

Interview

SHANE MIELKE

A creative adrenaline junkie whose drive to improve himself has helped him achieve commissions from some of the biggest names in the gaming and movie industries...



M meet Shane Seminole Mielke, a 35-year-old designer and creative director from Southern California whose passion for Photoshop, photography and web work has seen him create artwork for major names in the field, such as Activision and Warner Bros.

With such an impressive CV to his name, you'd forgive this creative for being bigheaded at worst or overly confident at the least. However, a few minutes with Mielke, and his modesty and desire to continually improve himself are clear for all to see. "Being surrounded by multi-talented friends who have interests other than my own motivates me," he begins. "They constantly inspire me to learn the things they're interested in simply by being amazing at what they do. When I see these talented people hard at work, loving what they do, I thirst to take a small piece of their excitement, passion and knowledge and infuse it into myself. It's actually a form of jealousy, I think!"

This envy shows through in the artist's more recent work in his photographic elements – a talent picked up via one of his friends: "I wanted to be like him, take beautiful pictures like him and also use the images in my design work. Now I have a ton of camera gear and my passion for photography has helped my overall vision, design style and is now leading me down a new path of artwork outside of web design."

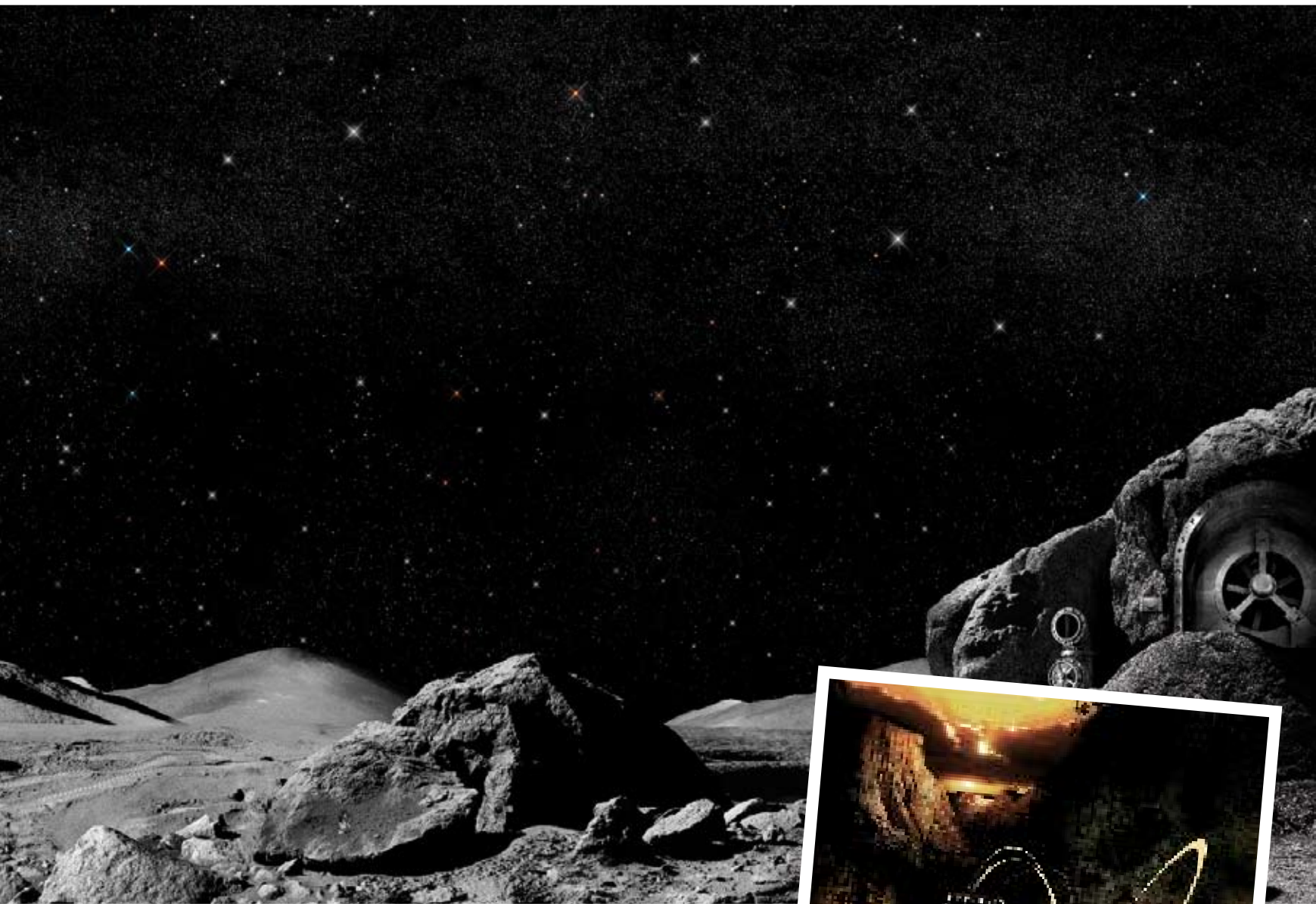
A country boy

Growing up on a rural five-acre ranch at the edge of the Cleveland National Forest in Southern California, Mielke's early experiences have marked

his Photoshop style differently from the wealth of urban artists to emerge of late: "We were miles away from our nearest neighbour and 15 minutes from a grocery store. Growing up surrounded by a national forest definitely influenced my style to be more organic and driven by nature – drastically different from most of my urban friends, I grew up hiking, exploring, fishing, swimming and hunting, all in my own back yard. Consciously or unconsciously, all of these experiences combined to impact on my style long before I ever started expressing myself through digital design. It's ironic that I've ended up at a place like 2Advanced whose name and perceived futuristic style is in contrast to much of the work I enjoy producing."

