

EXCLUSIVE JOHN HOWE INTERVIEW! **PLUS** THE RINGS OF POWER ART INSIDE

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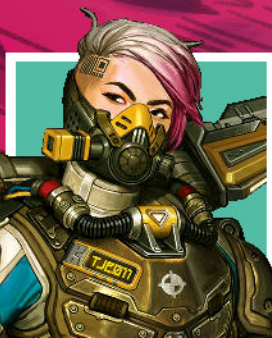
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FUTURE
ISSUE 221

Illustration: Cosmic Spectrum Art



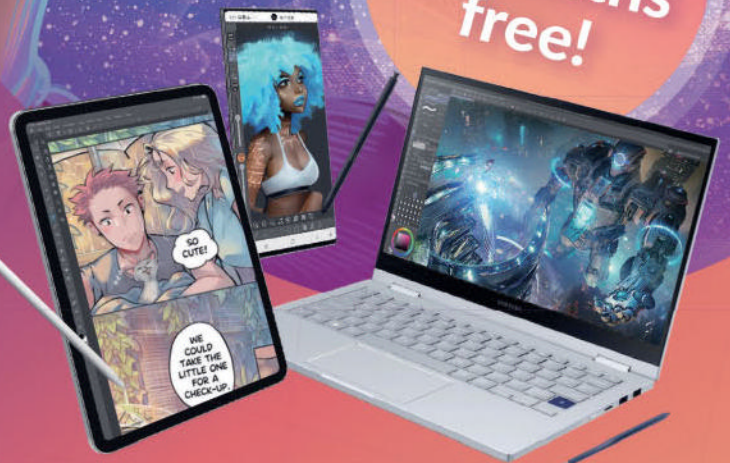
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Welcome to... NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX



There are few names in our industry that deserve such reverence as John Howe, so it's with great pleasure that this issue he joins the pages of ImagineFX. We take a look at some of his huge portfolio of work, focusing on his concept art for Tolkien's Middle-earth

and The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power.

It's not all about influential art though. We're here to help you get better at what you love with a host of advice on how to up your game for your next artistic projects.

Marvel and DC artist Toni Infante shares his thoughts on how to improve your characters and how fan art can help you succeed. Charlie Pickard also returns to our pages with some fantastic advice on shading and how to nail those values. Really practical and useful info. And for the traditional artists among you, check out Milivoj Ćeran's workshop, where he shows you how he made vinyl album artwork for Dungeons and Dragons using acrylics and airbrush.

Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

EDITOR'S CHOICE Three of my top picks this month...



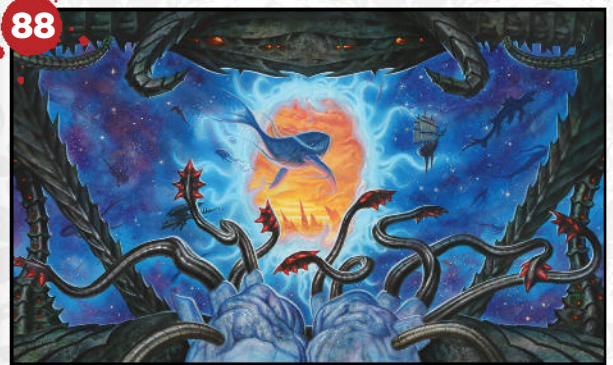
Exclusive John Howe interview

Discover the work of the legendary Middle-earth artist, who talks about his journey and what still excites him.



The art of Toni Infante

Learn how pursuing your fan art passions could lead to a superstar career with studios like Marvel and DC.



Traditional workshop

Break out the airbrush and explore some of the techniques used for painting stunning album art.

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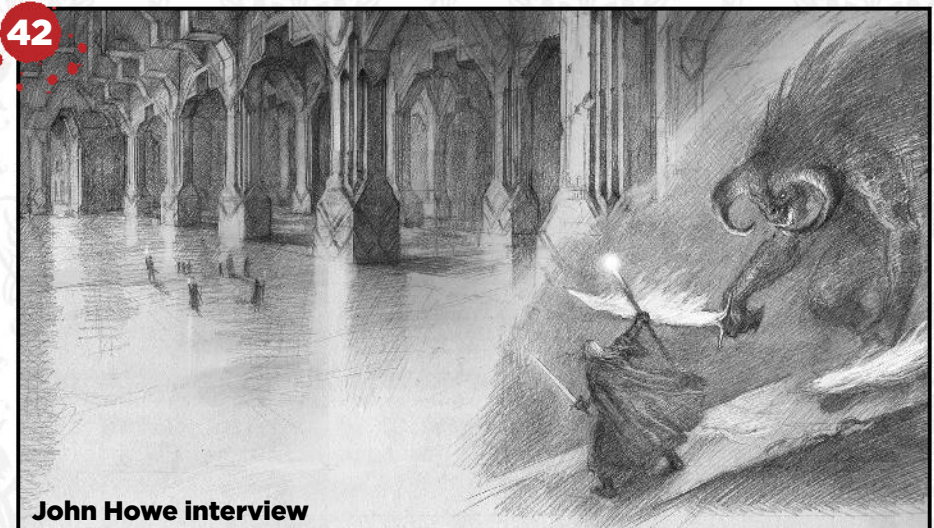
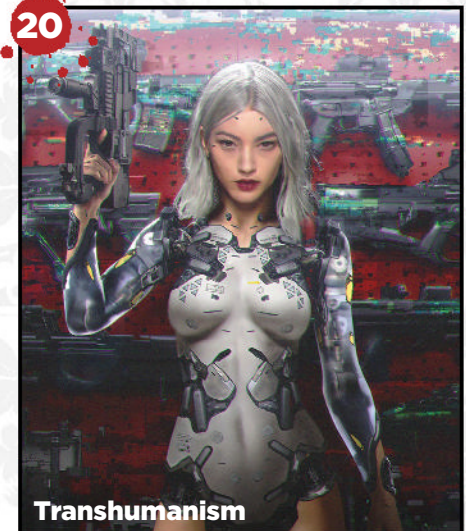
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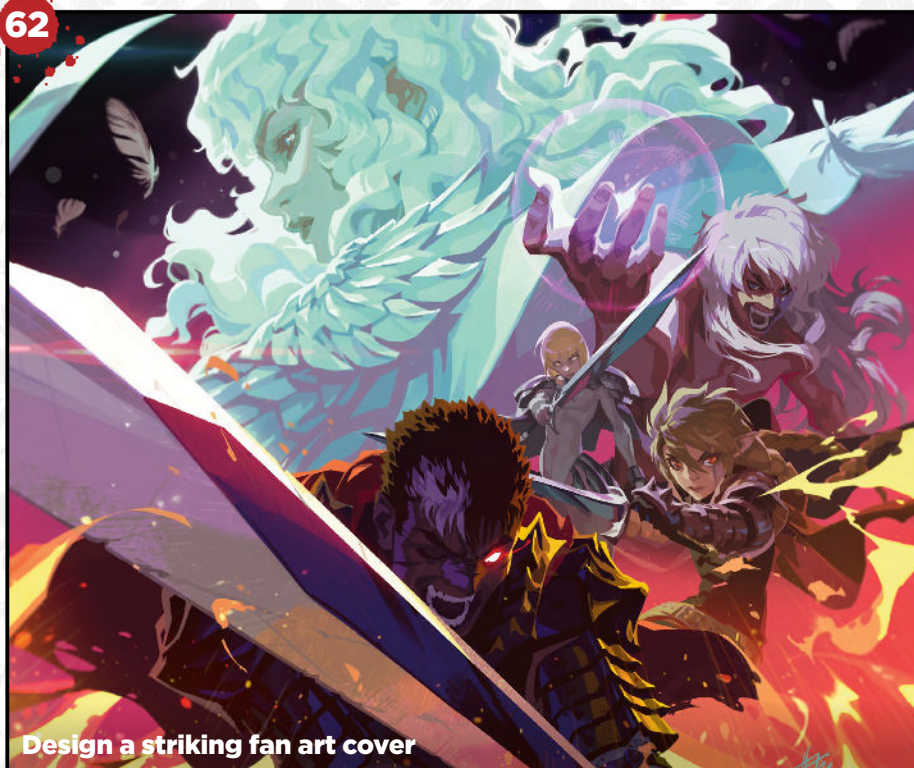
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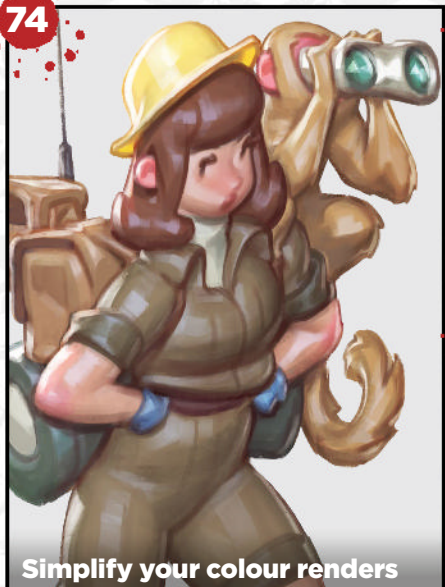
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Resources

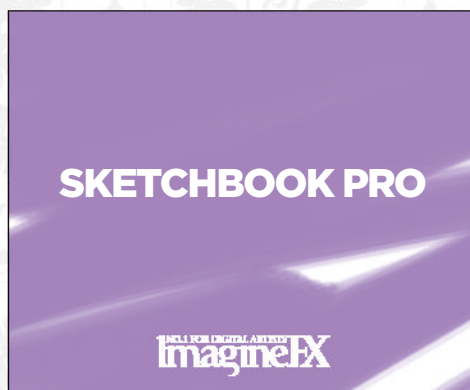
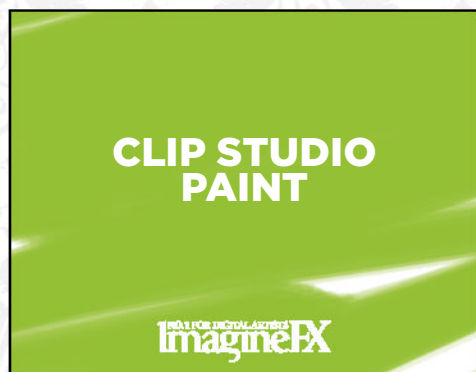
Getting hold of this issue's resources is easy.
Just visit: **<https://ifxm.ag/fanart>**

WORKSHOP BRUSHES



Download 6 Photoshop brushes for use in your own projects
Paint and draw like the pros with Toni Infante and Nurzhan Bekkaliyev's top brush choices.

BRUSH ROUND-UP



Gain access to a collection of brushes to boost your art
Download our huge collection of brushes from the above software, and get creating!

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ImagineFX

Next month

Next month in...
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LOISH

GUEST EDITOR! The one and only rockstar artist shares her thoughts and takes the reins

Also in the issue...

Paint stylised characters

Loish reveals the techniques for her stunning artwork

Master your screen printing

Learn to illustrate and design for a fresh medium

Take your art traditional

Angela Sung shares her tips for painting with natural media

Surrealist illustration

Add some magic to your art with an expert workshop

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FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Juliet Nneka

LOCATION: The Netherlands **MEDIA:** Procreate, Photoshop **WEB:** www.julietnneka.com

Juliet is an award-winning visual artist who grew up in Nigeria. Her art is drawn to organic shapes and inspired by biomorphism, futurism and antiquity.

3



1 APOLYSIS

"Proceeding from after-growth was genuinely difficult for me. I felt that I needed to shed some skin, and I decided to channel that emotion in the creation of this piece."

2 UNTITLED 01

"Pink has become a staple in my 2021/22 portfolio. Once again, my love for the side profile is very obvious here."

3 AN INTRUDER

"A study of process, if anything. I took inspiration from William-Adolphe Bouguereau's realistic painting style and the use of chiaroscuro to add volume to the portrait."

2



1





4 AFTER-GROWTH
 "A personal piece where I truly learned to love the colour pink. Thoughts of admiration for my mother and sister, female resilience, and the acceptance of growth came to the surface."



Kate Pfeilschifter

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop, ZBrush, Substance Painter, Maya, Blender **WEB:** www.katepfeilschifterart.com

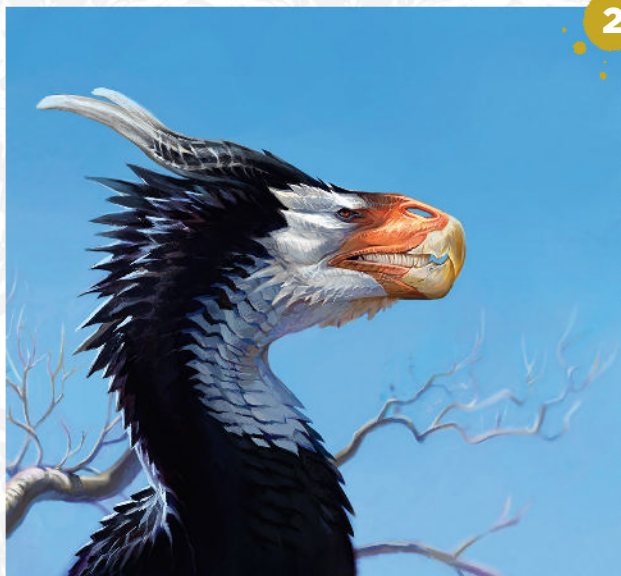
Kate is a specialised creature creator, working across 2D and 3D for books, tabletop RPGs, video games and other media. She is driven by a fascination with the natural world, mythology, biology and speculative evolution.

1 FLEET-FOOTED LINDORM

"An interpretation of the mythological lindorm, inspired by a line I'd come across in a mythology book that described a dragon with the ability to outrun horses."

2 AQUILA

"A combination of study and design practice. The lifestyles, anatomy and mannerisms of real animals are the best source of inspiration for creature design. I often turn to birds for dragons."



3 THE YALE

"Done initially as a class demonstration, a concept sculpt of a little-known creature from European myth and heraldry, known as the yale or eale."

4 JORMAG THE ELDER DRAGON

"A sculpt and model done for my work at ArenaNet on Guild Wars 2. Jormag is a gigantic, cunning, god-like elemental dragon with a body composed of snow-covered glacial ice."





Shawn G. Wood

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Krita, Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint, ZBrush, SketchUp **WEB:** www.sgwart.com

Shawn is a concept artist currently working in games and is known for his six years as an in-house senior concept artist for Dungeons and Dragons. "I strive to create images and designs that inspire stories and build worlds."

1 FIRBOLG

"An illustration for Volo's Guide to Monsters. The firbolg redesign quickly became a fan favourite and may be one of my larger contributions to the brand."

2 GIANT KILLER

"This illustration of a man holding an axe, looking at the body of a giant, was made for the Magic: The Gathering card Giant Killer."

3



1



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2



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3 DRUID NECROMANCER

"A personal thank you piece for Dungeons and Dragons fans. I illustrated this in my favourite personal style."

4 DEEP DRAGON CONCEPT SKETCHES

"The majority of my work is concept sketches. These sketches of the deep dragon featured in the book Fizban's Treasury of Dragons."



Martina Levrini

LOCATION: Italy **MEDIA:** Blender, Photoshop, Procreate, ZBrush **WEB:** www.martinalevrini.it

Martina is an Italian concept artist heavily influenced by her country's culture. "I love creating fantasy environments and props. It fulfils my crazy need to put a dark twist on pretty much everything."

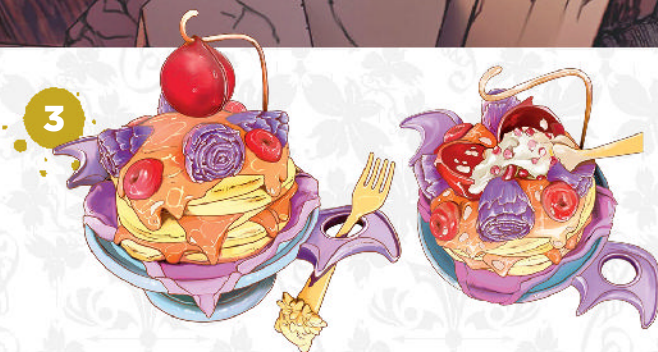
1 INFERNAL CITY OF DITE

"The place where heresiarchs are punished in the Divine Comedy. It is completely surrounded by the Stygian swamp, which must be crossed in order to reach Lucifer."

2 VIRGIL'S HEAD

"What if the Divine Comedy was a video game? In my take, Dante would be a necromancer who uses Virgil's head to roam Hell, Purgatory and Paradise."





3 KUPO CAKE

"A prop designed for a project based on video game foods. This cake, made for Final Fantasy's moogles, is topped with caramel and kupo nuts (and love!)."

4 TEMPLE OF DIONYSUS

"This piece is a shrine where satyrs can worship Dionysus, who is the god of the grape harvest, winemaking and madness. The messier, the better!"



Yuhai Han

LOCATION: China **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/kleinerhai

Yuhai is a concept illustrator and designer who currently works at Tacit Sign Studio. As well as working for animations, films and games, Yuhai is also working on their own IP called On the Way.

1 WATCH

"In this piece I wanted to capture an Eastern-style mood. It was inspired by Sekiro and Shadow Warrior by Akira Kurosawa."

2 THAT SHIT FOUND ME!!

"This is a practice piece inspired by old science fiction movies. In it, I wanted to practise some keyframe art techniques."

3 ON THE WAY

"This painting is an old piece of work from my own artbook On the Way. It was inspired by fantasy artists like Moebius and Alan Lee."



2





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Retro-Futurism

YEAR CREATED: 2022

MEDIA: Blender, Photoshop

+ + + + + + + + + + + + + + +

"Doing professional and recreational research into sci-fi in film, literature and other media really deepened my appreciation for the discussions that came up in science-fiction classics, so I guess this is my way of regurgitating everything I've been watching for the past year."

Artist **PROFILE**

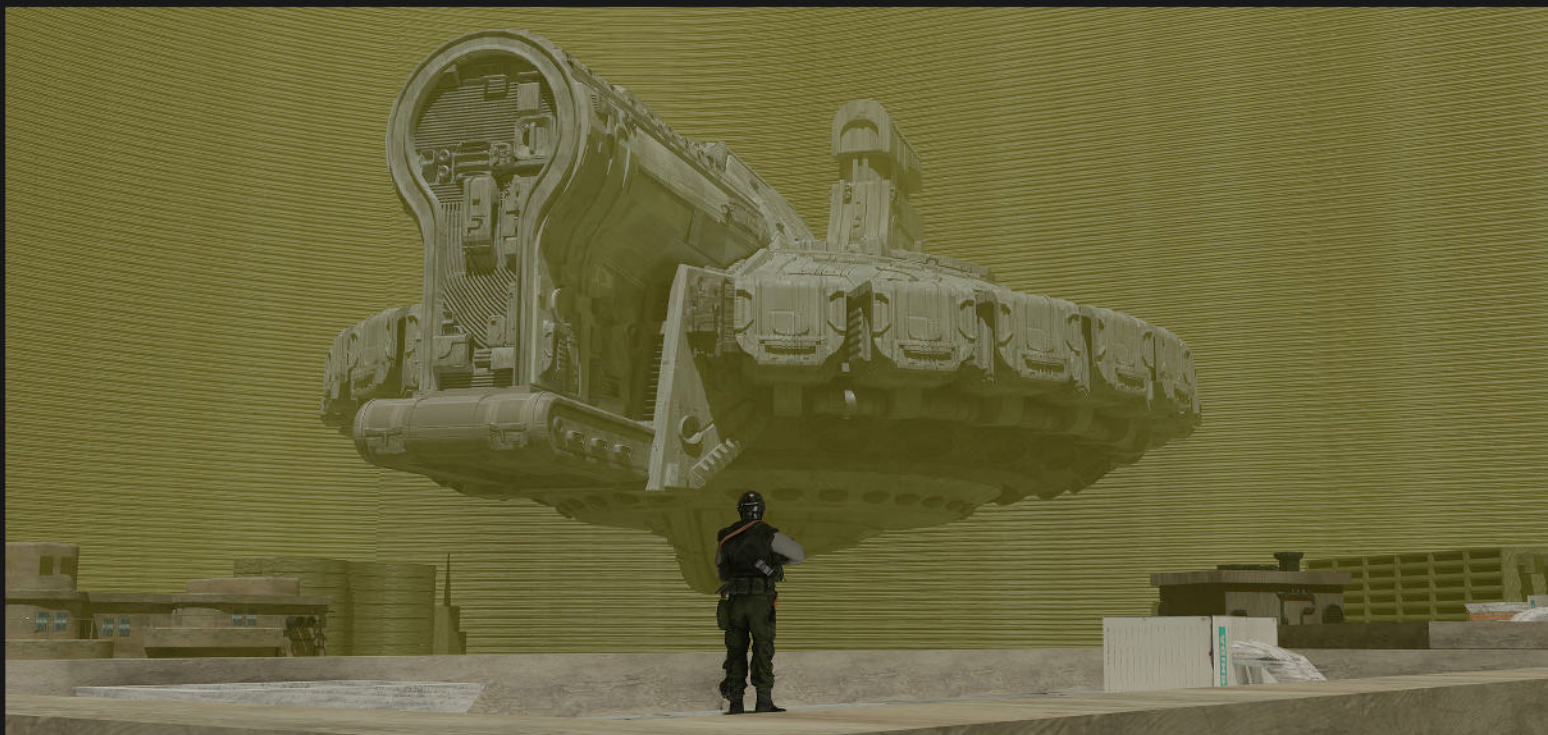
Murray Dawson

LOCATION: Australia



Murray is a third-year student at CDW Studios who enjoys drawing robots and spaceships. He is just getting started but eager to see where the sci-fi road leads.

www.therookies.co/entries/19030



ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS ImagineNation

AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY



Transhumanism

Humans 2.0 Tanya Combrinck meets artists creating characters who, for better or worse, are augmented with machine parts

The merging of flesh with man-made hardware has long been a useful means of exploring themes based around the nature of personhood and humanity. In the context of cyberpunk, human-machine hybrids form part of a dystopian society in which humanity is both commodified and degraded.

However, within the philosophy of transhumanism the prospect of replacing frail human body parts with superior synthetic ones is viewed differently. If it prolongs life, corrects

Dave Keenan's personal project HURT: In a World Full of It stories humanity's transition from augmented humans to full androids.

impairments, or even augments the body with extra capabilities, then it is viewed as a means of enriching humanity, even though it remains a controversial proposition.

For his personal work, concept



artist **Ronan Le Fur**, also known as Dofresh, places his characters in a world inspired by well-known cyberpunk novels

including *Hardwired*, *Neuromancer* and *Snow Crash*, as well as the tabletop RPG *Cyberpunk*.

"It's a very typical cyberpunk setting," Ronan explains. "Powerful transnational corporations, failed states, environmental collapse, narcostates using private armies, and a growing intensification of social tensions – or low-intensity civil war, as the writer Mike Davis would say.

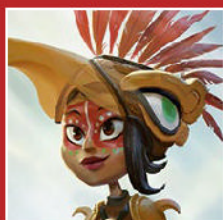
"Cyberpunk as a genre is dying, in my opinion, as everything it predicted in the 80s has now arrived. We tend to forget that the genre was a warning, not something to strive for, and we also tend to forget the political satire that the genre involves."

POWERFUL ILLUSTRATIONS

In two of his images, *The Grid* and *Spare Parts*, Ronan portrays the commodification of the human body via a futuristic motorcycle grand prix with augmented athletes. "This global event represents the opportunity for megacorps to showcase their latest advances in terms of cybernetics," he says. "The tech and cyber limbs are still prototypal and so expensive no-one would be able to afford them. So, in a way, the athletes do not own their

“We tend to forget the political satire that the genre involves”





AWARDS CEREMONY

Find out who took home the top honours and view the prize-winning images as this year's Concept Art Awards hit LightBox Expo in California. **Page 26**



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

Say hello to Alfred Achiampong, the trailblazing character designer and visual development artist paving the way for artists in Ghana. **Page 32**



WEIRD BUT WONDERFUL

Find out what inspires Dutch creature creator Eva Toorenent as we take a guided tour of the eclectic collection of objects that fuels her creative passions. **Page 36**



Yinton Jiang Geping's work depicts powerful augmented female characters. ©LUMINIGHT BY YINTON



©CD PROJEKT RED

own bodies any more, they are just living billboards."

