

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

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*Design heroic
characters with
Alex Jensen -
see page 60*

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



In this month's issue you'll find us exploring a whole range of topics. We start with a bumper trove of incredible inspiration, from our regular gallery of top artwork sent in from across the world, to a celebration of the very best of the best curated by the Concept Art Association at its annual awards event. There you'll find some of the best art seen across many genres from some names known and loved in the industry.

If you, like so many artists, have often dreamed of creating your own artbook or graphic novel, we have you covered, with a feature on how you can turn those dreams into a reality. There's nothing quite like seeing your work in print!

For many, ImagineFX is the place to come to increase your skills, and learn new techniques or master existing ones. If that sounds like you then look no further than our tutorial section! We have a huge assortment of in-depth workshops featuring everything from perfecting composition all the way through to creating standout lighting effects.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob

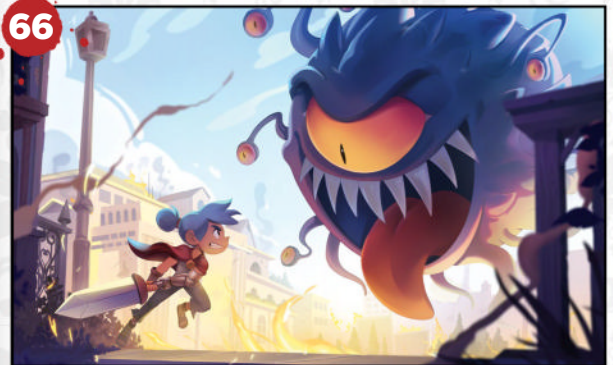
Editor
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EDITOR'S CHOICE Three of my top picks this month...



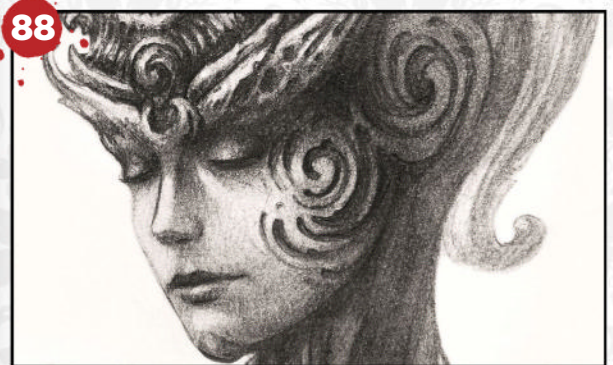
Open up a fantasy-filled sketchbook

Discover character sketches for tabletop role playing games created by talented freelance artist Joey Ro.



Composition: Commanding your focus

Make your compositions pop with expert advice from the artists of Brazilian studio Mad Boogie Creations.



Explore new fantasy worlds

Find out the process Damjan Gjorgievski follows when creating fantasy worlds and practising with graphite.

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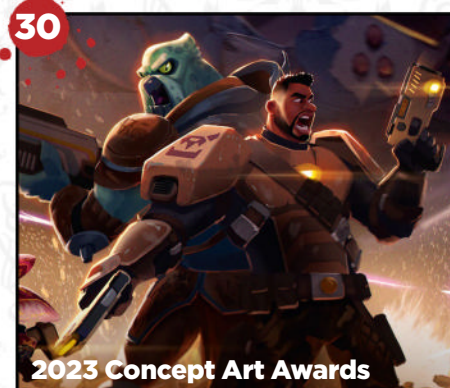
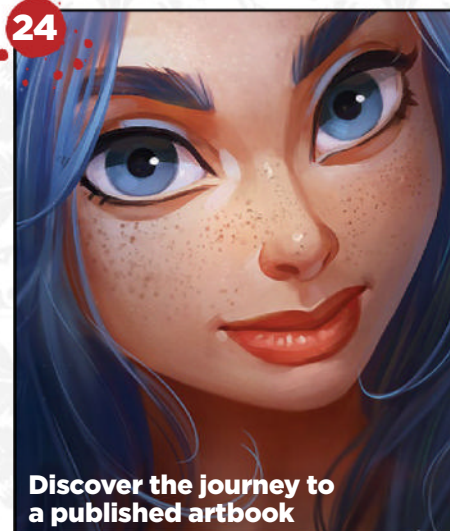
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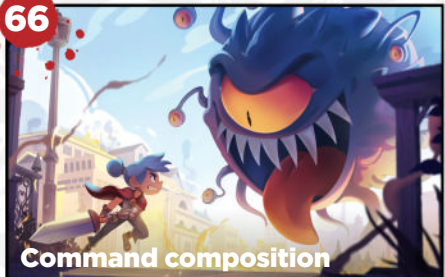
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2 Click the download link
Find your files ready for download.

3 Download what you need...
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Next month

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ImagineFX

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ANATOMY MASTERCLASS

Stan Prokopenko shows you how to excel at drawing the human form

Create creepy new characters

Discover Thomas Elliott's tricks for making grotesque monster creations

The story of a Disney legend

Explore the work of celebrated artist and veteran trainer Glenn Vilppu

How to develop hard-hitting art

Get expert advice on enhancing your perspective for maximum impact

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Rob

Editor, ImagineFX

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FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Artem Chebokha

LOCATION: Montenegro MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.artstation.com/rhads

Freelance artist Artem, also known as RHADS, has been working digitally since 2006. He seeks out his inspirations from realism, surrealism and fantasy art.

1



2



3

1 LUMINESCENT

"I love surfing, even though I've never done it myself. I just love the look of it. The wind, the waves, and the beautiful people."

2 SILENT WATCHER

"Many of us could be described as silent watchers who read the news on social media, just scrolling through often horrifying stories. It's scary, but become ordinary."

3 SUMMERTIME HAPPINESS

"Simple human happiness. Sometimes it just needs a little push, like being happy for a sunny day and beautiful sky over your head."



ImagineFX

4 SIGNALS

"A surreal artwork with an element of mystery. It's not difficult to guess the scheme of the solar system in the black circles, but it hooks the viewer's interest."



Underpalewater

LOCATION: Australia **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** <https://underpalewater.carrrd.co>

Underpalewater is a freelance illustrator and designer. Inspired by classical children's literature, she attempts to capture small moments of adventure, emphasising mystery, innocence and wonder.

1 RETURN

"In this piece I depicted Miel at the edge of the woods, the wind swirling as she returns home."

2 SPRING

"Spring in the forest. Dappled by the sunlight, Miel studies her bloodied sword. I wanted to contrast a warm, sunlit scene with a touch of melancholy here."

3 FISHING

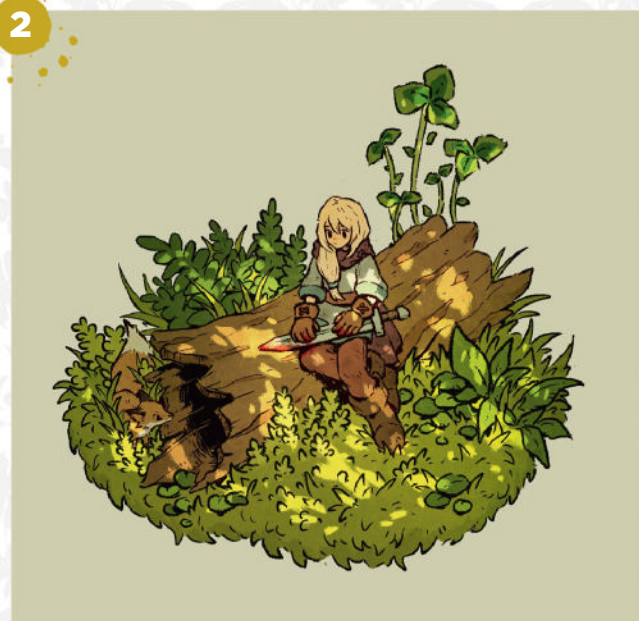
"A mouse rears his fishing spear at dawn. This piece was inspired by my passion for everything underwater. An attempt to push the depth of a sliced diorama scene."

4 MOUNTAIN PASS

"A mouse journeying through the mountains, wearied by the frigid wind, snow and ice."



2



3







Jack Nguyen

LOCATION: Vietnam **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/jackomoria

Jack didn't let his lack of formal art training get in the way of pursuing a creative career. Inspired by Magic: The Gathering and the work of the studio Sixmorevodka, he is now an artist in the gaming industry.

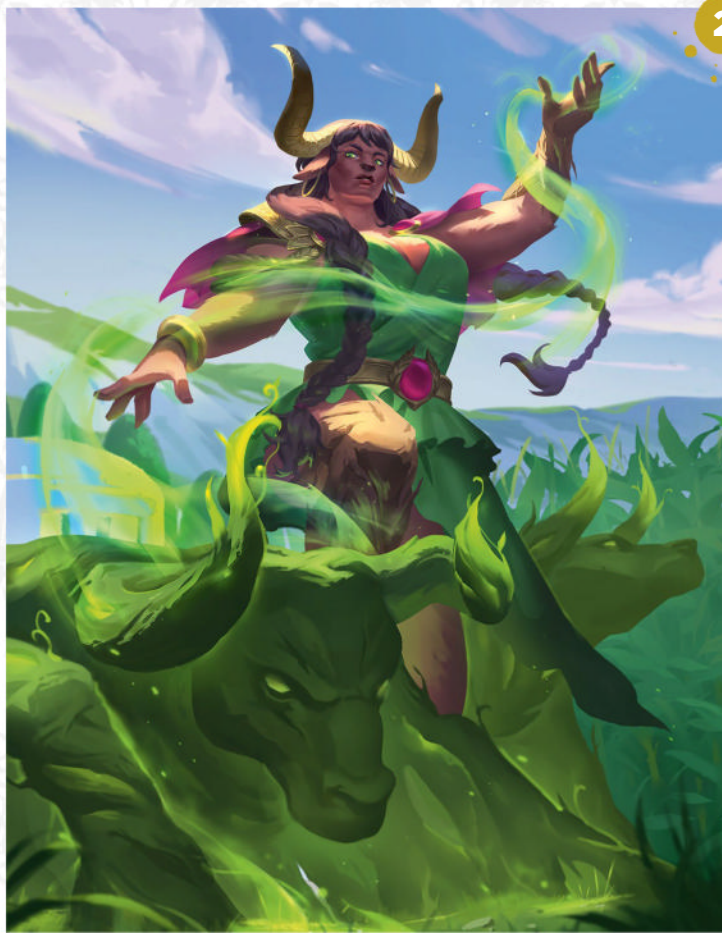


1 ORIGINAL CHARACTERS NUMBER FOUR

"The big wolf brother and the sister are my original characters. They live as mercenaries in a dystopian future and are collecting their bounty at a local bar."

2 DEMETER FOLLOWER

"Artwork for Genesis' TCG Mytheria. She's a loyal follower of Demeter. Her power is to summon centaur creatures made of wood and vines to protect the fields."

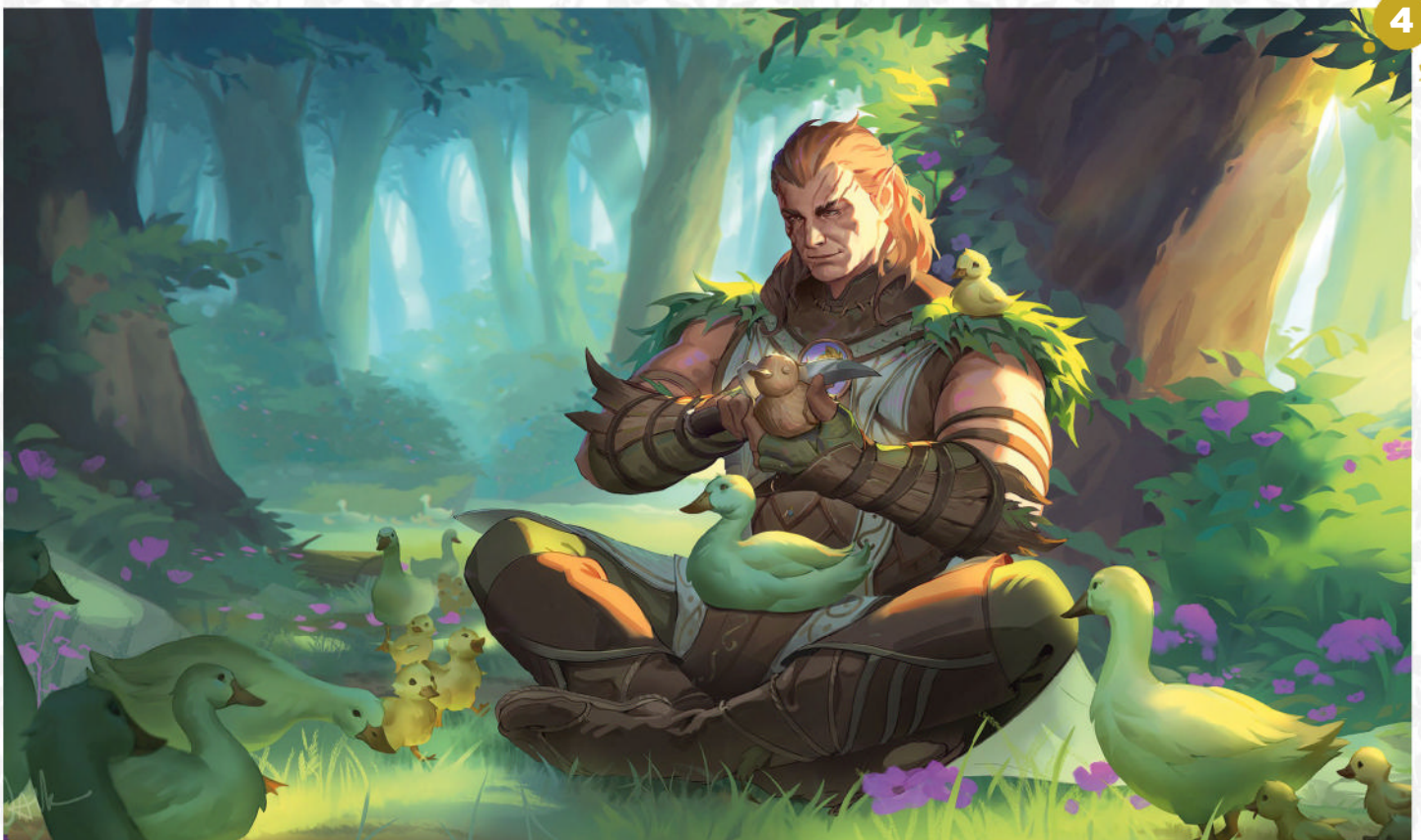


3 SUSANOO

"Another piece created for the TCG game Mytheria. This is Susanoo himself, the god of the sea, storms and fields. The artwork is inspired by traditional water and ink art on canvas."

4 HALSIN AND THE DUCKS

"This is an artwork of Halsin, a character from Larian Studios' hit RPG game Baldur's Gate 3. He loves ducks and carving."





Diana Naneva

LOCATION: Bulgaria MEDIA: Procreate, pencil WEB: www.instagram.com/functionalneighbour

Diana, AKA Functional Neighbour, is a comic artist and illustrator who works on both independent and collaborative projects. These pieces are from her Moby Dick-inspired personal project At Home with a Whale.



1 PROPERTY WITH BATHTUB

"Most of the time a bathtub is a luxury. But imagine if it was the only liveable place with a whale floating inside?"

2 PROPERTY WITH THREE FLOORS

"The piece that started my series. Twin whales took both floors, leaving less space inside the small dollhouse for the newcomer."

3 PROPERTY INSIDE THE WHALE

"Rooms don't exist here, as our hero spends her time in the whale's belly. Maybe she chose it to connect with the world through her phone?"



4 PROPERTY WITH A ROOF

"Wordplay isn't something new, but mucking around with 'a roof over your head' had its part in this piece. Perhaps it could mean a certain goal has almost been reached."





Serge Tsvelikh

LOCATION: Ukraine **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/resolvent

Serge is a concept artist and illustrator in the gaming industry, currently working with Blizzard Entertainment on the Hearthstone project. He likes to blend classic fantasy with Slavic culture in his artwork.

1



2





3

1 IN SEARCH

"The first of a personal series. A knight goes out in search of a witch that lives in the wilderness to break a curse he's afflicted with."

2 DOLLS

"A short story about two lovers turned into dolls. Now, even in this form, they will always be together."

3 LADY MIDDAY

"Poludnitsa, or Lady Middy, is a character from the Slavic bestiary. She is an evil spirit that dwells in fields and gardens."

4 INSPIRATION WORKSHEET

"This is the work I did in the preparation phase before I started illustrating Dolls. It complemented the story well and gave me inspiration."



4



Nia Kovalevski

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/antkoart

Nia grew up in a remote city where she'd lose herself in fantasy novels. She began her art career in 2022 and creates illustrations that are inspired by folklore and dark fantasy.

1 SACRIFICE TO THE LADIES OF THE WOOD

"An illustration inspired by The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt. The Ladies of the Wood are three witches who live in a cabin in the swamps, to whom the peasants make blood sacrifices."



2

2 SAM

"A piece that depicts the famous Hobbit from The Lord of the Rings stories. Here I showed his love of Elven culture and, of course, plants."



3



3 BOOK RUNNER

"An illustration showing a young wizard in his office. Here, I wanted to express the feelings of mystery and secrecy with this artwork."

4 WITCH

"A Halloween illustration about a fiancée who lost her lover after their wedding and turned to dark magic in order to bring him back."



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



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Devil Ray

YEAR CREATED: 2023 **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint

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

"The main purpose behind this illustration was about creating an anchor point in my progression. I'm a second-year student who's still growing, and this piece was a milestone that I needed to materialise. Beside the fact that manta rays are my favourite animal, the wilderness and cultural roots are topics that I care deeply about. This illustration is a melting pot of interest, motivation and accomplishment of progress that is really significant for me."





Artist PROFILE

Lise Marin

LOCATION: France



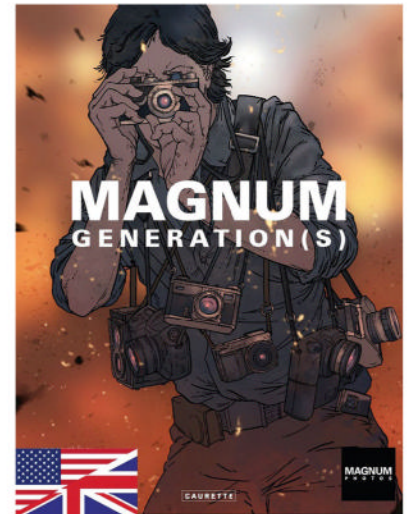
Lise is a student focusing on 2D animation and illustration studies at the Level.sup school based in Nantes. Her work is primarily illustrative and she's still looking to experiment with her artistic process.

www.therookies.co/projects/52616

ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS ImagineNation

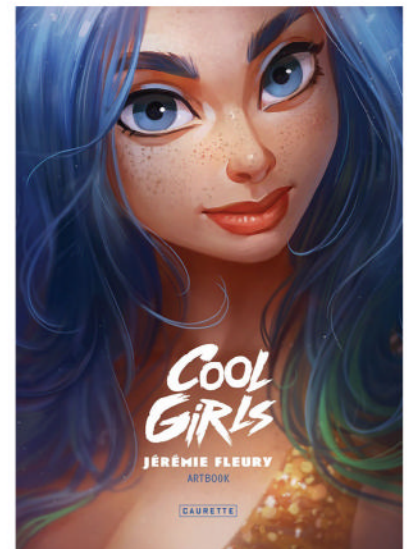
AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY

"We have over 50 projects in our folders and we can publish maybe 10 per year, so I often have to decline great proposals, and it's heartbreaking," says Jean-Christophe Caurette.



Jean-David Morvan, Rafael Ortiz, Scie Tronc and Arnaud Locquet

"I like traditional art, done with the soul. Don't come to us if you use AI," Jean-Christophe says.



Jérémie Fleury

"While a comic can sell thousands of copies, the artbook is a small niche," says Jean-Christophe.

The journey to a published artbook

Hitting the shelves Tanya Combrinck speaks to four creatives about the process of turning artbook and graphic novel dreams into reality

Making an artbook is a particularly rewarding career milestone that results in a product both you and your fans will treasure.

If you have a large body of work and a strong following behind you already, then you might aspire to make a traditional hardback alongside a publisher. While for those working on a smaller scale, self-publishing a crowdfunded indie artbook is an accessible option that lets you make all the creative decisions to produce exactly the book that you've imagined.

