

Courtesy photo

Tera Gambill says of her work: "Photography provides me the means to question what we accept as truth in regards to our visions."

Consoles take video games to the Web at industry expo

By Victor Godinez

The Dallas Morning News (KRT)

LOS ANGELES — If you've never been to the Electronic Entertainment Expo, just imagine a rock concert, party and video game arcade rolled into one.

Spread it out over 700,000 square feet, toss in 60,000 people over three days, and pump up the volume, fog machines and laser lights.

That'll give you an inkling of what it was like at the just-concluded E3 show in Los Angeles, where game developers, publishers, investors, retailers, and print, broadcast and Web journalists — plus various industry hangers-on — tried out early versions of the games you'll buy and play during the next year.

Game consoles and PCs made a good showing, but the buzz this year was clearly about online games for the consoles. Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo all say they'll take their console consumers online in some form or another this year.

Sony and the Seals

Sony's centerpiece was "SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals," an online shooting game where you play as a member of an elite military commando squad hunting down terrorists. Set for an August release, when the Sony PS2 modem goes on sale, "SOCOM" is a more cerebral approach to the combat genre, requiring you to coordinate with your teammates to track and kill the terrorists in a variety of environments.

You'll communicate with as many as 16 partners through on-

screen text or by speaking into a microphone headset that can recognize and transmit any one of hundreds of preprogrammed commands, such as "Hold your fire," "I've got the lead" or "Plant the explosives."

Other PlayStation 2 games that looked impressive included "The Getaway," a "Grand Theft Auto III"-type game scheduled for release this winter, and "Ratchet and Clank," a three-dimensional platform game in the Mario vein. Neither is an online title.

Microsoft offerings

Microsoft's offerings focused less on one particular game and instead showcased games that it is publishing itself, as well as some being published by other companies.

When Microsoft launches its Xbox Live network later this year, it will tout its online games "MechAssault," where you climb into a giant robot to blow up friends and surrounding cities, and "Midtown Madness 3," a racing game set in Paris and Washington.

For non-online games, Microsoft showed off "Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge," a visually stunning aerial combat game where you pilot modified World War II planes. The Crimson Skies franchise, which is a ton of fun to play, first appeared on the PC about a year ago, and the Xbox version will hit this fall.

As for Xbox titles from other publishers, Ubi Soft's "Splinter Cell," a stealth/combat game similar to Metal Gear Solid 2 but with better graphics, looks promising,

as does LucasArts' "Star Wars" role-playing game "Knights of the Old Republic."

But Sega had the best showing among the publishers with the Xbox-only "Panzer Dragoon Orta," a shooting game where you pilot a dragon through apocalyptic landscapes, and the stylish PS2 title Shinobi, where you are a deadly ninja who slashes magical foes.

Lines for Nintendo

Nintendo's titles for the GameCube — updates or sequels to its "Super Mario Sunshine" (Aug. 26 release), "Metroid Prime" (Nov. 18), the "Legend of Zelda" (February) and "Starfox Adventures" (Sept. 30) — had gamers lined up to test them. All four looked and played well, including Zelda, which created a stir a few months ago when it was revealed that the game was adopting the cartoonish graphical style called cel shading.

But "Metroid Prime" was head and shoulders above the rest. The graphics are amazing, the control is perfect and any doubts about making the jump to a first-person perspective were erased. The game is as intuitive and fun as "Halo," the near-perfect Xbox launch title, and should be a big hit.

Nintendo hasn't announced any online titles yet, preferring to see how outside publishers succeed in getting GameCube owners to play online.

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Exhibit

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- Painting by Kevin Bell, Michael Gambill, Mika Holtzinger and James Schauer
 - Photography by Shelley Foster, Tera Gambill and Samantha Stengel-Goetz
 - Sculpture by Mitch Mitchell
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A Robinson Theatre Production

Animation

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Hallock offers "Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within" and "Shrek" as other examples of how exaggeration gives reality to animation.

"The trouble with 'Final Fantasy' was that the characters were too rigid. They were gorgeously drawn by the best animators in Japan, but the characters didn't feel alive. In 'Shrek,' (the characters) feel alive, but they're totally exaggerated," she said.

