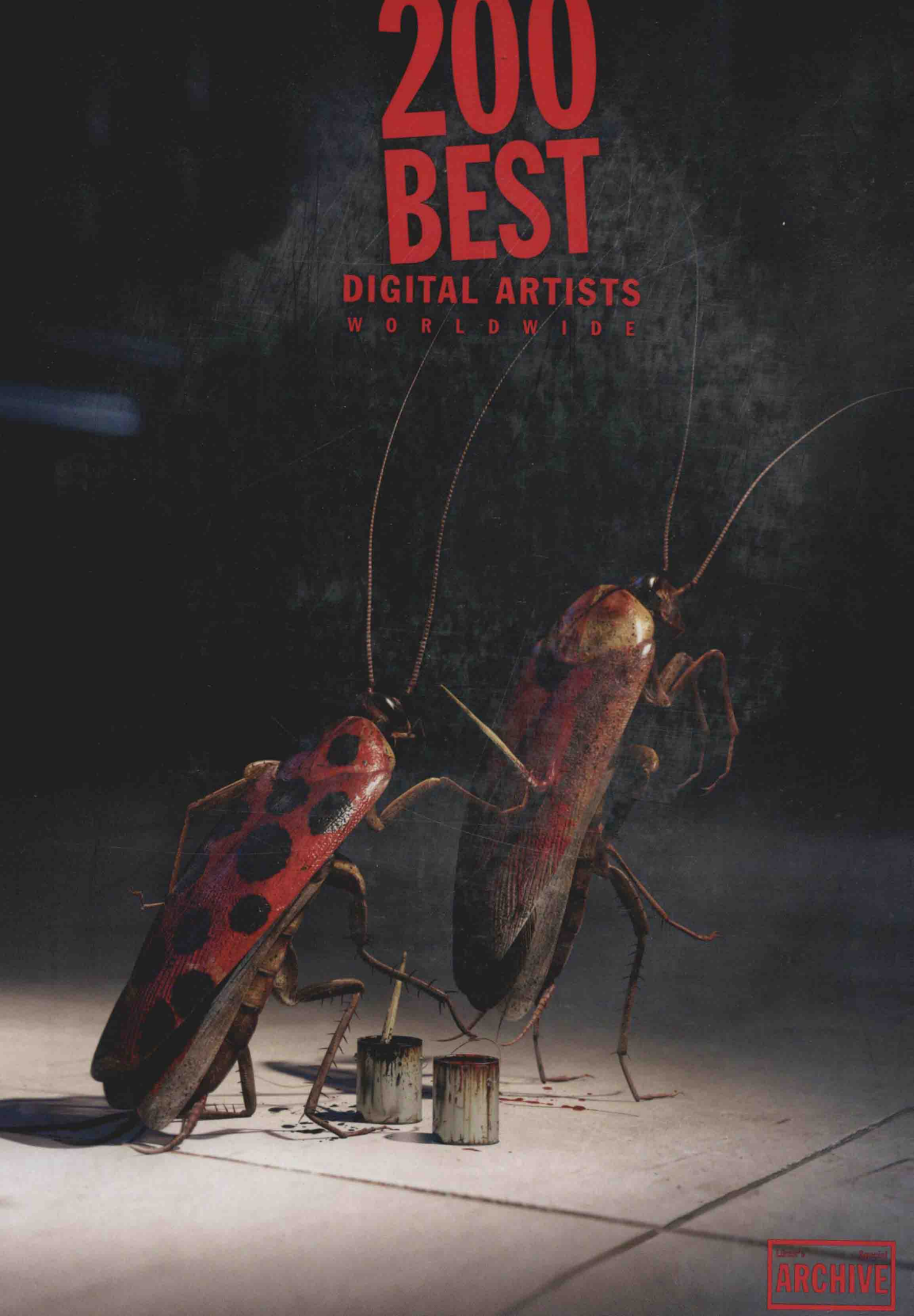
200 BEST

DIGITAL ARTISTS

WORLDWIDE



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Dear Readers,

Welcome to a new volume in our 200 Best series. The idea of devoting a book to the best digital artists was conceived at the very last meeting I had with Walter Lürzer, shortly before his passing in April 2011. We were talking about our very successful 200 Best Ad Photographers volume, published that same year, and the fact that it might well be time to celebrate in print CGI and the specialists responsible for this hybrid form of imaging, which blurs the borders between photography and illustration.

