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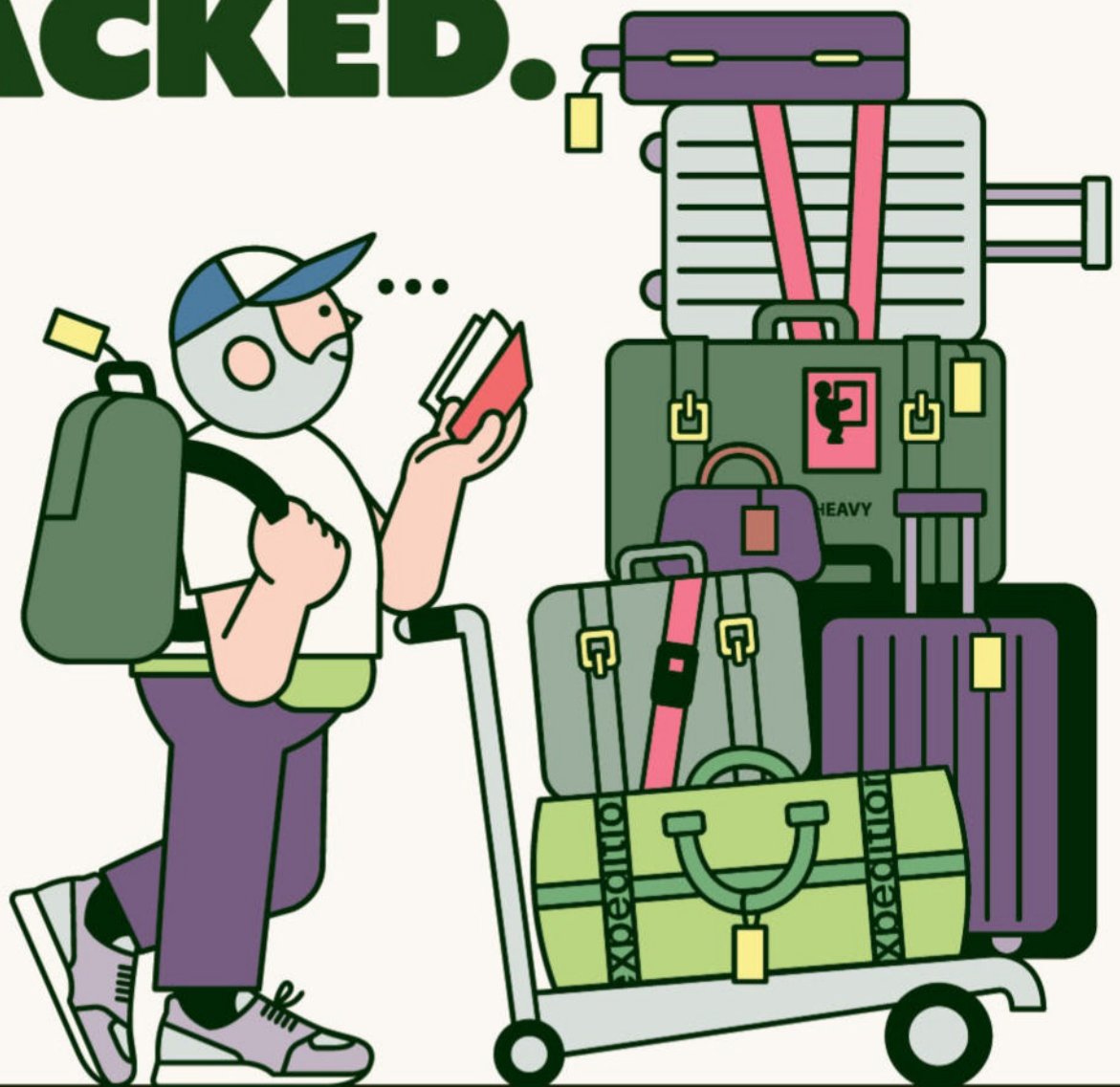
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Welcome to... NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX



As always, we start off this issue with our regular look at fantastic new art from the community, as well as some of the best entrants to our latest ImagineFX Art Challenge. If you're looking for a great way to test your skills and possibly have your art featured in the

pages of your favourite magazine, then make sure you follow us on our social media profiles below and join the fun! We set a new topic regularly and it's a fantastic way to push yourself.

As always, we highlight pro artists from around the globe, delving into their sketchbooks and studios. A favourite this month is the wonderful workspace of the manga artist Gigi Murakami, who has a passion for all things horror.

For those of you looking to learn new skills, we have tutorials covering everything from making light and shadow with graphite, through to creating a portrait with urban style just like our stunning cover. There are also tips for character animation and a look at how to add mood and atmosphere to your digital illustrations. Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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

34



Step inside a horror artist's workspace

Explore the studio of the awesome NYC manga artist Gigi Murakami, filled with inspirational curiosities.

58



Paint portraits with urban style

Follow along with Alvaro Escobar and learn how to add some street chic to your portrait illustrations.

92



Draw fascinating symbolic artwork

Use graphite to create drawings full of light, shadow and volume with top advice from Julián de la Mota.

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ImagineFX Contents

SUBSCRIBE & SAVE!

Your art

10 **FXPosé**

A round-up of incredible digital art submitted by you, featuring our latest Artist of the Month Pepper, Estrela Lourenço, Raquel M. Varela, Daria Widermanska, Daniel Oluwale, John Walters and Icezimy.

24 **The Rookies**

Enter a salvagepunk world as Janessa Kuek Jia Yun shares one of her student projects.

News and events

26 **The path to the top at a video game company**

Five pro artists share their advice on what it takes for new talent to rise through the ranks in a highly competitive sector.

32 **ImagineFX Art Challenge**

We showcase our favourite reader artwork created for the Fantasy Knight theme as the community forms a fearsome army.

34 **Artist in Residence: Gigi Murakami**

The horror specialist shows us around her manga-filled Brooklyn workspace and tells us why it sparks joy for her.

Features

42 **Creative strength in community at THU**

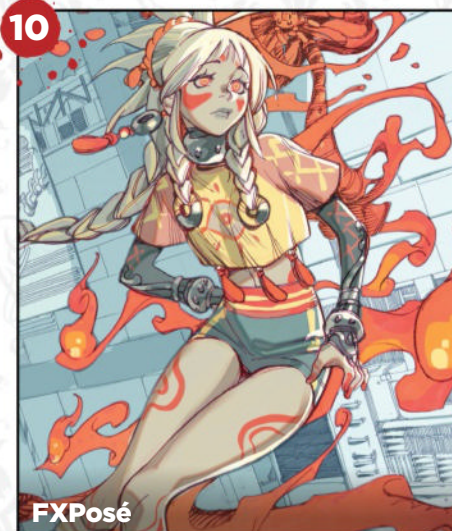
We speak to André Luís, the co-founder of Trojan Horse Was A Unicorn, who tells us all about the story behind the event.

50 **Sketchbook: Yong Nam Kim**

The artist opens up a sketchbook that explores his dreams, memories and elements of traditional Korean history.

Regulars

- 6 **Next month**
- 8 **Subscriptions**
- 41 **Letters**
- 48 **Recent editions**



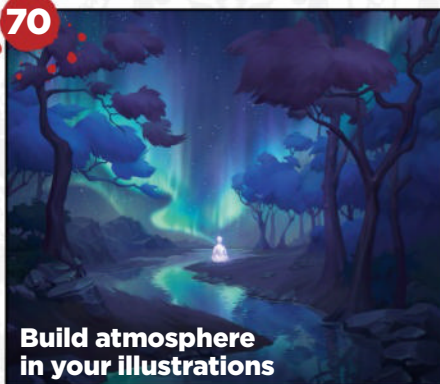
ImagineFX

64



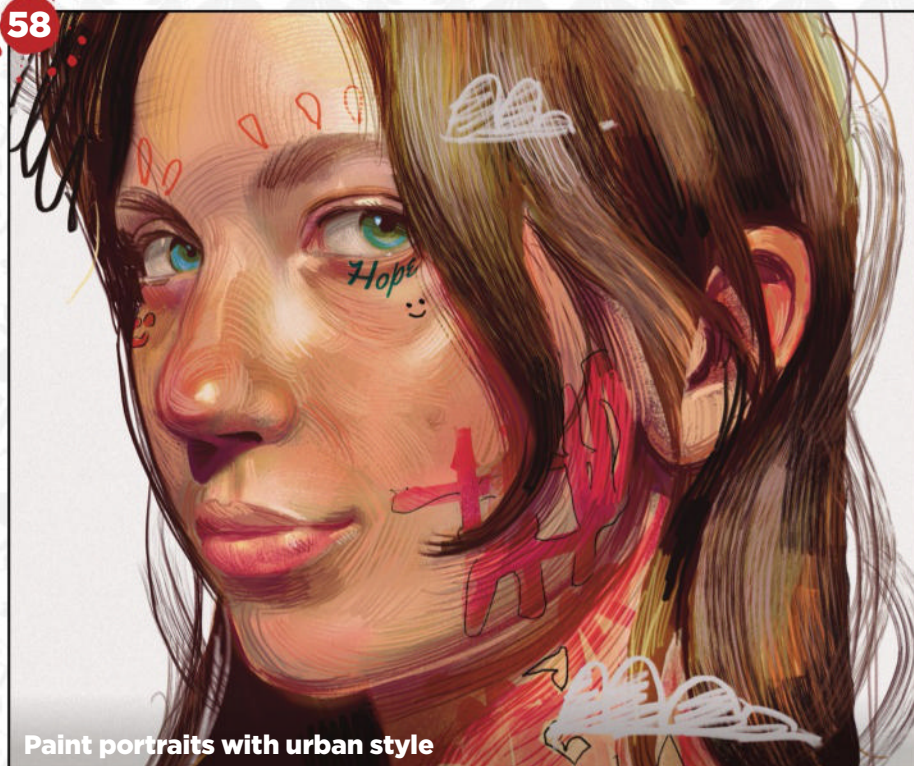
Create epic RPG cover art

70



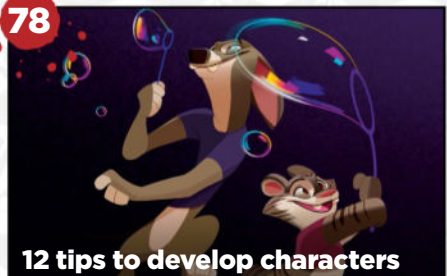
Build atmosphere in your illustrations

58



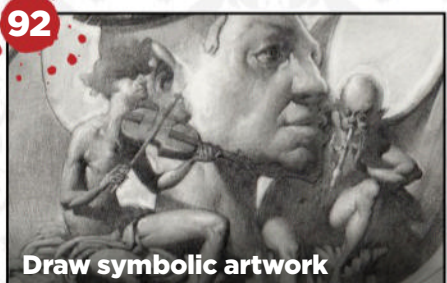
Paint portraits with urban style

78



12 tips to develop characters

92



Draw symbolic artwork

98



First Impressions: Ed Org

Workshops

58 Paint portraits with urban style

Learn how portrait pro Alvaro Escobar develops colour, texture and more.

64 Create epic artwork for an RPG cover

Antonio De Luca offers insight on the fine details of his evocative Gandalf creation.

68 Push colours while painting

Develop your palette as you progress through a painting, just like Richard Lay.

70 Build atmosphere in your illustrations

Eugenia Vi builds a meditative mood in her peaceful art with a bounty of tools.

76 Use soft shapes

Get a distinctive look through looser perspective with Simone Ferriero's advice.

78 12 tips to develop characters

Discover how to add a personal touch to your character designs from Brian Weisz.

84 Plan out your composition

Jules Darriulat comes prepared as he makes a scene starring reanimated apes.

Traditional Artist

88 Traditional FXPosé

The finest traditional art, sent in by you!

92 Draw symbolic artwork

Julián de la Mota explores the depths of his imagination to create fascinating art.

98 First Impressions: Ed Org

How an upbringing in the English countryside has influenced the artist.



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Find your files ready for download.
- 3 Download what you need...**
Save the files or watch the videos.

Next month

Artwork by Ngan (Anne) Hoang/Gnomon

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MEET THE RISING STARS OF 2024

Discover the best emerging talents in our incredible student showcase

Inside the art of Disney Lorcana

We go questing for the lore behind creating the TCG's stunning visuals

Doodles from an art director

Much-loved artist Simone Grünewald opens the pages of her sketchbook

Ink colourful manga artwork

Learn to master your markers with advice from Anne Chihiro Howe

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FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Pepper

LOCATION: Romania **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop, Blender

WEB: www.twitter.com/pepperacae

Pepper has worked in animation and comics. She especially loves character designs that allow for a fusion of modern and traditional elements, and is currently creating her own comic, GhostPunk.

1 GHOSTPUNK WORLD

"This concept art explores the world of GhostPunk, expanding on the setting."

2 CHARACTER EVOLUTION

"The final design for Vega brings together key elements from previous explorations: a limited colour palette of red, yellow, blue and grey; Romanian motifs in the costume; subtle fire-related imagery; and occult symbolism."



2



1

4



3 ORIGINS

"This early concept introduces Vega, his ghostly companion Faye, and a hint of eastern occultism."

4 ROMANIAN SPIRIT

"Focusing on Faye, the ghostly companion, I tested a limited colour palette, and incorporated traditional Romanian design elements, establishing a foundation for future characters."