"An artbook is the sum of an artist's work, which may span decades,"

"It's always immensely satisfying to share your work with others in a physical, lasting form," says Airi Pan.

Photo by Marine Charmasson



explains **Jean-Christophe Caurette**, the founder of the Éditions Caurette publishing house, which works with select artists to produce a wide range of beautiful illustrated books and graphic novels.

"My goal is to create a shrine to host those thousands of hours of work; a book that stands the test of time, and the artist is proud to call their own."

Making artbooks is a labour of love for the team at Caurette, so they give the artist a lot of creative control and work together to make decisions about everything from the content to the size, page

count and paper stock. "It's the artist's book much more than the publisher's book," says Jean-Christophe. "Every artist is different. We don't work in ready-to-wear; we work in tailor-made instead. That makes the books more expensive, but the process is a special opportunity to dive into an artist's mind and their archives."

In selecting artists to work with, Jean-Christophe has a simple test: he asks himself if their work is strong enough to make a book he would buy himself. But it's not just about the art; making a book is a long and involved process, so the personal relationship has to be right as well: "Don't make ➡





CONCEPT ART CELEBRATION

We take a look at the incredible artwork that took home the honours at this year's Concept Art Awards ceremony, held at LightBox Expo in Los Angeles.

Page 30



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

Rodney Fuentebella, a visual development supervisor for Marvel Studios, talks through his daily routine and offers up advice for the next generation.

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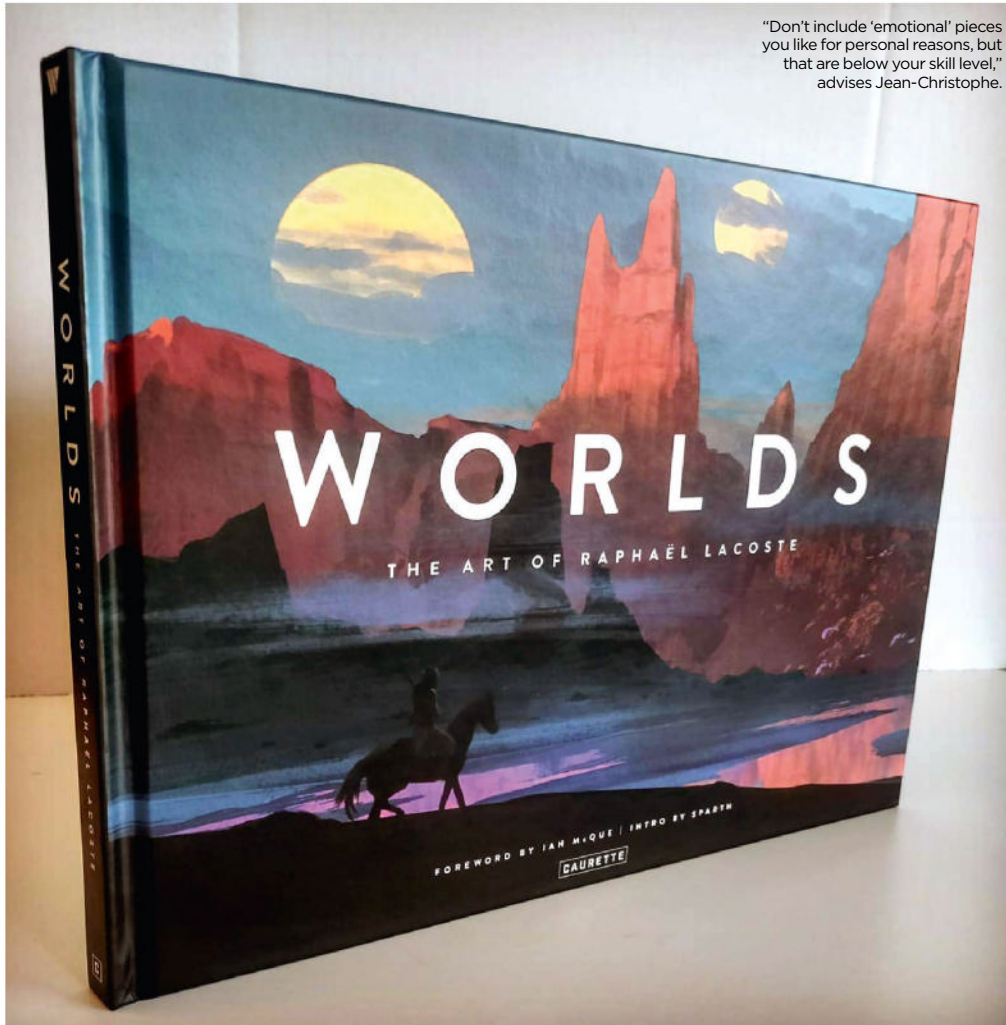


STUDIO FOR THE FAMILY

Zombie pigs, a jaguar head and much more are on display in the brand new studio of Disney's Cory Loftis, a space also enjoyed by his wife and children.

Page 38

Raphael Lacoste



"Don't include 'emotional' pieces you like for personal reasons, but that are below your skill level," advises Jean-Christophe.



"Quality is a non-negotiable for me, especially when it comes to the colour," explains Airi.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT SELF-PUBLISH AN ARTBOOK

Airi Pan on working with manufacturers for perfect prints

What are your main goals when you set out to create a new artbook?

Seeing my work in reality! While sharing your art online is wonderful, it's an entirely different experience to see it printed on paper. It's a tangible manifestation of all your hard work, and I believe it allows others to appreciate the art in a more personal way when they can hold it in their hands.

How do you make sure your artbook turns out exactly the way you want?

I need to see and feel things in person, which is why I often lean towards local manufacturers. I'll ask for every paper sample they have, as well as printed colour samples. I'm pretty particular about the binding as well. But the absolute must is ensuring colour accuracy. You have to see that printed; there's no way to judge it through a computer. It's a meticulous process, but it's the only way to ensure the artbook meets my standards.

What lessons have you taken away from your experiences creating artbooks?

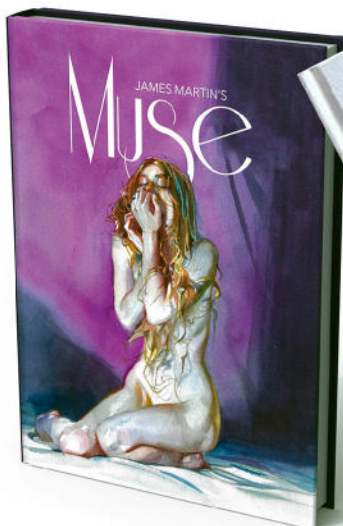
Making an artbook deepens your connection to your own art. Going through the process just once will also give you a new appreciation for other artbooks. You'll start noticing the details, the paper quality, and all of the thought that has gone into it. The stitches and glue become so much more fascinating!



Airi Pan is an illustrator and concept designer who works across video games, films, animation and more.

www.airipan.com

James Martin



James Martin's *Muse*, an exploration of the female form, published by Éditions Caurette.

➡ a book with someone you wouldn't invite to your home," he advises. "And that goes for both the artists and the publishers involved!"

THINK AHEAD

If putting out a book of your work is something you'd like to do one day, Jean-Christophe recommends laying the groundwork now. Some simple housekeeping that's easy to achieve today can save you real headaches in the future. Firstly, if you do client work, make sure that you retain the right to publish your work in an artbook. Get this sorted out now, because in 10 years' time it's going to be much more difficult to track down the people that need to give you the permissions to publish your artwork.

Secondly, when you draw in your sketchbooks, keep in mind your future

artbook and draw on one side of the paper only. "It's a pain to have a see-through effect when you scan your artwork, and you'll waste countless hours cleaning up the files in Photoshop," says Jean-Christophe. "And don't wait years to scan your art, try to process it every month or so. Label it correctly with the date and the client's name." Also be sure to write your name and contact information in each and every sketchbook you use. "You wouldn't believe the number of people who lose their art," he adds.

Finding a publisher where you're well-matched both personally and

“I learned to fight for my rights and my value, and I learned a lot about how important it is to have boundaries”

"My best advice to an artist considering their first artbook is a classic: Expect it to take twice as long as you think it will," says Airi.

creatively with your collaborators will give you a good start to your project, but you'll also need to be prepared to negotiate for things like better pay,



fairer deadlines, and a good marketing package.

Lara Pickle, who recently put out her first graphic novel with a publisher, says: "At the end of the day, as much as we're making things that we love, it's still business."

When Lara came up with the idea for her graphic novel – titled *I Feel Awful, Thanks* – her illustration and literary agent pitched it to various publishers and she chose one based

The *Castle in the Stars* artbooks, published by Éditions Caurette, are set in Alex Alice's universe, in which characters explore space in airships.



Alex Alice

James Martin



Pages from James Martin's *Muse*, a 350-page artbook that features a wide selection of beautiful, delicately crafted anatomical drawings.





Julie Mellan

on the marketing plan, which was a priority as a new author. "I was very conscious that if I didn't make a good choice, my book wouldn't have the same chance as more famous authors' books, so I chose a publisher that made a personalised plan of action."

Working with a publisher usually means you won't get to make all the creative decisions yourself, especially on a graphic novel, where there will be discussions about the story and the characters. Lara's book was pitched at the concept stage, so she was given an advance to write it, and worked under the supervision of an editor.

She was asked to change certain plot points "because of the publisher's target audience specifics", but overall felt she had a good degree of creative freedom: "I always tried to keep the core message intact, so if there had been any compromise on that, I'd probably have fought it as best as I could. I was very lucky though."

READ THE SMALL PRINT

Lara says the publishing process was a learning experience: "I learned to fight for my rights and my value, and I learned a lot about how important it is to have boundaries. I promised myself that next time I'd ask from the start to have full transparency, as well as be extremely mindful of contract clauses, and have everything written down."

Legal aspects such as advance payments, territorial rights, and royalties were all negotiated on

Instants: The Art of Julie Mellan is a collection of over 100 animal watercolours created by the children's book illustrator, published by Editions Caurette.



"Having books published in Spanish and French made a huge difference getting a deal for an English translation," says Lara.



An English-language version of *Lara Pickle*'s debut graphic novel, which has already been published in Spanish and French, will be available next year.



"Do things little by little and it will all come together in the end," advises the artist and author Haylee Morice.

"I thought I needed to wait until I had a huge backlog of art, but instead I went for a smaller collection of just 60 images," says Haylee.



"I use Shippo for any domestic orders and then Pirate Ship for my international ones," Haylee says of her artbook sales.

➡ Lara's behalf by her agent. "Having a supporting agency backing you up, and fighting for your rights and needs is a big deal," she says. "They can and will negotiate better pay."

She had little involvement in the process, but in hindsight wishes she had been more included, as it would have given her a better understanding of her rights. "It's important artists know as much as possible!" she adds. If you don't have an agent, Lara strongly recommends seeking legal advice: "It's vital to understand all of the nooks and crannies in the clauses before signing contracts. If something is not understood, ask questions! A thousand questions if needed."

GOING SOLO

For those who want to retain full creative control, avoid legal hassles and work at their own pace, self-

publishing is a great option. You also get to keep all the profit!

One artist and author who advises following that route is **Haylee Morice**, who has created two artbooks that she sells at conventions, through her website, and at a couple of galleries. "Start small," she says. "Find a place that will do a small print run, and get a taste of what it's like to set up your print files and work with a manufacturer. As you do this you'll become familiar with the different printing methods and figure out things that you want adjusted for next time."

For her first artbook, Haylee did a first run of just 50 copies. "Once they sold out, I went for 200, and then eventually a 1,000-book print run. For my second book, I went straight for 1,000." The first book was funded by



“It's vital to understand all of the nooks and crannies before signing contracts”



Drizzle, published by Éditions Caurette, is the fifth artbook from the artist known as Moon.

a simple pre-order on her website, and the second via a Kickstarter, which produced a much greater sum. She says the profit margins on her books have been good, as they cost just a few dollars each to make and are sold for \$25.

Haylee also found it manageable to do the Kickstarter fulfillment herself but, as is common with self-publishing projects, there were some imperfections in the product to deal with. "When my books arrived, a substantial number of them had a flaw with the binding glue on the second page, so I ended up spending quite a bit of time checking through each book," she recalls.

On top of helping to supplement her income, Haylee also looks upon her artbooks as a rewarding creative project. "I love holding the finished product in my hands," she reflects. "It's something that encapsulates particular years of my life, and it feels like a compact time capsule that I can return to whenever I want. And also knowing that it has a place on many other peoples' bookshelves as well is the cherry on top."

"There's something so satisfying about holding art in your hands as a book," says Airi.



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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 233

Christmas 2023

It's Colour Dodge time! Discover how YouTube phenomenon Ross Tran created this issue's gorgeous Hatsune Miku cover art. Plus, we talk to Phillip Boutte Jr. about his concept art career, and learn how to boost artwork with backstory.



Issue 232

December 2023

We bring you the lowdown on Dreams – Procreate's exciting new animation tool, delve into the history of LightBox with co-founder Bobby Chiu, and industry experts give insights on exhibiting at art conventions.



Issue 231

November 2023

Expert educators at The Gnomon Workshop share the processes behind their art. We also visit a galaxy far, far away with a look at the making of Star Wars: Visions Volume 2, and learn to paint a fantasy-style self-portrait.



Issue 230

October 2023

Discover a range of stunning art in our character design special! We also speak with pro artists Betsy Bauer, Kenneth Anderson and Luis Gadea, and delve into the art of Wayfinder from Joe Madureira's Airship Syndicate.

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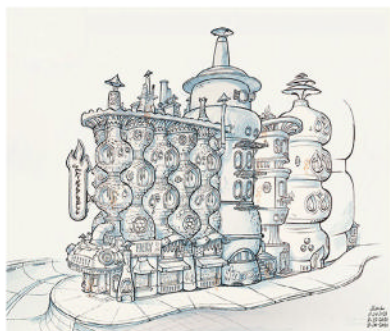
The Concept Art Awards 2023: **Winners**

Acclaimed concepts Explore the prize-winning artists and their celebrated work from this year's awards event at LightBox Expo



The fifth Annual Concept Art Awards show wrapped up recently at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium during this year's LightBox Expo. The event, run by the Concept Art Association, was created to recognise and elevate the essential artists working in the field of entertainment concept art.

© Pixar



Animated Feature Film: Environment Concept Art
Element City Firetown, Elemental
 by Don Shank www.donshank.com

The night celebrated professional, independent and student artists, and winners were awarded honours across over 20 categories. Actress Krystina Arielle (Star Wars: The High Republic Show) and artist Iain McCaig (Star Wars prequel trilogy) hosted the evening's ceremony, while an array of renowned concept artists from the worlds of live-action, animation and video games were in attendance.

Also honoured were Omar Gomet, named the Wacom Rising Star, and Karla Ortiz, who took home both the LBX Concept Art Luminary and 9B Collective Community Impact awards. Each year, Lifetime Achievement Awards are given to eminent artists at the top of their field, and this year's recipients were James Cameron and the late Kim Jung Gi.

For a full list of finalists, and to learn more about the Concept Art Awards, head over to www.conceptartassociation.com.



© Nickelodeon Animation Studio

Animated Feature Film: Color Keys
Color Keys Act 1, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Mutant Mayhem by Kellan Jett <https://kellanjett.art>



Animated Feature Film: Character Concept Art
Hobie Brown, Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse by Ami Thompson www.instagram.com/amithompson_h

© Sony Pictures Animation



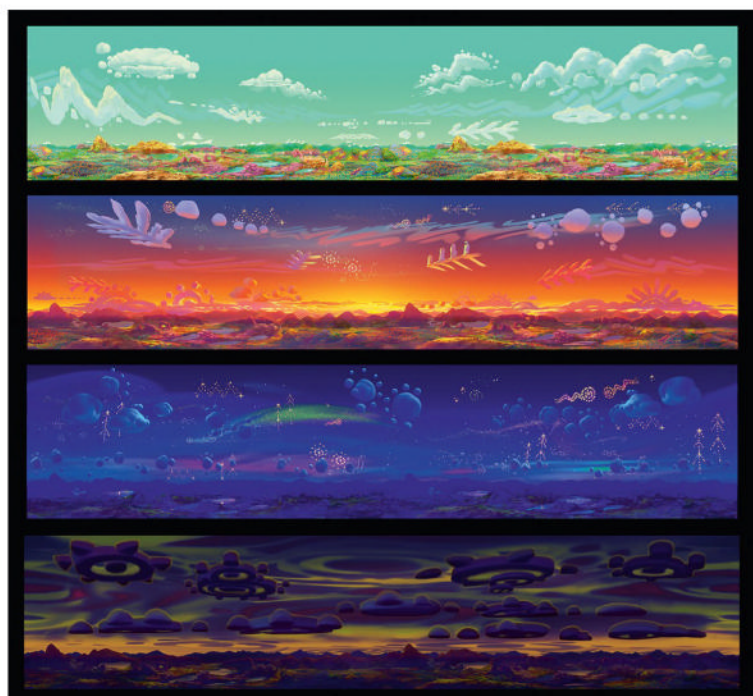
© Netflix Cartoon Pizza

Animated Series:
Visual Development Art
The Final Stand, My Dad the Bounty Hunter by Yuhki Demers
www.yuhkidemers.com



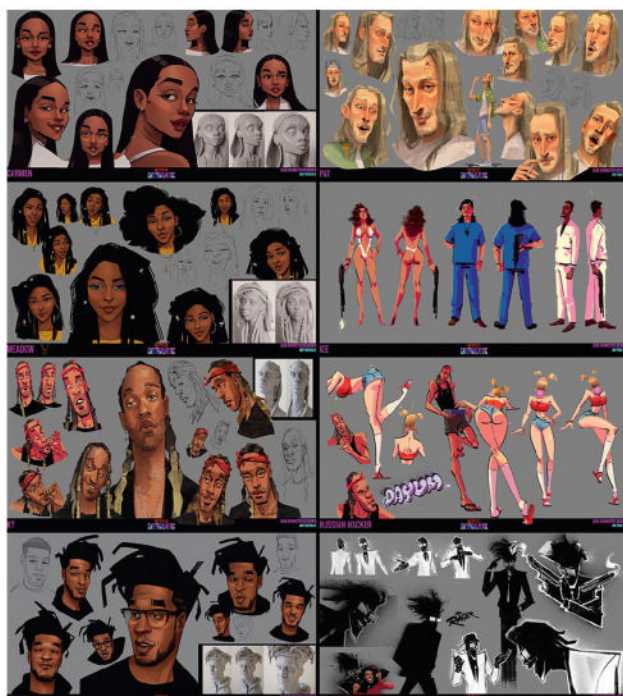
© Sony Pictures Animation

Animated Feature Film:
Visual Development Art
Manhattan, Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse by Yuhki Demers
www.yuhkidemers.com



© Netflix, Laughing Wild

Animated Series: Environment Art
Skies and Background Landscapes in the Spirit World, Spirit Rangers by Marie Delmas www.mariedelmas.com



© Netflix, DNEG

Animated Series: Character
Character Design, Entergalactic by Meybis Ruiz Cruz
www.artstation.com/meybisruizcruz

Live-Action Feature Film: Keyframe
Lo'ak and Payakan at Three Brothers Rocks,
Avatar: The Way of Water by Dylan Cole
<https://dylancolestudio.com>



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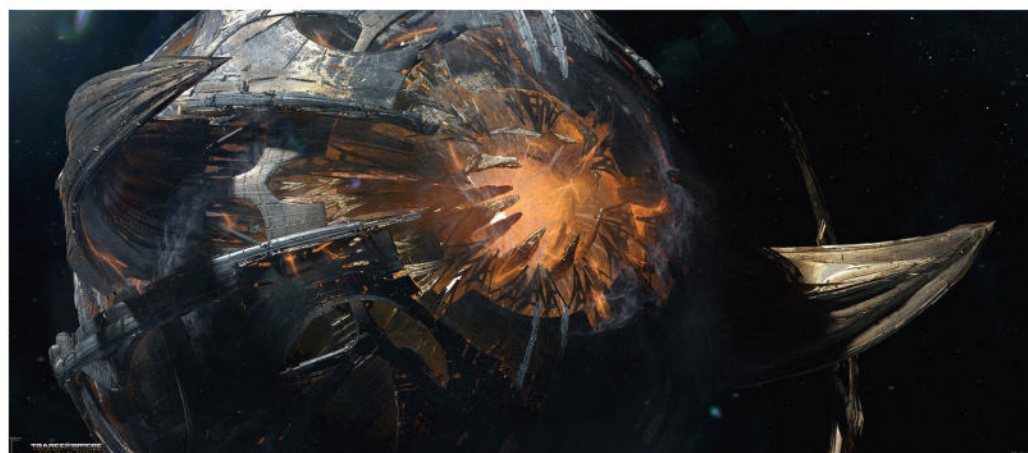
© Marvel Studios

Live-Action Feature
Film: Character
Midnight Angel, Black Panther:
Wakanda Forever by Josh Nizzi
www.joshnizzi.com



© 20th Century Studios

Live-Action Feature Film: Environment
Metkayina Village at Sunset, Avatar: The Way of Water by Dylan Cole <https://dylancolestudio.com>



© Paramount Pictures

Live-Action Feature Film: Prop/Vehicle
Unicron, Transformers: Rise of the Beasts by Pablo Dominguez www.artstation.com/pablodominguez



© 20th Century Studios

Live-Action Feature Film: Creature
Skimwing, Avatar: The Way of Water by Zachary Berger
www.artofzachary.com

Live-Action Series: Environment
Abandoned Hospital Hallways, The Last of Us by Pouya Moayedi
<https://pouyamoayedi.com>



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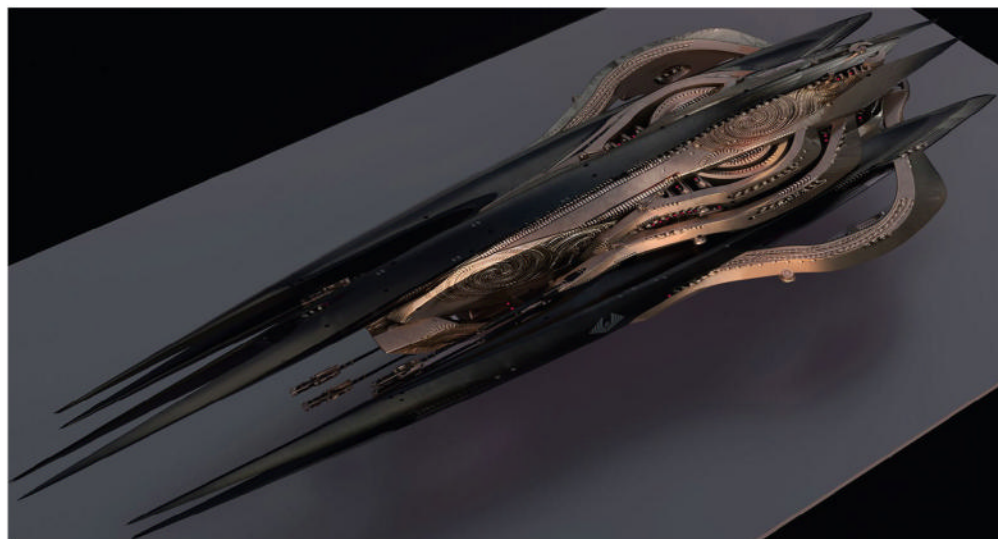
© WarnerBros.