We at Lürzer's Archive then started to get in touch with digital studios, artists, and those photographers who produce their own digital artistry – not only to enhance their photos, which is quite commonplace these days, particularly within a commercial context, but who are also able to create amazing fantasy worlds with the computer technology now available to them. We invited them to start submitting their best work and I began to take a closer look at publications dedicated to CGI.

In 2012, I was asked by the organizers of Photokina, the world's largest trade fair for the photographic and imaging industries, held biannually in Cologne, to be a juror on their very first CGI award. I was stunned that this was the first time they were presenting this award, the application of computer graphics to create – or contribute – to images having already been around for quite some time, albeit with ever improving technology. I expected to have a long day of work ahead of me when I arrived at the Kölnmesse building where the jury meeting was to take place. In actual fact, it took hardly more than a couple of hours for us to sift through the amazingly few submissions until we came across a – fortunately very good – winner. (You can see the winning entry and other work by the digital artists who created it on pages 266-267 of this volume.) At any rate, this experience confirmed my belief that this special field of imaging was deserving of greater attention.

Soon after, we had some 5,000 submissions to go through and preselect for our jury shortlist. What we excluded from the very start were images that use CGI simply to make photographs sleeker, sexier, etc., i.e. basically just a digital version of the kind of retouching that has been done ever since photography was used in a commercial context. Photos that looked like they were photos, and illustrations that looked as if they had been done using analog technology, were not what we wanted to show in this book. What we were after were images that, through digital means, created "fantastic worlds," images that could not have been created using conventional photographic or illustrative processes (or with the help of a modelmaker).

The jury appointed to pass verdict on the 1200 images preselected for their deliberations consisted of:

Anne Telford, freelance writer and editor and former managing editor of Communication Arts. Anne was a founding board member of ICON, the Illustration Conference (the 8th conference will take place in July 2014 in Portland, OR). Her photographs have appeared in Émigré, Communication Arts, and Step Inside Design magazines, the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Jose Mercury News, PDN, Allworth Press and Chronicle Books. Anne lives in La Jolla, California. "Judging this digital arts competition," she told us, "I was transported into unimaginable worlds of fantasy. This collection of work is inspirational and magical and made me realize that nearly anything is possible with artistry and imagination."

Professor Michael Jostmeier, Head of the Design Faculty at the Georg-Simon-Ohm University in Nuremberg, Germany. Jostmeier has been professor for media design and CGI imaging since 1996. He chairs the DFA, the German Photographie Academy, and in 2004 organized the symposium "Das Digitale Bild – Bildung des Digitalen II," and edited the accompanying book of the same title. Among many other things, Jostmeier has, since 2006, also been working on CGI projects in coöperation with BMW, Audi, and VW, and lectures frequently on CGI in Germany and abroad.

Our third judge was Chris Christodoulou, CEO of Saddington Baynes, one of the top addresses for digital imaging in the world. You can find out more about him in the interview that follows.

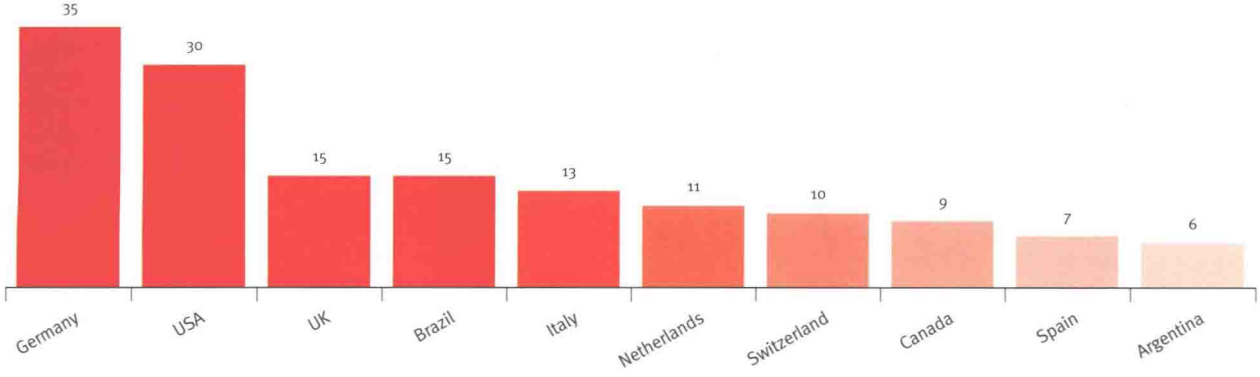
The cream of the crop comprises a total of 506 images assembled in this volume, 3,000 complimentary copies of which will be delivered to premium contacts throughout the advertising industry. Worldwide circulation of the title will be handled through our distributors in 68 countries.

