

Mikros image
www.mikrosimage.eu

Customer Success Story

Autodesk® Flame®
Autodesk® Maya®
and Autodesk® Lustre® software

“Along with a great level of interactivity, Flame allows us to see the project globally while other products only allow you to work shot by shot.”

—Laurent Creusot
Flame artist & VFX supervisor
Mikros image

The Bear / L'Ours.

Mikros Image Brings Bear to Life with Flame, Maya and Lustre

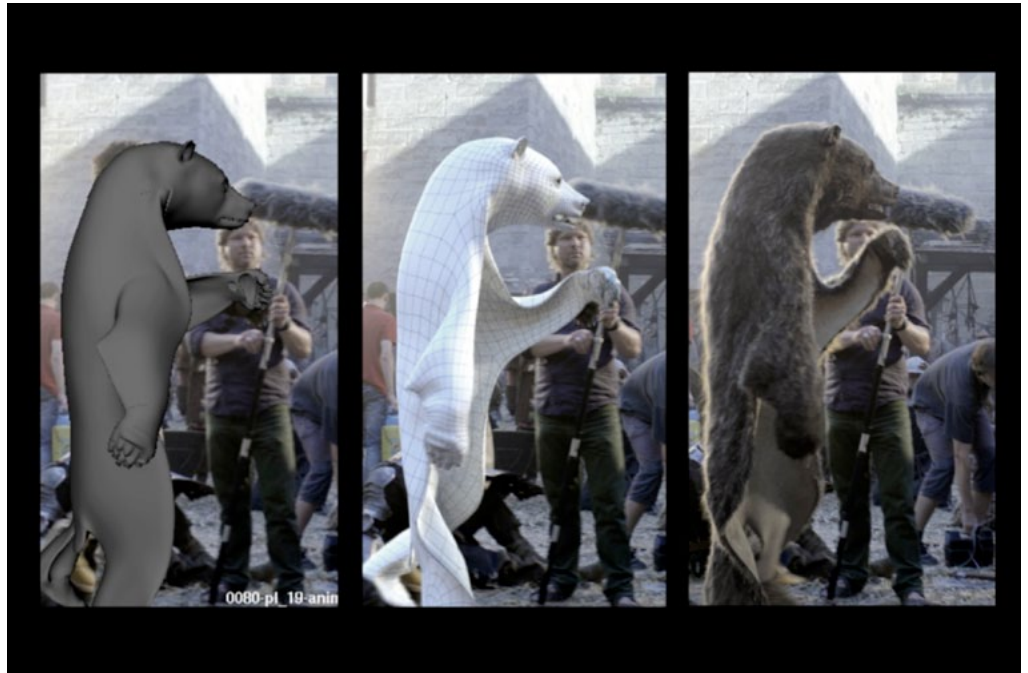


Image courtesy of Mikros image.

Project Summary

France-based Mikros image was behind one of the most successful commercials of 2011, entitled *The Bear*. An award-winning promo for Canal+, *The Bear* was part of a campaign focused on the merits of cinema. The promo's main character is unlike most we've ever seen – a bear in the form of a rug – which assumes the role of a passionate film director working to bring his cinematic vision to life.

The promo opens with a dramatic action-filled battle scene and promptly cuts to a behind-the-scenes look at a “day in the life” of a director who wants to remain true to his art. Like his human counterparts, the furry director guides actors' performances, collaborates with special effects teams, and fiercely defends his ideas in a very heated, yet comedic outburst aimed at members of the film crew.

In producing the challenging spot for Canal+, Mikros image turned to Autodesk® Flame®, Autodesk® Maya® and Autodesk® Lustre® software as their creative toolsets to help bring *The Bear* to life and to establish the overall look for the promo.

The Challenge

To deliver the challenging project within a 3-month period, Mikros image needed to bring their top talent together. Mikros image relied on Autodesk creative toolsets that would help the team leap into the cinematic world of the imaginative bear rug. Mikros image faced both artistic and technical challenges in the realization of *The Bear* project. The artistic challenges were focused primarily on the creation of human-like emotions in a CG bear character, whereas the technical challenges were focused on trying to achieve the photo-realistic look of a furry rug.

In a case of life imitating art, *The Bear* director, Matthijs Van Heijningen, had a clear vision for the project from start to finish. Van Heijningen wanted to capture human-like emotions in a photo-realistic brown bear while retaining the bear's rug-like form. Additionally, he wanted to avoid a “cartoon-like” effect in the animation style since it could dehumanize the bear and lessen the animal's emotional characteristics.

