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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

# ImagineFX

## LEARN TO SKETCH

Discover key techniques for drawing an expressive portrait with **Brooks Kim**



### INTERVIEW

## NATHAN FOWKES

The Disney artist on fearless fun in your sketchbook



# 50

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



While we like to vary the art styles in the magazine, we sometimes follow a specific theme. In this issue we're taking a closer look into the world of sketching, highlighting how it can be of great use to you and sharing fantastic inspiration from a range of artists.

That said, there's something for everybody in the pages ahead, no matter if you're looking to master the art of illustration using Photoshop, or want to take a peek inside the studio of a pro artist – in this case the wonderful toy-filled shrine of Edwin Huang. Or maybe you're interested in learning about how life at a small animation studio works; we have that covered too with a look at why your career can thrive in a cosier environment.

Many people come to ImagineFX to learn new skills, and with that in mind we have plenty to offer. There's training covering many techniques, from taking your work into a new dimension using Blender, to creating stunning pencil portraits like this month's fantastic cover from Brooks Kim.

I hope you enjoy the issue!

*Rob*

**Editor**

**Rob.Redman@futurenet.com**

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# ImagineFX

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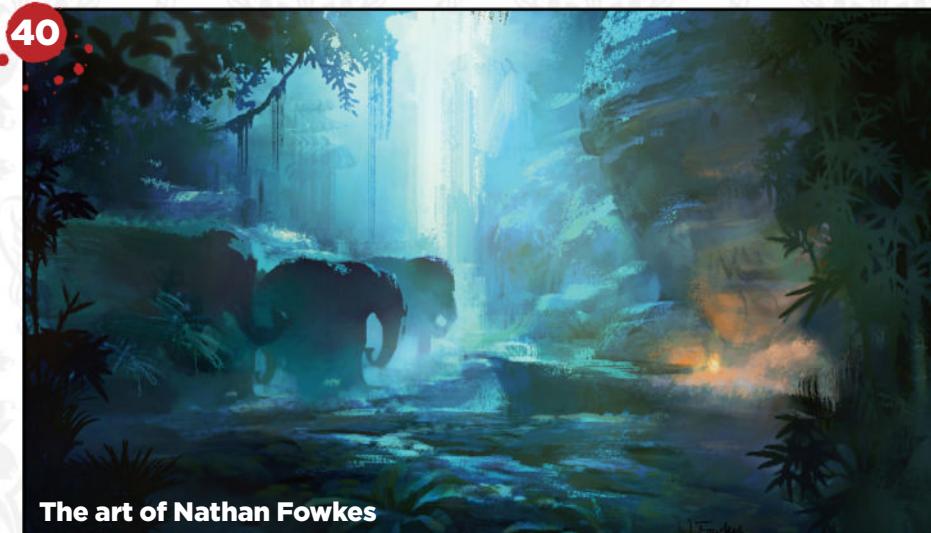
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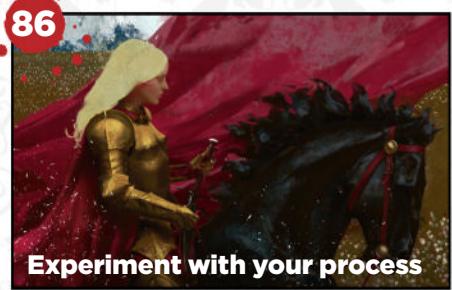
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You're three steps away from this issue's resource files...

#### 1 Go to the website

Type this into your browser's address bar.  
<https://ifxm.ag/learntosketch>

#### 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

Next month in...  
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## UNLOCK INDIE GAME ART SKILLS

Learn how Stunlock Studios created bloodthirsty vampires for **V Rising**



### Develop art for sci-fi universes

Learn how Bungie designed new story update Destiny 2: The Final Shape

### Making Master Chief's world

Halo Infinite artist Ben Mauro shares insights on a career in games and film

### Fascinated by future visions

David Diez opens his sketchbooks to show us a range of robotic creations

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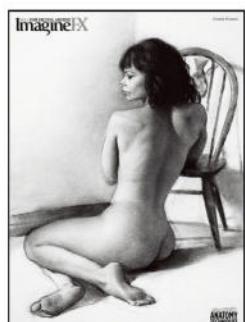
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# FX Posé

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1

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MONTH

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## Xenia Berezovsky

LOCATION: Germany MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: [www.artstation.com/oxiten](http://www.artstation.com/oxiten)

Xenia is a freelance illustrator and concept artist. Her greatest sources of inspiration are traditional cultures and folklore. She loves taking popular themes and sprinkling them with a touch of absurdity. "The main purpose of making art is having fun."

2



1 PET WALKER

"This illustration was inspired by a picture of a Mongolian kid and his reindeer. I love exploring different cultures to find inspiration for my work."

2 MOTHER GOOSE

"My interpretation of the Mother Goose character. As it was a personal project, I was able to simply enjoy the process, which usually leads to the best outcomes."

3 DARK SECRET SOCIETY

"My favourite art therapy technique is drawing one's fear and adding something funny to it. In this case, it was the Eye of Providence, which also resembles Bill Cipher from Gravity Falls."

3





## Jiunn Kuo

LOCATION: Taiwan MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: [www.artstation.com/jiunnkuo](http://www.artstation.com/jiunnkuo)

Jiunn is a digital artist with a passion for fantasy aesthetics. He has worked on League of Legends, Legends of Runeterra and ASUS, and enjoys drawing his inspiration from comics, movies and video games.

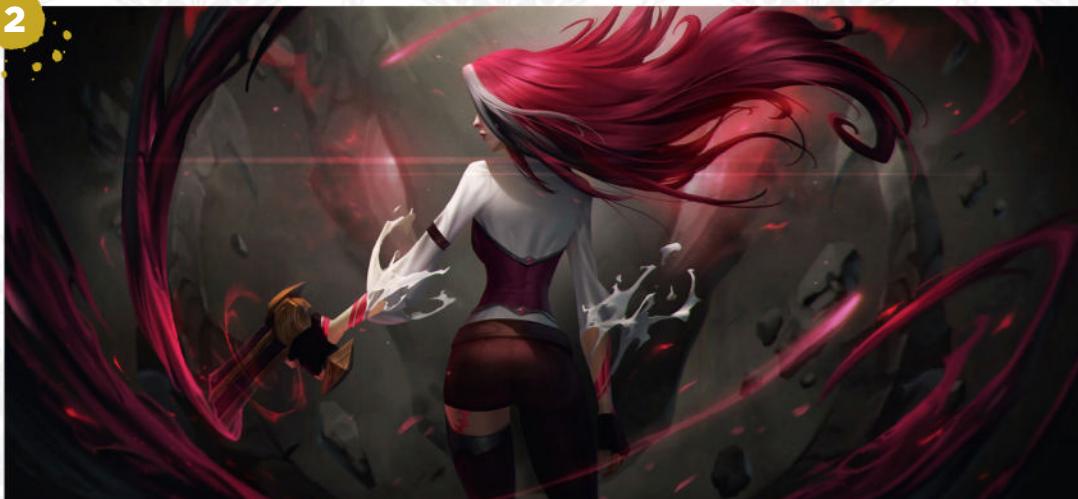
### 1 THE CRIMSON BOUNTY HUNTER

"I've always been fond of western and demonic styles, so I created a character and placed them within this unique world."

1



2



### 2 THE CRIMSON FORCE

"I wanted to capture the concept of power and integrate it into this artwork. Through flowing lines and a dynamic composition, I presented a strong and energetic atmosphere, showcasing the vitality and movement of power."

3

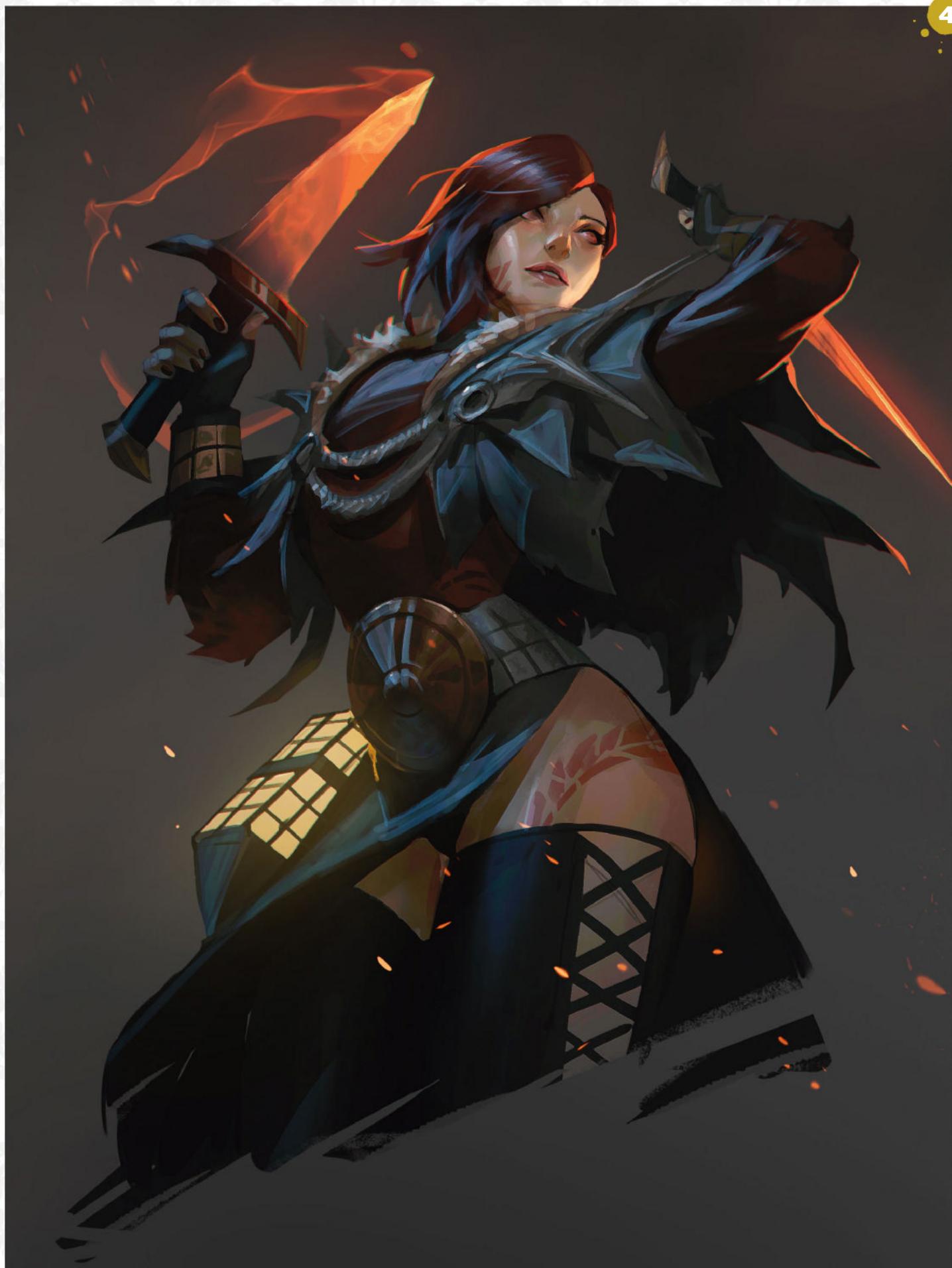


### 3 JOURNEY

"This scene came to mind when I was travelling. The main character and her companions are heading to the metropolis for a mission."

### 4 FAITH

"This artwork was made for my main character in Dragon's Dogma 2. I used contrasting warm and cool lighting here in order to best portray the scene."





## Diego Sáenz

LOCATION: Mexico MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate, Clip Studio Paint WEB: [www.instagram.com/drakerarts](http://www.instagram.com/drakerarts)

Diego is a concept artist and illustrator with a passion for character design. He loves to explore worlds and stories through character creation and is looking forward to contributing to the world of visual storytelling.

### 1 NEW AND OLD

"An original character design that combines traditional Chinese fashion with modern techno clothes. I like to mix themes from different times and places to create something new."

1



### 2 TEARS OF THE KINGDOM

"A fan art piece based on one of my favourite sagas: The Legend of Zelda. I wanted to integrate all the characters, dividing them into light and dark groups."

2



3

## 3 THE ONRYŌ

"Inspired by the Blue Eye Samurai series. I wanted to capture the essence of Mizu, a character feared by everyone, for both her skills and her eyes."



4

## 4 ODYSSEY

"This illustration shows Jo, the main character of my personal project, ready to go on an adventure through a modern world like ours, but filled with magic creatures and floating lands."



## Sebijy

LOCATION: France MEDIA: Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop WEB: [www.patreon.com/sebijy](http://www.patreon.com/sebijy)

Sebijy is a self-taught artist who has always been drawn to fantasy portraiture. Dark fantasy aesthetics with dramatic lighting and elegant atmospheres are signature elements of their artwork.

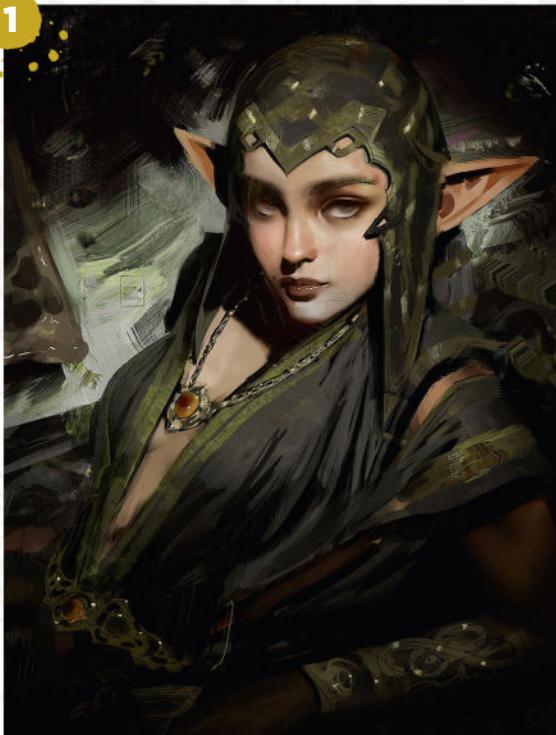
### 1 HILDUR

"Hildur is the queen of the elves. She's the most important character in my universe, Elven. I like to place my characters with dramatic lighting and give them a dark, elegant atmosphere."

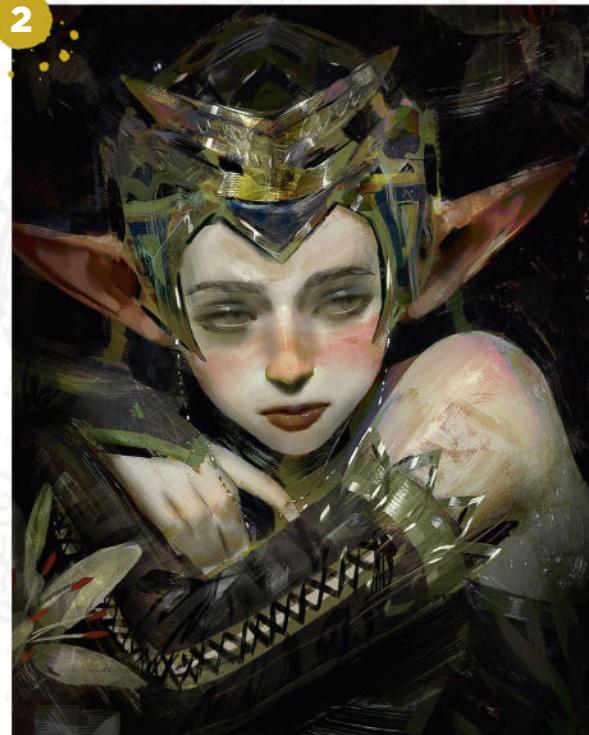
### 2 HEDERA

"Hedera was the first character that I created in this series, some time ago. I love playing with the contrast between her textured helmet and soft skin."

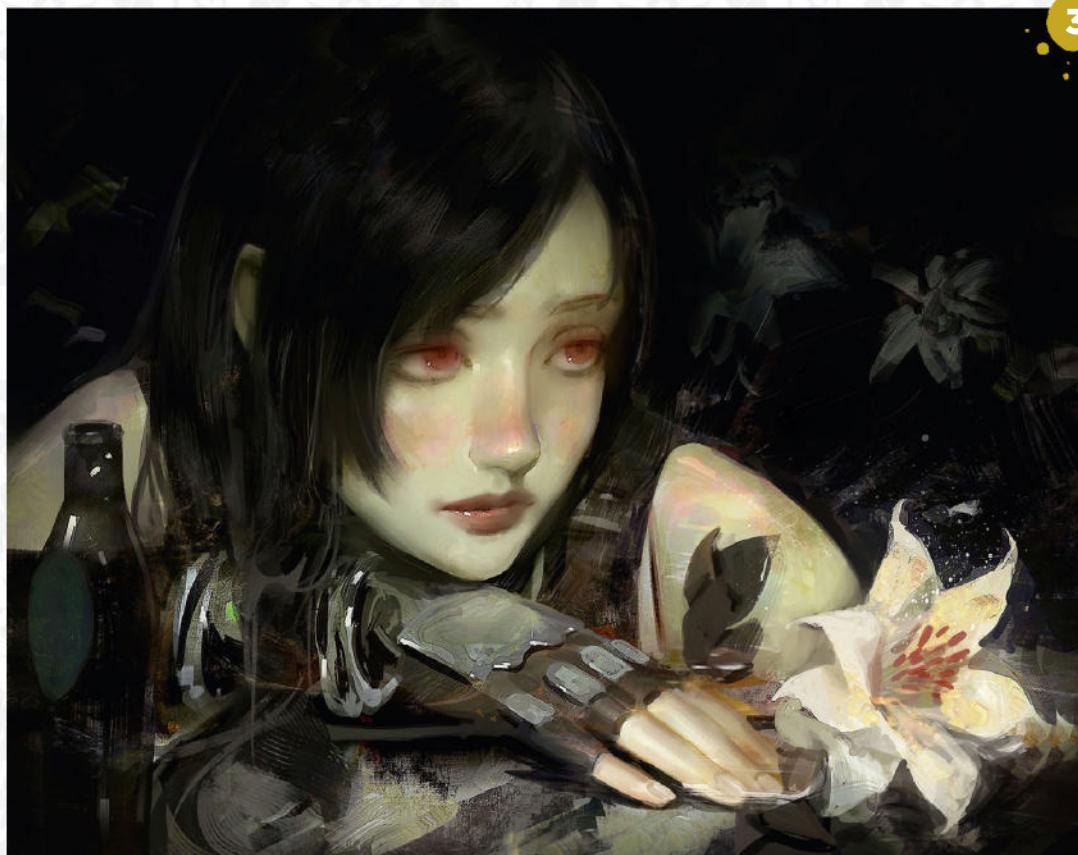
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### 3 TIFA LOCKHART

"A fan art piece I made following the release of Final Fantasy VII Rebirth. I adore Tifa's character and wanted to portray how she felt at the end of the game."

### 4 ALICE HARDY JR.

"I created this illustration for Halloween. This character would be the daughter or granddaughter of Alice from the Friday the 13th movies."



S  
sebijy



## Ma Liang

LOCATION: China MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender WEB: [www.artstation.com/liangmark](http://www.artstation.com/liangmark)

Ma Liang has spent the last 10 years working on AAA games and animation concepts. "I'm an art director at Riot Games and worked on Love, Death & Robots, and Star Wars." These pieces are from his personal IP, Crow.

### 1 CROW ALPHA

"I enjoy creating colour sketches in the worldbuilding process. These introduce the geography, plants and weather of the setting."

### 2 CROW EMPIRE AWAKENING

"This is the birth of an empire, as people begin to construct towering buildings and religious monuments."

