ImagineFX

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

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Sketch, storyboard and animate in Quill

GET AHEAD IN

ANIMATION

Learn to sculpt and paint vibrant character designs with **Fernando Peque**

MAYA AND THE THREE
Discover the art of Jorge Gutierrez's fantasy series

FUTURE

ISSUE 209

ALSO INSIDE
HOW TO SIMPLIFY YOUR CHARACTERS
ADVICE TO OVERCOME IMPOSTER SYNDROME
PHOTOSHOP 2022 – SHOULD YOU UPGRADE?

NETFLIX ACCESS! MAKING ARCANE, THE MITCHELLS VS. THE MACHINES & MORE

art by: instagram.com/raiffiesart

infos & videos: www.artrage.com/IFX

ArtRage

Welcome to…

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

This issue's animation theme has become something of a Netflix takeover. The streaming platform has invested heavily in animation and it's beginning to show. With a mantra to leave artists and creatives alone to make the films, series and shorts they want, it's easy to see why Netflix is dominating this issue.

We start with Paul Sullivan's insights into making the Mesoamerica fantasy series Maya and the Three, which is awash with colour and incredible visual design. We also take a close look at Arcane, the stylish animation from Riot Games and Fortiche – the creative director and art director share their thoughts on making the hit series. Finally, we speak with the creative duo behind Aardman's wintry animation Robin Robin, head to Australia for some winter sun with Back to the Outback, and catch up with the team behind one of the year's best animated films: The Mitchells vs. the Machines.

And if you want to follow in the footsteps of these artists, then turn to our workshops where Netflix artists Fernando Peque and Jackie Droujko reveal how to create characters for animation.
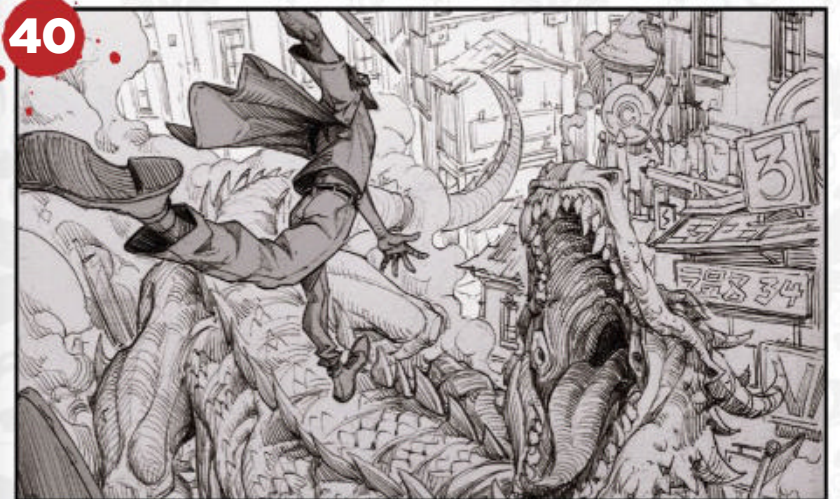
Editor
ian.dean@futurenet.com

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

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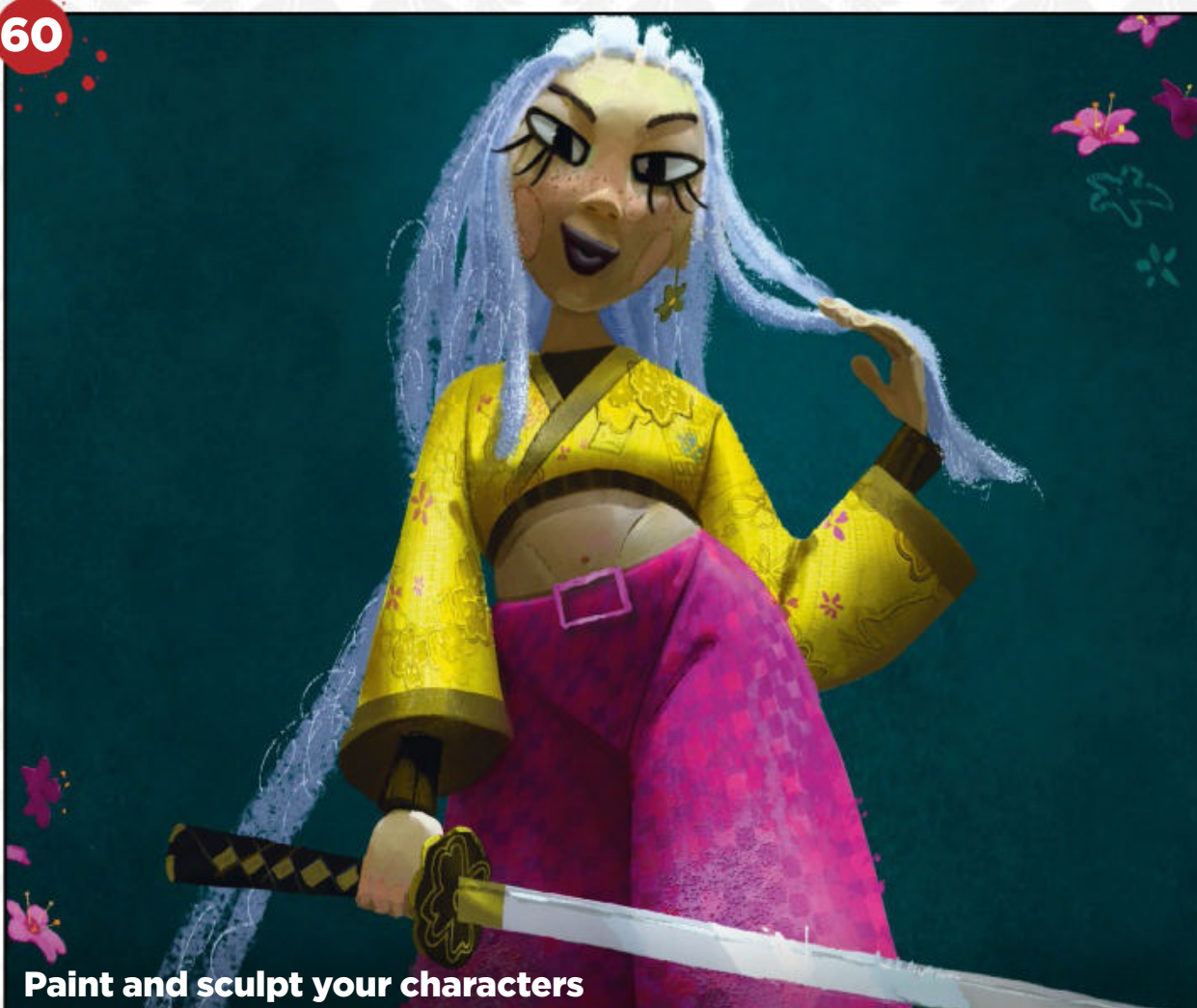
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Resources

Getting hold of this issue's resources is easy.
Just visit: ifxm.ag/animation209art

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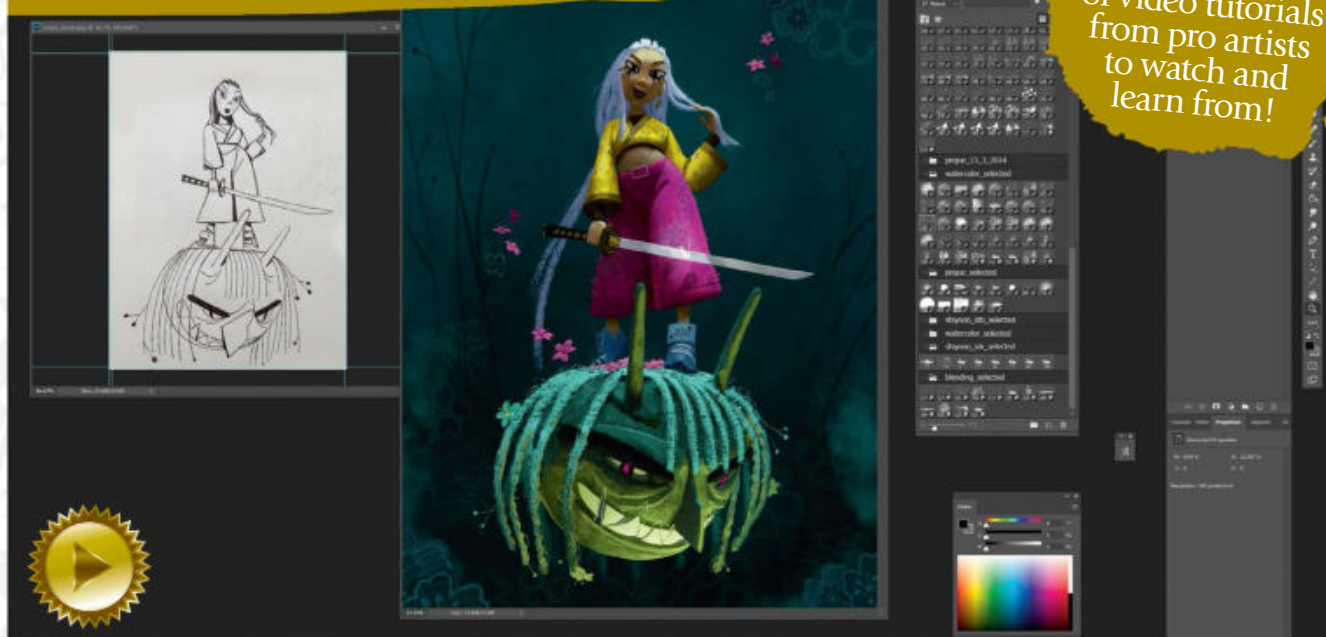
OVER 9 HOURS of video tutorials from pro artists to watch and learn from!

Get ahead in animation art

Watch as vis-dev artist Fernando Peque uses Adobe's virtual reality tool Medium, along with Blender and Photoshop, to create this month's stunning cover. There's more on page 60.
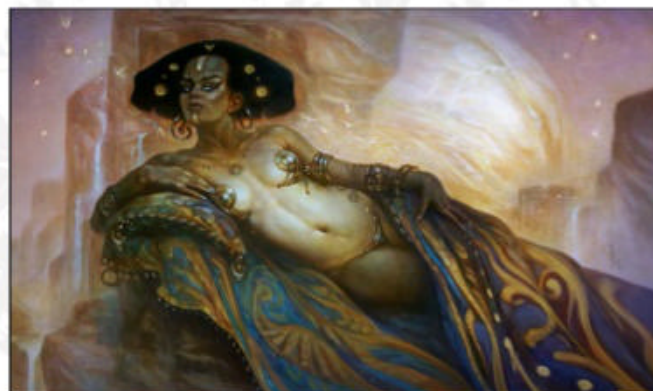
From sketch to finished oil painting

See how illustrator Patrick J Jones makes the best use of his preparatory work to create a fantasy portrait in oils, in the final instalment of his three-part series. Turn to page 92 for his workshop.

ANIMATION ARTIST EBOOK
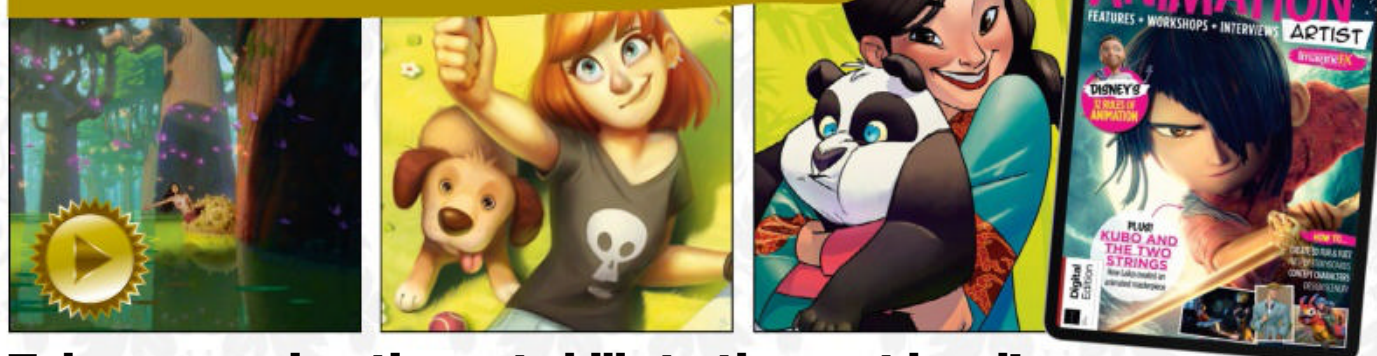
Take your animation art skills to the next level!

This 148-page ebook is packed with pro industry art advice: workshops on sharpening your vis-dev skills, using characters to tell a story, creating colourful animation art, and much more!

ipso. For press freedom with responsibility

Widely Recycled

FUTURE

Connectors. Creators. Experience Makers.

Next month in...

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
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Fantasy Illustration

Get spirited away with Johan Egerkran's beautiful and elegant new dragon art

Also in the issue…

From artist to author
The fantastic Tom Kidd shares art and insights from his book, Gnemo.

Master the tools of ArtRage 5
The acclaimed Disney tutor Chris Petrocchi creates a striking portrait.

Illustrate in Procreate
Maria Dimova shares her process for painting Art Nouveau.

Create art with a unique style
Control shape and form in your art with D&D's Harry Conway.

ISSUE 210 ON SALE 21 JANUARY *IN PRINT & DIGITAL*

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FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Kallie LeFave

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate **WEB:** instagram.com/kallielef

Kallie's love for fantasy and fandom art stems from Don Bluth and Ghibli films. She loves creating gesture and emotion through bold line-work, colour and light.

**ImagineFX
ARTIST
OF THE
MONTH**
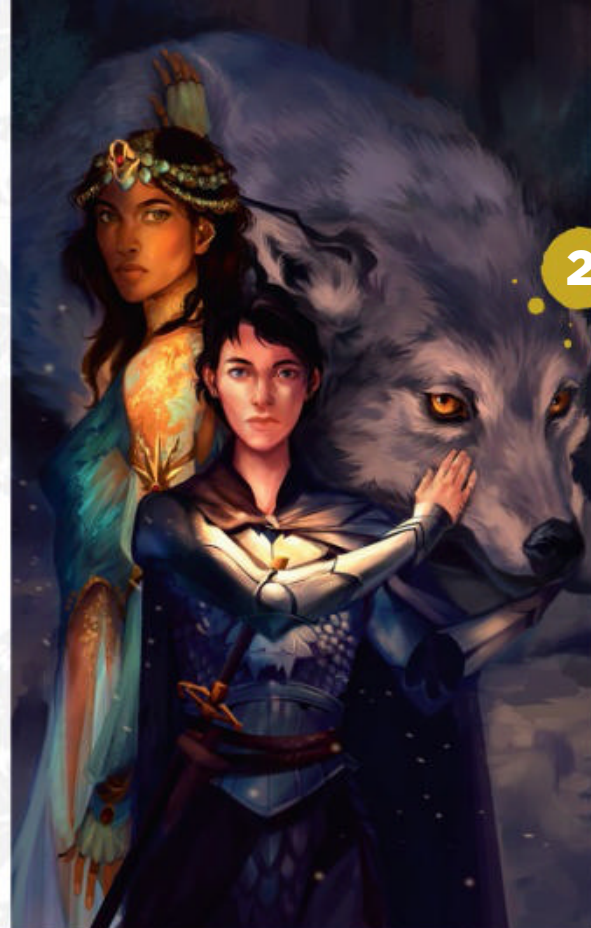
1 IN THE GRAVES
"This piece was inspired by a Dragon Age Inquisition character. I love nature and the many hues of green it provides, and this colour scheme felt magical."

2 WITCH QUEEN
"A piece depicting George RR Martin's Nymeria Sand, Arya Stark and her direwolf, Nymeria. I wanted to push this piece with a more painterly style."

3 THE IMPOSTOR
"Here I was inspired by Solas from Dragon Age Inquisition. I loved the Tarot cards created for the game and wanted to make something in a similar fashion."

Want to submit your work? Visit http://ifxm.ag/getinifx

FXPosé

Gennadiy Kim

LOCATION: Russia **MEDIA:** Photoshop, HEAVYPAINT **WEB:** instagram.com/gavn_art

Gennadiy is a self-taught artist who previously worked as a concept artist in the game-dev industry. "Now I'm much more focused on exploring personal art, specifically in portraiture. I love exploring new techniques."
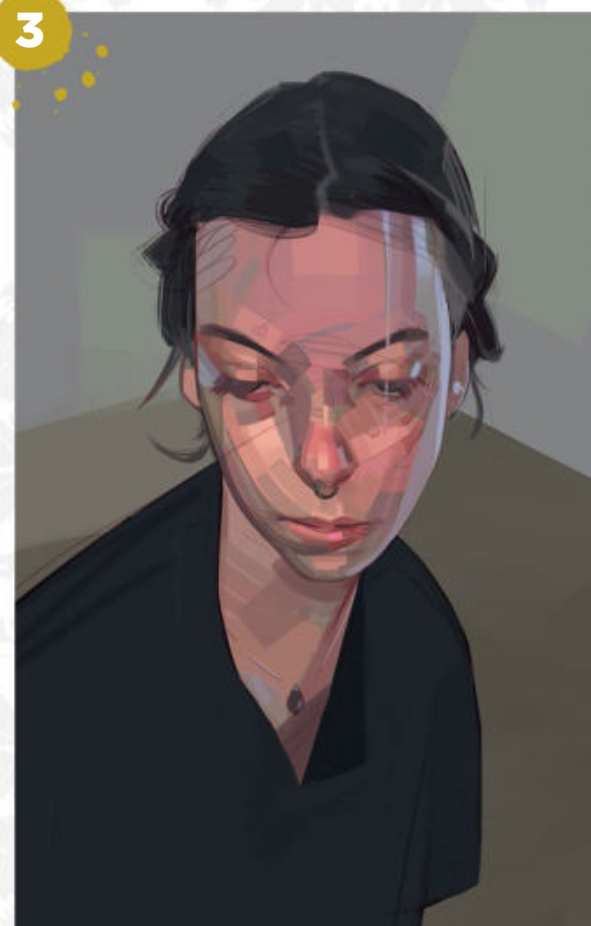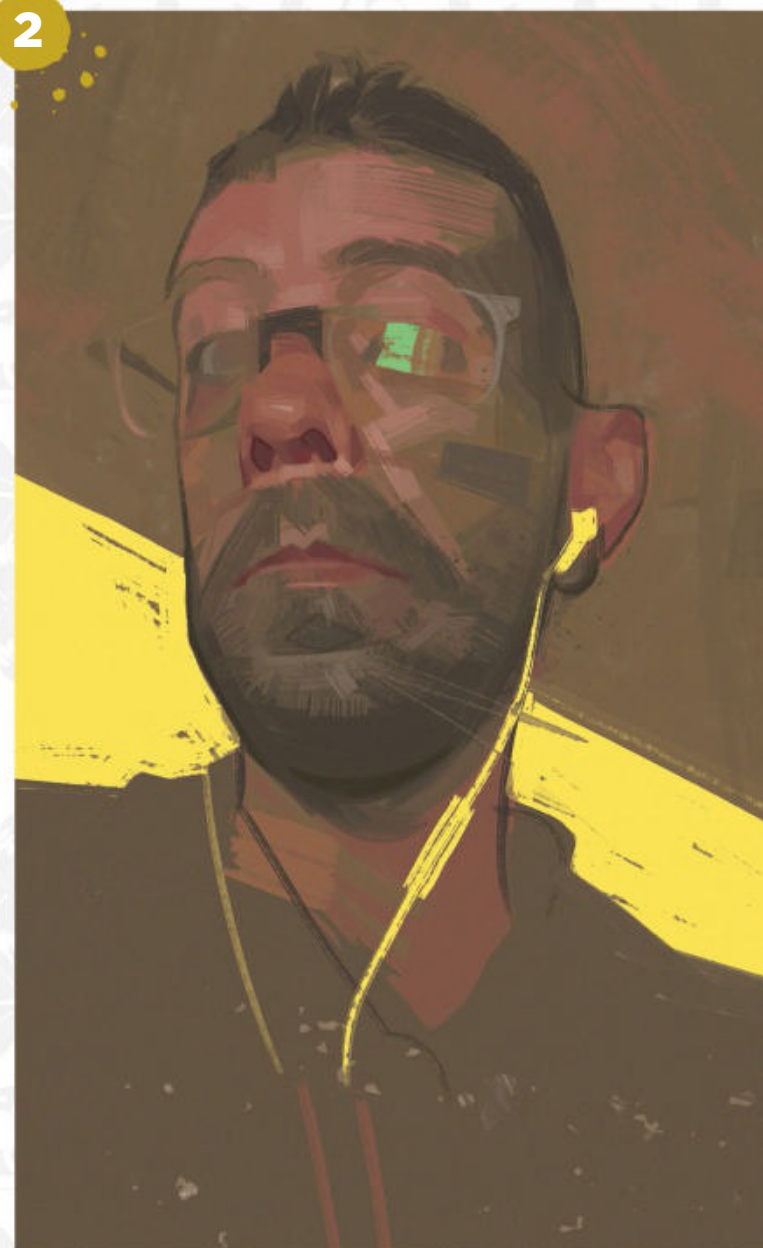
1 AIMEE
"This portrait is a result of merging two photos. I painted it in a chaotic manner with only the face and hands distinctly representing the subject."

2 SOURENA
"With this portrait the aim was to keep it low-contrast with little patches of high-contrast areas, focusing on the reflection in the glasses and the nose."

3 JOSIE
"In this portrait I tried to contrast the very soft shapes and curves of Josie's features with the more dirty colours and fragmented, bold brushstrokes."

Kablikhina Valeriya Sergeevna

LOCATION: Russia **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Illustrator, Maya, 3ds Max, ZBrush, SketchUp, Blender **WEB:** artstation.com/fallfox

Kablikhina, aka FallFox, has been drawing since childhood and graduated from Stroganov Moscow State University of Arts and Industry. She works in game development and is inspired by dark fantasy and cyberpunk.

1 ENLIGHTENED WARRIOR

"This character represents essential basic consciousness beyond the stream of experience. He is free from emotions and doubts."

2 BUTTERFLY DRAGON

"Who doesn't like dragons? Unfortunately, the more dragons are drawn, the harder it is to find a fresh angle. Hence why I added the wings of a butterfly."

3 KING OF THE WILD HUNT

"A vision of the Wild Hunt foreshadows some kind of catastrophe, such as war or plague."
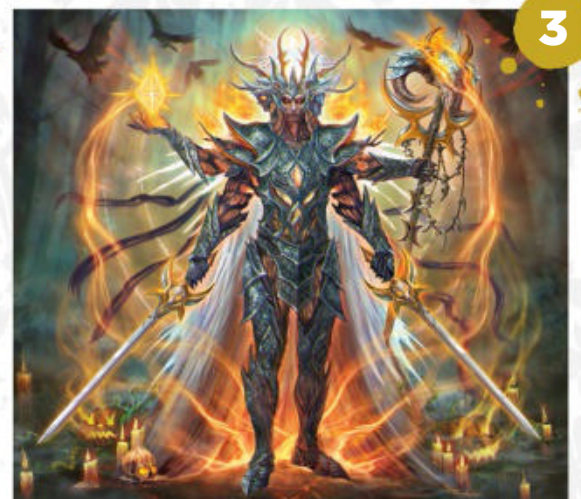
4 MYSTERY

"This is an alternate vision of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come from A Christmas Carol. I see the future as more mysterious than frightening."

FXPosé

Ke Yang

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** keyangdraws.wixsite.com/portfolio

Ke Yang is a visual development artist at Sony Pictures Animation. After graduating from Sheridan University in 2017, she has been working in the animation industry for clients such as Laika, Netflix and Baobab Studios.

1 NIGHT MARKET
"A sweet memory from my childhood where I went to a night market in Asia for dim sum and lemon tea with my friends."

2 FALLEN
"I love mechanical stuff, especially flying machines or aeroplanes. This is a story of a group of hardworking engineers having a test drive, but failing."

3 EAGLE AND CHICKEN
"This piece celebrates memories of childhood games. I love creating stories from memories – it's a great way to discover my past and celebrate my culture."

4 BOOKSTORE ON WATER
"I used a limited palette to create an elegant feeling that helps with the focus within the illustration."

FXPosé

![S Red Amparo portrait]

S Red Amparo

LOCATION: Philippines MEDIA: Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint WEB: oshredart.com

Red draws inspiration from the cute, macabre and the subtly erotic. When she isn't creating cover illustrations for independent authors and musicians, she paints pretty girls to populate her portfolio.

1 ARROGANCE

"An experiment in combining abstract elements and character art, as well as a Frankenstein monster of my older artworks, mashed together and painted over in Photoshop."

2 PREDATOR

"My depiction of a little vampire, a small creature of shadow. I prefer it when my art is mostly monochromatic, with a splash of red."
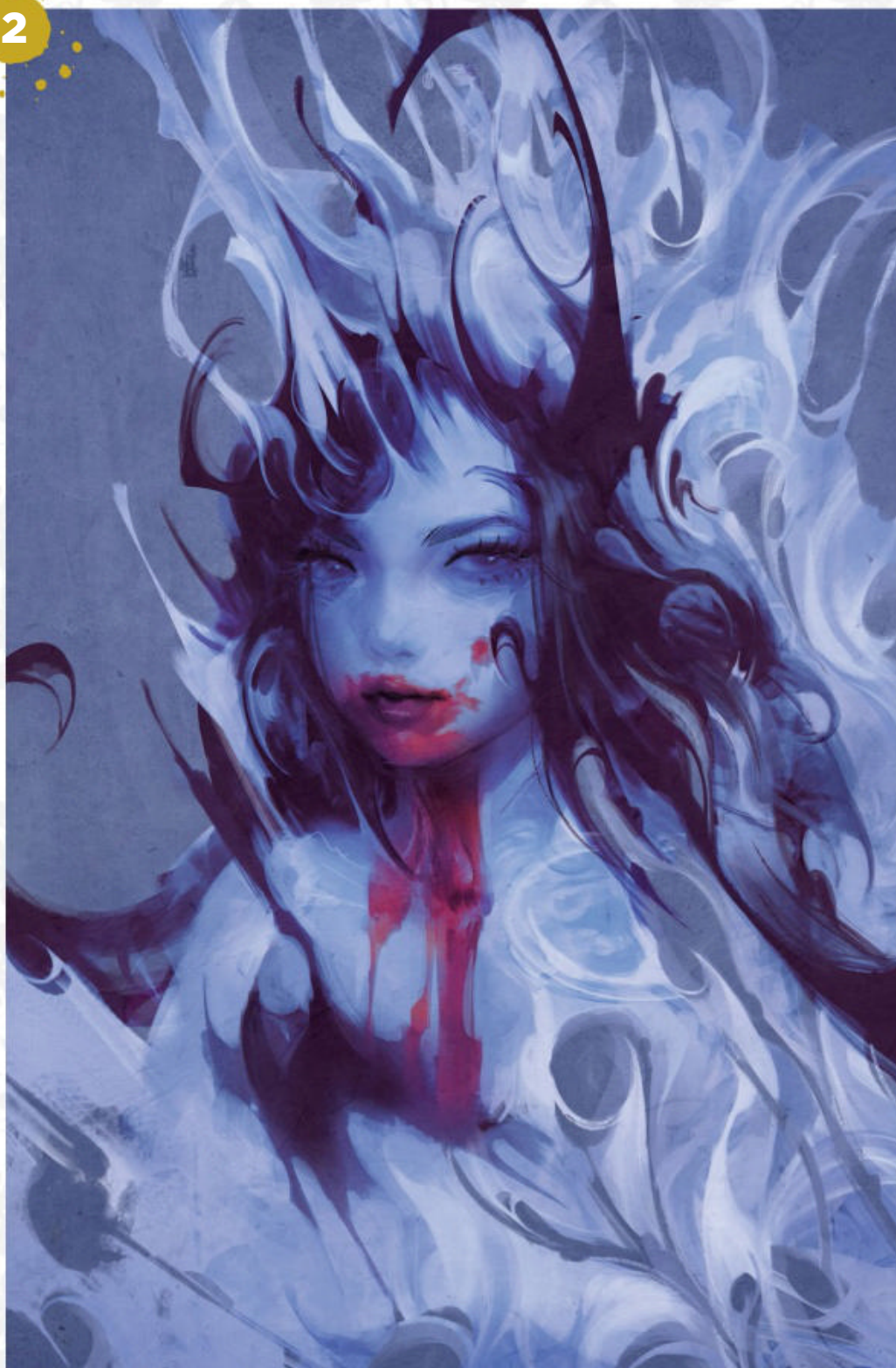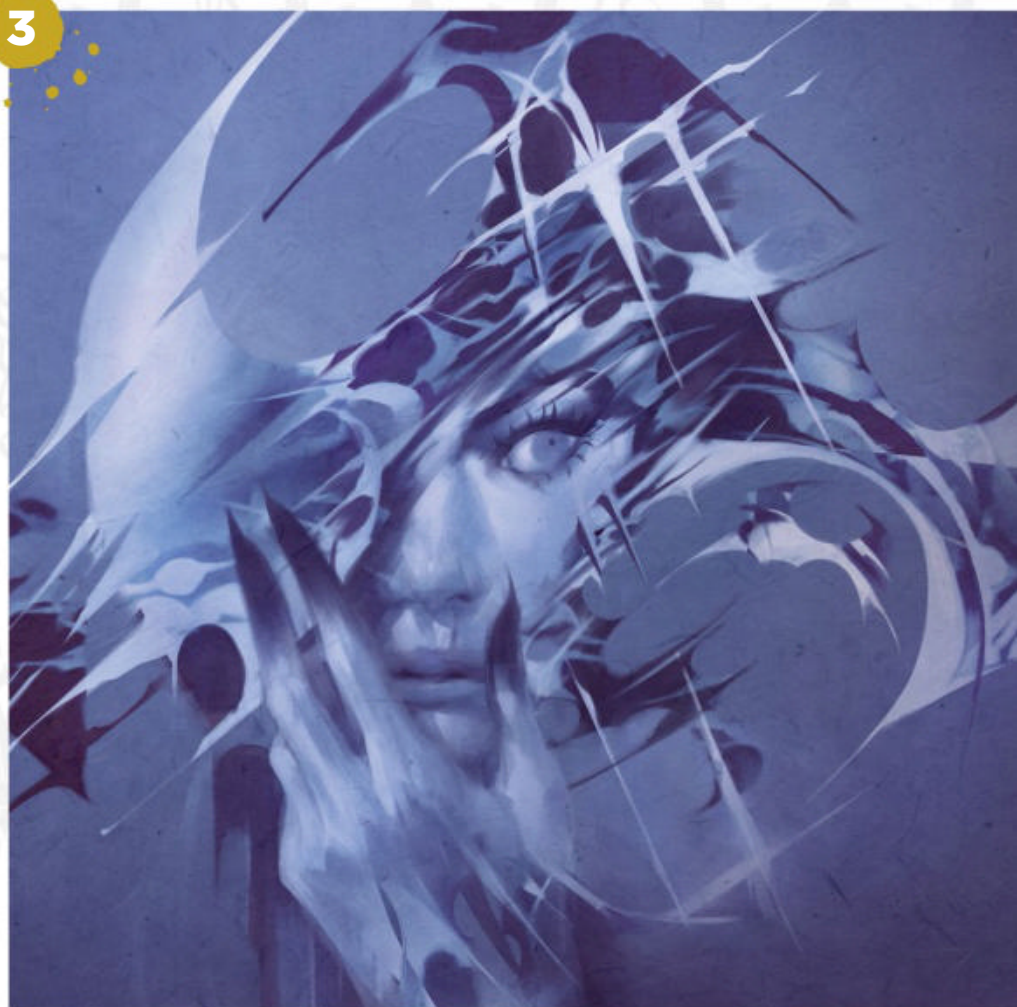
3 G.O.A.T.

"An experiment in combining portraiture with abstract elements. The title was taken from the song by Polyphia that I was listening to while I painted this."

4 TRIBUTE TO MUSHROOMS

"A tribute to Vicious Delicious by Infected Mushroom. It's a homage to the album cover by David Ho, one of my favourite artists."

Consuelo Pecchenino

LOCATION: Italy **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Flame Painter **WEB:** conzi-tool.com

Consuelo is a concept artist who specialises in architectural and landscape design. She loves to work in different industries like space agencies, films and tabletop games. Nature, science and everyday life are her inspirations.

1 DRAGON PEAK
"I love to explore complex compositions, and I always try to find a good balance between extreme simplification and details."

2 SPRING HILL
"I often get inspired by my hiking trips on the mountains, and like to create new environment concepts with a fantasy touch out of them."

Do you want to see your art on these pages? Then email five pieces of your work and a short explanation about each artwork, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to **fxpose@imaginefx.com**

"Given that we work in a visual medium where almost everyone is able to offer feedback, it's not always possible to shield ourselves against input that could be hurtful and unproductive," says Julia Metzger.

Overcoming impostor syndrome

Have faith Almost all creative people suffer self-doubt. **Tanya Combrinck** explores solutions and strategies with some established artists.

Self-doubt and self-criticism are healthy parts of personal development, but in the creative industries it's common for these thoughts to become debilitating. It can get to the point where a person feels as though they don't deserve their success, their achievements are all flukes, and they'll be exposed as the fraud they really are.

It's hard to believe that world-class artists could think of themselves as fakes. Yet many – perhaps even most – successful artists have at some point struggled with crippling self-doubt.

Just knowing that these feelings are part of being a professional artist is helpful for most people, but there are additional approaches you can do to kick your mind out of its destructive loop and into more productive ways of thinking.

Alexandria Neonakis is a freelancer who was previously a senior concept artist at Wonderstorm and a character concept artist at Naughty Dog. Her worst bout of impostor syndrome was set off by the start of a new job at a prestigious company. Despite having worked in the industry for five years she doubted her abilities.

"The pressure was immense, but it was honestly almost entirely self-inflicted," **Alexandria** says. "The team was super supportive of me and helped ensure my success. That didn't stop me from spiralling and thinking they were going to realise their mistake and
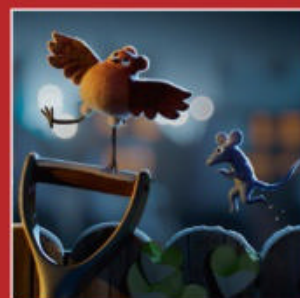
John Sweeney says, "I was fortunate enough to have a supportive family and community of friends around me, but that doesn't mean I didn't have that itch at the back of my brain telling me I don't deserve any of the success I've had."

fire me any day. That anxiety lasted about three months total."

Comparing one's own work to that of others is one of the main triggers for feelings of inadequacy. Alexandria has a way around it: remember that it's not the most important thing.

"What we bring to a team or a project is so much more than just the art or content we're producing," she says. "Our ideas, how we approach solving problems and how we work together with team members are all just as, if not more, important than the final paintings we produce.

"Knowing that now, when I'm having bad art days or don't feel my work is as good as someone else's, I remind myself I'm far more valuable than just the paintings that I can

> ❝ I remind myself I'm far more valuable than just the paintings that I can create ❞

"When you turn your love and hobby into your primary income stream, it puts a level of pressure on it that can be hard for our brains to sift through," says Alexandria Neonakis.

create day-to-day. That usually brings me back down when I'm in my own head about this stuff."

REFRAME YOURSELF
Alexandria has this practical advice: "Put aside where your work is right now versus where you want it to be, and list all of the other things you bring to your project or team. Maybe you're very good at communicating with game designers, or have given the team really great ideas that they've used to make the characters or environments better. If you shift focus from what you're not as good at to what you're very good at, it'll help reframe how you think of yourself in relation to the work you're doing."

Art director and concept artist Julia Metzger says she experienced paralysing feelings of self-doubt from her teenage years onwards as she compared her nascent skills to what she saw in online galleries.

"At points where I hit walls in my learning, it was easy to question if I could ever ➤

© Naughty Dog, LLC

PAINT FOR YOURSELF
John Sweeney on rediscovering the path to fulfilment

What do you do to address your feelings of self-doubt?
Looking at the earliest contract work I did in college compared to the professional work I do now is a reminder that despite my feelings, I've made progress.

To what extent is it still a part of your life?
Self-doubt is a constant feeling, especially with social media and the influx of polished imagery you get on a daily basis. It can become overwhelming to the point where I just don't want to generate anything. It's in those times I try to focus on making art for myself, ideally work that I don't plan on posting.

Are there industry factors that make people more likely to have these thoughts?
Definitely, whether it's due to toxic management, or members of a team or online group. Social media creates a vicious cycle of fearing that you're not good enough, and also fearing that you're missing out if you're not constantly posting art and generating "content".

What advice do you have for someone who is struggling with impostor syndrome?
Ask yourself if there are any factors in your life or job that might be contributing to those feelings. I've taken a step back from social media and I find my general mood is better and my sense of imposter syndrome has subsided considerably.

