

# Otis College of Art and Design

## Faculty Development Grant Report

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I received a Faculty Development grant in 2007 to purchase a 16-acre Island in Linden Labs virtual world Second Life to create a presence and further develop my approaches for art making & art education in a virtual world environment. Up to that point I had spent a year in the Second Life developing the tools and knowledge needed to create and run a project in a virtual world. This involvement was partly self-funded with further funding from an Otis TLC technology grant. During that year I had participated in several second life art events, had developed galleries in world where work can be exhibited, and had given a presentation in the summer of 2007 called “Art and Art Education in Virtual Worlds” at the SIGGRAPH 07 Conference in San Diego laying out the details to use second life for a student project. I was also a SIGGRAPH 07 residence artist creating work from virtual worlds as my project.

At the time this grant was given I was just winding up the aforementioned student project in Second Life. The project included 50 plus digital sophomore students on the Otis Island in Second Life. The project was to develop and create content for an environment based on a class-developed theme on the Otis Island in Second Life. The project required students to use team building, out-of-the-box creative thinking, 3D and 2D virtual tools as well as to work with a budget (3000 lindens per class), and with a limited amount of building blocks (3100primitives per class). Each team/class proceeded to develop a production pipeline and a theme for their area. Three hours of in-class time and ten hours of outside of class time were devoted to this project. None of the 55 students had previous Second Life experience. This introduction to working in a free form 3d world moves students forward into applications that they will use throughout their tenure at Otis. This project can be viewed at [http://otis.edu/life\\_otis/faculty\\_life/faculty\\_development/grantee\\_reports/michaelwright\\_virtual\\_worlds.html](http://otis.edu/life_otis/faculty_life/faculty_development/grantee_reports/michaelwright_virtual_worlds.html)

With the faculty development grant I wanted to set up the island as a virtual studio where I could develop strategies and methods that other instructors could use to meet and conduct classes in a virtual environment. My plan was to develop the island so my students and I could go into Second Life and create content using both 3d & 2d digital tools, which would continue to give sophomore students an introduction to 3d tools in the first semester of the digital program and would give me the opportunity to explore Second Life as an artistic visual statement in regards to image making and story development through role play. I placed my Island order once I had the grant capital in hand and was approved by Linden Labs as an educator. The island “I BE AM” was delivered on Feb 18<sup>th</sup> 2008. My grant letter from the college’s faculty Development Committee included the following proviso. “Otis students will be directed or given access to the grant-funded island only with the approval and oversight of your department Chair”. I felt that the committee was a bit nervous about students working on a sim

managed and run by me so I made the decision to keep all student activities at the Otis Island in Second Life and make my sim a studio where I could focus on work.

I had a number of areas I wanted to explore in world. The foremost was creative.... I wanted to import work I had created in real life and put them into a virtual exhibition context and in turn create a series of prints based on that virtual world. I also wanted to explore art that was unique to second life and the creation of the avatar as art. I wanted to work in a team context to shape the island similar to the project given my students. I wanted to explore methods of presentation and the further structuring of a creative class in a virtual world. With these objectives in mind I set to work.

The first thing I did was to put together a team of builders who I had met in Second Life. The team was made up of two avatars from the UK, four from Holland, one from Brazil, and one from the USA. Over the year my team worked on the island creating structures that were open to meetings, role-play, meditation, relaxation and creative building. In the meantime I set about creating a series of Prints based on my experiences in the virtual environment. Over the year I participated in a number of events that showcased Otis as a college leader in virtual world art education and my work in that direction. Following is a list of events and presentations that this grant allowed me to do.

February 2008 I was interviewed by the New Media Consortium regarding the student project. The interview was carried throughout the NMC's educational network. (The interview is available upon request)

I conducted a tour of over 70 avatars on the Otis Island through the student created environments in an event call the "Teachers Buzz" sponsored by the NMC. I conducted the tour in world and created an in world slide exhibition showcasing the evolution of the project. I was able to put the slide show together on my island in the virtual studio using Second Life tools. Over the year I made presentations to several in world groups using the slide show to talk about the process used in creating the Otis project.

Later in the spring of 08 I presented the "Virtual Worlds Project 07" to the AICAD Technology Forum, at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, Cal.

