SAVANNAH COLLEGE TEACHES THE FINE ART OF ANIMATION WITH ATI'S MOBILITY™ FIREGL™

The School of Film and Digital Media at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) prepares talented students for careers with the world's top film studios by teaching aspiring animators to master the world's most-advanced animation technology using ATI's MOBILITY™ FireGL™.

In their continuing efforts to improve the curriculum and stay ahead of other educational institutions, the faculty recently standardized on HP's Compaq nw8000 mobile workstations powered by MOBILITY™ FireGL™ graphics accelerators from ATI Technologies. These mobile workstations have the ability to run the same demanding 3D applications that were once tied only to large stationary workstations.

Faculty and students using the mobile workstations have the benefit of high powered 3D animation and visualization tools that they can take with them wherever they go-in the classroom, on the set, at home or in the dorm. As a result ATI's graphics technology is getting rave reviews for its 3D performance.

The right technology is Critical

"At its core, the art of animation combines craftsmanship and cutting-edge technology to really bring art to life," says Patricia Beckmann, who oversees 15 professors and up to 400 students who work on 600 different workstations. "The skills of the animator are certainly vital, but the right technology is critical in giving 3D pictures a realism that really wows an audience. The FireGL graphics technology consistently meets or exceeds our high standards and expectations for performance and reliability."

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State-of-the art animation programs used at the school include Adobe After Effects and Premiere, Macromedia Flash, Dreamweaver, Alias Maya, Xpress DV, Discreet 3ds max and Pixar RenderMan, to name just a few.

Complex tasks easily handled

Ms Beckmann, who teaches advanced character animation to graduate students making short films and animated characters, says FireGL graphics has virtually eliminated past problems with animation frames being dropped or only partially rendered in an animation sequence. In addition, she notes that more complex tasks are being handled easily and reliably since the introduction of ATI's FireGL™ graphics technology.

"We are handling much more advanced projects and it's just easier to get around a complex model and get it to move," she says. "Today, I have no problems with high-resolution Maya animation models, whereas prior to adopting the FireGL graphics, we would often rely on a low-res version of the animation in order to be able to see it quickly enough. The MOBILITY™ FireGL™ graphics have given us a new dimension of speed and the ability to work in real time."

Technological evolution

The animation industry's technology changes rapidly and ATI is helping to push the boundaries for animators, she adds. "Since 1995, rendering time has been chopped down from an hour a frame to maybe a minute a frame or less. Today, innovations such as ATI's FireGL graphics technology are giving us better tools, truly streamlining the production pipeline," she says. "There has been a great deal of 3D software progress in recent years but the software advancements could not have taken place without the advanced development in graphics hardware."

FireGL is instrumental to 3D animation. Cheryl Cabrera, a professor of 3D Character Animation at the School of Film and Digital Media, teaches junior, senior and graduate students in 3D character creation and animation. "ATI's FireGL graphics card has been instrumental in letting us work with more complicated 3D animation models and in allowing more complicated movement by those models," Cabrera says.

Real-time special effects

Much of the animation work being taught is geared to motion picture special effects, and being able to work in real time reliably is crucial. "The more complex the character animation, the more we need a graphics card that lets us manipulate an environment in real-time, as opposed to waiting for the computer to catch up with what we're doing," she says.

"ATI's FireGL graphics gives us tremendous possibilities in terms of what we can do in 3D animation, thanks to its speed and graphics capabilities."

Cheryl says much of the work she does involves Maya 3D software that lets animators create 3D animation from scratch, and she has high praise for the way ATI's FireGL™ graphics card brings images to life.

"For 3D character animation, the Mobility FireGL technology, in terms of the 3D capabilities it provides, is really key to our work and success. The FireGL graphics board lets us process information and work in real time."

Savannah College of Art and Design

The School of Film and Digital Media offers undergraduate and graduate programs leading to a Bachelor or Master of Fine Arts degree as well as a Master of Arts degree. Graduates of the school have gone on to create unforgettable special effects for hit films such as Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones, Star Wars Episode III, The Incredibles, The Matrix, and Matrix: Reloaded, A Shark's Tale, Polar Express, as well as a variety of television shows and commercials.

Savannah College of Art and Design, which has more than 50 facilities located in historic Savannah, Georgia. The college has 350 faculty members and more than 6,000 students from every U.S. state and more than 80 countries.

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