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ISSUE 226



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



Hello and welcome to issue 226 of ImagineFX! This month we bring you the usual features, workshops and more that we always do, but I also wanted to highlight that we take a deeper look into AI. We've covered the use of AI as part of creative pipelines before, but felt it's

time we discussed the ethical nature of these tools and what it means for artists.

I've often said that tools should be considered as just that, something to take or leave, depending on your working practices. I believe that still, but that should never come at the expense of the rights of artists. As it stands, most AI tools use methods to generate images that infringe on the copyrights of artists, with no acknowledgement or pay.

It seems that current laws need updating to keep abreast of the technology, protecting the rights of creators. Forging what this will look like in practice is for better minds than mine, and there are many campaigns out there looking to bring about these changes. I'd strongly urge you to sign up to these and I'm sure the change will happen.

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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Paint symbolic sci-fi artwork

Learn to use symmetry and symbolism to paint an atmospheric scene from hit Netflix show Dark.

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FXPosé



Artists vs AI



Jean-Baptiste Monge interview



**A day in the life of...
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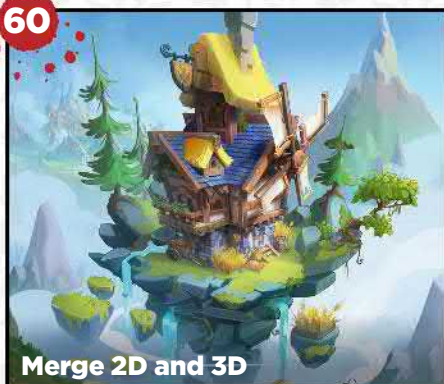


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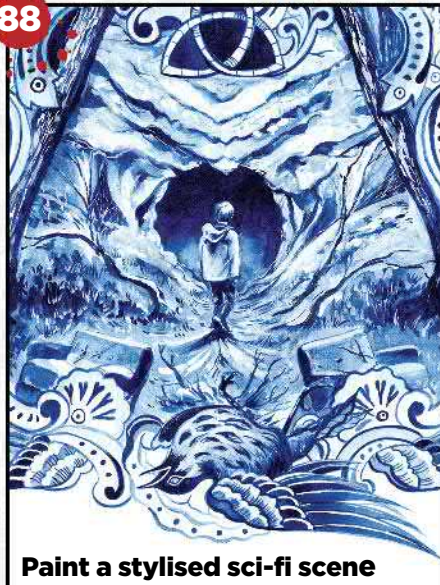
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GET YOUR RESOURCES

You're three steps away from this issue's resource files...

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Type this into your browser's address bar.
<https://lfxm.ag/fantasy>
- 2 Open the Dropbox link**
Find your files ready for download.
- 3 Download what you need...**
Save the files or watch the videos.

Next month



Next month in...
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MOBILE GAME CONCEPT ART

NetEase talks about the art of its
bestselling iOS and Android titles

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new masterclass
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artist Steve Ellis

Develop detail in your designs

Georgi Marnero
shares his process
for creating stylised
building concepts

Day in the life: a Marvel artist

Multi-disciplinary
pro Constantine
Sekeris shares his
daily workflow

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ImagineFX

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FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



1





Léo Chiola

LOCATION: Canada **MEDIA:** Pencil and ink, Clip Studio Paint, Procreate, Photoshop **WEB:** <https://leochiola.myportfolio.com>

Léo is an artist in animation, comics and video games. He recently became a storyboard artist at Gearbox Software, and previously worked as a character designer, concept artist and illustrator.

1 MOON KNIGHT

"The recent TV show Moon Knight inspired me to create a creepier design of this iconic character, almost like he was more of a creature than a human."

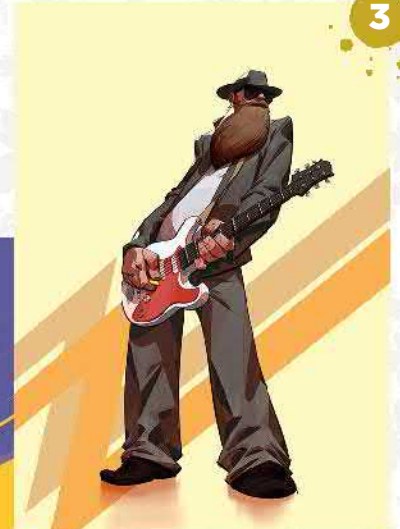
2 EL ZOMBO FANTASMA

"I was commissioned to do this illustration of the character El Zombo Fantasma. I wanted to show how brutal and fun the character is. Action was the way to go!"



El Zombo Fantasma © Dave Wilkins

3



4



3 A SHARP DRESSED MAN

"An homage to my favourite band, ZZ Top. The band is known for being mysterious and cool, so my goal was to exaggerate that feeling with a strong perspective and bold shapes!"

4 PUNK!

"I wanted to have fun combining animals with a 90s street vibe. I mixed concrete elements such as a varsity jacket with a more uncommon one, a mandrill."

Kiuyan Ran

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint WEB: www.kiuyanran.com

Kiuyan is an award-winning artist whose clients include HarperCollins, Entertainment Weekly, and NetEase Games. She currently serves as concept art outsource supervisor on Diablo IV at Blizzard Entertainment.



1 THE MERCHANT AND THE ALCHEMIST'S GATE

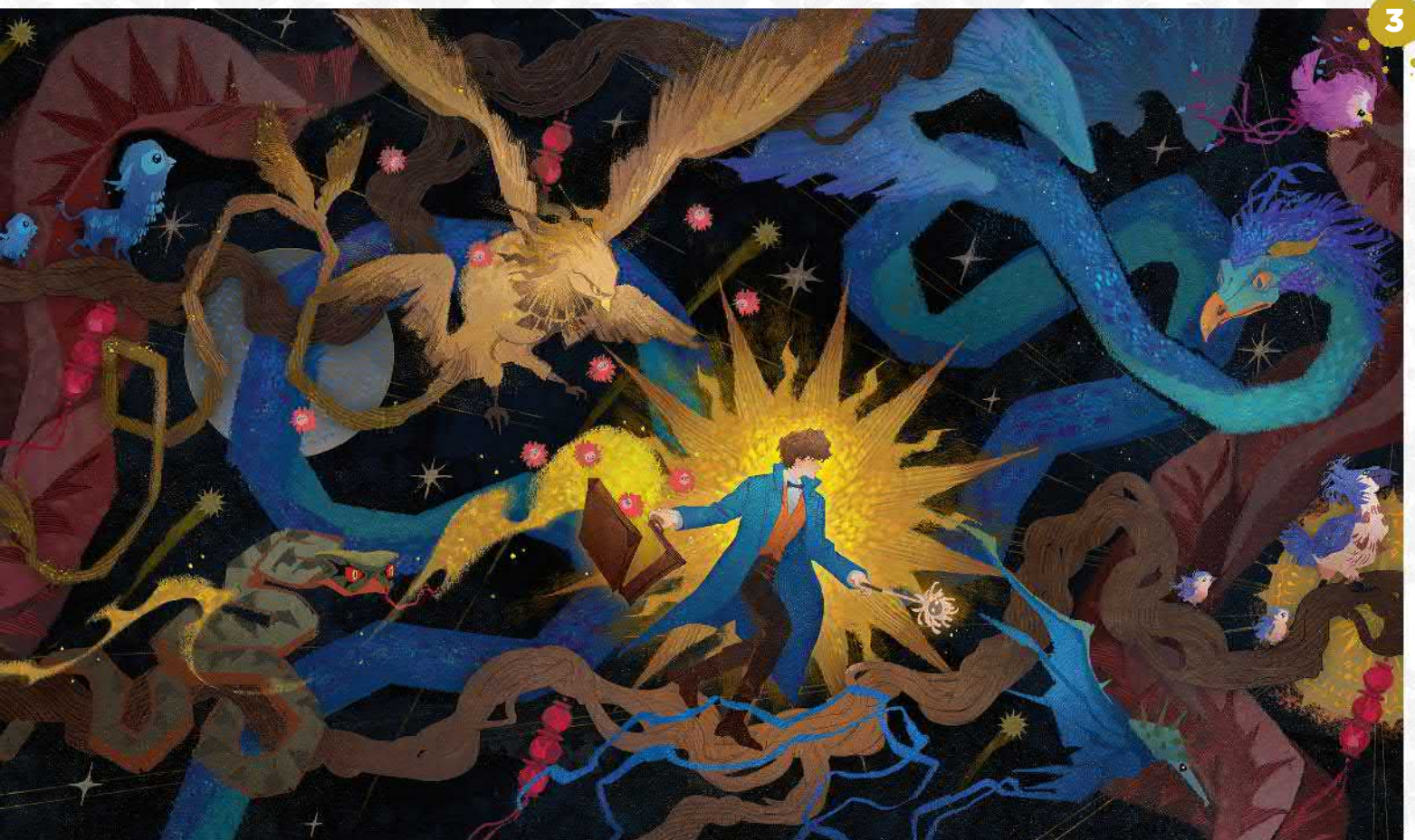
"No matter which point in time you travel from, or whether your destination is the past or the future, your actions won't alter your fate."

2 NIGHTMARE OF FIRETAKER

"In Firetaker's nightmare, there were a multitude of blurred figures and layers of flames which were darkened by the hatred in his heart."

3 FANTASTIC BEASTS AND THE LANTERN FESTIVAL

"Commissioned by NetEase Games to commemorate the Lantern Festival and the new character Newt Scamander. It shows Newt chasing the Zouwu at new year."





Kasia Slupecka

LOCATION: Poland **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.instagram.com/manequim_art

Kasia has been an artist in the games industry since 2011, and now works for Atomhawk. "I mainly do character concepts and sometimes illustration. My style is a mix of Western and Japanese influences."

1 FEMALE MONSTER HUNTER

"This character was one in the series of Monster Hunter characters I created for Small Giant Games."



2 ELF WOMAN

"In this piece I was trying to push the shapes, loosen up my rendering, and be more painterly."



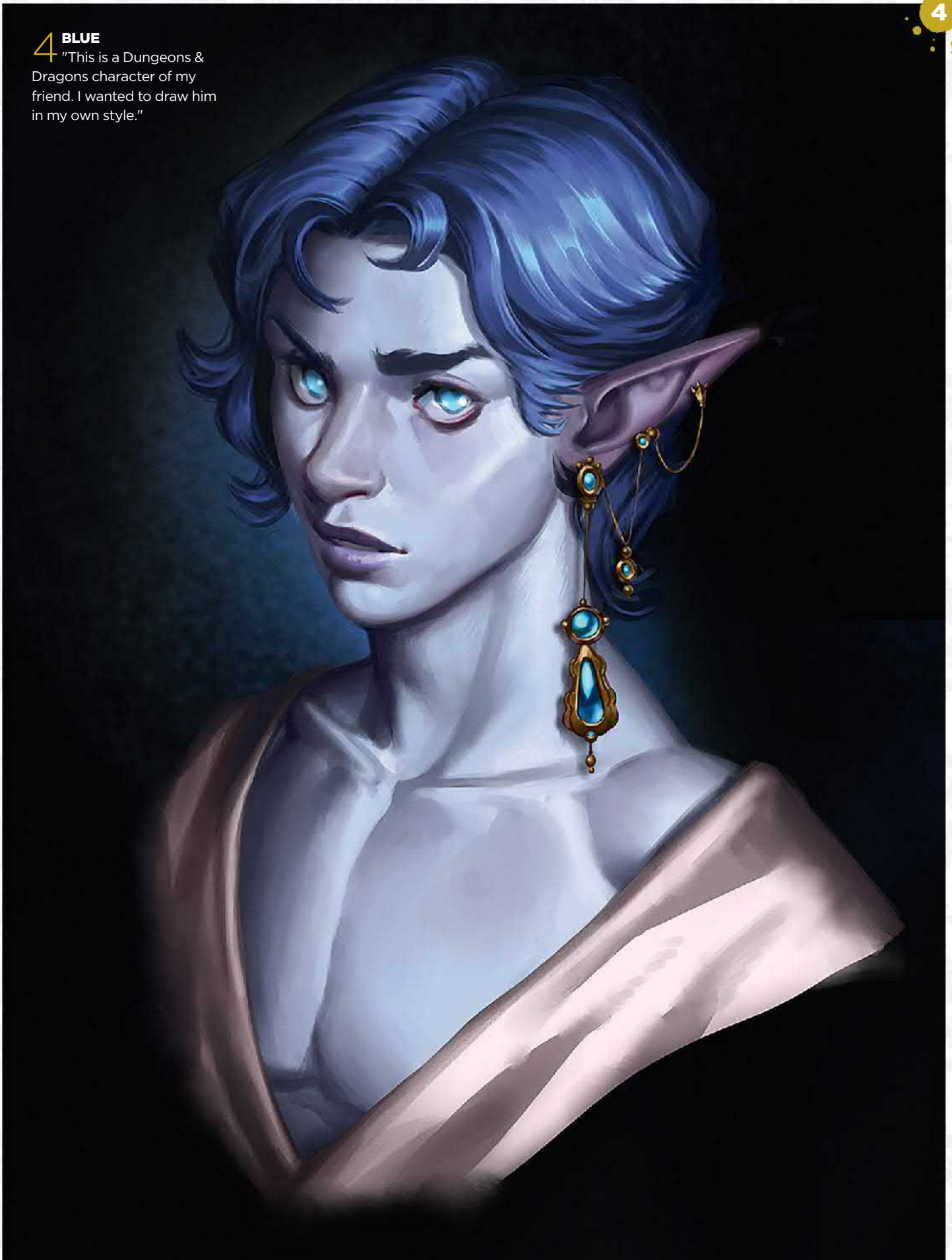
3 ITALIAN ISLAND

"As a huge Studio Ghibli fan, I wanted to create an environment in their style. I wanted it to look like it could fit in a Ghibli movie."



4 BLUE

"This is a Dungeons & Dragons character of my friend. I wanted to draw him in my own style."

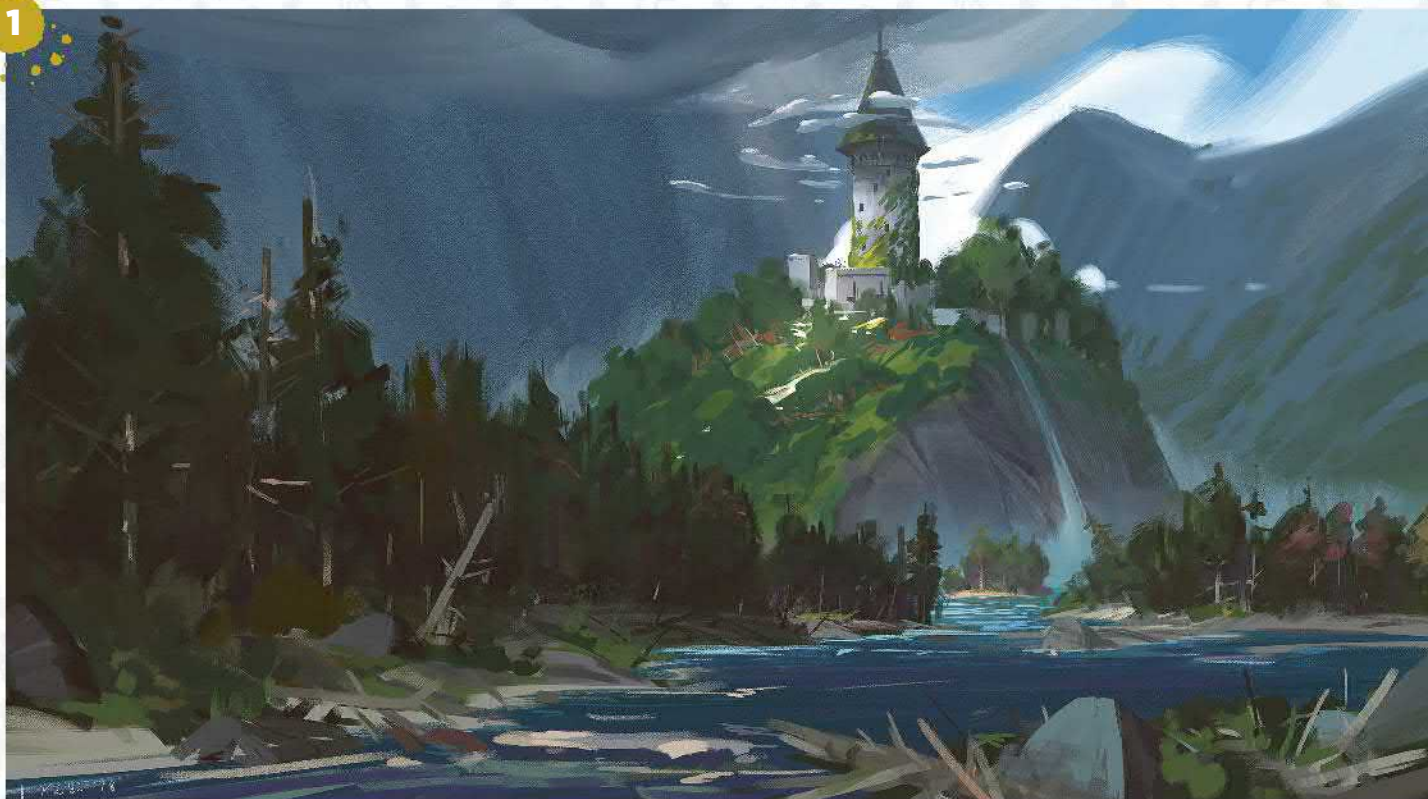




Kalen Chock

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender **WEB:** <http://k04sk.artstation.com>

Kalen is a senior visual development artist currently working at DreamWorks Animation. He constantly finds inspiration outdoors and tries to incorporate those life experiences into his paintings.



© Warner Bros.

1 MARKETPLACE

"I'm a big fan of RPGs, so painting environments where a player would go to get supplies is a must."

2 FARMLANDS

"Working on Kena: Bridge of Spirits was a dream. I would go to Hawaii a lot to visit family and I always found constant inspiration there."

3 ASCENSION LAUNCH

"Working on my favourite battle royale game, Apex Legends, was a dream come true for me. This was a colour script done for the Season 7 trailer."

4 EXPLORATION

"I'm a fan of ancient ruins and clouds, so these are usually things I like to paint in my spare time."



© The Mill/Respawn

2



© Ember Lab

3



4



1



2



Lava Hijzelaar

LOCATION: France **MEDIA:** Photoshop
WEB: www.instagram.com/lava_art

Lava is an animator from the Netherlands currently studying at Gobelins in Paris. She loves making characters come to life, and when she's not animating she makes digital illustrations.

1 SHARK ATTACK

"Inspired by my mum and my sister during our trip to Malaysia. We didn't expect to see a shark there! This one was drawn on an iPad."

2 SELF PORTRAIT

"This piece is a self portrait that is inspired by that magical feeling I have when I get inspiration."



Amélie Venuta

LOCATION: Italy **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop **WEB:** www.instagram.com/_aemyle_

Since graduating from Nemo Academy in 2020, Amélie has worked as a 2D animator and storyboard artist for feature films. In her personal work, she mostly draws girls on big trees with leafy hair and wooden horns.

