

FVEA 318/518

## ANIMATING VIRTUAL WORLDS

TH 1:00-3:50 PM

MAIN BUILDING F105

SPRING 2023

### SYLLABUS

#### COURSE INFO

**Instructor:** Dalena Tran (she/her/hers)

**Email:** [dtran@calarts.edu](mailto:dtran@calarts.edu) (~1 day response rate)

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#### HOW CAN YOU MEET WITH ME?

I am available on Thursdays after class between 4:00-5:00pm for our office hours. If that doesn't work, we can schedule a time to meet via Zoom. Please DM me on Discord. Meeting with me is an important part in supporting you throughout this course. Even if you don't have specific questions, needs, and concerns, I would love to talk with you at least once during this semester. Don't be a stranger~

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#### WHAT COURSE MATERIALS DO WE NEED?

- We'll be working on the **lab computers**, but a laptop/desktop of your own will come in handy.
- An **external hard drive**. It is a useful habit to be saving all your projects on your own mobile harddrive so you can work between computers.
- A **3 button mouse** is highly recommended. It is truly a game-changer.
- We'll be working with **Blender!** A super powerful 3D software that is also free and open-source! Hooray ^\_^.
- Outside of our weekly in-person classes, all communication happens on our **Discord server**. Consider it a hub where we share announcements, ideas, WIPs, and resources. It will become a place you can return back to for gems even after the course ends :~)

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#### WHAT IS THIS COURSE?

We'll be learning how to conceive, craft, and animate 3D environments. Through experimentation, we'll engage with ideas around immersive environments, worldbuilding, and real-time techniques. How do these properties intersect between cinema, animation, and games? By the end of the course, we will create our own virtual environments into a final video project. As a class, we'll look at digital art practices that engage on varying levels of virtual architecture, sculpture, and environmental storytelling. Revisiting and discussing works that inspire us will be as important as seeing works that approach moving image from different contexts. So that's what we'll do!

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## WHAT WILL YOU LEARN IN THIS COURSE?

We'll learn how to utilize Blender, a software, as a tool for experimental animation and creative expression. Through this course, you'll be able to learn how to scope a project based on limited time and resources, and develop a general framework for a project, including moments for experimentation. This class is really what you will make of it. You can push the boundaries of how software is conventionally applied, but we will also look at how to think of imaging on practical and in sometimes more technical terms. We will look at kitbashing as a playful technique of worldbuilding and at the dynamic properties of node-based shading in adding color, texture, and depth to our scenes. Finally, we will look at the ways your scenes can be animated in 3D space to create a final video project.

*This syllabus is intended to give you guidance in what may be covered during the semester and will be followed as closely as possible. However, I might modify, supplement and make changes as course needs arise. Any changes will be announced on our Discord and reflected on this website.*

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## HOW WILL YOUR LEARNING BE ASSESSED?

Grading is based on the exercises, assignments, and active participation. Focus, articulation of ideas, and contribution to class discussions are all part of class participation. All work will be evaluated based on (1) the fundamental idea and its originality, (2) the way the “look and feel” of the work relates to the idea, and (3) the craft, meaning the details of the images, motion, and fluency.

The numeric breakdown for all assignments follow:

- 20% - Participation/Attendance
- 15% - Workshop Exercises
- 10% - Model Mash
- 15% - Alternate OBJ
- 10% - Final Proposal
- 30% - Worlding Final Video

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## HOW DO YOU ASSESS PARTICIPATION?

Your interest and enthusiasm drives the potential of the course. We will all gain from each others participation. Participation involves actively engaging in discussions, coming to class on time, preparing and engaging in our workshops and assignments, offering feedback, and communicating with me. This class is meant to be a space in which you are encouraged and supported in learning, building community, communicating, and taking creative risks. It is important for you to play an active role in these endeavors!

Take a look at our schedule and assignments for more details.

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## RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT AND LEARNING

### YOUR WELLNESS MATTERS

As a student, you may experience a range of challenges that can interfere with learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, substance use, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may diminish your academic performance and/or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. CalArts services are available, and treatment does work. You can learn more about confidential mental health services available at the [Health and Wellness office](#).

