



CG GARAGE PODCAST #259

ANDREA BLASICH – SCULPTOR, “SPIDER-MAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE”

Traditional sculpting techniques still play an important role in CG film production. Talented sculptor Andrea Blasich tells Chris about the pros and cons of clay.

Andrea Blasich’s love of sculpting began on the beaches of southern Italy and it’s taken him all the way to Hollywood, where his talents have been put to use on movies including Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, Brave and Ice Age 2: The Meltdown. In this podcast, recorded at THU, he explains why time-honored techniques are still relevant in digital pipelines.

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- Chris Nichols: Thank you for doing this. I actually was ... I loved your work last year-
- Andrea Blasich: Thank you. Excellent.
- Chris Nichols: When I came last year and I saw all your sculptures and the way you were teaching, I think it's really important to be a teacher and a mentor and to teach people some new things.
- Andrea Blasich: It's not easy.
- Chris Nichols: No. It's not easy, right?
- Andrea Blasich: No. So for me was more almost like a develop of the... Kind of try to find a way how to teach people how I see, how I thinking when I'm doing my rough sketches. They can be for feature, for movies, or my personal stuff. It grew slowly and then I start to enjoy. I'm still doing because I'm getting energy to do stuff for myself through this lecture.
- Andrea Blasich: And to see the people, they are really interesting on what I'm doing. They kind of give me the motivation to keep doing. And lately, this year I did five or six workshops. So I did one in Sweden. It kind of allowed me even to teach people, to travel around, to go around. I went to Sweden. I went to Russia. I'm going to go to London in November.
- Chris Nichols: Wow.
- Andrea Blasich: To do a workshop for a company. So it has a lot of pro, teaching people. Especially because I can go see museums during the time so I can get more inspiration for future pieces.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah.
- Andrea Blasich: No, it's really interesting.
- Chris Nichols: Do you like doing that? Do you like going to museums and stuff?
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, yeah. I love to do museums.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah.
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah. I love especially coming even to Malta. It's amazing to just sort of feel the environment, feel the space, the history of design. It's incredible. When you look around, you see shapes, buildings that can give you influence, can give you some certain kind of inspiration for forms. Especially sculpture, it's all about form, shapes, silhouette, and so on.

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Chris Nichols: Yeah.

Andrea Blasich: It's pretty incredible, yeah.

Chris Nichols: Yeah. So I obviously do want to talk about your medium and sculpture a lot, and how you think things have changed for you with technology and how traditional things are, work, et cetera. But before we get into that, let's talk a little bit about your origin story. Even as a youngest child, what got you into liking to do art and doing sculpture?

Andrea Blasich: My mom reminds me that long time ago, when I was a kid, I was play with the sand in the south of Italy. There was a certain kind of clay, or Gila, natural Gila. So I start to create forms when I was on the beach. I start to play with the stuff. And I play with maybe with piece of stones that you could carve easily. And then, obviously, coming from Italy, I was immersed in this kind of environment with museum, all this history that we have. So I was really influenced by this kind of environment.

Andrea Blasich: This kind of brought me to explore more in different direction and then kind of brought me to study art, go through the art school and then do the Academy of Art. And then when I was in theater, I studied theater. But basically, I start to move more toward animation because I kind of like moving images. At the time when I start, it was like 2-D animation. CG animation wasn't even there yet. So I start to analyze how to do movies in 2-D. We were starting with friends some movies from the, you know, the old Disney movies. Tried to dissect and tried to understand how to achieve this kind of result. And then I did a small animation school in Milan, and then I start to travel around like in festival like this one. Start to meet people. Start to meet companies. Show the portfolio. Show a certain, like, a collection of drawing, because at the time I didn't know what was a portfolio. And then, through that, I was able to go to London, work on the first movie. So you start to get that-

Chris Nichols: What was your first movie?

Andrea Blasich: I work on Balto.

Chris Nichols: Oh, Bolt?

Andrea Blasich: Yeah, no. Balto. No, Balto.

Chris Nichols: Balto.

Andrea Blasich: Balto. It's 1994.

Chris Nichols: 1994.

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Andrea Blasich: London, in Amblimation.

Chris Nichols: Oh, okay.

Andrea Blasich: So I move from Milan. I went to London. It was the first time that I did this kind of move, the change of country. Okay, we were still in Europe but it was a different environment, different language. And so I was really immersed. And then at the time, Amblimation was moving to Los Angeles. It was becoming DreamWorks. So I tried to get to the kind of board, but I didn't get through because there were not spots. But that one kind of allowed me to go to Munich. So I work in Munich for one and a half year. Another studio, then I'm back to London. And then finally, now I was able to go to Los Angeles to work for DreamWorks in '97.

Chris Nichols: Okay.

Andrea Blasich: It was really nice because it was at the beginning of the studio, so there was this kind of ferment-

Chris Nichols: What were you doing for the animation?

Andrea Blasich: I was doing traditional layout.

Chris Nichols: Traditional layout?

Andrea Blasich: Yeah.

Chris Nichols: Okay.

Andrea Blasich: So basically, I studied theater, and then I discovered that theater and staging for animation was pretty much the same.

Chris Nichols: Oh, right.

Andrea Blasich: The same thinking.

Chris Nichols: Okay.

Andrea Blasich: Because in theater, it's a three-dimensional space but you are thinking bidimensional, because you work on the paper. You set everything on paper.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: So you try to achieve something three-dimensional.

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Chris Nichols: Of course.

Andrea Blasich: In animation, it was the opposite. Try to have something three-dimensional but on a 2-D surface. So it was kind of fascinating to think, to have the same thinking behind.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: So it was pretty cool. And then obviously, when I was in DreamWorks, I start to meet designers. I start to look around. The beauty of work in a big studio that you can meet in different departments, different artists from all around the world.

Chris Nichols: Sure.

Andrea Blasich: And I met Carlos Grangel, that is one of the speakers here. And we became really good friends. Start to work on some of the characters.

Chris Nichols: And which-

Andrea Blasich: That was Spirit. Spirit.

Chris Nichols: Cool. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Andrea Blasich: Stallion of the Cimarron. Yeah, it was a pretty ambitious project because it was realistic but stylized at the same time in 2-D. So the animators need the sculptor, the maquette, we call maquette. It's like a three-dimensional object we take as a reference for drawings.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: For when you have a different angle, like a up shot or down shot. So the animators uses the three-dimensional object to help them drawing-

Chris Nichols: It's reference.

Andrea Blasich: ... It's like a reference, yeah. At the time, it was reference.

Chris Nichols: Okay.

Andrea Blasich: And then it became more like a reference for a CG model, later. Because we were scanning the maquette.

Chris Nichols: Right.

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Andrea Blasich: So you scan the traditional surface, like a 3-D object, and then it become materialized in the computer.

Chris Nichols: The computer.

Andrea Blasich: But this came later.

Chris Nichols: This came later, right?

Andrea Blasich: It came later, yeah.

Chris Nichols: So but you were doing layouts mostly?

Andrea Blasich: I was doing layout. And then, obviously, when you enter in a studio, it's difficult to change department.

Chris Nichols: Okay.

Andrea Blasich: So I have to build up a portfolio for sculpture.

Chris Nichols: Now, when did you start sculpt ... besides you being a kid on the beach?

Andrea Blasich: I start when I was at the art school in Milan.

Chris Nichols: Oh, okay.

Andrea Blasich: I did traditional sculpture. Figurative sculpture.

