

From Production Artist to Educator: Preparing for the Change

Ed Kramer
Art Institute of Colorado
Denver, CO, USA
ed.kramer.cgi@gmail.com

Abstract:

There have been a number of paradigm shifts in the Computer Graphics industry over the last decade which have fundamentally changed the nature of employment and career stability. No longer can a CGI Artist expect a career path as a full-time employee for a single company for an extended period of time. Globalization, the proliferation of tax incentive programs in certain countries, lack of adequate CGI artist protections or organization, tightening of budgets by Studios with unrealistic production expectations, the ubiquitous nature of formerly-specialized high-end graphics software and the logarithmic rise in computational power and data storage capacity, at lower relative cost, have all contributed to a marketplace increasingly open primarily to a younger, more agile and mobile workforce.

For these, and a variety of other more personal reasons, many seasoned veterans of the Production world have begun considering a career shift into the scholarly realm of Higher Education. Whether for family stability, the desire to pass one's personal torch of expertise to a new generation, the gratification of launching careers for the best and brightest students, the desire to do academic research on specialized topics, or the sheer joy of molding a student into the right kind of professional, this panel will share their personal experiences about why they moved from production to education, and enlighten us with anecdotes about life in the University and other educational environments.

The panel will feature the following speakers: Ed Kramer (Art Institute of Colorado), Moderator, and Panelists John A Berton, Jr. (Drexel University), Vince de Quattro (Independent Education Consultant), Terrence Masson (Northeastern University), Tim McLaughlin (Texas A&M University.) and Tad Leckman (formerly Academy of Art University, currently Senior Training Manager, Blizzard Entertainment) This renowned group of former Senior Artists all worked at Industrial Light + Magic for a significant period of their careers, and their names grace the credit lists of many of the most well-known

Visual Effects movies in film history. At one time, each panelist had his own Senior-Level job function in ILM's Production Pipeline, and each now has an equally unique position within an educational environment. Some teach an assortment of specific VFX and CGI courses, while others serve as Chairs of their programs. Others have expertise supervising training at large facilities, consulting about curriculum design, conducting and publishing scholarly research, and lecturing in the US and abroad. All have been active in SIGGRAPH and other professional organizations over the years, including a former SIGGRAPH Conference Chair.

Attendees will be able to ask questions about any aspect of the transition from Production to Education, discussed from the personal perspective of each panelist. The realities of these experiences may be mind-opening and unexpected. (For example, I personally had no idea how much time I would spend grading student work, so I'll share a couple of strategies I've developed for making that process more efficient.) Based on this Panel, attendees will gain the insight needed to evaluate if they have the right stuff and are ready for a career move from the world of Production into the world of Education.

Presenter Bios:

ED KRAMER received his Bachelor of Science degree at Duke University and his Master of Arts in Film Production from the University of Texas, Austin. He has been a professional CGI artist since 1981, working in Hollywood, New York, Atlanta, and for NASA in Houston. In 1992 he helped animate the iconic Columbia Pictures "Lady with a Torch" logo for Kleiser/Walczak Studios, and worked with Douglas Trumbull supervising CGI for one of the Luxor Hotel ridefilms. Hired at ILM in 1994, he became a Sequence Supervisor for the Scarab shots from "The Mummy," the Rock Monster shots from "Galaxy Quest," and the Droid Factory shots from "STAR WARS Episode II" among many others. Since 2010, Ed has been an instructor of CGI Lighting, Modeling, Dynamics, and Portfolio Development, first at the Colorado Film School and currently at the Art Institute of Colorado.

JOHN ANDREW BERTON, Jr. started at the seminal CGI company Cranston Csuri Productions in 1983, joining ILM in 1990. Rising from Technical Director to CG Supervisor to Visual Effects Supervisor, John worked with Directors Stephen Sommers and Barry Sonnenfeld developing the VFX for two of the most well-loved franchises in movie history, "The Mummy"

and “Men In Black” movies. He independently supervised VFX for “I, Robot,” and “Charlotte’s Web,” and had a cameo as the Split Alien Guy in “Men in Black II.” Recently John has taught at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and is currently Assistant Professor at Drexel University in Philadelphia.

VINCE de QUATTRO completed his MFA from USC in 1995 in Computer Animation and Film, and worked for R/Greenberg/LA and Warner Brothers Digital before being hired as a Senior Technical Director at ILM in 1997. He did lighting and cloth simulation work on many films including “Mars Attacks!” “Mighty Joe Young,” “STAR WARS Episode I” and “Pirates of the Caribbean.” In 2005, Vince became Director of the Academy of Art University’s Online Program, and taught lighting, rendering, compositing and dynamics. He is currently an independent consultant on curriculum design, faculty development and industry outreach for University programs.

TAD LECKMAN joined ILM’s Computer Systems Engineering department in 1995. He founded ILM’s “Rebel Mac” Unit, an alternative pipeline team responsible for films like “Star Trek: First Contact.” He moved into Previsualization on “Space Cowboys” and “Planet of the Apes.” From 2002-2006, Tad was a lead faculty at Academy of Art University, and became Chair of Visual Effects at Savannah College of Art and Design where he developed the overall program and curriculum for individual classes. Recently he headed training for Lucasfilm Animation Singapore, and is currently Senior Training Manager for the cinematics team at Blizzard Entertainment.

TERRENCE MASSON literally wrote the book on Computer Graphics. His “CG: 101” is an industry standard reference work. Terrence has contributed work for “South Park,” Digital Domain, Warner Brothers, Dreamworks, and Sony Imageworks, and worked at ILM on films like “Hook,” “Spawn,” “Small Soldiers,” and “STAR WARS Episode I.” He has owned Digital Fauxtography for years, and is a frequent lecturer internationally. Terrence served as Electronic Theater Chair for SIGGRAPH 2006 and Conference Chair for SIGGRAPH 2010. For six years he has been Executive Professor at Northeastern University in Boston, and is Head of the Animation program there.

TIM McLAUGHLIN received his MS from Texas A&M’s Visualization Department in 1994, and was hired at ILM the same year. He moved from Technical Director to Creature Developer to Creature Supervisor, working on such classic films as “Jumanji,” “Mars Attacks!,” “Lemony Snicket” and “War of the Worlds.” He also worked on previsualization tools for George Lucas, and tests for James Cameron’s “Avatar.” In 2008, he returned to Texas A&M as Associate Professor and Department Head of the Visualization Department in the College of Architecture. Tim frequently publishes scholarly research and speaks on numerous topics at SIGGRAPH.