### WRITING CENTER

You can meet one-on-one with trained writing tutors to work on any writing-related task in the Writing Center. Writing-related tasks include class papers, artist statements, grant applications, resumes, etc. For more information or to book an appointment, visit the [Writing Center](#).

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT

For English language support, you can meet with a peer tutor at Writing Center. Tutors can assist with topics from grammar to brainstorming to everything in-between. For more information or to book an appointment, visit the [Writing Center](#).

### LIBRARY

Need help finding a book or other materials, researching sources for a paper or project, or just need a little guidance in the library? There is a CalArts Librarian that specializes in the resources and search strategies specific to each School and métier. The following are just a few of the ways in which the Library can help you:

- [Book an appointment to meet with a librarian about your research/information needs.](#)
- [Print a paper or project.](#)
- [Borrow a laptop.](#)
- [Use the group study room or computer lab. Check out how to use those spaces.](#)

## ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES & CALARTS POLICIES

### WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ACADEMIC HONESTY?

CalArts is a community of artists. In this community, all members including faculty, staff, and students are responsible for maintaining standards of academic and artistic honesty. As a student and a member of the CalArts community, you are here to get an education and are, therefore, expected to demonstrate integrity in your academic and artistic endeavors. You are evaluated on your own merits. [Cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, or other kinds of academic dishonesty](#) are considered unacceptable behavior and will result in formal disciplinary action, as determined by the faculty member, the dean of the student's school and the Office of the Provost.

Plagiarism is the use of ideas and/or quotations (from the Internet, books, films, television, newspapers, articles, the work of other students, works of art, media, etc.) without proper credit to the author/artist. While the argument in a paper can be enhanced by research, you are cautioned to delineate clearly your own original ideas from source material. To do so, CalArts recommends introducing your source material (either quoted or paraphrased), noting when the

source material ends, and providing citations for source materials using standard documentation formats. Misrepresentation of source material as your own original work and failing to credit it is plagiarism. If you have questions regarding plagiarism or would like direction on how to credit source material, there are reference guides on permanent reserve in the CalArts library. Please contact one of the [CalArts reference librarians](#) for more information.

### **HOW DO YOU OBTAIN REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THIS CLASS?**

CalArts is committed to providing reasonable accommodations in compliance with ADA of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to students with documented disabilities or otherwise documented. If you are requesting accommodations for equal access to this course, please register with the Disability Services Office, for the facilitation and verification of need. The Disability Services Office will meet with you and communicate with your faculty about appropriate and reasonable classroom accommodations. You are encouraged to use these procedures early in the semester, so that the proper arrangements can be in place throughout this course. The Disability Services Office is located in the Health & Wellness Office in F201, and can be contacted by emailing [DSO@calarts.edu](mailto:DSO@calarts.edu). Check out [Disability Services](#) for more information.

### **HOW DO YOU LEARN MORE ABOUT SEXUAL RESPECT?**

CalArts is committed to treating all members of the community with dignity, empathy, and respect. Accordingly, the Institute prohibits the following forms of Sex-Based Misconduct: sexual assault, sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, dating violence, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and stalking.

All faculty, staff, teaching assistances with teaching responsibilities are a non-confidential resource and have an obligation to [report any information about gender- or sex-based discrimination or harassment](#) to the Title IX coordinator. This includes all incidents of alleged sexual or dating violence. The Title IX coordinator is responsible for investigating violations of the sexual misconduct policy. Go here for more information about the [CalArts Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct Policy](#).

Members of the CalArts community who believe that they have been subjected to Sex-Based Misconduct are encouraged to report such incidents to the Institute and, where applicable, to local law enforcement. [Confidential resources](#) include the Institute Counselors and the Executive Director of Health & Wellness.

