

ILLUSION ARTS INC

"Piranesi Interior" Matte Painting from "Beauty and the Beast" by Syd Dutton, Illusion Arts, Inc.

Original in oils on glass, image 66" X 38" (approximate)

We created many matte painting shots for "Beauty and the Beast", often to extend the studio sets to a size and scope impossible to build in reality. In this case, the painting created a virtual set that would have been beyond the budget of most feature films.

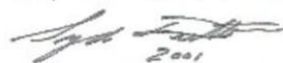
This shot is named for Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), the Italian architect whose designs have inspired innumerable film set designs, including several in "Beauty and the Beast". The art department built a minimal set, consisting of an arched doorway, a landing and a staircase which ended on the studio floor, and just enough wall to cover Vincent's walk down the stairs. We shot the live action with a VistaVision camera and a telephoto lens from at a distance appropriate to the widest view of the final image, filling the frame with the set. (VistaVision is a film format in which each frame is the size of a 35mm slide, twice the normal size of a full movie frame.)

Back at Illusion arts, we made a low-contrast print from the original negative and projected it onto a small screen behind a hole scraped in the painting (the black area in the middle of the image). The painting and the projection were adjusted to match exactly. (This is the classic "miniature rear-projection" matte technique.)

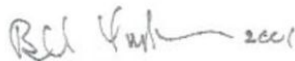
We photographed the painting and the projected live action in successive passes with a computer-controlled (Motion Control) camera that began close to the painting (nearly filling the screen with the projected image) then moved away to reveal the rest of the gigantic cavern.

Until Linda Hamilton became pregnant and called a halt to the practice, much of "Beauty and the Beast" was filmed in a smokey atmosphere, so the matte painting shots had to match. We filmed the live action in little or no smoke, then added diffusion on the final composite. The paintings had to be very graphic to "read" through the fog filters; they looked best when painted in an impressionistic, simplified style. This was good news for us, since the show's tight schedules would not have permitted a high degree of finish in any case!

An amusing sidelight: The script for this episode ran short, so the producer requested that we make this shot as long as possible. That's why the camera pans so leisurely around the left side of the painting, finds Vincent, follows him as he descends the stairs, and pulls back so slowly to the final wide shot.



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