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Shane Mielke



In order to produce these organic artworks, Mielke begins by searching out all the necessary assets as well as additional textures and background. This process means the designer can get to know his project inside out before he starts work: "This mundane process not only allows me to get acquainted with all of the assets, but leaves my mind free to wander and explore the possibilities of the design. By doing this, I usually avoid the pressure of staring at a blank starting canvas wondering where I am going to begin."

This technique is something the creative has taught himself, as he has had no formal training – a fact he's spent much of his working life trying to come to terms with: "I continually felt inferior to others who studied art in college. In my mind, they knew what was right or wrong according to the principles of art and design. I fell into the hole that many beginners do and questioned everything I did. I always asked for feedback (which is a good thing), but I never had the

JUXTAPOSITION (MAIN): "A panoramic moonscape for The Favourite Website Awards (FWA) founder, Rob Ford"

confidence to say, 'I know this looks good and is the best solution.'"

His confidence came in 2000, when Mielke finally had the courage to start thinking of himself as a creative: "Then I was able to start relaxing and feel a creative flow when I worked. It took years, but I slowly started to see the way I wanted things and no longer had to ask others for advice or look to other websites for inspiration. Eventually, I reinvented myself and I was no longer just a developer who knew everything about building a site. I evolved into someone with balance as both an artist and a developer."

Since his reincarnation, Mielke has continued to push himself creatively and experiment with styles. His ambition for 2009 is to start to move away from web work and become better >>>