I hope you will enjoy this foray into the world of digital imagery.

Sincerely,

Michael Weinzettl
Publisher & Editor-in-chief

Breakdown by country in 200 Best Digital Artists worldwide – Top 10



The rules of imagery used by artists for centuries still apply today.

Chris Christodoulou, CEO of Saddington Baynes, one of the top addresses for digital imaging in the world, kindly consented to be a juror for this special. In the interview that follows, Michael Weinzettl chats to Chris about the history of CGI in advertising, the extraordinary evolution of his London-based creative production studio, which has been creating imagery for the advertising industry since 1991, as well as his own career there, which he embarked on 19 years ago as their first digital retoucher.

L.A.: Hi Chris, you've been with Saddington Baynes since 1994. Can you tell us what led up to this? How and when did you first get interested in digital art?

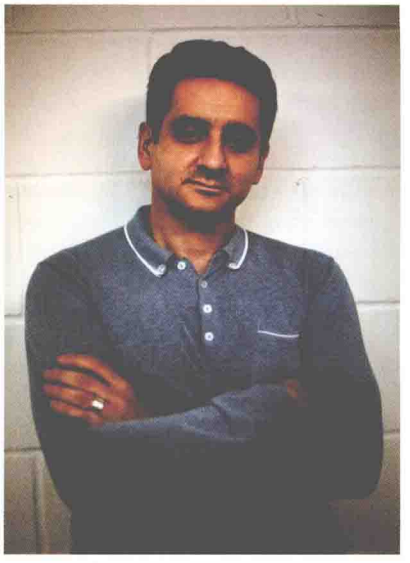
Chris Christodoulou: It's been an interesting journey, to be honest. I'd been collecting comics since I was five years old, sneaking them home because my mum thought they were the work of the devil! They inspired my imagination and brought out my latent ability to draw, which I did voraciously. I never went anywhere without paper and a pencil, drawing superheroes and spaceships on every scrap of paper I could find. I then became fascinated with films like Tron, Star Wars, Blade Runner, and the wonderful animated short Luxo Jr. by Pixar, and decided that I wanted to get into computers and cybernetics, designing the next R2-D2. I'm a fan of all things technological, especially when they combine art and science. I also appreciate the structural beauty of numbers found in mathematics and the logical thought process needed to solve complex formulae. I realized I wasn't good enough, or interested enough, in either computer programming or physics and shifted my focus back towards art, my first love, which led me to study art and design. It was at college that I used Paintbox, the first ever high-end retouching system. When I left, I was offered a job as a graphic designer and as a retoucher in the same week. Typical! I chose a career in retouching at Harmer Holbrook and I'm really glad I did. It was tremendously exciting to be involved in the first digital revolution in imagery, working with the top creatives in London and the best photographers, creating imagery that wasn't previously possible. The explosion of new ideas was incredible, and I was able to work on every kind of image imaginable. I then met Chas Saddington and Dick Baynes and, after a few years working with them at other companies, joined them at Saddington Baynes as its first retoucher.

L.A.: What were your main influences when you started out?

Chris Christodoulou: At the time, I was heavily influenced by films, art, and comic books. The late 80s was a golden period in comics, and some amazing art was being produced using oil painting and watercolors, pencils, and mixed media. Some of my favorite artists, like Gene Colan, Bill Sienkewicz, Frank Miller, Dave McKean and Jon J Muth, were producing groundbreaking work. I have always been a fan of post-impressionism, and am particularly drawn to the art of Paul Cézanne and Georges Seurat, who believed that there was a link between science and emotion and created a structure to their work which resonated with me. I think that's why my photography tends to be abstract, geometric imagery, not unlike comic book panels and structured paintings.

