



EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The LA Film School's Cintiq Lab Fosters Creative Expression and Equips Computer Animation Students with "Real World" Skills

THE
LOS ANGELES™
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Dean of Computer
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When visitors walk into the brand new Wacom® Cintiq® lab at the Los Angeles Film School, they might think they have stumbled onto H.G. Wells' time machine. In the middle of the room is a stairway to an elevated platform that is illuminated by spotlights. Twenty-six desks surround the platform, with futuristic-looking Wacom Cintiq 21UX interactive pen displays atop each one and large flat-panel monitors are mounted on the walls.

The lab is home to the Los Angeles Film School's new Computer Animation program, which enrolled its first class this year. Appropriately, it was designed on a Cintiq in Autodesk Maya by the program's dean, Bobby Milly. Formerly a senior character modeler at Electronic Arts, Milly wanted to create a classroom where students could learn animation techniques on Cintiqs from the start. He included the raised platform for models in drawing classes and the wall-mounted monitors to display an instructor's animation techniques for the whole class.

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"When I first saw a Cintiq, I knew it was definitely the way to go," he says. "The pen has a natural feeling for art and makes for an extremely fast and efficient workflow. Plus, my goal is to implement a completely green environment. All of our books are in PDF format and we urge the students to gravitate away from paper and do all of their work strictly on the Cintiq."



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Milly’s enthusiasm for the Cintiq is shared by Frank Silas, who has taught in the Computer Animation program. Silas had his first experiences with Cintiqs while working as an artist at Rockstar Games. He mastered the Cintiq’s brush and pen sensitivity settings and shared this insight with students in an introductory course called Object Perspectives.

“We discussed how to set the sensitivity and switch brushes to get different effects,” he says. “I showed how to create a brush that, at its lowest setting, behaves and feels just like a pencil but at the larger sizes, works just like a paintbrush. Students see that they don’t need to switch between brushes to achieve different effects. It’s a more natural workflow for them, and if they’ve touched paints before, those skills transfer over.”

The Los Angeles Film School is committed to teaching students state-of-the-art technology. Each animation student is furnished with a Cintiq 21UX display and a quad-core Dell® XPS workstation with 8GB RAM running 64-bit Windows® Vista. Software includes Adobe® Production Suite CS4, Autodesk® Maya® 2009 Unlimited and Pixologic® ZBrush®. Students are also given Dell Dimension laptops loaded with identical applications -- and Wacom Intuos® pen tablets -- for doing homework. To ensure continuing skill development even after graduation, they keep the laptop, the software and the Intuos tablet.

Both Silas and Milly believe that learning the Cintiq’s all-digital workflow as beginning animators prepares students for the workplace environments they will encounter and makes them attractive to future employers.

“I think a lot of employers want Cintiq-ready artists,” says Silas. “The digital workflow streamlines the production process and eliminates wrestling with different file formats or scanning hard physical objects into the machine.”

Students enrolled in the Computer Animation program agree. “After working as a 2D artist in the industry for several years and being laid off, I realized I needed an intensive 3D education,” says student Kelly Ellgass. “L.A. Film School’s program is perfect with experienced instructors, a focused curriculum and those great Wacom Cintiq displays!”

“I want students to get so used to the Cintiq that they tell employers, ‘I could do this faster and better if I had a Cintiq,’” adds Milly. “We’re not trying to make our students follow the ten year journey that we did as animators; we want to give them our best solutions and the Cintiq is definitely one of those.”