John is art director at Insomniac Games, and was previously AD on The Last of Us Part 2 at Naughty Dog.
artstation.com/johnsweeney
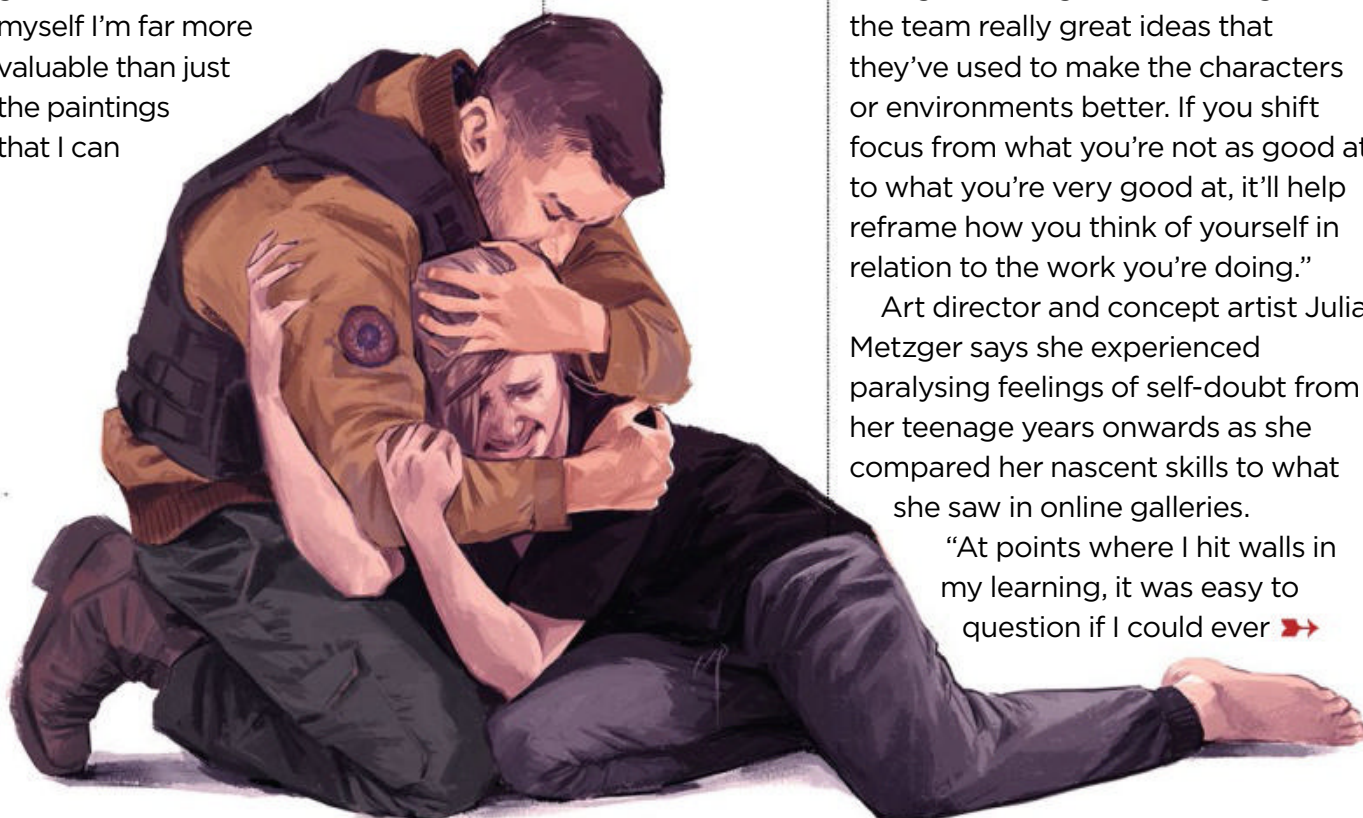
➥ reach similar skill levels," says **Jullia**. Like many artists, she still has these doubts even as a seasoned professional with high-profile, prestigious clients. "It remains easy to find artworks that feel so far beyond my basic understanding that it's hard to even acknowledge my own accomplishments as they look inadequate in comparison."

To get out of these thoughts Julia finds it helpful to go back to her tools. "I remind myself of the vast artistic tool belt I've acquired over the years and to trust myself and the fundamentals I've learned, even while all the voices in my head tell me not to," she says. "I've also built up a diverse support system of friends who can help me wiggle out of the negative feedback loop."

Julia also finds it helpful to teach upcoming artists: "I can help them to grow while reassessing my own knowledge base, which helps me gain perspective on how far I've come".

SHOULD YOU 'FAKE IT'?

When Wizards of the Coast first contacted illustrator and concept artist Randy Vargas his first thought was, "They are mistaken, this email can't be for me, I'm a total fraud, as soon as I send my first piece they'll find out." This led him into some unhealthy work habits. He left the feelings unaddressed for some time and followed the widespread advice to "keep faking it" but found this ineffective. "I see it not being a

"No matter how loud the inner voices are in the worst moments, they will pass and make way for better times," says Julia.

> ❝ I was overcompensating for something that wasn't lacking in the first place ❞

solution for a lot of people," says **Randy**. "I was overcompensating for something that wasn't lacking in the first place."

Like Julia, Randy found that putting his trust in his process and knowledge helped, as did talking about it with peers and seeing that they also have fears. He recognised that as a group

they were all judging themselves harshly. He advises getting feedback from someone whose opinion you value if you're feeling unsure about a piece of work. "Try to see things as factually as possible, and own your wins as you do with your failures."

Impostor syndrome is so ubiquitous that it might be considered a standard part of being a professional artist, so should we be calling it a 'syndrome' at all? Alexandria says she hasn't found it helpful to put this label on her feelings.

"I feel like there's a lot of baggage tied to it," she explains. "The internet latched onto it and made it into a much more intimidating thing than it has any right to be. It's just a natural stage in doing creative work for your career. Almost everyone I know experiences it on some level. I think in the past few years as it became part of art community discourse it's been treated like this horrible

"When people complimented me for my work, I could find a thousand reasons why I didn't deserve that compliment," reveals Randy Vargas.

Alexandria created these character concepts of Ellie and Dina for The Last of Us Part 2.

© Wizards of the Coast

© Naughty Dog LLC

On social media, John says: "There's a vicious cycle of fearing that you're not good enough, and simultaneously of missing out if you're not constantly posting art."

insurmountable monster of a thing, when it's really just a part of the mess of all of this."

COPING STRATEGIES

The conversation around impostor syndrome may have its downsides, but it does make people feel less alone and giving it a name can make it easier to grapple with. Julia has found it helpful to name the concept: "Having the possibility to build a framework around it in my mind opens up more strategies for coping".

While some level of impostor syndrome may be inevitable, some say there are features of the industry that exacerbate things. Randy points to the 'rockstar culture': "It makes people feel that they never will reach those heights and if they do, they don't belong."

Social media is, of course, one of the main drivers of the problem. It's easy to be overwhelmed by what you see online, but things aren't always what they seem. "The social media algorithms don't always give us an accurate impression of what a successful career looks like," says Julia. "What is needed for client work is often not the same as what's popular on online platforms. It's easy to look at numbers and think of them as responsible for success, instead of the many machinations happening behind the scenes."

© Wizards of the Coast

"Seeking help, talking to friends, trusting in your process and knowledge – those were the things that helped me the most," says Randy.

John's advice: "Try to rediscover the process of making art for yourself, and from there you'll hopefully find fulfilment."

Never have some of Australia's deadliest critters looked as cute – apart from the koala of course, which just looks cuter than usual.

Creature discomforts

G'day mates Co-directors **Clare Knight** and **Harry Cripps** reveal why they chose the hardest animals to animate for the latest Netflix release Back to the Outback

Proving that there are no easy jobs in animation, the team behind the Netflix film Back to the Outback set themselves a tough task. The aim to animate a snake – a venomous taipan – and make her approachable proved fraut but fun.

"Yeah, it was pretty hard because having come from Kung Fu Panda, where we had a snake, I knew that animating snakes was kind of a very complicated and hard thing to do," says **Clare Knight**. "I actually knew who the snake animators were – they were usually very dour, because trying to get the movement of a snake is quite hard."

Along with Maddie, the aforementioned taipan, the film also features a scorpion, spider and spiked lizard. If the animation team wanted a tough job then they certainly got it. And it wasn't long before they leapt head-long into the process.

"So it was a challenge that we took on because it's very important to feel that these animals are so interesting, and so unusual," adds Clare, who co-directs Back to the Outback with Harry Cripps.

This was a very personal movie – "a love letter to Australia," reveals **Harry**, adding: "Being Australians, you live with these animals in your backyard... I've had spiders fall on me in the night from the roof. I got one in my mouth when I was writing."

SNAKE CHARMERS

Directing is a first-time role for both Clare and Harry. Clare has edited some of the biggest animations in recent years, including Kung Fu Panda, Madagascar and The LEGO Movie 2: The Second Part, while Harry is an accomplished writer.

"We've been allowed to break out of our box," says Harry. "This movie is a metaphor for our careers, and it was surprising and daunting and incredibly exciting for us to be able to, you know, step up and do this whole new thing."

The message from Clare and Harry is simple: believe in yourself, trust the value of your experiences and don't shy away from hard work – even if that means making deadly snakes and spiders lovable.

Following a limited run in cinemas, you can watch Back to the Outback on Netflix.

The escaping animals burn rubber, in a scene from Back to the Outback.

© Netflix Animation

© Marvel

Jerad Marantz's concept of Thanos in his warrior guise, for Avengers: Endgame.

Batman wears a tactical suit for 2017's Justice League, as concepted by Jerad.

© DC Comics/ Warner Bros. Pictures

Jerad's concept for the rejigged Steppenwolf, from Zack Snyder's Justice League.

© DC Comics/ Warner Bros. Pictures

A day in the life of…
Jerad Marantz

Speaking personally Creature designer Jerad Marantz on the benefits of creating art for personal projects

"I wake up at 8:30 and help get my kids ready. On days my daughter goes to preschool, I get her dressed and then watch my son while my wife takes her to school.

Around 9:30, I get into my home studio and start working. Since I'm a freelance artist and juggle multiple shows, I start each day by looking at my deadlines and organising my priorities so I know exactly what needs to be done each day. I'm very honest with my clients, so they always know how much time I have to devote to them each week.

I utilise multiple techniques for creating so the work doesn't get stale.

I generally start my day drawing or digital painting and then by the end of the day will shift into 3D in ZBrush, since it's easier for me to create in 3D, especially if I'm feeling a little tired.

FAMILY MATTERS

Right now, I have two young children, so a lot of my breaks are centred around when my wife needs help with the kids. For the most part, I work straight through till dinner time at 8pm with the family, and then doing bedtime routine and family time till 10pm. Then, I typically go back to the studio till 2am or 4am and then start it all over the next day. With Covid and

CONCEPT ART ASSOCIATION

Concept Art Association is an organisation committed to elevating and raising the profile of concept artists, their art and their involvement in the entertainment industries. Its annual Concept Art Awards Show showcases and recognises behind-the-scenes individuals working in entertainment concept art. **conceptart association.com**.

my son being so young, things aren't really balanced right now, but we're getting our way back to it by doing movie date nights, and making time where we can.

Another thing that's important to me is working on personal projects. As a concept artist, your job is to help other people solve and make everything look cool, but at the end of the day it's not your movie, it's not your show, it's not your game. Having your own project not only makes you a better storyteller and fulfils you creatively, but bringing that storytelling into your art helps you push forward your designs and craft."

Jerad is a creature and character artist who's worked on projects like Avengers: Infinity War and Endgame, Zack Syder's Justice League, and Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice. See more of Jerad's art at artstation.com/jsmarantz.

> ❝ **I generally start my day drawing or digital painting and then by the end of the day will shift into 3D in ZBrush** ❞

© DC Comics/ Warner Bros. Pictures

Jerad reveals his work on Cyborg for Justice League helped redefine his creative process.

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

News · Bibliothek.

A wonderful example of why I need to practise yoga for back pain… I can't sit normally on a chair. At least one leg has to be on the chair. No idea why.

Laura H Rubin

Simple aesthetics A Tim Burton fan with soap bubbles, an unused guitar and an affectionate cat in a Narnia-like room hidden behind a wardrobe…
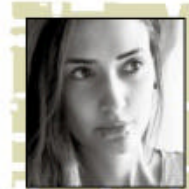
When I was little, my mother often moved with me. We never lived anywhere longer than one or two years, so it's important how and where I live and work to avoid moving. A few weeks ago I moved for the first time in almost 10 years, to a house in a town called Thun in Switzerland.

My studio is on the second floor and the living area on the third and fourth floor. The building was built in 1780 and it still has some original elements. Which is why, for example, the floors are a bit crooked, the walls are cracked and there is probably a pigeon living behind a wall on the upper floor, but the area surrounding the house is incredible.

In front of the house there's a crystal-clear river that meanders through the town, and on the other side there's a narrow alley with dozens of small restaurants, old boutiques, market stalls with fresh fruit and vegetables and street musicians. You feel a bit like you're in a Studio Ghibli anime here (except for the pigeon behind the wall). ➤➤

I love hanging plants but didn't have any high shelves to put this plant on. So when I found this rotten log in the woods I was like: "You have to meet my plants!"

My headphones. I can't work without music.

I'm very interested in neuroscience in combination with design. It's incredibly exciting to know how you can evoke feelings in viewers with certain colours or shapes.

My work Big Eyes, inspired (among other things) by the film of the same name by Tim Burton, in which one of the protagonists (a painter) gives the characters in her paintings supernaturally large eyes.

From this window one can see the river, which meanders through the old town only about three meters from the house.

I'm an Apple fan and therefore work almost exclusively with Apple products, such as here with an iMac. When it comes to drawing, however, I'll use an iPad Pro.

Alone In The Crowd – a piece that I created in a somewhat melancholic phase of my life. It's also the cover artwork of my book Melancholia.
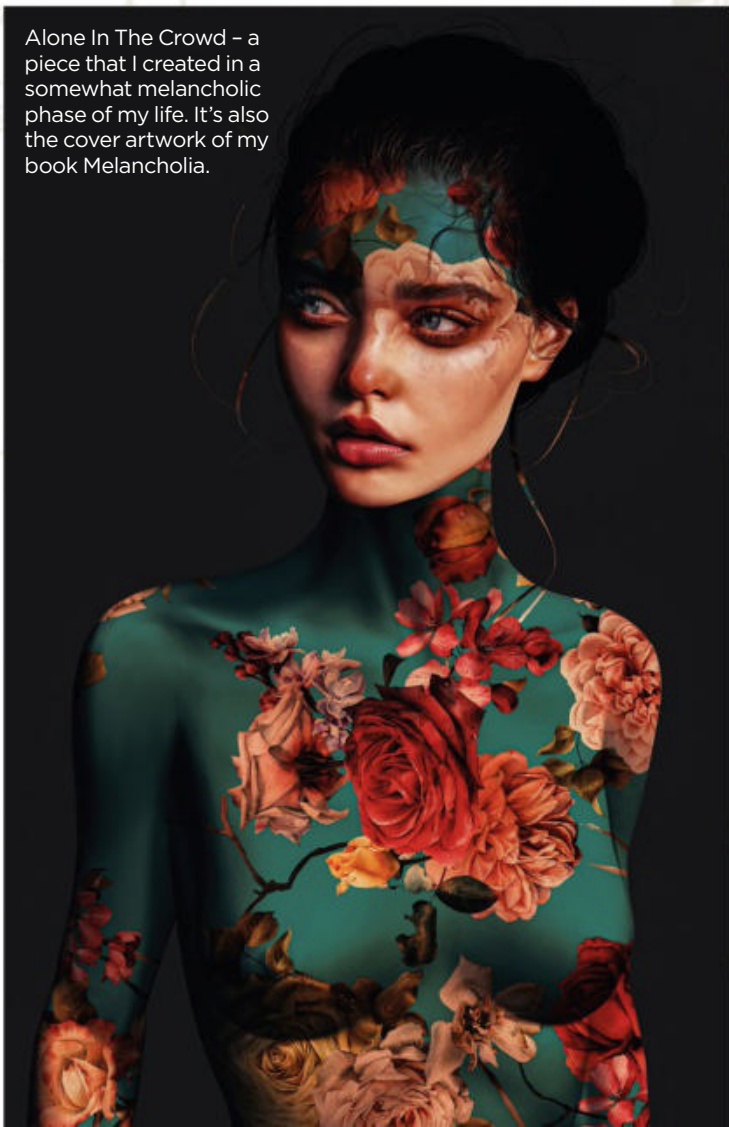
My little plant corner. My partner always asks if we're not starting to have enough plants around, but I'm like "NO!"
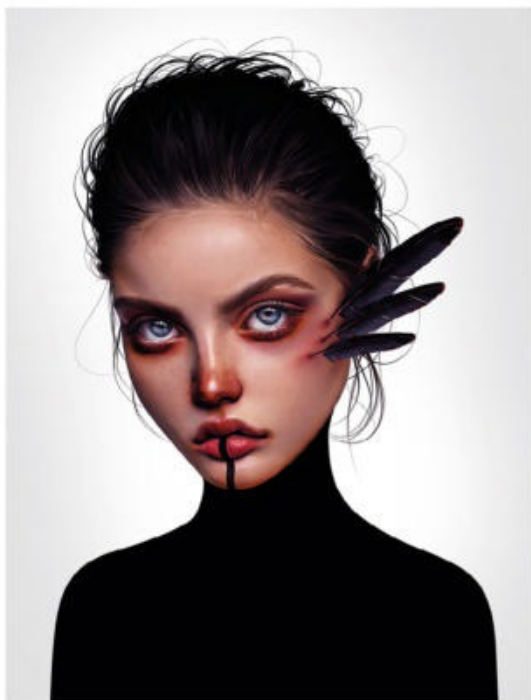
Apophis – probably my best-known work, because it was the key visual of the Stroke Art Fair in Munich.

A few brushes and sculpting tools still waiting to be placed on a new shelf.

➤ My workspace is spread over several rooms in the house and unfortunately it's not yet fully furnished. But no matter – my studio is rather simply equipped with some plants and printed works just waiting to be sent on to galleries or to their new owners.

UNPLANNED DAYS

As for my daily routine, I have various day planners, but often end up ignoring them. This really bugs me about myself. I always stick to my work appointments or deadlines, but I have absolutely no self-discipline when it comes to daily routines.

> 66 **Sometimes I just lie down on the floor in the apartment and stare at the ceiling…** 99

I often work in the gallery above the kitchen, because I love the smell of coffee, and because I eat all the time, so the fridge is right near me.

I start every day differently: sometimes I get up and go straight to the shower, sometimes I go to the studio without any detours, or sometimes I just lie down on the floor in the apartment and stare at the ceiling (just because it's possible).

I usually work until after midnight, but also start administrative work such as answering emails, project meetings or similar only around noon.

In the evening I take a short walk with my better half to clear my head and then the creative work begins with analog/traditional sketches or with digital work on the tablet.

Laura is an award-winning digital artist from Switzerland. She studied film/VFX and art at the SAE Institute in Zurich and has illustrated for companies such as Ubisoft and Crystal Dynamics. Discover more of her work at laurahrubin.com.

My favourite room is behind the wardrobe by the entrance. Although there's one other way into this room via normal doors, we mostly walk through the clothes in the wardrobe to enter the room, so we call it Narnia.
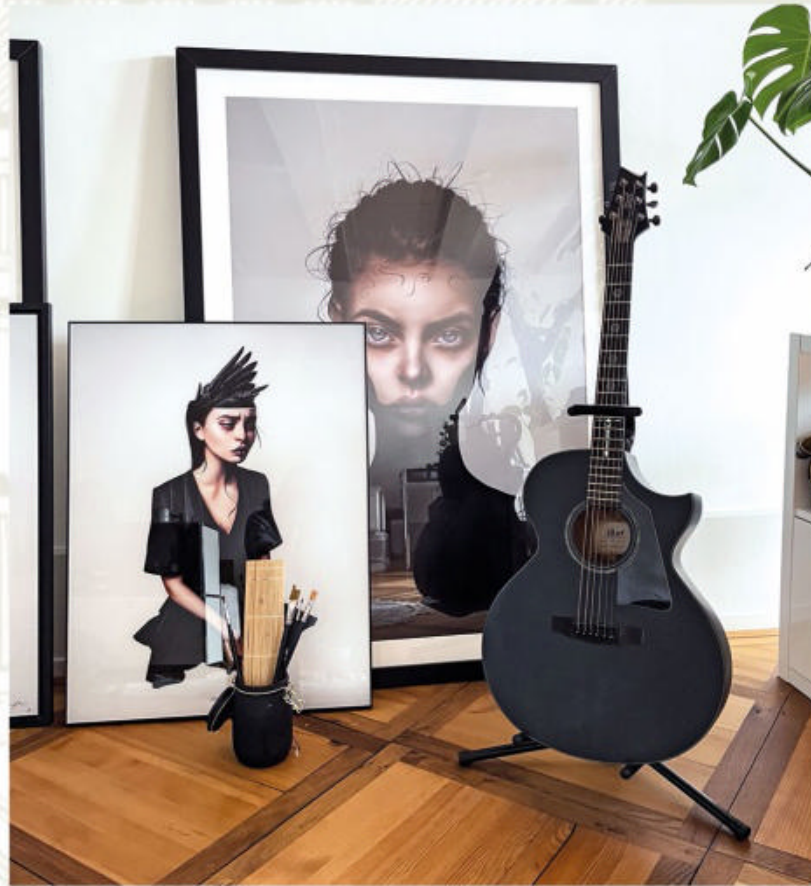
I play the guitar very well... OKAY! That was a lie. I don't know how to play the guitar. But I fell in love with it when I saw it in a music store as a teenager. My better half is a guitarist in the metal band Breakdown of Sanity and uses it from time to time.

I can't remember anything if I don't write it down or sketch it out, so I have various notebooks in which I write this and that.

This is Beans, probably the most affectionate cat in the world. He likes to sleep in my clothes while I'm working, so he always crawls into my sweaters while I'm wearing them.

Photography has been a hobby of mine for a long time. I started it when I was financing my studies with it.
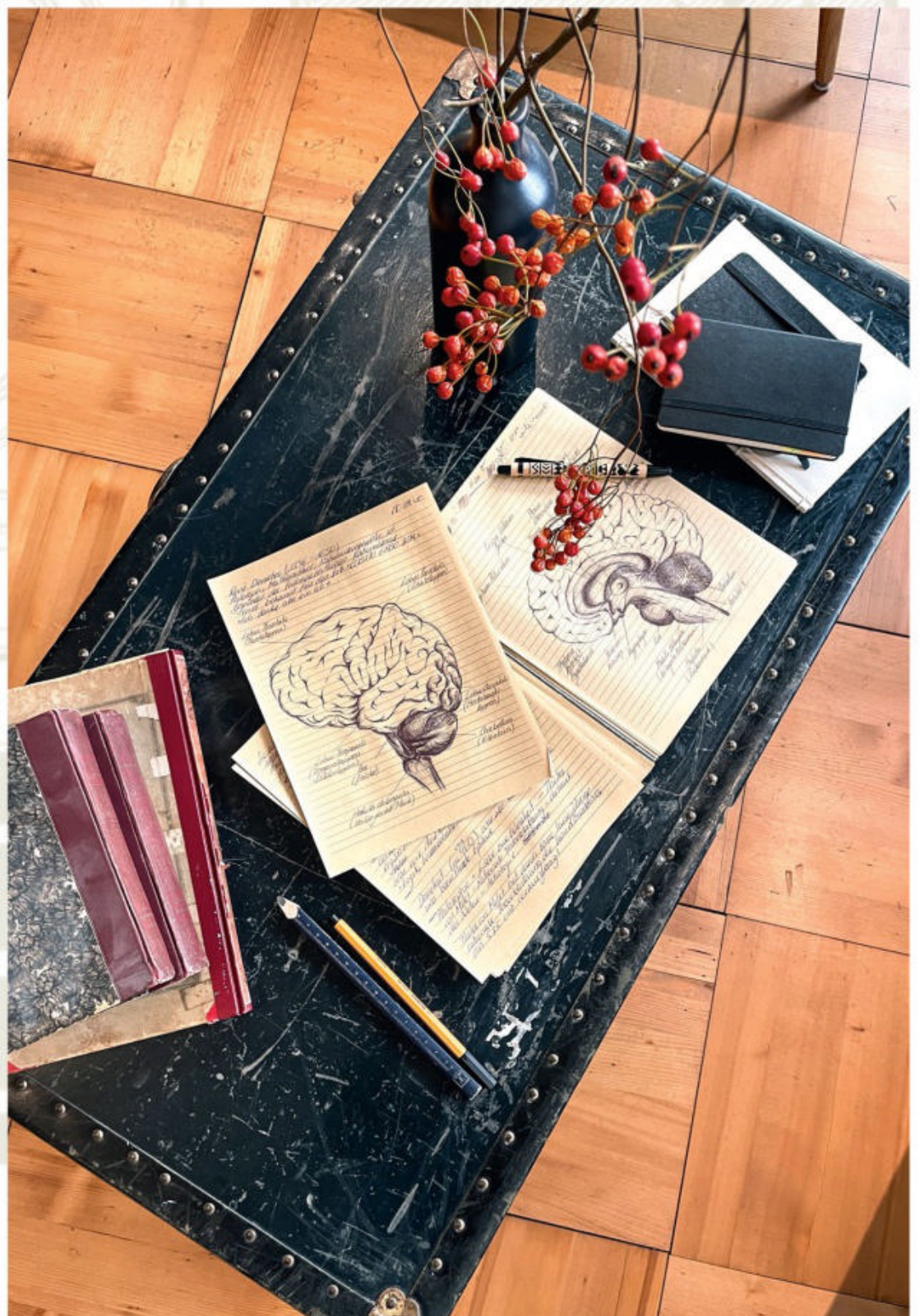
"The experiments to sort of try out this new approach using needle felt was incredibly welcomed by every level of the production [at Aardman]," explains Mikey Please.

All images © Aardman

An animated short that's intent on stealing Christmas

Star appeal **Dan Ojari** and **Mikey Please**, the duo behind Netflix and Aardman's festive felt animated hit, Robin Robin, explain why the journey is worthwhile…

It's said animation is 90 per cent perspiration and 10 per cent inspiration. For Dan Ojari and Mikey Please, bringing their Christmas special, Robin Robin, to Netflix was more work than they imagined.

"It feel this was 99.9 per cent perspiration," jokes **Dan**, who describes the ideas "as a brief moment of clear insight into a nice setup". That idea sees a robin being raised by a family of bipolar mice and convinced to steal the Christmas star by a magpie to prove she can be a "good mouse".

It's an idea Dan and Mikey had been kicking around since 2014, telling the tale to their children at Christmas every year. A script, picture book and story books were created organically. The idea and story was always there, but how to bring it to life was the

Mikey believes animated shorts is the place where indie and mainstream animation can mingle and experiment.

challenge. "We were working on how to tell that story right up until we delivered the film," says Dan.

PITCH PERFECT
Unknowingly, the pair had created the perfect pitch, so when Netflix and Aardman heard the story they'd been telling for years it was instantly snapped up. Now they had to make it.

The choice of stop-motion was a given – after all, Dan and Mickey have been doing this for 12 years – but the felt approach was another accidental success. To pitch to Aardman they brought felt Christmas decorations. **Mikey** says: "As a medium, it felt very appropriate to Christmas stories; it's warm, soft and fuzzy [and] Aardman has a great appetite to experiment with us."

The pair reveal how animating with felt has similar properties to clay,

❝ We were working on how to tell that story right up until we delivered the film ❞

Dan Ojari hard at work detailing a giant Christmas pudding at the Aardman studio.

THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFT?

Advice on getting ahead in animation with Dan and Mikey

What's the single best piece of advice you'd give to anyone who wants to be an animator?

Mikey: "I would absolutely encourage people to collaborate and build a community."

Dan: … "because of the nature of animation, often you start out and it's very internal. And it's very much your own thing. Collaborating with others, and figuring out ways in which to communicate creatively gives you the tools to do bigger and often better projects."

Do you need thick skin to be an animator?

Dan: "Having experienced that critique it's very, very healthy. If you just go straight from working in a way, where you've never had to present your idea and have it analysed by other people then that can be daunting. And you can take it very personally. And it can hurt. But I think understanding that the project is a new project, and everyone should look at it, and everyone should try and help it form into its best shape is good."

Did that happen to Robin Robin, because this feels like quite a personal project?

Mikey: "The thing that we have done on this project, and with others, is always be prepared to just destroy everything you've made, to rebuild it. If you have an idea that makes the whole thing better, don't be afraid to just knock it all down and build it up again. That's fundamental. And I guess we were lucky and being open and having the resources to be able to do that.

Mikey Please is an animation director and writer. He's a long-time collaborator with Dan Ojari, an animation director. The pair are co-founders of Parabella Studio.

mikeyplease.co.uk and danojari.com

because the medium can be dampened and moulded.

What was perhaps just as experimental on Robin Robin was the use of colour. Dan and Mikey hired the illustrator Matthew Forsythe as the film's production designer. "He treats colour in a very interesting way," says Dan. "He would layer on lots and lots of different hues, and build up the impression of a colour, but from lots and lots of different depths of colour [and it would] look like a Lucian Freud painting. We coined the phrase 'deep colour'".

Every colour palette in Robin Robin has lots of different hues all working together. "There was something thematic and really nice about that, too. The film is about how our differences can make us stronger. So when you layer these two things on top of each other, they are richer and deeper than they would have been on their own," explains Dan.

ARTISTIC FREEDOM

While Robin Robin is releasing on Netflix and is produced by Aardman, Dan and Mikey cut their cloth in the world of indie animation, winning BAFTAs and gongs along the way. But streaming means all animation can find a place, and isn't relegated to late nights on UK TV station Channel 4.

"It's more accessible," says Dan, reflecting on Netflix's promotion of animation. "We were given the kind of creative freedom that I imagine 10 years ago would have been unheard

"The idea that [Robin] was brought up by a family of mice, and she meets a materialistic magpie and they go on a mission to steal a star from a Christmas tree – that came together sort of really quickly, one day," says Dan.

of," he adds, revealing that the buck stops with artists.

Mikey jumps in, adding: "Netflix have a kind of mantra, which is trusting the creators of the content, to make the thing that they want to make the most, and make the best thing they can possibly make."

See more from Robin Robin and the animators at mikeyplease.co.uk/robinrobin. Robin Robin is showing on Netflix from 24 November.

Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

Contact the editor, Ian Dean, on mail@imaginefx.com or write to ImagineFX, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, England

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instagram.com/imaginefxmagazine

No nudity?

I was so please last issue to see the back advert had finally been changed after being the same for months. However, I was shocked when I opened the most recent issue of your magazine to find a very revealing image on the back, which doesn't reflect the content in the magazine.

I feel that ImagineFX should be a (reasonably) family friendly magazine for a wide audience where you can happy read it with your children and the family around or in public venues. However, I think image does not reflect this belief or the content of the rest of the magazine.

Christopher Peerman, via email

Ian replies *Hi Christopher, I'm sorry you feel this way, but these adverts promote life-drawing classes and the challenges of rendering the human figure. While we focus on fantasy art we're fundamentally a magazine for artists, and accepting and exploring the human form is a part of this education. I hope you find the rest of the magazine enjoyable.*

DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE? Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 208 at **ifxm.ag/single-ifx**.

Learning how to draw the (often naked) human form is a key part of art education, and it's something that we'll regularly cover in ImagineFX.

We loved hearing from the artists behind the latest Final Fantasy instalment in issue 208 of ImagineFX.

Fantasy job

I have all of the art books and so it was great to see Final Fantasy on the cover of the new ImagineFX. These games have some of the best art around, and I only wish I could paint as good as these guys. It's my dream to one day work in the games industry.

Kate Hopegood, via email

Ian replies *Hi Kate, we loved putting this issue together and you're right – the Final Fantasy art team are some of the most talented in the industry. Hopefully you picked up some sage words of advice from the artists we spoke to, and are on your way to that dream job in the video games industry. Keep at it, and stay in touch!*

Long-time reader

Loved the magazine from the start dating back when it came with DVDs. I've been painting both traditionally and digital and I take care of my handicapped son and paint for more or less pleasure – I create both children's illustration and horror illustrations. I look forward to the magazine coming in the mail every month.

Thomas Arensberg, via email

Ian replies *Hi Thomas, thank you for writing it. It's always fantastic to hear from long-time readers of the magazine. While we no longer have DVDs on the cover I hope you can still download our content.*

It's great to hear that you paint for your pleasure too. Art needn't always be a profession but also a hobby and outlet to relax and aid your mental health. Please keep painting and sharing your art online.

New starter

I'm new to digital art, can you recommend where I start?

Lucy McDonald, via email

Ian replies *Hi Lucy, you can start with us! But I'd also recommend cheap but good software such as ArtRage and Procreate. Huion's tablets are great for newcomers too.*

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention

Yueko @meltedbuns

Miranda Zimmerman @faunwood

Jehan Choo @jehandraws

If you've created art that you want us to shout about simply tag us on Twitter or Instagram, and use the hashtag #imaginefx

THE ART OF
MAYA AND THE THREE

Celebrated production designer **Paul Sullivan** describes what it took
to bring Netflix's inventive animated series to our screens

AN ARBOREAL ADVENTURE
Paul Sullivan reveals: "When we got to the Endless Forest I tried to imagine unique areas of the forest that would help the viewer feel like they've travelled a great distance to see something like this..."

"**T**here really is no toning it back," laughs production designer Paul Sullivan as he remembers trying to wrestle the complex shape design and colour of Maya and the Three into something that would work for an audience. Such exuberant detail is what writer and director Jorge Gutiérrez brings to an animation, and it's Paul's role to make it work and leave nothing behind.

"He loves skulls," says Paul to give some background. The jungle lands of Jorge's Mesoamerican fantasy are covered in skulls. It's what gives this area of his world an identity, and the more the better. "If we made the layout of the city shaped like a skull, he'd love it. And then if we put skulls all over each of the temples, he'd love that. And then when you get in even closer, and you see the details, they're skulls on top of skulls inside of the details, and so it's like you can never go too far with it. The more creative you get with adding those skulls – like look, the doorway is shaped like a skull! – like he loves that stuff."

The challenge was on, but it was a task that began far earlier when the hot Netflix series was still an idea scribbled out in drunken Dungeons &

> ❝ He loves skulls. If we made the layout of the city shaped like a skull, he'd love it ❞
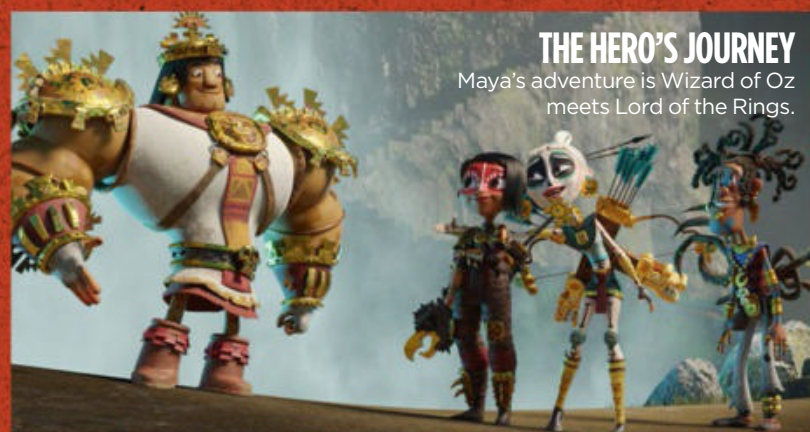
THE HERO'S JOURNEY
Maya's adventure is Wizard of Oz meets Lord of the Rings.

Dragons evenings – Jorge is known to constantly doodle and iterate ideas.

Having collaborated with the director on The Book of Life, the pair knew how each other worked. Because Jorge and his wife Sandra Equihua created most of the character designs together, it was down to Paul to flesh out the world. And yes, that meant ➡

➥ lots of skulls. Paul began by creating concept paintings for each world the characters will travel through. As sketches were completed Jorge would write to Paul's ideas, the pair padding out Maya's world in tandem: art leading story and story developing art.

"For me this was pretty new, and I felt honoured," shares Paul. "Some of the ideas I was making, I would like to think, come from a shorthand of working with Jorge for so many years.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE
Paul designed Maya's Chiappa leopard with Jorge's love of skulls in mind, replacing the spots. The animal's face was created to look angular, much like an Aztec sculpture.

It was fun to see [Jorge] kind of getting inspired by the imagery, and he was working it all out in his head as we were doing it."

CULTURAL CELEBRATION
Maya and the Three has been a personal project. For Jorge and Sandra it's about showing their culture and heritage on screen. For Paul it was his love of cultural anthropology. "It was just a really great excuse to do a deep dive into learning about the culture, different civilisations, and the history of those different civilisations."

The series is inspired by Jorge and Sandra's Mexican heritage, but also picks up on Aztec, Inca and Caribbean cultures, and presents these in a wondrous fantasy setting. Jorge's

visual style is rooted in symbolism, shape and colour. Everything is on screen for a reason. This level of design meant Paul had to get to the route of Jorge's vision, retain all of the detail but make it read on screen.

It also meant a lot of research to "understand the rules before you break the rules", as this is a fantasy take on past and present cultures. Paul says he did a lot of research to understand Jorge's vision. "I didn't want to go into this project with some of my unconscious biases of what the differences of Aztec and Mayan culture would be. I wanted to make sure that I researched as much as possible," he explains. "I wanted to make sure that I was being culturally sensitive and historically accurate." ➥

> ❝ I wanted to make sure that I was being culturally sensitive and historically accurate ❞

DEVELOPING TECA
Paul Sullivan presents a whistle-stop design tour of the city that never sleeps

URBAN EXPANSION PLANS
The Kingdom of Teca appears throughout the series but due to story developments it needs to change over time. "This one was a huge puzzle to figure out," says Paul.

