

## **1. Subject Profile**

Name: Ilja van Eck

Title: Web Designer and Developer

Studio: Independent Freelancer

## **2. Interview Notes**

Q1. What did you study?

The interviewee studied Communication and Multimedia Design (CMD) in Maastricht in the Netherlands for three years. They also spent half a year in Milan studying graphic design. They did not complete the degree and stopped in November.

Q2. How has your education helped you grow personally?

The course helped them realize that they enjoyed building websites. Although the program only offered a limited introduction to coding and design, it was enough to spark their interest. They then continued learning independently outside school, and that personal initiative eventually became the foundation of their current work.

Q3. Was this how you expected your work environment and tasks to be as a student or beginning designer?

No. The interviewee felt that the course did not reflect the reality of professional practice. They explained that the program focused heavily on research and theory, while real freelance work is much more direct and practical.

Q4. Do you see this as the job you would do until retirement?

No. The interviewee said they do not see themselves making websites for decades. They described themselves as someone whose interests shift over time, so they expect their future path may change, even though they do not yet know what that next step will be.

Q5. How have you used your studies to develop your career?

The interviewee said that their studies were useful mainly because they introduced them to web design and development. However, they also felt that the course content did not directly align with the work they do now. The real value of the education was that it helped them discover their interests, after which they developed their skills independently.

Q6. What challenges have you encountered since leaving school, and how did you overcome them?

The interviewee mentioned common freelance challenges such as difficult clients, poor communication, and project management issues. They said they overcame these problems mainly through improvisation, online research, reading, and learning by doing.

Q7. How did you experience the transition from school to work?

The transition was smooth. One major reason for leaving school was that they already had enough freelance opportunities to work full-time. Because they had already been combining work and study, leaving school actually felt like a relief and gave them more time and focus.

Q8. What inspired you to become a digital freelancer?

The interviewee was inspired by other designers and studios whose work they saw online. They were especially drawn to more experimental and creative websites rather than standard template-based work. Seeing this kind of design made them realize that there was a professional space for that kind of creativity and that clients were willing to pay for it.

Q9. How have you grown as a freelancer?

They grew mainly by sharing their work online. After hearing how important visibility is, they began publishing projects on digital platforms. One of their first uploaded projects received an Honorable Mention on Awwwards, and that exposure led to many client inquiries. They explained that awards played a larger role in getting clients than Instagram, although Instagram helped them connect with other designers internationally.

Q10. What are your daily tasks?

Their day usually starts by checking emails, especially because they work with people in different time zones. They also review work on Awwwards, where they recently became a jury member. In the morning, they try to complete the least enjoyable tasks first, such as updates, maintenance, or smaller jobs. The rest of the day is spent working on ongoing projects.

Q11. Do you have trouble finding projects?

No. The interviewee said they can easily fill their schedule months in advance, but they intentionally avoid booking too far ahead. They prefer to keep some flexibility in case an exciting new opportunity comes in.

Q12. How do you deal with projects you do not enjoy or that are outside your expertise?

They have learned to say no. In the beginning, they found this difficult because they were excited about every opportunity, but over time they became better at recognizing which projects or clients were not a good fit. They also said that when a project is not suitable for them, they often refer people to others in their network.

Q13. Do you have advice for beginning designers?

Yes. Their main advice was to share your work. They also stressed the importance of studying strong design work closely, understanding what makes it effective, and staying curious and hungry for inspiration. They even recommended recreating work for practice, not to publish it as original work, but to understand typography, composition, and visual details better.

Q14. What are the most important skills for being a successful freelancer?

The interviewee emphasized communication, especially when working remotely. Clients need regular updates so they know where they stand in the process. They also highlighted motivation and discipline, because freelancers need to manage their own time and keep projects moving independently.

Q15. How do you deal with deadlines?

They try not to promise deadlines that are too tight. Their approach is to under-promise and over-deliver. If they think a project will take three weeks, they may tell the client four weeks, which gives them extra room and increases the chance of delivering early or on time.

Q16. Do you experience stress?

Sometimes. The interviewee said stress mainly appears when many exciting opportunities happen at once, creating pressure to work long hours. They do not see this as a sustainable long-term rhythm, but they feel they can manage those intense periods in shorter phases.

Q17. What do you do if a project will not be finished on time?

They believe honesty is the best approach. If there is a delay, they inform the client openly, apologize, and remain transparent throughout the process. They also noted that experience helps improve time estimation, making such situations less common over time.

Q18. How do you stay relevant in a constantly changing digital environment?

The interviewee believes it is important to find something you personally enjoy and can become known for. For them, that was creating websites with animation and strong interactions. They also stressed that continually sharing your work helps people see that you are active and developing.

Q19. Can design and coding be combined?

Yes. Toward the end of the conversation, the interviewee explained that they do both design and development and see value in combining them. They said it can be very satisfying to take a project from a blank canvas all the way to a finished live website. They also admitted that although they recently did more development work, they missed the design side and want to combine both again.

### **3. Reflective Summary**

This interview gave me a broader view of what a creative career can look like. Even though the interviewee does not work directly in the 3D field, I still found the conversation valuable because I am interested in the possibility of freelancing in the future. It was also difficult to get responses from professionals, so interviewing an award-winning freelancer in coding and design became a meaningful alternative. Their achievements and experience made the conversation feel relevant and inspiring.

What stood out to me most was how much of their success came from self-initiative rather than only from formal education. Their studies helped them discover their interests, but most of their growth happened outside school through experimentation, sharing work, and learning by doing. This made me realize that building a creative career depends a lot on personal motivation and consistency. I also found it interesting that visibility played such a large role in their development. Posting work online and receiving recognition through awards helped them attract clients and opportunities.

This interview influenced how I think about my own future career path. Even if I choose to work in 3D, many of the same principles still apply: building a strong portfolio, developing a recognizable style, staying adaptable, and communicating well with clients or collaborators. It also reminded me that I do not have to limit myself too early. Like the interviewee, I may end up combining different skills rather than choosing only one direction. Overall, the interview encouraged me to think more seriously about independence, visibility, and continuous self-development.