A STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMBINATION OF PIXEL ART AND 2D ANIMATION AS A MEDIUM FOR A NARRATIVE SHORT MOVIE

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Abstract

This project falls under Digital 2D Animation while using elements of story-telling to figure out what the art style's potentials are and the capabilities of it. This comes from the observation from the lack of an appearance this style, most likely due to the medium the style is closely associated with, Video Games. The style is generally seen in independently developed video games to save time & cost in animation. Although pixel art is very beginner-friendly and is very easy to animate in. There are only a few studios that actually use this style to save budget and time in animation. The style itself although restrictive it allows the artist to be creative and work with the limited spaces they have, only a few studios actually dedicate their time and effort to this style since it's considered a niche by the general public. There have been studios and artists who have tried to meld the two with varying results. This study will focus and ask the question if you can tell a story with these two styles. In order to explore the scope and limitation of the styles, this project will attempt to make short 2D digitally animated short using this style, to find out if this style is feasible for telling a well-constructed narrative towards a certain audience.

Keywords: Well-Constructed Narrative, Pixel Art, 2D Animation, Multi-software, Blender, Aseprite

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Introduction

Pixel Art, the first thing that will most likely come into mind is video games, as the style was originated in that medium. It has been used since the 1970's all the way till the 1990s (Keo, 2017) as programmers back then were limited by their hardware & software capabilities. They used this new art style as a way to visually express what they wanted their users to see. As time progressed, so did technology, making the art style an old nostalgic relic of the old world where computers were bulky and heavy and arcades were the hub for socialization for kids. The style has made a recent resurgence around the mid-2010s as games like Shovel Knight & Celeste proves that the style can still stand up against its higher fidelity contemporaries. The art style itself found new life in the digital age of the internet and has made an appearance in the 2D animation space on the internet, YouTube in particular. Channels like PixelPalas & DEATH BATTLE incorporated the style in their respective animation. Studios like these are taking the initiative to preserve the style and to introduce it to a new generation, showing the beauty of limitations one pixel at a time. The goal of this research is to produce a short pixel art 2D animation with the information gathered while also answering the feasibility of the style, to tell stories.

Background of the Study

Pixel art, in the current era, has evolved in terms of color depth & color palette, all thanks to the advancement of technology. Applications such as Asepirite, Krita, and Gimp have allowed artists who want to experience and experiment with the style to do so. These artists find a beauty with each pixel they are given and have craved themselves their own niche. According to a research titled "Depixelizing pixel art," when magnified and rasterize, the pixel art looks different from the image they generated (Kopf & Lishchinki, 2011). Therefore, making Pixel Art a style that cannot be fully rendered without losing the charm it has. Pixel Art so happens to be a style easily accessible to the public, thanks in large to an old forgotten default software that everyone has on the Windows PC/Laptop called MS Paint, along with the helping hand of internet resources, people may pick up the art-style very quickly if they can dedicate the time and effort to learn it.

During the '80s and '90s, video game developers had two distinct methods of creating pixel art as well as animating them. The first method is using the keyboard and mouse to create pixel artworks, while the second method used special hardware called digitizers which is a tablet that came with a mouse called a digitizer puck, it came with a crosshair. The screen was calibrated to the tablet. Artist would make a rough drawing on a paper that was placed on top of the digitizer then traced with the digitizer puck. This is how companies back then like Capcom animate and create their games (Azzi, 2019).

Meanwhile, here in the Philippines, a local artist named Paul Timothy Sabado made waves in social media with his depiction of the daily life and environment here in the Philippines using the Pixel Art style. (Tabanera, 2019)

Over the years many experiments were done with 2D animation from people like surrealist artist Salvador Dali partnering up with Disney to make a 2D animated short titled "Destino" (2003) to a novice in the industry like David Firth's producing a bone-chilling series titled "Salad Fingers," (2004) and posting it on YouTube. The medium has been pushing boundaries to bring different styles of animation into its fold. The medium itself is commonly seen with Pixel Art in video games no less. Grave of the Fireflies produced by Studio Ghibli which tackled heavy themes covering the byproducts of war. It follows two children who are homeless and are orphaned, forced to fend for themselves. Film critic Robert Ebert posits that due to the themes of the film, it would've suited a live-action setting rather than being animated, although he points out that realism would've restricted the film since a child actor portraying the role of a child character starving would've broken the immersion and message of the film (Cavallaro, 2006). Grave of the Fireflies proved that 2D animation can even tell compelling a dark adult-oriented themed film and can maintain the audience's immersion in the story and characters. The aspect that allows 2D animation to be more creatively free from film aside from being held down by reality is stylization. This aspect allows animators to endlessly express their thoughts and ideas through these stylizations (Cavallaro, 2006).

The translation of animation principles to Pixel Art in video games holds up. In a study done by Kajaani University of Applied Sciences, thanks to the improvement of resolution and color depth, fighting game characters appeared more fluid than other fighting game characters from their previous rendition (Rantala, 2013), with this in mind, a seasoned Pixel Artis could easily learn the principles and dynamics of 2D Animation, as its easier to animate when you're working a pixel at a time, allowing the artist to make their animation as smooth and fluid as they please.

Statement of the Problem

When someone is showed pixel art, the first thing they associate them with has always been video games, it's the origin of the style. There have only been a few people & studios who have taken the initiative to take that style and apply in 2D Animation, and yet people don't know about it as some don't receive the notoriety needed. In an online article published on the popular gaming news website Polygon, the writer states that good artist can work with what they have, from a Game Boy to a 60-inch LED TV, the issues arise when an ordinary person must decide what is good art? (Reynolds, 2015). For 2D animation, stories have a beginning, middle, and end, with the viewers riding along for the story, while stories told in video games, has the viewer directly interacting with the story. There's the challenge with the combination, it has been done in the past where artists have managed to tell a story mixing the two mediums. I shall find out what are the characteristics as well as reference points to produce a short narrative-driven story 2D Animation.

Specifically, this study aims to on:
1. How can 2D Animation with the Pixel Art style tell a story?
2. Why is this style considered a niche by most people?
3. What are the challenges of mixing the two together?

Objectives

Pixel Art & 2D animation may have a harmonious relationship with each other. This paper will find that out by exploring the history of the two mediums coming together while discovering why people would forgo seeing a 2D animation used over highly rendered drawings with a broader color depth. Thanks to modern-day technology color palettes have become extremely easy to find with the help of the internet, allowing pixel artist to use a wide array of colors. Despite being a niche, an audience exists and I will perform a survey on the general public on their opinions of this style. I shall also document their experience using the two styles with a production diary to find out the challenges they've faced.

My main goal is to produce Pixel Art 2D narrative-driven animation short output with all the data gathered in mind to make an effective short.

Specifically, this study aims:

1. To find out the niche audience of the style and ask them their opinions of pixel art; -

2. Documenting the challenges of using the two mediums together, by using a production diary to record the progress each day during the production of the output; and -
3. Publish the artwork in order to raise awareness among artists & animators that pixel art is a viable style & aesthetic and to encourage them to try it out themselves.

Significance of the Study

This research addressed multimedia arts students; animators & other artists who intend to learn about the combination of these two forms. The progress and completion of the output shall be documented so that future students, researchers & faculty may access, discuss, and learn about the information gathered and the output produced in this study.

This project can be used as a future reference for:

Multimedia Art Students: The information produced from this project may allow students who specialize in 2D or 3D Animation to expand and/or experiment with the concepts and idea that's presented in this study or use this research for references for a similar animation project.

Animation Students: The information gathered by this study will allow animation students to grasp the idea and concepts of mixing 2D Animation with a Pixel Art style, giving them an opportunity to experiment with the two styles while learning about them. The study may also be used as a reference for their projects that fall under either of the styles.

Educational Institutions: This project will allow this party to use this project as educational material or visual aid to help instructors and students about this topic and can aid students from their respective educational institution to use this as reference material for their projects.

Future Researchers: This study will allow researchers to gain a brief understanding of how the two styles are combined and they will be able to point to this paper as a reference when pursuing a topic similar to the one covered here.

Scope and Limitations

The output of this research shall be a short narrative Pixel Art 2D animation that uses Aseprite (a software used to make sprites, environments, and animations for video games) and Adobe Premiere Pro to assemble the scenes into a 5-minute short. As of the writing of this paper, a global pandemic is underway, therefore, limiting my ability to

collect physical data and local documents that could contribute to the paper itself. Most of the information gathered here is through online articles and e-books. Some of the information presented here may lack local relevance and local studies similar to this research. The 5-minute short shall be presented with subtitles and no voice-over actor but will feature sound effects to maintain the film's immersion.

This study shall briefly explain the application of this art style in a video game. It will not present a detailed discussion of the games that used pixel art. Instead, it will list a single selected Pixel Art 2D Animated short that portray a narrative as an example to elaborate my argument. I shall also include the process of writing an effective narrative towards a targeted audience as part of the research since the story will act as the base of my argument.

In an online article, Rich Grilloti claims that his company Pixeljam's audience is mostly eight- to fourteen-year-olds (Buck, 2012), although the research and output are open for anyone to all to see, it is important to keep in mind that the study's core audience are multimedia art students, animators, and artist specifically from the age range of 18 to 35. I shall also reach out to multimedia arts students as well as professional animators and/or former animators who have worked in the industry to get insight and opinions on the subject.

Blender will also be used in the process for creating the short animation, although I do not have extensive experience with the software, it will be vital to the process as it will allow mr to apply camera techniques borrowed from filmmaking to the short animation.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are operational terms that will be used to further elaborate the meaning

2D Graphics: Two-dimensional digital graphics, also the most common dimension used in animation and Pixel Art.

Art-style: A particular visual style distinctive to a form or an artist. A general term mostly used by artist to describe other particular artist with referring to their works

Animation: A term that's usually used by the general public when describing rapid display of a sequence of still images to create an illusion of movement.

Bitmap: A 2d image constructed of pixels located contiguously in a grid. A color value is allocated to each pixel in the image. Also known as raster graphics. This term is commonly seen in and associated Pixel Art.

Color depth: The number of bits used to indicate the color value of a single pixel. Determines the amount of different color values a pixel in the image, this will be used to describe how pixel art can add depth to their characters and environment.

Color Palette: a color scheme is the choice of colors used in various artistic and design contexts.
can have. It will be used to describe the vast color options that pixel art has.