Chris Nichols: Okay.

Andrea Blasich: So I start anatomy, and then we would do life drawing, modeling, 3-D modeling with the model, with the live models. And then, but the passion was always there, always there. And then I wanted to do a sculpt master. But at the time, there was not a lot of opportunity and there weren't really good teachers. So I decide to go more toward theater.

Chris Nichols: Okay. Okay. Yeah.

Andrea Blasich: But then when I came to United States, I saw there was a demand for like physical sculpture.

Chris Nichols: Yes.

Andrea Blasich: So I kind of push in that direction. And since 2000, I'm doing sculpting for movies, video games, personal sculpture. Now CG, obviously, I use ZBrush.

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- Chris Nichols: So you went back to sculpting and you're ... There are a lot of people that may not understand sculpting, and how that helps in animation. We mentioned reference at some point, but that is an important part of the beginning of things, right?
- Andrea Blasich: When I started, it was really important because the studio really believe in this kind of first step. Because this is one of the character design. So the director, they have an idea and a vision. So they express this vision to the character designer.
- Chris Nichols: Sure.
- Andrea Blasich: And then the character design is the guy that, he draw the characters but on 2-D, on paper.
- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: And then, at that time, you have to take this 2-D drawings and then change in a 3-D form. So this was when I was starting to work directly with the character designer, the director, the production designer. Start to feel the character in the real form.
- Andrea Blasich: And then, obviously, they were approving the three-dimensional object, and then they were passing to the animators. This was a really important step to visualize, to decide exactly, okay, this is the right direction or this is not the right direction. Because you were exploring, during the creation of the character.
- Chris Nichols: Right, right, right.
- Andrea Blasich: So it could develop in another direction, because they didn't think about that solution. So you can explore different solution.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
- Andrea Blasich: Usually, at some time, I do even different takes. So one, maybe the face is a bit more elongated. The other one's more squashed. So the director can pick. Or maybe they say, "Okay, pick a little bit of this one, little bit of that." So you have to do this kind of collage. Sometimes when you do a collage, it's difficult to make sure that everything's uniform, everything is in harmony. So that is the kind of challenging but tricky part to accomplish. So some projects, they are more problematic because maybe there is no clear vision. Others, you have a clear vision so you can go faster.
- Andrea Blasich: So there are different steps. Each one of the projects that I work, they were pretty interesting to accomplish. Because of the result, they were

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completely different. That is kind of cool, yeah. But more what I'm looking is more the collaboration, especially with the years that you are doing. I'm doing this almost like 25 years, more than 25. So I meet all these artists. And the nice thing is when you gain the trust, because they really respect what you can bring on the table.

Chris Nichols: But there's a lot of discussion that happens around a sculpture.

Andrea Blasich: There is a discussion, and then there is lot of experimenting too. So it's one of the first collaboration. And it's really nice on my side, when I see that they can start to see it. So you can start to see they open the eyes. They start to feel it. They start to imagine how the movie's going to be.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: Especially in Spider-Man, the last movie. Not last movie. I work in 2017, and then it came out last November. And I haven't seen the movie since then, because I was working on the first Spider-Man, the characters and everything, and then the designer went there, "Go see the movie because you're going to see your sculpture moving on the screen." So I went, "Yeah, come on." He said, "No, no, no. Go see the..." So I went there. I was really blown away. It was really a big surprise. Usually it's the opposite.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: They don't translate what you achieve on the [crosstalk 00:11:41].

Chris Nichols: But you think they were faithful to your sculptures?

Andrea Blasich: They were really faithful, because we used a process that I start to implement in my pipeline now, when I work with studio. We scan the sculpture, and they rebuild the character based on the sculpture. Based on the CG data that we provide to the CG modeler.

Traditional sculpting vs. ZBrush

Chris Nichols: So, for you, what's important to you about doing traditional sculpting of maquettes, compared to just going ahead and doing it in ZBrush?

Andrea Blasich: You can do digital. For example, in Spider-Man, they called me back because they started digitally, but then they were unhappy because they

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couldn't find ... So, the designer asked to work with me, and we solved this kind of problem. And we did it, you know.

Chris Nichols: Do you think the problem is the fact that it's digital? Or do you think that it's-

Andrea Blasich: It's difficult for the director, for the productionist, to see it in real life. Because when you have a real object, you can lift it, the director can touch it. Sometimes when I see the director, or the production of the character, they're not there yet, I let them sculpt on top of my sculpt. So they own more the sculpture.

Chris Nichols: Oh, interesting.

Andrea Blasich: So it's easy for me to get approved because they get to touch the object. But then they start to see from the beginning.

Chris Nichols: So it's touching it?

Andrea Blasich: It's the tactile things.

Chris Nichols: You can still bring it back on a computer.

Andrea Blasich: You can bring it back, yeah.

Chris Nichols: Yeah, okay.

Andrea Blasich: And then, now with the 3-D printing, you can do changes. So if they don't like the size of the ... maybe the head is a little bit too big, so you can scan it, and then print it out, reduce the size. If they like, you can swap the heads. It's become more like a process that you work together. It's going back to your origin, you know.

Andrea Blasich: Even when Michelangelo and Bernini were proposing some, they were doing a bozzetto. Like, a little maquette of the fountain or the monument to sell to the committant.

Chris Nichols: Yeah, it's like a sketch, right?

Andrea Blasich: It's like a sketch. And that is easier to see directly, physically, then on the computer. Maybe with VR, because the next step is when I scan the stuff, I send it to the company and they can see it, visualize it, in VR. Because they can see there. It's almost like I'm there, you know.

Chris Nichols: Right. But, the other thing is scale, right? So if it's a really big monster, in VR you could see that scale.

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Andrea Blasich: But usually when I scan, I scale one-to-one, to the real maquette.

Chris Nichols: To the real maquette.

Andrea Blasich: So they can even bring it to the set and scale everything based on the maquette.

Chris Nichols: Oh, okay.

Andrea Blasich: So it's almost one-to-one. And they can see exactly the size that I'm using, when I send to clients. And the note is for Sony and even Netflix lately, they use the scanned data. They start to use more and more the scanned data that I provide. And until this year, because I bought this scanner this year, the resolution is really really good.

Chris Nichols: What kind of scanner is it?

Andrea Blasich: It's a scanner that's on the market.

Chris Nichols: It's a laser scanner or something?

Andrea Blasich: It's a laser scanner.

Chris Nichols: So is it the kind that you hand-hold?

Andrea Blasich: No, it's basically a photography scanner. The quality's really really good. The quality's really good.

Chris Nichols: So photogrammetry-type scanner?

Andrea Blasich: Photogrammetry scanner, yeah, and it's really good.

Chris Nichols: I think it's interesting that photogrammetry's becoming so good, right?

Andrea Blasich: It's better than the laser, yeah.

Chris Nichols: Really?

Andrea Blasich: I think so, yeah.

Chris Nichols: And you think it's-

Andrea Blasich: Because there are two cameras, and then one source of light, so you have the scan of two-dimension almost surface. And it's really really ... And the patching. I don't do anything. Everything of it is really really good. Really really good.