DAY AND NIGHT
As production was in full swing the team needed to storyboard the scenes and colour treatments for the city. Paul says: "I did lighting setups for different times of day scenarios that we'd use as some early lighting reference for the tangent team."

MICTLAN TEMPLE
While designed with historic references in mind the team were clear Maya and the Three is a fantasy.

ISLAND LIFE
"In the look book we had established that this would be a tropical Caribbean island with "S" curves motivating most of the shapes on the island."
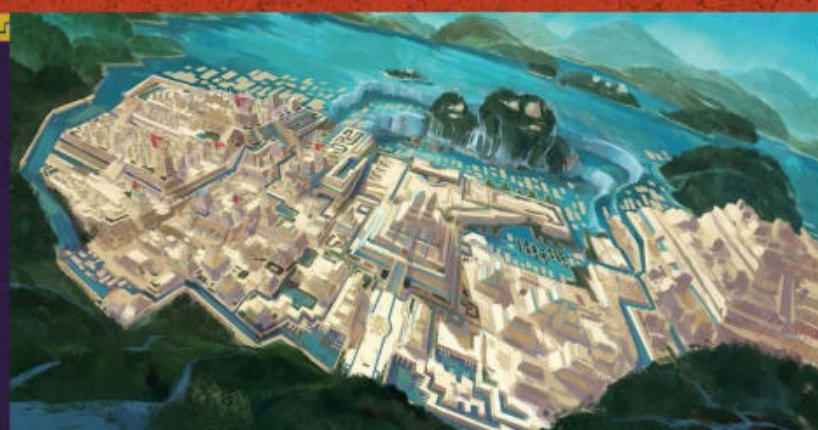
CALCULATING THE GEOMETRY OF THE CITY
The team hired 3D artist Ryan Holdridge to help model some quick geometry of what Paul had already painted. "We worked out the city together through a series of paintovers and sketches."

CAREER ADVICE

Paul Sullivan shares what he looks for when hiring new artists

What do you look for in a portfolio?
"I don't look for a specific aesthetic, but I love someone who's good with painting and design. Environmental design is always something that people kind of push off in school, but it ends up becoming the majority of the type of work that we do in the animation industry."

Should art be finished or sketches?
"I like to see the final paintings, the details. I like to see people thinking about the details of each of the elements. It's always good to see if someone understands that space, if they can design a space, if they can paint the space."

Should portfolios cover one subject?
I love versatile artists, and so I'll look for some of that less so than then [just] characters, especially working with Jorge, because Jorge and Sandra have a specific look that we don't just hire artists to supplement that and not drive it. They're fewer roles available on films for character designers, which doesn't mean artists shouldn't do that, it's just that [they should] understand if you want to expand your chances to work on stuff, showing the versatility within environment design and painting is probably the way to go."

So know the studio and show you can adapt?
"If the job is mostly environments and all your portfolio has is characters, that's going to be a difficult decision for the person hiring. But if you have a lot of environment design, and it's not necessarily the style that they're looking for, as long as you show proficiency it'll be an easier decision. There's no way that you're going to know what the style is, but if you can alternate between different sorts of visual styles then it'll sell the idea that you can jump on our show and adapt to our style."

THE DEVINE GATE
"This epic animated event feels lush with beautiful thoughtful design and a huge attention to detail," says Paul.

➤ It meant understanding how, for example, Aztec's would build their cities on top of swamp land and water: "A Mesoamerican Venice," adds Paul. There would be lava rock inside the stone, and buildings were mortared with limestone. These details influenced the believable locations Paul created. He "wanted to be intentional" with the details, "I wanted it to look more authentic."

Paul would recommend all concept artists do their research as it makes the worlds being created more real. He explains how spaces in the series range

> **I wish I was like other artists where I could just dive in and make cool, fun decisions**

from haphazard in design or more organised layouts; some are crisp and clean while others are aged. "You can make those finite decisions easier and quicker, and more intentional" with research. It's taken over his process, he says: "I wish I was like other artists where I could just dive in and make cool, fun decisions. But to me, it seems less researched and more arbitrary."

SCALE UP

Yet Maya and the Three is pure fantasy: "Jorge had to actually step in at some point and just say, 'Hey, don't worry about it. We're making a fantasy'." It meant the series had to be epic. In a chat with Jorge he refers to the series as "Wizard of Oz meets Lord of the Rings" and this challenged Paul to deliver that scale on the small screen.

"We want to make this thing epic and feel huge," explains Paul. "So like,

EPIC WORLD DESIGN
The director Jorge Gutiérrez wanted the world of Maya and the Three to be "vast and epic in scale," says Paul Sullivan.

DIVINE DESIGN
When stone creature meets a unique environment concept...

As well as the environments of Maya and the Three, Paul Sullivan also helped design some of the creatures of the world. The two combined for the Divine Gate, "because he was kind of an environment," says Paul, "so how would he be the environment *and* then work with becoming the character that he is, that they go up against. That was really fun."

The collaboration between Paul and Jorge would ultimately be on the series' larger, epic characters, but created from a specific aesthetic dictated by the director. The shapes come from a "library of shapes in his head that he likes to use for different reasons," reflects Paul. "So Jorge can go in with your design and just be like 'this is the exact shape that it needs to be' because he just knows what that is."

LANDSCAPES ARE CHARACTERS
Environments such as the Devine Gate were designed in the same process as the series' cast of characters.

really, the intention of some of those early images that I did was just to sell that idea that it was just an epic, huge kind of place."

Paul points to the kingdom of Teco as an example of the epic feel, and one of the most challenging locations to design. Aztec culture inspired this city. Built on a swamp and surrounded by chinampas (small, rectangular gardens), it recalls the maths and technology used by the Aztecs to create these vast geometric spaces.

"It was a very difficult thing to design because of the scale of it, and also because it shows up in six of nine chapters," says Paul. The challenge was to create a location that would change over time and be affected by the ➤➤

MAYA HERO DESIGNS
Director Jorge Gutiérrez "threw the kitchen sink" at his character designs.

THE THREE ARE FIT TO FIGHT
This battle with Lord Mictlan was one of the first paintings created by Paul Sullivan, and was based on old Dungeons & Dragons book covers.

battles taking place, but the team was design and writing chronologically, so they'd not yet fleshed out what the future looks like. "So it was complicated," he recalls, explaining how a diorama was made to help plot the location's changes.

For Paul, a solution to the series' world design was to "condense [everything] down into its lowest form, and compare that with the other things that we're gonna see in the show. And then just build on top of that".

It meant in the early stages creating loose paintings that took no more than a day, and he'd have the whole world of Maya and the Three sketched out. "It was really great to just get them all on paper and just make some quick decisions and see how they compare to one another, and then make our decisions from there," says Paul.

He explains: "Any complex painting or even idea is strengthened by building on a strong foundation. And if we can figure out what the foundation is first, and we can just build on top of those ideas, that same

idea will influence the way that we put in the details at the very end."

Working with Jorge and Sandra also offered a solid foundation. The pair rarely alter their character designs once created, so this means all Paul's locations had to be designed around these ideas. "It's pretty easy to work with that," says Paul, who tells us how the character designs would inspire the locations, leading him to add more eagle motifs or panther

NATURAL TOUCH
The concept for Luna Island was inspired by Nature – "where the architecture was leaning into sea slug patterns, and colours when we see the buildings up close."

LUNA PLAZA
"I was always chasing the pushed atmospheric depth of field often seen in Edgar Payne paintings," says Paul of this Luna Plaza concept art.

iconography to a location to reflect the people who live there.

EAGLE VISION

One unique solution to creating the world of Maya and the Three came from the use of 3D. While Paul paints in Photoshop, he worked with 3D artist Ryan Holdridge to quickly model the worlds he designed. After placing cameras he was able to "scout ahead" and see what the characters see, "so when Maya is in her bedroom, what does it look like when we look out of the window?"

It meant the City of the Eagle in the Kingdom of Teca changed dramatically from a flat sprawling design to a raised location because as the camera moved around the one-

Any complex painting […] is strengthened by building on a strong foundation

WIZARD CHARACTER DESIGN
The Oz-like cast of characters are designed around various facets of Mesoamerican culture and mythology.

HAIR CUT TIME
"I followed the lead of the Zatz design by keeping the same eye shapes and his earrings. Originally I gave him a long white bushy mane, but we had to shorten it when we went to the final show model."

ANIMATION ADVICE:
JORGE GUTIÉRREZ AND SANDRA EQUIHUA

Maya and the Three's director and character designer share their tips for industry success

Do you have any advice for designing characters for animation?
Sandra Equihua: "When you're designing the character, you have to think about their backstory. You have to see what they represent. Not only visually, but how did they grow? Where do they come from? What are they thinking? Ask would they wear that?

Jorge Gutiérrez: We try to do that with every character because as character designers we go, 'Well, what's the story? Why do they look the way they look?' So for example, Rico, and Chimi and Picchu, the three, it's a little bit of a love letter to the Wizard of Oz; it's the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Lion. And each of them have very unique specific things about who they are as characters.

Do you have a set idea of how to design a character?
Jorge: "We always say they should tell you who they are. And they should look as beautiful as possible, just standing. So when they move, it's a bonus."

Sandra: "A lot of the time some people tend to design the character and they look beautiful when they're in an action pose. But what does it look like when it's just standing there by itself? When you see the character, you should be able to at least understand it. Like where it's coming from, who it is, you know?"

How did that approach work for your lead, Maya?
Sandra: She's asymmetrical. Her hair is long on one side, while part of her skirt is higher than the other. It's an imbalance, a signal to where she wants to go in her life. She doesn't know, you know? She should go in the direction of where her heart is taking her or she should follow the steps as to what her mother and father want, which is to be the next ruler; is she going to be a warrior or a diplomat?

ATTENTION TO DETAIL
Backgrounds were designed to have sculptural elements that were historically accurate. "Even if it's just a tiny thing, you still see all of that love and care that the team put into all the designs," says Paul.

level location it lacked a readable sense – the viewer would lose a sense of space and distance to and from key locations. Paul tells us: "So we ended up stair-stepping them up like the eagle wings of the city, which implied they were flying, and we made one side red and one side blue. So when the camera was turning really quickly, we could orientate the viewer to say, 'Okay, this is at least the left side and the right side'."

Undoubtedly Paul recommends all concept artists learn and use 3D as well as 2D painting software. "I'm sold on it, I love it," he tells us. "I don't think it is necessary for everything. But I think with something like this, it's so epic and there's so much complexity to figure out, it just really serves as a great tool. So it's another tool in my tool kit to use to pull out when necessary."

Sketchbook

Pancho Vásquez

From battling a dragon to playing an oversized game of ping-pong, this illustrator's sketches are bursting with scale and drama

Artist PROFILE

Pancho Vásquez
LOCATION: Chile

Francisco, also known as Pancho, specialises in conceptual art, 2D animation and illustration. He's worked on commercials, comics, TV series and films for more than eight years. Pancho is currently part of the art team for an American production company, which is focused on the development of video games.
fvr.artstation.com

10/03/2019.

SELF-CRITICISM
"Every mistake that I discover in my drawings is a triumph that motivates me to keep improving."

MAD MAX
"I loved this film, so I wanted to use its characters in a composition by the Hungarian painter Gyula Benczúr."

SOCIAL CHAOS
"This drawing came out for a revolution that I never imagined I would witness in my country. There is no choice but to hope that all this disorder will be for the better."
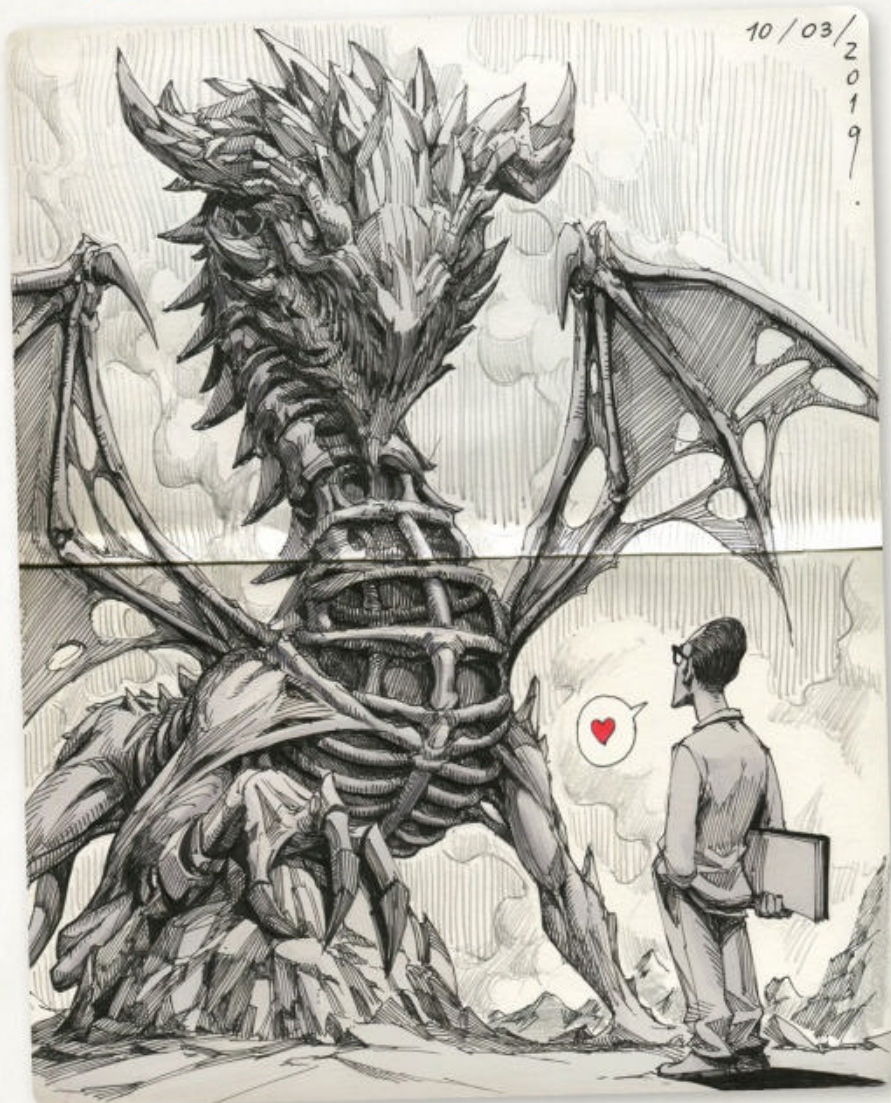
> **Every mistake that I discover […] motivates me to keep improving**

29·10·201

THE DRAGON
"This is a proposal that was discarded by the art director. However, I felt it had a lot of potential, so I decided to polish it. It ended up being one of my favourite drawings."

CARBURADORES
"When I worked on the film Nahuel and the Magic Book I met a lot of talented people who inspired me. Therefore, I didn't want to say goodbye without immortalising a normal day at the office."

TABLE TENNIS
"After receiving a brief introduction to ping-pong, this was the image that came to my mind, so I wanted to draw it before I forgot it."

MOVIL CASTLE
"I'm not a big fan of Miyazaki's stories, yet I find the art of his films is one of the most amazing things I've ever seen."

PERSPECTIVE
"Since perspective is one of the things that attracts me the most, I always try to exaggerate the angles to create a dynamic feeling in the frame."

GOD OF WAR
"I think the art of this game is majestic. I couldn't help but create something based on its universe."

❝ I always try to exaggerate the angles to create a dynamic feeling in the frame ❞

MAKING PILTOVER
Christian says: "Everyone that worked on Arcane was someone that is, in my opinion, a world-class crafts person in their field."

IN A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN

The leading creatives behind the smash hit series **Arcane** reveal how they scored big in bringing **League of Legends** to Netflix

Defining a style can be a challenge for any artist but when it involves translating one of the world's most-played games into an animated series, the job becomes that little bit harder.

Julien Georgel, the art director on Arcane, Netflix's hit series that's based on Riot Games' massively popular League of Legends, says it was clear from the outset that the art style of this animation would define its success. "We all wanted to achieve the same visual style," says **Julien**, "of mixing 2D and 3D with a painterly aspect."

He explains how getting heroine Jinx just right would set the tone. "That was the starting point behind the idea and mood of Arcane. That visual style was based on inspirations ranging from Japanese animation, like Ghibli, comic book art such as Mike Mignola, and Riot's own splash arts. All that mixed with inspiration from live-action cinema."

The series' art style is striking in its boldness, detail, subtleness and use of colour. Characters bend elastically

> ❝ **We wanted to achieve the visual style of mixing 2D and 3D with a painterly aspect** ❞

while simultaneously appearing rigid and stoic. There's a desire to enhance anatomy and present the drama of a scene in movement and colour.

It's what creative director at Riot Games **Christian Linke** says is at the heart of Riot's philosophy: to blend anime and western animation into a ▶▶

FIGHT STYLE
The animation style is an evolution of Riot Games' blend of western design and anime influence.
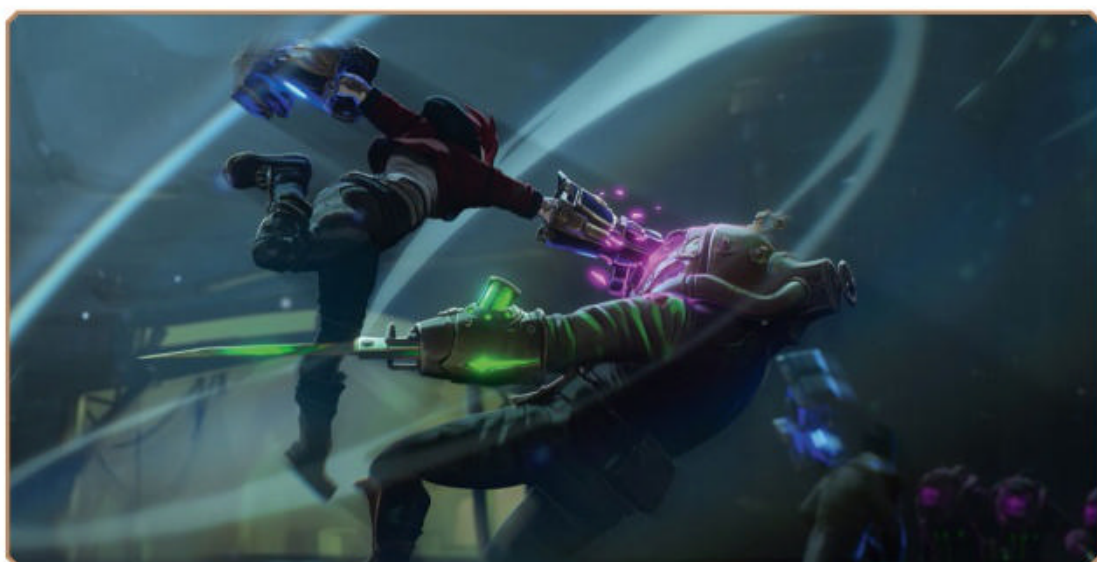
POSTER ART
Bringing fan-favourite League of Legends characters to Netflix took time because the Riot artists are very close to the designs they've created.

new middle ground. This was taken on by French animation studio Fortiche, which had a reputation for creating wild children's animations and hyper-real CG, but again Arcane needed to sit in the middle.

"So it took a long time to find our style," says Christian. He was adamant from the beginning Arcane wouldn't simply be an action-focused children's cartoon. This was about exploring the characters and drama of the League of Legends world. "Everyone advises against it. They said just do action, just do fighting. But that was the opposite of what we wanted. We want our characters to actually be real people."

Julien adds: "[We had] a mutual desire to tell a deep, serious and dramatic story. We need believable characters with impactful emotions within a rich, fascinating and immersive universe. […] In Arcane, we meet our characters through another medium: cinema. We get the chance to see them from every angle and in different on-screen sizes. To make them believable, they need to be a little more subtle and realistic while remaining stylised and fantasy-like."

STYLE AND SUBSTANCE

The result is an adult tone that blends 3D animation with 2D effects and stylisation. The world and the scenery looks like it's been painted on to the screen. "Technology's always gonna age poorly," says Christian, "but I look at these paintings, these backgrounds, that they painted at Fortiche and they're art pieces, timeless art pieces. To me this is true fine art."

> ❝ I look at these paintings, these backgrounds […] and they're timeless art pieces ❞
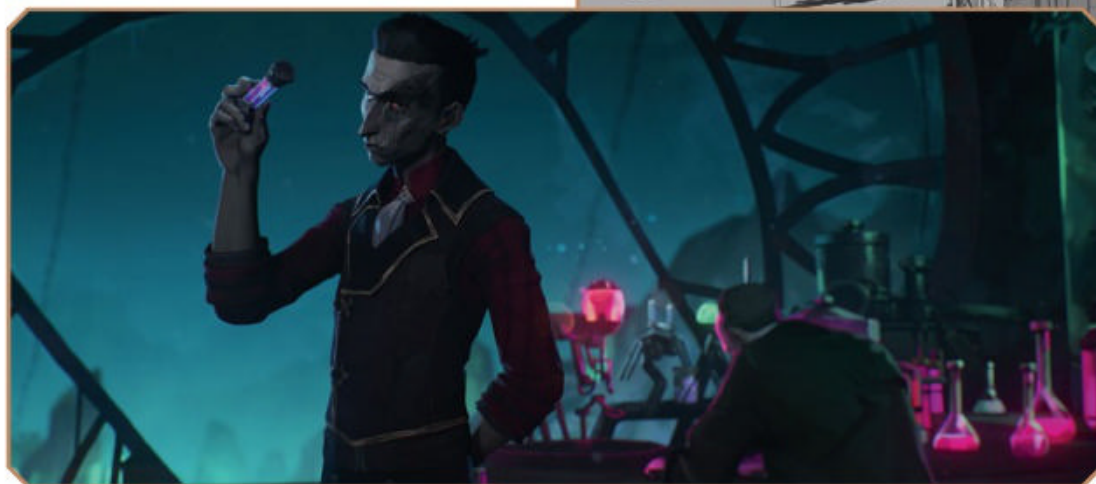
STREET DESIGN
Christian tells us Arcane was a grassroots project, with one goal: "Let's chase that dream of creating the animated series."

TECH EXPLORERS
The world of Arcane is one where fantasy and science collide, "someone can make an energy source to power a city in their basement," says Christian.

Arcane is not just about letting the rendering engines flex some muscle and put glorious 3D animation on screen. This series shows the artistry of the animators involved. To build a world for the animation took some creative thinking. The world of Runeterra is presented in illustrations and short cinematics, "so they need to be easily identifiable," says Julien.

The city of Piltover needed to be more immersive and fully formed, so Julien reveals the artists added more realism here, while remaining true to the painterly, exaggerated stylisation.

"It needs to feel like a real city with history and an architectural style inspired by several periods: Renaissance, Victorian, Art Nouveau, Art Deco," says the art director. "That way, we used a lot of photo references mixed and modified to achieve this kind of fantasy-steampunk universe we have in Arcane."

Creating the look of Arcane is a considered task. Nothing is on screen without cause to be there. Christian tells us great fantasy art is built on realistic foundations. He says: "What fantasy is really, is it's taking a million different inspirations that are worldly and combining them in ways that we haven't seen before."

MAGIC NUMBER

For designing the societies of Piltover and Zaun, and making an animation on the scale of Arcane, Christian says you need to have a philosophy behind your design. There needs to be a plan and an approach to the world design that doesn't buckle.

For Arcane these were three elements created by Riot Games' artist Evan Monteiro. These were a Victorian
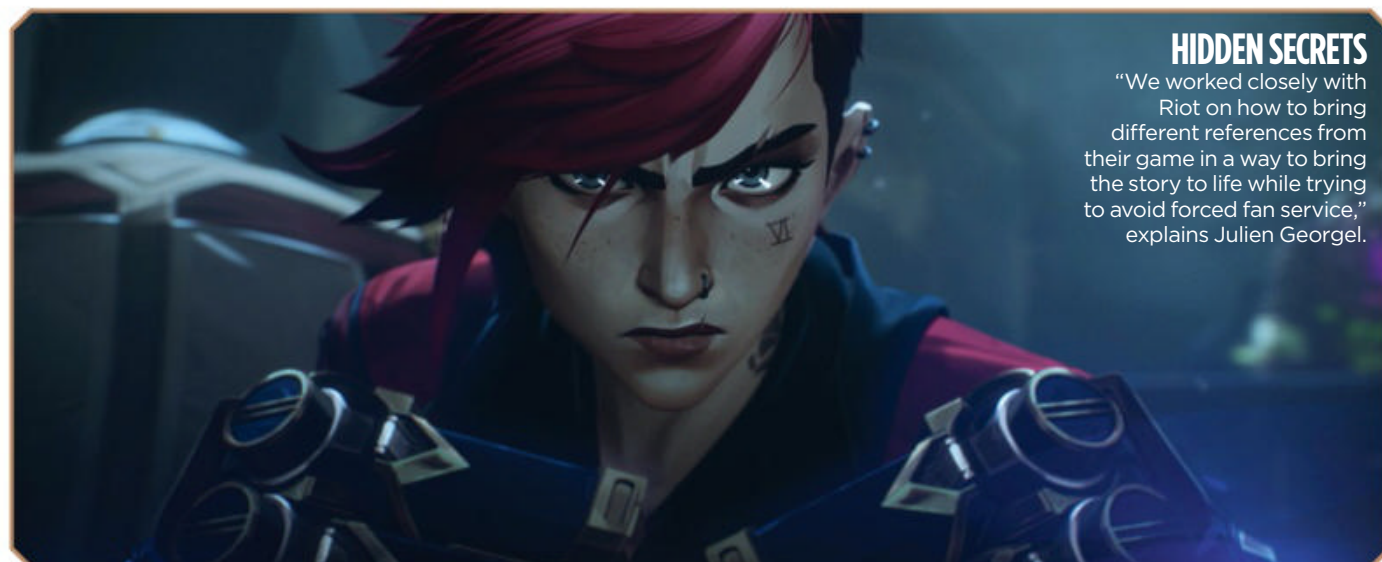
HIDDEN SECRETS
"We worked closely with Riot on how to bring different references from their game in a way to bring the story to life while trying to avoid forced fan service," explains Julien Georgel.

BRIDGE BASE
There's definitely going to be an art book once Riot Games can find a partner. "Otherwise, I think it would be an offence to the world of animation if there wasn't one," says Christian.

LAST DROP
You never see League of Legends characters talk or act closely, so creating an emotional drama proved a challenge.

OFFICE DESIGN
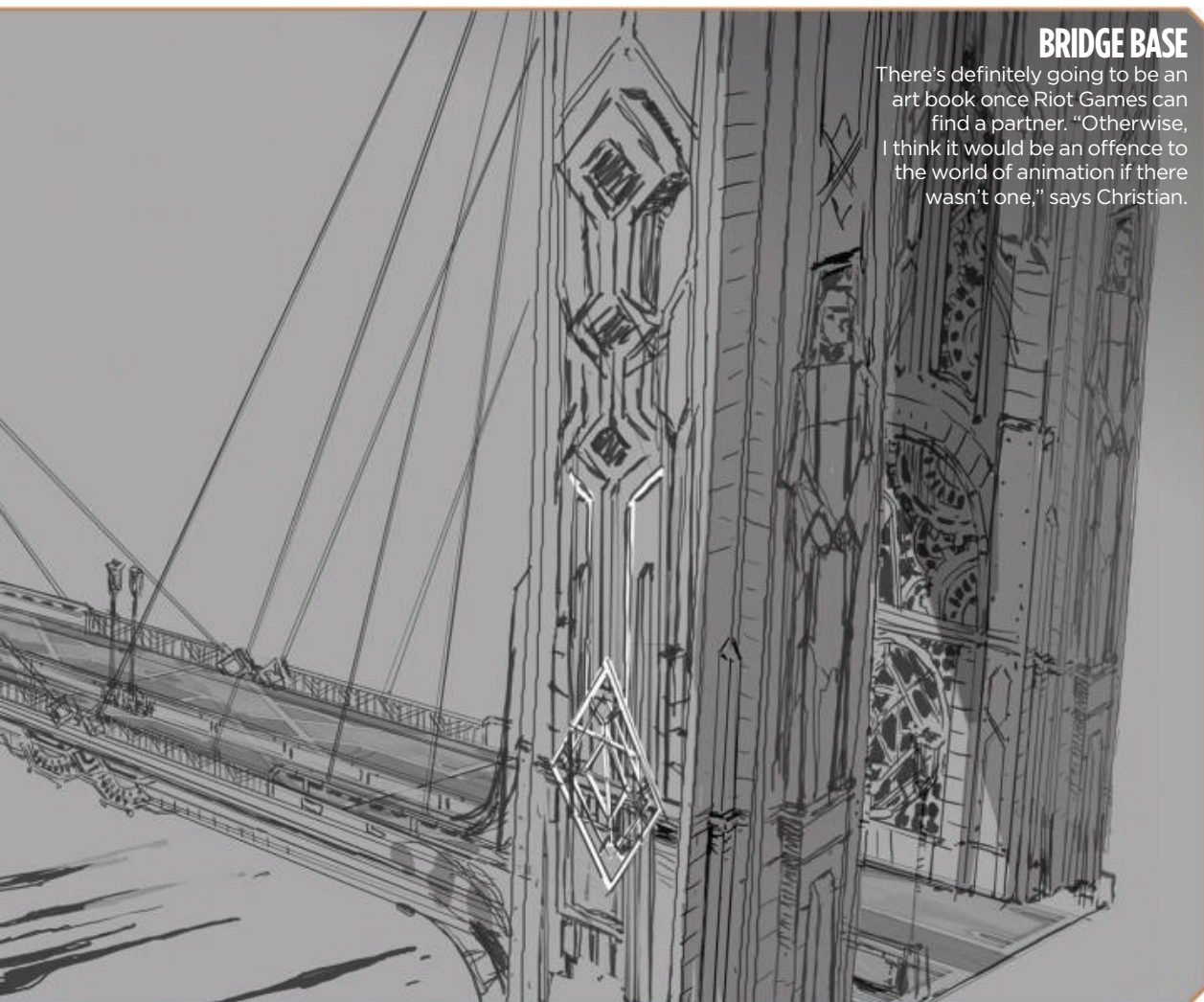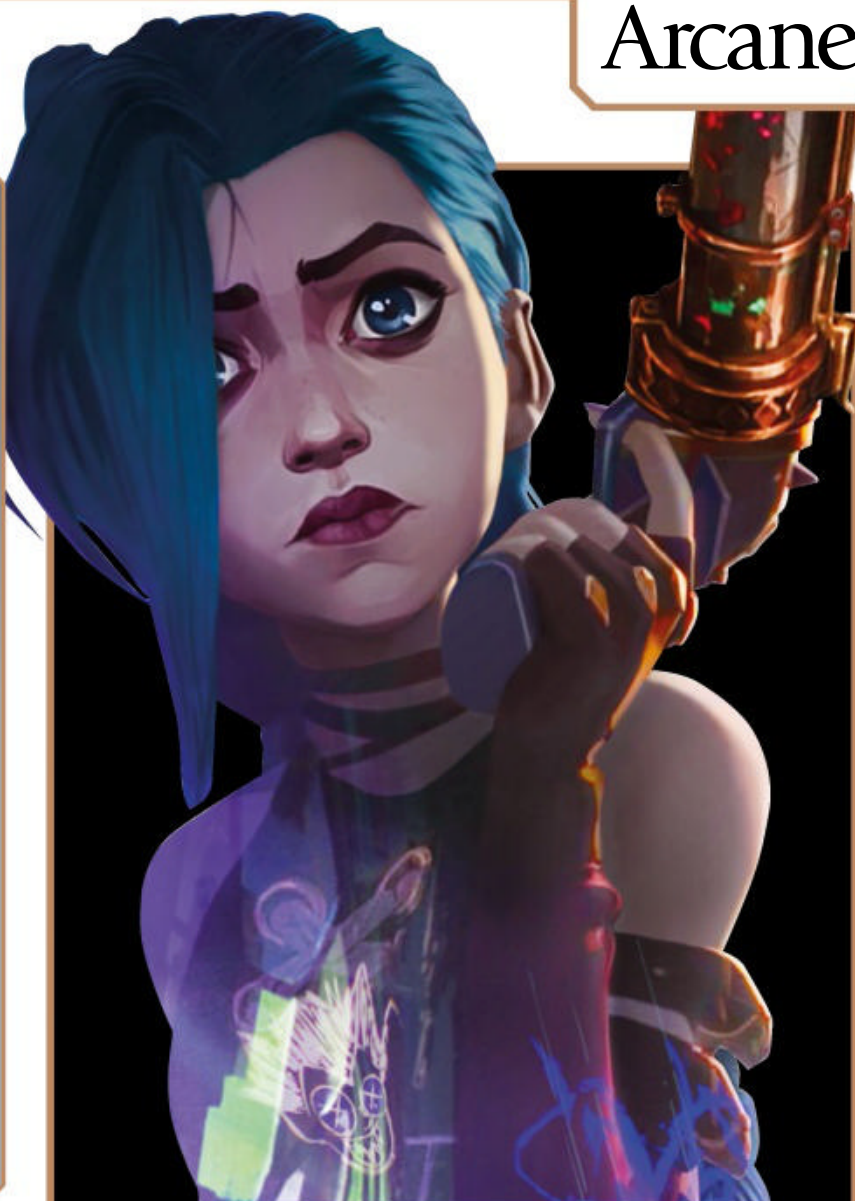"Our goal was to bring all viewers together into a powerful story, while remaining faithful to what Riot created, to the fans' expectations and yet not hesitating to surprise or shock them a little," says Julien.

ADVICE TO GET INTO ANIMATION
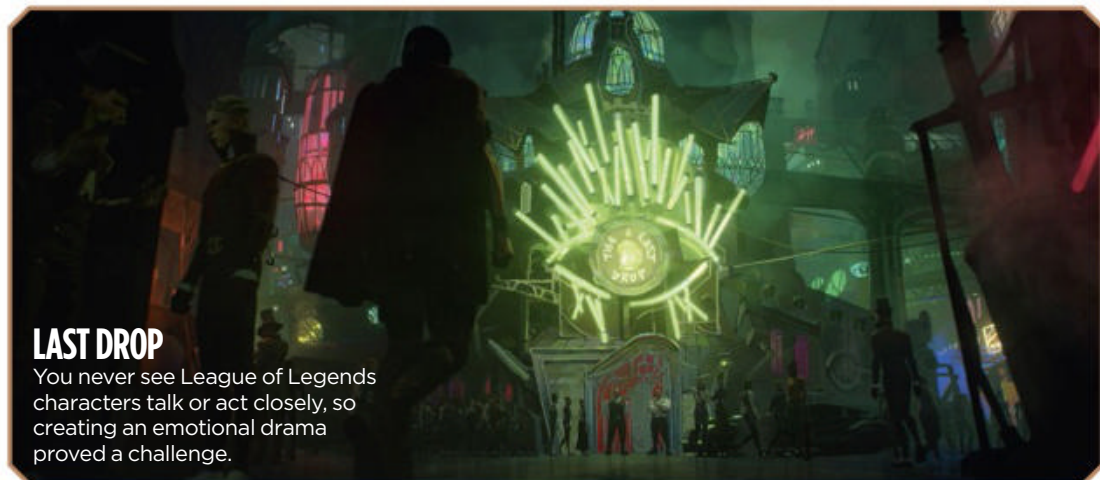**What does Christian Linke of Riot Games look for in a new artist?**

"I think perhaps the most important thing to me is actually self-awareness, which people think is a strange answer," begins Christian Linke, who explains this is about knowing what you're good at and taking that to a higher level.

For the creative director it's about trust. "So often it's better to be the most self-aware person of your own skills, and not always assume that you just have to make it work and deliver it no matter what."

This, he says, allows him to understand where an artist may need help, and a person who is confident and aware enough to ask for help can be relied upon. "That at least lets me trust your judgement," reflects Christian. "I think self-awareness is something that I probably value more than anything, because even if someone doesn't get there on the first attempt – the first design, the first little animation – if we both see what's not working, we'll find the answer. We have enough talent involved around us to get there. But if you don't see it, and I see it, that's tricky."

Don't be afraid to question what's being asked of you either, adds Christian. He values artists that don't shy away from critiquing decisions. Rather than waste time on something you know won't work just because you've been asked to do something.

"I would say, don't feel like you ever need to look like you have this professional thing figured out; just ask the question. Don't feel like you'll be vulnerable when you feel like you need more information, because we never have the perfect explanation."

influence; geometric shapes needed to be in every scene or background; and there needed to always be a technological aspect or sci-fi influence to the design.

"And so if you're missing one of these three things, if you're missing the sci-fi element, for example, it just looks like a period thing. If it's missing the Victorian aspect then it just looks too futuristic," says Christian. "So I think what's really important is that you develop a philosophy behind why you're designing. You need to understand who your audience is, what they've seen, and how to look at things through that perspective."

For Julien, achieving the look of Arcane practically meant examining how light and colour is used in the animation. Lighting, colour, framing and composition is applied to ➧

Feature

> 66 **The goal is to bring the viewer into a convincing context and to tell an intense story with colourful characters** 99

➤➤ ensure the characters fit their environment. "To achieve that, we either try to maintain a natural or realistic mood that feels true and immersive, or be a lot more cinematic and dramatic," says the director, explaining how contrasting and expressionistic colour is used to sell the emotion of a scene.

