

IN CONVERSATION

# FUTURE GAZING

**Andrew Jones** shares the thinking behind FutureDeluxe's surreal opening sequence for OFFF London, together with the experimental techniques that made it possible

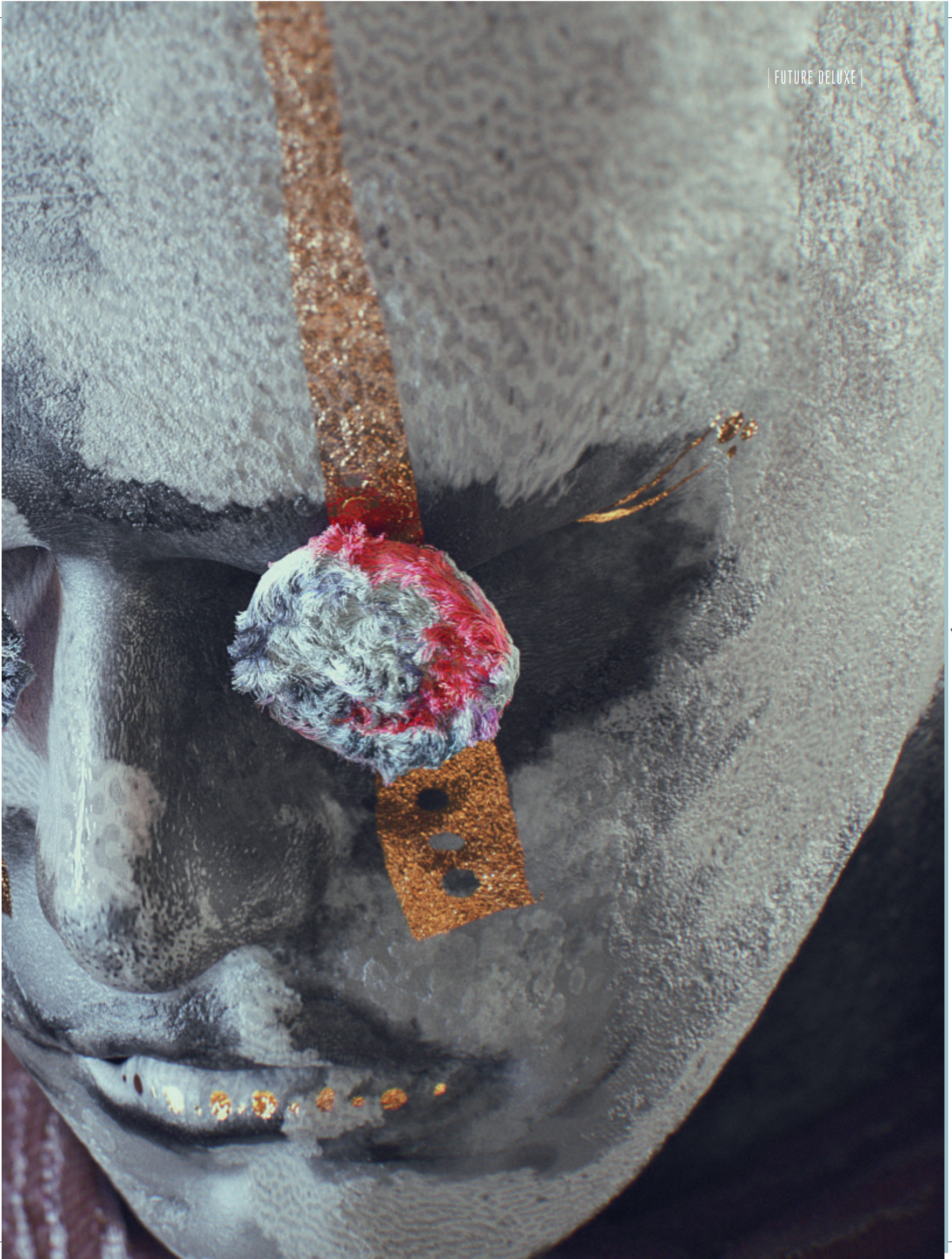
**FUTUREDELUXE** \_ FutureDeluxe is a London-based creative studio that specialises in design, technology and the moving image. It was founded in 2010 by Andrew Jones, now creative director. Jones was joined by director James Callahan in 2012. Clients include Nike, Adidas, Philips and Converse. [www.futuredeluxe.co.uk](http://www.futuredeluxe.co.uk)

■ WORDS: Ruth Hamilton

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Above: The FutureDeluxe team, including founder and creative director Andrew Jones (top left).

