3D Asset and Environment Modeller Within the Animation and Games Industry

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Introduction:

The 3D industry is massive and contains many areas, but we will be focusing on the Modelling aspects, specifically assets and environment in the animation and games industry. Discussing the financial differences between working in a studio to working freelance, with the benefits and downfalls to both.

After which case studying two artists working within the industry, one from animation and one from games, to cover more range, the games industry has grown massively and now accounts for a large proportion of the industry.

Chris Patrick O'Connell the animation case study currently works at Walt Disney Animation Studios and Clinton Crumpler who is games focused now owns his own company called Dekogon.

3D environmental artists work using specialist software like Maya, CAD, Sketch up, and more. They specialise in outdoor or indoor locations, these jobs are seen within: Games, Animation, Interior Design and Architecture.

3D asset creators work on building objects creating three-dimensional models or visuals of items using a variety of different computer programs and tools. Common programs used are Maya (Modelling and Animation), 3DS Max (Modelling), Mudbox (Sculpting), Blender (Similar to Maya), Revit (Architecture), AutoCAD (Architecture).

3DS Max and Maya are similar programmes viewed differently, "Between the two, it is 3Ds Max that comes with a very stout modeling toolset." "designers and architects love 3Ds Max very much." It is said that "With Maya, accomplishing complex models is not that easy." (3dhorse., 2018.) Blender, another program compared to Maya "has the ability to simplify and speed up the work." On the other hand, "the clearest industry standard is Maya…given its advanced tools" (3dhorse., 2018.). Both are strong programmes and the use of either would depend on your skillset and needs.

Within these programmes you can: UV map, texture and create high/low poly models amongst other effects.

Section 1: Environment Background Art, Asset Creator, 3D Modeller Introduction:

Within this section, there will be facts and data regarding the financial ups and downs working as an environment artist or 3D modeller either within a studio or freelance.
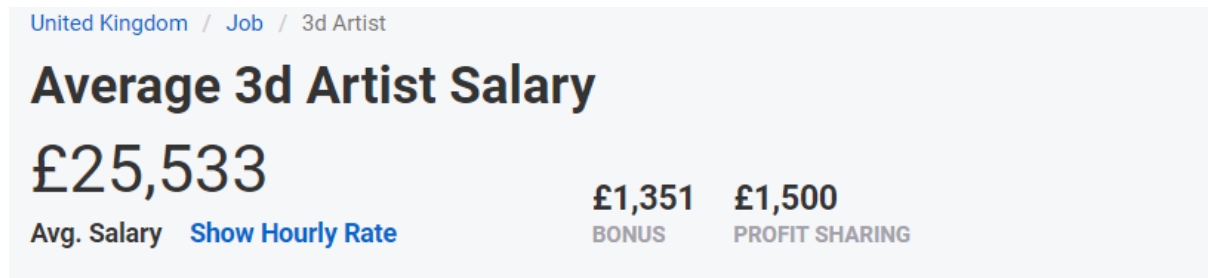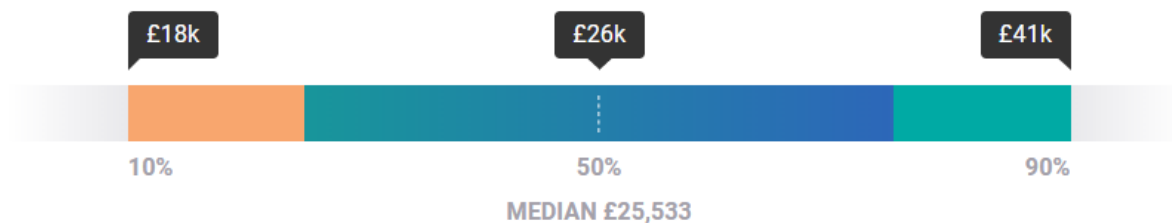
Fig 1. 3D Artist Salary

Fig 2. 3D Artist Freelance Salary

For a **3D artist** working **in industry** in the UK the **average yearly** income would be set at **£26k (£25,533**) (Payscale., 2019.). Alternatively, you can work **freelance** which comes in as an hourly rate of **$28** when converted works out **£ 21.55 hourly**, calculated at working an average of **25-30 hours weekly** that adds up to a yearly average of **£28,015-£33,618**. (ZipRecruiter., 2019.)

