

Source URL: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/meet-concept-artist-behind-world-859252>

## Meet the Concept Artist Behind the World of 'Blade Runner'

10:00 AM PST 2/2/2016 by Seth Abramovitch

•  
•  
•



Courtesy of Subject

**The vivid visions of Syd Mead, the recipient of this year's Visual Effects Society Visionary Award, also helped create the futuristic worlds of 'Star Trek,' 'Elysium' and 'Tomorrowland.'**

This story first appeared in the Feb. 5 issue of *The Hollywood Reporter* magazine. To receive the magazine, [click here to subscribe](#) [2].

If you ever have marveled at grimy, monolithic metropolis from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* or the sleek neon Light Cycles of the original *Tron*, you have Syd Mead to thank. The acclaimed concept artist has been inspiring Hollywood with his futuristic vehicles, robots and landscapes for nearly six decades (more recently with films like *Elysium* and *Tomorrowland*). Ahead of receiving the Visual Effects Society's Visionary Award — an honor previously given to Christopher Nolan — Mead, 82, spoke with *THR* at his Pasadena home.

### What does this award mean to you?

It's going to be quite an honor because J.J. Abrams was a previous recipient whom I worked with on *Mission: Impossible III* doing the mask-making machine. He invited me to Paramount to watch him film a scene where Tom Cruise is demonstrating to Ving Rhames how it works. Tom stripped off his T-shirt at one point, and we had pictures taken. It was really nice.

### How did you get your start?

I started drawing at 2. When I was 4, my dad, a Baptist minister, would read *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* to me. By age 7 — this was in the late 1930s — I had a sensibility for perspective and was drawing these cars with teardrop bodies. My first hire out of Art Center School in Los Angeles was drawing concept cars for the Ford Motor Co. That was in 1959, and I was making \$4,000 a year. Around that time, aluminum was starting to compete with stainless steel, and the industry was looking for a visual way to say, "Steel is cool!" So I was hired to complete this book of futuristic designs. It went viral, and I've been hauling ass ever since.

### How did you break into Hollywood?

I wasn't particularly mystified or determined to get into the movies. In 1978, I did the V'ger vessel design on *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, which to me was just another design job. Then, in 1980, I got a call from Ridley Scott, and we met at 9000 Sunset, which was the Playboy building at the time. The one comment I got from him was, "This is not going to be *Logan's Run*." This futuristic movie was not going to be clean and white with everybody running around in beautiful togas. *Blade Runner* was in preproduction for eight months, which is a long time. I was hired to design just vehicles. But one of my steel books had a rendering with this crappy weather and rain and the freeway going off into the city — just a wall of architecture. Ridley really liked that. It was the dark, moody, dystopian look he was after. He was doing Philip Marlowe in the future.

### How close is the world to what you predicted back in your youth?

The future has caught up with itself. We're now very close to putting mental visualization on the screen. They've done it with cats. They were taking an image right from the cat's visual center in its brain, and it matched up — which is kind of scary when you think about it.

# 14<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL VES AWARDS

FEBRUARY 2,  
THE BEVERLY HILTON

2016 HONOREES

**RIDLEY SCOTT** ▶  
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

**SYD MEAD**  
VISIONARY AWARD



Mead



[3]

- Links:**  
[1] [http://pinterest.com/pin/create/button/?url=www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/meet-concept-artist-behind-world-859252&media=http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/news\\_landscape/2016/01/spinnerstreet.jpg&description=Meet the Concept Artist Behind the World of &#039;Blade Runner&#039;](http://pinterest.com/pin/create/button/?url=www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/meet-concept-artist-behind-world-859252&media=http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/news_landscape/2016/01/spinnerstreet.jpg&description=Meet%20the%20Concept%20Artist%20Behind%20the%20World%20of%20Blade%20Runner)  
[2] <https://subscribe.hollywoodreporter.com/sub/?p=THR&f=sale&s=IH1402HR20>  
[3] <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/sites/default/files/custom/Arlene/auto/THR-bob-ves-awards.jpg>