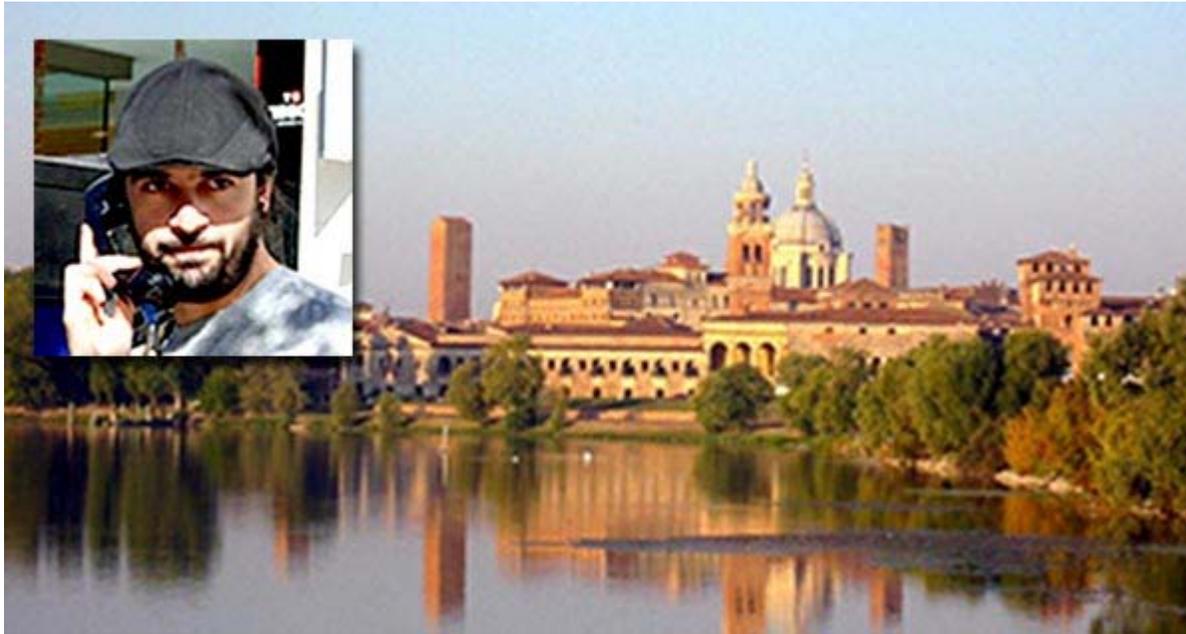


Meet CG Generalist Sebastiano D'Aprile

by David Heller



[Sebastiano D'Aprile](#), a quintessential Renaissance man, was born, raised and schooled in the small Italian Renaissance city of [Mantua](#) in the northern province of Lombardy where William Shakespeare's Romeo took refuge after being expelled from Verona.

Driven by his need to create, Sebastiano left Mantua for college in Torino keen to learn everything he could about art and the technical and artistic fundamentals of the 21st century's emerging art form: Computer Graphics and Animation.

In my quest to fully understand 'creativity' and the inner workings of creative people I caught up with Sebastiano in L.A., where he is now pursuing his creative dream as a CG generalist at [Moo Studios](#).

During my virtual visit I told Sebastiano that I was taken by his work and that I'd like to learn how he got to the point where he is now able to create high quality works like his recent 2013 demo reel and 'Rules,' his animated short starring a bottle opener bouncing around in the desert searching for a wine bottle to open.

I began my interview by asking Sebastiano when and where his creative journey started and how he arrived at this point in his career.

Sebastiano told me that, "I started in Italy but didn't initially study to become an artist. In high school, although I majored in technical studies and Electrical Engineering, I also studied some

art and multimedia in art that included a very basic introduction to CG with [3D Studio MAX](#). I fell in love with CG immediately. I was impressed by the artistic and creative possibilities. I remember that for the final exam I did a CG video and it went way beyond my teacher's expectations. I started by building a character. I textured it, I rigged it, I told a story with it, and, I'm super ashamed when I see it now. But, at the time I really liked it. It was my first CG animation.

When it came time to go to college in Torino I decided to completely change my major from Electrical Engineering to Art, and when I did, my life changed forever. I became immersed in learning all I could about all art forms, studying computer generated art, art history, cinema and theater. In fact, while I was in Torino I founded, directed and performed in an experimental collective theater. I fell in love with anything and everything that had to do with art, and I think that I went in this direction because the arts are me and because I hated being a technical guy. I found myself!"

