

Inclusion & Diversity in Animation & the Visual Media Arts

Presented by The CSUEA & Pipelines Mobile

• Panelists:

- [Flora Rees-Arendondo](#) - Concept Artist@ FS Studio (SJSU Alumna)
- [Abelle Hayford](#) - Background Painter @ Warner Brothers
- [Kano Kimanyen](#) - Character Designer @ Cartoon Network
- [Jamaal Bradley](#) - Senior Character Animator @ Valve Corporation
- [Wendell Dalit](#) - Art Director @ Sony Pictures Animation (SJSU Alumnus)
- [Shari Holly](#) - Moderator - Director of Operations @ PipelinesMobile

• [The CSU Entertainment Alliance](#) Intro

• [Pipelines Mobile](#) Intro

• Abelle

- Freelance and editorial
- Recent graduate and started working full time last month
- Started as a background painter
- Works with BLACK focused on helping black creatives

• Flora

- Freelance but also now working at FS Studios
- SJSU Grad
- Has a film Malinchista that is doing the festival circuit

• Wendell

- Visual development artist and art director at Sony
- Also a SJSU alum
- Worked at Sony since 2014 - smurfs, emoji, Into the Spider-Verse
- Also have done some comic book covers

• Jamaal

- Valve software
- Used to work at DreamWorks / etc

• KaNO

- Twenty years of experience
- Started on Daria
- Building his own brand for the last 10 years
- Cartoon Network / Warner Brothers & more

• Shari - How did you get where you are today?

What was your first creative roll?

When did you decide to pursue this?

• Jamaal

- Cartoon Network
- Went to undergrad for business
- The school was a HBCU and didn't really have the major but wanted to find a way to do something that he would be happy with for the rest of your life



- **Wendell**
 - Similar story
 - Was a sophomore when he realized he wanted to pursue this
 - Got a lot of pushback from parents who wanted him to be an engineer but made a conscious choice in college that he didn't want to spend his life doing something he didn't want to do.
- **Abelle**
 - Always knew she wanted to be an artist
 - Her parents got on board at an early age
 - Got her first creative job at 16 - freelancing for an online shop - animating characters for a clothing line
 - Did an internship at warner brothers
 - Every summer she went and was
 - Then became an art intern
- **Shari**
 - Most folks on this call are still in college
 - What are some resources / advice you can give for breaking into the industry?
 - How can they prepare?
 - Is it daunting?
 - What can they be doing right now?
- **Jamaal**
 - There is a lot of frustration on wanting to get into a studio
 - There's nothing stopping you from learning new things on your own time
 - Check out Pinterest / blender / unity / unreal and resources that are free to you
 - You can create your own production
 - At Valve they watch a lot of the indie games
 - The world is open to you
 - So many tutorials on YouTube, etc.
 - Right now its about building up a catalog and utilize the communities that already exist
- **Wendell**
 - Surround yourself with people who have the same goals as you
 - Share those resources with each other
 - Build your community of like minded people
 - Helped pivot him to where he wanted to go
- **KaNO**
 - Agrees with all of that
 - This down time of the pandemic gives a little bit of an advantage of working on your own art
 - Just because you make it into a studio doesn't mean you will stay in
 - Build something for yourself also
 - He has been in and out of studios for years
 - The hustle never ends - pandemic or not
 - Hold the value of yourself as an artist
 - Invest in your own value as an individual and an artist
 - It's a roller-coaster and you have to be built for that
- **Flora**
 - Agreed with all of that
 - We are all nomads
 - It sounds not fun but you have to think about where your next job is coming from
 - Be a nice person
 - Go to all the events
 - Online or in person when that is back open
 - Keep investing in your skills and talk to people
- **Jamaal**
 - Look at what is available in these communities
 - It's how you put stock in yourself
 - Put time into your own content
 - Studios will recognize that hard work / vision / voice



