



Every once in a while, one comes across strokes of brilliance in terms of the combination of Art and Technology which propels the narrative of a short film from just being another student film to one that outshines even professional feature length films. Mac N Cheese is one of the fine examples of this genre.

Mac 'n' Cheese is an animated short directed and created by four students at the Utrecht School of Arts in the Netherlands, Tom Hankins, Gijs van Kooten, Guido Puijk, Roy Nieterau. The short received great applause and publicity in no time. The story is an inspiration of childhood memory. The simple and interesting story-line gripped its audience with its endless excitement and adventure.

CGTantra got an opportunity to have an exchange of questions and answers. Here is the short conversation that we shared with Mac 'N' Cheese team.

## INTRODUCTION 'N' LIFE IN ANIMATION INDUSTRY

We're four students from the Utrecht School of Arts. We studied 3D computer animation and visual effects there. 'Mac 'n' Cheese' was our graduation film, but also our first film, the four of us worked on together. By knowing each others' strengths and weaknesses, we formed a pretty solid team. All tasks were distributed efficiently.

We co-directed the entire short. Roy was our Technical Director. He took care of the rigging and created an animation toolset, he, also, animated together with Gijs and Guido. Gijs was our Head of Story and set builder. Guido did modeling and texturing of the props. Tom was our art director, he developed the characters, did texturing and shading, rendering and compositing.





## GENERATING SIMPLE YET INTERESTING CONCEPT

The story was inspired by our childhood memories but we took it to the next level. The characters taking drugs and crashing cars is more extreme version of playing tag. Our underlying 'attitude' was born out of an innocent, somewhat resistant, behaviour against expectations on supportive narrative in animations and film. We're not born storytellers, not even trained storytellers. Frankly, we didn't even want to tell a story! Really! We wanted to focus on the visual directing (lighting, composition and colors), editing and animation. The main goal was to give the audience an intense visual and auditory experience. We just wanted to create something awesome, no story, and no message. Just pure "awesomeness"!

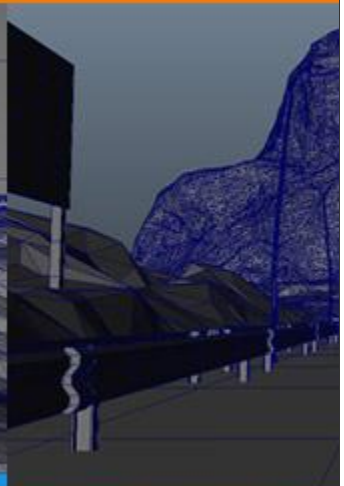
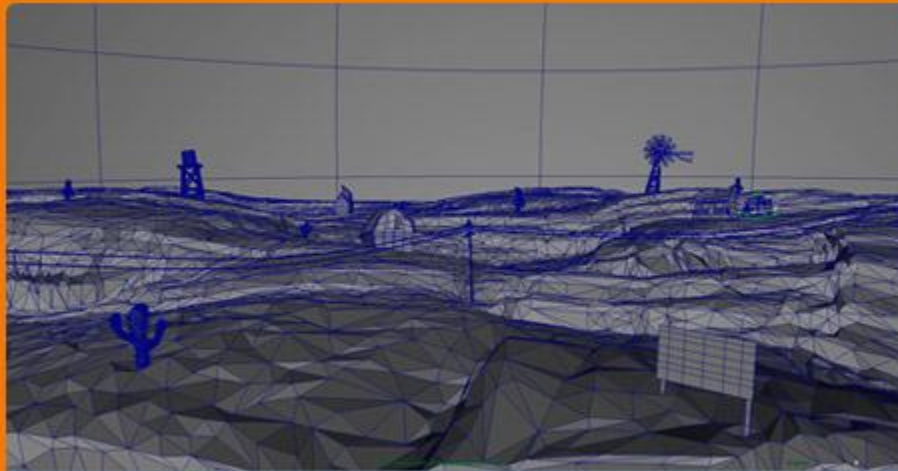




## PRODUCTION TIMELINE



From the first concept until final rendering it took us about 5 months to create this 2:43 minute long short. Storyboarding was our first priority after Gijs created the crazy story, from there we moved on to creating a timed storyboard, building all the assets simultaneously. We didn't start animating until three months in production. We worked through the entire animation, rendering and compositing pipeline in less than two months.