In another powerful illustration, *Slaves*, Ronan presents a vision of a two-tier post-pandemic society in which the ultra-wealthy can afford to place nanobots inside their bodies that protect them from disease, while most people must remain masked. This inequality is so contentious that

"In *Cyberpunk 2077* cyberware designs have developed over the years. You'll see primitive versions, as well as modern and advanced ones," says Lea Leonowicz.

they are guarded by private soldiers. "This is a very brutal way to depict social relations, of course, but it is a barely exaggerated illustration. The name 'Slaves' for a brand sounds so cynical and ridiculous that it might become a reality," he says.

Currently, these kinds of bodily enhancements are viewed with suspicion and seen as unsettling, ➡

INDUSTRY INSIGHT PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

Dave Keenan on his worldbuilding project that explores a cyberpunk future

Tell us about your personal project, *HURT: In a World Full of It*.

This is a visual and narrative tale that takes place in a world of two futures. One near future where we see the introduction of an addictive VR world and human enhancement, and a far future where we see the culmination of these events that leads to the transferral of human consciousness to a full android society. It addresses what it means to be human and how we confront our fears and emotions in times of conflict or great technological advancement.

What has led you to design characters that merge humans with hardware?

Mostly a love for the cyberpunk genre. Human nature and technology have an interesting contrast, there's a lot of tension between what is acceptable and what is not. I like to push those boundaries visually.

How does transhumanism inform your art?

It is part of the base theme in a lot of my work. The question of what it is to be human in a world of ever-expanding technology is very interesting to me. The psychological ramifications of such an advanced world and how that is connected to our growth or decline as a people is such a thought-provoking concept that I find it necessary to visualise it somehow.



Dave Keenan is principal concept artist at Zenimax Online Studios alongside working on personal projects

www.artstation.com/dkeeno

➡ but Ronan thinks this resistance would easily be overcome should this technology become a reality. "I am pretty sure that with a massive dose of propaganda and advertising, these modifications would become trendy and absolutely normal, like an element of style or a tattoo. The characters in my illustrations do not reflect upon such a way of life, they just live their own everyday lives in this world, just like us," he says.

TWISTED VISIONS

While the human-machine hybrid is presented ambivalently within the cyberpunk genre, proponents of transhumanism encourage us to push our discomfort to one side. Ronan is not a fan. "It sounds more like a religion rather than a movement," he says. "Their vision of the future is nightmarish and I truly hope that their

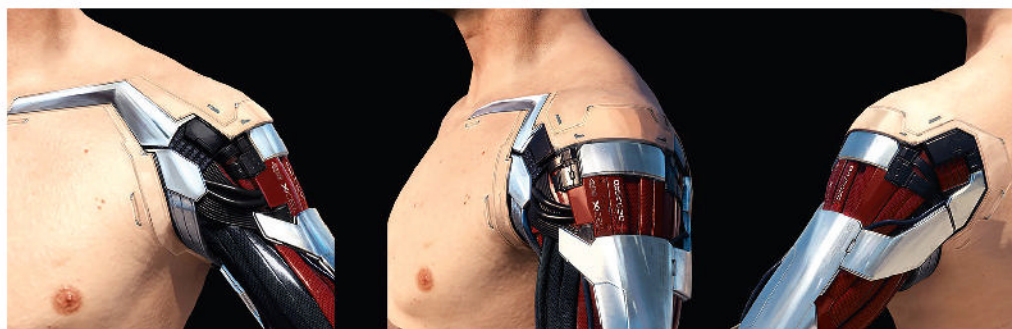
“In Cyberpunk 2077, implants are an inseparable and ubiquitous part of the world”

twisted visions will never become a reality. The potential of catastrophe is present at so many levels with this so-called 'philosophy'. It is a terrible example of a technology used without any kind of ethics or reflection upon its consequences."

As senior concept artist on the video game Cyberpunk 2077, **Lea Leonowicz** worked on developing characters enhanced with mechanical parts known as cyberware. As in Ronan's work,



Spare Parts, Ronan's artwork portraying athletes with high-tech artificial body parts.



©CD PROJEKT RED

those characters are accustomed to being part machine.

"In Cyberpunk 2077, implants are an inseparable and ubiquitous part of the world, no longer arousing emotions or ethical dilemmas," says Lea. "In such a dangerous, dystopian world where survival is at stake, man and machine are in symbiosis. The questions that arise here are about the limits of humanity, the concept of immortality and the human ghost; the soul is what matters. Our characters must grapple with these questions themselves."

In her characters for Cyberpunk 2077, Lea embedded mechanical parts deep inside the body to avoid a stark boundary between flesh and metal.

Concept artists on this project had to work closely with other teams in order to navigate the technological limitations that would constrain their designs. "Cyberware hard surface parts mixed with flesh and muscles had to be figured out so that they would work well with rigging and animations," says Lea. "The smooth transition between cyberware and the body of a character was particularly important to me. I wanted to avoid making a sudden border where the flesh and machine meet. So cyberware is always inserted deeper under the skin, tightly bound with natural tissue."

FINE DETAILS

One character, Johnny Silverhand, is the frontman of a band with a silver cyberarm that was fitted during his military days. It's branded with the logo of a corporation he hates.

"Visually, Johnny's arm had to be both retro and technologically progressive; utilitarian and a bit avant-garde at the same time," says Lea. "I decided to design synthetic fibres that act like mechanical muscles. ➡"



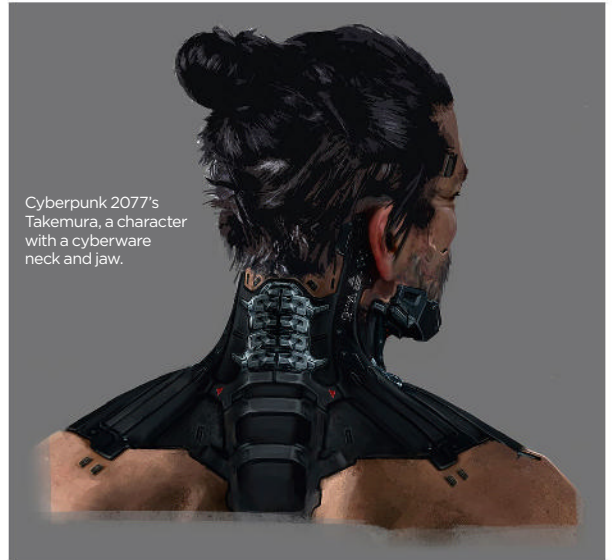
Emmanuel Shiu's image of augmented humans caring for each other.

"Johnny's famous silver cyberarm is branded Arasaka, his nemesis. Why keep it? That's his temperament, it's like whispering names of enemies before falling asleep," says Lea.



©CD PROJEKT RED

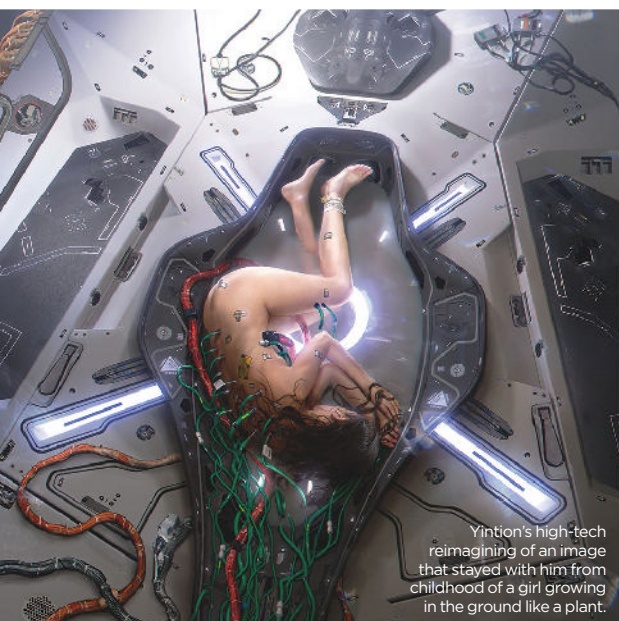
Cyberpunk 2077's Takemura, a character with a cyberware neck and jaw.



©CD PROJEKT RED

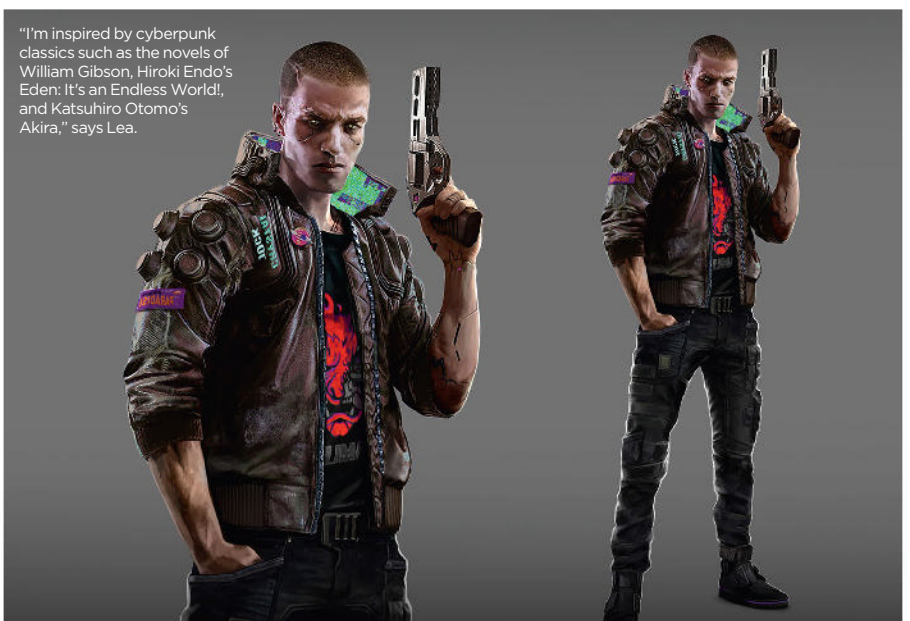


A tortured character from Dave Keenan's world who is tormented by self-aware viral code inside his brain.



Yinton's high-tech reimagining of an image that stayed with him from childhood of a girl growing in the ground like a plant.

"I'm inspired by cyberpunk classics such as the novels of William Gibson, Hiroki Endo's Edens: It's an Endless World!, and Katsuhiro Otomo's Akira," says Lea.



©CD PROJEKT RED

The female incarnation of V, the protagonist in *Cyberpunk 2077*.

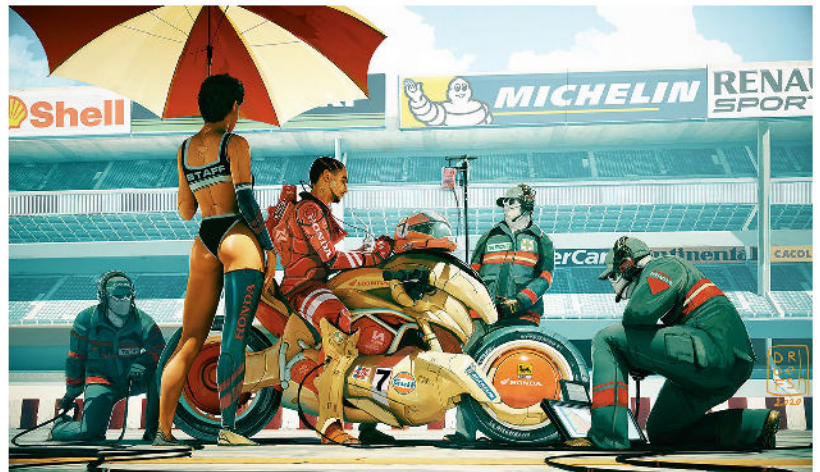


©CD PROJEKT RED



"This is from around 2014, one of the very first ideations of what cyberware would be like," says Lea.

©CD PROJEKT RED



➔ The outer shell is utilitarian though. Silverhand upgraded it a bit by adding blades on the elbow and enhancing fingertips for his guitar-player purposes. Those little touches are visible in closeups only a few times in the game, but they add flavour."

For designer and concept artist



Emmanuel Shiu, his reasons for depicting mechanically enhanced human beings are much closer to home. "I was injured and paralysed 30 years ago,

so man-made hardware has always been a part of my life, especially since I have metal rods holding up my spine and the fact that I use a wheelchair," he explains. "I guess it seeped into my art when I started doing a lot of personal work."

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

During his client work, Emmanuel has produced environments for films including *The Matrix Resurrections*, *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Blade Runner 2049*, although his personal projects

The Grid, Ronan's dystopian grand prix in which the athletes don't own their body parts.

are more character-based and focus on stories of augmented humans. "I tend to think from my own medical point of view and incorporate hardware that would make my life easier in this fantasy world. It's the only place that I can walk and do everything I want," he says.

"I incorporate hardware that would make my life easier in this fantasy world"



"This is from an alternate future where a lonesome soldier kills time waiting to return home," says Dave.

Concept artist and illustrator



Yintion Jiang Geping focuses on the theme of people merging with technology in his work. Many of his images depict humans wearing robotic equipment, others look at robotic humanoids, and some look at characters that are a combination of both.

One of the biggest influences on Yintion's art is the mecha anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. "I'm a big fan of the original TV series and the old versions of the Eva episodes," he says. "It totally blew my mind! Even though my work doesn't look similar



to it, it definitely inspired me on a deeper level."

Yinton uses his personal work as a way to express feelings and relate life experiences, although his images don't directly portray events or emotions. "There's usually a rough story behind my artworks, but no details," he says. "This makes the process easier and also gives the audience more space to imagine. But much of my existing personal work was created during some very strong emotional conditions." 🌹



Yinton's image of a waking android guarded by armed soldiers, as although she looks innocent, she may be dangerous.

A human with a metal spine looks out across his realm in Emmanuel Shiu's *Over the City*.

The Concept Art Awards 2022: **Winners**

Honour roll Check out the triumphant artists and their prize-winning work from this year's awards show as the community came together at LightBox Expo



The fourth year of the Concept Art Awards was marked in 2022. The event was created to honour and elevate those working in the vibrant and too-often overlooked field of entertainment concept art.

The CAA ceremony returned to the Pasadena Civic Auditorium, presented as part of this year's LightBox Expo. Winners from 25 categories across film, series, video games and

animation were honoured as both students and professionals gathered to watch hosts Krystina Arielle, (Star Wars: The High Republic Show), Imani Hakim (Mythic Quest), and artists at the top of their field including Peter de Sève, Karla Ortiz and Ben Mauro present the awards.

For a full list of the night's finalists and to learn more about the Concept Art Awards, visit www.conceptartassociation.com.



Animated Series – Character Maya and Chiapa by Paul Sullivan
www.pencilprimate.com



Animated Film – Color Keys
Ron's Gone Wrong by Aurelien Predal
www.aurelien-predal.com



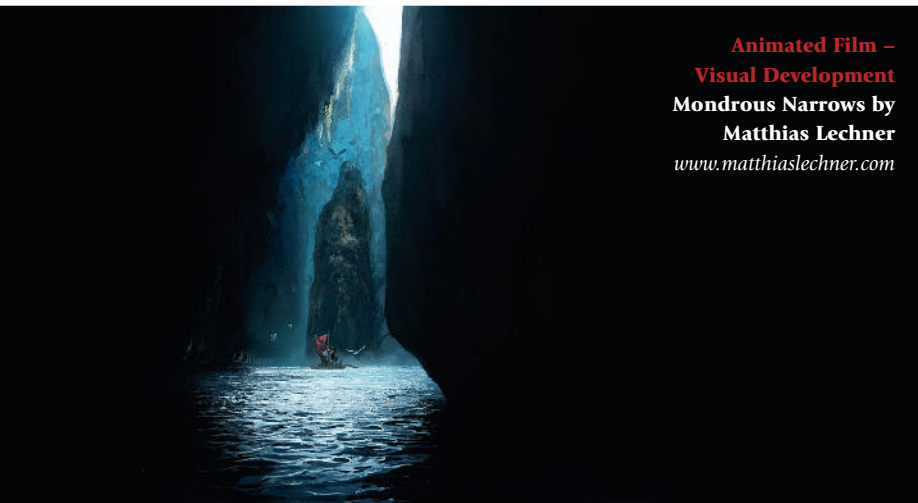
Animated Film – Character
Turning Red Main Cast by Keiko Murayama
www.instagram.com/berryshortcakeo

Turning Red – Pixar Animation Studios



Vivo - Sony Pictures Animation/Netflix

Animated Film – Environment Andres' Apartment in Habana by Aurora Jimenez
www.aurorafilmdesign.com



The Sea Beast - Netflix

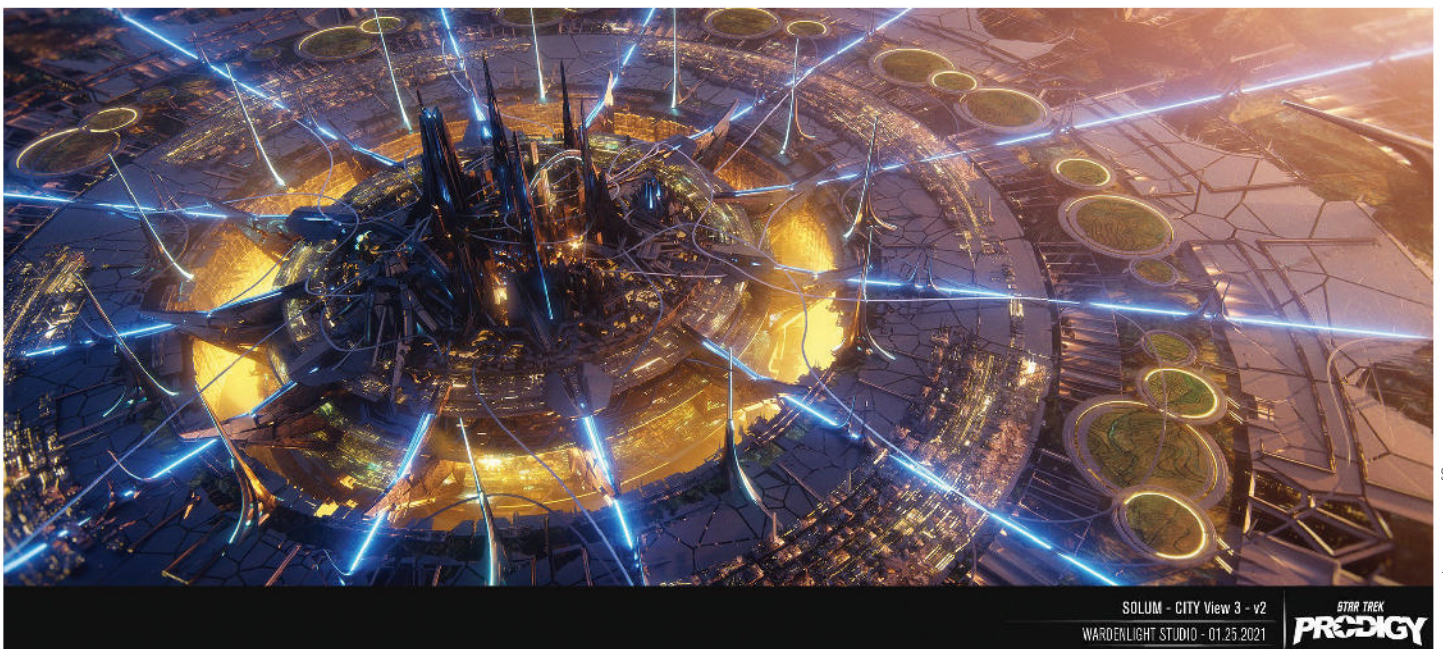
Animated Film – Visual Development
 Mondrous Narrows by
 Matthias Lechner
www.matthiaslechner.com



Walt Disney Animation Studios

Animated Film – Character Design Mirabel by Jin Kim
www.iamag.co/the-art-of-jin-kim

Animated Series – Environment
 Solum City by Bastien Grivet (below)
www.artstation.com/grivetart



Star Trek: Prodigy - Nickelodeon/Paramount+

SOLUM - CITY View 3 - v2
 WARDENLIGHT STUDIO - 01.25.2021

STAR TREK
 PRODIGY



Animated Series – Visual Development

Maya and the Three Battle Lord Mictlan by Paul Sullivan

www.pencilprimate.com

Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings - Marvel Studios



Live Action Film – Character Xu Wenwu

by Jackson Sze

www.instagram.com/jwsze



Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness - Marvel Studios

Live Action Film – Environment Mount Wundagore

by Bob Cheshire

www.bobcheshire.co.uk

Nope - Monkiepaw Productions/Universal Pictures



Live Action Film – Creature Jean Jacket

by Leandre Lagrange

www.technicolor.com/leandre-lagrange

Dune - Warner Bros. Pictures



Live Action Film - Keyframe

The Bene Gesserit Arrive on Caladan by Jeremy Hanna

www.artstation.com/jeremyhanna

Moon Knight - Marvel Studios



Live Action Series - Character

Moon Knight Suit by Ryan Meinerding

www.instagram.com/ryan_meinerding_art

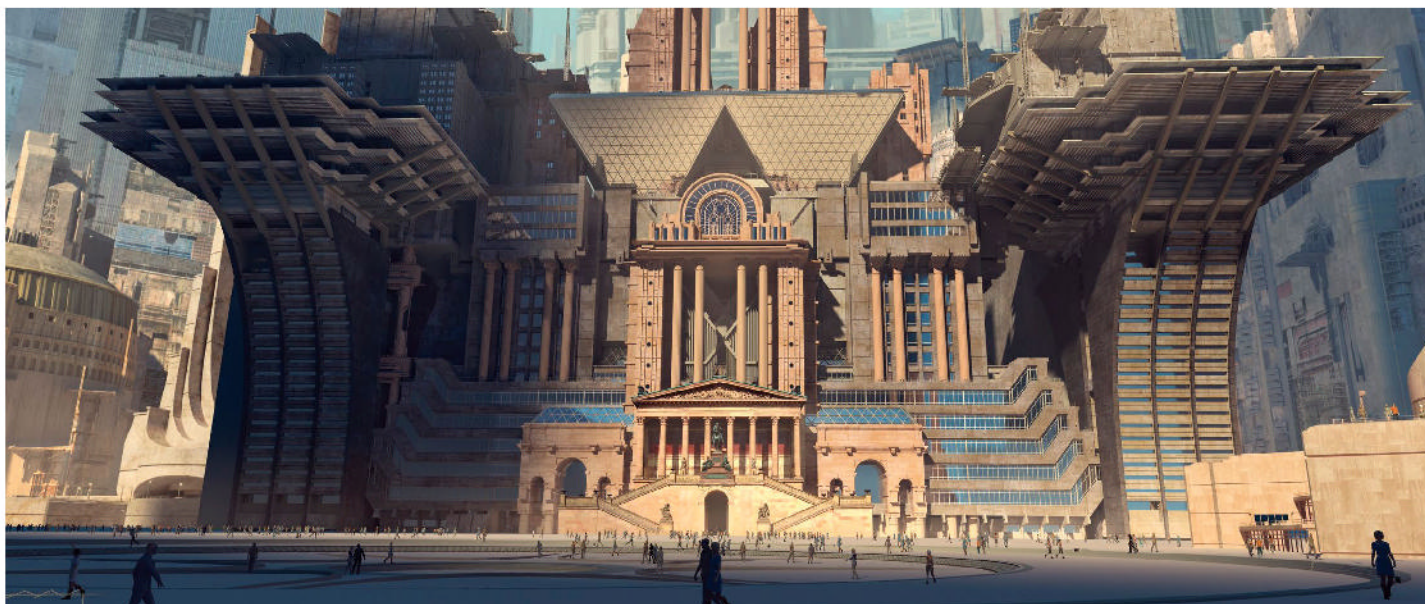


Live Action Film - Prop

Grapple Gun/Harpoon by Glyn Dillon

www.instagram.com/glyn_dillon

The Batman - Warner Bros. Pictures



Live Action Series - Environment **Trantor Library** by Wayne Haag www.artstation.com/ankaris

