

BEYOND THE GIF

Reed + Rader are making dynamic content that incorporates HD video, 3D modeling and some tricks from game designers. **BY MATTHEW ISMAEL RUIZ**



COURTESY REED + RADER

SINCE 2008, the duo Reed + Rader (Pamela Reed and Matthew Rader) have been bringing fashion images to life online, first for editorial clients like *POP* and *V* magazines, and then for commercial clients such as Victoria's Secret and Thom Browne. Until recently, their medium of choice was the GIF: the format for sharing animated images that has been popular since before streaming online video was possible. "It's a great way to show the clothes," Reed says. "If you want to buy a dress, you can actually see how a dress flows. It's not just still. When I walk down the street, I want to look awesome with that dress."

But while GIFs have become ubiquitous in mainstream media, the bitmap image format is limited: GIFs have no inherent compression, so to make a GIF easily shareable, it has to be small enough to load quickly on a Web browser. GIFs are also limited to 256 colors—one more reason why Reed + Rader are pushing the boundaries of the GIF, and gravitating towards shareable video.

One recent video creation is "Flowers," a project for *V* magazine that's also indicative of their workflow. Reed produced and art-directed a shoot with a model on a green-screen, using ultra-high-definition video cameras (2.5K or 4K),



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ABOVE: For "Flowers," commissioned by *V* magazine, Reed + Rader shot 2.5K videos, capturing a model in the round, and then composited the videos of her in different looks into 3D environments that complemented her clothes. **INSET, ABOVE:** Matthew Rader and Pamela Reed.

moving around the model as she posed in different looks. The results of the shoot were 2D videos capturing the model rotating 360 degrees. Rader then built 3D environments on the computer using a videogame engine—the software that provides the backbone for maps, characters and objects within a 3D videogame world. Finally they imported each video of the model into the 3D environments so she appears to be standing in fantastic meadows, gardens or an unreal landscape. The final product is captured with what Rader calls a “virtual camera”: in post, Reed + Rader can choose any angle or camera movement they can dream up—even ones that would be difficult or impossible to create in real life.

“We’d been doing GIFs and video for a long time, and we made it a goal of ours to not just have static cameras anymore,” Rader says. “We wanted sweeping camera angles.”

V’s online editor Natasha Stagg says Reed + Rader’s work helps illuminate the nuance of style and fashion trends. Before they began shooting “Flowers,” she talked to the pair about the floral prints and severe architectural shapes showing up in Spring/Summer 2014 clothes. “I thought the way Reed + Rader captured those shapes by creating this sort of sci-fi world for them to live in was just very on point,” Stagg says.

Their process allows them to create dramatic and imaginative camera movements in post production, rather than being forced to capture them on set. “We get to control whatever the flyby camera angle is after the [shoot],” Reed says. The results can be a video, as it was in “Flowers,” or they can drop frames and colors to make a GIF, as in their recent job for Ray-Ban sunglasses. The client, Moving Image & Content (MIC), matched Reed + Rader with Audrey Kitching, a blogger, model and jewelry designer. The workflow for the project, “Ray-Ban Remix,” was close to that of “Flowers,” with their video camera moving on a fixed track, but they composited each shot of Kitching into a single GIF. They made the CGI background with lots of pink and crystals, to match Kitching’s esthetic.

“Reed + Rader’s work is high fashion, yet still approachable,” says Quynh Mai, founder of MIC. “Their GIFs are high-quality and beautifully executed. There’s a sense of fantasy and magic within their work.”

They have reached the enviable position of being treated as hands-on collaborators by their clients. “Clients aren’t going to come to us to shoot a girl against a white wall,” Reed says. Rader concurs: “When a client approaches us, they pretty much leave it up to us. They have a vague scope, but it’s, ‘Work some magic,’ which is awesome.”



ABOVE: In “Ray-Ban Remix,” the duo composited their videos of the subject in many looks into a single GIF. **BELOW:** “Flowers” represents the “virtual camera” technique that allows Reed + Rader to create any camera movement they can imagine in post-production.

The pair, who met as students at Pittsburgh Art Institute, were not long out of graduate school at New York City’s School of Visual Arts when they decided they were done with making still images. Still images are static; the Internet is anything but. Why not take advantage of that? Even though they weren’t new, they could use GIFs to evolve “a new form of photography,” Rader says, that could leverage the Internet’s capability to do things that print can’t.

They pitched their ideas to fashion magazines that were in obvious need of help on their websites. Most turned them down, but the younger, forward-thinking magazines could see the potential. Their first high-profile editorial for *POP* magazine was a hit, and other offers started pouring in. One early editorial client was *V*.

“I really think that of all the teams I’ve worked with for online-only content, they really understand that idea of transferring a fashion editorial to a Web audience better than maybe any,” says *V*’s Stagg. She adds, “They also come up with ideas that are completely different from the one before them each time, and that’s really exciting.”

Reed + Rader are itching to keep pushing into new territories. Just as they wanted to change the perception of GIFs as goofy cartoon bitmaps, they’re trying to do the same with 3D gaming environments.

“People think of gaming engines and their first instinct is ‘Oh, ‘Deathmatch,’ we’re going to shoot people,’” says Reed. “So we’ve been really hyped up about making GIFs not just goofy flames and skulls...[but] turning them into a legitimate photographic medium.”

Rader says he hopes to take the virtual camera that they use in post-production rendering from passive to active, giving users control over their view of the 3D environments they create. The first step will be a follow up to a video called *Dubstep Dinosaurs*—which features dubstep dancers in cardboard costumes—which was part of their solo exhibition “Cretaceous Returns” that was shown at New York’s School of Visual Arts and 18 Hewett Street in London. For the sequel, *Dubstep Dinosaurs 3D*, they will import the dancing dinos into a 3D world—built in programs like Maya, MotionBuilder, Cinema 4D and Unreal Engine—that the viewer can explore.

It may be some time before the Internet can become as interactive as Reed + Rader envisions it. But it wouldn’t be surprising if they’ve already mastered it by the time it does. **pdn**

