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The Blizzard artist shares her mission

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FUTURE
ISSUE 238

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



Although we're a magazine for artists, we're part of a greater community and industry of like-minded people, all looking to discover fantastic new work and improve on our own skills. With that in mind it's clear that there's a case for not only reading about our passions but for meeting up and enjoying a shared experience, where creative ideas flow and friendships form.

That's why I'm excited to tell you that Vertex, our festival for artists, is returning to the physical domain this year in London, on 19 April. If you find yourself in or around the city then come along for the day, where you'll see talks and artist demos from names such as Pixar, Thomas Elliott and many more, panel discussions, and get to try out all the latest art gear from the likes of Wacom. You can read more about the event on page 22.

Elsewhere this issue you can level up your skills, with a big focus on creating manga! Learn how to design stunning art like our cover, build cohesive colours, and produce environment concepts from people at the top of the field. Plus, we chat with the fantastic Airi Pan. Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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Enter the lair of darkness

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Paint vibrant art with watercolours

Aria Fawn shows you a range of techniques to build up a uniquely textured traditional fantasy painting.

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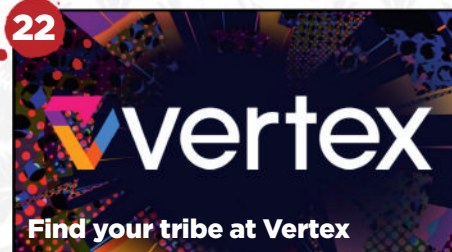
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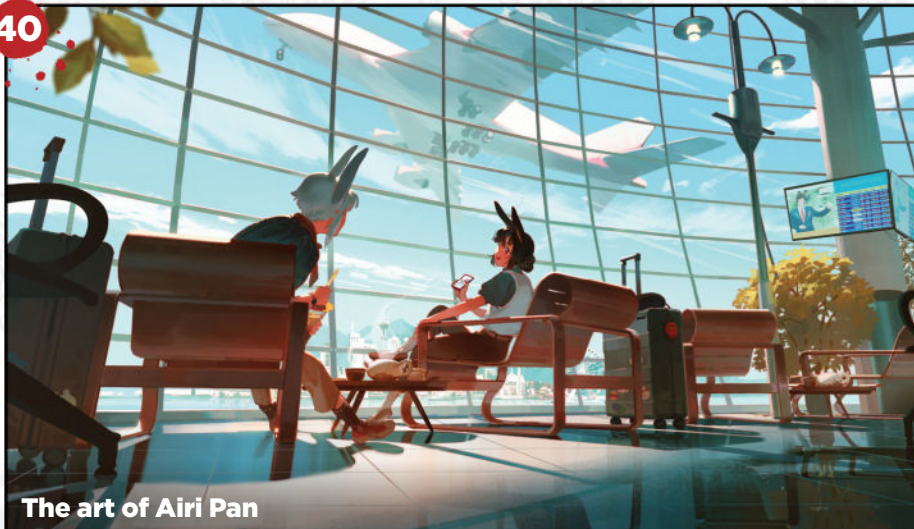
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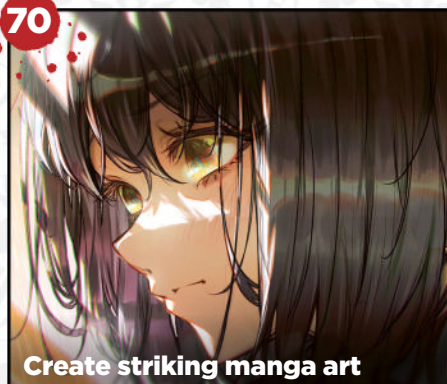


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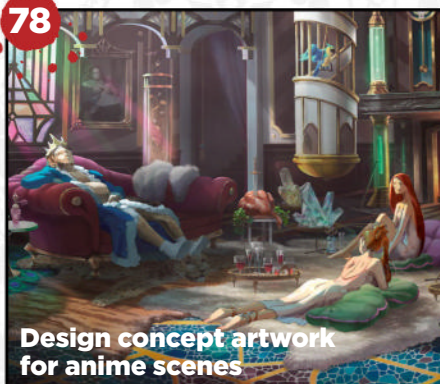
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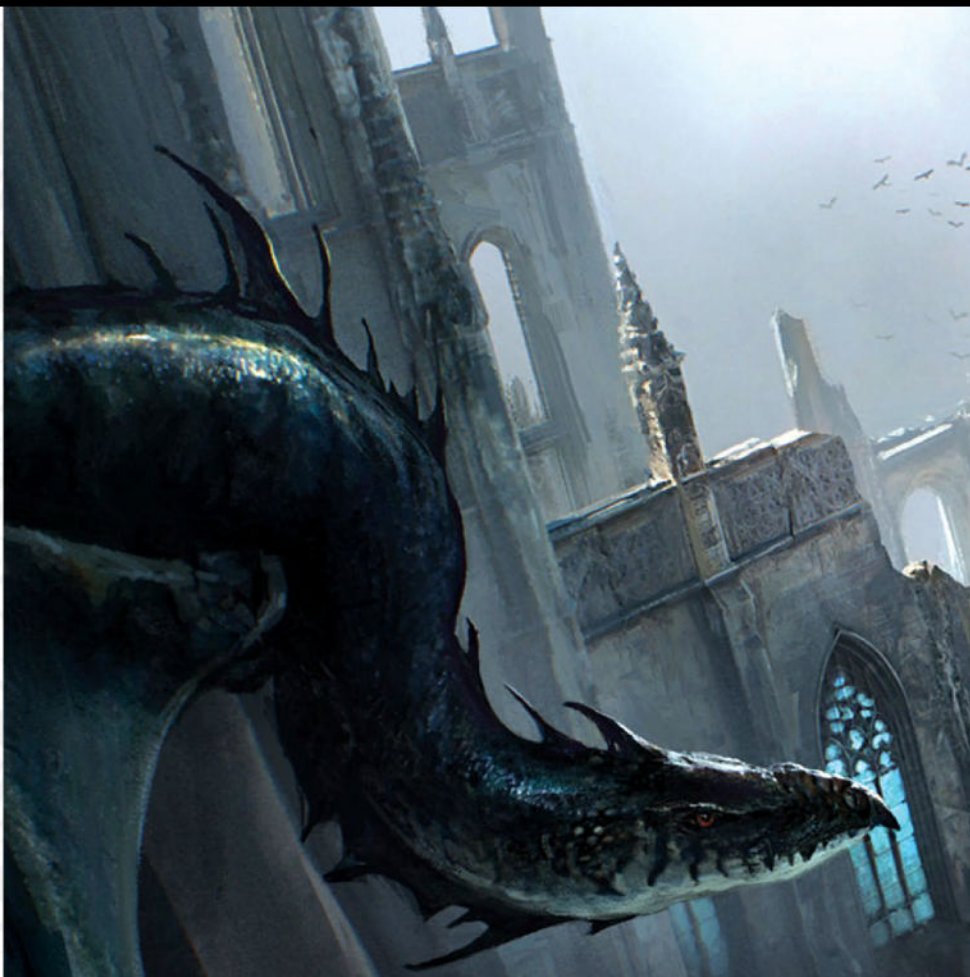
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<https://lfxm.ag/eyecatchingmanga>

2 Click the download link
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3 Download what you need...
Save the files or watch the videos.

Next month



Next month in...
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
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CONCEPT ART MASTERCLASS

Mix 2D and 3D tools with Jurassic
World artist **Gaëlle Seguillon**

Paint sprawling environments

Discover the secrets
of designing epic
landscape art with
Andres Martinez

Render a crisp vehicle design

John A. Frye shows
you how to create
a stunning texture
for hard surfaces

Learn anatomy fundamentals

Follow along with
the next entry of
Charlie Pickard's
in-depth training

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ImagineFX

Editorial

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vertex

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FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Jiahuiyi Yan

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender WEB: www.jyapsd.com

Jiahuiyi is a concept artist and illustrator who works in the entertainment industry. Her artwork has been recognised through a host of awards, including AI42, the 3x3 International Illustration Awards, and the Rookie Awards 2023.



1 COZY AFTERNOON

"In this painting, the characters are part of my visual development project Electric Bubble. It captures a serene moment where the girl is enjoying a peaceful rest in the sun alongside her robot parents."

2 GIFT FOR ENCHANTED KNIGHT ELVIRA

"This painting depicts my beloved original characters Elvira and Ignatius having a secret date in the woods."



ImagineFX

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4

3 CAERHAYS FORTRESS
 “An old castle belonging to a corrupted royal family. Elvira was the guard of this place, she later left as a result of Ignatius cleansing the cursed bond between her and the royal family.”

4 OUTSKIRTS SPIRITS
 “There will always be royal families longing for the power of dragons. Luckily, the knights they sent out for the hunt have been stopped by the loyal guardians.”



Antoine Decamps

LOCATION: France **MEDIA:** Blender, Photoshop, 3DCoat, Adobe Medium, Unreal Engine, Plasticity **WEB:** www.artstation.com/adeamps

Antoine is a former software engineer who switched to concept art and now illustrates environments, props and vehicles with a sci-fi edge. "This allows me to combine my passion for worldbuilding with my engineering background."



1 GATE OF THE DEPTHS

"This is part of a project that aimed to visualise the myth of Eldorado within Nordic culture, incorporating brutalist architecture. It's inspired by the League of Legends universe's worldbuilding."

2 BIG DAM

"My goal here was to go wild with shapes to have something visually striking. Mixing the ruins of the dam with the wooden Viking architecture was a fun challenge."

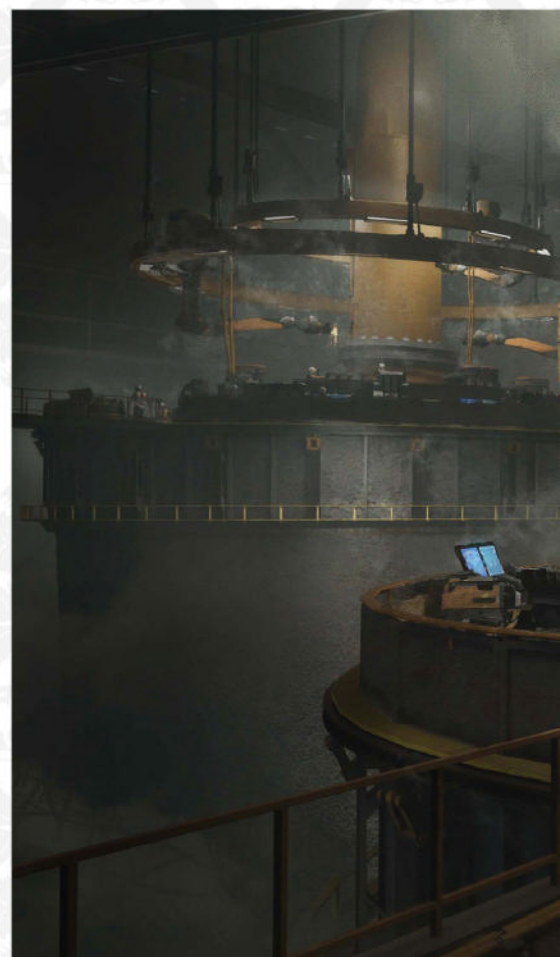


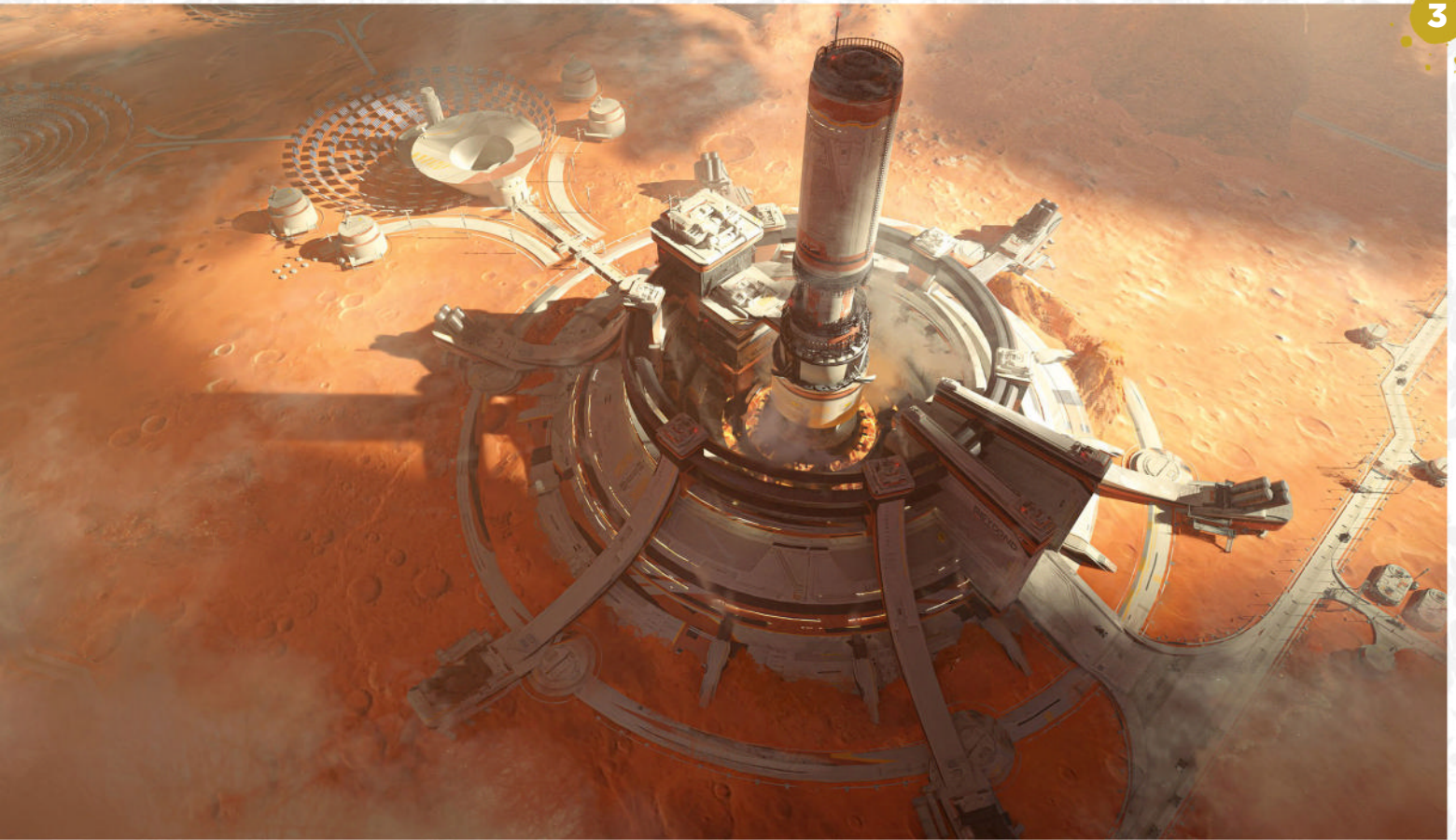
3 MINING BASE

"A facility whose main function is resource extraction. My goal was to design something with a strong central visual element that still feels somewhat believable."

4 3D ROCKET PRINTING FACILITY

"I wanted to do a facility inspired by companies that 3D print actual rockets. So I went for a platform design that would move up as the rockets are being built."







Matthew Lin

LOCATION: Taiwan **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/ponytail

Matthew Lin is a 2D artist who loves creating charming game characters. Having only pursued drawing as a career path after turning 30, he has gone on to work with clients such as Amazon Games, 2bytes and IGG.

1 WONDER WOMAN

"Fan art of one of my favourite characters. This is an exploration of how she could look in a game, and this could be her loading page art."

2 TOP GUN

"This fan art stylises well-known characters while retaining their likeness and personality. I used less saturated colours, strong forms and highlights to give it a retro feel."

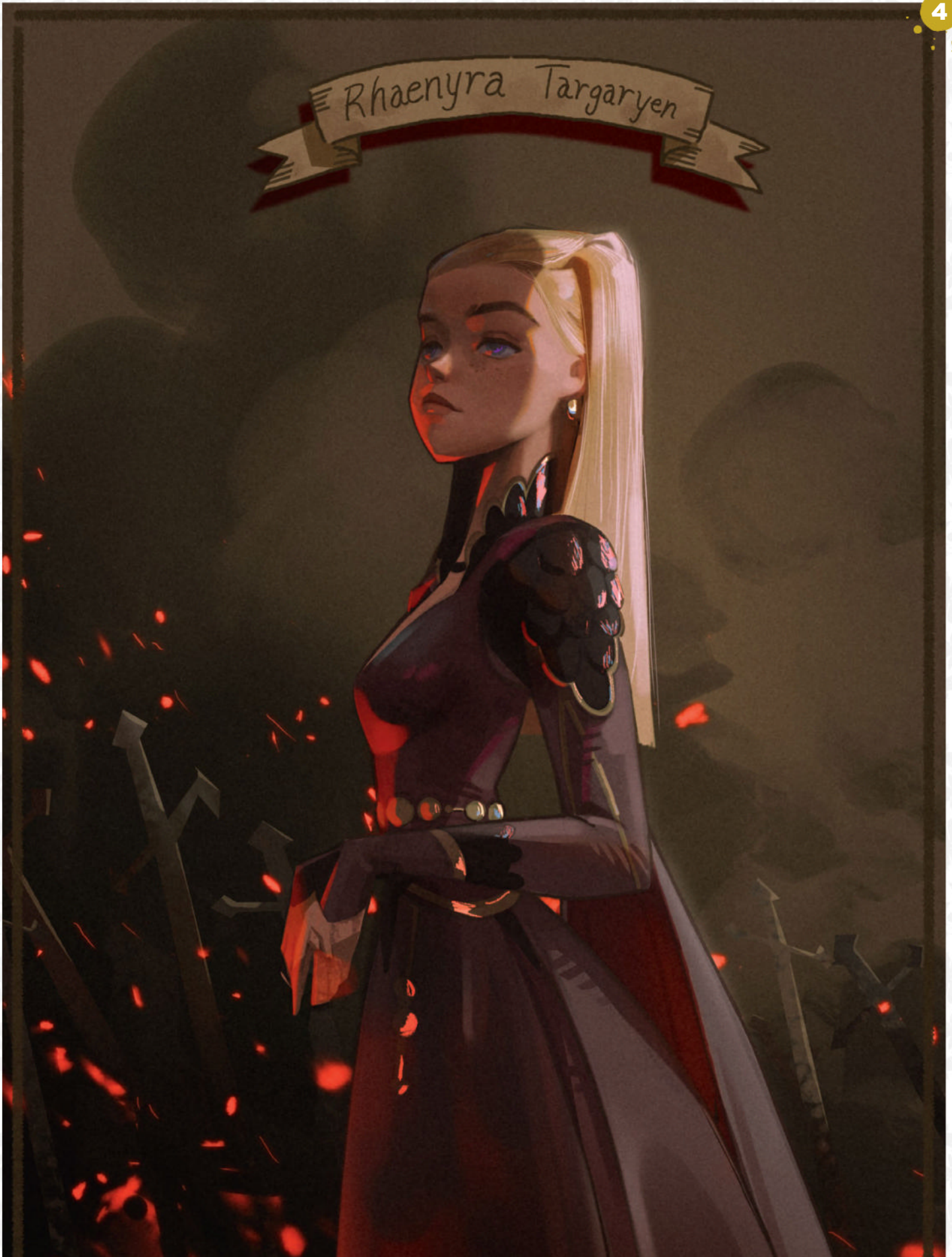
3 STEAMPUNK ARCHAEOLOGIST

"These are my original designs based on the idea of a steampunk archaeology world. The sketchy lines and strokes give it a rough style."

4 RHAENYRA TARGARYEN

"In this fan art based on the HBO series, I wanted to capture an arrogant and fearless charisma. Keeping the lines gives it a unique look. I think it would look good on a board game."







Anna Davis court

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Fresco, Procreate, watercolours, gouache, pastels, coloured pencils **WEB:** www.annadaviscourt.com

Anna is a children's book illustrator who blends her love of colour and nature to create whimsical characters and worlds. Her clients include Disney, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins and more.

1 ELEE & ME

"This illustration comes from Elee & Me, a book about a beautiful friendship between two unlikely characters from the Star Wars universe. Here Salju is sharing her favourite stories with Elee."

1



2 NOT A BOOK ABOUT BUNNIES

"Here is Porcupine talking about how spike-tacular she is. This illustration is from Not A Book About Bunnies, published by Starry Forest Books, Inc."



2

3



3 SOMETHING SWEET

"There's nothing more satisfying than plucking the perfect berry, especially for a little mouse! Inspired by the book The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry & The Big Hungry Bear."

4 THE EXPLORER

"This young explorer sets off to delve deep into the unknown. Little does she know that the unknown is searching for her as well."

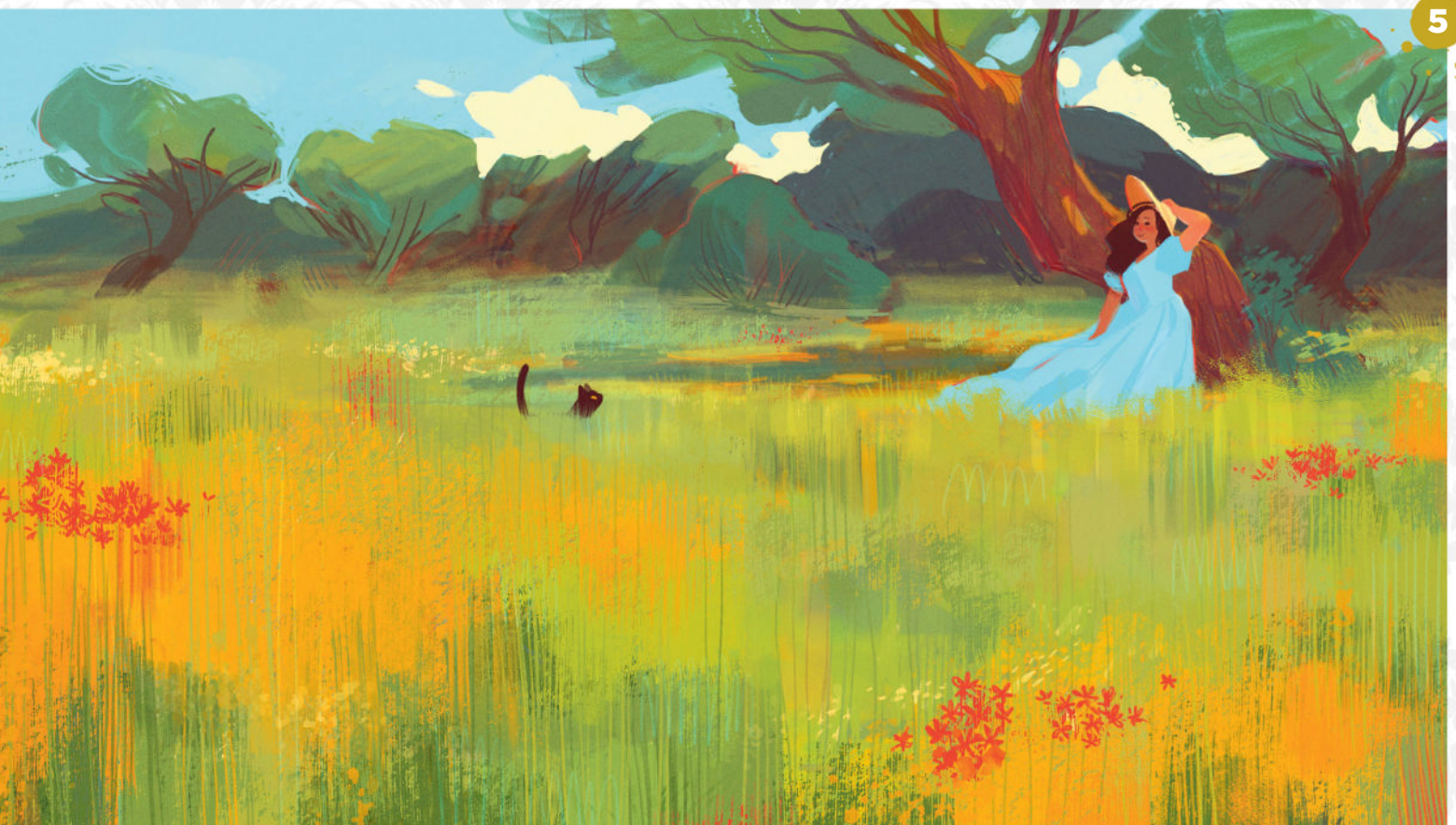
5 SUMMER STROLL

"Where is your happy place? Mine is in nature on a sunny day in a beautiful dress with an animal companion by my side."

4



5





Gediminas Skyrius

LOCATION: Lithuania **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.gediminasskyrius.com

Gediminas is a self-taught artist and art director working in animation. He sees every project as a new opportunity to experiment. His personal works actively kick back against the normality of his commissioned pieces.

1 GRANDMA

"An idea I had when visiting an ethnographic village in Lithuania. A grandma with a dark secret (look closer)."

2 KAUNAS

"A reimagining of the city of Kaunas and its modernist architecture as the head of a giant robot. Part of a series that I'm working on."

3 MODERN ANGELS

"The idea was to show what a modern angel (or demon) might look like. These are actually the first ideas that came to my head without much hesitation."

4 MEDIEVAL MANSION

"As a big fan of medieval architecture, I tried to imagine a medieval place where I would love to live."

1



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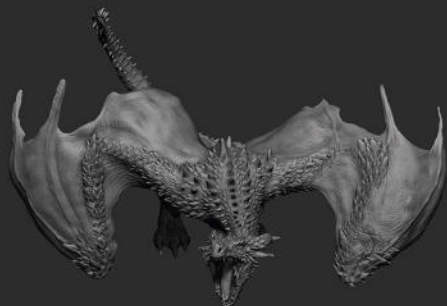


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The Rookies is a platform to help digital artists get discovered without having to compete with professionals for attention. You'll get to the front page of those sites one day, but for now, we've got your back and want to help turn your passion for creative media into a successful career.

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Battle with the Cavern Dragon

YEAR CREATED: 2023 MEDIA: PHOTOSHOP, ZBRUSH

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

"This project came from an exercise on the concept art master's degree at BigRock, in which we created an original storyboard. My story is the classic fantasy situation where the hero sets out to hunt a dragon that terrorises the population. Afterwards I decided to develop the design of the creature further, using a 3D model until the final keyframe was created."





Artist **PROFILE**

Andrea Cigala

LOCATION: Italy

Andrea is currently studying for a master's degree in concept art at the BigRock creative school, having already completed a three-year degree in painting at the SantaGiulia Academy of Fine Arts in Brescia.

www.therookies.co/u/IlCigo

Find your tribe at

vertex

Connect and learn Our festival of digital art, animation and VFX is back as a live event!
Tanya Combrinck explains why you should join us in central London on 19 April

One of the best things you can do for yourself both personally and professionally is to build connections with similar souls. That's why we got together with sister publications 3D World and Creative Bloq to create the Vertex conference.

It's a place where artists can come together to find community, guidance, inspiration and friendship, as well as an opportunity to build the kind of professional network that will boost your career. Not only that, the day is packed with talks from industry pros

about exciting new technologies and techniques, career advice, and other topics that will get you motivated.

One of the speakers heading to the event is **Anna Hollinrake**, a creative director who works in the video games and animation industries.



She has attended the conference before, and found it to be particularly valuable for new artists looking to find people at a similar point in their career. "Building a community of people at the same

Anna says: "Having everybody in town means catching up with some people you haven't seen in years, and building friendships with folks you'll see at conferences non-stop for the next decade!"

point as you cannot be overstated in its impact," she says.

Anna's talk is about environment concept art. "I'll be talking about breaking down those mental barriers that a lot of the newer artists among us can have when it comes to creating backgrounds and environments," she explains. "It's something that a lot of artists, myself included, have had to wrestle with when developing their art practice for professional work, as

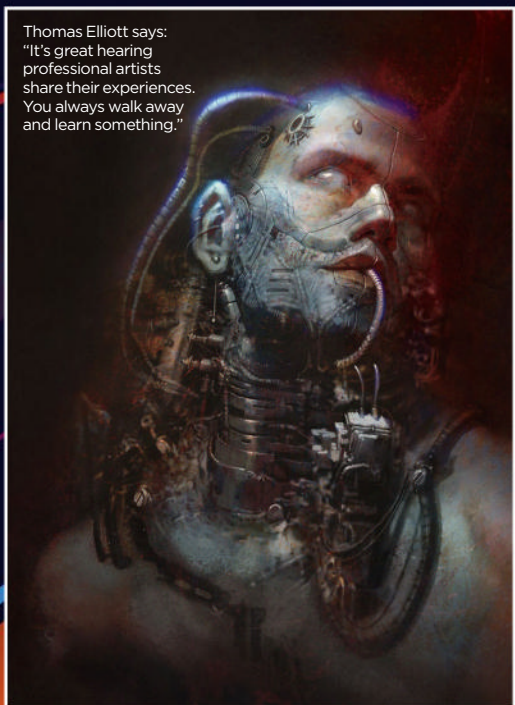
“Being precise about the skills you're eager to develop is often really impactful”

the 'safe zone' is most commonly character illustration.

