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Make a beauty to me

Why actors, interiors, urban landscapes and country landscapes look like they look and not otherwise



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avel Zakharov participated in the creation of graphics, animations and visual effects in more than thirty movies and a countless number of commercial and music videos. The list of the most knows films, where he worked as an artist, animator, 3D-modeller, compositor, visual effect designer, supervisor, includes "Dovlatov" (Alexey German jr., 2017, Russia), "Wanted" (Timur Bekmambetov, 2008, Universal, USA), "Legend No 17" (Nikolay Lebedev, 2013, Russia), "Mongol" (Sergey Bodrov-senior, 2007, Russia), "Irony of Destiny. The sequel" (Timur Bekmambetov, 2007, Russia). Before Mr. Zakharov go to Hollywood for another project, "Expert" has a conversation about what is a production of the image we see on the cinema screens.

— *How important is the role of graphics and visual effects in cinema now?*

— If the role of the VFX was episodic ten or twenty or even thirty years ago, then now it's pervasive overall. The shooting was natural before and the graphics were made in a unique way and applied to support the movie. Now we can not even notice the computer graphics. Monsters do not exist, but on the screen, they look so photorealistic. Explosions, blood in the frame - everyone understands that this is graphics. But the biggest trick is that almost all the actors went through a beauty work in post-production. The make-up is poor-quality, if the mask is applied and a seam is still noticeable, then it needs to be removed. The actors are rejuvenated. I have been doing this for more than ten years. Now is a common practice. If this is an advertisement, then certainly wrinkles, pimples will be removed, the color of the eyes, the lips color, the hair color can change. If somewhere the skin is stretched - we'll shrink it, we'll make a waist, we'll make the arms thinner, we'll remove a fat ... And this is not about the beauty only.

Next. In every movie or in every advertisement, it is necessary to work with the environment. I mean it needs to remove or add something to the frame. The simplest example is the chromakey. All commercials and very often the movies are shot in the pavilions with a green screen. Now it is spread so widely, that very often the live stream, for example in news, can be made in the same way. This is not a live shot. This news can be several days, but

there are professionals who can work with chromakey during the broadcasting. Only the specialist can see the secret of "beautiful".

— *How many specialists in Russia do have such skills?*

— I have been working in this field for so long that I can open my own school. I have developed techniques, and I know which method of cleanup (cleaning of video material from unwanted elements - "Expert") would be the best for a specific situation. Although, if we are talking about working with the look of an actor, then this is the beauty work. Lots of money is put into the budget for it. I often create music videos. Let's count. The average clip is about three minutes, which is around one hundred and fifty shots. The face will appear not in each, but in a half of them exactly. That means seventy-eighty shots for beauty work. Let's say it takes an hour per shot and remote freelancers will charge about \$15. Just multiply. Somebody is not combed, somewhere a pimple jumped up so it needs to be retouched. If there are glasses, then definitely some unwanted reflections will appear. And if some singer is already over twenty years on the stage, then there's no way a simple the makeup will fix his face.

Ten years ago American makeup artists worked very well. They did everything so perfectly that there was nothing left for postproduction. Now everything has changed. I work with the Mustache Agency, which does advertising in New York, and I have more and more beauty projects now. When it's a cosmetic commercial, you must show a beautiful actress and perfectly clean products. But this is impossible because during the shooting the objects could be rearranged, moved, shuffled, so fingerprints are left on them, and the actress may not always have a good mood and skin, and she just does her best. We fix this things in post-production. This is our job.

— *How cheaper is using graphics instead of natural filming?*

— Natural filming requires a lot of professionalism and well planning. The cameraman works for a frame for a long time, he has a lot of expensive light and a large number of assistants. Sometimes it happens that when everything is ready, the director suddenly says: "Stop! The sun is gone - we will continue tomorrow." You must have a very good budget for shooting on nature.

To me, it's important how the film was shot classical or digitally. If in a classic way, then the frame is really warm and light.

Movies which has been filmed classically, they shine. The light going through the film roll has unique properties and effects, much different from the light on the digital matrix. And it's much more pleasant to work with it. He has a different color range. You can pull out the details and do something more artistic with them rather than a digital frame. It's not a fad like a wish to work with the live material. This is a sign of a great professionalism and a big budget.

— ***What is the criteria for determining how natural is the image?***

— Just one - your eyes. You look at the shot and believe it or not. This is the first criterion. And criterion number two is your experience. There are the rules that you must follow in creating a composition, then the graphics will not come out to the foreground. Criterion number three is a "mom-test." What you did, you need to show to your mother, sister, wife or someone else and ask: "What's wrong with it?" I would say that so far no artist has created a really photorealistic character or animal. The more experience the artist has, the more difficult his competition with that what nature has already created. When I watch a movie, I notice everything. I know how and what effects were made, I can even assume the name of the artist who did it. Now it has become more difficult to achieve quality because there is usually a short time for post-production. And when it's a deadline but the level of a photoreal picture still has not been met, we usually say: "Well, it's a cartoon"(meaning it's fake). Most will not notice the computer graphics. Not only in Russia, but also in America. And now we spend less time to work with effects rather than before.