1 THE MOUNTAIN

"I have always loved the idea of giants just sitting or sleeping everywhere around us, in the form of mountains, rivers or hills."

2 LILY PADS

"A very sketchy digital painting with three nymphs getting out of their pond to fix their water lily hair. I'm not really happy with this, but I learned a lot in the process."



3 SLEEPING LEOPARD

"There was a big bush of leaves on a tree in my garden, with little twigs coming out of it. I thought it looked like someone with really big hair was sleeping on the branches."

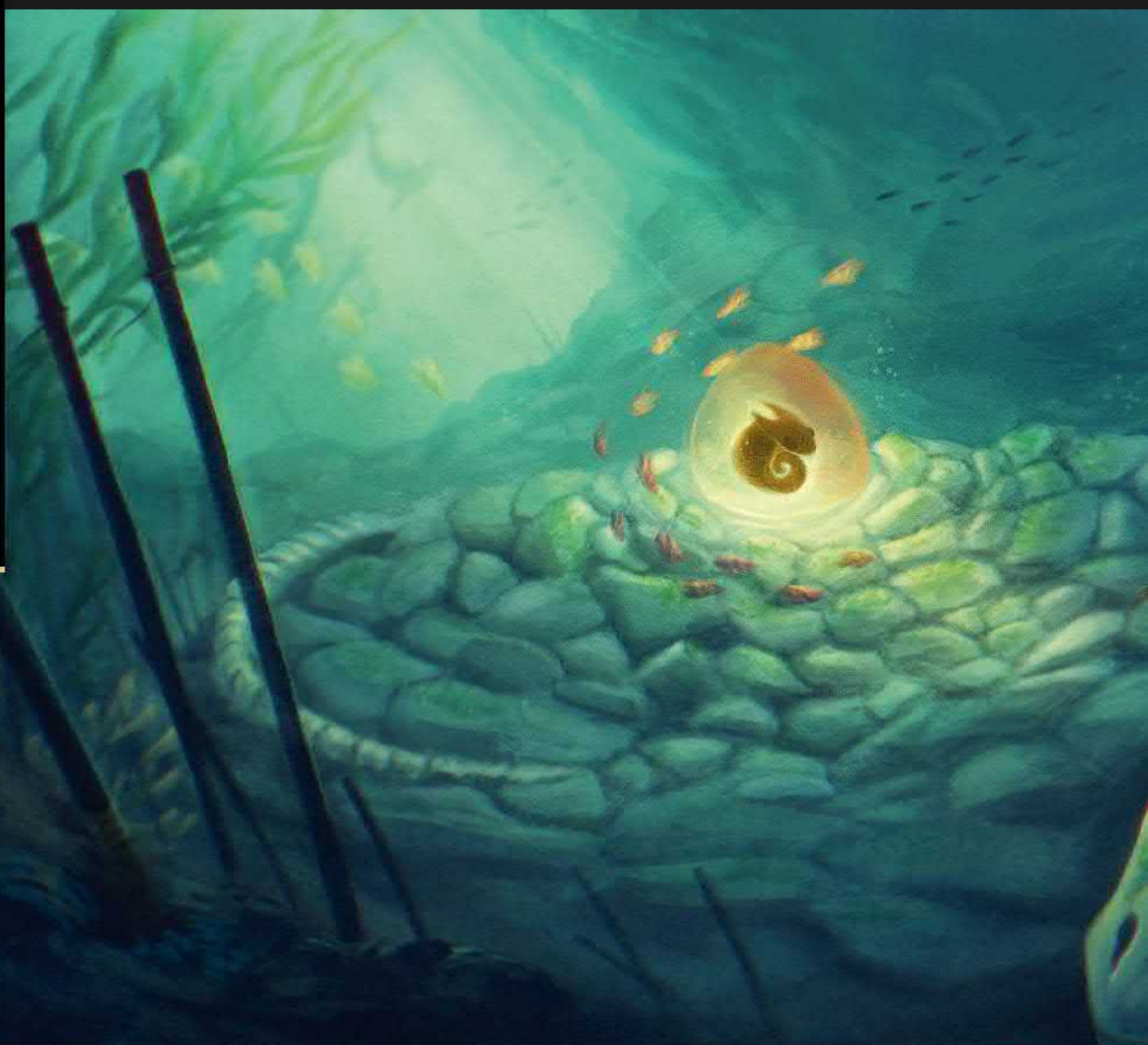
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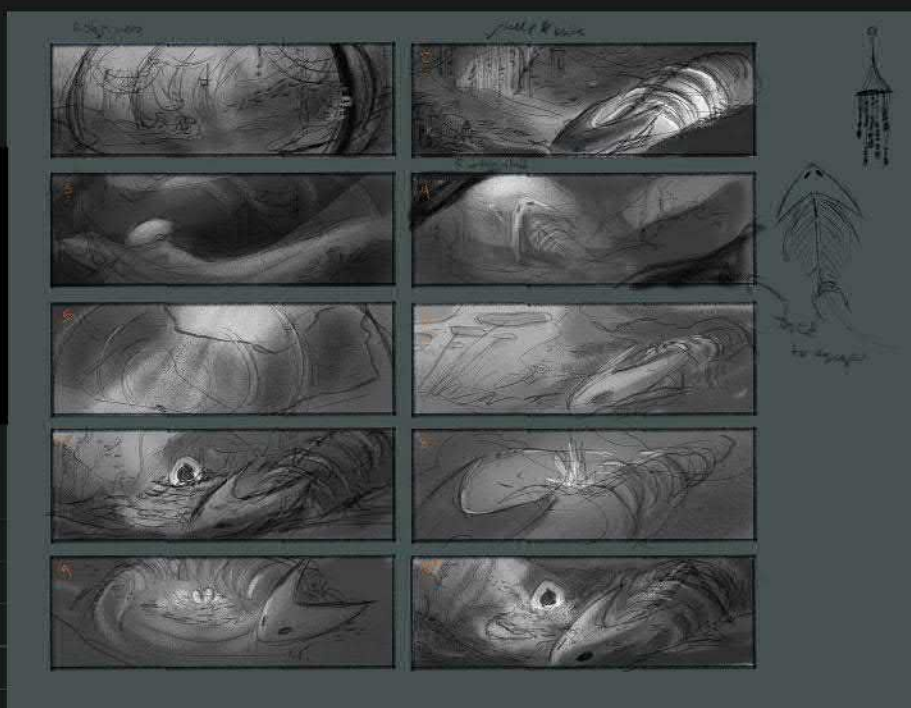


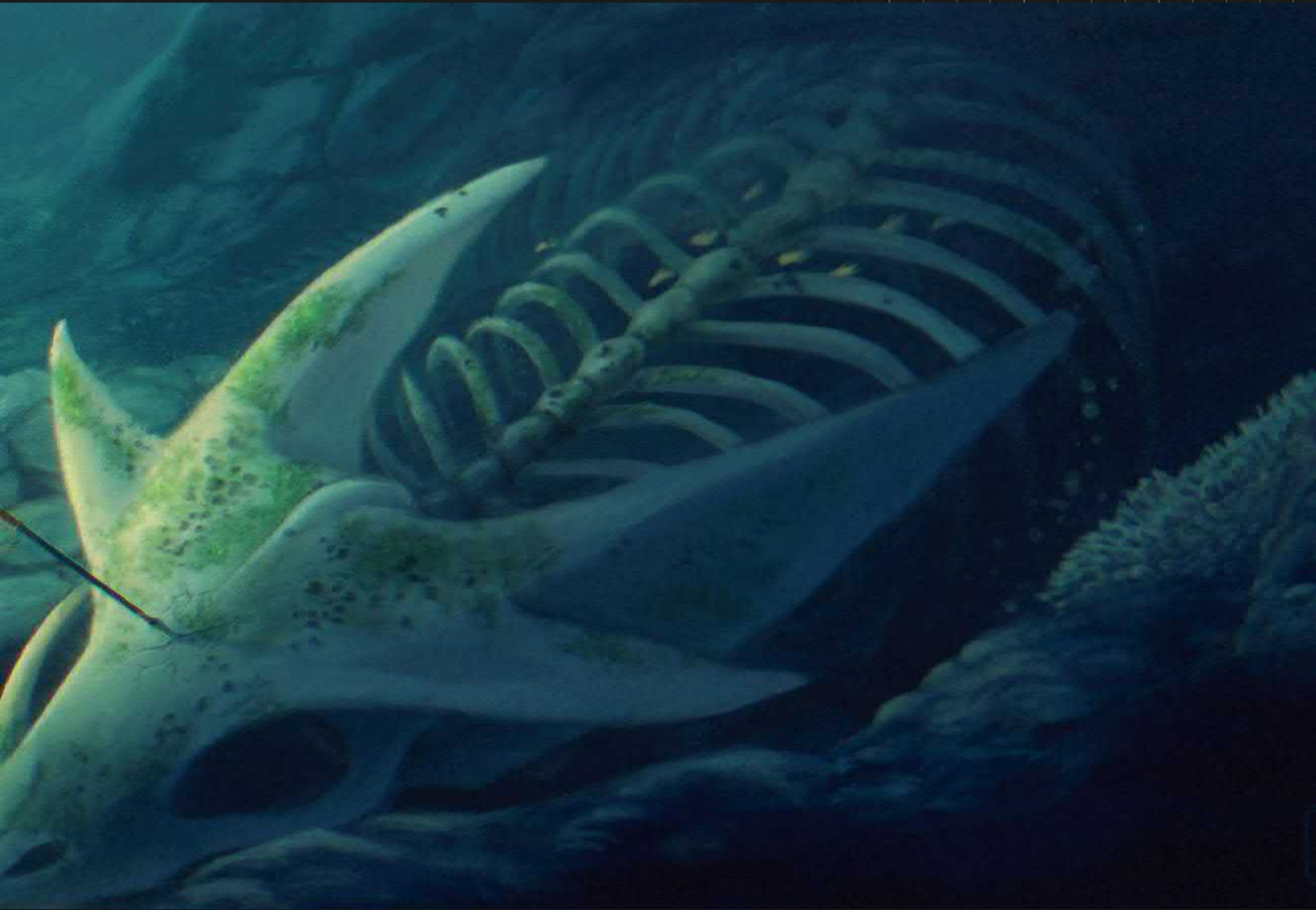
Carrion Comfort

YEAR CREATED: 2022 MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate

+++++

"This piece introduces the final boss arena in a D&D game I'm running for my friends. The focus was on storytelling, since this was their first impression of the space."





Artist **PROFILE**

Elias J. Hereña

LOCATION: US



Elias is an illustrator and concept artist from Chicago with a love of games and animation. He has a passion for storytelling, and uses vibrant colour, dramatic lighting and dynamic composition to build worlds.

www.therookies.co/u/mosscola

"AI isn't just affecting artists, it could go into industries and jobs we can't even imagine now," says Roena Rosenberger.



"AI databases should be built under strict rules; this is the only way this tech can be used safely," says Greg Rutkowski.



Artists fight back against AI

The soul of art **Tanya Combrinck** speaks to five artists about the impact of AI image generators, and what can be done to stop them



"Artists' rates have already stagnated and unregulated AI will give corporations an excuse to pay even less," says Deb JJ Lee.

When AI image generators burst into our lives last summer, what initially looked to many like a promising creative tool soon revealed itself to be problematic. Artists were shocked to find that their names were being used as prompts to churn out pastiche works that closely mimic their distinctive styles, sometimes even carrying garbled versions of their own signatures.

Even when AI-generated images don't closely resemble any one artist's work, many also find it galling that their images have been used as training data without their consent to create a product that may threaten their livelihoods.

"I'm a person who needs a plan; it helped me to contact a lawyer"

Illustrator **Deb JJ Lee** describes the moment they first encountered AI art in their style. "The experience of seeing someone toss my work into Stable Diffusion and make a model off it was nothing short of devastating," they say. "An artist's voice is a lifetime development that is an amalgam of their visual vocabulary, interpretations of influences, and even their beliefs. It's everything. To have work come out from a mindless machine learning model that looks just like mine, but without the struggle of developing that voice, is a slap in the face."



LEGAL ACTION

Deb isn't the only one to go through this experience, and some rights holders are fighting back. Three artists have launched a class-action lawsuit against Stable Diffusion (see stablediffusionlitigation.com) with a lawyer also litigating against GitHub CoPilot, an AI-powered programming tool trained on publicly available code from GitHub.

The suit alleges that "Stable Diffusion contains unauthorised copies of millions – and possibly billions – of copyrighted images," and seeks to use existing copyright law to sue Midjourney, Stability AI and DeviantArt. Getty Images has also



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

Concept artist Matteo Marjoram explains his daily routine and shares pro advice, including why an eagerness to be inquisitive is a vital part of his creative process.
Page 28



AN ART CAVE OF COLOUR

Find out how creating a happy environment packed with plants, trinkets and more helps Minyoung Yoon meet the challenges of working from home.
Page 30



YOUR VIEWS, YOUR ART

Readers write in with their art news and opinions on what we've covered in ImagineFX. Plus, we feature art that's caught our eye on social media.
Page 37



"What problem are AI images solving? Quality art already exists," says Deb JJ Lee.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT AI'S MISSING NARRATIVE

Joel Holtzman on what AI art generators will never achieve

How do you feel about AI image generators that are 'ethically trained' on paid-for datasets?

If companies use these datasets, it still creates the problem of a lack of work, because they'd only pay a few artists for the data and generate the rest themselves. It's better than what we have now, but not something that would benefit artists in the long run.

AI image generators can't solve problems like real artists, so do they really still pose a threat?

AI is like the Infinite Monkey Theorem. Type prompts for long enough and in theory you should get the perfect piece you had in mind. Considering the improvement of AI over time, it will take less and less time to create this 'perfect' image.

In practical use, AI may have a decent technical output, but it lacks narrative, an experience to share, a sense for design, and emotion. It lacks intention and the ability to ask questions. In the long run, I'm confident artists will have work one way or another exactly for these reasons.

What do you think of the Concept Art Association's plan to lobby the US government on AI?

An amazing initiative. AI won't go away, but the current Wild West situation is not sustainable. Anything to make creatives and AI exist side-by-side organically and ethically is welcome.



Joel Holtzman is a concept artist and illustrator. His clients include Marvel, Games Workshop and more.

www.joelchaimholtzman.com



➡ filed a suit against Stable Diffusion, and the Concept Art Association has raised over \$200,000 to pay for a government lobbyist in the US, with the intention of updating laws to ensure artists' interests are protected.

For individual artists, taking a first step legally can be a constructive action, even just to combat frustration and help with mental wellbeing.



Roena Rosenberger, an illustrator and concept artist based in Germany, used her legal costs insurance to hire a lawyer with a view to suing companies that have used her images to train AI models without her consent.

"It absolutely gave me peace of mind," she says. "I'm a person who needs to have a plan and it helped me a lot to contact a lawyer." Strategically it makes sense for her to wait until the German courts are more familiar with

the issue before moving forward, so she's currently biding her time.

Roena describes the technology as "a pretty, glossy toy" that's alarmingly good at mimicry of artists' styles, and notes that similar tools will likely start to affect other professions. When that happens, many more people will join the fight to protect the rights of creators. "Our boat won't stay as small as it is now," she says.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Many artists hope the makers of AI image generators will be forced to discard models trained on data sets that contain work they don't have permission to use, and build new ones using images for which they do have consent. Some companies are going down this road already, for example the photo and video editor Prequel powers some of its effects with its own in-house neural network built on

"AI can do some awesome stuff, but violating copyrights to make money without paying the artist isn't acceptable," says Roena Rosenberger.

images that artists have been commissioned and paid to create.

It's hoped that when artists' rights are respected, the conversation can move on to exploring how this technology can be used to assist the creative process, as opposed to replacing it. "I would like to see studios have a dialogue with their

“I think they have the potential to become a serious threat to working artists”

artists on how it's possible to implement AI in a way that lightens the workload on tasks that are repetitive, tedious, unwanted time



sinks, so that artists have more time for the actual important creative work," says **Christina Kraus**, a freelance artist who specialises in fantasy characters.

CAREER THREATENING

Alongside the ethical issue of artists' work being used without permission is the question of the extent to which AI art poses a threat to the livelihoods of artists. It's often pointed out that AI can't do the kind of problem-solving that's core to the role of a professional artist, so do they really need to worry?

"I think they have the potential to become a serious threat to working artists in the future if they don't get regulated," says Christina. "We already see AI images being used on book and magazine covers, to ➡





"I'd like AI image generator founders to finally listen to artists. So far they haven't," says Christina Kraus.



"While AI image generators have most technical skills down, these models lack the ability to make something truly unique," says Deb JJ Lee.



"Built ethically, AI could serve as some kind of secondary Pinterest that generates ideas in its own unique way," says Joel Holtzman.



"Companies simply don't want to pay artists a fair wage for their work and AI is a quick and cheap fix," says Christina Kraus.



Greg sees the use of artwork to train AI models without permission as a "violation on many levels", and believes that the building of datasets for AI should be strictly regulated. Like many artists, he notes that while AIs might be good at copying a style and producing work with superficial appeal, they can't design art the way a human does and adapt to feedback.

"There is a purpose in designing something from scratch," he says. "When you design clothing for a specific time period, you think about its purpose and the historical context. When you create concept art of machinery, for example, it has to make sense, be believable and look like it works. So far, AIs produce abstract, almost surreal ideas, that may lead you somewhere but have no consistent purpose."

The current situation is something we have seen many times before and will no doubt see again: a new technology emerges and the law has to catch up. Only when that happens will we have an idea of how AI art will fit into our lives.

➡ illustrate articles, and even Netflix experimenting with using AI for its anime *Dog and Boy*."

Christina anticipates that more companies will follow in the footsteps of Netflix, especially as the technology becomes more capable and overcomes some of its limitations. "It's always about saving money and churning out as much content as possible, often with no regard for the quality of the output or the wellbeing of the people creating it," she says.

"I don't think that AI can displace artists entirely, but it will change the climate, and many of the entry-level jobs that provide the first working experiences will be taken over by AI. Students and artists trying to break in will have an even harder time."

Christina supports efforts to make training sets ethical by obtaining consent and paying artists, but still holds reservations about the basic nature of the technology. Could we end up with a situation similar to music streaming, in which artists are paid a pittance per 'use' of their work?

"If AI becomes ethical, there's nothing to stop companies from using it. If we're lucky, we'll get a few bucks for our images being in the training data and that's it. That's why it's so



"There is no creative ability behind it, and no real understanding of scenes and briefings, but AI does a very good job of faking artists' styles," says Roena Rosenberger.