3



ImagineFX

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5 URBAN MIRAGE

"This final exploration captures the core aesthetic of GhostPunk: a stark contrast between the bleak, concrete cityscape and the vibrant, enigmatic protagonist."



Estrela Lourenço

LOCATION: Ireland **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate **WEB:** www.estrelalourenco.pt

Estrela is a children's book author and illustrator. Her work is influenced by her background in character animation and storyboards for clients such as Cartoon Network, and she channels comic strips like Calvin and Hobbes.

1 CHILDHOOD DREAMS

"This image was created for the monthly KidLitArtPostcard event on social media to showcase my work to art directors and editors in the children's book industry."

2 UNDERWATER TEA PARTY

"I always try to create a story around my illustrations – the sillier the better! Why is this girl willing to join these crabs for a tea party? Why do the crabs not look very pleased? I like asking these kinds of questions to conjure a story."

3 MUSHROOM BIRTHDAY PRESENT

"I love drawing forest and outdoor pictures full of plants and nature, so I challenged myself to create a quirky character, in this case a mushroom, coming out of his house with a mission."



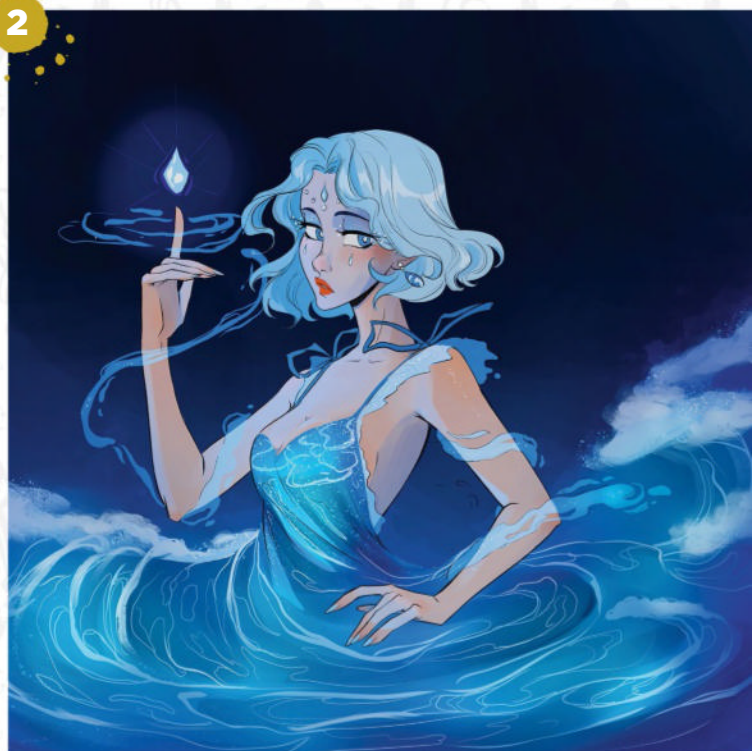
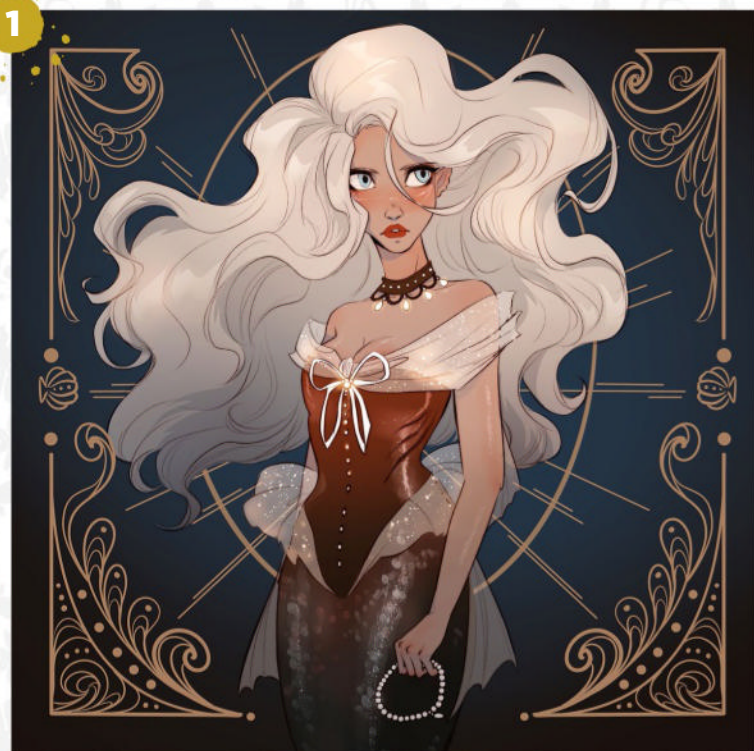




Raquel M. Varela

LOCATION: Spain MEDIA: Clip Studio Paint WEB: www.reireiart.com

Raquel is inspired by magic, fantasy and fairy tales. She loves designing female characters from distant worlds. "My greatest reference is Loish's art, thanks to her I learned to draw the movement and fluidity I like to convey."



1 VINTAGE MERMAID

"I drew this siren for the Mermay challenge this year. I love to design gold frames and decorations. In addition, the challenge inspired me to draw my characters as if they were underwater."

2 THE POWER OF WATER

"This illustration was a collaboration with the Spanish artist Milvilla. I had to choose an element and represent it in my own way. Obviously it had to be the water! The effect of the sea waves is something that must be practised a lot."

3 WITCH AND SKULL

"This was drawn for the Witchtober 2024 challenge. Designing witch hats and their dresses is a pleasure for me. This illustration is intended to be the cover of my fictitious artbook. One day it will be a reality!"

4 POWERLESS

"I love to make fan art. In this case, I drew Sailor Moon in one of those moments the hero looks weak. We can't always be all-in; sometimes we fall and we have the right to do so. I wanted to show that moment."





Daria Widermanska

LOCATION: Poland **MEDIA:** Procreate, Clip Studio Paint, Photoshop, marker pens **WEB:** <https://anako.art>

Daria, also known as Anako, has been drawing for as long as she can remember. Inspired by Disney and classic anime, she loves creating new characters and often finds that a single sketch can spark a unique story.

1 WHAT SPELL DID I JUST CAST?!

"I love witches. This is an inexperienced witch whose curiosity gets the better of her, accidentally causing an uncontrolled magic explosion; a wonderful subject for an illustration."

2 HELLO BUTTERFLY

"This was essentially practice in Procreate, which I started using only this year. However, I got too ambitious with the hair, and it turned into a full illustration that's now one of my favourites."

3 REMINISCENCE

"The idea for this illustration has been in my mind for years, inspired by the works of Stanisław Lem and David Bowie's Space Oddity. The loneliness of space is a terrifying yet fascinating vision."

4 THESE ANNOYING GHOSTIES

"An illustration featuring the heroine of one of my stories. I've always had a fondness for themes involving shadow magic versus light magic, and Natalie has to deal with their effects every day."



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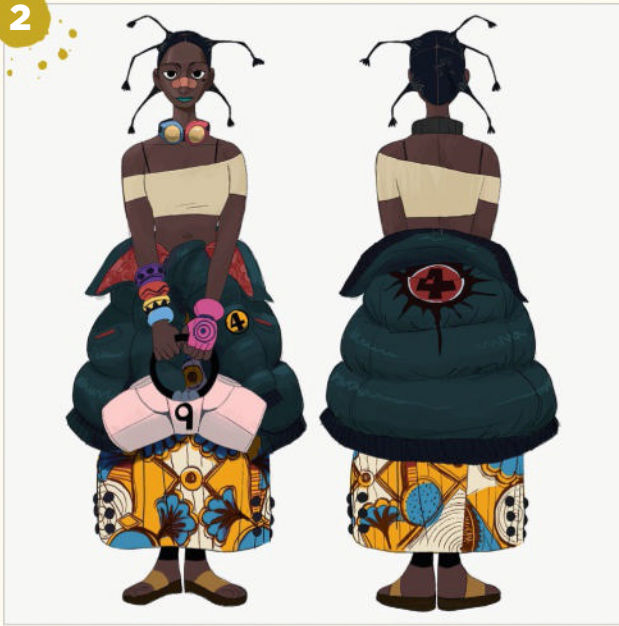
Daniel Oluwale

LOCATION: Nigeria **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/daniel_oluwale

Daniel likes to create otherworldly stories that reflect where he's from, as well as designing characters that he can build worlds around. His primary inspirations are contemporary art, Afrofantasy and editorial photography.



2



1 LAGBAJA

"Funny enough, this piece is inspired by an actual Nigerian musician named Lagbaja, which means an anonymous person in the Yoruba language."

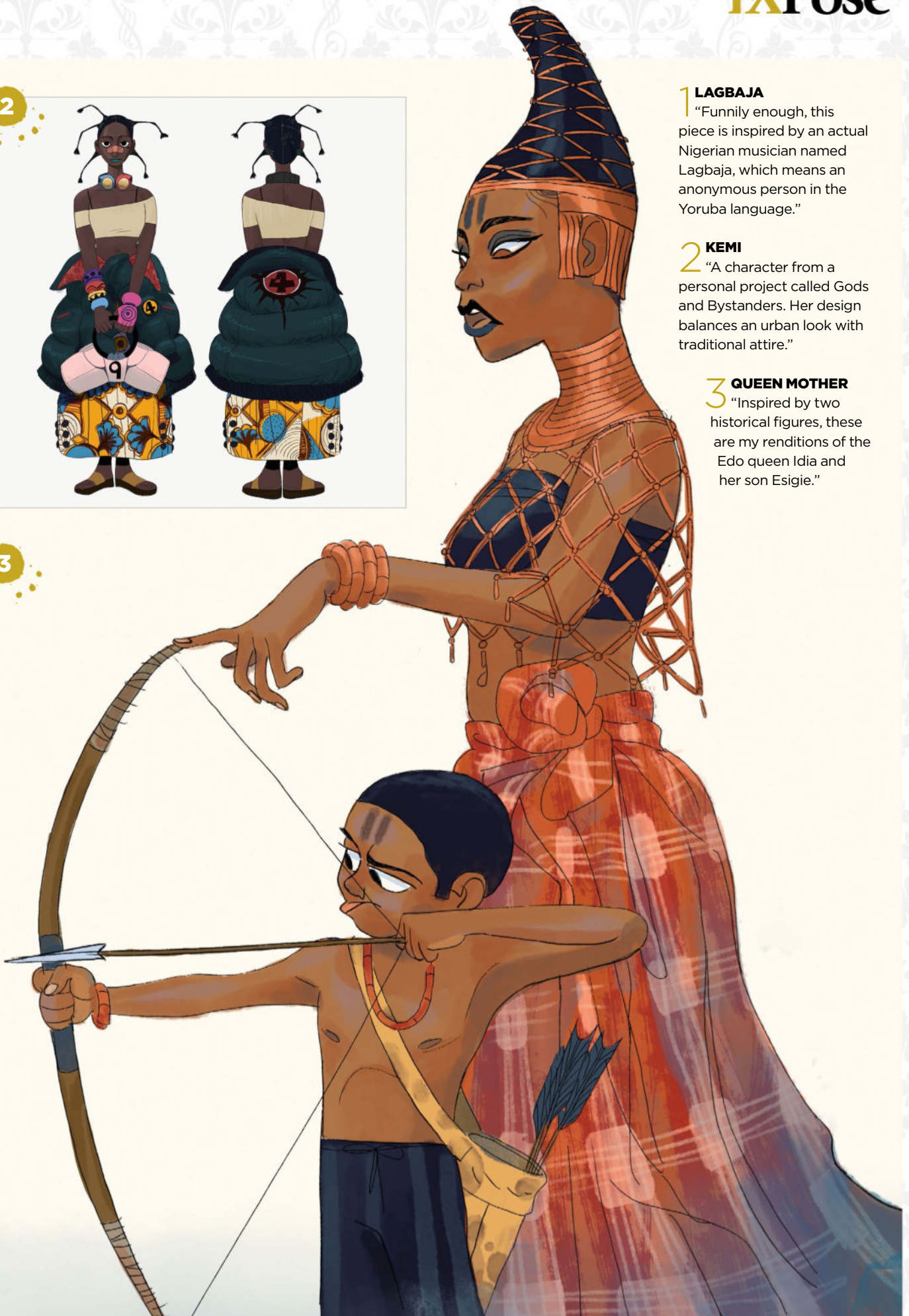
2 KEMI

"A character from a personal project called Gods and Bystanders. Her design balances an urban look with traditional attire."

3 QUEEN MOTHER

"Inspired by two historical figures, these are my renditions of the Edo queen Idia and her son Esigie."

3





John Walters

LOCATION: New Zealand **MEDIA:** Procreate, Nomad Sculpt, Photoshop, Maya, Nuke **WEB:** www.pommypixelpainter.artstation.com

John is a VFX art director who has worked in the industry for 15 years. His career started on the TV show Spartacus, before an eight-year stint at Wētā where he created matte paintings for Black Widow, The Batman and more.

1 FINEGAS THE DRUID PRIEST

"This was a character concept that I created for the Irish mythological story of Finn McCool."

2 THE MAD HATTER

"This is my own design of the Lewis Carroll character from Alice in Wonderland. Painted in Procreate."



