

Machinima for Theater: Interactive animation created for Adam Rapp's play *Stone Cold Dead Serious* (NYC, 2007) is used in Gauthier's program.

NYU Tisch Targets Asia

by Ellen Wolff

When film fans think of New York University-trained filmmakers, they're likely to picture Martin Scorsese or Spike Lee shooting movies in Manhattan. But a new view of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts is emerging—and it's in Singapore. Tisch Asia is already offering a Master of Fine Arts program in film production, and this fall its MFA curriculum in Animation and Digital Arts will begin. Headed by Vice Dean Pari Shirazi, Tisch Asia is operating in a 40,000 square-foot facility in central Singapore that contains sound stages and theaters as well as animation and editing labs and a film library.

The two-year Animation and Digital Arts program has been developed under the leadership of Jean-Marc Gauthier, an interactive artist who's on the Animation and Digital Arts faculty at Tisch's NYC campus. He's also the author of *Creating Interactive 3D Actors and their Worlds* and *Virtual Sets*

and *Pre-visualization for Games, Movies and the Web*. Given his background, it's not surprising that the new curriculum will have a broad focus.

"We want to go towards applications of animation that are not just traditional animation, but the whole range—which tends to be much more diverse than even 20 years ago," he explains. "We want to explore new venues in interactivity and the different uses of animation, whether it's for cell

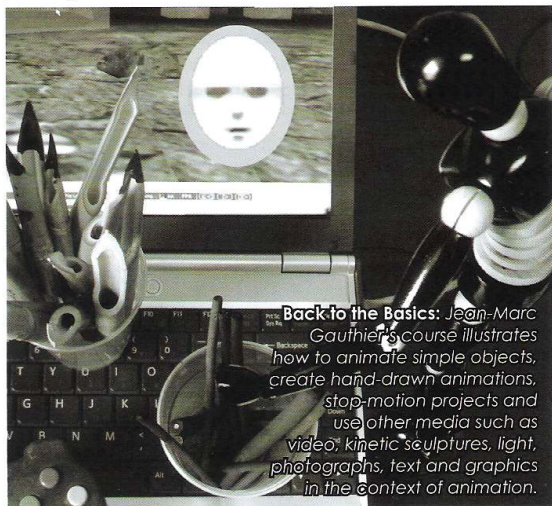
phones or theme parks."

Considering the rising profile of Singapore—with the presence of Electronic Arts and George Lucas' animation company—it seems like a natural expansion for NYU. Gauthier notes that SIGGRAPH Asia chose Singapore for its December 2007 gathering, and he hopes that the animation scene there will lead to internships for Tisch students. "Ours will be the first MFA animation program there," he says. "Most of what has been offered is more on the undergraduate level. There's a huge demand now for students who have competence in storytelling and conceptual ideas and not just technical execution, and this program will try to address that."

Scientific visualization is also an important focus of the curriculum, because Gauthier sees career opportunities increasing in that field. "For example, if we think about bringing robotics into our lives we definitely have to think about how those things move—from an animator's point of view and not only from an engineering perspective. Industrial design is one field where complex ideas are being defined through animation."

As a result, the MFA program will include scientific visualization as part of its second-year coursework. However, Gauthier stresses that first-year MFA courses will emphasize fundamentals. "I expect to have at least some students who know too much about computers, so we're going back to the basics and studying motion by observation—maybe without computers."

Another cornerstone of the Tisch Asia animation program will be an emphasis on collaborative projects. As Gauthier sees it, "The master's thesis class will be organized like a production course. I'm trying to build something dynamic that encourages collaboration. Personally, I don't like to see a student trying to do a 'big masterpiece' and never recover from it. A thesis project



Back to the Basics: Jean-Marc Gauthier's course illustrates how to animate simple objects, create hand-drawn animations, stop-motion projects and use other media such as video, kinetic sculptures, light, photographs, text and graphics in the context of animation.

continued on page 44

Opportunities

continued from page 42

is just one step in the career of a student."

Gauthier hopes to foster collaboration by having students work in clusters and not at static workstations. To that end, Tisch Asia will offer a "lending library" of laptops that are loaded with software like Autodesk Maya, Adobe Flash and Virtools, along with NVIDIA graphics cards.

In addition to designing the program, Gauthier is involved in selecting an inaugural class of 32 MFA candidates, which he expects will be divided into two teams of student collaborators. "We're trying to create groups of complementary people in terms of their skills and interests. We want these students to become super-communicators of their ideas. I'm an architect by training, and architecture is very similar to animation in the sense that you can sketch something on a napkin and have people working later on that sketch. I want them to realize the scalability of what they can do."

It will be interesting to see where Tisch Asia will draw its students from,

since Gauthier reports that half of the students for last fall's Film Production MFA program came from the U.S.