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- Chris Nichols: Okay. Well, I think it's interesting that you still use your traditional methods. Are you more comfortable with using-
- Andrea Blasich: I like digital too, but it's not the same feeling, you know. I know Scott is doing an amazing model-
- Chris Nichols: Do you feel you have faster sculpting by hand?
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, I think I'm faster. Especially when I do this kind of like demo, you know, sketch a character in half an hour, even people that do CG for 20 years say, no, we can't do something this fast and sell the idea this fast. And it's true, because, you know, even a sketch, if you start to give the pose, the twist, and the life, the director can start to see it faster than in CG. If you're fast, it's faster than CG, I think.
- Chris Nichols: It's true, it's true. But what got you so fast? Obviously years and years of experience.
- Andrea Blasich: No, it's experience, and then when I do lecture I show my mental approach when I'm doing it, when I do my own stuff. So even if I do stuff from movies, I use obviously a drawing, because you have to follow a certain style, certain drawing. But then even when I do that, I try to use the same approach, the same thinking. The same fluidity. And then I start to measure, but the first approach should be really spontaneous. And I think if you get that one, if you get what you feel inside, it's more to transfer what you feel inside into the clay.
- Andrea Blasich: I don't know if he sees it, but it's almost when you paint, you do the blocking. And you're ready with the blocking of the brush stroke, you can see where you're going to go.
- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: And that starts simpler, obviously. Try to find the simplicity of everything, and then you go deeper, you get more complex, you put more details later. So it's more like to transfer this energy that you have inside. Your thinking. It's like a musician. When you start to play music, and then you get into the zone, and then you go with the flow. It's pretty much find the flow. Obviously it's coming with experience, with your knowledge, your culture.
- Chris Nichols: Sure.
- Andrea Blasich: You absorb from different culture.

Is learning to sculpt important?

- Chris Nichols: Do you think that there's a lot of benefit for people who are doing character design animation to look to traditional sculpting?
- Andrea Blasich: I think so, yeah. It's like when you paint but you don't know how to paint traditionally. You use only Photoshop. A good painter should be able to be a good digital painter, but you should go from the physical foundation, you know? You need to know the foundation, and then you can push it.
- Andrea Blasich: For example, usually I teach in companies too. And I can see the CG modeler, they don't have a traditional background. And you can see the struggling, even to understand the form. For me, it's a little bit strange, because to be a modeler, you should know how to translate the forms. The planes, the lines, the shapes. And sometime, people that work, they are professional, they have a problem. Most of the time, people that are not CG modeler, they can do better than a CG modeler in traditional. It happened. It happened a couple of times. It was kind of-
- Chris Nichols: So you think ... Yeah. It's not just you who can do a sketch in 30 minutes. The practice of doing it that way allows-
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, it's the practice, and then transfer the emotion, your own emotion. Everybody's pretty emotional. If you are into this kind of a zone ... I'm getting this kind of zone, this kind of thing ... I'm the character that I'm sculpting. Try to feel like-
- Chris Nichols: But it's probably because you're touching it too, right? It's hard to physically touch things.
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah. For them in CG, with the VR, when we get to the point where we have the friction in VR, with the gloves-
- Chris Nichols: Where you can feel?
- Andrea Blasich: You can feel. It's going to be really really close.
- Chris Nichols: Okay.
- Andrea Blasich: I used VR for more than a week. This was a long time ago. I did this kind of VR stuff, and then I put it aside because I was doing this stuff, and I said, "Why I'm doing something that fakes the three-dimensionality when I can do the three-dimensionality?"

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Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: I can do the real sculpt. You know what I mean?

Chris Nichols: Yeah. Why use all this technology to pretend you're doing something you can just do?

Andrea Blasich: That I can do traditionally. I can use the real three-dimensional object. I'm not against the technology. At the end, you know, because I'm going to scan it, it's going to help me in my pipeline a lot. I mean, ZBrush-

Chris Nichols: I mean, it's the fastest way for you to transfer that data.

Andrea Blasich: To transfer, yeah. Like you say. It's the fastest way to transfer an idea.

Chris Nichols: Right. Yeah, that's interesting.

Andrea Blasich: It's a tool, you know. Even when you draw, or you draw with a Cintiq, or with a Wacom, you know. It's the same thinking to use a pen, but I use the pen.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: Especially because it kind of forces to commit with the stroke. While you have the Cintiq or the Apple pen, you can erase. You can control-Z. In sculpting, you don't control-Z. Because, you know, when you make a stroke, it's a stroke. You can't go back.

Chris Nichols: But if you're using clay, you can-

Andrea Blasich: No, with clay too. Because if you do a stroke and then you decide to change it, you can't go back to the stroke that you want.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: You know, the first stroke.

Chris Nichols: And it's even worse if you're doing marble sculpting.

Andrea Blasich: Marble, yeah. But marble, they were starting obviously with a maquette, with a sketch. They don't go freeform, you know.

Chris Nichols: No, of course not.

Andrea Blasich: That's not going to come out anything.

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Chris Nichols: Can you imagine?

Andrea Blasich: No, Michelangelo was doing it. You can see this sometimes, the sculpture will go in a different direction, the proportion. Because maybe he got to the point of his career that he didn't care, you know. Was going with his gut. And I think they are the more interesting sculpt that he did, the latest period.

Chris Nichols: Yeah, that's true. That's true. So, besides doing maquettes and doing sketches and doing stuff that you're scanning, do you actually go beyond that and do your own personal sculpting in-

Andrea Blasich: Usually when I'm working, I'm working on three-four different sculptures at a time. So usually maybe I have a commission or a work for studio, and then I have my personal piece there. Because I like to jump from one to the other one, so I can kind of get my brain fresh. And then go back, so I can see where are the mistakes. In my studio, I have maybe 30 sculptures that I started like six years ago, in the age of six years. Sometimes you leave it there on the shelf, and then you want to go back. Sometimes you go back and you kind of screwed up everything, because the sculpture was already done, even if it was rough. What you want to express was already accomplished.

Andrea Blasich: And it's kind of funny to see this way how you work. Maybe it was just an idea you wanted to express, and that's it. It's like when you do a little sketch, or you want to keep going with a sketch and do the final piece, sometimes it happens. Obviously when you do a commission, you have to finish the piece. But lately, even the studio, I noticed they like the roughness of my sculpture. They want to keep the sculpture with this kind of roughness. Maybe it give more life to the characters.

Chris Nichols: Got it.

Andrea Blasich: This is why I'm doing my sculpture more rough. More like a sketch.

Chris Nichols: I did sense ... Because I've seen a lot of your sculptures, and I've seen the very finished pieces, and then I've seen the ones that are just, like, you still see the thumb marks and the little ... And it looks more alive, sometimes. I can sense that-

Andrea Blasich: Yeah. Personally, I think they are more alive.

Chris Nichols: Because it's almost as if you can feel the motion.

Andrea Blasich: The tension.