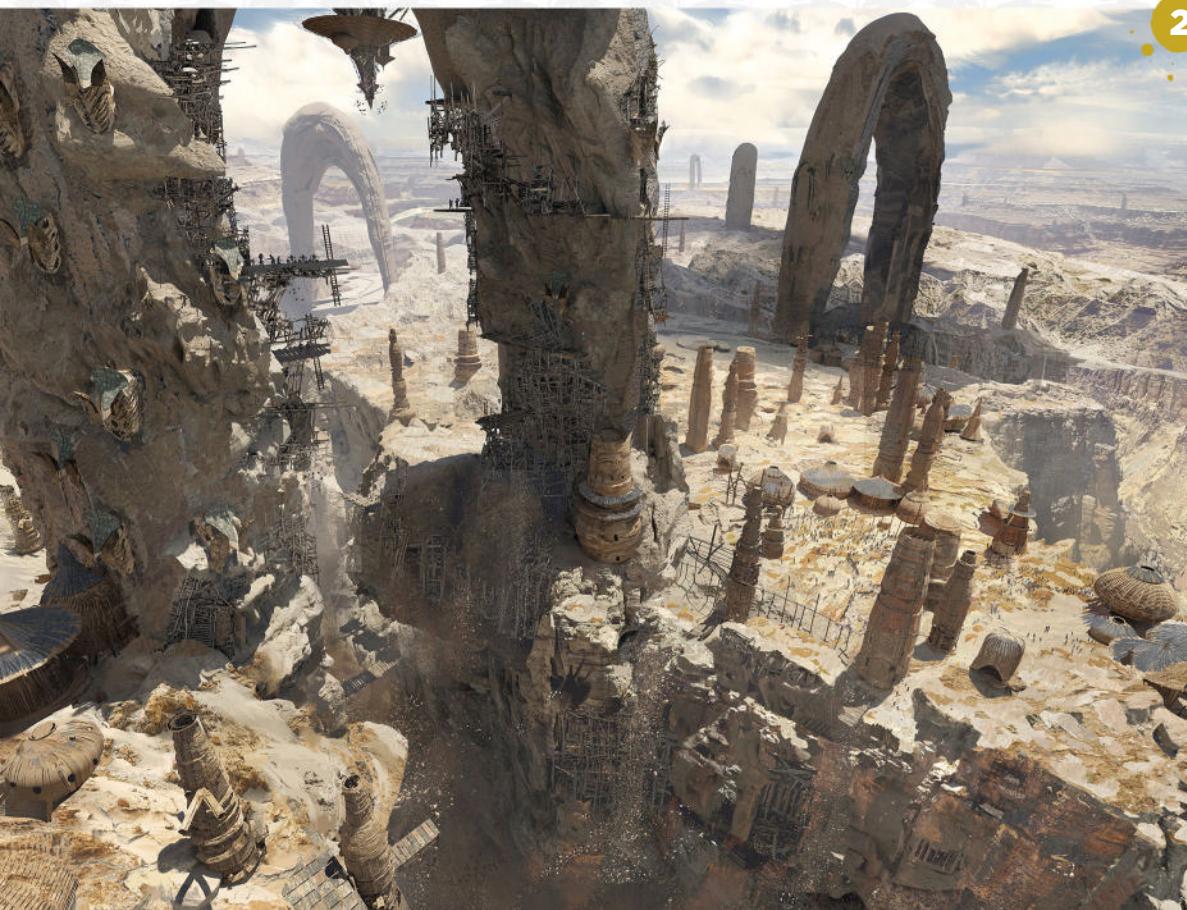
### 3 CROW ALPHA 2

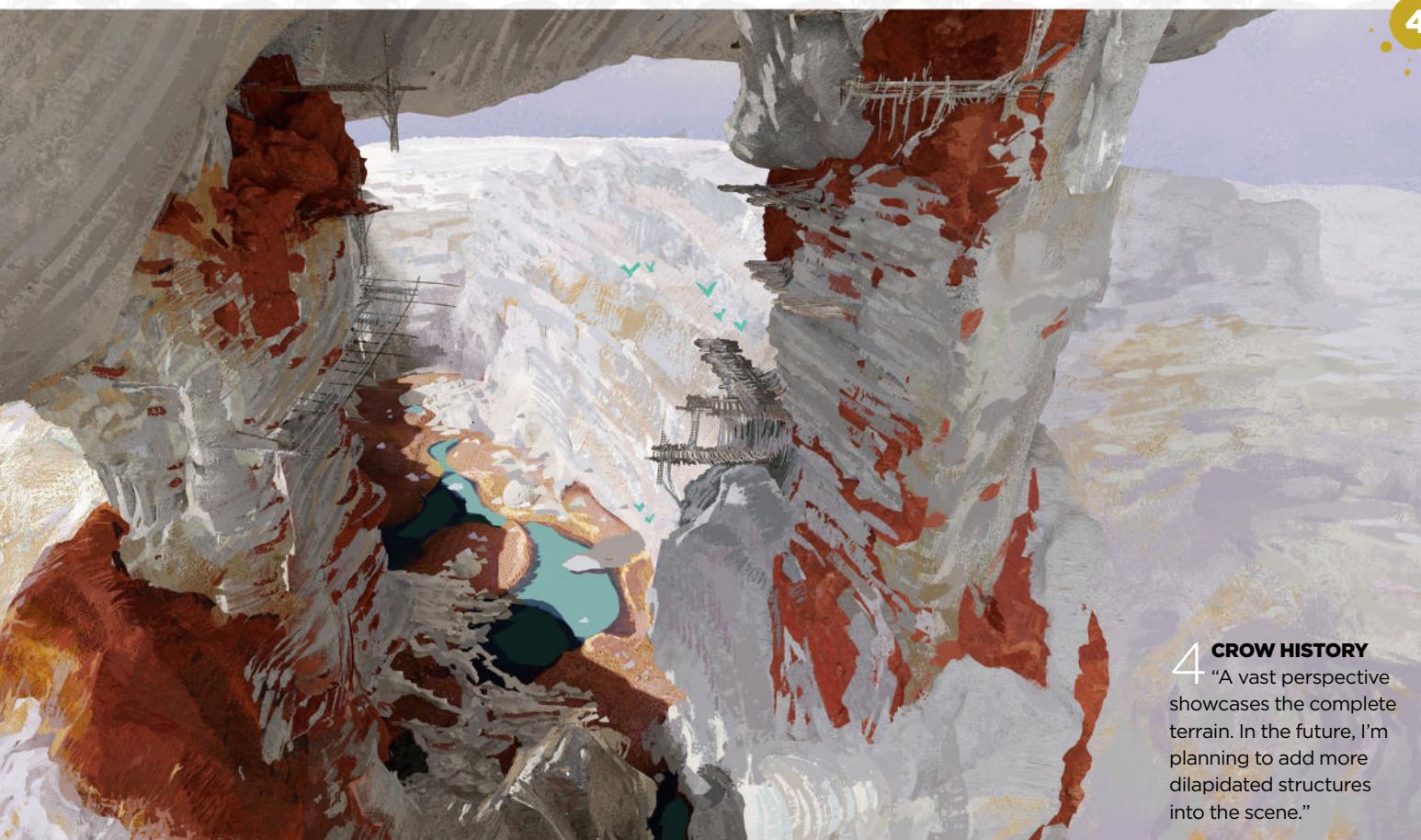
"A tribe of outsiders is preparing to invade the CROW-alpha tribe. The inspiration for the tribal houses scattered throughout the canyons comes from silkworm cocoons."

1



2



**4 CROW HISTORY**

"A vast perspective showcases the complete terrain. In the future, I'm planning to add more dilapidated structures into the scene."



## Anthony Catillaz

LOCATION: Switzerland MEDIA: Procreate, Photoshop, Lightroom WEB: [www.artstation.com/artico\\_luminos](http://www.artstation.com/artico_luminos)

Anthony, also known as Artico Luminos, is driven by his imagination and creativity, weaving worlds where fantasy meets sci-fi. His art evokes a sense of wonder through characters and settings filled with magic and mystery.

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### 1 ALIEN BREED

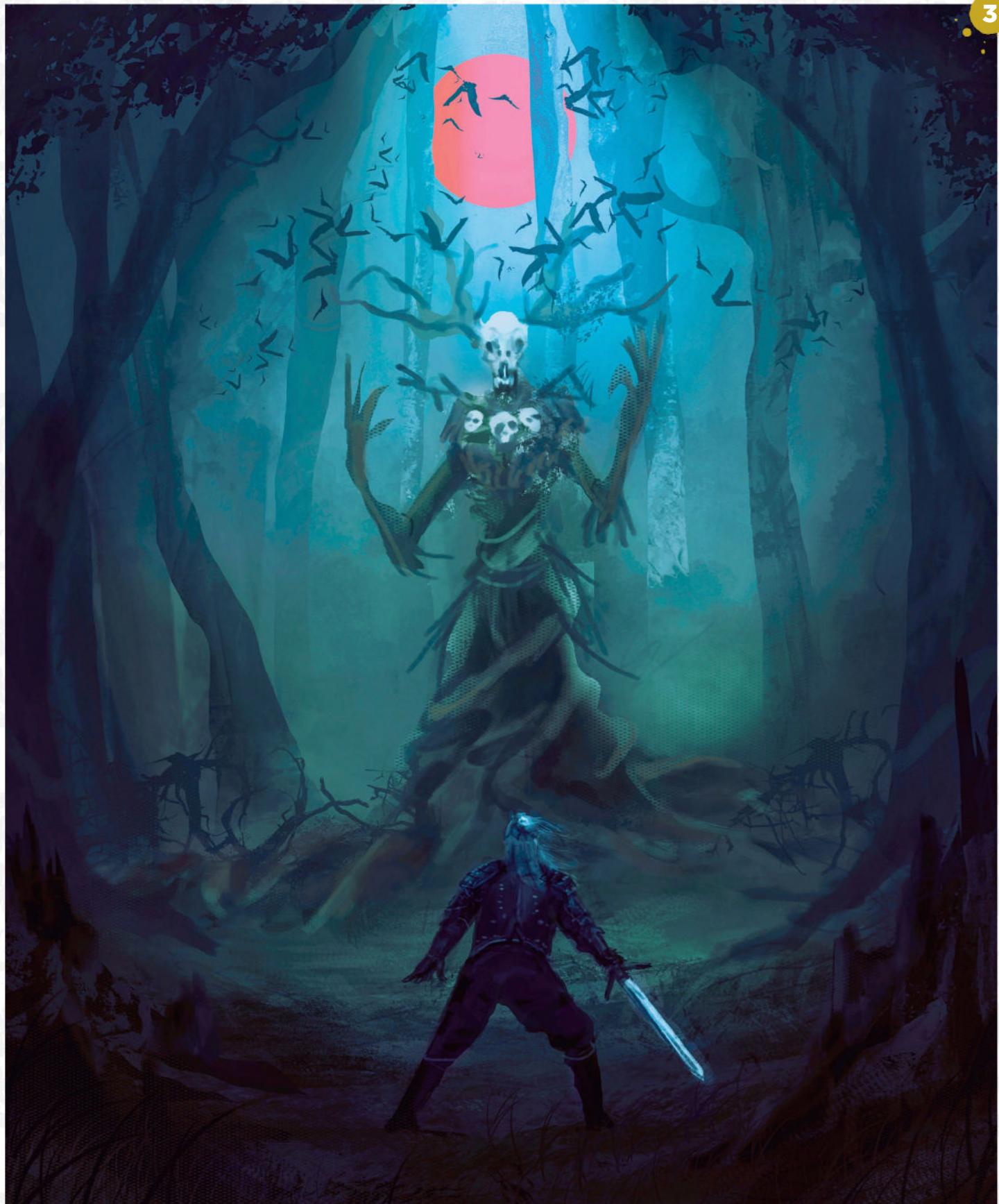
"Welcome to the dystopian frontier of Alien Breed, where humanity's final stand collides with extraterrestrial horror, birthing a saga of survival against the unknown."

### 2 AZREAL, DEATH ANGEL

"The ethereal visage of Azreal, Death Angel, a warrior poised to tip the scales of fate in the MythCraft RPG where every move echoes with the weight of destiny."

### 3 WITCHER LESHY HUNT

"Venture into the depths of the forest where the Witcher tracks the elusive Leshy, a primal guardian of the woods, in a hunt that tests courage against ancient magic."



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



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[WWW.THEROOKIES.CO](http://WWW.THEROOKIES.CO)



## The Peacocks

YEAR CREATED: 2023 MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender

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# Artist **PROFILE**

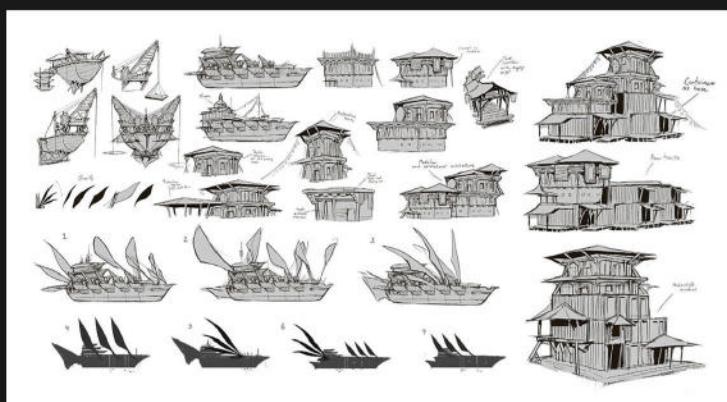
## **Jonas Nathanael Gali Kristensen**

**LOCATION:** Denmark

Jonas har



 Jonas has studied computer graphic arts at The Animation Workshop and harboured an enthusiasm for concept art and illustration from a young age.  
[www.therookies.co/u/MunchMallow](http://www.therookies.co/u/MunchMallow)



# ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS

# imagineNation

## AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY

"Your view of how work can be accomplished will shift with every new project," Kelsey Norden says on the value of variety and perspective.



## Life with a small animation studio

**Size matters** **Tanya Combrinck** looks at how being tasked to do more with less at a small studio can make you a better animator

**Working at a big studio certainly has its perks. Larger studios have luxurious facilities, and the projects you'll work on often have bigger, better budgets.**

But sometimes less really is more; a stint at a smaller company where you have to work within tighter constraints can boost creativity and make you a smarter, faster animator. You also might get the chance to work across a variety of roles on different kinds of projects, and experience more of the pipeline than you would working at a bigger organisation.

A director and storyboard artist, **Kelsey Norden** has spent time working at large studios such as Disney Television Animation and Warner Bros. Animation, as well as smaller outfits such as Six Point Harness, OddBot and Stoopid

Buddy Stoodios. She explains that if you've only ever worked at a big studio, there's valuable perspective to be gained from taking on a job at a company with a lower headcount.

### BIG JOB, SMALL BOX

"Smaller studios tend to have smaller budgets, so it forces the artist to do creative problem-solving to make a big ask from a client fit into a small box," Kelsey tells **ImagineFX**. "You'll miss the nicer office chairs, the big standing desk, and the fancy kitchen with fresh fruit, but you'll gain a new bag of tricks to take with you to any future project."



Kelsey's top skills for working at a smaller studio: "Flexibility, problem-solving, and stepping up when no one is available."

**“At the smaller studios, I developed clever tricks to be faster and remain efficient”**

"It can be demanding working for a smaller studio as teams are often spread thin," says Heidi Stephenson.

Her roles at smaller organisations all taught her ways to squeeze the most out of every single frame. Kelsey adds: "Titmouse, before they grew to the size they are now, taught me how to get a lot of character out of a little animation. OddBot taught me how to make a CG show on a budget; what parts of the show are most expensive, such as new characters, fur, and ➤



**Kelsey Norden** has spent time working at large studios such as Disney Television Animation and Warner Bros. Animation, as well as smaller outfits such as Six Point Harness, OddBot and Stoopid



## INCREDIBLE READER ART

The Fantasy Book Illustration theme for our second ImagineFX Art Challenge brought another high-quality selection of artwork for us to choose from.  
**Page 30**



## THE BEST OF VERTEX 2024

Our extravaganza of digital art proved to be a smash hit! We take a look back at our best bits, from fascinating artist insights through to major tech displays.  
**Page 32**



## A SHRINE TO COLLECTIBLES

Step inside the studio of fighting game fan Edwin Huang as he shows us cases full of incredible figurines and a range of his vibrant tribute artworks.  
**Page 34**



"Being humble, not being afraid to try something new, and being prepared to show up for a challenge are key traits for a small studio," says Mathieu Durand.



"You're in a position to gain trust more quickly,"  
Brendan Burch says of working in small teams.

## INDUSTRY INSIGHT

### IN THE SPOTLIGHT

*Creative director Charles Bigeast on getting your talent recognised*

#### What are the pros and cons of starting your career at a small studio?

It's a great environment to find your voice and improve quickly, and your co-workers will have more time to give you advice and to bounce ideas. On the other hand, working in a large studio can have the advantage of meeting a lot of people. These big houses have more turnover and can be a good way to create connections and allow a young artist to have a great network.

#### What can an artist who has only ever worked for big studios gain from moving to a smaller one?

This is probably not a hard rule, but in general, making a move to a smaller studio is great when looking for more creative work. An artist won't have to elbow their way to being heard and having input. On the contrary, they'll be asked to take the initiative. Your bosses probably sit a few metres away too, so it's easier to get noticed and evolve in the company, stepping up to more responsibilities.

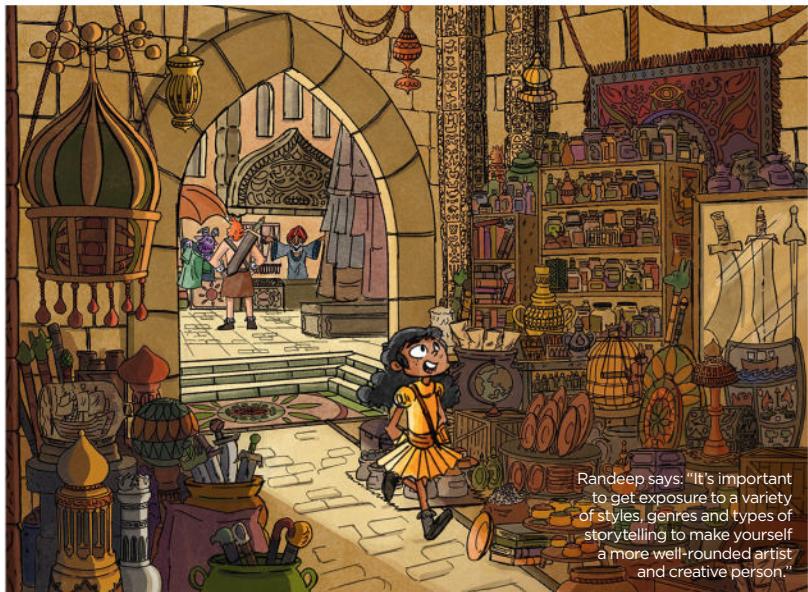
#### What skills are important for working at a smaller studio?

Flexibility, in the sense everyone needs to pull their weight and get their hands dirty, and it's not a place to be too precious about your position or role. But also flexibility in skills and styles. Being a generalist to some extent and navigating a few different styles will go a very long way.



Charles Bigeast is creative director at creative agency Golden Wolf, which has offices in London and NY.

[www.goldenwolf.tv](http://www.goldenwolf.tv)



Randeep says: "It's important to get exposure to a variety of styles, genres and types of storytelling to make yourself a more well-rounded artist and creative person."

props; and how it's built differently in storyboards when compared with a 2D show, as camera moves are cheaper than new shots, which can be the opposite in 2D.

"At the smaller studios, I developed clever tricks to work faster and stay efficient. You could say that at Warner Bros. and Disney I got a little more room to experiment, to try something big, but I largely stuck to the same ideas of being economical and quick. A person who saves the show money is an asset anywhere."

## TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Another benefit at a smaller studio is the chance to try out a broader range of jobs and art styles. "At a larger studio, usually your job is pretty well defined and you're tasked with doing a singular role such as a story artist, lighting, animator, and so on," says **Randeep Katari**.



"A person who saves the show money is an asset anywhere," says Kelsey of the tricks you will learn when working within smaller budgets



"We look for people with a wide range of ability so we can hold on to them longer for different projects," says Brendan.



"It's empowering to work in a small, tight-knit team, where every person has the same end goal: to make the best work possible!" says Heidi.

scenes and sequences", he adds, "but with constricting budgets and schedules, that isn't always the case these days".

## SKILLS ON DISPLAY

Smaller animation houses can also be a good choice for those who are eager



to progress faster in their careers. **Brendan Burch**, CEO at Six Point Harness, says: "Your talent is likely more visible and therefore

**"I think the best artists go back and forth between different-sized companies"**

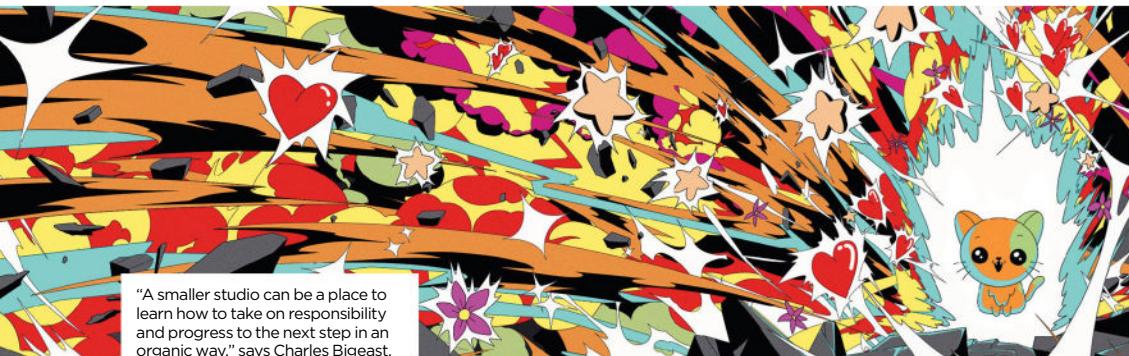


Brendan says: "There is less margin for error, which can create more urgency working at an independent studio."

# Artist news, software & events



Heidi says: "Working at different-sized organisations helps you understand how different teams work together and how those teams communicate."



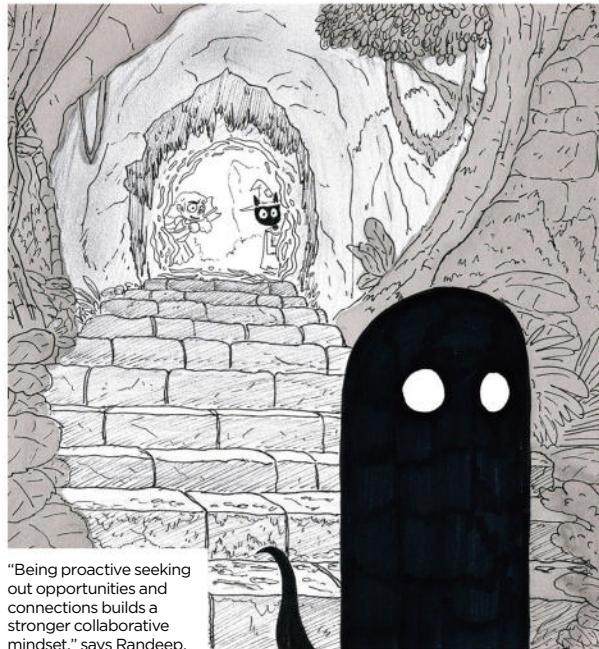
"A smaller studio can be a place to learn how to take on responsibility and progress to the next step in an organic way," says Charles Bigeast.



"The smaller the studio, the more you'll work with the same people," Randeep advises.

you'll have opportunities to advance more quickly in skill and rank. For example, a storyboard artist who is consistently knocking out amazing work and whose goal is to direct will be in a better position to become a director at a smaller studio. Smaller teams of people are more common and you're in a position to gain their trust quicker."

Brendan explains that the greater range of work can help you to hone your abilities and find your niche. "I think that your skills develop more thoroughly as you work on different kinds of projects over time," he says. "A smaller studio might have more of a variety of work and that could lead to a more interesting portfolio, or expose you to a style you might excel in or have more passion for. I think the best artists are the ones who go back



"Being proactive seeking out opportunities and connections builds a stronger collaborative mindset," says Randeep.

and forth between different-sized companies because they can bring interesting perspectives to every job they work on."

