NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

PROCREATE DREAMS!

MAKE DISNEY-STYLE
ANIMATIONS WITH
Aaron Blaise

IMPROVE YOUR

PAINTING TECHNIQUES

Learn how **Daniela Uhlig** creates
perfect portraits in Procreate

ALSO INSIDE

**EXPLORE A SHARED
ARTISTIC WORKSPACE**
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
WITH ZEZHOU CHEN

**DEVELOP A MERMAID'S
STORY WITH COLOUR**

ART MASTERCLASS

BUILD STRIKING ENVIRONMENTS

Combine 2D and 3D for
speedy concept scenes

FUTURE

ISSUE **236**

GET INTO GAME ART! EXPERTS SHARE ADVICE ON PURSUING A DREAM CAREER

Welcome to…

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

We've got an absolutely jam-packed issue waiting for you this month! In our latest big interview we talked to veteran artist Zezhou Chen about his work on huge IPs like Magic: The Gathering, his personal projects, and how he stays energised. Leaping from cards to consoles, we also spoke to artists in the video games industry to uncover their experiences of working in the business, as well as some advice for those of you looking to carve out your own career in that world, including some of the obstacles and opportunities you might encounter.

If you're looking to boost your skills we have some fantastic tutorials for you. Just take a look at our stunning cover art, then learn how to combine the traditional and the digital to create your own beautiful portraits just like Daniela Uhlig. If you want more dimension in your manga characters, then head to our workshop on using light to add volume and life to your paintings. With mermaids, anatomy and landscapes too, there's plenty inside.

No matter what you came for, I hope you have a thoroughly enjoyable time reading the issue!

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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ImagineFX
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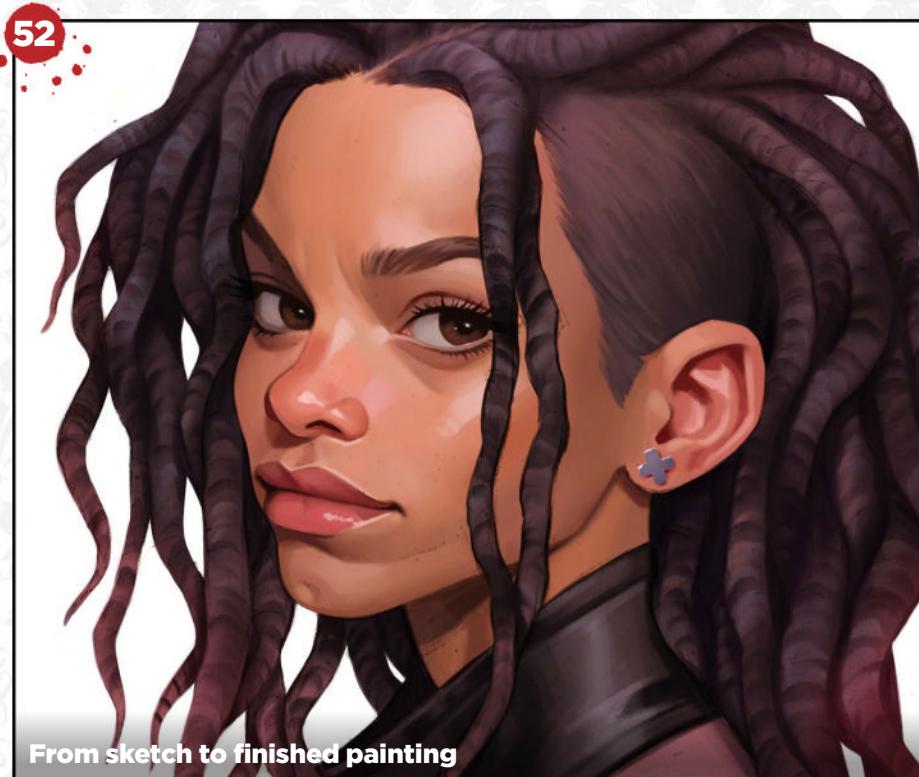
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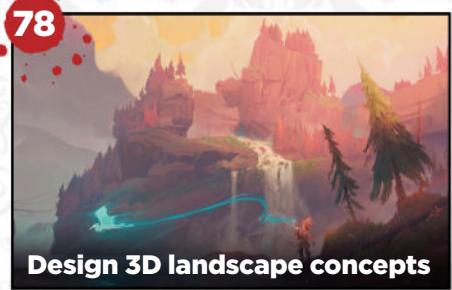
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Recreate an iconic Iron Man comic book cover

GET YOUR RESOURCES

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

1 Go to the website
Type this into your browser's address bar.
https://ifxm.ag/paint-techniques

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

3 Download what you need...
Save the files or watch the videos.

Next month in...

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

BECOME A BOOK ILLUSTRATOR

Learn how to create fantasy cover art with the masterful **Tony DiTerlizzi**

Explore a comic veteran's work

Dive into the art of Wonder Woman and Green Lantern artist Liam Sharp

Head inside a nostalgic studio

We feel the retro vibes on a tour of Ryan Shi's moody artistic workspace

Expert tips to draw figures

Charlie Pickard returns with the third part of his anatomy series

ISSUE 237 ON SALE 13TH FEBRUARY
IN PRINT & DIGITAL

TICKETS NOW ON SALE

vertex

THE ULTIMATE EVENT FOR THE CG COMMUNITY

19 April, 2024 | Business Design Centre, London

The ultimate event for the digital art community is back!

After huge demand, Vertex conference is back as an in-person event! Join us on Friday 19 April, 2024 at the Business Design Centre, London.

We'll bring together more of the CG community than ever before for practical information, amazing inspiration and a fantastic networking opportunity.

Find out more at vertexconf.com

#VertexConf

Cover art
for issue 140
by Ilya
Kuvshinov

FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Mona Finden

LOCATION: Norway **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.monafinden.com

Mona works as a commercial illustrator and loves to draw fantasy scenes, detailed characters and floral shapes. Her artwork often has a melancholic feel, though she mostly aims for a sense of calm.

ARTIST of the MONTH

1 NIGHT MOTHER
"Inspired by Elden Ring, I wanted to draw a priestess and go wild with details. I also wanted to imply importance and danger."

2 A FORGOTTEN LOVE STORY
"A repaint of an older drawing of the same name. I wanted to capture an untold love story frozen in time with this piece."

3 MERMAID
"Similar to A Forgotten Love Story, this shows the remnants of a story. A mermaid is crushing on the only man around."

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

FXPosé

Nicole Cardiff

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artofnicolecardiff.com

Nicole is a Savannah College of Art and Design graduate who specialises in fantasy. Influenced by Alphonse Mucha, N.C. Wyeth and J.C. Leyendecker, she loves doing pieces at the intersection of flat graphic design and realism.

1 BADB
"The Celtic war goddesses and their crows are always an enjoyable subject for me, and this piece allowed me to explore using knotwork as a design element."

2 PERSEPHONE
"I find Persephone, the goddess of the underworld, fascinating, so I painted her with the poisonous plants nightshade and datura, and the dead as her retinue."

3 DEVIL/ANGEL
"I absolutely adore arabesque designs, and this piece let me experiment with using them as an element of the background."

4 BLUE ROSE
"This image was a fun exploration of what a courtly, showy outfit could look like when used for a sorcerer character."

FXPosé

Jose Santaeulalia

LOCATION: Spain **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/josesantaeulalia

Jose has been working as a sculptor for 22 years for the Spanish collectible company Lladró. He has art directed countless projects, overseeing every stage from initial ideas to the moodboards, designs and scripts.

1 DUELLING BANJOS

"I tried to square the illustration here. It's from a collection I call Cube, and working in this format was a challenge."
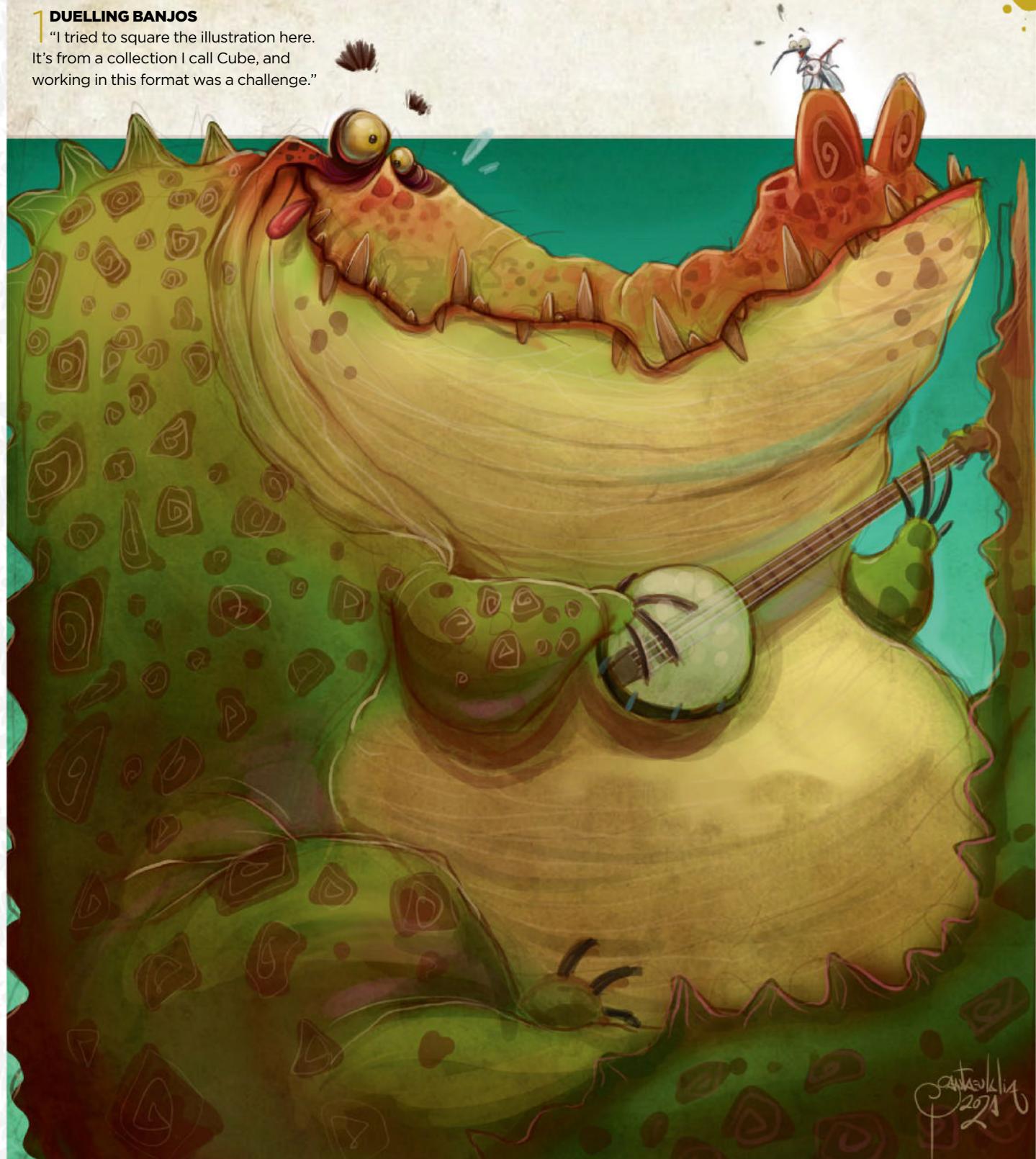
2 FAIR

"This illustration is an old one. The drawing was done in pencil and painted over with Photoshop. I always like to give my characters their own personality, especially when I draw children."

3 ASCOTSAURUS

"I really enjoyed creating this piece. It was made for a character design challenge, and it proved popular with the public too. I think we all know a lady that has this expression on her face."

ASCOTSAURUS

4 WRESTLING

"I've always loved the aesthetics you find in Mexican wrestling, and it had been a long time since I'd done a fully handmade illustration."

5 HULK

"For this piece, I wanted to create a funny moment by contrasting the brutality of the Hulk against the delicacy of threading a needle."

FXPosé

Rebeca Puebla

LOCATION: Spain   **MEDIA:** 3ds Max, ZBrush, Photoshop   **WEB:** www.artstation.com/subversivegirl

Working in both 2D and 3D, Rebeca loves to create characters, in particular strong women with plenty of personality. Her greatest inspiration is cinema, especially classic films, which is usually present in all of her work.

1 PUNCHLINE DC FAN ART
"This was the first piece that I made using a 3D base. Just like in all my other artwork, I painted over it digitally. It's inspired by the DC character Punchline."

2 VAMPIRELLA VS THE SUPERPOWERS ISSUE 2 VARIANT COVER
"Vampirella vs The Superpowers, created by Dynamite Comics, is set in the 50s, so I chose to show a different Vampirella who's not so sexualised and has a powerful look."

Dynamite Comics

Heroic Signatures and Titan Comics

3 CONAN THE BARBARIAN ISSUE 5 VARIANT COVER
"My latest variant cover for issue 5 of Conan the Barbarian, made by Titan Comics and Heroic Signatures. The look I decided on for Conan's love interest, Bêlit, was inspired by the silent film actress Theda Bara."

4 VAMPIRELLA VS THE SUPERPOWERS ISSUE 5 VARIANT COVER
"Another variant for Vampirella vs The Superpowers. This time I was inspired by Kim Basinger in the movie L.A. Confidential and Vlad's armour from the classic horror film Bram Stoker's Dracula."

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

FXPosé

Mariia Bulgakova

LOCATION: Bulgaria **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.instagram.com/bastetmary

Mariia is a game development artist and content director with over 100,000 fans on social media, where she shares art hacks and advice. She enjoys creating picturesque fantasy work.

1 DARK HEROINE-ADVENTURER

"When creating this character, I was inspired by the atmosphere and style of Dark Souls and Elden Ring. With this piece, I wanted to convey the dark, wandering vibe emanating from the character."

2 DEYANIRA

"This illustration depicts a goddess whose name was chosen by my followers. She hovers high above the clouds, holding immense power in her hands and gathering energy around her."

3 MIRAJ

"A fantasy charácter whose name was also selected by one of my followers. This name holds two meanings: in Arabic it translates as 'ascension', and in Japanese can be translated as 'future'."
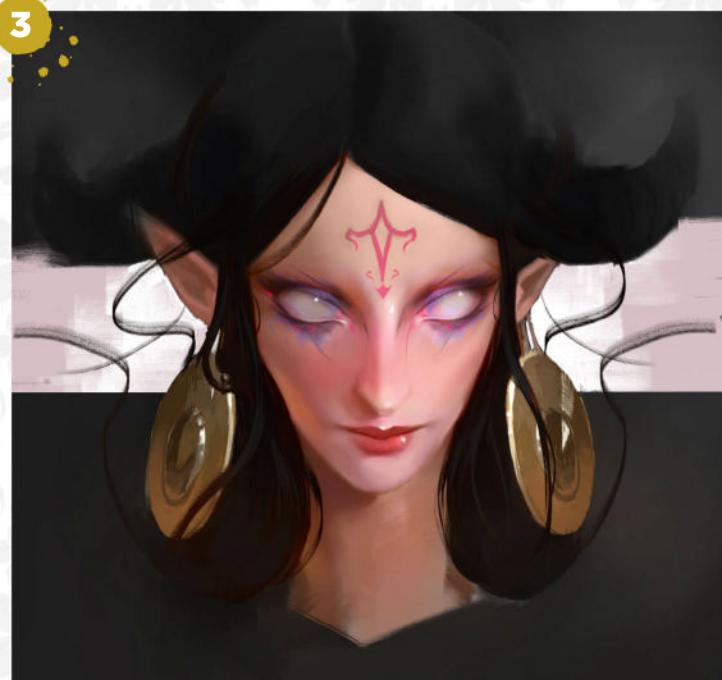
4 SNIPER

"This is a concept art piece that depicts a sniper girl in a steampunk style. She lost her leg in one of her many adventures and has to use a prosthetic that operates on steam, much like her sniper rifle."

4

Who cares about me

YEAR CREATED: 2023 MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate

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

"This is the final keyframe of the last storyboard I finalised. I wanted to tell a sweet story, but with an underlying sense of melancholy: a superhero who spends all his time worrying about other people's problems while often neglecting his own. After the awards, the superficial handshakes and the glory, however, everyone goes back to their lives without thinking about our hero. Fortunately, someone who really cares about him is waiting at home."
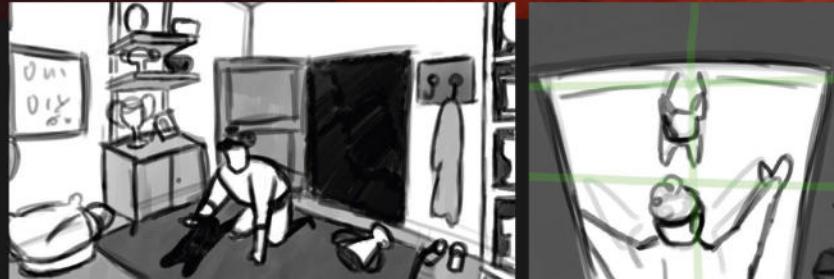
Artist PROFILE

Benedetta Anzuini

LOCATION: Italy
Benedetta has loved drawing and art since she was a child, but it was just a hobby until recently. After completing an art history degree, she followed her passion and graduated with a master's in concept art at BigRock Institute of Magic Technologies.
https://www.therookies.co/u/benedtart
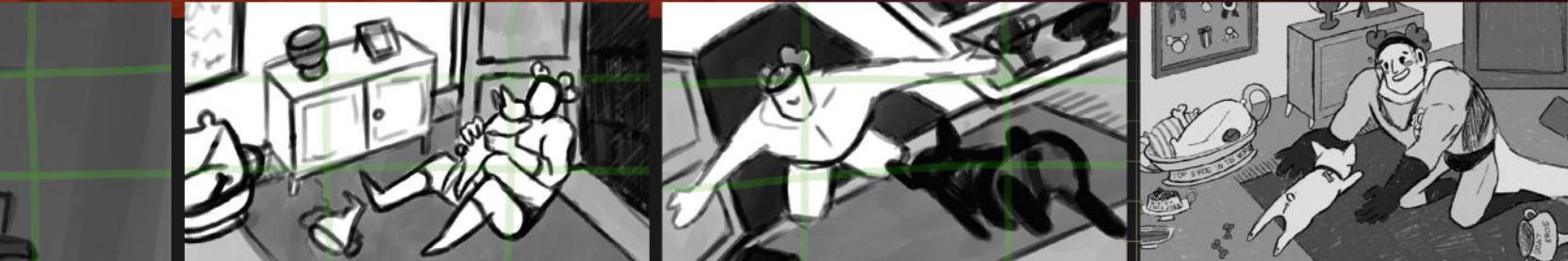
Fanny Vergne says: "You might feel like someone else is always doing better, but you're only seeing the tip of their iceberg, not the challenges they've overcome to reach where they are."
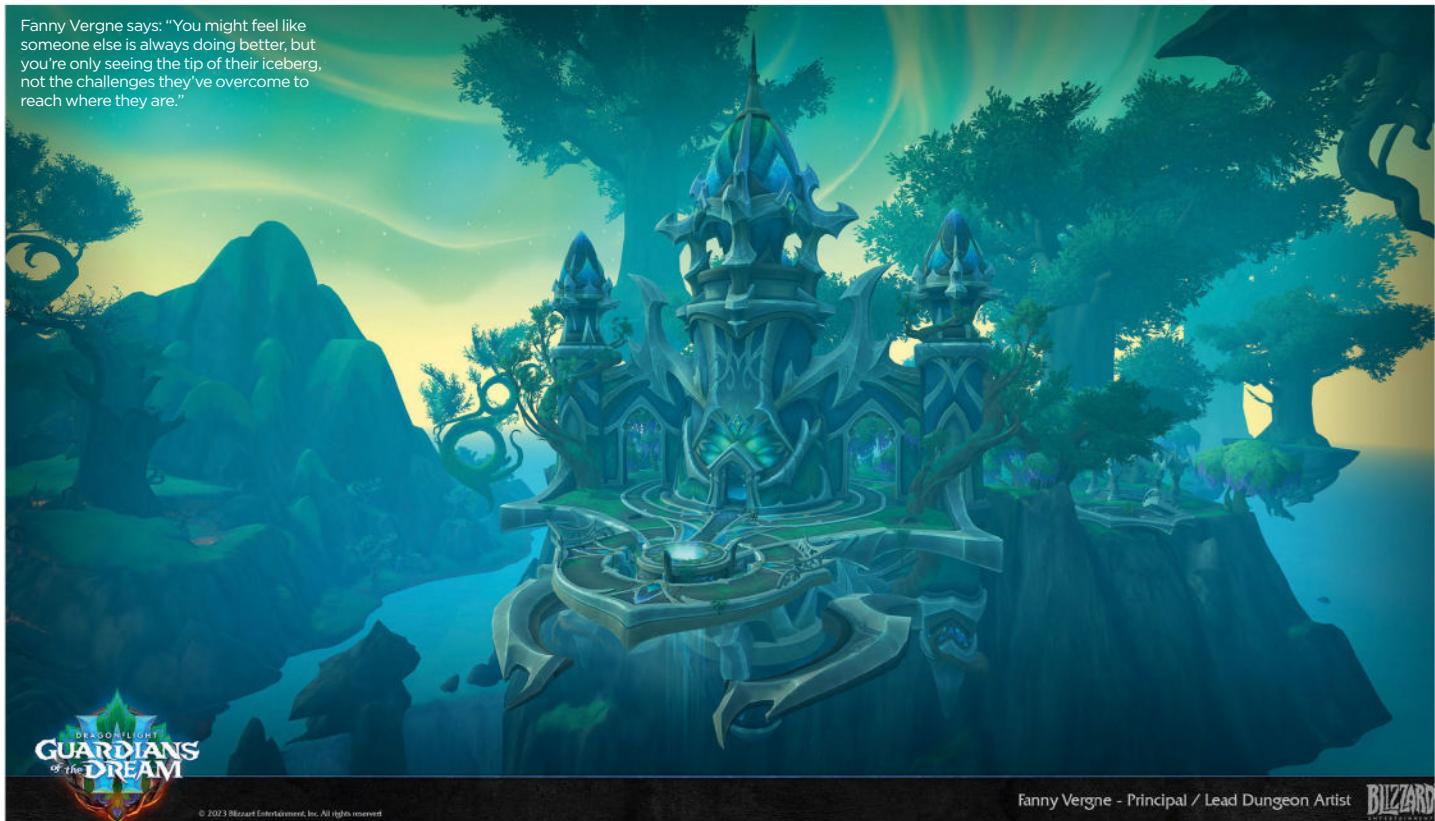
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Fanny Vergne - Principal / Lead Dungeon Artist — BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Should I work in the games industry?

New level loading **Tanya Combrinck** speaks with four industry veterans about the rewards and challenges of pursuing an art career in the world of video games

Working in games can be a thrilling career, but it's also something that requires tough compromises. On the one hand, being part of a world-class team that creates beautiful universes for AAA games might sound like a dream job. On the other, the industry is notorious for its crunch culture, and there's plenty of controversy around poor treatment of women and minorities at big companies.

So what's it really like? And is it right for you? To help you decide, we asked four artists about what it does for your journey as an artist, the culture, the working life, and what traits and skills make someone suited to the job. And,

if you do decide it's for you, we've got advice on breaking into the industry.

LIVING THE DREAM

A lead 3D artist and principal artist at Blizzard Entertainment, **Fanny Vergne** works on World of Warcraft. She tells us that "being an artist in the game industry is a dream come true", and that she

> 66 **A crucial trait for success as an artist is the ability to receive feedback gracefully** 99

gets immense satisfaction creating something so loved by its audience.

"One of my real cherished moments is standing among the crowd at the BlizzCon opening ceremonies, and witnessing the joy and excitement when new content is announced," she says. "It's easy to forget the wide-reaching impact of your work when immersed in day-to-day project tasks, but witnessing it in real life reinforces the meaningfulness of your efforts."

On top of this, Fanny believes that exposure to the exceptional talent she's encountered has helped her to flourish as an artist, and made for a "truly incredible" experience.

Raphael Lacoste says: "As a concept artist, your work is solving problems, guiding the creative vision and defining compromises while aiming as high as possible. Do your best and bring your own bricks to the castle!"

"Games development provides a unique canvas for artistic expression," says Donglu Yu.

A career in games has brought great fulfilment, but Fanny notes that getting there is a long road that takes a lot of dedication. You'll need to hold yourself to a very high standard when developing your skills. "I see many students that evaluate their skills by comparing themselves to classmates rather than considering the global talent pool," says Fanny.

Big companies are willing to hire from anywhere, so you're competing with junior artists from all over the world. She adds: "While it may seem demoralising initially, it can also serve as motivation." Fanny explains that aiming for a career in a competitive field is not an unrealistic goal, just so long as you're realistic about the skill level you'll have to hit, and the hours you'll have to put in to get there.

EGO AND PRIDE
Like anyone hoping to achieve the extraordinary, how you manage your psychology is key. Fanny explains: "Two crucial traits for success as an artist is the ability to receive feedback gracefully, and consistently evaluate your work critically. It's important to separate your sense of self-worth from your work, recognising that we all start from a mediocre point. ➤➤

"If you're open to constructive criticism and enjoy refining art, the game industry can be a good fit," says Donglu.

66 The continuous problem-solving aspect keeps the job intellectually stimulating 99

➤➤ "Constructive feedback is a critique of your work, not a judgement of you as a person. I believe the artists who grasp this concept generally tend to improve more rapidly.

"However, it's equally essential to distinguish between ego and pride. Ego impedes fast learning, while pride allows you to celebrate achievements and build self-confidence."

Donglu Yu is an acclaimed concept artist whose list of credits includes the Assassin's Creed series and Far Cry 4. She says that working in games puts you into a cyclical routine of always striving to become better. "Game development

"I loved working in films and learned a lot, but it was more technical and offered me less creative freedom than I've had in the games industry," says Raphael.

Donglu says: "The freedom to bring your most imaginative and intricate ideas to life is incredibly fulfilling."

is an iterative process with frequent feedback loops," she says. "So I was pushed to learn to embrace feedback, adjust accordingly, and refine my work continuously. This approach fosters a mindset of constant improvement and refinement in you."

STIMULATING CAREER

While this process will make a massive contribution to professional growth, it has to be something you're open to as an artist. Rather than following your imaginative path to wherever it goes, you'll have to use logical thinking to solve visual problems. For artists such as Donglu who thrive on developing this type of work, this is a part of the appeal. "The continuous problem-solving aspect keeps it intellectually stimulating," she says. On top of

enjoying visual puzzles, Donglu adds: "Conceptualisation, the ability to take abstract ideas and translate them into visual concepts, is a crucial skill for the concept artist's role."

Since you'll be working on large teams, sometimes with hundreds of artists, you'll need to develop the right personal traits to work effectively too. Donglu says: "Concept artists need to be efficient in both collaboration and communication to actively participate in discussions, to interpret feedback, and to express abstract ideas in a tangible manner."

As a woman in the games industry, Donglu says that she considers herself "very lucky", as she has never had to deal with toxic behaviour, but also notes how accountability, continued pressure and collective efforts are ➤➤

"You need to be able to adapt to different styles and not be constrained to just one area," says Jordan Grimmer.

"Collaborating with talented individuals to create something greater than ourselves never loses its magic for me," says Fanny.

