Meet Artist Paul Sutton

by David Heller

I've always been fascinated by the creative process. Where does the inspiration come from? Is the spark always there? Is it persistent? My creative spark shows up rarely and unexpectedly and when it does I'm compelled to take action and create. But, once I've scratched my creative itch it disappears only to return again at another unpredictable time when the cycle begins again. Erratic creativity at best.

In my quest to learn how truly creative people break out of the cycle and are able to consistently devote their lives to the pursuit of their art I decided to visit with ShareCG's artists to learn how they tick and what gives them their magical powers of prolific creativity.

To begin my journey I first chose to pay a visit with Paul Sutton who epitomizes the consummate contemporary artist and has more than 250 works of art posted just on ShareCG.

Thankfully we live in a connected world where travelling from my home in Campbell California to 'sit down' with Paul Sutton who lives six thousand miles away in England, doesn't require anything more than Skype and access to the web. I made this journey a week ago.

Cement Cows in Milton Keynes   Filming Superman 1 in Milton Keynes

Paul lives in the town of Newport Pagnell just 40 minutes north of London and next door to Milton Keynes, a large town that humorously holds on to its last vestiges of rural farmland with a scattering of cement cows who, Paul told me, sport socks during the winter to keep their feet warm, and stand incongruously dwarfed by the same super modern gleaming glass and steel buildings that acted as backdrop for the original Superman film.

Over a pint of suds enjoyed simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic Paul told me that, "Every day I like to be creative in some way. I don't think my day is complete without producing something, otherwise I feel as though I've wasted the day. It's kind of an addiction, really. I do have some black days," he continued, "I go a little crazy. Obviously in Poser I'll produce something that I'm not happy with and I think that it's not creative enough. Even if I don't necessarily publish anything I'll get the work to a single point and if I don't think it's worthy I'll just put it to one side. Eventually something will inspire me and when I think this new inspiration will work perfectly I go back to the piece, add that element and then do something with it."

"My problem is that I'm a perfectionist. I might try fifteen different lighting scenarios to get the perfect lighting. I'll stick with a picture until I'm absolutely overwhelmed with the light that's there. In my mind it has to be the right look or else I'm not happy, so I just keep going with the same picture until I get it right."

Rolling a cigarette a relaxed Paul gave me a bit of insight into his world. "Someone once said to me that you do things that you like and sometimes you do things that you think other people will like. I don't always try to do things that just please people. It's so easy to do that. As you can see online, certainly the art works that get the most attention are typically those that are scantily dressed. But, for me art has to have some kind of concept or some juxtaposition, something other than just being a nude."

I mentioned that, "I recently posted some of your not-nude works on our ShareCG Facebook page. One is your new 'Force of Nature' and it got unbelievable attention, people really loved it, and your 'Pretty Vicious' was liked by more than one-thousand people. One of the comments about Pretty Vicious was, 'I know this woman, I know her!' Pretty Vicious reminded him of someone he knew. It seemed as if there was something familiar to this person about Pretty Vicious that came completely out of your imagination. What was this portrait based on?"

"What Pretty Vicious is wearing, he replied, and her punk look was based on pictures of Sex Pistols' bass player and vocalist Sid Vicious who died in 1979 after overdosing on heroine. Her facial features, especially the big lips, are based on Scarlett Johansson the actress who starred in the 'Girl with the Pearl Earring.'
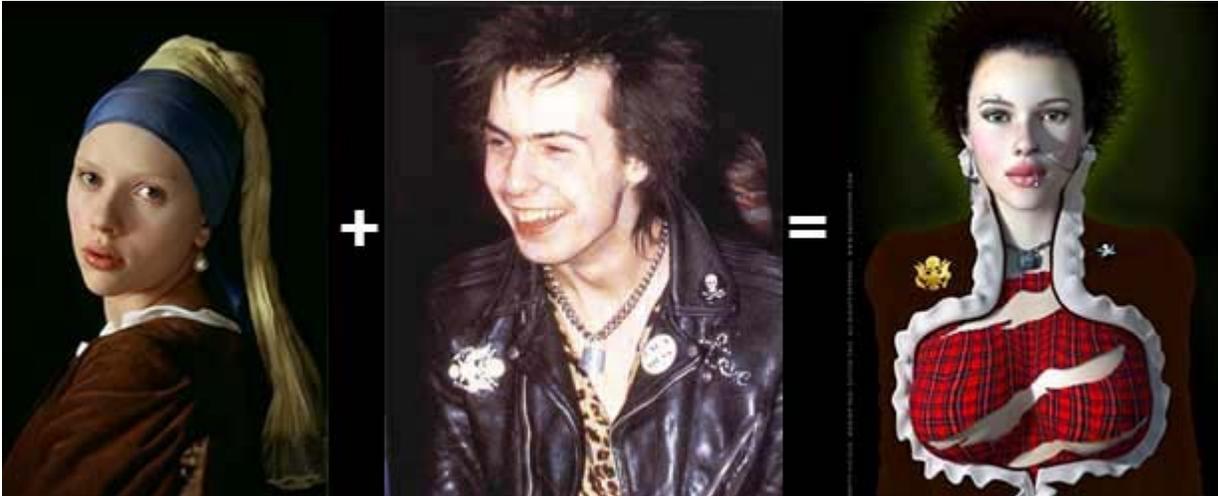
Scarlett Johansson + Sid Vicious = Pretty Vicious

"I always like to do something different and brought a sort of punk element into this portrait to give it an edge. The hair comes from a model you can buy called 'Black Hearted.' It's actually not made for the model I put it on, I just thought that the hair looked like Sid Vicious, a little bit punky."

