

# Disney Animation to premiere first VR short at SIGGRAPH 2018

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Walt Disney Animation Studios will debut its first ever virtual reality short film at SIGGRAPH 2018, and the hope is viewers will walk away feeling connected to the characters as equally as they will with the VR technology involved in making the film.

*Cycles*, an experimental film directed by Jeff Gipson, centers around the true meaning of creating a home and the life it holds inside its walls. The idea for the film is personal, inspired by Gipson's childhood spending time with his grandparents and creating memories in their home, and later, having to move them to an assisted living residence.

"Every house has a story unique to the people, the characters who live there," says Gipson. "We wanted to create a story in this single place and be able to have the viewer witness life happening around them. It is an emotionally driven film, expressing the real ups and downs, the happy and sad moments in life."

For *Cycles*, Gipson also drew from his past life as an architect, having spent several years designing skate parks, and from his passion for action sports, including freestyle BMX. In Los Angeles, where Gipson lives, it is not unusual to find homes with an empty swimming pool reserved for skating or freestyle biking. Part of the pitch for *Cycles* came out of Gipson's experience riding in these empty pools and being curious about the homes attached to them, the families who lived there, and the memories they made.

SIGGRAPH attendees will have the opportunity to experience *Cycles* at the Immersive Pavilion, a new space for this year's conference. The Pavilion is devoted exclusively to virtual, augmented, and mixed reality and will contain: the VR Theater, a storytelling extravaganza that is part of the Computer Animation Festival; the Vrcade, a space for VR, AR, and MR games or experiences; and the well-known Village, for showcasing large-scale projects. SIGGRAPH 2018, held 12-16 August in Vancouver, British Columbia, is an annual gathering that showcases the world's leading professionals, academics, and creative minds at the forefront of computer graphics and interactive techniques.

The production team completed *Cycles* in four months with about 50 collaborators as part of a professional development program at the studio. A key difference in VR filmmaking includes getting creative with how to translate a story to the VR "screen." Pre-visualizing the narrative, for one, was a challenge. Rather than traditional storyboarding, Gipson and his team instead used a mix of Quill VR painting techniques and motion capture to "storyboard" *Cycles*, incorporating painters and artists to generate sculptures or 3-D models of characters early on and draw scenes for the VR space. The creators also got innovative with the use of light and color saturation in scenes to help guide the user's eyes during the film.

"What's cool for VR is that we are really on the edge of trying to figure out what it is and how to tell stories in this new medium," says Gipson. "In VR, you can look anywhere and really be transported to a different world, experience it from different angles, and see every detail. We want people watching to feel alive and feel emotion, and give them a true cinematic experience."

This is Gipson's VR directorial debut. He joined Walt Disney Animation Studios in 2013, serving as a lighting artist on Disney favorites like *Frozen*, *Zootopia*, and *Moana*. Of getting to direct the studio's first VR

short, he says, "VR is an amazing technology and a lot of times the technology is what is really celebrated. We hope more and more people begin to see the emotional weight of VR [films](#), and with Cycles in particular, we hope they will feel the emotions we aimed to convey with our story."

**More information:** [s2018.siggraph.org/attend/register/](https://2018.siggraph.org/attend/register/)

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