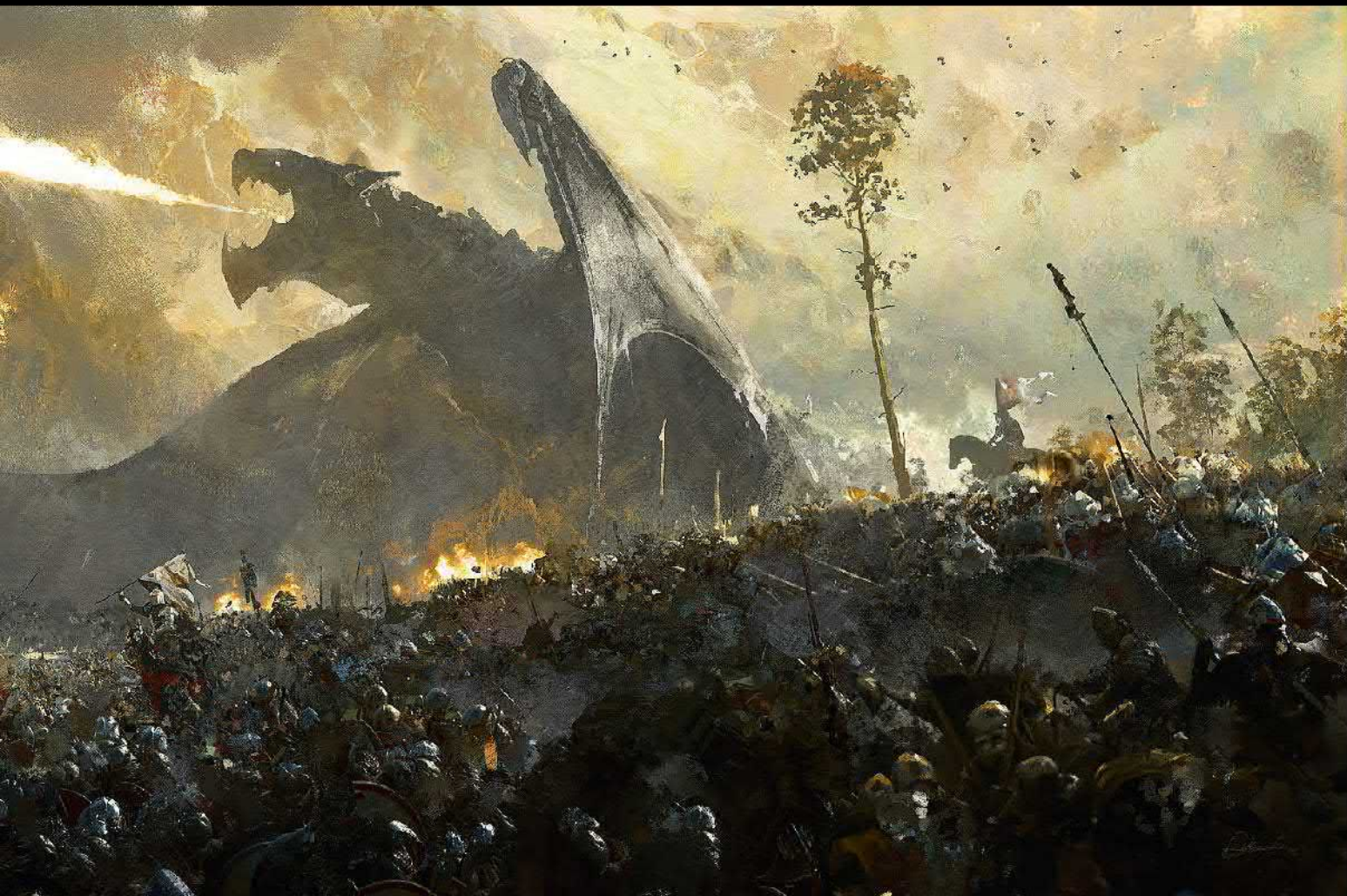
important that studios have a dialogue with artists instead of simply cutting costs and getting rid of them. In the end, I'm not sure if ethical AI would make the situation better or worse for artists at large."

THE HUMAN TOUCH

One artist who became a prominent voice in the conversation is **Greg Rutkowski**, after it became a trend to use his name as a prompt for generating a particular painterly style. "I was shocked to find so many artworks signed with my name that weren't mine," he says.



"I don't think that AI can displace artists entirely, but it will change the climate"



"There should be no way to do img2img, an easy way to generate content based on any input image," says Joel Holtzman.



Greg Rutkowski points out that for too long, copyright infringement of visual arts has been taken less seriously than fields such as music or film, by both the courts and the press.

"The human creative process can't be sped up, because it's based on the personal experience and the emotions of the person working through it. It takes time to develop compelling and thoughtful ideas other humans will relate to," says Christina Kraus.

An early exploration for Surtr's Temple in Muspelheim, which was created during Matteo's work on God of War Ragnarök.



A day in the life of...

Matteo Marjoram

Concepts and curios Inquisitiveness is an important part of the artist's day

Matteo is a concept artist who specialises in visual development. He started out with a sink-or-swim opportunity on The Last of Us Part II, and has been working in the video games industry ever since.

"My cats wake me up by 8:30am. I like silence in the morning. Then I get to the desk at 9am and turn on my music, and the silence is gone. I'll check emails to see if there are any fires. I have a bullet journal, and will

mark one or two things to finish that day. Sometimes I can just turn on my working brain. But on other days, it's like an old car. I've got to crank it up with warm-ups.

Over lunch, I'll usually watch some educational videos on YouTube; engineering channels, or lately it's been Cold War-era vehicles like an aircraft carrier that's also a submarine. It informs cool designs for me. I think one of the strongest assets for any



Illustration defining the look and feel for the World Tree in the Realm Between Realms.



An architectural painting to flesh out the design of Sindri's backyard.



All artwork © Sony Interactive Media



Matteo's feline friends wake him up in the morning, before adding a touch of joy to his office.

artist is to have encyclopedic knowledge of random stuff. It's like having a curio cabinet in my head. I never know when I'll be like, 'Where did I put that thing? It would be perfect here.'

BEDTIME ROUTINE

I try to wrap up by 7pm for work-life balance. After dinner, I often return to the computer, but for pleasure. Or I'll spend time with my girlfriend, or play



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.

with the cats. I host a weekly game night too. I don't have the best sleep hygiene at the moment. My goal is in bed by 10pm, asleep by 2am, but I don't always achieve that. I enjoy the tranquillity of night.

Besides 'learn your fundamentals', I'd say the best advice to newcomers is to try not to compare yourself to others. We all have that friend that runs six miles by 6am, then produces personal art before starting their

demanding job. But you know what? You've had more experiences than they have. Or your hobbies inform your work in wonderful ways. You can't beat yourself up."

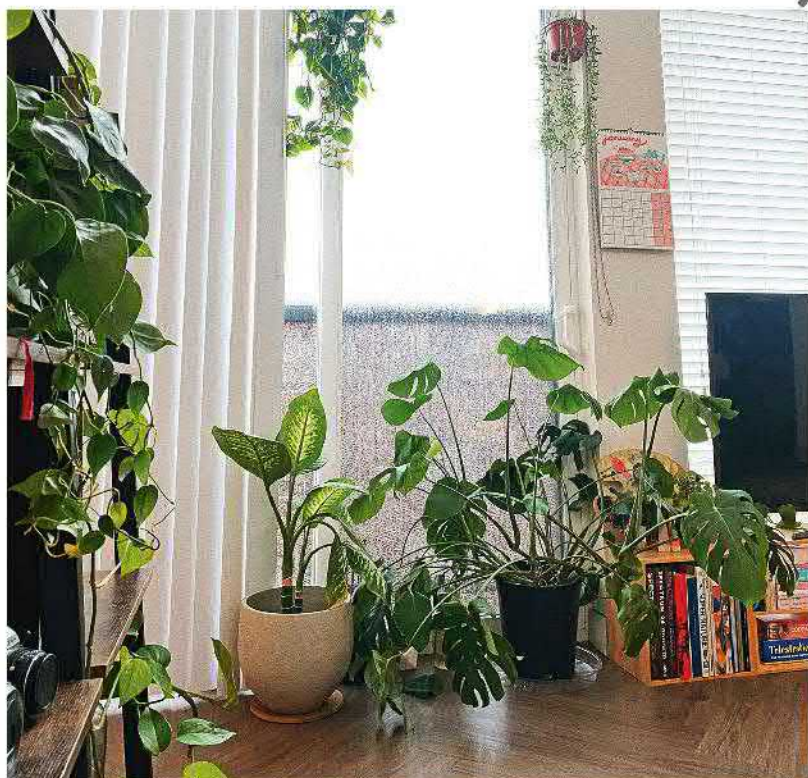


*A self-avowed style chameleon, Matteo recently worked on **God of War Ragnarök**. He is known for his work on **The Last of Us Part II**, and will have artwork appearing in a **Magic: The Gathering** set next year. <https://bit.ly/3JjMkeR>*



I absolutely love the tall windows and abundance of plants in my space. Although I'm a sunshine girlie, the mood is perfect when it's raining or if there are big puffy clouds outside. We're also fortunate to get a view of the downtown LA skyline, as well as some mountains! I get to people-watch from my desk as well.

The little whale pen holder behind my iPad screen is a token from my art school days. Despite majoring in 2D art, the curriculum had us creating tangible objects in a woodworking class! I had a lot of fun making something 3D with my hands and learned a lot from the experience.



I love the tiny Isabelle figurine below my monitor! She was an impulse purchase at a nearby Japanese grocer, but I've gotten my money's worth from all of the serotonin that she gives me. So cute!

I love the mannequin hands holding sage and incense. I got it when I was working in the fashion industry. Before I was a full-time artist, I worked many odd jobs, as I had to drop out of school. Although taking a non-direct path to my dreams was hard, I don't regret anything as I grew a lot, learned so much about myself, experienced things I never would have, befriended folks from different walks of life, and gained soft skills.

Minyoung Yoon

Happy place This art gremlin's cave is full of sunshine, luscious plants, colourful prints and prized trinkets



My partner and I live in a loft together and our workspaces occupy different floors. His is upstairs so he gets less glare from the windows, whereas mine is on the lower floor to bask in all the sunlight.

We originally had our desks side-by-side downstairs, but we appreciate having separate spaces to avoid disturbing one another, especially during Zoom calls! Plus, if we summon each other for feedback, we're forced to take the stairs, which gives a much-needed boost to our daily step counts.

I live through my senses and strongly believe that our environment

is a reflection of our mental and emotional state. Working from home can be quite isolating, so I've prioritised surrounding myself with things that make me happy. I've got lots of plants to emulate the outdoors and add more liveliness, prints from various favourite artists to give me a dose of inspiration, candles for when it gets too musty in the art cave, trinkets of cute things to spark some joy, long-form essays and podcasts playing through my headphones to fulfil my extroverted needs, and shelves filled with rows of art books for when I'm seeking reference.

I'm also a two-drink minimum kind of girl at all times; I'll have one cup ➡

Artist news, software & events



The small plant to the left of my monitor was a gift from my sister. She's also an artist and is my main inspiration! It had just one leaf when I first got it three years ago, when I began my art journey, and now it has five, so I like to think that we're growing together.

I always have a film camera ready. Photography is a good way to practise composition and storytelling. I also love how the colours and values come out! It's so juicy and nicely grouped.



My partner's gun prop for our yearly visits to the renaissance fairs! It has a satisfying click and actually came in handy a few times for shooting references (that pun is fully, deeply intended).



The Deathwing figurine is a reminder of my World of Warcraft days, which inspired me to get into concept art and worldbuilding! MMORPGs are my preferred type of game.

ImagineNation Artist in Residence



My little cat, Clementine! Nothing makes me happier than working with her cuddling in my lap. Having a pet helps combat the loneliness of working remotely. She'll also occasionally remind me to take breaks by attacking my tablet pen!

I'm relatively new to the industry and am still figuring out how to juggle professional and personal work. During my off time I enjoy painting portrait studies, but I'm aiming to create smaller, full-bodied character design projects!



I'm always dancing between graphic and painterly works. I create whatever I'm feeling.



I love this Korean-inspired laser-cut mirror. It's next to my desk so I can check my nose for boogers before calls, and practise expressions for character expression sheets!

“I prioritise surrounding myself with things that make me happy”



Although I've had some late-night painting sessions, I prefer working during the daytime (I know, I'm freaky) and can't function without music and caffeine. My body can't take all-nighters anymore!



Despite my space being small, I'm grateful for its openness. I think of my workspace as a productive area instead of just a work desk; art is not enough!

➡ filled with caffeine and a glass of water at my desk to stay energised and hydrated.

I like to think of my workspace as something that'll grow with me. My current setup worked quite well at the beginning of my career, but I'm now finding that the ergonomics can be improved with a better chair and a mobile arm for my Cintiq.

Having my tablet sitting directly on my desk causes me to hunch forward really badly, so even though my posture seems okay in the photo of

“To combat my 6-8 hours of sitting, I start my mornings with 20 minutes of yoga”

me working, in reality I sit like a shrimp and probably look as if I don't know how to use a chair properly. It's even worse when my cat sits on my lap, I feel like I'm constantly losing blood flow to my legs!

Other than that, I'm pretty satisfied with my general setup. I have PureRef pulled up on my main large monitor, my iPad acts as a second monitor with Chrome, Spotify, YouTube and Google open, and my Cintiq has Photoshop for drawing! Having multiple screens allows me to work efficiently, without having to constantly hop around different tabs.

Behind my workspace is the kitchen. I think it's important for artists to have other interests and hobbies aside from drawing and painting. It's so refreshing to exercise your creativity and express yourself in other ways! Cooking is one of my favourite outlets. I get to design the plating, use delicious ingredients, and feed the people I love.



To combat my 6-8 hours of sitting, I start my mornings with at least 20 minutes of yoga. Daily physical and mental movement is important for us creative folks! I know I probably sound like some pesky wellness influencer, but it's true. I went most of my adult life without taking care of myself, so I can see the difference it makes.

Clearing my mind by meditating and journaling also helps greatly, whenever I experience art block or am frustrated with my work, it's usually because my head is elsewhere rather than focusing on the task at hand.

Minyoung is a Los Angeles-based character concept artist who enjoys cooking, roller skating, thrifting, and film photography.

You can take a peek at her work by visiting www.instagram.com/mindoodley.



My partner and I created a cosy comic book corner. We enjoy being bundled up in this papasan.



Our beloved Nespresso machine! I'm also a connoisseur for artisan pottery and mugs. This is one of my favourite espresso jars, made by my lovely friend Megan.



My partner's literal suit of armour is the only reason why I never blur my background during Zoom calls. It's the best flex! Also great for material reference. It gets kind of spooky at night, though; he's such a looming figure in the dark.

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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



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Read blockbuster concept design insight from The Sandman and Dune artist Deak Ferrand. Olga Andriyenko paints witches with attitude in Clip Studio Paint, and we get the lowdown on five top entertainment art schools.



Issue 224 April 2023

Manga master Acky Bright shares the secrets of his black and white art style. Star Wars and Dune concept artist Colie Wertz talks about his career in an exclusive chat, plus pro design skills advice and a host of awesome tutorials.



Issue 223 March 2023

Acclaimed artists including Sparth, Aaron Blaise, John Howe and so many more open up their sketchbooks in our epic special edition! Plus, read our fascinating interviews with artists Pernille Ørum and Dibujante Nocturno.



Issue 222 February 2023

Special Guest Editor Loish shares the influences that inspired her work and goes behind the scenes of her gorgeous cover art. We also chat with artist and author Toni DiTerlizzi, and pay a visit to an animal-inhabited studio.

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No more AI

Greetings! I'd like to ask for more coverage on a sensitive subject. I've noticed in the last many months that you've been covering AI, but I've found that coverage to be remarkably one-sided. Blindingly so. I'd love to see IFX do a deep-dive into the abuse, harassment, manipulation, gaslighting, and outright lies the long-time artistic community has been facing from those who use image generators.

All it takes is one look at YouTube to see this is a popular subject with no definitive solution. I challenge you to draw upon your connections: reach out to the long-time artist community and listen to artists who have been mocked, taunted, threatened, stolen from, and have given up hope because of the communities pushing AI. Find the elusive solution for painters, sketchers, cartoonists, inkers, colourists, authors, storyboarders, VFX makers, and 3D artists of all skill levels.

I look forward to seeing your work.
Mary, via email



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 225 at ifxm.ag/single-ifx.

Digital artist Rachel Bradley combined Midjourney AI with Clip Studio Paint to develop an image in issue 219.



In our last issue, Olga Andriyenko painted a coven of witches with attitude using Clip Studio Paint's tools.

AI woes

Hello. I've noticed that over the last few issues you have showed how to use AI tools as part of a production process, but haven't really addressed the ethical issues that surround this area and are affecting so many artists.

Johann, via email

Rob replies

Thanks Mary and Johann. You are quite right to raise these concerns. While AI can be a fascinating tool and I do believe it will ultimately have a place in many people's workflows, I don't think the current state of play is acceptable.

No artist should have their work stolen, or used without permission, remuneration or credit. In this issue we look at this more closely, talking to a number of artists who feel strongly about this very topic. I think it will be a tough slog to find a solution that is fair to artists while allowing the tech to be a useful tool, but many are forging the way in this.

Our friends at Concept Art Association are just one group looking to make changes and have legislation to ensure copyright isn't infringed, and that the technology isn't detrimental to the industry. We share their ideals and back the art community. I'd urge you to back the various campaigns being run.

If any readers want to share their stories about the effects of AI, or any other topic, do drop me an email, or DM us on social media.

More variety please

So I notice you don't feature many tutorials for Clip Studio Paint. I mostly see Photoshop as the main program used in your articles. I get that PS is the main one everyone uses, but please give more love to us CSP users. Thanks and keep up the great articles!

Jimmy, via Instagram

Rob replies Hi Jimmy! We try our best to get various software tutorials in ImagineFX. In fact, our cover art this issue and the accompanying tutorial were actually created in Clip Studio Paint! We're currently talking with CSP about future projects we'd like to cover too, so watch this space.



New works that have grabbed our attention



TheArtDistrict
[@theartdistrict86](https://theartdistrict86)



Neri
[@nerimitsu](https://nerimitsu)



Hannah Blything
[@hannahbeeart](https://hannahbeeart)

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

The art of JEAN-BAPT



SETTING OFF

"Becoming an artist is like starting a journey," says Jean-Baptiste. "It's not the result that matters, but how you give back to the world through the prism of your imagination."

ISTE MONGE

Dominic Carter talks to the master artist and author about his career, working for the biggest in the business, and his stance on AI



For over 30 years, Jean-Baptiste Monge has been busily honing his craft and working with a selection of the most-renowned creative studios across the planet, all while managing to maintain his independence as both an author and an illustrator.

We caught up with him to learn more about his career, how he's managed to balance his creativity and integrity throughout his varied works, and why he's concerned about the dangers of AI-generated art.

Hi Jean-Baptiste! You've been active for over three decades. How did you get started, and how did you get to where you are now?

I've always felt a strong attraction to pictures and imaginary worlds, and therefore, by extension, a strong interest and curiosity for drawings, paintings, sculptures and writing.

I was born before home computers, games consoles and other crazy high-tech gizmos, so my culture and learning process came from books. We did have a TV at home but no video recorder, so the limited access my brother, sister and I had connected us to national channels.

By chance, there were sometimes great movies for us to watch, or sci-fi shows and excellent cartoons. Rarest

of all were the fantasy movies, like Willow or Legend.

Five of us lived in a tiny flat. I shared a bedroom with my brother. We didn't have a table for leisure activities, the only table was the dining table that was used for homework. I couldn't draw at home but I did practise in my exercise book at school, much to the despair of my teachers, who considered me a hopeless dreamer.

