The Making Of Skating Babies. An Evian's Commercial
Gold Award at the London International Awards 2009 for Best Visual Effects

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Michael Gracey directed Evian's commercial "Skating Babies", a multi-national campaign bringing together choreographed roller-skating babies and the re-mixed street sound of The Sugar Hill Gang's Rapper's Delight. Created by the agency BETC Euro RSCG, the spot was produced by Fabrice Brovelli, Head of TV at BETC and Jaques Etienne Stein at Partizan. MPC created fully CG baby bodies and carried out extensive live action head replacement and compositing as well as large scale digital matte paintings to extend the park environment for the TV and online campaigns.

The MPC crew was involved from pre-production, creating pre-vis based on Michael's supplied story board to aid the development of the scenes. Early testing researched the best way to integrate 2D and 3D techniques to create the young skaters, who needed to act like adults, yet keep the babies' personalities. To do this, the VFX team opted to combine live action heads with the CG bodies. To make this happen, a total of 134 babies were filmed, and their heads were matched to 3D animatics displaying the baby like body behaviour.div.overlay { width:1040px; height:640px; } #imgplay { margin:86px 0px 0px 190px; } #player { background:no-repeat url('/videos/news/2009/november/evian.jpg') top center; } #splash, #player, #player embed, #player object { width:560px; height:336px; }

VFX supervisor Dean Robinson and Drew Downes attended the shoot in Melbourne; shooting back plates and lighting reference. They also took reference for the digital matte paintings which enhance the background and re-create the city environment. A mo-cap shoot also took place to capture moves for the background dancers.

MPC's team of animators used Autodesk Maya to create the baby skaters' bodies. To ensure the babies appear fully realistic, it was important to carefully match movements, paying special attention to interaction between the shoulders, neck and head. To help achieve this, full CG babies were created and their heads were replaced later by the live action versions from the shoot by MPC's compositing team led by Ludo Fealy. Creating the babies in full made sure the newly positioned heads would follow the shoulder movement naturally. This also helped during the lighting stage, as shadows of the heads could be easily projected. Another challenge was to create realistic skin texture and match the different skin colours. To achieve this, the 2D team composited together multiple layers and carried out general clean-up of the plates.

Many elements were shot on RED with the MPC Data Lab handling digital development and processing of the media. For dailies, the lab trans-coded the footage directly to native AVID media files and project bins so editor Ben Harrex at Final Cut could start cutting immediately with no additional transcoding or importing. For the high quality media, the lab was able to process large amounts of 2K data on the render farm very quickly. The lab's client area meant that during the heat of the final delivery stages Michael Gracey was able to make additional footage selections which could then be rendered out and delivered straight to the VFX suites within minutes.

Paul Harrison and Jean Clement Soret added the master grade, carefully balancing the back plates, live action heads and CG bodies.

More Information at www.moving-picture.com. Image and Video Courtesy of MPC. Video Montage and Transcoding: 3Dup.com