

User Profile - Dark Hoffman

"Vue has become such a powerful and much needed tool in the industry!"

Dark Hoffman, Moving Picture Company.



Please meet Dark Hoffman, a Vue artist currently working for MPC London. Dark started in the VFX industry when he was only 17, and learned all the secrets of floor effects (rain, wind, fire...), props and miniatures. After several years spent on the "Babylon 5" TV show, Dark turned to production art and matte painting. He started this new career with Digital Domain.

Although completely swamped in the production of "Prince of Persia" and "Robin Hood", Dark takes the time to share with us his passion for Vue.

Dark tells us how he got to use Vue in feature films such as "2012", "Fantastic Four 2", "GI Joe", "The Wolf Man", "Alien vs Predator 2: Requiem", "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button", the video game "Dantes Inferno" and many, many more projects!

Dark has been a Vue evangelist for many years, working at Digital Domain, Hydraulx, Framestore, Animal Logic, Asylum, Rhythm & Hues to name a few.

About Dark Hoffman

E-on: Tell us a little about yourself?

Dark Hoffman: I started in the film industry at the age of 17, working on films like "Dreamscape" and "Splash", learning the ropes and doing special effects like wind, rain, snow, pyro and miniatures on set. After 5 years of floor effects, I moved on to props and miniatures. Working in such prop houses as Neotech and Hand Prop Room as builder and designer.

I then moved onto the hit show, "Babylon 5", as prop builder, designer and propmaster for 5 years. From there I designed all the props on the computer using Photoshop, Painter, and Lightwave. I also was a partner in a graphic design company for many years.

After the show ended, I went back to building and designing miniatures at New Deal Studios. Still designing and creating my own art on the computer, I ventured into matte painting and concept art, starting at Digital Domain and working for many visual effects companies, building up my portfolio and working on amazing shows up to this day.

I now love doing production art, art direction, concept art and matte painting. I have worked in places such as London and Australia and look forward to traveling to other countries.



I also taught matte painting at Gnomon School of Visual Effects and it was a great experience. My love for films at a young age helped propel me into the world of visual effects.



Vue shorelines and skies in "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button".
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You have a long history with visual effects and a very interesting and diverse background. Can you fill us in on some of the highlights of your career, some of the different areas of the industry you have worked in, and some of the studios you've worked for?

DH: I think working on "Babylon 5" for 5 years was a great experience for me. Building and designing such strange props was a good way for me to start getting to know what the computer can do. Before Vue, I started working with Photoshop, Painter and various other tools to help with my design work. After that I could take my knowledge with me to work in such effects houses as Digital Domain, Rhythm and Hues, Asylum and go overseas to Animal Logic and Framestore.

What lead you to using Vue? What spurred your interest in Vue and when did you become involved in it?

DH: I found Vue when I was working at Hydraulx on projects like "Fantastic Four 2", "Invasion" and "300" and I needed a good program to do quick renders of landscapes and props for most of my concepts at first and then turn them into elements for my matte paintings. I was using Poser a lot but I found Vue to do quick renders and turnarounds where I could change the lighting and materials at a minutes notice. The clients loved that!



Vue backgrounds in "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button".
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How long have you been using Vue?

DH: I have been using Vue since Hydraulx Visual Effects and have introduced it to all the companies I have worked at. When I found it can do fantastic skies, I really pushed it to see what I could get for "Benjamin Button" at Asylum FX. Most of the Mississippi sequence had Vue backgrounds and skies.

As an artist, how does CG art fit into your work? What is its role?

DH: Most matte painting is done with CG now, meaning it's mostly 3D and projections now. I am kind of an old school artist and still love 2D but love using 3D elements in my artwork. I can render out props in Vue so I can match the lighting and add it to my paintings. The Ecosystem is an incredible addition to my paintings since I can use it in so many forms from background trees to foreground bushes, palm trees, as in "Australia" and "Prince of Persia", and grass.



Dark used Vue and Photoshop to create the sky matte painting from "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"

You seem to have carved a very interesting path through the industry doing production work as well as designing some very cool projects. What has been the most important skill for you as an artist?

