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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

How you can think like a sculptor
see page 54

BE A FUTURISTIC DIGITAL ARTIST

Creative ways to get painting in Clip Studio Paint with **Mel Milton**

ARTIST OF THE YEAR
SUBMIT FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN!
SEE PAGE 10

+

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Make engaging imagery with colour & texture

ALSO INSIDE...

ADVICE ON CAPTURING MOOD IN YOUR WORK
HOW TO TACKLE ABUSE IN THE ART INDUSTRY
SKETCHES, ARTIST STUDIOS AND MORE...

WORKSHOP DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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FUTURE
ISSUE 194

SAM NASSOUR ON HOW TO BREAK THE RULES OF CHARACTER CREATION!

Image by Nick Harris - Tutorial IFX 187

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ArtRage 6

Welcome to...

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

The art community can be a collaborative, inclusive and wonderful world to be a part of, but despite this there are people within it who use their power to take advantage of others.

Recent claims and admissions of abuse in the art industry have come to light. Because of this, I knew we had to talk to people in the industry about what we – collectively as a community – can do. The resultant article, Tackling Abuse in the Art Industry on page 22, can't claim to be exhaustive or offer full solutions to the problem, but we can help shine a light on the industry we represent and begin the delicate conversations that you can continue with co-workers and friends.

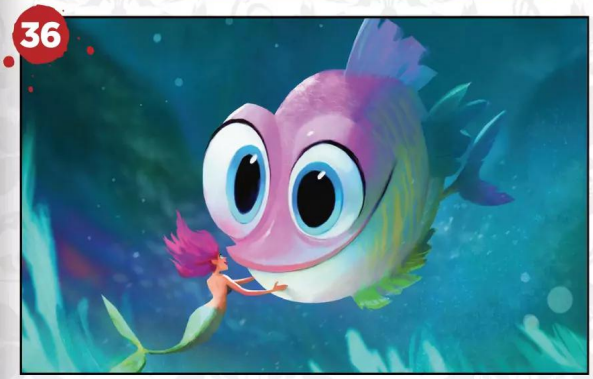
Whether you've been affected by these events yourself or realise that you need to be an ally to others, please look for the advice and guidance in our Get Help, Be Supportive section on page 25. I'd like to thank the artists who agreed to talk to us about these issues, as it's never easy to speak out.

Look after yourselves.

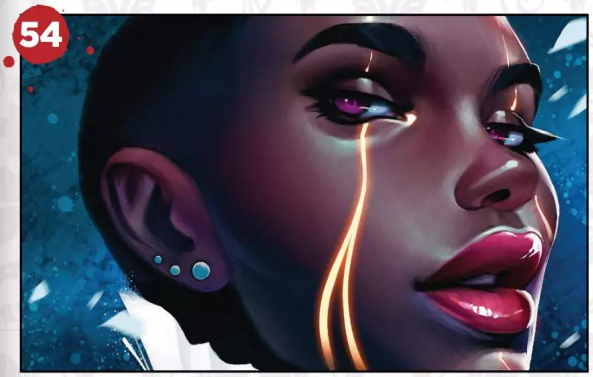
Claire

Editor in chief
claire@imaginefx.com

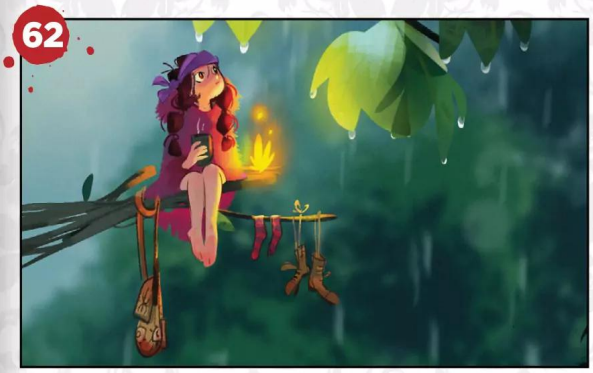
EDITOR'S CHOICE Three of my top picks this month...



The eyes have it
If you don't crack a smile at Sam Nassour's characterful artwork, you're probably dead inside.



The future is here
Mel Milton's work is always on point. I regularly take a trip to his Instagram feed for an eyeball treat.



Take shelter
Rising concept art star Taraneh Karimi captures a beautiful scene of shelter, hope and comfort.

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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

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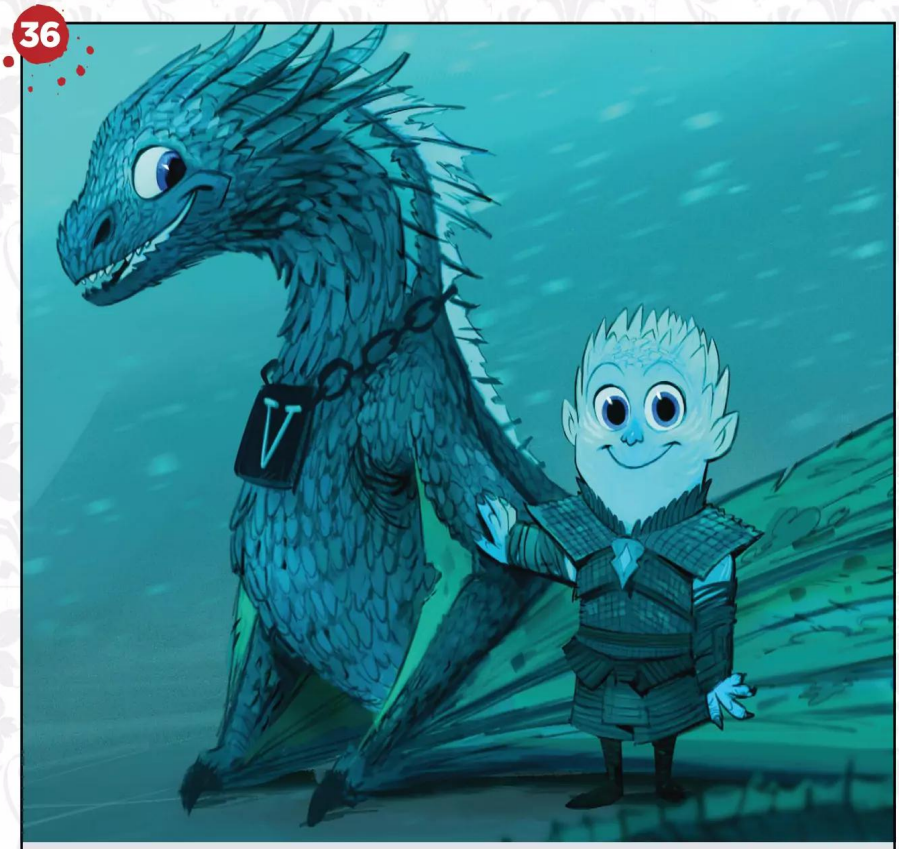
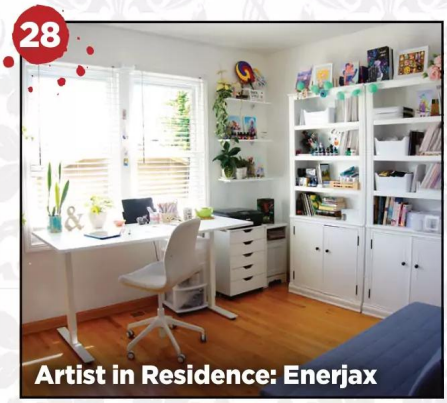


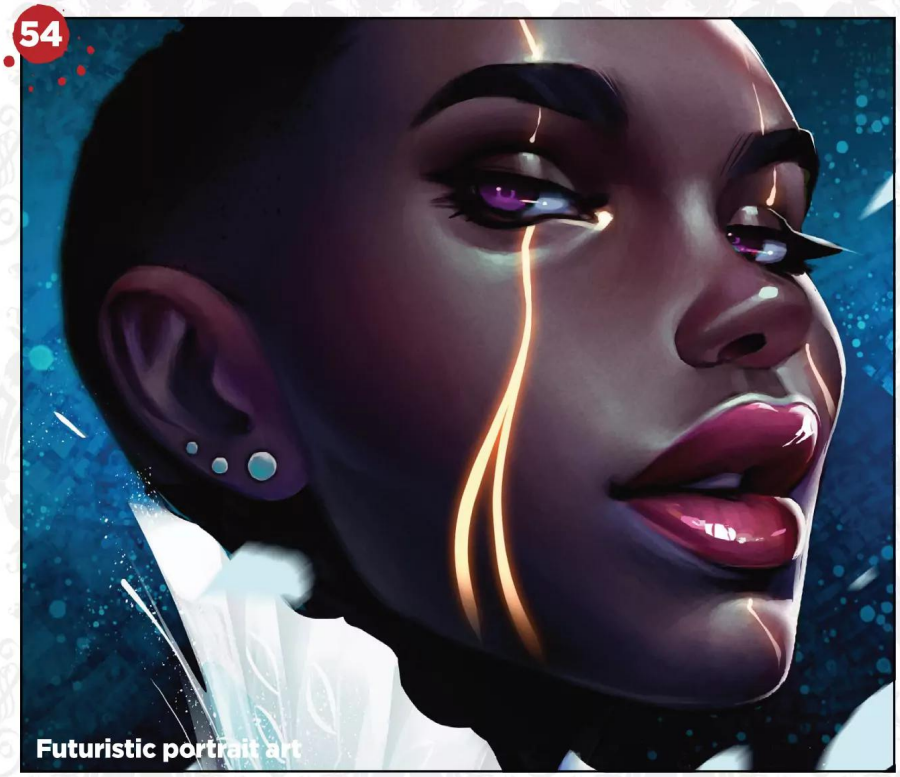
Artist Portfolio

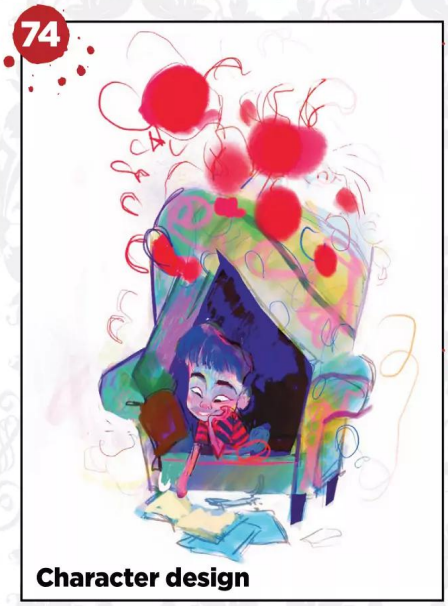
SAM NASSOUR

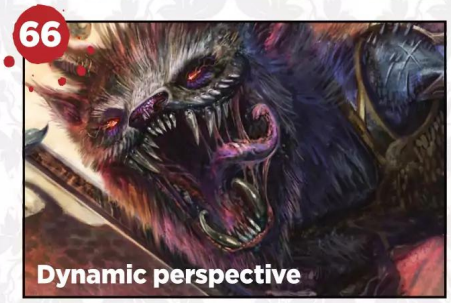
"I felt naturally gravitated towards simplifying shapes and designs"

Sam on his early art style









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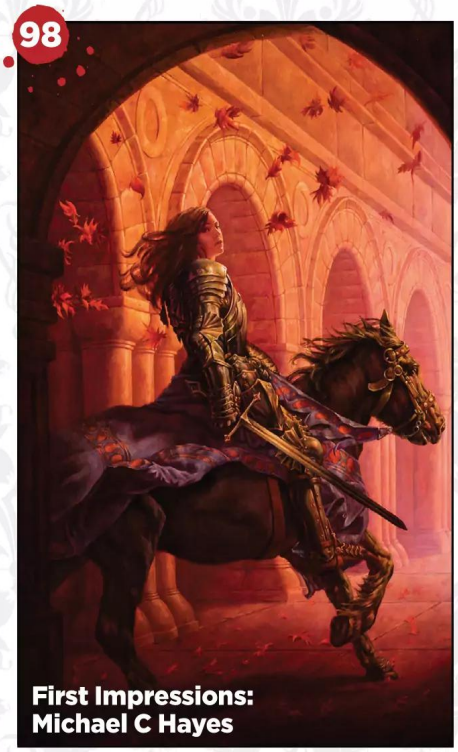
Mel Milton thinks like a sculptor when working with values.

62 Capture mood in your art
Learn how Taraneh Karimi conveys mood and emotion in her paintings.

66 Create dynamic perspective
Mike Corriero covers forced perspective and composition in a fantasy scene.

74 Bring texture to your character designs
Oona Holtane on capturing human nature and storytelling in her artwork.



Traditional Artist

88 Traditional FXPosé
Discover this month's selection of the finest traditional art, sent in by you!

92 Workshop: Varnish acrylics and create textures
David Body varnishes acrylic paintings and develop textures in the medium.

98 First Impressions: Michael C Hayes
The US fantasy artist reveals where things finally 'clicked' for him…

ImagineFX Resources

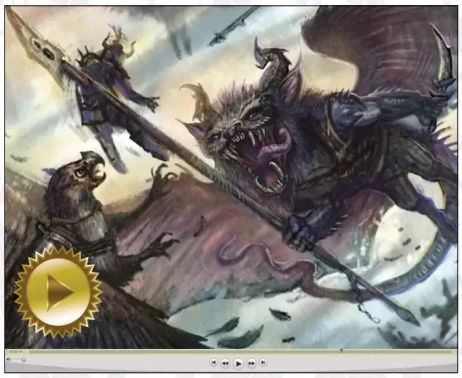
Visit **http://ifxm.ag/194digifutartist** to download this issue's workshop videos and custom brushes

WORKSHOP VIDEOS

OVER 1 HOUR of video tutorials from pro artists to watch and learn from!

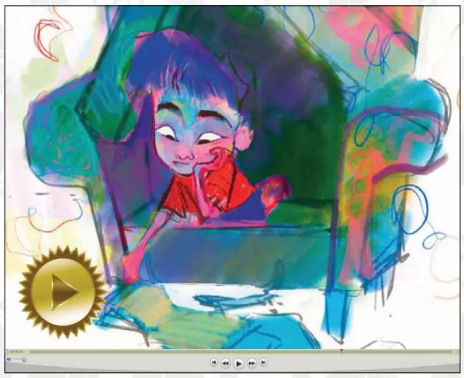
Think like a sculptor when working with values

Watch how Mel Milton uses Clip Studio Paint to build up the values of this issue's stunning cover art, before he moves on to colour. Turn to page 54 to read more about his process.



Dynamic perspective advice

See how Mike Corriero ramps up the drama in his composition. There's more on page 66.



Develop engaging characters

Watch Oona Holtane as she refines her image's storytelling. Her workshop's on page 74.

PLUS THESE CUSTOM BRUSHES...

FLAT MARKER BRUSH
Mel Milton alters his Cintiq's pressure sensitivity to blend with this custom Clip Studio Paint brush.

CHALK BRUSH
When painting this issue's cover art, Mel used this Clip Studio Paint brush to lay in the background.

SPLATTER BRUSH
Once he had created the background's chalk pattern, Mel used this brush to break it up.

ImagineFX

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FXPosé

PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

ImagineFX Artist of the Month

Stephen Stark

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender **WEB:** www.i-stark.com

Steve is the lead background supervisor for Netflix's Castlevania. "In my free time, I'm illustrating a series on the lives of everyday people in fantasy settings."

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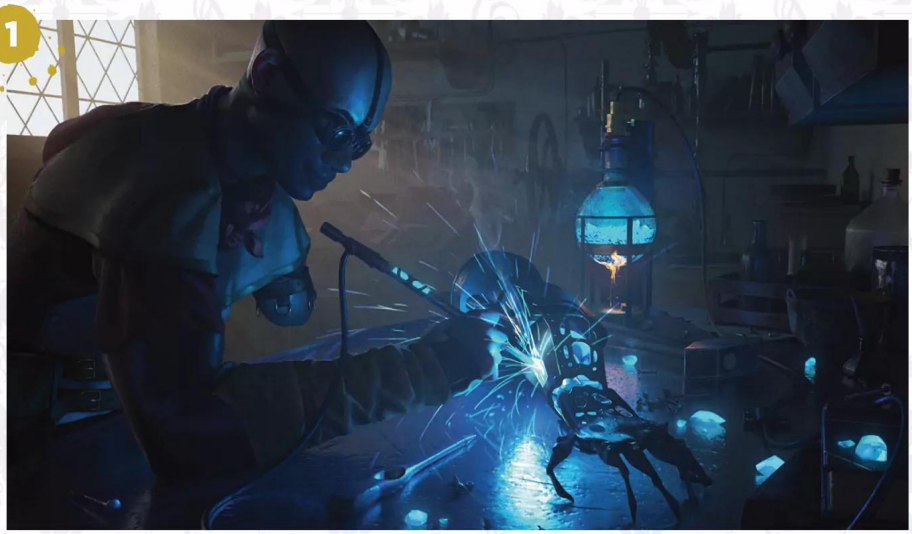

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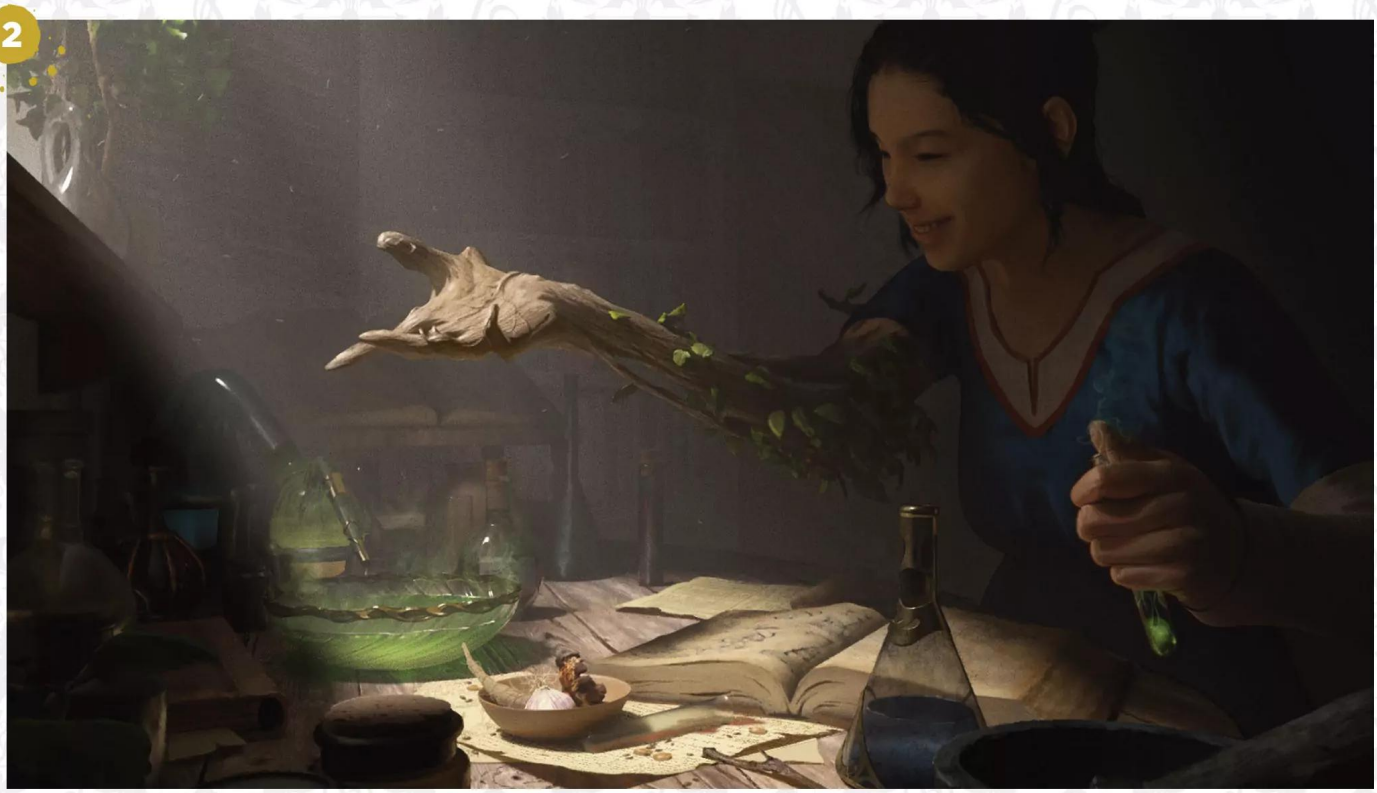

Submit your work: https://ifxm.ag/artistofthemonth

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1 **MACHINIST**
"This painting, together with my Alchemist artwork, are companion pieces. I made the robotic arm in Blender and then painted over it."

2 **ALCHEMIST**
"As with the earlier Machinist piece, I wanted to explore different ways to solve a similar problem."

3 **ANIMAL HANDLER**
"This was a tricky piece that I spent a long time on. My favourite part was painting the centre-girl's hair."

4 **CHEF**
"I enjoy artists who primarily paint food, and this recent piece was my stab at that."

ImagineFX Artist of the Month

Congratulations to Stephen, our Artist of the Month who receives a copy of **Corel Painter 2021**, together with an **Ultimate Brush Pack** containing over 600 unique brushes, worth over **£1,500**, courtesy of our friends at Corel!

ImagineFX Artist of the Year

We'll reveal the **Artist of the Year** at Vertex 2021, chosen from all our Artists of the Month between now and the event. **www.vertexconf.com**

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR WORK

Please send us:
- Five high-res (300dpi) images of your work, with a title and a 30-word caption for each.
- Your name, the software you use, location and website.
- 50 words about you.
- A photo of yourself.

Email this info to: fxpose@imaginefx.com
More info and T&Cs: **https://ifxm.ag/artistofthemonth**

Kino Scialabba

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop, ZBrush, Maya, Corel Painter, Daz 3D, SketchUp, KeyShot, Redshift, Clarisse iFX, 3ds Max, Mandelbulb 3D **WEB:** www.artstation.com/kinoscialabba

Kino is a visual futurist and conceptual artist whose film work includes Alita: Battle Angel, Thor: The Dark World, Iron Man and many more. His style draws on industrial design art, history, technology, cultural anthropology and the sciences.

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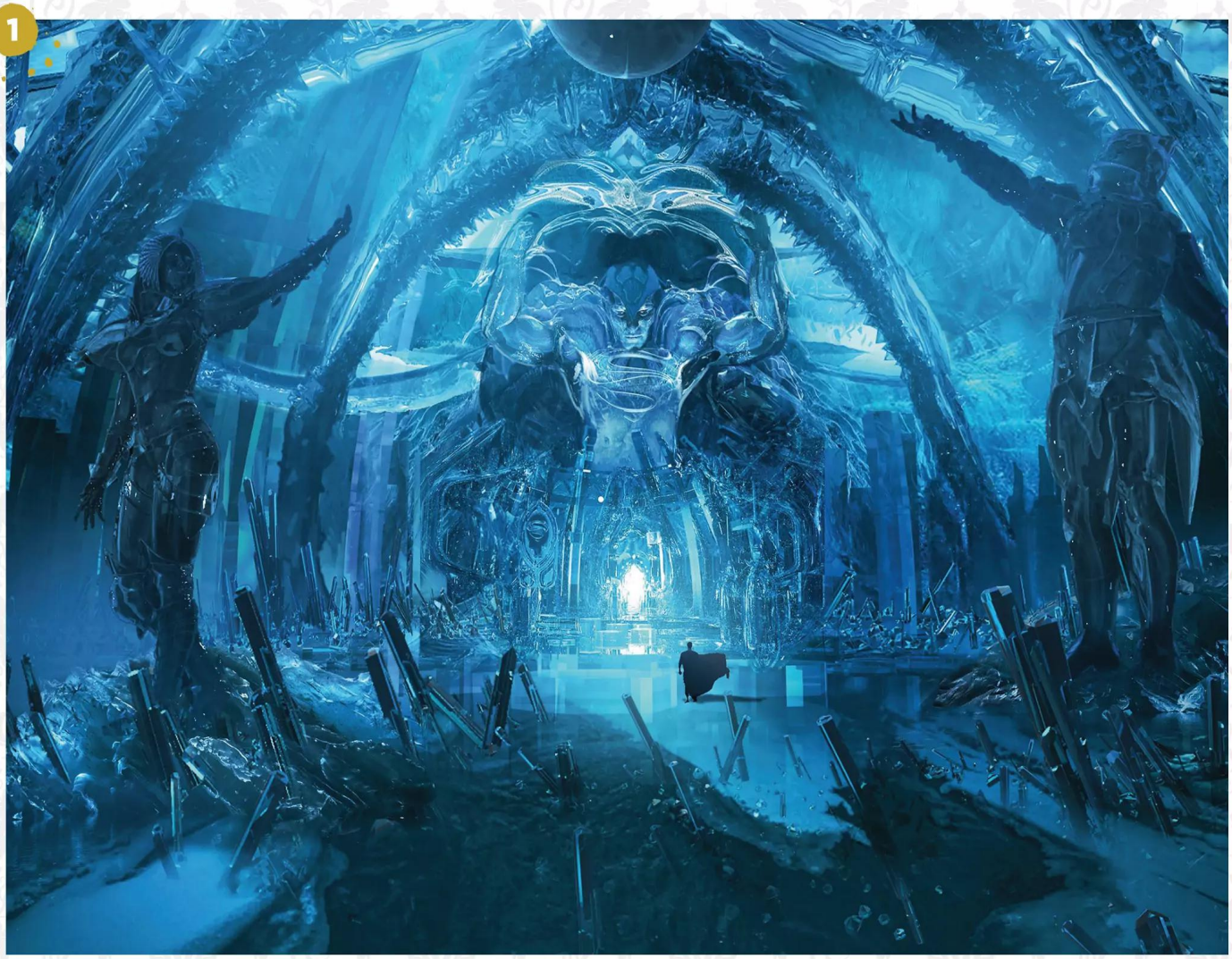

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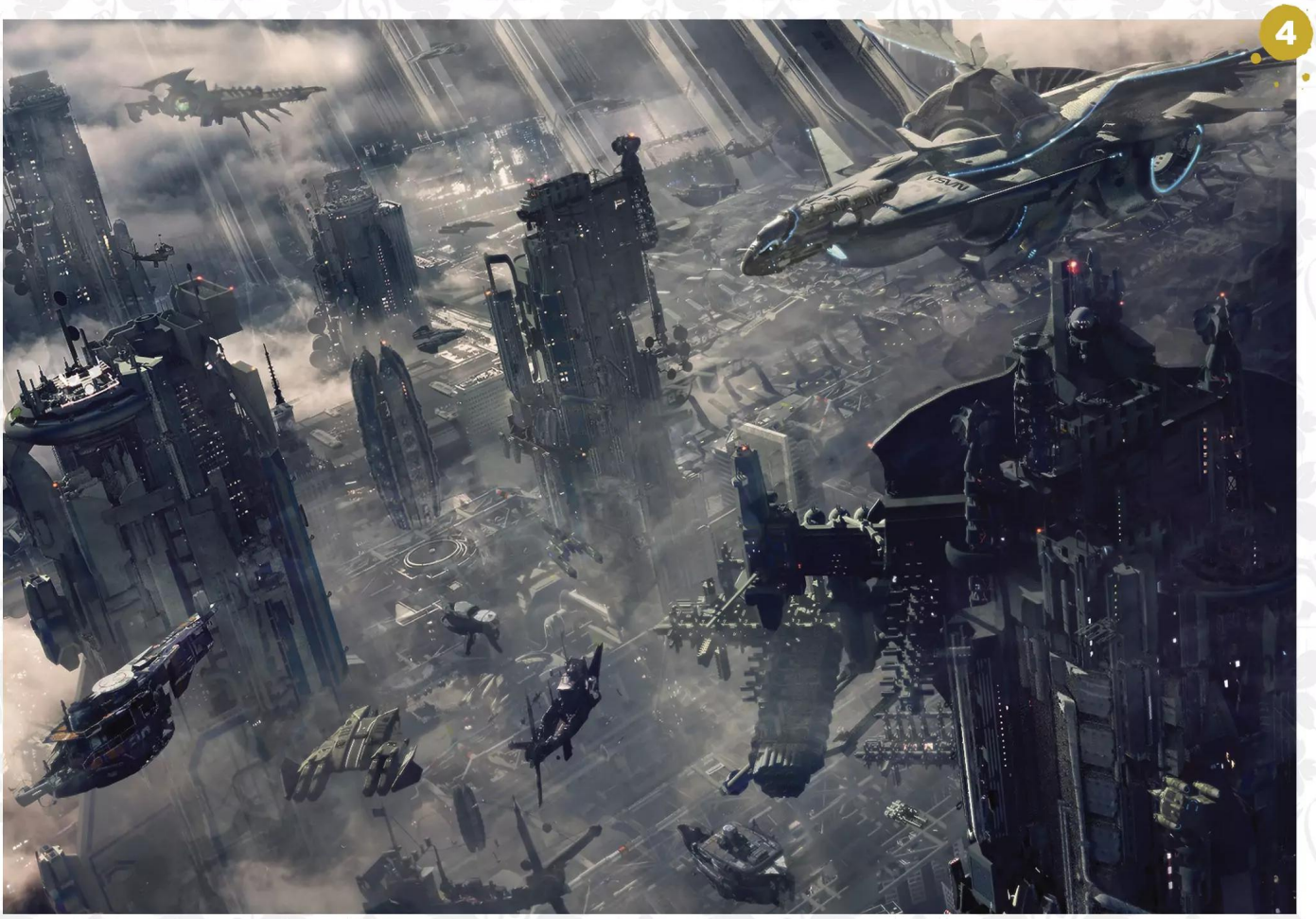

1 SUPERMAN FORTRESS
"My concept of the Fortress of Solitude for the Supergirl TV series. I wanted it to be a shrine to Superman's parents."

