

Whale tale wins animation award

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staff writer

Lauren Kimball wanted to train orcas when she grew up.

But her love of art, storytelling and animation trumped her desire to train whales when she graduated in 2006 from Olathe Northwest High School.

She enrolled in the Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design in Denver, where she is pursuing a double-major in 2-D and 3-D animation.

"I really enjoy animation and storytelling, but I didn't forget about whales," she said.

So, she combined her passions together, she said, and developed a 3-D short animation feature about Lolita, an orca that has lived in captivity for 40 years at the Miami Seaquarium.

Kimball saw Lolita as a child, and the experience troubled her.

"To see her in these outdated conditions just broke my heart," she said.

Her film, "Perchance to Dream," is the stuff of which Lolita might dream – freedom, the open oceans, interacting with other whales – after audiences leave the aquarium each day. It gives the film audience a view of how Lolita sees the world from her small tank.

Kimball's combined passions led to international acclaim in March when she received the Golden Flamingo under the Viewers Choice Award category at the 2009 South Beach International Animation Film Festival in Miami, Fla. It's the highest award audiences viewing films in the festival can bestow upon a contestant.

Kimball, 21, competed against veteran companies and directors in the animation industry, such as Aardman Animation Ltd., which has won Oscars for its animation work.

"I didn't know what to expect going in to it," she said.

Kimball found out four days before the festival that she would attend the event.

"It was a little crazy, but exciting," she said.

Kimball came up with idea about Lolita when she was 18. College, however, made it difficult for her to develop it further.

She went back to the idea in January 2008, and started drawing story boards and developing the animation. It took her a year of working six to 16 hour days to complete the film, which is four minutes long without the credits.

"I'm a little bit masochistic," she said.

But her hard work is paying off, and she may earn more awards for "Perchance to Dream." Judging for the South Beach festival remains open in other categories because the jury wasn't able to judge all the films by the time the event closed. Kimball is in the running for the festival's top honor.

And the film has been accepted to the Blue Ocean Film Festival in Savannah, Ga.

"I've entered it in about 20 festivals and I'm waiting to hear back from the others," she said.

Kimball plans to graduate from college in December and the award boosts her blossoming career. It helps build her portfolio as an artist and animator, she said, but that's not why the short film means so much to her.

"My primary reason for making it was to tell Lolita's story," she said.

To see a trailer of "Perchance to Dream" visit www.solaceskies.com.