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

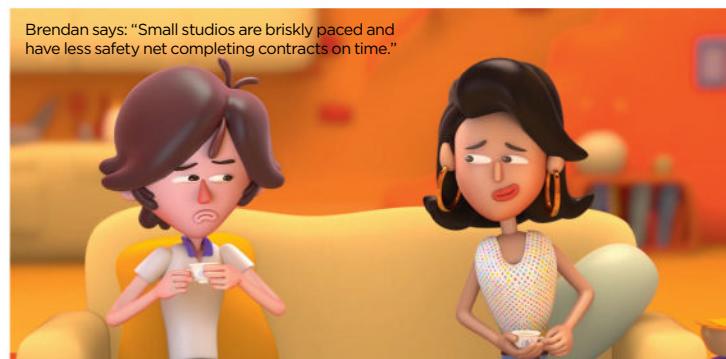
The head of production at creative agency Golden Wolf, **Heidi Stephenson** notes that another advantage of working for a smaller studio is your "power to influence". She explains: "The larger studios often come with vast amounts of infrastructure and systems you ➤



"Working for a small studio as a junior really allows you to develop as an artist," says Charles.



Brendan says: "Small studios are briskly paced and have less safety net completing contracts on time."



► need to learn, but at the smaller studios there can be an opportunity for problem-solving and offering new solutions to the workflows that you're in control of."

Stephenson adds: "Smaller studios often also provide more opportunity to take on more responsibility than you might in a larger studio. People may miss the structure that a larger company often offers, but in a smaller studio, the fast-paced, all-hands-on-deck environment can be exhilarating and career-boosting."

And then there's the chance to play a part your every stage of a project. Smaller animation houses give artists

greater "ownership over their work", reflects **Mathieu Durand**, an art director at Golden Wolf who has worked at a range of smaller studios including Kong Orange, M2 Film and Atomic Digital. "Being able to accompany a project from the initial pitch, to establishing a design language through styleframes, all the way to the delivery, is so rewarding and valuable," he says.

### THINKING BIGGER

Of course, while the benefits of small studios are strong, there are different things to enjoy at bigger studios.

"You have to get more creative to stretch a dollar, which will mean finding economical ways to get a project done while still making it engaging," Kelsey says of smaller studios.

While it's great for your skill-building to work within tight timeframes and budgets, sometimes it's fun to do something fancy. Kelsey says: "At Disney, you're working directly for the producer of your project, so you may have access to a more flexible budget. There's more room for cool animation and art that might cost a little more. Small studios are taking on work from clients and have to bid against other studios to win that kind of work, so their budgets are tighter."

Follow-up work may also be easier to come by. "At a larger studio with more shows in production, when you roll off your project there might be another one hiring that can take you on. Smaller studios don't always have that kind of overlap," Kelsey adds.

The good news is that even if you don't get to choose whether you start your career at a small or large studio, every workplace and project will teach you something valuable, and could take you in a new direction that you'd never thought of.

Randeep says: "It's important to be open-minded about the types of projects you may be offered to work on, which you may not have initially considered. These days, the level of talent is so amazing everywhere that whether you're working at a small studio or a large one, the amount you learn from your peers is incredible."

**“In a smaller studio, the fast-paced, all-hands-on-deck environment can be exhilarating and career-boosting”**





Randeep says: "A vital skill is the ability to think creatively and find solutions within the parameters you're given."





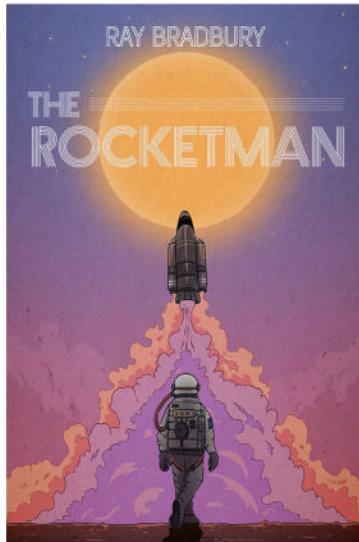
**Book-smart** Check out our favourite entries from the latest stunning submissions by ImagineFX readers

**The second chapter in the ImagineFX Art Challenge story has been written with this super selection of entries for our Fantasy Book Illustration theme.**

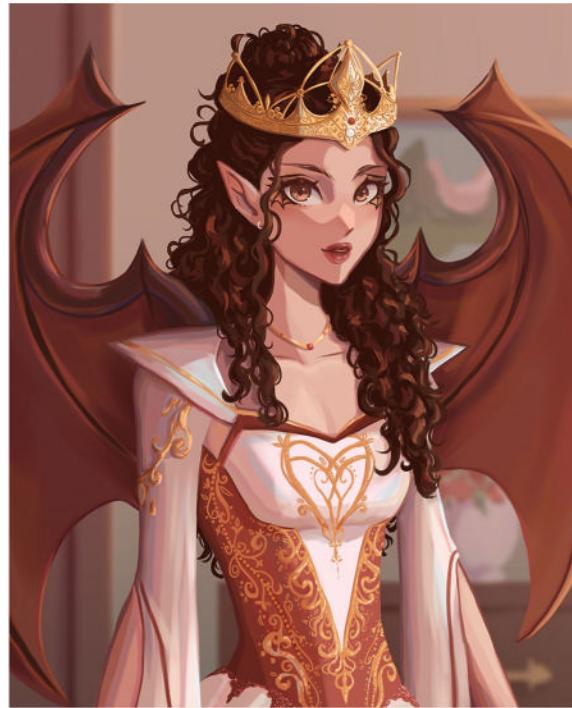
Once again there was no shortage of choice for our judges, who picked out eight stunning pieces to feature in this issue. You brought a whole library worth of inspiration, with The Lord of the Rings and Middle-earth a popular subject, alongside other high fantasy favourites and classic fairy tales.

Thanks once again to everyone who entered and congratulations to our top choices. We're already excited to turn the page for our next challenge!

**Jonivisual** [www.instagram.com/jonivisual\\_](https://www.instagram.com/jonivisual_)  
The Rocket Man by Ray Bradbury (right)



**Gaia Cafiso** <https://gaiacafiso.artstation.com>  
Moiraine Damodred from The Wheel of Time by Robert Jordan

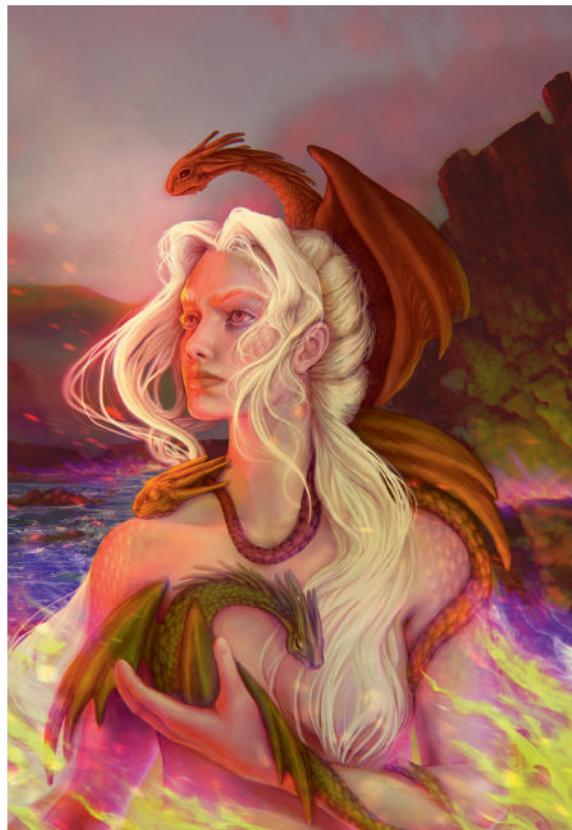


**Jordan Davids** [www.instagram.com/artbyjordn](https://www.instagram.com/artbyjordn)  
Quinn from On Wings of Ash and Dust by Brittany Wang



**Jenevieve Broomall** [www.jenbroomall.com](https://www.jenbroomall.com)  
The Last Unicorn by Peter S. Beagle

**Challenge accepted** Keep an eye on our social media channels for all the latest ImagineFX Art Challenge details and you could see your art in a future issue! **Visit page 3 for all our social channels**



**Anastasia Safronova** [www.instagram.com/nastynastyadraws](https://www.instagram.com/nastynastyadraws)  
Daenerys Targaryen from *A Song of Ice and Fire*  
by George R. R. Martin



**Andrea Masi** [www.instagram.com/andreamasi\\_art](https://www.instagram.com/andreamasi_art)  
Gothmog from *The Silmarillion* by J. R. R. Tolkien



**Romain Meynard** [www.instagram.com/meynardromain](https://www.instagram.com/meynardromain)  
The Liveship Traders by Robin Hobb



**Kazuki Okuda** <https://isseinoisssyou.work>  
The Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Andersen



ImagineFX Editor Rob Redman (left) and Vertex co-organiser Ian Dean.

## The best of Vertex

**Artists reunited** We reflect on a fantastic day meeting our incredible digital art community and learning from so many talented speakers

**We had a blast at Vertex 2024, our live digital art event held at London's Business Design Centre, organised alongside our friends from 3D World and Creative Bloq.**

It was wonderful to absorb the artistic goodness, speaking to a roster of talented speakers, going hands-on with new and exciting products from leading exhibitors like Wacom and Xencelabs, and checking out all the imaginative and hilarious sketch wall designs crafted by attendees. We hope you had a great time too if you spent the day with us!

The event ran smoothly with a wide variety of talks held across the three stages, plus live demonstrations from the best in the business and life drawing sessions offering inspiration for visitors to draw from. Did we also



The Business Design Centre in London was the perfect venue.

This year's Vertex was the first held in person since the 2020 event.

mention the countless fabulous freebies handed out and the amazing coffee we had brewed up?

### TAKING TO THE STAGE

Among the speakers were illustrator and character designer Pernille Ørum, who shared her career highlights and demoed her process, Brynn Metheney talking about the approach she takes to creature designs for movies, and twins Raide and Leffie discussing how collaboration can affect workflows.



Game artist Anna Hollinrake was in her zone with a Madonna mic and stage to jump about, and our regular tutorial artist Charlie Pickard drew a big crowd for his talk about artistic fundamentals. We'd especially like to thank artists who stepped out of their comfort zone to inspire attendees, such as Alina Fedaseyenka, who shared her approach to art design for VR gaming, and French artist Nana Dhebuadze, who did a talk in English.

For **ImagineFX** and 3D World Editor Rob Redman and his Vertex co-organiser, Creative Bloq's Digital Art & 3D Editor Ian Dean, it was a chance to catch up with artists that they've known and worked with for over a decade.

Rob was keen to both touch base with old friends and put new faces to

**vertex**  
THE ULTIMATE EVENT FOR THE CG COMMUNITY

# Artist news, software & events



“Live events really can’t be matched! Being back together with our amazing community was truly fantastic”

names, making the most of Vertex being an in-person event for the first time since 2020. One of his highlights was Thomas Elliott, who kicked off the day with an insightful talk about his journey in the illustration business. The artist has graced our pages on many occasions and shares our Editor's love of fantasy and sci-fi art, as well as both being former Games Workshop members, working on the Warhammer universes.

## INSPIRING EXPERIENCE

At the other end of the day, Rob also enjoyed Ian Failes' panel talk about creating the BAFTA-winning film *Poor Things*, showcasing and discussing some of the awe-inspiring work done by the VFX team on what was a truly remarkable project.

As a former editor of both 3D World and **ImagineFX**, Ian has been commissioning artists and writing about their work for a long time, and Vertex was a chance to catch up with David Levy, Hazel Mead and so many other familiar faces.

Creative Bloq's Ecommerce Writer Beth spent the day chatting with exhibitors about top secret digital art products, while News Writer Natalie was the top interviewer. She got the details on Brynn's thriving goat farm, and spoke to Thomas fresh from sharing insights into his art process.

What did we love learning the most? That live events really can't be matched. It's what we missed during the Covid years and being back together with our community was a truly fantastic experience. 

David Levy offered key feedback on budding artists' portfolios.



# ImagineNation Artist in Residence





Make sure you never cheap out on frames. They warp!



My extra-wide monitor is great for having two browsers up. Now I don't need to choose between reference images and YouTube videos.



My XP Pen tablet is my life. I don't draw when I travel, so my whole life's work is truly made on this tablet.



I had a 10-year-old office keyboard before my friend gifted me a super loud clicky-clacky one. I love the sound of this thing!

I always tend to display the latest figure in front of me. Statue building is always a team effort and it's great to be able to ogle over the finished product!

This label printer is for side hustles! I have an online shop, which is a must to stay afloat.



**They're not dolls!** Enter a toy shrine that doubles as the concept artist's studio

I finally gave up the hustle and bustle of the New York City studio lifestyle. I made the move to lazy California about five years ago and have never looked back.

My primary workstation is in a small bedroom. Most of my work is digital these days, so the setup is fairly simple: two monitors, a desk, and proper lighting is all I really need to get working. I live a pretty sedentary life, so the standing desk is extremely important for blood flow!



My average month consists of a healthy balance of client work, personal work, and comic convention travel. Don't get me wrong, it's a luxury to ↗



# ImagineNation Artist in Residence



I'm usually wearing a tank top and boxers while I'm working, but I put on something semi-presentable to take this photo!

► be able to work from home, but it also forces me to be disciplined or else the bills don't get paid. Remaining motivated is a skill you have to learn if you're working from home in any capacity. I also have to learn when to put down the pen and enjoy personal time with my wife and friends.

My partner and I are toy concept artists, so the rest of the house is filled with figurines and statues. We love surrounding ourselves with toys, and call them reference material as an

**“ Remaining motivated is a skill that you have to learn if you’re working from home ”**

My two-screen work setup. Nothing more, nothing less!

excuse for our childish behaviour. What's not pictured are the millions of toy boxes in our garage and closets. Though we have our own studios, we spend a lot of downtime together in the loft area and enjoy gaming and binge-watching cartoons. Finding the right co-op game is the hard part!

## FIGHTING GAME ENTHUSIAST

My hobbies include fighting games, toy collecting, cars and working out. All of my interests tend to blend and define what I like to draw. If it's not obvious, Street Fighter and video games have truly infested my daily life. I try to convince myself that gaming for six hours straight is part of the work process, but we all know that's a sham. The slow downfall of my career will be downloading Steam onto my work computer.



Mega Man X was my favourite SNES game growing up. I revisit it every few years to marvel at it.

I'm lucky to be able to quit my studio-based jobs back in New York and work from home. My time in New York built the foundation of my career, but I was also burning the candle at both ends. The quieter lifestyle here in California truly has its health benefits.

*Edwin Huang, also known as Ironpinky, is a California-based illustrator and concept artist best known for his published work on Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. To see more of his work, visit <https://edwinhuang.com>.*



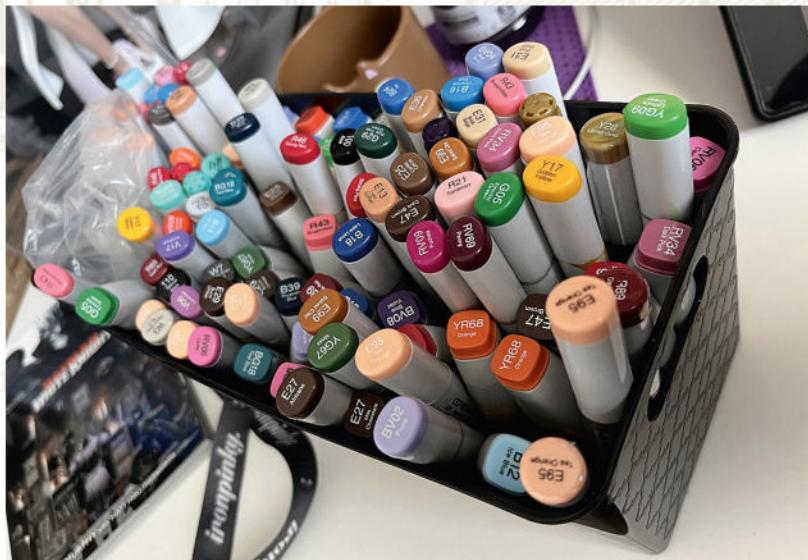
A 1/3-scale Chun-Li. One of the first 1/3-scale figures I had the pleasure of working on.



I've had 2,500 hours on Smash Bros. and 1,000 hours in Street Fighter. Where does the time go?



I drew this Spider-Gwen piece when Into the Spider-Verse came out. The background took way longer than the foreground did.



My Copic marker collection. They're primarily used for comic convention sketches. Having these around definitely keeps my traditional skills from atrophy.

This is the loft area where me and my wife spend most of our time when either gaming or generally slacking off.



# Complete your collection!

# Recent editions

Missed an issue? Here's how you can order previous print or digital editions of ImagineFX

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## Other devices

We're available via nook on Barnes & Noble and Amazon's range of Fire tablets.



## PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



### Issue 240

July 2024

Find out how fan art can take you to new heights! We have tutorials on recreating some much-loved characters from Howl's Moving Castle, Spider-Man and Pokémon, and learn why creating fan art could lift your career prospects.



### Issue 239

June 2024

Get the secrets behind making magical characters in Clip Studio Paint, just like our stunning cover art. We chat about getting into game art in our big interview with Grégory Fromenteau, and teach you the basics of powerful values.



### Issue 238

May 2024

We go all out on manga with a full feast of tutorials, including the vibrant cover from our star artist Julio Cesar. Blizzard's Airi Pan shares her mission statement in our big interview, plus we visit Wayne Barlowe's curious studio.



### Issue 237

April 2024

Learn how to design incredible book cover art with bestselling artist and author Tony DiTerlizzi. DC artist Liam Sharp also talks about his creative formula, and we get expert advice on painting a ferocious fire-breathing dragon.

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# Letters

## YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



Contact the editor, Rob Redman, on [mail@imaginefx.com](mailto:mail@imaginefx.com) or write to ImagineFX, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, England



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Workshops

**ArtRage Vitae**  
**CREATE A STYLED FAN ART PORTRAIT**

Illustrator **RedmanArt** pays tribute to much-loved Studio Ghibli film *Howl's Moving Castle* with a semi-realistic portrait piece

**PROFILES**

**Draw your fan art**

**Watch the process**

### Fanatical about fan art

Hey ImagineFX. Your last issue was outstanding! I've been working on my own fan art projects for a long time but have never considered using it as part of my career. Now that has all changed. Reading how I could take what I do to the next level has inspired me massively, so a very warm thank you from me and please keep doing more of the same.

*Nikael, via email*

**Rob replies** Thanks for getting in touch Nikael, and I'm really glad to hear you enjoyed our fan art issue last month.

There's so much that can be learned both from studying artists you admire, as well as taking inspiration from some of the wonderful worlds that have been built. And don't forget, fan art doesn't just mean paying homage to a favourite character, it could also be exploring themes from music, or a book that you love.

No need to worry, we'll be bringing you plenty more of this kind of content in the future. Let us know if there's anything you'd like to see in the magazine!

Our fan art issue last month has proved very popular. Not surprising, given the wonderful cover and features!



**DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?**  
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 240 at [ifxm.ag/single-ifx](http://ifxm.ag/single-ifx).

Workshops

**IN-DEPTH DEVELOP DETAILED VENUSAUR FAN ART**

Ever wanted to learn how to paint a detailed version of a fan art character? Well, now's your chance! In this workshop, artist Juan Diego León shows you how to paint a detailed version of the iconic Pokémon Venusaur.

**IN-DEPTH STYLED FAN ART**

Ever wanted to learn how to paint a detailed version of a fan art character? Well, now's your chance! In this workshop, artist Juan Diego León shows you how to paint a detailed version of the iconic Pokémon Venusaur.

*Pokémon enthusiast Juan Diego León taught us how to create our very own Venusaur in issue 240.*

### Pokémon go!

I'm just writing a quick thank you for the tutorial you had last month explaining how to paint a Pokémon character (and Venusaur is even one of my favourites!). I've wanted to do this for some time but my skills were never enough to tackle it. That has all changed and after following along, I've started a series of them and been very happy with them. I really appreciate all of the training that you guys share. Thank you!

*Amy, via email*

**Rob replies** Hi Amy. It's so good to know you've got past that roadblock and that ImagineFX was able to help in some way. That particular tutorial from Juan Diego León and the art itself is a great example. Keep coming back as we have a bunch more workshops planned covering some of our favourite franchises.

### Applause for the tours

Hello there, Rob. I adore your Artist in Residence articles. There's nothing quite like having a good old nose around somebody else's studio space and last month was a fantastic example. I've been a fan of Greg Manchess for a long time now, so it was just wonderful to see where he works. It's such a creative space and yet manages to remain warm and homely at the same time.

*Jeanette, via email*

**Rob replies** Lovely to hear from you Jeanette. It's always a pleasure to find out what our readers enjoy about the magazine and I totally agree with you on this one; I'm a massive fan of the Artist in Residence articles. Getting some insight into what creative people surround themselves with is a real eye-opener. It's definitely not one rule fits all, so we're all looking forward to seeing more spectacular workspaces!



New works that have grabbed our attention



**Druakim**  
[@druakim](https://druakim)



**Len H. Nicholas**  
[@toyagogo](https://toyagogo)



**Jacob Aybara**  
[@jacobaybara](https://jacobaybara)

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

## ELEPHANTS!

Nathan loves to leave aspects of a painting to the viewer's imagination as it allows them to participate in his work.



# THE ART OF NATHAN FOWKES

**Dominic Carter** talks to the concept pro about getting the most out of his sketchbooks, and the cusp of huge change facing artists



**OAK TREE**  
Knowing what to leave out is as important as what to leave in. "It gives a great quality of purpose."



**D**uring the course of his stellar career, concept artist and teacher Nathan Fowkes has already witnessed huge changes in terms of how artists work. And while the industry is on the threshold of even bigger innovations, he explains to us how the humble sketchbook is still immensely valuable to students and professionals alike.