2 RAMJAW
"A living war tank that uses sound as a weapon. It lives in its ivory, ever-changing snail shell with other soldiers."

3 THE FORGE
"On the edge of a decaying volcano there sits an ancient forge, where Drow elves would create magical weapons."

4 EMBARGO MORITUA
"While on Mars, a technological deity meets a living artefact that makes her the face for the revolution in the AI Wars."

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Zhanna Garbar

LOCATION: Russia **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop, SketchUp **WEB:** www.deviantart.com/whizumi

Zhanna is a self-taught freelance illustrator and comic artist. Her work is inspired by Korean webcomics and fantasy RPGs. "I use a combination of these two elements to create the work I love the most," she reveals.

1 I WILL PREVAIL
"Characters and story are my main sources of inspiration. The story will always tell you what to draw, and your characters will help you stay motivated."

2 OUT OF THE WINDOW
"I always try to put some story into my work, playing with composition and colour. Here I used bright, warm lighting, but at the same time the window gives the impression of a cage."

3 LOVE LETTER
"When my story and characters are fixed in place, you can safely work with colour without changing anything in the composition."

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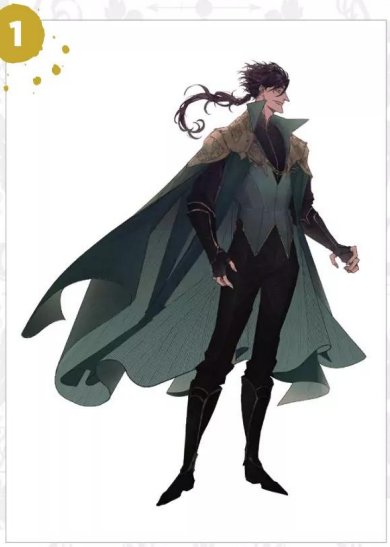

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Ellie Cooper

LOCATION: England **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender, 3D-Coat, Octane Standalone **WEB:** www.elliejcooper.co.uk

Ellie is a freelance concept artist and illustrator who's inspired by mythology and history. "Storytelling is the driving force behind my art," she says. "Recently I've been working a lot for tabletop and indie games."

1 NATURAL SPRINGS
"I wanted to create something colourful with interesting design and scale, and I think I achieved that with this piece."

2 THE DUAT
"Inspired by an Egyptian mythology book that I read, which described the Duat as an unusual, nature-defying place."

3 THE OLD TOWER
"A piece for a private client, who wanted an old tower, forgotten and partially destroyed but eerily beautiful."

4 KING'S RETURN
"A piece inspired by a trip to the British Museum in London. I also used a lot of photos taken from that trip in the painting."

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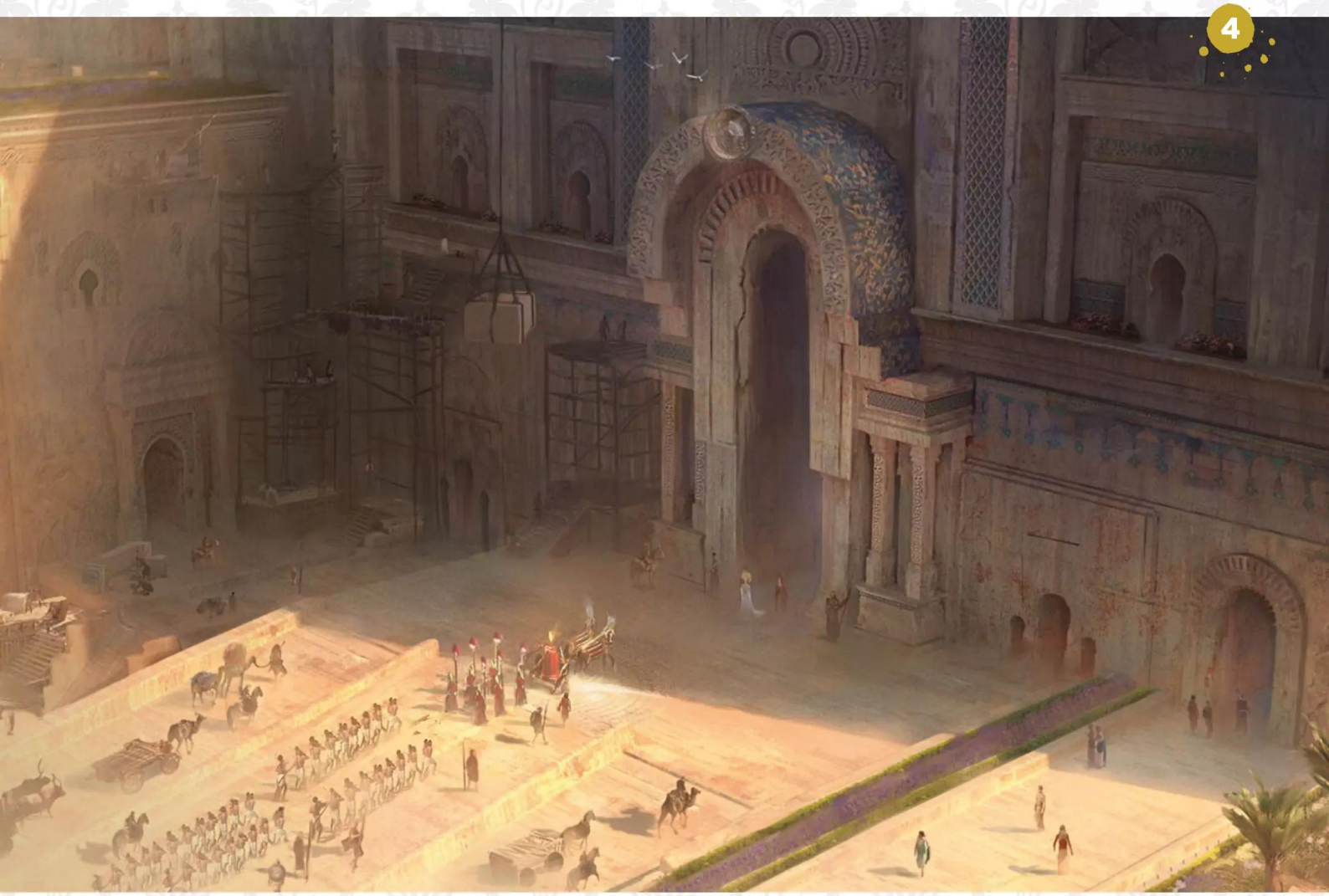

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5 DRAGON ATTACK
"This is one of a series I did of a dragon attacking a town. The project really helped to push my 3D skills and workflow."

Fabio Leone

LOCATION: Croatia **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/fabioleone

Since he was a kid, Fabio had a love for books, drawing and colouring. In 2004 he graduated in oil painting from Rome's Fine Arts Academy, and in 2007 he started to produce digital art.

1 PORTRAIT
"I enjoy painting portraits: this was commissioned to celebrate the client's friend's graduation. Details point to his hobbies and interests."

2 DARKSIDE COVER
"This is a book cover for an independent Italian writer. I had fun experimenting with a restricted palette and strong reds."

3 PRINCE IMRAHIL
"I love to paint lesser-known events from Tolkien's literature. This is Prince Imrahil of Dol Amroth arriving at Minas Tirith."

4 WITHIN
"A personal study inspired by Derek Stenning. Painted in 2018, I was pondering what it would be like to live your whole life confined in a space suit."

5 THE AFTERMATH
"Another Tolkien piece. This one shows the aftermath of the Azanulbizar battle."

Submit your work: https://ifxm.ag/artistofthemonth

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Zana Zeqiri

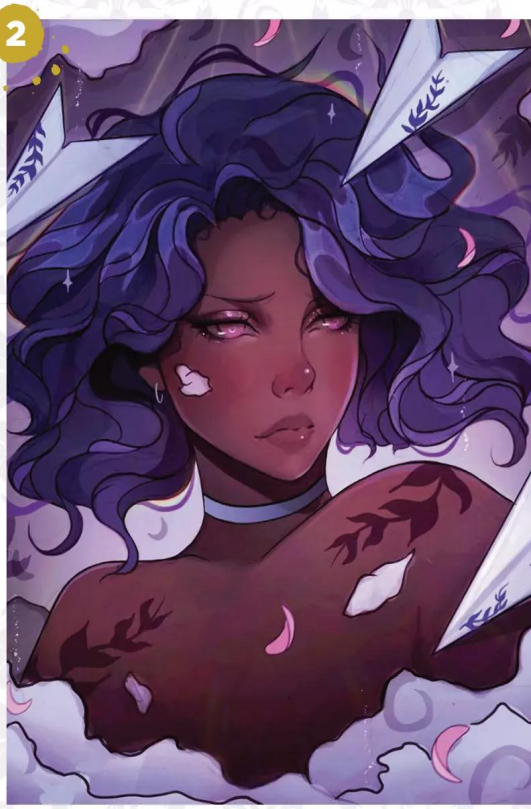
LOCATION: England **MEDIA:** Procreate for the iPad, paper and pencil for sketching **WEB:** www.instagram.com/cloudyzan

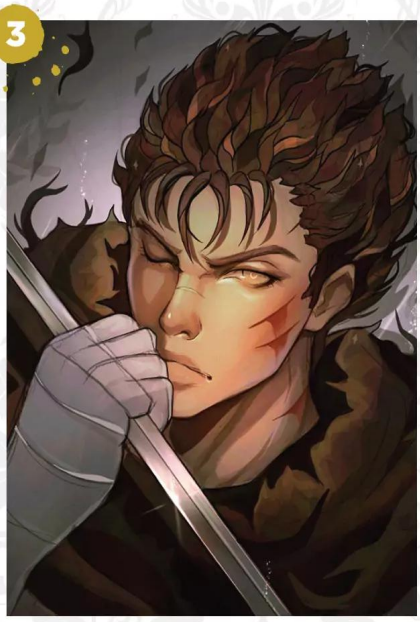
"My work is heavily inspired by anime and fantasy themes with a touch of semi-realism," says Zana. "I adore using dark and moody colour schemes to give my artwork a mysterious yet alluring feel!"

1 BUTTERCUP
"One of the three Powerpuff sisters I drew for a 'classy' Powerpuff series. I wanted to make the girls look fancy, contrasting their regular tough appearance."

2 LIFT-OFF
"This piece is a 'draw this in your style' entry I did for the illustrator Lord Gris (@lord_gris). I wanted to give the piece a melancholic feel through her gaze."

3 GUTS
"Fan art of my favourite character from the anime Berserk, created by Kentaro Miura. I wanted to capture a crucial scene from the manga in this study."





4 WISTERIA SERPENT QUEEN
"The older sister of the Green Tree Python, her katana contrasts her sister's longsword. She is queen of her land, far more deadly and regal than her sibling."

The Powerpuff Girls © Cartoon Network Studios. Distributed by Warner Bros. Television

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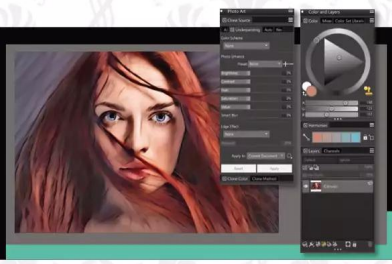

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ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS

ImagineNation

AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY

ARTIST'S RETREAT
US artist Enerjax has a busy home life with her children, and so she's happy that her sun-lit studio enables her to create art in relative peace and quiet.
Page 28

TAP INTO GREAT ART!
Have you considered taking out a digital subscription of ImagineFX? We're on iOS and Android, so you can read us whatever your smart device!
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YOUR VIEWS, YOUR ART
Drop us a line with your news and opinions on what we've covered in the magazine. Plus, we feature artwork that's caught our eye on social media.
Page 35

Tackling abuse in the art industry

Under pressure **Ruth Hamilton** takes a closer look at predatory behaviour that's hit headlines recently, and what we can all do to turn the industry into a safe, fair space for all artists

In recent months, a long-overdue spotlight has been shone on the toxic culture underpinning parts of the digital art industry. While the issues are varied and complex, the core focuses on individuals in positions of power using their clout to exploit and prey on artists who are simply trying to establish themselves.

It's a problem that's recognised as not being exclusive to comics or concept art workplaces. Indeed, a number of industries are being forced to acknowledge the scale and significance of the abuses of power going on behind the scenes.

So how have we ended up in this situation? And what do we do now the conversations have started? We asked artists working in the industry today what steps we need to take to create a safe, fair space for everyone.

BLURRED LINES

It's difficult to pin-point what might have caused the rise of this predatory culture, but there are some practices that may have perpetuated the

Rachel Quinlan says part of the issue is how enticing and competitive art is as a career. "It creates this atmosphere where younger artists are desperate to know how to succeed and will put themselves into situations where they can be exploited."

problems. One is the informal and typically boozy after-hours meet-ups at events, where hosts actively encourage industry networking to take place.

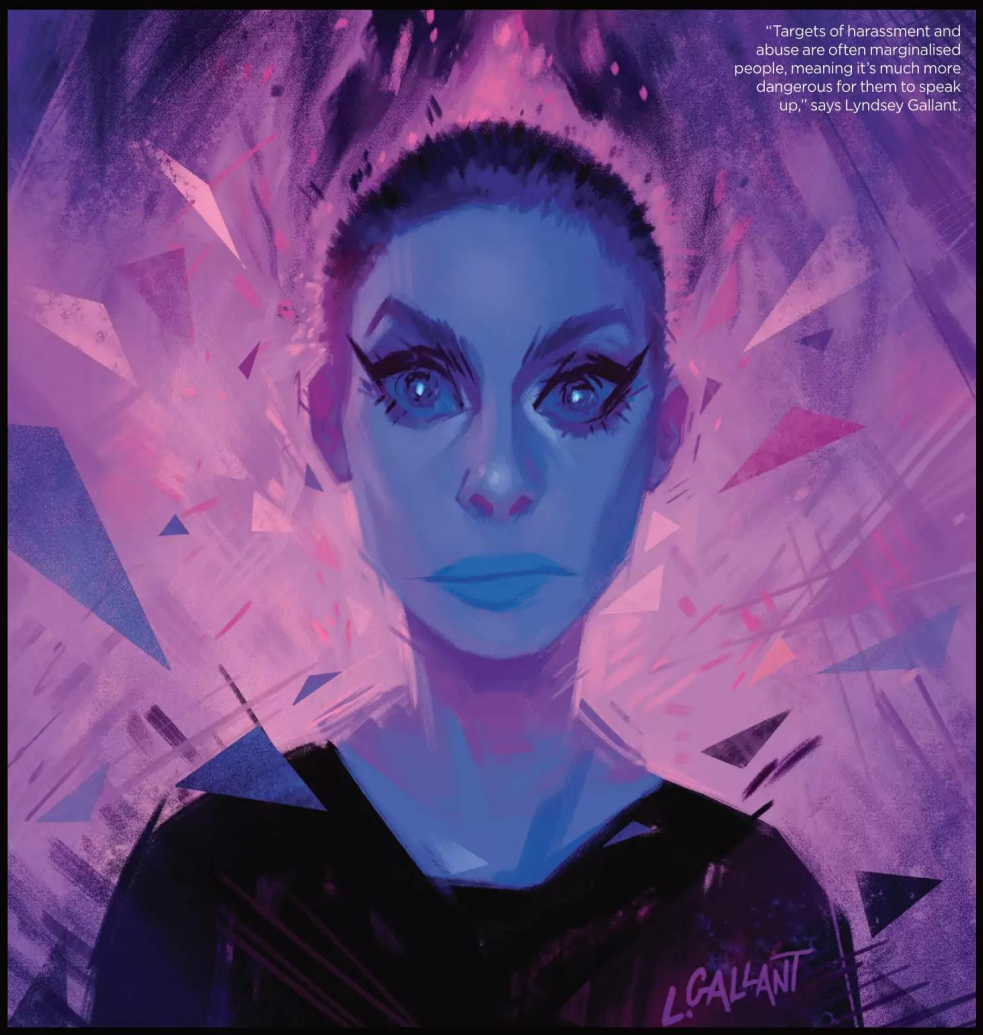
"Beginners are told that they can increase their likelihood of getting opportunities by networking at conventions and having peers recommend them for jobs," says American fantasy artist and illustrator **Rachel Quinlan**. "Interacting in these environments seems like a critical step in their career."

WHY MEET UP AFTER-HOURS?

The problem is that these events are neither wholly social nor completely professional situations. Are you there to network with other professionals, just spending an hour or two catching up with friends or simply letting off steam at the end of a busy day? **Bon Alimagno**, a former talent scout for Marvel, believes that, "You end up with this toxic mix where folks with power and folks without power are mingling under totally unclear terms, and with many looking to just have whatever they think a good time is."

The parties might be one of the places where abuse thrives, but they're not causing the behaviour all on their own. "An industry party with an open bar does not magically make someone an abuser," comments **Lyndsey Gallant**, an art director and concept artist.

Look a little closer, and exacerbating the issue is an industry where someone's whole career can hinge on who they're able to win over.



"Targets of harassment and abuse are often marginalised people, meaning it's much more dangerous for them to speak up," says Lyndsey Gallant.

"We need to help emerging artists get the confidence they need to take pro artists off pedestals," says Sara Alfageeh.

> "Power dynamics between artists can be perceived for a number of reasons: visibility, seniority, actual workplace politics"
>
> **Sara Alfageeh, illustrator and creative director**

> While environment is a factor in how uninhibited people feel, patterns of abuse are a matter of culture; not context
>
> Lyndsey Gallant, art director and concept artist

"Entertainment industries embody a variety of factors that are incredibly conducive to power dynamic inequities, and those inequities allow predation to thrive," continues Lyndsey. "Like it or not, we're an industry where gatekeeping and cults of personality are encouraged and maintained."

Rachel first tried to pursue illustration professionally in the early 2000s, but her experience was so toxic back then that, she gave up on her plan for the next 15 years.

> Any event organiser's job is to create an environment that feels safe for attendees and exhibitors alike
>
> Jim Demonakos, LightBox director

Bon points out that there's a lack of formal mechanisms to connect younger talent with editors and publishers. "If they don't get selected for a portfolio review, if they can't get a minute of an editor's time at their booth or table, if they can't meet them after a panel – what else is there?" he says. "These after-hours parties start looking like the last best shot to meet the gatekeepers." Factor in the money invested in attending big conventions in the first place, and the stakes become even higher.

"The over-emphasis on networking and lack of entry-level opportunities sets aspiring artists up to be vulnerable, desperate, and therefore more easily taken advantage of,"

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

GET HELP, BE SUPPORTIVE

Learn more about the issues, and help those affected by them

Industry pledges #SFFPledge and #ComicsPledge
These Twitter hashtags are linked to the written pledges created for each industry to stamp out predatory behaviour and change the way things are done going forward. It's also a useful starting point for exploring the discussions around the issues.

Samaritans
www.samaritans.org
Samaritans is a UK mental health charity that provides emotional support for anyone struggling to cope, is feeling suicidal, or in emotional distress. It runs a free telephone helpline that's open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Crash Override
http://ifxm.ag/c-override
Crash Override is a group dedicated to stamping out online abuse through educating and providing direct assistance. It's run by experts and survivors, and offers a crisis helpline and resource centre for those who are experiencing abuse online.

Comics experience podcast #202
http://ifxm.ag/cep202
In this podcast from June 2020, Heather Antos – senior editor at Valiant Comics and Image Comics, and previously editor at Marvel – is in conversation with host Joey Groah about predatory behaviour within the comic industry, and explores ways that we can all check in on peers to keep everyone safe.

SoManyOfUs.com
www.somanyofus.com
A comprehensive collection of organisations, articles, books, apps, podcasts and more aimed at helping survivors of abuse understand and recover from their experiences.

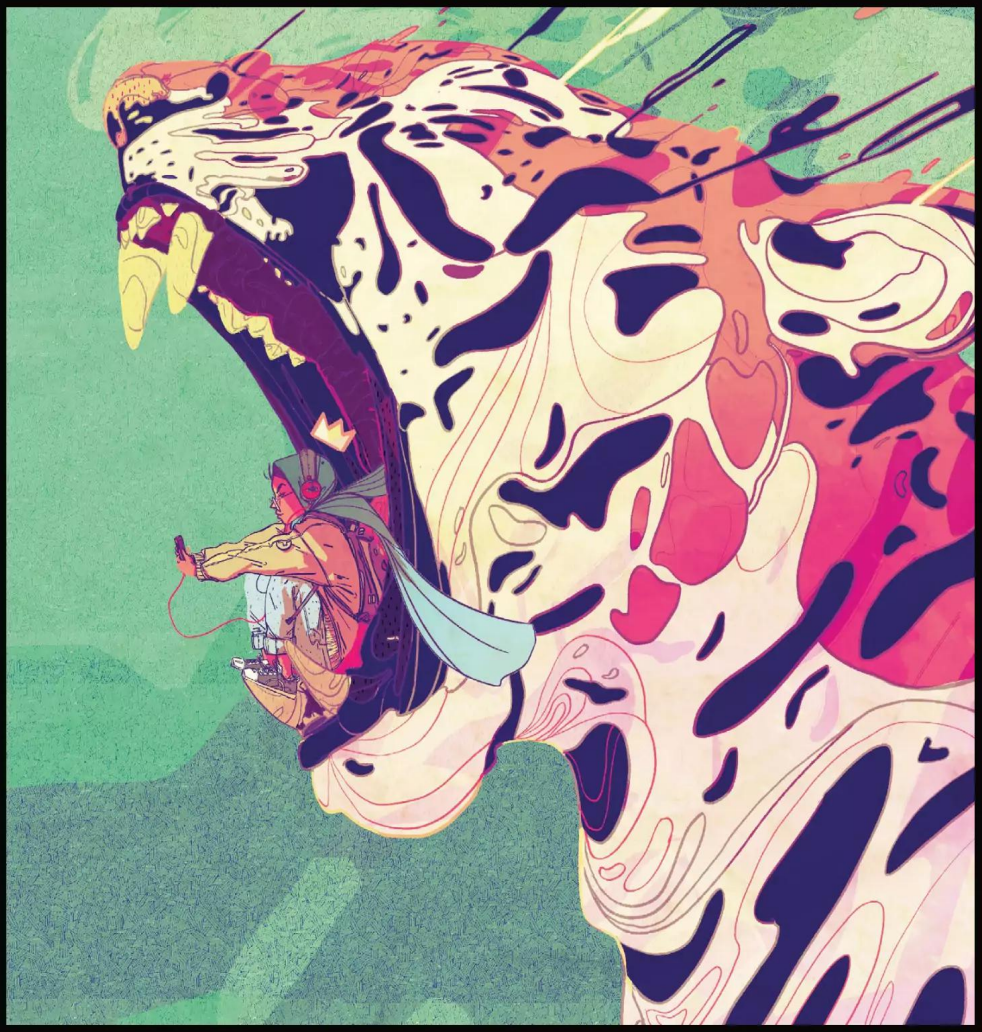
> Nearly all of the attendees at these after-hours events are freelancers, so already there's a greater lack of accountability
>
> Bon Alimagno, former Marvel talent scout

says Lyndsey. "Getting chummy with professionals who want to act like rockstars shouldn't be considered a compulsory part of getting a job."

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

An uncomfortable truth about the situation is that many were aware there was some level of abuse going on before the revelations began. "It's not that people saw abusive behaviour and assault and chose to do nothing about it. It's that many saw bad behaviour but nothing that on glance escalated to crossing any lines," comments Bon. "In hindsight much of what was witnessed was the tip of the iceberg and few, if any, asked what was really going on below the surface."

Whatever reasons people had for not getting involved previously, it's clear that the time for keeping quiet is over. "People need to be more vocal about known offenders and continue to call them out," says Rachel. "It's become apparent in the last few years that whisper networks are failing people – not only upcoming artists, but more established artists."

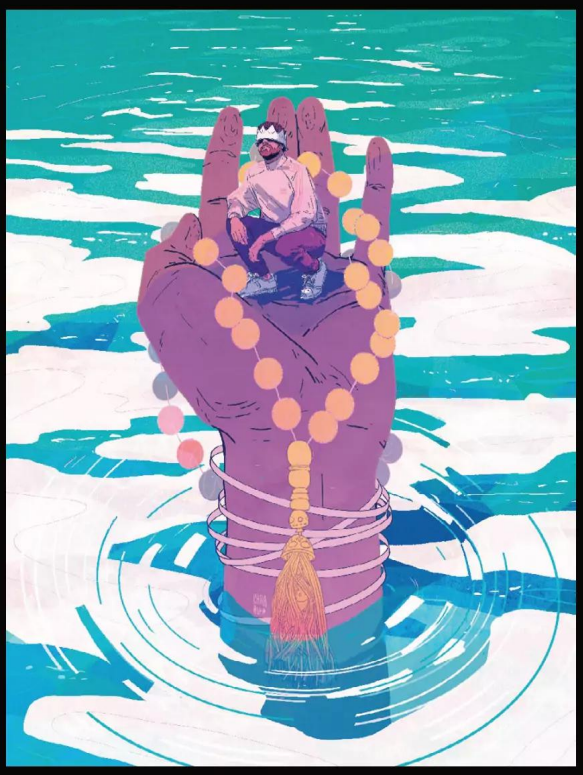


"A convention is a convention, whether the conversations are happening with a signing table between two people, or at a hotel bar a block away," says Sara.

Offering advice on how to step in when something looks like it might be amiss, many of our interviewees suggest keeping it casual. "It never hurts to check in and say hello; it doesn't need to be a full-on confrontation," says illustrator and creative director **Sara Alfageeh**. She recounts a situation at a convention where she was made to feel uncomfortable by a larger man. Another attendee noticed, made eye contact, and then found an excuse to go over and speak to her. "Just like that the situation de-escalated. The smallest intervention can make the difference."

There's plenty that bystanders can do to help address the toxic culture on a wider scale, too – especially those in a position of social privilege. "As a male ally, you essentially have a super power. It's the most powerful spell in your spellbook, and it is simply, 'Hey man, that's not cool'. If you hear a co-worker say something that's racist, sexist or problematic, then laughing uncomfortably or saying nothing still advocates for problematic behaviour by allowing for it to exist," says Lyndsey. "Speaking up in disapproval is crucial. It's your way of influencing which attitudes are made to be widely acceptable."

> Give people the vocabulary they need to walk away from an uncomfortable situation
>
> Sara Alfageeh



If you're worried your actions might be unintentionally causing offence, Lyndsey suggests asking yourself 'Would I say/do this thing if that person was not from a marginalised group?' before you speak or act. "Just try flipping the script around, and you'll get the hang of it."

Involving yourself in a situation that looks potentially problematic doesn't need to be a huge deal, says Sara. "The smallest intervention can make the difference."

STARTING AFRESH

So what happens next for the industry? One avenue that's already being explored is daytime networking events, where alcohol isn't present – a brunch or a pre-conference run, for instance. Inevitably, after-hours meet-ups will still take place, and some of the onus here is on hosts to stamp out bad behaviour. Bon suggests that a good starting point is to have a publicly available code of conduct, which is visibly and strictly enforced. That includes clear guidelines for the entire event around harassment, how it's reported and the consequences for those breaking the rules.