I didn't have the chance to enter a real academy of art because it was too expensive, although I would have loved to do the animation school at Les Gobelins. Instead, I attended one

“I've always felt a strong attraction to pictures and imaginary worlds”

that was close to my home. I didn't finish but I learned how to work hard. And what I really wanted to learn, I discovered by myself.

I had a friend, Erlé Ferronnière, who was in the same situation as me. We decided to team up and work together. When I was 23, I released my first book alongside him called Halloween. It was a real book of self-taught illustrators, with quite an immature style. It met with success though, and the basis ➡

KEEPING BUSY

Jean-Baptiste keeps himself motivated by constantly evolving. "I don't have time to get bored! I'm always in a state of learning."

of my work can be found throughout its pages.

Before my illustration work, the emotion of a picture and the ability to communicate simple things was the focus of my style. Then, during some 10 to 15 years in a publishing house, I created books based around fantasy worlds and faeries, alongside other artists who are still very good mates.

“Be swift to react to a change of direction, and be the most original version of yourself in your work”

In 2007 I met Margo, who is now my wife, and she gave up her job as an osteopath to help create our publishing company and promote my work all around the world. In 2009 everything changed for me. Sony Pictures Animation called me for a CG animation project, my first job in the movie industry, and at this very moment a new chapter in my life began. Working in the animation

industry had always been a dream of mine, and I really didn't want to miss that opportunity.

Everything went very fast. I was supposed to work in New Zealand on *The Hobbit* under Guillermo del Toro's hands, but that didn't happen due to Peter Jackson taking the reins of that project. I called Richard Taylor from Weta Digital to ask if they were still

company, Goblin's WAY, which handles my illustrations and books thanks to Margo, who developed my different websites and online shops. She has no background in art or online business, so like me she is self-taught, and has the patience that I don't have for all that technical stuff.

You work in the fantasy genre. How do you find fresh approaches to this well-worn category?

Ha, I don't agree with you about that! Audiences still find it interesting. Anyway, I'm not the trend and I'm not on-trend. I never have been and never followed it. I just follow my own way, the one I know and like.

I feel that I exist in an ageless universe, one without any edges or boundaries, where time feels like it's moving in slow-motion and is close to a Dickensian period with a steampunk look. I love great-looking old stuff, with flourishes and details and beautiful landscapes. I like looking at them and I like creating them, the rest

WATCH THE BIRDIE

For Jean-Baptiste, inspiration is a living thing. "You need to study it and analyse it, and shift it into something personal."

Artist PROFILE

Jean-Baptiste Monge

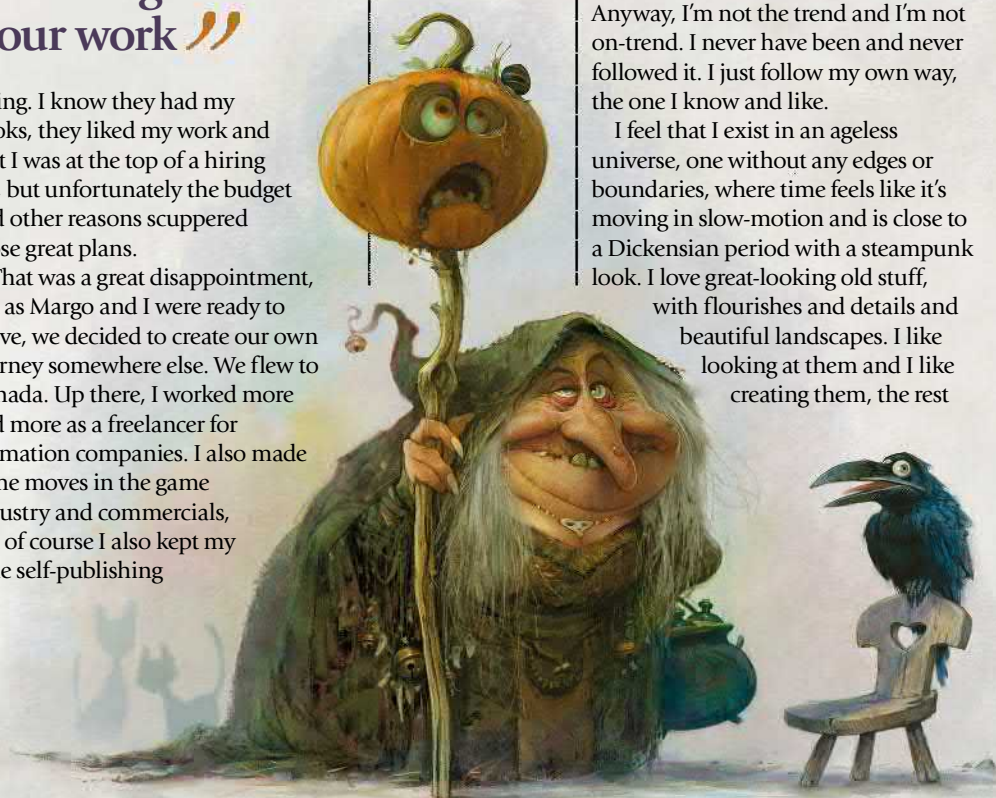


LOCATION: France
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Norman Rockwell, J.C. Leyendecker, Haddon Sundblom, Arthur Rackham, Brian Froud, Alan Lee,

Rien Poortvliet, André Franquin, Jean Roba
MEDIA: Watercolour, gouache, pencil, oil paint, acrylic, ink, Photoshop, Maya, ZBrush, TopGun, KeyShot, ArtRage, Manga Studio
WEB: www.jbmonge.com

hiring. I know they had my books, they liked my work and that I was at the top of a hiring list, but unfortunately the budget and other reasons scuppered those great plans.

That was a great disappointment, but as Margo and I were ready to move, we decided to create our own journey somewhere else. We flew to Canada. Up there, I worked more and more as a freelancer for animation companies. I also made some moves in the game industry and commercials, but of course I also kept my little self-publishing



HOW TO CREATE EYE-CATCHING CHARACTERS

Discover Jean-Baptiste's top tips for making standout character designs

- 1** First of all, you need to understand the needs of your client. The key is to attentively listen to what they require and what style they are expecting.
- 2** Conduct thorough research in terms of gathering references. Don't be limited by your design. But in terms of style, try not to be too influenced by a particular look you have in mind.
- 3** Don't copy or mimic the style of another character designer. Try to find your own voice and study what it's saying. It's better to put your abilities, skills and ideas into a picture, as they are likely to chime with your design.
- 4** In terms of character design, use strong shapes, establish a good gesture, and combine them with the story. Colour should be secondary, even if it can be a valuable and interesting addition.
- 5** Get familiar with 3D software, but use it carefully because it's more rigid than 2D tools. A good understanding of deformations in Photoshop or 3D software is a useful skill to master.

HIT THE BOOKS (ABOVE)

Jean-Baptiste's main goal as an artist is to develop his creative world and master new techniques.

does not affect me. And really, I don't do fantasy. People just usually don't know how to label me.

You've worked for some of the biggest names in the business. What advice would you give to artists hoping to do the same?

Work a lot on your own style, or to find your own style, but also study and understand the style of your clients. In general, animation companies call you because you offer a fresh, new look on their production. They don't call you just for you to sell your style. You need to adapt yourself to their universe by bringing ideas, your unique way of seeing things, and definitely not generic concepts.

As a character designer, the ideal situation is to establish good contact and honest communication with the leader for whom you work directly. It's important to keep an open mind, and not tie yourself to your ideas, because you're not the only one who has them. The trick is to remain versatile because

everything can change in an instant. Crucially, you need to know how to listen. Be swift to react to a change of direction, and be the most original version of yourself in your work.

Studying different styles is very important in order to understand your limits and everyone else's limits. As artists we keep learning every day, so you'll do this gradually as your career progresses. It's fascinating to learn how to enter a world that is not your own. You'll never be bored!

BEDTIME STORY

Research is an extremely important part of Jean-Baptiste's work. Even familiar references like Little Red Riding Hood are looked up to help shape an illustration.

Finally, you need to keep growing your secret garden. Because everything you do outside of it will keep it fed, and you'll always have the space to revitalise yourself when you need to. And who knows, it might become your main source of income one day!

How does your career as an author influence your art and illustration?

It's a constant exchange! Each story brings a drawing or illustration, each doodle brings a story. For me, the





WING AND A PRAYER

Jean-Baptiste and his wife decided to leave Canada because it pushed their emotional limits. "I always get back on my feet thanks to my solid partner, Margo. We have each other's backs."

THE STORY OF PAPA TANGO CHARLIE

Jean-Baptiste on the creation of this piece he drew after returning to France from Canada

We left Canada for France after 12 years of adventure. I began illustrating this a couple of weeks after we landed, mainly when I was sleeping in hotels or staying with family and friends, because we were still without a home. It was a little bit chaotic! It's more of a cartoon than the rest of my work. I guess I needed to express a difficult arrival! Illustrations are often a reflection of an artist's life, and this one clearly captured my mood.

I used Procreate to sketch it and add part of the colour. My iPad Pro is easy to carry around and the interface with Procreate is super simple, intuitive and delivers at high performance. The brushes and textures you can create in it replicate traditional painting techniques very well. My only complaint would be that Procreate only works on tablets, which have a smaller screen than computers or the Wacom Cintiq.

Interview

➡ artist and illustrator is the author, I just can't see one without the other.

If you have nothing to tell and no inner world, even for freelance work, you'll never be able to create a lot of things. Of course people can create some good pictures, but you'll never feel at home anywhere.

This authorial side, even if you don't write or write a lot, is in my opinion essential. And it's this quality that will make you last in time instead of fading after one buzz.

What's next for you? Do you have any exciting projects coming up, or are there areas you'd like to explore?

I just hope the best is yet to come! I don't actively seek freelance work, I often wait to be contacted. I worked on 10 Lives last year, which will be released this year, and I illustrated the cover for the next Blizzard artbook Diablo: Book of Lorath. So now I'd like to take some time for myself.

“ This authorial side, even if you don't write or write a lot, is in my opinion essential ”

Personally, I have different projects in the works. I have books in preparation, illustrations that need to be painted, and others that need to wait for their turn to exist. I have a lot of ideas and I don't have enough time to realise them.

Looking in the short term, I'll be releasing a new sketchbook, and I'll also reprint my bestselling book Celtic Faeries: The Secret Kingdom in both English and French. I'll be using Kickstarter or Ulule to fund this, depending on the country.

In terms of longer projects, I'm reworking Baltimore and Redingote, an old children's book that I wrote and illustrated in 1999. It's a story about the

THE GREAT CARTOGRAPHER

Jean-Baptiste has shared a making-of video of this snail-riding character on his Instagram page.



FLIGHT OF FANCY

Jean-Baptiste discovered hummingbirds when he moved to Canada. "Legend says they carry hopes of love, joy and celebration."

THANKSGIVING JOURNEY

Small, gnome-like characters riding on birds are a recurring theme within Jean-Baptiste's creative universe.

fantastic journey of a kid and his stuffed goose. My wife wanted to print it again because it has been sold out for a long time, but I couldn't bear to look at all of the flaws in my drawing! So that's why I'll illustrate it again in my current style.

If I get the time, I'd like to go back to my easel and create some new wildlife oil paintings without faeries, sculpt traditionally, create new bronzes and maybe prepare an exhibition. Margo and I would also like to travel through Europe, the United Kingdom in particular, because I've been invited to the Glastonbury Fairy Weekend taking place next October. I'm still figuring out how to display our booth, but I think it will be terrific!

You've taken a firm stance against AI-generated images. What made you adopt this position?

First of all, I'm not against technology. On the contrary, I'm very interested in it! However, as far as AI-generated images are concerned, there are two important points that made me speak out loudly about it.

First: it's very disrespectful, irresponsible and shameful how some open organisations have used and manipulated the research sector, or not disclosed the purposes for which they use AI for their commercial objectives. By this subterfuge, they had access to protected data that would not have been available otherwise, and whose use without consent is totally illegal.



ODE TO THE MOON

This piece started out as a watercolour illustration, but it wasn't until Jean-Baptiste returned years later digitally that he was happy with it.



We have all witnessed a very organised theft that has been brought to daylight. The perpetrators not only don't care about the consequences, but also flout the rights of tens of thousands of people. They exploited loopholes in laws that were not prepared to deal with such behaviour.

Of course, there is also the fact that they used the most fallacious arguments possible. If we don't stop them, they will continue on this path, to the detriment of the fragile balance of our society. It doesn't just concern artists, the harm is much broader, and unfortunately we might find out the true extent quickly if we do nothing.

Secondly, I'm really worried about the learning aspect of our profession,

and about all those who are connected to it. Study and understanding are necessary in order to evolve and flourish in our profession, and AI doesn't cater to those needs.

AI disconnects people from real work and study. It only shows the final result. There are no artists behind the art with AI. Many people call AI a tool, but it is not a tool since the prompter is not a director or creator of the pictures that have been generated.

The prompter is only a spectator. There is no act of creation. There is no trace of the prompter, no hint of their inner self,



BEWARE OF THE MARSH HUNTER

It's not just birds that are used to hitch a ride in Jean-Baptiste's artwork, frogs get saddled up too!

no consciousness, no life experience and no emotions. The result is no more than a product without a soul, and the act of the prompter has no more value than ordering a burger at a fast-food restaurant.

We need to call it as it is: AI art is a product, not a picture. Ready-to-use prompts work like an online game where people buy hard-to-find items out of laziness, in order to shine in a society that doesn't care about them anyway. Moreover, behaving in this way most often pushes people to stop playing. Because without a challenge, you end up getting bored, right?

The underlying danger is that most of the students who really want to become artists because of the journey it entails will encounter difficulty as they try to find their place in this new market. If you're interested in the subject and would like to dig deeper, you can visit my Facebook page. I have already written a little on the subject and share articles written by people I respect.

Anyway, we're working hard to reinforce the rights of artists and for ethical use of AI. For once, artists are standing up. And with the same voice in the US and in the EU, we say to the unethical AI, 'You shall not pass!' 🍷

GOING FORWARD

A career spanning 30 years and a place in the hearts of fans makes Jean-Baptiste feel proud. "I hope my legacy continues after me."



Julian del Rey

Sketchbooks are the concept artist's ticket for travelling to weird, uncanny and fascinating fantasy worlds

Artist PROFILE

Julian del Rey

LOCATION: Spain



Julian is a concept artist, illustrator and visual developer working in the video games industry for companies including Riot Games. He is a traditional artist who likes to grab his sketchbook and explore imaginary worlds. When he isn't drawing, Julian can be found hiking, looking at artbooks, and watching anime and movies.

www.artstation.com/juliasking



DELICATE

"I wanted to combine the elegance of fine lines with the fierce expression as a point of contrast. I've always been interested in fashion and trends, and it's something that I try to incorporate into my designs."

“I wanted to combine the elegance of fine lines with fierce expression”



FIRE AND WATER

"Twins possessed by the elemental guardians Fire and Water, ready to defeat the forces of evil."

BAT CROWN

"The Bat Crown has one magic eye so the queen may see who is a kind soul and a real hero."



Sketchbook



THE WATCHMAN

"Up on the rock, ever watchful, ever alert, alone, as unruffled as a marble statue."

“My comfort zone is faces. I draw a lot. I find them appealing, and always better with music”

REST

"After travelling a long way, it's good to rest your body and soul. Fantasy is a place that I come back to all the time. It's just so good to imagine whimsical worlds and creatures."



ALWAYS READY

"For every creature, I like to play with the style. Finding something unique helps to make the character stand up."



EYES

"The windows to the soul. Mirrors of feelings that speak for themselves."



MONK DUDE

"I think outfits can tell stories, and also help you learn more about the character. A fancy monk dude with a kind of intimidating outfit."



GOBLIN CREW

"Just a group of fellas getting ready for battle when a nurse is looking after them. She knows they'll be hurt."



NO. 1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

Sketchbook



SUMMONING

"In the face of danger,
she invoked the
ancestors to protect
the citadel."





MUSIC AND A FACE

"My comfort zone is faces. I draw a lot. I find them appealing, and always better with good music."

SHAPES

"Sometimes I try this exercise. I make random shapes and see what comes from that. It's funny and entertaining."

NESTKEEPER

"In the middle of the night a whisper, and everything seems calm, everything is fine. I like to play with textures and materials on my sketches. They feel more alive."



“I like to play with textures and materials on my sketches. They feel more alive”



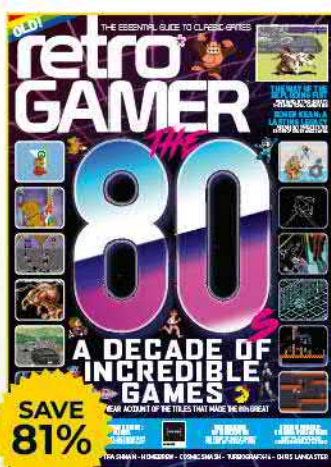
Do you want to share your sketches with your fellow ImagineFX readers? Send us an email with a selection of your art, captions for each piece and a photo and bio of yourself to **sketchbook@imaginefx.com**



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are available...**

Download your resources by turning to page 5. And if you see the video workshop badge, you can watch the artist in action, too.



Advice from the world's best artists



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Clip Studio Paint

PAINT CULTURALLY INSPIRED FANTASY CHARACTER ART

Comic artist [Ann Maulina](#) talks us through the creation of a portrait made for her Raruurien universe

Artist PROFILE

Ann Maulina
LOCATION: Indonesia

Ann is a comic book artist and the author of the award-winning webcomic Raruurien. She loves exploring various cultures and lore as part of her concept-rich process when she builds new worlds. <https://bit.ly/40otLNB>



This portrait is part of an illustration series called Fancy Hats. It's a personal project where I focus on

showcasing various headdress designs from seven different fantasy tribes within the universe of Raruurien, my original webcomic.

Each tribe was inspired by different ethnic groups. This particular piece was inspired by the Miao, an ethnic group from China and Southeast Asia.

My illustration works are mostly visual storytelling, with characters interacting with each other or their environments. Drawing portraits gives me interesting challenges, where I have to pay more attention to a character's expressions, facial features, and the details of accessories and outfits. In this workshop, I'll guide you through my process for creating this portrait and overcoming those challenges.

I have a consistent style in my drawings, but I'm quite flexible in

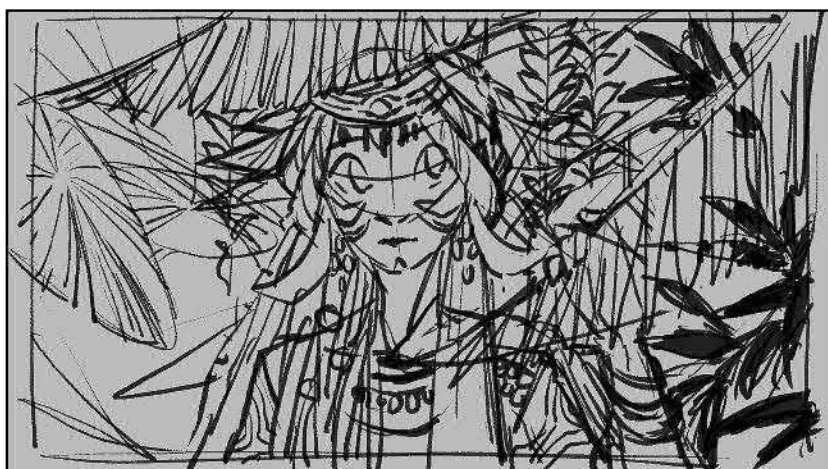
the process. I think it's due to how heavily I invest in my preparation. The pre-production phase consists of concepting, thumbnailing, and making a colour scheme. The result is a coloured sketch where I can see quite clearly how the drawing will look once it's finished.