Fanny Vergne - Principal / Lead Dungeon Artist

Raphael says: "An environment where we feel safe, listened to, and free from toxicity is a key element to wellbeing."
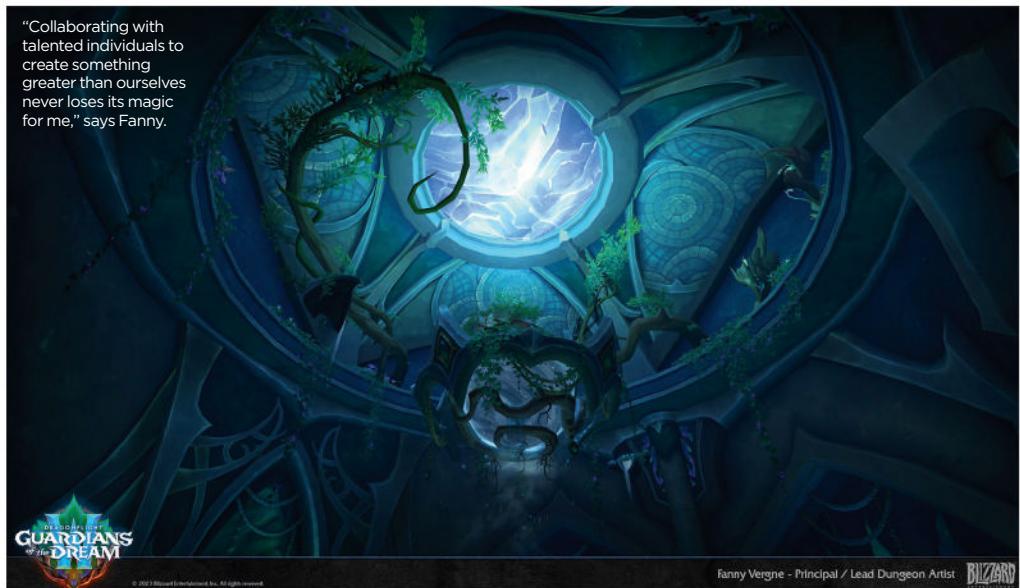
INDUSTRY INSIGHT
WOMEN AND MINORITIES

Fanny Vergne on working as a woman from a minority group

What has your experience of being a woman working in games been like?

When I started my career in 2008, it wasn't uncommon to be the only female in a team of hundreds, which required thick skin. I hid my gender online with pseudonyms, and many assumed I was a man. I foolishly took pride in that, not realising it shouldn't have been necessary.

Fortunately things have been evolving. Since the #MeToo movement, I've noticed many positive changes. Big companies have taken steps to prevent any misconduct, readily letting go of those who violate strict rules, and educational initiatives and robust reporting processes make sure that everyone is aware of appropriate conduct.

How does the industry treat other kinds of minorities?

Individuals from minority groups are discovering that it's acceptable not to tolerate certain behaviours, challenging the silence they felt compelled to maintain in the past. I've also noticed people from minorities, like myself, are entering more leadership roles. Those of us in these positions are particularly committed to maintaining a fair, equal, diverse and safe culture for all of our employees and potential hires.

I remain hopeful for the video games industry's future and would absolutely encourage everyone to ensure that their voices are heard. Never hesitate to report any incident, even if you have doubts, no matter if it happened to you or if you were a witness to it. Have faith in your own judgement.

Fanny Vergne is a lead 3D artist and principal artist at Blizzard Entertainment on World of Warcraft

https://www.artstation.com/faf

➨ essential to make sure that these problems are addressed.

An art director who has worked in both the film and games industries, **Raphael Lacoste** is well-known for his work at Electronic Arts Montreal and Ubisoft. Like Donglu, he enjoys the learning, artistic development and creative solutions that come from working within the limits of a problem that needs to be solved. He shares a quote from French author André Gide: "Art is born from constraint, lives through struggle and dies through liberty."

DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

Raphael says that if you're considering a career in games, you need to forget about working primarily for your own portfolio and "consider that your work is there to serve a project larger than yourself". You'll also need to be ready to work on a team that contains lots of different personalities.

"Making a game is a democracy," he says. "You have to find the best balance between the art, design, tech, performance, and so on. You need to satisfy all of the different pillars while maintaining the right direction and pushing things to the next level."

At the start of your career, Raphael advises not to be too rigid with your ambitions and to embrace whatever opportunities come your way, as there are always lessons to learn in every situation. You might dream of working on a big, famous game, but there are advantages to working on smaller projects. "The huge projects are like cargo ships; extremely powerful, but very difficult to steer," he says. "The smaller companies are like small, fast boats; they have a more horizontal organisation, better agility, and more people have a voice, so it's less top-down as direction goes. Any type of creative people can find their fit, and it is refreshing and constructive to learn from both sides and try different types of productions."

Also, keep in mind that working on the game of your dreams isn't the be

"Be humble, passionate, keep your curiosity strong and work as a team; these elements are key to your success," says Raphael.

© 2024 Ubisoft Entertainment

"Working within a team of creative people, you'll need self-awareness, empathy, listening skills, and be able to manage tempers," says Raphael.

all and end all. "You could be working on your favourite franchise, but if the team is toxic, nothing will help you to be happy," says Raphael. Conversely, you might not be so fond of a project, but if you love your team, you'll have a great time nevertheless.

FLEXIBLE CAPABILITIES

Jordan Grimmer is a senior concept artist at UK-based studio The Chinese Room. "Being a concept artist means being adaptable and flexible to goals changing, and being open to working in areas that might be outside of your comfort zone," he says. You'll need to be able to produce art in the style the project needs, which forces you to expand your capabilities.

In terms of work culture, Jordan sees the games industry as one of the most progressive places to work, but he qualifies this by noting that as he is male, he has not experienced gender-based harassment.

> ❝ **The idea a subset of the public can't fathom that the media they consume is made by people unlike them is sad** ❞

Jordan says: "We're making games; it should be fun. So it's important to try to match that energy and leave your ego at the door."

© EA Industrial Toys

"Within the World of Warcraft team, we don't tolerate toxic behaviour," says Fanny.

Fanny Vergne - Lead Dungeon Artist

Donglu says: "The industry is known for crunch periods. This can be demanding and impact work-life balance."
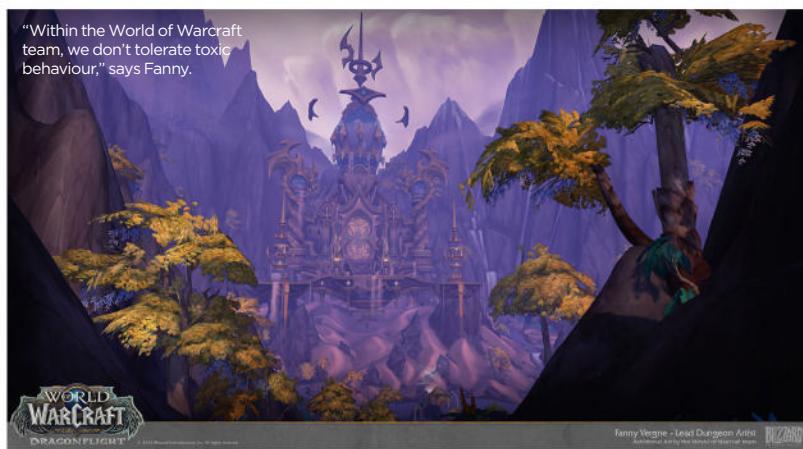
Jordan says from what he has seen, the worst behaviour comes not from within the industry, but instead from the public. "The harassment that gets thrown at female, non-binary, trans, people of colour and queer employees is atrocious," he explains. "The idea a subset of the general public can't fathom that the media they consume is made by people unlike them is just sad. I think it's frightening just how much hate is riled up because of this ridiculous notion that gaming has always been a 'male' pastime. It never has been that way."

Jordan continues: "I can only speak from what I've seen, but I feel that the companies I have worked at have all been great protecting their employees from any harassment and bullying, whether that's from inside or outside of the industry."

Up to 50 users can work on a canvas at a single time, paving the way for increased collaboration during meetings.

Artwork by Bobby Chiu
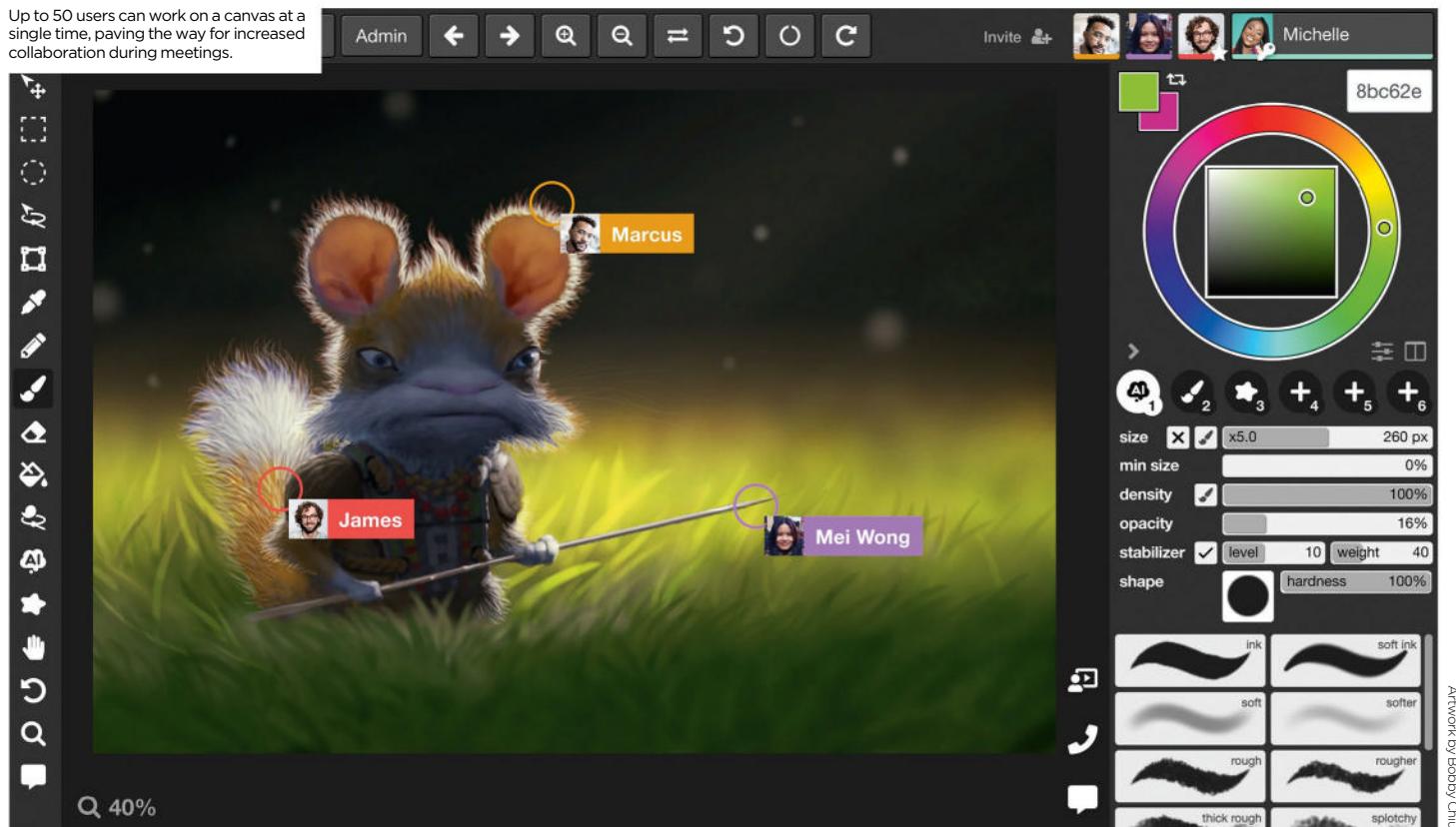
Enhance your team's projects

The art of collaboration Skip the downloads and jump straight into working on your next team design task with **Magma**, the browser-based digital art platform

Creatives are no strangers to collaborative tools, as well as the hefty software downloads that so often come hand-in-hand with them. In an effort to spare artists of yet another program in their already crowded taskbar, Magma has followed a different approach, instead offering a browser-based solution for art teams.

Magma is a digital art platform out to combine a creative tool with real-

EXCLUSIVE TWO-MONTH MAGMA OFFER
Get a free taste of Blaze with the code **BlazeFX** at www.magma.com/imaginefx

time communication and project-management capabilities for those working in the gaming, animation and entertainment industries. It offers a well-stocked drawing and design feature set, and enables up to 50 users to work on a canvas at once while housing built-in voice, video and text chat communication. All that work is then saved in a cloud-based library to keep track of version history and iterations along the way.

PLAN AND PRESENT
All this means that artists can join live sessions to plan their projects, host presentations and leave feedback directly on the canvas. It's a tool that's already used by the likes of Pitch Dev Studios and Sunna Entertainment to

help simplify their workflows. Using Magma has meant that stakeholders including managers and developers are kept in the loop on progress from almost any device. Magma says it has resulted in a 25 per cent reduction in delivery time and 40 per cent fewer revisions for creative teams.

It's also a platform the company is committed to evolving. Magma has raised $5million of investment in its most recent round of funding, which it plans to use for developing additional new features and scaling its team. An eye has been kept on learning and fun too. Magma is eager to support the creative endeavours of its user base of over two million people, having hosted live art classes and other community-focused events.

Magma offers a professional drawing experience including a range of tools.

Artwork by Bobby Chiu

> ❝ Magma offers a well-stocked drawing and design feature set and enables up to 50 users to work on a canvas at once ❞

Artwork by Nexus

Built-in communication allows meetings to be held in Magma alone.

Socialise with other artists in drawing jams and try out Magma's community events.

Artwork by Grandfailure/Tithi Luadthong

Make gorgeous art with up to 200 layers thanks to Magma's Blaze package.

Artwork by Yariv Newman

Starting from a free basic package suitable for occasional collaboration, Magma also offers a Blaze package that provides access for 50 users per drawing, an 8K canvas, and increased storage and file imports at $9.99 per month. To get more out of Magma, there's the Fusion package available at $50 per seat per month, which brings further options including the ability to use custom brushes and shapes, plus greater storage, alongside unlimited concurrent sessions and much more. *Head to www.magma.com/imaginefx and use the code 'BlazeIFX' for two free months of Magma Blaze. Terms and conditions apply. See www.magma.com for full T&Cs.*
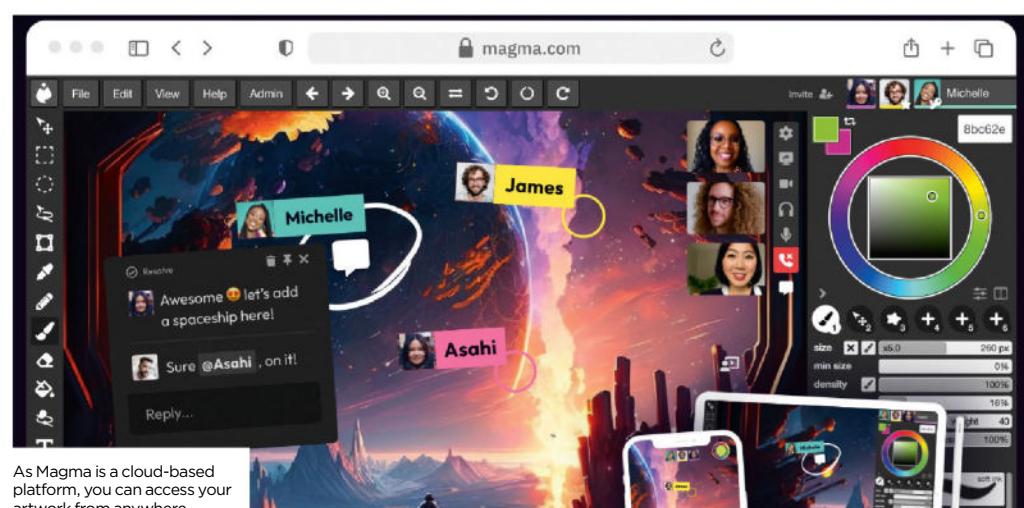
As Magma is a cloud-based platform, you can access your artwork from anywhere.

Lost Heaven is a personal piece Andres worked on as part of a video game project.

A day in the life of…
Andres Martinez

Stress less The comic colourist turned concept illustrator balances working for worldwide clients from his home in South America

"I wake up at 5.30am and work out, and have a breakfast of eggs, cereal and orange juice. I take my girlfriend to work, and am at my desk for 8am.

By then it's afternoon in Europe, so I can deal with clients there, and LA is ready for work later in the morning, so that's my organisational and meeting time. Hopefully by 11am I get to start drawing. First I'll do a warm-up just for myself and work until 1pm.

I'll take an hour for lunch and either cook or walk to pick up food, just to clear my head. The hard work comes after lunch from 2pm to around 6pm. Europe is asleep at that point and I've already had my meetings with LA, so I can seriously focus on the job now. After that, I turn everything off and have some dinner.

Around six or seven years ago I never stopped, working 16-18 hours

per day. But maybe two years ago, I suddenly couldn't draw, I couldn't see my computer. It was burnout. I had to stop everything for a few months and learned how vital mental health is.

I also learned about good time management. You can get everything done in a working day if you're smart about it. Now after work I have dinner with my girlfriend, watch a movie and learn English. But I don't dwell on my work and just let the thoughts pass. I finally go to bed around 11pm.

My advice for artists is not to rush. Everybody has their own path. Some will get their dream job in their first year, while others find their way at 55. It's all okay and you can't force it, so just enjoy your journey. For me there's no longer any anxiety, which is good, because I don't want to go crazy."

CONCEPT ART ASSOCIATION

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

Based remotely from his home in Tunja, Colombia, Andres works with clients in Europe and the US.

Freelance concept illustrator Andres most recently worked on Marvel's Madame Web. He has also worked on games and says his most fulfilling project was designing props for Ark: Survival Evolved. See more of Andres' art at www.andresconcept.com.

Inspirations from Colombia and its Boyaca region influenced Draco as Andres experimented with new dragons and plants.

Playing with colours and lighting makes Andres travel to unique places with his art.

Andres explored depth and dynamic shapes in Wise Tree.

Creating new worlds and being expressive with designs is an enjoyable process for Andres.

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Elisabeth found an old CD shelf at a junk shop, and it makes a fantastic desk organiser!

These flat files were made by Scott's awesome grandfather, who was a carpenter and firefighter. Scott put wheels on the bottom so that we can roll it around the studio. This is extra helpful when we're shooting reference photos for paintings.

These bookshelves hold our collection of graphic novels, among other things, and also serve to hide the sink from view.

One of Elisabeth's hobbies is trying to keep houseplants alive. This room has the best natural lighting in the whole house.

Elisabeth Alba and Scott Murphy

Studio for two The illustrators invite us to explore inside their spacious shared home workspace as they juggle busy freelance careers with raising two young children

"Scott and I have worked back-to-back since 2010," Elisabeth says. **"We first shared a one-bed apartment in New York City with the studio space in our bedroom.**

After moving to Massachusetts, our studios to date have been found on an enclosed porch, in a living room, and then a dining room. We were finally able to build our dream home studio in 2021; it's a much-needed space for us to have with two young kids and a rambunctious dog.

It's been 13 years of sharing an art space and we still haven't gotten sick of each other. We absolutely love working from home in the space that we built. Everything we need is within reach, from our entire artbook library to our shipping supplies. We even

have a slop sink! The large windows let in a ton of natural light, and the huge space is also great for when we need an area to shoot photo reference. This room has become our oasis, especially once the kids are in bed.

WORKING BACK-TO-BACK
As you enter the room, my work space is on the far left. I have my L-shaped desk where I paint, my computer, ➤

These fun plushies on our printer were made by The Beast Peddler, another Massachusetts-based artist. We love supporting other artists, so our walls in every room are small galleries of artworks that we've picked up over the years from people we admire.

The neighbours are pretty close on either side, but the view right out the back is the woods. Lovely to look at throughout the year!
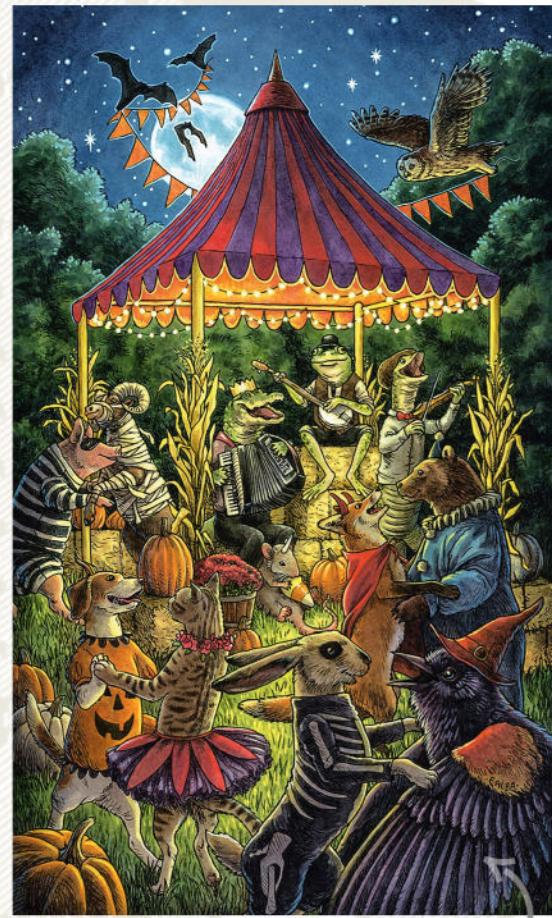
Scott plays guitar and Elisabeth used to play piano. Someday we would like to have the time to get back to practising! Currently the instruments are for impromptu jam sessions with the kids.

Four of Wands from the 78 Tarot Halloween deck was a delight to paint for Elisabeth. She has really been into drawing and painting cute anthropomorphic animal scenes recently.
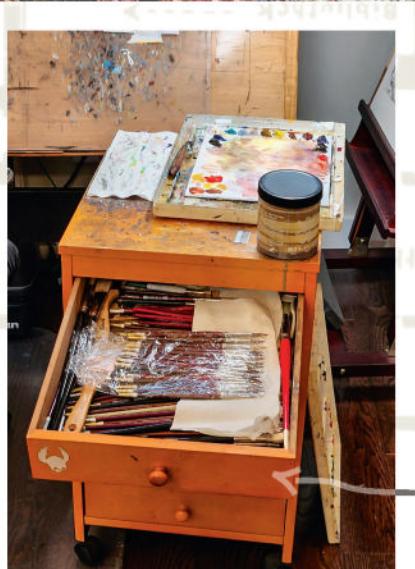
The silicoil jar contains safflower oil. Scott stopped using solvents a few years ago and has a small container filled with solvent-free fluid for a medium. As he mostly uses safflower oil and solvent-free fluid, Scott likes to use alkyd white paint to help paint dry faster, and stores his paints and brushes in the freezer during projects to keep the paint from drying too much between sessions.

Here is Scott's side of the studio, showing the set-up of his computer and drafting table, as well as storage carts filled with a host of artistic goodies. He also has a floor easel for when he needs to work on larger paintings.

Mirrodin Avenged is one of Scott's favourite recent pieces created for Magic: The Gathering.

A photo of Elisabeth, dressed as Wesley Crusher, with some of the cast of Star Trek: The Next Generation. "I'll treasure this photo always. One of the best days of my life!" she says.
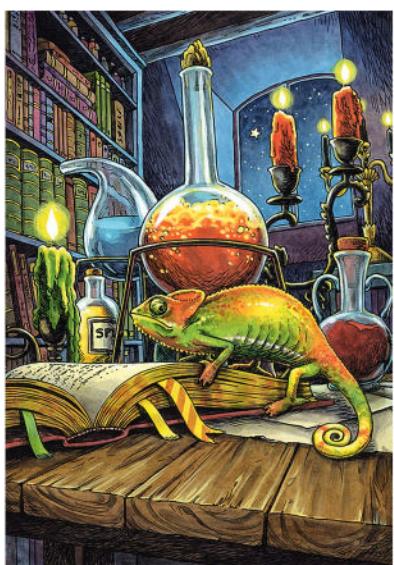
A lot of Elisabeth's work over the past few years has been from tarot and oracle decks. She has fully illustrated two 78-card tarot and two 40-card oracle decks. The Chameleon is from the Everyday Witch's Familiars Oracle written by Deborah Blake.

Twisted Sewer Witch, another of Scott's favourite artworks for Magic: The Gathering.

➡ supplies, packing materials, the scanner, and my own mini flat files. The sink is near me too. Scott is on the right, with his computer, large drafting table and supplies.

In-between us are our bookshelves, our Epson SureColor P800 printer, and large wooden flat files built by Scott's grandfather. We also have a couch. We keep a pile of toys and a laptop for entertainment in the corner, because sometimes the kids need to join us, like when we work during the weekend, or when the older one is at

❝ The home studio works well for us. There's no commute, and it's invaluable to have each other for daily feedback ❞

home sick. We both work traditionally. My usual mediums are watercolour, ink, acryla gouache and occasionally pencil. Scott's go-tos are charcoal, oil paint and occasionally ink."

DAILY SCHEDULE

Scott adds: "We have a pretty solid routine set during the day where we work around the parenting. Right now, most of our work is done when one of our kids is at school and the other is napping, and we continue work after their bedtime. We also give each other additional time throughout the day, especially when there's a deadline and one of us really needs it.

The home studio works well for us. There's no commute, and it's been invaluable to have each other for daily feedback on paintings and projects. It's also been lovely for us to be at

home and always around for the kids while they're young. It's not ideal, but we've gotten really good at being able to drop and pick up our work multiple times during a day to deal with stuff happening in our family lives.

One benefit of that is that we have become way more efficient with our time. Somehow we manage to get it all done. No longer do I have to work through the night like I often found myself doing before we had kids!

We're looking forward to so many more years of painting in this studio, and we're also planning to create a little arts and crafts corner for our kids when they're a bit older!"

Freelance illustrators Elisabeth Alba and Scott Murphy are based in Massachusetts. Their work can be found in books, articles, games and divination decks. To find out more visit www.albaillustration.com for Elisabeth's work, and see more from Scott at www.murphyillustration.com.

Threat of Takhisis was created for Dungeons & Dragons by Scott. It's an oil painting on a masonite panel, much like his recent Magic: The Gathering work.

We were so excited to install a slop sink in the studio. We no longer have to go all the way down to the basement to clean our brushes and palettes.

This is the entrance to the studio, a sliding door to maximise space, and the first thing you might see is the ceiling light. With such a high ceiling, we knew we needed a large light fixture. We were inspired to get this one after seeing Norman Rockwell's wagon wheel chandelier in his Vermont studio.

Scott makes maquettes for many of his paintings, especially if there's a creature involved. He uses wire and aluminium foil as a base and covers it in Sculpey, or occasionally uses oil-based clay.

