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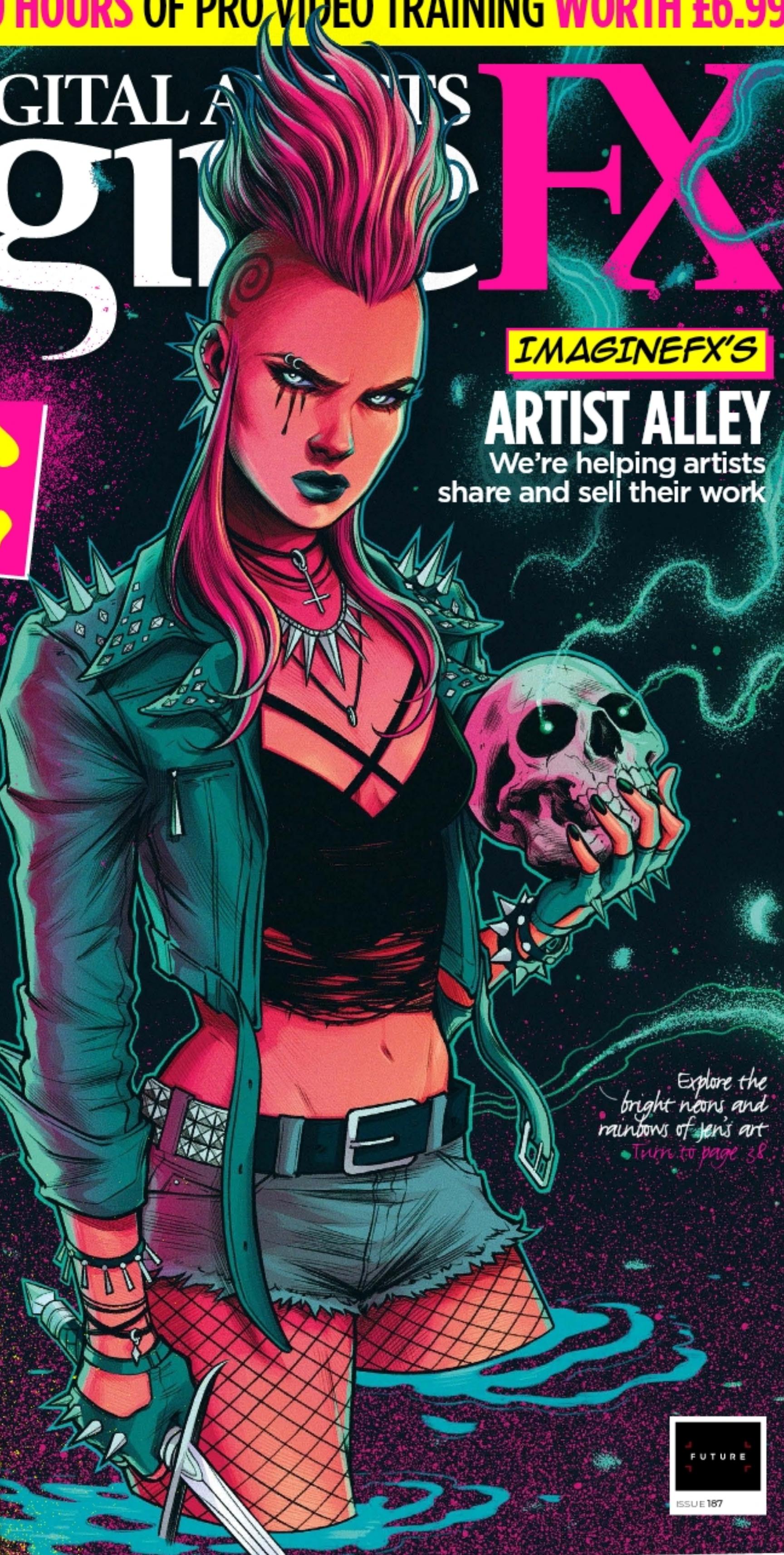


VIKTOR KALVACHEV STORYTELLING COMES NATURALLY TO THIS COMIC ARTIST

IMAGINEFX'S

ARTIST ALLEY

We're helping artists
share and sell their work



Explore the
bright neons and
rainbows of Jen's art
Turn to page 38



ISSUE 187

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



The world has changed so much in recent months. We're experiencing a disruption to our lives, jobs, day-to-day activities and more. Undeniably, there's a lot to worry about, but I've been reassured by remembering that we're all in this together. I've come to realise that the people nearest me and the things I care about most are what I should focus on now. I'm sure you feel the same. Our international art community is a strong and helpful bunch. We're lucky to have each other and, in our art making, we have a much-needed outlet for times of stress.

I know the art community has been hit hard by event cancellations caused by the Covid-19 outbreak. That's why I set up the ImagineFX Artist Alley so artists from around the globe can showcase their work in our virtual gathering. Turn to page 20 to see a worldwide group of talented artists sharing their work with you. If you see something you like, why not buy it or show your appreciation of their work? It's these small gestures that will make the difference to someone's day. Remember to look after yourselves and each other. Stay safe.

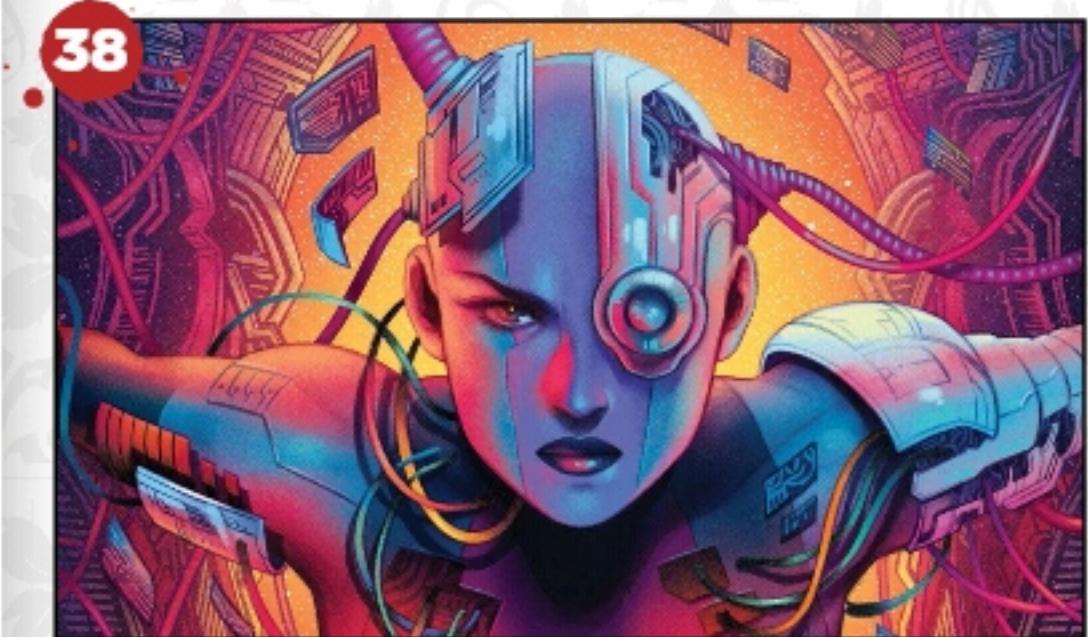
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EDITOR'S CHOICE Three of my top picks this month...



You go girl!

I'm simply in awe of the energy that Jen Bartel manages to cram into her artwork. Go give your eyeballs a treat!



We are the champions

A long-time contributor to ImagineFX returns to share his Marvel cover art skills. Thanks Toni Infante!



Inky goodness

Pepe Larraz shows us how he tells a story by using light and shadow to create that all important contrast.



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Cover art for
ImagineFX
issue 128 by
Brett Parson

ImagineFX

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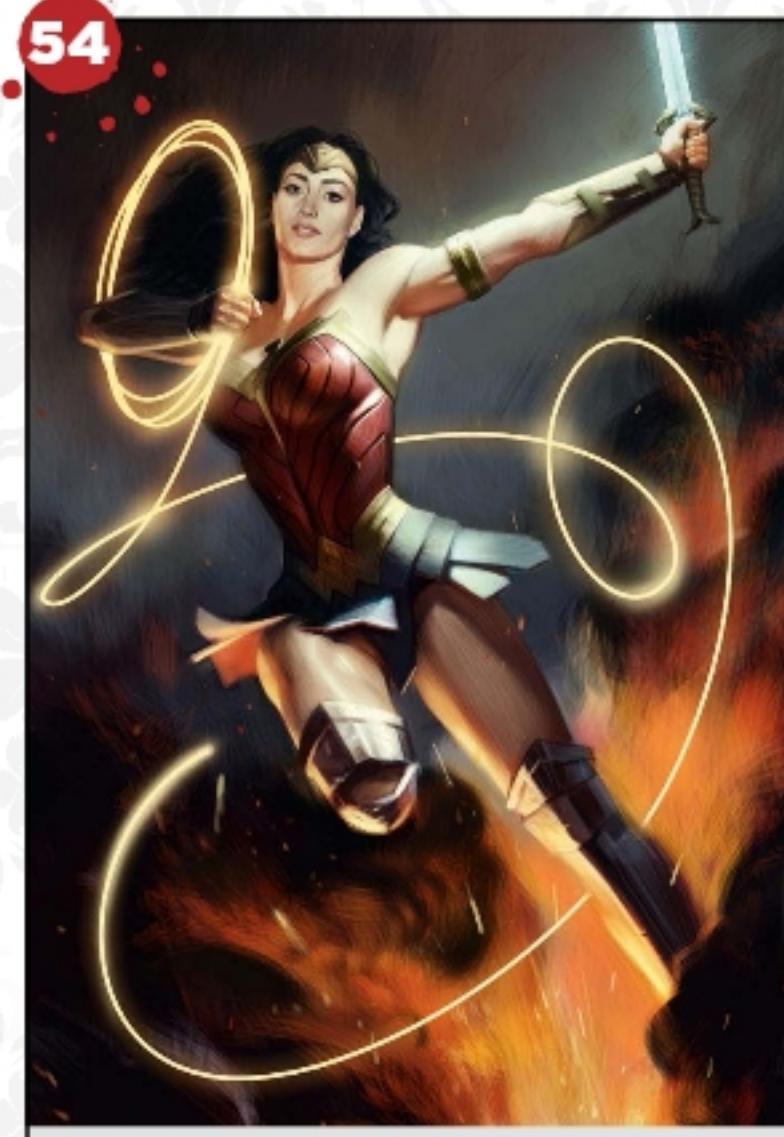
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Artist Portfolio JEN BARTEL

"I've always had an eye for colour, composition and harmony"

Jen lists just a few of her art skills



Artist Portfolio VIKTOR KALVACHEV

"I was having a kind of rebirth. I got it. Everything made sense"
Viktor's moment of colour clarity



Artist in Residence:
Brett Parson





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Action-packed panels



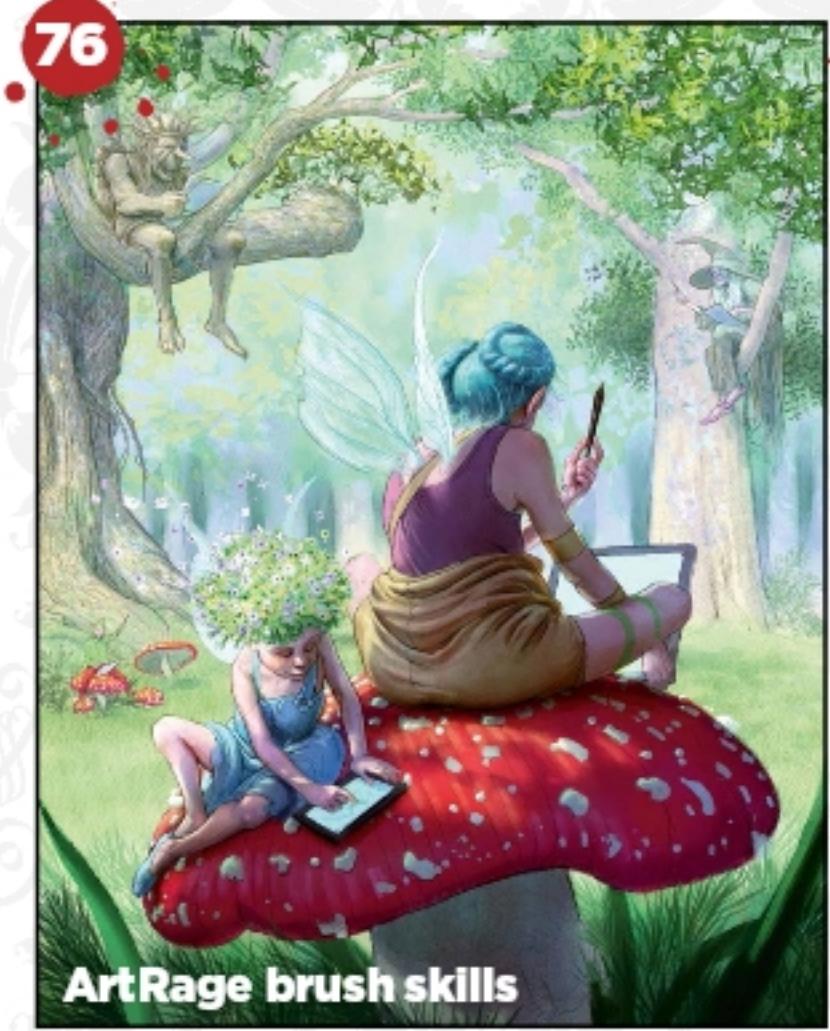
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This US artist's first commission was creating art for a Batman crossword.

ImagineFX Resources

Getting hold of this issue's resources is easy.
Just visit <https://ifxm.ag/comic187artist>

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WORKSHOP VIDEO

Get more from ArtRage's custom brush engines

Watch as book illustrator Nick Harris uses a fantastic variety of custom brushes in ArtRage to paint a leafy woodland scene. Turn to page 76 to learn more.

PLUS 11 CUSTOM BRUSHES, INCLUDING...



TWIGGY LEAF1

Nick Harris' custom ArtRage brushes includes this one for filling the mid-ground with foliage.



BUSHY 1

A brush that's useful for filling clumpier areas of foliage which sit between the mid- and background.



BUSHY 2

This is similar to Nick's Twiggy Leaf custom brush, but offers a slightly different leaf arrangement.

ImagineFX

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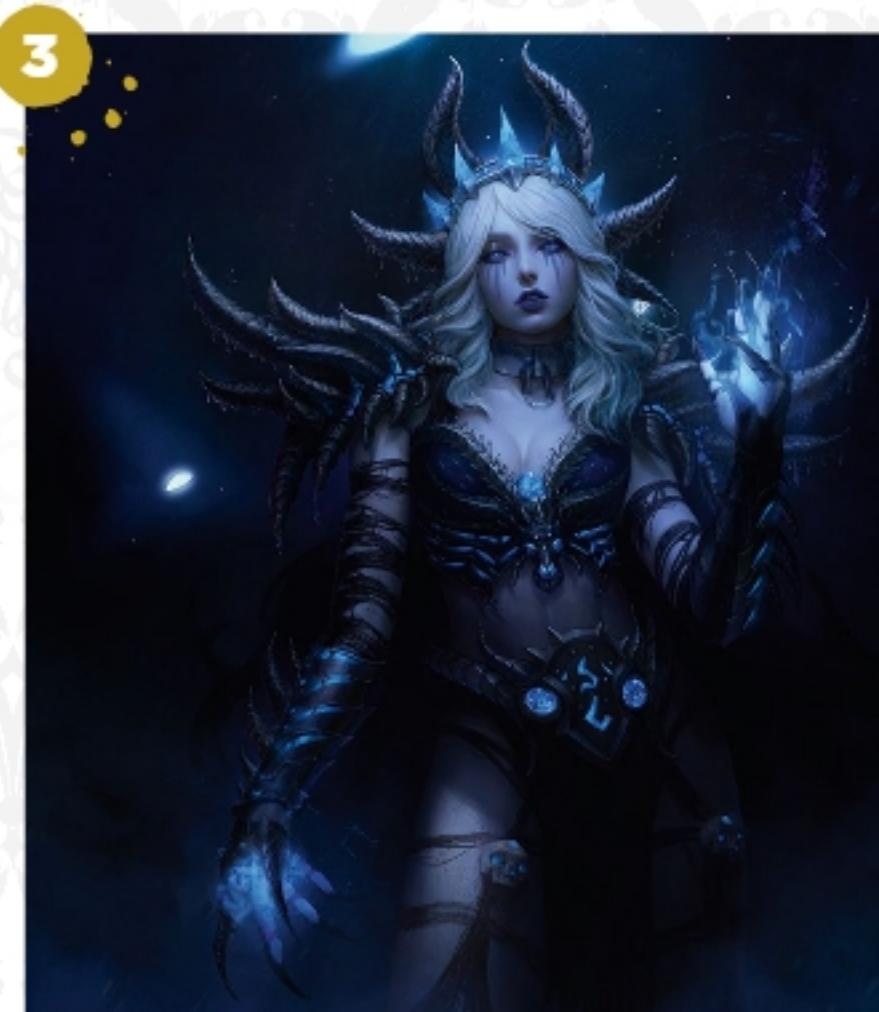
PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Ina Wong

LOCATION: Indonesia MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.artstation.com/inawong

Ina studied civil engineering, but started working as a freelance artist before graduating. She's since established the art company Unreal Studio.



1 ARWEN NIGHTBREEZE

"Arwen is my client's Dungeons & Dragons character. She's a wood elf ranger. Some people have said that she reminds them of a character from The Witcher."

2 COLLECTION: FIRST PURCHASE

"This artwork was a bookcover art commission I did in 2019. It tells the story of a woman who's kidnapped and trapped inside a box made for a doll."

3 SINDRAGOSA

"Sindragosa was a World of Warcraft character commission. The armour was inspired by Zach Fischer's design."

4 KEYRIA AMARYTH

"Keyria is one of my most recent pieces. She's sort of a valkyrie, a battle angel, and is one of my favourite character designs."



INA
WORRY



Maxim Kozhevnikov

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop, 3ds Max, Blender, ZBrush WEB: www.artstation.com/graphmaximus

Globe-trotting concept artist Maxim moved from Houston to Russia and then to Pasadena to pursue his career. "Since then I've worked on incredible films such as Maleficent: Mistress of Evil, Men in Black: International and 1917."

1



1 DETECTIVE

"This is one of my oldest works. It's based on the idea of a discharged detective who wanted to finish his case at any cost."

2 DRAGON

"This was a challenging personal project. My goal was to design a photorealistic character that could also fit into the Rango or Maleficent film universes."

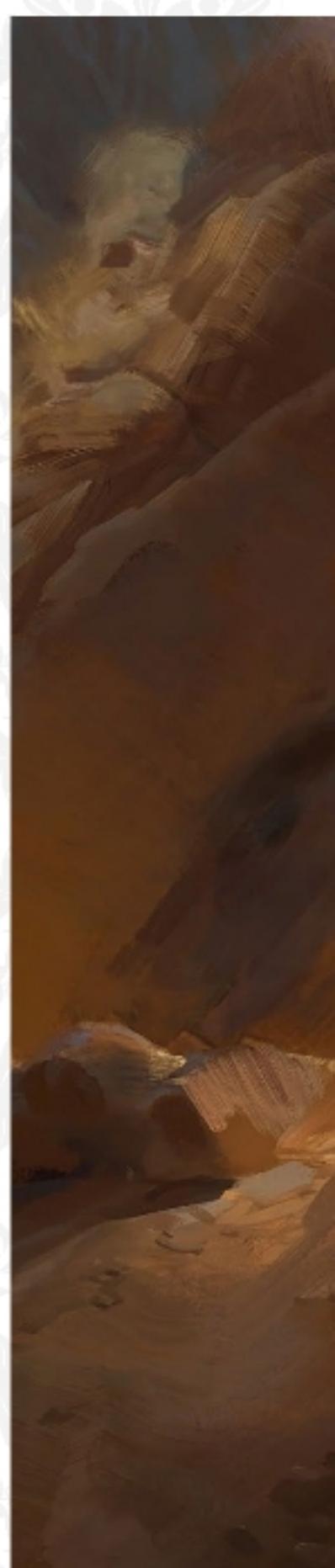
3 HONEY HUNTERS

"Part of my graduation project at ArtCenter College of Design, this piece reveals a fantasy world and the lifestyle of nomads who live among the ruins of an ancient civilisation."

4 WAGON IN THE DESERT

"I've always loved watching Westerns. In this piece I used simple rock canyons and light beams to create a Western atmosphere."

2



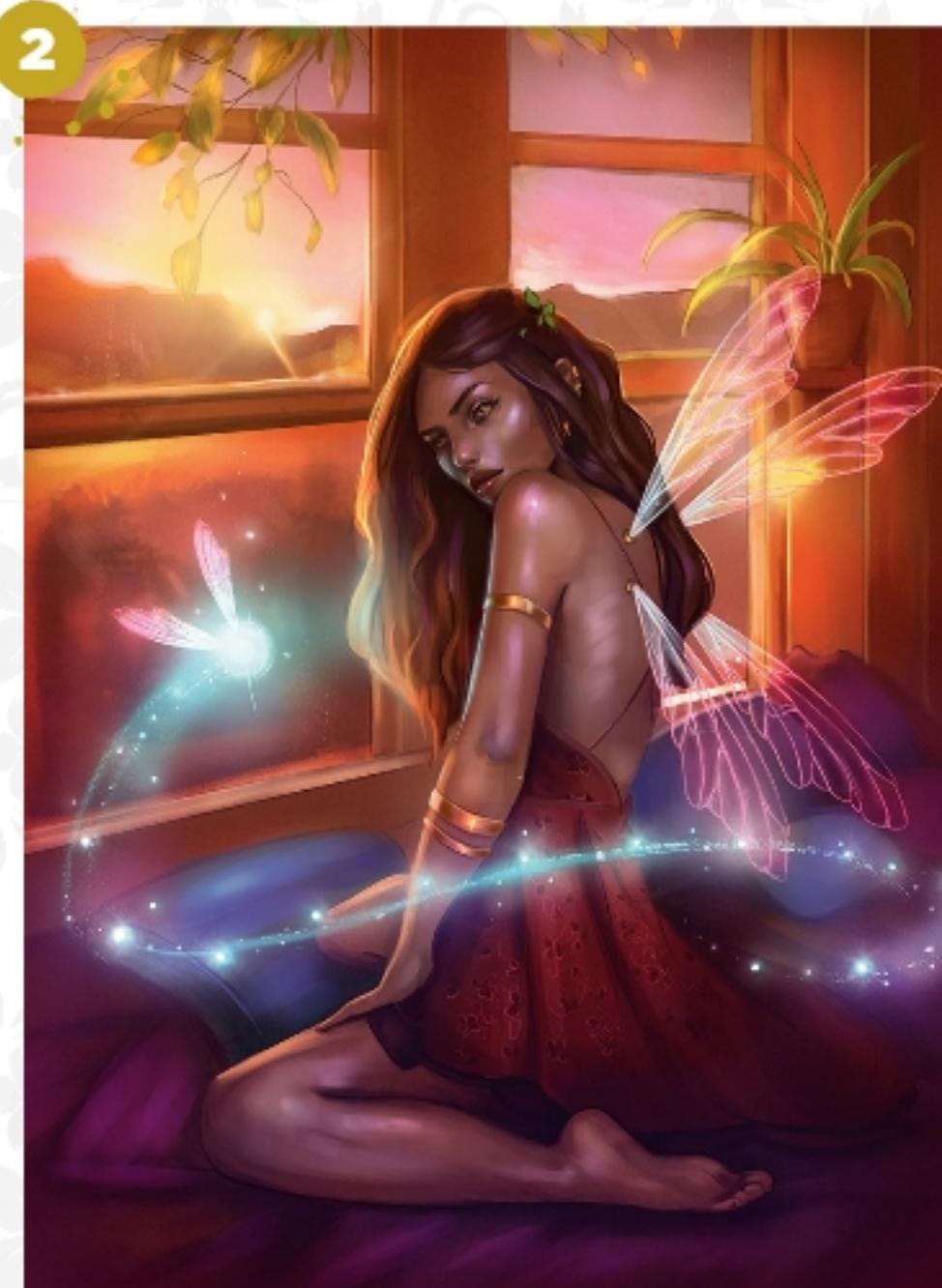




Beth Gilbert

LOCATION: England MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.artstation.com/bethgilbert

"I love exploring fantasy themes and that sense of escapism into another world," says concept artist Beth, who works both in studio for a giftware company, and freelance for a variety of clients seeking digital illustrations.





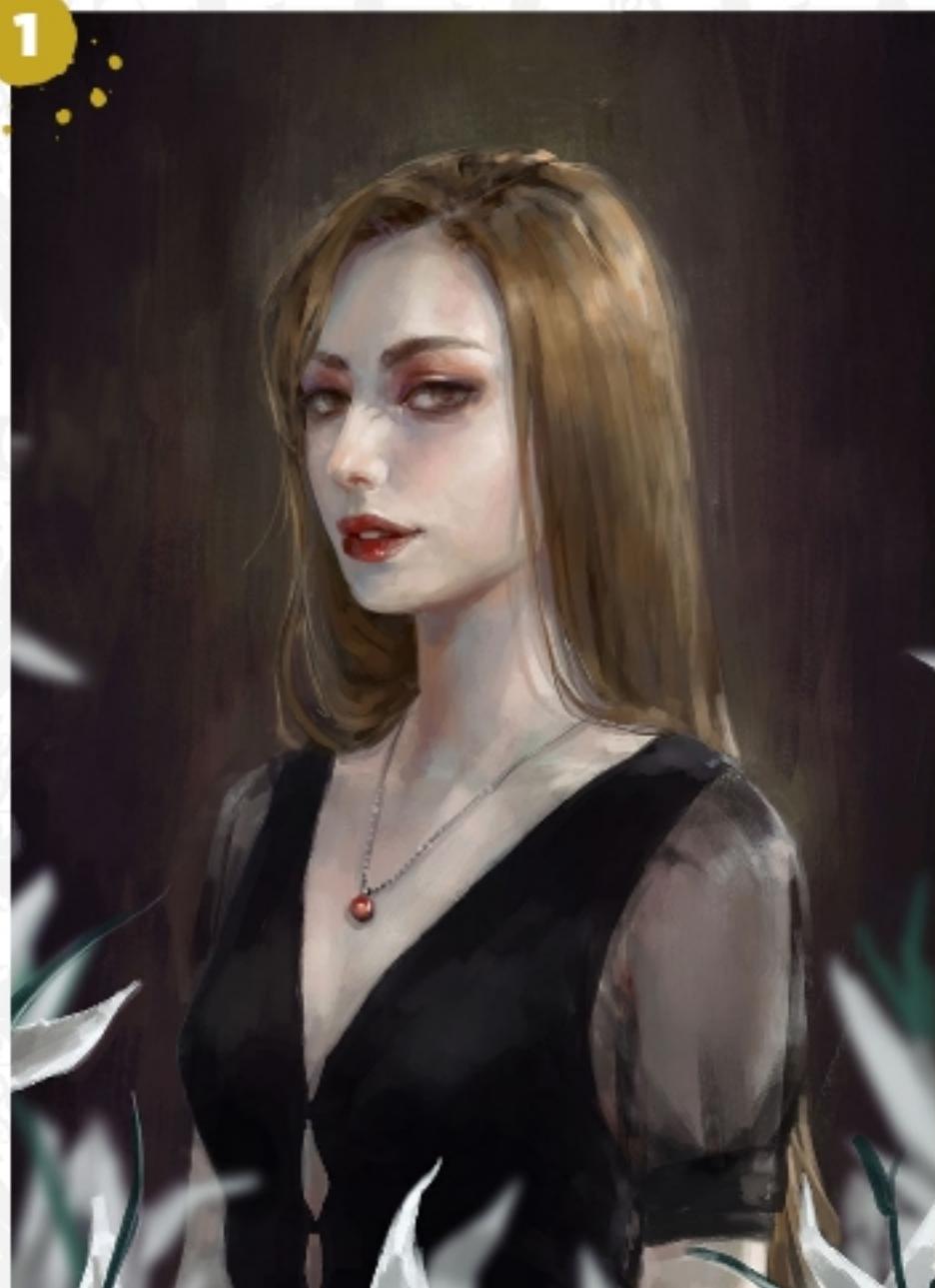


Runa Ivana Rosenberger

LOCATION: Germany MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.artstation.com/rosenbeart

Runa is a freelance illustrator and concept artist from Berlin who loves drawings related to storytelling. "When I draw for myself, I'm mostly excited about occult fantasy themes, portraits and characters."

