IN THE SPOTLIGHT

ALESSANDRO MANCINI

Alessandro Mancini is a freelance environment artist currently residing in Rome, Italy. His most recent projects include environment design for the movie "Genesis: Paradise lost", 360° scenes for an event in Dubai to show a simulation of a future resort, and currently, he is working on environments for an attraction in a park. Here is what he said about his experience working as a freelance environment artist and using VUE for creating 3D CG environments.
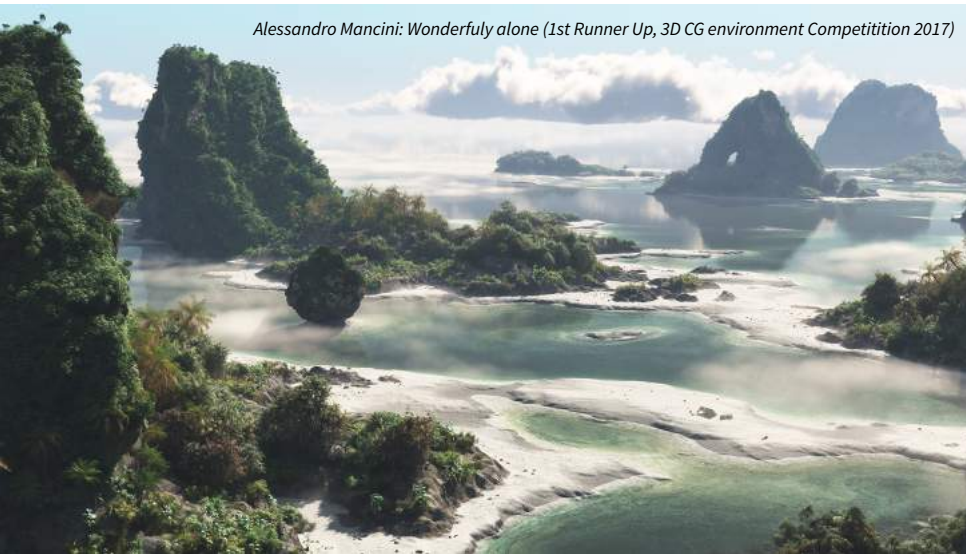
e-on: What is your background: When did you get started in this industry? What does your day to day life look like? What software did you start on?

Alessandro Mancini: Since I was a teenager, I loved computer graphics, a passion that comes from the experience of some videogames. In particular, I love "Riven: the sequel to Myst", the game that I still consider the masterpiece of the series.

I approached the creation of digital environments starting with 3d Studio Max R3, then I discovered Terragen 0.9, software with which I fell in love with for the creation of digital landscapes. In the meantime, I grew up, and chose to be a priest, which I am really grateful and happy about. I deal with the seminary in which I live and accompany young people who want to share the same life choice.

My first contact with the industry was completely unexpected, and it seems fair to say that it happened thanks to e-on software's website. I was contacted after the publication of some of my renders in the "Picture of the Day" section. My landscapes were just what Ralph Strean, producer and director of the movie Genesis: Paradise Lost, needed. From that moment, a fruitful collaboration began, the fact that the film has a biblical theme was an interesting coincidence. From that moment, thanks also to the visibility that gave me my gallery on Artstation, I received many other proposals, from small houses and from big houses, and although I had to refuse many of them, for obvious reasons, I am very pleased with the appreciation I receive for my landscapes, and I am grateful to all the artists and friends who have contributed strongly to my growth.

Alessandro Mancini: Inside the forest

e: What motivated you to enter the 3D CG Environment Competition? Can you tell us more about your artwork? How did you get inspired? Were you surprised that you won?

AM: To be honest, the main motivation was to try to win the fabulous prizes that the contest offered, but there is also another reason, no less important. Since I've known VUE, I have always wanted to win this contest, a kind of challenge with myself more than with the other contestants, although obviously the presence of talented artists makes the challenge very difficult. Even if I'm not exactly the winner, being 1st runner up is, for me, a great joy, and satisfies my wish, although I think I'll participate again! The theme of my entry was inspired by the landscapes of Costa Rica and Malaysia. I looked at dozens and dozens of photos. However, I preferred to leave to my imagination the composition and choice of the vegetation, to get something familiar and new at the same time.

e: Which are your favorite entries from other participants?
(Check them out in our website galleries: www.e-onsoftware.com/competition/2017)

AM: This year there were excellent renderers! Among the finalists, I particularly love: *First Contact* by David Aguero, *Fisherman* by Maciek Sikora, *Tree of Knowledge* by Ralph Strean. And among other contestants, I really like: *Le 7e jour* by Philippe Caine, *Spain Landscape* (even if not Vue) by Lukasz Szeflinski and *Winter Forest* by Oli Roberts.

e: Over the past decade, what struck you most in terms of the evolution of hardware, software, and other techniques in your domain?

AM: I have to answer that I was amazed by the evolution of realtime 3D engines, which are reaching an excellent level of photorealism. Regarding the hardware, in tandem with what I said earlier, the video card performance, that makes it possible to take advantage, of virtual reality, finally in a decent way, although in my opinion the technology is not yet mature. I am pleased that VUE is present in this area, thanks to some new features.

Alessandro Mancini: Wonderfuly alone (1st Runner Up, 3D CG environment Competitition 2017)

e-on: How did you discover VUE: How long have you used VUE? Have you used or are you currently using VUE for any professional projects? What was the first project you worked on professionally and how did you use the software? How has your VUE usage changed over the year? Where did you use VUE recently and for what aspects?

