**View Magic**

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Many myths and legends call Turin, Italy, a magical city. The Romans who founded Augusta Taurinorum placed the city at the intersection of the Po and Dora Rivers, with four gates facing four cardinal directions according, some say, to the laws of magic.

Today, guides send tourists on walks that purportedly highlight various magical and mystical landmarks. It is a setting worthy of a Dan Brown novel. But for the more than 6,000 professionals who gathered in Turin in late October, in addition to the 3,000 local students, the magic happened during the 12th annual View Conference. Directed by Maria Elena Gutierrez (pictured below), the conference brought speakers from around the world to the beautiful baroque city, the fourth largest in Italy.

I returned because I think it’s one of the best CG conferences in the world, not just in Italy. So, because I’ve written before about my reactions and those of the attendees, this year I wanted to let some of the speakers share their impressions.

“I was surprised by the diversity and high quality of the presenters,” says Randy Thom, director of sound design at Skywalker Sound, who attended the conference for the first time and gave a keynote address. “The conference is impressive. Maria Elena did a magnificent job of organizing it. More than organizing. What she accomplished was something akin to alchemy. I made friends among the speakers and audience that will last.”

Thom was one of four outstanding keynote speakers that Gutierrez brought to Turin for the conference. The other three were science-fiction writer, blogger, futurist, and activist Cory Doctorow (pictured below); Pixar cinematographer Sharon Calahan, who most recently was lighting director on Cars 2; and Tom Wujec, Autodesk fellow and author.

The four keynote speakers reflect the ways in which the conference, the largest computer graphics symposium in Italy, is changing and expanding to include a wider range of computer graphics applications and to offer practical training to students and young professionals. Cory Doctorow challenged the audience to think about what they are doing and how it relates to the world at large. Randy Thom reminded people that the characters in their films can hear what’s happening around them and to use that knowledge in the film’s design. Tom Wujec tickled the audience’s imagination and challenged them to move out of the box. And, Sharon Calahan showed us how light can lift a story away from the ordinary and into the extraordinary.

“I think the caliber of the speakers was amazing, even more outstanding than normal,” says Calahan, who has previously spoken at View. “I liked the wide variety of topics covered, the diversity. The presentations were thought provoking and creatively inspiring. And, the workshops were a great idea. I think they were more popular than expected, which is a good problem to have.” One of the most popular workshops was Ermilio Pique’s creature lab, where Pique entertained attendees with some of his fantastical wearable sculptures and where attendees learned how to make creatures of their own. David Revoy’s digital painting sessions also struck an empathetic note with attendees. At View, attendees could learn how to paint, track cameras with Blender, create creatures both digital and real, draw comics, and learn how to apply software programs to specific applications in workshops given by artists using tools from Adobe, Autodesk, Wacom, Pixologic, Google,
and Pixar's RenderMan group.

The popularity of the workshops also indicates how important this conference is for the people in the region. During the inaugural session, Turin's mayor, Piero Fassino, noted that the city has 100,000 students attending its various institutes. Many of those students attended the conference.

"The View conference is an important moment in the cultural life of our city," Fassino says. "Turin has undergone a tremendous change in the past 20 years. It was a manufacturing center until the beginning of the 1980s. Today, we have a wide range of cultural industries. And, during View, we have four days to concentrate on technology and culture, which is why we look to this event with such great interest."

As expected from this highly-regarded conference, other speakers included professionals at the top of their fields in visual effects and animation. Industrial Light & Magic sent two visual effects supervisors. Two-time Oscar winner Scott Farrar dazzled the audience with the impossibly complex CG robots and photorealistic CG environments in Transformers: Dark of the Moon, and showed a documentary he had made while on set to give the professionals and students in the audience a closer look at what it's like to work with director Michael Bay. ILM's Roger Guyett, visual effects supervisor and second-unit director, detailed that studio's work on Cowboys & Aliens. Both films are on the "long list" for visual effects Oscar consideration. From Weta Digital, Wayne Stables walked the audience through the making of The Adventures of Tintin, which has received Golden Globe and Annie nominations for best animated film. This was a coup for View because it was the first talk Stables had given about the film, which released in Italy long before the US. A bit of information from his talk is included in the in-depth cover story of the December 2011/January 2012 issue of CGW www.cgw.com/Publications/CGW/2011/Volume-34-Issue-9-Dec-Jan-2012-Animation-Evolution.aspx.