Autodesk®

“One of our greatest challenges was the creation of facial expressions during the interview scenes” says Guillaume Ho, CG supervisor. To guide the animation process, the director shot multiple scenes with real actors to capture facial expressions as a reference point for the 3D character animation in Maya. Ho goes on to explain, “with real actors and audio voiceovers as a reference point, we were able to recreate all of the gestures, movements and emotional references in Maya for a more realistic result.”

The Solution

Mikros image has built an extensive Maya-based 3D pipeline across their entire facility to meet demanding production requirements. Maya delivers a comprehensive creative feature set with tools for 3D animation, modeling, simulation, and rendering. Given the challenges with the project’s CG shots, a sophisticated rigging and simulation pipeline was required. “Maya delivered the creative toolset we needed to address the complexity of the project’s animation needs”, said Olivier Mitonneau, a Maya artist who worked on the promo.

Specifically, Maya nCloth was extremely valuable for developing dynamic cloth simulations and helping to create a realistic effect for the bear’s skin and fur. “In the interview scenes, the bear’s skin follows the form of the chair and when the bear moves his arms, the skin reacts in a very natural way. nCloth is a great tool for creating this type of dynamic animation”, said Mitonneau.

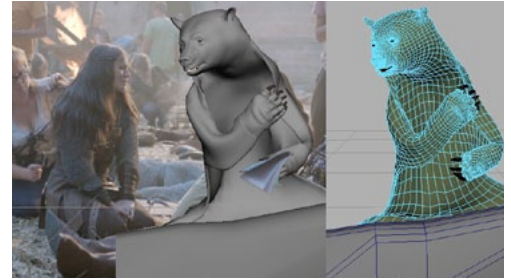
Along with Maya 3D animation software, Mikros image used Flame as an essential part of its compositing workflow and for all finishing. Although most of the CG imagery in *The Bear* was created using Maya, a few CG shots were also created directly in Flame. “Flame is an ideal tool for working interactively with a director or an agency” says Laurent Creusot, Flame artist & VFX supervisor.

“The tool’s interactivity gives artists the ability to make changes or additions very quickly and you can see the entire project globally rather than working shot by shot. There is significant value to the creative process given that you can better understand the different elements of each part of the project”, says Creusot. In addition, Lustre was used for final color correction on the project and Creusot adds “the interaction between Flame and Lustre is very user-friendly since you can share the project easily on both systems, which makes things very efficient.”

The Result

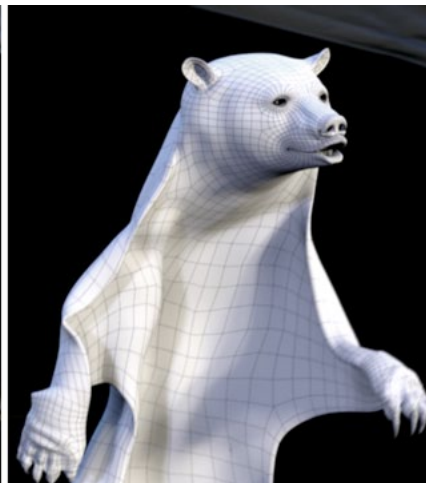
The promo’s director, Van Heijningen, was very involved throughout the entire production and post-production process, working very closely with the Mikros image team. Creating a bear with a body as flexible and supple as a carpet while preserving the characteristics of an intense, energetic living creature was not easy. Mikros approached this artistic and technical challenge with fierce determination, a robust toolset, and a collective meeting of creative minds. Benoit Holl, Head of CG Commercials, explains, “our technical experience combined with creative tools such as Maya, Flame and Lustre allowed us to concentrate more on creating the artistic and emotional aspects of the bear.” With regards to the bear’s acting abilities, Creusot adds “you can truly relate to him while he’s speaking, and his emotions do transpire.”

A key component of the project’s success was the use of previsualization to experiment during the pre-production process. Using Maya, multiple animation tests were conducted to guide the Mikros team prior to shooting the promo. Flame artist and on-set supervisor Laurent Creusot says “we knew from the start we had a good project in our hands and the use of excellent references helped us to create a really high-end and dynamic digital bear rug character”.



Images courtesy of Mikros image.

As a company with more than 150 full-time collaborators and 70 freelance artists, Mikros image strives to stay true to its vision and a focus on quality. Talent, creative toolsets and efficient workflows are shared across various departments. As for what simplifies the complexity of post-production, Creusot concludes “the ease of moving shots from one application to another with easier interoperability brings significant artistic value and efficiency to any post-production facility.” Mikros image’s combination of creativity, top talent, creative toolsets and an efficient workflow all contribute to its continued success.



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—Benoit Holl
Head of CG Commercials
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