Foundation - Apple TV+

Star Trek: Strange New Worlds - Paramount+

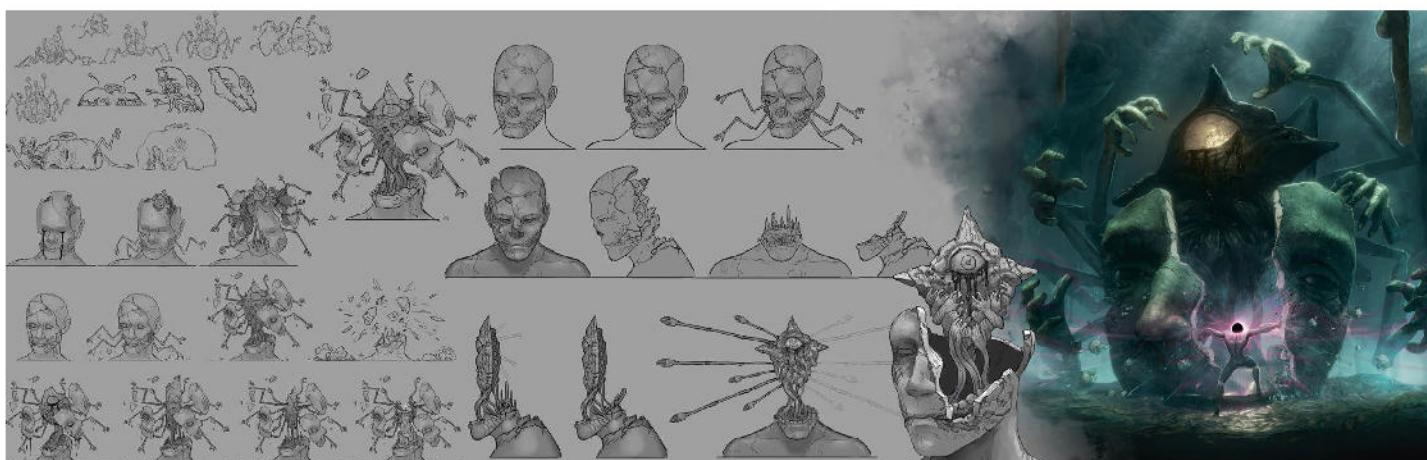


Live Action Series – Prop Gorn Hunter by Daniel Burns
www.danieljburns.com



Live Action Series – Creature Khonshu by Constantine Sekeris
www.artstation.com/artofconstantine

Moon Knight - Marvel Studios



Video Game – Creature Amalgam by Yarden Weissbrot
www.endartol.wixsite.com/yarhar

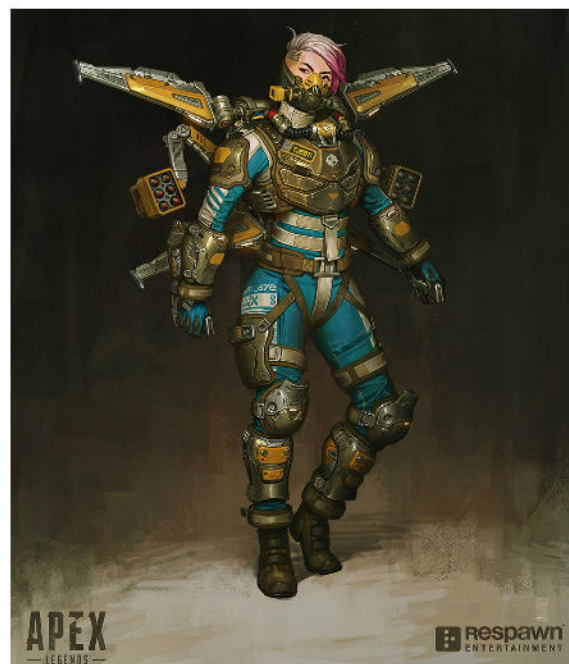
GRIME - Clover Bite / Aupura Games

Dying Light 2 Stay Human - Techland



Video Game – Environment
Postapo Windmill by Emil Cegielski
www.artstation.com/emilcegielski

Video Game – Character
Valkyrie Unshackled by Jude Smith
www.artstation.com/jude_smith



Apex Legends - Respawn Entertainment

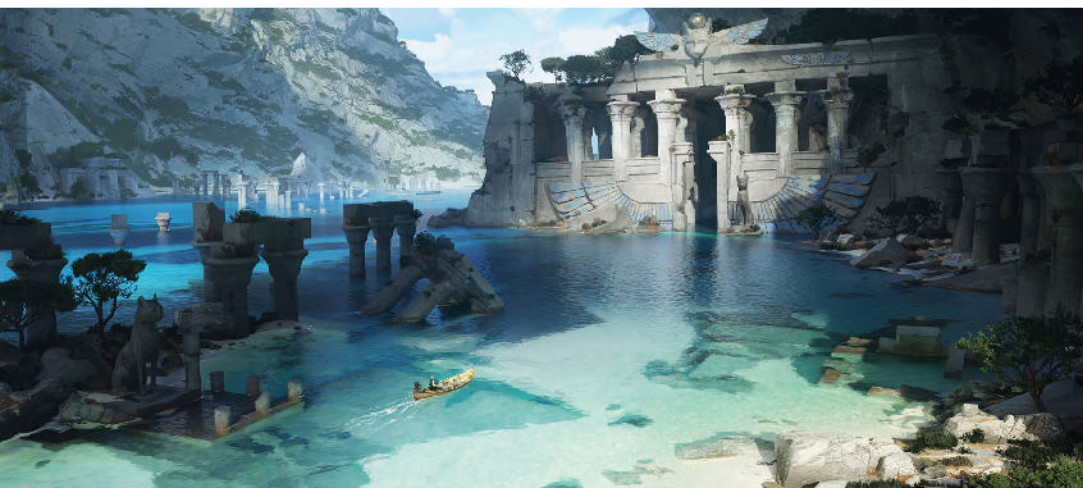


New3dge Concept Art

Independent Environment Clock Tower by Eunbi Kang www.eunbikang.com



New3dge Concept Art



Student Environment

Flooded Egyptian Temple by Robin Costet
www.artstation.com/robincostet

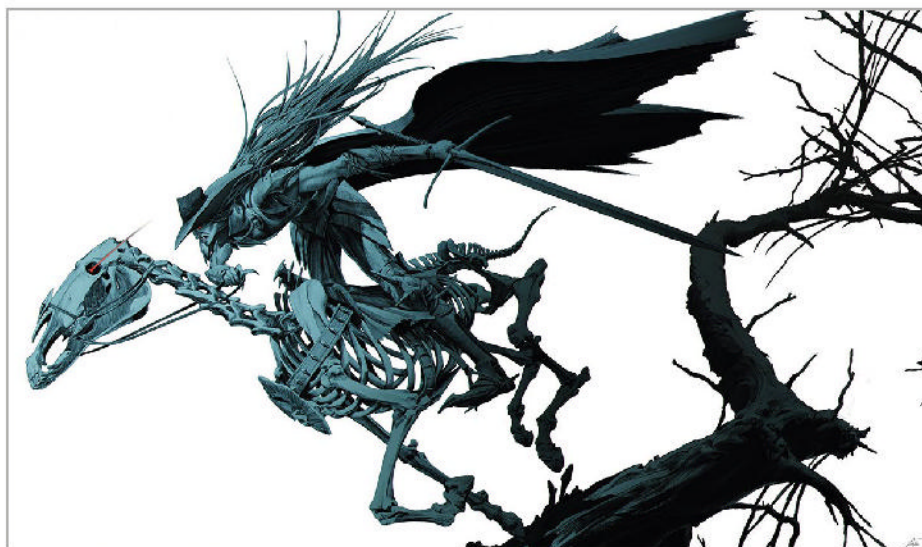


Student Character Skullsworn – Pyrre & Ruc
Lan Lac by Cyprien Rousson (right)
www.artstation.com/kolzura



Independent Character

Caretaker by Tomek Pietrzyk
www.artstation.com/tomekpietrzyk



Fan Art The Rider – Abe Taraky www.artstation.com/abe-taraky



Protect your head at all times. This was a two-image series of headshots with quirky helmets.

A day in the life of...

Alfred Achiampong

Hunger makes the difference We learn about the daily schedule of the Ghanaian character designer and visual development artist for film, games and comics

"I wake up early, around 4am. It's a habit learned from my mum. I do some journaling to get a sense of my day, and go to the gym. Before I start work around 8:30 or 9am, I check my journal again to figure out what task to start with. I don't do warm-ups, but I do like to gather as many Pinterest references as possible so I can hit the client's targets.

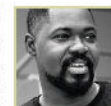
An advantage of being a freelancer is that I can take on more than one project. So when I'm working on two, three or four projects, I push through until dinner. If I'm stopping for lunch, it's around 1pm. I'll have jollof, which is a popular rice dish in my part of the world. I give myself 90 minutes, then I'm back to work for as long as I can go. Between 10pm and 2am, I'm done.

I'll watch some YouTube or Netflix until I'm tired, and that's it.

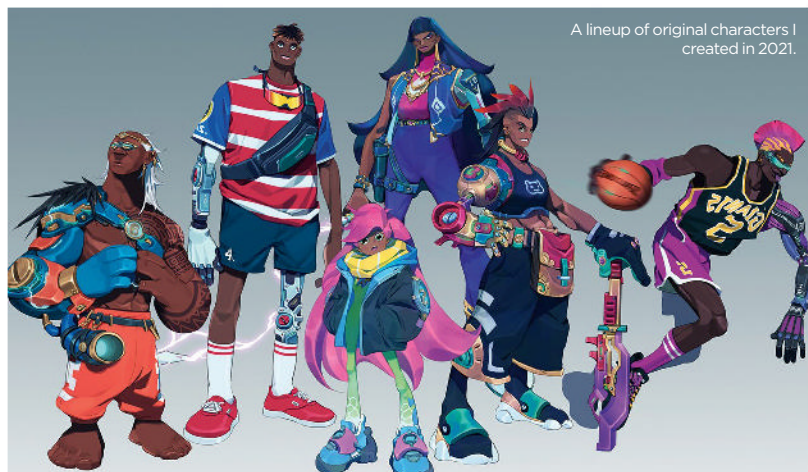
PAVING THE WAY

Art as a career is not very big here in Ghana. It's overshadowed by industries that are seen as more stable, such as medicine and engineering. The internet is starting to change that, but convincing our parents is the hard part.

Living here rather than LA, it creates a level of hunger and drive to succeed, because you have a point to prove. You're also aware that you're breaking ground for others who might want to follow your lead. So you push yourself harder than if you were just spoonfed your career. I think ultimately, that hunger is what makes the difference."



Alfred has experience in many facets of concept art. He has upcoming projects with 9B Collective, as well as Disney and Netflix. You can find more of his work at www.artstation.com/alfredachiampong.



A lineup of original characters I created in 2021.



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.

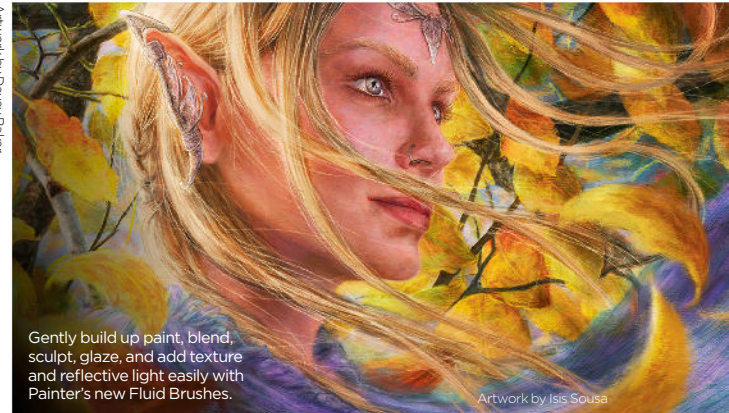


The Brush Accelerator in Painter continues to boost performance. Most popular brush engines are now optimised to make the most of your machine.

Improved keyboard shortcuts to switch from Addition or Subtractive Selection modes are among several enhancements that make your interactions faster.

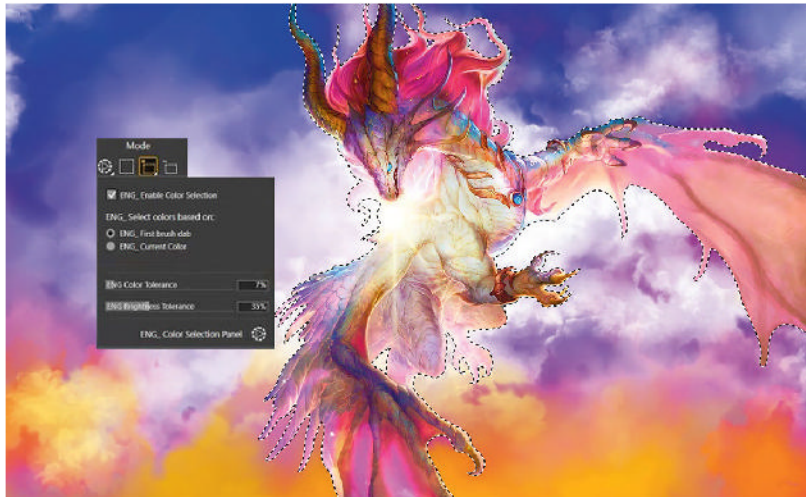


Artwork by Davey Baker



Gently build up paint, blend, sculpt, glaze, and add texture and reflective light easily with Painter's new Fluid Brushes.

Artwork by Isis Sousa



Artwork by Christina Yen



Combine the power of a Magic Wand and the versatility of a Selection Brush to easily select areas of an image by colour.

Artwork by Yann LeGuen

Why artists choose Painter 2023

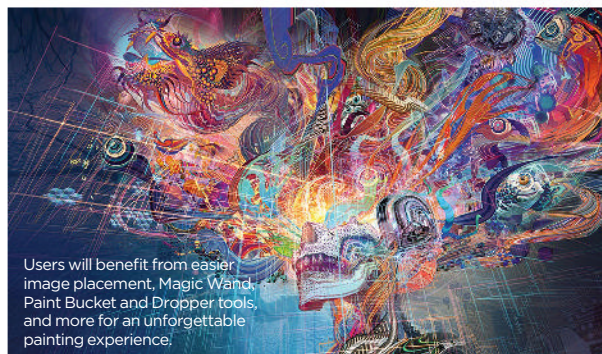
Free Trial! Get your hands on the new and improved Painter to unleash your creativity and burst through artistic barriers this holiday season

For digital artists looking for the best tool to visualise their concepts, Painter 2023 is a fantastic resource. It allows for true creative freedom and offers options for genuine innovation in your art.

For many creative minds software can be a barrier to expression, but Painter 2023 overcomes this with freedom of customisation. The interface is fully customisable to make a workspace fit any purpose with ease, such as palettes and windows

that can be freely moved, docked, hidden or shown. Individual tools can also be adjusted for optimal results. "I fell in love with the way that Painter 2023 blends digital mediums and the vast library of brushes to do so," says Christina Yen, professional illustrator.

“Painter encourages and celebrates artists that create freely and fearlessly”



Artwork by Android Jones

Users will benefit from easier image placement, Magic Wand, Paint Bucket and Dropper tools, and more for an unforgettable painting experience.

If you enjoy collaborating, you can share custom workspaces and brushes, or download brushes from other artists' libraries.

Painter has a reputation for world-class natural media brushes that look and feel like true versions of traditional media, from Thick Paints that can be pushed, pulled and scraped around, to chalks, impasto oils and more, offering artists an authentic experience with none of the mess.

As children we were told to colour inside the lines but Painter 2023 encourages and celebrates artists that create freely and fearlessly, with exciting tools and features that allow you to live outside the lines. "I can create whatever I want, quickly add layers to experiment, change colours when I like, and so on. These things are only possible because of the digital element," says Davey Baker, concept artist and illustrator.

Painter 2023 is a leading tool for digital artists, powering creative minds. Work with your favourite pen, display tablet or iPad using Sidecar and preserve file content transferring between Photoshop and Painter, all with a powerful brush engine optimised to make the most of your CPU and GPU and keep your creative flow uninterrupted.

Check out www.painterartist.com/imaginefx to save big this Black Friday and holiday season. Give Painter 2023 a try for FREE today and see what you think!



Tony Boudin

NEW!
Painter® 2023

LIVE
**outside
the lines**

Your painting possibilities are endless with the all-new Painter® 2023, the trusted digital art software that helps you create unparalleled artwork. Sketch, paint, and illustrate with hundreds of realistic brushes, superior blending options, versatile art tools and exceptional performance.

To try Painter free and save **BIG** this Black Friday,
visit painterartist.com/imagineFX.

ImagineNation Artist in Residence

I've been working on the pre-production of my new book for nearly two years. Currently I'm looking for a suitable publisher for this fantasy book, featuring strange, macabre creatures.

My grandfather had this weird little toy on his desk when he was a doctor. When I was little, I was determined to have this strange but intriguing toy on my desk. And now I have him!

I found this dried-up bean in an abandoned theme park called Land van Ooit in the Netherlands. At first, I thought it was a leftover decoration. Turns out it is just a real bean!



I used to work at Jora Vision, a theme park design company. One day, I had to clean a room filled with old samples, drawings, and the like. During this clean-up, I found this sample of a sign for a famous theme park. I asked if I could take it home, and fortunately I was allowed to! It has been my brush holder ever since.

Photographs by Timo Bersee



My mum fished this chest out of a river when I was little. This box and the magical items inside inspired my first book, *The Wonderful World of Eva*.



This creature is the first piece of art I did not want to sell. Many people have inquired about buying my little creature, but I have refused all offers. He is my child, after all.



George the Handwash Monster cleaned his hands so many times there is no flesh left on them!



Eva Toorenent

Weird but wonderful Explore the kooky collection of organised madness that fills this Dutch artist's studio



I absolutely hate the taste of absinthe, but I adore the design of this bottle. One of my dreams is to create an absinthe bottle label one day.

I always have a rich collection of old candy and sweets. Not necessarily to eat, but for inspiration. My great-grandfather Michael van Melle was a candy inventor. Whenever a friend visits my home, they ask if they can take one from the jar. I always warn them not to, but they never listen to me. The candy is ancient and tastes horrendous.



Although I have lived in this home for a relatively short period of time, the objects, materials, and weird little details in my studio are from a lifetime of collecting. You could say I am a collector, or hoarder, of the strange and macabre.

People think my workspace has no rhyme or reason, but nothing is further from the truth. My atelier can be best described as organised madness. My partner refuses to touch anything in my studio because there is a real chance that something might ➔



➡ attack him – or more likely he will break something.

My work day starts with a cup of coffee and a fancy chocolate. When those are consumed, I get the administrative stuff out of the way. I can only focus on writing for two to three hours in the morning. Some days I use these hours for writing stories and some days I use them for emails. When I am writing text, I listen to a BioShock music playlist. Old-timey music helps me concentrate.

After the writing tasks are done, I can focus on the fun stuff: drawing

This bottle is filled with swamp water. It was clear at first but has turned dark and green over time.

Mother's Day inspired me to create this illustration, the Pink Watertroll. Sadly, my mum did not like the depiction of her.



©2021, Clavis Publishing



A rat skull, a broken pigeon egg, and a dead wasp. I have no reason to have these items in my house. I don't always need a reason to have stuff.

and painting. During the day I paint traditionally when the natural light is optimal. In the evening, when my room is dark, I work digitally.

INSPIRATION AT SUNDOWN

When I am painting digitally, I use my Wacom Cintiq. While working, I use three monitors. By having multiple screens, I can have something to watch, have references on screen, and create art simultaneously. Creating art is like muscle memory; I can get quite bored if I have nothing on screen to entertain me. I amuse myself by watching podcasts, horror gameplay, or a true-crime show.

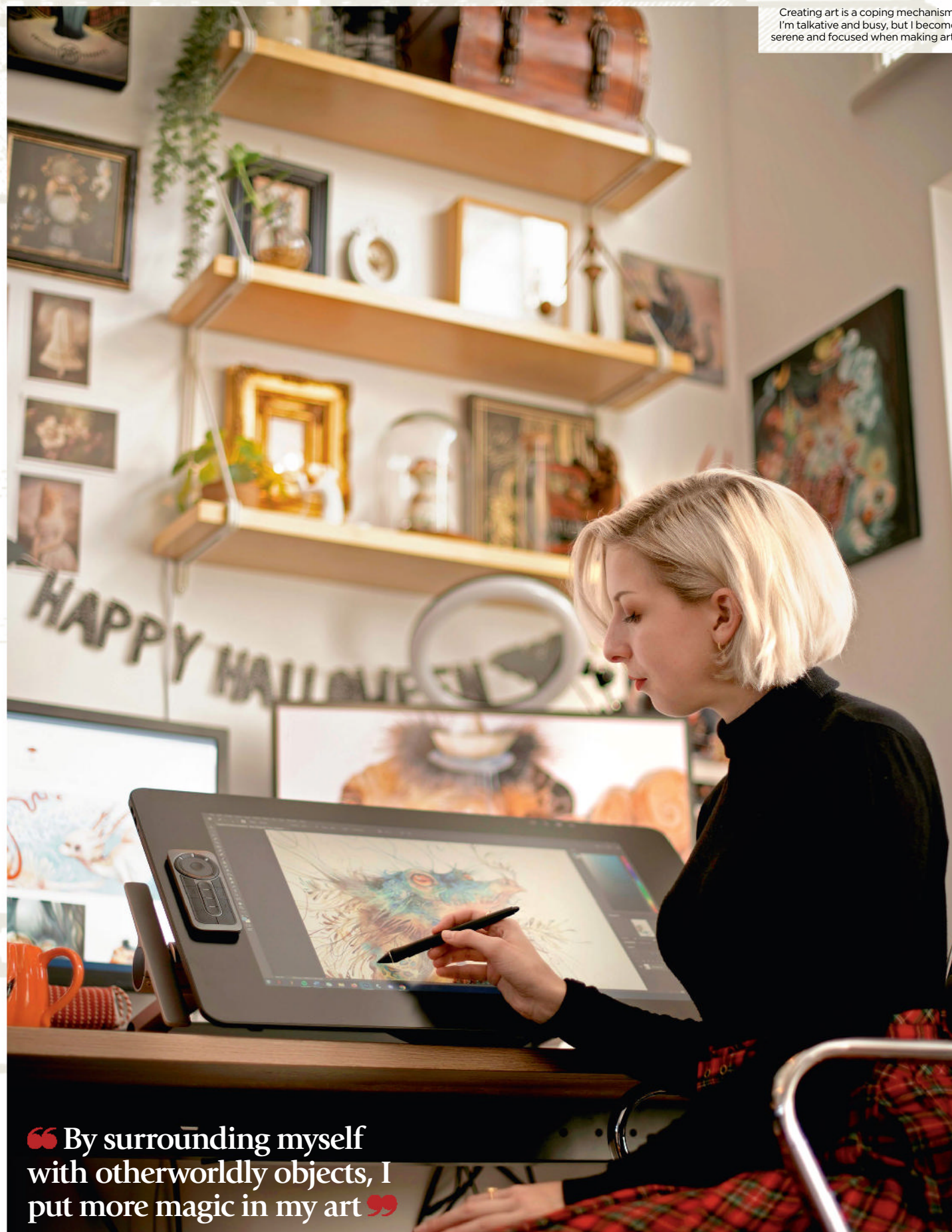
When I have free time after a day's work, I take on my personal projects, do a course, or use the evenings to sketch. Usually I become inspired at night. Most creatures come out of the woodwork during sundown, after all.

