HOW TO CREATE A
PORTFOLIO

BY MITCH LEEUWE

EBOOK PACKED WITH TIPS AND TRICKS TO CREATE YOUR OWN CHARACTER PORTFOLIO

How to create a Portfolio

By Mitch Leeuwe

Hi THERE!

Let me introduce myself. I'm Mitch Leeuwe and am an illustrator from the Netherlands. I always drew a lot as a kid. I even had the childhood dream to become an animator at Disney. During my teenage years, I lost that dream. Luckily, I slowly started drawing more and more. When I was 19, I began to do some freelance work as a graphic designer, which made me consider picking up drawing again. I attended several drawing programs at schools but I learned most from online resources. Now, I'm a freelance artist working on visual development. This means I design characters, props and backgrounds for games, animation and toys. However, you probably know me from my Instagram where I release tutorials and more. My goal is to create a place where people can learn the things I wanted to learn when I started out.

ABOUT THIS EBOOK

As an artist, your portfolio tells more than a thousand words. It shows your art style and skills. It reflects who you are as an artist. Because it's so personal, there is no step-by-step guide for this, nor is this ebook. In this ebook, I'll share everything I know about building a portfolio, tell you about all the lessons I've learned over the years, and give you tips on starting your career.

When I saw The Lion King as a kid, I started to dream about working at Disney. At the time, I didn't know what that meant and what I needed to do to get there, but it got me inspired!

I started drawing a lot, but when I had to choose my career path, I decided to study Graphic Design instead of Illustration or Animation. I simply found it hard to believe that I would ever work in the animation industry. As a graphic designer, I created my first portfolio, and I shared my work online to receive feedback to develop my skills. I got my first job at an advertisement agency by showing my work and putting myself out there, even when I wasn't sure I would meet the required skill level. My online appearance showed others my skills, that I was eager to learn and that I was open for feedback. This is what got me the job, not only my skills.

What you see on online platforms is just the tip of the iceberg. Every artist started somewhere and has been insecure (or still is) if they could make it. Behind the art you see are many hours of dedication to master the skills they have nowadays and will achieve in the future. Don't let this stop you from sharing your work because putting yourself out there will let you grow as an artist.

Another misconception about artists is that you need to be talented. In my opinion, talent is an abstract term and unmeasurable; The opinion about how talented you are can depend on who you talk to. For me, what makes the difference is: development of talent, also known as 'hard work'. You can be born with a certain gut feeling for aesthetics, but if you never develop this further, you are behind on someone who does. Never stop learning.

I hope you will enjoy this ebook and that it helps you create a portfolio that reflects who you are as an artist.

PRACTICAL TIPS

HOW TO NETWORK

You can have a fantastic portfolio(website), but it doesn't matter how good it is when nobody sees it, right? The people who matter for getting a job need to see and know your work. This is where networking comes in.

Back in 2008, I frequently posted personal artwork on a Dutch forum. By receiving feedback on my artwork and replying to others' artwork, people started to know me and notice my work. I even became digital friends with some of them. One of the guys I often talked with worked at an advertisement agency. He told me they needed an animator who was also able to illustrate. He asked me if I was interested in this job. I was over the moon! He recommended me and long story short: I got the job.

I met more people in this industry by working at this agency. They even recommended me for freelance projects later. Meeting people, being a friendly colleague, putting myself (and art) out there, and working on my skills, created a foundation for my personal art network.

Another place to network is (art) school. I didn't go to an art school, but there were many graphic designers, video editors, game designers, and other creative people at my university. Keep in mind that all these fellow students will work at some agency or studio someday and possibly recommend you for a project or job.

Internships are maybe one of the best ways to network when you're starting out. Here in the

PORTFOLIO
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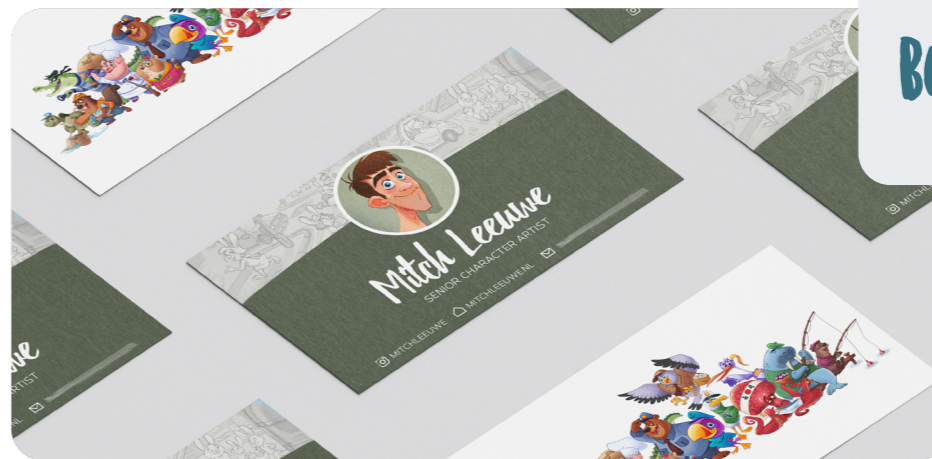
BONUS TIP! Get yourself some awesome business cards and make sure you have them with you wherever you go!

Netherlands, it's only possible to get an internship when you're in school, but that could differ for your country. On an internship, there is a big chance you have to do something to assist the artists working there. My first internship was first to organize all the files. But by being an assistant, people get to know you. So even when your task is just to get coffee for the art director, you can learn and watch from seeing what the art director does day by day and get to know people in the industry.

I also reached out to some companies to show them my portfolio and ask if they'd like to drink a cup of coffee together to get to know each other. Because The Netherlands is a tiny but crowded country, the companies are pretty accessible, and
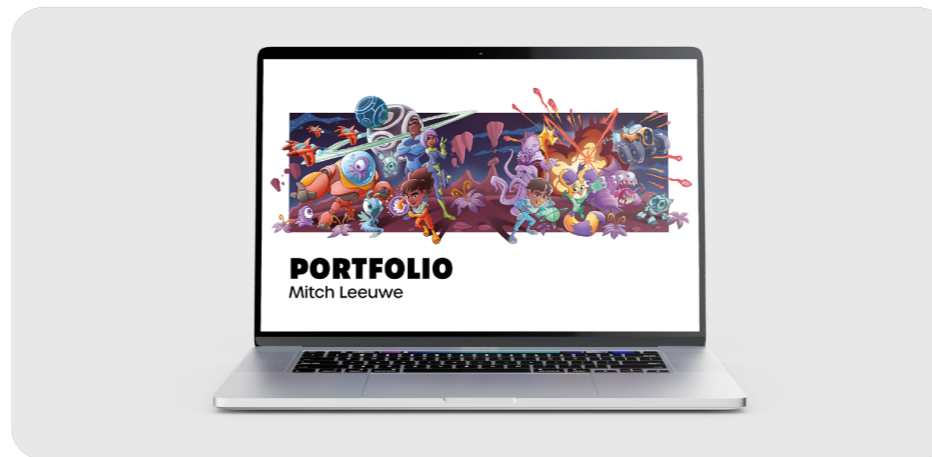
some were open for this. This could be different for your country, but you could give it a shot, right? It helped me a lot to grow my network and to become less shy. The first time I sent this kind of email, I found it very exciting, and also when I had my first coffee meeting. But when I kept practicing this, it became more regular. Keep in mind that it's nothing personal when the company doesn't like to meet you or even doesn't reply to your email. Just keep working on your skills; maybe they'd like to meet you when you've grown.

We haven't talked about art events or conferences yet! This helped me so much in meeting my heroes. When I got to my first international art conference in Amsterdam, I saw people from Disney and Pixar walking around. The recruiter told in a talk that it was okay to reach out to her for questions. So, that was the first time I talked to a recruiter from that level. Years later, I met that

recruiter again, she recognized me, and we had a good conversation.

In recent years things have started to get more digital. Some art conferences that were usually in real life are now beginning to do more digital events. You can get a video call with a recruiter; this is perfect for when you live in a country without art conferences or a big industry.

I wanted to end this chapter to say that it's always important to stay humble. Like I said before, it's okay to ask, but don't always expect a reply. People can be just too busy or have another reason to not reply. Don't take it personally and move on. Also, when you're at an art event, it's good to reach out to people who you want to talk to. But don't be pushy and try to find the right moment.

WAYS OF WORKING

Most artists find it hard to choose their specialization and/or to decide whether they should specialize at all. If you don't want to specialize and like to do a bit over everything, becoming an all-round artist might be the path for you. As a generalist, you are very valuable for smaller companies or companies with smaller budgets because they can't afford to hire multiple specialists.

I was an all-round artist for almost 10 years at multiple companies. I've explored different disciplines during this period to determine what suited me best. Maybe you always dreamt of becoming a character artist. Still, by exploring other disciplines, you find out that storyboarding (or something else) is your dream job. You can only discover that by trying it out.

This ebook is about character design portfolios, so let's focus on that! As a character artist, you will be designing characters.

These designs can be used for feature animation or tv shows, commercials, games, toys, and so much more. It can be wise to look for jobs in these different industries, especially when you are starting out. In my case, I started my first job in advertising. Although it was my dream to work on a feature animation, a position in advertising is/was an excellent stepping stone to gain experience and knowledge.

You can work as a freelancer or in-house artist. My first jobs were freelance, and later I got hired to work at different companies as an in-house artist. There is a lot of difference between being a freelance or an in-house artist. It's not always something you can choose, but I think it's good to consider what suits you best. The best way to find this out is by trying. I'll share my experiences with both with you.
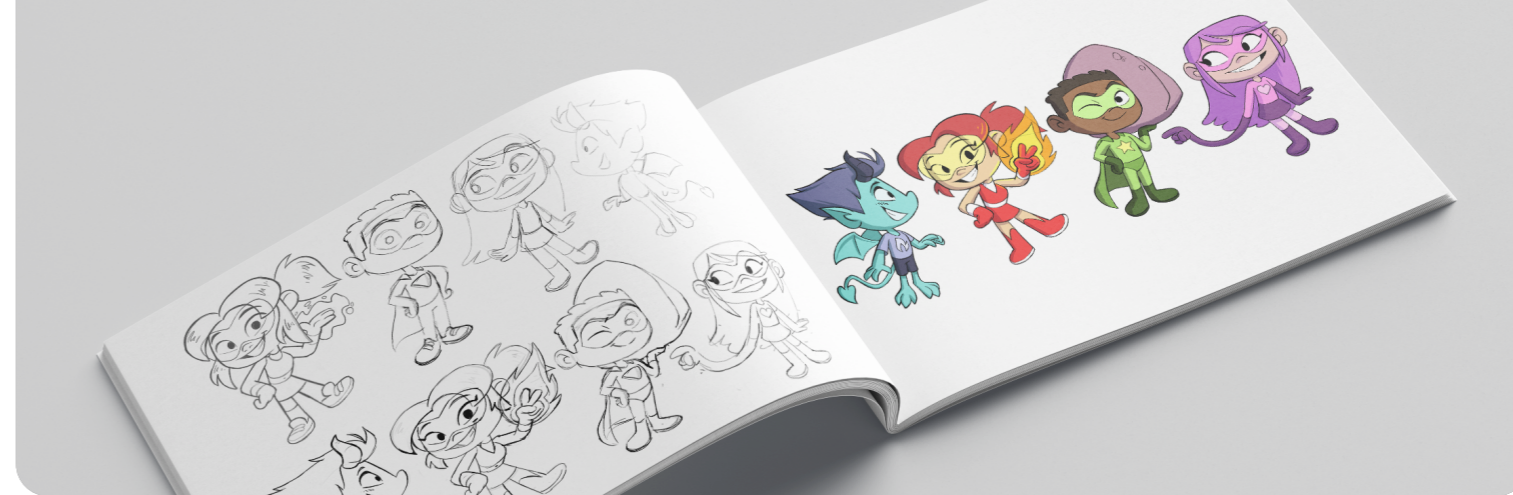
Inhouse

Working inside a studio can be a great experience. When you love working in a team or like to experience this, this is an excellent place for you. You'll get to know people from different departments, gain experience with hierarchy, and in some cases, you can learn a lot from other/senior artists. Working inside a studio will also help you work together with studios when you decide to freelance later in your career. For example, you know how the process and workflow inside the studio work, so you understand these kinds of things better. So, I recommend all artists to work in-house at least once in their career.

