

Chris Coakley Bio

I was born July 17th 1950, raised in the San Fernando Valley, went to public schools, and did the normal things a boy does with his free time, namely throwing and kicking and catching and swatting at anything round, riding my bike with the guys, and skating, and pretending to be a GI Joe. On those times I had to stay in the house, I would play army with my models, turning my bed room into a major battle field, with my two other brothers we would stage major wars. And then sometimes I would make drawings of the events. At school the teachers noticed I could draw just about anything, so I was assigned all the duties of providing pictures for the school paper, decorating for events, and posters for whatever the occasion. By high school, I had put the crayons down and began focusing on an education, taking all the advanced placement courses I could get. In the summers, if I could, I took advanced art classes. These were geared for people really planning to do something with their art talents. I did not think that was me at the time, but when I look back on it now I was excited to be there. I had one other experience that pointed me towards that career in art. It was while visiting my uncle's one summer; he had the swimming pool. He had a studio built over his garage, and in that studio he painted these large realistic paintings, dipping into large pans of really rich looking paint with all different colors. I decided then that I would discover how to make one of these paintings. I didn't know at the time, that my uncle worked in the movie business and he had the responsibility of producing the backgrounds that surround the sets on the stages.

When I started college, my area of learning was physics and chemistry, but I kept pestering my uncle for a job at his studio during the summers. When he final acquiesced to my pleadings, I was turning 18 and going to U.C.L.A. as a science major. My first job at the studio was to assist the shop man. That meant cleaning brushes and cleaning the pallets, getting tools for the artists, and learning how to mix up the various mixtures of colors and dyes, and binders and such. In the Studios, most crafts were passed on by the apprentice system. They weren't teaching these things in school. However, as I became more interested in what was going on at the Studio, I began taking drawing classes at U.C.L.A. My studies in science faltered, and I had to transfer to something easier to master so I could still manage to sneak in an art class or two. Meanwhile, I was motoring to the Studio after class every day, and working full time in the summers. After Five years and graduation from U.C.L.A. with a bachelors' in Economics I was ready for a full time job in...the Studios. I was an assistant, learning the skills of drafting and perspective, and learning how to paint the big skies that many studios used when filming.

My first experience learning to paint realistically was on "Planet of the Apes", the first one. Since then, and pretty much up to four years ago, the shows were coming one after another. I've had the pleasure of working on many, many pictures, and painting practically every kind of landscape seascape, architecture, machination, or space environment you can imagine. Here's a partial list:

Ghost Busters	Alien	Coma	Men in Black	Independence Day
Tora Tora Tora	1941	Black Hole	Home Alone	King Kong(not the first)

Star Trek(the first one)	Cannery Row	Silver Streak	Winter kills
New York, New York	Young Frankenstein	Towering Inferno	
My Best Friend's Wedding	40 Year Old Virgin	Earthquake	Space Balls
History of the World	Three Amigos	Lemony Snicket	IronMan
Pirates of the Caribbean	Spider Man	War of the Worlds....to name a few.	

It's not uncommon for a crew of ten to twelve artists to spend several months painting the murals for these shows. Typically a mural (we call them backgrounds or backings) can be 30 to 40 feet high and run from 300 to 600 feet long. Some can be very detailed and run right up to the set, thus creating the illusion of a continuous environment. Some, using monumental perspective tricks can be used in special effects to create the illusion of the continuation of something too expensive to build, like the engine room of the Star Trek Enterprise with its pulsing glowing tubes.

Amidst all this production, around 1979, Disney, a company that makes a business in theme parks, borrows heavily from the Studios in Hollywood, from time to time for experienced artisans to build their attractions across the world. I had to go..., this time to Florida for the building of EPCOT. I was hired by Disney to do the large wall murals for the Land Pavilion, and the black light murals for Space Ship Earth. These were the first large scale realistic murals ever attempted. From Florida to Japan is a big stretch both in terms of culture and in technical progress. Disney was attempting its first foreign theme park, and using foreign artisans to create the illusions so familiar to westerners and so sought after by Asians. Back in 1981 there were vast differences in culture and industrial practices. I was sent over to teach Japanese artists our modern day production methods used in the movie studios of Hollywood.

When I returned home, Disney was not thru with me yet, they were expanding again, in Florida, Japan, and in Anaheim. I felt it was time to start a business that catered to this type of production. I started Scenex and began working on early designs for Disney's next level of theme park experience, but as a vendor now. I did the paint design for Splash Mountain in Anaheim, and followed up with a crew of 14 studio artists to paint the actual show in the field. Next, I helped design the show for Japan, This one being a major upgrade to Anaheim's. I followed the production to Japan and was put in charge of seven different paint companies to paint the interior show of Japan's Splash Mountain. I was there 17 months. I continue to maintain friends over there, and from time to time Disney will request that I travel to do some teaching or training program for show painting

I have had similar experiences going to France and Korea. In France I designed and painted murals for Disney's Paris Park. In Korea I painted new sections of a theme park built and owned by the Samsung family. This was the first time I worked under my own banner, and didn't have the comfort of a Disney to take care of all the necessities of doing business overseas. Problems in communication, transportation, housing, and banking. I had to arrange for ten artists to travel and live for six weeks in a land that was pretty much backward and closed to the outside. That was 1996, in 2005 I went back to do another addition, this time as a working consultant to a Korean paint company. Welcome to the 21 Century I say, what a change they've gone through in just ten short years. Everyone wearing the latest clothes, talking on the latest phones using the latest computers, and using that technology to build a new Theme Park. We still had to paint the murals by hand, but we were looking at photoshopped printouts, not actual hand painted designs.

Speaking of this new technology, it has crashed the gates of Hollywood and is here to stay. No longer do the mega shows being produced now have need for murals to create the environment on the stages for the actors to act. All the backgrounds, even the sets, can be computer generated seamlessly with the live action. I had always thought I could work in show biz until retirement. Now I'm looking for a new direction and for new uses of the old practices I've learned from the Studios. I would like to do things with my paint work that have a positive impact on the public. I would like my images to be representative of timeless memories that people hold dear. Images that make one stop and reflect, and maybe chuckle over a private thought.

Alternate Bio from Web page:

Chris Coakley is a native Californian raised in the Los Angeles area and has been living in Hermosa Beach since 1978. He graduated from UCLA with a degree in Economics, while still managing to continue his art education taking drawing and painting classes. He went back to UCLA in later years to take Photography, Interior Design, and Computer Graphics.

Since 1969 he has worked in the Movie business and the Entertainment industry. His main passion is for the large scale painted backgrounds, or murals that wrap around the sets to complete the filming environment. Through the years, he has been able to ply his craft at every major studio in Hollywood, and including every genre such as live stage, commercials, touring rock shows, television, and music videos.

Along with his career in the movie business Chris branched into the Theme Park industry. There he applied his knowledge of movie tricks to paint the large murals for many of the shows at Disneyland, Universal, and Six Flags. He began to work closely with the design teams to develop the color schemes, and the character of the show. To do this, he would paint the models and produce the concept art so that others involved in the productions could see what they were going to build.

Largely because of this experience Chris started Scenex in 1987, and for the next twenty years he was busy providing a full range of art services to the Entertainment industry. He has contributed to major projects in France, Japan, and Korea, and continues to visit those resorts from time to time as a consultant. Chris's mission going forward is to develop the potential for creating visual impact using the skills he has honed from the Entertainment industry. Hopefully it will be a positive experience for everyone.