

OLIVE WELSH

INTERVIEW BY IRENE FELEO

PRONOUNS: *They/Them*

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Olive Welsh is a Freelance Motion Graphics Artist based in New York. Their portfolio is filled with gorgeous, colorful images of worlds that feel so real that I fight back an impulse to reach out and touch them.

A rocketship taking off in an epic plume of clouds. Bright purple leaves that almost invite you to feel their velvety surface. Olive's work is rich and lush in detail, a testament to the skill and love they have for captivating narratives and the finer details in worldbuilding. Their clients include NASA, Snapchat, Reebok, WalMart, and many more.

This is a particularly exciting Spotlight interview for me because it is the first one in which I have not met our Spotlight guest in person. I loved getting to know and chat with another member of this Panimation community; and it is times like these, amidst pandemic and moments when we feel so far apart, that I feel grateful for this community of generous artists like Olive, who are willing to lend me their time and insights.

Rocking bright blue hair (that I am forever jealous of), Olive is a curious and joyful creative. Time flew by as we chatted about everything; topics ranging from how they got their early start in animation (they were 12 when they first started using After Effects!) and how they combine technical knowledge with creativity and problem-solving. It was such a lovely experience to get to know Olive and I hope you enjoy reading this interview!



The Nakagin

Tell us a little bit about what you do and what path led you to working in animation and motion graphics. How old were you when you first started animating?

Hello! I'm Olive, a nonbinary artist in Motion Design! I craft CG sequences for advertising, broadcast, and technology clients. My trajectory was a messy one and is ever changing!!

My interests bounced around a ton as a kid, from illustration, music, programming and game design, making movies with friends, to eventually animation. I always wanted to make movies, but after a childhood move across the states, I sought something I could do on my own. I got into After Effects when I was 12 years old, quickly learned about motion design and went wild.

I gave almost everything in post (production) a try: editing, color grading, compositing, even roto (one of my earliest jobs was blurring butts on a whole season of "My 600lb Life"). Anything to pay the bills without waiting tables, so I was a proper generalist for a while.

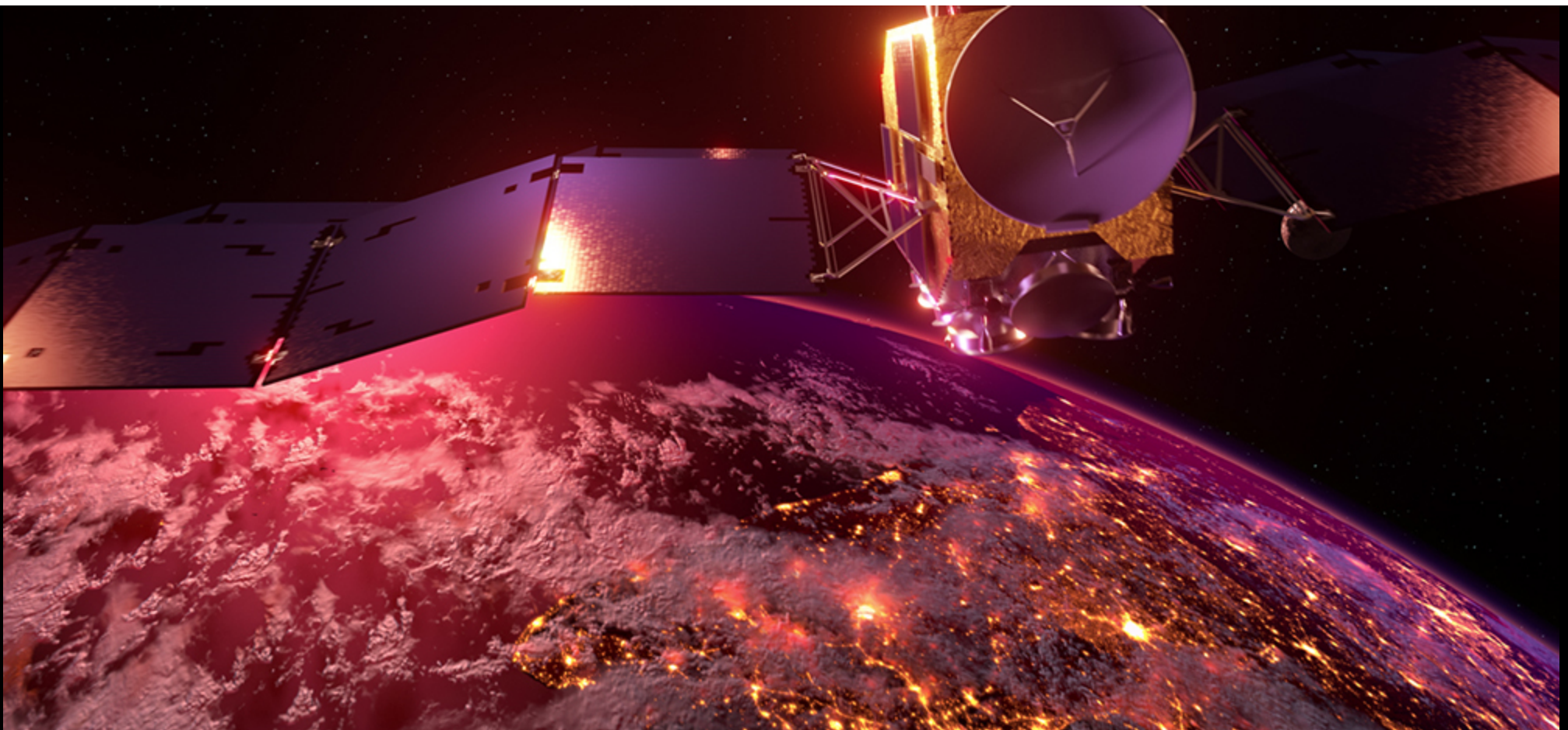
By the time I made it to LA I was exhausted, trying to do everything to make ends meet. It wasn't fun anymore. I nearly left the industry, quit a soulsucking agency job and prepared to jump ship for tech. But with some time off, I rekindled my deep love for animation, and finally saw it not as a means to an end, but as a true career. I kept at it and became committed, and left the generalist days behind.

