

# Breakthrough CG Set To Hit The Animation Festival Circuit

## *SIGGRAPH Showcase Evolves; Future To Blend With Past At Confab As The Late Stan Winston Will Be Honored*

### **A SHOOT Staff Report**

The theme for SIGGRAPH 2008 at the Los Angeles Convention Center from Aug. 11-15 is "Evolve" and clearly one of the confab's perennial marquee attractions, the annual Computer Animation Festival, is evolving on several fronts. The showcase of noteworthy work is expanding into a full-scale film festival that will incorporate curated and competition screenings, discussion panels with filmmakers, artists and producers, and an awards program. Additionally, the general public will have greater access to the Festival than ever before.

In all, there will be five days of screenings (at the Nokia Theatre, just a stone's throw from the Los Angeles Convention Center), four days of talks, three nights of all star studio events and two days of 3D stereoscopic panels and screenings.

Commercials and music videos will again be part of the Festival menu. Among the spot entrees are:

- Bridgestone's "Scream" directed by Kinka Usher of House of Usher Films, Santa Monica, for The Richards Group, Dallas, with visual effects from Method, Santa Monica. For the spot, Method brought a group of forest creatures to life, including one in full photorealistic 3D. Method built facial expression on numerous woodland creatures. Though the creatures were built in a computer, the studio gave them the timing and emotional commitment that the comedic vision called for. The studio's greatest challenge was the creation of a fully 3D squirrel that had to scream with its face full screen at HD1080. Other shots were action cuts from real squir-

rel to 3D animated squirrel. Method created its own custom fur pipeline using Sidefx Houdini, which provided full control over all aspects of the fur and the creative freedom to manipulate any element as needed. Method's Alex Frisch was VFX shoot supervisor and lead 2D VFX artist. Andy Boyd was lead 3D VFX artist.

- IBM's "What Makes You Special?" web campaign, produced by animation studio Little Fluffy Clouds in Mill Valley, Calif., and Curious Pictures, New York, for Ogilvy One, New York. Directors/art directors/graphic designers were Jerry van de Beek and Betsy de Fries, with the former also serving as technical director/CGI director/lead animator/compositor and de Fries as CGI producer. The studios were asked to make a series of spots for IBM that could define the company's global objective, entertain and be both innovative and fun. Ostensibly for the web, these spots were also leveraged across such advertising media as cinema, TV and print. In the dimensional space of a free flowing inkblot, a narrative is told of a company situated in many parts of the world but tightly connected at the core. Using soft, muted tones and playing freely with the movement of patterns, a rush of ink and a sweeping camera, the work reveals people, ideas, jobs and other elements in the form of a global interconnected dance. For each spot, a seminal image—created in Illustrator and enhanced with Photoshop—was brought into AfterEffects, where each layer was separated, placed and animated in its unique 3D environment. These animated illustrations were meshed with 3D elements and effects.

- Clorox's "Turtle" directed by Russell Brooke of Passion Pictures, London, for Dieste Harmel & Partners, San Francisco. This computer-animated commercial uses various paper and fabric textures to create a children's storybook-like world. A giant knitted turtle sneezes on a busy city street, the force of which triggers an extraordinary chain of events. A skateboarding dog crashes into a rocket which takes off, leaving the spaceman pilot behind. The rocket lands nearby, causing a lorry driver to swerve and lose his load of colored balls, which tumble down a hill. One of the balls lands in a mud puddle, which splashes all over a boy who is playing football. Cut to a live-action boy arriving back at home wearing his dirty white shirt. "And that's how my shirt got dirty, Mommy," he says.

- Framestore, London and New York, is prominent in the Festival mix spanning both short and long form, with a lineup that includes three commercials directed by Daniel Kleinman of Rattling Stick, London (whose directors are repped stateside by bi-coastal Epoch Films): Unilever Lux's "Neon Girl" for Buenos Aires agent Santo; Rexona's "Redline" out of Lowe New York; and Monster.com's "Stork" for BBDO New York.

In the latter, we see a stork carrying a little bundle of joy, enduring inclement weather and even a confrontation with ravenous wolves during the course of a long, arduous journey. Indeed the stork offers more than just the gift of flight. He nurtures and protects the baby before finally delivering the infant safely at the doorstep of a home where loving parents await. We

then fast forward to that baby now, all grown up as a young man working mindlessly in a dead-end office job. The same stork appears at the office window and sees what's become of his precious bundle, looks down in disappointment and flies off. The man too is disappointed, embarrassed by his lot in life which hits home for him at the sight of the stork. He realizes that he can do better, at which point a Monster.com logo appears accompanied by the slogan, "Your calling is calling."