"We don't have the same innate knowledge of a bridge or a building that we do with the human body, and so the blank sheet of paper effect is often much more pronounced. I'm going to be talking about ways to reduce that feeling, and telling stories within those spaces too."

There's a lot going on at Vertex, so Anna recommends that you make some specific goals about what you want to get out of the day before you get there. "Being precise about what skills you want to develop and how you're going to find answers to

Thomas Elliott says:
"It's great hearing professional artists share their experiences. You always walk away and learn something."





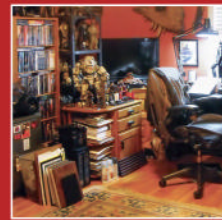
THU HEADING TO PORTUGAL

Find out all the details, including a fantastic line-up of speakers, for this year's Trojan Horse was a Unicorn, which is all set for September and October.
Page 28



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

We talk to storyboard artist Sam Tung about his daily process and how he manages his many parenting duties alongside working on a AAA video game.
Page 30



STEP INSIDE A CREATIVE DEN

The artist and author Wayne Barlowe shows us the treasure trove of figurines, books and artworks that put his personality on display in a packed studio.
Page 32



A packed crowd took in Loish's talk at Vertex 2020.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT LAUNCHING YOUR CAREER

Veteran artist David Levy on what you'll get out of Vertex

How do artists benefit from attending events like Vertex?

After the Covid years, Vertex is like a breath of fresh air for artists itching to reconnect and revitalise their creative mojo. Being an artist can sometimes feel like a solo journey through the wilderness. But at Vertex we're flipping that script! It's all about mingling, swapping stories, and sharing skills. Because let's be real, the magic really happens when we come together and bounce ideas off each other.

Whether you're a painter or 3D modeller, this is a chance to soak up inspiration, make new pals, and maybe spark a few collaborations. Let's paint the town red – or blue, or whatever colour inspires you – and remind ourselves that even in the toughest times, our creative flame burns bright when we're in good company.

What's your advice for those attending for the first time?

For artists on the lookout for opportunities, don't forget to pack your portfolio! It's not just a chance to showcase your skills, but also get invaluable feedback from seasoned art directors. Trust me, there's nothing like hearing straight from the pros about what they're looking for and how you can up your game.

Plus, it's the perfect opportunity to build your professional network. Who knows, that casual chat over coffee could lead to your big break! So dust off those masterpieces, and brush up your networking. It's not just a conference; it's a launchpad for your artistic career.



David Levy is the CEO at Pitch Dev Studios, and currently the lead artist on *Dune: Awakening*.

vyleart.com



"Prepare your portfolio in advance, select your best artwork, and bring them on iPad or printed," Nana Dhebuadze suggests.



By the Dappled Path, an artwork by Anna Hollinrake inspired by a trip to Kew Gardens in 2018.



"I'm genuinely thrilled about reconnecting with old friends or co-workers and diving into conversations with all the new faces I'll meet," says David.



"I'm most looking forward to bumping into old friends and meeting a new generation of artists," says Anna.



Dylan says: "Vertex is a crash course in the future of art and technology. You'll see the latest trends and learn about new tech. It's a great opportunity."

➡ those challenges is often really impactful," she says. "Looking at a schedule can feel overwhelming, but I really recommend checking out the artists in advance and seeing whose work not only inspires you, but is created in a way that is applicable to your process."

CREATIVE BUZZ

Another artist returning to Vertex for



the second time is VFX and animation specialist **Dylan Sisson**, who has been with Pixar since 1999. "Expect to be inspired, maybe a bit overwhelmed, and definitely energised by all the creative buzz," he says.

Dylan tells us that the best way to make the most of the day is to put yourself out there. "Ask questions, share your own experiences, and don't be afraid to introduce yourself. Remember, today's stranger could be tomorrow's collaborator."



David says: "There's something magical about catching up with friends and forging new friendships in the creative community."

Dylan is particularly looking forward to the sessions about new technology. "It's fascinating to see the creative solutions that people are finding to age-old problems, as well as the new challenges we're facing now with the implications of generative AI," he says.

And, like most attendees, he can't wait to catch up with old friends and make some new ones. "There's something special about connecting with fellow artists and tech enthusiasts who understand the peculiarities of

“Expect to be inspired, maybe a bit overwhelmed, and definitely energised”

our work, like why we get emotionally attached to things such as Walking Teapots," he tells us.

Dylan's talk will be about emerging technologies and their impact on the film industry and storytelling. "We'll look at how technology is reshaping what's possible in animation and VFX, from AI to VR and RenderMan," he says. "I'll show production examples from Pixar, and also put a spotlight on Pixar's RenderMan Art Challenges. Of course, it's not just about the tools; it's about the creative possibilities they unlock for artists."

UNREAL OPPORTUNITIES

One of the most exciting tools at the moment is Unreal Engine, and no digital art conference would be complete without a session on it. At Vertex, you'll get to hear all about ➡

"I came away with an appreciation that we're all part of a grand experiment in creativity and technology," says Dylan Sisson of his time at Vertex 2020.



© Disney/Pixar



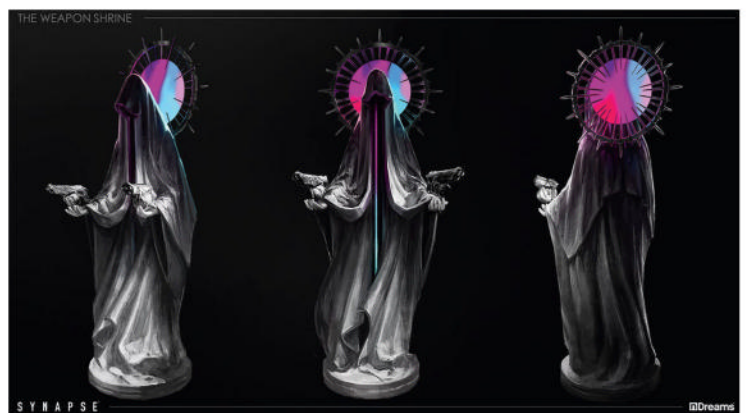
Creature is a personal project by Nana, done in Photoshop, KeyShot and ZBrush. Check out some in-progress shots on her ArtStation page.

"I've never been to Vertex before, but I can't wait to confirm all the good things my friends have told me about it!" says Pablo.



"It's a rare opportunity to meet a cross-section of industry pros, and regardless of your particular discipline you'll learn something," says Thomas.

Alina on a previous Vertex: "I felt a surge of inspiration listening to incredibly talented individuals share their stories and demo the approaches to different aspects of the job."



➡➡ how the short film Moon Kontrol was created by concept artist and art



director **David Levy**, who has worked on both video games and movies.

David will take us on a detailed tour of his process from start to finish. We'll see how Unreal can recreate the subtleties of real-life filming, and you'll also get a deep understanding of just how powerful the platform is for realising creative expression. As well as that, we'll get an insight into how David's team collaborated to produce this work, and his approach to the art of worldbuilding and storytelling.

Like Dylan, David is also keen to explore the other technology talks at the conference in search of new tools and techniques to give his workflow an extra boost. "From nifty painting tools to cutting-edge art directing advice, I'm on the lookout for anything that can take our craft to the next level," he says.

AWARD WINNER

If you're interested in the VR gaming space, you'll want to take in the talk



from **Alina Fedaseyenka**.

She's well-known for her exceptional, distinctive art direction on the highly regarded PS VR2 game Synapse, which won Best AR/VR Game at the 2023 TIGA awards.

Part of her success is down to her striving to set up the right conditions for creative inspiration to thrive. "In my talk, I'll deep dive into the journey we undertook with Synapse, and speak about the creation of a safe space for artists; a nurturing environment that's



"I'm eager to explore the latest advancements in technology and techniques that can supercharge our production work," says David.

designed to foster creativity," she says. "The main focus will be about boosting confidence among artists and instilling a strong belief in their creative abilities."

To get the best out of the day, Alina echoes Anna's advice to plan your visit in advance, and bring your sketchpad along. "Aside from the exciting talks lined up this year, I'm looking forward to the life drawing sessions," she says. "There's a mix of excitement and tranquillity that comes from sketching alongside other artists, reminding me of my student years."

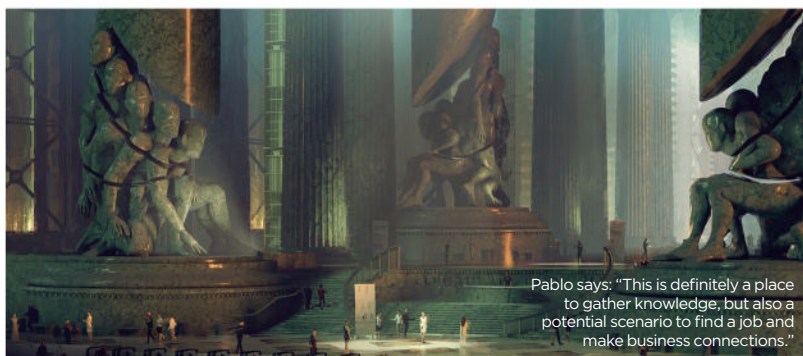
Artists still at an early point in their careers, or those who are looking to take the next step, will get something out of **Pablo Carpio's** talk on how to grow within the art industry. Pablo has worked as a freelance concept artist and art



"Attending events such as Vertex means that artists can recharge their creativity and give their inspiration a boost," recommends Alina.



Anna's artwork showing a volunteer medical courier as she ends her shift rounding up the cats lost after an earthquake.



Pablo says: "This is definitely a place to gather knowledge, but also a potential scenario to find a job and make business connections."

“Make sure you take advantage of the day and speak to as many artists as you can. Get out there and meet people!”



3D artist Mike Griggs says: "Bring an open mind. Don't just go to the talks you think you should go to; if you have the time, explore the other talks."



A personal project by Nana, done in Blender. See the full scene on her ArtStation profile.



Karla Ortiz held a captive audience for her session back at the Vertex event in 2020.



Dylan is a Pixar veteran who has been at the company since 1999.

director for names including Disney, Pixar, Marvel Studios, Industrial Light and Magic, Netflix, Warner Bros. and more, and has a wealth of experience to inform his advice on subjects like getting your first job, seeking out a promotion, starting your own project or company, and transitioning from games to film or vice versa.

READY TO MINGLE

Pablo's top tip for attending Vertex is to make sure that your portfolio is downloaded to your device. "It might sound obvious, but I've seen a lot of people having issues showing their portfolio due to connection issues," he says. "So make sure that you take advantage of the day and speak to as many people as you can. Don't just be stuck around your friends; get out there and meet new people!"

There are too many talks to cover here, but other highlights you'll want to look out for are Thomas Elliott's session *Blood, Bullets and Skulls: The biography of a wargame illustrator*, all about making artwork of epic fantasy battles; Nana Dhebuadze's talk on making keyframes for film and games; and Brynn Metheney's session about creating believable creatures through anatomy and storytelling.

No matter where you are in your artistic journey, Vertex has something for you. And if you're just taking the first steps in your career, meeting your peers and getting advice from leading pros is especially important; it will help to build you up and potentially lead to some great opportunities. So come and join us! 🍷



"Do a bit of research about the speakers beforehand. You never know when a Q&A session will be happening and it's good to have some questions in mind to get the most out of it," says Thomas.



Major studios and industry players all seek talent at THU's recruitment sessions.

Get THU 2024 in your calendar!

Trojan Horse was a Unicorn All the details on an event that promises to change the lives of creators and the minds of art industry leaders

Trojan Horse was a Unicorn (THU) has announced the dates for the 10th edition of the event, which is all set to take place in Troia, Portugal from 30 September to 5 October 2024.

The line-up features impressive names such as Karla Ortiz (concept designer and illustrator), Iain McCaig (artist, writer and filmmaker), Mike Azevedo (art director and concept artist), Andrea Blasich (sculptor), Miss Jisu (Superani artist), Matt Omernick (co-founder and chief creative officer at Akili Interactive), Doug Chiang (senior vice president and executive design director at Lucasfilm), Kyle Balda (BAFTA-nominated feature animation director), Neville Page (concept designer, illustrator and creature designer), and Simon Lee (sculptor, creature art director and concept designer), with many more still to be announced.



The late Kim Jung Gi draws with Dong Ho Kim at a previous THU.

Attendees gather for a mentorship session with Deanna Marsigliese, a character art director with Pixar.

THU is a small six-day gathering for seniors from all areas of the digital entertainment industry, as well as creators, builders, artists and everyone establishing their creative journey. It's an opportunity to take careers to the next step and make unprecedented connections with some of the biggest companies and names in the industry.

The organisers set aside six days for the event as they believe attendees need time to be fully immersed in the atmosphere and experience a creative reboot, and truly connect with each other on a meaningful level. It's an

“There's a saying that I heard at THU, which was that 'we are standing on the shoulders of giants'”

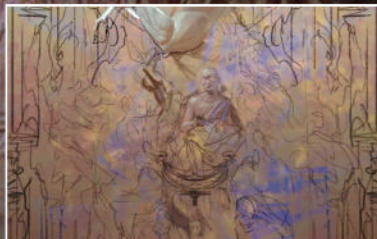
If you think the main event at THU is a regular convention then you'd be mistaken. For the whole duration of the event, attendees and guests are surrounded by art and encouraged to interact with a village especially built to nurture creativity. From recruitment and mentorships with some of the best companies and recruiters in the industry, through to an art gallery and sensory experiences, everything is carefully planned out with the goal of stimulating thought exchange.

event that takes pride in having a no VIPs approach, as well as no roll-ups, stands, or any other splashy brand materials. The focus is on connecting, growing together, and understanding the meaning of community, all while being surrounded by nature, incredible beaches and breathtaking views.

THU is taking place from 30 September until 5 October 2024. Tickets are available on the website, with the option of paying by instalments at no extra charge. Find out more at www.trojan-unicorn.com.

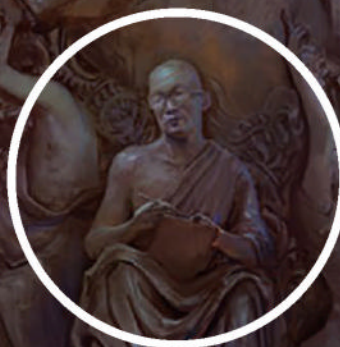
Everlasting artwork

Multi-award winning artist Marc Simonetti made the official poster for this year's THU event. The theme is 'everlasting', which focuses on celebrating artists and creators that have left their mark on the creative industry by helping others and sharing their craft. "There's a saying that I heard at THU, which was that 'we are standing on the shoulders of giants'," Marc says.



Inspiring giant

Marc adds: "The statues in the poster represent friends and artists that mean to me what THU is. First, I wanted to represent Kim Jung Gi in the centre as he incarnates so well the giant that inspires. He was also extremely nice and funny. In a way, he was a perfect example of what THU is."



Almost immortal

"All the artists that paved the way before us, that led us to be artists, have created a kind of immortality; their work inspires generations, it's something that connects people independently of any language, culture and beliefs," Marc explains.



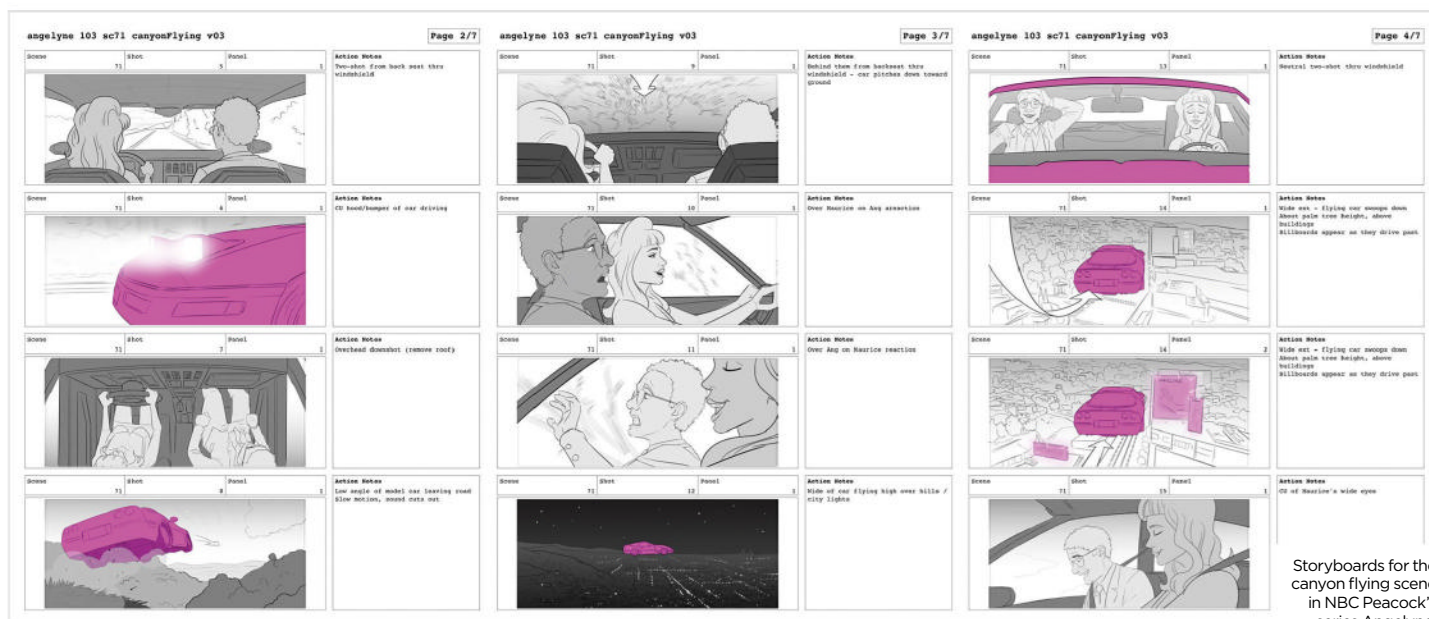
THU 2024

SEPTEMBER 30 - OCTOBER 05

TROIA, PORTUGAL

imagineFX





A day in the life of... Sam Tung

Baby on board We discover how the storyboard artist balances his work with raising a young child at home

“Our toddler has me up by 6.30am. I feed him, feed the dog, then go for a walk. I sit down about 8am and check emails, then it’s drawing time! That could be roughing in a sequence, cleaning up one that I’ve roughed, or addressing notes on a sequence I’ve turned in. I may also have meetings scattered throughout the day.

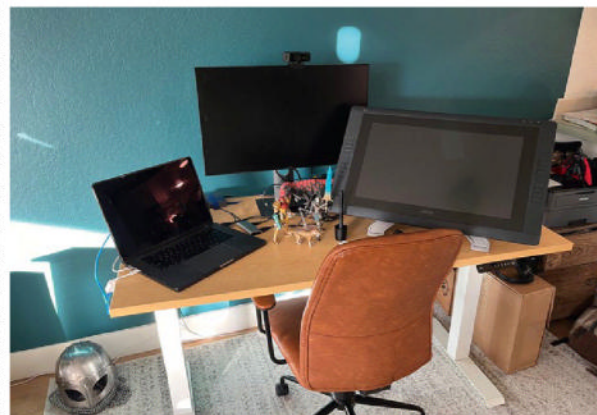
Pre-baby I worked all day; just non-stop. Now my day orbits around the toddler. I take lunch around 11am, and

by the time I’ve got us fed and we’ve done a dog walk, it’s been an hour.

I prefer to work on one thing a day. Sometimes I’m balancing multiple projects, but I schedule my week so that a day is all one, and the next is another. I’ll work until I’m done with one component, or at least at a good stopping point for the day.

If we have energy, my wife and I cook dinner. I used to want to keep working after, but I remind myself

“If you want a family, it’s such a huge part of the human experience and we, as artists, seek to capture that”



Sam packs a number of screens onto a small space in his office.

now that no one on their deathbed ever says they wish they’d worked more, so we have family time. Once the baby’s asleep, it’s nice to be grown-ups; we’ll watch a show with a glass of wine, or I’ll work on a personal project. I’ve also been more involved with the union because of generative AI stuff. I’m often in bed by 10.30pm because it starts over pretty soon.

As far as making it work with a family, I’m figuring it out as I go. It’s challenging. But if you want a family, it’s such a huge part of the human experience and we, as artists, seek to capture that. So please don’t let the challenge deter you, you’ll find a way to make it work.”



Sam is a senior storyboard artist at Retro Studios, and is working on an exciting AAA game for Nintendo. He first storyboarded on The Dark Tower for Sony Pictures, and has worked on the X-Men animated series for Marvel. See more at www.artstation.com/samtung.



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



The cover artwork for
Longsword, a tabletop
RPG from Plus One EXP.



I have to admit I never read Batman comics as a kid. I still have two 1960s baseball cards from my childhood, but that was pretty much the extent of my investigations. As an adult, though, with the help of the Nolan films, I've really grown to enjoy the character's darkness and human foibles. Somehow, I can relate. And so, I've got a few figures like the 1/4 scale Dark Knight and bits of memorabilia to scratch that dark hero itch.

Wayne Barlowe

Treasure trove The renowned artist and author opens the doors to his creative lair



It goes almost without saying that a studio is many things at once. It's a purpose-driven space, sometimes it's a welcoming, creative incunabulum filled with things that inspire, and sometimes it's a challenging creative crucible in which one has to find oneself. It's at once a sanctuary and a torture chamber. At least, that's what it can be for me.

My working habits have changed significantly over the years. I used to spend all of my creative time in the studio. Now, because I work on my iPad, I divide my time between this studio and a comfy couch where I do my digital work. But this room is where I write and draw, and it's still the core of my creativity.

My studios have never been places of light. I prefer a darker, cosier realm so that I can better focus on my work. With curtains drawn, it could be night or day outside and I'd never know. I've had many studios during my life. Ten to be exact, this one being my favourite. Nearly all of them have been in co-opted bedrooms with the same basic ingredients: books, collectibles, art supplies. I've collected books since I was a kid driving with my dad ➡

This small cabinet was adjacent to my dad's drawing table in my folks' studio. He kept tools and his airbrush in it - the hook to hold the airbrush gun is still on its side. I keep notebooks, iterations of scripts I've written and small personal items in it. A ton of brushes and pens reside in mugs atop it as well as a large Titanfall mech who guards it all.



This Titanfall Ogre is a recent and happy acquisition. It's a 1/12 mech from the game Titanfall, and made by ThreeZero. I loved Titanfall 2's campaign but am sadly mediocre at the fantastic PvP. Which doesn't stop me from considering it as, perhaps, my favourite console game. I love mechs!

Artist news, software & events

This cast is palaeontological inspiration made real. It was made years ago from what was then the largest T-rex found. You really can't look at it without marvelling that this is just a small part of the enormous skull of the animal. It has variously graced stairwells and living rooms and is now where it belongs.

Also known as a Barbary Sheep, this trophy head once adorned the office of the editor of Field & Stream. It was acquired by an ill-fated restaurant, the kind owners of which eventually bestowed it upon me. As the son of natural history illustrators, I don't and won't indulge in hunting. That said, the creature was beautiful, and I couldn't resist putting it on my wall.

I've owned this unsharpened sword since I was a teenager. My mum wouldn't permit me to have a sharp one, probably wisely, so this one had to do! I've fantasised about taking kendo or iaido; I did fence epee for a few years, but I do wish I'd pursued the Japanese art of the sword.



I used to have a desktop PC (mostly, admittedly, for me to play strategy games) and then moved back to a Mac for writing and using Painter. Now I'm mostly generating artwork on my iPad, this laptop is primarily used for writing. Consider it an instrument of torture.

ImagineNation Artist in Residence

What you see here represents a fraction of my true library. These books are the cream of the crop; books I've owned from childhood, signed books, artbooks, books I've created and books that I use on a daily basis. Because of my Hell writing, there's also a growing and slightly unsettling slant towards the occult.



This Arborite hunter sits contemplatively with his pet. He's a sentient, tribal plant who fits perfectly into the ecology of Gessner II, a planet I'm developing.



“ I prefer a darker, cosier realm so that I can better focus on my work ”



The Daggerwrist is perhaps the most iconic creature in Expedition. I pictured delving into their arboreal behaviour as Jane Goodall did with her beloved chimps. Maybe someday.



Here's a marvellous Dr Grordbort Raygun personalised with my hellish glyphs by the wonderful folks at Wētā Workshop in New Zealand. It was kindly bestowed upon me for some work I did down there in beautiful Aotearoa.



These are two of my most precious studio items. After my dad passed away, I had his opaque watercolour palette and brush mounted in honour of him. And I traded a painting years ago for the Burton piece which reads 'The Pilgrim' beneath his signature. He was the archetypal Victorian polymath, and his influence was instrumental to me creating Expedition.

Me in my natural habitat, sat among a lifetime's supply of treasures and curios.



ImagineNation Artist in Residence

Produced by Zenpunk of China, this 1/6th figure is an important character, Baron Farai, from my novel *God's Demon*. I drew many preliminary sketches and worked in close collaboration with Zenpunk and the sculptor, Simon Lee, on this figure.



“My studio is a place where my personality is on full display”

➡ from book sale to book sale. Archaeology, palaeontology, nature, WW1 aviation, Roman history, the occult, film design; all subjects that find their ways onto my shelves.

Then there are the collectibles. Within my universe nature abhors a flat surface, and so I've found myself nesting whatever will fit into whatever sized niche suits. There are a lot of robots, which is odd because I never draw robots; I just like them. And there are the many 1/6th scale figures that represent not just a love of collecting them, but also my fascination with WW1, ancient Rome, *The Lord of the Rings*, feudal Japan and, of course, science fiction. I find them inspiring from a design standpoint.

CREATIVE TOOLS, OLD AND NEW

Art-related things are harder to find in my studio. An easel stands folded behind my door, mocking me for not having been used in some five years, fallout from my gravitating towards digital art on my iPad. Brushes and pens stand at the ready on my dad's old tabouret and paints lie silently in metal drawers, allies of that annoying easel. My desk is small just like every desk I've had, but it's big enough for my scanner and Mac and it's perfect for drawing and writing.



A cartoon-illustrated note from Ray Bradbury “commanding” me to do a version of *The Fog Horn* sits beneath the script of *Aliens* generously signed by James Cameron. And a signed print of Jacques Cousteau surmounted by a picture of my dad. All treasures.

Apart from my work on films, I've worked from home all my professional life. In many ways, this studio is a physical manifestation of who I am; a place in which my personality and diverse interests are on full display. It's a bit like walking into my brain. Only with better lighting.

Wayne Barlowe is an artist, author, screenwriter and producer currently writing his third novel. His artbooks include *Barlowe's Guide to Extraterrestrials and Fantasy*, *Barlowe's Inferno*, and *Expedition*, a sci-fi and natural history narrative that became Discovery Channel special *Alien Planet*. He has also designed for films. Visit his Instagram at <https://bit.ly/49IOXIW>.

This scene of Gryphons atop the Great Wall adds two things that I love, archaeology and palaeontology, into the mix of creature design.





I've been collecting 1/6th figures for probably 15 years. They've gotten better and better over time and, in my opinion, represent a new and true art form. And they're just fun to have around. Predictably, their presence led me to want to have figures based on my own work, something I'm still actively working towards.

Photos: Jackson Huemer

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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 237 April 2024

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



Issue 236 March 2024

This month's awesome cover star Daniela Uhlig shows you her pro techniques for creating Procreate portraits. Plus, we discover what life is like in the game's industry, and how Aaron Blaise made an adorable Disney-style animation.



Issue 235 February 2024

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



Issue 234 January 2024

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

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Each issue we share a workspace, highlighting artists' interesting collections, references and studio setup.

Shared spaces

Hello ImagineFX. Me and my wife share a workspace and I know a few other artist and designer types with a similar setup, but I don't recall ever seeing an example of this in your magazine before. It was great to see and I'd love to check out more, as it's a very different way of working than being alone.

Ben, via email

Through the keyhole

I'd like to ask for more of the Artist in Residence articles you run. This is one of my favourite parts of the magazine and is always the first section I head for when my new issue arrives.

I love everything else in the mag too, but I'm always fascinated by looking at where other artists work, what sort of items they surround themselves with for inspiration, and what tools they use. It's a bit of a through the keyhole look into how others do things, which I find interesting, especially seeing as how so many artists can be insular.

Jenny, via email

Rob replies Hi Ben, thanks for getting in touch to share your thoughts. I'm all for sharing as diverse setups as we can in the magazine and I agree, it's a very different proposition to share a space. Not only do you have some company, but you can bounce creative ideas off each other, as well as take the important breaks together too. Do feel free to share your own studio space with me. Maybe it will fit the bill to grace the pages of a future issue!

And Jenny, thanks for sending in your thoughts too! I share your feelings. It's a wonderful little glimpse into the world of another artist, which can be fascinating and gives some insights that could help others work better or smarter, which is always a good thing.

Tony's fantastic cover art, for both our last issue and his book *The Search for WondLa*, made for an insightful workshop.



