MAXimising creativity

With the release 1, 3D StudioMAX broke new ground in 3D modelling and animation. MAX 2.5 pushes the envelope further

Traversing through endless layers of tools, menus, options, and buttons in 3D StudioMAX 2.5 almost makes one feel like Alice in Wonderland. Unlike Alice however, who had a ready-made wonderland to wander around in, you create your own world of make-believe in 3D StudioMAX.

Toolbar travails

With 3D StudioMAX release 1, Kinetix broke links with its illustrious DOS-lineage, and PC-based 3D animation took on new dimensions. With release 2.5, MAX gets many new features that make using the application more fun than ever. For starters, the application comes with a tutorial, a users' guide and two volumes of reference material—all of them about as thick as an average encyclopaedia. Operations are incredibly complex. The interface has banks of tool-buttons, and getting tool-actions right depends on how well you control the numerous tool-parameters found in the innumerable menus and sub-menus.

Scale the steep learning curve and you will find that the results are well worth it. MAX 2.5 retains the intuitive interface of the first version. In addition are many new features like the 'geometry' panel, which now contains 'extended primitives' like Spindle, Gengon, ChamferBox, L-Ext, and C-Ext among others. These new primitives reduce the modelling tedium. 'Scatter', a useful new compound object, replicates and distributes one object over the surface of another. The 'Boolean' function is in its second iteration and is actually called Boolean 2!

WHAT'S NEW IN 3D STUDIO MAX

- Support for external motion capture devices
- Support for NURBS objects
- New 'Extended Primitives'
- QuickTime files can now be used as texture maps
- VRML import and export

The new algorithm is supposed to be more predictable, and produces less complex object geometry than before, which should be useful in animated booleans. New 'particle systems' have been incorporated—'Super Spray', 'Blizzard', and 'PCloud'.

The biggest advancement might be the inclusion of NURBS (Non-Uniform Rational Basis-Splines) objects which though not easy to use, are very effective for interactive modelling of 3D objects with complex, organic surfaces.

Walking away to glory

3D Studio MAX has long been a favourite for creating architectural walk-throughs. In version 2.5, creating virtual spaces is easy—'doors' and 'windows' have been included in the geometry panel, and can be modified interactively. So can 'walls', which are also easy to make with the L-Ext and C-Ext tools. MAX allows you to export your virtual walk-throughs in the VRML 1.0 and VRML 97 formats, with the .WRL filename extension. These files can be viewed in any Web browser with a VRML-viewer plug-in, and allows you to take your virtual imagery to the Web.

MAX can use external motion capture devices to 'record' movement from any source and map it to any character in MAX, in real-time. Together with the Character Studio Plug-in, MAX can be a very powerful tool for game-developers who want to design and animate humanoid characters.

Finally, MAX 2.5 comes with MAXScript, its very own object-oriented scripting language, which allows users to build batch-processing tools, write batch-rendering scripts, and build import/export tools to suit their individual requirements.

Whether you are a weekend-warrior in the world of 3D modelling and animation, or an accomplished professional, who thinks nothing of creating a five-minute animation on his own, you are going to love using this program.

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3D StudioMAX 2.5
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