



Creature Design

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Digital Design Workshop



Context

When I started at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU), I wanted to go into Character Design and Animation and planned to do that for my Senior Project during my final year. This changed however during my time here at FGCU where I gained an internship where I get to learn how to 3D model assets for video games and simulations. though not drastic but I'm now more interested in Visual Development (vis dev) and the process for creature design in both 2D and 3D.

For workshop, I wanted to in a way “test drive” a concept I was interested in which was making creature designs from Vis Dev to their final model in 3D. During the same time with my internship, I was tasked to learn the program Zbrush which I also decided to merge into this project to help me learn more about professional modeling. My original idea was to merge both Vis Dev and modeling, delivering one finished concept work, a design sheet, and a finished 3D model of a bust of the creature. To make the process a little more convenient for myself, I decided to use an original creature I designed a couple years prior for AP 3D so I could potentially have a better time frame for that I planned on making.

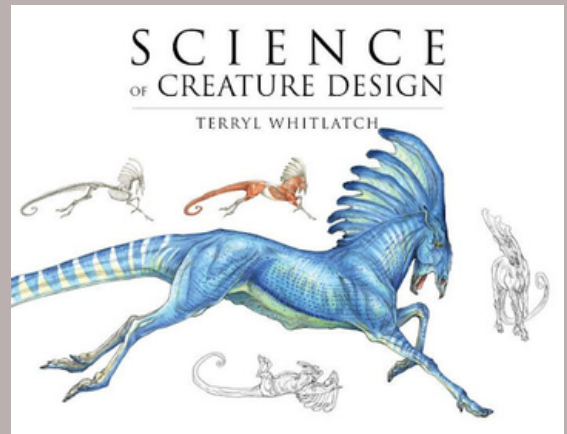
During the time of making the piece come together, I was able to complete two main deliverables which was a concept piece and a model of the bust within the time frame.



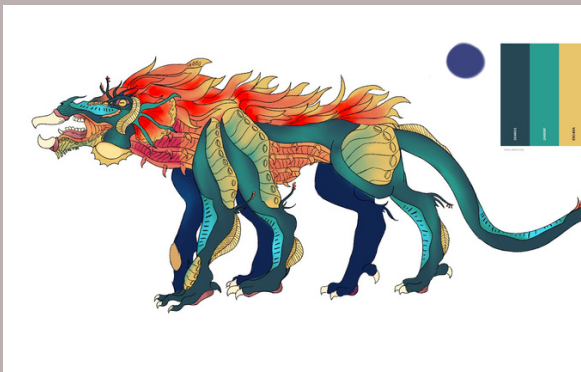
Inspiration

For my inspiration, I wanted to learn from three of my favorite artists in film which are Doug Chiang, Terryl Whitlatch, and Christina Zhang. All artists well known in either Creature Design and Vis Dev within Disney or Lucasfilm. A dream goal for myself is to one day get to work for Lucasfilm on a series or movie since I've always been a fan of the Star Wars franchise along with my family.

For the creature I designed itself, It concept dates all the way back when I was in Middle school when I became obsessed with James Cameron's Avatar world and its creatures. I wanted to create my own design of a big cat that would live on pandora, similar to a Thanator. Later in high school is when I altered the original drawings I would make where I created a monster bust out of super sculpty . And later on for making the final designs for Workshop, I designed the creature's full body design while also redesigning the head again a bit while using other reference creatures like the Narglatch and Nundu.



Development



As mentioned before hand, The original design for the creature was meant to be like something that was supposed to live in Pandora. When I went back to redesign it, that was when I decided to make it more of my own, giving it these predator like fangs and more reptilian features versus a feline. Though I kept the original reference the same which was making the creature a reimagined lion, having its mane be bright and able to puff out like many Birds of Paradise.

During my research side of this redesign, I for sure looked back at the thanator's anatomy for the claws and body length, but I wanted this apex predator to not need to camouflage even due to how powerful it was. Or at least the males. Females would most likely be designed to do the opposite so they could hunt in prides just like lions in our world. The males would be bigger, have bright colorful mains to resemble a face like multiple different butterfly species for mimicry and be able to puff out their body to look even bigger then they are when threatened.