That was 6 years ago and I'm still at it!

You have had experience working in all sorts of roles during your career; editor, designer, animator, the list goes on! I am curious about how these roles have helped get you to where you are today, was there a lot of trial and error or did it feel like a natural progression?

Oh so much trial and error! I think coming from an editing background was crucial, it gave me a good sense of timing that I think translated really well to animation. My more compositing/VFX foray also helped with the more technical side while educating me about just how messed up work/life balance can be if you work for the wrong people. The Rhythm & Hues bankruptcy was eye-opening.

Most importantly however, figuring out how to do all these different roles gave me the tools to continue learning on the fly, in whatever I do.



NASA: Low Earth Orbit

What kind of work are you most excited about?

Environmental-driven creatives with the time to really craft a scene, where I have the autonomy to create something that is my own. I try to stay away from social media focused jobs, and lean towards longer contracts where I can spend 2-4 weeks on a single shot. I crave narrative pieces that tell a good story, but you don't always get that in advertising. That's okay though, I'll take any opportunity to make something full of feeling.

I am always so impressed by artists that work on the CG side of things. I have never been much of a technical person, so I am always blown away by the level of detail and knowledge artists like yourself have. Even just looking at your online resume - I LOVE how you break down and name your hardware stations, it's something I have never seen done before. Have you always embraced the technical side of the job? How do you approach learning and adapting to this vast and growing field?

Yes! I've always loved computers, every workstation I've owned, I've built. I nearly became a programmer before C# turned me off from game design. I've always found the technical side endlessly interesting.

However, it can be a trap too! It's an endless ocean of code, workflows, shading languages, render engines, etc. It's impossible to learn it all, and sometimes the hardcore technical side is a distraction. Procedural workflows are incredibly exciting, but sometimes require too much time upfront to be worthwhile. VR and real time engines are incredible, but I'd

rather focus on my fundamentals.

Taking a step back, I look for solutions to make designing easier and faster, less tedious. Knowing when to be clever and when to do the grunt work is important. I always try to remember, I'm trying to be a better artist, not a technician.



Rollins Visuals: Leaf

I am interested to hear how creativity blends with the technical. Do you feel you approach a project from a creative side first, or does technical ability and restrictions inform what you create?