Complex Pixel Art: Pixel art that does requires heavy details to visually communicate its design

Frame: A single still image in an animation sequence. A term mostly used by animators to describe whether a scene needs more or less frames

FPS: A term seen in game development to describe to frame rate, the number of frames per second in animation or other video games.

High Definition (HD): Resolutions higher than standard-definition, such as 720p (1280x720) and 1080p (1920x1080). Most commonly seen and used by the general public to describe the clarity and resolution of screen

Meme(s): an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture.

Pixel: The smallest component of a bitmap image/screen.

Pixel Art: a form of digital art, created through the use of software, where images are edited on the smallest level, pixels.

Resolution: The number of pixels in an image, usually quoted as width x height, this term is usually used by the general public to describe the clarity of a screen is.

Simple Pixel Art: Pixel art that does not required heavy details to visually communicate its design

Sprite: A two-dimensional graphic image, often animated, that is integrated into a larger scene, the term is used in game development and animation so the teams can effectively communicate with each other
.
Surrealism:

Upscale: The conversion of a lower resolution image into a higher resolution format to display properly. The term will be used to reiterate that Pixel Art cannot be upscaled

Video Games: a game played by electronically manipulating images produced by a computer program on a television screen or other display screen.

The Design Concept

This chapter shall promptly discuss the projects/works which may have similar studies relating to this project, while also presenting the Creative Framework displaying how this research shall tackle the questions and methods that will be used to find a conclusive answer.

Multimedia Project Description

This project was originally inspired by the simplicity of Pixel Art and how Pixel Art animation looks so simple yet so complex in classic fighting games. Old fighting games would use bitmap assets since the hardware limitations of that era forced game developers to work with lower resolutions as well as a limited color palette (Rantala, 2013). The intrigue always stayed due to YouTube channels like Death Battle! Applying a mixed media aspect to pixel art, using pixel art as the bases for animating their characters than adding them on top of upscaled 2D environments for them to move around, they would occasionally draw a new angle to their characters in the action needed it whenever they would change camera angles. The show itself would look odd sometimes as the environment contradicted the characters displayed on the screen, but thanks to their creative application of the style it has blossomed into more than 4 million subscribers to their YouTube channel. Outside of Death Battle! Pixel Art has mostly been seen in video games or illustrations done by the graphic design artist. Their would-be short looping Pixel Art animations called GIFs popping up here and there on the internet but only a few dare to go full fledge on the Pixel Art trend.

One of the key reasons why I choose to tackle the style of Pixel Art while combining them with 2D Animation is that the style is very beginner-friendly as well as it's much more intricate in a way, whereby the artist themself can manipulate the literally pixels of their artwork, allowing them to make adjustments very easily. This research will also further pursue to legitimize the claim that Pixel Art is easy, and can potentially lead to further interests outside Pixel Art, the neighbor being 2D Animation. While exploring and learning Pixel Art, artists will be able to learn some of the fundamentals of arts, like basic color theory, shading, and line art. The style has led artists to explore other styles and also practice the fundamentals they learn from their time starting out with Pixel Art.

Another show that inspired this project was Avatar: The Last Airbender particularly the characterization and story-telling of the show and how they execute their narrative beats. This is why the attention will be paid to building a well-constructed narrative, with a strong character that is not offensive for this current era, along with an interesting setting and also tackling heavy themes like war. The harmony amongst each aspect makes an interesting and compelling story, it's thanks to this the show is still relevant and is compared to shows currently airing or just aired. After the show finished some fans were left wanting more, since the writing was strong, and later the showrunners would provide a sequel although it was lack-luster and weak in the eyes of

some fans, but thematically a lot of the subject matters they choose to tackle were thought-provoking, like how a communist/fascist ideology would work in this world. The fans themselves felt the execution of these ideas were all wrong and they didn't experiment with the ideas they presented. It was these sets of ideas that inspired the story focused aspect of the project.

With the two inspirations in mind, the project will take the two and combine them into a short 6-minutes animated film that will revolve around an old man character traveling in a mysterious and lively fantasy world. The story itself will deal with some socially relevant theme like a global pandemic but scaled down to a small nation, as he searches for spells and potions to cure his family.

This project will contribute to the small pool of short catalogue of animated shorts in the style of Pixel Art while also proving that the style can convey and communicate narrative themes to a specific audience and hopefully to inspire other artists to try out the simplistic style to tell their own story either for a specific audience or the general populace.

Review of Related Literature

The documents covering both Pixel Art and 2D animation are vast. The following related literature that was collected shall be used as a guide for the output of this research.

Well-Constructed Narrative

Stories have been conveyed by various mediums since ancient times when the Greeks would use theaters to tell stories of gods and myths, and in time we gradually develop different modes and styles to portray these stories through books and images. We even develop certain stories or themes that would cater to a certain demographic to either please them or to make them think critically, telling an effective narrative that resonates with your audience even after your story concludes is a show of an effective story.

People throughout the ages have managed to tell amazing stories from authors like William Shakespeare (Hamlet), J.R.R Tolkien (The Lord of The Rings), and George R. R. Martin (Game of Thrones.) These writers all have told stories that resonated with their audiences and have left a lasting impact on them. "*If a reader picks up a book and remains in his own world, there was no point in picking up the book in the first place. What the reader seeks is an experience that is other*" (Bell, 2004). Now the challenge is making a story that suits 2D animation and keeps the audience immersed in the story.

A great way to also grab the audience is by establishing a captivating world and setting. In chapter two, the author claims, writers should be meticulous when it comes to the detail when it comes to making their worlds (Rozelle, 2005).

As for character writing, audiences of the popular Nickelodeon cartoon show "Avatar: The Last Airbender" were extremely captivated by one of the shows best characters "Iroh" (Failde, 2020). His character was written as the wise and old mentor to a morally troubled nephew of his "Zuko" but later on in the series he would also be the guiding light to other supporting characters in the show. The relationship between the two is further communicated by the dialogue they have in the show. In the very first episode, it is revealed what the two want in the show, Zuko wanting to regain his honor back so he can go home, while Iroh wants Zuko to reevaluate himself and to look at the bigger picture. Delivering clearly character motivations through dialogue is important to progress the story further (Kress, 2005). One of the reasons people resonated with his character so well is due to the fact he was like an elder figure children, teenagers, and young adults could look onto for guidance and consoling, an intentional writing choice from the characters as the show was targeted for children at that time.

To further analyze Iroh, he also follows Joseph Campbell's "The Hero's Journey" structure. Using "The Initiation" described by Joseph Campbell himself, it is a realm where the hero is either aided by previous companions they've encountered and/or discover an eternal force supporting them throughout their journey (Campbell, 2004), in relation to Iroh, he lost his only child in a war which leads him on a spiritual journey to make himself whole once. It is through this journey he discovers the spirit world; this conclusion had a profound impact on Iroh's life that he reevaluates his previous actions leading him to pass the lesson onto his nephew Zuko which left a narrative impact in the overall show. Iroh himself has aged well in time as kids who grew up fondly remember him as the best uncle they never had.

Pixel Art

The birth of Pixel Art was due to hardware limitations, starting out with 8-bit graphics while handheld consoles of that time would receive a limited color palette to work with leaving game developers & designers a limited room to work with, but for some, it was liberating. The most iconic 8-bit character that can come to mind is Mario, the silhouette itself is iconic and it is also thanks to the limit of Pixel Art. The creator of Mario, Shigeru Miyamoto would later state the process of creating Mario in an interview, the limited palette allowed him to create Mario distinct, which lead to the big nose that Mario now has (Miyamoto, 2009). Later renditions of Mario would be able to communicate how Mario visually looks, acts, and feel to the player. As said by (Azzi, 2019) once a 16-bit and 32-bit era artist had more leeway, giving them the ability to just draw their characters on a sheet of grid paper and scan them later on and trace them digitally pixel by pixel on a bitmap to make things a tad easier.

Games like early role-playing games like the original Legend of Zelda (1986) and the early Final Fantasy series (1987-present) used Pixel Art back then as it was the only

option back then and now, they have evolved into the high-fidelity sphere of stylized 3D games. The genre these games takes place in "Role-playing games" or RPG takes the player to role-play as the main protagonist of their stories, with the player given direct control of how the story ends. How RPGs immerse their players is through interesting environments, characters, gameplay mechanics, and a story that the player can truly care. These early RPGs followed the narrative trope of "Main protagonist must save city/world" and as time progressed narratives became more nuisances and intricate for the betterment of the gaming industry in general. A strong recent proponent of mixing Pixel Art as well as a complex narrative is Undertale (2015), the game receives massive positive feedback from its fans, as it subverted the RPG mechanics while also doing a great job in making the players care about the games story.

The resurgence of Pixel Art can be heavily attributed to the popularity of indie-games, games that were made by a small studio/team, or just a one-man project. It was also due to the current trend of graphics in video games, as big companies were getting better and better graphics. Games like Undertale (2015), Stardew Valley (2016) and Minecraft are considered the golden children by the indie gaming community since it was worked on by a single developer. All sharing the common trait of Pixel Art, this proves that if artist have the time but necessarily enough resources, they can use Pixel Art as a style to captivate their audiences. Pixel Art was the cheap alternative to Pixel Art was the David and high-fidelity graphics was the Goliath, the contrarian to the status quo of video games. The prerequisite to designing a full 3D game requires to model a character, create the texture, create the animations and import the assets to the game, and that's a summarization of the workflow when it comes to 3D itself, but with Pixel Art, all you need is a character design, the animations then import (Silber, 2016).

Aside from the obvious association Pixel Art has with video games, the style has taken a stand to be its own thing. The style has captured the minds of the new millennial of kids and also inspired them to pursue the style and to allow it to grow, it is also thanks in large part to video games and their boom in the early 2010s. Pixel Artists like Kenze Wee, Dušan Čežek & Diego Sanches exercise their artistic abilities in this style and some of them even used it to lunch their art careers. It's all due to the ease of Pixel Art itself, the style is friendly for beginners and can still support a growing artist's curiosity in other forms of art. Pixel Art allows future artists to learn the basics of shading, color theory, and line art (Silber, 2016) the fundamentals for all new artists, the limits of Pixel Art can act as the baby cage for the artist until they learn what they need.

The digital age of the internet introduced a new approach to Pixel Art, it took the medium away from its video games roots and trusted in the age of the internet culture. The video game approach of Pixel Art back then was to work economically and efficiently with the pixels you were given where you needed optimize the shape and design of your object or character so the player/viewer can understand what their looking at and to be able easily animate it. In the digital era. In general, Pixel Art is the perfect platform for young developing artist when it comes to learning the basic and fundamentals. Although the style is works for artist starting out, it lacks the complexity

experienced animators use, like creative use of camera work. As for experienced artist they can only do and express so much with a one-by-one pixel square.