I love working at home because I can visualise something immediately when inspiration hits. All my materials are right at my fingertips. If my workspace was outside my house, I would be unable to instantly create something when inspiration strikes. For this same reason, I also keep a notebook beside my bed. If I have a cool idea, I write it down there. If I don't write them down immediately, I will almost certainly forget them come the next day.

What I love about my studio is that the place itself gives me inspiration. By surrounding myself with other-worldly objects, I am able to put more magic in my art.

Eva Toorenent is a freelance creature designer, artist and author from the Netherlands. Her greatest passion in life is to create curious creatures. You can find more of her art at www.evaboneva.com.

Creating art is a coping mechanism. I'm talkative and busy, but I become serene and focused when making art.



“By surrounding myself with otherworldly objects, I put more magic in my art”

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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 220 Christmas 2022

Dive into the world of character design in our exclusive interviews and workshops with pro artists. We also pay tribute to the legendary Kim Jung Gi, and teach you how to create your own large-scale fantasy scenes.



Issue 219 December 2022

Explore the mystical world of Magic: The Gathering with our exclusive artist interviews, insight, and step-by-step breakdown. Plus, learn how to build a dynamic composition, and use AI tools for developing new ideas.



Issue 218 November 2022

Learn how to create striking portraits, stunning landscapes and gorgeous Art Nouveau work in our tutorials. Plus, discover the beautiful art of 'solarpunk', and read our insightful interview with pro fantasy artist Dave Greco.



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'.

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instagram.com/imaginefxmagazine

Celebrating a legend

Hi ImagineFX crew. I'm contacting you to thank you for paying tribute to the loss of Kim Jung Gi. He was a legend in our community and gave so much. I was lucky enough to meet him at Trojan Horse was a Unicorn and the language barrier couldn't hide his passion for his art or the industry family he inspired. It was so good to see all the words of affection and respect for him in your magazine and across social media. He went before his time and will be missed. Thank you for honouring him.

Danni, via email

Rob replies Hi Danni, thanks for writing in to acknowledge that. We felt it was important for such a well-known and respected artist. I actually met him at the same event and totally agree with you. He was warm, passionate and a huge talent that inspired all around him, and watching him work was a rare treat.

Character focus

Hello. I've been a long-time reader of ImagineFX and it has helped me



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?

Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 220 at ifxm.ag/single-iffx.

We paid our respects after the loss of Kim Jung Gi in our last issue



We focused on character design and drawing last issue, with a number of workshops to help you master yours

improve my skills a lot. I have to say I got more out of the last issue than I have for a while. I really find characters difficult. Not so much the rendering of them but the design and concept, so it was a real pleasure to get some insights into these areas. The tutorial on designing unique creatures was ace too. Not the sort of thing I have thought much of but I really enjoyed it and will be trying out some of the tips in there. Thank you!

Sebastien, via email

Rob replies Hi Sebastien. Lovely to hear from you and so pleased you like the issue. Characters can be a large part of the process for many artists, so we try to get some of that in the mag fairly frequently. It's great to hear from people who are benefitting from this, as well as hearing how we are sparking new ideas for artists. Good luck mastering your own characters and creatures and please share them with us when you're ready!

Massive masterpiece

Wow! Just a quick note to say what a great issue it was last month. There was a lot to learn but for me the biggest shock was seeing the huge scale that Patrick Jones paints at. I've been turning my hand to more traditional media of late and my canvases have all been far smaller. But seeing how others work has really been an eye opener, so thank you for covering the traditional side of art too. I feel much more confident that I can get better results if I work at a larger scale now. Keep it up!

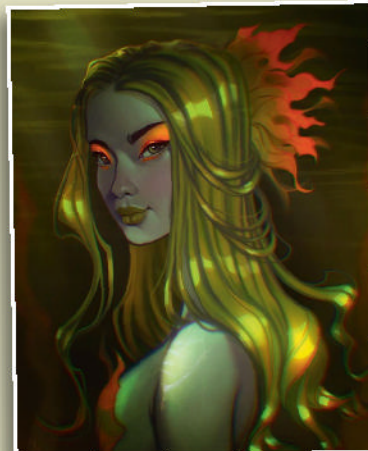
Norris, via email

Rob replies Hi Norris. Great to hear your thoughts and that you've been exposed to something useful from the magazine. I love Patrick's art. He paints such epic pieces and on an equally epic-sized canvas. I hope you get the results you hope for when you start upscaling your own work.



FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention



Nicole Graham
[@nicolnicholsillustrate](https://twitter.com/nicolnicholsillustrate)



Roeve
[@roeve](https://twitter.com/roeve)



Jodi Illustrates
[@mooondance_studio](https://twitter.com/mooondance_studio)

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

JOHN HOWE

“You have this context which can be established from Tolkien’s sources which are more or less Dark Ages and earlier in Europe. Then building on that you have the emotions of the characters, what they feel, what their sentiments are, and that’s liberating”

Trevor Hogg takes a guided tour of Middle-earth and learns what it takes to become a visual storyteller from John Howe...

From his home in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, Canadian illustrator John Howe has become a visual gatekeeper for Middle-earth, starting with calendars and books, and then expanding into cinema with *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, and currently with Prime Video series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*.

Becoming part of the fellowship of Oxford professor and fantasy author J.R.R. Tolkien was not something that was preordained in elvish script or dwarven lore. “I grew up in an extremely rural environment with very little art available. I fell in love with Frank Frazetta’s artwork, which was only visible on paperback covers

at the time. I would cycle around with a friend to every used bookshop that we could reach, pawing through stacks and stacks of musty paperbacks looking for Frazetta covers. Later, my pantheon expanded to include Barry Windsor-Smith, Bernie Wrightson, Michael Kaluta, and Jeff Jones, the quartet of self-styled Pre-Raphaelites of The Studio. I was also a great admirer of the French artist Gustave Doré, so you can imagine my delight when I ended up in his city of birth, Strasbourg, to attend art school.”

FANTASY ROOTS

Initially, John illustrated children’s books for French publishers and drew political cartoons for the press. “It went full circle and returned to my first interests, which were fantasy and heroic fantasy. A first piece was accepted by Unwin Paperbacks in 1986 for a Tolkien calendar, then one thing led to another and here we are.”

Innumerable layers of history and culture are incorporated into fantasy. “As soon as we look back to early medieval or Viking times and before, we are in a world that truly suits me visually. Those are the worlds which have given us many of our most ➡



ELVEN STATUE

One of dozens of drawings depicting effigies of the fallen, carved into living trees in Lindon.

Artist PROFILE



John Howe

LOCATION: Switzerland

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: All of the symbolists, Pre-Raphaelites and golden age illustrators

MEDIA: Watercolours and inks

BOOKS: *A Middle-earth Traveller* (HarperCollins, Oct 2018), John Howe’s *Ultimate Fantasy Art Academy* (David & Charles, Nov 2021)

WEB: www.john-howe.com

John Howe



GANDALF THE GREY

Aptly named Stormcrow, Gandalf,
with the approaching storm in his wake.
From the Tolkien Calendar, 1991.

ImagineFX



Feature

KHAZAD-DÛM

This is not the deserted kingdom we glimpsed in *The Lord of the Rings*, it is a vibrant, thriving community.



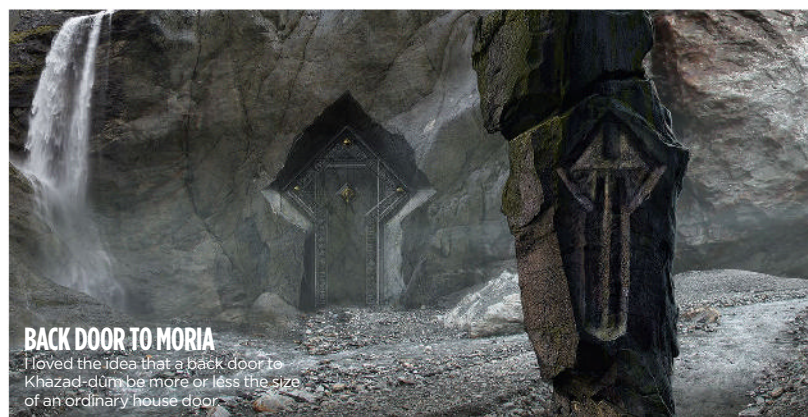
Courtesy of John Howe/Prime Video

➡ enduring myths and legends, worlds that inspired Tolkien as well." John finds all forms of architecture inspirational. "I'm acutely aware of the materials and techniques involved. They define to a large degree your approach: how high you can build, the type of stonework and carving, and how long rafters can be. I've always found that any imagined architecture that embodies a given fictional culture requires a half-dozen distinct elements to actually get it going in your mind."

An illustrator's style is organic rather than a set formula. "It's something

that creeps up on you unawares and is composed of such a multitude of elements such as light, colour, layout, which instances you choose to portray, and what you most enjoy doing," John reflects. "Establishing those points of contact and interest is what allows you to project yourself into the artwork and hopefully touch other people in that same way."

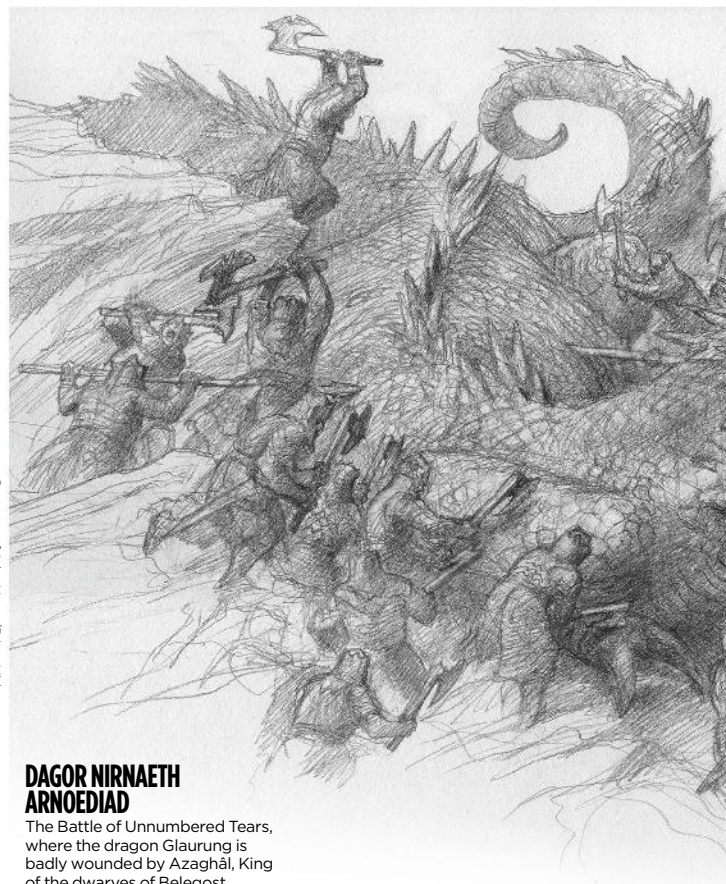
The tools of John's trade include sketchbooks, watercolours, brushes, Staedtler pencils, scanner, Wacom tablet and Photoshop. "I truly believe that it is a dialogue that needs to be



BACK DOOR TO MORIA

I loved the idea that a back door to Khazad-dûm be more or less the size of an ordinary house door.

Courtesy of John Howe/Prime Video



DAGOR NIRNAETH ARNOEDIAD

The Battle of Unnumbered Tears, where the dragon Glaurung is badly wounded by Azaghâl, King of the dwarves of Belegost.

SNOW TROLL

One of a generous handful of snow troll concepts. A chance pencil line led to the tusks.



TOP TIP

Information is a permanent quest, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Inspiration is what happens when you stop thinking about it and just let it happen. Once you've done the sketch then you can happily drag out the reference material. It won't interfere with your creative process and will resolve your technical questions.

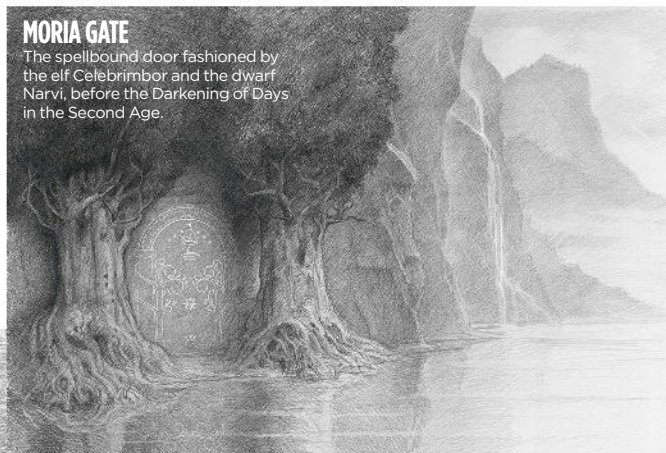
ENVISIONING A SNOW TROLL

The snow troll makes its Middle-earth debut after six or seven varied sketches

"I do not know exactly where my idea of trolls comes from, possibly partly from the Swedish illustrator John Bauer. Partly from other sources that have mentioned trolls in different legends and stories. A good deal obviously from Peter Jackson's films where we had time to get to know trolls quite well. When a snow troll cropped up in the script, it clearly needed to be identifiable as a troll but something a little different. I know that those tusks are based on the tusks of a wild boar. I do have a skull of a wild boar in my basement so that may have been part of the inspiration. More likely though, it was the chance stroke of a pencil and I thought, 'That looks like a boar's tusk,' and went on from there. This three-way dialogue between creator, theme and the drawing itself is essential."

MORIA GATE

The spellbound door fashioned by the elf Celebrimbor and the dwarf Narvi, before the Darkening of Days in the Second Age.

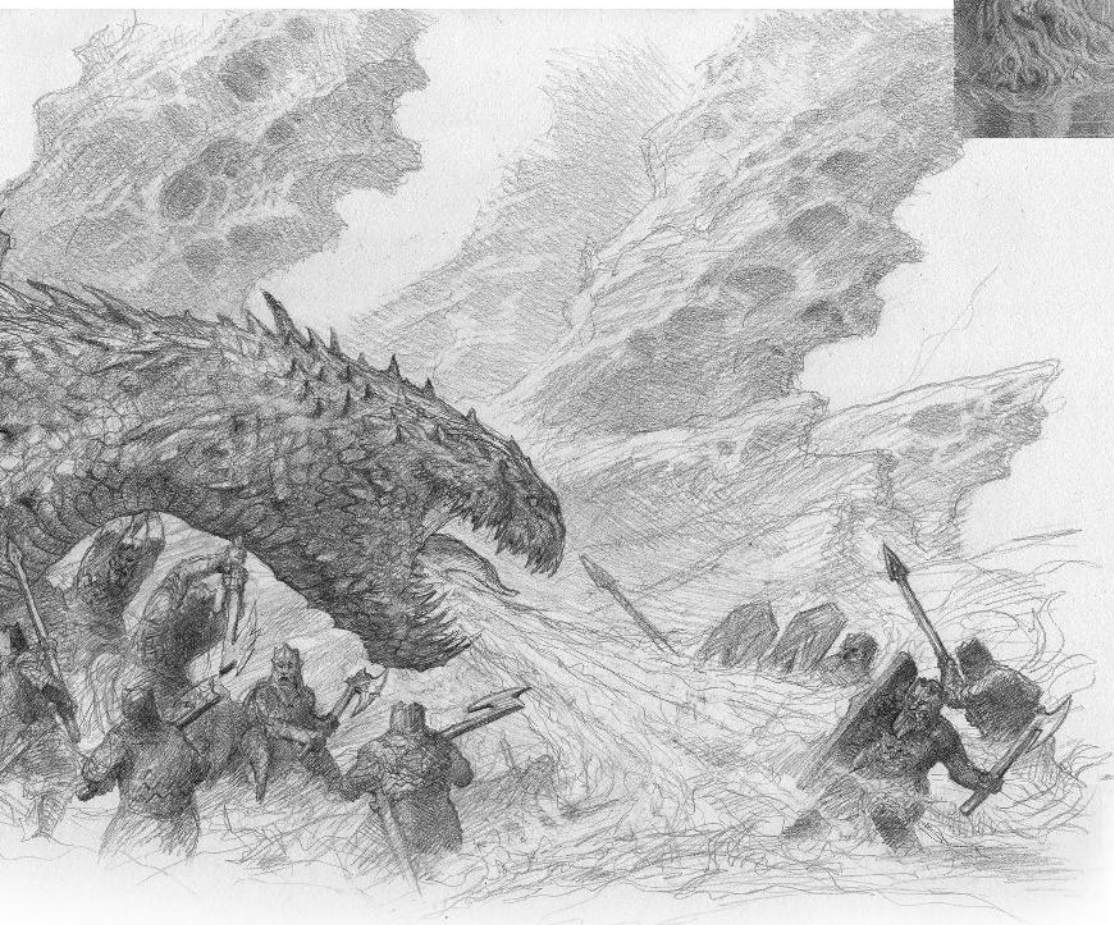


“ Sometimes the drawing gives you back an idea from a chance line ”

established between yourself, the theme you're pursuing, and the drawing itself, and all three should contribute to the process. Sometimes the drawing gives you back an idea from a chance line and you think, 'Oh, look at that,' and change your direction entirely. Those are absolutely magical moments."

CAPTIVATING LANDSCAPES

John has always found the works of Tolkien visually compelling. "Tolkien, besides being a historian and philologist, familiar with a number of vanished tongues, reading ancient Gothic and God knows what else, ➡





GLORFINDEL AND THE BALROG

A dramatic confrontation from the First Age. Glorfindel defending the refugees fleeing the fall of Gondolin.

➡ is someone who writes in pictures. If you read his works attentively, they generate images relentlessly. It's akin to a conversation, a back-and-forth between word and image.

"Also, Tolkien was one of these wonderful authors who does not give you a huge amount of detail and physical description. He will describe the emotions of the characters when

Familiar environments impact John's landscapes. "Clearly, there is a lot of New Zealand in much that I've done since I first set foot there. Some things feel right and others just don't. If I'm thinking of the First or Second Age then it's got to be Patagonia. If I'm thinking of the Third Age, it's the Alps. Curiously the Canadian Rockies, which I know well, don't fit at all.

“Tolkien was one of these wonderful authors who doesn't give huge amounts of detail and physical description”

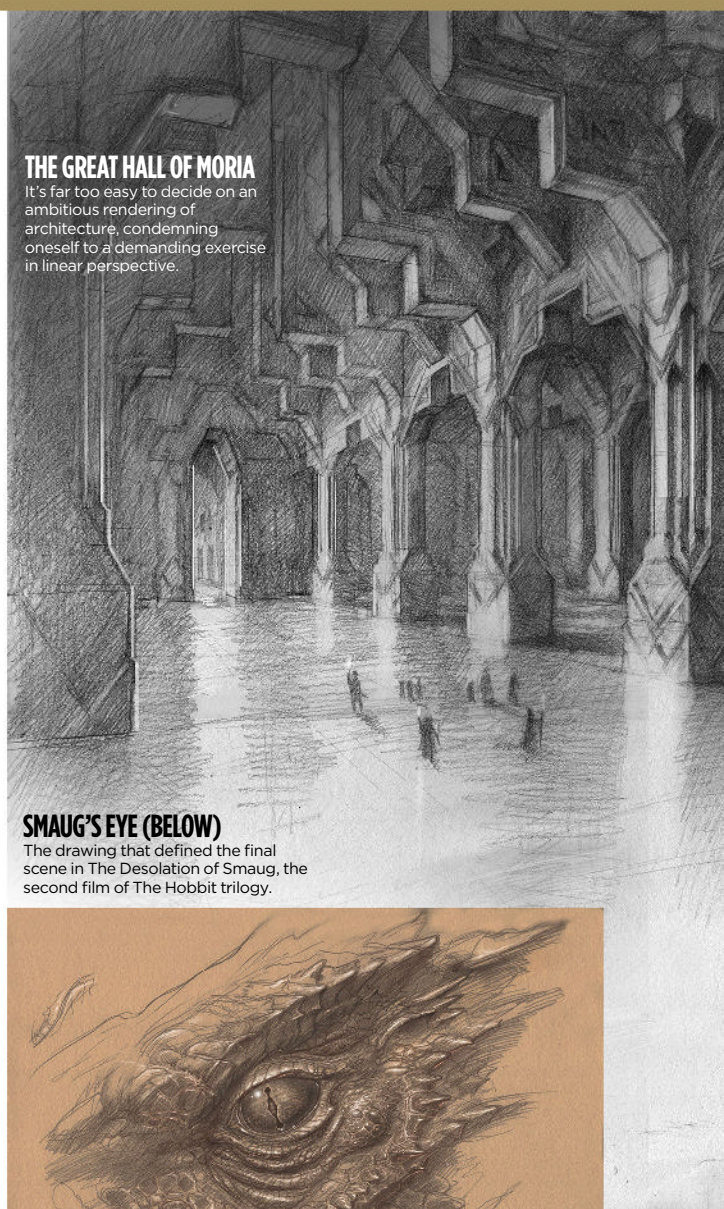
they are in a given situation, but doesn't necessarily tell you exactly how many feet high a tower is, or how big it is around. Interestingly enough, Tolkien did a walking tour of Switzerland in 1911 when he was 19 years old with a group of other people, crossing the Alps from Interlaken to the Valais. You can see the Alps all throughout the Misty Mountains within *The Hobbit*."

Don't ask why. Inspiration is like that; a product of circumstance, serendipity and subjectivity."

Beginning with the Third Age and working back to the Second has its challenges. "That was something I did think about a little bit despite myself," John admits. "I don't like the idea of taking existing elements from a fictional universe and then trying to go back in time in that same ➡

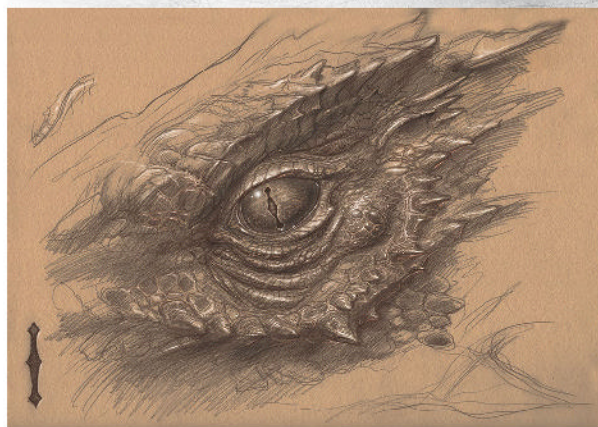
THE GREAT HALL OF MORIA

It's far too easy to decide on an ambitious rendering of architecture, condemning oneself to a demanding exercise in linear perspective.



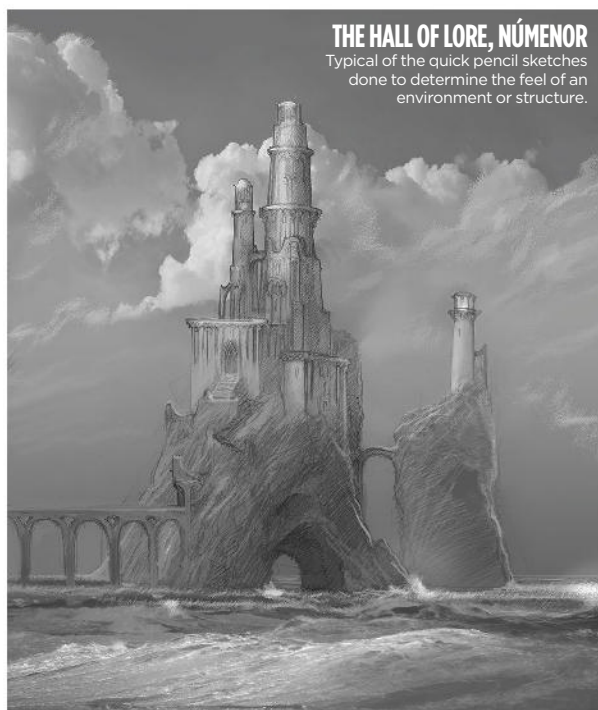
SMAUG'S EYE (BELOW)

The drawing that defined the final scene in *The Desolation of Smaug*, the second film of *The Hobbit* trilogy.



