DEGREE PROJECT

Creating guidelines for game character designs

Bachelor thesis in the subject of computer graphics arts

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Preface

This paper ends my three years of studies at Luleå University of Technology's computer graphics programme. Through these three years I have gained knowledge in both VFX and game graphics, although my interest in the game industry has always been stronger. I've always had a large interest in artistic aspect of games, the visual experience and not so much the technical process. So the direction of my thesis, writing about design rather than technique, felt quite obvious.
Character design is the subject of this thesis. The subject of character design has always been interesting to me, and choosing a subject that is interesting and that I already have some basic knowledge about for this thesis felt like a good choice.

For the duration of this last course I have been working as an intern at Paradox Arctic in Umeå, where I also did practical work on a character for games. Although related to the subject of character design, this is not something I will discuss in this thesis.

Clara Lundwall

Abstract

This thesis will address the subject of character design for games. I will look into developing a method for creating a design template that one can use as basic guidelines when designing a character. The thesis includes research work revolving the subject of how shapes and colors are used to convey a game character's personality and identity without dialogue or context. How the use of different poses and combinations of lines and shapes help define a character and the essence of the characters role in the game.
The essay includes the creation of a module, how it would be used in a character design pipeline, and also ideas on how the module could be further developed. The module is tested by being used to create three different characters and the result is presented along with an evaluation of the usability of the module in a design pipeline.
The summary and discussion includes how the module might be useful for less experienced artist, whilst redundant for the more experienced. How the module gave an initial boost and starting point in the designing of the three characters in this essay is also discussed.

Sammanfattning

Denna uppsatts kommer att behandla ämnet karaktärsdesign för spel. Jag kommer att undersöka hur man utvecklar en metod för att skapa en designmall som man kan använda som grundläggande riktlinjer när man utformar en karaktär. Avhandlingen innehåller forskning som undersöker hur former och färger används för att förmedla en spelkaraktärs personlighet och identitet utan dialog eller sammanhang. Hur användningen av olika poseringar och kombinationer av linjer och former hjälper till att definiera en karaktär och karaktärens roll i spelet.
I uppsatsen ingår skapandet av en modul, hur den skulle användas i en karaktärsdesign pipeline, och även idéer om hur modulen skulle kunna vidareutvecklas. Modulen testas genom att användas för att skapa tre olika karaktärer och resultatet presenteras tillsammans med en utvärdering av modulens användbarhet i en designpipeline.
Sammanfattningen och diskussionen behandlar hur modulen kan vara användbar för mindre erfarna konstnärer, samtidigt som den kanske är överflödiga för de mer erfarna. Hur modulen gav ett första steg och utgångspunkt i utformningen av de tre karaktärerna i denna uppsats diskuteras också.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

There are two ways of conveying information about a character. Explicit characterization, which is when the audience is told what the character is like, through narration or dialogue. Or implicit characterization, that is when the characters information is given to be interpreted by the audience through the characters actions, manners, interaction with other characters, speech and choice of words, and also the characters physical appearance. The last one, is the one which this thesis will be focusing on. Conveying a character's personality through its physical appearance, specifically, a character for games.
The task of creating a character design for games is often assigned to a concept artist. The concept artist will through sketches, paintings, model sheets and other references create an image of what the character will look like in the final game. Based on information about the game, the characters story, and other parameters given by the game designer. The concept is then used by game artists for the actual creation of the character inside the game(modeling, texturing etc.).
There are a lot of guides and tutorial for character design currently, and a lot of theory and research work on shapes, colors and silhouettes. And also many guides and tips on how to combine these two areas of knowledge and research to create a specific character, and summaries on what is important when creating a character design.
So my idea was to attempt on gathering some of this information and composing it into a matrice in which one can pick the traits of the character that is going to be designed and get a sort of summarized design template. The design template would then be used as inspiration, guidelines or a quick way to get started in the character design pipeline.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate whether a module that generates a design template can benefit the concept artist when designing a character. To see if the task of designing a character can be made easier, or if the generated template can work as an inspiration source, guideline or starting point.