Furthermore, Pixel Art cannot be upscaled without looking odd or uncanny, there's a tendency the edges are left blurred and leave unwanted outlines around the upscaled Pixel Art (Kopf & Lishchinki, 2011). It is a style that can't be upgraded through an algorithm, but rather best upgraded by hand. The art style itself may visually seem odd at times with the squares of pixel connecting each other but even artificial intelligence can't upgrade the visuals of the style yet. The crux of this style is its simply tied down to three aspects, video games, nostalgia, and the retro aesthetic, the style itself for better or for worst can only perform as good as the artist wants too, the art style is only as good as the artist, limiting to that impressionist feel by not adding too much detail due to the artist's lack of technique and familiarity with the style.

2D Animation

In the realm of 2D animation, it has only existed for only a century, it already has established rules and principles set by the artist of yesteryear. Most artists follow those rules while the contrarian's experiment with animations that do not follow the status quo. Like melding post-romanticism or abstract with 2D animation, it is these kinds of people that really push progression in the creative field of 2D animation.

Works by Studio Ghibli and Disney is what brought the medium mainstream attention, as it captured the heart and minds of a growing generation that would later inspire them to step in the industry and to learn the craft itself. *"Miyazaki's heroines have, by the end of the movie, managed to negotiate successfully a problematic moment of their lives, the experience constitutes a beginning and not a resolution."* (Cavallaro, 2006) while Disney films would have a more conclusive ending, leaving audiences with a smile on their faces after witnessing the happy ending.

This research will put empathizes with both the story-making and storyboarding process of the output so it can deliver both an effective, satisfying, and conclusive output. The author claims "*A strong storyboard is half the project done. It's the foundation on which movies, TV series or computer game is built*" (Byrne, 1999).

In the realm of fighting game animation, certain characters will feel different from one another. Each character having their own movesets, rhythm, style etc. and players would visually know what that character is all about and how he plays, whether an honest fighter who will shake their opponents' hand after the match or disrespect them after by they beat them in a dirty fashion (Rantala, 2013). This is another key feature when it's time to animate the characters, by simply adding flair and personality to their regular poses, how many frames each character uses to express themselves is important, they become distinct and more memorable in the eyes of the audiences, it is a technique that was birth from 2D animation and seamed through the other animation forms.

With this information in mind, the combination of a strong story structure, character, and setting it should be complemented by a strong Pixel Art character design along with a very good storyboard and animation applied, should be able to communicate the goal of this project. The information presented here will be able to reemphasize that Pixel Art is a viable style to tell stories in 2D Animation.

Review of Related Works

The following works are what inspired me to commit to this research, as it showed them that the combination in this day and age is still feasible and the audience for them exist to support the existence of this niche/sub-genre of animation. These are the artist and artworks accompanied with a short paragraph explaining them:

Figure 1 Screenshot from "Aang VS Edward Elric (Avatar VS Fullmetal Alchemist) | DEATH BATTLE!"A mix media animation by the YouTube channel DEATH BATTLE! (2019)

Aang VS Edward Elric (Avatar VS Fullmetal Alchemist) (Ben Singer, 2019) by DEATH BATTLE! Is a YouTube channel that uses fictional characters ranging from comic books, novels, anime, cartoon, movies etc. and pit them against one another to seen which character is stronger than the other with the help of research. The channel uses various animation styles from 2D and 3D animation as well as 2.5D animation. Their method of animating is by creating certain animation assets for the characters they will use, thus making their process easier and more streamlined. The way the Pixel Art is used to design the characters and asset is a reference point that will be used for the final output.
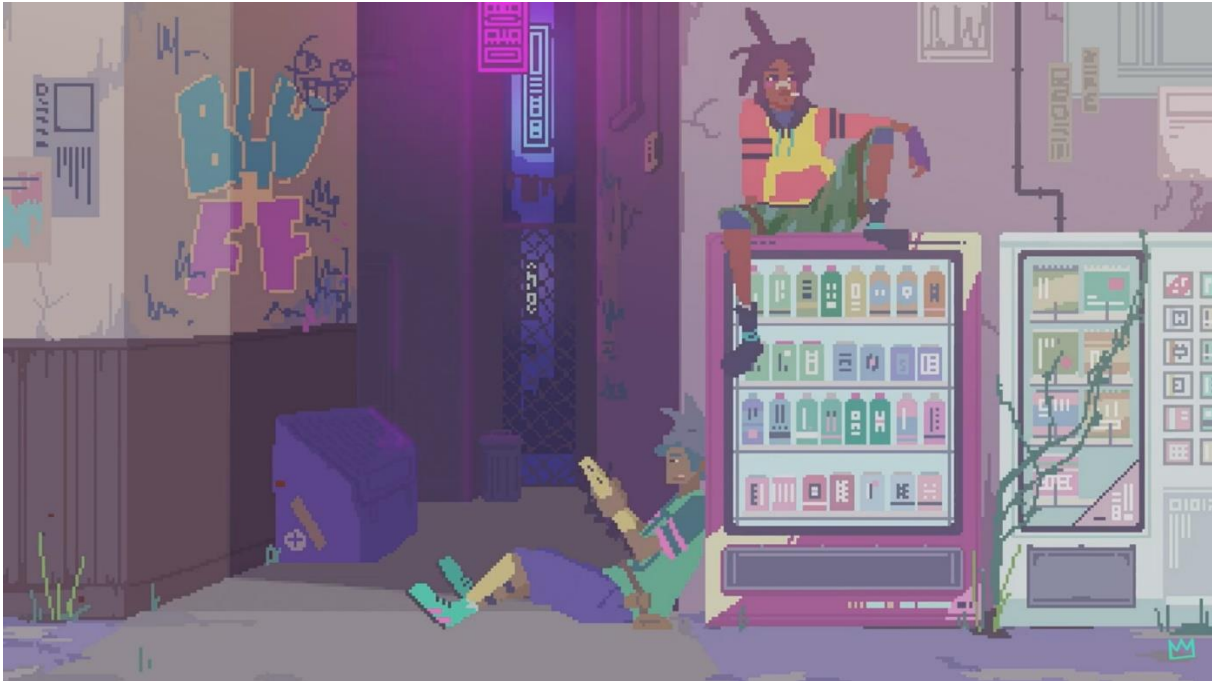
Figure 2 Screenshot from "Pixel Art Animation | The Heroes Of This Story © | Intro Sequence Concept" by Harry Sussams (2019)

The Poncho Pilgrim is owned by freelance artist Harry Sussams. He has commissioned works for games and has animated a music video for bands. In this particular video he released, it's a compilation of different characters living in various vibrant environments, which is a common trait in some of his pixel art animation where he would create interesting environments. His different world buildings and environments will be used as reference for the final output.

Figure 3 Screenshot from "Tales of Ba Sing Se" from Avatar: The Last Airbender by Michael DiMartino & Bryan Ehasz (2006)

Avatar: The Last Airbender is one of the shows that resonated with the youth when the show aired and till this day it is widely regarded as one of the best cartoons of its time due to its ability to also tell mature themes but still fit its target demographic of children and can also be watched by adults. This particular episode featured developments for a select few from the cast, this episode also featured a prominent character from the series named "Iroh" or most commonly referred as "Uncle Iron." It features him showcasing the all his character traits and showed why fans loved his character. The character "Iroh" will be used as a reference point to create a character that shares similarities with him that will be important in the story.

Figure 4 Screenshot from "Howl's Moving Castle" by Studio Ghibli, directed by Hayao Miyazaki (2004)

Howl's Moving Castle is a feature-length animated film by Studio Ghibli, set in a fantasy world which mixes the industrialism boom of the 1800's and the monarchs of the 1600-1700's. It features a girl caught in a wizard's war between himself and an opposing threat and has to serve him as his house keeper on the wizards moving castle. In this particular scene, the old lady explores the different environments she is transported to by the magical properties of the door. This particular sequence is relevant to the project as it pertains to an interesting world and setting, it allows the audience to be immersed in the world through curiosity. The film will be used as reference for how Studio Ghibli is able to build its world and environment and as well how they wrote the world itself.

Figure 5 Screenshot from "Survival of the Sublime | Pixel Art Animation | Short Film" by by Harry Sussams (2019)

In this particular short Harry Sussams focuses on a single character and their journey across different environments. The way Harry Sussams presents this short is by using traditional style of 2D animation and turning the character into a sprite and creating asset for it like the ones seen from Death Battle! This style shall be carried over and be referenced in the final output, by mixing the method of creating asset for the animation while also free drawing some of the scenes in the short.