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- Chris Nichols: The tension of you doing it. Right? The other ones feel way more still.
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah. But then, obviously, if you do for a studio, they ask you to clean it up. Let's say, clean it up, bring it to the final super-clean phase, because maybe they need it for marketing or for scan. So I understand you have to bring it to the next level. I don't like to do that kind of really meticulous, measure a lot, photo measurement. It can be really tedious.
- Chris Nichols: It must be hard, because you want to keep the-
- Andrea Blasich: No, you can do it!
- Chris Nichols: But you want to keep the original version.
- Andrea Blasich: I know.
- Chris Nichols: So you can't like copy it and then continue going.
- Andrea Blasich: Especially when ... I worked on a project, I don't have the name of the director, but I did a sketch. And they said, "Okay, now you have to clean it up." And then, for me, "Don't fuck it up." I said, what do you mean? You know, don't lose the freshness, this freshness we were saying, when you clean it up. So it was really difficult. And at that time, I didn't understand what he was meaning. And then I realized that this freshness that I respond to, but obviously when you work on a stop-motion, on a puppet, you need to have the surface really clean. So that was the reason why he asked me to do it cleaner. But that is really difficult to don't lose all the ... Maybe each smaller stroke, it can change completely the silhouette of the tension, that we were saying before, of the sculpture, of the character.
- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: Of the nostril. Maybe the line of the mouth could change the expression, if you clean the wrong one. So that was an important lesson at the time. But it's even nice when you go super-smooth, so you can become graphic. Almost like a car, you know. You like the lines of the shapes.
- Chris Nichols: Okay.
- Andrea Blasich: When it's something stylized, you know.
- Chris Nichols: It's interesting that you say that, because I was actually thinking about that. In car design, they used to do a lot of clay models, right? They don't do them anymore.
- Andrea Blasich: No, they just scan it, yeah. They 3-D print.

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- Chris Nichols: They 3-D print, they scan it, or they actually just look at it all on a computer.
- Andrea Blasich: On a computer, yeah.
- Chris Nichols: Because it's very expensive to do sculpts, you know. It sounds like you do mostly character, right? Do you do environment?
- Andrea Blasich: More characters. Environmental, no. I did for a personal project. I did the set, because when I did theater I was building sets. So I would build a small one-to-ten scale models. And I kind of like to do that, because everything has to be kind of designed. I'm working on a personal project that's like stop-motion, so I built the characters and then the set has to be in size with the character. I did it with plaster, so it's almost like building a set in theater. Like a façade of a building, a display where there's nothing behind. So you fake that there's something behind. It was really interesting.
- Andrea Blasich: It's a different mindset, but pretty much the same plan, how you do the characters with the environment. I'm approaching the two in the same way. Like, I'm approach the CG, when I do CG, the same way I'm approach traditional sculpture.
- Andrea Blasich: For this, I was telling you, I think it's important for a modeler to know how to sculpt. Because it can help you, your workflow in CG. Helps you to visualize, you know?
- Chris Nichols: Besides obviously tactile problems and all the other issues, what are some of the other lessons that you think that people lose if they go all-digital on their sculpting?
- Andrea Blasich: I think it's more like ... There is a problem, I think, to build a sculpture. You know, to give it structure. Because in CG, you know, you build a character but you don't have the weight.
- Chris Nichols: The gravity.
- Andrea Blasich: The gravity.
- Chris Nichols: Right, yeah yeah.
- Andrea Blasich: So here you have to accomplish the gravity. Obviously, there are certain solutions that you can do, that in CG you can do. That you can do a sculpture that is jumping. So you have to think how the sculpture is going to physically support with the jumping. I'm working on a sculpture that the guy is jumping, so I came up with a kind of idea for a base that is

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integrated with the character, that doesn't take off your view of the guy jumping but supports the guy's jumping. I don't know if that makes sense.

Chris Nichols: Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course it does.

Andrea Blasich: So the problematic thing of the structure, and then the way how you resolve the shape, the silhouette. Because it has to be good from different views.

Chris Nichols: Yes.

Andrea Blasich: And in CG, sometimes, I know this because I print some CG stuff that I did, then when you print it, I feel that today I would have pushed a little bit more the proportion, pushed a little bit more the angle, pushed a little bit more, maybe the legs a little bit longer. Because even if you don't see, it looks more natural. So those are things that I notice, between CG and traditional sculpture.

Chris Nichols: You think people sculpt mostly from a certain point of view and they don't maybe-

Andrea Blasich: Yes, because, you know, from one view, but then you try to make it work from the other side. Sometimes, you know, you miss something in the other view, that maybe you achieved on the view of the drawing, but the other view they are a little bit weak.

Chris Nichols: Yes.

Andrea Blasich: So you have to emphasize those different views. And that in traditionally, it's easier-

Chris Nichols: Because you're moving around?

Andrea Blasich: Yeah, because you're moving around. Even when I do a quick sketch, I'm moving around. I go around fast. You do the same in CG-

Chris Nichols: Sure.

Andrea Blasich: But it's different. How you spin around the sculpt is different than when you spin the sculpt in the computer. Because it's a monogram. It's a 3-D space, but it's on a mono-

Chris Nichols: It's still a model-

Andrea Blasich: It's like on a flat surface.

Chris Nichols: Right.

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- Andrea Blasich: Here, we are moving around ... Like, the microphone, we can go around it. We can see how the microphone is, the microphone that we use now. It's a different shape, different view, different planes.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah.
- Andrea Blasich: That's one thing that is missing. With VR, it's nice, but then, even the angle is ... because the angle of the VR is really open. Wide-angle. It's different from our angle. Everything looks really distort. So you have to step back, reduce it.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah. You can't actually get as close in VR, because it's actually not good for your vision, right? So you always have to look at something that's at a distance all the time.
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah. From a distance. When I was copying this, I always copy it small, so you can promote the shape. Even when I drew a bigger shape and then I start to go down, but the bigger shape has to be readable, and it has to be stronger, you know? When you have a strong shape, I think 80% of the sculpt is there.
- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: Drawing or sculpt, anything.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah.
- Andrea Blasich: Even painting. You see the masters, it's all about silhouette, shapes, balance, harmony. All these elements, they get together. And then you put the detail. When I do classes, people start with ... Maybe they start with the hands, you know. No, no, because if you spend too much time in one area and then you don't like it, then maybe it doesn't make sense with the rest of the body because you just start from the wrong point. Not from the overall shape.
- Chris Nichols: So you're always thinking about the larger-
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, the larger shape, the pose, the twisting, the torsion. You know, the way that the character is interacting with other characters or with himself in the environment. Because even the way, let's say, that a character is sitting, you can sit in a different way. Different way, you tell a different story.
- Chris Nichols: Sure.

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- Andrea Blasich: So I'm thinking all this stuff. The clothing, you know, what kind of clothing you are using. The clothing can help you with the line of force, with the direction of the view, that you want to bring the spectator to see one particular area of the sculpt.
- Chris Nichols: Right, right, right.
- Andrea Blasich: So all these things, they become all one piece that is your final piece. I use all these things together, you know?

The best part of the process

- Chris Nichols: What's your favorite part of doing the sculpting?
- Andrea Blasich: It's maybe the first 10-15 minutes, when I start to see it.
- Chris Nichols: Oh, because it's-
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, I like that.
- Chris Nichols: When you start to see it.
- Andrea Blasich: And then, when I start to see, when I can transfer what I have in my mind, then it's just a matter of finalize, really fine. Most of the sketches ... I noticed that lately, when I do this kind of lecture, it's like 30 minutes. In 30 minutes, you know, I get to the point that it kind of satisfied.
- Chris Nichols: Right. And then the rest is just sort of detail.
- Andrea Blasich: And then the rest is just, you know, yeah.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah. But seeing that larger shape-
- Andrea Blasich: I like that. I like that.
- Chris Nichols: Does it feel alive to you, right?
- Andrea Blasich: Especially when I see the life, yeah. When I do the lecture, you know, I put clay, I put chunk of clay together, and then the audience, the people there, they're looking and saying, "What is he doing?" And then, finally, when they start to see where I'm going-

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Chris Nichols: Oh, their eyes change? Right.

Andrea Blasich: They start to change the expressions and they start to get it. That is nice.

Chris Nichols: Yeah.

