How ‘that’ scene in Three Billboards was created using VFX

Union VFX takes us through how they subtly enhanced some of the Oscar-winning film’s most powerful scenes using VFX.

Warning: this story contains major spoilers for the film.

Lacking dragons, spaceships and digital doubles, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri* isn’t a film you associate with VFX. We’re all aware that in this modern age even the simplest production will feature CG elements and effects work – but it’s rare to see a VFX breakdown for a major production that doesn’t feature CG characters, environments or at least someone’s head being blown in half.

Which is why it’s great to see Union VFX‘s breakdown reel for *Three Billboards*, as it shows how relatively simple and sometimes subtle use of visual effects help create some of the film’s most powerful moments – whether horrific or beautiful – and help immerse the viewer in the very real-feeling world of Ebbing.

[embedded content]

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri follows Mildred (Frances McDormand), whose daughter has been raped and murdered, and her attempt to spur the local police force into finding the killer. McDormand won this year’s Best Actress Oscar for her role in the film, with Sam Rockwell picking up a Best Supporting Actor gong for his portrayal of an ignorant, racist cop. The film also picked up five further nominations.

In the VFX breakdown, you can see how the hard-to-watch scene in the dentist's where Mildred plunges a drill into the his fingernail was made to look so painful.

There's also breakdowns of how Union VFX added fire to a number of scenes, some of it caused by Mildred and some she wants to put out – which was created through a mixture of CG fire and comping in fire shot separately. The studio also created a CG molotov to replace a prop thrown by McDormand that didn't fly or land as planned.

Union's work wasn't all pain and destruction though – also shown is it work compositing a deer shot elsewhere into one of the film's softer, more touching scenes.

Though the film is set in Missouri and shot in North Carolina, Union VFX is based in London. The studio has worked a lot with Danny Boyle, including on *T2: Trainspotting*.

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