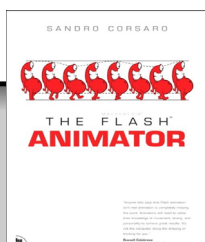


This chapter focuses on the various tools artists can use to draw in Flash. Whether you want to splatter paint with your Wacom tablet or draw line art with a mouse, Flash offers an array of choices..

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Working with Tablets
- Working with Scanned Artwork
- Working with the Mouse
- Flash's Drawing Tools

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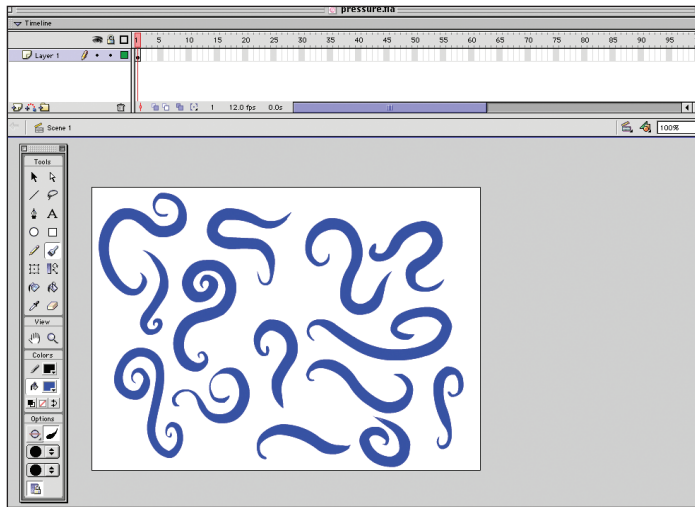
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There are three basic methods in which Flash artists can create their artwork for Flash: pen/tablet, mouse, or scan and trace. Although some are more time consuming than others, each has its own distinct advantage.

Working with Tablets

One of the most frustrating parts of animating in Flash is learning how to draw with pressure sensitive tablet and pen. Many traditional artists have complained of the slickness and lack of traction on the tablet. (Yes, I know, I feel your pain.) When I first began using this tool, I would go absolutely nuts because I could not replicate my stroke with the ease I had on paper. It felt like learning to ride a bike all over again. One thing that helped was to place a sheet of paper on the tablet in order to gain some tooth (or traction). The paper was thin enough so that the pressure-sensitive pen could still transmit my strokes onto the screen. Sure enough my strokes got better. Using the paper as a set of training wheels also prevented me from hurling the computer out the window. Eventually, I got used to the feel of the surface and got rid of the paper.

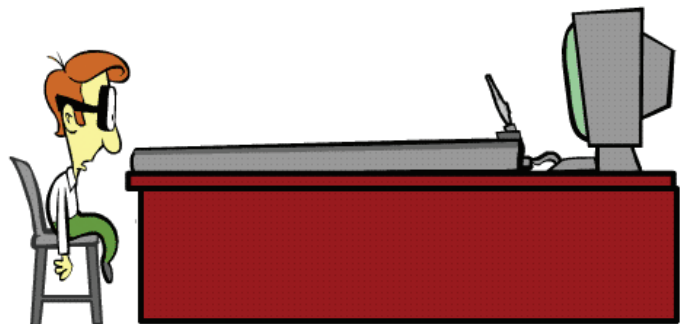
Drawing while looking up at a screen instead of down at the paper represents another learning curve for many artists. There will be a period of hand-eye readjustment, even for the highly skilled traditional animator. With consistent practice and diligent hard work, it won't be long before you're replicating your pencil art perfectly. Turning on the pressure sensitivity will turn your pen into a loaded wet brush. Consequently, the artist will have to learn how to delicately gauge the applied pressure. Mastering the digital stroke is a skill that saves an enormous amount of time in the long run. Practice drawing simple shapes or familiar characters when starting out. Try tapering your paint strokes by gradually building and then releasing pressure as shown in the following figure.



People always ask me how long will it take to learn to draw with consistency straight into Flash. It's hard to say because each person brings their own individual work ethic and artistic potential to the table. I have seen some talented traditional animators struggle with their hand eye re-coordination. But, during my interview with Hanna Barbera legend Iwoa Takamoto, he knocked out a beautiful gesture drawing on his first try.