Fig 3. 3D Modeller Salary
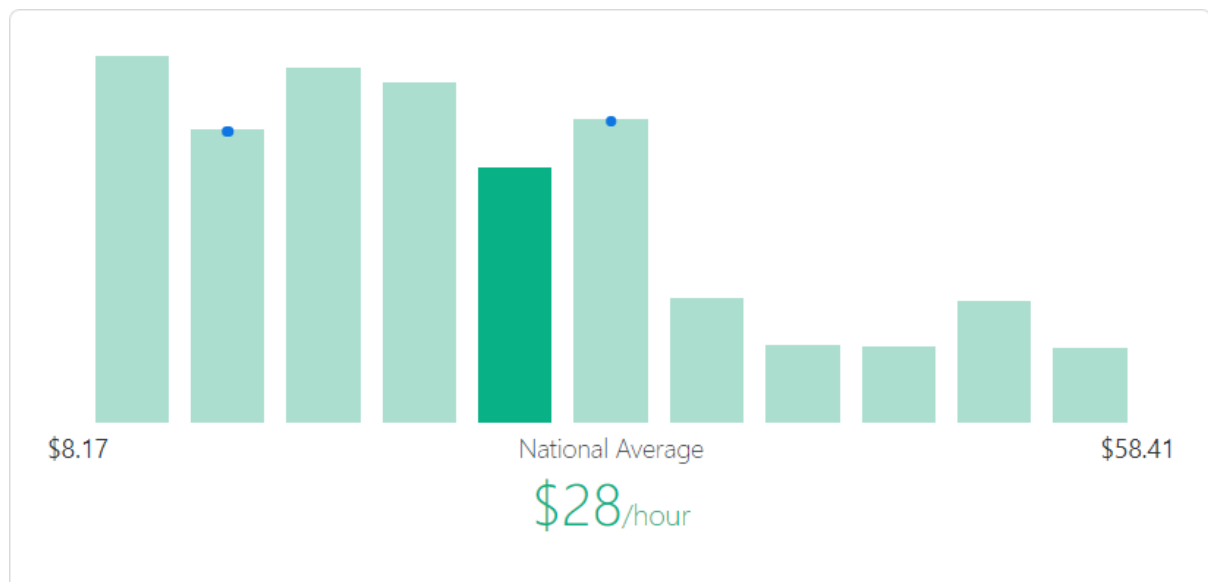