1.3 Question formulation

Is it possible to create a module for generating a design template that can be used when designing characters for a game? If parameters like game style, game view, character identity and character mood were put into a module that contains some basic guidelines for designing a character with those parameters. Could a concept artist use these guidelines when creating a concept for a character? Will it benefit the pipeline in any way?

1.4 Limitations

This thesis will be focusing on the visual design of a character, not the writing of a character and it's personality. I will focus on creating a module containing four different parameters. Game style, character identity, game view and mood.
Within these parameters i will cover 3-4 different directions. For example, within the "character identity" parameter I will cover the identity of a game protagonist, antagonist, supporting character and NPC/fill character.
The plan is that the module should be eligible for extension, and that this will be a base only to see if it will provide the wanted results.

2 Theory

2.1 Characters

Character are found in all kinds of medias and forms, in all stories and narrative work. They are what creates and drives a story in a book, movie, theatre play or game. And during the last couple of years, the amount of game characters being created has increased as the game industry has grown.
The amount of new characters and character design needed for all these games has grown vastly. Trying to come up with a good and unique design has become harder, especially the latter one. I'm not claiming that character design was easier before, but creating a character that stands out has become a much deeper task. It takes a lot more than just giving the character a crazy hair color and dramatic scar to make it memorable and unique to all the other existing characters.
Creating a successful character is hard and will always be hard and require a lot of practice and research. There won't be any automatic solution of generating a character, it takes talent and time.

2.2 Colors and shapes

Every time someone is introduced to a new person, they automatically get their own impression of the person quickly based on what they know from people they've met before, and things they know from before. The impression might be wrong, or get changed as more information about the person is revealed, but the first impression of a new person will always be important (Haake, M. & Gulz, A. 2008) .
Not using this as an advantage when designing a character would be a waste. Playing on preconceptions, symbolism, allegory and alliteration in a subtle way to show some of who the character is and making sure the audience gets the right first impression will do a lot for the story. But keep in mind, that the meaning of different symbols, shapes and colors may not be universally (Robh Ruppel, 2014).

Colors

Color, especially, have different meaning in different parts of the world. In a BBC's production Horizon, they find that depending on people's former experience of the color, they will perceive and interpret it differently (Sophie Robinson, 2011).

One way to get around this could be to not assume that one color has same meaning everywhere, but to at least use it for the same intentions and elements within the universe that the designed character resides.
One aspect of color that has to be considered is the saturation. The use of more vibrant colors versus desaturated colors is a good way to create an interesting contrast in a character.
In an artguide posted on Dota2 workshop forum (Valve Corporation, 2015), they discuss the use of value and saturation to create visual interest. Their theory on color saturation is to avoid using large amount of highly saturated colors, only use these small details to reinforce visual interest. “Less is more”, is used to describe the use of saturated colors in this artguide. (Figure 1)
Value, the balance between dark and bright, is also an aspect to consider. Contrast between dark/black and bright/white should be used on the character in a way that defines the characters important features, separating and defining the face and other important attributes from the less important parts. (Figure 2)

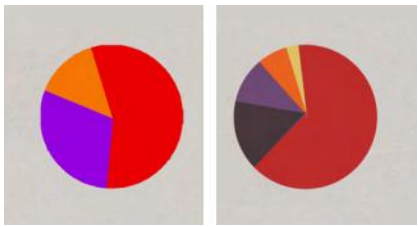

Figure 1: Example for the use of saturation. Highly saturated (left) versus desaturated colors(right)(Valve Corporation, 2015)

Figure 2: Example for the use of contrast in values to highlight various shapes in the design (Valve Corporation, 2015).

Shapes

The primary shapes used to design a character's silhouette are circles, squares and triangles. These have a much more universal meaning to them, because their meaning has its roots in nature rather than culture (Figure 3).

