

BRIAN R. HANDLER

CG ENVIRONMENTS / TECHNICAL PRODUCTION LEADERSHIP

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PROFILE

CG environments and technical production leader with 18 years in feature animation and visual effects at Blue Sky Studios, Wētā FX, and LAIKA. Career built at the intersection of artistry, production, and technology, progressing from hands-on environment work and pipeline problem-solving to establishing and leading LAIKA's CG Environments department. Combines an artist's understanding of what a particular production needs with a technical director's problem-solving approach and the leadership experience to guide multidisciplinary teams through complex production challenges.

PRODUCTION LEADERSHIP & TECHNICAL STRENGTHS

Department building and recruiting • Artist management and development • Production bidding and forecasting • Environment production and set assembly • Pipeline and workflow development • Procedural asset creation and dressing • Asset testing and performance optimization • LOD strategy and implementation • Cross-department technical troubleshooting

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

LAIKA | Lead Artist, Environments

Hillsboro, OR • Apr 2024 – Sep 2026

Led day-to-day artistic, technical, and production priorities for the CG Environments team on *Wildwood*, spanning landscape and terrain assets, set assembly and dressing, texture and LookDev. Partnered with Art Direction, CG Supervisors, Production, and Production Technology on delivery and workflow priorities.

- Established LAIKA's CG Environments department for *Wildwood*, defining production responsibilities, staffing requirements, and technical priorities as the team grew to a peak of approximately 24 artists.
- Served as hiring manager for the department, personally selecting 20 hires across LAIKA and a vendor partner, developing job descriptions, and recruiting experienced artists from other departments.
- Built a show-wide landscape asset library that recreated LAIKA's handcrafted stage aesthetic using purpose-built, scalable CG assets, procedural techniques, and carefully directed shading, supporting hundreds of fully digital shots and shots combining CG environments with practical stage photography.
- Directed development and adoption of standardized Houdini/USD workflows for asset creation, procedural dressing, set assembly, and publishing. Established technical guardrails and consistent production practices across the department.
- Led a production-wide Level of Detail (LOD) migration during active production, coordinating asset conversion, set assembly updates, and downstream compatibility with Production and CG Supervisors while preserving approved work.
- Established asset performance testing and optimization practices across the department, using geometry, shading, and instancing benchmarks to identify expensive configurations before delivery.
- Investigated render-farm warnings, performance regressions, and USD integration issues by analyzing render logs and performance data, identifying environment-related problems or routing findings to the appropriate departments.

- Partnered with Production on environment bids, estimate-versus-actual reviews, staffing forecasts, and delivery priorities, balancing near-term production needs against longer-range show requirements.
- Managed artist assignments, performance reviews, and professional development; identified and mentored emerging talent, successfully delegating complex sequence leadership while maintaining oversight of broader production priorities.
- Developed and coordinated a non-disruptive solution to late-stage environment lighting challenges, introducing opt-in asset variants and shader controls that gave Lighting greater flexibility without pushing changes into approved shots or existing set assemblies.

WĒTĀ FX | Senior Layout TD

Remote, NY • Apr 2021 – Apr 2024

Senior Layout TD on large-scale live-action VFX productions, combining environment construction and procedural dressing with camera and creature blocking, survey integration, and sequence continuity.

- Integrated previs, motion capture, LiDAR, survey data, cameras, and production geometry to establish shot continuity and deliver reliable scenes to downstream departments.
- Built and dressed environments in Maya and Houdini, established camera and creature blocking, and developed diagnostic views and layout renders to support creative review and technical handoffs.
- Selected for a Talent and Culture working group focused on structured feedback, goal-setting, and career development, and helped develop recommendations that Wētā subsequently implemented across the studio.

BLUE SKY STUDIOS | Environment Artist

Greenwich, CT • Sep 2008 – Apr 2021

Technical Assistant, Lighting & Assembly (2008–2010) → Environment Artist (2010–2021)

Cross-disciplinary environment artist and pipeline specialist spanning Assembly, Digital Matte Painting, set extensions, and compositing integration. Applied deep knowledge of Blue Sky's production pipeline to creative problem-solving and technical workflow development.

- Built expertise in scene assembly, render troubleshooting, and studio pipeline operations while moving from technical assistance into environment production.
- Worked across Assembly, Digital Matte Painting, and set extensions, maintaining production continuity and helping DMP artists integrate scene data into downstream shots.
- Built and dressed complex stylized environments and large-scale sets across feature productions; led small teams on selected short-form projects.
- Helped define artist requirements and direct tool development during Blue Sky's transition from Maya-based assembly to Houdini, working with technical artists and engineers to turn production needs into practical workflows.
- Researched and authored a proposed studio-wide Optimization & Tactics program, consulting CG Supervisors and Walt Disney Animation Studios counterparts on proactive benchmarking, production planning, and performance optimization.

SELECTED SCREEN CREDITS | CHRONOLOGICAL

Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs (2009) • *Rio* (2011) • *Ice Age: Continental Drift* (2012) • *Epic* (2013) • *Rio 2* (2014) • *The Peanuts Movie* (2015) • *Ice Age: Collision Course* (2016) • *Ferdinand* (2017) • *Spies in Disguise* (2019) • *Ice Age: Scrat Tales* (2022) • *Black Adam* (2022) • *She-Hulk: Attorney at Law* (2022) • *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022) • *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3* (2023) • *Monarch: Legacy of Monsters* (2023) • *A Minecraft Movie* (2025) • *Wildwood* (2026)

TOOLS & PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

Houdini • Maya • Blender • USD • Python • RenderMan • Katana • SpeedTree • Nuke • Photoshop • Substance Painter • Unreal Engine • ShotGrid • Jira • YouTrack • Confluence • Linux • ChatGPT • Codex

EDUCATION & ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

Muncie, IN • Dec 2006 – Sep 2008

Graduate studies

- Served as instructor of record for a two-credit Field Lighting course; developed the syllabus and taught practical production techniques.
- Worked as Research Manager for the Human Factors Institute within the Center for Information and Communication Science (CICS); established a usability lab to observe and document user interactions with websites and digital interfaces.
- Served as Director of Photography and Production Manager for the PBS documentary *Movers and Stakers: Stories Along the Indiana National Road*.

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Kent, OH • Sep 2002 – Aug 2006

Bachelor of Arts, Electronic Media Production

- Served as General Manager of Kent State TV2, a 120-member student television organization.

RECOGNITION & AWARDS

- Regional Student Emmy Award (NATAS), Producer, *Dragged Under*
- Kent State College of Communication and Information, Fast Track Alumni Award (2010)