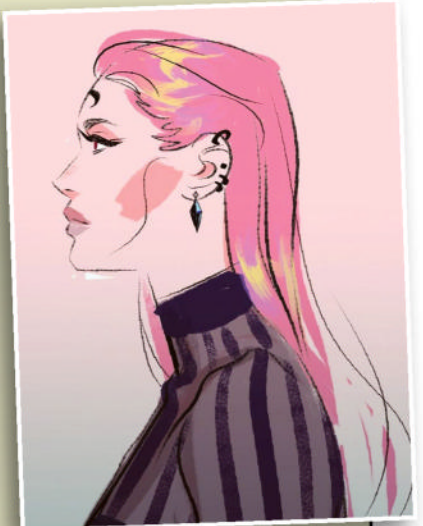
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New works that have grabbed our attention



The Art District'86
[@janrayab](https://twitter.com/janrayab)



Mei Mei Agnieszka
[@meimei_2503](https://twitter.com/meimei_2503)



Randy Debono
[@debonoart](https://twitter.com/debonoart)

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

Simply WondLa-ful

Hi there Rob, I wanted to reach out to say thank you for getting Tony DiTerlizzi in the magazine last month. I've been a fan of his work for some time now and he has been somewhat of an inspiration to my own artistic endeavours, so it was so good to see him sharing some of his processes, and of course his amazing cover art for *The Search for WondLa*. Please keep talking to artists like this so we can all learn from them and their incredible work (can we have Rodney Matthews please!). Thanks!

Jacob, via email

Rob replies Thanks so much for writing in Jacob! I couldn't agree more about the value of having established artists sharing their processes and thoughts. People like Tony have done the hard work for you, so tapping their knowledge as a resource is a fantastic way to speed up your learning. And have no fear, we'll be having many more top artists coming up in the pages of the magazine soon. Possibly even Rodney, who's a personal favourite of mine too!



THE ART OF AIRI PAN

Dominic Carter talks to the senior concept artist at Blizzard about her role, running a Schoolism course, and providing a service as a creative

When Airi Pan takes on a job she has a mission: to be an asset to her clients.

With a résumé including work for the likes of Activision, Netflix and Pixar, she knows how to deliver. We caught up with the Blizzard concept artist to learn more about how she's honed her skills, tips for keeping motivated, and why Downton Abbey is her secret weapon.

Tell us about your background as an artist. How did you get started, and what path has your career taken?

I was 100 per cent that kid who would doodle on any piece of paper in the

AIRPORT ADVENTURE

This piece saw Airi get back into making big paintings, and was inspired by a trip to Seattle.



back of class. When I was around 12, I discovered DeviantArt and digital art. From then, I bought my first dinky drawing tablet, and began uploading anatomically incorrect anime angels.

Eventually, I decided to pursue art more seriously in high school, and I then attended the ArtCenter College of Design. Since the first year, my career path has been a string of freelance gigs that started out small, and eventually longer commitments on feature films at large studios like Pixar and Netflix.

I interned for Activision during my second year of school, and then joined Turtle Rock Studios as a concept artist full-time. Shortly afterwards Blizzard reached out, and here I am today!

Outside of my main career, I also teach, exhibit at conventions, upkeep social media, and work on personal illustrations to develop the purely artistic side of myself.

How has your art developed, and what has driven those changes?

As a kid, art was so simple because my art was basically a shrine to whatever my heart fancied, and that was all about anime. Then school happened. I had to get my art good enough to get into art school, and eventually a job. So I moulded my style into something I believed would be the most hireable.

Now that I feel more secure in my professional work, I've come full ➡



SILVER

Airi always enjoys drawing her bunny-themed original character. "Making this was the equivalent of eating nostalgic comfort food."

Interview

➡ circle, and back to my first love: anime. But now, I'm able to implement all the techniques that I've learned to execute the highest fidelity pieces I can muster. It's been like returning to the highest visions of my 12-year-old self, except now it's moved on from just angel and demon original characters, because I've learned that the world is a lot cooler than just knights with giant swords and six wings.

Your mission statement as an artist is: 'To leave a place and its people, better than when you entered.' Can you tell us how you settled on this, and how it shows itself in your art?

My mentor James Paick told us that we as artists, at the end of the day, provide a service. The moment I understood that, something clicked. My artwork, no matter how beautiful or ugly, if it's working with someone else, it should serve a purpose, whether it's bringing someone's grandiose visions to life, or just helping to ideate 10 different cups.

But artists are more than just their art! I want not only my artwork, but also me as a person to be an asset. I want someone's life to be easier after they work with me, even if just a little, as we all have enough to deal with!

“The file was so big I had to separate the PSD into four different parts, and then stitch it together at the end!”

Of all the work that you've created so far, what piece are you the most proud of and why?

Catching Stars, for sure. Not only was it the biggest piece I've ever worked on so far, but during its creation I was also going through a tough time mentally.

It's a massive 30 x 40 foot mural commissioned by LightBox Expo. The file was so big that I had to separate the PSD into four different parts, and then stitch it together at the end. Plus, to align with the theme of light, I



SPILLING THE TEA

Airi drew this for her mum to remember their time spent drinking tea and looking at flowers.

wanted to challenge myself by doing refractions on the water, and I learned how to simulate waves and textured water in 3D all for that purpose.

What makes it my pride and joy is the fact that it wasn't just challenging artistically; my life was throwing me curveballs left and right, and some pretty strong curveballs at that.

Looking back, the fact that I not only survived that time but also finished this gigantic piece of art out of it, that's the real victory.

You're currently a senior concept artist at Blizzard Entertainment.

Can you tell us a little about what your job involves?

My main role is designing characters. This can be the bosses that could crush a building, down to cute little rabbits scampering around ambiently. I help figure out what they look like, what they wear, what tools players are holding, and what weapons they'll be using to murder each other in the game.

But when you're working in the unpredictable world of video games, you've got to be a jack of all trades too. So I also do environment work, colour keys, and basically whatever the game craves. If the game needs it, then I'm on it.

END OF SUMMER IN KYOTO

This more realistic painting is a tribute to one of Airi's favourite animes, The Eccentric Family, AKA Uchouten Kazoku.



Outside of our work, the Blizzard campus is always hosting events, and people love bringing their pets in. We've got people who bring home-made apple cider, give blacksmithing demos, and plein-air painting outside the cafeteria.

Can you talk us through your average working day? (If such a thing exists!)

Sure thing! Here's as average of a breakdown as I can get:

7:30am: Wake up, and plan the day.

8am: Gym time! Sometimes it's arm day, sometimes it's leg day.

9am: I have breakfast and dive into work mode.

12pm: Lunch break, and sometimes an episode of anime, before getting back to work.

6pm: Tackle my emails and respond to social media.

7pm: Shake off work by either cooking or doing exercise.

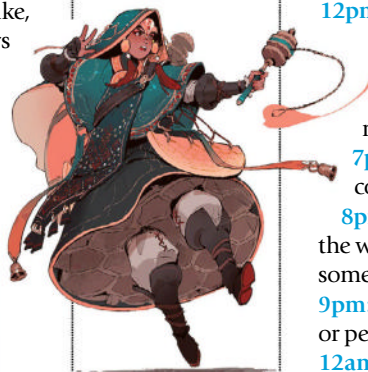
8pm: Clean up. I've got to keep the workspace and kitchen looking somewhat civilised!

9pm: Work on any outside projects or personal artwork.

12am: Lights out.

AMBROSIA

This princess is seeking the origin of Ambrosia, a mystical honey that powers the magic of her world but is now disappearing.



Artist PROFILE

Airi Pan



LOCATION: Los Angeles
FAVOURITE ARTISTS:
John Singer Sargent, Rei17,
Sergey Kolesov, Richard
Schmid, Yoneyama Mai,

Ryota-H, Bernie Fuchs

MEDIA: Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint,
Blender

WEB: www.airipan.com



GET HIRED BY A MAJOR STUDIO

What Airi says hopefuls should keep in mind applying to big names like Activision or Pixar

- The biggest killer is self-doubt. I've seen so many artists who have great portfolios self-sabotage as they've convinced themselves they'll never get hired. Walk into that interview like you're a professional, even if you've never freelanced a day in your life. It doesn't matter if it's a multi-million dollar studio; you're dealing with human beings, the same as you.
- Your portfolio is your golden ticket. Tailor it to the gig you want; show them you're the missing piece in their creative puzzle. I once told an art director that I liked painting when they were actually looking for a line work artist, and the interview was basically already decided from that moment.
- Don't neglect networking. Attend events, mingle, and show your art. Most people's first gigs come from a connection. My first job came from a friend I made at an anime convention. You never know!
- Lastly, don't forget that they're hiring a person, not a robot. If they vibe with your artwork, the next thing they'll be looking at is you! So always be a respectful, decent human being.



PORCELAIN PAINTER

Another piece dedicated to Airi's mum, who loves dishware. It now hangs in her living room.



GONE FISHING

The characters in this massive piece are fishing for stars to tie in with the theme of LightBox Expo 2023, which was light itself.



CATCHING STARS

Airi talks us through how she created her pride and joy, which was commissioned for the 2023 LightBox Expo

To get started, for the characters I asked my friends to help pose for the references. For any big piece that I create, I always prefer to take my own references so I can nail any human element details.

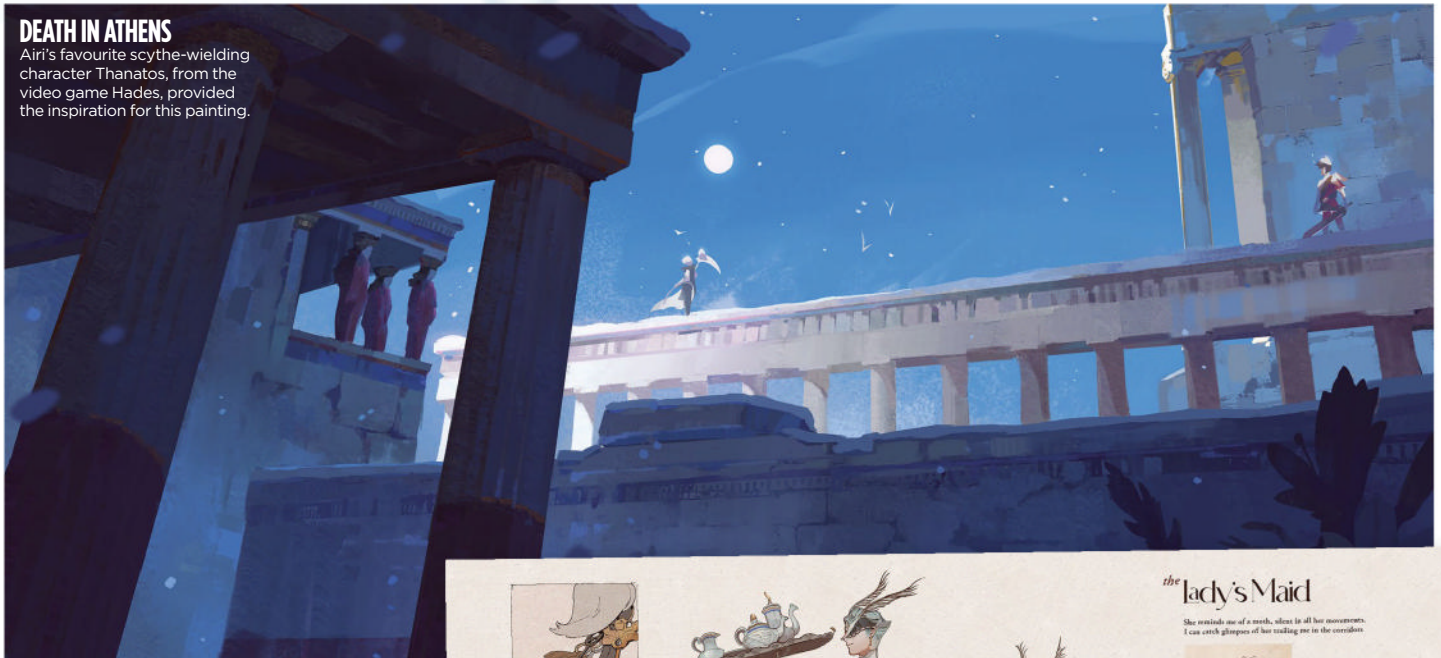
I then hand-modelled the boat in 3D, although someone had to walk me through it because 3D is not my speciality. For the water, I used Wave Simulations in Blender after watching a couple of tutorials on YouTube. I modelled the stars, and set the scene out roughly in 3D, with glass shaders set to the stars and water shaders to the ocean to simulate accurate light refractions as best as I could.

After that marathon of prep work it was painting time. I took this slow and steady, because this is the part that really doesn't have any shortcuts to it. I just sit there and I paint. If anyone finds that they struggle with getting bored like I do after rendering for a while, I try to find a work buddy who helps to keep me accountable. Other than that, I've discovered that my secret weapon is having Downton Abbey on in the background.

This entire piece was a mixture of patience, innovation and precision, but seeing *Catching Stars* come to life made every pixel-pushing moment worth it.

DEATH IN ATHENS

Airi's favourite scythe-wielding character Thanatos, from the video game Hades, provided the inspiration for this painting.



➔ Of course, this is the ideal scenario. Some days my key deadlines will play the lead role, and that schedule will go out the window.

Do you ever suffer from burnout, and if so, how do you deal with it?

Two years ago I didn't actually believe in burnout, until it hit me like a ton of bricks during the Covid pandemic. It turns out that being in denial doesn't make it go away. My body was protesting; I had headaches, trouble sleeping, and a lack of motivation.

It was diving into a completely different hobby that saved my artistic sanity. I took up weightlifting and



YELLOW

As its glorious colours suggest, Airi created this vivid piece for the yellow day of the annual Huevember art challenge.



MAID AND FOOTMAN

These Edwardian-themed characters toiled so endlessly that they've become part of an ancient estate.

started to study something adjacent to art, like graphic design. I also tried to explore different places to draw art, and found a love for unique cafes.

I realised that I was just staring at concept art 24/7, and my brain needed a different menu. I make the best art when I'm happy and motivated, and so I made it my professional goal to find things that sparked joy in my life that weren't art.

What made you decide to set up your own Schoolism course, and what can students expect to learn there that they won't find anywhere else?

Back in high school, I myself took some Schoolism courses; specifically Nathan Fowkes' and Tonko House's courses. It was my first introduction to entertainment art before I could get any formal training.

So when I was asked to create a Schoolism course, I said yes. I look

back to when I was a student and I definitely saw some gaps that I'd love to have known about, so it became my mission to fill those gaps. If I can save someone from the struggles I faced or teach them tricks I had to figure out the hard way, then I'm satisfied.

Students taking my course can expect a mix of tried-and-true basics, and those juicy nuggets of wisdom I wish someone had dropped on me earlier. It's not just about what's out there already; it's about adding a fresh perspective. Plus I want to keep it real and fun; I don't want anybody falling asleep in my class!

Are you able to tell us anything about the survival game you're currently working on?

I can only tell you what Blizzard is able to tell the press, which is that it'll be a first-person survival game, and a new IP! Otherwise, my lips are sealed.

“ One personal goal is to sketch in three different countries over the coming year. I'm planning how I can achieve that ”



BERRIES AND BOURBON

Made for LightBox Expo, this piece is dedicated to the summer sun and simple pleasures of an iced drink.



GOLD

A friend's arm tattoo inspired the sleeve details in this piece made for a Gallery Nucleus exhibition.

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

Right now, I'm all about doing my best on that current game project here at Blizzard. I wish I could say more.

But in the meantime, I'm always at work on my personal projects! I'm gearing up to do another one, and I think it's incredibly important to allow my art to just be, without any rules or client briefs.

I've always loved sketchbooking as well! One personal goal of mine is to sketch in three different countries over the coming year. I'm actually planning how I can achieve that as of writing.

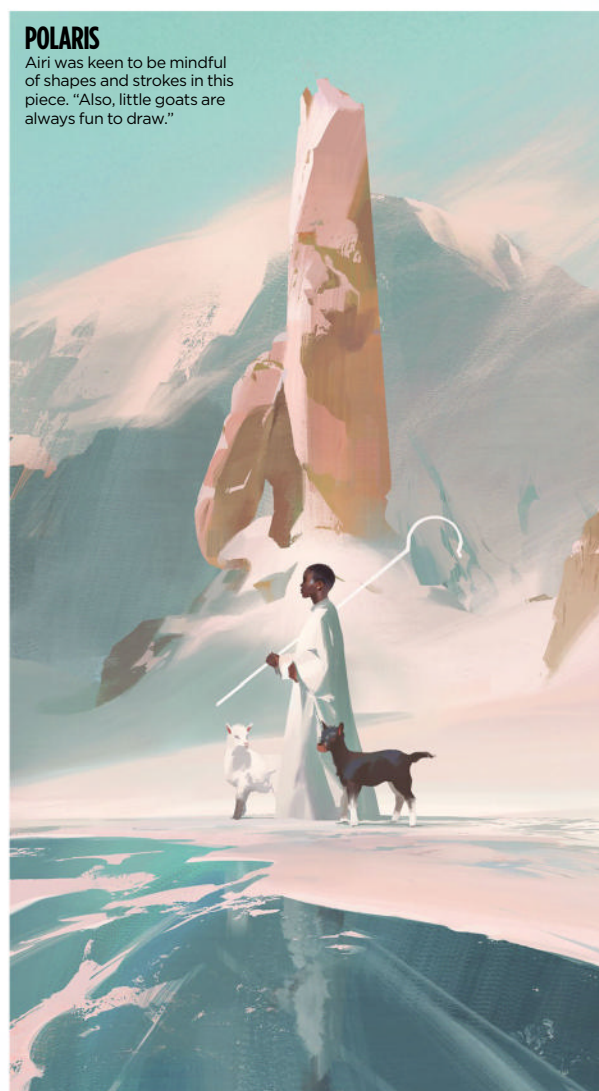
What advice would you give to aspiring concept artists hoping to follow in your footsteps?

First thing first, you've got to want it. And I mean really want it. Concept art

isn't the career for the faint of heart, but if you're truly passionate, then it's the kind of job that only keeps giving back for you.

Here's the real talk: it's competitive out there. But guess what? The most rewarding gigs usually are. So, my advice for those interested in concept art work is to be ready to put in the hours, to soak up all the knowledge like a sponge, and to build their portfolio, then rebuild it, and rebuild it, and rebuild it again.

I don't know what unique life circumstances that you, the reader, are going through. Perhaps going to art school is the best option for you, or a private mentor, or maybe flying out to a convention to network, or possibly putting your artwork on to social media to get more noticed. But if you want it, I have faith that you'll find a way to get it. It's a journey, not a sprint. You've got this! 🐾



POLARIS

Airi was keen to be mindful of shapes and strokes in this piece. "Also, little goats are always fun to draw."

ChrissaBug

Delve into the fantasy realms dreamt up by this independent illustrator with a love for magic and myths

Artist PROFILE

ChrissaBug

LOCATION: Sweden



Chrissa is an ex-game artist and now a full-time independent illustrator with a love for magic and nature. She has a passion for exploring the worlds of fantasy and mythology, and finding a magical escape amid brushstrokes. Chrissa also creates online tutorials to help others pick up a pencil and tap into their own creative potential.

www.chrissabug.com

FAE PRINCE

"Fantasy, especially fantasy that has magic, dark forests, and fae creatures that bewitch humans, is my favourite genre. I often like to draw and imagine characters that would exist in a world like that."

FREYJA'S QUEST

"For this sketch of Freyja I wanted to incorporate some Scandinavian-style knotwork into the frame behind her, so I used the Urnes Stave Church in Norway as reference!"

SPELLBOUND SECRETS

"I love sketching young witches. They are at the age of coming into their power but don't yet have the wisdom to not bite off more than they can chew, which can lead to interesting magical conflict and stories."



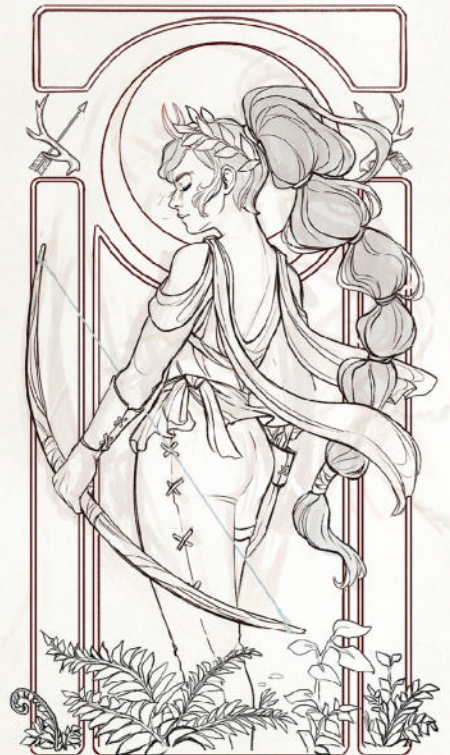
FREYJA, CAT MUM

"I love that the Norse goddess Freyja has two cats. I wanted to draw this beautiful warrior goddess of love and war with her two adorable furbabies!"



ARTEMIS

"This is a reimagining of Artemis in trousers! I also love incorporating her symbolism of the moon, antlers, arrows, and forest plants."



DARK FAIRY TALE

"When linework gets very detailed in a sketch, it can really help to lay down another tone in order to see the silhouette of the character, like in this sketch."

CATS CANDLES AND TEA

"I drew this piece as a depiction of myself with my two cats. Little did I know that they would both pass away not too long after I drew this. Now this piece holds an extra special place in my heart to commemorate our time together."

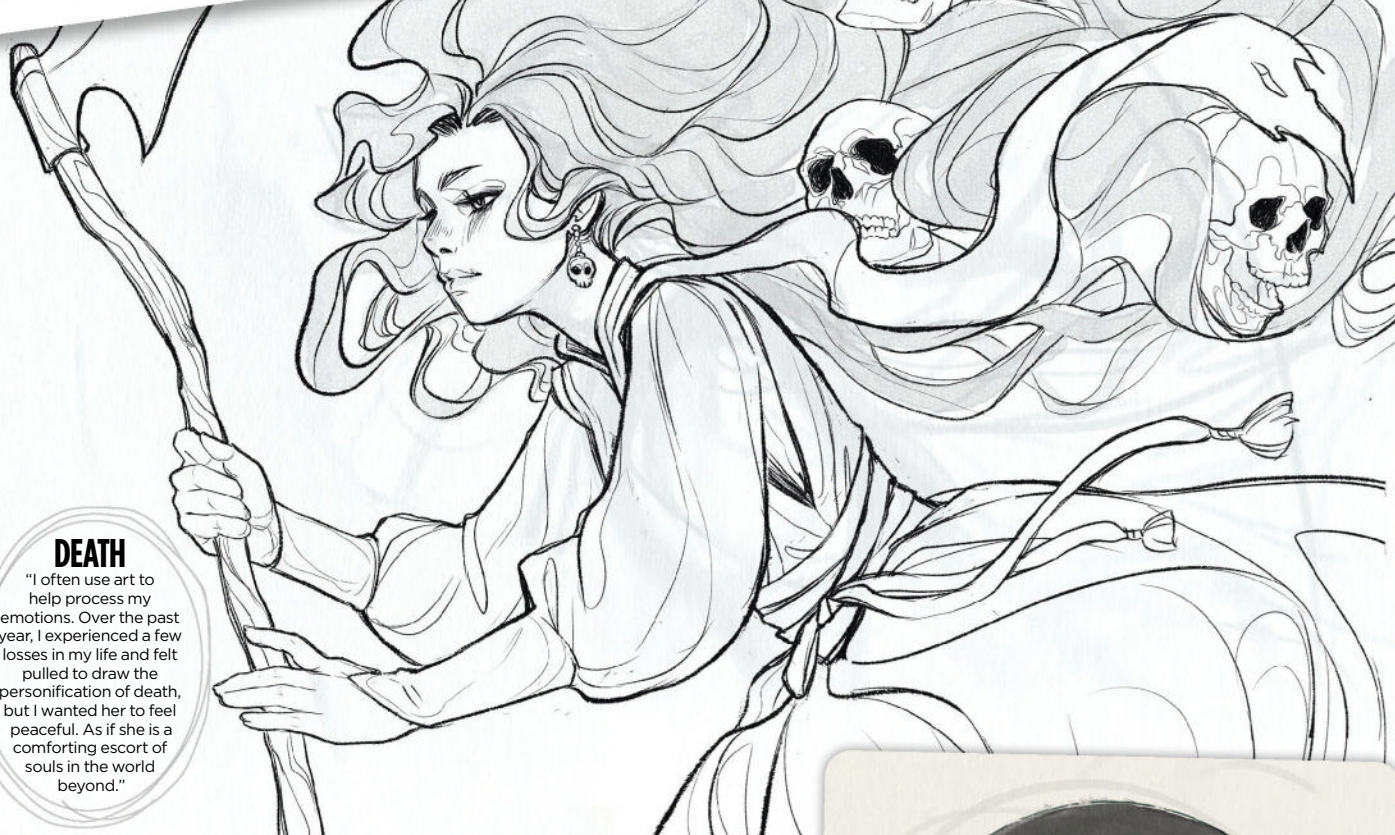


“It can really help to lay down another tone to see the silhouette”

Sketchbook

DEATH

"I often use art to help process my emotions. Over the past year, I experienced a few losses in my life and felt pulled to draw the personification of death, but I wanted her to feel peaceful. As if she is a comforting escort of souls in the world beyond."



UNDERWORLDLY ROMANCE

"I draw a lot of mythology and one of my favourites to reinterpret is Hades and Persephone. In this sketch, I imagined that it was a reunion that happens every autumn and winter when Persephone returns to the Underworld."

MOONLIT DRYAD

"A portrait of an elf or a fae is my ultimate comfort zone. I love drawing the fae and imagining their stories. If I sit down to sketch without a plan, I will usually sketch a fae portrait, which is exactly how this one came about!"

SANGUINE SACRAMENT

"I also love reading and writing a bit of Gothic romance. Sometimes, as I draw, a little snippet of story comes to me. It is like I am discovering the characters and their stories as I sketch them on the page. Once I am finished drawing, I often write a short prose about the piece!"

“ Sometimes, as I draw, a little snippet of story comes to me ”



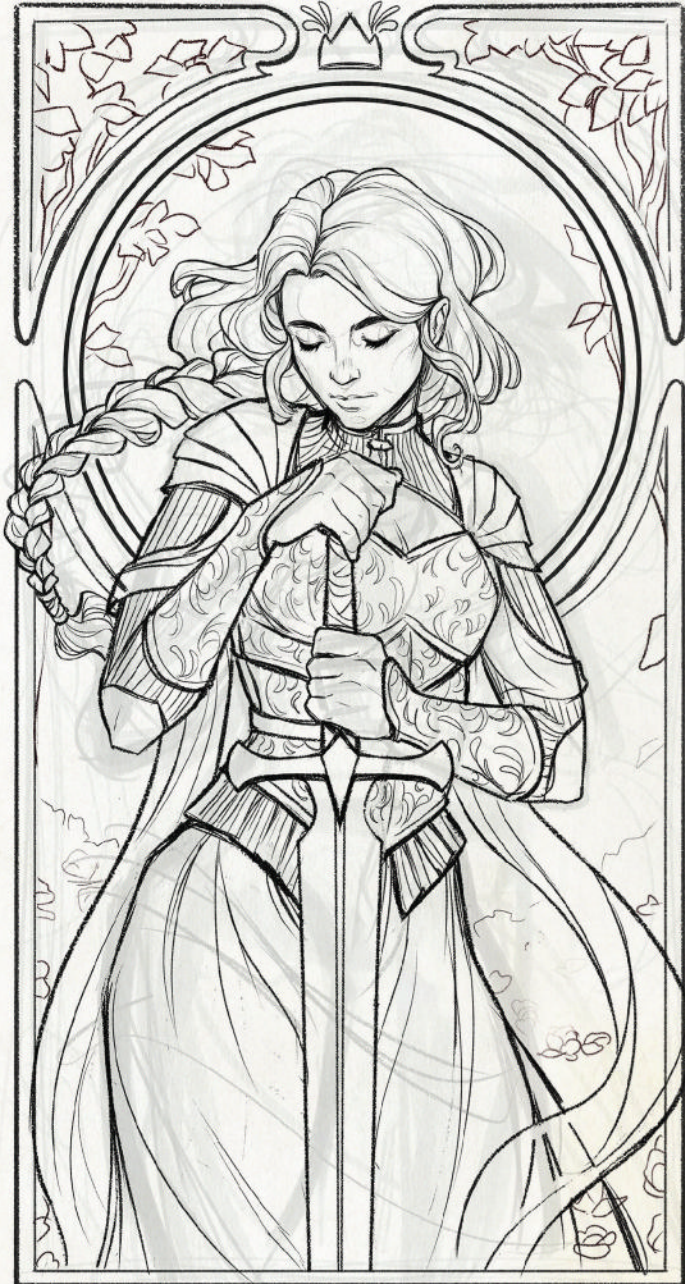
Sketchbook



SPRING EQUINOX

"Seasonal holidays are great inspiration because there is so much symbolism. This piece showing the spring equinox incorporates eggs, rabbits and plants, but also I wanted to show that the light and darkness are perfectly equal by showing the half sun in the background with a line going through it."

“ Seasonal holidays are great inspiration because there is so much symbolism ”



QUEEN OF SWORDS

"I created this piece originally for a colouring tutorial, but I also love how the black and white sketch turned out even without colour."