Andrea Blasich: It's a nice feeling. It's a nice feeling.

Chris Nichols: Yeah, I'm sure. So, when were doing obviously character stuff, you obviously studied a lot of anatomy, I'm assuming?

Andrea Blasich: Studied anatomy. I don't remember what the name it's like called, but you know. But I know where the insertion are, where the major muscles go. I've met a lot of people, they know all the names but they don't know how to apply. Know the anatomy, but you have to know how to apply it to your use.

Chris Nichols: Sure.

Andrea Blasich: If you're a painter, if you do realistic, you have to know basic anatomy. Maybe not everything, but you should know. It's like I told you before, it's a foundational-

Chris Nichols: It's a foundation.

Andrea Blasich: It's a foundation, yeah.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: And I use anatomy to push it. Even when it is Spider-Man, it's kind of realistically stylized. So you have to know where to stylize the muscles. Where to push more one muscle, and maybe the other one you push less, or become like a different shape. Because it's all about shapes, even anatomy is all about an intersection of shapes. Even the tendon, muscles, you know. And then the balance. So it's all a matter to find the proportion, find how to ... It's like, you know the rules but you break the rules.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: That, I think, is when you get the interesting things. It's nice, the realism, but everybody can ... Not everybody, but you can achieve more a realistic look than stylized realistic look. Because it's more complex, I think.

Chris Nichols: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely. I think it's-

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- Andrea Blasich: This is my ... I respect all the people that can do really incredible stuff. This CG, it's kind of nice, you know. But to me, I'm more attract from people that can push the boundary. They can go further. They can discover other things with anatomy.
- Chris Nichols: Okay.
- Andrea Blasich: If I'm talking about anatomy. But it's more like about the shape, the overall. The motion, this power. Even Bernini was doing super-realistic sculpture at the time, but you can see there is a gruffness in his marbles. The David, you know, it's almost like a curve. From some point, it's almost like one complete curve. It's the force that you want to push from the human body, and it's pretty modern, if you think about when he did it in the 1600s.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah.
- Andrea Blasich: It looks more almost like a modern sculpture. Or Michelangelo, the model of La Pietà, the Rondanini, the last one, it's really really pushed the realistic body.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah.
- Andrea Blasich: It's kind of cool, when you break this kind of rule. And then you realize you're still, compared to a realistic-
- Chris Nichols: What I also think is very interesting, and hard to convey, is cloth. Cloth is very, like you mentioned the Pietà, the cloth is incredible in that it's still soft even though it's made of a hard marble. You know?
- Andrea Blasich: That is technique, you know? That is a lot of technique. You have to know, obviously, how the cloth is reacting to the body, but there are models. Obviously they were using real cloth in the model, and then rework it. Or sketch just the way the cloth is on the body, and then re-emulate in the sculpt. Obviously there is a lot of study from real models. But then, it's a lot of things. Technique, ability to try to catch the right corner of the wrinkles. It's like I was telling before with the-
- Chris Nichols: With the lips.
- Andrea Blasich: The lips.
- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: If you do the wrong fold, it doesn't look natural.
- Chris Nichols: Or it looks too-

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- Andrea Blasich: It looks to stiff, yeah.
- Chris Nichols: Stiff, right. Right.
- Andrea Blasich: That is the ability of the sculptor to make everything kind of harmonical, with harmony, and then get to the point. Maybe the expression, or maybe he want to push more on the folding. Maybe and this sculpt the fold is the important stuff. This sculpture, you see, there is like a drapery on the face but you see the pulling of the drapery. So it's a pretty cool process.
- Andrea Blasich: And each sculptor did in a different way. I do the fold in a way, another guys do the fold in another way, so that's pretty cool.
- Chris Nichols: What's your secret to doing folding? I mean, obviously, do you look at reference of cloths?
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, for example I work on Brave. And we have to do Brave for Pixar. It was a Scottish movie, so they had the kilt. So to do a kilt, you need to know how is a real kilt. So we had a mannequin, and they were dressing the mannequin in the way they dressed themselves, with a kilt. So thanks to the real kilt, we were able to sculpt a kilt. So it's tried to analyze how the big fold is going to the smaller folding, how the weight of the skirt is going with the upper part of the kilt, the thickness of the fabric. You have to think about that. The wool, how it is different-
- Chris Nichols: Yeah, because it's a very thick fabric.
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah. Yeah. So you have to think about that, and try to transfer it in your stylized maquette. So we are looking for a realistic kilt, and then we do a kind of stylized kilt. It has to be believable that it is the real kilt. So it's kind of challenging, you know? It's kind of cool too, you know?
- Chris Nichols: Yeah, I'm sure.
- Andrea Blasich: And obviously it's a step, because then you give your sculpt to the guy who does the real material in CG. So they use the sculpt to try to see how you did the folding, and try to emulate that one in CG.
- Chris Nichols: Sure.
- Andrea Blasich: You pass the ball, you know? If you start-
- Chris Nichols: But they're starting with something good, right?
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah. No, if it's good, it's going to be even more. It's an improvement. Should be an improvement.

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- Chris Nichols: Right, right, right. And I'm sure the same is for hair. Hair is also-
- Andrea Blasich: For hair, for all the stuff.
- Chris Nichols: Because Brave, obviously, there was a lot of-
- Andrea Blasich: I worked on Ice Age 2, and I did the fur of this big water buffalo. So I did them a certain way, because Peter DeSève was the designer. So I did the really sketchy fur, so I kind of stylized the fur. And the fur guy, they really liked the way I did it, and they tried to emulate the same. So sometimes you are an inspiration for the next guy, you know?
- Chris Nichols: Right, right, right.
- Andrea Blasich: And then it's kind of cool. Because then when you see that your idea of the fur, it kind of get to the screen. It's a pretty cool feeling, you know? Really-

Into the Spider-Verse

- Chris Nichols: Do you still want to do more animation, or get more in animation?
- Andrea Blasich: I'm working for two movies now, at the moment, for two different companies, but for me it's more the collaboration. Working with the designer, try to give something different, something new. Like, obviously you always hope that each movie is different from the other. You can kind of influence the industry doing different things. Because in the Spider-Man thing, we pushed the boundary. I can see my sculpture on the screen. It's one of the few movies that I can really see the translation of the real sculpture in a CG form. It was really satisfying.
- Chris Nichols: Why do you think that one worked more than others?
- Andrea Blasich: Because I think that the designer, from the beginning, really pushed going in this direction, or really pushed this kind of plan. Okay, let's do the sculpt, we scan the sculpt, and then we translate the sculpt. Because we decided the sculpt is this style, we translated it into the movie.
- Chris Nichols: Was he more involved in the process?
- Andrea Blasich: He was involved on the main characters, yeah.

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Chris Nichols: Okay.

Andrea Blasich: The Green Goblin. Because if you see the sculpt of the Green Goblin, it's 98% the sculpt that I did.

Chris Nichols: Interesting.

Andrea Blasich: And they were able to ... And obviously it depended on the will of the CG modeler too, of the production designer to say, "Okay, let's do that one."

Chris Nichols: Sure.