One of the most significant advantages of being an in-house artist over a freelance artist is having a fixed income and some social security and benefits depending on where you live.

For me, the biggest disadvantage was that you don't always get the assignments/tasks you like the most or want to grow in as an artist. This was also the main reason I went freelance; I had set my goal to become a visual development artist. In my full-time job as a game artist, I couldn't focus on this enough. As soon as I noticed I could get enough freelance work and had saved some money, I decided to take the jump and quit my job. I found it hard to give up the security of a steady job and income, but it was the right time for me to go for it.

Freelance

The freedom you get as a freelancer is fantastic. You can choose what to work on, how to spend your time, when you're working, and when you have weekend. When I was working in-house, I occasionally had some small freelance projects. I can really recommend this because you start learning how the freelance business works: How to talk to clients, create an invoice, manage your time, etc.

When you are a freelancer, you also need to manage things like invoices, administration, taxes, finding and working with clients, etc. This can be a bit overwhelming in the beginning. Having a lot of freedom as a freelancer is fantastic, but that can also be tricky and daunting, because of the responsibilities.

You don't have control over everything, but I would recommend making a plan when you want to go freelance. Talk with some freelancers about that plan for a reality check. It's impossible to define when it is your time to go full-time freelance; I think this depends on your personality and situation.

GETTING PAID

I wish money wasn't important and that we could focus all our time on art. But we need to make a living, and how great is it that we can make that as an artist?! Unfortunately, I often see an artist being taken advantage of. There are many examples of this, to name a few: when a client says they can give you exposure instead of paying you, or when the client says you should do something for way too little money. Artists are working from their passion, and for some reason, some people think this means they are allowed to take advantage of this.

When you are starting out as an artist, it can be tough finding a job or projects that pay you enough to provide for your living costs. Another scenario can be that you work at a company that doesn't bring you closer to your goals. For example, you work at a company where you only design interfaces, but you'd like to grow as a character artist. In both cases, a side job can help you out. There are many variations for this solution, one of them is to look for a job that takes less time but the same amount of income, so you can do freelance projects on the side. Or you ask your boss if it's possible to work fewer hours so you can spend some extra free time in developing the skills you prefer. Key is: Know your goal and find a balance for yourself between having enough time and energy to work on the skills you'd like to develop and the money you earn.
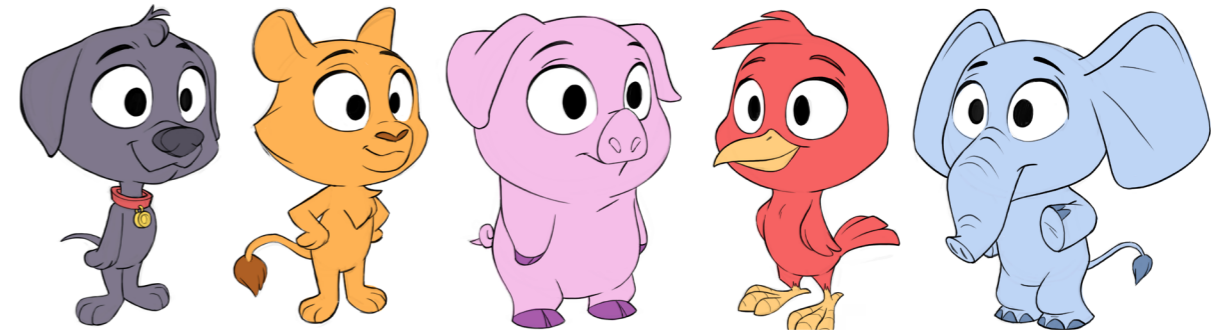
How much should you ask?
This is very different for every country. The best way of finding out is by asking freelance artists from your own country or looking up the rate of freelancers where you live. Try using the internet search engine and look for "freelance rate (your country)". For example, in the Netherlands, it starts with 35 euros excluding VAT an hour, and more experienced artists earn more. Maybe this sounds like a lot to you, but I believe this is a good minimum for freelancers here.

From this rate, you need to buy your own hardware, software, pay your accountant, maybe insurances, taxes, but also your food and standard personal life stuff. To get an overview of this, try to write down your monthly/yearly costs. Be sure to reserve some budget for unexpected expenses, or to save money to replace your pc for example, too.

Besides that, you also need to enjoy a normal, fun life. So don't forget the money you need for your free time and maybe for going on a hard-earned vacation. I hear and see that many artists do not take this into account and perhaps even think they don't need it. However, I really believe that to become a good artist, you also need time to relax.

I took the Netherlands as an example because that's where I live. The rate for your country depends on the general rate in your country and what the costs of a general living are there.I believe artists should earn what they deserve. Do some research to know what you're worth.

MY PROCESS OF CREATING A PORTFOLIO PROJECT

HOW I CREATE A PORTFOLIO PROJECT

Just start drawing

When I started this project, I had no particular idea in mind. I started with an open mind and just followed where the process brought me. To get this going, I prefer to make many sketches, start brainstorming, and develop ideas while drawing. I don't like to start with a blank sheet of paper, so I just draw something to not have to stare at an empty sheet of paper.
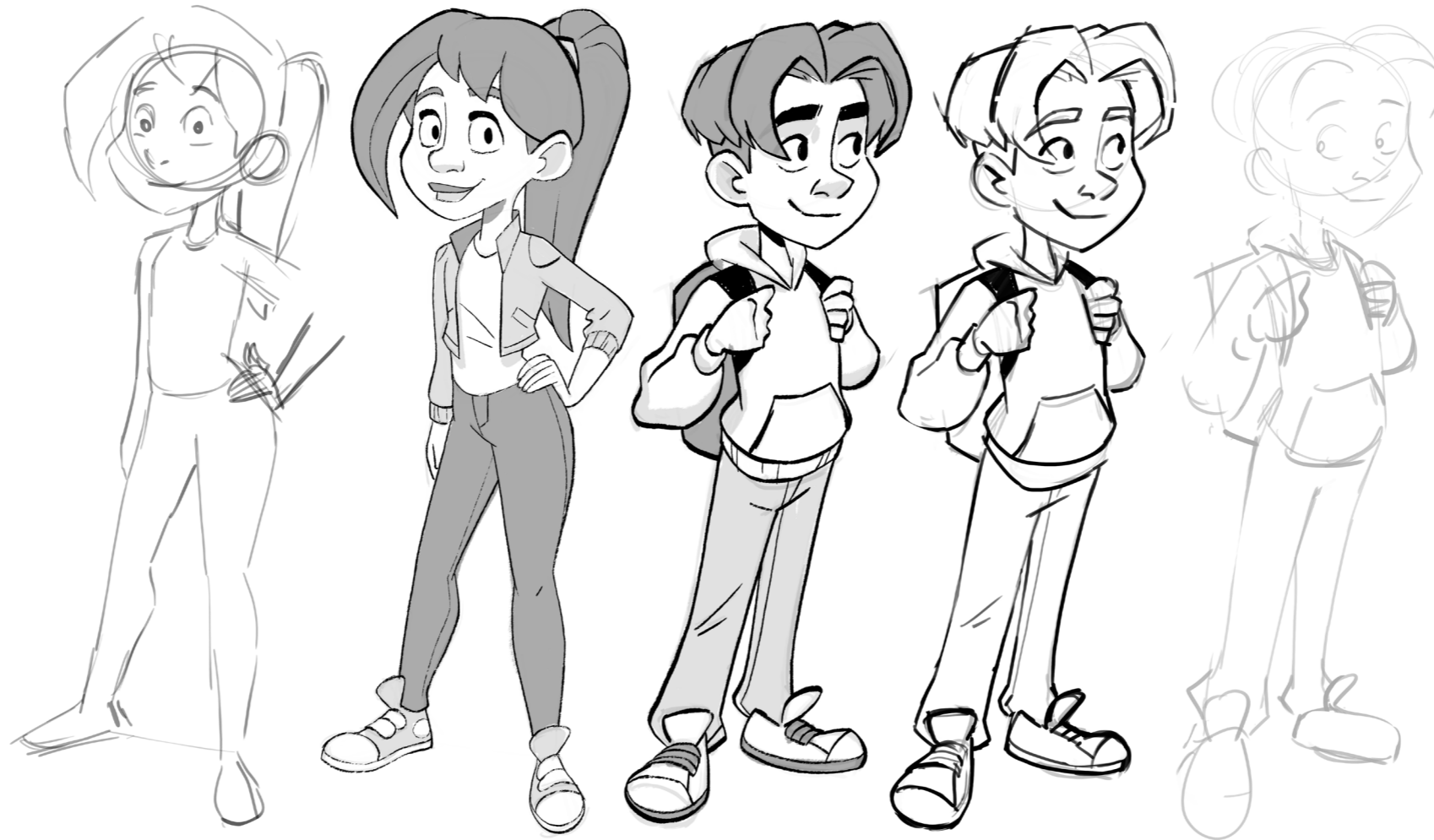
I started drawing these kids. I think I'd like to make something around two kids from about 12 years old. I don't have any idea yet who they are, where they live, or where they'll go. I leave it as open as possible.

After making the sketches on the previous page, I realized I had already gone into too many details. So, I took a step back and made some rougher sketches to get the ideas flowing. Don't lose yourself in details too soon.

