

Gravity Wins Big at the 12th Annual VES Awards

February 13, 2014 | By [Mark London Williams](#)



Tim Webber (left) and Dale Newton collect a VES award for *Gravity*

The **Visual Effects Society** (VES) held its 12th annual awards show at the Beverly Hilton last night – meaning that while it's barely younger than the century itself, it continues to share a venue with the Golden Globes. Yet the evening was more dignified than the average Globes telecast.

Indeed, this edition brought VES' own version of the hosting duo **Tina Fey** and **Amy Poehler**, who anchor the Globes in the same ballroom. For the VFX community, this meant the return of comedian/actor **Patton Oswalt**.

Oswalt was in good form, casually dressed, which reflected the almost-formal-but-not-quite vibe that the VES has maintained for years.

He joked early on about it being an evening for *Gravity* awards, and he wasn't wrong, as the existential man-against-universe (or woman-against-universe, as the case may be) film directed by **Alfonso Cuarón** copped not only a Visionary award for the director himself, who established his sci-fi/FX-driven cred with the dystopian *Children of Men*, but went on to nab half a dozen awards for the night, including the VES version of best picture, namely outstanding visual effects in a visual effects-driven feature motion picture.

Their best non-FX picture award, outstanding supporting visual effects in a feature motion picture, went to the surprisingly resilient *Lone Ranger*, which is also nominated in the FX category on Oscar night – but where it will lose to, yes, *Gravity*.

Director Cuarón talked about cinematography and visual effects merging into "the whole cinematic experience," after being introduced by surprise presenter **Sandra Bullock**, "the integration of lights, sets and even actors."

But what does that integration mean for the people who build those sets? Or render them? The most interesting conversation BTL had about *Gravity*, and the state of visual effects as an industry, came not during the awards, but at the bar of the Beverly Hilton, waiting for the ballroom doors to open.

We wound up sitting next to a renderer for a premier digital effects house. He was happy to be working primarily on commercials, however, instead of features, since work on motion pictures was too unpredictable, too unsteady. He was lamenting that he and his cohorts, who rushed into the biz around the turn of century, all thought that having a unique skill set, and being in a seemingly rarefied industry, would keep their work steady, and their wages high.

But now most of the middle tier work in films – outside of the tentpoles – can be handled with plug-n'-play software, by workers in low-wage economies. "We thought," said renderer opined, "that only our grandfathers needed unions. We never realized we did."

Were they too late? Or is that organizing yet to come?

There was scant mention of such tension from the podium. Unlike previous years, there were no real laments by either executive director **Eric Roth** or VES chair **Jeffrey Okun**, about outsourcing or any of the other issues affecting the "day laborers" of the digital world, or the "digital gaffers," as they were referred to by Roth in his opening remarks.

Our disgruntled bar companion – as well-positioned as he was at a name brand house – was busy trying to deliver a final cut by Friday, working his phone as he attended the awards. He remarked that faster

rendering speeds and newer tech didn't matter anymore. Producers simply expected more complex visuals in the same time frames as they did when digits were in their infancy.

But there were many call-outs to an earlier era of visual effects, not only in the lifetime achievement award to Oscar-winning **John Dykstra**, whose credits stretch back to the original *Star Wars* trilogy, but also when Okun mentioned a talk with late VFX pioneer **Ray Harryhausen** who worked in a pre-digital, stop-motion era. "I just didn't know I couldn't do it," Harryhausen remarked to him.

Which is kind of the plucky mantra – overtime or benefits notwithstanding – that has held sway in the visual effects industry ever since.

Things are headed to a friendly protest by VFX artists on Oscar night over some of the economic issue affecting this now-pervasive aspect of filmmaking. But VES night was amiable and low key, with minimal agitation, or mention – outside of the hotel bar – about the macro issues affecting the industry.

Meanwhile, with *Frozen* as one of the evening's other big winners, with awards in the four categories it was nominated for, and *Game of Thrones* grabbing three statues in the TV categories, there were few surprises as well.

Sometimes, the surprises are best saved for the screen. This year, in contrast to Harryhausen's comments, the VES was quite happy to know what it could do, and to deliver it in a solid and relatively low-key evening.

Unless you happen to be talking to one of the "digital gaffers" at the bar.