Tell us a little about your artistic background. How did you get started, and what path has your career taken?

My career has been such an interesting ride because I started back in the early 90s before the big animation and

video game boom, and before concept art was really a thing. So no one was teaching those things, I just knew I wanted to do what I thought of as imaginative art.

Early on, going into art school at the Art Center College of Design based in Pasadena, I thought I would do things like book cover art and illustration, but then when I graduated in 1995, opportunities were starting to appear

#### UTAH STUDY

Leaving gaps in a sketch like this one creates room to make them more engaging.

in entertainment art, and that was absolutely the place for me. Getting paid to do splashy, imaginative art? It's exactly what I'd hoped to do.

I started out doing theme park show design at a company that contracted out to Disney, Universal and overseas theme parks, but two years into it I had an opportunity to show my portfolio at DreamWorks Animation. I'd always thought of animation as being too cartoony for the more painterly type of work I enjoy doing, but when I saw the development artwork DreamWorks was already doing for their epic *The Prince of* ➤

**“Getting paid to do splashy, imaginative art? It's exactly what I'd hoped to do”**

## Artist PROFILE

### Nathan Fowkes

LOCATION: US

FAVOURITE ARTISTS:

Richard Schmid, Pascal Campion,

Bobby Chiu

MEDIA: Watercolour, gouache,

charcoal, Photoshop, Procreate

WEB: [www.nathanfowkesart.com](http://www.nathanfowkesart.com)

→ Egypt, I completely forgot about my theme park job and just had to get hired to work on this painterly and atmospheric epic. I made it onto the show and that was the crossroads of my whole career.

How has your art developed over the years, and what has been behind those changes?

I had to learn to become a better storyteller in my work, and I'll tell you, I suffered some real beatdowns from directors until I figured out what it was my work was missing. Initially I was more of a scene painter and environment design artist. I'd paint what we call colour keys, which were small and loose sketches that would establish the colour, lighting and composition of a scene. And upon the director's approval, I'd paint a finish based on the colour key.

About seven or eight years into my career, traditional animation was replaced by CG animation. It was an amazing time and an incredible technological change, but it meant I needed to change as well. I became what we call a visual development artist, so my work no longer literally appeared in the movies but was meant



to visualise how those final scenes should look.

I'd paint locations that I was very proud of, and thought would serve the movie well, and then the response I got from directors was something like, 'Well, it looks pretty good, umm, it's missing something, how about you try making it warmer?' So I'd literally do what they said and make it warmer, and when they saw it again they hated it and would ask why it became so hot and sweaty looking. I always was too professional to respond by saying, 'I did exactly what you told me to do.'

“No one has to see the work that's in your sketchbook. You can just try things out and see what pieces take”



CALIFORNIA COASTAL EUCLYPTUS

The iconic trees of the California coast are one of Nathan's favourite subjects to paint.

What I realised was this: they didn't literally mean make it warmer, they meant they didn't feel the emotion of that particular moment in the story. So even when I was only meant to be doing environment work, I'd start to add characters and character moments into the scenes, and suddenly they stopped asking me to make paintings warmer and started saying the magic word, which was 'approved'.

The lesson was a righteous one; nobody cares whether you're a good painter, they care if your work creates a powerful emotional response in them.



BALBOA PARK, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Nathan's teaching work allows him to travel the world and paint what he sees. A recent trip took him to Japan.

This is another of the most important lessons I've learned in my career.

Tell us a bit about the sketchbook section on your site. How much of your work does this represent?

I've spent a great deal of time in my sketchbooks. This is where an artist can practise without having the ever-present fear that it won't turn out. No one has to see the work that's in your sketchbook; you can just try things



## BREAK TIME

For Nathan, watercolours are a pleasant change of pace from working at a screen.



## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Besides paints, Nathan likes charcoal for the rich subtlety of its mark making.



## MAXIMISE YOUR PRACTICE IN A SKETCHBOOK

Nathan reveals what artists should keep in mind to get the most out of their sketches

I think young artists can consider two things for their sketchbooks: they should practise what's challenging for them, but more importantly they should spend time sketching in a way they enjoy. This is critical, as we come back to the things we enjoy over and over. At the same time, there's a temptation to abandon things that are difficult and frustrating. Willpower can get us through frustration in the short term, but it's only the enjoyment that keeps us coming back. I'll often start professional assignments with doodles; the pressure is off and I can just try things out.

The other things to focus on are master studies, sketches from life, and sketches from imagination. I call this standing on the shoulders of giants as you learn from the best ideas out there while adding your own as well. For many of us, the goal is to be able to sketch and paint anything we can imagine.



**TWO TREES**  
The contrasting values of these trees create a powerful sense of depth and focus.

out, and see what pieces take and which ones don't.

I couldn't tell you exactly how much of my work time is represented in sketchbooks, but I can tell you that back in the 90s I made a personal commitment that I'd do at least one practice study every single day without exception. I've held this commitment over all these years, and this one habit has helped me to be prepared for opportunities that I wouldn't have otherwise been ready for.

Do you think artists should share everything from their sketchbooks on social media, or is it good to hold stuff back?

My opinion about this won't be right for everyone, but I believe in holding some things back. The reputation of a professional artist is only as good as

what they show to the public, and that requires us to constantly put our best foot forward. So I always try to post a wide range of images, subjects and techniques to show some versatility and keep the audience interested, but only if I think those images live up to a professional standard.

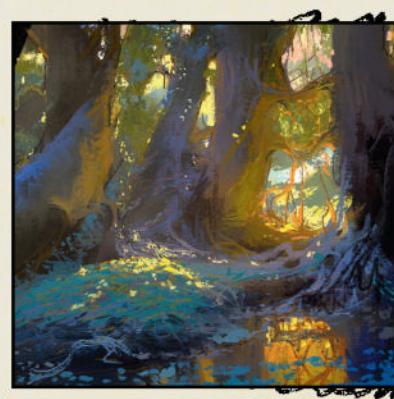
I think this would be different for students though. There's some value in saying up front, 'Hey, I'm a student, here's what I'm doing, and I'd really appreciate constructive feedback.'

Other people never see our work exactly the way we do, and sometimes images that make perfect sense to us as the creator are unclear to people who don't know the purpose or back story of the image. That kind of feedback is invaluable. Ultimately our work is done for an audience, and we need to learn how they respond to our work so that we can ultimately make a better connection with them.

Do you still work with traditional, physical sketchbooks? How do you use them to sharpen your skills?

I still keep a small watercolour kit in my car with the idea that I can stop and do a quick sketch any time, any place. I also carry a slim sketchbook and a black Prismacolor pencil around in my pocket so that I can do little thumbnails and doodles when I have a few free minutes.

My favourite thing to do is compose little black and white scenes. I'm a ➤

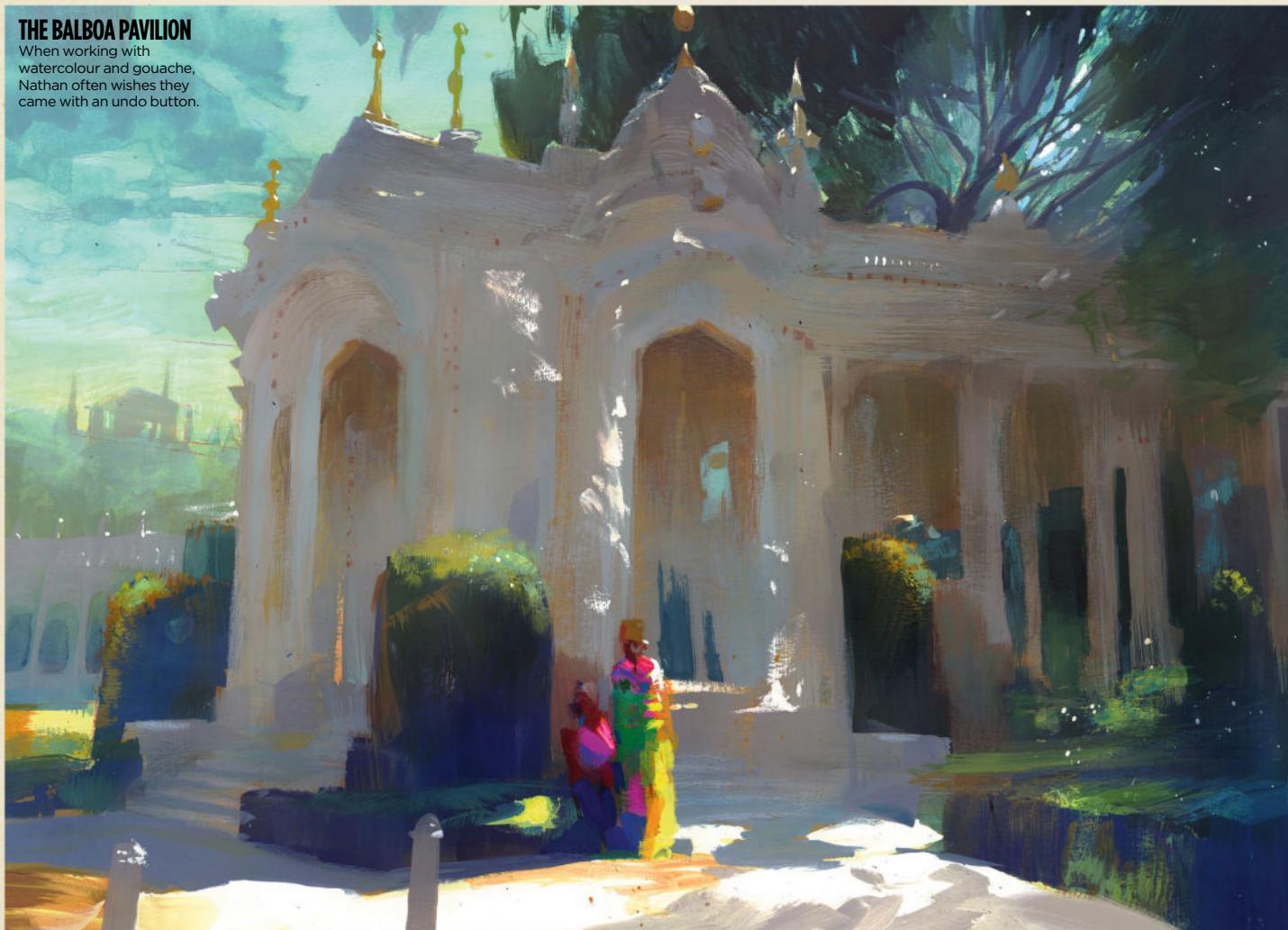


## FOREST STUDY

When working outdoors, Nathan prefers to get away from screens and use traditional mediums.

## THE BALBOA PAVILION

When working with watercolour and gouache, Nathan often wishes they came with an undo button.



» picture maker by trade and constantly doing this keeps me away from just using the same formulaic compositions over and over. I've done many thousands of these black and white thumbnails in the hope that all the practice will translate into muscle memory; my hand and my eye will simply know what to do when I face visual challenges.

But it's true that I spend less time in sketchbooks now than I used to, that's

## RUINS

Nathan enjoyed sketching this piece with a Prismacolor pencil and gouache on toned grey paper. It's a technique that he developed in the 90s.



**“I believe anyone has the bandwidth to do two things well, but everything else has to be a distant third”**

simply because I can put that time into more finished watercolours. Paintings that can hopefully be framed and are ready to be sold.

How difficult is it to juggle your time working as a concept artist, writer and teacher?

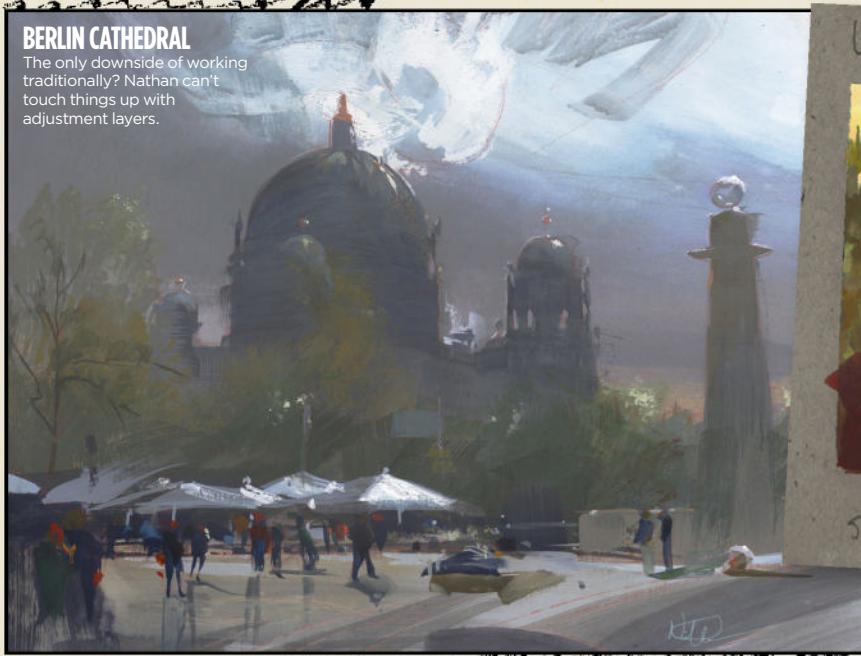
Great question, because it's not just artist, teacher and writer, it's also dad, husband, and player of Halo Infinite. I believe that anyone has the bandwidth to do two things well, but everything else has to be a distant third. So if you want to have a family and an intense artistic career, it's definitely doable, it's just that you can't do quite as much of anything else. But that's the nature of a sacrifice; giving up good things in the hope of gaining something better.

The other thing that I do to help my productivity is work during the night.

Logistically this is difficult, but through the quiet of the night I'm able to focus without distraction. There are no phone calls, emails or texts I must immediately respond to, and everyone else at home is asleep. And I do work in my home studio. I'm currently not accepting jobs that require me to commute to another location, so this definitely helps my schedule.

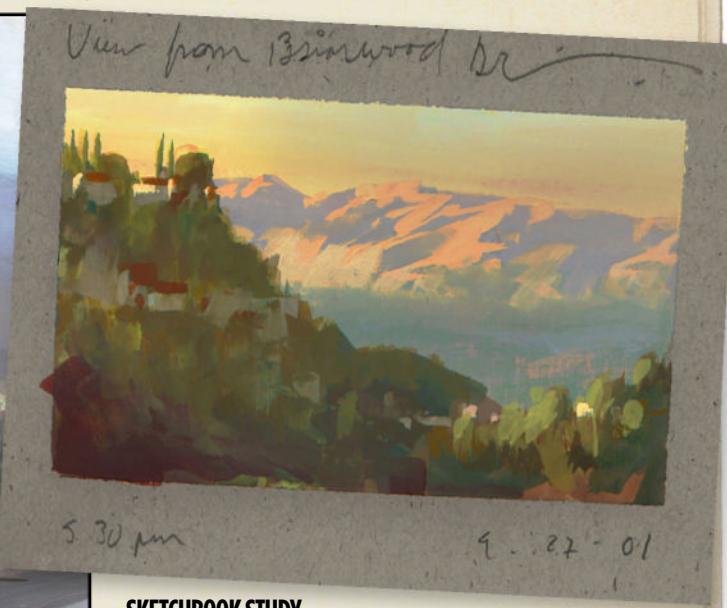
Of all the work you've created to date, what are you the most proud of and why?

I'd have to say it's my colour script work in general that I'm most proud of. Colour scripting a feature animated movie is so incredibly difficult and frustrating, because it has to be approved by all levels of the studio: the production designer, the director, producers, the executives, and so ➤



## BERLIN CATHEDRAL

The only downside of working traditionally? Nathan can't touch things up with adjustment layers.



## SKETCHBOOK STUDY

For this stunning vista, Nathan's use of colour was key to creating a dramatic sense of atmospheric perspective.



## DODO FOREST

The forest was the main purpose of this piece, but Nathan thought a dodo would be a fun addition.

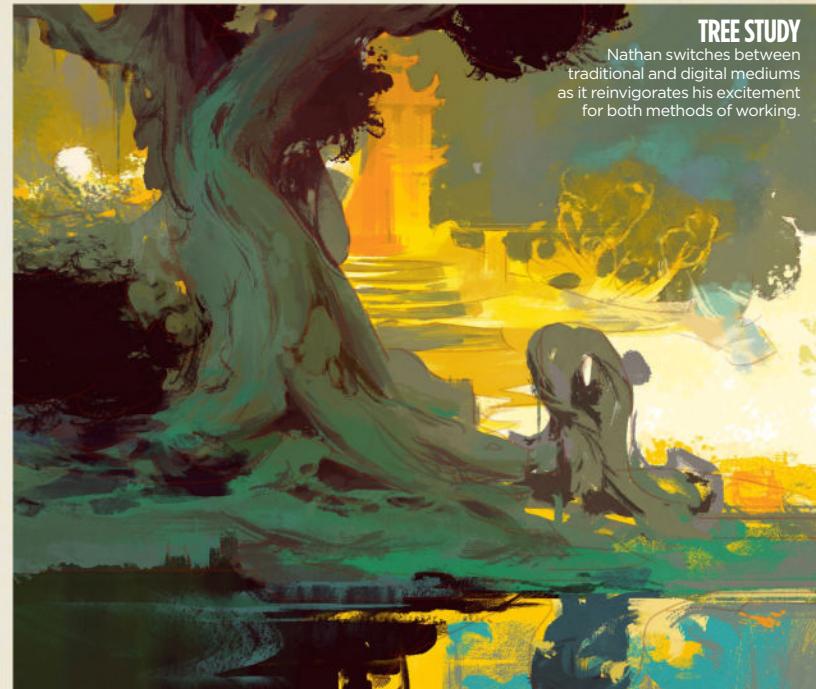
## SPOTLIGHT ON SPEED-PAINTING

Nathan explains how he created a dramatic lighting effect for an opera-inspired image

This piece was quite the guilty pleasure because it was really about developing a new speed-painting technique while I had a specific reference. I'd just gotten back from watching an opera and was fascinated with the way the lighting was staged and depth was artificially created in the set. You can see in this image that a primary brush is used for most of it. I worked the brush out recently for this type of work and have used it off and on ever since. It's simply a brush shape that's hard-edged and opaque on one side, and soft-edged and transparent on the other and has some built-in texture. Then I spaced it for a nice repetition and gave it pressure sensitivity for size. The harder I press the tablet, the larger the brush is, so I can quickly create depth by altering the size of the brush through pen pressure.

### LET THERE BE LIGHT

Nathan is drawn to stage lighting as he feels it reflects what he tries to achieve in animation.



## TREE STUDY

Nathan switches between traditional and digital mediums as it reinvigorates his excitement for both methods of working.

“A good colour script has to bring all the aspects of visual storytelling to bear to create the emotion of the show”

» on. But for me, this is the top step of the career ladder.

I've never wanted to become a production designer or director; for me the top of the ladder has always been to be the person who colour scripts the show. I did my first full feature colour script at DreamWorks Animation for *Puss in Boots*, and since then I've worked on colour scripts for Disney and Paramount as well.

A good colour script has to bring all of the aspects of visual storytelling to bear to create the emotion of all the varied scenes of the show. It has to address any and every time of day, lighting scenario, colour palette and story emotion. It's the visual guide to

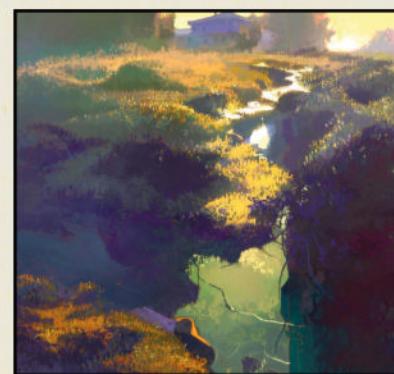
the entire movie and stays in play all the way until the movie is a wrap.

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

I'd certainly recommend my books and online classes to learn all the critical skills of colour and light design, environment design, and picture composition. But once they have a working knowledge of those subjects, I recommend not following in my footsteps.

I say this because we're standing at the threshold of a new period in art history. In 1,000 years, art historians will look back at this moment when hyper image-making technologies appeared, they'll look at how artists used them to create new, innovative work, and they'll look at how artists differentiated themselves from this technology by doing their own new and innovative work.

It's a heavy weight placed on the shoulders of our current artists, but they're stood at the threshold of one of the most important moments in art history. It's time for fresh ideas and new ways of doing things. But the essential principles of good design never change, and that's where I can continue to be helpful. ■



## REDWOOD SHORES

This painting from the outskirts of the Bay Area was made while Nathan was working on *Shrek*.

