



Job title Lead Composer, Blue Sky Studios
Location Greenwich, CT
Website www.curvstudios.com
Biography Ari Rubenstein is from Maryland. From an early age he was inspired by comic book art and kung fu movies from the Chinese film production company, The Shaw Brothers. He has worked at Xaos and Tippett Studio and started his own company Curv, before joining Blue Sky Studios
Portfolio highlights
■ *Ice Age: Collision Course*, 2016
■ *Epic*, 2013
■ *Rio*, 2011
■ *Horton Hears A Who*, 2008
■ *Charlotte's Web*, 2006
■ *Constantine*, 2005
■ *Starship Troopers 2*, 2004
■ *Hellboy*, 2004
■ *The Matrix Revolutions*, 2003
■ *Alter Echo*, 2003
■ *Africa's Elephant Kingdom*, 1998

Ari Rubenstein

From Soundgarden to The Matrix and Ice Age, the industry veteran reveals his journey into filmmaking

It's the Nineties and Ari Rubenstein had just returned from a long exploratory jaunt across US, driven by what author Hunter S Thompson referred to as "a savage journey into the heart of the American dream". Unfortunately the "dream" ended like many others have done, unromantically through a variety of menial jobs, not least of which included a stint in Seattle setting up mics for a Soundgarden music video in the beginning of the grunge scene.

Rubenstein had gone home to Maryland and his father who, unimpressed with his then-directionless existence gave him an ultimatum: he could stay the night but he must pick a trade by the following night or he would have to find somewhere else to sleep. Rubenstein went to the library, reading through a tome that was called *The Trade Book* in an attempt to become inspired for a new career path – but to no avail. He returned home, without an answer for his father. That's when he spotted a brochure detailing new computer animation program at the local community college. "I thought quickly to myself... I can draw really well, and the computer may cut out half the labour, I'll try it," Rubenstein tells us, "so my entry into this field was based on a lazy, last-minute desperate notion."

This last-minute choice would lead to Rubenstein being hired at a design shop in Florida, where his boss took him to SIGGRAPH, a still growing conference at the time. "SIGGRAPH's job board in 1992 had two standing boards with Post-it notes, a far cry from today. But it was enough – I didn't get a job with my boss looking over my shoulder, but I saw the birth of an industry I could explore."

What followed was a two-decade career in visual effects across feature films, IMAX, TV and games, predominantly as

GIVE A LITTLE RESPECT

Ari Rubenstein tells us some invaluable advice for new and aspiring artists looking to join the industry

"Unlike 25 years ago, simple searches in Google and YouTube yield a vast array of information one can learn and grow from," says Rubenstein. "More than anything, though, give yourself a history lesson so you can come to appreciate those who came before you, whose shoulders you're now standing on, and from this perspective you'll inherently show respect and become one whom others are happy to collaborate with. Show humility through honest reflections and a thoughtful frame of reference. That said, I'm certain I have more humble pie to eat in the future."



“It was like I’d entered the NFL and was working, and competing, with giants”

Ari Rubenstein,
Lead Composer,
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- 01 “Only thing I’d do differently is talk less and listen more,” says Rubenstein of what he would change about his earlier job roles
- 02 Both personal and commercial side projects are important to Rubenstein. “One very useful takeaway from both these types of projects is the knowledge of how to distinguish yourself in a big company”
- 03 Rubenstein says that understanding your value is key. “Anyone can learn how to push buttons in the right sequence, but being someone others choose to work with, versus have to work with, should be your goal”



04 Blue Sky Studios has worked on a variety of popular franchises, including *Ice Age* and *Rio*

05 Rubenstein says that a wide range of in-house proprietary Nuke tools have been developed for look development

06 Being able to “take the film across the finish line” is just one of the drives behind Rubenstein’s 20-year career

07 “It’s harder to inspire when artists can’t envision a quality of life they can work towards,” says Rubenstein of the current state of the VFX industry

08 Rubenstein had read about Tippett Studio before joining to work on *The Matrix Revolutions*

09 “Everyday I’d... see artwork and efforts which just filled me up with inspiration,” says Rubenstein of *The Matrix*



“It felt like a renaissance in computer graphics and filmmaking, partly because three trilogies were being produced globally (*The Matrix*, *Lord Of The Rings* and *Star Wars* prequels) and artists and techniques were cross-pollinating like wildfire.”

Ari Rubenstein,
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a compositor at companies including Xaos and Tippett Studio. “Specifically I enjoy control of the final image quality,” he explains of the drive behind his compositing work. “More psychologically I’m a big picture thinker, and compositing, being at the end of the production pipeline, is where all the disparate elements of artwork come together... I enjoy being in this driver’s seat and taking the film across the finish line.”

Rubenstein joined Tippett to work on *The Matrix Revolutions*. “It felt like a renaissance in computer graphics and filmmaking, partly because three trilogies were being produced globally (*The Matrix*, *Lord Of The Rings* and *Star Wars* prequels) and artists and techniques were cross-pollinating like wildfire. There seemed great humility in the artists of that day, as everyone was being inspired and rewarded in such a way the ego seemed to fall away. I’ll admit I was a bit wide-eyed and bushy-tailed at that point but it was like I’d entered the NFL and was working, and competing, with giants. One day my VFX supervisor Craig Hayes (whom I’d read about in *Cinefex* for his work on *Jurassic Park* while I was a wee lad in Maryland) would be taking the time to ride a bike with me down to the ‘stage’ to show me the subtle aesthetics of how smoke appears in light rays across a full-size Stan Winston puppet, and the next day the *Matrix* directors [the Wachowski siblings] would be at my desk giving notes on the sickest shot I’d ever dreamed I’d have the opportunity to work on. It was nuts. Tippett was my big break as it were. It was a time where everything was still not possible, and so you were creating the industry and expanding it, whereas now it feels there are few new horizons to identify.”

His work at Tippett overlapped the creation of his own company Curv, where Rubenstein was responsible for sales, marketing, producing, VFX supervision and all other areas of the pipeline. Curv would produce 3D animation and 2D compositing for game cinematics, TV documentaries and feature films. After that, Rubenstein went to Blue Sky where he worked on films including both the *Ice Age* and *Rio* series.

In terms of enhancing his own artistry after 20 years in the industry, Rubenstein says that development is more than just being involved in your job. “From a career perspective I’m always looking for ways to create opportunities so I don’t get rutted, physically or financially. This translates into personal and commercial projects outside of my day job, but ones which fit a few criteria always, those being that it is something I find creatively and intellectually substantial, that I learn new and valuable techniques and that it in some way holds the potential to further my career. I think it is these side projects, more so than my day jobs, which have contributed to my development as an artist.”