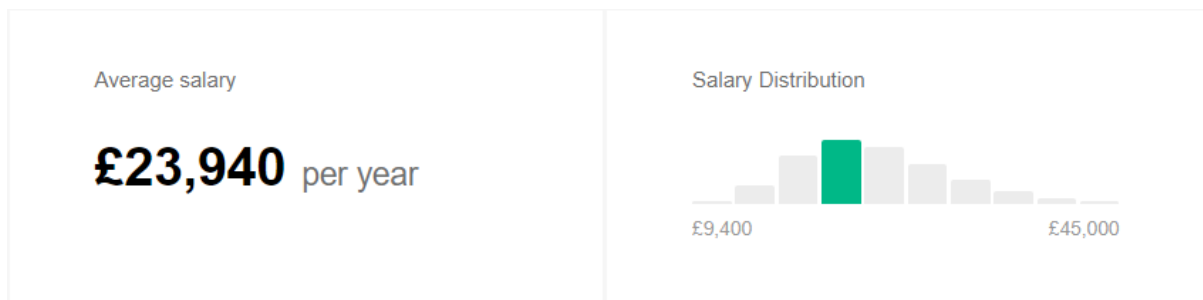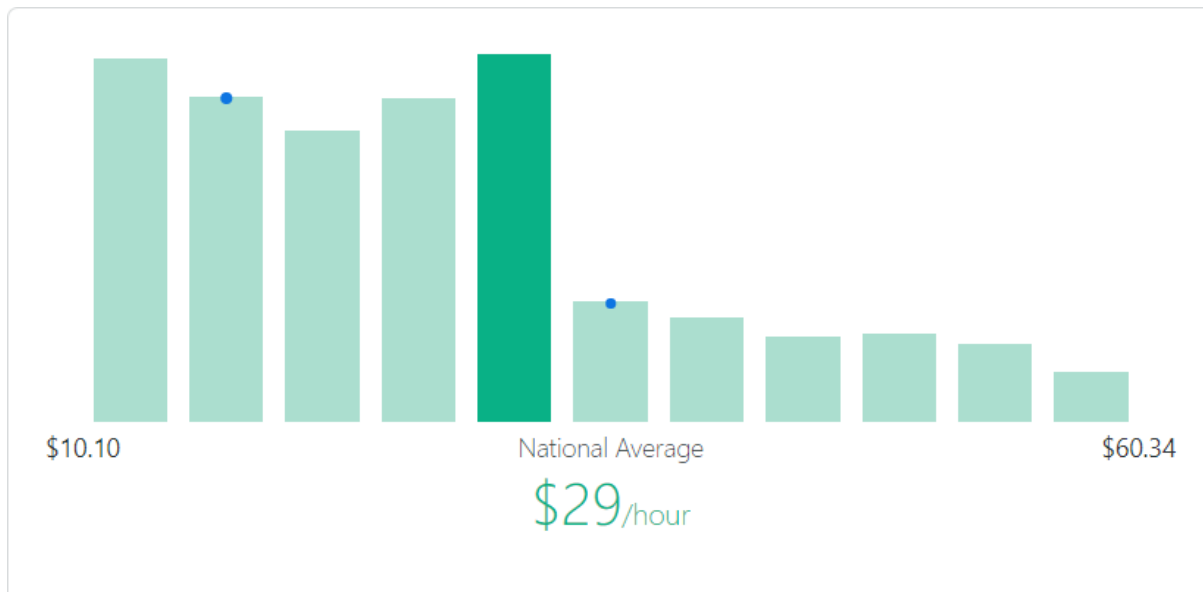

