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CG Pioneer Encourages SIGGRAPH to Broaden Focus

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Thursday, December 11, 2008
By: [Ramin Zahed](#)

Don Greenberg, director of Cornell University's highly regarded computer graphics program, encouraged the audience at the inaugural edition of SIGGRAPH Asia in Singapore to expand the applications of the technology and to help build bridges between disciplines in the future. In his keynote speech today (December 11), Greenberg used colorful examples from his amazing scientific and academic career to illustrate how far the CG community has come in the span of four decades.

Greenberg, whose current research projects involve realistic image generation and parallel-processing algorithms for rendering new graphical user interfaces, discussed the various application of computer sciences which go beyond animation and gaming. He talked about how some of the innovations in CG led to advances in areas from automotive design to medical operations, and how IBM scientists studied the brain's circulatory system to create new 3D chips that help cool computer systems. He shared some of the early virtual imaging work he and his team produced for Cornell University back in 1968. The opening day audience was also treated to footage of Greenberg's CG recreation of the flight of a possibly extinct ivory-billed woodpecker, which led him to an extensive study of flight mechanisms in birds and its scientific application in the field of aviation.

"Have courage to take risks and don't shy away from attacking the big problems," he urged. "With our expanding universe of computer technologies, why are we so concentrated on gaming and animation? The algorithms that we've developed can help accelerate research in other fields [medical, environmental studies, architecture, etc.], but they aren't applied because we don't talk to each other…because we don't cross disciplines. The domain of our focus at SIGGRAPH has become narrow. It's time for us to expand our boundaries to make the results of all this superb research more relevant to other disciplines."

One of Greenberg's many distinguished students, Rob Cook, VP of advanced technology at Pixar, is scheduled to deliver Friday's (Dec. 12) keynote speech at SIGGRAPH Asia. Cook was the co-architect and primary author of Pixar's Oscar-winning RenderMan software. He was also the first to use Monte Carlo techniques in computer graphics, which were essential for simulation of complex, realistic lights and camera effects. He won the ACM SIGGRAPH Achievement Award in recognition of these contributions.

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