He adds: "The goal being finding the right balance between those, to bring the viewer into a convincing context and to tell an intense story with colourful characters. Everything is about this balance between things that could seem opposites. We play with rhythm in order to achieve a good dynamic with neutral-enough moments and elements so we can make what's important stand out. It's all about contrast and rhythm."

FAN APPEAL

The elephant in the room was always how fans would respond to the series. But Riot Games and Fortiche needn't have worried: it was number one on Netflix. More interesting is Christian's desire to appease the artists that work on the game, whose designs have been reworked for a different medium.

"Riot has so many amazing artists and so many smart creatives," begins Christian. "And I think if there's anyone that we were scared of disappointing it was those people that

TONED DOWN
To make Riot Games' characters fit Fortiche reworked them with greater subtlety, while remaining fantastical.

FOLLOWING THE THREE RULES OF ARCANE
The art direction for Netflix's animated series takes its cue from a triad of key design elements

Shaping up the experience
Every environment must have geometric design and shape language. Creative director Christian Linke says this is the base for every scene in the animated series.

Hi-tech gadgets and gizmos
A technological element is also required, "to create that sense of exploration of possibilities," says Christian. Again, it clashes with other elements and defines the style.

A clash of the old vs the new
There's a Victorian aesthetic to the series – this is another must-have for every scene and design. It's the clash of the old and the new that lends Arcane a unique style.

INSTANT APPEAL
Julien says: "League of Legends' success is in part based on the champions and their various skins. Riot achieved that in creating super appealing and diverse character designs that work at first sight."

HELLGATE DESIGN
The world of Arcane needed to feel realistic, with identifiable architectural design while also feeling fantastic and strange.

HEXTECH LAB
Backgrounds in Arcane are designed to feature three aspects of the series' world to remain consistent.

had a personal connection to these characters. So yeah, that was scary."

While the game's art team weren't involved, the animation studio would seek feedback. Explains Christian: "They always had positive feedback. So that really helped give us confidence."

Getting the characters right was key because these were the starting point for everything in the animated series. The steampunk notes of design in the characters' designs is extrapolated into the world of Arcane and influences the environments, props and scenery. From this comes a Da Vinci-meets-technological tomorrowland that feels connected and consistent.

ARTIST'S EYE
That's not to say everything went smoothly. Arcane grew over years of work, and Christian says you can see it

in the show. As episodes progress the team becomes more confident in the style and how they blend the anime and western influences. A use of VFX or an emotional swash of colour, a bend of an arm or blink of an eye and camera pan. "It's cohesive enough to not get distracted by it, but if you pay close attention there's a lot of little things where the whole thing kind of evolved," alludes Christain.

As a renowned perfectionist, do these small issues play on his mind? "Yeah, it drives me absolutely f**king nuts," he exclaims, before acknowledging this is an aspect of art everyone has to accept, "because over the years you grow as a creative, your eye grows, it changes."

With such attention to detail, there's little doubt Arcane season two is going to be a spectacular watch.

MAKING
THE MITCHELLS
VS. THE
MACHINES

Production designer **Lindsey Olivares**, director **Mike Rianda**, co-director **Jeff Rowe**, producers **Phil Lord** and **Chris Miller** and others share their insights into making one of 2021's best animated movies…

Lindsey Olivares (production designer)
"Our production designer, Lindsey Olivares, came up with these amazing early drawings for the movie, and we thought, 'Wow, what if the movie looked exactly like your drawings?' So we decided to go for that." **Director Mike Rianda**

Hanna Cho (storyboard artist)
"We pay a lot of attention to the details of the characters. They feel complex emotions and have flaws and wants that are in opposition to each other. We hope to have more emotional depth than your average animated movie." **Co-director Jeff Rowe**

HP 1%

We did tests over renders to form a language for Katie's films…

Linda

Yashar Kassai (vis-dev artist)

"The Stealthbots ended up being some of my favourite parts of the movie. The actual robots looked a bit goofy and not that scary, so we started thinking about how the robots would update themselves. They'd take away all the curves and visuals that make humans comfortable." **Mike Rianda**
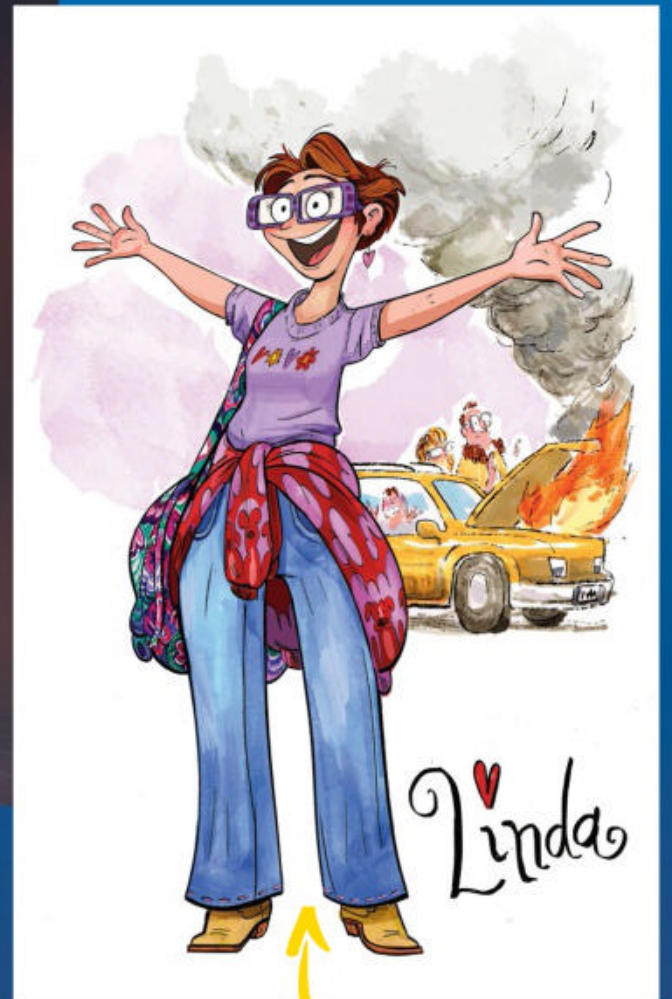
Lindsey Olivares

Production designer and lead character designer Lindsey Olivares says Linda was designed as a giant heart, to reflect her role as the family cheerleader.

Lily Nishita (graphic designer)

"One of Lily Nishita's first assignments was to push and explore Katie's drawing style. She became the hand and handwriting of Katie, from designing the text on her hands and text cards on screen to building puppets." **Lindsey Olivares**

I do!
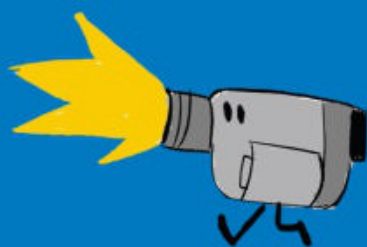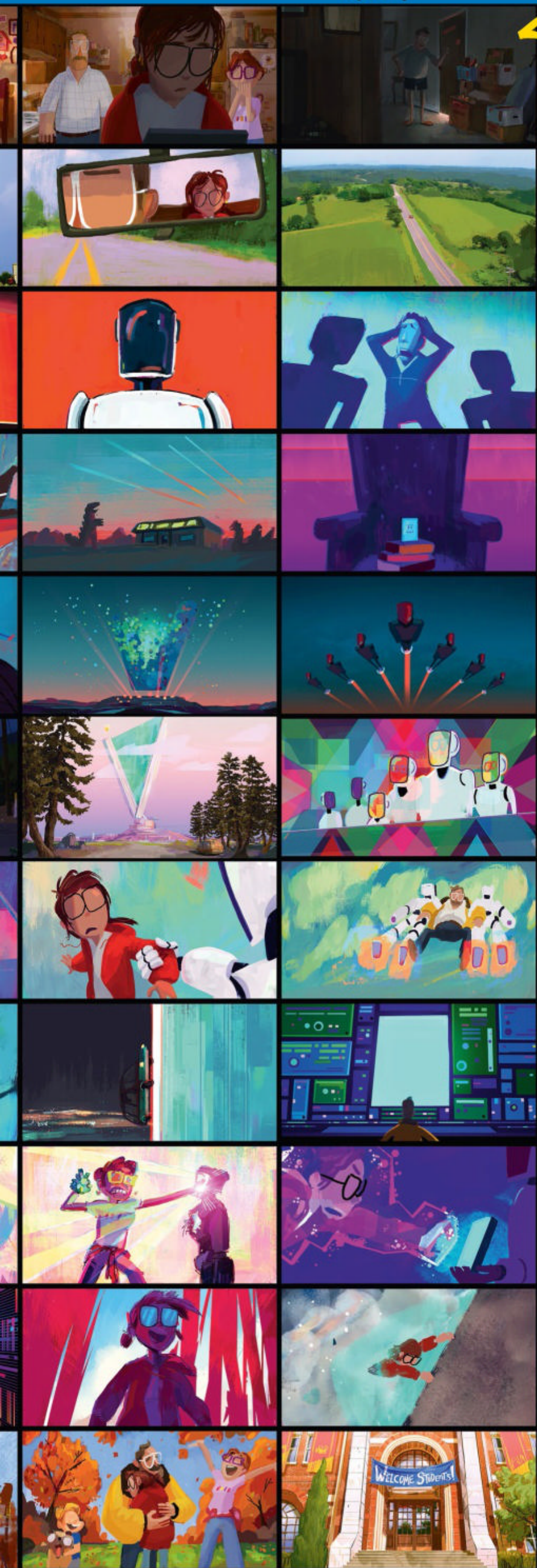
David Bleich (colour and lighting designer)

According to lead colour and lighting designer David Bleich, one of the film's biggest challenges for the artist was creating a colour palette with a point of view that supported the emotional aspect of the story.

Lindsey Olivares

"The coat Rick wears in the movie is based on an aviator jacket director Mike Rianda's dad owned in the 1970s."

R1N7943

Peter Chan (vis-dev artist)

In this concept art piece of Aaron's bedroom by visual development artist Peter Chan, one detail includes a herd of toy dinosaurs surrounding a Jell-O shrine.

DINOSAURS

WELCOME STUDENTS!

Jake Panian (vis-dev artist)
"When the machines invade, they dominate the human world, and their colour palette takes over as well." **Art director Toby Wilson**

Lindsey Olivares
Aaron, the gentle, dinosaur-loving youngest member of the Mitchell family, is loosely inspired by directors Michael Rianda and Jeff Rowe when they were young.

aaron AND MONCHI

POWER UP

❱❱ Peter Chan did a great job of introducing the robot-world colours as they begin to infect the world ❱❱
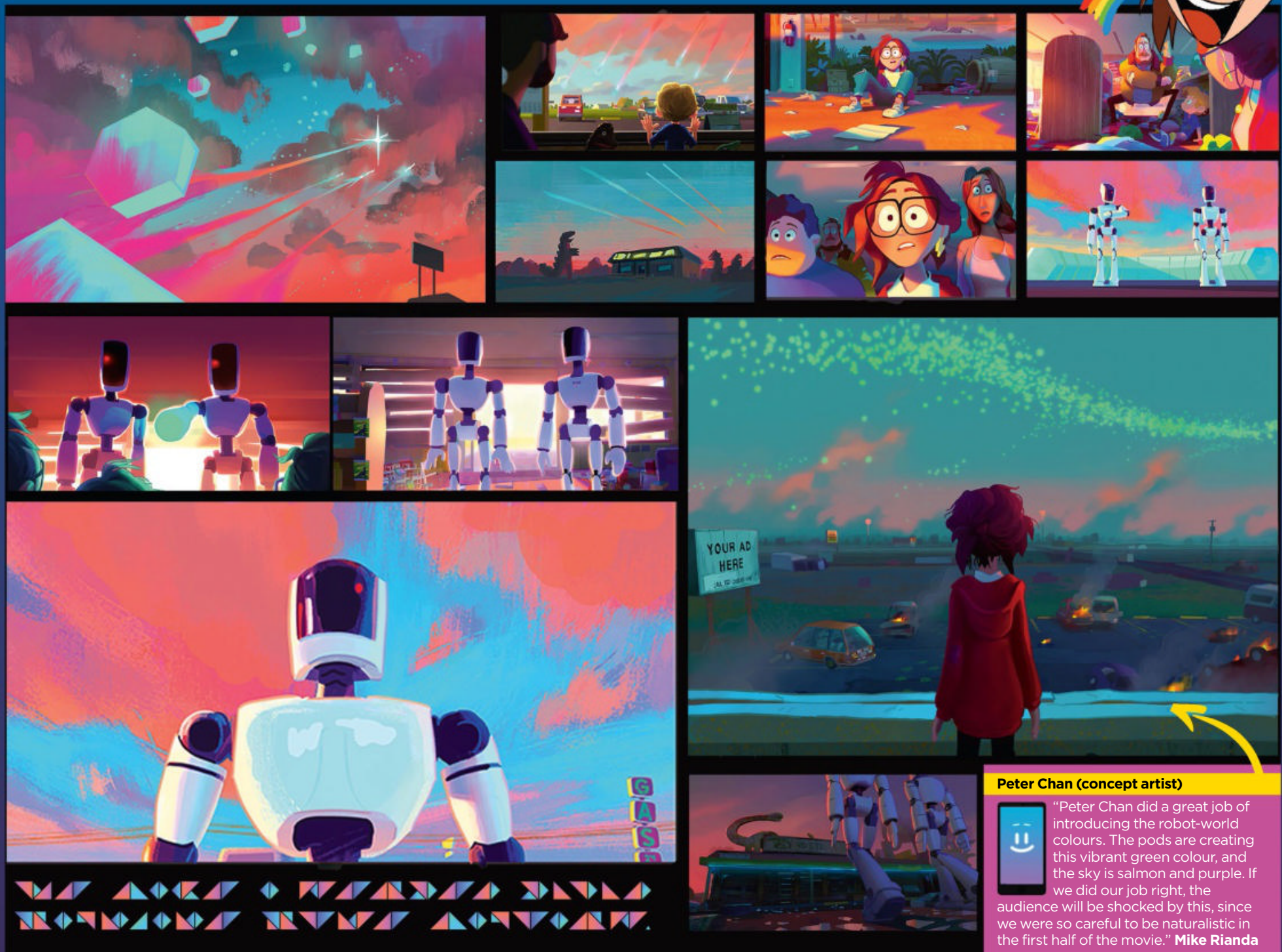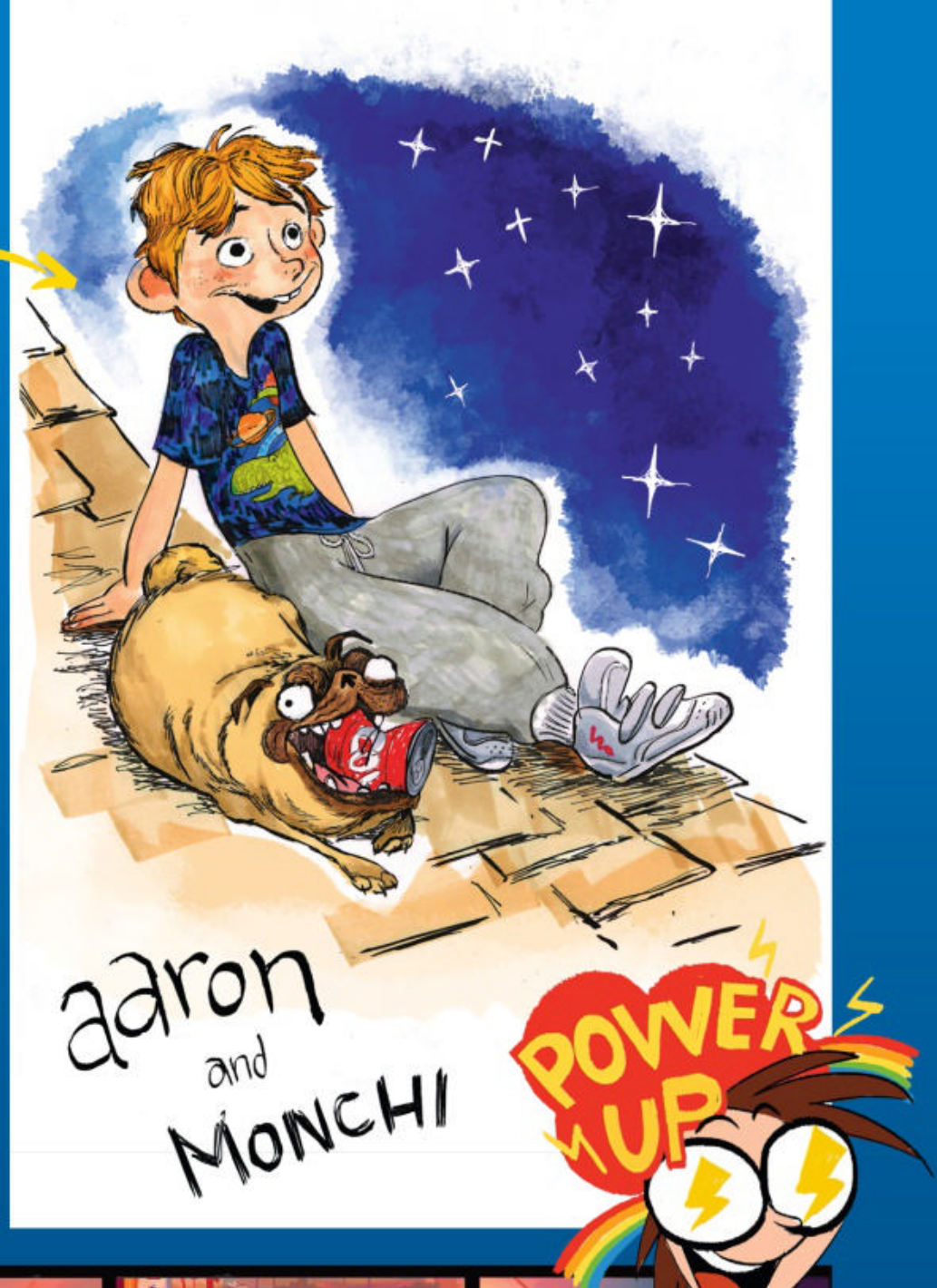
Peter Chan (concept artist)
"Peter Chan did a great job of introducing the robot-world colours. The pods are creating this vibrant green colour, and the sky is salmon and purple. If we did our job right, the audience will be shocked by this, since we were so careful to be naturalistic in the first half of the movie." **Mike Rianda**

Peter Chan

"We wanted Katie's room to feel lived-in. There was even a time when we had her living in the home's laundry room, with her bed placed above the washing machine!" **Jeff Rowe**

Tiffany Lam (vis-dev artist)

Production designer Lindsey Olivares says she loves the fact that the movie pays close attention to real people, embracing all their human frailties and faults. "It's great to include all the details and to create a world that feels very real and observed," she notes.

Yashar Kassai

The original concept of the rocket was designed by visual development artist Alex Konstad. "Alex gave us something that looked too cool not to use," says **co-director Jeff Rowe**. "It had this triangularity that was visually iconic."

Arthur Fong (vis-dev and concept artist)

Because Katie Mitchell is a filmmaker herself, the team felt it was a great idea to have her creativity and vision spill on to the screen – a visual touch they called Katie Vision.

Lizzie Nichols (vis-dev artist)

"What's cool about Sony Animation is that they don't have a house style, and they embrace letting the films feel unique and driven by the creators. This allows for the look and tone of each film to feel distinct and extra special. It's a very artist-friendly ethos."
Producers Phil Lord and Chris Miller

❱❱ Sony embraces letting the films feel unique and driven by the creators… ❱❱

Michael Isaak (art director)

The Mitchell family car is based on a blue 1990 Chevrolet Celebrity station wagon that co-director Jeff Rowe used to own. He affectionately named it Tom Hanks.

Lindsey Olivares, James Castillo (concept artist) and Guillermo Martinez (head of story)

"With a character like Monchi, you know you aren't done until he makes you laugh out loud."
Lindsey Olivares
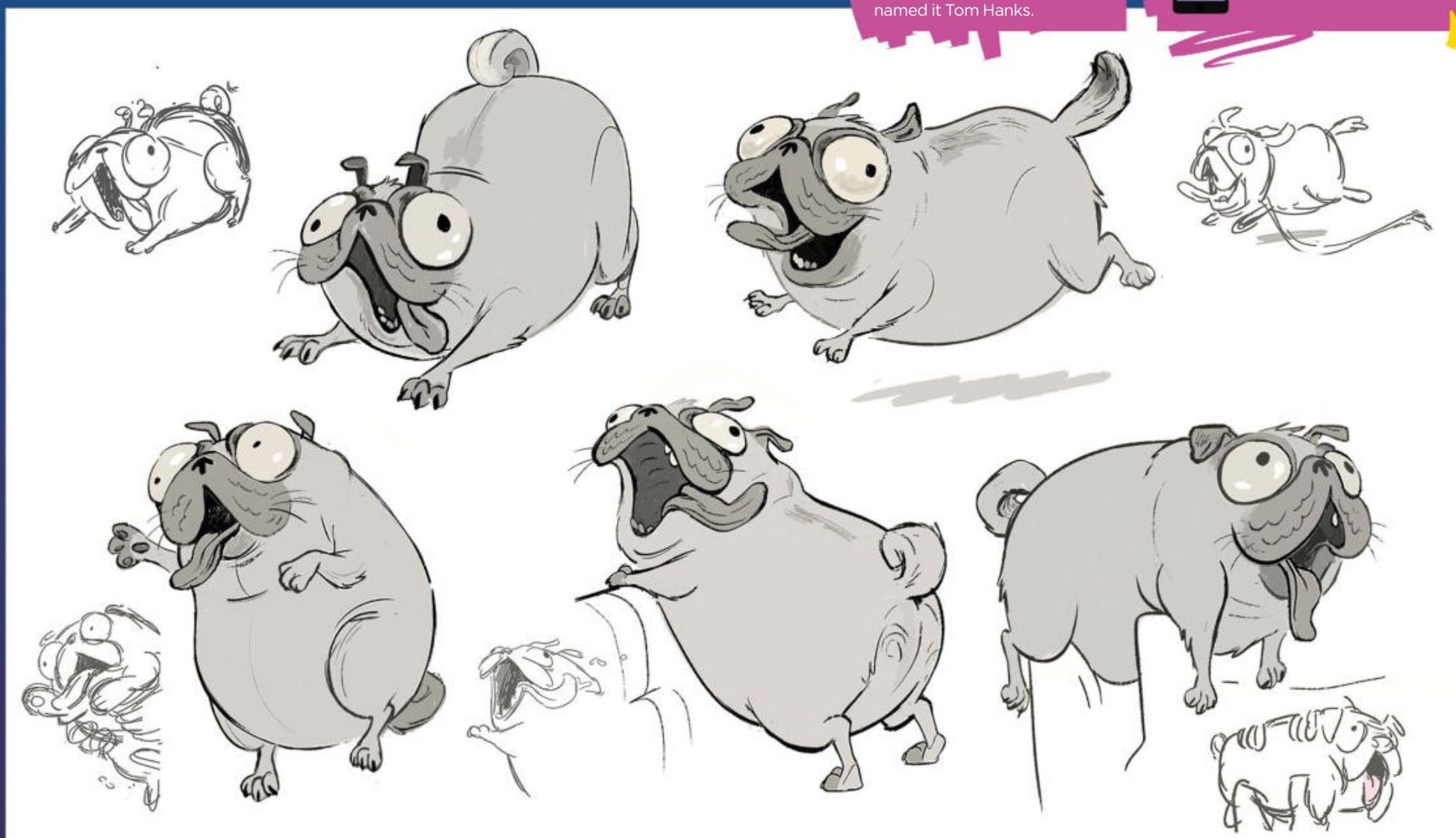
Kellan Jett (vis-dev artist)

The earliest team members on the film, including Mike Rianda, Jeff Rowe, Lindsey Olivares, Andrew Ross and Guillermo Martinez went on a road trip to Las Vegas (where the climax of the movie was originally set) and found inspiration for DinoStop at Peggy Sue's 50s Diner and Dino-Saur Park (as well as the Cabazon Dinosaur park, and the now shuttered Prairie Dog Town in Kansas).

Lindsey Olivares

Production designer Lindsey Olivares did a lot of explorations to come up with the final visuals of the character Katie Mitchell. "She is lanky, fidgety, and your typical future art-school student," she explains.

Yashar Kassai

"The goal was to design a world that would make the Mitchells completely out of place. It's sleek, clean and monochromatic."
Jeff Rowe

OK!

VIDEO WORKSHOP

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX
Workshops

Advice from the world's best artists

This issue:

Photoshop, Medium & Blender
SCULPT AND PAINT CHARACTER ART

Fernando Peque uses virtual reality, 2D and 3D tools to develop a demon-riding warrior to inspire animation

Artist PROFILE

Fernando Peque
LOCATION: Brazil

Fernando is a vis-dev artist working at Netflix Animation. His previous clients include House of Cool, Passion Pictures, Aardman, Locksmith Animation and more.
ifxm.ag/fpeque

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

Recently, I've been experimenting with my creative process, trying to incorporate CG sculpting tools with painting techniques. So in this workshop I'll show you how I use Adobe's VR program Medium with Blender and Photoshop. I'll go from a rough sketch to the final painting, while considering composition, values, colour and light.

I think there are different ways to do a piece like this – probably easier methods – so I'm sorry in case things gets a little 'messy'. Hopefully you'll learn something that you can apply to your own art approach.

Starting with Photoshop, I'll create a file and start simply with just a drawing. Next, I'll clean up the sketch and bring that into Medium for a rough sculpture. After that I'll render my base in Blender, and experiment with perspective and light. For the last part I'll bring everything back into Photoshop and paint on top, applying adjustment layers and incorporating what I did in the previous steps.
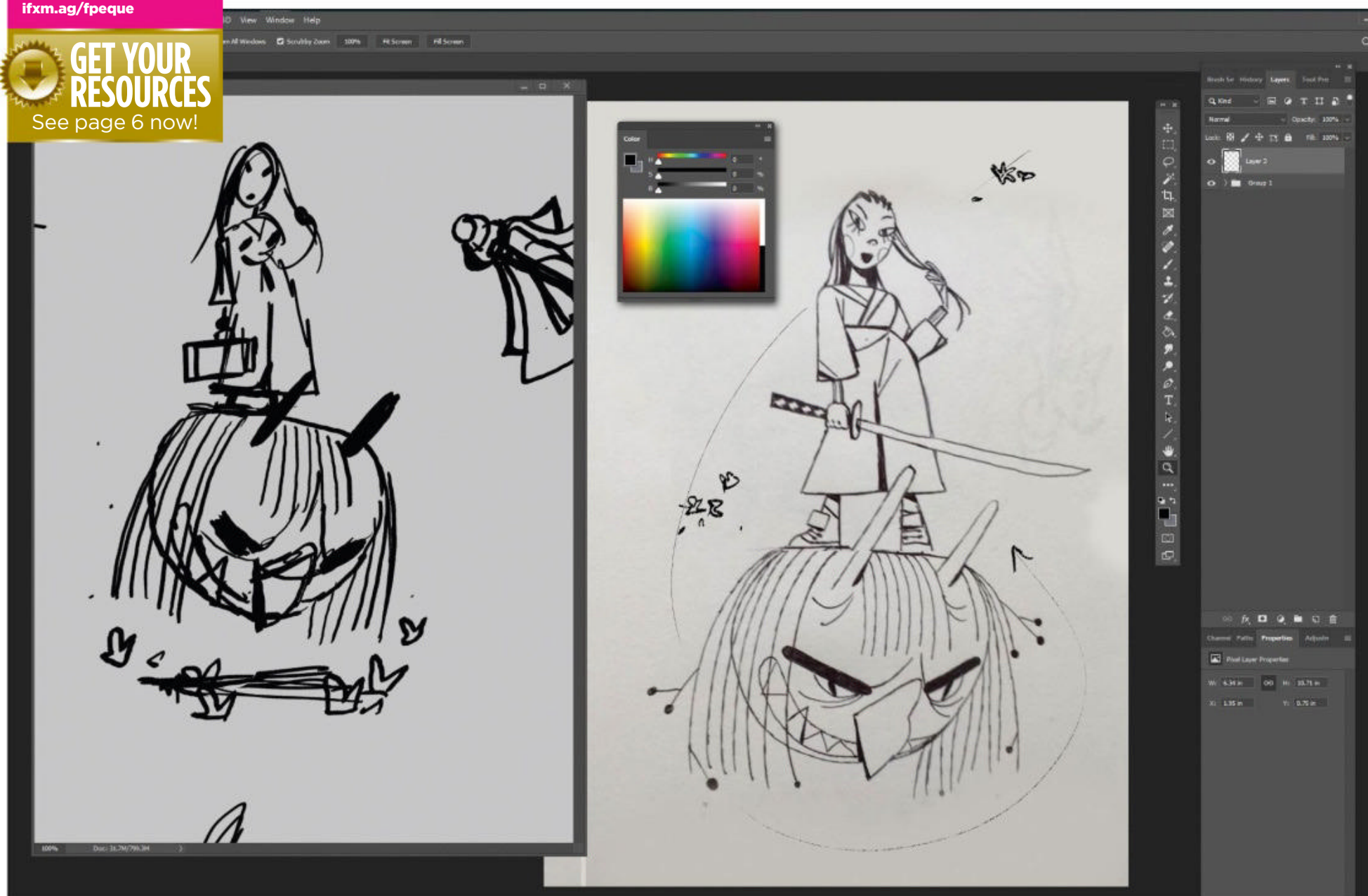
1 Sketch out some ideas and explore possible compositions

I normally start with a very loose sketch, exploring ideas and compositions. For this piece I create the sketch digitally and then clean it up in my sketchbook with a black ballpoint pen. However, most of the time I do everything digitally. ➤➤
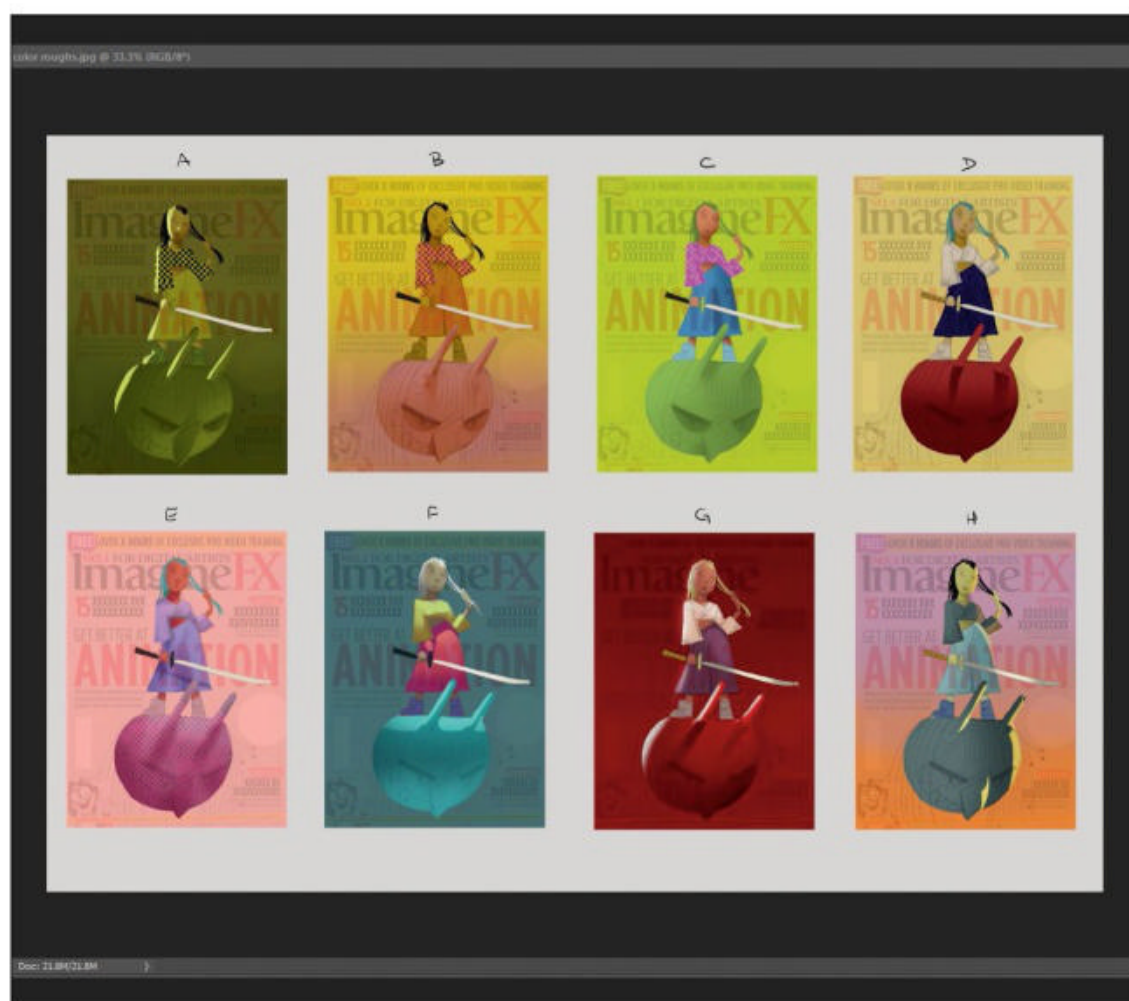
2 Colour blocking to develop a range of options

Ian Dean and Daniel Vincent (the editor and art editor of ImagineFX) suggest a few changes on the sketch to create the vibe they have in mind. I then do some loose colour blocking, just to see where they want to take the artwork. I also double-check my values and think about what will be the main focus of the image.