Rounder look friendlier and softer because they almost always are, like flowers, cotton or smooth rocks. Which makes round shapes appropriate for the character that are supposed to feel likable, friendly and good hearted.
The square shapes are found in more robust objects like mountains, rocks and cliffs. Square shapes represent something steady, robust and reliable. This makes squares useful to character that are to be perceived as just that, steady and strong.
And then we have triangles, which in nature are sharp and edgy to the touch. These shapes are the ones communicating most caution. Triangles form sharp rocks, thorns, teeth, and the classic shark fin. Using these to enhance a character's evilness or dangerous traits would be a good use of shapes (Hanna Ekström, 2013)

Figure 3: Examples of the three shaped found in nature.

2.3 Designing for games

When designing for games, there are a lot of limitations and other aspects to keep in mind. Just as in designing characters for hand drawn cartoons, where the characters shapes should for example be easily drawn from all angles and also easy to repeatedly draw, game characters also have some demands on them. Depending on what medium the character will be presented in, the design and its limitation can differ greatly. Games that are to be played on smartphones and other similar devices will have to be a lot smaller in resolution and polygon count and not as demanding in prestanda as games played on computers. This will create a limit in polygons, texture sizes, the use of dynamic materials such as hair and cloth.
Keeping this in mind during the character design is important. Creating a highly realistic and detailed design and then trying to convert it into a character played on a 5 inch screen could turn out to be hard and eventually not result in a good looking and readable character.

Another limit that game characters have is the amount of dialogue and text that can be used to present the characters personality and backstory. The time and information needed to get to know a character is limited comparing to a movie or in a book, and that's why the design sometimes need to step in and fill in some of the information. Instead of hearing a long intertwining story about, for example, the characters rough and dangerous background, it can be told by giving the character an old scar or missing limb perhaps (Robh Ruppel, 2014). Also, making use of the stereotypes that exist in different medias to some degree, will fill in the gaps that the story or dialogue doesn't tell. Visual stereotypes are a part of our social autopilot, they build up common references and suggests traits of the character used for understanding and predicting the character and its actions (Haake, M. & Gulz, A. 2008).

2.4 The design process

Since every artist has a personal preference in the method of creating and working on their designs, the pipeline for the design process isn't anything that can be decided or named as “the best way”. Developing a pipeline fit for how one works based on what steps it should involve is the best way. After researching other artists pipelines (Arnold Tsang, 2014)(Lars Martinsson, 2014) and comparing it to how I'm used to work I've come up with my own pipeline that I will use for this project. It’s based on three steps, which I will go into in this section.

Research

Study the type of character that's going to be designed. Having keywords is a good start when searching for inspiration and references. The characters description and story should be the main source of inspiration and information for the character design.

Get a good understanding of whom and what the character is going to be in the game. What is their backstory, goal, personality etc. Knowing the “what” and “who” is important before starting to create the visual representation of the character. Always base the design choices in something tied to the characters story or function. It's important to have a reason behind the design choices, keep asking “why” when developing the character. So this step is mainly about gathering inspiration, references and information about the character in form of pictures, sketches and keywords.

Concept

Based on the references and keywords found and gathered during the research stage, continue with drawing small sketches and thumbnails. It's a good way to get the creativity flowing and to get all initial ideas down quickly without having to spend time and drawing them correctly.
At this stage, no idea is a bad idea, everything is worth doing a sketch of. Try drawing different shapes and silhouettes and see what mediates the characters personality in the best way. At the end of this stage there should be a few different variation of designs, no details are needed just the basic shapes, colors and silhouettes.

Finalize

Step back and look at the different ideas and thumbnails that have been created. Evaluate what seems like a good idea and what doesn't. When looking at all ideas as a whole it's easier to see what stands out and what seems more interesting. Choose a few of these, maybe two or three, and do further work on them. Define the silhouettes and lines in the design and make it readable. Work on creating a believable anatomy and proportions. Try out different poses to see how the character acts. Will the character be able to perform the movement and expressions it should? Does it still fit to the description of the characters role in the game? Explore details, colors, materials, hair and other elements to the design. A finished concept usually contains a full model sheet. A model sheet usually contains the characters appearance, different views (side, front, back) of the character, material reference and other information needed by the game artists to create the character.

