 's son Edward and his partner Jess Gorell . The availability of Bakshi 's work on the Internet sparked a resurgence of interest in his career , resulting in a three @-@ day American Cinematheque retrospective held at Grauman 's Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood and the Aero Theater in Santa Monica , California , in April 2005 . Unfiltered : The Complete Ralph Bakshi , a hardcover book of Bakshi 's art , was released on April 1 , 2008 . The foreword was written by Quentin Tarantino and the afterword by Bakshi .

The Online Film Critics Society released a list of the " Top 100 Animated Features of All Time " in March 2003 that included four of Bakshi 's films : Fritz the Cat , The Lord of the Rings , Coonskin and Fire and Ice . Fritz the Cat was ranked number 56 in the 2004 poll conducted by Britain 's Channel 4 for its documentary The 100 Greatest Cartoons . The Museum of Modern Art has added Bakshi 's films to its collection for preservation .

After attending a Quentin Tarantino FilmFest in April 1999 where Coonskin was screened , Ain 't It Cool News head writer Harry Knowles wrote that American Pop was still his favorite Ralph Bakshi film .

Gore Verbinski commented about Ralph Bakshi and showed that he was inspired by him during an interview in The Hollywood Reporter for his first animated movie , Rango . Saying , " What happened to the Ralph Bakshis of the world ? We 're all sitting here talking family entertainment . Does animation have to be family entertainment ? Audiences want something new ; they just can 't articulate what . "

On January 12 , 2014 at The Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood , there was a special screening of Bakshi 's film American Pop with actors Ron Thompson and Mews Small in attendance , it was the first time lead actor Ron Thompson had ever introduced the film before a live audience .

At the Aero Theatre in Santa Monica , California on March 27 , 2015 , there was a screening of Heavy Traffic and American Pop with Ralph Bakshi , Ron Thompson and Mews Small attending .

= = Filmography = =

= = = Films = = =

= = = Television = = =

^ I Selected episodes ^ II Provided the voices of Connelly and Goldblum in the episode " Sex Drive " , and Stevie in the episode " Mano 's Hands " ^ III Provided the voice of the Super Hero ^ IV Animated in conjunction with Doug Compton ^ V Provided the voice of Fire Chief in the episode " Fire Dogs 2 "