Faculty for the program will include teachers from NYU's Manhattan school, but Gauthier hopes to invite animation experts from Asia as well. "The idea is not to duplicate what's



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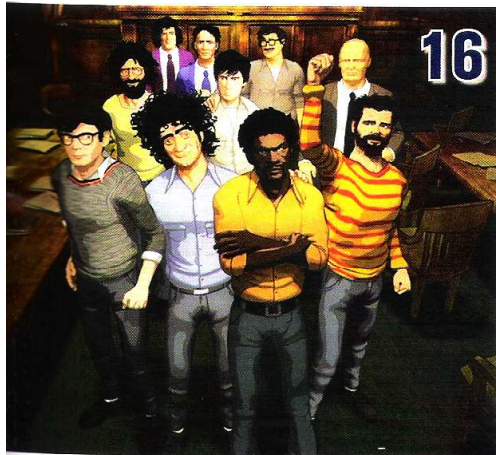


in New York. We don't want to make the mistake of doing a 'franchise' in Asia. It's an opportunity to define what could be the next step for an animation school."

Gauthier is optimistic that Tisch Asia can realize these ambitious plans. "It's a

global vision," he admits. "But I have an intuition that students will be interested in learning animation in Singapore. They think it's where the future lies." ■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects, CG animation and education.



6 Frame-by-Frame

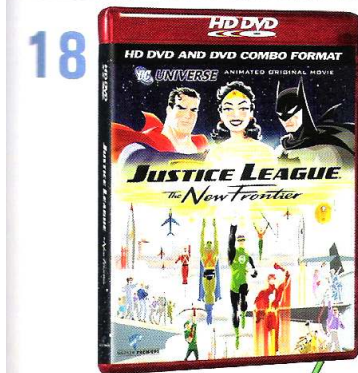
March Animation Planner ... Books We Love ... What's New at Cartoon Movie ... Disney's 101 Dalmatians are barking again.

9 Gaming

9 **Gaming After the Rock Invasion.** GDC Offers a look at what's next in game development. [by Ryan Ball]

12 Feature

12 **Five Eclectic Choices.** How Goofy and Aardman didn't make the cut, while five offbeat Eurocentric shorts nabbed Oscar noms. [by Barbara Robertson] 16 **Mo-Capping the Anti-War Movement.** Brett Morgen's *Chicago 10* uses animation to recreate the trial of the 1968 Democratic National Convention protesters. [by Chris Grove] 17 **Plugged-In Prague.** *Goat Story*, Jan Tománek's distinctive new CG-animated feature, aims to chew up a new place in the Czech artistic landscape. [by Ramin Zahed]



18 **World of Wonders.** Bruce Timm and his skillful team at Warner Bros. Animation explore the retro universe of *Justice League: The New Frontier*. [by Thomas J. McLean] 23 **The Obscure and the Celebrated.** Review of *Dragonlance: Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, Warner Bros.' Academy Awards® Animation Collection and *Minushi*. [by Mercedes Milligan]

24 Television

24 **Watch Out For That Tree ... Again!** *George of the Jungle* swings back into action on Cartoon Network. [by Ryan Ball] 28 **Say 'Ni Hao!' to Nick Jr.'s Newest Star.** *Ni Hao, Kai-Lan* uses Chinese language and culture to educate and inspire. [by Mercedes Milligan] 30 **Cult of Personality.** Using a sketch comedy format, the new *Mr. Men Show* boldly goes where few other preschool toons have dared to roam! [by Ramin Zahed] 32 **Anicomm Awards.** Psyop's *Coke: Happiness Factory* is our pick for 2007's best animated spot. Plus nine other ads that knocked our socks off.



34 VFX

34 **All Creatures Weird and Wonderful.** ILM and Tippett Studio join forces to create the magical world of *The Spiderwick Chronicles*. [by Barbara Robertson] 36 **Adventures in Triumphant Teleporting.** Doug Liman, Kevin Elam and Joel Hynek create a cool traveling method in *Jumper*. [by Ron Magid] 40 **Digital Magic.** Our intrepid columnist comes clean about CES 2008 and focuses on some new tech developments. [by Chris Grove] 41 **Tech Reviews.** Find out about Toon Boom's Digital Pro and Kolor's Autopano. [by Todd Sheridan Perry]



42 Opportunities

42 **NYU Tisch Targets Asia.** A new M.F.A. program offers animation and digital arts studies in Singapore. [by Ellen Wolff] 48 **3D Pete.** Cartoon hero dreams of Oscar glory. [By Mike Fisher]

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Correction: In last month's issue, an article about ADC's project *Action Dad* erroneously referred to the property's creators Tom Hodges and Teri Fortiana-Hodges as DC Comics veterans. Hodges wrote to let us know that neither he nor his wife have worked at DC Comics. Hodges is known for his work with Lucasfilm and Star Wars projects.