3 Designing the scene in VR

At the same time, I start to block in the sculpture in Medium. Basically you have a few tools and lots of 'brushes' and it's much like adding and removing clay; I'm pushing and pulling the medium, just like in real life. After I've finished I export the image as an OBJ file.
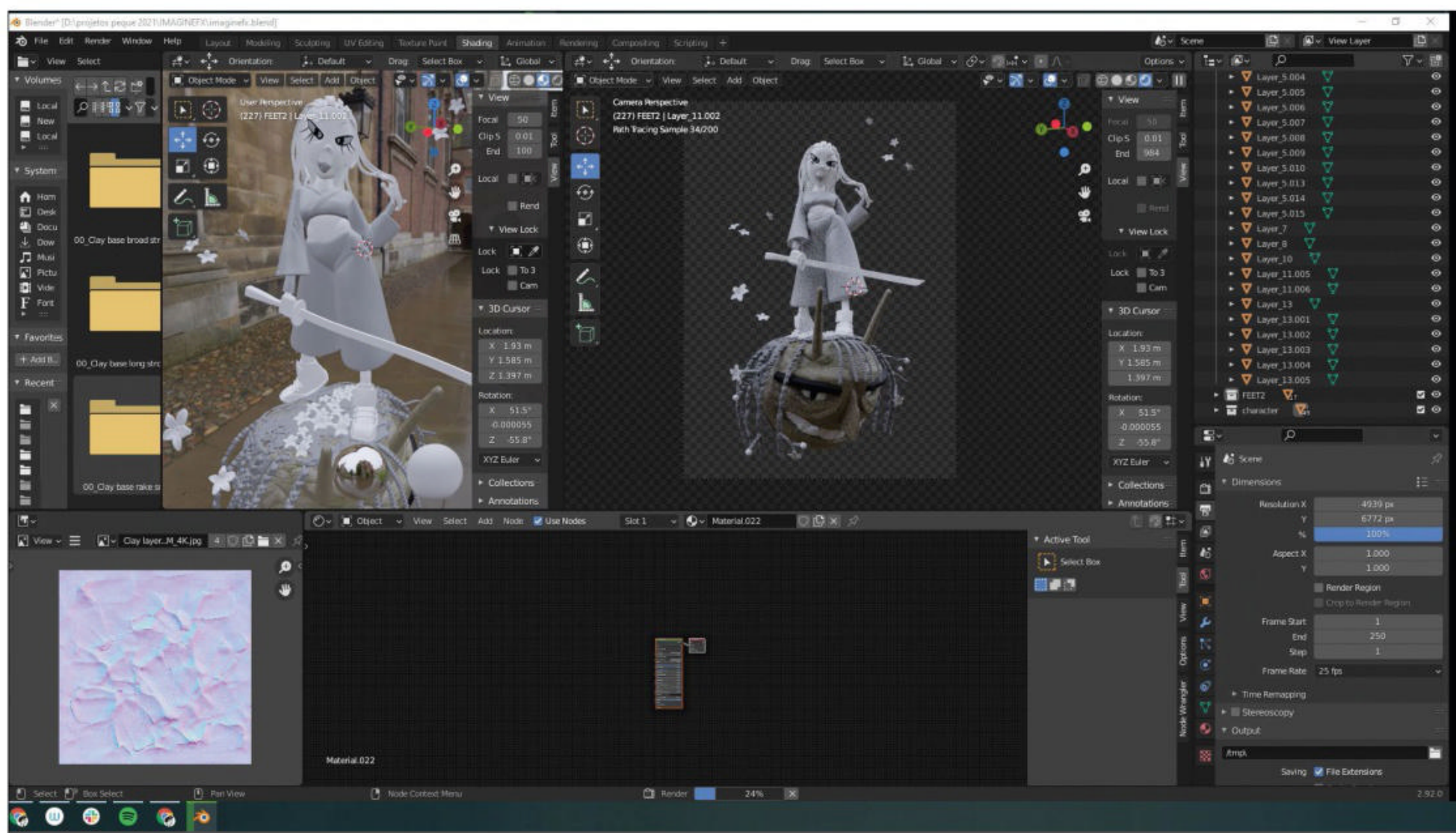
4 Generating the render in Blender

Now that I have a rough sculpture, I bring it into Blender and play with the camera and lighting. My thumbnail helps me to adjust the lighting. I render lights separately, so I can have more control when I paint. Finally, I save my file as a JPG and bring everything into Photoshop.
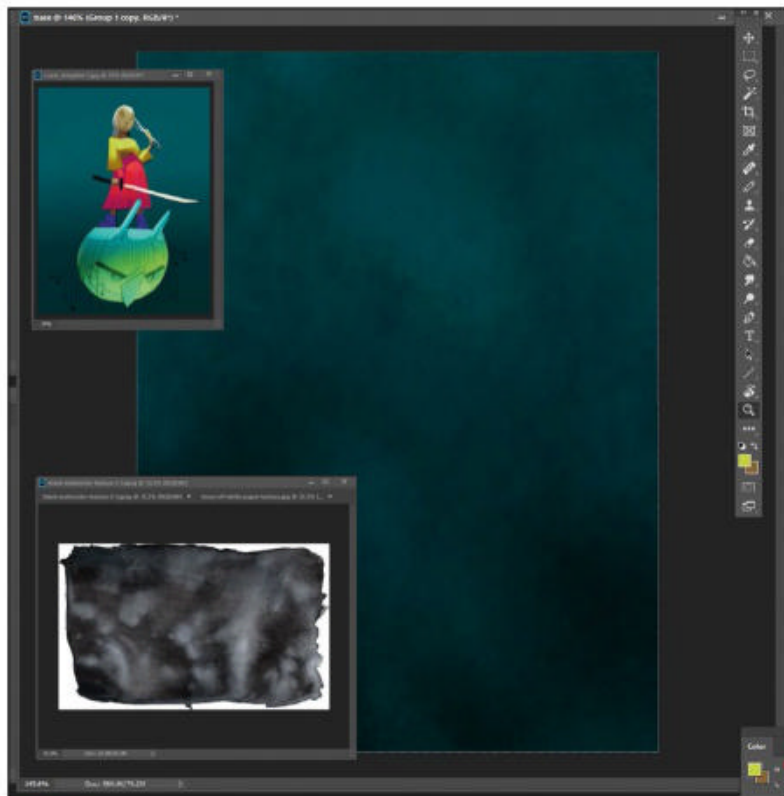
5 Background colour and texture

I start to think of the whole artwork, starting with the texture of the background. I love using the Watercolor brushes developed by Kyle T Webster. I also bring some watercolour textures that I've created in real life. I import them into a new file at a lower resolution. Watercolour brushes behave differently when the file is too big.
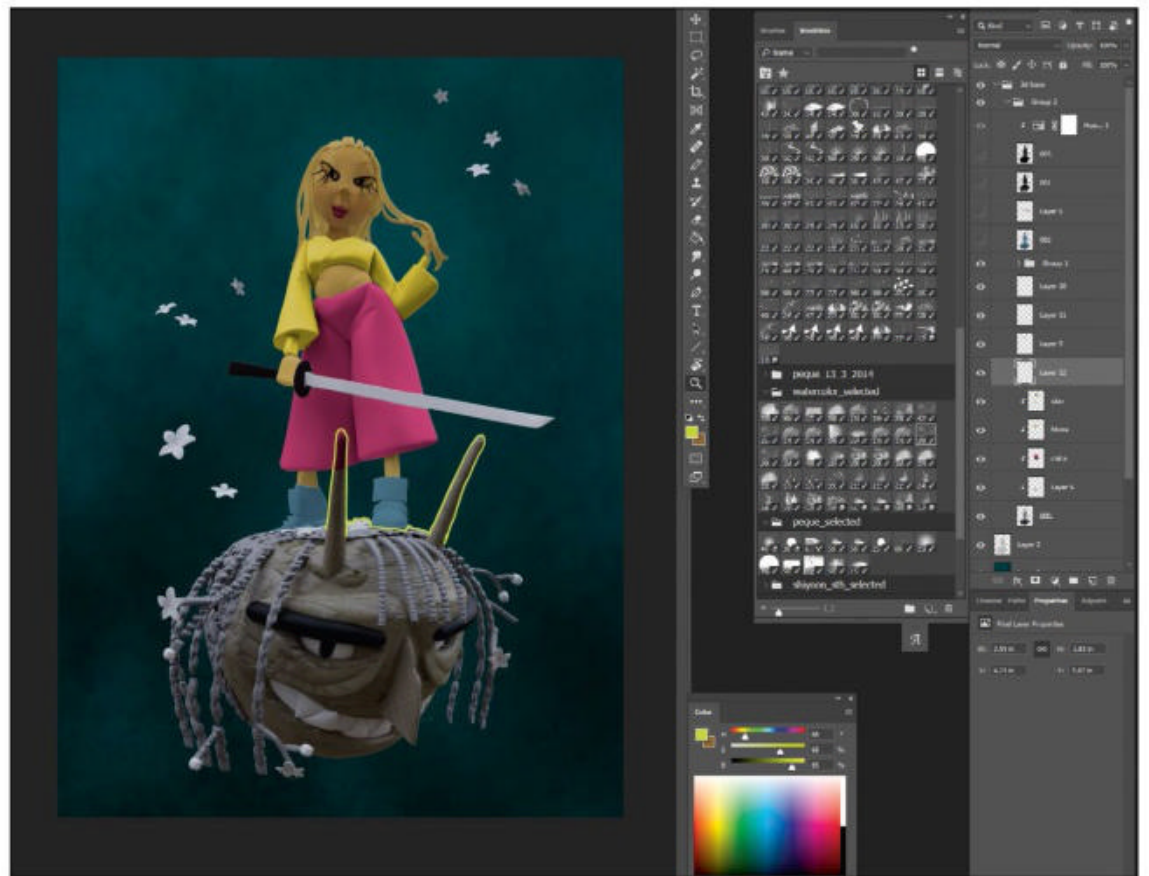
6 Adding the CG base and background

I add all my renders to Photoshop, then bring in the background that I've just painted. Now I start to paint and draw, and block in the colours. I'm already adding different hues to the skin. I'll adjust what I don't like on my rough sculpt. My early thumbnail work really helps at this stage of the painting process.

7 Integrating the renders

When painting I don't want to lose the volumetric feeling that the sculpture brings, so I use the CG base as a guide, either as a filter layer (Hard Light mode) to bring volumes back or sometimes just as a guide to paint light and shadow. I regularly double-check the design and see what I don't like and what can be improved.

8 Creating clothing textures

Normally I'll carry out my costume research for my character beforehand, so I know how it should look and feel. Here I'm working with a Smart Object as a texture. Basically I open a different PSD file (hi-res is the best way to go) and paint the texture design as a simple flat surface. ➤➤
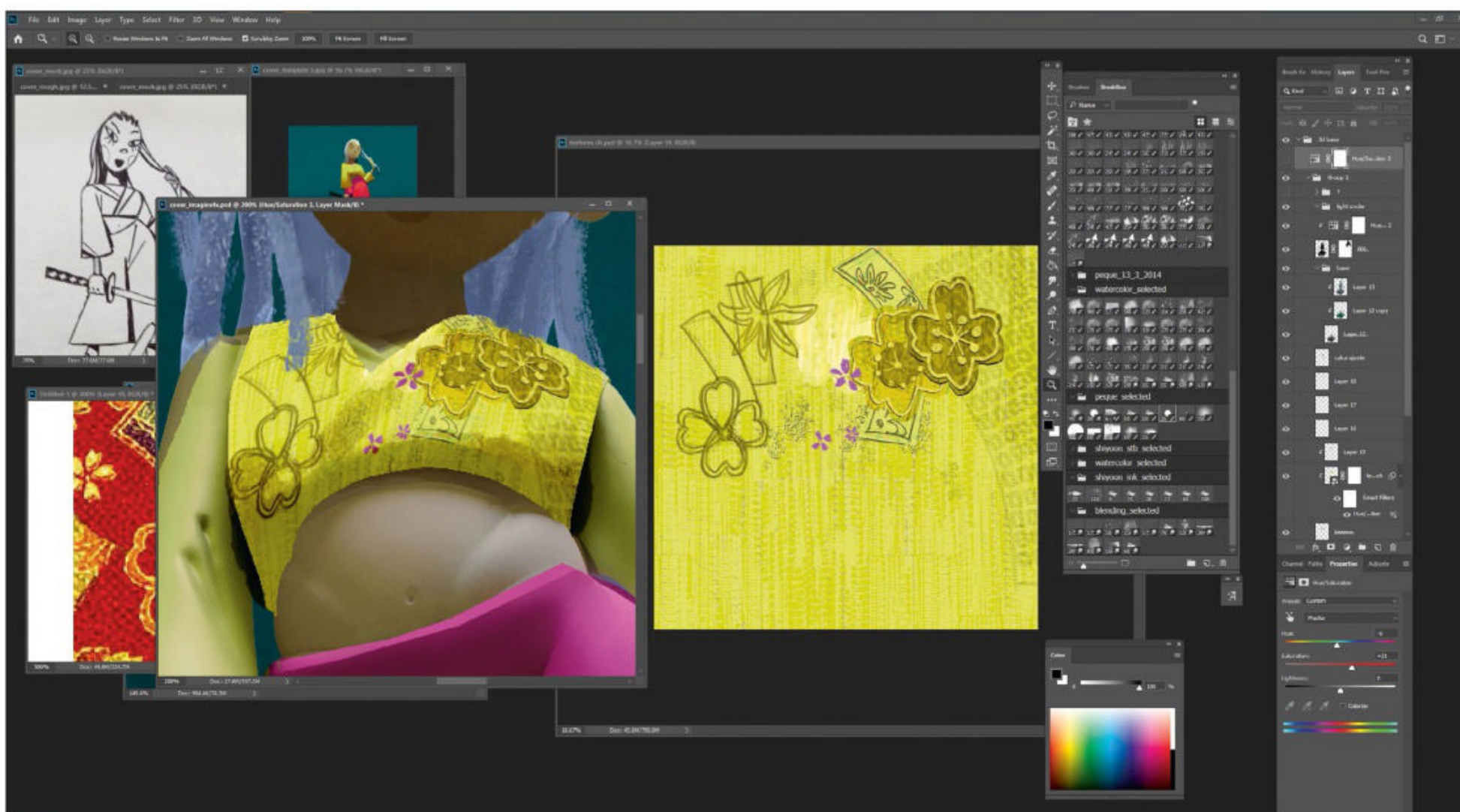
9 Applying texture to the character's clothing

Now I use the Transform tool (Edit>Free Transform) to distort the texture and match the volume that I'm working on. I do this for the top and for the bottom part of the character's costume. After I create the textures I go back and paint on top, refining and adding details.
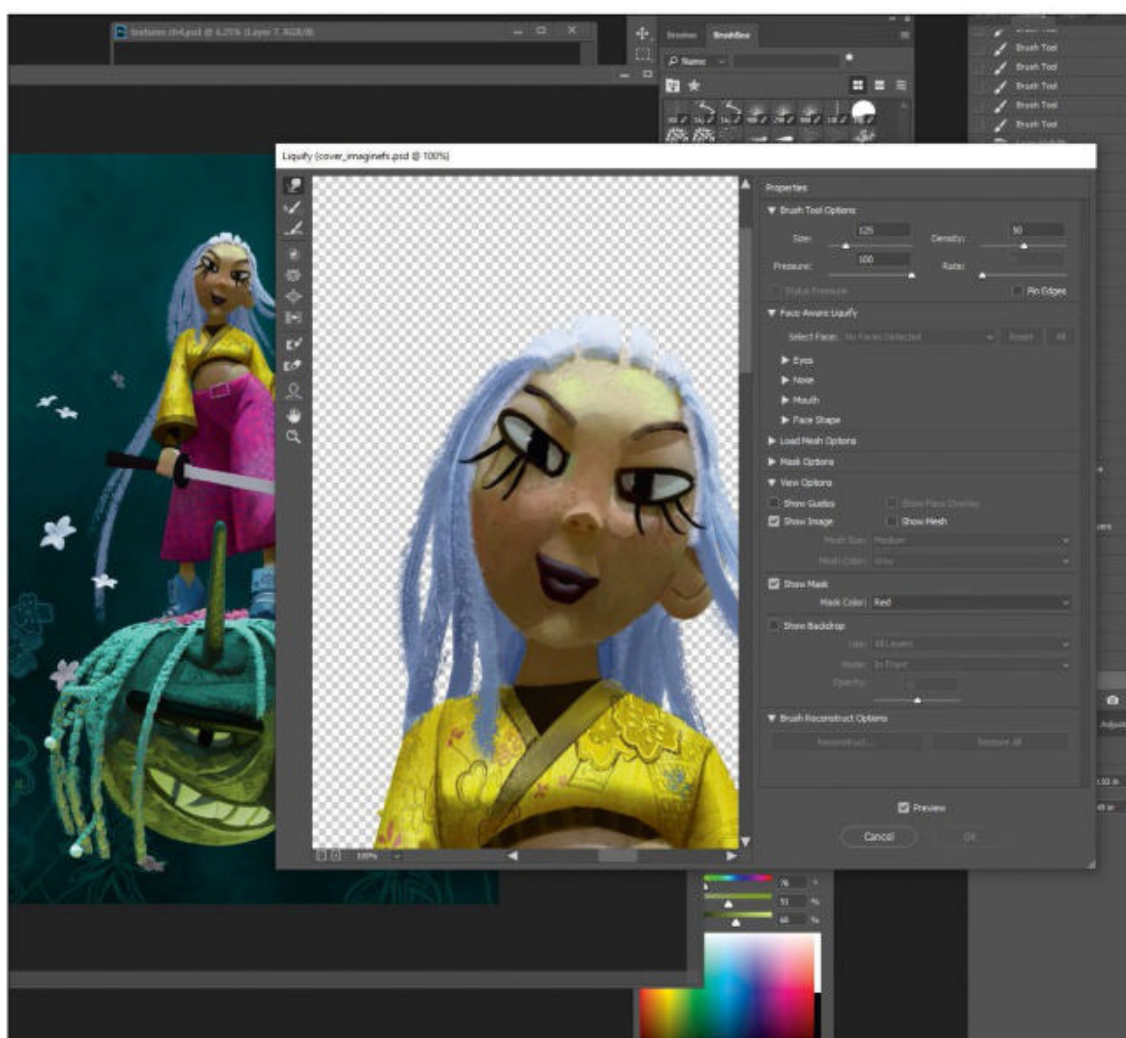
10 Adding overall details

I recheck areas that I've painted and add more details here and there. I use a lot of the clipped layers and masks to adjust the silhouette and shapes. I notice that the head is too big and am not totally happy with her facial features, so I decide to apply the Liquify filter (Filter>Liquify) to try out a few different approaches.

11 Painting the demon head

This is the same process that I used on the figure. I already have the Blender render, so I just need to integrate everything and paint on top to soften some areas and enhance others. I use a lot of what's present in the CG base, especially the lighting, which is a real time-saver.
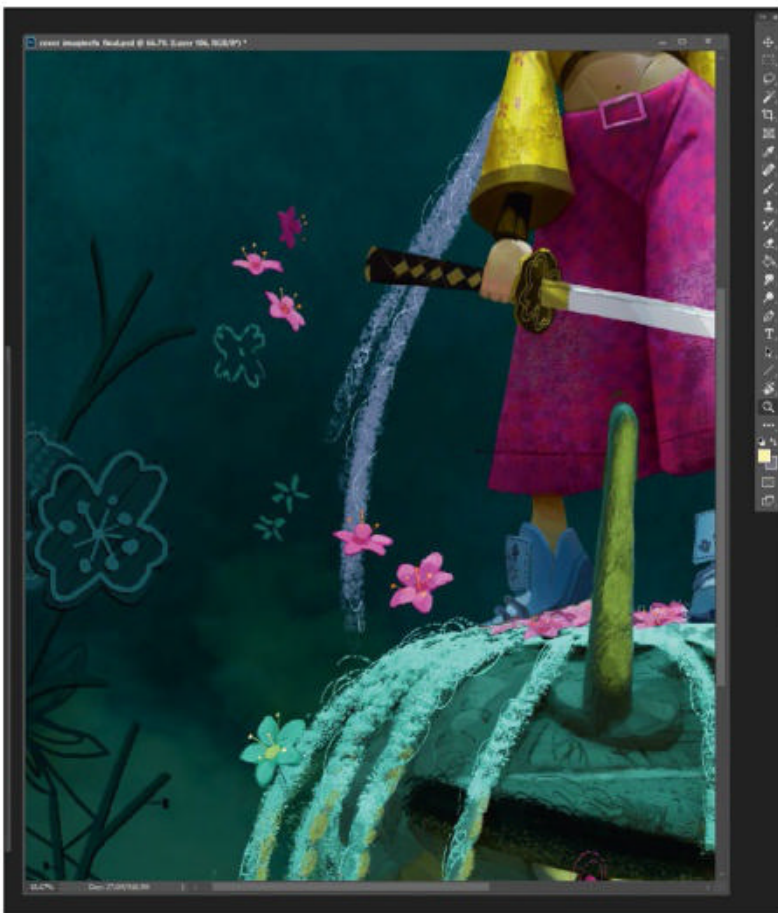
12 Small elements and background

I'm nearing the finish line: I paint small elements, check the composition and so on. And I double-check the background to see if it's helping the composition. I try a few things using textures that I created for the character's costume. Ian and Dan suggest some trees and clouds, to give the impression that the figure is floating.
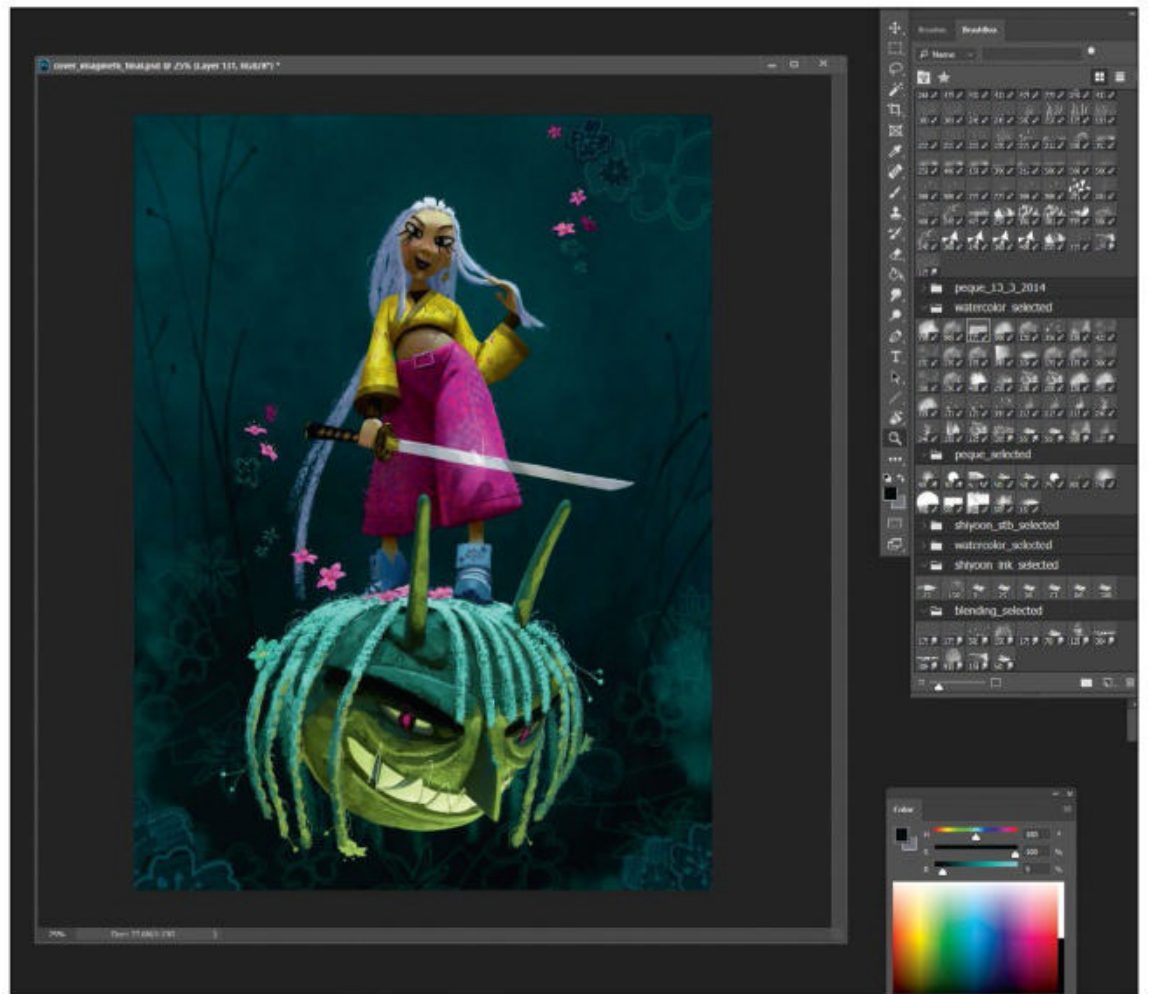
13 Checking values and proportions

I review my values and the proportion of elements. Then I study my initial sketch and see if there's anything interesting I might have missed, which I can apply to the artwork. I used the Liquify filter to make the demon more menacing and then check the lighting, knocking back some areas to have a clear focal point.
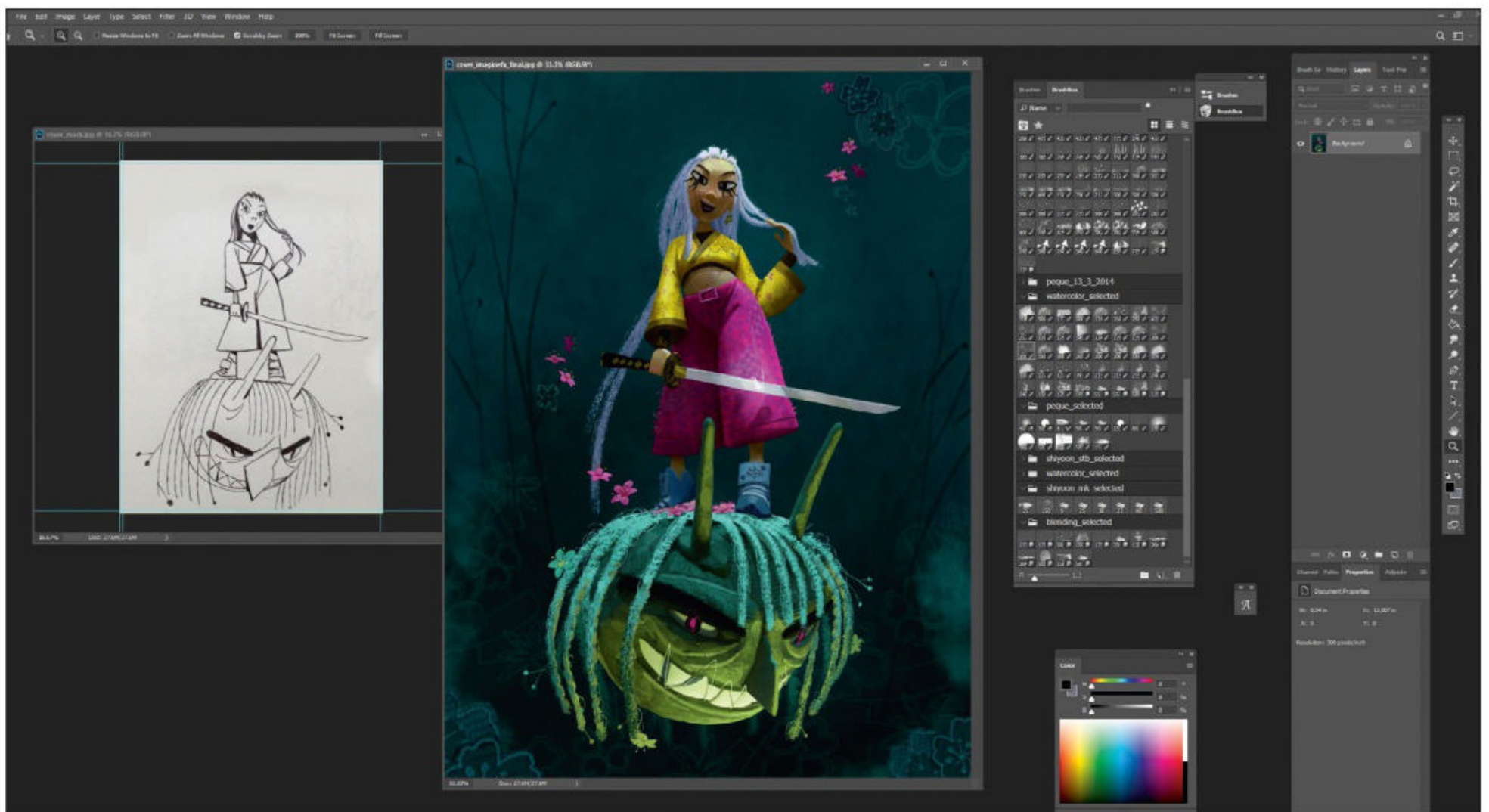
14 The painting is finished, but there's still time to learn

Let's call the artwork done. I hope you're enjoyed this workshop – I'm still finding out how to get the most from this mix of digital tools. Hopefully you'll have learned at least one or two things from my process. I also hope that it inspire you to try new approaches in your drawings and paintings. Thank you to Ian and Dan and all the ImagineFX team for inviting me to be a part of this issue. Take care everyone!

Artist insight – Part 1
SIMPLIFY FIGURES FOR ANIMATION

In this workshop, **Jackie Droujko** will guide you through her thought process of creating simple yet appealing characters for animation

Artist **PROFILE**
Jackie Droujko
LOCATION: Canada

Sheridan animation graduate Jackie is a character designer working at Netflix on feature films. Her passion lies in creating simple and appealing designs that convey compelling stories. jackiedroujko.com

When creating characters, it's easy to get lost in the details. If you're designing for animation, comics or even your portfolio, it's important to be able to design a simple character that can be drawn again and again.

The ultimate goal is to retain as much information as possible while stripping your characters down to their essential elements. It's all about simplifying while keeping the design appeal. How far can we simplify a character, pose or expression as much as possible without losing what keeps it alive? Animation is a tedious process and so the fewer lines you need to draw, the more efficient the animation process will be.

I've been character designing professionally for a few years now, and am excited to share all the things I keep in mind when creating characters for animation projects. I'm constantly learning new techniques and tricks since design is a challenging and ever-evolving process. I hope this time next year I'll have even more insight to share!

This hat rim helps break up the shape, adds interest to the overall silhouette.

Look how many bumps your eye has to follow to get from head to toe.

A more streamlined shoe leads the viewer's eye up the leg and to the focal point.

Shapes can get funny when caught up in the detail.

2 HANDY TIP!
I love using three different angles to show a simple hand! Notice how I always keep the back of the hand straight and angular, while the front of the hand always has plenty of curves and intricacies. I also love breaking up the shape of a hand by separating a finger out of the silhouette.

1 SIMPLIFY YOUR CHARACTER
It's easy to get tunnel vision when designing a character. Here, the sunglasses and earrings are overcrowding her face. Does it add anything to her character, or tell us something about her personality? Not really, so I'm removing it. I personally struggle with adding too many accessories to characters. Sometimes the simplest design is the most appealing.

3 STRAIGHTS VS CURVES

It's important to have a healthy balance of straights vs curves because it adds visual interest to any drawing. Perhaps this is the most important element of design under my belt! Straight lines suggest stability, structure and direction. Curves suggest flesh, muscle and squashing. When used harmoniously together, they create an illusion of contrast and volume.

For example, I love keeping one side of the drawing straight and the opposite side curvy. Like a straight back and a curvy bust, or a straight arm and curvy sleeves. The harder I push this theory, the more graphic a character looks, so I either push or pull back on this element of design, depending on the project that I'm working on.

> **" I love keeping one side of the drawing straight and the opposite side curvy "**

- Not paying attention to straights and curves balance
- Everything is pretty rounded

- Curved lines are offset by straight lines
- More power in her stance

Feel the weight and volume of the hair with simple straight and curve.

Straight arm and loose sweater.

Line of action.

Line of action.

Line of action.

4 LINE OF ACTION

If you imagine a line that goes through your drawing, it can help push the feeling of movement – that's called a line of action. A less curved line can emphasise a quicker movement, while a more curved line can show a slower one. However, a line of action isn't always used for movement. Here, I'm demonstrating a static character but it's still directional. ➤➤

5 CONTRASTING SHAPES

When creating a pose, I always consider what shape their body is making. I want the shape to be clear with a strong shape language. I also consider the shapes of the smaller elements of the character. I make sure there's enough different types of shapes to maintain visual appeal. All these shapes play off each other simply by being different. Contrast is interest! Mixing round shapes with angular shapes can add a lot of visual appeal to your character.
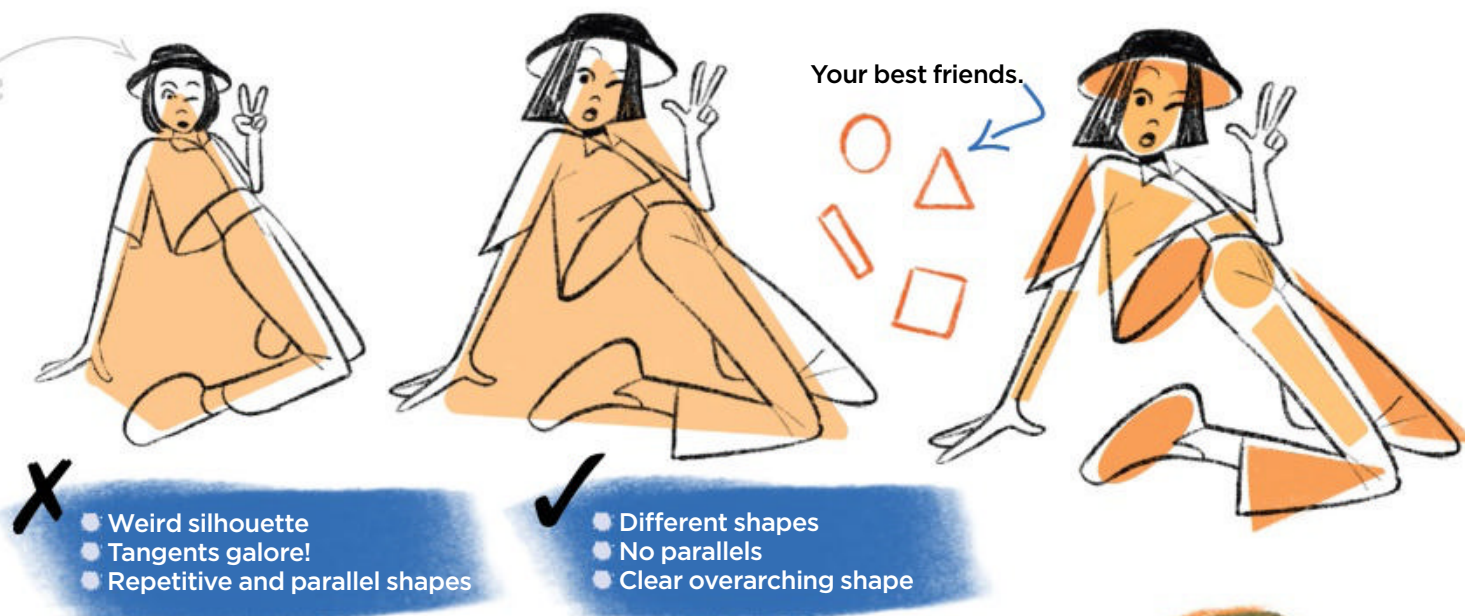
Your best friends.

✗
● Weird silhouette
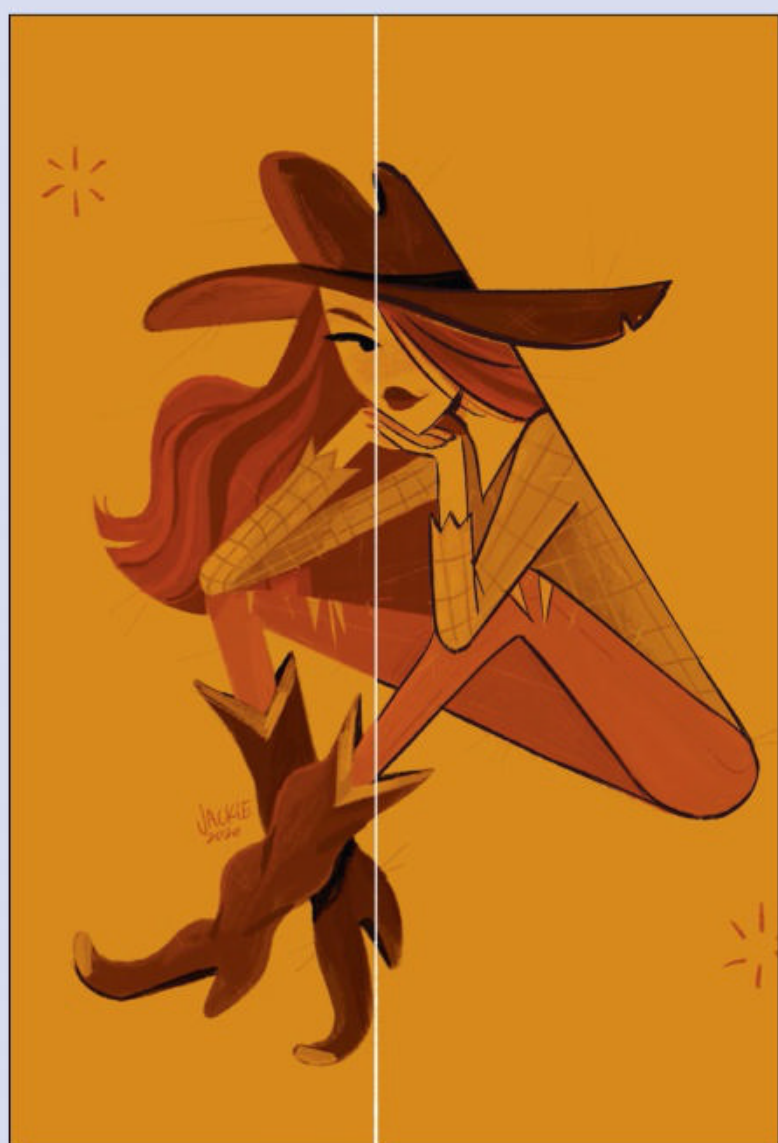● Tangents galore!
● Repetitive and parallel shapes

✓
● Different shapes
● No parallels
● Clear overarching shape

> 66 Do your best to keep visual interest and tilt the parallel line to create a new shape 99

Easy to make this mistake!

✗

6 LINE VS LINELESS

An important decision to make in your design process for animation is whether you're going to make your characters lined or lineless. I tend to prefer a lineless drawing, where the character's shapes speak for itself and the colours are contrasted enough to create obvious lines. However, it's much more efficient to have lined characters because you don't have to have this extra step of getting rid of your lines. Another obstacle with a lineless character is that they take much more effort to stand out from the background, since there's nothing clearly dividing them as a foreground element.

Come back next issue for more character design advice from **Jackie Droujko**

7 AVOIDING PARALLEL LINES!

Try not to have parallel lines in your drawings. Do your best to keep visual interest and tilt the parallel line to create a new shape. When we have repetitive shapes and lines, it removes contrast and interest in the design. When I learned about this tip a few years ago, my mind was blown and changed the way I approached design. There's so much to consider when making cool characters!

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Christmas 2021
Immerse yourself in the world of Dune, as artists, art directors and costume designers describe their work on the film, and the book's influence. Plus: paint fantasy environments, D&D card art and up the ante in your portrait art.

Issue 206
December 2021
Cover artist Christophe Young, Lauren Brown and Rafael Sarmento bring you insights on character design. We also talk to Spider-Verse artist Patrick O'Keefe, illustrator Iris Compiet and concept artist Karla Ortiz.

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November 2021
Joshua Swaby brings Harley Quinn to life on the cover! Inside there's Adi Granov's life lessons, Terry Dobson's tutorial on comic covers, David Najayama revamps Zorro and Igor Wolski draws in the ligne claire comic style.

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Artist insight
15 TIPS FOR BETTER BACKGROUNDS

Learn how you can effectively set the stage for your original animation characters, with **Dia Jamandron's** pro-level advice

Artist
PROFILE

Dia Jamandron
LOCATION: US

Dia is a background designer in animation who's worked for Netflix, Marvel, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Titmouse and ReelFX.
**diajamandron.com**

Background design is a role in animation in which the artist gets to set the stage for the characters' world. Think of background design as being an architect but for a 2D world, or a set designer for a fictional character. Backgrounds are key as you establish the context to the world. Does it take place in a fantasy castle? A fictitious city in space? Or perhaps the world is more grounded in everyday life?