1



2



1 AUTOMAT

"This is the female half of a vampire sibling duo who's smiling at the funeral of their most beloved enemy: their father."

2 GIRLS WITH GUNS

"Set in a dystopian world without laws. This girl has nobody to trust, except the little orphan at her side."

3 MAGICAL GIRL

"A sexy fantasy hero with a little companion and some magic tools who lives in a forest. I'm sure she fights against monsters, too."



4 BEGINNING
 "The end of something bad is always the beginning of something good. Just don't forget your weapon of choice."

5 DARK PRIESTESS
 "A seer of evil and catastrophes in the future, past and present, despite being blind. She's feared and respected as a diviner."



Henriette Boldt

LOCATION: Germany MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.henrietteboldt.de

"I'm inspired by the beauty of unusual people," says Henriette, who wants to see better representation and more atypical characters in gaming.

1 FALLEN KING

"This was a character commission of a betrayed monarch who's trying to redeem what he's lost."



2 SWEET KENKU

"In overwhelming situations, Speck will hide under his large hat. This was another character commission."



3 GENASI PORTRAIT

3 GENASI PORTRAIT

"I draw people's RPG characters as rewards on Patreon but this was a personal character that I created."

4 INDIGO

"I fell in love with this Tiefling amputee because they represent inclusivity, diversity and non-binary gender."





Artist Alley

Walk this way With art conventions on hold for now, meet the creatives selling their work online

The coronavirus crisis is affecting lives around the world. For artists, the closure of events where they'd usually sell their art has led to financial losses and worry and stress.

This is where editor **Claire Howlett** thought she and the ImagineFX team could help, by bringing the artists – along with their art and merchandise – to you. If you like what you see, visit their website and make a purchase. You'll be supporting them during these difficult times, and helping to ensure they'll still be able to create art once life has – hopefully – returned to normality.

1 Michael Manomivibul



Michael is an illustrator making intricate, atmospheric work in pen and ink. He's offering fine art watercolour paper prints and a crab eating noodles pin.

www.mikemanoart.storenvy.com

1



2 Aurigae



Living near Nuremberg, Germany, Aurigae is a freelance illustrator and artist creating illustrations and merchandise such as pins, charms and stickers. Her art is a way to express emotions and stories, as well as providing a small window into the things that are important to her.

Nature, wonder and magic is something Aurigae wants to show in her art as well as the beauty of relationships with one another, and she does this through both original art pieces and fan work, all which makes it possible to give back some of the joy that she's experienced.

www.aurigae.art

2





COOKING UP A STORM

US comic artist Brett Parson has surrounded himself with plenty of art inspiration in his studio - but also likes to work to the sound of thunder. BOOM! Page 30



SWIPE TO READ IFX!

Avoid experiencing delays to reading your favourite art magazine by subscribing to the ImagineFX digital edition - available on iOS or Android. Page 36



FEEDBACK WELCOME!

On our Letters page one reader reveals how they were heartened by our interview with Camilla D'Errico, who talked about selling her art and merchandise. Page 37

3**4****5**

3 Kelly McKernan



An independent artist based in Nashville, Tennessee, Kelly works primarily in watercolours and acrylic gouache. She documents in vibrant colours the journey of women through luminescent dream worlds and the eternal relevance of the feminine principle. Kelly's created art for Dark Horse Comics, Stranger Things, Magic: The Gathering and Star Wars, to name but a few.

www.kellymckernan.com

4 André Meister



André describes himself as a Brazilian Frankenstein type of artist. Putting together animation, comics, concept art and a bit of insanity mixed with philosophy and love for the craft, he's found his art niche by combining the experience of working with games, films and tabletop RPGs, and publishing a comic book inspired by a heavy metal band called SEMBLANT. André believes every artist is a necessary voice of nature turned into images - some laughable, some grotesque, but all with meaning.

www.andremeister.com

5 Micaela Dawn



Micaela is a freelance illustrator who loves bold shapes and colours as well as reimagining myths and legends. She lives in the dinosaur capital of the world (Drumheller, Canada), where she has a home studio and several pets that help her with her artistic projects. Micaela loves creating cover art and comics about bad-ass ladies, and developing projects that tackle equality and the promotion of women's rights.

Most of her art is created digitally, but Micaela also enjoys using pen and ink with metallic highlights. When she's not creating mythical stories and creatures, she draws nature and pun-based artwork like her MorbidiTea series that pairs skulls with tea.

www.micaeladawn.com



1 BlueFayt



If you like bunnies, D&D, and pastel cuteness, this is what BlueFayt's art is all about! The artist, also known as Katie Sheppard, sells her art in the form of stickers, prints, holographic pins and T-shirts. BlueFayt also takes on commissions and can personalise her character sheets with your characters.

<https://ifxm.ag/bluefayt>



2 Sarah Finnegan



Sarah paints surreal allegorical landscapes for viewers to explore. She works with acrylics, and at conventions you can find her selling her original paintings, as well as prints, playmats, desk mats and enamel pins. Sarah says that she infuses her landscapes with fantastical elements to spark curiosity and the desire to explore, and to inspire a sense of reverence, awe and wonder.

www.sarahfinnegan.com



3 Maurice Terry Jr



Maurice is a graphic designer and freelance artist. Over the years he's managed projects that include books, logos, posters and web graphics. He's also worked as a comic book artist, penciller and inker, and created character concepts and storyboards. He says the graphic design and illustration work is never as steady as he'd like it to be, and finds comfort in going to comic book conventions, selling his creator-owned works and getting a commission or two.

www.mauriceterryart.blogspot.com



4 Enerjax



Enerjax, aka Jackie, describes her style as soft and hyper-feminine, emphasised by her love of plants and florals. She paints with gouache and ink, but also enjoys illustrating in Procreate and Photoshop. The past couple of years she's dived into original character art, but still indulges in characters from TV, films and games. Her shop is a mix of original pieces and fan art.

www.enerjax.storenvy.com





5 Dylan Bonner



Dylan is a freelance artist who works mainly with the Disney Princess property. In his personal work Dylan reveals that his primary subject matter is mermaids. He loves to create pieces that tell little stories or evoke specific feelings while being inclusive, somewhat realistic and always glam.

www.society6.com/dylanbonner

6 JunTwei



JunTwei is a full-time illustrator and an avid dog lover... she enjoys all things dog-related! The Tokyo-based artist reveals that at the moment she's enjoying combining steampunk elements to her doggos, and hopes that people love her artworks as much as she loves creating them.

www.etsy.com/shop/juntwei

7 Yangtian Li



Yangtian is a concept designer and illustrator working in the entertainment industry – primarily in video games. She was born in China and studied in Australia, and currently is based in Seattle, US.

The artist tells us that she's always loved to draw since she was a little kid and that she's always been very passionate with her creative process, so it naturally became her full-time profession. In her spare time she loves working on personal art and making her own prints and books.

www.etsy.com/shop/artofyangtianli

8 Eldritch Rach



Eldritch's art is inspired by her interests and hobbies, and she loves learning about cryptids, mythology and playing Dungeons & Dragons! At comic cons she sell a variety of items such as stickers, enamel pins, acrylic pins, keyrings, charms, washi tape, sketchbooks and dice bags. She's recently finished a book on cryptids, mythology and folklore that'll soon be available online.

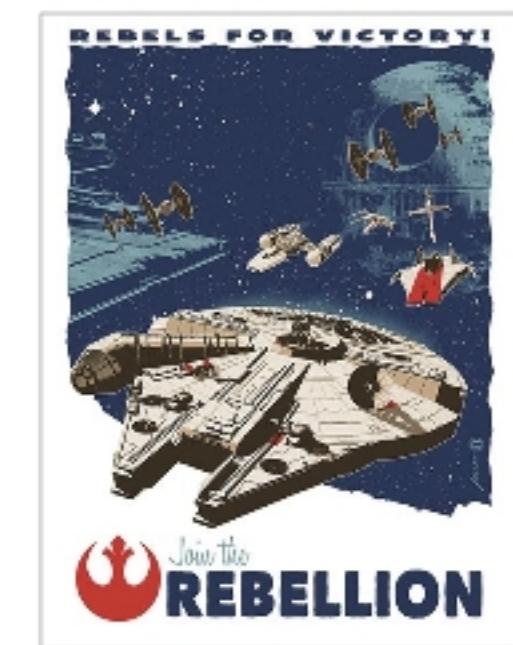
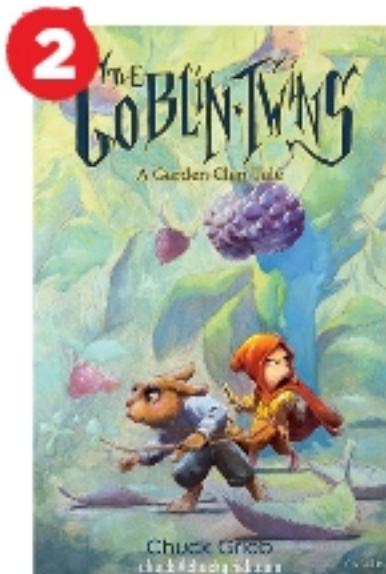
www.eldritchrach.com

1 Brian Miller



Brian is best known for his officially licensed pop culture propaganda artwork in his vintage-inspired signature style. He illustrates images for Star Wars, Doctor Who, The X-Files, Rick and Morty, Archer and The Simpsons as well as other popular characters from comics, films and video games. Brian's illustrations have been featured at major events such as Star Wars Celebration, San Diego Comic-Con and Disney's D23 Expo. Brian also has a strong commitment to art education.

www.oktopolis.com



2 Chuck Grieb



Chuck is an illustrator, animator and storyteller, and says that his tale The Garden Clan was inspired by his love for old stories, magic and the nature that surrounds us. The Goblin Twins is the first Garden Clan illustrated novel, and follows the adventures of twins Bela and Vuto.

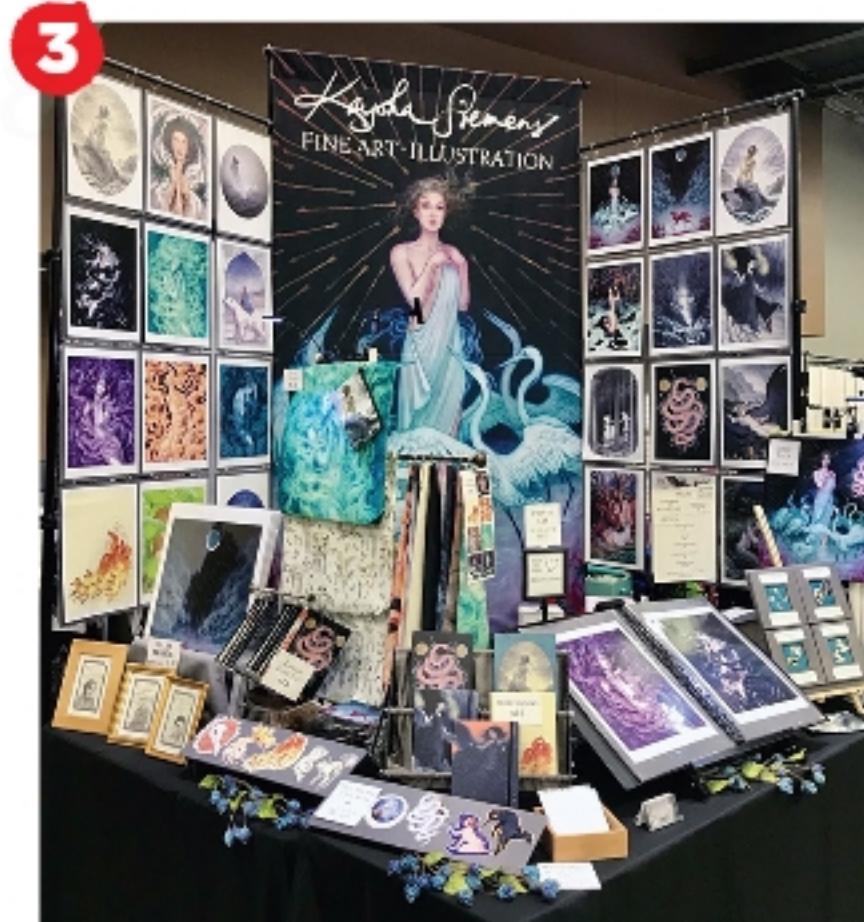
www.artofchuckgrieb.bigcartel.com

3 Kaysha Siemens



Canadian-born Kaysha now lives in North Carolina, US, and is an oil painter working on an ongoing project called Mnemosyne, inspired by Greek myths. However, Kaysha will occasionally break away from that project to paint a mermaid, or create a tribute to a favourite fandom or folktale. She offers prints, enamel pins, tote bags and zipper pouches, stickers, sketchbooks, scarves, and even the odd original in person at conventions.

www.kayshasiemens.com

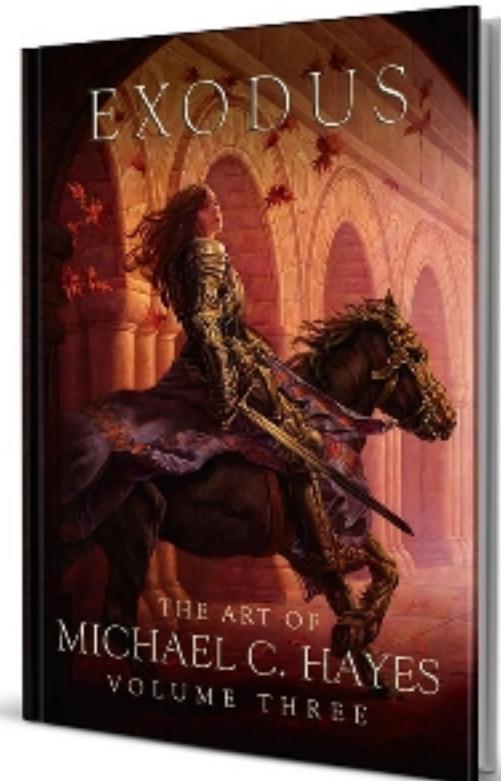


4 Michael C Hayes



Michael describes himself as a classically trained oil painter working in the imaginative realism genre. He sells paintings and charcoal drawings, prints and laser-cut matted prints. The artist tells us that his online shop is broken down into a few sections, but everything can be found through his website.

www.artofmike.com



ImagineFX Artist Alley

5



5 Joe Corroney



Joe's a professional freelance Star Wars illustrator for Lucasfilm and Disney, and a comic book artist for a variety of studios and publishers. Most of the illustration work he does is either for fine art lithographs, licencing art, publishing or comic book artwork and fan art and commissions for collectors but that income and work is heavily supplemented and dependent upon the 15 to 20 comic cons and events he does on average throughout the year.

www.joecorroney.storenvy.com

6



6 Barbara Lucas



A freelance digital artist based in Stuttgart, Germany, Barbara's work is mostly fantasy themed, and whether it's magic effects or elf ears, she tells us it's always fun to paint. She usually enjoys offering prints of her portfolio pieces at conventions held near her, but the current situation means she's only selling her work through her INPRNT store. However, she hopes to meet people at conventions soon!

www.inprnt.com/gallery/sylthuria

7



8



7 James Bousema



James is a Las Vegas-based freelance digital illustrator of dark fantasy, horror and heavy metal imagery. He enjoys showing the power behind fantastical beings through detail, strong colours and the darker side of their nature. At his artist alley tables and in his shop you'll find all sorts of Gothic art prints, gaming playmats, a set of Gargoyle enamel pins and plenty more to satiate your thirst for the macabre!

www.jamesbousema.storenvy.com



8 Erika Wiseman



Erika, better known online as Erikathegoober, paints colourful, stylised characters and illustrations in either Photoshop or Procreate. Her convention/online shop merchandise currently consists of art prints and stickers.

<https://ifxm.ag/erika-g>



1 Sajedene



Nikki Elise, known as Sajedene online, creates portraits and illustrations on the themes of fantasy, video games and pop culture. She describes her art as ranging from the cute to the dark and quirky. Nikki mostly sells art prints, but also offers stickers, buttons and keychains through her shop.

www.sajedene.com

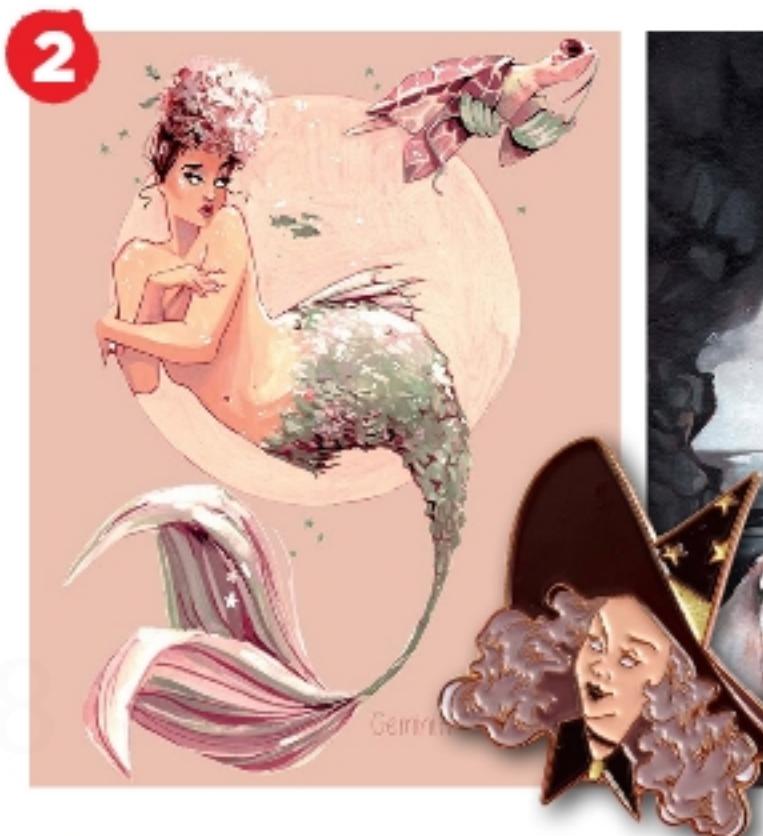


2 Gemini H



Gemini H is a French visual artist and storyteller. Her work is inspired by history and contains elements of folklore, nostalgia, nature and a bit of poetry. She loves combining these elements and experimenting with different mediums and tools. Her shop sells pins, stickers, prints, zines and art books, hand-painted brooches and a couple of original pieces.

www.gemini-h.com



3 Kevin B Cleveland



Kevin's always been painting, but only on a professional scale for the past three years following an inspiring meeting with Mark Raats, a leading film industry artist. Kevin's a licenced artist for Topps trading cards and has painted for titles such as Star Wars, The Walking Dead, TMNT and Stranger Things. He's also worked for a range of companies including Dynamite Entertainment, Rusty Inc and Printed in Blood, all the while developing his own materials and commissions.

<http://ifxm.ag/kbcleveland>



4 Destiney Hett



Destiney is an artist based in Nashville, Tennessee. She works mainly in oil and acrylic creating gothic-style dark art. Her portrait works are based on a lot of lore, mythology and old fairy tales. Through her shop she sells original paintings, fine art prints and various merchandise featuring her artworks, including candles, coasters and stickers.

www.destineyhettart.com

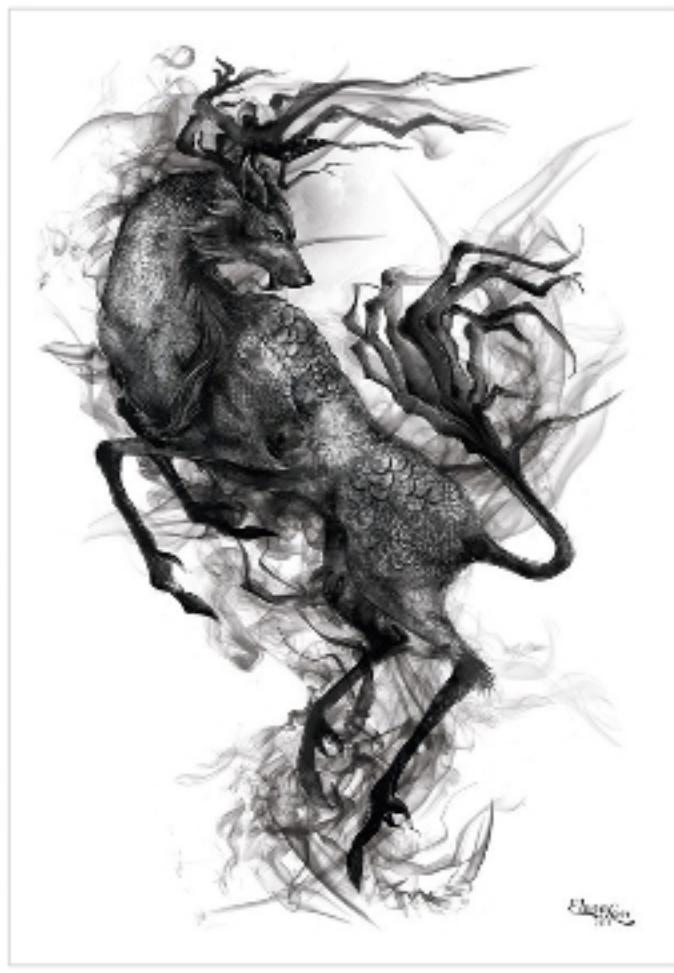
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5 Monkey Minion



Monkey Minion is the name of the store run by artist and graphic designer Dane Ault and his wife Ashlie Hammond, a creative copywriter and crafter. Based in Portland, Oregon, Monkey Minion usually appears at comic cons around the US. The store specialises in art featuring science, space, nature and pop-culture themes with a retro flavour, and Dane and Ashlie make art prints, posters, books, magnets and pins featuring Dane's art.

www.monkeyminionpress.com

6 Tristan Tait



Based in Australia, Tristan tells us that he creates fun and over-the-top caricature fan art of everything from Disney, through to Rick and Morty, Beetlejuice, Pokémon and much more, along with original designs and artworks of his own. He has these available as prints, as well as a number of buttons, stickers and bags containing other original designs in the style of retro Japanese cartoons and classic horror with a funky twist.

www.instagram.com/tristan.tait

7 Elena Lam



Elena lives in Dundee and for several years has exhibited and sold her illustrations in the city and at other locations around the UK, including Glasgow, Edinburgh and London. Most of the conventions and fairs she's booked for this year have been cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic - something that's sadly common among many of the artists we've spoken to.

In addition to selling in person, Elena also operates a store online. Her animal illustrations, consisting of smoky and ethereal imagery, are the artist's most recognised series of work. She creates them using traditional and digital tools, and sells them as high-quality prints. They're printed on imported rice washi from Japan, and Elena tells us that the gestural and flowing style of her artworks complement the naturally textured paper.

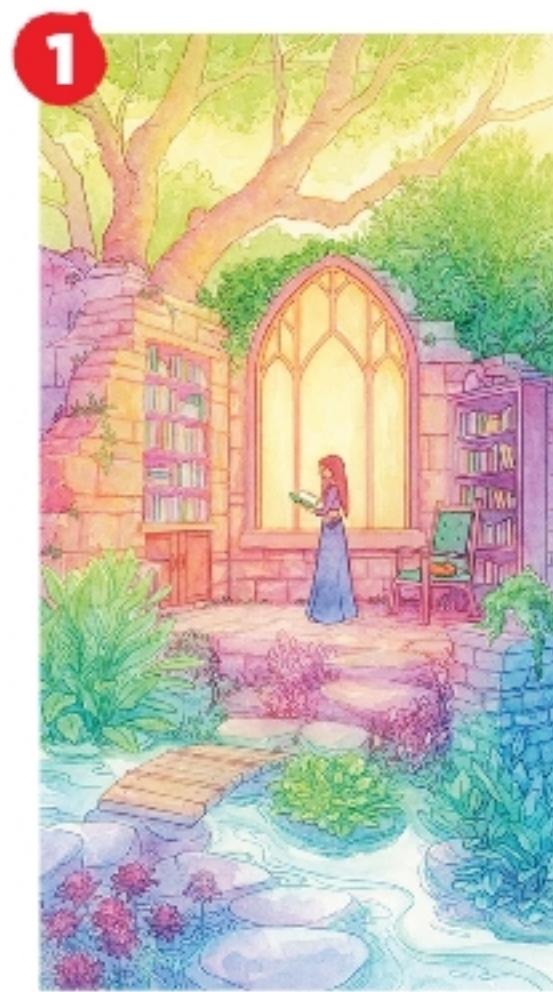
www.instagram.com/elenalam

1 Naomi VanDoren



Naomi is an independent artist and author based in California. She's comfortable in both digital and traditional mediums, working most frequently in watercolour and pen. Her adventure-inspired artwork is influenced by a childhood spent in Indonesia. Currently, she's developing a series of illustrated novels set in a tropical world filled with magic. Her work is available in art books, prints, original paintings, playing cards, T-shirts, gaming mats and more online in her store.

www.naomivandoren.com



2 Heather R Hitchman



Heather is a fantasy artist and world builder, and is creating a paranormal fairy tale world of art and stories called Terratoff. Every piece of art comes with a story about the creature in the artwork. Her goal is to make Terratoff a multi-media project, comprising illustrated novels, comic strips, videos and more!

www.heatherhitchman.com

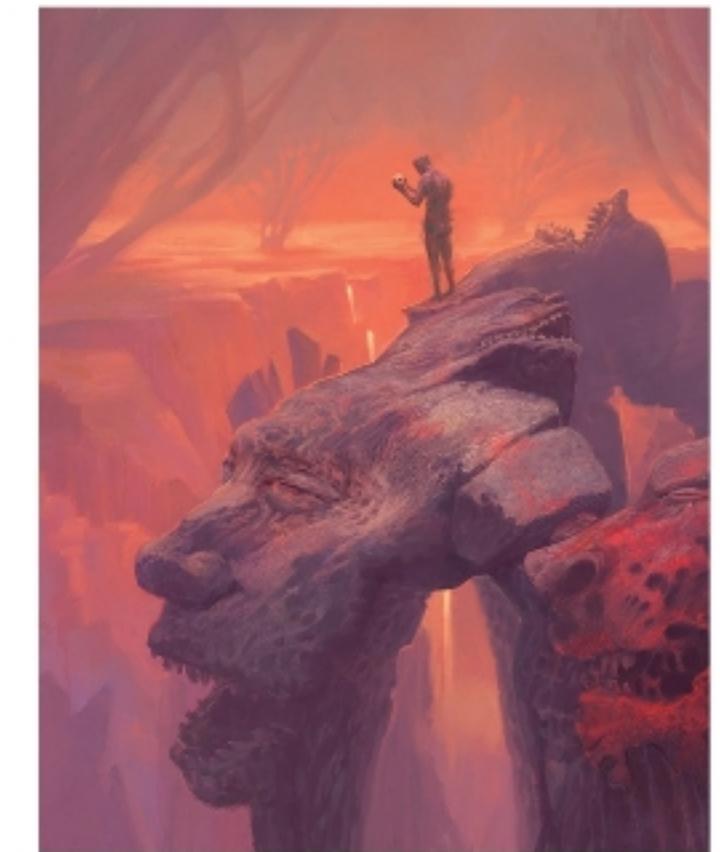


3 Bruce Brenneise



Award-winning artist Bruce paints epic alien landscapes. He's best known for his work for video games and RPGs such as Slay the Spire and Numenera. He sells playmats and prints of his work through his website.

