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Theorising aesthetic design in contemporary Irish animation:

A Case Study of Cartoon Saloon's *The Secret of Kells* and *Song of the Sea*.

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Abstract

This thesis shall examine and contextualise the development of aesthetic design in contemporary Irish animation, specifically applied to Cartoon Saloon's feature productions *The Secret of Kells*(2009) and *Song of the Sea*(2014). Irish animation is currently an extremely profitable export, and is renowned worldwide for a distinct and recognisable aesthetic design. From the earliest stop frame productions commissioned by national broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann, to large scale animated features produced on Irish soil by American studios such as Sullivan Bluth, the Irish animation industry has an irregular and fascinating history. It can be argued the early animation scene in Ireland was shaped primarily by Disney-influenced animators and studios, which resulted in the medium developing without an authentic animation style and indigenous aesthetic for the majority of the 20th century. This study will offer an overview and contextualisation of the history of Western and Irish animation and practices.

Irish independent studios are currently creating content which conveys an aesthetic grounded firmly in Irish culture. This aesthetic design is produced through a number of influences ranging from Celtic symbolism, Irish medieval monastic art, the European art-house animation scene, and the traditionalism of Oriental and Eastern artwork. This investigation will consider the cultural and artistic significance of these influences in the development of contemporary Irish animation aesthetic. This study will also consider the narrative direction of these productions. While they are universally accessible to a world audience, they also serve to unobtrusively explore and celebrate the history, folklore and culture of Ireland.

The aim of this research is to theorize the current trends in Irish animation, specifically applied to feature productions *The Secret of Kells* and *Song of the Sea* by successful animation studio Cartoon Saloon, and whether the narrative and artistic themes of nationalist pride, exploration of history, folklore and culture, are consciously challenging the dominant styles and practices of past and current American studios.