"It isn't the environments we need to worry about changing," says Lyndsey. "It's the culture that enables these behaviours to exist and thrive in the first place."

"The burden should not be entirely on the victims," says Rachel. "I think the entire SFF community should be calling out this behaviour when it happens."

> "Established artists are put on a pedestal and, historically, bad behaviour has been tolerated and/or ignored"
>
> **Rachel Quinlan, fantasy illustrator**

From the organisers' perspectives, it's also time to get pickier about who attends your events. "Curation is a big part of the equation," says **Jim Demonakos** who runs LightBox Expo. "If you're taking an active role in not inviting people who you know are problematic, and ensuring diversity in attendees, that can lead you on the path of creating a better and safer atmosphere."

Because for a real cultural shift to take place, it's not just about targeting the predators, but about creating an inclusive environment. "It's about doing things that let people know you care about their safety, wellbeing and peace of mind," continues Jim. "Things such as assigning gender-neutral bathrooms or creating quiet zones for people with some social anxiety."

Lyndsey says it's time to start taking big artists down from their pedestals, too. "It's a job. It's work. That's it! You're not more valuable than another human being because your art is incredibly good. When we dismantle this narrative, we can equalise the social hierarchy and make it a safer industry for vulnerable groups."

My husband and I used to work in Japan and collected several favourite uchiwa over the years. We get to sport them when we go to the Bon Odori festival here in town once a year (thanks, Mitsuwa!), so they get some use!

Because the window faces south, this room is blessed with divine light all day. I can't tell you how much seeing daylight perks up my mood every day.

My family in South Korea threw us an engagement party when we visited there years back and I kept the boochae fan that I received from them.

After seeing the plants I had on the shelves, my good friend would gift a plant to me every so often and it's been a delight seeing the studio garden growing little by little. Wonder how it will look a few years down the road... Jumanji, anyone?

This chair from IKEA is possibly my favourite item in the studio other than the table (also from IKEA). It's so comfortable, and I can easily wheel over to my drawers and shelves. It's just the perfect chair!

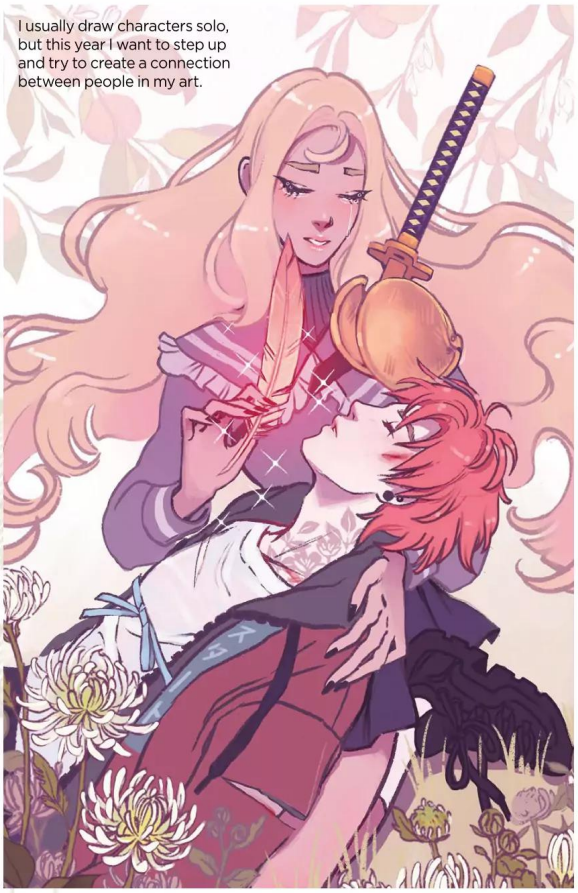
This little storage unit on wheels is a life saver. When packaging up orders I keep clear envelopes of various sizes in it, and it's so easy to reach down and quickly grab what I need. I don't even have to look anymore – thanks to muscle memory my hands know where to go.

Enerjax

Welcome sight Favourite pieces of art cover the walls of this illustrator's bright studio, based in the Chicago suburbs

Over the past two years I've collected a few art books from artists who I adore on Instagram. I have a ton of official art books in the cabinet, but the ones up here are great to display because maybe some friends haven't seen these artists before, so it's nice to spread the word.

I recently saw another artist mention how they store stickers in this giant transparent case with mini cases inside and thought it would be perfect for me as well. Such a help! When I have orders with stickers I can just pull the whole case down.



I usually draw characters solo, but this year I want to step up and try to create a connection between people in my art.

My studio not only is the brightest room in the house, but also has a lovely view of the rooftops of our neighbourhood, which relaxes me and feels like a little escape. Having never experienced a studio space in my life before, I've turned this room into my sanctuary.

To accommodate our growing family we moved into this house in the suburbs only just last year from a much smaller town house. Previously, after the little ones turned in for a nap I'd bring the inks and paints to the dining table and paint for a bit. When they woke up I'd have to put everything away and clear the table. Bedtime was rinse

In the old house I would display a few of my favourite prints in this frame. After a while I accumulated so many prints that it felt a shame to rotate them – I wanted to see them all together. So I began covering the walls. No regrets!

My mum is a well-respected painter and mainly works with oil paint. She gifted this painting to my son when he was born as a birthday present of a pond we visited together, and yeah, I'm just holding onto it for him, for a while.

“Having never experienced a studio space in my life before, I've turned this room into my sanctuary”

My absolute favourite part of the work day is when I have all of my supplies at the ready and a cosy drink to get going.

This is the corner I frequent the most. It's where I access my prints stored on the shelves for orders, get what I need from the printer, and where I peruse paints and materials.

and repeat. Every day. Twice a day. Now I have a space to call my own, to display my supplies so proudly all day. It feels like such a relief!

My large drawing table is a must with orders coming in and art projects happening simultaneously. I mostly work with gouache and ink, Copic markers and digital tools. This means I have drawings or projects in progress out while another area of the table is covered in flat mailers, prints and business cards.

The table becomes covered quickly, but having a closet to stow away the crazy is a benefit. Juggling works-in-progress, packaging orders, and being at the beck and call of my children is quite the challenge, so it's convenient to just close the closet door even though the tasks are incomplete. Yeah, that's tomorrow Jackie's problem...

OUT OF HARM'S WAY

The day after we painted the walls, I installed floating shelves to be out of reach of little fingers. Having a few tall bookcases and wall shelves means I can keep my prints and supplies within reach and visible, but safe from toddler destruction. I always loved the idea of

> **Sometimes I start a piece and I don't even know what materials I want to use**

a studio that resembles a shop – the shop-chic look is all the rage, right? Walking into art supply stores is such a motivation for me and I wanted to bring that excitement to this studio.

Sometimes I start a piece and I don't even know what materials I want to use. I look around my shelves and think, "Well, this gouache colour is super lonely – let's bust it out today!" Another huge motivation is having art displayed with a fun, gallery feel. I began sticking favourite prints of other artists in the corner and from there it kept growing. It's nice to just sit with my tea and look at them all, then get back to work.

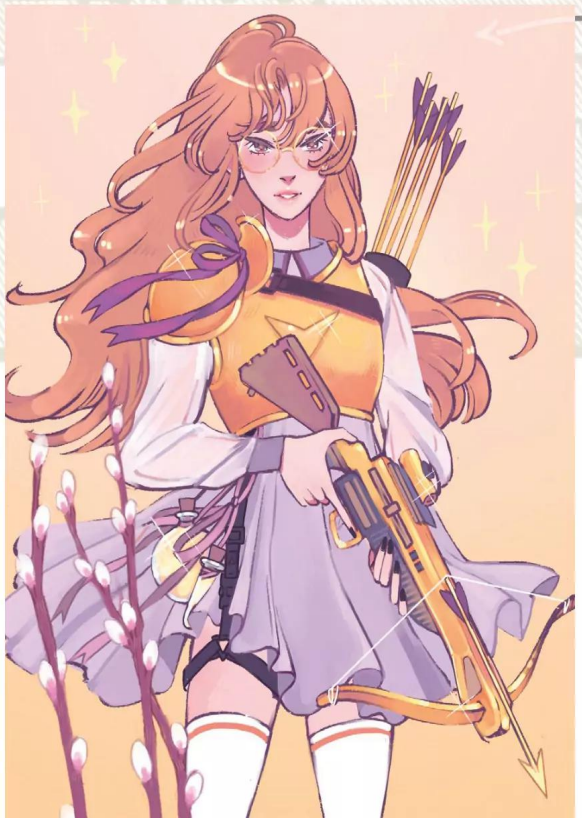
Enerjax draws and paints whatever makes her happy – lately swords and fluff. She wanted to bring the same soft brightness to her studio as she does in her work, which you can see at www.instagram.com/enerjax.

These plants used to be in the townhouse kitchen (it was the room with the most light until we moved here). Now they've been relocated to the studio and are very much at home.

My favourite art companion is my giant Pusheen plushie! This little guy is not only super cuddly, but he's also the perfect iPad holder.

I only recently discovered gouache paints. I love their milky, layered nature. This peony witch was made with Copic markers for the hair and skin, gouache for the background and petals, and coloured ink for the leaves and skirt.

What started out as four or five favourite purchased prints from artists slowly took over my north-west corner and I'm more than okay about it. I used to want to frame everything, but I can look at far more prints this way.



If Final Fantasy VI has taught me anything it's that Edgar and his gadgets are a bad-ass combination. So, automated crossbow it is for this character.

I love using coloured inks. Magic happens when you brush ink onto wet paper. Also, sorry kids – my inks are staying up here. For now, you're sticking with Crayola!

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Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

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Old DVD content online

Is there is a way to download old DVD content from the issues I bought in the past (some from 2010, 2011 and 2013)? I don't have any proof of purchase anymore, just the magazines and DVDs, which I can take pictures of. Thank you for your time and help!

Tamara Kovač

What goes on the DVD, stays on the DVD – sorry about that, Tamara!

Claire replies *Hello Tamara, nice to hear from you. Unfortunately, the resources from those editions are only available on the DVDs. They aren't online. Sorry I can't help any more.*

See the light

I just wanted to share my thoughts related to Evelin's letter (issue 192) and your question about social media vs forums. As someone who never knew he wanted to be an artist (I'm a software engineer and started drawing just five years ago), social media has been invaluable for me to get in touch with the art community and art enthusiasts.

But yes, it often feels like shouting into the void, so I was pleased with my LightBox Expo Online experience this year. Seeing my art heroes being humans after all, and the excited chatter and interaction in the streams made me feel so much better. I learned that there are many people like me, coming from other careers and testing the waters in art. The atmosphere was so inclusive! Even though I now hope to attend in person some day, I do think online events in this format have a great future due to their low entry barrier. I'd have been extremely shy of attending such a professional event even in normal times, let alone meeting the travel costs.

DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?

Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 193 at **http://ifxm.ag/single-ifx**.

Online art events such as LightBox Expo have helped artists from around the globe feel connected.

Also, technologies such as Discord servers provide much better community platforms than traditional social media. For instance, in one session about Tech Art, participants founded a Discord server about the subject even before the stream was over! A small community is there now, eagerly chatting and figuring out how to learn from each other. I must say, after this past weekend Instagram feels a bit dated to me.

Actually, I'd love to see an article about people who discovered the joy of making art rather late in life and got serious about it. How did they manage the transition, were they able to combine a past career with their new interests, how can you make a living starting over in a completely new field at 40, 50 or 60+? There must be some good stories in that.

Kolja, Germany

Claire replies *Kolja, thanks so much for writing in with your insight. It's good to hear that social media and events like LightBox Expo have kept you connected. As for a story on switching to an art career art later in life, did you see Iris Compiet's interview in issue 192? She talks about making it in art when she was considered 'old'. I know that a lot or readers loved hearing about this.*

Helpful Corel

I thought I'd comment on Christian's letter in issue 191. I too migrated from Adobe to Corel. Initially I struggled, but if you join Corel's website and sign up, they have second-to-none help and advice systems. I've made full use of Corel's Tech support: I've found them patient, knowledgeable and with a diligence that puts them head and shoulders above any other tech support that I have encountered.

John, UK

Claire replies *You're right John, let's hear it for the tech support people who help us get the most out of our software. Decent, fast-replying tech support is a fantastic sign of a company's care for their customers.*

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention

Sébastien Michel @artseb26

Irina French @irinafrenchart

Paula Garcia @wyndraw

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

SAM NASSOUR

The Syrian artist tells **Gary Evans** why it's important to learn the art rules, then break those rules and find your own voice

CAPTAIN WHISKERS
"Captain Whiskers of the high seas. He's been through it all."

Sam Nassour always wanted to work in animation, but Syria didn't have any good animation schools, so he studied architecture. Sam learned the rules of perspective and the principles of universal design – he liked how architecture combined the laws of science and the basics of art.

As a student, Sam worked in a graphic design studio, and the studio owner taught him Photoshop. Sam learned the dos and don'ts of creating advertising graphics on a computer before he actually owned a computer. His studies took him to Rome, where architecture played by different rules, had different principles, a city in which architecture really felt inseparable from art.

Sam continued working on his own character designs and story ideas, but was no closer finding work in animation. He got his big chance in the United Arab Emirates: opportunity finally came knocking… and it found the artist in his beach shorts.

Sam is speaking to us from Finland. Earlier this year, he joined Rovio Entertainment, the Finnish company behind Angry Birds. He was in London before this, and Dubai before that. It's been an eventful career, in which Sam seems to have diligently learned the rules of his various artistic pursuits, just so he can break them.

GOOD KITTY
"I did this piece in Procreate, experimenting with composition and a warm sunlight effect."

SAM'S FIRST CRITICAL VOICE

Sam's dad had been an art critic. So, growing up, Sam received a lot of good, constructive advice on how to improve his doodles. It was seeing The Lion King (1994) that him hooked on animation. Sam was into animals, but not for the usual reasons kid are into animals. He was interested in the challenge posed by the huge variety of shapes and colours: "I remember getting frustrated after failing to draw

Artist PROFILE

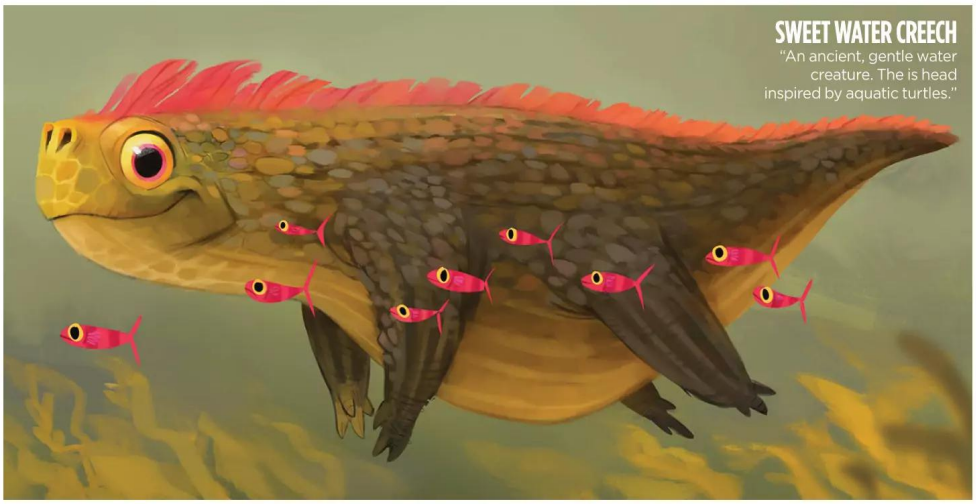
Sam Nassour
LOCATION: Finland
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Nathan Fowkes, Robert Kondo, Cory Loftis, John Nevarez and Dice Tsutsumi
SOFTWARE: Photoshop, Procreate
WEB: www.samnassour.com

© Savage Interactive

NIGHT KING PET
"A very innocent Night King, really happy with his new pet. Just some fan art of Game of Thrones."

a tiger I saw in a magazine, so I got one of those blue carbon sheets that my mum used for sewing dresses, and traced the tiger onto it. It felt nice being able to capture something I liked in my own way."

Sam grew up in Latakia in Syria ("which was a much different and better place to live back then"). Early on, he developed an artist's curiosity for the world around him, felt the need to draw everything, draw everywhere. He drew on paper, and he drew on the walls of the house: "I'm lucky to have very supportive parents who nurtured my interest in drawing."



SWEET WATER CREECH
"An ancient, gentle water creature. The is head inspired by aquatic turtles."

BIRRRDY
"A sketch of a happy bird character, where I was experimenting with different shapes and colour."

I'M IN LOVE!
"One word describes this image: lovestruck!"

Darkwing Duck was his favourite animated series, then he got into Asterix. He liked "exaggerated character designs." Albert Uderzo, Asterix's illustrator, seemed to push what was possible with the rules of shape, but did it with careful, skilful lines: "I didn't want to copy that style, but learn from it," Says Sam. "I felt naturally gravitated towards simplifying shapes and designs. The right level of appeal, the importance of drawing with flow and gesture, straights versus curves: those drawing principles started to make sense."

CARTOON NETWORK

Sam broke all the rules of professional etiquette to get his big break in animation. He'd decided to move – without a job – to Dubai, one of the most expensive cities in the world. He was at the beach with friends and saw a comic con taking place nearby. He went alone. Cartoon Network had a booth there – it had opened a studio in the United Arab Emirates and needed artists. Sam really wanted to talk to them, but didn't have his portfolio, so he approached the booth in his shorts, took out his phone, and swiped through pictures of his art posted on Facebook. By his own admission, it wasn't the best way to apply for a job. But the art itself made a good impression. Sam went home and sent a "more professional email," and things went from there.

POLAR
"Study of a polar bear and sunlight. It was a fun challenge – painting white things in bright sunlight."

> "Sometimes you have to let go of perfectionism and be okay sharing rough ideas to get the ball rolling"

Sam has two main roles in animation: visual development artist and art director. As a visual development artist, you're typically working on projects where "the style and artistic vision" has already been established. The script for a TV show or a feature film or a mobile game is done: it's your job to come up with character designs, concept ideas and colour keys that work in that specific world. To do that, you need to spend time really getting to know the story.

He's just finished working (remotely) on visual development for an unannounced Netflix animated feature film. He came in at the beginning of the project so there was a rough script, but no art for the characters or the world itself. This "exploration stage" is Sam's favourite: "The challenge is staying on track and submitting designs on time. Sometimes you have to let go of perfectionism and be okay sharing rough ideas for the purpose of getting the ball rolling. I wouldn't say

WHEN PETS LOOK LIKE THEIR OWNERS...

Sam explains how light and shadow enhance this image of a Viking and his pet dragon

"This Beard Buddies piece was painted in Photoshop when I started thinking about light and colour in a more logical, process-driven way.

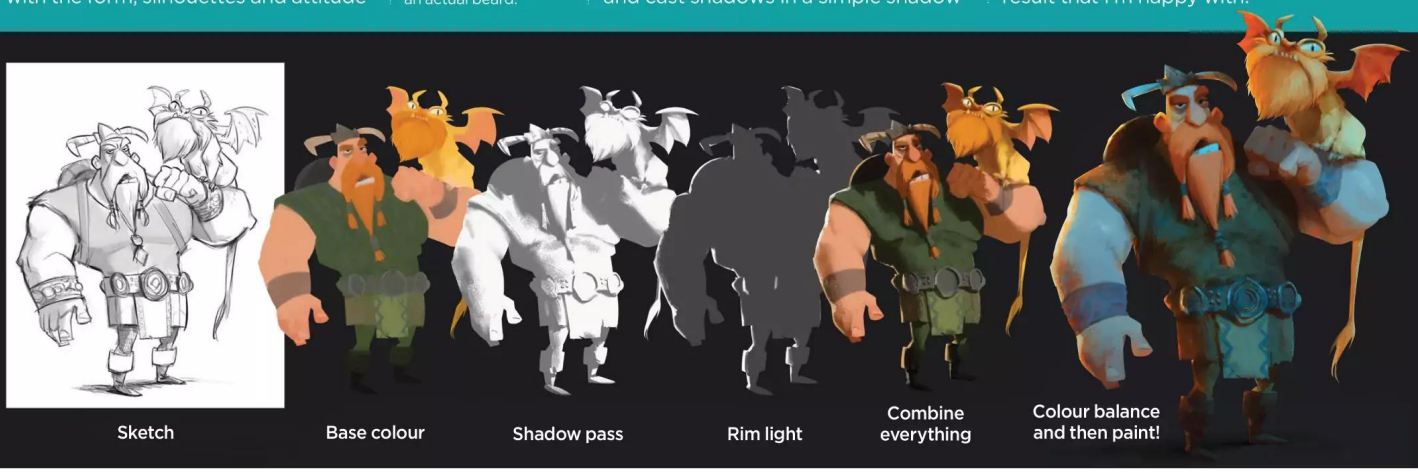
I had this silly idea of a Viking and his dragon pet, which had a similar beard. And, at that time, "Viking" was the Character Design Challenge theme for the month. I felt it was a good opportunity to participate by bringing these characters to a finish.

My process is pretty straightforward. I start with a rough pencil sketch, which I clean up a bit until I'm happy with the form, silhouettes and attitude of the characters. I then make a layer under the lines (which are set on a low Opacity) and create a base colour that doesn't include any light or shadow information, just subtle colour variations to the skin and clothes.

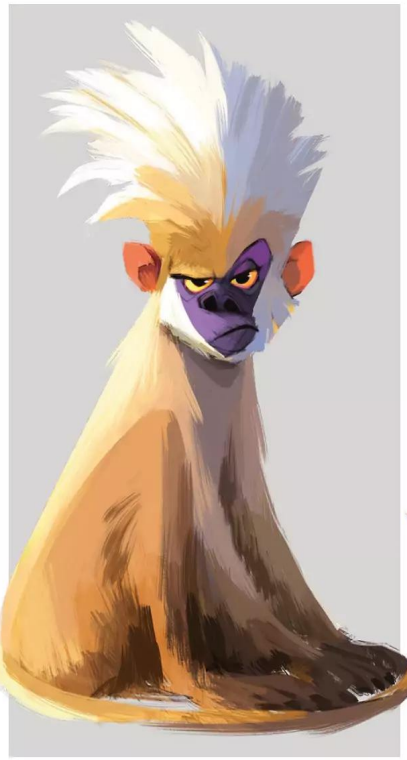
The most important step for creating convincing lighting is the shadow pass layer: I create a new layer above the base colour, turn on Clipping Mask, set the blending mode to Multiply, and begin to paint the shadows from a specific light direction, combining form shadows and cast shadows in a simple shadow shape design. On a separate layer, also clipped to the layers below and set to Linear Dodge, I paint in a rim light coming from behind, which separates the characters from the background and further defines their form.

I merge all three layers and treat the whole thing as one painting. I use Photoshop's Color Balance adjustment tool to make the shadows feel cooler and the light warmer. I also improve the contrast overall with the Levels adjustment tool. Then I just paint and refine until I reach a final result that I'm happy with!"

BEARD BUDDIES
"A Viking and his dragon pet, which has an actual beard."



ENCOUNTER
"My mermaid is a tiny little creature. Created for the Mermay challenge."



GRUMPS
"Some monkeys have really grumpy faces, but they're always fun to draw, whatever their expression."

DOGNOME
"You've really gotta watch out for those dog-stealing gnomes."

CHI
"This pose and the wide-leg pants is based on a photo reference that I wanted to stylise."

HAPPY COTTONS
"Larry just found out he was being laid off from Happy Cottons Inc."

there's pressure when working on those kinds of titles – well, maybe a little bit – but it's more of an excitement, and also feeling grateful to have those opportunities, which keeps me motivated."

MORE THAN JUST MANAGEMENT

Sam worked as art director at Cartoon Network in the United Arab Emirates, and also at Blue Zoo in London, working on the Paddington TV series. As an art director, you lead the look of the show or movie. You talk directly to the director, and supervise the 2D designs from the art team and the 3D production assets.

However, Sam is a hands-on art director. He still likes to contribute designs for characters, locations and colour keys, but in a rough state, which he then passes on to the art team. He sees art direction as not just "management kind of work," but something more collaborative. He looks for similar qualities when hiring – the art and the artists have to have "approachability and appeal."

Sam explains: "As an art director, I definitely first look for portfolios of artists who do similar type of work that fits the movie or game I'm working on. Generally, it has to have a good understanding of appeal, clarity, excellent colour and light, and a variety of interesting visual ideas. I like to see personal artwork that feels as if it could easily be animated or be in either a movie or a TV show.

"In both roles – visual development artist and art director – I think what takes it to the next level is working with enthusiasm, having good focus and attention to detail, but more importantly also being able to see the bigger picture of the art and project clearly."

A FANTASY SKETCH DUMP
"Character sketches, playing around with a stylised fantasy theme."

ANIMATION DESIGN

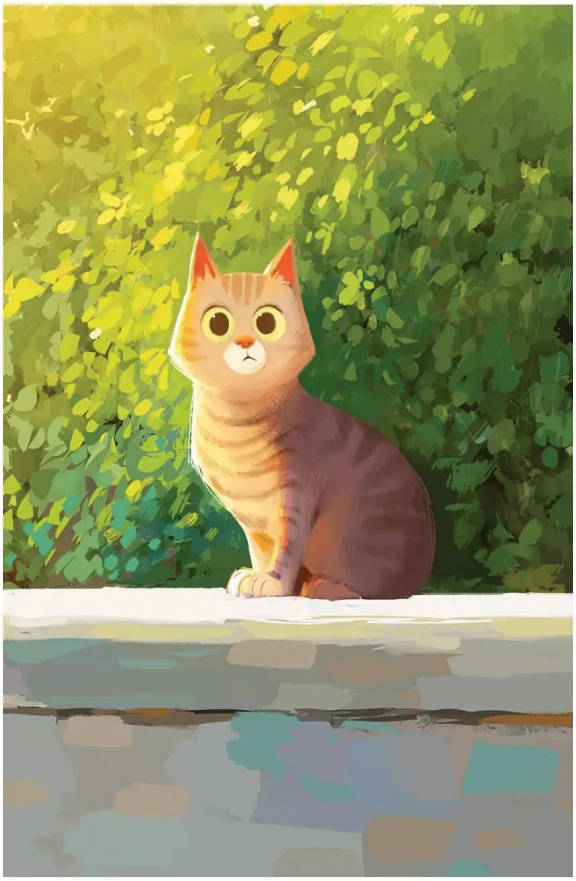
Sam describes his work as "animation design" – meaning art that can be animated, but also art that has a fun, animation look. He's excellent at facial expression, and depicting little moments that look like the punchline to a visual joke. His works seems to move, even when it doesn't. This is art with a real voice, and it's warm and it's witty and it's just a little bit anarchic.

> **"I like to see personal artwork that feels as if it could easily be animated or be in either a movie or a TV show"**

For personal pieces, Sam doesn't have one single approach to developing ideas. An idea might come from a photo he's seen or an article he's read. It could even be a doodle

PINK HALLOWEEN
"Fun Halloween characters. I have a whole story in mind for this image."

GIRL & DOG
"A simple composition – a girl and her pup – based on the '&' symbol."



he's done in a meeting. He recently developed an image based on the ampersand ('&'). The key point is not to force it: "I leave the opportunity to explore wide open, playing around with shapes, colour and composition as I go, instead of having a solid step-by-step approach."

CREATING ART WITH CLARITY

Sam does rough sketches in Procreate on his iPad ("a digital sketchbook of sorts") but doesn't like too much detail, not even in more developed pieces. He wants to keep the original sketch's "energy and looseness." So he works quickly – nothing should take more than a couple of days to complete. Then he leaves it alone, looks at it again the next day with fresh eyes: "It becomes easier to spot any problems. The issue is often in 'clarity' – how easy is it for a viewer to get the point of the artwork, and relate to the characters or scene."

Sam plans to continue working on games, TV shows and movies, but he's also working on a concept for a graphic novel, which gives him the chance to focus on a larger, connected project, instead of lots of smaller, separate ideas.

> **"The 'voice' is a key ingredient in finding your own unique style. It's like an extension of your own personality"**

BASKING LIZ
"A weird lizard-type creature basking in the sun."

Learning the rules, and breaking them: the two things that seemed to have defined Sam's success as an artist. Study the rules of perspective and the principles of universal design, but don't let them get in the way of drawing a good character, of telling a good story. The working artist must have approachability and appeal – same as the art they make – even when the one is presenting the other to a major studio while wearing just a pair of shorts. Learn the rules, break the rules, find your own voice…

ON A FENCE
"This image is based on a photo of a cat that I took in Turkey."

