

1 NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

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INTERVIEW

THE ART OF DAVE GRECO

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ISSUE 218



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Welcome to... 1 NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX



There's such a wealth of talent in our community it can lead to a sort of choice paralysis when looking for inspiration, but ImagineFX has long looked far and wide to bring the best artists onto our pages, in the hope that you will discover new techniques, skills and processes

from as broad a collection of styles as we can. This month is no different and we have a fantastic range of content that will inspire and inform you no matter what your tastes.

Take our cover as a prime example. Laura H. Rubin created this stunning piece and shares her thoughts and processes in her tutorial on page 56.

If you are interested in adding 3D to your workflow then head to page 70, where Rob Green explains how to rapidly produce wonderful concept art with a base in Blender. He's also recorded a fantastic video to accompany this.

We also bring you a host of other training, from Chris Panatier's traditional Art Nouveau to Blake Rottinger's epic landscapes, and hope you learn some new skills this month.

Rob

Editor

Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Three of my top picks this month...

56.



Paint a striking female portrait

Discover how Laura H. Rubin utilises colour, emotional contrasts and strong posing.

40.



The art of Dave Greco

Blizzard artist Dave Greco opens up about designing characters and breaking out of his comfort zone.

70.



Illustrate an ancient jungle

Concept artist Rob Green explains his image creation process, demonstrating his techniques step by step.



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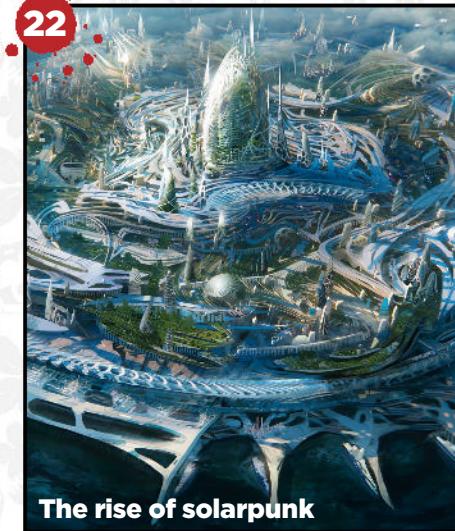
ImagineFX

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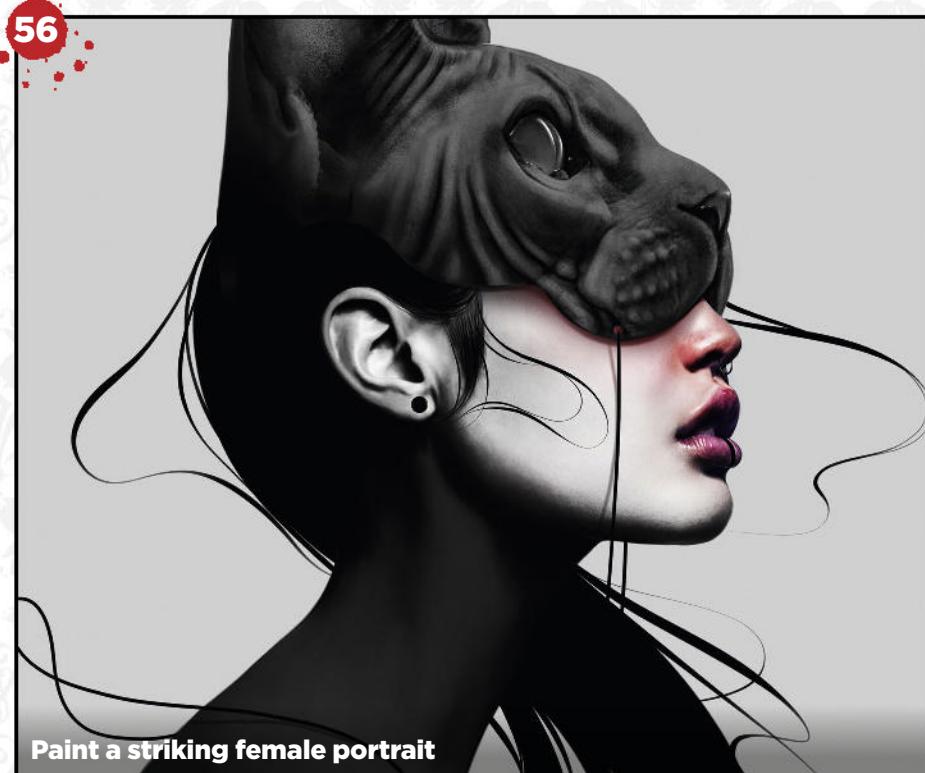




Create stunning landscapes



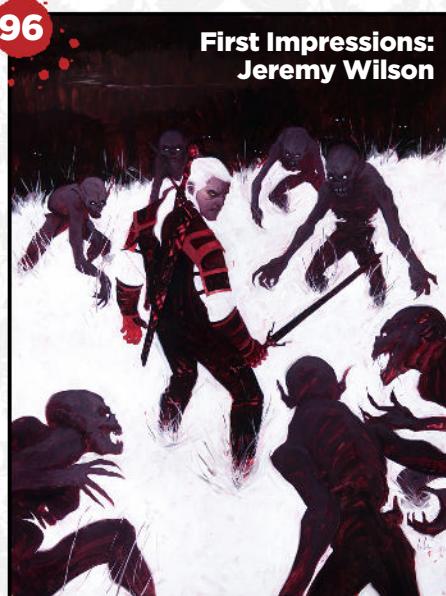
Illustrate an ancient jungle



Paint a striking female portrait



**Art Nouveau:
from sketch to ink**



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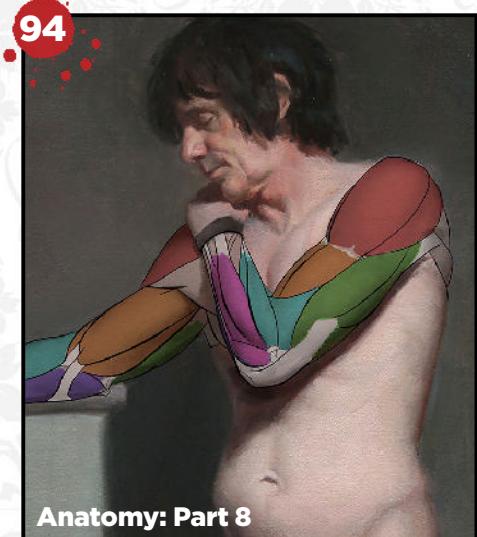
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Check out this illustrator's unique style.



ImagineFX Resources

Getting hold of this issue's resources is easy.
Just visit: <https://ifxm.ag/getpainting>

WORKSHOP FILES



Video workshop: Illustrate an ancient jungle

Concept artist Rob Green demonstrates his creative process in Blender and Photoshop.

SAMPLED BRUSH 2 11

SQUARE 2

STENCIL SPONGE

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This issue's workshop artists Rob Green and Blake Rottinger provide the brushes they use.

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Next month

Next month in...
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ImagineFX

MAGIC: THE GATHERING

Explore the art and artists behind the worldwide fantasy phenomenon

Also in the issue...

Meet Joe Mad

Discover the epic art of the veteran American comic book artist.

Master Midjourney

Learn how to make AI work for you, not against you.

How to draw characters

Expert artist Florian Satzinger explains his process.

The art of Black Panther

Go behind the scenes of Marvel's spectacular sequel.

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EXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Robynn Frauhn

LOCATION: France MEDIA: Clip Studio Paint WEB: robynnfrauhn.carrd.co

Robynn is an illustrator and character designer who has worked in the video game industry for clients such as Dark Horse and Fantasy Flight Games. They love to highlight powerful characters in detailed and colourful environments.

1 CALL OF THE SEA

"Illustration made for the artbook 'SAMURAI Reunion: The Beauty of Men'. It shows the intoxication of freedom, the call to let go."

1



2 RAIN'S FIANCÉE

"This was created for the French artbook 'Mythes et Légendes'. A modern representation of the Amazigh myth of the bride of the rain, 'Tislit n Anzar'."

2



3 THE WITCH

"Personal illustration from 2019. An Amazigh witch from a personal universe of dark fantasy and horror for a future comic."

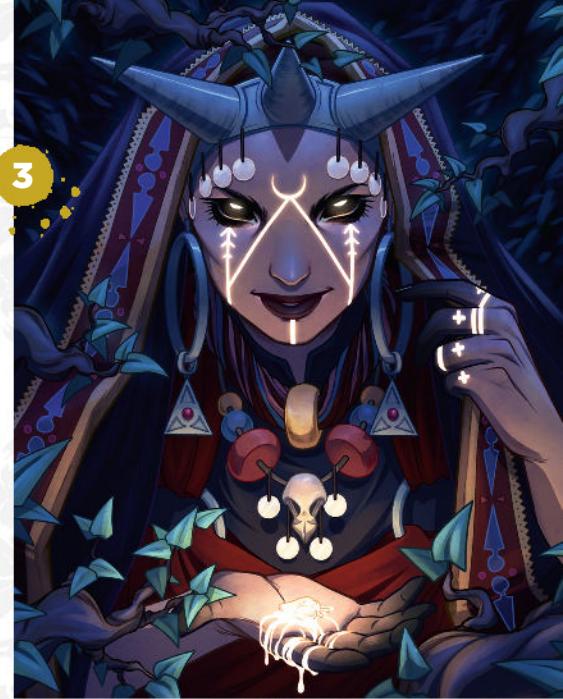
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ImagineFX

4 FUNERALS

"Personal work from 2020. It depicts the funeral of a Gypsy Dwarf Bard. First illustration of a long series on funeral rites."

3



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



1



2





I.M. Gibney

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: isabelgibney.com

I.M. Gibney is an illustrator who makes art for clients such as Dungeons & Dragons, Kabam and Hachette. They enjoy creating emotive, colour-driven images inhabited by characters who pull you into their story.

1 COLD SURVIVAL

"An illustration for Ghostfire Gaming's D&D 5e setting, 'Arora'. Developing the texture of the skull was very satisfying."

2 WINDSURFER

"After marathoning Ghibli movies one weekend, I was inspired by the joy and freedom found in their flying scenes, and wanted to try drawing my own."

3 THE CAT OF KARA'VAL

"TTRPGs make up a large part of both my professional and personal work. This piece was a gift for my D&D campaign's one year anniversary."

4 FALCONER'S REMORSE

"I wanted to question what the true costs are of the grand battles we so often depict in fantasy."





Hammond Liang

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Procreate, Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop WEB: www.artstation.com/hammling

Hammond grew up doodling all the characters in the little booklets that came with PlayStation 1 games. From games to anime and manga, he fell in love with art as a storytelling medium.

1 MONKEY AND PEACH

"The scene of an engraved throne, depicting imagery of peaceful nature contrasted against the malicious Yokai. From their first original saga, illustrated by me and written by David Chun."

2 2021

"Painted in the middle of the pandemic in 2020; hoping that 2021 would be a better year."

3 ULTRAVIOLET

"This was an exploration in experimenting with a strong colour palette; all painted while being hungry late at night making some instant noodles."

1



2









Ellie Jordan

LOCATION: England MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.dogspyjamas.co.uk

Ellie is an illustrator working on TTRPG and board game projects. Having loved fantasy books and TV shows for as long as she can remember, Ellie played D&D for the first time in 2021 and never looked back.

1 CANDLEKEEP CREW

"This was a challenge of composition and design! I painted this family portrait of my D&D group's characters as a Christmas present."

2 THE WILD

"This piece was a turning point for me in terms of style. The forest guardian is an ancient fey creature that's rarely seen but sometimes glimpsed from the corner of a tired hiker's eye."



3



4

3 THE HORROR

"Inspired by a daydream, a half-written story and a song, The Horror is a guardian to the realm of faerie. It offers power and fortune, at a price."

4 CENTAUR WIZARD

"Letting the dice decide what I draw... I rolled a centaur wizard, what could be more obvious!"





Tadas Adomavičius

LOCATION: Lithuania MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate WEB: www.behance.net/TadasAdomavicius

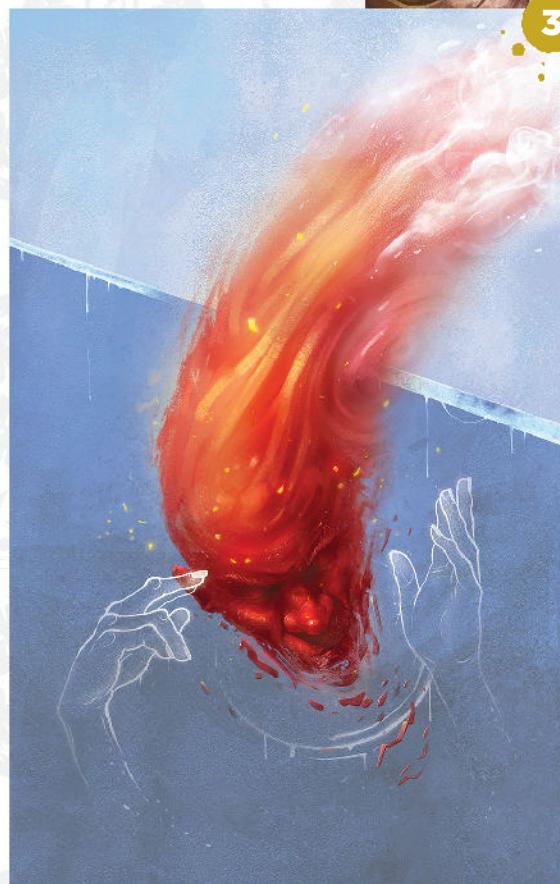
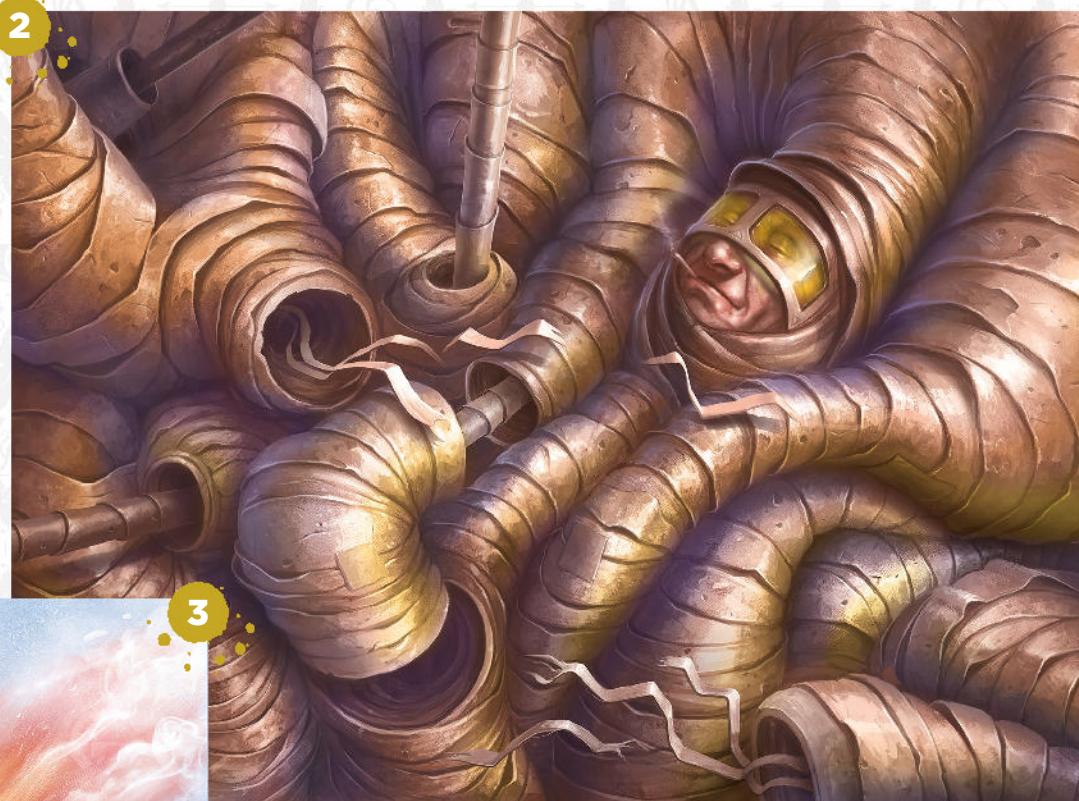
Tadas is an artist and illustrator working in mobile games. His work exposes internal and external human experiences. "I am an observer who not only observes others and the environment, but also myself."

1 MIGHTY NEPTUNE

"My vision of the god of freshwater and the sea in Roman religion. He is the counterpart of the Greek god Poseidon."

2 DEEP CHILL

"I tried to capture a physical and mental state where your body and mind are free from tension and anxiety."



3



4

3 STATE OF MIND

"The concept of the mind is understood in many different ways by many different cultural and religious traditions. This is my attempt to portray a state of mind."

4 STEAM FISH

"This is a mythical creature, half fish, half floating steam apparatus. It is inspired by steampunk-style art."

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

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Artist PROFILE

Edwin Vong

LOCATION: France

Edwin Vong is a French artist who has recently graduated from the isart Digital school in Paris, and has been working as a concept artist and illustrator at Ubisoft Paris Mobile.

www.therookies.cc/u/Edwin

Mermaid and Coast Guards

YEAR CREATED: 2021 MEDIA: Photoshop

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The rise of solarpunk

A new world **Tanya Combrinck** explores the art movement focused on an optimistic vision of the future as a high-tech utopia that honours nature

At a time when the climate emergency appears increasingly desperate, it seems natural that much of our science fiction envisions our future as a grim, cyberpunk dystopia. But what if we actually stepped up and solved our problems? Some creators are imagining what that would look like, and the answer is solarpunk.

The solarpunk aesthetic revolves around architecture and infrastructure that works in concert with nature rather than against it. Clean, renewable energy sources are visible and blended with the living space, which is usually festooned with plant

life and other natural elements. The Art Nouveau style often features in these utopian artworks, as its humanist philosophy of bringing beauty to the masses and rejecting capitalism aligns well with the solarpunk values.

WORKING IN HARMONY

In recent years solarpunk has been making inroads into popular culture. In the Marvel film Black Panther, the Kingdom of Wakanda is a technologically advanced nation that

has solved the major problems of civilisation and embodies what African society and culture might look like had it not been colonised. While the team did not explicitly use the term when designing this world, Wakanda and its Golden City manifest the solarpunk vision and aesthetic ➡



A CREATIVE BALANCE

We discover what a day in the life of creative director Paul Tobin looks like, as he tries to balance work and his own personal artistic endeavours.
Page 28



THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

Find out how Edward Dennis worked with Corel Painter to create his own illustrated book centring around important cultural representation.
Page 30



MOVIE MEMORABILIA

We take a tour of production designer Armand Serrano's studio, whose signed posters, rare merch and four cute dogs are excellent company.
Page 32



“The architecture flows with nature and adapts to it, but it also has incredible strength and flexibility”

“The solarpunk movement shows us an optimistic version of the future instead of the burning and barren world we'll get if we don't change,” says Leon Tukker.

Till Nowak's concept art for Black Panther depicts the utopian nation of Wakanda, where architecture mimics and incorporates nature.

© Marvel Studios



► of a high-tech society that blends nature with infrastructure.

Concept artist **Till Nowak** worked with production designer Hannah



Beachler and director Ryan Coogler on the environment design, which places futuristic structures in the midst of lush jungle. "The architecture does two things simultaneously," says Till. "It flows with nature and adapts to it, but it also has incredible, almost dream-like strength and flexibility that allows us to reach places that we haven't been able to reach before. Those aspects symbolise what we need to set our minds to if we want to solve today's problems."

The world is based on the principles of biomimetics – the adaptation of nature's principles into modern engineering, such as the structure of cells or mathematical patterns like the Fibonacci curve – and biophilic design, which incorporates natural lighting and ventilation to create productive and healthy built environments.

"Science fiction comes to us as a tale from the future, but is in fact a

reflection of the present," says Till. "Creators turn their observations, wishes and fears of our present into a warning (when it's a dystopia) or an inspiration (when it's a utopia) for our future. The climate crisis and the hunger for energy and resources have become the topic of this century and therefore I'd expect them to become an even more dominant theme in our future visions. Hopefully every piece of solarpunk can help inspire change." You can see more of Till's work on Instagram at @till.nowak.

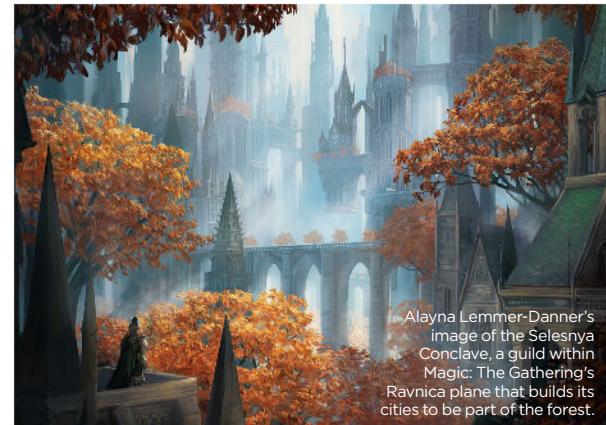
A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The solarpunk aesthetic can also be found within Magic: The Gathering's Ravnica plane, where one of the guilds, the Selesnya Conclave, strives to merge their civilisation with the natural world. Art director and illustrator **Alayna Lemmer-Danner** is



one of several artists who have brought to life its beautiful cityscapes that combine grand, traditional architecture with forestry.

Alayna shoots her own reference photography for her buildings when



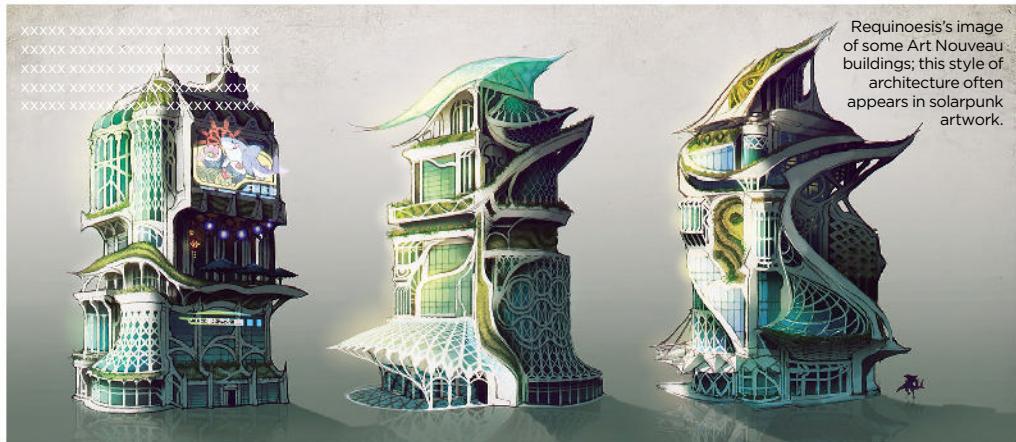
Alayna Lemmer-Danner's image of the Selesnya Conclave, a guild within Magic: The Gathering's Ravnica plane that builds its cities to be part of the forest.



