

The Mexican Tec professor who animated characters in ‘Space Jam 2’



The film ‘**Space Jam 2: A New Legacy**’ has a **Mexican flavor**: animator **Luis Manuel Villarreal**, who brought **Looney Tunes** characters to life, as well as doing several scenes with the animated version of protagonist basketball player **LeBron James**.

For **Villarreal**, who won an **Oscar** for his work on the [animated short Hair Love](#), participating in this Warner Bros. mega-production had a special connection to his childhood.

*“I dreamed of animating **Wile E. Coyote** because my grandfather, on my mother’s side, loved those cartoons and watched them with me. To get to this moment when I had the chance to work on the film was incredible,” Villarreal said.*



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Villarreal, who is also a **distinguished professor in the School of Architecture, Art, and Design at Tec de Monterrey**, worked on around **14 2D animation scenes** for the film, some with **up to 27 characters on screen**.

*"I can say that **I animated all the characters**, but the ones I think I did the most animation on were Bugs Bunny, Lola Bunny, and LeBron James. Also, for example, there were scenes in which I had to animate Granny, Tweety, Yosemite Sam, the Tasmanian Devil, Daffy Duck, and Wile E. Coyote,"* he said.

*"It's exciting knowing that **these characters are icons**, with a history going all the way back to 1930, that anyone **in any part of the world will recognize**,"* he said.

<https://media.giphy.com/media/FJOP5DN3DWXIzSNMHZ/giphy.gif>

"You have to become the character"

Luis Manuel Villarreal has more **than 20 years of experience**. He's worked on **short films and feature films**, done animation for **domestic and foreign productions**, and even **won an Oscar in 2020** in the category of **Best Animated Short** for the short film **Hair Love**.

For Villarreal, working in his own animation studio [Jugando en Serio](#) (Playing for Real) has led to him collaborating with prominent colleagues.

One of them, who works at **Warner Bros.**, put him in touch with one of the directors on the film, which combines real images with 2D and 3D animated versions.

After being interviewed by the director, **several months passed without any news**, but they eventually **contacted him**.

“These characters are icons, with a history going all the way back to 1930, that anyone in any part of the world will recognize.”

In the first two scenes he worked on, the Mexican had to animate up to **16 characters** who appeared in a frame. He had to make sure everyone, whether it was the **Looney Tunes** characters or the **Lakers star**, kept their personality and the traits that distinguish them.

*“You have to concentrate and **become that character** to do the animation. It’s great because in the end you **get to explore their characteristics**. You say, ‘he has to act this way because he’s crazy,’ or for example, Wile E. Coyote is always scheming, so you imagine all his expressions,”* he explained.

<https://youtu.be/RCsEKvz2mxs>

He admitted that the work wasn’t easy because **for about 4 months** he focused on production and spent long days working in the studio he set up in his home in Mexico City.

*“Basically, **I would get up and go sit in the studio**. From seven in the morning until 12 or 1 at night every day, even Saturdays and Sundays. I was tired a lot. There were moments when I fell asleep, but I said, ‘**You have to keep going**,’”* he said.

On the other hand, he pointed out that one of the things he enjoyed most about this project was that they let him pitch ideas.

