

CONSTRUCTING THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF 19TH CENTURY CELEBES SEA REGION MARITIME CULTURE THROUGH CONCEPT ART

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Abstract: In order to create a believable world for the animated content. Concept art for the animation are created through the process of studying literatures about Celebes Sea maritime history and field observation on Celebes Sea region. In this paper, the concept art being discussed is limited to the environment of the animated world along with some of its property such as houses and boat, however there are minimum visual data on related literature and unmaintained artifacts / model from field observation. Therefore, visual language has to be decoded through historical text in the literature and also through visual research on available artifacts / model of the property. The concept art development is still an ongoing process.

Keywords: Celebes Sea, maritime culture, concept art

Introduction

The animated movie project revolves around Indonesian maritime culture and piracy phenomenon in 19th century Celebes Sea region. This research will discuss the process on animated movie concept art development.

While in the process of developing the concept art, the existing problems are very minimal visual references in related literature. With this in mind, the need to decode textual data from the literature are critical. Field observation is very crucial as well, in order to get the as many visual data as possible for the visual development process. With this in mind, the research methodology is as follows:

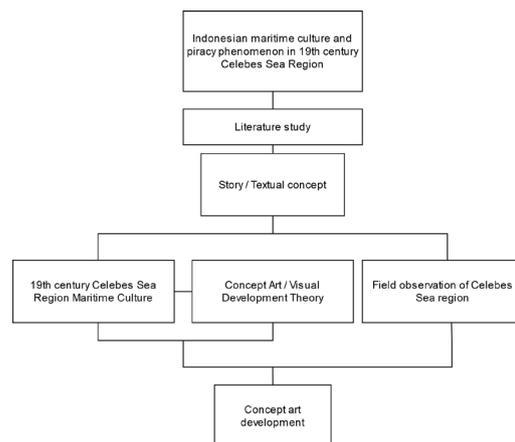


Figure 1. Research methodology schematics

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19th Century Celebes Sea Region Maritime Culture

Lapian (2009) says Celebes Sea region people have maritime way of living. That is to say, they live near the sea region. Having said that, not all of people who lives in the coastal areas depends on sea to survive. Ara Village People in South Celebes, for instance prefers dry land and well known for their boat making craftsmanship.

For centuries, before colonial domination. Celebes Sea region was controlled by local sea powers which are 'Raja Laut' (translated as 'King of Sea' in English), Bajak Laut (Pirates), and Orang Laut (Sea People). Each serves different purpose in the sea region ecosystem. Raja Laut as legal power and Bajak Laut as counterbalance of legal power, and Orang Laut as a servant of both. Bajak Laut and Orang Laut shared the similar way of living. However, they have different attitude or tendency. Both spends most of their time around sea area, and are proficient at sailing.

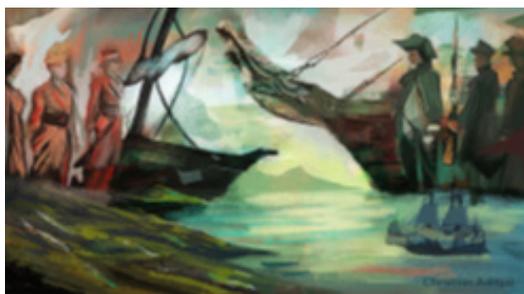


Figure 2. Painting depicting the colonialization versus local maritime powers by the Author

Since they live and spend most of their time of life in the sea, they assume water region as theirs, and act as if the water region is their hunting ground. They follow the traditional law of "adat tawan karang" (customary law of find). This law regulates the activity of gathering food and also hunting.

Although unwritten, this law authorizes them to exploit or even assault everything located within their claimed territory, it can be animals, fish, treasure, boat, ship, even other humans. From their point of view, assaulting anything in their territory is legal. From the colonial perspective, this act of assault, robbery, kidnapping and killing on their vessels are considered an act of piracy. Hence they are referred as pirates.



Figure 3. Painting depicting "Tawan Karang" by the Author

Contrary to popular views that these pirates are criminals, Iranti (2017) suggests that there are different ways to understanding the piracy phenomenon in Celebes Sea region - Indonesia. That is this Bajak Laut is also the victims of the colonizers. Bajak Laut is considered as victim since they depend on their environment to survive.

When the colonizer colonized their territory, soon the Bajak Laut met their fate. To understand how the Bajak Laut lived, the observation of the maritime environment including setting and properties is done beside the literature studies.

Concept Art / Visual Development

Broadbin (2015) says that in the creation of the concept art, artists often-times get their source material from real world

observations. Immersing themselves in the real existing environment, art, or architecture. To give an illustration, Bennet (2013) explains the process of creating the world from the movie (Epic, 2013), Epic's artist went to the woods surrounding their offices in Connecticut and other area to collect pictures and references in order to create a believable world for the leafmen.