THE HALL OF LORE, NÚMENOR

Typical of the quick pencil sketches done to determine the feel of an environment or structure.



Courtesy of John Howe/Prime Video



“SIGN ME UP FOR THE FIRST AGE!”

Even after four decades, John still seeks new adventures in Middle-earth

Is there a character or setting in Middle-earth that you would love to illustrate?

“Sign me up for the First Age please! I also very much want to draw the Blue Wizards, the two who wander off to the East and are never heard from again. When I think about the number of times I’ve been standing somewhere, on top of the ramparts of Angband, in the bell tower of Lake-town, or perhaps in Lindon looking out over the landscape, and thought, ‘I know what’s just beyond the horizon there. But the script is not going to let me go.’ I wish I had the opportunity to explore that. It is like discovering a new country except you’re making it up as you go.”

The two trilogies by Peter Jackson afforded you the opportunity to work with an illustrator you admire

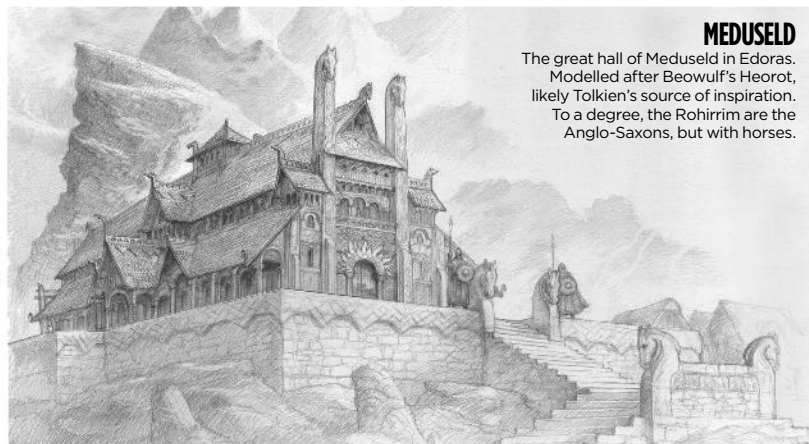
“I actually wrote this letter to this gentleman named Alan Lee, don’t know if you’ve heard of him at all! I had seen a book called Once Upon a Time with artwork by many people including Alan. I wrote, ‘Dear Mr Lee, I’m finishing high school and would like to pursue a career in illustration. I am wondering if you had any thoughts that you would like to share.’ Of course, he never wrote back. But he has promised to reply, so I’m patiently waiting!”

Do you approach concept art for a movie differently than book illustrations?

“I’m attached to the idea of having some form of depth in every picture, of concentrating detail where it’s of the most use. I love working within the CinemaScope because you have that width, which is exciting to play with. I find now when I’m doing a vertical illustration that it is very constrictive. There has to be an internal logic to the picture, which is no more than an artificial framing of something that goes on indefinitely outside of that frame. It also needs to have a coherent internal narration and pictorial logic, as well as the extended narrative; what happened before and what might happen after.”

MEDUSELD

The great hall of Meduseld in Edoras. Modelled after Beowulf’s Heorot, likely Tolkien’s source of inspiration. To a degree, the Rohirrim are the Anglo-Saxons, but with horses.



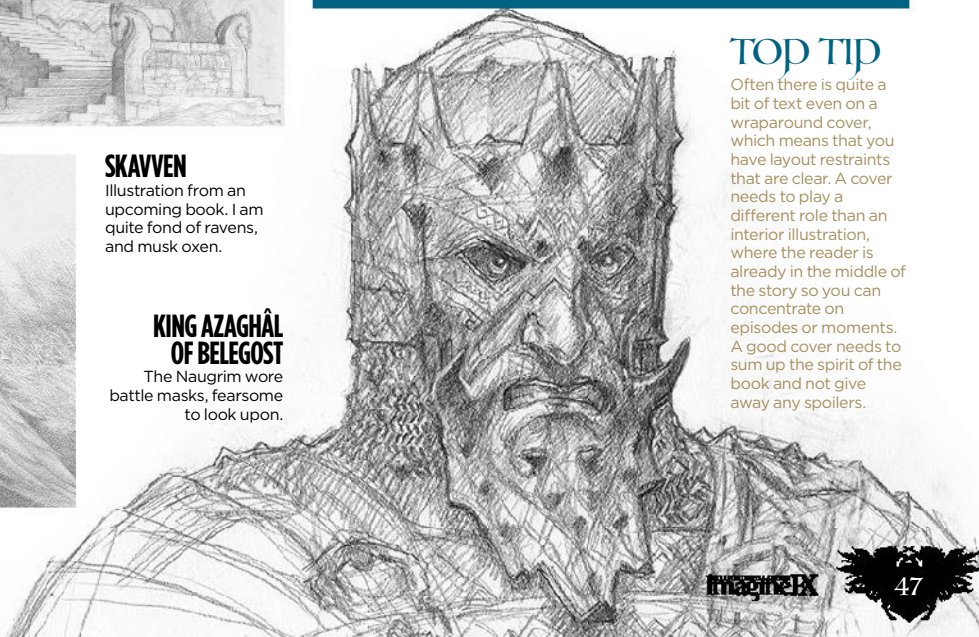
SKAVVEN

Illustration from an upcoming book. I am quite fond of ravens, and musk oxen.



KING AZAGHÂL OF BELEGOST

The Naugrim wore battle masks, fearsome to look upon.



TOP TIP

Often there is quite a bit of text even on a wraparound cover, which means that you have layout restraints that are clear. A cover needs to play a different role than an interior illustration, where the reader is already in the middle of the story so you can concentrate on episodes or moments. A good cover needs to sum up the spirit of the book and not give away any spoilers.

A FROZEN FIND IN THE WASTE

Galadriel and her company discover a fortress north of the Grey Mountains

"I did a lot of artwork for the environment. It's lost in the snowstorm so we don't ever get to see it clearly, but I'm trying to convey a sense of foreboding and awe. These elves have trekked north in the middle of these frozen wastelands and finally discover the place they are seeking. It's like a great creature that is ready to eat them. But honestly, I don't suss all of that out as I'm drawing, it's all very intuitive. I try to let things happen and see where they go. The drawings are a form of dialogue. They are there to ask questions of the production designer or the showrunners so we can figure out where we're all going with this."



MORGOTH'S LAST STRONGHOLD

Deserted fortress in the Northern Waste, not unlike the jaws of some great beast about to close on the intruders.

Courtesy of John Howe/Prime Video



LLORA AND THE RAVEN

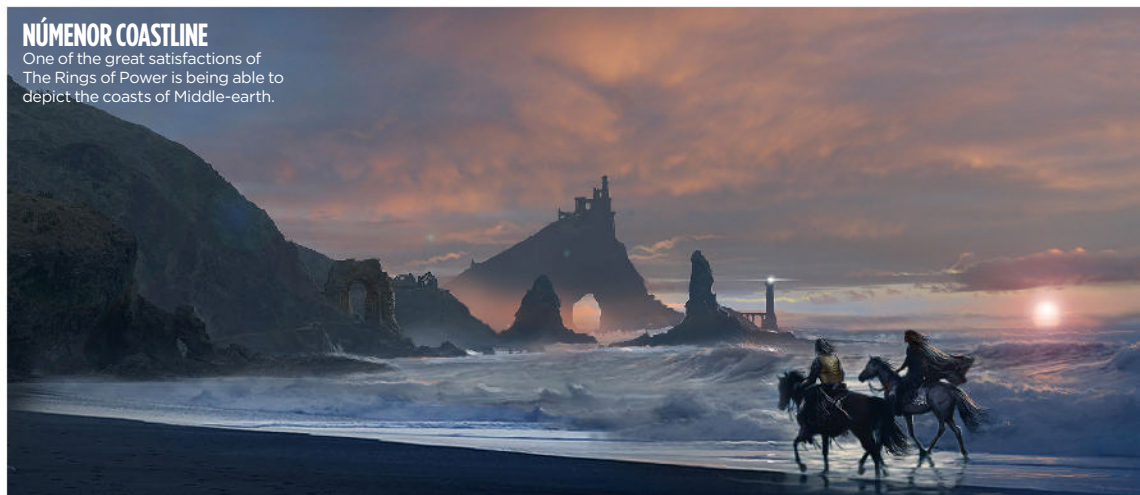
"Tell me what you see," said the Raven.

➡ universe to imagine what it might have looked like. It's very much done in science fiction. What I rather try to do is to get back as close as possible to the original spirit of the books or source material, try to imagine that, keeping in mind that we are 2000-odd years before, and then move forward. If your intuition can be trusted then you'll end up in the same place."

Depicting the Second Age for The Rings of Power was a unique challenge as The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings occur in the Third Age. "It's the same world but a far different time, and that means you must reconsider a fresh approach to almost everything. When doing the map of Númenor, I struggled with what we know and

NÚMENOR COASTLINE

One of the great satisfactions of The Rings of Power is being able to depict the coasts of Middle-earth.



Courtesy of John Howe/Prime Video

TOP TIP

I'm often asked how I deal with artist's block, the emptiness of the white page. I always reply that a piece of paper is not a piece of paper, it's a window to a three-dimensional infinite space, into which you can reach with your pencils and uncover what is there. I used to believe we had all the images in our heads and drawing was simply a question of getting them out. I know now that what we have in us is the experience, the technique and the desire to find those images, but they are out there, in the world. You have to reach out to touch them, that's where they are.

“If you say ‘dragon’ to anybody they will know what a dragon is like, but nobody has ever seen one”

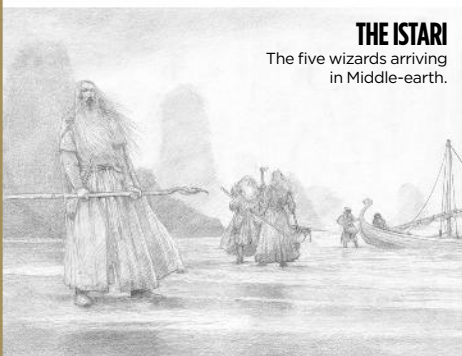
don't know. We don't know how far Númenor is from Middle-earth. We do know the coastlines changed with the sinking of Númenor because Lindon to a large degree was destroyed and the mouth of the Anduin changed."

NÚMENOR RISING

A lot of concept art was created for the human kingdom of Númenor, a thriving maritime nation possibly inspired by the legend of Atlantis. "I love the idea of going from a wide view of the city and then doing a detail of a doorknob, all in the same fictional culture," John remarks. "I find this permanent shifting of focus energising. You need to grasp as best you can the believability of it all and then the rest follows suit."

In fantasy, a double form of credibility needs to be achieved, otherwise the viewer will remain distant. "I'm fascinated by this notion of shared culture. If you say 'dragon' to anybody they will know what a dragon is like, but nobody has ever seen one and they don't exist. Where do those images come from? They are syncretic, and grown and evolved over many cultures, over many centuries."

The Rings of Power introduces Middle-earth to a new generation. "It's natural when you are a dedicated fan of the universe to only accept what you have taken into your heart. It can be hard to open up again and accept something new. I'm grateful for the opportunity to broaden our perception of Middle-earth."



THE ISTARI

The five wizards arriving in Middle-earth.

John Howe

A BLACK RIDER

Nazgûl seeking the One Ring, the sudden intrusion of the wide and perilous world into the cosy Shire.



Alex Vede

The storytelling illustrator and comic book artist travels the world and beyond through the characters in his sketchbook

TENTACLES

"I wanted to draw a diver in danger. And tentacles are always a fun visual resource to use."

ALIEN SPECIES

"I really liked the motion of this vertical panel. Somehow vertical compositions always give me a sense of speed and danger."

Artist PROFILE

Alex Vede

LOCATION: Spain



Alex Vede is an illustrator and comic book artist based in Spain. He draws mainly fantasy and science fiction worlds and

characters, giving great importance to storytelling. After working as a storyboard artist and illustrator, he is now dedicated to making his own original comics and art books.

www.instagram.com/alexvede96



DESERT WALKER

"When I design a character, I like their clothes to be a reflection of the environment in which they move. In this case it is a desert nomad who has to withstand heavy sandstorms."

GANGSTERS AND ALIENS

"When I don't have many ideas, I usually think of combining concepts that don't have much to do with each other and see what comes out."

ASTRONAUT PORTRAIT

"I have always liked the expressiveness of the lines in this drawing, for me it is the most important thing. Let the lines of the drawing have life and movement."

THE GHOST AND THE KID

"I like to think of characters that can inhabit my drawings, and these two feature in a lot of them. I'm always thinking of new adventures to put them in."

“ Somehow vertical compositions always give me a sense of speed and danger ”

Sketchbook

COSMONAUT HELMET

"I almost always use ink on pencil. The large, solid spots give the drawings a lot of strength."

JAPANESE INK

"This illustration is part of a book I made about an imaginary Japanese world. Different ink intensities can create the effect of depth."



ASTRONAUT GIRL

"Astronauts are my go-to subjects, they're always fun. I don't think I'll ever tire of them."

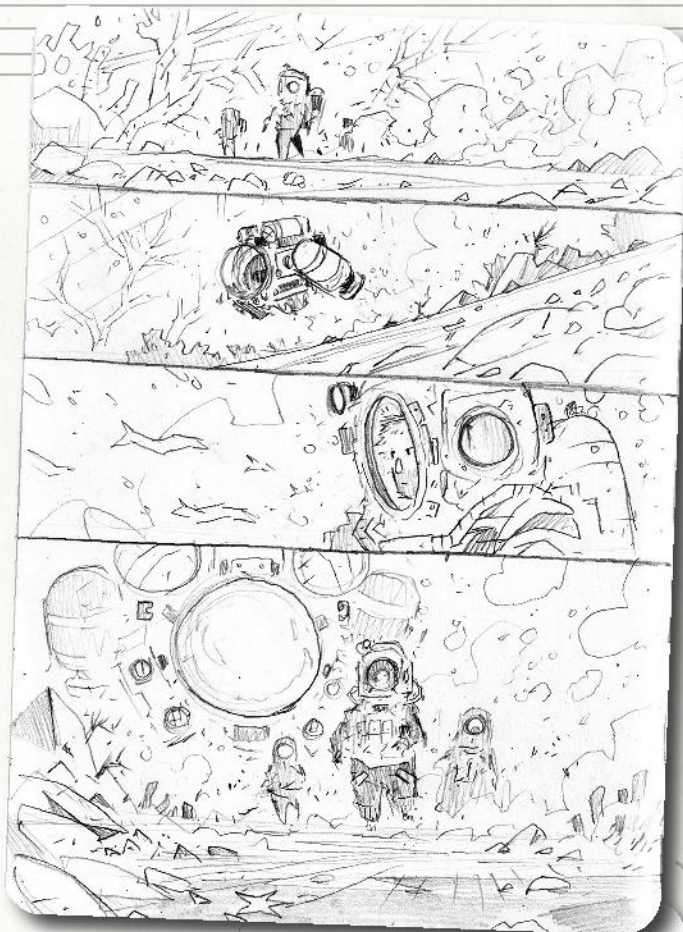


“Drawing allows me to travel to other times and cultures”

INUITS

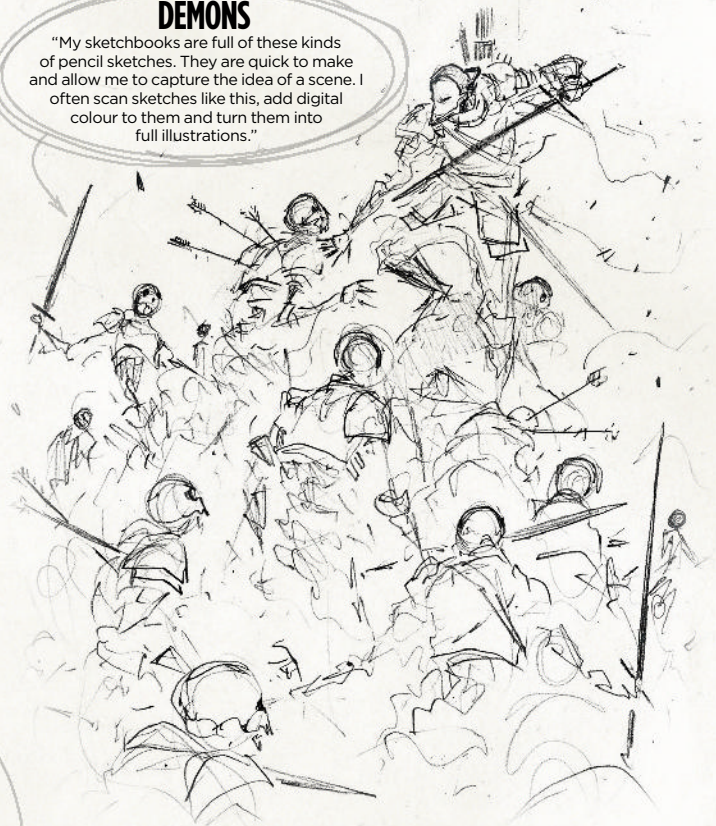
"I don't usually draw scenes of the present world, I like that drawing allows me to travel to other times and cultures. Real and imaginary. This is just a quick sketch, but when you dig deeper you end up discovering a lot of unknown things to draw."





DEMONS

"My sketchbooks are full of these kinds of pencil sketches. They are quick to make and allow me to capture the idea of a scene. I often scan sketches like this, add digital colour to them and turn them into full illustrations."

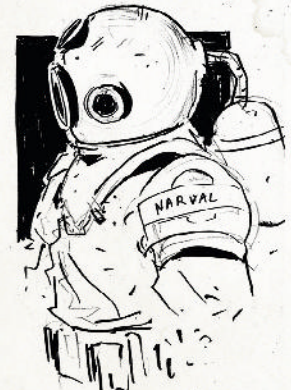
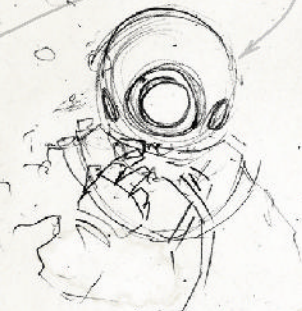


COMIC BOOK SKETCHES

"I do sketches like these to explore the potential of a story, to see how the idea would look in images. I try to imagine a lot of different scenes of the same story and get them down on paper before I forget them."

DIVER SUIT

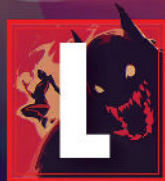
"When I stopped to think that divers are the astronauts of the sea, I couldn't stop drawing them."



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

THE ART OF TONI INFANTE

Dominic Carter talks to the Marvel and DC artist about illustrating beloved characters and how fan art breeds opportunities



Life is full of surprises. Take Toni Infante, who discovered he would be illustrating Spider-Man while

playing a computer game about the beloved Marvel character. His journey to this point has been a long one, full of inspiring friends and peers, and has led to him giving back to other creators now he's made it. We caught up with Toni to learn more about his fascinating career to date.

Tell us a little about your background as an artist. How did you start and what has your career been like so far? My passion for art started in my childhood, with Dragon Ball and other comic books. Not much later I

became interested in the artists behind those works, and started to think about how to become one of them. That led to me studying fine arts and illustration, and learning together with wonderful people.

My first steps on the professional side of things was 10 years ago and I did not follow a straightforward path. I worked for very low-budget projects until I jumped into more well-paid work with Disney. Then, thanks to my comic book background, I was involved in the production of a comic series for two years. That gave me

contact with some US editors, with whom I made my first comic covers. Now I've developed my style and am working for some of the most important companies in the world.

Can you tell us a bit about the illustration and comic scenes in Barcelona?

Historically, there has always been a ton of talent in Spain, and that is true even today. Some of the most talented artists in the fields of video games, illustration and comic books live here. This makes the city a wonderful place to live if you want to study something related to those industries. There's daily life-drawing activities, museums and shops everywhere, which makes it much easier to meet new people and be inspired by new things. ➡➡

❖❖ Everything I've learned is thanks to others who shared their knowledge before me ❖❖



SKYWARD SWORD

This image is one of Toni's favourites, which he talks about in more detail on page 58. "It was a double cover so that always increases the complexity, the cover has to work alone, and also the whole image at the same time."

Interview

➡➡ Which artists have inspired you the most and why?

I love to be inspired by new artists every day, so that is a hard question. But it's true that there are a few that left a huge impression and helped me to develop my current style! Akira Toriyama, Sean Murphy and Ashley Wood to name a few. If there's something in common between them, it is the energy and dynamism of their work, something I think is one of the signatures of my own style today.

How has your art developed, and what has driven those changes? My personal interests and tastes, mostly. My love for anime, video games and cinema keep influencing my work, adding new effects, colour palettes and artistic choices. You need to keep feeding your reference library with culture every day. Especially nowadays, when styles develop so fast and we have unlimited access to artists from all around the globe!

There's a lot of stunning fan art on your site. What is the appeal of doing fan art, and why would you recommend other creators do it too? It's my way to give back to those stories, pay tribute to the creators and connect with other fans at the same time. It's my place to experiment with other styles and work without the pressure of deadlines.

And if it weren't enough, working on fan art has helped me to get in touch with those companies and make official art, like CD Projekt Red, Atlus or Genshin! So you know, 100 per cent recommend including fan art in your portfolio. It's a great way to get work from the companies or licences you love, while you keep building your online presence and community.

What made you decide to focus on illustration and cover art?

I get tired of working on the same project for several months. And making covers forces me to work with different characters and stories each week. In addition, while I'm fascinated



THE ART OF TEMTEM

"One of my latest works, The Art of Temtem cover. Years ago it was hard to paint more than two characters. I can't believe I can paint more than 20 monsters now without dying!"

with storytelling, I'm way more comfortable using a single image to tell a story. You have to focus on several elements and represent them carefully, which makes my work very dynamic as well.

Has there been a defining moment in your career so far where you've felt as though you've 'made it'? If so, what was that like?

Clearly, there have been some huge commissions from big companies that made me so excited and happy. The first one was making covers for the

❖❖ You need to keep feeding your reference library with culture every day ❖❖

Batman Ninja movie, and more recently there are commissions for Atlus that I can't talk about yet. Making official art for some of the most beloved licences while retaining my recognisable style is priceless, and I feel really lucky. I still hope to collaborate with Square Enix though. Maybe someday?

Your site says you are an illustrator and comic artist. How do these lines of work differ? Do you have to use different skills or approaches? Absolutely, they are different mediums. Making comics requires you to be faster, leave details, and focus first on good storytelling between the panels. While with illustration, and cover art specifically, I need to create an eye-catching image that shows the characters, a scene or a mood that represents a bigger story. Both use many of the same skills, but they are pretty different on the whole. Cover art is like a movie poster, while the movie is the comic itself.

You've created art for some huge IPs, including Batman, Spider-Man and Fantastic Four. Was that a surreal experience? Were you already a fan of these series?

Yes! I was already a Marvel fan when I got these first job proposals. Actually, I



VERGIL

"Sometimes you just need some shapes and silhouettes to paint a big bunch of characters. This is one of the lessons I learned from studying Frank Frazetta's work."

Artist PROFILE

Toni Infante



LOCATION: Spain

FAVOURITE ARTISTS:

Akira Toriyama, Sean Murphy, Ashley Wood

MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate

WEB: <https://toniinfante.com>

DEVELOP YOUR PATREON FANS

Toni shares his advice for growing your own set of dedicated patrons

- 1** Patreon is about sharing, sharing, and sharing some more without expecting anything back. The first few months are difficult, and you should appreciate every single patron and bit of support you get. It's coming from people who love your work and they deserve the best content possible.
- 2** Keep being persistent and consistent with your publication schedule. Publish something new every week. Include different types of content, like videos, sneak peeks, tutorials, gifs, and so on.
- 3** Share your work, but more importantly, your art journey. This includes your work-in-progress pieces, inspirations and struggles too. Exclusive content is a must as well.
- 4** Know your audience, and ask them about their interests and which content they are most excited about. You have polls available plus direct contact through Discord, so use them!
- 5** Don't make content just to gain more patrons or a following. Be faithful to yourself and enjoy what you do. That's the way you will connect with people with the same interests as you!
- 6** Finally, keep it simple! Don't have too many tiers and make it all accessible with just a few clicks.