Tips with the Tablet

Tablets come in a variety of brands and sizes. For the purposes of animation, bigger is not always better. As an independent animator, a smaller tablet is a wiser choice for travel convenience. The actual area on which you will draw will never exceed a few inches. Many animators use the small 4x6-inch models. I recommend the 6x8-inch Wacom Tablet. It's small enough to use on a plane, and big enough to use without feeling that your workspace is cramped. I used to work on a 12x12-inch tablet, which was simply too clunky and cumbersome.



Working with Scanned Artwork

If you are uncomfortable with the idea of drawing straight into the program, there are a few other programs and techniques you can use to get your ink-on-paper illustrations into Flash. Todd Gallina is an independent Flash animator who uses a scanning and vectorizing process. A step-by-step tutorial of the process he uses can be seen on his web site (www.toddgallina.com).

The basic idea is to scan your black-and-white inked illustration at 300–400 DPI and save it as a .tif file. Next convert the .tif into vector art. This can be done using Adobe Streamline or by using the Auto Trace tool in Macromedia Freehand or Adobe Illustrator. Once your art is vectorized, simply import it into Flash.

To clean up the drawings, go to the Modify menu and select Optimize Curves. This will reduce your file size by flattening any unnecessary bumps. Once you're happy with the optimized version of your black-and-white artwork, use the Paint Bucket tool to fill it with color. Todd's artwork displays this conversion process from pencil artwork to vector format.

You can also bring your scanned artwork into Flash by importing bitmapped files. Simply select a layer to bring in your pencil artwork and import the drawings. Then add a layer above your imported artwork and trace over your work. When you have finished tracing over the bitmapped artwork, delete the layer.

Working with the Mouse

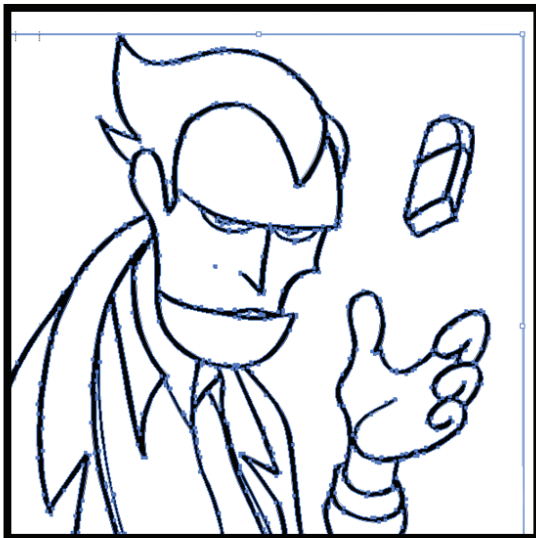
Some designers are accustomed to working without the use of a tablet or scanned artwork. Using a mouse or trackball to draw can limit an animator's ability to create loose dimensional shapes, which form the building blocks for great character animation. Many designers, however, enjoy the control of creating even shapes and lines with the Shape tools that are offered by a mouse or trackball. This method tends to result in a flatter style of artwork, similar to that featured at www.mishmashmedia.com.



1. Pencil drawing



2. Inked drawing to be scanned



3. Auto traced and vectorized



4. Colored and animated

Copyright © Todd Gallina

Flash's Drawing Tools

When you are comfortable enough to start drawing in Flash, you have two weapons of choice: the pencil and the paintbrush. The Pencil tool always provides a much tighter style than the Paintbrush tool. The Paintbrush tool combined with the pressure sensitivity option allows for a loose style.

The Pencil Tool

The Pencil tool allows the user to vary the pencil's thickness, style, and color.

When using the Pencil tool, you can draw in three modes: Smooth, Ink, and Straighten. Smooth mode will attempt to recognize any shapes automatically. The Straighten mode will attempt to reduce your objects into shapes. The Smooth mode does not adjust your lines dramatically, but subtly smoothes your stroke. Both Smooth and Straighten modes will connect lines that have end points close to each other. Ink mode gives the artist the mobility of freehand pencil drawing. There is no smoothing, shape recognition, or line connection.

Explore the stroke textures and thicknesses in the drop-down Window menu. One of the most renowned flash animators, Joe Shields, a.k.a. Joe Cartoon, has made quite a mark on the web with his use of the Pencil tool.

