

Luke Warpus Interview

Transcript

Starting off looking through your IMDB it seems you do a lot of work on TV shows.

So I mostly do work for advertising now, the thing with advertising is that you don't really get IMDB stuff for it, but at Untold we also do film and TV stuff as well so whenever I do work on those shows I chuck it on there as well.

Yeah, I was looking though, and I think I saw one of my favorite adverts the one with the rollerblading tortoise.

Yeah, that was just before I joined, I think like a month before I came on, but I've since worked on Netflix's goat glider Coors Beers I think I did, I did some big ones, but I can't remember what they were. But yeah, I work mostly in high-end advertising which is a different style of work than F&E (Film and Entertainment), but I've had enough experience so if you have questions about the F&E side, I can answer them too.

Yeah so, I was going to ask, how does TV and Advertising VFX differ from film VFX.

Yeah, so film and TV nowadays are kinda like the same process, you just have to do more to do in TV but you're still working on long-form content at the end of the day because TV series these days are like several movies long. Typically what I find is that everything is much more structured on Film and TV, so your scripts usually have a template, production kind of run it in stages each shot will have like a Comp block where your setting things up then a Comp WIP where stuff is starting to get put together then you have comp final, tech check, tech final and you move through those steps very procedurally, obviously some shows just go to shit and there's nothing that can be done and everyone is just scrambling to get it done it takes after a lot of that format. The advertising side gives you an opportunity to be a lot more dynamic if a certain shot calls for a different setup then you're thinking on the fly and setting things up as they come in as the feedback process is usually a lot quicker from the client so you have to juggle there along with whatever internal notes you're getting and usually you can break a few more rules in advertising you can cheat a bit. "That being said, there are very high-end Ads that end up being run a lot more like a TV show would; where we would have a comp template that was set up so everyone knows where stuff is in the script"but usually I'm responsible for my own shot from day 1 to delivery so it's my shot if it's a bit of a mess no one's going to come and beat you over the head for it.

So, I also saw you worked on a short film “Calico.”

Yeah, I did that in February that came through Untold.

As the lead VFX Artist, how did you find managing the team? What kind of things did you learn?

Do you guys have shotgrid licenses?

No, I don’t think so.

Calico was brought into untold I think it was done mostly as a favor to some friends of the people who run the company. But I was brought on, to be fair for that show, it was just me and one other girl, and I was just giving notes to her because she was more junior than I was, we went through the show and that wasn’t too bad to look after. But that was a primer for me to pick up a different project for Beats headphones, their tech spec videos, and actually on that I was working with a couple of artists and one of them was an idea so there was a time zone issue, and a language barrier I had 70 shots to keep track of, and as far of keeping track of that I had to have some mental note of who was assigned to what shot though shotgrid or shotgun which is kinda the industry standard thing that we use for it and the ways I was giving notes and dailies was that I was leaving notes and annotations on their shot. It's important to remember that you can learn a lot more about production staff at the end of the day, it's my responsibility to do the work, it's their responsibility to manage the project and everyone's time.

As for your role as a compositor, what stuff can you be doing in the pre-production phase of a project that can really help?

Well not everybody is brought on at the start of the project however on the projects where I was brought on at the start you could be going over workflow stuff, “How do we want to comp this stuff” “Here's a problem I can for see us running into” set up lens grids get your distortion right. Get grain plates at different ISOs to regain properly another thing I did was shoot vignette plates. We did a bunch of multiplications and inverse multiplications to add them back in at the end of the comp. It's a lot of little stuff to make your life easier later on. I guess until you get the CG and Plates there's not a lot you can do, if you get CG, you can see if anything breaks. See if there are any passes you might want, One thing I always want is a position reference pass so you can use things like depth bubble or P-matte if something doesn't have that I can flag it early so we not pushing up against the deadline

If you've used it, have you found Nuke's machine learning toolset helpful and have you used them in any interesting ways yet? Copycat, Depth Generation for example.

Copypcat, it's one of those things that whenever we can get it to work it's very cool but we don't want to rely on it because of the state it's in. and the amount of work it takes to set up a good copypcat model, all the learning videos they (Foundry) put up on copypcat is "take frame A frame B copypcat will figure out the rest" and that's great for really simple things for texture on people's faces or adding digital makeup. But to do any actual real cleanup work where things are passing over people's faces, occluding, to do any of that stuff you have to set up so much extra crap to get it to function properly. And then on top of that if you're working on a machine that doesn't have a crazy GPU like some of the machines that I work on that don't have crazy GPUs because compositing is largely CPU-based it just takes ages and I have to leave it running overnight or over the weekend to see that it's still flickering. If you want to get an insight into more of that area Victor Perez did an interview with the foundry where he showed off some of the cool features but the guy zooms out at the script and seeing is so long I'm things well it would be easier to do all this stuff by hand.

I did use it on a show recently and it was good, but it was on simple stuff I should've just painted out instead. I was removing things that were going to be covered up anyway, so it was more for safety.

I admittedly have not looked that much into the AI and machine learning software as much as I but it's almost always faster to do it by hand.

We have recently used ComfyUI we started rolling it out on more shows. And some of the stuff on that is quite cool being able to generate normal maps or AI roto stuff, but at the same time is more of a headache.

What is a VFX shot, like painting or keying, that you find yourself doing the most?