2.5 Parameters for the module

This section will introduce the parameters that will be included inside the module created for this thesis, along with examples from existing game character from various games.

2.5.1 Genre

Realistic

Creating a game in a realistic style puts more demands on both artist and hardware performance. In order to recreate the reality as close as possible, games with higher polycount, higher resolution textures, more dynamic simulation etc. are the ones that comes closest to achieve just that.

The use of reference from real life becomes highly important and creating assets and designs purely from imagination almost always results in flaws in realism. When it comes to creating characters in a realistic style this is extremely vital. For the character to be believable and to avoid the uncanny valley, references of human and animal anatomy should be used and considered at all times. Even if the creature itself may be made up, using existing creatures and their functions and anatomy build as a reference of how the invented creature would move and function is highly recommended.

Semi-realistic

This level of realism and style invites more creative freedom for both concept artists and graphic artists. Having realistic proportions and references to real life anatomy when designing characters is still recommended for semi-realistic style, but features can be exaggerated or altered to better enhance the visual appeal without needing to be truly realistic.

Stylized

Games that don't strive for realism can be categorized as stylized. They have their graphical design based on visual appeal in first hand rather than realism and realistic credibility. These games concept artist have much higher creative freedom, but still some constraints. As with all games, it's important keeping a constant visual theme throughout and having art style guidelines that the concept artists and graphic artist can work within. A few common elements found in stylized games are exaggerated proportions, bold colors, cel-shading, retro influences, geometric shapes and many more.

2.5.2 Character Identity

The protagonist

This character should stand out against other characters in the game. Giving them attributes that no other character has, and a more unique silhouette and color scheme. The character should be easily recognized and distinguished from the rest of the crowd of game characters.
Since the hero will be the player's avatar when experiencing the game, being able to relate to this character and feeling like one owns it is important. Making the character feel familiar and likable could favor the players relation to the character and by that also enhance the experience of the game.

The character is a player's tool and the player channels all their actions through the game character (Manninen, T. & Kujanpää, T., 2007)
Something that really help with the feeling of owning and bonding with a character is to have some customizable options. It could be as immersive and developed as in games like Skyrim or Black Desert, where everything between height, hair color or shape of the nose can be customized. Or simpler customization, as being able to change the color of the clothes and weapons the character is carrying, as in Blizzard's game Diablo 3.
Shapes often found in this type of character are typically rounder and smoother (Figure 4) to seem friendly. Giving the character a visible and friendly face also gives the player a slightly bigger chance to bond with them.

Figure 4: Silhouettes of three moderately well know game protagonists. (Zelda, Banjo & Kazooie, Samus Aran from Nintendo Co.)

The antagonist

Defeating the villain in the game is what should drive the player to play the game. Having an uninspiring and unchallenging villain that doesn't provide that interest will make the player lose interest in the goal of the game (Manninen, T. & Kujanpää, T., 2007). The protagonist doesn't necessarily have to consist of one specific character, many games use other villain in the form of situations, obstacles or other inanimate enemies. But for the more classic bad guy design, there are some general guidelines commonly used within the design. Having an unlikable protagonist is something that will help with driving the player's motivation to defeat them. The contrast between the protagonist and antagonist design should be defined, show the opposites and make them easily recognized. In general, the story of the game is driven by the antagonist and protagonist's relation, to their differences and disagreements. So visualizing their opposites can help with understanding the story without having to explain it.

When designing a villain, there are a lot of different looks to approach, but some of the most common ones are the ones made up by hard and heavy looking shapes. Squares and triangles, sharp and spiky edges (Figure 5). The reason for this kind of design is to make the character unmistakably evil. To be able to identify the character as the villain without hearing a whole lot of plot and backstory. Designing the villain is as vital as designing a good protagonist, the contrast and battle between them is what makes up the main goal and story of the game.