Scott bought his drafting table off Craigslist and refurbished it. He also set up a stand for his Cintiq Companion as a screen for reference, and has a wall of inspiring prints and postcards.
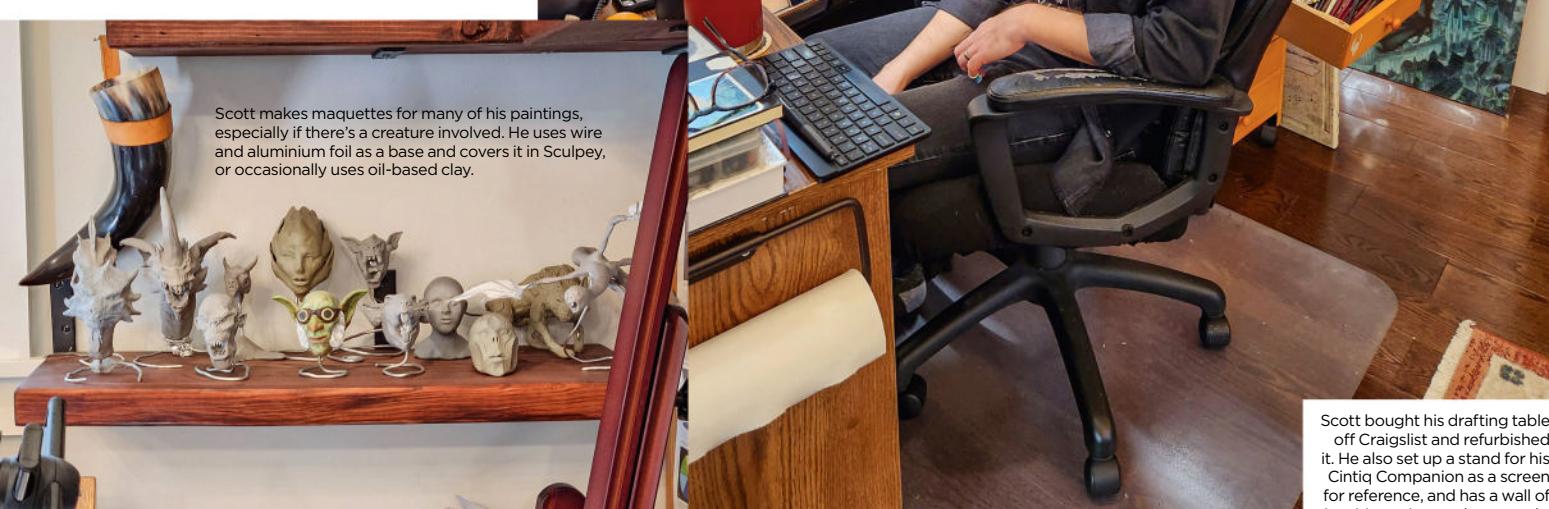
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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES

Issue 235
February 2024
Become a master of anatomy as expert artists share their insights. We learn to unleash the power of foreshortening, and speak to the legendary Disney teacher Glenn Vilppu. Plus, discover 15 must-see tips to improve your sketches!

Issue 234
January 2024
Incredible artists bring you a host of advice to up your game, from making animal-based characters to lighting and composition tips. We also find out how to make your artbook dreams come true, and tour a Disney artist's studio.

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 Boutté 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.

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Letters
YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

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Our anatomy workshops in issue 235 covered key skills for drawing and detailing human figures.

Anatomy solved!

Hi Rob. I'm writing in to say a massive thank you for the latest issue. I'm a pretty confident artist and feel very at home in most areas, but drawing the anatomy is definitely not one of them. I've often struggled to get this right, but not been able to quite manage it.

Your anatomy issue helped me out so much. I loved the training and seeing the different approaches. It's interesting to see such varied results all coming from a place of realism. Thanks again!
Ella, via email

Rob replies *Hi Ella. Thanks so much for reaching out to us. I absolutely get what you mean and that's why we strive to offer all our readers a variety of training and inspiration each month. The fundamentals of anatomy are core elements to learn for most artists, so having a range of different takes can only be a good thing. I'm so glad you found that useful and hope your future endeavours give you even more confidence in your artwork. Do share your projects with us too, we'd love to see them!*

DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 235 at **ifxm.ag/ single-ifx**.

Thomas Elliott showed us how to use realistic basics and then break the rules to create hideous mutants.

Terrifying bodies

Greetings ImagineFX. I just wanted to say a quick well done for your last issue. I loved it all, but especially enjoyed going through Thomas Elliott's tutorial on designing mutants. I'm a big fan of The Thing type of creature design, so it was a joy to see such a good artist sharing their workflow on such a monster. More of this disgustingly wonderful art please.
Michael, via email

Rob replies *Hello Michael. I'm really pleased to hear you enjoyed that tutorial. Thomas is a truly fantastic artist and his passions and skills really shine through in his workshops. It's great to see how such a monstrosity can come to life through the understanding of normal human anatomy too. I'll absolutely look at more of this kind of content for the future.*

New Year project

Hello there. I'd like to thank you for your story on New Year's resolutions from your last issue. I found it was really interesting to hear from artists who look beyond the simple idea of learning a new tool, but look at the industry and community to see what's happening too, and how they want to see changes made for the better of everyone.

The threat of AI, and the damage done by social media and the like play such a big part in the lives of artists. It was so lovely to see this discussed with an air of optimism, so thank you.
Priti, via email

Rob replies *Hi Priti. I couldn't agree more. The New Year is often a time to take stock and think ahead about what we can change, but it's very easy to think of these goals as simple tasks when what might be more rewarding is to think about change on a greater scale. Happy New Year!*

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention

📷 **Irnes**
@tropexart

📷 **Tomek Larek**
@tomek_larek

📷 **ArtfullyFaith**
@artfullyfaith

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
ZEZHOU CHEN

Dominic Carter talks to the artist about drawing for Magic: The Gathering, personal projects and staying energised

Freelance illustrator Zezhou Chen has emerged from humble beginnings to work with some of the top names in the industry. We caught up with him to hear how he went from not having enough money for cigarettes to illustrating Magic: The Gathering, why he quit teaching, and how computer games stop him burning out.

Tell us about your art background.
Between 2004 and 2008 I studied computer arts and design at college. It was a total scam, but luckily I didn't waste too much time on it and instead bought a Wacom tablet to teach myself digital painting. Later on, from 2009 to 2011, I completed a master's degree in graphic design at the Ukrainian National Academy of Fine Arts. After completing my studies, from 2011 to 2012 I worked for a couple of games companies in China.

At that time, Chinese companies typically required overtime, which I couldn't tolerate. So I went back to my hometown and started accepting freelance work. At first I didn't have many orders and I was broke. I couldn't even afford to buy cigarettes, so I had to quit smoking. But during that time my life was relatively easy, and I had more time to deeply study my technical skills, which helped me improve my professional level.

From 2015 to 2017, I moved to Chengdu and taught digital painting at an educational institution on a part-time basis, while also receiving more freelance work. My financial situation quickly improved. ➤➤

Zezhou Chen

DUEL OF THE FATES
Light and dark clash in this fourth piece from Zezhou's Before the World Ends series.

❝ At first I didn't have many orders and I was broke. I couldn't even afford to buy cigarettes ❞

EXCAVATED WALL
A figure walks past a mysterious ruin in this illustration art directed by Taylor Ingvarsson.

PEACE
Zezhou breaks down the process behind making this warrior enjoying a moment's rest on his website.
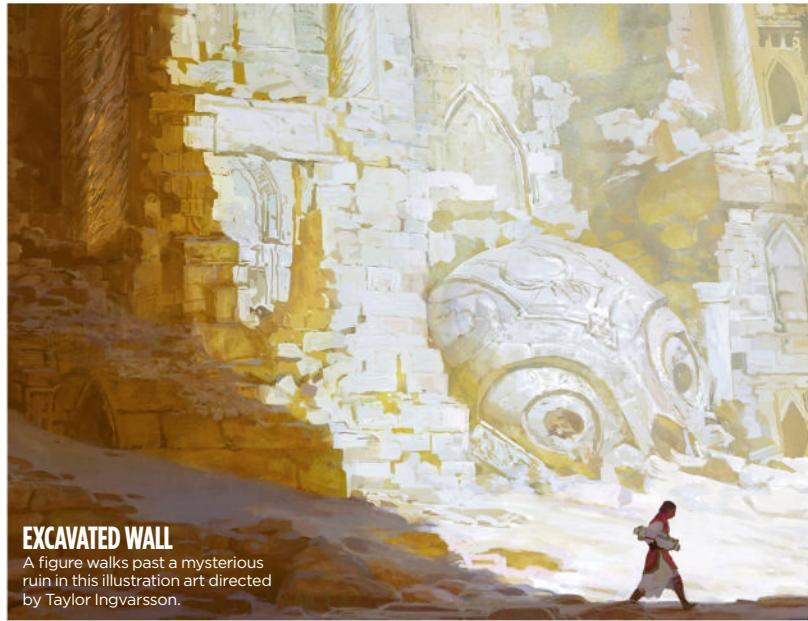
➤➤ I'm skilled in organising and teaching abstract concepts [only in Chinese], but I lack the patience with others. Dealing with the students on a daily basis made me feel suffocated, so I quit my teaching job and have been working as a freelancer ever since.

How has your art developed, and what has driven those changes?
Exploring feels like playing an open-world game. There are interesting points, challenges, and ways you can overcome obstacles as you get closer to them. After practising and gaining experience, you'll gradually develop a

figure out what the object looks like, and then decide what angle to present it from. If it's a person or an animal, I also need to consider its movements. These are the elements that determine the composition of any picture. Then I'll consider the lighting, and finally the background.

What research do you do when creating an artwork?
Generally it's related to the form, which means what shape something should be, such as the shape of a bat, or the shape of a certain muscle in a certain situation. Secondly, it's about

> **" Dealing with students daily made me feel suffocated, so I quit my teaching job and have been a freelancer ever since "**

rich, solid understanding of the game, much like drawing. I can't pinpoint each step as it likely includes emotions and experiences beyond just drawing.

How do you interpret a brief from a client when you receive it?
Commercial illustrations are basically about a real object. My main job is to

the material, such as melting snow in the mud. The way to collect all of this knowledge is of course to search for pictures and videos online.

You've created a lot of work for Magic: The Gathering. How did you come to be involved with this?
Like many other businesses, the quantity and quality of the customers are key factors in determining the success of your work. At the beginning of my freelance career, I received very few orders and didn't have any high-quality clients.

In order to improve this situation, I proactively reached out to all of the gaming companies that I could find, including Wizards of the Coast. After about two years, they contacted me

RETURN TO HEAVEN 7
Want to see how this haunting piece was created? There's a five-minute timelapse video on Zezhou's YouTube channel.

and asked if I wanted to illustrate some Magic: The Gathering cards.

Were you already a fan of MTG before working on it? If so, did this influence your approach?
Back when I was in high school, in around 2002, the local computer store that sold pirated DVDs started selling Magic: The Gathering cards too. I was really interested, but didn't have the means to play at the time.

However, I bought the Magic novels Invasion and The Brothers' War, which I could read at school. Up until now I haven't particularly delved into the ➤➤

Artist
PROFILE

Zezhou Chen
LOCATION: China
FAVOURITE ARTIST: Janus Liang
MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender, Substance 3D Painter, Marvelous Designer, oil paint, acrylic
WEB: https://zezhouchen.com

CYBERDRIVE AWAKENER
This card art illustration was made for Magic: The Gathering's Kamigawa: Neon Destiny set.

™ and © Wizards of the Coast

RETURN TO HEAVEN 5
A stranded astronaut surrounded by a flock of birds, in an image from Zezhou's personal project.
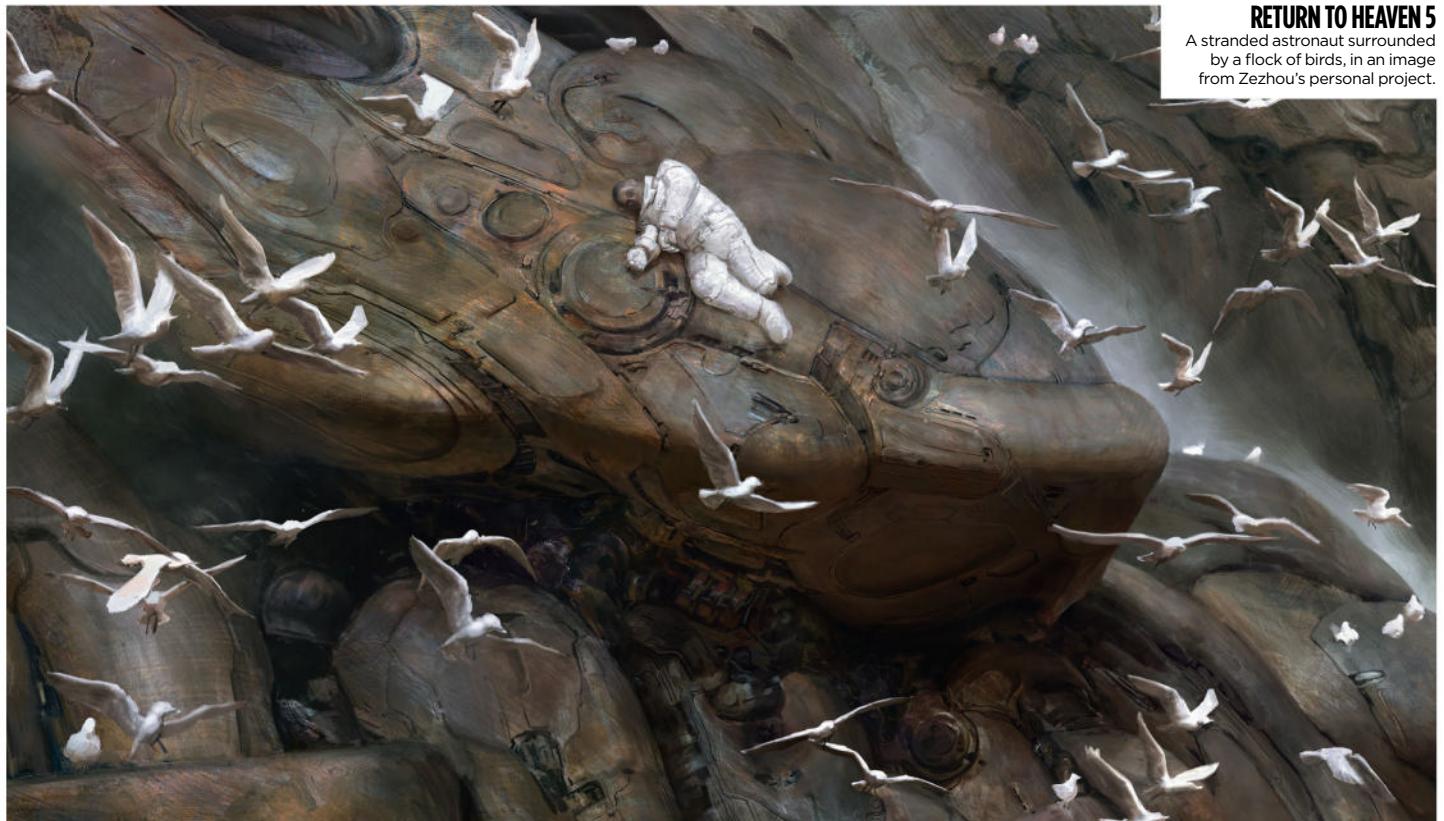
Interview

After practising and gaining experience, you'll develop a rich, solid understanding

GIFT
It took Zezhou six months to refine the characters and composition in this personal piece.

playing side, I just have some basic understanding of the rules. Although I wouldn't call myself a fan of the game, I'm a fan of its artwork. I've always admired the illustrations in Magic: The Gathering, and hoped I could draw something similar myself.

There are lots of amazing personal projects on your website. How do you make time in your schedule to work on these?
If I'm tired or feel like working on a personal piece, or if I just want to play

seen before. I'm not going to draw just to learn or practise.

Have you ever suffered from burnout? If so, do you have any advice for overcoming it?
Everyone gets tired, it's a part of work. You might ask yourself, 'What's the point of what I'm doing?' But really, that's just a part of the bigger question: 'What's the point of life?' Which is a tough one to answer.

But fortunately, you can avoid questioning the meaning of your work

> ❝ I always strive for uniqueness and originality; I want to draw things that you haven't really seen before ❞

some games, then I'll simply turn down a few orders to create that free time for myself.

Do you have any specific aims when you're making personal projects? And do you use them to develop certain skills or techniques?
First of all, when it comes to my personal works, I paint things that I find interesting or that will make me happy. Secondly, I always strive for uniqueness and originality; I want to draw things that you haven't really

by taking a break from it. If I feel burnt out, I'll try to shift my focus over to something else that can help to keep me energised and passionate, such as playing a fun game, doing exercise, or pursuing a hobby.

It's important to remain motivated. I'm still continuing to work, but I'm just doing so with less intensity. I'll prioritise the easier tasks first to make them feel a little more manageable. By completing those easier tasks early on, the difficult parts then become much less daunting.

RETURN TO HEAVEN 3A
A departure from the rest of the Return to Heaven series, as a woman shelters from the sun under an umbrella.

Zezhou Chen

In my daily life, I play a lot of video games. If I find a fun game, I'll play it for a few hours before starting work. I also take breaks to play games while working. I try to maintain a good mood as often as possible.

Of all the artwork that you've created so far, what are you most proud of and why?
Return to Heaven 7. Only I can make something like this, it's so awesome. It's very unique and poetic. I'm being a bit conceited here of course; that's not an objective fact. Other people can also achieve it.

What's next for you? Do you have any exciting projects on the horizon, or are there other areas that you'd like to explore?
My usual chill time is during the first half of the year. The next few months are already packed with work for me. During the first half of next year [2024], I'll be continuing to work on game engines and programming. I've been doing that for quite some time over the first half of this year [2023], and now I'm pretty much able to develop the features that I want freely using code. I'm pretty awesome, if I do say so myself!

What advice would you give to aspiring artists hoping to follow in your footsteps?
Don't get too stressed. I'm not sure what to say that could be of any use. I think it's definitely a wise idea to save your work often. ✺

RETURN TO HEAVEN 4
If you're a fan of the Return to Heaven series, prints are available to buy from Zezhou's shop.

Sketchbook

Thomas Mahon

The concept artist gives us an insight on the portraits of pets and people from his collection of digital sketches

Artist PROFILE

Thomas Mahon
LOCATION: England

Passionate about making art, Thomas is a senior concept artist and painter approaching a decade working within the video game industry. More recently he has been drawn to creating pet portraits in his spare time and sharing his process online to help other artists.
www.artstation.com/thomasmahon

A FAVOURITE
"I was commissioned to paint someone's father, and was given permission to publish it here. It's one of my favourite portraits I've made. I try not to overwork my paintings, and I'm very happy with the brush economy used in the piece."

CAT NAPS
"I quite like the composition and how the shapes flow into each other. The pets' owner was happy with my initial version, but requested a more interesting background, so I made this colourful little window. It really pulls the composition together."
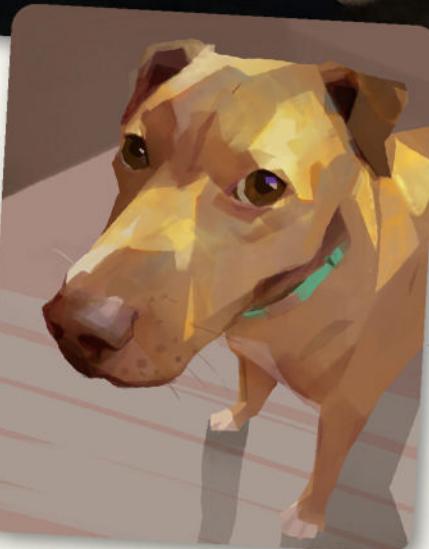
AMBROSE
"This is our cat Ambrose; he's magnificent. He's actually just a tabby as far as we know, but everyone asks if he's a Maine coon. I'm quite happy with the lighting here. I was trying to build up my local colours and lighting separately, but eventually they sort of merged into one thing."

DAPPLED LIGHT
"Here I've gone for something more expressive with chunky brushstrokes, so it's a bit more blocky. The dappled light was super fun to paint. The pose was pretty close to the reference, but I love the more extreme angle."

HONEY
"I purposefully kept the cast shadows across the side really sharp to contrast with the soft fur. People generally think contrast only applies to lighting, but there are many different kinds. If you want something to look really soft, it's better to surround that with harsher and sharper edges. I definitely recommend Richard Schmid's artbook Alla Prima for anything involving edges."

66 **People think contrast only applies to lighting, but there are many different kinds** 99

Sketchbook

ANGI

"This is my partner Angi. She's also magnificent. I took the photo this is based on. It was one of our first dates together by a local pond. I have fond memories of this time. With the painting, I wanted to capture the strong side lighting."

BLACK GOAT

"My partner wanted me to paint something witchy to hang in the house. I like how the simplified horns contrast with the fur. When you paint black fur, the variation in value and colour is more subtle, but it's still there. It depends how realistic you want to be."

SIMPLE SNAP

"This is based on a shot by photographer @1earthsworld. I'd totally recommend his page. I picked this out because of how simple it is. It's a bit more graphic than my usual work and I want to return to that from time to time. The light pops nicely!"

PROCESS

"I felt a lot more confident in my process after I made this one, as if something had clicked. I really enjoy sharing my process with people. I learned a lot online when I was growing up, so it's nice to think that someone is getting something out of me sharing these."

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**

STRONG SILHOUETTES
"I paint a lot of pets! This one has a good energy, and I think the light in his eyes turned out nicely. A recurring theme throughout my work is a strong, simple silhouette with intricate internal forms."

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Advice from the world's best artists

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This issue:

Procreate

FROM SKETCH TO FINISHED PAINTING

Daniela Uhlig combines the traditional and digital worlds as she experiments in a Procreate portrait

Artist
PROFILE

Daniela Uhlig
LOCATION: Germany

Since moving to Berlin in 2003, digital painter Daniela has discovered a greater passion for the illustration and character design worlds. Within a year, she began to work professionally within the industry.
https://bit.ly/3uVqf2S

This picture doesn't really have a profound message. There were no specific references, or forward plans for how the portrait should look later on. This piece is more just the result of my constant struggle to keep my drawing skills fresh. There are times that I have to force myself to draw traditionally again so that my brain doesn't forget everything.

But honestly, I can't help but drift into digital colouring very quickly. For this artwork, I decided to keep the original sketch and include it in the finished piece. This meant I had to work intensively with the layer Blend Modes found in Procreate to get the image I wanted.

So, this piece was a combination of practice, experimentation, and trying to combine the mediums of traditional and digital art. In many ways for me, it was more of a game and a way to be at home in both of those worlds. Sometimes creating art is just about having fun and being creative without needing a big message behind it.

How I create...
A PORTRAIT FROM A BASE SKETCH
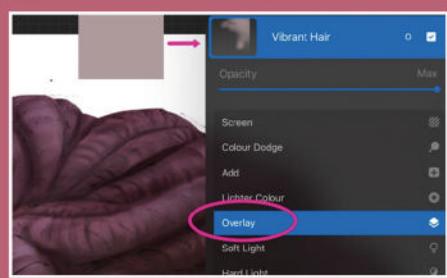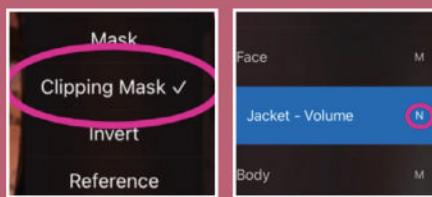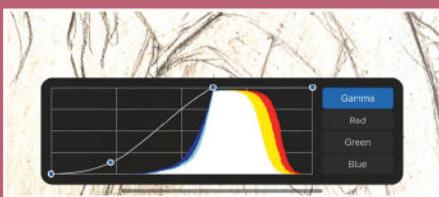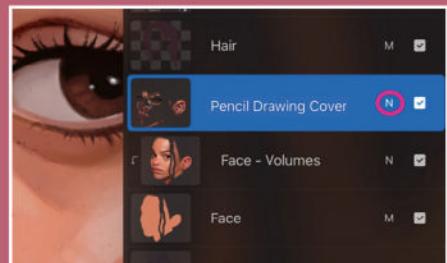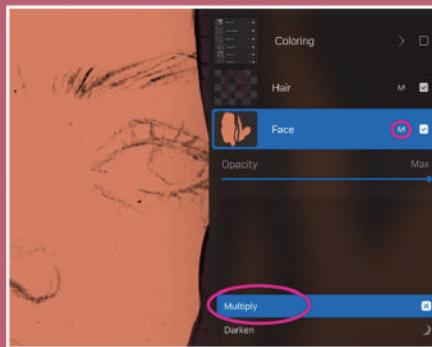
1 Prepare in Procreate
First I create a traditional sketch, photograph it and import it into Procreate. When doing this, I need to make sure that the resolution is at least 300dpi with the longest side 3,500px at a minimum. I'll also adjust the curves to create extra contrast, aiming to make the background as white as possible while leaving the sketch visible, and then remove the saturation.

2 Begin to add colour
Now I create three separate layers for the face, hair and jacket, and set them all to the Multiply blend mode so that I can still see my sketch. I start with the face, create a new layer in Normal mode, and connect it to the face layer below using a clipping mask. The sketch will remain visible above everything as I paint on it. I'll continue the same way with the hair and jacket layers.

3 Add correction layers
In between, but especially at the end, I create correction layers, which are usually left in Normal mode. This was particularly important to me for the face as I didn't want the sketch to look intense across the board. I set the other areas to either Soft Light or Overlay mode, for example to blend another colour tone into the hair, or to lighten or darken it over a large area.