"This was my first time at the View conference, and the experience has been amazing," Stables (pictured above) says. "There are so many amazing presenters covering a huge range of topics, and that makes this a conference that shouldn't be missed. I traveled halfway around the world to get here, and it has been worth every moment for the things I've learned and the new friends I've made. I'll definitely be back."

Digital Domain's visual effects supervisor Erik Nash described the complicated process the filmmakers and visual effects studios used to create Real Steel; Gavin Graham, effects supervisor from Double Negative, brought a fighter sequence in the clouds from Captain America; and MPC's Adriano Rinaldi and Daniele Bigi showed that studio's work on X-Men: First Class, three more films on that list of possible 2012 visual effects Oscar nominees. POI/DreamWorks' character technical director Lucía Modesto showed attendees how that studio creates character rigs for its feature films. Visual effects supervisor Peter Nofz from Sony Pictures Imageworks stepped the audience through the making of a Green Lantern monster. And, Henrik Fett, visual effects supervisor and co-founder of LOOK Effects, brought case studies from this studio's work on Black Swan and Limitless. Then, to help attendees turn dreams into a personal reality, LOOK's director of marketing and VES second vice-chair Pam Hogarth explained, through a case study, how to succeed in visual effects.

"After hearing about View for some time, I got a chance to participate this year," Fett says. "The conference surpassed my expectations in many ways. The pool of presenters is made of highly accomplished practitioners and, therefore, allows for wonderful exchanges. The audience is energetic, curious, and extremely appreciative of the presentations. It is extremely well organized and takes place in an amazing setting. This is a conference that should not be missed, and I will most definitely be back."

Several speakers noted the huge range of topics, and I'll list a few: State of the art computer graphics for automotive design, visualization and in-vehicle safety (Daniel Shapiro, Nvidia), visualization technologies for automotive products (Aldo Maggiore, Fiat), extreme prototype development (Michael Robinson, Bertone), 3D models for cultural heritage (Paolo Cignoni, ISTI-CNR), a revolution in lighting control devices (Simona Braga, Arclab), augmented reality for pre-operative planning and minimally invasive surgery (Ludov De Poliols, University of Salento), using motion capture to analyze and treat joint disorders (Cecilia Charbonnier, ArtAnim), and virtual reality and augmented reality applied to surgery (Luc Soler, IRCAD).

Kris Piotrowski, co-founder and creative director for CAPR, introduced the strange and wonderful game "Sword & Sorcery EP"; Tom Kucha, gaming evangelist for Adobe, convinced everyone that the one million Flash users provide a ripe and interesting market for game developers; Glenn Ennis, POI co-founder, former head of DreamWorks Interactive, and now a founding partner in Vanage Capital, introduced "gamification" to the audience; and Pixar's Roger Gould brought fantasy into the real world in another way by transforming Pixar stories into Disney theme-park experiences.

"View is a remarkable gathering of world-class professionals sharing their work and
insights," Gould says. "The setting’s scale and intimacy remind me of the early days of
SIGGRAPH conferences, where you could meet and interact with the presenters. I’m so
happy I came to present here in Torino."

It’s impossible to describe all the incredible talks and workshops at the conference, and I
always must omit so many in my report. I can, however, give you one last impression from
a speaker, keynote Tom Wujec (pictured above), who also gave a workshop on using
visual thinking to collaborate, innovate, and get things done. Who better?

"Wow!" he says. "Who could have anticipated that View could pack so much into such a
beautiful setting? Maria Elena has created a special gathering. On any single day, you could
see leaders in visual effects show the state of their art, and then an icon in sound design
talk about how to listen to films.

Together, it’s a real brain scratch. Add the time you spend swapping stories over Italian
food, and real friendships are born. If you’re serious about the industry, pack your bags and
visit Turin for View. The quality of the speakers, their ideas, and the curated themes create
a truly magical event."

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