

Animation Sketch Education in Canada and Its Inspiration to Chinese Animation Education

Cao Yang

Nanjing Normal University Fine Art School
1st Wen Yuan Road
Nanjing, Jiangsu, China
13770657511 kent1019@163.com

Abstract

Canadian animation education has a certain reputation in the world. Most researchers gave much attention to its animation technology and concept, but less research on animation basic education, especially animation sketching. Author research some samples and analyzes Canadian animation course through the concepts and works, and provides a new idea and reference to enhance our animation basic education.

Keywords: Canadian animation education, Sheridan College, Animated sketch, Nicolaides

Introduction

With its unique artistic characteristics, Canadian animated short film has won universal affirmation from the industry. Specifically speaking, the original style, surrealist colors, the style of abstract paintings, noble humanistic care, profound image and philosophical connotations, unique dubbing and background music, surprising style and mature skills jointly make Canadian animated short films a unique school deeply loved across the world. Such achievements are indispensable with the fact that Canada currently has the best animation education in the world. For instance, quite a few colleges providing animation education in Canada enjoy a worldwide reputation, such as the Sheridan College, the cradle of animation masters, Quebec University, the largest animation college, Vancouver Film Academy and Emily Carr University of Art and Design^[1]. Apart from attaching importance to high technology and innovations, Canadian animation education pays much attention to fundamental education and particularly animation sketch. Affected by the teaching method of American educator Nicolaides, Canadian animation education stimulates one's drawing thinking and enhances the modeling methods essential to animation creation.

Canadian Animation Sketch Teaching

Animation education pays a higher emphasis over the comprehensiveness of creation. Hence the specific links of producing an animation is more likely to receive attention. Currently, the focus is on representing diversified superficial images, including real texture, shadow, artistic style and virtual reality, while the essentially fundamental drawing capacity and the understanding and grasp of motion laws are neglected. In the impression of many people, Canadian animation education attaches much importance to cultivating the curricular setting and creative thinking of animation technology. In fact, these colleges follow the education

thinking of laying an equal stress on science and art. The education priority has never been away from the foundation of animation even in contemporary era when animation hi-tech software is popularized. Hence animation sketch course, as an important link, has received much attention in Canadian for years.

Taking Canadian Sheridan College for instance, a student should pass the sketch entrance examination for admission and take a sketch course in eight semesters of subsequent four years. Generally speaking, the sketch course is a basic course about arts, involving the human portrait, quick sketch and line drawing. Sketch, and particularly dynamic sketch, is given much attention to teach students the action structure and motion laws.

The curricular setting of animation major in Quebec University is as follows: After a student starts the professional learning of animation major, the training of basic sketch abilities still accounts for a high proportion of all courses, and basic sketch course is provided in nearly six semesters, including human portrait, quick sketch and line drawing. Although sketch training in the basic phase is boring, time-consuming and painstaking, it brings substantial returns, including fundamental improvement in the ability of drawing expression. It is crucial because a solid drawing foundation helps a student have better control in future model designs or modeling learning. Donperot, the dean of Commercial Animation major, University of Capilano, Vancouver, thought the university has a high graduate employment rate and solid foundation skills, which are all benefited by the excellent teaching methods of human portraits adopted by Professor Margolis. Hence all students have developed outstanding professional capacities. In fact, taking human portrait as the central course of animation major emphasizes the importance of human portrait.

Basic Methods of Practicing Canadian Animation Sketches

A. Gesture Drawing

Gesture drawing is also known as dynamic sketch. It differs from traditional sketch in studying the motion direction and trend of a gesture and representing the general trends of the dynamic human body with virtual lines that run through the axis of the human body^[2]. Hence the action stroke often covers with the human spine or central axis line to indicate the action direction of the human body (see Fig. 1).

30-s training: The drawer should sense how the action lines of the human body stretch in the first ten seconds, draw the directions of the head, arms and legs in the second ten seconds and outline blocks in the last ten seconds. With such training

methods, a student will develop the ability of fast drawing and meet future demands for animation creation.

One-minute training: The drawer should draw the model's general posture in the first 30 seconds and try to complete the drawing without looking at the model in the remaining 30

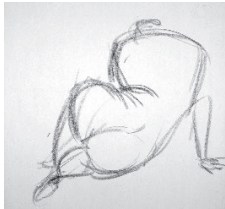


Fig. 1 Gesture Drawing.

seconds. With this approach, a drawer will memorize as many details as possible, which in turn improves his ability of observing details during drawing.