**S**ince it was founded seven years ago, FutureDeluxe has been breaking boundaries. The London-based studio, which operates at the intersection of design, technology and the moving image, has produced motion work for clients including Adidas, Disney, Nike and Sony. It is known for embracing new technologies, experimenting with new techniques, and generally pushing limits with its work.

One of its recent projects – the opening titles for OFFF London (see page 16) – was no exception. A visual tour de force incorporating realistic CG of futuristic humans, mesmerising experiments in colour effects, a bonkers storyline and a goosebump-inducing soundtrack, the piece was the talking point of the event. We caught up with founder Andrew Jones to find out what it was all about...

**Your OFFF title sequence is pretty strange. Talk us through your idea.**  
We asked ourselves one question: what is OFFF and the creative

community and process really all about? We came up with the notion that it's about sharing knowledge and passing information back and forth. From there, we introduced these stylised tribes and groups. We added some FutureDeluxe design witchcraft into the mix to get the final result.

**What was your response when OFFF first got in touch?**

When you're given an open brief it's always an exciting prospect. However, given that it's the OFFF titles, it comes with a bit of peer pressure! Especially given it was London – and let's face it, London is a tough crowd to please at the best of times.

**Did the open brief throw up any issues further down the line?**

Once we'd tied down the initial idea, the project became a labour of love as there was no commercial budget. This is always a difficult situation resource-wise, given commitments to other commercial projects. It can put a lot of pressure on everyone. Another big challenge was time – the whole thing was created in just two months.

**Were there any particular elements that were really tricky to crack?**

Creating character CG to the level we wanted to achieve was really difficult. I didn't think we could pull this off and so I challenged our CG designer to prove to me we could create something realistic.

Within one week he had created a great demo of Linda (who opens the film), which was so realistic. We knew at that point we were on to something.

**How did you create the particle work seen on the individual speakers' title screens?**

It's created using real-world macro footage of paint pigments and liquids. We shot hours and hours of footage with long-term friend and collaborator Davy Evans. We then went through the footage and selected a few key sequences to use for the titles.

These were then driven through a Houdini FX setup, which tracks the motion and colour of the film and turns it into physical particles that we can stylise and add further physics to. Then we can add cameras anywhere within the scenes to make them really dynamic. We hadn't





Above: For its OFFF titles, FutureDeluxe opted for heavily stylised, surreal characters rather than straight photorealism.

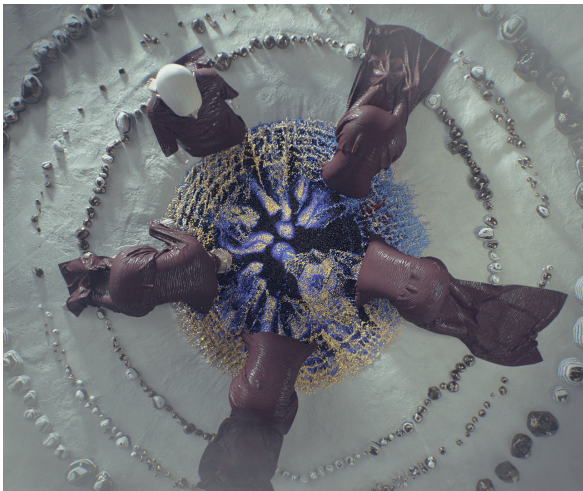
Left: The team sorted through hours of footage of paint particles to pick the right scenes for each title shot.



