

## Introduction

This interview features an experienced animator Cihan Ezerbolat who began their career in traditional 2D animation, progressing through roles such as clean-up artist, inbetweener, and cel animator before transitioning into 3D animation. With over a decade of industry experience, they have worked across multiple disciplines including character animation, previs, and animation supervision. Currently operating as a freelance animator through their own company based in London, they bring a diverse international perspective shaped by work in both Turkey and the UK. Their expertise spans not only technical animation skills but also a strong understanding of cinematic language, performance, and production workflow.

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## Q&A

1. After starting in animation as a clean-up artist and working in 2D for a long time before transitioning to 3D, how did this shape your career? What contribution has this background made to your current work?

Having gone through the stages of traditional animation first as a clean-up artist, then as an inbetweener, and finally as a cel animator naturally requires a strong foundation in drawing anatomy, which I believe is essential for any animator. Anatomical knowledge is particularly important in posing and, more generally, in the use of rigs. Although it is often assumed otherwise, 3D animation, due to its structure, can sometimes limit the animator's creativity. As animators, we can become overly constrained by what the rig allows us to do (especially under time pressure), and we may settle for more rigid poses than we are actually capable of achieving. Being aware of the inherent freedom of cel animation is, in my opinion, an advantage regardless of the technique we use.

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2. You mentioned that you transitioned to 3D around 2010. What was the most challenging aspect of that transition for you?

I do not recall it being particularly difficult. It has been such a long time that I may simply have forgotten, but the only thing that comes to mind is getting used to the logic of the graph editor. I must have dealt with various technical issues and rig limitations, of course, but overall, it did not remain in my memory as a particularly challenging transition.

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3. You mentioned that you also worked on stop-motion projects for a period. Did your stop-motion experience have any impact on your other work, particularly in terms of timing and performance?

I would have to say no. The necessity of working in a straight-ahead manner may have contributed to my development in that area, but overall, the biggest impact of stop-motion projects on me was probably simply how much I enjoyed them.

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4. You stated that in the past 2–3 years you have mainly worked in previz and as a lead. What is the fundamental difference between these two roles for you?

They are, of course, completely different roles. Although there are projects where I have taken on both, they are generally kept separate. As a lead animator or animation supervisor, your primary responsibility is to ensure that the animations are produced at a consistent level of quality. As a previs artist, your main responsibility is to prepare the scene before it reaches the animator or director. This includes determining camera angles and movements, establishing scene timing, and, when necessary, providing key poses to the animator (even if not in great detail). In short, while one role focuses on the final animation output, the other requires a stronger focus on cinematic language and the overall flow of the film.

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5. You mentioned that as a lead you have moved somewhat away from hands-on animation. How has this change affected your motivation or perspective on the work?

Although I sometimes miss animating, there is a distinct satisfaction in working as a lead or supervisor. Beyond all the direction, revisions, and scheduling, I particularly enjoy the moments when I feel that I am able to pass something on to the animators in the project.

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6. How does working on previs projects require a different way of thinking compared to classical character animation?

When animating, you typically have a shot and characters, and your focus is on the mechanics and performance of the character in that moment. In previs, although you still need to consider timing and poses, your primary concerns shift toward elements such as scene layout, camera work, and continuity issues that are more related to film grammar than animation itself. This naturally requires knowledge beyond animation, particularly in cinematic language.

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7. You work freelance through your own company in London. What are the biggest advantages and challenges of this working model for you?

I enjoy being freelance. Although there have been periods in my career where I worked in studios for several years, I have always tried to remain freelance. The greatest advantage is, of course, the ability to manage your own time and the sense of freedom it provides. However, this

also comes with increased concerns compared to an in-house employee such as maintaining a steady network, ensuring consistent cash flow, and the constant reality that there will always be people who are better than you. Additionally, that sense of freedom requires a high level of discipline. The most challenging aspect for me is networking, which is also the area I struggle with the most. I would not recommend this working model to newcomers in the industry, at least not until they have built a certain network and reputation.

