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Computer animation at the half-century: How did we get here?

Fifty years ago, a graduate student at MIT completed his thesis project by creating the first ever animation program on a declassified Cold War computer used to track Soviet nukes. In the intervening years, Computer Graphics (or CG) has forever changed the way we experience media. Without CG, the Titanic would not sink. The armies of Middle Earth could not march. We would never know Shrek, Lara Croft, Buzz Lightyear or the Naavi. It has made movie film itself an anachronism. Yet, few today understand its origins. Ask seven professionals what was the first computer graphics in a major motion picture, and you will probably get seven different answers. There is more to the history of CG than one day George Lucas rubbed a lamp and Pixar popped out. Tom Sito, author of the first ever complete history of CG, describes how an unlikely cast of characters—math nerds, experimental artists, beatniks, test pilots, hippies, video gamers and entrepreneurs shared a common dream, to create art with a computer, heretofore considered only a machine for calculations. Together, they created something no one asked for, and no one knew they wanted, and they used it to change the entire world's media.

Biography

Tom Sito has been a Professional Animator since 1975. One of the key players in Disney's animation revival in the 1990s, he animated on such classic films as *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *The Lion King* (1994). He is Chair of The John C Hench Division of Animation and Digital Arts at the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California and the President Emeritus of the Animation Guild, Local 839, Hollywood. He is author of several books including *Drawing the Line: The Untold Story of the Animation Unions from Bosko to Bart Simpson* (Univ Press of Kentucky, 2006), and *Moving Innovation, a History of Computer Animation* (MIT Press, 2013).

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