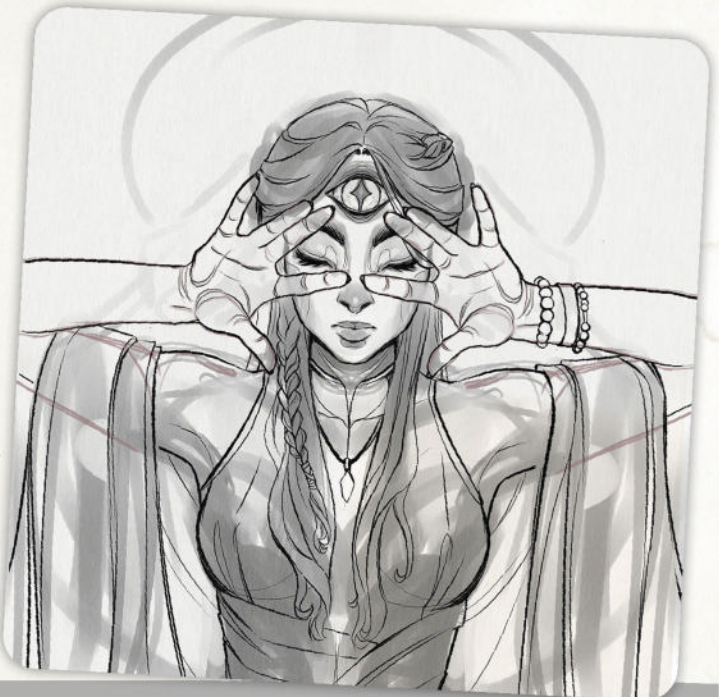
WITCH'S EYE

"If I am working digitally, I usually have two layers of sketches. One lighter, messier layer, and then I go over the top with a second layer of finer lines and details. In this picture you can see more of that initial rough, messy sketch."



THE GOBLIN'S BRIDE

"There's something I love about a piece that wouldn't seem eerie at all except for that one element that seems off. In this piece the creepy hand coming from off the canvas is that element!"



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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Julio Cesar explains his thought process for creating this issue's bright and beautiful cover art.

62 Limit your colours
How keeping colour selection to a minimum helps Gonzalo Kenny's art catch the eye.

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70 Create striking manga-style art
Use a cohesive choice of colours to make outstanding character artwork with Lim Wei Lun.

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Discover how Ayumi Sugimoto plans and brings to life a new environment for a project.

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Ruan Jia imbues his spectacular image from a ferocious fantasy battle with narrative.

Procreate, Clip Studio Paint & Photoshop

GIVE YOUR VIBRANT MANGA ARTWORK A SURREAL TWIST

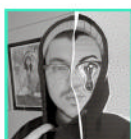
Our cover artist **Julio Cesar** explains how he created a colourful character that melds classic Japanese style with Brazilian flair

Artist PROFILE

Julio Cesar
LOCATION: Brazil

Also known as MZ09, Julio has been a visual artist and art director since 2016, working for DreamWorks, Disney, Nickelodeon and Amazon. His personal work draws inspiration from anime, music and superflat art.

<https://bit.ly/42SSHPE>



I want to give you a little glimpse into my personal process for character creation. I like to mix the surreal with the vibrancy of manga and use cultural references from my home of north-eastern Brazil.

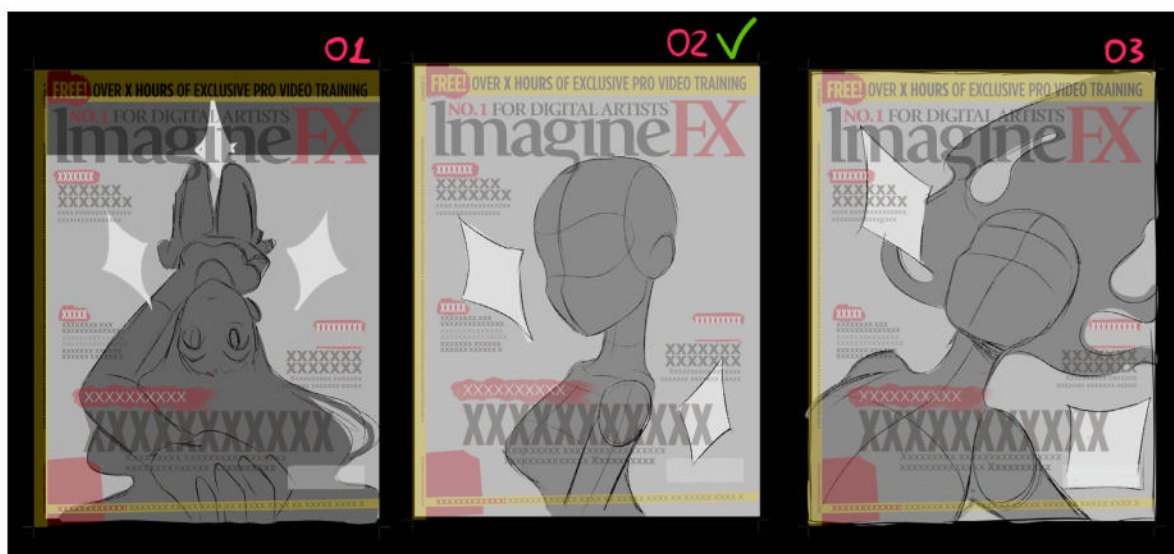
We'll start off with creating basic sketches for my cover artwork, where I experimented with different poses that not only tell a story, but also fit within the layout of the page. From there, it's about refining the line-art,

adding in extra details, and creating breathing room within the complex patterns and shapes.

Custom brushes are crucial to an efficient process, especially when dealing with the unique textures and details that give my style its signature look. We'll also cover how choosing the right colours in your piece can elevate the character, and how a carefully designed background will serve as more than just noise; a good backdrop should complement and enhance the character itself.

The next steps consist of adding lighting and shadow, using a soft glow for a dreamlike look, and the importance of texture in bringing a character to life. Finally, we'll add in some last decorative touches to make the character pop.

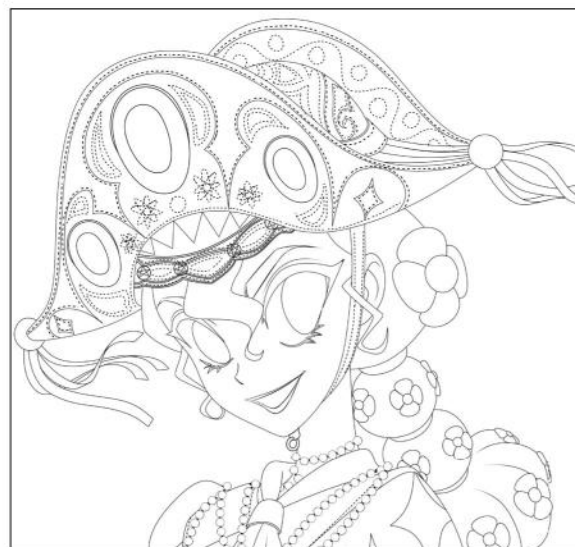
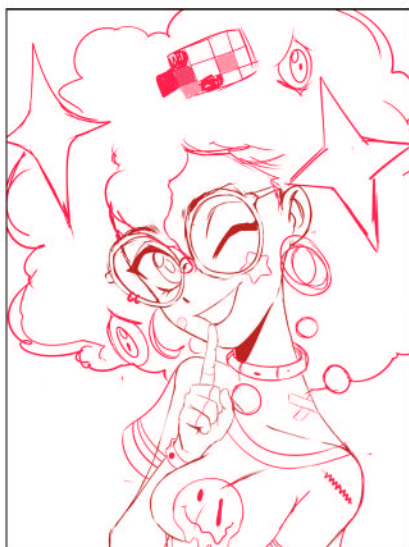
By the end of this tutorial, I hope you'll have a grasp of the thought process and considerations that go into creating a character with both personality and a unique touch, and I hope you'll be inspired to develop some of your own.



1 Decide on a layout with the cover in mind

When creating artwork to a brief like this piece, you'll want to make sure that you're on the right path from the beginning. Given that this image was going to take pride of place on the front of a magazine, I began by testing a variety of compositions to see what would work best with the ImagineFX cover layout. I had to make sure that the focal point matched the main area of negative space on the cover, and be careful not to create too much clutter that would interfere with the cover's masthead and other text areas. You can see three of the options I drew up here, before ultimately deciding to progress with the middle version as my basis. ➡



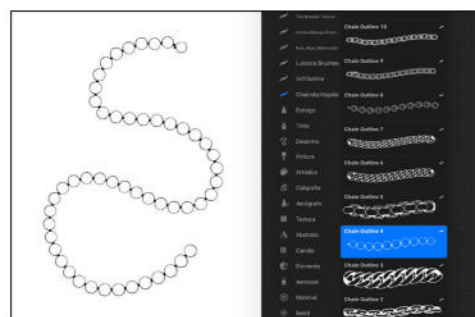
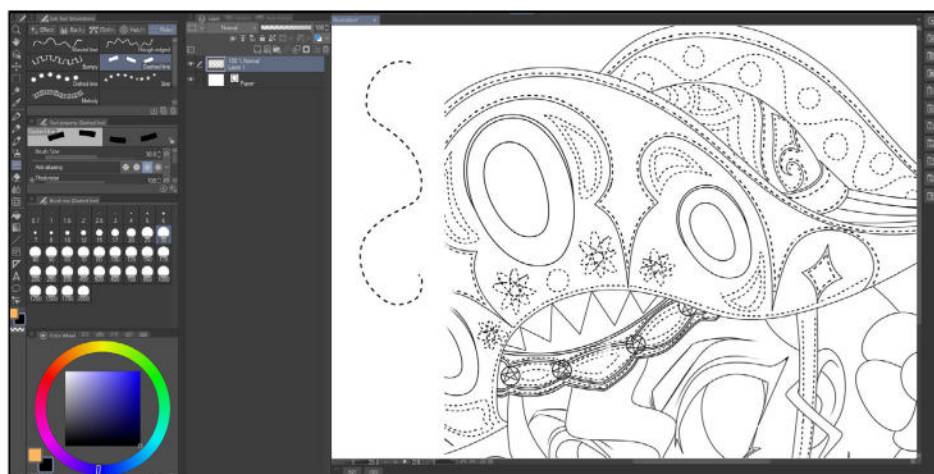


2 Create the sketch

Once the layout was decided, I started sketching the character in the style of my personal Alleathorium series. It's a mix of surrealism, the style of Japanese anime and manga, and cultural motifs from the north-east of Brazil, where I'm from. As this piece was specifically destined for a magazine cover, I made sure that the posing was not only dynamic but also complemented the layout.

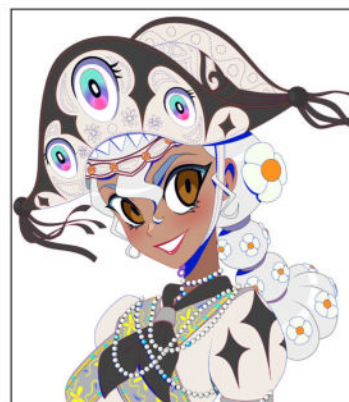
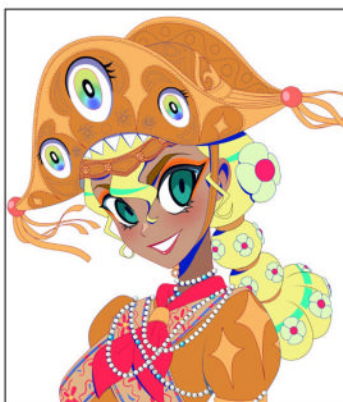
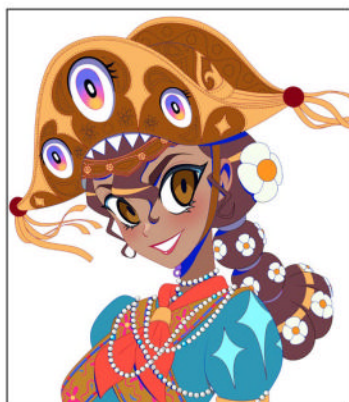
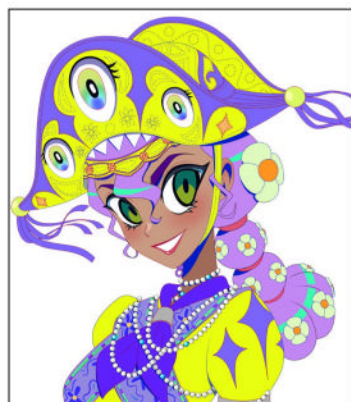
3 Final line-art

The next step was refining the line-art. For this, I put the focus on clarity among the ornate patterns that I wanted to add to the outfit, while varying between overly detailed areas that still had some breathing room and pockets of negative space.



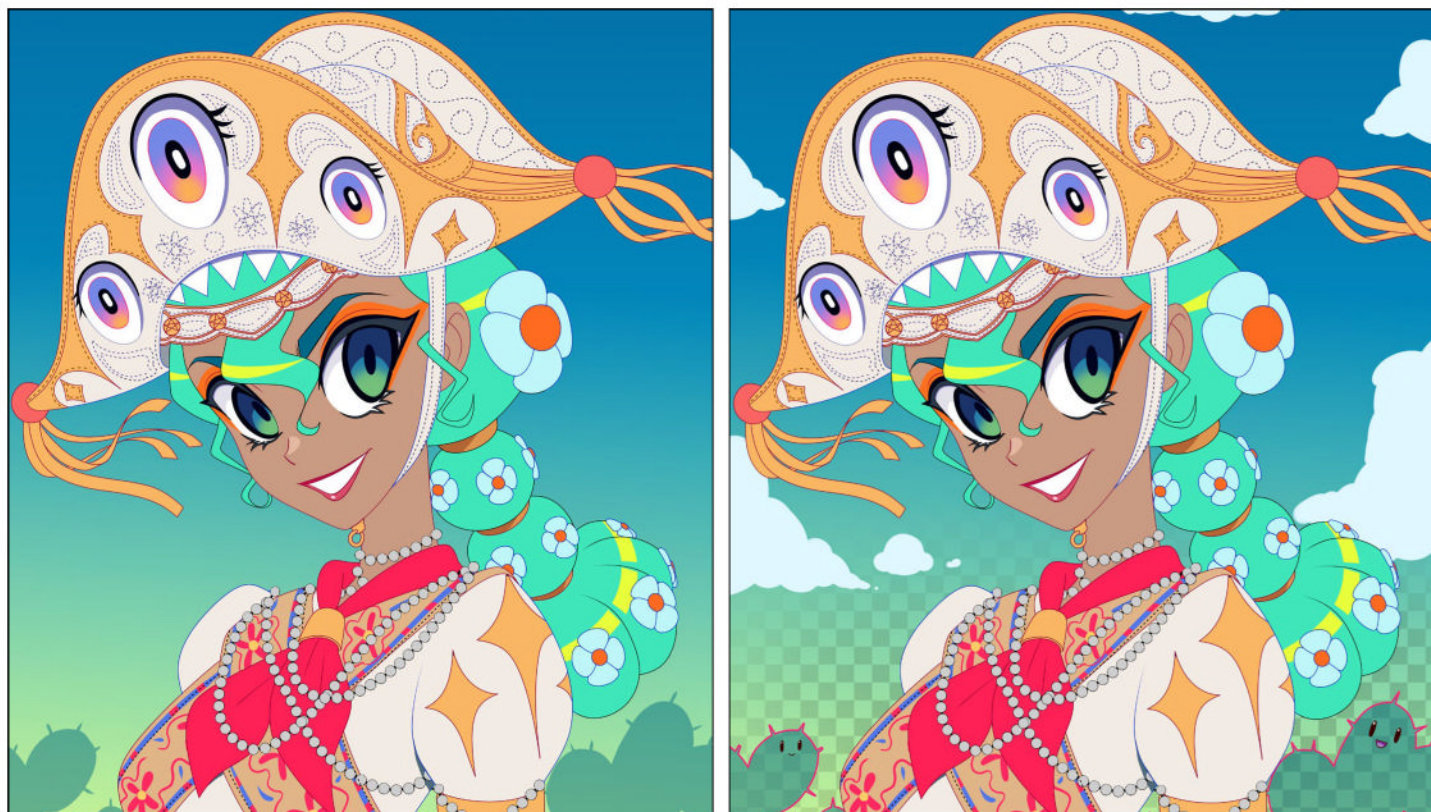
4 Custom brushes

To add the specific details on the hat and clothing, like the stitching and beads, I used custom brushes. This allowed me to maintain consistency and speed up the process.



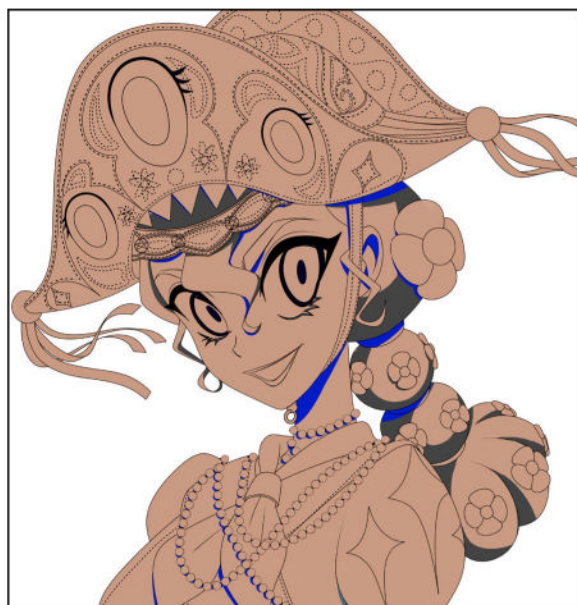
5 Select a colour palette to develop your character

Picking the right colours to give your piece the mood you want is a vital step for character development. After creating a number of options, I chose a vibrant colour palette of reds and oranges to help bring the character to life. The selection of bold and soft complementary colours was absolutely essential in order to highlight the different elements and contrasts used throughout the piece.



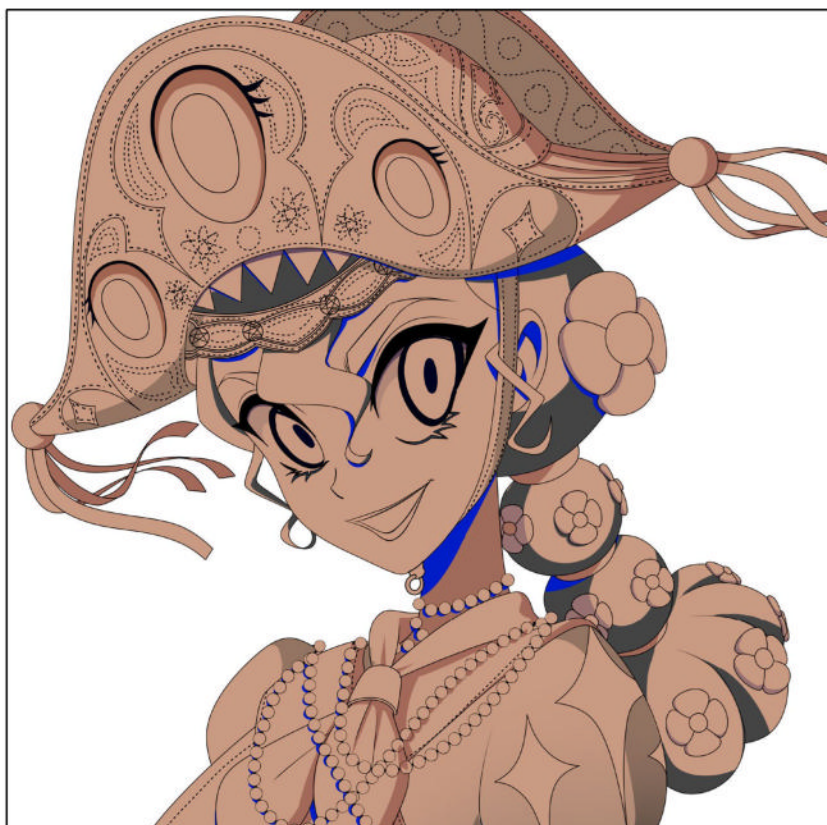
6 Add a background with balance and contrast

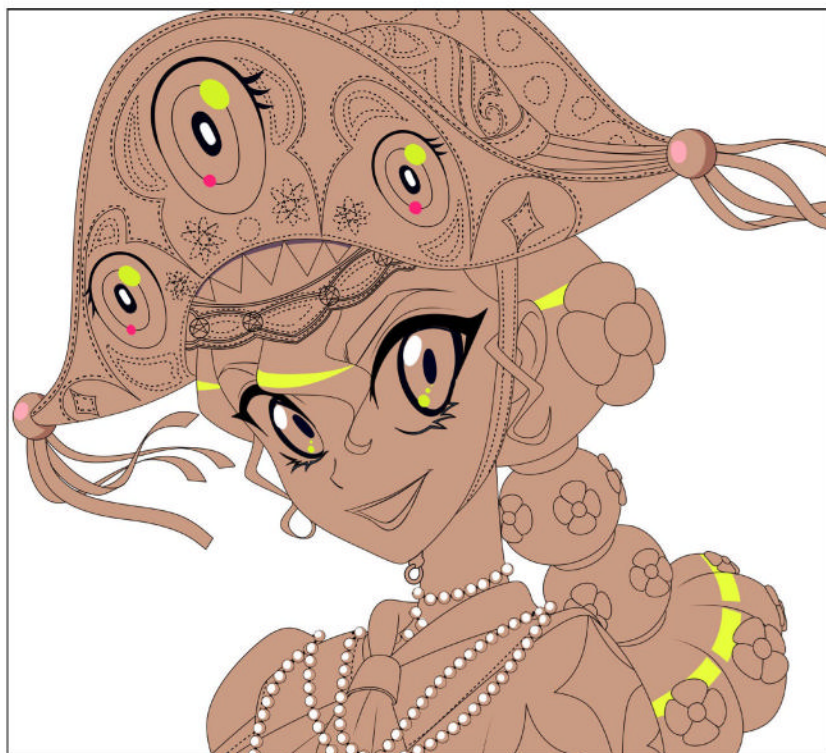
So far we've been putting the focus on our colourful character, but now it's time to take a look at the background behind her. For my piece, I designed the background elements carefully, balancing out the composition with a custom chequer-pattern brush over the lower half of the image, which contrasted well with the more organic and flowy lines that make up the character. I also added in some clouds and friendly little cactus characters, as well as a blue-green gradient for the sky to round out the background.



7 Paint shadows

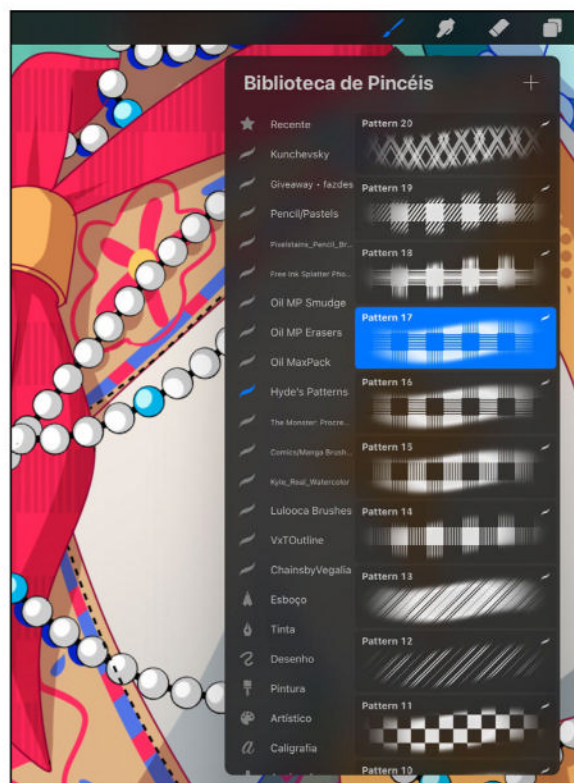
Casting shadows on the character builds the believability in our art. I added my own shadow layers, and wanted to create a light source that cast deep, vibrant shadows in contrast with the colour palette, and then made an additional layer with a softer tone that would give form to all the different shapes. ➡➡





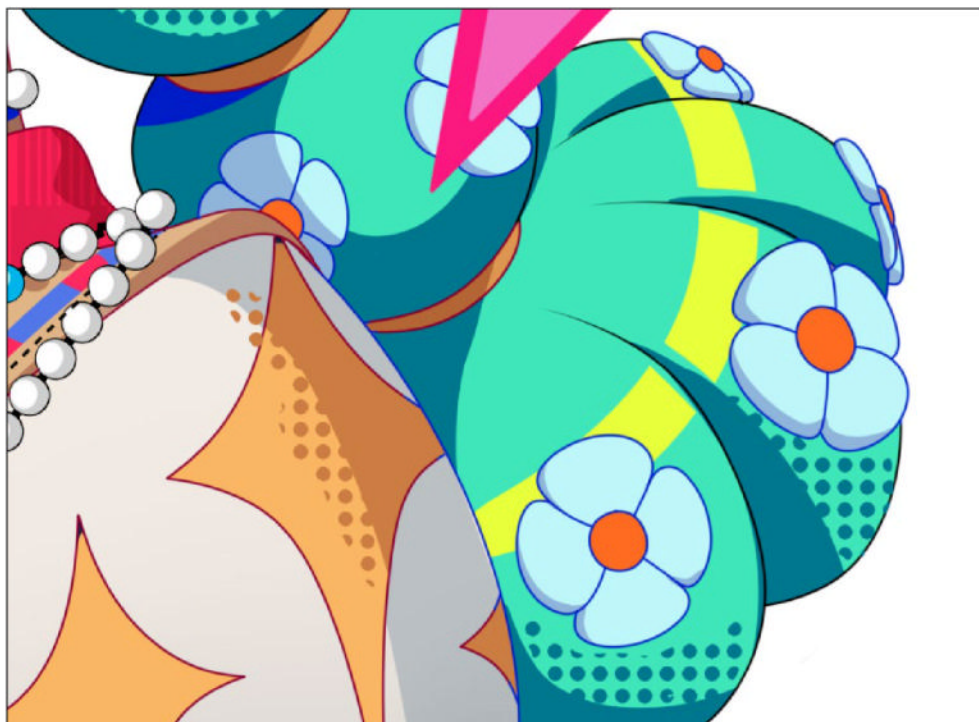
8 Match the highlights

When developing your lighting highlights, be sure to match up with the same light source you used to create the shadows from the previous step. I added my highlights in a complementary colour to make them pop. I also zoomed in to add intricate decorative details like the beads and highlights in the eyes, create reflections, and make necessary colour adjustments.



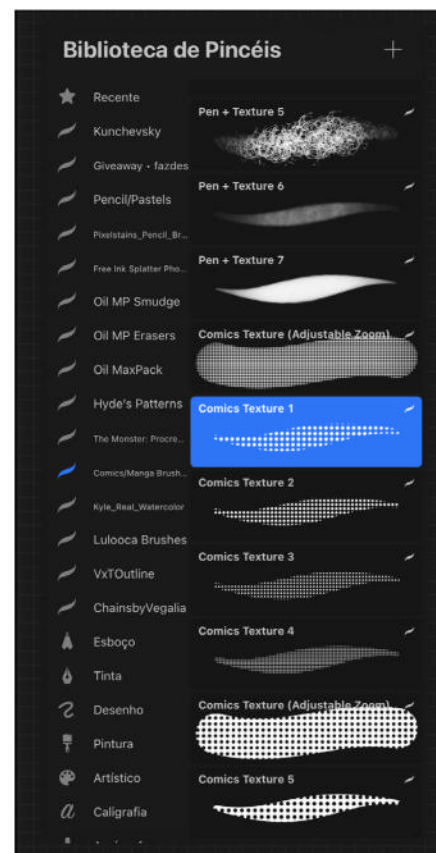
9 Create details with patterns

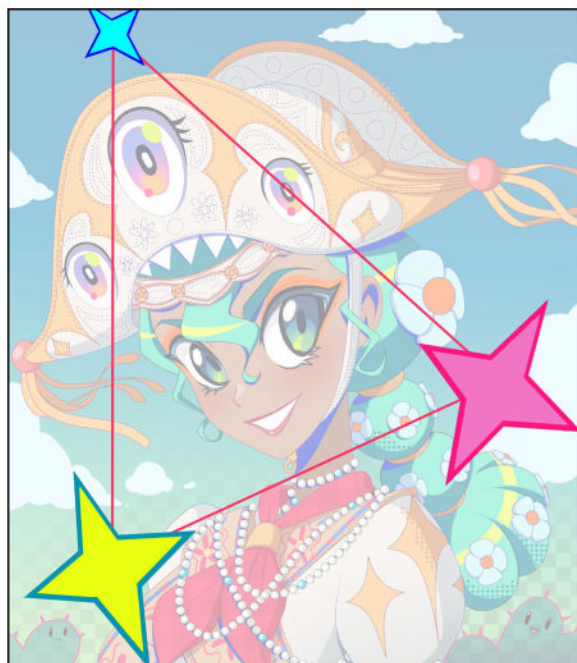
You can add extra details to your image by using patterns. I applied some patterned textures to strike a balance between the detailed attire and smoother skin, ensuring that the visual focus remained on her face.



