

For Platige Image, it's all about the story

Warsaw VFX company moves into feature film production

Platige Image, a CG and VFX firm headquartered in Warsaw, Poland, has grown almost as fast as the industries it serves. Founded in 1997 as a four person shop, Platige now has a creative staff approaching 150 full-time artists and designers, supplemented by a core group of freelancers. With over 4,000 productions to its credit, the company's reputation is—to say the least—distinguished. Platige has received over 200 awards and honors, including four Best of Show awards at the SIGGRAPH festival and a BAFTA award. The firm was also nominated for an Academy Award®, the Golden Palm at the Cannes Film Festival, and the Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival.

While technologies and markets have changed radically since the 1990s, Platige remains focused on a core principle: the use of effective storytelling as the foundation for creative, memorable, and surprising productions. Every project the company creates—whether features, shorts, commercials, cinematics, VFX, or animation—is underscored by this principle, which is clearly evident in the firm's extensive and impressive portfolio of work.

Creative corner

A look at artists and facilities taking creativity to new levels.

Image courtesy of Platige Image S.A.

Commercials, shorts, and now feature films

Platige has created over 2,500 commercials and has worked with the largest advertising agencies in Poland and abroad. Commercials created by Platige have appeared in the United Kingdom, Russia, Portugal, and the United States; they promote a wide variety of brands, including LEGO, Kellogg Company, the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, and Vodafone. Platige won international recognition and acclaim for its animated shorts, including *The Cathedral* (2003), *Fallen Art* (2004), *The Kinematograph* (2009), and *Paths of Hate* (2010). The Platige team was also involved in several unique projects, including *City of Ruins* (2011), the first ever stereoscopic reconstruction of Warsaw during World War II.

A subsidiary company, called Platige Films, was created to extend the feature film and TV production capacities of Platige. The first feature produced by the subsidiary will be called *Another Day of Life*. The film, currently in pre-production, is based on a book of the same name written by famed Polish author and journalist Ryszard Kapuściński.

Platige directors and their tool of choice

Tomek Bagiński is a Polish director who's collaborated with Platige on a number of award-winning animated short films and cinematics. His debut film, *The Cathedral*, won Best Animated Short at SIGGRAPH 2002 and was nominated in 2003 for an Academy Award®. Though experienced with numerous animation tools, Bagiński remains partial to a tool that he's used from the start: Autodesk® 3ds Max® software. Bagiński recently told us: "I think 3ds Max is the most flexible CG software out there, and it's also the friendliest for a single user. It's a great tool if you're working solo or within



Image courtesy of Platige Image S.A.

a small team and you have to fix something very quickly. It's amazing for that, especially when you're working in commercials. I love the fact that any challenges we encounter can be solved either within the program or with a few plug-ins. There is something brilliant about that."



Damian Nenow, award-winning staff director of animation at Platige where he directs ads and is often involved in various special projects. Nenow directed *City of Ruins*, which received the prestigious Muse Award in 2011, and he's a key creative on the feature *Another Day of Life*, which will use an innovative mixture of documentary and animation. Like Bagiński, Nenow is deeply experienced with Autodesk tools, particularly with 3ds Max. "We did the development teaser for *Another Day of Life* entirely in 3ds Max, and there was some motion capture recording involved too," he comments. "The whole production went really fast. When I have an opportunity to work on projects that have no pipeline and no rules at all, and I have at least a bit of freedom, I always choose 3ds Max because then I can really experiment and find my own solutions. And sometimes what result are fresh visual effects that are new and unique."

Storytelling to the max (3ds and otherwise)

As Platige moves into feature film production with its forthcoming *Another Day of Life*, it should be interesting to see how the company's artists transform their skills at telling a short story—as evidenced in numerous commercials and short animated films—into telling a long one. As is the case with many other studios, Autodesk is proud to play a role in this evolutionary process, and it's always exciting to see how tried-and-true tools, like 3ds Max, continue to be used in new and innovative ways.