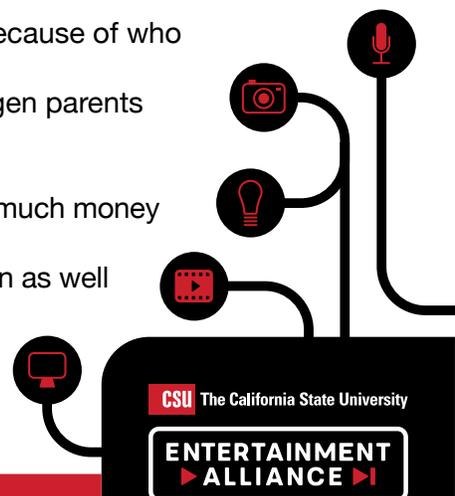
- **Shari**
 - Intentionally diversified this panel with those who freelance and those who are established
 - Assuming a lot of the folks on this call don't necessarily know how many different career paths there are in this field
 - Can you explain about your role and other roles within your company?
- **Abelle**
 - As a background painter - responsible for assets and coloring etc.
 - Working with the art director to get notes
 - Color designers are also roles (props / characters / effects / etc.)
 - Start with internships!
 - Production etc so you can figure out how the system works
- **Flora**
 - Freelance / contracts / full time
 - The first two have a lot of flexibility but don't have benefits
 - You get to work on all kinds of different projects
 - You may have days or months of nothing and then a couple in the next month
- **KaNo**
 - Character designer
 - Sometimes the industry dictates what the next move is
 - Had to shift and pivot to storyboards
 - Then got into character design
 - Works in TV and the roles change - can be tough to break in to
 - There is ALWAYS work for storyboarding
 - Animation gets outsourced a lot unless you are fixing some things that have been done wrong
- **Wendell**
 - As an art director in feature films he works with all the roles mentioned
 - There are people who are more design focused, etc. some who are more visual development focused, there are several things involved - pulls together a lot of different specialties
- **Jamaal**
 - Valve tries to hire with the T specialty
 - Design meetings dictate what is needed from him
 - Think about what will make you excited about when you do it
 - He left Valve and then came back
 - Works with riggers, modelers, etc
 - There is a lot of back and forth, etc.
 - Customers, especially in gaming, are very particular and detailed but the customer comes first when working with a company
- **Shari**
 - Freelance vs. studio / company?
 - What advice can you give as they are formulating their career?
- **KaNo**
 - Freelancer for studios on contract but is a part of a union so he gets benefits
 - When working for a company, often, you can't do other freelance gigs
 - Depends on what you want
 - Sometimes being at a place for a long time doesn't benefit him because the world is changing around you and the studio may not be keeping up with it
 - When working on Kids Next Door - they did all the storyboards on paper - when they finished it was all being done on flash, etc - if he hadn't been freelancing he wouldn't have been able to pivot
 - He is hesitant to take jobs that don't allow him to make other moves for his life



