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Fusion CI Studios是一家专业的视觉效果工作室，作品包括《国家宝藏2：秘宝之书》、《本杰明·巴顿奇事》、《特种部队》......
STUNNING VISUAL EFFECTS

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Mass: Please give a brief introduction about your team and members, let more Chinese leaders know you.

Fusion GI Studios: Fusion GI Studios is a specialized visual effects studio located in Santa Monica, California, focusing on computer generated “dynamic effects”. This means physically simulated animation, such as ocean surfaces, rivers, waterfalls, explosions, mist, fire, cloth, destruction effects. It’s a very specific area of visual effects and also one of the most technically challenging. It is where science and art merge – hence our studio’s name Fusion. We are primarily known for our work in CG fluid effects, which are particularly challenging. Studios and agencies all over the world come to us to help with fluid effects on projects because of our years of experience and our big core library of advanced simulation methods. We work as a remote CG & FX group, allowing any animation studio to achieve high-end dynamic FX in their projects. The size of our team varies with the demands of projects but generally is between 4 and 10 experienced dynamic effects artists. We work any kind of project, no matter how small or large -- music videos, installation art, television series, commercials and feature film.

The principals in the company are:
Mark Stadick, co-founder and vfx supervisor
Lauren Millar, co-founder and executive producer.

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融合图像工作室（Fusion CI Studios）是一家专业的视觉效果工作室，坐落在加利福尼亚州的圣马特奥。主要业务是计算机生成的“动态效果”，也就是物理模拟，如海洋表面、雨滴、爆炸、雾、火、布等破坏效果的动画。他们参与过很多著名电影的制作：《碟中谍4》、《极寒之城》、《国家宝藏2：神秘宝盒》、《魔鬼岛》（又名《极限特工》）、《特种部队》、《未来战争》以及著名的《格列佛游记》等。在商业方面，他们已经完成了许多知名品牌的广告和宣传视频，如可口可乐、耐克、麦当劳、吉普、Rambler和资生堂的特效工作。
**Mars:** In recent years special effects shots are needed in more and more movies. Is it a big opportunity for your team?

**Fusion CI Studios:** Yes it is. Visual effects have become very important to directors for story-telling purposes, but also for budget and “glitz factor.” CG effects are less expensive and more controllable than physical effects, keeping costs down. In *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* we helped Asylum FX create an underwater explosion that destroyed a submarine that would’ve been ridiculously costly to do with physical effects. And now audiences have come to expect spectacular visuals even from lower budget films, so it is getting more important to pull in audiences and give them a special theatrical experience. Even more important, as 3D stereo films become more popular, CG effects are becoming more important since it’s harder to use compositing tricks to add elements to shots in 3D.
**Mars**: which projects have you participated in? Are there any well-known movies?

We have worked on a number of well-known films: *The Guardian*, *Poseidon*, *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *G.I. Joe*, *The Surrogates* and most recently *Gulliver’s Travels*. On the commercial side, we’ve done work for many well-known brands such as Coke, Nike, Minute Maid, Sprite, Nivea and Shiseido. Perhaps our best-known work, however, is the Whole Water commercial spot for New Zealand client Department of Motion Graphics where we morphed water into a series of shapes, from a brain to a bridge to bananas. That work has become iconic in the industry and is often sent to us as visual reference for new projects.

http://fusioncis.com/projects/television/whole-water/

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Mars: In a project, what does your work process like?

Fusion CI Studios: Our work process is like a combination of scientific research and art. Our VFX Supervisor, Mark Stasiuk, has a PhD in fluid dynamics—so he is well-equipped to devise solutions to difficult technical challenges. Our clients come to us with complex effects requirements and our job is to figure them out. We start off by working closely with our clients to determine what is needed, visually, in their projects. We go thru the project storyboards, determine what's possible for the budget and production schedule, and what the best methods are to achieve it. Then we usually move into a period of research and development, where we work out the technical details of the methods we’ll use. Because we have so much experience and expertise in this area, our research period is often only a few days to a week. Usually we have done something similar on past projects, and can use those results as building blocks for new projects. Once we get our methods working and demonstrate them to our clients, we move into the final production period, when we create the CG effects in our clients' shots. This is where most of the art comes into play, as we create different versions of the visuals to achieve the creative goal. Still, in this stage a lot of technical capability is required. Some of the biggest challenges lie in the ability to art-direct physical simulations, since they do whatever the physics determines. At Fusion, a big part of our development process is building in ways of controlling and art-directing our simulations, giving us an ability to make revisions quickly and according to the creative needs of the client.

(http://fusionci.com/projects/television/whole-water/)

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More: what's the most tricky finance problem in the team management and project management?

Fusion Cl, the 3 biggest sources of difficulty are time, budget and communication. Projects, whether film or commercial, have over-shrinking budgets and timelines. Good CG effects, especially challenging simulation-based effects, take significant time to develop and complete, and they require artists with a high level of technical expertise (who are the most costly of artists). With less time to produce, the CG always suffers, and if the budget is also small, it's necessary to use top-level artists less, and junior artists more. So there's always a tension between keeping the project fast and inexpensive, and doing the best possible work. Communication issues can also get tangled into this problem, because short timelines mean everyone is less able to take the time to communicate clearly, and when communication is poor the visuals always wander away from what the client really wants, leaving people disappointed in the results. We put significant effort into addressing these problems, mainly thru our internal systems. Our expansive library of simulation methods means we can be very efficient with our efforts, development and our experience and expertise means we can achieve creative goals faster. We update our clients regularly, and use tools like CineSync to make sure that we all understand what our clients need.
Mars: What’s the standard of a good work? Could you please share a most satisfying work of your own with us? What is its creative process like? At the same time, are there any places that you are not satisfied it now appears?