With the tips and advice ahead, I'll give you some important pointers on how to achieve a background design portfolio and what to expect once you're in this role in the animation industry. I'll cover shape language, composition advice, and the need to create a floorplan – even for 2D animation. I like to take inspiration from the real world as well as the cinematography of my favourite films, and it all gets worked into the final background concept. So, let's start learning…
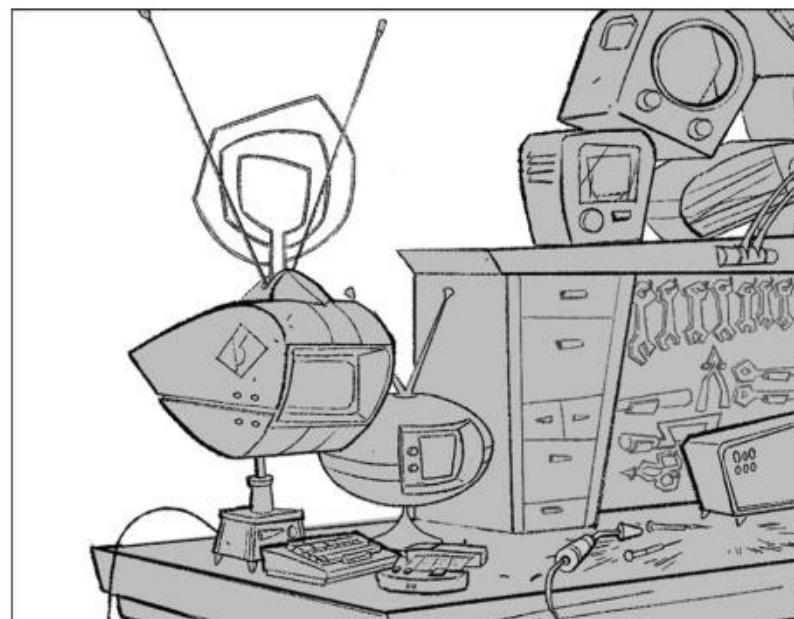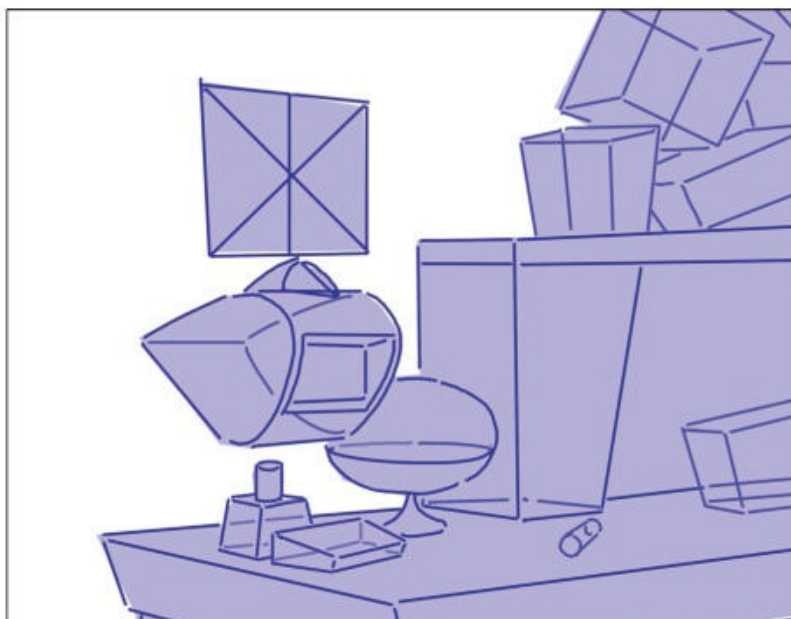
1 DEPICTING FORM
We can break down objects into shapes like cylinders, cubes and cones. Even if the show is more stylised than realistic, it helps to convey what the simple shape is, while items on the surface can show how the plane changes.
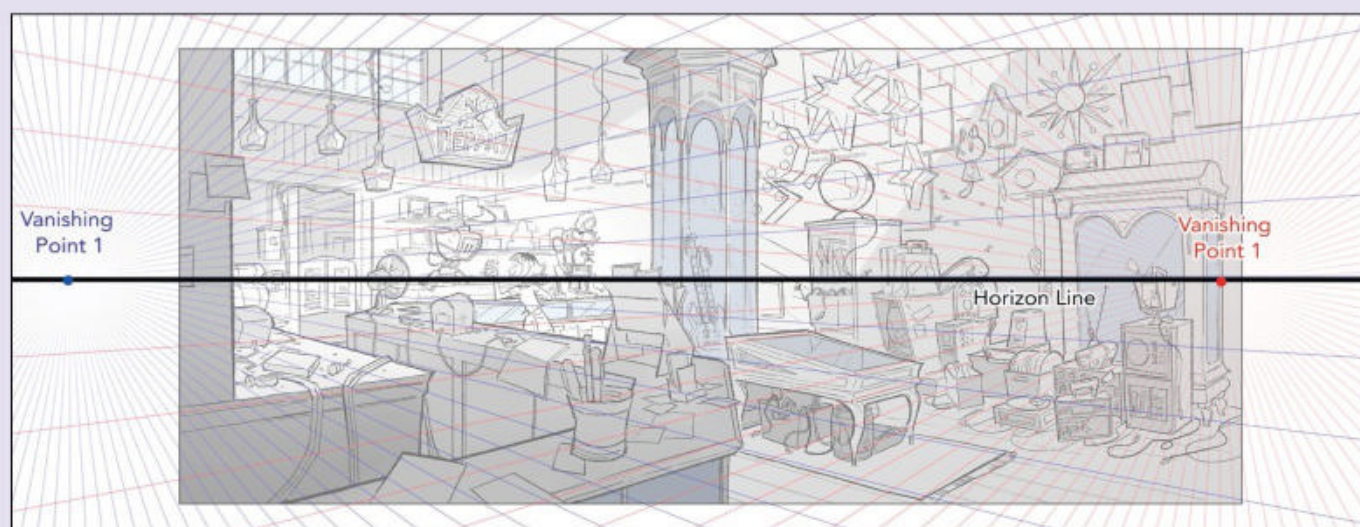
2 DRAWING IN PERSPECTIVE
A key skill to master for background design is being able to draw objects in perspective. Vanishing points and horizon lines are your best friends, and knowing the basics of one-, two- and three-point perspective will raise the quality of your work.

3 CHARACTERS FOR REFERENCE SCALE

Having the right scale is important when you draw environments that feature man-made objects. You need to relate it back to the character and their height. Have your character in multiple distances such as close ones and further out. It helps determine how big the space is, and how tall things are the further out or closer you go.

4 HAVE REFERENCE IMAGES READY

I like to take photos of places when I travel – they come in handy as I look back to use them for future projects. Before starting a drawing, I'd advise collecting as many images and references as you can. I've found that it saves a lot of time when you have them ready and next to you.

SPANISH PUEBLO REVIVAL

OLD WEST
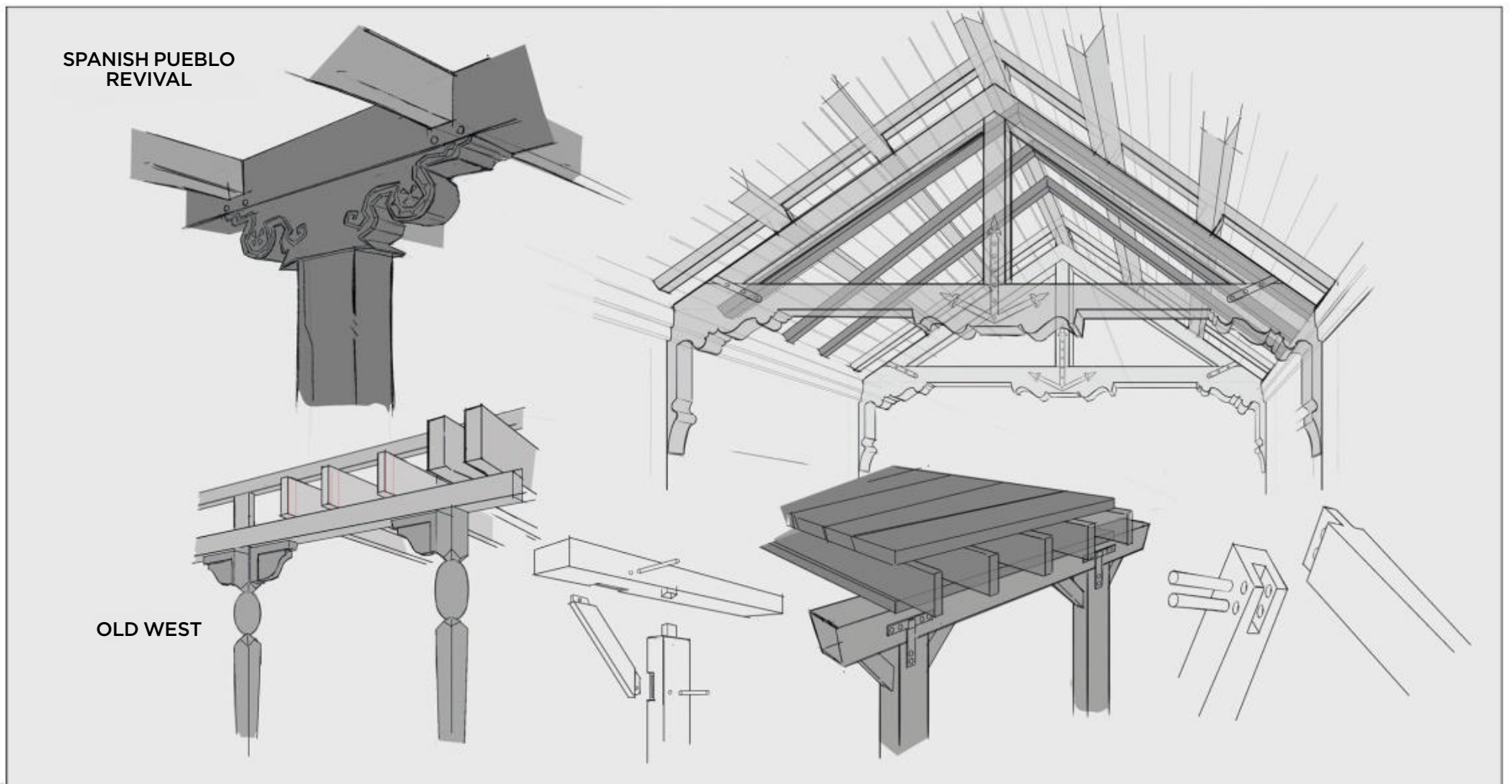
5 REFERENCE REAL-LIFE ARCHITECTURE

When it comes to background design, I highly recommend paying attention to the architecture. It's a subtle detail, especially when you draw buildings or houses. So it's best to ask yourself what's the time period? What culture is it? What did the characters use to support their houses? Even if the world is fictional, it does add some believability in terms of how the population might have approached construction. ➤➤

6 DRAWING PROPS FIRST

When I begin a project, I usually start small by
drawing a prop or a corner of a room, just so
I can get the feel of the style that I'm going for.
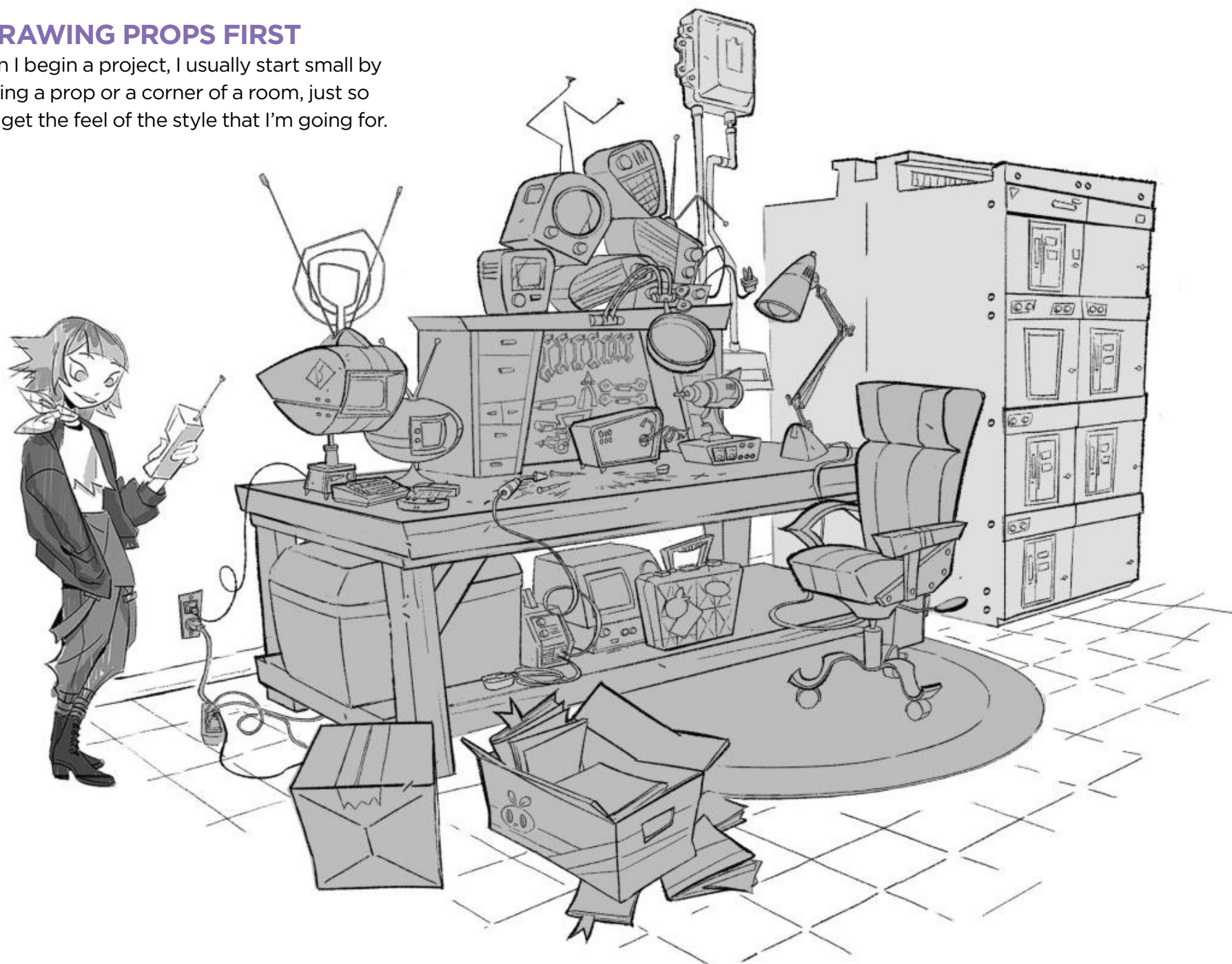
PUSHED PROPORTIONS   REALISTIC PROPORTIONS
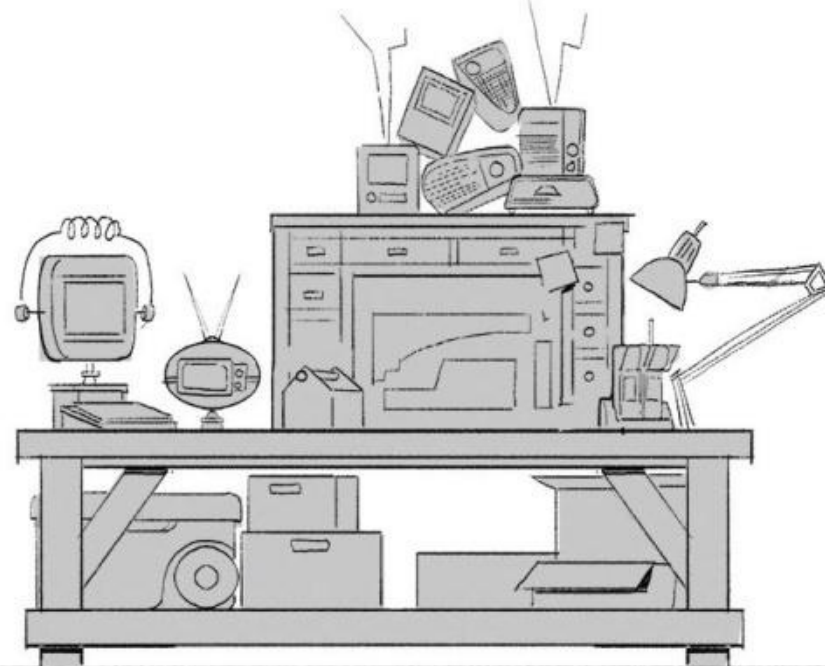
7 SHAPE LANGUAGE, STYLISING AND PROPORTIONS

There'll come a point when you need to consider stylisation. Do you go more realistic or cartoonish – what will that look like? You can play with
proportions by stretching or squashing things, or rounding or sharpening the shapes a bit more to give the world its own unique flavour.

8 PREPARE WITH THREE TONES

After creating the line-work for the background, I tend to add some tonal greys to the piece. I like to keep it simple and use only three tones: black, grey and white. I've found that it helps when it comes to painting and the type of lighting or time of day I want to employ. Using cast shadows and highlights tend to create interesting compositions, too.

> 66 The rule of thumb of getting that strong composition is have an equal three-by-three grid on your canvas 99

9 COMPOSITION BASICS

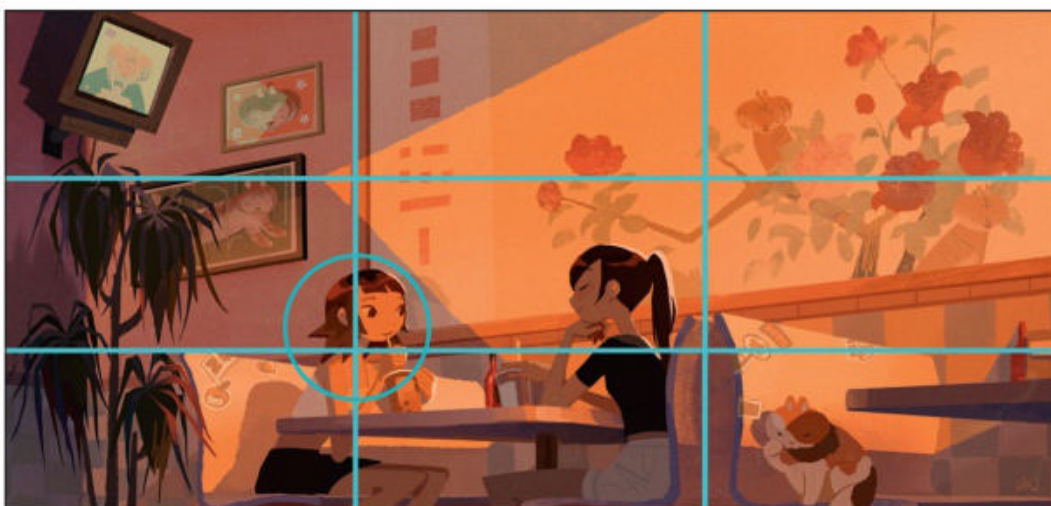I'd say the rule of thumb of getting that strong composition is have an equal three-by-three grid on your canvas. Where the lines intersect is where you can have something, such as a character or an important story piece. It doesn't have to be all four points, and nor it doesn't exactly have to fall in line with this. It's also okay to break some rules and just experiment.
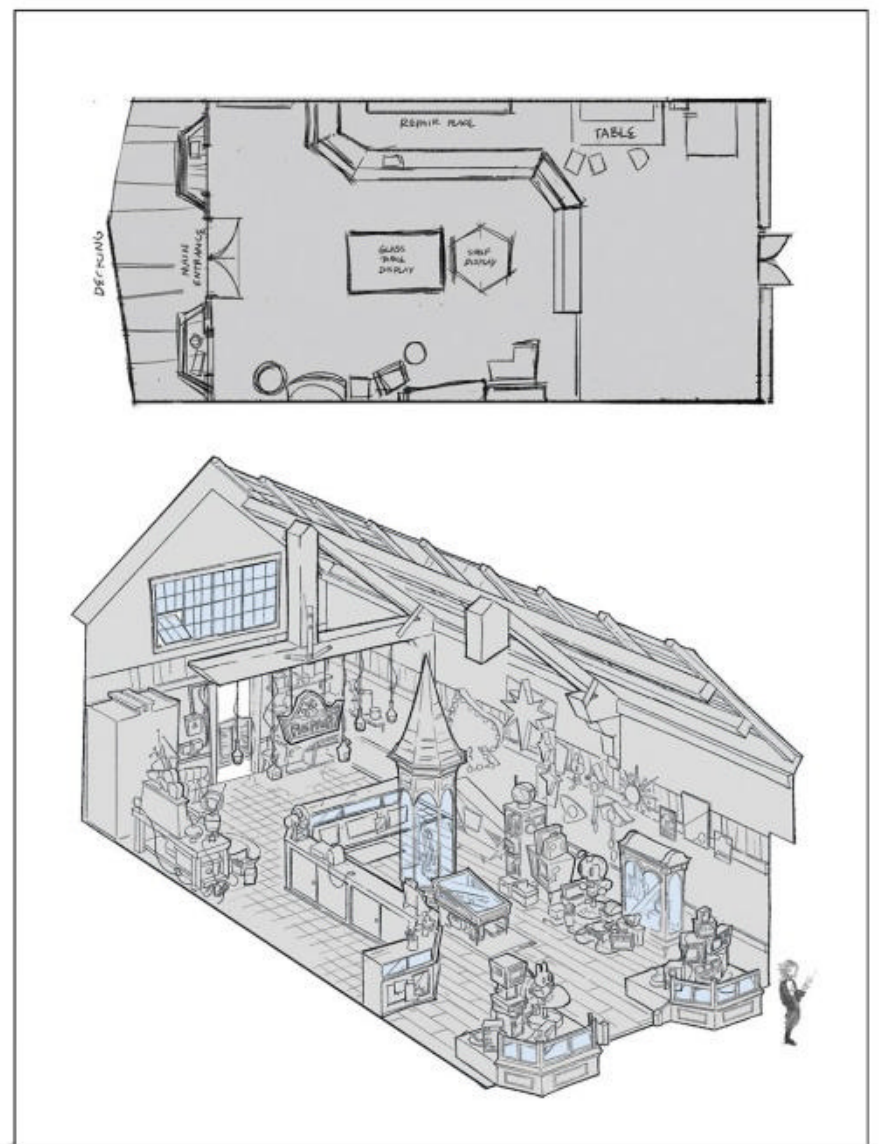
10 FLOOR PLAN

Sometimes designing a space needs you to see where things are. Think of a floor plan as a map or a top-down view of the environment you're designing. Sometimes you need to know the location of items in the space. So, in interiors consider mapping out where the door, furniture or key items are. ➤➤

11 THE PROCESS FOR BACKGROUND DESIGN
Follow these steps for creating strong scenery concepts

Employee one walks in with items from the wasteland. Employee two looks on curiously. Adjectives: excessiveness, curiosity, excitement.

A Visualise your ideas
Set the stage with some thumbnails or rough ideas for the scene. It helps to list the mood you're going for, and from there you can also collect reference images. The more images and details you can plan out, the better.

B Flesh out the sketch
From here, I tend to establish the perspective lines of the environment. I plan out my characters as a scale of reference, flesh out the sketch and the proportions, and then establish the major forms of the objects.

C Choice of rendering
Finally, we get to execute the final look. It's usually common to paint it as line-art – and have it as a greyscale image. Other artists prefer to have it either in grey tones (so it's a line-free look, but with fill shapes instead) or a mix of both!

STILL SHOT

PAN SHOT

ZOOM OUT
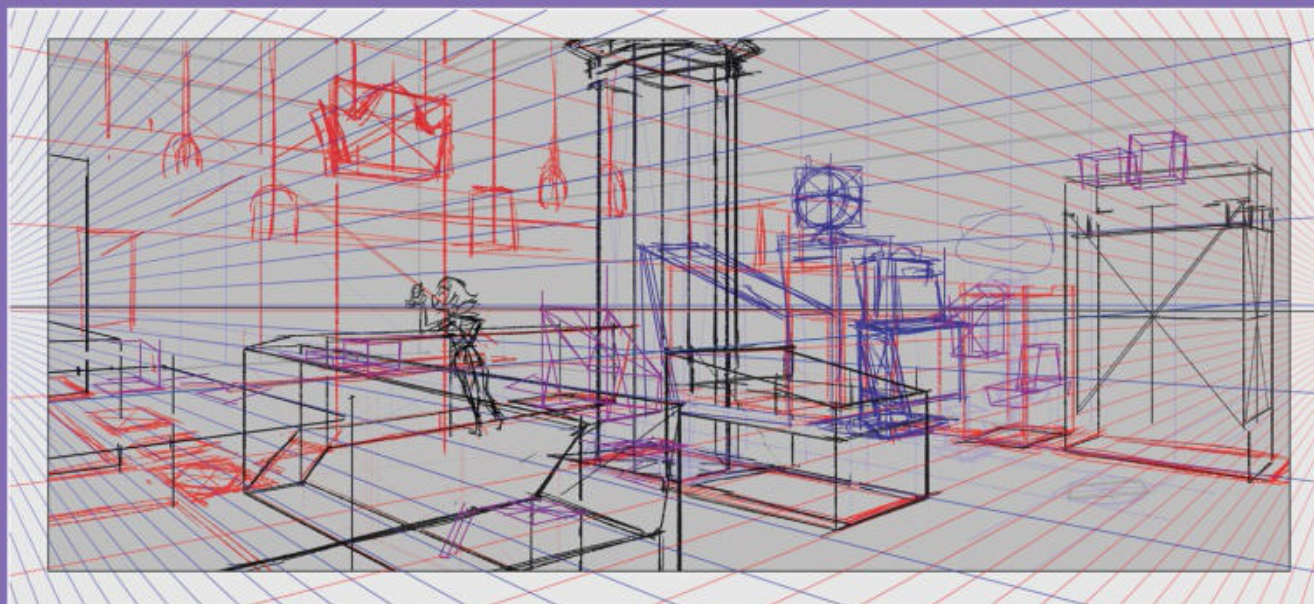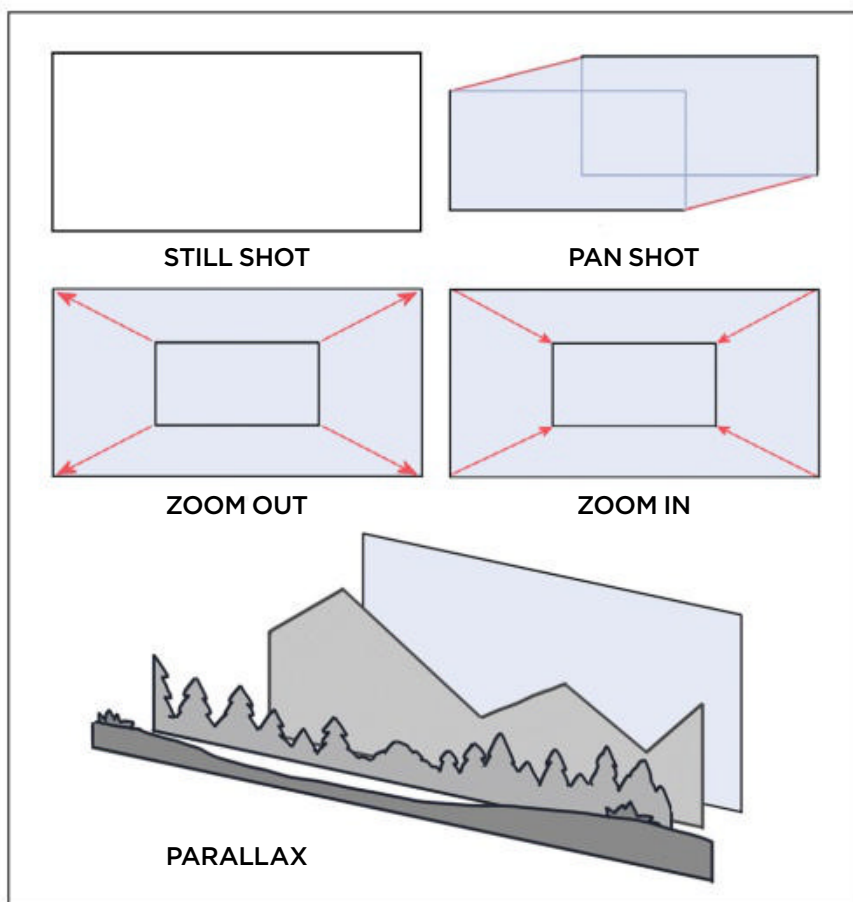
ZOOM IN

PARALLAX

12 COMMON BACKGROUND DESIGN SHOTS

When it comes to background design, some basic cinematography shots you'll encounter are stills, pan shots, zoom in, zoom out and parallax shots (which means as the camera moves, the foreground and background move at different speeds). Usually designers tend to work from a storyboard sequence.

13 CINEMATOGRAPHY FOR INSPIRATION

Studying films is another way to be inspired. Cinematographers are good at conveying mood and storytelling. They tend to play with lighting, shape language and value contrast to communicate a scene. Akira Kurowsawa, Alfred Hitchcock and Gregg Toland are examples of cinematographers who are effective visual storytellers.
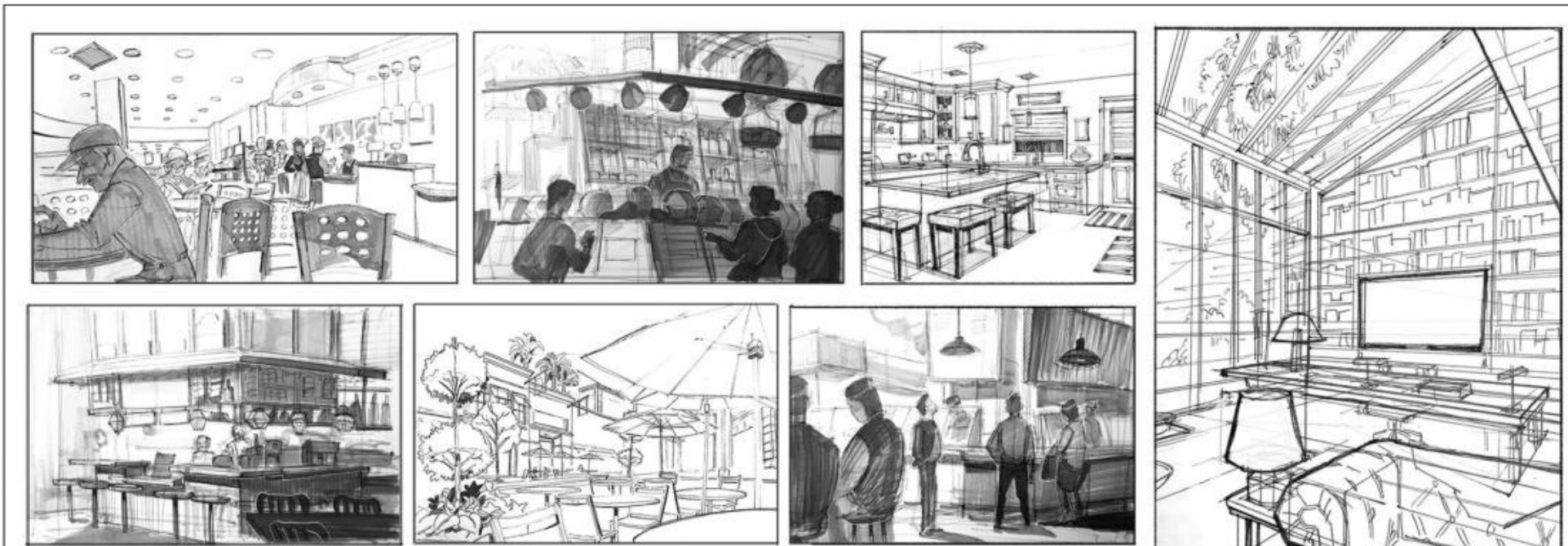

14 STUDY FROM LIFE

When starting out, a good warm-up exercise is to have your sketchbook and pen handy, and observe your environment as you draw. From your point of view, try to find the horizon line and the vanishing points as you look at the objects that surround you.

15 SIMPLIFYING

Sometimes we can get caught up with the details when drawing. Although it's important to communicate to the viewer what they're looking at, sometimes a simpler depiction will suffice. Visualising the main forms of an object is usually enough, without having any extra noise that could end up being a distraction.

COMPLEX ← → SIMPLE
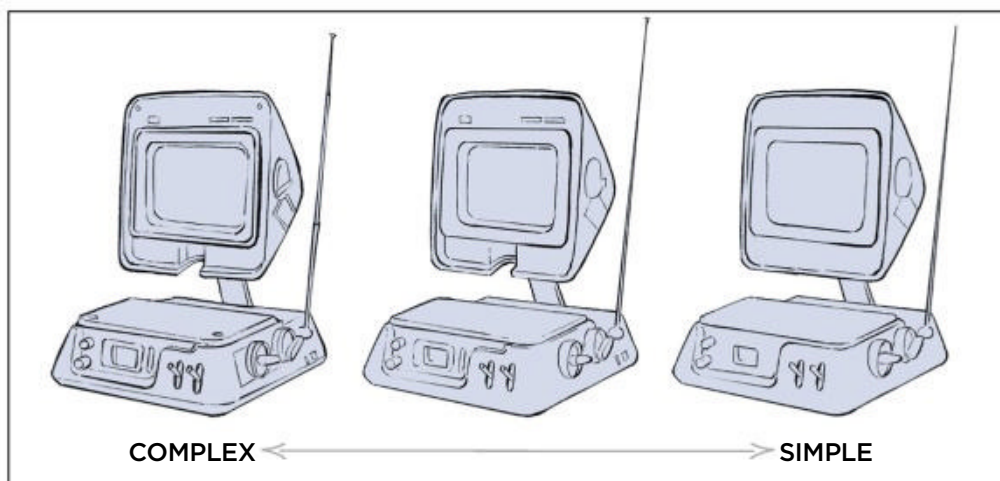
10 TIPS TO GET STARTED IN QUILL

Director and virtual reality creative **Dan Franke** shares his advice for sketching, storyboarding and painting an animation project in VR

Artist PROFILE

Dan Franke
LOCATION: Germany

Dan is a director and VR artist based in Germany. He's the co-founder of Studio Syro, a virtual animation studio with an international team of artists. He's working on the second season of Tales from Soda Island, the world's first VR series that's entirely created in VR.
studiosyro.com

When we came to make our new VR animated short Namoo, which we call a narrative poem brought to life, Oculus Quill was the obvious choice to achieve the painterly look we wanted. Quill is a VR painting and animation software created by Smoothstep, which enables you to make art in a virtual space, in 360 degrees. It's quite amazing and not too challenging to pick up and begin having fun with.

Imagine not being limited to painting on a 2D surface such as on a drawing tablet, but in 3D and all around you, and then taking your creations in your hand and moving them through space to animate them. This is what Quill offers, and while we've used it to create our movie, it can be used for all sorts of VR art and animation projects.

