

The Professional Artist Interview

Artist Name: Ali Tomineek

Title : Freelance 3D Artist and Animator

Interview Notes

1. How did you first get into 3D animation?

Ali explained that his creative background originally started in video editing. His transition into 3D animation happened gradually as he became interested in having more control over the entire visual scene, including lighting, camera placement, and composition. Animation allowed him to move beyond editing existing footage and instead build complete worlds from scratch.

He began seriously animating around 2020–2021, during which he started sharing his work online. Early projects gained significant traction online, receiving millions of views, which confirmed that his creative direction resonated with audiences. This positive feedback encouraged him to continue developing his animation work.

2. Why did you choose the freelance route instead of working in a studio?

Ali explained that his background as a musician influenced his decision to work independently. He felt that working in a studio environment would mean contributing to projects driven by other people's creative vision. While he acknowledged that studio work offers financial stability and predictable projects, he preferred maintaining creative independence and pursuing ideas he personally felt passionate about. Another factor was the immediate response from audiences online. When he began posting his work and saw large engagement numbers, it validated that his independent creative direction could succeed without needing to rely on studio employment.

3. What is the biggest challenge of freelancing?

Ali identified several challenges associated with freelancing, particularly:

- Building a professional community
- Learning how to build and manage a team
- Managing workload independently

He explained that when working freelance, the artist often has to perform multiple roles simultaneously, including animation, production management, scheduling, and communication with clients.

He described a particularly intense period in 2024 where he had multiple large projects due in the same month, working with companies such as NBC, NBA, Hulu, and ESPN. Managing these deadlines required long working hours and strong time management. He emphasized that the mental workload of juggling multiple responsibilities can be extremely demanding.

4. How did you develop your visual style?

Ali described his creative process as largely intuitive. Rather than deliberately designing a specific style, he creates visuals based on what he personally finds visually appealing as an audience member. Through experimentation, he discovered a balance between stylization and realism. His characters and environments are clearly stylized, but their movements and physical behaviour maintain a sense of realism. This approach creates a visual style that feels distinctive and recognizable, combining elements of cartoon-like design with realistic motion and detail.

5. Where do you find inspiration for your projects?

Ali explained that he does not actively search for inspiration in traditional visual sources. Instead, music plays a central role in his creative process. As a musician, he often begins with a sound or musical idea, which then triggers a visual concept in his mind. From there, he builds animation sequences that visually interpret the emotions or ideas suggested by the music. This process highlights the strong connection between audio and visual storytelling in his work.

6. How do music and animation influence each other in your work?

Ali explained that music and animation function similarly in their ability to tell layered stories. He compared songwriting techniques in hip-hop, such as double entendres, with visual symbolism in animation. Both mediums can communicate deeper meanings beneath the surface. He referenced one of his projects, where the animation visually represents emotional themes related to personal loss. In the animation, bright and colourful visuals contrast with deeper emotional symbolism, demonstrating how visuals can represent hidden emotional layers.

7. What role does animation currently play in hip-hop culture?

Ali believes animation within hip-hop culture is still developing and expanding, and he sees an opportunity to contribute to that growth. He described his ambition to create animated characters representing real artists and celebrities, allowing them to interact in ways that would be

impossible in live-action media. He expressed confidence that his work could play an important role in shaping the future relationship between animation and hip-hop culture.

8. What are your thoughts on AI in 3D and art?

Ali described AI primarily as a tool rather than a replacement for artists. He believes AI can be useful for generating ideas or sparking inspiration, but he strongly emphasized the importance of maintaining human creativity and artistic identity. He explained that he may occasionally use AI tools to brainstorm ideas, but he avoids relying on them to produce the final artwork.

9. Why do you primarily use Blender instead of Maya?

Ali initially chose Blender simply because it is free software, which allowed him to start creating without financial barriers. Since he was working independently and trying to minimize expenses, Blender was the most practical option. Over time, he became comfortable with the software and discovered its strengths. Although he acknowledges that Maya is widely used in professional studios, he has continued using Blender because it suits his workflow and creative needs.

10. What advice would you give to someone starting in the field?

Ali emphasized that the most important factor is passion for the craft. Without genuine interest and dedication, the challenges of learning and practicing animation can become overwhelming. He also stressed the importance of taking action rather than waiting for the perfect moment to begin learning. He compared learning animation to learning how to swim: the only way to truly learn is to jump in and start practicing.

Reflective Summary

Conducting this interview with Ali was a valuable opportunity to gain insight into an alternative pathway into the 3D animation industry. One of the most interesting aspects of his career journey is that he did not follow the traditional route of entering a studio environment. Instead, he built his career independently by sharing his work online and developing a direct relationship with audiences. This highlighted the importance of platforms such as social media in allowing emerging artists to build visibility and establish their own creative identity without necessarily relying on traditional industry structures.

Another key takeaway from the interview was the importance of creative independence and personal vision. Ali explained that his decision to pursue freelancing was influenced by his desire to work on projects that he felt personally passionate about rather than contributing to projects defined by a studio pipeline. This perspective challenged my previous assumption that

working within a studio is the primary or most successful route for 3D animators. Instead, it demonstrated that independent creators can build successful careers by developing a unique artistic voice and cultivating an audience.

I was also particularly interested in his explanation of how music influences his creative process. As someone who comes from a musical background, Ali approaches animation as a visual interpretation of sound. This idea of translating audio into visual storytelling was especially compelling to me, as it demonstrates how different creative disciplines can intersect and inspire each other. It reinforced my own interest in exploring 3D animation outside of traditional film and gaming contexts, particularly in areas such as music visuals and cultural media.

His discussion about the challenges of freelancing also provided important practical insight. While independence offers creative freedom, it also requires strong time management, self-discipline, and the ability to manage multiple projects simultaneously. Hearing about the intensity of balancing several large client projects made me more aware of the practical demands of working independently.

Another interesting topic discussed during the interview was the role of AI in the creative industry. Ali described AI as a tool that can assist in idea generation but emphasized that artists should maintain their own creative voice and avoid relying too heavily on automated systems. This perspective helped me think more critically about how emerging technologies might be integrated into creative workflows while still preserving artistic originality.

Overall, this interview reinforced the importance of passion, experimentation, and persistence when developing a career in animation. Ali's advice about "jumping in and getting your feet wet" resonated strongly with me, as it emphasizes learning through practice rather than waiting for the perfect moment or level of knowledge to begin creating.

Finally, it was encouraging to receive feedback on my own portfolio during the conversation. Ali's positive response and willingness to offer further guidance gave me additional confidence in continuing to develop my work and pursue opportunities within the field of 3D animation.

This interview has helped me better understand the realities of working as an independent artist and has encouraged me to continue exploring how 3D animation can be used within music and cultural media spaces, which is an area I am particularly interested in pursuing in the future.