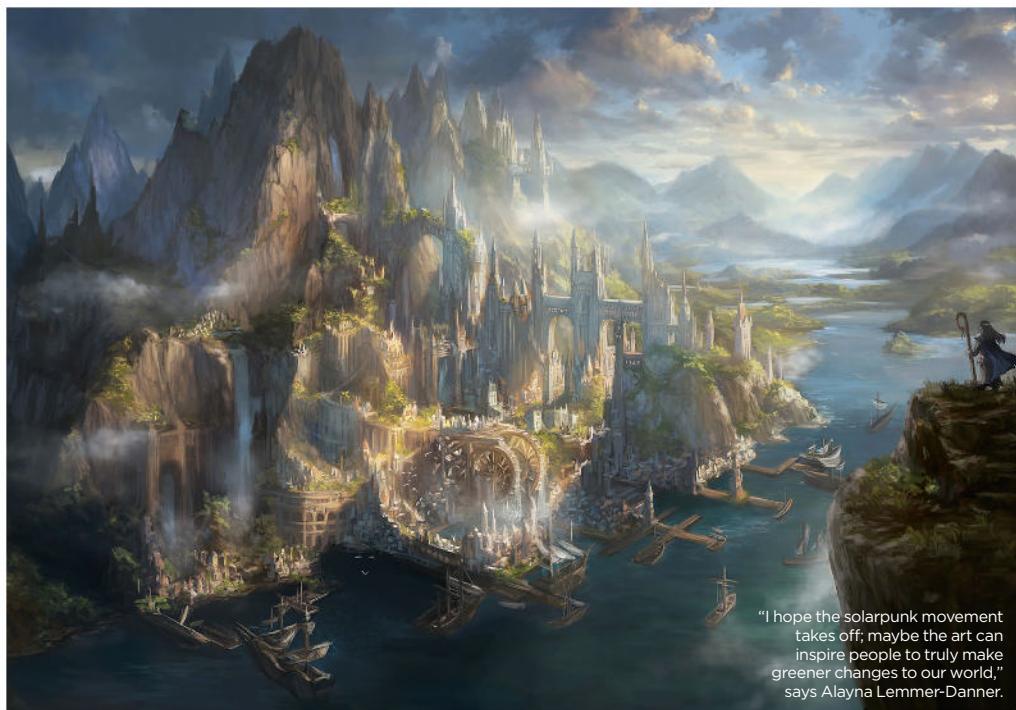
Jessica Woulfe's artwork won the Atomhawk solarpunk challenge in 2019 and features a real design for airborne wind turbines.

“An optimistic version of civilisation, where we work in harmony with nature to create an even greater society”

Artist news, software & events



Requinoesis's image of some Art Nouveau buildings; this style of architecture often appears in solarpunk artwork.



"I hope the solarpunk movement takes off; maybe the art can inspire people to truly make greener changes to our world," says Alayna Lemmer-Danner.



she has the opportunity to capture a structure that inspires her. "I enjoy neoclassical and Beaux-Arts architecture," she says. "I envision buildings in those styles blended with nature, and I like to think about how people could live in these forests and cultivate more interesting plants."

Combining human structures with natural environments is also a staple of Alayna's personal artwork. "In a time where we are surrounded by the realities of climate change, I escape by creating environments that show an optimistic version of civilisation, where instead of fighting nature, we work in harmony with it to create an even greater society," she says.

Jessica Woulfe is a concept artist at Sony Interactive Entertainment whose environment work often depicts scenes in which an ancient man- ➤

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

KEEPING IT GROUNDED

Jessica Woulfe on the making of her high-tech artwork

Do you think solarpunk is a growing trend, or could it be too optimistic to resonate with people given the current state of the world?

A lot of people seem to look at the future with a sense of hopelessness, and even apathy. Solarpunk seems to be an unlikely future to many people, no matter how beautiful and desirable it may be. However, if the movement gains greater momentum with games and movies based around it, I think it will be incredibly important to change people's attitudes.

What research did you do to create your artwork?

I did research on different types of wind turbines, the latest green energy technology, and I researched the traditional Norwegian farmhouse. I am always inspired by Hayao Miyazaki, and Studio Ghibli, and the way they are able to capture the simplicity of living in touch with nature, but with added fantastical elements that create a sense of wonder. I also love games like *The Last of Us*, which has a very grounded, human story, and is deeply invested in realism.

How did you come up with the wind turbine design?

These airborne wind turbines actually exist! As it stands, multiple proposals for this technology exist but no commercial products are currently available. Hopefully, my artwork will inspire more people to consider the idea seriously, and potentially as an alternative to clearing acres of land for standing wind turbines.



Jessica Woulfe is a concept artist at Sony Interactive Entertainment based in Edmonton, Canada.

www.artstation.com/jessicawoulfe

Till Nowak's Black Panther concept art shows us an architectural style in which buildings flow with nature.



© Marvel Studios



→ made structure has been reclaimed by nature. It was therefore a natural progression for her to take an interest in solarpunk. "I had actually never heard of the genre until I

 discovered Atomhawk's contest to create a solarpunk artwork in 2019," says **Jessica**. "As I read more about it, I realised it mirrored a lot of my own artistic inspirations. Emphasising a

integrated in our surroundings without being outlandish. These considerations formed the basis of Jessica's thinking for her entry to the Atomhawk contest, which won first prize. "I wanted my image of a solarpunk future to be very grounded in reality, something that could actually happen in the future," she says. "There are a lot of great solarpunk futuristic cityscapes, and those definitely inspire awe. However, I

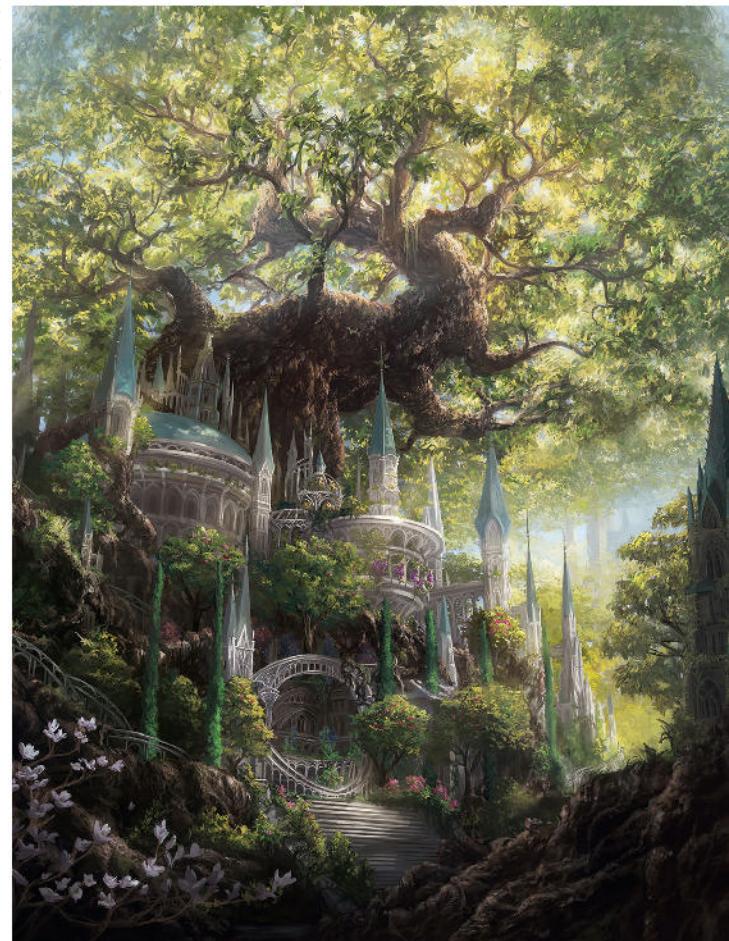
“I love the idea of building towards something sustainable rather than fixating on the bad news in the world”

deep connection to nature is an integral part of my artwork. I also love the idea of building towards something sustainable rather than fixating on all the negativity and bad news in the world."

Dramatic and large-scale buildings feature heavily in solarpunk artwork, but this look is by no means necessary for a scene to embody the values of the movement. Not everyone will be living in cities in the future, and green technology can be visible and

wanted my image to be closer to home, with our shared humanity being at the centre of it."

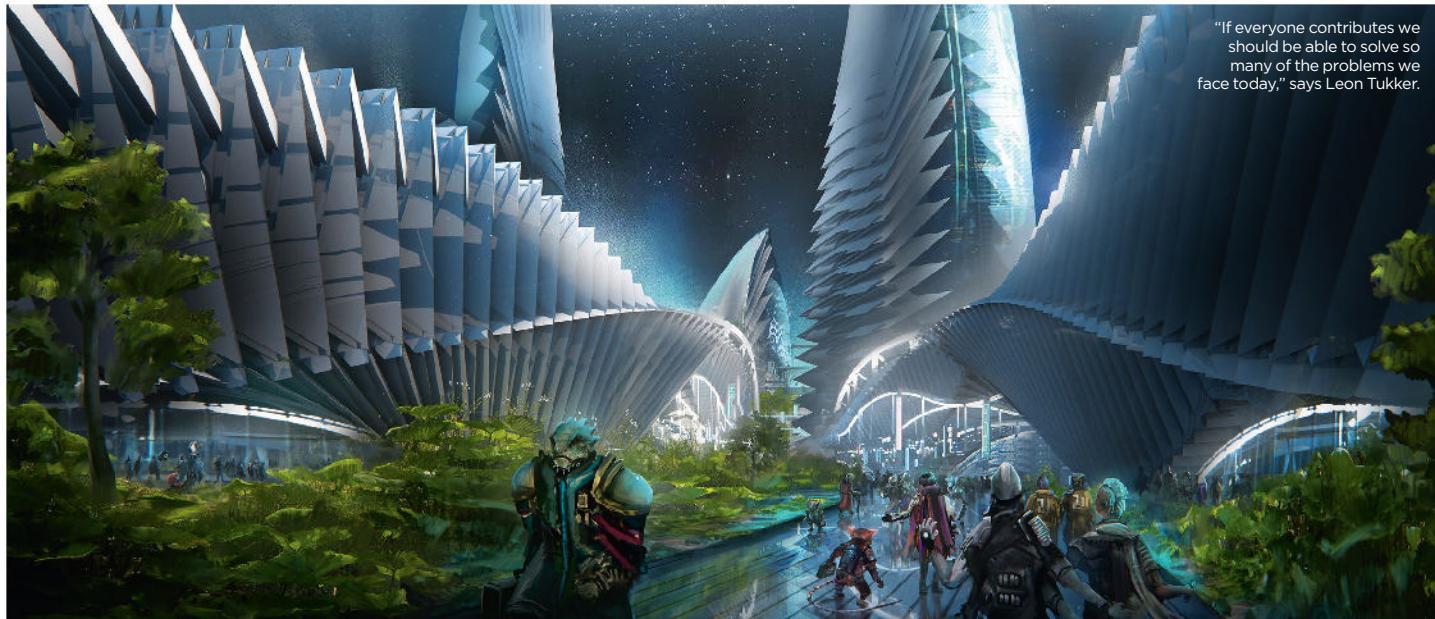
The story behind her image is about a father and daughter, the old generation and the new generation, and is set in 2060 so is an achievable target within our lifetime. "The government subsidises farmers to allow wind turbines to fly above their farms, while still allowing for use of the land for crops and livestock," says Jessica. "The floating wind turbines



"I am a huge fan of Hayao Miyazaki and visiting the Studio Ghibli museum in Tokyo is very inspiring, the building is covered in plants – it's quite a place to see," says Alayna Lemmer-Danner.



Inspired by a holiday to Thailand, this solar powered city by Leon Tukker features buildings based on Asian ornaments.



are the new technology, juxtaposed against a very traditional Norwegian farmhouse. It represents the coming together of old and new, past and future, to build towards a sustainable future integrated with nature."

OBtainable worlds

A feature of the solarpunk genre that speaks to its organic nature is that, like the Black Panther team, some artists are creating work that falls within the theme without knowing about the term or the movement. **Requinoesis** is one such artist who found a very natural path to it, having created many stories and artworks about optimistic human futures before actually discovering the genre.

"I have always really liked worldbuilding in which there is a civilisation in harmony with nature and artificial intelligence technology," he says. "So I got to know about solarpunk when a friend recognised that it was close to my interests. From there I discovered the anthology

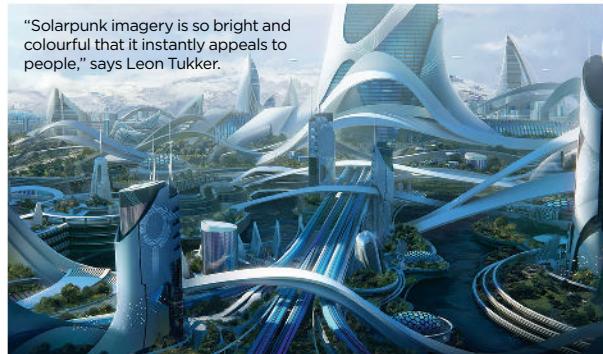
'Ecological and Fantastical Stories in a Sustainable World' by Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro, a fellow Brazilian. I also took a lot of inspiration from the architect Vincent Callebaut and his visions of Paris in 2050."

Requinoesis believes in the value of creating artwork that inspires hope. "I think today's young people are thinking: why dream, if the world will soon be uninhabitable? The Netflix series Euphoria demonstrates this feeling very well." Optimistic media could be the cure for this feeling.

'Dishes', a personal artwork by Till Nowak.



"Solarpunk imagery is so bright and colourful that it instantly appeals to people," says Leon Tukker.



© KIRBESCHS

Leon Tukker is a concept artist specialising in architecture, science fiction and environment design, who has always favoured bright and lively work over the dark and dystopian imagery that warns us to change our ways. Solarpunk was a natural fit. "I'd say most of my cities are inspired by modern architecture," he says. "Architects like Santiago Calatrava and Zaha Hadid were early



"It is up to us to decide which way we will go; there are many possibilities from catastrophic to utopian," says Requinoesis.

inspirations and organic architecture styles are really appealing to me, as are modern architects trying to blend nature with the built environment."

"The great thing about solarpunk is that there is so much to explore within this genre. What if we combine solarpunk with Art Nouveau, or Brutalism, even? As long as the artist envisions a positive society where nature and man-made structures co-exist instead of nature being pushed away, it works."

A day in the life of... Paul Tobin

Taking the lead The co-founder and creative director at Arkus Games breaks down his daily working process

Paul Tobin is a concept designer and art director for games, TV and film. After close to two decades at Weta Workshop, he now works as creative director at Arkus Games, a company he co-founded.

“During my time at Weta Workshop, I would wake up between 4am and 5am, and sneakily grab my iPhone to not wake up my wife. I do some of my best thinking at that time from an ideation and direction perspective. I do a bulk of my planning like that until 7am, when we get up, eat breakfast and feed the cats. I use the time between 7am and 8am when I sit down to work to catch up on the world online. Then I bike into work and we have our morning standup around 9am. Everyone goes in a circle and says what they’re working on, and then I check in on the artists and give design direction. Most of my morning is meetings with clients, other teams, whatever we’re working on at the moment. Around 12 it’s time for a quick lunch and a walk.

THE FINAL RUSH

I’m back to work at 1pm where I get to do a sprint on my own design work until 3:30pm, when a group of us take a walk together. Then it’s a panic to get everything into the Dropbox to show clients at the end of the day. Sometimes we’ll work late, sometimes we have a bit of a social gathering and play table tennis together, but usually I’ll take a beautiful, slow bike ride along the peninsula and be home



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. conceptartassociation.com



© Weta Workshop and New Line Cinema

“Find a creative activity in your personal life that helps fill your reservoir up”

I've been working on an Atlantis-inspired IP for over ten years, and this 'Stormchaser' design is from the forthcoming Arkus board game.



around 6pm. My wife and I cook dinner together and have an early meal around 6:30pm, then watch an hour episode of something. Then we’ll both retreat to our respective studios to go back to work for a bit, or we’ll hang out in the lounge and draw together with a movie on until around 10:30pm. I might read a chapter of a book to decompress, then go to bed.

For people working in the industry that are having to use their creativity to deliver every day, I think it’s important to find some type of creative activity in your personal life that helps fill your reservoir up. It can get to a point where you’re too fragmented and you can burn out. But it’s a very lucky position to be in – to get to create for a living.”

Having my dedicated studio at home allows me to take a break, turn around and pick up a real brush.



Paul lives in Wellington, New Zealand with his wife, Claire. He's worked on projects like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Scale of Our War*, a World War I exhibit at the National Museum of New Zealand. You can see more of Paul's work at www.paultobinart.com



© Weta Workshop School

This yakuza for Ghost in the Shell was one of three characters that played on the concept of "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil".



© Weta Workshop and Paramount Pictures

Frankenstein's Monster, a personal piece produced for a Halloween exhibition. I wanted to explore a design that avoided any similarity to Boris Karloff's portrayal.





The road to success

Sneak peek! Artist **Edward Dennis** shares the story of how he produced his first illustrated book, powered by Corel Painter

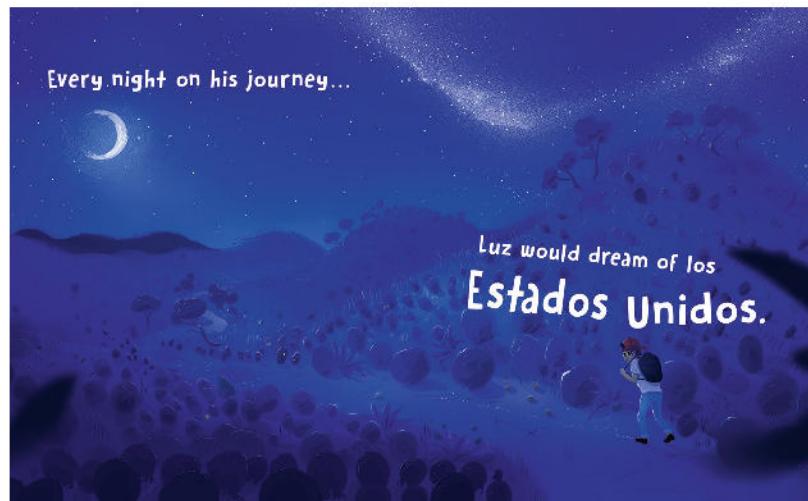


Edward Dennis began the journey to create his own illustrated children's book by doing simply that: just starting.

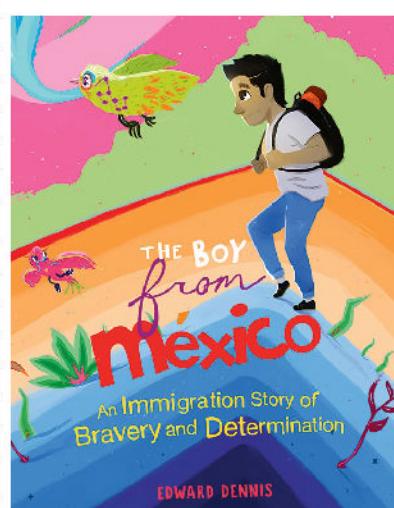
Sometimes a creative process is inspired by an event, or something from the environment but other times it's an underlying desire to build a world, with no specifics in

mind. This desire is what drove him to embark on this endeavour, building on his Mexican-American heritage and the lack of books representing his background.

Edward says that, "Living in the United States has its struggles, especially in the southwestern area. So I decided to base my writing and art around that."



Edward's illustrated book, *The Boy from Mexico*, goes on sale towards the end of the year, on 8 November.



“Painter, with my Wacom, makes me feel like I’m still using paper or canvas”

Being primarily an illustrator, Edward started off visually by creating sketches to get an idea for his story, swapping to writing the text, then fleshing out the concepts using Corel Painter.

DIGITAL CANVAS

Edward paired powerful Corel Painter with an intuitive Wacom Cintiq drawing tablet to create engaging, attractive illustrations to help convey his Boy from Mexico story. "Painter's



customisation tools were key to the success here, with layouts and brushes all able to be adjusted and stored, and available at any time when needed," says Edward. "This aids in easily and quickly being able to jump to custom brushes and back again, while not breaking creative flow."

While this might make things appear to be complex and convoluted, it's anything but. Painter remains intuitive and fast, with workflow and results that are consistent – an important factor for any project like this. Being able to rely on an efficient and consistent workflow is what gave Edward the support he needed to pursue his journey.

"Painter, paired with my giant Wacom 32, makes me feel like I'm still using paper or canvas, and I appreciate this so much," says Edward.

While it can be nerve-wracking to pitch a book to publishers, Edward's belief in his art and storytelling, backed by his incredible artistic talent, led to him being signed by Mango.

"My advice to anyone out there wanting to create a children's book is make sure you're inspired, you know what tools you'll use, and lastly be ready for the long haul," says Edward. Visit www.painterartist.com/imaginefx to embark on your own artistic journey with a 15-day free trial and an exclusive discount for ImagineFX readers.

ImagineNation Artist in Residence





Our four family dogs, keeping me company! From top to bottom: Colt, a Belgian Malinois; Ryder, a long-haired Chihuahua with Sombra, Shepherd mix; Pawnee, a German Rottweiler.



Armand Serrano

Movie making We take a tour of this experienced production designer's awesome studio setup



It was back in 2012 when I decided to give up my art director position, which required me to be physically in the studio all the time, and go back into visual development so I could work mainly from home and spend time with family (this was years before 'work from home' was even a thing!). I used video conferencing apps like Skype and BlueJeans back then until Zoom and GoToMeeting came around.

Since I started working from my home studio, I worked on a variety of projects from award-winning animated films like Disney's *Big* ➡

ImagineNation Artist in Residence



Artist news, software & events



MY ON-THE-GO RIG

My family and I travel a lot. So I make sure that location and distance doesn't hinder me from working. So I invested in reliable hardware that can handle serious, solid work while enjoying the moment.

