REVIEW

Liquid+/Pencil+ NPR Combo Pack

This non-photorealistic plug-in suite will satisfy the tortured artist in you

BY PETE DRAPER

Want to treat your *3ds max* renders to a non-photorealistic makeover? These two new plug-ins, from Japanese developer PSoft, could be the answer. *Liquid+* deals with paint effects and adding paint styles to a scene is a straightforward operation. Applied in two stages, using the *Liquid+* material, you amend the render engine to pass information through to the *Liquid+* renderer so that the painting can be applied.

The painting process in particular is what makes the product stand out. Once the Scanline pass has completed, the *Liquid+* renderer kicks in and paints using the brushes and styles designed in the material. Amending the styles is simple; just tweak the brush styles, paint densities, colour bleeding and so on. Its detailed manual has some comedy Japanese-to-English translation errors, but is simple to use.

Pencil+ is mainly material based, and produces toon-shader results which are easily amended, by adding and tweaking pencil line styl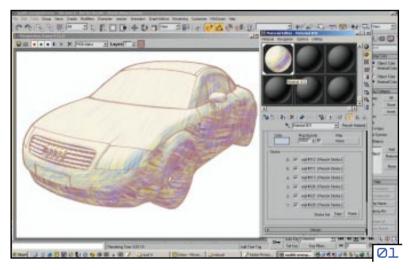es for each band of colour. These colour bands are determined by designing the gradient which blends the bands together. There's also the option of adding multiple pencil styles and colours to each band by amending each sub-band map; this can be copied and instanced as required. The end results are effective; with several coloured pencils, we can get that 'Conte Painting Pencil' effect.

Couple that with a *Liquid+* material, and a little water can be added to create a convincing result.

LIQUID+ AND PENCIL+ DEMONSTRATE HOW NON-PHOTOREALISTIC RENDERERS SHOULD BE

When it comes to animation, new brush strokes are generated at a desired interval or – and this is really cool – only if the object is moving, so we get a Tony Hart-esque oil painting animation which looks really convincing (see www.tonyhart.co.uk for more on this legendary artist).

You can also use the contours of the mesh to determine brush or pencil strokes, for more authenticity. It looks as though the 'artist' has applied them to suggest curvature, whereas other renderers simply slap them on over the top, ruining the effect.

To be ultra critical, you can get lost in *Pencil+* with the amount of strokes you can add. There's no preset function, and the gradient is a little awkward. Some spinner fields don't redraw properly, and the outliner effect can get jittery. But these gripes pale in comparison to the end results: this is how an NPR should be. ∎

[Ø1] Within each defined band, you can design a number of pencil types and colours, creating exactly the right style of effect that you require

[Ø2] Using the basic materials of the scene and different brush styles, you can set up and paint a good oil painting effect in a matter of minutes

3D VERDICT · 9

RANGE OF FEATURES	9
VALUE FOR MONEY	9

PROS Excellent painting >> Unlimited styles >> Easy implementaiton >> Stroke animation >> Influence of Geometry feature

CONS No preset function >> Finicky Zone gradient >> Environment effects pre-rendered then overlaid