

Derek Chan

When I first entered computer science, one of my goals was to create software that “even my mother could use.” Now that I’ve been working at DreamWorks for nearly five years, my goals are more closely aligned with making software that “even a traditional animator could use.” In either case, you are looking at a pretty tough road.

In the digital age, the push continues to be for faster and more efficient production pipelines. At DreamWorks, the way we’ve tried to do this for traditional animation has been through a progression. During the development of ToonShooter, our new Linux-based pencil test system, the goal was to make the current process as quick and painless as possible. We focused a great deal of time on understanding what the traditional animators do and how we could help them do the mundane things faster. This led to a number of new features and enhancements that might not have occurred to us without their involvement. Now that we have gained confidence in providing tools that make their current process as efficient as possible, we are looking at how much faster we could make things if we changed their process. This is where our next stage of development is headed. Can we allow the artists to do what they do best in a way that fits more easily into the digital world? Our development efforts include:

- Digital drawing tools
- CG animation tools geared toward traditional animators
- Remote collaboration
- Integration with other digital departments (editorial and layout)

As we continue to travel down this road of making tools for traditional artists, we’re finding it to be an intriguing journey.

Derek Chan has served as a software project manager at DreamWorks on the animated features “The Prince of Egypt” and “The Road to El Dorado.” One of the projects Chan helped oversee was setting up the studio’s batch queue system, which was used on “The Prince of Egypt” and “The Road to El Dorado,” and is currently in use on the forthcoming animated feature “Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron.” Chan has also worked on the studio’s new Linux-based pencil test system, ToonShooter, which is now being used for DreamWorks animation projects. In addition, Chan has been involved in pipeline utilities, where he manages and develops software that makes the production pipeline run more efficiently. For Software Operations, he manages a group of six developers who work closely with production to identify and solve development issues.

Prior to joining DreamWorks, he worked at SGI as a member of their SoftWindows development team, where his focus being on multimedia playback. He also worked at IBM on an electronic installation program for Windows and OS/2. He earned a bachelor of science and electrical engineering at the University of California, Los Angeles and studied computer science at Stanford University.

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It is no secret that computer graphics technology is becoming more accessible everyday to the less technically minded. This has had the effect of shifting the preferred job requirements away from those who have computer science degrees to those who have more developed artistic training. In the past, simply wading through an interface was sometimes a major accomplishment achieved only by the select few. Those few more technically minded specialists were very highly paid and highly regarded, and they had total creative control over the work, because no one with creative skills had enough technical knowledge to confidently direct the work. The result was that the work had a distinct lack of artistic involvement on both sides of the equation: the work that was delivered, and the tools that were conceived to achieve it. The overwhelming attitude at the time seemed to be fear of approaching technological voodoo.

Today however, leaps and bounds have been made in the areas of technological engineering. Even though nothing is quite as intuitive as an analog device, such as a pencil or a paintbrush, technology is bridging the gap, in both hardware and software. The upshot of all of this is that the technological controls are becoming more transparent, and they reveal the artistic shortcomings of their users more quickly.

Ultimately, it is the brain that steers the hand to utilize either brush or stylus. To say that the art is in the medium would be as silly as to say that one artist is more evocative simply because her brushes were treated with a more technologically advanced process. Thousands of years of art history have taught us why this is not so.

Ivo Horvat began his career in the entertainment industry in 1992. After leaving Art Center College of Design, where he was studying transportation design, he quickly secured an agent and began freelancing as a conceptual artist and illustrator. Over the next two years, he did work for clients such as Ridley Scott and Assoc., and Taco Bell. In 1994, he joined the newly formed visual effects facility Sony Pictures Imageworks. Over the next four years, he contributed paintings for the films “Tall Tale,” “Speed,” “Judge Dredd,” “The Cable Guy,” “Virtuosity,” “Anaconda,” “Phenomenon,” “The Ghost and the Darkness,” “Contact,” “Starship Troopers,” “The Postman,” and “Snow Falling on Cedars.”

Utilizing his background in industrial design and illustration, he contributed to the Imageworks art department, creating conceptual artwork for a number of films, including: “James and the Giant Peach,” “Harold and the Purple Crayon,” “Anaconda,” and the first incarnation of “Godzilla.” In 1998, joined the matte painting department at Industrial Light + Magic, where he applied his unique talents to “Star Wars:

Episode One," "The Mummy," "Wild Wild West," "Galaxy Quest," "The Perfect Storm," "Space Cowboys," "Impostor," "E.T." (15-year anniversary re-release), and "The Mummy Returns." Projects for ILM's commercial division included the Star Wars: Episode One Pepsi campaign and the campaign for First Union Bank, which won an Emmy for Best Visual Effects. In 2001, at the request of Ken Ralston, he re-joined Sony Pictures Imageworks to head the matte painting department. He currently oversees matte painting on: "Spiderman," America's Sweethearts," "Stuart Little 2," and "Harry Potter."