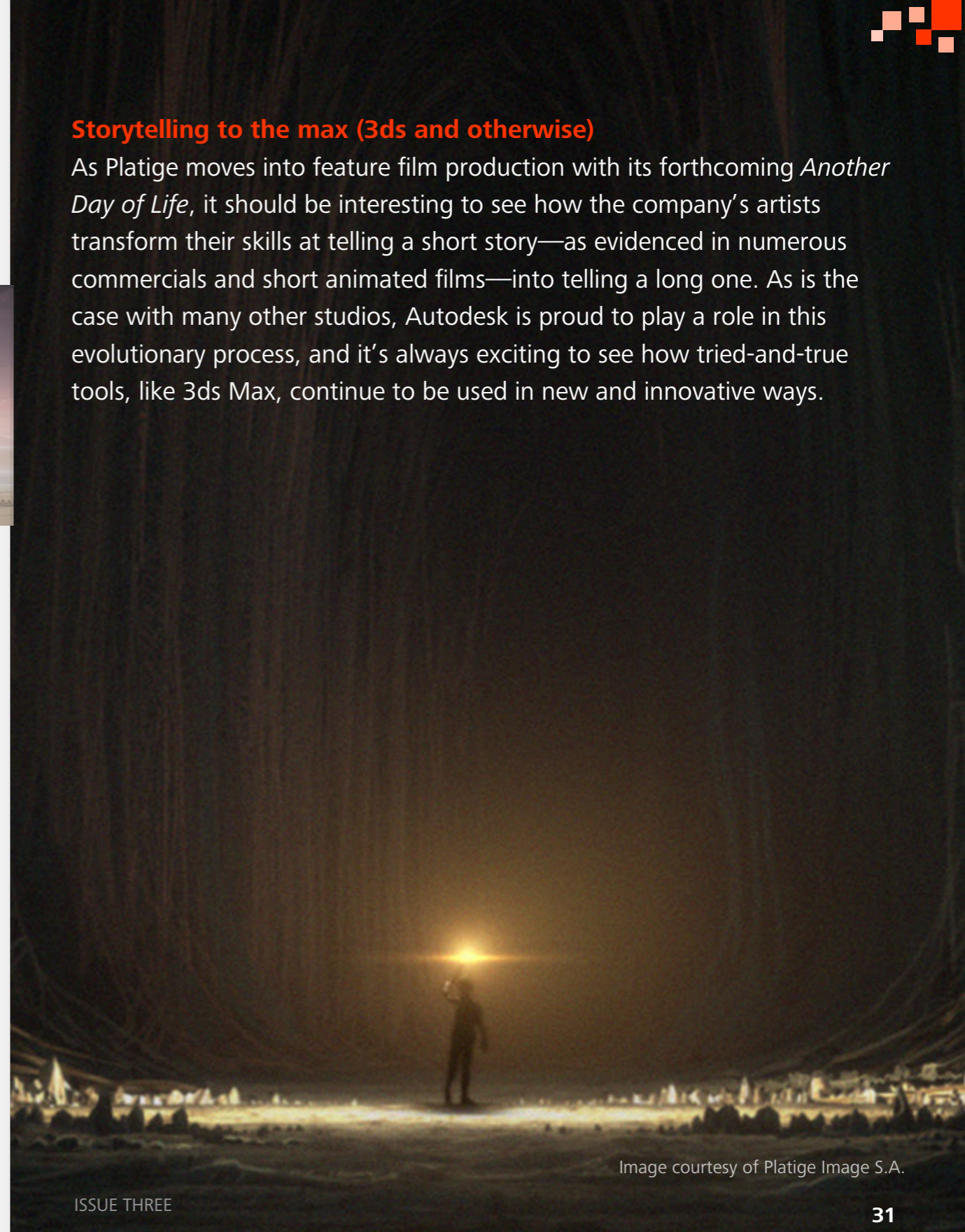


Image courtesy of Platige Image S.A.

Is it Real or is it Roarty?

Graphic artist challenges and delights
with amazing photorealism

Image courtesy of Dan Roarty

An initial review of Dan Roarty's portfolio is likely to evoke positive comments about the artistic quality of his portrait photographs or the amazing makeup used to transform actors into alien beings. Of course, what's truly amazing is that none of the images, despite their convincing appearance, are photographs at all. They are computer graphics—designed and created by a master practitioner of the exacting art of photorealism.

The gentle art of deception

Dan Roarty's graphic world is one where art and reality mesh, where a new kind of "real world" is created and formed through the mind and skills of the creative artist. The results to date are astonishing, with a stark realism that can cleverly deceive audiences. For Roarty, that deceptive quality is part of what he's seeking to achieve. "I love the idea of making someone think that it's a photograph when in fact it's a graphic. When they say 'I don't believe it!', I just find that very rewarding."

Distinguished by its incredible realism and detail, Roarty's work might strike the viewer as almost obsessive, a reaction he won't deny. "It is an obsession of mine to get the characters to look as photoreal as possible," he says, "and I still try to do everything by hand without using scanned data or

Born: Vancouver, B.C.

Education: Centre for Digital Imaging and Sound (*now The Art Institute of Vancouver, Vancouver B.C.*)

Past Experience: MTV Canada, Radical Entertainment, 2K, and LucasArts

Recent Work: Lead Character Artist, *Tomb Raider* series, Crystal Dynamics

photos for projecting shapes and textures. I don't think we've reached the limits for photorealistic graphics and that's what keeps me pushing ahead."

