

Ai Example

Moving Screens

The background of a stage is formed of screen segments, each hung from Artnet controlled winches. Ai calculates position and rotation of each segment, and maps the contents accordingly.

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tested in version:	Ai v8
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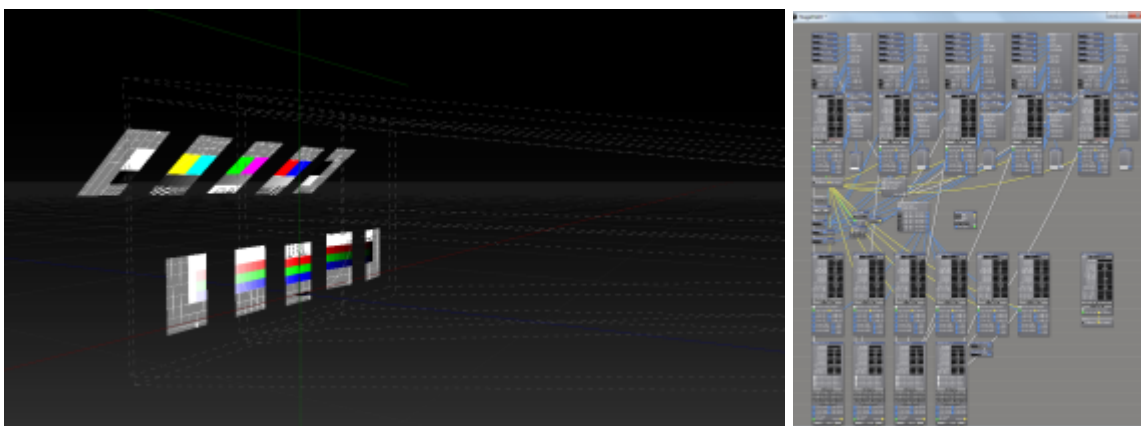
Hint: click the images to show them larger.

[moving](#), [winch](#), [quaternion](#), [uv-map](#)

Background

This project was done for a friend of mine who is the lighting designer for one of Germany's most well-known comedians. He designed the stage elements and wanted to use Ai to map on the moving segments. This project was used on tour for more than a year.

The background of the setup is formed from a number of segments, each a flat surface of approx. 1 x 2 meters. Five such segments are hung from the rig, each with 3 Artnet-controlled winches. Per segment there is one winch for the top/left corner, one for the top/right corner, and one for the bottom-center point, this winch being suspended more upstage. With the winches in such a setup it is possible to hoist the segment, and to rotate and/or tilt it (within limits). The winches used in this setup feed their current position back via Artnet - and these data are used by Ai to calculate the current position and rotation of each segment. Likewise, more such segments were standing on the ground, on Artnet-controlled rotators, which also fed their current position back. This way it was possible to map contents onto the whole surface.





Here, Ai was not only used as visualiser, but was the main mapping machine. The show was controlled from a GrandMA2 command wing, and most of the parts were timecoded to be in sync with the music.

Some of the special aspects of this project:

- it was necessary to mimic the real behaviour of the segments, in order to reproduce it from the position data
- something what was completely new to me: we ran into a gimbal lock, and Mr. Dave Green was kind enough to explain this and provide a solution - see [EulerToQuaternion](#)
- the handles of the projectors and of most of the screen fixtures were hidden from the stage construction page, in order to gain overview
- it is not possible to do a proper softedge on surfaces which can dynamically tilt. Hence it was decided to go for a hardedge, and only some segments were displayed per projector
- as the entire background was always mapped as one big canvas, only one screen was exposed to the Ai GUI. The part each segment was to show was set in the UV map - hence, each segment needed to have its designated model.