L.A.: Having been in the CGI business for so long, almost since its beginnings, could you walk us through its history? What were some of the landmarks in the evolution of CGI?

Chris Christodoulou: CGI had been around a while before we got involved in it, certainly in the film and gaming industries with pioneers like Pixar and ILM and Shigeru Miyamoto at Nintendo, using established software like Maya and rendering engines such as Mental Ray and Renderman, but it wasn't that widespread in advertising. The technology and software wasn't fast enough, or cheap enough, at the time to deliver on the fast-moving deadlines demanded by the agencies, so it wasn't a viable alternative to photography, which was being still shot on film at the time, so it was used mainly for packshots. The big shift in CGI for marketing happened in 2004, with two simultaneous breakthroughs. A company in Cambridge, ART VPS, had developed the Render Drive, a powerful and fast hardware-based renderer. Alongside Spheron's HDRi camera, which could capture an entire location in 360 by 180 degrees in high dynamic range, the missing link to having realistic reflections and the correct lighting in a 3D object was solved. US car photographer Clint Clemens, who had heard from some of his agency clients that car prototypes for marketing were being drastically reduced, contacted us. We were initially asked to bring in our retouching skills to help deliver the first photorealistic samples for a tour of the US agency market. I spent time in the US with Clint and a Detroit company called Armstrong White, and we cracked a lot of the CGI methodology at that time. It was a lot of fun to be involved at the birth of a new industry like that, and to pioneer a fundamental change in how imagery is created. It's fair to say we were met with a lot of skepticism at first. The biggest shift since then has undoubtedly been the advent of 64-bit hardware technology, which then allowed us to work on huge CAD data sets supplied by our clients far more easily, and to work in 32-bit



Chris Christodoulou, CEO of Saddington Baynes

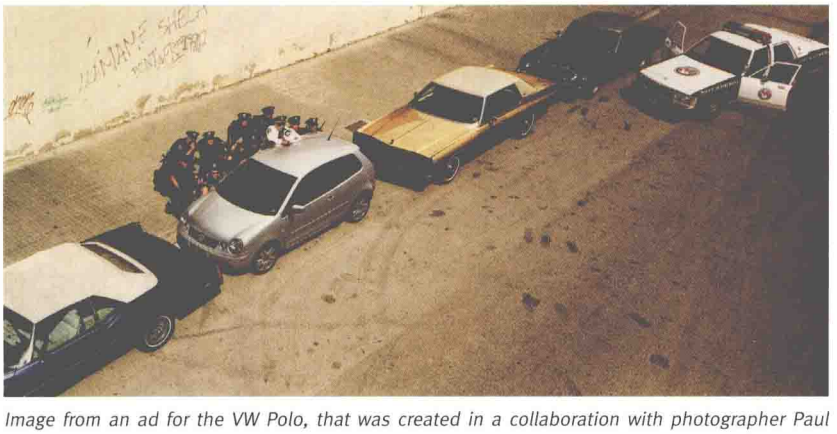


Image from an ad for the VW Polo, that was created in a collaboration with photographer Paul Murphy and DDB, London. It won the Press Grand Prix at the Cannes Lions in 2004.

to deliver imagery and animations much more quickly, and with greater detail, both in CGI and in retouching. Allied to that, the use of real-time rendering techniques, and the improvements in ray tracing by the rendering software companies, have been a real driver behind the ability to produce true realism across advertising, film, and the gaming industries.

L.A: What about Saddington Baynes? It was founded only three years before you joined. Please tell us a little about the studio and its origins, about its growth over these past 22 years, and where you, as CEO, are trying to lead it?