10 Screentones for transitions

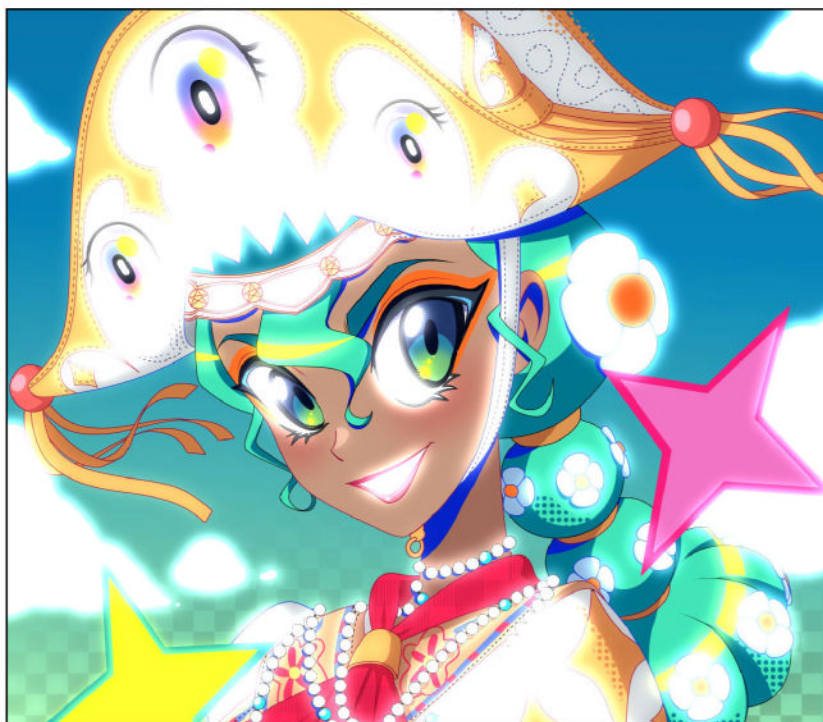
If you've seen a lot of comic art, then you'll probably have seen screentones used before. I have a selection of them ready to go in my software, and decided to soften the transition in my image between the light and dark by using halftone patterns, rather than a gradient or blur.





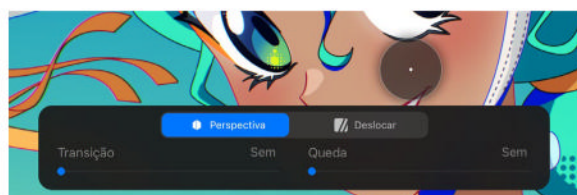
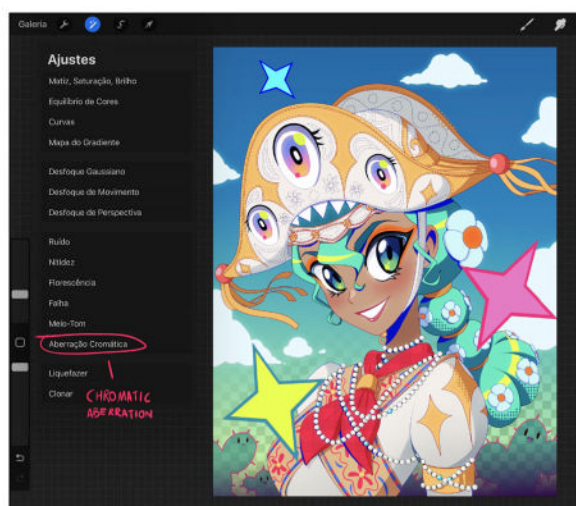
11 Sparkly shapes

These graphic sparkles are an integral part of the Alleathorium look that I've developed. But I can't just add them anywhere; I have to pick their placement carefully to enhance the dynamic composition, lead the eye, and make sure it frames the focal point well.



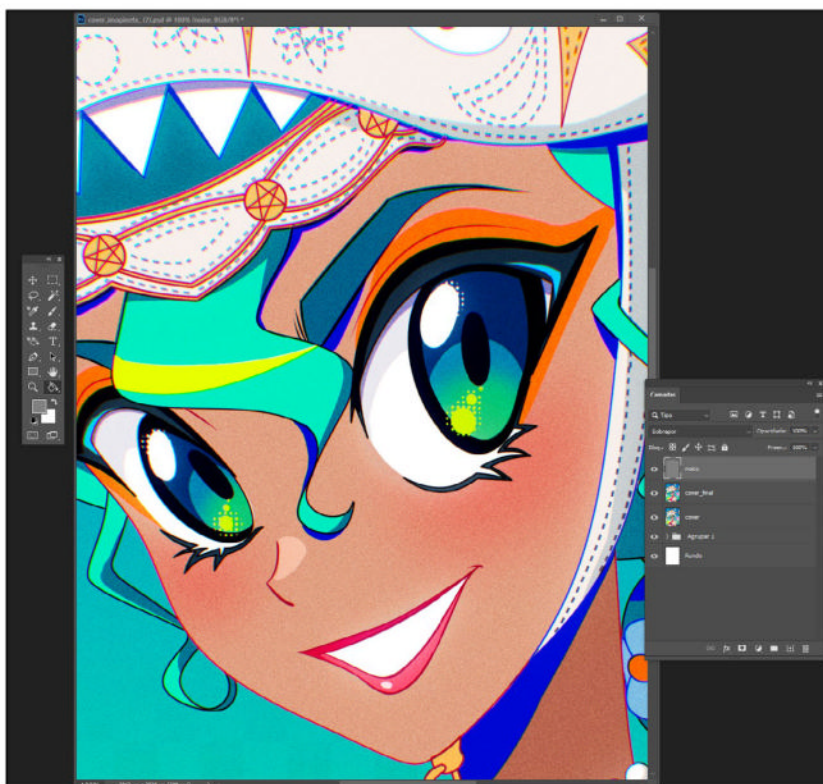
12 Soft glow effect

Now let's do some work with effects to give the image more vibrancy. I applied a soft bloom effect to accentuate the whimsical elements of the character, adding a dreamy glow around the brightest areas.



13 Chromatic aberration

And how about another! I also brought in a filter effect from Procreate called chromatic aberration, which simulates a focus error in photography where the colours are displaced and adds coloured edges around the shapes. This provides us with a retro, glitchy feel that's also a trademark of the Alleathorium series.



14 Finish with a noise filter

Finally I go back to Photoshop and add an Overlay layer with the Noise filter, which helps to add some texture, atmosphere and depth to the image, while also helping to reduce the banding of any gradients. With that the artwork is complete and ready to hit the cover of the latest ImagineFX!

Technique focus

LIMIT YOUR COLOURS

Gonzalo Kenny paints an attention-grabbing demon with the help of a restricted palette



"I usually strive for my illustrations to be eye-catching and captivating. In this piece, I focused on a distinct silhouette;

squint your eyes and you'll quickly see the creature's body, horns and bat-like wings against the background. The luminous circle behind the demon's head emphasises it in all its glory!

I strategically placed a spotlight on its chest to shadow the face and highlight the intimidating physique. The lower limbs fade into shadows, blending with the ground and emphasising the form of the goat legs.

It's a good idea to limit your colour palette, but be sure that there's variety within your chosen range as well. Here I used warm, reddish tones." 🎨

Artist PROFILE

Gonzalo Kenny

LOCATION: Argentina

Gonzalo is an artist based in Buenos Aires, where he works as an illustrator in the global publishing and entertainment industries. His wide range of projects includes games, trading cards and films.

<https://bit.ly/42J0nnP>



Artist insight

PART 4: LEARN TO MIX YOUR COLOURS

Fine artist **Charlie Pickard** reveals his top tips for creating more accurate colour mixes in your traditional paintings

Artist PROFILE

Charlie Pickard

LOCATION: England

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



Colour is one of the most fascinating elements of painting, to the layman and the professional alike. It's not uncommon to hear people talk of colour when they describe their favourite works of art and this speaks to the expressive powers that it holds to us. It's often the most direct access we have to our audience's emotions in the visual mediums.

Due to this, an accurate and powerful control over this quality is an asset to any visual designer. The first step on this journey is getting an accurate understanding of how to reproduce colours. But this is often an incredibly confusing, challenging task for a student who's just starting out. Colours seem inaccessible when we try to mix them.

Even beyond this, we often lack the simple language to accurately

describe how one is different from another. This becomes increasingly obvious the more accurate we get with our mixtures.

This article explores some of the most powerful ideas I've come across teaching classical figure painting for the last decade, addressing common errors I see from beginners. If we can understand these basic ideas, then we can transform our understanding and get control over colour mixtures!

1 THE THREE QUALITIES OF COLOUR

The first element we want to establish is a clear idea of the language we use when we describe a colour. For this purpose, I believe the most complete and accurate way is via the Munsell colour system.

Albert Henry Munsell was a 19th-century colour theorist and artist who developed the Munsell colour system. It conceives of colour as consisting of three separate qualities, these are:



- **Value:** The lightness or darkness of a colour; the most important quality for realism.

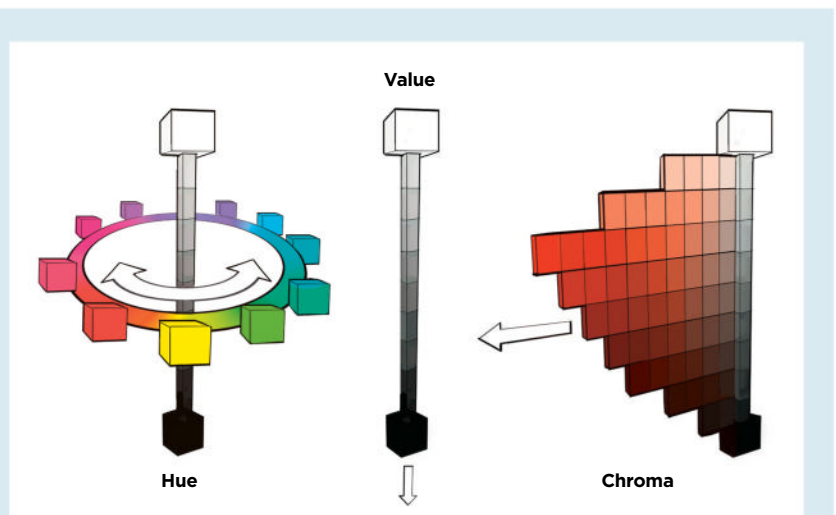


- **Hue:** The colour's position on the rainbow. Is it more blue, or more red?



- **Chroma:** The purity or intensity of the colour, or it's distance from a neutral grey.

These may seem obvious to those working digitally as Photoshop has adopted a Hue/Value/Saturation slider, though the latter is actually slightly different from chroma. This language will serve us well to truly understand and describe colour.



2 THINK OF THESE AS THREE DIMENSIONS

While the descriptive power of considering colour this way is an important part of its use to us as artists, there's another, more powerful element to this too. This way of thinking means that we can consider colour as a three-dimensional space, with each of these qualities being a different dimension within that space.

To visualise the Munsell colour system, we can consider value as a central pillar moving from top to bottom, hue as occurring in a circle around this pillar, and the chroma as a direction moving out from this central pillar. When they are all considered together, these three dimensions create the Munsell colour space; it's a conceptual shape that contains every possible colour. ➡

**DID
YOU MISS
PARTS 1-3?**

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237 to catch up on
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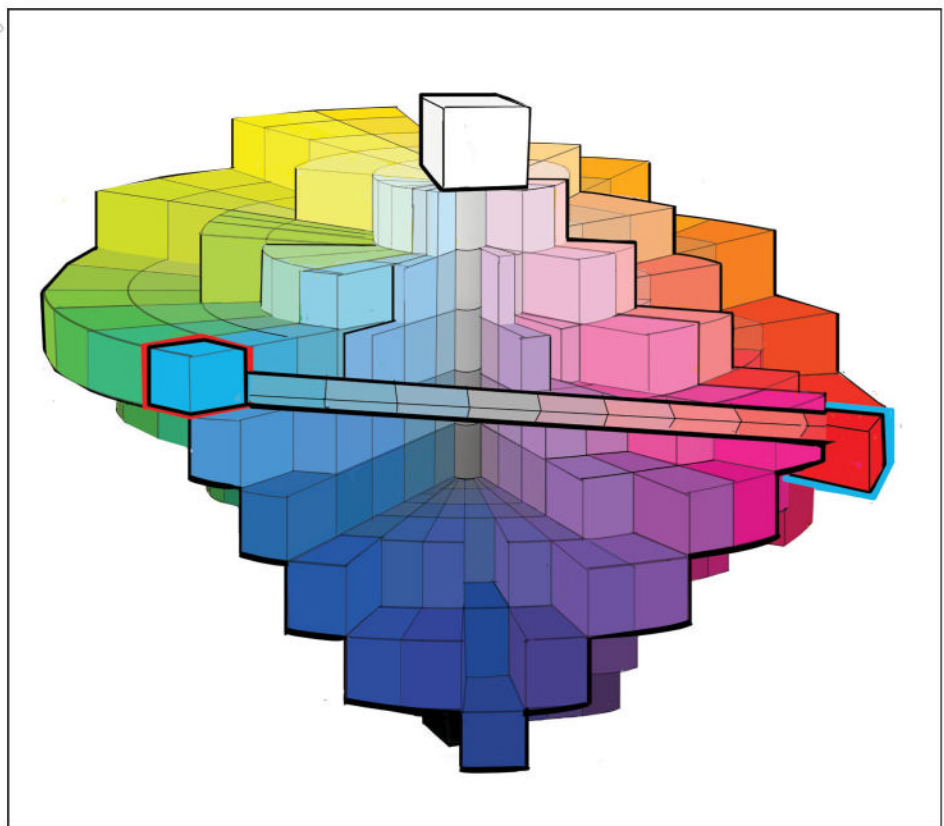
3 VISUALISING THE SPACE

So, with all that theory explained, this is what that colour space actually looks like. It may initially appear a bit intimidating but don't worry, we don't need to model out the whole space in order to help improve our painting. This simply represents more of a conceptual space that we can use to simplify mixing.

We can think of each pigment as a point within this space. When they're viewed in this way, mixtures between two colours merely chart a straight path through the space.

This idea also brings about an important realisation of colour. Every colour has some aspect of each of these qualities and will have an effect on any resulting colour mixture in all three of these ways.

“It may initially look a bit intimidating but don't worry, we don't need to model out the whole space”



4 ISOLATING VALUE

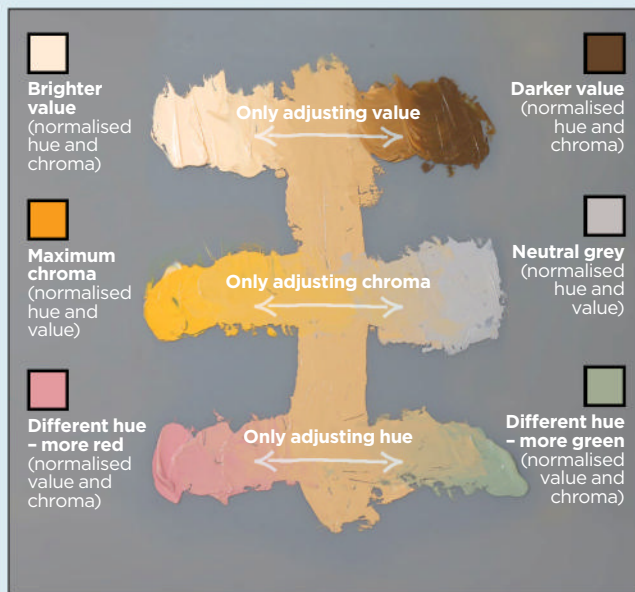
To illustrate the immense use of this idea in helping us mix our colours both effectively and accurately, let's take a look at the most typical way a colour is mixed and compare it to a mixture using these ideas. We'll will take a typical caucasian skin tone and attempt to shift it a bit redder. This type of colour change is common in figure painting, so it will be useful to have an effective approach.

Above (left) is the typical way that we've all mixed colour shifts. First we notice we want more red, and since red is not only red but also a darker value, this also darkens our mix. How annoying! So, we add white to brighten it back up, but now the red isn't strong enough. We ultimately add more red back and forth in this way until we arrive at our desired colour.

These steps are numerous and hard to predict, so it's no

wonder that colour mixing is hard; we're juggling too many qualities all at once!

What if we use the Munsell system to simplify this a little? We'll first add the red and white until our mixture is the same value as our original mix. When we add this colour now it won't disturb the value, but only add the desired increase in the red. This way we can arrive at our target mixture with only one step. Much simpler!

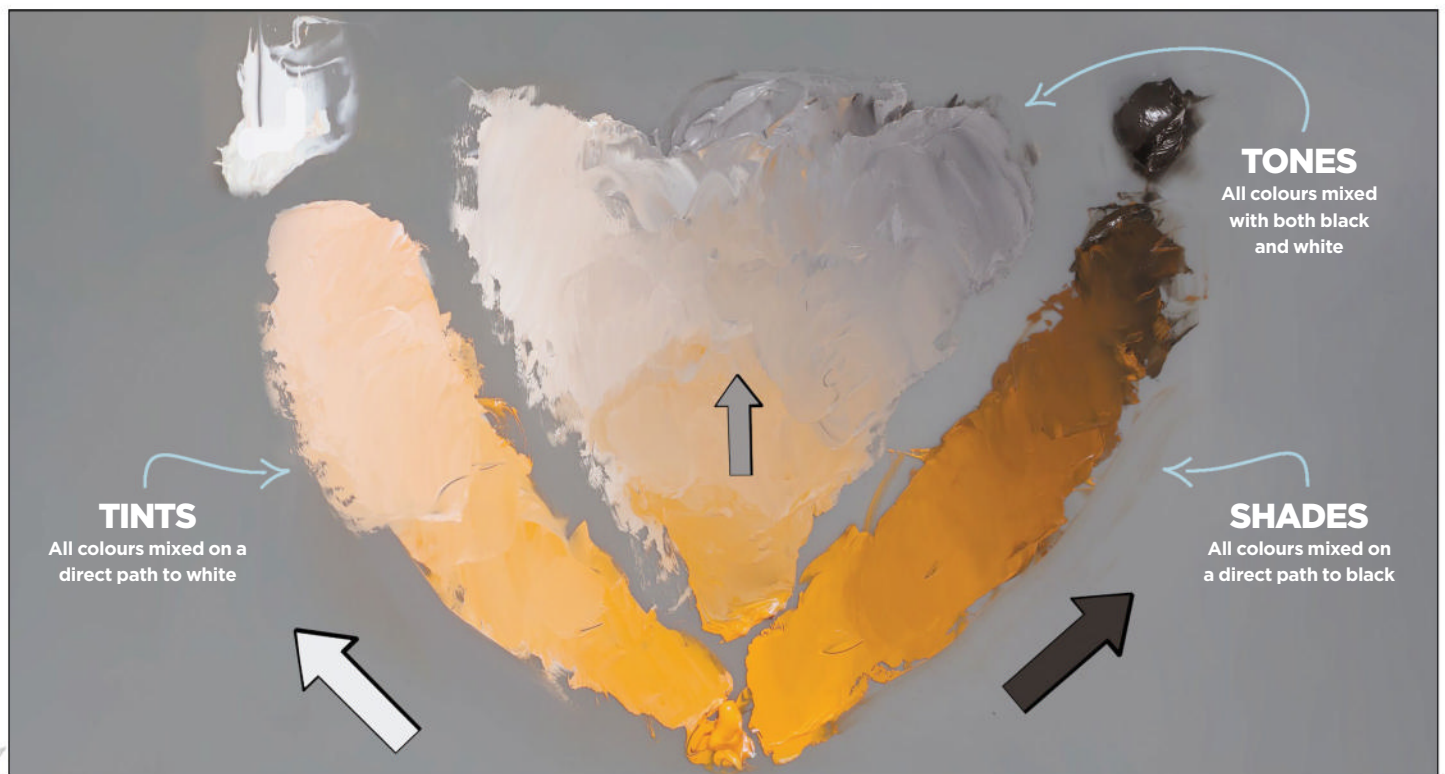


5 ISOLATE ALL THREE DIMENSIONS

This isolating of the dimensions of colour is the real key skill in learning effective colour mixing, and if we can become conscious and strive specifically to only adjust one of these dimensions at a time, then our task will become so much more simple. We need only quiz ourselves over these three points:

- Is the value right? Darker or lighter?
- Is the chroma right? More or less colourful?
- Is the hue right? Warmer or cooler?

When making adjustments, we can isolate any of these three qualities and adjust them one at a time. Give it a go for yourself! Take a colour and try to adjust only the value, then try tweaking the chroma and finally the hue. If you can master this, then you've mastered most of the difficulties of colour mixing!



6 TINTS, SHADES AND TONES

Traditional mixing isn't quite so simple and Munsell doesn't quite answer every question. Sometimes mixtures simply won't mix bright or dark enough and it can be hard to explain.

We need another concept here: the idea of tints, shades and tones. These describe the type of colour based on how many pigments are contained within it.

- **Tints:** These are mixtures of pure colours with white. They are the most bright and

colourful colours accessible and can only be mixed with a maximum of three colours.

- **Shades:** These are mixtures of pure colours plus a conceptual black. They are the most colourful dark colours and can only be mixed via a maximum of three colours.

- **Tones:** Any other colour, and mixed via three or more colours. Most paintings often lay in these colours and we can get trapped in them if we add new pigments haphazardly.

Making sure that we've actually painted some tints and shades in our artwork is often what people are talking about when they speak of 'fresh' colours, and getting trapped in tones is often the cause of what people will call 'muddy' colours.

A good rule of thumb is to try to mix all your colours using no more than three pigments until you become aware of the difference between these. If you miss the colour, restart the mixture rather than trying to save it, as sometimes it's impossible. ➡

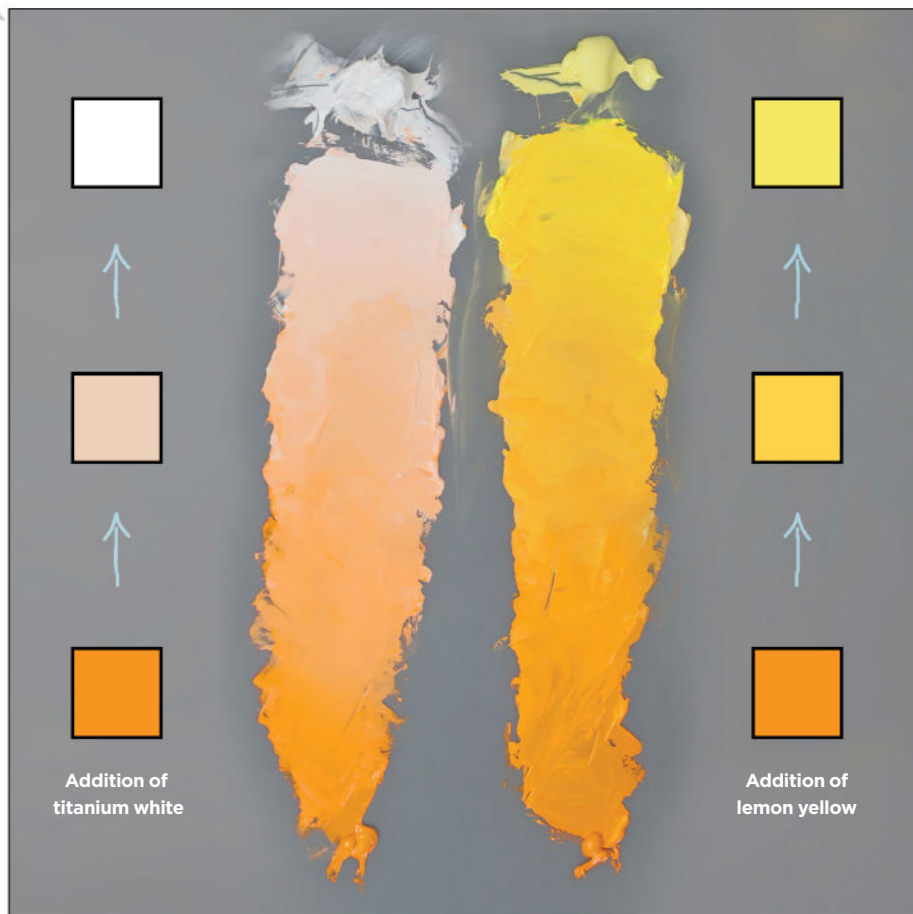
7 RETHINK WHITE

Another element that can open up our colour mixing beyond this idea is realising that white is actually a colour too. Just like any other colour, it's made up of these three qualities of hue, value and chroma. The major advantage of white is obviously how bright it is, and as a result of this we often think of it as the only way that we can brighten our colours. This however, is not strictly true.

One of the downsides of white is that it's one of the least chromatic colours available, and this isn't always desirable. If we're making it our objective to obtain the brightest, most chromatic mixtures then this quality of white can get in the way.

Let's try that! We'll take cadmium orange and try to brighten it first with white, and then with a high value yellow. When we do this you can see just how different a result we get. The addition of the yellow has given us a mixture that's incredibly bright and warm. In contrast, the addition of the white has given us a pretty dull and drab value. It's certainly bright, but lacking in chroma and coming nowhere near the orange we get with the yellow.

So the next time you're mixing, first try to achieve the brightness you want by using a colour before jumping straight to white. You may be surprised at how often it's not quite the ideal choice.



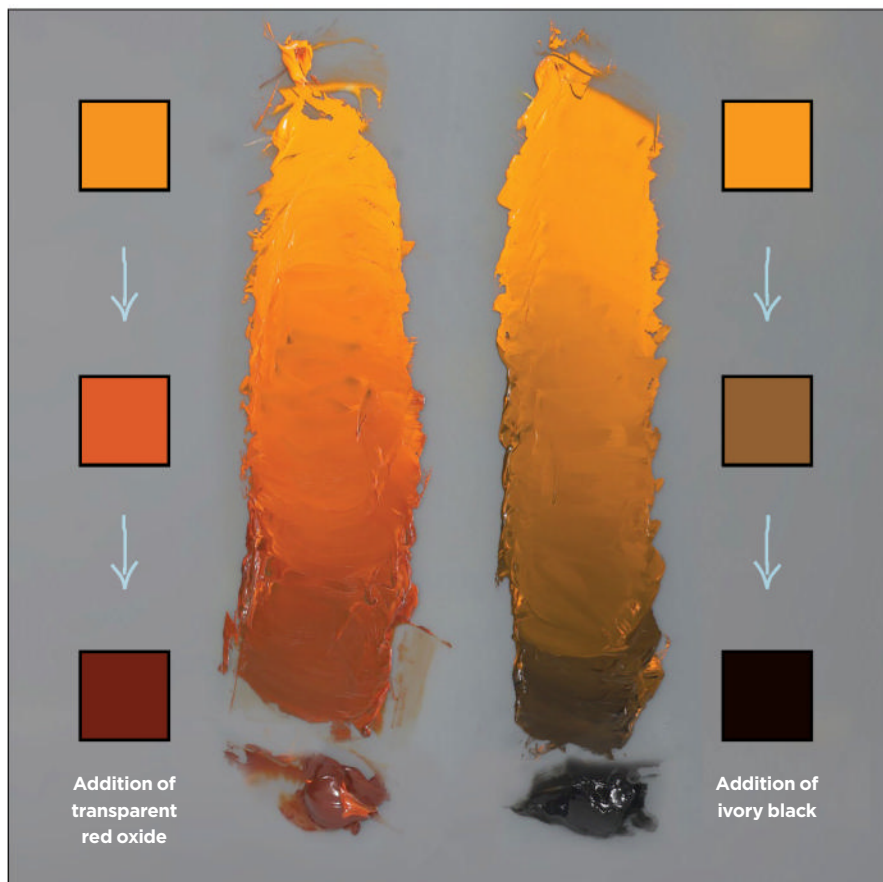
8 RETHINK BLACK

Similar to white, black tends to be thought of as synonymous with darkness; it is, after all, one of the darkest colours that we have access to. But just like white it has something of all three of these qualities. Black is truly a low chroma, low value blue, and all of these qualities effect our mixtures.

To see this in action, let's perform a similar test. Again, we'll make our goal to achieve the highest chroma colour, this time in the dark direction. First we'll add black to our orange, and you can see how grey and muddy the resulting colour will be. That's because that low chroma blue has sapped a lot of the colour potential out of our mix.

On the other hand, if we instead add a dark, high chroma orange colour like transparent red oxide, you can see just how much more of an intense colour we achieve. So whenever you want to create a dark colour, try to think first of whether or not you can start with a darker version of the desired colour instead of always jumping straight to using black in your mixture.

It was due to this low chroma influence of black that many of the renowned impressionist painters, whose main goal was colour, eliminated black from their palettes entirely. Personally, I tend to think all colours are useful in their own way. But having said that, being sparing in how we use black can be an excellent way to encourage more adventurous use of colour in our artwork.



9 USE A MIXED BLACK

One way we can still have the benefits of the dark, deep value of black while still being able to make use of the variety of a wider colour palette is to not work with a simple black like ivory black, but instead using a mixed black by combining two complementary colours. This is the way I typically get around the problem of using black within my own paintings.

I've displayed a few common complementary pairs within the accompanying image here. Where needed I've slightly brightened the value so that we can better see the colour. I usually like to have at least one of these on my palette as it allows me to have access to colour variety at every level of my value scale. It can be a fantastic way to shake up your palette!