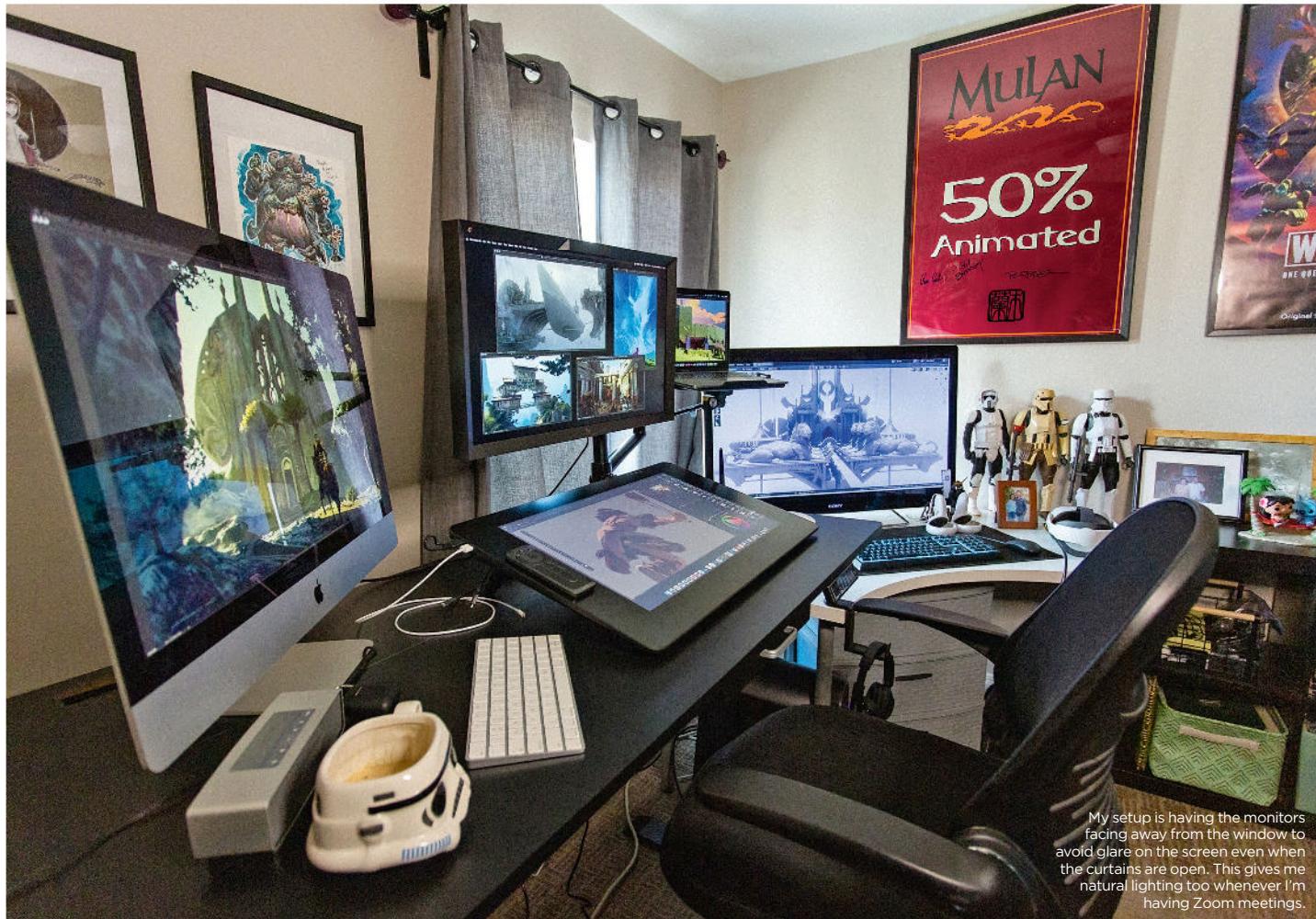
DRAWING SETUP



VR SETUP



ImagineNation Artist in Residence



“For efficiency and ease, I kept my setup similar to a pilot’s cockpit, where all the tools I need are at arm’s length”

→ Hero 6 and Zootopia, to games like Blizzard’s World of Warcraft and Hearthstone, and Marvel Studio’s first streaming animated series, What If, to name a few. I was able to go back into art direction on an unreleased independent animated film from South Africa and production design on Netflix’s Animal Crackers done in Spain. We even hosted online our annual event, Icon Manila, from home during the pandemic. I am now working full-time as production designer at Skydance Animation.

A CONSIDERED SPACE

It was very crucial for me to make myself as engaged here at home as if I was physically in the studio. I invested in the same or similar (or even better) hardware and equipment as that of the studios. It was truly a blessing to

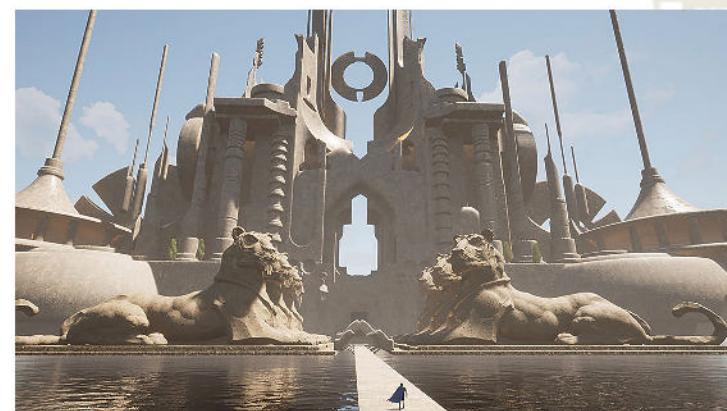
be offered to become a Wacom ambassador as they have sponsored me through the years until now. For efficiency and ease, I kept my setup similar to that of a pilot’s cockpit, where all the tools I need are at arm’s length with strong but minimal movement. My main work table can be adjusted high or low and I work almost all day standing up. Standing keeps the blood flow going in my legs. It also gives my arm both the utmost freedom and strong, dynamic strokes.

Lastly, our family dogs, Pawnee, Colt, Sombra and Ryder come in and out of my work area during the day to keep me company.

Armand Serrano works as production designer at Skydance Animation, having also worked for Marvel, Disney, Blizzard Entertainment, Riot Games, Netflix and more. artstation.com/armandserrano



An early production cast and crew bowl when the film was still called, 'The Legend Of Mulan'.

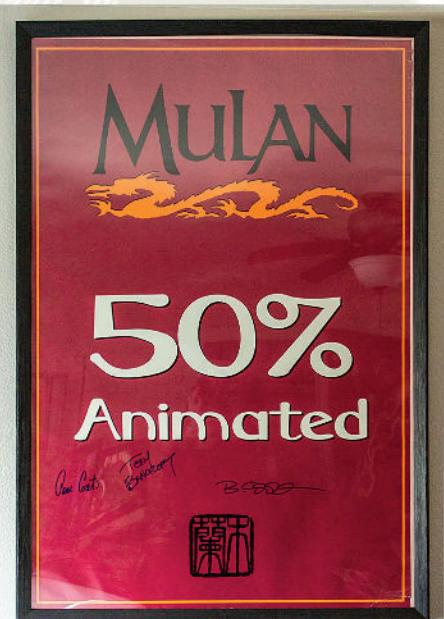
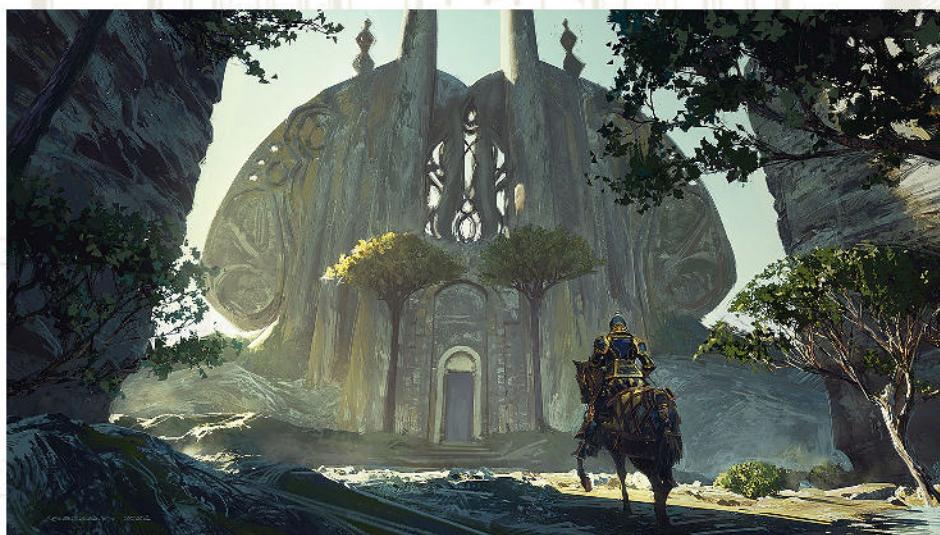


VR + 3D + PS. Sketching and layout is realised through virtual sculpting (VR). Then the set is imported into a 3D software for rendering texture, colour and lighting possibilities. Then final touches on still shots are done in Photoshop.

Artist news, software & events

Two of my Disney figures. (Left) Animator Mickey. The icon of the studio when it was still officially called Walt Disney Feature Animation Studio. (Right) Bored Stitch – a Funko pop from a moment in the film that I designed.

I am constantly in production, so I have to intentionally plan the time to make art for myself. I love creating a back story, concept and style in advance in order to utilise my limited time wisely.



When animation on *Mulan* was 50 per cent completed, the studio threw a party after office hours. The studio printed these posters and posted them around the event room. With permission, I took a poster and had it signed by co-directors Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook, and producer Pam Coats.



This was the very first animated feature film I worked on. I had a poster signed by the art and production crew, only to be damaged by the framer. Thankfully I had one left (not signed).

This is my side table setup under the banner of my favourite childhood anime, Voltes V. I use this as my reference table and notes, keeping the bottom area clear for my dogs to move around or sleep on.



Anycubic 3D printer. My son uses this for printing really cool D&D figures.

Canon Pro Series printer. This is for professional-quality art prints I sell during conventions.

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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 217

October 2022

Create incredible sci-fi scenes and watercolour portraits, learn top tips from the pros on how to get hired by an art studio, expert advice on levelling up your creative process, and go behind the scenes on YA comic 'Hollow'.



Issue 216

September 2022

Learn the basics of Procreate and discover how to paint a futuristic robot. Plus, expert tips on character design, delve into the magical concepts of Fantastic Beasts, and explore the new, fascinating world of AI art tools.



Issue 215

August 2022

In our manga special, we go behind the scenes of beautiful animated film 'Belle', interview manga artists about their projects, and learn expert tips for mech design, manga-style fight scenes, and dynamic characters.



Issue 214

July 2022

We adventure into the incredible worlds of D&D, interviewing a huge range of amazing artists for their expert insight. Plus, tutorials on creating abstract portraits, dynamic fantasy scenes, and how to master references.

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My next job

Hello ImagineFX. I've been reading the magazine for many years and really like it. It has helped me become a better artist and I usually head straight to the tutorial section. Last issue I was very impressed by the news section, where you talked about ways to get hired by a studio. Some of the advice was invaluable and I'm now looking to take my art from being a passionate hobby to a full-time job.

Jordan, via email

Rob replies Hi Jordan. Thanks for writing in. It's great to hear you find our training section useful and that you've found that news piece inspiring enough to take that step. What exciting times ahead for you now! Let us know how you get on and feel free to send us some of your art.

Skills negated?

Thanks for covering AI art and Midjourney, it was a really interesting and comprehensive insight to this new tool. I found it really depressing though – AI will take over for sure and there will



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 217 at ifxm.ag/single-ifx.

Last month we shared advice on getting a job as a studio artist.



AI remains a hot topic in the art scene and while there are some concerns, could it become a valuable tool?

be no point in learning to draw and paint anymore. Design concepts will be needed, sure. But I'd argue they don't take anywhere near as much effort, time and practice to learn.

Moreover, you can probably skip knowledge of design principles by telling the Machine to produce something similar to a movie shot or photo that you want to reference. I know the end-to-end process of producing art is always challenged, made easier and reduced by new tech – particularly digital art. But this feels like it'll really negate the need to learn to paint and draw proficiently. What do you think?

Chris, via email

AI for the win

I've been quite pleased recently. When I look on social media I see a lot of negativity about AI art tools. I do understand some people's fears but I see it as just another way to be creative. Thanks for staying balanced on this issue. I'm sure over time people will find it to be a useful addition.

Sarah, via email

Rob replies Thanks Chris and Sarah. This issue is absolutely contentious but, as I've said before, it is early days and we don't know what will come.

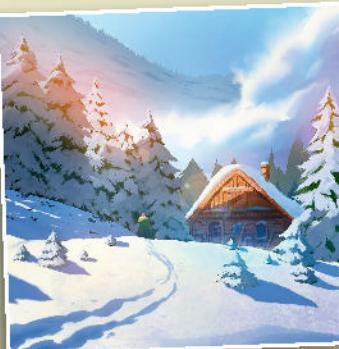
That said, the more I see the more I think it is less of a threat than some worry about. Artistic choices still need to be made by a creative mind. There may well be times when someone uses AI to generate an image and takes the result as is, but I think more and more artists will use it as a prototyping tool, taking those images more as mood boards, then using their skill and tastes to paint finished results. In fact, next issue we have a workshop on doing just this, so check back to see how an AI tool like Midjourney could find its way into your work.

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention



Nathan Poole
@nathan_pooke1998



Farhad
@farhad.k_afs



Wayne O Connor
@druakim

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

Interview

Artist **PROFILE**

Dave Greco

LOCATION: US

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Jim Lee, Todd McFarlane, Joe Mad, JC Leyendecker, James Jean, Tomer Hanuka

MEDIA: Photoshop

WEB: www.artstation.com/dgreco



FLAMESHOT SYLVANAS

This piece proved to be a nerve-wracking task for Dave, because she's such an iconic Hearthstone character. "But I totally loved the vibe they wanted for this one," he says.





DAVE THE CARTOONIST OF COOL

Dom Carter interviews the Blizzard senior visual development artist, who opens up about designing characters and leaving his comfort zone

Interview



hat's it like to land your dream job and work for some of the biggest names in the art industry? Dave Greco, senior visual development artist at Blizzard, fills us in on his career journey, talks his favourite creators and inspirations, provides his expert advice for aspiring concept artists, and reveals how he's empowering the next generation by sharing his knowledge in new and exciting ways.

How did you first get started as an artist, and what has your career been like so far?

I was always interested in drawing and painting when I was a kid. My subject matter was typical of most kids' interests at the time in the 80s: drawing the likes of Ninja Turtles, video game characters, and tons of comic book characters.

Once I reached my early teens, I was blown away by the art I was seeing coming out in comic books. Todd McFarlane and the entire Image cast of artists were re-defining what comic books could even look like. I started to see new creative and innovative directions I could take my art and I decided I wanted to make this my career. In 2001 I drove my old Jetta from Massachusetts down to Florida to attend Ringling College of Art and Design, majoring in Illustration.

I was fortunate enough to be offered a job at EA Tiburon as a texture artist right out of school. That was the job that got my foot in the door of the game industry. From there I've worked at several other game studios in New York City and Austin, Texas, as well as freelancing for a period of time. I'm currently a senior visual development artist for Blizzard Entertainment.

Which artists have inspired you the most, and why?

Growing up I was massively inspired by Jim Lee, Todd McFarlane, and a slew of other comic book artists. During college, artists like Joe Mad, JC Leyendecker, James Jean and Tomer Hanuka were significant inspirations of mine. Their stylised linework with amazing colour choices really opened my eyes to ways to take a simple idea and skew it to express your own voice and perspective as an artist. It's that stylised direction that really took my interest in art and illustration to a whole new level.

VARDEN'S AQUARIOR

"Water elementals are always super iconic for the Warcraft universe, and I definitely felt the weight of trying to get this one right."

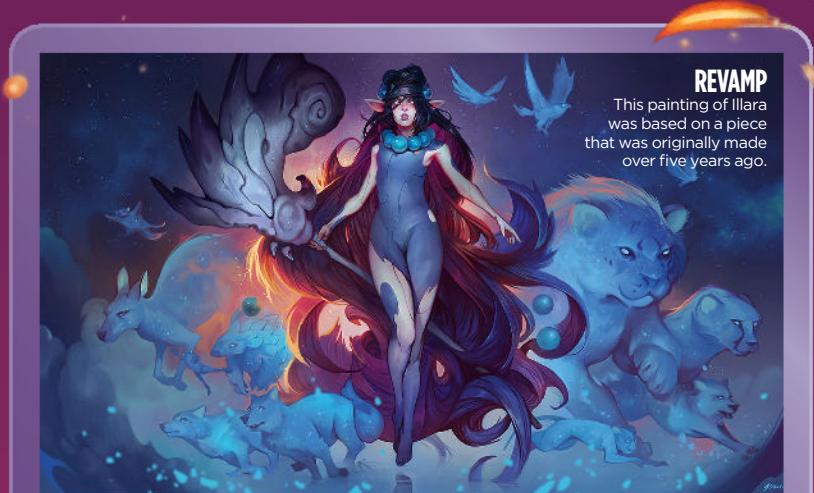


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ZALEENA

Zaleena was a god in Crowfall which Dave was eager to revisit and give a second pass. "I am glad I did, because she is now one of my favourites."



ILLARA THE TRAVELER

Dave was tasked with revamping this illustration to bring it in line with the current Crowfall style

I created Illara the Traveler when I was the lead concept artist at ArtCraft Entertainment working on Crowfall. She was a character that I always had in my head. I envisioned her with a large, beaded necklace and faded eyes.

The process for this piece wasn't too complicated. My creative director and I wanted to design a lot of the gods as full illustrations

that really showed off their mood and vibe. Once we've decided on the general direction of the piece, I begin blocking out the composition. After that I refined and created the central character. Once that's complete, I begin exploring different colour palettes until I settle on the right one. The final step in my process would be to render the piece.

How has your artwork developed over the years, and what has helped to drive those changes?

Some of the biggest changes within my own work over the past five years have been a result of my strong desire not to plateau as an artist. I think it can be easy to get comfortable with where you are creatively once you land a full-time job. After starting in the industry, I noticed I wasn't really pushing myself out of my comfort zone artistically. My work wasn't developing and progressing like it should have. I had to make a conscious effort to push my boundaries on my personal art outside of work. In an effort to stay inspired and inspire others, I started a YouTube channel and began streaming my art and my process on Twitch. Building this community helped to keep me inspired and push the limits of what I could accomplish creatively.

 **I had to make a conscious effort to push my boundaries on my personal art** 

You've worked for big names such as Marvel, Games Workshop and Magic: The Gathering. What's it like working for these hugely popular companies? It's been a huge honour to be offered work from these amazing studios. Magic: The Gathering was a tough client to get. I was emailing my portfolio to Wizards of the Coast twice a year for about six years before I got a response. They are fairly competitive, and most artists would love to have them on their resume, so they are flooded with inquiries from top talent all the time. My style is a bit off the road for Magic: The Gathering, so I had to adapt my work along the way. I would work a bit more texture into my pieces and reduce the line work so that they would integrate seamlessly into the 'traditional illustration' feel they are known for.

You're the senior visual development artist for Blizzard Entertainment. Can you tell us what that role encompasses and what you most enjoy about it?

Being a visual development artist for Blizzard is about the best job I've ➤

Interview

► ever had in the industry. The team is amazing – supportive and completely inspiring. I work on the World of Warcraft team, which is a game that has shaped so much of my artistic life over the past 18 years. Currently I am focused on character development, so I am coming up with brand-new characters, mobs, raid bosses, armour sets, ambient creatures, and more.

It's unbelievable that I get to wake up every day to draw and create in a world that I adore with some of the top artists in the industry.

What makes for an excellent and effective character design?

For me, it's mostly the mood and feeling of the character. The design should be memorable and stand on its own compared to other designs that exist out in the market. Why should

“Learn from each piece... so that you can push yourself further on the next one”

someone that sees your character care about them? I try to find something that can make the viewer relate in some way, just something small that can make the character come to their mind later.

You say you're always trying to 'push your work and style just one step further'. How do you go about that and why is it so important?

I am definitely an artist that is not often happy with where my art lands, and I know there is always a way for me to push my art further. This goes back to what I said earlier about not letting my work plateau. I think seeking out feedback from your peers is super important. I try to take in the constructive criticism and keep that in the back of my mind when working on my next piece.

I always say with every piece you get about .01% better, so just keep cranking work out. But with that said, you really need to learn from each piece and realise what worked and what might not have been great, so that you can push yourself further on the next one.



PLAQUE MARINE

Dave originally created a Plague Marine piece for Games Workshop back in 2012. He wanted to see how he would tackle detail and form compared to then.

FINAL FANTASY XIV

This commission took a different approach by not focusing on the character carrying weapons. Instead, Dave went for a more intimate and relaxed vibe.



You share lots of valuable advice on your YouTube channel. Why is it important to you to make this expertise easily accessible?

This is a really important question and the reason for a lot of what I do. I feel a connection to all the artists out there who have decided that creating art is going to be their life journey. I've been where they are and it can feel scary. If I can provide support or knowledge to even just a few people out there trying to get their foot in the door, then I feel a sense of purpose. If me taking the time to review a portfolio or give feedback gives someone the confidence to keep pushing themselves, that is absolutely huge for me. I never had these types of resources online when I was in school and I felt like I was walking into the darkness completely blind. Just a few small things could ➤

MAG'HAR DEATH KNIGHT

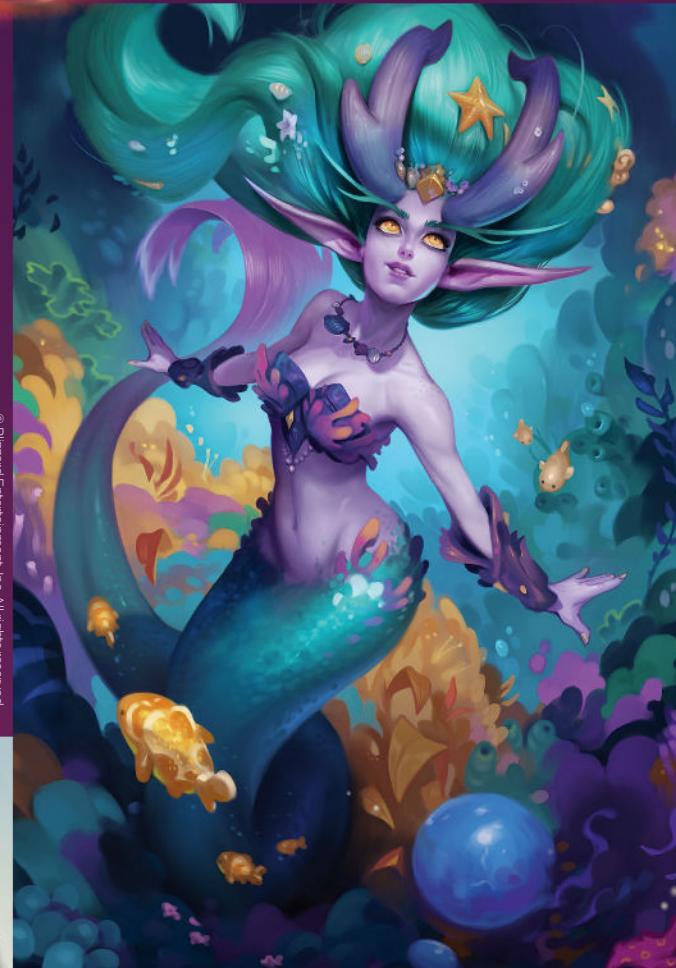
Dave's enthusiasm for his work always appears in the finished result. Here he was filled with hype for the launch of World of Warcraft Shadowlands.



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WILD MAGIC SURGE

One of Dave's favourite Magic: The Gathering cards to work on, as it features the iconic characters of Minsc, Boo and Delina.



