

# Animating Art History: Building a Bridge Between Disciplines

Professor LiQin Tan  
Project Director  
Rutgers University at Camden  
ltan@crab.rutgers.edu

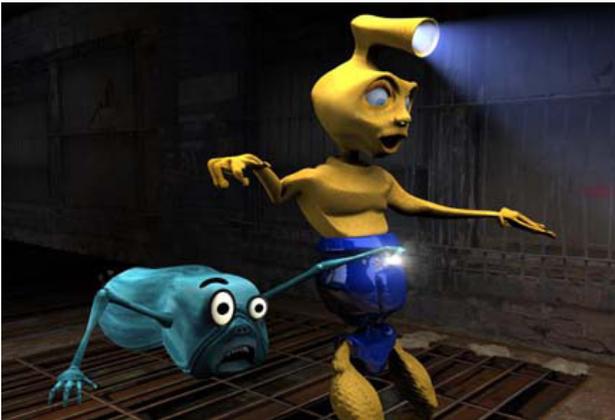
Professor Roberta K. Tarbell  
Project Director  
Rutgers University at Camden  
tarbell@camden.rutgers.edu

Robert Wuilfe  
Project Coordinator  
Rutgers University at Camden  
rwuilfe@camden.rutgers.edu

## Abstract

The study of art history is an exciting and rewarding one, but one in which the student frequently encounters complex and difficult to understand concepts. Traditional methodologies for educators presenting these ideas to students have included slides, lectures, textbooks and videos of static works of art. In our technologically driven and media-saturated society, though, high school and early college students in introductory art history courses respond more positively to today's multimedia pedagogical tools.

Computer animation offers a new and interdisciplinary paradigm with which to approach the art historical curriculum. With advanced three-dimensional animation technology, the *Animating Art History* team is creating original and dynamic tools for classroom use. *Animating Art History* presents complicated concepts in art history within the framework of a fully realized animation segment. Through plot, humor and visual exaggeration, animation captures the imagination of the student and facilitates learning.



Two characters from *Animating Art History*.

## 1 The Project and Panel

For 2003, the *Animating Art History* team is creating a tool for the art history classroom that will assist students in understanding some of the basic concepts surrounding Cubist sculpture of the early twentieth century. By fusing complicated notions of planar spaces, n-dimensional geometry, time and essential form with the aesthetics of modernity and the machine age, such artists as Jacques Lipchitz and Raymond Duchamp-Villon charted a new course for sculpture. Although Cubism proved pivotal in the evolution of art in the last century, it is difficult to understand.

The *Animating Art History* team utilized the masterworks of Lipchitz and Duchamp-Villon to elucidate the topic of Cubist sculpture. Concurrently, the team approached the design and development of the final product with the goal of integrating educational content as seamlessly as possible into a

self-contained and entertaining animation segment. This integration (essential to the effectiveness of *Animating Art History* in the classroom) reflects the collaborative and cross-disciplinary philosophy that made the project possible.

Building upon the extensive feedback and positive response to the presentation of the *Animating Art History* prototype at ACM SIGGRAPH 2002, the project team has worked to make the project easy to use and accessible to the widest possible audience. With this in mind, the team has developed simple navigation for the CD-ROM, and an important new multilingual capability. For an increasingly diverse society and interconnected world, it is vital that educational tools be created with the needs of more than one population in mind.

The creation of new and interdisciplinary pedagogical tools requires an active and continuous dialogue between peers. The *Animating Art History* project at Rutgers University reaches across theoretical boundaries to challenge artificial separations between disciplines in academia. As such, for the project to move successfully forward from research and development to classroom practice it will be necessary to solicit reactions from the greatest possible number of animators, art historians and educators in a variety of fields.

The aims of this panel are to 1) examine the effectiveness of the final product in light of evolving pedagogical goals, 2) discuss the success of the integration of didactic art historical components with the technological and entertainment aspects of the three-dimensional animation, and 3) engage the audience in a conversation about the project's potential efficacy in other fields of teaching. The *Animating Art History* model is one with possible applications far beyond art history. Educators in all subjects, and at all levels, face the common challenge of engaging the interest of students while disseminating information and concepts that may be difficult to understand. Computer animation is ideally suited to play a significant role in facing this challenge in the near future.