TONES

Most of the colours in most images



TINTS

Usually mainly in highlights



SHADES

Usually mainly in deep darks



10 COLOUR IN CONTEXT

One important point to mention here is that tints and shades are quite rare in nature, so we shouldn't worry too much about every single mix in a painting. As you can see in this image, the tints and shades used in a typical realistic image are generally contained to only the brightest highlights and the deepest dark accents in a painting.

Most parts of the majority of paintings are in fact made up of tones, and so are easily accessible whatever way we mix our colours. A great way to work with this is to initially paint without worrying, and then apply these tints and shades later in the process, when everything is already established. Think of them more as a way to elevate your artwork.

Of course and as always, the only way that any of this will be useful is if you learn it with your hands, so give it a try on your next piece. Happy painting!

“A great way to work with this is to initially paint without worrying, and then apply these tints and shades to a painting later on in the process”



ARTISTS' MASTER SERIES: COLOR & LIGHT

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



Clip Studio Paint & Photoshop CREATE STRIKING MANGA-STYLE ART

Illustrator **Lim Wei Lun** shares his expert advice on how to make gorgeous character art with a cohesive colour palette

Artist PROFILE

Lim Wei Lun

LOCATION: Singapore

Wei Lun is an illustrator based in Singapore and works for Collateral Damage Studios. He mainly creates manga-styled artwork and has a passion for portraying his characters in striking, beautiful scenes.
www.collateralids.com



When we talk about striking colours in our art, it's not always about being bold and bright, but can come from using a palette that sits together as a cohesive whole and enables greater storytelling.

That was vital when creating this piece. I was aiming to portray the sadness of the character, which is why I decided to work with a mostly monochrome colour scheme, and

yet still keen to maintain a vibrant and united palette.

For this tutorial, I'll be sharing my process and tips on my workflow, including an explanation of how I choose and blend colours to achieve a cohesive and lively final artwork. To accentuate this point, the piece features a largely neutral set of base colours to show that you can still achieve a striking palette even when you're working with a predominantly monochromatic scheme.

In addition, I'll also make use of mood lighting to help convey that feeling of sadness in the illustration, as changing up the way we light the character can create vastly different feelings in the viewer. Finally, I also want to talk you through some of the cinematographic techniques that I personally like to use, such as effects like chromatic aberration, blur and bloom, plus some noise textures to bring my illustration to a more polished final look.

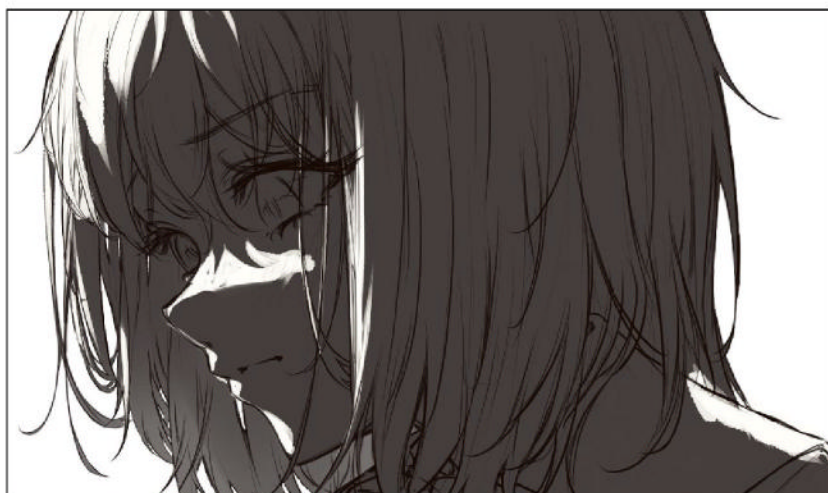
1 Sketching and line work

I'll be using this sketch to explain my workflow to you. We'll start with Clip Studio Paint and then do the final touches in Photoshop. I find using Real G-Pen creates the best lines for sketching and line work, as you can control the line weight using pen pressure and it creates very clean, textured lines. My workflow doesn't involve doing clean line-art, as I tend to prefer a more sketchy look when we get to the final illustration.



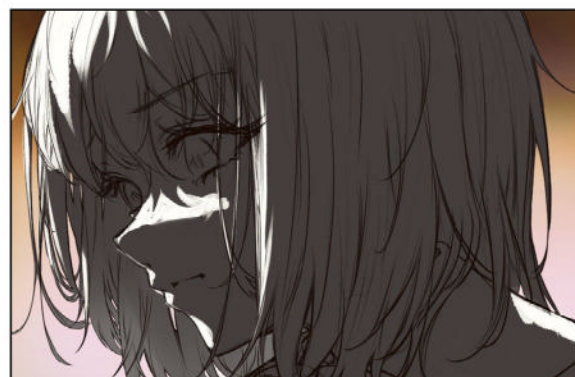
2 Character blockout and layer separation

Next I'll prepare the sketch for the colour phase by blocking out each individual part into their own layers. This makes it easier to manage your colour layers. The above-right image shows a visualisation of the layer separation using different values for each layer. ➡



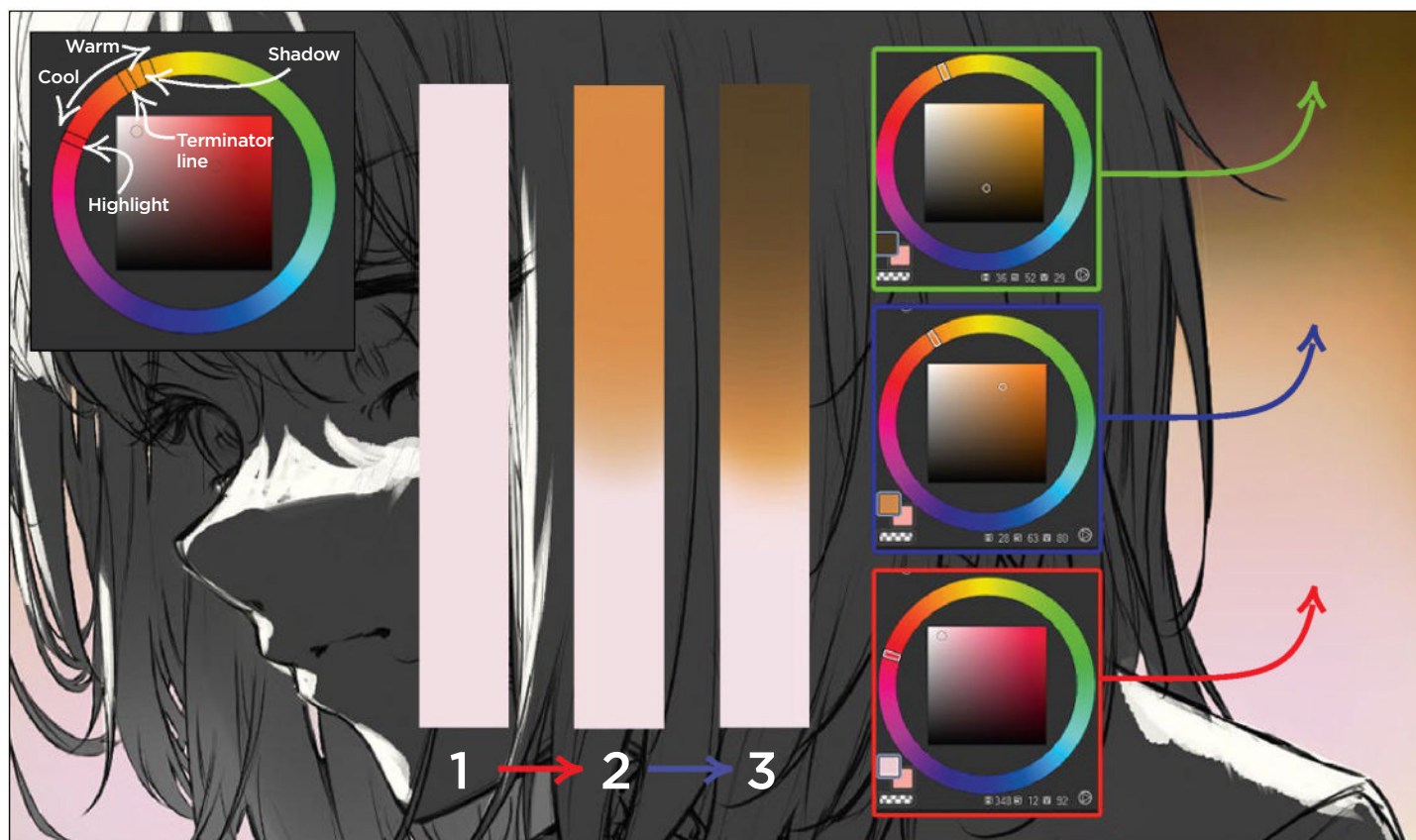
3 Plan the lighting

Next I want to decide on how I'd like my scene to be lit. For this particular piece, I wanted the light source to be coming slightly from the front and right of the character. This allows me to light the character in an interesting and dynamic way, as shown. I wanted to portray the character's sadness, and this lighting allows me to hide her eyes in the shadow of her hair.



4 Rough background colour blocking

A good tip for colouring your character is to start with the background, as that will affect the colours you pick for your character. I start off by blocking in a rough colour for my background. Here I wanted the overall scene to have cool highlights and warm shadows; this combination can create a very different atmosphere when compared to using warm highlights and cool shadows, so feel free to experiment and see what works best for the mood sought in your piece!

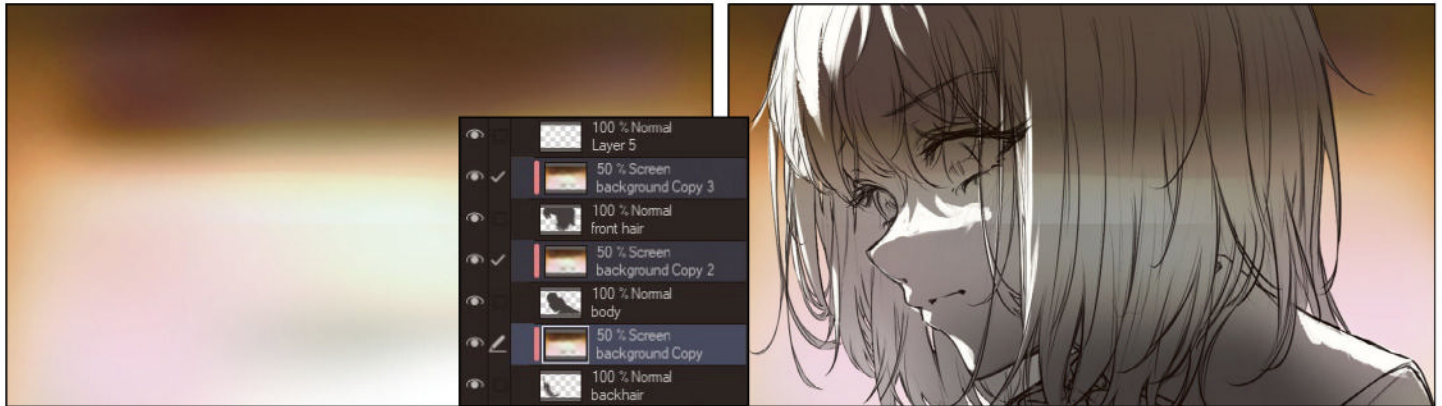


5 Tips for picking colours

I use Clip Studio Paint's default Round mixing brush for most of my rendering work. Utilising different pen pressures, this brush enables me to blend colours naturally; for example, lightly brushing red over blue will blend the red brush onto a blue surface, thus making purple. I'll be making use of this a lot in my colouring process.

The screenshot above illustrates how I pick and blend the colours, making use of the blending feature of the Round mixing brush. I'll get started with the lightest tone (1, low saturation), then I paint on the mid-tones (2, high saturation), and finally brush down the shadows (3, mid saturation) leaving a bit of the mid-tones exposed in the middle of the blend. This creates a nice harmony of colours

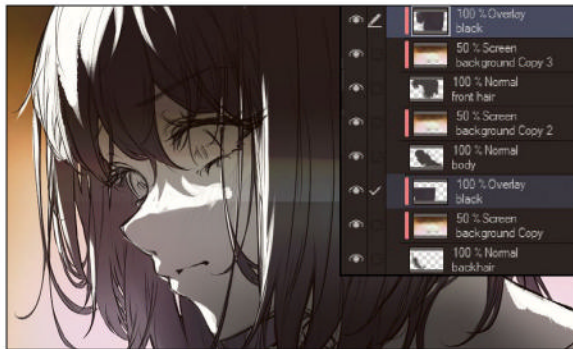
as shown (3). Notice how the lightest colour, the low-saturation red, appears to be a cool tone even though red is normally associated with being a warm colour. This is because colours are relative, which means a colour can appear both warm or cool depending on the colours that you put beside it. You can make use of this to choose more cohesive colours for your palette.



6 Use your rough background as a base for your characters

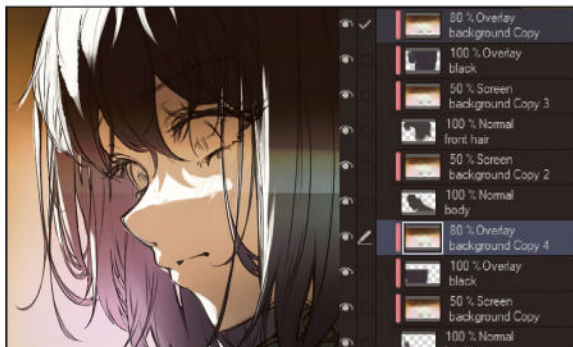
If you look at the image in step 4, you'll notice that the character looks very out of place with the background. This is because the lighting for the background and the character is different. Here's a tip on how to use your rough background as a base for your characters. Start by

duplicating your entire background folder and merging it as shown (above left). Then proceed to duplicate this new layer for each masked part that your character has. Clip each background layer to each layer mask, change the blend mode to Screen, and then adjust the opacity accordingly until your character fits into the background as shown (above right). This will now be the base for adding colours.



7 Add base colours to the character

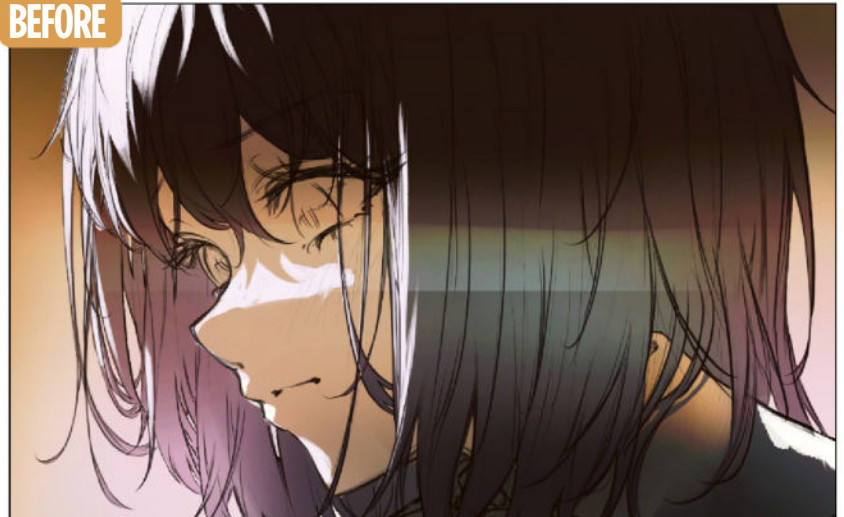
Create a new base layer on the top-most layer of each mask, then change the blend mode to Overlay and start adding in the base colour. This will allow for the background lighting as prepared in the previous step to bleed through the base colour. You can adjust the opacity or blend mode as necessary. Repeat this step for the other parts of the character.



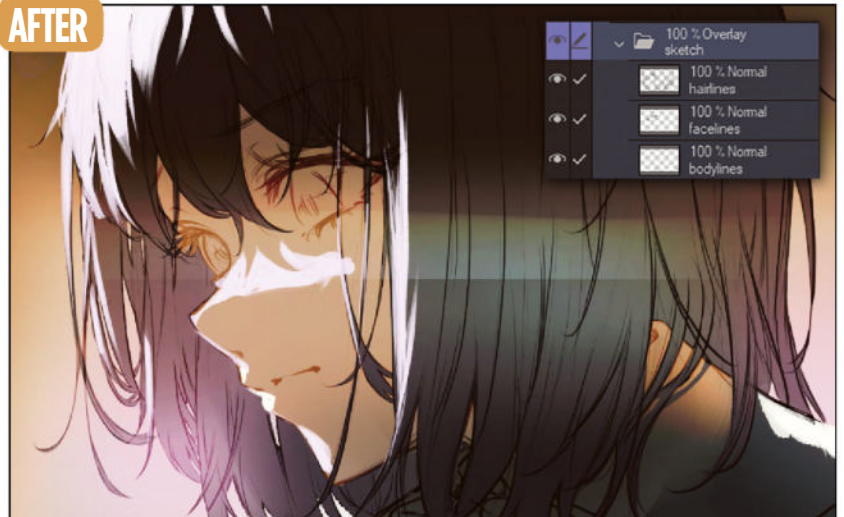
8 Readjust the character's blending

If, after adding the base colour, the character appears detached from the background, proceed to duplicate the background layer created in step 6 on the top-most layer and change the blend mode to Overlay, or as otherwise necessary, to blend the character back into the background as shown.

BEFORE

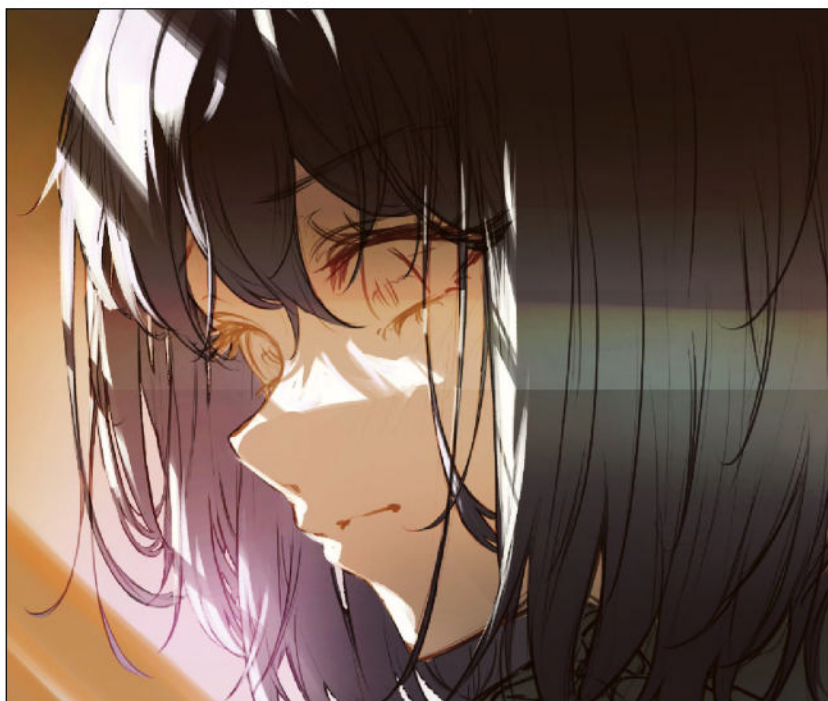


AFTER



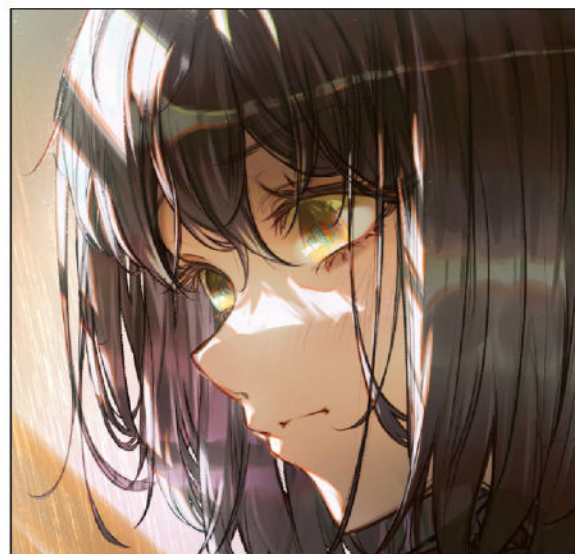
9 Blend the line work into your render

Next I'll place all my line work layers into a folder and change the blend mode of the folder to Overlay. This will blend the line work layer into your render as you can see here. At the top is the image before overlaying the line work, and underneath is the result after overlaying it. ➡



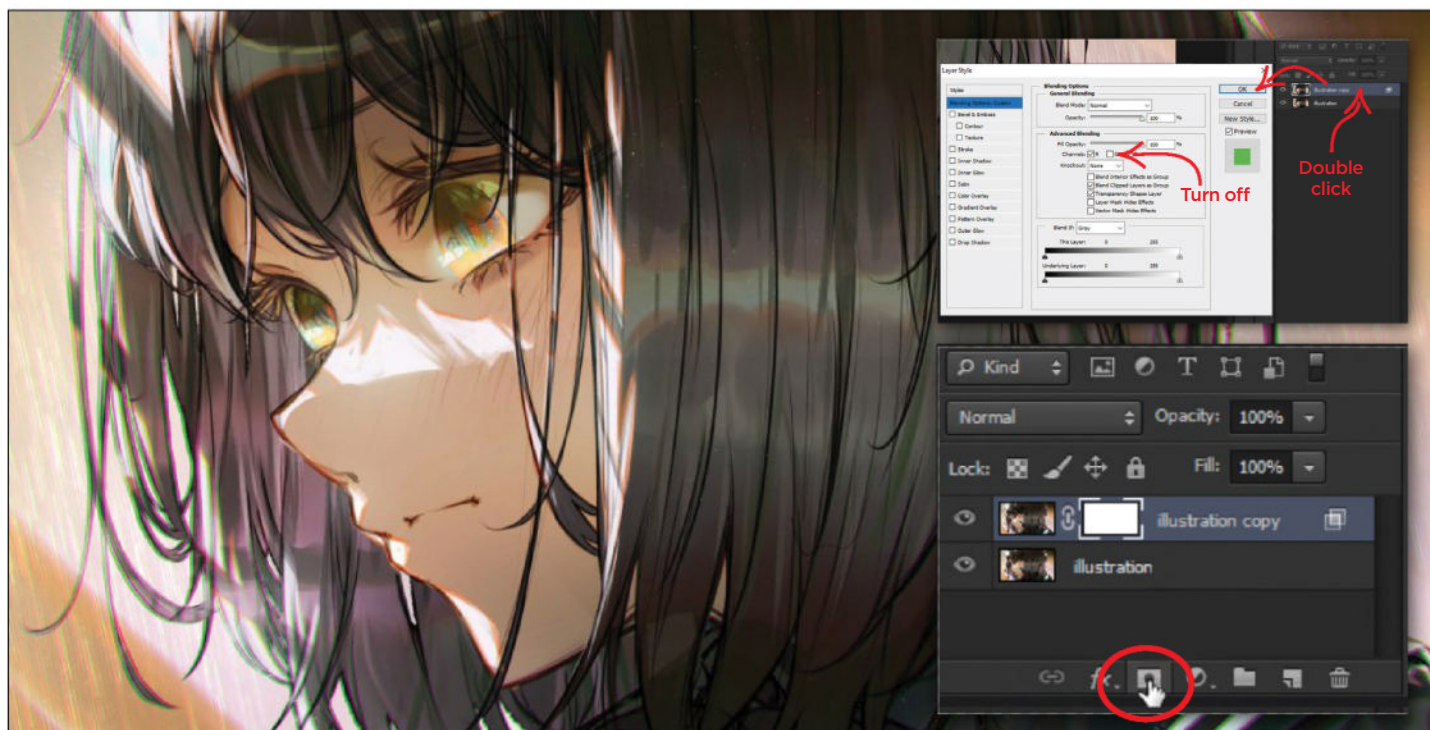
10 Refine the lighting

Here I started to refine the highlights that I added in on step 3. I tried to break up the big chunks of highlights and brought in more details such as shadows cast from the background, as well as hair strands in order to make the highlighted area more interesting, just like you can see here.



11 Render more details and add in new atmospheric effects

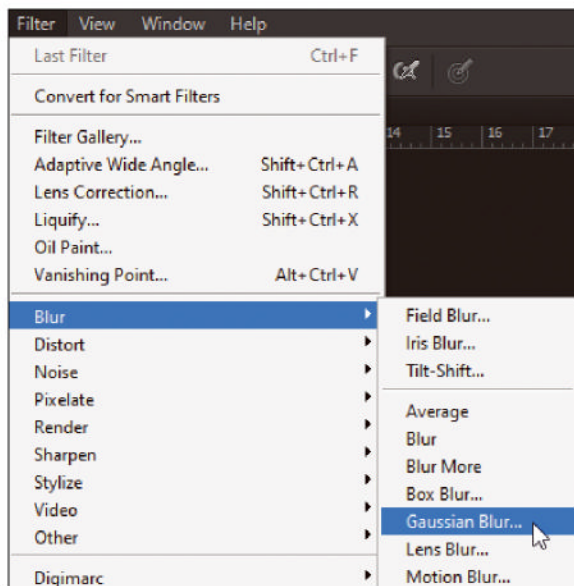
In this next step we'll focus on rendering important additional details and cleaning up. First, I create a new layer and set the blend mode to Screen, and with a big airbrush I then add a bloom effect on the highlights from the intense light, followed by another layer on Multiply to emphasise the shadow areas. The work-in-progress image above shows the final result after adding bloom and emphasising the shadows.



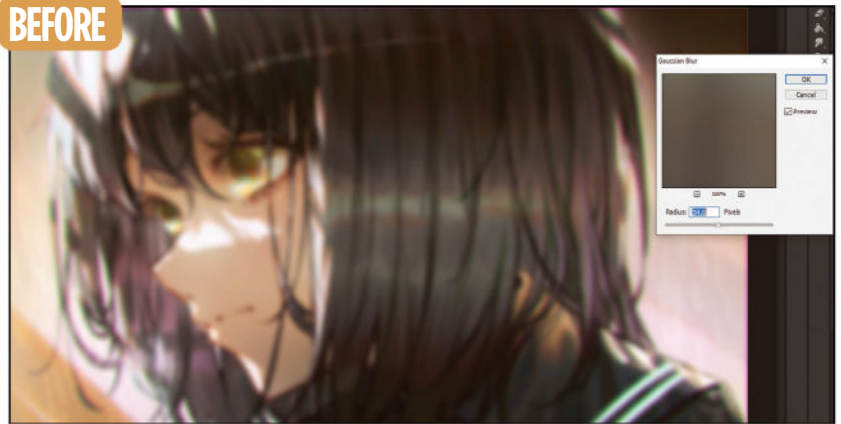
12 Use chromatic aberration

Chromatic aberration can help to add a nice finishing touch to your artwork. In this step I'll be shifting over to Photoshop. I start by duplicating the entire artwork layer into a new merged layer, and then double-clicking on the blank space of the newly duplicated artwork layer, opening the Layer Style pop-up window. I turn off the green channel as shown (top right) and name this new layer

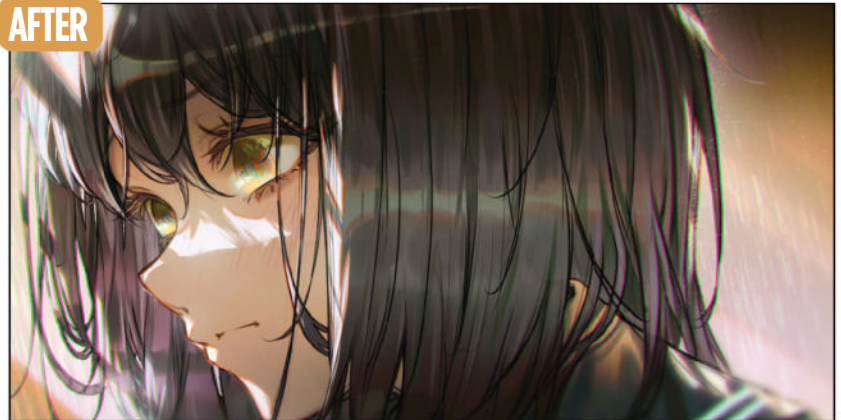
'chromatic aberration'. Then I start to expand the duplicated layer ever so slightly, causing the top image to misalign with the bottom image, which creates the chromatic aberration effect. One downside is that chromatic aberration can cause an image to become blurry, which you want to control. I create a layer mask on the chromatic aberration layer and start to mask out the areas I don't want the effect to be shown, like the face. The image above is the final result.