SEA DRYAD LUNARA

This Hearthstone character has always been a favourite of Dave's. He says this piece was a ton of fun to work on.

BOLVAR THE GRILL MASTER

Dave says creating work for Blizzard has been his dream for the past 15 years.



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Interview

► have helped or changed the trajectory of my artistic journey so much. I wish I had time for so much more, but I will continue to help the best I can for as long as I can.

Are you ever able to 'switch off' as a concept artist? A lot of your downtime feeds back into your personal work.

I do have a hard time not working, especially these last few years when most of us were stuck at home. When I am not doing concept art, I usually settle back into illustration. My evenings usually consist of doing illustration work for Hearthstone, which has such an amazing team behind it and I really love doing those illustrations. Lately I am trying to give myself more of a break at night and I usually spend time either playing World of Warcraft or League of Legends with my friends. I'm also a big fan of Minecraft and spend SO much time in that game.

“I'd rather see amazing creativity in a portfolio than just the ability to render”

Of all the work you have created, what are you most proud of and why? The piece that stands out for me most is one called 'Eternal Love'. While I was working on that piece, I felt a complete shift in how I was painting, and a lot of pieces started clicking into place as far as how I was approaching colour and even the subtlety of colours next to each other. This was also my first piece that was accepted into Spectrum, which was a major accomplishment for me personally.

What advice do you have for aspiring concept artists?

The obvious one is probably just creating a stellar portfolio. I usually recommend 10-15 pieces of your best work and work that really reflects what you want to do in the industry. Show as much of your creativity and your process as you can. Fully rendered splash illustrations won't help as much when trying to land a concept art job. They want to see your imagination at play and how you can then connect the

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ROADBOAR

This was released for the Quilboar Hearthstone Battlegrounds set. "My favourite part was definitely the bunny."



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dots to help the rest of the team see your vision as well. I would much rather see amazing creativity in a portfolio than just the ability to render. Rendering skills are something that will come in time, while creativity is a lot harder to teach.

What is next for you? Do you have any exciting projects coming up, or are there areas you'd like to explore? Right now, all my work at Blizzard keeps me really busy. Between World of Warcraft and Hearthstone, my schedule is quite hectic. One area I would love to explore someday is working on comic books and comic book covers. They have always been such an inspiration to me, but I have yet to have the opportunity to work on any. That would just be a huge dream come true.

NORDRASSIL DRUID

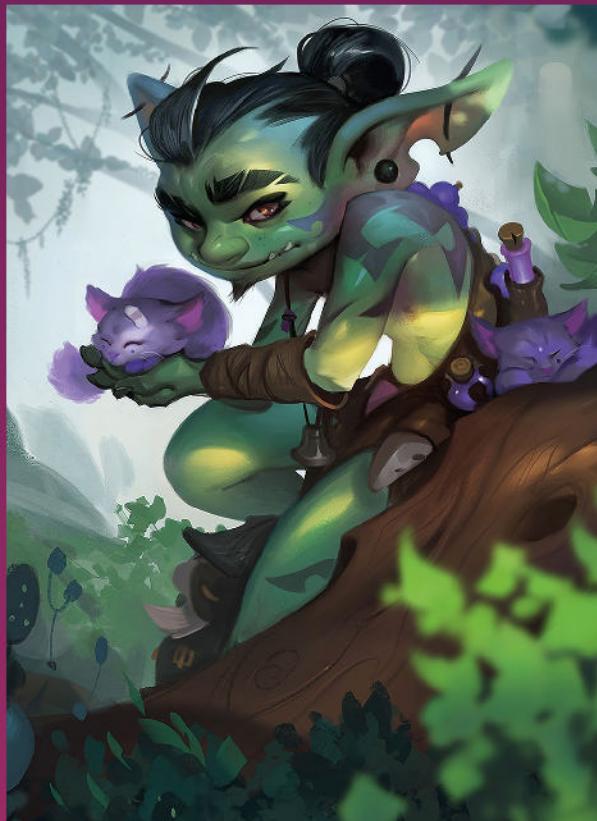
This was Dave's first card for the Hearthstone Core Set. "Creating work for them has been a major goal of mine for many years now."





ETERNAL LOVE

This was a pivotal piece of work in Dave's career as it was featured in Spectrum 25.



GOBLIN

This kindly goblin was whipped up for #goblinweek. Rather than being cruel or mischievous, he's a goblin with a big heart.



RAVEN

Dave wanted to create some "comfy vibe art" for his Twitch channel, so Raven was born.

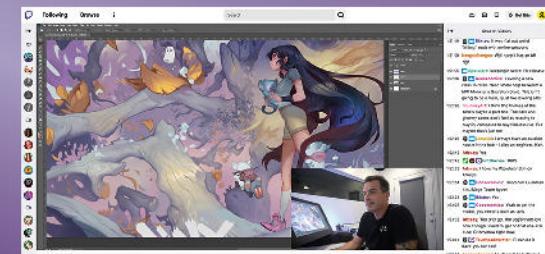
STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Dave Greco talks engaging with the community by streaming on Twitch

When I decided to start streaming my art in 2017, I saw it as a way to hold myself accountable to painting at least three nights a week in order to drive my skills to the next level. My initial plan was to stream for 30 days while working on a few portfolio pieces and then I would be done.

What I didn't anticipate was how much I would end up loving it. It was the community that built up around me that convinced me to create a YouTube channel. I only intended to post a few simple tutorials, but even that blew up into something bigger than I anticipated. Art streaming is a category on Twitch that isn't supported very heavily and the ceiling for it is quite low; because of this, I sometimes found it hard to justify the time spent streaming art. I balanced this with the love I had for the community and the opportunity to help newer artists who were just starting out. I even had the chance to collaborate and work with Mike Shinoda, which is an experience that would have never been possible otherwise.

My best advice is to stream art for the love of streaming and creating art in the company of others. If you are jumping into it with dreams of riches raining down, it may be pretty rough.



ARTIST IN ACTION

Catch one of Dave Greco's streams at twitch.tv/davegrecoart, and check out his video tutorials at youtube.com/c/DaveGreco.

Sketchbook

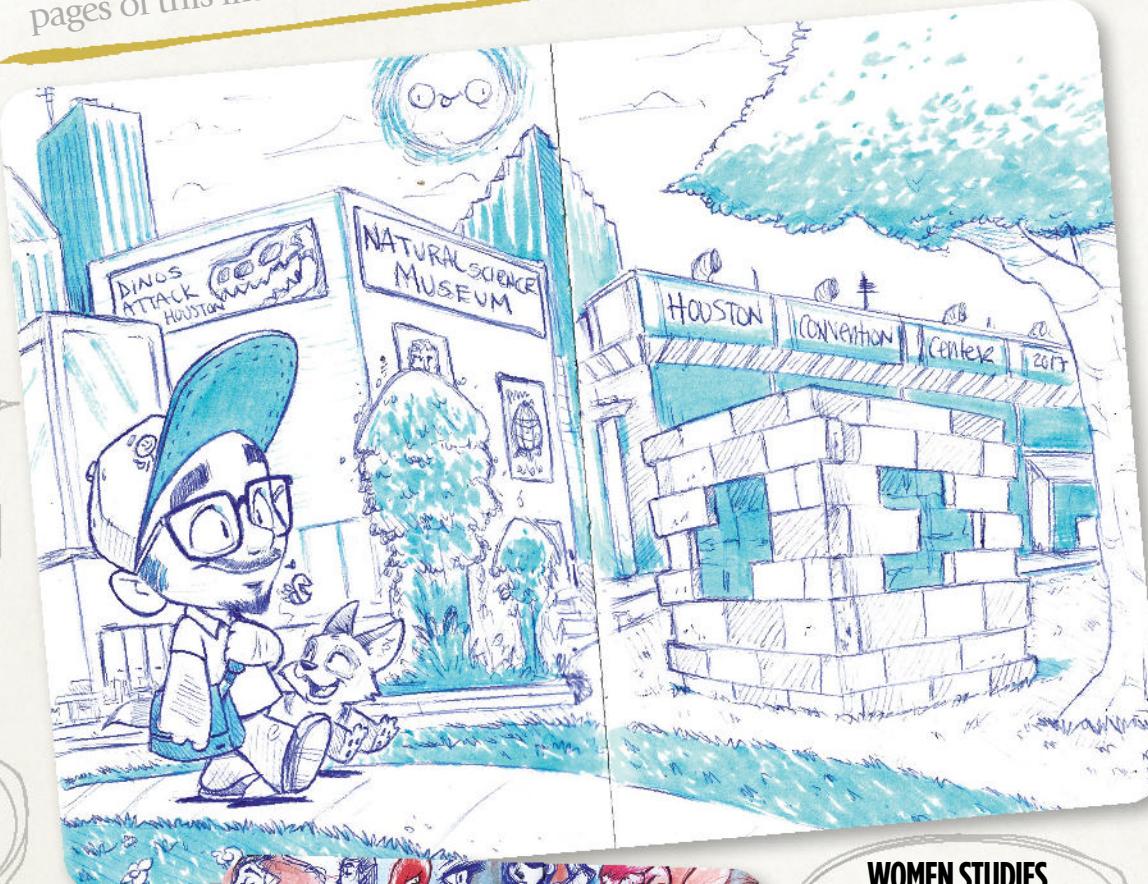
Rodrigo Gonzalez

Check out the amazing variety of styles, genres and character designs inside the pages of this illustrator and designer's diverse sketchbook



MY LIFE'S STORY

"I have come to love sharing my life experiences through my doodles. The reason I became an artist was because I wanted to journal my life. Creating stories, emotions and feelings through a still image is something I strive for with each drawing I do."



SKETCH EVERYTHING

"If you want to become an artist, you need to learn to draw and draw! So always have a sketchbook ready, or find a napkin or notepad. Find that time to draw."



WOMEN STUDIES

"The lovely women in my life will always be the #1 inspiration for my drawings."

Artist PROFILE

Rodrigo Gonzalez (Rodgon)

LOCATION: US



Rod is an illustrator from San Diego, California. He is an Animation graduate from the Art Institute of CA, and has an extensive background in multimedia, character design, comics, graphic design and production art. With that knowledge, he aims to teach people how to navigate living life as an artist, all through his social media channels. www.rodgon.com

PINUPS AND MOVIES

"I have always been a fan of pin-up illustrations. When I was young all I wanted to do was draw amazing women like my Idols Frank Cho, Chris Sanders and Dean Yeagle."



“The reason I became an artist was because I wanted to journal my life”

FANTASY WORLD

"There are few things I love more than drawing dragons, monsters and all sorts of fantasy creatures. I always do my best to spin them into fun interactions that make you giggle."



Sketchbook



LIFE AS A MENTOR

"I have always wanted to be a teacher. I have wanted to teach art but I wasn't able to afford to get my master's degree... So I found my own way. I love teaching as much as I love drawing and want to reach as many artists as I can!"



CUTE ANIMALS AND PRETTY GIRLS

"My two favourite things to draw are pinups and cute animal companions. I find that combination to be the absolute best."



“Treat styles as different tools in your arsenal and learn to combine them”



ART TOOLBOX

"It's silly to just stick to one style. Treat styles as different tools in your arsenal and learn to combine them for an even wider range in your art skills!"



Sketchbook Rodrigo Gonzalez



PENNYWISE

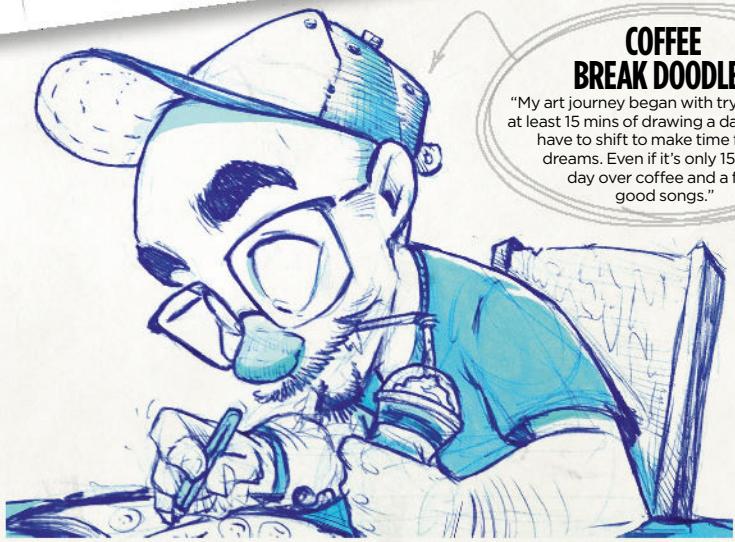
"As an illustrator I consider myself a storyteller as well. I believe that you really do need both skills to grow. So read some books and watch some movies to build that mental library up too!"



HARD TOPICS

"I love taking topics that we normally find hard to express and make them into characters that will not just warm your heart, but help you understand those emotions better."

Sketchbook

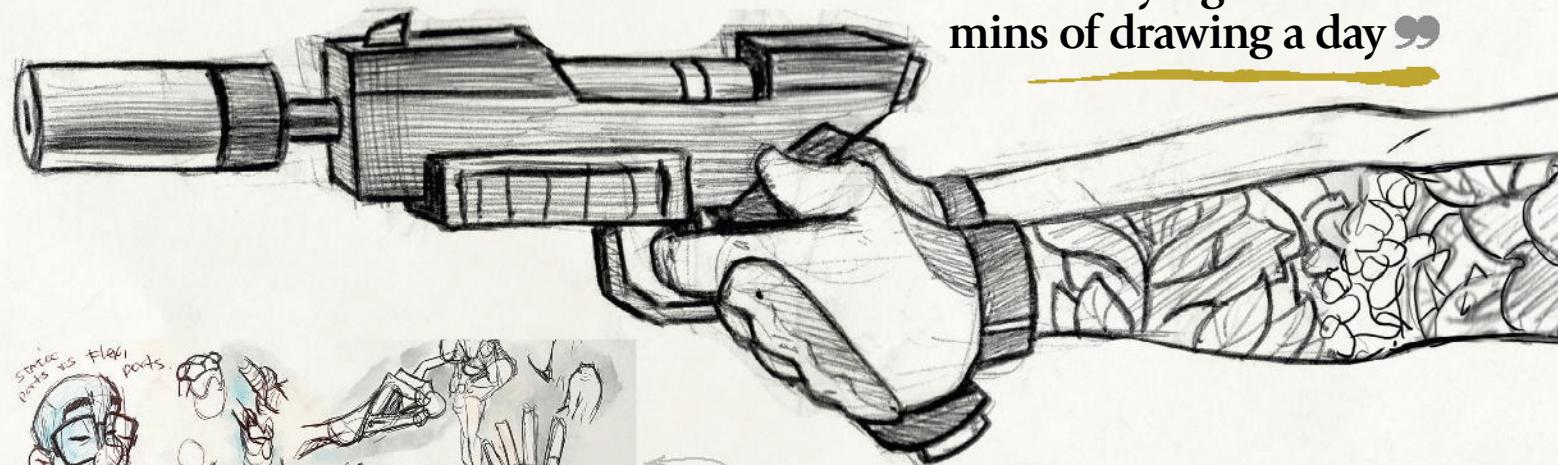


COFFEE BREAK DOODLES

"My art journey began with trying to fit in at least 15 mins of drawing a day. Priorities have to shift to make time for your dreams. Even if it's only 15 mins a day over coffee and a few good songs."



“My art journey began with trying to fit in 15 mins of drawing a day”

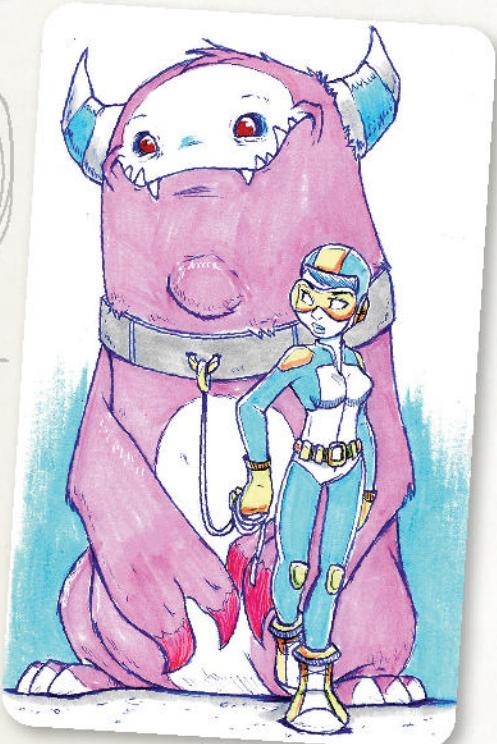


STREAMING DAY AND NIGHT

"One day I decided that I would share my time drawing with my followers. I have never looked back and am able to help people by answering their questions live with doodles and good explanations."

THE PRETTY AND THE UGLY

"I love creating contrasts that go beyond colour. I like putting creepy with cute, sad and happy and everything in between! I love playing with contrasting elements in personalities as well."



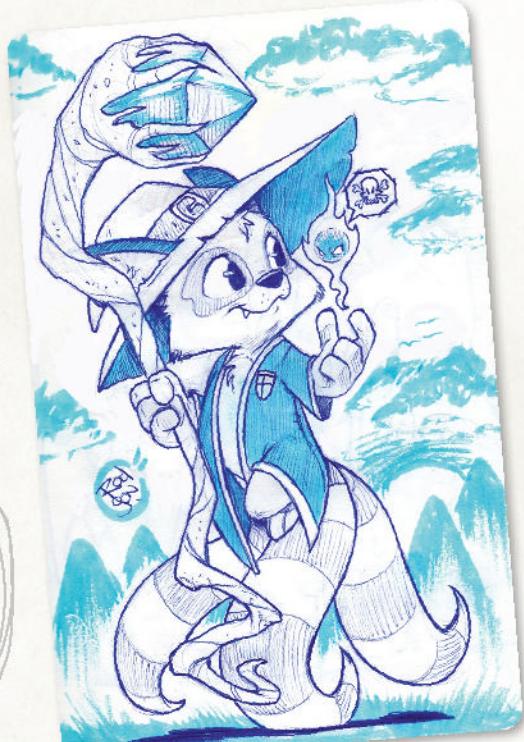
Sketchbook Rodrigo Gonzalez



MY PAL ARCHIE PANDA

"Archie panda is my little character that represents all my goodness and kindness. I created him and a few others so that

I could draw my emotions easier, and he is cute as a button."



NO ERASING!

"I started drawing with only pen, so that I would need to force myself to have better and more decisive linework. It was horrible at first and felt like I would never create good art. Gradually my art got better, cleaner, and I'll never look back."

ONE LAST WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

"Don't ever forget the reasons you became an artist. Those loves and passions you had will help you get through some tough times and harsh jobs. Always keep that little light on to help you when you need it most. You got this!"

Do you want to share your sketches with your fellow ImagineFX readers? Send us an email with a selection of your art, captions for each piece and a photo and bio of yourself to sketchbook@imaginefx.com

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1 NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineEX Workshops

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are available...**

Download your resources by turning to page 6. And if you see the video workshop badge, you can watch the artist in action, too.



Advice from the world's best artists



This issue:

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Our cover artist Laura H. Rubin breaks down her process.

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Check out this incredible fantasy battle by Greg Rutkowski.

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Blake Rottinger explores how to design a beautiful vista.

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Discover the inspirations to Ismail Inceoglu's sci-fi scene.

70 Illustrate an ancient jungle

Rob Green demonstrates how to build an amazing environment.

Procreate

PAINT A STRIKING FEMALE PORTRAIT

Discover how **Laura H. Rubin** utilises colour, emotional contrasts and strong posing in her amazing character portraits

Artist PROFILE

Laura H. Rubin
LOCATION: Switzerland

Laura is an award-winning digital artist who specialises primarily in emotional character portraits. She has designed for clients such as Ubisoft and Square Enix. www.laurahrubin.com



In this workshop I will guide you through the process of creating a graceful yet strong female character. I'll show you step by step how I go from a simple idea, to a rough sketch, to the final character design. For this I mainly work with my personal portrait brushes in Procreate.

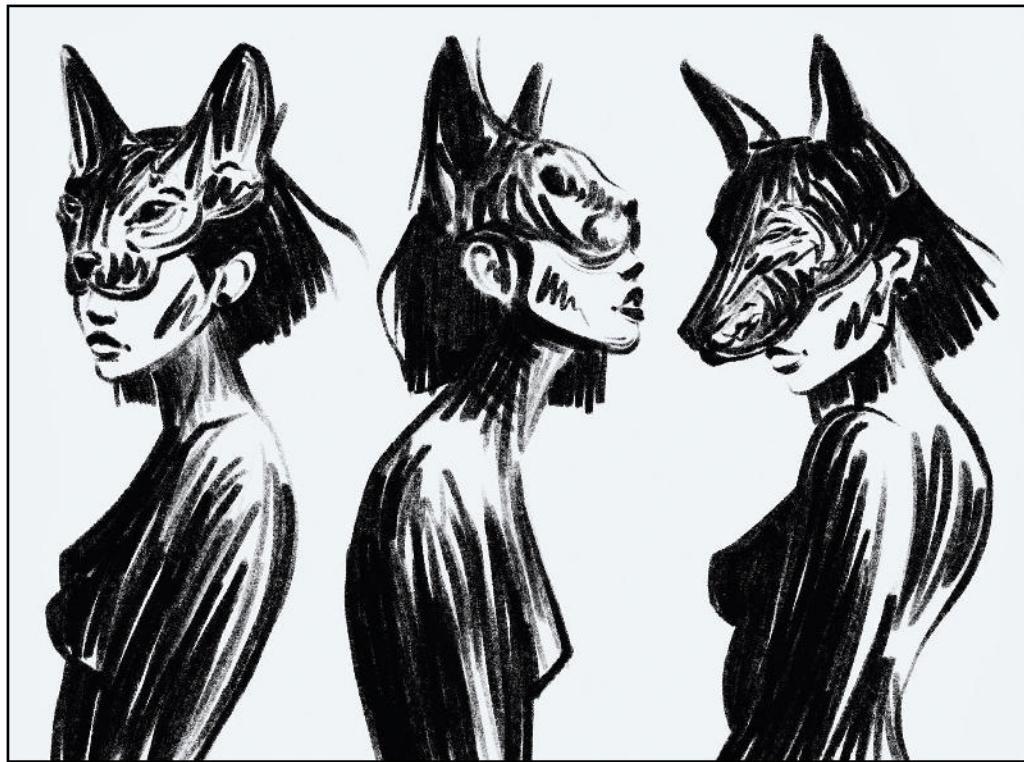
I love to create designs with strong contrasts, but I'm not only talking about the obvious light/dark, but

also emotional contrasts, which only reveal themselves after a longer look. A graceful and almost fragile character, who nevertheless appears to possess great inner strength thanks to simple body language and correctly placed shading.