Their ideal habitat being a lush colorful jungle with lots of colorful plants with also darker parts of the terrain.

From 3D to 2D to 3D



Getting to have a prior design to reference really helped with the overall development since it allowed me to put a lot more time into the modeling and learning Zbrush versus making a creature from scratch, I believe that having a 3D sculpted version in front of my face was also very helpful for me to understand how the Creature should look in Zbrush.



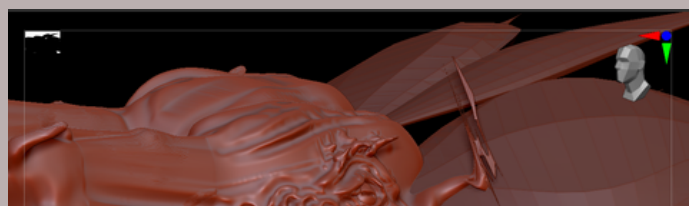
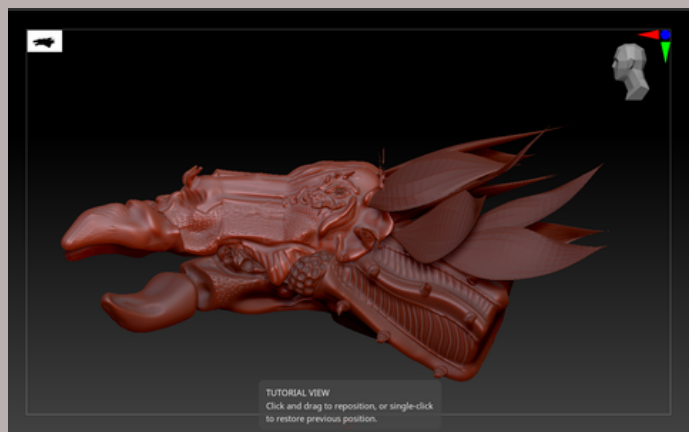
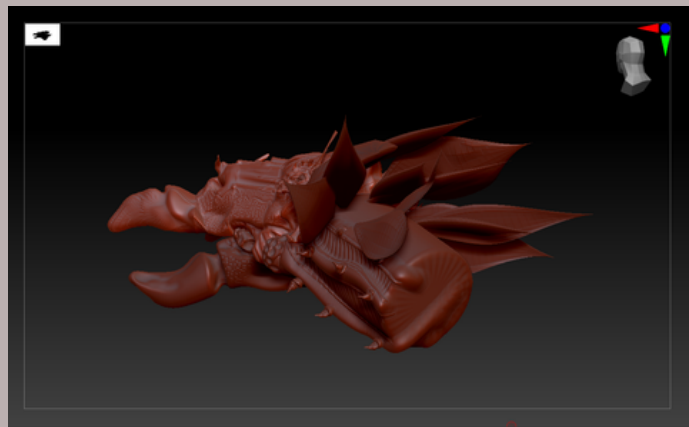
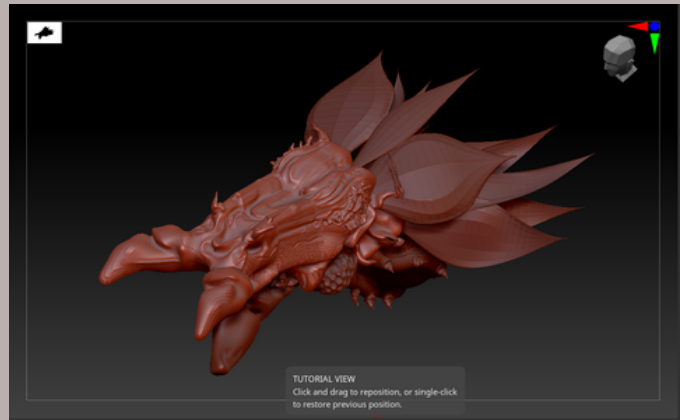
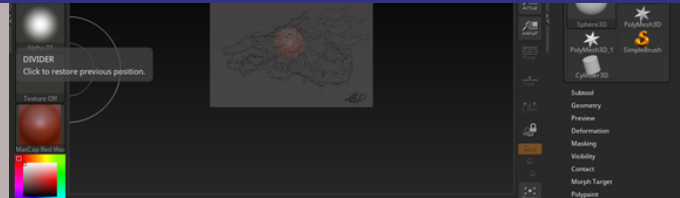
This actually being a technique many animators and character designers use to this day to help understand a character's anatomy, form, and volume. From there the only thing I wanted to redesign was the actual body, for the original redesign was only for the head itself that was being designed and sculpted, while for this project, I wanted to have concept work which would require a full creature design.