"I think getting a taste and understanding of those 'rules' is important, but then it also allows you to push them – or break them – and make something your own way. Something simpler, or more complex – it doesn't matter. But it's built on that simple foundation. The 'voice' is something that depends on personal taste: likes and dislikes, the subject matter you feel more interested in. It's a key ingredient in finding your own unique style. It's like an extension of your own personality."

BERIC
"Fan art of Beric from Game of Thrones. I loved that character."

ART THAT'S APPROACHABLE AND APPEALING

There are two simple principles that will improve your art and your career prospects, reveals Sam...

"The audience relates better to my art when it's concise and simplified. It comes down to simplicity and the attempt to communicate a clear design or an idea. I try to get my characters to convey a clear expression, emotion or story, and that probably helps making it feel approachable and 'easy to digest.'

Approachability and appeal are also key factors when designing for animation and games. Working in mobile games has been a recent experience of mine, and it's been fun learning about the world of visually striking yet simple character designs for players to enjoy.

Artists starting out need to define what they like to do and what artistic approach they prefer to adopt. They should take inspiration from pro artists whom they relate to artistically, and be keen to improve. Finally, they should try to be confident when making art and have a good time while doing so, because it shows in their work.

I encourage artists to capture their outlook on life and show their personality in their art, which makes it unique and interesting. Be inspired by the world around you: there's no better way to understand colour and light than by observing it first hand. I also advise artists to make their work relatable to the viewers, to convey the emotion of the character or the point of the scene clearly.

The key point is being enthusiastic and dedicated enough to improve through practice. Don't be afraid of making 'bad art', as long as you know what needs to be improved."

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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES

Issue 193
December 2020

Embrace spontaneity in your art with Audra Auclair, boost drama levels with Klaus Scherwinski while Phillip Boutté Jr. presents tips on film costume design. Plus we talk to Justin Gerard and look back at LightBox Expo 2020.

Issue 192
November 2020

Karl Kopinski provides plenty of drawing advice, Iris Compiet tells us about working on Dark Crystal art and meeting Brian Froud, art directors reveal what they look for in applicants, Donglu Yu talks colour studies, and plenty more!

Issue 191
October 2020

Bring your characters to life with the help of cover artist's Pietmaen's workshop, learn how to paint over a 3D environment, and create a surreal portrait. We talk to Pascal Blanché, and show how to get work via social media.

Issue 190
September 2020

Ejiwa 'Edge' Ebenebe's cover art ties nicely with our feature on how to be happy as an artist. We focus on the art of The Last of Us Part II, present tips for a better Blender workflow, help you improve your character design, and more!

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Max Berthelot

Japanese video games and media have strongly influenced the fantasy and sci-fi sketches created by this French freelance artist

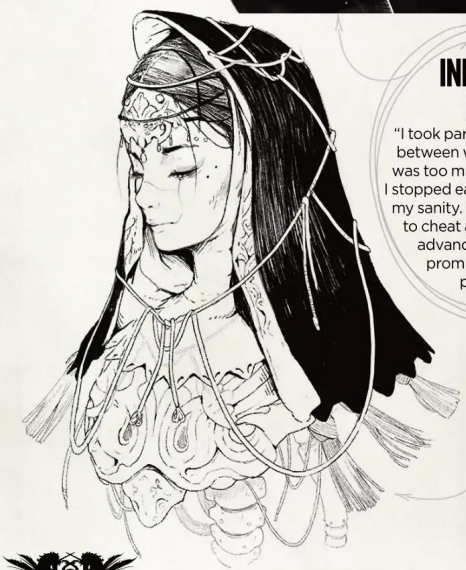
Artist PROFILE

Max Berthelot
LOCATION: Japan

Max is a French freelance artist living in Japan. He's addicted to the fantasy genre and creates character designs and concept art for video games and CG movies. He strives to find a new art style that combines Japanese and Western trappings. Max has worked with a range of companies in the JRPG industry, such as Mistwalker, Level-5 and Acquire Corp.
www.artstation.com/maxberthelot

ADAM

"Inspired by the first Final Fantasy's concepts and Moebius's work, I've started a project with this main character."



INKTOBER 2018

"I took part in the challenge between work. My mistake was too much detailing, and I stopped early on to preserve my sanity. Next time I'll have to cheat and create art in advance without any prompts. No one's perfect!"

> I tried to make the turtle believable with plenty of details

GIANT TURTLE

"This is a fantasy piece, but I tried to make it believable with plenty of details. You can see gravity doing its work and pushing the cargo to the sides. I even thought about their contents at the time!"

Sketchbook

BREATH OF FIRE IV

"Fan art that I did for my Patreon. This illustration was a new challenge for me. I used some 3D tools to help identify a compelling perspective with the camera, and an interesting composition."

NUADA

"Here's one of my favourite character. The details are mostly on the top part, which contrast with her slim legs. At first glance you think she's human, but when you look closer you can see the weird mechanical parts and gears. She's been through a lot..."

"I drew it like a decorative piece to show that there is beauty even in deadly things"

SEPHI

"This character is slowly turning into a monster. However, I drew it like a decorative piece to show that there is beauty even in deadly things."

GRISAILLE

"The dark brown colours were applied with a Photoshop brush in Color Burn mode. It's a favourite drawing technique of mine."

ROASTED

"In this Inktober sketch this royal knight was burnt alive trying to protect the Queen. The King's dark mage summoned him back, and now he's trapped between life and death."

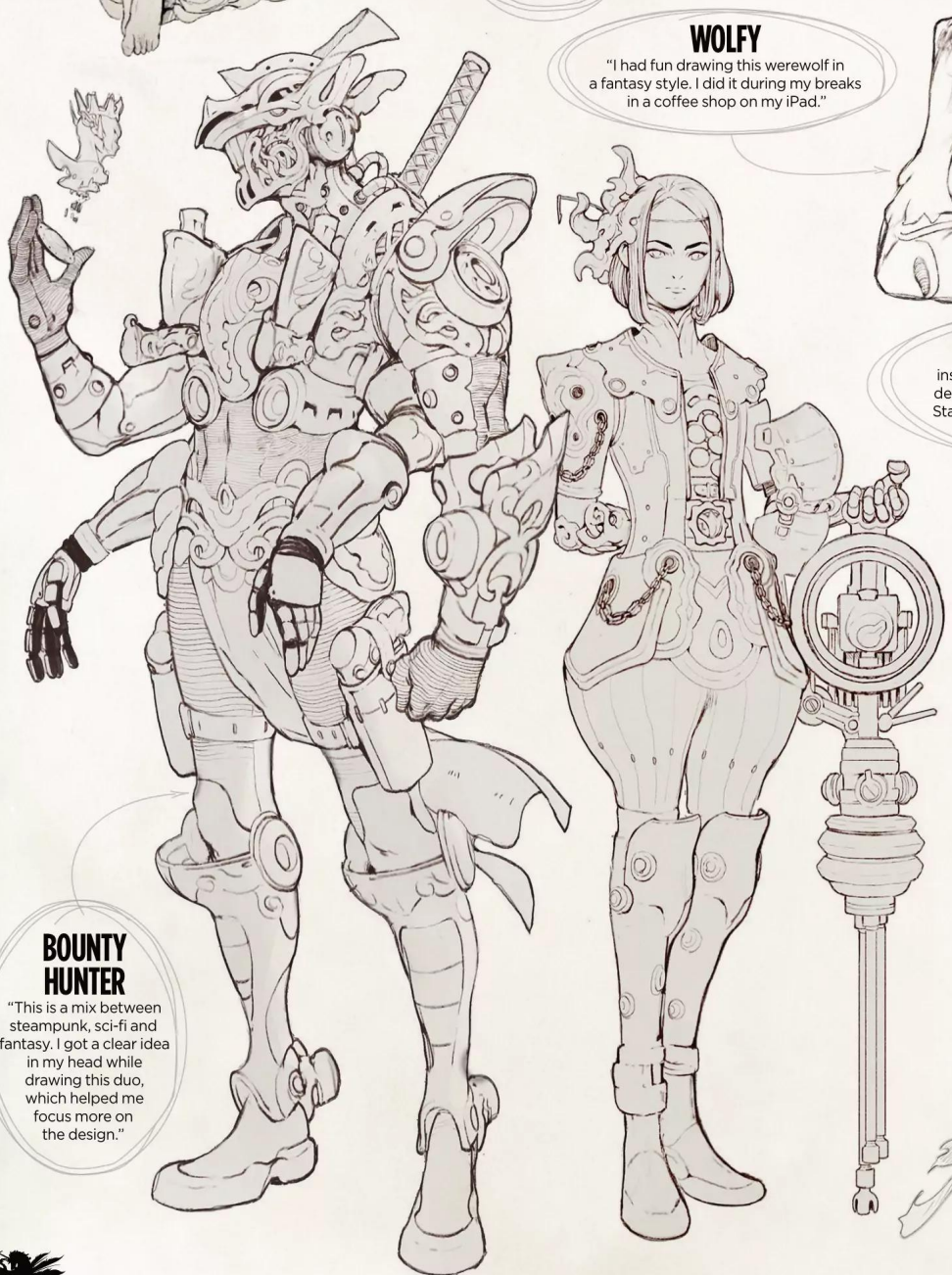
Sketchbook

SUMMONS

"This character is a summoner who's able to conjure up creatures that are small and cute... as long as they remain within their magic bubbles."

WOLFY

"I had fun drawing this werewolf in a fantasy style. I did it during my breaks in a coffee shop on my iPad."



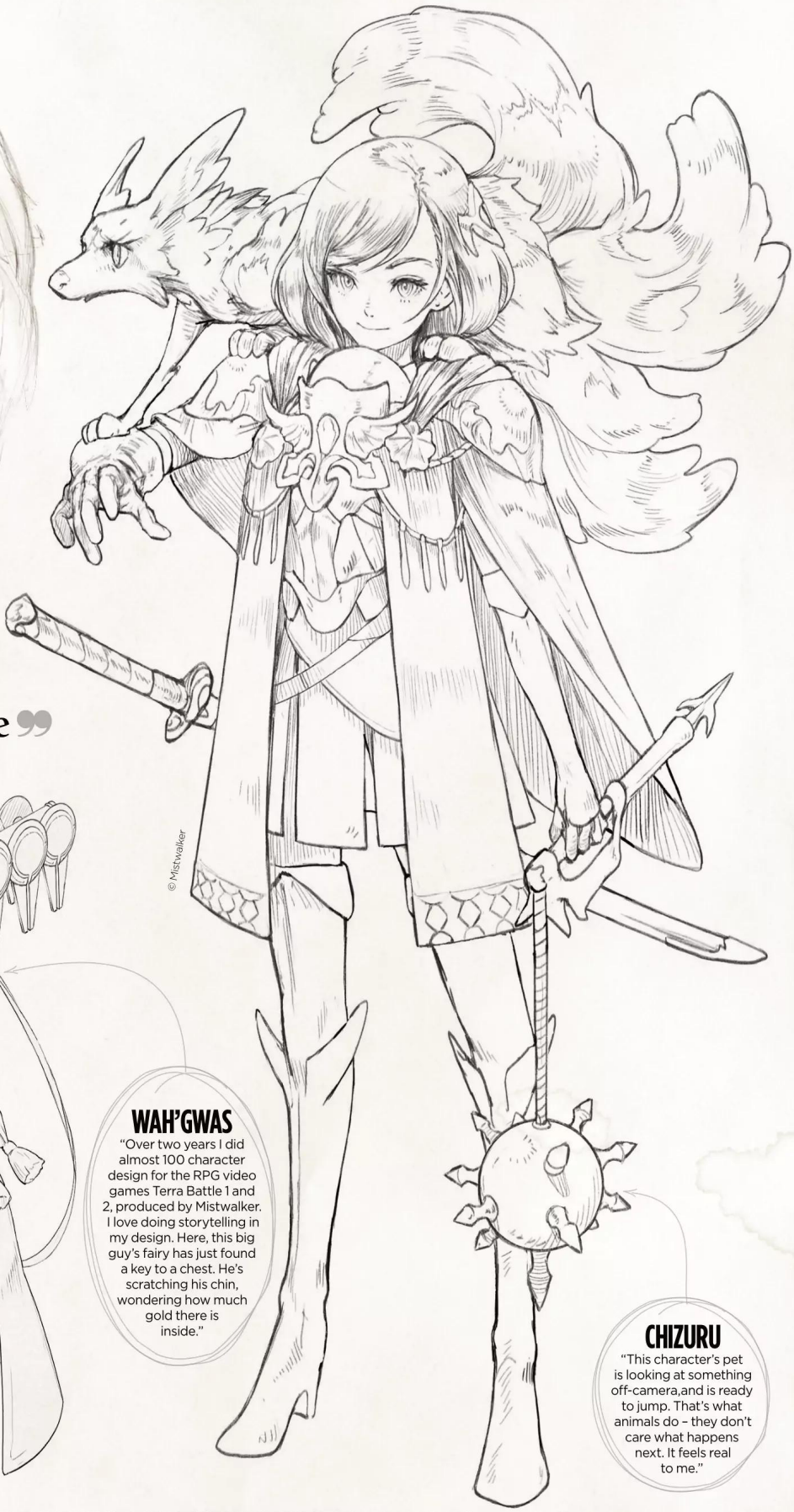
BOUNTY HUNTER

"This is a mix between steampunk, sci-fi and fantasy. I got a clear idea in my head while drawing this duo, which helped me focus more on the design."

SIRSI

"The face of this character was very much inspired by Yoshitaka Amano's illustrations. The design behind her head was also inspired by the Statue of Liberty. The wavy shapes contrast with her cold and sharp expression."

ONI
"Here's a demon adopting a pose like a fashion model on the cover of a magazine."



© Mistwalker

"He's scratching his chin, wondering how much gold there is inside"

© Mistwalker

WAH'GWAS
"Over two years I did almost 100 character design for the RPG video games Terra Battle 1 and 2, produced by Mistwalker. I love doing storytelling in my design. Here, this big guy's fairy has just found a key to a chest. He's scratching his chin, wondering how much gold there is inside."

CHIZURU
"This character's pet is looking at something off-camera,and is ready to jump. That's what animals do – they don't care what happens next. It feels real to me."

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

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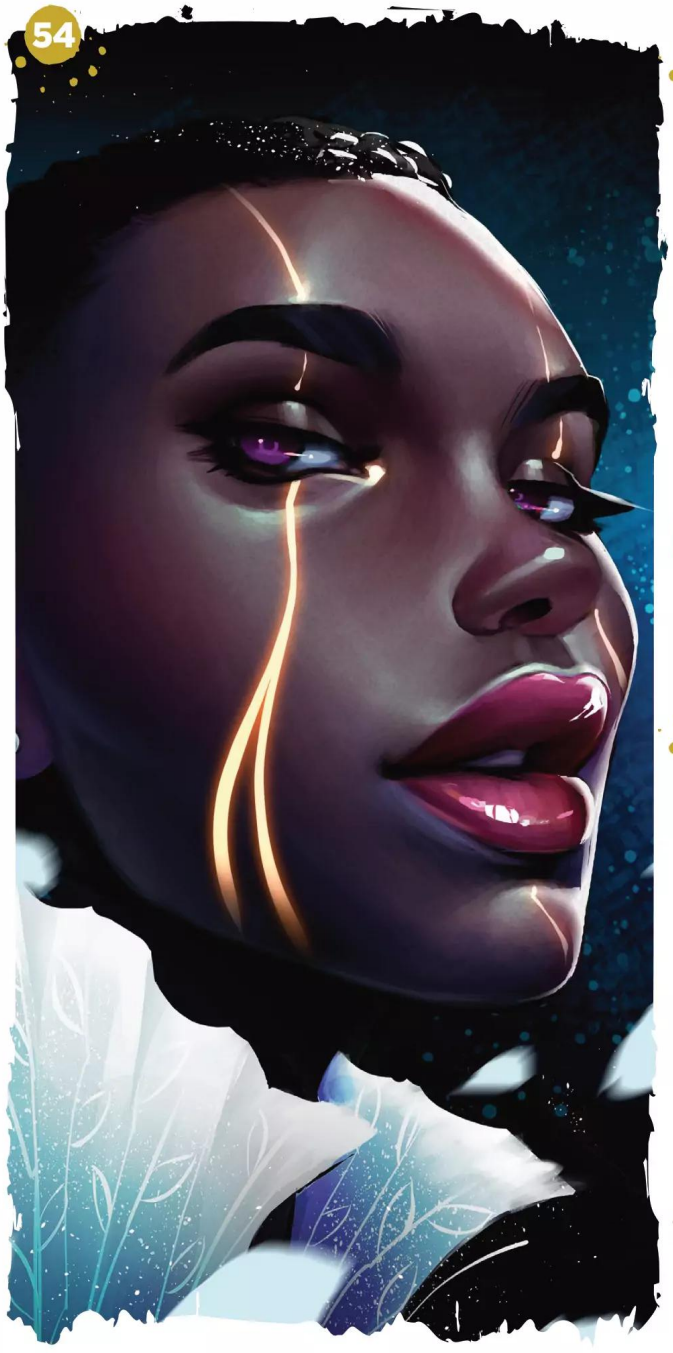
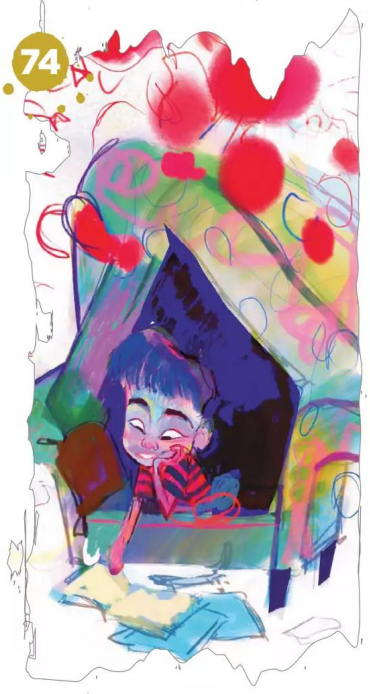
Advice from the world's best artists





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Mel Milton thinks like a sculptor when working with values.

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Learn how Taraneh Karimi conveys mood and emotion.

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Mike Corriero covers forced perspective and composition.

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Oona Holtane on capturing human nature and storytelling.

Clip Studio Paint

PAINT FUTURISTIC PORTRAIT ART

Mel Milton on why he thinks like a sculptor when working with values before he adds colour to his portrait piece

Artist **PROFILE**

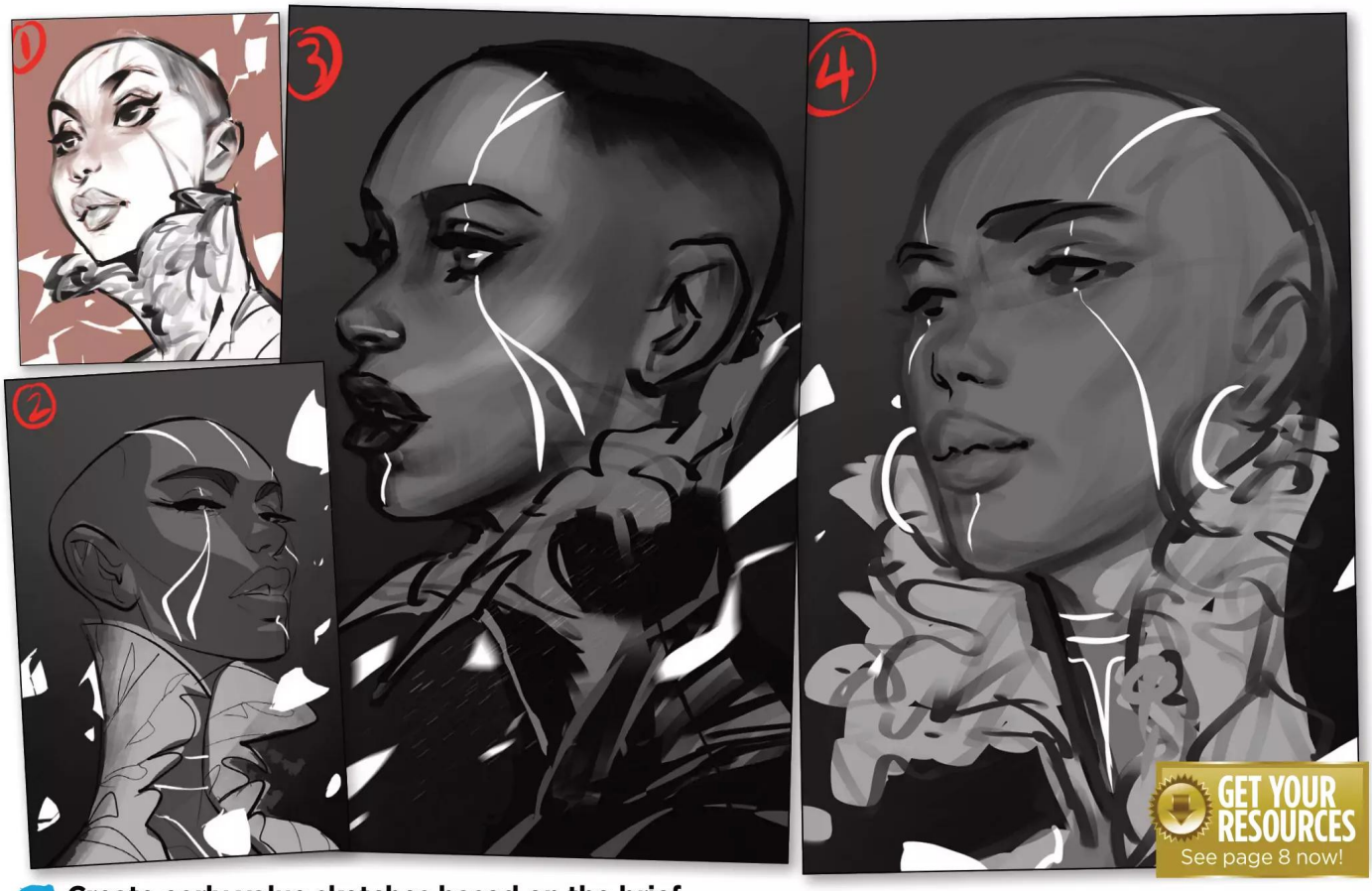
Mel Milton
LOCATION: US

Mel is a former character animator and figure drawing instructor who is now a full-time freelance illustrator.
https://ifxm.ag/melm

With all the craziness going on in the world, creating art has been a lifesaver. To say I was excited about the opportunity to do this workshop is an understatement. I'm probably even more giddy about doing this one as it gives me a chance to see how I've changed since the last workshop.

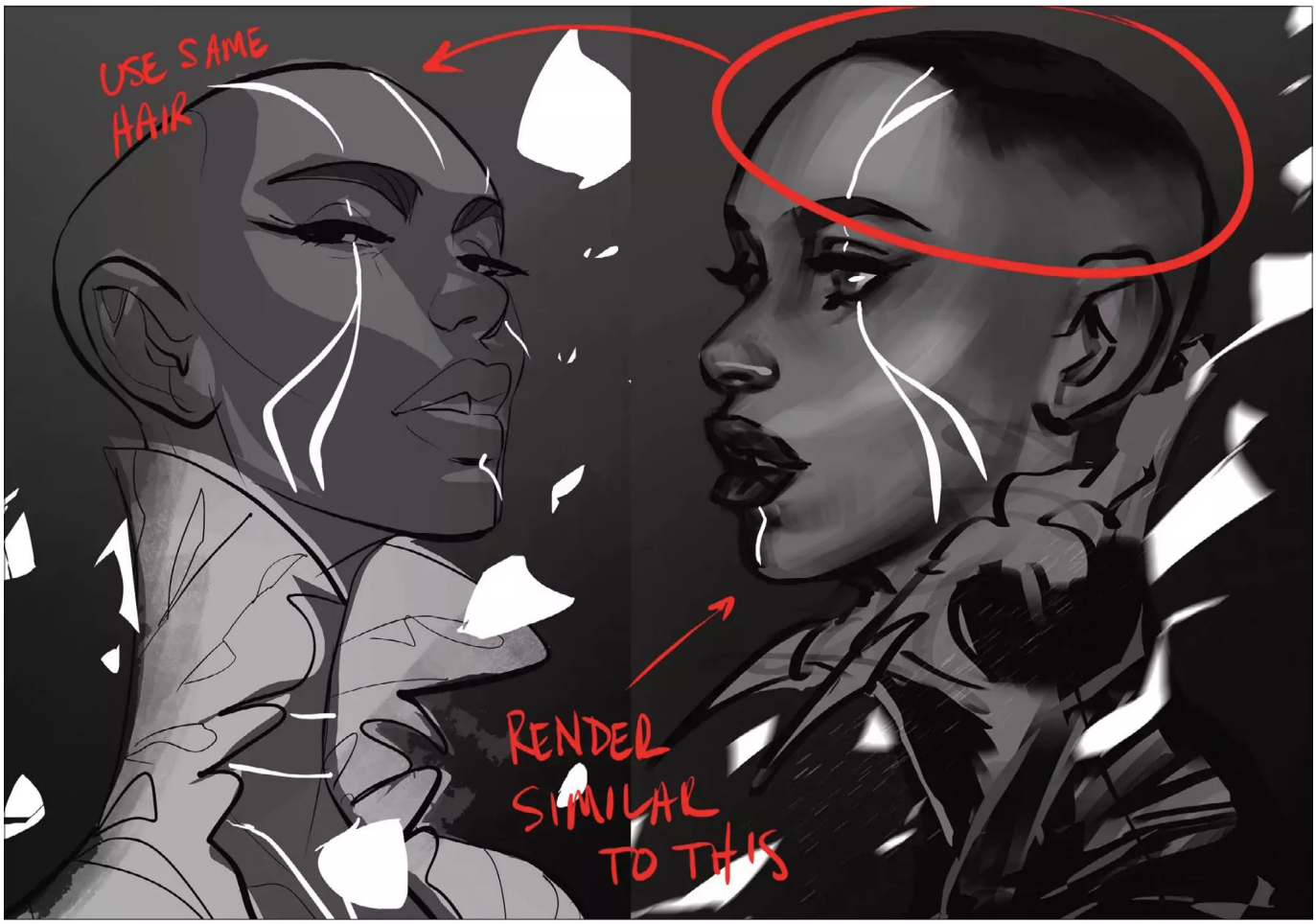
In issue 168 I created a portrait using Photoshop and shortly after that I decided to switch to Clip Studio Paint. I was amazed with how feature-rich it was for the cost (I purchased the EX version when it was on sale) and I've not used Photoshop since. It took me a little while to get used to it (having worked in Photoshop for over 20 years didn't help matters), but it was also familiar in many aspects and so it wasn't too frustrating to learn my way around.

I'm still finding new ways of doing things in Clip Studio Paint and am excited to grow with the program. It's been almost two years since that transition and I'm happy to share one of my processes I use to create a portrait. I hope you find it helpful!



1 Create early value sketches based on the brief

I receive notes to create a 20-something African American female with a profile view and lighting to bring out her strong features and short hair. The ImagineFX team doesn't want a straight-on profile, but something that's turned a little so that both eyes are seen. They also say that they enjoyed the pieces I had recently created for my Instagram page with the glowing patterns on the face. (I was excited about this because it helps me think of it as a personal piece rather than client work, which takes some of the pressure off.) I do a few value sketches and send them off. ➳



2 Focusing on values

Image 2 is chosen with some elements from 3. When I received my brief I didn't have a plan on how I wanted to tackle colours. I did know that I wanted to focus on values, though: this would make it easier for me to keep track of how the image was lit and its forms. Once I'm happy with the values, I'll decide where to take my colours.

RESOURCES
WORKSHOP BRUSHES

CLIP STUDIO PAINT

CUSTOM BRUSHES: FLAT MARKER BRUSH

This feels like a chisel tip marker. I alter Pressure Sensitivity to blend with it.