Fig 4. 3D Modeller Freelance Salary

For a **3D Modeller** working **in industry** in the **UK** the **average yearly** income would be set at **£23,940** (Indeed., 2019). Alternatively, you also have the option to work **freelance**, with an hourly rate of **$29** when converted works out **£22.32 hourly**, calculated at working an average of **25-30 hours weekly** that adds up to a yearly average of **£29,016-£33,819**. (ZipRecruiter., 2019.)

Evidently, it would be more beneficial to work freelance as the yearly rate works out higher. However, this is under the impression that you work 25-30 hours per week. There are ups and downs to both options depending on who you are as an artist.

The general issue with working freelance is that you can go from working 40-50 hours a week to not working at all as it is a very uncertain position and you are never guaranteed work. In this case the yearly income discussed above could change dramatically depending on how good your year is.

Working freelance you are essentially your own boss, but this means you are classed as self-employed, so you would have to sort out your tax, insurance and general finances on top of trying to gain work for yourself. For example, if you worked 9-5pm on your creative processes you would still end up working extra to sort out finances.
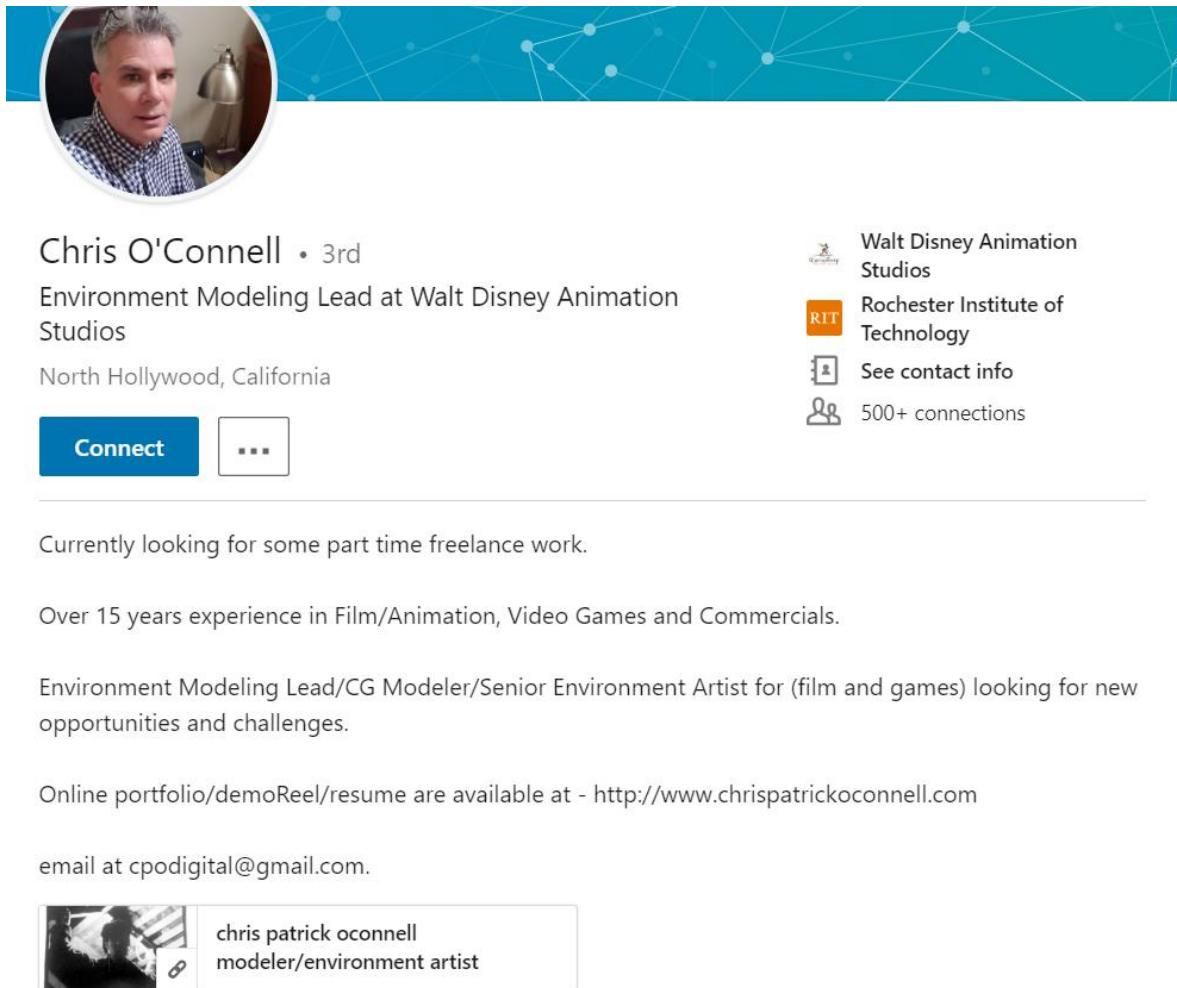
It is often said that working for a company first you gain experience, then people have moved onto freelance when they have built up contacts and experience.

If you worked for a company there are options to progress (junior to senior), this would result in a salary increase. The company would also cover your tax and holiday pay. However, you are tied into what the company and boss has set you, this could be an issue for some and would depend on the size of company you work for.

Working as a lead environment artist for example you are given more responsibility "to maintain the overall aesthetic of the environments and objects as per the design from the art director." As well as to "act as a foreman to make sure the artists do not paint themselves into a corner." (Getinmedia., 2018.) Working as a junior would be to work as a member of the team under the lead environment artist.

Section 2: Case Study 1 – Chris Patrick O'Connell (Zootopia, Ralph Breaks the Internet – Environment Modelling Lead at Walt Disney Animation Studios)

The first case study will be Chris O'Connell, who is currently an Environment Modelling Lead at Walt Disney Animation Studios.