In the following 10 tips I'll walk you through some key capabilities of Quill and the things to keep in mind when creating a VR film like Namoo. We'll look at sketching in a 3D space, using the software to storyboard, animating frame-by-frame… all sorts of tips and techniques to get you started.
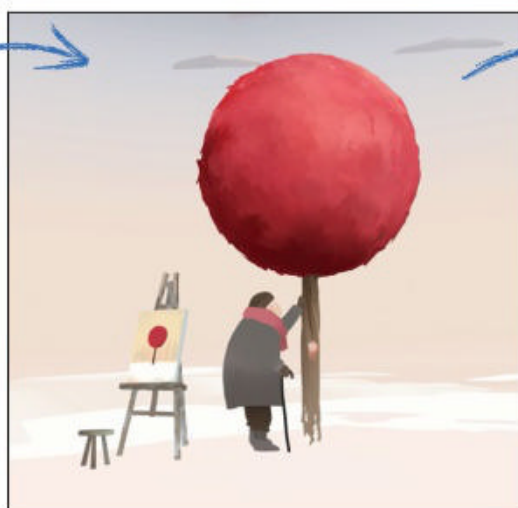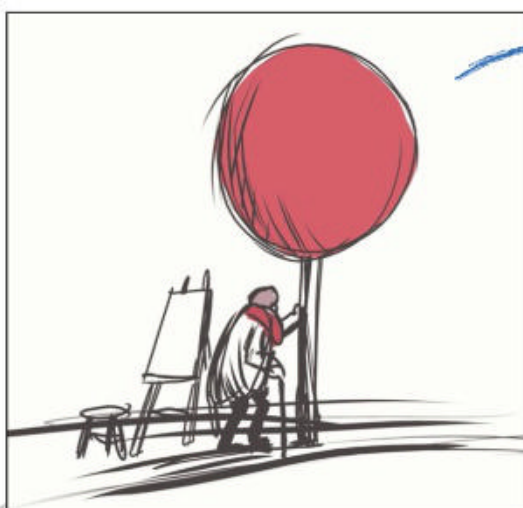
1 SKETCHING IN QUILL

To generate an idea of a scene in VR, you can either create a line-drawing to suggest environments and character poses, or block out shapes with a grey box set, using primitive shapes and broad brushstrokes. Keep it loose and create variations of ideas you like. Drawing sets in a virtual space enables you to freely move through your scenes to try out different camera angles and character staging. This workflow is similar to blocking a scene in a 3D program.
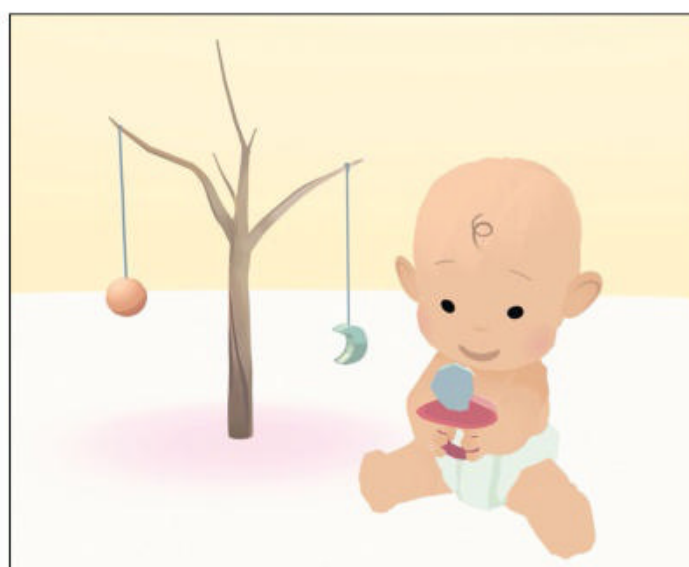
2 GET STORYBOARDING

Rather than editing a 2D animatic first before creating a 3D pre-viz, in Quill you can combine both processes into one step by painting and editing storyboards directly in 3D. For the first scene of Namoo we created a rough 3D model of the toddler next to the tree and then puppeteered the baby through the scene. To do this you enable Transform Mode on the layer and the Record option, and then simply grab and move the layer through space.
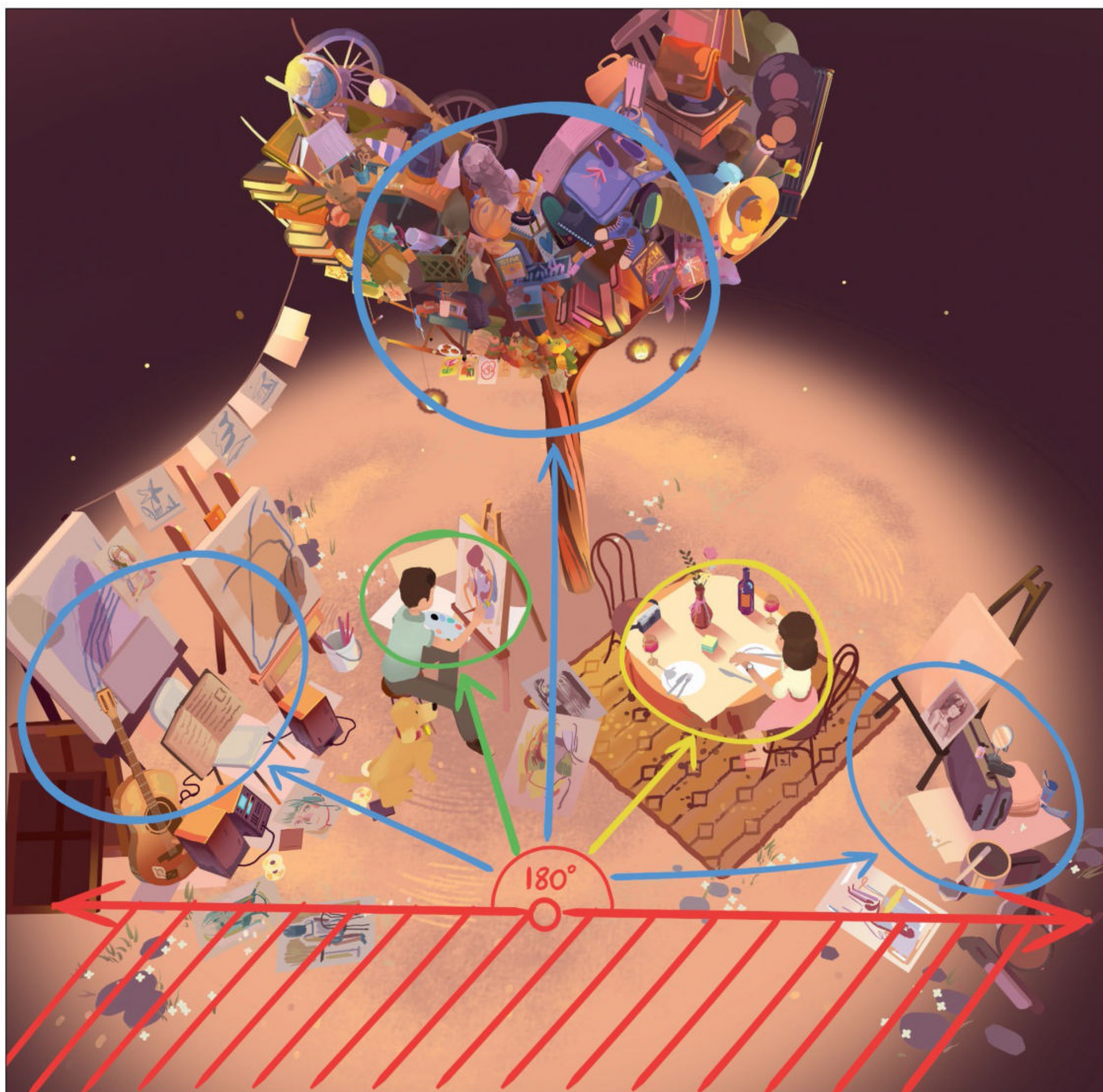
3 DESIGN A 180 DEGREE SPACE

Viewers often watch VR while seated, which makes it uncomfortable to turn around. I usually design the space for 180 degrees, so the viewer has to only turn 90 degrees to either side. In Namoo the tree serves as the main focal point and stays in the centre of the composition with the scene designed around it. We made sure to have focal points that guide the viewer's eye through the scene and to not add distracting details near the 180 degree line or behind the viewer.
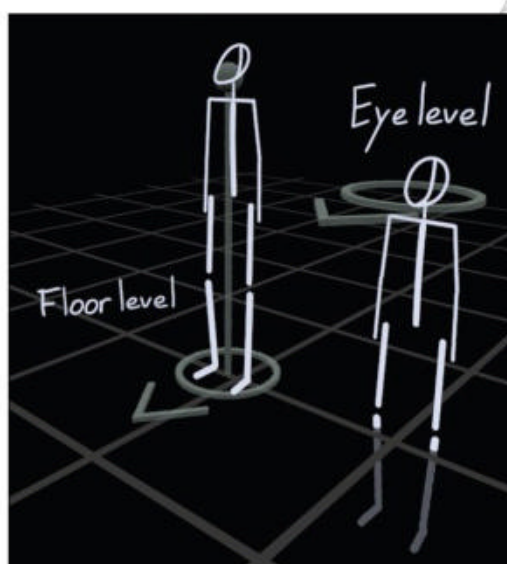
4 SPAWN AREAS

A Spawn Area in Quill controls the position of the viewer in the scene. By clicking the Spawn Area layer you can switch between Eye level or Floor level. Namoo uses an Eye level-based Spawn Area to make sure every viewer experiences the film from the same perspective, no matter their height. When animating a Spawn Area using Transform Keys, make sure the movement is slow and steady to avoid making the viewer feel nauseous. ➤➤
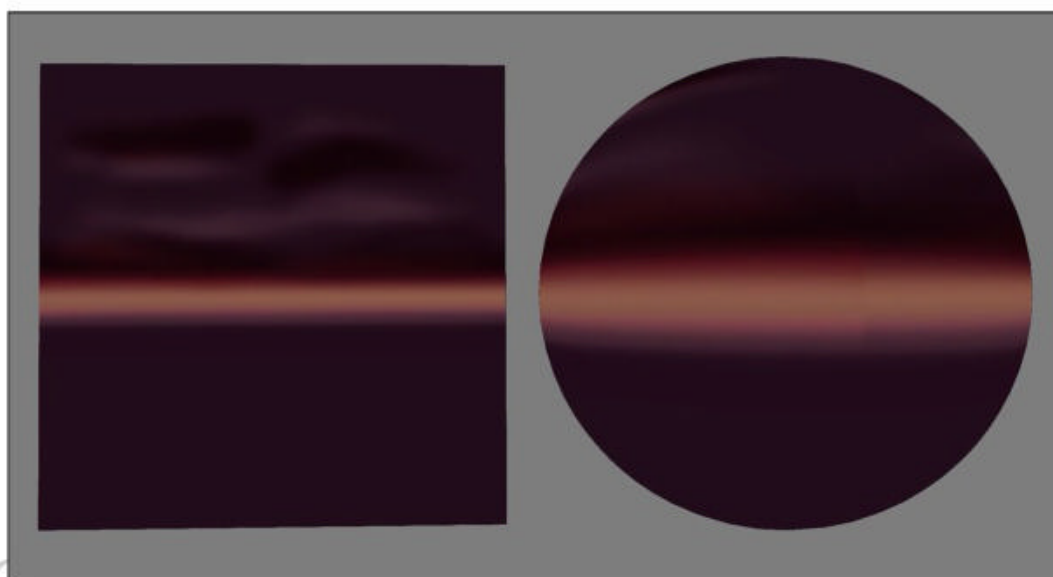
5 USING PNG IMAGES

Quill only offers a limited set of brushes based on primitive shapes, making it tricky to add detailed textures to your painting. It can sometimes be helpful to import a flat .PNG image layer. When importing an image you can also select the 3D equirectangular option. This stretches the image along a sphere, creating a perfect skybox! Using images rather than brush stroke meshes reduces your polycount, but be careful to keep the image resolution low (around 2k) to not use up too much space in your Quill file.

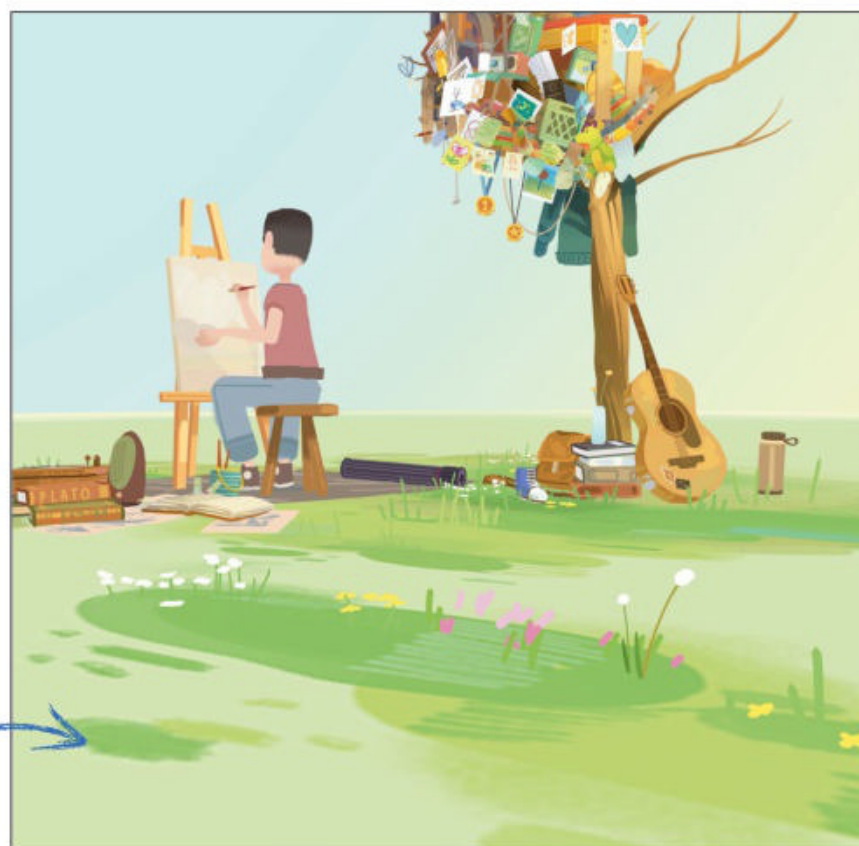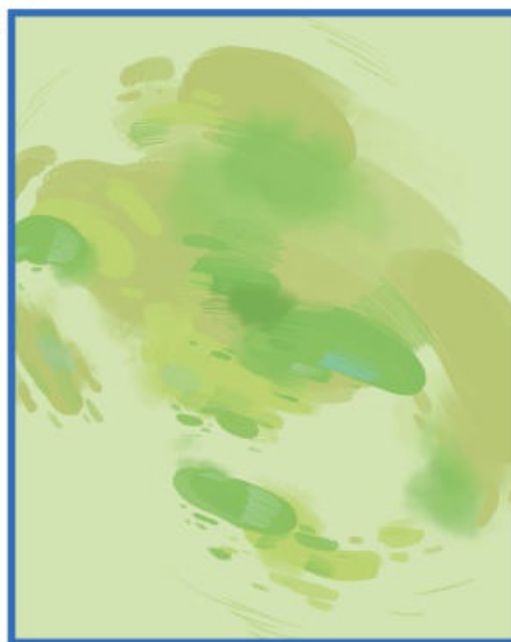> 66 Be careful to keep the image resolution low (around 2k) to not use up too much space in your Quill file 99
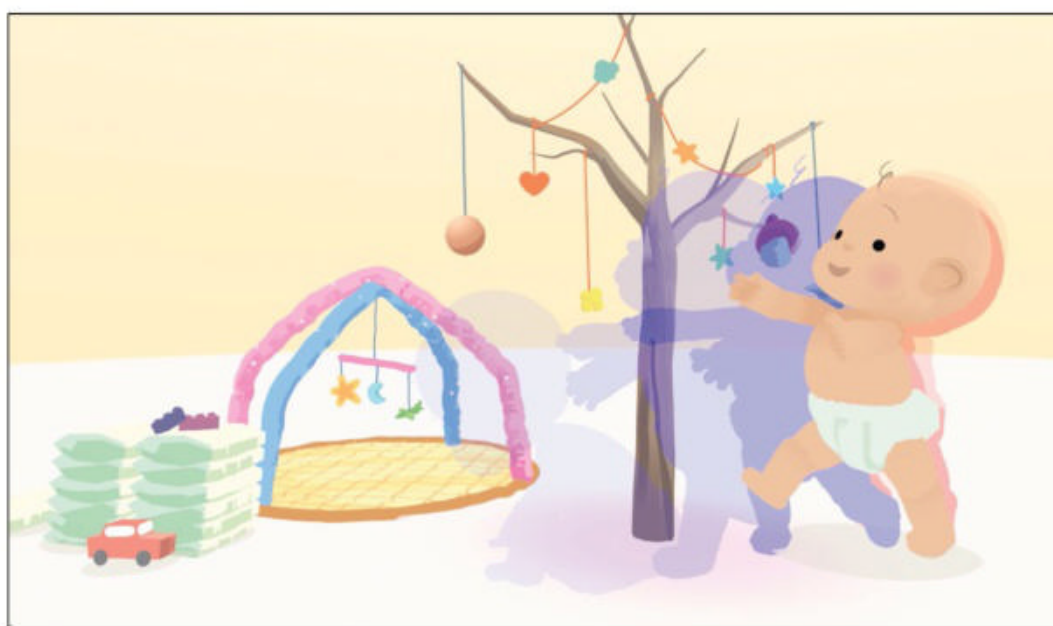
6 ANIMATING FRAME BY FRAME

The Frame by Frame animation process in Quill combines the haptic feeling of handmade stop-motion with the advantages of 2D animation, such as adding inbetweens or smear frames. To animate frame by frame, you select the mesh, move and shape it, then duplicate the entire mesh to the next frame and repeat the process. Every frame adds to the overall mesh data and costs file space, but the animation is much more versatile and can easily be squashed and stretched with the powerful Grab Tool.

57k   17k

7 WATCH YOUR POLYCOUNT

Quill experiences have to be watchable on the Oculus Quest, an untethered mobile VR headset. Therefore you have to follow certain rules for optimal performance. The entire film has to be below 1.5Gb and can never have either 1.2 million polygons or 65 drawcalls (layers) visible at the same time. The Performance menu highlights areas that need to be optimised, which can be done by reducing polycount with the Optimise Brush or merging layers to reduce drawcalls. Be careful to never merge a static layer with an animated one!
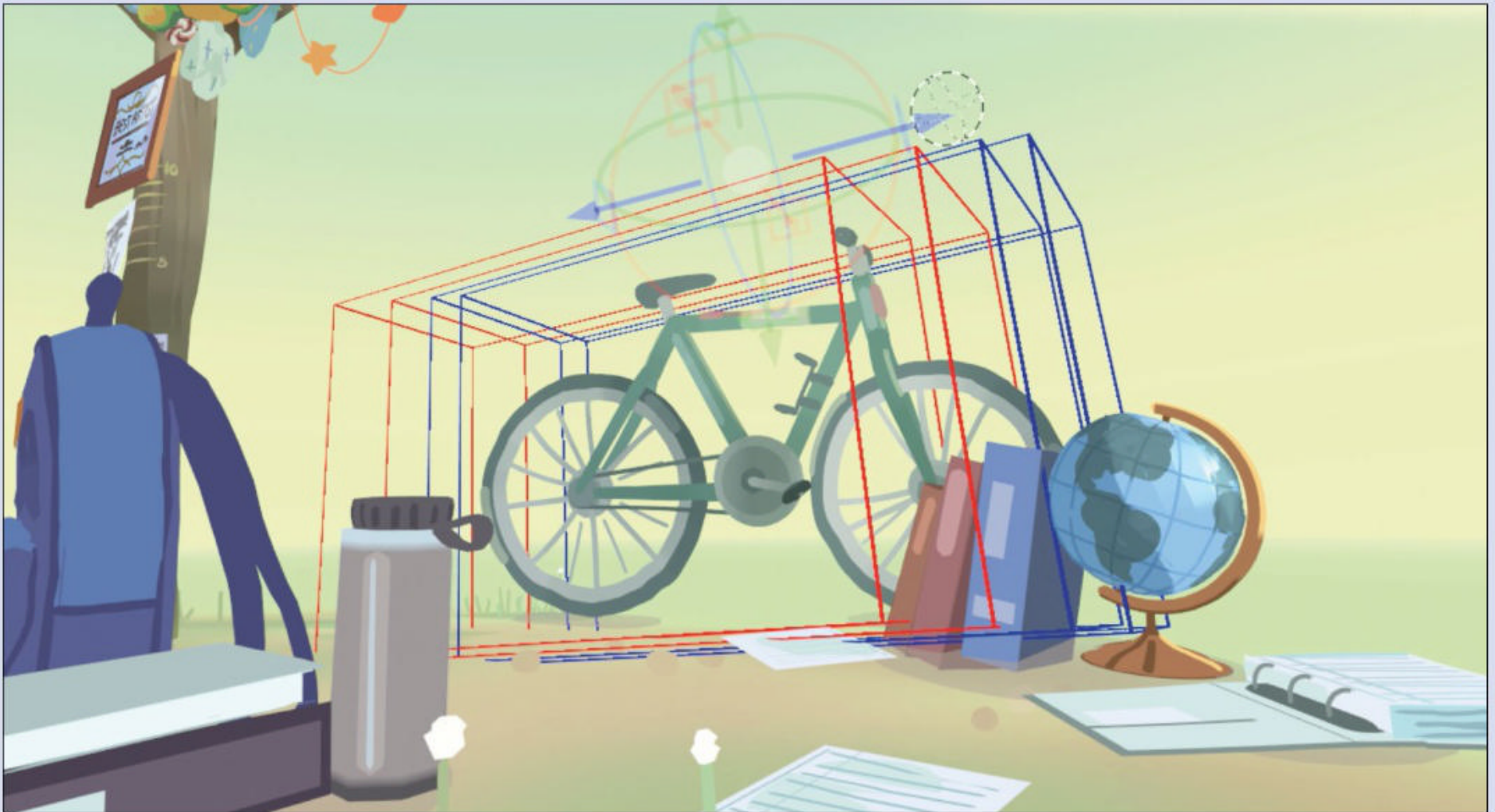
8 TRANSFORM KEYS

Transform Key animation is similar to 3D animation with interpolation between keyframes. Transform Keys can only be applied to a whole layer, so to animate a character you have to create a "rig" by separating body parts into layers and then grouping them in the right order. Only storing transform data makes your file much lighter, but it generates more drawcalls. For Namoo we preferred to animate characters with more flexible frame-by-frame animation and used Transform Keys mainly for simple objects.

9 ANIMBRUSH: ADDING EFFECTS IN SECONDS

The Animbrush is a truly magical tool that enables you to animate effects simply by moving your hand through space. To use it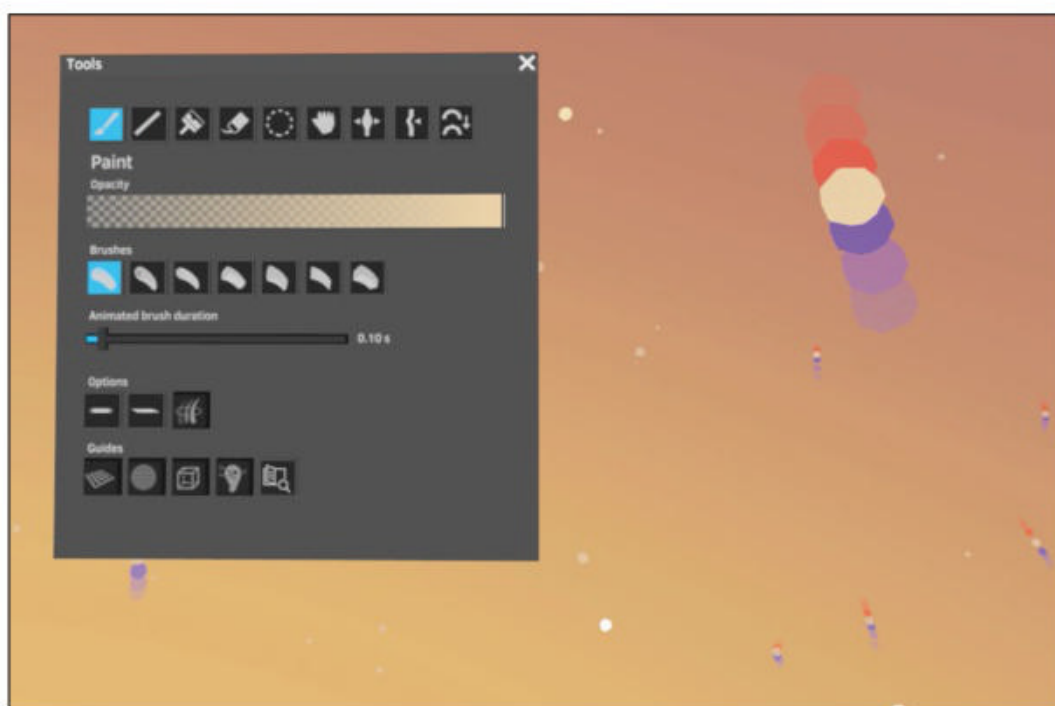, create a new layer, add a few empty frames, set the layer to Loop, hit Play on the timeline and start painting. The movement and speed of your brushstroke are recorded, creating an animated stroke in real time. You can control the length of the brushstroke by moving the animated brush duration slider in the Tool options. In Namoo we used Animbrush to create rain, wind and snow. Rain, wind, snow and other effects in Namoo were all done with this fun tool.

10 EDITING IN VR

To edit in Quill, group your scenes into Sequence Layers and cut them by using In and Out timeline keyframes. Cuts in VR can be jarring and disorienting. To prevent that, make sure to guide the viewer's eye to a certain area in the scene and then place the point of interest in the next shot in the same spot. For a few cuts in Namoo we chose to wipe an object, for example a cloud, in front of the viewer to completely hide a cut. This creates a smooth transition into the next scene and is especially useful when cutting between moving shots.

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
Reviews

The latest art resources are put to the test by the ImagineFX team…

5 PRODUCTS ON TEST
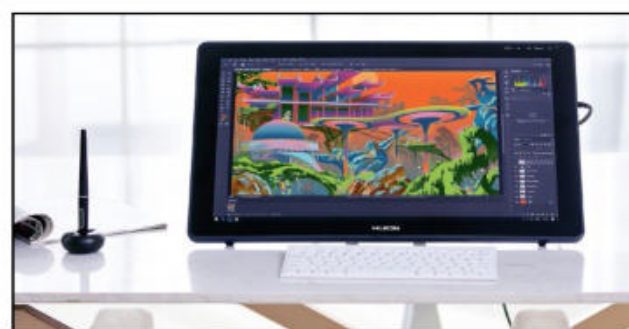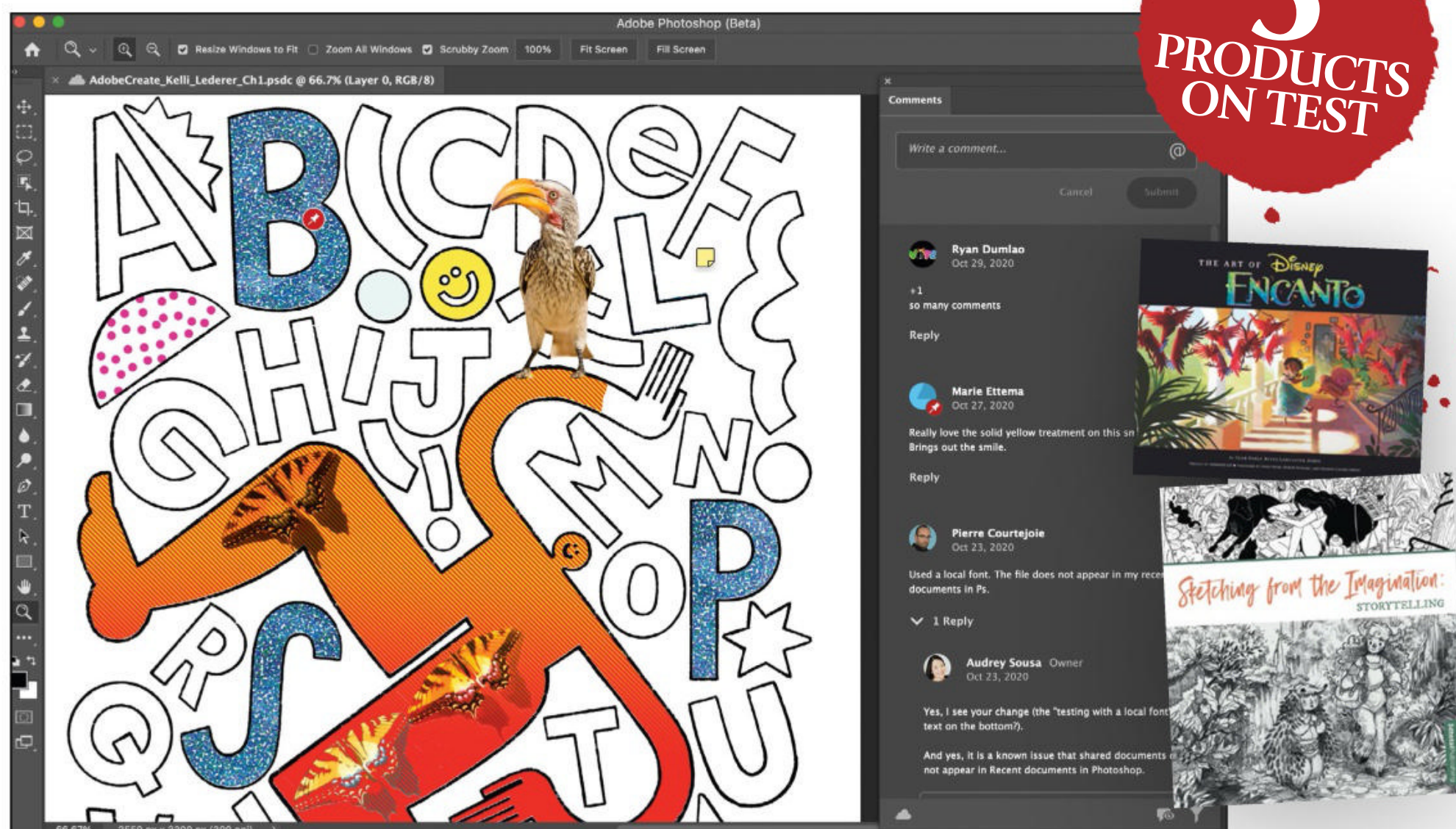
SOFTWARE AND HARDWARE

82 Photoshop 2022
The industry-standard creative software now comes crammed with AI power.

83 Kamvas 22 Plus
This update has a screen as good as any other mid-weight pen display around.

84 Intangbo
Can this tablet cram in the same features as an XP-Pen, for less than half the price?

BOOKS

85 The Art of Encanto
Discover how reference helped inform the visual development of Disney's latest film.
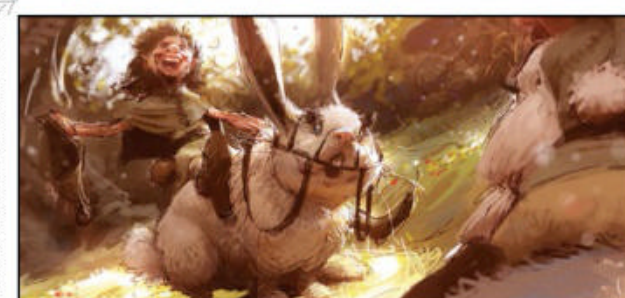
85 Sketching from the Imagination: Storytelling
Get help strengthening your art narratives.

RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ Magnificent   ★★★★ Great   ★★★ Good   ★★ Poor   ★ Atrocious

Work corroboratively in Photoshop 2022 with commenting from fellow artists.
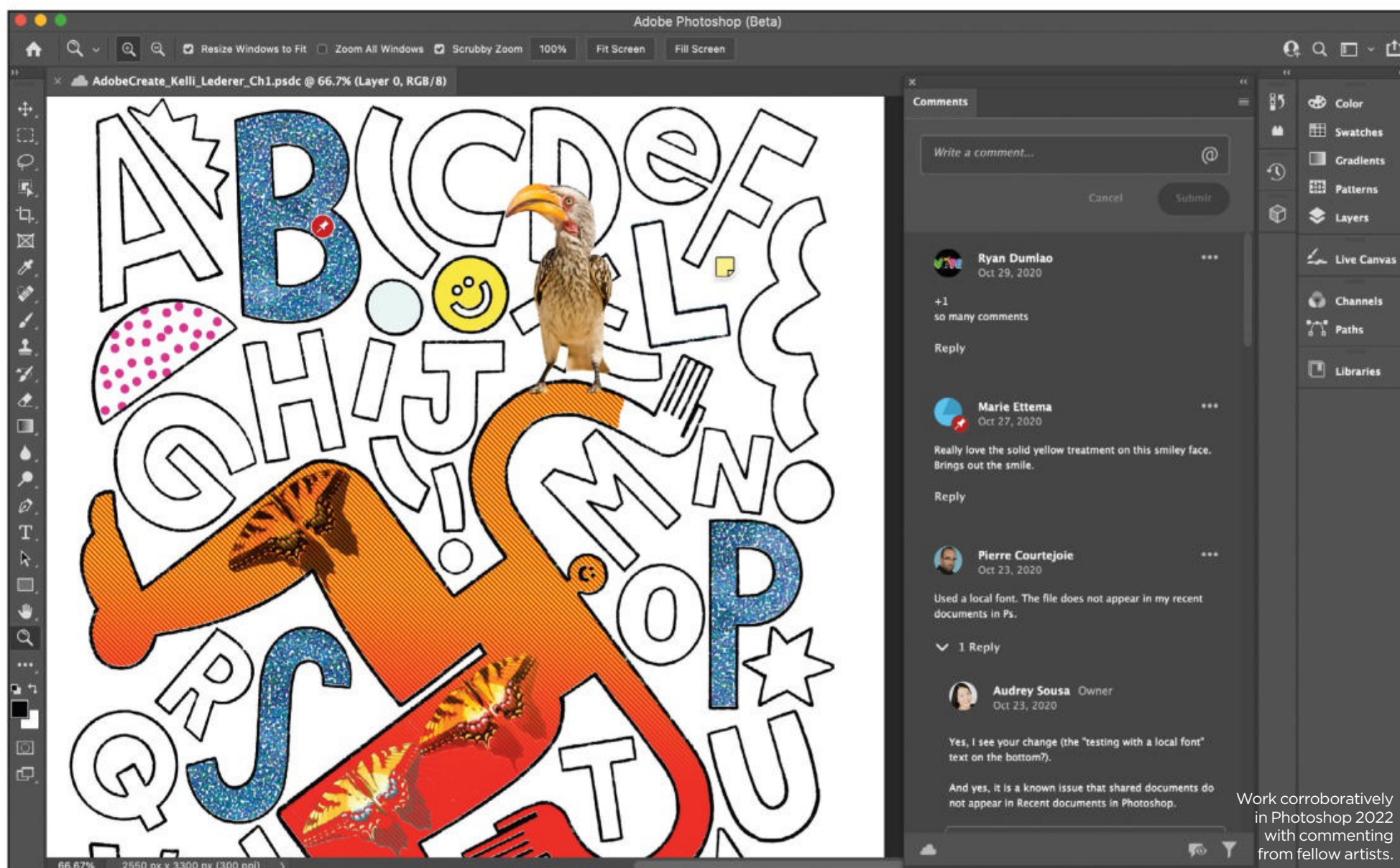
Photoshop 2022

INTELLIGENT ART The industry-standard creative software now comes crammed with AI power to help you create even better artwork

Price £49.99 Creative Cloud subscription, £19.97 Photoshop-only subscription **Company** Adobe **Web** adobe.com

The latest version of Photoshop is powered by Adobe Sensei, and is a significant leap forward in the program's artificially intelligent neural filters, which scans images and cleverly makes changes to complete a multitude of tasks.

Simply hover over subjects to view an automatic selection for faster masking, and share images with others for feedback and commenting. Improved cross-compatibility with Illustrator means vector images can now be imported with colour, stroke and other properties – maintaining layer structure and vector masks.

New beta neural filters are available for experimenting with. Choose from the landscape mixer, colour transfer and harmonisation.

The ability to add seemingly unlimited layers in a project means the sky's the limit when it comes to editing art. Each layer can contain photos, graphics or text, and are easily masked or blended together with various modes and opacity options.

Every useful tool you might need to edit exposure, colour, definition, size or shape are all available both as destructive and non-destructive entities via the Image Adjustments tab and Adjustment Layers menus.

GET CONNECTED

Options to save progress in edits favour artists who like to go back over their working while creating, refining brush strokes, blending modes or masking out unwanted sections.

Frame animations are simple to create using the tools for timeline animations. This feature makes Photoshop useful for some moving graphics as well as editing stills.

It's in how Photoshop 2022 connects to other Adobe software and services that impresses. This is great for artists as integration between Illustrator and Photoshop means it's easier to maintain layer structure and other properties between programs.

> ❝ The Super Zoom feature will automatically fill in lost detail while also resizing ❞

Unfortunately, 3D artists will have to look elsewhere for their 3D answers as Adobe are planning on phasing this aspect of the software out due to technical issues.

There are some further downsides for artists. Many of the new Neural filters, powered by Adobe Sensei, are

You can nondestructively edit Smart Objects, such as an Illustrator file, and preserve its original characteristics.
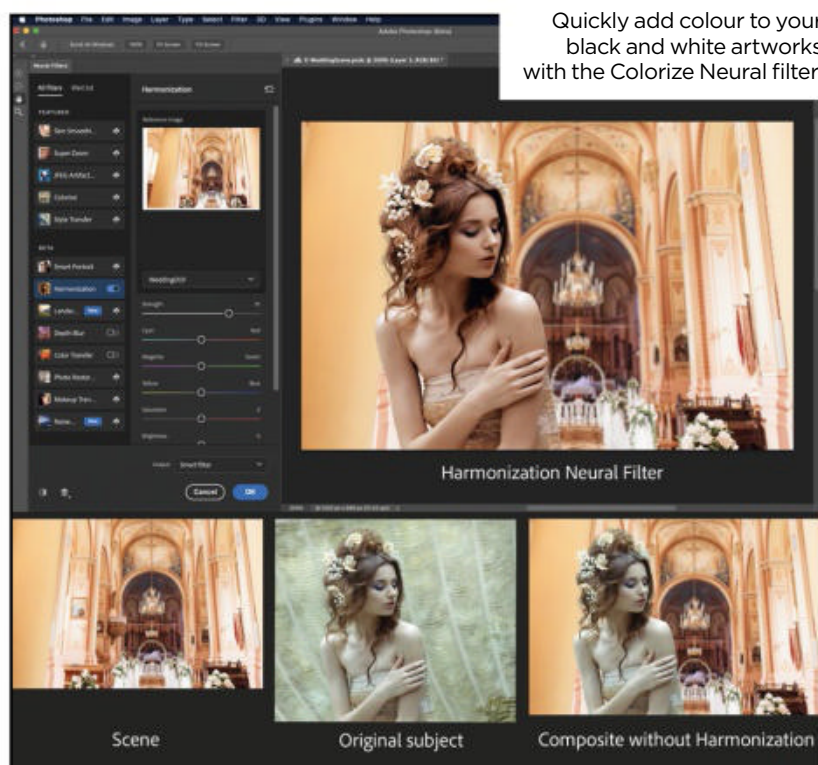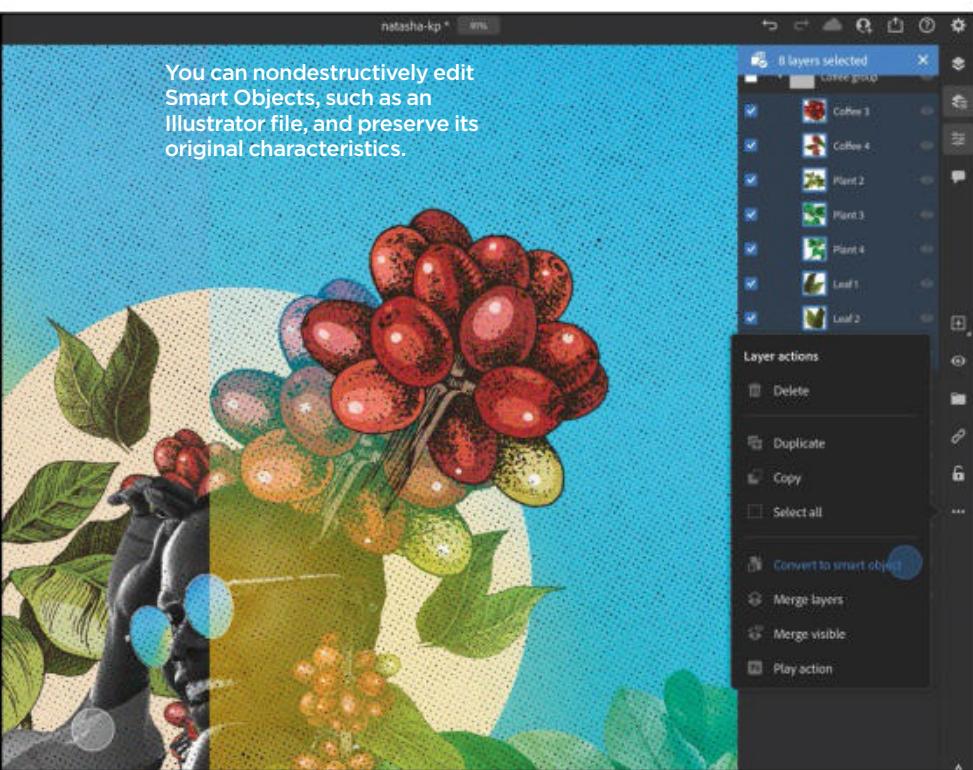
Quickly add colour to your black and white artworks with the Colorize Neural filter.

aimed squarely at photographers and designers. For example, Skin Smoothing speeds up editing portraits, offering up tools to blur and smooth skin. Meanwhile, the Super Zoom feature will automatically fill in lost detail while also resizing. Perfect for both cropping in on details in a larger image or enhancing the size of distant subjects. The Colorize Neural filter will turn black and white photos into colour at a click. All are great additions, and we're sure savvy digital painters will bend these new tools to their own uses, particularly in the speed-intense world of concept art.