BONUS TIP!
It's never too late to take a step back. However, don't keep walking in circles; your project needs to move forward to get finished some day!
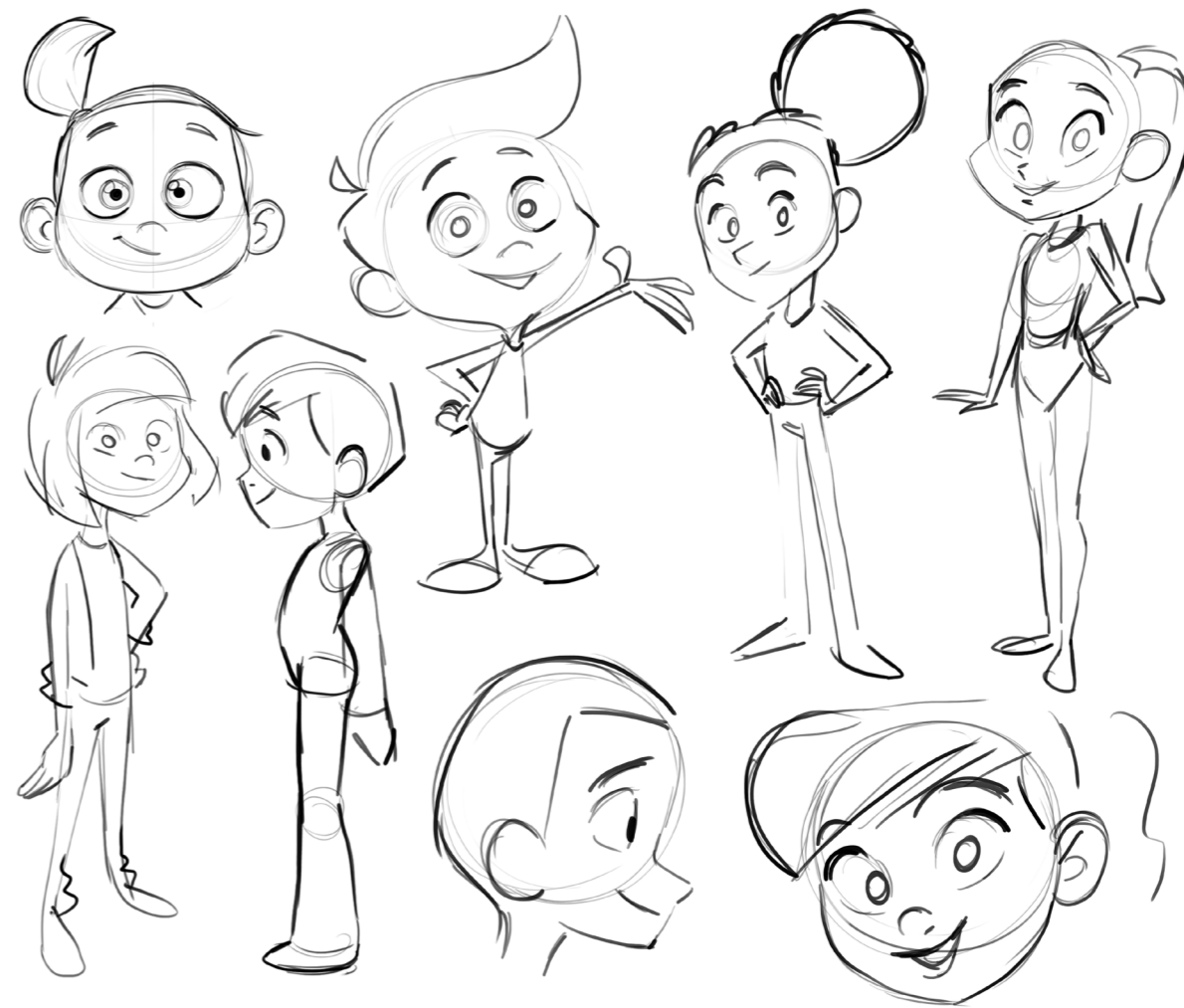
Explore some themes

Let's explore a fantasy setting, like an archer with a cape. This is still very generic, and my first go. When I would like to add some more research, I could push this idea more. The bow and arrow are important for this setting, but they could also be another object.

Another traditional weapon would be the shield and sword. This makes the character totally different. The archer feels more like a character that sneaks; that's why I also drew the cape over its head. The sword and shield are for more close combat. Try thinking about what you want to tell with your character and what kind of weapon would help to tell that story.
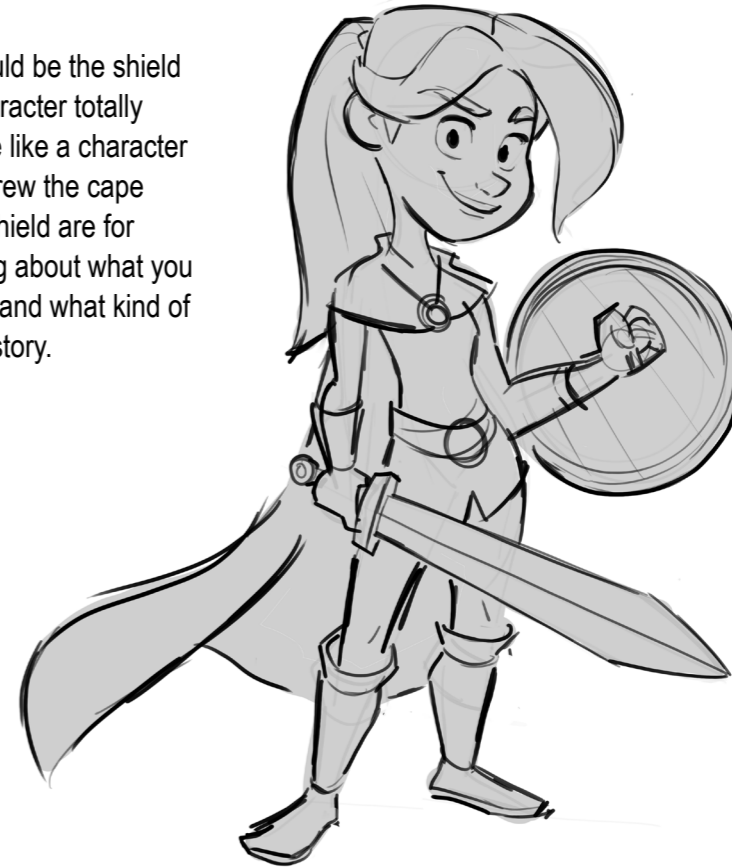
Characters that interact

I could also go for a character with a robot. Maybe the boy made it himself. Or it found it, or perhaps it's a toy. I find the idea of a robot pet funny.

I liked the idea of a spider bot; I think it would be cool to see those little legs to be animated. Maybe it can run up the ceiling!
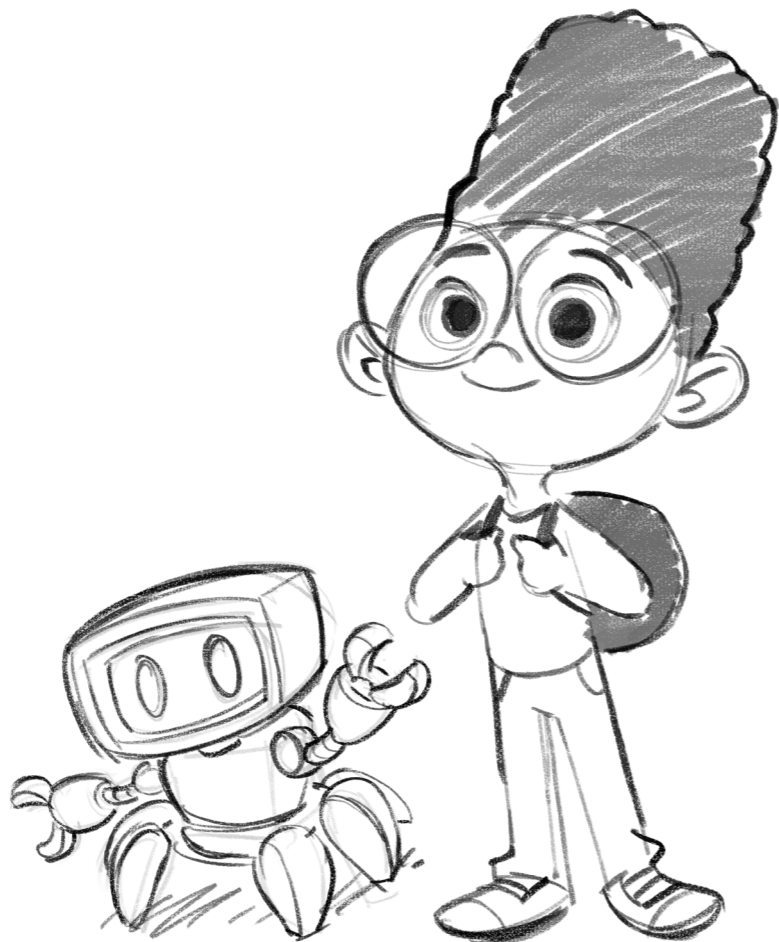
It could also be a robot dog. Maybe the robot dog has some powers; maybe it came out of space. A lot of things that can be explored if I decide to continue with it.

Maybe instead of a tiny sidekick, I can add a hefty sidekick. This one could be an alien, or maybe it's a creature living in the sea that needs the help of this boy.

Contrast between characters

It could also be a smaller sea creature that looks goofy. For this one, I thought it would be funny to make the lead character longer. When I would decide to continue with this idea, I would tweak the main character more to create some contrast or connection with the sidekick.
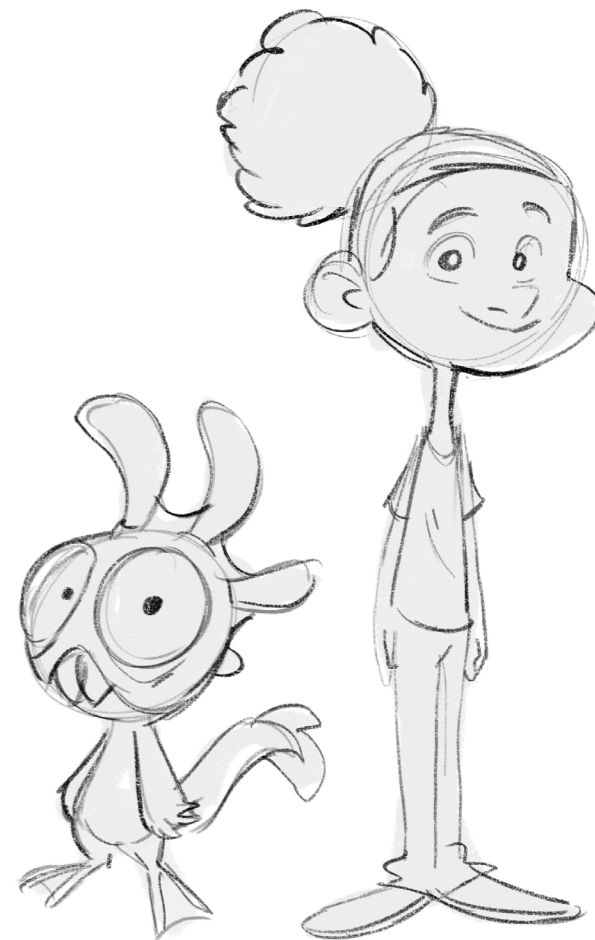
The concept of a forest friend could also be fun to work on. Maybe there is a hidden forest the main character accidentally discovers!

There are many possibilities and ways to apply these characters. Try to define how you could link your character concepts to different target audiences and media. Pick the one you would love to work for and continue with that goal in mind.

Think about how it could be applied

What if a kid finds a triceratops in the garden?! I think this idea could work very well for a children's book or short story.

I could also do a story about a little witch and her forest friends. Maybe she created these characters themself with her power. The possibilities are endless and something that is fun to explore more. My first thought is that this would be fun to make for a children's book but would also be suited for other applications like toys or a tv show.

Instead of a dinosaur as a friend, it could also be a dragon. There are many ways to elaborate on this concept.

See how rough my drawings are. You don't have to show anyone these sketches. These are for yourself to help you explore your ideas and decide what you want to make later on.

After drawing the previous drawings, I got the idea about a boy that meets a dragon that travels with him to a medieval time, where the characters from the line-up live.