Chris Christodoulou: Saddington Baynes opened for business in 1991 when the two founders, Chas Saddington & Dick Baynes, saw that digital retouching was going to take over from analogue retouching as the future of the industry. Their goal was simple: to be the best retouching studio in the world. Having worked on the very first adverts to come out of agencies such as AMV and Saatchi, Chas and Dick had garnered a brilliant reputation for the quality and artistry of their photo-compositing and finishing when retouching was an analogue, wet process produced in darkrooms. I joined in 1994 and set about striving to make us the best company in the world at digital retouching, training all the artists and being responsible for the quality of all work we produced. There were some very long hours! I'm proud of the fact that we were the first UK retouching company to work regularly with the top US agencies on several award-winning campaigns. I am also proud that some of the artists I trained have gone on to run successful businesses in their own right. That combination of photographic sensibility and technical innovation has now gone to the natural next step: offering our clients full production of motion and digital content alongside our traditional print work; and developing our interactive department to take full advantage of emerging technologies, from mobile apps through to our own proprietary platform, SBridge, which bridges the gap between digital and print in an engaging new way. Over the years, we have continued to adapt to topsy-turvy market conditions, and the company has now grown to become a 50-strong studio, continuing to work globally with a passion and a mission to create beautiful, engaging and innovative visual content.

L.A.: Can you give us some examples of work done by Saddington Baynes that you're particularly proud of and why?

Chris Christodoulou: We've been very fortunate to have collaborated on some exceptional campaigns over the years, so it is difficult to single out a few. Ironically, we work as hard as we can to be as invisible as possible when creating imagery, whether photographic or computer generated. I would say the ones that I'm especially proud of are those where we had to overcome tricky technical challenges, combined with a sensitive and distinctive color grade, to deliver a seamless and beautiful result. These are the projects that give me the biggest buzz. Most recently, I'd say I am most proud of our SBook app (case-studies.saddingtonbaynes.com), developed and built by our digital team, which has continued our heritage of innovation. The interactive AR app has been created as a new consumer touchpoint, unlocking the full potential of a wholly integrated campaign running across both print and digital media. Retrospectively, the Isuzu campaigns of the early 90s with Graham Westmoreland and Goodby Silverstein; The American Airlines ad for DDB with Mark Reddy and John Offenbach; The Petit Bateau campaign with John Offenbach and BETC; The VW Polo ad with Paul Murphy and DDB London; the Saab campaign with Michael Kenna and The Martin Agency; The Shelter "House of Cards" campaign with Blinkk and Leo Burnett; and the Stella Artois "Devil" ads with Lowe.

L.A.: What, to you, were some of the major achievements in the field of CGI in the past years in general, and which were you most impressed by?

Chris Christodoulou: There have been many breakthroughs, led mainly by the film industry, but some that stay in the memory for me in particular are the original Tron movie and Luxo Jr. from Pixar, both of which were unbelievable at the time they were done. They inspired me to look beyond traditional media and I started computer programming because I wanted to create art that way too. I eventually went back to art, but that fusion of art and computing has stayed with me and is the foundation of our approach.

L.A.: Where do you personally get your inspiration?

Chris Christodoulou: I find inspiration in music, film, theatre, art, nature, photography, graphic novels, my friends. I'm always absorbing as much as I can and my eyes are always open to the unseen moments we take for granted. I take my own photos, usually when travelling, and I'm constantly taking images with my iPhone every day. Music is also a massive inspiration to me, and I listen to it wherever I am and whatever I'm doing.

L.A.: Which individual – either still alive or no longer with us – would be the dream collaborator for you?

Chris Christodoulou: Neil Gaiman, the novelist and writer. In another life, I would have been a world-famous comic book artist. For me, comics allowed me to escape into another world. His stories were magical and beautifully written. Definitely some of the most memorable reading experiences of my youth, especially during his tenure on DC Comics' Sandman, Books of Magic and Death: The high cost of living. Pardon the pun, but it would be my dream to draw and ink a story by him.

L.A.: How does an average day as CEO at Saddington Baynes shape up – provided, that is, there is such a thing as an average day?

This image from a Stella Artois ad, a joint effort produced together with DLKW Lowe, London, was featured in Lürzer's Archive Vol. 1-2005.

Chris Christodoulou: I wish I knew! Since I became CEO and stepped back from day-to-day production, handing over to James Digby-Jones, our supremely talented ECD, my role is more focused on the strategic direction and performance of the business and managing the great team under me, as well as developing relationships with brand clients. There's never a dull moment, and even though it's very different to what I started out doing, I'm still able to apply all of the knowledge I've gained – of both the business and how we do the work to good effect when working closely with clients.

