

VIEW Conference Comes to a Close

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Hai capito? Visual culture panelists (l to r) Phil Stenton, Will Wright, Glen Entis and Michael Rubin get some auditory input.

Friday, the final day of the VIEW Conference, and a time for summing up. Let's make a list:

- That luscious gianduia chocolate.
- On the technical side, the computer graphics folks such as Paul Topolos of Pixar, Lucia Modesto of PDI-DreamWorks, and Jack Graham of Double Negative seemed to revel in showing off what they have been able to do with their new toys and techniques.



- Four mornings of delicate pastries and pungent coffee at the bar on the corner (not to mention the free Lavazza coffee during breaks)

- It was a bit of a disappointment to see only two Italian entries at the event. Maga Animation studios brought two of their animators down and did their work for those perusing the exhibit area, and their CEO, Massimo Carrier Ragazzi showed off an impressive set of pipeline tools for their TV series. The other Italian entry was game company Artematica, whose CEO Richard Cangini walked the audience through the licensing for video games, concluding that the really big breakthroughs involved original content.

Reward elements.

- Three bottles of excellent Barolo wine
- The peach conference was a real revelation. Though the presentations have a tendency to get very technical. It's a great networking event for folks on the cutting edge of technology for system integrators seeking to combine products. The researchers and small high-tech companies present seemed equally sanguine, since they seem to be making progress on all fronts and see new mass markets for their products coming their way.
- The first glimmerings of Artificial Intelligence in games as Anne Gibeault and Matthew Clarke of Ubisoft explained how they developed the character of Erika to life in the latest iteration of the *Prince of Persia* franchise



Who's afraid of AI? Matthew Clark and Anne Gibeault do the Prince and Erika.

- Lots of personal and inspirational stories, such as Larry Bafia's account of his times doing stop motion with Will Vinton and discovery of computer graphics, as well as Michael Rubin's look back at the early days of computer graphics under George Lucas.
- Did I mention the giandua chocolate?

Most of the people on the games end know this is an historical moment. Last year it surpassed the film industry in gross income and grew by a whopping 40%. Games makers and distributors have begun to market new products to the entire family, not just teenage males. One might well ask if this means that eventually the entire family will have the attention span of their hormone-charged offspring.

Yet many of those present at the conference have already begun the soul searching. Ken Perlin, from the Media Research Laboratory of New York University, showed some of the educational toys and interfaces his group was developing for little money, and lofted a challenge to the pervasive computing crowd: "The computer is the world around us," he opined in his amusing speech. "We need to make it fun and exciting for kids." *Sims* and *Spore* designer Will Wright added his own rules: the new generation of games should have high

leverage, be fun to use, useful, social and multipurpose. Putting the emphasis on the verbs of “play, create, and share,” he delivered what was perhaps the most powerful message of the conference: “anyone can be creative.”

Oddly, the speakers seemed to be picking up where the other left off. EA and PDI-DreamWorks exec Glen Entis was energized in addressing his colleagues. “We have developed powerful ways of explaining and persuading people. There is a positive aspect of this, which is open and creative, there a grey zone, which is advertising and marketing, and really nefarious.” He makes it clear that the trends that have led to the predominance of the games market in terms of technology show no signs of letting up, and we can project them into the future. “Game designers should be looking at more than games,” Entis told the audience. “They should be looking at the whole world. The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihályi wrote about “the flow,” the positive and energized state one gets into when challenge and skills are in equal balance you feel like a winner. We know how to make great games. Can we apply that to other things?”



A transformational experience - chocolate cabbage.

For the speakers it has become more than a junket, it is a chance to retreat, reflect, and cross-pollinate their ideas. This has a wonderful effect on the audience, because it inspires them and they find the speakers more accessible in this, well, euphoric state. The theme of the conference was transformation, and one gets the feeling that the speakers took the theme very personally to explain their quests and challenge others to find their own.

One cannot help feeling that there is something very special in the way Maria Elena Gutierrez has put together this festival: her cultivation of industry figures, her contacts with other festivals, and her warmth as a hostess.

Or maybe it's the chocolate.

Russell Bekins has served time in story and project development for Creative Artists Agency and Disney. He now lives in Bologna, Italy, where he specializes in concept design for theme park, aquarium and museum installations.