These works will act as the key inspiration on the how the projects world and character may look and feel like, by mixing the character styles of Harry Sassums & Death Battle! Compact video game style together to make an amalgamation of two, while also complimented by the character insight and writing of Iroh from Avatar: The Last Airbender. Along with the pixel world the building by Harry Sassums combined with Studio Ghibli's depictions shall help the project have a solid reference base.
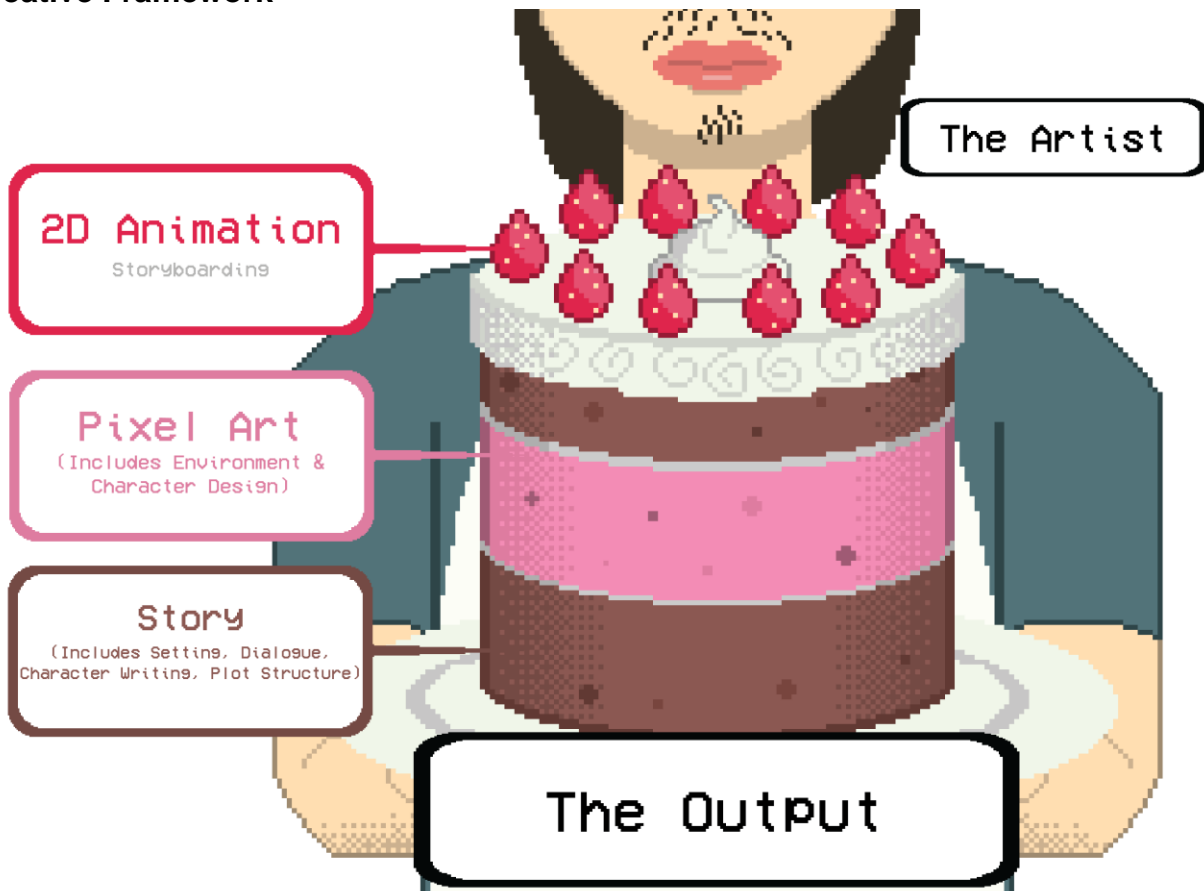
Creative Framework

Figure 6 "A Study on the Effectiveness of the Combination of Pixel Art and 2D Animation's" Creative Framework

The study shall delve into the processes and steps that will be taken in constructing the final output. This paragraph shall talk about how important the story-making process will be in the process, as well how important it can be in building the world and design then it will talk about the character design processes and how the world was design in the Pixel Art style then further talk about the process of the storyboarding process for the 2D animation aspect of the output.

Story-telling will be a key aspect to support the final output, as a good story will capture the audience and even convince them to take the style more seriously. The challenge itself will be keeping the writing consistent and making the narrative clear within the 10-minute time frame the project has. The writing will act as the base and the first act of the project and attention will be given to it. Description and Setting is key to fiction but other aspect is needed for them to run cohesively (Rozelle, 2005).

The Pixel Art will explore how the world will be built on and how the characters will be designed around. Nowadays artists break the rules of how Pixel Art was conventionally used back then, since it was limited by game design. Artist like Harry

Sassums takes the traditional approach when it comes to him making his Pixel Art 2D animations, by creating characters more complex rather than the style's simplistic and compact roots. This aspect of the project will be the metaphorical sponge or the baked cake itself, adding flavor and depth to project with its visual designs.

2D Animation shall play major role in portraying the story written by myself as it will communicate the emotions and environment the story it is set in, by using 2D animation techniques and principals to build an interesting and engaging world for the audience. The storyboarding aspect will be paid attention to closely as it can propel a mediocre/average story to a more attractive and satisfying one to witness. This is will be the last push for the project, the icing and cherry on either a mediocre or very well-crafted cake.

Methodology

This research used mixed method research design, utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods for data gathering and analyzing data. The respondents were determined by convenience sampling from a population of a) multimedia arts students; b) artists; c) animators. Data gathering was done through online surveys and interviews, with questions that were formulated with the thought of what, why, and how people perceive and consume Pixel Art. After the data gathering process, the researcher analyzed the data from the interviews using conventional content analysis. Then data from the surveys were then analyzed and organized using a cross-tabulation method to find the conclusive answer.

Research Design

The usage of mixed methods in this research is vital in accomplishing the objectives of this research. The combination of the qualitative and quantitative data acquired from using the data gathering instruments greatly helped the researcher answer his research objectives and brainstorm and create the multimedia project.

The research collected quantitative data from the online surveys and the qualitative data from the chosen interviewees from the target population, by using the online survey format, it allowed the researcher to cover the target population to gain insight on their perspective on Pixel Art through quantitative means. Qualitative data collected from interviews from selected individuals with knowledge and expertise about the subject area would also provide relevant insights about the style and its overall limits. The selected individuals will come from Pixel Artists and Animators who work in the creative and animation industries.

Data-gathering Instruments

The sources of each of the data gathered are from published articles and other research conducted by other parties who have observed and practiced the styles growth and evolution. I used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In terms of quantitative research method, I used survey gathering, while the qualitative research method used the interviews of the selected candidates. The former method used Google Forms as the medium for data collection for the as it is the most accessible means for the target audience of this research. The latter research method used interviews via Zoom or Google Meets to acquire the necessary data for conventional content analysis.

A. Interviews

The selected candidates for interviews are professionals from the industry and have used Pixel Art Animation at least one or more times in their projects. The researcher interviewed the interviewees about their experience with Pixel Art, and their insights about the consumption of this specific art style. The interviews were held using either Zoom or Google Meets.

B. Survey

The questionnaire asked the target audience about their opinions on the Pixel Art style and how they came to know about the style itself, with the sole goal of figuring out the extent of how receptive multimedia art students, animators and other artists are towards the style itself in either a positive or negative manner and used Google Forms as it is the most accessible form for the target audience.

Respondents

The targeted audience for the survey is multimedia art students, artists, and animators from different universities ranging from the range of 18 to 35, from any nationality or ethnicity as this demographic has a significant impact on the research and output. The selection of this particular group is due to the likelihood of them experiencing Pixel Art at least once in their lifetime in either a video game that they played or while they were going through their social media feeds.

As for the candidates for the interview section, they were selected due to their background in working with Pixel Art at least more than once or have industry experience in animation. The first candidate for the interview has experience in

animating with Pixel Art assets for a YouTube Channel called "DEATH BATTLE!" The second interview was from a local artist here in the Philippines and has done Pixel Art related projects in the past and has used it to propel their career in art forward.

Data Analysis

The data gathered by the researcher was analyzed through cross-tabulation and conventional content analysis, while interviews were analyzed through thematic content analysis. The outcome of the data analysis will dictate how the output will be produced to make sure that it is optimal for the targeted audience.

Design Process

Multimedia Project

The multimedia project is 2D animated short film that will last 5 minutes long, it will cover basic narrative premises and will display the Pixel Art style. It will be created digitally with the help of two software, called Aseperite and Premiere Pro. Pixel Art is a digitally exclusive art-style and is the main reason my choice for making this digitally. The following software were used:

A. **Aseprite**

   Aseprite itself is an animated sprite editor and Pixel Art tool used to create sprite assets and 2D environments for video games. It is mostly used among independent game developers who don't have time nor resources to create complex 2D Character Designs or Environment.

B. **Premiere Pro**
   Premiere Pro itself is a video editing software used by professionals in the film and video editing industry. It is used to assemble footage as well as color grade said footage and compiles them all into a single video format for the public to watch.

C. **Blender**
   Blender is a 3D Modeling/Animation software used by a few animation studios around the world. It was added late into the research process and will be implemented in the animation process as it allows me to be more creative with their shots, as one of the interviewees talked about how they used Blender in their animation process.

Target Audience
The audience for this project was chosen due to their high receptiveness to art styles
from varying degrees, and will be published digitally to showcase towards a larger
audience

A. Demographic

This research demographic range from 18-35 years of age as these are the ones
who have encountered Pixel Art at least once in their lives. For those in the 25
and above demographic, they have definitely lived through the era where video
games still followed the Pixel Art style, as games from that era were exclusively
produced in that style. The demographic ranging below the 25 years old
demographic, they're the ones who have experienced the trend and resurgence
of Pixel Art in video games.

B. **Geographic**

The research itself does not restrict itself to any specific geographical region in
the world and is open for multimedia art students, animators and other artists
around the world to provide their input and insights to this research. Although the
research is conducted from the Philippines a large majority of its respondents are
Filipino artists and students.

C. **Psychographic**

The target audience of animators, artist and multimedia art students was chosen
due to the fact they are more open and exposed to different artistic styles varying
from surreal and abstract to complex and neo-realistic art works.

D. **Behavioristic**

The target audience of this research will be artist who usual are exposed varies
forms of art-styles and forms and will later have more to say about the style and
the output itself as their line of work also requires them to give out critical
opinions as well as appreciate the style itself.

Results and Discussion

Research Survey Results

I conducted this survey around 2021 with the bulk of the respondents being students from De La Salle University College of Saint Benilde at around 70.58% while students and alumnus of Asia Pacific College were around 29.41%. The results of the survey showed that most multimedia arts students have positive opinions on Pixel Art as an art style, in the sense 88.2% would watch a short-animated film using the style. Although they have the opinion that Pixel Art itself is hard to learn and animate with, around 67.6% believe that. The reasoning to why one of them has such opinion is mostly due to the fact that they have limited camera angles to work with. Another pointed out that, *"it takes great patience since you have to calculate the placement and color."* Says on respondent on the survey.

As for the respondents who believed that Pixel Art is easy to animate with, around 17.6% while 82.4% believe it would be difficult to animate. For some of the answers over ease of animating with Pixel Art, one respondent answered with *"Whatever the medium is, animating is time consuming."* While another respondent answered with *"it can be economical for a small animation studio, but very tiring way of animating since you are a bit limited to it (in a way)."* One of the respondents pointed out that the other reason why Pixel Art is considered niche is due to its heavy association to retro video games and the nostalgia that it brings to it.

Overall, the results gave insight into what multimedia artist truly think about the art style. At the end multimedia artist are the ones that are more open to new art style and concepts, which is why they were chosen as the target audience for the survey, with that being said. This means that Pixel Art still has some hurdles to get through as multimedia artist would watch an animated film using Pixel Art but will not try it themselves nor learn to animate with it.