Live-Action Series: Character
White Guards, House of the Dragon by Constantine Sekeris
www.artstation.com/artofconstantine



© Marvel Studios

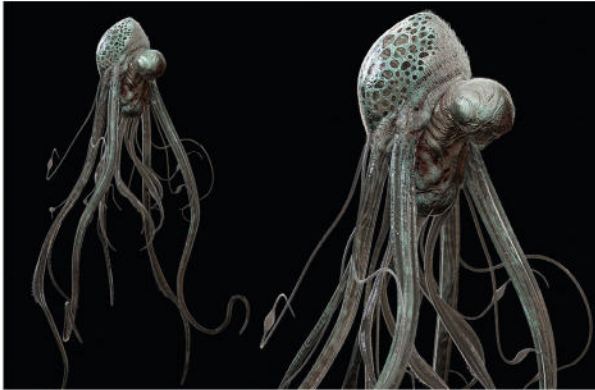
Live-Action Series: Keyframe
Tiki Bar, She-Hulk: Attorney at Law by Mushk Rizvi <https://bit.ly/46GYEAH>



© Skydance Television

Live-Action Series: Prop/Vehicle
Anacreon Ship 2, Foundation by Stephan Martiniere www.martiniere.com

© Netflix, Double Dare You (DDY)



Live-Action Series: Creature

The Traveler from The Autopsy, Guillermo del Toro's Cabinet of Curiosities by Jerad S. Marantz

www.instagram.com/jsmarantz

© Motive Studios



Video Game: Environment Concept Art

Environment Concept, Dead Space by Egor Poskriakov

www.artstation.com/egorpos

© Studio 369



Video Game: Prop/Vehicle Concept Art

Onacona, MetalCore by Stephan Martinieri

www.martinieri.com



© Santa Monica Studio

Video Game: Creature Concept Art

Nidhogg Exploration, God of War Ragnarök by Stephen Oakley

www.instagram.com/stephen.oakley

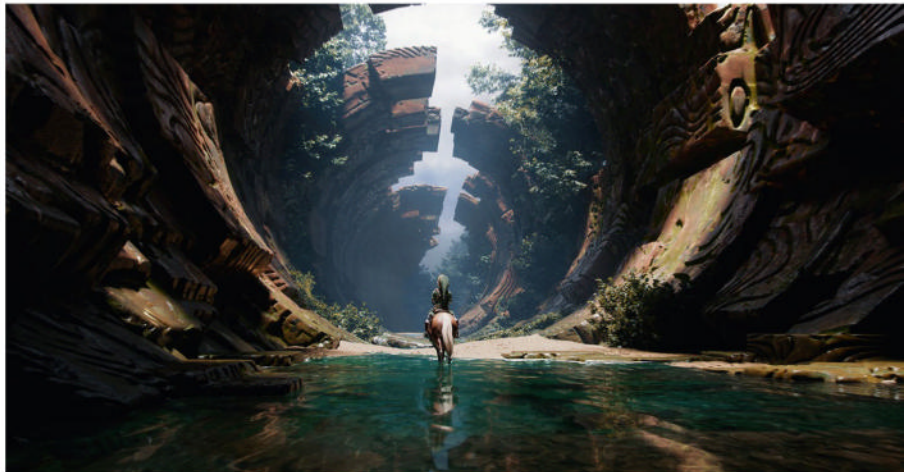
© Santa Monica Studio



Video Game: Character Concept Art

Kratos Hero Design, God of War Ragnarök

by Jose Cabrera www.artstation.com/thrax



Independent: Environment

Corridor by Florent Lebrun www.artstation.com/florentlebrun

Student: Environment
Magnetic Cave by Boyuan Shi,
ArtCenter College of Design
www.artstation.com/ryanshi



Independent: Character
Alien Outlaws Part 2 by Jerad S. Marantz
www.instagram.com/jsmarantz



Student: Character
SongHai by Songyu Liu,
Academy of Art University
<https://briarchy.artstation.com>



Fan Art
Road to the New York Comic Con by Nacho Molina
www.instagram.com/nachomolinaart



All images © Marvel

A keyframe illustration Rodney developed for the Hawkeye miniseries.

A day in the life of... Rodney Fuentebella

Just keep going The Marvel Studios visual development supervisor on keeping his focus, the joy of sketching, and sticking to your craft

“The alarm goes off around 6:30am. I hit it a few times, and then get up, have a protein shake and tea. If it’s my turn to take the kids to school I sort them, then get in my zen state for the commute to work.

When I get to work, I get everything settled and check emails, then pick up from the day before, either painting or sketching and 3D modelling. I do it for

about 20 minutes, then take a break. I’m pretty antsy and will find some background music or a movie. I’m the youngest of six kids, so I feel weird if it’s too quiet. I’ll work till lunch, which is around noon.

I’ll either go out with my co-workers or on my own at lunch. Maybe I’ll do sketches of people as I eat. Working on the computer so much, it’s nice to



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.

get that kinesthetic feel of something real. After lunch, I might touch base with people on the team to see what they’re working on. This will keep me inspired/nervous enough to work even harder, until around 6pm or so.

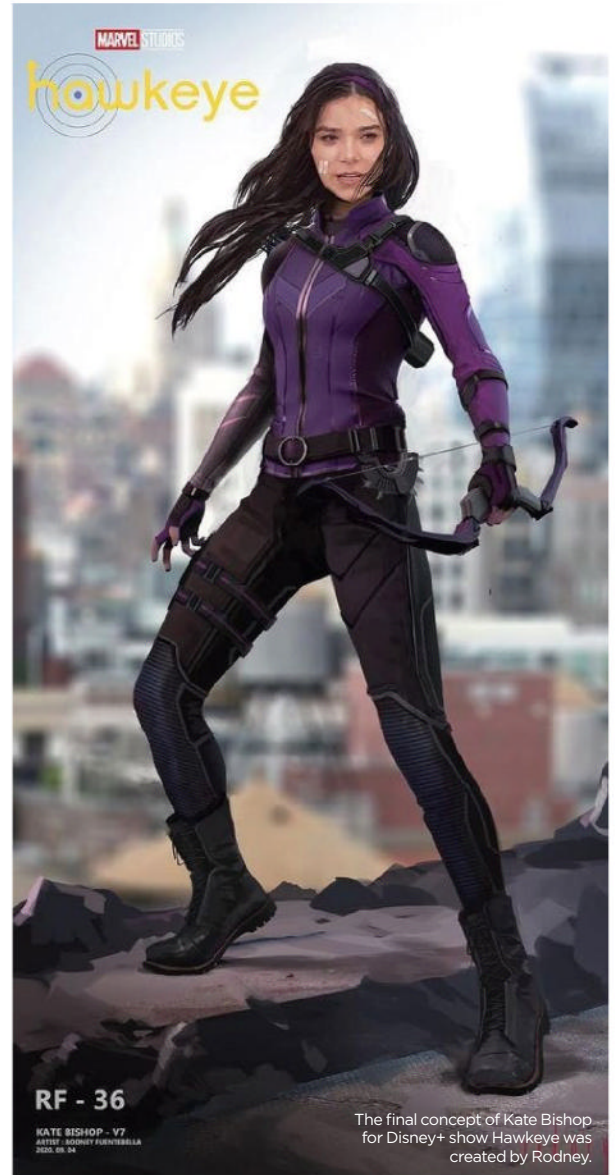
I go to my gym after work until the traffic dies down. Getting a good workout in helps to calm my general anxiety. My wife and I both work, so it’s take-out city for dinner at our house. If I’m close to a deadline, I’ll do more work, then just let my brain rest, catch up on a movie or play some video games; I bought a PS5 last year. I go to bed around midnight.

My advice for newcomers is just keep going. Keep making art. It’s hard when you don’t have a deadline, and some days you’re going to feel awful, but your chances don’t end until you stop. Remember that.”



Visual development supervisor Rodney has worked at Marvel for over 10 years. His career highlights were The Avengers, which was his first foray into keyframe art, and Hawkeye, where he first led a visdev team. See more at www.rodneymimages.com.

When not at the office, Rodney works from a sleek home studio.





My Nick and Hopps maquettes. I thoroughly enjoyed working on Zootopia and absolutely love the way these maquettes turned out.

Just out of the frame here is my Disney animation desk.

The first gift my wife Alena gave me; a 3D print of Higgins from Zootopia that she had modelled. It sat on my desk at Disney until Shiyeon Kim accidentally knocked it over and broke his ear off.

Cory Loftis

Family space The Disney designer shows us around the studio in his new Rancho Cucamonga home



than just looking at images on the computer screen. It's so incredibly

I love books; real, hold-in-your-hand, printed-on-paper books. I find them so much more satisfying

inspirational. I'm not just looking at random images, but a singular thought. I guess it feels a lot like listening to a single versus a well thought-out album. The album is much more of an 'experience', and so is a physical book.

I've never had space to enjoy books in my office. They always had to be in some other room, on the floor, or in boxes in the garage. When my wife Alena and I moved out to Rancho Cucamonga last year, we finally got that chance to bring our books and our work into the same space.

It's wonderful to be able to enjoy time in my office as well as just get work done. With two toddlers, we haven't had a lot of time to decorate, or unpack everything yet, but I've at least moved most of my art supplies, books and artwork into the space.

Artist news, software & events

My WildStar poster signed by the crew. I had already left for Disney before it hit store shelves. The crew sent me this poster signed by everyone.

A wall of mostly original art that has special meaning to me. I still have lots of pictures to hang in this house, but it's going to take some time.

An original clay sculpt Alena is currently completing of a character from our children's book, which I'm finishing up right now.

This is my ridiculously comfortable recliner that used to sit in my son's nursery. I love sitting there reading books. I also slept there when I came down with pneumonia late last year.

These plastic briefcases belonged to my sister and I when we were in elementary school. I've kept drawings stored in them ever since.



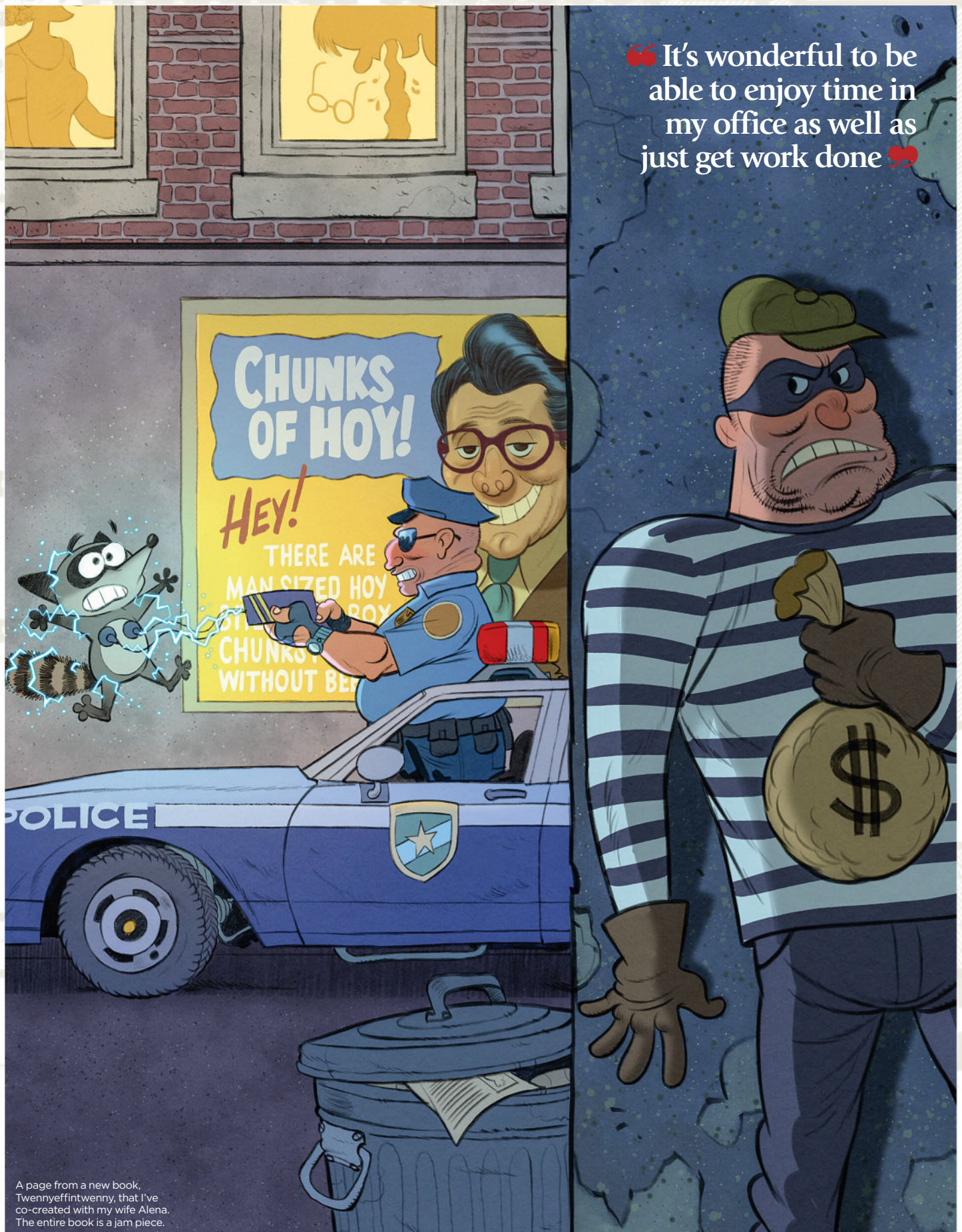
This is a pen and ink drawing done for a continuing pig vampire hunter project.

I have this wonderful recliner we bought when our son was born. It was in his nursery in Glendale, and we'd sit with him through the night in that recliner when he was a newborn. It's one of the comfiest chairs on the planet and a centerpiece of my office. The kids will sit there and watch a movie. I'll sit there in the evening and flip through new books. Alena will sit there and catch me up on the day as I finish assignments late at night.

Since we both started working remotely in early 2020, I think the biggest change to my workday is ➡

ImagineNation Artist in Residence





“It’s wonderful to be able to enjoy time in my office as well as just get work done”

A page from a new book, Twennyeffintwenny, that I've co-created with my wife Alena. The entire book is a jam piece.

ImagineNation Artist in Residence

➡ the hours. With two kids running wild around this house, only meetings are handled during daylight hours.

After the kids go to bed at about 8:30pm, the late-night shift at our home office begins. I generally draw at the desk now between about 9pm and 4am. That's not my preferred time to draw, but life has chosen our hours for us. Alena has her own large office on the first floor with me, but it's on the other side of the house.

GETTING IN THE ZONE

I'll often watch movies, put on YouTube videos, or listen to music. I find the most important thing is that the media is repetitive. The same series on loop or listening to the same playlist. It's meant to be noise, but not distracting and competing for my attention. I have a personal machine and a work machine at my desk, and I have a switch to swap between the two setups. For personal work, I've always enjoyed PCs, but I work faster with muscle memory if I have mirrored setups now, so Mac it is.

“This new space has been a true joy... I hope to make a large body of work here”

You may think my workspace looks cleanish, but that's not the norm. Once I start in on new work, whether a film, book, or gallery show, I sort of stop cleaning or changing my workspace until I'm finished. I get in the zone, and I don't want anything to break it. I'll watch the same thing on repeat until I'm done. You can call it superstitious, but the truth is my desk gets filthy.

This new space has been a true joy. I've always worked in tiny guest rooms, closets, or back corners of living rooms. This is my first true 'studio', and it's even more amazing that my family can enjoy the space as well. I hope to make a large body of work from this space.

Cory Loftis is an award-winning designer in the animation industry, working on films for Walt Disney Animation including Frozen and Zootopia. When not on the clock, he enjoys creating books with his wife Alena and spending time with their children. See more at www.instagram.com/coryloftis.



Jaguar head given to me on my last day at Carbine by my friend Miguel. I had some friends over years later and their kids picked the beads off the teeth until I caught them.



This is a spread from my book Before I Forget. It's a memory of my grandfather and I going fishing.

My computer desk I bought from IKEA almost 20 years ago! Also in the centre is a caricature of me for my 40th birthday from Ami Thompson.



Another look at my framed WildStar poster. One of the greatest experiences of my life was working at Carbine Studios.



A clay sculpt in progress by my talented wife Alena. The character is from our upcoming children's book.



I loved taxidermy as a child. Now I prefer fake taxidermy. My kids are still unsure of this yeti head.



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RossDraws rocks!

Hello ImagineFX crew! I've been a huge fan of RossDraws for so long and also subscribe to his Patreon. Then when I received my latest copy of the magazine his artwork was on the cover! I'll admit that I squealed just a little bit.

Thank you for getting Ross in the magazine. He's been a huge inspiration for me, and I've learned so much from his online tutorials and all the positive energy in everything he does. If anyone hasn't found him yet, I would definitely recommend checking out his Patreon and YouTube channel.

Rosie, via email

Rob replies Hi Rosie. Thanks for getting in touch, it's always great to hear from our readers. I couldn't agree more about Ross! His skills are of course top notch, but I totally concur, his passion and enthusiasm shines through, and he really passes on not just his knowledge, but his real love for the craft, inspiring so many artists both new and old. All of his socials and Patreon are fantastic; I'd totally recommend them too!

YouTube art sensation RossDraws joined us last issue with some stunning artwork and insights.



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?

Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 233 at ifxm.ag/single-iffx.



Eva Toorenent's workshop in issue 233 shows how you can develop a backstory to support your art.

