

3D Art Direct Podcast

Session #2

9 Essential Composition Tips for Digital Artists



Paul: This is the 3D Art Direct Podcast with Paul Bussey, Session Two.

Announcer: Welcome to the 3D Art Direct Podcast where it's all about fresh inspiration for 3D digital artists and promoting your portfolio through multiple media. Sign up and discover our free monthly online magazine at www.3DArtDirect.com for in-depth interviews and vibrant galleries. Now your host, the editor of 3D Art Direct Magazine, Paul Bussey.

Paul: I have a very special offer for those of you interested in Poser. As you may know, Poser offers a fast way to create and digitally shape humans, animals and entire scenes in 3D. You can render these in Poser or have these creations imported into other 3D packages. The power of bringing human figures into a 3D scene really lets you start telling stories on a greater level, so it's well worth investing in something like Poser in your collection of 3D tools.

Listen out to the end of the podcast for when this offer is available. There's only a short window for it. Find out where exactly you can get this on the 3DArtDirect.com website.

Well, we've just published Issue 17 of the mag and I'd like to say thank you to Mickey Mills, my assistant editor, who helped me put together this issue. He found two artists that have formed a great collaboration for producing artwork in the Extrasolar Project. We have Bjorn Malmberg. He's from Sweden and he's used Hexagon, Vue, and Poser and started digital artwork way back in 1997. He's collaborating with Ryan Malone from North Carolina in the U.S. Ryan's inspiration came from the Isaac Asimov stories, the Foundation and Robot series, which I have a great affinity for. He's a Vue artist and he started in 2006.

Bjorn's URL is at arial-x.deviantart.com and Ryan's is at jrmalone.deviantart.com. Go over to their portfolios, have a look and comment on their work, especially on the Extrasolar Project.

I'd also like to mention our two other artists in Issue 17. We have Lewis Moorcroft, Mojoworld artist, with his new website AstralRealm.co.uk and he features artwork as well as music there. I'll include a small clip of his music.

That's pretty cool music. Lewis has 10 tracks you can listen to which run for around 60 minutes from his Astral Realm website. You can download all of the tracks, as well, as one mp3 file.

We also have Glenn Clovis who has created a 17-step tutorial on how to create a nebula scene. Check that out and see if you can follow his steps in Photoshop to create your own nebula.

Issue 17 is themed with the idea of collaborations. As the editorial mentions, creating digital art, although rewarding, can be a solitary experience. It's just you and your work station. All those hours can be burned away and you may have your next masterpiece ready to upload but there hasn't been another human soul in the process. How do you connect with other digital artists? Let us know. What's your favorite forum? Do you have the opportunity to go to live conferences? Collaborating with another artist on the project offers the advantage of bringing together additional strengths to a creation.

For example, one artist may be excellent with landscapes or starscapes. Another may have good experience with Poser figure. Combining this example of skills could really generate something quite eye catching.

There's also the gain of bringing hardware assets together. If the artists are close by, then it's possible to network machines together to take advantage of a render farm. Some 3D art packages allow the sharing of processing power to render the final image more quickly. This is really useful if it has a lot of included, for instance, Poser figure elements and it will be rendered to a high resolution. I believe the Vue package has this render farm type option.

Digital art really lends itself to cooperative projects. Individual elements of a 3D scene can be assigned to each artist, even down to the textures or materials of each object. It's almost like the construction of a movie set with a crew knowing which parts they are responsible for. Indeed, film production designers and most commercial theaters have begun producing scale drawings with the aid of computer drafting programs such as AutoCAD or Vectorworks.

Now, with more artists in collaboration, specialists on model making, lighting, natural elements, figures, and so on, could be engaged, but this would really need an overall art director. For instance, in a major film production, this would be known as the Supervising Art Director, to ensure that everything fits together well. It's more common to find a group effort with just two or three artists involved in a collaboration project.