Figure 5: Silhouettes from three moderately well know game antagonists. (Samus Aran, Banjo & Kazooie from Nintendo Co. - Diablo 3 from Blizzard Entertainment)

Supporting character

The supporting character can be as unique as the protagonist, since it can often serve as an extension of the hero. If the role of the supporting character is the role of a companion, then the player is often meant to feel a connection to the companion and feel somewhat responsible for them. They often work as an extension of the main character to help drive the story and game forward or giving the task and challenges more meaning. Giving the supporting character attributes criteria's as the protagonist is often done. Softer shapes and friendly faces can be found in this type of character (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Three examples of Supporting characters from different game genres. (Samus Aran, Banjo & Kazooie from Nintendo Co. - Witcher 3 from CD Projekt RED)

NPC/Fill character

These are the "filler" characters of a game. Common inhabitants or enemies in the game world. Their purpose could be to serve as either quest givers, different types of enemies, or minor roles to give a more lively feeling to the environment. They usually don't contribute to the story as much as the main characters do. These characters are usually much simpler and less unique than the other character in the game. This is sometimes due to the time and size restraint game productions have. Time and work is usually spent on the more important character, and a few versions of NPCs are created then used multiple times in the game.
These characters are typically based on simpler designs with less details and unique features to help with separating the main characters from the crowd.

2.5.3 Game view

Top down view

According to Dota 2's character art guide(Valve Corporation, 2015), when designing character for games using top down view the concept of a good silhouette, along with good use of detail becomes more important. Since the character will be viewed from a distance and a fixed camera angle, a recognizable silhouette is what will distinguish the many characters in a game from each other.
Another important part of designing for top down is knowing where to place details, and how much details to use. Make sure the details that are used are a reasonable size, if they are too small they won't read well at a distance and will only be perceived as noise. Also make sure to leave larger areas without details to give the eyes some areas to rest.

These areas don't necessarily have to be one colored and flat, but subtle details and softer color differences could be used to still keep the area simpler and easier on the eyes. (Figure 7) Focus will almost always be above waist on the character in this view, so those are the part that the focus of the designer should also lay on.

Figure 7: Example of detail placement and areas of rest. The red marks where details are focused.
Green marks where areas of rest are used. Also, example of characters viewed in top down view. (Valve Corporation, 2015)

3rd person view

Characters seen from third person view will be available for more detail than top down view. This applies for both the character one plays as, and other characters in the game since they will also most times be seen from close up (Arnold Tsang, 2014)
They also often require to be more dynamic and interesting to look at since they will most of the time be seen more continuously and in a bigger scale than characters in top down view. Looking at the back of the character during a longer game session in 3rd person view can be tiring if the design isn't interesting enough. This also goes for the animation which can be made more dynamic and interesting by for example adding animated cloth, hair or other simulations, and also by having parts or assets on the character that receives secondary movement. These sorts of attributes can be found in many 3rd person viewed game characters. For example, Geralt from The Witcher game series (Figure 8). The two sword always carried by this character makes for an interesting silhouette, and also provides secondary movement as the character moves. And the hair provides an even more interesting look with its dynamic movements.

Figure 8: "Geralt of rivia" (Witcher 3 from CD Projekt RED)

Side View

As with top down view, side view also requires strong silhouettes. Apart from that, one of the main aspects needed for side view characters, is the ability to be viewed equally clearly from both sides. Having some major accessory, like a cape, that could cover the character from one angle might not be a good choice and something to avoid. Poses for the character also become more important in side view, for the same reason. A pose when the character faces right on the screen might not work as well when the character is turned around to face left (Arnold Tsang, 2014). One example of a well know character from a side-view game is Ryu, from the "Street fighter" series (Figure 9).