It's like having a clear goal and blueprint ready to be worked on in the beginning. As long as I have that clear goal in my mind, I can use any different kind of method in the drawing and rendering process.



1 Create a concept

The character I'm going to draw is from the Tiger tribe, which lives deep in a tropical rainforest. I've done a design of a character from the same tribe before, so I didn't have to start from scratch when it came to this one. I'll just have to design a variation from it, featuring a more elaborate outfit and headdress, but still using the same materials, shapes and textures as before.



2 Draw thumbnails

After I have the design, I put the character in different compositions in the form of thumbnails. It's important to keep the thumbnails small and lack details, so I can explore as many as I can in a short time. Sometimes I'll explore the colours in this phase by trying different colour schemes on the chosen composition.



3 Small, medium and large

Rainforests are known for their diversity of flora, so the setting will have a lot of different shapes. Having to fit a lot of different objects onto the canvas can be overwhelming. To create an illusion of diversity, I choose a few plants of different sizes. I put at least one different kind of plant for the small, medium, and large sizes, which makes them easier to arrange in the composition.



4 Cook up a colour scheme

After exploring reference images for rainforests, I found that they mostly contain green and red hues. I used that as a starting point, and then chose a tetradic combination, using colour theory, which includes those main colours. Next, I create a colour scheme by choosing colours with varying values and saturation. Throwing those colours directly onto the sketch usually helps because of colour relativity, which is how colours appear when they are close to other colours.



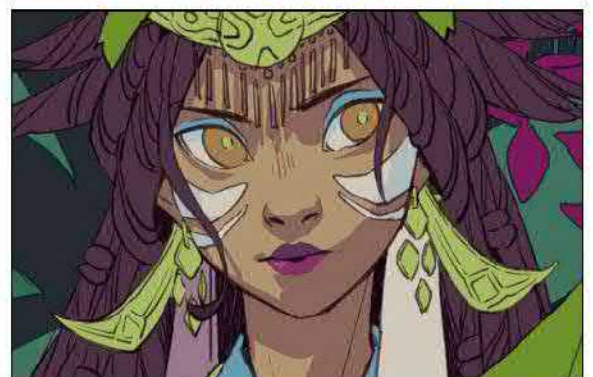
5 Refine the sketch

In this phase, I do some more detailed sketches on top of the thumbnail, such as figuring out the detailed shapes of the accessories, the expression, and the tribal patterns that appear in her outfit.



6 Inking

After I have a clearer picture of the shapes thanks to the refined sketch, I can proceed to the line-art. I draw the lines using the same thickness for each part initially, and then edit them using the Correct Line tool. Closer objects have thicker lines, while details such as hair strands have thinner lines.



7 Flat colours

I don't have to think much in this phase because the colours are already prepared at the beginning. Here I just have to pick colours and fill. You may notice that I used a shade for the skin area. I added those manually because skin tones work differently to other materials. If I use Layer mode for cel shading on the skin, it usually doesn't turn out how I want. ➡➡

Bright base colour plus Multiply layer



Dark base colour plus Overlay layer



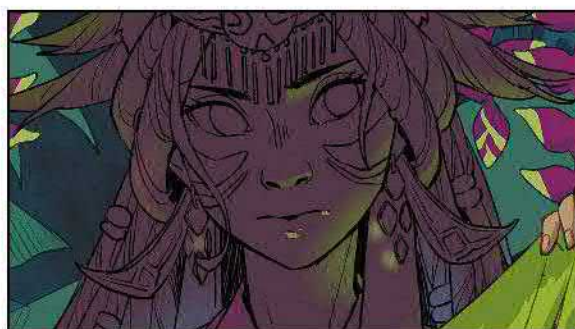
8 Cel shading

There are two methods of cel shading I can choose from, based on the overall ambience of the illustration. For a light ambience, I start with bright base colours, and then add a Multiply layer for the shadow. For dark ambience, I start with dark base colours, and then add an Overlay layer for the parts touched by light. This image has a dark ambience, so I chose the latter.



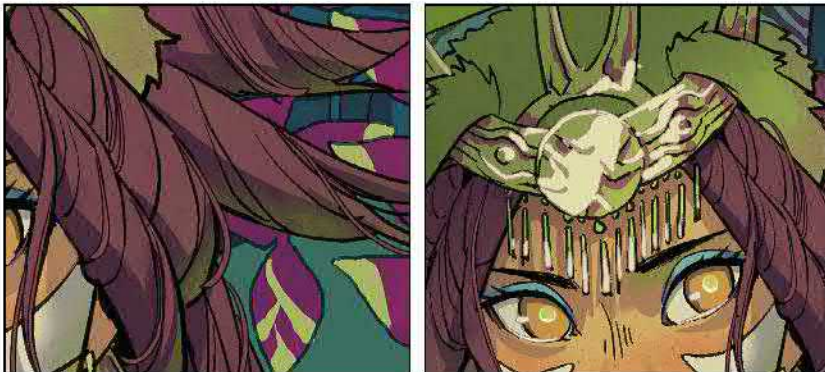
9 Work on the background

I use soft watercolour-like shading for the background. I also add a hard-shaped colour for the highlights. The background has much simpler rendering compared to the character, because I want the audience to pay more attention to her as the main focus of the image. This method creates a depth-of-field effect; a lack of details has a similar effect as blur.



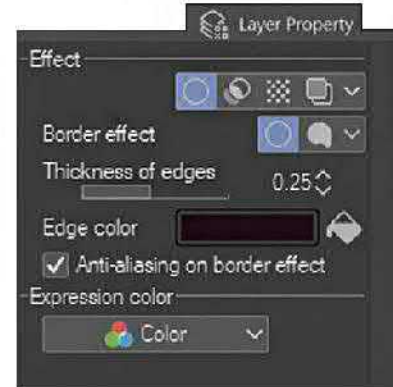
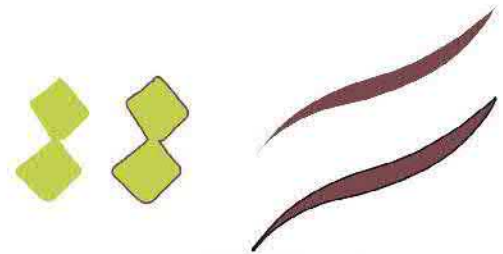
10 Reflected colours

The colours are reflecting each other. Here, I bounced the colours from one surface to another, and sometimes to each other. The inner part of the hair has soft blue colours from the outfit, and the outfit has red colours from the hair. The reflected colours on the accessories have hard edges, while the hair and outfit have soft reflected colours due to their materials.



11 Add details

I brought in small details such as strands of hair, some more detailed patterns on the outfit, and also the hard highlight of metal accessories. I'll generally add these details on a different layer, placed on top of the line-art layer. The coloured lines come from the Stroke layer effect.



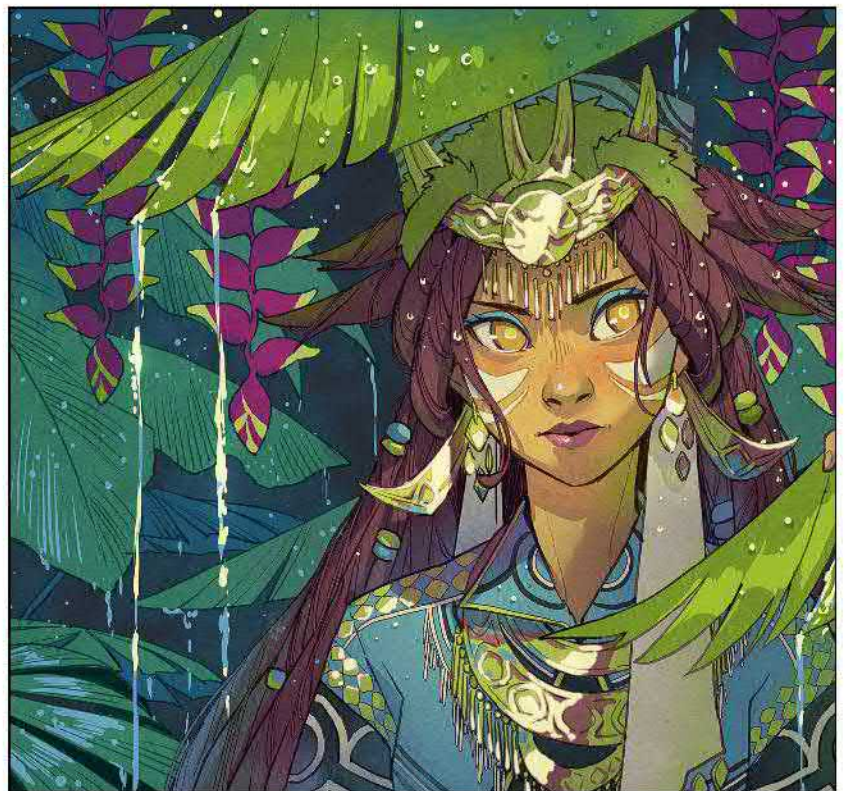
12 Stroke effect

Here's how I use the Stroke effect for adding details. It adds outlines to any shape I create within a layer. This effect can be added by turning on the 'Border effect' option in the Layer Property palette. This is also where you can adjust the thickness and the colour of the outlines. If you're working in Photoshop, this feature is available under Blending Options>Stroke.



13 Colour the line-art

While having black lines provides a nice comic look, sometimes I colour the line-art to add more depth in places. The line colours in the background are closer to the object's colours, so the lines aren't as strong. I also coloured the lines on the face to soften her features.



14 Finishing touches

My final changes usually consist of adding textured paper, atmospheric dust and adjusting the brightness. In this case, I added splashes and drops of water.

Blender & Photoshop

BUILD A DREAMLIKE FANTASY SETTING

Etienne Savoie shares his behind-the-scenes methods as he designs a stylised environment with 2D and 3D tools

Artist PROFILE

Etienne Savoie
LOCATION: France

Concept artist and illustrator Etienne lives in the mountains, with his inspiration outside his office window.
<http://etiennesavoie.fr>



For this image, I wanted to create a universe that is both an attractive place to live, and somewhere you would want to spend your holidays. However, I also wanted to add a touch of magic to make something that catches the eye. The idea of the flying island was an obvious one for me; I've drawn a few in the past, and it's a subject I like.

With the natural lighting at around 2pm, the colours are vivid throughout the scene, and balanced between the cold tones on the environment and the warm on the windmill. The whole image is based around the windmill. I like the movement it provides for the composition, as well as the fact that someone can live and work inside it.

The overall composition is triangular, with the warm colours

inside the triangle. The path is also a guideline to bring the viewer's eye towards the windmill. For the shapes, there is nothing sharp. I work with dynamic curves a lot to try to make it fluid and alive. The goal is to make the image peaceful and not dangerous.

The clouds and mist add depth and atmosphere, which help to detach the windmill and the island to give them more importance.

How I create...

A 3D IMAGE BASE FOR PAINTOVER



1 Rough 3D

With Blender, I make a 3D base quickly to get a global shape and fix the big elements of the future drawing. The 3D does not need to be detailed or pretty, as the finer touches and some of the volume will be painted in afterwards. The important point is to block the global volume, which will save me time later.



2 Colour and rendering

Once the overall volumes are created, I make a quick colour base in Blender. It doesn't have to be perfect, but the colours must be balanced and correspond to my idea. At this stage, I think about the colours directly in 3D; it's convenient to have a preview in the Viewport. When I'm satisfied, I'll move on to the rendering.



3 Paintover and texture

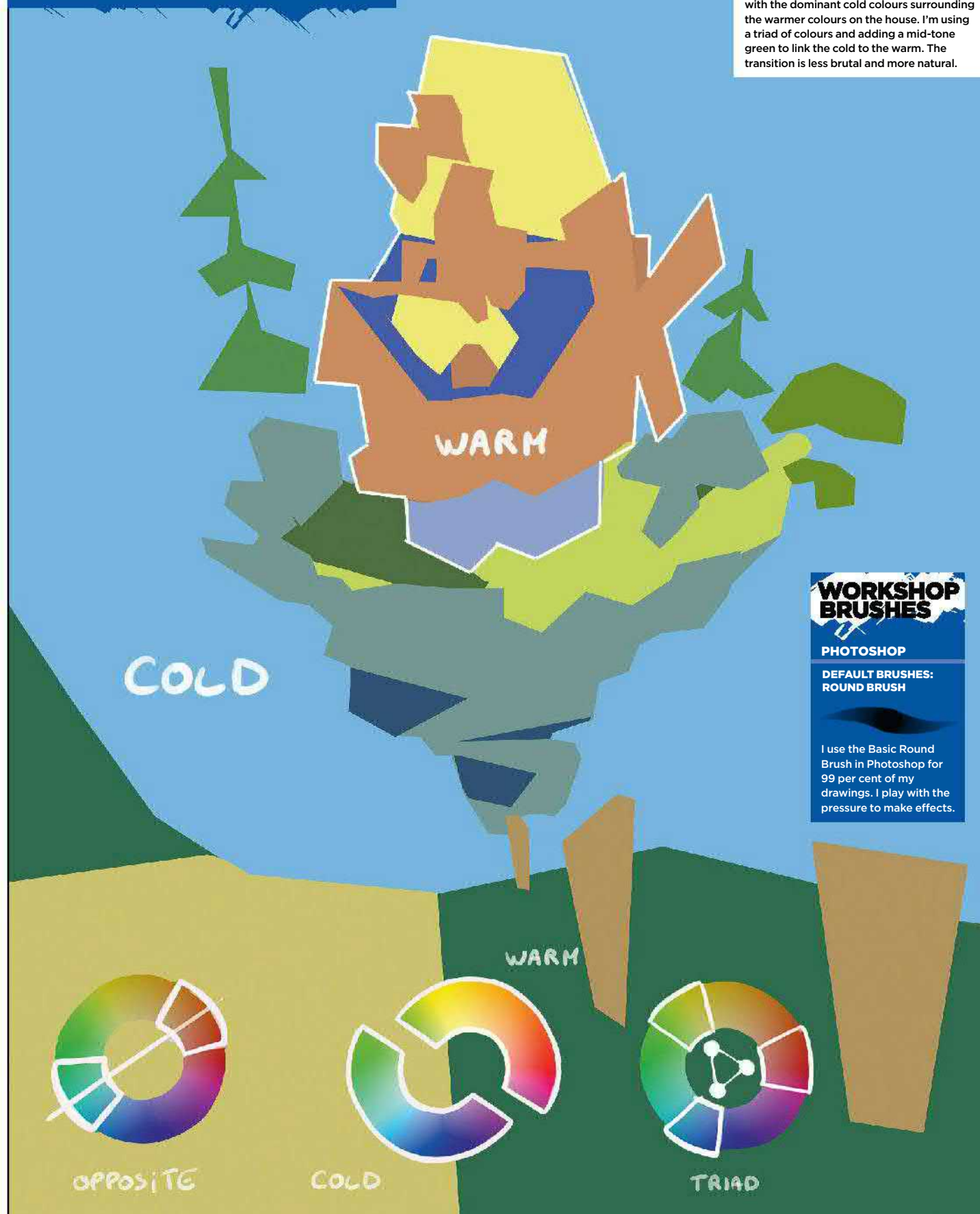
Now it's time to switch over to Photoshop. I'm going to paint all of the texture details and make some shape modifications. I'll break the angles of the 3D render and start adding all the missing elements to my final image. The goal is to pull the image away from the 3D rendering and bring it to life.



CRAFT THE SCENE

Balancing act

This is the final draft of my colour balance, with the dominant cold colours surrounding the house. I'm using a triad of colours and adding a mid-tone green to link the cold to the warm. The transition is less brutal and more natural.



In depth Fantasy scenes

Timber details

For the details of the wood, I try not to overdo it to avoid overloading the visuals. I draw curves to represent the cracks in the wood and make some colour variations on the edges to simulate a bevel.

Background

Even if the background is much less important, I won't neglect it. Without putting in too many details, I created a valley to give depth and credibility to the universe. This invites the viewer to look further into the scene.

Consistency

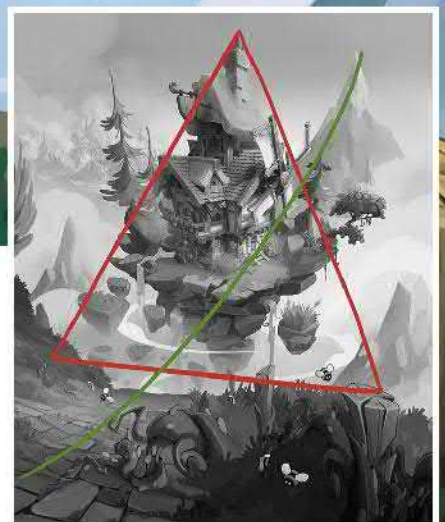
The shape of the tree trunk is a reminder of the brambles seen in the foreground. The designs of the vegetation should not be too different from each other. I try to put reminders of forms to create a coherent vegetation and not put too much into the image.

Worldbuilding

For the brambles in the foreground, the goal was to show that outside the house, the rest of the scene could be dangerous. I added movement and volume, with dynamic shapes to this bramble so it was lively and fluid.

Composition

I try to make the shapes simple and geometric. The warm colours are all within the triangular composition highlighted here, while the eye is brought to the mill by the path. I check in black and white if my tones go from dark to light for good depth of field.



Technique focus

WORLDBUILDING THROUGH SHAPE

Leo Li explains how he suggests meaning through the architectural components of his sci-fi artwork

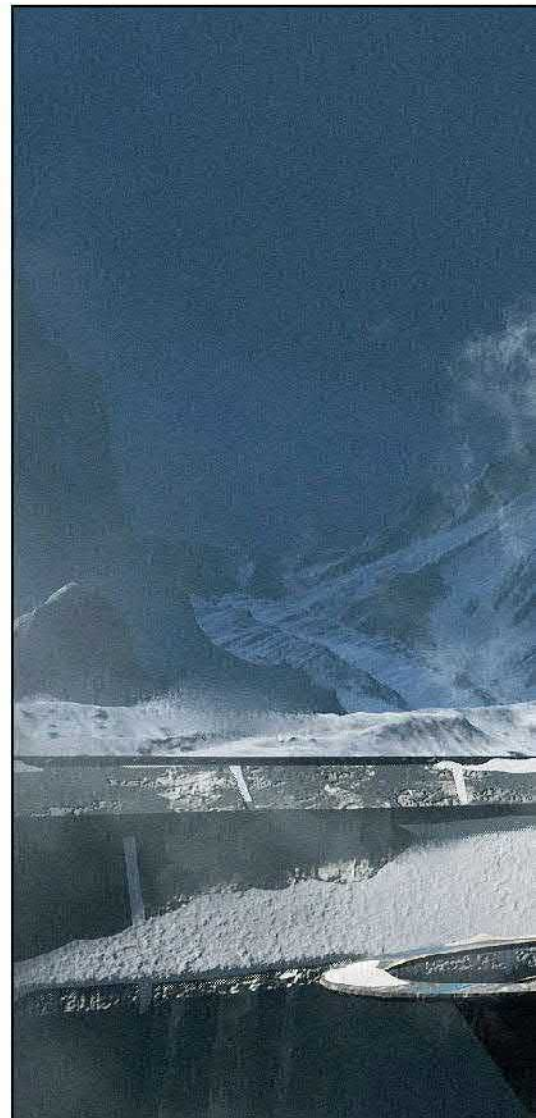


"The initial idea for this piece was inspired by the topic 'ancient alien planet' and the TV show Raised by

Wolves. I thought of suggesting something mysterious behind the scenes by mixing alien buildings with African-style architecture.

