

Digital Sets and Environments for Film - Opening Speech

Thank you...

Angela, for your very kind words. I would like to be very brief in my introduction to the seminar today and I would like to try to put the event into perspective.

Those of you who have googled me will know that I am not really in the film business. Not quite yet. I am by education an architect and a design technology advocate by passion. I am also an avid globetrotter and network surfer of the global Computer Graphics community. Being a lover of Architecture in Film and of film in Architecture, I have lately taken the liberty of borrowing the film language as a new tool in my toolbox of visual communication in architecture and design (at Placebo Effects). In a parallel universe I am also seeing myself designing the headquarters of the villain in Harald Zwart's future sci-fi flick. Think James Bond movies. The bad guys always have the coolest houses.

More important, I am finding an enormous untapped potential in the synergetic effects resulting in the use of similar technologies between the fields of computer games, architectural design and visualization and film.

By no means am I alone in seeking these synergies. Between the conferences of the last few years at SIGGRAPH in Los Angeles, Virtuality in Turin Italy, IMAGINA in Monaco and now the defunct 3D Festival in Copenhagen such avenues have been explored and presented to the full.

With the loss of the 3D Festival however, and Norway's geographic position somewhat on the outskirts of Europe and the rest of the world for that matter, I suspect that not too many people in the Norwegian film industry have had the opportunity to learn about some these topics first hand. That is why we are here today.

That is why this seminar is now

The use of technology in film is nothing new. The use of computer technology in film isn't even new - it is at least 30 years old. So the use of digital visual effects and digital sets isn't a novelty anymore - in film it has become such a common phenomenon - in Hollywood movies - it is probably fairly difficult to find a movie that does NOT feature a digital set these days. In Norwegian movies the story is bit different, and in Sweden too.

Åse Klevland, formerly the director of the Swedish Film Institute, pointed out when asked to describe the state of affairs in the Swedish film industry that money for special effects and period movies are very hard to get indeed.

However it is possible to do visual effects and digital sets for small scale productions and there has been done this type of work in Norway, as recent as the comedy “Lange Flate Ballær” directed by Bjørn Fast Nagell and produced by Harald Zwart premiering this past Friday as well as the Swedish film “Storm” directed by Måns Mårland and Björn Stein which digital set work will be presented later today by Drylab.

From my point of view I see at least two interesting avenues to be explored further in relation to the use of 3d sets - or digital sets - technologies in film – the most obvious is what new or extended design possibilities it gives the director and the whole production team. The second avenue is perhaps even more interesting, and it is one which I suspect that Alex McDowell will address, and that is the impact of the use of these technologies in the development and design of the film itself, both as a pre-viz tool and a tool for developing sets and environments that are to be executed with more traditional methods in plaster, wood, steel and stone. Much like what happens in architecture.

You hold or will soon hold in your hands a copy of the Norwegian issue of Popular Science featuring an article about the Science of Hollywood featuring Hollywood’s first scientific advisor John Underkoffler who has been working alongside our keynote speaker today Alex McDowell on several movies. I find this confluence of events, and the congregation of all of you talented people in the audience coming from so many different professions in my mind proves that this seminar is indeed very timely.

We will hear today...

from visual effects designer Eric Hanson of Visura Imaging in LA, from Torgeir Busch and Aksel Jermstad of Drylab in Oslo, from Dayne Cowan of Double Negative in London and from production designer Alex McDowell, CEO of Matter Science and Art about their digital set and environment work for a number of very significant films. The lessons learned from these projects I hope will spark ideas and interest for bringing more spectacular Norwegian and Scandinavian movies into the light.

I think, and this is my personal opinion, that most Norwegian movies lack that larger-than-life stylized-realism that many Hollywood movies bring to the screen. The use of more visual effects and digital sets and environments in Norwegian, and Scandinavian film productions in the future could be one part of the solution to make our films more commercially appealing abroad.

With all the visual effects design talent present in this theatre, all the directors, producers, production designers, writers, actors and other film professionals here and with all of the students from both the Lillehammer School of Film,

Noroff and others, I see no reason why we cannot start to develop a similar talent pool and creative environment here in Norway that Peter Jackson at Weta has achieved in New Zealand. At least I would like to think that this is possible.

Thanks is due

Before I have the pleasure to introduce to you my friend Eric Hanson, I would like to briefly thank a few good people that have made this event possible. We hadn't been here today if it had not been for the great efforts of the people at Ballistic Publishing in Australia who are behind the CGSociety.org and the 3D Festival - in particular Leonard Teo and Dr. Mark Snoswell. Secondly I would like to thank Alex Alvarez and Jill Smolin of Gnomon School of Visual Effects in Hollywood for their most kind hospitality and support. And of course Alex McDowell, Eric Hanson, Dayne Cowan and Torgeir Busch and Aksel Jermstad for taking time out of their busy schedules to share their knowledge with us today.

Last, but not least the Norwegian Film Development and chief of this event Angela Amoroso for so supporting the idea for the seminar with such enthusiasm in the first place and for making this all happen!

I first met Eric Hanson...

at the 3D Festival in Copenhagen in 2003, having known about his pioneering 3d visualization work for some of USA's largest architectural firms since the mid nineties when I started working in this field.

From the architecture scene Eric moved into the feature film visual effects market and his work can be seen in films such as "Stealth", "The Day After Tomorrow", "Cast Away", "Hollow Man", "Mission to Mars", "Bicentennial Man", "Fantasia 2000", "Atlantis", and one of my all-time favorite sci-fi movies "The Fifth Element".

Eric has had tenures with such prominent facilities as Digital Domain, Sony Imageworks, Walt Disney Feature Animation, and Dream Quest Images, specializing in 3D work with Maya, Renderman and Shake. He is also an avid and active teacher of these software packages, having instructed courses on digital visual effects at Silicon Studio, Gnomon, as well as leading the current curriculum on visual effects at University of Southern California's School of Cinema-TV. He has spoken and held workshops at a number of conventions and universities, in the USA as well as abroad.

Eric Hanson is a member of The Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and The Visual Effects Society, and holds a professional degree in Architecture from University of Texas in Austin.

Recently he has pioneered techniques for producing large scale digital environments combining Digital Terrain Models (DTMs or DEMs) with gigapixel resolution panoramic imagery, techniques which he will be teaching to the lucky few at the workshop tomorrow and work which he will also be presenting today.

Eric will also be chairing the panel of all the speakers later this afternoon that will close the seminar.

The floor is yours Eric!

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