Game Character Artist

Spotlight

Are you an avid gamer? Today's video game landscape is teeming with all sorts of exciting games of varying genres and storylines, but these games would be vapid and boring without rich expressive characters to drive the story. These characters are designed by game character artists and advances in technology have allowed these artists to push the limit of what's possible in video games.

Personal Connection

Game character artists take ideas from game developers and produce concept artwork for review. From here they will render the characters in 3D taking into consideration the style of the world that they exist in and the challenges that the animators will face. Becoming a game character artist is all about the artistic factor, along with learning about the science behind animation:

- Do you love video games?
- Do you like to draw?
- Are you interested in coding and computer programming?
- Do you like worldbuilding?
- Do you like to write and tell stories?

Other Connections

Even if you don't end up becoming a game character artist, there are many different career paths that are involved in and are a part of helping care for animals, including:

- Using your coding skills to improve the programs that game developers and artists use as a software engineer or developer
- Becoming a story-writer and creating fantastical worlds for video games to draw inspiration from
- Writing scripts and storylines for games to be built around as a video game writer
- Becoming an animator and using 3D modeling software to execute the game designer's vision
- Designing and producing your own video games as a video game designer
- Working as an illustrator for designers or writers and providing imagery for their imaginary worlds
- Working alongside game designers and programmers to ensure a video game works flawlessly before they send the game out to the market as a video game tester

Fun Facts

Some nerdy trivia about your favorite video game characters:

Mario was supposed to ride Yoshi as soon as early as Super Mario Bros, but hardware limitations held the popular green dinosaur back 6 years until Super Mario World.

Minecraft players' worst nightmare, the creeper, was created on accident when one of the character animators botched the design for one of the game's harmless pigs.

Talk about being in your brother's shadow, Mario and Luigi have no official last name, but since they're referred to as the 'Mario Bros' one can only assume that they can be properly addressed as Mario Mario and Luigi Mario.

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STEM Connection

Here are just a few ways that new and emerging technologies are transforming the game character artist's profession:

- Increased graphics capabilities are blurring the line between animation and live action: Do you ever revisit video games from your childhood and scoff at the graphic quality? That's because video game animators are tirelessly striving for realism. Character artists have their work cut out for them as graphics improve and game characters are expected to be rendered with a certain realism. There is no ceiling on the potential of graphic quality and sooner or later even the most experienced gamers may not be able to tell the difference between animated video games and live action film. Read more.

- 2D or 3D, make your choice: Notably different technical skills are required for 2D and 3D animation. While 2D is quite charming and has certainly carved out its niche in gaming, 3D is the industry's dominant medium currently, and game character artists should look to embrace it as 3D gaming is becoming more immersive than ever. Read more.

- Facial animations are bringing video games to life: Video games have been voiced by actors for decades. Full voice characters are easier to connect with and provide a multi-sensory storytelling experience. Today, game animators are skilled enough to match the facial expressions of the characters with the inflection of the actors' lines. These advancements in something as subtle as facial expressions can really immerse you in a video game and connect you with the characters. Read more.

- Artificial Intelligence is getting eerily smart: One of the most enriching parts of any video game is the interaction with in-game characters (NPCs). Classically, these NPCs have served the simple purpose of moving the player along in the story, but the potential exists to grant NPCs their own agency. This would allow them to respond according to every unique player's actions. Future gaming AI may be able to have novel interactions, providing a singular gaming experience for each and every player. This poses a rewarding challenge for character artists who will have to design the NPCs universally and refine them to move fluidly through every action and reaction. Read more.

- Full Immersion could be a precursor to teleportation and alternate reality existence: Full Immersion is the idea of embedding your consciousness into an artificial body. As it pertains to gaming, your senses, thoughts, and actions would have one-to-one consequences on your in-game character. Additionally, you would be able to see, hear, and feel the game as if you were actually there. Read more.

Articles, Videos, and Podcasts of Interest

Watch a video about the evolution of facial animation in video games and how modern characters are able to convey emotion and enhance the story.

Youtube Channel Riot Games created a special video about game character art. Watch here to learn some of the key things game artists consider throughout the modeling process.

Read an interesting article that compares game art and animation design to artistic practices throughout human history.

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Journeys to Becoming a Game Character Artist

The journey to becoming a game character artist is constantly changing, but a passion for art and a knack for creative solutions are the most important elements of a successful career. This is one career you can get started on in high school.

Read about one young man's journey to being a game artist:

Brian Thompson loved to draw as a kid. He loved it almost as much as he loved running around outside with his brother, pretending they lived in a fantasy world. "With my nose deep in these stories and my hand drawing all the time, my sense of visual storytelling began to take form." In high school, Brian's teachers helped him find his own artistic style. He was exposed to the history of illustration and the ancient techniques of drawing by hand. Brian went on to apply to the College of Design at the University of Washington to study illustration and entertainment design. Here Brian honed his skills and developed a passion for his craft. After school, he worked at a number of jobs in entertainment design, before finally ending up at Big Fish Studios.

Brian recommends that aspiring game artists draw every day and draw what they love. He sees too many portfolios that are full of what other people want to see. Brian also recommends taking up other artistic mediums like sculpting, wood-working and screen printing as well as getting some technical experience like CAD drafting and computer programming. Ultimately, Brian stresses that a career in game art is about following your passion.

Read more about Brian's journey here.

Read about one man's preparation for an illustrious career in concept art:

Tyler James is an award winning concept artist and illustrator. Tyler has completed projects for Blizzard Entertainment, Cryptozoic and Fantasy Flight Games. As a kid, Tyler enjoyed drawing, collecting comics and playing Magic the Gathering. Tyler was fascinated by the fictional creatures that filled his games and comics. Tyler went through formal art training at an art institute, but he also took accompanying classes in character design and figure drawing.

Tyler says that the most important considerations when producing concept art are anatomy, material, and lighting. He recommends training in 3D modeling software to aspiring game artists because they allow you to experiment with these considerations and develop an understanding of a digital interface. Tyler admits that a career as a game concept artist is a lot of hard work, but he confirms that it won't feel like a ton of work if you're truly passionate. His best advice is to jump at potential opportunities and keep striving for more.

Read more about Tyler's story here.

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