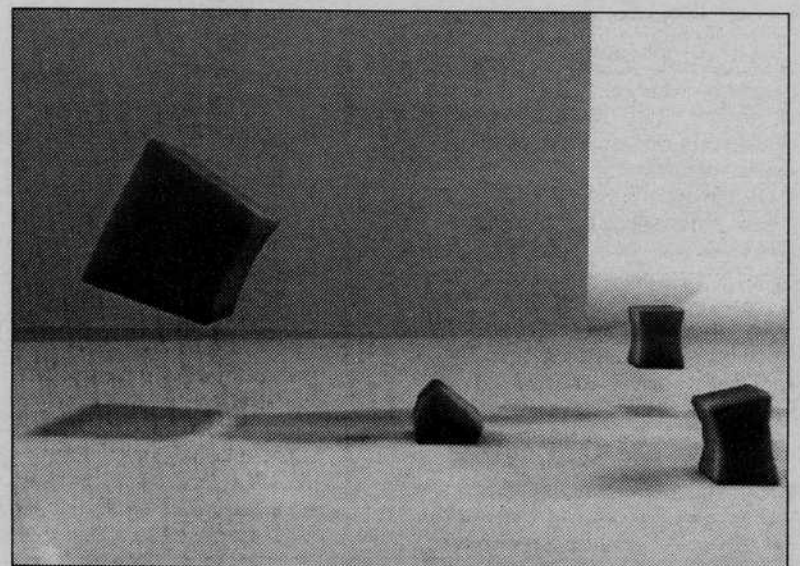
Other techniques used in some animation include physically scratching the film, then projecting it, according to Pat Welbrn, a senior in the multimedia design program. He said the animators etch drawings onto the negative, creating shapes and simulated movement. The art department encourages its students to develop a broad understanding of many different kinds of animation rather than specializing in just one, according to senior Nick Falbo. He will be one of the last few visual design majors to graduate this year.

In the last four years, Falbo said he has been a part of "Animation Explosion" and has experimented with drawing, clay model, computer and abstract animation, but he has not yet found a favorite medium.

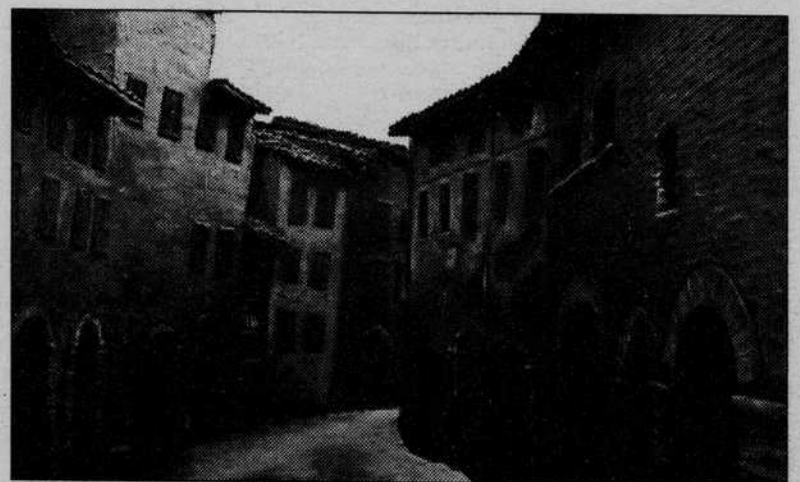
He said he will submit three or four pieces of animation for the event this year, including his BFA terminal project.

"I've been experimenting with different narrative structures," Falbo said. "How does alternative (narrative) structures affect the story itself?"

In his project, he has taken Shakespeare's character Ophelia, from "Hamlet," and told her story through a forensic study of her



Courtesy photo



Courtesy photo

death. The result is a very fragmented view of Ophelia's life and death, he said.

Welbrn and other animators have also experimented with using mathematical formulas to manipulate images. He said they could change the shape and color of an image by changing the formula.

Hallock said each night will exhibit many different animation pieces, and most animation pieces are less than five minutes long.

"Get there early," she said. "It fills up fast."

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