"I always aim for a particular style of face and the model I used for Pretty Vicious has quite full lips. I also added a safety pin through her eyebrow, she's got a ripped shirt on and she's got the padlock necklace so it's like sweet and sour in that what she's wearing, which is quite punk, is a counterpoint to her sweet face. I wanted a pretty face, but I wanted it to be believable so she had to be a certain age. I didn't want her to be too young and wanted her to be a woman to fit into the kind of genre that I'd done here. "

I was also curious about the genesis and creation of Force of Nature and Paul started be telling me that, "I'd like you to know first off that I do all my work using Poser Pro 2014, Adobe Photoshop, illustrator, and InDesign.

"For Force of Nature I used Photoshop to create the hair. Typically you get a 3D hair prop and place the hair on her head, but in this case the hair prop is flat since it's done in Photoshop, but then in Poser I'm able to layer hair as I want it. I created one version of her hair in Photoshop and then in Poser I placed multiple iterations at angles using different size variations placing the first one forward and then layering the next ones going backwards. I placed various shadows and hair behind the first one so it ended up looking like the hair is full and rich while it's actually flat and made up of multiple JPEGs."

Force of Nature

"Obviously there's no product that will make the hair the way it appears. I like challenges and thought, 'how am I going to produce that?' Force of Nature was originally an original painting and I wanted to reproduce it in a 3D environment. But, there was nothing commercially available that would make the hair look as does in my painting. I tried doing it all in Photoshop, but it never looked quite right. You can add shadows in Photoshop but it's never quite the same as working within the Poser environment where you can adjust how light hits the hair creating the illusion that the hair feels full. And in Poser, even though the hair is only 2D it still leaves a shadow that makes you believe that it's full and rich."

"My original idea was to incorporate surf like waves into the hair, but after rendering I didn't like the result so I redid the work to achieve the essence of being pulled, like a force of nature. It's like there's a magnet pulling the hair and necklace forward rather than the wind blowing them."

Paul became more animated as he started telling me about his pride and joy. "People have said that they want the Adult Barbie Doll art and I've thought about doing a limited print of some of them. One of the Adult Barbie Doll versions I did has more than 160,000 hits worldwide and it's listed number two on ShareCG and last time I checked more than 19,000 people had looked at it!"

Paul told me that Hidden-in-plain-sight humor is present throughout the series and pointed me to a version with a sticker on her private parts that says 'peel here,' which, he explained, "is a subtle reference to the banana in the picture and although Barbie is made by Matel my adult version says Mental. "

Speaking philosophically Paul said that, "the general premise and idea of a Barbie doll is kind of weird isn't it? You're imposing a certain type of look on kids when they grow up, aren't you? Kids are holding their Barbie Doll and thinking, this is how I must look when I get older. My work is tongue and cheek satirical commentary about, you know, blonde hair, a sleek car, and Ken."

Just at this point a cheerful woman's voice popped in and I could almost see the smile on her face as she exclaimed, "It looks a bit like me."

Paul chimed in, "It's too bad you don't have your video on. Sarah looks a bit like a Barbie" Even with broken video, I knew he was happy as he introduced us. "You wouldn't believe, he said enthusiastically, the amount of people who ask where they can buy this doll. I had a Dutch company interested in obtaining the rights to manufacture it at one point. Unfortunately the climate changed and they lost funding for the project. But, maybe one day!"

"Say Paul, I really enjoy some of the early works you put on the site. They were also very tongue and check. All these male Grecian type statues in a row, and pop, there's a naked woman smack

in the middle of the line-up. And your take on The Last Supper and other work based on classical art?"

"I do like the classics. The version of the Last Supper that I did was as accurate to the original as I could get it, but as you see it's all women but, where Mary Magdalene from Dan Brown's Da Vinci Code she is theorized to be in the original, I've inserted a man. The picture's background and table are from the original painting."

 "One of my favorites is the tough girl series. It makes such a shocking statement. I should go back and redo them since Poser has moved on and there are lots more ways now to get more realism now. At that time, three or four years ago, that was the best I could do, and sometimes I do go back to update images. I would like to go back to this Tough Girl series. I can add what I've learned and make it 3 times better."

"Oh, almost forgot. I made the little machine gun earrings and the Marlboro Blacks." I could almost see his eyes glinting. "She's so hard that she smokes Marlboro Black. It's got a really high tar content."

After looking at Paul's gallery of work I had to ask him how he was able to achieve the realism and humanism he does working solely in Poser.

"I was a photographer for around 20 years and the photography in me wants me to reproduce the type of realism that I've done in my pictures. Not always, but it has to have some element of realism. Since you can achieve realism with Poser why not do it? I wouldn't like it to look stiff, I don't want it to look like a blow up doll, and I'd rather have the real thing.

I asked Paul if he was working on anything new that he wanted to share with ShareCG members.

"I just did a review of Poser Pro 2014 and for that I've produced an image that I tried to make as best as I can since it is going into this printed magazine. Once the magazine is released I'll put the picture up on ShareCG. (July 17th 3DArtist Online.com) 3D Artist Magazine. Published by Image Publishing, part of a bigger publishing group."

Paul's Tip for All Artists

"Look on the internet, go to art galleries, get inspiration from everything you look at. Look at The way hair falls, the way people actually, really are I suppose. Look for realism look at real pictures rather than what you imagine is real. Look for references, once you look at enough of them, and absorb them, you'll get inspired to create something!