Figure 4. Concept Art of Epic (2013) by Ty Carter

Broadbin (2015) further explain that Concept art can also derived from the story of the animation itself. The imagery is created out of their requisites and environment than a visual language established outside of the story. To illustrate this, the prehistoric settings of the film (The Croods, 2013) requires the visual development team to create world that not as well as documented as let say woods in Connecticut says Hueso (2013).

Field Observation of Celebes Sea Region

For this research, field observations to Celebes sea region are conducted to get the most out of real source material. We visited Manado, North Sulawesi (Celebes). By this observation, situations interpretations are expected by visiting local maritime museums and fishermen village in the coastal region. Within the visit to the local maritime museum "Museum Sulawesi Utara" visual data are gathered by taking photo-graphs of maritime ar-

tifacts and boats models. However, the conditions of the exhibit are poorly lit and somewhat unmaintained with minimum description of the model and artifacts. This resulted in a poor quality of visual data.



Figure 5. Model of traditional Orang Laut Boats

Field observation to local fishermen village in Manado is conducted in order to get an interpretation on the real environment situations. Within this observation, most of the visual data gathered will be a base to create the environment of the animated movie. Within this observation, we found that it is very possible to start developing the world using the picture taken from this observation.



Figure 6. Traditional boat used by the local fishermen

By immersing ourselves to the environment of the village, we can get a sense of how most of the traditional structure are built, which are not that different from centuries ago. The use of natural

material as wood, sticks, and rope to connect each parts are very traditional and practical as it is still widely use in most of the structures in the village. By looking on the society way of living in the area, it is very possible to use the photos from this field observation as a base material for digital painting process in the making of the concept art.

Developing The Concept Art

The visualization of the concept art is produced using digital painting technique. By using digital media, the process of integrating material images from the observation are easily done. This chapter study the process of creating some aspects of the concept art. To further maximize the efficiency of visual development.

Visualizing Orang Laut boats are important of this animation concept art. However, as mentioned earlier, the problem with the reference image gathered within the observation process are the poorly lit exhibit and inadequate quality of the boat model in the museum. The solution to this problem are making 3d digital models of the boat model. By utilizing 3d digital model in the concept art process, visualizing a scene in a concept art production will be much faster and also more precise, rather than general production of drawing the boats one by one in a scene.

Orang Laut Boat Visual Development

Boats will be the highlight of this animation concept art, as it will appear in almost all of the scenes. That is to say, visualizing a precise and correct Orang Laut boat are crucial in the visual development of the animation.

First of all, the process started by examining the textual literature of the shape

of one type of the fishing boat that are used by Orang Laut. This certain boat can be called Vinta. Vinta boat are used mainly for fishing purposes, and are used as smuggling boat as well. Vinta boat has long shape and narrow body made from one whole wood log. To balance the boat, outrigger is made on both sides of the boat. The outrigger is made out of long bamboo stick and are connected using three to four wood that are bind together on each outrigger.

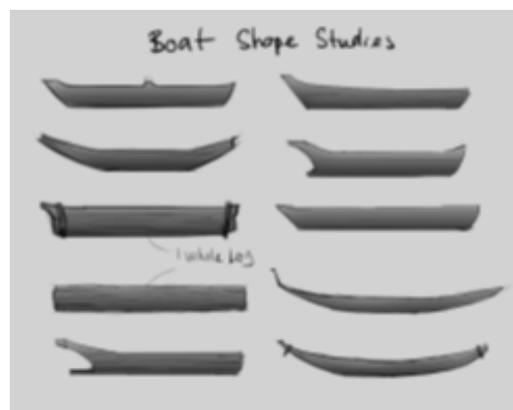


Figure 7. Vinta boat shape studies

Tarling (1963) stated that vinta boat couldn't sail against wind. Having said that, vinta boat will sail with extreme speed when tail wind rushes them from behind. Without wind, vinta can be sailed by paddling. Vinta boat also need to be sailed by experienced people.

Boat shape studies are done by imagining the visual look of the boat by decoding the textual data. We try to communicate the shape and form of the boat that are written in the literature and create digital sketches in Photoshop. At this stage, artist created some sketches that best represent the explanation of the boat's shape and form within the literature (figure 7).

Digital sketches produced become the starting point to continue the final visualization. The process on finalizing