Images and dev

When starting the model, I was able to find out how to apply a reference image inside the program which began the process. An error though went through as I kept reopening the program and the image would be completely gone, with this I decided to use only the sculpture and reference images I had for designing it.

Overall I mostly continued to play with the basics of Zbrush sculpting throughout the process, and to try and quicken my process I decided to sculpt one side of the face then duplicate and mirror the other side to make one full piece while merging meshes. This process was golden in theory for me until Zbrush wouldn't allow me to use this method due to having multiple layers or the poly count was too high on things. This caused me to have immense difficulty in creating specifically the bottom jaw for the creature since it unfortunately just wasn't meshing correct since the poly was overly high for a more detailed sculpt.



Obstacles & Opportunities

Technical Difficulties

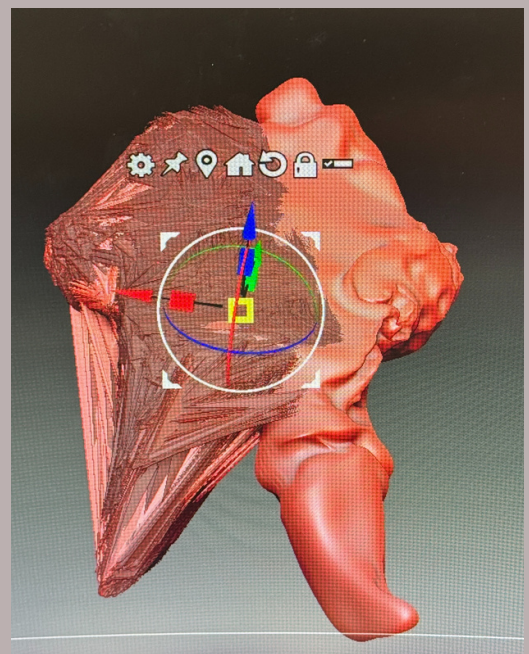
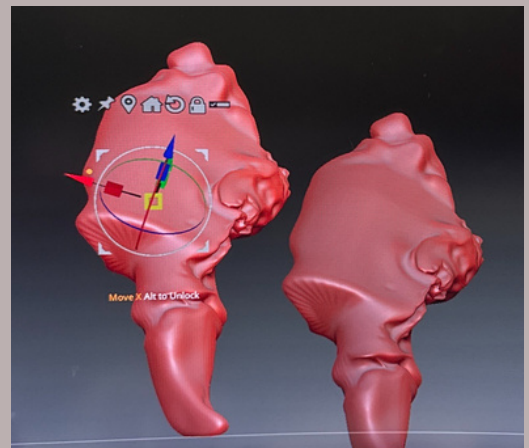
One of my biggest issues when completing the sculpt through Zbrush was that my computer was not able to handle the process. I'd spend sometimes ten minutes waiting just for ZBrush to autosave or even just to try and navigate within the program itself, this made the entire process of the actual sculpting take much longer than needed. There was a point even where 1 hour of work was lost due to saving issues which also set me back.

Time

With the project since it was due after Thanksgiving break which is currently the most busiest time of the year with my current job outside of school. I ended up scrambling to finish which was not how I wanted to have things planned out.

Learning a New Program

Though I've worked in multiple 3D programs before, Zbrush is nothing like what I've gotten to dabble in which increased the difficulty of this project. The program would also have trouble handling my pieces which led me down countless rabbit holes of Youtube videos which all led to dead ends.