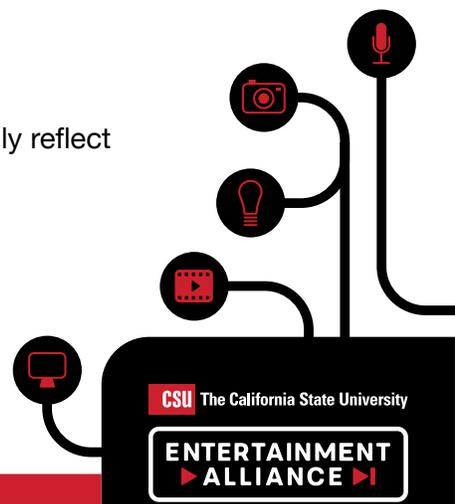
- **Flora**
 - Benefits of freelance
 - Contract is longer term freelance usually
 - A lot of students ask if they should learn one thing or should diversify
 - She learned more skills than what she set out for but it ended up benefiting her in the long run to have a variety of skills
 - Then you can pick and choose your projects as you go
 - Goal in life is to use art as a form of social activism and to raise voices that aren't heard from
 - Has had more success in doing indie projects with that because they aren't as restricted
- **Abelle**
 - Freelancing AND working full time
 - With ADHD she prefers the structure of full time
 - Was an illustration major and a lot of the experience was in that
 - Experience in other industries helped her to get where she is
 - You have to always be prepared to be laid off
 - It's good to start with freelance when you are in college
- **Shari**
 - Careers in visual arts
 - What are the rewards? What are the pros and cons?
 - What are the perks of working in this industry and what are some real challenges they should be prepared for?
- **Flora**
 - A lot of folks go Pixar or Disney full steam but those jobs are so hard to find
 - Be prepared to work some jobs you don't love at first
 - When you build you community it's easier to find jobs that you love
- **Jamaal**
 - Agreed
 - Don't put yourself in a box - take different jobs
 - There is nothing better than getting paid for your artwork
 - Take the jobs
 - If you can get paid to animate or draw - what is better than that?
 - Got hired at first from someone who watched him work hard in his classes
 - So do the thing that got you where you are
 - Was a manager at the gap in grad school and would come home and work on his own stuff - has been doing that with every job since
 - Getting comfortable is scary - express your own ideas and keep your fire
- **Abelle**
 - She tried to eliminate the idea of having a dream job because it was holding her back
 - Don't sell yourself short and advocate for yourself, especially in studio scenarios
 - Familiarize yourself with the unions/guilds so you know your rights when you work
- **KaNo**
 - The cons - it's not always your talent that gets you hired - sometimes it's political
 - Sometimes it just takes one person knowing you and your work ethic to get hired
 - The people who put in work will often get the job above the most talented
 - The pros
 - Time goes by so fast and your resume will be great
 - Say yes to everything when you start and then you can start saying no once you get better
 - You have to put in the time in those studios
 - Sometimes there are rockstars that get the jobs but they aren't good workers so they botch it
 - Everything you do is a part of your journey and is important
 - There are no losses when you do work



- **Jamaal**
 - Also dreams change!
 - You might get to your dream place and actually not really like it
- **KaNo**
 - Small companies / less good studios will have potential benefits down the line!
 - Everyone you meet is a potential gig down the road
 - You are young and you have a minimal resume so you have to build it up and make connections
- **Shari**
 - What are your three must haves to do your best work?
- **Wendell**
 - Coffee!
 - Bench Press
 - Cintiq - makes the process so much quicker
- **Jamaal**
 - Good reference - understanding the content and subject matter before I even start
 - Someone to bounce ideas off of - he shows his wife his work and she gives feedback and new eyes on his work
- **KaNo**
 - Netflix / Hulu (j/k)
 - Time
 - Peace of mind
 - Music
 - For programs - Photoshop is the main
- **Abelle**
 - MUSIC!
 - Likes working on her iPad because it feels more fluent
 - So used to using it
 - Multiple screens to be able to pull up references
- **Flora**
 - Cintiq
 - An ergonomic set up for your body!
- **Shari**
 - Lack of representation in this field - women, people of color, etc.
 - Why do you think that is? And why is it so important to increase that?
- **Flora**
 - Part of it is that the animation industry is a friends club
 - It's frustrating because you can have connections and the portfolio
 - If you're white and you only have white friends that's who you will hire
 - Need more representation from LGBTQ and POC and Womxn
- **KaNo**
 - When he started it was pretty diverse but that was a particular company
 - Now it's different
 - People who hire from within their school network also run into that issue because of who goes to their school / alma mater
 - What we do is considered kind of niche or geeky and when you have first gen parents they don't always see it as a career and can be harder to get support
 - Geek culture has become regular society culture now
 - When you look at the big marvel and Pixar movies, etc. you are seeing how much money is in it so it is becoming easier for parents to see the value
 - Artists alley - now has a lot of folks of color - starting to see it more on screen as well
 - Its happening right now
 - There's a lot more in the programming now