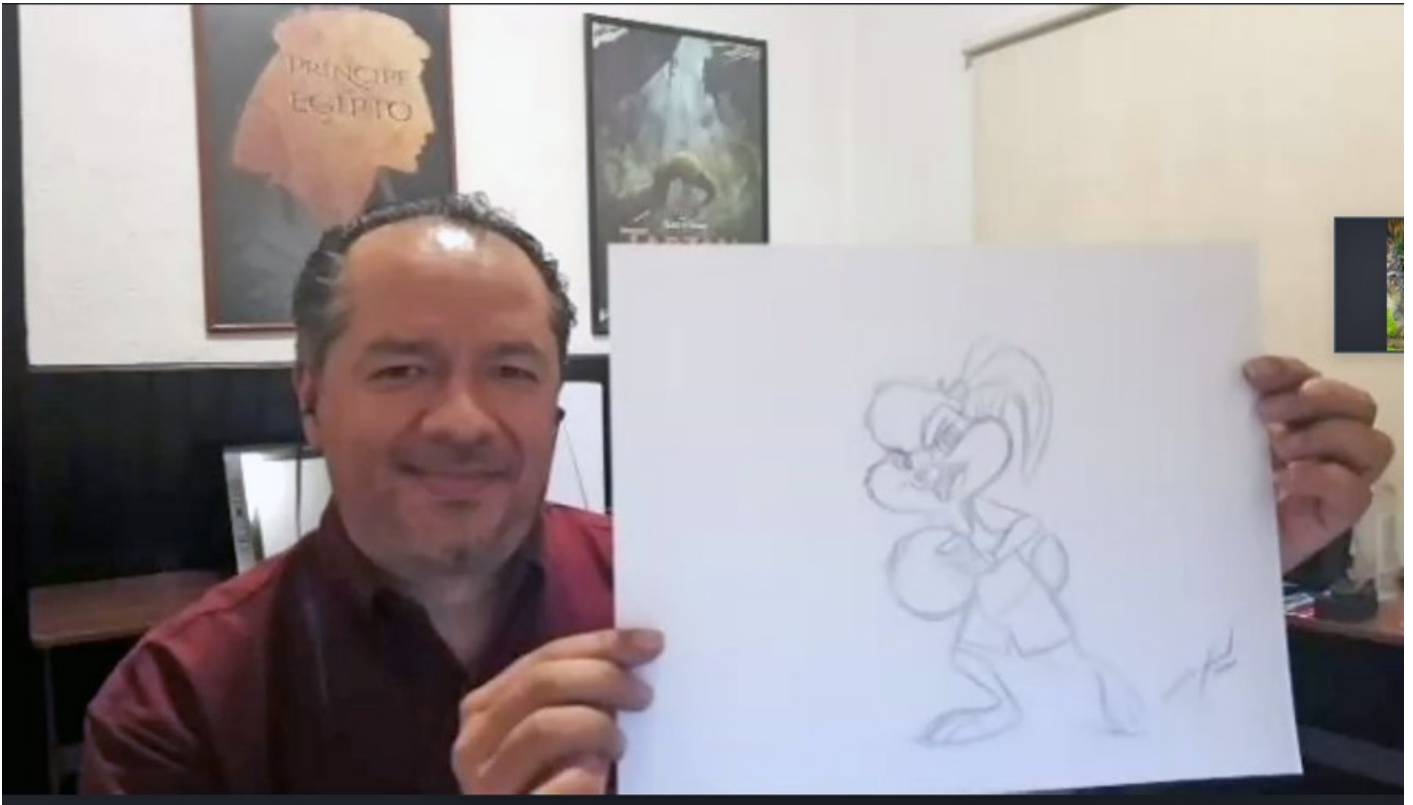
*“It’s very exciting because they suddenly give you the freedom to do something cool with the scene in these productions. They explain it to you in a very general way, but being a **senior animator** means they also expect you to put yourself into it and explore your creativity,”* he said.

The challenges with Lola Bunny and Foghorn Leghorn

The Mexican artist believes that **animation** is not only about making a drawing move. It goes further than that. It has to do with really being able to **make a character act**, to give it **identity and the ability to transmit emotions**.

Lola Bunny, for example, was one of the characters he enjoyed working on the most, despite the controversy of her redesign, compared to Lola in the 1996 version of Space Jam.

*“It was great with Lola. **She’s a very interesting and sympathetic character**. Yes, she’s less voluptuous or whatever -it wasn’t what (the producers) had in mind- but she keeps her sensuality, and she’s this empowered character; she’s bolder,”* he said.



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Another interesting story from the project was how he managed to gain the trust of several animation directors by “coming to the rescue” with a **complicated Foghorn Leghorn scene**.

*“It was Friday, and there had been two and a half weeks of work on this scene that wasn’t going as expected, so they said, ‘Can you?’, and I said, ‘Of course!’, but they said, ‘We want it for Monday.’ By Saturday, I was already turning in **rushes of the animation, and they loved them,**”* he recalled.

The animator explained that the scene, which lasts about 6 seconds, has a lot of **movement of the character and his clothes**, as if there were wind coming up from below. In addition, he points out that Foghorn Leghorn is a difficult character to animate.

By successfully finishing the task in just three days, Villarreal gained the trust of animators such as **Len Simon**, who worked on films such as **Anastasia, Titan A.E., and Klaus**, who then invited him to participate in animating publicity for the film’s advertising campaign.

*“When production wrapped, he said, ‘Luis, I want you to give me a hand because I have more production outside of **Looney Tunes,**’ things for various customers like **TNT and Nike.**”*



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Although he's always working on animation projects, Villarreal said that he'll make room in his diary to go see **'Space Jam 2'**, with the same enthusiasm he had when he was a child and watched Looney Tunes cartoons with his grandfather.

*"As an artist, you set goals, and then with a lot of pride you can sometimes say **'I'm going to sit back and enjoy the popcorn.'** In my case, I always dreamed of working with those characters, and now I can say: **I've done it!**"*

His next projects include continuing to mentor Tec students as a distinguished professor, and he's already **working on an animated short film of his own** for his studio **Jugando en Serio**.

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<https://tec.mx/en/news/national/art-culture/tec-students-learn-animation-oscar-winner>