Steven Markowski

My attitude when I made the transition from traditional to computer animation was fairly simplistic: "Good animation is good animation. All I need to do is learn the new tool and it's basically the same thing." To a large extent, this is true. The principles of animation remain the same no matter what the medium. But now I think the success of traditional animators attempting to transition to the computer are largely dependent on how they approach their work. Animators who work very intuitively or rely heavily on their strength in drawing can become frustrated by a medium that has only peripheral use for their drawing skills and is too complex to allow excessive intuition. However, those with a more analytical approach to animation, who enjoy honing actions and performances more than drawings, can find it a medium that offers them a greater level of sophistication than they can find in the traditional animation world. There is also a world of creative freedom and exploration that opens up to them when they are given that greatest of gifts that the digital realm has to offer: the "undo" button.

Steven Markowski was born in Brooklyn, New York. Since graduating from the California Institute of the Arts in 1987, he has worked in a variety of traditional animation and story positions for numerous studios, including Disney, Fox, and Turner. By 1996, he had taught himself how to animate on the computer, and he was chosen to supervise the title character for Warner Brothers' "The Iron Giant." He is currently the Animation Director at Cinesite Visual Effects in Los Angeles, where he recently finished supervising the animation for A.M.E.E., the robot star of Warner Brothers' "Red Planet."

Sande Scoredos

In recent years, I have seen a tremendous increase in the number of people who enter the computer graphics field with a strong traditional arts background and a good foundation in digital technology. There is no substitute for a good foundation in both traditional and digital skills. Anyone working in animation today would benefit from learning as much as they can about computer tools and traditional art forms. Artist, technicians, and developers gain a better understanding of how to create and use digital tools by working in both the traditional and digital forum.

Sande Scoredos is executive director of technical training and artist development at Sony Pictures Imageworks. She has a background in production tools and methods used in creating computer graphics imagery in the scientific, engineering, gaming, video, and film effects industries. Her technical knowledge includes work in 3D from computer animation techniques to radiosity and

volumetric rendering, and she has an extensive background in art education, computer science, and 2D and 3D computer graphics production. Her background in studio art led her to teach at the professional studio and university level. Adding computer science and engineering to her credentials, she began teaching microwave engineering design on 2D UNIX CAD systems. The emergence of UNIX-based 3D computer graphics in the mid-1980s enabled her to combine art and computer technology. As manager of training at Wavefront Technologies for many years, she designed the worldwide training program and curriculum, instructing professionals in the use of 3D computer graphics and animation for broadcast, engineering, gaming, and scientific visualization. She then moved on to Rhythm & Hues, where she again designed a training facility and curriculum, and focused on teaching proprietary software tools and production methods to novice and experienced digital production artists. In 1997, she joined Sony, where she has once again set up a training facility for a production studio. She educates experienced artists to use the tools they need to produce world-class imagery. This training program is also designed to enrich the aesthetic, as well as the technical skills of the artists, and to provide artistic career development.

She is very committed to education. She works with schools to review reels and portfolios for student projects and participates with Sony recruitment at festivals and job fairs. As a UCLA alumna, she is very active in the UCLA Professional Entertainment Studies program and teaches 3D computer graphics courses in the Digital Creation program. She is also chair of the SIGGRAPH 2001 Computer Animation Festival.

Tom Sito

Hollywood is a place that frequently like to turn itself upside down over new technologies. But the problem in this mania for change is how to exploit the strengths of the new technologies and still preserve the traditional skills of filmmaking, animation, and story telling. For movies, technology is not an end in itself. The ultimate goal is a good story well told. The time is coming when audiences will stop granting CGI animation a curve because it has not yet reached its potential. The audience demands quality as good or better than the traditional paint and pencil could ever achieve.

Tom Sito is a 26-year veteran of animated film production. His screen credits include the Disney classics "The Little Mermaid," "Beauty & the Beast," "Aladdin," "The Lion King," "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?," "Pocahontas," "Fantasia 2000," and "Dinosaurs." At DreamWorks SKG, his talents contributed to "The Prince of Egypt," "Antz," "Shrek," "Spirit," and "Paulie." He has just co-directed Warner Brothers' "Osmosis Jones."

He teaches at the University of Southern California and has written numerous articles on animation. He has lectured at New York University, SVA, UCLA, AFI, the annual SIGGRAPH conference, Microsoft, Capilano College, Sheridan College, Ecole du Grand Gobelin, Palma Majorca, and the Yomiuri Forum in Tokyo. He is president of the Motion Picture Screen Cartoonist's Union Local #839, where he is an outspoken advocate for the rights of artists.