3 THE WICKED WITCH

"Made in Procreate, this illustration is influenced by characters from well-known fairy tales and film."



Icezimy

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Artstudio Pro **WEB:** <https://icezimy.com>

Icezimy is a digital artist with almost six years of freelance experience. She always strives to explore and challenge her creative skills to visually express how she sees the world. Her main focus is creating interesting characters, often in fantasy settings.

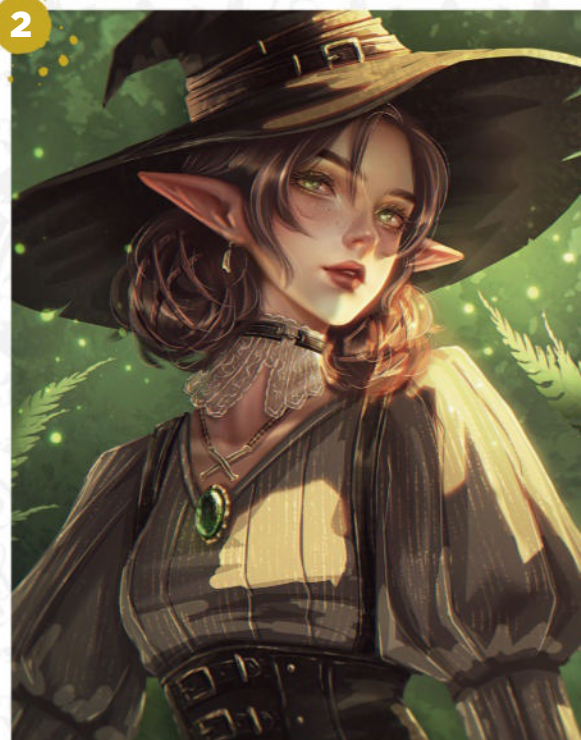
1 AINE, A LONG DAY

"This is one of my original characters. My goal here was to set the scene as she returns to the guild's tavern at the end of a long day of hunting monsters."



2 FERNA PORTRAIT

"Another of my original characters. With this portrait I focused on achieving a simple yet flowing pose, and interesting shapes and light."



3 FLOWER FIELD

"With this painting of Princess Zelda, I tried to capture the feeling of a quiet spring day as she takes time off from her royal duties."



4 FRIEREN IN ARMOUR

"Another fan art piece. I reimagined Frieren in an alternative universe, where instead of being a mage she's a paladin. My goal was to capture a bittersweet feeling."



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



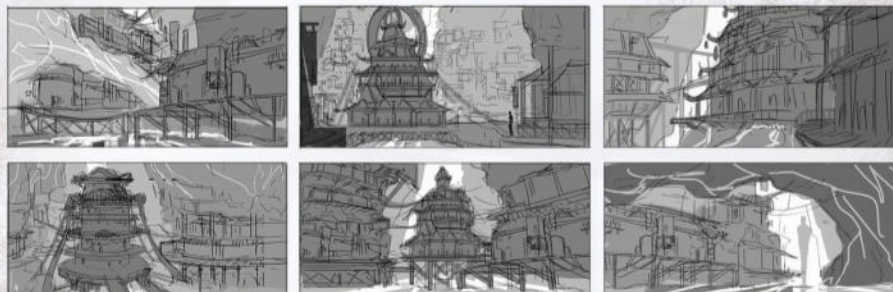
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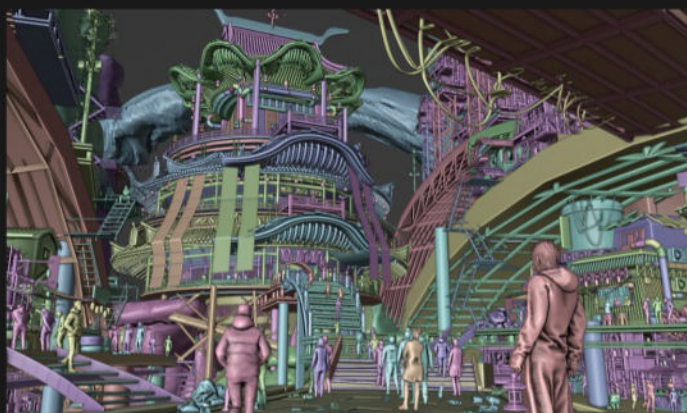
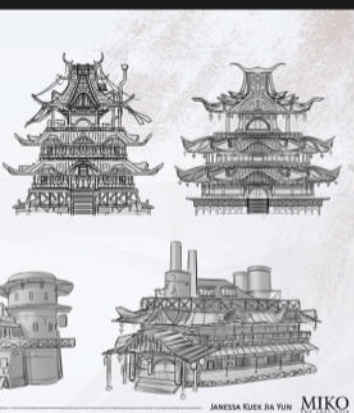
COMMON HOUSES SKETCHES



MIKO: The Lost Heir – The Settlement

YEAR CREATED: 2024 MEDIA: Blender, Photoshop

“MIKO: The Lost Heir was an individual project completed during my time at Syn Studio. The idea stemmed from a desire to explore and combine familiar cultural motifs with a fresh and imaginative twist, offering a unique narrative and visual experience for the audience. As a result, the fusion of post-apocalyptic and salvagepunk elements within a Japanese cultural context was born.”



Artist PROFILE

Janessa Kuek Jia Yun

LOCATION: Canada

Environment concept artist
Janessa is a recent graduate from the Cestar Collège – Syn Studio concept art school. Based in Montreal, she is a specialist in crafting immersive storytelling within her environments and places a keen focus on developing realistic AAA-style artwork.
www.therookies.co/u/artemisjy



©Bethesda



"Accept the fact that everyone is different, and so it's difficult to be something that isn't you," says Cecil.



Alexander says: "My goal is to make my team's life easy and unblock any obstacles so they can focus on their tasks at hand. When they create awesome work, it's a win for everyone."

STARFIELD

BETHESDA

SENIOR ENVIRONMENT ARTIST / ALEXANDER ALZA

The path to the top at a video games company

No cheat codes required Tanya Combrinck finds out exactly what it takes to make the leap from burgeoning student to game-shaping art director

If you love video games, leading a team of exceptional artists to create fantastical new worlds might sound like a dream job. But in an industry that's more competitive than ever, how can you set yourself apart? And what do you have to do to forge a path to the top?



A veteran art director with close to three decades' experience working on AAA titles such as the God of War series is **Cecil Kim**. "First off, you should know what area of art production you want to get into," he says. "It means knowing what you're passionate about doing."

Like any career, it's tricky to work out your specialism at an early stage, but finding the things that are a natural fit for you as soon as possible will make your life much easier. "If you aren't certain, take some courses and see if you enjoy learning a certain discipline," advises Cecil. Finding that

passion will give you the drive you need to keep learning, discovering, and pushing yourself that bit harder than your peers.

For example, if you're drawn to worldbuilding or character design, Cecil points out that a "strong interest in world cultures and ancient history" will help you. Reading up on these and other relevant topics might uncover an interest you never knew you had.

LEARNING JOURNEY

It's also worth noting here that a formal education is by no means a prerequisite for finding success in the games industry. "Times have changed a lot since I was starting out," reflects Bethesda Game Studios lead artist



Alexander says: "I try not to lose sight of how fortunate I am to do this, so I approach each day with an appreciation and passion as if I was just getting started."



Alexander Alza. "These days you can absorb so much knowledge for free online. I know people who are self-taught and have had solid careers in the industry."

While Alexander did study at art school himself, it's not where he learned how to do his job. "From the start I was a sponge, absorbing all the knowledge," he recalls. "While I'm appreciative of what I learned at ➔

“I know people who are self-taught and have solid careers in the industry”



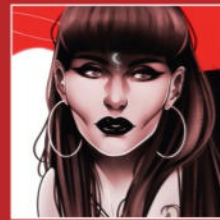
FABULOUS FANTASY ART

Check out our favourite noble knights and magnificent mounts as the talented ImagineFX community tackled our Art Challenge with their incredible submissions. **Page 32**



HORROR AND MANGA MEET

We peruse the studio of Gigi Murakami, an artist and content creator specialising in melding horror and manga, with a little encouragement from her canine pal. **Page 34**



YOUR VIEWS, YOUR ART

Readers write in with their art news and opinions on what we've covered in ImagineFX. Plus, we feature your art that's caught our eye on social media. **Page 41**



"Create a look players will remember, and infuse your own tastes in your designs," says Beth on creating compelling characters.



"I try to find inspiration in almost everything, and I love discovering parallels in different interests," says Eric.



Of being an art director, Ilya says: "It takes optimism, good communication, enthusiasm and a desire to make a fun game."



Artwork from Sky: Children Of The Light by thatgamecompany, where Cecil works as an art director.

CAREER SPOTLIGHT

ILYA NAZAROV

The stops on a journey from new starter to art director

2004-2008

Artist at Retro Studios

3D characters and environments, UI and concept art for Metroid Prime 2 and 3. Early pre-production for Donkey Kong Country Returns.



2009-2011

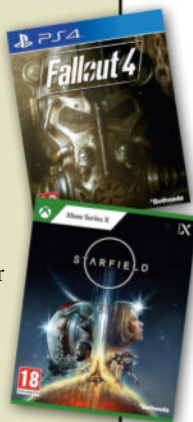
Concept artist at Warner Bros. Games

Concept art and marketing illustrations for Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor and The Lord of The Rings: War In The North.

2011-2022

Lead concept artist at Bethesda Game Studios

Worked on Starfield, Fallout 76, Fallout 4 and other upcoming games. Led a team of eight concept artists producing character, costume, creature and environment concept art; industrial, vehicle and weapon design; marketing and in-game illustrations, plus game and book covers; colour grading, storyboarding, paintovers and look dev. Set up all in-game natural lighting and weather in Fallout 76 and Fallout 4.



2023-present

Art director at Loric Games

Leading a team of artists creating a stylised survival co-op game, defining visual style and more.



Currently an art director for Loric Games, Ilya Nazarov has worked for a number of major video game studios.

<http://ilyanazarov.com>



On putting together your portfolio, Beth says: "Employers searching for a concept artist are looking to see good design skill and clear execution, ideally in the same genre of their project."

➡ school, most of my modern-day skills were learned on the job, and I've thankfully had great leads inspiring me the whole way." He also notes another key characteristic: "One thing I never stopped doing was learning in my free time. I continue to be curious, exploring new software or techniques that can improve my workflow."

If you're lucky enough to land an internship or first job in the games industry, it's important to be strategic about your professional development



and focus on the right things. **Beth Hobbs**, a senior concept artist at Raw Power Games, tells us: "Juniors should

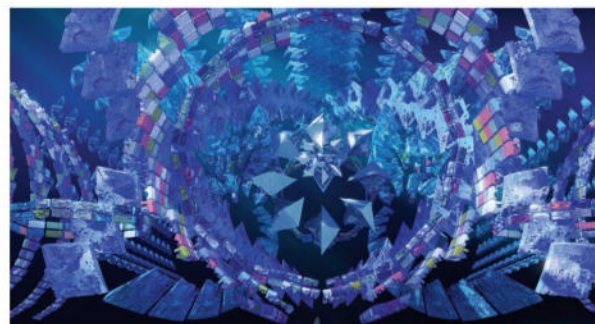
prioritise improving their design abilities and executing thoughtful, purposeful design in their concept artwork. Many inexperienced concept artists will go astray by focusing on creating beautiful images rather than useful images."

KNOW YOUR ROLE

That's a situation that can be attested to by Bungie senior concept artist



Eric Pfeiffer. "I got my start as a concept artist after working in illustration and comics for a number of years, and I was used to seeing my work as successful when it was polished," he remembers of



©Bungie

"After work, I'd be on the bus teeming with ideas and sketching stuff out, still in a sort of disbelief I was getting a chance to do this for a living," says Eric of his early days on the job.

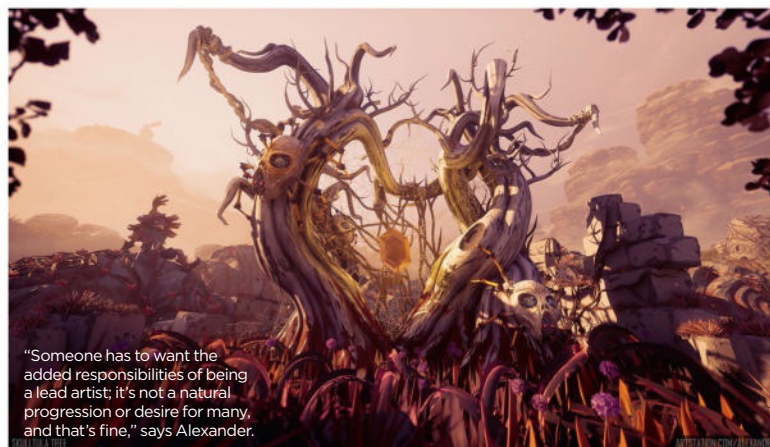
making his switch. "I was still hanging on to the mindset of an illustrator.

"In concept art, your job is one of the earliest in the process, but you need to imagine the game as a whole, years down the road. The designs you make will be seen and experienced globally for many years to come, so ultimately no one will care how polished your work was if the design of it was half-baked. Having designs that are hard to read or hard to

“You need to imagine the game as a whole, years down the road”



"The real breakthroughs about design or process come outside of work when I realise how an experience is analogous to visual design or something I'm working on with concept art," says Eric.



