

This Little Fish aims to make a very big splash

Many of us have been struggling to keep our heads above water whilst swimming upstream, but the current gets stronger and the flood water keeps rising. So some of us realised that we must either change or die. Amongst them were two AOP members who have just struck out for the further shore of reality with a brave venture that aims to make a huge splash.

The impudent notion

that two top photographers might launch a 3D post production house was spotted lurking at the bottom of several bottles of wine consumed at the Digital Imaging Group's 10th anniversary re-union last year. Both Doug and Carl were founder members of DIG along with Martin Evening, Ian McKinnel, Mike Russell, myself and many others.

Doug has been weaving 3D software into his commercial work since the mid 1990's ("the early days of Bryce landscapes" he says) and Carl has been shooting cars (amongst lots of other things) for nearly as long. They recognised that advanced 3D modeling skills allied to high end car photography and a fistful of top clients was an extremely powerful joint skillset; and timely too, as the whole of automotive photography was racing into the realms of CGI, based on 3D lighting maps, beautiful backgrounds and manufacturers CAD data. (Computer Graphic Imaging and Computer Aided Design)



Synergy (from the Greek syn-ergo, meaning working together, circa 1660) refers to the phenomenon in which two or more discrete influences or agents ("or perhaps even photographers" Ed:) acting together create an effect greater than that predicted by knowing only the separate effects of the individual agents.

This Little Fish is just such a venture. AOP members Doug Fisher and Carl Lyttle started This Little Fish less than a year ago as the first post-production house to bring

Work by Adam Wolfitt

photographers perspectives and skills to 3D work in the automotive field. Since joining forces they have quickly enhanced their reputation for creativity, innovation and prompt delivery to clients such as Nissan, Nike, Samsung and Barclays. They are using Bunkspeed's revolutionary software, "hyperShot" and "hyperDrive" to offer art directors and creatives realtime rendering (sic) on laptop machines, something that was unthinkable even three years ago.

Why Bunkspeed? Because, as

Carl says "they are the only people who seriously get where this is all going!" The first really powerful rendering software that will run happily on a laptop, Bunkspeed enables visual feedback on raytraced, global illumination scenes within seconds rather than hours, an absolute boon for creative departments that can now make instant decisions on the composition of a finished photorealistic image anytime, anywhere.

In a very short space of time they had set out their business

plan and started remodeling their respective businesses. Working very long hours Doug transferred his workflow and rendering equipment to W1 while Carl was ripping out his studio to make room for 12 image processing and retouching workstations and a secure server room.

Entirely financed with their own hard earned money they embarked on a blizzard of spending. As Carl says bravely "Everything in our lives is pooled here - It cannot fail"

moofe

Nor is it likely to fail, because apart from a strong and continuing relationship with their UK clients who have been buying Doug and Carl's services for CGI and photography for years, This Little Fish is also breaking new ground with a 3D Library called "oofe". This has it's own dedicated space in the revamped offices and already employs 10 people.

moofe will go live on 1 July 2008. moofe will generate and then licence photographic and data packages of car

backgrounds shot to an intelligently researched car shooters brief that will include all the necessary angles from all the necessary elevations. The images will come at the highest possible quality fully colour matched and complete with properly calibrated lighting maps. At launch, moofe will have 1,000 locations – with at least 10 different shots per location and all with matching HDRI files Part of the moofe library deal will be a preview package of software so that potential clients can check that a background really works with a low resolution render, before committing themselves to serious money.

Designed to be consistent and calibrated throughout, each package has GPS data, and includes a reference "moofecube" aligned on the target surface to give very precise data about camera angle and location and to make dropping the 3D car "model" into place



The "cube" which is used when shooting TLF's backplates to give precise lighting and dimensional information GPS data is also recorded for each location

as simple as possible. Working at such high quality has involved buying or leasing a lot of brand new kit including 4 Spheron HDRi 360° cameras, 4 Hasselblad H3D Mk11's with 39 Mpx backs (and lots of wide lenses).

Carl says of "moofe" that it is not principally about saving clients money. Their complete backplate and lighting map packages will undercut some things involved in a live shoot. But moofe's most important feature is that a complete, properly shot location will be available instantly, without location finding, weather hassles or any of the hazards of sending someone somewhere to recce or shoot a background. 'moofe' already has, on staff, two experienced two man location teams who are out in the field (Australia right now, Iceland last month) shooting backgrounds and matched HDR lighting maps. At launch in July 2008 "moofe" will have 1000 location packages available and will aim to add 50 sets a month.