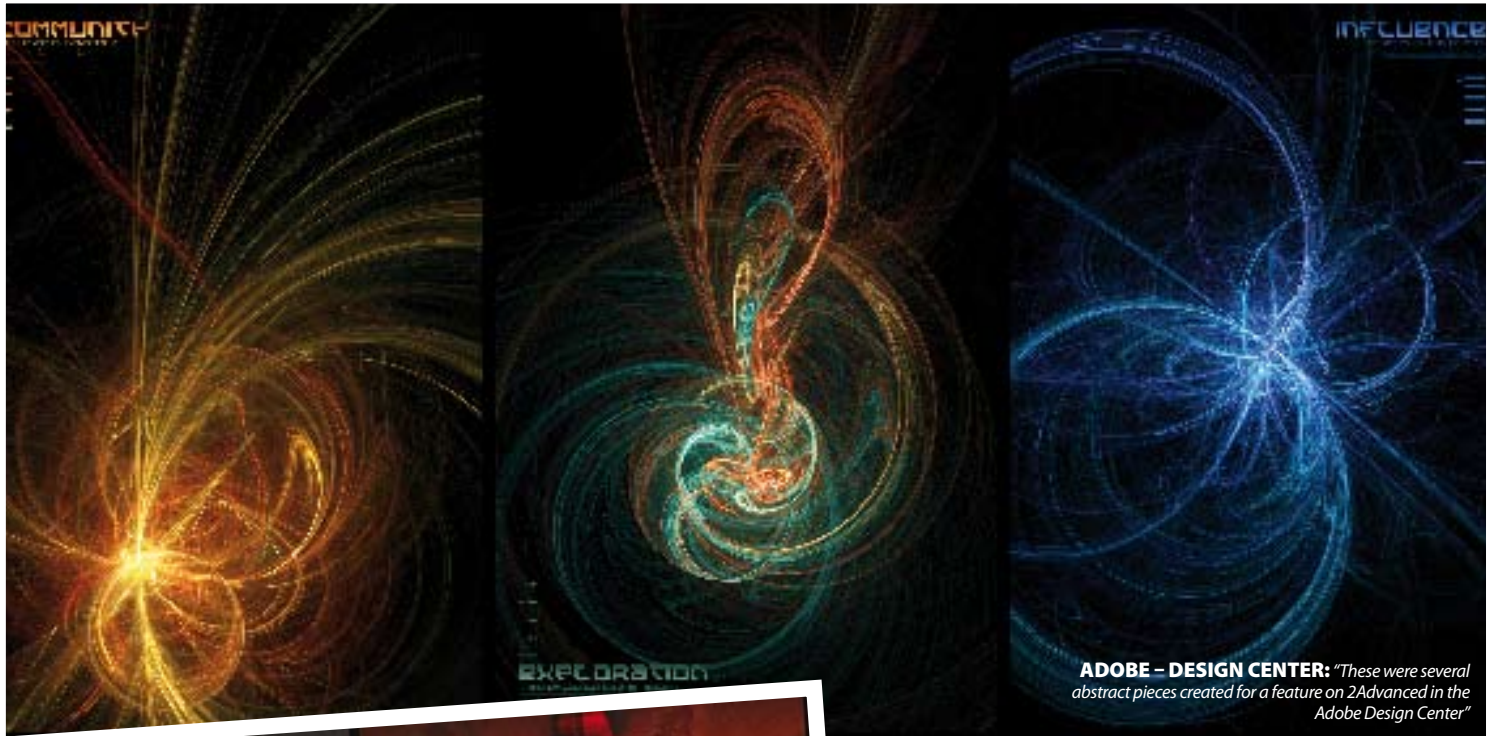
EMPRYEAN: "This is a collaborative poster I created with Mark Wisniowski (aka PROBE3)"

Interview



AGAPE: "This was a book submission for nonprofit organisation DAHRA, Designers Against Human Rights Abuse (www.dahra.org)"

Shane Mielke



ADOBE – DESIGN CENTER: “These were several abstract pieces created for a feature on 2Advanced in the Adobe Design Center”



**EA – 007:
FROM RUSSIA
WITH LOVE:**

“UI design and animation for EA’s James Bond 007: From Russia With Love retro videogame”

NASA photos. The two limited-edition panoramic prints hang on the walls of our home offices in England and California, and the wallpaper version is downloadable from www.thefwa.com.”

