

Case Study – Katherine Seale at Framestore in London

What did you study at AUB?

I studied Animation Production from 2010 to 2013 and graduated with a 1st.

Why did you choose AUB and this particular course?

I chose AUB because I loved the graduate films being made there. I first saw them when I went to the summer school at the age of 14, and decided then that it was where I wanted to study. At the time I was very keen to learn traditional animation and the course has a strong focus on the importance of good drawing skills; I wanted to learn how to be a better draftsman and to be a part of making a graduate film like the ones I had been inspired by at the summer school.

What exposure to the business world did you have during your studies at AUB – e.g. through mentoring, internships, work placements, industry guest lectures, ...?

My first real exposure to the industry was my summer internship at Fabrique d'Images, Luxembourg in second year; I was an intern on a CG preschool show called Percy's Tiger Tales. Prior to this I was given the opportunity to attend a VFX event with a few of my classmates during my second year, which included talks by industry professionals at Framestore, Double Negative, etc. This was my first look into the VFX world as told from an animation perspective. Finally, in my third year I was accepted to mentor under Dreamworks animator Samy Fecih through an external program called Motivarti; Samy taught me more about what it's like to work in the animation industry, and through weekly exercises taught me some valuable animation lessons. There were also many guest lectures over the course which helped me understand the industry from a variety of disciplines and studios.

How many jobs did you apply to and how many interviews did you have before joining FrameStore?

I was invited to an interview as a runner at The Mill, and applied to 3 jobs in total after graduating; Blue Zoo, TeamTO and Framestore. As it happens I ended up working for all three! I did three days freelance for Blue Zoo, then went to work at TeamTO for nearly 4 months. I assumed Framestore a lost cause but I was contacted and asked to interview about 6 weeks into my time at TeamTO.

How did you learn about FrameStore? / How did you make contact?

I think my learning about Framestore was quite gradual over the course of my studies. I just kind of ended up accumulating pieces of knowledge from a variety of sources, such as lectures at uni or tutorials I would watch online. Learning that they did the VFX in some of my favourite movies like the Harry Potter films and Where the Wild Things Are was certainly inspiring and it encouraged me to learn more about the company. I met a couple of Framestore animators at events in London, and Samy used to work there so I learnt more about the company from him, but actually my first real contact was when I had my interview.

Did you have contact to the OutPost of Framestore in the Enterprise Pavilion during your studies? How did FrameStore's presence at AUB benefit your studies/ your progression?

I knew about the OutPost, and I have friends who work or worked there, but I never made any formal contact with the Outpost, so I only learnt about the work being done there through these friends, and one lesson of tracking I took in third year. Certainly, knowing about the tracking and paint/roto process has helped me integrate more smoothly into the production here at Framestore, as a good knowledge of the whole production pipeline is pretty useful, just to know what you're requesting when you ask for tracks or rotos, and appreciate the hard work that goes into that process.

What skills / course subjects did you learn in your course that are useful in your job now?

I learnt how to animate in Maya! I had never touched Maya before I started uni, and never thought I would. I also gained a lot of experience working in teams, either under a director or as the director myself. Finally, I became more confident with my drawing, which I very often integrate into my workflow, whether it's by drawing quick thumbnails before I start a shot or to draw over my animation and figure out stronger poses.

What skills / course subjects didn't you learn in your course, but would have liked to?

I didn't learn a lot of scripting or technical know-how while I was at uni, which is understandable due to the creative nature of the course, but now that I'm in a work environment, I can appreciate the value of knowing this stuff; things like making basic scripts. Whilst it doesn't hold me back from doing my job, it would be another skill in the toolbox for animators to speed up their workflow. I'm going about learning this now. I also think it would be valuable to teach students about the importance of a good workflow, both overall in the whole animation pipeline but also specifically to character animators. I learnt about this through Kenny Roy tutorials that I watched in my spare time at uni, and it's been the best advice I've gotten. When I was at uni, and now even in the work environment I see people waste time or get themselves muddled up because they've rushed ahead and not followed a workflow pattern. It saves time and makes animating a little bit less headachey.

Q: What skills / course subjects are absolutely necessary to get a job in VFX/ for your current job at FrameStore?

To be an animator at Framestore, you have to have a thorough knowledge of Maya, a solid understanding of the principles of animation as demonstrated through your showreel, knowledge of rigging and animation pipelines, an attention to detail, good organisation, communication, timekeeping and an openness to direction. A traditional art background, scripting knowledge and understanding of anatomy isn't essential but certainly helps.

What graduate training/ mentoring have you received since you joined FrameStore?

Honestly, I've been thrown straight in at the deep end! After an initial few days of being allowed to play with the rigs and learning about the pipeline here, I was introduced to my Lead Animator and given my first shots. I work closely with my Lead to ensure that we're both on the same page in terms of what is required from the shot, and he offers me critique and advice when needed, which is really great.

What was the recruitment process?

I was contacted by a recruiter who was looking for animators, and asked if I would be interested in interviewing. I agreed and a couple of weeks later I was interviewed by animation director Pablo Grillo and Millie Cox from Human Resources. It was over Skype since I was in France at the time, otherwise it would have been at the studio. The interview was very relaxed and felt more like a conversation than an interview. Pablo was interested in talking about my graduation film, Sapling, which he had seen at the BFI grad show in July. I was asked about the type of animation I was interested in, and I asked Pablo a few questions about the pipeline at Framestore and what I should expect. The interview lasted around 20 minutes in total, and I was contacted about a week later and offered a position, told which studio it was at (London or Montreal) and which production I would be working on if I were to accept.

When did you start at FrameStore?

My first day was December 9th, 2013.

What do you have to offer to FrameStore that you were taken on at a higher level?

In talking to Pablo during my interview, it seemed like they were interested in me because of the work I did on Sapling. As a VFX studio it appealed to them because my main character was a quadruped, which is a common element in so many VFX films. He mentioned there was a sensibility and an attention to detail in the movements of Griff that was very appealing. Though I enjoy animating bipeds too, I explained that I have always been more interested in animal locomotion, and I think this may be why I was a good fit for Framestore, particularly with their current line-up of productions. I am now an animator on 'Guardians of the Galaxy' animating Rocket, an anthropomorphic raccoon, and Groot, a sentient tree, so it suits my interests.

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