BEFORE

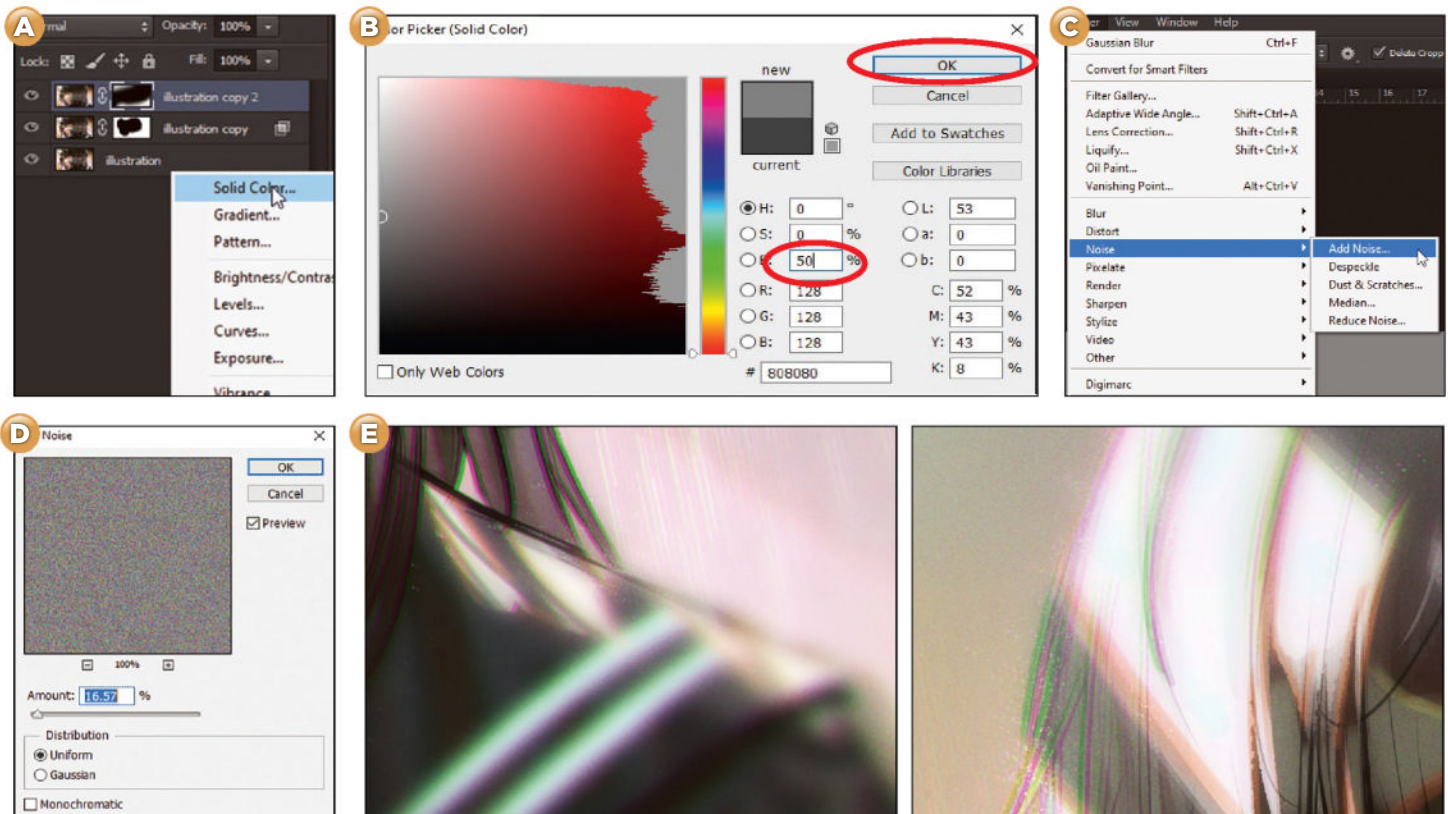


AFTER



13 Apply a blur effect

At this stage in the process I'd also like to add a blur effect to further enhance my artwork. I start off by duplicating all the current layers into a new merged layer named 'blur effect'. I then go to Photoshop's Filter menu and apply the Gaussian Blur effect, which will be applied to the entire layer. As with the chromatic aberration, I proceed to create a masking layer in order to mask out all the areas I don't want the blur to affect.



14 Wrap up your image with a noise texture

For the finishing touches I'll be adding a noise filter, which can help make your artwork look more detailed by adding a texture to the canvas. I start by creating a 50% grey layer (A and B) named 'noise texture'. I then go to the Filter menu and add noise (C and D), which will be changed to Overlay mode, and with that I'm done! You can see the noise texture up close in the final images (E).



Technique focus

USE LIGHTING REFERENCES

Billy Christian explains how a dash of 3D brings perfect light to his artwork

Artist PROFILE

Billy Christian
LOCATION: Indonesia

Billy is an illustrator and concept artist from Indonesia with 10 years of industry experience. His notable clients are Wizards of the Coast, Riot Games, Square Enix and Marvel.
<https://bit.ly/3SLNNAD>



"My preferred style of painting features immaculate lighting, which can be achieved by either using precise

references or making 3D models. I always like to start off with a sketch, however, to prevent my characters from looking rigid. When I'm happy with the composition, I'll make a 3D mock-up, and then after everything is set I light the scene according to the mood I want. Now this is complete, I can start painting. The majority of the time, I use the sketch as the base and build up the colours underneath the line-art. After that, I render and tidy up the overall piece on top of the line-art layer."





Photoshop & Procreate

DESIGN CONCEPTS FOR ANIME SCENES

Ayumi Sugimoto explains her thought process for developing a striking background environment to match her project brief

Artist PROFILE

Ayumi Sugimoto

LOCATION: Japan

Ayumi is an artist and the owner of Senju Kobo Co., Ltd., which creates visual development for games and anime. www.senjukobo.co.jp

GET YOUR RESOURCES

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Within the Japanese animation industry, we make nearly all our anime in 2D. That's why we need to create a concept for the background art that works in harmony with the style of the characters in any given project.

For instance, my team recently contributed to the background art for the popular series SPYxFAMILY and Mushoku Tensei. During the creation of the background scenes

for these, we didn't immediately start drawing. Instead, we started off the process by developing blueprints and planning out all of the furniture and props in the room before we delved into the line work.

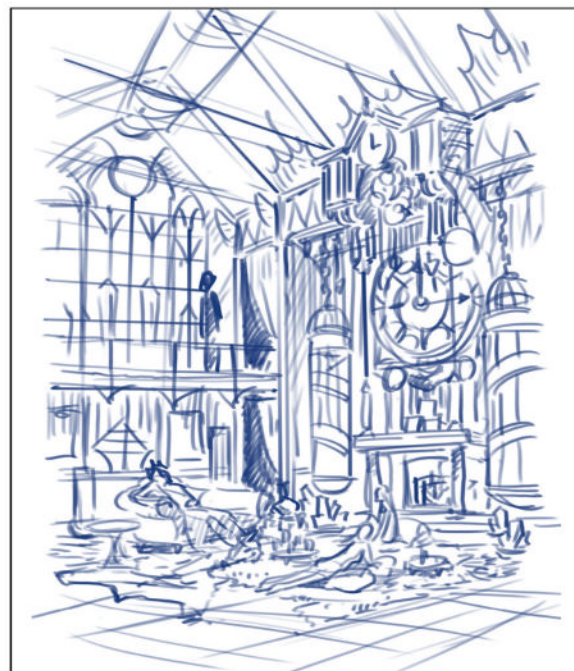
The background art in Japanese animation is characterised by its detailed depiction and use of colour. Another feature that's unique to 2D is that we deliberately lie about the expression of light; in other words, we'll sometimes exaggerate the

shadows and reflections of light to make the whole scene come together. It's also important for the backdrop to blend with the anime characters, which aren't realistically 3D. There's a tendency to draw in detail such as the texture and pattern of each piece with the 3D feel.

In this tutorial, I'll introduce the process of developing background environments and demonstrate how we can infuse striking colours into the distinctive Japanese anime style.

King's room in a decadent palace

- The main industry of the kingdom is glass manufacturing
- The king lost his only son
- I want some cyberpunk elements
- The king is overindulgent
- Things aren't going well with the princess
- Has a parrot that belonged to his son when he was still alive
- King's court witnesses his corruption



1 Organise your ideas

Note down what's important for you to include after reading over the plot or scenario, ensuring you have everything necessary for the scene. At this stage, I came up with the idea of adding a large clock and lighting that feels a little cyberpunk, plus a large stained glass window. You can see the list I jotted down here.

2 Explore the composition

Begin by sketching ideas on a small piece of paper, pick the one you like and enlarge it. My composition looks up at the huge clock and stained glass to emphasise them. As the story is about a king being spied on, I drew a curtain at the entrance to the stairs so people could peek through. Even if the room's structure isn't explained, if you know what the characters will do, we can proactively suggest where the action should take place. ➡

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

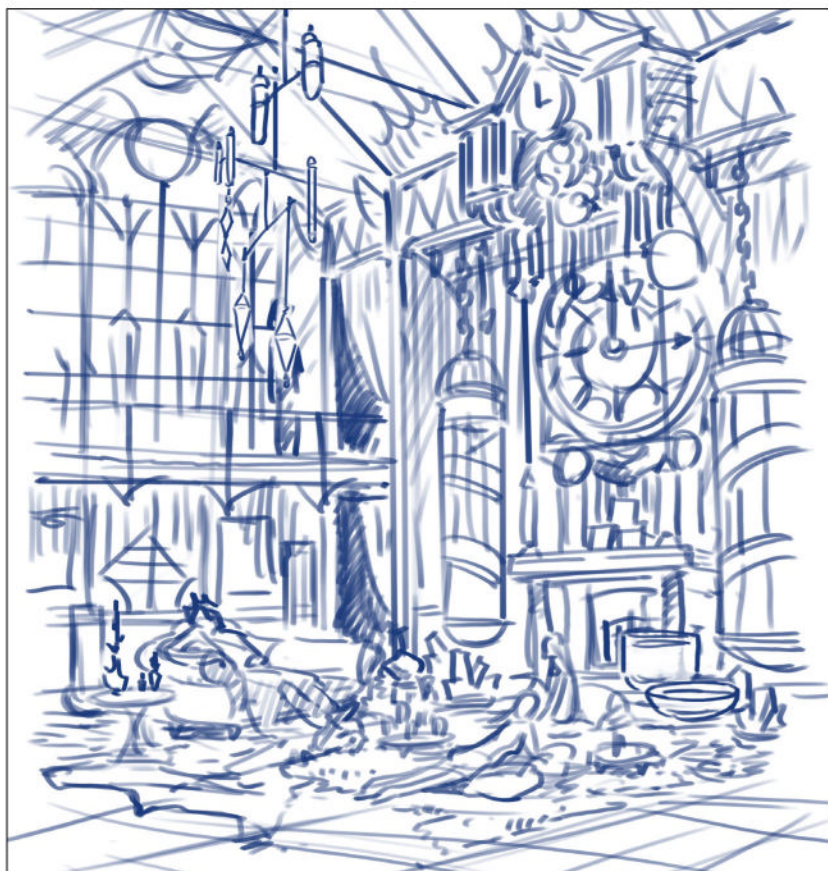
PHOTOSHOP

OIL PASTEL LARGE

As it creates strokes similar to a real brush, I use this when painting rough colours.

In depth Anime backgrounds





3 Incorporate suitable elements

Using specific objects in your scene can help to build the storytelling. For instance, here I added the shisha pipe to emphasise the decadence, a large glass bowl to suggest a thriving glass industry, and a chandelier with tube-like lights to add in extra elements for the cyberpunk touches I wanted.



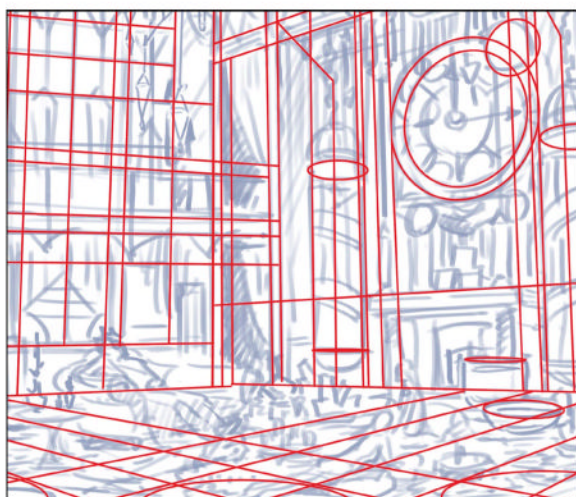
Image by Vilnius Kulinauskas from Pixabay



Adobe Stock/ANP Production

4 Find materials

I've never actually smoked shisha, but often the shisha shops you see in Japan are in semi-basements, and the atmosphere is dark and feels decadent, so I drew this to express the personality of the fallen king. As I've never seen the real thing, I only started to search for materials at this stage. This is key; I never do this while sketching as it can make it difficult to develop interesting ideas. I try to draw freely based on my own experiences instead.



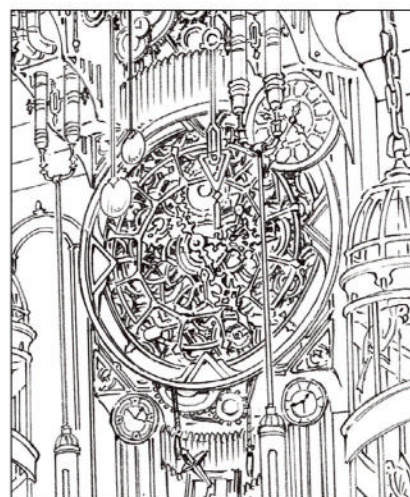
5 Draw a rough perspective

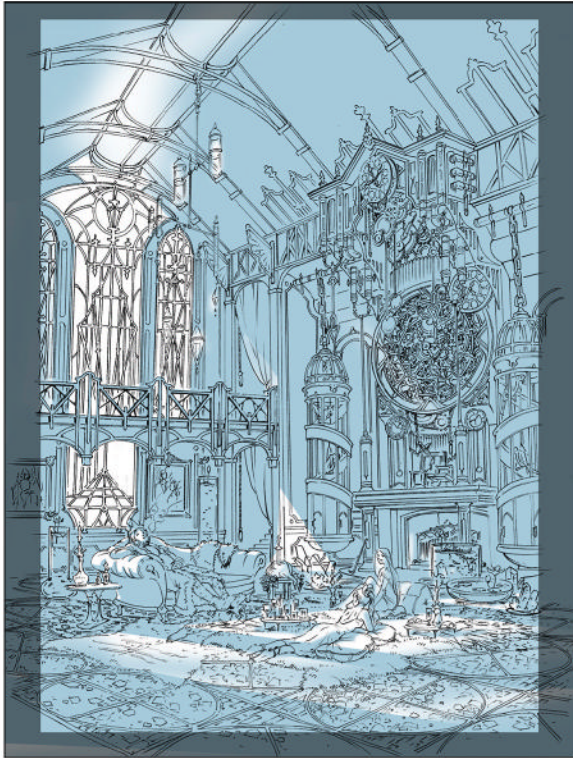
In order for the animators to accurately convey movement and the size of objects, we can't intentionally distort the perspective in the final art. But as concept art conveys atmosphere, we can distort it slightly to make the space look bigger or smaller. Don't deviate too far from the initial idea. When I began tracking the perspective accurately, I found myself moving away from the vibrant composition, and the pictures often end up quite boring.



6 Add in the details

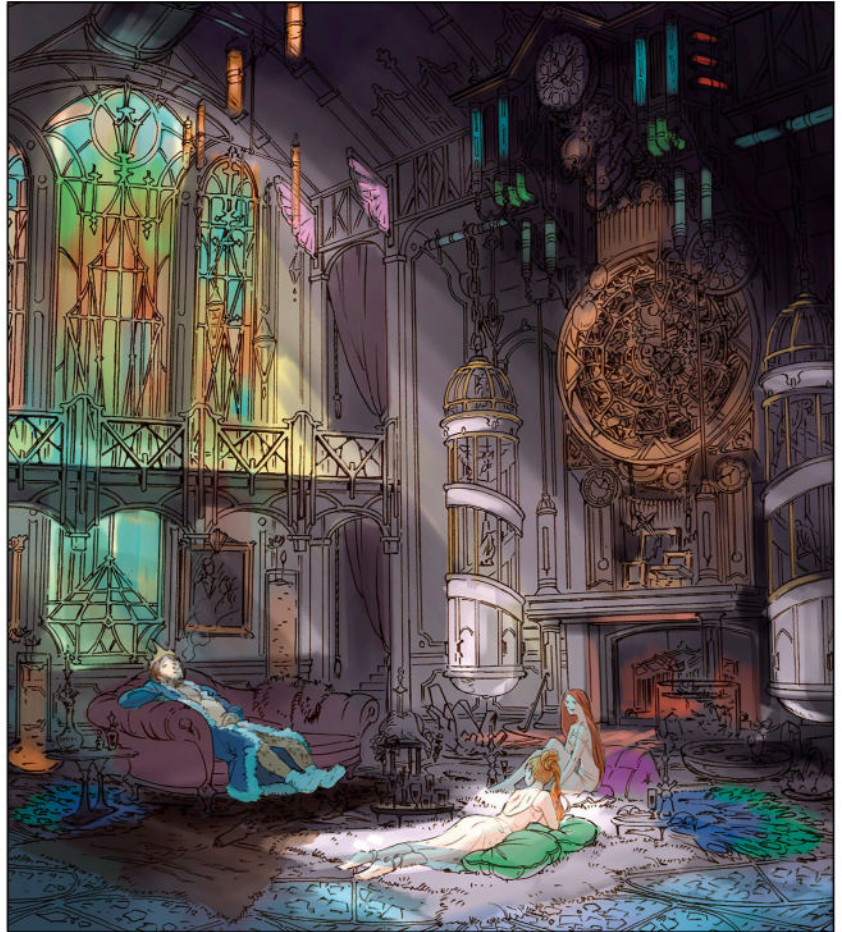
Now the small, vague elements from the rough sketches need to be drawn in detail. No matter how small they are, proceed with the design while thinking how people will feel about the story. In my case, it took about eight hours to develop the rough sketch to this detailed line drawing. Consider the wider universe as well. For example, the stained glass industry of this world was once flourishing, but now it's pottery that's thriving. By developing a floor covered in coloured stones and with a round frame it has a distinctive look. I also discuss ideas with my director. This way we can make suggestions, even mid-drawing, that can be incorporated.





7 Make a lighting plan

I wanted to create a beautiful stained glass window as part of a lavish setting, so I decided to illuminate the king from behind. Increasing the contrast helps draw the audience's attention, so I often use contrast on the main subject. This time I'm starting with a lighting plan, but there's another way to draw that involves using unique colours, shadows, textures, and aerial perspective all at once. This can be executed well by someone experienced, and as I understand shapes, textures, light and shadows, I can paint them simultaneously. For beginners, it may be better to divide the process into more manageable parts.



8 Put down rough colours

Keeping the main subject in mind based on the lighting plan, we can roughly colour the scene in Photoshop. I often use the Oil Pastel Large brush for the rough colouring. Apply the unique rough colours and place the shadow layer made in step 7 as a Multiply layer to check the overall tone. At this stage that layer is a light blue-grey colour, but we'll adjust that later, so don't worry too much here.

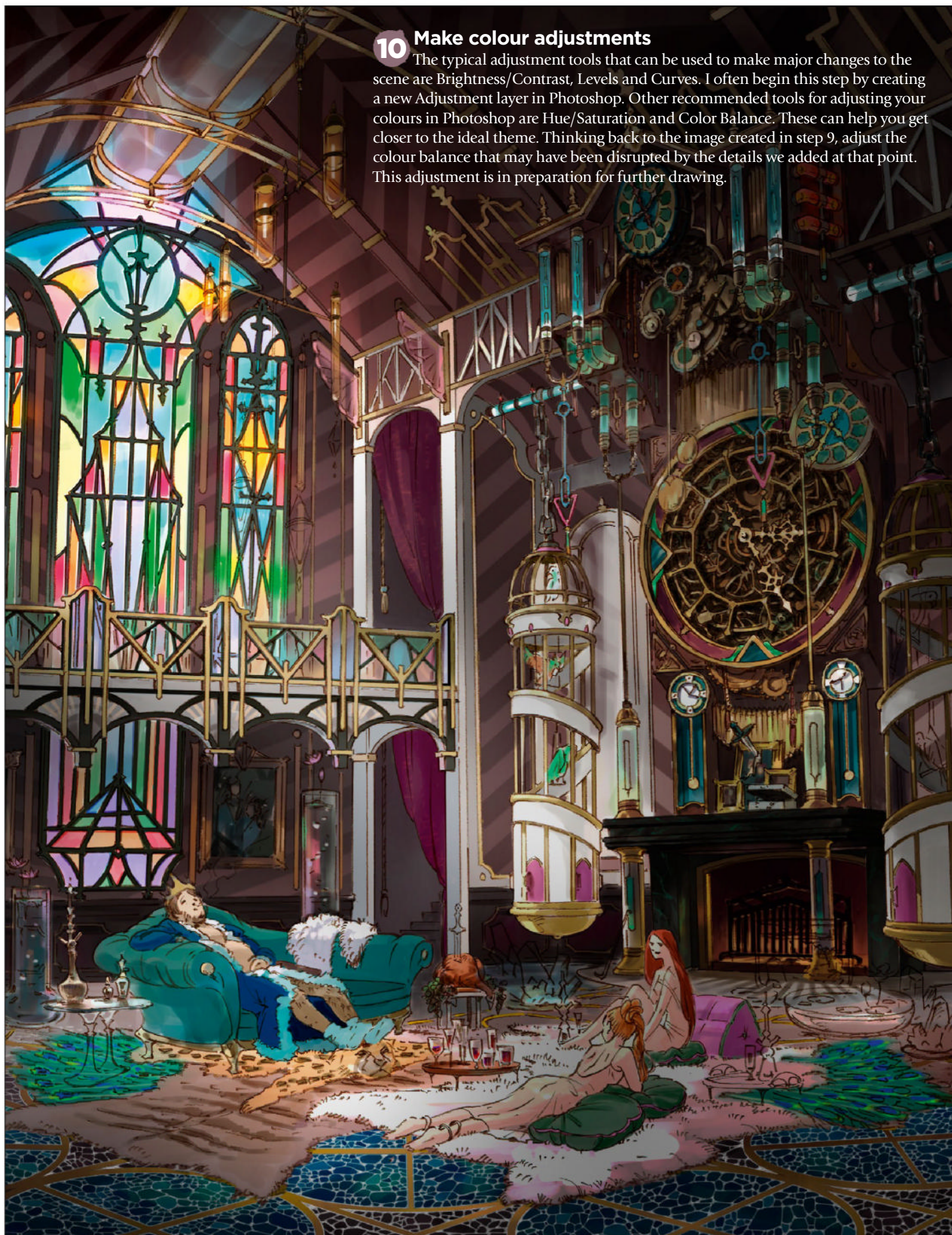


9 Paint each colour into your scene

In step 8, I established an overall atmosphere, but here we'll prioritise deciding on each unique colour. As you can see by looking at the floor surface, this is the stage where detailed drawings are made, so it may feel like you're filling in a colouring book. You might be concerned about the colours not harmonising with their adjacent colours, but that's no problem, as this will be adjusted later on. ➡

10 Make colour adjustments

The typical adjustment tools that can be used to make major changes to the scene are Brightness/Contrast, Levels and Curves. I often begin this step by creating a new Adjustment layer in Photoshop. Other recommended tools for adjusting your colours in Photoshop are Hue/Saturation and Color Balance. These can help you get closer to the ideal theme. Thinking back to the image created in step 9, adjust the colour balance that may have been disrupted by the details we added at that point. This adjustment is in preparation for further drawing.





11 Depict individual textures

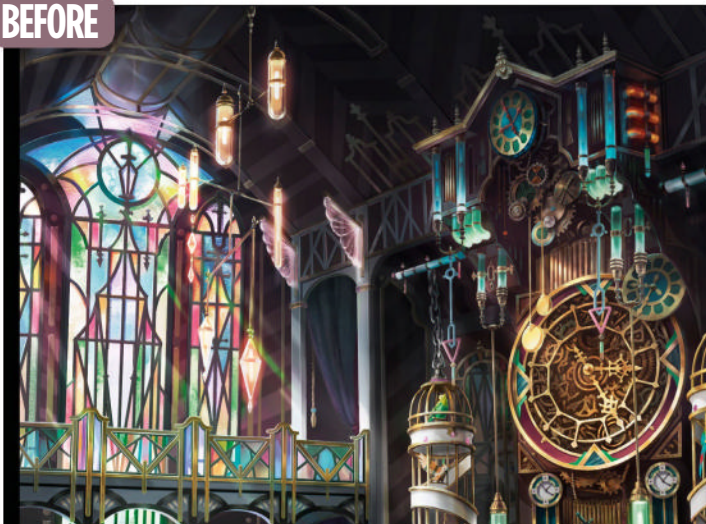
Now we want to draw in the textures, which for my scene are required for the glass, cloth, metal, and other materials. While you can paste in a premade texture, as this is for anime I wanted to cherish the hand-drawn style and purposely avoided using photo textures. When drawing glass, we express its transparency by depicting the thickness and diffused reflection of light, while highlights are added to metal for a sense of hardness.



12 Check overall balance and tweak details

I received feedback that there were too many details on the clock, which was drawing too much attention when viewed from a distance, so I simplified it by removing some of the details. In a similar vein, I'll work on other areas where I might have drawn too much and add in more details where they're needed too. The dial, which functions as a clock, wasn't noticeable due to the detailed depiction of all the internal gears with high brightness and strong contrast. So to make the dial stand out, I reduced the contrast within the internal structure and intentionally minimised the amount of details on it.

BEFORE



AFTER



13 Place the characters and finalise

Add the characters and blend their colours with the scene. In anime there are character settings, and they are arranged accordingly. Even if the character setting isn't decided at that time, draw the characters as a comparison. Combine everything into one image and apply lighting effects in Photoshop. This time I used Lens Flare to show the light from the stained glass windows. I also added an orange flare to the light coming from the ceiling. Make some fine adjustments to the details, and the image will be completed. ●

Technique focus

CREATE STRENGTH THROUGH SCALE


Ruan Jia unpacks the all-important narrative behind this spectacular fantasy fight scene



"This is an illustration from my Black Dragon Crown series, which depicts the sealed blue dragon called Qingling.

It was locked away by the legendary Shangguan family, who used their magical weapon to control the strength of the seal. The dragon becomes smaller when the seal's strength is

higher, and then larger when the seal becomes weaker.

In this image I wanted to depict two giant creatures wrestling together. They are fighting in the sky above a science fiction city, which can be seen in the background. The blue dragon Qingling uses powers known as doppelganger and entanglement to fight its enemy, the white dragon." 



Artist
PROFILE

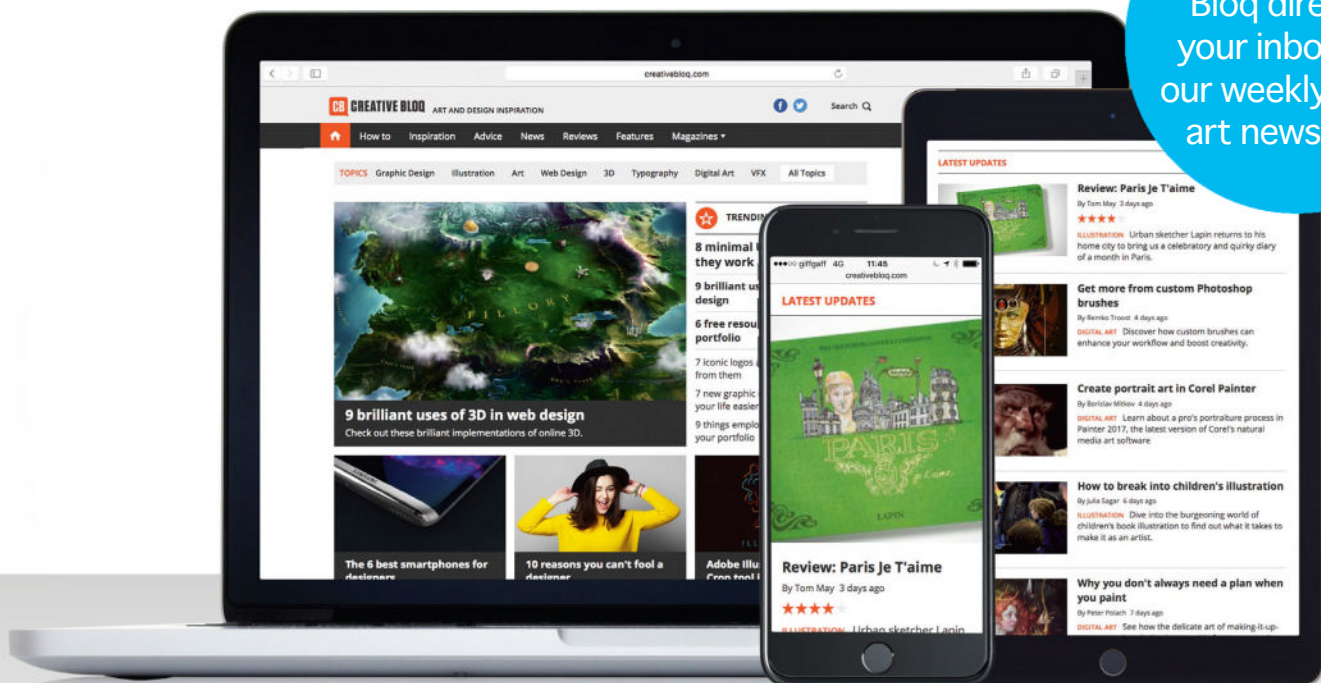
Ruan Jia

LOCATION: China

Ruan Jia is a freelance concept artist who has previously worked with the likes of ArenaNet and 343 Industries. Currently, he's developing his own epic series titled Black Dragon Crown.
<https://bit.ly/3OUOpBB>

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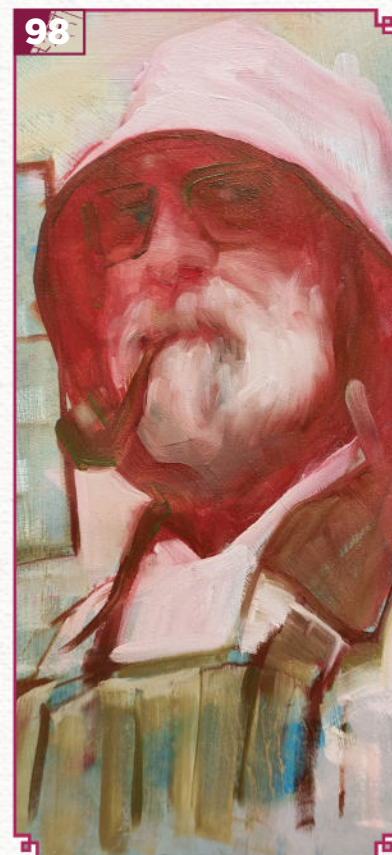
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How Old Masters continue to be an inspiration to the fine artist.