Our main feature is non-essential composition tips for digital artwork. Now what is composition? That's a Latin word meaning arrangement. In terms of photography or in digital art, it is arranging the elements in the scene to make the final image aesthetically pleasing. Now, when I say elements, what do I mean? It's every 3D object in the scene and its physical arrangement. It's the position and use of the camera, the lighting, the textures used on the objects.

Now, out of the nine, our first one is depth. Because digital art is a two-dimensional medium, we have to choose our composition carefully to convey a good sense of depth. You can create depth in an image by including objects in fore, middle and background. Another use for composition technique is overlapping where you deliberately partially obscure one object with another. The human eye naturally recognizes these layers and mentally separates them out, creating an image with more depth.

Now, in the example of one piece of artwork we have here by Brian Christensen, which is called *Escape Velocity*, overlapping is used with good effect by the planet overlaying its moon. The foreground spacecraft includes a leading line of an exhaust trail to create even more depth in the foreground portion of the image.

Now my second composition tip is to do with framing. The real world is full of objects which make perfect, natural frames, such as trees or archways. In 3D digital art, the choice of frames is, of course, even greater. You can simply make them up. By placing frames around the edge of the composition, you help to isolate and place attention on the main subject. The result is a more focused image which draws your eye naturally to the main point of interest.

Now in an example I've put on the post for this session, I have Warren Turner's *Pans Labyrinth* which is created with Mojoworld. Warren uses effective framing to create a sense of depth and exploration in this image. In fact, as well as the main foreground frame, multiple frames from the lattice structure create further depth and mystery in the image.

Cropping is a useful composition method. An image can lack impact because the main subject is so small it becomes lost among the clutter of its surroundings. By cropping tight around the subject, you eliminate the background's noise, ensuring the subject gets the viewer's undivided attention.

My fourth composition tip is to do with symmetry and patterns. Now, patterns and symmetry are all around us, both in natural and in manmade formats. They both can make for very eye-catching compositions, especially in situations where they are not expected. You can try upsetting the balance of symmetry in an image. You could place an object to weight the image on one side to create a kind of attention or a focal point to the scene.

With digital art, it's easy to introduce patterns using repeated textures that look seamless when placed together. This is particularly powerful in landscape scenes where you can use rock or ground textures to good effects. Take Lewis Moorcroft's Patrol image rendered in Mojoworld that has a fantastic ground texture that he's used as a great example of patterns.

Composition tip number five is viewpoint. 3D digital art has a large advantage in that the virtual camera can be placed with ease anywhere in the scene. Because of this, very interesting or unusual viewpoints can be accomplished. Viewpoint has a huge impact on the composition of an image. As a result, it can greatly affect the story that the shot conveys. Rather than just using an eye level point of view, which we often default to when we're not thinking about composition, consider placing the virtual camera from high above, down at ground level, from the side, from the back, from a long way away, from very close up, and so on.

For a good example of viewpoint, look at the image of Kid Soldier by Wolfgang Sigl. This makes good use of viewpoint by having the virtual camera at quite a low position. It's looking up towards the child and the soldier. The soldier, from this viewpoint, looks quite menacing, quite large, and quite overbearing for the child who's also in the picture.

Composition tip number six is background. Having a busy background will lessen the impact that the foreground objects are trying to make. The background will tend to blend into the foreground in this case. A real world or virtual camera has a tendency to flatten the foreground and background. This can often ruin an otherwise great photo or 3D digital image. Don't crowd your background. Make it a little plainer and more unobtrusive in order to power up the foreground.

Now the seventh tip, rule of thirds, is quite a well-known and talked about composition effect. Imagine that your image is divided into nine equal parts by two horizontal and two vertical lines. Try to place the most important elements in your scene along these lines or at the points where they intersect, which is sometimes known as the power points. Doing so will add balance and interest to your render.

Now it's actually quite amazing that a rule so seemingly mathematical can be applied to something as varied and subjective as a photograph, but it works and surprisingly well. The rule of thirds is all about creating the right aesthetic tradeoffs. It often creates a sense of balance without making the image appear too static and a sense of complexity without making the image look too busy.