Rough sketch

Here you can see how my sketch for this looks. It was accidentally quite clean already.

Clean up

I decided to clean it up a bit more. While cleaning it up, I consider whether this is what I'm looking for or not and what I'd like to change.

What's the relationship between the characters?

Here is another version of the idea of a dragon and a young boy. The dragon teaches could teach the boy magic? Or maybe the boy accidentally conjures himself to medieval times, and the dragon will help him get back to his own time. I'm looking for an interesting connection between the two characters.

Here you can see my sketch for this. How a sketch looks depends on your own style and preferences. It can look rougher or cleaner; there are no rules for this.
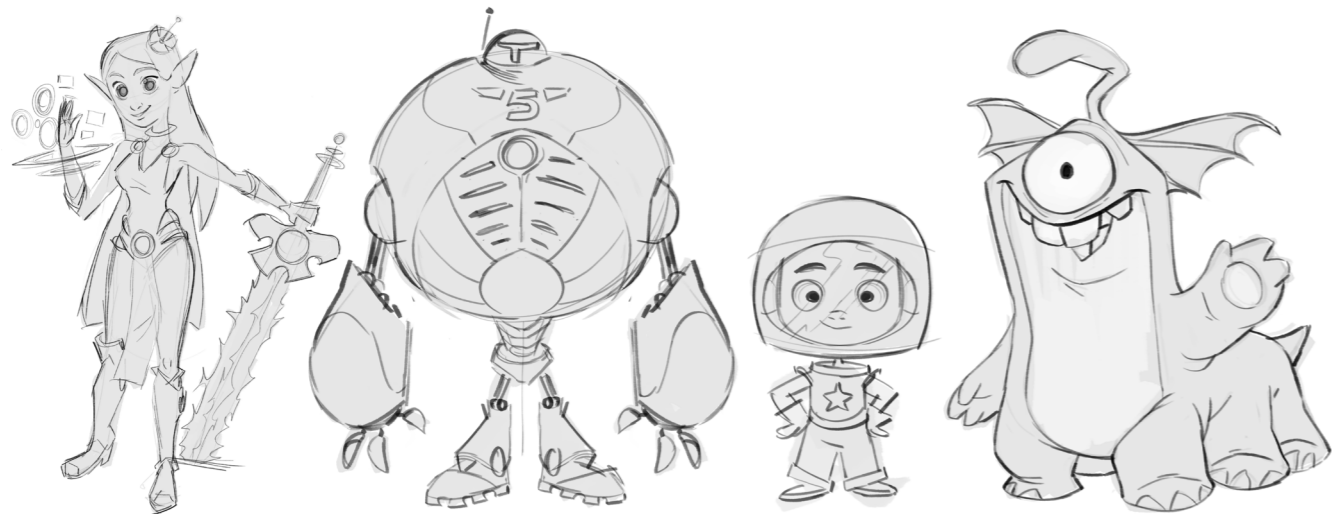
Character line-ups

Here I drew some cliché fantasy characters. I find it hard not to spend too much time improving the drawing in this exploration phase. So, I draw them until I think they are clean enough. You should decide this for yourself. In this example, I wanted to explore some more versions first, so if I want to improve and clean them up, I can always pick them up later.

For things like the harness, I usually need more time to research. But at this phase, I'm okay with that it's not perfect. If I decide to continue with this line-up, I'll do some more research, and will find out how I can make it less generic, later.

After finishing the fantasy line-up, I liked to explore the sci-fi theme. The hardest part is always putting something on paper. So, I would recommend being not too critical to yourself and just getting started. Maybe start with something cliché. After that, you can always look at it and see if you can develop something more creative and original.

In sci-fi, the possibilities are endless. Helmets, boots, creatures, special effects, weird plants, you can go as crazy as you like. I can keep adding more characters to this line-up, but it's good to move on and look at some other themes for now.

A theme is not required!

You don't necessarily need to draw something with a specific theme. You can also draw something like an 'ordinary family like I did here for your portfolio. You could give it a twist to make it less ordinary if you'd like to.
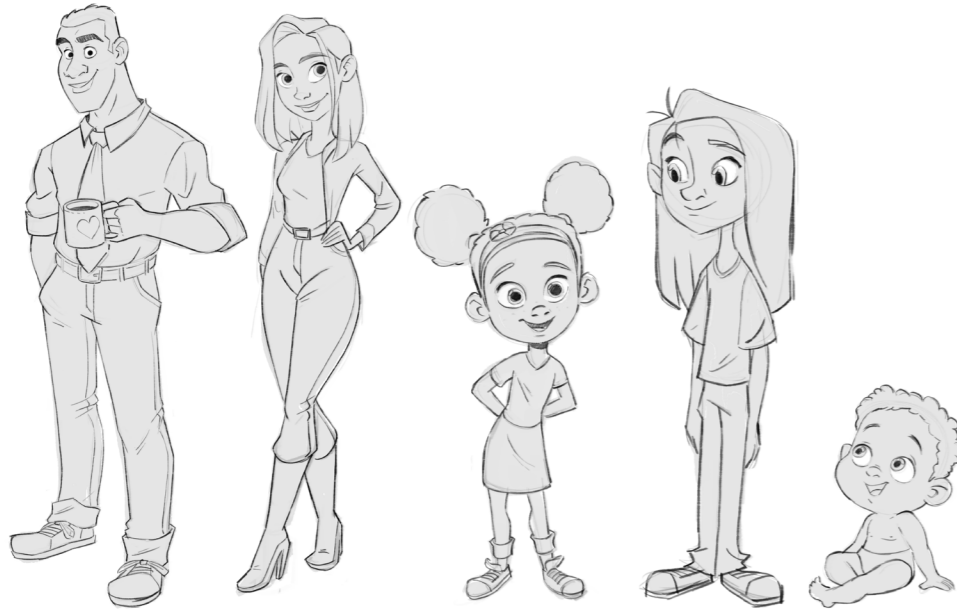
I started by drawing the parents, and I drew them a bit more "realistic" than the others. When I drew the kid in the middle of the line-up, I noticed that the kid looked a bit more stylistic than the parents. At that moment, I decided to go for a more stylistic route. So, don't be afraid to change some stuff while working on it. Creativity is an ongoing process, and when you'll finalize the line-up, you'll make it more consistent.
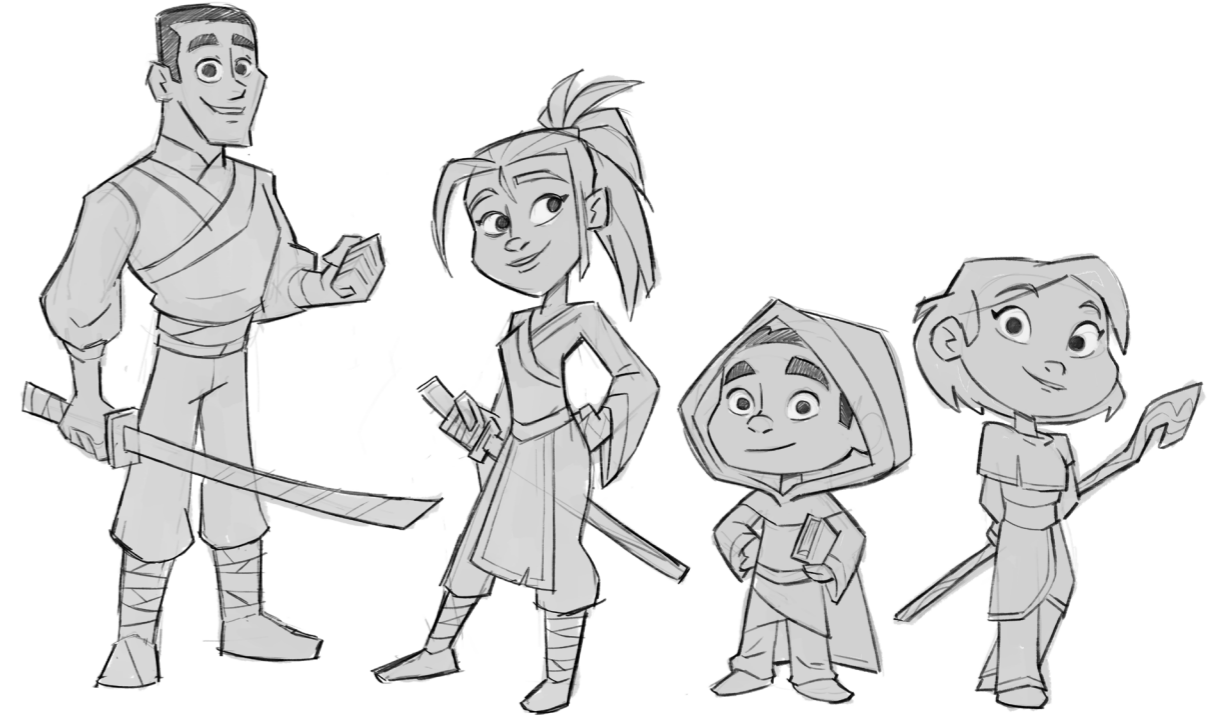
Here I went for a more stylistic approach. This family is from a more mythical world. I could add more characters to this line-up, like the grandmother and -father, the aunt and uncle. Or maybe a pet. Can you come up with more?

Choosing a direction

At one point, you want and need to move forward. This is hard with personal projects because nobody tells you when to stop. So, I flipped through my sketches and picked the ones I like the most and combined them to make the line-up you see here on this and the next page.

I liked the idea of a boy traveling through space and meeting friends in different galaxies. He has built his own astronaut suit, so I gave him a suit that looks like a mix between self-made and fantasy. Next to him, you see different kinds of aliens he met along his journey.

Here you can see his family. His sister, mom, and dad. Some robots hide in his room. The alien the sister is holding pretends to be a toy but secretly is a real alien. I focused on the lines and colors. I could also add some shadow and light to make it more appealing, but this would be enough for this phase.

Choose a style

Try to think about the style you want to apply to finish the line-up. Here I picked this alien character to showcase some different styles. I took the rough sketch and cleaned it up (second image). It's still a sketch, but it's a cleaned-up version of the rougher one. The third image is cleaner;

I made the lines as clean as possible. Here I didn't use line variety; almost all lines are the same width. When I do apply variety, I usually draw the important shapes with thicker lines and the small shapes lighter.

The first one is cell-shaded. This is commonly seen in 2D cartoons. It's suited for animation because it's a very basic style, but with a lot of charm. I added a 1 tone shadow, but you could decide to for no shadows at all to make it even more straightforward. The second one still has line-art, but the lines are colored. The shapes also have some

shading. This is what I often use for concept art for games. Or when I propose a character to a client. In the third image, you see a painted character. This would be great as a reference for how a character might look in 3D. For a game, 3D animation, or maybe a toy! This style takes the most time to draw, so it's less suited for 2D animation.

What would you love to work on?

Here I went for a children's book style. When you're making a portfolio, think about what your goal is. Is it getting a job at a game studio, an animation studio, or would you like to make children's book illustrations? Try to add projects and designs to your portfolio you would like to work on.


I went for a 3D style for this one, as if it's made for an animated movie. If you want to work for the feature animation movies, consider learning how to paint in 3D and "render" your drawings. This gives the illustration a look like it's from the movie. Try to find someone who has the job you want; they often have public portfolios. Look at their portfolio to see what they put in their portfolio.