Used Modules and Patches

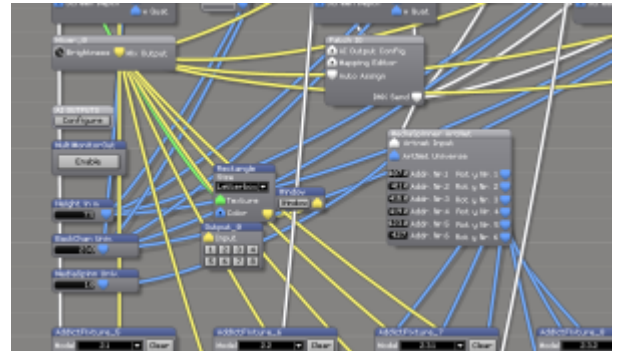
- [Constant](#)
- [Rectangle](#)
- [Window](#)
- [video out](#)
- [Monitor](#)
- [Euler To Quaternion](#)
- [Formula](#)
- [ArtNet Input Large](#)
- [Patch IO](#)
- [Notepad](#)
- [Vector Math](#)

Stage Patch

Again, the whole stage patch can be divided in some sections:

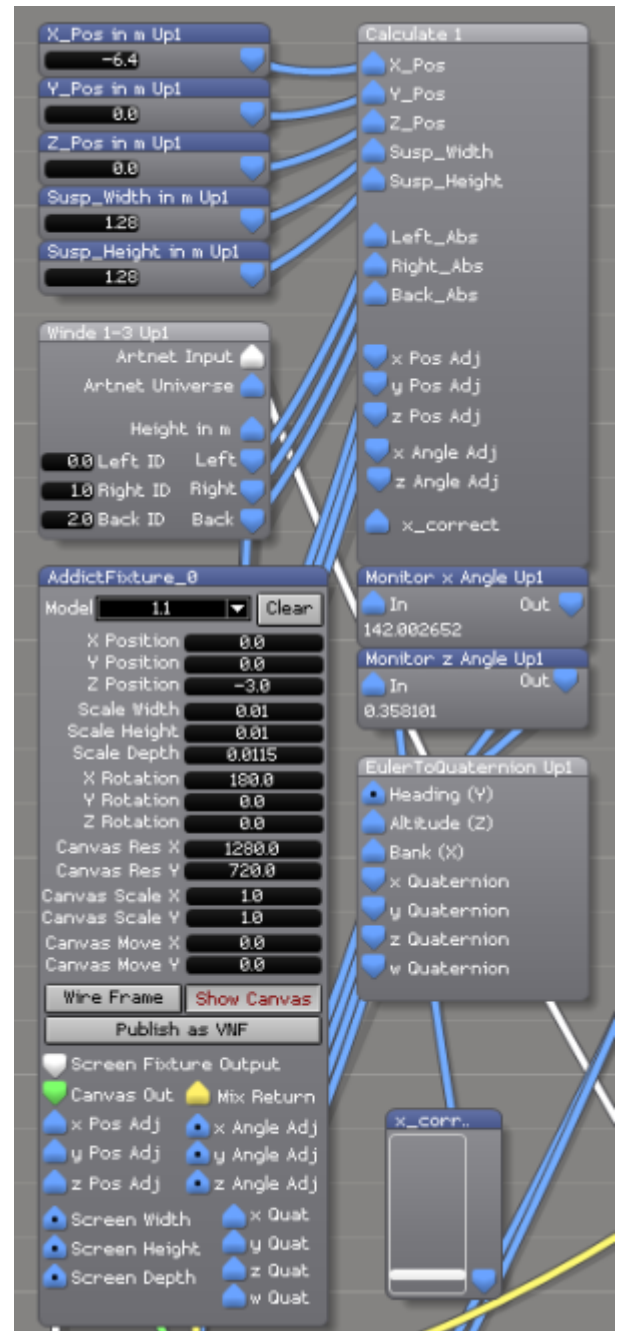
- in the middle there are the main inputs and outputs
- the upper part holds the upper (hung) segments - the screens, inputs, and calculations
- the lower part holds the segments which were standing on the ground
- at the bottom there are the projector definitions