Inspiring reads

Hi! I've subscribed to ImagineFX every month since I was in college. Every time I got discouraged from pursuing my career and during my breaking point in my final year in college, I opened my art magazines and read other artists' past lives and struggles. It's helped me build up my courage, and I know that the art community takes care of each other. You guys have had so much influence on me. I can't thank you enough!

Victor, via Instagram

Rob replies Hi Victor. Nice to hear from you, and thanks for sharing those thoughts. I'm sure you aren't alone in feeling the pressures of the real world at certain times. The art community may be a global one, but it can also feel close and connected, and it's lovely to hear when artists are supportive of each other. We're honoured to be a part of your story!

Breaking down the wall

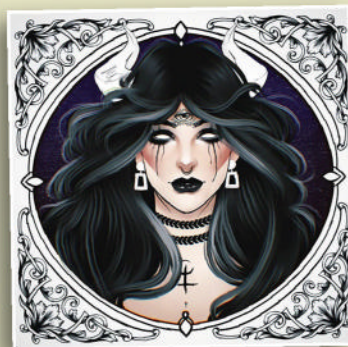
Hello there Rob. I've really been trying to hone in on my character designs recently but always felt that something has been missing. That's why I found Eva Toorenent's workshop about coming up with a backstory to help your creative process in last month's issue super helpful. Now I feel as though I've broken through the artistic wall that I'd been hitting. It was such great insight for me.

Kostas, via email

Rob replies Hi Kostas. Thanks so much for getting in contact. It's always a joy to hear how what we do at ImagineFX helps people, and having a network of artists like Eva on hand to offer their incredible expert insights is a real honour for us as well. If you're looking for more character design advice, check out the tutorial of this issue's cover art from Alex Jensen on page 60.



New works that have grabbed our attention



Debbi
[@miss_debbi](https://instagram.com/miss_debbi)



ArtfullyFaith
[@artfullyfaith](https://instagram.com/artfullyfaith)



Ruban Lourdhu
[@ruban_lourdhu](https://instagram.com/ruban_lourdhu)

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

THE ART OF OGNJEN SPORIN

Dominic Carter talks to the rising fantasy artist about carving out a career, building a portfolio, and his love of the genre



Ognjen Sporin might be a relative newcomer, but he's already begun working with the likes of Netflix, Wizards of the Coast and Marvel. Fuelled by his love of the fantasy genre and a relentless drive to improve, Ognjen's artwork is a shining example of what you can achieve if you roll up your sleeves and commit yourself to your craft. We caught up with him to learn more about his work.

Tell us about your background as an artist. How did you get started, and what path has your career taken? Honestly, I don't remember drawing that much more than the other kids when I was very little, but I started getting more into it around the age of 13, mostly drawing and designing



ANGEL

Ognjen frequently practises portraits, with subjects such as angels, outlaws and pirates.

anime characters. Very early on in that process I got introduced to online tutorials, and later also books and courses.

I quickly got very absorbed in practising art. I began taking it truly seriously when I was about 15, just around the time I started high school, even though I was realistically oblivious of any tangible artistic career prospects.

I don't actually know what it is that drew me to it, or made me start disciplining myself with drawing, but it was the first skill I seriously devoted myself to developing. I'm not sure what made me stick with it for a few years either, but I look at it almost

“I don't actually know what it is that drew me to art, or made me start disciplining myself with drawing”

Artist PROFILE

Ognjen Sporin



LOCATION: Serbia

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Wei Wang, Laurel D. Austin, Cole Eastburn, Max Grecke, Rafael Zanchetin, Frank Frazetta

MEDIA: Photoshop, pencil, ink

WEB: www.artstation.com/ognjensporin

as a fortunate coincidence that paid off for me relatively quickly, because I started getting my first commissions around the age of 18, and by 19 I had joined the more professional side of the art industry and was actually able to sustain myself from that work.



SKETCHES AND DOODLES

Ognjen enjoys experimenting with traditional media, something he wants to do more of in the future.



Initially, a lot of my higher-paying work was more concept art oriented, but as my career and art progresses, I think I'm now veering further in the direction of illustration, whether that be splashes, promo, covers, or interior book art. I've also done a bit of pre-production visual development work and it's something that really appeals to me. It feels like a nice mixture of both concept art and illustration, and provides a lot of freedom, so I'd love to take part in more projects of the pre-prod variety.

How has your art developed, and what has driven those changes? I think you could sort of track the development of my art along with the development of my influences. But practically, I developed a lot of my style or aesthetic by drawing and studying a lot, both from reference ➡

Ognjen Sporin

HELHEIM INHABITANT

This illustration was made
as a reward for a Draw This
In Your Style challenge.





PORTRAIT DEMO

One of the three portraits Ognjen painted as a final demo for his Portrait Painting course.

➔ and other artists, and making different discoveries and having happy accidents on the paper. I haven't actually focused any real energy on coming up with my own style per se, it's just something that's happened and progressed organically.

As a beginner, I feel that having a limited range of influences is not only natural, but also helpful, so that you don't become overwhelmed with too many options and possibilities. In that sense, tunnel vision and focusing on skill rather than style usually yields the best results and most progress.

Of course, as you develop your skills, you'll inevitably also develop artistically, and your influences will generally become more eclectic. I believe it's the inclusion of those

REXXAR AND MISHA

This duo from World of Warcraft are just a sample of the character sketches Ognjen has created for the fantasy franchise.



unexpected influences that give any artist a slightly more distinct edge and feel, including myself, but I also know I could always still find more different and interesting sources to pull.

What made you drop out of studying illustration at college, and why was that the right choice for you?

With the wealth of online resources available to everyone now, college



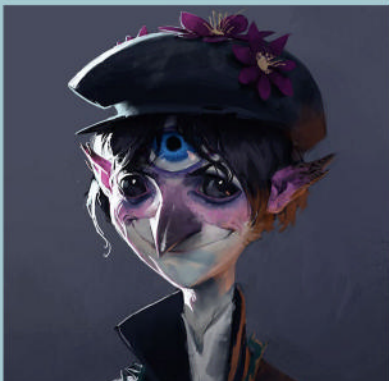
BELL DWARF

One of the many amazing daily drawings Ognjen creates to keep his skills sharp.

since I'd been so dedicated to it for years at that point.

Since then you've gone on to work for big names like Netflix, Wizards of the Coast and Marvel. What are they looking for besides a college qualification in artists?

College doesn't really play much of a role, if any, when it comes to getting hired as an artist. That role is filled by your portfolio, but it's not enough to just have a collection of really good images. Instead, what an aspiring artist should seek to do is organise and package the portfolio in a way that ➔



BEYOND THE FRINGE

A secret is hidden behind the cover of this creepy character's flowing locks.

often seems like a way of putting off reality and actually getting to work. That's sort of how I experienced it as well. It just felt like a bit of a waste of time, as all of my actual fundamental improvement and practice was done on my own free time.

As soon as I was getting good work reliably enough, I decided I should just drop out so I could really pursue my career exclusively. It seemed like it was obviously the right choice. At the time, I don't think I had even properly considered the possibility of running out of work and not succeeding at making art a long-term career for me,

LIGHT

This little character was created in exchange for an honest review of a ScreenBar Halo monitor lamp.



GOBLIN KNIGHT

Another DTIYS illustration, this time with a specially designed star-nosed mole.



MY PERSONAL PROJECT PERKS

Ognjen explains the benefits of taking the time to work on passion projects

1 You get to make riskier, more original, and unexpected decisions that art directors and companies will often pass up on a big production, primarily out of their fears of the project becoming unmarketable or too unconventional.

2 It allows you to explore and develop your own interests in depth, which in turn often allows you to make the work that actually gets you hired.

3 It often prevents the burnout and dissatisfaction that can occur when you're working exclusively on client work. Ideally it serves as a kind of palette cleanser and refresher so that you can get back into professional work with renewed vigour.

4 It's a perfect way to develop your own particular style and aesthetic, something that working on client projects often actively discourages.

5 It can help you to build up a bigger audience and begin monetising your artwork through selling prints and creating content.

COZY SPIDER

This charming knitting arachnid was drawn especially for Ognjen's fiancée.



Interview



FAIRY CATCHER

The sparrows in this personal project also appear in *The Wagoner* to add a sense of worldbuilding.



HELMET GOBLIN

A fun personal painting of a goblin wearing armour made from a helmet.

➡ clearly shows what it is that they can do for their clients in an actual professional pipeline.

What this means practically is not just having random pictures, but starting each of the projects with a clear intention. For example, clarifying for yourself that you want to work on interior book illustration, or on video game concept art. Then it's all about working around those parameters you set out. Including lots of exploration, sketches and development work is also helpful for your portfolio.

What appeals to you about working on fantasy projects in particular? I think my interest in medieval-type fantasy is primarily a reflection of the books, movies and games that left the strongest impact on me when I was



ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

The first in a series of portraits where archangels incarnate in a medieval world.

growing up. Harry Potter, Warcraft and The Spiderwick Chronicles were a few of my biggest influences. As a kid, I don't think I was ever really exposed to any sci-fi media, and now I feel like I literally live in a sci-fi world, what with staring at a computer screen the whole day and having grown up with the internet. Because of that, I feel as though coming up with sci-fi ideas and painting them would just be something of an oversaturation.

“There's a romanticism and idealism in me that relates to the past or the historical”

Fantasy is a kind of escapism for me, because it tends to be clearly separate and sometimes opposite from the modern world. There's also a certain romanticism and idealism in me that relates to the past or the historical, as opposed to the future, which I don't really have an interest in imagining.



GOBLIN AND FRIEND

Another goblin wearing helmet armour, this time with a special little rodent friend.



IRON DWARF

Ognjen creates a sense of strength and personality with his dramatic use of colour.

Of all the artwork that you've created so far, what are you the most proud of and why? I'm still very early on in my career, having only worked full-time in the industry for about four years now, and because of that a lot of my big studio work that I like is still under NDA (non-disclosure agreement). Still, out of everything that I've ever worked on professionally, I would say that my contribution to Ryoko's Guide to the Yokai Realms is what I both enjoyed working on the most, and feel the most happy with. ➡



WAGON DRIVER

Ognjen's first pass at the wagon driver character, complete with birds and thorny accessories.



WAGONER'S CARRIAGE

Wolves were chosen by Ognjen to pull the carriage because he finds them very cute.

➤ It's a full Dungeons & Dragons 5E supplement that raised over \$3million on Kickstarter, and I got to create over 15 characters, as well as around 10 of the promo and interior illustrations for it. It was also the most extensive project I've ever participated in! When it comes to my personal work, I don't really have a candidate that sticks out quite so much, but I think that my most recent paintings Scarecrow Carrier, and Lumberjack and Sparrow are most likely my favourites so far!

“It's important to recognise where you truly want to go and to start heading there”



THE VINEYARD KEEPER

An old man takes his work, as well as his wares, in his stride.

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

I'm looking to create a full Dungeons & Dragons book with the art almost entirely drawn by myself, working with Loot Tavern, the same guys who helped make Ryoko's Guide. I'm really excited about it and think it would be a crazy challenge, so I might need some help in the art department as the contents develop.

I've also been working with an online school called Artwod for more than a year now, and I'll likely be making some more courses for our programme in the near future, which is always an exciting change of pace from just the constant drawing and painting work.

What advice would you give to aspiring artists who are hoping to follow in your footsteps?

I think the most important element to improving, as well as becoming successful in art, is consistency. In order to maintain that consistency, you have to develop good habits, and in order to develop the habits, you have to build into them, take it one day at a time, and allow yourself to get acclimated. This way you'll avoid burnout and build a positive mental connection to studying and working.

If you can get yourself to study art for just half an hour every day, that will add up to a tremendous amount



STRAW GIANT

This character can be purchased as a print on a hoodie from drawned.com.

of mileage in just a year. And if you understand and take this journey as a lifelong marathon, it could add up into so much more over decades.

The other crucial piece of advice I'd suggest is to work on what you actually like and want to work on, especially as you're developing your portfolio. So many people, myself included, fall into the trap of trying to work on what's popular, appealing, or what we think might be expected of us. In reality, though, you're never going to make art that's better than the art you genuinely want to make and that you yourself like.

Of course, getting yourself to that point of authenticity is a journey in

THE WAGONER

Breaking down how planning made this music-inspired project easy to realise

This painting was in large part inspired by a song called The Wagoner by Sematary and Ghost Mountain, and it's probably the first image I've made that's in some way based on music. A crucial step in developing this piece was the preliminary sketches, where I came up with the Wagoner's visage, as well as how his little helpers, the sparrows, would look. As the Wagoner is in some way a metaphor for death, I didn't just want simple horses to drag the carriage, but something more symbolic and surreal, which is how I came up with the draped wolves.

After I had the characters established, I did a round of colour thumbnails, played around with the atmosphere and added a strange, crimson colour to the ground. I landed on a sketch that I liked and made sure to have a strong, solid drawing informed by plenty of reference, particularly for the wolves and carriage. With that stage solved, it's usually pretty smooth sailing, since I have the colour thumbs for reference as I paint, as well as a whole reference board to help me polish and detail.



WAGON THUMBNAI

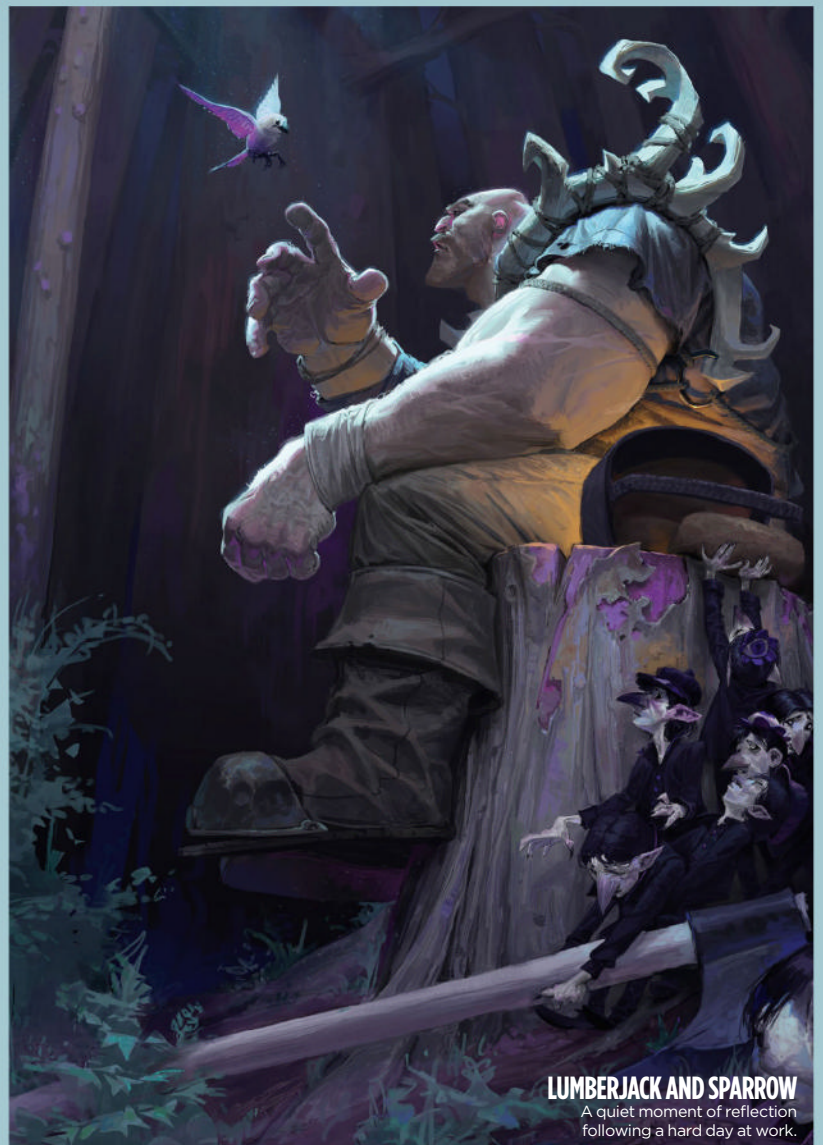
Testing out different compositions saved Ognjen unnecessary work further down the line.



and of itself, and it takes lots of trial, error, failure and experimentation, but it's important to recognise where you truly want to go and to start heading there. The sentiment might sound idealistic or impractical, but you'll find that there will always be projects and work for you, as long as your art is actually really good, no matter how niche your interests might be. 🍂

THE SCARECROW CARRIER

A big troll character protects the pumpkins from circling dragons.



LUMBERJACK AND SPARROW

A quiet moment of reflection following a hard day at work.

Joey Ro

The freelance fantasy artist rolls initiative as he sketches out new ideas for his latest TTRPG character creations

Artist PROFILE

Joey Ro

LOCATION: US

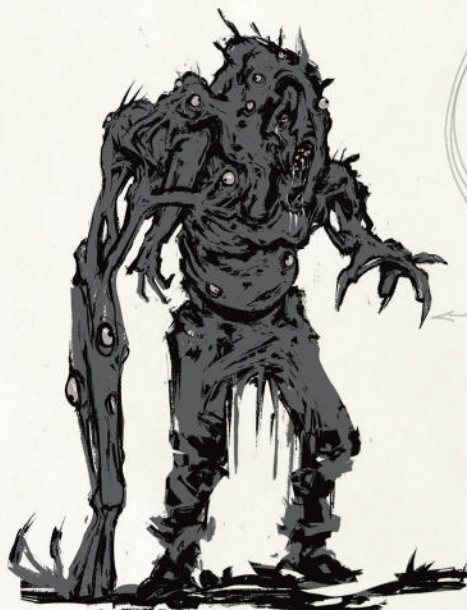


Joey comes from a family of artists, with he and his brother following in the footsteps of their father, who was a graffiti artist in the 70s, during their youth. Joey would later work as a texture designer for a wallpaper company and has now been making a living as a freelance artist for some time, focusing largely on creating characters and monsters for tabletop RPGs. He loves to mix artwork with TTRPG storytelling and finds his work incredibly satisfying.

www.joeyro.art

FOG LURCHER

"Growing up as a fan of movies like John Carpenter's *The Thing* and Ridley Scott's *Alien* has helped fuel some of my monster designs for sure."



GREATER DRAG FEEDER

"The original concept for the drag feeder came from a friend of mine. I worked on it a little further and pushed it to be more of an insectoid-human monstrosity to really tap into the creep factor we wanted for these guys."



BUCKLER

"Similar to *Dark Souls* characters, I wanted this warrior to have armour that felt like mismatched odds and ends. The asymmetry came easier because of it."



FARMER SKELLY

"Warrior skeletons have been a fun fallback of mine for some time. They initially began as quick sketches during a vacation, which have now grown into a collection of undead 'resparked' warriors that I keep adding to."

“ Sometimes a bolt of inspiration sets me ablaze ”



THE DEFENDER

"I love to ink bludgeoning weapons. Pockmarked and battle-worn weaponry can tell a lot about a character. In this case, they seem to believe a good offence makes a good defence."



Sketchbook



SWAMP SHAPE 1 & 2

"When I can, I like to work my poses as if the character was caught mid-step. In this case of a lumbering beast, I played with an initial shape, then duplicated and continued iterating until I felt I landed that heavy, slow, lumbering gait. This process helped get all the juice out of the squeeze."



“When I can, I like to work my poses as if the character is mid-step”

DOOR THROUGH THE VEIL

"This is a shining example of a stroke warm-up gotten out of hand. I was having so much fun making the stones that I decided to make a whole arch, which then of course needed a subject."



TAMBURN BEAST

"Sometimes a lightning bolt of inspiration sets me ablaze. In this case it came from a twisted, dark short story, and an accompanying piece of pixel art that birthed this guy. He's a beast that haunts the shores of Tamburn Lake."



THE RANGER

"Breaking the silhouette up on this one was a fun challenge. It shows enough to read at first pass, but is obscure enough to push the narrative of this character's stealthy methods."

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

LEGION SKELLY

"I thought it would be cool to imagine these raised warriors' flames being different colours based on their levels; a typical RPG ranking common to legendary status, the flames change as they become more powerful. This guy would have been a mid-tier level skelly."



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Advice from the world's best artists



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Photoshop

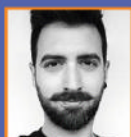
HATCH A FANTASY CHARACTER DESIGN

Cover artist **Alex Jensen** picks out the important details behind the concept and creation of his sword-wielding warrior bird

Artist PROFILE

Alex Jensen
LOCATION: Spain

Alex is a character artist who has a passion for drawing, exploring and creating new designs for the both animation and video game industries. alexjensenart.es



Fantasy warriors, creatures and many anthropomorphic characters are themes I always love to draw.