Fusion CI Studios: One of our favourite projects was the Frey Chocolate Easter commercial. We worked with Asylum FX, who handled the non-fluid animation, compositing, finishing, and also did the up-front creative work with the agency. The concept of that project was to have molten chocolate flying thru an artistic space, and form a series of iconic forms to support the ad’s message. We worked very closely with the team at Asylum and they included us in creative meetings with the agency and director. This meant that, at all times, we understood very clearly what the creative vision was based on the actual words and emotions we could hear coming from the creatives in charge. We also had good opportunity to provide our own creative feedback and ideas, and to present alternative ideas where there were technical issues with drawing the best possible performance from the CG fluids. We used our proprietary methods for morphing the chocolate and giving it a smooth, silky behavior, and we also shaded, lit and rendered the results, handing Asylum the chocolate as rendered image sequences ready to comp. It was a really tightly integrated project, with excellent, frequent communication between all involved groups. As a result, the project delivered smoothly, and the result was beautiful, something we are proud to have on our demo reel.
Mars: What is the difference when you work on project for business than personal work? Are there constraints when it comes to business?

Fusion CI Studios: We rarely have time to do personal or internal projects now. When we do, the main difference is the overall time period over which the work gets done. Business projects always have tight deadlines, and there's always a point at which you have to say, "we have to call it finished". Mainly in those cases we work to ensure that our client, and their agency client or the funding movie studio, are happy. When they are happy, we have to be too. But on personal projects, even if we aren't putting in all that much more work time on them, we can give the creative and technical ideas time to bounce around in our heads. In this kind of work, it takes time for ideas to surface, whether it's time to come up with how you want it to look, or time to have ideas to solve technical issues.
**Mars:** When your works conflicts with business intention, how do you solve this problem? Do you persuade them to accept your idea or compromised your idea for them? Or you work with them to find a better solution for both of you?

**Fusion C1 Studios:** We always work together with our client to find a better solution. In general, our rule is to give them as close to what they want as technically possible, and to avoid cluttering their thought process with possible technical problems. Sometimes however, what they want doesn’t work out perfectly for reasons they could not have for foreseen, because they don’t have the expertise or technical know-how of these particular kinds of visuals. In those cases we enter into a creative discussion, providing alternative ideas that are still consistent with the spirit of the project. We have always been able to come up with a solution through discussion.
Mars: Softwares seem to be the indispensable tool in digital art, which software do you use in your work? Are there any tips in the process of learning to use the software?

Fusion CI Studios: We use a variety of software tools, each of which has different strengths. For our fluids work, we mostly use RealFlow. For pyrotechnical work (fire, smoke, explosions), we use Houdini, 3DS Max + FumeFX + Krakatoa, and Maya. For compositing we use Nuke. Most of these packages have become very complex and it's become extremely challenging for anybody to know more than one really well. However, once you understand how VFX works, you generally know what you need to do, so it then becomes more straightforward to find out or figure out how to make that happen in any particular package.

This is why our team environment is so important. We have a small, talented team who work closely together. Everyone is encouraged to contribute ideas and expertise. We have twice daily meetings to throw around ideas. There's no stigma here related to asking how to do something in a software package. One minute, you'll be asking one expert how to do something, but the next someone will be tapping into your expertise to find out how to do something else. It's a sort of academic creative conference, happening all day every day. We keep it that way intentionally, it makes the work a lot more fun and stimulating, and makes everyone's work better. At the same time, we all keep learning.

An important thing that arises out of our "r&d" style of VFX development, is the development of our own unique methods. In some cases, our methods are particular ways of using off-the-shelf software packages in concert, passing data sets from one to another. But we also do a lot of our own tool creation, something that we have become known for in the CG community. Every software package has its limitations and almost every project pushes beyond those limitations. No creative director is willing to be told that what they want is not possible. So we do a lot of proprietary development of plugins, that work within our main software packages. These allow us to achieve extra levels of control and to create entirely new physical behaviors.

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For example, our projects for Whale Water and Frey Chocolate required a fluid morphing behavior that simply did not exist, so we built a plugin for RealFlow that made it happen.

For our Epic Mickey project, we needed thin sheets of paint flying thru the air but CG fluid cannot natively create thin sheets of fluid (it always breakup into tiny blads). So we created a plugin, called Smorganic (smooth + organic) that prevented the breakup of the fluid. We develop new tools, or new variations of tools, on almost every project now, and it has become a part of our standard workflow. And it makes each new project easier, because with time we have built up a very large library of proprietary methods. We can take pieces of our unique code and put together new tools for specific project needs in just a day or two, rather than the more typical weeks or months for most studios.
Mars: The last question, do you worry that one day your inspiration suddenly disappear and you can no longer come up with the shocking design? If there will be a day, how do you find the lost inspiration?

Fusion CI Studios: So far, luckily, we haven’t got close to this state of lost inspiration. Sometimes we get tired when the days are long or the projects difficult. But there’s a never ending stream of amazing creative ideas swirling through our studio, both from the artists and from our clients. We have a long list of things we want to develop, experiments to try. One of those is a list of natural phenomena — things like water spouts, perfect breaking waves, air bubbles rising in water, or the most photorealistic pour of beer into a glass. We take most of our inspiration from nature and, with time, have been working out ways of mimicking these various processes in CG, coming up with new technologies. As we do this, our library of methods just keeps growing and getting adapted for other projects. A method developed for making bubbles in beer gets converted to a way of making cough syrup break apart magically in mid-air to form balloons of fluid. This kind of method and idea exchange fuels our inspiration.

Mars: Thank you!
Fusion CI Studios’ work

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