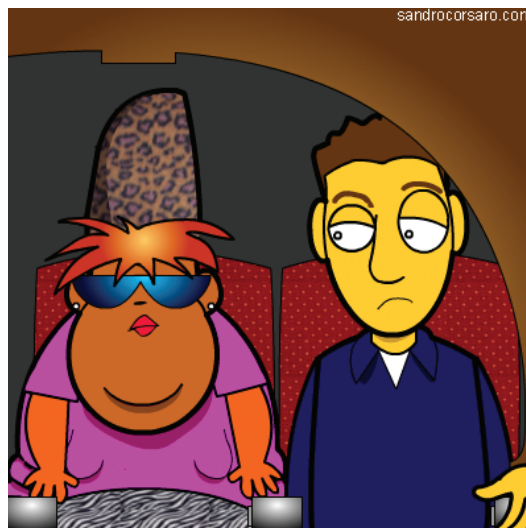
The Paintbrush Tool

The Paintbrush tool allows for a looser style of drawing. Like the Pencil tool, there are choices for line thickness and texture. The Paintbrush, when used in conjunction with a pressure-sensitive tablet, can make beautifully weighted strokes. Veteran *Simpsons* animator and Doodle.com creator Tom Winkler has made this style his signature on the web. If you decide to turn on the pressure-sensitive setting, be aware of the force you exert on the pen. If you have a heavy hand, use a small brush size.



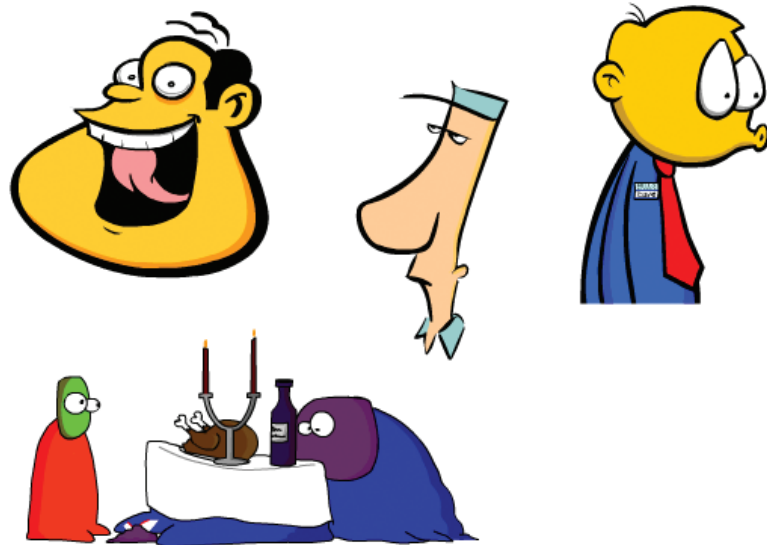
Copyright © Tom Winkler

You can also import a bitmap to use as a paintbrush or Fill tool. As you can see in the following cartoon, much of the fabric was imported as a bitmap and then broken up. After a bitmap is broken up, you can simply dip your Dropper tool into it to use it as a paintbrush. Be aware that it is still a bitmap, and your file size will subsequently reflect that if you over-use this trick.

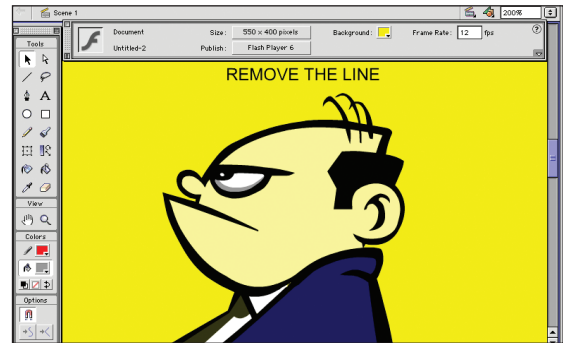
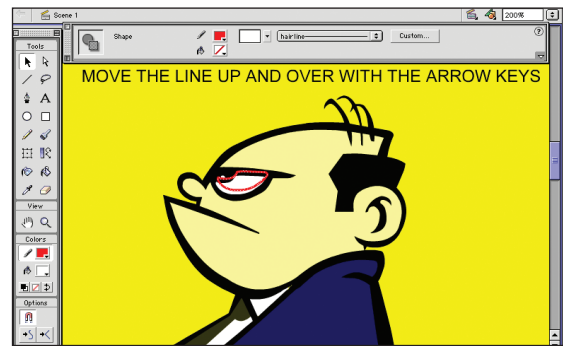
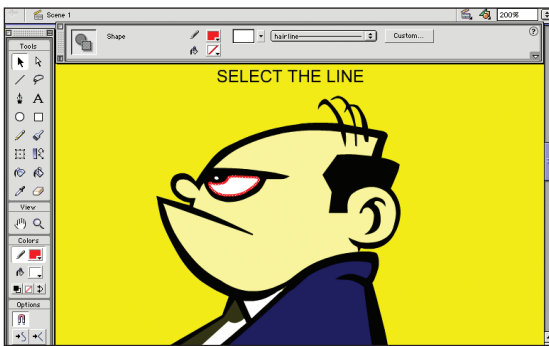


