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CMPM 163, Homework 1
January 28, 2018

Part D: Okami's Painterly Visual Effect

Okami (Clover Studios, 2006) has some of the most stunning visual effects and aesthetics I've ever seen in a game. The entire game looks as though it has been painted on a Japanese scroll, and its beauty holds up even today despite the game being 12 years old.



Source: <http://www.justpushstart.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/hd-screenshot-okami-1.jpg>

The effect in general applies large, black inkbrush strokes around the edges of each object, and varies the thickness of these lines to mimic actual brush strokes like those seen in the Sumi style of painting. The colors of the world are also often thick and vibrant, and all the textures present appear as though each frame has been painted by hand.

What I appreciate about this game, and one of the reasons it's held up so well over time without looking dated, is that it creates an aesthetic as opposed to hyper-realism. Games that are hyper-realistic and can render each individual hair or bead of

sweat can be impressive, but you don't have to do that to make a game look good. Having cohesive theming, color palettes, and a general sense of style can be just as effective for captivating your audience. Also, as a painter and artist myself, I adore this visual style.

The style I think comes from multiple visual effects – such as having genuinely nice textures – but by far the most important is the thick black outlining brushstrokes. The lines change shape depending on the angle being viewed and are typically thicker around the outline of each model, which leads me to believe that they are being drawn dynamically, probably in a shader. I think how it works is once the frame is close to being towards the end of processing—possibly around the same time it's figuring out transparency and which objects are hidden from one another—it figures out where the outer part of each object is. It already draws some black lines all the time, but where the edge of one object crosses over another, or some part of the model overlaps itself, it draws and thickens a boarder around the objects edge.