# SCHEDULE

Week		
Topic	Due Before class	Due In-class
<b>ONE</b> Jan 26th		
Intro to class, Syllabus, Discord, Discuss Model Mashing, Blender UI/UX Workshop	Join Discord Server	<b>Workshop Exercise</b> Primitive Mashing
<b>TWO</b> Feb 2nd		
Discuss 3D Art, Composition, Style, Importing and Sculpting Workshop	<b>Assignment</b> Model Mash	<b>Workshop Exercise</b> Sculpture Garden
<b>THREE</b> Feb 9th		
Add-ons, Materials and Lighting Workshop	<b>Assignment</b> Alternate OBJ	<b>Workshop Exercise</b> Model Makeover
<b>FOUR</b> Feb 16th		
Camera, Animation, Keyframe Workshop, Screenings of artist work, Intro to final project	<b>Assignment</b> Final Proposal	<b>Workshop Exercise</b> Cinematic City
<b>FIVE</b> Feb 23rd		
Render and Compositing Workshop, Studio time	~	<b>Workshop Exercise</b> Collage Composites
<b>SIX</b> March 2nd		
Studio time	~	~
<b>SEVEN</b> March 9th		
Studio time	<b>Assignment</b> Worlding Final Video	~

# ASSIGNMENTS

## MODEL MASH



*still from Toy Story (1995) dir. John Lasseter*

Create a virtual sculpture by using 3D models found online. Look for mundane objects with baggage, history and built-in symbolism. No object can be used as is, create composite objects, and create contradictions: mix it up, use nonsense objects.

Share a still image in our Discord server **ASSIGNMENTS** ⇒ **#model-mash**

## ALTERNATE OBJ



*"Vivs isolette" by SM Mayer*

In this assignment, you'll model an artifact from an alternate planet, future, dimension, or history. Can you imagine a world around the artifact? How is the object used within the world that you'll create in your final project?

Share 2-3 still images from different angles in our Discord server **ASSIGNMENTS** ⇒ **#alternate-obj**

Your final proposal is a working document that gives us a sense of the environment you'll be creating for your final project.

In several paragraphs, paint a picture of your environment. Please add any lore you have around it and any other relevant information that would help us gain access to what you have in mind. Answer the following questions:

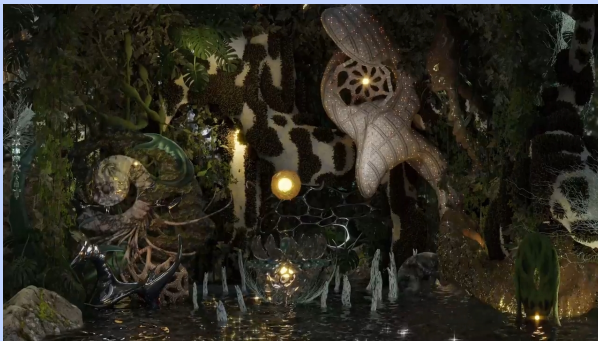
- What is the mood and mental state of this environment?
- How will you conceive of dimension, time, and emotive qualities into your environment?
- What are some visual and spatial strategies you can use?
- How will sound and music play a role?
- Will there be parts of the process that you'd like to further experiment in? This can also be in post.
- How many scenes will you have? How long will it be? Is it a narrative?
- 3D assets: How will you obtain them? What will you model yourself and what will you get online? How will you be integrating them into your scene?
- What will be the most challenging aspect of your project and why?
- Is your project feasible in the timeframe that we have?

Please include moodboard references images and sketches of maps, objects, characters, animation, and camera angle/movement as well as title ideas, color direction, materials, and reference images.

The more you contribute to your proposal, the better foundation you will have in developing a robust environment. It is important to be realistic and take rendering into consideration. You are more than welcome to use Eevee, cycles, or even render directly from the viewport. Just know that these decisions impact the image quality and timeline of your project.

Share your doc/slide/pdf in our Discord server **ASSIGNMENTS** ⇒ **#final-proposal**

## **WORLDING FINAL VIDEO**



*ammonite swamp<sup>3</sup> by d3mo\_*

For your final project, you'll be crafting out a distinct world and using the 3D camera to animate through the space. You can have one to several scenes and cuts. You can tell a story or simply bring us on a journey into the space you've created. The video must be 15 seconds or more.

Share your video as a Youtube or Vimeo link in our Discord server **ASSIGNMENTS** ⇒ **#worlding-final**