



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
Office of Media and Public Relations
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Alumnus Brian Walters bringing big images to small screens, from Netflix to Disney+ and beyond

Brian Walters is a busy guy. He plays a key role in the creation of animated films for one of the biggest studios in the world, Sony Imageworks. As a rough layout artist, he is responsible for blocking out all the characters and the action sequences before animators work their magic. Walters was the Rough Layout Lead for Imageworks' incredibly successful 2018 feature "Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse." These days, he is contributing to streaming projects on content platforms such as Disney+ and Netflix. He also is putting his creative chops on display for a special project to highlight the history of the city of Vancouver, Canada, where he lives and works. Walters earned a B.A. in Directing from Ramapo's School of Communication Arts in 2000, and has worked with some of the industry greats, earning wide acclaim. We recently caught up with him and one thing is clear – there is no slowing him down.

Content platforms, like Netflix and Amazon, Disney+, etc., seem to have taken over where traditional movie theaters lost out in the last year. What kinds of projects are you working on now?

Streaming projects have definitely been keeping us busy. Currently I'm working on an animated feature called *The Sea Beast* for Netflix. Our director is Chris Williams, who previously directed *Moana*, *Big Hero 6*, and *Bolt* at Disney.

It was just announced that *Vivo*, an animated feature I worked on for Sony Animation featuring original songs by Lin Manuel Miranda, is heading to Netflix this summer. It was originally going to be released in theaters.

<https://deadline.com/2021/04/sony-animation-lin-manuel-miranda-musical-pic-vivo-headed-to-netflix-1234744464/>

Another feature I recently helped out on briefly is [computer animated science fiction comedy] *The Mitchells vs. the Machines*. That, too, was originally intended for theaters, but instead will premiere on Netflix in May. For anybody watching, I blocked out the short but awesome sequence of when the robots activate for the first time and take off.

Another streaming project I worked on was *The Falcon and The Winter Soldier* for Disney+. Imageworks produced the VFX [visual effects] for the climactic battle in Episode 6. Add in *Over the Moon* for Netflix, and you can say I've worked on more streaming shows in the last few years than theatrical releases.

***Over the Moon* was recently nominated for an Academy Award in the Animated Film category. What was your role?**

I helped out with *Over the Moon* for a couple of months towards the end of its production. I blocked out the middle portion of the ping pong battle and set-dressed all the little floating bits in the background of dozens of Lunaria shots. It was a treat to get to work with Glen Keane*.

Here's a fun fact... Glen won an Oscar for directing Kobe Bryant's animated short *Dear Basketball*. Most people don't know that Kobe used to shoot hoops at Ramapo before he was drafted. We knew of him at the time as 'that high school kid who thinks he can go pro'... How's that for a Ramapo connection?

(Here's proof of Kobe at Ramapo in the first paragraph: <https://grantland.com/features/the-secret-history-kobe-bryant-failed-attempt-rap-career/>)

(*Glen Keane is an American animator, author and illustrator. He was a character animator for feature films including *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, *Tarzan* and *Tangled*.)

Tell us a little about the Vancouver project...it looks fantastic.

The Vancouver project started out as just a geeky desire to model old buildings that no longer exist, especially in the area of our Sony Imageworks office downtown where there was once a grand hotel. When I'm finished, the viewer will be able to experience the city growing around them every decade from 1880 to today in both Augmented and Virtual reality. Now if only I had a little more spare time!

Check out a sample here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRP3X669HXc

Your photography website is quite impressive, too. How does this work correspond to your graphics designs?

At Imageworks, I am what is called a Rough Layout Artist. We are responsible for both blocking out all the characters and action of a sequence (before sending it to the animation department), but also shooting the movie with the CG camera. Working a CG camera in a 3D world follows many of the same rules as traditional photography, especially when it comes to things like frame composition and lens selection. It was my experience with photography since high school that led me to my job as a layout artist today.

Some of my other past projects include co-designing the steampunk drumkit Neil Peart played when Rush was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and co-designing the stage backdrop used on Jimmy Kimmel Live for 8 seasons. My personal work has also been included in the broadcasts of the Academy Awards, Emmys, Grammys, Tonys, and CMA Awards.

What advice can you give to Ramapo students who wish to pursue a career in graphics and/or animation?

Don't ever give up and grow thick skin. Know how to take criticism without it hurting your feelings. Be okay with delivering pizzas until you land steady work because you know you are following your dream.

Always have a side project that you are working on, even if it's only to improve your skills. But don't be discouraged by the long road ahead because somebody is going to succeed by going down that road -- and there is no reason that somebody can't be you.

Visit www.brian-walters.com for his portfolio.

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Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state's premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding. The College is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by College Choice, has been named one of the 50 Most Beautiful College Campuses in America by *CondéNast Traveler*, and is recognized as a top college by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Kiplinger's*, Princeton Review and *Money* magazine, among others. Ramapo College is also distinguished as a Career Development College of Distinction by CollegesofDistinction.com, boasts the best campus housing in New Jersey on Niche.com, and is designated a "Military Friendly College" in Victoria Media's *Guide to Military Friendly Schools*.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, data science, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business, education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to master's degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, Creative Music Technology, Data Science, Educational Technology, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education, as well as a post-master's Doctor of Nursing Practice.