What's usually most important is that your main subject or region isn't always in the direct middle of the image. For landscapes, this usually means having the horizon line in the upper or lower third of the image. For subjects, this usually means

placing them to either side of the image. This can make landscape compositions much more dynamic and gives subjects a sense of direction.

Tip number eight is leading lines. When we look at an image our eye is naturally drawn along lines. By thinking about how you place lines in your composition, you can affect the way we view the image by pulling us into the picture towards the subject or on a kind of a journey through the scene. There are different types of lines you can think of to gain this effect such as curvy, diagonal, straight, zigzag, radial, and so on. Each of these can be used to enhance the image's composition. Now you could start from the edge of the frame, preferably as close as possible to one of the corners, and lead into the image or towards the focal point of your image.

Examples of leading lines in the real world could be streams, railway tracks, roads, or some kind of geological feature.

Tip number nine, the last tip, is balancing the weight of elements. Placing your main subject off-center creates a more interesting image, but it can leave a gap in the scene which can make it feel empty. You should balance the weight of the subject in the scene by including another object of lesser importance to fill the space.

Now, a good example of balancing the weight of elements is the idea of a see-saw. If you have two people of the same weight, they need to be the same distance from the center fulcrum, which is the pivot of the see-saw. However, it is also possible to balance the see-saw with two people of wildly different sizes and weights by making the larger one sit closer to the fulcrum. The same principles of balance apply exactly when you're composing a scene if you think of the center of an image as being the fulcrum about which the differing elements need to balance out in their visual weight and importance within the overall image.

That's my brief outline of nine composition tips. Now, they're not really rules. Do we have to stick with these tips or rules? No. Breaking the rules may actually benefit the final image. As you compose more and more artwork you may just get a better gut feeling about what looks right and what could be improved. I suppose I see these tips as a range of ingredients that make a good recipe for the final image. Just take what you need to try to improve things.

By all means, have a look at your own portfolio and look at your 3D digital art images where you've made successful use of cropping, depth, framing, leading lines, balancing the elements, rule of thirds, symmetry and patterns, background, or viewpoint and post or give us a link to any images that you feel fit one of these categories of composition tips.

Let me know of your 3D digital art images in the sci-fi and fantasy genres where you've made good use of a composition method of either cropping, depth,

framing, leading lines, balancing the elements, rule of thirds, symmetry and patterns, background, or viewpoint. You can post a comment and link to your artwork in the 3DArtDirect.com Session Two podcast blog post or you could send me a copy of your artwork to our drop box in the "Get Published" section on the 3D Art Direct blog.

Now to our Poser special offer. It's for Poser Version 8, which is one version old, but it is 70% off from \$250 reduced down to \$77. It comes with eight poseable figures, four male and four female, and you can modify the figures with a tremendous amount of control where entire bodies can be customized to different weights and sizes. Hair sculpting has been a bit tricky in Poser, but now it comes with a few pre-made hairpieces that have their own controls to set the length, fullness, and so on. These can be animated so hair can sort of blow back and forth in the virtual wind for a more realistic result. Now, you also get 2.5 gigabytes of props to go with the figures. These can be anything from laptops to a convertible car, and importantly, for 3D Art Direct listeners, some space fantasy gear. Legacy clothing for before Version 8 can be used with a Legacy clothing wizard, which is useful. The interface in this version of Poser has been given a good makeover. It's much easier to pick things from the library as you create your figure, so much improved over previous versions.

To get this special offer please go to 3DArtDirect.com/specialoffer. Note that this special offer is only available from the 7th of June to the 7th of July, 2012.

Thanks for listening to Session Two. Remember to let us know of any science fiction or fantasy collaborative artwork that you've been creating. Bye for now.

Announcer: Thanks for listening to the 3D Art Direct Podcast at www.3DArtDirect.com.