1. What's your age range?
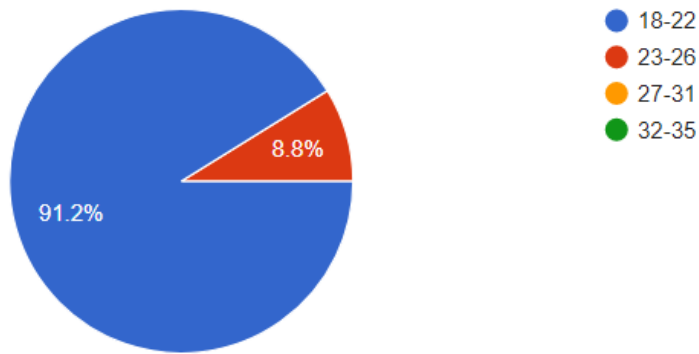
What's your age range?

34 responses

Figure 7 *Pie chart of age range of respondents*

2. Which University/College are you from?
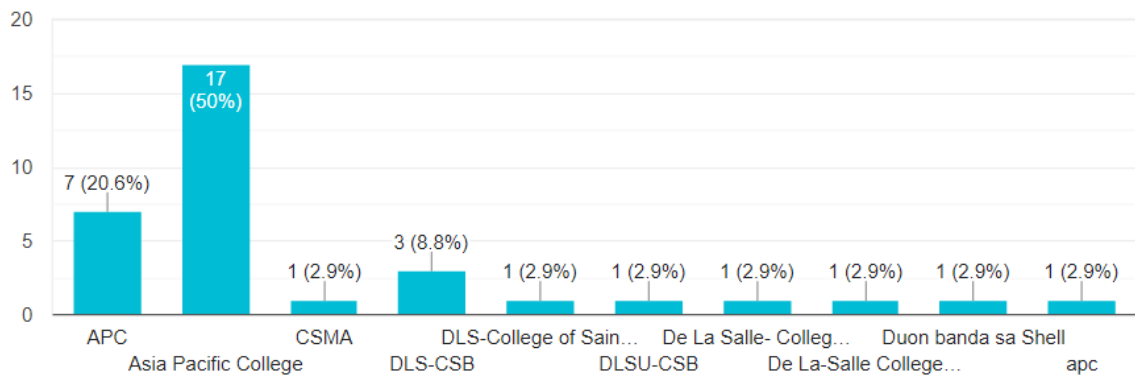
Which University/College are you from?

34 responses

Figure 8 *Percentage of respondents currently enrolled university*

3. Have you heard of Pixel Art?
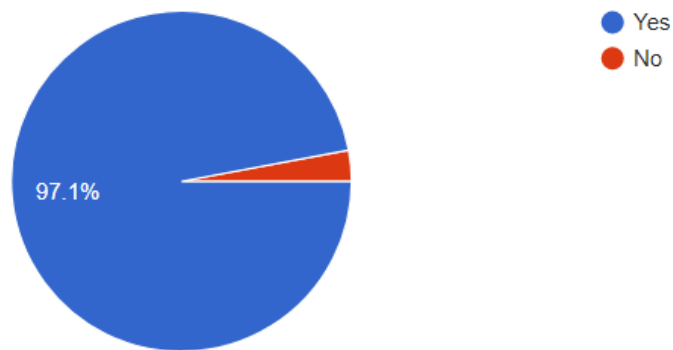
Have you heard of Pixel Art?

34 responses

Figure 9 *Pie chart of whether the respondents heard of Pixel Art*

4. Do you think Pixel Art is easy to learn?
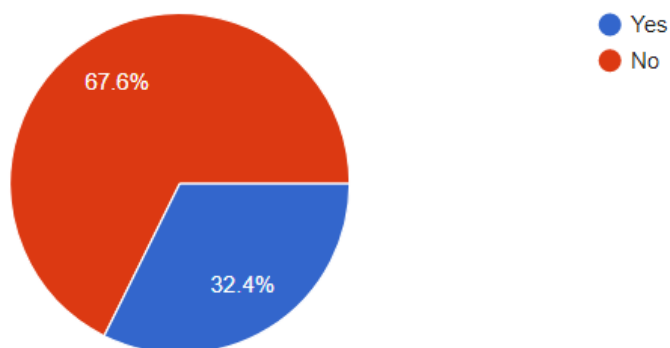
Do you think Pixel Art is easy to learn?

34 responses

Figure 1.4 *Pie chart of whether the respondents think Pixel Art is easy to learn*

5. Do you think Pixel Art is easy to animate with?

Do you think Pixel Art is easy to animate with?
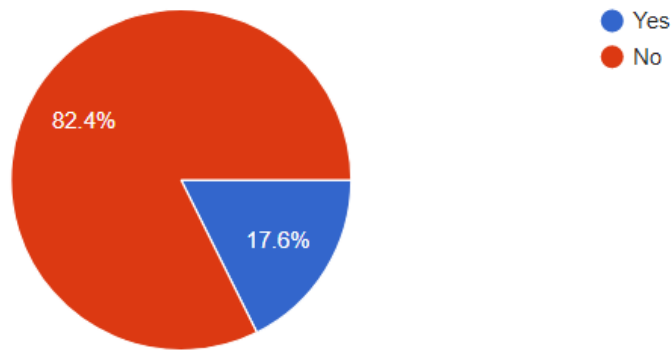
34 responses

Figure 10 *Pie chart of whether the respondents think Pixel Art is easy to animate with*

6. If you answered YES in the previous question, why? (Answer N/A if you answered 'NO')

If you answered YES in the previous question, why? (Answer N/A if you answered 'NO')   Copy
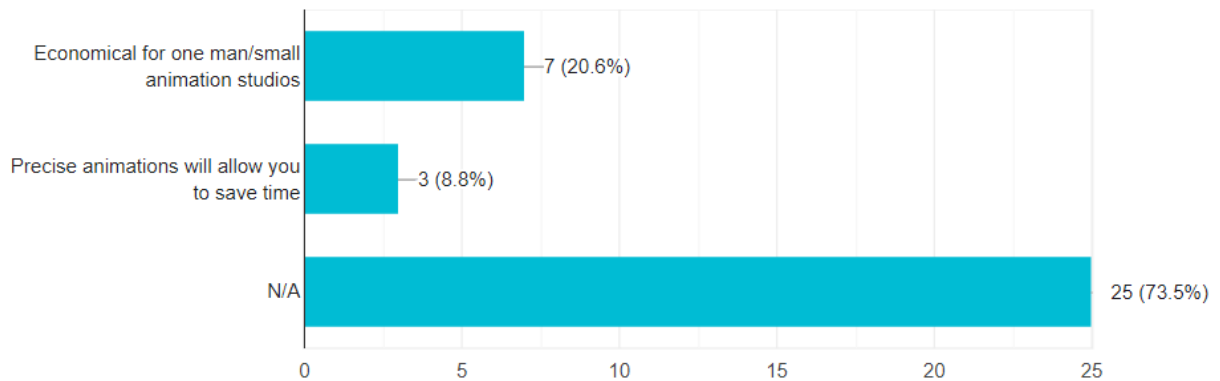
34 responses

Figure 11 *Percentage of respondents that think Pixel Art is easy to animate with*

7. **If you answered NO in the previous question, why? (Answer N/A if you answered 'YES')**

If you answered NO in the previous question, why? (Answer N/A if you answered 'YES')   Copy
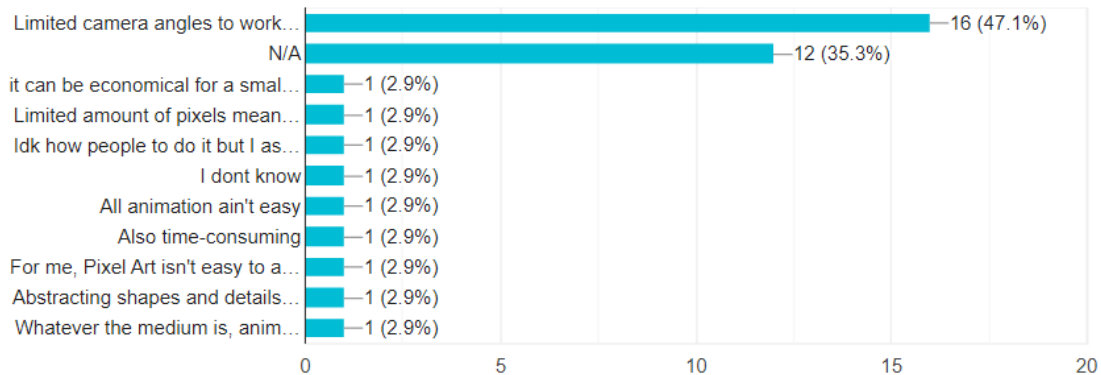
34 responses

Limited camera angles to work...	16 (47.1%)
N/A	12 (35.3%)
it can be economical for a smal...	1 (2.9%)
Limited amount of pixels mean...	1 (2.9%)
Idk how people to do it but I as...	1 (2.9%)
I dont know	1 (2.9%)
All animation ain't easy	1 (2.9%)
Also time-consuming	1 (2.9%)
For me, Pixel Art isn't easy to a...	1 (2.9%)
Abstracting shapes and details...	1 (2.9%)
Whatever the medium is, anim...	1 (2.9%)

Figure 12 *Percentage of respondents that think Pixel Art is not easy animate with*

8. **Given the right circumstances, would you try Pixel Art and/or Pixel Art animation yourself?**

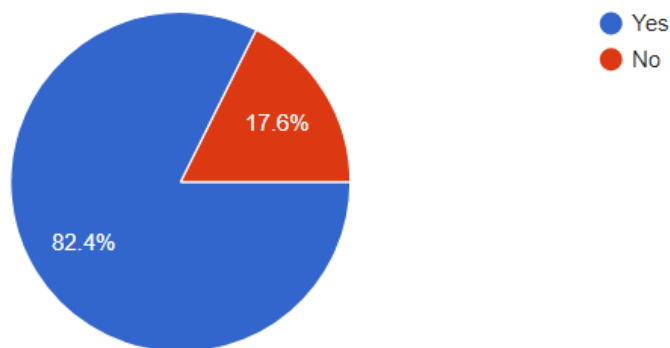Given the right circumstances, would you try Pixel Art and/or Pixel Art animation yourself?