Figure 9: The character "Ryu". (Street Fighter from Capcom)

2.5.4 Character mood

Use the characters looks to enhance their personality and what they are feeling will lower the need for long dialogues about it. Mediate the characters story through color, shape and pose. Poses is the way the character is presented, the characters mood will be easily read from its pose. As in theatre, dance and other performing arts the pose involves every part of the body. Conveying a message or emotion relies heavily on poses and silhouettes (George Maestri, 2001).
One of the most powerful languages is the body language, and what it communicates best is feelings. So using strong body language to communicate the character's mood is a good way to express their personality and goals. Strong body language can also work as substitute for lots of dialogue. For example, expressing surprise or disappointment can be done easily through body language instead of having the character explaining its feelings in dialogue (Les Pardew, 2008).

Angry/intense

As stated before, colors can mean different things in different parts of the world. But some facts about color stay the same. For example, red. Red is a vibrant color used by both nature and people as a warning color. This also makes it a good fit for intense or strong feelings.
It's an intense and stimulating color, which makes it appropriate for intense characters.
Strong and powerful poses are also found in this type of character mood. A good example of this character mood is the protagonist from God of War, Kratos (Figure 10). He has a strong and fierce pose making him come off as intense or angry. He's design also contains some red element, which enhances this.

Figure 10: The character "Kratos" (God of War from Sony Computer Entertainment).

Sad/melancholy

Some general characteristics of a sad or mellower pose are drooping shoulder, limbs closer to the body and head down. Using these kinds of traits and downward drooping shapes and lines will make the character seem fragile and be more available for sympathy.
The color to work with to enhance the feeling of sadness often includes darker and more desaturated colors. Blue is commonly known as a color appropriate for representing sadness or calmness, but as stated before, the meaning behind it can vary. One example of a sad/melancholy character is the character "Amumu" from Riot games "League of Legends" (Figure 11). The desaturated blue tones, down tilted head and closed pose make the characters mood easy to identify.

Figure 11: The character "Amumu"(League of Legends from Riot Games).

Happy/light

If the characters mood should represent happiness or lightness of some kind, it's basically the opposite of the characteristics for sadness. Upward facing and pointing lines, limbs posed more spread, and head facing outward to its environment. This will make the character feel confident and more excited/happy.
Same goes for colors. Bright, vibrant and more stimulating colors are usually used to communicate these feelings. One good example of this is Nintendo's character “Toad” from the Super Mario franchise (Figure 12).

Figure 12: The character “Toad”(Super Mario from Nintendo).

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Crazy/weird

Creating a character which mood could be categorized as “crazy or weird”, thinking outside the box and making them unpredictable is a good aim. Characters like for example Cheshire cat from Alice in wonderland (Figure 13), could be classified as “crazy”. He has a unique body language but the poses and lines that build him vary between cats, human and behaves in unnatural ways. This makes him a good, perhaps a bit exaggerated, example of a crazy character. Using unnatural mixed colors, strange poses and shapes that cannot be identified as easily is a good start on creating a character with this particular mood.

Figure 13: The character "Cheshire Cat" (Alice: Madness returns from EA Games).

2.6 Creating the module

The parameters that have been discussed in the previous section of this thesis have been summarized and sorted into a module with four different bars. These four bars will represent the four different parameters I chose to work with and research on.
The module should now be able to provide me with a design template/base, based on what parameters I've chosen.

Game style	Realistic	Semi-realistic	Stylized	
	Accurate anatomy Real life references Less creative freedom	Less accurate anatomy Real life references Larger creative freedom	Anatomy not required References not required Largest creative freedom	
Character identity	Protagonist	Antagonist	Supporting Character	NPC/fill Character
	Familiar, likable and relatable Unique traits/accesories Round, soft shapes Preferably visible face	Unlikable, protagonists opposite Unique traits/accesories Square, hard shapes	Familiar, likable and relatable Unique traits/acessories Round, soft shapes	Common, less unique Simpler shapes, less detail
Game view	Top down	3rd Person	Side view	
	Defined, simple silhouette Areas of rest, less details Focus above waits Visible turn directions	Dynamic elements(hair, cloth) Higher amount of detail Focus on back	Defined, strpng silhouette Viewable from both sides	
Character mood	Angry/intense	Sad/melancholy	Happy/light	Crazy/weird
	Sharp and strong shapes Strong, confident poses Red/vibrant colors Harder contrast in colors	Softer shapes, downward lines Weak, fragile, closed poses Blue/grey desaturated colors	Soft and light shapes Light, open poses, upward lines Bright saturated colors	Mixed shapes, crooked/curvy lines Unnatural , strange poses Mixed, unharmonic colors