SEVEN SECRETS CHALLENGE

"This image for Seven Secrets was quite a challenge. It was hard to maintain the focus and make it work despite having lots of characters."

remember playing the Marvel Spider-Man game when I got the chance to make a cover for the comic adaptation, and I was like, "What the hell just happened?" I quickly wrote to one of my friends telling him. Creating fan art makes it easier to get in touch with some of the IP owners, so I've managed to work on official art for properties that I am familiar with fairly frequently.

What's uniquely different about creating art for these properties as opposed to other projects? Almost all projects require you to be faithful and respectful to the IP, characters and mood. So the only difference is the level of freedom they can give me, and it depends on the product. It's not the same making a variant cover, where they usually give you a lot of freedom to choose characters and style, compared to ➔



WINTER GUARD

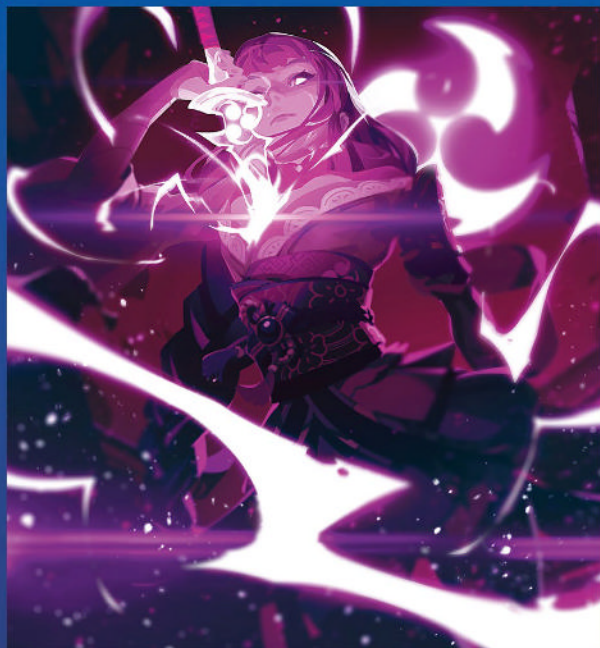
"This image for Winter Guard #3 was a great opportunity to play with new Marvel characters and follow a different approach, including pulp vibes."



WE ARE (NOT) ALONE

"My cover for a French book about Evangelion. One of my favourite anime shows ever."

Interview



➔ creating a cover for a movie, for example, where the client comes in with a pretty accurate idea of what they need. This sometimes even includes the marketing team in the equation, which makes the process longer and harder.

You share tutorials online on YouTube. Why is it important to you to make this knowledge available to people so freely?

All the content I share is on Patreon, but I understand that the best way to share knowledge is without a paywall, so I also post updates on Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube, with new tutorials uploaded whenever I can. Making these and creating videos is very time-consuming though, and that's why I need the support of my

SHOGUN RAIDEN

A rare instance of Toni using a monochromatic colour palette. "I'm still happy with the angle and composition."

ADDED DETAILS

"For this We Only Find Them When They Are Dead image, I recall challenging myself by painting more details than usual, especially on the hair and face."



patrons to keep doing these. Everything that I have learned is thanks to other people who shared their own knowledge before me, so this is my way of giving back and hopefully sharing something useful with people myself.

Do you ever feel burnout? And if so, how do you deal with it? Of course! Especially when working on longer projects, which is why I try to avoid taking them on. Also, keeping a good work-life balance is key. Last year I started to rest on weekends, which absolutely helps to recover energy and keep your mind clear.

Anxiety and depression are sadly common nowadays, no matter what you work on or your age. It's like a poison, it paralyses you. So I try to keep it away from me as much as possible by having a balanced way of

life. Nothing is worth it if it is ruining your health, after all.

Of all the work you have created, what are you most proud of and why? My Champions covers for Marvel are still my favourite cover run so far. There are lots of different colour schemes, ideas and concepts going on there, and it was an absolute pleasure playing around with these beloved characters. Also, my Zelda Skyward Sword illustration for the Spanish magazine CTM is probably one of my favourites, together with the Batman Ninja Steelbook.

What's next for you? Do you have any exciting projects coming up, or other areas that you'd like to explore? I'm now there's some cool stuff coming up related to a famous JRPG and several new covers for different IPs I love. As for other areas, I'd love to explore doing something for other audiovisual productions. I'd also like to keep expanding my tutorials into maybe bigger courses and share more educational content in the future!



CHAMPIONS COVER

"I painted this Champions image in March 2020. It was cathartic painting them travelling and happy, while in the real world the pandemic had just started and everyone had to stay at home."

❖❖ My Champions covers for Marvel are still my favourite cover run so far ❖❖

YUKI-ONNA

How Toni created an attention-grabbing character in this personal project

For this piece, my inspiration came from an old Japanese tale. In particular from the spirit Yuki-Onna, or snow woman. Beyond that, this is a free interpretation of the character. I just took the concept and made my interpretation, adding the tigers, the crystal sword, a long scarf, horns, tattoos, and a visually appealing design with huge colour contrast, while also playing with complementary colours.

I only used a few brushes in Photoshop, mostly a basic elliptical. My goal was to show a strong, wild character with perspective, diagonals and a dynamic composition. Using a contrasting colour scheme and warm oranges to make the character stand out helped to create points of interest. I added FX and particle effects to push the movement and energy, making all those elements combine to focus the attention on the character.



NEW CHARACTER

One of Toni's few character designs. "While I love creating characters, it's time consuming and not always worth it."



DORORO TRIBUTE

"My fan art for Dororo. I had a great time painting all those monsters and using different levels of depth to make it work."

What advice would you give to other artists thinking of becoming an illustrator or comic artist? There is not a straight road to becoming an illustrator, and there's nothing wrong with making mistakes. Do not compare yourself with other artists. Everyone follows a different path, and you should only be faithful to yourself. Meet other aspiring artists like you, share your artistic journey with others and don't stop learning. Get inspiration from everywhere you can and learn about art history, because having a deep artistic knowledge is key. Also remember to stay focused and be disciplined.



HYRULE CHAMPIONS

"While there are many dark colours in this Hyrule Champions piece, the composition and contrast make it work. I'm still happy about this one and the light effects."



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Advice from the world's best artists



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Add environmental effects to bring mystery to your scenes.

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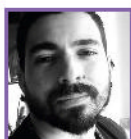
CREATE A STRIKING FAN ART TRIBUTE

Toni Infante guides us through his process for making action-packed images from your favourite franchises

Artist PROFILE

Toni Infante
LOCATION: Spain

Toni is a professional artist making key art and covers for Apple, Marvel and many more. He shares his passion and tips for fan art on social media and Patreon.
www.toniinfante.com



Sometimes you're fortunate enough to be invited to work with some of your favourite franchises.

For this piece, video game magazine GTM wanted a dark fantasy manga cover featuring Berserk, Bastard!! and Claymore. It's true that working with such beloved characters can be frightening, but it's a great way to pay tribute to what came before, being

respectful and faithful as well as giving it your own spin.

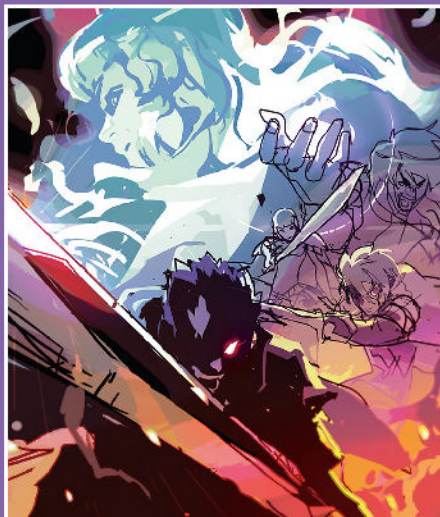
They gave me total freedom in terms of composition, so as a fan of Berserk, it was easy to think up an idea and I made the first sketches faster than usual. Knowing the story also helps in terms of storytelling, mood and knowing which pose to use for each character. The last thing you want in this case is to portray a character the wrong way. That's why

spending time diving into references and inspiration is crucial working with someone else's characters.

The hardest part was to include all the side characters without breaking the composition. Everything is about balance and hierarchy, and playing with sizes, contrast and values is key to keep the focal points on Guts and Griffith, while also guiding the eye to the side elements to make for an appealing image.

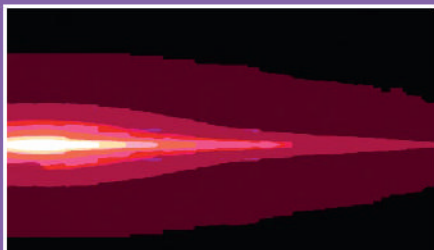
How I create...

VISUAL EFFECTS FOR EXTRA DYNAMISM



1 Adding more movement

I'm obsessed with adding light and other types of effects. Right here we have magic, fire, particles and lens flares as well. Those are perfect to add a sense of realism and dynamism. Each of those elements are done differently, but I like to start searching for inspiration and then use it by painting over the top.



2 Blending

Once I find a lighting effect as a reference, I use it with the Lighten blending mode in Photoshop. I then adjust it to find the best result, such as a Posterise filter, and paint over the top to enhance or amend the shapes. It's common to create these from scratch, especially if I want a more stylised look, like the fire effects here!



3 Balance

Beyond those effects, you don't want to create chaos, so I'm careful not to overwhelm the image and keep each effect within a correct value range. The goal is to add more atmosphere and movement without too much visual weight that pulls us from the main focus. The fire shapes here guide the eye to the main character.



DESIGNING FAN ART



Initial sketch

Everything starts with some rough lines before adding more definition with extra sketches and moving on to Photoshop. At this stage, I am already applying some colours with Grayscale and Gradient Maps filters, which provide a more accurate idea about the final product. It helps a lot for me and the client to know how the final artwork will look.



RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: ELLIPTICAL

Simple brush, used at 50 per cent opacity and mostly for sketching.

SHAPE BRUSH

Halfway between a circle and a square. Used for rendering, painting volumes, light... I use it for everything.

SPLATTER

For particle effects, like fire, embers or water.

TEXTURED BRUSH

For backgrounds and general shapes. I find this one especially useful for creating textures.

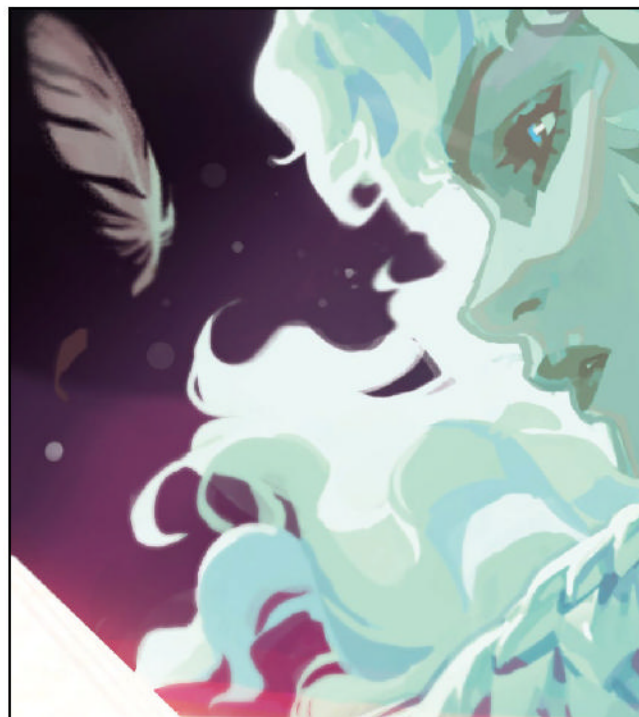
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Detailed drawing

After the rough is approved, I spend a lot of time detailing the characters and fixing the poses. Despite not having any line art on the final piece, there's always a detailed sketch.



Motion

In most of my work everything is moving; hair, particles, fire. Illustration is a static medium, unless it's animated, so it's really important for me to convey that dynamism and involve the reader to make the world come alive.

In depth Striking fan art

Contrast

The values and colours of this character are different to create a strong visual contrast and add depth to the composition. Unlike the others, I painted him using greys and then applied a Gradient Map to get the blue tones. After that, I modified some of the colours and added a few purples to the shadow areas.

The eclipse

Inspired by Berserk, this element came in handy to place the magazine's masthead, and also added a bit of symmetry and balance to the image.

Strong expression

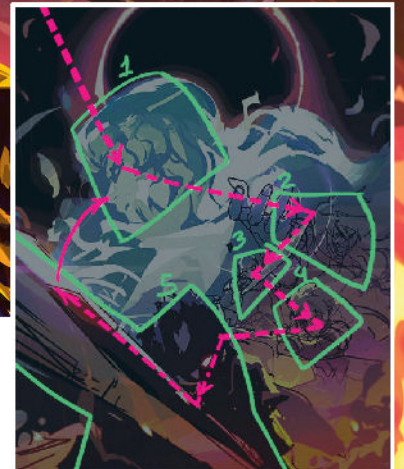
Simplifying is key to not overwhelm the image with details. While Guts has a strong, energetic expression, it's done mostly with silhouettes. The eye and teeth create the necessary detail to read the expression and add energy to his body language.

Fire effects

The flames were entirely painted from scratch to get that anime feel and create composition lines that pull us into the image. Later on, I added blur with filters and ember particles to express even more movement.

Side characters

I painted the other characters playing with size dependent on the client's priority. The poses created an invisible path that helps the reader and makes for a harmonious illustration.



Technique focus

FIREFLIES IN THE FOG

Discover how **Fan Liu** used environmental effects to add an extra layer of mystery to their storytelling artwork in Photoshop



"In this foggy, chaotic piece, an aircraft is flown to a forgotten border country.

Guided by fireflies, it finds what vaguely resembles the figure of a huge monster. On its approach, it finds that the monster is a mobile fortress that combines biology with machinery. Perhaps this is where the fireflies live.

The design was inspired by Howl's Moving Castle, Shadow of the Colossus, and other video games. I created it entirely in Photoshop and initially concentrated on the outer space setting and giant machinery. I then added an exploring spaceship to give it some human purpose. By combining the yellow firelight with the fog, I was able to build up a mysterious atmosphere." 🌟



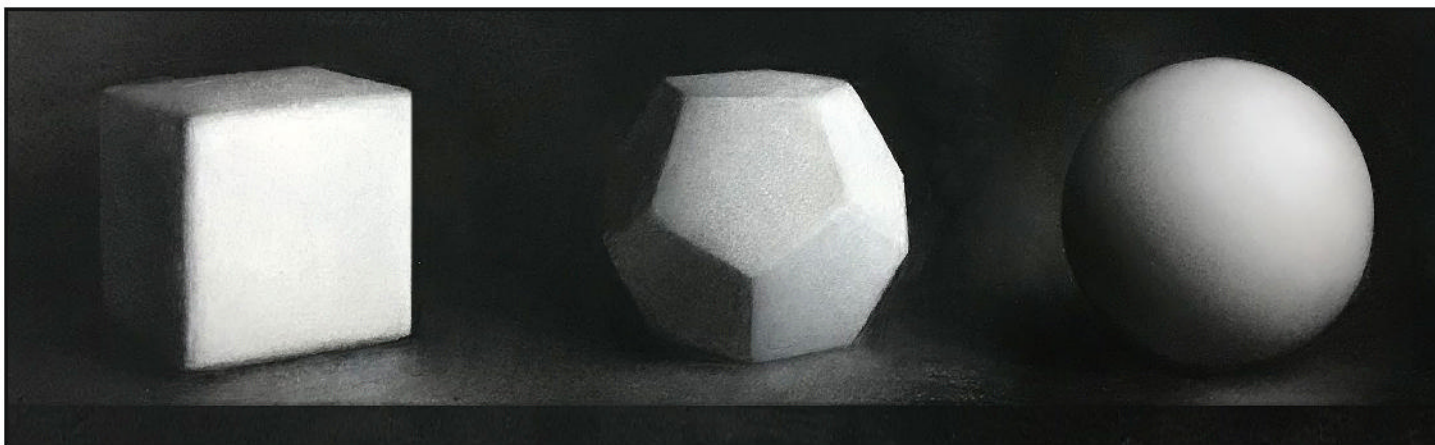


Artist **PROFILE**

Fan Liu

LOCATION: China

Fan Liu is a concept artist for 3 LY Studio in China. They enjoy depicting fantastical worlds that are both unconstrained and fun. <https://bit.ly/3FGRT76>



Artist insight

INTRODUCTION TO SHADING THEORY

Charlie Pickard teaches you how to apply the fundamental skills for simple shapes onto more complex references in your art

Artist PROFILE

Charlie Pickard

LOCATION: England

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 based in London. You can learn more about his artwork and exhibitions at <http://bit.ly/3UANWVs>.



One of the most fascinating topics in any artist's journey is shading. As artists we are always working

with light and, as such, it will always be a fundamentally important topic of study. In fact, light is the only way we can see anything at all. A truly powerful understanding of light will inspire our audience and lend our work more majesty.

However, when approaching this topic it is easy to feel intimidated and overwhelmed as it can seem complex and hard to tackle. Most often this difficulty occurs because students attempt overly complex subjects without properly understanding the most fundamental and simple of forms. Often, knowledge of these forms is taken for granted.

Thankfully for us, the majority of the most taxing problems when it

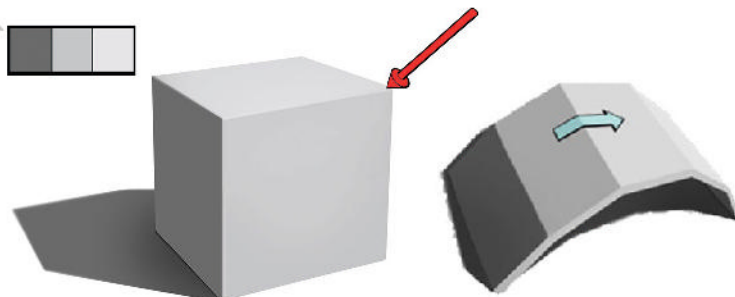
comes to shading can be solved with serious study of these simple shapes. Going through this study process is not to be underestimated.

As our understanding of these simple forms grows, our control over light will exponentially increase. The most simple of these forms are the cube and the sphere. Below, I have compiled a few applications, notes and tips that we can take into account from their study.

1 CUBE LESSON

Starting with the cube, we can talk about the most fundamental idea in all of shading, the value of a plane will vary depending on its position relative to the light source. It will be at its lightest when facing the light source, and as the planes turn away from the source they will gradually become darker until finally falling into shadow when they are missed by the light.

This means that each plane will have a specific value relative to the light. This can broadly be stated as a plane change resulting in a value change on the shape.



The cube has three of these planes visible at any given time, which leads us to another lesson. These three planes will have three values associated with them, and this is the simplest way that any form can be represented and appear three-

dimensional. This is called a 'three-value' read and every subject can be simplified down to it. So when tackling more complex subjects, always first approach them through their most simple three values before getting into more complexity.



2 SPHERE LESSON

If we move on to the sphere with these lessons in mind we can learn more interesting ideas about the rounding of forms. While the appearance of a sphere may be considerably different from a cube, it fundamentally runs on the same basic idea. As its planes turn to the light they are lit more and lose value as they turn away.

If we examine for a moment a single strip of this sphere (seen

above), we can begin to learn the fundamental difference that causes the appearance of roundness to the eye. As you can see, if I begin with the simplified three-value planar aspect of this strip and gradually increase the middle planes' values, the appearance of more and more roundness gradually emerges.

This leads us to an important truth: rounded forms are truly the result of more and more planes. A perfectly round form would have infinite

planes and be made up of infinite values, or a gradient of values.

While no forms in real life will quite match these two perfect forms, much of the complexity in shading lies between the dichotomy of how rounded or planar each object is. Exploring this will be of fundamental importance in all subjects. The fundamental lesson of the sphere is that how much it sways either way is truly a question of how many values lie between the light and the shade.

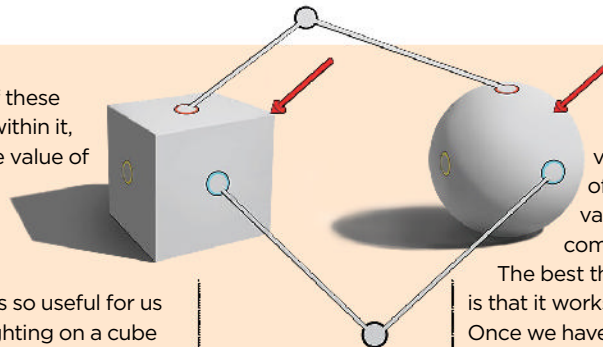
3 VALUE TRANSFER

One of the useful relationships to understand about how the cube and sphere relate lies in how we can use the sphere to plan the lighting of each plane of the cube.

The sphere as a form contains every angle of plane possible for our eyes to see, since it turns away in every direction simultaneously. Since each plane's value is a result of its orientation to the light and the

sphere has each of these planes contained within it, we can transfer the value of any plane to the corresponding value on the cube (seen right).

The reason this is so useful for us is that, while the lighting on a cube and other planar objects may vary a lot and get quite confusing at times, the lighting on a sphere is relatively



predictable and simple. There is so little variation in the lighting of spheres that each variation can easily be committed to memory.

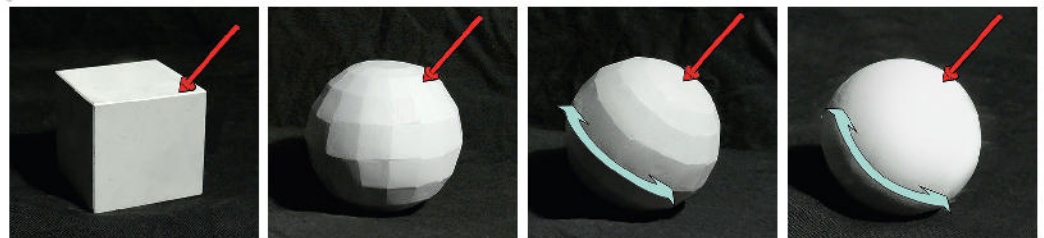
The best thing about this method is that it works for almost any form. Once we have the lighting of the sphere clear in our minds, we can use this value transfer technique to light the planes on any form.

4 PLANES GIVE SHAPE, SPHERES GIVE THE LIGHT DIRECTION

Another incredibly useful element to understand from these simple forms is how they contribute to the way tonal shapes are created on forms. This is most clearly seen if we use a planar version of our sphere.

As you can see on its left side, the shapes of the various values follow the shapes of its planes. This may seem like stating the obvious, but it is a profound effect of light. No matter how I rotate the light source around the cube, these shapes will never change fundamentally. They will merely change in value, getting lighter or darker, but their presented shapes will not change.

We can see that this is also the case for our more complex planar sphere when it is orientated away from the light. However, something interesting happens when we



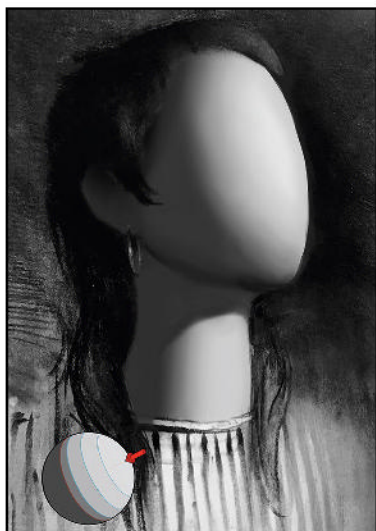
orientate this planar sphere directly to the light source. As you can see on its left, many of the planes take on exactly the same value and a series of concentric rings appear. The shapes are now organised to the light. This can only happen in one orientation for the planar sphere.