# Sketchbook

# Charles Lister

Explore the Aegolist, our sketch star's personal universe filled with macabre abominations seeking redemption



### FRIEND

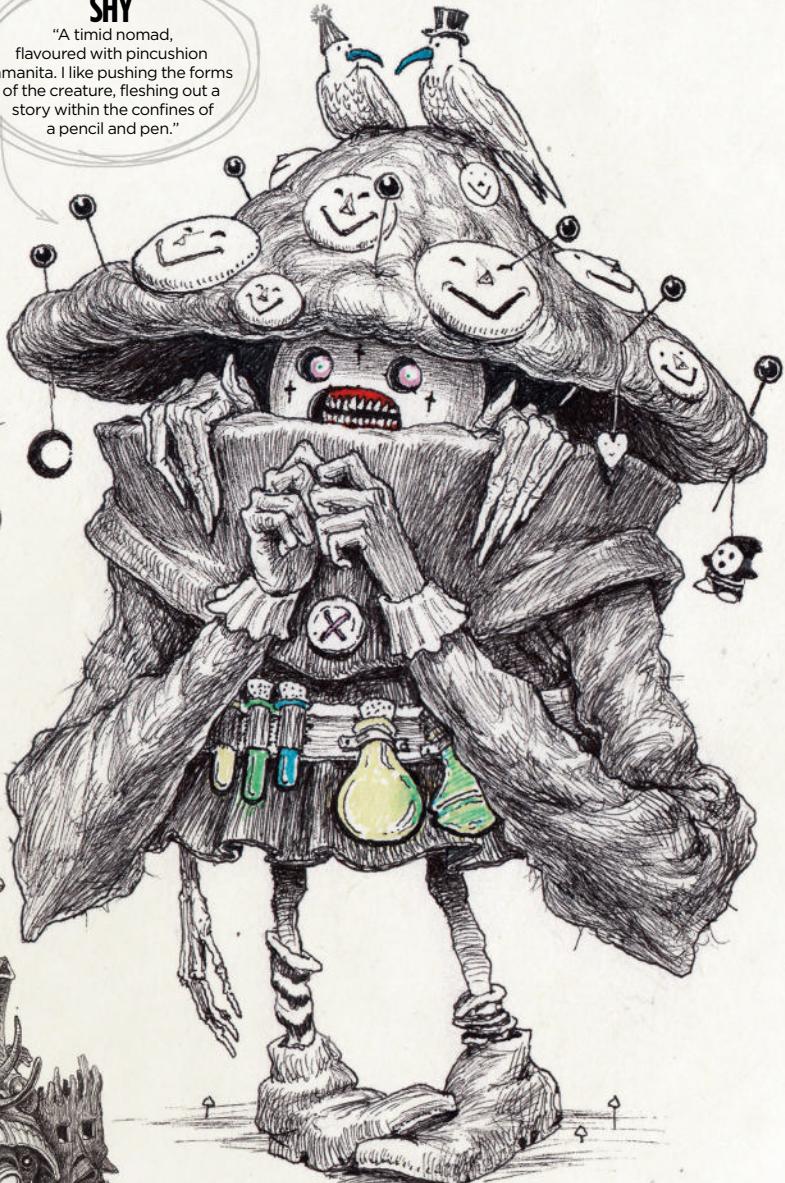
"I enjoy the contrast of the shapes. They must have told an inside joke or something. I believe some of my best work comes from a symbiotic relationship."



### GUARDED

"An otherworldly steampunk abomination tenderly protecting his kitten. They're quite a dynamic duo."

**SHY**  
"A timid nomad, flavoured with pincushion amanita. I like pushing the forms of the creature, fleshing out a story within the confines of a pencil and pen."



**“I believe some of my best work comes from a symbiotic relationship”**

## Artist **PROFILE**

### Charles Lister

LOCATION: US



Concept artist Charles works in traditional media and specialises in making macabre and fantastical creatures, and streams their creation to art lovers on Twitch. The characters here are part of his growing personal world entitled the Aegolist, to which he regularly adds new graphite works on paper. Charles' range of inspirations include classic vaudeville carnival combined with psychedelic aesthetics.

<https://linktr.ee/charleslister>

## STOLEN

"A lackey puppet and his assailant friend of Lunatoc steals a most precious skull from Sheol. The other skulls hover around in the hope of freeing their buddy. Maybe he deserved it though, the nosy son of a gun."



# Sketchbook

## CREATOR OF THE AEGOLIST UNIVERSE

"A never-ending sea of self-propelled abominations in search of redemption are washed about this unhinged landscape. Puppets, masked nomads and deviants of mind distortion."

“This is an endeavour that's been going on for longer than 10 years”



## GOBLIN VIGILANTE

"On the prowl, ready to bag more meats for his eye-toddler. He took a few to the head, but he's all right."

## INHABITANTS

"I like to make as many of these characters as possible. It fills and embellishes the world of the Aegolist. This is a lifelong endeavour going on longer than 10 years now. I'm not sure if they're ready for redemption."

## PEARLESCENT

"A puppet is in awe, seeing a glimmer of hope. The ballerina presents something he hasn't seen before. I really love the interplay of light and dark in this one, which helps the focal point of the drawing."



# Sketchbook



## CAEREMOS OF THE LUNATOC BENTHOFATUM

"A masked individual, free from the Lunatoc's grasp. He goes about his life roaming the hills of the Valley of Sod. One day, he may run into the Aegolist and learn his true nature. The ghost duck friend wearing the hat, Anatyns, follows Lomingo in hopes of being redeemed himself. This is my favourite medium as I can quickly produce forms and play around with the character before settling. It's not about getting it right the first time, it's about delving deeper into an idea and eventually isolating it into a tangible substance for the viewer."

“It's not about getting it right the first time, it's about delving deeper into an idea”



## ODD COMPANIONS

"An avian ghost hugging its close feline friend. It's best to find someone close through the hellish landscape that is the Valley of Sod."

## PATTERN

"The Queen of Puppets controlling Thalia and Melpo. Inspired by a prompt, it became something for my story."



## AEGOLIST CREATURES

"Some are deranged puppets, some are polyhedral atomic entities, some are parasitic, but all seek to change into something else."



# Sketchbook

# Hicham Habchi

The art director explores new perspectives on much-loved characters in his delightfully dynamic array of sketches

## Artist **PROFILE**

### Hicham Habchi

LOCATION: US



Hicham is a concept artist and art director, currently working as character art director at Player First Games, on the award-winning Warner Bros. Games IP MultiVersus. Hicham has also made comic covers for Marvel and DC, and worked for Riot Games on League of Legends. He loves anything related to comics and video games.

[www.artstation.com/hichamhabchi1](http://www.artstation.com/hichamhabchi1)

### THE PRINCE FROM THE FUTURE

"This character is based on a series of sketches I've created to explore the world of Dragon Ball Z and the story of Trunks, from the future to the past, with a different stylistic and narrative lens."



### BATMAN & ROBIN, THE VAGABOND

"In a clash of vigilantes, Batman and Robin, father and son, compete to determine the leader of the League of Shadows."



### URBAN NINJA WARRIOR

"Discovering your own unique style can be a challenging journey, but once you reach that point, it's incredibly rewarding. The combination of urban vibes and imperfect shapes is the element I've always been seeking out."



“Discovering your own style is incredibly rewarding”

## BATMAN, THE VAGABOND DARK KNIGHT

“The story is set in the underworld of a futuristic, dystopian Gotham that has reached the pinnacle of its strength. Crime is controlled by a mysterious vigilante called the Bat, who leads a group of martial arts masters in a fight against the tyranny of the Owl's Parliament.”

## LYKO THE ARENA MASTER

“This piece is a tribute for the Battle Chasers: Nightwar video game.”



# Sketchbook

## ANDROID 17 & 18

"Another from my 'what if' series of sketches exploring Dragon Ball Z's world, the Cell Saga, and the story of Trunks with a different twist."

## ARMOR SOLDIER

"The Armor Soldier was a good exercise in sketching the overall form of the character. Your character will show and tell different stories."

## FUTURE STATE: CATWOMAN

"A sketch of the variant art cover created for Future State: Catwoman #2."

## THE 13TH WARRIOR

"This concept sketch of The 13th Warrior was an exhilarating adventure in bringing to life a compelling character based on historical fiction."



“I can use simple, yet eye-catching VFX to bring dynamism to still designs”

## TRIBUTES AND SKETCHES

“A set of sketches and pin-up tributes for the Battle Chasers and Darksiders games and comics.”

## ART STUDIES

“Art studies can help me learn how to design dynamic movements to showcase the clothes and props I’ve created for my character concepts. Additionally, I can use simple yet eye-catching VFX to bring dynamism to still designs.”



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](mailto:sketchbook@imaginefx.com)

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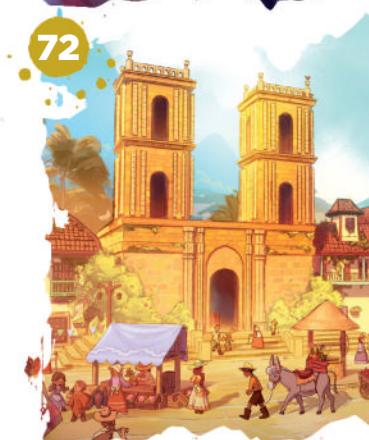
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Photoshop and Krita are used in tandem for Maximilian Gütter's noble knightly painting.

# Procreate CREATE A PENCIL PORTRAIT SKETCH

Illustrator **Brooks Kim** puts methods from the masters into practice as he details the making of his Procreate drawing

## Artist PROFILE

**Brooks Kim**

LOCATION: South Korea

Brooks Kim is as a game artist and illustrator, and also personally works as a portrait artist.

<https://bit.ly/4dry5mD>



When I was teaching myself how to draw, two artists whose methods had a huge influence on me were Charles Bargue and Andrew Loomis. The skills they teach are clear and precise in both the outline and structure of their characters.

In my early days, I copied and studied Loomis's book on drawing the human body several times. It may seem like a tedious process, but

it ultimately helped me improve my figure-drawing skills.

I've seen many people who are just starting out draw figures without any order. This is like wandering down a complicated road without a map. Learning the traditional methods is just like reading a map that has your destination marked out. Using these skills, you can draw more stable and dynamic pencil drawings.

I've implemented both traditional pencil and conté in Procreate, and

I'm still improving it little by little. Pencil drawing is the foundation of all forms of drawing, and through it you can learn the composition and value of a drawing.

Using the methods and brushes mentioned here, you can achieve more traditional results in your own art. I update my artwork with these brushes two or three times a week on my Instagram, where you can also see the drawing process. If you're interested, be sure to stop by!

## 20 PROCREATE CUSTOM BRUSH DOWNLOAD



## RESOURCES WORKSHOP BRUSHES

### PROCREATE

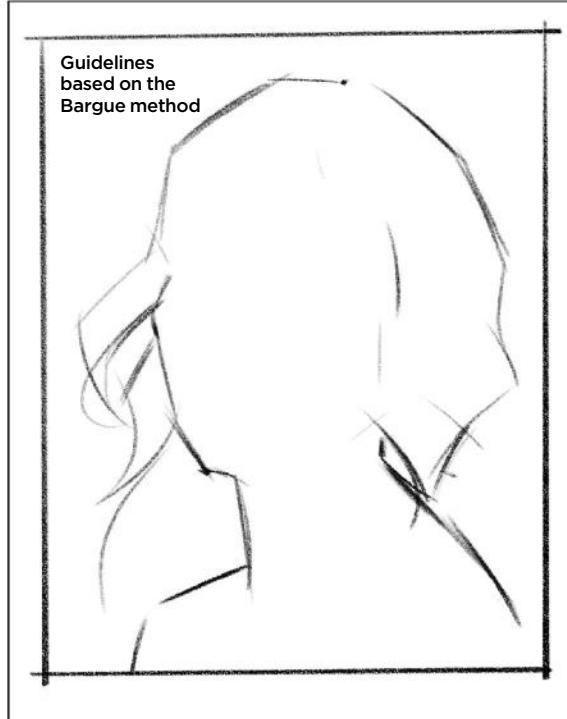
CUSTOM BRUSHES:  
BROOKS SKETCHES  
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Brooks Kim's brush set contains a variety of tools for developing a realistic feel in your sketches. Get more of Brooks' brushes at <https://bit.ly/3y8DzCB>

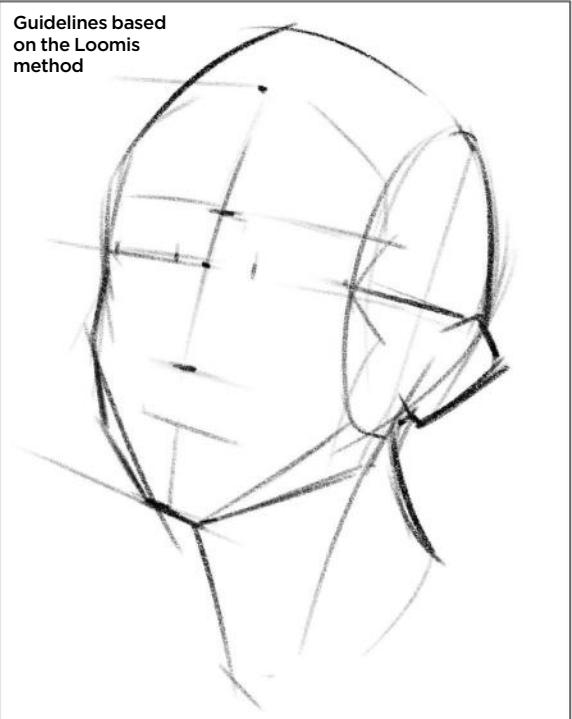
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### 1 Discover the Bargue method

The Bargue Drawing Method is the process of interpreting a model into basic lines and shapes, and then drawing based on these. The reason for using simple lines is that it makes it easier to create proportions and balance within the elements. This is useful when you're drawing portraits or still life with subjects.



### 2 Learn the Loomis method

Meanwhile, the Loomis Method views the model three-dimensionally and draws it based on spheres and grids. Of course, this method is helpful when we're drawing general portraits, but starting with a sphere and gradually forming the face or body is especially useful when drawing more creative characters. ➤

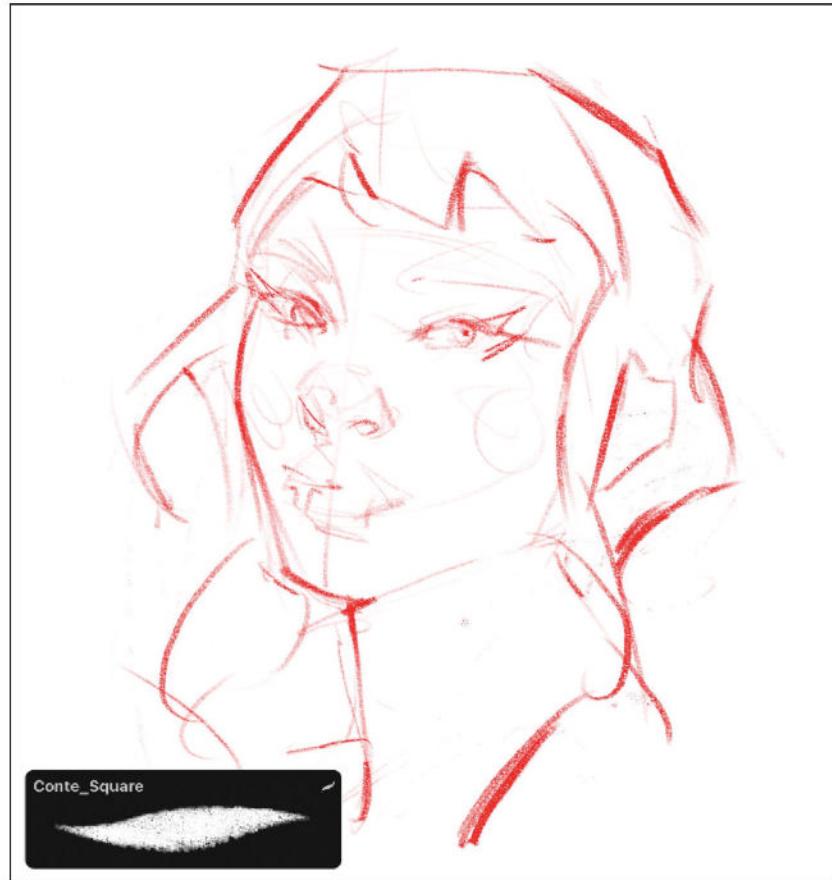
# In depth Pencil portraits



# Workshops

## 3 Draw guidelines (pictured right)

I like to use the Bargue and Loomis methods in combination; the former to establish contour and shape, and the latter to set up a balanced three-dimensional structure. Based on this blueprint, we can complete the guideline sketch in red. Drawing these lines in red makes them much easier to distinguish when we're drawing our other solid lines in black.

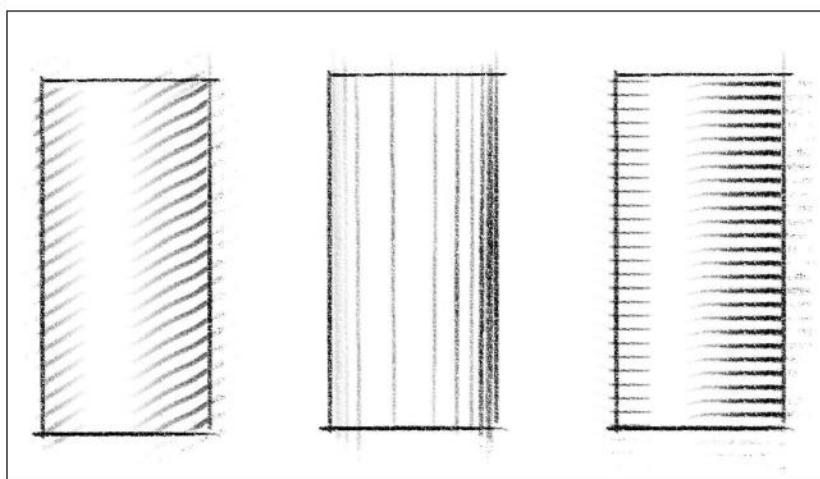
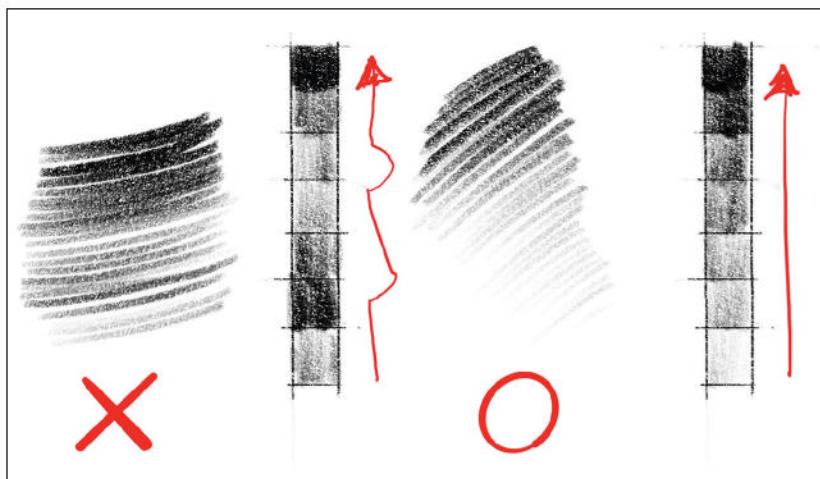


## 4 Set up shapes

Lower the transparency of the guideline layer to about 40 and start drawing solid lines on a new layer. At first, draw these lines in lightly. Rather than thinking of it as drawing lines, I prefer to draw with the idea of creating edges. You can also look at this as the act of carving out a shape to complete a 3D portrait.

## 5 Create the shadows

After the character's shape has been completed, we want to add in shadows using hatching to create direction, texture and gradation. The direction shows the dynamic strength and weakness of the image, while the texture displays the lights, darks and density, and the gradation illustrates the connection between each part of the portrait, as well as the depth of our values.

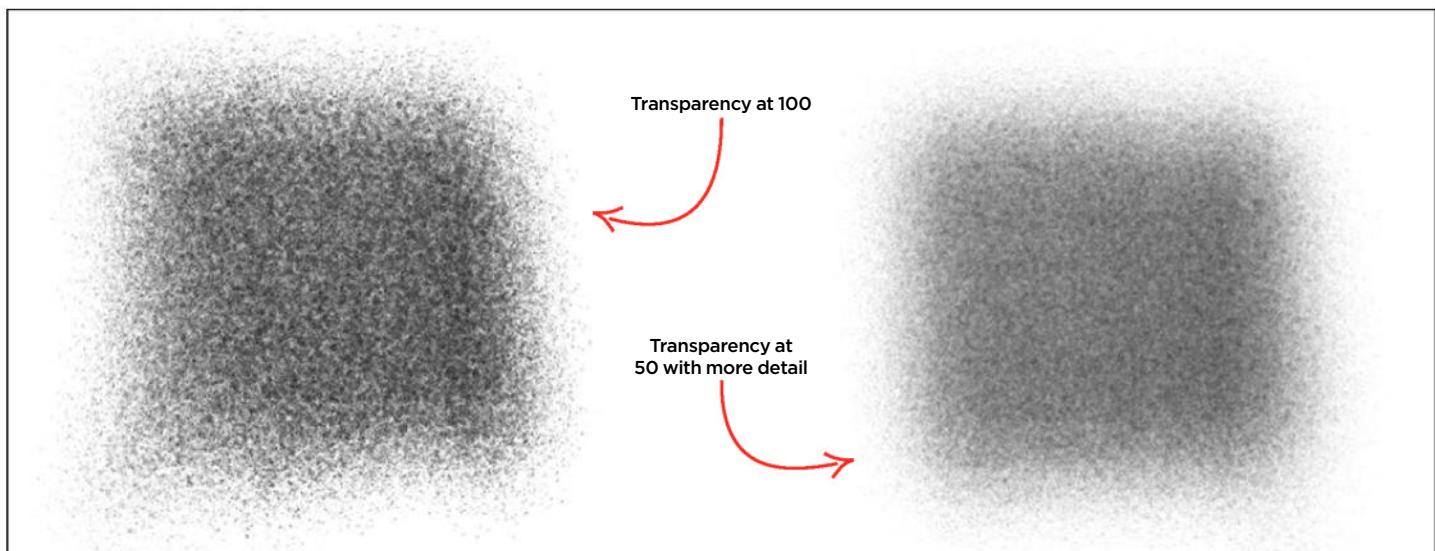


## 6 Keep hatching consistent

The application is important when expressing hatching consistently. If a dark or blurry line suddenly appears, the area will look curved or stained. But even if the directions of the lines are all different, the same form can still be expressed as long as the spacing and strength are made consistently.