It's a wonderfully diverse and rich world where I'm able to contribute creative solutions.

This concept was devised for a character design challenge themed around a bird warrior. Whenever I have the time, I'm always eager to dive into these challenges. I relish the opportunity to tackle character

design, and learn from other artists' approaches and execution, which I find incredibly inspiring.

It's a perfect space to experiment differently from my usual methods, and the fact that it's a short challenge allows for more direct execution, avoiding days of extensive concept exploration. It also encourages me to take a step out of my comfort zone, tackling concepts I may not have had the chance to work on before. Have I ever created a warrior bird? Let's see what comes of it!

Throughout this process, I merge the more traditional methods with digital, initially sketching ideas in a notebook and transitioning across to digital to render the final image, and add those finishing touches. With this piece, my goal was to create a contrast between an elegant and masterful bird, who exudes lightness and yet carries a certain power in his swordsmanship. He's a kind of knight who comes from a grand realm, undefeated but battle-tested through numerous conflicts.

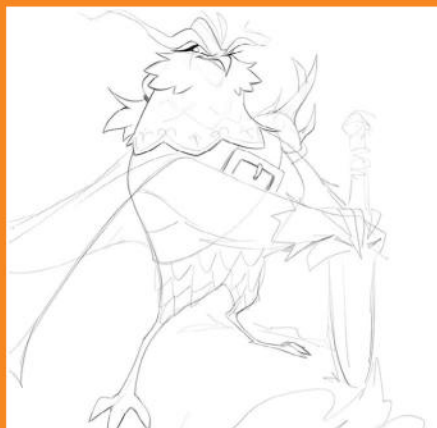
How I create...

A FEATHERED FIGHTER



1 Rough ideas

I always start with rough sketches, allowing my imagination to roam freely or finding inspiration from references. I like to keep the drawings loose and avoid delving into details too soon. My main focus isn't on perfecting the drawing, but rather enjoying the creative process as I aim to extract as many ideas as possible without fixating on precise construction or technique.



2 Refine the concept

Choosing ideas that I think might work, I aim to combine them into a unified design and will add or remove elements until I'm satisfied. At this point, I'll continue sketching quite loosely so I can quickly discard any elements I don't like during the process. Next I refine the sketch, focusing on structures and volumes to ensure a consistent and realistic final appearance.



3 Bring the character to life

Breathing life into a character with colour is one of my favourite aspects. My approach to colouring is pretty simple: fill the silhouette with a solid colour and add masks for different elements. I incorporate shadows in Multiply mode and then apply gradient and effect lights to emphasise the character's expression and gaze, which, for me, is always the most impactful feature.



VITAL VISUALS



Light sources

Rim lighting is always a great way to make the character stand out from the background and further accentuate the texture and volume of particular elements. Typically, the rim light will be positioned behind the subject, on the opposite side of the key light as a complementary light source.

Additional touches

Adding noise or chromatic aberration can impart a more organic feel to your image. A subtle layer of noise creates a paper-like effect with a hint of texture, while chromatic aberration adds dynamism and vibrancy. I prefer using it with low opacity, ensuring it's not immediately noticeable at first glance.

Wide viewpoint

I aimed to use a wide shot to showcase both the details and elements that tell a story, paired with a strong and dynamic pose, reinforced by elements like the cape or the wind-blown smoke. Using a simple colour palette avoids visual noise and directs the viewer's focus towards the character's expression.

Dynamic smoke

I enhanced the dynamism with a smoke effect on the ground, giving the sensation of the character posing on a circular base around them, and guiding the viewer's gaze upwards. I use the Lasso tool for this effect as it feels more dynamic and loose.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: SOFT PENCIL

A pencil texture that, combined with pen tilt, creates expressive lines. My most-used brush for sketching or inking.

TEXTURE BRUSH

Mostly used for shading or adding colour, I love the texture and how organic it feels.

SMOOTH GRAIN

I use this finger brush to softly blend shadows, volumes or effects. I love the subtle grainy effect!

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Technique focus

DELAY DETAILING

Jordan Kerbow explains the value of having a steady workflow behind his stunning fantasy art

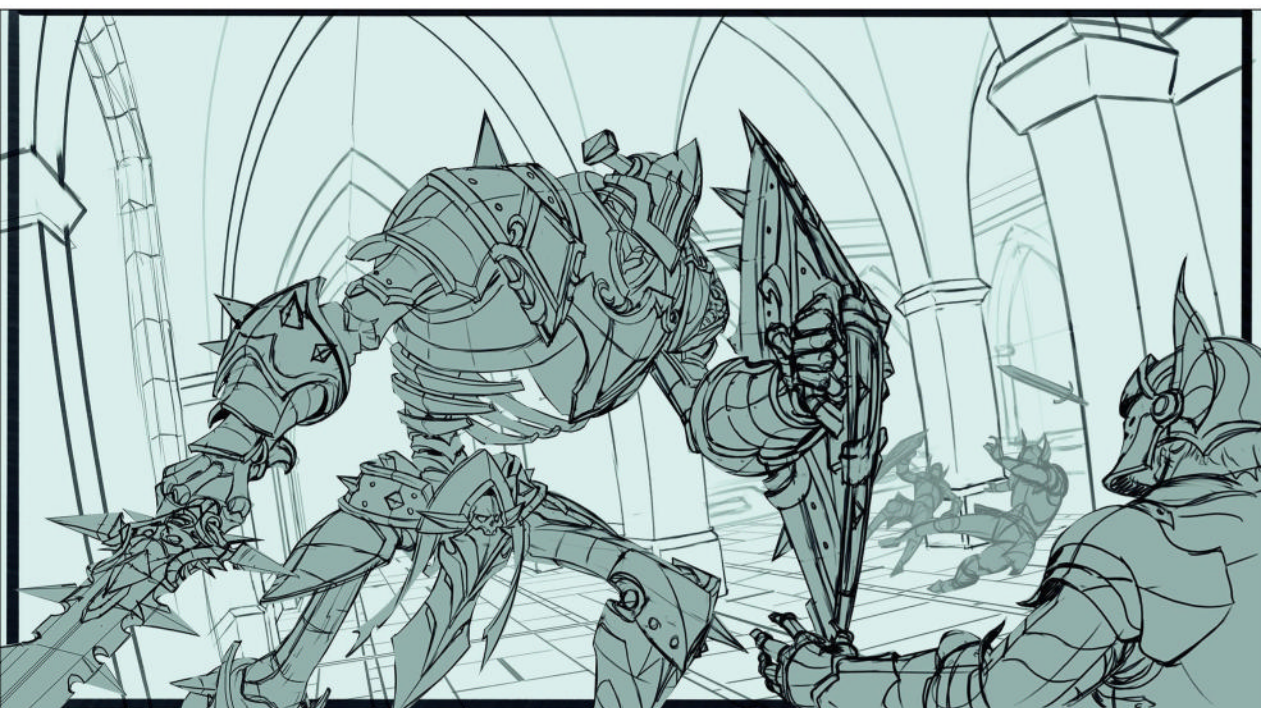


"I initiated the creative process with three or four value sketches, which emphasised the character's hulking

size and employed evocative, horror-style lighting for the ambiance. Upon selecting a sketch, I began the final.

In order for me to capture all of the action around him, I used a wide-

angle perspective with a subtle Dutch angle. Once the foundation was set, I laid in the major areas of colour and then built up my lighting using layers to achieve the desired effect. After that I zoomed in and rendered each area to completion. I recommend planning a simple value pattern early and to avoid detailing until everything is in place."



Artist PROFILE

Jordan Kerbow

LOCATION: US

Jordan is a hooligan that escaped the jungle and taught himself to draw. He loves Dungeons & Dragons, orcs and all things fantasy.
<https://bit.ly/4920pK8>

Photoshop

COMPOSITION: COMMANDING YOUR FOCUS

Turn composition chaos into actionable steps using placement, size, colour and texture to build visual hierarchy with advice from **Mad Boogie Creations**



Artist PROFILE

Mad Boogie Creations

LOCATION: Brazil

Mad Boogie Creations is a Brazilian outsourcing studio that creates whimsical illustrations and visual development work for clients globally, and also develops its own original IPs. www.madboogie.com

Whether you're a seasoned artist or just beginning your artistic journey, understanding composition makes all the difference. It has the power to guide the audience's eye, making certain elements pop while subduing others to improve storytelling.

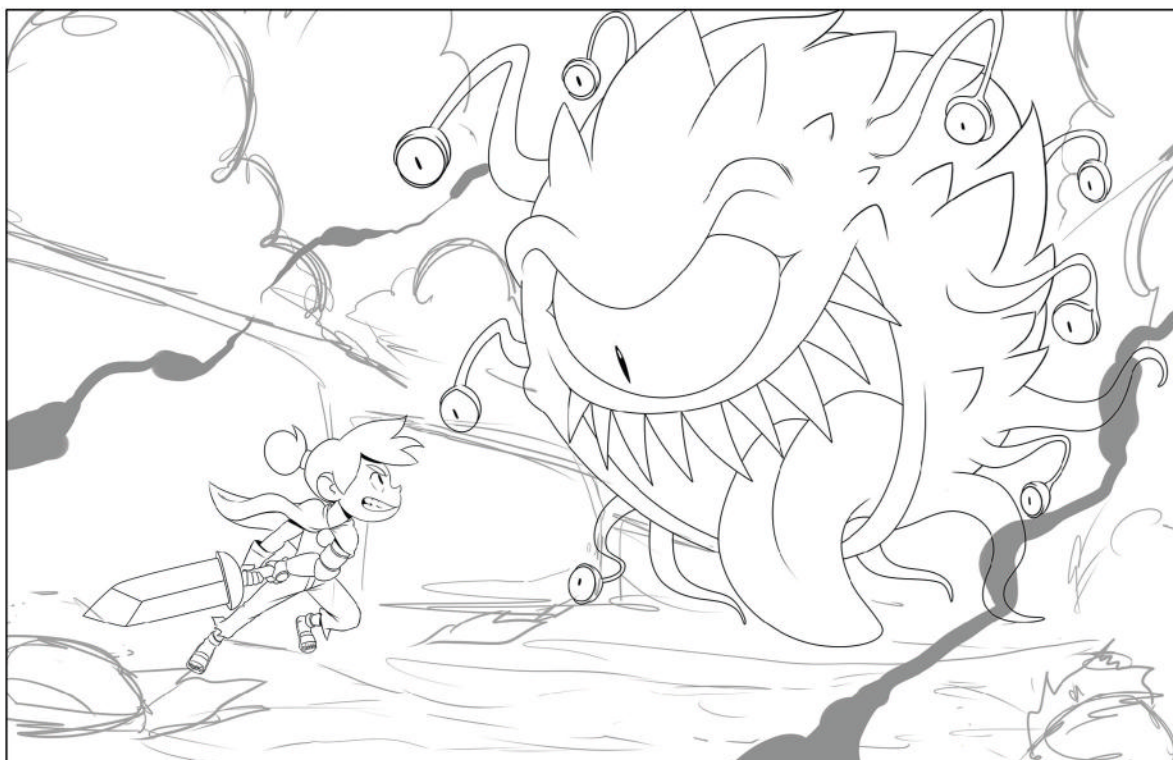
In this workshop, artists Amanda Duarte, Julio 'MZ09' Cesar and

Filipe Laurentino will share the keys of composition, ensuring you use them confidently and effectively.

We'll start with thumbnails, where manipulating the position, size and angles will dictate dominance in a scene, and how greyscale tones can add depth with overlapped elements and atmosphere. And no illustration

can be complete without the perfect splash of colour and texture, so we'll also talk about these nuances.

From well-known concepts like the rule of thirds through to more subtle considerations like framing and staging, this workshop provides an objective look into the world of composition. Let's get started!



WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: KYLE'S PAINTBOX - GOUACHE SOFT

Used for sketching. This is a modified pencil brush from Kyle Webster.

KYLE'S FX BOX - ADD WATER SLOWLY

This brush is great when it comes to blending.

HARDSOFT FLIPPED

Hardsoft Flipped is used for soft and hard edge rendering.

See more Photoshop brushes available from Mad Boogie Creations at <https://bit.ly/49njCpA>

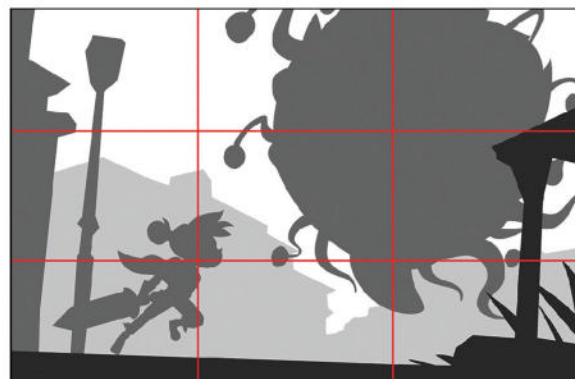
1 The importance of positioning

The more an object is placed towards the centre, the more attention it will get. While it can be visually striking, especially when displaying other elements symmetrically, it can also make the composition feel too rigid or stagnant. We aimed to illustrate a dynamic battle between our hero, Caito, and a colossal Beholder. While neither character occupies the exact centre of the composition, the focal tension between them does.



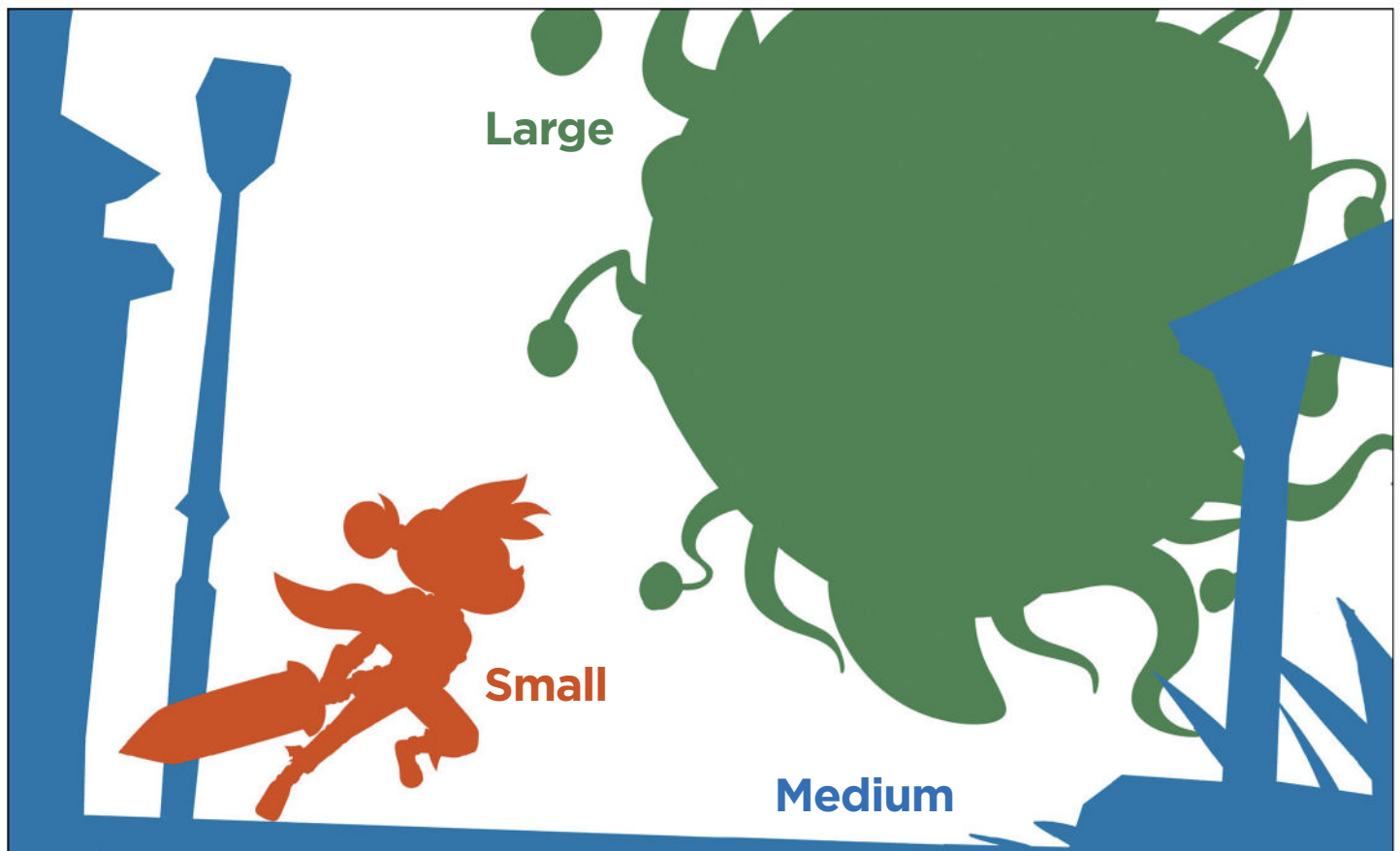
2 Set the stage

Staging is the way you arrange elements, as if you were organising a theatre stage. Consider what elements are important to this scene, where are they displayed, and why. With a backdrop of a village's destruction, the impending battle between Caito and the Beholder is staged as the scene's pivotal moment.



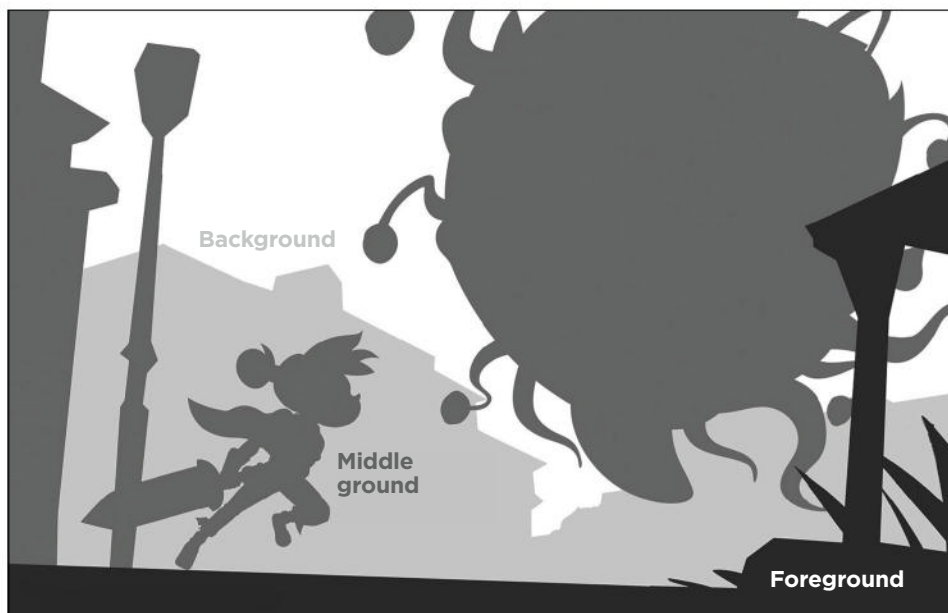
3 Use the rule of thirds

The rule of thirds is about placing any important elements along the lines and intersections of a 3x3 grid. Positioning the hero and monster in the opposing thirds guides the viewer's eye along that diagonal, while also ensuring both subjects are balanced within the frame.



4 Consider the size of elements

Size determines dominance. Bigger elements usually capture the eye, but contrast is key; a small, brightly coloured element among a sea of larger muted elements can still be the focal point. You can break down any composition into large, medium and small-sized elements, then play around with their positioning to find out what works best.



5 Develop the layout with planes

Grouping elements into three planes – the foreground, middle ground and background – can help to create compelling layouts in a less overwhelming way, even if you have highly complex scenes. On our thumbnail we utilised these planes, and especially the negative space between them, to ensure a clear visual hierarchy of the confrontation.