PERFECT FEATURES

Highlight placement
The highlights are created in areas hit directly by light, which goes for both outwardly and inwardly curved areas. The hardness of the highlight will depend on the surface texture and curvature. The tip of the nose and eye areas have harder highlights, while a more diffuse, soft highlight brightens the skin on the forehead.
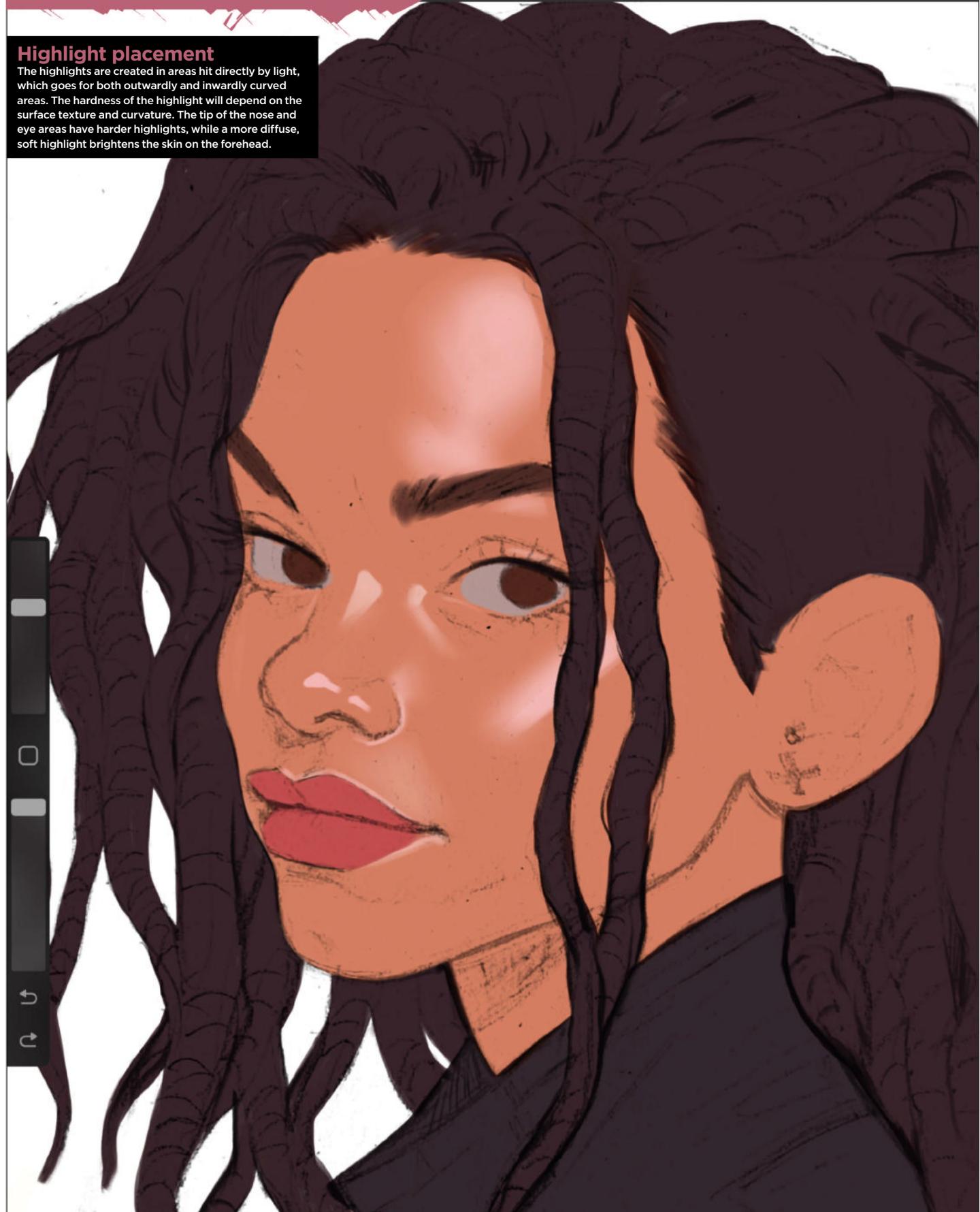
Glint in the eye

When painting the iris, it's important to consider the lighting. Light from above creates reflections in the upper area, which will make the opposite side appear brighter. The same rule applies for every direction except for frontal light, such as a flash, which results in a completely radiant iris.
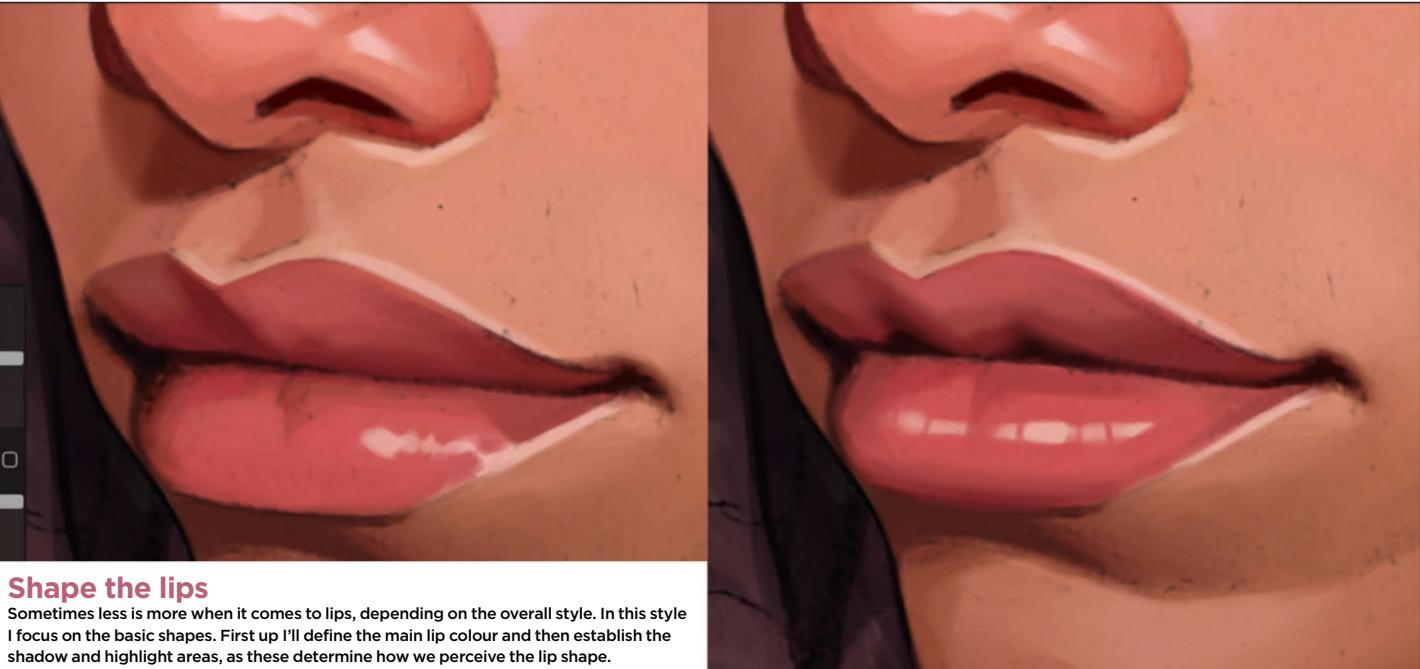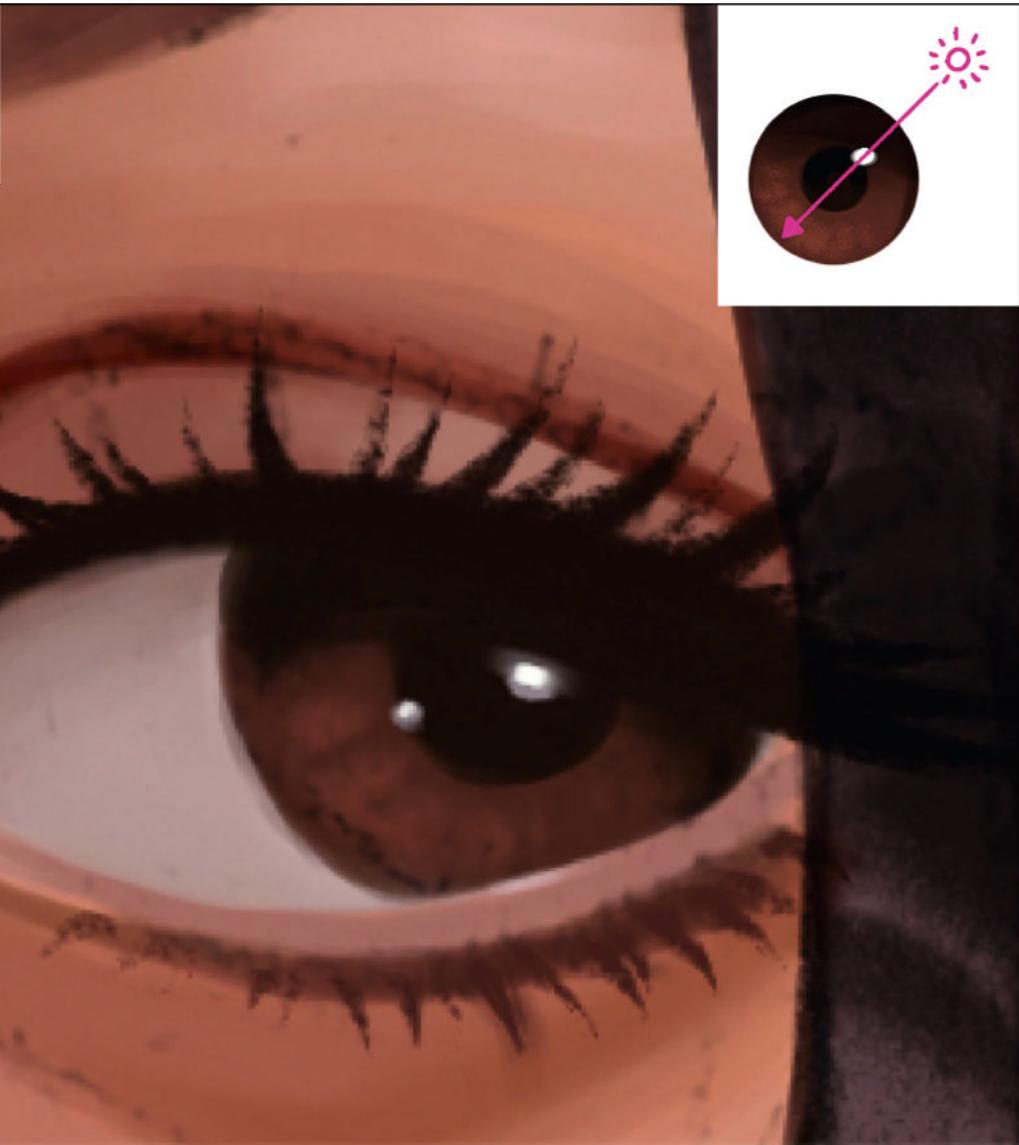
Shape the lips

Sometimes less is more when it comes to lips, depending on the overall style. In this style I focus on the basic shapes. First up I'll define the main lip colour and then establish the shadow and highlight areas, as these determine how we perceive the lip shape.

THE FINER DETAILS

Shadow tones

The shadowy areas are generally more saturated. Compared to the base tone they're also darker and appear slightly red. Using black for skin shadows is generally a taboo unless you have a specific reason. The shadow colours will depend on the brightness and the character's surroundings, as these are the elements reflected by the skin.

Vibrant shades

To add vibrancy to the face I chose different shades of red to purple. With a big Soft brush I painted this colour on a new layer over the cheeks, nose and chin, set the layer to Soft Light, and adjusted the opacity where it was necessary. This gives the skin a more vibrant colour and radiance.
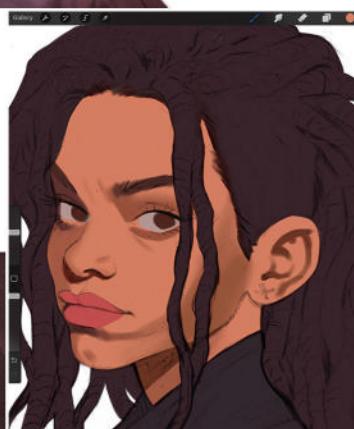
Tidying up

As my sketch feels rather messy and doesn't look good in all places, I took the Smudge brush and did some work over these areas of the image.
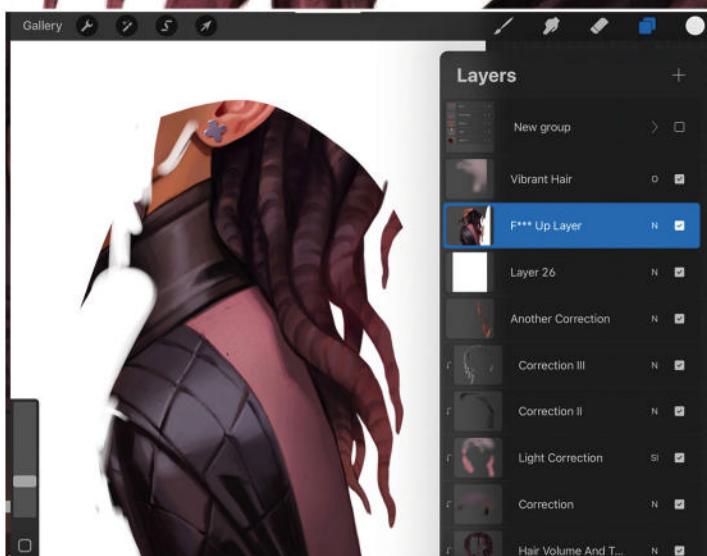
Emergency plan

If I notice a detail at the end that can't be easily fixed due to the layer structure, such as a proportion not fitting, I have a workaround in place. I'll instead save a JPG of the latest version, then import it into my painting, cut out the problematic part on a new layer, and then deform and move the area I want to change.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PROCREATE

DEFAULT BRUSHES: MEDIUM HARD AIRBRUSH

This brush is simple and straightforward, I use it for almost everything.

SOFT BRUSH

This fluffy brush is just perfect if you want to paint a touch of colour or blend any colours.

NIKKO RULL

This brush has beautiful texture. I use it when I want to work rougher, and have also made an angular version.

Layers

- New group
- Vibrant Hair
- F*** Up Layer
- Layer 26
- Another Correction
- Correction III
- Correction II
- Light Correction
- Correction
- Hair Volume And T...

Procreate Dreams
CREATE ANIMATION IN A DISNEY STYLE

The legendary **Aaron Blaise** reveals how he made his latest animated short in the newly released Procreate Dreams app

Artist PROFILE
Aaron Blaise
LOCATION: US

A graduate of Ringling College of Art and Design, Aaron worked as an animator for Disney for 21 years. He was co-director of Brother Bear and nominated for an Oscar, and worked on Beauty and the Beast, The Lion King, Mulan and more hit movies. He now teaches animation techniques and regularly gives talks at events.
https://bit.ly/3RlKcYe

Early last year I was contacted by Procreate and asked if I'd be interested in talking to them about a secret project. Intrigued, I said yes.

They informed me that for several years they'd been working on a new animation app called Procreate Dreams, and wanted to know if I'd be interested in trying it and creating a demo animation. Once again I gave them a resounding yes!

They gave me full reign to develop a concept. Because of my Disney background, I settled on something story based and that I could likely animate in a few weeks. The fact that they're based in Tasmania was on my mind so I started doing research on the area and learned the region is home to one of the smallest penguin species in the world, known as fairy penguins or little blue penguins. I also discovered that the island of Tasmania has simply breathtaking cliffs. Coupled with the software name, this sparked a concept of this little penguin that dreams of flying.

A few days later, they got me an early build to start working with and I was off. Being an alpha build there were a number of features not yet in place, but I still found it super easy to
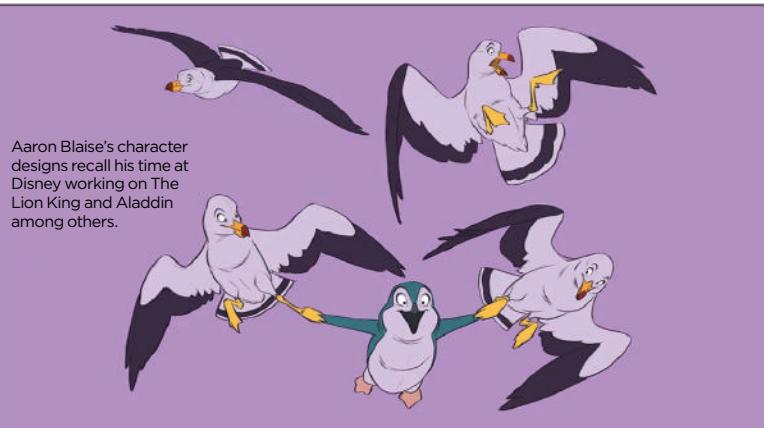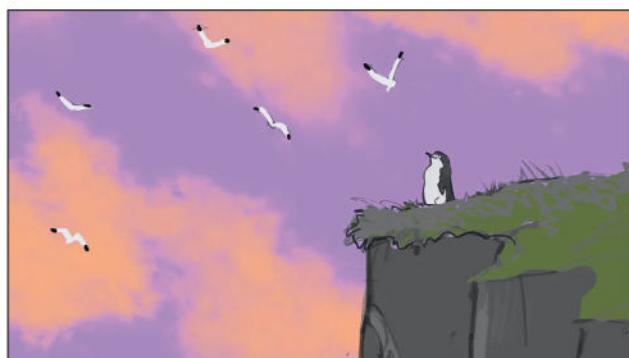
Aaron Blaise's character designs recall his time at Disney working on The Lion King and Aladdin among others.

use. I spent about 12 weeks doing the project, including full animation, backgrounds, colour, and sound and music, with a little assistance on the character colouring. In my Disney days, a shot of approximately the same time on a film like Beauty and the Beast would take a team of 65 many months to complete.

I approached the project the same way I would any other. I'm a frame-by-frame character animator, so I used Dreams the same way I might have used a stack of paper and pencil many years ago: one drawing at a time, one frame at a time. I also used some of the built-in keyframing tools for things like the panning of clouds, as well as the opening shot where we vertically pan up the tall cliff.

That's the beauty of this software to me. It has so many features that it can apply to numerous workflows. Want to make a classic cartoon? You can! Want to draw over live-action video and use it as a replacement for After Effects. Check! Want to create anime-style sliding backgrounds with broad acting on top? Go for it!

Once I'd finished up the little penguin animation, I was asked if I

The composer Max Mueller created the soundtrack to Aaron's Procreate Dreams animation.

could attend the announcement of the software in London this past September. Once again I said yes, and I was completely taken by surprise when Procreate CEO James Cuda used my animation as the climax of his keynote. It was such a cool experience seeing how well the audience responded to the short.

I believe we're going to see an explosion in 2D animation. Now Dreams is out, there's no excuse not to try. I've already been contacted by friends at animation studios asking if the software is legit. It is.

There's no one-size-fits-all for animation. Roger Rabbit and Akira are approached differently, but both valid. With that in mind, I want to share my approach to Dreams.

Former Disney animator Aaron says that Dreams is an artist-friendly app.

1 Do your research

If you're trying to tell a story, it's imperative that you do your homework, and essential to make the world of your story believable. I guarantee you that the crew of SpongeBob SquarePants know everything there is to know about sponges and coral reefs.

2 Make a storyboard and thumbnails

In Procreate Dreams, open up a new document, set your desired resolution and then start roughing out your storyboards. What's great about Dreams is that you can do this properly in the app. You can rough out your boards on the timeline and essentially create an animatic right there. This is a great chance to work out your ideas for elements like cuts, shot staging and timing.

3 Character design

Once you have your story down it's time to design the characters. In the case of animation, it's important that the characters have appealing designs but are also not overly complex. Remember that you'll have to redraw them a lot! Get those designs down to something that's easy to read, yet simple for you to draw over and over again throughout the project.

4 Create backgrounds and layouts

In Procreate Dreams, the area that's visible to the viewer in the final movie is called the stage, and anything outside of this viewer window is called backstage. While the drawing tools in Dreams are quite capable themselves, I chose to create my backgrounds in Procreate and then import them to Dreams. Each layer can be brought in individually to the timeline, or you can bring in the entire file. Typically for the penguin short I had the ground plane on one layer, with the sky layer behind it and the cloud elements on a sparse layer between those two. ➤➤

Pull down on this handle to enter Flipbook
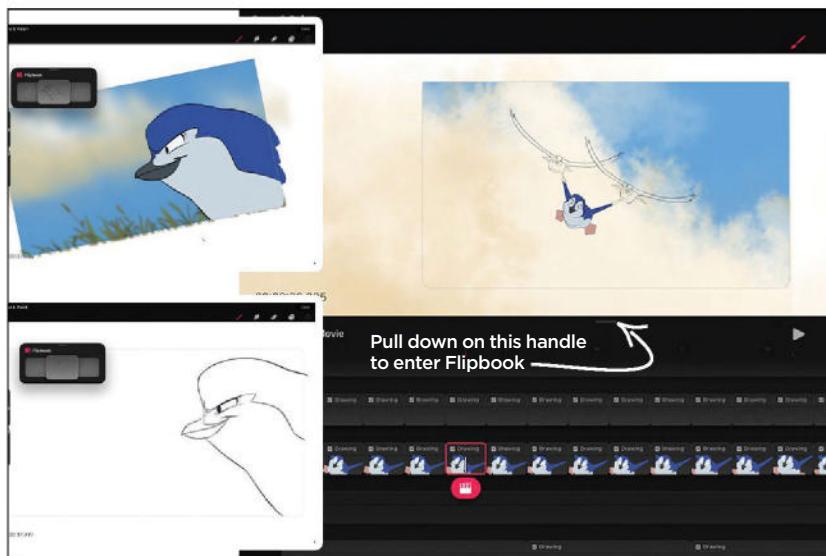
5 Rough out the key animation

If your storyboard is detailed enough, you should know precisely how long each of your shots will take. Use this as your guide and create a new layer in the timeline. On this new layer begin to rough your key animation poses at the times they should occur. You're trying to get the essential poses of an action, known as pose-to-pose animation.

Here's a pro tip for you: if you click the Drawing mode icon and then drag down on the Flipbook handle you can enter Flipbook mode. This allows you to have a much larger drawing area, while you can also flip back and forth to see the motion. While in Flipbook mode, if you click the timecode in the lower-left corner of the screen you can toggle on the onion skin and make adjustments to its parameters.
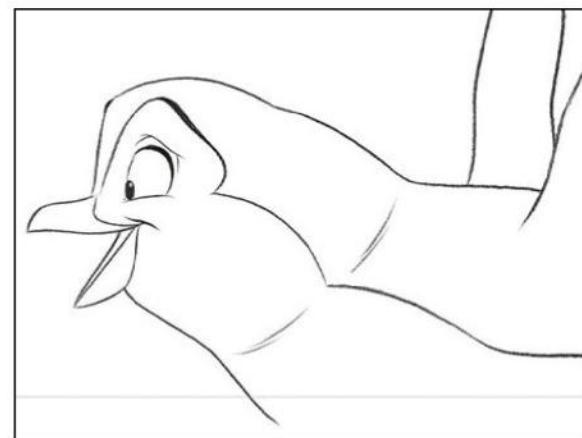
6 Draw the breakdowns and in-betweens for your sequence

This is an animation term for what essentially boils down to doing the rest of the drawings. Your key pose drawings should be placed on your timeline in a way that tells you how long an action will take. During this step, you go back in and add all the additional drawings required to make it look smooth. It's useful to remember that a movie will typically run at 24 frames per second, and in many cases for slower action you're able to get away with holding each drawing for two frames; this is known as animating on twos. For faster action sequences you'll generally do one drawing for every frame, which we call animating on ones. If you animate over video you'll need to work on ones or else the motion will appear to stutter.

Clouds extend past the stage as the camera passes

Shadow layer was animated on its own as a separate element

Each shot is a separate group

Foreground cloud elements

00:01:17.014

00Dream 2-migrated
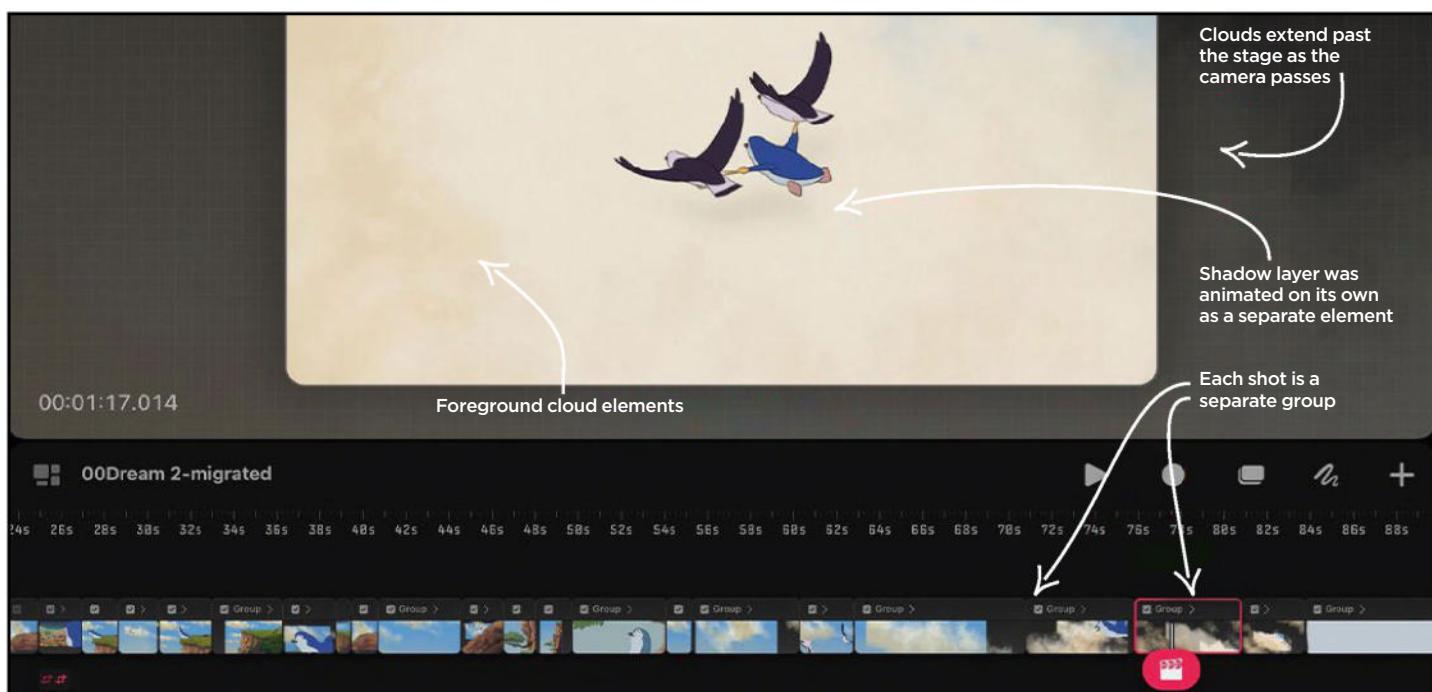
7 Add motion elements and SFX animation

This particular short didn't have a ton of effects so that I could handle it in a relatively short period of time, although this phase is typically where you'd animate elements like smoke or water splashes, and so on.

In my case, I used the Keyframe tools in Dreams to animate the clouds as they moved across the sky in the background. This is done by going to the frame you want the move to start on, tapping on the playhead icon, and then clicking Move. Next, simply drag the clouds where you want them to start, before

going to the frame where you want the move to stop and repeat the process.

In the final shot I had multiple layers of clouds to give a sense of speed. Those closest to the camera move faster than those further away. This layered effect provides you with a strong sense of speed and depth.
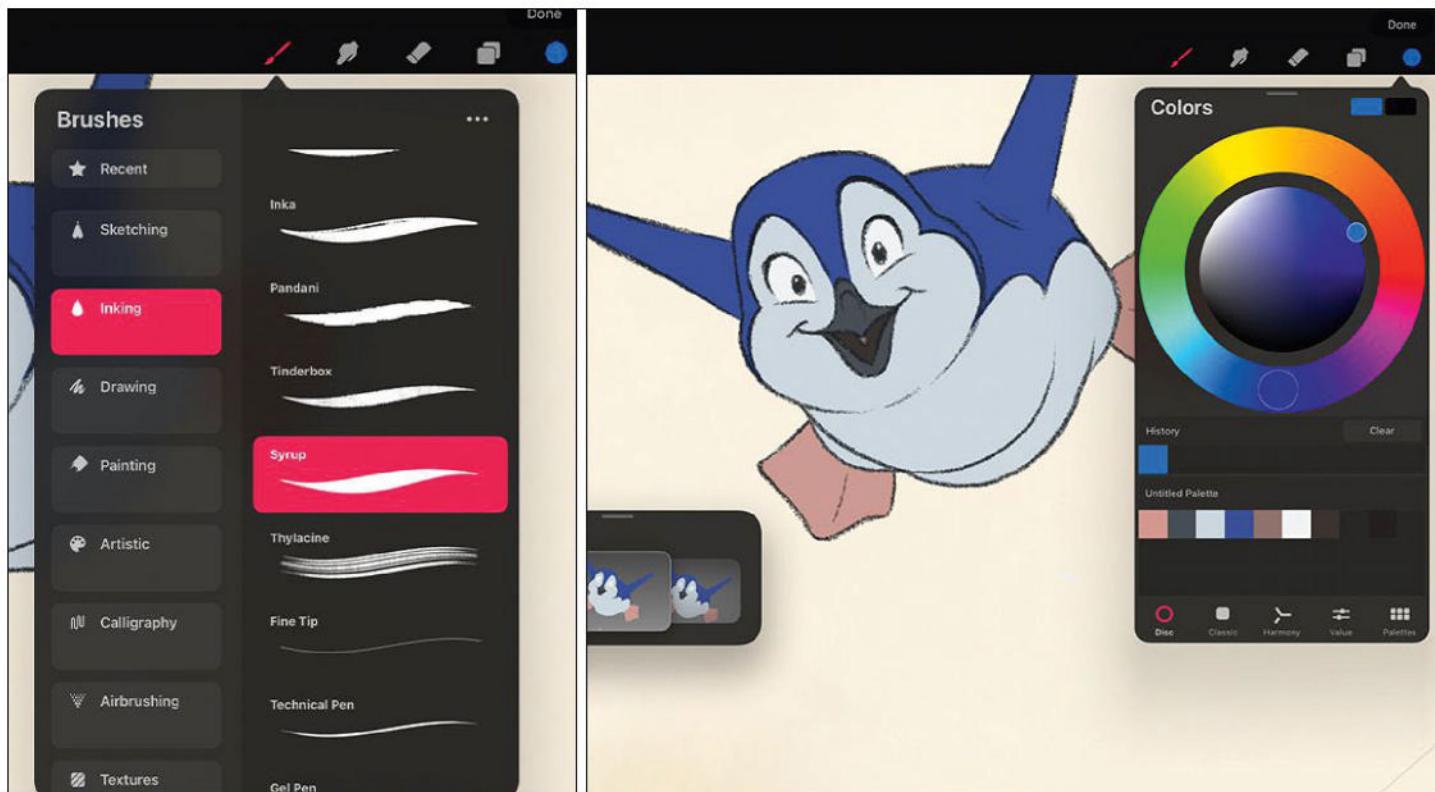
8 Give the character their colour

There was no Colour Fill option in the early version of Procreate Dreams I worked on, so the approach I used was to create a colour layer that appeared behind the line layers. I'd colour the first frame of each shot and pass it on to my assistants Claudia and Nick. We used the Syrup brush for colour as it gives a nice flat texture. This is just like the method of painting cels back in the old days of Disney animation.

