

OPERA MEETS NEW MEDIA – PUCCINI, RICORDI UND THE RISE OF THE MODERN ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY” October 30, 2025 – January 04, 2026, Thursdays to Sundays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. and on performance days one hour before regular admission in the foyer of Theater Gütersloh



Interview with digital artist Hadi Karimi

One of the highlights of the Puccini exhibition is a large, digital 3D sculpture showing the composer at the age of 42. The sculpture was created by Hadi Karimi, an Iranian 3D artist who has already breathed new life into many famous personages with his 3D sculptures.

Hadi Karimi began working as a digital artist almost 15 years ago and soon discovered his love for portraits and 3D art. He has been presenting his work online since 2011, including on Instagram since 2019, and has since become internationally renowned for his work. Hadi Karimi portrays modern-day celebrities such as actor Tom Hanks and singer Freddie Mercury as well as classical composers such as Beethoven, Chopin and Bach. In an interview with BENET, Hadi Karimi talks about his art, his love of classical music, and the opportunities and challenges that artificial intelligence brings to his work.

Mr. Karimi, you've been working as a freelance CG artist since 2010. How did you come to this, and then to 3D art?

Hadi Karimi: I started my journey almost ten years ago. Not as a 3D artist, but as a digital painter. Photoshop was the only software that I knew how to work with. Then I became interested in learning more and more software like 3Ds Max, C4D, and Maya. I finally realized 3D art is more aligned with my style than painting and now I believe it was the right decision.

You mainly create 3D portraits of well-known artists. Why?

My true passion lies in making portraits (2D or 3D). Sculpting a face in 3D takes some time to give you the desired result. But the real challenge is when you want to capture a likeness, especially the face of a celebrity, which so many people are

familiar with. It's so easy to go wrong and raise the critics. It was extremely frustrating when I started doing likenesses, but I love a challenge, and I think every artist has to. It's crucial if you want to improve your skills.

Your works include a striking number of portraits of famous classical composers such as Beethoven, Chopin, and Bach. Do you have a particular fondness for classical music, or why is this?

Classical music has a very rich and interesting history. It's amazing how greatly music has developed since just a few centuries ago, which is just a short period of time when you compare it to human history. Besides, I really love listening to classical music and have always been interested in knowing more about the geniuses behind it. Another fun fact; before I decided to become a digital artist, I tried to become a musician, but for so many reasons it never worked out. But my enthusiasm for it has never died; I still love music and that's why the majority of my subjects are musicians.

You have been publishing your 3D portraits on Instagram and other social media since the beginning of 2019. How did this come about?

I think I'm very lucky to live in an era that has given me the opportunity to grow a platform that I can easily reach out to and get feedback from whenever I publish a new artwork. Of course, it wasn't like that from the beginning, I had a very small number of followers on Facebook when I started posting my works online back in 2011. When I got into 3D art, my platform started growing much faster, thanks to the subjects I picked, which hadn't previously been worked on in this format. Nowadays social media and the type of content that people are interested in following have changed a lot and as an artist/content creator, you have to keep yourself up to date to stay relevant.

How has 3D technology developed in recent years? Are your portraits even more accurate and realistic today than when you started?

It has definitely gotten better over the last decade. If you compare what we have today to CG renders or VFX shots from 2014, you can clearly see the progress. The render engines that we use get better and better every year, and help 3D artists like me to achieve more photorealistic results easier and faster. Also, I have to mention the elephant in the room, AI, which is both terrifying and exciting. Terrifying because it adds a lot of uncertainty to the future of this industry and the careers of digital artists like me, and exciting because it has the potential to open the door to tons of new opportunities and also eliminates a lot of drudgery from the workflow.

How can you create 3D portraits of historical figures who lived before the invention of photography?

My works fall into two different categories, which are very similar but require different approaches. The first category is likeness portraits of celebrities (like Will Smith, Marilyn Monroe, ...), which is pretty straightforward since everyone knows exactly what they look like, and I use as many references as I can find to capture their likenesses with details. The second category is facial reconstructions of historical figures (Beethoven, Chopin, ...), of whom we kind of know what they looked like but

not exactly, and the only references that are still available are paintings, death masks, life masks, and biographies or descriptions of their appearances. Without a doubt, the second type is far more complicated and calls for more dedication and research.

How long does it take you to complete a new portrait, and how long did it take in the case of Puccini?

It totally depends on the case. If we're talking about someone where we know what they look like and we have lots of high-quality references, it could take 3-4 weeks. But if the subject is someone from hundreds of years ago, then that's a different beast and it could take months. Puccini was a mix of the two, there were photographs of him but most of them were of very low quality, especially since I worked on a younger version of him. I'd also like to thank "Leila Khalili" for helping me with this project. She modeled the clothes for Puccini's portrait, she also helped a lot with his likeness. I'm not sure I'd have been able to pull it off in such a short amount of time (less than a month) without her help.

About Bertelsmann

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