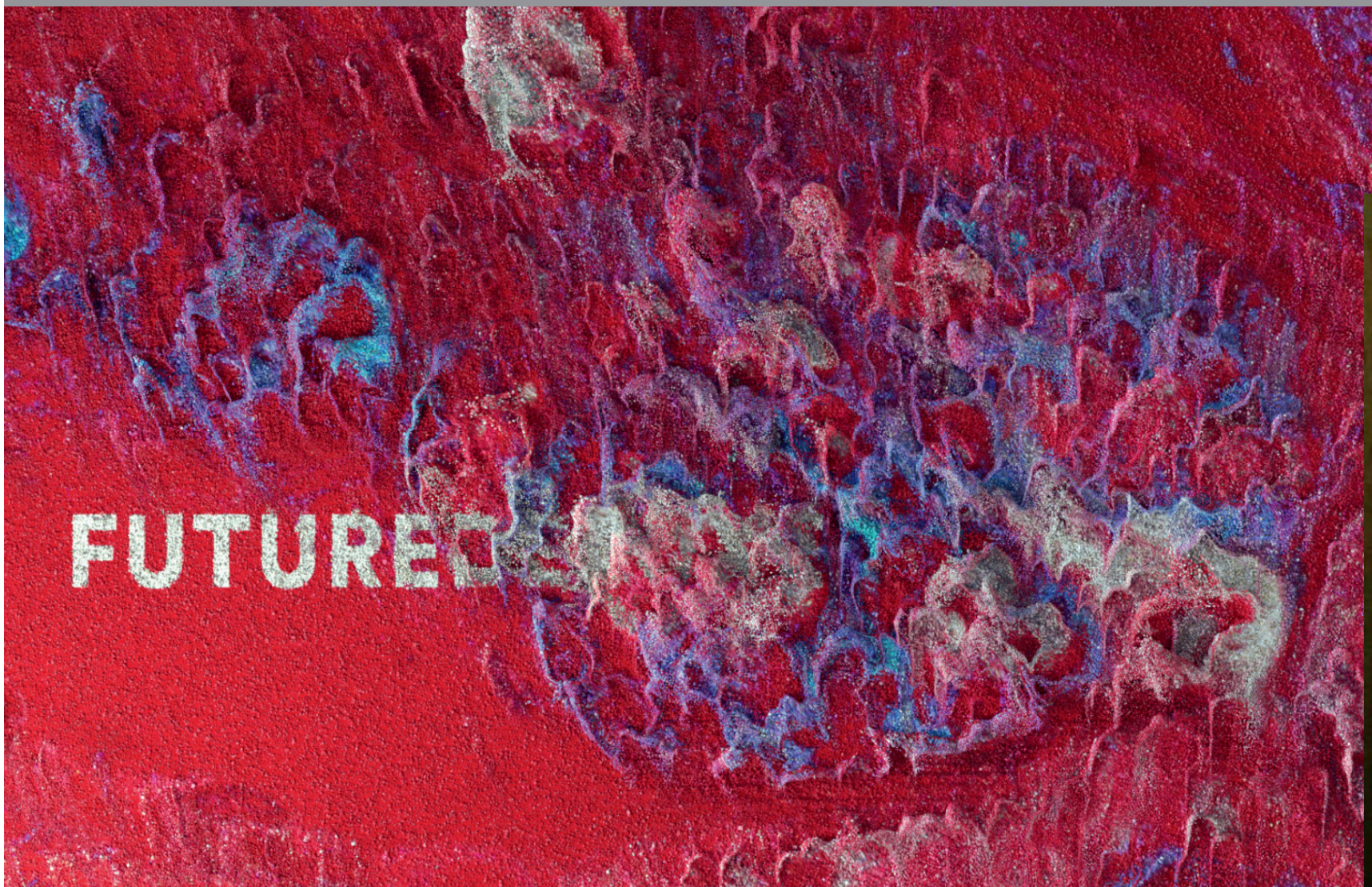


Top: FutureDeluxe experimented with complex particle work to create mesmerising screens for each speaker.

Middle and bottom: The story is based on a group of quirky individuals who share knowledge and information – a stylised take on the creative industries.







■ seen this technique used before. However we've since seen it appear elsewhere online a few times!

**Why do you think people have responded so enthusiastically to the final piece?**

I hope it was because it felt different, and because it mixed a variety of styles and techniques, along with a crazy audio score.

Creating realistic characters is a huge ask, and not something our studio is known for. We decided to go for a very abstract, stylised look as we didn't want to try and create something that was photorealistic. This style, combined with dynamic particles used in the title screens, seemed to really work.

**Do you have a favourite character?**

I feel like I've had a relationship with them all! Except Carlos, the weird dude with John Lennon glasses made of fur. If I had to pick one, it would be Eddie, the albino girl at the end – she's underrated.

**What prompted you to launch FutureDeluxe in the first place?**

I was always fascinated with experimental moving image and design. I was frustrated working at bigger agencies because I wanted to play with technology and design in a way the commercial projects wouldn't allow.