## 2 A Collaborative Model for the Future

As the initial impetus behind *Animating Art History* evolved at Rutgers University, both Art History Professor Roberta K. Tarbell and Computer Animation Professor LiQin Tan realized very quickly how revolutionary and exciting the collaboration between their two disciplines could be. Unlike anything that had been tried before, this project began an interdisciplinary conversation that has taken on a life of its own. Drawing from the skills and knowledge bases of two ostensibly different fields, they and the rest of the *Animating Art History* team have found the process to be at once both challenging and powerful.

This bridge between the disciplines has resulted in a new educational methodology that utilizes sophisticated computer animation technology to reveal the concepts central to art history.

Art history, a discipline that generally relies upon very traditional tools, has been given a new one for the twenty-first century. At the same time, the animators involved in the project have learned to apply their skills to innovative and surprising ends. Professor Tan believes that digital animation is an expressive creative vehicle that gives the artist tremendous freedom to create visual narratives with striking impact.

Educators in all fields should take note of the synergistic potential of this type of collaboration and dialogue. The partnership with computer animators can have far-reaching implications for all parties involved, and the pioneering work that results has the ability to transform education as we know it today. As we move into the future, educators will find more and more that their greatest resources are each other. The insular practices of the past will need to be left behind for teaching and discourse that embraces multiple fields at once. With its rapidly increasing presence and capabilities, computer animation is an ideal collaborative partner for any discipline seeking to practice this new philosophy of cooperation and engagement.

### 3 The Panelists

#### *Professor LiQin Tan*

Professor LiQin Tan has displayed his inventive energy as a computer animator, artist, teacher and researcher since 1973. He holds a Master's degree in art education from Concordia University and a Graduate Certificate in computer animation from Sheridan College.

He has conducted art and computer three-dimensional and two-dimensional animation and graphics classes for over 11 years across college levels internationally, and since 2000 has served as an assistant professor at Rutgers University. He has worked as an art director, animator, graphic designer and exclusive art editor in local and board industries for the past decade. His artwork has been exhibited internationally in solo and group shows, and has received numerous awards.

Tan's alter ego is that of a research scholar and art critic, in fields as varied as art education, art criticism, cross-cultural studies and the correlation of three-dimensional and two-dimensional animation. He has published more than twenty articles on art criticism and art teaching methods issues.

#### *Dr. Roberta K. Tarbell*

Roberta K. Tarbell, Assoc. Prof. of Art History and Director, Museum Studies Program, Fine Arts Department, has taught at Rutgers University, Camden, New Jersey, since 1984. She studied at Cornell University (B.S., 1965) and the University of Delaware (M.A., 1968; Ph.D., 1976) focusing on the History of American Art and Modern Sculpture, subjects she taught there (1980-84) as an Assoc. Prof. of Art History. She has been a consulting professor for the University of Delaware/Winterthur Museum programs in Art Conservation since 1986. Her fifty publications include book-length exhibition catalogs for the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the University of Chicago, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, other museums and most recently, the Portland {Maine} Museum of Art. Tarbell has developed interdisciplinary curriculum and publications on art and literature. She contributed chapters or essays to *Walt Whitman and the Visual Arts*, which she edited (Rutgers University, 1992), *An Historical Whitman* (Oxford University Press, 2000) and the new *Encyclopedia of American Studies*. She has also spearheaded joint electronic art projects for studio artists and art historians.

#### *Robert Wuilfe*

An Art History/Museum Studies major at Rutgers University, Robert Wuilfe is a returning student with a strong interest in the convergence of traditional art historical scholarship with new media and technology. Robert comes to Rutgers and the *Animating Art History* project with extensive private sector experience, both as an entrepreneur and in management. *Animating Art History* has allowed Robert to combine his administrative and project management skills with his passionate interest in the arts.

Robert is currently the Slide Curator for Rutgers University at Camden, where he will be coordinating the integration of a new, digital image resource system for classroom use. He also serves as the primary art historical researcher for an interactive, online history of printmaking being developed by The Philadelphia Print Collaborative. After graduation from Rutgers, Robert plans to pursue a PhD in Art History, while continuing to incorporate advanced technology and interdisciplinary collaboration into his work, studies and teaching.

### 4 Animation and Production Team

- Kelli Butz
- Stevie Gardiner
- Shaun B. Jennings
- Joseph Johnson
- Bruce Massey
- Theo Yuen