The winners of the 12th Annual VES Awards are:

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Visual Effects-Driven Feature Motion Picture

Gravity
Tim Webber
Nikki Penny
Neil Corbould
Richard McBride

Outstanding Supporting Visual Effects in a Feature Motion Picture

The Lone Ranger
Tim Alexander
Gary Brozenich
Shari Hanson
Kevin Martel

Outstanding Animation in an Animated Feature Motion Picture

Frozen
Chris Buck
Jennifer Lee
Peter Del Vecho
Lino Di Salvo

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Broadcast Program

Game of Thrones: Valar Dohaeris
Steve Kullback
Joe Bauer
Jörn Großhans
Sven Martin

Outstanding Supporting Visual Effects in a Broadcast Program

Banshee: Pilot
Armen Kevorkian
Mark Skowronski
Jeremy Jozwik
Ricardo Ramirez

Outstanding Real-Time Visuals in a Video Game

Call of Duty: Ghosts
Mark Rubin
Richard Kriegler
David Johnson
Alessandro Nardini

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Commercial

PETA: "98% Human"
Angus Kneale
Vince Baertsoen
Colin Blaney
Kyle Cody

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Special Venue Project

Space Shuttle Atlantis
Daren Ulmer
John Gross
Cedar Connor
Christian Bloch

Outstanding Animated Character in a Live Action Feature Motion Picture

The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug: Smaug
Eric Reynolds
David Clayton
Myriam Catrin
Guillaume Francois

Outstanding Animated Character in an Animated Feature Motion Picture

Frozen: Bringing the Snow Queen to Life
Alexander Alvarado
Joy Johnson
Chad Stubblefield
Wayne Unten

Outstanding Animated Character in a Commercial or Broadcast Program

PETA: "98% Human"
Vince Baertsoen
Alex Allain
Henning Koczy

Outstanding Created Environment in a Live Action Feature Motion Picture

Gravity: Exterior
Paul Beilby
Kyle McCulloch
Stuart Penn
Ian Comley

Outstanding Created Environment in an Animated Feature Motion Picture

Frozen: Elsa's Ice Palace
Virgilio John Aquino
Alessandro Jacomini
Lance Summers
David Womersley

Outstanding Created Environment in a Commercial or Broadcast Program

Game of Thrones: The Climb
Patrick Zentis
Mayur Patel
Nitin Singh
Tim Alexander

Outstanding Virtual Cinematography in a Live Action Feature Motion Picture

Gravity
Tim Webber
Emmanuel Lubezki
Richard McBride
Dale Newton

Outstanding Virtual Cinematography in a Live Action Commercial or Broadcast Program

The Crew
Dominique Boidin
Rémi Kozyra
Léon Bérelle
Maxime Luère

Outstanding Models in a Feature Motion Picture

Gravity: ISS Exterior
Ben Lambert
Paul Beilby
Chris Lawrence
Andy Nicholson

Outstanding FX and Simulation Animation in a Live Action Feature Motion Picture

Gravity: Parachute and ISS Destruction
Alexis Wajsbrot
Sylvain Degrotte
Horacio Mendoza
Juan-Luis Sanchez

Outstanding FX and Simulation Animation in an Animated Feature Motion Picture

Frozen: Elsa's Blizzard
Eric W. Araujo
Marc Bryant
Dong Joo Byun

Tim Molinder

Outstanding FX and Simulation Animation in a Commercial or Broadcast Program

PETA: "98% Human"

Vince Baertsoen

Jimmy Gass

Dave Barosin

Outstanding Compositing in a Feature Motion Picture

Gravity

Mark Bakowski

Anthony Smith

Theodor Groeneboom

Adrian Metzelaar

Outstanding Compositing in a Broadcast Program

Game of Thrones: The Climb

Kirk Brillon

Steve Gordon

Geoff Sayer

Winston Lee

Outstanding Compositing in a Commercial

Call of Duty: "Epic Night Out"

Chris Knight

Daniel Thuresson

Nick Tayler

Dag Ivarsory

Outstanding Visual Effects in a Student Project

Rugbybugs

Matthias Baeuerle

Carl Schroeter

Martin Lapp

Emanuel Fuchs



Latest Headlines

April 15, 2014

- [Galaxy 61 Delivers Intro for VH1's *The Fabulous Life*](#)

April 15, 2014

- [Shotgun Software Introduces Client Review Site with Shotgun 5.3](#)

April 15, 2014

- [Lucas Eskin Joins Cut+Run](#)

April 14, 2014

- [Douglas Trumbull's *UFOTOG* to Premiere at Seattle Cinerama's Science Fiction Festival](#)

April 14, 2014

- [Mr. Wolf Sets Up Shop in Santa Monica](#)

April 14, 2014

- [Drive Thru Puts Frankie to Work on Remote Client Interactions](#)

April 11, 2014

- [Sheriff's Deputies Accidentally Kill Tosh, 0 PA John Winkler](#)

View More Headlines

Lucy