www.brucebrenneise.com



4 Amelia Royce Leonards



Amelia's a graduate of Montserrat College of Art, where she spent four years baffling her peers and professors with drawings of goddesses and antlered women. Her work is influenced by the beauty of ancient myth, folklore and the natural world around us. Amelia sells a range of products, from originals and matted prints of her work to greeting cards, illustrated booklets and mugs. They feature fantastical birds and creatures, goddesses of folklore and myth, and, inevitably, animal puns.

www.etsy.com/shop/ameluria

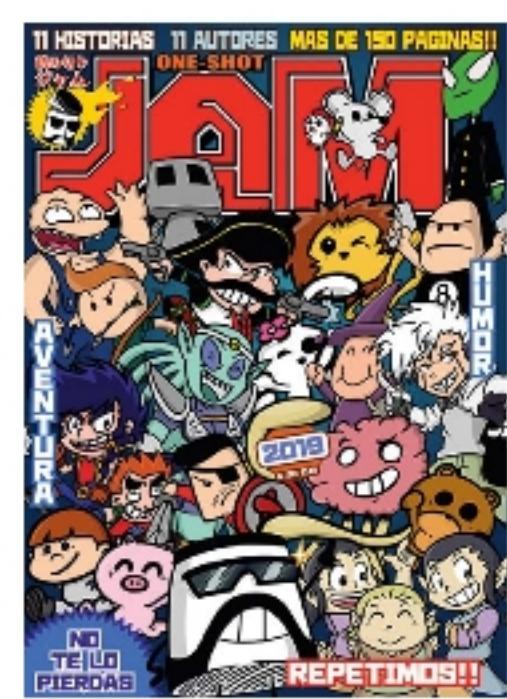


ImagineFX Artist Alley

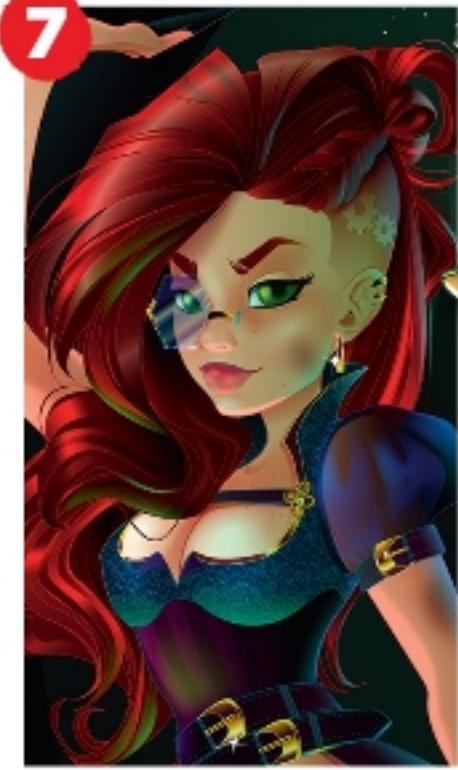
5 OCKMEDIA



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5 Rockmedia Studio



Rockmedia, led by Ivan Roca, is a studio based in Barcelona, Spain that caters for the youngest comic book authors in the world. The Rockmedia team creates comics for all ages, some of them dialogue free and the rest in Spanish. All the comics are written and drawn by the studio members, who also created One-Shot JAM, a manga-themed compilation magazine with short stories from different authors. www.rockmedia.es

6 Melonsquare Studios



Erin from Melonsquare Studios tells us that she draws on her animation background to create a range of brightly coloured artworks. She specialises in graphic illustration, apparel, prints, keychains, comics and more. Erin's having a sale at her Etsy store over the next month or so. Just use the code Con15 at the checkout for 15 per cent off your order. <http://ifxm.ag/melonsquare>

7 AsherBee



Ashley, aka AsherBee, creates predominately colourful vector work. Her work includes Rudicorns ("slightly snarky unicorns"), pin-up comic covers and a line of scented plushies called Fauna Fruits. Ashley's shop contains an array of enamel pins, stickers, prints, tote bags and plush toys.

www.asherbee.com/etsy-shop

8 Kelsey Eng



Kelsey is a visual development artist who works in animation at Disney TV, and previously at DreamWorks TV, Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon. Shows she's been a part of include She-Ra, We Bare Bears and Dragons: Race to the Edge. She also produced the cover for the upcoming Dragon Prince middle-grade novel from Scholastic. Her artwork is RPG and fantasy inspired. Use the code FX14 for a 14 per cent discount at her store.

www.kelseyeng.com



Brett Parson

Weather man This US cartoonist likes to work during storms and surrounds himself with chaotic inspiration



I started working as a full-time comic artist not long before my oldest daughter was born. For the first few years I was able to keep a studio at home where I could bounce back and forth between working and hanging out with her.

However, after a few years the excitement and chaos of family life was in full swing, and I realised that if I was going to get work done I needed

to look for another space outside of the house. Luckily, around this time a spot had opened up in an old factory building just a 10-minute drive away.

Built in the late-1700s, it was originally a tannery where they made buggy whips, and later became a woodworking and furniture shop (where my father worked in the late-70s doing drafting and design work).

I usually try to get to the studio as early as I can and I'll put a film or podcast on, have a couple of cups ➤



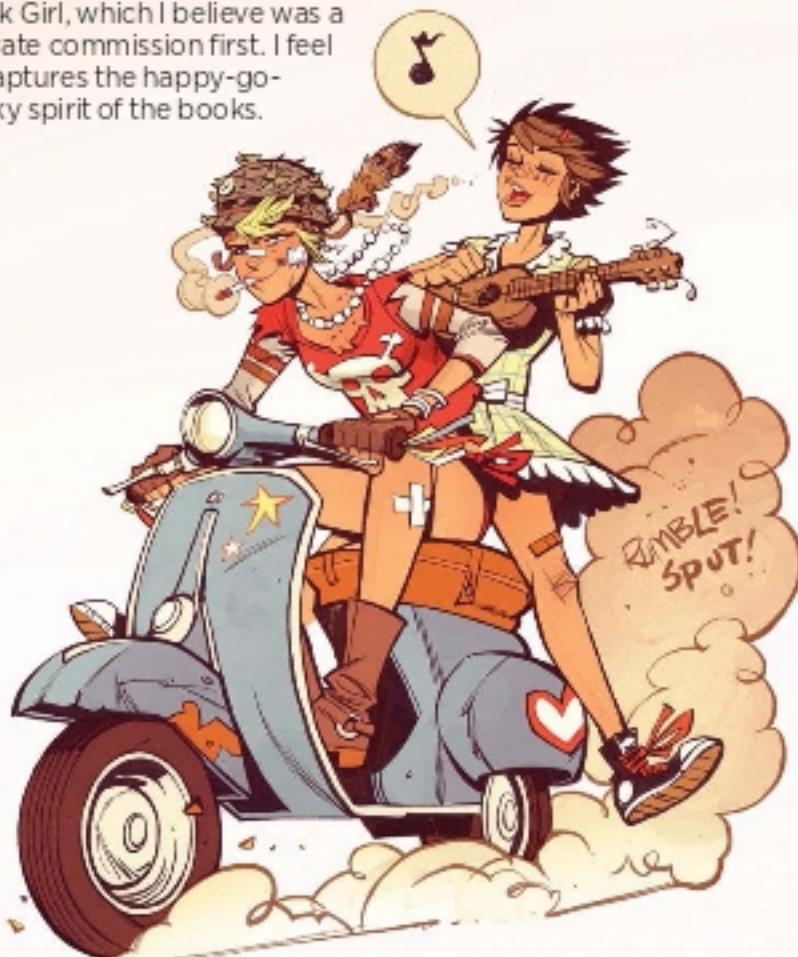
There's nothing like putting ink down on a sheet of paper. There's a thrill and danger to it that I miss when working digitally.

Artist news, software & events



My studio is my happy place. Even when I'm under crazy deadlines, as soon as I walk in I feel relaxed and ready to have some fun.

Here's a spot illustration from *Tank Girl*, which I believe was a private commission first. I feel it captures the happy-go-lucky spirit of the books.

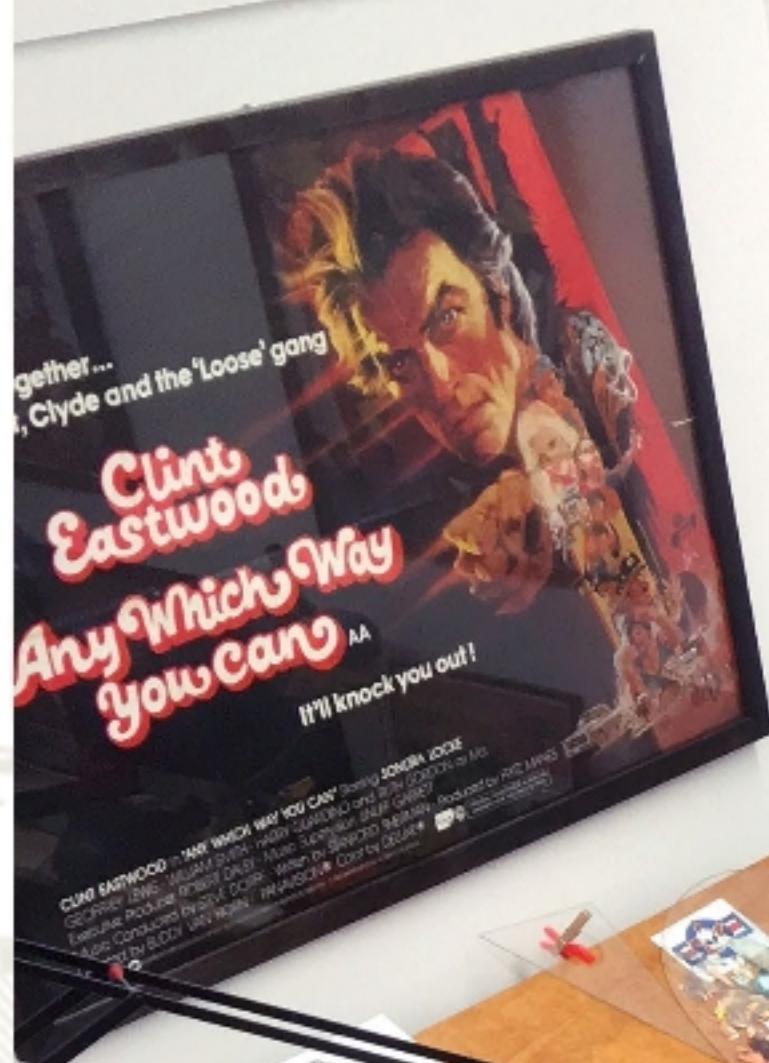


I use these monster mugs to keep brushes, pens and pencils in. And the vintage Panasonic Autostop sharpener is the best sharpener I've owned. I found it at an estate sale, new in the box!



ImagineNation Artist in Residence

For Christmas my wife Sammi got me this original animation cel from Don Bluth's The Secret of NIMH. Don's art (and his animation art in general) has had a huge influence on my style.



I usually keep films playing in the background to listen to while I work. It helps make the studio feel a little less lonely and even sometimes inspire new ideas.



Being a dad is my favourite thing. If I could just hang with my girls all day and have fun, I'd be in heaven! So I like to have family pictures around to keep me company while at work.



When inking and drawing I like to have lights on either side of the drafting table to eliminate shadows. I've had this Tizio lamp on the left since I was a kid.



This big drafting table was once a rusty mess with no top, sinking into the weeds on the side of the road. My dad did an amazing job breathing life back into it, and gave it to me when I moved into my first apartment.



My dad got me this chair a couple years ago. It's a vintage Knoll Pollock Executive Chair, and it's so damn comfortable! I love working in this chair.



I'm not a superstitious guy, but for some reason I hung this Hawaiian party lei on my Cintiq almost 10 years ago, and haven't taken it off since. It's become a weird lucky charm.

Artist news, software & events

I love exploitation films from the 60s, 70s and 80s. On this wall and opposite are two of my favourite Clint Eastwood movies with awesome poster art by Bob Peak. Between them are classic Pinky Violence film posters from Japan.



Artist Edition books are the best! I recommend to any young kid looking to be a cartoonist, spend the money you were going to spend on art school on a collection of these amazing books. You can learn so much!



Tank Girl and all related characters TM and © Hewlett and Martin



This is Harry, a Blue Heeler mix. We rescued him five or six years ago, and since then he's been with me everywhere I go. He keeps me company at the studio all day while I'm working. I couldn't ask for a better friend!



This little Super-Monster dude was a quick warm up I did early this winter. One of my biggest influences these days is Jack Davis, and I thought this one really had a bit of that vibe.

» of coffee and unwind for a half hour or so before diving into work. I like to keep a recording of rain and thunderstorms playing quietly in the background throughout the day. I find that I feel more at ease and creative when it's stormy, and this helps create that mood regardless of the weather outside. My work area is away from the windows: there are fewer distractions and I can dim the lights and just lose myself in the work.

IMAGINATION OVERLOAD

I love being surrounded by inspiration. So the walls and shelves are covered with posters, comics, Halloween decorations, toys and stuff like that to overload the imagination. It must feel a bit chaotic to people stopping in, but it makes me excited to create stuff.

I've always been a fan of a cockpit-style workspace. Working both digitally and traditionally, I find this helps tie the two worlds together and keep things contained. Over the years I've tried a few different desk setups to

“I find that I feel more at ease and creative when it's stormy”



hold my computer and tablets, and this one is my favourite by far. I built a custom shelving unit that stores my art supplies, computer and keyboard, while having room below for art books and comics. It also has a perpendicular knee wall attached to it, that I mount my Cintiq on with an adjustable arm at just the right height.

I do most of my sketching and drawing digitally in Photoshop and

I have a couple of these awesome vintage flat files. I've found they're a great way to store materials, prints and finished artwork.

SketchBook, and then print out blue line on Bristol or paper to ink it traditionally. Once the line art is done, I'll jump back on the computer and colour in Photoshop.

Brett tries to instil his work with the tone and aesthetic of underground comics and grindhouse movies, while also giving it a polished mainstream look. You can check out more of his artwork either on Instagram or at www.blitzcadet.com.

Artist news, software & events



Last autumn I started doing these random little ink portraits to have fun and warm up in the morning. I've kept on making them when I can, and hopefully they'll soon be collected in a book.



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**JEN BARTEL
INTERVIEW**
We salute the new queen of comic art!

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VIKTOR KALVACHEV STORYTELLING COMES NATURALLY TO THIS COMIC ARTIST

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ImagineFX/LightBox poster

I love, love, love the poster that came with my latest ImagineFX [issue 186]! Claire Wendling has been a huge inspiration to be for many, many years. Both her Desk and Daisies books are treasured possessions. I would recommend them to anyone who's serious about art. For me, her sketches, renderings and development work are without compare.

My next aim is to get to California and LightBox Expo as I might get a chance to meet her. Please can you do a competition to win tickets and travel to the event?

Craig, via email

Claire replies Ah, once you fall for Claire Wendling's work, you fall in love pretty hard. Her work is fantastic – it's unpretentious and utterly refined at the same time. As for LightBox Expo, I'm sure we'll be working



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of it at <https://ifxm.ag/buyissue186>

Our free poster LightBox Expo from issue 186, featuring art by Claire Wendling, made reader Craig's day.



Reader Savannah suggests doing live interviews with artists in their home studios. We love her idea!

closely with the organisers on prizes and tickets for the event, but I doubt it will include travel. Thanks so much for writing in about the poster – we love it as well!

Artist in Residence – live!

Have you thought about doing video interviews with the artists for Artist in Residence? You could video them showing us around their studio as they're being interviewed. Artist in Residence is the first page I go to when I download my copy of the mag. I'd love to sit there and watch a video of their studio.

Savannah, via email

Claire replies Savannah, you and me speak the same language. I would LOVE to see this! It'd be fantastic to actually see the artist sat at their workspace chatting about how they use the space. Unfortunately, it's not something that we could easily put together, but thank you for your great idea!

Yes to clued-up artists!

Thanks for your interview with Camilla D'Errico [issue 185]. To be honest I'm actually quite new to her work, but what I enjoyed about the interview was Camilla's focus on her merchandise and also the selling of her art. It was refreshing to see an artist who's aware of her worth. Quite often you'll see artists avoiding the money or direct-selling aspect of art because it's seen by some as a dirty secret.

Camilla's approach was good for me to see as I am about to branch out into the world of selling my art and I need guidance! Thanks to Camilla for inspiring me.

Grace, via email

Claire replies Grace, I totally agree with your points. I'm in awe of artists who build their own brands and go for it. Camilla is a great example of this tenacity as well as skill. You didn't provide links to your work, but please send them in when you set up a shop. Thanks for emailing in, I'm sure Camilla will be pleased to have inspired a fellow artist.

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention



Instagram **Ana Marija**
@madebyinkyjar



Instagram **Hayley Hyuga**
@hayleyhyuga



Instagram **Hanna Kenakkala**
@hanna_kenakkala

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



ARTIST PORTFOLIO

JEN BARTEL

The US artist tells **Gary Evans** how she carved out her own niche in comics, making stories about women told from the perspective of women

Jen Bartel went to the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York City. She graduated with a BFA in illustration, but if you had asked her classmates which of them was most likely to make it after college, then "absolutely none of them would have named me," she says.

Jen describes herself as a mediocre student. She did okay, but never stood out. She thinks this is a pretty common experience: the kid who's the best artist in their high school goes to art school and ends up a smaller fish in a much bigger pond. But she always had "absolute stubbornness and grit." She never gave up, never lost sight of her ambition to be a professional artist.

The artist was born in Los Angeles, but spent most of her childhood in Seoul, Korea. She attended an international school and had what she calls a mixed cultural upbringing that would influence her art: "A lot of my influences and stylistic preferences stem from having a mixed background and wanting to incorporate eastern and western aesthetics into my work."

She was into manga like Sailor Moon, Cardcaptor Sakura and Magic

“A lot of my influences and stylistic preferences stem from having a mixed background”



© Valiant Entertainment

PUNK MAMBO

"This is the retailer exclusive cover for Punk Mambo, created for Knowhere Games and Comics," says Jen Bartel.

Knights Rayearth. The big game franchise growing up was Final Fantasy. And she loved Lisa Frank, the company known for stickers and school supplies in rainbow and neon colours. These things made Jen want to draw. In her teens she started sharing work online, where she met people into the similar stuff who would become friends and, later, professional peers.

COOL-LOOKING WOMEN

Jen chose the illustration course at SVA because it seemed the best fit for somebody who want to draw for a living. She didn't know the school specialised in "pumping out editorial illustrators." Jen had a clear idea of the sort of work she wanted to make. She had a portfolio full of it: "basically... pin-ups of cool-looking women." Teachers discouraged her because they believed it would be difficult for her to find work with this style. ➤



HARLEY KICKS

"My illustration of Harley Quinn created for the Birds of Prey x Puma x Jen Bartel sneaker collab - used on packaging as well as promotional materials."

Artist PROFILE

Jen Bartel

LOCATION: US

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Joy Ang, Becky Cloonan, James Jean, Joshua Middleton and Fiona Staples

MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate and Clip Studio Paint

WEB: www.jenbartel.com



JEN BARTEL

NEBULA

"My cover for Nebula #1, the kick-off to Nebula's first solo comic miniseries, written by Vita Ayala and drawn by Claire Roe."

© Marvel

JEN
BARTEL

June 2020  ImagineEX



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Interview

» "A big part of why I got so much push-back while I was in school was because there wasn't anyone out there doing what I currently do. The entire landscape of illustration and comics was very different when I graduated: there weren't nearly as many women working in media; there weren't nearly as many stories about women being told, especially not from the perspective of women; and it all contributed to me feeling aimless and less motivated while I was a student. Ironically, now 90 per cent of what I get hired to draw professionally is pin-ups of cool-looking women!"

COVER STORY

In 2015, Jen was posting a lot of fan art online, including what she described as "fashion redesigns of superheroes." A senior editor at IDW Publishing saw these posts and asked her to do a cover for *Jem and the Holograms*, based on the 80s musical cartoon series. She hadn't done any professional work in comics, but this assignment led to her doing cover art for more than 20 issues of the series, and would go on to create covers for DC, Image, Marvel... pretty much every major publisher of comics.

Each cover is different. But generally, the publisher approaches Jen with a commission. She submits no more than four concept sketches to the art director, but avoids sending ideas that are too similar, and never offers a concept she wouldn't be excited to draw ("because that would inevitably be the concept that gets chosen"). The art director selects one, then Jen gets to work refining it. She doesn't work with a colourist. She





“I do feel a certain amount of pressure when depicting some characters with a lot of history and dedicated fanbases”

does everything on her own, even though comic deadlines tend to be much tighter than the book and advertising work she does. Earlier in her career, Jen would show art directors the piece in various stages of development. Now she's established, she knows clients are “hiring me to be me.” They know what to expect. She doesn't show the piece again until it's finished. Still, some covers are trickier than others.

“I do feel a certain amount of pressure when depicting some characters with a lot of history and dedicated fanbases, because even though some perceive comics to be silly or childish, these stories mean something to a lot of people, and many of these characters helped folks get through difficult and important times in their lives,” the artist states. “I always take as much care as possible

depicting established characters as accurately as I can, because I want to respect the creators and the fans.”

ILLUSTRATOR INSIGHTS

Jen reveals that, “The thing that no one tells you about being a professional illustrator is that the more established you become, the less time you have in your day to dedicate to drawing.”

In her early days as freelancer, Jen wouldn't turn down anything. She'd agree to do too much work for too little pay. She couldn't go on like this, and ended up getting a nine to five job as a product designer. She started drawing stuff for herself on evenings and at weekends, and eventually found her way back into the kind of art she wanted to make professionally.

These days, a lot of the artist's time is taken up by emails, admin stuff, ➤



Interview

© Lucasfilm



LEIA

"Done for Women of the Galaxy from Chronicle Books. It's always intimidating to draw such a beloved character."

► filling out forms and sending invoices, managing social media channels... and it can be dull. But she never loses sight of the important thing, the bit she looks forward to most: the drawing.

For personal pieces, Jen starts by writing out her idea. She hasn't kept a sketchbook since high school because she finds it difficult to leave a drawing half-done. But she'd like to make more time for practice. She knows pro artists who go to figure-drawing sessions, or to the zoo for animal life-drawing. Her busy schedules has kept her from doing that, but she believes it'd be "beneficial to work those muscles out every now and then." But she's always

MARVEL #1000

"My variant cover for the historic MARVEL #1000, celebrating my favourite character and iconic leader of the X-Men."

BLACKBIRD

"Covers for Blackbird, my creator-owned book at Image Comics. I wanted to create a eye-catching image of our protagonist, Nina for the first issue (left").



© MARVEL

collecting images online. If she's stuck for ideas, she browses her folder of inspirational images ("this year it's been a lot of celestial-themed couture fashion inspiring me"). She finds something that gets her in the mood to draw, then looks for additional references, but avoids looking at stuff that's similar to her own work.

"All art is influential by nature, so if I'm in the early stages of planning a

piece or even just conceptualising something, the last thing I want is to be overly influenced by other illustrators in the industries I work in. It's fine to look back at how artists from previous generations solved problems, but I don't want to veer into inadvertently copying my contemporaries."

'DESIGNING' BLACKBIRD

Jen doesn't see herself as an illustrator, but rather as a designer who happens to be able to draw. "That's generally how I approach all of my illustration work. I've never been the best narrative problem solver, or the best conceptual painter, but I have always had an eye for colour, composition and harmony, so I try to play to my strengths and lean into my strong suits."

She's working on a new creator-owned comic with writer Saladin Ahmed, but can't say much more than that. Jen recently completed volume one of her own series Blackbird, a neo-noir fantasy in which a "world ruled by ruthless cabals is hiding just beneath the veneer of Los Angeles." The story contains an element of magic ►►





© Marvel

THANOS

"This cover was also done as part of the Marvel Tales series, and when I pitched the idea I assumed it would never get green-lit, but they were all about the rainbows, surprisingly!"

Interview



“I think the element that separates a great illustration from a good one is intent – it doesn’t happen accidentally”

→ influenced by Final Fantasy VII. She started the project with writer Sam Humphries a few years ago, before she had any real experience in the comics industry. She found it tough – and still does – to work on both covers and interior pages: “It’s like two different parts of my brain get used for each and I have a hard time alternating without taking a bit of time off in between!”

RAINBOWS AND NEONS

She describes her art as having “a very decorative feel” which has its roots in her childhood. Her intention is to weave into her work elements of the things that made her want to be an artist in the first place, and to capture the feeling of nostalgia these things invoke. She was thrilled to be described as the Lisa Frank of the internet era.

And you can see the influence in her rainbow and neon colours.

Yet Jen’s carved out her own niche in comics, applying the same grit that got her through art school, making stories about women told from the perspective of women. She played to her strengths. She leaned into her strong suits. Or, to put it a lot more pithily, she made a successful career out of pinups of cool-looking women.

“I think the element that separates a great illustration from a good one is intent – it doesn’t happen accidentally. There’s usually a clear goal that has been achieved, whether that’s a particular evocation of a feeling or mood, or simply creating something that is accurately representational. It’s usually pretty apparent when an artist has truly hit the mark.”





JEN'S TOP COMIC PORTFOLIO TIPS

The artist explains how to improve your portfolio, to secure a job in comics

"These are some best practices I've picked up from teachers I've had and other professionals when it comes to creating a portfolio that will – hopefully – get you hired.

Keep your portfolio somewhere in the realm of 12-20 pieces. These illustrations should be your best work overall, but they should also accurately represent the type of art you're able to create when you're on deadline. Depending on the type of illustration you're looking to be hired for, your timelines will likely range from three days to three months, but it's rare to work on illustration assignments that have longer than a three-month schedule. Some book covers will provide more flexibility, but it's best not to count on that, especially early on in your career.

All of your portfolio pieces should look like they were created by the same artist. If you have wildly different style offerings, it might be best to place them in different sections rather than lumping them all together. Inconsistency is a big red flag for many hiring art directors, especially if they're taking a risk on a new artist. Consistency shows them that they can expect something similar if they hire you.

Your portfolio pieces often serve as an audition for the job, so it's best to create images that reflect the type of work you'd like to be hired for. If you want to draw superheroes, then superheroes should be in your portfolio. If you want to do editorial spot illustrations, that's primarily what your portfolio should consist of. And if you want to draw comics, it's important that you have some sequential samples.

Finally, many artists use a 'sandwiching' technique when choosing the order of the images in their portfolios. So I say: start strong, end strong."

SPIDER-MAN

"I was tasked with creating covers for 12 issues of Marvel Tales books. For Spider-Man I wanted to capture elements of the 90s comic book styles that I associate him with."



X-MEN

"A classic X-Men team for Marvel Tales: X-Men. Again, I wanted to use a juicy candy-coloured palette for this and capture a strong comic-book aesthetic."

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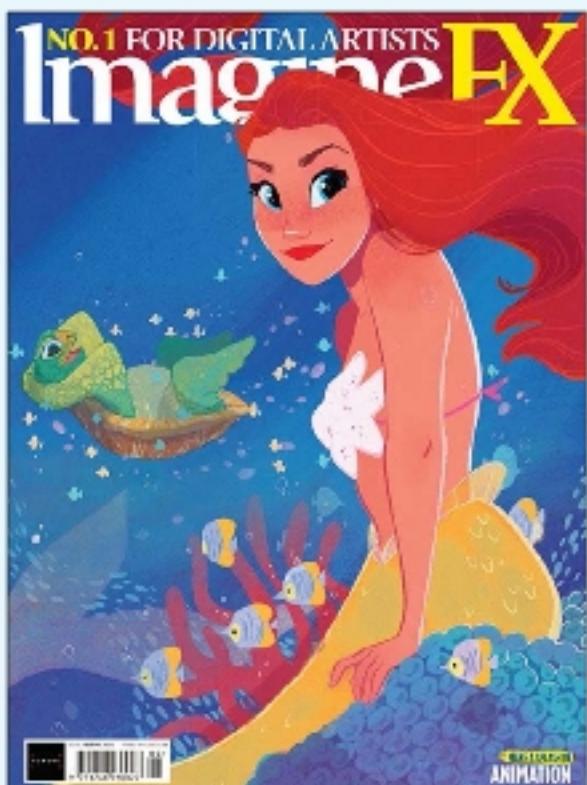
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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 186

May 2020

Animation artists pass on their character and vis-dev skills, including cover artist Amanda MacFarlane, Mark Lim and Prem Sai GS. Plus we talk to Cécile Carre and Ty Carter about life in the animation industry.