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8. Considering your experience in both Turkey and abroad, what are the most noticeable differences in work culture between these environments?

This should be considered from two perspectives. In terms of how the work itself is carried out, there are no major differences. In all the countries I have worked in, I have encountered both highly skilled and knowledgeable individuals as well as the opposite. The workflow of projects is largely standardized everywhere. Between the UK and Turkey, the most significant difference lies in the expected quality of the final output, which is more related to budgets than to the abilities of the artists. However, there is a fundamental difference in freelance working models. In the UK, since work is typically paid on a daily rate, scheduling errors, preproduction issues, or changes in direction do not directly affect me financially. In countries like Turkey, where compensation may be project-based or calculated per minute, any mistakes or changes outside your control can result in both time and financial loss for you.

I should also add that here, even when accepting a project from a studio I have never worked with before, I can do so with greater confidence and peace of mind.

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9. In your opinion, what are the most critical skills for an animator in a lead position? What do you see as the most common shortcomings among younger animators?

As a lead, I believe the most critical skill is the ability to analyze the team correctly and distribute shots fairly and appropriately. This is the first step in ensuring that the resulting animations align with the overall style and maintain consistency within the film. Providing animation revisions is, of course, an essential part of the role, but this comes naturally with sufficient experience. Decisions made before the scene even reaches the animator are often more critical. The biggest shortcoming I observe among younger animators is the belief that simply being able to animate is sufficient. Applying the 12 principles alone does not make an animation good. Ignoring the story, psychology, and audience perception of a scene, and focusing only on acceptable mechanical motion, is often inadequate. Another common issue is the tendency to rely repeatedly on familiar poses, returning to them regardless of the character's context or situation.

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10. What would be your most straightforward advice to someone who wants to enter the industry today, particularly in character animation, based on your own career path?

From a career perspective, there is a common situation, especially at the beginning. In countries like Turkey, because this is seen as an art form that we love, there are often attempts to have work done for very low pay or even for free. First and foremost, it is important to remember that you are a professional. Even though we may love what we do and treat it almost like a hobby, it is still a profession that requires knowledge, effort, and time. I understand that in the early stages, due to concerns about entering the industry, there is often a tendency to say “yes” to many things. However, except for special cases such as helping on a short film, if the other party stands to gain financially while expecting you to sacrifice your own earnings, this is a serious issue and indicates that your inexperience is being exploited. It is important not to allow this as much as possible. In my entire career, I have never seen those promises of future gains such as potential jobs, building a showreel, or career opportunities actually materialize. In short: remain professional and do not allow the value of your work to be undermined.

Additionally, I would like to emphasize something I have believed for many years: knowing animation alone is not enough to become a truly good animator. My personal recommendation would be to develop knowledge in film grammar, anatomy, and acting. Like all art forms, animation can be greatly improved by gaining knowledge in areas that may seem unrelated at first glance.

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## **Reflective Summary**

This interview provided me with a deeper understanding of both the technical and professional aspects of working in the animation industry. One of the most significant insights was the importance of having a strong foundational background, particularly in anatomy and traditional animation practices. It became clear that even in 3D animation, these fundamentals play a crucial role in creating convincing and expressive performances. I also found it particularly valuable to recognize that while tools such as rigs are essential, they can sometimes limit creativity if relied on too heavily.

Another key takeaway was the distinction between different roles within the industry. The contrast between character animation and previs work highlighted how animation is not only about performance but also about understanding cinematic language, including camera work, staging, and narrative flow. This broadened my perspective on what it means to be an animator, emphasizing the importance of thinking beyond individual shots and considering the film as a whole.

The discussion around freelance work and international differences was also very insightful. It made me more aware of the importance of self-discipline, networking, and maintaining professional boundaries, especially in terms of valuing one's work. The emphasis on not

accepting unpaid or undervalued work resonated strongly with me as someone entering the field.

Overall, this interview encouraged me to approach animation more holistically, not only by improving my technical skills but also by developing knowledge in areas such as acting, film grammar, and storytelling.