

Paintings Per Second

By Tim Sassoon

Video Gogh (plug-in for Adobe After Effects 4.0 and later). \$89.95. Windows 98/NT and Power Mac. RE:Vision Effects, info@revisionfx.com, www.revisionfx.com.

THERE COMES A TIME WHEN EVERY MOTION-graphics designer hits a creative block. And when that happens, there's no better cure than having a great new After Effects plug-in to play with. RE:Vision Effects, Inc., a company founded by two veteran visual-effects wizards, has given us the Video Gogh plug-in. Based on the same technology that the founders used to create the "painted worlds" effect in the film *What Dreams May Come*, Video Gogh creates a "moving painting" from any kind of footage.

A single still taken from the effect might look like an image passed through



Video Gogh converts the video of a rippling flag into a moving oil painting, using a brush size of 0.15.

one of Photoshop's many artistic filters (such as Watercolor), but Video Gogh actually tracks the movements of individual features throughout a scene. Brush strokes, which are adjustable, move with the subject, and new ones grow out of objects and features as they appear. This gives the effect an entirely different look from what you'll find anywhere else—one with lots of visual continuity and interest.

The brush strokes also create their own alpha channels, making it easy for you to composite lightly painted footage on an unpainted version of your footage. I found that a light coat of paint composited in this way gives the scene a nice air of unreality without taking it too far into the abstract.

Other effects often come with a bliz-

zard of sliders and pop-ups, but thankfully, Video Gogh requires only a few easily learned controls. In the Effect Controls palette, you can choose the style of painting (oily, watercolor, or chalk), its opacity, and the size of the brush. You can also specify how far apart brush strokes are from each other (or, in other words, how many brush strokes paint your scene).

Video Gogh uses considerably more RAM than most plug-ins, needing an extra 30 MB to process full-resolution video. Also, because the plug-in needs to keep track of pixel positions across every frame in a sequence, you can't use distributed rendering, or stop and restart rendering without creating discontinuity in the image flow. But if you have a fast computer, you'll get an amazing variety of looks for your footage by manipulating a few simple controls.

Video Gogh is a worthwhile, inspirational addition to the toolkit of the motion-graphics designer. • Tim Sassoon is Creative Director of Sassoon

Film Design in Santa Monica, California, and teaches motion graphics at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena.

Sound Bytes

By Jeff Carlson

Beatnik Editor and Editor Pro (standalone applications). Editor is free; Editor Pro, which supports MP3-formatted files, is \$24.95. Windows 95/98/NT and Power Mac, OS 8 and later. Beatnik, (650) 295-2300, www.beatnik.com.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT ADDING sound to your Web page? I'm not talking about something clumsy like forcing a .wav or MIDI file to play when a page



PBS's site for kids uses Beatnik software to add various sounds to parts of the page (the links in the upper-left corner play "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star").

loads; I mean real interactive sound that adds audible depth to your site. Buttons hum, background music indicates which section of the site you're in, navigational elements whisper their destinations. Over time, the multimedia promise of the Web has delivered rich visuals—but we don't walk around wearing earplugs, so why should we settle for the same effect on the Web?

You'll be happy to hear that now we don't have to. Using Beatnik's Editor or Editor Pro, you can add true interactive sound to your Web site. You can import sound samples from MIDI devices or existing media files, edit the samples, and then export them into Beatnik's Rich Music Format (RMF, which gives you marvelously compact files) for playing in a browser equipped with the Beatnik Player plug-in (required for hearing the RMF files). You can also draw on the library of RMF instruments built into the Beatnik Player to specify, for example, that clicking an image plays a piano's low c.

One of Beatnik's strengths is its multi-layered complexity. If you're looking only to add some spice to your page's rollovers or insert a background rhythm, but you're not a musician, the Beatnik Editor includes several good pre-made examples. Prepping them for your Web site is often as simple as exporting the RMF file. At the same time, technical audiophiles will be pleased to learn that Beatnik's Editor also provides controls for advanced sound

manipulation—you can modify instrument properties such as modulation and resonance. And, if you think

your hard work will become fodder for others, the Beatnik Editor lets you embed encrypted copyright information into RMF files.

Getting Beatnik sounds on your Web page isn't always a simple process, however. Beatnik relies heavily on JavaScript, so if you want to add its functionality by hand, I recommend that you be quite familiar with JavaScript coding. (See Beatnik's Web site for some helpful tutorials and tools.) But with a Windows version of the Editor due out in late spring of 2000, Beatnik is taking interactive audio on the Web far beyond the competition.

• Jeff Carlson, the coauthor of *Real World Adobe GoLive 4* (Adobe Press), is a regular contributor to *Adobe Magazine*.

Foreign Service

By Agen Schmitz

4Translation.com (Web service and plug-in for Adobe Acrobat 4.0). \$29 for plug-in; rates vary for translation. Windows 95/98/NT only for plug-in. 4Translation, (888) 777-9531, www.4translation.com.

AS THE WORLD CONTINUES TO SHRINK, thanks to advances in communication (the Internet) and distribution (next-day air delivery), new commerce paths and possibilities for businesses are becoming available on a global scale. But while we have the means to transmit all manner of audio, video, and print materials from country to country, there's still a niggling communication hurdle: language.

Enter 4Translation, a Web service that translates technical and business materials using a global network of native speakers. They currently provide translations in

more than 30 languages, from major European and Asian languages to more localized ones (such as Norwegian, Hindi, or Hebrew), to a few specific dialects (such as Brazilian or European Portuguese).

The process is easy: visit the Web site and use the Instant Quote form to submit a document for pricing and scheduling. If you send an Acrobat PDF file or either a Microsoft Word or Rich Text Format (RTF) file, you'll get a quote back for your job within minutes via e-mail. (You can quicken this process even further by using the PDFCount plug-in for Acrobat, detailed below.) Other file formats, such as Adobe InDesign, Adobe PageMaker, and QuarkXPress are accepted, but quotes come back within 24 hours.

4Translation uses a logarithmic calculation for its estimate, assessing both word count and number of target languages and providing discounts based on volume. Thus, the per-word rate ranges from \$0.18 to \$100 (U.S.)—the latter determined if you have only one word you need translated; there is a \$100 minimum. The final product is delivered in Word, HTML, or RTF format; 4Translation also offers a desktop publishing service that can work with a client's source file.

To test the service, I submitted a marketing bulletin using the PDFCount plug-in for Acrobat 4.0 (it also works with Acrobat Reader and Acrobat Exchange 3.01). After exporting my PageMaker document into a PDF file, I opened Acrobat and chose the Word Count option from the Plug-Ins menu, which gave me the stats: 1 page, 483 words. Clicking the Send for Quotation button gave me the option of selecting my source (English) and target (German) languages. (Unfortunately, not all languages included in 4Translation services are shown in the plug-in menu; if you need, say, a Vietnamese or Swedish translation, you have to check *Obscure Languages*.) A bid was returned within minutes—\$136 for translation and independent edit—and the translated document was delivered within three days. *Ausgezeichnet!*

So while we're no closer to instantaneous multilingual communication (à la the babel fish in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*), 4Translation is helping to bridge the gap and quicken the pace.

• Agen Schmitz is a featured writer in *Real World Adobe GoLive 4* (Adobe Press).