Issue 185

April 2020

Ilya Kuvshinov's cover art heralds our popular manga-themed issue, with pro advice on painting manga faces, new rendering techniques and more. We reveal the modern masters of manga, and speak to Camilla D'Errico.



Issue 184

March 2020

Cover artist Ramón Nuñez paints a fun character piece for our cover, while Antony Ward reveals how to depict wet skin. Pro artist tell us how they turned failures into successes, and we talk the enigmatic illustrator Heikala.



Issue 183

February 2020

Elevate your human and animal anatomy skills with the help of Oliver Sin and Aaron Blaise, and discover new brush techniques in Procreate 5. We also talk to MTG's Cynthia Sheppard and illustrator Anna Dittmann.

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Sketchbook

Hicham Habchi

Comic heroes and antiheroes mingle with original characters seeking vengeance, victory in battle or just a well-placed graffiti tag



Artist PROFILE

Hicham Habchi

LOCATION: US



Hicham, also known as Pyroow, is a senior/lead concept artist and comic artist working at Riot Games in Los Angeles, California. He immerses himself in the worlds of video games and comics, especially the concept development side of them. His art often references comics, video games, branding, music videos and urban life. Hicham has worked on many high-profile projects including League of Legends, Overwatch, Borderlands 3, Spawn, Naruto and Clash Royale.

www.artstation.com/hichamhabchi

L3ARBI SAMURAI CREW

"The crew is reunited and it's time to find their leader!"

Drawing a line-up of characters with different stories and abilities is my way of relaxing!"

ARTBOOK COVER

"This sketch was the basis of the cover artwork for my first artbook!"

SPAWN SKETCH COVER #275

"One of my best artwork experiences occurs when I had the chance to collaborate with Todd McFarlane, exploring a new style and mood that I never had the opportunity to do before."



Sketchbook



EYEPATCH GIRL

"A former assassin fuelled with a hunger for revenge. She's unstoppable!"

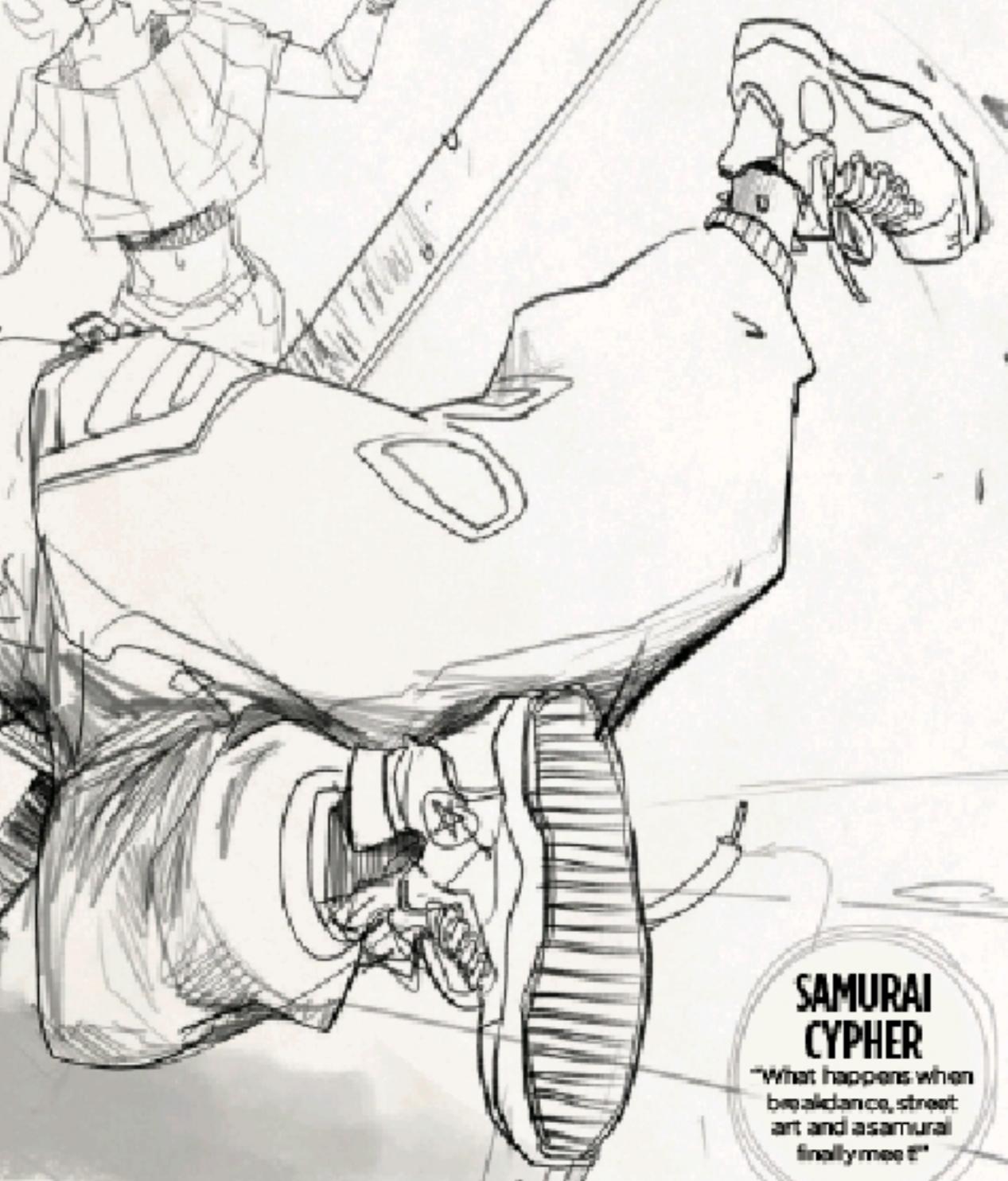


PORTRAITS

"I always love drawing faces with a powerful expression and mood... eyes in particular, because they can tell many interesting stories."



“Nice”



SAMURAI CYpher

"What happens when breakdance, street art and a samurai finally meet?"



Sketchbook



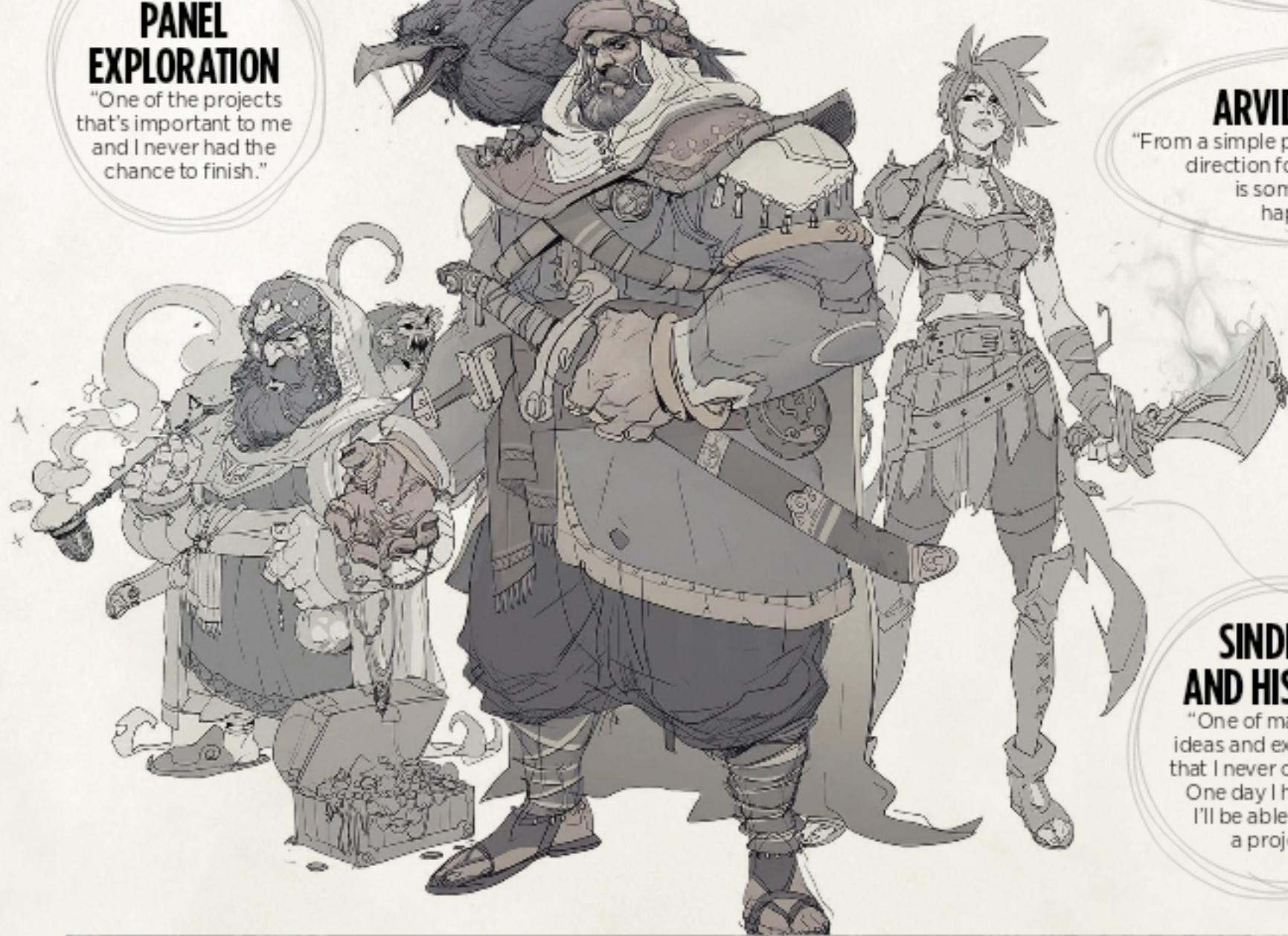
COMIC PANEL EXPLORATION

"One of the projects that's important to me and I never had the chance to finish."



DRAW OR DIE PROJECT

"Self-portrait of my daily struggle! There are no shortcuts when it comes to getting what you want."



ARVID AND BJORN

"From a simple portraits study to a thematic direction for a future project... art is sometimes a fun and happy accident!"



SINDBAD AND HIS FLEET

"One of many story ideas and explorations that I never completed. One day I hope that I'll be able to finish a project!"

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

Sketchbook Hicham Habchi

“There are no
shortcuts when it
comes to getting
what you want”

SPIDER-VERSE

“I drew this Spider-Verse comic
cover exploration
because I like the universe
and the feel of it.”

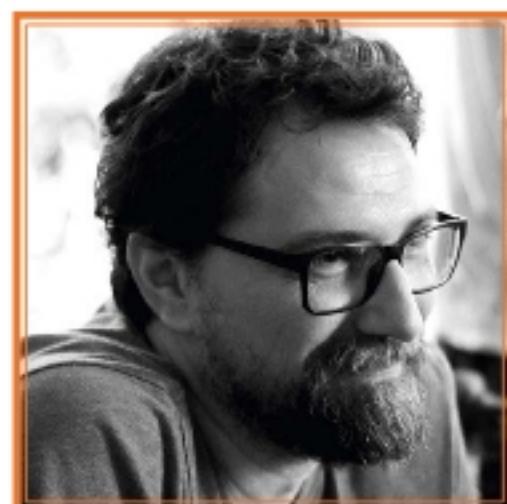
Interview

WONDER WOMAN

"The pressure of Batman was nothing compared to the pressure of the cover for Wonder Woman. Drawing strong, attractive women isn't easy."



© DC Entertainment



ARTIST PORTFOLIO

VIKTOR KALVACHEV

From a top art academy to comics, via the army and the clip-art business: the Bulgarian artist shares stories with **Gary Evans**

Viktor Kalvachev is a great storyteller. During our time with the Bulgarian-born artist he tells us about the time when he earned a living drawing caricatures of drunk people in Sofia bars, making more money in some nights than his dad made in a month. Then there's the one that involved negotiating a lucrative contract with a US company to produce vector images – despite having no experience producing vector images – and eventually building a team that created over 5,000 unique clip art pictures every single month.

One of Viktor's stories reveals how he moved to California to start the job for which he successfully interviewed with a black eye and hair dyed accidentally green. Another about how he moved to Paris to work on a video game based on his own comic book.

There's the story about how he somehow acquired state-of-the art 3D software that enabled his small team in Sofia to make better assets for children's games than most companies were making for adult games. The one about how he went on a kind of reconnaissance mission to the US to get a feel for America culture (for the clip art assignment) and had an embarrassing moment with a drinks

“I always knew one day I would be an artist... I always knew”



machine in a burger joint. And another about how he was forced to skip his honeymoon to meet a deadline (for the clip art job again).

Yet the stories that we've chosen to focus on here are even better. Early in our interview, Viktor says this good thing about his childhood: "I always knew one day I would be an artist." He says this same way he'd state his name or his nationality, with the same casual certainty. "I always knew."

INSPIRED WORK

Viktor's cover art for INSPIRE. He raised money on Kickstarter last year for this book of his collected drawings, paintings and digital pieces.

Artist PROFILE

Viktor Kalvachev

LOCATION: France

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Herluf Bidstrup, Thomas Fluharty, Mike Mignola, Robert Valley and Andrea Serio

MEDIA: Photoshop, SketchUp, acrylics, coloured pencils, watercolour and pastels

WEB: www.kalvachev.com

Viktor grew up in the 70s and 80s in communist Bulgaria, so he didn't have access to the usual comics, films, television, or "anything remotely similar to western kids." Fine art was the thing. He knew his Caravaggio, his Leonardo da Vinci. His family owned the Great Soviet Encyclopedia – all 30 volumes – as well as the children's version, which had illustrations he could copy or trace. He always drew people, never environments. People were more interesting.

COMIC INSPIRATION

His dad "magically produced" a subscription to a comic called Pif Gadget, made by French communists. Viktor didn't know he was reading allegory and propaganda. He was into the stories. Wednesdays, when the magazine arrived with its free self-assembly toy, were some of the "brightest moments of my childhood." Herluf Bidstrup was another. The Danish cartoonist made these thrilling one-page vignettes, pen and ink, no text, expressive characters, simple lines. Bidstrup said a lot with little.

But when did Viktor have such confidence he would become an ➤

Interview



JU-JITSU

This Wonder Woman-like character from Viktor's book INSPIRE easily dodges a knife attack.

► artist? "It was a sunny day outside," Viktor says, starting another perfectly structured story. "My family lived on the first floor in a building that looked like the projects in western culture. All the kids were outside playing football. They were like: 'Come down. Come play with us. We just need one more to make the sides.' I said: 'No. I want to draw.' That's how I knew I was going to become an artist. I had my priorities straight."

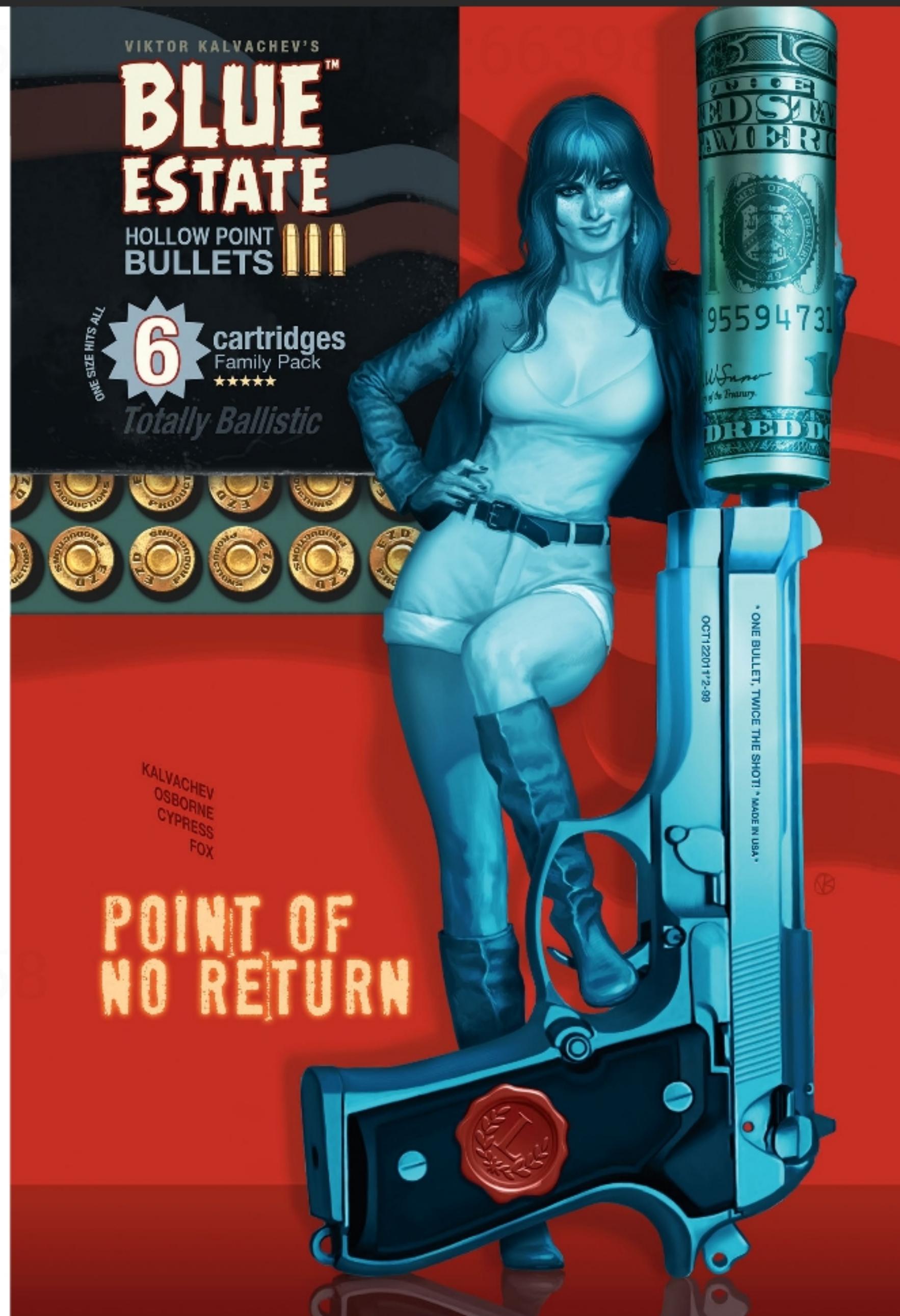
THE REBEL

Viktor attended a high school in hometown of Varna, which specialised in art. To get in, he had to sit an exam that involved drawing a square, a sphere and some drapery. His dad sent him to a local art teacher to practise. She made him fill more than a hundred 50x70cm pieces of paper with nothing but crosshatching. Viktor sucked at first, but gradually he

“My family lived on the first floor in a building that looked like the projects in western culture”

got better. The teacher finally allowed him to draw a square, a sphere and some drapery. Technique was now second nature, leaving him free to focus on the feel of the drawings: values, shadow, texture.

The second part of the exam focused on colour, and Viktor couldn't do colour. But his dad managed to get him some watercolour pencils – which nobody really had in Bulgaria in those days. The "magic trick" of water transforming apparently normal



BLUE ESTATE

Cover art from Viktor's own project Blue Estate – a comic featuring private eyes, sleazy criminals and faded Hollywood stars.

That was the night before the exam. During the exam itself, his nose bled all over his work. Viktor decided to join the army.

ARMY DREAMER

In the late 80s and early 90s, communism was starting to fall in Bulgaria and throughout Europe. So Viktor's time in the army wasn't as bad as it could've been. He was supposed to know how to blow things up ("I don't. I would be a terrible soldier"). What he ended up doing was painting original pieces of art for his commanding officers based on the tacky postcards they picked up on their travels: boats bobbing in the harbour, cheesy sunsets. Viktor quickly got bored. He

coloured pencils into watercolour paint helped him "knock it out of the park."

His next entry examination wouldn't go so well. Viktor applied to the prestigious National Academy of Arts. Everybody who applied had talent. To get in, you needed connections. Luckily, Viktor's dad (from whom Viktor clearly gets his industriousness and resourcefulness) got hold of one of the Academy's illustration professors. "The dude just ripped me to pieces," Viktor says.



hatched a plan to parody the famous Ilya Repin painting *Reply of the Zaporozhian Cossacks to Sultan Mehmed IV of the Ottoman Empire*. Viktor's version – two metres wide – would portray his own commanding officers in a very unflattering light. Pretty soon, word got out, and Viktor was demoted to the duties of a regular solider. But not for long.

The old army band had just retired. The new army band needed a singer. Viktor, by his own admission, wasn't the best vocalist. But nobody else dared sing, so he filled the vacancy and for the next six months sang every night in the army bar, covering of Led Zeppelin, Guns N' Roses, Bon Jovi. "So," Viktor says, "I had quite a lot of fun."

Viktor started to enjoy his drawing again. He applied to the Academy – mainly because the army would give him time off to sit the exams. Viktor went with his girlfriend to Sofia and had a "good time." Because either option – the Army or the Academy – placed no pressure on him, when it came to the exams he "killed it."

Viktor's time in the Academy was equally dramatic ("me being 20 years old, all rebel and shit"). He chose to resist the whole of his first year after a bust-up with a professor. He was also allowed to skip classes that focused on his big weakness: colour. Looking back, he believes his professors should have pushed him to improve what was now "a huge block." ➤

COVERS THAT ASK QUESTIONS

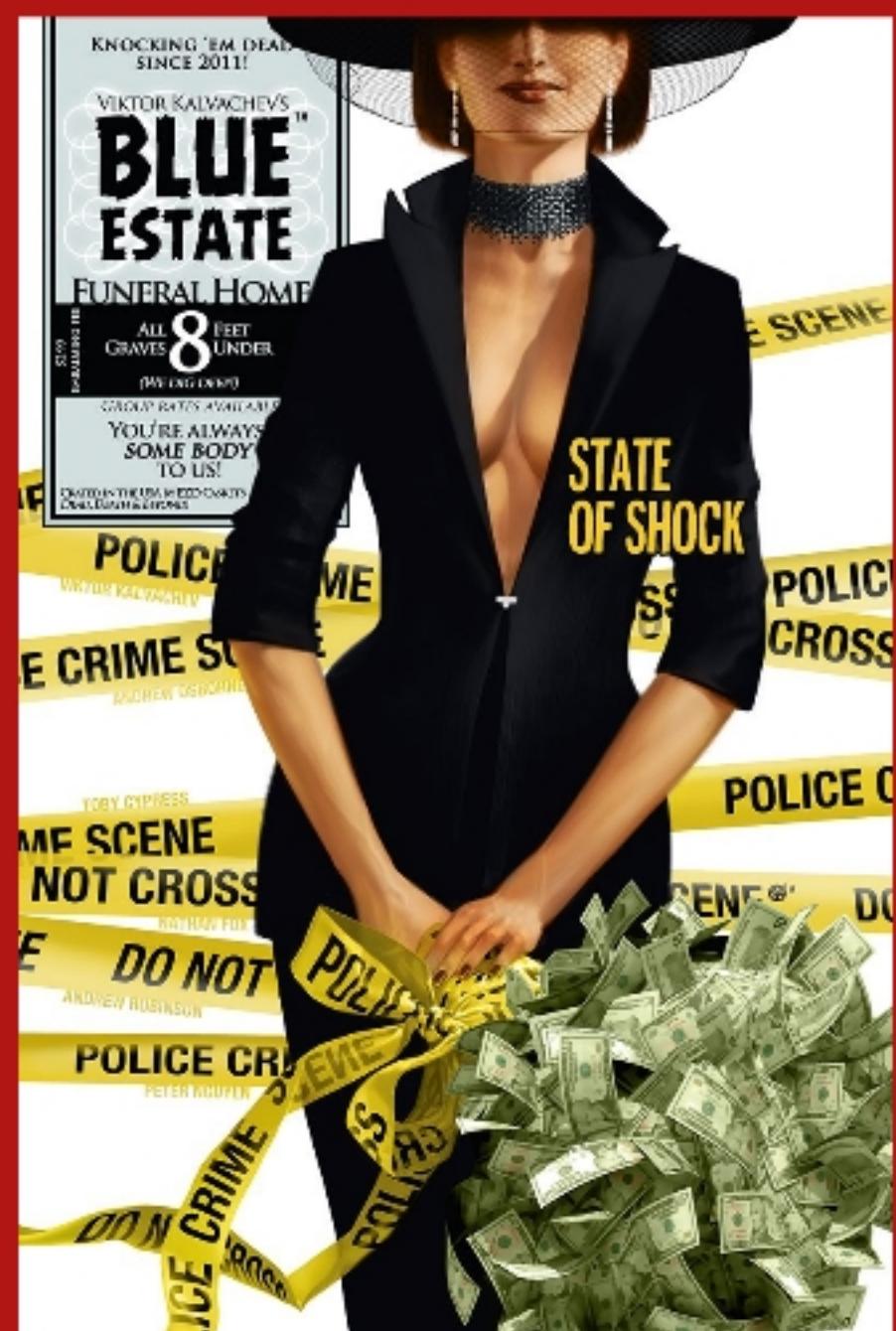
Viktor on his three-stage process for creating killer comic book covers

"When it comes to covers, you only have a split second to make an impression. I never look at a cover as just an illustration. Covers have three elements that, when put together, will ask questions that will hopefully be big enough to make you stop and go: 'Wait, what did I just see?' Great covers do that."

During the first stage, there are going to be a few things on the cover that immediately register as shapes. They're put together in a way that's super-recognisable. Your brain gets them right away. But the unique combination of those elements is the first question: "Why are these things together? What the hell?!"

Then comes stage number two: to deliver on quality. From the moment the viewer looks at the cover, it has to look expensive and well done.

Then it's the third stage, and the viewer is really focusing on the cover. You have to put things on layers. After seeing the image is well done, the viewer should start discovering little things – clever composition, metaphors, symbols. So the viewer is holding something that was interesting at first, that they know is good quality, and which should now make them ask more questions. To answer these questions, they have to turn the cover and look inside, and my work is done."



An example of Viktor's three-stage approach to drawing covers: this is an image that encourages the viewer to ask questions.

Interview



BATMAN BEYOND

In one of Viktor's favourite covers, Batman hides in the shadows as the citizens of Gotham turn against him.