AM: I discovered VUE when I reading an article by Luigi Marini on an Italian computer graphics magazine. At the time, I used Terragen 0.9, but when I tried to use VUE, thanks to the Personal Learning Edition, it became my only reference software for the design of digital landscapes. I used VUE from version 6.0 and I learned a lot from Geekatplay Studios, Quadspinner and Asile FX, in addition to thousands of hours dedicated to this passion, and to the inspiration of great artists discovered on your pages. The first professional project I worked on was the movie Genesis: Paradise Lost, as I said before. The movie makes an intense use of VUE as the main software. I created the landscapes following the indications received, but with a wide margin of freedom. Then, I sent the files of the scenes, that were used integrating VUE with Maya, to insert animals and other external elements. This remains the main use of VUE that I am asked for: creating landscapes ready to be animated.

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

AM: This field comes out my bucolic side. I deeply love nature and aspire to have greater contact with it. When I'm in a natural landscape, I literally take nourishment from feelings, smells, and touch that the place where I am gives me. Sometimes, when I can, I love walking barefoot in the woods or country-side. These experiences remain in me, and when I create a landscape, I recall those feelings, trying to reproduce them visually. It is something I feel that is not easy to describe. I believe this is the artistic side of using VUE, in the sense of expressing something that you have inside and that you want to communicate. In any case, many of my personal projects start more casually or by exercise, and sometimes they become more.

e: What are some of the "must haves" for a portfolio, as well as some things that potential clients may perceive as warning signs?

AM: I don't think I have the experience and skills to say this, but from what I have read and heard, and from my own experience, what counts in a portfolio

is the quality of the images, much more than their quantity. They should help the visitor understand what you are capable of and in which field you more easily move. It is also useful to try to publish different works, demonstrating that you are a versatile artist, capable of tropical landscapes, deserts, underwater environments, or aliens, but all consistent with your real abilities. A bad sign is the repetitiveness, or the hasty publication of images that maybe are incomplete in the more important details. One suggestion is to look at the portfolio of professionals and see how they treat their presentation, not to copy them, but to understand how they work.

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?

AM: The questions you ask, honor me, but again, I do not have the experience necessary to respond. It is certainly true that the Internet and the world of online training gives everyone the opportunity to enter this world, I am an example - all I did, I did without moving from home. I think, however, that if you want to take this path on a professional level, you need to participate in courses, meetings, conventions, and presentations, because this allows you to forge relationships with people, make friends, open your mind, and access opportunities. Many things that only physical presence can do. In conclusion, both approaches have a lot to give, and one does not exclude the other.

e: What is your favorite feature or features of VUE and what other preferred software do you usually use alongside VUE? Would you recommend VUE to other artists, and why?

AM: Of VUE, I love the interface and user experience that is generally positive, all the management of EcoSystems, and the function editor, which allows you to bring all the functions of VUE to a higher level. This regards the creation of terrains, textures, material or EcoSystem distribution, creation of hypertextures, metablob, displacement maps, etc. Everything can be improved and made unique thanks to the function editor.
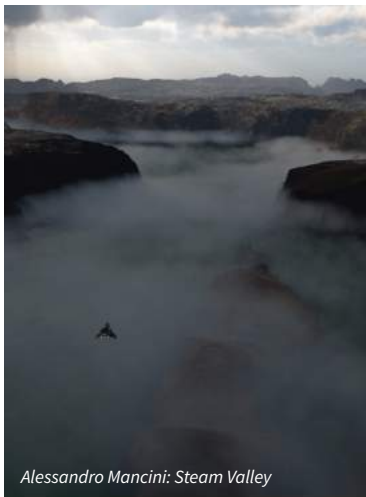
Alessandro Mancini: Steam Valley

Would I recommend VUE to other artists? Yes! Although it is not used as the main software, it can be very useful for the composition of concept art and matte painting - the work of Christian Hecker is an example. VUE is very underrated in this field in my opinion. Along with VUE I use World Machine for terrain creation, Zbrush and Blender for particular rock formations or other assets to insert in my scenes, and of course the PlantFactory.

e: What was the biggest challenge you faced in your most recent projects? What was the experience like? How do you consistently get inspired? On all the shots/movies you've worked on, is there one that you're particularly proud of?

AM: A customer wanted animations at huge resolution and at 360°. An immense job even for the best render farm! Optimizing the scene to speed up the render time as much as possible, keeping overall quality. It was a very arduous feat, and we had to get down to compromise anyway. However the customer was extremely satisfied with the final result. About this, I would like to say to e-on that many of the potential customers who contact me, are ecstatic from what you can do with VUE.

e: And finally, have you used or tested PlantFactory yet?

AM: Yes, but not as much as I would like because of the lack of time. It is a software with incredible potential. I also used it for professional projects to create new plants or for the excellent function "grow on object", which allowed me to make several effective scenes. Moreover, as many artists show, first on all Benny Govaerts, you can use TPF to generate plants and with a little bit of imagination, you can do many other things! ➥

e-onsoftware thanks Alessandro Mancini for supporting VUE! We hope this inspired you to create. Check out – Alessandro Mancini's online portfolio at:

www.artstation.com/alessandromancini

Alessandro Mancini: Lizard Desert

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