CHALK BRUSH

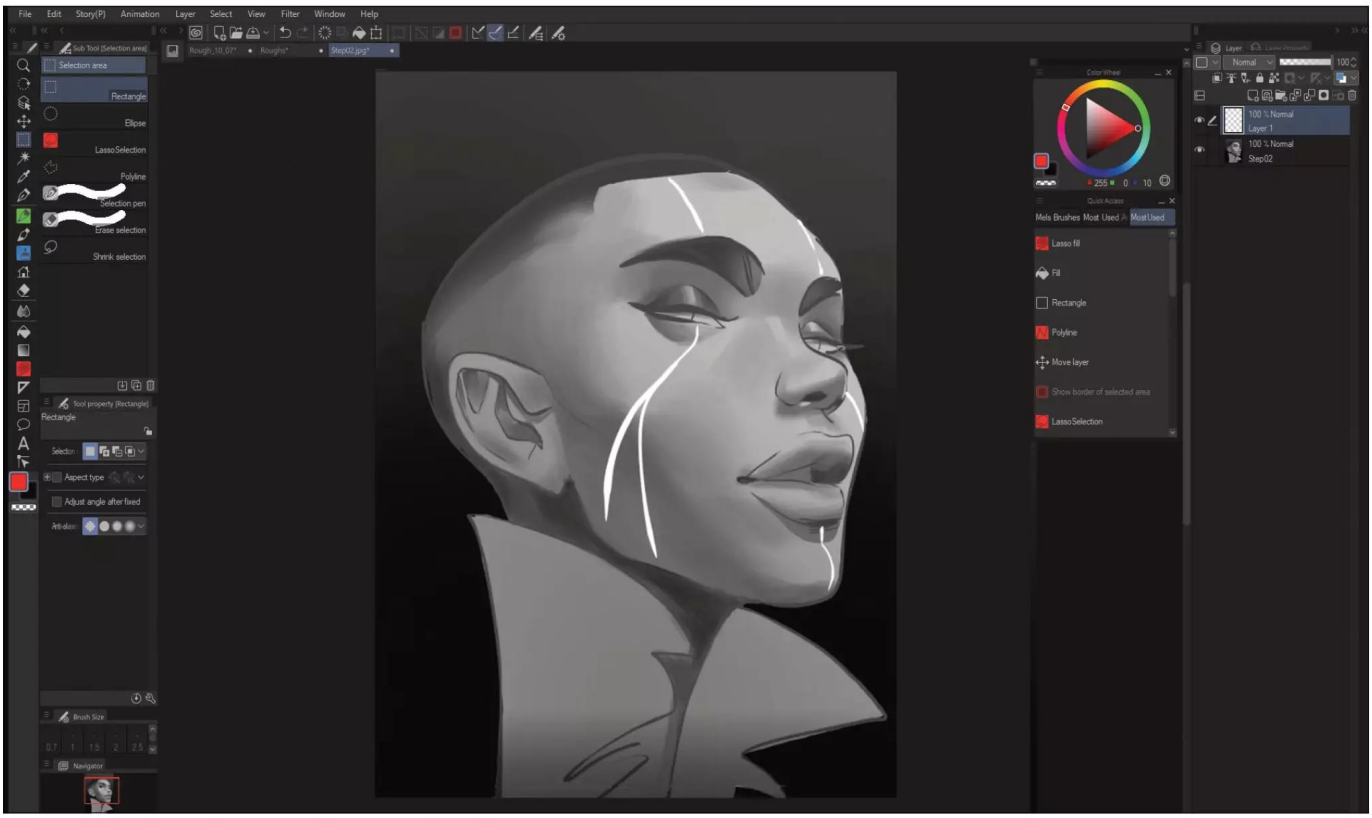
I used this brush to detail the background.

SPLATTER BRUSH

I added small textures on the top of her head and collar with this brush.

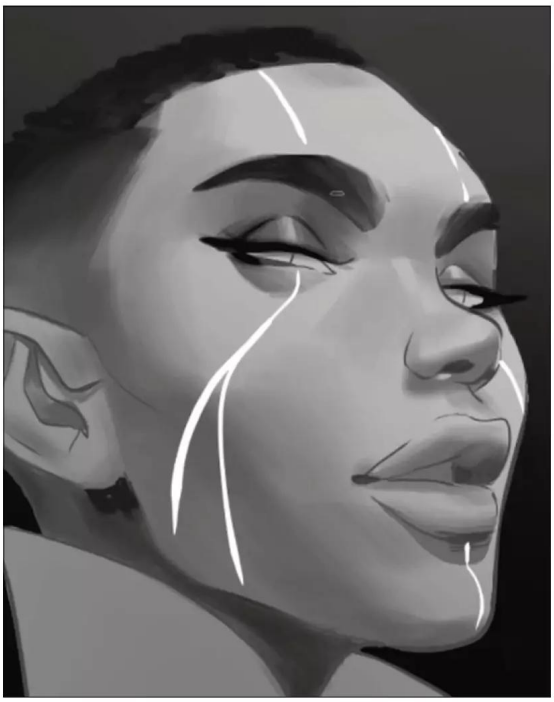
3 Blocking the artwork with the cover text as a guide

For this stage I use the layout the ImagineFX team sends me so I can see where the title and text will sit. I use Clip Studio Paint's G-pen to sketch in the portrait and the Lasso tool to fill in major masses such as shadows.



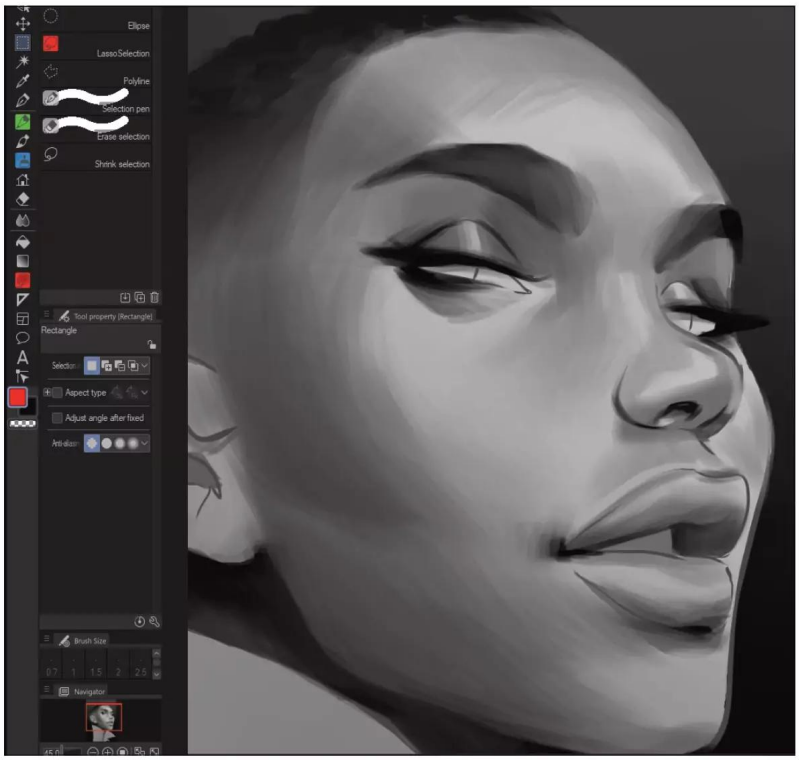
4 Thinking like a sculptor as I paint

Most of the work on this piece is dedicated to the values and blending. I think more like a sculptor when I'm in this stage of the process. It's liberating to not think about colour. Instead, I keep things simple by staying with light, medium and dark values, and blending them together.



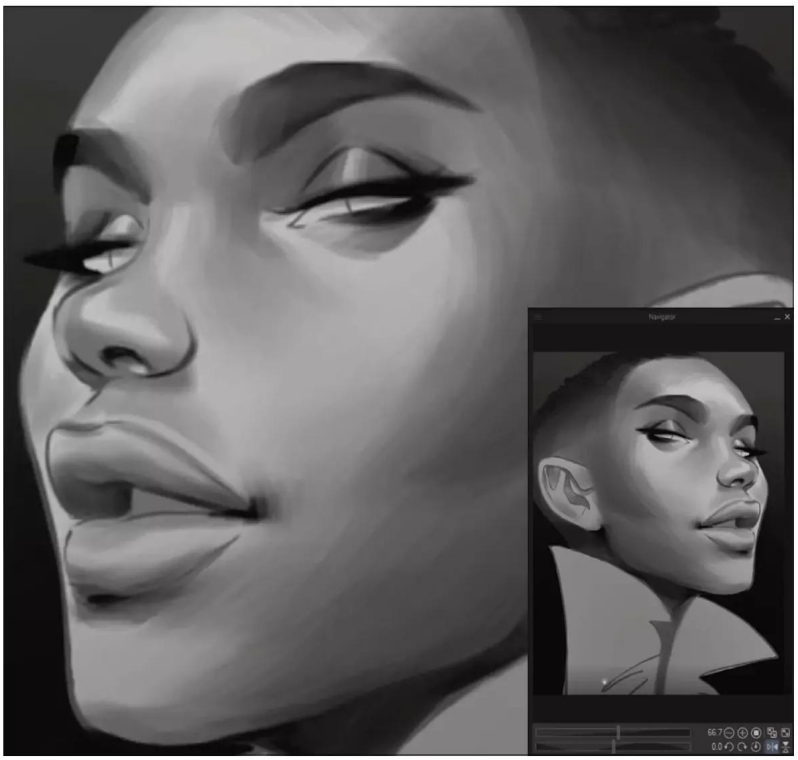
5 Noodle those values

I try to limit where I put my darkest darks and lightest lights, and use them to emphasise specific areas. These include the eyes and the hair that's right at the top of the character's head. The latter sets off the contrast between this area and the lighter part of the background.



6 Direct viewers to the face

Most of my time painting portraits is spent making sure the eyes are working well. Your viewer will naturally look there first, so it makes sense to put in the extra effort to get them right. I start adding darker tones to ensure they stand out.

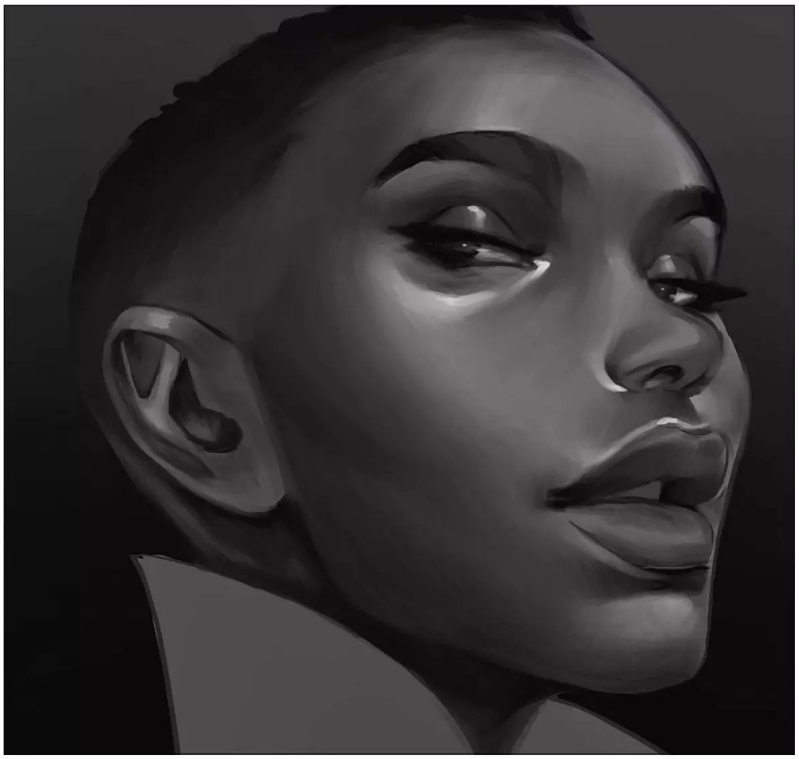


7 Flipping the image and making corrections

I flip the image: it's a good way to see if your proportions are working out. I feel at this stage that the tones aren't as dark as I would like, so I add a Brightness/Contrast correction layer to remedy that.

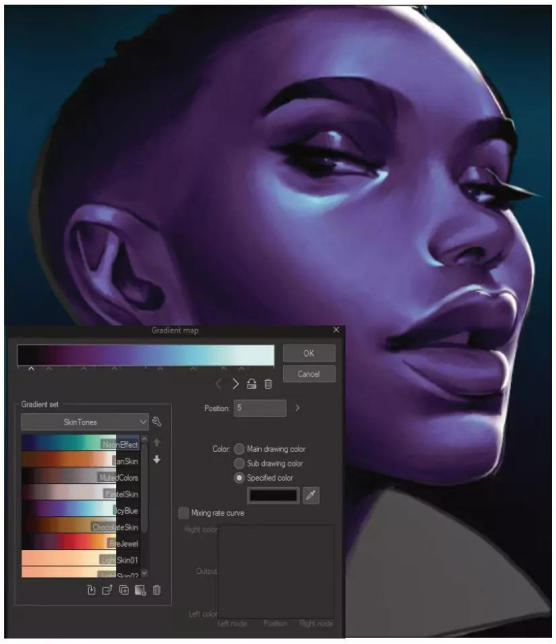
8 Make the collar pop

I paint the collar a stark white, although at some point I'll add some details here. I know I want it to look like it's glowing, which will give me a chance to introduce bounce light to her jawline. I'm still trying to figure out what I want to do here that won't detract from her face.



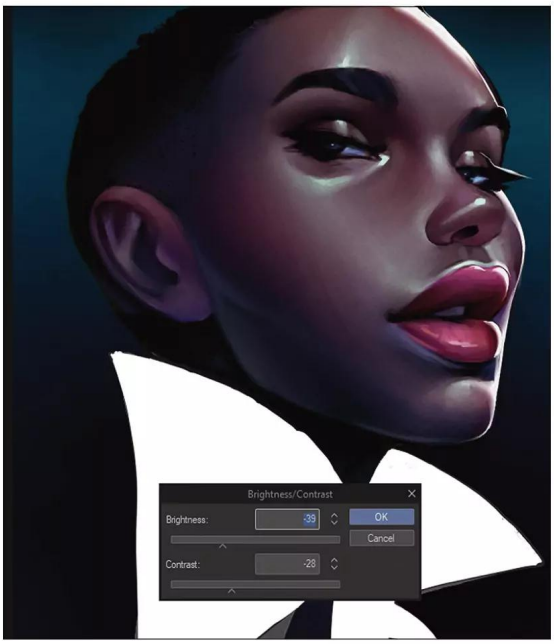
9 Stepping back and taking stock

I have a few other projects on my plate as well as my daughter's birthday, so I use this time to take a step back and let my work-in-progress simmer for a bit. The other projects are similar in nature, which gives me something I can pull from to bring into this piece. The birthday with the daughter is the refuel I need!



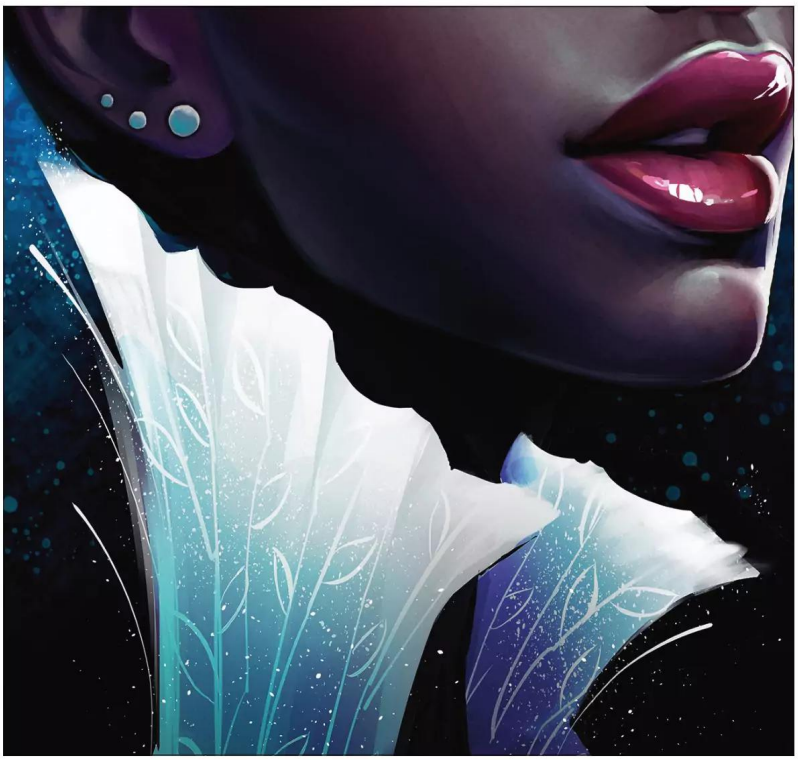
10 Colours... finally!

This part is where I experiment – a lot! I stick to a basic theme with my colours to keep from wandering all over the place. First off, I want the majority of the image to have a cool feel to it and the light areas to feel warmer. I use a lot of correction layers. The first one is the Gradient Map. This gets me to a place where I work out the cool parts of the portrait first. I also add a rim light to my character so that she doesn't feel flat.



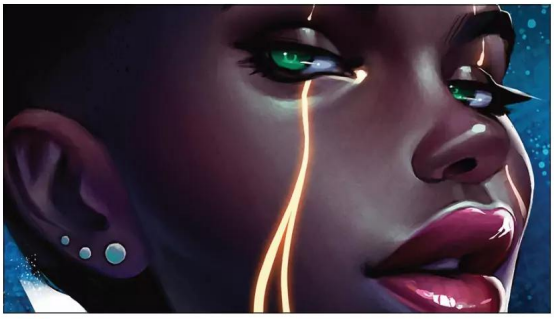
11 Acting on feedback

Some of the notes I receive from ImagineFX are to smooth out the tones in her face, punch up the contrast as well as add a bit of the cool blues into her collar. I create another Brightness/Contrast correction layer with only her face being affected. Correction layers are ideal for client work because if my changes need taking further, I can just go to that layer and make appropriate fixes.



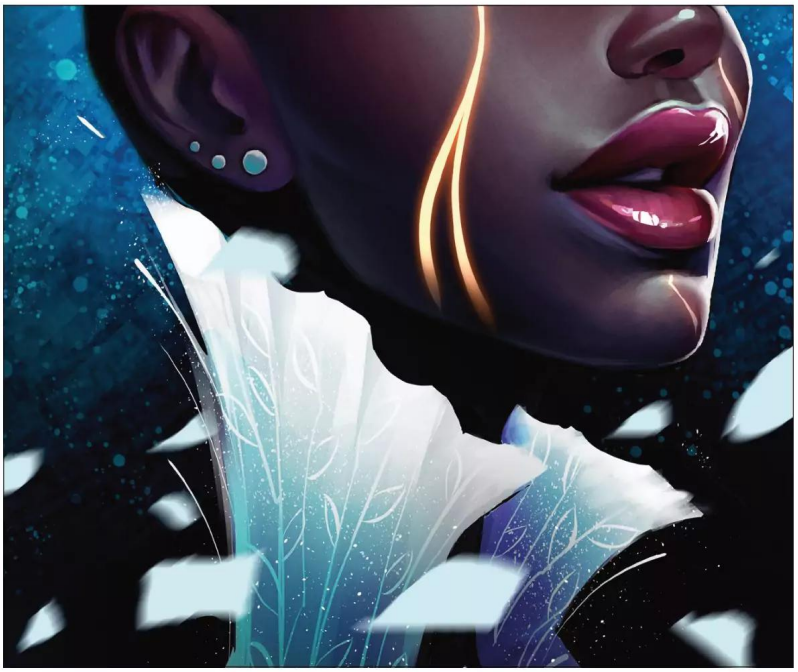
12 Background and collar refinements

I block in the background with cool blue tones and use a Chalk and Splatter brush to punch up its texture. I also add textures and some blue to soften the collar and give it form and depth. I want the rough textures to frame her smooth skin.



13 Icing on the cake

It's time to paint the glowing face lines. I've been looking forward to this step, although I'm not sure why. Perhaps it's just that I'm nearing the end of the project. Regardless, it's a satisfying stage! I take the layer with those lines, duplicate it, add a Gaussian blur and set the layer to Add (Glow). I lock that layer's Transparency and use the Lasso Fill tool with the colour set to yellow to create a glow that feels warm and blends into the skin.



14 A greater understanding of values and colours

I change the eye colour to a magenta because the green is a bit much, and add the blurred flying debris. I'm pretty happy with how she's turned out. I've used this workflow a lot more lately: it's enabled me to strengthen my value work and better understand how they work with colours, and vice versa. These steps keep me from getting too lost and bring my focus on the things I want to convey to the viewer. It's also been a great opportunity to document those steps and see how my thought process has evolved since switching from Photoshop to Clip Studio Paint.

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Learn how to generate ideas, paint concept art and craft your own fantasy worlds!

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Visual development artist Chrystin Garland shares how she creates.

Environment workshop
Concept artist and matt painter Lynn Yang visualises a fantasy landscape.

Sci-fi scene speed painting
Learn how to quickly set up and light a scene with artist Lixin Yin.

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Cubebrush's Marc Brunet gives us a tour of his creative art space!

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The creators of Cyberpunk 2077 tell us how they crafted one of this year's most stunning games!

Photoshop

HOW TO CAPTURE MOOD IN YOUR ART

Taraneh Karimi shares her process for creating illustrations to convey mood and emotion, helping to connect her work with the audience

Artist PROFILE

Taraneh Karimi
LOCATION:
The Netherlands

Concept artist Taraneh has worked in motion graphics, advertising, games and animation. She loves to study how humans think and feel.
www.taraneh.me

There's magic in simplicity. I often study traditional Japanese paintings of beautiful landscapes with simple shades and colours. They're a huge source of inspiration when illustrating mood.

I created this image as part of a pitch for a story to an animation studio. This was not the only image in the presentation, but my contribution was to find a way to create a mood image and convey how the story will feel like, bearing in mind the visual style of the proposed animated story.

My favourite part of creating an image is to achieve mood through colours, and have the audience feel what I feel. You could call it taking a more poetic approach to painting, rather than simply churning out artworks for production purposes.

To convey the mood I have in mind, I search for references that match the art direction. In this case it's mostly traditional Japanese art and nature photography. I'm keen to push the realism because this will enable the viewer to connect with the art and the story it's telling. I use depth in the background and a focal point in the foreground to make it easy to read the story, and use colour and light to add the mood magic!

How I create...
A RESTFUL IMAGE IN A RAIN FOREST

1 Capturing the composition

The first element of storytelling is a strong composition, and I usually find it using thumbnails and sketches. This method also helps me to see if my idea is working visually. I recommend trying unusual angles early on – use references if you can't imagine them yourself. For this concept I picked a static composition, because the story is about resting and biding one's time.

2 Inspired by a rain forest

References also help me find the right colours and lighting. For this image I already had in mind a rain forest: lush, peaceful and dense. It's pleasant to watch or even listen to, and that's what I like about it. It's relatable, and also romantic and emotional – like a good memory. That helps me to choose a monotone background colour, and green and blue foreground elements.

3 Rendering the focal point

The mid-ground is where the story happens, Here we need detail, sharpness, and contrasting shapes and colours. Using a subsurface scatter effect on the leaves will help to make them look more realistic. I use a blurry brush to fade some part of the image, and use a noise texture to make it less like vector art. Loose brush strokes help create happy accidents in the painting.

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PAINT A RAIN FOREST

Soft-focus background

Bokeh is defined as the effect of a soft, out-of-focus background that you achieve when shooting a subject. I used these elements for the background to make it more feel like a photo rather than an illustration, and this makes the image appear more realistic.

Lighting techniques

To strengthen an image, try letting the lighting lead part of the story. I chose subsurface scattering in this image for the leaves. It contrasts with the rest of the image and creates a focal point around the character and her story. It also makes the image more pleasing and magical, bringing light and hope to a cold, rainy forest.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: HARD ROUND PRESSURE AND FLOW

SAMPLED BRUSH 10 2

GOODJEFF_006 OIL PASTEL

TEMPLATE – TREE 02

With these brushes I can create a pencil-like texture or less-subtle textures. The Round brush is for adding gradients and bokeh effects, while the leaf brush helps me create leaf silhouettes.

Contrast in storytelling

There are so many aspects within a concept or illustration to consider when bringing a story to life. Here it's mostly about creating contrasts. The contrast of a real environment and fairy elements, having a warm fire in a cold, rainy setting, and the scale of the mid-ground and background.

Foreground

Adding three planes in this illustration makes it easier for the viewer to understand the environment. Although the foreground is only a small part of the image compared to the mid- and background, it makes the image less flat and creates the illusion of space.

The devil is in the detail

Part of the story could be within the details around the main character or the focal point. While small elements might not seem that important at first glance, they'll add layers to the story and will introduce aspects of the character. It's always pleasing to set up a secondary story around the main one with some additional details. It brings depth to the composition.

Procreate

CREATE DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Mike Corriero covers forced perspective, composition, and posing creatures and characters to produce dynamic art

Artist **PROFILE**

Mike Corriero
LOCATION: US

With over 17 years of experience as a freelance concept artist and illustrator for the entertainment industries, Mike's worked for companies such as FATface Production Limited HK, Radical Entertainment, The Topps Company and Hasbro, Inc.
www.mikecorriero.com

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One of the more important art fundamentals is to learn about the basics of composition. Illustrations that work well tend to involve design aspects with visual cues. These help play a role in perspective, depth and dynamics, and help the viewer see what you're trying to communicate.

A lot of the design elements we'll be covering in this workshop involve forced perspective, dynamic action, atmospheric depth and little overlapping details that help strengthen the overall story. We'll be concentrating on developing a dynamic and interesting perspective. This will include utilising some basics of composition and forced perspective, focal points, and helping to lead the viewer's eyes around the image. While working on such a relatively chaotic piece, you'll learn how to apply more attention to the key aspects of the overall image. We'll also be talking about colour theory, light and values.

It helps to think about the image in three different layers, starting with the main focal point which would be in the middle of our audience's vantage point. Then we're going to include elements of design in the foreground that will help push the atmosphere and perspective back in space. Finally, there'll be additional design elements in the background to be used as supporting designs, as well as reinforcing the dynamics of the composition.

Composition is a crucial part of planning the layout of any image. It dictates how the different characters, elements and other designs interact with each other to create a harmonious cohesion of imagery.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PROCREATE

DEFAULT BRUSHES: CHARCOAL BLOCK

This brush was used to give the image more of a traditional look.

BURNT TREE

Used sparingly in larger areas where I wanted some interesting texture.

GLOAMING

I like to use this brush for finer details, such as hair, spikes and so on.

FLOWING HAIR

I use this brush to create movement, much like Photoshop's Motion filter.

1 Create a rough sketch

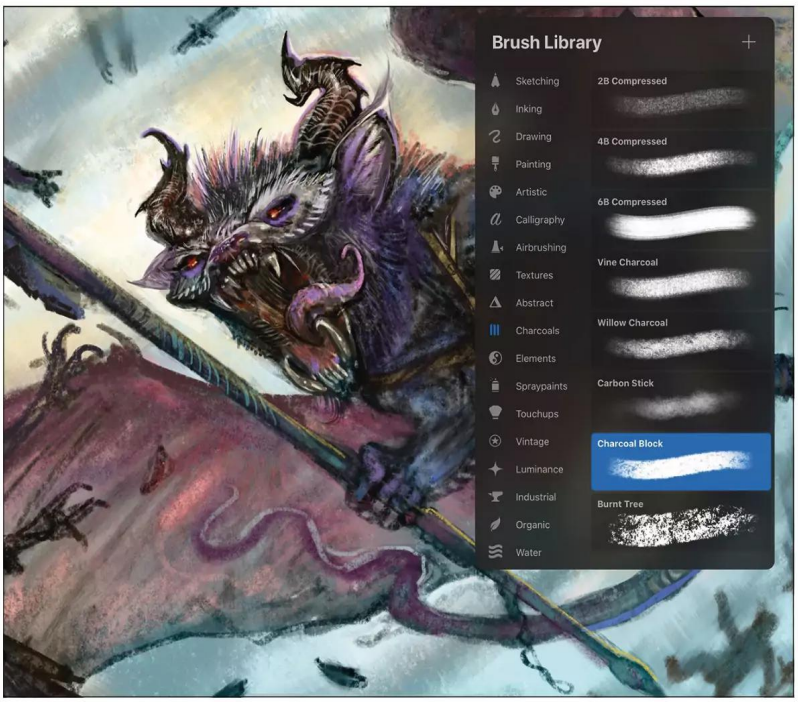
The sketch for an illustration doesn't need to be precise. You may be better off leaving it a bit rough and in this case I used the Charcoal Block brush to work out the basic line work and composition. This gives me enough leeway to reposition and resize important elements before finalising their placement and scale.

2 Generate rough values

Separating and keeping key characters/creatures and designs on their own layers makes it much easier to work out the placement of everything, eventually producing the strongest composition. Creating a new layer and setting it to Multiply is a quick way to provide shades of grey within the silhouette without losing the lines.