"Someone has to want the added responsibilities of being a lead artist; it's not a natural progression or desire for many, and that's fine," says Alexander.



Beth says: "If a character is visually memorable to players or they love the way the character looks, I've done a good job."



"Stay humble and positive, and always try to support and understand other people as a team player," says Cecil.

remember has real consequences for a game's identity, so that should be the priority to focus on."

Another piece of advice that both Beth and Eric agree upon is the need for originality in your artwork. Beth stresses: "I can't emphasise this enough: look outside of ArtStation when seeking inspiration!"

Eric also warns newer artists to look further afield. "Try not to pull from the same references as everyone else," he adds. "If you open up ArtStation, you can see trends immediately. When you're making a AAA game, it's important to realise you're being paid to offer original ideas. It's our job to build an identity for a franchise that feels unique, so that it will stand out against competition for many years to

come. That can be hard to do if you're always pulling from the same source material as the competition."

PART OF THE PIPELINE

Your designs need to be original, but they also need to be practical. Junior artists will need to get to grips with the technical limitations of other departments that apply to artwork in games. Beth explains: "A character-related example would be that long, flowing fabrics might not work with a rig or animation, and wholly bespoke outfits might not fit in with the 3D production timeline. This would mean you're now restricted to more form-fitting outfits and recycling assets to create your character designs.

Understanding the limitations of ➡



"Along the way I discovered a love for realistic and historical character concepts, so have become specialised in that," says Beth on the route to finding her passion.



➡ the other departments that you're working with means fewer revisions and less of a headache for everyone."

She also notes that responding appropriately and learning from any feedback is important. Eric's advice here is to figure out how to be "self-critical in a healthy way that allows you to grow without feeling either too anxious or defeated by your shortcomings". He adds: "We all have

room to grow, so try to learn how to self-edit without over-encumbering yourself with doubt. Embrace the feedback and be willing to evolve."

BE A PEOPLE PERSON

It's easy to think you need to focus on art abilities above all else, but if you're not a good person to work with, you won't get far. Time and again, industry professionals tell us about the

Ilya says of his job at a startup: "You have to be quick on your feet, adapt to new plans and ideas, and make the best of your resources. I'm learning a ton, so that's really satisfying."

importance of interpersonal skills, and how these traits need attention in the same way you focus on your art.

It's a point that's enthusiastically echoed by Loric Games art director



Ilya Nazarov. "The best skills to work on are communication, problem-solving, and being a team player," he says. "Art skills

come a close second. Working on games is a collaborative effort and some of the best work is the result of multiple talented people working on a creative problem together."

And remember that being eager to progress doesn't mean losing your

“Enter a project with an open mind, and be ready to absorb ideas and ways of working established before you”

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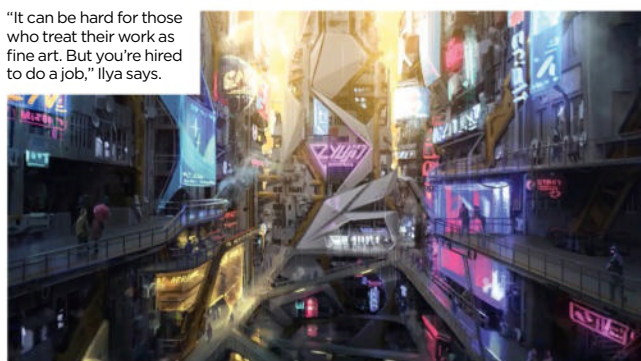
Ilya says: "Few young people recognise the value of being able to create their own things while having few expenses and dependents. Enjoy that time while you have it."



"What I find the most satisfying is seeing player reactions to characters I've conceptualized," says Beth.

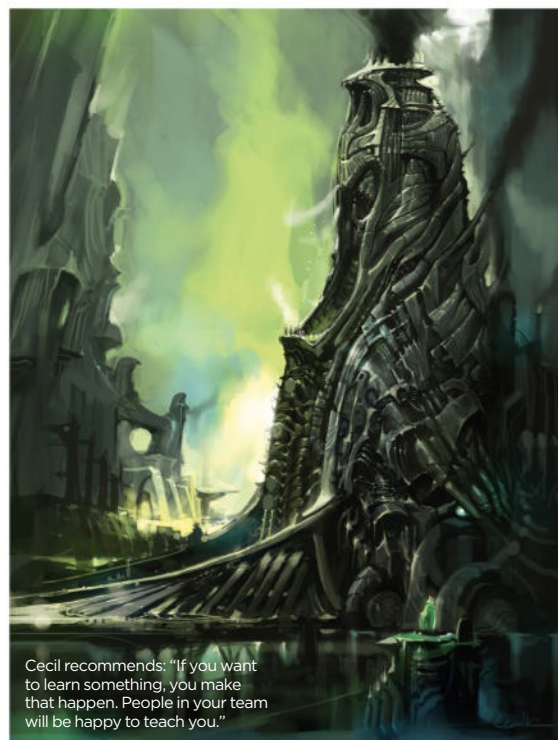


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humility; you can be confident and humble at the same time. Eric says: "Enter a project with an open mind, and be ready to absorb the ideas and ways of working that were established before you," he says. "Show up with humility and understand that you have a lot to learn from the wide array of talent you get to interact with.

"Ambition doesn't mean disruption. Don't think you have to reinvent everything to prove your value. Your value should be additive; try to build on what was established and see how you can add to it. Ultimately, it's vital to be a team player and understand the end goal is the player experience."

TAKING THE LEAD

When you get your chance to move up to an art lead role, Alexander says it's vital to be an available and clear communicator, while serving as a guiding hand. "Be involved in many conversations, and have your eyes on other departments as well," he says.

"The most important thing is trusting the talent working with you. Remember, you're in service of the artists, and you're there to make their lives easier. Guiding, challenging and listening to your team is huge, but ultimately, let your artists contribute their own magic to the formula and they'll feel more ownership and artistic satisfaction, which results in a better overall product." 🍷

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ImagineFX ART CHALLENGE

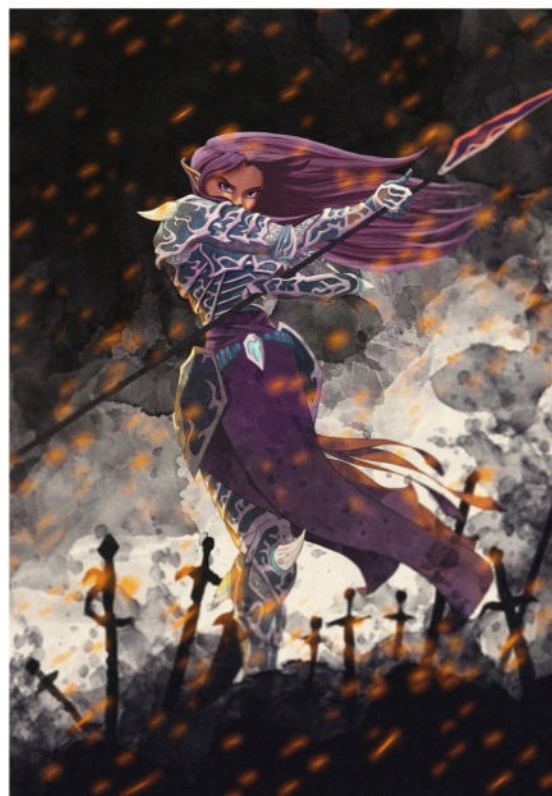
Fantasy army We pick our favourites from the troop of fearsome knights created by our talented community

The ImagineFX Art Challenge is back! For this issue, we asked our readers to assemble a battalion to ride into the fight for the Fantasy Knights theme.

Among the entries were a huge variety of styles with every aspect of a noble knight's arsenal covered. We particularly loved the menagerie of creative mounts you chose! As ever, our judging panel had a difficult choice in picking out their favourites, with plenty of healthy debate before we made our final decisions. A huge thank you to everyone who entered – it's awesome to see just how much talent there is among our readers.



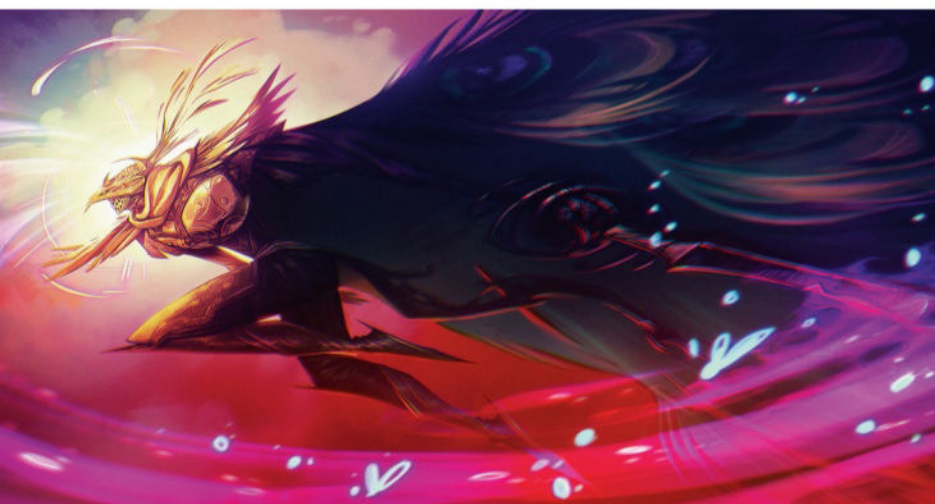
MEANDI Draws
www.artstation.com/meandidraws



Jacob Aybara www.instagram.com/jacobaybara



Josep Albert Pérez Pardo www.artstation.com/jperez



Alice Pisoni www.instagram.com/alispisoni

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



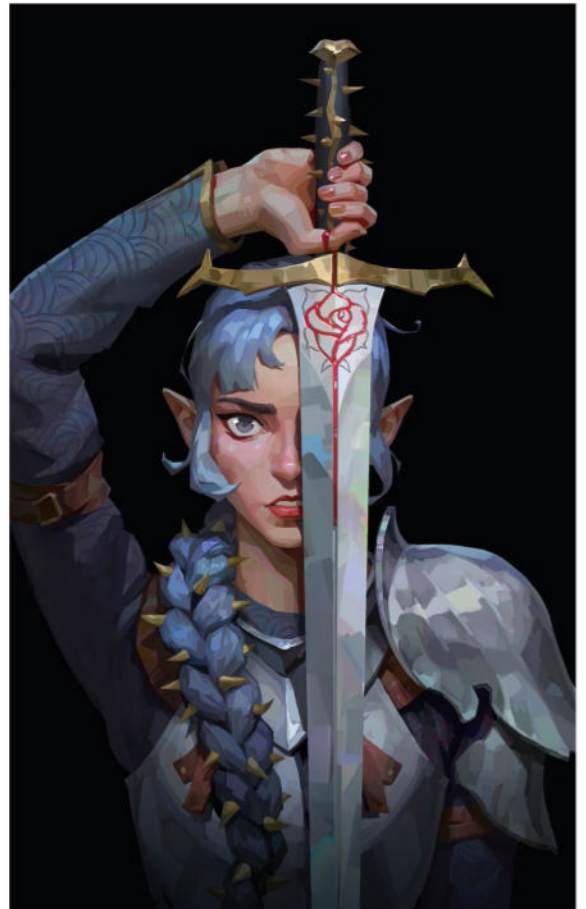
Manuel Zepic www.instagram.com/manuelzepic_art



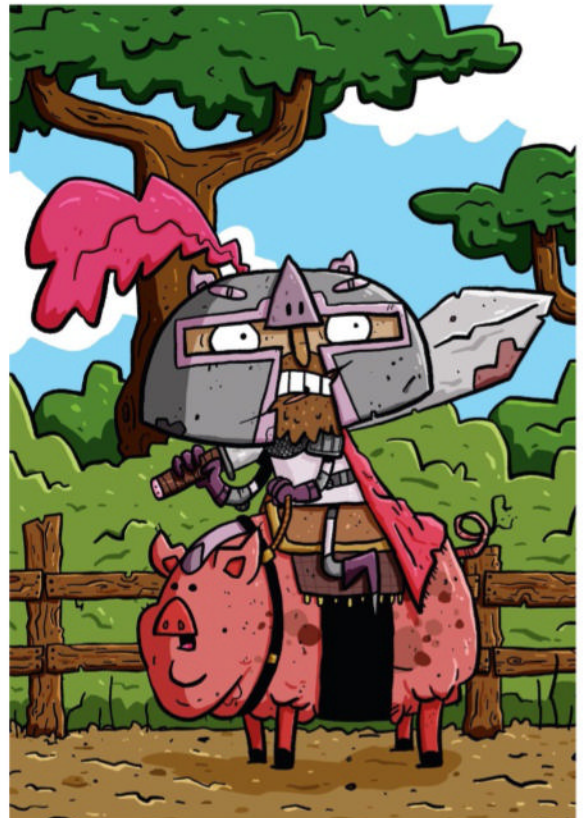
Christina Doose
www.instagram.com/creativechrisi



Rodrigo 'Digo' Salazar
www.instagram.com/digo_doodles



Assia Wynn www.artstation.com/assiamaywynn



Scott Triffle www.instagram.com/striffle



Arthur Baron-Clément <https://arthur.baron-clement.com/en>

ImagineNation Artist in Residence



I often watch Naoki Urasawa's *Monster* while I'm working. It gives me a ton of motivation and insight. I love it!