DH: I would say my love for films and art. I was always interested in visual effects as a kid and grew up on films like "2001", "Forbidden Planet", "Star Wars", "Blade Runner" and you can probably ask any effects artist what films influenced them and they would give you the same list. As an artist, honing your skills on any project is a great way to learn and find your path.

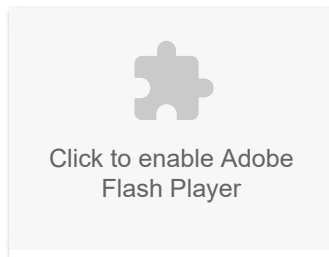


Some of the movies on which Dark used Vue

How does Vue, in general, contribute to your artwork?

DH: I try to incorporate it in every project I work on. Either in production art or a concept or a matte painting. When I have time, I use it especially in my personal art, which very soon, I will have on my website, including a Vue gallery.

The list of movies and commercials you've worked on is pretty impressive, could you name some of the projects you've used Vue on?



Burger King "Transform Your Way" ad

DH: Well, both in concepts and matte paintings:

"2012", "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button", "GI Joe", "The Wolf Man", "Fantastic Four 2", "Australia", "The Invasion", "Alien vs Predator 2: Requiem", "Life After People", some Burger King Transformer commercials, "Dantes Inferno" video game...

For the Burger King ads, the interior of the kitchen that the robot comes out of was built in Vue with Cornucopia items, but I admit it's tough to see with all the smoke! :)



Las Vegas Runaway Concept for "2012"

The above image is one of the concepts I did for "2012". I laid out a few of the Las Vegas airport scenes in Vue and built it up with buildings from Cornucopia3d.com where the Antonov is taking off.

Once the concepts were validated, it was fairly easy to re-use what I already did in Vue for the final shots!

You work for MPC right now. Can you tell us a little about what your day contains?

DH: Dailies, deadlines and getting the paintings done as soon as I can. I go over my schedule and see what is due that week and get the painting to a point where we can give it to the 3D artist and/or compositor and see what it looks like in dailies, where we can see on the big screen how it is looking in the shot.



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About Vue



One of "Dantes Inferno" levels

Where does Vue fit into this? Tell us a bit about your pipeline.

DH: I mainly use Vue on my own for my own elements to include in my paintings. The way I can do skies in Vue is a major advantage to something very dramatic to something you wouldn't look at twice, because it can render out so realistically, I don't have to do much post work. Also elements like in "Wolf Man", I can render out barrels, crates and all sorts of props and details in Vue with the right lighting.

What was the most powerful part of using Vue in your workflow for both visual development and production work?

DH: The easy render time and work flow. For both concept and matte painting work, it has become such a powerful and much needed tool in the industry and it is being introduced to more companies. The artists here at MPC are really getting into what it can really do. Especially the skies, which we are doing tests for the new feature coming up.



Vue level concept for "Dantes Inferno"

What do you consider to be the most fundamental difference between Vue and traditional 3d programs?

DH: Probably the easy and intuitive interface and render times. Also the plant and EcoSystems are a much needed and highly applauded addition to any DMP (Digital Matte Painting) team that most 3D software don't give you.

What is your favorite new feature or features of Vue?

DH: The Metablobs and Hypertextures are a great new feature as well as the new Spectral atmosphere settings.



Dark used Vue and Photoshop to create the sky matte painting from "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"

How do you train yourself to Vue (and do you need training?) And what would you like to learn next?

DH: A long time ago, I used to use another landscape program for prop design and my own art, so the Vue interface was a next step up and it is very intuitive and easy to learn. The first time I used Vue I used it basically for props and elements for my concepts and matte paintings but now I have dug even further into what it is really capable of and love it even more.



Vue backgrounds in "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button".

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I read that you have taught "Matte Painting" at Gnomon, was Vue part of the course?

DH: I would have loved to but we didn't have it included in the software that I was teaching. I did tell them about it and highly recommended that they look into it.

Would you recommend Vue to other artists, and why?

DH: I have and they are using it. I'm not sure how many artists I've worked with have either downloaded the Learning Edition or have purchased the full package. It didn't take much to sell them on what it can do for the industry.



Vue backgrounds in "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button".
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For more information, visit Dark's homepage at <http://www.darkgrafix.com/>. Also make sure to check Dark's profile on IMDB.

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