L.A.: How do you view the importance of CGI for the advertising industry today?

Chris Christodoulou: I really believe CGI has proved itself to be a valuable addition to the creative toolkit alongside traditional methods for agencies and marketers today. Not only can we now create content and experiences that would be almost impossible to do traditionally from a creative and production standpoint, but also we can fully serve the range of new media channels, providing a more coherent experience for the consumer, and providing brands with greater consistency of image. The automotive industry, in particular, has seen real value in embracing it fully as part of the entire customer journey. I would say that the most effective and realistic CGI tends to come from studios that, like ours, were originally in retouching because we have been immersed in photographic principles and techniques and have applied them to our CGI skill sets to maintain authenticity. The best work is the right fusion of the two disciplines. We respect the rules of photography because, if we break them, the eye won't believe the image. For me, the introduction of CGI into the industry has led to an explosion of ideas even greater than the first digital revolution with retouching in the late 80s, because CGI is a fully digital production process – from concept through to delivery. The widespread acceptance of digital photography about six years ago only served to speed up its adoption. Traditional processes such as model making, set building, product and still life photography, even locations, can now be combined into one process with more flexibility and control than ever before.

L.A.: Can there be such a thing as excessive use of CGI, or unnecessary reliance on the technology involved?

Chris Christodoulou: Certainly. If we don't think something should be done in CGI, we would tell a client. It's about balance. It's more about the idea, what the creative is trying to communicate, and how you want the viewer to feel when they see the image. We then look at every brief and offer the right solution, whether it involves CGI or not, or a combination of CGI and photography or video. Some ideas clearly need a CGI solution to realize them, and in some cases the idea has been inspired by other images created in that way. For us, CGI is just one part of what we offer; we are all about creating beautiful imagery whatever the technique.

L.A.: Are there cases where it's better to go for traditional, even analog, photography or illustration rather than CGI?

Chris Christodoulou: Absolutely. Although we can emulate many styles of photography, there is certain imagery that can only, and should only, be done with photography, such as lifestyle or fashion imagery, reportage and editorial, food and portraiture. Ultimately, it's down to the visual language that underpins any ad campaign and what is being communicated. Although by no means limited to these examples, if a campaign calls for something that either doesn't exist; is difficult to find or get to; needs to be specific to a brand, such as architecture and interiors or products; imagery that is heavy with visual metaphor; model making that would be logistically impossible to do at scale or detail; characters and creatures, then CGI is the right approach.

L.A.: What makes a work of digital art great as opposed to just good?

Chris Christodoulou: For me, any great work of digital art, whether a computer generated image or a retouched photograph, should make you feel something, make a connection, however fleeting that moment is. The rules of imagery used by artists for centuries still apply today and need to be considered when creating images. As people, we are in tune with the visual shortcuts and the unspoken symbolism that have existed for hundred of years. The use of storytelling, structure, composition, light and color combined with imagination, will elicit a response when applied in the right way. Great imagery tends to be the perfect fusion of all of those attributes. A computer or camera doesn't know those rules, the best artists do. That's what we try and bring to our work.

L.A.: How important is inspiration – as opposed to just delivering the goods by being expert at deploying the technology involved? And how much input from the digital artist does the client usually wish to have?

Chris Christodoulou: For us, inspiration is everything. We have always been about technique, not technology. Whether we are using computers, cameras, pencils or paints, these are purely part of a toolkit that needs inspired artists to fuel their creativity. As a company, our clients value that we go further than just operating software, and that's why they come to us. Input from the artist is sought and respected, whether retouching an image or creating original digital art, animated or otherwise.

L.A.: What do you look for in a young digital artist who might want to work for you?

Chris Christodoulou: We like to hire people who have a lot of energy, passion, and that wonderful combination of creativity and logic. One of the things we look for when finding new people is that beautiful fusion of artistic sensibilities and technical nous, that mixture of art and science. I did Physics, Maths and Art, and Executive Creative Director and partner James studied Architecture and Visual Media, so we're very left-brained, right-brained people. That's why the transition from 2D to 3D was organic, because we think in 3D space when putting together a 2D image. It's also why moving into digital has been a natural progression for us. We now want to influence the process by which our imagery is experienced, and not just seen, by the consumer.