I used gigantic triangular and circular shapes as the dominant foundation of the building and

layout, as it can suggest both geometric sci-fi architecture and brutalism. Adding ritualistic, church-like decorations helped to dress it up. I used an upside down triangle shape because I wanted to push a feeling of evil and horror. When the camera angle moves down, an abstract evil face presents itself from all the details. I used Blender and Eevee to create this piece, as they provide easy and realistic previews."



Artist PROFILE

Leo Li

LOCATION: Canada

Leo Li is a concept artist in the entertainment industry. He has three AAA video game credits with Ubisoft since 2015 from his work on Far Cry Primal, Watch Dogs 2 and Watch Dogs: Legion. He currently works for Tesla as a concept artist.
<https://bit.ly/3yqm2T2>



Procreate

ADD POP TO YOUR CHARACTER ART

Alix Harris showcases her process for creating vibrant portraits that provide personality for your characters

Artist PROFILE

Alix Harris
LOCATION: US

Alix is an illustrator and character artist whose primary medium is digital, creating in Procreate on iPad, and occasionally working traditionally in gouache. www.cyanallart.com



For this workshop, we'll be creating a portrait that gives your character, well, their character! Whether

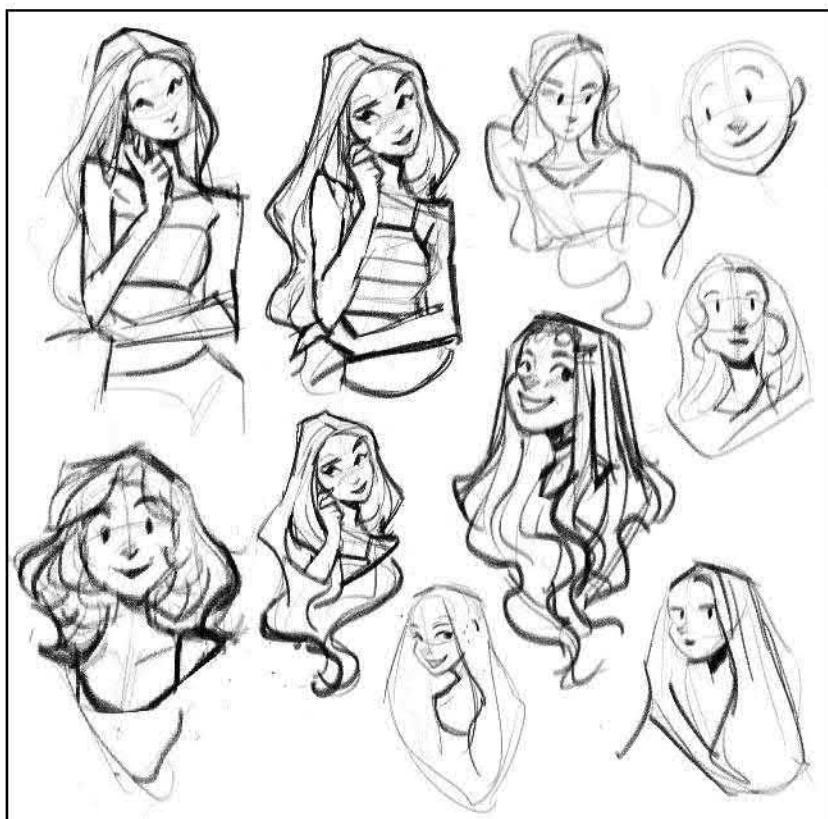
you're a beginner artist or more experienced, a portrait can be a great way to explore characters. While the design can focus on anything from their build to setting the character's tone, the portrait can show who they are at an intimate level.

Try to focus on the overall shape of the portrait design. Be aware of negative space around your character and how that can help with clarity, like how the hair can frame the face or the full portrait. As for colour, we'll focus on a simple colour palette that compliments the design.

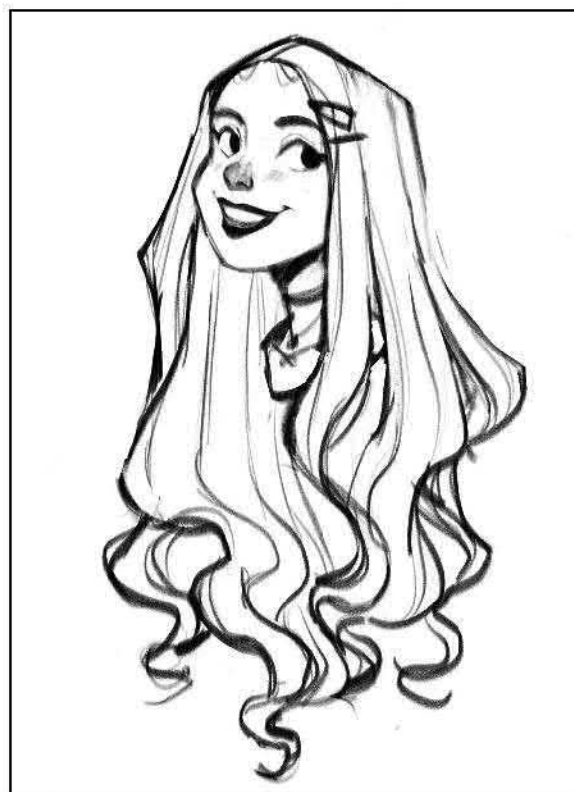
One thing to keep in mind is the expression. Try thinking of your character's situation and how they would react. What would their

expression be? Would it be over the top? Many people connect with an expression, which can make it pop.

We'll be using Procreate for the iPad. This software is a great way to explore your character, from sketching to finalising a painting. We'll use multiple brushes, layer modes and adjustments to achieve the look for you. Awareness of some basic digital art techniques will be helpful for this tutorial.



1 Start out with thumbnails
Using the Angular Sketch brush, create a few thumbnails of your character. Pay attention to the figure's overall shape and use elements, like the shape of the hair and how it frames the character, to convey that shape. Play around with the head tilt, pose and expressions until you find one that works best.



2 Sculpt your rough sketch
Copy and paste your thumbnail and enlarge it on a new canvas set to 300dpi. Select the Eraser and choose the Sharp Render brush. Use it to clean up some lines of your sketch. Think of it like clay; you're sculpting the lines and shapes for clarity. ➡



WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PROCREATE

CUSTOM BRUSHES: JINGSKETCH - ANGLED SKETCHING PENCIL

This brush is perfect for your loose sketching work. It's used for both thumbnails and cleaning up the sketch.

SHARP RENDER

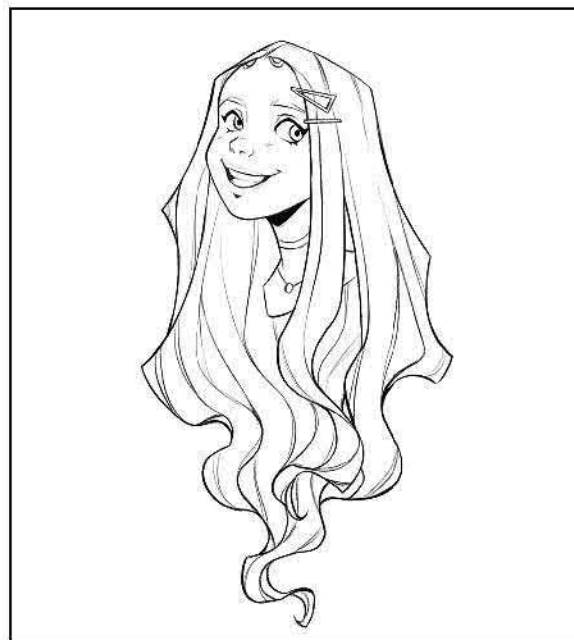
This brush serves two purposes. One is as an eraser to clean up shapes, and the other is for cleaning up shapes during rendering.

You can download more Procreate brushes from Jingsketch by visiting <https://bit.ly/3ZA90yw>



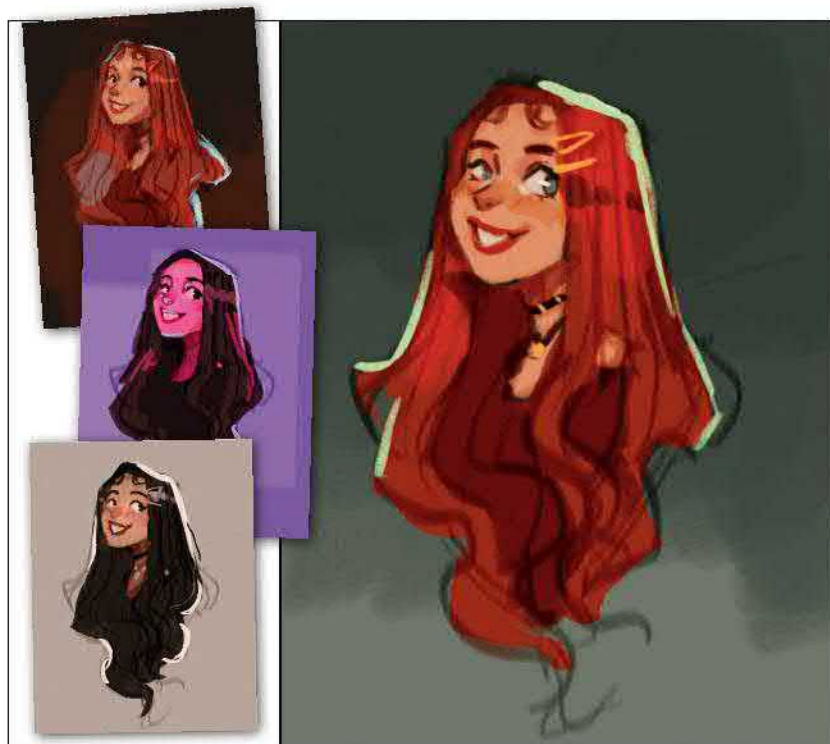
3 Start your second sketch

Lower the opacity of your rough sketch and create a new layer. At this stage, focus on what you can add or remove to make the piece pop. Can you push the expression further? Add more detail in one area? Less in another? Remember to keep the overall shape consistent.



4 Line-art

Use the Oval Sketch brush on a new layer to begin your line-art. Focus on creating smoother lines. You can adjust the stroke of your lines under the Stabilization settings of your brush to help keep them smooth. If you need to, create separate layers for lines behind other shapes. You can clean them up with the Eraser, then merge everything on one layer.



5 Test out your colours

I like to create a separate canvas with my thumbnail sketch for colour comps. Create four separate groups of your sketch with a background layer. Using the Gouache Clean Glaze brush, paint four different colour palettes. Try to keep your palettes limited and stay zoomed out, so you can easily see the colours' cohesion. Once you like a combination, merge that group and copy it to your main canvas.



6 Begin your background

Create a new layer under your line-art. You can select and fill the layer with the primary background colour from your colour comp or the Color panel. To add some variation, use the Wes Gardner Lovely Paint #2 brush, or any texture brush to paint in variation in tone, or add some extra values.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PROCREATE

CUSTOM BRUSHES: MAXPACK GOUACHE - TOOTHY SQUARE

I used this as a texture brush at low opacity to paint extra tones over the skin and hair.

CLEAN GLAZE V2

This brush is perfect for basic shapes for creating colour comps, and some rendering at the end of the painting process.

Get more Procreate brushes from Max Ulichney by visiting <https://maxpacks.com>



7 Add in base colours

Use the Hard Round brush on a new layer to create an outline of your portrait. Fill in the shape using the base skin tone from your colour comp. Create a new layer above and set the layer to Clipping Mask. Repeat the outline, this time around the hair, then fill in with the base hair colour. Next, fill in the smaller details on a separate layer using the clipping mask. ➡

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PROCREATE

CUSTOM BRUSHES:
DIZZYTARA - OVAL
SKETCH

I use this brush to create clean line work. You can change the Stroke settings in Procreate to smooth out the lines.

You can download more Procreate brushes from DizzyTara by visiting <https://bit.ly/3ZALRmb>



8 Tone line-art

Alpha Lock the line-art layer and select a dark hue that fits your colour palette in the Color panel. Fill your line-art layer, then change the layer mode to Hard Light. You can use the Hue and Saturation options under Adjustments. Move Saturation under 40 per cent, push the brightness for the line-art transparency, and adjust the Hue to match the colour palette to what works best.



9 Paint tones and detail

Continue to paint in more colours. Use a low-opacity brush to paint in some reddish and cooler tones, to create variations on new layers above your skin and hair base. You can paint background colours in at a low opacity to add more cohesion to the piece. Add more colour details under the line-art, like a dark colour under the eyelashes and eyebrows.



10 Add shadows

Create a new layer above your colour layers and set the mode to Multiply. Select a reddish-grey and paint in your basic shadows using the Clean Glaze brush. Remember where the lighting is and the general shape of the figure, and you can adjust the colour using the Hue and Saturation. Just in case, duplicate your canvas to save the piece, so you can make any changes before rendering after you finish the shadows.





11 First render pass

Under the line-art layer, create a layer above your colours to start rendering. Focus on clearing up larger shapes and adding details, like extra skin highlights, eye details, and smaller shadows in the hair. Use the Sharp Render brush for clean shapes and the Gouache Clean Glaze brush for loose paint strokes.



12 Second render pass

Group together all your layers, minus the background, and then flatten them. Create a new layer and continue to render over your portrait. Add even more detail and start cleaning lines for clarity. Focus less on blending everything out, and try to paint in texture to create more enticing shapes.



13 Extra effects and lighting

Create an extra layer set to Multiply to add a little more shadow. Bring in more dramatic lighting by painting in a rim light along the edge of your piece on a separate layer above. You can also paint in some highlights to the hair, and then erase them to clean up the shapes.



14 Finishing touches

Using more of Procreate's adjustments, you can add effects to help clean up the piece. To start, merge all your layers with the background. Try Bloom to add a little glow to the highlights, while Sharpen is excellent for clearing shapes, and finally use a little bit of Noise to add a slight grain texture. Congratulations, you now have a finished character portrait! 🍷

Technique focus

FROM BIG SHAPES TO SMALL SHAPES

Léa Pinto works her way down to the minute details with Photoshop's toolset



"While painting, and even in my everyday life, I see objects as shapes. If you look closely at

my paintings you'll only see simple shapes everywhere! I like to paint with a limited brush set as this allows me to stay focused on shapes and simplification. I mainly use the Basic Round Hard/Smooth brushes and the Square Brush with no opacity. I also like to use several tools from Photoshop such as the Lasso, Marquee and Gradient tools.

Basically, I start off my painting by colour blocking in big shapes, then I refine it into more and more small shapes. When it comes to texturing some areas, such as the concrete seen in this painting, I allow myself to go for more crazy brushes. I do my best to design my textures and create appealing shapes while I'm texturing."





Artist PROFILE

Léa Pinto

LOCATION: France

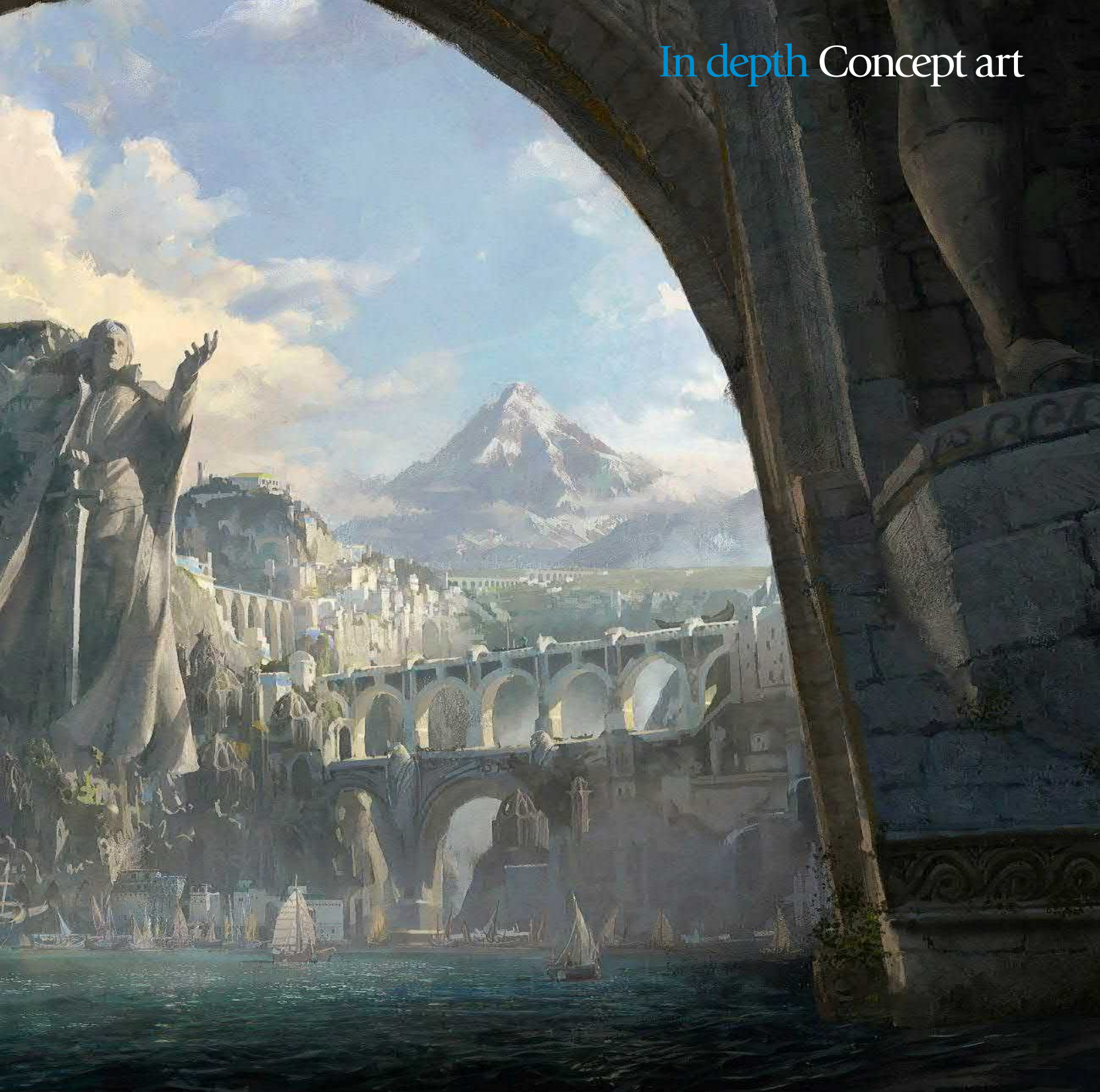
Léa is a visual development artist and background painter based in Normandy, working in both the animation and video game industries. She has worked on Netflix features including the Jibaro episode of Love, Death + Robots.
<https://bit.ly/3yozuHj>



Blender & Photoshop

CREATE FANTASY CITY CONCEPT ART

Julien Gauthier discusses the making of his designs for Armenelos in Amazon Prime series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*



Artist PROFILE

Julien Gauthier

LOCATION: Canada

Originally from France, Julien began his concept art career at ILM in 2016. While with the company, he art directed VFX for Jungle Cruise and The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power, before turning freelance. <https://bit.ly/3mzkrYB>



Under the supervision of production designer Ramsey Avery and alongside other artists such as Jaime Jones,

Roberto Castro and many others, I was involved in the pre-production of The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power, and one of my tasks was to help design the city of Armenelos. The city went through a lot of phases until we settled down to this design.