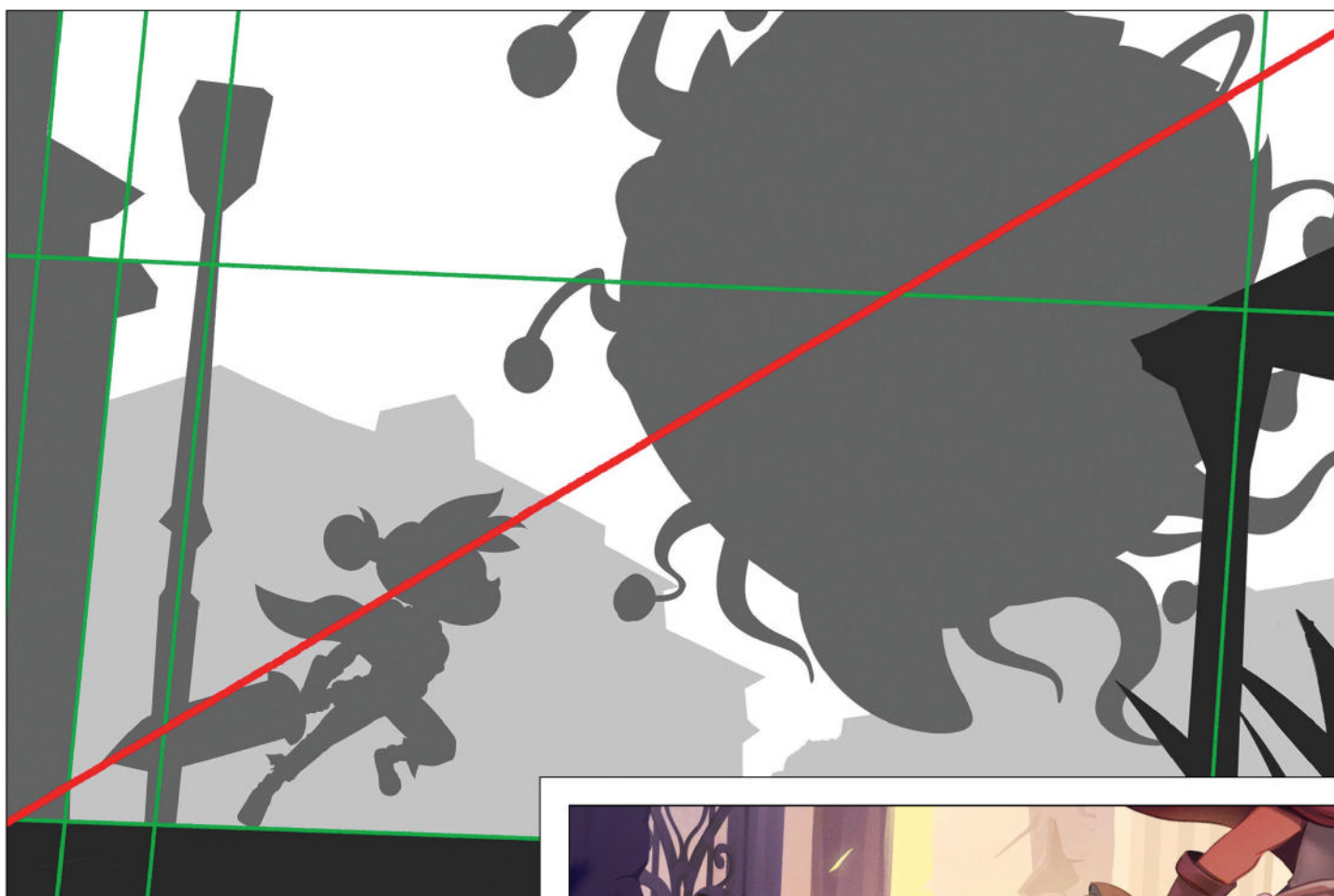
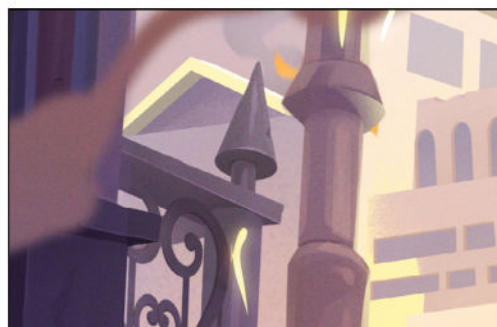
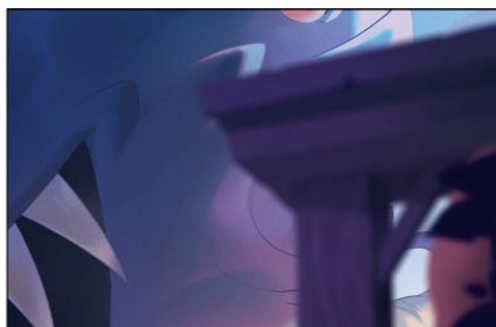


6 Framing and cropping

Framing isn't just about borders, it's also about selective emphasis. Choosing to omit certain things tells the story as much as showing them, and cropping elements out implies that there's a world beyond what's being shown. Our choice of letting the buildings in the foreground exit the frame reinforces that Caito's showdown with the Beholder is happening right in the heart of the village, further immersing the viewer. ➡

7 Create depth

Overlapping elements convey depth and hierarchy. Even a large item, when overlapped by a smaller one, can appear less dominant. Elements rarely exist in isolation; overlaps also make a scene more natural and relatable. In our scene, this was especially vital to convey a sense of scale. Despite being further away from the structure in the foreground, it's clearly still massive.



8 Mix up your angles

Using perpendicular and parallel lines helps to evoke both stability and calmness, establishing a sense of order within the image, while diagonals and leading lines will introduce both movement and tension, and direct the viewer's eye. In our scene, the parallel lines in the background starkly contrast with the dynamic diagonal that links the two characters together.

9 Tell story with patterns

Patterns introduce rhythm and predictability through repetition, and breaking these patterns can be a great tool to capture the attention. In our composition, the diagonals cut through the structured building grid, symbolising the disruption caused by the monster and the looming battle in the once peaceful village.



10 Only use tangent lines wisely

Tangents are lines formed by the edges of different elements meeting, and can be distracting and confusing. Unless intentionally used, they are best avoided. For example, we chose to keep this tangent to highlight Caito's feet lifting off the ground, which shows imminent action and adds more tension.



11 Highlight focal points with colour

Colours set mood, emotion, atmosphere and even the time of day. Highlight your focal points with contrasting hues, saturation and tonal values. In our final painting, the red areas seen above, which are the focal point, have very warm and very cool vibrant colours next to each other, and the most variation in values. The green areas, on the other hand, predominantly feature muted colours.

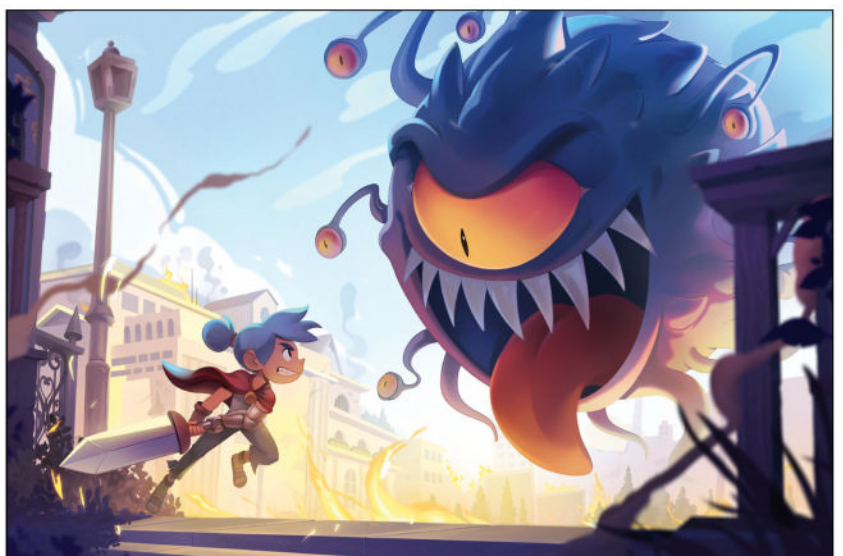
12 Add texture effectively

Textures add depth, detail and interest. The red sections have a medium detail level, which was a stylistic choice. Because of that, we had to make sure everything else contrasted well to support this decision. That's why the most intricate textures appear on the purple areas. This, combined with the limited colour variation and a little blur to convey depth of field, maintains balance.



13 Find subjective attraction

Our eyes are naturally drawn to certain elements, like faces and emotionally charged subjects. These can command attention regardless of other compositional factors, which means we have to be careful when adding in, for example, accidentally prominent background characters who might overpower the focal point.



14 Rules are made to be broken

While these concepts offer a solid base for your creativity and can help you tackle challenging compositions, the main objective remains the same: to tell your story in the most effective way. These concepts are useful tools rather than strict rules. Adapt and break them as needed to best show your vision.



Technique focus

CONSCIOUSLY CHOOSE COLOUR

Mengxuan Li takes notes from her surroundings as she picks out a palette for a new series of paintings



"This is a series of paintings based on the short story of a witch looking for her cat. For this, I used my real-life surroundings as my inspiration and reference, and added stories to them. In terms of colour selection, I like to use impressionistic colours. I also

like to create saturation, and warm and cold colour contrasts in these images. When deciding on colours to paint, we can choose the tone and atmosphere based on our subjective consciousness and feelings, and then exaggerate them. I also recommend drawing thumbnails of different tones to test their possibilities." 🍎





Artist
PROFILE

Mengxuan Li

LOCATION: China

Shanghai-based concept artist Mengxuan Li is currently working in the games and animation industries. She always looks to create a sense of intimacy in her artwork.
<https://bit.ly/3S7Sg0M>

Krita

CREATE DRAMATIC LIGHTING EFFECTS

Pro illustrator **Toby Willsmer** shares his key techniques for painting and adjusting standout lighting in your artwork

Artist PROFILE

Toby Willsmer

LOCATION:
New Zealand

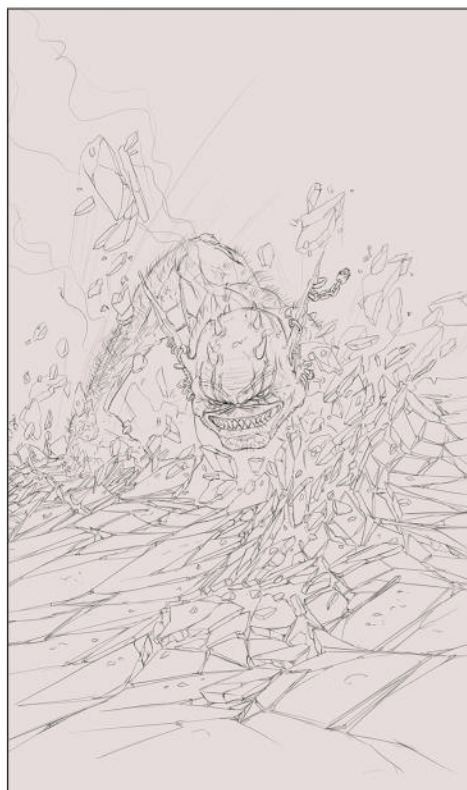
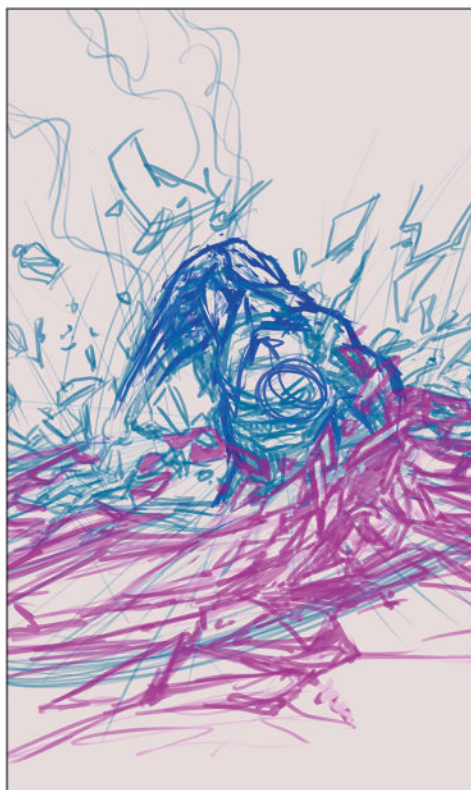
Toby is a freelance illustrator in the comic and publishing worlds. His work is known for its vibrancy and dynamics. www.willsmer.com



In this workshop, I'll be focusing on some techniques I use to add dramatic lighting to illustrations. We'll start from the beginning, where I'll describe the initial sketching stages and set up some simple masks to use while painting. From there, it's on to the process of painting our light sources, including using Adjustment Layers to enhance colours, and some post-colour adjustments to give your finished illustration depth.

Throughout this tutorial, I'll share pointers to keep in mind such as tweaking your saturation levels and adding movement when painting with light effects. This workshop will also take a look at shadows and how you can use a simple technique to add more depth to them. I'll be using the painting software Krita for the entire piece, explaining the default brushes that I've used for this piece, plus how you can give a finished illustration extra pop with the help of an overall Filter Layer.

Almost all of my work is figurative and having a basic understanding of anatomic form will absolutely help you when it comes to adding in dramatic lighting to enhance figures. Whether you're just starting out or honing your skills further, focusing on the early stages of sketching and adding values will help you find the right mix of light and dark in your artwork. This practice is a real asset when you begin to paint lighting in your illustrations. With that covered, let's get stuck right in.

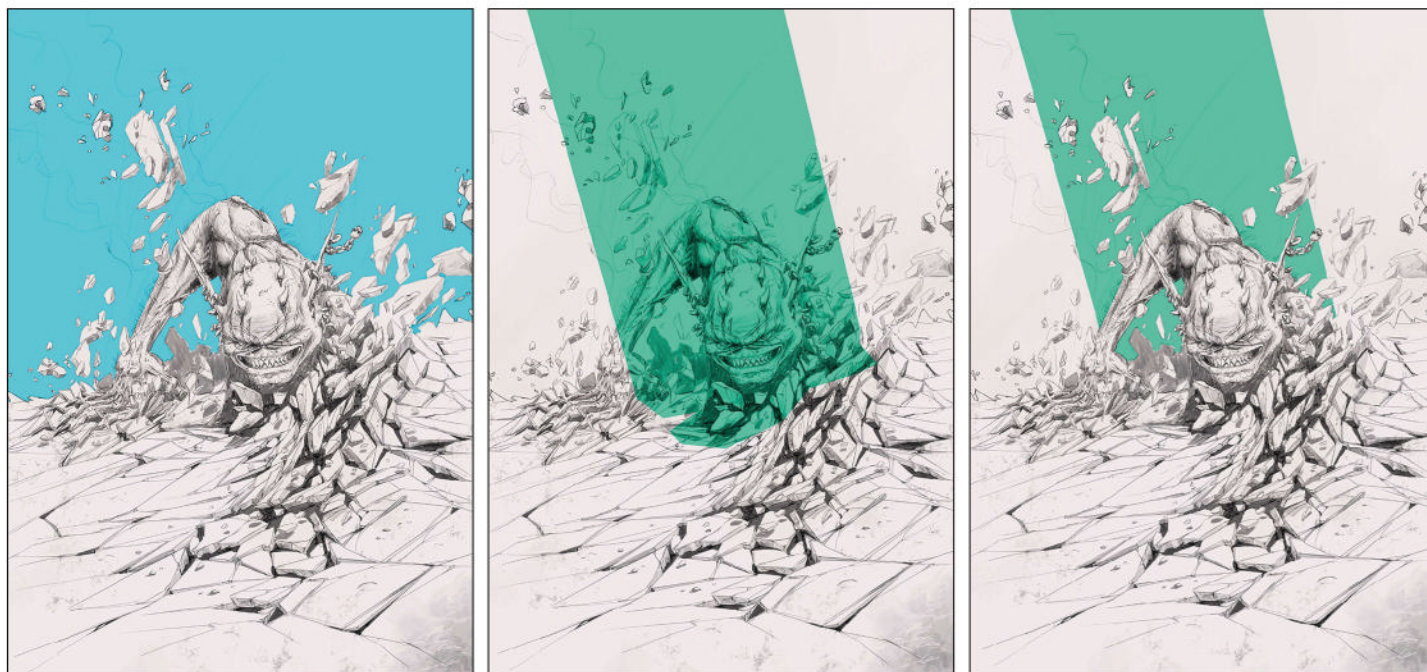


1 Gradually form the basis for your initial concept

When you want to use some dramatic lighting in a piece, you'll still need to start off with the basics. Here we begin with the rough idea, before moving on to line work, and then adding in some base values and basic shadows as a jumping-off point to work from. As we progress, we'll add in more shadowing with colour before bringing in the scene's primary light source. ➡➡

In depth Dramatic lighting





2 Draw out masks for different areas of the image

Make some masks in separate layers underneath the line work, then use a basic ink brush to paint out the main top area mask, and the Bezier Curve selection tool for the basic shape of the background mask. Using the Contiguous Selection tool, we'll select the top area mask, invert the selection, and then delete everything from the background mask shape to get our final background mask.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

KRITA

DEFAULT BRUSHES:
BRISTLES-3 LARGE
SMOOTH

I use this dry brush the most, at every stage from the sketch, to filling and defining details.

TEXTURE SPRAY

For textured fades at smaller sizes, and at larger sizes for textures like stone or debris.

WET BRISTLES ROUGH

Used in the background at larger sizes for filling areas, and for the smoke effect at smaller size.

WATERCOLOUR TEXTURE

Mostly for background wall textures, starting large and adding smaller sizes on top for depth.



3 Starting point for the light

Using the top mask selection, add base colours and shadowing to set the overall tone for the lighting. As this stage is usually fast and somewhat messy, it's best to paint this in a layer that sits under the line work. This saves us having to redefine any line work at a later stage, when we paint the focus area in a layer that's above the line work.



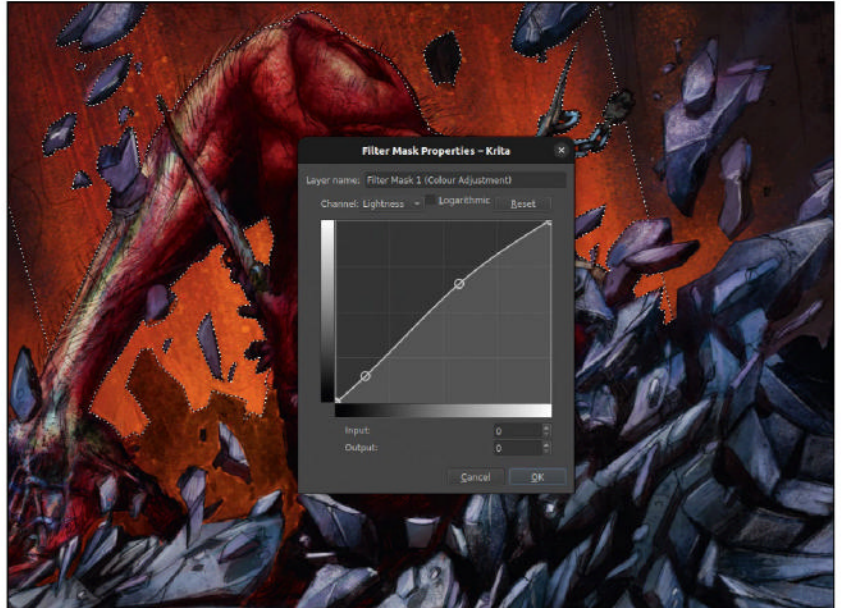
4 Add the default light

Start to paint in the default top-down light source based on the basic values we shaded in the early stages. This lighting is meant to be more diffused than the main light source, as the heavy lifting for the lighting and shadows will be a much stronger light source coming from below the character and out of the ground.



5 Background light flare

Selecting the background mask shape, paint inside it to concentrate on the flaring effect. Once we have the glow the way we want it, use a basic airbrush set to Erase and soften the edges from the selection. We'll also invert the selection and use the same airbrush to paint in some very faint black to define the flaring column once the inner edges have been softened.



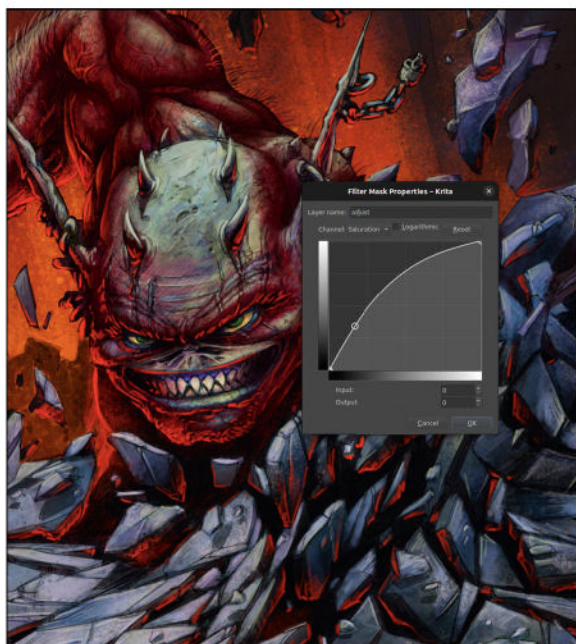
6 Avoid oversaturation

When using strong colours to define areas of an illustration, it can be easy to oversaturate all the colour in that area. Here we want to use a Filter Mask Colour Adjustment layer to lighten the flare and make it glow a little more. By doing so, this will take the saturation down. Use Lighten rather than Saturation in order to achieve this, as we don't want to only desaturate the colour.