Doing it yourself

Like many designers, Mielke’s talent has developed from hours of hard work, experimentation and simply from being observant of techniques and styles of others. “Part of me wishes that I had a degree or formal education in design, but I also feel that not knowing some things has helped me be more

“Half of my friends have a design education and the other half are self-taught like myself”

open to self-growth, experimentation and just having a diverse skill set not limited to any one thing. Half of my friends have a design education and the other half are self-taught like myself. In the end, all that matters is if your work is any good or not. Some people need the structure and guidance of a formal education. Others are do-it-yourself types who need to move at their own speed and figure things out through trial and error. Neither way is perfect; ultimately,

known for his art and photography. He’s well on his way to achieving his ambition too, with his first major non-web commission for The Favourite Website Awards (www.thefwa.com). “Initially, the piece was intended to only be a wallpaper but I proposed the idea of doing a larger piece that

could be printed and hung. After a few email conversations we decided upon a fictional scene depicting man’s first steps on the moon representing the initial launch of FWA. The final moonscape was a 44 x 16-inch print mixing over 100 personal reference photos as well as several

Interview



ASSORTED WEBSITE PROJECTS: "From the top – Dakine, Chevy Transformers, Motorola David Beckham, VAST, 2Advanced"

LUCAS ARTS – FRACTURE
(RIGHT): "Fans of Sony PlayStation 3s may recognise this website for Lucas Arts' Fracture videogame"

LUCAS ARTS – STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT
(BELOW): "This is a website I designed for Lucas Arts' Star Wars Battlefront: Renegade Squadron videogame"



» success and beautiful work depends upon the individual and how they grow, learn and create the best."

Outside of work, the designer tries to stay away from anything web, immersing himself instead in his wife, children, friends and photography. However hard he tries, though, both halves of his life are heavily intertwined: "I'm a very conservative person. I'm not a flashy person who strives for attention. I'm very organised, very precise and straightforward. I love symmetry and avoid chaos or abstract artwork that has no meaning. When I

look at my design and photography style, I see all of these various personality quirks reflected. Everything I do is very clean, simple, polished, symmetrical and serious. Everything has a purpose, is in balance and tells a story."

Looking at his web design work, his photography holds a strong presence, with lots of depth, textures and realism filtering through on even the most surreal sites: "I like to create imagery and experiences that feel as if you could reach out into to the monitor and touch everything. Almost as if someone hung a picture

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Shane Mielke



REBIRTH: Another example of Shane's work that combines both photographic and Photoshop elements

on a wall and you could step into the scene or walk into another world."

Surprisingly, this artist is influenced heavily by authors such as David Farland (*Runelords*) and J.R.R. Tolkien (*The Hobbit, Lord of the Rings*), as well as the designers who grace the covers of these tomes: "I grew up looking at the amazingly detailed artwork of Darrell K. Sweet, whose fantasy art taught and influenced me to sketch and draw from a young age. I was fascinated by all of his intricate brushstrokes and the amount of detail he put into each piece of artwork."

A traditionalist, his photographic inspiration comes from master Ansel Adams, whose captures of the Yosemite region are particularly meaningful to the designer born and bred in that area: "However, now inspiration comes from inside of me. I find that lately I don't need to look around

NINTENDO – GAME BOY MICRO: "Designed as artwork for a website for Nintendo's Game Boy Micro handheld gaming platform"

to be inspired for ideas, and that is a very fun place to be."

On the horizon

So what's next for this web wonder? "I enjoy the fact that I don't feel I've ever done my best work. It means that I'm not satisfied with what I'm doing and pushes me to continue exploring new ideas, techniques and keeps me working at getting better. I'm excited about the interactive work I do because I'm constantly learning new techniques, styles and software. Things move very fast on the web and you have to think on your feet to stay up



to speed on everything. However, even the most mundane, repetitive task can be used as practice to improve performance. Challenges and obstacles are actually opportunities if we allow them to be."

His advice for those following his career path is simple – don't wait for others to show you the way; sit down and figure it out on your own: "Be inspired by the journey of exploration and growth in all things creative, like the adrenaline junkie who skydives simply for the rush and excitement."

See more of Mielke's work at www.shanemielke.com, www.terraspirit.com and www.2advanced.com.