

The Power of Color Symposium: Exploring Color Art, and Technology

BY RUSSELL POOLE

On the morning of 6 February 2024, SMPTE introduced the Power of Color Symposium (POC) to the world. This event showcased the intersection of art and science, new technologies in the realm of color science, and the importance of accurate representation in film and television. Over two days, those at the forefront of color science gave powerful, dynamic presentations that challenged established media experts and inspired future leaders.

While current industry leaders learned from the event, the students of Spelman and Morehouse Colleges, and

Clark Atlanta University (CAU), the gracious host of the event, made the symposium a success. These students absorbed all the knowledge offered to them, networked with some of the industry's greatest minds, and thrived when given the opportunity to work on-site at the event.

So, what was presented at the Power of Color? What did the speakers, leaders, and attendees say about it?

Tuesday, 6 February

The event opened with welcoming remarks from SMPTE leadership, members, and our wonderful hosts at CAU,



(L-R): SMPTE President Renard T. Jenkins; CAU students Jacquelynn Dupree and Kennedy Hampton; and Brian Bentley, EdD, CAU Associate Dean of the School of Arts & Science delved into the impact video games have on culture, industry, and education and how the video game industry has greatly impacted contemporary society.

including the Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences, Brian Bentley, EdD. “The Power of Color Symposium at Clark Atlanta University was Breathtaking,” said Bentley about the event. “This was truly an exceptional opportunity for students, faculty, and industry professionals across the globe.”

Other welcoming remarks were given by Zandra Clarke, transmission specialist at Warner Bros. Discovery; Michele Wright, PhD, SMPTE Director of Business Development and Outreach; Renard T. Jenkins, SMPTE President; Charlene Gilbert, CAU Provost; Andre Dickens, Mayor of Atlanta; and Laquie TN Campbell, Mistress of Ceremonies.

The first session of the day focused on representation and why it mattered. Elfried Samba, CEO and co-founder of the Butterfly 3ffect, spoke on the science and impact of representation, addressing the need for greater diversity in all fields, not just film and television. “Despite enduring an 18-hour flight from Dubai to Atlanta, I approached the event with great optimism and excitement,” said Samba. “It exceeded my expectations. It was amazing to connect with professionals and students who share a genuine enthusiasm for the future of color and its significance in representation and collaboration.”

One such student was Paul Ekomwen, a sophomore and entrepreneur who plans to make a significant mark on the world. “I arrived at this event by chance and got some of the most useful information in my two years in college,” said Ekomwen. “There was so much gold inside of the room and just as much outside in the conversations with speakers. I am thankful to have experienced something that I believe has helped define my path in music, fashion, entrepreneurship, and philanthropy!”

The following session featured Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, PhD, Director of Graduate Studies, African American and African Diaspora Studies at Indiana University, discussing cross-cultural communications as it pertains to viewing skin tones. The session asked, “How do you accurately represent the way you want to be represented?” Calloway-Thomas did not hold back, discussing hard truths regarding representation and requesting everyone listen with open minds and hearts.

Darius Evans, co-president of Georgia Production Partnership, and Saxton Moore, producer and award-winning animation director, then discussed representation in animation. The two leaders discussed how representation could impact a child’s life and create a more vibrant story, which inspired the young crowd intently listening to the session.

The event continued with an interactive session by Christian Epps, founder and CEO of Lights, Camera Diaspora. He demonstrated how different skin tones react to lighting, using equipment that one might find on larger film sets. The discussion challenged people’s traditional opinions on lighting and sought to explain why adequate lighting can represent some accurately and convey the tone a filmmaker is trying to achieve.

The final sessions of day one all dealt with representation in art, including illustration, action, and storytelling. Speak-



Session Chair Catherine Meininger of Portrait Displays leads a discussion on “From The Grading Suite: A Colorist’s Perspective” with Grant Reynolds, video colorist at Moonshine Post-Production Studio, and John Petersen, Moonshine Post-Production partner and supervising colorist. They shared their experiences working across a diverse portfolio and discussed current and future evolutions in media color technology.

ers Keith White of AfroAnimation and Kwame Nyong’o of Savannah College of Art and Design sat with Renard Jenkins to discuss the history of illustration. South Africa native Ingred de Beer, partner and producer of Lucan Animation Studio, and Nigeria-born illustrator and director Shofela Coker discussed their groundbreaking film, *Moremi*. Immix Studios’ award-winning director and producer Lin Tam showed her short, animated film, *Friendship*, and led a fireside chat on how AI will influence animation. It was a powerful way to end the first day.

