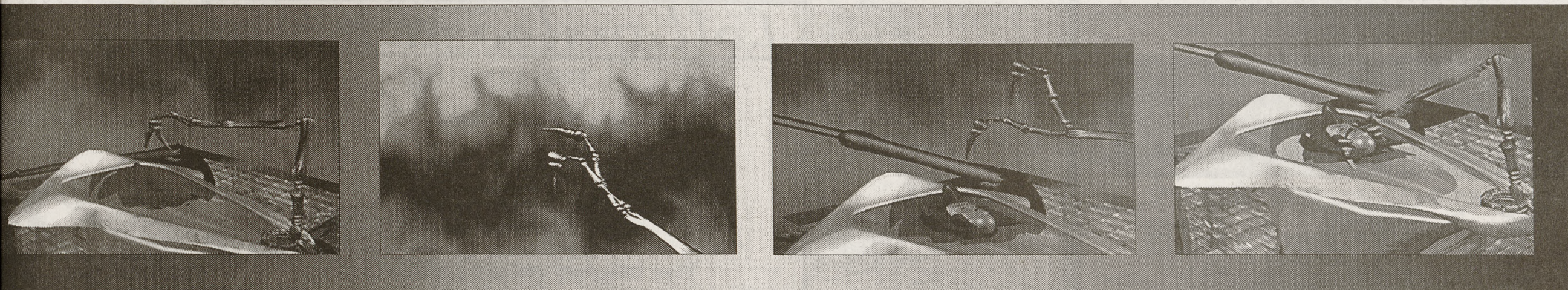
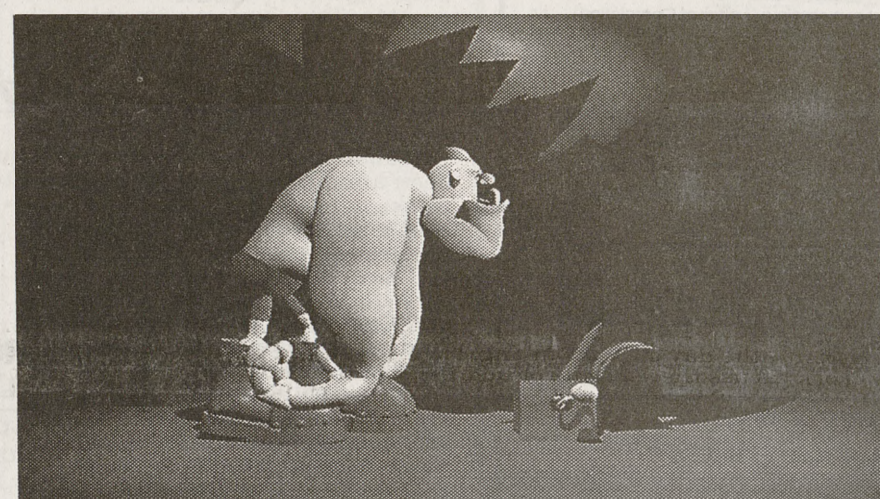
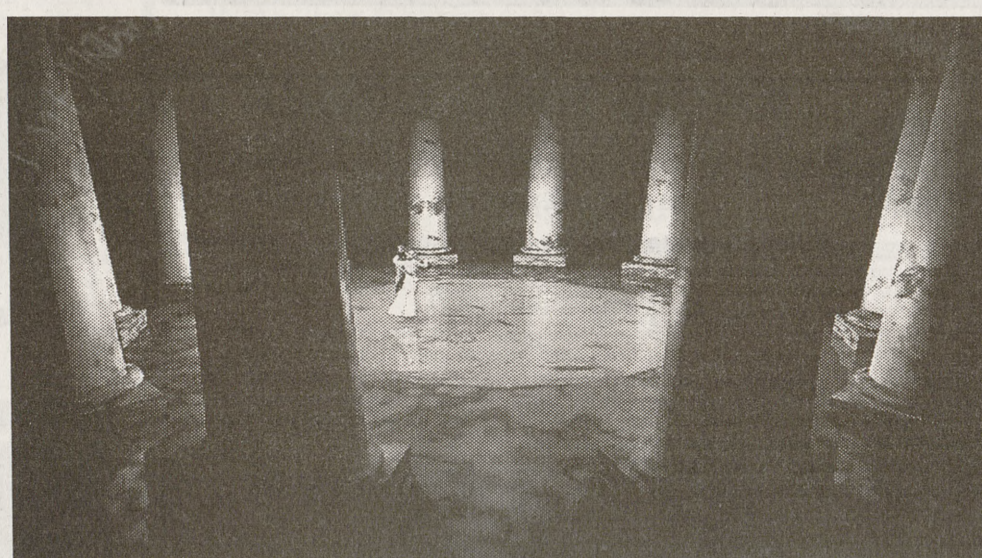