9 Bring in music and sound effects

I was fortunate enough to be able to work with a composer by the name of Max Mueller, who created an original composition specifically for my short. He was able to work on the music while I was doing the animation, which was possible because I had my storyboards timed out to the exact running time of the final animation.

Within the animation industry this is called locking the reels. With the reels locked, Max could work out all of his music timing and cues, and it would all match up. The best part was that he got it recorded by a live orchestra. I can't stress enough how much good music will help the emotional beats of a story, especially a piece with no dialogue.

Once Max gave me the final music track I was able to import it directly into Dreams. From there, I created a sound FX track where I added the additional sound effects such as the water and seagull noises, among others. All of this can be mixed and adjusted using the tools available in Dreams.
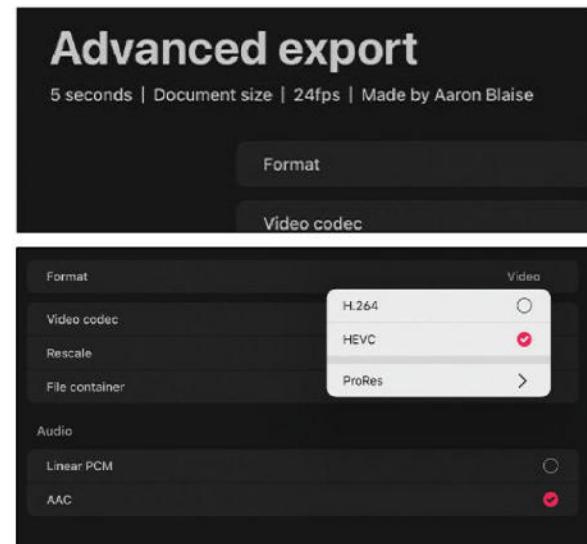
10 Export the completed file

With all of my shots, music and sound effects finalised on the timeline, it's now just a simple matter of hitting the Export button. I chose to export as a movie file with the Best quality option. Under the Export menu, if you click Advanced Export and select Custom Settings, you can choose from a variety of different video and sound formats. This process only took a few seconds and the final movie appeared right in the camera roll on my iPad. From here I delivered the final video to Procreate, who added the titles, and that was a wrap! 🌸

Artist insight
PART 2: MASTERFUL SHAPES AND EDGES

Improve on your figure-drawing skills with expert advice from **Charlie Pickard**, as he shares his tips for perfecting anatomy

Artist PROFILE
Charlie Pickard
LOCATION: England

Charlie is a classically trained fine artist and illustrator who works, exhibits and teaches out of his studio in London.
https://bit.ly/3R3Dcz3

When we first begin to draw, it's common to represent what we see using lines. However, lines don't exist in nature. Everything that we see is, in reality, just varying shapes of colour. Once we realise this simple truth we run into a problem. Shapes on their own appear 2D, but when we look at the world we perceive 3D forms. So how can we express these?

Many students will try to express form by adding more and more value shapes, which often results in broken-up and over-modelled art. However, we now know that the simpler our values, the stronger our artwork will be.

To express form without breaking up our simple value structure, the key is to pay attention not to the shapes themselves, but rather their boundaries. We can also call these their edges, and think of them on a spectrum from perfectly distinct sharp edges to perfectly indistinct soft edges, often called gradients.

While there's an infinite level of variety between these two extremes, we can think of a midpoint between the two as a firm edge. We can use these as our three main categories of edge, similar to how we use the three different value groups; the lights, midtones, and darks.

Look at the drawing below for an example of this. While the shading may seem quite complex from a first glance, much of the volume and form that's expressed here is coming primarily from the way I've explored these three groups of edge. How many of them can you spot within this figure drawing?

1 FUNDAMENTAL TO FORM

Think of these three types of edge as the levels of distinctness of a shape. The more perfectly clear it is, the sharper it is, and the less clear, the more soft. It seems like stating the obvious, but this simple relationship of shapes is often misunderstood, and its relation to reality can't be overstated. Students often consider the softening and play of edges as merely blending colours, performed towards the end of a work as a finishing touch. However, it's much deeper and should be considered carefully at all stages of a painting or drawing.

Below shows how fundamentally the play of different edge varieties creates form. All that's been done between the steps is surrounding the soft and firm edges with a hard edge, which immediately creates a palpable sense of form and finish. The simplest way to think of form is as soft edges surrounded by sharp ones. Our exploration will become more complex, but in its simplest state, this is how to create the sensation. With this fundamental concept, we can achieve a clear form quickly.
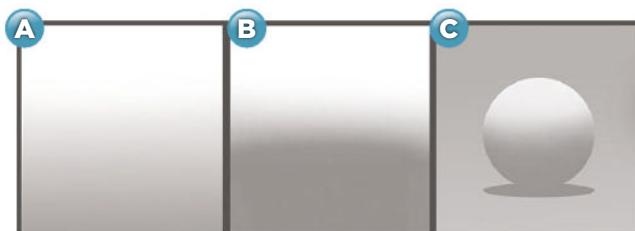
A — Soft edge gradient

B — Add a firm edge

C — Surround soft edges with sharps to create form
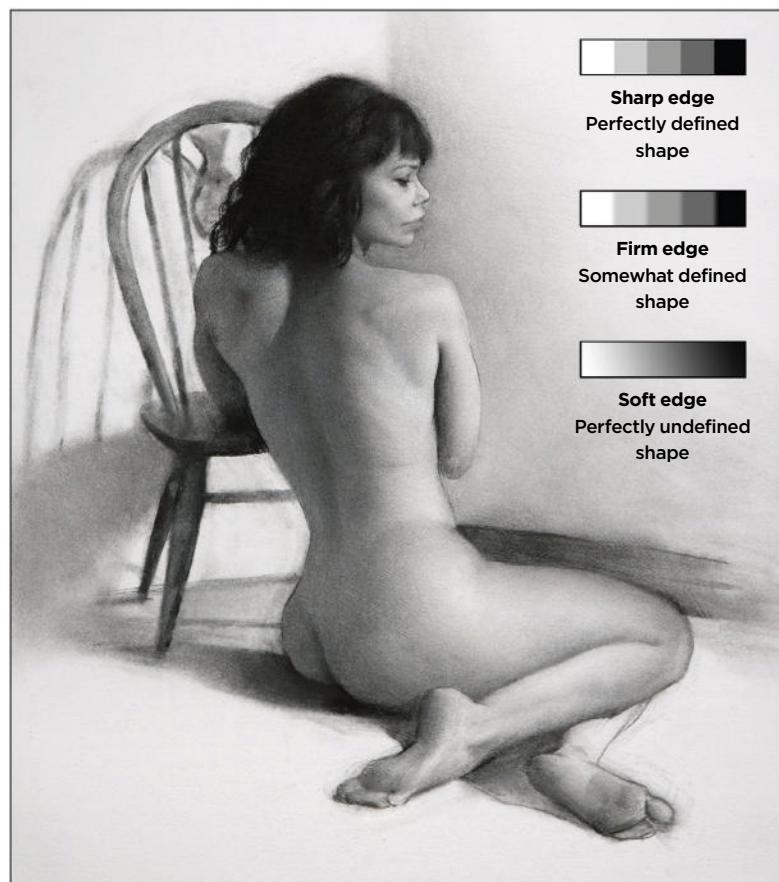
Sharp edge
Perfectly defined shape

Firm edge
Somewhat defined shape

Soft edge
Perfectly undefined shape

2 THE SECRET TO SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE SHADING

This simple and straightforward concept of shading can be massively useful to us when we want to approach shading in a faster way when we draw. The main idea is that firm and soft edges will, in a general way, make up the internal modelling of the form, and sharper edges will be presented on the contours and cast shadows.

If we apply this concept in a quick sketch, we can get a believable sense of the form in a much faster way. The image to the right took just 10 minutes to draw, and yet you can still see the level of volume that can be achieved just by applying this concept. This idea doesn't mean the concept of edges replaces drawing lines, just that this aspect of shapes should also be a part of drawing. We don't need to separate rendering from drawing, as they're actually one and the same. The edges are just a single part of the shape-drawing process.

Typically, your sharper edges will be more noticeable, while the softer edges will be more subtle and less contrasting within your image. We can use this to our advantage by starting with soft, blurry marks, then cutting into them with sharper accents. In this case I initially used stumps and sponges for the softer information, with charcoal and hard erasers for the sharper edges; mostly the contours and cast shadows. This method is one of my favourites for approaching this, but is by no means the only way. Try out as many methods as you can think of.

This leads us to questions: what actually causes this effect of edge variation? How can we organise our thoughts in relation to it and better use edges? In general, edges vary due to three main causes.
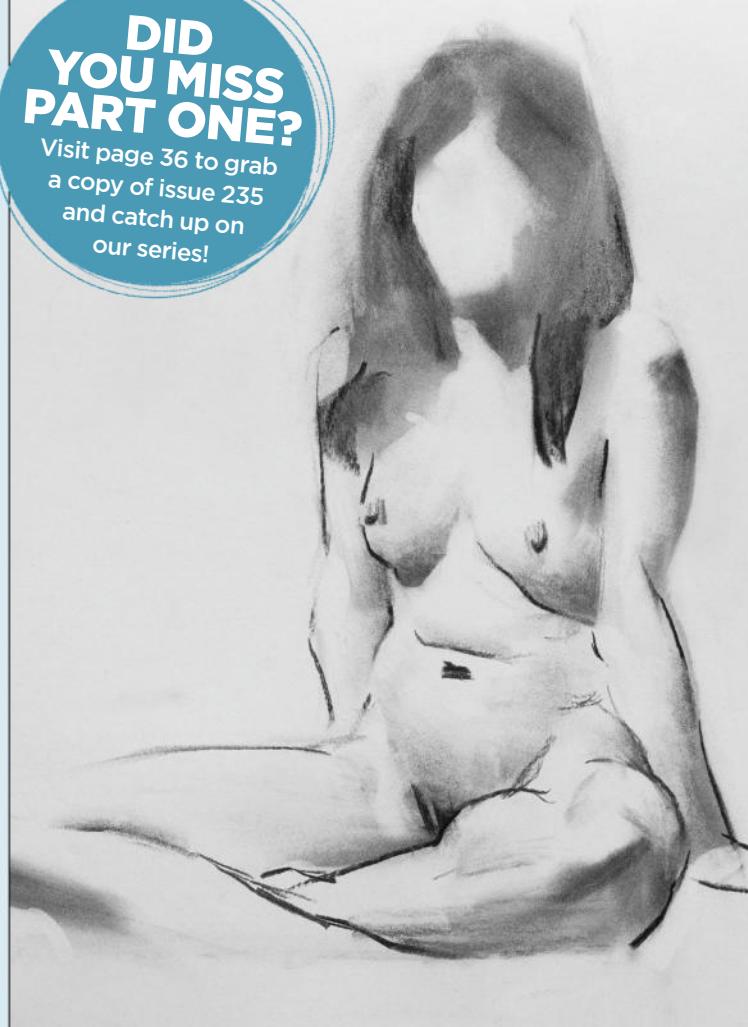
> 66 We don't need to separate the rendering from drawing, as they're actually one and the same 99

Hard Edges
Planes

Soft edges
Curved surfaces

3 CHANGES IN FORM

As you can see here, the rounder forms are modelled using softer edges, and the planar, blocky forms with sharper edges. This is often the first way students think about softening edges.

We can use this round-blocky binary, and although modelling can get more complex than this, it's a great way to start thinking about it. It's a simple concept to understand, but is also the area that can have the most depth of variety and complexity. Many of the finest drawings ever created rested largely on varying forms in this way. ➤➤

Focus in the foreground

Focus in the midground

Focus in the background
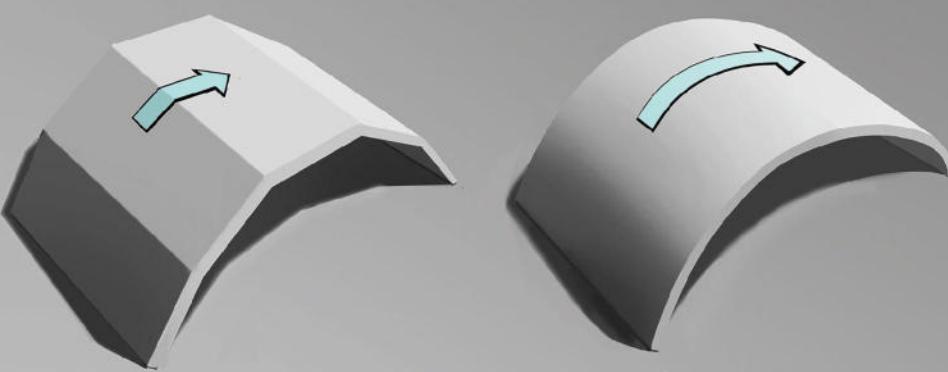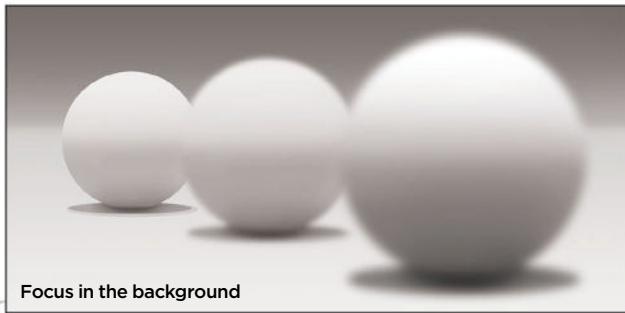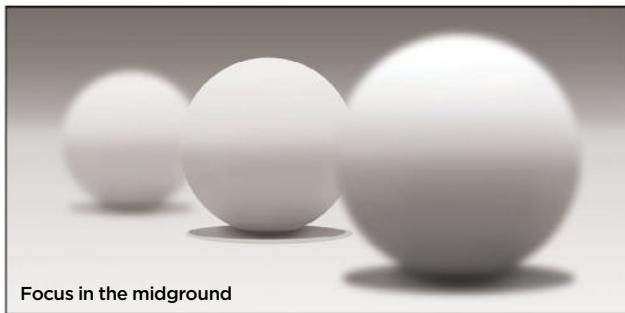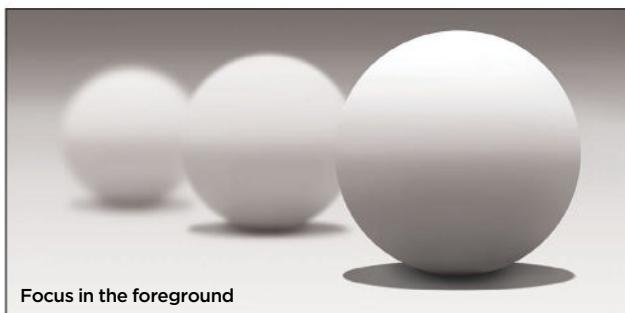
4 DEPTH OF FIELD

The human eye is a lens, and like all lenses it has a depth of focus and only one depth at which it's 100 per cent focused. As a result of this, objects closer or farther away than this focal depth will appear more blurry. We can use this knowledge to our advantage when communicating distance. Simply pick your focal point and then make sure that the subjects closer or farther away are a level softer.

Which of these two dots is your eye drawn to?
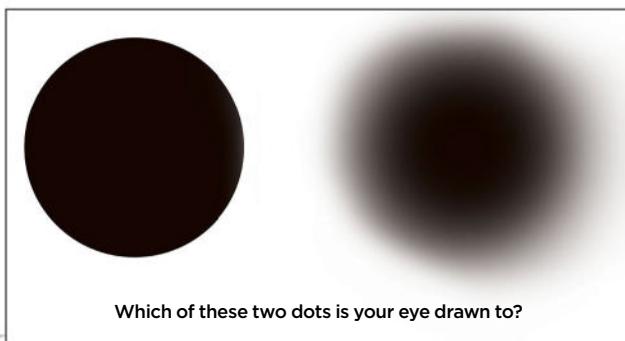
5 CENTRE OF FOCUS

Our eye also only has a narrow range for its centre of focus. We don't often realise this, but only about 15 degrees of our vision can be in focus at the same time. Due to this, levels of sharpness and distinct detail will draw the eye the most. One of the strongest ways to draw your viewer's attention is to sharpen the focal point of an image while softening the areas that you want to draw less attention.

> ❝ These more technical concepts for painting and drawing should be flexible tools for expression in art ❞

Distant forms
Softened for depth of focus

Centre of focus
Sharp edges kept here for focus, softened elsewhere

Planar form
Sharper edge

Rounded form
Softer edge
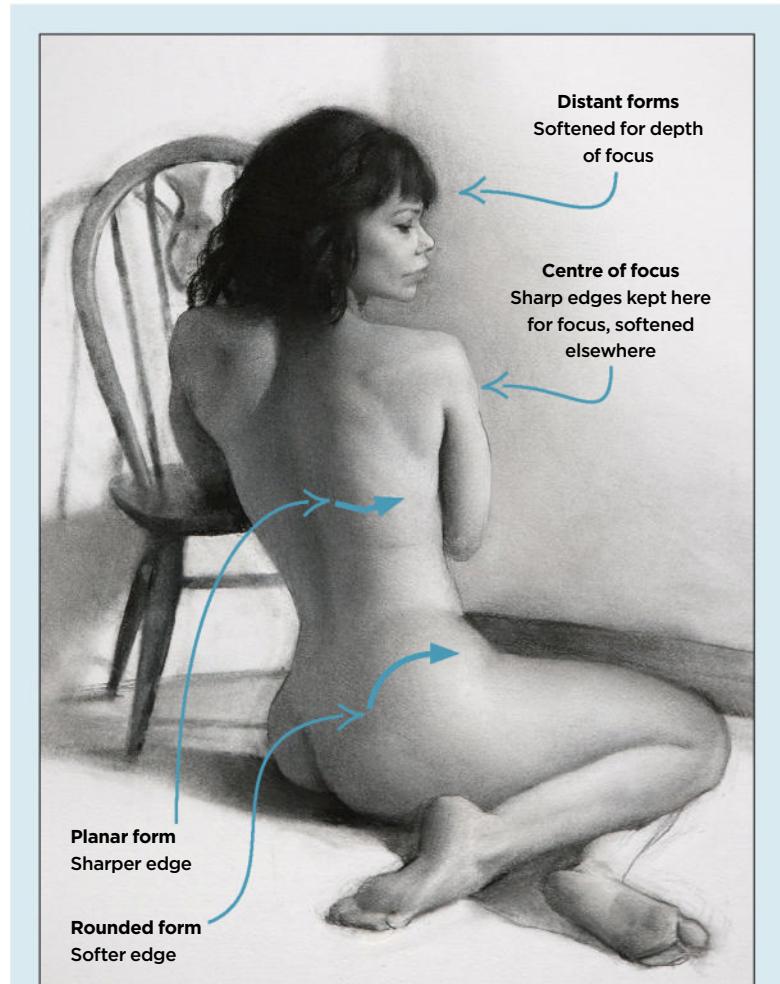
6 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

To conclude, let's take a look at how this might be used in a more complete artwork. As you can see in the image above, I use these concepts to varying degrees throughout my drawing.

It should always be remembered that these more technical concepts for painting and drawing should always be used as flexible tools for expression in your art. It's important that we make sure they're always subordinate to our personal expression and we can use them to exaggerate or heighten certain areas of our images. This concept of edges primarily offers a way to tackle shading in a more flexible and usable manner, and can be a lot of fun to explore, so give it a go for yourself! ☀

ARTISTS' MASTER SERIES: COLOR & LIGHT
This article is an excerpt from the Artists' Master Series book that Charlie wrote in partnership with 3dtotal Publishing. In the book he delves into this and many more topics in greater detail, with in-depth tutorials from other artists featured. To carry on learning, check it out at **https://bit.ly/4837PM9**.

Photoshop
MAKE A MYSTICAL MERMAID SCENE

Tasia M.S. explains the key details of her magical illustration for LightBox Expo, including structure, her brush choices and more

Artist PROFILE

Tasia M.S.
LOCATION: South Africa

Tasia is an illustrator and concept designer who works in diverse creative realms, from publishing to films. She always sets out to craft captivating visual narratives.
www.tasiams.com

My task began when LightBox Expo asked me to work on an illustration befitting their event, which I was so excited for. They also wanted me to incorporate their logo into the artwork, which had to be more than just an appendage.

My goal was clear; I wanted the logo to represent the feeling of awe I have for LightBox. It needed to radiate as the focal point, ensconced within the heart of the illustration, sparking curiosity as if a magical creature had just stumbled upon an enigmatic revelation.

My initial idea was to have a fairy sat on some flowers in a forest and interacting with the logo. It didn't work as the flowers took too much focus from the logo, which I wanted to be the primary detail. Instead, I opted to do a majestic mermaid.

With my newfound clarity, I embarked on this voyage where the mermaid, intertwined with the logo, would unearth a world of wonder, fusing together fantasy and reality into an extraordinary tapestry of imagination. Using The Fisherman and the Syren by Frederic Leighton, as well as the mermaid paintings of Victor Nizovtsev, as my inspiration, I set out to create a fitting illustration of my own.

How I create...
AN EYE-CATCHING ILLUSTRATION

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 5 now!

1 Value compositions
To make a canvas enchanting, I start with value sketches. I focused on essential structure, playing with light and shadow for depth and realism. The objective here is to immerse the viewer in a magical landscape, with the mermaid gazing on the logo.

2 Storytelling with colours
My colour choices were guided by the narrative and emotional resonance. Inspired by the moon's gentle radiance and nocturnal hues, I painted a world where the water lilies cradled the mermaid's embrace of the ethereal light of the logo.

3 Rendering and textures
Finally I delved into finer details and rendering. There was so much to fit in: the light shining on the mermaid and intricate patterns on her tail; illuminating water lilies for a magical landscape; and capturing the gentle reflections dancing on the water.

INTRICATE TOUCHES

1

2

3
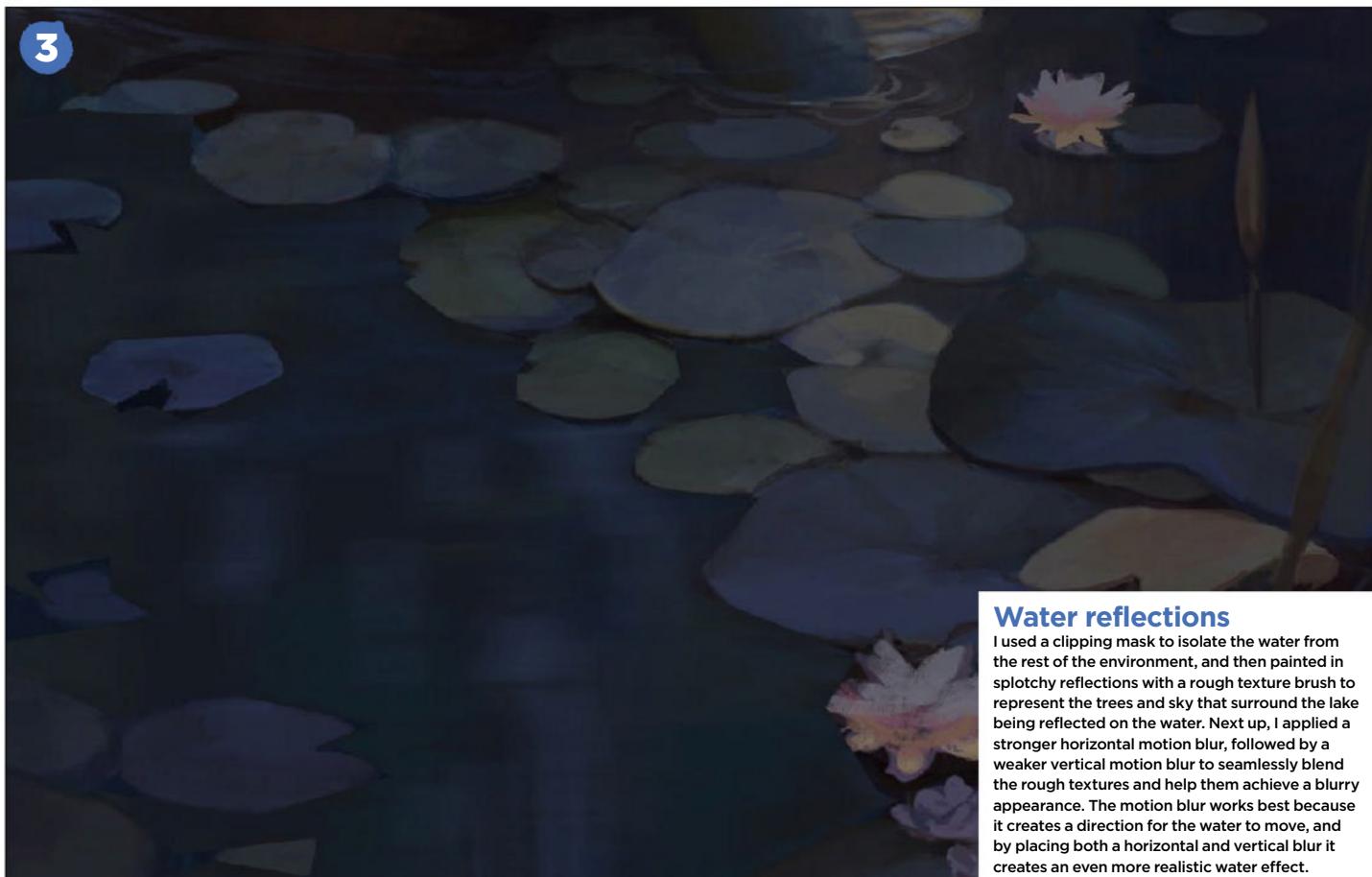
Water reflections

I used a clipping mask to isolate the water from the rest of the environment, and then painted in splotchy reflections with a rough texture brush to represent the trees and sky that surround the lake being reflected on the water. Next up, I applied a stronger horizontal motion blur, followed by a weaker vertical motion blur to seamlessly blend the rough textures and help them achieve a blurry appearance. The motion blur works best because it creates a direction for the water to move, and by placing both a horizontal and vertical blur it creates an even more realistic water effect.