I have ADHD, so I bought this mushroom timer to help me focus on my tasks using the Pomodoro technique.

I started using a lightbox in high school and now it's become the core of my workflow. When it's time to work digitally, I collapse the lightbox and slide my Wacom tablet out from under my monitor stand.

I use traditional manga tools like G-pens, Maru pens and Nihonji pens with Pilot drawing ink.



Something I learned from manga artist Naoki Urasawa is to keep a mirror nearby for drawing emotions more accurately. It also helps me film content effectively.

Here's my microphone stand for when I'm streaming. When not in use, it also serves as a great headphone stand.

I keep a stack of manga for panel references, and just to read through for later.

Gigi Murakami

Shock and terror! Step into the world of the American horror manga artist, where her tastes are on full display



I've always been into drawing, horror, and storytelling - which means it might have been inevitable for me to get into horror manga, comics, movies and content creation.

Being an NYC native means I understand better than most how small apartments can get (although they've gotten even smaller over the years), and growing up poor means I fully understand the luxury of being able to build a creative space that one

can escape into. I remember being in college and flipping through copies of **ImagineFX** at the bookstore, skipping straight to this exact section and getting lost in the studio spaces of my fellow artists. When it came to building my own creative space, I was ready.

Photography by Shihui Murakami

JOYFUL SPARKS

My husband Shinji and I moved into our apartment during the pandemic in early 2022. Once I knew we were going to be moving, I gathered my plan of Pinterest boards and Instagram inspiration and got to work. During ➔

ImagineNation Artist in Residence



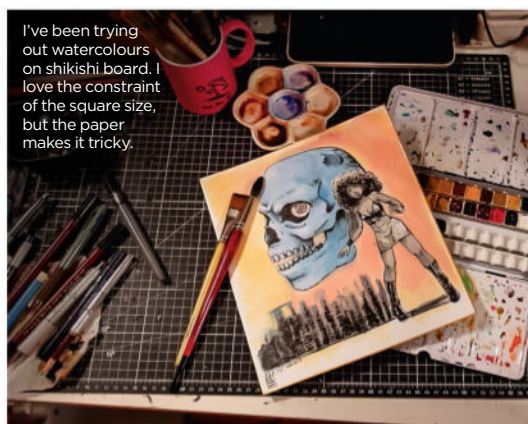
In addition to loving neon lights, I wanted a central motivating phrase that I could look up to whenever I felt imposter syndrome creeping.

➡ the times when I'd be unloading boxes on my own, I'd find myself alone in our new apartment testing paint strips, and using a proper-sized ladder (for the first time ever) to stretch all 5ft 3in of me to paint corners, edges and trims as neatly as I could, which in hindsight wasn't very neat at all.

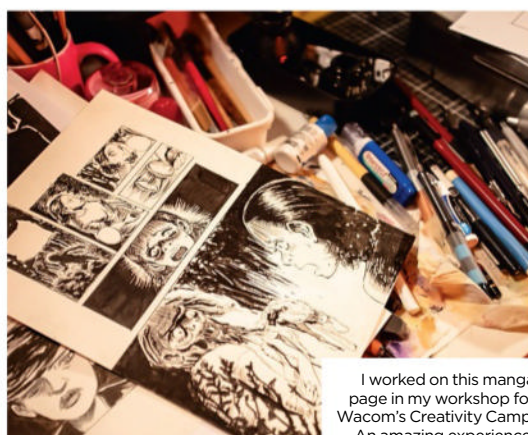
My space is made up of a ton of things that spark joy for me. One thing

“ In my home studio, you'll find a perfect blend of my tastes ”

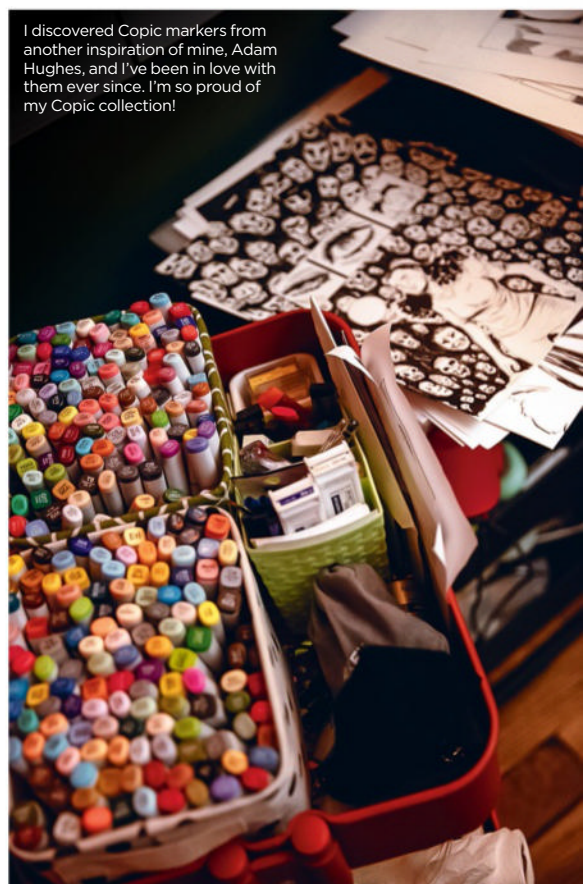
that I started doing in this space in particular was adding, and framing, posters of old movies and old advertisement art that I liked. This wasn't something I did in my old workspaces, not that I had much space to do any sort of meaningful decorating in them. In my home studio now, you'll find a perfect blend of my tastes, from classic horror, Japanese anime and manga, movie posters and cult classics, and art and reference ➡



I've been trying out watercolours on shikishi board. I love the constraint of the square size, but the paper makes it tricky.



I worked on this manga page in my workshop for Wacom's Creativity Camp. An amazing experience!



I discovered Copic markers from another inspiration of mine, Adam Hughes, and I've been in love with them ever since. I'm so proud of my Copic collection!



In addition to creating manga and content, I design and sell shirts in my online store, including this one! The grind goes on.



In times of trouble, having a good, fluffy dog nearby can turn things around.

“Compared to my experiences as a kid, I’m grateful to be able to do this job and have such a personal space to create”

→ books, all the way down to my small collection of figures and my online shop product hub.

ARTISTIC PROCESS

This space is where I spend the majority of my time, creating anything from manga and illustrations to content. On a typical day, I’m up at 8-9am, off to the gym, then aiming to start work at 10-11am at the latest. I try to finish up at a “reasonable time” like 8pm, but on the days when it’s crunch time for client work, I can be working as late as 4am. I hate working so late, but since I was a kid I’ve always been more creative late at night.

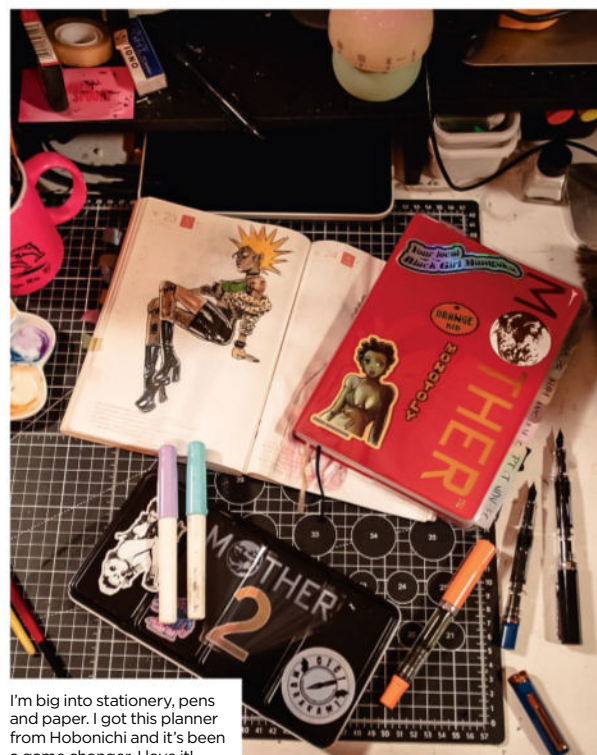
For my work, it’s split at about 70 per cent traditional and 30 per cent digital. For illustrations, I use a lightbox

to sketch onto my illustration paper, scan, clean up, and then apply colours digitally from there. My process for making manga is a little more complicated, but it involves scanning and printing out my storyboards to trace over with my lightbox, ink and then clean up, tone and letter digitally.

The work can be challenging, but it’s fun. Compared to my experiences as a kid, I’m really grateful to be able to do this job and to have such a personal space to create in.

Gigi Murakami is a horror manga artist and illustrator based in Brooklyn, NY.

Fuelled by film, her work blends Japanese manga art and vintage western comic, poster and pulp aesthetics. To see more of Gigi’s work and follow her journey, pay a visit to www.gigimurakami.art.



I’m big into stationery, pens and paper. I got this planner from Hobonichi and it’s been a game changer. I love it!



I have a wide variety of books, from artbooks to spirituality. As a largely independent artist, keeping my skills sharp is vital.



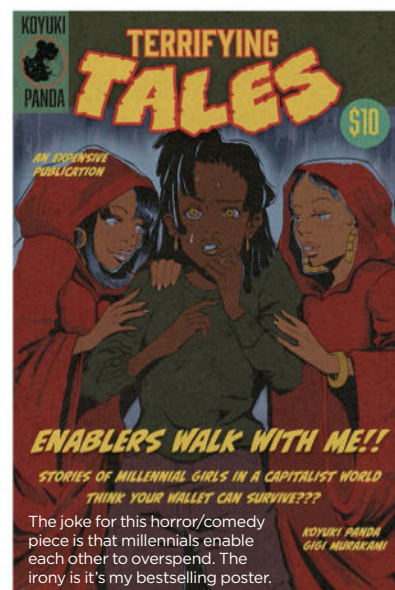
I got this poster from Rockin'Jelly Bean's Erotika store in Japan. RJB is another favourite artist of mine. His work is absolutely incredible!



One of my favourite pieces! A lot of my poster work blends horror and comedy with everyday situations.



A page from my supernatural horror manga, RESENTER.



The joke for this horror/comedy piece is that millennials enable each other to overspend. The irony is it's my bestselling poster.

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TROYAN HORSE WAS A UNICORN THE MUST-SEE EVENT OF THE YEAR IS BACK!

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IMAGINEFX

Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



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Dressing it up

I've spent a good few years as a working artist now and always enjoy thinking up outlandish costumes for the characters I draw. Last month you had a feature on how to make a career out of this, which is something that I'd never considered previously. Now, with my eyes opened to the possibility, I'm rather embracing the prospect, so thank you for the idea and the really informative article, which has given me a real boost and will keep pushing me in the right direction.

Genevieve, via email

Rob replies Thanks for getting in touch Genevieve. It's great to hear you've been able to seek out new opportunities based on the magazine. I think many of us actually do things daily that could be turned into exciting new possibilities, which is why we try to explore some of these options. This issue we've taken a look at climbing the ladder in the video games industry. Be sure to keep your eyes peeled in future issues for plenty more career advice in other sectors too. All the best!

In issue 243 we showed you how to sew up a career in costume design.



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE? Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 243 at ifxm.ag/single-ifx.



Our cover and accompanying workshop last issue was an absolute gem of a colourful fantasy artwork.

Perfect colours

Hi Rob. The cover of your last issue was amazing! I'm a massive fan of more traditional fantasy art and was really pleased to see this. That colour palette is stunning and really spoke to me. Even better you had the tutorial showing how to create art in a similar style, which I'll be putting into practice soon. Keep it up!

Gregor, via email

Rob replies Hi Gregor, it's great to hear from you. I think Alex Alexandrov did a brilliant job with that cover art and his workshop in our last issue. We love hearing that we've helped and inspired you in your own artistic pursuits; that's what the magazine is all about after all.

Mixed-media magic

Hello ImagineFX. I read your last issue and enjoyed it all, but the tutorial about mixing 3D with a paintover to make an environment was brilliant. I'm not particularly good at perspective or initial layouts, but after reading that I definitely feel that I can do better. It looks like I'm going to have a busy weekend trying out Blender and maybe other new tools!

Xander, via email

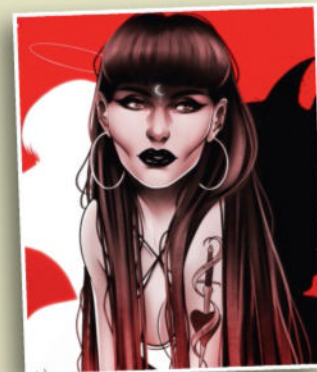
Rob replies I hope you have a great time trying out something new Xander! Being exposed to tips, tricks and tools can really invigorate your artistic eye, so I'm glad to hear you've spotted something that can help. There's plenty more where that came from too! Subscribers to the magazine now get access to digital editions of our back catalogue for free, so anybody looking to boost their skills or get some of that all-important inspiration can do so, with years' worth of training. It's a really valuable resource that we're very pleased to share. Turn to page 8 if you want to find out more about becoming a subscriber!