In order to work in such a complex environment, I had to rely heavily on

3D. Every time I had to make a new image I was improving the model a little bit. It was important to figure out what kind of shot this design would allow, and specifically where the practical set would fit in it.

For this illustration, I explored what an entrance shot of the city could be. I wanted to emphasise the size and make the giant statue one of the most important elements. I also incorporated many aspects of the city that make it unique: its use of water-based technology with the aqueduct;

the mountain of Meneltarma behind; the ruins of an ancient Elvish-influenced building; and its verticality and splendour.

Finding the composition was difficult, but I liked the idea of passing under the bridge to reveal it all, and the arch creates another frame. I went for a cool, calm morning light to enhance the warmth picking up in the clouds and golden sails. I also had to play with the size of the ship and made it way smaller than it actually is. ➡

SCENE SETTING IN ARMENELOS

Human influences

Around the city you'll find a lot of human representation. We wanted to show that the Men are detaching themselves from their Elvish inspirations, and are strong and powerful on their own. There are a lot of carvings, statues and paintings showing the strength of the human race all around the city.

Birds

Adding in flying birds is always a nice touch to provide a sense of scale to your scene, as well as an element of extra life in the setting.

Ship

The ship design was done later on. I made the model projecting the concept art from the side, in order to have a solid base to work from once I was able to move on to developing the final paintover of the piece. It's actually much smaller than it ended up in the show. This was intentional to make the bridge more impressive.



How I create...

THE RINGS OF POWER CONCEPT ARTWORK

1 Initial sketches

The first few steps were exploratory sketches. I kept them simple in black and white, mixing photos and paintings, and proposing multiple options. The production designer, showrunner and director pick their favourite and give some indication on where they want to go next.



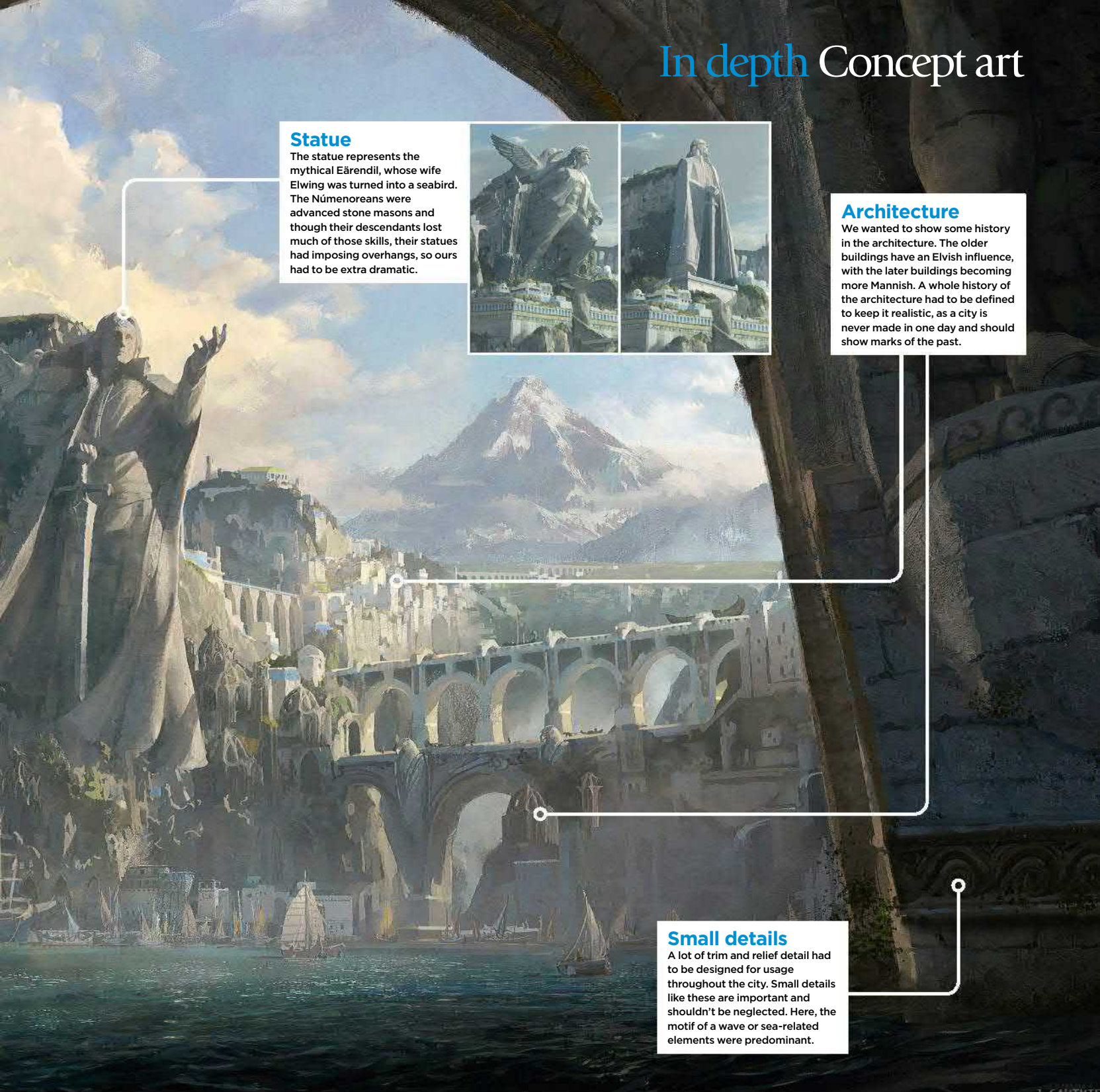
Statue

The statue represents the mythical Eärendil, whose wife Elwing was turned into a seabird. The Númenoreans were advanced stone masons and though their descendants lost much of those skills, their statues had imposing overhangs, so ours had to be extra dramatic.



Architecture

We wanted to show some history in the architecture. The older buildings have an Elvish influence, with the later buildings becoming more Mannish. A whole history of the architecture had to be defined to keep it realistic, as a city is never made in one day and should show marks of the past.

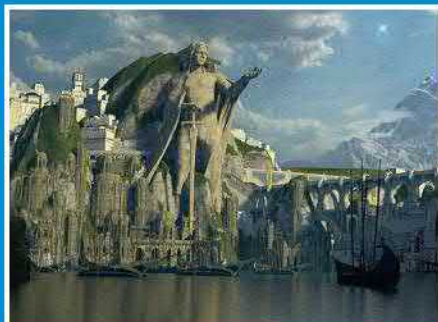


Small details

A lot of trim and relief detail had to be designed for usage throughout the city. Small details like these are important and shouldn't be neglected. Here, the motif of a wave or sea-related elements were predominant.

2 3D renders

I switch to 3D and start submitting animated renders and paintover for a better idea of the geography and cinematography. The 3D model is always influenced by the painting and feedback, but is only a base and never pushed in detail. Big brushstrokes are made directly on the renders as talking points for ideas. The turnover is fast.



3 Detailed paintings

At some point the city is solid enough to start making more detailed paintings. Multiple views are requested of the different physical set locations, different angles and landmarks. This illustration is one of them. I set up my camera in the 3D model and created simple lighting. The painting process was long since the 3D version was not holding up well enough. It's important to keep the main elements separated on layers to be able to explore options and new composition more easily.

Workshops

Technique focus

PLAN OUT AND REFINE YOUR ART

Justin Gerard shares his workflow
from first designs to detailed finish



Artist PROFILE

Justin Gerard

LOCATION: US

Justin is an independent artist who has worked for clients including Disney, DreamWorks, Sony, Riot Games and Blizzard. His artwork is also regularly featured in Spectrum Fantastic Art annuals.

<https://bit.ly/3IZ1kPk>





"Before I began this drawing, I created several smaller designs in ink to prevent me from getting too

invested in the details or shadows. I then transferred my design with a Huion light pad to paper, before finishing the drawing in graphite. Once the pencil drawing was finished, I applied transparent values over it to get a clear sense of the lighting and shadows.

With my underpainting finished, I applied a transparent glaze of colour to everything, paying close attention

to local colours. Then I began to paint more opaquely to blend my colours and values together. This helps add a sense of dimensionality and weight to the figure. With this finished, I added textures and details using a variety of brushes I've designed myself in Photoshop.

Finally, I zoomed in a bit to add some extra fine details to areas of interest, like the faces, hands, and little bits of armour. The sharp details add narrative interest to the figures, while the textures create a sense that you could reach out and touch them."

1



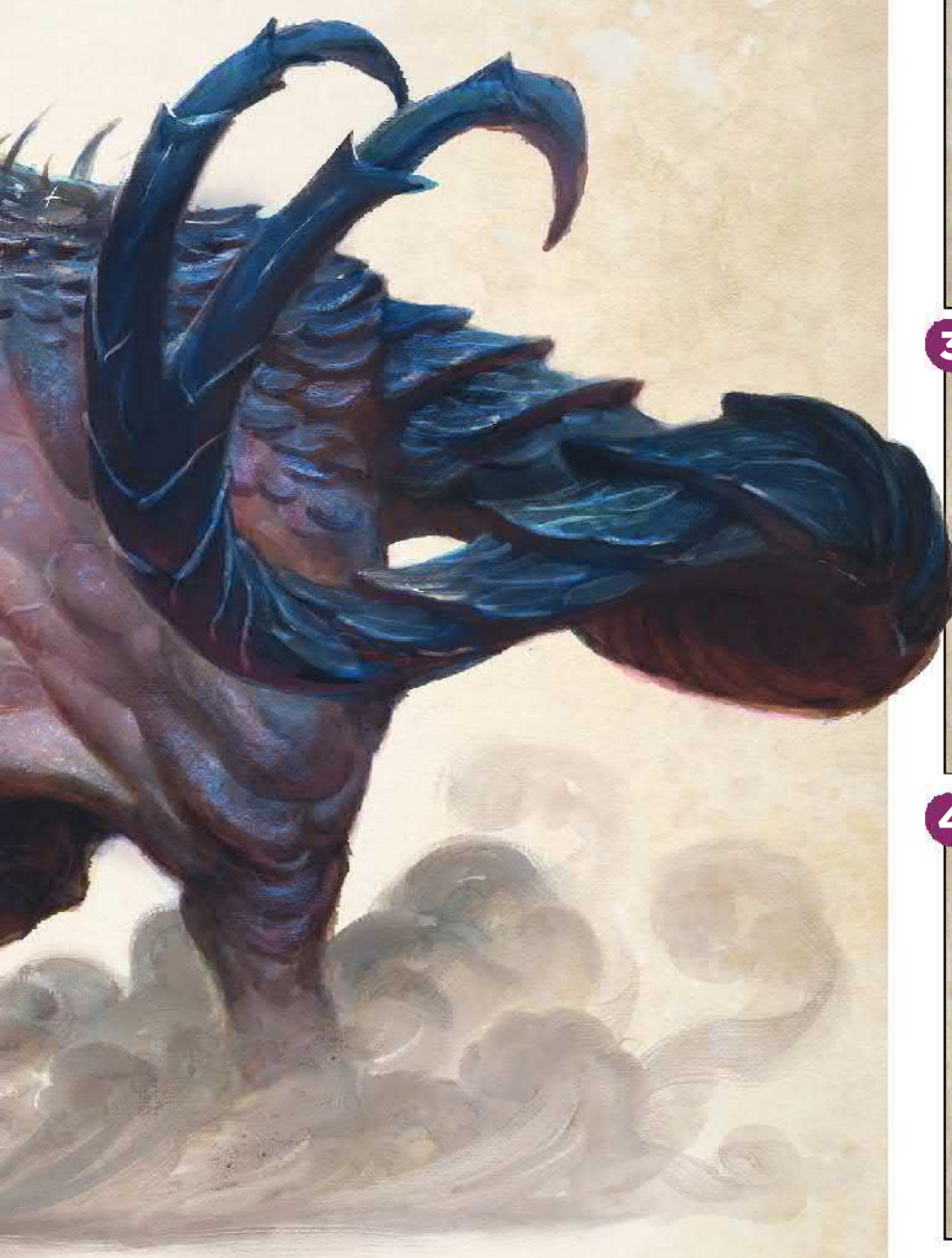
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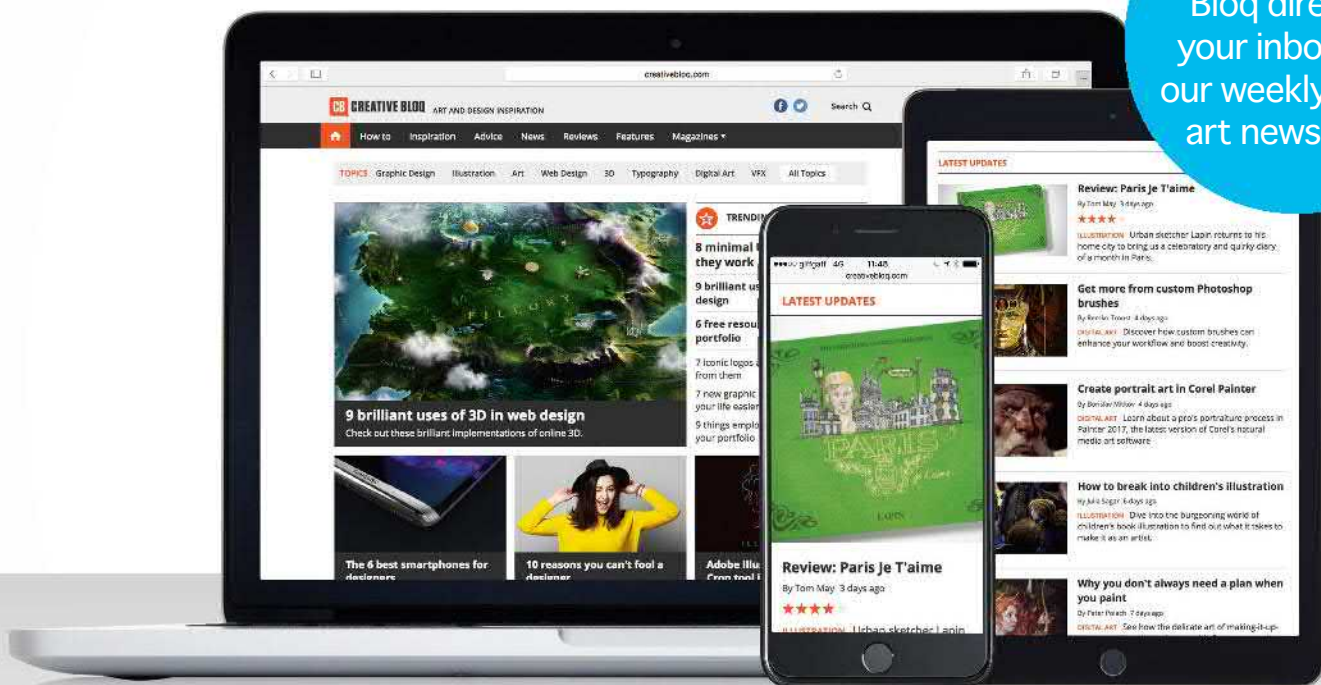


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FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Seth Boyden

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Watercolour, pencil, hot pressed watercolour paper

WEB: www.instagram.com/seth.boyden.art

Seth uses his animation experience to create fictional worlds filled with imaginative creatures. He is inspired by fairy tales, and 80s music and fantasy films.



1 BATTLE OF THE TREETOPS

"I usually start an illustration by designing the characters first and then developing a story around them. In this case, these acorns and pinecones are fighting to claim the best spot in the forest to grow their trees."

2 GEMTROLL DISCOVERY

"I like to make the most of watercolour's versatility in a single painting, whether it's using a lot of water to allow light to pass through a wash, or placing heavily saturated, opaque colours next to each other."

3 SAWTOOTH PASS

"Suggesting a story in a painting is something that I really enjoy doing. With these pieces, I put contemporary electronic instruments from our time in a fictional world of gnomes and trolls."





Fabien Daubet

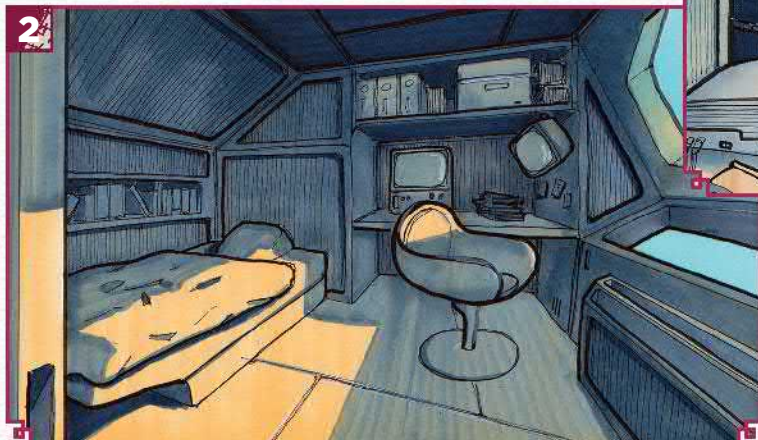
LOCATION: Denmark **MEDIA:** Pen and ink, alcohol markers **WEB:** www.artstation.com/penguinkstudio

Fabien is a French-born concept artist and illustrator currently based in Denmark, who specialises in retrofuturism. His clients are predominantly independent studios within the gaming and animation industries.



1 SPACE TRUCK
“This piece is a sketchbook drawing of an industrial, single-man crew hauling spaceship.”

2 SMALL BEDROOM
“A simple sketch depicting basic living quarters in a futuristic industrial complex.”



3 COCKPIT
“A captain’s chair on board a typical commercial space vessel.”

4 DYSTOPIA
“I wanted to depict inhuman architecture. Its form is dictated by its function. It will accommodate your body while crushing your soul.”





Lisa 'Sprite' Hansen

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Polymer clay, apoxie sculpt, resin, acrylics, natural material **WEB:** www.thebrokenplanet.com

Sprite is a mixed media sculptor from New York. She works intuitively using polymer and apoxie clays to make fantastical creatures. Her pieces often include leaves, bones, crystals, twigs, and items found on nature walks.

1 ETERNAL

"Finding comfort and healing in loss and in love."