Chris O'Connell · 3rd
Environment Modeling Lead at Walt Disney Animation Studios
North Hollywood, California

Connect   ...

Walt Disney Animation Studios
Rochester Institute of Technology
See contact info
500+ connections

Currently looking for some part time freelance work.

Over 15 years experience in Film/Animation, Video Games and Commercials.

Environment Modeling Lead/CG Modeler/Senior Environment Artist for (film and games) looking for new opportunities and challenges.

Online portfolio/demoReel/resume are available at - http://www.chrispatrickoconnell.com

email at cpodigital@gmail.com.

chris patrick oconnell
modeler/environment artist

Fig 5. LinkedIn Chris O'Connell

Chris O'Connell has had over 15 years' experience within the industry, he works using 3D or within a 3D modelling environment (LinkedIn., O'Connell, C.P., 2019.)

His education was at the University of Dayton (1988 – 1991) studying a BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) in visual comm design. After graduating he then studied at the Rochester Institute of Technology (1996 – 1999) studying his masters (MFA) in Computer Animation.

Upon leaving education he worked his way into the industry, his timeline shows his progression:

- Jan 1999- June 2004 – Post Central Inc
- Jan 2000 - Jan 2001 – Producers Colour Service
- July 2004 – Jan 2005 – Double Edge Digital
- Jan 2005 – Aug 2006 – Viewpoint Inc
- Aug 2006 – July 2008 - Heavy Iron Studios
- July 2008 – Nov 2010 – ImageMovers Digital
- Feb 2011 – Apr 2011 – Hydraulx
- Apr 2011 – Nov 2011 – MPC Vancouver
- Nov 2011 – May 2012 – Sony Pictures Imageworks
- May 2012 – Sept 2012 - Rhythm & Hues
- 2018 – Present – The Art Institutes
- Sept 2012 – Present – Walt Disney Animation Studios

He started working on national, regional and local commercials at Post Central Inc working his way up, until he reached the position of Senior Environment Artist at Heavy Iron Studios. Working on Environment/Prop Modelling, Texturing and Proprietary Game Engine Editing. Working on Wall-E (Senior Environment Artist/Level lead), DemoGame (Environment Artist/Level Lead) and Ratatouille (Environment Artist) for range of devices (Xbox 360, PS3, Wii).
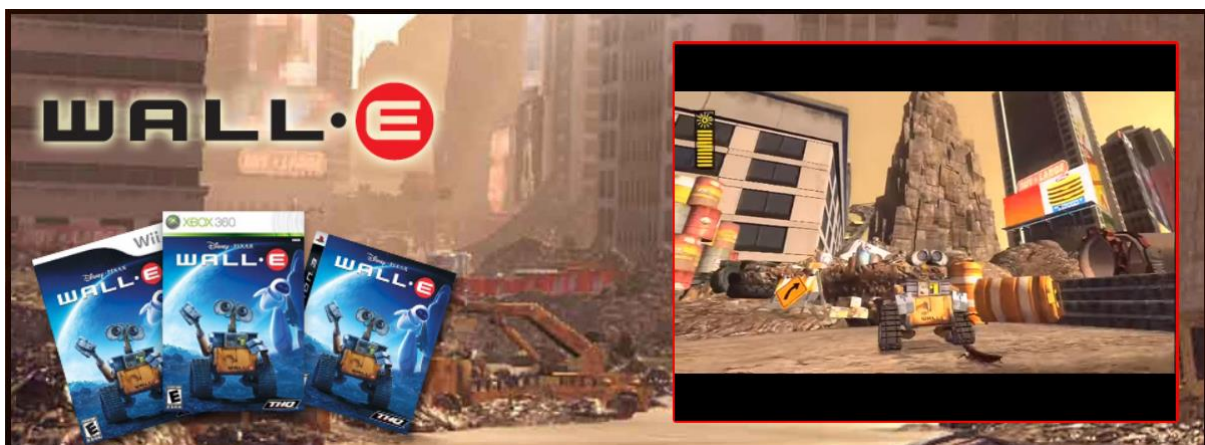

Fig 6. Heavy Iron Studios – Wall-E

He continued to work at a variety of studios with a range of roles until he hit, Sony Pictures Imageworks working as a CG Modeler on Oz: The Great and Powerful. Then at Rhythm and Hues working on Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters and R.I.P.D as a Modelling TD.