3 Method

3.1 Testing the module

To test this module I will design three characters with different parameters, enter them into the module and use the information I get as a design template. I will choose a specific genre (fantasy/sci-fi/horror) that all three characters will be designed for.

After choosing what kind of character was going to be created, the corresponding parameters were selected. These are the different characters and parameters I selected from the matrice, to use as a design template. (Figure A, B C,)
These are the character combinations I've chosen to design for.

Character 1: Protagonist, created for a realistic styled game. Created for 3rd person view and the mood of this character is sad/melancholy.

Realistic	Protagonist	3rd Person	Sad/melancholy
Accurate anatomy Real life references Less creative freedom	Familiar, likable and relatable Unique traits/accessories Round, soft shapes Preferably visible face	Dynamic elements(hair, cloth) Higher amount of detail Focus on back	Softer shapes, downward lines Weak, fragile, closed poses Blue/grey desaturated colors

Character 2: A supporting character in semi-realistic style. Created for top down view, and the mood of this character is happy/light.

Semi-realistic	Supporting Character	Top down	Happy/light
Less accurate anatomy Real life references Larger creative freedom	Familiar, likable and relatable Unique traits/accessories Round, soft shapes	Defined, simple silhouette Areas of rest, less details Focus above waist Visible turn directions	Soft and light shapes Light, open poses, upward lines Bright saturated colors

Character 3: The last character is the antagonist, created for a stylized game in side view. The mood of this character is angry/intense.

Stylized	Antagonist	Side view	Angry/intense
Anatomy not required References not required Largest creative freedom	Unlikable, protagonists opposite Unique traits/accessories Square, hard shapes	Defined, strong silhouette Viewable from both sides	Sharp and strong shapes Strong, confident poses Red/vibrant colors Harder contrast in colors

3.2 Design theme chosen

I chose to create three character fitting the same genre and with a common theme of inspiration. The genre I chose was fantasy. The reason I chose to use one genre was to not let it affect the differences between the characters and to leave the difference to be show by the other parameters that I've used in the matrice. Fantasy is a common theme in games and familiar to most people. So I thought it would be a good choice since its known and won't be distracting since the focus isn't on the genre, but rather on the parameters that I've chosen to include in the matrice.
The common theme I chose was also something familiar to the fantasy genre in games. The main source of inspiration i had, and one of the keywords I used was fauns. The mythical half-man half-goat creature commonly found in both fantasy games and movies. This choice was also to not distract from what the focus should be on.

3.3 Creating three characters

I will now proceed to creating the designs for the different types of characters I've chosen. Using the same pipeline and design process as previously mentioned and discussed in this thesis. And also, applying the module to the pipeline.

Research

So the type of characters that was designed was decided, as stated in the previous section of this thesis. The next step was to gather inspiration and references based on the guidelines generated from the module along with the genre and keyword chosen. A reference and inspiration board was put together manually using images collected for this step in the pipeline. Various search engines on the internet were used to gather these images.

Gathering a reference and inspiration board for the character design is essential as one of the first step for most character designer. The creating of the inspiration board is something done manually using inspirational sources, such as the search engines, movies, literature, nature and whatever else inspires the artist in any way.

Smaller thumbnails (Figure 15, 16, 17) and combinations of poses and shapes were drawn during this stage to try to get a feeling for the characters, and to get the imagination and inspiration flowing.
These are a few of the initial design concepts very roughly sketched for the tree characters. In this step the focus was on getting all ideas “on paper” and not as much on focus was on getting the right characters and choices for the designs.