Three-minute training: This approach requires a drawer to draw a posture sketch in the first 30 second. Next, the drawer should reorganize the whole body with different shapes, with a circle being the head, a cylinder being the neck, arms and legs, a box being the pelvis and another soft circle being the upper body. If one practices his drawing with this method repeatedly, he will grasp the human body structurally and the designing structure of the animation image. As time passes, he will eventually develop the ability of drawing stereoscopic animation sketches.

B. Contour Drawing

Contour is an important link of animation sketch training. After abstracting the modeling into a closed shape, the silhouette contour allows a drawer to observe the model's whole body more clearly and smoothly. In addition, a silhouette can be used to observe and represent whether the lines and shapes of a gesture are clear and specific (see Fig. 2). Whether a moving cartoon character is a human or anthropomorphic animal in cartoon, it is designed based on the movement of a human body. Hence a natural animation can only be created with free expression of lines. In other words, one can imagine the gesture of walking or shrugging even without a model. In addition, a desired modeling can also be deduced. Apart from studying structure, one should also pay attention to the beauty of negative space.

C. Continuous Sketch

The continuous sketch trains an animator's abilities of making analyses and judgments, accepting or rejecting the omissions of creation elements on the image, which is helpful

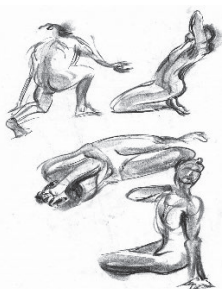


Fig. 2 Contour Drawing.

to grasp the actions of animation modeling. In particular, the key parts of characters' modeling actions lay a practical foundation for studying the motion laws of animation. Taking a series of key actions of the character's backward roll for instance (see Fig. 3), an animator first seizes key frames the same as a smart camera, which can never be replaced by a computer. In the continuous sketch creation, connecting lines can be used to connect all key parts of the human body, which helps to represent the movement smoothness and directions of an animation character clearly.

D. Synthesis between Human and Animal

When making artistic creations, an animator emphasizes the inherent characteristics of an objective thing or a character's personality characteristics or to centrally reflect the nature with formal beauty. It tends to change the normal conditions

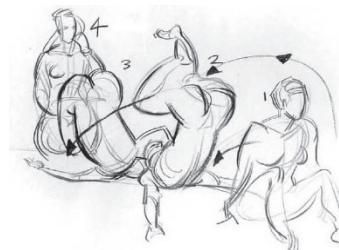


Fig. 3 Continuous Sketch.

of an object's external appearance to create a bizarre, absurd and striking artistic effect through enlargement, shrinkage, intentional alteration that runs counter to the nature, purposeful cutting, grafting and variation.

Sometimes, a human is synthesized with animal or an animal is turned into an anthropomorphic figure to meet the creation need of TV and films, games and animations. Fig. 4 is the sketch of a centaur drawn by a Canadian student as the practice work of sketch creation.

E. Animated Character

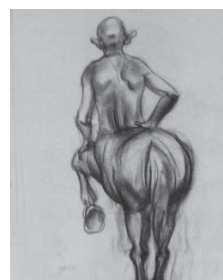


Fig. 4 Synthesis between Human and Animal.

The training of animated modeling is a compulsory basic course for students majored in animation. In addition, a student's modeling ability is basically cultivated through animation training. The animation major is a highly professional and marginalized subject, highly combining the knowledge of science, films, TV plays and drawings. In fact, drawing design is the key to determining whether an animated film is successful. A concise animation language is suitable for summarizing modeling, concluding exaggerated characteristics, abstracting forms and summarizing the order. Based on understanding and memorization, one can process

the objective information provided by a material object into a subjective modeling fast and accentuate the order of form and

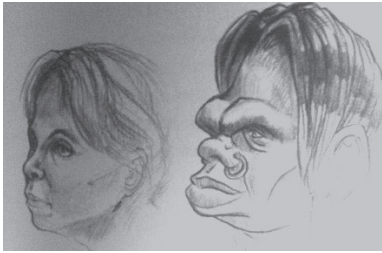


Fig. 5 Animated Character.

the essence of this object. In addition, the visual elements on the original drawing, which are abstracted through a sketch, are more favorable for converting the animation language (see Fig. 5).