Andrea Blasich: Because, you know, most of the time, everybody has a kind of certain ego. So, you know, I do this one and then the modeler say, "Okay," and they put it on the table and immediately start from sketch. So obviously if you do that one, it's not going to be like the sculpt. Even if you are a really good modeler, because you're going to put more of what you want to do.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: Sometime you have to kind of step back with the ego and follow the plan that was set from the beginning. And that in Spider-Man, they set this kind of path, and you can see that path to the end. That is really ... especially because we put a lot of effort. It's not easy to do this kind of job, try to make happy like 12 people with different tastes, different positions. And then there are the positions in the studio, so I'm a character design, okay, I'm production design, I'm on top of you. Then the director is on top of the production design. So this kind of hierarchy, try to make happy everybody, then the Marvel people, you know. It wasn't easy.

Andrea Blasich: And then when you see all this effort, all this fight, labor, went in the right direction is really nice. Really nice. Nice feeling, yeah. Especially when you see people that they recognize and they appreciate what you did.

Chris Nichols: Yeah.

Andrea Blasich: It's really cool.

Chris Nichols: Well, it sounded like they did, because like you were saying, you want to see your sculpture move.

Andrea Blasich: That was one of the few projects was really really close.

Chris Nichols: Right.

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Andrea Blasich: Spider-Man is very close. I can see my sculpture. It's funny, because they redid the pose with the final model exactly like the pose of the sculpt. To show the director.

Chris Nichols: Nice.

Andrea Blasich: To show the director, it was one to one. And they did it for Spider-Man, Gwanda, and the Green Goblin.

Chris Nichols: Wow.

Andrea Blasich: I did only three sculpts for the show. Maybe we going to do more sculpts for the second show.

Chris Nichols: Okay, well I think it's really cool. I think it's really great that the studios still look at traditional sculpting in a lot of ways. I think you're right that the tactile nature of it makes it feel, especially for characters ... If it's a character-

Andrea Blasich: Yeah, the character's more important.

Chris Nichols: It's more important. You know, if you did a tree-

Andrea Blasich: It depends. Because if the tree is stylized, if the movie the tree is the main-

Chris Nichols: Character, right.

Andrea Blasich: Character, you have to approach it as the main character in the same way.

Chris Nichols: So, yeah, absolutely.

Andrea Blasich: Like Lord of the Rings, they did a lot of sculpture for the practical CG stuff. Even to visualize, you know? It's easier when you have a real set, then you can see. And then depend from the director. New director, they're like, "Well, the VR, let you do the previews in CG."

Chris Nichols: Do you think that you're seeing more VR used for concept stuff?

Andrea Blasich: I saw friends that used the VR, and then I think, for concepting, I think it's a good tool. Even for a director to be in the set.

Chris Nichols: Okay, yes. To be in the set, absolutely.

Andrea Blasich: And then you can see, maybe you move around, you start to see the relation. If it's a live action, you can see the relationship. Even for

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animation, maybe you can do ... I don't know, I'm thinking about dragons now. Maybe you see the fly of these dragons, so you are on the dragons. Or Avatar, when it came out. Avatar, you know?

Chris Nichols: Yeah.

Andrea Blasich: I'm sure it's helpful for the directors, you know? But at the end of the day, it's the story. If the story is strong, you can find always the solution to achieve the ... It's truly about the story, in the end. We can do visually really amazing stuff, but then the movie's crap.

Chris Nichols: Right. Well, how do you feel your ... Obviously, your sculptures contribute to the story. You're trying to incorporate parts of the story into the sculptures that you do, right?

Andrea Blasich: I see my step as more like an influence, you know?

Chris Nichols: It's an influence? Right.

Andrea Blasich: It's an influence for the director to maybe think something else, you know? This happened with one director, that we were doing something and I did something really quick, and then he liked it, and they used that one. It kind of give an idea, develop a little part of the story based on that one.

Chris Nichols: It was an influence.

Andrea Blasich: It was an influence, yeah. It can go in the right way, or it can go maybe ... He has these influence, it goes in the direction that he's losing the direction. It could be that one too.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: You hope not, but obviously the director should have a strong vision and then you help him with this three-dimensional object to feel, to taste how it's going to be the final one. It's a really cool feeling.

Chris Nichols: That's nice.

Andrea Blasich: Especially when they tell you, "You know, Andrea, we want to have your take. Use the drawing as a starting point, but do your take." And it happened. You know, lately I did the work for Warner Brothers. They're working on a project and they asked me, "We want to have your take on this take." It means that they like what I can bring on the table, and it's really nice. Especially after all these years, appreciation of your work. It's pretty cool. Cool feeling.

Chris Nichols: What is your thoughts on it, when you're doing that? You're trying to-

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- Andrea Blasich: Sometimes it's coming to me late, because, you know, they give you free go.
- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: So I hope I don't screw it up. Obviously there is always ... you are intimidating, but at the same time challenging. I like the challenge, to be challenged on something that maybe I never did. For example, I worked on a project for Disney. I don't like to do kind of round shapes, or round form. But this project was with Mickey Mouse in the 1930s, was a short. They were using a sculpt for the CG, but the character was really round. You know, Mickey Mouse and Minnie.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah, they're round.
- Andrea Blasich: They are really round. To find something expressive in roundness is not easy. Especially because in the 1930s, they were cheating with the ears. So Eric Goldberg, that was the designer, said, "No, I want to have that"
- Chris Nichols: That's so strange.
- Andrea Blasich: So he wanted to have a sculpt that looked like 2-D but it is 3-D. Then it was more like a mindset. Try to find the right click. The right way to express. That is the challenge, that is the fun. That was a nice time. And then I started to appreciate more doing round stuff, after that. It's funny, because I saw the beauty of doing round shapes.
- Chris Nichols: Yes.
- Andrea Blasich: More than angular shapes. Because sometimes, round shapes, they are more difficult to make something pleasurable than when you have a lot of angles, a lot of planes. A lot of change of planes. It's easier.
- Chris Nichols: But it's a different emotion you get from it.
- Andrea Blasich: And the mindset, yeah.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah.
- Andrea Blasich: When I worked for Tonko House, you know, they own the Dam Keeper. Their characters are really simpler. A simpler shape. But then they are really appealing at the same time. So you have to try to find the appealing in the simpler form, in the round form.

BioShock 2 and The Witness

Chris Nichols: Right. You've done stuff for game stuff, right?

Andrea Blasich: I did for games too. I worked on BioShock 2.

Chris Nichols: Oh, nice.

Andrea Blasich: That was a work that I did all completely in CG, but then at the end of the show, they asked me to do like a prototype of Big Sister. So I did a sculpt of the main character in a pose for the crew. Then I worked on, do you know The Witness? It's a puzzle game that came out two-three years ago. Over there, it's funny, they hired me as a sculptor, which I thought was a traditional sculptor but they were meaning like a sculptor for CG, like a CG modeler.

Chris Nichols: CG modeler.

Andrea Blasich: So I was, okay. So I did a test in ZBrush, and then we found the style of the ... Because they were approaching the characters as a traditional sculpture, but a sculpture to tell a story behind, to resolve the puzzle. So it was kind of interesting. So they would give me like a few notes on the characters, so I have to design the character in the modern time but it was feeling like old time. It was pretty cool, pretty cool project. And I did like 60 characters in CG, in ZBrush. It was an interesting project.

Chris Nichols: So you didn't do any traditional sculpting?

Andrea Blasich: Not really. I did all CG there. But they want to have the look of, almost like Russian sculpture, turn of the century, like deco.

Chris Nichols: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Andrea Blasich: Not really faceted.

Chris Nichols: Faceted, yeah.

Andrea Blasich: It was kind of a cool project.

Chris Nichols: Interesting.

Andrea Blasich: In a way, you know, in the last eight years I'm a freelancer, so I'm able to work more projects at the same time.

