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CG ARTISTS

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INTERVIEW

CREATING THE UNREAL

Bertrand Benoit on the
drive behind his artwork

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PAGES OF TRAINING

MODEL CHARACTERFUL
CARTOONS FROM 2D

CREATE DETAILED
CREATURE SKIN ALPHAS

MAKE A PIXAR-STYLE
BLENDER ANIMATION

CONJURE GREAT

Character sculpts

Blizzard senior modeller Jamir Blanco
gives us a masterclass in ZBrush

AARDMAN TAKE THEIR STYLE TO A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY





STYLIZED HANFU GIRL

■ I love sculpting, but I also want to simplify the creation process as much as possible. So I usually use Polypaint instead of textures, so that I can skip the steps of retopology and UV unwrapping. After the general shape is sculpted, I usually use Sculptriis Pro to sculpt the details. This way, where a lot of details are needed there can be enough polygons, and the parts that do not need details can keep a relatively low polycount. ■■

● artstation.com/zhuyao



ARTIST
zhuzhu
SOFTWARE
ZBrush, Blender



ADAM DRIVER

Great 3D character artists online create portraits so lifelike; it's really inspiring. In a way, you become the photographer, and it's like your own digital photo studio.

My inspiration comes from a series of photographs from Chad Kirkland. I think it's important to work closely with your references.

On this project I had the opportunity to process the skin texture maps at work at Texturing XYZ, and then use them on this portrait of the actor. The best tool to make your work believable is probably Photoshop; a quick paintover or photo edit of your reference, compared to your

work-in-progress, really shows what needs more work.

Using masks in Maya's Hypershade to adjust the displacement, roughness or specular by areas gives more control and speeds up lookdev. ■■

● artstation.com/anderr



ARTIST

Ander Humbert

SOFTWARE

Maya, Arnold, ZBrush, Mari, Nuke, XGen, Photoshop

STOP- MOTION VISIONS

3D World talks to director Magdalena Osinska about the making of the new Aardman *Star Wars* short film *I Am Your Mother*

Stop-motion has been a part of *Star Wars* storytelling since the original George Lucas movie was released in the summer of 1977. From the game board pieces aboard the Millennium Falcon to the realisation of the Tauntaun in *The Empire Strikes Back*; from the evil Empire's machines in *Return of the Jedi* to the creatures of Endor in the Ewok TV movies *The Ewok Adventure* and *The Battle for Endor*, stop-motion has been showcased in a galaxy far, far away. This distinct storytelling style has been the perfect match for Aardman, and the studio's new film *I Am Your Mother* is one of the nine new short films comprising the second series of *Star Wars: Visions* that launched in May 2023 on the Disney+ channel.

Aardman's new film embraces the opportunity to be playful and whimsical and, in its short-film running time, packs in plentiful nods to *Star Wars* lore, while never losing focus on the core character drama of the film – which centres on a young Twi'lek pilot named Anni, who teams up with her clingy mother Kalina for a race. The characters for

the episode were a collaborative design venture between Felicie Haymoz and Andy Janes.

Director Magdalena Osinska begins our conversation by explaining that “the opportunity came to Aardman and the brief was quite broad, simple and open. They [Lucasfilm] wanted *Star Wars* to meet Aardman. I was very excited about making it in stop-motion. Just imagining this *Star Wars* universe with these amazing sets, costumes, characters and creatures to be done in miniature [as stop-motion] was just a really exciting opportunity.”

Osinska goes on to note the deeper connection between *Star Wars* and Aardman. “I love stop-motion that's really detailed and textured,” she explains, “and I tried to add a little bit more of that to my *Star Wars* short. The costumes are so amazing in *Star Wars*, and they're all very detailed and textured. I hear that a lot of people may think that

bringing *Star Wars* and Aardman together is quite unusual, but I actually saw quite a lot of similarities and links between these two worlds. To start with, in the original films there was some stop-motion.”

The established, widely recognised overarching *Star Wars* ‘look’ is typically described as being one that depicts a ‘used universe’, and it's a production design aesthetic that's been part of the visual language of the films for nearly 50 years. *I Am Your Mother* stays true to the tradition. Of the production and costume design for the film, Osinska notes: “I was very excited. I tried to take all of the things that I love about *Star Wars*, and the detail of it, into the Aardman universe.” The project also allowed for the fabrication of a range of sets to be filmed on the studio floor at Aardman, and Osinska emphasises her excitement at having a variety of sets and spaceships to create. ➤

“IMAGINING THE *STAR WARS* UNIVERSE IN MINIATURE WAS REALLY EXCITING”

Magdalena Osinska, director, *I Am Your Mother*



ARTIST BIO

Bertrand Benoit

Bertrand is a French-born, Berlin-based artist who started as a photographer and evolved towards 3D 15 years ago. His focus is photorealism and architecture. bertrand-benoit.com



THREE PIECES OF ADVICE

1. It's okay to have role models, but look outside the world of CG for inspiration.

2. Try to understand what you're good at and what your artistic goals or aspirations are, and work hard to bring those two into alignment.