Middle: the main inputs and outputs



- there are a few **Constant** modules to make it easy to set some parameters globally:
 - **Height in m** sets the general height of where the winches are hung
 - **BackChan Univ.** sets the ArtNet universe for the data for the background segments' winches
 - **MediaSpinn Univ.** sets the ArtNet universe for the rotators on the ground
- the little cluster of a **Rectangle**, a **Window** and a **video out (Output_0)** gets its signal from the first screen fixture (which is the only one shown in the GUI) - this allows a quick preview, in a window or on a screen
- the **AI OUTPUTS** patch and the **Multi MonitorOut** button are simply moved here when moving modules and patches around - they belong to any proper stage patch/project
- **Mixer_0** is the only mixer in this patch - it stems from the beginning of this project when only one screen was in the patch. Note that as there was only one mixer needed (all screen elements get the same contents and apply their UV map), all other mixers were simply removed, and all screen fixtures get their video input from this one mixer
- **Patch IO** is not the module but the main IO which is there in every project, to allow connectivity to your network. Here, the **DMX Send** port needs to be connected to various other patches in order for them to receive the ArtNet data
- the **MediaSpinner ArtNet** subpatch belongs (technically) to the ground rotators and is explained further down

Upper part: the hung segments



For each of the 5 hung segments there are some patches and modules in order to calculate positions and rotation data, and to display the screen segment:

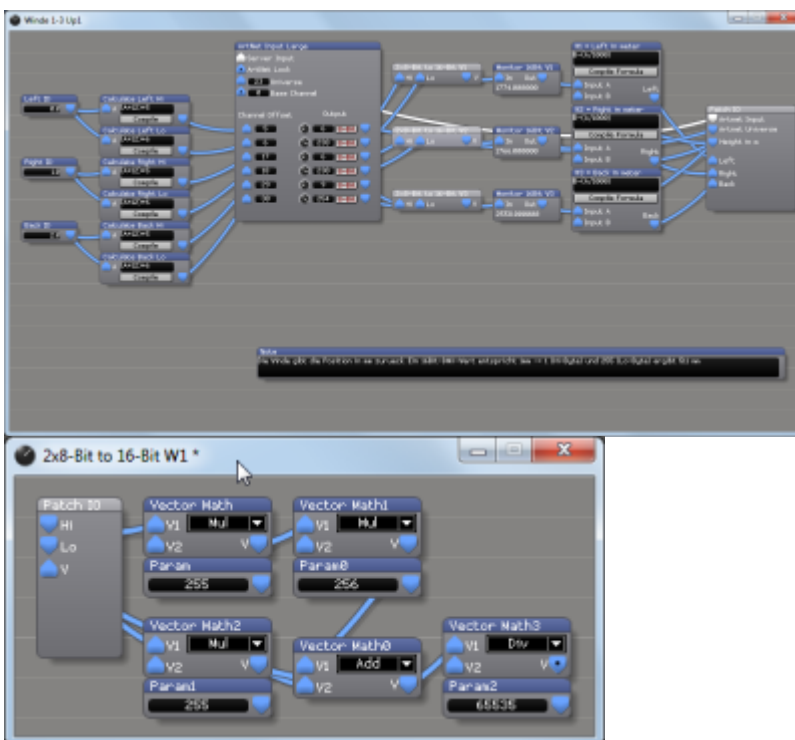
- top-left, there are some **constants** to define the general position: X_Pos, Y_Pos and Z_Pos set where the segment generally is (its origin), and Susp_Width and Susp_Height let us fine-tune how the segments are rigged (the smaller the suspension distance, the more tilt can be achieved with a little winch travel)
- Winde 1-3 is a subpatch. It takes the global Artnet Input, Artnet Universe and Height. Also, the IDs of the winches are exposed as inputs and need to be set to match which winch is located where. The patch then takes the Artnet data and calculates the height of each of the three points (left, right, back). These results are then send to the next subpatch Calculate. For an explanation of the calculations [see below](#).
- Calculate is the subpatch where the magic happens: from the height data for each point the absolute position and rotation of this segment is calculated. Inputs are the constants defined

and the positions from the previous subpatch - outputs are position and rotation (angle) data. For an explanation of the calculations [see below](#).