## 7 Complement the shadows

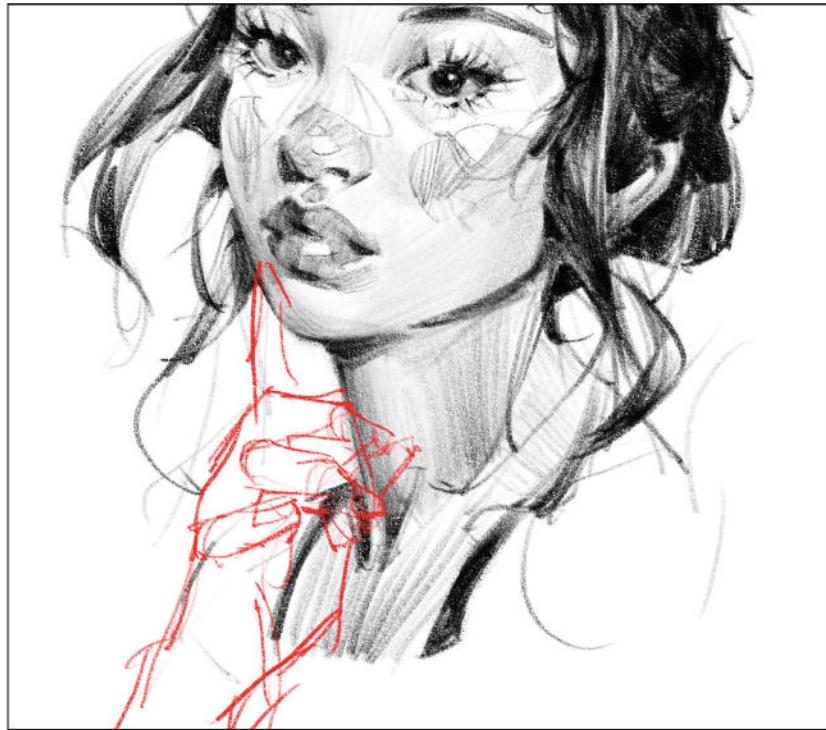
This step complements the shadows and uses the 'Dusty chalk\_Soft' brush. Shadows drawn by hatching often create areas where the light and dark look empty. In this case, you can fill in the empty areas by lowering the transparency down to somewhere between 50-70 with the 'Dusty chalk\_Soft' brush and painting repeatedly.



## 8 Get the right look for your textures

If you set the transparency to 100 and paint, the texture will come out well, although it may look a little rough. Conversely, if you lower the transparency and paint, the drawing will look soft but a little boring. I usually paint the outside of the picture roughly to create the feeling of a natural material, and then paint the central areas with a softer, more detailed appearance. ➤

# Workshops



## 9 Change the expression

When the drawing was about 70 per cent complete, I thought the character's expression and general atmosphere seemed a bit static and heavy, so I slightly amended the expression and added hand gestures. One of the biggest advantages of iPad drawing is that these changes can be done cleanly and easily.



## 10 Adjust hand shape

When drawing a portrait it's best to stick to the original plan, but when you're painting a portrait with a little creative freedom, there are bound to be situations where changes will occur along the way. In my image, I decided to place the character's hand on the lips, and made small changes to them to match with the hand.



## 11 Amend the character's mouth shape

Because the entire face shape was already drawn, it was difficult to change the character's expression. In this case, the most effective method is to change the shape of the lips. This kind of adjustment doesn't make much difference to the character's facial muscles, so with just a few changes you can give them a shallower smile while keeping the rest of the face unchanged.



## 12 Smudge with the Finger tool for a smooth finish

Drawings that use a pencil texture look as though they've been created on real paper, but too much texture can make them messy and distracting. To get around this, I used the 'Smudge\_soft blend' brush with the Finger tool to carefully smooth out any rough areas. Just like the other brushes, lowering the transparency to around 60 will allow you to create more detailed expressions.



## 13 Mix up the hair details

I use 'Pencil\_Detail' to bring additional details to the hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, and so on. These contribute greatly to the completed feel of the painting. If the flow of the tips is too uniform it can make the area boring, so when designing this brush, I intentionally changed their flow to show off the natural hair shape.



## 14 Use hard and soft edges

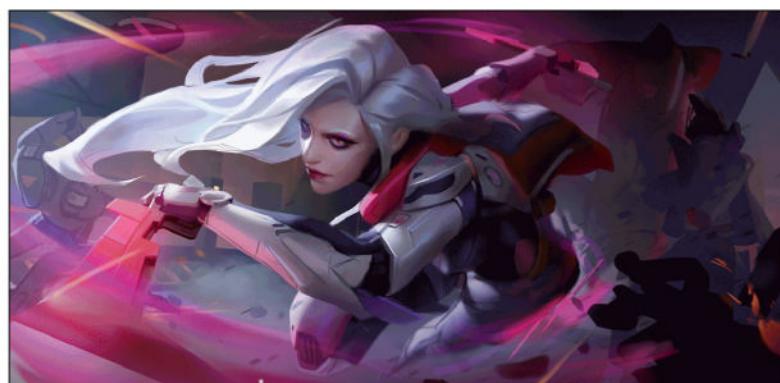
Lastly, make small changes to the edges. I create a kind of hard edge and soft edge in the painting. The hard edge serves to finish the outline, completing the portrait. And by adding soft edges here and there, I'm able to make the painting feel a little more relaxed and can wrap up the portrait.

# Workshops



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## Technique focus

# MONOCHROME DEVELOPMENT

Why **Songmutougada** uses black and white to help build his League of Legends artwork



"When drawing this picture of Katarina, I started by gathering reference images. I then used dynamic sketching and moveable figures to establish perspective, before creating the black and white picture. After several sketches, I chose my favourite and refined it with Daz Studio to fix

the lighting and camera position. At this point I worked in black and white to establish the hierarchical relationships; it's important not to rush how everything sits together. From here I refined the details of the materials and environment. Filter effects such as Gaussian blur and lens blur enhance the contrast and create a visual centre."



# Photoshop **ADD EXCITEMENT TO ENVIRONMENTS**

Concept artist **Jeremy Fenske** shares his process for bringing a dynamic composition to life with environmental storytelling

# In depth Environmental storytelling



## Artist PROFILE

**Jeremy Fenske**  
LOCATION: US

Art director and concept artist Jeremy worked on *The Elder Scrolls Online* and *Destiny 2*, and led Palia's art team at a start-up studio. He shares his process in live streams, YouTube and by holding workshops.  
<https://bit.ly/3UymJEw>



This painting is a personal piece that was inspired by an idea I'd had in mind for a long time. It's

part of an ongoing series, and I'm excited to share this particular work first, along with some insights into my personal creative process.

I'm fascinated by whimsical forest scenes, but I wanted to incorporate elements of decay and tragedy into the scene as well. There's a unique

beauty in abandoned objects and how nature reclaims them. In this scene, a crashed plane, seemingly downed during World War II, is being explored by modern-day kids.

This concept stems from my childhood memories of spending countless days exploring the woods, discovering rusted old cars among other discarded items from decades past. I love blending these themes of nature and human-made decay with a touch of fantasy.

At the centre of the painting, a girl interacts with a giant beetle in flight, symbolising nature, as the wind swirls around her and her friends. Additionally, I aimed to refine my artistic process by focusing on shape, notan (the arrangement of dark and light areas with a composition), and stylised directional brushwork. This approach allowed me to create a dynamic and engaging background for the scene, enhancing the overall impact of the painting.

## BUILD A VISUAL STORY

### Keep the viewer guessing

I avoid being too safe or consistent with my concepts, adding odd elements like the plane to create a sense of the unexpected. The girl's almost telekinetic connection to the giant beetle suggests intriguing stories, making the image more than just a background or concept.



### Place characters

A powerful visual trick is to include actors in your scene. Even in background or environment concept art, characters help the audience to empathise, and mirror their emotions and gaze. Placing kids on the plane, climbing and looking off at the distant waterfall, adds authenticity to the story and completes the moment.



### WORKSHOP BRUSHES

#### PHOTOSHOP

#### CUSTOM BRUSH: WORKHORSE

I used my favourite and versatile Workhorse brush for the sketching, blocking in my values, gradients, and textures.



### GET YOUR RESOURCES

See page 5 now!

### Create a believable setting

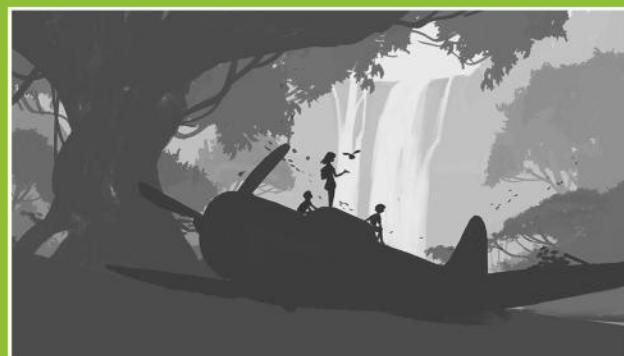
When designing the fallen WWII propeller plane, I researched to find the right type of plane for my composition and considered how it might have crashed years ago. I focused on where it would be torn, rusted and covered in overgrowth, ensuring the drawing was accurate to make the scene feel grounded and believable.

### How I create...

## A COMPLEX PAINTING FROM A SIMPLE START

### 1 Block in the major shapes

It's crucial to block in shapes and major elements, as we need to be confident that the shapes and values are clear from sketch to final. While setting this up, I'll typically keep each shape and value on its own layer organised from foreground to background. Doing so ensures that the file is malleable and easy to edit throughout the process.



# In depth Environmental storytelling



## Hidden mysteries

Successful environment concepts often show depth while maintaining mystery. It's important not to define every detail, leaving room for the audience's imagination. The waterfalls and minimalistic sky suggest vastness beyond the main subjects.

## Maintaining focus

To keep the attention on the main elements, I reduce contrast at the edges of the painting, preventing the viewer's eye from drifting away. The central figures and crashed plane are the focal points, and I guide the audience's gaze in a circular motion towards them, which keeps the composition engaging.



## Sell and suggest minor details

Painting every detail meticulously can result in stiffness. Instead, I'll focus on accuracy in select areas such as the foreground flowers, and suggest details more loosely elsewhere for efficiency. This way, the audience grasps the scene without needing every element meticulously rendered, akin to a cartoon brick wall.

### 2 Light and shadow

With the major shapes blocked in and the composition set, add light and shadow layers to define contours. Accurate drawing is crucial, especially for the aeroplane with cylinders, perspective, foreshortening and form language. Each light and shadow again uses an individual layer as a clipping mask to keep things organised and simple.



### 3 Add colour

Lock the transparency and paint with colour, making sure to maintain the initial value structure. Consistent values will ensure readability, while vibrant colours inject mood and tone into the image. With the colours blocked in, we can start to work on detailing the painting for more definition. I tend to let a lot go on at the outer edges.



# Workshops



In depth 3D worldbuilding

# Blender & Photoshop **DESIGN STYLISED BLENDER WORLDS**

**Andrés Aponte** teaches you how to integrate the free 3D app into your worldbuilding and visual development processes



# Workshops

## Artist PROFILE

### Andrés Aponte

LOCATION: Colombia

Andrés is a freelance visual development and background artist for the game and animation industries. He is mostly self-taught and enjoys learning challenging new tools to expand his artistic talents.

<https://bit.ly/4dwJaml>



Nowadays, 3D is becoming an essential part of the process for our pre-production, worldbuilding and concept art, including both realistic and stylised approaches. Free and friendly, I believe Blender is a perfect entry point for artists to get into 3D, especially those that have only dabbled in drawing and painting.

There are many ways Blender can be advantageous and speed up the concept process. There's no way to replace the fundamental expertise though, and adding 3D tools to your artistic skill set can only enhance your knowledge of composition, light and storytelling. And of course that's the fun part, since you'll be able to focus mostly on the story or design of your piece.

Blender can be overwhelming at first, but the process of developing new skills will not only make you a better artist, but also expand your possibilities! In this tutorial, I'm going to show you how I combined Blender and Photoshop to help in the worldbuilding of my personal fantasy project Teyuna, inspired by the rural landscapes of Colombia, and pre-Columbian culture.



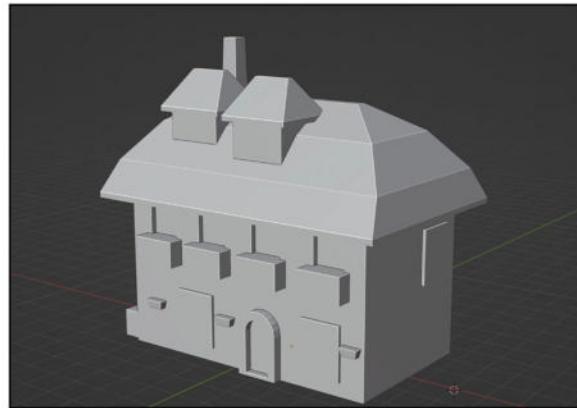
### 1 Sketch out the idea

For this project, I already have a story and world that I've been developing for some time. It's inspired by rural and colonial architecture from Colombian towns and villages, but with a hint of fantasy elements to keep it unique. I prefer to explore shapes, proportions and architectural details by drawing digitally since I can create a large variety of different types of doors, windows or balconies, and then use that collection of assets to mix and match, and see what happens. It's also generally a quick and fun ideation process to work through.



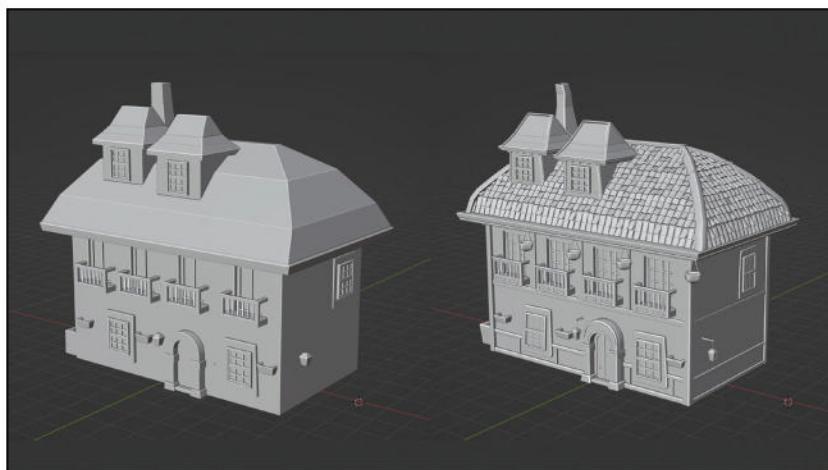
### 2 Draw the town layout

Again, I prefer to keep exploring the design process through sketching. I want to have a better idea of how to lay out this town. My goal is to recreate the feeling of a busy market plaza with a large church in the centre, which is a feature that you'll commonly find in these sorts of settlements. This can also be a good time to test out some initial thumbnail compositions for the image.



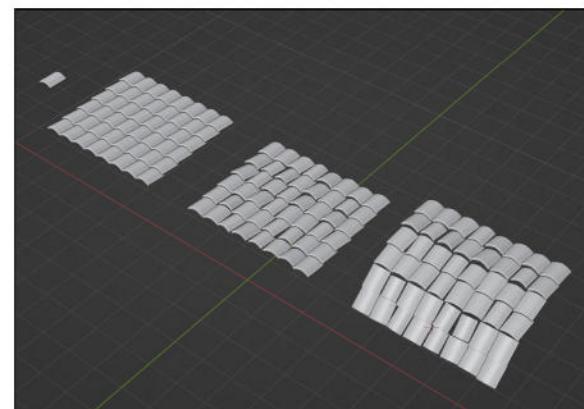
### 3 Basic blocking

This is a similar approach to beginning any 3D model. Start by blocking out the basic shapes of the building with primitive objects like cubes. Getting the proportions right is the key to this part, and since we already have a 2D concept we can better adjust this to get it right early on. This is all done by scaling objects, and selecting faces to extrude and scale.



## 4 Detail the models

Think of the architectural details in your reference and try to model them with a mindset of simplification. Use the fastest methods and easiest tools. You can easily copy and paste objects like the windows and bars on balconies, inset faces to add depth to windows, and bevel edges to get the arch shape on a door. The key is to focus on the big shapes first and smaller shapes later.



## 5 Quick roof tiles

One detail I wanted to focus on were the roof tiles, as they can seem overwhelming but are actually quite simple. Model a single tile by subdividing and arcing a plane, then use the Array modifier to create copies on the X and Y axes. Apply the modifier and go to Separate>By Loose Parts to select and rotate tiles to add randomness. Finally, regroup and rotate them to place on any surface.



## 6 Materials and last details

Now add more details, but remember that you almost always end up painting over most things, so try not to spend too much time here. You can quickly add materials by assigning basic single-colour materials to each object. You can also select various objects, hit **Ctrl+L**, and select Link Materials to copy colours from one object to the others. When choosing your colours, use Material Preview to remove any light influence. I made pretty much every building with this process.



## 7 Build the town plaza

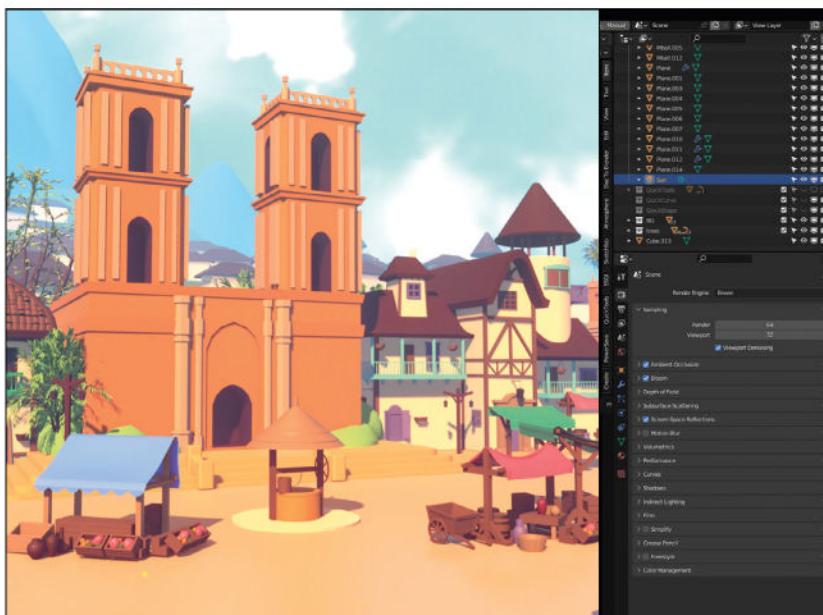
This part is the most fun to me, as it feels like playing with a LEGO set! Create a new document and start copying your buildings over. You can select every object that forms a building and hit **Ctrl+J** to make them a single object. I try to get close to my initial idea and copy more buildings into the background to fill out the scene. Here, I'm mostly thinking of the camera's viewpoint.



## 8 Object scattering

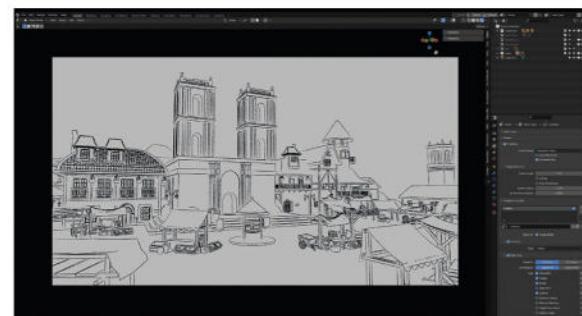
To add more detail to the background, you can create a simple building to save on resources and then use scattering with Blender's Hair Particle system to quickly create various instances. To do this, first create a simple terrain, go to the Particle settings, and add a Hair Particle system. Next, under the Render tab choose 'Render as Object' and the building that you want to scatter across the landscape. You can experiment with the sliders under the Emission and Rotation tabs to tweak the appearance a little further. However, be aware that object scattering can be a heavy task for your system to handle, so keep the number of buildings you're generating low unless you know it's capable of handling it. ➤

# Workshops



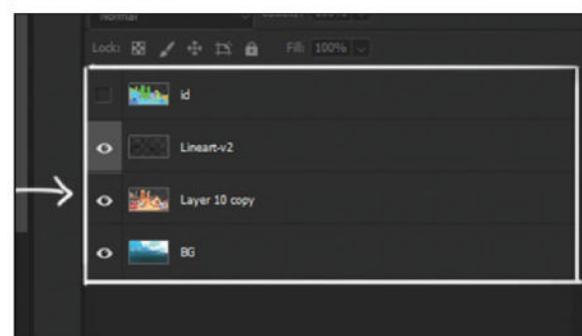
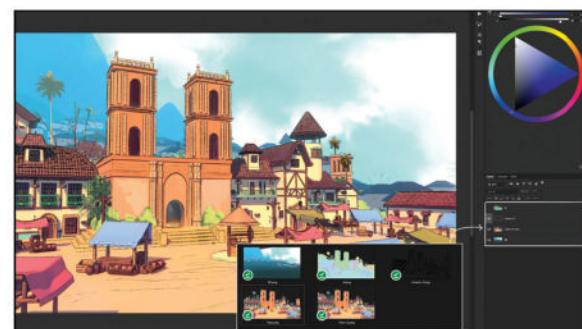
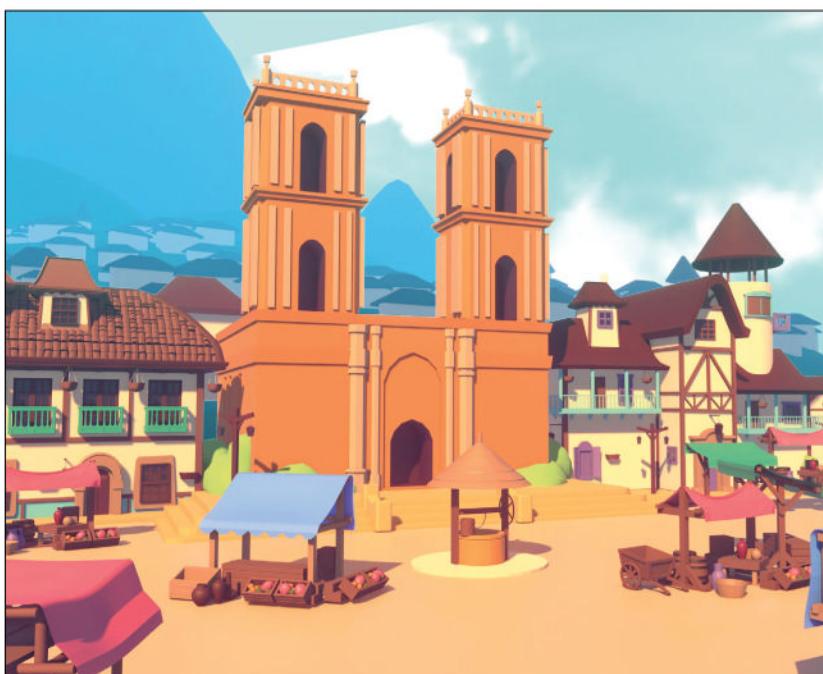
## 9 Set up the camera and lighting

At this stage you can start setting up your shot. Add a camera to the scene and duplicate multiple cameras to try different shots. For me, the best way to move your camera is to press 'N', then go to View and select 'Camera to View'. Now you can navigate as you would in the Viewport, but the camera will follow you, and once you're finished you can turn this off. The lighting setup here is pretty simple; I added a sun light with a strength of around 10 and a warm tone. On the side panel go to Item>Transform so you can tweak the values to move the light around. Finally, for the sky I just used a picture and added it as a simple plane.