Brush choice

The mermaid's skin is painted using a soft, untextured brush that captures the subtle shifts in colour, as well as the illumination influenced by the radiant logo that, in contrast, possesses a sharp clarity to create a captivating fusion of sharp shapes and soft edges.
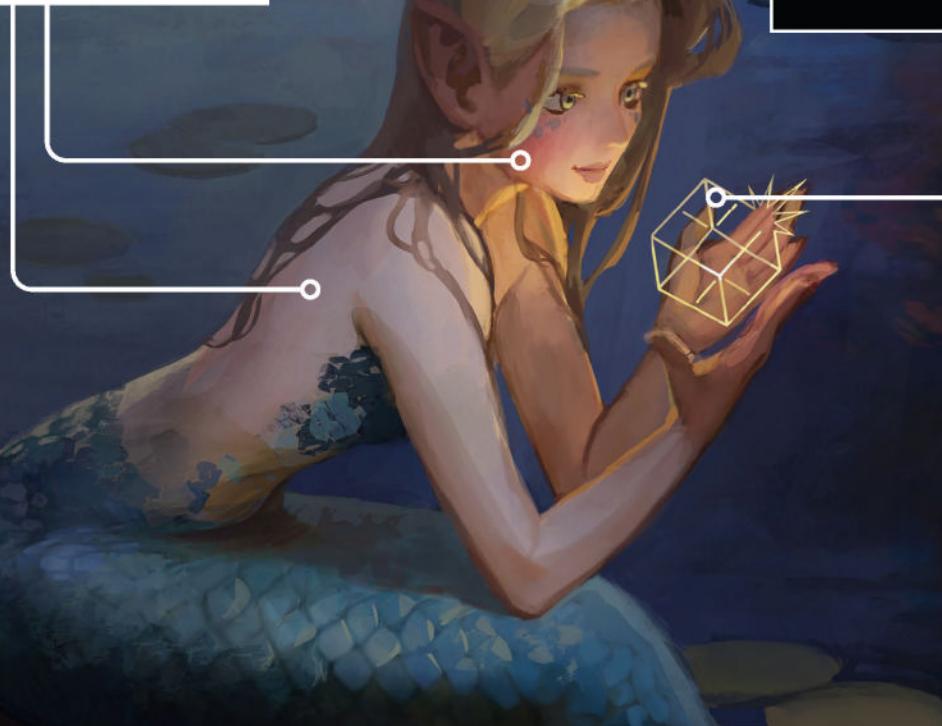
Lighting setup

To craft the illusion of light, I went for three distinct colours. I used a warm hue emanating from the light source (the logo and the flowers), plus a core shadow (a darker shade that's derived from the object's base colour), and a cool reflective light coming from above. This selection meant that I could intricately depict the lighting within the artwork.
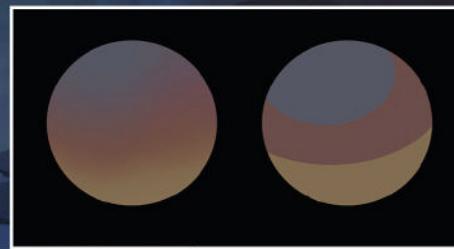
Structure with curves

The artwork features a recurring pattern of C curves within it. These mirror the graceful flow of both the water lilies and the mermaid's pose, which help capture the serene essence of the scene.
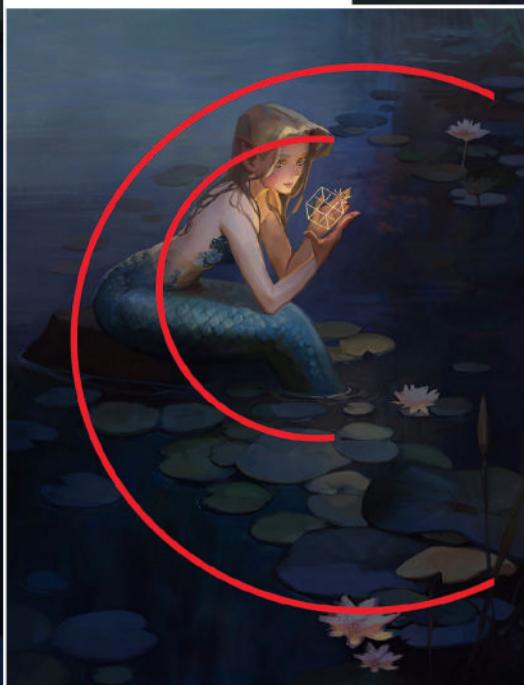
Lily texture

To elevate the painting's visual interest, the water lilies were rendered by using a textured brush. This crafts a contrast to the soft, blurred waterscape.

CREATE NOVEL CONCEPT IDEAS

Manh Lu keeps a copy of her inspiration to hand as she develops animation-style art from a book

"My project, The Devil Has Come To Town, is based on Mikhail Bulgakov's novel The Master and Margarita, in which the devil visits Moscow to wreak havoc in a city that refuses to believe in God or Satan.

The concept was made like a sort of animated fantasy movie that's dark yet still comical. Most of the scenes have a symmetrical look that was largely inspired by the films of director Wes Anderson.

I first made hand-drawn character sketches, then used Photoshop to paint the colour keys. While making the concept, the book was always on my desk. I hope to make it into an animation in the future."
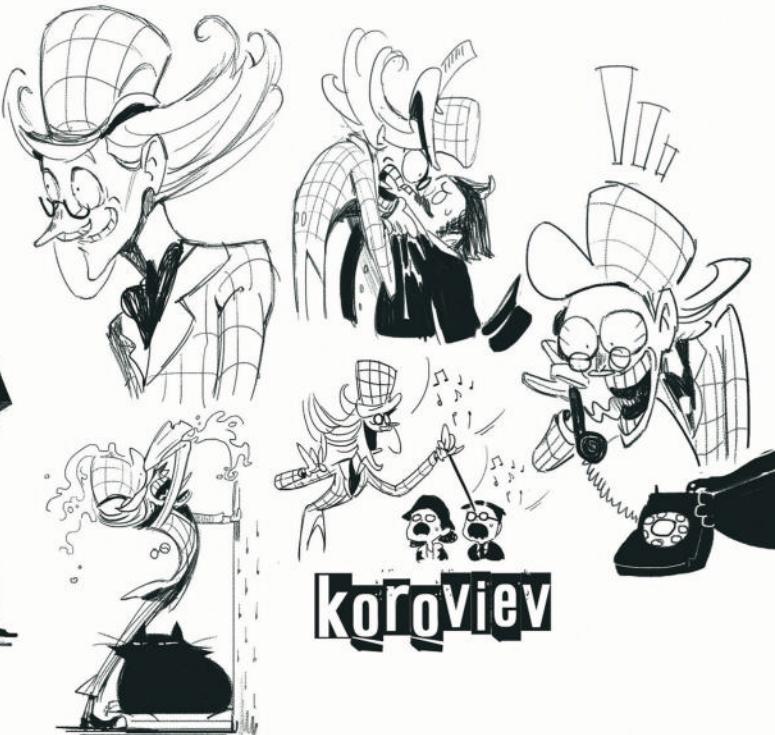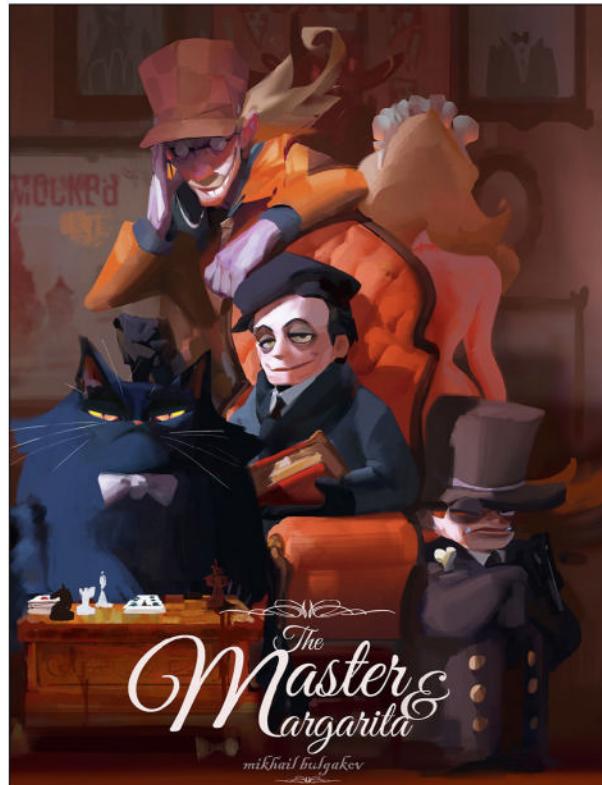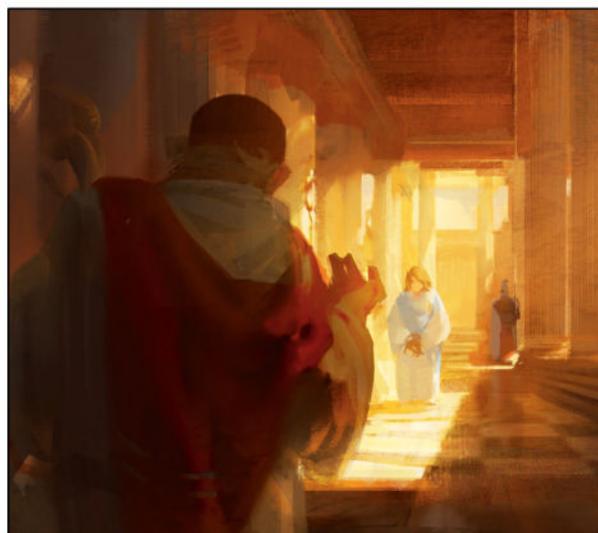
Satan's Great Ball

Artist
PROFILE
Manh Lu
LOCATION: Vietnam

Manh Lu is a visual development artist based in Ho Chi Minh City. When she's not busy creating concept artwork based on classic Russian novels, her main mission in life is just to have fun.
https://bit.ly/3RgBavt

Photoshop
LEARN TO PAINT VOLUMETRICALLY

Bring anime characters to life with an expert guide to volumetric painting from Collateral Damage Studios artist **Joshua Francis**

Artist
PROFILE

Joshua Francis
LOCATION: Singapore

Joshua is a professional illustrator who enjoys spending his spare time reading comic books and fine-tuning his craft.
https://bit.ly/3NnFtUv

Volumetric painting is a great way to achieve a 3D appearance in your artwork. In this tutorial, I'll show you how I develop this style for an anime character, following a method that allows you to understand the forms better, and help you to build greater confidence in your art.

What I want to introduce to you is the concept of painting light onto a form. This process is much more flexible because you don't have to worry about creating perfect line-art. In essence, we're thinking about this like we're sculpting a character out of clay. One good focus point to keep in mind is how the forms are being lit, as this will help you to understand where the light and shadow is. You can use a basic sphere or cube being lit as a reference.

We'll be painting in greyscale here, because this prevents you from being distracted by badly placed or overly vibrant colours. We'll also be using minimal brushes for this; just a Soft brush to create gradients, a regular Hard Round brush for the sketching, a Texture brush for painting and sculpting, and a Smudge brush to blend out and smooth certain edges.

Personally I enjoy following this workflow, as it allows me to paint freely while still achieving a strong end result. Used well, it can save you a lot of time while also being a great learning tool.

1 Basic sketch
Start with a rough sketch layer. I tend to work with the regular Hard Round brush for sketching as it's Photoshop's most basic tool. If you're able to get comfortable with this tool, you can use almost any brush. Focus on the pose and the rhythm of the lines at this stage. You want to be as loose as you can to prevent your art from looking stiff.

2 Draw clothes
The clothing can describe a lot about a character. Do they wear more loose-fitting clothes and have a clean aesthetic? Or are they more rough around the edges, wearing ripped jeans and piercings? In this particular case, I wanted my character to give off a more punk-style vibe, so I decided to give her a crop top and jeans.

3 Add design elements
At this point we're just adding on some basic design ideas to her shirt. It's not a big difference, but I tend to test out certain ideas during this stage to just have some fun with the drawing. I added a belt and a glove to the character to build the punk aesthetic further. At this point you should have a clearer idea of what you want to paint. ➤➤
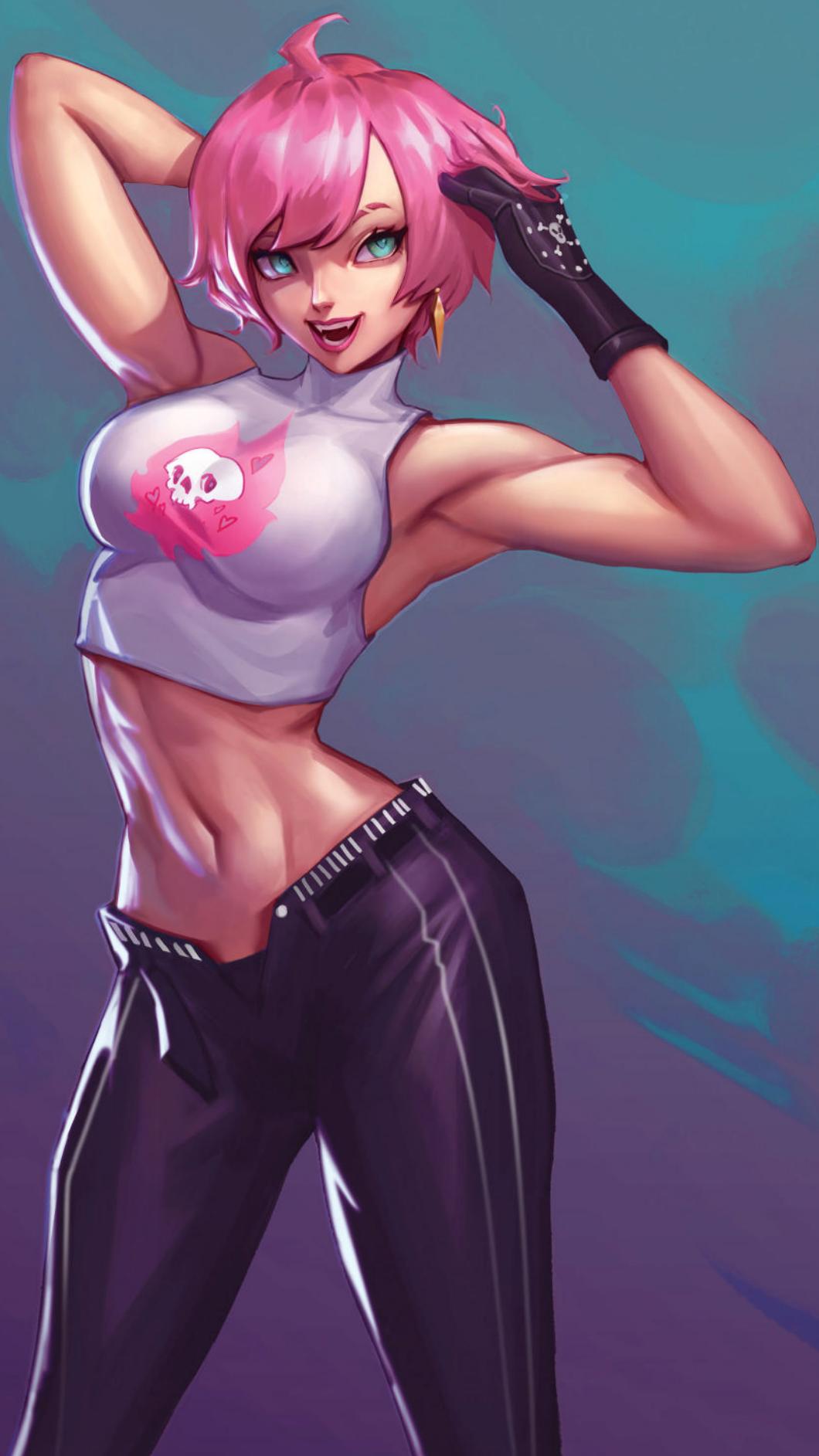
4 Fill in the silhouette

Lasso out the silhouette and fill it in with a mid grey on a separate layer so that we can paint in the layer without affecting the sketch. The idea behind this is that you'll paint within the boundary of the grey layer and not have to worry about painting outside of it as a result. In the Layer menu, you'll see a chequered box on top; click on this to lock the transparent pixels on the layer.
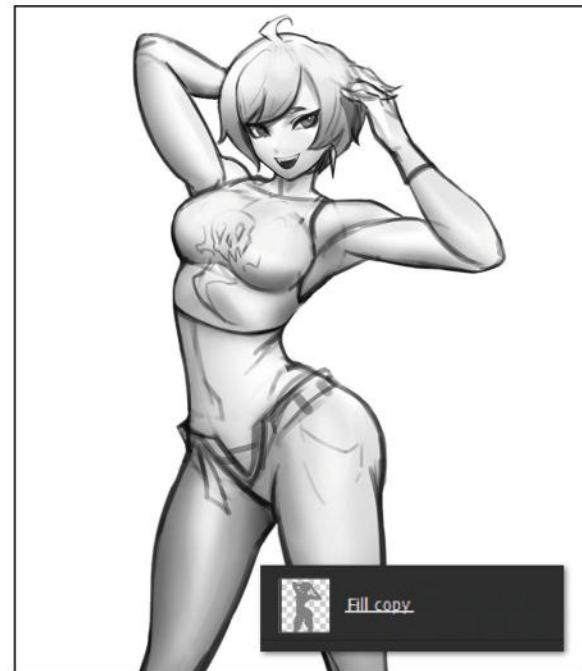
5 Create ambient lighting

Ambient Lighting is basically indirect lighting. Think of a soft light evenly lighting the character; there should be no harsh shadows at all. This helps to describe the form of the character, and make it look as though it has a little form. For this step, roughly paint in the areas with light on a layer above the grey layer. Ctrl+click on the layer thumbnail to select the silhouette.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

DEFAULT BRUSHES: SOFT BRUSH

I mainly used this brush to create gradients or blend colours together.

HARD ROUND

The Hard Round brush is excellent for sketching and erasing tasks.

SOFT ERASER

Similar to the Soft Brush, I used this to erase areas where I wanted to see a smooth transition.

TEXTURE BRUSH

This brush sorted the majority of my painting and blocking-in of light.

6 Sculpt the light

The fun step! I'm using the Texture brush here. Choose a light source and start roughly painting it. In my case, I went for a light source from the top-right and started to sculpt out the forms. Thinking of basic volumes like spheres, cylinders and cubes will help you define the forms. It's also good to keep in mind that shape design can add a whole lot more appeal to your characters, so use various shapes to add more interest to your art.

7 Refine the details

Once we've blocked in the basic lighting, we want to refine the edges and smooth out certain areas like the skin, which tend to be softer. How refined the painting is will depend on the amount of time you spend on it. I defined certain areas such as the face and torso to create a much more polished look. During this stage you can create a copy of the layers so far and merge them. Also use the Smudge tool to blend out certain areas.

8 **Add a Gradient Map for increased colour control**
Using a gradient map can give you better control over your colours. If you have your grey layer from before, you can click on the layer thumbnail and then Lasso out the areas you want to colour. I normally use three or four colours and fine-tune it until I have a satisfactory result. It doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to look good! The darkest colour will be on the left slider, and the brightest on the right slider. ➤➤
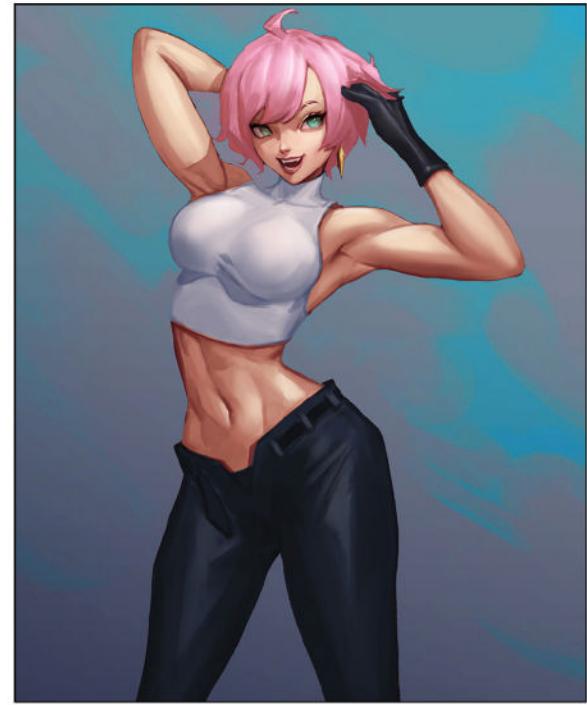
9 Colour adjustments

If you want, add another Gradient Map for the background. Create a new layer on top of this for colour adjustments set to the Color blend mode. You can also use this step to make minor adjustments to areas like the eyes, teeth and lips. Next make a copy of the layers without the background and merge them again.

10 Use reflections

Reflections add a lot of life to your character and are where I tend to use the brightest colours or values. Think of it as appearing on the surfaces where it tends to be a bit more glossy. This is most obvious on the eyes and hair, where it looks as though the light from the source is being reflected to your own eye.
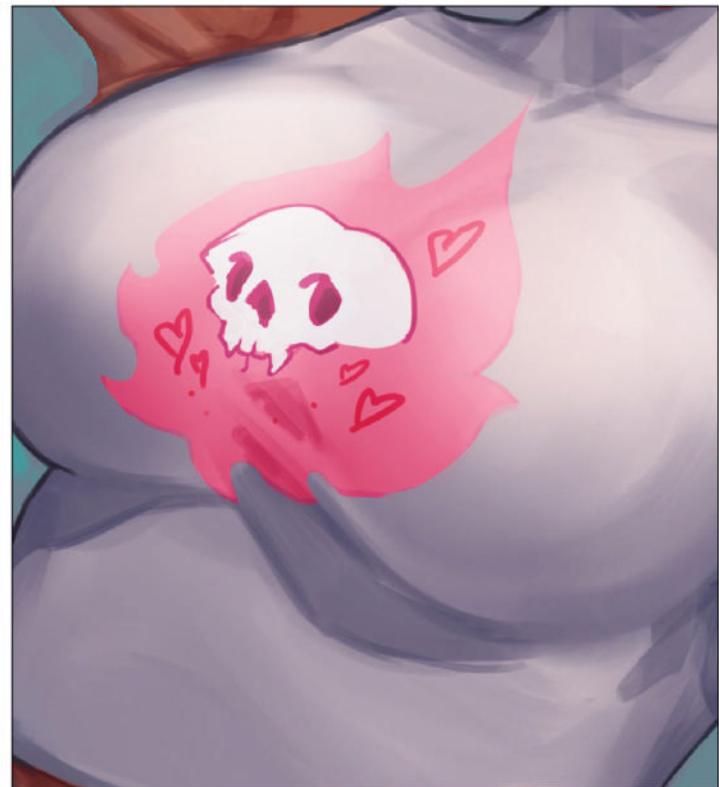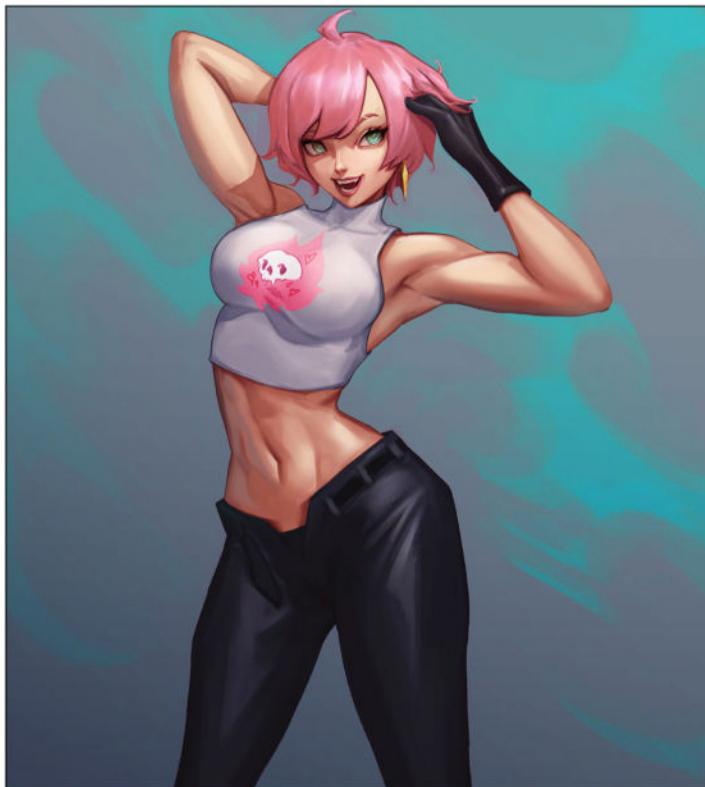
11 Paint in detailed design elements and refine

Remember my skull design from earlier? I painted it onto a separate layer and set it to the Soft Light blend mode. You can warp the design by pressing Ctrl+T to fit the form better. At this stage, I also painted in a cool tone in the shadow area and slightly darker reds in the hair.
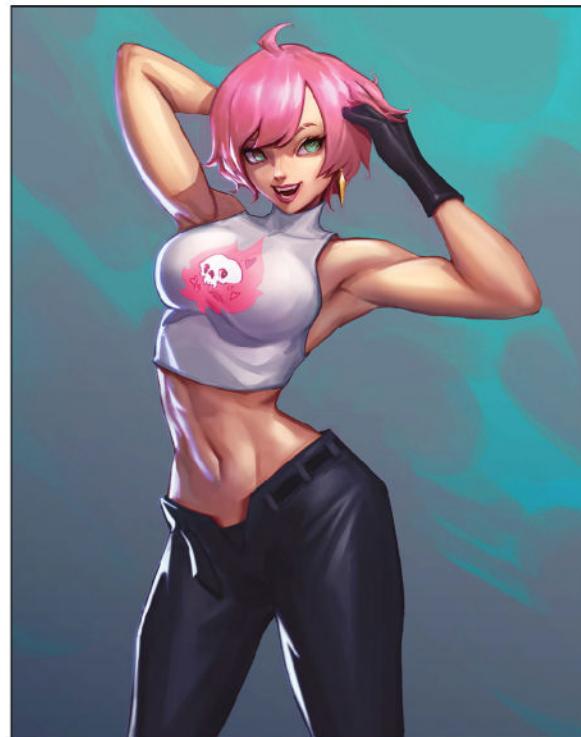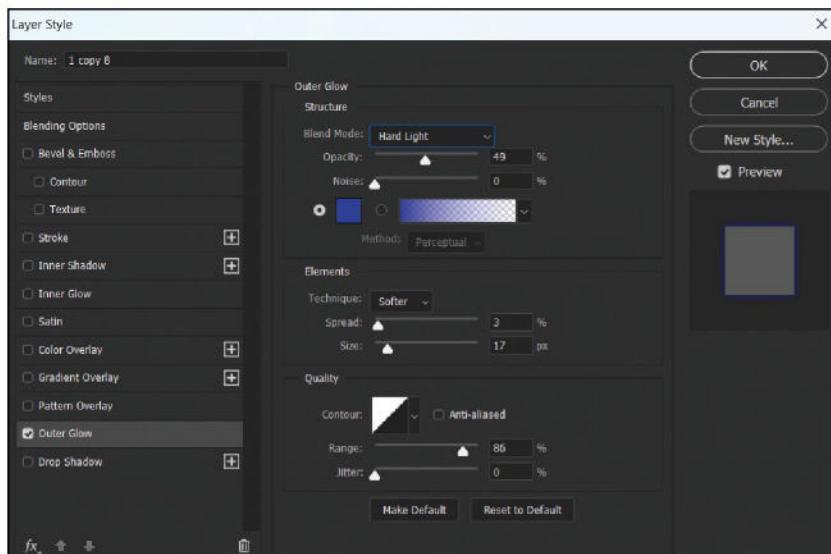
12 Second light source

We can have a bit of fun setting up our secondary light source here. Start by creating a new layer, right-click on it and select Blending Mode. I turned on the Outer Glow effect, set it to Hard Light and chose a cool colour. Paint in a light, in my case from the left side, to make the character pop out a lot more. Think of the surfaces the light is hitting and paint in interesting shapes.
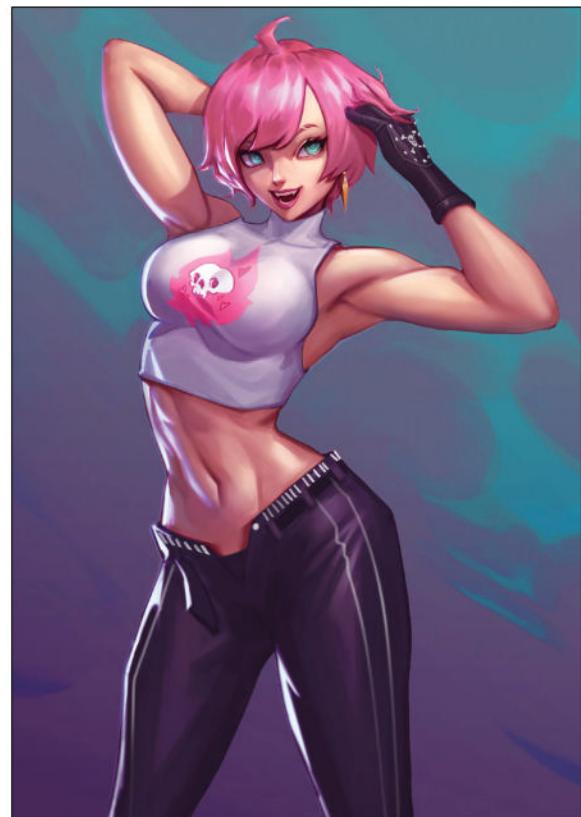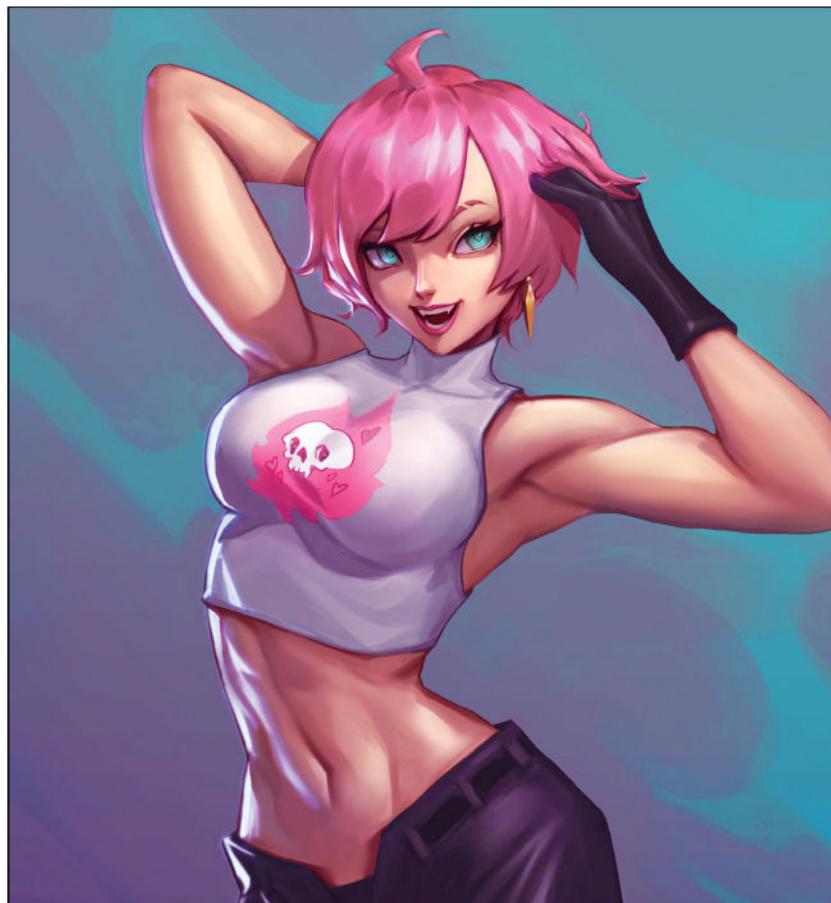
13 Time for tweaks

I wanted to exaggerate her pose a bit more, so I Liquified it slightly by pushing her chest to the left. I also adjusted some of the colours for the background and character by tweaking the Hue/Saturation and Colour Balance options, which you can use by pressing Ctrl+U and Ctrl+B respectively.

