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**Scout & About**

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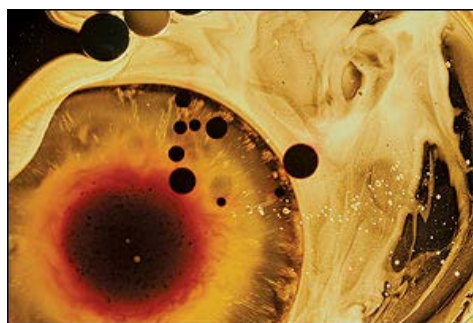
## Hollywood in the Berkshires

### Scout & About: Massachusetts 2012

By TODD LONGWELL

The Berkshires in western Massachusetts are known for their mountain vistas, quaint towns and world-famous music and theater festivals.

But the area also has a less-heralded rep as a creative cauldron for movie magic. On a wall of the Animagic Museum of Special Effects in the small town of Lee hangs a family tree illustrating the history of pioneering visual effects work done in the region, from the living painting technology used in "What Dreams May Come" to the super slo-mo 360-degree bullet effect used in "The Matrix."



Berkshires-based vfx pioneer Doug Trumbull worked on "Tree of Life."

At the root of this unlikely presence of vfx wizardry in the rural part of an eastern state is Douglas Trumbull, the visionary behind the effects in films such as "2001: A Space Odyssey" and "Blade Runner."

"Doug was the person who started the whole influx," says Berkshires-based vfx supervisor Jeff Kleiser, who runs Synthespian Studios with wife Diana Walczak.

Trumbull moved to the Berkshires from his native Los Angeles in 1987. "I really wanted to live in the country and have animals and more of a farm-like life," Trumbull says. "I felt that the ability to communicate with the world over the Internet was feasible, and it's turned out to be true."

Trumbull applied his movie experience to theme park-type attractions, working on "Back to the Future – The Ride" for Universal Studios and a trio of presentations for the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas, budgeted at \$40 million.

At its peak in the early 1990s, the Luxor project employed 300 people, including John Nugent, who now runs Sandbox FX, in Pittsfield, Mass., which has provided 2D animation, rotoscoping and digital paintwork for films including "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy and "Night at the Museum."

Kleiser and Walczak came from L.A. to work on the Luxor project and wound up setting up their own shop in the town of North Adams, where they've supervised effects for "The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man" ride at Universal's Islands of Adventure in Florida and such films as "X-Men: The Last Stand," "Surrogates" and Indian action film "Ra.One."

In 1995, Trumbull sold his Lenox, Mass., facility to Cinergi F/X. Renamed Mass.Illusions (and, later, Manex Visual Effects), it went on to work on films including "Judge Dredd," "Starship Troopers," "The Matrix" and "What Dreams May Come" with Oscar-winners such as John Gaeta and Joel Hynek. The company went through several ownership changes and moves (to Alameda, Calif., then Trenton,





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New Jersey) before petering out in the mid-2000s.

For Trumbull's most recent project, Terrence Malick's 2011 "Tree of Life," he returned to old-fashioned organic effects processes he used in "2001" and "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," such as photographing chemical interactions in petri dishes. But now he's looking ahead once more, experimenting with virtual sets and electronic cinematography at his Berkshires studio.

"It's very helpful to be away from the mainstream of Hollywood business-as-usual, so that we can experiment with what movies really could be" in the future, Trumbull says.

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