## Spot range

Jill Smolin, who is the SIGGRAPH Conference's entertainment director, noted, "I'm not alone in thinking that the best part of television shows can be the commercials we try to speed past. This year is no exception. In addition to being entertaining, informative and looking amazing, the spots in this year's Festival cover all manner of styles. Method's hilarious spot for Bridgestone, for instance, brings us photoreal animals...screaming. In total contrast is the Clorox 'Turtle' spot from Framstore, which combines live action with absolutely simple and colorful animation. IBM's artistically infused campaign 'What Makes You Special?' is complemented by Framstore's "Stork," which features a completely realistic bird."

Also slated for SIGGRAPH are discussions on the "Stork" spot as well as the overall topic of animation in commercials. The latter session (8/14, 3:45-5:30 p.m.) is being moderated by Limbert Fabian of Radium, with scheduled panelists being Dariush Derakhshani of Radium, Gil Baron of Method, Scott Gagain and Amy Calcote from House of Moves and Andy MacDonald of Riot Santa Monica.

The "Stork" session (8/14, 2:20-2:50 p.m.) features Daniel Seddon of Framstore who will discuss making a photo-real stork in eight weeks deploying such resources as Houdini, Maya and RenderMan.

## Expanded program

The aforementioned expansion to a full blown film festival, said Smolin, is "a direct reflection of the importance of computer graphics in many aspects of everyday life...Plus, from cell phones to laptops, the general public has never had as much access to really great animated content as they do today.

**SIGGRAPH's** traditional awards structure of Best In Show continues. In addition, an expanded awards program will include an interactive audience voting mechanism as well as major award announcements throughout the confab week. Also, screening times will be expanded to showcase full-length animated features in a single theater space.

Best In Show Nominations for the '08 Fest include:

- *Bolides* from French studio Supinfo.com. This imaginative student film takes viewers on a chaotic, hilarious wheelchair race through an old-age home.
- *Carbon Footprint* from Jellyfish Pictures in the U.K. This poignant piece presents the decomposition of a single soda can over half a century, in a single seamless shot. A better alternative to junking the can, points out the film, is recycling it.
- A sequence from the DreamWorks Animation film *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* offers a new perspective on flying with animals.

- *Oktapodi*, a short directed by third-year students from France's Gobelins school. This animated piece centers on two octopi in their fast paced, comical escape from the clutches of a stubborn restaurant cook.

- And another project from Framstore, the Chemical Brothers music video "The Salmon Dance," in which an aquarium tank filled with rapping, beatboxing and dancing fish

## Stan Winston

The earlier alluded to studio events

portion of the Fest consists of three evenings hosted, respectively, by Pixar, Sony Pictures Imageworks and Industrial Light+Magic. The Sony session is of particular interest in that it will be a tribute to the renowned makeup, creature creator and visual effects wizard Stan Winston who died last month due to complications from multiple myeloma. He was 62.

Celebrating Winston's life and body of work lends a retrospective perspective to the SIGGRAPH proceedings which traditionally look forward to the future. However Winston's work bridges the gap. His breakthrough creativity has helped to shape that future, influencing a generation of artists and will likely influence more generations to come.

Winston's work on *Aliens*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and *Jurassic Park* earned him four Academy Awards. Via his Stan Winston Studio in Van Nuys, Calif., he also made his mark on commercials (see this week's spot.com.mentary column). Winston additionally earned five Emmy Award nominations and shared Emmys for his makeup on *Gargoyles* and *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, for which actress Cicely Tyson was aged into a 110-year-old woman.

Among Winston and his team's more recent endeavors were the creation of the crystal skeletons for *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, and the character suits for the superhero Iron Man and his arch enemy The Iron Monger in the movie *Iron Man*.

## Major turnout

SIGGRAPH 2008 will draw an estimated 30,000 attendees from six continents. Celebrating its 35th year, the confab will also include a three-day (8/12-14) exhibition of products and services from the computer graphics and interactive marketplace. More than 250 companies from around the world are slated to exhibit.

The confab is also a hot spot for studio recruitment of budding CG creative talent.

**SIGGRAPH** is sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), the world's largest educational and scientific computing society, uniting educators, researchers and professionals to inspire dialogue, share resources and address the field's

challenges. ACM helps to strengthen the computing profession's collective voice through strong leadership, promotion of the highest standards, and recognition of technical excellence. The group supports the professional growth of its rank-and-file membership by providing opportunities for learning, for career development and industry networking.