



Euan McGrath, the artist who collaborated with UNKLE in his Stanley Kubrick exhibition

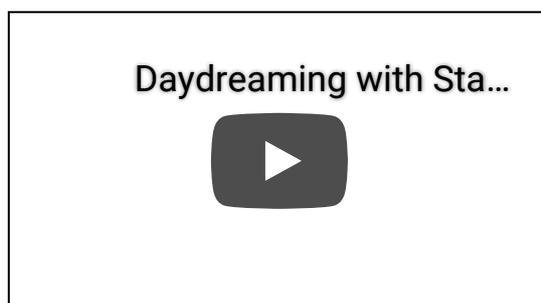
// By: Diego Galán
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The visual universe of UNKLE is a subject that we have touched on in great detail. Visual projects as dedicated as companions to a musical product, inevitably require a creative structure.

Euan McGrath is a *motion designer* based in London, England, whose career has not only highlighted his talents in corners of the creative visual industry such as art, advertising and entertainment, but also serves as a creative leader of great awareness on how to achieve his goals in this market



In an interview, we talked with McGrath about his origin story, particular interests, creative process and his relationship with Lavelle.



Film and graphic design

Tell me a little about your work and your career. What brought you to this medium?

Since I was little I made some kind of 'graphic art'. I don't want to sound *pretentious*, just but I was always creating posters, comics, magazine covers, character design, spaceships and all that stuff. When I was a child I *constantly* drew, then I went to college and that was when graphic design and cinema really took over. Here I was obsessed with the making of films and graphic design, but in those days I imagined that I would have to choose one of the two to continue as a career.

I chose the making of films and kept the design as a 'hobby'. It was only after college that the concept of 'movement design' really solidified in my head and I realized that, in fact, I could take these two aspects and mix them in my work. I have always been happier when I am flexible with what I am creating. I love being able to design a poster one day, work on a trailer the next and animate something later. Variety is what keeps me moving forward creatively.

How different is your energy focused, when designing and leading a team in creative terms?

I think they are very different mentalities, at least for me. When I am designing, I need time and space above all. I need space to empty all the things that buzz in my head and try to start the process from scratch. I have a process in which I start with the closest to anything, then I start thinking about the real basics.



more organic.

While when I work with a team, everything *is* about communication. I used to say this to my team so often that we joked that I should get tattooed on my knuckles! Communication and clarity These are the two most important problems we face when dealing with someone in a creative / work situation. For me, a team is about checking, not chasing, but being that delicate but stabilizing presence for the other team members.

Everyone should feel that they have their voice and their own abilities to be creative, but as a leader, it is your job to achieve a careful balance of letting people do their thing, and at the same time making sure things stay on time and constant. . I think being constant is often the biggest victim when working in a larger team, the more people are involved, the greater the opportunity for the creative to dilute or become muddy.

It is something very important for a creative leader to follow up, it is one of the biggest challenges of the process, to remain focused in all aspects, to maintain a vision of the whole.



Tell me a little about your relationship with James Lavelle? What projects have you worked on together?

It is a really interesting story. He had been a UNKLE fan since the first releases that happened when he was a teenager. I was in that perfect age for new music, when something really connected, it got deep and impacted you as a person, that was UNKLE for me. One of the tracks of Psyence Fiction, 'Lonely Soul' directly inspired my final film for film school. The idea had been growing and evolving in my head since 1998 when I first heard it, until 2002 when I finally filmed and finished the movie. It was a very proud moment at that time, since it was such a big task for me, but I knew that I had to do justice to music and my idea, especially after all those years.



Then, years later, I was working as Design Manager at a film and television advance company called Ignition Creative and the MD asked me if I knew a DJ named James Lavelle. (I've been a DJ since college, so everyone knew that this was one of my real areas of obsession). I said "James Lavelle *UNKLE* ?" And she answered yes. I got excited and explained my love for his music, so she said I should go to a meeting with him to discuss a possible breakthrough of her next Stanley Kubrick exhibition.

I thought I had died and gone to heaven, it was the perfect project! We all get together. We chatted and it quickly became clear that we were on the same page creatively, creating two very different trailers for the exhibition (one of them, one special and one purely for animation). Then, about a month before the exhibition was launched (as is usually the case with UNKLE!) James called me to tell me that he wanted to collaborate on something else with me, to create a set of custom images for a live show that were performing at Somerset House to celebrate the Kubrick Exhibition.

I was so excited as this combined many of my favorite things together in a single project, music, movies and live visuals. The only drawback was that we only had three weeks to create more than an hour of images, without a budget (I had spent everything on the exhibition!) And also had my full time job at Ignition, so I could only work during the afternoon and weekends.

We reached the end and it was a great experience to be a small part of the UNKLE live show. See the crowd respond to the images. It gave me such pleasure and I can't wait to do more things like this. After that, James saw how dedicated he was to work and how we were creatively on the same page so we worked together several times over the next few years, several videos. More recently and in a much deeper way, at the Beyond The Road Exhibition, at the Saatchi Gallery with Stephen Dobbie and Colin Nightingale.

