Poster session

Sean McComber & Eric Farrar

El Oro: Animating Digital Humanities

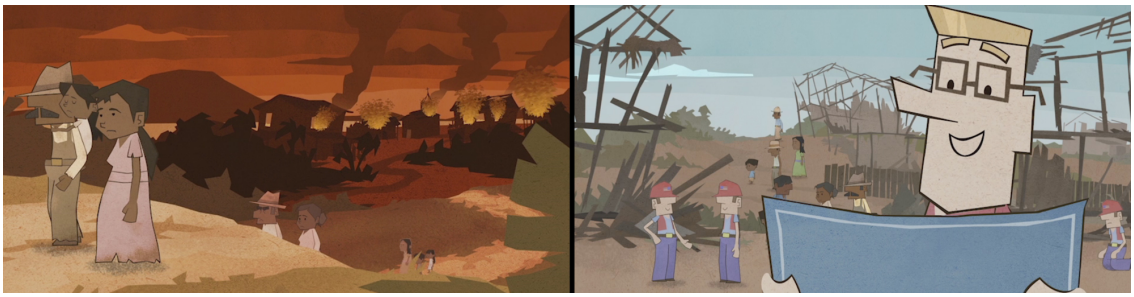

Figure 1: *Animating El Oro, 2016.*

Abstract

Traditional historical research media, such as text, can allow for a great deal of exposition and elaboration. This works well to fully articulate complex ideas and arguments to fellow scholars. However, it is not conducive to engaging unfamiliar non-scholars. This limits both the potential reach of the research and growth of audience. In contrast, animation often requires ideas, emotions, and performance be broken down into their simplest term(s) in order to be presented efficiently to an audience.

Animating El Oro is a collaborative research project between historians and animators. It explores animation as a means of communicating narrative and historical argument. The result offers lessons on how historians can broaden audiences and communicate nuances without prose. These lessons are of importance to historical researchers and educators.

During WWII the United States came to the aid of El Oro, Ecuador in an attempt to stem the spread of fascism. This project is an animated depiction of a research argument surrounding this effort, presented from the Latin American perspective.

1 Development

1.1 Historical Argument

Traditional archival research reveals that despite best intentions and considerable resources, American efforts in El Oro often failed because of a lack of cultural understanding. Moments of cross-cultural partnership generated positive change, while American attempts to impose technologies, norms, and social patterns failed.

1.2 Story

The historians developed an in depth outline. Key events and topics were identified. Photo reference libraries were compiled.

The animation team was responsible for condensing the research information into a compelling narrative. The main character of the story is the village of El Oro itself. Individual characters represent the interests and issues of larger stakeholder groups. There is no voice over or narration to maximize audience reach, and to test the ability of animation alone to communicate the key information.

2 Design and Production

All character and environment designs were based upon photo reference to maintain the required historical integrity. Character animation was completed using Autodesk Maya.

3 Impact

3.1 Animation Workflow Adoption by Historians

The historians recognized story and performance practices utilized by animators are directly applicable to their own research. They have begun to use these techniques to arrive at succinct and pointed historical arguments more quickly and efficiently. This has become a key finding discussed at length during national and international conference presentations.

The final animation has been recognized as a viable platform to grow the reach of digital humanities work and to communicate historical argument. Future expansion opportunities include interactive media and ebooks with animated content.

3.3 Educational Impact

Graduate courses are being developed around this collaboration exposing students to the use of animation for research argument. These include working directly with researchers, gaining an understanding of research, identifying target audiences, and developing methods for effective communication. New collaboration partnerships are currently being identified.

Biography

Sean McComber
Assistant Professor, The University of Texas at Dallas
sean.mccomber@utdallas.edu

Sean McComber is an Assistant Professor of Animation in Arts and Technology (ATEC) at the University of Texas at Dallas. He graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design with a B.F.A. in Computer Art and an emphasis in Animation and received his M.F.A in ATEC from UTD. After graduating, Sean was accepted into the internship program at Rhythm & Hues Studios, a visual effects production company for film. Sean rose from intern to Lead Animator and eventually traveled to Rhythm & Hues' Mumbai, India, facility as Supervising Animator. Sean is currently teaching classes in Character Animation.

Eric Farrar
Associate Dean, The University of Texas at Dallas

Eric Farrar is an Associate Professor of 3D Computer Animation in Arts and Technology (ATEC). He graduated from The Ohio State University where he completed an MFA in Computer Animation and Visualization working through the Advanced Computing Center for Art and Design (ACCAD). Eric then went to work for the Los Angeles based visual-effects studio, Rhythm & Hues where he worked as a character rigger creating bone and muscle systems for digital characters for films such as Night at the Museum and The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe. Eric is currently teaching classes in 3D animation including courses specifically focused on the more technical side of character rigging.