Image from a campaign for Shelter, a housing charity. Featured in Lürzer's Archive Vol. 2-2009.

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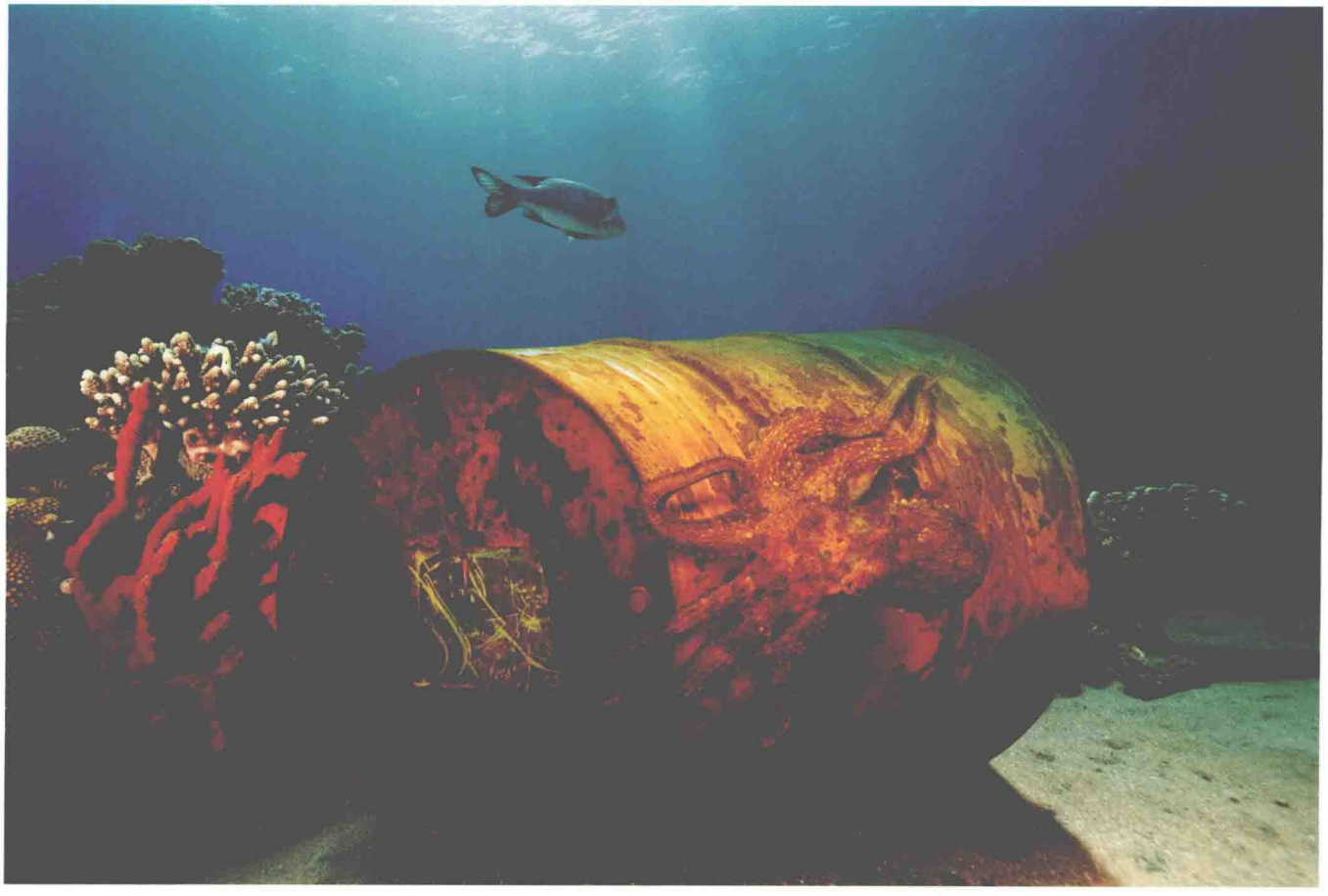
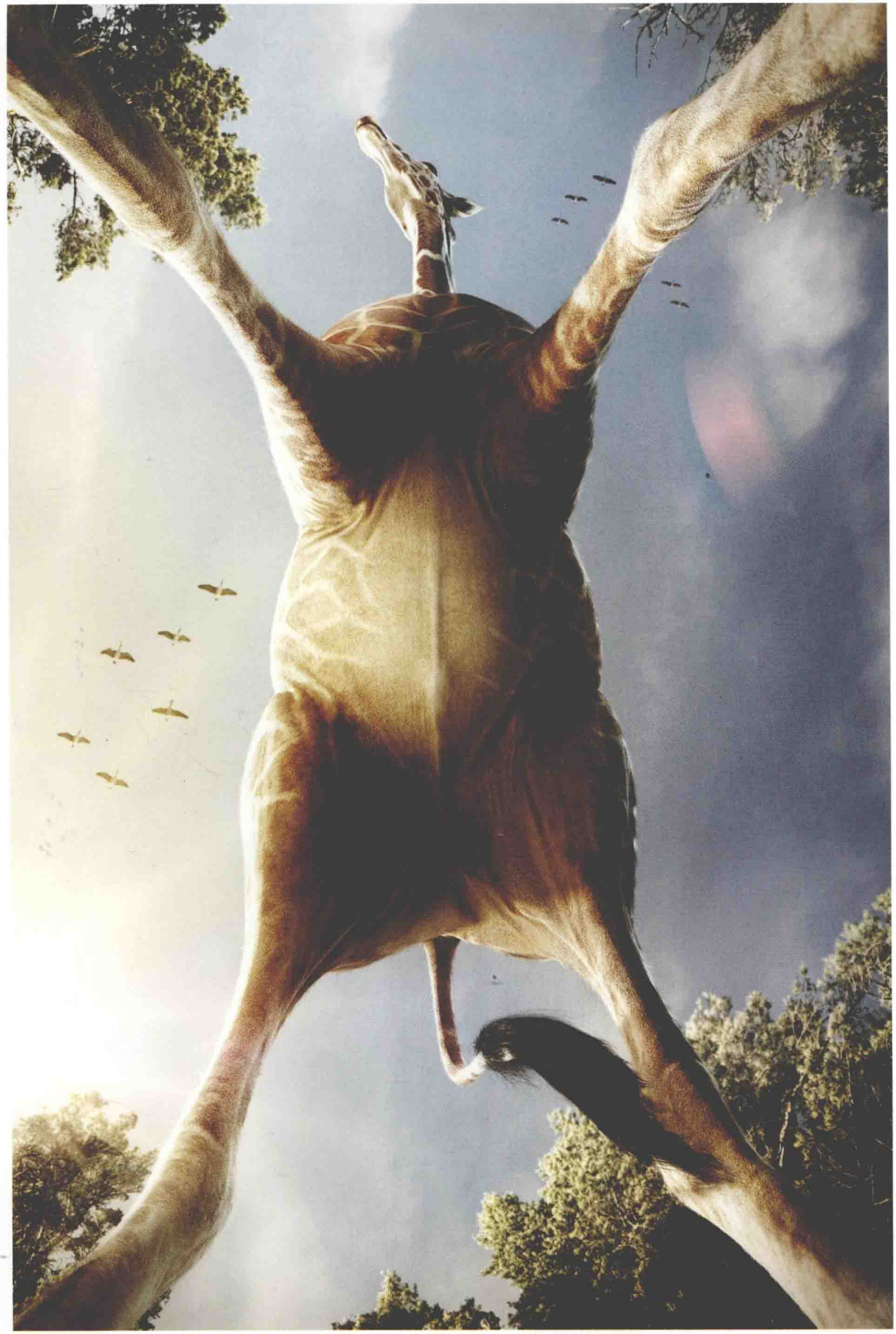


: George Greyling : Y&R, Johannesburg : Liam Wielopolski : Steve Dirnberger : JHB Zoo

: George Greyling : JWT, Johannesburg : Paul Strappini : Neil Lindsay : Ford Ranger



: Manipula : Africa, São Paulo : Guy Costa : Thiago Konno : Suzuki Motors

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