The psychological aspect of my work has always been very important to me. Few artists talk about this, as it is not really taught in art schools, but for me it means everything. It ensures drawing

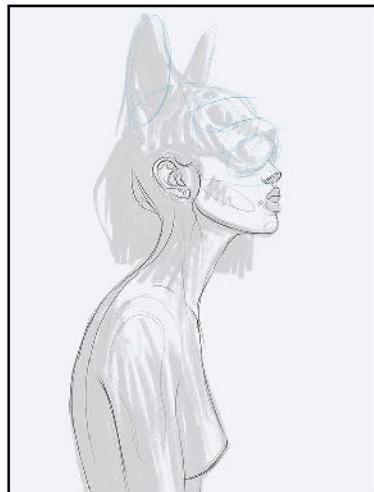
doesn't feel like work, but rather a soothing therapy. Which is why I think it's important to talk about neuro-scientific thoughts when creating a new character, because a completed work of art always involves at least two people: the artist with a vision, and the viewer with an impression.

In this tutorial I'll show you how I created 'Through My Eyes', one of my better known works, and what thoughts I had during the process.



1 Create a rough sketch

I start with some simple, very rough sketches. I use one of the Procreate basic brushes for this, 6B Pencil, which looks a bit like it imitates pastels. I can work better if I start with a rough pencil, as it keeps me from suddenly getting lost in small, irrelevant details. I always look to generate a strong yet natural pose. A little tip: the neck points slightly forward and the shoulders tend to pull back. This way you can achieve a confident posture that doesn't look arrogant thanks to the neck bending forward.



2 Proportions

Next I choose the sketch I like best, set the layer to half opacity and paint a more detailed sketch over it, using the HB Pencil. This sketch is mainly about proportions. If the proportions aren't right yet, I use parts of my own face as a reference. The correct positioning of the cat mask is also very important in this step. The forehead of the cat must be placed at the same height as the crown of the character. If I place the mask too high or low, the head will look strangely deformed. ➤

In depth Striking portraits



Workshops



3 Work non-destructively

Now I hide my first sketch and finalise the new, more detailed drawing. To work non-destructively, I use as many layers as possible. I also paint the cat mask on separate layers and place them in a layer folder so that I can reposition the mask later if necessary. Non-destructive editing is a type of editing where the original content is preserved and not changed. This opens up the possibility of undoing any operation without losing data. Therefore, I would always advise to use many layers and also layer masks to take full advantage of digital working.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PROCREATE

DEFAULT BRUSHES: HB PENCIL

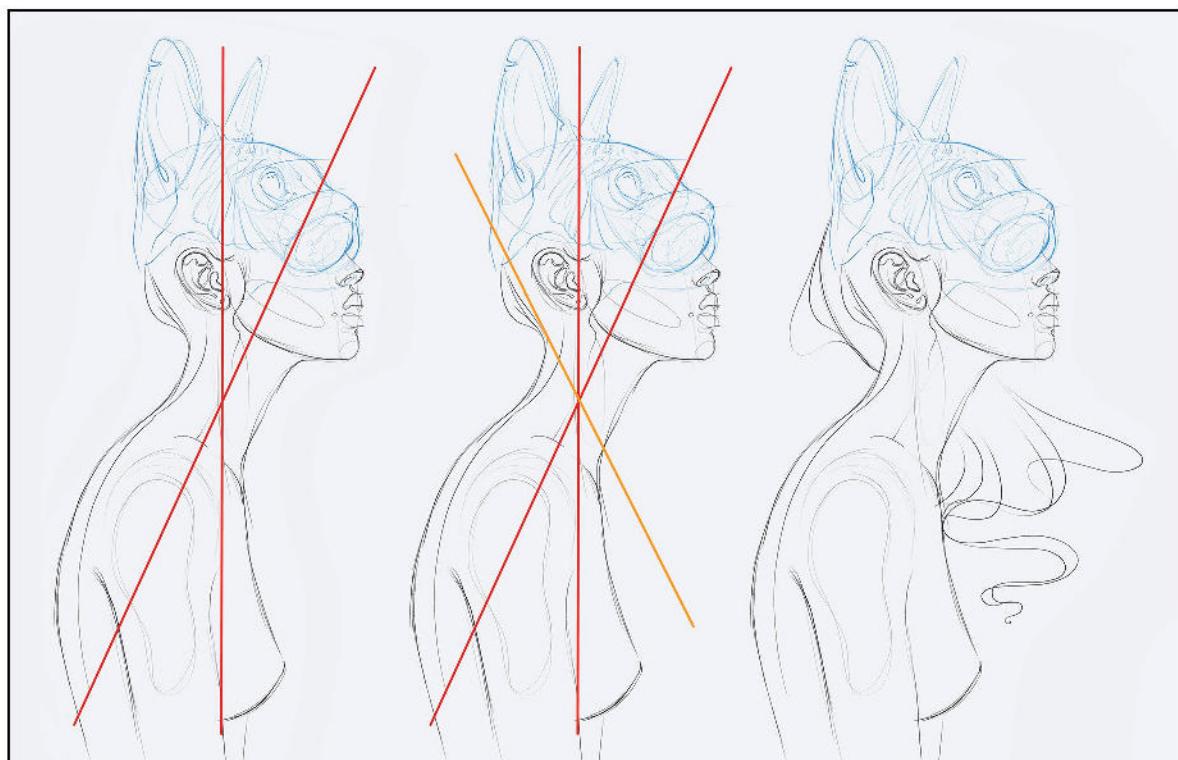
This brush is ideal for detailed sketches, because the pen imitates a sharp pencil.

6B PENCIL

I find that this brush is particularly good for rough sketches, so you don't get lost in details.

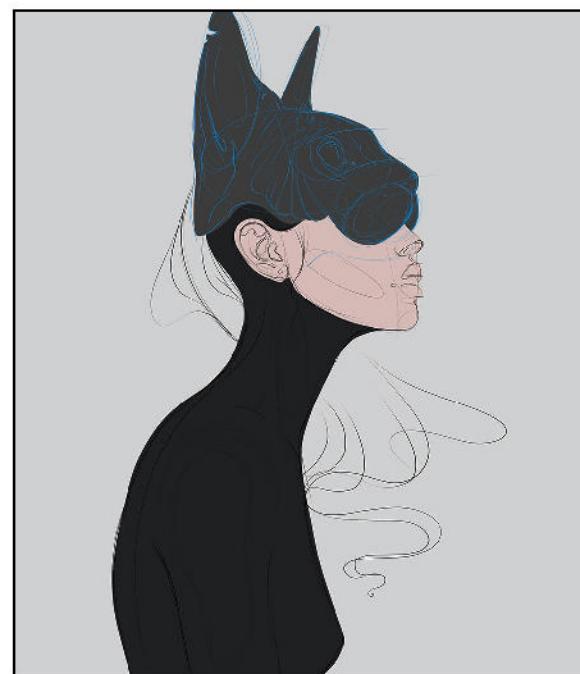
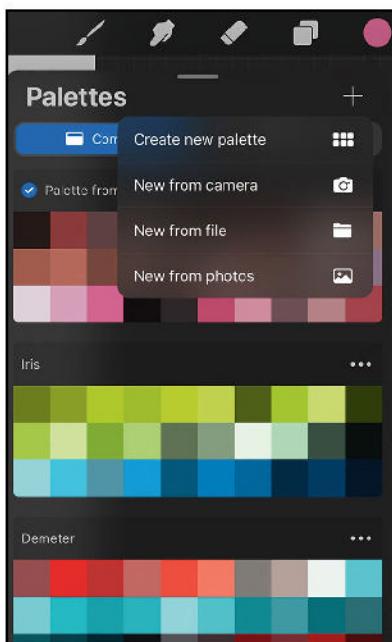
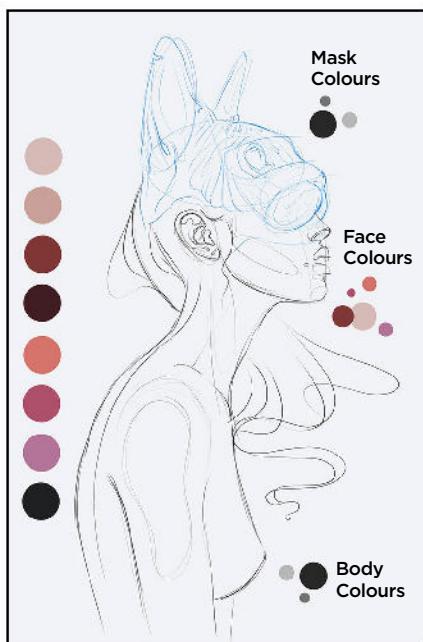


You can also purchase a huge range of custom Procreate brushes made by Laura H. Rubin via laurarubin.gumroad.com



4 Construct the posture, and ensure balance

In the first example, the body is well balanced, as the head is tilted as far forward as the back is tilted backward in return. However, I would now like to have another element, which from top-left to bottom-right completes the composition (see example 2 with the orange line). In most cases the placement of hair, for example, is suitable for this. Therefore I don't just apply the hair from the first sketch, but change it a bit to round off the composition.

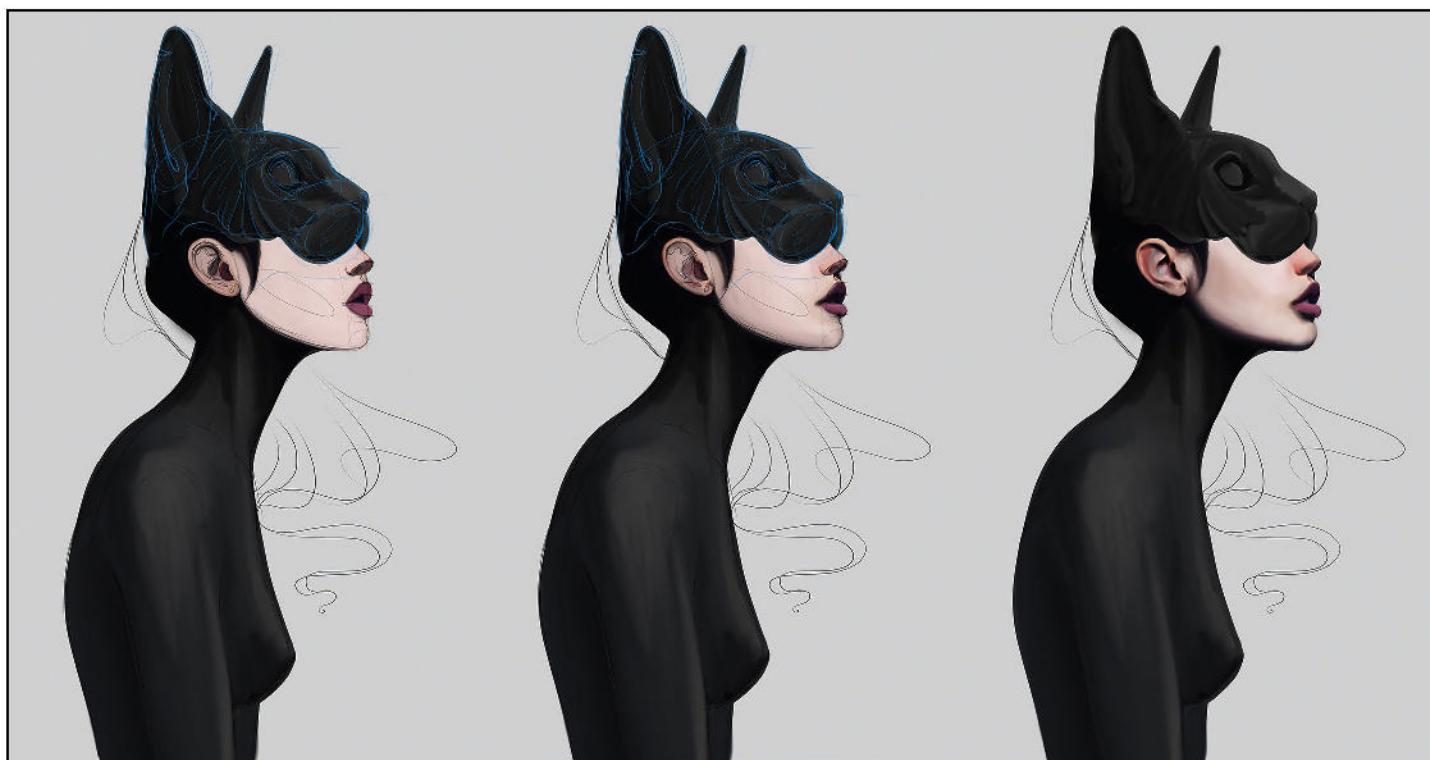


5 Colour selection

The sketch is now finished and ready for some colour. If, like me, you sometimes just need a little inspiration for your colour scheme, you can have Procreate create an inspiration palette for you from an existing photo. To do this, open the colour palettes in Procreate and click + in the upper right corner. Then select 'New from photos' and choose a picture from your photo album where you like the colours. Procreate will then create a new colour palette for you, consisting of the colours of the image.

6 Base colouring

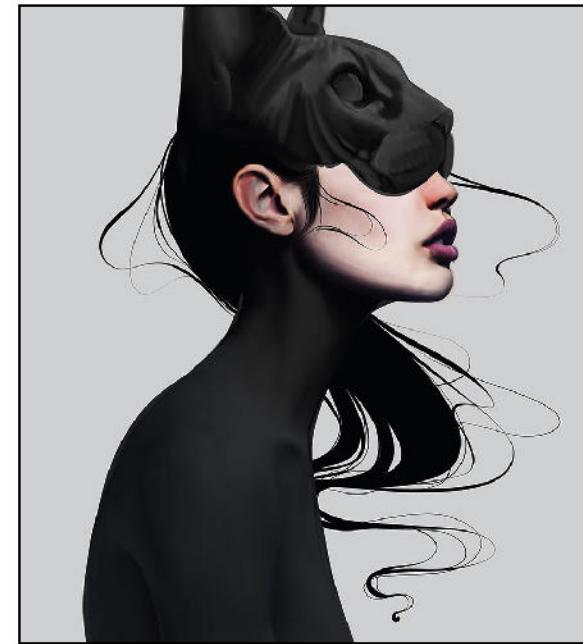
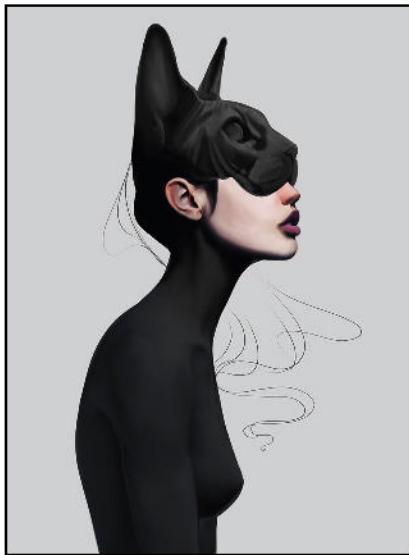
When colouring, I always start with one base colour per area. Here, for example, one colour for the mask, the face and the body. I'll colour the hair separately later. From here on I use the brushes that I have created myself over the last few years. These are based on real skin structures, which makes my work much easier.



7 Detailed areas

From here on I go step by step into more and more detail. I choose additional colours for areas like the mouth, nose and ears. For the mask and body, I start using a slightly lighter colour to highlight the individual body parts. Next, I use the Smudge tool in Procreate to smudge the individual colour areas to create smooth transitions. Once I have all the colours defined, I start shading. In this step I usually hide the guides because I don't need them to see the proportions anymore. ➡

Workshops



8 Finalise body posture

In the next step, I start with the first details and slowly venture into the facial expressions of the mask and the character. It's important that the character's chin is pointed upwards, so that she doesn't look submissive due to the slightly bent posture. I paint the mouth slightly open – she should look interested, as if she had just looked up at that very moment, looking for something. This section is unfortunately also the most strenuous, because you can see only now, through the shading, whether the pose makes sense. If it doesn't, the liquify tool can help, at least for fixing minor mistakes, otherwise you have to start again from the second sketch. In this step I try to paint the body/posture already as detailed as possible, so that I can judge again whether the pose really makes sense.

9 Hair

I love giving the characters this weightless manga hair. Even though the hair design is all black, it still looks light and graceful. I was inspired by anime and also by the 2003 animated movie Sinbad, where the antagonist was Eris, the goddess of chaos. Her body, as well as her hair, was always completely weightless, as if she was underwater all the time.



10 Realistic-looking skin

Next I paint the skin texture, pores and small wrinkles. In this case, the lips and ears are the most difficult. The use of highlight brushes is very important here for a more dynamic look. I am referring to the white areas around the mouth, nose, ears, and of course the eyes of the cat mask.

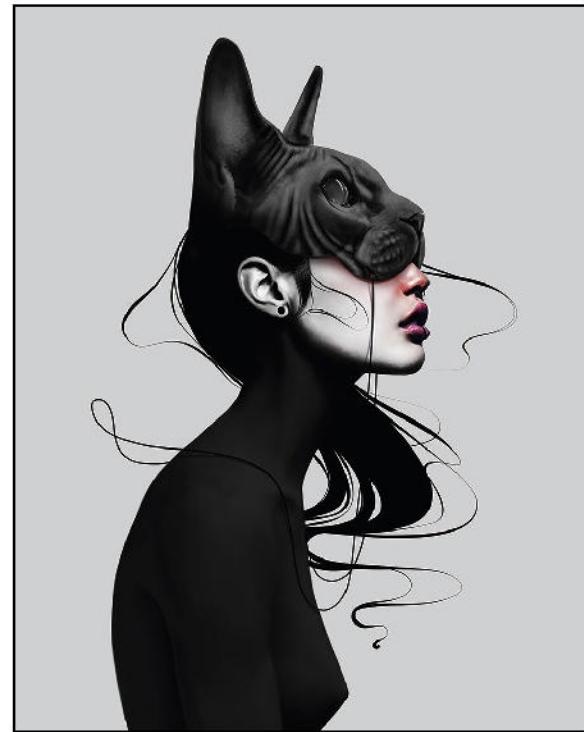
I give the character this 1% smile by lifting the corners of the mouth ever so slightly; it depends on the observer's way of thinking and if they actually interpret the slightly raised mouth corners as a subtle smile or not. Both would be fine, because the interpretation of each viewer is different and depends on their life experiences.

The wrinkled skin of the cat mask was also tough; it helps to have good references on hand. The look of the cat mask should reflect the look of the character under it. Humans are programmed to always look in the eyes first; according to studies, we even look into the eyes of a character first – even a fantasy creature that doesn't wear its eyes on its head.



11 Characteristics

I am now taking care of the final details, such as some features that all my characters get. These would be plugs on both ears, a septum piercing and, most importantly, the line on the lower lip. Also, I add the shadow that the mask is casting on the face. The back of the character's head now merges with the mask, making it unclear where the mask begins and the character ends. Such details have been shown to keep the viewer in front of your work longer, as the brain automatically tries to create logical connections where there are none.



12 Final colour grading

Now comes the colour grading. I want to make the character look more sensual, so I draw the viewer's attention to the lips. One way to do so is leaving only this area coloured and desaturating the rest.



13 Finishing touches

I like to put a light grain over the image. I use one of my noise brushes and paint the entire image with it, then change the layer settings to Overlay. This gives the image an analog effect like most people know from photography. Unattractive brush-stroke imperfections or banding artefacts from gradients are smoothed out and make the work look a bit more detailed and natural.



14 Everybody needs some friends

You know that feeling when you've completed your artwork, but you can't shake the notion that there's still something missing? I had that with this piece, so I did the other sketch as well. Sometimes one artwork just doesn't express everything you want it to, which is where a series of images can help.

Technique focus

LAY THE GROUNDWORK

Greg Rutkowski on composing this intense volcano battle illustration for the video game *Neverwinter: Dragonslayer*



"This artwork was a joy to create. It's a genre that I love, with amazing creatures and the type of scenes I enjoy building. Once I established the composition, I started working on the value and the light. I decided to light the dragon from below to make it look terrifying, and also to separate the background and

foreground. This gave me an interesting focal point, but the real challenge was to separate the colours. Being in a volcano, I didn't have many to play with!"

"When creating a large scene like this, spend enough time analysing everything at the composition stage. If you establish an interesting composition, it'll guide you through the whole painting process."

Artist PROFILE

Greg Rutkowski

LOCATION: Poland

Greg Rutkowski is a Polish artist who has worked professionally in the industry since 2009. His clients include Wizards of the Coast, Gearbox Publishing, Disney and Ubisoft. <https://bit.ly/3dIeSYZ>

Tech Focus Composition



Photoshop CREATE STUNNING LANDSCAPES

Blake Rottinger breaks down the core elements that help bring this beautiful fantasy vista to life

Artist **PROFILE**

Blake Rottinger

LOCATION: Australia

Blake is a freelance concept artist with seven years of professional experience in the AAA games industry. He is currently working on Marvel's Spider-Man 2 for the PlayStation 5. blakerottingerart.com



When starting my personal paintings, such as this one, I tend to theme them around a specific colour wheel and general mood. I always try to change the environments I paint and don't usually do similar colour schemes throughout recent pieces. My professional work also influences my personal work, so I found myself looking to change it up from the dark and dreary work my clients are asking for at the moment. For this image I started with a photo plate I found online where I found the colour and lighting appealing.

I tend not to plan too much with these types of pieces, allowing myself

more creative freedom. If I'm working on a specific skill I will plan the image more – however, for this piece I knew I wanted a detailed figure in the foreground looking over this vista, so I came up with a travelling merchant peddling strange curios on her way to a trading hub of sorts. I knew I didn't want to have too many compositional elements and keep the read of the shapes fairly simple, instead focusing on the lighting and details of the figure as well as the water in the foreground. I personally find set dressing a space really fun, so I knew the figure would be the focal point and I would spend a lot of time on the items and patterns shown there. ►



How I create... FANTASY ENVIRONMENTS



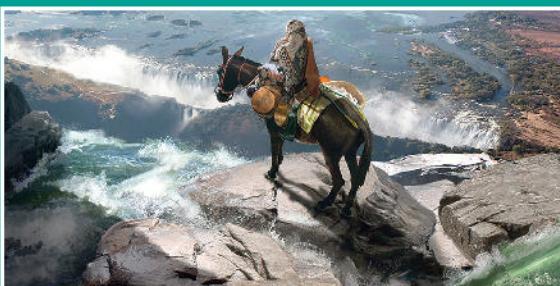
1 Photobashing

The photo plate I used in the background informed most of the decisions I made throughout the image, such as lighting and composition. I photobashed the foreground to match the lighting, also considering the shape and flow of the rocks to aid the composition.



2 A cohesive story

From here, I then got to work on the story elements and polishing up existing work, such as the figure. The main detail in this image was the figure so I spent majority of my time here. I then changed the original plate's geography and added the city to give the image a cohesive story and secondary grab.



3 Detail and texture

Nearing the final stages of a painting, detail density and the human touch is highly important to me. I use a good old-fashioned paint brush to work over the image and get interesting strokes, while also dialing back the detail in places where it is not needed. I utilise the Mixer brush on the photos themselves to create texture and interesting elements.