Here I inked and colored the sketches I made earlier. It's not necessary to really render everything perfectly. If you show a couple of drawings fully rendered, you can choose to leave some pages with flat colors. You've already proven you can paint!

Although I think it's good to show some story and characters. I don't think it's wrong to stay a little bit with the clichés. Of course, it would be better to have an original idea, but you're going to be hired to translate someone else ideas. So, the most important thing is that you show you can translate those ideas on paper.
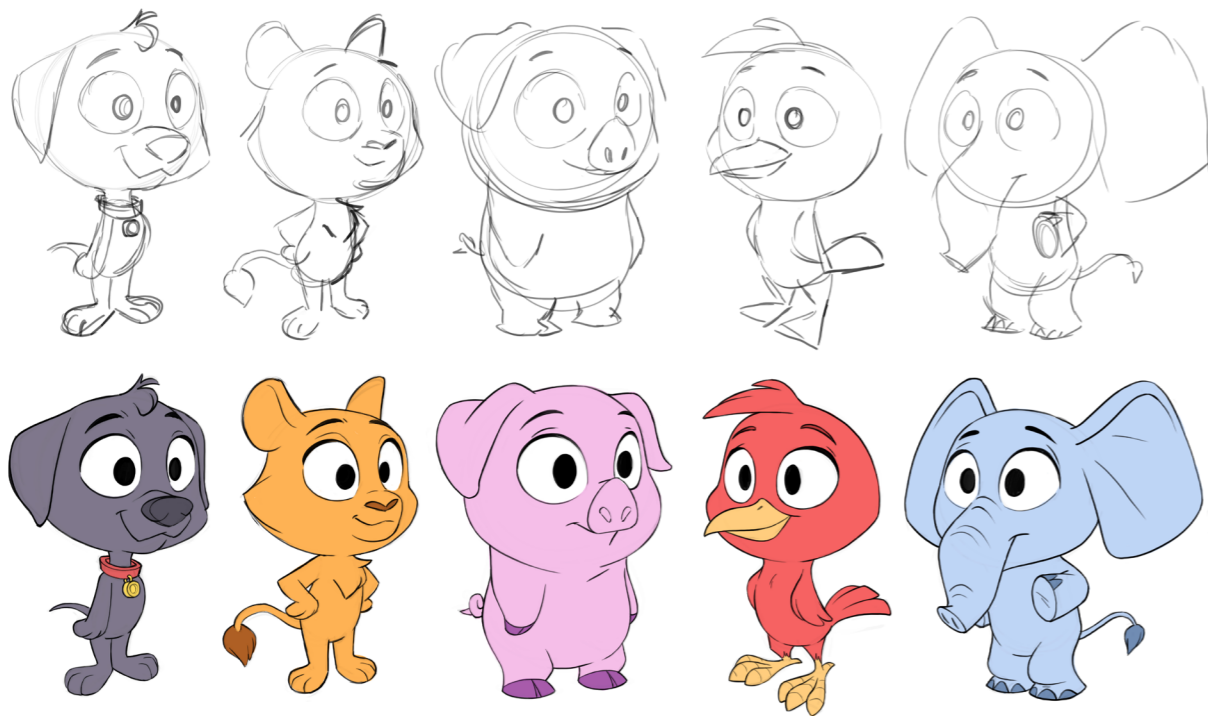
Combine characters to tell a story

Don't only think about working for the biggest studios! You could also find a job working on a children's show. Or maybe this is for a toy line-up. Think about what you really like to draw. Even when it's a dream for me to work on a big, animated feature, working on smaller productions can be just as fun and rewarding.
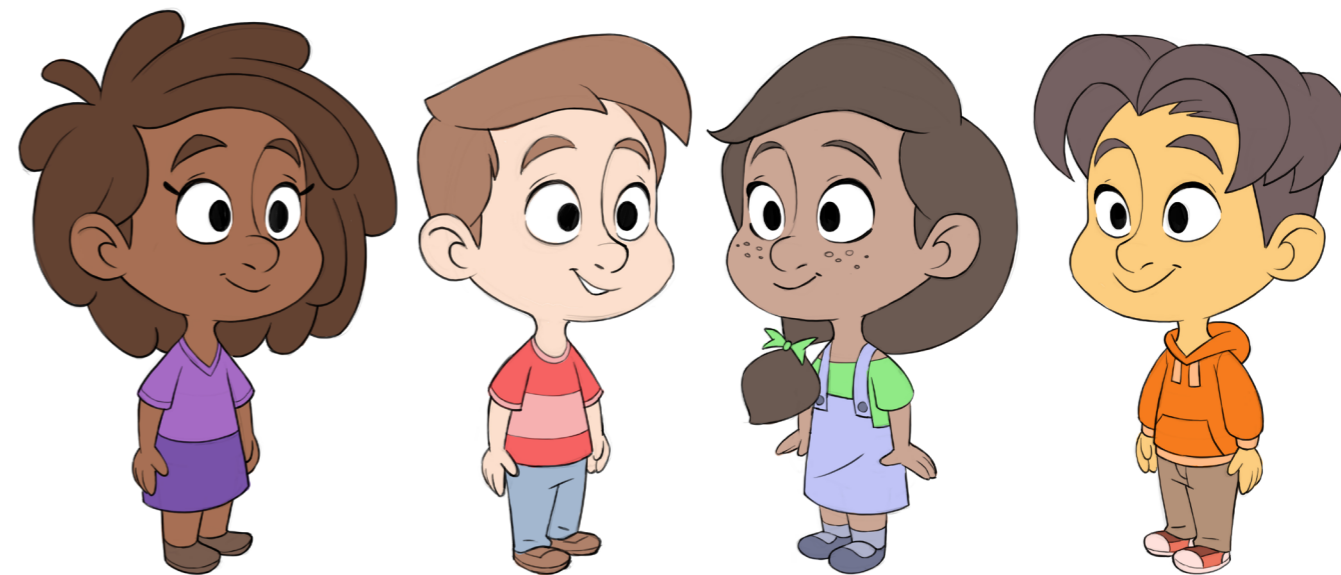
Also, show you can draw different kinds of characters. Characters that would team up perfectly with the animal characters. I haven't thought of a story for this one, but we can add this later. I just like to have fun and go with the flow when I'm drawing. After setting up these characters, I I could choose to add a scene or theme. Maybe these animals and kids live on a farm or a zoo. If it's a zoo, you can give these kids some clothing and props that fit that theme.

I liked the previous line-up, but I thought I could do more with it. That's why I made this line-up. I tried adding more personality to all the characters and giving it a more defined theme. I started with the idea of a pre-school kids show about a farm that is taken care of by children. With that simple idea, I started to sketch very rough this idea, using the characters I previously drew.

Once I have made that rough sketch, and I'm happy with it, I start cleaning it up. I didn't make many corrections; I just took the rough sketch and brought all the characters more towards their final versions. Basically, I'm making decisions here for the final result.
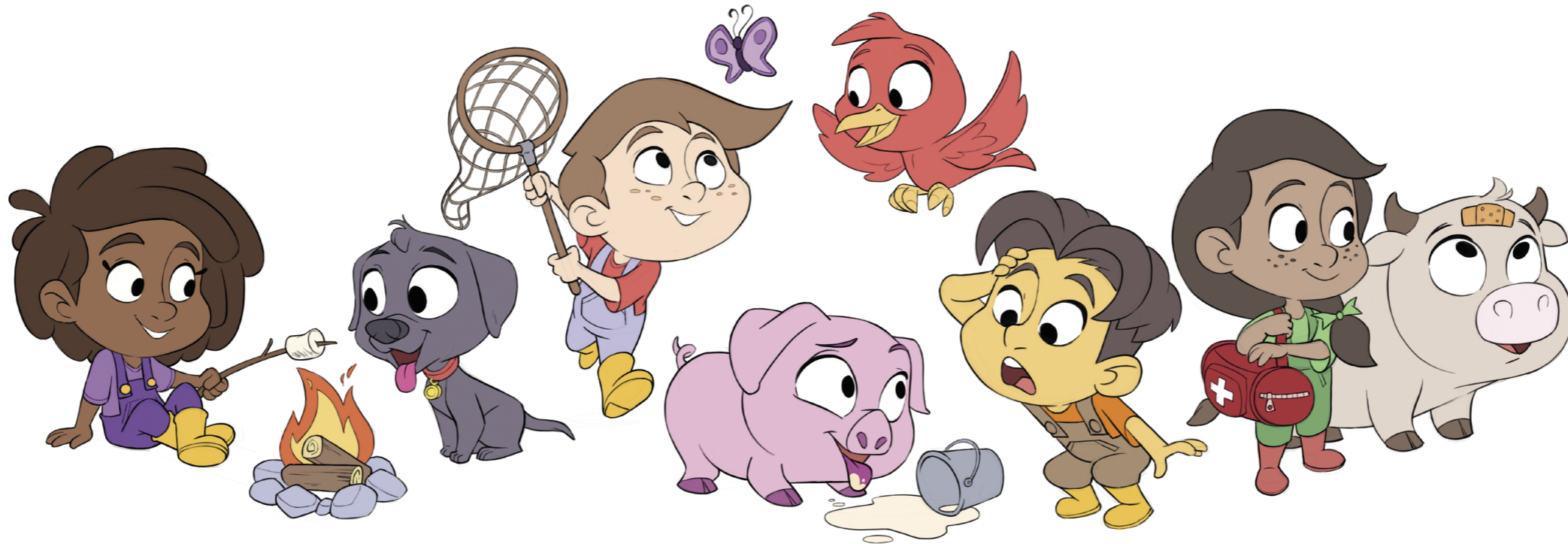
Here is the final drawing. It's cleaned up and colored. It's not an illustration that will be used for anything; it's more supposed to get an idea for the style of a show. This could be for a pitch for a show. Maybe I would render them (paint them 3D) or clean them up more, depending on where it's for. If it's for in-house with maybe a director that can see through a rough sketch, this would be enough. If it's for someone who really doesn't know much about drawing, I would probably spend more time on this drawing to sell it. I personally would put something like this in my portfolio because I really enjoy making drawings like this; Just putting down an idea and not spending hours and hours finishing it. Fill your portfolio with work you'd love to do because they will probably ask you to do that kind of work.

Ask for feedback!

In these sketches, you can see a little bit of my process. I started with my first ideas; these tend to be weak. I showed these to a friend, who gave me some new ideas. So, I decided to add some things to make the characters stronger. See the second row. For example, for the boy, it was hard to see what his power was, so I added the boulder to show he is powerful. I also added the longer arm for the girl, so you could see her superpower clearly as well. Because in the final illustration, I want to make it as clear as possible what these characters are all about.

