

## **Darja Katova**



Darja has kindly shared her journey to becoming a 2D Animator and Illustrator. Darja has clearly established a solid foundation in a career she is passionate about, with experience spanning freelance projects for YouTubers, working as a Pre-production Lead in a studio, and producing her own independent animation.

### **Please provide a brief overview of your role and the primary activities that make up your average workday.**

My name is Darja Kotova, and I am a 2D animator and illustrator. I work both freelance and within a studio environment, taking on a variety of roles across the animation production pipeline. Currently, I am working as a Pre-Production Lead at King Bee Studios, where I am developing a pre-production art book for an undisclosed project.

Alongside my studio work, I freelance as an animator for various clients. One of my regular clients is a YouTuber called, Sillyincorporated, for whom I create comedy videos and animated skits for a channel with over 860,000 subscribers. Outside of industry work, I also animate independently, developing my own short films and submitting them to film festivals.

### **Could you provide a brief overview of the qualifications and career path that led you to your current role?**

After leaving QE, I studied BA Animation at Middlesex University London, where I graduated in 2025 with a First-Class Honours degree.

During my time at Queen Elizabeth's, I studied Art, History, German, and EPQ at A Level. The EPQ was particularly significant for me, as I chose to create a 2D animated video for my project, which became a key piece in my portfolio. Alongside my studies, I regularly created animated content and illustrations at home, focusing on original characters and storytelling. This combination of coursework and personal passion helped me secure a place at university, receiving three unconditional offers. I chose Middlesex because it offered the resources and support I needed to develop my skills further.

While at university, I produced two standout student films in my second and final years, which led to awards and festival submissions. My final-year film, Rave-olution, was submitted by my tutors to the Royal Television Society Programme Awards and is also scheduled to be showcased at the Monstra Film Festival in France.

Towards the end of my degree, I began freelancing for YouTube channels, which led to opportunities to work and collaborate with clients such as Sillyincorporated, Century Games, Glorbworldwide and many more. This experience, combined with my academic work, helped me secure an internship at King Bee Studios, which later developed into freelance studio work in animation pre-production.

Overall, both my education and personal projects played a huge role in building the opportunities that led me to where I am today.

### **Which teacher or subject had the biggest impact on you, and why?**

Many of my A Level teachers had a significant impact on me, whether by building my confidence or encouraging me to push myself further. However, the Subject EPQ stood out as particularly influential.

Mrs Day was a teacher at QE who was incredibly supportive of my EPQ animation project and encouraged me to fully pursue my idea. When I received my final mark, just one mark away from full marks, and a phone call home praising my work, it gave me a huge boost in confidence. That moment made me fully realise my potential and motivated me to continue creating animation, ultimately helping me secure my place at university.

### **If you could go back and tell your 'QE self' one thing, what would it be?**

Be confident in yourself and your work. Comparing yourself to others will only hold you back rather than help you grow. It can be discouraging when things don't go as planned or when you don't achieve the results you hoped for, but that's okay. Everyone has their own path and their own strengths, which develop over time into something meaningful and beautiful. As Mr Sladden says, "Rome wasn't built in a day." which is something I still strongly stand by, up until this day.

### **Are there specific values or habits you learned at school that you still use in your job today?**

One of the most important habits I developed at QE was strong time management and meeting deadlines. This was especially important during Art A Level and my EPQ, where I had to produce work quickly while maintaining a professional standard as well as managing other responsibilities.

This skill is essential in animation, and it's something I still rely on today as I consistently aim to deliver work early without compromising quality.

I also learned the importance of working independently while maintaining a healthy balance. Being able to stay focused, take breaks when needed, and prioritise your wellbeing is crucial. Work is a marathon, not a sprint.

### **What is the one achievement you are most proud of so far?**

The achievement I am most proud of is how early I was able to establish myself within the industry as a graduate, as well as the connections I have built simply by sharing my work online.



Posting both my university projects and personal work has opened the door to a wide range of client relationships and opportunities. One of my first major milestones was having my work dubbed into Portuguese by a Brazilian company Quartel Canvete, that has worked on well-known indie productions such as Metal Family and Ramshackle, as well as receiving my first film festival invitation from Beverly Hills 'BreakOut Music, Movie, and Media Festival.

These two experiences gave me a huge boost in confidence and motivated me to continue creating, leading to a steady flow of new and paid opportunities.

Overall, I am incredibly proud of how far I have come and the effort I have put into building my career.

**What do you think is the most important skill for a young person to develop in 2026?**

In a constantly evolving world, building connections is one of the most valuable skills you can develop. In animation and illustration especially, networking is key, many connections can lead to recommendations, collaborations and job opportunities.

These connections can come from anywhere, whether it's your university peers or industry professionals. Sometimes, the most unexpected meetings can grow into long-term working relationships and it is something I have personally experienced with my career.

At the end of the day, kindness and professionalism go a long way. A friendly, reliable person is far more likely to succeed than someone who is difficult to work with, regardless of talent.