## 10 Use Freestyle for line work

As my special ingredient, I like to add line work later on in the process. There are various ways to make lines in Blender, and this time we'll use Freestyle. Go to Render Properties and turn on Freestyle, then head to View Layer Properties and under Freestyle tick 'As Render Pass'. To tweak your lines you can add modifiers to create more randomness for a hand-drawn look.



## 11 Ready your render

I render in EEVEE, Blender's real-time render engine, as for this type of work we don't need the best performance. At this point, take the time to organise every object into collections so you can create different renders by turning them on and off, for example separating the background. Under the Render Properties you can turn on Ambient Occlusion and Bloom if you like, while in Output Properties you can change the resolution. I use Workbench and set the Lighting to Flat and the Color to Random to get an ID pass useful for selections in Photoshop.

## 12 Prepare your painting

Set up your painting in Photoshop by importing each layer, including the ID pass and the Freestyle line work. For Freestyle, be sure to have checked 'As Render Pass' in Blender and check the Transparent option under Film in the Render Settings so you can export a PNG with no alpha. Name your layers so they are easier to track later when you have a lot of them.



## 13 Adjust the lighting

The first thing to do in Photoshop is enhance the colours and lighting. Follow the same approach as the modelling, thinking generally first and then specifics. Work with your canvas zoomed out and constantly change to black and white by adding a black filled layer set to Saturation over the top. By using adjustment layers like Levels, Color Balance and Curves, and painting with layers set on Screen, Overlay and many others to lighten and Multiply to darken, adjust the light as needed.



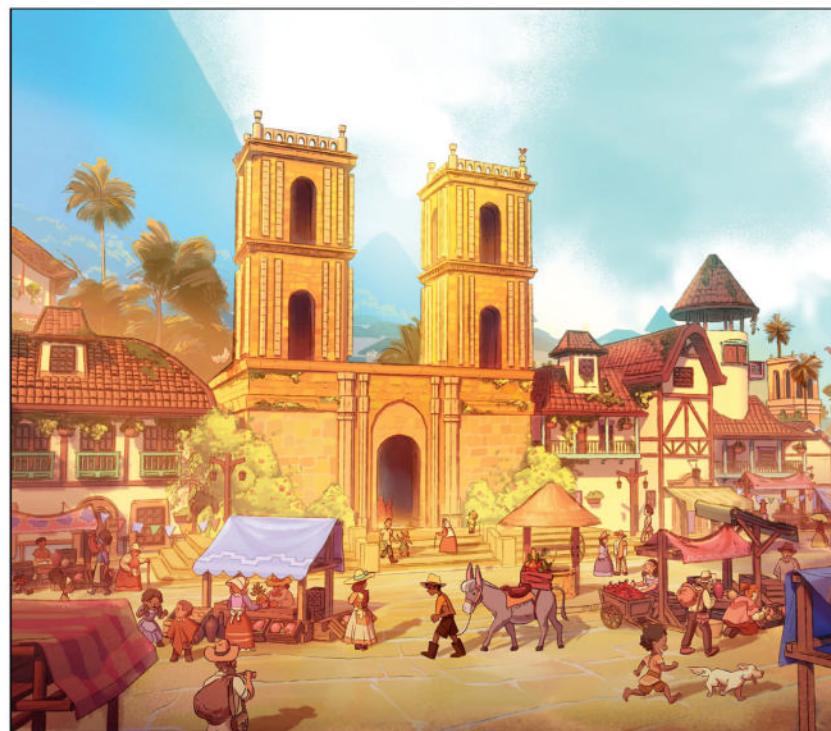
## 14 Add more details

I prefer to paint in objects like plants and clouds, as it's often faster and looks more organic. Also, I like to work with a small amount of brushes and strokes so I can keep a traditional quality. This is the time to add in details such as patterns on fabrics, debris on the floor, or plants crawling up walls. These can be powerful storytelling tools, but remember to keep your focal point in mind as well.



## 15 Sketch characters

I wanted the image to feel lived in with lots of people populating the scene, going through their daily routines. For characters, I prefer the expressivity I get by drawing, so I drew and painted each in a 2D animated style. It took time but was worth it. It's important to keep the story in mind, and create actions and interactions between characters to make the scene believable.



## 16 Paint over characters and add final touches

Complete each character with their required colours. After that, paint with a lightening adjustment layer such as Screen and set it as a clipping mask on your characters to quickly paint the light. Do the same for the shadows on a Multiply layer and don't forget to cast shadows on the floor too. Now it's just a matter of adding small details to take the image to a finish and we're all done!

# Workshops

"In this piece I wanted to create a dramatic moment with a story behind it. Will the hero escape or fall prey to the creatures? My intention was to communicate this through exaggeration and movement. The combination of the characters' poses, their expressions, and the slightly exaggerated proportions all help to create the drama."



The initial line drawing and hatching shines through and guides the eye diagonally, maintaining the flow of the action. Meanwhile, the colour palette was chosen from a split complementary range. A warm, orange palette contrasts the cool teal of the main character. If you're trying this approach, try not to lose the dynamic pose while rendering."



## Technique focus

### EXAGGERATE TO CREATE DRAMA

**Erkan Karagöz** uses movement and embellished elements to bring his retro comic art piece to life

Tech Focus Create drama

**Artist PROFILE**

**Erkan Karagöz**  
LOCATION: Germany

Erkan is a professional concept artist working in the animation and video game industries, and also has experience in art direction.  
<https://bit.ly/4a2hVsd>



**Photoshop**  
**PHOTOBASH FIERCE**  
**PROMOTIONAL ART**

**Lina Sidorova** explains the techniques that she used to create a dramatic promo piece for fantasy video game Dragon Nest



## Artist PROFILE

### Lina Sidorova

LOCATION: Montenegro

Lina is a concept artist, matte painter and art teacher who has worked on a number of video game titles.

<https://bit.ly/3JO4dmV>

Photobashing is a technique used to create images from photographs, before rendering them into a single, cohesive piece. This process enables an artist to quickly assemble an illustration from different elements of photographs without having to draw them from scratch, and can be a useful method when you're seeking to develop a particular style.

To help you get a head start with photobashing, in this tutorial I'll analyse the creation of a piece of promo art that I made for the game

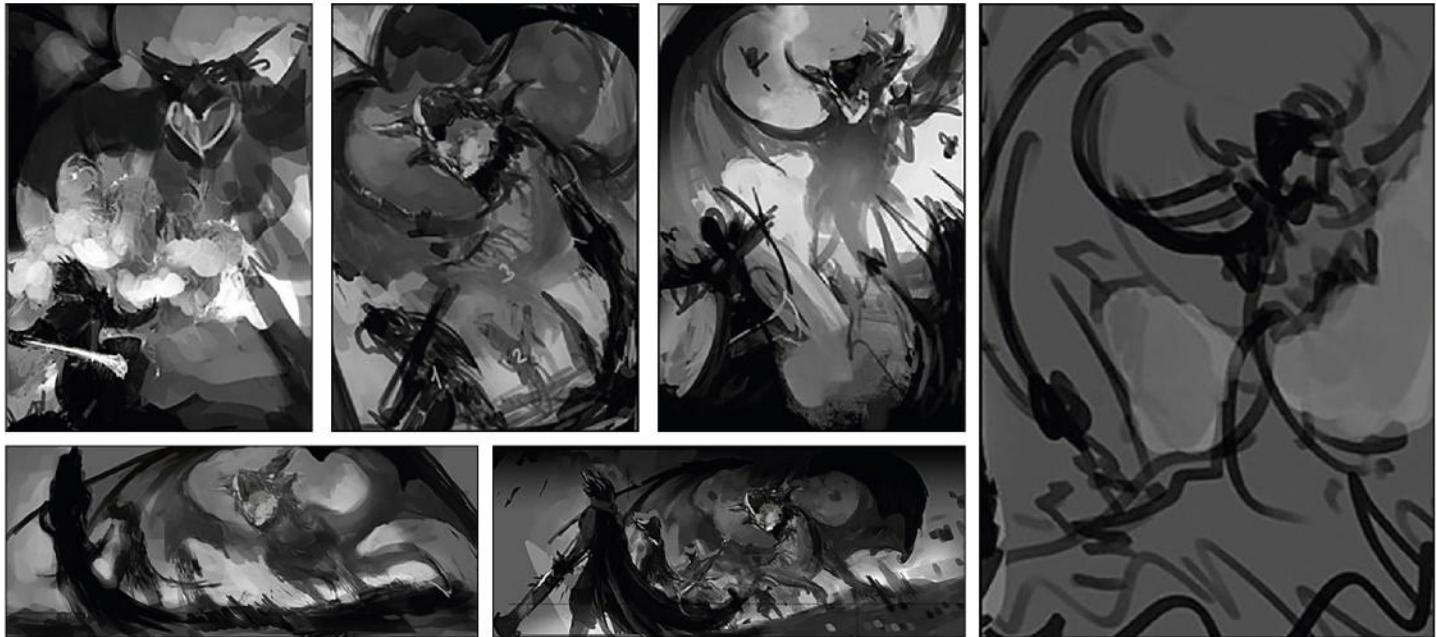
Dragon Nest. The commission set out for me was to make a dynamic promotional design in a realistic style, and using as much detail as was workable. The style of Dragon Nest itself is quite interesting, using chibi and cartoon-styled locations, and scenes with dramatic lighting that depict epic battles.

The art was to be used for printing on large banners at Gamescom and other gaming conventions, as well as posters at various game events, on advertising assets, and so on. As a

result, the composition had to be readable both with the dragon on its own, and with the addition of hero characters and text elements.

For images to be used in this way, both the quality and detail of the picture, and the composition, are important. It should be possible to place characters, logos and other necessary branding onto the image, or alternatively remove elements completely, while still being able to retain the quality. So, let's jump in and get photobashing!

# Workshops



## 1 Work out your composition with initial sketches

Any illustration or promotional art begins with sketches. At this stage I had to consider versions that would look good both with and without the addition of human figures in the composition. Ultimately, I chose the bottom-middle sketch above and proceeded to plan my next steps. I thought it would be a good idea to accentuate the dragon's mouth and make it the focal point with colour and light.

## 2 Begin photobashing

In addition to spreading out the colour on the blocks, you can now start to photobash. I used a photo for drawing the tongue and then painted over it, while for the muzzle I took a photo of crocodile skin and then added in the spines. I also planned to place puddles with reflections on the ground to create dynamic diagonal stripes and contrasting materials. After this, I began to overlay the photos on the dragon's body and tweaked anatomy such as the eyes and neck.



## 3 Keep a close eye on your volumes

I tried to choose photos with the correct volume to correspond to a specific part of the dragon's body. This means not simply putting flat textures on top of cylinders for the feet or body, or spheres for the skull, for example. Doing so makes it difficult to imitate the volume correctly, as the texture is no longer in shape and the light won't correspond. This is why I made sure to use references of a crocodile and other reptiles.

## 4 Develop variation in the dragon's scales

For my dragon, I also tried to maintain variety in the scales, with some small and round, and others larger and rectangular. Creating this variation plays with the composition and contrast of the scaled texture. At this point, the dragon's body is already looking pretty solid.



## 5 The pyramid of perception, analysis and image creation

Before moving on, let's deconstruct and analyse the image by levels of perception. At the bottom of my pyramid is **composition**. All the main parts of the composition are solved at the sketch level: the shape and the readability of the silhouette, the location of the points of interest, and the leading lines of movement. We can only enhance and emphasise it at the following levels.

Next comes the **tone** or value. When you're working with photos, pay close attention to the tone of the edges and overall tone of the materials you're glueing together. In my dragon example, everything was adjusted with each new piece being added.

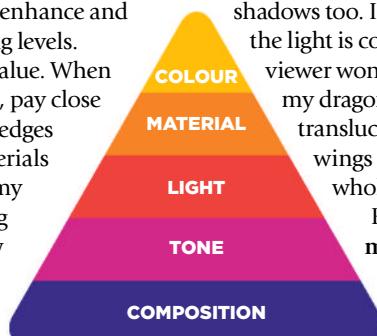
The **light** sits in the middle of the pyramid,

and must remain solid in all areas. It will almost always fall differently throughout your various source photos, but the light on the target object must appear to come from a single source. Take into account the lighting of your final photobashed piece, try to select photos with similar lighting, finish over the top or with an adjustment layer, and merge the good parts. Accentuate the volume of the shadows too. If you don't understand where the light is coming from yourself, the viewer won't believe your picture. For my dragon, I decided to add a warm translucency showing through the wings and a cold side light on the whole figure for volume.

Fourth on the pyramid is the **material**, for which there are three components. First, in all photographic work and with all techniques,

everything must be subject to your composition. The silhouette and lines dictate the direction of the scales, but don't forget the variety and other coordinated areas as well. Secondly, the degree of gloss of each piece should be consistent with the material you have in mind. And finally, the translucency and transparency here can also be used as a contrast. The dragon has webbing, hard scales, an underbelly and horns, and having different materials can add more variety.

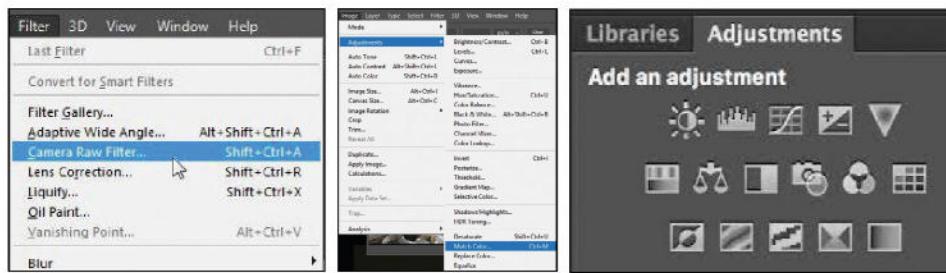
**Colour** sits at the top of the pyramid. Never forget to colour match the pieces with the Match Color option and adjustment layers in Photoshop. The body shouldn't be monochromatic; some areas will be warmer, and some cooler. Also emphasise the contrast of warmth in the highlights and shadows. Don't paint over the photos through layer blending modes, as this will kill all the colour shimmers in the texture. ➤



# Workshops

## 6 Work with layers

There are various tools in Photoshop that can help to bring your photobashed elements together. I set adjustment layers, use the Match Color option, and colour correct with the Camera Raw Filter. After combining the photos with all of these methods, I began to apply additional special effects and work on developing the ground.



## 7 Dynamic elements

Magic and particles can be placed into the image using the Screen blend mode, but remember that it's important to maintain the scale, and balance the amount of debris; it should remain dynamic. A common mistake with particles is to make them the same size

or to distribute them evenly, which can look bland and unrealistic. To avoid this, keep in mind the basic principles of composition, which also work when we're dealing with fine particles, or patches of smoke or fog.

My personal handy workaround is to make large particles closer to the viewer, exaggerate

their scale and blur them so the viewer doesn't focus on them. Deeper into the image, you can create groups of particles at varying distances from the viewer, gradually reducing them in size. This is how you can emphasise the composition and create the depth within your image.



## 8 Final amendments to a dynamic composition

The dynamic sensation is also set by the depth. In this image, this had already been done at the sketch level, where there's a sprawling silhouette with a long, smooth line. Everything here gives the impression of movement, even the proportions of the frame. After this, I drew the wings and finished the puddles, before employing a cooler colour gamut after feedback from my art director.

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## Technique focus

# DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPERIMENT

**Maximilian Gütter** develops a personal process as he combines two leading digital art programs



"For this artwork, I experimented with using a workflow that incorporates both Photoshop and Krita.

I started off the process by sketching the composition in Krita using the Sketching Chrome Thin Brush. I love this brush, as it feels like I'm drawing and painting at the same time.

When I was satisfied, I hopped back over to Photoshop and blocked

in the colours over the top of my Krita sketch with the help of clipping masks. At this stage, I was able to radically experiment with colours.

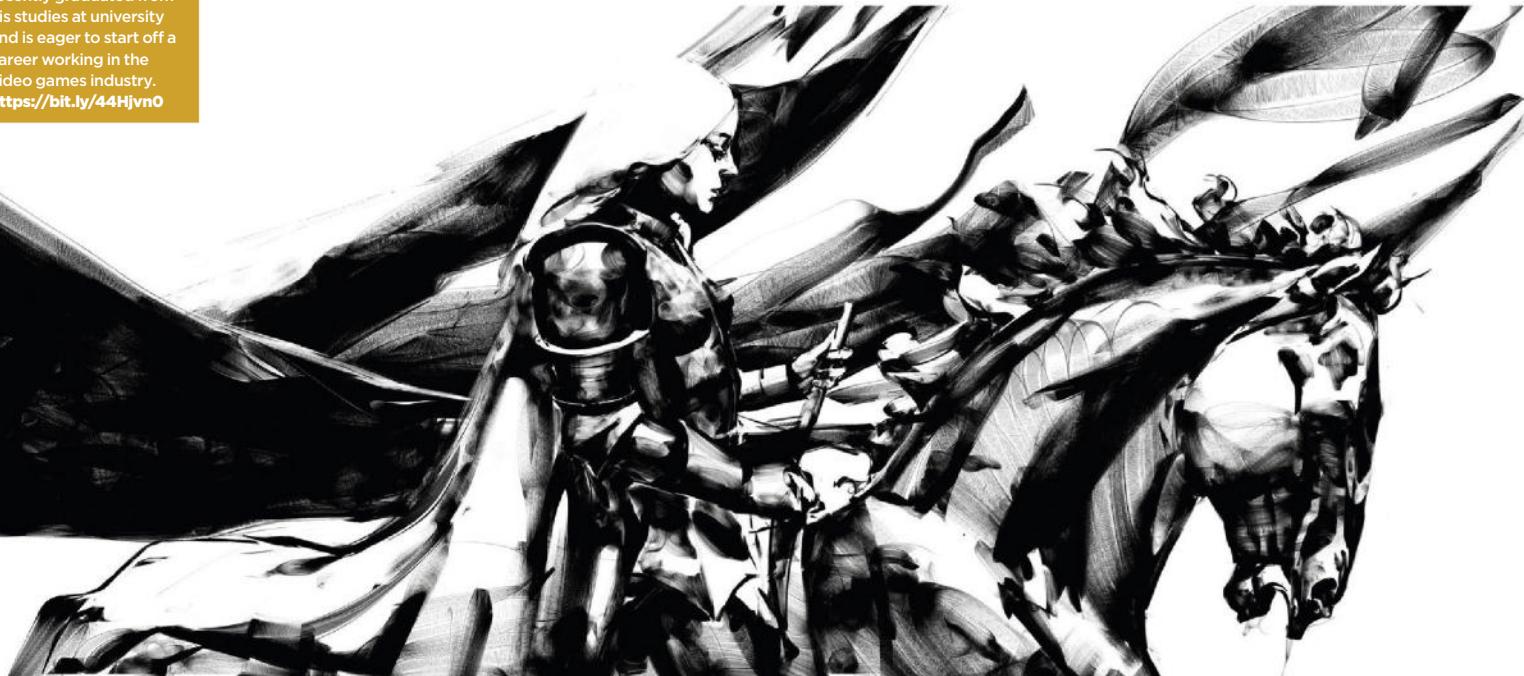
When I reached a result I liked, all that was left was to render on top back in Krita. What helped me the most when creating this image was trying out all the different tools and processes. It can be scary, but it's also a way you can find something that truly stands out as yours."