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Entering the world of the

VisLab



Clockwise: top stills from Jeremy Goldman's animation "Tiamat," Ballroom scene from "The Dance" by Rhett Bennett, "Tiny" still by Kevin Thomason, David Esneault's stills from "HANS de XYMBOL-KA," and "Marionette" by David Hisanaga.

VisLab provides opportunity for the creation of visualization, animation and computer simulations

By Jay Knium
THE BATTALION

Anyone impressed with the antics of "Ren and Stimpy" have only seen the tip of the iceberg.

In the Visualization Laboratory (VisLab), a garden of huge silicon graphic monitors in the Langford Architecture building, graduate students spend months impressing their visions into computer simulations and animation.

As part of the architecture department, the VisLab offers a few chosen students to work with, and eventually earn a degree in, the science of visualization. The lab consists entirely of 25 graduate students.

Thuy Tran, a visiting professor from Germany, describes visualization as having two categories: simulation and animation.

Tran said simulation is creating computer-generated images that simulate real life. She said that aircraft simulation is the most famous example of this science.

"Before you have pilots sitting in \$2 million worth of aircraft, they are sitting inside a cockpit that is simulated with scenes that are built with computer graphics," Tran said. "They fly in a sort of virtual environment."

Tran said the main use of simulation in architecture is to visualize a structure that has not been built yet. She said the computer can take a person on a "walk-through" to see what the structure will look like and how it will function when it is built.

"You could save yourself time and money for investing in something you might not want to have after seeing what it looks like," Tran said.

Tran described animation, literally "to bring to life" in Latin, as giving movement to something without worrying about physics.

Kevin Reuter, a graduate student pursuing the visualization degree, said while simulation is geared toward the laws of physics, animation is up to the animator's whim. He said a lot of details in motion that go largely unnoticed are very important in animation.

"We see people walking around all the time, but most people don't actually sit there and take a really close look," Reuter said.

"What's the difference between the way a heavy person walks and the way a light person walks? There's a lot of different things to take into considera-

tion when you're trying to animate — like just someone walking — to get it to look like the kind of walk you're trying to."

Reuter said that the quest for perfection in animation is a slow, painstaking, and sometimes torturous task.

Reuter's biggest animation project involved a pouncing black panther.

He describes the piece as showing a sleeping panther that is suddenly awakened by someone off-screen calling out a name, as if to someone lost. The panther angrily gets up, spots the yellor and leaps out at him.

At the end, it is revealed that the man and the panther are friends, and the man was calling out to the cat the whole time.

At least, that's how it was supposed to go.

"I basically got to the part where the panther wakes up," Reuter said. "I spent most of the semester just building the panther's body, and everything. For any decent amount of detail, it takes a long time."

David Esneault, another visualization graduate student, said that he remains in the lab an average of 12-14 hours a day, due to the slow process of animation.

He is currently working on an animation 2,000 frames long for the second-year animation class. The first-year class project was a 300-frame animation, roughly 10 seconds long.