I asked him to tell me a little bit about his current day job and he responded by saying that, "For the past two years I've been working full time at Moo Studios, a small production company in Los Angeles. I started as a rigger, but I didn't want to focus just on rigging so I'm a generalist there, and anytime computer graphics are involved in a project I am the CG and visual effects supervisor.

I asked Sebastiano what his favorite CG tools are and how he uses them and he told me that, "I mainly use [Maya](#) for CG creation and Adobe [After Effects](#) for compositing. I know that there are a lot of people who are [Nuke](#) nerds and that there are also After Effect nerds who hate Nuke. I don't love or hate any tool, but I'm pretty happy with After Effects. Especially because in most studios we don't just composite CG elements we do a lot of motion graphics and we mix motion graphics with pure CG and for that I think After Effects is still the best tool.

"How about tools for Vfx work?" I asked.

"I use a lot of [Photoshop](#)," Sebastiano said, "and of course Maya, and [Mudbox](#) for texturing. When we lay CG on top of or accompanying live action footage I usually use [SynthEyes](#) to track the footage in order to get a virtual camera that matches exactly the one used during the shoot."

I told Sebastiano that, "I was watching your [2015 demo reel](#) and it's really great stuff. It's begins really commercial, and then suddenly there's this corkscrew bottle opener bouncing around in the desert! Where did that come from?"



“That’s my personal project. One time I didn’t have much to do and decided to make a short movie. In my mind I had an image of a corkscrew jumping around. A corkscrew-bottle opener’s shape is very human like. At the time I had just moved to the U.S. and one of the things that I was most impressed by was the nature here, especially the deserts. Since I’ve moved here the desert has been a big part of my life and when I have a couple of days off I take long rides through the desert solo or with a friend.

As I was saying, when I first moved here I was impressed by the desert and I had in my mind the corkscrew doing something and I decided to put the two things together. And, I wanted to tell a story in a short animation. Whenever someone sees it, it’s not very clear and I want to make sure that everyone knows that it was not my intention to be clear... Although this is my personal animation it’s a very impersonal story too. It’s called ‘[Rules](#)’ and shows my first impressions of the United States – Rules and desert.

So this guy, this corkscrew, who happens to be in the desert looking for some wine but there’s a rule that in the desert you cannot drink wine. And so he doesn’t have anything to drink. He sees a mirage of a beautiful shiny bottle in the distance and he tries to reach it and right before he thinks he’s going to get it a police cheese grater comes from the sky and traps him ... got him! It’s a little bit nonsensical, but fun.”

“Is there going to be a sequel to Rules and is there going to be a happy ending?” I asked.

‘I’ve been thinking of a sequel where maybe he’ll fall in love with another corkscrew. ‘

“And they walk off happily into the sunset?”



“Exactly! And, I’d also like you to pay attention to the shapes of corkscrews and you’ll find that some of them are more girlish while others are more manlike. Perfect characters for a 3D animated short.”

“Just to wrap it up, what advice would you give to people who are just getting started and have a passion for CG art and animation and would like to pursue a career in this field,?”

“I would tell them not to learn a tool just for the sake of learning that tool. Try to learn the tool while making something bigger. For example, always think about a story, think about a small animation or a still image and learn the tools that you can use to make that happen so you’ll always have something to show. While you’re involved in the process you may find out that you are a very good story teller or discover other abilities that you didn’t realize you had.

Don’t try to learn a tool just because you want to add it to your resume. Try to do something bigger. Try to have all the tools you’re learning converge in your final work of art.

Another good thing is to browse the web and bookmark everything that you like. We live in front of a computer screen and bookmarks are very easy to do. Just bookmark anything and everything that interests you.

And, when you’re out and about be observant and take notes. I’m always on the lookout for awkward or funny human foibles and odd situations that can be turned into compelling animations. Bring a professional note pad with you like I do.

I get creative inspirations every day, every half an hour. I always have a notebook with me because I think my memory is not that good anymore. So, I need to write down every image and thought that comes into my mind. Unfortunately many of the images come when I’m driving, so I can’t write them all down and a lot gets lost.”

I assured him that, “They’ll come back. They’re still in your mind hiding someplace but they’re not gone forever, right?”

“Absolutely,” he said and I interjected that, “They’ll just reenter your consciousness one day and they’ll be new to you then.” I could almost see him smile 😊