3. Don't fixate on the tools, don't be afraid of trying new tools, and don't mourn the old ways of doing things.

Opposite: Benoit utilises photography techniques to give his work a filmic look

Right: Never one to shy away from more abstract pieces, Benoit evokes a sense of intrigue here



of a mentor, and Alex Roman. I was also developing at the same time as more 'artistic' artists who I admire, like Cornelius Dämmrich, also known as Zomax, who's a friend, or Marek Denko.

But I also received a lot of influence from outside CG, from architectural and interior photographers and stylists, and more recently from painters, in particular of the symbolist era, like Arnold Böcklin, or from contemporary artists like Neo Rauch. I draw a lot of inspiration from movie directors and cinematographers in terms of framing or evoking strong emotions visually.

Which 3D artists challenged you to be better, and why?

There is a lot more staggeringly good work around than when I

started. The tools have become easier to use; techniques such as photogrammetry are helping modellers save time, and there are tons of high-quality, ready-made assets that weren't available back when I started. That's all lowered the barrier to entry for people like me who have a creative mind, but may not be super technically minded.

But it's not just that. I feel 3D artists have matured visually, they've become much better at incorporating photographic and cinematographic techniques. Most have a better eye than we had 10 or 15 years ago. In my area of photorealistic archviz, artists like Gabriel Fabra and Jonathan Nicholson are people I keep a close eye on. I'm also a big fan of Mike Golden, and how his art radiates beyond archviz. ➤



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DEVELOP A STYLISTED ANIMATION PROJECT

Guilherme Campos explains why organisation was vital to his workflow as he follows the studio approach to a personal piece

Managing a 3D animation project as a solo artist has its own set of challenges and opportunities. In this article, we'll explore the steps taken by an artist in making a demo reel to break into the industry, from initial inspiration to the final product and the choices made to deliver on time.



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<https://bit.ly/3dworld-creaturesculpting>

01 INITIAL INSPIRATION

It all started when I stumbled upon Braydan Barrett's concept on ArtStation ([artstation.com/artwork/zOvKr2](https://www.artstation.com/artwork/zOvKr2)) and it ignited my mind with various story ideas. The style of the piece perfectly matched what I was seeking, and it had the potential to tell a story that would feature the passage of time and diverse lighting conditions.

While I had some experience with character and product lighting, I was keen on venturing outside of my comfort zone by exploring exterior lighting.

02 STORYBOARD

Storyboarding offers the advantage of having the freedom and flexibility to experiment with various ideas. During the initial pass, the focus was on developing the narrative and visual storytelling. Once a solid foundation was established, I proceeded to a second pass, refining the lines and colours, which played a vital role in enhancing the storytelling.

With the storyboard complete, I could assess the workload for animation, assets, and rendering time. This stage presents a crucial



AUTHOR

Guilherme Campos

Guilherme is a 3D artist who is transitioning from advertising to animation. He has a passion for lighting and project management.
bit.ly/435HaeD



Left: Lux Aeterna's short feature *Reno* had its visual concept formed using the AI-powered photorealistic text-to-image generator Stable Diffusion

Below: Move.ai is one of a number of AI tools integrated into VFX workflows in 2023



"ANYTHING THAT ANSWERS QUESTIONS HANGING OVER A PROJECT AND OPENS UP NEW AVENUES IS INVALUABLE"

James Pollock, creative technologist, Lux Aeterna

magical as these tools are, they're still just tools, so we're looking for ways our artists can use them to reach new heights. It's about human inputs and human outputs."

The 3D models and animations produced by generative AI models so far are fairly rudimentary, but then so were the results from 2D generative models just a year ago. "The R&D work we're doing as part of the MyWorld initiative will help to take away some of the risk of undertaking projects that use the tech we're exploring," says Pollock.

"Based on my experience of working in VFX and immersive tech, anything that answers questions hanging over a project plan and opens up new avenues is totally invaluable. That's why our approach to disseminating R&D is to make it as practical as possible, so that anyone can use it as a guide for their own projects."

TOP TOOLS FOR AI VFX

The best options to consider adding to your pipeline

Whether the goal is to make a pipeline more efficient or to aid a concept with inspiration, the number of AI tools on offer to artists is increasing by the day. Here are some of Lux Aeterna's top suggestions.

Midjourney

Utilising tools like Midjourney, with its ability to generate photorealistic text-to-image visuals, can aid the creative development of your project. This enables you to explore complex ideas visually, in a matter of seconds.

Move.ai

Gone are the days of expensive and restrictive mocap suits. Move.ai has introduced markerless motion capture with the simple use of iPhones. The free app offers an initial two free minutes of motion, while a \$365 annual subscription fee gives you unlimited motion.

Nvidia Instant NeRF

This inverse rendering tool uses AI to turn static 2D images into immersive 3D scenes in a matter of minutes.

MetaHuman Creator

Powered by Epic Games' Unreal Engine, MetaHuman Creator is a free cloud-based app that enables you to create high-fidelity, fully rigged, and photorealistic digital humans in real-time.

ChatGPT

While famed for its ability to fool even university academics, the OpenAI giant can go as far as writing scripts for tools like Maya and Houdini, generating code in languages including Python, MEL and VEX.