At this point he secured a job at Walt Disney Animation Studios, currently an Environment Modelling Lead. Since working here, he has worked on: Frozen, Big Hero 6, Zootopia and Moana as a CG Modeller. Then moving up to an Environment Modelling Lead on Wreck it Ralph 2 and the upcoming Frozen 2.

Taking various jobs at smaller/less well-known studios, he built up his contacts and experience to show his strong skillset leading him up to where he is today in one of the biggest animation studios known worldwide.

With Chris being an Environment Modelling Lead he is the "Point person for a team of environment modelers" with his responsibilities in which he "worked with other departments making sure they had what they needed to get their tasks completed. Worked closely with Environment Modeling Supervisor and Layout, while meeting with the Layout artists daily to improve communication and work flow." (O'Connell, C.P., 2019.)

In reference to Disney's aims and general attitude it is believed that "artists invest their time and talent in pursuit of creating entertaining and visually stimulating new environments, and finding ways to communicate the humor, wonder and emotion of that place through visual cues and artistic expression." Doing this correctly would "transport moviegoers someplace new or take a familiar place and give it a fresh and different twist." (DisneyAnimation., 2019.)

Section 3: Case Study 2 – Clinton Crumpler (Gears of War Franchise – Microsoft- Games- Senior Look Development Artist)

The second case study will be Clinton Crumpler who is currently a Studio Owner at Dekogon and a Principle Artist at Midwinter Entertainment:
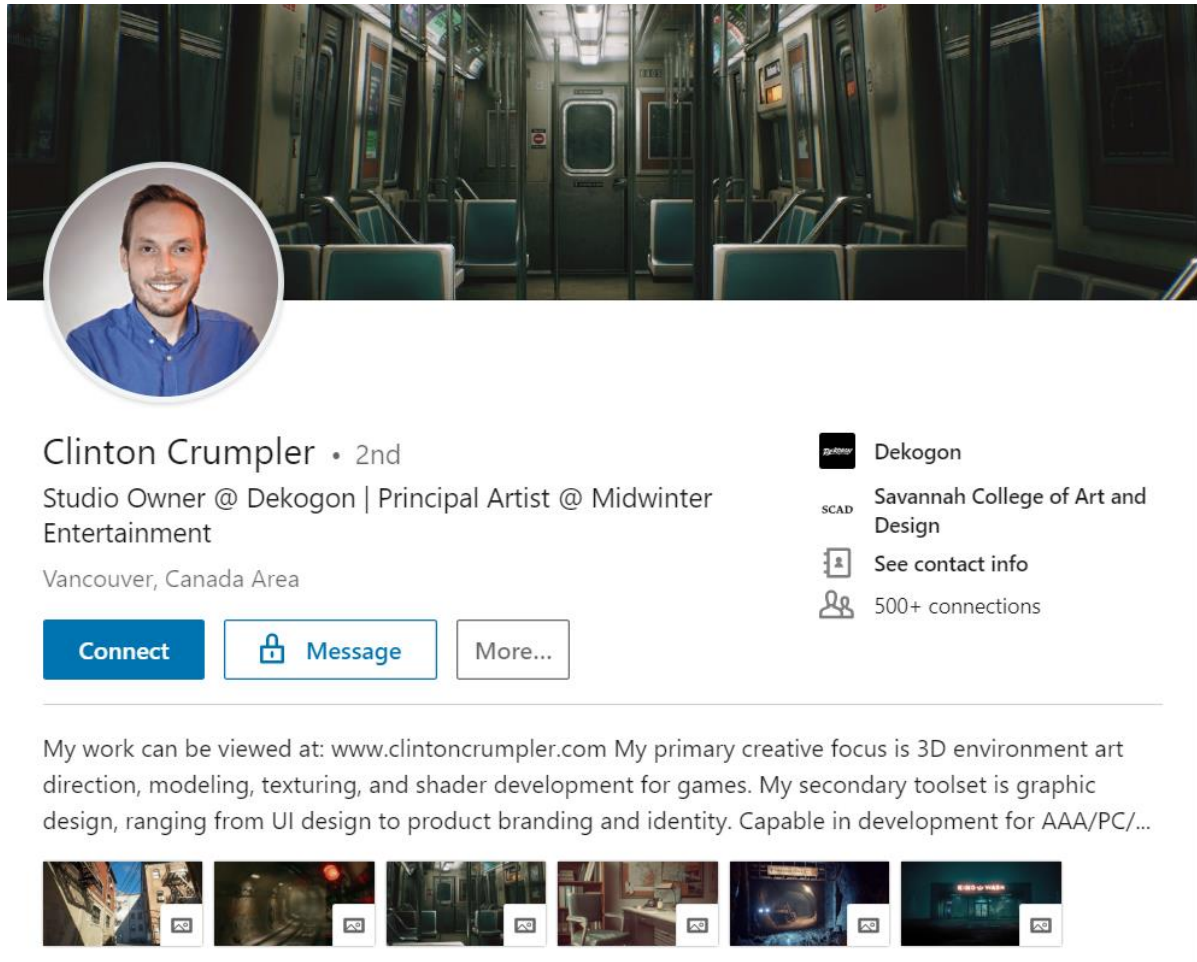
Fig 7. LinkedIn Clinton Crumpler