FRESH
PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention



Cat
[@catbudinger](https://twitter.com/catbudinger)



miss_debbi
[@miss_debbi](https://twitter.com/miss_debbi)

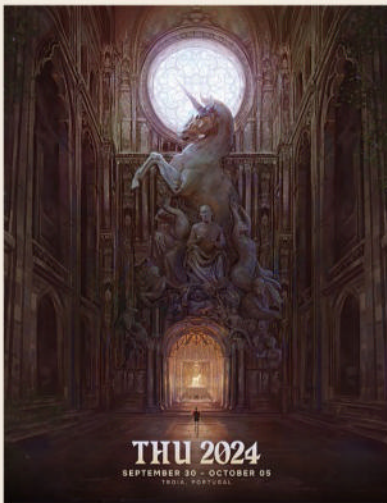


Brad Scott
[@bradscottart](https://twitter.com/bradscottart)

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

CREATIVE STRENGTH IN COMMUNITY

Co-founder and creative force **André Luís** talks about the ethos and evolution of **Trojan Horse Was A Unicorn**



ONE FOR THE CALENDAR

This year's THU main event takes place in Tróia, Portugal, from 30 September to 5 October.

Where there's a will there's a way. It's an old adage and one that holds enduring resonance. A testament to willpower and creative fearlessness is



André Luís, co-founder of the global digital creative community Trojan Horse Was A Unicorn, a playful name chosen after trying hundreds of different options and often shortened to THU.

The organisation's mission is to provide access to networking and mentoring opportunities that can showcase artists' work right across the digital space. Being part of THU is to participate in a variety of communities that can support and nurture careers in the creative industry. Its network includes developers, musicians, designers, marketers, composers, illustrators and 3D artists.

During our conversation, André's commitment to what THU can



become shines through. Identifying a key driver for the mission, he explains that "I care about diversity and inclusion." Indeed, across the past decade, THU's efforts to connect with industry has yielded the involvement of companies including Netflix, Weta FX, Lightheart Entertainment, Mikros Animation, Supercell, Triggerfish and Polygon Pictures, among others.

Central to THU's annual schedule is a live event, alongside a developing online point of connectivity. This year,

TOGETHERNESS

The spirit of community animates all things across THU.

“We're the only organisation now that connects all of the industries and all the ages”

for example, its Talent League has been working as an accelerator for ideas and burgeoning artists. Looking ahead to 2025, André anticipates its live event being hosted in Japan.

Of THU's profile, he says: "We're the only organisation now that connects all of the industries, all the areas, all the ages. We're trying to help all these silos to actually connect. We know that if we really want to be serious about our mission, we need to try to work with all of them."

SPURRED BY EXPERIENCE

Out of great challenges, great opportunities can arise, and 2024 is proving a major moment for THU in the relationships it's nurturing, and in

Trojan Horse Was A Unicorn



LESSONS TO LEARN

A range of masterclasses in new and traditional arts are vital to the program.



LINKING UP

Making connections and new friendships energises the event.



its ever-expanding recognition across the creative industries.

André recalls his own difficult beginning, looking to find a path into the creative industries in Portugal and perhaps beyond. He explains that when he was starting out, he didn't know anyone internationally, and hence his own direct experience as an educated creative struggling to make

his way prompted and inspired him to begin developing what has become THU. Of supporting emerging artists, André is emphatic: "I want them to have what I didn't as a young artist."

The foundations of THU were first laid more than a decade ago. "I've spent the last 10 or 11 years studying the creative industries, and now we're an impact project focusing on creative

ELECTRIC ENERGY

Collective energy and playfulness define all of THU's gatherings.

economies around the world," André says. "When we started this 11 years ago, I was the co-founder of the first computer graphics school in Portugal, which opened in 2008."

By 2012, he came to recognise just how challenging it was for graduates of the school to pursue work and networking opportunities. From this, THU was sparked. It has taken ➡

MASTERS OF THE ARTS

Aspiring artists share work and ambitions in discussion with expert practitioners.



➡ time for the work and profile to cohere, but it has been worthwhile. “If you go online, you’ll see that THU has a lot of projects,” André adds. “All of the projects are perceived as events. All the projects have a specific mission in place; an impact mission in place.”

With its first decade marked, André discusses the immediate future for THU. “We’re now going to the next step; our impact mission is to develop creative economies,” he says. “We’re working to ensure we can understand what these creative economies are.” Beyond cultivating ways for creatives to connect and share their work, André also has an ambition for THU to find a space to address and provide

a venue for considering how to change behaviours in the creative industries.

CREATIVE PLATFORM

There’s a holistic approach, then, that’s key to its work in challenging a silo mindset about creative industries, and André notes: “What we’re trying to provide is a platform for creatives to find a path.” Indeed, he’s keen to continue connecting THU’s creative network to opportunities beyond the most familiar screen media and explains: “Three or four years ago, I decided to connect our industry with lifestyle companies like Mastercard.”

While it continues to forge new connections, what remains central to



A PLACE FOR ALL

The spirit of diversity and inclusion fuel THU’s events.

THU’s work and profile is its live event, which has been a constant. From 30 September until 5 October this year, the live event will take place in Tróia, Portugal. This is the 10th year that the event has run, and as of this edition THU is entering an exciting new phase in its mission to support creativity, and to do so in an intensely immersive way.

“The main event is the starting point,” André explains. “It’s like one place in the world where, every two years, the best 1,000 minds will sit down to talk about innovation and creativity. It’s not to sell anything, ➡

SUPPORTIVE SPACE

THU nurtures and supports creatives at different points in their careers.



“What we’re trying to provide is a platform for creatives to find a path”

Trojan Horse Was A Unicorn



BEST AND BRIGHTEST

Passion and focus are required by anyone looking to take part in the various THU initiatives.

MENTORING WITH THE KNIGHTS

André Luís discusses the spirit of THU's guidance programs

A facet of the THU live event is the involvement of the Knights. These are industry-successful award winners who are in one place for six days with THU attendees. André notes: "The Knights have a mission to help. They know that our mission is not about ego."

High-profile Knights have included Brenda Chapman, Iain McCaig and Kevin Baillie. "They are called Knights because we invite them to battle," André explains. "We always tell them that we're here to change mentalities. Knights are trusted by people. The way we operate is with a system that allows you to change mentalities and helps you make connections."



PLENTY TO SEE

A wide range of media is showcased at THU events.

NURTURING CAREER AMBITIONS

Why THU's Career Camp events are so important for artists

"The story about Career Camp is that we're picky in selecting the creatives [that take part]," André explains of the initiative. "We're a creative company. The selection process has 7,000 people applying. Selection isn't necessarily because you have a good portfolio, but you do need to have passion. We want you to respect your investment. The best jobs you have and the best deals that you make are always born from relationships. If you're coming to THU, then you'll already know something about what we are."

JOIN THE TRIBE

At THU, personal focus and a willingness to be part of an international creative tribe are key.



MAKE IT YOU

Personal work and unique sensibilities are nurtured by THU and its events.

➡ not to show projects. It's for people who want to go to the next level. We're like a bootcamp. We're part of your creative networking system, even for senior artists. THU can be a place for seniors [40-50 years old] to reboot and we have a lot of them."

Of the live event, André stresses: "It's not for young kids. If you want to

“Conversations rather than Q&As means that attendees can really talk about stuff”

learn the ABCs, go to another place. THU is tough because it's a place we tell the truth about portfolios, career preparedness and perhaps even attitude, so it's not for everyone. We only want people at THU who actually want to be better and help others."

There's a high value placed on time spent in discussion with industry mentors and practitioners. "2024 is our 10th anniversary," André adds. "We'll have masterclasses where you have time to talk, so there will be talks that last 25 minutes with 35 minutes of conversation after. Conversations rather than Q&As or panels means attendees can really talk about stuff."

CENTRE STAGE

THU offers a timeless reminder of the need for art in our lives.



Trojan Horse Was A Unicorn



TOP TEACHERS

Global voices share their creative potential in live masterclasses and talks.

To further make the point, André observes how the live event contrasts with other live events and expos. He adds: "FMX is a wonderful event. There's one huge problem: there are 5,000 people for 700 seats. At Annecy, there are 16,000 people for 800 seats."

WELL CONNECTED

Of THU's expanding networks, André says: "We have a strong relationship with everyone and we never stop. We've always been bringing lots of industries to the live event and now that includes the health industry with its work in digital medicine. THU can help with building the bridge between scientists and artists."

"I want people to start bringing a new perception about why THU is different. From September 2024, we're going to launch a new platform that will enable us to become the most important platform for business creatives. That's big: the creatives need to understand the business. Even if you don't want to have a business, you have to understand the business."

Of the essential function of THU, André candidly observes: "We finally know what we are. We have all the tools to help. Entrepreneurship, diversity and inclusion, storytelling,



young people; these are the themes of THU. People tell you the truth and they care. We can bend the light to a lot of people lost in their careers."

As we talk, André pauses to express profound concern about the creative industry's challenge in retaining talent and ensuring its values are recognised. He wants THU to play its part in showcasing the industry's impact on society. "My biggest fear is 'How do I make sure that people can actually find answers about how to continue in

LIVE LEARNING

Workshops are essential events at THU gatherings.



the industry and not quit?' Creative industries allow you to have more culture, they're not a niche."

Finally, André offers an evocative closing comment that captures a feeling creatives might well recognise from those moments they consider the ongoing challenge of shaping and making a career. He says: "Fear will block you. We want to make sure artists aren't alone. Giving them the foundations for where to go is the most important thing."

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Yong Nam Kim

Ancient history and cherished memories have inspired the Korean artist, who also shares some of his personal animation projects

Artist PROFILE

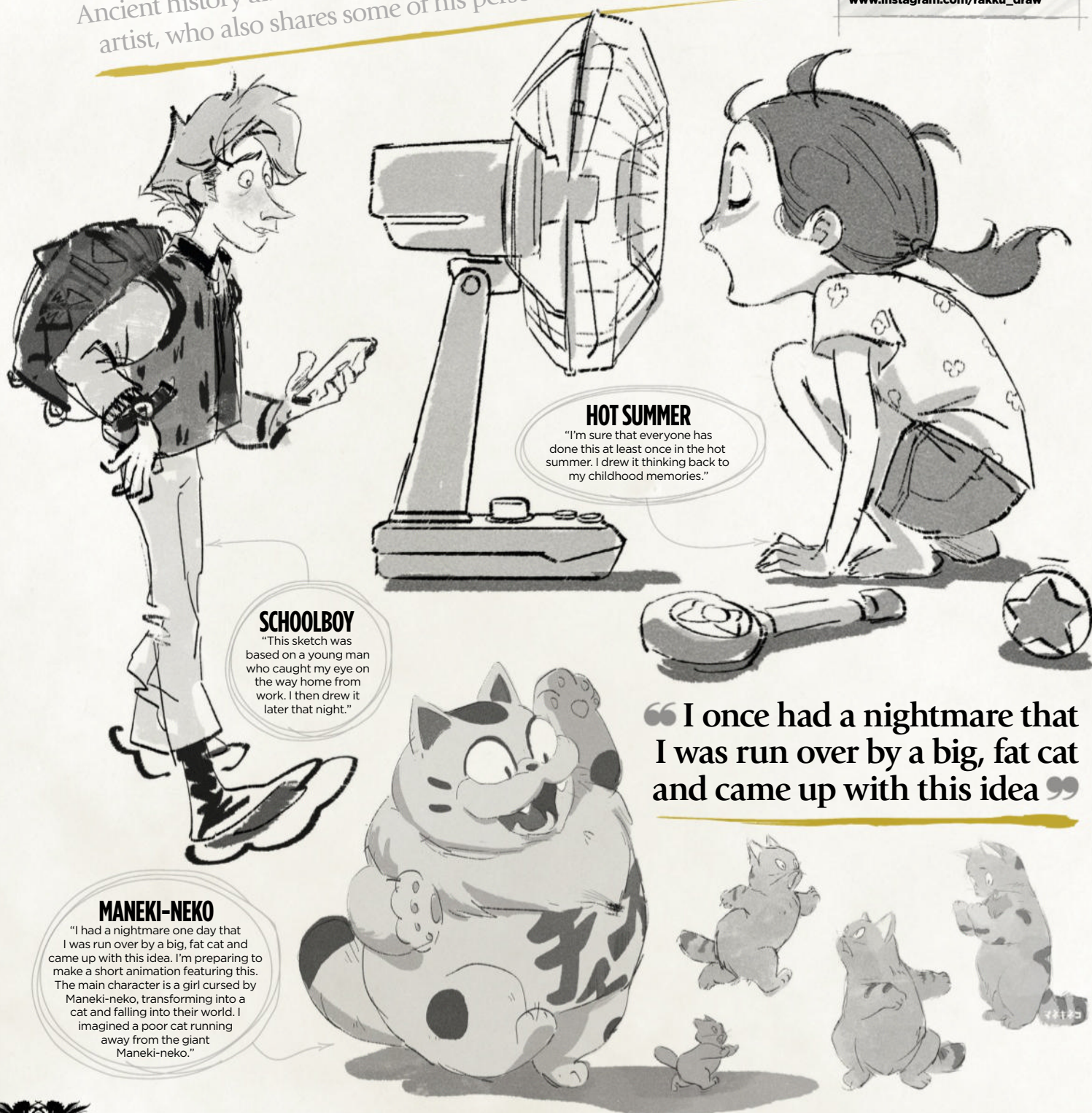
Yong Nam Kim

LOCATION: South Korea



Yong Nam Kim is a senior concept artist who dropped out of art college to make a living for his family and began his own path of self-study. He has now worked within the South Korean animation industry for 10 years and creates a variety of content. He's still trying to make his dreams come true and seeks to create stories with characters that will be loved by everyone.

www.instagram.com/rakku_draw



SCHOOLBOY

"This sketch was based on a young man who caught my eye on the way home from work. I then drew it later that night."