Wednesday, 7 February

The second day opened with a wrap-up of day one. It led right into the first session with color scientist Catherine Meininger, director of color science at Portrait Displays, who covered everything the SMPTE RIS Color Management working group was working on. This technical session was rife with information, and Meininger made every technical aspect of the presentation easy to follow and understand.

Meininger’s talk flowed into a presentation from Atlanta’s own Moonshine Post-Production. John Peterson, senior colorist partner, and Grant Reynolds, colorist and dailies supervisor, showcased some of their past, current, and future endeavors, and the technology they use to make these projects happen. They also discussed the future of color science and how these technologies will make the job of colorists easier.

Meininger then introduced Ellis Monk, PhD, professor of sociology at Harvard University, who gave a talk on colorism in AI and the Monk Skin Tone Scale. The session detailed how



Front Row (L-R): Laquie TN Campbell; Michele Wright, PhD; Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, PhD; and Catherine Meininger.

Back Row (L-R): Brian Bentley, EdD; Brian Jenkins; Roy George, PhD; Robert Joseph, PhD; Zandra Clarke; Christian Epps; Ariel Paxton; Grant Reynolds and John Petersen.

AI had a color bias because it mimics humans. To improve AI, we need to improve ourselves. Monk also discussed his Monk Skin Tone Scale and society's bias in skin tones.

After a brief intermission, the event continued with Ariel Paxton, a storyboard artist at Noggin. Paxton discussed the evolving technologies involved in animation and how these new technologies can enhance the storytelling experience. Afterward, Zandra Clark sat down with Robert Joseph, PhD, co-founder of Team MindShift, to discuss how AI can maximize profit and efficiency on a project. Finally, Bentley sat down with Renard T. Jenkins and two of CAU's brightest students to discuss the video game industry.

The last part of the event began with a talk on the creative potential of AI from CAU's professor and chair of the Department of Cyber-Physical Systems, Roy George, PhD, particularly from script development and editing angle. This paired well with the following session on traditional production practices from CAU's TV station manager, Bryan Jenkins.

Bentley and Wright concluded the symposium by acknowledging and thanking everyone who attended, particularly the students. SMPTE and CAU came together a few months ago to form the first SMPTE Student Chapter at an HBCU, resulting in a collaborative force that has changed the lives of many of CAU's finest.

"In the prevailing educational landscape, particularly within the context of Black history, there exists a palpable act of erasure vis-à-vis our stories," said Rileigh Foster, a sophomore at Spelman. "It is imperative for us, as Black creatives, to assume the mantle of responsibility in reclaiming our history and the narratives that have been systematically

marginalized. The symposium has served as an enlightening forum, elucidating the expansive possibilities available to us as creatives to redefine the presentation of our historical narrative."

Conclusion

Although the Power of Color symposium has ended, its teachings must continue to make their way through the media tech industry. Film and television serve as ideal avenues to promote education, diversity, inclusion, and growth.

"I am still talking about the SMPTE Power of Color Symposium!" Calloway Thomas, PhD, remarked. "What an enthralling event—so full of fascinating, splendid presentations on a wide variety of topics on the workings of color in the human imagination. The symposium was also a testament to the beautiful people who make SMPTE an influential organization. I enjoyed the symposium in every way and am grateful to have been a part of such a superb event."

The students of CAU, Spelman, and Morehouse have the passion and tools to change this industry, and our responsibility is to help them along the way. The Power of Color Symposium is one step toward a stronger media technology industry, and we are deeply honored that so many students had an opportunity to experience it.

"The Power of Color Symposium was a historic first not only for SMPTE and CAU but for the collective Media and Entertainment Industry as a whole," said Michele Wright, who also served as POC Chair. "The unique array of speakers, participants, and attendees from diverse industries generated a wealth of knowledge, perspectives, and breadth to the importance of accurate depiction across the art, science, and engineering spectrum. This is why it is imperative that, although this symposium is the first of its kind, it must not be the last of its kind. The door to discussing these topics must remain open as our industry continues to embrace inclusivity and purposefully expands its multidimensional reach, impact, and representation."

"I want to thank all of the presenters, participants and especially our hosts, Clark Atlanta University," said SMPTE President Renard T. Jenkins. "This was a truly informative and enlightening event because of their willingness to share their knowledge. The Power of Color was conceived to be an event where we could bring the hard science of accurate image representation and color science across all content mediums to the forefront of the conversation for all people involved in the creative community...I think the symposium accomplished its goal."