Interviewee Profile

Li Ziyuan is a freelance artist working in digital art and 3D-related production. As an independent creator, he is involved in multiple stages of the production process and has a general understanding of industry workflows.

Interview Notes

Q1: What does a typical day look like for a 3D character animator in a studio? What are the main responsibilities?

A:
The interviewee noted that they have not personally worked as a 3D character animator, so they could not provide a fully experience-based description of the role. However, based on general industry knowledge, the role is highly specialized.

A 3D character animator typically works according to the director's or project's requirements, focusing on designing character movements and performances within a shot. Their responsibilities include creating believable motion, controlling timing, and delivering expressive character performances.

Within the production pipeline, character animation usually occurs in the following sequence:
Character Design → Modeling → Texturing → Rigging → Animation → Rendering

This indicates that the role is primarily focused on execution and performance rather than early-stage conceptual design.

Q2: During the early stages of your career, what experiences or methods helped you improve the most?

A:
The interviewee highlighted three key factors:

- **Internships**: These provided valuable exposure to real production environments and industry workflows.
- **Final Graduation Project**: This served as a comprehensive demonstration of skills and became a crucial part of their portfolio.
- **Watching Films and Animations Extensively**: By analyzing high-quality work, they were able to improve their sense of timing, storytelling, and visual standards.

Together, these experiences significantly contributed to their professional development.

Q3: I am currently unsure whether to focus on character design or character animation. Is this a common situation, and what advice would you give for choosing a direction?

A:
The interviewee explained that this is a common situation among students and early-stage creators, as both areas involve creativity and can be equally appealing.

However, from an industry perspective, these two roles belong to different stages of the production pipeline:

- Character Design is part of the pre-production phase
- Character Animation belongs to the later production stage

As a result, the overlap between the two roles is relatively limited.

From a career development standpoint, the interviewee recommended:

- **Specializing in one direction** rather than trying to pursue both simultaneously
- Evaluating personal strengths, including:
    - Natural aptitude
    - Long-term interest
    - Preferred industry (e.g., animation vs game industry)

They also emphasized that both roles require a high level of talent and long-term dedication.

Additionally, the interviewee suggested exploring platforms such as Bilibili and Rednote (Xiaohongshu) to better understand real industry practices and job roles.

Q4: When reviewing portfolios, do studios value complete short films more, or focused demonstrations of specific technical skills?

A:
According to the interviewee, studios generally prioritize **clear demonstrations of specific skills** rather than complete short films.

In particular:

- A fully produced short film is not necessary

- What matters more is the ability to showcase professional-level skills, such as animation quality, motion design, and technical execution

Regarding independent short films, the interviewee pointed out that:

- They require significant time and effort
- They may not be the most efficient way to build a portfolio for employment

The interviewee also mentioned that AI tools are increasingly being integrated into production workflows. Learning how to use AI to improve efficiency and reduce production time is becoming an important skill for future artists.

Reflection

This interview provided me with a clearer understanding of the practical realities of the 3D art industry, particularly in relation to the differences between character design and character animation. Before the interview, I was equally interested in both areas and found it difficult to choose between them. However, the discussion helped me realize that these roles exist at different stages of the production pipeline and require distinct skill sets, making it necessary to focus on one direction in a professional context.

One key insight was the importance of specialization. I had previously hoped to develop multiple skills at the same time, but I now understand that focusing on one area is more beneficial for long-term career development. This has encouraged me to reflect more critically on my own strengths and potential direction.

In addition, my perspective on portfolio development has changed. I used to prefer creating complete short films, valuing narrative and visual completeness. However, I now recognize that, from an industry perspective, clearly demonstrating specific technical skills is more important than producing a fully finished piece. This will influence how I plan my portfolio in the future, with a stronger focus on efficiency and relevance.

The interviewee also mentioned the increasing use of AI in production workflows. While I acknowledge its potential in improving efficiency, I remain cautious about its role in the creative process. I believe that over-reliance on AI may weaken an artist’s originality and personal expression, which are essential in creative fields. Therefore, I would prefer to treat AI as a supportive tool rather than a primary driver of creative work.

Overall, this interview has given me a more realistic and structured understanding of my future career path, and it will directly influence my approach to skill development and portfolio preparation.