For the sphere proper, we see this same orientation of concentric rings

of value organised to the light. Contrasting to the planar objects, the rings will form perpendicular to the light and their shape is entirely decided by the light's position. The reason for this is that the sphere can be thought of as being orientated in all directions at once, given its shape.

This orientation that was special for the planar object is in fact commonplace for the sphere. What this leads us to is a useful idea about light shapes. The light shapes of the object are revealed in the planes, and the direction of the light by the rounded forms. ➡

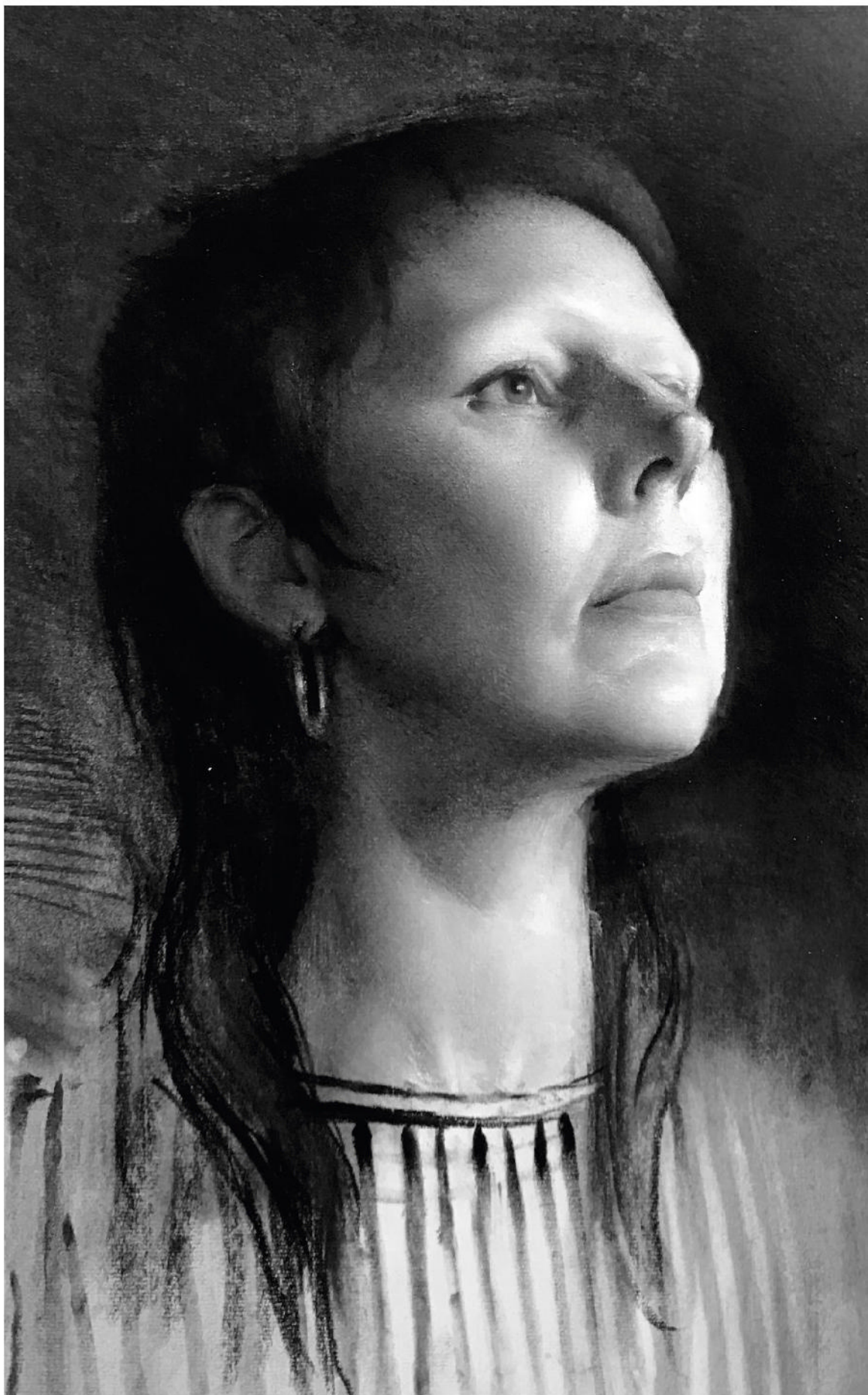
“As our understanding of these simple forms grows, our control over light increases”



5 APPLY KNOWLEDGE TO STUDY REFERENCE

Of course, no object in the real world is so strictly and perfectly rounded or planar. Everything we will see in reality lies somewhere in between these two extremes. However, if we want to build a strong understanding of the reasons why lighting occurs the way it does, these become extremely useful lenses to look at objects through.

Next time you draw a reference, try to extrapolate out these two extremes, a faceted planar construction and a rounded version. Pictured here, you can see a version of this I made to understand this portraiture study. While this is incredibly useful for the human form, I also want you to realise this kind of study is bigger than that. It teaches the way light fundamentally works. Do it from any and all references you can think of and watch your own understanding grow!





6 USE THE SAME EXERCISE TO CHANGE THE REFERENCE

While this will make you much better at understanding and replicating reference, the true power of this exercise lies in its application to manipulating and inventing lighting on references and imaginary drawings. We want to move beyond merely being copying machines and be able to manipulate and invent lighting to our own creative ends.

The best way to take our first steps is to manipulate references using this method. Use a sphere to change the lighting direction, then use value transfer to create this lighting on your reference studies. See how many different moods you can evoke by moving the lighting.

Next, try using this method to apply lighting to your own invented paintings. Proper application can be the key to grounded, consistent light that will improve any painting. 🍷





Artist PROFILE

Sora Kim

LOCATION: South Korea

Sora Kim has worked in the video games industry as a concept artist and illustrator since 2014. She has worked on titles including League of Legends and ArcheAge. <https://bit.ly/3TrcQqH>

Technique focus
**POPULAR
DEMAND**
Sora Kim on putting the colours
in her artwork to a public vote

"Sometimes I want to see which colours would look the best for the illustration I am creating. For this artwork I made four options, with colours that are completely different from each other. When you make layers for each colour on your Photoshop file, it's quick and easy. I used the Hue/Saturation and Replace Color functions in Photoshop. The point is to separate layers as materials and colours. I made a poll on my social media and then finished the painting with the most popular vote: a woman in black armour with a blue dragon. It was fun to make various options and receive responses immediately."



Photoshop

SIMPLIFY YOUR COLOUR RENDERS

Nurzhan Bekkaliyev explains how organising your workflow like a 3D artist can smooth the process for multi-stage images

Artist PROFILE

Nurzhan Bekkaliyev

LOCATION: Kazakhstan

Nurzhan is a freelance character concept artist with eight years of professional experience working across the video game and animated film industries. <https://bit.ly/3UIXaWh>

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!



When I draw, I pay special attention to the visualisation process. I like to experiment with it and when I set out to draw, I have a readily developed workflow that I'd like to share with you.

Visualisation is a complex process that consists of many things, such as light, shadow, reflection, and so on. In 2D, in order to get a well-rendered drawing, we need to think and consider everything at the same time, which can be challenging to work around.

However, we can learn from the way 3D artists render in stages. By focusing on tasks separately, we can achieve good results more easily and avoid unnecessary steps that slow us down. I believe this method also leaves great space for practice, helping to improve your skills.



1 Initial sketches

Before I start drawing, I think about what I would like to see in the final result. As I wanted to show my colour rendering process, I started with random quick sketches to explore ideas that would make a good example. When drawing sketches I consider shapes, differences and balance of forms, and making the silhouettes readable. ➡

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

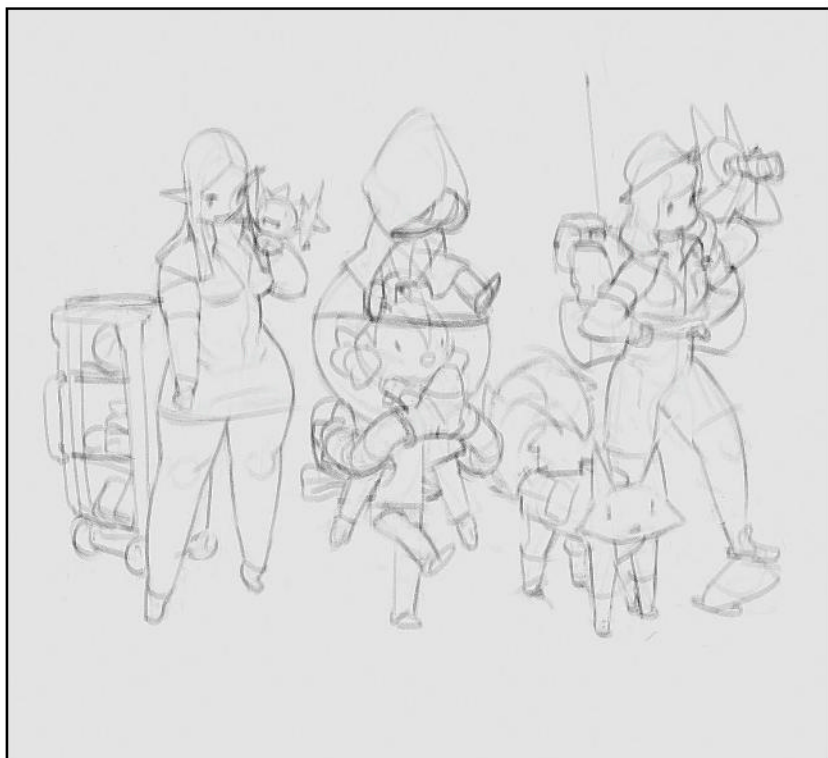
CUSTOM BRUSHES: LINE

Vertically elongated brush that I utilise for both line drawings and making sketches.

LINE V2

The normal version of the line brush is my most used. I bring it out for almost everything.





2 Define detail

After I collate my ideas, I begin to define the sketches and add new details where needed. For the lines, I used a vertical-shaped brush that creates a dynamic feel. I draw with black at low pressure, which allows me to control the depth.



3 Polish the lines

To begin rendering, we need to complete our line art. I chose one of the sketches and started to polish the lines. We must make sure that all the elements are clear and distinct, but not necessarily too detailed as we will paint over the top come the final stage.



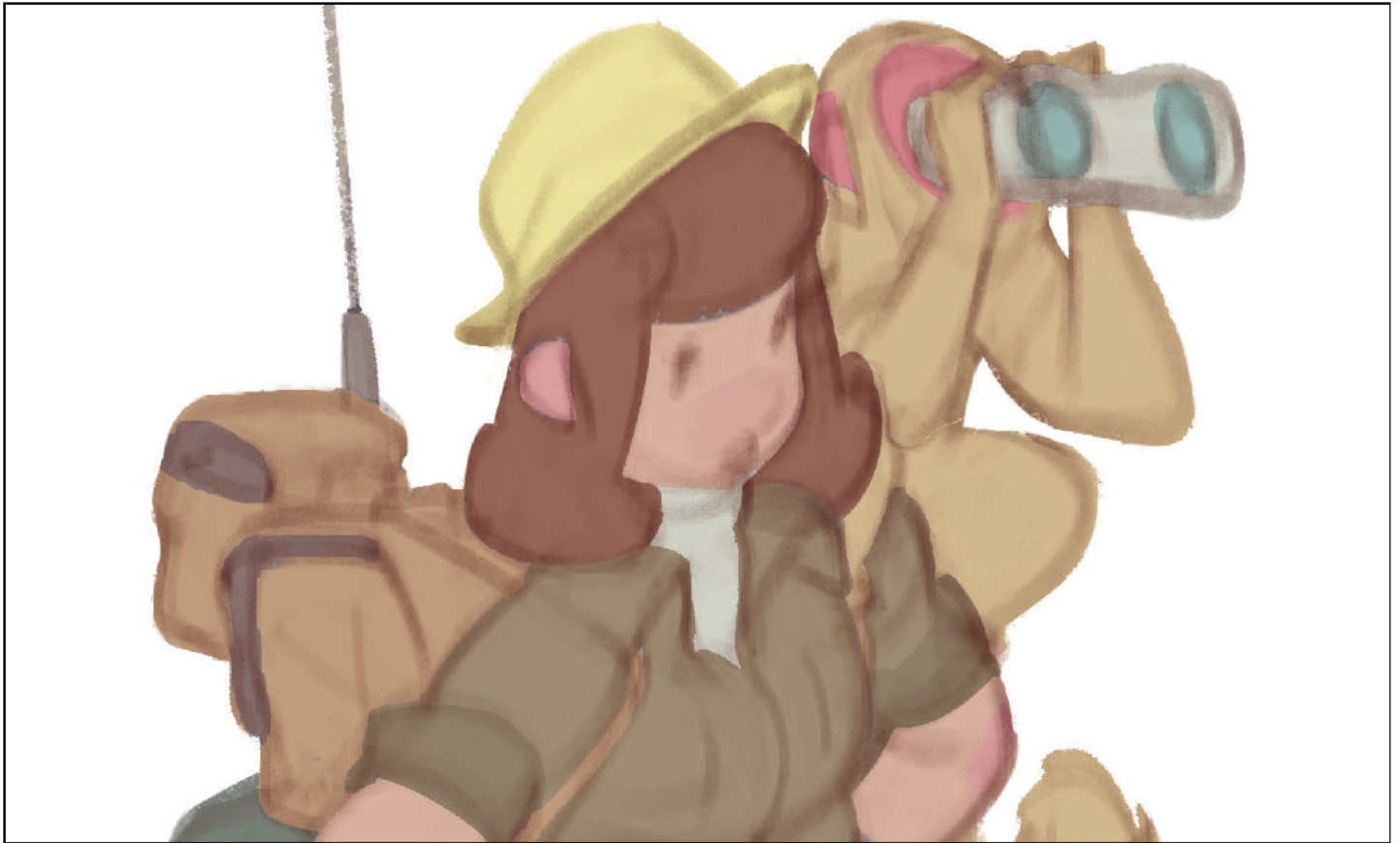
4 Make a silhouette

The rendering process starts with a base block. I made a filled silhouette layer and placed the line art on top, then created a clipping mask by pressing Alt and clicking between the thumbnails. New layers were also placed inside this layer to help the silhouette keep its shape and prevent it from blending with the background.



5 Add more blocks

For experimenting with colour variations, tones, and to prepare the colour base faster, we can make a few more block layers inside the base block. Make sure to lock transparent pixels in layer settings. We can use these layers in the future if we need to select a specific piece by pressing Control and clicking the thumbnail.



6 Bring in colour

I started painting with the lines, giving them red hints with a Hue/Saturation adjustment. I also experimented with colour combinations taking differences in tones into consideration. Colour references are helpful here. I prefer to paint in dim tones to leave space for changes. ➡



7 Create shadows

After the colour base is complete, I added volume by drawing shadows at the edge of all the surfaces for the appearance of a shadow from a spotlight. I painted the shadows with black and adjusted the transparency of the layer. To show you how I drew the shadows, I turned off the layer with colours.



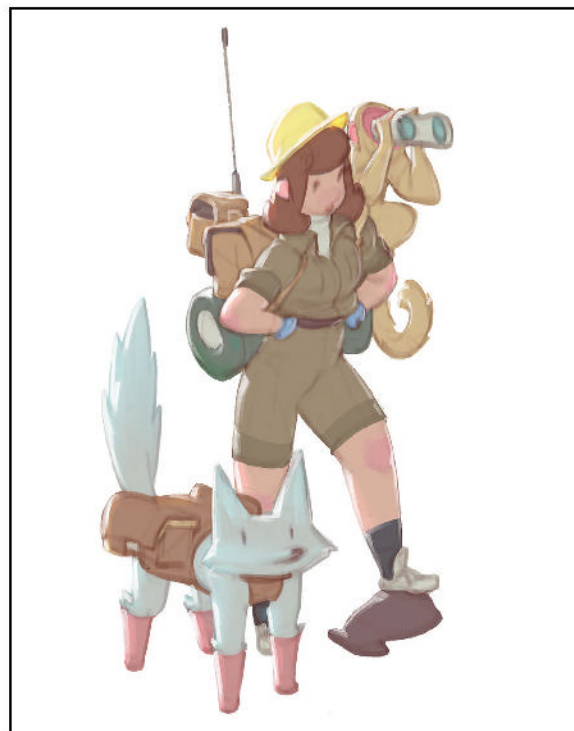
9 Rim lighting

Adding the rim lighting is one of the easiest and most efficient ways to give the drawing a 3D appearance. I drew with white and adjusted the opacity of the layer. I usually make two separate layers, the first in Overlay mode and the second in Normal underneath the first, which helps control the level of light.



8 Draw reflections

Just as I did with the shadows, I drew light reflections by imagining a spotlight over the characters. I drew highlights on the most convex parts of the surfaces with a sharp-edged brush. For this, I chose a blue colour and the Screen blend mode.



10 Subsurface scattering

With the rim light ready, I moved on to subsurface scattering. I created a layer in Overlay blend mode and painted mostly along the rim lights, with the colour shift I wanted informing my colour choice. Using brushes without sharp edges helps make soft transitions.



11 Filter adjustments

We have prepared the base, but before moving to polishing I adjusted the image with filters. Here I made the colours a little darker and saturated via Brightness/Contrast and Levels. I placed the adjustment filters on top of the colour layer, but below the rest of the layers, to make it apply only to the colours. As you can see, all of the previous steps are combined.

12 Intricate touches

I started the detailing process on top of all the layers in Normal mode. As we already have everything completed below, we can now draw by colour picking with the help of the Eyedropper tool anywhere we want. Meanwhile, to add depth I created a layer in Overlay blend mode and used a soft brush to darken shadows, similar to ambient occlusion.



13 Balance tones

To balance the overall tones of the drawing I used a large soft brush in an Overlay blend layer, and to make the silhouette more defined I adjusted the outlines where necessary. The drawing is almost done and does not require major changes, but I prefer to leave the last steps to the next day to make any adjustments.



14 Merge and liquify

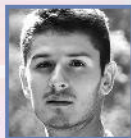
To complete the drawing, I made the finishing touches by creating extra layers with various different blending modes where needed. For the last step, I merged all of the layers and slightly corrected the forms with the Liquify filter.



Technique focus

AN UNREAL PERSPECTIVE

Pierre Broissand reveals the advantages of using 3D software in his colourful art



"For this scene I used Unreal Engine to build the desert, and then Megascans to create realistic cliffs, rocks and fields. With Unreal Engine, I was able to achieve a proper perspective, which allowed me to focus on the painting. I value the harmony of the

soft environment lighting and the hard asset lighting. It's a powerful combination that makes for an interesting composition and draws the eye to a focal point. This step, involving drawing greyscale or simple colour images, can be realistic, clearer and faster with 3D images in Unreal Engine."

Artist PROFILE

**Pierre
Broissand**

LOCATION: France

Pierre enjoys the exciting opportunities offered by creating imaginary worlds as a concept artist. He has recently jumped from working on comic projects to the animation and video game industries.
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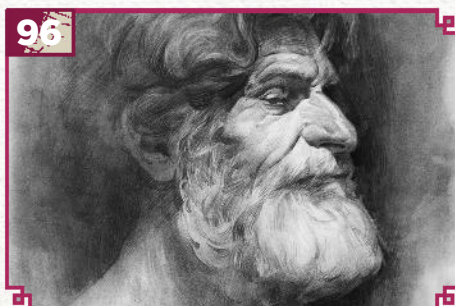
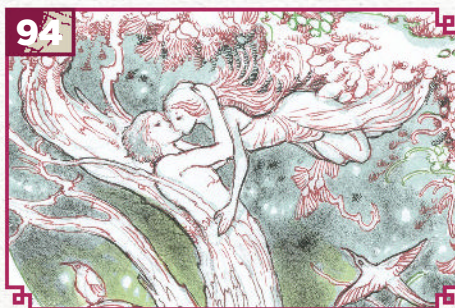


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ImagineFX

Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists



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Discover this month's selection of the finest traditional art, which has been sent in by you!

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A guide to the pens and inks in Stephanie Law's toolkit.

96 First Impressions: Stan Prokopenko

We catch up with the artist and instructor on his career to date and what the future holds.

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



J. Henry

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Oil paint **WEB:** www.jhenry.work

J. Henry is an exhibiting fine artist, and a scenic artist primarily in the New York City theatre industry. Her work in both fields has been shown internationally.



1 LULLABY II

"A depiction of an architectural ornament coming to life, inspired by rocaille grotesque motifs."



2 CANTAFABULE

"Playing with elements of trompe l'oeil, inspired by the Cantafabule rock opera by the band Transsylvania Phoenix after spending some time with Valeriu Sepi."



3 FREYA

"This depicts an imaginary myth in the recurring theme of architectural ornaments coming to life. I had been listening to the song Freya by The Sword a lot."

4 SINE METU

"A memento mori of Death and the Maiden, based on the work of the underappreciated multimedia artist and printmaker Sebald Beham. Both done during times of optimistic productivity despite epidemic plague."



5

5 JORDI DE LLIMONES

"Based on a beloved yet unassuming statue of Saint George seen in Valencia, nestled in the foliage of a lime tree."



Manelle Oliphant

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Watercolour **WEB:** www.talesfantastic.com

Manelle loves storytelling with her art. As an illustrator and author many of her illustrations are inspired by stories she has read or written. When not creating client work, she enjoys crafting illustrations inspired by fairy tales.

1 ORGAN ENCHANTMENT

"This is a painting about someone who understands that her art and creativity are important, even if she is the only person that enjoys it."

2 FAE EVER

"Autumn is a battle between winter and autumn, where autumn doesn't want to give up her grip on the world but it's no longer her time. Even if we don't love the idea of the cold, frozen world, we understand the necessity of the seasons."



3 RUMPELSTILTSKIN

"This is a visual retelling of the fairy tale from Rumpelstiltskin's point of view. The goal of this painting was to show off his sinister character."

4 FOREST QUEEN

"This was inspired by an original short story exploring ideas of man versus nature and how we need to use the resources we have while taking care of our planet."





Pencil

Acrylic

PAINT EPIC D&D SPELLJAMMER VINYL ALBUM ART

MILIVOJ ČERAN details the making of his interior art for the Dungeons & Dragons Spelljams vinyl album using acrylic and airbrush



An exciting assignment came my way for Dungeons & Dragons a few months ago. I was asked to create a three-fold interior artwork for Spelljams, the vinyl soundtrack album to accompany the game's Spelljammer: Adventures in Space campaign. I was tasked with designing a panoramic scene from the interior view of the spaceship that appears on the album's cover. I needed to paint the bridge interior to feel like you were viewing the scene on the cover from a different vantage point.

The ship, a Nautiloid craft used by the illithid, needed to feature the bridge and control panel, with a large panoramic window out to the

environment that was to be filled with wild and wacky creatures and other spaceships. The central image needed to be the focus of the painting, with a Nautiloid ship emerging from a Wildspace portal into Avernus.

