

Hi-res pictures and infos:

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3D Space Award: Computer-generated 3D animation

The big box office success of *Shrek*, *Finding Nemo* or *The Incredibles* has made it obvious that computer-generated animation is blockbuster material. Ever since it started out in 2000, the Bitfilm Festival has shown 3D computer films – covering the whole range from Hollywood to the digital underground. The Pixar short film *For the Birds*, for instance, was shown at Bitfilm in 2001 – before it received an Academy Award. In 2004, Bitfilm dedicated a retrospective to the world's leading computer animation studio from Emeryville, California.

“But of course the festival focusses on discovering new talents“, explains Bitfilm director Aaron Koenig. “We show entertaining cartoon movies, which the audience loves, as well as breathtaking visual experiments.“

FX Mix Award: Digitally composed hybrids mixing various techniques

Today's cinema would be unthinkable without digital visual effects. Hardly any big Hollywood film works without computer-generated additions – even if it just means brushing up the complexion of the leading actress. What is more, digital postproduction is no longer the exclusive domain of Hollywood and its high-end companies. An ordinary PC with off-the-shelf software can produce stunning visuals these days. It has become easy to combine shots of real humans in front of a blue screen with animated scenes rendered in the computer.

“Digital technology has led to a democratic revolution in the film and visual effects world“, says Moritz Hirchenhain, Bitfilm's co-director. “Many great ideas, which, in the past, would have cost millions of Euros, can now be produced on a shoestring budget.“

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Flash Award: Animations made with Flash

Back in 1996, the internet mainly consisted of statistical information with tiny graphics in order to minimize excruciating download times. As a result, the first internet animations created a real stir. By a trick, the software Future Splash managed to conjure up movement in very little time, even for users of slow modems: it did not save each pixel but vectors – mathematical formulas describing the image elements. This trick only works with twodimensional, geometrical forms, but they can then be enlarged to any size.

Future Splash was bought by the software giant Macromedia (now: Adobe), renamed Flash – and soon pre-installed in every internet browser. A dynamic scene of digital artists evolved around this software which had, in no time at all, become the existing standard for internet animation. They greeted the new production and distribution tool for their ideas with enthusiasm.

In 2000, Bitfilm set up its Flash Award – the oldest and still biggest competition for Flash animation in Germany. At first, the award was part of other events like the Berlin Beta conference and Filmfest Hamburg. In 2003 it was merged with the Bitfilm Festival.

“Flash films, although conceived for the computer monitor, work very well on the large cinema screen“, explains Aaron Koenig, the festival’s director. “As opposed to pixel films, enlarged vector-based films do not lose any of their quality.“

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Machinima Award: Films shot live in computer games

The artificial word Machinima, composed of machine, animation and cinema, describes a new way of producing films. Machinimas use so-called game engines which computer games are based upon. They represent characters and backgrounds in such a way that they directly follow the player's moves. In order to create a smooth impression, it needs to generate 25 images per second. With classic 3D animated films, it can take up to some seconds, minutes or even hours to calculate one single image. You only get movement once the film is played.

By contrast, games instantly react to the commands of the players, in a split second - or in computer slang: "in realtime". As modern games offer the option of designing your own characters and backgrounds, gamers and film enthusiasts started to make their own films, in their own game worlds, and distribute them via the internet.

"Back in 2002, we had a special programme on the new machinima phenomenon and invited Hugh Hancock, one of the gurus of this movement", festival director Aaron Koenig recalls. "Thanks to Hugh's help, in 2003 we became the first festival worldwide to set up a Machinima competition."

"Early Machinima films were still very much marked by game aesthetics. Today, artists have a lot more possibilities of expressing themselves", states Moritz Hirchenhain of the Bitfilm programme team. "Over the last few years, the Machinima movement has developed tremendously, and produced some outstanding films."

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Realtime Award: Animation made on the spot

Realtime means: the computer renders a film frame just as fast as it is being displayed, usually a 25th of a second. Unlike classical computer animation, where it might take minutes, hours or whole nights to compute just one single image, realtime animation has no waiting time. This category shows all forms of realtime filmmaking which do not rely on off-the-shelf computer games (those are presented in the Machinima category), but rather on advanced programming skills. In 2004, Bitfilm was the first film festival worldwide to introduce a competition category for realtime animation.

Mobile Award: Short clips designed for mobile devices

“When we started our mobile competition, people were still slightly amused about our activities“, Bitfilm’s director Aaron Koenig recollects. “Back in 2003, hardly anyone could imagine films for the small screens of mobile phones – only few devices would actually play films.“

Today, the video function has become a standard feature of mobiles. The big network operators have started their own mobile TV channels. In order to promote content for these new channels, the Bitfilm Festival, for the sixth time, calls upon artists to submit their films to the Mobile competition.