Here is the final line-up. Didn't really change that much anymore from the previous sketch. I chose colors that would add more to the character. And also that they all have their own color, so they feel distinctive.
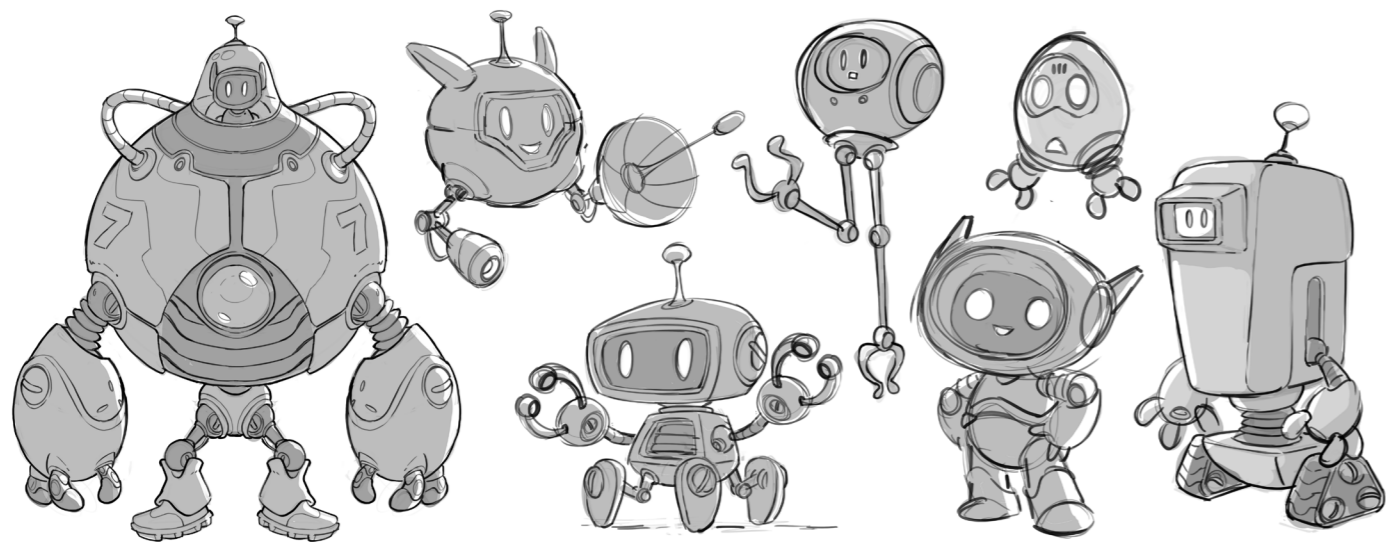
Explore variations

Doodles I made when I wanted to do something with robots! I didn't have a big idea; I just wanted to make a line-up for robots that would be appealing for young kids. So, I tried to come up with a bunch of ideas for robots. I like to add these kinds of sketches to my portfolio because they show you can develop different designs. It also shows you can make quick doodles for ideas.

I picked the funkiest robots to create a fun line-up with. Also changed them a bit to make the designs work better together and added colors. I gave every robot its own color. I believe that adds to the personality, and it also makes it even easier to distinguish them from each other.
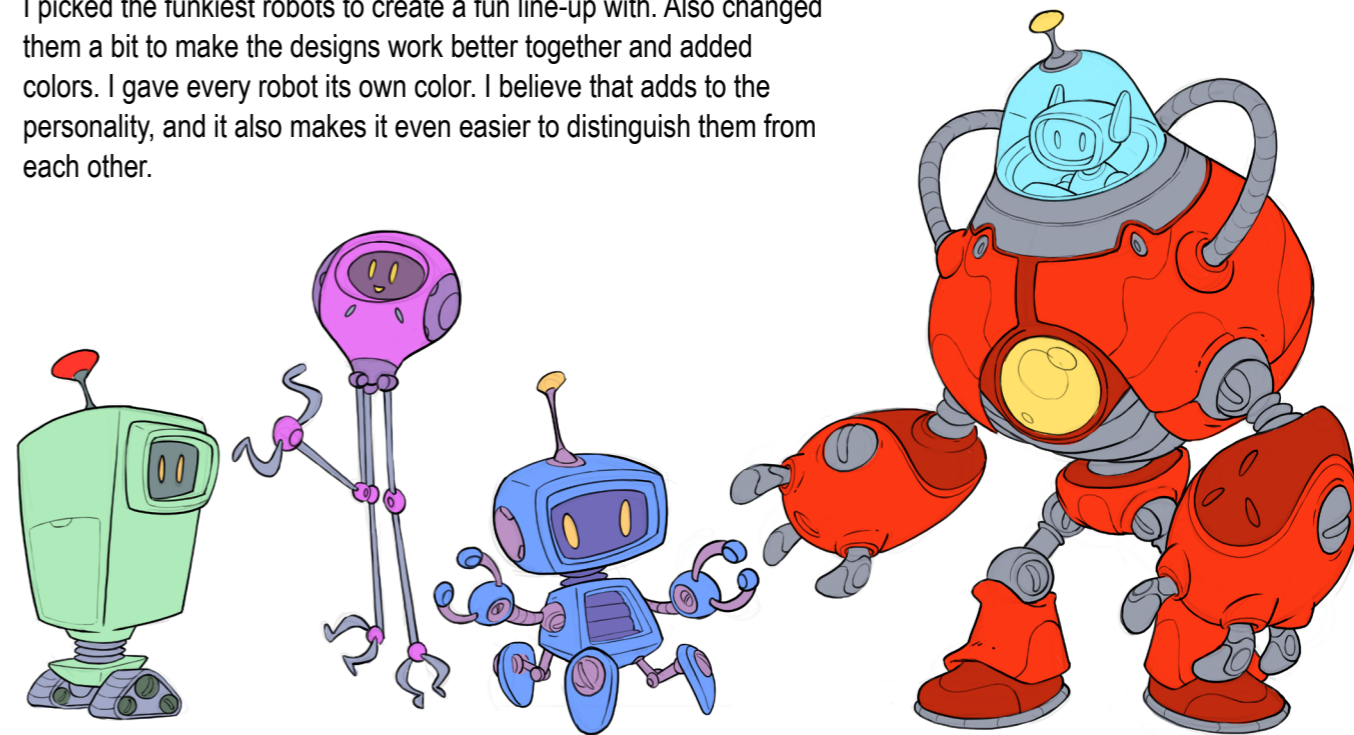
Don't be afraid to experiment

Some more examples of coming up with ideas for a line-up. Here I wanted to do something influenced by nature, spirits, and fantasy. I'm thinking of my favorite movies in that genre and looking a bit on the internet for inspiration. Eventually making my own versions of it. I make these kinds of sketches to see if I'm interested in spending more time on the project. Looking if it gets me excited. Try to find something you find interesting by experimenting and doing stuff.

Go as far as you'd like

When I made this drawing, it was almost Halloween, so I decided to make a Halloween line-up. It can be this simple to start with an idea; just start generic. Maybe after this generic line-up, you could think of ideas to make it more fun and unique. Perhaps you want to take one of these characters and make a whole family out of it. With children, grandma, and grandpa, and more. Or maybe push these characters more! For example, make the witch crazier or the zombie falling apart, etc.

PROJECTS FROM MY PORTFOLIO
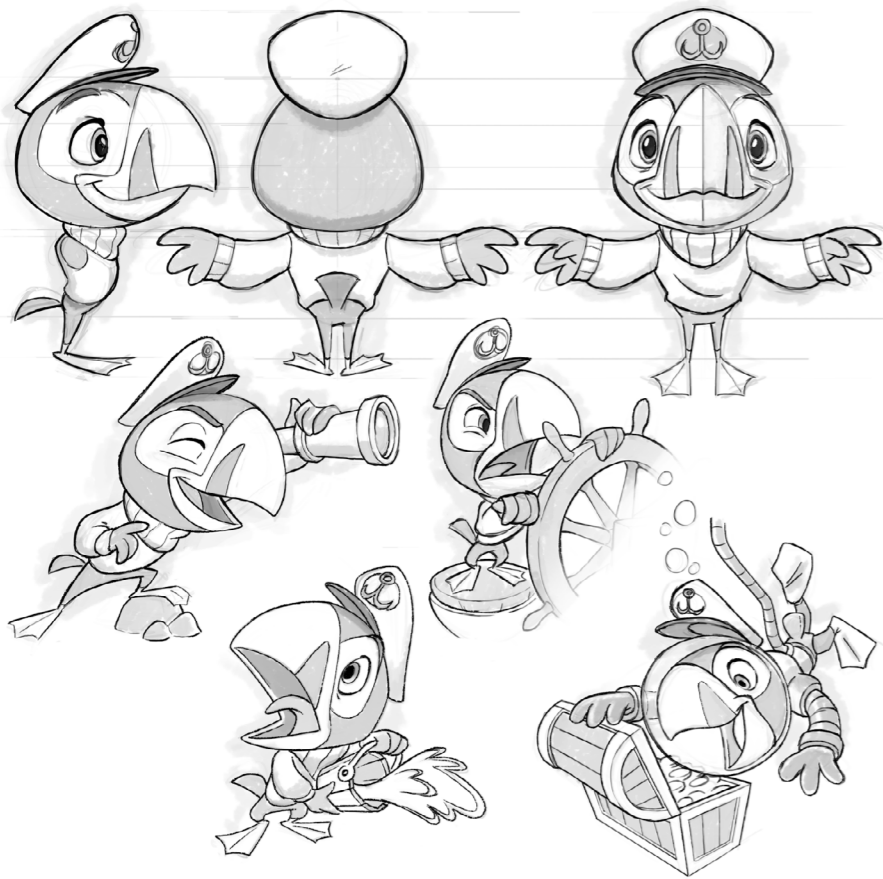
The puffin

I've created this project when I worked at a game company but wanted to get into the animation industry. To do that I bought a ticket to a conference where you could meet professional artists and recruiters from animation studios. So, I designed this personal project to get a job as a character artist for animation production. The lead character is a Puffin.

