

Render Magazine – 08 (22).2008.

Interview: Neil Blevins.



Hello, Neil! We are thankful that you have agreed to answer a few questions for render.ru. Tell us about your self please. Where were you born, how did you get into the world of CG. Did you study anywhere or learnt this art yourself?

Well, I was born in Montreal in Canada. I started off painting and drawing traditionally, and then got into 3d graphics when I got my hands on some software called POVRay. After getting a BFA in Design Art, I moved to Los Angeles where I worked for Blur Studio. I now live in San Francisco working as a Technical Director for PIXAR. In my spare time, I make sci-fi 3d/2d hybrid artwork, author tools and writes art related lessons and tutorials for my website. I am self taught in 3d, but I have taken a lot of art classes in drawing and painting, which is good theory that can be applied to any medium.

You used to work in different companies. Tell us what are you usually responsible for?

Several things. At blur I did a little of everything, modeling, texturing, lighting, compositing, FX, animation. At PIXAR I have also done a number of things, such as FX animation and digimatte, but primarily I model and shade / paint environments.



Neil, tell us what usually inspires you to create a picture?

Lots of things. I'm inspired by watching nature. I'm inspired by a certain color combination. I am inspired by odd shapes I see while driving. I'm inspired by music. Inspired by films. And other artists. Generally I'll get a very simple idea, then I'll quickly sketch it down. Then come back to it several days later and flush out the details, maybe changing the idea slightly to make it better, or just adjusting things so that the main goal of the piece is clearer and stronger.

In your works you used to use 3ds Max, Brazil r's & Photoshop, tell us which software you are using at the present time? Have you ever been using programs like Maya, Softimage or even ZBrush?

I am still using those pieces of software for my personal work, but at work I also use maya and prman for rendering. I've only slightly played with XSI, and I did used to use ZBrush until I got MudBox, now I use MudBox pretty exclusively for my organic sculpting.

Neil, which advise could you give to the beginners artists, who are just starting to learn one or another computer graphics programs. What should they concentrate on while they are studying?

Well, there are many different types of jobs in the industry. Some require strong artistic skills, some stronger programming skills. For people who enjoy art, I'd recommend all of the standard drawing, painting and sculpture classes you can get your hands on. If you're more of a programmer type, any school with a good solid computer graphics degree is a good bet. Or if you

enjoy both, try mixing it up a little. It's ok to study 3d in school these days, but I'd recommend making sure you go to a school that focuses on the art, don't go to a school where all they'll do is teach you the tutorials that ship with a specific 3d package, that you can do at home.

Is it worth to fetch out just one area while learning to work with CG? For instance, modelling, texturing or rendering.



I recommend trying everything at first, and if there's one area you like a lot more, specialize. But if you like the whole process, there are plenty of jobs in the industry for generalists who like doing everything.

Could you give a few professional advises for both beginners and advanced artists?

Well, here's some advice for everybody, one of the most important skills you can have is the ability to work as part of a team. Even if you're a generalist

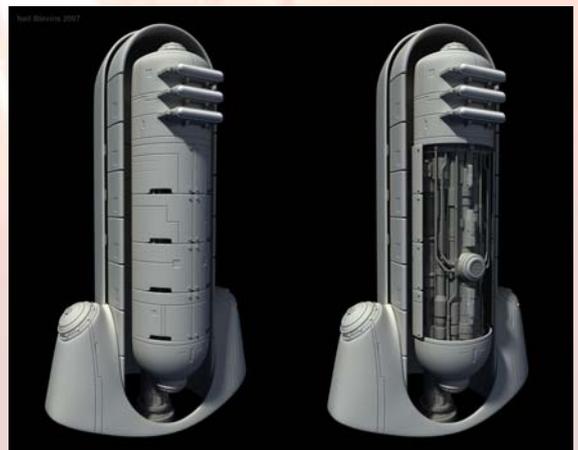
and can do entire shots of your own, you need to learn how to deal with other people who may work on your assets, may hand you assets for your shots, art directors who you have to communicate with, directors, clients, etc. This is a very team oriented field, and even if you're good, if you don't know how to work as a team, you're going to have trouble keeping a job.

Neil, you wrote many useful scripts for 3ds Max and lately you are writing scripts for Maya. What can you say about MEL language used in Maya, to which extend it is better / worsted than MAXScript language?

It's better in some ways and worse in others. MEL has more access to everything inside the maya interface, which I like, MAXScript was written after max was created, so there's still plenty of areas inaccessible using MAXScript. But MAXScript as a language is a little more forgiving, you don't have to declare a variable's type ahead of time (which is both good and bad), and I personally find it a little more human readable.

Finally, Neil could you share with us which picture you are working on at the moment and what it is going to be like? Because all your compositions are usually very beautiful and bright.

Actually I have just finished a new model that I'll reveal after SIGGRAPH, called Loaderbot 1. it's a big forklift looking robot that has more pipes than any model I think I've done before Right now I'm going to take a little break from making art for a few months, doing production work all day and then coming home to more art can be very draining, and I need a vacation



Neil, we are happy that you found the time to answer our questions. I hope that we will speak with you again.



No problem, thanks for the interview.



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