HOT SUMMER

"I'm sure that everyone has done this at least once in the hot summer. I drew it thinking back to my childhood memories."

MANEKI-NEKO

"I had a nightmare one day that I was run over by a big, fat cat and came up with this idea. I'm preparing to make a short animation featuring this. The main character is a girl cursed by Maneki-neko, transforming into a cat and falling into their world. I imagined a poor cat running away from the giant Maneki-neko."

"I once had a nightmare that I was run over by a big, fat cat and came up with this idea"

MASTER

"This guy was inspired by watching a Stephen Chow movie."



PRINCESS MONSTERA

"I love plants and like to draw girls, so I mixed my favourite things."

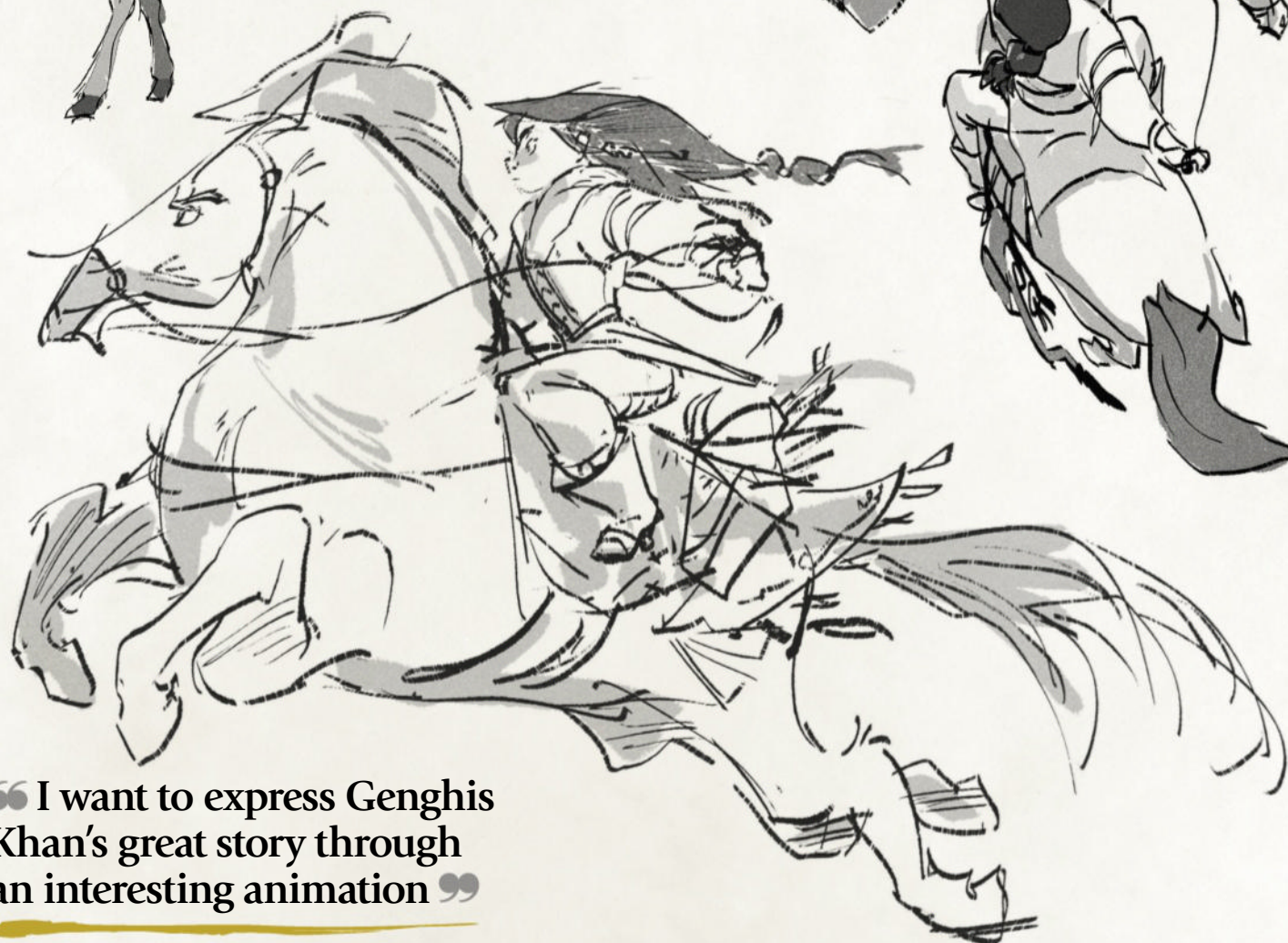


Sketchbook



KHAN

"This boy is Genghis Khan during his childhood. It's also the beginning of a grand personal project. I want to express Mongolian costumes, environment and Khan's great story in an interesting animation."



“I want to express Genghis Khan's great story through an interesting animation”



Sketchbook

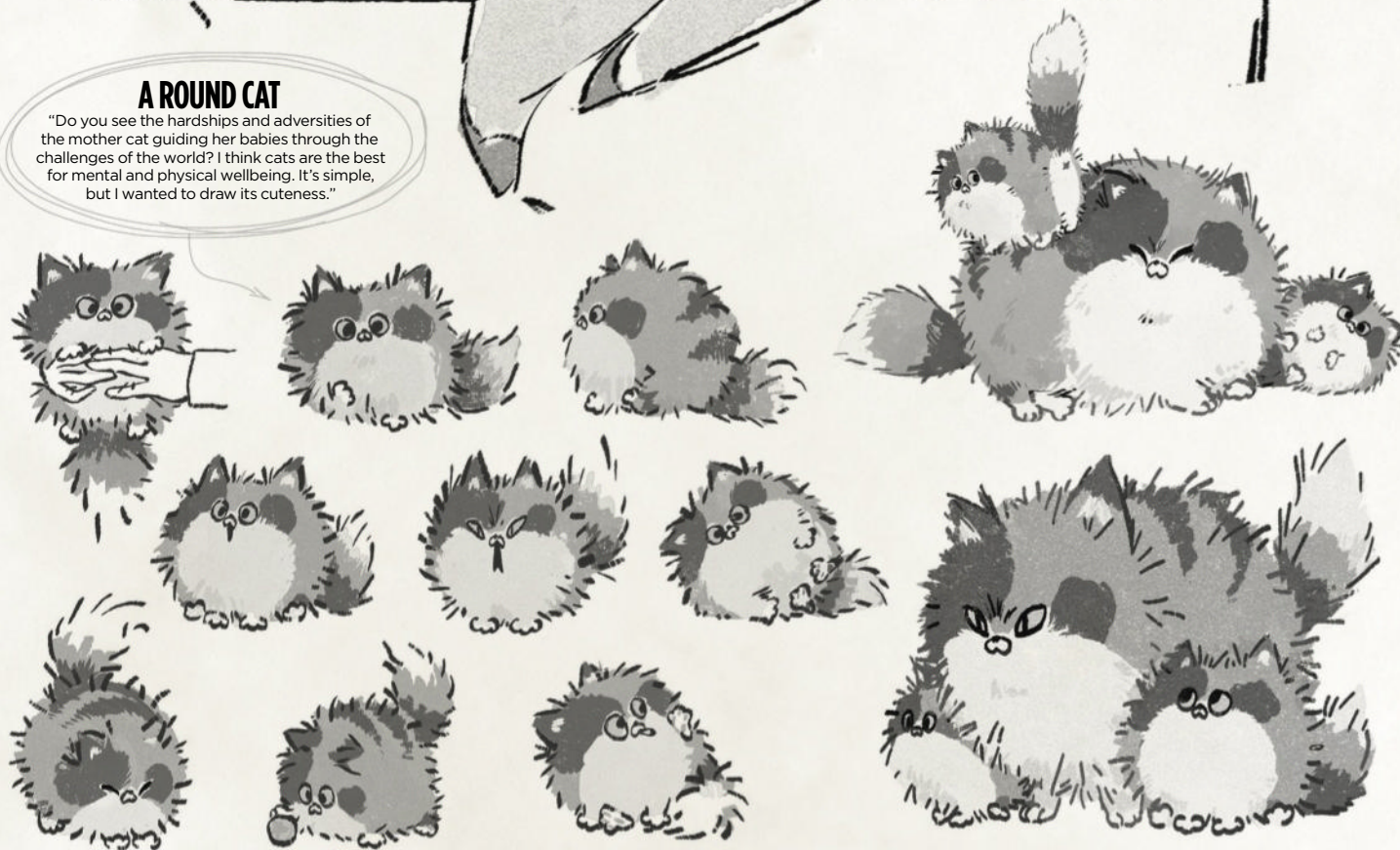
PRECIOUS MEMORIES

"Leaving work one day, I thought of my grandmother and sketched from my longing heart."



A ROUND CAT

"Do you see the hardships and adversities of the mother cat guiding her babies through the challenges of the world? I think cats are the best for mental and physical wellbeing. It's simple, but I wanted to draw its cuteness."





TRADITIONAL KOREAN HUNTING

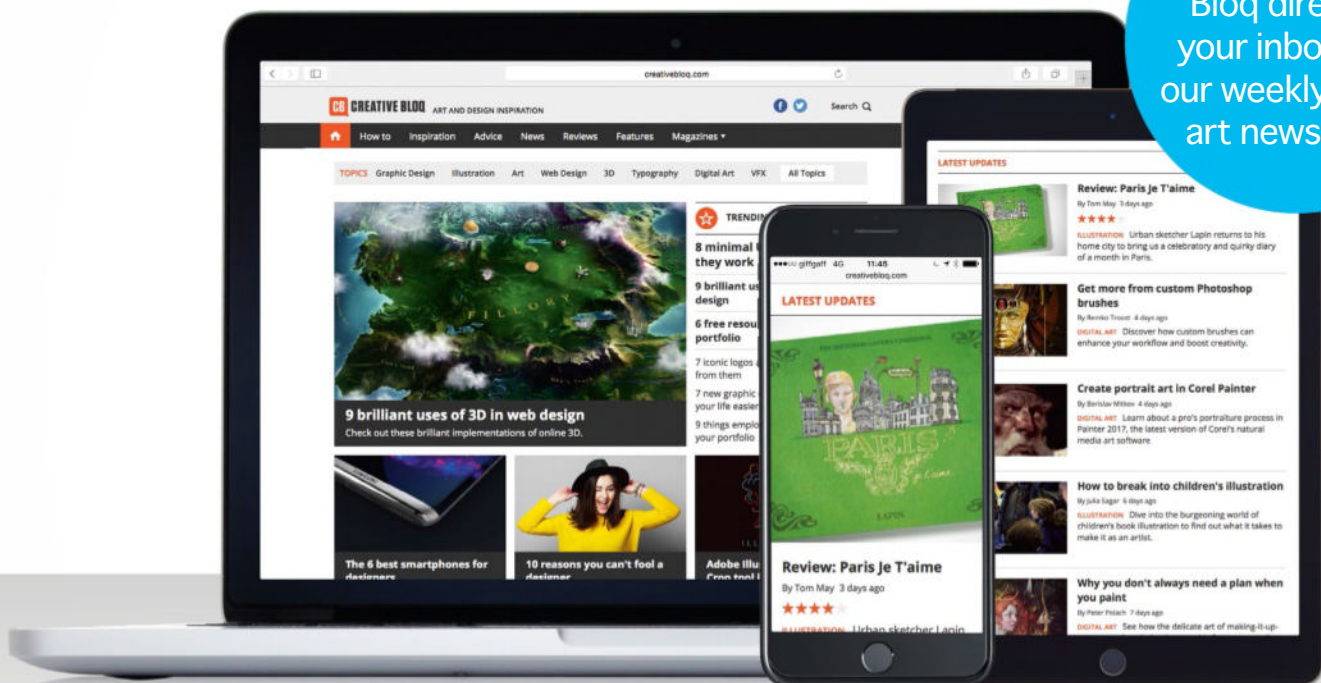
"In the old days, many people in Korea were killed by tigers. In these sketches, I thought it was fun to see the hunter being hunted while trying to provide for his beloved family."