34 responses

- Yes
- No

17.6%

82.4%

Figure 13 *Pie chart of respondents that would try Pixel Art animation*

9. What kind of media have you consumed in the past week or so?

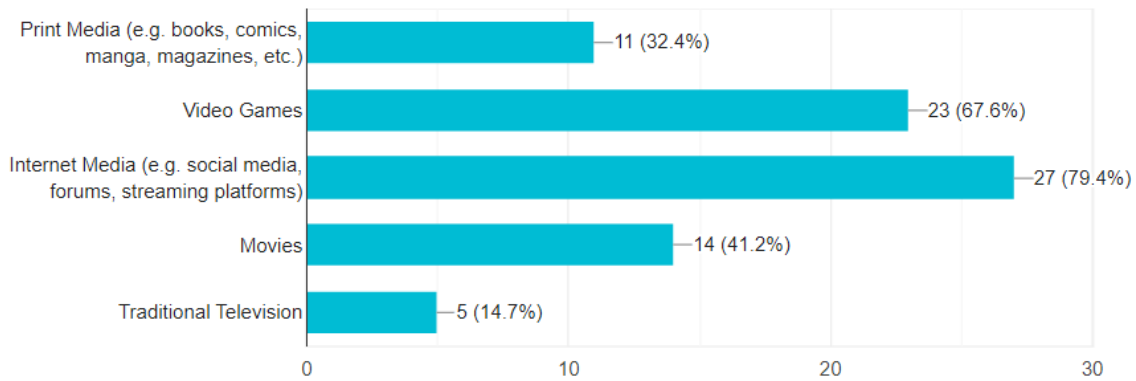What kind of media have you consumed in the past week or so?   Copy

34 responses

Print Media (e.g. books, comics, manga, magazines, etc.) — 11 (32.4%)

Video Games — 23 (67.6%)

Internet Media (e.g. social media, forums, streaming platforms) — 27 (79.4%)

Movies — 14 (41.2%)

Traditional Television — 5 (14.7%)

0   10   20   30

Figure 14 *Percentage of respondents that have consumed certain media in the past few weeks*

10. Have you consumed any media with Pixel Art in the past week or so?

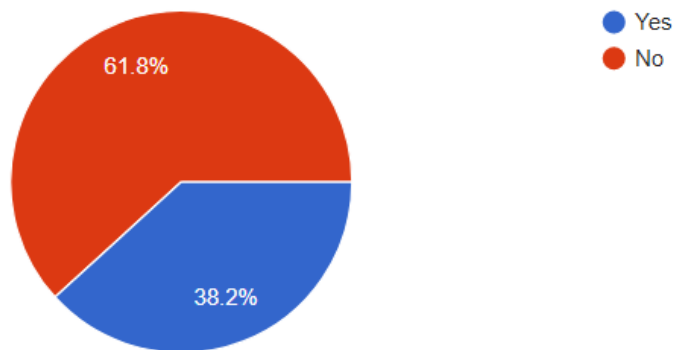Have you consumed any media with Pixel Art in the past week or so?

34 responses

- Yes
- No

61.8%

38.2%

Figure 15 *Pie chart of media that respondents consumed in past few weeks and featured Pixel Art*
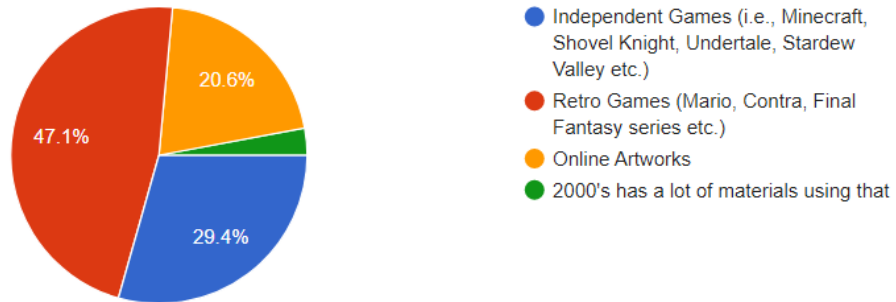
11. Where did you discover Pixel Art?

Figure 16 *Pie chart of where respondents discovered Pixel Art*

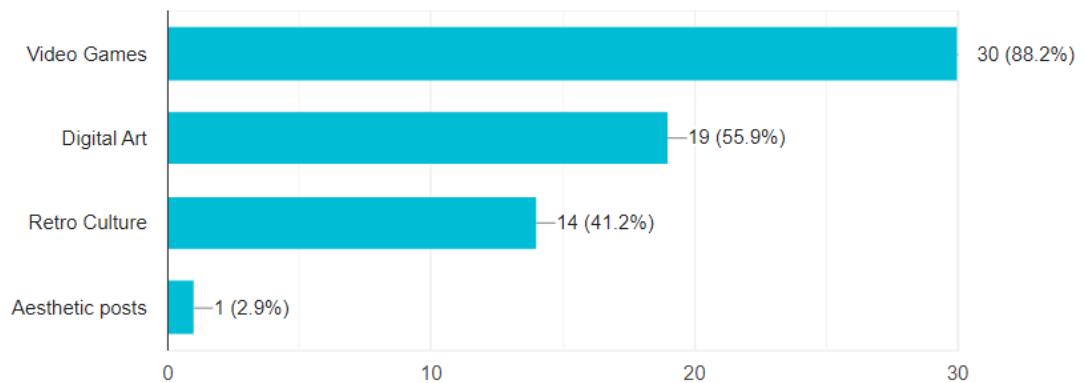**12. What media do you associate with Pixel Art? Check all of those that apply**

Figure 17 *Percentage of what media respondents associate Pixel Art with*

13.Do you think Pixel Art can stand out on its own as an art-style, without being associated with video games, and retro culture?

Do you think Pixel Art can stand out on its own as an art-style, without being associated with video games, and retro culture?
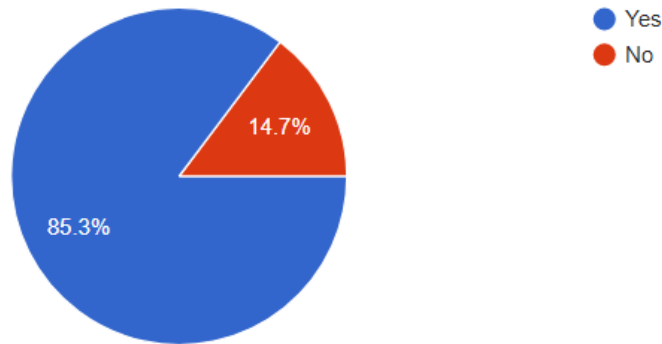
34 responses

Figure 18 *Pie chart of whether respondents can associate Pixel Art as a stand-alone art style*

14.If you answered NO in the previous question, why?

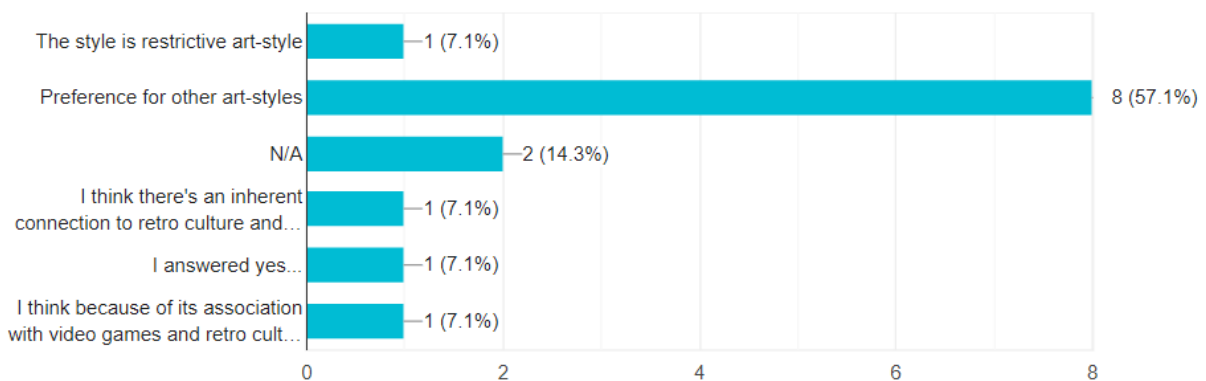If you answered NO in the previous question, why?   Copy

14 responses

Figure 19 *Percentage of respondents that do not think Pixel Art can be stand its own*

15. **Which do you prefer more?**
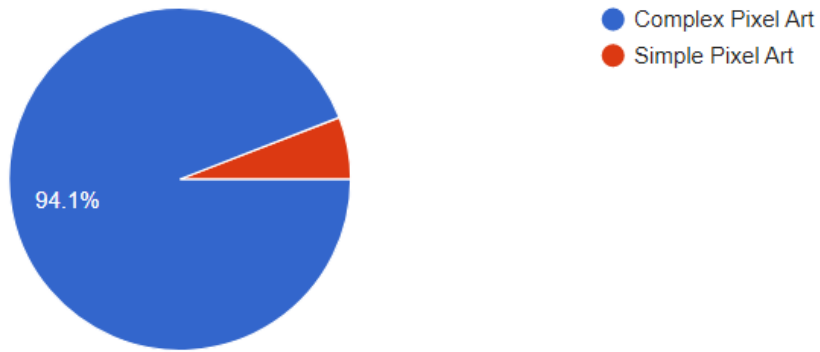
Which do you prefer more?