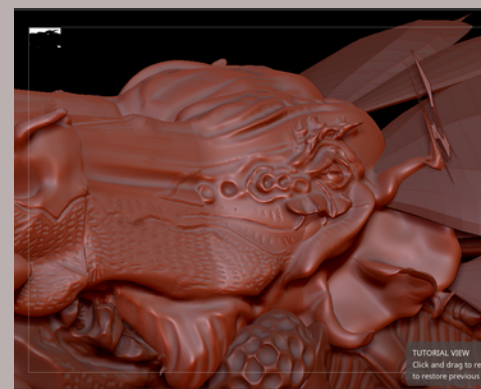
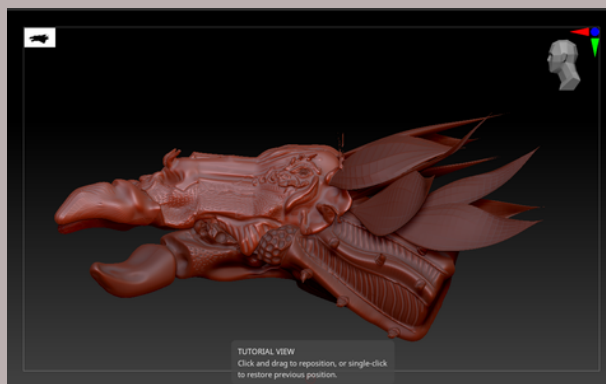
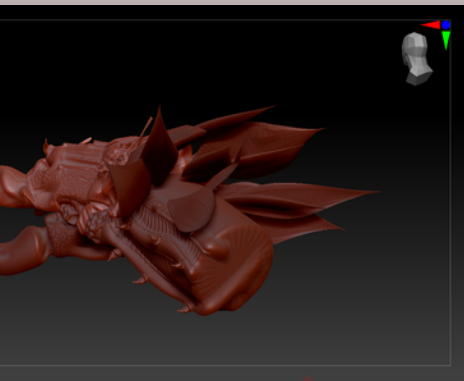


Mentor Critique

"I know you want to do creatures... but to do creatures you need to know anatomy. A fish... then do a little girl.... then do a lizard.... then do an adult female... then do an adult male... then do a mutant with creature elements... then do a dinosaur... then do your dragon thing. You are jumping to the end of a long process. Along the way... gather reference for each of these... and draw your own. Front, left, right, back.... ortho views. Learn as much anatomy as you can. You should be able to name every bone... every muscle... and have examples of your studies.

Show examples of life drawings of models... then take off their clothes and draw them from the inside out. Accurately. To the point that there is no question. This is the way. Line of action is one thing... I don't care where the reference comes from... prove that you can re-interpret that and make it your own. I haven't seen it. Case in point.... anime artists in Japan... they have 8 years of fine art life drawing study in the live figure drawing studio before they get recommended to go to an anime studio in production. They don't just draw anime and magically get jobs making anime. In the US... same same... life drawing is key.... even for games making Pokémon. The real question is... are you taking this seriously? To actually be an artist... or pretend you're an artist and keep drawing copies of someone else's style and content. The latter will get you a job making corporate animations of how to use the next accounting software for a bank."

-Chad J. (12/07/2025)



Reflection

This project ended up going exactly how I wanted it to go while also completely not at the same time. With all of my obstacles added, I was able to create a concept piece and model for this creature along with other design sheets. But at the same time I believe that the final outcome is not to the skill level I want to reach in both of the deliverables. And after having my mentor look at my model too even he found the same things in it too and recommended me to go back into my basics and revisit anatomy on paper then bring it into the system. For Senior project, I do believe I can bring this concept over and refine it, my only challenge being to make the quality of work I expect myself to produce which would be high enough to land an internship for I want to do.

My goals for Senior Project would to be to dive deeper into Terryl Wiltach's designs and principles so I can better understand alternating anatomy while also revisiting anatomy over the break as a refresh and for my concept work to take a dive into Christina Zhang's illustrations so I can gain better digital painting skills on the way.

This project really helped me understand my process to this and the opportunities I had, I believe that if I'm able to cut the obstacles out during break, I should have no problems during Senior Project to complete up to 4 creatures if possible.



Citations

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