Artistic Expression using Second Life in the Classroom

1 Introduction

The persistent online virtual world of Second Life is transforming education in unique and innovative ways. Universities and educational institutions have taken advantage of this flexible platform by purchasing "islands" in the virtual world where social interaction and creative endeavors can be the focus of project-based learning. Bowling Green State University’s virtual campus provides an environment for art educator’s to explore new means of artistic expression and critique. The arts area of the Bowling Green State Island includes three visual art galleries, a media theatre, an interactive music and nature walk, and a performance center. Based on the experiences of three professors at Bowling Green State University, this panel will focus on educational prospects in the arts in the virtual world of Second Life. Dr. Dena Eber will present on student artistic reactions to Second Life experiences and a public virtual art critique event that followed. Anthony Fontana will focus on the use of machinima to create documentary and expressive narrative works in an educational context. Bonnie Mitchell will explore a new form of scripted immersive art that is surfacing because of the programming and modeling capabilities of Second Life.

Bowling Green State University Virtual Campus

2 Reactions and Artistic Expression

After creating virtual identities through avatars and experiencing other galleries and events in Second Life, advanced imaging students made artworks that were based on a reaction to their experience. After critiquing the works, the students then posted them in a virtual gallery on the BGSU island in Second Life. A public critique was held "in-world" with educators and art enthusiasts from remote locations attending. The students were questioned and received feedback from the Second Life attendees. When the event was over, the students were asked to analyze their experience within the broader context of exhibition, educational, and expressive opportunities already available. One overarching objective was to have students examine Second Life as a possibility for display and dissemination of work as well as other options such as mobile technologies and traditional galleries.

3 Scripting Art Experiences

The programming language embedded in Second Life provides educators and students the ability to construct unique interactive art environments. Through the development of object specific or genetic-like algorithms, environments can be created that respond to avatars and change over time. These responsive environments are often fully immersive and avatars can travel through the experience and trigger audio and visual events. Although interactive electronic art environments are not uncommon in the digital art world, this unique form of art experience is beginning to emerge in the virtual world as an exciting new direction. As a digital art educator, the ability to create virtual art experiences offers opportunities for students to combine their programming, art, and usability skills.

4 Machinima

The Second Life platform provides a unique opportunity for documentary and expressive narrative works in the form of machinima, or computer-generated animation that uses the virtual world engine to render real-time three-dimensional graphics. Machinima has been used extensively to teach Second Life residents how to use software, maneuver the virtual world, and build and script objects. Machinima can also act as a means to document the interactive happenings of the virtual world. The Second Life Cable Network (SLCN) also features a number of interview and talk-show style machinima programs. Machinima has also been a catalyst for independent filmmakers and burgeoning animators. Second Life machinimatographers are able to create their own sets, costumes, and animations and "film" the narrative without the time and material costs of 3D animation. As an expressive medium, machinima can be used both as an educational tool and a means of creating time-based works of art.

5 Conclusion

The persistent online virtual world of Second Life is transforming education in unique and innovative ways. Bowling Green State University’s virtual campus provides an environment for art educator’s to explore new means of artistic expression and critique. Using images, real-time interaction, and animation to illustrate the pedagogical possibilities of Second Life, the presenters discuss student response, faculty engagement, and technical possibilities. They also analyze the benefits and pitfalls of educational applications in Second Life and conclude with suggestions.

6 References

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