14 Final touches

It doesn't hurt to have a little fun with your designs here. You can continue to polish and adjust the colours if you want, but at this stage, you can call your piece done. In my image, I just added some design elements to the glove and trousers to wrap up. Volumetric painting is a great way to be loose with your process and still achieve well-polished results in your art, so give it a try!

Photoshop & Blender

DESIGN 3D LANDSCAPE CONCEPTS

Theonidas shows you how to use your 2D art to build a fully realised concept environment in Blender, complete with lighting and cameras

Artist **PROFILE**

Theonidas
LOCATION: US

Freelance artist Andrew Theophilopoulos is known for their League of Legends splash art and poster art for the Spider-Verse films, as well as their educational art content.
https://theonidas.com

Want to learn how to show off your concept art using dynamic lighting, atmosphere and cameras? When working on grandiose concept art and illustrations, it would be great if we only needed to paint a few basic assets rather than an entire scene. That's entirely possible with Blender, enabling us to create an immersive 3D scene to show off to art directors, rather than a single 2D image.

With Blender's real-time EEVEE render engine, plus the atmospheric tricks and lighting available, we can build a stylised world that looks and feels like a scene straight out of The Iron Giant. Using Blender, you can scatter your stylised, hand-painted objects such as trees, rocks or grass, and then align the 2D images to face the camera so we never see that the paintings are flat planes in 3D space.

Entire biomes will be created in this tutorial, all in your unique art style without having to learn the ins and outs of the 3D art pipeline. By removing these daunting workflows from the process, we can skip past the difficult worlds of 3D modelling, sculpting, retopology, texturing and so on, and stay within our comfort zone as 2D painters.

For this tutorial you should have basic knowledge of Photoshop or another 2D app of choice, as well as a basic understanding of Blender's navigation and UI, and an interest in cinematography, composition and mood. You'll also need a relatively capable computer that can handle scattering hundreds or thousands of instances to create a thick forest.

Check out my 2D to 3D course at **https://theonidas.gumroad.com** to see a video walkthrough complete with a collection of assets. ➤➤

1 Set up necessary add-ons for Blender

To import your images into Blender, we first need to activate a few add-ons that will come in handy. First, go to Edit>Preferences>Add-ons, then search for and enable 'Import Images as Planes'. Next look up and enable the ANT Landscape plugin to quickly create cool landscapes. Most importantly we'll need an add-on for scattering. I like to use the amazing Eco-Scatter add-on that you can find on Gumroad. It does require a fee, but you can get 50 per cent off the add-on's price at **https://blenderlabs.gumroad.com/l/ecoscatter/imaginefx**.
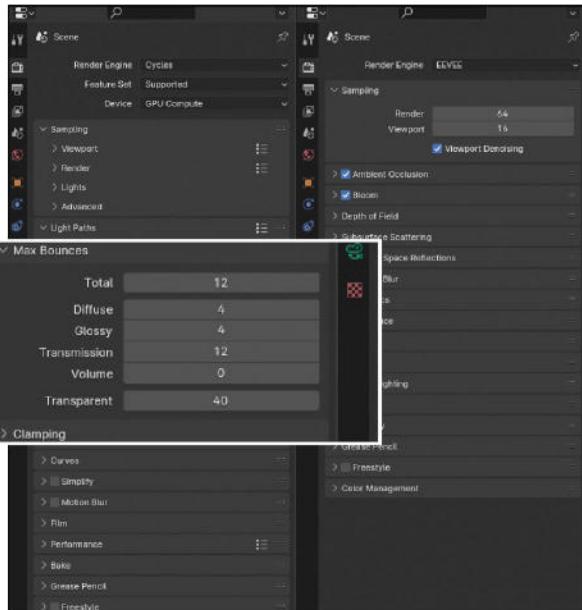
2 Adjust render settings

When setting up your file, under the Render tab you can toggle a few settings to make EEVEE shine. Ambient Occlusion, Bloom and Screen Space Reflections should all be checked. If you want to render using Cycles instead, you'll need to scroll down to Light Paths>Max Bounces and turn up the Transparent setting to between 20 and 40.
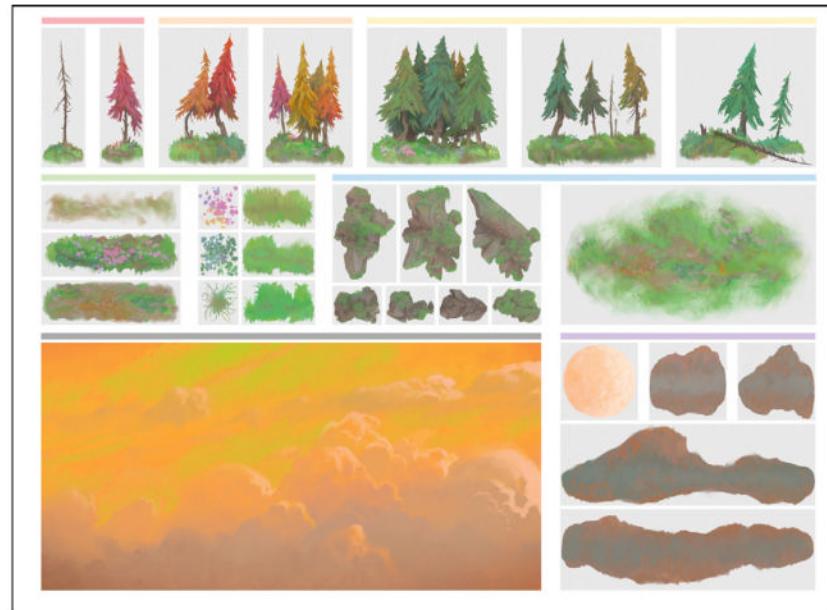
3 Paint your biome assets

In order to scatter your own hand-painted biome, you first need to paint your assets. Imagine you're in a forest, look around at what you want to make, and think about what you can see; clusters of lush green trees, rock formations, grass, flowers, mountains and the sky. I like to paint a few variations of each asset so that we don't have obvious clones when we scatter the objects. A little variation goes a long way, and this is your chance to show off your artistic voice.
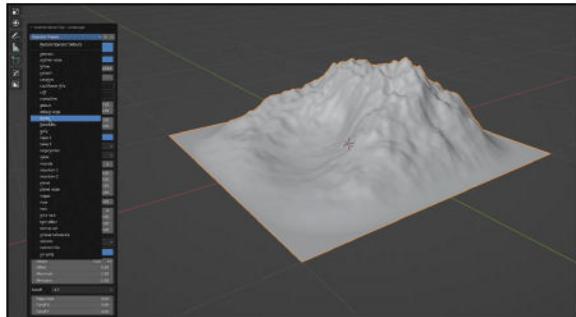
4 Create a surface to begin scattering your objects

With a new Blender File, remove the basic cube, hit Shift+A to add a new mesh, and click on Landscape. Now we just need to customise it. Operator Presets will give you a dropdown list of landscape types, so let's go with Dunes since it's a stylised form. Play with the settings to increase the depth and scale, or test out any other types of landscapes you might want instead.
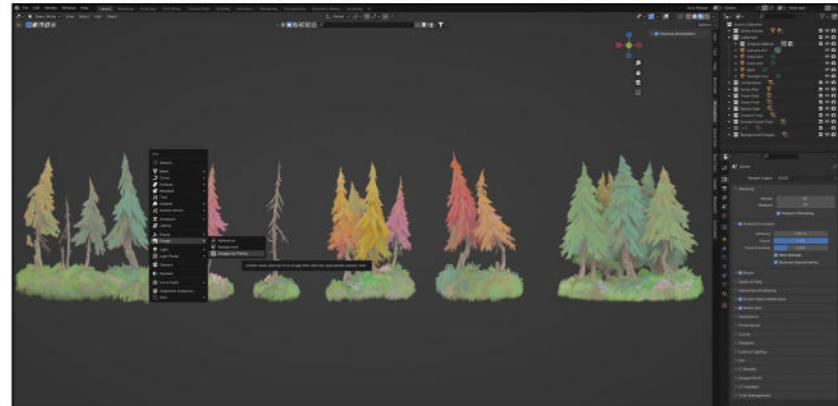
5 Import your assets into Blender

With our landscape ready, we need to import our transparent biome assets. Hit Shift+A and scroll down to Image>Images as Planes, and import your biome PNGs. You'll want to make sure each asset is perfectly cropped on a transparent background; my Gumroad page has 30 pre-made biome assets if you need them. This template will enable you to have each brushstroke show up live in Blender.
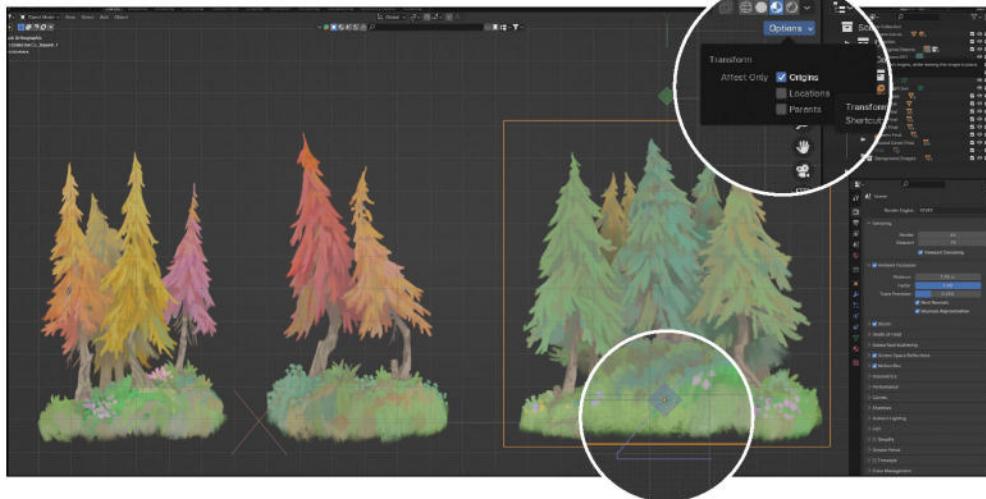
6 Move the origin points

Next we need to move the Object Origin Points into place. Underneath the Viewport Shading buttons at the top-right of your Viewport, click on the Options dropdown menu and switch the transform style to Origins. Now when you select an asset and press 'G', you can move the Origin Point down to where you want the object to sprout out from the surface. Hit 'G' followed by 'Z' to move up and down to where it would interact with the ground.
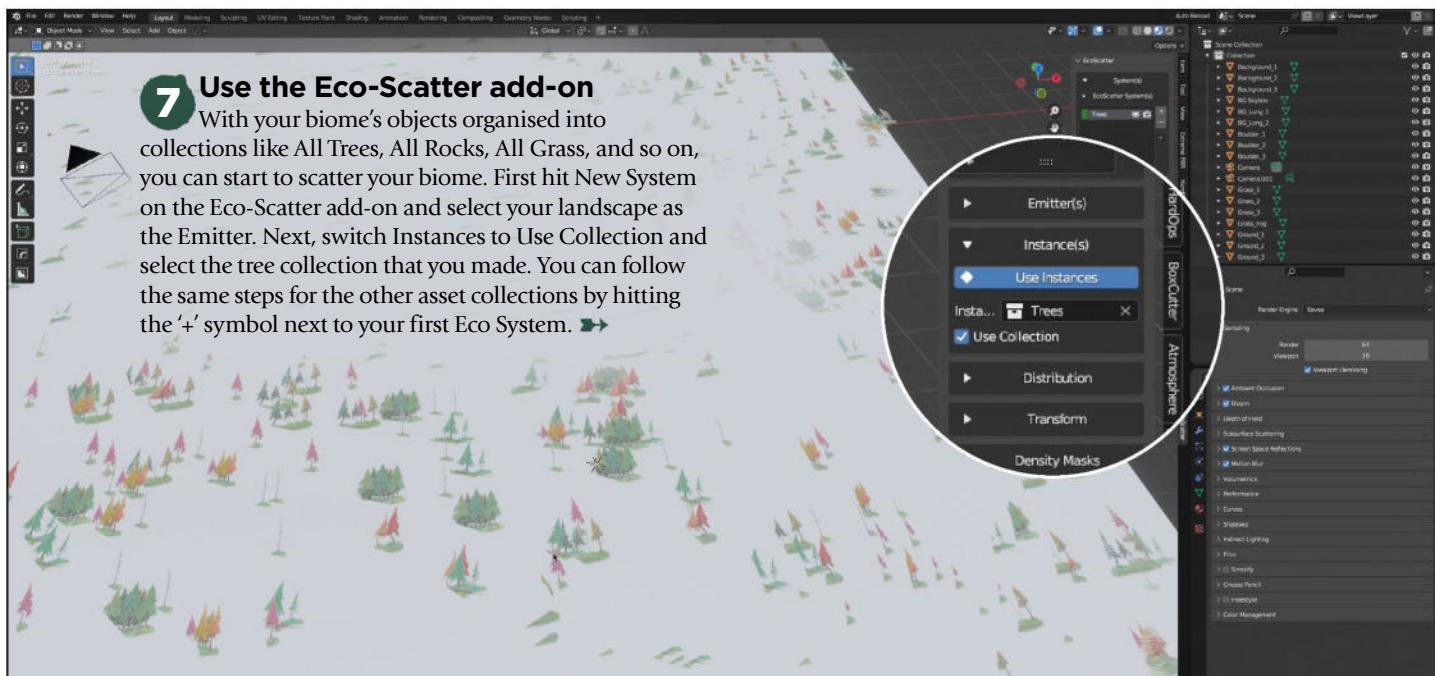
7 Use the Eco-Scatter add-on

With your biome's objects organised into collections like All Trees, All Rocks, All Grass, and so on, you can start to scatter your biome. First hit New System on the Eco-Scatter add-on and select your landscape as the Emitter. Next, switch Instances to Use Collection and select the tree collection that you made. You can follow the same steps for the other asset collections by hitting the '+' symbol next to your first Eco System. ➤
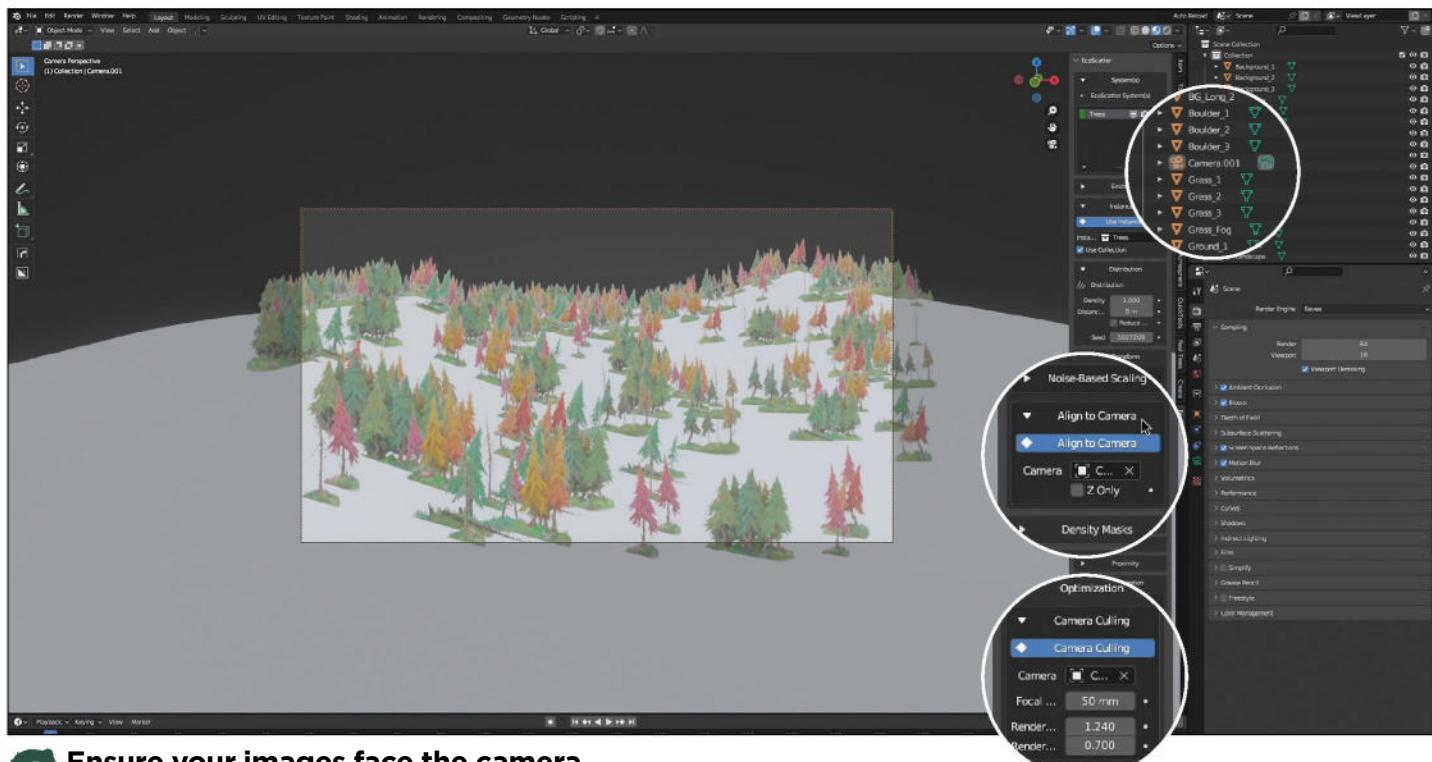
8 Ensure your images face the camera

You'll notice that your paintings aren't facing the right direction, and this is where Eco-Scatter's true power comes into play. Under the Transform tab, scroll to 'Align to Camera' and choose your active camera. Now the flat images will always point towards your camera. Under Optimization you can also toggle Camera Culling to remove the objects outside of the camera's view to reduce lag.
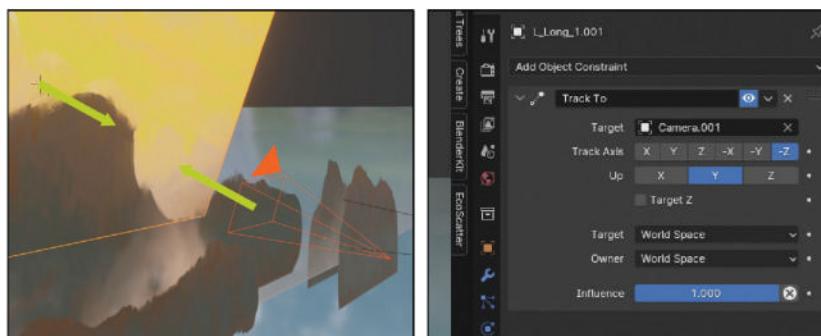
9 Add distant objects

Some objects like the distant mountain ranges and the sky don't need to be scattered. Let's go over how we lock those to the camera without Eco-Scatter. Select a skybox painting and move it far off into the distance. Under the Constraints tab, add the Track To object constraint, and then select the active camera as your target. Repeat this process for any other distant background objects.
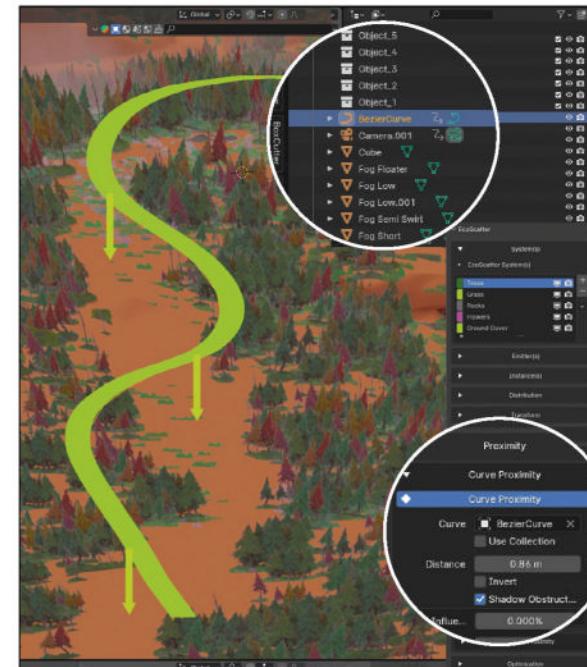
10 Make pathways

Eco-Scatter has Slope, Elevation and Proximity settings. With these, you can make it so that trees don't grow out of a steep cliff, or add in a curve that creates a path through your forest. Press Shift+A to add a Curve through your scene and select it in the Curve Proximity tab. After that you can use Shadow Obstruction to cut a path through your landscape, which is perfect to stage characters along a winding road up the hill.
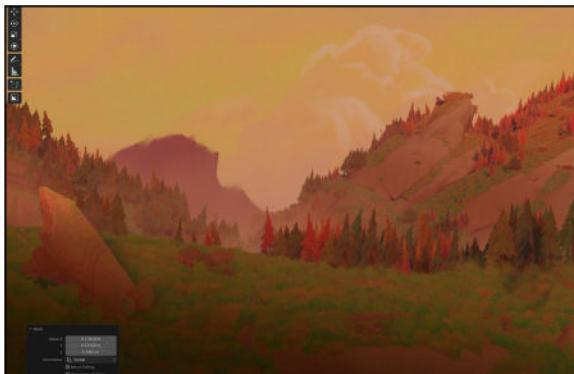
11 Complete the biome

With a wide range of random distribution, scale, and rotation settings to choose from, you can groom the forest as you see fit. Perhaps you have only 100 trees, and 20,000 grass instances, with maybe 20 rocks, and 500 flowers. Customise each part of your biome to fit your needs using Eco-Scatter's powerful settings.
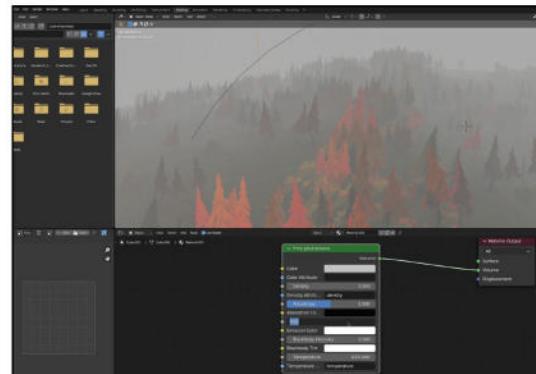
12 Create atmosphere and fog

No landscape is complete without atmospheric perspective. To create fog, we first need to add a cube larger than the entire scene before switching over to the Shading tab and adding a new material to the cube. Remove the Principled BSDF shader and hit Shift+A to search for 'Principled Volume', which needs connecting to the Volume slot on the Output. Lower the Density to 0.05 and the Emission Strength to 0.01, and finally change the colours to fit your desired mood.
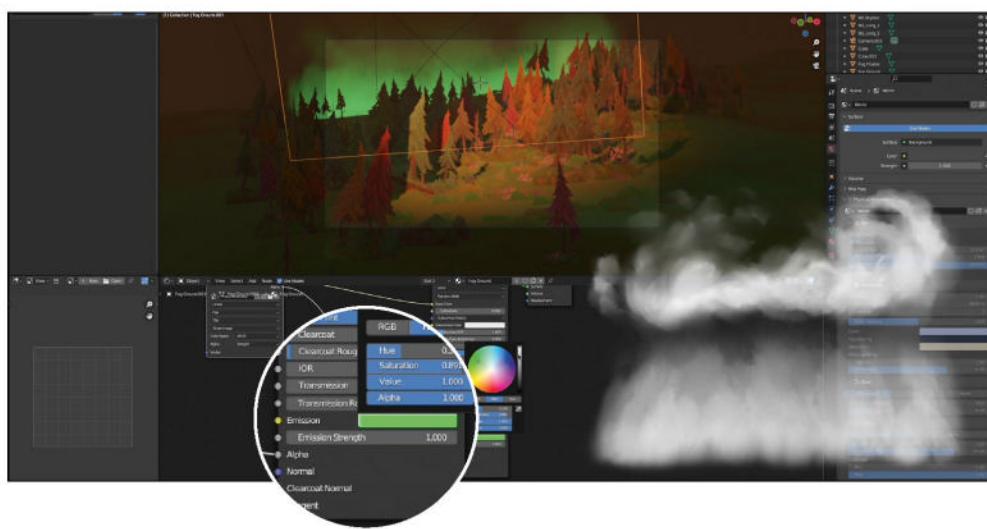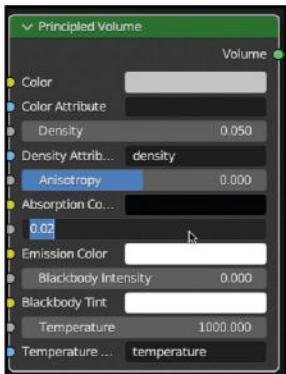
13 Hand-painted fog

Another way to add simple fog effects is to hand-paint some transparent clouds in Photoshop. Soft gradients and dusty clouds work best for this. Export these as transparent PNGs, import them into your scene, and place them to create depth. In the Shading tab, you can then change the Emission Color and Strength to turn your cloud into a glowing or colourful fog. My Gumroad tutorial also includes a selection of hand-painted fog assets for you to use.
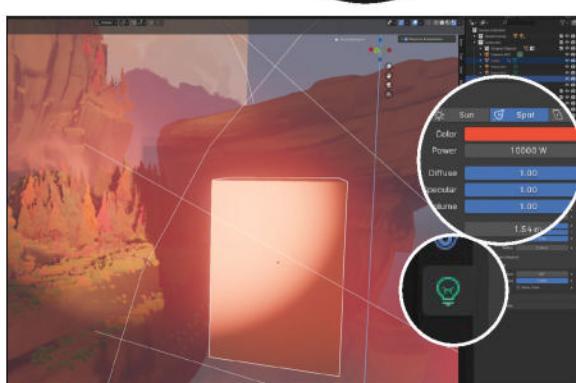
14 Place lights

Lighting can make or break a painting, so let's set some up. I usually have a Sun Light and several supporting lights to help bring focus to an area of importance. Press Shift+A and add a Spot or Sun Light as your main light source. You can change the colour and intensity here in the data properties. Point Lights are a great choice to bring extra focus and colour, while you can also place objects in front of the sun to cast shadow and lead the viewer's eye.
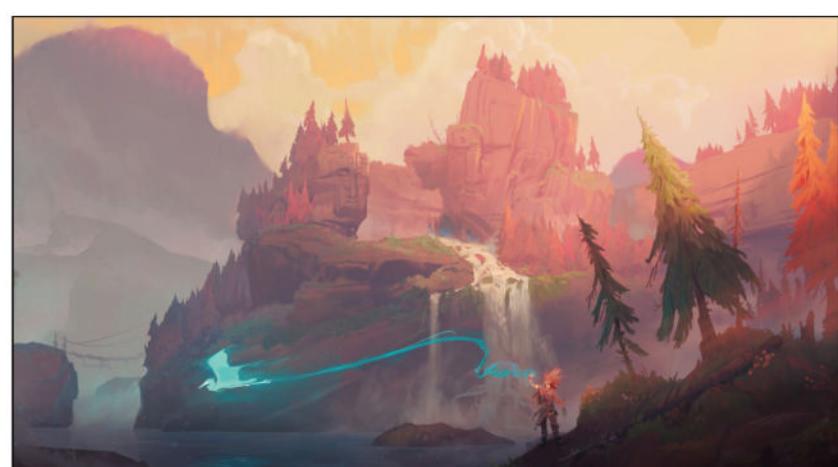
15 Use characters and wildlife to make it feel alive

For the finishing touches, let's head back to Photoshop with your final render for a paintover. While we could have added characters in 3D, this tutorial is meant to be painter-friendly, remember? Truly bring your concept to life by introducing characters or wildlife for scale and realism. Also check for and correct any visual errors from Blender, and leverage your favourite brushes to enhance your 2D art style for a little magic. Ultimately, just go wild and have fun!