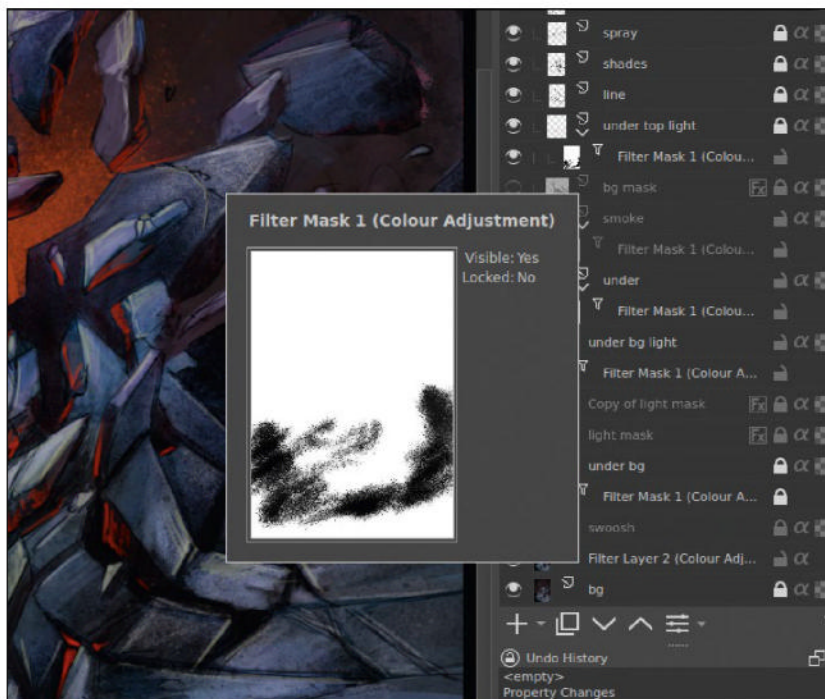
7 Create the glow from below the creature

We'll only use two shades of a colour for the main light source: a darker shade to start with and a lighter one for detailing. The aim is to make it look as though the light source is strong and directional, contrasting the default diffused light. Where the light is the strongest, paint more defined lines, and where the source is further away, blend it more into the shadows. ➡➡



8 Saturate the focus lighting

The image is now coming to life and I can clearly see where the light needs to be strongest. Remembering that we lightened/desaturated the background flaring to push it backwards in the image, we now want to up the saturation on the light effects layer to pull the lighting forward. Using an Adjustment Filter Mask, increase the saturation only to boost the lighting.



9 Filter Layers and Masks

When using Filter Masks in Krita, you can use any paintbrush in Erase mode to remove parts of the applied filter. So if you want your Filter Mask adjustments to only affect a specific part of the illustration, simply select the Filter Mask or Filter Layer and then paint using Erase mode. Here, I used this technique with a spray brush to have only the focus area affected by the filter.



10 Group layers and adjustments

It's always a smart idea to group together the focus area layers so that we can make any adjustments within the group if needed. By doing this, any applied Filter Layer adjustments will only affect the layers within that group. With this piece, we want to pull the character into the default light a little more, so we'll adjust the lightness within the particular group of layers for this.



11 Multiply airbrush shading

As the illustration progresses and the main lighting has now been completed, we want to push back some of the shadows in certain areas. To do this we can use the default Multiply airbrush. Using the Colour Selection tool, pick out the colour where you're planning to add in shadow, and then set it to a shade darker than previously. After that, lightly paint at varying brush sizes to add a generally darker tone to an area.



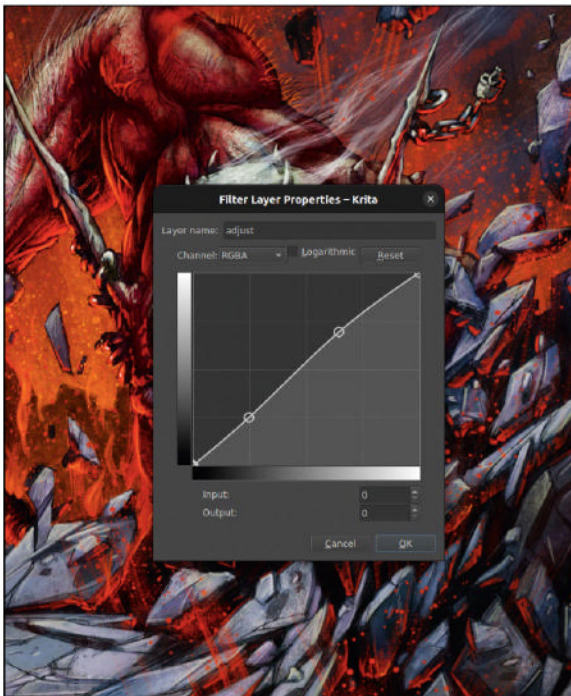
12 Add movement

Selecting the main top mask we made and using the main light source colour, we'll now add a large energetic swoosh to give the character some dynamic movement, connecting it to the lighting effect. Along with that, some added smoke in different colours will help to show overall movement in the scene, giving the whole piece some extra atmosphere, as well as the character.



13 The small details

With only the final touches left, the small details are what can make an illustration stand out. You can use several brushes to add a selection of sparks, flames and light flares coming from the breaking ground, which adds extra dynamics and movement. From here, add in the final white highlights, using them sparingly so not to make parts of the image look too shiny.



14 Final pop

As the finished illustration has heavy light and dark areas, we can make the focus area pop a little more. Use a Filter Layer at the top level of the layer structure to enable an overall RGBA colour adjustment. This will lock the darker tones on the curve, while also subtly enhancing the lighter end of the curve to achieve this. ●







Technique focus

BASE FANTASY ART IN REALITY

Yousaf Ejaz Khan finds inspiration in the deserts of Egypt as he combines Blender and Photoshop



"This painting was inspired by the crystal formations found in Egypt's White Desert.

Usually when creating an idea, composition or design, I like to start out by creating a few rough sketches. With these complete, I then modelled the base in Blender.

I used a Mix shader for the crystal effect and Megascans textures for the ground and rocks. Once I was done with the base, I did a paintover in Photoshop. I find that it's best to use real locations as inspiration for my imaginary worlds, as this lends a sense of realism to the work and makes it feel more grounded."



Artist PROFILE

Yousaf Ejaz Khan

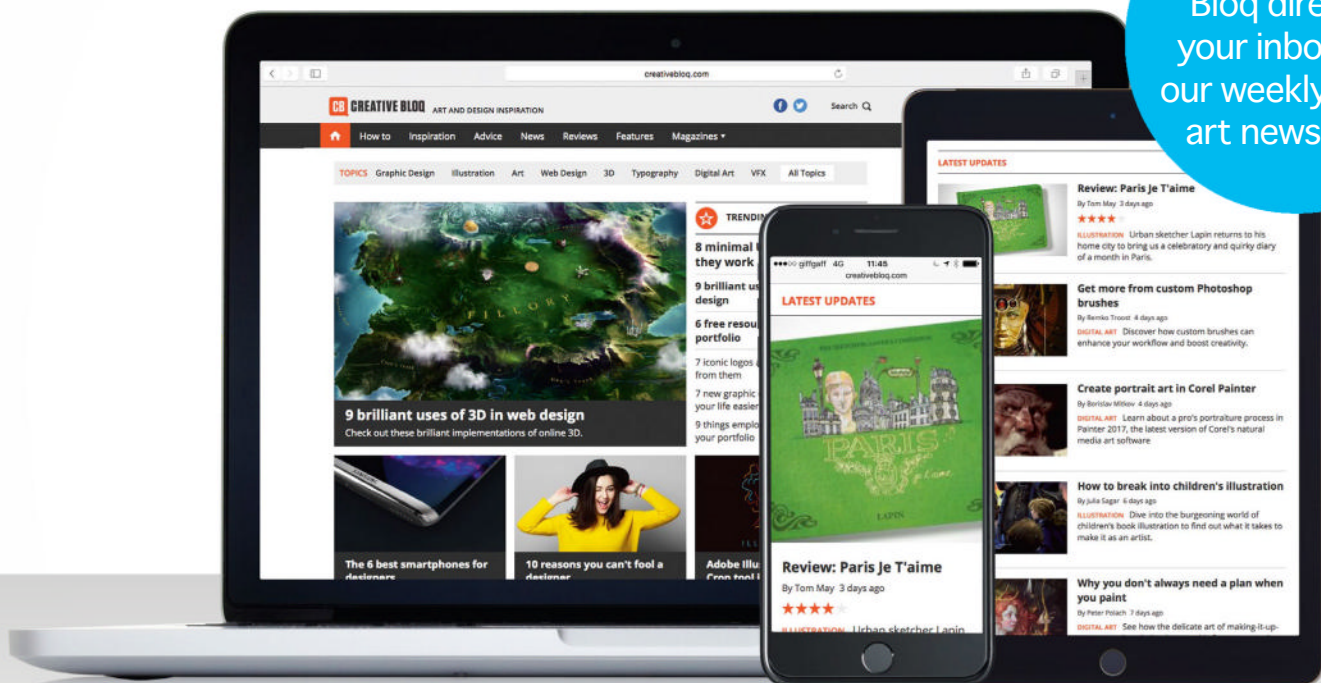
LOCATION: Sweden

Yousaf is a senior concept artist working at Ubisoft, where he mostly develops environments and character designs. Outside of work he likes photography, travelling and playing Tekken.

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Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

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Learn how Damjan Gjorgievski creates breathtaking drawings.

94 Create a black and white ink scene

Cory Loftis builds a detailed image with striking contrast.

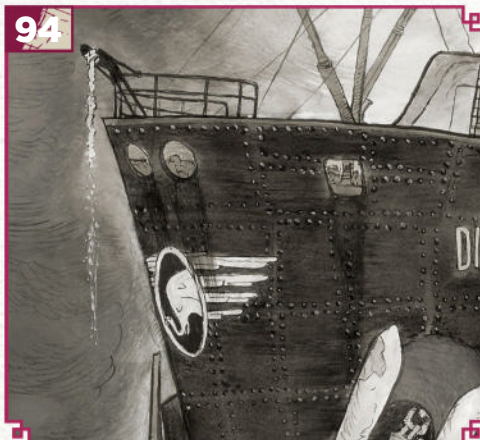
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The artist talks about her first commission and coming work.

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FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

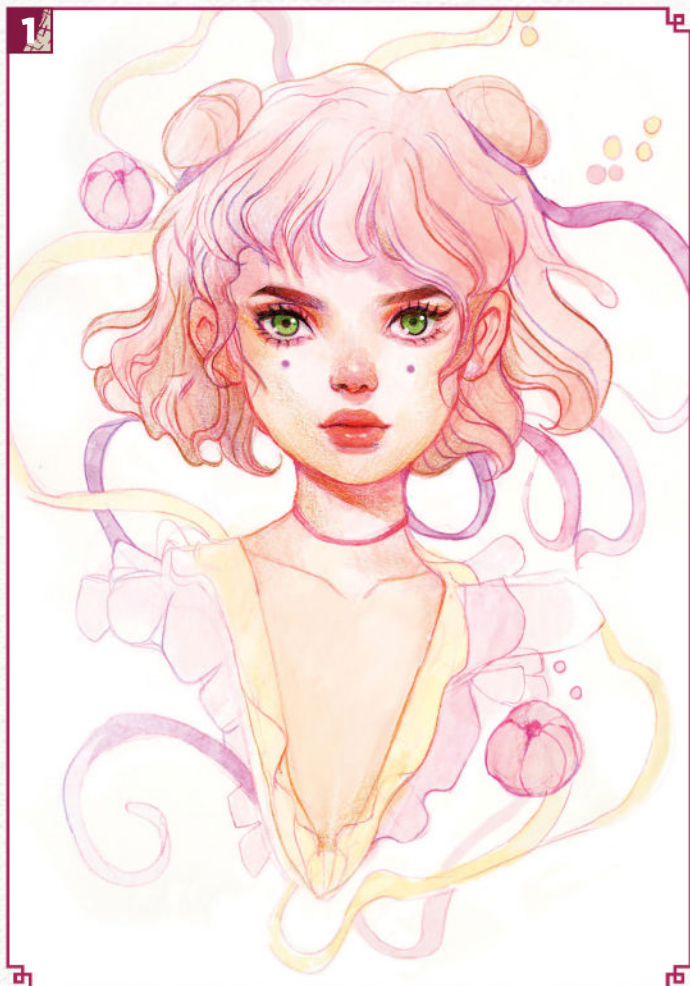


Angelika Schulte

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Watercolour, coloured pencils, gouache, ink, graphite

WEB: www.instagram.com/artfusion__

Graphic designer Angelika fell in love with traditional mediums as a child. Her latest project is a colouring book that shares her passion for art and creativity.



1 SHADES OF GREEN

"I used light washes of watercolour at first and added more detail with coloured pencil. These help to create more depth and focus in the eye area."



2 WITCH

"This portrait was lots of fun to work on. I kept her design simple and let the sketch remain visible in the final design to add greater dimension."

3 POETRY

"This is a piece from one of my older sketchbooks. I had no colour scheme in my mind, I just started somewhere and went for some soft tones."

4 DAYDREAM

"For this piece, I wanted to create a slightly more surreal atmosphere, with the dynamic lines helping me to capture the feeling of a daydream."





David Diez

LOCATION: Spain **MEDIA:** Ink, watercolours **WEB:** www.instagram.com/daviddiez_ilustrador

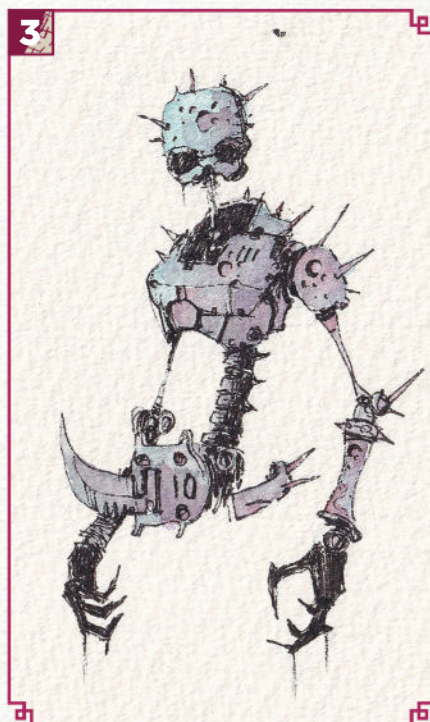
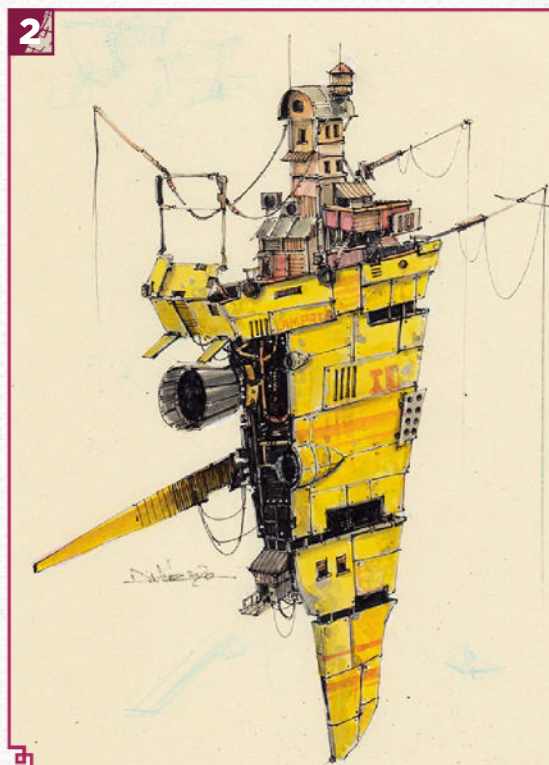
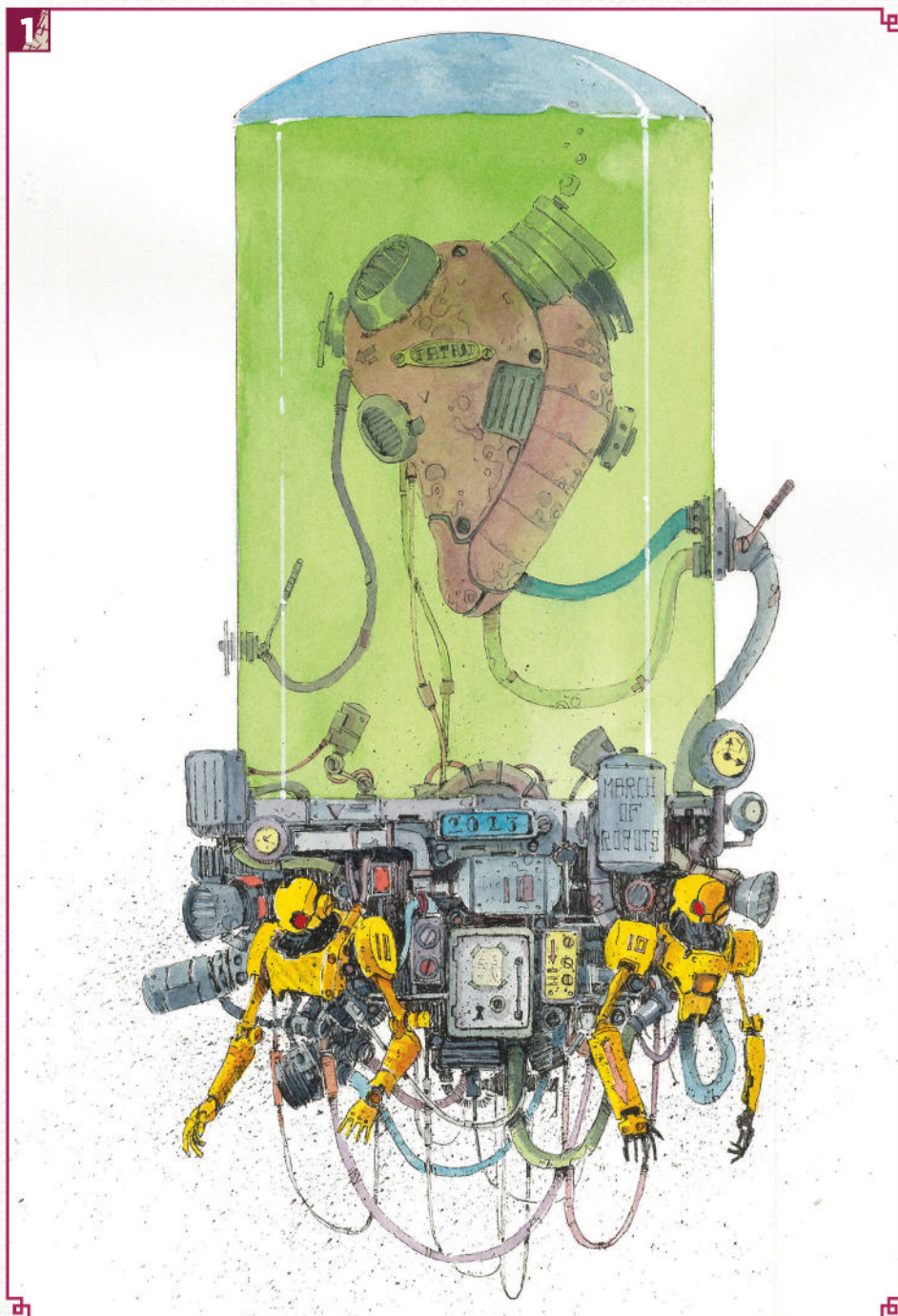
David studied advertising drawing at the Salamanca School of Arts, and taught for 10 years after travelling the world. He has now dedicated himself to drawing full-time while taking care of his mother.

