Technology
in action

Computing has transformed the way most of us work but we could probably go back to pen and paper if we had to. For 3D artist John Clive his PC is his drawing board, as he tells Rosemary Haworth

John Clive is an award-winning artist, filmmaker and commercials director. Most recently his entry, Yellow4, won the Canon award for graphics and illustration in the Digital Creators Contest 2002. The masterpiece was created entirely on the PC with nothing either representative of, or based on, anything from the outside world. In this sense, Clive's work is a traditional abstract even though his means of creation is not. However, John Clive has long been an innovator in the world of digital arts.

Clive made a name for himself creating TV commercials and films. Back in the dim and distant past, when the adverts came on the nation would collectively rush to put the kettle on. These days, commercials are often at least as entertaining as the programs they bookend. Clive's dancing cows for Anchor Butter was one of the earliest such adverts and is still one of the best-known examples of computer animation in the medium.

Other credits on his CV include a talking frog for a Lemsip ad, which he created a full five years before the cute kids' movie *Babe* made computer-animated animal stars almost commonplace. His technical skills are also coveted by other filmmakers – David Puttnam and Franco Zeferelli have both made use of his visual effects know-how.

Clive still makes commercials but is also able to pursue a complimentary career as a digital artist. In May, his work was on display as a solo exhibition at a central London gallery. He continues to hone his skills in computer-generated graphics and 3D animation and is a real proselytiser for people learning them from a young age.

It's the way that you do it

Surprisingly, given his background in commercials, Clive is a total digital convert and eschews the drawing board for a direct relationship with his creations. These he designs and realises in full on his computer, usually in his chosen medium of 3D software.

His fascination is with creating works on the computer that "cannot be done or could not have been done any other way". His is an art form that only exists because of the PC. Partly, he claims, this is because computer-generated applications do not restrict him to a single medium. He cites as inspiration a 1960s process artist called Klaus Oldenburg.

Clive's digital creations are the result of experimentation, as he explores the possibilities of the medium and pushes it to the maximum. The results are both organic and as far removed from nature as can be. "If I can visualise the idea before I begin, it never goes any further," he boasts. The knowledge adventure – described as "the process" by Clive – is the whole point. And he creates solely for himself.

Clive sums it up by stating: "When I'm making a commercial or a film I'm simply following a brief, realising someone's else's idea. When I'm creating art, I'm the client."

Butter wouldn't melt…

When it comes to his bread and butter – making adverts – he takes a very different, workmanlike approach. He makes "live action commercials" that "sometimes have CG (computer-generated)

Tools of the trade

John Clive studied at Ealing College of Art in west London and is based in the capital. He is a commercials and film director, computer-generated graphics animator and visual effects consultant but is also an established digital artist. Clive began experimenting with computer arts in the mid-1980s and has used software ranging from the first version of Maya 2D to the best of today's 3D graphics packages.

His pieces can be found in collections in the UK, US, Germany, Japan and Argentina. He has won a number of awards for his films and artwork, including the Canon award for graphics and illustration in the Digital Creators Contest 2002.

• Website **Digital artwork: www.johnclive.co.uk; Commercials and films: www.johnclive.com**

• UK representative **Storm Films: 020 7439 1616**

• Hardware used **Dell 510 dual-processor PC with 2GB of RAM and a 500GB hard disk. Other equipment depends on the commercial commission. John Clive's digital artwork is purely PC-based.**

• Software used **Primarily 3D Studio, Rhinoceros and a range of 2D and 3D image editing, authoring and morphing packages.**

Anchor Butter

Alka Seltzer

Lemsip

elements" and his specialism is creating talking animals.

Although 3D modelling is time consuming, the ability to explore an apparently real environment and experience the result of effects tested upon it is invaluable.

"I previsualise all my commercials," he says. Clients get a 25fps (frames per second) mockup of the end result. When he started working this way, combining CG features with more traditional film, only complex sequences were previsualised. Clients are now given entire projects that are effectively complete before they are fully realised.

As his commercial website, www.johnclive.com explains, this approach has many advantages. "Instead of having only a limited time to line up a shot, experimentation with moves and angles can be done offline at the director's leisure. Sequences can be approved in advance; the art department knows to the foot how much set needs to be built; grips know exactly where to lay tracks; and action sequences can be set up in half the time."

Both parties know exactly what they're getting and it helps in making decisions such as whether to make final lighting and angle changes.

John taught himself how to use the tools that he now relies on both for his commercial work and his own interest. In the main, he sculpts within 3D Studio but also uses applications such as Rhinoceros which, as he explains, is "particularly good for [rendering images of] nerves".

Just can't get enough

His design work makes huge demands on a computer. Asked whether he uses a PC or an Apple Mac, he gives us a hard stare and, after a pause, offers "a PC", as if his answer was an obvious one. In Clive's opinion the Mac is not an adequate platform for 3D graphic art.

Neither, it seems, is his existing setup. He acknowledges that the kit at his disposal – a Dell 510 PC with dual 2GHz processors, 2GB of RAM and a 400-500GB hard drive – constitutes a fairly luxurious setup. But he amiably agrees that he hankers after more and that, however high his PC specification, there will probably never be "enough".

As someone pushing the limits of technological capabilities and visual effects, Clive may never be completely satisfied with what he's got.

However, at the moment the PC offers both the hardware and software needed for his particular take on 3D sculpture. Until, that is, his imagination hits on something even more innovative and then there's no telling how much processing power will suffice. ■