BUILDING THE SCENE

City

For the city's architecture I took inspiration from the likes of Ancient Egypt and the Mayan civilisation. To bring in some fantastical elements, I adorned the main building with interesting shapes and littered the surrounding islands with these converging giant bridges.

Middle ground

Since this is a predominantly bright image, I needed a darker value to separate the foreground and background. The darkness itself doesn't come from light per se, but instead the materials the light is interacting with. Water reflects light a lot more than grass and trees.



Grouped values

I also use my personal paintings to further develop skills for my professional career. I find it important to reach out to peers who are better than myself to critique and give feedback on my work. For this piece, I contacted a friend who is a better traditional painter, who provided me with invaluable feedback on my grouped values and lighting exposure.



Real-life reference

For the figure I asked my partner to be the model. Setting up and taking your own photos is almost always better than trying to find them on the internet, since you can dictate perspective, lighting and pose. It's a good way to get perfect lighting and not have to necessarily theorise it and paint it.

Lighting a scene

For the curios on the merchant's steed, I used images from a photo pack of a bazaar I purchased. It's great to buy photo packs and keep them on hand since you never know when they will come in handy. I tried to balance some generic items with occult-like items to keep the mystery.



Water rendering

Water is one of my favourite elements to paint because you can really make the shapes flow. I usually start with photobashing as a base plate to get the intricate details you see. After I have a base I then usually go in with brushes to dial back detail and make interesting paint strokes.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: TEXTURED ALL ROUNDER

I use this brush as a general all-rounder. Good for sketching fine lines and also for texture.

STENCIL SPONGE

A great brush for bringing in some high noise texture.

FLAT TEXTURE

A hard shaped brush, ideal for when you want to really show your Photoshop paint strokes.

Technique focus
COLOUR AND ATMOSPHERE

Ismail Inceoglu talks the thoughts behind his sci-fi scene 'Little Planet'

"Usually when I start a new drawing I don't have any particular idea in mind. Instead of sketching I prefer to paint big spots of colours and set the atmosphere from the beginning. Once I'm happy with the mood I proceed with the details. Despite the bright colours I like to add a twist of melancholy to make it a bit controversial. For this drawing I wanted to hint at the sci-fi covers of the 60-70s which I like a lot. My best advice would be to stop thinking, combine colours and go with the flow. Trust your imagination." 



Artist
PROFILE

Ismail
Inceoglu

LOCATION: Bulgaria

Ismail Inceoglu is a concept artist and illustrator of video games, movies and books. He is a true fan of sci-fi and cyberpunk.
<https://bit.ly/3qf9Hz0>





Blender & Photoshop ILLUSTRATE AN ANCIENT JUNGLE

Concept artist **Rob Green** explains his approach to image creation, demonstrating techniques to fast track you to a finished scene



In depth Illustrate an ancient jungle



Artist PROFILE

Rob Green
LOCATION: UK

Concept artist with six years of industry experience, currently working at Fallen leaf Studios on *Fort Solis*.
<https://bit.ly/3QIBjLZ>



Starting out as an artist, creating a professional-level image can feel like an unattainable feat. This is exacerbated when you see thousands of highly skilled artists on social media, creating incredible images that leave you wondering how on earth they arrived at such a detailed and complex final result. When you don't know the strategies artists use to get such

outcomes, the ArtStation home page can be quite an intimidating place. Hopefully, in this workshop I can help remedy this by breaking down the gargantuan task of creating a professional-level image into nice, bite-sized, achievable tasks.

In this tutorial I will be giving you a glimpse behind the curtain and showing you some of the many strategies we concept artists utilise to get a professional outcome in a short amount of time.

I'll start by describing how I come up with ideas and create black-and-white sketches. After that, I'll cover a variety of techniques for building a 3D base for your image in Blender. Finally, I'll utilise a combination of photo-bashing and painting techniques to bring us to the final image in Photoshop. I can't cover everything in this article, so if you want a more in-depth look, check out the video tutorial in the resources section! ➤

Workshops



RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: TEXTURE 2

Incredibly versatile, with lots of texture for the early sketching phase and great at polishing.

SAMPLED BRUSH 2 11

A very textural brush that keeps away the temptation of diving into details too early.

SAMPLED BRUSH 10 3

This brush leaves a smooth finish and is perfect for painting rounded forms.

SAMPLED BRUSH 13 9

Great for adding gritty texture. Perfect for painting rocks and other rough surfaces.

SQUARE 2

I almost always use this brush for polishing a piece; it works really well for nitty-gritty details.

CLOUD 1

This brush never fails when I need to knock back some background elements with some fog.

1 Get your ideas down

For me, making a bunch of sketches is typically the first step in producing a personal piece. No one creates successful images on every attempt, so I try to get through all the unsuccessful ones as sketches. It's far better to realise a sketch isn't working than a piece you've sunk 15 hours into! I usually start off with line work, then paint some silhouettes in block value underneath.

2 Finish the sketch

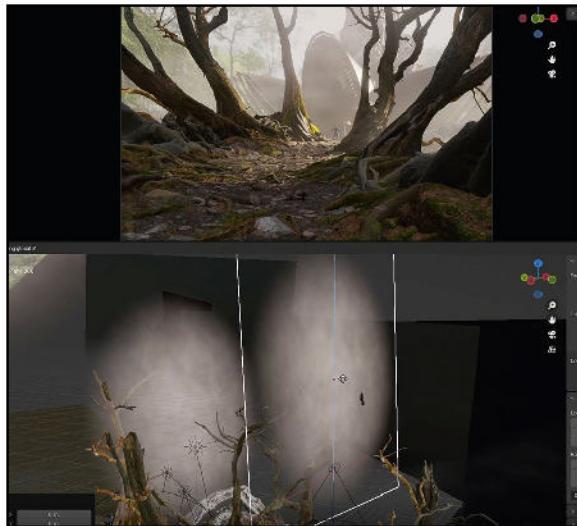
At this stage, try to figure out if your sketch is showing potential before fully committing to it. If it needs to be changed or even abandoned entirely, now is the time. It may help you create a more effective image overall. I am using the block values as masks to paint within and add light, shadow and texture. Then paint on top of everything to add some finer details.



3 Block out the 3D

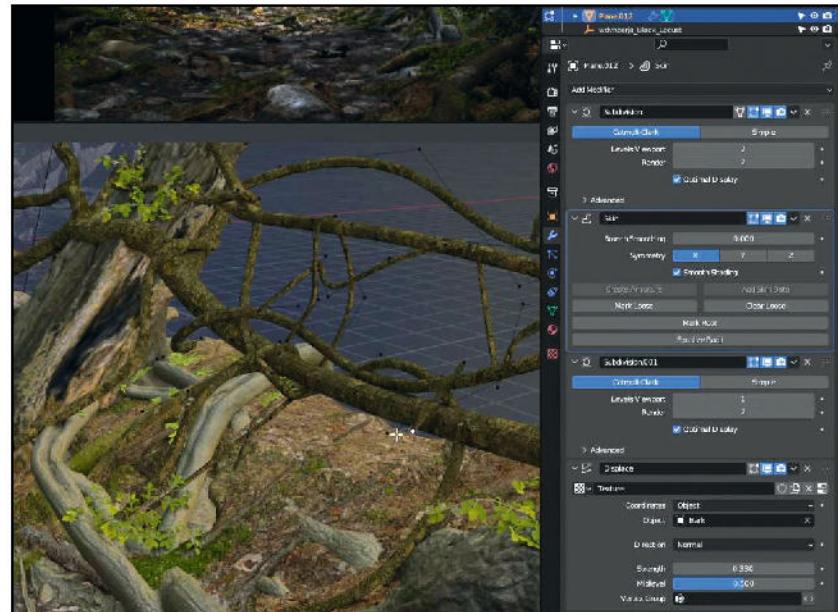
Once I am happy with a sketch, I will begin the 3D blockout. I have used a ton of resources to jump start the image. In this instance, I gathered some photogrammetry from Megascans and Sketchfab. I am matching the 3D to the sketch by using the sketch as a background image in the camera settings, and using proportional editing to warp the models into the correct shapes.

In depth Illustrate an ancient jungle



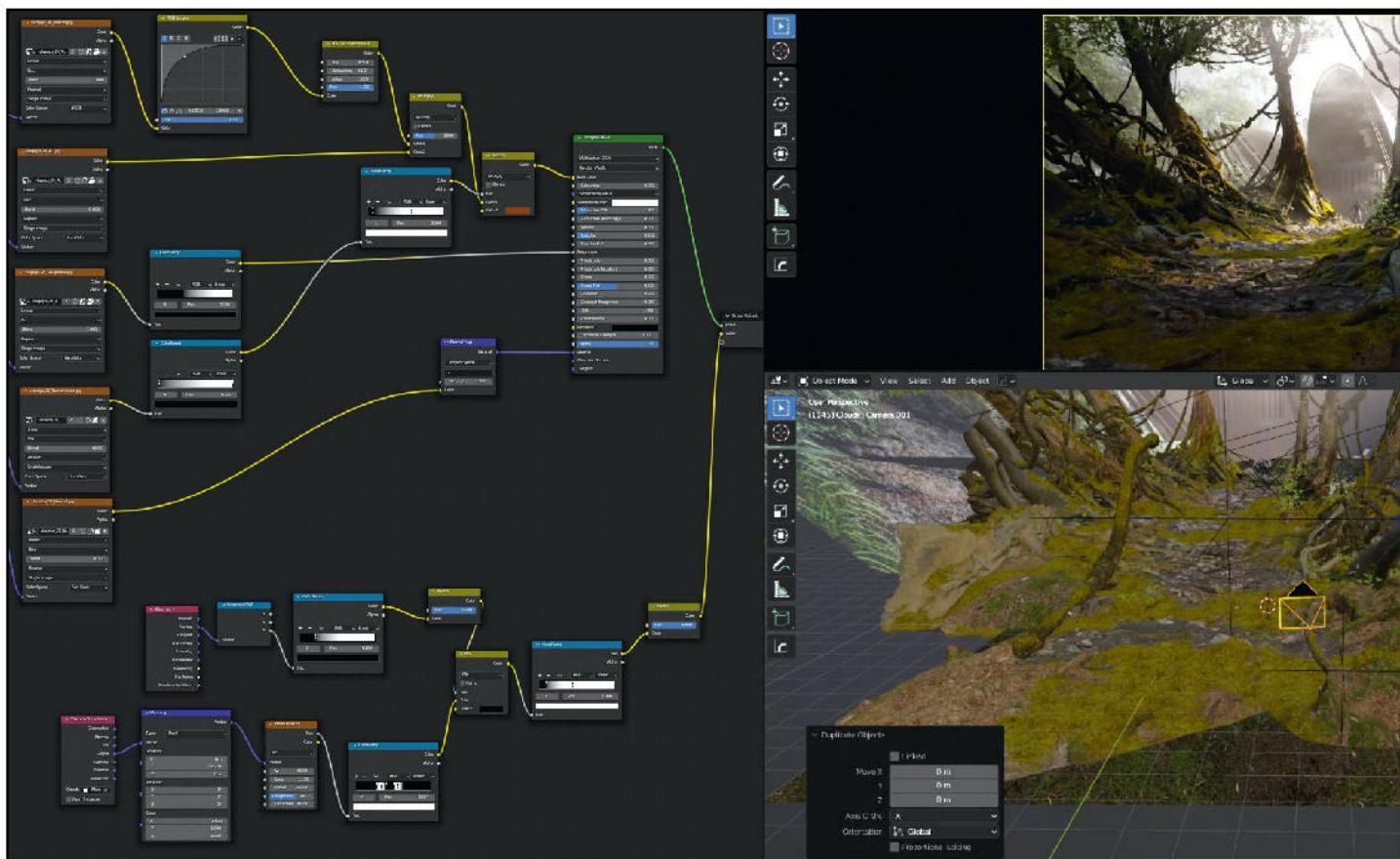
4 Mood and lighting

I like to try to establish the mood of the image with lighting and atmosphere as early as possible. I am using one directional light with some spotlights to highlight certain areas. Additionally, I'm using a Principled Volume shader applied to a cube to add fog and some emissive fog planes dotted around the scene. I'm also casting shadows into the scene using off-camera geometry, blocking off the directional light.



5 Set dressing

Next I'm adding some flora from Megascans. I am also creating vines by starting with an edge and extruding it. Now for some modifiers. First, I add a Subdivision Surface, then a Skin modifier to add thickness. Next, I'm adding another Subdivision Surface on top of that to provide more geometry for the Displacement modifier on top of everything, which is using a bark texture.



6 Unify the scene

Next, use a Mix Shader node to combine moss with the pre-existing material. This will unify all the models in the scene. Add a Geometry node and feed the Normal into a Separate XYZ node. You will get a mask of everything facing upwards from the Z output. Using this, I can have moss only grow on the tops of objects. Dial in the mask with some noise on top. ➤

Workshops

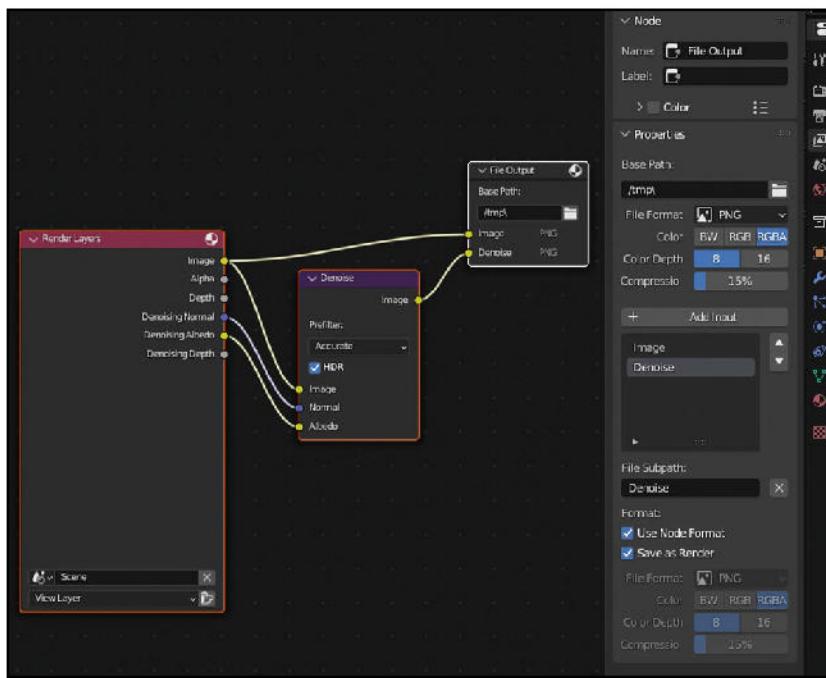


7 Character base

Now, to create a really simple base for the character, I am using an image from Photobash.co. After tweaking it in Photoshop, I imported the image into Blender using the 'Import Images as Planes' addon. Cut out the character with the knife tool and extrude it to add thickness. Then bevel the edges and smooth them in sculpt mode. This will provide a rough base to paint on top of.

8 Make some architecture

Creating the building started out with blocking out the shapes using a Subdivision Surface to get the rough shape of the canopy. Then work into that by extruding loops to create structural beams and using Boolean objects to cut holes into the mesh. Finally, I used the same Skin modifier techniques I used for the vines earlier to create bamboo supports.



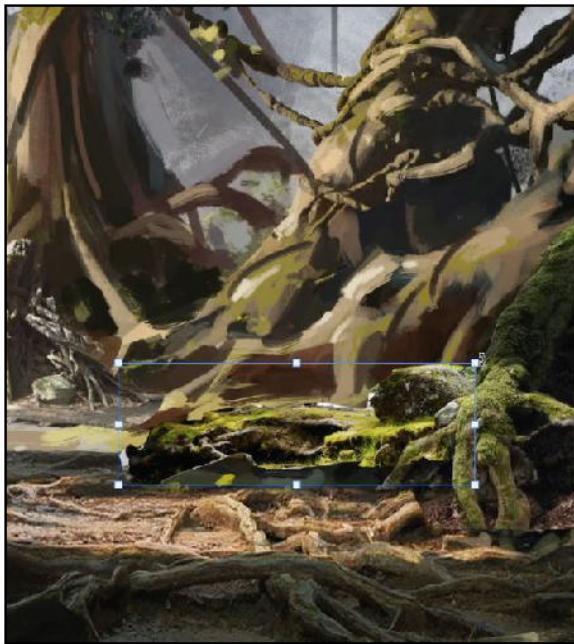
9 Time to render!

Using Cycles with the Denoiser requires a bit of setup. Firstly, enable Denoising Data in the View Layer Properties tab. Next, we will create a simple node setup in the compositor. Create a File Output node. Press 'N' for the node properties. Input your file path and add inputs to save different passes. Add an Image and a Denoise input. Then, add a Denoise node and input the corresponding outputs.

10 Destroy the render!

When moving into Photoshop for the paintover, I try to paint as loosely as possible. I treat this as a secondary sketching phase, making a game plan for the rest of the image. This has the advantage of covering up the 3D render, quickly getting rid of the CG feel. It's important to avoid being precious. If you feel that big changes need to be made, now is the time.

In depth Illustrate an ancient jungle



11 Photobashing

At this point, I like to start photobashing. Once I've masked the image I'm using, I will then try to integrate the colour and value using adjustment layers. I generally start with a curves layer, matching values using the RGB curve, then adjusting the colour channels individually. Try to slow down at this stage. Taking the time to integrate the photos properly will really improve the quality of your image.



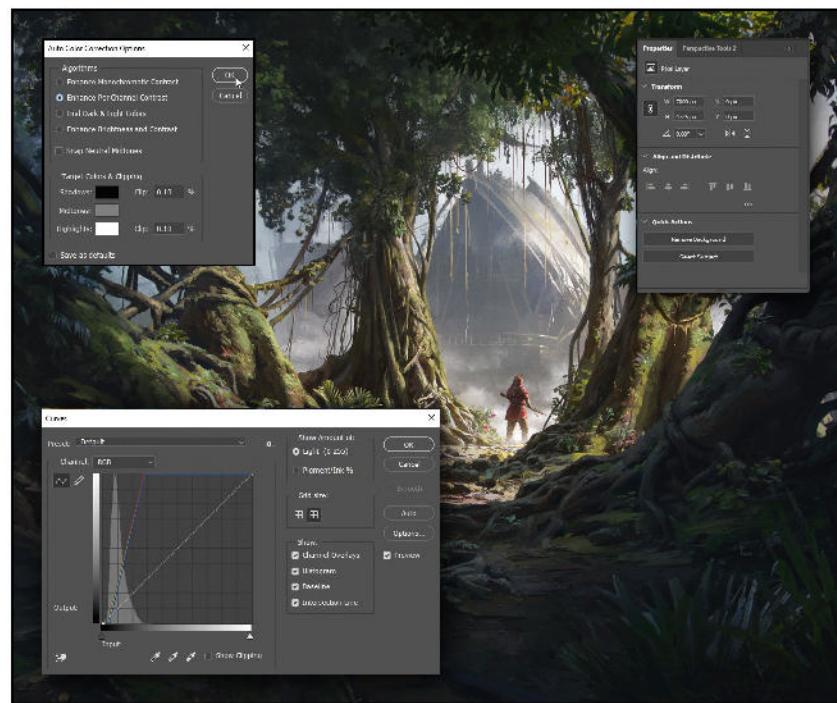
12 Paint the character

Taking a break from the environment, it's time to work on top of the base character we created previously. The base we made for ourselves already had the correct proportions, lighting and colours, making it a great base to work with. Now it is just a case of adding details. I tried to vary the material types between cloth and gold to add interest to the character.



13 Polishing

I find the polishing phase of an image quite therapeutic, painting over everything that's already there with a small brush to unify it all, bringing it closer to final. At this stage, try to relax and take your time! Put on an audiobook and keep chipping away at the image until you either run out of time, or you're happy to call it done!



14 Finish him!

Time to add the finishing touches. Merge your layers down, right-click and go to Blending Options, then uncheck one of the colour channels. Scale the layer a little to add chromatic aberration. Then add a 50% grey layer, go to filters, and add noise. Also desaturate that layer. Set it to Soft Light and dial in the opacity. This will add a subtle film grain to your image.

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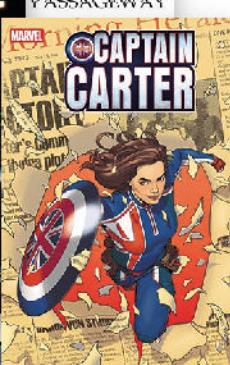
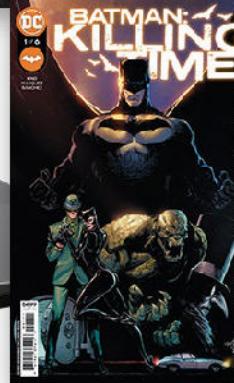
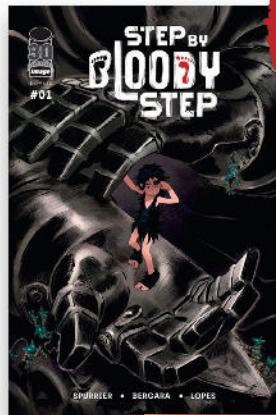
Reviews



Artist's Choice Award

Art resources with a five-star rating receive the ImagineFX Artist's Choice award!

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



6
PRODUCTS
ON TEST



HARDWARE

78 Asus ROG Flow X16

We check out this powerful, well-built laptop with a stellar mini-LED screen.

79 Maidesite SC1 Pro standing desk

This electric standing desk is the perfect choice for creative work.



COMICS

80 Batman: Killing Time

Batman teams up with his adversaries on a daring heist in this six-issue miniseries.

80 Step By Bloody Step

Discover a unique, textless story of a young girl's journey across a fantasy world.



81 The Passageway

This graphic novel kicks off an ambitious new horror universe.

81 Captain Carter

Explore an alternate reality, starring Peggy Carter as a shield-wielding Super Soldier.

RATINGS EXPLAINED

★★★★★ Magnificent

★★★★ Great

★★★ Good

★★ Poor

★ Atrocious



In our testing, we found the ROG Flow X16 wasn't the most comfortable to use in tablet mode.

Mini-LED screen tech tends to disappoint on the desktop, but Asus has nailed it in this high-performance laptop.

Asus ROG Flow X16

PACKED WITH POWER This laptop has a killer mini-LED screen, fantastic all-round performance and 2-in-1 tablet functionality – albeit at quite a price

Price £2,800/\$2,700 **Company** Asus **Web** www.asus.com

The ROG Flow X16 packs a huge range of features and functionality. No question, its killer feature is its 16-inch mini-LED powered screen. The 2,560 by 1,600 pixel native resolution and 165Hz refresh are nice enough, but it's the 512-zone mini-LED backlight that marks this panel out as something special.