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Charles Lister

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Graphite, ink, white gel pen, colour pencil, watercolour

WEB: <https://linktr.ee/charleslister>

Charles Lister specialises in creating macabre and fantastical creatures who are part of a growing world called The Aegolist. He is inspired by vaudeville carnivals and uses Twitch to stream his creations.



1 DOLLS IN THE ATTIC

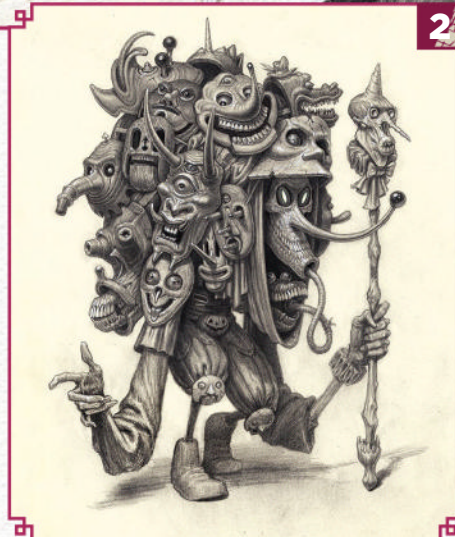
"A collection of dolls, clowns, puppets and marionettes delighted to see you. Inspired by the drawing event Drawtober."

2 MASK SALESMAN FREVMORZI KRAZ

"One of the greater mask collectors, hiding behind the many personas he has acquired. By gathering the egos of others, he hopes to find his own."

3 VALLEY OF SOD

"The Aegolist traverses the Globulep arena. This is another maddening location within the invisible landscape."







Jason Rodriguez

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Colour pencil, watercolour, gouache **WEB:** <https://jdrpictures.bigcartel.com>

Jason is a sketch card artist and art instructor with a love of the process as well as the finished result. He prefers the slow and sometimes painful process of putting pencil to paper: “the joy of creating is worth it.”

1 WINTER

“Here’s a curious elf with some friends. I wanted the hands to be as expressive as the face. A lot of time was spent on repeating patterns in the background to create depth and joy.”

2 SUMMER

“I wondered what it was like for Indigenous Americans to see those big ships coming onto shore. I also wanted to put as much life in the shadows as in the sunlight.”

3 CHESHIRE CAT

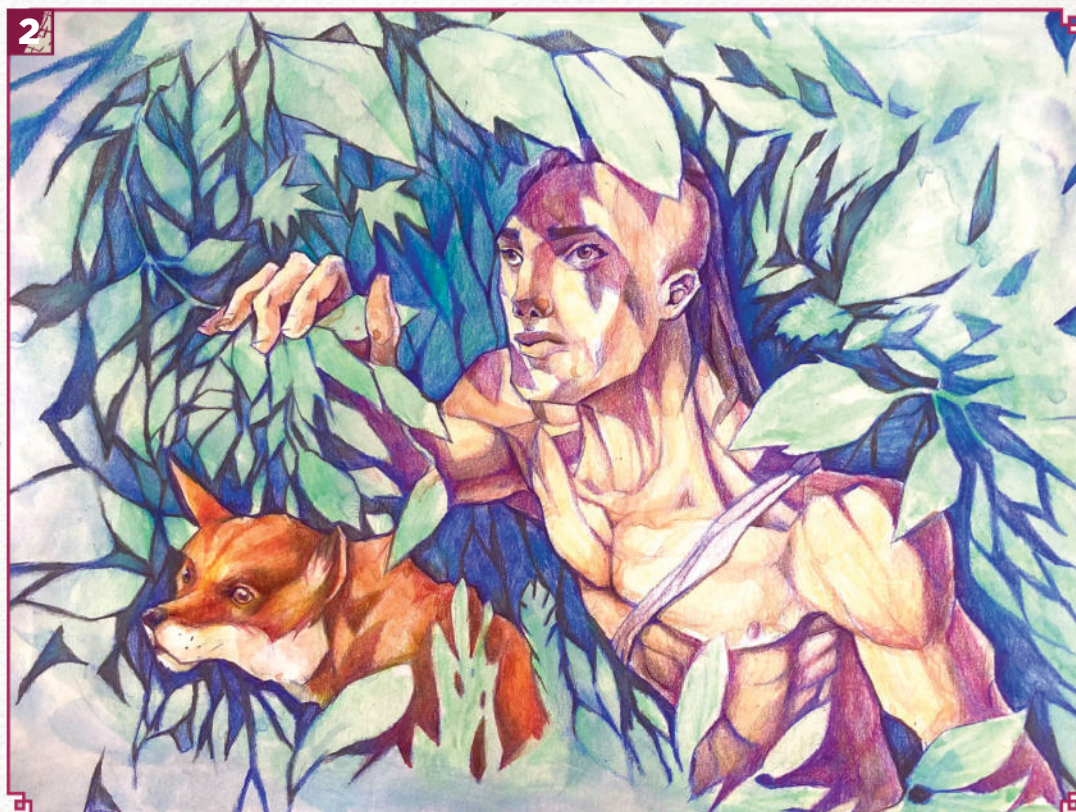
“I love the characters and weirdness of Alice in Wonderland. This one was done with gouache as a base and with colour pencils for the details.”

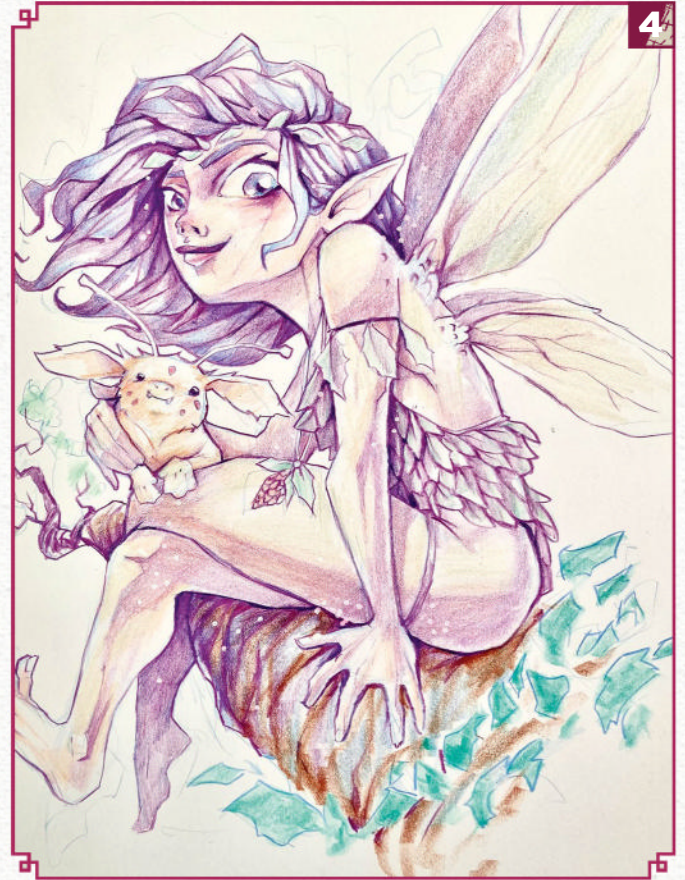
4 FAIRY FRIEND

“The colours, expression and furry friend are examples of the playfulness that colour pencils can provide. This is an example of choosing any colour and treating it like a graphite pencil.”

5 FALL

“What would be better to put in a pile of leaves but a cool dragon? In this one, I challenged myself to make the shadows warm and the light cool.”









Watercolour

ADD TEXTURE TO WATERCOLOURS

Discover why **ARIA FAWN** loved using watercolour ground to create a unique surface for her vibrant painting, packed with intricate details

Years ago I discovered watercolour ground, and it completely changed how I paint. The way it enables you to create such wonderful textures and vibrant colours instantly hooked me in.

You can utilise so many of these techniques on watercolour paper as well, though I encourage you to give watercolour ground a go as it's a truly unique experience. It takes a bit of patience and getting used to, so be

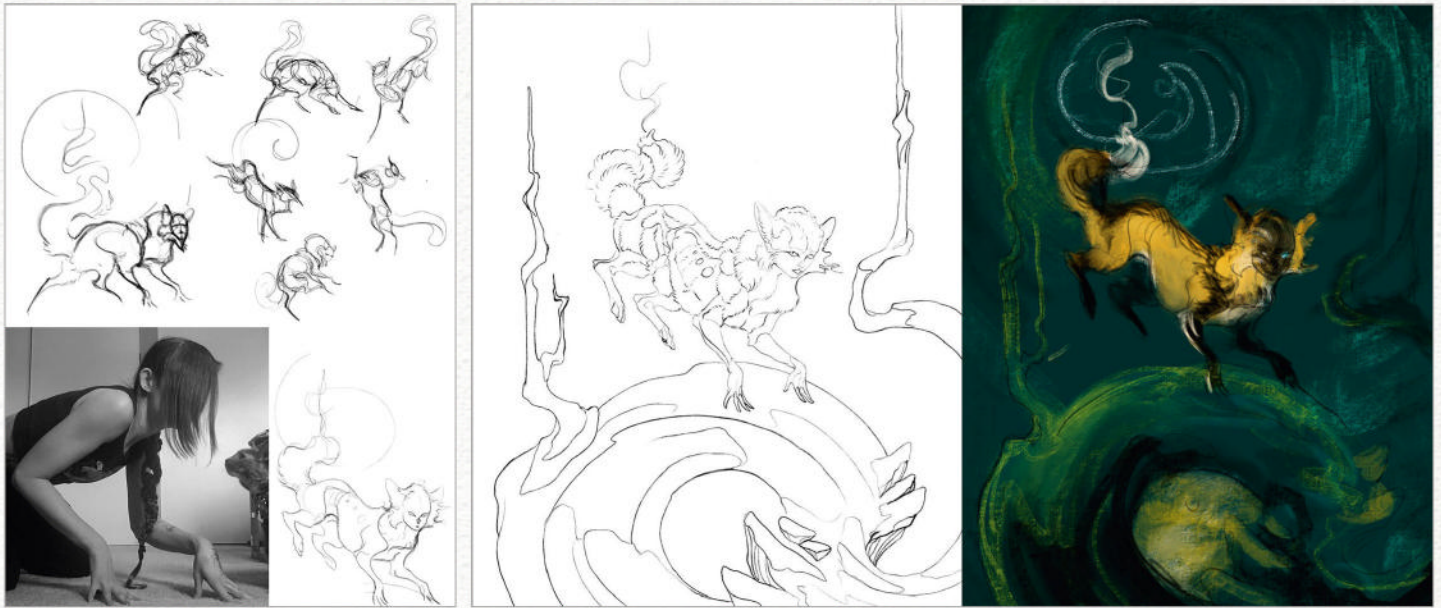
sure to approach your work with an open mind and take joy in playing with the paint. On top of the new techniques that watercolour ground opens up, I also love to mix in gold leaf, metallic pigments and gouache to create highlights.

For this workshop, I wanted to paint a version of a fox that I used to know in person. She'd make regular visits to an old cabin that my great-grandmother built. Much of my art uses animals as metaphors for the

human experience. I believe that the art of silence and listening is one of the most important skills we can learn, and what better an animal to have express this quality than that of nature's most quiet and clever observer: the fox.



Colorado-based Aria's dreamlike artwork explores the themes of human nature through animal iconography in watercolour, pencil and sculpture. Find out more at www.ariafawn.com.



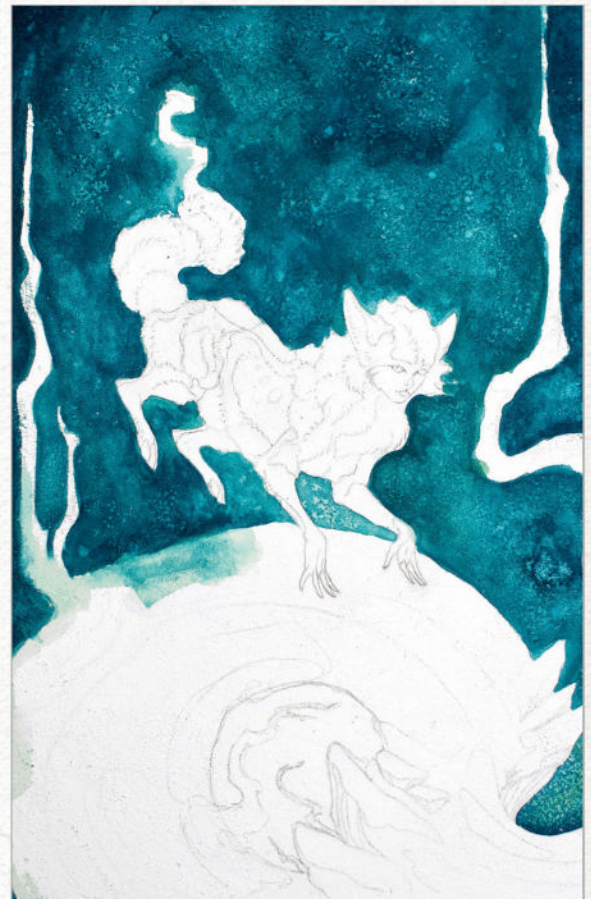
1 Plan out your ideas and search for references

I often freehand my messy ideas before using various references, including my own, to correct the final image. Doing these quick thumbnail sketches helps me capture the greater idea without getting lost in the details. I prefer to do much of my detailing in paint, so my final iPad sketch is quite simple before I begin working traditionally. I also do a quick colour rough to get an idea of the direction I wish to go.



2 Prepare the surface and texture

I print the drawing and go over it with a layer of watercolour ground, using a sponge to create a bumpy texture. This will give the paint more to stick to as watercolour ground is less absorbent than paper. Using the back of my brush, I push further little textures into the watercolour ground. I typically keep these more prominent textures to the background, preferring an even, though still slightly bumpy, surface for the character and important details.



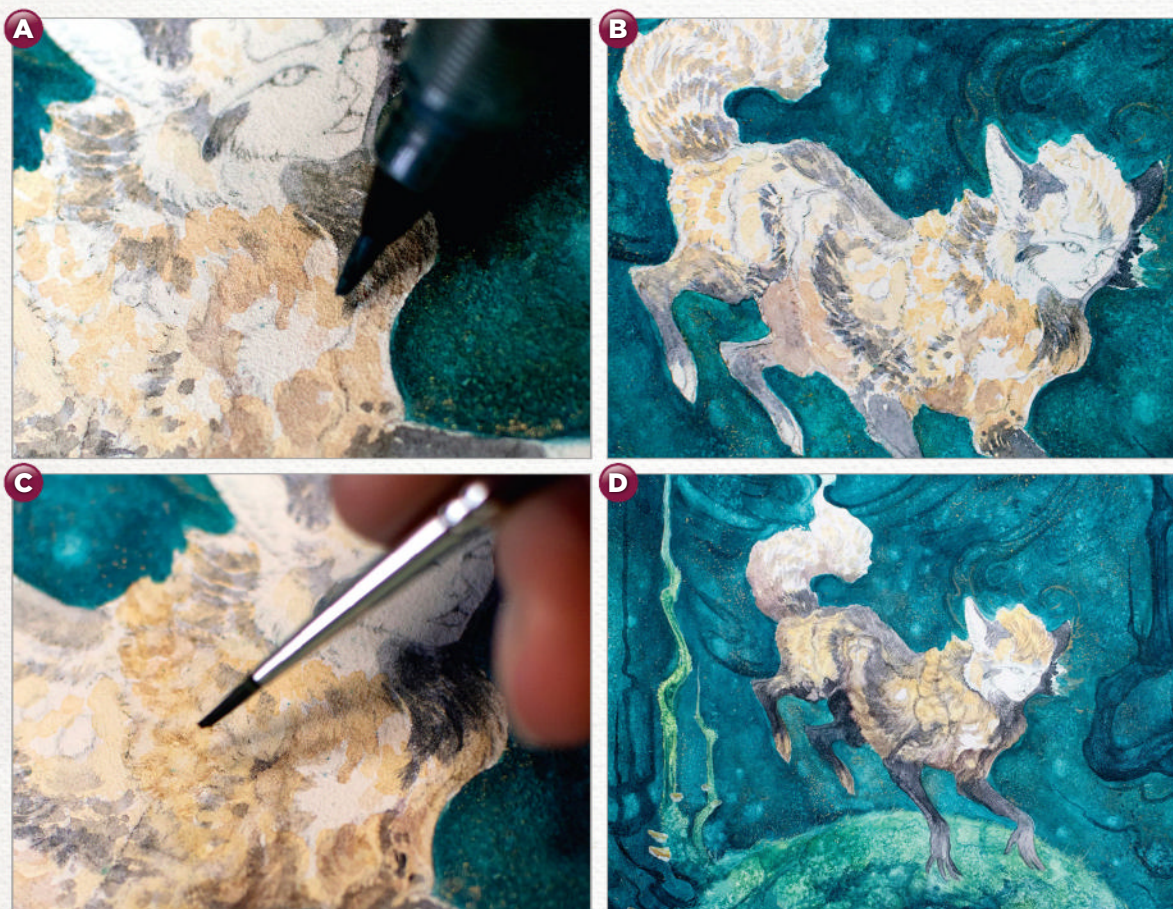
3 Block in the background

I block in the background with a mix of my blues and greens, adding salt and Pearl Ex gold pigment to help bring out the watercolour ground textures. I also decided to handpaint some swirly background details.



4 Watercolour ground additions and background details

The watercolour ground allows me to lift paint by scrubbing it away with clean water. I did just that for these additional mushrooms I added on a whim, and used watercolour ground to brighten them further before painting in the details. Among the various background details I add are the mushrooms and tree moss. For any small details I use finer brushes that are just barely damp, which helps keep the details sharp. I also add some gouache highlights.



MATERIALS

WATERCOLOUR PAINTS

- Daniel Smith manganese blue
- Prussian blue
- Phthalo green
- Carbazole violet
- Carmine
- Indian yellow
- Yellow ochre
- Chinese white

PAPER

- Legion 300lb cold press watercolour paper

WATERCOLOUR GROUND

- Daniel Smith titanium white

BRUSHES

- Pentel Aquash water brush
- Princeton Velvetouch Round brushes, size 1
- Various well-worn flat brushes

OTHER

- Pearl Ex pigments, Aztec Gold mixed with gum arabic
- 24K gold leaf and Kölner Miniatur size
- iPad for sketching

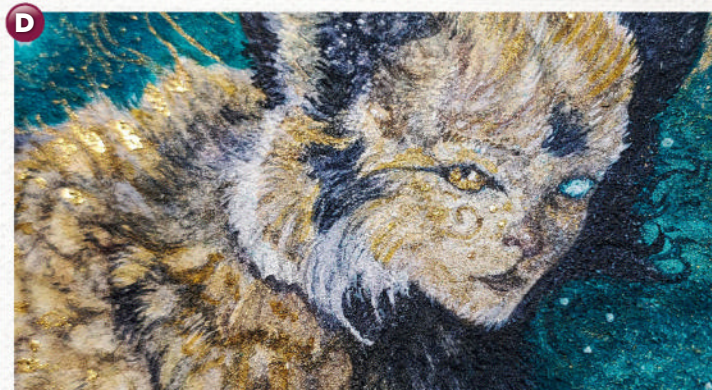
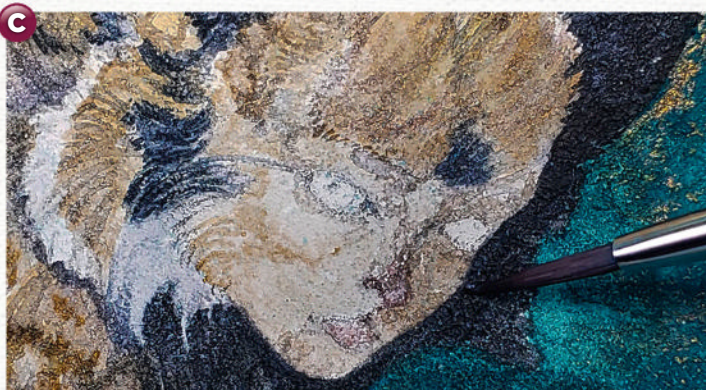
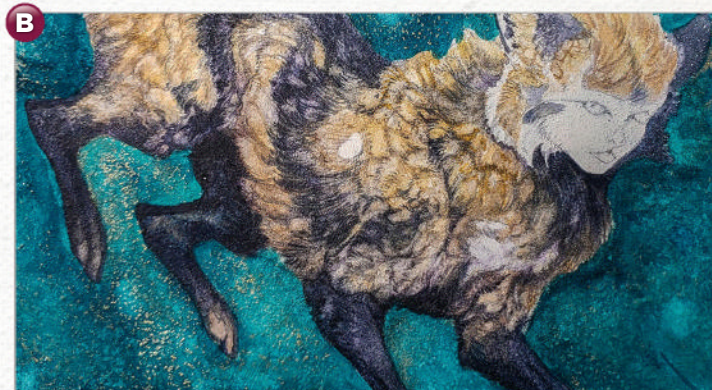
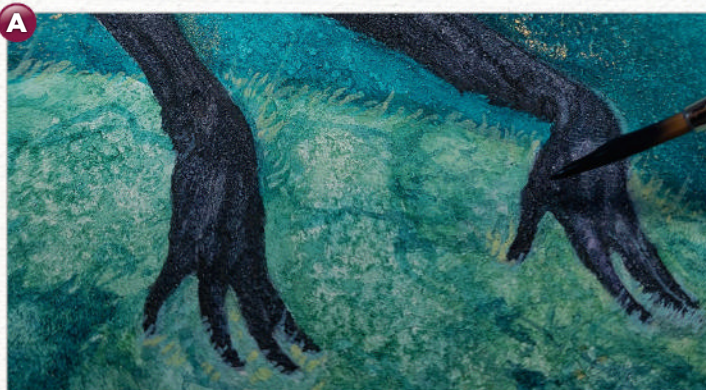
5 Block in the character and create fur texture

I roughly block in my character, just trying to get an idea of the colours and fur direction. I'm hopping all over with different shades of yellow, brown and my hand-mixed black, made from Yellow Ochre, violet and Prussian Blue. As I go along, I begin adding in loose details to create the basic idea of fur texture, as well as increasing the vibrancy and shadow. I'm careful not to get too detailed just yet, however. ➡➡



6 *Paint in the finer fur details on the character*

I began layering in finer details little by little. I'm using mostly the same sized brushes at this point, but as the details get finer, I use newer brushes that have a better tip. To create the extremely fine hair details, I'm careful to use a brush that's just barely damp. This helps to keep the lines super crisp. Using quick flicks of the brush will also produce a sharp tip for your lines.



7 *Create the hands, feet and face*

I often paint the hands and feet in their own segment, but still follow the same rule of blocking in, and using layers of more and more detail as I build up the form. I also love saving the face to do all at once. Using the same method of building up the details, I'll make small adjustments to the facial expression and features as I render over the top of the loose sketch.



8 *Add in small touches to build the image*

For the smoke, I use a bit of white gouache to paint some of the finer lines of the smoky tail, and use a barely damp brush with just clean water to blur the details slightly. I also want to add a golden window within the branches of the tree, so I apply 24K gold leaf using Kölner Miniatur, which is a sort of adhesive. I then paint over it with a few small details.



9 *Final highlights*

It's time to add the last details; a few tiny gold leaf highlights throughout the piece, a few touches of white gouache here and there, and I also use a brush to flick on some white stars using watercolour ground.



10 *Finishing touches to complete the piece*

By this point I'm hopping all over the painting – even more than usual, I'm a pretty chaotic painter – just adding any touch-ups and further highlights, and looking at the piece from different angles to see what needs fixing. 🍷

First Impressions

✧ Lizet Dingemans ✧

The fine artist on the inspiration of Old Masters and more



Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?
I grew up in the Netherlands. Though

we're known for our Old Masters and proud of that heritage, I didn't find any art schools that would teach me how to paint and draw figuratively. I got the feeling it was looked down on by art universities.

When I tell this to my students now, I notice this is common among figurative artists. There seems to be a real divide between figurative and contemporary art practice.

I moved to the UK to pursue my goals and found more of a thriving figurative scene, which invigorates me. I think this is changing now, and figurative art is again getting more international attention.

Is there a painting that you saw in your formative years that changed everything? What was it?

The artist that I admired when I was young, and continue to admire now, is Gustav Klimt. The 1890-1910 period is my favourite in art history. There's such a fantastic combination of skill and experimentation. With Klimt in particular, you can see the tremendous craftsmanship and skill in his early work, and such a strong feeling for aesthetics as he evolved.



BOAT ENTHUSIAST

This painting was done from a photograph taken at a boat enthusiasts' convention. I enjoyed playing with strong colour contrasts in this one.

He didn't think of himself as an artist first; he was focused on the overall aesthetic. He was obsessed with patterns, and also designed furniture, and even whole spaces to complement and strengthen his ideal aesthetic.

“The best thing about being an artist is that there's no time limit to greatness”

This strong conviction is what's inspiring to me, but that alone isn't enough. It's the strong work ethic and skills. That combination is what I strive for in my own art. I still have a long way to go, but that journey is the point. I may never arrive there, but that's okay!

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

Not at all! I think we all have the fantasy of just painting away in our

studio and that being what it's all about. Realistically though, there's a lot more to it.

Like all jobs in the arts, it takes enormous determination. The arts aren't always taken seriously, and there's no guarantee of a steady income. You also need the discipline to show up every day and create, even if you're not feeling inspired.

Then there's the fact that even if you do make amazing artwork, if nobody knows about it, that's not going to pay the bills. So a large part of being an artist is also networking, selling yourself and administration. I think that's a different picture of being an artist than what we had in mind. At least for me it was.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way?

I'd tell myself not to be so critical. I did have a period where the joy of creating got lost. I'd mentally beat myself up, telling myself it was just not good enough. Instead, that time was better spent learning the other skills needed to be an artist and just enjoying the process along the way!

I think this feeling of wanting to push yourself is incredibly common among artists. Nowadays, I try to focus on just putting the hours in and enjoying the process. Practice makes perfect!

What's your next step in art or life?

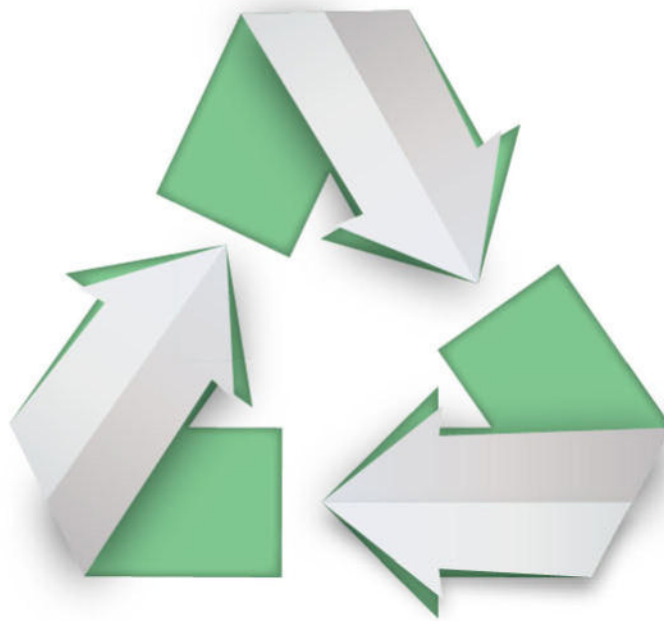
The best thing about being an artist is that there's no time limit to greatness. A lot of the Old Masters did their best work near the end of their lives.

I'm look forward to continuing to hone my skills, discovering new ways to create pictures and enjoying the process of seeing it evolve as I age. It's something that I'm very much looking forward to!

Award-winning artist Lizet Dingemans teaches online and in-person portrait classes at Raw Umber Studios in Stroud, England, and has also been exhibited internationally. You can find out more about Lizet at www.lizetdingemans.com.

EGG

I love the creativity of working with still life, as it gives you full control over the composition.



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