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Ever since the invention of linear perspective during the Renaissance, the art of painting has been moving toward that of sculptor. With this year's SIGGRAPH, the convergence entered its final phase. When pixels settle, there will be little distinction between the 2D and 3D, at least from the artistic standpoint...

The ultimate expression of 2D/3D convergence at SIGGRAPH 99 was the debut of Pixologic ZBrush (for Windows and MAC). ZBrush is a 2D paint program, and it does all the things you'd expect a 2D program to do— but it also does a lot of things you'd expect a 3D modeling and rendering program to do. A ZBrush object can be sculpted Amorphium-style, rotated, and textured until you move on to the next one, at which time it becomes a 2D object. Object ID and Z depth are retained for lighting, procedural texturing, and other effects. The ability to move freely between two dimensions and three is a luxury that digital artists may come to regard as a necessity. Although it's a wonderful shortcut, it's more than that. It's one more step toward optimizing the creative impulse by providing the opportunity to make changes at any point during production without losing any of the work you've done, and it seems likely to lead to new styles of expression. It's been a long time since the Renaissance, but the payoff will be worth the wait.