Design Tricks with the Pencil and Brush

The Pencil tool can be used in its own unique way in conjunction with the Ink bottle tool. The ink bottle will draw a line around the contour of any painted object. Look at the following figure examples. First select the ink bottle and make sure you have the hairline stroke selected. Then tap the inside of the filled shape, in this case the white eyefill. This creates an outline around the eyefill contour. Select your new pencil line and, using your arrow keys, move it a few pixels over. Now select your paint bucket and fill in the space you have created with a new color. To create this kind of effect, you always want to use a color slightly lighter or darker than the color next to it. When using this technique be sure you have your selected close large gaps in the gap options, otherwise your spaces will not always fill with colors when you dump paint in them.



Use highlights to give form and shape



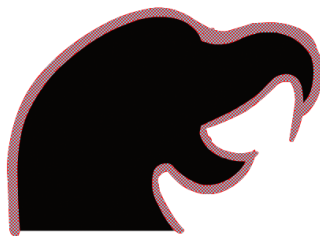
By now you should know that if you paint a stroke over a previously painted stroke on the same layer, the new stroke will cover (or eat away) the old stroke. This can be used to your advantage. I often design my keyframes in one color and then refine the pose directly on top of the old one in another color. When I am done I simply remove the first pose by selecting its color. The paintbrush can also be used as a great cleanup tool. The following figure was trace bitmapped and left me with thousands of jagged edges. These jagged edges could end up creating a large file size. By simply tracing over the outermost part of the artwork with my red paintbrush, I have deleted the jagged edges. Simply remove the red paint stroke after you have finished tracing the object and you're done.



This image has jagged edges



Trace the contour with another paintbrush color



Select the paint outline



Delete the selection



The Paintbrush and Pencil tools also offer the artist an array of shapes and strokes. Besides giving you various brush sizes, the Paintbrush tool also offers you a multitude of shaped brushes to vary your line quality. Experiment with these features to create new styles and designs.



Change your stroke and brush tools for various design styles

BRAD ABLESON

Brad Ableson, 26, attended USC's School of Cinema-Television, where his student film, My Ding-A-Ling, won 11 international awards and helped score him his dream job, working as a character animator on The Simpsons at the age of 19. After graduation, he was promoted to storyboard artist and is now starting his seventh season on The Simpsons. You may also have seen his artwork on products, promotions, and limited-edition animation cels from The Simpsons. In his free time, Brad enjoys movies, surfing, and teaching. He has taught storyboarding at USC's School of Cinema-Television, Gnomon School of Visual Effects, and the Academy of Entertainment & Technology in Santa Monica. Though animation is his first love, Brad hopes to make a career directing live-action feature films. Currently, he is writing a screenplay that is based on three weeks he spent undercover in a northern California high school. Also, Brad recently wrote, directed, and produced a short film called Save Virgil, which combines live-action and animation and stars The Man Show's Adam Carolla as the voice of Virgil, a cartoon boy accidentally born into the real world. Though still a work-in-progress, Brad hopes that Save Virgil will inspire a TV series, feature film, or at least the opportunity to direct the high-school movie he's currently writing.

Q You have a unique educational background compared to most animators, why did you choose to attend USC over a CalArts-type school?

A I was tempted to go to an art school like CalArts to learn to be an animator, but ultimately decided a film school, like USC, would teach me the broader skills needed to become a well-rounded director. Plus, there are hotter chicks at USC.

Q What is the most critical element of great storyboarding?

A The most critical element of great storyboarding is the ability to recognize when it's appropriate to show off and when it's appropriate to hold back. A clever camera move used at the right time can be unforgettable, but if used at an unmotivated time, it can be very distracting and pretentious.



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Q As an animator, what advantages do you feel you have over live-action “storytellers?”