I wanted to collaborate with as many exciting artists globally as I could, but at the time that just wasn't a thing. We take it for granted now, jumping on Skype or Google Hangouts with designers and artists from around the world on a daily basis, but back then it felt so new. Collaboration is still a huge part of how we work at FutureDeluxe.

**How many people work at FutureDeluxe now?**

There are 15 of us. We expand through regular trusted freelance support as we get busy, but we have made a clear decision to remain around the 20-person mark within the London studio – purely because the standard we want to keep is very difficult to recruit for. Also, because creatives are a fickle bunch, if it gets too big we always feel we lose that personal touch, start-up drive and general mentality.

**You've previously mentioned the commercial danger of spending too much time on arts-based projects. How do you know where to channel your energies?**

From making mistakes! We have learnt a lot over the years about what does work financially and what doesn't. Our approach has always been based on experimentation – it's the core of our business and has attracted the clients we work with. However, you learn when to start and stop that process, and how to use it effectively.

**Could you give an example of a project you poured a lot of love and energy into, but it paid off?**

These OFFF titles are a great example – the phone hasn't stopped ringing! We've had a lot of enquiries in the past few weeks since we released these. Our last piece of work tends to be the driver for new business, and also the experiments section of our site is also the driver of many new client conversations.

**Do you have issues with clients just wanting the same effects as your existing project?** ■

Above: Vibrant shots were created using real-world macro footage of paint pigments and liquids.









It's a really big issue. Brands and agencies can sometimes be very lazy with their briefs. As Pinterest and social media has exploded further over the recent years, it's all too easy with a limited time to just grab an image as reference and say "We want that" without even thinking what the brief requires. Hence why we always get pointed to our last project – or even worse, one of our competitors' – and then asked to recreate it.

#### **How do you combat this so you can keep progressing as a studio?**

It's something I feel really strongly about and always try to push the client in a more considered direction. We publish a lot of experimental and self-initiated work for the sole purpose of moving away from the last job and look. We also try to convince the client to give us more time and budget during the R&D phase of projects to find something unique and think more.

#### **Your work often explores new technologies. Which comes first, the idea or the technology?**

We definitely start with an idea or a response to a brief first, but we are all very interested in technology-driven processes. So we apply this knowledge where we think it's suitable. I love the scale and

potential that technology adds to production, it gives us options that we can never design or plan for.

#### **What's your opinion of the design scene in London?**

London has always attracted amazingly talented people from all over the world. However, in today's climate the boundaries are broken. The London is scene is now global. We compete with other studios globally, our briefs and clients are global and we collaborate with artists all over the world.

If anything, with all that's going on politically in this city, it's making London seem like a less attractive place creatively than it ever has. Our industry is transient, which means the best artists can be positioned anywhere they want in the world. Which sometimes makes my life a logistical challenge!

#### **What new techniques or aesthetics are you drawn to at the moment?**

I'm still a huge fan of any form of data-driven visualisation or computational design. Any combination of digital tools or processes that can be used in different ways to give unique creative content will always blow my mind. Finding that new aesthetic will always be a huge part of how we work as a studio. ■

Above: The film is full of bonkers touches; albino Eddie shares information with Dennis by pressing her face into his inverted features.

Far left: Inside FutureDeluxe's studio space.

## THREE WAYS TO TACKLE AN OPEN BRIEF

Andrew Jones shares his advice

### 01 GET THE WHOLE TEAM INVOLVED

At FutureDeluxe, the first step in finding the right direction is to get the whole team involved in the brainstorming process. "Personally I think we come up with the best work when a few people are involved in that early concept stage," explains Jones.

### 02 LET EVERYONE SHARE IDEAS

The next step is to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts. The key here is to explore a number of different avenues until you hit on something that resonates. "It really is a free-for-all – we definitely encourage everyone to be involved," smiles Jones. "You know when you have something that feels different or right."

### 03 BACK IT UP WITH RESEARCH

If you're going to explore cutting-edge techniques, you need to make sure you have the skills to make them work. "We always try and secure a decent amount of time for research and development," says Jones. "We'll sometimes have weeks of this, with different artists working on different ideas. It's exciting because sometimes we stumble on something we didn't predict, and that's the point, right?"