At least in AD (Advertisement) a lot of what we do is clean up, You are going to be doing beauty work, moving things on set, changing the color of something because it doesn't quite match the brands, though with other shots it really varies on the show and the studio. When I was at MPC basically every shot was a digital character, my first gig was on a medical drama so everything I was doing was making wounds look good.

I saw a bulging neck.

Yeah that kind of stuff, then here my work varies Untold is known for CG creatures so there's a lot of CG characters the Job I'm working on now, a lot of 2D work a lot of cleanup, I don't think there's ever one type of shot that comes up more than the others it all varies on the subject matter your working on

So, in your week you're working on one shot at a time or are you spread out over multiple shots over different days.

I'm working on multiple shots all of the time. So what will happen is the show will come in and as we start to get things figured out I will get X amount of shots assigned to me so then I get shot A too a point where I think it's good, then send it for dailies, shot B good send and so on. And as I work through that list the next day, I'll get new dailies some will be approved some will get notes. Approved will be sent to the client and taken off my list for the time being then I'll get new shots with new notes and so on. You don't get one shot work on it finish it, it's everything all at once.

I more meant are you working on shots for TV show A one day then working on shots for TV show B another day

Not normally, we have a resources department that assigns artists to shows based on their budget. Normally you're on that show for X amount of time then you'll move onto something else or if they really need you on something else, they will schedule you for a couple of days. But it's very rare you'll have two instances of nuke open working on two different shows.

Are there any specific workflow techniques that you picked up from your time in industry that you wish you had learned sooner?

On the whole anything to do with projections it's just always endlessly useful. Then going off projections being able to UV paint, taking any geo you have being able to pipe the plate in then set the scanline render to UV then you have a stabilized 2d representation of what's in 3D as if you were painting on a UV texture map and you can work on a flattened out image then re-project onto the model. On top of that any kind of frequency separation so changing one aspect of the plate and dividing that against the plate so you can work on the colour and the details separately, it's really useful for when you need to generate new information for example when you need to paint something out by patching in the colour with a big soft brush you can blur things and copy colours from anywhere else.

I used that technique to track a road recently because there wasn't enough detail.

Yesterday I used it to track a big cityscape shot that gamma'd up then multiplied it over to get nice sharp details.

Other work flow things a big pet peeve of mine, so when you're coming you have a B pipe and something you want to add in, they will pipe it in like that, put a node here set it to mask with a roto going into it. That frustrates me to no end because it is so much cleaner use a blur if you need it a copy node then premult it because everyone will go into your script and see and understand what's going on. 9 times out of 10 when you mask something it just gets lost late on in the pipeline.

-See Clip

Are there any key events or meetups in the UK that I should be aware of

Don't think there's anything up north which is unfortunate but that's just because the entire industry lives in London. There's the big ones like FBX, NAB the trade shows the closest things to look for is a big VFX pub night in London, though a lot of those groups are private, you might need to look deeper, the VFX and Animation Union might be a good place to look, but I don't really know.

In your opinion what are some of the important innovations in the compositing world that have happened recently?

On the day-to-day, I don't think there has been anything that has shaken up the landscape because at studios if something was coming out studios and their pipelines have had time to adjust to that which is why I haven't personally been freaking out over AI stuff because I know the amount of work that will have to go into the pipeline on top of all the legal issues around it.

The advent of Deep Compositing opens up a lot of cool things to do but if you know how to leverage deep comp... I know it's not really new, but it can save you in a lot of situations, and also knowing where you can get deep information from, a lot of people don't know that the scanline renderer kicks out deep information by default so if you have geo you can take deep information from there. I don't think there are that many groundbreaking things that affect my day-to-day just tips and tricks.

So, there isn't any new updates that have really affected the pipeline much.

Nuke has USD now so that's cool, I guess! Doesn't help me! (Sarcasm)

What innovations would you like to see come out of the compositing world in the future?

I would love a better particle system in nuke, and I would love to see the paint node revamped, if it could be made to be able to work with custom brushes and textures, basically I want it to function like photoshop. The paint node is super powerful I don't know how much you go into it in your course you can do so much more with the paint node, and you could do so much more with custom brushes. The particle system I think in nuke is great you can leverage it to some good things but it can be a bit buggy, I would love to see a Houdini-esque system, that could also be a skill issue I'm sure you can do great things with it, particle blink stuff but I would like to plug and play with nodes. I keep hearing that the 3D system is going to be sped up for like viewing textures and that's awesome, but I would really like projections to have another look at like what kind of tools can we use to make a compositor life easy working in 3D systems.

And lastly is there any general advice or information you would want to tell me that I haven't asked about yet?

You can't really take criticism personally, if you get notes on a shot is not about you it's about the work. You can put your heart and soul into a shot, send it off to a client and they say thanks I hate it; it happens, and it sucks.

****Talking about living in England and VFX***

The industry in a funny place I think the UK has weathered it the best.

Is there a limit to how many keys you should use to get a good alpha?

Its whatever works

Points taken away from Demo.

Concatenation is very important with transforms, don't undistort and distort your plate just distort the background and assets being pulled in. If you don't do this your edges will lose quality

IBK Colour, we want everything that's plate black and everything that's not colour.

IBK stacks give you a different result, watch Tony Lines 5-part keying.

Tassels "need some other treatment to get them imprinted properly onto the background" look up how to do this.

Always copy premult no mask nodes