I was invited by the NMC to present the project at their summer conference at Princeton University in June. I presented in the *Interactive Sessions* hosted by Princeton University. The NMC Interactives are designed to showcase online materials, including software, tools, research, and more. The presentation was well received by all attendees. While at the conference I was invited to exhibit my real life digital work in world through the Learning Times Squirrel Island galleries. The exhibition was made up of work created in real life and uploaded to Second Life. The exhibition was located at the Dome and Tail galleries opening the first of August and remains up to this day. I also over time created four other galleries that house examples of my real life work including the sky gallery that hovers over the Otis Island and houses the "Portrait Virus" project that I created at SIGGRAPH 04 and 05.

Speaking of SIGGRAPH, I had been approached by the 08-conference education committee in the spring regarding a partnership with Otis to bring the SpaceTime international student exhibition into Second Life on the Otis Island using the Otis Gallery as the space. After gaining approval for the use of the gallery from Sue Maberry and John Gordon, Shelly Forbes and I working hand in hand with the SIGGRAPH education committee created a state of the art exhibition including animations, interactive works and wall works. Much of the experiments to do this were created at my virtual studio and then taken to the Galley at the Otis Island. Our work was introduced in August at the real life reception for the SpaceTime Gallery at the SIGGRAPH 08 Conference "Evolve" at the Los Angeles Convention Center. The installation was so successful and innovative that Linden Labs featured the SpaceTime exhibition at the Otis Gallery for six months in its showcase. The Gallery and Otis Island has had thousands of visitors since the opening looking at the work. The installation is still intact and can be seen in world at the Otis Island.

I also gave a presentation at SIGGRAPH in the "Studio" called "SIGGRAPH 08 Art and Art Education in Virtual Worlds: One year later, The Projects." "One year ago, in San Diego on the first day of the conference, SIGGRAPH Studio Resident Artist and Otis College of Art and Design professor, Michael Wright kicked off the virtual Otis Island in Second Life. In his presentation at the Studio, Wright discussed possibilities of art creation and curriculum development in a virtual environment. One year later Wright returns to show case his virtual world project and an exploration of his personal projects which focus on creation and movement of art between reality and virtual reality." This presentation given to an international audience again showcased Otis, its digital media program and the innovative technologies of Web 3.0.

Also in August one of my prints, created from Second Life, was curated by Howard N. Fox, Curator of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, into an exhibition called "DigitalArt, LA" This international exhibition was exhibited at the Los Angeles Center for Digital Art for the month and during the SIGGRAPH conference.

When the fall semester 08 began I again introduced the Virtual World Project to a new class of Digital Media Sophomores. The new class had grown from 50 to 69 again split into three sections. Shelly Forbes, the Otis Island administrator, had removed all the previous years built and restructured the island landscape, better known as terra forming. I approached the project a bit different based on the previous years experience and the skills the grant had allowed me to develop up to that time. There were also differences in the students in this round. Many had already had some experience in a virtual world as part of their cyber life. The focus was again on team building with an emphasis on the production pipeline. Each section again came up with a concept, style frames supporting the concept and then the actual build on the island, which can be viewed in world at this time. I found that I had gained more knowledge and skills in terms of assisting the students from the previous year. The project was completed in early December and can be seen currently on the Otis Island in Second Life.

In Oct 08 one of my real life prints created from Second Life was exhibited at the Bonita Museum in San Diego as part of a juried exhibition and catalog called "Urban Legends and Country Tales". This print represented one of over a hundred prints that I have created this year from the second life environment. The prints are available for viewing upon request and I have attached the two images that were exhibited in the above-mentioned exhibitions as examples.

This spring 09 I will be presenting the student projects at the "TechEd 2009" conference being held at the Ontario Convention Center in Ontario California. The session called "Art and Art Education in Second life" will be presented Monday March 23. In April I will be part of a panel at the "2009 WASC Academic Resource Conference (ARC)" which will take place at the Hollywood Renaissance Hotel in Hollywood, CA. The panel will focus on ways in which art schools can meet the challenge of assessment and meaningful peer review and an introduction the virtual world consortium of universities, colleges, & art schools and the way virtual worlds can support art education. All of this has been supported by and is a result of the Faculty Development Grant.

The yearly fees for my sim will become due in several days. I will continue to fund it with my own finances to continue my research and development. I personally believe that virtual worlds will continue to grow and expand in the future. Artists and Designers will be essential to that growth. As William Gibson stated in a 2007 "Rolling Stone", interview. "One of the things our grandchildren will find quaintest about us is that we distinguish the digital from the real, the virtual from the real. In the future, that will become literally impossible. The distinction between cyberspace and that which isn't cyberspace is going to be unimaginable." I would like to thank the Faculty Development committee in granting my proposal to continue my research and development in this new and vital area of our expanding cyber culture.