© DC Entertainment

**ASTRANGE THING**

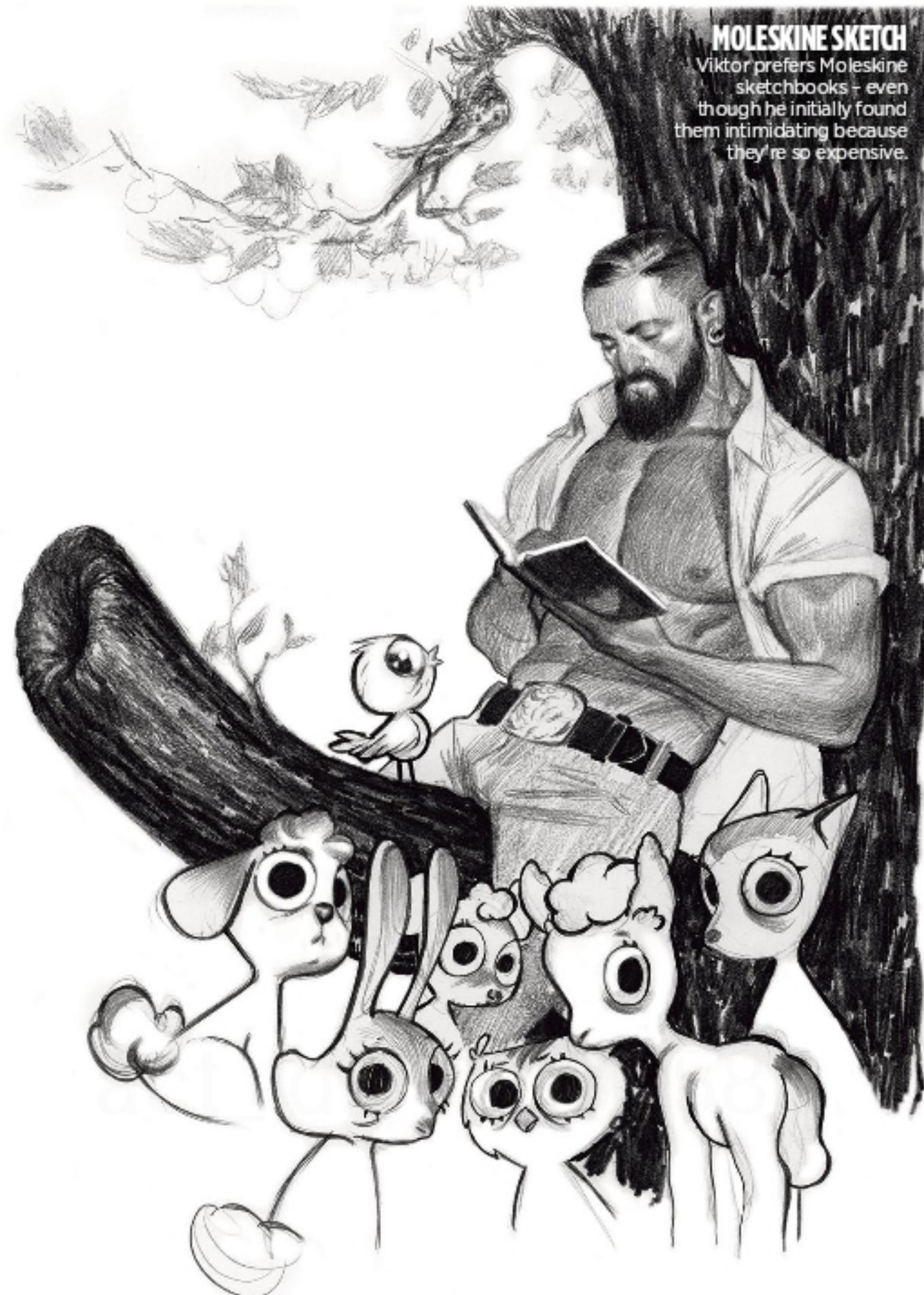
A cover for Viktor's ongoing work for the comic tie-in to the hit Netflix show *Stranger Things*.

» Viktor has worked in art production, graphic design, UIX design, and numerous other jobs in entertainment art for the likes of Pixar, Disney and DreamWorks, taking him from hometown Varna to Sofia, from Bulgaria to the US, and from California to Paris, where he now lives, working remotely as the studio art director for Tel Aviv mobile game developer Moon Active.

Viktor is best known for his comic book covers for DC, Dark Horse and

ZOMBIE KILLER

This character from Viktor's book *INSPIRE* casually carries the head of a zombie slung over her shoulder.

**MOLESKINE SKETCH**

Viktor prefers Moleskine sketchbooks - even though he initially found them intimidating because they're so expensive.

his own hugely successful title *Blue Estate*. At the moment he's working on the comic of *Stranger Things*, based on the Netflix original series.

COVER STRATEGY

Viktor begins a cover by gathering research materials. For *Stranger Things*, that means watching every episode. He also likes to ask the writer or editor of

viewer double-take. Maybe something's a little off? Maybe something unusual is happening? The cover has to be layered so it poses questions.

A good example is the barbed wire in his *Batman Beyond* cover: it seems to grow out of the building behind the Dark Knight and bind him, because this is the issue in which Gotham has turned against its hero.

“I started sinking in my chair. Deeper, deeper, deeper... I was having a kind of rebirth: I suddenly got it”

the comic to send him a list of words summarising the issue. What's the message? What feeling does the writer want to leave with the reader? He makes quick sketches based on the three most important words, trying to come up with clever compositions or metaphors. He starts with rough elements - shapes that take a second to recognise, but which also make the

Viktor has these early concepts approved by the client, then looks for references. He's doesn't know much about guns, for example. So he'll find the right gun to use as a base, then hone this reference to make it his own. If Viktor's working on a big title like *Batman*, he can sell the original piece, so he'll work in pencil or acrylic, then scan the image in Photoshop. If ➤

Interview



THE RACHEL SITUATION

For Viktor's own title, Blue Estate, he has total creative control of covers - leading to stunning work like this.



ROKU

Composition is one of Viktor's great strengths. Here, he leads your eye through the image in a unique way.



© Valiant Entertainment

MIDNIGHT IN PARIS

Viktor shares pages from his Moleskine, which have become hugely popular on Instagram

"I started the Moleskine thing when I moved to Paris. I didn't speak a word of French, so the TV sucked and I was renting a place in the middle of the city, surrounded by non-stop parties. But I felt super inspired by the city. There are so many beautiful people walking the streets. Not just women, but really handsome guys. It's a melting pot of the entire world.

I would just come from work, get some wine and cheese, and open my windows and look down on the streets, all the people walking. Paris came in with all the noises and smells and yelling. And I'd just sit on a giant armchair and draw. And it became a habit.

They're just pure fun. They're about the moment that I'm experiencing

while drawing, the interesting people that I see, the memories I have from the day. Sometimes I have a solid idea. Sometimes I don't. It's all about starting. I don't do thumbnails or sketches. I just go.

Here's some advice for young artists: you should be able to get rid of parts of your drawings that are dragging everything else down. If I don't like the way the drawing is going, I erase everything and start again. I'd rather not draw than leave something half-assed.

I decided to try to start posting them on Instagram. There was no plan, no campaign, nothing. It was just me posting stuff. And that's it. I'm drawing because I have the need to draw, and I like the act of doing it."

ERASE IT

Viktor never leaves a sketch unfinished: he always completely erases an image he isn't happy with.





IT'S PERSONAL

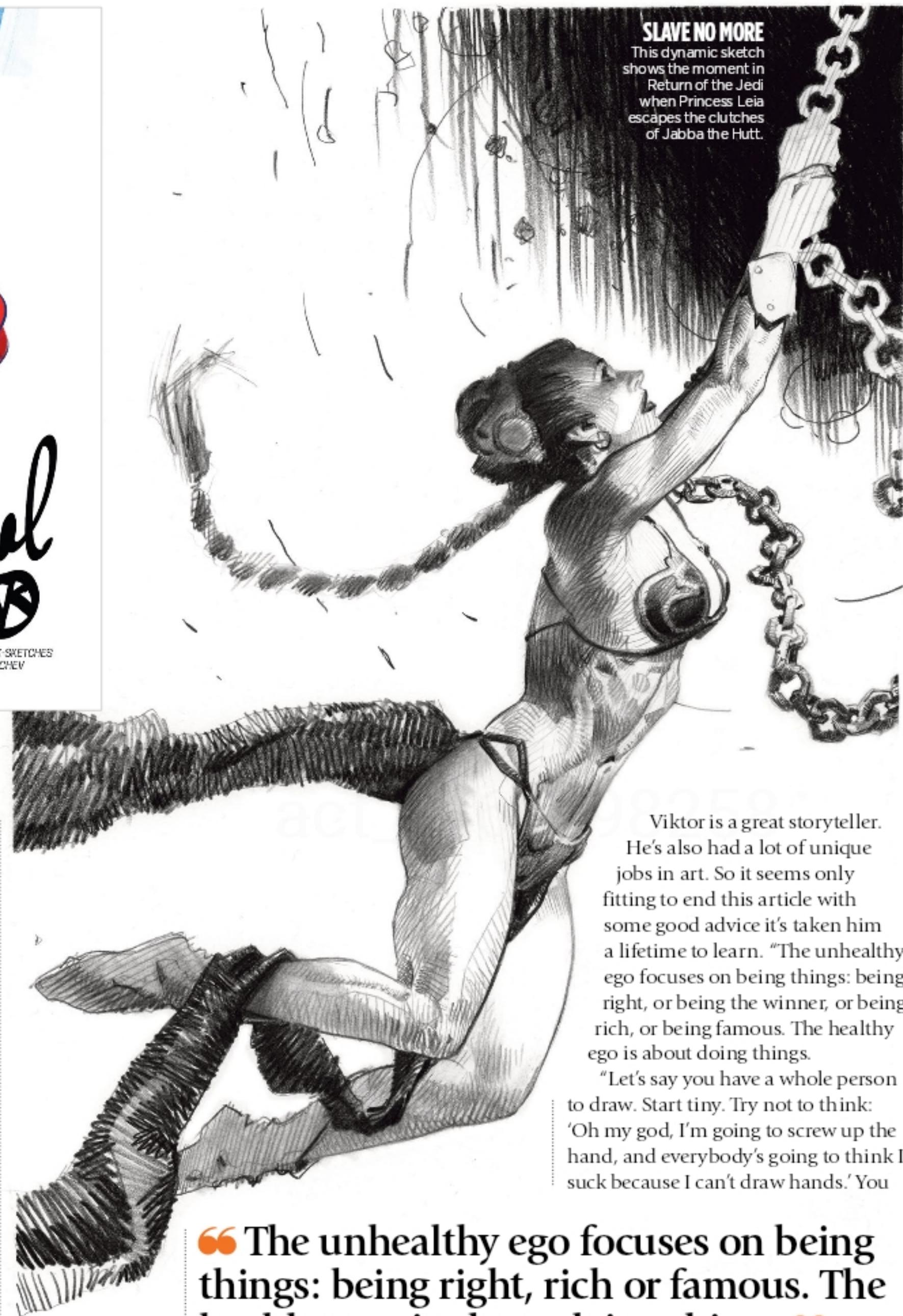
Viktor's new, limited edition book feature images that are "very personal and done in the moment."

► not, he starts in Photoshop or SketchUp. He uses more references for characters with tricky poses – usually images online, or a family member. In a pinch, he'll hire a model. Deadline permitting, he lets the piece "rest" for at least a few days, ideally a week, then looks at it again with fresh eyes.

TRUE COLOURS

While living in California, Victor's wife paid for art classes in an attempt to fix his problem with colour. It didn't work and he quit the class. But the company persuaded him to go to a free seminar on colour. Viktor reluctantly agreed. The lecturer was a man with a "kind face and big moustache." But Viktor's insecurities made him arrogant and angry. The lecturer showed his own painting of a house with a red roof and white chimney, green trees, blue sky. Viktor couldn't have been more bored. The lecturer went into a speech about how light hits the red roof and bounces off the white chimney, and the green trees do this, and the blue sky does that.

"I started sinking in my chair," Viktor says. "Deeper, deeper, deeper... I was having a kind of rebirth: I suddenly got it. Suddenly, everything made sense. I realised how small and pathetic I was for acting the way I was acting a few seconds ago." Viktor was



SLAVE NO MORE

This dynamic sketch shows the moment in Return of the Jedi when Princess Leia escapes the clutches of Jabba the Hutt.

© Walt Disney Company

“The unhealthy ego focuses on being things: being right, rich or famous. The healthy ego is about doing things”

too embarrassed to talk to the lecturer on his way out. "The guy probably thought I was a real asshole, but he changed my life."

Viktor has since received two nominations for two Eisner awards, for both his cover and colour work. He's published two book showcases everything he's learned: INSPIRE and It's Personal, and is about to start teaching a class through Schoolism on drawing characters.

focus on drawing a great hand. You continue – the arm, the areas that are easier, and you start having fun, and then, at the end of the day, you have a figure... a drawing you're proud of. And that drawing represents the best that you can do in that particular moment in time. If you keep doing that, what's going to happen is behind you there's going to be a trail of objects, of products, of things of value that represent the best you can do." ■



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Advice from the world's best artists



This issue:

64 Paint story-filled comic cover art

For his cover of Champions #2 Toni Infante combines several elements in one image.

70 Draw action-packed panels

Discover how Steve Ellis injects action and movement into his sequential artwork.

76 Brush skills in ArtRage

Nick Harris explores ArtRage's two custom brush engines while painting a whimsical image.

82 Create contrast with inkwash

Pepe Larraz separates different layers on an inkwash illustration using tonal value and contrast.

Photoshop PAINT STORY-FILLED COMIC COVER ART

Toni Infante breaks down the creative process behind the cover of *Champions* #2, revealing how to combine several elements in one image

Artist PROFILE

Toni Infante
LOCATION: Spain

Toni spent his childhood reading comics and playing games. Now he works in both industries as a freelance artist, with clients including Marvel and Apple.
www.toniinfante.com



Illustration work – and cover art in particular – is all about storytelling. When I paint a new cover, the process and problems I face are usually the same. It needs to stand out on the shelf while giving readers some clues about the story inside.

Alanna Smith, my editor at Marvel, asked me to paint the cover for *Champions* #2 and sent me a concept

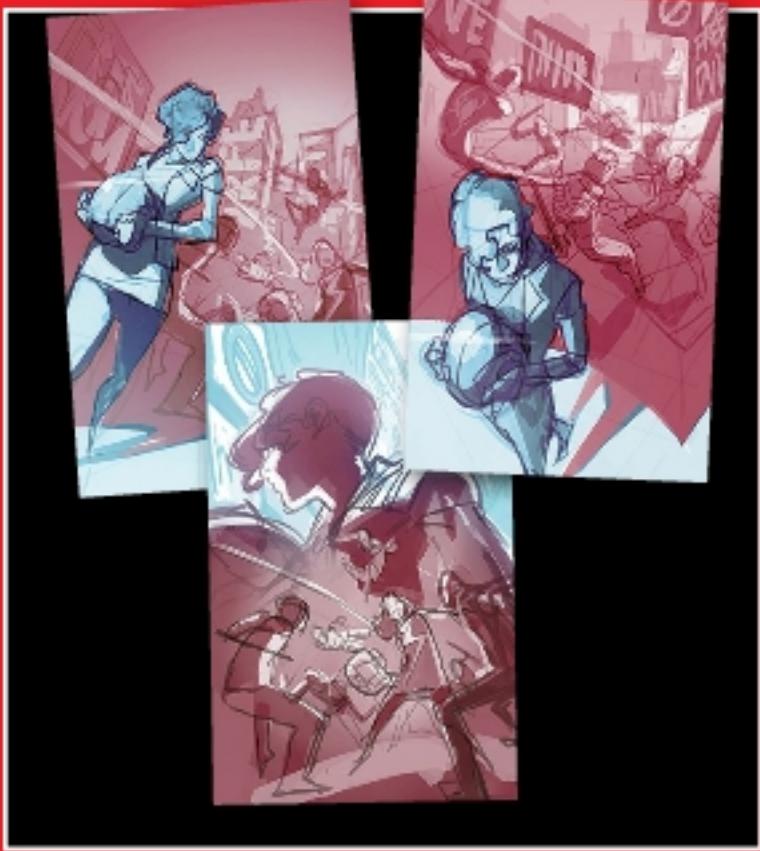
and brief synopsis. We had to show the *Champions* members caught up in a protest event featuring both pro and anti teen-vigilantes, while fighting the overzealous C.R.A.D.L.E. special forces.

There were so many elements happening on the cover that it became a huge challenge to explain some of the characters' conflicts and story themes, while also showing a crowd of people fighting together.

Here, I'll explain my creative process for creating a narrative-based composition, and reveal how I'm able to blend all this information without creating a chaotic image. However, before creating the first rough sketches, I'll spend some hours just thinking about the main themes and looking around for inspiration and reference. This includes taking notes, reading art books and using Google Images or Pinterest. ➤

How I create...

A COVER THAT'S PACKED WITH ACTION



1 Presenting my initial ideas

These are the first roughs I send to my editor. I receive some feedback and we chose one of the options together. There's not too much detail there, but it should still be readable. I take the most important decisions during this step, and therefore it's one of the hardest parts of the process. Perspective, composition, anatomy and values are more or less decided now.

2 Developing the big picture

Now that we've decided on one option, I move forward and start detailing the characters and background, working on anatomy, clothes, character expressions and other details. Next, I produce a quick colour sketch, focusing on lighting, values and volume. It's important that I don't drift from the overall look we've agreed on, and as such I work from big to small.

3 Adding details and polish

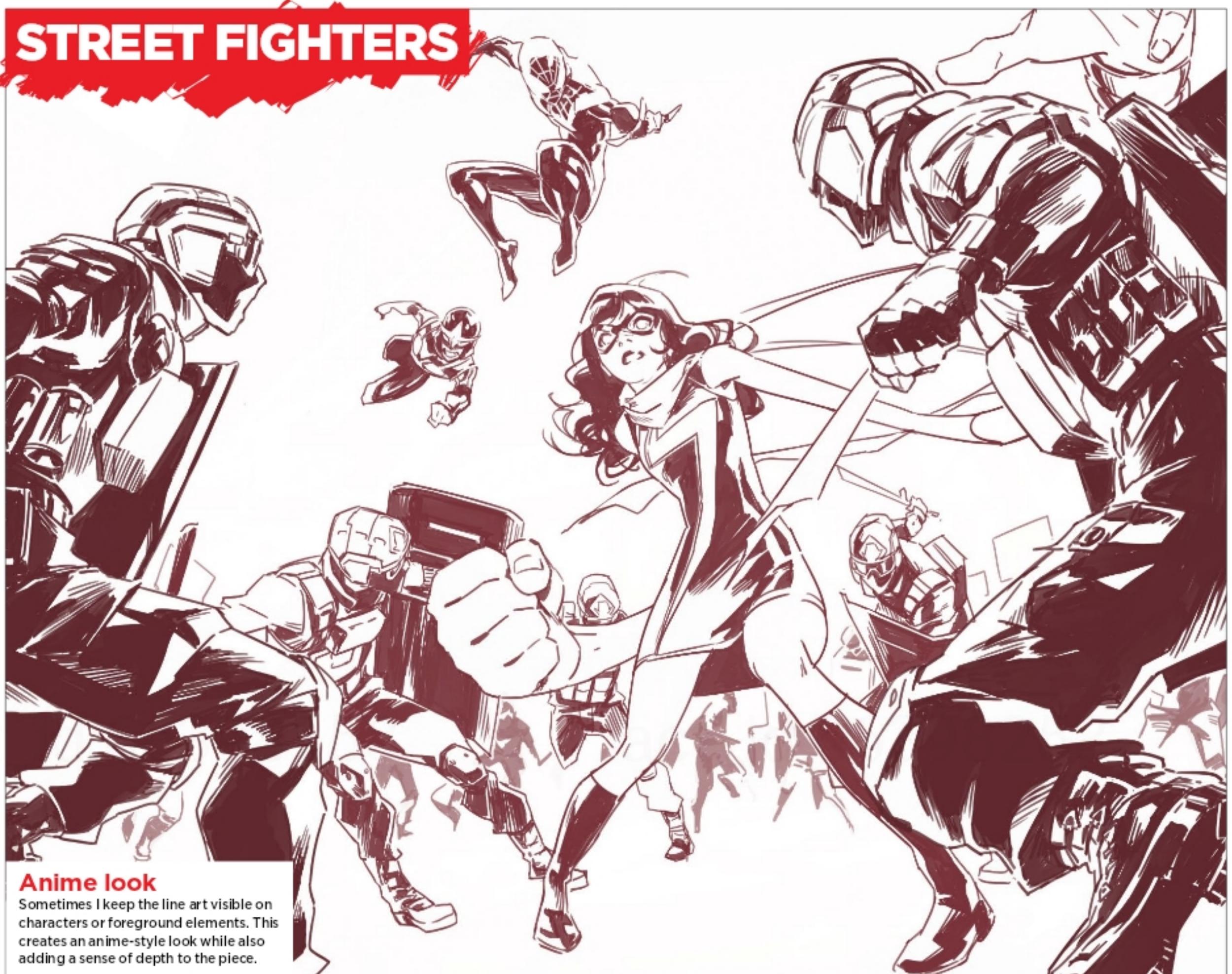
The last part of the process is perhaps the most time-consuming, but also the easiest part. All the key decisions have already been made, so it's time to relax and just add details. I finish the line art and render the characters, paint the background, add some light effects, textures and dust effects, and polish a few rough areas. And now I can say it's done!

Artist insight Comic cover art



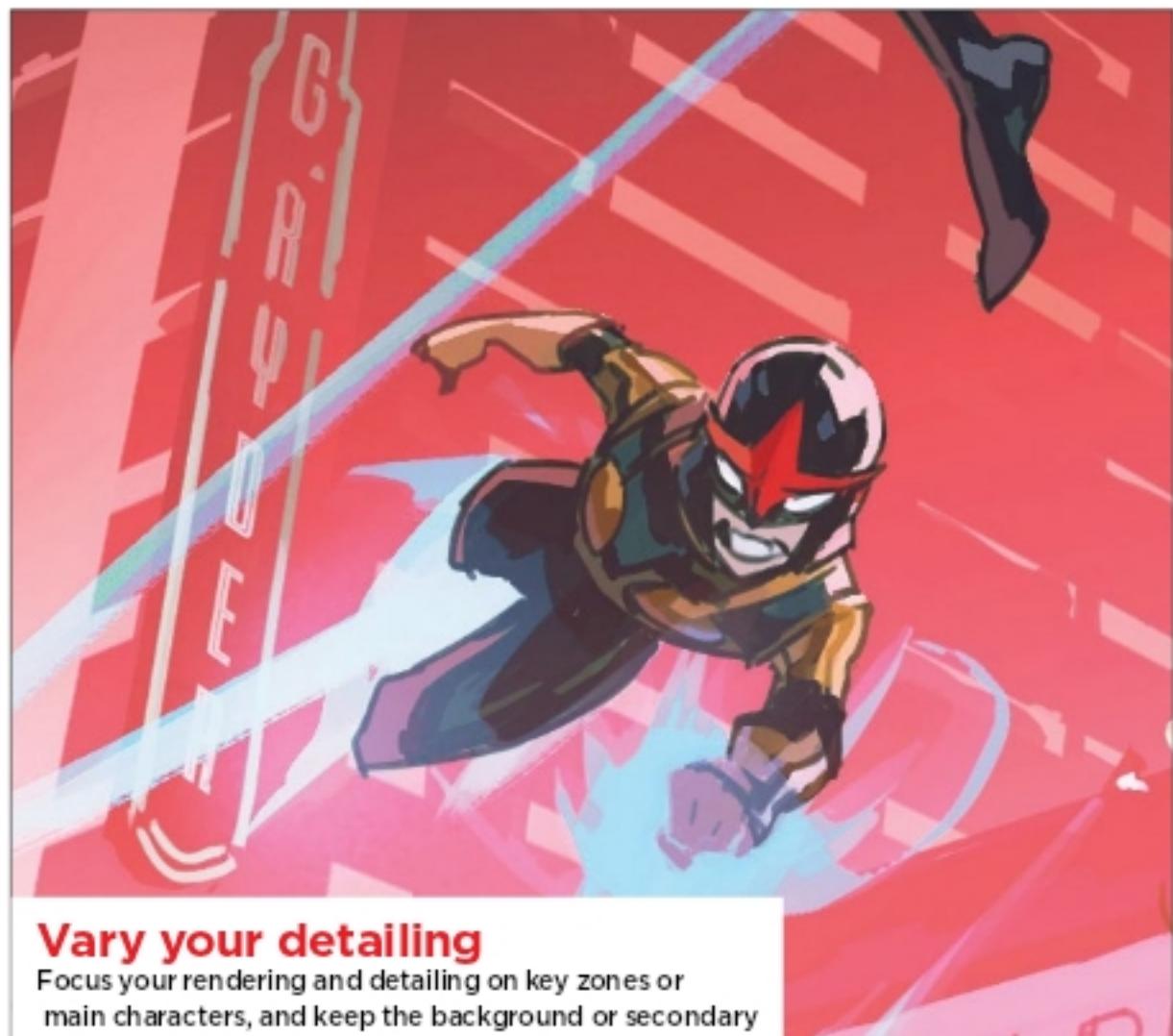
Workshops

STREET FIGHTERS



Anime look

Sometimes I keep the line art visible on characters or foreground elements. This creates an anime-style look while also adding a sense of depth to the piece.



Vary your detailing

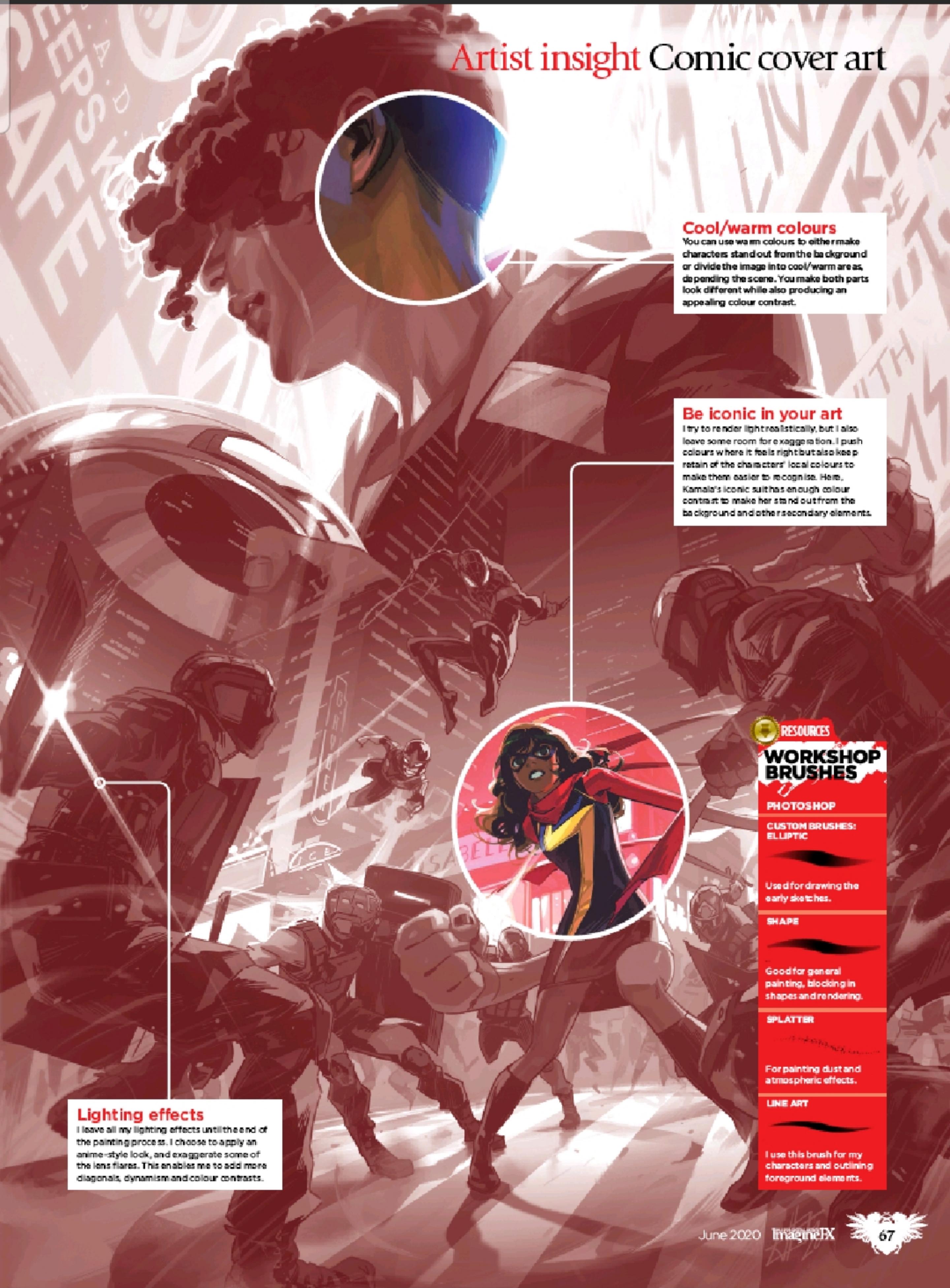
Focus your rendering and detailing on key zones or main characters, and keep the background or secondary elements more vague and sketchy. This creates more depth and makes the image more engaging.



