

## Frank Vitale

Snowboarders crave excitement. You can tell by the acrobatic jumps they make and the perilously steep runs they tear down, all while their feet are attached to one piece of plastic measuring, on average, a mere 37 inches long by 9 inches wide. Considering snowboarders' thrill-seeking nature, it's not surprising that the design on a snowboard—specifically, the theme, layout, and color—is a major selling point for many riders. In this sport, dull won't do.

### 3ds max behind radical Burton Board designs

With this in mind, independent digital artist Frank Vitale turned to Discreet **3ds max**® software when he landed a job to create the 3D illustrations that would be emblazoned on new models in two popular lines of snowboards made by leading manufacturer Burton Snowboards. "I like **3ds max** because it lets me explore my creativity," says Vitale, who is based in Phoenix. "With **3ds max**, I created exciting illustrations for these boards—illustrations that definitely catch the eye. And that's important when it comes to snowboards. The design on the board—the bright colors, and the mood and 'attitude' the board evokes—is a big selling factor."



Work on this project began when the folks at Jager DiPaola Kemp, the Vermont-based design firm in charge of the Burton account, contacted Vitale to create the illustrations. Burton was introducing new models in its youth-oriented Chopper and Punch snowboard lines. Each year Burton introduces a different theme for these boards. "They wanted the new theme for the Chopper line to be a Japanese illustration-style fighting mech, and for the Punch line they wanted a mechanical, insect-like character," Vitale explains.

After determining the direction JDK wanted to take for the Chopper line, Vitale hired concept artist Phil Saunders, who worked with Vitale and JDK's Michael Jager to develop rough sketches of the mech character. When the final design was approved, Saunders created a refined drawing for Vitale to use as a modeling reference. Using this reference, Vitale built the fighting mech against a bright nebula background in **3ds max**. He surfaced, posed, lit, and rendered the character in the **3ds max** application as well.

The same process was followed for the illustrations for the Punch line. "For this line, the idea was to do a creature that was organic and insect-like, but mechanical and unlike anything else," Vitale says. So, Jager and JDK designer Nathan Nedorostek began by collecting photos of the creatures they wanted to mimic—a polar bear, baboon, preying mantis, dragonfly, and several others. Ultimately, Vitale, Jager, and Nedorostek decided the creature would have wings, six legs, a humanoid head, four eyes, and a jaw that could extend and dislocate. Saunders created conceptual sketches, which Vitale used as reference as he built the character in **3ds max**. Vitale also used the software for surfacing, posing, lighting, and rendering, and to create a rough background comprising a surreal, open space with reflections of light and motion that Nedorostek later refined.

In total, Vitale created five versions of the mech, one version appearing on each of the five boards in the Chopper line, but in a different pose and in a different color based on design direction provided by JDK's Richard Curren and Ryan Widrig. For the Punch line he created various groupings of the insect character—all of them tweaked in terms of pose and color so that they don't look alike—based on design direction by Nedorostek. Vitale submitted the 3D illustrations to JDK, which managed the printing process and subsequent application of the illustrations onto the snowboards.

According to Vitale, he relied on the Modifier Stack in **3ds max** quite often for this project. “With the Modifier Stack I could begin by creating simple models of the characters and backgrounds and change them—subdivide, bend, and twist them, and edit their meshes—to create the look I was after,” he says. “The Modifier Stack is one reason why I love **3ds max**. Because an object’s history is maintained, I could go into the Stack and easily tweak to accommodate feedback from the design team.”

Vitale says the surfacing tools in **3ds max** were invaluable also. “With the excellent surfacing tools, I quickly and easily tweaked the colors to make the characters look unique from board to board,” he enthuses.

With help from **3ds max** Vitale created eye-popping 3D illustrations that are bound to excite even the most extreme snowboarder. “I love **3ds max**,” he concludes. “With **3ds max**, I can really express my style.”



Images courtesy of Frank Vitale