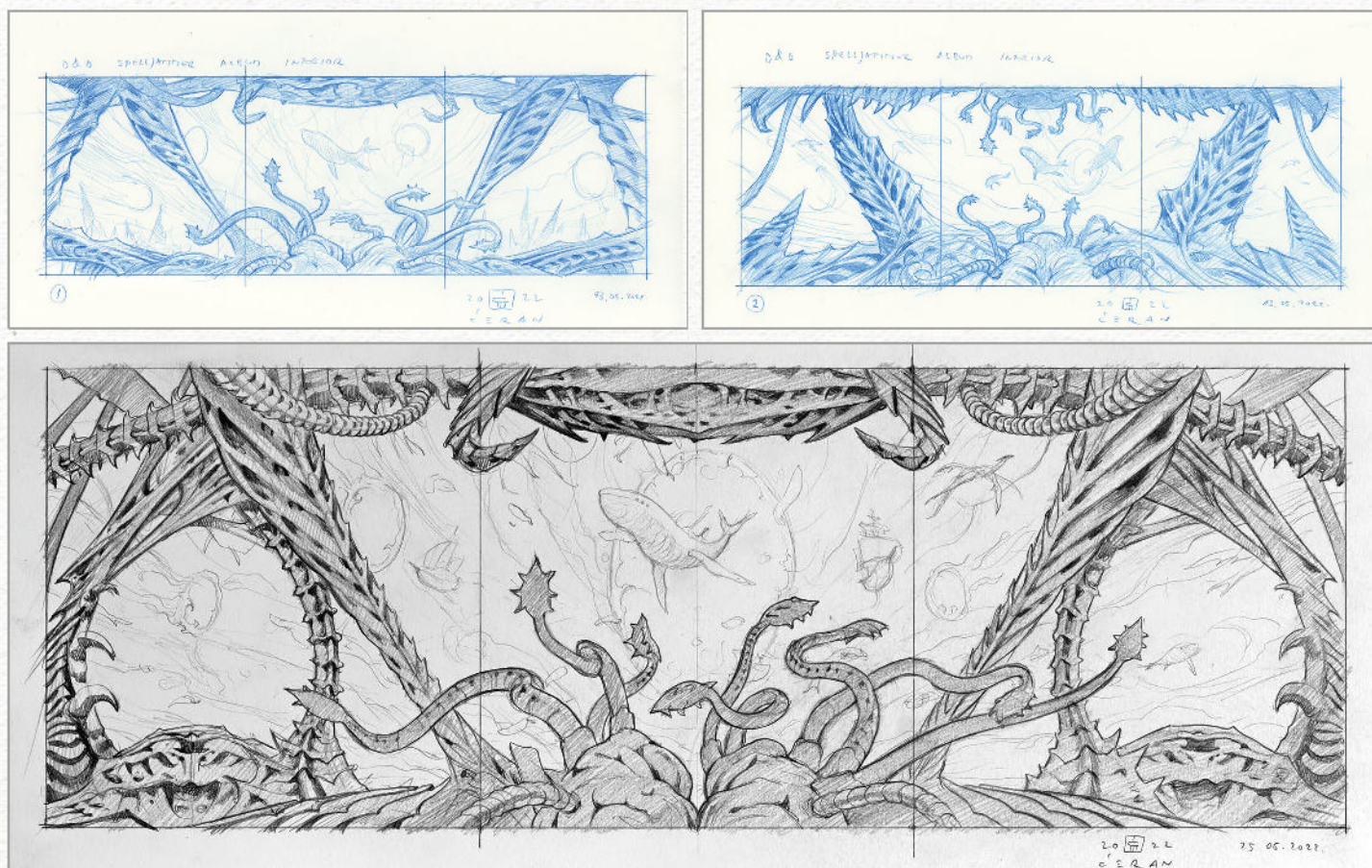
The other panels also needed to be filled with additional portals revealing Wildspace from a different viewpoint than the cover, but at the same moment in time. The left and right panels had to feature the ship's control panels, but not be too busy as the album's track listings would be printed over that area. The craft's bridge had to be biomechanical and the Wildspace needed to fill its view.

This was a challenging assignment because the painting needed to work

both as a unique standalone image, but also as three separated folds for the vinyl album with designated places for the text. I rarely have an opportunity to create wide panoramic artworks, or anything biomechanical, so this raised the artistic bar and forced me to think outside the box. As vinyl albums are large in size, I decided that the original painting should also be bigger than my typical commissions. The medium I went with was acrylic and airbrush on paper.



Milivoj is known for his work in the gaming industry and has authored the Norse Mythology Art Book. He has been a professional illustrator since 2002. www.mceran-art.com



1 Initial sketches

To begin, I made two quick compositional thumbnails in blue pencil, based on the rough idea from my art director Nick Bartoletti. At this stage it's important to put all the elements in and create the first visualisation. My art director chose one rough and suggested I rework parts of the ship's interior in line with the layout, which was needed for the track listings and other text. With that in mind, I set about a detailed sketch.



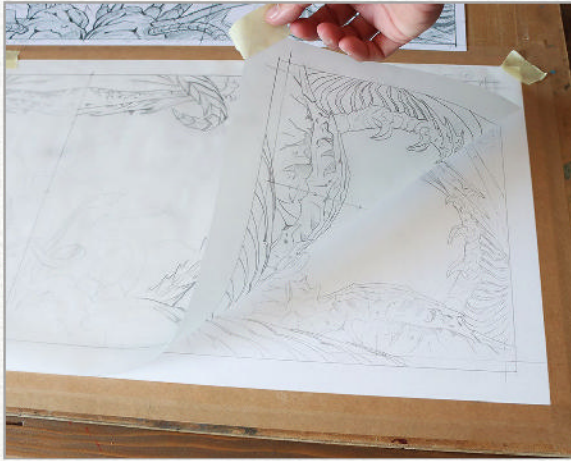
2 Transfer to watercolour paper

I printed the enlarged sketch to the final artwork size, covered the back of the paper with graphite and traced it onto the watercolour paper.



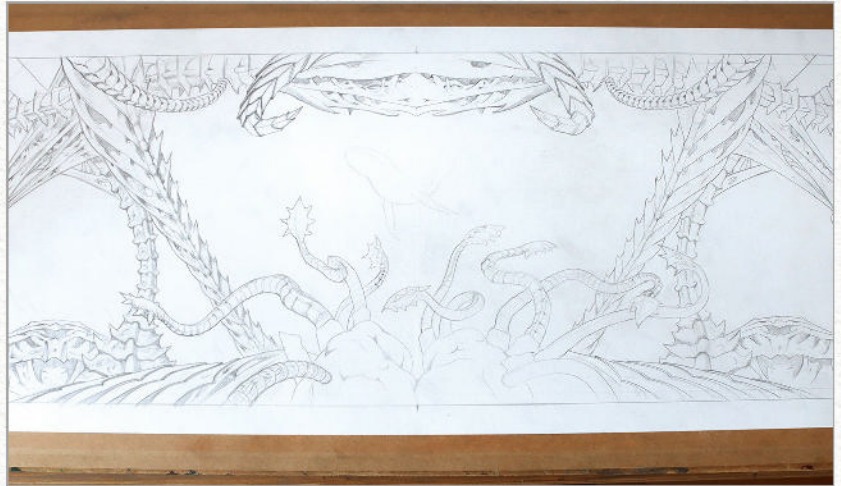
3 Detailed drawing

After the sketch is transferred, I worked on the detailed drawing on the left side of the artwork. The composition is symmetrical, so after I drew all the elements in detail, I copied them to the tracing paper.



4 Trace for symmetry

With the drawing of the left-hand side completed, I traced it to the right side of the paper. It was important to carefully match all the lines, using guidelines, to ensure perfect symmetry.



5 Complete the drawing

Once I had placed the linear drawing with the tracing paper, I redrew it in stronger lines with pencil. This part is much easier in digital art, taking seconds to copy, paste and flip, compared to drawing for at least an hour on paper.



6 Darker lines

With the pencil drawing finished, I added shades and darker lines with the diluted acrylic colour. This enables me to have a strong, visible drawing before applying basic colour and texture when pencil usually gets lost. ➡

MATERIALS

PAPER

■ Fabriano 5, hot pressed, satin, 300gsm

BRUSHES

■ Synthetic sable brushes, synthetic flat brushes

ACRYLICS

■ Winsor & Newton Galeria

■ Royal Talens Amsterdam

■ Vallejo Acrylic Gouache

ACRYLIC INKS

■ Liquitex

■ Royal Talens Amsterdam acrylic inks

AIRBRUSH

■ Boesner Sparmax AC-20 compressor

■ Rich AB-300 pistol, 0.3mm nozzle

PENCILS

■ HB, 6B graphite

OTHER

■ Tracing paper

■ Schmincke 50731 blue-tinted masking fluid



7 Colour and background

I splashed diluted acrylic colours, working on the green and grey on the biomechanical ship interior. I used toothbrush a lot for the texture, splashing water to the half-dry acrylic paint. At this stage I started to paint the background, a combination of bluish, purple and magenta colours using the wet-on-wet technique.



8 Mask the central frame

I used tape to cover the bigger parts of the central frame and liquid masking fluid for fine covering. This enabled me to paint with freedom over those areas, because everything masked will stay untouched.



9 Paint around masked area

I painted the Wildspace background around the masked Avernus portal in the blue, purple and magenta, and then worked on the tentacles in the foreground.



10 On to the portal

I removed the masking fluid and tape with my fingers and rubber. It is important to remove the masking fluid after no more than 2-3 days, otherwise the paper can absorb some of the substances from the fluid and turn yellow. I painted the Avernus inside the portal with warm colours, which is in contrast with the cold Wildspace around it.

11 Add details

To achieve more mood, depth and scale, I spent a lot of time painting stars through a combination of splattering paint with a toothbrush and painting with a small brush. I also paint in texture in the Wildspace, again using the wet-on-wet technique, and added creatures and spaceships.



12 Whale amendments

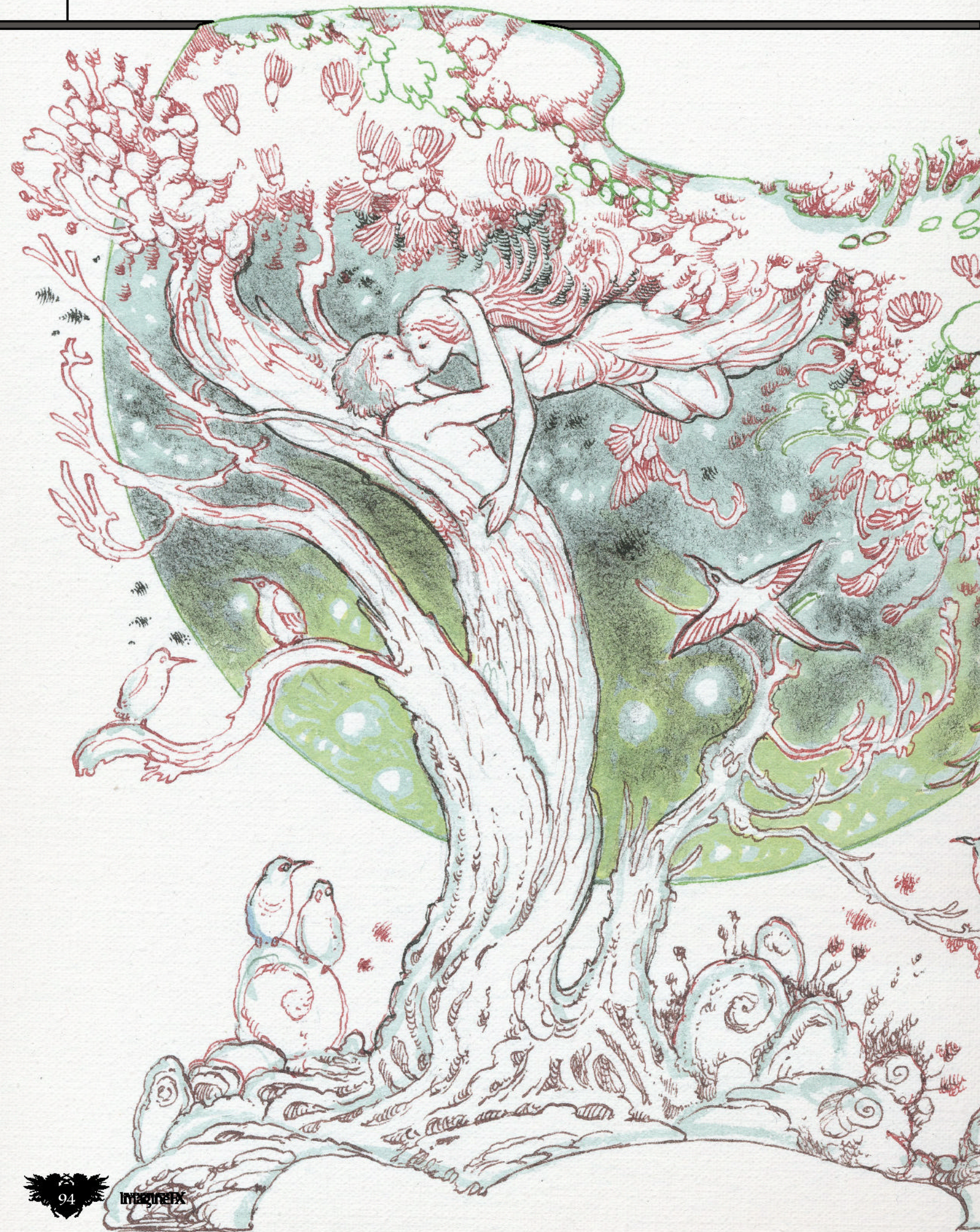
My art director requested I flip the position of the whale, as it needed to be going away from the Wildspace. This is time consuming in traditional medium and required three separate steps. **A** Drawing the whale in its new direction with white paint. **B** Blocking the colours

of the whale in its new direction. I also covered parts of the whale in the opaque white colour so the cold colours won't interfere with the warm upper layer too much. **C** The last part was painting the background of the Avernus in the warm colours over the white base. I also added volume, darker tones and details on the whale.



13 Final touches

The last part of any painting process is to paint all the details such as rim lights and tiny touches to make the artwork more epic. Usually I like this part the most because it seals the final image. 🌟





Technique focus

EQUIPMENT SELECTION

STEPHANIE LAW takes us through the toolkit used for the ink drawings from her Undying Tales series

The drawing is a combination of ink linework and coloured ink brush pen. I use fine point dip pens for the line elements, which I enjoy over using gel or marker pens because of the ability to create variation in my line width and more organic character. I use varying line width, as well as shading techniques like hatching and cross-hatching. I like to custom-mix my colours using the De Atramentis Document Ink

line, which is both lightfast and waterproof. I load them into cartridges for fountain brush pens so that I can add limited colour palette choices for background contrast and additional shading.



Stephanie Law's images trace the boundary between dream and reality. She delves into allegory, explores mythology in new contexts, and highlights the beauty found in nature. www.shadowscapes.com.

First Impressions

✧ Stan Prokopenko ✧

The artist and instructor on his life and future plans



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

I was born in Odesa, Ukraine, but my family moved a few times as I was growing up; from Ukraine, to Chicago, to San Diego. The culture in Ukraine is very respectful to the arts. Artists are admired.

When I showed interest at a young age my parents tried hard to support my development as an artist. They helped one of their friends move to the US and in return he gave me weekly private painting lessons. This gave me priceless experience with representational art and playing with paint at a young age. I also visited my relatives who live on a farm in Ukraine when I was in my 20s. It inspired me to do a series of paintings based on my experience and the people I met.

In high school I was lucky to live near the Watts Atelier, where I learned most of what I know about drawing and painting. The teachers there highly influenced my style and the path I chose in my career.



ROB - LIFE DRAWING

An 18 x 24 charcoal on newsprint figurative anatomy study from life. This piece took me six hours.

GALINA

A demo of my grandmother for my students showing mixed media of graphite and charcoal powder on Bristol paper.



What, outside of art, has had the most influence on your artwork through the years?

It would probably be all the different creative activities that I was diving into at a young age. For example, there was a period where I was focused on film-making. When I was heavily focused on that I was learning about storytelling, shot composition, working with a camera, and a little bit of acting. I also spent years learning how to code. This improved my ability to think logically and stay organized. I did karate for 10 years which taught me discipline, hard work, and

pushing through discomfort. Throughout all four years of high school I did animation. I learned about 3D, audio, and video editing software. After high school I experimented with various entrepreneurial ventures. This taught me a lot about marketing, running a business, leading a team and finances. It's hard for me to nail down any one particular thing because it's a combination of all of them that has influenced my art and my career.

Is there a painting that you saw in your formative years that changed everything? What was it?

I can't identify a single painting, but I'm highly inspired and influenced by my instructors Jeff Watts and Erik Gist. There are also many artists that I studied heavily, including Morgan Weistling, Nicolai Fechin, Ilya Repin, Steve Huston, Colleen Barry, Norman Rockwell and many others.

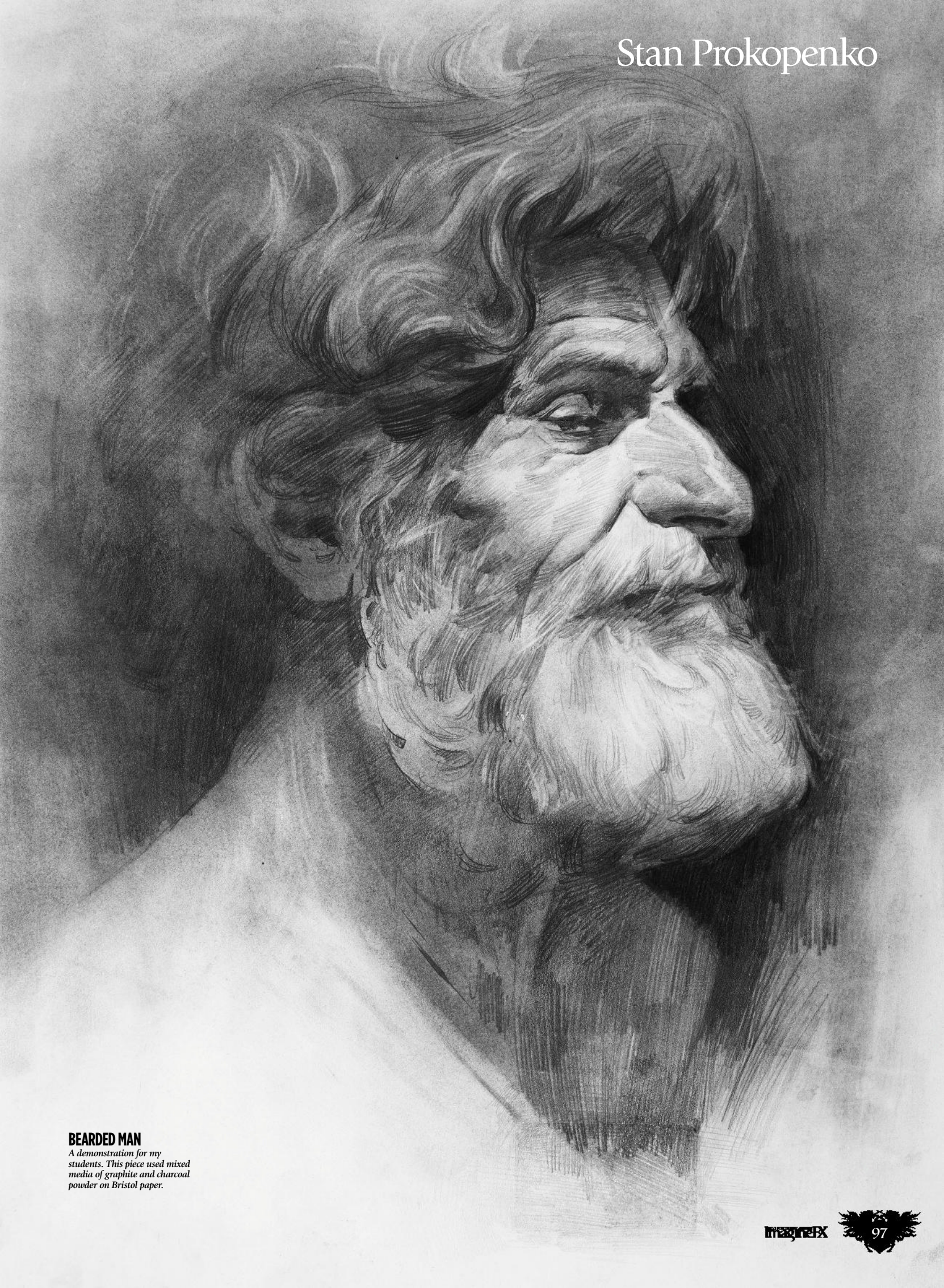
Tell us about your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?

My first paid commission was from a family friend, he commissioned me to draw a portrait of his son. It was my best work at the time, but that was when I was a teenager, before I received professional training. I have improved quite a bit since then.

What's the last piece you finished, and how do the two differ?

The last piece I finished was a painting for my Ukraine fundraiser. We invited a bunch of artists to the Proko studio and we livestreamed for two days as we each painted a Ukrainian girl from life. The nice part about this stage in my life is I can use my reach to make a bigger difference. Art is about culture and society. Back then I was focused completely on trying to make a visually appealing drawing. Today I have the privilege of using my ➡➡

“The nice part about this stage in my life is I can use my reach to make a difference”



BEARDED MAN

A demonstration for my students. This piece used mixed media of graphite and charcoal powder on Bristol paper.

➡ creative energy to try to make the world a better place.

Is making a living as an artist all you thought it would be?

This is a tough question to answer. In 2007, when I started making a living from selling paintings, the economy was going through a recession. This impacted the art markets a lot. It was hard to make a living as a new, young artist with no collectors. I got into some galleries and did all right, but not enough to live comfortably in California.

When I started selling my courses online, I knew I had found success, even though I didn't realise the scope of what Proko could become until years later. My attention for the past 10 years has been on teaching and creating videos, which is not what I expected going into it.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way?

I can't think of any major piece of advice I'd want to give my younger self. My parents did a really good job of encouraging me to pursue my passions and I was able to experiment and follow through with what I put my mind to.

A huge piece of advice that I am going to pass on to my children is to pursue what interests you, and don't be afraid if you're learning something that doesn't relate directly to another subject. Also, don't be afraid of failure. It doesn't feel good, but it's a mandatory part of growing and making things that have a big impact.

What's your next step in art or life?

Other than learning how to be a good father to my two young kids, my main priority is continuing to make **proko.com** the best place for artists to gather online to learn how to draw and paint.

Currently, I'm focused on making my drawing fundamentals course. We are going to start releasing episodes for it at the start of 2023. It has been long in the making and I'm extremely excited that I can now



NOBLE SAVAGE

This painting was the winner of the Members' Choice Award at the Oil Painters of America's 19th Annual National Juried Exhibition in 2010.

release a course that will be aimed exclusively at teaching beginners.

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

The growth of the internet and social media has brought a lot of opportunities for artists. There has never been a better time to be an artist than right now. We are seeing an influx of more and more artists entering the space and earning a living with their work.

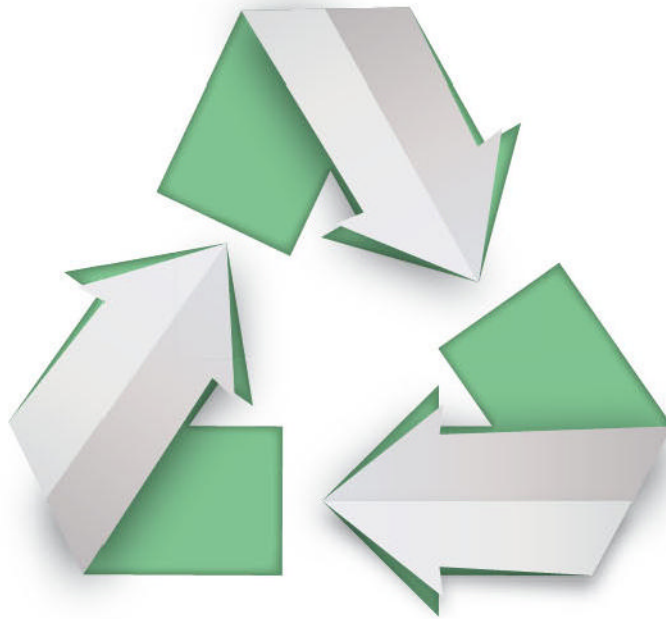
The number of options for artists just continues to balloon and not all of them rely on an artist having to work for a corporation or wealthy

commissioners. The fandom economy where you've got your fanbase supporting you has truly given artists like me and so many others the freedom to do what they want, and that's something that's still very recent in art history.

The internet has also greatly increased the educational opportunities for artists since I entered the space, and that's going to help many students who live in parts of the world that do not have good art schools.

*Stan is an artist and instructor. He is the founder of art education site **proko.com**, where he is currently teaching his drawing basics course at www.proko.com/drawing.*

“We are seeing an influx of more and more artists earning a living with their work”



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