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FEATURE INTERVIEW

Building Ishaan's Lively World

Bollywood is welcoming animation wholeheartedly. Apart from 2d and 3d, clay animation too made it onto the silver screen with the recent hit *Taare Zameen Par*. In this exclusive interview, stopmotion conjuror Dhimant Vyas shares his experience working on this project and how he envisioned Ishaan's world.

Hi Kaka! Welcome to Animation Today.

Thanks Ranjith. It is my pleasure.

First of all let me congratulate you for your work in TZP. Tell us how you got involved in this project?

Thanks for the appreciation. I had shown some of my works to Aamir when I worked on the caricatures for Lagaan DVD, which he really appreciated. So, when he wanted to make use of animation for TZP, he approached me.

Was Clay animation the first choice?

No. Initially when Aamir described the story and idea he wanted the look and feel of animation with a 2D painterly feel. I showed him some of my clay animation samples. He liked it and decided to use this medium. The story comes first and then the use of animation with different styles if required. There are so many animation styles rather than 2d cel animation and Computer generated animation. This film needs that hand made textured feel like the toys made by children out of clay. It reminds us our childhood days. Clay is something that everyone can easily relate to. There is an organic feel which is not easily achievable through computer generated animation



There are sequences with cel animation and 3d in the movie.

Two sequences were planned to make use clay animation technique. The title sequence and 3x9 animation. But, since the time was very short and I had only one and half months to do every thing and it was very difficult to make it in time. So Vaibhav has done 3x9 sequences in 2D style. I selected to do title animation sequence.

Why the title sequence?

Since I have similar ideas and wild imaginations as film's character Ishaan has. I love crazy dream and think wild!!

And, how it evolved?

I visualized the entire sequence and presented a few concepts to Aamir which we discussed and finalized before beginning the actual animation. We removed as well as added a few elements to the initial idea. Before I put my ideas on story board Aamir showed the film and we discussed how we can use animation best. It is a dream sequence, where the boy is lost in his own world of fantasy with colorful elements from nature - fish, animals, birds, plants, flowers and so on but no humans in it. The idea of scene transit one to another smoothly like a dream with transitions like morphs, camera move, element appear disappear, one element drag you to another scene, so there



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is not cut till the end. You do not realize when 3 minute passes by giving the audience a glimpse into the child's inner world and the animation captures that perfectly.

It is not animation just for the sake of animating something. There is a purpose and that is to carry the story forward. 3 excellent model makers *Arvind, Vishal and Harshad* were working with me so I was out of half the tension.

Since they are from animation background and model making experience I did not have to waste time explain in detail. Satya Prakash Rath did the cinematography and lighting who has vast experience in stop motion shooting. We used 2 cameras - a web cam to check the animation frame by frame and another Canon digital SLR for capturing the final hi-res stills. For certain scenes, instead of modeling directly on the table, we made replacements beforehand and used them to speed up the actual animation process like in the scene where the peacock turns into a flower etc.

Everything was animated on one layer rather than multiple glass layers as is generally used for this technique. We left very little work for post-production. Only the bee's, bird's wings and hippo going in water were created using Photoshop. The name of the film *Taare Zameen Par* morphs from English to Hindi to Urdu, octopus movement, fish, and parrot was shot against a blue, red and green screen

placed under the glass, Tata Elxsi composited those shots against painted BG as well as the visual effects and CG animation. They also did compositing, putting Credits on my Title animation sequence, and some FX in my Clay animation sequence.

Tell us about the specific technique you use called "embossed clay illustration". Can you give us the details and how it is different and efficient from traditional clay animation techniques?

Yes .It is different from typical clay animation, as the clay figures don't stand upright but are laid out flat on a smooth surface. It is technically easier to animate in this manner as it requires less planning than when armatures are used. Light is used to give the almost 2D surface the look and feel of a three dimensional one so the challenge is in creating a model that looks three dimensional under the camera and giving illusion of 3D space in animating them.

What was the difficult part you had to deal with in this project?

To maintain correct timing, there were no cuts in the 3 minute sequence and our deadline was very tight. Each element has a different speed and a unique style of motion in that sequence. Sometimes, one shot has 20 to 25 items moving. One small mistake means everything needs to be redone. Let me tell you, it was physically stressful but



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creatively most satisfying. I thoroughly enjoyed animating it.

Tell us about Aamir Khan, the director. How was this experience to work with him?

Aamir is a perfectionist, down to earth and was very clear of what he wants; what he was looking for. He also gave me total freedom and trusted me. He was ready to experiment different styles of animation and have courage to use it in film making. I am glad that he used animation in a perfect way to tell the story.

And now the movie is a big success and even moved some of our strongest political leaders to tears.

I was very sure that 'Taare zameen Par' will be a big hit on the box office when I watched it first time during the editing process in September 07. The story, direction, acting, songs and music are very powerful part of this film.



Any message to our readers.

Thanks to all readers, I am getting viewer response from every where that they liked the Film *Taare Zameen Par* very much and also liked Clay animation a lot! Thanks to Aamir that he gave me chance and freedom to do animation in TZP. It is great encouragement for me when I hear great response from TZP viewer. I like to thank Joan ashworth (Head of Animation Dept Royal Collage of Art, UK) and Cathy Greenhalgh at this junction for teaching me stop motion technique at NID.

Thank You Kaka. Congrats once again and waiting to see more from you.

Thanks you Ranju and Animation Today, It is great pleasure to talk to you.

Thanks Ranjith

.....By Ranjith PM

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