34 responses

94.1%

● Complex Pixel Art
● Simple Pixel Art

Figure 20 *Pie chart of which Pixel Art style respondents prefer*

16. **Why do you think Pixel Art is not used too often as medium to tell a story?**

Why do you think Pixel Art is not used too often as medium to tell a story?   Copy

34 responses

Preference for other art-styles — 13 (38.2%)
It is too niche (i.e. an interest th... — 16 (47.1%)
The art style is too limiting — 12 (35.3%)
The association of the art style... — 1 (2.9%)
I would say the difficulty in lear... — 1 (2.9%)
Not for me but I think people w... — 1 (2.9%)
I guess because it's not easy a... — 1 (2.9%)
Many people want HD and ma... — 1 (2.9%)
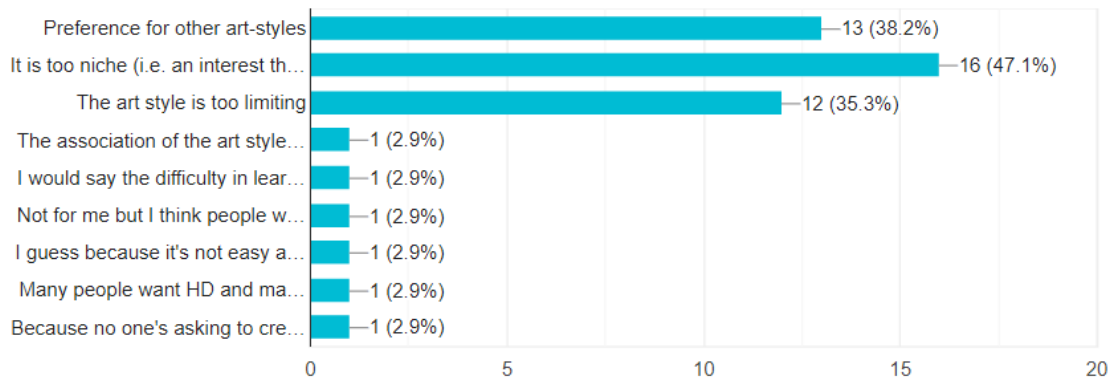Because no one's asking to cre... — 1 (2.9%)

Figure 21 Percentage of why respondents think why Pixel Art is not used often

17. **Would you watch a short-animated film using Pixel Art without voice-over dialogue?**

Would you watch a short-animated film using Pixel Art without voice-over dialogue?
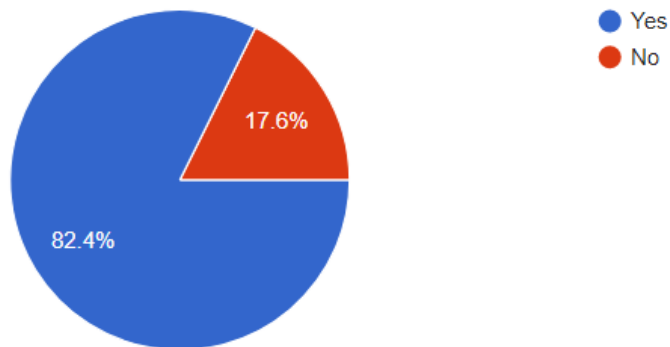
34 responses

Figure 22 *Pie chart of whether respondents would watch a Pixel Art based film without voice-over dialogue*

18. **Would you watch a short-animated film using Pixel Art?**

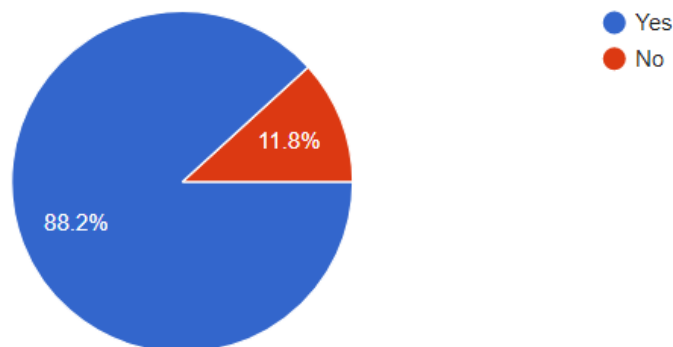Would you watch a short-animated film using Pixel Art?

34 responses

Figure 23 *Pie chart of whether or not respondents would watch Pixel Art based short animated film*

Interview Results and Discussion

My process for finding the right people to interview needed to follow these criteria:

- Uses Pixel Art as their main mode of art style for their medium
- Works in or out the Philippines
- Has substantial social media following

These criteria are what I used to look for artist(s). I reached out to the lead 2D animator of Death Battle, Luis Cruz but he did not get back to me on time, while two of the local artists I reached to, SuperBayani and ClisterArt responded and provided me with a substantial amount of insight. ClisterArt's design process is what helped streamline the animation process for this project, as his workflow involved exporting PNG versions the animation and then importing them to Blender as an Image Sequence to allow the 3D application to play 2D animation as intended. SuperBayani discussed that he focused more on the content aspect of his design process when using Pixel Art.

To further elaborate ClisterArt's interview, He recommended Asepirte as the default application when it comes to learning Pixel Art. *"It helped me be more creative in animating shots. Imagine animating in a small canvas, it needs a huge amount of problem-solving to do face expressions alone. In addition, the blocky nature of pixel art, makes it challenging to achieve fluid animations. With those experiences, it made animating, whether in 3d or 2d, easier for me."* According to ClisterArt and his answers on whether Pixel Art has helped him improve as an artist. ClisterArt mentioned that his previous works required After Effects to composite his pixel animations afterwards he shifted to Blender but needed time to experiment with the application to find a workflow that was suitable for him. The process he used was, creating and animating the exporting the animations he made on Aseprite as PNGs and then importing them into Blender as a image sequence to maintain the animations he made on Aseprite.

As for SuperBayani, his interview provided insight on his content and why he decided to use a Pixel Art style. His workflow was very different from Clister, as he would use a combination of Photoshop to sketch out his storyboard then composite them in After Effects. He added *"You got to use a property or an icon"* when answering on why most Filipinos liked his comedy sketches, to further elaborate *"I think that if someone sees something that they're familiar with, it'd be easier for them to watch the video or click on it."* It is important to note that SuperBayani also states that content you are creating whether it be animation or film, matters more than the art style, it's also how you get views and followers in this digital age.

The results of the interviews were very fruitful and I've gained a lot of insight into how I can approach and manage certain processes in my project, not only that. The survey itself has provided the answer that Multimedia Arts are open to consuming Pixel Art but are not willing to try it. Thanks to SuperBayani, it shows that the general public can accept and consume the art style if the content is created in relevant to the viewer

will most likely be viewed several and by multiple people. Thanks to ClisterArt, he showed a workflow that is doable and given the right creative concepts can produce an artwork that can be appealing to a mass audience as well.

Transcript of ClisterArt Interview:

General Questions

1. **What interested you trying out the Pixel Art style and what software did you use?**

ClisterArt: I first got interested in pixel art back in 2018 when I really wanted to learn animation in a short span of time. At first glance, it looks easy to do pixel art but the longer you do pixel art, the more you see how challenging it actually is to use in animation due to its limitations. For the software, I use Aseprite up to this day.

2. **Do you think Pixel Art being so heavily associated with retro video games, hinder its growth to becoming a respected art-style in the wider art community?**

ClisterArt: I don't think so. I recently noticed that there is a growing popularity in pixel art due to new innovations/experimentations with the medium. Artists such as Noah Bradley and Kenze Wee are popularizing pixel art as a medium for detailed concept artworks and animation.

3. **In your experience, how has the Pixel Art style contributed to your growth as an artist/animator, were there any factors that made you realized that Pixel Art had and other styles didn't?**

ClisterArt: Yes! It helped me be more creative in animating shots. Imagine animating in a small canvas, it needs a huge amount of problem-solving to do face expressions alone. In addition, the blocky nature of pixel art, makes it challenging to achieve fluid animations. With those experiences, it made animating, whether in 3d or 2d, easier for me.

4. **What software would you recommend for someone to use when animating Pixel Art?**

ClisterArt: I highly recommend Aseprite to those who wants to do pixel art.

5. **What inspired you to pick-up Pixel Art?**

ClisterArt: The lack of pixel artists in the local art scene itself made me want to pick up pixel art for my artworks.

Artist Specific Questions:

1. **Why did you choose Pixel art itself to make Spoliarium and not another style instead?**

ClisterArt: Aside from it is aesthetically pleasing, pixel art is also something that is very palatable to a wide demographic which I see fit for an artwork that needs to reach a lot of people. It challenged me to experiment with pixel art itself since it is an artform that is rarely used in serious artworks.

2. **How did you discover Blender as a tool you can use in Pixel art?**

ClisterArt: Before my spoliarium-era pixel artworks, I originally used after effects to composite my pixel animations which results into a flat two-dimensional artwork. Earlier last year, Blender started to gain attention because of its new real-time Eevee rendering, which was very fast and not memory-heavy. Since I have a prior knowledge in 3D, it intrigued me if I can replicate a game trailer I saw last year (The Last Night by Oddtales). It took me weeks to experiment with blender before settling with that cinematic look.

3. **How important is Blender to your process of animation?**

ClisterArt: Well technically, all of the pixel animations are done in Aseprite. What blender contributes to my creative process is it gives me freedom to utilize my filmmaking skills. After exporting my pixel animations to Blender, I setup my materials, cameras and lights. After hours of rendering, it always turns out better than I imagine.

4. **Do you think Blender can help Pixel Art excel to the point where it might change public perception of the style?**

ClisterArt: Generally speaking, I'm not limiting it to Blender. As long as artists continue to innovate and experiment with pixel art, then people will surely support and appreciate pixel art as an art style/form.

Transcript of SuperBayani Interview:

Me: So I've basically lined up two sets of questions. One is very general questions, which I've also asked like I've listed there and the other one is more art specific and curated towards you.

SuperBayani: Ok, ok.

Me: Ok so. First general question, what interested you trying out the Pixel art style and what software did you use?

SuperBayani: Ok. Well, I first wanted to do the Pixel art art style when I saw Sabado Sabado Sabado's video. I know he did this 8 bit ulan (rain) video that was after that I went to his page.

Me: Ohh yeah yeah I saw that and went to his page

SuperBayani: That was my jollibee sya and like. It's just, it's it kind of evokes, like, you know, the feeling of nostalgia. Because I used to, you know, I used to play DS games, Pokémon games back in the day. You know, seeing that art style in something that specifically Filipino. OK. It kind of, you know, has its own unique charm to it.

Me: Ok.

SuperBayani: And tapos as for what I use to animate my art style, I kind of kind of got inspired from. These Youtubers named Umami and Ethereal Snake, and they use Photoshop and After Effects, so I kind of have to like I kind of had to like reverse engineer how they did it because there weren't any tutorials on YouTube. So I used Photoshop and After Effects.

Me: All right, that's interesting. Because a fun little insight to Clister naman because he actually uses Aseprite which is also the same software I'm using for this particular project and it's very interesting because. Though I'm trying to like find a proper workflow tackle this right now. Because this is also generally my first time in like.

SuperBayani: An animator?

Me: Yeah, basically because like the last time I've animated was way back in my 2D subject. So ok, so.

SuperBayani: Actually same thing like I didn't start you know actually animating until I started the YouTube channel because I wanted to make skits. So I thought and I can't make skits in during quarantine because my all my friends are in their houses. So I decided to make cartoons. All right.

Me: So next question am I. Do you think pixel art being so heavily associated with virtual video games and their its growth to becoming a respected art style in the wider art community?

