FacialStudio Gives Good (Um)... Head

BY BIJAN TEHRANI

FacialStudio is a plug-in for 3ds max that helps create, modify, texture, animate and lip-sync human heads. Motion capture can facilitate the job of facial animation by simplifying the task, but tends to limit creativity and provide unreliable results. Morphing seems to be most animators' solution-of-choice because it allows for more artistic control. The only problem is, morphing even a short piece of facial animation can mean a humongous amount of work. That's because when an object is morphed, all states of the object must be carefully planned out and sliders must be created for each stage of the animation.

Now, with FacialStudio, the task of facial animation has become extremely easy and fast. Once this plug-in is installed, you will find it in the 'create' panel of 3ds max. With only a click of the mouse you can create a fully modifiable generic head. You'll be able to choose the general shape of the head (long, round... etc.), the age, sex, muscle defi-

nition and ethnicity. FacialStudio also allows you to mix features together or even create caricature style features.

You can also modify all the shapes that create the face and head and the individual features that make up the head such as the ears, eyes, tongue, nose, forehead, eyebrows, cheeks and jowls. The custom modification tools make it easy to define the area you wish to modify. For example, when modifying the eyes there are transforms available that give you complete control over their placement, separation, depth and rotation angle. You'll also have control over the size and shape of all the individual parts that make up the eye, such as the eyelids and the eyeballs.

If you have a photo of a person or a sketch of the character you want to create, you can scan and import that image into 3ds max. Then, using FacialStudio, you can very easily modify your character to match the sketch or photo.

Sliders make it easy to create quick animations and see results in realtime. Another wonderful feature of FacialStudio is its ability to work with other lip-sync packages. After you analyze your sound recording in one of these packages, just transfer the data to max's track view. FacialStudio will adopt the data and synchronize it to create lip-synch animation for your character. FacialStudio's phonetic feature automatically creates sliders for individual sounds, making animation of dialogue tracks a breeze.

FacialStudio from Di-O-Matic rose well above my expectations. I express my full admiration for the Di-O-Matic artists who have created this magnificent piece of software. In future additions, however, I would like to see a stand-alone version of FacialStudio with a body studio that combines both facial and body animation.

www.di-o-matic.com

Rating: ***** Seal of Excellence

Our Rating System   * Lousy   ** OK   *** Good   **** Very GOOD   ***** *Animation Magazine*'s Seal of Excellence