

The New Monthly Column Looking At 3D Art

Gang Xu

Some time ago whilst browsing through the cluttered archives of info Mac I came across a program called Mechanisto. The info text described it as a shareware 3D animation program. Having nothing better to do I down-loaded the 1MB file. I spent the next two days trying to understand the difference between the extrude tool and the "sweep' tool.

Since then 3D software has moved on a long way. Over the last few years, there has been an explosion in the amount of 3D software available for the Mac. The potential of even the most basic 3D software is amazing. With a little bit of imagination, and a lot of patience the result can be mind-stunning.

program like Extreme 3D is very old and was given away

on a magazine cover CD. But it can still create good results

3D software can be used in a number of ways, at the moment it is heavily in conjunction with 2D programs to produce mainly composite work. This technique is used widely throughout broadcasting and illustration. The results of this technique can be very effective, but more often than not do not give a realistic blend between the computer-generated model and the 2D background. This is the technique I use heavily since it doesn't require "serious" hardware to achieve an acceptable result.

The other technique which I'm starting to use is to produce every element of the image in 3D. This technique produces very realistic worlds, however the demand on hardware

is quite substantial. The main software I use is Infini-D 4.0. Infini-D has been around for a long time, originally published by specular it is now owned by MetaCreations. The basic interface is similar to that found in many other applications. The work area is divided into 4 windows, giving you the side view, top view, front view, and a 3D view of your model. I find this interface the easiest to use since it allows me to interact with all aspects of my model at the same time. Some people however prefer the environment provided to them by programs such as Poser 3D, or Bryce.

he work I produce at the moment is very heavily based around man-made objects. This is probably due to the fact that I grew up building Airfix models. As a result, I prefer to 'build' up my models bit by bit. This process takes time but I find it an easy way to build up a 3D model.

Most of my models are built up this way, it allows me to name and change all components easily. Naming individual objects that make up the finished piece allows me to keep track of all the objects that make up the model, this is especially necessary when I have to animate a complicated model.

Having the ability to add that extra dimension to your art can often give your work a new lease of life. There are many courses you can go on to learn how do to use 3D programs. A few years ago that might have been the only way to learn 3D modelling. However, my recommendation is with so much cheap software around the best way to get into 3D is to get yourself some and start experimenting, it's the best way to learn!!!.

Gang Xu

[<gxu@wxumac.demon.co.uk>](mailto:gxu@wxumac.demon.co.uk)