SuperBayani: I mean, yeah, obviously ano din sya eh It has its roots in video games din. And like. I think it's not just purely out of nostalgia because I think that. It got popular for the same reason that lofi music got popular as well, cause when it's simple so it's easy to produce that was. It's I guess in some way easy to consume as well. Just because of how simple it is so it's easier for people to I guess get into it.

Me: So like easy to. Produce and also easy to consume, yeah. For the third in your experience, how has the Pixel Art style contributed to your growth as an artist animator? Were there any factors that made you realize that pixel art had and what? What factors? What factors that made you realize that pixel art? Had and other styles didn't.

SuperBayani: Well, there's a lot of pixel art animators in the Philippines. Pero, you know, I think that the kind of pixel art that. I guess I do kinda has its own look to it, so when I post something in Facebook I think people would easily. Like see it na, "Ah ito pala yung gawa ni SuperBayani." so And I like his previous video, so I think that I'll watch it again. So it kind of helps myself be, I guess be more unique and. Makes my channel easier to identify.

Me: Yeah, because like, there's the way I'm approaching, like my paper right now is there's two ways you can approach pixel art, either the conventional sense where you work, work with it as if it's like. You know, typical.

SuperBayani: A game?

Me: Like, yeah. And then you have the game developer approach where you basically, you know, turn into. Like a Sprite basically. And that's the more compact way of working and like one of the reasons why I've selected you is because you're technically using pixel art. But you also somehow like managed to like gain a certain amount of virality. And like everyone like approved. Love it. So yeah.

SuperBayani: Another that it's not just another like about the pixel art art style, because I think the, you know, the pixel art has to like complement like what the video is about. And you know, that's really, you know, the basis of how you get viewers, you know, what is the video about?

Me: Ok.

SuperBayani: Tapos cherry on top rin yung art style.

Me: Yeah, yeah. Kasi natuwa talaga ako with your video about Wowowin

SuperBayani: Oh yeah. Thank you. Thank you

Me: Alright, now moving on to the last general question. What software would you recommend for someone to use when animating pixel art?

SuperBayani: Um, ano. If you. If you want free software, you know GIMP would do that. Tapos, I'm sure there's there's a free version like a free. I guess counterpart of After Effects, pero if wala You can also do the trial version of After Effects and all that. Or you could also be a bit shady and alam mo na gagawin doon

SuperBayani: Yeah, yeah.

SuperBayani: They know that yeah, so pero if you like, I guess like the mid-tier software, you know Photoshop, After Effects, actually Blender would be a, would be like a really good choice din if you want to do do some 3D Pixel Art animation.

Me: Yeah, that's also what Clister Technically recommended. Because good job on him kasi I'm familiarized with Blender and he really implemented. It in workflow.

SuperBayani: Yeah, and like Blender is free, so you know another. The only excuse you have for not learning is like you. Not having the time for it.

Me: Yeah, yun nga because like as of right now, I am trying to also like learn Blender so I can implement a bit of like what Clister said in this workflow and also mix in with like how you're able to present your "Pixel Art". Into like the project. Ok, so now down to the artist specific questions. So these are only like 3 questions for you.

SuperBayani: Ok.

Me: So why do you think the general masses of Filipino like you're short animations.

SuperBayani: Like my video specifically. I know, yeah. Well one, like I heard this from somewhere I don't remember where federal someone said that if you want to get viral in the Internet, you gotta use a property or an icon. And so the way I wanted to make like comedy sketches and. I kind of like disguised my, you know, comedy sketches under the. I guess the cover of these personalities like sina Unique, Cardo si Kuya Will and I think that you know if someone sees something they're familiar with, they'd be easier. It'd be easier for them to. You know, watch the video or to click. On the video. I know.

Me: So, it's basically just adding like a comedic twist to that icon.

SuperBayani: Yeah, you do. And you kind of make something. You make something familiar with with something new I guess.

Me: All right, I see. Ok. So second question, what's your animation workflow like when animating like "Pixel Art?"

SuperBayani: Yung ginagawa ko, like at least for right now I storyboard the thing on paper. Like I draw it on an actual paper tapos. I draw after that. I transformed those storyboards into like quick sketches on Photoshop. Tapos once I'm done with that. I put in the details, put in the color, stuff like that, and then composite everything in After Effects.

Me: Alright, alright. That's interesting. So last question. Do you do animation by yourself, or do you have a partner or team to help you out with your projects?

SuperBayani: Well, everything up to yung "Salamat Kuya Will" was done by myself. And like. I kind of regretted it because yung "Salamat Kuya Will." Well, it took me 5 weeks to do, plus may mga ano pa ako

Me: Ok.

SuperBayani: Cuz I have like a job and like other stuff going on, kaya it took a long time. OK. Right now for this new video that I'm working on, the Manny Pacquiao video. I brought in my friend Noirion. Yun yung handle nya Yeah so. I think medyo humati yung workload ko So I think that if you have like you know the I guess the manpower or like connections, I think you should maximize them. Kasi, you know, there's no point to doing everything yourself. If you could ask for help.

Me: Because like, as of right now, this current thesis project of mine is sort of a one man team. And right now, I'm like reaching out-

SuperBayani: Musta naman yun?

Me: I'm basically. In very, very. Actually it's. I'm in the pre-production stage as of right now because I'm storyboarding it and like just to give you, like a brief insight, it's because I'm approaching. I'm approaching this particular project in a medieval slash fantasy aspect. And what I'm trying to convey is that with pixel art itself, it's a legitimate medium, at least for now, or maybe somewhere in the future to like be used by animators, or maybe film makers that like convey, you know, stories. And I'm really like hitting my head in the wall on, like, uh, why should the audience care for, like, take so hard as of right now? Whereas All in all, so far, like it's going well. You were saying?

SuperBayani: I think that and I'll say like the pixel art esthetic, it also has kind of a barrier, cause I think it's a lot more acceptable by people from. Like who grew up with that kind? Of art style.

Me: Yeah, yeah.

SuperBayani: So like people now, you know, I guess above. and di nila ma gegets kung bat puro cube

Me Yeah, yeah

SuperBayani: Blocks.

Me: Hence why my target audience for this project right now is just multimedia artists as well as animators here in the Philippines.

SuperBayani: So yeah. Yeah, it's a nice a nice target.

Me: So and that's all. And if I have any other questions, I'll, I'll. E-mail you if that's fine.

SuperBayani: Yeah, no problem. Send me your project. If you're done. Like e-mail it to me, I'm curious to see it.

Research Results about the Design Process

The process itself required a lot of trial and error in terms of figuring out an optimal way to produce assets, animate and assemble them. I used a similar process that ClisterArt use when he produces some of his works, by creating 2D assets with Aseprite and then importing them into a 3D environment over to Blender. The project ended up with a 2.5D effect due to some shots having a visible amount of depth in most if not all of the scenes in the animation.

To save time, during the Castle and Bar scene, the assets over there were made in Blender using 3D assets, afterwards I used a composite to turn the scene into the intended Pixel Art style. The process itself took time as I needed to find the right color palette as well as specific lighting angles, so as the buildings/scenery don't look too flat. Some of the visual effects as well was created on Blender to save time. The rest of the assets were created Aseprite.

The post-production part of the project focused on visual effects and compositing, such as color correction and adding filters to make certain scenes pop and have flavor in them. During the creation of this project, I learned the basics of Blender's compositing node, and if I had prior knowledge of it I would have definitely spent more time on learning the feature to exaggerate the colors. The visual effects that were added included the aura resonating around the two characters as well as the fight scene in the open field.

A good way to optimize this process of mixing two different software's together is to organizing the assets and animation you need to create for each scene to save a lot of time and make sure to decide during the pre-production the scenes you need want in 3D and then later composite it into a Pixel Art look. Organization is essential when working in with multiple software so you will not find yourself going from one software to another and not realizing you needed to create an asset beforehand to place into your scene.

For example;
- Start creating assets and animation in Aseprite that you need to place into your scenes, then
- Create a rough 3D environment in Blender using planes that you will import your image to and/or actual 3D assets which you can later composite into a Pixel Art style

- Render the animated scenes into PNG images, since it's much more stable and risk-free due to the fact you can pick a frame and render it from there and assemble them as an Image Sequence in your preferred editing software

Conclusion and Recommendation

The discoveries I made with this project was valuable and the data gathered was suffice to prove that Pixel Art can tell a story and with this design process of using Blender and Aseprite in tandem. It also proves that the Pixel Art style can be a viewed by the general public regularly thanks to the works of ClisterArt and SuperBayani who are prominent users of the style in their content. The workflow of these two applications allows multimedia artist to experiment with their composition and cinematography without having it look awkward to a degree.

The purpose of the project was to find out if Pixel Art is a viable art style that can be used by multimedia artist as mode to tell their narrative story through animation, comic panels or illustrations; find a niche audience that will accept the art style and; to document the process. All of them were answered in this paper and a production diary which thoroughly dives into the design process and the workflow. Thanks to the likes ClisterArt, he has shown a workflow that is viable for multimedia artist to use and create their respective stories from, while SuperBayani reinforces the idea that the content you are producing whether it be comedy, drama, romance etc. has to be relatable to a broader audience rather than having your content center around the art style itself, as long as it is attached to a pop culture figurehead and/or is a reference to mainstream media so that the public will have some familiarity to your works.

The project itself run into some rough patches wherein it was put on hold for 2 years and the workflow was put into a mess. I would advise people who are much more experienced with Blender to also experiment with its composite node to add more visual flair in their scenes, as this project did not tackle the complex feature that the composite node has to offer whether it be for Visual Effects and/or Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) projects that involve Blender. If a project tackles any sort of Computer Generated Imagery, Visual Effects and/or 3D Models. Blender would be a great tool to allow the artist to express their vision(s) as the software is free and the only barrier of entry using it is prior knowledge with 3D principles. This suggestion itself focuses on people who plan to uses film, 3D animation and Visual Effects. For those who wishes to focus on the 2D side, Aseprite itself is a great tool for animation and is quite a cheaper alternative to other 2D animation software like Adobe Animate. This suggestion would only apply to those who want a project that captures the Pixel Art style, as Aseprite does not have an Anti-Aliasing feature, which allows you to smoothing the line art of your animation naturally.

In conclusion, Pixel Art is an art style that can be applied to any form of narrative based story as at the end of the day, it is just a visual representation and it is up to the artist to decide whether or not the art style is appropriate for the story they want to convey on screen. The general audience will accept the style as long as the story is

substantial and/or satisfactory to them and, something familiar attached to it, like a pop culture icon or a reference to mainstream media. They will embrace it with open arms.

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