Figure 15: Basic concept sketches for character 1.
(Protagonist, realistic game, 3rd person view, sad/melancholy)

Figure 16: Basic sketches and concepts for character 2.
(supporting character, semi-realistic style. top down view, happy/light.)

Figure 17: Basic first sketches for character 3.
(Antagonist, stylized game, side view, angry/intense.)

Finalize

This is when the three characters are rendered and finalized. Details, anatomy and materials on the character are defined. One of each basic design was chosen, tweaked and further polished into a simple, but fully usable character concept.

4 Resultat

4.1 Character 1

The concept for this character was created with a realistic look in mind. The anatomy was created using real life references from both humans and goats, combined into a “faun” creature. Proportions and the construction of the character were created with the aim to be believable, as if the character could have existed in reality.
As the protagonist should be someone player can relate to and bond with, the character was given a friendly and visible face, softer shapes and color combinations.
Loose hair, a medium sized cape and a tail was given to the character to add some dynamic parts that can receive secondary movement and give the character and more interesting animation while seen from 3rd person view in a game.
The character was posed in a way that would enhance the mood (sad/melancholy). Legs faced inwards, back arced forward and hands and tail hanging down. The character doesn't have a strong weight point, making the pose look unstable and weak.

Figure 18: Final design of character 1.

4.2 Character 2

This character was designed to be used in a semi-realistic game. The anatomy is based on real life references, but some proportions have been exaggerated and tweaked to create a more cartoony style and to enhance some of the characters traits.
To be appropriate as the supporting character in a game, the character was given a friendly and visible face with round and soft features. The design of this character has been created with top down view in mind. The wool-cape and the long, curved horns would give the character a unique and defined silhouette from the top down angle.
To enhance the character's mood (happy/light), it was given bright colors such as light green and yellow. Also, the pose is perky, open and constructed by upward pointing lines.

Figure 19: Final design of character 2

4.3 Character 3

Character number 3 was designed for a stylized game. The anatomy of the character isn't firmly based in anything from real life. It has both undefined, disconnected and missing body parts.
The give the character the look of an antagonist, sharp edges and triangular shapes were used. An unfriendly face, sharp claws and vibrant colors were also added to enhance this.
For this to be easily implemented in a game with side view the character was made symmetrical and the fact that it would mostly be viewed in profile was taken into consideration.

To give the character the right mood (angry/intense), it was posed with its back arched backward and head straight forward to give an decisive look. The vibrant, red colors used were appropriate for this mood, and the contrast between the dark red and lighter grey was also effective.

Figure 20: Final design of character 3.

5 Discussion

5.1 Conclusion

The matrice was fully applicable and did not disrupt the pipeline, but rather gave the initial boost when I started sketching. I found that the design template generated from the matrice did provide something to the pipeline of designing a character. Using the summarized information about the parameters searching inspiration and as guidelines when designing was useful. Also having this information to go back to and check if the design was still on the right path and following the initial direction of the charterer. I found that I used the information from the module as a sort of checklist, to see if the design included the suggested requirements from the module.
Experienced concept artist might find it redundant. As I believe that this is something that, after a while, gets imbedded in the unconsciousness and comes naturally to the artist during the design process. Although, having a matrice of this kind to go back to and refresh some basics could be useful too.

However, a matrice like this would be most useful for novice designers to get a basic idea of character designing principles and to get a start of inspiration.
My overall opinion is that the module could be useful and I found that it did what was intended in my character design pipeline.

5.2 For the future

One of the future work mentioned earlier in this thesis, is the expansion of this matrice. To add further parameters and design directions. A few examples of this could be Game genre, theme, gameplay aspects etc. Or, it might even be expanded to cover more than just characters. Developing this to be used for both human and animal characters, but also for inanimate objects and environments could be interesting. A game asset or environment sharing similar characteristics as an intense antagonist might be perceived as hostile territory, or something to fear and avoid.

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