— ***Is it possible to do without these technologies?***

— If I'm not mistaken, in 2002 there was the last live broadcast of the New Year's TV show. After that, everything was recorded and everything was retouched. Since then, I have done not only correction in movies but also correction for TV shows. So for example, the mayor looked beautiful on the television screens. In the early 2000s, the correction was also a trap for clients. For example, Oleg Gusev, who creates music clips for the main Russian stars, he had a hidden line in a price. Yes, it was listed what will be in the video, visual effects, etc., but the cleanup has never been included. Although it was done in each clip. At the same time, it turned out that the artist looks perfect. The skin looks beautiful, makeup is perfect, the light is fine. The artist looks beautiful in every frame. Then the artist who has been filmed by Oleg Gusev always look better than in any other video. And the question comes out: "How come he looks so well?" Later the cleanup spread widely to other studios. For example, all of our actors, who were filmed in the sequel of the original version of "The Irony of Fate or With Easy Steam" were pretty old and needed to be slightly rejuvenated, especially in the scenes where the film refers to their past. Or the Elizabeth Boyarsky's scar on her cheek - it was fully removed. A third part of the whole movie was a huge work with facial cleanup. After that, every Russian FX studios began to apply a digital cleanup in the film industry.

— ***How often are these technologies used on television?***

— Television broadcasts are just for one time, watch and forget. Now there are technologies for automatic cleaning. But only for the television format, because we still do not have a full HD TV(in Russia). We still have a PAL picture(720x576). And for such formats, with a small size, we have technologies of automatic cleaning already for five years. This correction takes simultaneously with the shooting like the face smoothing, changing the tone, etc. But I think the automatic cleaning will reach the full size formats very soon. Honestly, ten years ago we already saw the technology of automatic

face replacement as it was, for example, in the film "The Running Man". I remember we called that technology the "Killer of the roto-painting". We thought that we would remain unemployed. But then this technology existed without an interface, it was a prototype with complex mathematical formulas, implemented with the special software 'MathLab'. And now the best thing that came out of this venture is realized in the iPhone apps when we can add or remove an object in the real-time mode. So that technology is still under construction. Therefore, we still have a lot of work.

— ***What are the criteria of beauty when you work with human faces?***

— There are the certain characters, I mean actors. I worked with their faces a hundred times I did the same again and again. I have certain skills. And the director knows that I will do everything correctly, and trusts me. But there are special cases when something needs only to be cleaned up a little - some detail of the face or skin ... And not only the face: if the person has cellulite or the veins are too popped up, or something else, then such things will be discussed. Some things noticeable by themselves as wrinkles or a saggy chin fixed with a tape, and then this tape must be cleaned. There are obvious things, for example, when we do American cosmetic commercials, the client may ask: "Leave the moles, leave freckles, remove this wrinkle, and do not touch that wrinkle cause it's her feature." The image-makers are responsible for that: something cannot be removed, because this is a distinctive feature. Or maybe this problem: at the beginning of video, until the cream is applied to the face, we have a skin being natural. And at the end, when the process has reached the final stage, packshot (close-up image in an advantageous perspective - "Expert"), then we have FX correction more visible. So in one video, the level of intensity of the digital cleanup may change. But very often I will decide how a person should look. Fortunately, I'm trusted on this issue.

— ***How long did you work on the film 'Dovlatov'?***

— Eight or ten months did not leave the studio. I guess for me it was the longest period of post-production. Work on every episode. It should look like the Soviet era. But we see behind the actor's highway and all the modern cars and flashing lights. Or all the houses with plastic windows. All this was retouched. I remember really well it's look in the USSR. Leningrad was just gray. Also, Aleksei Herman jr.(Director/Producer) knew where is the place of every stone. And this was very important for him, especially on long shots. Somewhere a piece of rusty pipe is added, some poster removed, stripes on clothes, the brightness of the frame, the color of the usual rope... All this was discussed before the post-production. For example, in a scene with a flower stall, we longly decided what flowers were selling over there in 70x. For the Director such details were very important so you can imagine how many tons of graphics there are (laughing). The houses are all replaced. We worked with historians. And here we are told that in those days the attic of a house was not there. Or a yacht at that moment had no mast, and yet there was no blue strip onside. Historians have given us a huge amount of information on how to make a picture authentic... Or if the landscape was shot somewhere here in St. Petersburg but it should be lakes of Murmansk. So, the lake was filmed from the shore, then added a coast on the horizon and trees. And if this is a house, then its storm drains must be rusted and made of other tin. And if it's a gate that leads into a house, then they can not be electric, so the wires and electric drives had to be cleaned.