2 PEEK

"A sweet but mischievous little feathered faerie. She loves peeking and sneaking into human homes through keyholes, usually helping herself to tiny treasures, trinkets and sweet treats."

2



3

1



3 SEVENLOR

"A healer of children, turning tears into treasure. One of seven from my Dragon Cameos series."

3



4 ELGARA

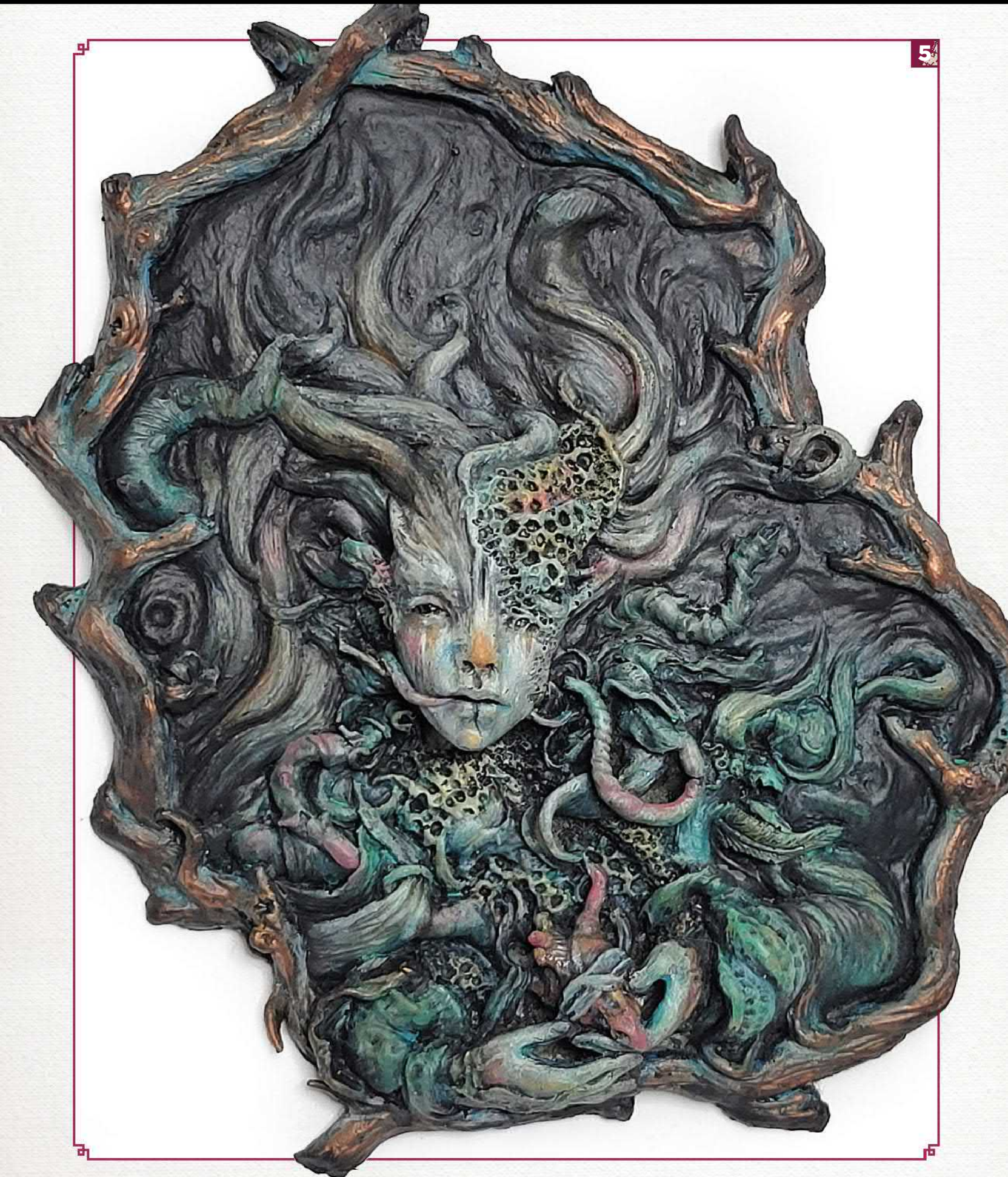
"A shaman faerie with spirit helper frogs. This piece embodies renewal, magic and coming into your power."

5 METAMORPHOSIS

"This piece is about transformative healing. Relief sculpting is meditative; it reveals things from my subconscious."

4





5





Watercolour

Gouache

PAINT SYMBOLIC SCI-FI ARTWORK

Discover how **ANNA SOKOLOVA** explores symmetry and symbolism to paint an atmospheric scene from Netflix hit *Dark*

There was one phrase in *Dark* that enchanted me right away: "The question is not where. But when." I had a dream project with Netflix, and *Dark* was one of the series I illustrated for a mural at their headquarters. As a huge sci-fi fan, I dove into exploring the layers of symbolism woven into the plot.

I moved to Berlin several years ago and was curious about German cultural heritage. *Dark* is the first German Netflix original series, full of clues and hidden meanings, including drawing inspiration and aesthetics from Albrecht Dürer and Lucas Cranach the Elder.

I used symmetrical composition, surrounded by meaningful elements

and profound symbols. This type of split screen supports the narrative of travelling between the worlds of Adam and Eva. The kaleidoscope visual creates a surreal world that seems similar, but never the same.

In this workshop, I'll use various watercolour and gouache techniques to add atmosphere and interest. I'll begin with finding inspiration and planning ahead. This invisible step is crucial and adds considerably to the unique quality of the finished piece.

In my sketchbook, I'll gather figural elements, such as stunned animals affected by noises from the time-travel phenomenon. The top of the frame is crowned with the Trinity knot, or triquetra, symbolising the cave's time loops every 33 years.

After making a value study to show light, dark and middle tones, I'll secure the areas with masking fluid to save the light contrast areas. Using the dry brush technique helps add variety and rich texture to the stones, tree trunks, and grass, even with a monochrome colour palette.

When working on the focal point, I'll use a few layers of washes to increase the depth and lead the eye to the hero. Finally, I'll use white gouache to heighten the areas and unite the whole artwork, supporting the cryptic and complex atmosphere.



Anna Sokolova is an award-winning artist and author, inspired by merging the traditional and innovative.

See more at www.annasokolova.eu.

Traditional Artist Workshop



1 Inspiration and ideas

I love to combine various sources of inspiration in real life, like books and impressions from exhibitions. It allows me to find gems that Google and Pinterest don't show everyone. I browse through the works of Albrecht Dürer and a Japanese enamel vase collection for a visual cue.



2 Prepare the materials

I use the same art materials for most of my projects, which helps to avoid the agony of choosing between the many art supplies that we all own. I use synthetic brushes for line work and a French brush for washes. I prefer working with paint in pans for fine lines and tubes for large washes.

MATERIALS

PAPER

■ Hahnemühle Expression, 100 per cent cotton paper (matt), cold press, 300gsm

BRUSHES

■ Mop (French) brush size 3/0
■ Rounded synthetic watercolour brushes sizes 2, 3, 6

WATERCOLOUR PAINTS

■ St. Petersburg White Nights
■ Schmincke Horadam
■ Daniel Smith

GOUACHE PAINT

■ Linel extra-fine

PENCILS

■ Tombow Mono-Graph HB

ERASERS

■ Faber-Castell kneaded eraser

MISCELLANEOUS

■ Schmincke masking fluid
■ Drawing gum



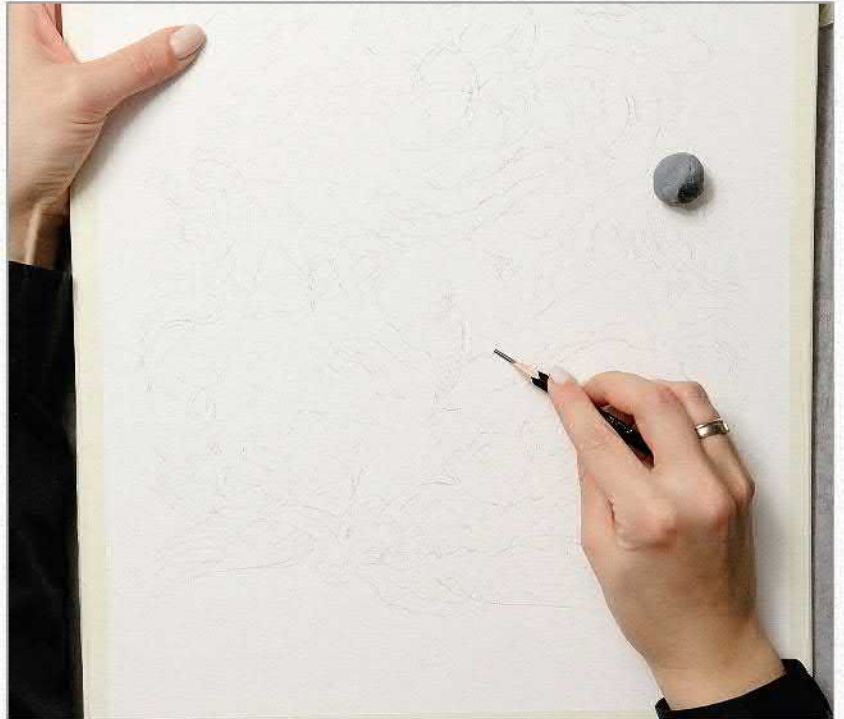
3 Explore and sketch symbols

Now I put the inspiration phase into practice. In my sketchbook, I separately draw the various symbolic elements. The imaging system consists of stunned birds, sheep, and a triquetra, united with a detailed graphic contrast of lights and darks, and solid ornamental outlines.



4 *Make a value study*

I try various compositions and place the symbols around the focal point. I make a value study and define the light, dark, and middle tones. It's one of the most effective and essential ways to determine if your illustration works. Tonal value works on a small scale in the same way as on a large sheet of paper.



5 *Refine the sketch*

I make a highly detailed sketch with an HB pencil on cold-pressed watercolour paper, secured to the polymer panel with paper tape. I prefer working over thick lines to focus on values and not think about composition at this stage. I'll also lighten the pencil marks with a kneaded eraser.



6 *Paint the frame outlines*

Using the small brush, I start to paint the outlines with simple areas just to calm down a bit (you know how scary it can be to begin painting!). I rotate the polymer panel so it's more comfortable to draw the finest lines on the bird and the specific direction of the ornamental feathers. With a diluted colour, I define the cave entrance and the outline of the hero.



7 *Add a masking fluid*

I take an old, small brush and cover specific areas with drawing gum to protect them from future layers of washes, so they remain white. I cover the hero and put random marks on the stones of the cave, on the grass, and on the trunks of the trees, then I give it some time to dry. ➡



8 Paint the frame

While the gum dries, I work on other detailed areas that aren't affected. I build up layers of subtle washes on the frame figures, partly covering the graphic elements. Depth is also added to the bird, comparing it to the sketchbook study.



9 Lay down subtle washes

I ensure the masking fluid is completely dry, and lay down the subtle wash inside the frame with a French brush. While the paint is still wet, I add more pigment to the brush and define some cracks in the cave and textures on the grass. I'll repeat this step a few times.



10 Defining focal point

I gently remove the masking fluid with my fingers. Using a size 6 synthetic brush loaded with a lot of pigment, I paint the dark cave entrance and then work on the hero. Making his iconic coat recognisable, even in monochromatic colour, is essential, so I keep the shadows sharp.



11 Enhance the dark values

To add a dramatic effect to the composition and support the focal point, I put more layers of paint around the cave entrance and other elements like trees and grass, and increase the shadows on the hero's clothes.



12

Add dry brush textures

I add masses of texture and marks to the stones and trees with a dry brush technique. I blot paint on the watercolour paper and flatten the point of the brush, so that brushstrokes can create several lines simultaneously.



13

Finish the frame details

I add dark areas to the frame to keep the contrast and refine the symbolic details. I check the sketchbook study and see how the frame relates to the focal point. Working on the fine details of the frame helps convey the series' complexity.



14

Final touches with white gouache

I add the super-pigmented white gouache on top of the moody blues to increase the dramatic effect and mysterious feel. Some areas on top of the cave are also lightened, while I add highlights on the hero, and correct areas that were protected by the masking fluid and had rough edges. I'll take a break to return with fresh eyes, and add final touches in white to unite the artwork.



15

Wrapping it up

Once again I'll take a break before carefully examining the final piece. I wait impatiently till the paint is dry and scan it in my Epson scanner at 1,200dpi for future production. I only slightly enhance the brightness and contrast in Photoshop and remove some dust. After that, I send the high-resolution file to the atelier, where it will be transferred to the ceramic tiles. 🍷



Technique focus

INKING A SCRAP PAPER CANVAS

ARTEM SOLOP eschews the traditional sketchbook to enhance his darkly gorgeous drawings

This is a selection of my 2019 sketches. I draw on printer paper or use the clean side of an invoice, bill, receipt, or anything I can find, which creates subtle texture and adds to my gritty style.

I draw with pens straight away and just go with the flow. My subject matter is often monsters, skulls, or animals with mechanical parts. A graffiti influence explains my stylised name featuring in sketches.

I used a MUJI 0.7mm gel pen for dark blue sketches. It's line is a bit transparent, which makes cross-

hatching possible in two or three layers. Black sketches are drawn with my favourite 0.9mm Molotow Blackliner. I leave it without a cap for a few hours to achieve a rough, dry effect. Arteza gel pens were used for colour sketches; their blue and violet range is gorgeous. I sketched the rest with random ballpoint pens.



Based in Stockholm, Ukrainian artist Artem combines hand-drawing skills with graphic design and motion graphics to create striking images.
www.artstation.com/artemsolop



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Technique focus

THE LIFE CYCLE OF CARD ART

TIFFANY TURRILL details the twists, turns and tweaks in her Magic: The Gathering artwork

This piece, the Ichormoon Gauntlet card art for Magic: The Gathering's latest set, went through several turns. As it depicts a named character, the planeswalker Tamiyo, who would be well-known to the client's audience, I wanted to do the character justice, while keeping my own horror-inclined fingerprints all over it.

Initially the brief described Tamiyo's laboratory exploding, but this was revised by the designers early on to favour the evil magic of the gauntlet itself. I saw the joining of planeswalker and gauntlet as an act of exultant obliteration, a

scouring of Tamiyo from herself as a necessary part of the dark bargain to gain more knowledge.

My art director was cool with the angle, but found my portrayal overly emotive for the character. After digitally turning her to face the viewer, I did a few rendering passes to clarify the gauntlet's shapes and unify the sheen. Done and done!



Tiffany has worked as a freelance illustrator for games, comics, and publishing since 2015, with a focus on historical fiction, fantasy horror and creature design. You can see more of her work at <http://tiffanyturrill.com>.

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First Impressions

✧ Chris Casciano ✧

The artist explains his fascination with all things medieval

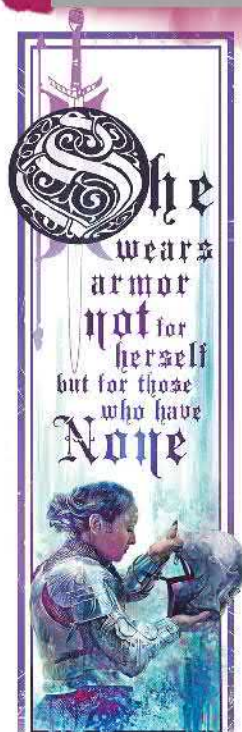


Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art? I grew up in the frozen tundra of

Syracuse, New York, and still live there today. The list of things I love about Syracuse is too long to explain, but I can tell you the one and only thing that I hate is the winters! For a good six months of the year it drops below hypothermic temperatures, so growing up I spent a lot of time inside.

From a young age my friends and I spent much of this time playing fantastic nerdy games, flooded with fantasy creatures and environments. Surrounding myself with creative friends, fictional places, and high-quality artwork most definitely played a huge part in shaping what I create today.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your artwork? One of the great things about summer, besides the fact that there's no snow, is the renaissance festival. And the best thing about that is the armoured jousts! I've watched this event probably thousands of times, but one day I was able to get up close to one of the knights. Holy guacamole! The armour they wore was so beautifully crafted it made



UNSUNG HERO 8: PRIA (LEFT) AND UNSUNG HERO 16: SUMA

All of the characters in The Iron Cast are accompanied by a short story. You can read them all at www.theironcast.com.



DESOLATE HILLS

A scene from the world of The Iron Cast, made with ink and oils on hardboard.



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

I painted the character Rickon Stark for the A Game of Thrones trading card game. I thought it was the coolest thing I'd ever done. Looking back now the artwork doesn't represent my style any more, but I still think it's pretty great that I was able to work for Game of Thrones!

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

I've always been interested in the process of creating art. I love trying new techniques. Sometimes cool things happen, sometimes they fail. Over time I've built an arsenal of strategies that work for me.

My most current pieces are mixed-media works that combine materials and techniques from years of experimentation. Back when I painted Rickon Stark, I didn't have all the tools in my toolkit yet, so naturally I think my current pieces are much more successful.

“Holy guacamole! The armour they wore was so beautifully crafted it made me want to paint it”

me want to paint it. What I loved most about it was that it wasn't shiny. It was battle-tested. Dented, bruised, and grimy. I wanted to capture this feeling in my paintings.

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with? With every knight painting, I write a story behind the character, most of which revolve around overcoming obstacles. I've got many, many flaws, but one thing I pride myself on is perseverance. So in that sense, I think I identify with the large majority of them.

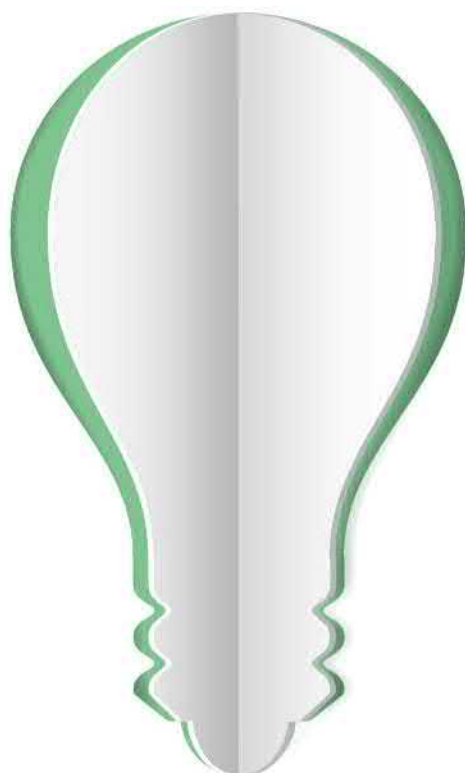
What are your painting rituals? I prefer to paint in perfect silence. I know it sounds weird and boring.

Is creating art as a career all you thought it would be?

I've always thought I'd reach a point in my career where I'd be like, 'I did it! I've made it!' I'm not sure that really exists. Or at least that feeling hasn't happened for me yet. Even though I've been able to accomplish a lot, I always want to do more and strive to be better.

What does the future hold for you? Many more years of just enjoying the process and having fun.

Chris Casciano is a medieval fantasy artist who illustrates heroes in battle-tested armour. His personal series The Iron Cast brings these characters and environments to fruition. See more of his work at www.theironcast.com.



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