Not only is it good for 1,100 nits of peak brightness and HDR 1000 certified, Asus also says it covers fully 100 per cent of the demanding DCI-P3 digital cinema gamut. Impressive. It's also a touch-enabled panel supporting tablet functionality and Microsoft Pen Protocol 2.0.

As for core components, up front and centre is the hot new Ryzen 9 6900HS CPU, an eight-core and 35W variant of AMD's latest mobile CPU. That's paired with a 125W version of the Nvidia GeForce RTX 3070 Ti GPU, along with a MUX switch to ensure maximum graphics performance extraction.

Factor in the 32GB of DDR5 memory, not to mention a 1TB PCIe 4.0 SSD and Asus's comprehensive cooling tech including a Tri-fan thermal module, and you have a recipe for huge performance by pretty much every metric.

FEATURES AND DESIGN

If there's a chink in the Asus ROG Flow X16's armour, it probably involves the 2-in-1 tablet functionality. Not that it's poorly engineered. The chassis feels very rigid and the 360-degree hinge is smooth, slick and has just the right amount of stiction. The keyboard bed is likewise super-solid and the generously proportioned trackpad has little to no flex.

But this is not a compact device at over 35cm wide and tipping the scales at well over 2kg. So, in basic

If you're looking for a powerful, portable laptop, the ROG Flow X16 ticks an awful lot of boxes.

Connectivity includes a pair of 20Gbps USB-C ports with DisplayPort Alt mode and a microSD card reader, which is good, but only HDMI 2.0 rather than 2.1, which is a little disappointing.



ROG Flow X16 images © Asus

ergonomic terms, it's not a terribly comfortable device to hold in tablet mode. Of course, the hinge does offer other benefits too, including the so-called tent or presentation mode. And the touchscreen functionality is always a welcome feature. But it's as a tablet that the Asus ROG Flow X16 is least convincing.

All that said, for such a powerful 16-inch laptop, it's relatively thin, while slim screen bezels keep the over





proportions about as compact as they can be. Thanks to the 2-in-1 functionality, however, all the ports and connectors are located on the sides of the chassis rather than the rear. Depending on how you like to set your desk up, that may not be the best solution for cable management.

The mini-LED panel in this laptop is spectacular. It's painfully bright if you want it to be, but also very well calibrated. Overall, this is one of the

Sure, even quicker 3080 and 3080 Ti graphics chops are available from Nvidia. But we're very much talking marginal gains for benchmark results rather than the sort of big step that you can feel in the real world.

SHOULD YOU BUY IT?

If you're after a really powerful laptop with a fabulous screen, the simple answer is yes. It's very well built, the mini-LED display is exceptional, and its

It's impressive to find that over seven hours of battery-powered video playback is possible.

“It's very well built, the mini-LED display is exceptional, and its CPU and GPU serve up massive performance”

best panels with full-array local dimming implementations we've seen, far better than any comparable desktop monitor. With HDR enabled, you get none of the backlighting weirdnesses that afflict desktop monitors. Just utterly eye-popping HDR performance, plus excellent SDR rendering when in HDR mode. There really are no drawbacks. You can even adjust the overall brightness level in HDR mode, something that's usually not possible with a monitor. Long story short, this is HDR and local dimming done right.

As for the Nvidia graphics, well, again the 3070 Ti GPU is awfully quick.

CPU and GPU serve up massive performance. Add in the 2-in-1 tablet functionality and this is a multi-talented laptop that does so many things well. OK, it's too big to use comfortably as a tablet. And port location on the sides of the chassis can be annoying and untidy in terms of cable management. And, of course, this class of laptop is never going to be cheap. But if you're in the market for a really powerful desktop replacement with a great screen that's up to the job of everything from gaming to heavy-duty video encoding, put the Asus ROG Flow X16 near the top of your shortlist. It's fantastic.

The Maidesite SC1 Pro has ample space, but does it deserve to be in your office?



Maidesite SC1 Pro standing desk

Price £449/\$545

Company Maidesite

Web www.maidesite.co.uk

The benefits of a standing desk have been much lauded recently, with reports claiming that spending more time standing up can do wonders for your back, shoulders and neck health. Since working from home has become more mainstream, there's a wealth of desk options around, with a huge range of price points.

I was already accustomed to bobbing up and down during my work day as I'd been using a standing desk converter for around a year already. So honestly, I was a little sceptical about any benefits I could possibly gain from upgrading to a full standing desk. But I got one anyway, and put it to the test.

The ample size of this pro-level, electric standing desk makes this the perfect choice for creative work. After a couple of weeks using the desk, I'm really impressed by the way it works. When the desk is moving, it is buttery-smooth, really responsive, and has ample space for all your creative kit.

For the size, it's reasonably priced so if you need a lot of space to work (and have a lot of space in your office), it's certainly worth the investment. It's well-designed, beautifully constructed and works like a dream.

DETAILS

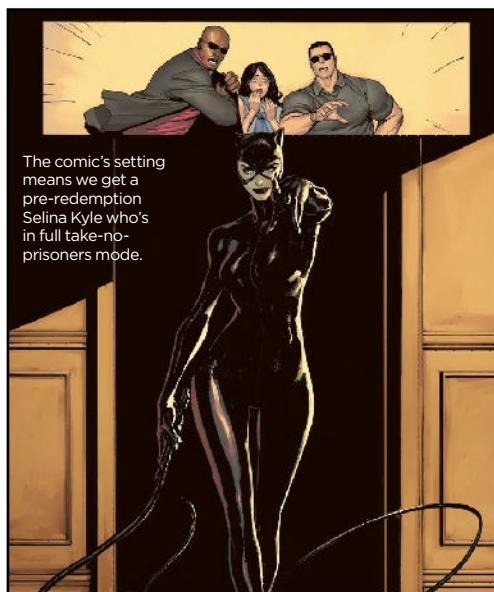
Specifications

- CPU: AMD Ryzen 9 6900HS
- Graphics: Nvidia RTX 3070 Ti 8GB
- RAM: 32GB DDR5
- Screen: 16-inch, 2,560 x 1,600 IPS touch
- HDMI 2.0, 2x USB 3.2 Type-A, 2x USB 3.2 Type-C, 2x USB audio jack, MicroSD card reader, ROG XG Mobile
- Storage: 1TB SSD
- Connectivity: Wi-Fi 6E, Bluetooth 5.2
- Battery: 90Wh
- Camera: 720P webcam
- Size: 35.5 x 24.3 x 1.94cm
- Weight: 2.10kg

Rating



RATING ★★★★★



The comic's setting means we get a pre-redemption Selina Kyle who's in full take-no-prisoners mode.



This six-issue Black Label miniseries is set in the early days of Batman's career as a vigilante.

Batman: Killing Time

THE BIG STEAL The Caped Crusader teams up with his adversaries on a daring heist in this miniseries

Issues 1-3 **Writer** Tom King **Artist** David Marquez **Publisher** DC Comics/Black Label

Comic writer Tom King's projects have almost always been seriously psychological, especially when it comes to his lengthy run on Batman – so it's a surprise to see that his latest series featuring the Dark Knight goes in a very different direction. *Batman: Killing Time* isn't interested in spending time examining its characters. Instead, it concentrates on delivering a dark, fast-paced crime caper that pits the Caped Crusader against four of his best-known adversaries.

The first three issues of this tightly crafted thrill-ride showcase a lot of jumping back and forward in time, but unlike in King's Batman/Catwoman miniseries, where his approach is occasionally inscrutable, the storytelling is always clear and concise. There are some more out-



there moments – especially when the story abruptly starts making occasional tangents into Greek mythology – but for the most part, this is a no-nonsense, pedal-to-the-metal tale of tension, intrigue and backstabbing. And while the conflicts between the group of adversaries are thoroughly entertaining, King also introduces an intimidatingly fearsome new villain, a mystery man known only as "the Help".

The plot twists are enjoyable, the set-pieces are eye-opening, and while

“A no-nonsense, pedal-to-the-metal tale of tension, intrigue and backstabbing”

the art from David Marquez is never revolutionary – his style is sturdy but very standard superhero action – he does pull off some moody atmosphere, along with an impressive muscle car remix of the Batmobile.

So far, *Killing Time* is a well-executed, nicely self-contained thriller that proves Tom King should just relax and enjoy himself with Batman stories more often.

RATING ★★★★☆



The focus here is mainly on the villains, particularly Catwoman and the Riddler.

The completely textless comic takes you on a breathtaking journey across a fantasy world.



Step By Bloody Step

Issues 1-4

Writer Si Spurrier

Artist Matias Bergara,

Matheus Lopes

Publisher Image Comics

Given that comics are essentially an amalgamation of words and pictures, reading this beguiling series is initially a disorienting experience, as you adjust to the complete absence of captions and dialogue – save for some indecipherable hieroglyphs, intriguingly rendered by letterer Jim Campbell.

It chronicles an amnesiac young girl and her mysterious armoured giant protector's journey through a vast fantastical world, in a completely straight line. You sometimes have to go back for a re-read to make sense of the unfolding plot, which spans a number of years over the course of the four issues, as the story's unnamed girl grows from a child to a teenager.

But that's no great hardship considering the lusciousness of Mateus Bergara's Moebius-esque art. Adding a few unexpected twists, Si Spurrier is unable to fall back on his usual witty quips and narrative tricks, so much more falls on Bergara's shoulders, and you have to pay special attention to facial expressions and study his expertly choreographed action sequences. Bergara's sumptuous work is further enhanced by Matheus Lopes's vibrant colouring.

While there are, as the title suggests, plenty of visceral, violent scenes, this infectiously charming series is worth many return visits.

RATING ★★★★★

Discover the first tale in a new horror universe set to span multiple books and comics.



The Passageway

Issues Graphic novel

Writer Jeff Lemire

Artist Andrea Sorrentino

Publisher Image Comics

Jeff Lemire and Andrea Sorrentino remain one of comics' most dynamic duos. This short graphic novel is the first part of the Bone Orchard Mythos – a new, loosely connected horror universe. Future releases will include miniseries and more standalone works, and if they're anywhere near as memorable as this, then it will be a project worth keeping a close eye on.

John Reed of the Canadian Geological Society is summoned to a remote island with a single inhabitant. Sal has been tending the lighthouse for 25 years, but something has changed: a hole has appeared from nowhere, plunging down through the rocks. Reed sets out to discover what's at the bottom of this abyss – a foolhardy errand he will soon come to regret.

Like the creators' previous collaboration, *Gideon Falls*, *The Passageway* has one foot in the real world, the other somewhere far weirder and Lovecraftian. Robert Eggers' *The Lighthouse* is a clear influence, with the supernatural elements abstract and ambiguous. It's brilliant, unsettling stuff, expertly rendered by Sorrentino and colourist Dave Stewart, who daubs each page with thunderous greys and bright splashes of red. It's a work so vivid you can practically feel the freezing Canadian waters and hear the cries of gulls wheeling ominously overhead.

RATING ★★★★★

Fighting evil in high heels is certainly no easy task...



© Marvel

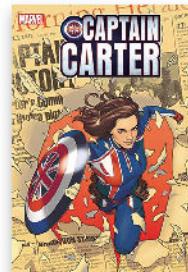
Captain Carter

SHIELD MAIDEN Dive into an alternate reality in which Agent Peggy Carter was the one to take the Super-Soldier Serum

Format 1-3 **Writer** Jamie McKelvie **Artist** Marika Cresta **Publisher** Marvel Comics

The Multiverse is a hot concept right now, and Captain Carter provides further proof of that. An alternate-universe version of Peggy Carter who took the Super-Soldier Serum instead of Steve Rogers, her popularity has exploded following a slew of appearances in different media, and she's now netted her own five-issue Marvel miniseries.

It's an enjoyable remix of Captain America's arrival into the modern era, as Peggy is abruptly reawakened nearly 80 years after World War II. Returning to the UK and struggling to adapt, adventure is the last thing on Peggy's mind, but when evil organisation Hydra re-emerges, she doesn't hesitate to leap into action.



Political shenanigans and dark conspiracies are a major factor in these first three issues, and while Jamie McKelvie is better known as an artist than a writer, he does a good job of keeping this lively and fast-paced. The biggest strength is his portrayal of Peggy, with McKelvie giving her some interesting nuances and making her both good-hearted and a little old-fashioned in her outlook.

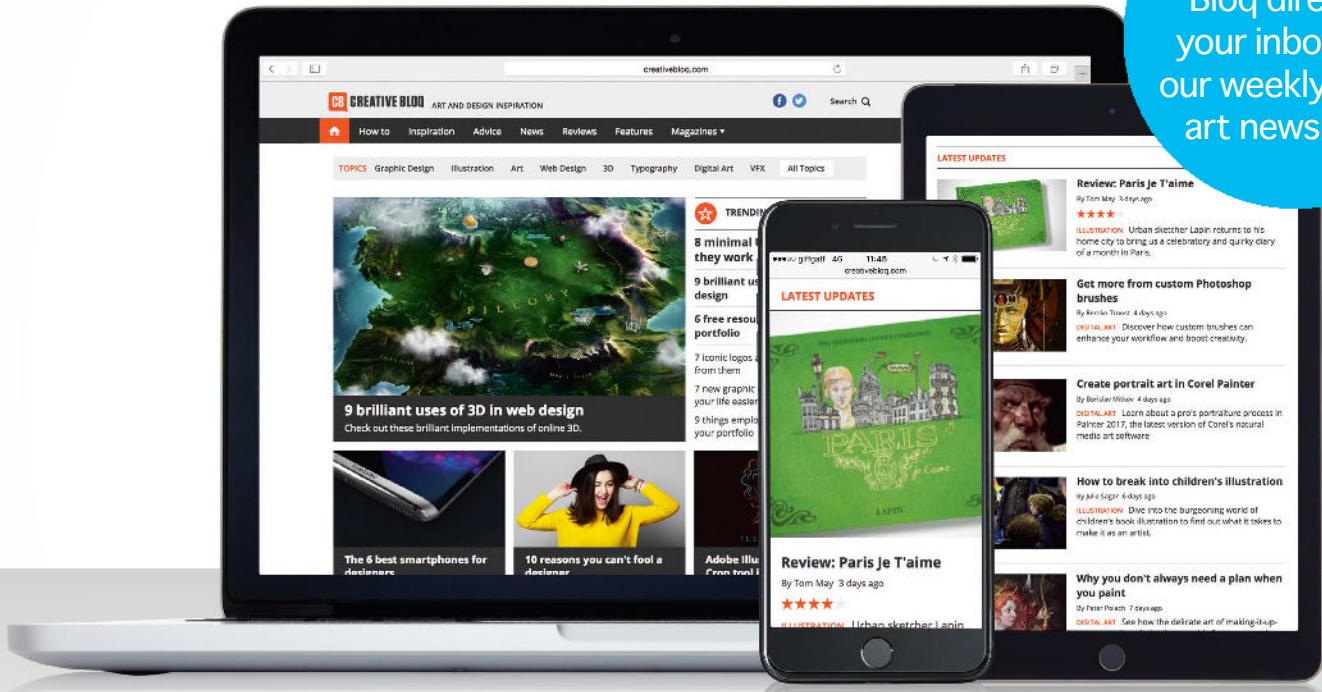
It's hard not to wish that McKelvie was handling the interior art as well, rather than just the covers, but Marika Cresta pulls off some engaging and characterful visuals, channelling the energy of artists like Stuart Immonen in kinetic set-pieces. The political subtext briefly tips into preachiness, and the story hasn't yet managed any genuine surprises, but there's still enough potential here to suggest there'll be plenty more Captain Carter adventures to come.

“Political shenanigans and dark conspiracies are a major factor in these first issues”

RATING ★★★★★

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Part 8 in Charlie Pickard's ongoing anatomy series.

96 First Impressions: Jeremy Wilson
Find out what influences this award-winning artist's style.

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Paige Carpenter

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Oil, acrylic WEB: www.paigecarpenter.com

Paige is a fantasy artist exploring themes from mythology and folklore. She believes that stories reveal deep truths about the soul, and in 2022 her art was featured in the Llewellyn Astrological Calendar. She is inspired by classical art and sculptures.





1



2



3

1 ATHENA AT REST

"This explores my love of mythology and my Christian faith. Athena finds rest at the feet of the Madonna. As Tolkien said, 'The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them'."

2 THE SUMMER KING

"The Summer King comes into his power during the warmest season. He stands guard in the forest, keeping watch over the young oaks. This was inspired by Alphonse Mucha's 'Slav Epic' series."

3 TAURUS

"Created for Llewellyn's 2022 Astrological Calendar. Taurus represents strength, loyalty, patience, and a love of luxury. This was inspired by the work of 18th century portrait artist Thomas Gainsborough."



Yi-Wen Leow

LOCATION: Malaysia MEDIA: Watercolour, ink WEB: [instagram.com/starstray](https://www.instagram.com/starstray)

Yi-Wen used to work full-time in animation as a background artist and art director. She is currently a 2D game artist and freelance illustrator. She enjoys going back to traditional mediums as a form of personal therapy.

1 FAT TIGER

"There is a saying in Chinese that means to be prosperous – and thus fat – and the word prosperous is a homonym of the word for tiger. And so, this tiger is fat."



2 CORAL MERMAID

"For this image, I worked more with ink and fountain pen with an emphasis on linework. Painted as a collaboration with Rhodia and a local stationery store."

3 CHRYSANthemum GARDEN

4



1



3 CHRYSANTHEMUM GARDEN

"This is a pastiche of John Singer Sargent's 'Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose'. I shifted the theming to be Asian inspired as I was working on a series of Shanghai-focused paintings."

4 SWEET OLIVE

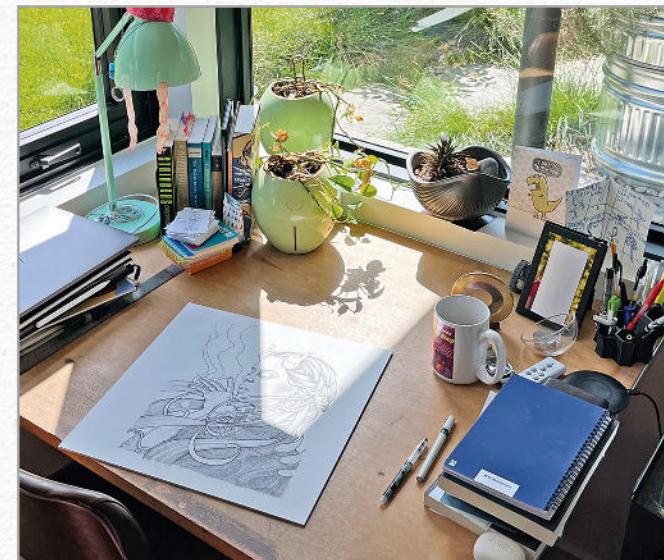
"The scent of sweet olive or osmanthus flowers in autumn is something I miss very much from my five-year stay in Shanghai. The flower is a subject I constantly return to when I can."





5 CORAL MERMAID 2

"In this piece I wanted to experiment more with ink shapes and quick mark making rather than the carefully layered watercolour approach I usually take. Painted as a collab with Rhodia and a local stationery store."



Ink

ART NOUVEAU: FROM SKETCH TO INK

CHRIS PANATIER guides us step-by-step through the key principles of drawing beautiful characters and environments in the Art Nouveau style

Here I will demonstrate how I compose, frame, sketch and execute this type of illustration in ink, demonstrating some texturing, shading, and lining techniques consistent with the Art Nouveau look – including stippling for skin, whip-shading for hair, building volumes of fabric, and bold lines to make it all pop.

One of the most satisfying forms of texturing and shading for flesh is the stippling technique. It's a tool that allows the artist to slowly build value and has less of the all-or-nothing risk of some other styles. The trade-off when you go from a quicker method like crosshatching is

the need for immense patience and a good deal of time. The reward is a finished piece that will have all of the depth and feel of real life.

It requires a small-gauge pen (usually a 01 or 005 Micron) and a very light touch – at least when you're putting down the initial areas of shading.

BALANCE AND MOTION

I draw hair in a pretty realistic-looking style – perhaps a bit more realistic than most Art Nouveau – but there's very little magic to it. The keys are a smooth wrist action to get your lines pointing in the same direction, and then using your judgment to determine when your shadows are dark enough in comparison to the highlights. As with the stippling, it's important to work up to the level of darkness you want in a deliberate way, because you can't go back.

Another feature that we'll see in this tutorial is that of bold lines. This is something that I've borrowed directly from Art Nouveau – Alphonse Mucha specifically. The key to compelling lines is a good initial sketch that provides a balanced composition and motion. I've found that the most engaging pictures have movement suggested in more than one direction, and usually opposing directions. In this image, the big movement is the hair whipping around the left side of the frame, with the counteracting movement being the billowing fabric. I spare no amount of time in my sketching, often repeatedly drawing and erasing in order to get the motion and shape correct.



Chris Panatier is a professional artist, science fiction/fantasy novelist, and trial lawyer. He listens to a lot of metal. chrispanatier.com

“The most engaging pictures have movement suggested in more than one direction”



Traditional Artist Workshop

MATERIALS

PAPER

■ Any paper works, don't be precious about it. Since I am often watercolouring on top of this, I use hot press, #300 Crescent board. It doesn't warp and stands up to constant erasing.

PENCIL

■ Mechanical pencil. Anything you like works, so long as it erases. I use a .5mm with HB or 2B lead.

ERASER

■ Staedtler mars plastic - I wouldn't use anything else.

PENS

■ Rapidograph - small diameter, usually .25 (tan lid) or .30 (yellow lid). For bigger lines and ultra small work, you can use Microns of various sizes.

INK FOR THE RAPIDOGRAPH

■ Rapidograph Universal Black India waterproof. It doesn't fade even under extreme erasing.



1 Layout and proportions

References are especially important if you are going for realistic shading. Initial blocking and proportions are key. I probably redrew the head and its location on the canvas four or five times. You can see in this image that I've used some yellow transfer paper to take a previous sketch of the head and move it.



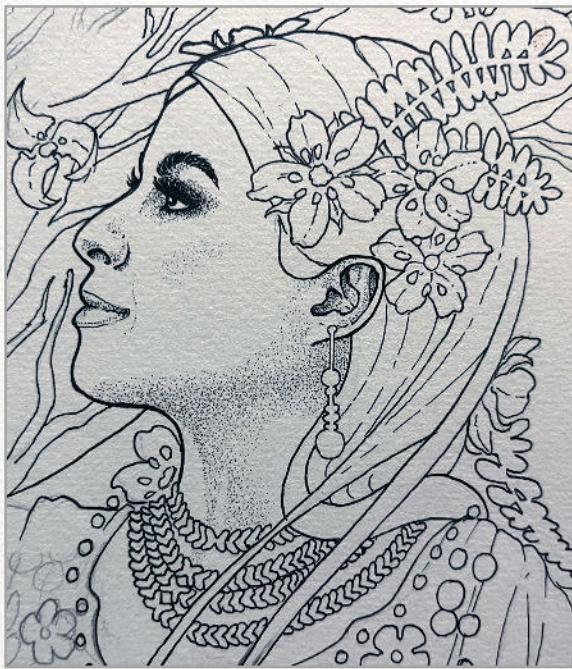
2 Sketching

Since you're working with ink, it's extremely important to get your sketch exactly where you want it before putting down the permanent medium. You can always use a little bit of correction paint (and I often do), but better to get it right the first time. I always walk away and come back to see it later. This is the final sketch. It appears well balanced on the paper.