Clinton has had 7 years' experience working in the industry, his focus is "3D environment art direction, modeling, texturing, and shader development for games". (LinkedIn., Crumpler, C., 2019)

His education involved a BFA (Bachelor of Fine Art) in Graphic Design at Longwood University (2003-2007), this later led him onto Savanna Collage of Art and Design (2008-2010) where he studied a BFA in Animation. After this, still in attendance of Savanna Collage he studied an MFA (Master of Fine Art) in Games and Interactive Media (2010-2012).

He worked as an intern at Microsoft in a collaborative design and research project for the Kinect sponsored by Microsoft Studios through the Savannah College of Art and Design.

His responsibilities included "High / low poly modeling, shader creation, and texturing of environment buildings, landscapes, and props Assisted and collaborated in

design of gameplay mechanics, story beats, and 3D construction workflows." (LinkedIn., C., Crumpler. 2012)

Clintons first major studio role was working on the game series America's Army at SAIC (Proving Ground, Go Army: Edge Sports, and various government and defence projects) as an Art Lead/Environment Artist (2012 – 2013). His responsibilities included "High/Low poly modeling, shader creation, and texturing of environment buildings, landscapes, and props." (LinkedIn., C., Crumpler. 2013)

From 2013 - 2015 he worked in a variety of studios in different roles. An Environment artist at **KIXEYE** working on an unannounced project in UE4 (Unreal Engine), as a freelance environment artist at **Tuque Games** on **World War Machine**, he then worked as a texture artist at **MekTek Studio** working on PC title - **Heavy Gear: Assault** in UE4. While completing these he was also working as an Instructor at Digital-Tutorials where he "Instructed on the use of game development tools (Zbrush, Maya, Quixel, UDK, UE4, Photoshop, Illustrator)". (LinkedIn., C., Crumpler. 2015)

In august 2016 he became Creative Director and Studio Owner of independent artist collective Dekogon Studios Ltd; he and his studio are responsible for:

• Art direction and management | Establish art quality bar

• Manage 100+ International remote artists

• Marketing, social media, promotion of brand

(LinkedIn., C., Crumpler. 2019)

While he was setting up his own studio he worked as a Mentor at Think Tank Training Centre and at Microsoft working as a Senior Look Dev Artist/Senior Environment Artist from (Sep 2017 – Jan 2018), working on the **Gears of War** game franchise.

He still works as an instructor for Environment Art Game Development at CGMA (Computer Graphics Master Academy) and as a Principal Environment Artist for Scavengers at Midwinter Entertainment.