In the first image, you can see a turnaround and some poses. This shows you know how to participate in the production, like making a technical turnaround of a character and drawing the character consistently in different poses. I also drew his boat to show I can draw props and environments and show some story for the puffin.
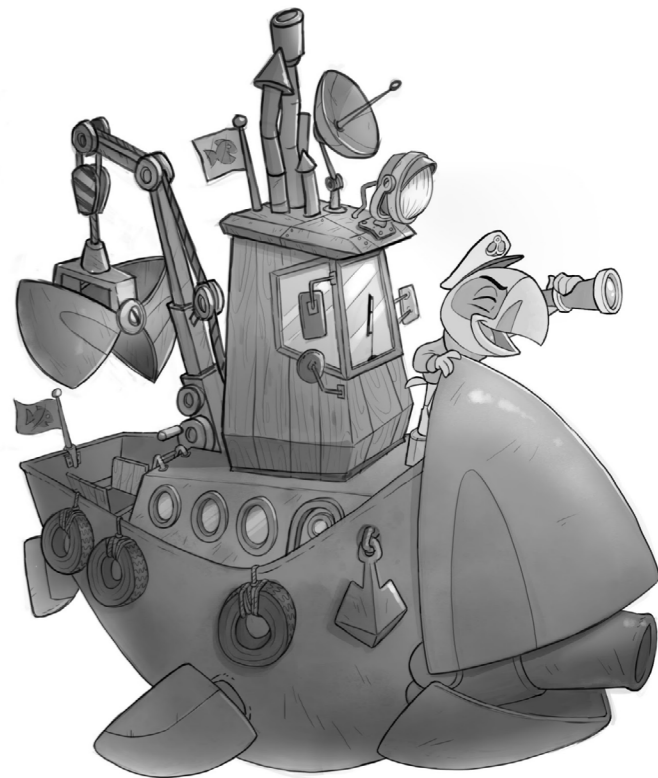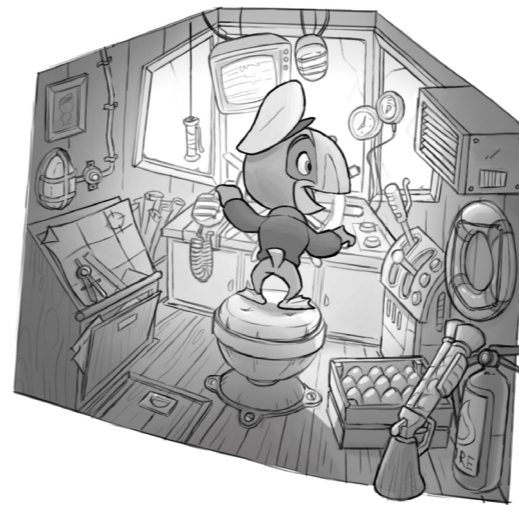
Here is the character line-up. It shows all his friends, fellow villagers, and other characters that play a role in his life. This image helps bringing the idea to life. I would recommend everyone to focus their portfolio on 1 or 2 projects like this because it shows you can do everything needed in production. It's also easier to talk about projects like this and be excited by them. This is something that is often appreciated by recruiters.
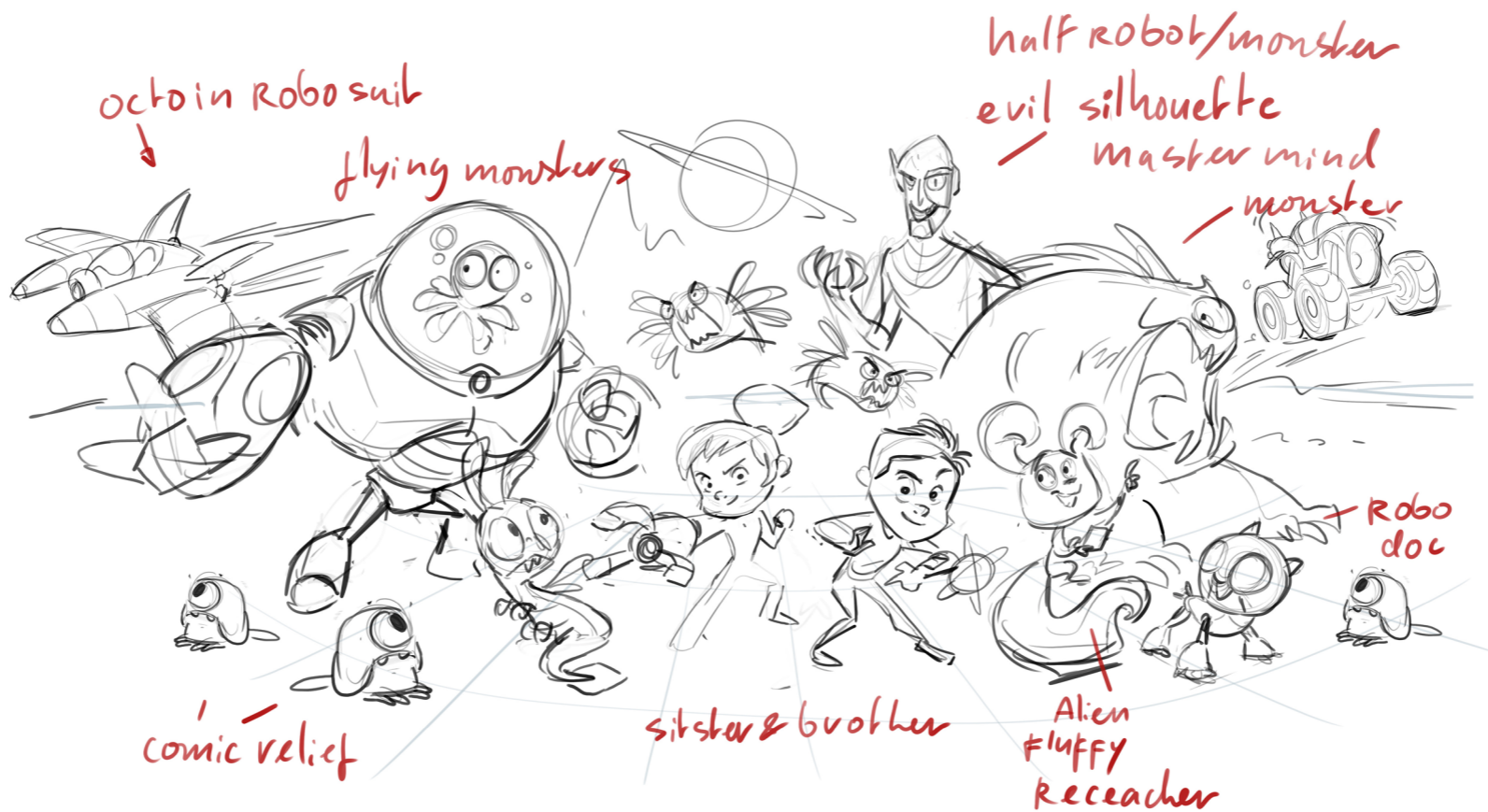
Act as if you already work for the studio and create not one character but the whole line-up as they would do for a movie. You could look at movie art books for more inspiration. Pick your favorite animated movie and see if you can find the art of book. Get inspired by the drawings they make for productions; learn from them to create your own portfolio piece.
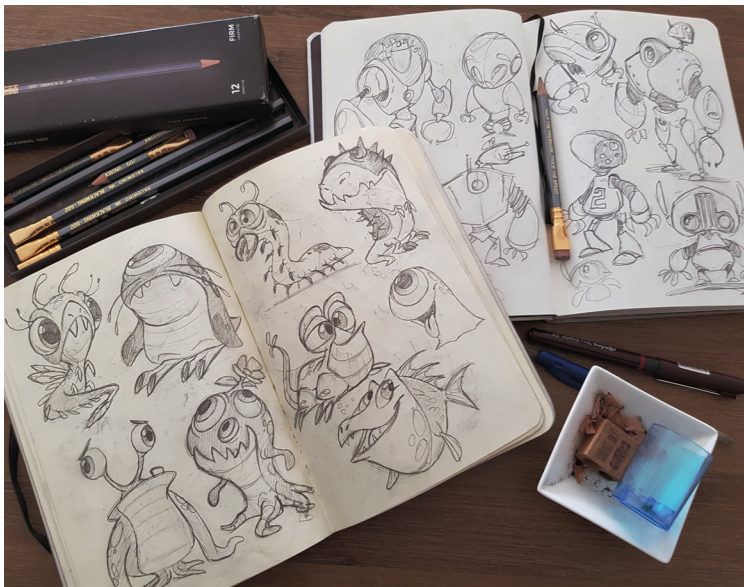
Imagine FX

Sometimes I find it challenging to pick a theme or to start on projects for my portfolio. I was asked by Imagine FX to create a tutorial for them. So, that was an excellent opportunity to create a new character line-up and talk about that in the magazine. It helped me a lot that they gave me a deadline, so I could not spend too much time on it, and it also needed to be good, because this magazine is being published worldwide.

To get started, I picked a theme and made some doodles. When I was hesitant, I shoved it off and just continued making sketches and looking for things I would like to draw. During this project, I had a lot of negative thoughts; I didn't ignore them but gave them a place, so they didn't bother me too much. The deadline really helped me with that. Without the deadline, I would probably have started over five times. It can even help when you just give yourself an imaginary deadline. Write it down and stick to it!

See the final design on the next page and check out the magazine of Imagine FX issue July 2019 for the full article with more drawings and explanations about this project.
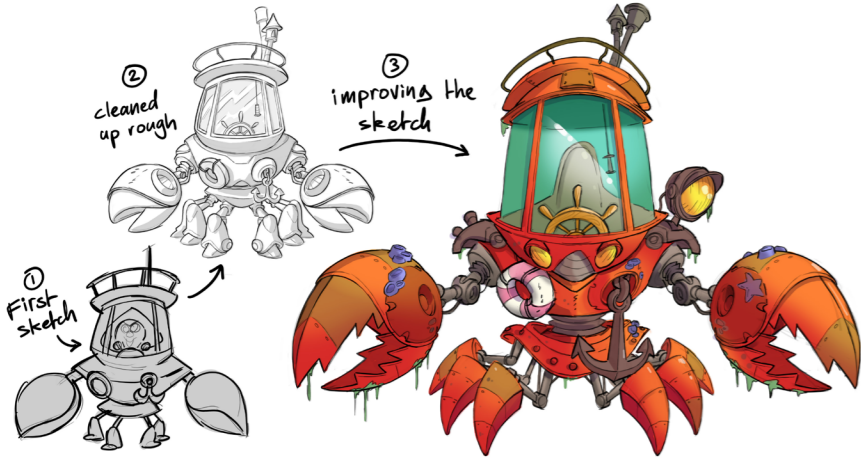
3D Total

Later 3D Total asked me to make a portfolio project for their magazine Character Design Quarterly. The cool thing was that, besides a deadline, they also gave me three synopsizes to pick from. I chose the Deepsea villain with a sidekick. Every idea could turn into something cool, so don't worry too much about the actual idea. It's all about what you're going to do with it.