## Artist PROFILE

### Maximilian Gütter

LOCATION: Germany

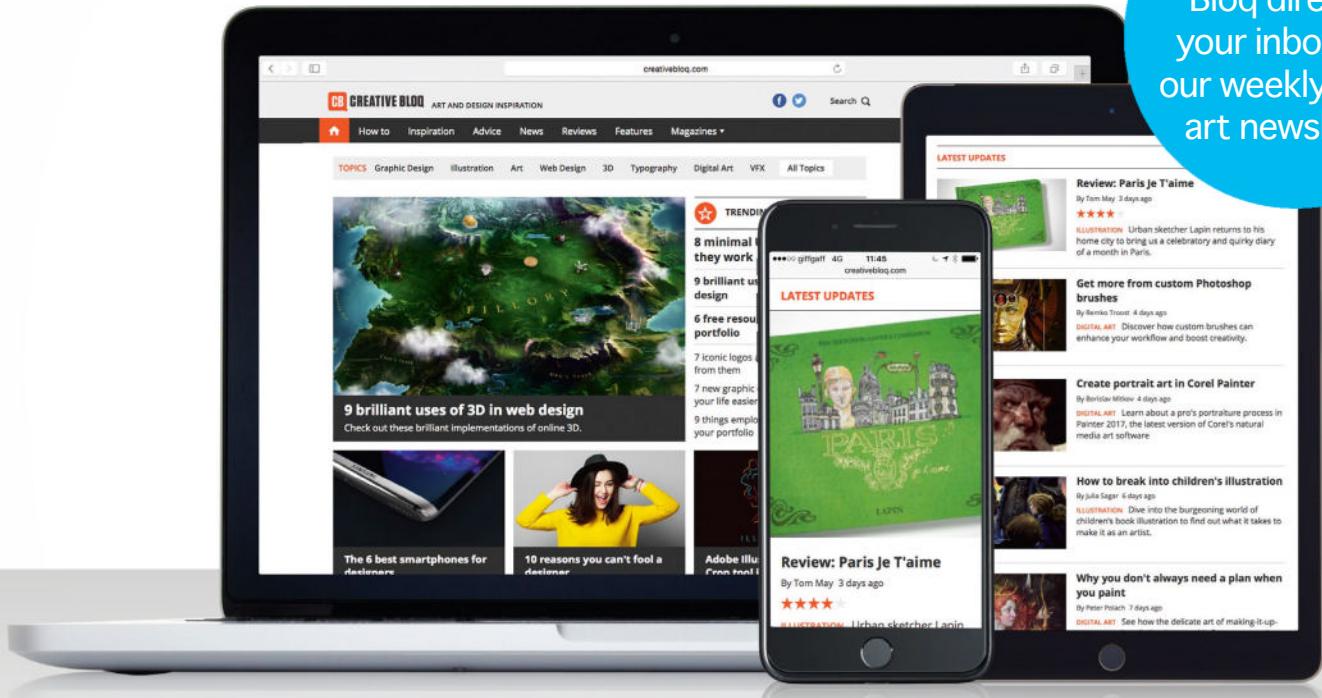
Maximilian is a concept artist and illustrator based in Munich. He has recently graduated from his studies at university and is eager to start off a career working in the video games industry.  
<https://bit.ly/44Hjvn0>





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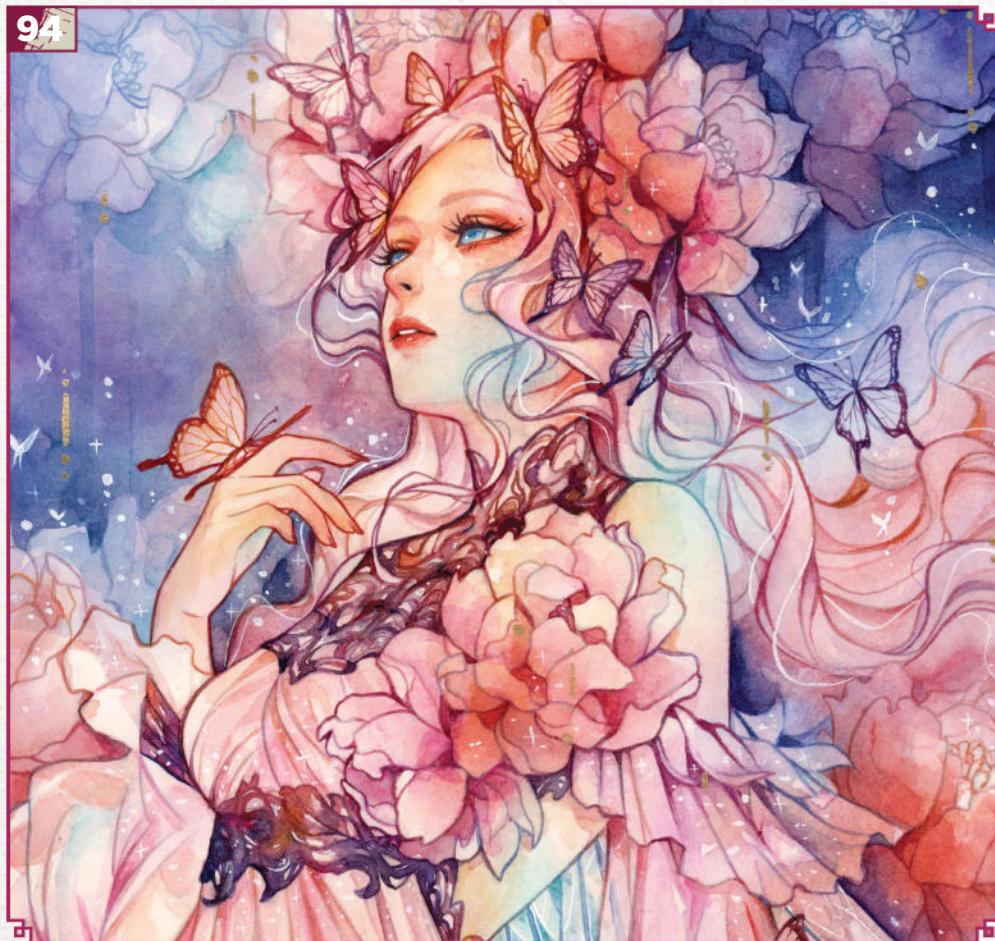
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# Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

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**94 Paint elegant characters**  
Margaret Morales shares the secrets to her delicate artwork.

**98 First Impressions: John DePianto**  
The watercolour specialist takes us through his artistic journey.

# FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



## Erin Ewer

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Watercolour WEB: [www.liquidfae.com](http://www.liquidfae.com)

Erin is an illustrator whose creations sit at the border of fantasy and the natural world. Infused with nature, mythology and spiritualism, her art explores the grey spaces where reality and imagination intertwine.



### 1 THE POISON PATH

"A portrayal of the shifting line that separates cure from poison. A boundary that only exists on circumstance, it marks the space between life and death."

### 2 OWL MAIDEN

"This work represents the blending of humans and nature. Seeing ourselves as a single unit rather than separate pieces of a whole, we can become one."

### 3 EPILOGUE

"Depicting the boundaries of life and death as they blur into one. Death is only the illusion of an ending; peer at death closely and you'll find life within."

### 4 RUMINATION

"This shows the freeing of one's true self, even when the outcome is uncertain. Breaking free, allowing oneself to flourish and fly into the unknown."





## Lucracia Ray

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Watercolour, gouache, colour pencil WEB: [www.instagram.com/lightdraconis](http://www.instagram.com/lightdraconis)

Lucracia is an independent artist in the Pacific Northwest. She enjoys painting whimsical characters, often anthropomorphised woodland animals and plants. She hopes her work brings a sense of warmth and comfort.

### 1 THE TIMID

"Gentle and unassuming, he lives alone at the base of a mossy tree stump. Butterflies gather around him at dusk every day to whisper the secrets that they've learned. Although poisonous, he's very friendly."

### 2 THE NARMOUSE

"An elusive creature that sometimes enjoys nestling within the delicate petals of iris flowers. The Narmouse uses her majestic tusk to skewer wild berries for her tea. While she makes her home primarily in fields, she still feels the soft call of the ocean."



### 2



### 3



### 3 THE LONESOME

"Inky caps are often shunned at an early age. They grow up to be hermits and live far from other mushrooms. They do sometimes miss the company, but what can be done when you drip with ink?"

### 4 AN ASSORTMENT OF MUSHROOMS

"A collection of Amanita mushrooms from the Woodland realm. One bakes cupcakes, and another entertains his pet snail. Amanitas are happiest when they can focus on the little things in life."



## Watercolour

# PAINT ELEGANT CHARACTERS

**MARGARET MORALES** tells us how she uses symbolic elements to create a watercolour piece filled with story for a gallery exhibit

**M**y painting, which I titled *Fleeting*, was originally made for the *Ephemeral* art exhibit at Jiro Miura Gallery in Tokyo, Japan. Coming from the word 'ephemeral' itself – meaning something that doesn't last a long time – I pictured a story of a mysterious maiden lost in thought, and longing to remember someone she had been with momentarily.

To further illustrate this concept of impermanence, I incorporated

details such as butterflies and flowers in a place that appears to be enchanted. Butterflies are creatures with a short lifespan that symbolise dreams. Flowers, on the other hand, have different meanings such as love and loss. I thought it was fitting to surround her with these elements that tell more of her story.

Watercolour is my favourite medium because of the variety of textures it creates. The soft blending of watercolours on the background gives this piece an airy and dreamy

atmosphere. The transparency of watercolour also lets subtle colours see through layered washes; perfect for creating her flowing dress and wings. There's something about the soft washes in watercolour that add a magical touch to every painting.



**Margaret Morales** lives in New Jersey. She loves to paint in watercolour, placing semi-realistic female subjects in contemplative settings with natural elements, textures and vibrant colours. See more at [www.margaretmorales.com](http://www.margaretmorales.com)

### Step-by-step: Develop a delicate painting



#### 1 EXPERIMENT WITH COLOUR

After sketching and creating the line-art digitally, I test colour combinations and lighting. This makes it easier to pinpoint where the lights and darks are, as well as guide me on what base colours to use once I transfer the line-art to watercolour paper. It also gives me a preview of the overall colour atmosphere I'm trying to achieve.



#### 2 SET OUT THE LINE WORK

Once the line-art is transferred, I apply the colour washes first using wet-on-wet technique, letting the colours bleed around each other. After the paint has dried, I re-establish the line-art with the same colour placement from my digital line-art. This creates a seamless blend of the colour gradients giving a soft, continuous feel.



#### 3 LAYERING AND DETAILING

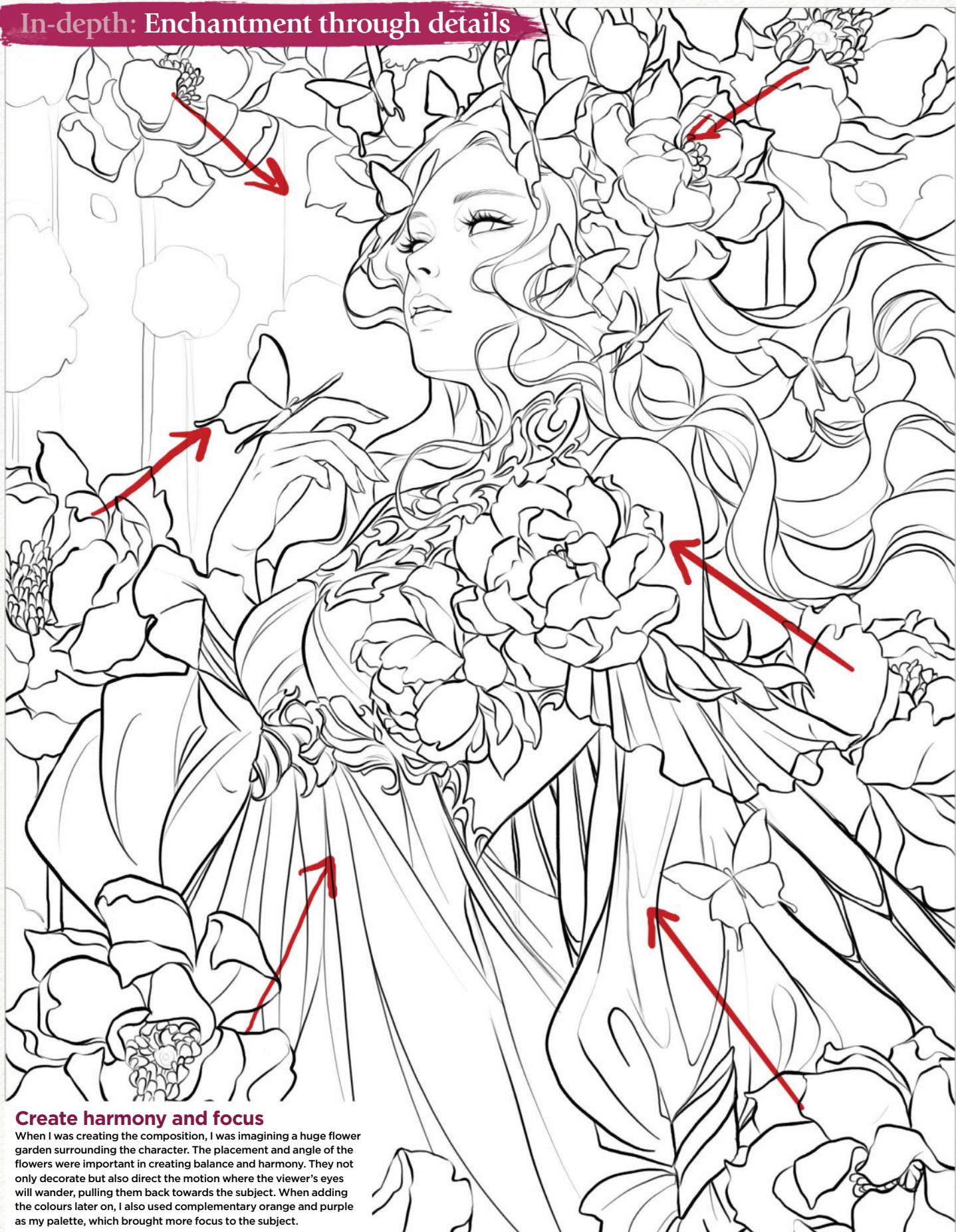
I continue building the layers and add in more details on areas of the image that need to be more defined and focused, such as her face, the butterflies and clothes. The contrast I created made the surrounding floral elements appear to be fading into the background, which helped to add an illusion of depth to the painting.

Artist insight Elegant characters



# Traditional Artist Workshops

## In-depth: Enchantment through details



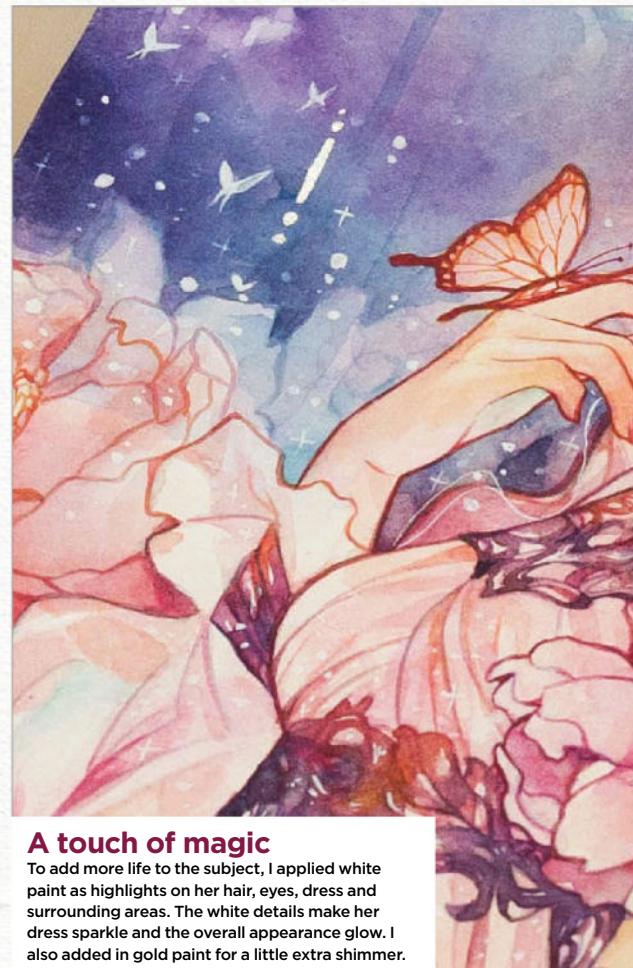
### Create harmony and focus

When I was creating the composition, I was imagining a huge flower garden surrounding the character. The placement and angle of the flowers were important in creating balance and harmony. They not only decorate but also direct the motion where the viewer's eyes will wander, pulling them back towards the subject. When adding the colours later on, I also used complementary orange and purple as my palette, which brought more focus to the subject.



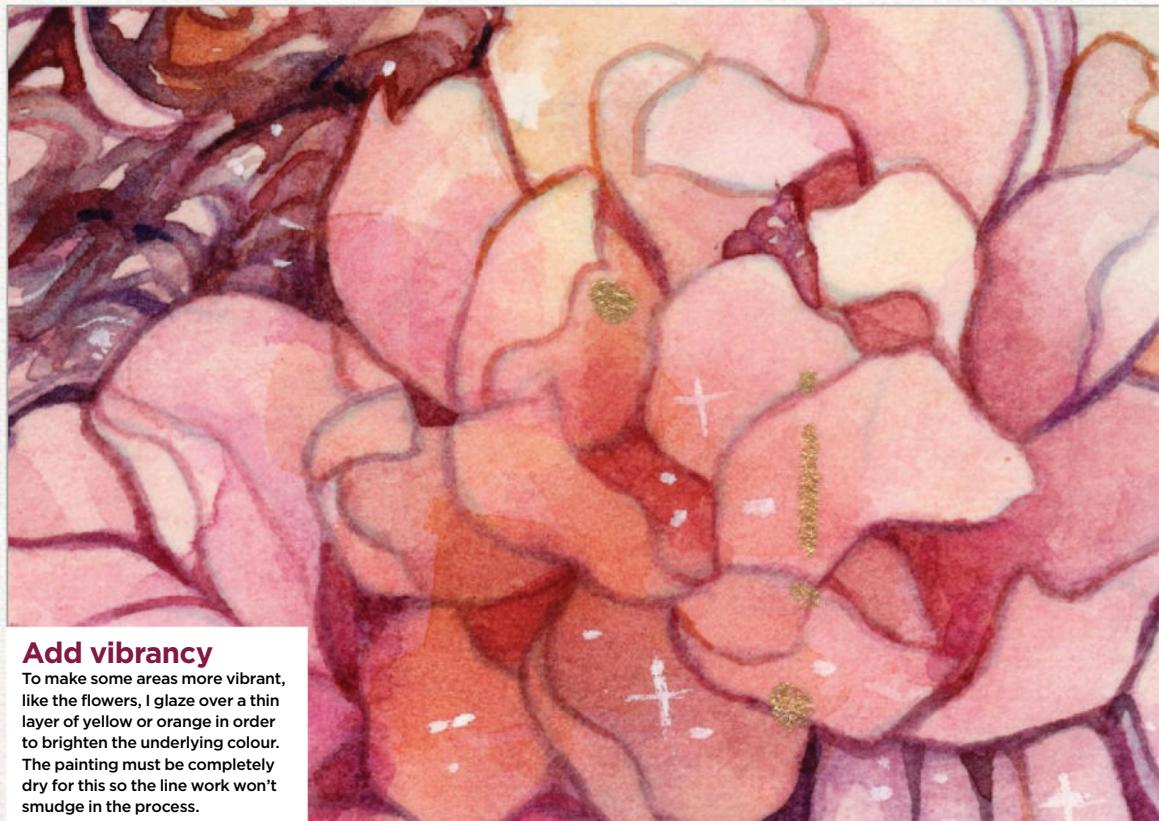
## Focal point

I always bring focus and importance to the eyes, as they convey the emotion of the whole piece. I used a bright shade of blue to complement the red-orange colour of her skin. I also used a mixture of Payne's grey and brown to darken her eyelashes. Creating this contrast around the eyes draws the audience's attention to her face.



## A touch of magic

To add more life to the subject, I applied white paint as highlights on her hair, eyes, dress and surrounding areas. The white details make her dress sparkle and the overall appearance glow. I also added in gold paint for a little extra shimmer.



## Add vibrancy

To make some areas more vibrant, like the flowers, I glaze over a thin layer of yellow or orange in order to brighten the underlying colour. The painting must be completely dry for this so the line work won't smudge in the process.

## MATERIALS

### PAPER

■ Arches hot-pressed watercolour paper

### BRUSHES

■ Polina Bright Round brushes

■ ZenART detailing brushes

### WATERCOLOURS

■ Winsor & Newton Professional Watercolour

■ Mijello Mission Gold Watercolour

■ Coliro Watercolour Metallic Gold

### GOUACHE

■ Acryla Gouache white

### DIGITAL LINE-ART

■ Procreate on iPad Pro

# First Impressions

John DePianto

The artist talks about how his watercolour work has developed



Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art? I grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. There are many parts of the Bay where art is celebrated. This included not only illustration but also music, theatre and more. I was lucky to have grown up in an area where creativity was encouraged.

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

Outside of picture book illustration, animation and comics, I'd say that my family has been very influential in my work. Growing up, I always enjoyed being around a family who had such strong, hilarious and caring personalities on both sides.

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

My first paid commission was while I was in school. I'd just gotten an agent and was commissioned to create illustrations for a small story in an educational magazine. It was a fun job because the story starred a robot character who taught kids how to recycle. The mediums I used



## MINESTRONE

*This was inspired by my grandmother, who cooks wonderful minestrone, and also a memory of making homemade pizza with my mother as a child.*



## FROG WIZARD

*A lot of my colour palettes have been warm lately, so I wanted to paint this with cooler colours.*

“There’s always some small piece of me in my art, even the goofier paintings”

were watercolour and ink. I believe I've grown way more comfortable with watercolour since then.

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

The last piece I worked on is a watercolour image of a frog wizard perched on a lily pad. These days I love to use coloured pencils with my watercolour more often than ink. I enjoy coloured pencils because of how I'm able to cross-hatch while still having a softer effect.

**What rituals do you follow when you're painting?**

I usually start out with thumbnails and colour roughs. I generally create



## SENTIENT HAT

*I love to draw detailed faces with a lot of cross-hatching. It's also fun to pull out the highlights with pastel pencils.*

colour roughs in watercolour, mainly because it's the medium I end up doing the final piece in, but I've also had a lot of fun testing out different colour combinations digitally more often before putting my brush to paper.

Since this phase requires focus, I only put on music or podcasts after I've settled on the composition and done the preliminary work. It's fun to have something playing in the background while I cross-hatch on top of the watercolour washes with coloured pencils.

**What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?** I think I can identify with all of them to some extent. There's always some small piece of me in my art, even the goofier paintings.

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

Yes and no. I've been surprised how much social media has played a role in the lives of many illustrators. When I was in art school, social media was just starting to become a useful tool for illustrators. It's been interesting to see how much it has grown over the years, and how it has given many illustrators many different opportunities.

**What does the future hold for you and your art?**

I hope to continue coming up with fun characters and stories through illustration. An ultimate goal that I'm working towards is creating a picture book using some of the characters that I've created over the past few years. I have many other projects I'm excited to work on, which I'll be posting about on my social media channels.

*John DePianto is an illustrator who primarily uses watercolour mixed-media. While freelancing on a variety of work including narrative illustrations and commission projects, he also teaches illustration and visual arts. Discover more about John at [www.johndrawing.com](http://www.johndrawing.com).*



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