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Chris Nichols: Where do you live? Do you live in Italy?

Andrea Blasich: No, in San Francisco.

Chris Nichols: In San Francisco.

Andrea Blasich: In the Bay Area. I live in America. For example, I'm now working for a company in Los Angeles, so once a month I go down, I show the work. Even now the CG scan, I can scan the sculpt, send the .obj file to them, and they can see.

Chris Nichols: They can look at it, yeah.

Andrea Blasich: They can look at, so they can see exactly how it is. Because sometime I take a picture of the sculpt, or video, do like a little editing, different view, different turn around, show detail so they can see ... But I notice that it's different for them to understand, sometime, even with a video and the picture, so I'm implementing a CG scan and it's a plus for them.

Chris Nichols: I think you're absolutely right. When I look at your sculptures, they're not the same as photographs. You know what I mean?

Andrea Blasich: No.

Chris Nichols: You experience it very different.

Andrea Blasich: When you see from life, it's different.

Chris Nichols: It's different. So I can only imagine, even if you do make an .obj from the scan and are just tumbling around in a view, that's not going to be the same experience.

Andrea Blasich: It's not the same, but maybe it's more ... With the picture, they can get a little bit more. It's sometimes fine, because when they see the picture, they ask me to change. And I say, "Now, wait a moment. Let me show you the real one." So last time I went down to Los Angeles, showed the real one, and they saw it. They saw it was right. Don't change it. Don't change. Stop! Now stop! Don't change it now because I show you. I guarantee you that ... Because sometimes even the perspective, how you put the camera, the flatness.

Chris Nichols: Yes, or-

Andrea Blasich: What lighting.

Chris Nichols: What lens you use. Right?

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Andrea Blasich: The lens. Usually I use a long lens, so I can kind of-

Chris Nichols: So you can compress it.

Andrea Blasich: So it's more compressed.

Chris Nichols: What lens do you use?

Andrea Blasich: Like 85.

Chris Nichols: Okay, that's what I was going to-

Andrea Blasich: 85, 50, it depends.

Chris Nichols: Whenever I do renderings of humans and stuff, if you start to use like a 35mm lens, their nose is going to look huge, right?

Andrea Blasich: Then they're going to say it's too big, and it's too-

Chris Nichols: Small. And it's like, no, no. But if you make it an 85, it's a big difference. Yeah.

Andrea Blasich: Sometimes I even you the orthographic view.

Chris Nichols: Orthographic view, right.

Andrea Blasich: So it's more flat.

Chris Nichols: Yeah. Because that's how your eye sees it.

Andrea Blasich: Yeah. You have to find the good balance for you to sell the idea, to sell that the stuff that you're doing is good. Especially when you work remotely.

Chris Nichols: Yeah. It's interesting to something you said a while ago, I was just thinking about it. Or talking about how you build your own narrative while you're sculpting, right? So you have something based on the character designer or whoever you're doing, but then as you start to develop it, you build your own narrative on top of that to supplement it. Because maybe parts of the story are missing that they've told you. And you're like, "But I need some information."

Andrea Blasich: Or maybe you put some details they didn't even think about, that's going to help them.

Chris Nichols: Yes.

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- Andrea Blasich: Because it's helping me. If I think that, you know, maybe a thing that ... This element can help me to visualize, to sell this character.
- Chris Nichols: Well, I did a podcast with one of the guys who worked on Thanos and Avengers, right? He was doing a lot of the modeling and the textures for it. And so much as he was doing it, he was really thinking about the story of Thanos, which is not all in there, right?
- Andrea Blasich: It's important.
- Chris Nichols: So it was like he was doing just hands, right? And he had just little cuts. And then the nails were, like, this is the hands of a warrior who's been in many battles.
- Andrea Blasich: So blood, scratches-
- Chris Nichols: What would happen in that hand? What kind of stuff? You can't just put a bunch of scratches, right? You have to think about why they're there, everything that's there. And this is just the texture maps, you know?
- Andrea Blasich: Everybody think in this direction, it's going to be something unique.
- Chris Nichols: Everyone has a part of the story that they've developed that goes well beyond-
- Andrea Blasich: Even more believable. Because when he showed this hand to the director, he says, "Yeah, this is the hand of the guy. I can see."
- Chris Nichols: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think it's really interesting. I think it's so good that people ... You can build so much narrative into things that are not necessarily said. It becomes part of this story-
- Andrea Blasich: Or maybe sometime you even do less, and the person that is looking your sculpt or your painting, he can fill with his-
- Chris Nichols: With his own imagination.
- Andrea Blasich: His own imagination.
- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: I like that. When you see a movie that it's open, maybe the end is a little bit confused, or you don't know where it can go. It can go either way. I like that, because you get stimulated. When you go out to the cinema, you start to think about even more. You appreciate even more. I like that kind

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of ... It's like when you go to a museum, you see ... For this, I'm a little bit more on the roughness, because it kind of gives more interpretation.

- Chris Nichols: I was thinking, you did stuff on How to Train Your Dragon?
- Andrea Blasich: I did a collaboration with Nicolas Marlet on the dragon, yeah.
- Chris Nichols: I mean, I think I know, just thinking about that, you hear some parts of the story about Toothless, right?
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah.
- Chris Nichols: As an example. But so many people have so many theories about Toothless that are not said in the movie. Like, oh, he's like a cat, or he's doing this, or he's doing that. All the things that are inferred, all of it's in your imagination and none of it's literally told you in the story, but there's something about the way something looks that someone put in there that you've picked up on, and you become part of that story.
- Andrea Blasich: I think that is the coolest piece of our job, you know?
- Chris Nichols: Yeah. If it's done well, right? Because otherwise, it's just plain-
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, but you do it because you ... Let's just say, it's done well, but you wouldn't do it if you don't know how to do it.
- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: It's going to be something that doesn't make sense.
- Chris Nichols: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Absolutely.
- Andrea Blasich: No, that was a collaboration with Nico. You know, we are friends since long time. That was the first design that he got approved in the movie, so for him he was really attached to the drawing.
- Chris Nichols: Oh, that's great. That's great.
- Andrea Blasich: I learned a lot from him. And as I told before, I like collaboration. This was a really nice collaboration.
- Chris Nichols: That's great. It's hard to think of a sculptor being collaborative, but it's great to hear that-
- Andrea Blasich: No, for me it's the base. It's the key. You work on a friend project, you know?

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- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: You work with friends.
- Chris Nichols: What are some of your favorite projects that you think you can do? I mean, I know that there's probably a lot of them, but-
- Andrea Blasich: Each project is different. Each project there is some problem, there is some really nice moments. I learn from all the projects. Spider-Man was a surprise, because I worked like two years before the movie came out.
- Chris Nichols: Right.
- Andrea Blasich: To be honest with you, I'm not a really big superhero fan. When they asked me to do Spider-Man, I said, Oh, jeez. Spider-Man. And then I was thinking about Mickey Mouse too, and I said, Okay, maybe if I approach in a different way. I'm not a superhero fan, but I can appreciate the way ... Because I like the design, so I can appreciate his drawing and try to make sure that we do something different. And then, when the movie came out, when I saw this stuff, I was really wowed.
- Andrea Blasich: It was a revelation. It's nice when you don't expect, and then something that came out is good, people respond. And they won the Oscars too, so it was nice to be part. And then the director tells you, "You know, you were a big step of the creation of the style," it's nice. It's a nice compliment.
- Chris Nichols: It was a surprising movie.
- Andrea Blasich: For me, it was a surprising movie, yeah.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah. I think everyone was a bit surprised.
- Andrea Blasich: Especially because I saw it at Pixar before the movie came out, with the directors were there. In front of this audience, was a pretty tough audience. The Pixar guys. And then, at the end, it was like a standing ovation. Everybody was really quiet but then start to clap. Everybody really respond. And when I saw it, I told the guys, the directors, "I'm sure you're going to win the Oscar." I told them in December, before the movie came out. They won the Oscar. I could feel there was something different. Something that could push the boundary.
- Andrea Blasich: Like when I start to go to festivals, I saw Nightmare Before Christmas, in the 1990s. And there was a changing-point movie for a lot of art directors, production designers, as a visual. Visually. And that is kind of cool, when you bring the entertainment in one direction. And now I saw that other studios, they try to emulate the kind of Spider-Man way of to do movies.