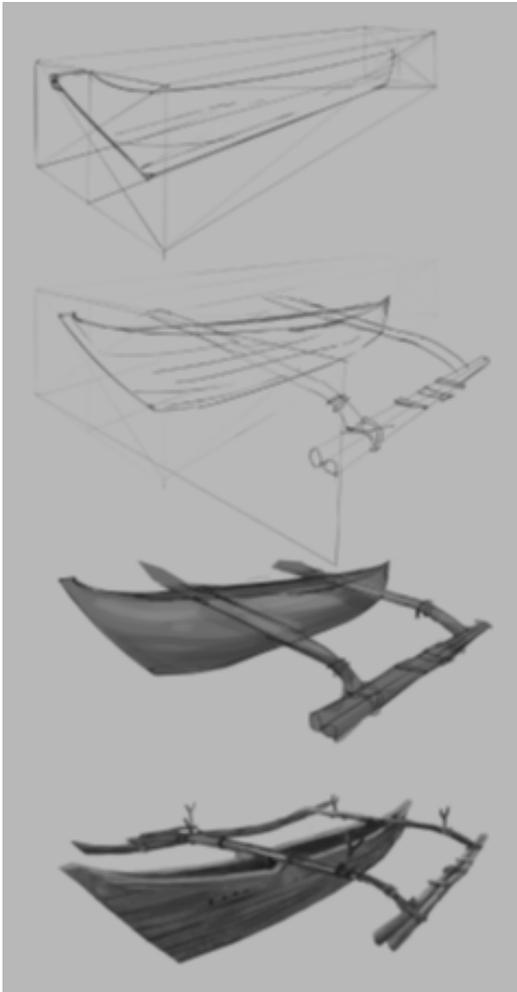


Figure 8. Visual development process

the visualization, heavily rely on the material images taken from the field observation. Textures and shading of the boat are drawn by following other references as well. The final result are as follows (figure 9).

Continuing this process, to get a sense of depth and the form of the Boat, 3D digital models of the boats are built with the help of 3d software. Furthermore, material texturing and shading of the model are also done to help artist imagining the look of the real boat (figure 10).

The 3D models serve as a base refer-



Figure 9. Concept art of the boat



Figure 10. 3D rendition of the boat

ence on creating the concept art. With 3D digital model, concept artist can freely manipulate the view, angle, rotation, perspectives of the scene, therefore the production will be much more efficient. To give an illustration, to draw a concept art scene containing more than one boat, using general production technique without 3D digital model, an artist has to deal

with perspective, proportion, and composition which are going to take a while to be resolved. With 3D digital model, boats can be duplicated without any problem, hence visual development will be faster and efficient.

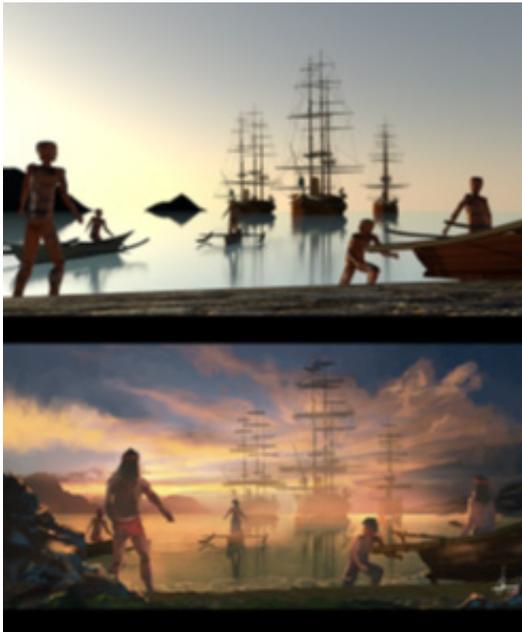


Figure 11. Visual development utilizing 3D digital model

Orang Laut Village Visual Development

Visualizing a believable environment where the story take place is crucial. One of the example is the process of visualizing the Orang Laut Village. To gather visual data, we went to a village near the coastal area where most of the population's profession are fisherman (figure 12). Within this observation we immersed ourselves to get a better sense of how the community lives, this can also be a base for creating the concept art.

On the field observation, we found that there are many settlements in the downstream of a river area near the shore. We also observe that many boats are harbor

next to the settlement. The photos gathered from the field observation to the fishermen village proofed to be a perfect starting base to visualize the village area.



Figure 12. Fishermen village

First process of the visualization started with a selected picture from the field observation. Through digital painting method, this photo (figure 13) serves a base photo for matte painting process of the visualization.



Figure 13. Downstream of the river near the shore

Digital matte painting process combines the visual of the photo, and also the artist interpretation or style. This process also time efficient, resulting in a believable interpretation of the environment (figure 14).



Figure 14. Concept art of Orang Laut Village

Conclusions

Concept art is a crucial part of animated film production as it can visualize the final looks of the film. In creating the concept art of this particular animation, the process of decoding the textual data from literature to visual can be hard as it is can be multi-interpreted. On the other hand, gathering many visual references through photo in the field can also quite challenging. Evidently in this research, problems of the field observation in the available museum are the unmaintained condition of the exhibit can interfere with the visual data collecting. By combining this two method, a concept art can be visualized more easily.

In visualizing the concept art, digital technology heavily impacts in production process. By harnessing the use of 3d digital model, artist can speed up the process of laying down perspective, proportion, and duplication of objects in a scene. Resulting in faster visualization of a scene concept. Matte painting process utilizing photo as a base also can create a believable rendition of the environment of the animation.

With the technology of creating a visual through digital technology, artist can blend the visual language decoded from historical text or literature with available visual reference from observation more efficiently than general production pipeline.

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