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Intern Finds His Calling in Film

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Intern finds his calling in film



If Nick Jauregui '09 were an animated object, he just might be a sponge.

Sitting in the production studio of *Coraline*, an animated feature film released this year about a young girl who enters an alternate version of her life,

Jauregui absorbed all that he could from the great creative masters of animation.

"I would sneak in, watch their shots and listen to them," said Jauregui, a double major in electronic art and studio art. "The best of the best were talking and I was trying to soak up everything they were saying."

Fascinated with animation, Jauregui was searching for a summer internship that would test his skills and teach him new techniques in computer graphics. A field trip to LAIKA, an animation company specializing in commercials, music videos and feature films, captured his imagination. Through persistence and luck he landed the position of Data Wrangler 2.

Jauregui realized immediately that the internship had a steep learning curve. On a daily basis he juggled various digital camera formats and computer programs. As the work load increased, the time frame for *Coraline* became tighter. If a cameraman didn't get his shots to Jauregui on time, he immediately fell behind. Assistant directors demanded shots in time for Henry Selick, the film's director and co-writer, to view the film. Any delay at Jauregui's station slowed production and post-production of the entire movie.

"It was stressful because there was so much pressure on us to have Selick approve shots that were all laid out on my desk," Jauregui said. "I was responsible for so much, and had access to so much, that if I hit the wrong keys I could literally delete the whole movie."

Jauregui learned the multitude of ways to shoot specific scenes, most of which never make the final cut. Animators shoot from numerous angles to test different possibilities for a scene in the movie. A scene can be put together dozens of different ways, but only one will make it into the film.

One of Jauregui's biggest challenges came when the director changed the format of the entire movie, requiring that all of the lines on the faces of each puppet be removed by a computer program that Jauregui had never used before.

Jauregui had to capture and pixilate the puppet strings that crossed each character's face so they disappeared and the face looked smooth. Shadows made the process even more difficult. With a steady hand and patience, he finished his three shots.

"The program required that we do the work frame by frame," Jauregui explained. "It was so time consuming and I only did 3.5 seconds of the total movie, which took me 24 hours."

Working tirelessly on a major motion picture does have its perks. Jauregui's memorabilia includes one of the dancing mice and a pair of specialty *Coraline* shoes. Inside information is another bonus. The address of the pink palace in the movie is the address of the Hillsboro production building and the face on the dollar bills in the movie is Selick's. Jauregui also hinted that a picture of Jack from the *Nightmare Before Christmas* can be seen somewhere in the *Coraline* movie and challenges viewers to spot it.

Dan Ford, Jauregui's electronic art advisor, believes that Jauregui's personality and hard work are what earned him the internship of a lifetime.

"For an intern he was given a great deal of responsibility and credit," said Ford. "He was able to work for a premier animation studio and contribute, in his own way, toward the creation of a successful feature film."

Jauregui's experience on *Coraline* has sharpened his career focus on entertainment and animation. After graduating next fall, he hopes to work on the next LAIKA animation movie, *Paranorman*, which begins shooting in the fall.

"Movies are so different because there are magical elements to them," he said. "Once I started doing it I never wanted to stop."

— Megan Wills '09