It's clear Photoshop 2022 is full of tricks and new AI-powered features that can be used – and abused of course – in new ways. As ever, it's not what the tools are, but how you can inventively adapt them to your creative process. ●

DETAILS

Features
■ Extended plugins
■ Enhanced management of colour and HDR features
■ Unified text engine
■ A new modern oil paint filter
■ New Gradient tool
■ New camera and lens support

System Requirements
PC: Intel or AMD CPU with 64-bit support, 2GHz or faster CPU with SSE 4.2 or later, Windows 10 64-bit or later, GPU with DirectX 12
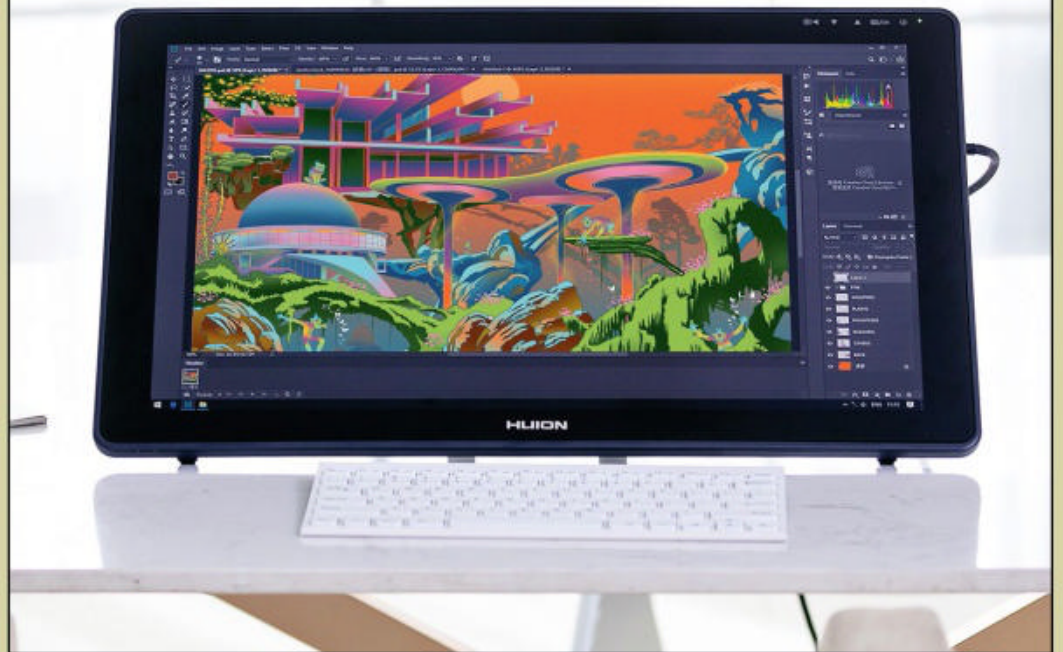**Mac:** Intel CPU with 64-bit support; 2GHz or faster CPU with SSE 4.2 or later, macOS Catalina or later, GPU with Metal support

Rating
★★★★★

Use the Kamvas 22's built-in stand to adjust the drawing position, or attach your own arm mount via the 75x75mm VESA mounting point.

Kamvas 22 Plus

LEVEL UP This update has a screen as good as any other mid-weight pen display on the market

Price £520	
Company	
Web huion.com	

RATING ★★★★☆

The Kamvas range is Huion's answer to Wacom's Cintiq, but at a fraction of the cost. This means you get a large pen display for around £500. The Kamvas 22 Plus is an upgrade to the existing tablet, so can it compete with Wacom?

First off, at 22 inches the screen is a nice size and unlike its older Kamvas 22 namesake comes with an etched anti-glare glass screen rather than the 22's mere anti-glare film, which means the screen is going to last a whole lot longer. The acid-etching adds a very slight texture that makes the drawing experience that little more refined.

Not only does the surface feel great to draw on, but the anti-glare works a real treat, too.

Drawing experience is good. Full lamination means the glass is very close to the LCD screen beneath, meaning the nib feels close to the cursor and gives the impression that you're drawing directly on the surface. And although the Huion Kamvas 22 Plus doesn't have touch capabilities, the drawing experience is excellent.

The PW517 pen has standard levels of pressure sensitivity and is a solid stylus, although it lacks nib varieties. In fact, the build quality overall is good – we particularly love the large, sturdy stand.

The hero here is clearly the screen with shortcuts taken in lack of touch screen and broader features. For the price it's recommended.
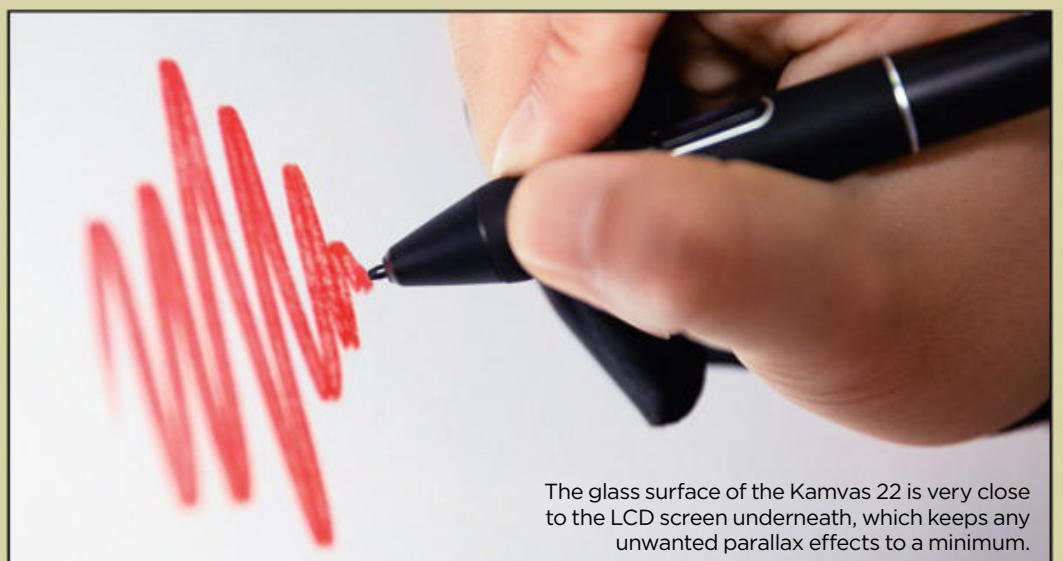
The glass surface of the Kamvas 22 is very close to the LCD screen underneath, which keeps any unwanted parallax effects to a minimum.

Photo: Parblo

The Lilac Purple model is a fun colour and complements the mobile nature of the Intangbo tablet.

Intangbo

RIGHT PRICE Can this tablet from Chinese manufacturer Parblo cram in the same features as an XP-Pen, for less than half the price?

Price £70 **Company** Parblo **Web** parblo.com

This tablet from relative newcomers Parblo (it's been going for six years) is a fun and affordable addition to the growing sector that has enough tech to draw attention away from mainstays such as Wacom and XP-Pen's higher-priced tools.

Out of the box the Intangbo comes with a pen stylus and ink-well style holder, drawing glove, USB-C cable and adaptors, and screen wipe. In keeping with the youthful feel you also get some stylish stickers, too.

The tablet is available in two sizes: Medium (10x6.25 inches) and Small (7x4 inches). We're testing the Medium model; the Small offering feels *too* small, though it does fit into Intangbo's mobile approach. As well

as supporting Windows and Mac, this tablet is also compatible with Android, so it's perfect for Chromebooks and use with a mobile phone. Better still, this means it's plug-and-draw: simply connect the cable and go – no drivers or downloads required.

GRAPHIC APPEAL

The tablet feels light but is solid. It features 8,192 levels of pressure sensitivity, which is excellent and on a par with far more expensive tablets such as the XP-PEN Artist 12. Combined with a screen resolution of 5,080LPI (lines per inch) and 266RPS read rate, the Intangbo offers a great drawing experience.

While the tablet itself is excellent, the pen is a little light in the hand, and

The pen is a little light in the hand and the buttons can feel flimsy. However, with 60 degrees of tilt the tech is excellent.

DETAILS

Features
- Two sizes: Medium (10x6.25 inches) and Small (7x4 inches)
- 8,192 pen pressure levels of sensitivity
- 60 degree tilt functionality
- 5,080 LPI and 266RPS reading rate

System Requirements
PC: Windows 7, 8, 10 or above
Mac: OS X 10.11 or better
Mobile: Android 6.0 or above

Rating
★★★★☆

lacks a weight to its nib end to give a satisfying sense of connection to the tablet. This is a personal preference, however; with a tilt function of 60 degrees you can tilt the pen to emulate the feel of a brush or charcoal.

One downside is the tablet doesn't come with a stand to make full use of the pen's tilt feature. You can buy a sturdy metal stand, but it's a sign the price point has some limitations.

Regardless of a lack of stand, it's hard not to love the Intangbo. The tablet packs in the features you'd expect to see in higher-end products and is incredibly easy to set up and begin using within seconds.

> ❝ The tablet features 8,192 levels of pressure sensitivity, which is on a par with far more expensive tablets ❞

The Art of Encanto

TALENT SPOTTING Discover how a wealth of reference material helped inform the visual development of Disney's latest magic-laden movie

Authors Juan Pablo Reyes Lancaster Jones **Publisher** Chronicle Books **Price** £30 **Web** chroniclebooks.com **Available** Now

Disney's 60th animated film has one foot in the fantastical, the other in South America. This art-of book reveals the lengths at which the production team went to ensure their real-world visuals rang true.

At the heart of Encanto is a tale about a family from Columbia, and the book proudly charts the team's reference-gathering efforts. Trips to towns and cities in the country's five distinct regions helped inform their
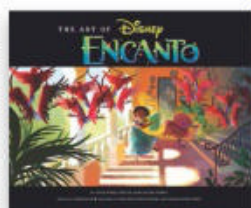

Clothing and shoe explorations by Neysa Bové, for the film's lead character Mirabel.

© Disney

characters' costumes, the locale of the enchanted house, and the animals that interact with the family. Conversations with Latino and Latina, and Afro-Columbian experts further defined the look of the Madrigal household.

Ensuring this knowledge dovetailed into the story's requirements was the job of the vis-dev and concept artists. Chapters provide insight into the design process behind lead character Mirabel and her large family. On average a paragraph per page spread helps to explain the direction of the process, and why certain ideas weren't taken further. Body poses, facial expressions, storyboards and more are on show, providing a rich seam to mine for those readers interested in making their mark in the animation industry.

RATING ★★★★☆
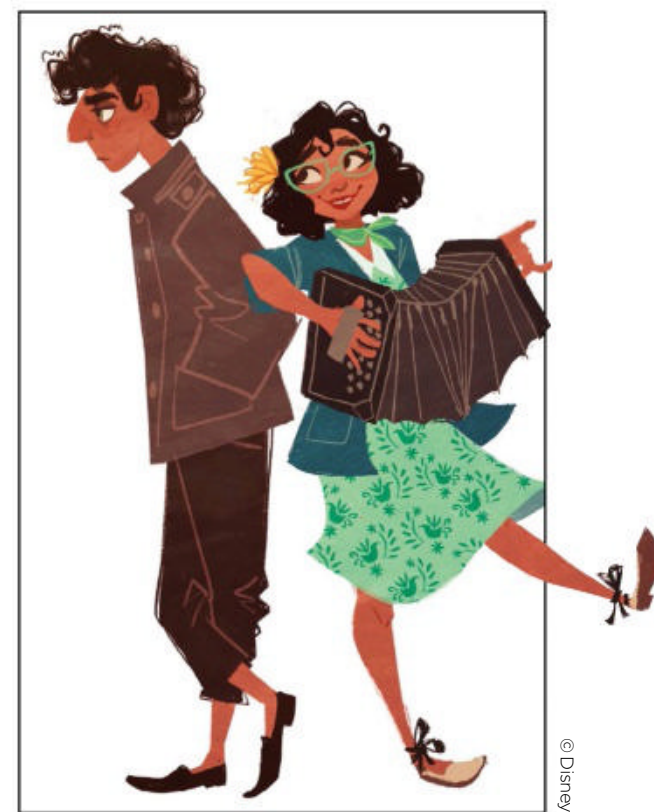
© Disney
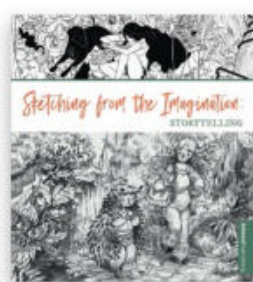Vis-dev artist Meg Park illustrates a character beat between Mirabel and an early version of Bruno.

Sketching from the Imagination: Storytelling

TELLING TALES Do you need help strengthening the narrative you're developing in your art? Then this book might have the answers...

Author Marisa Lewis **Publisher** 3dtotal Publishing **Price** £26 **Web** 3dtotal.com **Available** Now

Fifty international artists reveal their approach to visual storytelling, in the latest instalment of 3dtotal's Sketching from the Imagination series.

As you'd might expect, the pro advice on offer varies tremendously; the topic doesn't lend itself to

Henrik Fetz says there are times when he's almost overwhelmed by ideas and can't catch them fast enough.

straightforward art stratagems. But this works in Storytelling's favour; each artist provides a refreshingly different take on how to engage the viewer through composition, detail and emotion. Their life experiences and line of work often factor into their insight, further adding to the book's appeal.

The 50 entries follow the same format: a paragraph or two on the artist's education, career to date and their creative outlook, followed by their inspiration and ideas, and their art materials and techniques. There are also standalone tips that range from a new approach to learning, to exploring your home culture.

Enveloping the text-based guidance is, of course, artwork from the

Japan-based illustrator Tono takes inspiration from "beautiful insects and flowers."

contributors. Most of it comprises line sketches, but there are more rendered pieces on display, too. The styles may not be to everyone's taste, but each piece contributes to the storytelling drive that the book is keen to impress on the reader.

RATING ★★★★☆

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

This issue:

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

Iryna Khymych

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Oil **WEB:** irynakhymych.com

Originally from the Ukraine, Iryna studied English literature in New York City. "Today, I'm a freelance illustrator who loves to paint strong characters."

1 PERSEPHONE GODDESS OF SPRING
"Persephone at the entrance to the underworld. I wanted to combine the imagery of death and rebirth."

2 SUNRISE GUARDIAN
"In this painting I wanted to depict a priestess who's guarding an archway to the otherworld."

3 KALADIN STORMBLESSED
"This painting of Kaladin Stormblessed is based on Brandon Sanderson's series of fantasy novels, The Stormlight Archive."

Want to submit your work? Visit ifxm.ag/getinifx

4 SHALLAN DAVAR
"Also based on Brandon Sanderson's The Stormlight Archive. Shallan bearing her cross, coming to terms with who and what she is."

Want to submit your work? Visit ifxm.ag/getinifx

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Julia Lundman

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Oil, acrylic, watercolour, coloured pencil, graphite **WEB:** julialundman.com

Julia is inspired by folklore, with an interest in the depiction of women in myth and culture. Her work is influenced primarily by the Pre-Raphaelites, Victorian fantasy painters and the natural world.

1 NORTH SEA MERMAID
"Studying sea folk tales and lore inspired me to create this beautiful mermaid luring a Viking to his watery grave."

2 YOUNG DRYAD
"Part of a series of seasonal dryads. I imagine that a tree spirit dryad in the spring will be young, and will age as the year progresses."

3 GARDEN UNICORN
"I was inspired by a medieval unicorn tapestry I saw as a child on a visit to a museum. This is an homage to the magical feeling I had when I first saw it."

4 DEATH OF THE SUN
"As she blots out the sun, the Queen of the Night releases her magical night spirits upon the world."

Want to submit your work? Visit ifxm.ag/getinifx

Want to submit your work? Visit ifxm.ag/getinifx

ImagineFX

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Pencil *Oils*

PAINT A PORTRAIT – PART 3: OILS

In his final part of his portrait series PATRICK J. JONES puts all his preparatory steps to good use, as he creates a fantasy oil painting on stretched canvas

Welcome to the final part of my portrait series. We've spent two workshops bashing out backstory, sketching, working out colour compositions, then photographing a model, before we nailing down a detailed working sketch. Was all this prep worth it? Ask Frank Frazetta, who would spent weeks mulling over ideas and colour sketches before painting a picture, sometimes in a single night. He knew the importance, and so did his collectors, who today willingly bid millions of dollars for his paintings.

> ❝ **What an amazing thing to create something from nothing…** ❞

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

MATERIALS

PAINTING TOOLS
- Liquitex Matte Medium
- Artist's grade oil paints
- Various synthetic brushes
- Canvas
- Masonite board
- Gamsol
- Galkyd Lite medium
- Walnut oil

Frank's story validated my own approach, which is to paint pictures to be proud of for a lifetime. Almost all my paintings are in private collections, but one, Solomon's Loss, hangs on my own wall. Sometimes I can't believe that it came from my own hands. What an amazing thing to create something from nothing that we can love, something that didn't exist, until we decided to explore our inner creativity.

EMOTIONAL DEPTH IS KEY

Not all paintings work on my emotions. For that to happen they need to go deeper than the surface. I have many works from my advertising days that I have no interest in looking at again, because they have none of the emotional depth and metaphor that we explored in the preparation for this painting.

Solid preparation not only strengthens the final painting on an emotional level, it also strengthens the confidence in our hand and mind, because we know its chances of success are much higher than if we were just shooting in the dark. Our colour composition gets us off to a good start as it is, in reality, our final painting on a small scale, but it doesn't mean we should robotically render from that point on. We should treat the painting stage as a new beginning for further exploration. We need to live and breathe the excitement of creation from the first scribble to the final brushstroke, only then can we produce something lasting.

*Patrick is the author of the bestselling books, The Anatomy of Style, The Sci-fi & Fantasy Techniques of Patrick J. Jones and Oil Painting Masterclass. He also teaches figure drawing classes online. You can see more of his work at pjartworks.com.*

1 *A positive drawing of the Martian Queen*
I stretch my canvas onto Masonite Board, which provides a solid base, then I burnish down my reverse drawing with a big spoon, leaving a positive drawing. To make sure the pencil doesn't move I spray a light coat of fixative, then seal it with three coats of Liquitex Matte Medium.
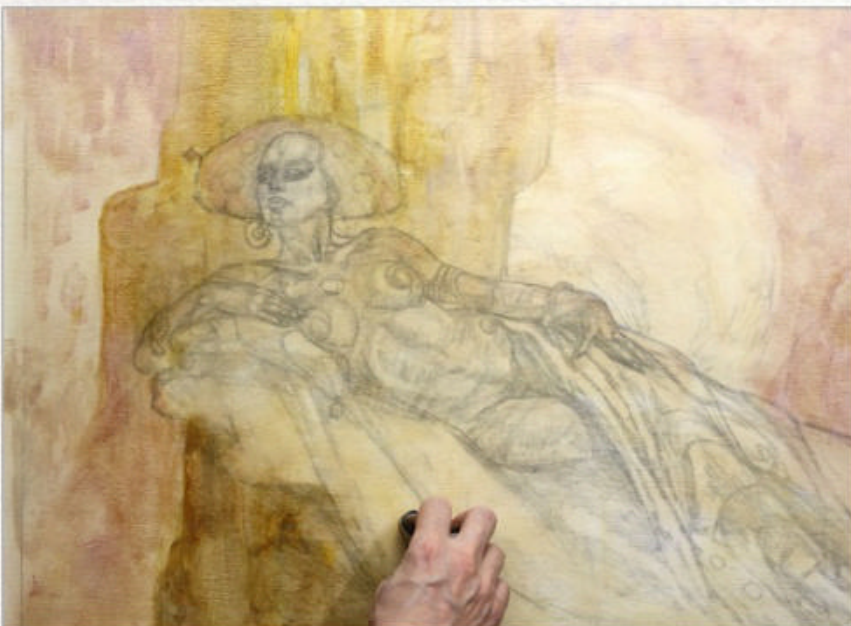
2 *Lay down the underpainting*
I roughen the glossy Matte Medium surface with very fine sandpaper, which gives the paint something to grip, I then clean the surface with solvent. The canvas is now smooth and silky, and I lay down the underpainting, which goes in very quickly due to the surface preparation.

3 *Loosely cover the canvas*
I paint the background first with filbert and angle brushes. I paint with great freedom and I don't worry about edges because the next paint layer will overlap. If I were to start with the figures first and then the background, I would have to be careful twice with the edges. ➤➤

4 Slow down and detail

I slow down to detail the finer points of the figure. This give me a road map that I can wipe back to if necessary once I start blocking in with a bigger brush. I'm using a Mahl stick to keep my hands off the surface. Note also my Parallel Palette, which attaches to a regular tripod.

5 Start the block-in stage

Working with the same philosophy as my drawing process I paint the biggest shapes first. These blocky shapes give me a good overall read on how strong the values should be in relation to each other going forward. This is called the block-in stage for that very reason.


6 Unify the colour palette

I mix analogous colours for both the background and the figure, meaning the figure shares some of the background colour, especially in the flesh, which is oily and reflective. If we don't keep this in mind our figures will look like they don't belong to the environment.

7 Work to a simple structure

I work out my darkest darks and lightest lights. At this point I don't think of blending too much, as this can be confusing early on. What is most important is treating the forms as simple, dimensional structures. Keeping things simple makes it easier to put in the subtle blends later.
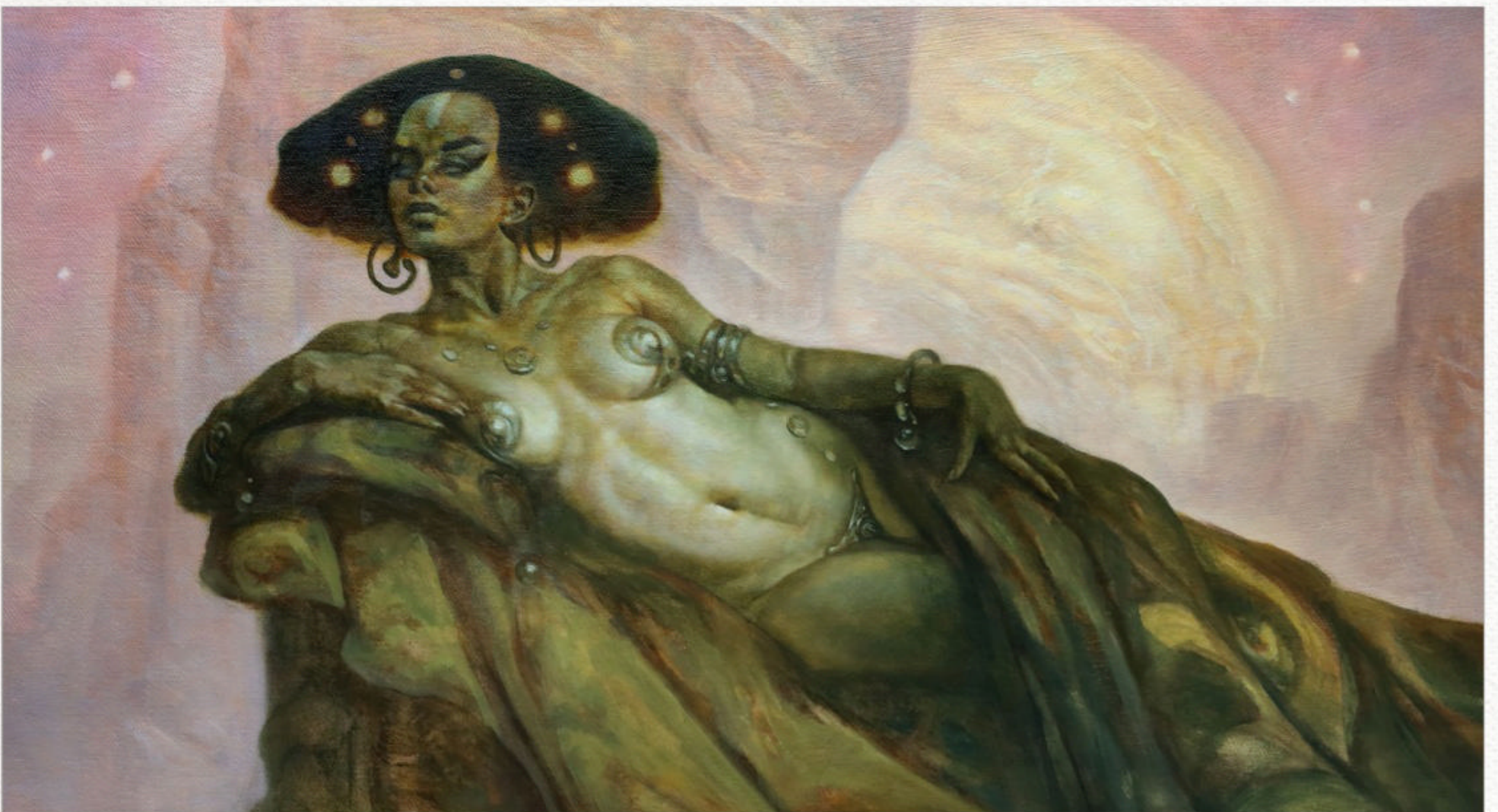

8 Know your brushes

I continue painting with multiple-sized brushes. Some loaded with paint and dry brushes to blend the edges. A handful of brushes for different colours and blends makes short work of it. Make sure you don't confuse the loaded paintbrushes with the dry blending brushes. ➡

9 Use a continuous flow

Painting is generally slower than drawing and it's easy to lose the gesture. I work at arm's-length and keep in mind the sweep of the figure as I paint the florid designs of the cloak, the figure and the luxurious fabrics in a continuous flow.
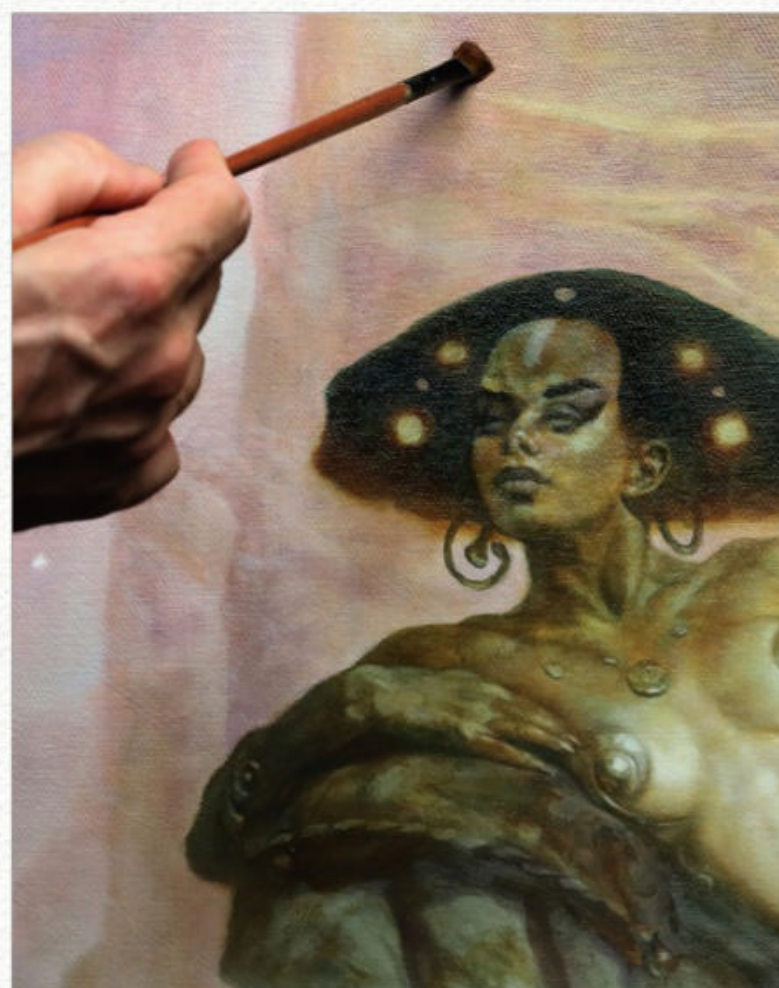
10 Considering colour and value

While I have my big brushes out I work on the larger objects around the figure, painting back and forth to find the right amount of depth. I don't spend too much time on the background in the early stages, knowing I can judge colour and value better once the figure is in place.

11 Adjust the gesture

With everything working in harmony I have the freedom to change and elaborate things already there in place. I add gesture to the jewellery and fabrics. Having played with the idea that the Martian Queen would lay on a bearskin I decide it kills the gesture too much, and change it to a more flowing cloth.

12 How to use brush strokes

I work with more random brushstrokes for the fabric than I do with the more measured brushstrokes and blending of the figure. This adds energy and vibrancy to the painting and also shows off both painting techniques by their very contrast to each other. I want the painting to look like a painting.

13 *Using atmospheric perspective*

The warm background colours of Mars have the illusion of being closer, and I add waterfalls and birds to the background to create an illusion of distance. On Earth distant shapes normally have more blue in them as they recede. This sense of depth via cool colours and light value is known as atmospheric perspective.

14 *Manage the lighting*

As I finish the painting I constantly adjust the lighting to keep the focus on the Queen. The tug-of-war here is between the moon of Mars and the Queen herself. I want a spectacular background, but not at the cost of the dramatic story of the love-lorn queen.

15 *Apply the final glaze*

And now on to the glazing aspect of oils. Here the painting comes together holistically. With thinned oil colours on top of previous dry colours I create a transparent richness akin to church windows casting their light. For me this is what makes oils the king of paints.

First Impressions

✷ Adria Alvarado ✷

The Peruvian artist on receiving advice from Boris Vallejo

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?
I grew up on the northern coast of Peru. Close to the beach, the sun… a place where you find bright colours in every corner and in every face you meet. I believe that this chromatic richness together with my admiration for classical art converged in a magical way to give shape to what I now capture in my portraits.

You're a child, you see a painting or drawing that changes everything… What are you looking at, and what effect did it have?
I have a vivid memory staring at Arcimboldo's paintings for a long time. It was the first time I came into contact with something like that. I was still too young to understand it technically but I think I was intrigued by the idea of being able to materialise unreality and abstraction with that strength.

Does one person stand out as being helpful during your early years?
On the personal side, definitely my mom. She always encouraged my artistic inclination even when I felt like giving up.

I remember coming home from school, sitting down ready to paint and finding the watercolour tones I

TIÁN II
An 8x11.7-inch oil painting. This is the smallest format I have ever worked with. When I want to clear my mind I use small formats, where I can control the brushstrokes and the space. It's very relaxing.

SI HAY UN MILLÓN COMO TÚ ¿POR QUÉ DEJÉ DE DORMIR?
An 11.7x16.5-inch oil painting, this is the second of two self-portraits that I have painted in my entire career.

had used up and finished already replaced by new ones.

And artistically speaking, Boris Vallejo. I once wrote to him (I was about 14) asking him for advice about my work, which at that time was still very amateurish, and after reviewing my portfolio he replied that he saw a lot of potential in my

> ❝ **I'm so grateful to be able to get up every day and sit down and do what I love** ❞

art and that I should continue with my work.

His words were the little push I needed at the time. One way or another I think both cases made me firmly believe in the importance of encouraging and guiding others who are just starting out. We all start at the same place…

What was your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?
My first serious commission was for César Mallorquí, a writer I appreciate very much. It was a portrait of his beloved wife. I remember sending it all the way to Spain and thinking, "So I can really make a living out of this!"

What's the last piece you finished, and how do the two differ?
Now I find myself also working in the animation industry, colour key art, specifically. So the last thing I did was the colour script for an animated film, two colour studies in oil and many drawings on paper. I wouldn't say they differ from the beginning of my commissions. They are more a reflection of the daily journey I make between traditional and digital art. My studio is a hybrid of monitors and linseed oil, where I oscillate in between.

Is making a living as an artist all you thought it would be?
I'm happy to say that it's better than I thought it would be. I'm so grateful to be able to get up every day and sit down and do what I love.

**What does the future hold for you?**
Artistically I don't intend to have a concrete schedule anymore… and I'm not talking about consistency or hours of practice but to be willing to explore all the artistic challenges that come my way.

In the past few years I've been involved with projects I never thought I would collaborate in (movies, video games, 3D art) and I think it was one of the best decisions I made, to get out of my comfort zone and my self-limitations. I love feeling that the artistic path is a never-ending exploration. After all, I think that's what life is all about.

Adria is a fine artist and colour key artist. You can see more of her work at artstation.com/adriaalvaradoarte.
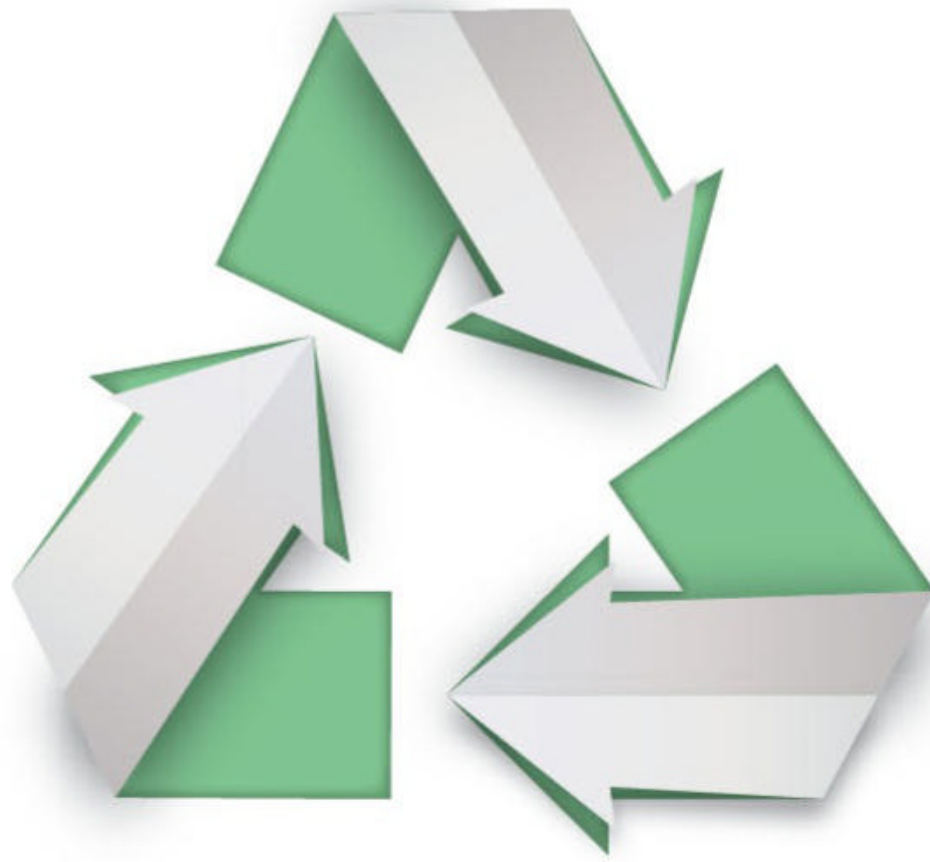
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