Tools for the job

Essential to Roarty's work are the computer graphics tools he uses to design and create. Trained in college on Autodesk® Maya® software, a tool he's used constantly ever since, Roarty integrates other Autodesk tools, primarily Autodesk® Mudbox® software, into his workflow. Roarty finds the tight integration between Autodesk tools to be a huge asset, especially when it comes to modifying and fine-tuning his images. "Maya and Mudbox enable me to create basically anything I want to," he comments. "When I'm using both pieces of software the only thing that's limiting me is my imagination, and that's awesome. And I really value the live connection between the two. I can create Blend Shapes in Maya, take that dataset into Mudbox for sculpting and texturing, go back to Maya to adjust, generate a bunch of new shapes again, and keep the workflow moving. The Maya-Mudbox back-and-forth connection has tripled the speed with which I'm able to process characters and Blend Shapes."

No room for error

Photorealism is an especially challenging graphics discipline because there's absolutely no room for error or compromise. The image either looks real, or it looks synthetic, and achieving the former demands exacting detail and

superb technique on the part of the artist. For Roarty, there are no short cuts for achieving the look he's after, even when aided by the industry's best art tools. "I still work by hand, and by that I mean doing everything within the software," he comments. "I'll build the model in Maya and then use Mudbox to sculpt and paint every blemish, every pore, every wrinkle by hand, without relying on photo references or photo textures at all. It's more exacting, more time-consuming work, but it gives me the results I'm after."

Those results can be seen on his [website](#) in a gallery of images that includes photo-realistic portraits of people: fantasy and alien beings, comical characters, his wife, and a loving portrait of his late grandmother. Roarty's reverence for one his favorite artists, Norman Rockwell, is also evident in the believable and sympathetic way that he portrays many of his real-world subjects.

Animating the future

Having advanced the art with his static images, Roarty looks to animating those images as his next step. He observes: "I've done animation in the past but it wasn't photoreal animation, so that's going to be my growth path, learning not just how to render images for animation but how to do the animation. Maybe it will be motion capture, or maybe I'll do it by hand. I won't know until I get there. But the idea is to push the boundaries and do great work with the Autodesk software I use without relying on a major budget. That's the next thing I want to accomplish."



Image courtesy of Dan Roarty

Where are they now?

The answer is right where they want to be



Michael Meltchenko



Christopher Erickson

In the last two issues of “Celebrating Creativity” we profiled two young rising stars in the world of CG and VFX. Michael Meltchenko had just been hired on as an animator at Ubisoft Montreal and Christopher Erickson was looking for an entry-level internship with a major animation studio. For both artists, their experience and expertise with Autodesk® Media Creation tools opened doors. Now that some time has passed, we thought it would be interesting to check back in with Michael and Christopher to see how their respective careers are developing.

Q: *Where are you working?*

Michael Meltchenko: I’m working at Ubisoft Montreal as a cinematic animator.

Christopher Erickson: I’m currently training at Disney Animation Studios to be a lighting apprentice.

Q: *What has been the best thing about your current job?*

MM: The best thing about my job right now is working with a great team and that I'm going to be doing something creative—solving all kinds of technical puzzles to help achieve superior quality in my work.

CE: The best thing about work here is that you don't have to do it alone. It's really great to be part of a family-like environment that's so collaborative and helpful.

Q: *How has your knowledge and use of Autodesk tools influenced your professional career development to date? What tools are you currently using and what tools might you be using in the near future?*

MM: When I was in school, our work was focused on Autodesk® 3ds Max® software. Thanks to that, I can better grasp the technical foundation I'm using today for my animation work. Because 3ds Max is a very good program for modeling and rendering, I think it really enhanced my aptitude for technically oriented tasks when animating with other programs. We're using Autodesk® MotionBuilder® software a lot as well. It's precisely what we need when working with motion capture data scenes. The MotionBuilder control rig is amazing! I haven't had the opportunity to work with Autodesk® Maya® yet, so I am looking forward to learning that software.

CE: While most of the tools at the Disney studio are proprietary, my exposure to the CG pipeline through the Autodesk suite has helped me to understand the working environment around me. I continue to use Maya, 3ds Max, and Autodesk® Mudbox® software on personal work when I get the time.

Q: *Any updated "words of wisdom" for students and other artists just starting out in their careers?*

MM: One thing I can say to all students and those that are striving to achieve their goals: never give up! Practice every day and that "one day" will come true. Believe in yourself and you will achieve anything in life.

CE: Learn everything you can and accept that you'll always be a "student" in this industry. The best thing you can do is equip yourself with everything you can to become a storyteller, from sketching silly cartoons to writing the fur procedurals, to making pixels come to life in the final renders.

Q: *If we check back with you in say, three years, what would you like to say about your career?*

MM: That I've helped ship a couple of great games. I'd also like to say that I'm doing a project of my own with a couple of great artists. That would be a really cool achievement!

CE: I'd like to be able to point to that shiny OSCAR® on the shelf, but it's probably better to take things one step at a time. While it would be really cool to work on big studio features, I find a certain charm in the idea of being able to say I worked on one of the shorts shown before the feature. Smaller projects tend to have smaller teams where versatility in skill sets is key. I learned a lot about CG animation with the Autodesk software in school and I'd like to be able to flex that hard-learned versatility on the big screen someday. ■