3 Apply the base colours

After laying down values for the main design elements, I take that layer and set one above it to Color. This enables me to quickly lay down basic colours for the characters and the background. Colour, just like values, is a way to help provide more interest to a single point.



4 Laying down some detail

While detailing anatomy and rendering you'll want to paint in enough detail without finalising any one point. Currently, the face of the demonic creature will be the primary focal point and once the image is complete it'll serve as the dominant element in the entire image. This will play a key role in the composition: the audience and viewer's eyes will start here and eventually move about the illustration to the secondary locations.

5 Forcing perspective

I'm purposely keeping details loose and vague at this point for a couple of reasons. One being that it enables me to shrink or enlarge areas that I want to push back and forth. In this case I've tilted the canvas in Procreate to focus on the anatomy, but more importantly to resize the basic silhouette and scale.

6 Pushing the sense of action

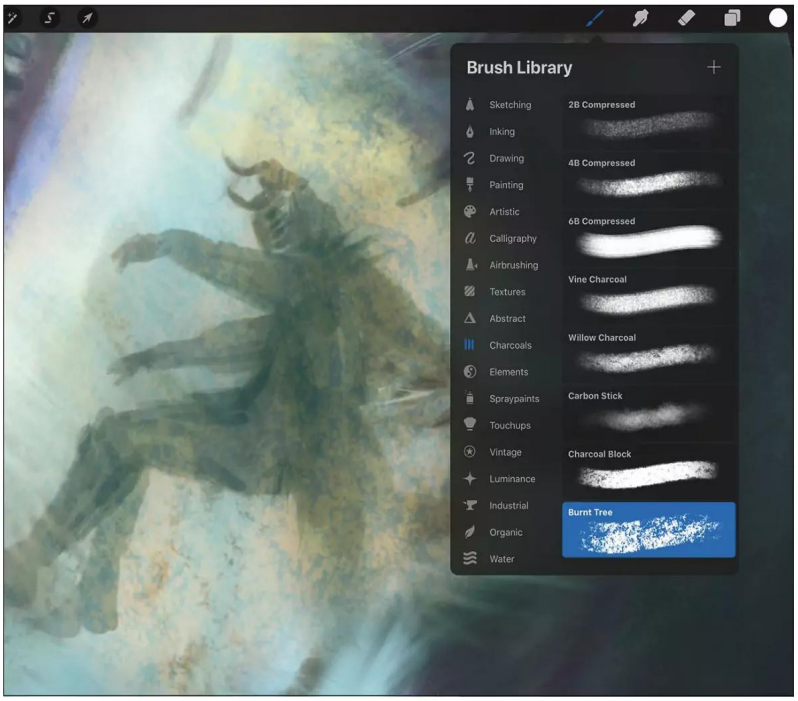
In order to supply more action and a dynamic story, I'm including anatomical- and object-based items to strengthen the composition. The demon's tail, for example, is another way to help lead your eye down to that section and back around to the eagle-based creature. I'm adding another soldier falling on the bottom right and a soldier mounted on another bird up top. These are all consciously placed to reinforce the story and action.

7 Use a triangle to identify key areas

This main region is made up of two supporting characters and one main creature. The points within the triangle comprise the area within the illustration that has the most contrast in value, the most detail and saturated colour. The triangle supports other choices of placement and how they lead the eye around the page. One point of the triangle is leading toward the tail of the demon, which also reinforces the forced perspective.

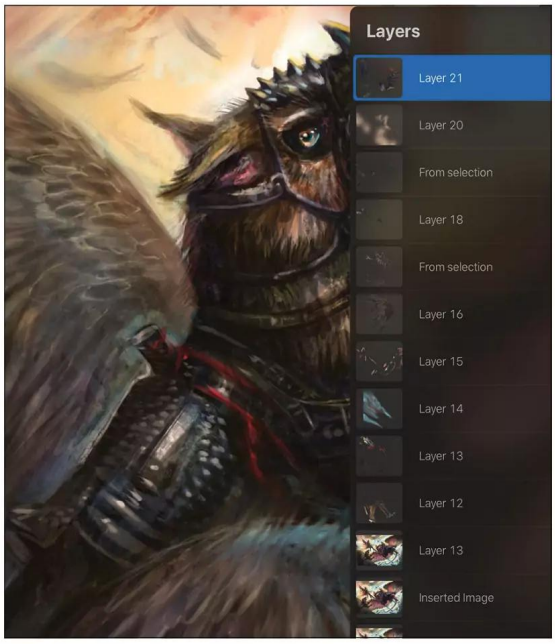
8 Increase the size of the image

I realised it would help the forced perspective as well as the composition if I widened the horizontal dimensions. All I did was flatten the entire image, create a new layer and then grab and stretch the sides using the Selection tool. Once you've done that you can easily use the Touchups>Flowing Hair tool for blending/smudging. I finalise the look of the knight to match that of a knight falling in the bottom right corner.



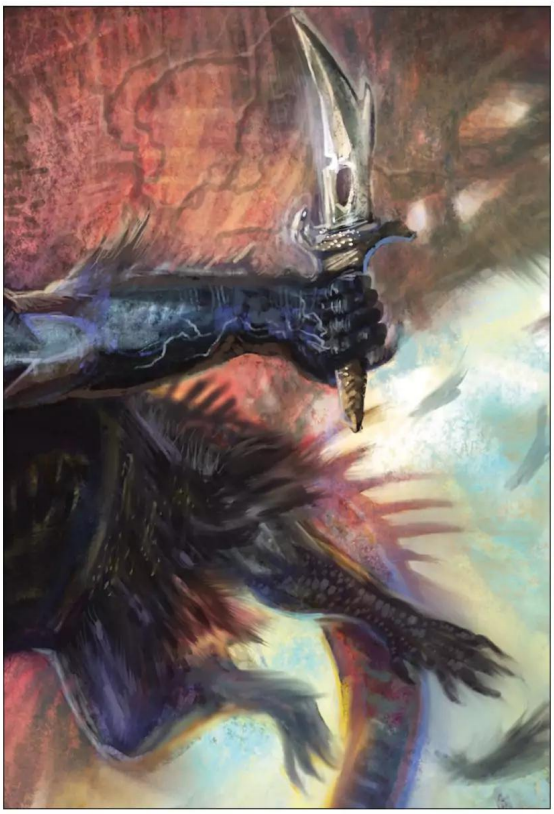
9 Subtle texture and implied detail

When you want to push the atmospheric depth and layers of perspective further in space, the trick is to reduce the contrast of value and the amount of detail. By doing this and keeping aspects less detailed or a bit blurry, it'll provide more space and depth, and this will provide a great deal of forced perspective to every element involved. The Burnt Tree Charcoal brush is great for subtle yet effective textures regarding this illustration technique.



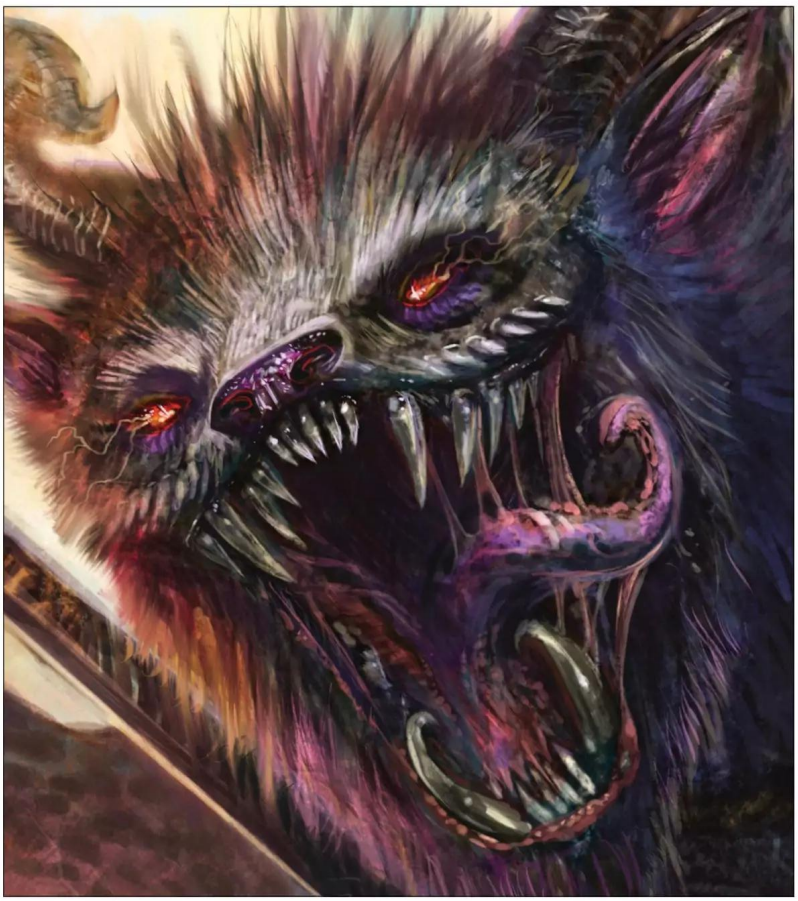
10 Push atmospheric depth

Painting elements such as feathers, leaves and smaller characters is a great way to provide depth to any illustration. I want them to be noticeable enough without completely taking away too much focus from the action in the scene. In this case, the feathers and falling knight are perfect to help balance out the composition while also providing a way to push items forward or further back in the atmospheric depth of space.



11 Paint details that count

When reaching the end of a piece of work like this, I like to make sure there are little details that provide a big reaction. This would include veins in the wings, scales and veins on the arms, rips in the wings as well as hinting at implied detail on something like the knife or dagger. Hitting these areas up with a warm yellow orange on an Overlay layer can really attract the viewer's attention.

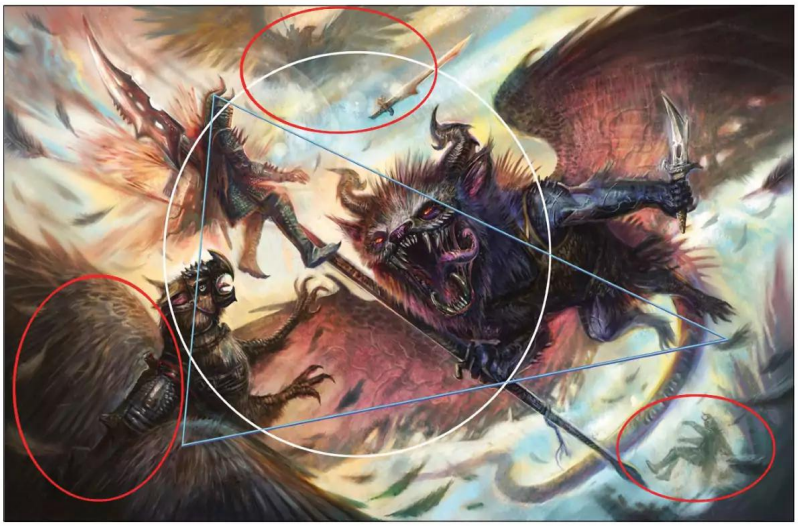


12 Providing designs with life

Once I get down to the finer details of things such as teeth, hair and the eyes I like to keep in mind how I can make a creature appear a bit more realistic. Adding elements such as saliva, spit or a tongue hanging out all adds to the realism of the attacking demon creature.

13 Scars, kinks and dents

I like to remember that regardless of what creature I'm creating or painting, they're all living beings that have a history. So while working on the arm and body of the demon creature, I'm adding scars, scrapes, veins and textures that are slightly off-key. It's these imperfections that provide the realism to your concept and painting. Nothing in nature is perfect.



14 Forced perspective and composition

I like to supply a way of moving the viewer's eyes around the image. What we have here is the triangle along with two additions to the composition. The main white circle is the most important part of the entire image, while the secondary elements are circled in red. This includes the falling knight, the mounted knight and floating feathers. All of these design aspects lead from the outer ring to the central circle and the main attraction.

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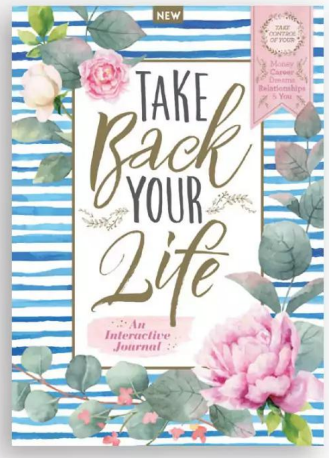

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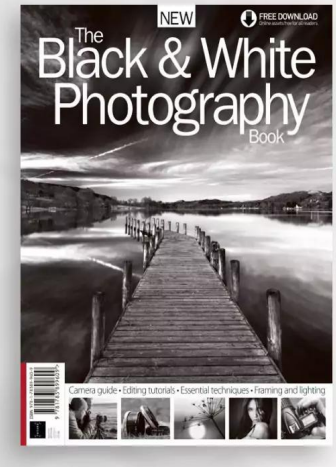

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BRING TEXTURE TO YOUR CHARACTERS

Capturing human nature and telling a story is key to **Oona Holtane's** character design work. Here she reveals how she tackles both concepts

Artist PROFILE

Oona Holtane
LOCATION: US

Oona is an artist working in feature animation, and is currently helping to develop an unannounced film at Kuku Studios. Past clients include Disney and Illumination Mac Guff. Her passion is storytelling through the use of colourful stories, characters and worlds, to help others view life's events from a more positive perspective.
www.oonaholtane.com

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Drawing from life and observing people is something that drives me to create. I love capturing with pencil the nuances individuals have, seeing their journey, their passions, their likes and dislikes, their disappointments, their achievements.

All of this life experience shows through how they greet someone, how they sit while they drink a cup of tea. It's every ounce of their being condensed into everything they express – or don't express, because they may be choosing not to show their true self. All of this is what makes us who we are, whether we realise it or not. This variety in human nature is what I believe is the root of character design.

Character design infamously has a superficial side. Something we see for how it simply reads on paper. We're more concerned with the size of the eyes in relation to the nose for the limits of appeal, than what it actually communicates about the character. While it's important to be conscious of proportions, shape and colour, it should be used as a tool to communicate ideas rather than live on its own without a reason for being. Design must be purposeful. It should tell a clear story.

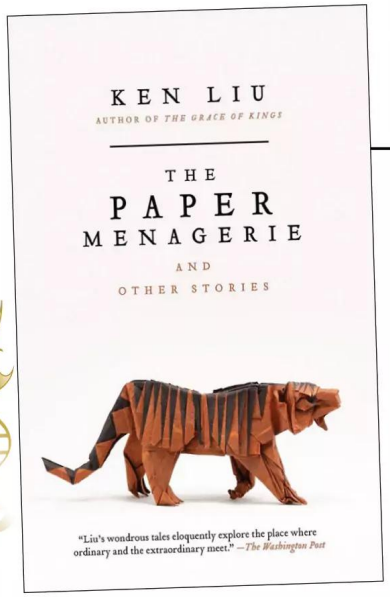
RELATING TO THE AUDIENCE

When I design a character, I want the viewer, director or production designer to feel something. To relate with this character, to feel like it's an old friend, someone they want to know. Ultimately, I want the audience to empathise with this character as much as I do. And the only way to communicate that is to feel it yourself. If we as designers can't care about this character, then the audience won't, either.

If our designs aren't clear to the average person – someone who hasn't studied art – then how is an entire audience going to react? The beautiful thing about animation and film in general is that we don't need to be artists ourselves to appreciate a character or a story within a film.

As character designers, we develop a cast for a film. We build "actors" who will serve the roles the directors have written. These actors don't exist yet. Usually, early on in a production, directors and art directors want to see as many ideas as possible. They want to push ideas until they break and then reign them back in. The goal is to create a character the audience can connect with, while being unique and telling the story clearly. We as designers refer to many different resources: storyboards, verbal explanations, scripts, research, inspiration. But the point of all this research and rumination is to understand what needs to be communicated through our design.

In this workshop, I'll be explaining how you can go from initial thought to completion within your own mind. The example will be using the story The Paper Menagerie as a script. I want to share with you how I design characters from start to finish. My body of work focuses on early development and exploratory ideas. While my methods of designing are not for everyone, I hope it brings a new perspective to your work.



ImagineFX VIDEO WORKSHOP

1 Understand the story

I'll start by getting acquainted with the story and characters. I'll be using The Paper Menagerie, by Ken Liu. This story connected with me and I felt the complexity of the characters would give way to a well-rounded design if done correctly. I'll be designing the main characters: Jack, a younger boy who has a Chinese mother and Caucasian father who's facing conflictions with his family and culture, and Laohu, a paper tiger his mother made for Jack

The first step is to read the script and understand who your characters are. Be mindful of your characters' motivations, their arcs and relationships. Try to understand the setting, time of year and culture. All of this is integral to building the design. At this point we can do some emotionally charged sketches. Taking the time to sketch out ideas before in-depth research helps us retain the initial response we have to the story and characters. It also helps us identify what needs researching.

Image by Pexels from Pixabay

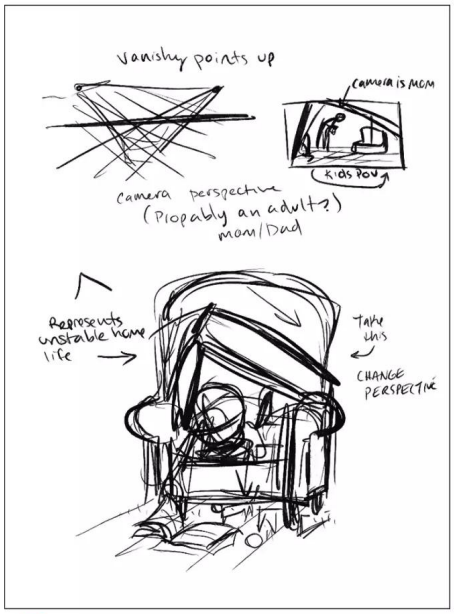
Image by TheOtherKev from Pixabay

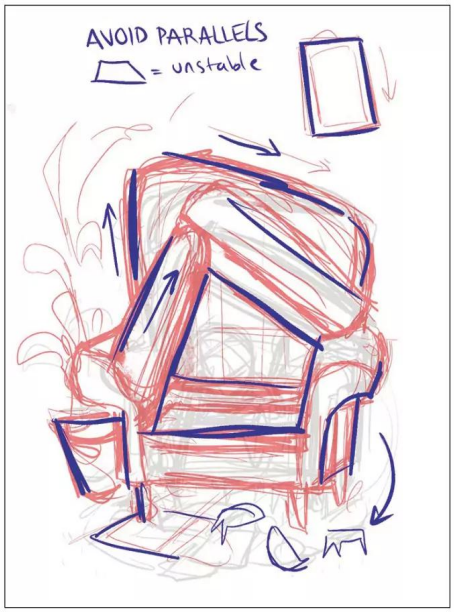
2 Educating ourselves

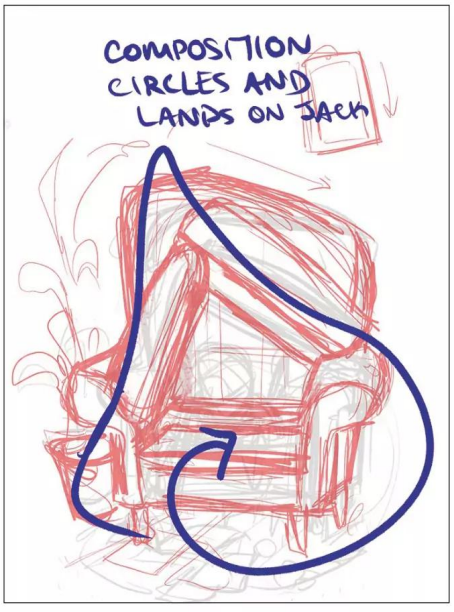
One reason why I enjoy character design is because I have an excuse to dive into a new world, culture or scientific research. It's like being paid to learn. If I'm designing a specific animal, I'm going to watch hours of videos, learn as much anatomy as possible and study their behaviour. This area of design is more logical, but it's one of the most overlooked areas. This can be the difference between a design we connect with and one that isn't memorable.

To communicate our ideas effectively, it's important to educate ourselves. Misrepresentation or incomplete representation can lead to communicating ideas that can hurt others, but also incorrectly represent what we want to say. Education also enables us to be more free when designing. Instead of constantly referring back to what's culturally or anatomically accurate, we can spend that time generating ideas.

Since I'll be designing a young Chinese American/Caucasian boy and a tiger, I want to understand the basics to the culture and autonomy of the characters. I like to break my research into separate boards. The boy's can be physical, behavioural, costume… anything that aids in the authenticity of the character The tiger will be a mix of origami and other paper sculpture, and screenshots of tigers. This takes both sides of the character and enables us to combine them. Shown here is some reference for developing the tiger character. I examine animal movement and how origami is constructed to ensure accuracy.







3 Exploring with thumbnails

Before tackling a larger story moment, I want to do exploratory drawings to figure out what works and what doesn't. I'm exploring shape and how that can communicate the character. Energy is a large part of how I think of shape. The direction of line, movement and rhythm can push how we feel out the character's personality. Energy can dictate how a character presents themselves.

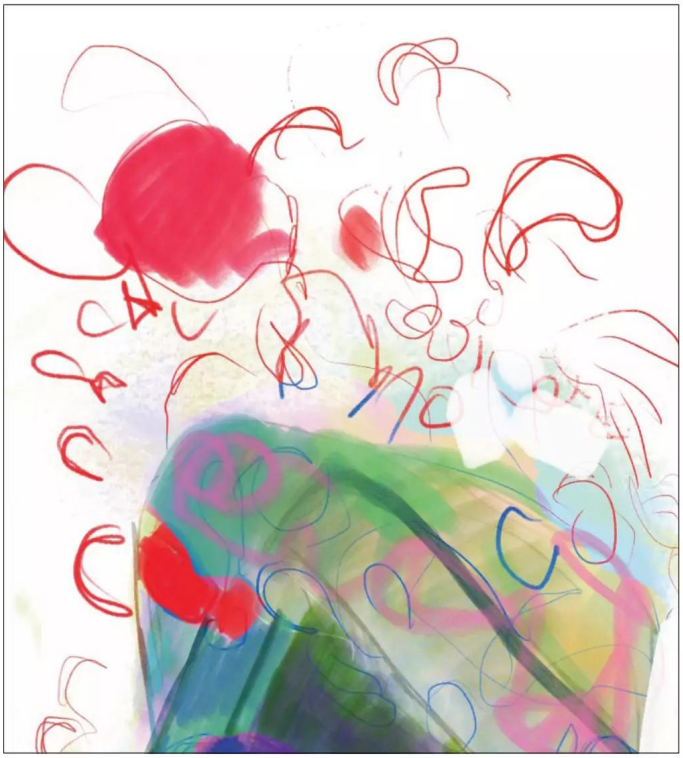
At this stage, we want as many options as possible. Generating ideas and getting out the bad ones help us get closer to what we want. This means pushing and pulling shape, trying out different costumes, poses and expressions. The goal is to exhaust your options. I'm showing in this example how quick my thought process is. In thinking of an entire story point I like to see it from a cinematic point of view. One of the first things I think of when developing a composition is the perspective. Not just the vanishing points, but why and how we're viewing that character or moment from this angle and in this pose.

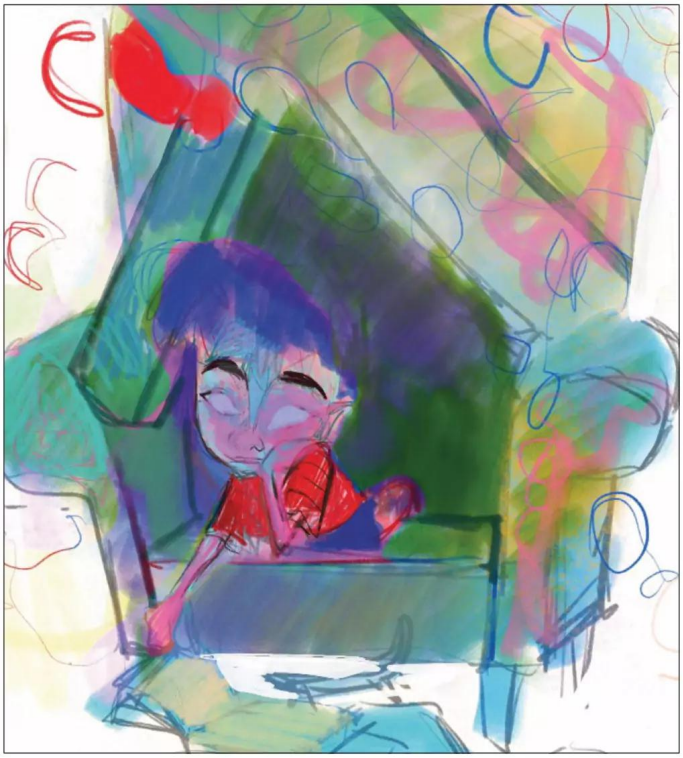
Sometimes I'll do some paper-cut abstract work just to get a feeling for how I see the character. Doing tiny thumbnails can also be an effective way to start fresh.

To build an illustrative story moment, I'll want to sketch out poses and versions of those poses to see which are the clearest and most appealing. Pushing the poses and giving the image a well-designed composition comes from more thumbnails. In these small thumbnails I'll sometimes use Procreate's Puppet Warp tool to see how I can improve the rhythm of the pose. I can also use this tool to test different proportions and exaggerate the shapes. I think of animation principles here as well. Visualising the pose as a keyframe and imagining it moving in space can help push the believability of the character.

4 Refining the illustration and colour blocking

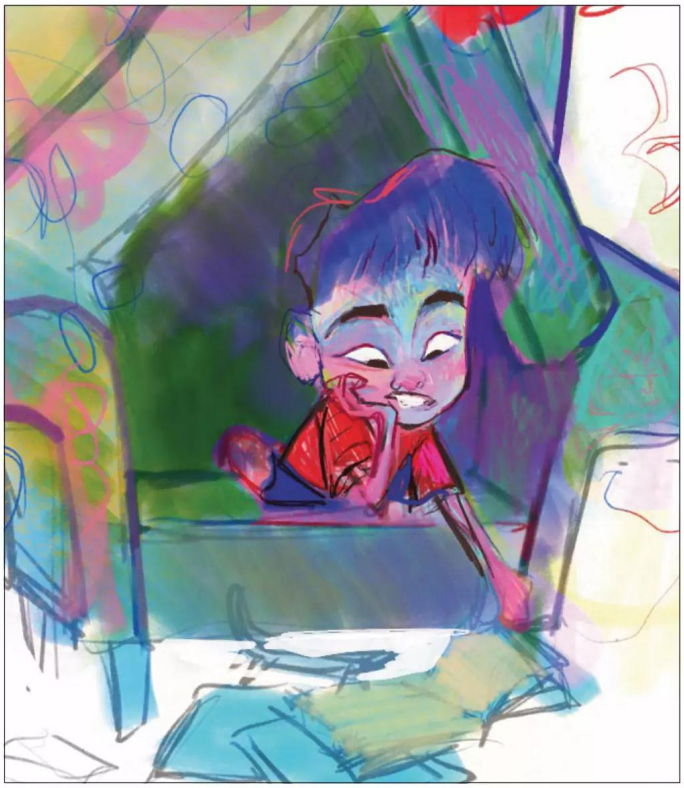
Once I feel good about a base, I'll start refining the illustration. I'm not married to the pose, but will build off it. I'll block in shapes with colour and work more intuitively. Adding a new Multiply layer enables me to build on top of my sketch while still seeing the lines underneath. As I add layers I'll merge them when I feel like moving to the next one. It keeps me spontaneous; using fewer layers feels like painting traditionally.