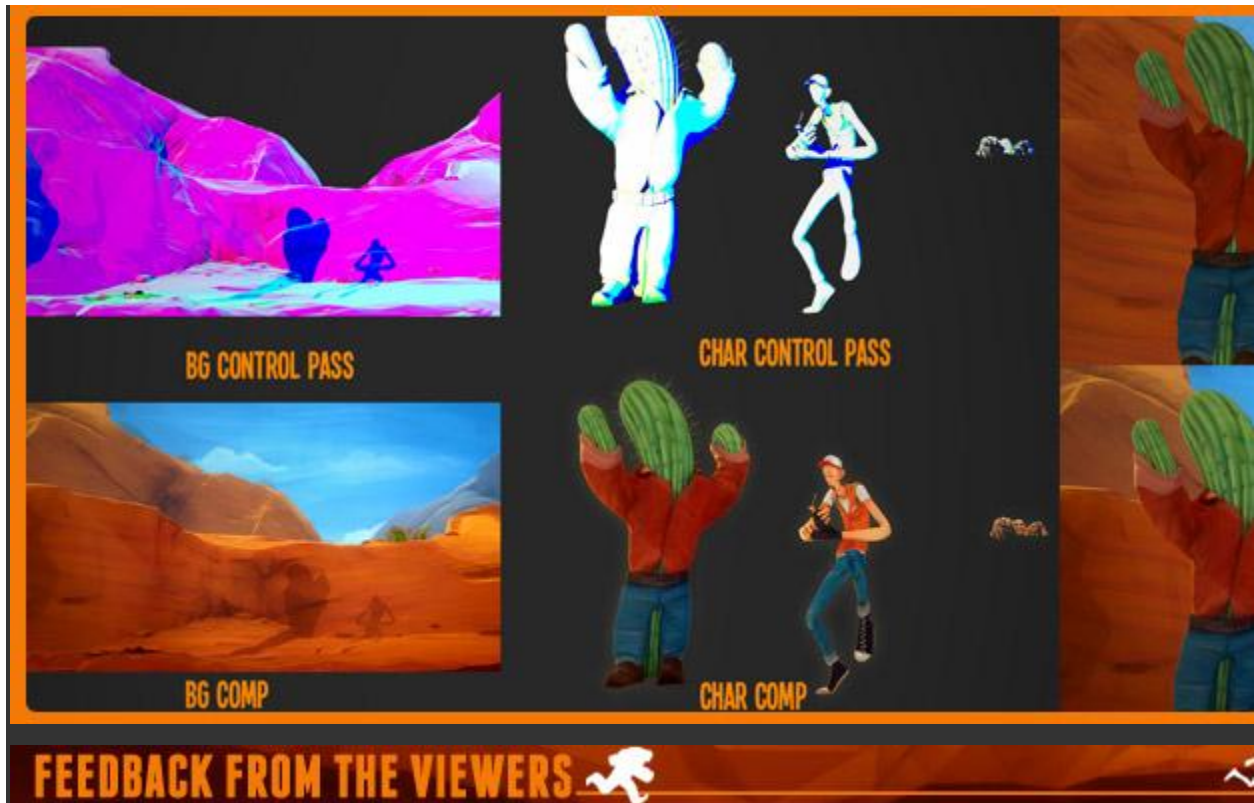
We started from scratch, we had to do a lot of testing to find out a proper way to create what we had pictured in our minds. The texturing turned out to be the most crucial part in creating a successful shader setup. Everything else is just an addition to make everything in our short work together. The use of Ambient Occlusion for example will provide you with solid contact shadows, but it will also make everything more 3D. Soft shadows would almost create Lambertian shading, we didn't want this. Harder shadows would make an object in motion look like it was reflective and would sometimes make it flicker. It took a while to create the perfect settings for the shadow elements, by turning down the values quite a bit we maintained the 2D look we were hoping to get. Blending all the shadow styles together in post gave our compositor, Tom, a lot of control. We were able to fake a little SSS (Subsurface Scattering) and adjust shadows on every part of a character in every single shot!



## THE TECHNIQUE STYLISATION



Fusions erode/dilate filter was used to create a painterly style. This filter is very powerful. You can also use it as a 'median' to reduce some noise and artifacts or extend/subtract your edges. We've used it extensively throughout the entire compositing process, mainly for the backgrounds. Gijs would sculpt the environments in Zbrush. Decimating the mesh triangulates it very nicely; it was just the result we were looking for. Once rendered and composited, the dilate filter smudged all the triangle shapes together making it look like paint daubs, we used this entirely.



Completely cutting out any narrative elements, created some challenges for us. It was very tricky to motivate the decisions our protagonists made, we would wonder constantly if the audience would get what happened on screen. Forcing each other out of our comfort zones, we worked blindly on scenes sometimes. We could take a few steps back to analyze what we were doing. Our motto actually was "Is it insane enough?" The best ideas we had were the craziest, we would usually just draw or act them out. Distilling a crazy idea to make it work, we took some time, but it really worked well. It was a very resourceful method actually. We chose whichever part we wanted to use and how to make it work within the time limit.



## FEEDBACK FROM THE VIEWERS

We've been approached by many different parties. Most people wanted to meet us and discuss the possible future collaborations or do short interviews. Everybody seemed to enjoy Mac 'n' Cheese a lot. It has gone viral and we only received positive feedbacks. We've reached almost a million views within the first month of its release on Vimeo alone. With 1500 Facebook likes and 7500 Vimeo likes we're very happy!



## AIMS FOR THE THIS PROJECT



Mac 'n' Cheese is screening at about 15 different festivals around the world this year. We're planning on sending it in to even more festivals in 2012. We're all going to have freelance jobs, hoping to make enough money to support our future dreams of creating more and more shorts or even feature length films! Our company name is Colorbleed. You can find more info at [www.colorbleed.nl](http://www.colorbleed.nl) or mail us at [info@colorbleed.nl](mailto:info@colorbleed.nl).

CGTANTRA has been lucky to be able to feature such inspirational short films ( the previous one being [CGTantra Exclusive - An Interview with the Makers of Loom](#)) by really talented students which can spark inspiration for fellow animation students all around the world.



[www.macncheese.nl](http://www.macncheese.nl)

[www.colorbleed.nl](http://www.colorbleed.nl)