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Stop Motion and Other Animation Programs

There are more ways than one in how to animate claims Paul Wells. He writes in his book "The Fundamentals of Animation," 3D stop-motion animation has two distinct histories (2006). The first is the largely European tradition of short stop-motion films made by individual artists, and stop-motion series principally made for children's television (Wells, 2006). The second, and predominantly Hollywood tradition, is the 'invisible' history of stop-motion animation as a branch of special effects for feature length films (Wells, 2006). This is complicated further by the fact that 3D stop-motion animation has got two principal approaches using either puppets or clay models, but also includes films made with objects and artifacts (Wells, 2006). Ken Priebe writes that whether it was for a short film or a brief fantasy sequence in a feature, these stop-motion efforts were designed to hold the audience's attention only for a brief moment, a mere bridge getting them from one feature of entertainment to another (Priebe, 2011). He goes on to say that the short format for stop-motion is a double-edged sword in the opportunity it has lavished on the medium (Priebe, 2011). He also says that for the most well executed stop-motion sequences, such as Harryhausen's 5-minute skeleton fight in 1963's Jason and the Argonauts, the shorter format provided a solid frame to place as much quality as possible into them (Priebe, 2011). Priebe goes on to say that combining quality stop-motion animation with a format long enough to truly involve an audience on an emotional level, through a longer story arc of about 70 to 120 minutes, proved to be a very difficult task to pull off in its early development (Priebe, 2011). The number of stop-motion features produced would often have several years of dormancy between them, depending on the country. The time-consuming nature of stop-motion in general, combined with the extra effort needed to produce more than one hour of it, has partly contributed to this sporadic output (Priebe, 2011). The commercial success or failure of these films would also have an impact on how often they would arrive, since it was also difficult to finance projects of this magnitude (Priebe, 2011). Stop motion animation is still an ongoing animation technique that's still in use, but animation programs have grown to become the more dominant way to animate, such as Adobe Flash.

In the book Flash Professional CS5 Bible, Todd Perkins writes that since its humble beginnings as FutureSplash in 1997, the Flash authoring tool and the Flash platform have matured into a powerful tool for deploying a wide range of media content (Perkins, 2010). The book goes on that after Adobe acquired Macromedia in 2005, Adobe has expanded Flash capabilities in several Creative Suite products, as well as development tools such as Adobe Flex Builder (Perkins, 2010). Perkins goes into detail by stating that Flash content can be viewed in a few different ways. Perkins writes that the most common method is from within a Web browser, either as an asset within an HTML page or as a Web site completely comprised of a master Flash movie using several smaller Flash movies as loaded SWF assets (Perkins, 2010). The Flash Player is also available as a stand-alone application also known as a projector,

which can be used to view movies without needing a Web browser or the plug-in (Perkins, 2010). This method is commonly used for deployment of Flash movies on CD-ROMs, floppy disks, or other offline media formats. Finally, with Flash CS5, content made in Flash can be published as iPhone and iPod touch applications, and released in Apple's App Store. In the book, Flash supports three basic methods of animation: Frame-by-frame animation, Keyframe-based tweened animation, and object-based motion animation (Perkins, 2010). Frame-by-frame animation is achieved by manually changing the individual contents of each of any number of successive keyframes. Keyframe-based tweened animation is achieved by defining the contents of the start and endpoints of an animation using only with keyframes and allowing Flash to interpolate the contents of the frames in between. Flash CS5 has two kinds of keyframe-based tweening: Shape tweening and Classic tweening. Object-based motion tweening is an amazing evolution of keyframe-based or Classic tweening (Perkins, 2010).. In Flash CS5, the animator can now apply a tween to a target object on the Stage, and by simply moving or transforming the object, property keyframes are auto-created to track and animate the changes (Perkins, 2010). Though Flash is a popular animation program for animators to use, it is not the only one that is available.

Prior to starting the book, George Avgerakis and his publisher McGraw did a survey to find out what was the most popular animation software. Their results revealed three animation products: NewTek's LightWave, discreet's 3ds max, and Alias Wavefront's Maya (Avgerakis, 2004). In his opinion, he had classified New Tech's LightWave as the easiest 3D animation program to learn, although it may be shallow in terms of some of its facilities, especially where character animation is concerned (Avgerakis, 2004). In his book, he writes that Discreet's 3ds max is more difficult to learn than LightWave, but its more robust features increase its depth. Further on, both Softimage XSI from Avid and Alias Wavefront's Maya are at the top of the difficulty spectrum (Avgerakis, 2004). In the book, it says that each program offers four methods for viewing a scene, three of which are orthographic: the front view of the X and Y axes, the top view of the X and Z axes, and the Y and Z axes. The fourth is a perspective or pictorial view. The book continues by saying that orthographic views are devoid of perspective and intended to be simple, clinical, blueprint kinds of displays based on a 3D Cartesian plane grid. Orthographic views are useful for creating, finding, and changing specific elements of a design, such as a seam or points, and for accurately laying out animation (Avegrakis, 2004).

Works Cited Page

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