- two **Monitor** modules were inserted here only to monitor the computed angels
- **Euler To Quaternion** is another subpatch which is [explained below](#). It converts the computed rotation data to another dimension (Quaternions).
- **x_corr** is a fader to allow for minor corrections of the x position - its value is also sent into the Calculate subpatch
- finally, bottom-left is the screen fixture for this very segment:
 - only the first one is left with its original name **AddictFixture_0**, and all others were renamed to some other name. This is how Ai works: only fixtures with names in ascending order are displayed with handles in the GUI. Renaming the other screen fixtures removes their handles, but lets them still show up, in the GUI
 - make sure to load the correct model into each screen fixture (drag and drop the 3ds file onto the fixture)
 - **Canvas Res X** and **Canvas Res Y** need to be set to the values the contents is produced in
 - **Screen Fixture Output** is sent to the projectors at the bottom of the stage patch
 - the green **Canvas Out** is connected only for the very first screen (the one with the mixer) and is patched to our little monitor window (see above)
 - **Mix Return** gets the main video mix from our only mixer (see above)
 - **x/y/z Pos Adj** are connected to our **Calculate** subpatch where they get the positions from
 - **x/y/z/w Quat** get the special rotation data from the **EulerToQuaternion** subpatch

Winde 1-3: getting the absolute height data

As described above the subpatch **Winde 1-3** takes the Artnet dat and returns the absolut heights for the three points. Double-click the module to reveal its contents:



This should be easy to understand - simply read it left-to-right:

- happen by controlling the travel properly, to prevent the pane from flipping): *back_real* minus *Susp_Height* plus 0.001
- rotation: the 'roll', computed from *left_real*, *right_real* and *Susp_Width* - note that this result is in radians
 - rotation_grad: converts the rotation (roll) value to degrees (by multiplying with 180/PI)
 - y_position_front: either the mid between *left_real* and *right_real*, or *min_front* (if L and R are slack)
 - tilt: the tilt angle is computed (in radians) from diff between *back_real*, *y_position_front*, and *Susp_Height*
 - tilt_grad: by multiplying with 180/PI tilt is converted to degrees. +90 accomodates for rotated models. The result is *x Angle Adjust*
 - x_z_correct: the amount of correction for the x value, based on the tilt angle
 - x_correct is the amount of correction to the x value (how far the model is shifted horizontally). This is computed from *rotation* (roll), *Susp_Height*, *x_z_correct* and *x_correct* which allows to be set from the parent patch
 - x_total: *X_Pos* and *x_correct* give the total x value (*x Pos Adj*) - this is the left-right-position based on the computed rotation angles
 - y_position: the amount of correction for the y value, based on the computed heights of the front (*y position front*) and back (*back real*)
 - y_total: *Y_Pos* and *y position* give the total y value (*y Pos Adj*) - this is the top-bottom-position based on the computed rotation angles
 - z_total: it was planned to add some logic to also correct the z parameter (front-back) - however, here *Z_Pos* is only passed to *z Pos Adj*

EulerToQuaternion

When creating this project I ran into a strange problem: x, y, and z rotation are no independent from each other. I described it like this:

in AI, the x and y rotation of a screen fixture refer to the world's x and y axis. However, z rotation refers to the screen's z axis. This leads to the situation - with *x_rot* = -90 - that *y_rot* and *z_rot* do exactly the same, but the screen cannot be tilted sideways (what *z_rot* rotation does).

Dave Green was kind enough to give a thorough explanation of this:

You have discovered one of the draw backs of the Euler angle system we use in to rotate screens in Ai. Gimbal Lock. There is a short video explaining the problem here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zc8b2jo7mno>. The advantage to using the Euler system for angles is that everybody understands it. But the trade off is that it has limitations in the form of gimbal lock.

So you are probably thinking what can I do to resolve this problem? Well the simplest option is to have a second version of your model which is 'pre-rotated' by 90' on the x axis. That will allow your z rotation to function as you expect. That might not be the solution you need in this case, but it is a common solution to the problem.

Another option is to use the alternate skin for the Fixture in the stage patch and then connect to the x,y,z,w Quat ports. I believe these allow you to rotate the fixture using quaternion rotation. Only problem is I just tried this and I have no idea what data you need to feed into it. I know this solves this problem though if you can work out what to feed into it. Ciaran may be able to

