



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

JEAN-MARIE MARBACH

Jean-Marie is a Director and VFX Supervisor currently working as a Freelancer, residing in France. His most recent projects include “*L’oiseau qui danse*”, a particle-based music video for the Canadian electro band, Tennyson (<https://vimeo.com/228308202>). Check out what he has to say about his experience using VUE to create 3D CG environments.

e-on: What drew you towards VFX/CG? What do you love most about the projects you work on? What does your day to day life look like? Which software did you start on?

Jean-Marie Marbach: I started on After Effects. I couldn’t draw and lacked the production values to shoot anything decent (this was right before the DSLR boom), so VFX/CGI was the best way to express myself and create visually.

The best thing about the projects I work on is that there’s always something new coming up. Whether it’s a new client, a new production company or a new technical challenge, it keeps me motivated and I never get bored.

My day to day life depends on whether I’m in production or not, and if I am, whether live shoots are required or not. Shooting with a crew on set is obviously very different from working on VFX, but both are demanding, and I can’t do anything else at the same time. Outside production work, I try to keep a balance between testing new ideas and enjoying life as far away from my screen as possible.

e: How long have you used VUE? What was the first project you worked on professionally, and how did you use it? How has your VUE usage changed over the years? Where have you used VUE recently and for what aspects?

JMM: My first use of VUE in production was around ten years ago, for a commercial where a shot above the clouds was required. This was a stand-alone render with no further VFX needed. Then, I went on to work on



vegetation, water planes and terrains.

My VUE usage changed when I started to use it not only for full environment creation but also for real set enhancements and non-natural objects rendering. More recently, I directed an Evian production where not only the environment was rendered in VUE, but also the Evian bottle itself.

e: What did you have to learn while on the job to remain competitive? Over the past decade, what struck you most in terms of the evolution of VFX, i.e. hardware, software, various techniques etc.

JMM: In my experience, the two keys to remaining competitive stand on opposites: On one side, you need to know how to reproduce whatever is the flavor of the moment (because briefs are often influenced by recent creations), while providing some amount of originality and personality on the other (so that clients remember and come back to you). It’s a delicate line to dance on.

What struck me the most in the past decade, beyond the obvious technical updates, is the exponential increase of talents coming from countries never mentioned in the business before (mostly Vietnam and India). I realize it’s not software or hardware related, but I believe this will reshape the industry the most in the years to come.



e: In your opinion, what has been the most important skill for you as an Artist? What advice would you give someone who'd wish to start a career in the industry?

JMM: Without a doubt, my most important skill has been particle animation. Not only did it expand the array of visuals I could create, but it also kept job offers coming on a regular basis.

Not easy to throw general advice to beginners on the fly, everybody is different... but I’d say, pick the tools most suited to you and focus on it. It’s better to know one or two softwares thoroughly than multiple ones with less expertise. In my experience, production companies are usually more interested in real experts on limited tools, than in Jack-of-all-trades with average skills.

e: Can you tell us a little bit about your process for hiring talent for your team? What are some of the "must haves" for a portfolio, as well as some of the warning signs? Where do you seek out help or advice when you come across an obstacle on a project?

JMM: Must haves for a portfolio are originality, distinct style and full expertise of the tools used. Fancy brands and references may be a plus, but the lack of it won’t be an issue if previous criteria are met.

I don’t have clear warning signs... It’s all very subjective. I can look beyond sloppy keyframes if I love the art design, and be impressed by technical achievements despite bland visuals. It all depends on what I’m looking for at any given moment.

When I need help, I usually turn to colleagues or message boards like Reddit and Mograph... but sometimes that’s not enough.

For my last music video for Tennyson, I needed some animation features which AE couldn’t provide natively... so I contacted scripting guru Dan Ebberts (<http://www.motionscript.com>). He agreed to work on the project and provided me with custom AE expressions related to my needs.

e: Now that the industry has become more accessible, we have seen significant growth in educational programs tailored towards 2D and 3D entertainment art. What are your thoughts on the various methods for learning? For instance, should budding artists seek out brick and mortar classrooms in a larger university, or focus on online training options? What are some drawbacks/benefits to both?

JMM: I believe in technical training. Some softwares are so powerful that you need guidance to make sure you’ll use their full potential. Also, the more you know how to use your tools, the more at ease you are to create freely.

I have no experience in classroom training, so I can’t elaborate on that... But online trainings are often affordable and beneficial. Speaking of my own VUE training, Nick Pellegrino’s AsileFX tutorials (<http://www.asilefx.net/catalog/>) were a huge help, not only getting started, but also delving into advanced techniques rarely showcased anywhere else.

e: Where do forums and online communities play a role when it comes to finding or maintaining a career as an artist, or further evolving a skill set?

JMM: I've never heard of anyone finding a job on forums, let alone a career. Having said that, exchanging with online communities is paramount: Everyone has a specific experience to share and you always learn when you are in contact to others.

e: **What is your favorite feature or features of VUE and what other preferred software do you usually use alongside VUE?**

JMM: Vue is filled with unique and powerful features (atmosphere and ecosystem paint tools, bucket rendering, etc.), but if I had to pick one, I guess it would be the node-based function editor. Daunting at first, it's actually pretty straight-forward once you dive in and incredibly powerful. The level of control it provides on a scene is something I never expected to enjoy outside a large VFX studio.

I always render separate passes on VUE for compositing and color timing, so the other main software I use alongside VUE is After Effects.

e: **What was the biggest challenge you faced in your most recent projects? What was the experience like?**

JMM: I worked on a production in China last summer where I had to deliver particle animations in 7K resolution. Working in such a resolution was definitely challenging. It forced me to optimize every step of my workflow, and pay attention to details I never cared about before. Now I apply the same workflow optimizations in all my jobs, and going back to "simple" HD almost feels like a holiday.

e: **How do you get constantly inspired?**

JMM: I wish I could be constantly inspired. I wish I could tell you I have this

constant flow of new ideas in my mind... but I don't. Sometimes I'm stuck in front of a blank page too.

So, when that happens, I don't push it. I give it time. I try to stay curious about everything, but I avoid inspiration feeds (I only look at these when I actually don't need inspiration, just to stay up-to-date), and I listen to music a lot. Eventually, inspiration always comes back.

e: **On all the shots/movies you've worked on, is there one that you're particularly proud of?**

JMM: I guess what I'm the most proud of are the music videos I directed. Not because of the videos themselves, but because of the stories and crews attached to them. Always challenging at first, these projects ended up easy to produce thanks to the crew involved... and the support and trust from these über talented people is probably my greatest source of pride.

e: **Would you recommend VUE to other Artists, and why?**

JMM: I've been recommending VUE for years. Anyone interested in natural 3D environment creation or real set enhancement should give VUE a serious try. Some of the tools featured in VUE are currently unmatched. Add powerful rendering options to the mix, and it makes VUE not only recommended, but unavoidable in my book. ↻

e-on software thanks Jean-Marie Marbach for supporting VUE for so many years! We hope this has inspired you to create.

Check out Jean Marie Marbach's portfolio at:

www.jm-marbach.net/