A Animators have none of the limitations that live-action storytellers have. In animation, there is no stunt too dangerous, no location too inaccessible, no actor too stubborn, and no prop too expensive. You have the ability to craft every detail of a performance without having to depend on other people. It’s the perfect medium for a socially inept control freak!

Q Besides the great scripts, what makes *The Simpsons* so successful?

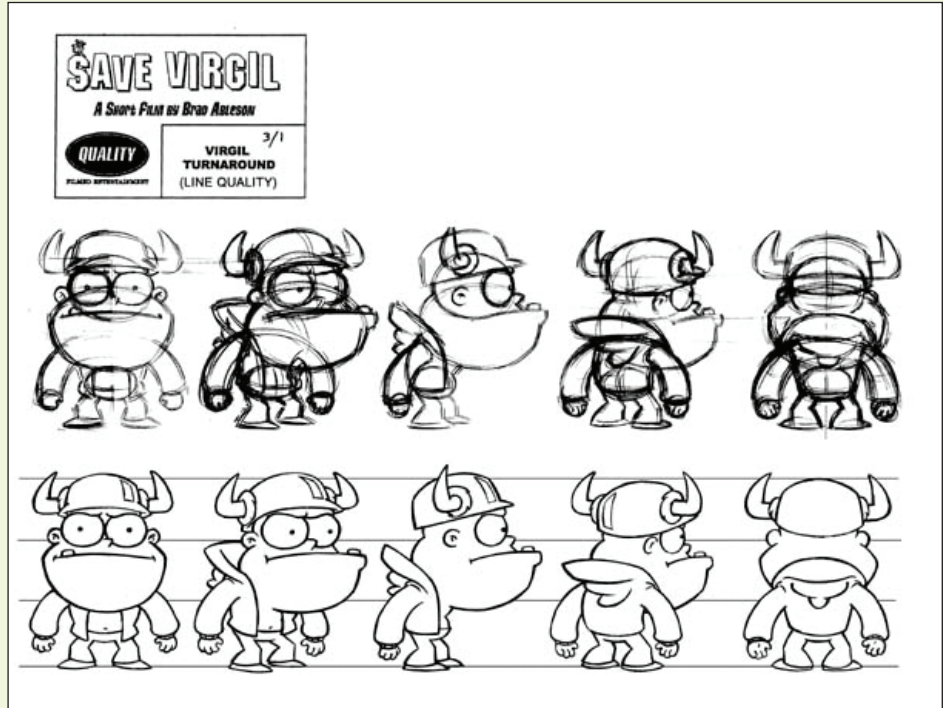
A To be honest, I can’t think of anything other than the great scripts that make *The Simpsons* successful. I’d like to think the animation is responsible, but if shows like *Beavis & Butthead* and *South Park* have proved anything, it’s that no matter how ugly a show looks, great writing is what people respond to. Oh yeah, my storyboards are pretty sweet too!

Q What has been your favorite project/episode to work on and why?

A My favorite *Simpsons* episodes to work on have been the Halloween shows. Generally, they are more cinematic, more action packed, and the storyboard artists are encouraged to experiment with tricky animation. Particularly, “Night of the Dolphins” is my pride and joy since it is a bizarre homage to *The Birds*.

Q What art/artists inspire you?

A Most of my artistic influences come from my childhood. *Mad* magazine artists like Sergio Aragones, Mort Drucker, and Sam Viviano inspired my drawing techniques. Comics like “Calvin & Hobbes” and “Wilbur Kookmeyer” inspired my storytelling style. Directors like John Hughes and Robert Zemeckis inspired my filmmaking instincts. As an adult, I’m inspired by pretty much everything I see. If it’s good, I want to know why; and if it’s bad, I want to know why. The only thing I’m not inspired by is *Will & Grace*.



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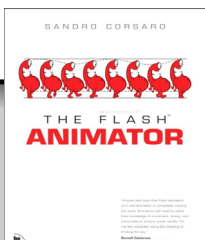


Q Understandable.

What advice do you have for the youngsters out there?

A Don't limit your experiences to just what you see on TV or in the movies. Go out there and do lots of crazy stuff yourself. That way, when you're making your film, you're drawing from real life experiences and observations, rather than recycling what you've seen on TV or in the movies. And always keep track of your dirty home movies before lending videos to your parents.

Good pointer. I'm sure you just saved some 14-year-old boy some future embarrassment.



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