Clinton has discussed his process when it comes to completing his art work, he has advice when it comes to getting caught up in your work cycle, with it becoming too repetitive - "switching between structural assets to textures to props can help alleviate the symptoms of too much repetition" going home he will "work on things that are very opposite to what I'm doing at work" this way he is shaking things up and there is always variety.

Clinton discussed getting stuck with technical issues, in which he feels that "No one minds helping someone as long as they show initiative and they are trying to solve the problem or work things out on their own first, before coming to someone else", he means that he will go to others for help and he welcomes this but only if you have showed you have tried to work it out on your own first, to show employers and others that you are not only determined but can show initiative.

While working on a larger projects which may be daunting to some he finds that "taking it one step at a time can really help figure out where you are during the

process" so in this case he recommends "take it in smaller bitesize chunks compared to looking at the whole and being intimidated" (YouTube., Crumpler, C., 2017.)

Conclusion:

In conclusion from the financial information gathered working freelance as either a 3D modeller or 3D artist would be more beneficial, however this is providing you can gain employment on a regular basis or your income could drop drastically. There is more freedom in working freelance, but you are working on a more day to basis.

Working in a studio although shows to be earning less, you would be in a more secure position as you will be in contract to a studio and not having to constantly keep an eye out for work opportunities.

In reference to the case studies undertook for two artists, O'Connell has more experience in the industry over Crumpler and currently works in one of the biggest animation studios known worldwide. Crumpler however has managed to set up his own business within 7 years of working within the games industry, which is quite an achievement. They have both gained employment regularly apart from earlier on, once they had a foothold on the industry, both haven't had a gap in employment since then. They have clearly worked hard to get where they both are currently.

Their aims where to create visually stimulating environments, to communicate their visions to the audience. Taking your work step by step is viewed to be more beneficial then taking it all in one go which can be quite daunting. They feel spreading your time out evenly and switching between tasks can help to keep your brain stimulated and be less of repetitive process.

The way these artists gained access to the industry isn't the only way. Depending on you as an artist and the opportunities you can gain there are many paths and obstacles to overcome.

Generally, being able to show initiative, being determined and communicate a clear vision is a step in the right direction.

5 Year Action Plan:

Writing a report has been beneficial and aided me in constructing my 5 year plan, by looking into progressions of other artists in the industry as well as the roles financial aspects as well as where it could lead.

I don't have any plans to work for specific studios, but I know I would like to work within 3D Modelling for Environments and Asset creation. I have put together a plan which you see below:

Fig 8. 5 Year Plan

In my first year I would like to search for positions, to cover all bases I will be applying for a range, from 3D Modeller to Environment artist and Runner positions. Keeping up my skill set is also an important aspect and I would like to explore other programmes within the 3D environment, this is so I have numerous angles covered to improve my chances with multiple employers.

I feel that keeping my portfolio on my website updated regularly will give me an opportunity to work on my own ideas and keep my skills fresh for new employment. I would like to take the opportunity to visit festivals, so I can see work from others as well as build up my contacts and get my work seen more.

Leading into the second year if I am not offered a position by then I would like to apply for a course, to work on the development of my 3D skills, specialising if possible, in Assets and Environments. I would also like to delve deeper into artists, to see how their paths run and see if I can pick up tips and tricks from them to improve generally.

By my third year I would like to have gained employments as either a Junior 3D Modeller or Junior Environment Artist, with options for night classes where possible to

explore other avenues as well as keeping my skills fresh and up to date with the latest technology and programmes.

My aim through years 4 and 5 would be to develop my skillset further and create good impressions as well as looking out for great opportunities to get myself into a senior 3D Modeller or Environment artist position. At this stage I would consider looking into alternative paths such as production, to explore other interests.

Overall my plan is to build up my skillset and progress through the industry to gain employment as a senior 3D Modeller or Environment artist. Taking the plan and process into consideration as well as the research completed throughout this report, keeping up with artists and picking up on tips and tricks will help greatly to start on the path towards this goal.

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