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Maybe the animation's more snappy, because the animation was really snappy compared to DreamWorks or Pixar.

Andrea Blasich: Even the way they stylized the environment. It's kind of nice when you have an edgy movie that can bring the industry in another direction. Try to experiment more. One thing that I've seen in all these companies, I think we are missing the experimentation. We are missing the take a risk.

Chris Nichols: Well, it's hard for studios today to take a risk.

Andrea Blasich: It's hard. But even small studio, a studio like a new studio, they open, they play it safe. You should try to push at least a couple of movies and then play safe with the other movies, know what I mean? Because at DreamWorks when I started, they were taking risks.

Chris Nichols: Sure.

Andrea Blasich: The Prince of Egypt, El Dorado, Sinbad. Each movie was completely different.

Chris Nichols: You worked on Prince of Egypt?

Andrea Blasich: I worked on the last, I don't know, three months, so the production. I worked already on El Dorado. Start on El Dorado at DreamWorks, yeah. You could feel that everybody was believing doing something new.

Chris Nichols: That's awesome. That's awesome.

Andrea Blasich: I never had the same ... No, maybe I had the same feeling on another project, maybe because it was the first time that I was doing stop-motion.

Chris Nichols: Right.

Andrea Blasich: It was a different medium. For a sculptor to work on stop-motion is the-

Chris Nichols: The ultimate dream, yeah.

Andrea Blasich: Yeah. Like, your lifelong.

Chris Nichols: Your sculpture really is moving.

Andrea Blasich: Yeah, because the one that you're going to see ... Yeah, that is the character. We were pretty impressive. Unfortunately, the movie never came out, but, you know. You worked two and a half years on this movie, and then ... But we did a good job.

Chris Nichols: Okay.

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- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, it's kind of frustrating, when you could see that potential. It's funny, because every time I show the sculpt, around the people say, "Wow, this is nice. I want to see this more. I want to see this more." But, unfortunately, nobody-
- Chris Nichols: Eh, it's okay. It happens.
- Andrea Blasich: It happens.
- Chris Nichols: It happens, yeah.
- Chris Nichols: Well, we're actually over an hour already, which is great.
- Andrea Blasich: Ah, okay. We went too far.
- Chris Nichols: No, we didn't. No, no, no, no. I go longer sometimes if I have to. But I do want to know, is there anything you can talk about ... Maybe not talk too much about the projects you're doing, but you could talk about some of the studios. You must be doing a lot of work at this point, right?
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, as I told you before, after Spider-Man, the work really started to kick in. Lately, I've been working for Sony. Doing like one sculpt for Spider-Man. I don't know if they're going to use it for the maquette, whatever. Then I am working for Netflix right now. It's the studio that there is a big demand, so everybody wants to go there. Especially it's a new studio, so they want to start to do new projects.
- Chris Nichols: New content.
- Andrea Blasich: New content, yeah. They need a lot of content, especially you know for the streaming. I kind of like the format of the streaming.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah?
- Andrea Blasich: In a way, you can have a bigger audience than a cinema. More people going to go see your movie, from home, you know. And so I'm working for them, and then I have some personal projects, I'm traveling to workshops. I'm going to go to London in November, do a workshop there.
- Chris Nichols: Well, I think it's great. Going back to where we started, it's really great that you're taking on this knowledge and teaching people as well. I think it's cool.
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah. No, thank you. I told that the student, or people that come to my lecture, I'm still doing it because of these people, that they come to the lecture.

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Chris Nichols: Nice.

Andrea Blasich: As I told before, they give me the energy to keep doing this. Sometimes I say, well, why am I doing this stuff? You know, I feel like a downer in this kind of high-tech environment. But as I told you before, the expression, or the feeling when I see people they open their eyes, they start to feel it. This kind of energy is really important for me to keep going. I'm taking this energy and I'm putting it on the work for companies too. Especially see the company that really respond on the doing more maquette. It's really gratifying, you know? Because I put a lot of effort, try still pushing. I have lot of friends, they were doing traditional, they were traditional sculptors. They abandon traditional sculpture to just doing CG.

Chris Nichols: Right. Well, that's a shame.

Andrea Blasich: It's a shame, yeah. Even with traditional animation, you can see the animation kind of level everything, CG levels everything. You don't see anymore the James Baxter animation, who was 2-D with CG, because you can blend a lot. Before, you had to ... To be honest, to be a traditional artist was a lot of studying to have reached the point. I remember, you need to have a really really good portfolio to get through the selection, you know? I'm sure now too, but I think even the students, they can go to find the cheaper 3-D modeling, you know what I mean?

Chris Nichols: Yeah.

Andrea Blasich: You know, it's all about saving money, unfortunately.

Chris Nichols: Yeah. Well, that's too bad.

Chris Nichols: I think it's great. I think it's really cool that you're still doing the things you do. I look forward to seeing you in a gallery. Are you going to do stuff in a gallery?

Andrea Blasich: Yeah. So the idea this year was to do a small workshop, so to give 10-20 people the feeling how you set up a sculpt and how you build an armature, you do the next level, next stage. So that was the idea with Andre, we talk about that. Last year, I did more a day one, and then people start to sculpt. It was kind of amazing, because they were looking at me and then they wanted to sculpt for all the three days or four days. They were sculpting every day. So it was pretty demanding on my side, but, you know, it was nice to feel that you give something.

Chris Nichols: And you had to stop and help them and, like-

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- Andrea Blasich: Yeah. And then you feel that you have to be there. So this year is more like this idea to have a small workshop and try to give something to the audience. Then I want to thank you for this interview. It was nice. It's nice that I catch your attention, you know? No, it's kind of cool that you get the opportunity to know a little bit more of what I'm doing now.
- Chris Nichols: Well, I think it's great, that people need to see that stuff and understand it. And I think it's important for them to be able to take it and say, hey, maybe I should start looking at sculpting, sculpting-sculpting. Right? It may be something that's missing from the process.
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, I think it's important. Oh, the pipeline, yeah.
- Chris Nichols: Yeah, the pipeline.
- Andrea Blasich: I think it's important.
- Chris Nichols: So it's really good.
- Andrea Blasich: Well thank you.
- Chris Nichols: Well thank you so much for doing this. This has been awesome, and I will let you know when it comes out. But I'll be spending time when you're there in the room and trying to see if I can take some pictures of the stuff you guys do.
- Andrea Blasich: Yeah, and then you can post it, yes.
- Chris Nichols: Perfect.
- Andrea Blasich: Thank you, man.