There seems to be a common interest in Stanley Kubrick's work ...

He is one of the parents of cinematography. It could be said that it is the most distinctive, most influential, most studied and most revered cinematography of all time. Certainly, he has had the greatest influence on different film genres, despite not having made so many movies in his life. I had always been aware of his work while growing up and watching some of his films when he was too young to appreciate them, this exhibition (and the work I did with the BFI in his reissue of Barry Lyndon



lifetime of cinema, music and art that come together in a glorious amalgam, all cured by one of my creative heroes.



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Many people see UNKLE, almost as an independent entity, a creative collective. What did you find within the UNKLE universe creatively?

I think one of the reasons why UNKLE has lasted for so many years (apart from the absolute commitment to quality), is that they always evolve, while remaining UNKLE in some way in its purest essence. I think much of that comes from the way James is as a person, his natural radar of new and interesting influences, the way he interacts and collaborates with all the people who have been involved with UNKLE over the years.

It is something unique, especially in music, which can sometimes be a 'solo' or 'band' experience, this sea of constantly changing collaborators, all working through the prism that is James as the guardian of UNKLE. From my brief experience of working with him in a visual medium, it is obvious that he has a clear vision of what he wants to create, can describe it in many ways, give references, tell him what he *does not* want it to be (which I find very useful) and he knows very clearly when he sees something he does not like, he is an expert collaborator as evidenced by his legacy of creative work!

How do you think the images interact today in something like a live show? What was your main focus on creating an effective musical visual for this type of project?

My absolute motto with any kind of visual effects is that you should always *improve* the music, never contradict or distract it. I know that I am not the best technical creator in any field, but I know that I am very good at knowing what has an impact and if something is right for the purpose for which it is intended. With the images of UNKLE in which James and I collaborated (together with Tupac and the other artists



audience watching). You don't want to take it too far and for people to feel that you are not respecting the original creation. So yes, balance is the key to most of these things, respect the music, respect the audience, respect the creators, keep those things under control and keep it bold and impactful.

I have to mention the images I saw of The Chemical Brothers in Glastonbury this year. They were perfect. Bold, distinctive, creative, but with a deliberately 'simple' appearance, limited but changing color palette, varies between filming, motion graphics and 3D animation, surprising and sometimes quite strange, but they were always in complete harmony with the state of mood and energy of music.

Your work has been involved in a wide range of projects, what would be your ideal project?

Yes, I am fortunate to have worked on a variety of different things. This is definitely how I am happier. With a new challenge, but enough experience to create something great. It's hard to say what my 'ideal' would be, I don't like to establish specific 'dreams' to achieve, but the Kubrick project was definitely an ideal project. It involved design, motion graphics, shooting, editing, music, cinema, impressive results, respect for what we were creating and a very collaborative client, what more could you ask for! A bigger budget maybe, so yes, something like that is always what I'm going to be looking for and waiting for in my work, something that I can have my hands on multiple levels creatively.



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from Euan McGrath

In your experience, how different is the creative industry for someone as a movement designer? How do customers perceive their work? Do we generally understand your industry?

I think that from what I do, people outside the industry still have no idea what a motion designer is. Although the clue really is in the name. Think about how many



people to understand, strangely we are surrounded by them.

In terms of within the industry, they are really the same old complaints, customers and producers who do not appreciate the creative process and only expect things to be quick and easy. People simply cannot understand the level of detail that much of our work entails, add transfer times to that file, see things, adjust, preview and process times, everything really adds up. However, in this world of instant gratification, people honestly think that you just open the computer and press a button sometimes.

Another thing I have experienced frequently is that the ideas are diluted, you have a vision of something, then the client gives his ideas, the producer gives his ideas and you have to keep everyone happy. This is not how you end up with an excellent job, period. I am not advocating a creative dictatorship! The world does not work and should not work that way, collaboration is essential for me to create great things, but if there is no one with a clear vision to guide the creative process, then you will end up with half measures and lack of clarity.

What can we expect from you in the future?

Well, recently I went back to work on my own, after 4 years as Chief of Design, so it's like feeling like a child again. I am walking and moving, but it still feels new and exciting. I don't know what will be next. I just want to continue in this direction, working on a variety of projects in which I can deepen and collaborate with interesting people. I just moved to a new space in East London, which is new and fun, I have new images for UNKLE and I am collaborating with Tupac at Satore Studios on other projects, so it is an exciting time. I can't wait to have more things to take out and share with everyone soon.



UNKLE LIVE CDMX



UNKLE , which will also be present as headliner at the Guadalupe Valley Wine, Food & Music Festival , is the forerunner of the trip-hop project directed by James Lavelle and will deliver an intense live-set that is rarely presented. Tickets are already available through the Ticket System.



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