Exaggerate effects

Push any environmental effects such as dust and wind. Illustration and comics are muted and static - exaggerate those effects to create a more interesting piece of art.

Artist insight Comic cover art



Next month

UK artist Anna
Hollinrake
shares how she
keeps healthy
and creative!



Next month

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Watercolour workshop

Artist Audrey Benjaminsen reveals how she paints creatures.

ISSUE 188 ON SALE IN THE UK 15 May 2020

Photoshop & Clip Studio Paint DRAW ACTION-PACKED PANELS

Steve Ellis reveals his process for injecting action and movement into his sequential artwork, helping to immerse the reader in his world

Artist PROFILE

Steve Ellis
LOCATION: US

Steve is a comic artist by day and a fantasy artist by night. His most recent graphic novel, *The Only Living Boy*, earned him a Best Artist of 2019 Ringo nomination. www.steveellisart.com



I love seeing action pages in comics. When I draw action scenes I want the reader to feel the sense of urgency. I want the page to feel visceral: if a character gets punched in the gut, I want the reader to hurt. If a character falls, I want the page to reflect the sensation of falling. A well-done action scene can be an immersive event for the reader.

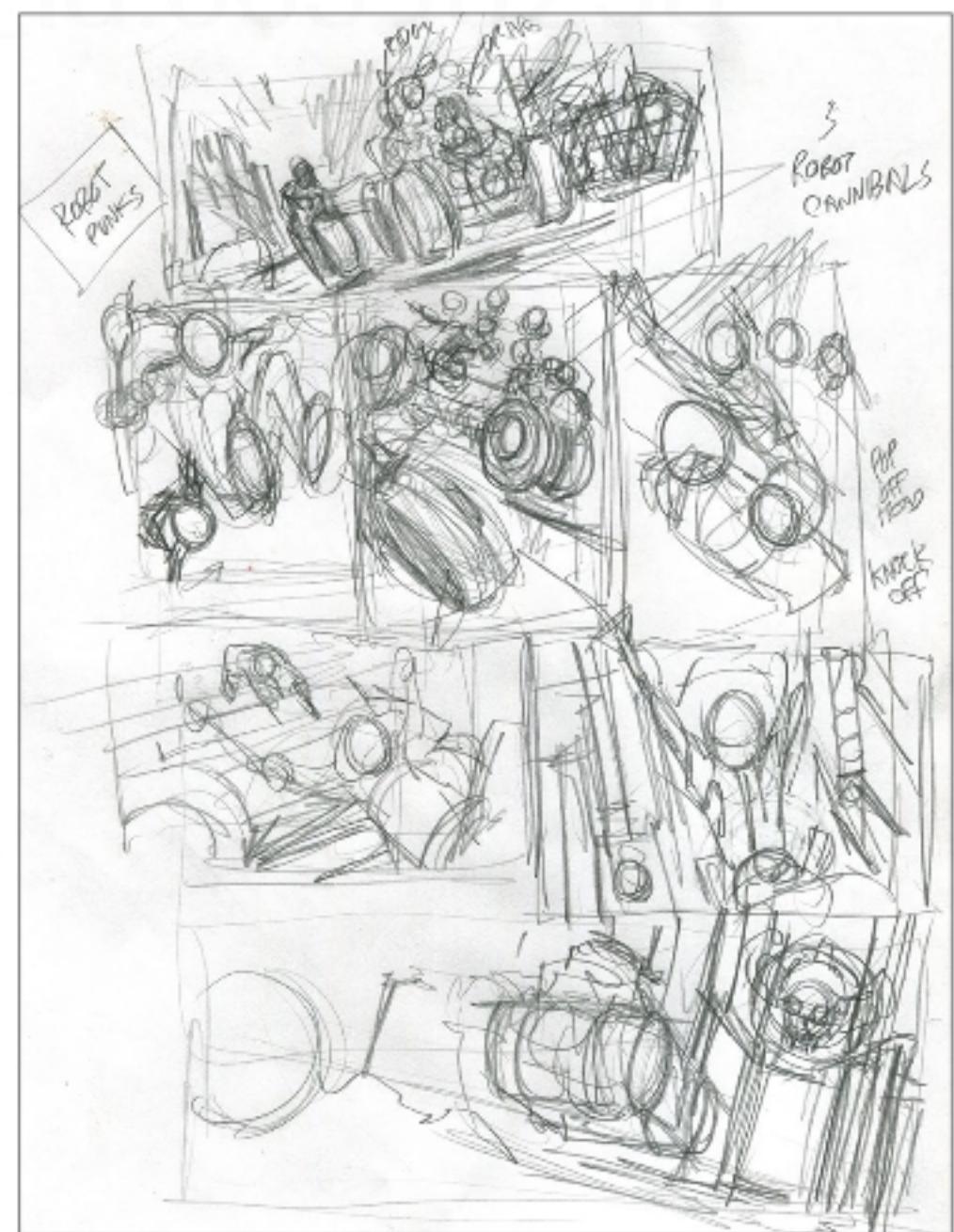
I take inspiration from some of my favourite TV shows and films. There are lots of similarities between films and comics, so I tend to use a lot of movie "tricks". Yet unlike film you get to see every moment on each panel, and you can go back and look at panels out of order to examine what you like about a particular "shot." Since there's no actual movement, you need to create the illusion of movement with your drawings.

In this workshop, I'm going to show you how to think about setting up an action scene, how to choose the right moment to draw for the most impact, and how to take the character and the reader through a complex step-by-step sequence while establishing a sense of speed. I'll lay out tips to maintain clarity and teach you about transitions between panels, and how to use movement to drive the viewer from panel to panel.



1 Pacing out the story

Sometimes the script gives me the plan, but usually it's up to me to provide the pacing. First I consider how the action begins and ends. Then I sketch random ideas of angles, shots, panel movements and actions. They're usually out of order and messy because I just want to react emotionally to the script.



2 The rough layout

I think about moment-to-moment action by lining up the angles and shots from my sketches to assemble a rough step-by-step layout that gets me from points A to B. Often each step becomes a panel. I'll draw a lot of extra steps, then edit them down to the most important ones. Each story might require a different number of panels. ➤

In depth Action-packed panels



Workshops



WORKSHOP BRUSHES

CLIP STUDIO PAINT

CUSTOM BRUSHES: G-PEN

A highly sensitive inking tool that flows nicely and gives a lot of line variation with pressure.



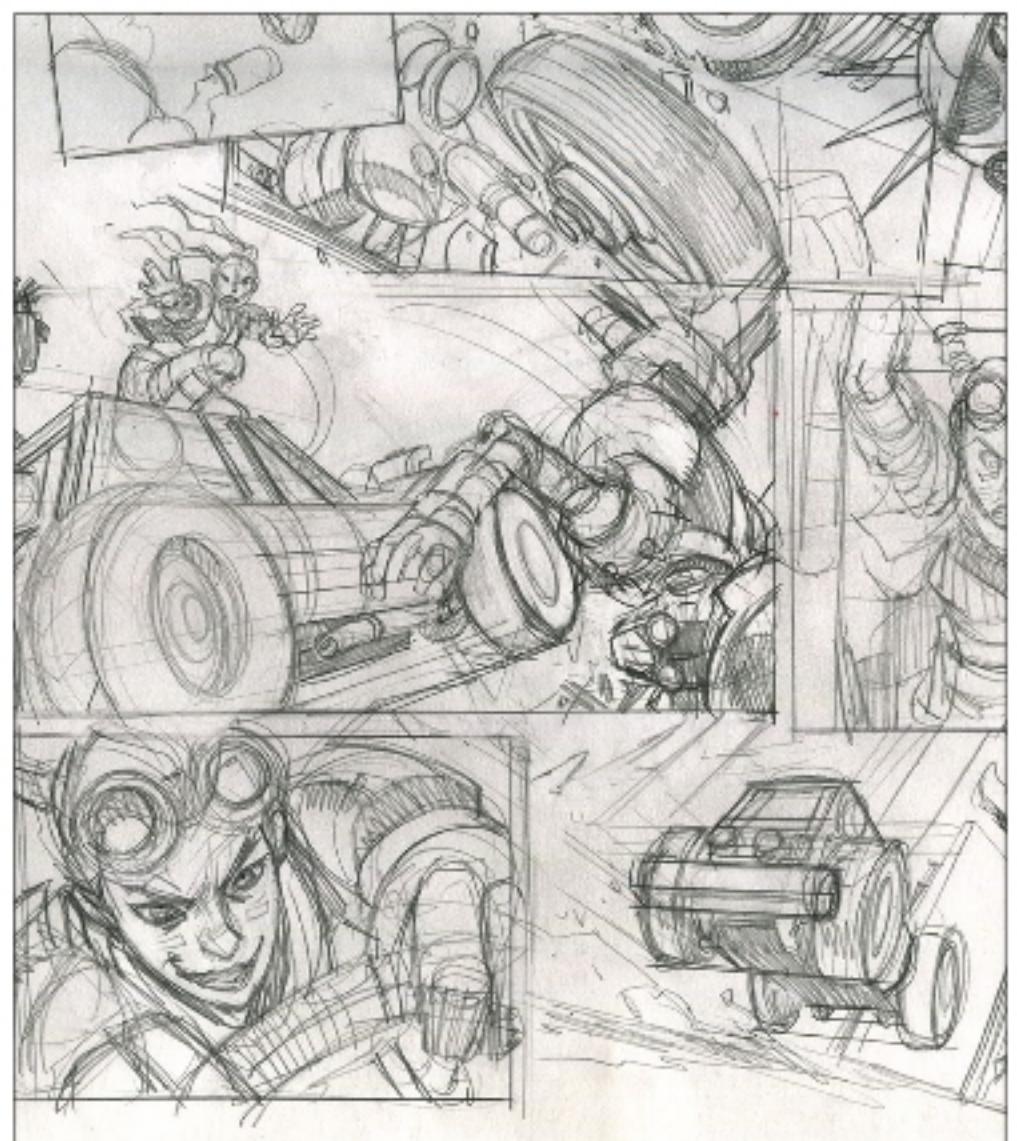
3 Sketching out the page

Now that I have the steps figured out as panels, I can think about how they work together as a page. Here, how the action of one panel flows into the next panel will ensure the proper left-to-right or up-to-down reading movement. At this stage I frequently drop a few panels to streamline the action as much as possible.



4 Establishing the setting

I choose a distant shot for the first panel to both establish the scene and the environment, and the relationship between the characters. This is vital so that when in the second panel the character jumps, we already know where she is in the space. We follow this up in the third panel with the character having landed on the jeep and her bike in the foreground crashing.

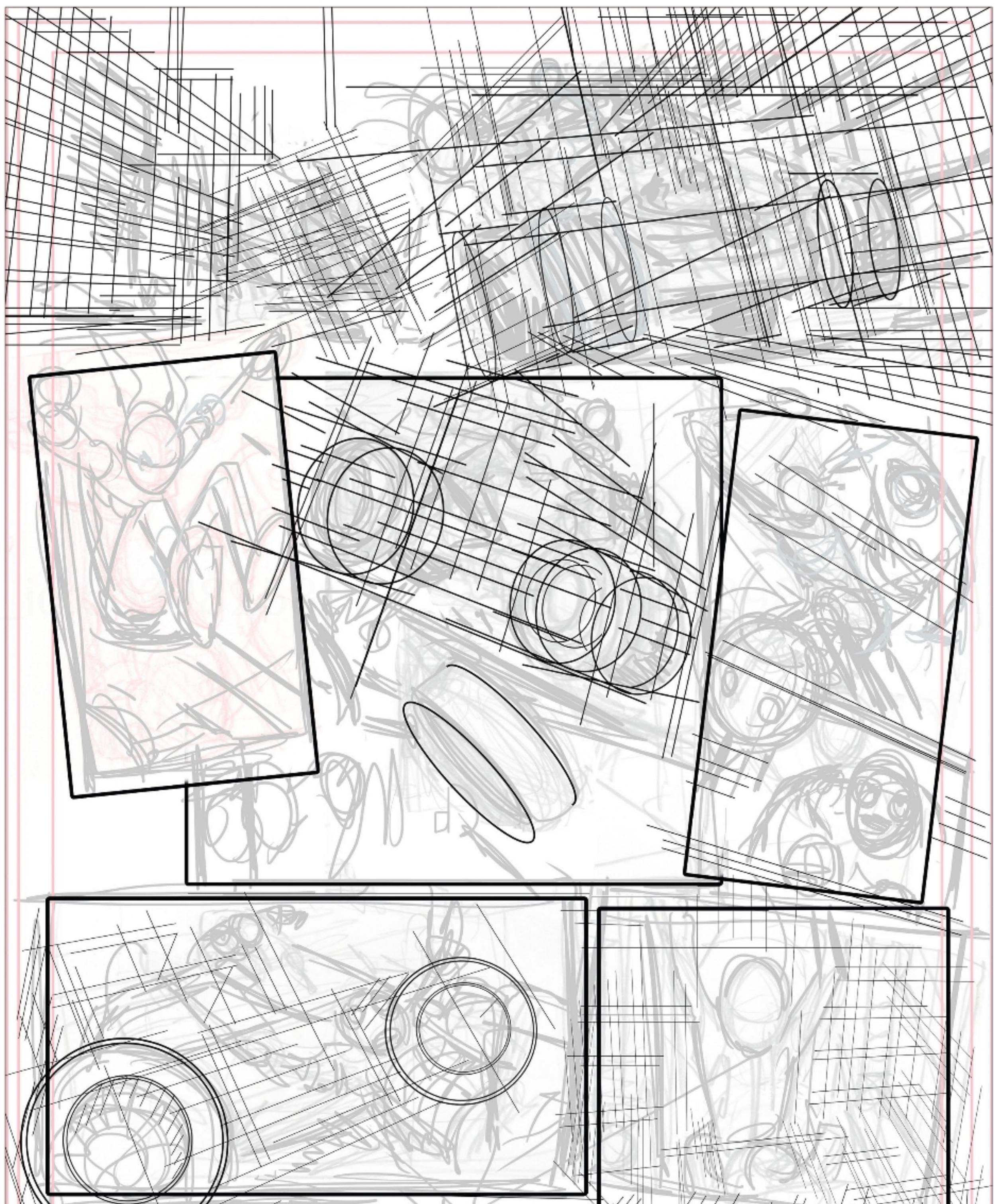


5 Following the action

In the fourth panel, I jump forward a few seconds. I'm relying on the reader to understand that in the time between panels (the gutter time) she's climbed up, gotten a purchase and is able to take a swing, knocking off the robot's head. The head is positioned down to direct the reader's eye toward the lower tier of panels.

6 Exiting the page

In the next panel, I draw the viewer's eye towards the left with the action of the car, and I set up the shot so the driver's body falls towards the right. Again, this should lead the eye to the next panel on the right. The next two panels are our character's moments as she takes control of the car and we drive off the page in the final panel.



7 Generating grids and borders in Photoshop

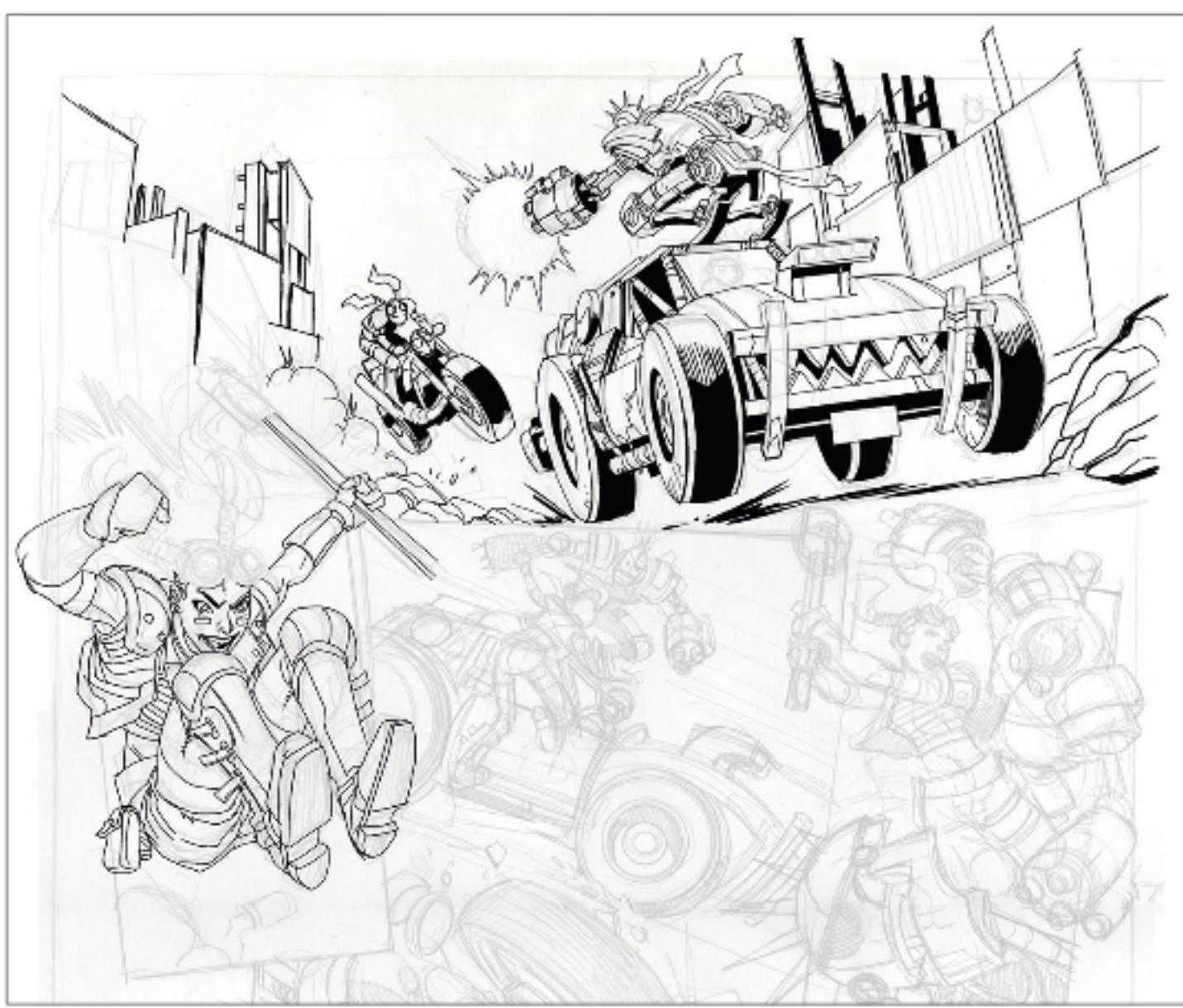
I like to create the illusion of a grid on a page and use angled panels for exciting contrast. In Photoshop I cut up the page and rearrange and resize, and zoom into panels for the most impact. This gives me a chance to rethink the borders and overlapping elements.

Workshops



8 Developing a bit of perspective and ramping up the action

I want there to be a lot of movement, so I'm using extreme angles on everything. However, I also want the reader to understand the space. Using Clip Studio Paint, I overlay one perspective grid for the fixed items to create a believable world and give the vehicles their own perspective grids. I want to make the vehicles look like they're bouncing around without breaking the laws of physics too badly.



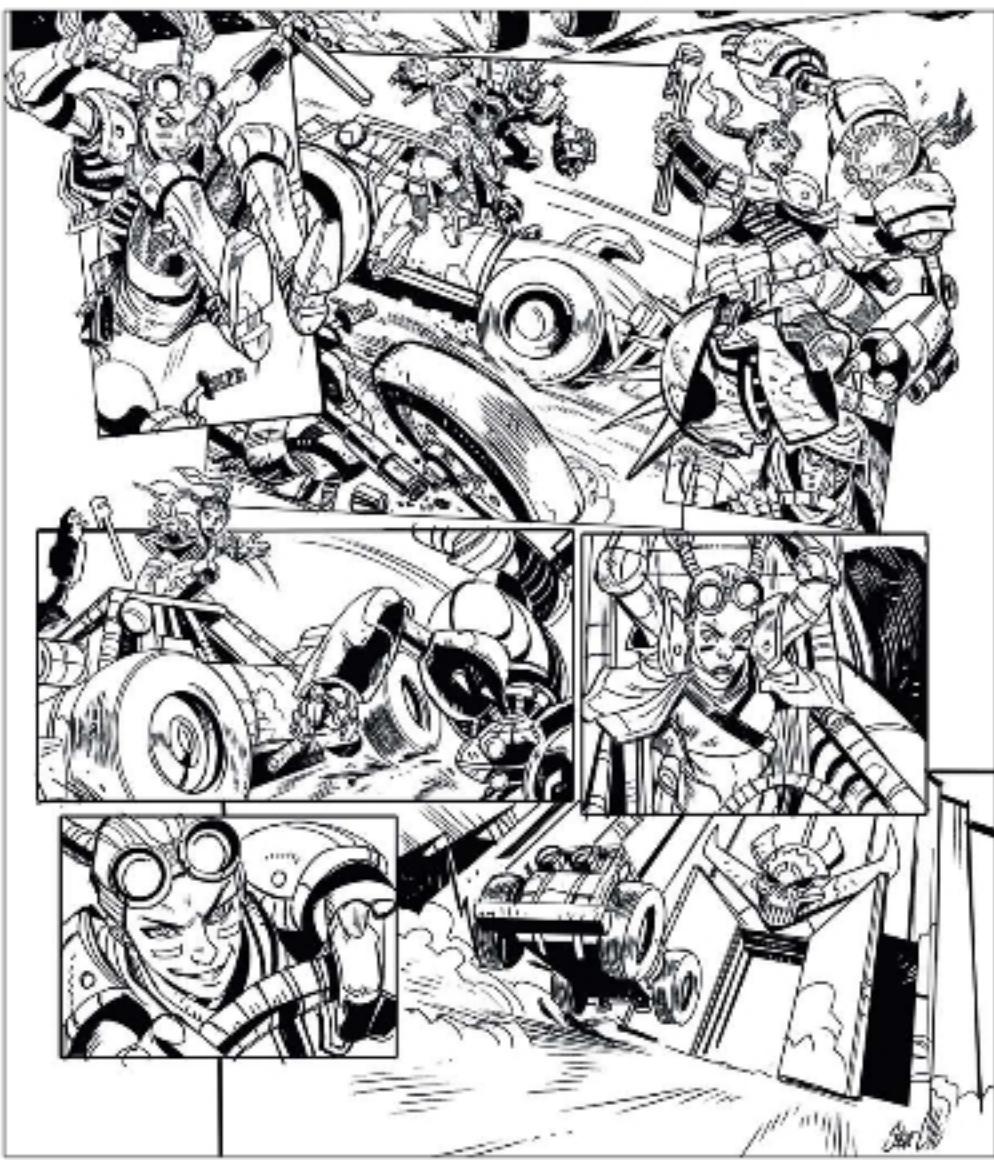
9 Pencilling and finalising ideas

I print the page out on to copy paper and lightbox the drawing on to Bristol paper, leaving out the messy or structural bits. I add details, finalise ideas and make sure everything's on point from my original designs. I also analyse the acting/facial expressions of the characters and how that affects the story. While I thought about it before, it's only now that the exact expressions and feelings start to come through.

10 Varying the weight of my ink lines

After scanning into Clip Studio Paint, I use the standard line marker with a single line weight on an Inks layer, tracing the pencils. Next, I differentiate objects from the background by using heavier line weights, looking for opportunities to let the varying line-weights of Clip's G-pen Nib create some active exciting lines. Broken up lines and scratchy lines really make things move.

In depth Action-packed panels



11 Adding textures and blacks

I use different textured lines (jagged, smooth, cross-hatch, parallel line grids and hash marks) for hair, rocks, rust on a car, blasts from a gun, fishnet tights, combat boots and so on. Black areas are great for separating elements and giving objects weight. The jeep looks like it's flying because of the scratchy lines behind and on it, and the black area under it showing it lifting into the air



12 Flattening in the colours

I create a layer under the ink layer and call it Flats. I change the ink layer mode to Multiply so I can see the layer below it. Next, I select areas from the ink line layer and fill them in on the Flats layer. Clip enables you to change the inks layer into a Reference layer, and you can select and fill in areas easily on the Flats layer.



13 Painting in the dark areas

I make sure the "flattened" colours are correct before adding the shadows. I use the Selection tool to grab areas, choose a colour that's darker than the current colour and paint them in using the Marker tool. Here, I'm only looking to create one value darker than the base colour. I don't need to get into deep rendering because I want the art to be dominated by the inks, and to flow quickly.



14 Highlights and finishing

I soften harsher colour edges with the Airbrush tool, then start to desaturate selected areas that need to recede to make important elements pop out. I "colour hold" the lines using a Lighten layer above them. I use a low Opacity layer on top to make action swooshes behind actions that I want to emphasise. As a finisher, I create a highlights layer on top and airbrush areas with bright whites for highlights, reflections and gunfire to really pump up the action!

ArtRage

BRUSH SKILLS IN ARTRAGE



Illustrator **Nick Harris** tackles a whimsical image about drawing and painting together, while exploring ArtRage's two custom brush engines

Artist PROFILE
Nick Harris
LOCATION: England

Nick has been a children's book illustrator for over 30 years. No wonder he wears glasses.
www.nickillus.com

GET YOUR RESOURCES
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There's much to recommend in the latest version of ArtRage, not least the additions to its Brush Designer controls. That feature – alongside the Stickers system – means you have two custom brush engines inside one painting program.

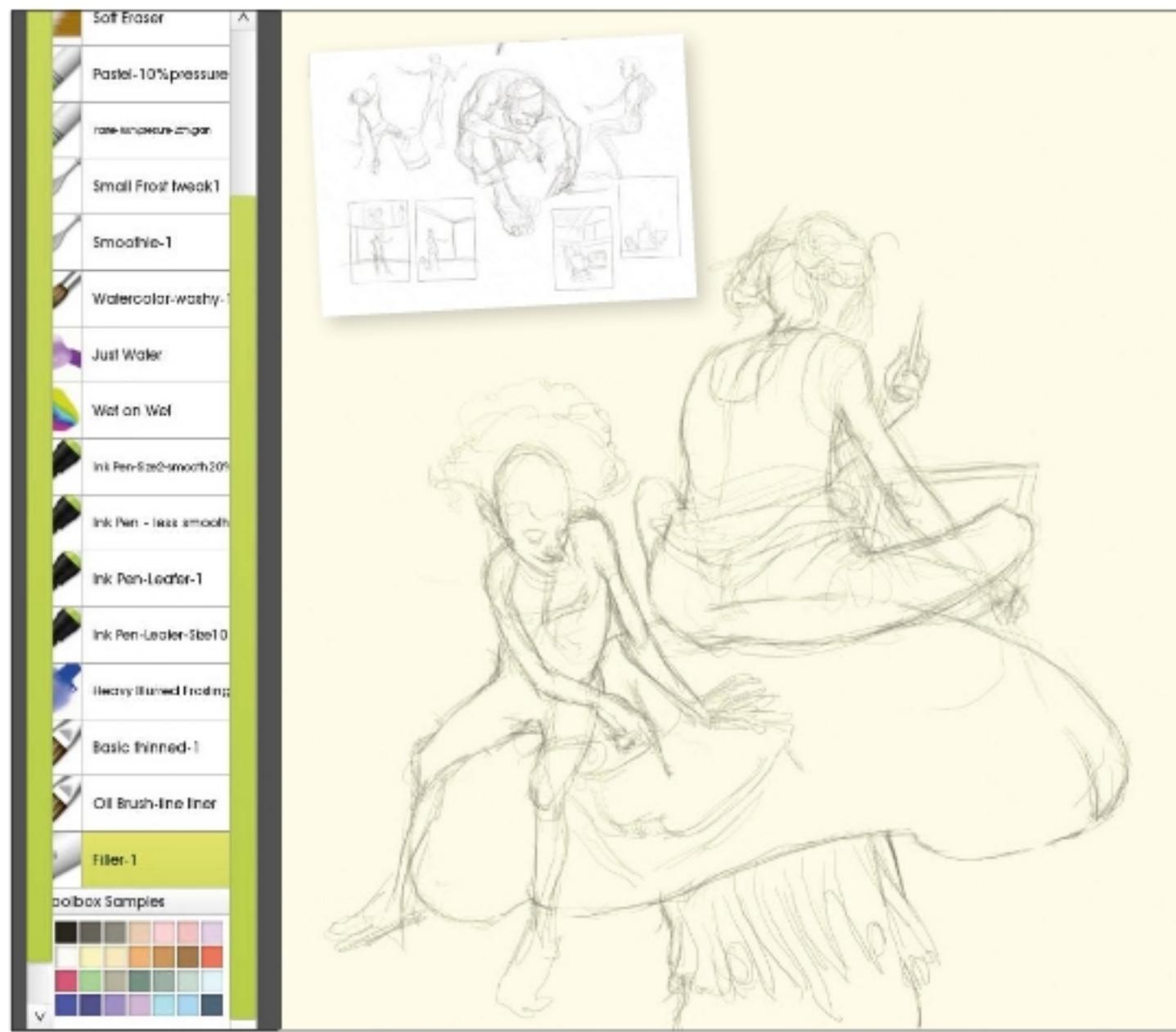
I only have time to skim the surface of what's possible with those brush engines here, because the creative potential in ArtRage 6 is now almost infinite. Hopefully, I'll skim

close enough to pique your interest about what they might offer you.

