

Facial Studio

Time to face facts – creating the perfect mug has never been easier

BY PETE DRAPER

PRICE \$699
(£480)

SUPPLIER
Di-O-Matic

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MINIMUM SYSTEM

- PC
- Intel-compatible 300MHz or greater, Windows NT4 (SP4), 2000 or 98, 128MB RAM, 50MB HD, OpenGL graphics card

MAIN FEATURES

- Parametric mesh
- Skin shader and composite material
- Phonemes generator
- Compatible with UVW mapping and MeshSmooth
- Muscles-based deformations

Facial Studio is a simple-to-use 3ds max 4 plug-in that enables you to create the perfect base head model – a simple parametric mesh which you can easily tweak and deform for superb results. The mesh itself allows for any possible deformation, with seams, folds and creases automatically put in all the right places as you mould your figure. Alongside the main head mesh are other useful elements, such as teeth, tongue and eyes (complete with iris).

To deform the mesh into a shape other than the default one (which is a combination of male, female, anime and caricature), you simply select Sub-Objects and amend the parameters – thereby pushing, pulling, deforming, scaling and moving the selected attribute to the right shape.

It really is that simple. From start to finish, we managed to shape the base head mesh to something that resembled our editor's own noggin [*Cheeky – Ed.*] in a matter of minutes – something that would have taken hours to perfect had we been using a non-parametric equivalent.

To help guide the user to the required facial attributes, the *Facial Studio* primitive is broken up into Sub-Object categories. Some knowledge of anatomical terms and definitions is helpful here, especially for the nose – but even without this knowledge you can pretty much hit the ground running, thanks to Di-O-Matic's concise online help guide.

Of course, you can tweak and modify all the presets, as well as extra features (Anime, Asian, East European, Fat, Muscle, Young, Old, and so on) to your liking. Once your head is shaped up, it's quite amusing to tweak these settings to see how your creation looks under such unusual circumstances.

CREATE THE PERFECT BASE HEAD MODEL IN MINUTES

TALK TO THE HAND

Animation is straightforward: phonemes in the form of spinners make lip-synching a breeze, and there's a library of basic expressions – sadness, anger, disgust, surprise – to expedite the modelling process. However, tweaking these has a

PICTURE COURTESY OF: Di-o-matic (Artist: Laurent M. Abecassis)



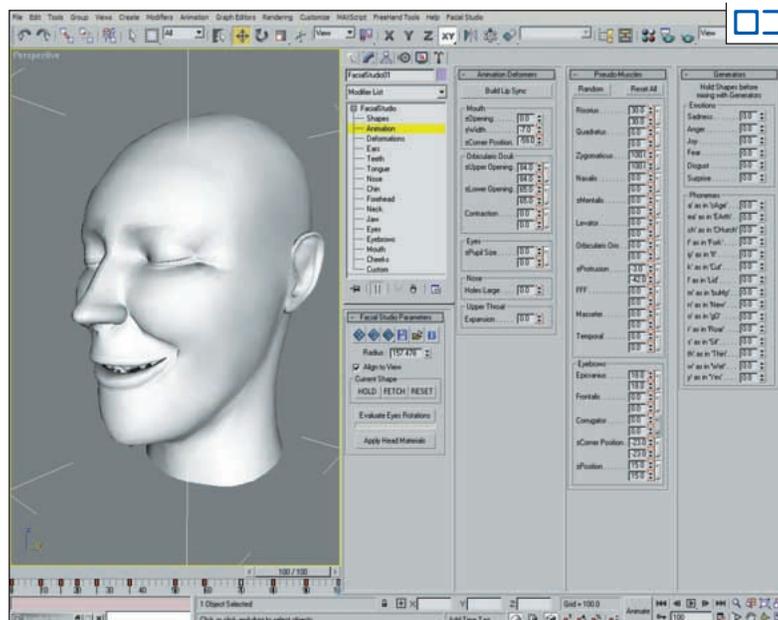
considerable effect on keyframes, so manually amending these can be a little difficult. The software is also compatible with *Ventriloquist*, *FatLips* or *Maggie*: the data is simply imported and converted to *Facial Studio*'s LipSync deformations.

In short, Di-O-Matic's software is a truly powerful piece of kit. If you're someone who considers stock body parts only a slight step up from 3D clip-art, think again. The sheer number of animatable and deformable parameters, concisely organised for maximum flexibility, will surely win you over. But while easy to use, hardened modellers and animators may find the mesh a little limiting (if you want to add or remove eyes, for example).

Still, the speed with which you can create a head is second to none. And realistic skin shaders and materials, which mimic skin more effectively than *max*, make it worth the price tag alone.

[01] Animation is simple: by amending a few spinner settings over a series of frames, you can produce convincing lip-synching animation in next to no time.

[02] Fashion your own skin materials using *Facial Studio*'s built-in material shader. This simulates skin more accurately than Phong or Blinn shading.



3Dworld Verdict



PROS

- Ease of use • Parametric creation and amendment • Additional skin shader
- Organised layout

CONS

- Some problems with Undo
- Amending Generator spinners can occasionally result in loss of expressions