Teaching Method of Nicolaides

Canadian and American animation sketches are both profoundly affected by the teaching method adopted by American educator Kimon Nicolaides. Kimon Nicolaides (1891~1938), an American art educator, developed a set of sketch teaching ways based on his 15 years of teaching experience and emphasized the observation method and the combination between feeling and sense of touch. The gesture drawing and contour drawing were highly popular in the American drawing training between the 1940s and the 1950s. Jackson Pollock, an abstract expressionist painter in the 1950s, was enlightened by the teaching method of Nicolaides. The sketch teaching system adopted by Nicolaides is of high reference values to imagination training: Many exercise methods are consistent with the characteristics of animation major. For instance, the right-angle point exercise and mirror exercise are helpful to cultivate a student's ability of observing, imagining about and eventually designing the human body of all actions based on mere imagination from diversified perspectives as if producing a film.

Memory drawing is a core concept in the sketch teaching system of Nicolaides, which has innovated in both traditional ways of drawing and the concept of traditional sketch. Memory drawing runs counter to the usual habits of drawing, in which the drawer's eyes are not glued to the drawing trajectory of the pen, but the sketch object before his eyes. The drawer pays his attention to the changes in the object's outline details. His eyes move along with his heart, while the paint brush moves along with his eyes. It achieves synchronization between visual sense and the sense of touch. Overall, observation and drawing happen at the same time. Observation, feeling and sketch are thus perfectly combined, happening, continuing and ending at the same time. This method is also known as mental image sketch or crazy sketch^[3]. In such a mighty field, every student should "speak" loudly



Fig. 6 crazy sketch.

and boldly with sketch and wave his pen brush unscrupulously, leading the work to glory through instinct (see Fig. 6).

Inspiration to the Basic Education of Chinese Animation Foundation

China has come into contact with and learned from foreign modern sketch methods and the sketch concept of drawing with the right mind since the August Fifth Artistic New Movement. Affected by the sketch teaching system of Nicolaides, animation sketch provides inspiration to changing the current basic training of animation sketch based on examination-oriented education. Classroom short sketch, a method born out of the Nicolaides teaching method, is an effective training approach that requires a model to make a powerful posture or one favorable for animation creation for one minute or shorter and then change the posture one after another. It is helpful to study dynamic modeling and provides a zone for traditional sketch to shift to animation sketch.

The animation sketch plays a significant role in both 2-D and 3-D animations. The same as making a sculpture with accurate knowledge of the human structure, the 3-D animation starts with creating an animation image and then the body. Next, the animator places in muscles and bones that ensure the body can move. Similarly, bones and muscles should be put in the correct position, allowing the animation image to move better without abnormal situations. In addition, it also points out the contraction and relaxation of muscles. Hence an animation image modeler had better know the position of each muscle accurately. It is also favorable for the animator to reflect the movements of arms and legs. For an animator, a computer is merely a tool which replaces pencil. Hence animation sketch also brings experience to computer animation creation. It allows an animator to create a more detailed and natural animation, reflect wonderful postures and display natural movements.

Conclusions

The teaching methods of Canadian animation sketch are essentially innovations of traditional sketch teaching, which correctly process the technology—art and art—culture relations and abandon the long-term exercise and experience accumulation valued by traditional sketch teaching. Combined with psychology, it provides basic training on modeling to cultivate a student's modeling ability, drawing style and expression opinions.

Animation sketch is not parallel to traditional sketch, but a professionalized branch of the latter. The concept of animated sketch was mainly enlightened by the design sketch that emerged in the 1980s^[4]. Animation sketch and traditional sketch are essentially consistent regarding basic principles, including the overall observation methods and the laws governing the elements, structure, projection and composition of represented modeling.

Animated sketch considers the changes and process in the time dimension, namely the study and representation of modeling dynamics. Animated sketch incorporated professional elements of animation designing into traditional sketch and focuses on cultivating an animator's ability of making fast modeling, analyzing and representing a character's serial actions. Moreover, it is a sketch training

method that aims to evoke imagination and creativity.

Acknowledgements

This research is supported in part of excellent course in English Teaching Project by the Jiangsu Provincial Department of Education (164120000401)

References

[1] Liu Ruoyi, Characteristics of animation education mode in

Canadian Universities, Hundred Schools in Arts, 2012, pp.404.

[2] Michael D. Mattesi, Force The key to capturing Life through Drawing, Universe Star US 2004.

[3] Li Ben, "Alternative" sketches -- on the concept and training of the pursuit of sketches, Art Research, 2005. 2, pp.107.

[4] Qian Mingjun, Film animation Sketch Teaching, Journal of Beijing Film Academy, 2003 (4), pp.100.