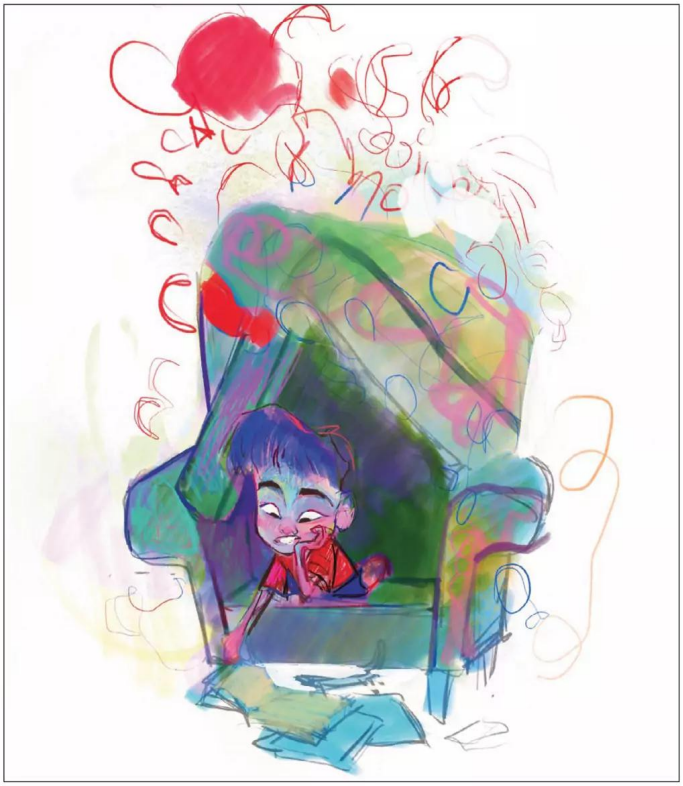




5 Keeping the artwork looking gritty

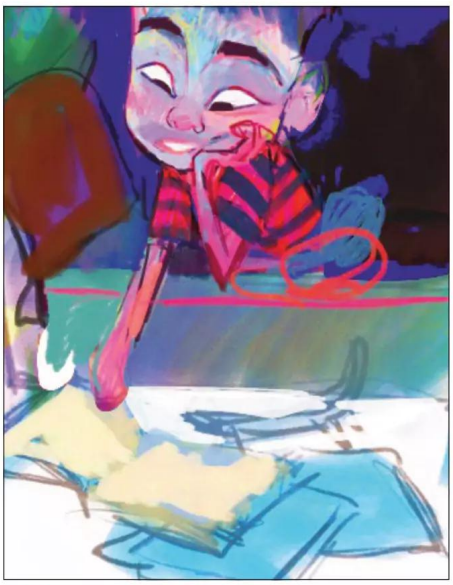
If I notice my piece looking too clean early on, I'll use the Smudge tool to add back in some spontaneous energy. This helps me keep my options open to improve the flow of the piece. Previously, I've noticed that if I tie my work down too early, it loses the energy and life initially given to it. This is because I'm focusing more on the line quality than what I'm working to communicate.





6 Improving the design and assessing my progress

Once the design is there, I like to work up the edges and add some extra design principles. If a hand is missing dimension then I'll solve it at this stage. If I need to tweak the expression to be more asymmetrical, solve perspective, alter some colours or emphasise some straights then I'll do that here, too. Flipping the drawing horizontally can help show where I might have overlooked some elements.



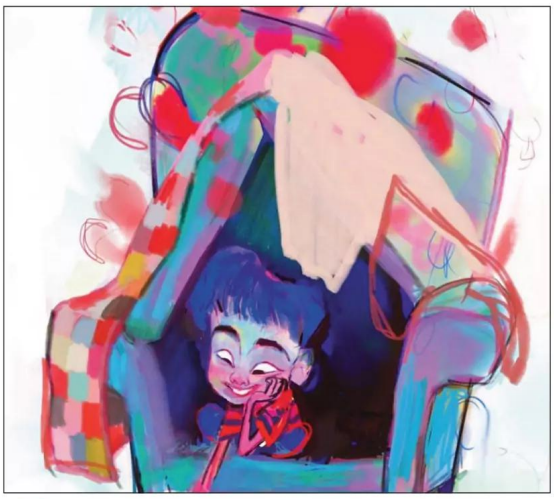
7 Colour and emotion

I like to place colours based on pure emotion and not care about the outcome because they're on separate layers. This can be either trying out more adjustment layers, or choosing a conflicting colour and testing out how it alters the mood of the piece.

Colour can subconsciously impact the viewer. Sometimes it's more obvious – like using warm colours to indicate an uplifting scene, or cool colours to show something subdued, but sometimes it can be far more subconscious. I draw on personal experiences and remember feelings when I work.

With this character I think of how to communicate that melancholy yet nostalgic feeling of childhood. I want to capture the feeling of being uncomfortable in your own skin. For early exploration I tend to skew away from realism. If the sky's the limit, then I'm going to push that as far as possible. Exaggerating the hues in the skin tones isn't just aesthetic – it's how I can best communicate my ideas of emotion.

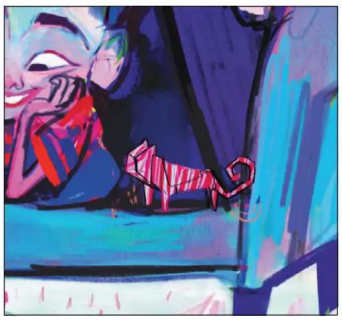
To keep the empathy high between myself and these characters, I input a few of my own life experiences and some that I've observed. Combining this with my research, I can accurately depict this character in a way that's unique to my perspective.



8 Art experiments with fresh eyes

At this stage I'll take the image, save it and start fresh on a new canvas. Having this final image enables me to think of it as if it were not my own. I'll look at it with a mentor's eyes and see what I can improve. If I have time I'll do a drawover and see what I could change. If I don't have time I'll ask a friend to give me feedback.

When I've been looking at my own drawing for a few hours, I tend to overlook what's missing from the piece. Having a new set of eyes on the design can help break through that. I notice that the composition is lacking in balance but also life. I wonder how it would look to pop a few blankets on this kid's fort, and enjoy how it gives the little space a bit more character.



9 Finishing touches

I decide to redraw the tiger on a new layer and prioritise his placement and silhouette. Giving this lighter coloured character a darker background helps him pop. And the clear silhouette makes him recognisable as a tiger. I finish by just polishing the design. If there's a problem with the staging or the dimension of a hand, silhouette or composition then I'll solve it in this stage. I'll also do some colour correction, just to see if I can find more appealing colours and values. I'll also add some extra lines and shapes. Nothing too drastic, though. What I'll work on finding is if I can relate with the character and if it tells a story.

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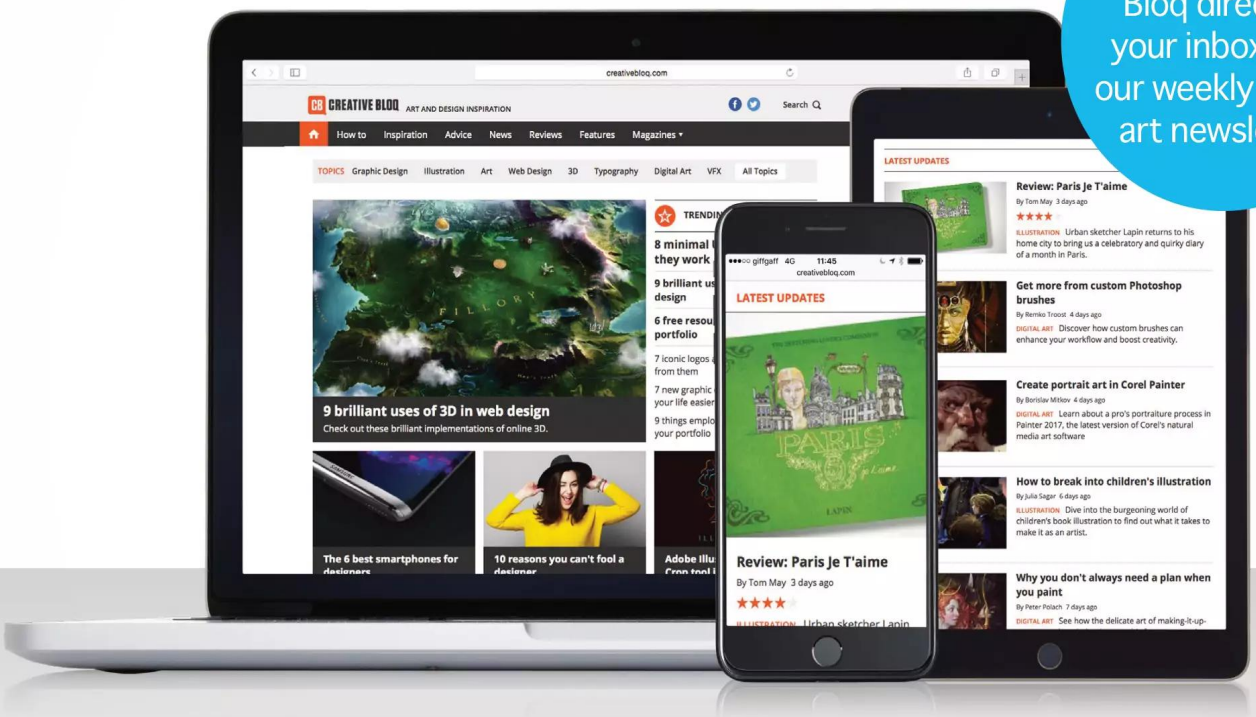

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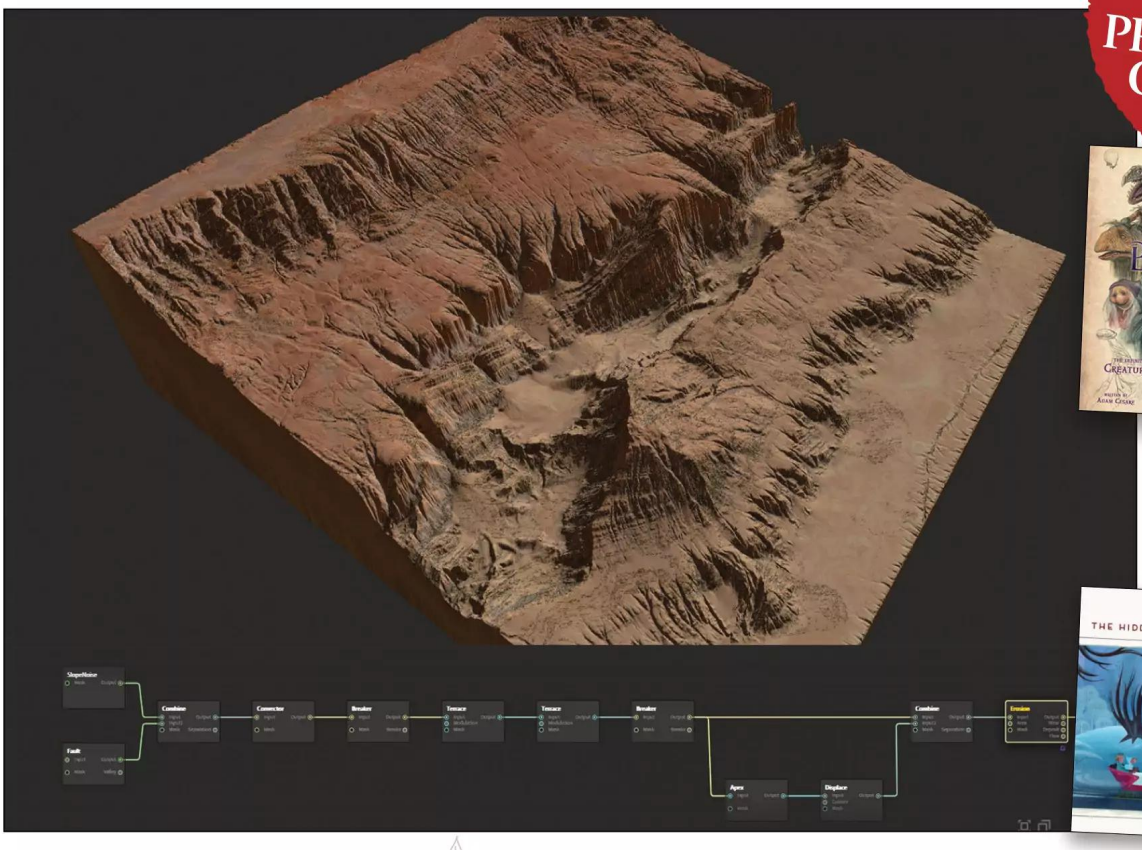
ImagineFX Reviews

Artist's Choice Award
Art resources with a five-star rating receives the ImagineFX Artist's Choice award!

The latest art resources are put to the test by the ImagineFX team…

4 PRODUCTS ON TEST



SOFTWARE

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We discover if the future of CG terrain design lies in the direction of Gaea, which has received a significant update.

BOOKS

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With this illustrated guide you'll be able to identify the myriad creatures that inhabit Thra, the rich setting of The Dark Crystal.

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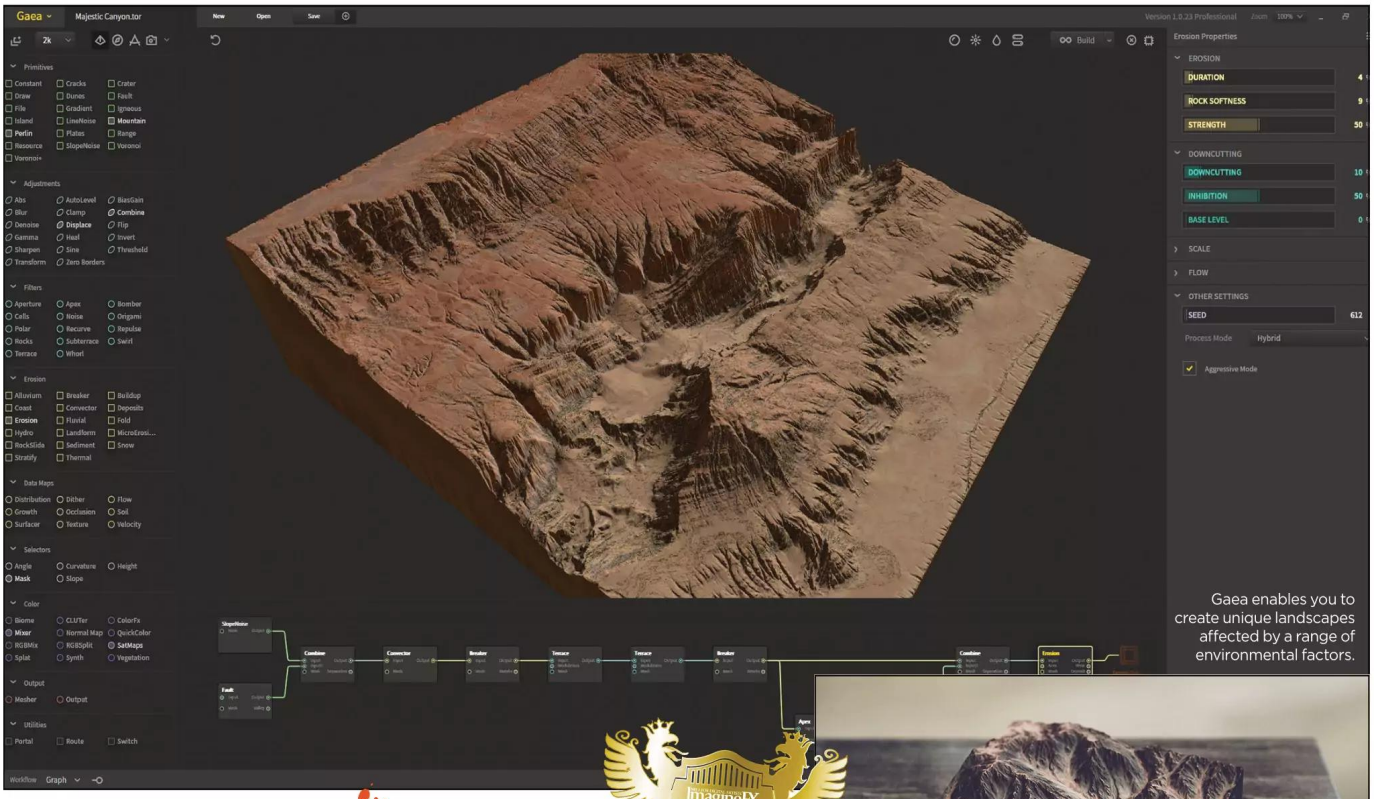
Marking 35 years since Ghostbusters first hit cinemas, this book is a diverse collection of art inspired by the film.

85 They Drew As They Pleased: The Hidden Art of Disney's Golden Age: The 1990s to 2020
A showcase of four key artists involved with Disney's output over the past 30 years.

RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ Magnificent ★★★★ Great ★★★ Good ★★ Poor ★ Atrocious



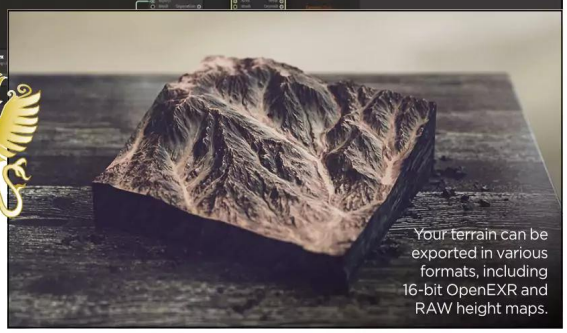
Gaea enables you to create unique landscapes affected by a range of environmental factors.

All images: © QuadSpinner

Gaea

PC ONLY

ImagineFX ARTIST'S CHOICE



Your terrain can be exported in various formats, including 16-bit OpenEXR and RAW height maps.

WORLD BUILDING We discover if the future of CG terrain design lies in the direction of Gaea

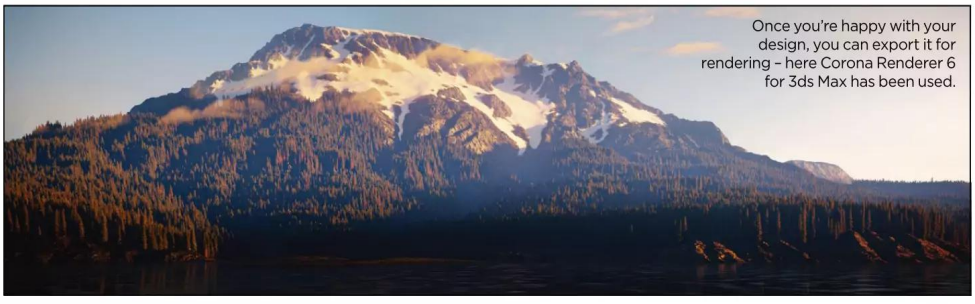
Price Free (Community), £77 (Indie), £155 (Professional), £232 (Enterprise) **Company** QuadSpinner **Web** www.quadspinner.com

QuadSpinner's Gaea is aimed at anyone who's interested in generating terrains. This can range from hobbyists and independent artists, right up to large studios. The program has benefited from regularly updates since it was launched last year, and is now on version 1.2.

On release, QuadSpinner made much about its dedication to creating tools and technologies to provide artists with both speed and realism in terrain generation. And this still holds true. On a terrain generation field where Gaea, World Creator and a lagging World Machine are the ones left standing, it's Gaea that offers the most extensive set of features by far.

One of the first standouts when Gaea was released was its inviting UI, and its ease of use thanks to its layer or node-based workflows. This is still the case. The speed of terrain generation and output remains impressive, especially now that the team has added a memory optimisation option for working with big graphs. This gives you the choice of either clearing the cache or optimising and compacting it when you notice Gaea slowing down.

> "The Island node enables users to generate the outline of continents and islands"

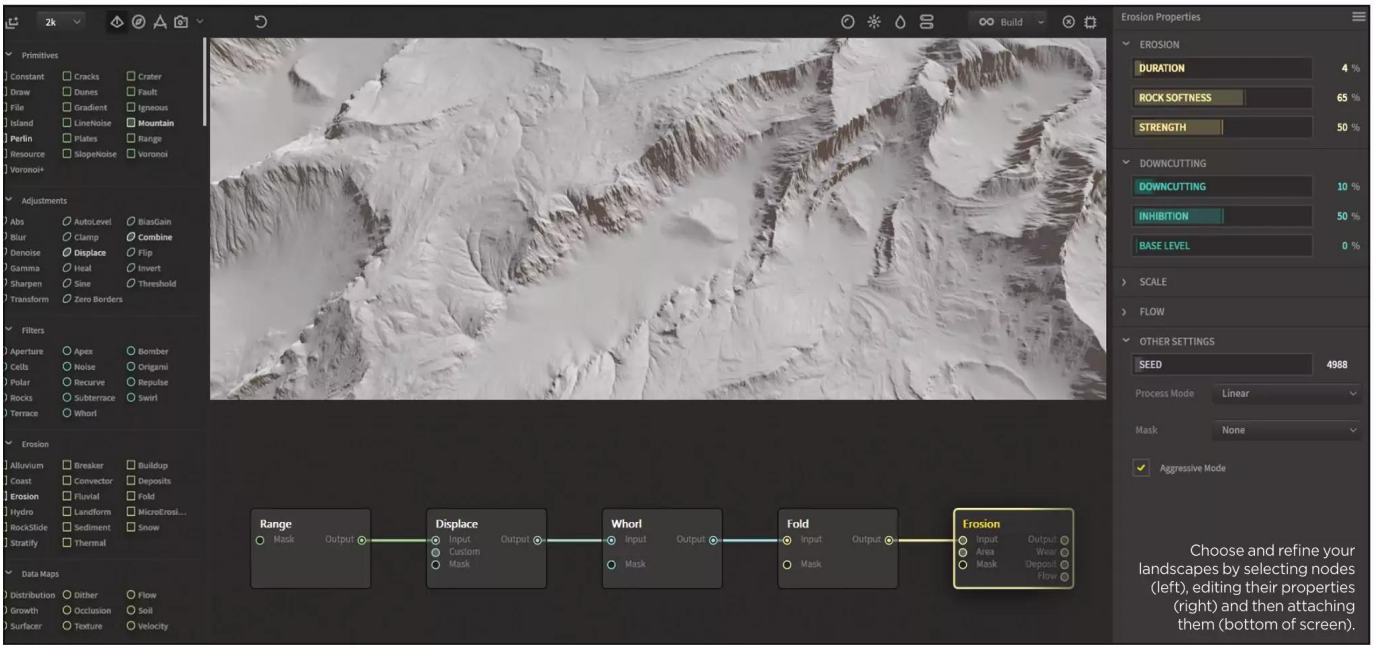


Once you're happy with your design, you can export it for rendering – here Corona Renderer 6 for 3ds Max has been used.

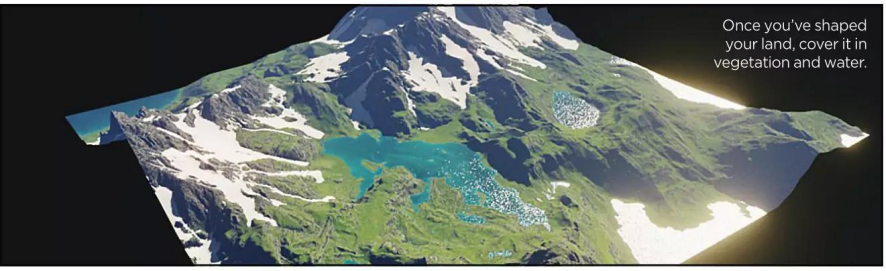
ISLAND BUILDING

In a relatively short space of time Gaea has implemented many new features and updates, such as the Island node that enables users to generate the outline of continents and islands as well as draw them. Together with the rewritten Bomber node and new Crater node, it's a breeze to create islands and continents with calderas and battle damage.

Gaea also taps into some much-needed texturing muscle, which brings us to the second standout feature: the Texture and Vegetation nodes. Combined with the added Splat map as well as the improved Snow node, they make rendering and texturing in

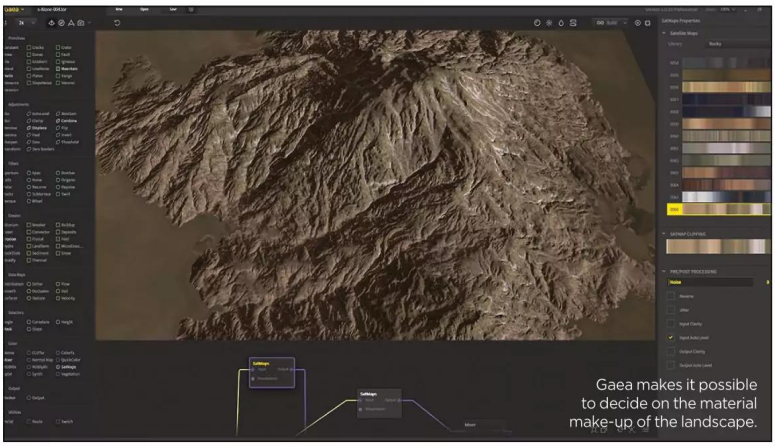


Choose and refine your landscapes by selecting nodes (left), editing their properties (right) and then attaching them (bottom of screen).



Once you've shaped your land, cover it in vegetation and water.

Take your fantasy world-building exercises to a whole new level with Gaea.



Gaea makes it possible to decide on the material make-up of the landscape.

or outside of Gaea, such as in Quixel's Mixer, so much easier.

Where the Texture node makes it possible for you to create advanced texture masks for colouring, the Vegetation node complements it with its ability for generating foliage overlays on any of your colour texture maps. The Texture node enables you to use colour nodes or external colour inputs such as SatMaps. This makes the colouring workflow much easier, because it removes the need to combine multiple maps for masking. This is a welcome development because it tended to get cluttered in that particular node at times. Combined with the Vegetation node, you can now go to town on your detailing and colouring, as the node makes it simple for you to add the nuances needed to mimic vegetation.

BETTER SUPPORT FOR WACOM

The third standout is not the new Infinity Graph, the new renderer and its light-baking capabilities, or the inclusion into the Houdini integration club and its subsequent bridge framework. It's the improved Wacom support and the ability to generate terrains by drawing their outlines. Both the Draw and Island nodes have this capability. They look deceptively simplistic, but they can assist in creating highly sophisticated output. The ability to outline your terrains like this and then plug them into all the features available makes Gaea both fun and efficient to use.

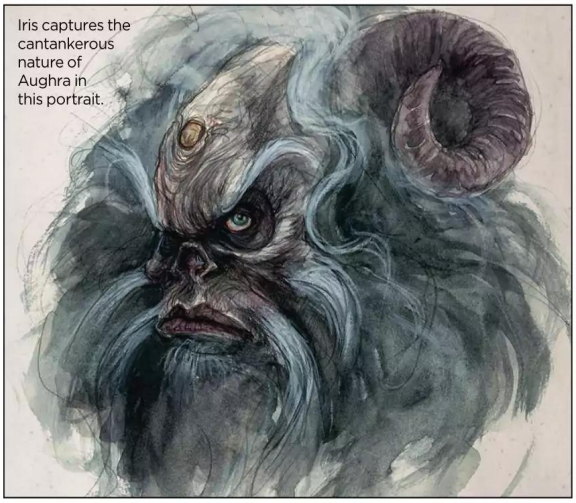
There are a few negatives about this release. The Build Swarm 'ding' sounds are annoying; they drowned out Spotify on complex terrain graphs. We also had some issues with the floating 2D viewport obscuring things, but nothing significant that cramped our workflow. And it would be great if the QuadSpinner team had time for more tutorials. Overall, though, Gaea 1.2 shines thanks to its raft of easy-to-use features and various price points that put it within reach of most artists, whatever their background.

DETAILS

Features
- Infinity Graph streamlines terrain creation process
- 32-bit EXR support
- Terrains can be exported as meshes, point clouds or RAW height maps
- 2.5D viewport
- Improved interface
- Session cache manager

System Requirements
PC: Intel i7 or similar, 24GB RAM, 10GB hard drive space, modern GPU with 1GB VRAM, Shader Model 3 and DirectX 11 support

Rating
★★★★★



Iris captures the cantankerous nature of Aughra in this portrait.

The colourful plumage of the bird-like sharp awlid is just one example of Iris's watercolour skills.

Early sketches show how Iris developed her designs, such as this flame-based fireling.

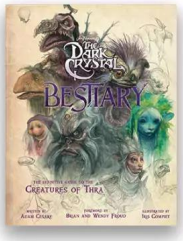
The Dark Crystal Bestiary

ART GEM With this illustrated guide you'll be able to identify the myriad creatures that inhabit Thra, the rich setting of The Dark Crystal

Author Adam Cesare **Publisher** Titan Books **Price** £27 **Web** www.titanbooks.com **Available** Now

The Dark Crystal introduced 1982's cinemagoers to Thra and its inhabitants. Back then it was Brian Froud who shaped the look of the skeksis, mystics, gelflings and more. Now the baton has been passed to Iris Compiet, who's been tasked with visualising everything that strides, flies and scuttles across the lands of Thra for The Dark Crystal Bestiary.