- **Jamaal**
 - The best designers at Disney when he was there - were women
 - There is a bigger issue with people of color and that is the financial means of getting the tools to make it happen
 - Access to these things - even in the schools - needs to be better
 - Someone has to be the gateway to show you it's a viable thing
 - Computers are getting cheaper and that is good
 - For many generations - being a person of color and going into an art field was a hard no because you are already trying to play catch up
 - It's such a huge barrier
 - You have to work harder to excel past what's there and then bring other people with you!
 - While white men were able to play, black and latino folks were just trying to survive
 - Access is everything
 - The revolution and evolution has already started - parents are starting to see the possibility
 - People of color are the biggest consumers of media
 - The biggest thing is that if you want to see that change, is to make your own content!
 - Don't wait to make stuff
- **Shari**
 - Samples of work
 - What is your WHY?
 - When the inspiration goes away, how do you keep going?
- **Flora**
 - The why is: a tool for social justice - educating and lifting up
- **Abelle**
 - The why is: wanted to see more black, female, non-binary artists and wants her work to reflect her world
- **KaNo**
 - The why is: from New York city and got into art because of graffiti - wanted to make a living and the why is: this is the work he is most proud of -- it provides a living for him and his family
 - Also makes murals
- **Wendell**
 - The why is: it is constantly changing - early on - it was just to improve and get better - self-improvement - as he has grown it has become - its something he is good at and he can support himself and his family and it have a great sense of accomplishment - especially when you see your name in the credits on the screen
- **Shari**
 - How did you make money on the side when you were learning?
- **Abelle**
 - Lived with friends and family to help offset costs
 - Then some freelance work
 - Internship income - low but something
 - It is a push and pull
 - If you are in California, stay in California
- **Shari**
 - What resources do you have for negotiating rates, etc?
- **KaNo**
 - It comes with experience - some books can be helpful but they don't usually reflect small studios etc.
 - Starting out you will not make much and you have to work to build it up
 - Sometimes you find out the hard way
 - There's no way around it - you will be taken advantage of at some point
- **Flora**
 - Ask around to people you trust that have experience in it
 - That is how she learned
 - Look at the union rate, etc. but also think about the project budget



- **Shari**
 - Top three technical and human skills a new artist should have?
- **Jamaal**
 - Keep grinding - it will be worth it
- **Wendell**
 - Be friendly - be someone people want to work with
 - Anatomy, color, form, etc.
- **KaNo**
 - Look people in the eyes when you talk to them
 - Pay attention to people who are paying attention to you
 - PUT YOUR PHONE DOWN and focus because it makes you look like you don't hair
 - You are there to learn and gain experience
 - Be professional
- **Shari**
 - Best advice for someone who wants to pursue the career but goes to a campus that doesn't have an art program
- **Abelle**
 - Free online learning! More cost effective, etc.
 - Taught by professionals and they are always on top of what is happening in the industry
 - So many free online resources
 - Learn from other artists
 - So many more resources are available now
- **Flora**
 - Do your research on schools, etc and see what each school has
 - Worked 3 jobs and have loans
 - Do you want classes besides art?
- **Shari**
 - What do companies look for in a portfolio?
- **Wendell**
 - Both
 - School work - shows technical proficiency
 - Style - important to have your own voice and let it stand out
 - If he can see that someone has great foundation skills, then he can guide them to the look that they are going for
- **KaNo**
 - Still a puzzle sometimes
 - To a certain extent, academic portfolios look pretty similar
 - Your style is the only thing that will make it pop out
 - Gets repetitive
 - So put in something that makes it stick out
 - Your mission should be to make people remember you at the end of your internship - stand out
- **Shari**
 - Most effective ways to network as an artist?
- **Flora**
 - Be nice to EVERYONE you meet - be a good person - from the chefs to the person in the elevator
 - See people as human beings rather than job potentials
- **Abelle**
 - Have an online presence - use that to your advantage
 - Social media has helped a lot with that
 - Discord groups
 - Be nice online as well



- **Shari**

- Do you ever have a point in time where you were doubtful of your creative work and how do you overcome that?

- **Wendell**

- ALL the time - every time
- There is always a phase when you start something new and then you learn to overcome it
- Keep pushing through
- It cycles
- Keep trying to make yourself and your work better



CSU The California State University

ENTERTAINMENT
▶ ALLIANCE ▶

CSUentertainment.com