The meat of this image will be tackled with more basic tools such as the Pencil, Pastel and Watercolor brushes, combining solid base colours and translucent media washes. The challenge when introducing elements from the custom brush engines can be to make them sit comfortably among the more traditional mark-making tool emulations. While familiarity with ArtRage is an advantage, its

accessibility means that you won't be too hamstrung without it. I'm no ArtRage ninja myself, relying more on traditional media techniques combined with a relatively modest depth of technical knowledge to produce my artworks.

The painting will be themed on isolation, while remaining connected through a shared activity. I have in mind a fantasy woodland scene with a handful of characters enjoying painting together, while sitting apart. Let's begin, shall we...?



1 Sharpen your styluses

I set up a document at 200dpi. I'll bump it to 300dpi later, after the blocking-in stage. This helps avoid lag on slower machines and effectively increases the 500 pixel upper brush limit. I flood-fill the base with a warm tone and start sketching in pencil on another layer set to Multiply. I pin some warm-up doodles to the work space by clicking the Drawing Pin icon.



2 Putting things in their place

My working methodology is pretty fluid; compositions evolve as I go. The initial idea is to have two central figures drawing while sitting on a toadstool. Other figures are placed a discreet distance away doing the same. I doodle background shapes using the Pencil tool on one layer and block some pastel colours behind. I lay a translucent shadow over the foreground figures on another layer that's set to Multiply. ➤

In depth ArtRage brushes



Workshops

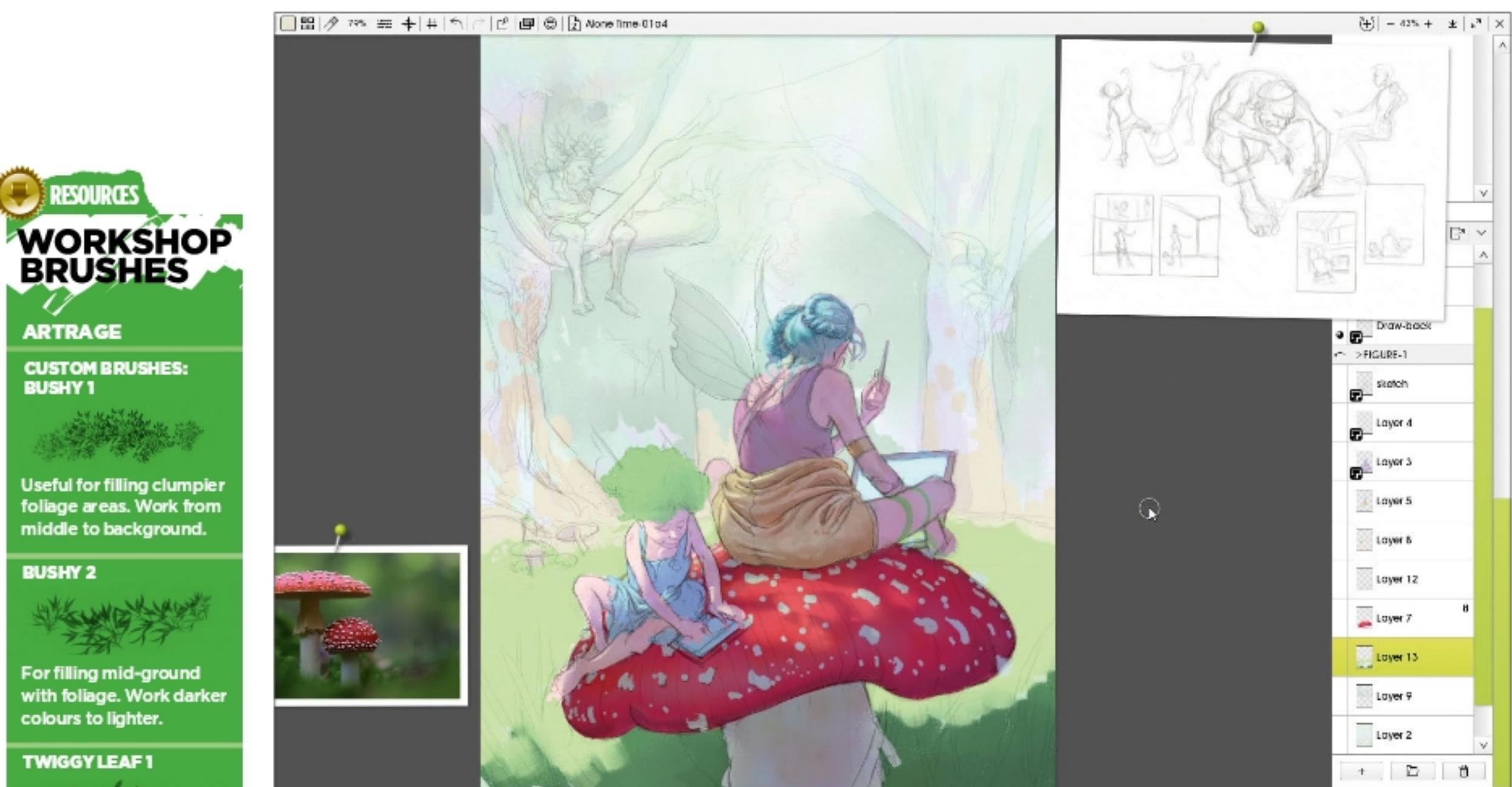


3 Blocking in using solid colours

I block solid foreground colours on a layer above the background one, but behind the shadow. These are bolder to separate them from the lighter colours behind. I'm using the Pastel tool for most of this stage. On textured paper this leaves rough edges – tidy them with the Eraser where necessary. I usually do this as I go along, or soften them using a suitable Blender or Palette knife.

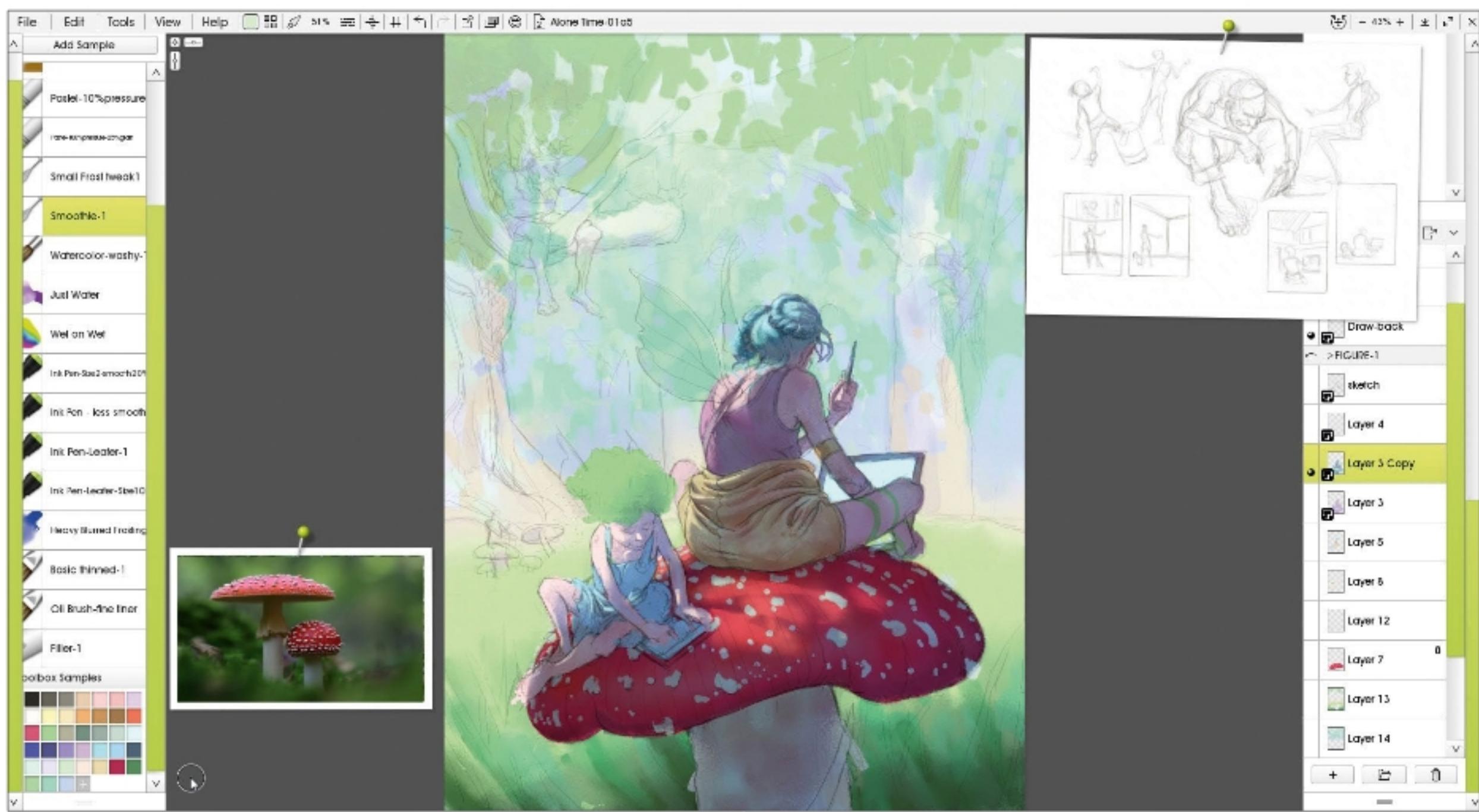
4 Making change to the scene

The figure front left isn't working for me. I remove it and draw an alternative using solid and translucent layers as before, and adjust the shadow layer to follow the new forms. The light source comes from high and left; the cast shadow across them suggests a tree or bush out of shot.



5 Use the Blender and Eraser tools to sculpt shadows

I work the foreground figures and their shadow up more, sculpting shadows with the Eraser and softening edges with a soft Blender where appropriate. Cast shadows are great for helping describe form. I load some toadstool references from Pixabay to help me with our foreground fungus. The Fly agaric helps to add a classic, fairy tale flavour.



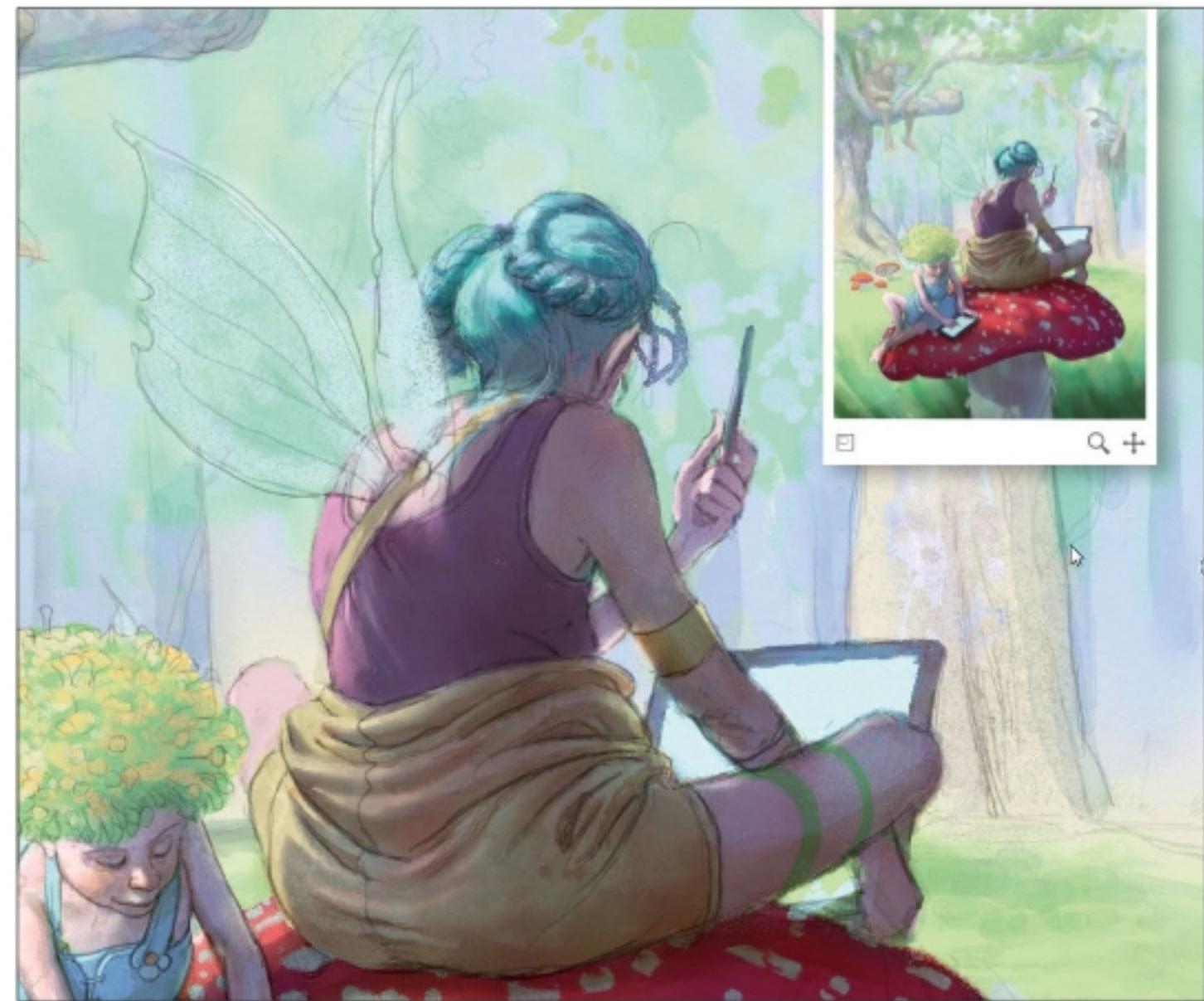
6 Beef up the background through the use of colour

Working all areas at once, I move on to the background again and introduce depth of colour on another layer. I still keep to more muted tones than the foreground, and also use more blues and purple tints. I deepen some of the shadow areas using a light watercolour wash. I set up several 'tone' layers for this earlier. I find it offers more control and depth to have several such layers standing by.



7 Add a glow to the tech

I continue to work all over, blocking in some colours on the background figures and cutting shadow away to help describe their form. I also begin to tighten up their line work a little. Meanwhile, in the foreground I cut the shadow away to add glow to the tablets our pair are using. Yes, I know folklore and tech shouldn't mix.



8 Double vision... but in a good way

The foreground figures need attention. I spend some time refining and tidying line and tone, but try to avoid spending too long on any one part. It's easier to keep a better perspective while zoomed in if you open a new View, which is an option you'll find on the Reference palette. You can scale the window as big as you want and paint in either window. ➔

Workshops

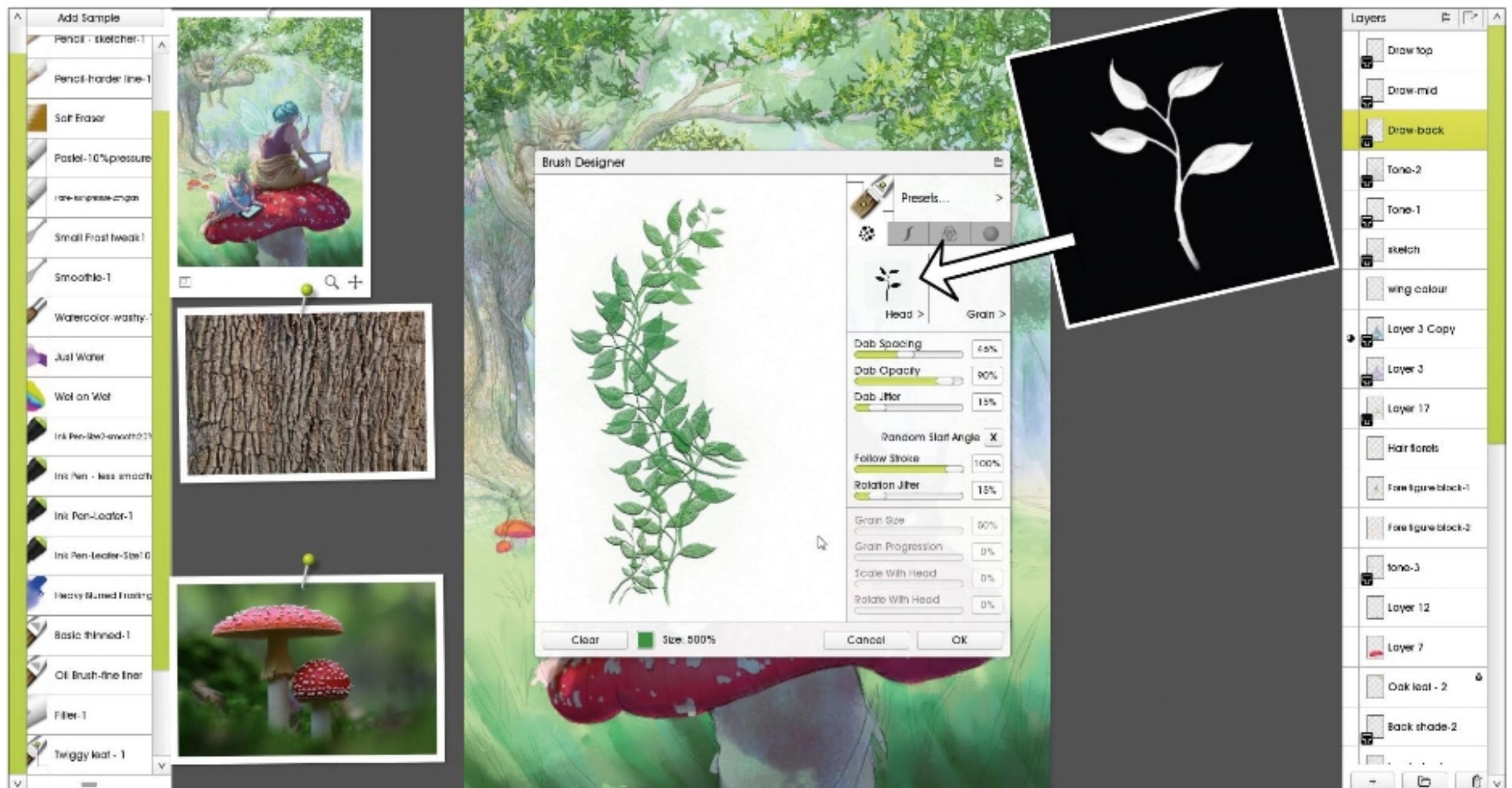


9 Detailing the characters in the scene

I hop about, spending time on different areas. The characters all need attention because the eye tends to seek figures out first. Our tree sprite is most likely the secondary focal point after the foreground group, simply because of his size. This is all me using Pencil, Pastel and Watercolor tools in combination on various layers. But those branches are looking a little too bare for my liking...

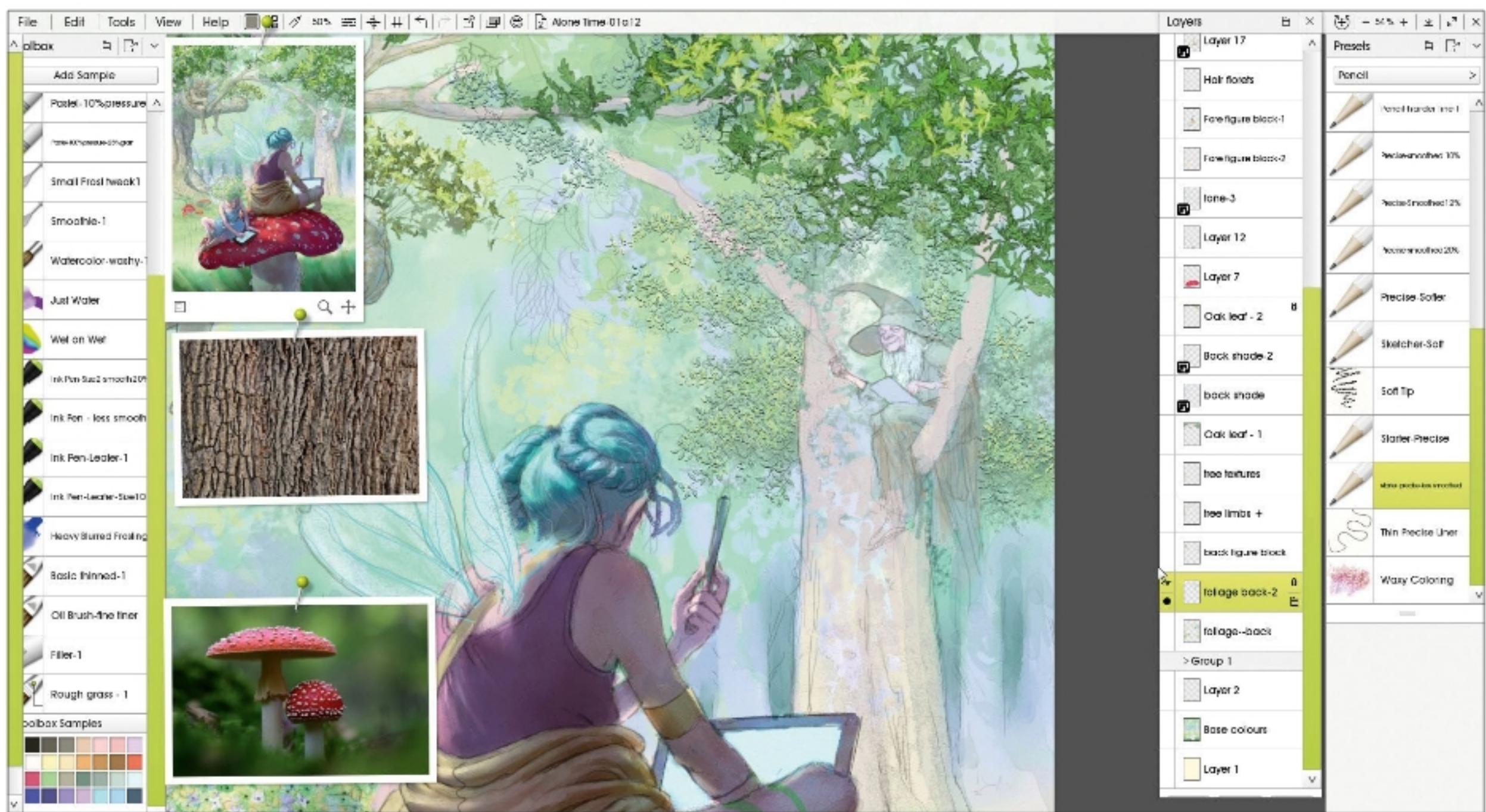
10 A sudden rush of greenery

I select a foliage Sticker brush to splash some leafage around the nearest branches. I spread it across a couple of layers, painting darker colours underneath and lighter above to create some volume. It's a bit 'stuck on' looking, though. I try to soften the effect in places with a Blender brush, and overpaint with flat colours to push other areas back (locking Layer Transparency intermittently).



11 Manufacture a mark maker

I knock together a quick brush head for the Brush Designer. I take a 750 pixel square and paint a small branch motif in white on black. Next, I load it into the Brush Designer and play with the settings until I get something usable. I've applied Paint Depth, but may go back and redo the brush later without this setting if this doesn't sit right. You'll find the Brush Designer palette in the Tools menu.



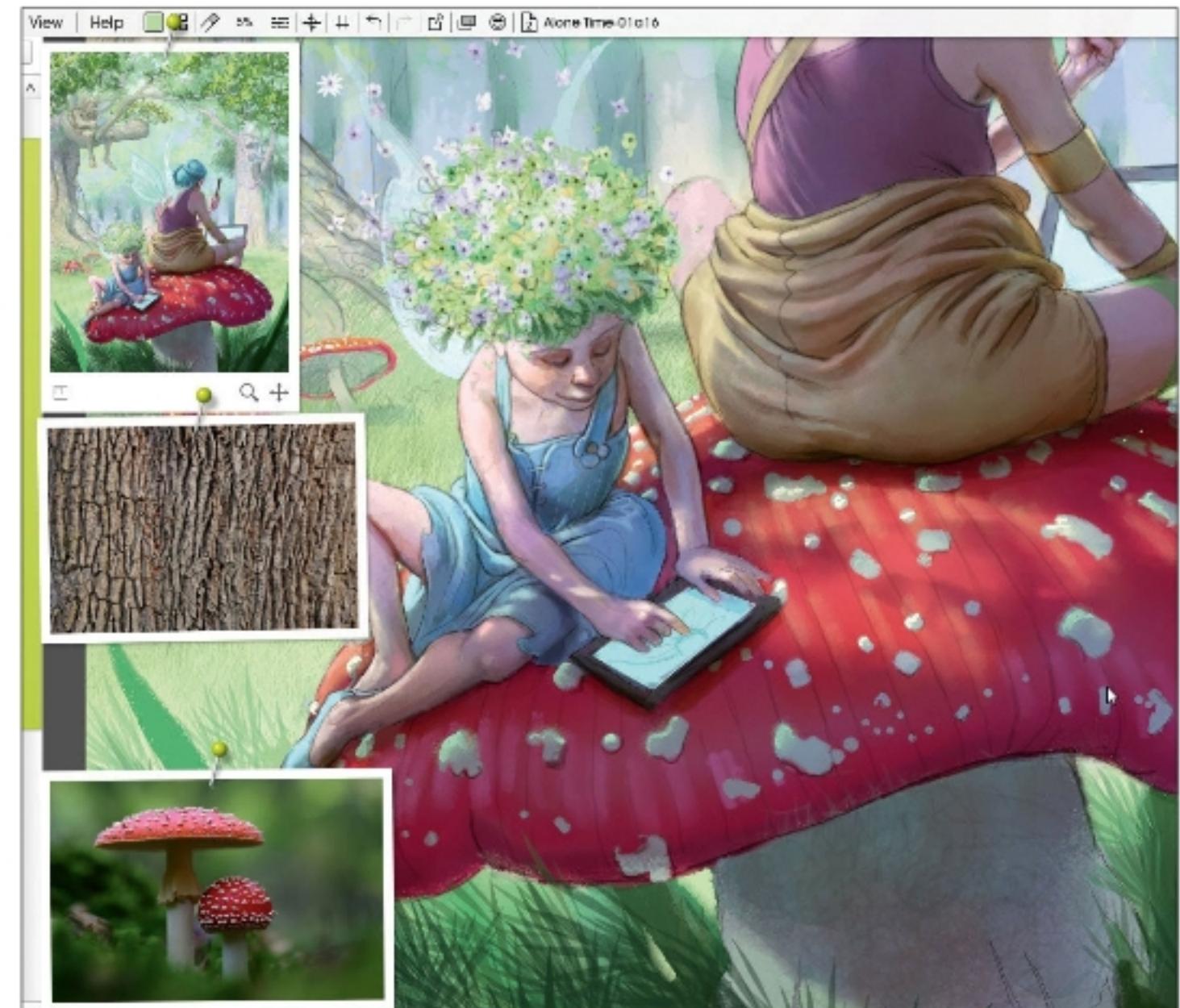
12 Painting over foliage using a different brush setting

That foliage near our blue-haired witch doesn't fit in. I reopen Brush Designer and simply turn off the Paint Texture option, before resaving the brush with a different name. This means that I retain both variants. It's a quick job to erase and replace the problem area. I also add some wild flower Sticker effects on the faerie child's hair, to introduce some extra visual interest to the character.