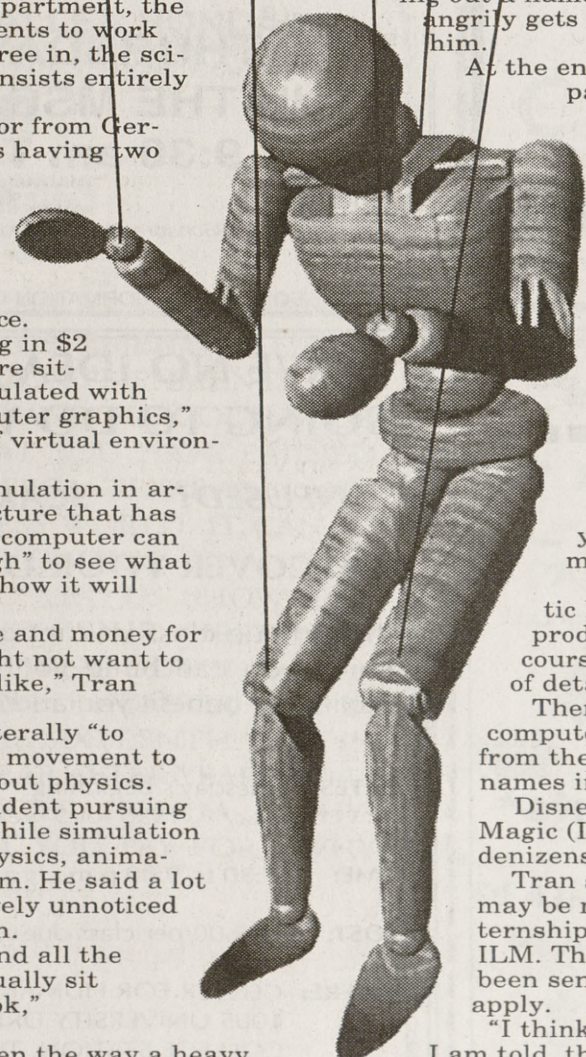
Reuter said that, according to a statistic he heard once, a good animator may produce two minutes of animation in the course of an entire year, due to the amount of detail involved.

There are attainable rewards for talent in computer animation. A few lucky students from the VisLab have been picked up by big names in the computer animation field.

Disney and Lucasfilm's Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) have hired about six VisLab denizens since last year.

Tran said that jobs in computer animation may be more easily attainable, due to a new internship program the VisLab has set up with ILM. The program is brand new, no one has been sent yet, although all the students may apply.

"I think our intern student will be, from what I am told, the very first intern at ILM who would have hands-on experience with doing animation," Tran said.



Visualization on center stage for Viz-A-Go-Go presentation

By Keryl Cryer
THE BATTALION

Graduate students in the College of Architecture will participate in Viz-A-Go-Go in Rudder Theater on Friday, May 5 at 8 p.m.

The presentation will feature paintings, sculptures, videos, animation and computer software done by the students.

Don House, associate professor of architecture and director of visualization programs, said one of the main goals of the show is to present the members of the program with an opportunity to show their works to a broad audience.

"There will be a video show which will be a mixture of computer animation and video film making, and also some work in experimental techniques in visualization," House said.

"Then, besides the video show, we're going to have some interactive demonstrations that will be outside the theater."

In addition to completed and experimental works, Viz-A-Go-Go will include many "works in progress." These will be pieces

done in half resolution or lower instead of in a finished form since many works take so long to complete.

"You can still see what the work is like and what it will be like in the end form," Thuy Tran, a visiting professor said. "It'll still be nice work."

The first Viz-A-Go-Go, which was held in the Rudder Forum last year, attracted such a large crowd that this year's event has been moved to the larger theater.

This year, it will also include works that were not yet completed for last year's show and have been completed since then.

"Students do not get one instructive theme to work on," Tran said. "They have to do certain techniques, but they get to come up with their own story."

The students get the opportunity to show their creativity when using techniques such as morphs, which allow the students to make one shape change into another shape in a technique called image processing.

Knowledge of these techniques is particularly important when recruiters are considering high-paying job offers to the students in the program.