1 HEART

"An illustration made with watercolours and ink on graphite paper for this year's March of Robots art challenge."

2 THE LAMPREY

"I created this piece when we were in lockdown. It's a part of my personal series of steampunk and cyberpunk ships."

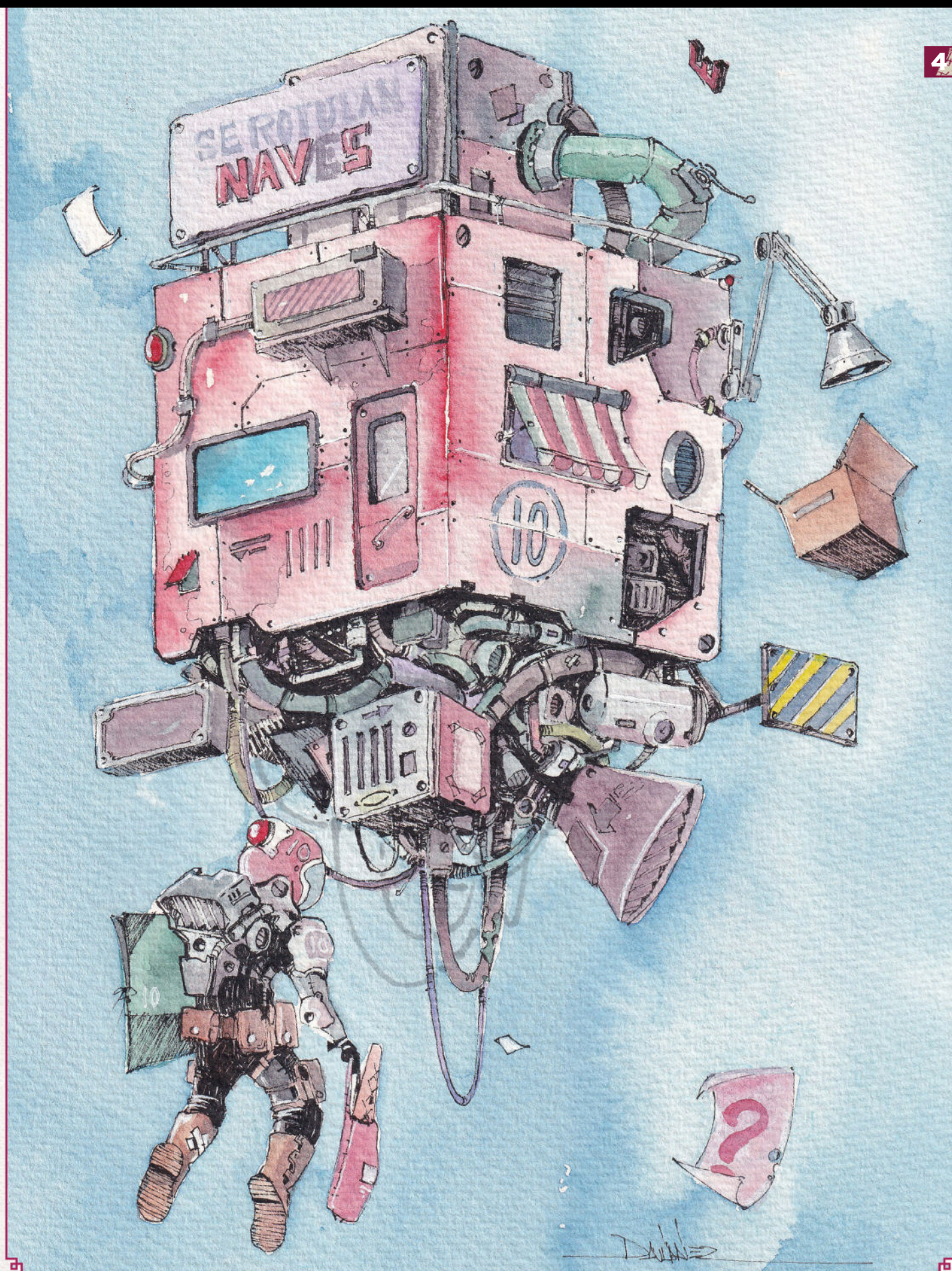


3 EVA

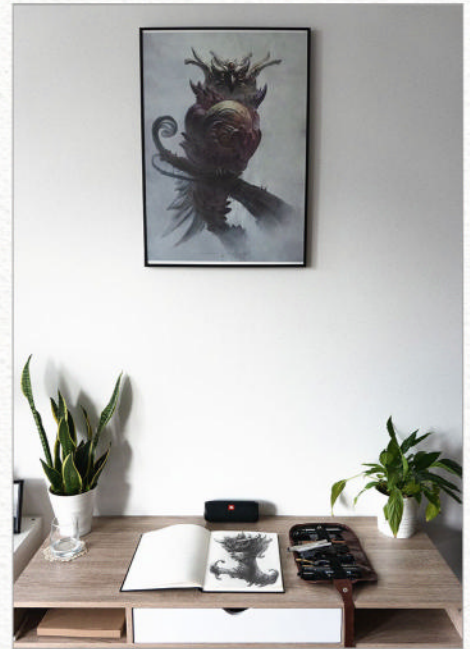
"This is the alter ego of Patàn, one of my favourite female characters. I also used it as a piece for a sticker."

4 SHIPS ARE LABELLED

"This is an illustration that I created for the exhibition Where is Patàn?, which was set to take place in November 2023."







Pencil

EXPLORE NEW FANTASY WORLDS

DAMJAN GJORGIEVSKI shares his methods for drawing fantasy subjects, as he dives into creating new work for his artbook using graphite pencil

Over the past few years I've developed my artistic skills so much faster thanks to the fun methods that I've found for practising production and exploration. These techniques have helped me fill so many sketchbooks, while steering clear of burnout and retaining the pure joy of doodling.

That's what I want to cover in this workshop, where you'll witness the process for creating one of the pieces for my artbook projects. I developed these techniques by studying my idols, and the need to portray a certain aesthetic quality and mood fit for the world to see, while having little time to create.

For that reason I went ahead and looked into how masters like Allen

Williams, Alan Lee, John Howe, Gary Villarreal and many more use pencil to shape their drawings and give them the three-dimensionality I was looking for. In the meantime, I was also deep into a period of obsession with Art Nouveau, which unconsciously showed through in much of my artwork.

The reason I chose pencil for my art is because, for me at least, it's the most versatile and mobile tool. Combined with a sketchbook of a decent size, it offers you the perfect opportunity to be anywhere, at any time, being creative and having fun. Besides that, it also gives you the chance to take a break, and sit back on your sofa as you please while still creating and exploring new ideas for your artistic process.



Damjan was born and raised in North Macedonia, and currently lives in Finland.

After many years of working in gaming, he went back to his roots and is now focusing on worldbuilding through his artbooks and other projects. Discover more at www.damjangjorgievski.com.



1 *Develop the initial concept for your piece*

I start off by loosely sketching with a pencil and a blending stump, looking for the shapes that are closest to what I have in my mind. I keep things loose when it comes to the overall design here. Typically I'll gather some references and make rules about the world that my creature resides in to prevent me from straying too far away from the original concept.



MATERIALS

PENCIL

- Blackwing, Staedtler, Cretacolor, Tombow graphite pencils (4H, 2H, 2B, 6B, 9B)
- Staedtler HB fineliner, 0.7mm

MISCELLANEOUS

- Paper/cotton bud
- Cotton napkin
- Soft kneaded eraser
- Hahnemühle 120g sketchbook

2 *Create mid-tones*

Next, I'll gently go over the whole drawing with either a soft or kneaded eraser. I do this in order to get everything to a mid-tone so that I can replan the values in a more intentional manner. However, be careful to not erase notes that are important to you.

3 *The main shapes*

At this stage I solve the distribution of details, lights and darks, so that later I can focus solely on the rendering and have fun with it. Mainly I'm trying not to oversaturate the drawing with unnecessary details, as the style is already decorative enough.



4 *Making the important decisions on the artwork's direction*

This step is where I use the most brain power. Here I'm mostly working on the detail distribution and design. It could change later, but at this point I need a clear enough direction. I don't think about it functioning as a 3D model, instead I mostly care about aesthetic value. ➡



5 Focus on the distribution of details in the piece

Here I sharpen the pencil more and do my best to pull out only the important details, while merging the unimportant ones with the nearby values to create bigger shapes. Be careful to not create too much contrast everywhere, as that makes the drawing more messy.



6 Add the final touches

The goal here is to finalise the last details and clean up with a sharp eraser. I do my best to keep only the important elements and not overdo the piece. Check the value and detail distribution again by looking at the drawing from a distance. It'll never be finished though, so at some point I decide to move on to the next one.



7 Scanning and clean-up

If you need to, you can now scan, clean up and prepare the image for digital printing. I usually scan at 600 DPI and will then only clean up the textures and dirt around the subject. I'll also avoid editing the drawing itself, unless I'd already planned to do so. ●

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Ink

CREATE A BLACK AND WHITE INK SCENE

CORY LOFTIS shares the workflow he used for creating a traditional image packed with symbolic details and personal meaning for a gallery show

When I was asked to be a part of the Line Weight show held at Gallery Nucleus, I wanted to create a few pieces of how I was feeling during the Covid pandemic. Everyone's experience was different, but there were times I felt very small with the weight of everyone else's opinions looming so large.

It was easy to feel overwhelmed. Everyone shouted their opinions at you without invitation. I was quoted mountains of disinformation with people vomiting conspiracy theories. I wanted everyone to feel just enough humour to get a smile.

It seemed like two distinct shapes were needed; one large for everyone's opinions, and one small representing my point of view. I enjoy working

with ink, but I knew that the large expanse of ink for the ship would be challenging. I wanted to make sure my whites popped, so I planned the steps I'd take to keep the contrast.



Cory Loftis is a designer in the animation industry, working for Walt Disney Animation. When not on the clock, he enjoys spending time with his family. www.instagram.com/coryloftis

Step-by-step: Build up an ink image



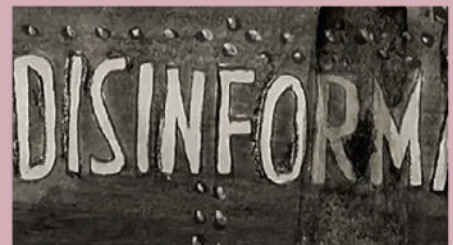
1 START WITH THE SKETCH

I roughed out a sketch the same ratio as the Bristol board I had on hand. I sketch once, make a plan, then jump into the final. I have an image in my head of what I want it to look like, but that's never how it turns out. There's a hand in my artistic mind that at times doesn't feel like my own, and I just let it take the wheel. I'm always surprised how a piece turns out.



2 ADD MASKING FLUID

I started by painting masking fluid over the areas I wanted to keep 100 per cent white: the lightning, the seagulls, and the text on the ship. I chose larger areas to paint with masking fluid. If the area is small enough, I can paint it with opaque white ink. I also take out some scrap Bristol and begin trying out the brushes, pens and nibs that I might use for this drawing.



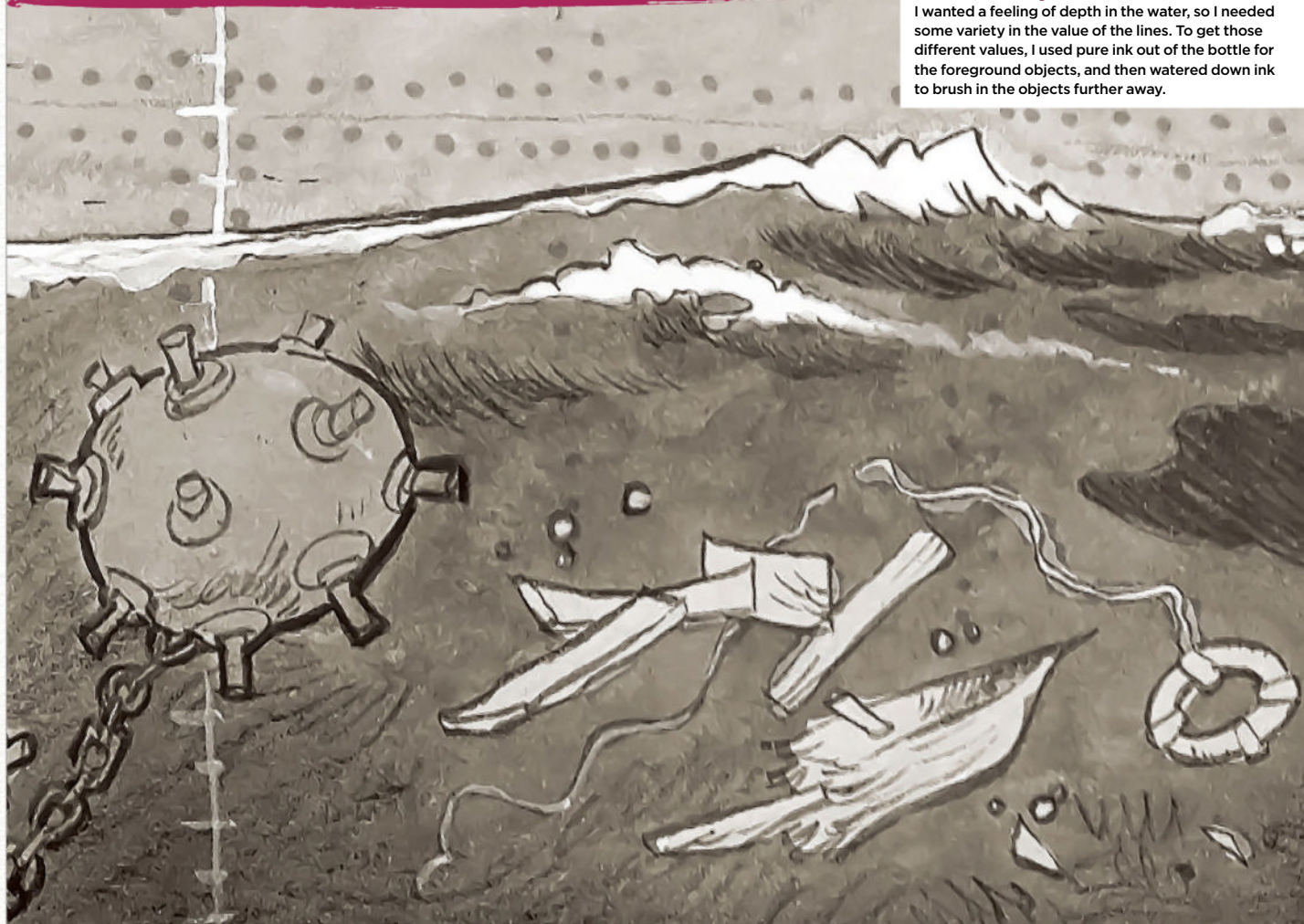
3 WASHES AND MORE

I inked the larger containing lines, which I typically do with a fine brush, and mixed washes for the large areas. When covering big areas, I want the ink-water ratio the same or else it can get splotchy. I added washes and extra detail over the wash once it dries, plus a black Prismacolor pencil for texture. The piece is finished with a warm white NuPastel for a little glow.

Points of interest: In-depth on key details

Ocean depths

I wanted a feeling of depth in the water, so I needed some variety in the value of the lines. To get those different values, I used pure ink out of the bottle for the foreground objects, and then watered down ink to brush in the objects further away.



MATERIALS

BRUSHES

- Winsor & Newton Series 7
- Winsor & Newton Watercolour Sable

INKS

- Black and white inks

PENCIL

- Black Prismacolor pencil

MISCELLANEOUS

- White NuPastel
- Masking fluid
- Photoshop
- Lightbox



No straight edges

I don't like crisp lines in my art and rarely use a straight edge. Plus I have a bit of a shaky hand as well. I very much enjoy the type of wiggly line I get when I just allow my hand to shake instead of correcting it.

Intricate touches

The figures pushed the limit of what details I could accomplish with a brush at that scale. I had to get very close to the paper and try to stop my shaky hand to even get these little figures on paper. The vomit was made with just one or two hairs on my brush.

Perfecting the rivets

I started out with all the rivets as middle value dots everywhere. I thought they would be easy, but when I was done they looked like garbage. In the end I decided to do the difficult thing and give each a highlight and shadow. I just tapped each with a little pure black ink and some white opaque ink.

Lightning branches

The lightning was done by masking the pure white paper. But I also added in smaller branching bolts with opaque white ink and put some glow on the whites with a NuPastel. I just tap the pastel on the paper to create some dust, and then blend it out with my finger tips. You must do this when its completely dry or else you'll get gross areas where it feels as though the ink temperature swings from warm to cool.

Keeping it simple

I use few tools when working either traditionally or digitally, and like to focus on drawing instead of switching between tools. My initial sketch was done in Photoshop before I used a lightbox to transfer it to my paper. I'll sometimes just sketch on paper, but for this particular show I was doing seven pieces and wanted to get an idea of them as a whole before I started any one individually. Digital sketching made that aspect a little easier.

First Impressions

✧ Anna Sokolova ✧

How a mind-blowing first commission spurred the artist on



Is there a painting you saw in your formative years that changed everything? I remember that

feeling like it was yesterday! I was studying publishing at university and avidly absorbed all of the information that I could find. I saw Ilya Repin's painting Sadko in the Underwater Kingdom. I could stare at it for so long it made the museum steward nervous. I'll still stare at paintings for a long time in Berlin's Museum Island now. I mentioned Sadko's painting in the introduction of my book Brilliant Inks, and had a few people email me afterwards, thanking me for introducing the painting to them.

Tell us about your first paid commission. Does it stand as a representation of your talent? This first real paid commission came out of the blue, changed my mindset, and made me believe that an art career was possible. As a first-year student, I got a commission to illustrate an edition of *The Devil's Dictionary* by Ambrose Bierce.

Back then, freelancing seemed a weird and unusual way of working. But I was curious, so I put some of



THE WHITE CAT

This artwork was made for the WOW x WOW gallery, inspired by *The White Cat* (*La Chatte Blanche*), a French fairytale by Madame d'Aulnoy.

my artwork on freelance websites and the publisher just found me. The project included over 50 pen and ink illustrations, and I was extremely nervous, kept to the deadline, and very much enjoyed the process of the work itself.

After I sent the finished work to the client, the editor reached out to

“My artwork is a symbiosis of the elements and symbols that have enchanted me”

me with mind-blowing news: they decided to double my honorary fee! This gave me the much-needed confidence to keep going.

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

I've just finished a painting called Murr for the Cat Art Show in LA, curated by Susan Michals. It's inspired by satirical novel *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* by E.A. Hoffmann, about a cat that

has learned to write and made an autobiography of his life and work, accidentally mixed with a book about conductor Johannes Kreisler.

The book contrasts confidence with moody melancholy. It's also monochrome, and based on literary fiction. So it seems like, except for a hopefully better technique, the core of my style hasn't changed.

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

The biggest revelation for me was that it was possible! With the help of technology, strategic thinking, and the free market, you can be a thriving artist. It takes years and a tremendous amount of work to get where you want. It's like being the engineer of your creative career.

Paradoxically, as technology has evolved, I've moved to traditional techniques almost exclusively and feel happy with each brushstroke. I do use a lot of software to produce and market my art though, and my studio is full of equipment.

What character or scene you've painted do you most identify with?

Creating worlds that never existed before is my biggest inspiration. I see myself more as an author or film director orchestrating the characters coming to life. My art is a symbiosis of the elements and symbols that have enchanted me over the years. We have multifaceted personalities, so exploring these narratives brings creative fulfilment.

What's your next step in art or life?

I'm preparing my artwork for the Society of Illustrators in New York. This exhibition will feature works-in-progress from my collaboration with the fashion house Maison Margiela and John Galliano, where I'll share sketches and ideations of hand-painted clogs.

Anna Sokolova is an award-winning artist and author, who is inspired by merging the traditional and innovative. To discover more visit www.annasokolova.eu.



DARK

Anna covered the creation of this piece, made for Netflix based on its series *Dark*, in a tutorial for issue 226.

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URGENT APPEAL



Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is not just a humanitarian crisis for the Ukrainian people; it's a child protection emergency.

Up to 100,000 children warehoused in Ukraine's vast orphanage system – a network of over 700 buildings – risk being forgotten. Left to face the dangers of war alone as staff flee. As families are torn apart or forced from their homes, many more children are at risk of being separated from the love and protection they desperately need. Worse still, they are at risk of trafficking, or being placed in overcrowded, understaffed and poorly resourced orphanages in border countries.

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