13 Flattening layers and tidying up

The layer stack is becoming cumbersome, and we're quite far along, so I save the file and flatten everything. It's refreshing to commit to decisions, and feels like a fresh start to take me through to the home straight. I work round the image tidying up those loose ends – softening areas that leap forward too much and picking out details that may have gotten lost along the way.



14 Placing highlights and accents

Now's the most enjoyable part: adding highlight and accents. I do this on a layer on top of everything. This is the time to tweak those little details while making sure things still work as a whole. Note that I've only used a few brushes and tools here – ArtRage has a wealth of creative toys for you to play with. Enjoy! ☺

Clip Studio Paint & Traditional art skills **CREATE CONTRAST WITH INKWASH**

Comic book artist **Pepe Larraz** shows how he's able to separate different layers on an inkwash illustration by using tonal value and contrast

Artist PROFILE

Pepe Larraz
LOCATION: Spain

Pepe studied for a sculpture and art history degree at college, and has been working as a professional freelance illustrator and comic book artist for more than 15 years.
<https://ifxm.ag/pepe-l>



Everything in my art is defined by the relationship between light and shadow. And because I work in black and white most of the time, this relationship is expressed by tonal value and contrast. Black, white and everything in between.

For this workshop I'm going to create an illustration that will feature three characters, each one with a distinct contrast between black and white. This will help to separate the

different layers on the image, and will act as an unifying thread to explore the possibilities of inkwash.

There are only four ways to represent the relationship between light and shade in a painting: dark over light; light over dark (both of these approaches result in strong, powerful silhouettes); light over light; and dark over dark (these two rely on subtle tone variations).

In this particular case I'm going to use a scheme of dark to light to dark. The foreground will have the more

extreme contrast (almost pure black against pure whites) while the middle layer will display middle values – different tones of grey with almost no pure black. The third figure, the source of light, will be portrayed in almost white over white flames. The flames will be silhouetted by the dark background.

An illustration has to tell a story with only one image. I need to convey the idea unequivocally, in the most expressive and aesthetic way possible. Let's do this...

WORKSHOP MATERIALS

PAPER
Arches Watercolour Hot Pressed 300g/m²

PENCIL
Mechanical pencil, 05 HB black graphite lead and Faber Castell kneaded eraser

INK
Winsor & Newton Indian ink

BRUSHES
Winsor & Newton Petit Gris #000 and #1, and Da Vinci Maestro #2

MARKERS
Uni PIN Fine Line markers #0.8, #0.5, #0.2 and #0.05, Tombow Calligraphy pen and Edding 1455 marker

WHITE RETOUCHES
Winsor & Newton's permanent white gouache, Molotow acrylic marker and Prismacolor white pencil



1 Transfer the digital sketch

Nowadays I do my sketches in Clip Studio Paint because it enables me to cut, copy and move elements around more quickly. Then I print the sketch and trace it on a lightbox. This ensures that the paper for the definitive piece remains clean.



2 Fast, clean pencilling

The traced pencils should be clean and detailed, but I'm not aiming for beautiful line art – just a functional, clear image. More graphite on the paper than necessary makes it harder to carry out the water techniques. ➤

In depth Create contrast



Workshops



3 Inkwash materials

I use Winsor & Newton's Indian ink, preferably the one with a dropper. It's useful for controlling the amount of ink I mix with water, and to replicate it in case I run out of the mix. The brushes are Petit Gris #000 and #1 (also Winsor & Newton). They can absorb a huge amount of water. I use a DaVinci Maestro #2 for details.



4 Arranging my material and references

The table setup, with both the digital sketch and references on screen, enables me to keep an eye on what I want to achieve with my art. I use three mixes of ink and water: light, medium and dark. I can combine them or add more water or ink to create additional medium or darker values.



5 First things first

I start with the background to provide a reference value. The goal here is to separate the different layers of the image using tonal value and contrast: the foreground is going to be the darkest; the middle ground is going to have medium and lighter tones; and the background is dark again. Dark to light to dark always works.



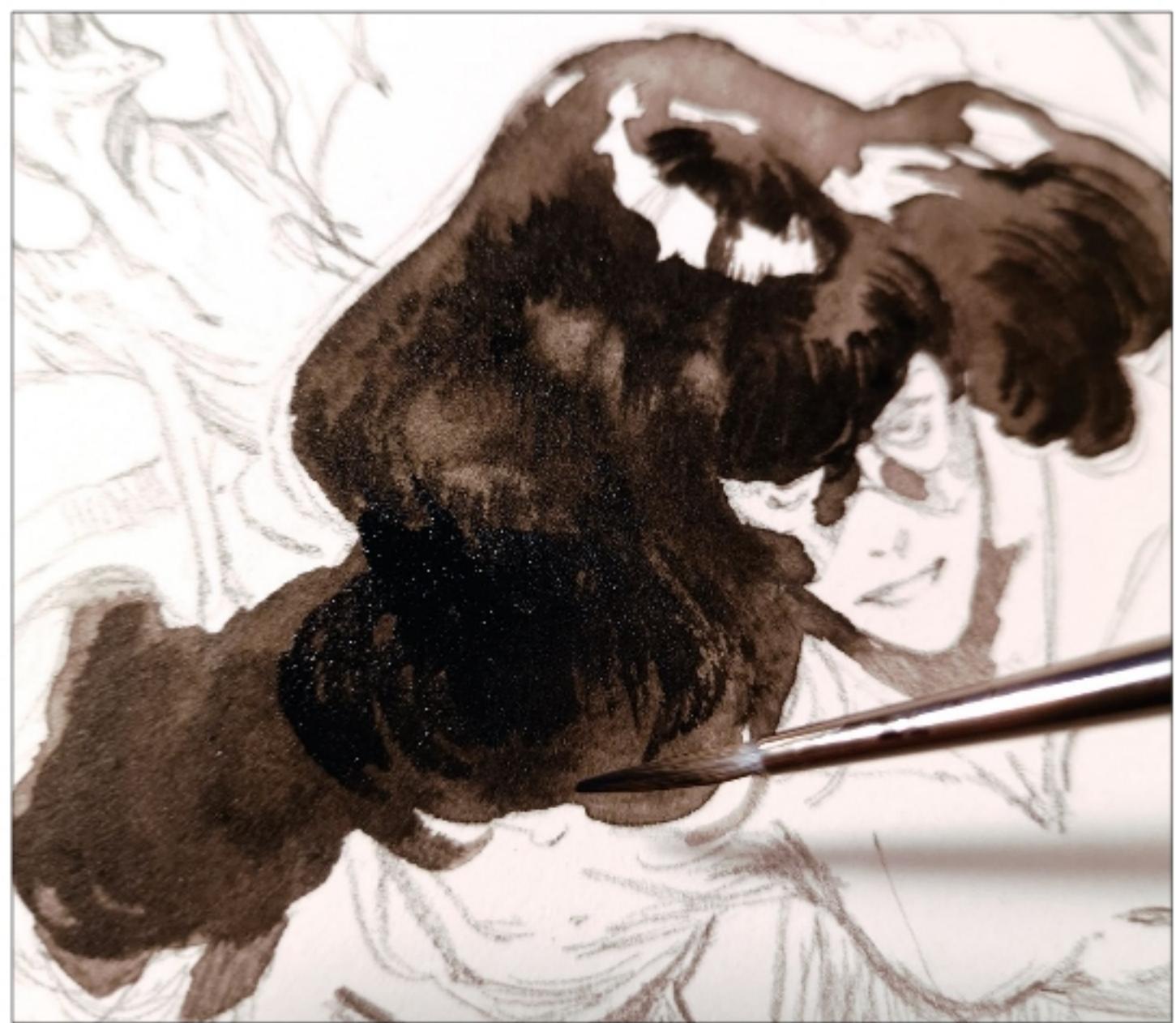
6 Using position to strengthen a focal point

The focal points of a figure painting are always the faces and hands, especially if they're looking straight at the viewer. The key focal point of an image is the one that features the most contrast, while the frame's focal point is the bottom right-hand corner, because we read from top to bottom, and left to right. The head of this figure has enough contrast and is in the right position, forcing the viewer to look at it.



7 Applying a wet-on-wet inkwash

In the background and the foreground I work wet-on-wet applying different tones of dark inkwash over a wet surface. This way the ink creates gradients that help to render smoother volumes and beautiful textures. I don't pursue an extreme realism – I like the materials to speak.



8 Adding details and shaping the hair

Once the main volumes are completed I can add details, along with textures where necessary using a dry brush. Hair is tricky: the thousands of strands have to look slightly chaotic to give the impression of movement, but it also has to have a structure underneath, to avoid creating a messy blob on a character's head.



9 Assessing the inkwash

The inkwash is done and you can see the contrast on the different layers: almost black and pure white on the foreground; middle tones on the second figure (almost no white on it); and the lighter tones on the third, on the upper half. Dark tones in the background creates the silhouette of the fire. Time for the final line art.



10 Inking materials

For the final line art I make use of a collection of inking materials. For lines I use Uni Pin fine Line Markers (#0.8 #0.5 #0.2 and #0.05) and a Tombow Calligraphy Pen. For big, black areas I use an Edding 1455 with a customised tip (some parts were cut off with an exacto to create a dry brush effect). For white lights and corrections, I use Winsor & Newton's permanent white gouache, a Molotov acrylic marker and a Prismacolor white pencil. ➤

Workshops



11 Deciding on the amount of lines

I prefer to do the inkwash stage before line art: this way I know how many lines the art requires. Doing things the other way round might lead me to redraw elements unnecessarily. I use the line to support the grey tones, defining volumes, but I need to do some crosshatching.



12 Crosshatching the gradients

I finish defining the gradients using crosshatching and outlines. There's no proper formula for doing crosshatchings correctly – just keep an eye on the distance between lines. Practice is the key to it. I use a lot of crosshatching marks in my artworks and only sometimes am I completely satisfied with the results.



13 Create highlights using gouache

I use white gouache for highlights and corrections. Again, hair is tricky. After doing the gradients, the dry brush and some line art, I add some highlights on it to make it brighter and to provide contrast. I spend a lot of time drawing hair.



14 Retouching and signing the artwork

After applying the white gouache, I use the white pencil to give a smooth render to the white areas where I don't want a sharp edge on them. This is also great for glazing with white because the gouache is very opaque. As a final tip, I recommend signing your art in a place where it can't be cropped off when the final art is printed. Make it readable, too so people can find your work in the shop or on the internet.

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

Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists



This issue:

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

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Relight your creative fires**
Sasha Ira reveals how taking a different approach to her art provided a welcome injection of motivation and inspiration.

**98 First Impressions:
Dustin Nguyen**
This US artist's first commission was creating art for a Batman crossword puzzle.

FXPosé

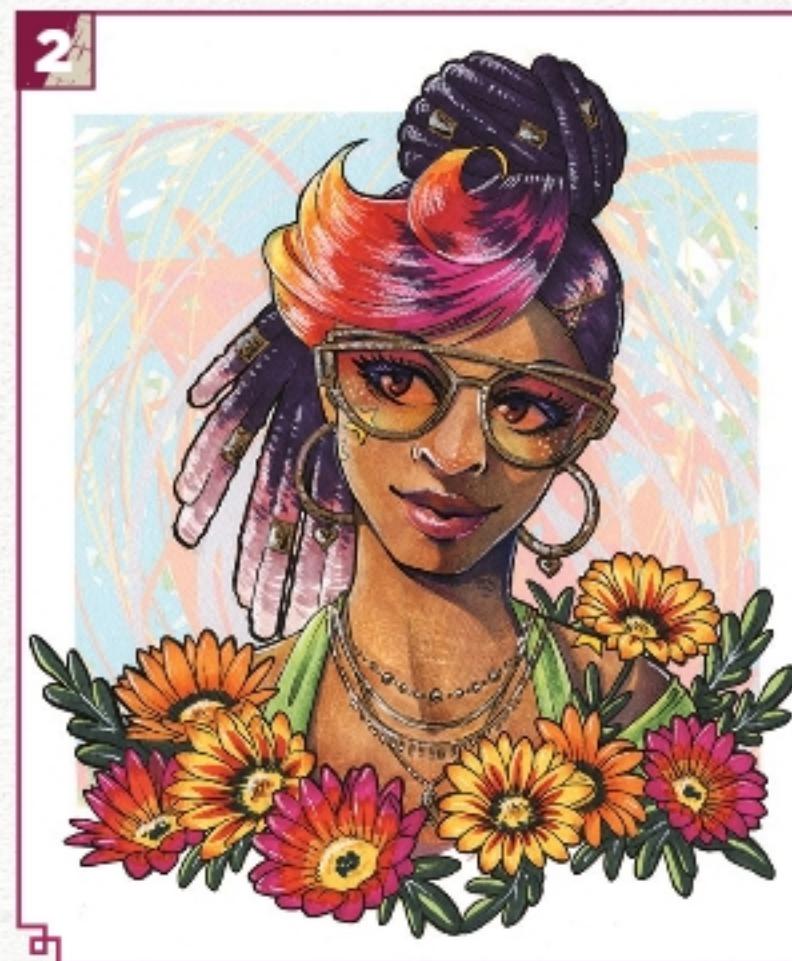
SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Alicja Chakravarti

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Acrylics, coloured pencils, Copic markers WEB: www.artstation.com/aachakra

"I started drawing at a young age," says Alicja, who studied studio art and costume design at university. "Anime and Art Nouveau have been major influences in my work."



1 SHE-WOLF BYTES

"I often think about where the supernatural and our technological world collide. My goal was to give each wolf a hint of personality and distinction."

2 MAKAYLA

"This piece was inspired by my son's baby-sitter. I admire her fashion sense. The background was a collaborative effort between me and my son's scribbles."

3 TO SLEEP AMONG GIANTS

"An exploration of our relationship with nature and the dreams nestled within our hearts. I wanted to challenge myself with depicting water and foreshortened forms."

Inspirational art

31



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

June 2020

ImagineFX

91



Ana Neves

LOCATION: Switzerland MEDIA: Acrylics, colour pencils WEB: www.instagram.com/ananevesart

Ana is a self-taught mixed media artist who focuses on painting fantasy and romantic illustrations. "Mostly I like to paint strong female figures, sometimes as goddesses." Nature, photography and fairy tales are her main inspirations.



1 O OBJETIVO

"The meaning of this painting was to never forget your objective, no matter how long your path is."

2 OBLIVION

"I wanted to paint the meaning of the word, to remind me to keep the good thoughts and memories. To write it down and never forget it."

3 RENEWAL

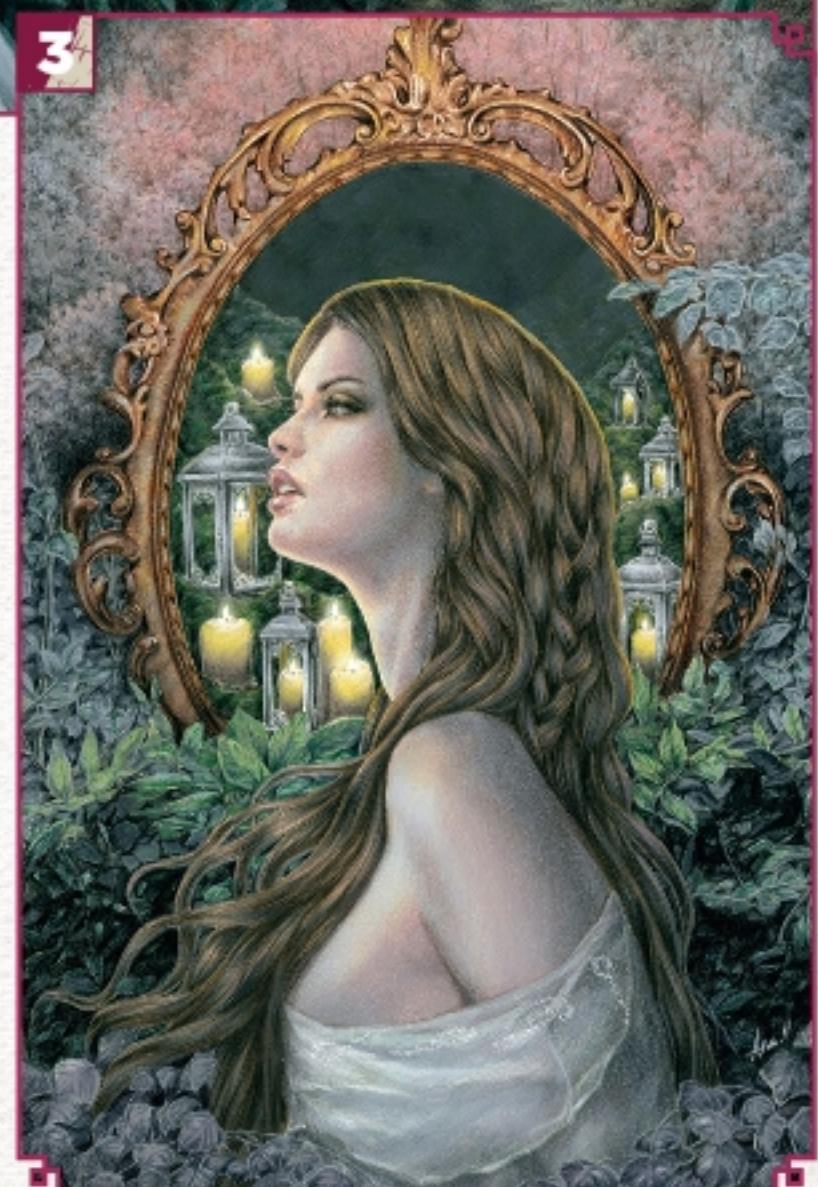
"In this piece I wanted to reminisce and go back to an older style. I had fun with it and have used what I learnt again."

4 ARABELLA

"This portrait was more of a challenge to try and get out of my comfort zone, since I prefer to paint smaller figures."



3





Oils

RELIGHT YOUR CREATIVE FIRES

SASHA IRA reveals how taking a different approach to her art helped her to develop as an artist, providing a welcome injection of motivation and inspiration

After a solo show in 2018, then another small solo that was held at the end of last year, and showing at a few other exhibitions in between them – all the while trying to make time for personal projects – I was feeling incredibly burnt out. I had been lacking in inspiration and feeling unsatisfied with the pieces that I was creating, becoming even more critical of my work.

After my last show finished I was unsure of which direction I should go in. I had doubts about whether or not pursuing art was something that I wanted to continue.

Around this time I found myself studying works of art that I normally didn't pay much mind to, and was beginning to feel inspired by art that seemed so differently rendered from my own. This motivated me to begin something new. And so I started this small painting, letting myself

approach it in a different manner, more slowly, questioning things I didn't before. And even if others may not see the difference compared to my other works, I feel I was able to grow and learn from this piece and can say I'm quite happy with the end result.



Sasha is a self-taught artist from the Chicago area who works primarily in oils and graphite. See more of her artworks at www.sashaira.com. ➤

Step-by-step: Use oils to paint a character study



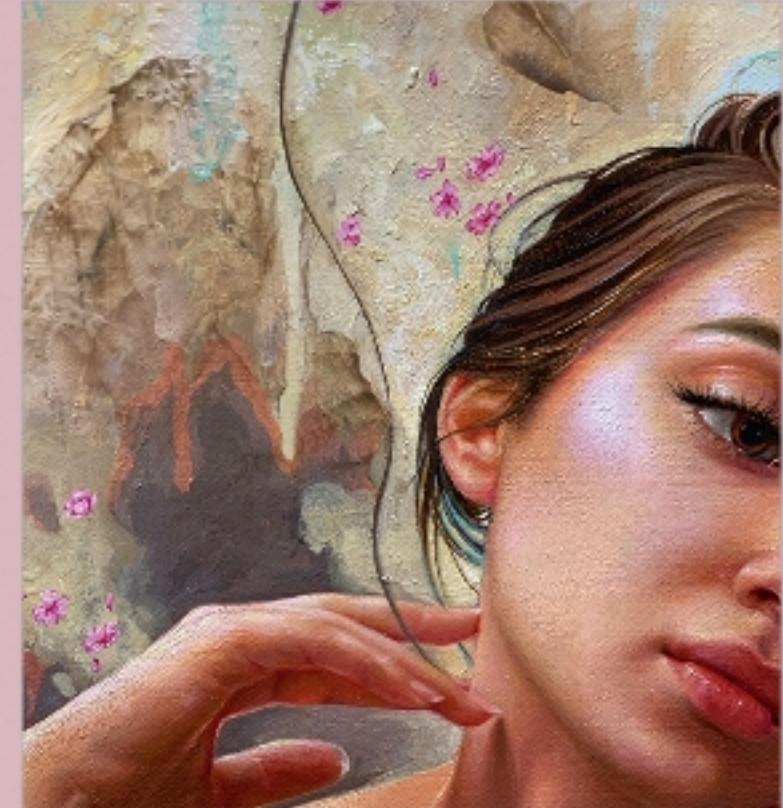
1 SKETCHING OUT IDEAS

I almost always begin with a few rough drafts; this piece was no exception. I start by sketching out some ideas in blue lead, mostly just trying to figure out what elements I want to bring into this piece and the composition of the background. A few notes are written down as well and possible colours that I'm thinking of using.



2 DRAWING ON THE CANVAS

Sometimes I'll make a refined drawing after the initial draft to transfer over to the canvas with graphite, but this time I decide to move straight on to drawing it out on the canvas. I then spray the line art with a bit of fixative, wait for it to dry and begin painting the first layers with oil paints that are thinned out with gamsol.



3 DETAILING THE FIGURE

After everything's painted in I begin refining. I focus on the details, adding the lashes, more highlights, and glazes to deepen the shadows. I play with the background, adding thick layers of paint, pushing it around and taking some away. Layers applied with a wedge are added on top, allowing the bottom layers to show through.



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Points of interest: Portraiture advice

Glazing strategies

Lately, I've come to really enjoy glazing. It's a great way to create depth gradually with layers, or to add a pop of colour that gives more vibrancy or even changing the hue. Here I use glazing to darken the shadows on the face and to the lips for a more rosy look.

Maintain the original light

I try to keep the lights and shadows from the original photograph in sync with the background. This helps create an appearance of the face and figure being illuminated from one end and having the dark background and shadows on the other end.

MATERIALS

SURFACE

■ Linen panel

OIL PAINTS

■ Michael Harding
■ Gamblin
■ Williamsburg
■ M. Graham & Co
■ Lefranc Bourgeois

MEDIUMS

■ Galkyd gel
■ Solvent-free fluid

TOOLS

■ Princeton Aspen
brushes
■ Utrecht Mangan
brushes
■ Blick Masterstroke
Taklon brushes
■ Catalyst wedge
■ Spatulas

Use the canvas

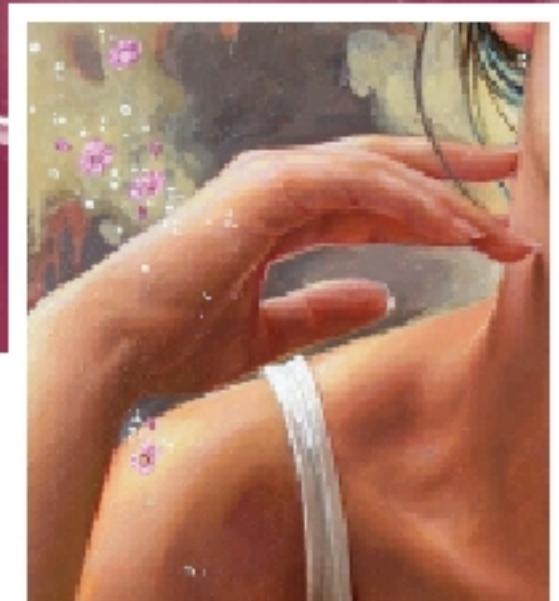
Here I've left some of the white of the canvas showing through. By leaving parts in areas unpainted and exposing the white of the canvas underneath, you're able to create the appearance of highlights. It can even help to give a unique and raw look to certain areas.

Capture the right mood

With this painting I want to express a tranquil mood by focusing on the pose and executing it as naturally and relaxed as I'm able to. Though quite challenging, having the right pose and being able to render it well can really help express the right mood and feeling in a portrait.

Keep things simple

When painting portraiture that's refined and detailed, having a simple, uncluttered background can help bring in the viewer's eyes to focus on the portrait. Small figure details might go unnoticed in a background with a lot going on.



First Impressions

※ Dustin Nguyen ※

A Batman crossword featured early in this US artist's career...



Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art? My family moved around a lot, so my

influences come from mostly observing people and their everyday lives. I arrived in the US as a refugee fleeing Vietnam by boat in the early 80s. I grew up in Columbus, Georgia until I was about 12, when I moved to southern California.

Coming from a rural southern area like Georgia to the heavily populated, more diverse part of California enabled me to observe a range of people and different lifestyles. This comes in handy when developing characters, behaviour and so on.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your artwork? I'd say music, cinema and design. The works of Wong Kar-wai: the direction, pacing, storytelling, his characters, their subtle gestures and



SNAPSHOT (BACK COVER)

'An example of the sketches I'm doing for myself. They're more loose and I let the paper and paints do whatever they like.'

how they interact... all that. Before comics, I was a 3D mechanical designer, so my love of machinery and their uses follow me to this day.

Does one person stand out as being helpful during your early years? The year I broke into comics was the year I learned the most, and mostly it was that I didn't know the basics. I got to meet and work alongside Jerry Bingham (Batman: Son Of The Demon artist) at Stan Lee Media where I watched him paint in acrylics and learned a lot about style versus flaws, storytelling and just how to approach a painting. His advice to this day has kept me on the right path to being an artist and being able to make a living from it.

“I get the best results with headphones on, music blasting”



ASCENDER COVER 11

'It's the return of Driller! There's just so much room for painting mistakes and nuances that add to his character.'

What was your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent? This was a Batman crossword puzzle art page for DC Comics! It was for a children's magazine promoting milk, and I got to draw Batman, Robin and a bunch of other Gotham characters. I'm sure it represented the best I could do at the time ha ha, but being able to draw Batman as a first gig isn't bad.

What's the last piece you finished, and how do the two differ? The most recent is a cover for my creator-owned comic book series with Jeff Lemire called Ascender. The two are different in almost every way: from materials, execution to the subject matter. One thing they both have in common is my love for them both, which is probably the most important part of any project.

What are your painting rituals? I get the best results with headphones on, music blasting and late at night when the rest of the world is sleeping.

How is your art evolving? Lately my projects have enabled me to be more reckless with my style, worrying less about making everything polished to perfection. Loose, energetic and full of nuances were things I've always admired in so many, but was never able to cut loose. I'm starting to relax more.

What does the future hold for you? Hopefully the "one for me, one for them" plan for comics: continue to have my foot in both the mainstream comics world, but at the same time work on passion projects that drive my imagination while enabling me to keep moving forward and learning more. But definitely comics – it's all I really want to do forever.

Dustin is a two-times Eisner Award-winning US comic creator. You can explore his art at www.dustin005.com.

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