There are over 120 entries in the book. Each character or creature receives an atmospheric write-up from author Adam Cesare. When we talked to Iris about the book's creation, she said that she referred to Adam's rough manuscript to create the look of the creatures, a process that took four months. And while a lot of the creatures have been observed in the 1982 film, subsequent comics and Netflix's The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance series, there were some that had never been seen before. Iris reveals that she worked with Adam to "shape" these newcomers so they fitted into the world of Thra.

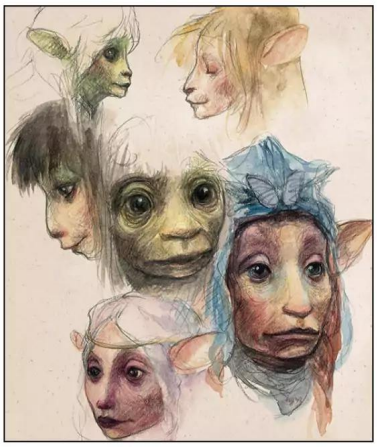


> "It's clear that Iris wanted to put her own stamp on the world of The Dark Crystal"

In The Dark Crystal Bestiary, each creatures receives a detailed write-up. Here, the reader learns about Skeksil, the cunning skeksis chamberlain.

Indeed, observed is a good way to describe the book's approach, which resembles a naturalist's field guide. Iris's art – a mix of pencil sketches and refined line-art, with watercolour, gouache and coloured pencils – captures each creature in the moment. Adam's text, printed in a script font to accentuate the personal touch, is a little hard on the eyes, though.

Iris reveals that she watched episodes from The Age of Resistance, pausing the video to sketch the creatures, much like a life-drawing lesson. She created over 1,000 sketches to get the feel of the creatures, to truly understand their movements and behaviours. Some of those sketches are printed alongside the final art, showing the reader how the designs progressed.



The bestiary's section on gelflings features all seven of their clans, and describes their subtle differences.

It's clear that Iris, while a life-long fan of Brian's work, wanted to put her own stamp on the world of The Dark Crystal. And through her imaginative designs she's succeeded, setting aside Brian's intricate line-art and muted colour palette and replacing them with flowing lines and vibrant tones. The result is an excellent example of world-building. Every creature design stays true to the ecology of Thra and is lovingly presented on the page, for the reader to pore over at their leisure.

RATING ★★★★☆

Ghostbusters: Artbook

SPECTRAL VISIONS Marking 35 years since Ghostbusters first hit cinemas, this book is a diverse collection of art inspired by the film

Editor Lauren Lepera **Publisher** Titan Books **Price** £35 **Web** www.titanbooks.com **Available** Now

Who you gonna call when you want to celebrate a tale of paranormal investigators? The answer is 171 artists, each of whom have created art based on the 1984 film.

With their backgrounds in comics, fine art, animation, video games and more, the prospect of the art on show was exciting, but the end result is a mixed bag. For instance, the quality of the art in the book is variable and some pieces that take a film poster approach merely resemble paintovers of characters in overfamiliar settings.

Spanish illustrator Ángel Trancón portrays the Ghostbusters facing off against something huge and marshmallow-like.

Yet a lack of professional polish can be forgiven if an artist looks beyond the obvious for inspiration. Examples that spring to mind include Manhattan atop a giant Twinkie, the four Ghostbusters depicted as children roasting Stay Puft marshmallows over a campfire, and Ecto-1 as a military vehicle soaring through the skies.

There are no insights on painting techniques as such. Rather, some of the artists reveal their early memories of seeing Ghostbusters, which is sure to elicit much nodding of heads with the film's fans. If you count yourself among this group, then this book is worth a closer look.

RATING ★★★☆☆

A reimagined Ecto-1 painted by Alejandro Blasi, who usually creates artwork for musicians.

They Drew As They Pleased: The Hidden Art of Disney's Golden Age: The 1990s to 2020

MIXED MEDIA A book series five years in the making draws to a close by looking at four key artists involved with Disney's film output over the past 30 years

Author Didier Chez **Publisher** Chronicle Books **Price** £40 **Web** www.chroniclebooks.com **Available** Now

Joe Grant, Hans Bacher, Mike Gabriel and Michael Giaimo. Not household names by any means, yet all have had a creative say in Disney films from the 1990s onwards.

In Joe's case, it's even longer: he worked with Walt Disney in the early 1930s. He left the company in 1949, but returned to the Disney fold in 1989.

By Hans Bacher, © 2020 Disney

The tragic nature of the beast's curse is expertly captured in Hans Bacher's early concept art from 1989, for Beauty and the Beast.

By Michael Giaimo, © 2020 Disney

By Joe Grant, © 2020 Disney

Joe Grant's early concept art for The Hunchback of Notre Dame presented the lead character in a very different light to his appearance in the finished film.

Joe's chapter – as those for the other three creatives – features entertaining anecdotes supplied either by the artists themselves or their colleagues. Yet it's the art that the book's main draw. Given that this period in the studio's history covers its transition from traditional media to CGI, it's a surprise that most of the art is traditionally created. There's also plenty of artwork and information on abandoned film projects.

If there's a complaint, it's that a lot of each artist's work is presented as an art dump at the end of each chapter, with little supporting text. But it's a small gripe, drowned out by the work of talented artists and their stories.

RATING ★★★★☆

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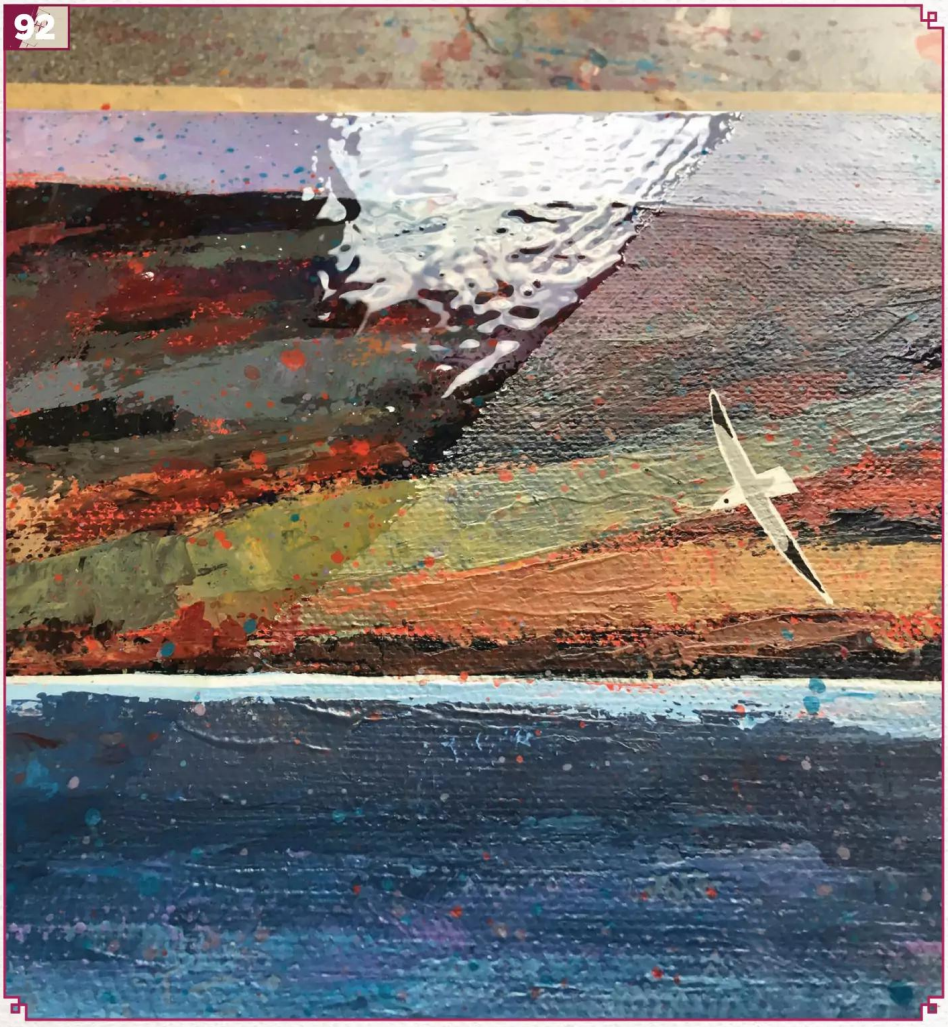

This issue:

88 Traditional FXPosé
Discover this month's selection of the finest traditional art, which has been sent in by you!

92 Workshop: Varnish acrylics & create textures
Illustrator David Body reveals how to varnish your acrylic paintings and develop interesting textures in the popular medium.

98 First Impressions: Michael C Hayes
This US artist reveals where things finally 'clicked' for him…

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

Scot Howden

LOCATION: England **MEDIA:** Watercolour, pencil **WEB:** www.instagram.com/scothowden

"I enjoy creating and painting fantasy and mythical pieces that enable me to be more creative," says Scot, who's based in the Peak District National Park.

1 CAT'S WHISKERS
"I wanted my portrait of Catwoman and her trusty companion Fluffy to capture a sense of their unity."

2 CHAMELEON
"This scene is a visual metaphor for change and the importance of being able to adapt to changes in circumstances."

3 FAE
"When painting a picture that involves a figure I try to lay in the hardest elements first, usually the face."

4 CLOSE ENCOUNTERS
"For this painting I imagined a future astronaut and her feelings as she explores an exotic new world."

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4

Sen

LOCATION: Japan **MEDIA:** Pen, ink **WEB:** www.sen1217.wixsite.com/norie

"I want to express the delicate, elegant and gentle world view of Buddhism with a pen," says Sen, who previously worked as an interior designer for a Japanese automobile manufacturer.

1 NAGARJUNA BODHISATTVA
"Nagarjuna Bodhisattva is the Buddhist philosopher who is said to have derived the Theory of Sky for the Heart Sutra."

2 AMITABHA
"Amitabha is a celestial buddha. This illustration depicts a Bodhisattva in the clouds with lotus flowers."

3 ASHURA
"In Buddhism, an ashura is a demigod of Kāmadhātu. They are described as having three heads and faces, and mine is raging with six hands."

4 BODHISATTVA BODHISATTVA
"Nyoirin Kannon Bosatsu is a Kannon Bosatsu that saves others from suffering with its six hands."

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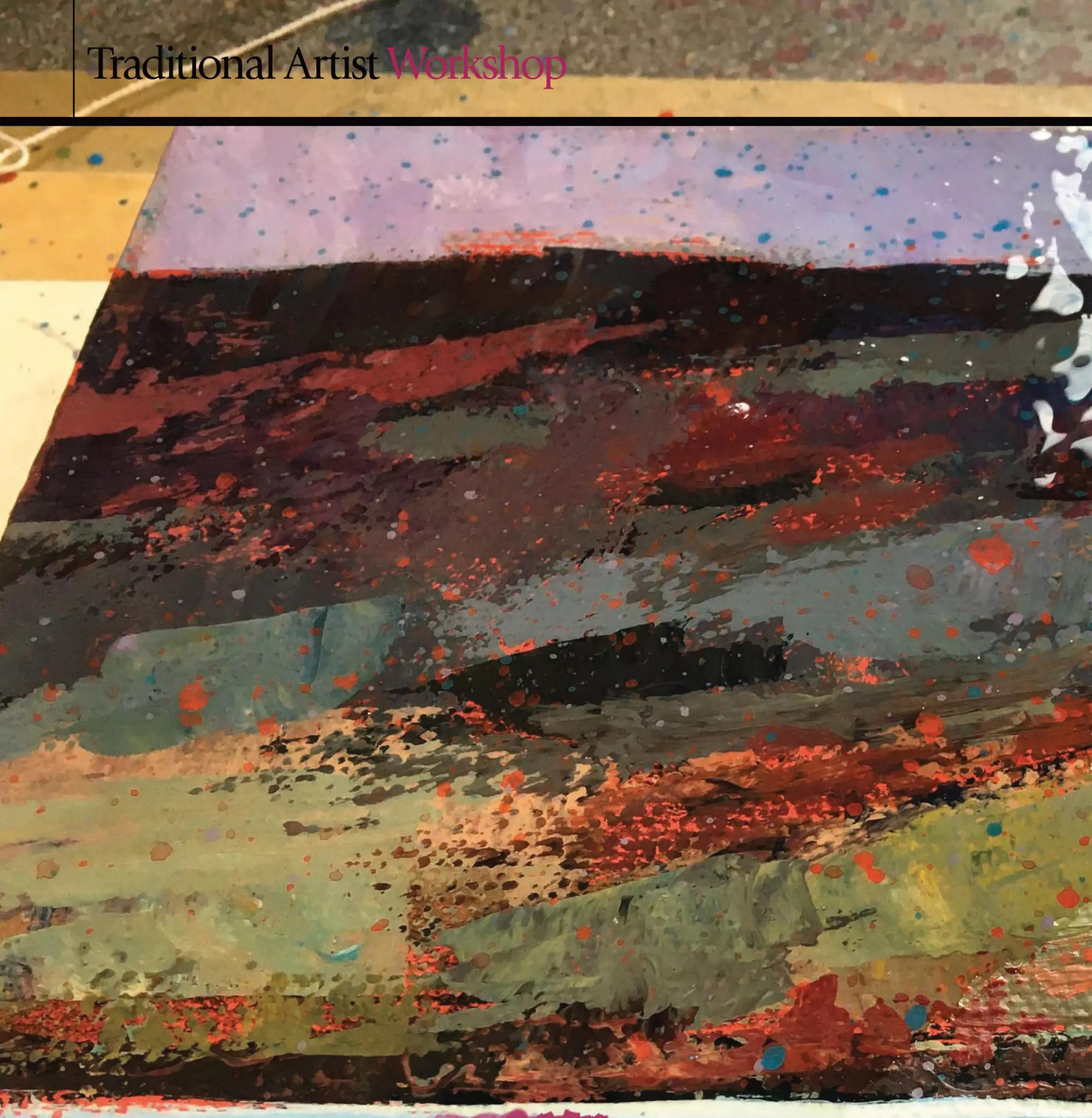


Acrylics

VARNISH ACRYLICS & CREATE TEXTURES

Illustrator DAVID BODY reveals how to go about varnishing your acrylic paintings, and also covers techniques for generating textures in the popular medium

David started out as a potter, but has been painting since 2004 and moved to painting full time in 2012. He has a studio in his garden in Inverness, and he loves to capture the Highlands on canvas. See his art at www.davidbody.co.uk.

1 *Three reasons to varnish: a) The wet-stone effect*

Varnishing an acrylic, oil or watercolour painting benefits it on three levels. There's the wet-stone effect that not only brings out the colours, but also increases their depth. This is particularly noticeable with the darker colours that tend to dry matt and chalky.

b) Colour protection and UV filter

A coat of varnish will not only enhance colours in your work, but add a layer of physical protection to your painting, too. Some varnishes also contain an ultraviolet light filter that prevents the scene from fading. These varnishes can be more expensive, but are well worth considering.

c) Preserving your work

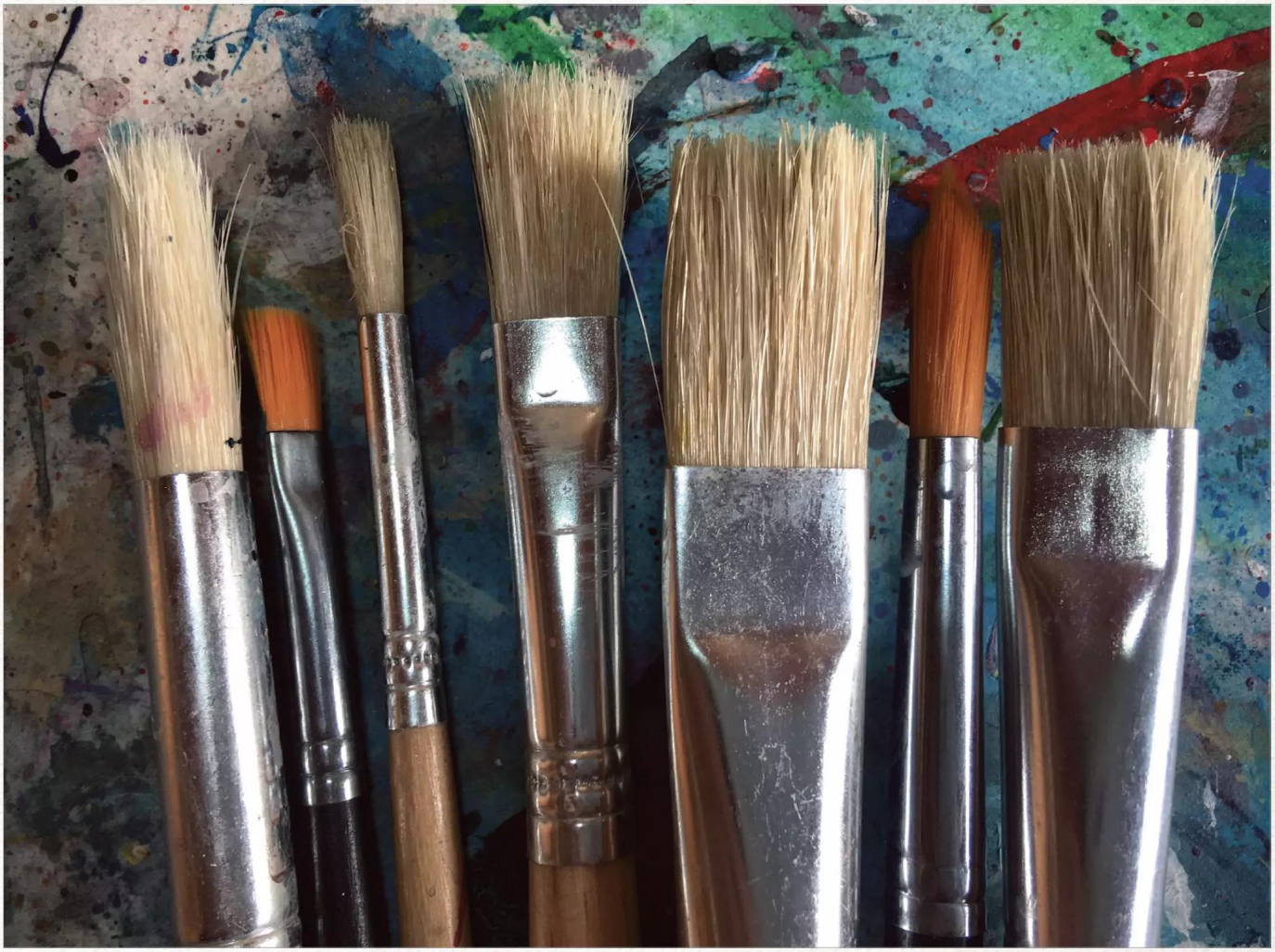
There are permanent and removable varnishes, but in the case of conservation it's always better to use a removable varnish. This will help matters if your work ever needs to be cleaned in the future. On the other hand, most permanent varnishes are archival and prevent discolouring and fogging in the first place. ➳

2 *Pick your type of varnish*

There are three basic types of varnish in terms of the finish they provide: matt, satin and gloss. Matt gives good protection, but doesn't enhance the colours as much as the other two. If the paint finish is textured then gloss can create unwanted reflected highlights and after much experimenting I now use a Golden Satin spirit varnish with ultraviolet filter protection, although if you want to experiment then Liquitex makes a range that enables you to combine varnishes for a custom finish.

3 *Choose the right brush*

Sable/nylon, hog hair/bristle, Round or Flat? Depending on the paint application, I'd normally use a hog hair or bristle brush: these are stiffer and make it easier to the spread the varnish evenly. Square-end brushes are good for larger works, while sable/nylon brushes are best for more delicate works.



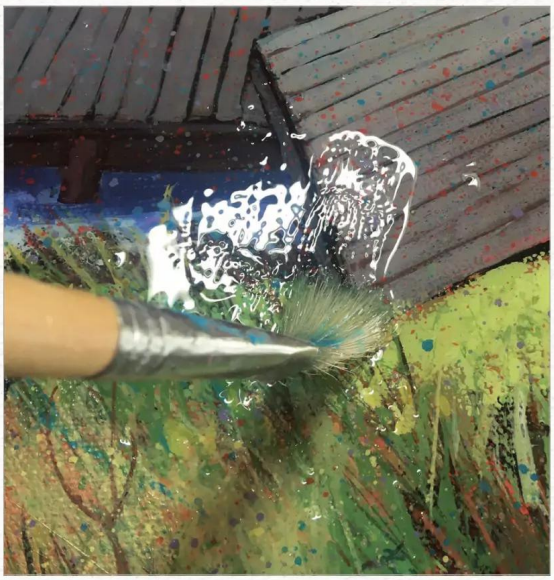
4 *Canvas types and paper choices*

Standard, box or panel? Standard canvases and panels are best varnished on the flat, but when I'm using box canvases that have painted sides, I like to varnish the sides and back first while keeping the coating as thin as possible to avoid any runs. Once dry, I then place the canvas on a flat surface to varnish the painting surface, being very careful not to overlap the sides or let any varnish run over the edge.

For watercolour on paper, spraying two even coats of the aerosol Archival Varnish (gloss) is usually enough to seal and adhere the pigments to the paper. I'd recommend doing a test first if you're using a spirit varnish, because this can affect the paper and make it turn more transparent than you'd like.

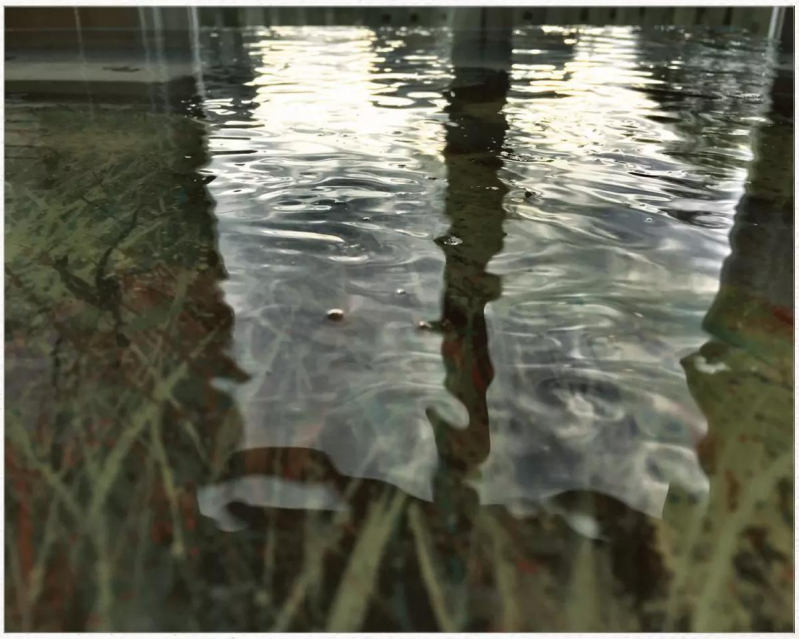
5 *Gradations with a retarder*

Because acrylic paint dries so quickly, it's harder to achieve those subtle variations in tone that you would in oils. Adding a retarder, such as Golden Acrylic Glazing Liquid, helps to lengthen the paint's drying time. Blending with a bristle brush can produce a textured yet smooth feel, while blending with a moist brush in long strokes will result in a smooth transition.



6 *Impasto gel and a palette knife*

Apply thick layers of paint from a tube and use the palette knife to sculpt the paint. Using the flat of the knife, scraping with edges and smoothly juggling it can be a great way to create unique textures. You can use an impasto gel to add volume to the acrylic, which will also give an oil paint feel to your artwork.



7 *Develop texture with sand*

Using sand is a great way to add texture to acrylic paint, which can dry very smooth. You'll need to use clean silica sand for this and when you're mixing it in, make sure you go slowly to avoid bubbles forming in the mixture. When applied to your acrylic with a palette knife, this is an easy way to build up texture.

8 *Painting wet in wet and over dry to build texture*

Painting over and around wet paint can build up texture. However, using acrylics in this way means you'll need to work fast before it dries. Conversely, you can drag a dry brush across dried paint to catch flecks of colour on the high spots, building colour and texture as you go.

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First Impressions

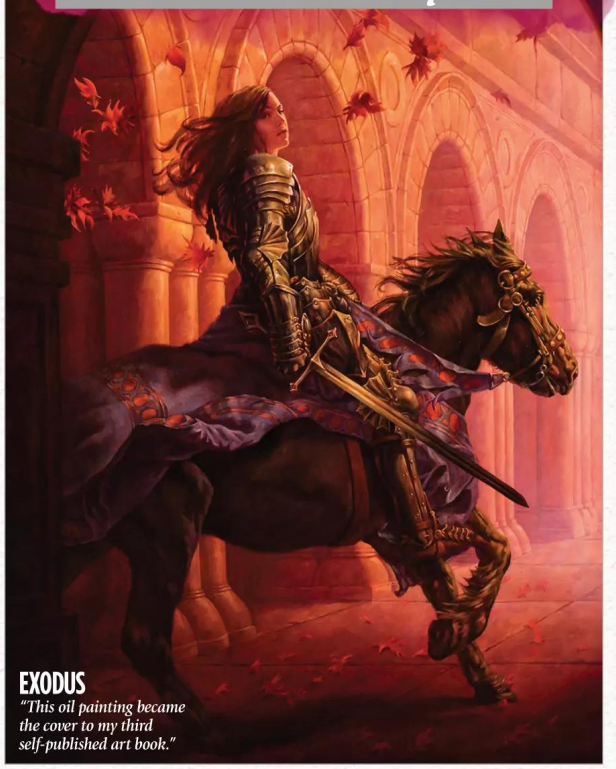
Michael C Hayes

This US artist reveals where things finally 'clicked' for him...

What was your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?
My first gig was back in 2008 for Legends of Norrath, an online card game that was part of Everquest. Obviously, my skills have improved since then, but when I look at the first two cards I did, they hold up surprisingly well. I feel like the compositions and structural drawing are solid; the highly saturated colour throughout is the only aspect I cringe at. I've since learned that greys and browns exist and that I should put them in my paintings.

What's the last piece that you finished, and how do the two artworks differ?
I have just finished a very large painting for a private collector. The size of the painting, the amount of time invested and the pay cheque are all significantly larger than those first cards.

Is your art evolving? What recent experiment have you made?
I would say that my art evolves less like a line and more like a tree branch. I'm always experimenting in different directions, many of which lead nowhere. A recent experiment was a series of Art Nouveau-inspired paintings with laser cut frames that I designed, built and finished myself. It was a cool project and I'm happy with the results, but the process was extremely time-consuming and ultimately took too much time away from actually drawing and painting.



EXODUS
"This oil painting became the cover to my third self-published art book."

> **"I'm always experimenting in different directions, many of which lead nowhere"**

HAVEN
"Painted for the 2015 infra:REAL show at the Jonathan Levine Gallery."

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way?
This is going to be so much harder than you can possibly imagine, and yet, equally rewarding. You're going to fall down, a lot, and that's okay. Just keep getting back and up and going forward. Be highly critical of your art, but not yourself. It's okay to take a day off, I promise.

What, outside of visual art, has most influenced your artwork through the years?
Books, without a doubt. I have been an avid reader of fantasy, historical fiction and real history my whole life. The path to me becoming an oil painter was long and windy, but there was never any real question to what I was going to paint.
Whenever I dabble in other subject matter – both in reading and in creating art – there is always something that pulls me back to my roots time and time again.

Does one person stand out as being helpful during your early years as an artist?
I can't narrow it down to just one person – the entire faculty at Watts Atelier of the Arts was crucial to my development. I simply would not be where I am today without them. I spent years at other schools spinning my wheels and making little to no progress until I finally found a place where the quality and methods of instructions worked for me.

What's the art tool that can't you live without?
My mahl stick, for resting my hand on above a wet painting. I've made do with all manner of substandard materials. But I cannot, for the life of me, keep my hand steady enough on its own.

What character that you've painted do you most identify with?
The character in my painting Exodus is me. Not literally, obviously. But the entire painting is about shifting the focus of my career from freelance work to my own creations, and all of the fears and anxiety that comes with that big of a change.

Michael is a classically trained oil painter. Formerly a freelance illustrator, he now prefers to spend the majority of his creative efforts as an artist-entrepreneur and fine art gallery painter. You can explore more of his work at www.new.artofmike.com.

At Vertex 2020 Loish spoke about developing an art career from doing what you love. The event also featured Karla Ortiz, Izzy Burton, Goro Fujita and so many more! We'll announce speakers for 2021 very soon.

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