3 Initial ink on skin

This first inking step will set your values. Always begin with the areas of darkest shading and contrast, which is usually around the eyes. Everything else will be tied to those initial shadows and highlights. Don't over-outline. I used an 01 Micron here. Erase sketch lines as soon as you have enough ink down to see what you're doing.



4 Layers of shadow

You can always add more dots for shadow, but you can't take them away. Add a little and repeatedly set the picture back to look at it. Add layers of shadow deliberately. Don't go too dark too quickly with your stippling. Be cognizant of highlights within shadow (see under her chin).



5 Hair, jewellery and accessories

Hair is my favourite part of the process. Here I use the .30mm Rapidograph. The key for me is to draw with my wrist so that all the hair striations are going in approximately the same direction. Keep in mind where hair tightens versus where it loosens. Your strokes will be more dense in tighter areas. Again here, I'm working from inside to outside, as the focal point is the individual.



6 Texture hair

This is risky business with ink. This image shows a length of hair that appears behind two other objects. I whip-shade toward the centre from both sides, then do a few deliberate connecting lines to bring it all together.



7 Map hair around a curve

You have to remember that hair has the side you're seeing and the side you're not. So when you transfer via a twist or turn, the back to the front, you have to imagine where the strands came from and where they are going. I generally map out a few lines to figure out where it needs to go. ➤

Traditional Artist Workshop



8 Hair progress

There is lots of dark hair in this image. This will show finished sections of hair as well as a chunk I've just started. If the character in the piece had light brown or blonde hair, I would probably leave it as is, in the lighter section.



9 Texturing flora

Flower petals and leaves always have lovely lines that help you map their contours. Here I'm using the Rapidograph to add those contours to the flowers.



10 Bold lining

A staple of Art Nouveau are those fat lines. I think the contrasting bold outlines against the thinner contour lines is a great look. Important here is to get your forearm and hand relaxed, but set. A technique I learned from Jeff Gogue (amazing tattoo artist) is to move from the elbow more so than the hand. This is going to render lines consistently smooth. It takes some practice, but it's worth it. You only get one pass at big, fat lines.



11 Body, hair and clothing

I will usually hit all of the sketch lines with the Rapidograph. It doesn't erase away like Microns when you get rid of the pencil. Here I've already done the top bit of her hair, have her face blocked in for the most part, and have drawn in the folds of clothing. I always consult my Mucha books when I'm about to draw fabric. It doesn't come naturally to me, so I need reminders.



12 Group collections of flora in bold lines

I outline the large groups of flowers and branches in bold lines. Note, however, that where two flowers come together, they don't get a bold line. This helps to draw the eye to the entire group and not just a pile of individual flowers.



13 Shading fabric

Consulting my Art Nouveau references, the main thing I've noticed is that this style goes very heavy in shading to very light, very quickly. My technique is to lift the pen as I go from dark to light, giving an almost Morse-code look. The viewer's eye will naturally process this when all the lines are together and consistently rendered.



14 Refine the shadows

I went back and darkened my initial 'dark' shadows in the fabric in order to better decipher the values. This shows depth, and more importantly, volume.



15 Final detail and lining

This shows some final stippling work and the bold outlines. I reline my big, sweeping lines. They tend to fade a bit when the pencil is erased away. This should be your final step before colour. I use watercolours and they will fade your ink as well, so you'll need to hit all the big lines one last time after watercolouring. Rapidograph ink and Microns do not bleed with watercolour.

Anatomy quick tips

SIMPLIFYING ARM BONES AND MUSCLES

CHARLIE PICKARD continues his ten-part series of quick tips to improve your figure drawing; this month, how to tackle the complexity of arm anatomy

When we begin to study the arm and its varying structures, it can be easy to quickly become overwhelmed. There are many complex and varying movements the arm has to accommodate, each one needing a unique muscle. Housing 24 total

ANATOMY – PART 8

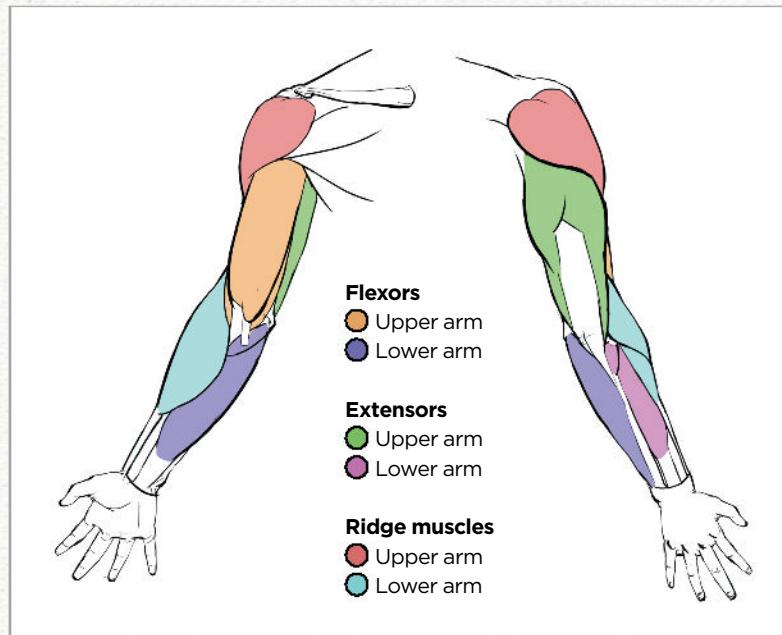
muscles, it can be difficult to remember each one in the abstract.

Due to this, the need to simplify this complex structure is absolutely essential if we are going to gain confident control over the arm in our drawings. In this article, we will cover a few useful strategies to approach learning this difficult form in a simple, approachable way. If we

use these strategies in tandem, we can go a long way towards mastery over arm anatomy, so study well!



Charlie Pickard is a classically trained fine artist and illustrator. Recently awarded the Philip de László Award for excellence, Charlie continues to work, exhibit and teach out of his studio in London. www.charliepickardart.com



1 Divide and conquer

The first and most important element to simplifying this structure is to split the muscles into simple groups, and the easiest way to do this is to group them based on function.

Approached in this way, the 24 muscles we can struggle to memorise are simplified down to six groups, a much more manageable number. Even better, the simple groups of the

upper and lower arm are roughly similar. Both are primarily composed of two antagonist groups, the Flexors and Extensors. Alongside these, both sections house an additional 'ridge' group alongside the side plane of the arm.

An important element to study within these groups is their relationship to the bones. Fundamentally, the functions of the

varying groups are to move the bones, and so they have common origins in particular areas.

So as you approach studying these groups, pay close attention to where they start and end in relationship to the bones. For more information on how exactly the bones exist within the arm, check out our previous article in Part 3 of the series: 'Understanding Bone Structure'.

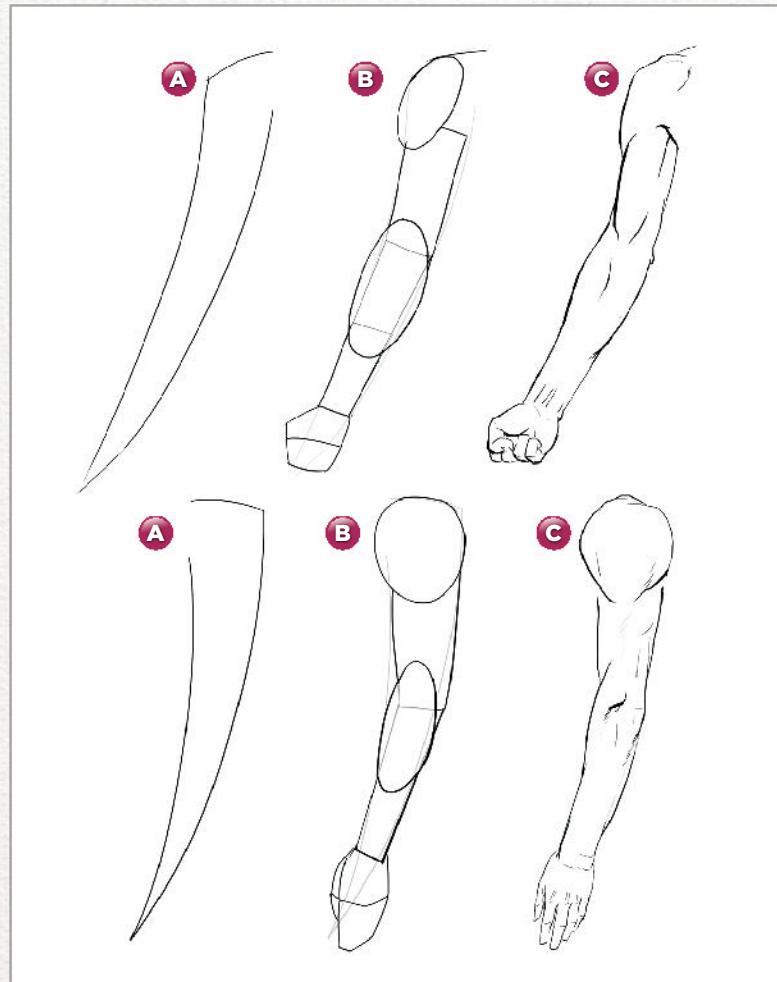
2 Chain link

Once we have the groups understood and memorised, another way to simplify our approach is to take a look at the major masses of the arm and how they wedge one into the other.

Think of the arm as analogous to a simple chain structure. As you can see in the image on the right, we can

visualise the arm as formed of four box-like structures, each of these orientated roughly at right angles to each other.

Understanding these large form connections will offer us a lot of guidance on where exactly the forms overlap, and is always core to the expression of the bulk of the arm, regardless of the level of detail.



3 The graphic construction

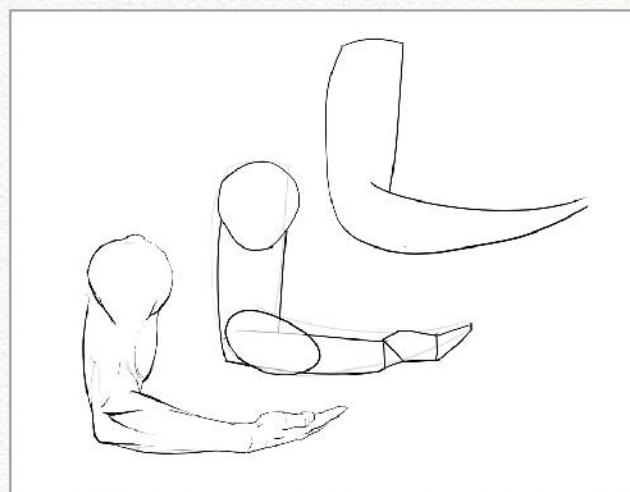
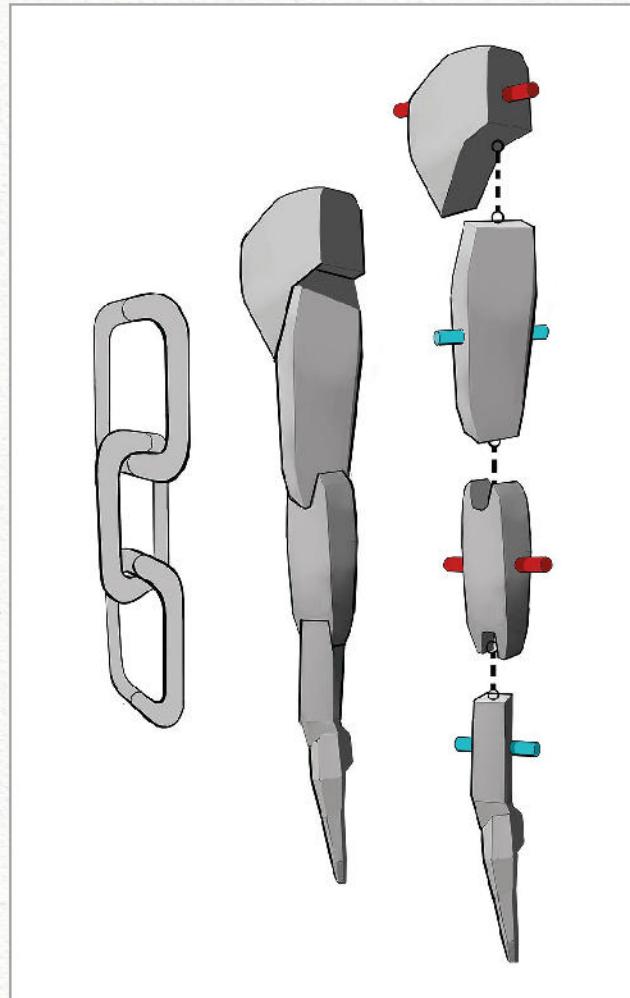
Of course, once we understand these larger ideas and we endeavour to actually draw an arm, it is important that we have an approach that is simple, graphic and intuitive to use.

Luckily for us, there is a simple solution that will offer us all of this and can serve as a general basis to our approach:

A Large gesture – We can first establish the large rhythm of the arm. As seen above, we can initially think of the arm as a tendril-like, simple tapering cylinder.

B Simple structure – Following this, we can establish the large separation between bones and muscle. Start by thinking of the bones simply as square, cuboid structures, and then the muscles as rounded, ovoid structures.

C Finishing structures – Lastly, we can add the final structures. Focus on finding the separation between the functional groups. Additionally, focus on the inherent asymmetry of the muscular structures. Take note of where they peak and note how these positions vary in height.



4 Pay attention to the rhythm

This basic approach will work for any view and offers us a consistent and repeatable construction. One important, final element to consider when using this approach is that the muscles will generally offer us an opportunity to express the rhythms of the arm. The bones behave as a slight bump within this larger rhythm, and care should be taken not to allow them to break this when adding them. As always, the best way to absorb and learn these concepts is to sketch them for yourself, so give it a go! Happy drawing!

First Impressions

★ *Jeremy Wilson* ★

The award-winning illustrator talks his art background, style, and recent projects



Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?

I grew up in a small farm valley town in upstate New York near the Berkshire mountain area. I did not grow up on a farm, but surrounded by them in an 1813 brick Federal house, which my parents bought when I was around seven.

The house was large, impressive and held infinite mysteries to me and my younger brother. There were hidden passages, cupboards, a 1960s era single-occupant elevator, and a terrifying 19th century basement. The house is on dozens of acres, leaving so much to explore. There was a huge, old safe that had fallen through the floor into the basement, totally empty, the door open and incredibly heavy, but I was convinced we'd find some loot somewhere in the house or in the safe itself. Suffice to say, it was a house and area that held a lot of haunting, mysterious qualities.

My father is an oil painter as well. His studio is in an old carriage house attached to the house. I grew up there, surrounded daily by traditional art and early American architecture and antiques. We watched a lot of *Twilight Zone*, *Vincent Price* movies and were introduced to illustration, namely *Norman Rockwell*, whose work and studio were preserved nearby.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your artwork?

I love horror movies and old radio dramas. In fact, I have done a number of illustrations designed as book covers for some of the old



© MARVEL and The Upper Deck Company

WIDOW VS WIDOW

Variant image used as a limited edition giclee. 24" x 30", oil on panel. Created for The Upper Deck Company. Art director: Samantha Padilla.

radio horror stories. I am fortunate to be in a position and career where I can indulge in so much of what I loved as a child. I can read and collect books, comics, toys and magic cards, which is exactly what I was doing 25 years ago.

What was your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?

My first 'official job' was for Fantasy Flight Games painting Bran Stark for

one of their Game of Thrones TCGs. However, going even further back, I was commissioned by my late Grandfather to paint a still life of a disco ball in a very traditionally realist way. He loved Art Deco and Art Nouveau and was a big supporter of the arts.

This was a very daunting commission. Once I found a disco ball to paint for the still life, I had to figure out how on earth I would paint the hundreds of facets that were only about half an inch square! I had a lot of instruction from my father on how to break it down visually, but each day was still a lesson in perseverance and focus. I completed the painting and he loved it, but I felt like I had made every mistake along the way to finding the success in completion. In retrospect I have been pretty singularly focused on my career and have always been a subscriber (and practitioner) of perseverance. Learning all of the facets of this business and painting while still considering this career as a whole... now I can say with confidence that this particular commission is an eerily accurate metaphor.

What's the last piece you finished, and how does it compare?

Unfortunately I can't get into the last few works I've completed as they're for Wizards of the Coast or various other companies, and are under Non-Disclosure. However, if I look at my work now versus then, I would say I am far more open to different aesthetics and techniques. While I was in school I had a very narrow mindset for how to learn drawing, painting and sculpture. It essentially followed a traditional atelier mindset. While that did result in good classic foundational skills, it didn't leave a whole lot of room for personal 'style' or voice.

In 2012 I joined a group studio in Richmond which was a satellite studio for The Art Department, based in Missouri. The studio, ➡

“My first ever commission was daunting... it was a lesson in perseverance and focus”

Jeremy Wilson

THE WITCHER, FADING
MEMORIES ISSUE #1

Geralt stands off against a horde of
Foglets in this 22" x 30", oil on panel
piece. Client: Dark Horse Comics
and CD PROJEKT RED.
Art director: Megan Walker.

© CD PROJEKT RED and Dark Horse Comics



Traditional Artist Interview

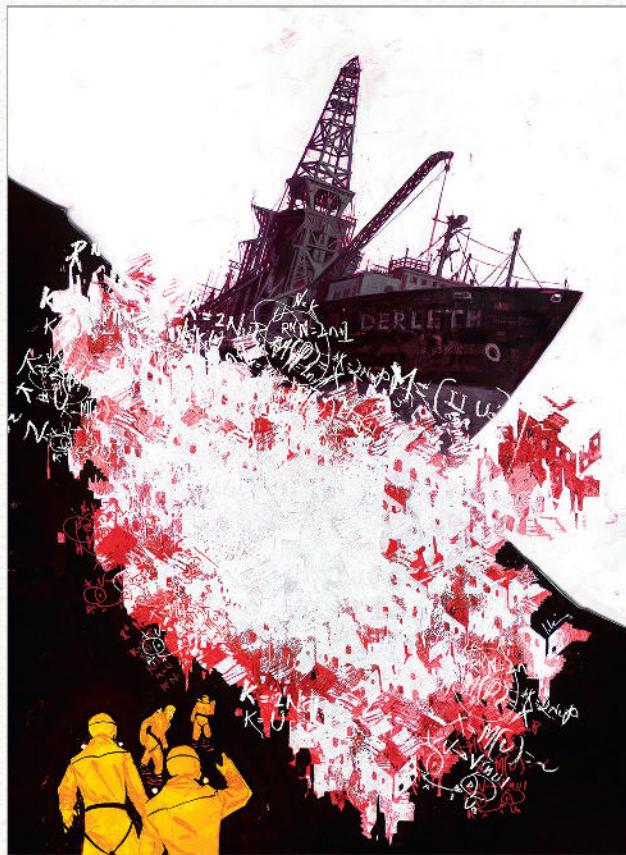
→ under the direction of Sterling Hundley, opened up a whole different facet of illustration, conceptual thought and technique. Seeing visual problems so successfully solved by artists such as Sterling, Edward Kinsella III and Jeffrey Alan Love really opened my mind up to experimenting with techniques. Years later the experimentations inspired by those more conceptual illustrators, comics, and illustrators from Coles Phillips to Bernie Fuchs led me into the way of technique and thinking that I employ now.

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?
I don't think a direct comparison between myself and Geralt is even remotely accurate, but I had so much fun on The Witcher 'Fading Memories' miniseries variant covers I did. To be even a small part of that franchise is wonderful. As a character Geralt is a wonderfully complicated anti-hero or at least, unwilling hero.

I do find that with today's nebulous moral views (especially in the socio-political climate), the conundrum of keeping one's morality, views and deeds true is somewhat reflected in his character.

Is your art evolving? What's the most recent experiment you've made?

Constantly. I experiment with a new technique or idea on almost every new work. I did a run of six covers for DC Black Label, 'Hill House Comics' – a 'pop-up' run of stories curated or written by Joe Hill. I did



© DC Comics

PLUNGE

The first cover for PLUNGE, Joe Hill's story homage to John Carpenter's 'The Thing'. 18" x 24", oil on panel. Client: DC Black Label. Art director: Amedeo Turturro.

the covers for his story 'PLUNGE', which is an homage to John Carpenter's 'The Thing'.

The story follows a salvage crew who is sent to rescue a 40-year-old oil rig wreck. They encounter the original crew who haven't aged a day and have been taken over by an alien hivemind of sorts. We have

“I experiment with a new technique or idea on almost every new work”

this incalculable alien intelligence that the characters can't really comprehend fully, so I wanted to achieve this primitive terror of the unknown and unfathomable in concept and technique. Take issue #1 for example; the brief I've got is essentially pared down to the (aforementioned) story arc, oil container ship, unknowable terror, insanity through math equations, an undersea city that is almost non-Euclidean and insectile in appearance, and a team of rescuers.

I split the composition in two: surface and below the surface of water. This gives me a literal



DIRTY WINDOWS

22" x 30", oil on panel – a young boy moves into a boarding house filled with ghostly tenants. Client: Brian Magruder (author). Art director: Sean Stokely.

representation of the worlds the story will follow. The surface is orderly, purposeful, engineered, but on the precipice. Below the surface the composition is abstracted. I wanted the city to seem insane, primitive and nigh impossible to comprehend, so I carved out a few very abstracted structures in linoleum and used white paint to make print registers, essentially stamps. Then I used a brayer to compositionally join the individual registers together with more white paint, creating this sort of undulating city that you can't really get an understanding of structurally.

How has the industry of art changed for good since you've been working in it?

Of course I can't answer outside of my experience on what it was like before, but there seems to be much more community. Communities have formed through conventions, work, painting collectors, and so on. Plus, the 'ease' in which someone can get in touch with you or vice versa is ultimately a beneficial tool. A peer can reach out for technical advice or on how much to quote a client. An artist in the beginning of their career can reach out to someone who is three decades into theirs, both glean something from the relationship. I can access and form relationships with potential collectors of my paintings. Like most things this does come with a downside; that everything and everyone vying for your attention can become overwhelming, distracting and draining. It's important to use these tools to your benefit, keep moving forward and keep a good focus.

What does the future hold for you?

The immediate future will see several new works for Wizards of the Coast over the next few years as well as some book covers for various publishers that I'll be doing. Some commissions and painting sales, raising my daughter. That's my immediate horizon!

Award-winning illustrator Jeremy Wilson has worked for clients including DC, MTG, Hasbro, Orbit Books and more. Check out his work and his unique style at www.jeremywilsonart.com, where he also sells prints, merch and originals.



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