I started with the lead character. I thought of an old woman who lost her husband and ship on the sea. From that moment, she lives in the ocean. I started by searching for a head and face that fits her personality. I did this in my sketchbook by doodling a lot and, after that, made these designs to explore.
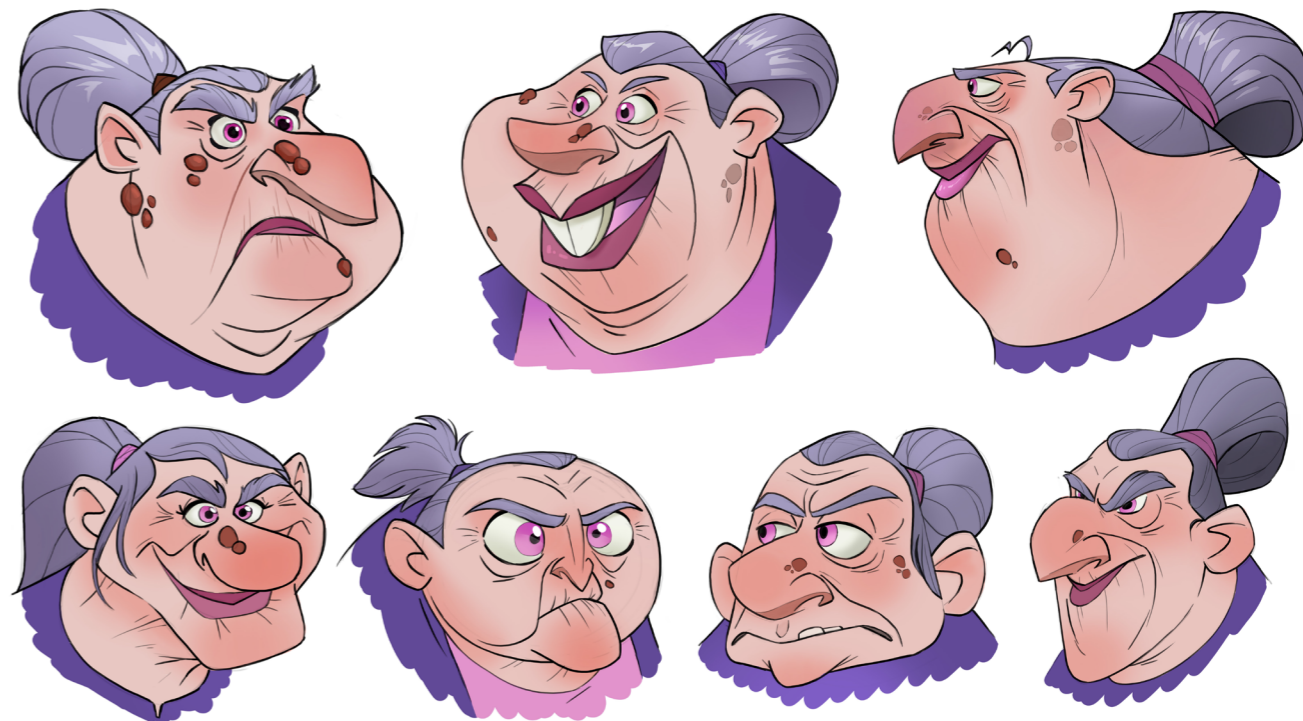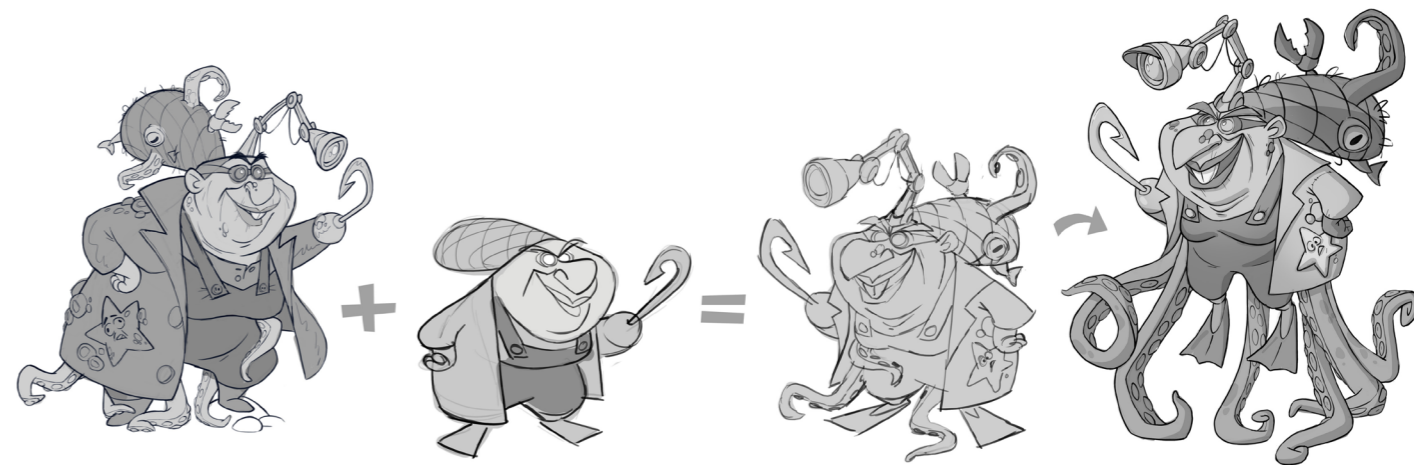
Once I made some heads, I didn't stick to only one design. I began drawing the whole figure, starting with some simple doodles first and drawing some more detailed versions after it. In the end, I mixed the designs and found something that I liked. I picked a design and decided to continue with it. Don't be satisfied with your first drawings; keep exploring. Since these are sketches, it's still easy to make a lot of different versions. And explore without losing too much time.

② cleaned up rough

③ improving the sketch

I thought about making some illustrations of the sea witch and her minion together. So, I started doodling some story ideas. 3D total didn't ask for this, but it helps me flashing out the character more. What is her relationship with the minion? It doesn't have to be super complex, but a bit of a backstory adds a lot. Finally, I chose to add a robot. And that brought me on the idea that she sank her boat years ago and transformed the wreckage into a robot, which makes her able to live under the sea.

These are the final illustrations. I always find it hard to choose the final design; sometimes, you just must make a choice. And you can always show the other versions. So, in my mind, it doesn't matter too much which you choose as a final result. I chose the painted one as the final design, but I also liked the one walking on the octopus' arms. This page could be a page out of my portfolio.

CONCLUSION _and_ THANK YOU
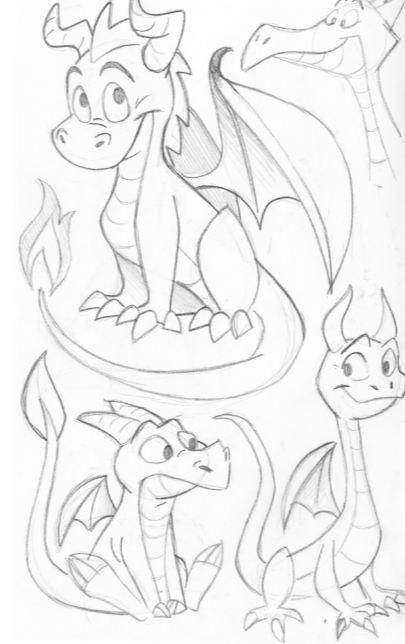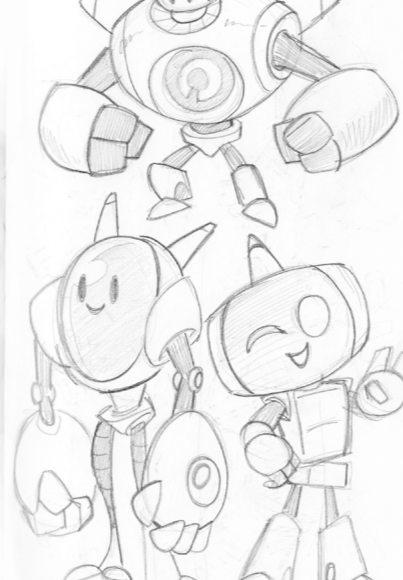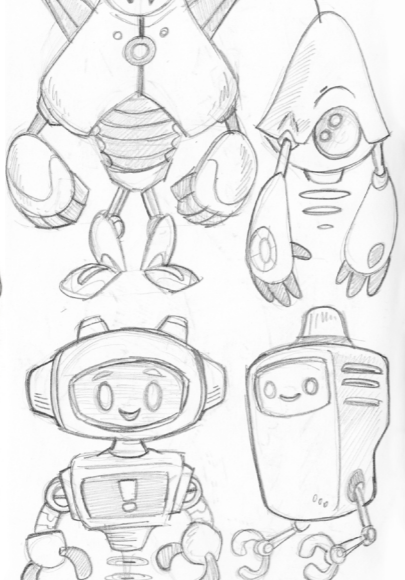
PICK UP YOUR SKETCHBOOK

Before spending a lot of time on a design, I make doodles. And I like to do that in my sketchbook. I can take my sketchbook wherever I want. I can sit on the couch watching tv and start doodling something in it. I like to take it easy in the beginning. Not too much pressure. This is different for everyone, but I like to begin very relaxed. That way, it's easier for me to be creative and not listen too much to those negative voices in my head telling me my art sucks, etcetera. Find something that works for you. I can only tell what works for me; for some people, it works better to put some pressure on them and say to themselves, like: "in the next 2 hours, I'm going to make 50 doodles of character x". Again, try different ways. Look at various interviews of other artists to learn how they work and see if that could work for you. In these images, you can see a bunch of my doodles. I always draw neatly, but it's maybe even better to be very rough in this stage. This stage is all about the ideas and less about the result. That comes later.

BUILD YOUR PORTFOLIO!

I thought it's helpful to end this book with an example or list what you could do to start your own project.
First of all: Think about what your goal is. Don't be afraid that it is too ambitious. I believe we should aim high, mainly to bring out the best in us. At the same time, watch out for working too hard; I don't want you to get burned out. But when you speak something out loud, for me, that was "I want to work for Disney", things start to get moving. You can find out what you need to do to achieve that. You can speak to people and have a clear goal. So, just write down that goal! It can never be too crazy or ambitious.

Now when you have written down that goal, you can start thinking about what you would do at that dream job. That could be creating all the characters for a movie. The next step is to come up with a concept for a movie and write shortly down what's it about. See the projects I made in this book as an example; it doesn't have to be super original or complex.

The next step is to create the content. When your dream job is to work as a character designer on movies for studios, go create the characters as if you are already working there. Start making a character line-up, draw the characters in different poses, draw the whole family, draw the lead character in different ages, draw the character maybe in other essential memories of its life, and come up with as much stuff as you can. Look at the art books of your favorite movies, or look at the examples in this ebook for inspiration and ideas about what you can do.
Now it's time to create a portfolio with all the content you

made. I think 10 pages is perfect for a portfolio. Around 5 images on each page, but be careful to make it too crowded. I believe a portfolio contains your best work; showing different skills is stronger than a portfolio with 100 weak pieces. Also, only add stuff in the portfolio you would like to work on.

Here is an example list of what I think would be a good portfolio. I would maybe focus my portfolio on 1 or 2 own story ideas.

- **Character line-up**; I like to start with this to talk about the project.
- **Model sheet of the lead character**; On one page in not more than five poses. If you want, you could do two pages with a total of 10 poses. I think this is worth it because the lead character is very important.
- **Doodles of the lead character**; Show the versions you made before you got the final design. To show how your design process goes and that you can come up with ideas
- **Turnaround of the lead character**; Show that you can create a turnaround, and this also showcases your technical abilities to make a turnaround
- **Optional**: **All above with a secondary character;** The villain, the love interest, the minion, etcetera. Whatever you think could be cool to show more of.
- **Pick a character and make a line-up of it with different ages**; It could be the main character, but maybe it's better for the variation to do it with a very different character
- **Show more rough sketches with ideas from different characters**; To show you can quickly doodle characters and ideas
- **Optional: draw the character in a background**; This is a subtle way of showing you can draw backgrounds. (Only do this when you are confident and enjoy drawing backgrounds), you could also do this by creating a story beat (a storyboard drawing of an important moment in the movie), or the character interacting with an important prop, and so on. A great way to show you can also do different things than character design without putting the attention away from character design
- **Figure drawing skills**; showing your best figure drawings on 1 or 2 pages. Just to show your drawing skills.

THAT'S IT!

Thanks for reading this ebook. I hope it helped you to get started with your own character portfolio, no matter at what point you are in your career. Having a portfolio representing you and your work is a powerful tool to get hired as an artist.

Besides your work, your mindset is very important too. Don't be afraid to aim for what you dream of. When I started out, I felt insecure about my skills, but by setting a goal for myself, I knew what I needed to develop to get closer to my goal. Even if you eventually change your mind or don't achieve this goal completely, you'll always have grown as an artist in many ways. Make sure this goal is something that excites you. It should motivate and inspire you along your way.

Believe in yourself and in your art style. You can settle for something popular, but in the end, working on what you like the most will be most satisfying. I used to be driven by fear and doubting my skills all the time. Turning this around into believing in myself and daring to share my ambition with others opened more doors for awesome projects and jobs.

So, don't be afraid to show yourself. Your work may be seen! Go for it.

Best,
Mitch Leeuwe

LEARN HOW TO DRAW!

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