It really varies on the job. The less time I have, the more I limit the creative to within my technical comfort zone, and flex with composition and movement. But on many projects, especially personal works, I let my creativity go mad and try to catch up technically. Of course, the danger is endless scope creep, or barrelling down a rabbit hole then suddenly you're learning Python in Houdini because you wanted an accurate point cloud of the night sky when a noise shader would've worked fine. I fell victim to this a ton early on, and is something I'm still very conscious about.

Even so, I try not to be too afraid of wild scopes! Right now I'm working on a personal piece that features a ton of character animation, something I've never done before. But I'll learn and make it work! It's a big part of how I've grown, to keep pushing when I can.

What is a project (professional or personal) that you are most proud of and why?

The Rollins Visuals ID. It's hard for me to ignore it's warts and flaws almost 3 years later, but it was a very important piece! I was able to go really wild and experimental with it. Sink my teeth into doing what I always wanted to do commercially, build beautiful worlds! I was mostly an After Effects artist before that job, but once it was released it totally changed the sort of work I got, and I'm thankful.

The work in your portfolio is super varied and detailed. I love how every project feels like it encapsulates whole worlds, I'm looking at the Rollins Visuals Identity and NASA work in particular. How do you go about building these worlds? I would love to hear a little bit about your process!

I think about the mood! The feelings I want to capture, typically for maximum drama. My favorite sequences are all about momentum, so I try to conceive and build sets that look best at speed. Colors and lighting come after composition blocking, but I generally know what I'm after from the start. There are days I obsess over lookdev and slap animation on afterwards, and vice versa. It varies on the job and how I feel like working that particular day.



You strike me as an infinitely curious person with a lot of interests outside of design/animation. What are you currently interested in and how does it relate to your professional/creative practice (if it does - doesn't have to!) What are you excited about?

Gosh, it's boundless!

In the past I tried to keep my hobbies industry related, namely drawing and writing. Many of the animation skills I focus on are to realize the concepts and stories I'd like to tell someday. They're the backbone and main constant of my career. But keeping all your hobbies tied to work is tiring, so I've made an effort to not be endlessly productive.

My latest diversion is analog modular synthesis. I'm not much of a musician but it's always a blast to plug in patch cables, twist some knobs and dials making bleeps and bleeps like I'm piloting a spaceship! I've convinced myself I'd tie this into animation, for sound design or music, but at the moment I'm just fooling around.

Riding my motorcycle (Moto Guzzi V7) is probably the best hobby I have outside the studio. Nothing creative about it, just dancing through traffic, dodging taxis, and feeling the wind all around you at speed. Always a rush.

Droplet

Lastly, do you have any advice for fellow creatives. What is something you have learned during your career that you wish someone had told you?

Many many little things. A vertical mouse can seriously help your wrist pain. We could all stand to charge more, and have better contracts! No one should be paid beyond Net 30, and 12 hour days are never an acceptable norm. Get that 1.5x overtime! 2x on weekends!

Crucially though, remember to have fun! Remember to find the fun, and think deeply in what sort of work you want to do. Because we can all craft the sort of career we want to have, given time and focus. So don't be afraid to experiment and try to resist the temptation to be swept up in trendy tools and workflows. Find inspiration outside of Motionographer and your industry groups.

It's your career, make it your own!



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We'd like to thank Olive Welsh for taking the time to answer our questions and we hope you've enjoyed the Third Edition of our Spotlight! Special thanks to Irene Feleo for her work in this wonderful interview full of insights and wisdom and for championing our voices forward.

Panimation NYC was started by Emily Suvanvej and Dorca Musseb in 2017. In 2018, Irene Feleo joined us as an admin. Panimation was started in London by Bee Grandinetti, Linn Fritz and Hedvig Alhberg in 2015. Visit our international directory to find underrepresented motion artists at panimation.tv. Our work is done on a volunteer basis and you can help keep us going by donating to our [Patreon](#). Visit our [Panimation IG](#) account to see the work of our talented, diverse members who showcase their beautiful creations every week.

Thanks to all our volunteers that put together this newsletter: Emily Suvanvej, Irene Feleo, Dorca Musseb, Jordan Knight, Liz DiBello, Melody Shih and Sabrina Chaney. To all the members of our community, thank you for your amazing and continued support. We truly appreciate all of you! You lovely, lovely people!!! We wouldn't exist without you!