

Ben Ib
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with Mudbox.

—Ben Ib,
Director

All in *The Wall*.

Director Ben Ib uses Autodesk® software to create stunning concert visuals for Roger Waters' tour featuring Pink Floyd's iconic rock opera.



Image courtesy of Sean Evans and Ben Ib Ltd.

Summary

When *The Wall*, the 11th studio album from progressive rock band Pink Floyd, was released in 1979, it quickly became a critical and commercial sensation. Drawing his inspiration from themes of personal isolation and abandonment, Pink Floyd bassist and lyricist Roger Waters struck a chord with audiences everywhere that has yet to wane. The album spawned a landmark film in 1982, which featured the deeply evocative, often terrifying animations of illustrator Gerald Scarfe. In 2010, Waters began *The Wall Live*, a worldwide tour of performances of the complete album, backed by some of the most spectacular concert visuals audiences are ever likely to see.

For London-based music video director and 3D animator Ben Ib, *The Wall Live* presented a unique opportunity to both rekindle the spirit of an iconic rock opera and revitalize that vision for a new generation. Working closely with both Waters and Sean Evans, art director on the tour, Ib used a combination of Autodesk® Maya® and Autodesk® Mudbox™ software to create spellbinding visuals—many of them based on Scarfe's original drawings—particularly for the live performances of the songs “Run Like Hell” and “Empty Spaces.”

The Challenge

“Working on *The Wall Live* was the opportunity of a lifetime,” says Ib. “It was also something of a balancing act. The concept of the album and Scarfe's imagery from the film are so firmly entrenched in people's minds that it would be almost sacrilegious to mess with it. At the same time, it was important to give concert audiences something fresh. The big challenge in the end was staying true to Roger's vision, while extending into new and exciting areas, and on to this immense screen. That said, there was a huge amount of experimentation and creativity involved in these animations, and Autodesk Maya gave me the tools to take the sense and motion of *The Wall* in wildly different directions. We had a lot of fun with this.”

“Run Like Hell”

Reflecting the dark sense of foreboding implicit in the lyrics of “Run Like Hell,” the animations projected onto the massive screen behind Waters and his band include advertising images and slogans as familiar as they are fascistic. As the song progresses, the bricks of the wall, continually spray-painted with graffiti, are swept away again and again to reveal increasingly disturbing images of war and destruction.

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“Roger knew exactly the look he wanted, so we were really following his lead,” says Ib. “To create the continually crumbling, fragmented look of the wall, I made heavy use of Maya nCloth. With nCloth, we could do the simulations in real time, so we had the confidence of knowing that if the wall didn’t fall properly, we could just rewind and try something else.”

As “Run Like Hell” reaches its crescendo, the whole wall explodes to reveal an ominous cluster of Humvee military vehicles invading the screen for an execution scene for which Waters had very specific ideas.

“Roger had that scene planned right down to the frame, and it’s amazing how closely it works with the music,” says Ib. “We used a great deal of the volumetric lighting in mental ray, which ultimately made for some hefty render times, especially when you consider that the image size of each frame was 8560 by 1080 pixels. By using the nCloth simulations to refine our vision, however, we were able to keep our rendering times manageable. During the planning

stage, we were also able to use Mudbox to rebuild the original image from behind the wall that appears on the original album artwork. That was something I would not have attempted before I learned what Mudbox can do.”

“Empty Spaces”

For the performance of “Empty Spaces,” Ib returned to one of his favorite Maya tools, using Paint Effects work with Scarfe’s original animations. Working with the celebrated illustrations, Ib was inspired through his use of Maya. “It would have been just plain wrong to make Scarfe’s visions appear too futuristic or digital,” he says. “Using Maya Paint Effects, however, we were able to create a look we called ‘cel animation on steroids.’ It was incredible how quickly we could get results with Paint Effects. We created pulsating flower roots that expanded into muscles. By using Maya to tweak the presets and customize the look, we really got our ideas flowing. With Paint Effects, the file sizes remained light and the renders were very quick.”

The Results

Although he has been using Maya for over a decade, Ib’s move to music video directing, and more live action work, curtailed his animation work for a few years. Now that he has returned to projects which require using Maya, he is excited by what he sees: “The software has come a long way in opening up possibilities for 3D. Using Maya on this project wasn’t your usual use of 3D graphics and animation. The software enabled us to be messy, playful, and experimental.”

As *The Wall* Live gathers glowing reviews across the world, Ib has gone on to creating concert visuals for Kylie Minogue’s Aphrodite tour, continuing to use Maya and Mudbox.

“I’ve been using Maya Fluid Effects and vector rendering a lot more, and I’ve used Mudbox to sculpt images of Greek gods and that kind of thing,” he says. “I’m really falling in love with Mudbox.”

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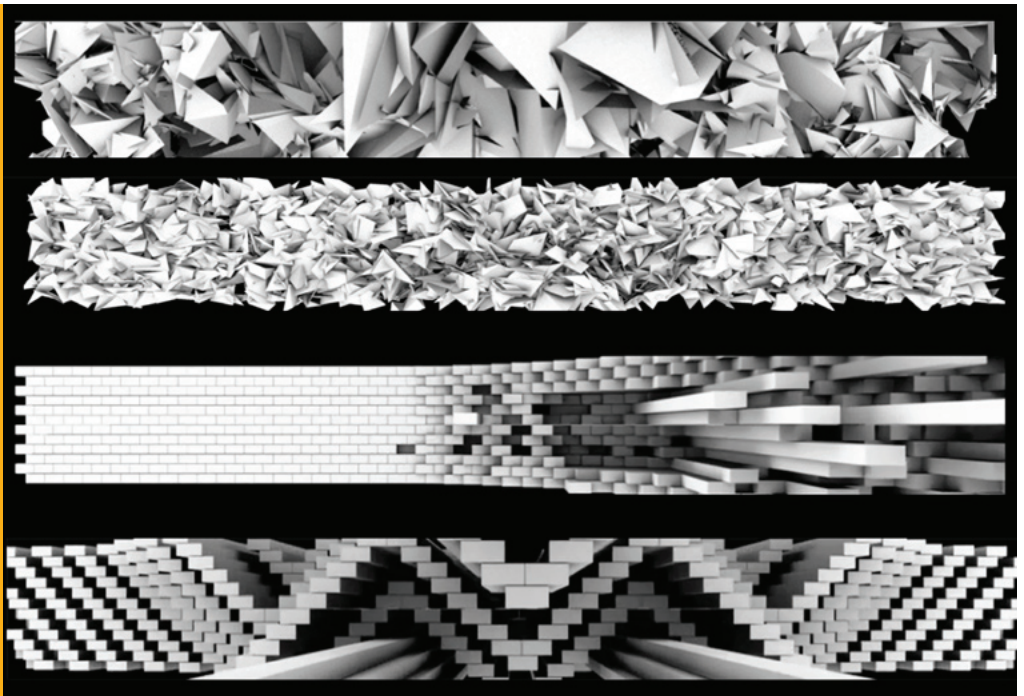


Image courtesy of Sean Evans and Ben Ib Ltd.