Technique focus

SPACECRAFT DESIGN AIMS

Till Freitag shares how he builds striking starships using contrast and materials

"This is one of the first spaceships I designed. It's actually based on a shampoo bottle that gave me a nice constrained base shape to work with. The idea is that the ship can grab something with the hydraulic arms on the front, but they also double as a transportation bay when collapsed. This piece uses tight line work as a base, with the shading then added on top. When I design spaceships my priorities are the readability, shape hierarchy and material distribution. The cockpit is set as a clear focus point by contrast and material choice."
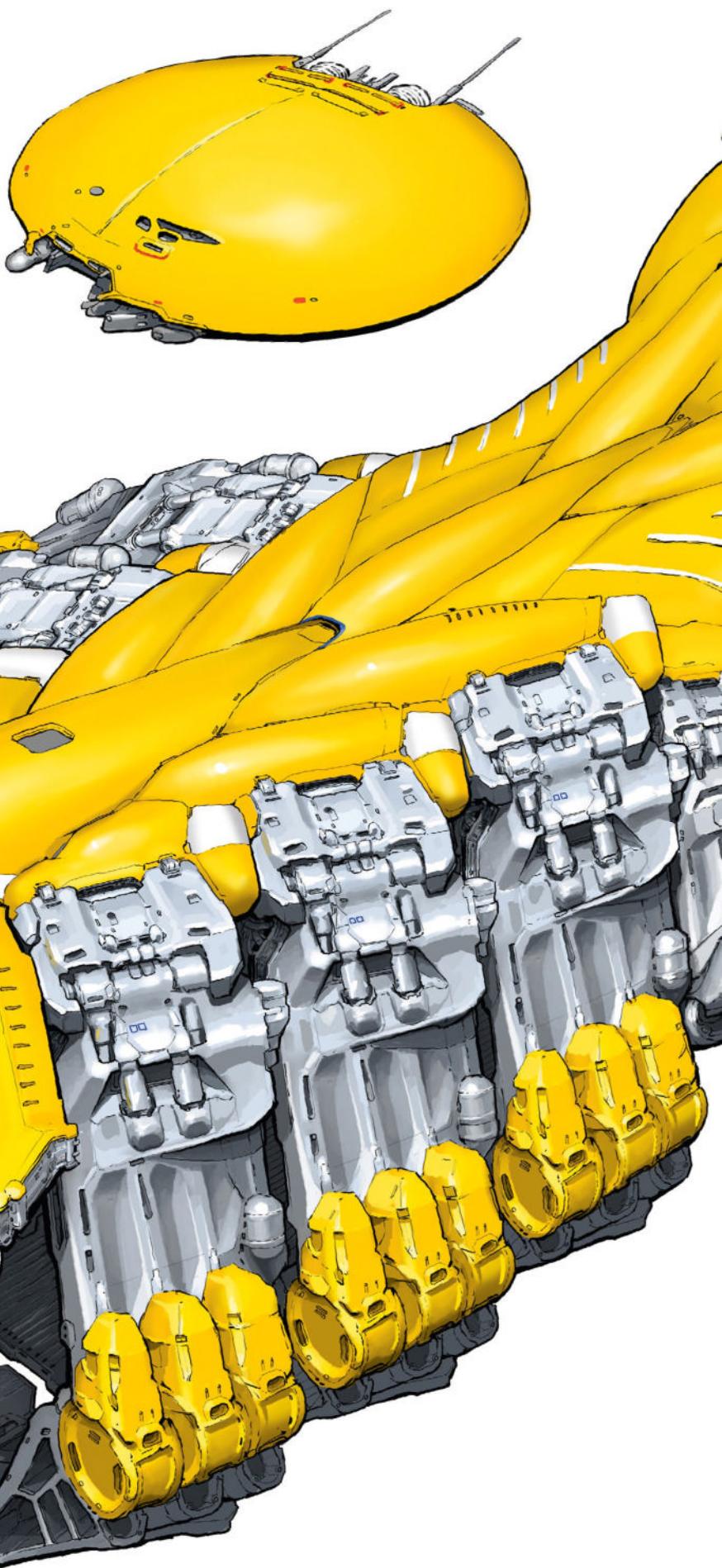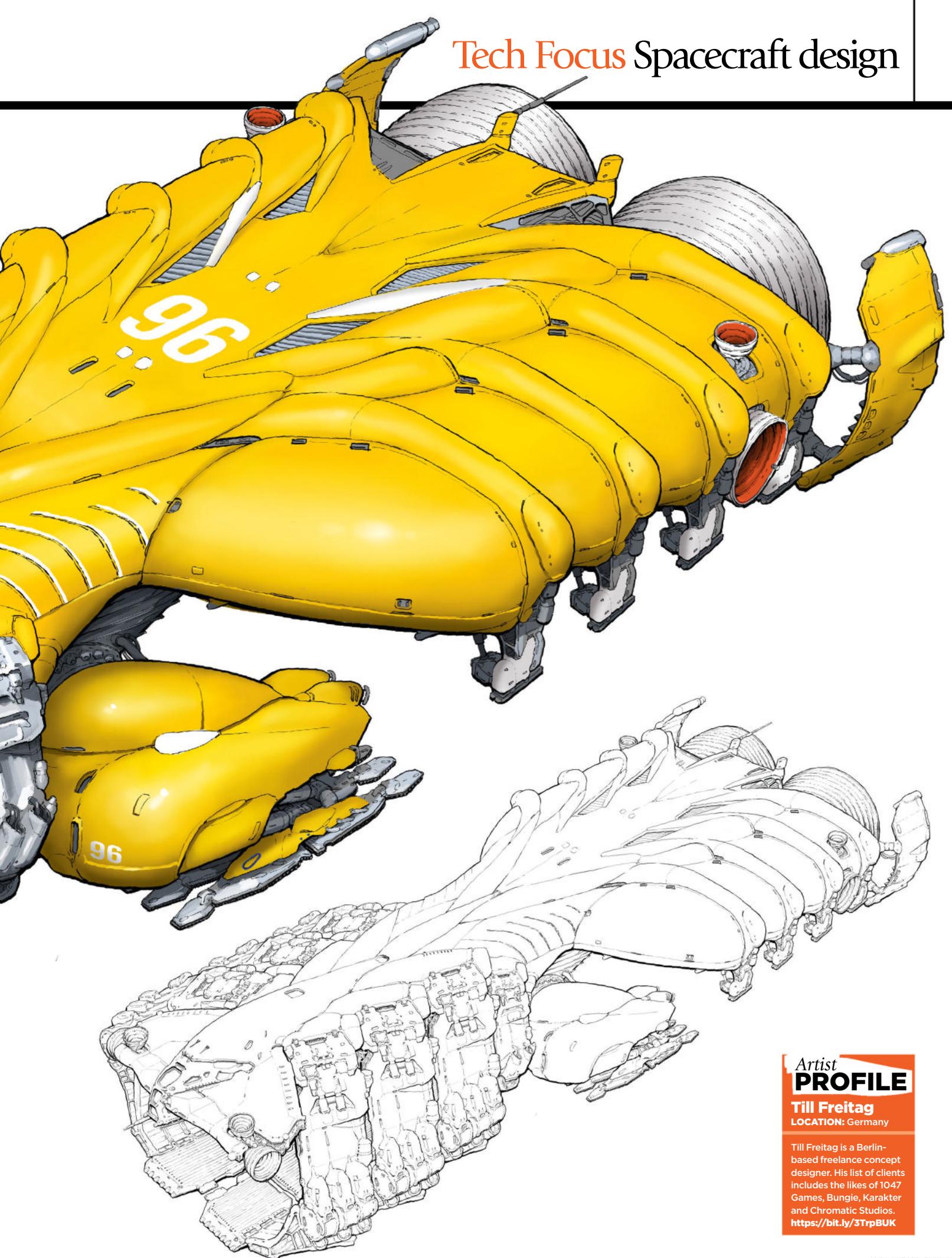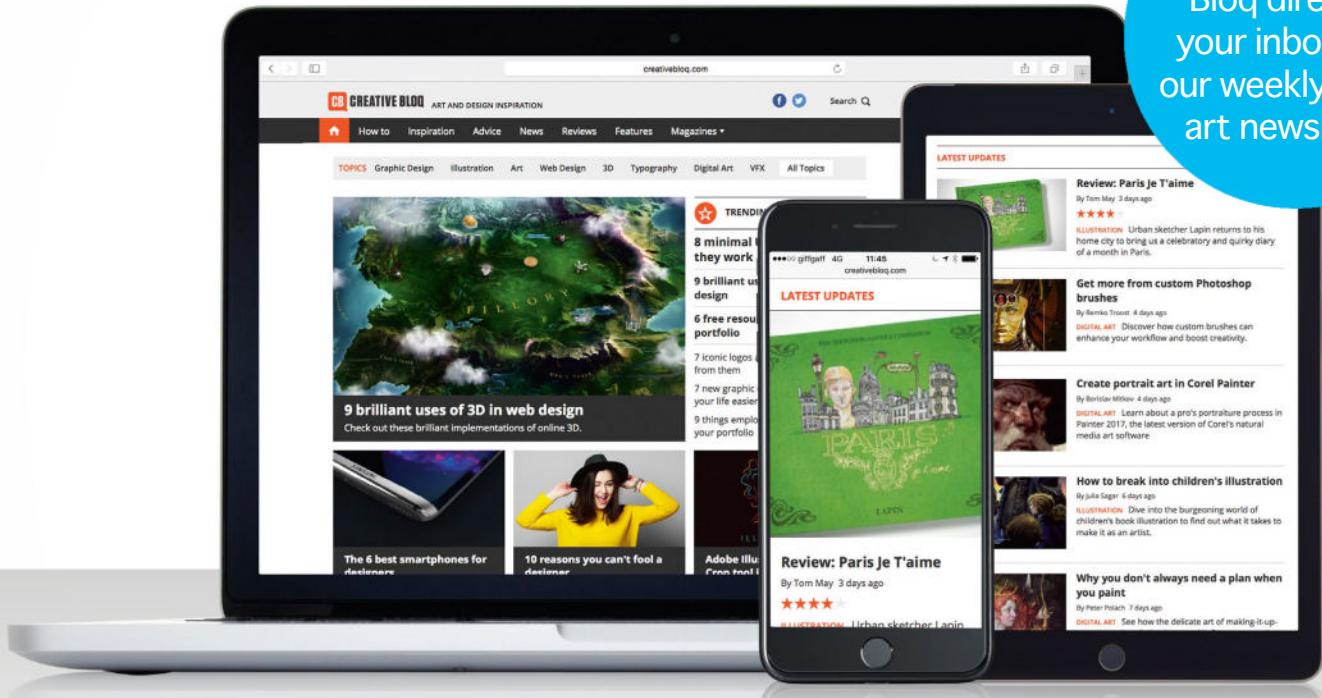
Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

This issue:

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

Kimera Wachna

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Acrylic **WEB:** www.gracemerewoods.com

Kimera is a fine artist and illustrator who specialises in exploring the human condition through the use of stories, nature, spirituality and dreams.
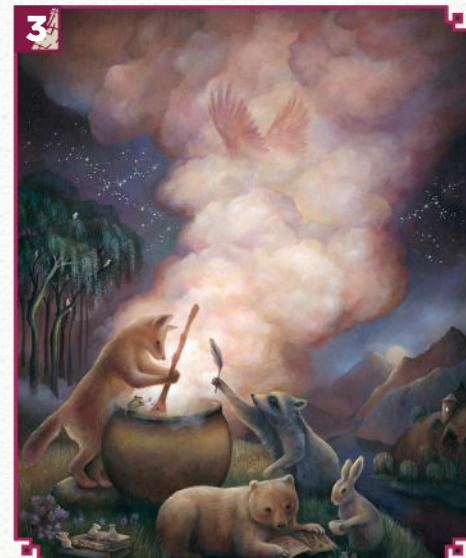
1 AD INFINITUM
"Two opposing owls personify contrasting conditions and flow together in cyclical perpetuity."

2 JOURNEY BACK HOME
"A bear proceeds to unlock a singular path to its centre. This was part of a collection shown at Haven Gallery on Long Island."

3 ENCHANTMENT
"When creating this piece, I was eager to explore the power behind collective intention and its desired outcome."

4 THE MASKS WE WORE
"Spirits guide the hand reluctant to change, unravelling the several guises that no longer serve the wearer."

Aria Fawn

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Watercolour, graphite, clay **WEB:** www.ariafawn.com

Aria crafts pieces inspired by dreams, nature and nostalgia. Their work aims to give viewers a sense of wonder and sanctuary in the darker places where they might otherwise feel lost.

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

1 OUR DREAMS WERE ALL FOR EVERYTHING
"This piece is a tribute to the wisdom that we're often given through dreams, and a reminder to remember it in the waking world."

2 A SONG TO CALL THE MUSES HOME
"I believe that inspiration is endless when we put in the work. This piece is an ode to the devotion we give our craft to call our muses to us."

3 FROM THE MOMENT WE BLOOMED
"This artwork is about leaving the room for exploration and curiosity as we strive to embrace the unique fluidity of ourselves."

4 THE TAMING OF DREAMS
"The basis for this piece is facing fears. Often when we face our fears, we realise they're made of gentler things. If they're not, we discover strengths we never knew that we had before."

Acrylic

RECREATE AN ICONIC COMIC BOOK COVER

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of his first comic cover art for Marvel, ADI GRANOV freshens up a classic Iron Man illustration

The first comic book cover I ever illustrated for Marvel was 20 years ago. As a way to mark that milestone, I proposed to create new versions of some of my early works. I was fortunate that two of my earliest projects became big hits and resulted in iconic images that have influenced the way these characters have been portrayed since.

I chose new versions of She-Hulk #1 and The Invincible Iron Man #76, both of which were painted in 2003

and published in 2004. The Iron Man cover in particular became one of the most influential and copied images, and was the start of my long relationship with the character in comics, movies and video games.

The original image was painted digitally in Photoshop over the top of traditional line work. Most of my work now is fully traditional using acrylic paints, which itself provided a natural difference between the two. However, my understanding of light, volume and colour, among others,

has improved significantly over the last two decades, so I decided not to try to reinvent the wheel, but create an improved homage of the original.

In many ways, this image was as much of an emotional homage to the time that has passed as it was to the character itself, which has been such a large part of my career.

Adi is an artist, illustrator and concept designer on comics, film, concert posters, games, toys and collectibles. See more at www.adigranov.net.

In-depth: **Plan of action**
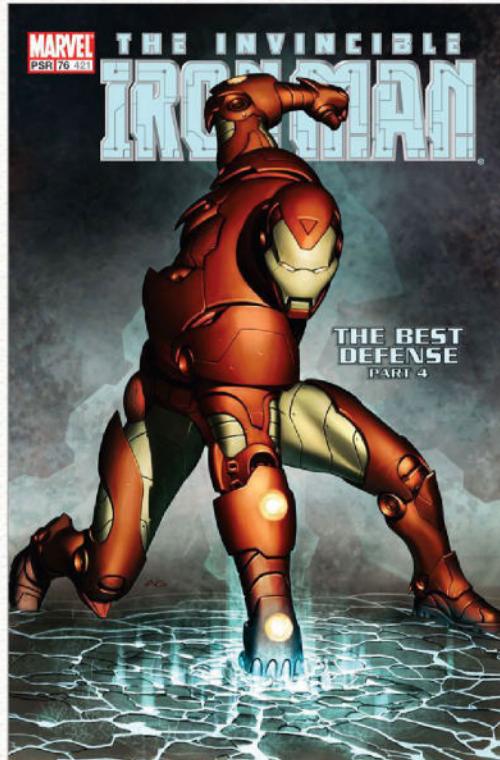
New light

I decided that the main difference between the original and the new image would be the treatment of light and the way it interacted with the surfaces. The original was highly stylised and used only a single light source with hardly any reflection, so I chose to make the new art more complex, keeping the primary light source but adding a backlight, environmental bounce, and plenty of reflections.

Greyscale starter

I tend to use my own version of grisaille, meaning I do a resolved greyscale painting before adding any colour to it. This allows me to focus on form, volume, and light and shadow, and figure out all the details before introducing colours. I strive for a sculptural quality and an illusion of mass and weight in my work. I particularly love this way of creating as it allows me to sculpt with paint and play with forms until they look just right, adding and subtracting just as you would with clay. It's a time-consuming method, but highly flexible and powerful.

In-depth: Paint and finish

Flexible workflow
I use acrylic paints on primed watercolour board, but I do the tight layouts in pencil, so this combination allows for quite a bit of flexibility and correction.

First colours
Once the grisaille is complete, I start glazing colours in very thin with transparent layers of diluted acrylic paint to build up the depth. Light penetrates through the layers and bounces back, so we see the interplay of the different tones, which would be difficult to replicate with opaque paint. This is especially apparent when viewing the original painting, but I photograph my work instead of scanning and try to capture as much of what the eye sees. Sadly, the printed reproductions can never fully capture the effect that the light has on the original.

Keep the pose
The layout was set by the original artwork, and after deliberating I decided to stick to it faithfully. I used the original line-art and then improved it only slightly to fix up some anatomical and perspective issues. Overall the character has a very stylised pose, so trying to make it too realistic would have risked removing the tension.

Limited palette
I also always try to reduce my colour palette to two colours and resist using more until I take that limited approach as far as it will go. Glazing allows for gradual overlapping and changing of the tones by adjusting them on the surface of the image, rather than pre-mixing on the palette.

Brushwork
Even though my work always tends to look quite tight and technical, I like texture and brushstrokes. That's why I generally begin with large brushes and broad strokes, and get them as tight as possible before getting ever smaller with each pass. I try to get a level of optical texture that looks alive and vibrating by using alternating tones of cool and warm, and complementary colours on top of and next to each other.

Seal the art
My final step is to seal the artwork with transparent layers of acrylic medium and then varnish. This is always a tedious and stressful process, but it's well worth the effort as not only will it protect the painting, but also unifies the surface and deepens the colours further.

MATERIALS

PAINT
■ Holbein, Schmincke and Golden acrylics
■ Acrylic mediums (mostly glazing)

BRUSHES
■ Various brushes (primarily flat for acrylic and watercolour)

BOARD
■ 100 per cent cotton watercolour board

LEARN FROM THE EXPERTS AND BECOME A BETTER ARTIST TODAY

Whether you're a budding creator or a seasoned pro, ImagineFX Art School has something to offer every artist, from improving your doodles and generating new ideas to painting skylines, sketching animals and drawing fight scenes.

First Impressions

✳ Steve Ellis ✳

The artist shares his heroes and thoughts on the industry

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?
I grew up in north-western New Jersey, about an hour away from New York at the time, but it was a different world; cow pastures and farm fields. I didn't really fit in socially and left when I first had the chance. I went to art school, and left for New York City as soon as possible.

I guess it might have been an anti-influence. I liked running around in the fields at times, but I spent most of my childhood inside drawing, usually characters from comics and Star Wars stuff.

What, outside of art, has had the most influence on your artwork through the years?
Probably humour and faces. I love seeing the personality of a person coming out through their face. So when I'm painting or drawing, I try to capture the magic of a personality and a sense of humour in the work. I do a fair amount of caricatures in my sketchbooks as well, because I love exaggeration.

THE WOOD WITCH
To brighten up this character from Thornclaw Manor, yet still keep her woodsy, I used brighter watercolours and sepia ink. I wanted her formidable but kind.

FLYING GANGLEE
I created a set of these forest monsters for Thornclaw Manor. I wanted to get an aged feel, so I worked in watercolour and sepia ink again.

Is there a painting that you saw in your formative years that changed everything? What was it?
It's hard to pin down just one, but I was a collector of Epic Illustrated back in the day and there was a short, fully painted story by Phil Hale where a guy beats up a soda machine robot. There was so much explosive energy in the artwork and I found it inspiring.

The work of Phil Hale, Frank Frazetta and Bernie Wrightson were

> ❝ When I'm painting or drawing, I try to capture the magic of a personality ❞

big when I was younger, and then I discovered Alphonse Mucha, Arthur Rackham, J.C. Leyendecker and Caravaggio while I was at art school. It's a weird mix.

Tell us about your first paid commission. Does it stand as a representation of your talent?
My first painted commission was for a card game that's now defunct. I'd painted in college, but it had been a few years and all the colour that I'd done was digital. The company asked for a painting and I jumped in, using gouache for the first time.

The pieces still hold up now. In some ways they're exciting for their experimentation, but I think what represents me is the willingness to jump into something knowing that I could fail, yet still making it work even if I don't really know what I'm doing going in.

What's the last piece you finished, and how do the two differ?
I just completed a set of cards for Magic: The Gathering. I'm working mostly in mixed-media now, I use inks, watercolour, coloured pencils and acrylic in a bizarre brew of materials. I think the biggest thing that has always stayed the same is my determination to make the piece work, using whatever the materials that will make it work.

Is making a living as an artist all you thought it would be?
When I decided to go into art school, my father took me aside and handed me a book from the School of Visual Arts in New York called Careers in Art, which I still have. The book basically outlined the different careers available and the sections on freelance artist, comic artist and fantasy artist basically said, I paraphrase: 'You will work super hard and probably starve'.

Well, I work really hard, I have long hours, but I love what I do and have never starved. I did have a few years where all I ate was cans of ➤➤

THE THORNED QUEEN
She's not as evil as the others so I added more blue and brown tones. While she's still judgemental, I wanted the colours to show that she could be reasoned with.

➤➤ beans and struggled to pay rent, but I survived, built a career and have been lucky enough to raise my family doing it. So I think it's a lot more than I thought it could be.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way?
Take an entrepreneurial business class. Don't be nervous when you're approaching art directors or editors, they're just humans too. Stay in touch with as many of the people you meet along the way as you can, they can become a lifeline, lifetime friends, and you never know how they'll influence your future career.

In what ways has the industry of art changed for good since you've been working in it?
Back when I was a kid, it was hard to find fantasy art at all. You had to go to a specific comic book store just to find it, so there wasn't much to learn from. I had to piece together a lot of my self-art education from the occasional book and by trying to deconstruct how artists did their work from the finished piece.

Now there's so much art online and so many artists who are willing to share the secrets of creating the art with anyone willing to listen. There's so much support.

Also, when I was growing up, being into comics or fantasy games was considered the realm of geeks and losers. It was reason enough to be insulted and bullied. I'd hide the fact that I liked those things from people I met until I thought I could trust them. In art school you didn't talk about them either. But as video games have become ubiquitous and

GANGLEE CROW
For this guy, I really wanted the crow to have personality too. I spent a lot of time on the design and expression of the characters.

comics are big-screen sensations, all kinds of people are now interested in fantasy and comics, and the world is filled with art. There's so much to see and learn from!

What's your next step in art or life?
I'm focusing on personal projects while I juggle freelance. I have a project, Thornclaw Manor, that I'm working on an illustrated novel and a tabletop game for. I'm drawing a

> ❝ **I'm going to keep making art until they pull the brush from my cold, dead fingers** ❞

comic called Moonshine Bigfoot that I co-created as well. I want to try to be the entrepreneurial artist, make more of my own things, and then eventually make my personal projects the centre of my career.

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?
I did a painting a few years ago called One Hit Point Left. It features a beaten up hero with cuts all over him, broken armour and arrows sticking out of his body. He has just

ICE DRAGON
This piece is watercolour and gouache. I wanted to attempt a subdued colour palette, but still have an intense piece.

GANGLEE QUEEN
I wanted this one to feel creepy and bloodthirsty. I kept the colours subdued to keep her eerie.

THE PRIESTESS
As this character is the main antagonist of the book, she had to be terrifying. Having muted colours and dark, archaic symbols pushed that feeling for me.

broken down a door, and is now facing a dragon and a horde of monsters. He should be lying down defeated, but instead stands strong facing it all, even though he knows he probably won't make it out alive.

I don't know if I embody that as much as I see it as my totem. But basically, I'm going to keep making art until they pull the brush from my cold, dead fingers.

Steve Ellis paints, draws and writes comics and fantasy art, working with clients like Marvel and DC. His focus has been on bringing to life personal projects like Iron Killer, Thornclaw Manor and Moonshine Bigfoot. www.steveellisart.com.

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