Doug's old £40,000 RenderDrive RD6400 equipment ("History" says Doug sadly) lives in a completely new air conditioned server room. The new server houses 40 terra bytes of storage and is " – already nearly full!" says Carl glumly.

This Little Fish are currently working with very large data sets, on both 32bit and 64bit workstations able to handle 12k renders. Before too long all software will support 64bit OS and they look forward to increasing the render resolution they can deliver, knowing their original photographic quality will sustain this jump.



Doug Fisher and Carl Lyttle took time out to attend CgAM 2008 in March 2008. CgAM is the world's leading CGI conference and Carl used his speakers slot to introduced This Little Fish to the Conference while colleague Eoin O'Connor launched moofe, their new venture into 3D stock imagery.

While at Getty Images, Eoin O'Connor was instrumental in launching Edit magazine and developing the marketing launch for their Japanese site. Working in partnership with leading photographers, moofe will encourage a change of pace in product marketing through the increased adoption of CG at source. Eoin's pedigree includes experience with global brands in

design, marketing and communication. He currently handles business development and strategy for moofe as they approach a launch date of July 1st 2008.

The full list of speakers at CgAM 2008 reads like a 3D Hall of Fame Wet Dream.

Amongst the notable speakers were Sheena Duggal, Visual Effects Supervisor and Director for Sony Picture's Imageworks; and from the ranks of software and hardware engineers for the new 3D industry were Tom Engdahl President and CEO of Radiance Technologies and Paul Debevec who pioneered and developed the techniques for illuminating computer-generated scenes with real-world lighting

captured through high dynamic range photography and went on to lead the development of a series of Light Stage devices for capturing and simulating how objects and people reflect light, recently used in films such as SpiderMan 2 and Superman Returns.

Camera manufacturer Gerhard Bonnet CEO of Spheron VR AG who started his career as a scientist, became fascinated by photography, and saw the potential of a digital panoramic camera in late 1997 was there. He spoke about Spheron's newest offering is the SpheroCam HDR, with a 26 f-stop dynamic range and a full spherical field of view, which can capture almost every real-world luminosity value, from the darkest shadows through to the brightest sunlight – in a single scan.

Tom Weisz has a strong interest in emerging and integrated media creation, motion graphics, CGI exploration, design and storytelling. Prior to joining Autodesk (who own Maya, the industry standard 3D package) he was a Group Creative Director at the Designory, and Director of New Media at BBDO. He has been VP Creative Director for Global Hue, Chief Creative Officer for Organic, and Design Director, Brand Integration Group Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide.

Richard Chuang left PDI/DreamWorks early 2008 to start a new company. After spending 27 years in helping to build the largest CG film production studio in the industry, he is now taking a fresh look at how to capture the creativities of the next generation of talents in the new world of digital content creation and multi-

channel deliveries.

All in all quite an event and definitely the right place to be seen and also a place where they are likely to be able to reach the most senior executives from various car manufacturers who hold the key to the crown jewels.

CAD data

The whole technique of 3D modeling and CGI rendering depends 100% on engineering data from the manufacturers in-house design studios. Without the highest quality data it is, says Doug Fisher, incredibly difficult to make photorealistic renders. Yet the manufacturers often deny this vital data even to those working on their product accounts. Doug Fisher says that they sometimes get raw data that

is so poor that it can take endless hours of painstaking retouching to clean up the lines and details and achieve a really good model.

In their frustration they sometimes resort to completely re-scanning a car with their own Mephisto 3D scanner from 4dDynamics to get proper detail. But this process is expensive and time consuming and worst of all, requires getting hold of a car; tricky if it hasn't yet been built! And all along they know that the manufacturer has micron perfect engineering data but simply won't release it to any but their most trusted suppliers.

Photography has changed more in the last decade than it did in the century before that; and it's never going to stop. This latest evolution is going to make all product photography unrecognisable before long and the fear for photographers is that they may get thrown out with the bath water.

If you want to know where automotive photography went – it went that'a'way!

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