Critical Appraisal – Margarida Belo

Introduction – The brief

Throughout these last few months, we were tasked with working on a project that focused mostly on character design and movement in a 3D space. The main intent of this assignment was to design and model a character that represented a national holiday. Afterwards, we were required to model it, colour it and rig the mesh so that we could then use motion capture to simulate movement. Sadly, this last step was not possible since the mocap suit was broken, so we had to rely on motion libraries to achieve similar results.

My idea

For my project, I decided to do a character inspired by a Portuguese holiday called 25 de Abril, which celebrates the independence achieved by the Portuguese people after overthrowing the extremist nationalist regime imposed for years. One particular thing about this holiday that I would like to point out is its peaceful nature, being one of the very few revolutions that did not use violence to achieve its goals. The most iconic images from this holiday are carnations which are used to remember the ones soldiers put inside their weapons as a symbol of peace. Therefore, I wanted to create a character that looked relaxed a harmless while at the same time having the strength and willingness to fight. As a result, I ended up choosing the Iberian wolf, native to Portugal and a splendid way to show the spirit of this holiday.

What went well

For the design, I went with a very cartoonish approach to make the character readable and approachable to any audience. This, combined with saturated hues of brown and orange, gave this wolf life and expression. I reckon it was a very successful design, and I was able to translate it to a 3D adaptation very well. Moreover, working with blender to sculpt the character, not only provided me with new knowledge but also proved to be quite an advantage for the type of detail that I was trying to achieve while keeping a comfortable workflow. At the same time, working with Maya alongside other software helped me realize different methods for achieving the same results and tackling problems in very specific ways.

The UV process was a bit challenging at first, but in the end I got very successful results and ended up being able to create my envision for the wolf's patterns. Finally, attributing movement to the character was the most fun and rewarding part of the project, besides having been extremely successful. I felt like the movement I was able to gather and merge gave a feel for the wolf's personality. Even though the mocap process was not necessarily what it should have been initially, I am very content with the results I got.

I also want to mention a detail I think is extremely relevant. I designed the wolf to carry a weapon at all times. However, it has a carnation inside, meaning it is not meant to be shot and not once does this wolf hold the gun or engage in lethal positions with it. I think this was extremely successful in expressing the peace that came with this revolution and a message against the frightening tendency of representing such a lethal instrument with ease, nowadays as if it were not an instrument to kill other beings.

What did not go well/Could have gone better

Unfortunately, this project didn't come without its challenges and failures. One of the most significant is the rig. For some reason I cannot quite grasp while attaching the rig to the character it would distort the mesh and completely render my model useless when it came to motion capture. Therefore, my only choice here was to use Mixamo to download my animations. I still completed the rigging process; I just could not use it in the end.

There is also another step that I would like to mention, and that honestly still haunts me. Quad drawing was such a tiresome process, mostly due to the file size, making it slow and complicated to progress. Moreover, I feel that I still have a lot to learn when it comes to this step. It was complicated trying to understand how I could draw cohesively on top of a mesh and make specific decisions for different types of curvatures and the relationship with would have with quads connected to those that would then go to other limbs and surfaces. Even so, I was able to do it and despite a few vertexes that could be changed, it was successful.

Conclusion

Overall, it was a very enriching assignment, and I feel like I have learned a lot. Furthermore, the results were extremely successful, and I feel like I put my everything into every step and decision throughout the whole project. Hopefully, the viewers will be able to connect with it and find their own interpretations of this character and the iconic Portuguese holiday it represents.