“ I thought it was fun to see the hunter being hunted while trying to provide for his family ”

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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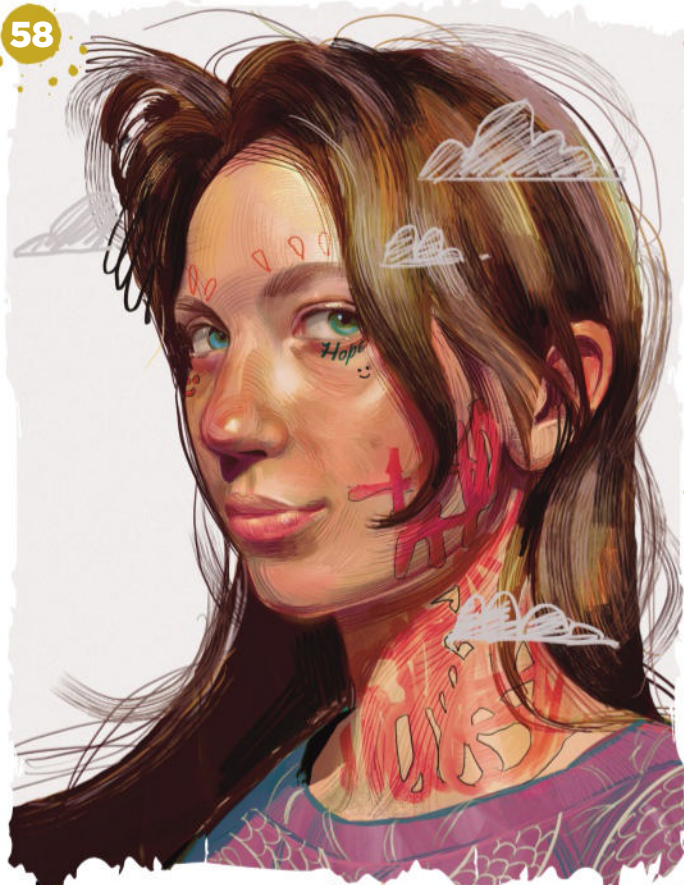
ImagineFX Workshops

**Workshop assets
are available...**

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Advice from the world's best artists



This issue:

58 Paint portraits with urban style

Alvaro Escobar guides you through the process he follows to make expressive artwork.

64 Create epic art for an RPG cover

In-depth insight from Antonio De Luca on his eye-catching Lord of the Rings commission.

68 Push colours while painting

Gradually build up your colour palette with pro advice from illustrator Richard Lay.

70 Build atmosphere in illustrations

Learn how to develop a mood from Eugenia Vi as she creates a thoughtful, meditative scene.

76 Use soft shapes

Why Simone Ferriero uses a looser perspective to get a distinctive style in his art.

78 12 tips to develop your characters

Brian Weisz shares his bite-size advice to boost your designs, including simple exercises.

84 Plan out your composition

Take the right steps to ensure you make a strong start with concept artist Jules Darriulat.

Procreate PAINT PORTRAITS WITH URBAN STYLE

Bring a touch of street chic to your artwork as **Alvaro Escobar** explains his process for creating expressive, stylised portraits

Artist PROFILE

Alvaro Escobar
LOCATION: US

Alvaro is a Salvadoran-American illustrator based in Washington, D.C. He works across a variety of disciplines including concept art, editorial illustration and portraiture.
<https://bit.ly/4fC0Fmb>



Welcome to my digital portrait workshop! In this tutorial, I'll guide you along the process I follow for creating

a detailed and expressive portrait using a variety of digital brushes and techniques. Whether you're a fresh-faced beginner just getting started or an experienced artist out to refine your skills, this workshop will offer valuable insight and practical steps to give your work a lift.

We'll start off with the basics of composition and proportions using a

hard airbrush for quick and gestural layout. This foundational step helps in establishing the overall structure of your portrait. From there, we'll refine the sketch with a precise brush, considering major shadow shapes and highlights to add depth and dimension.

Throughout the workflow, we'll also make use of tricks like canvas flipping and the Selection tool to maintain symmetry and focus on specific areas. By saving and loading selections, we can ensure an efficient process and precise detailing.

We'll explore layering techniques to build up shadows, highlights and midtones, gradually transitioning to colour adjustments for a warm, lifelike appearance. Texture plays a key role, so we'll employ various brushes to add intricate details and smooth finishes too.

Incorporating elements like hatching and graffiti enhances the portrait's character and style. Finally, we'll wrap things up with a layer of solid white fill in the Multiply blend mode and add noise for a cohesive, polished look.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PROCREATE

DEFAULT BRUSHES: HARD BRUSH AIRBRUSH

I like to use this brush to get a rough layout of the initial proportions.

CUSTOM BRUSHES: MAXU VISDEV BRUSH - RETRO MAXPACK

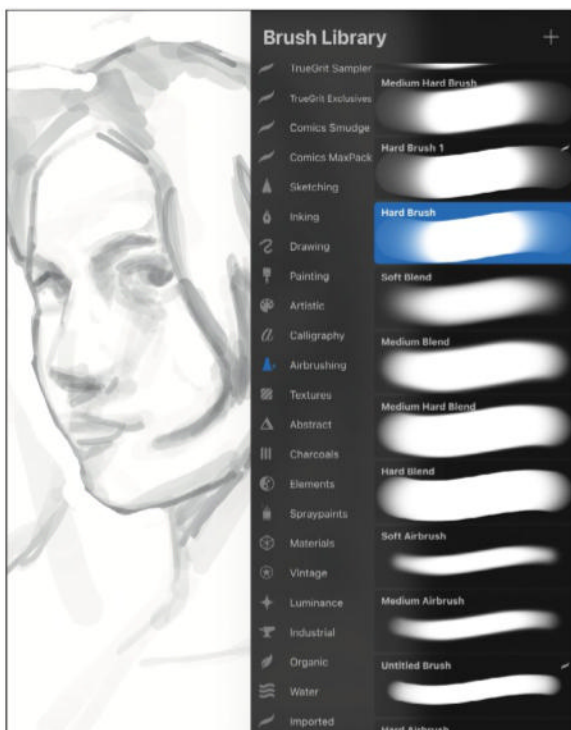
After the first sketch has been laid down, this brush is good to refine it.

MAXU OIL TUBE - OIL MAXPACK

I've found this brush great for creating texture within my base values.

MAXU FINE GRAIN SPRAY - RETRO PACK

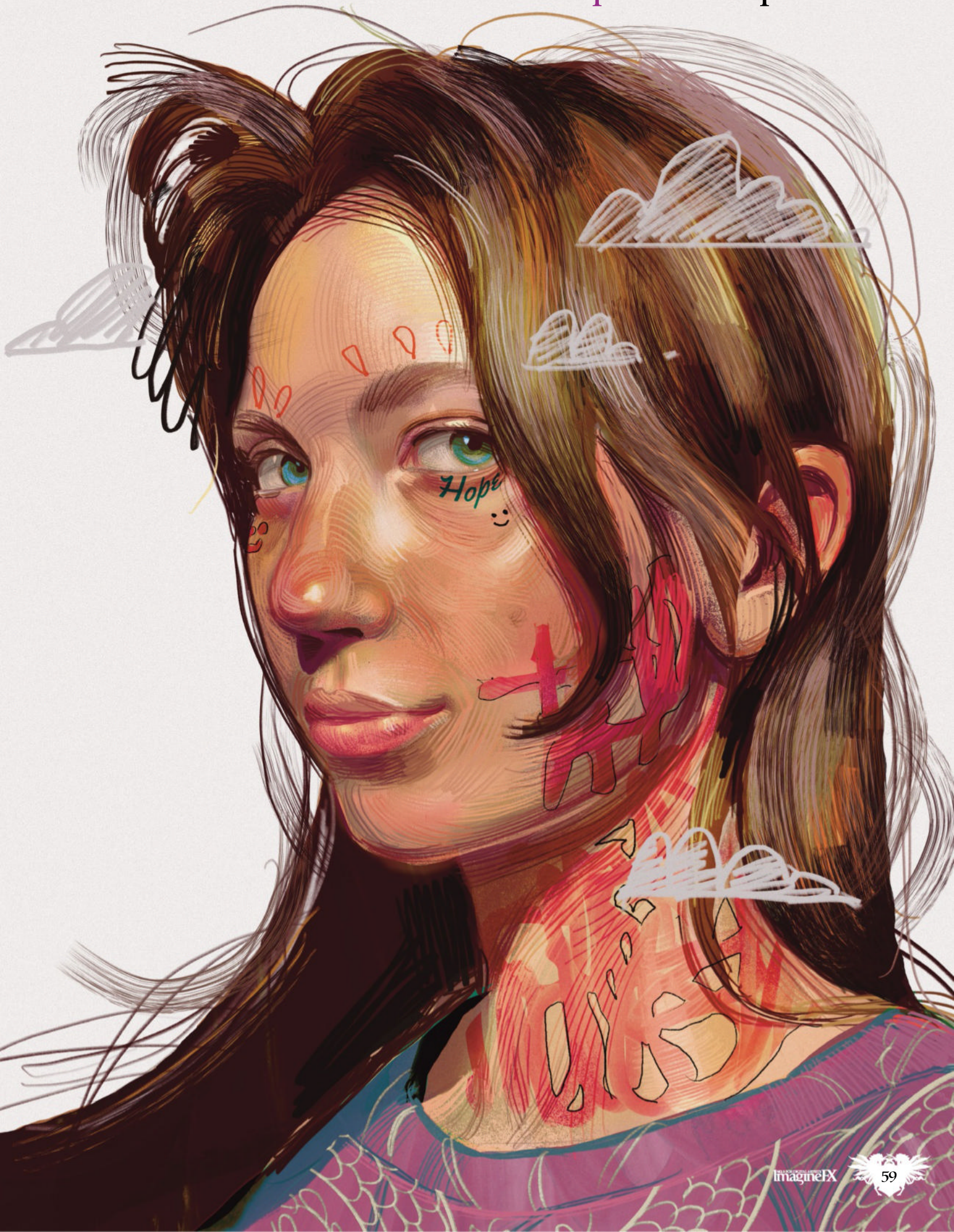
Another one for working on your values, this is also good for textures.

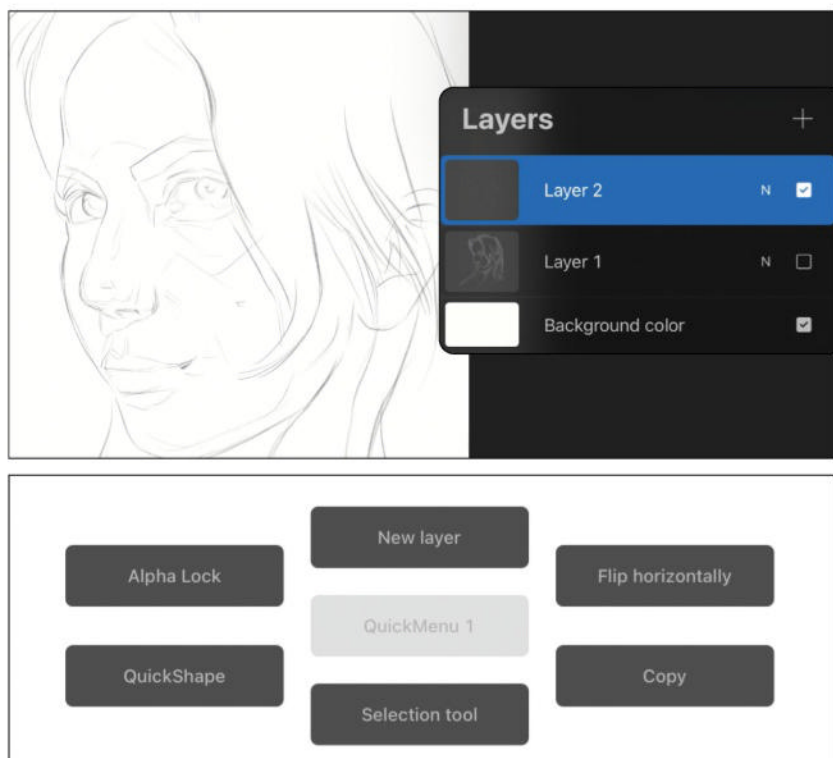


1 Create a basic idea
Start out with the Hard Brush Airbrush to quickly lay out the composition and proportions for your piece. This first step is meant to be quick and gestural, so don't get too hung up on the details here.



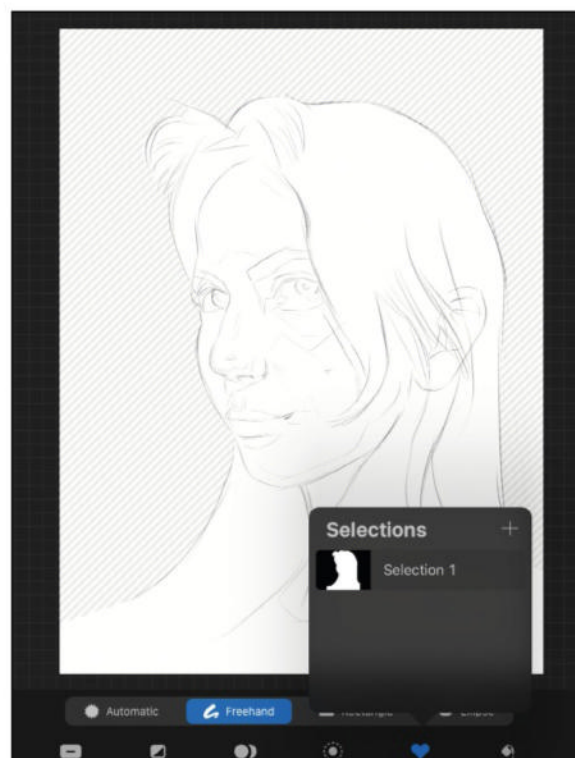
2 Refine the sketch
Next, lower the opacity of this base layer. With that done, create a new layer and use a precise brush – such as the MaxU Visdev brush I used – to go back in and refine the sketch a little further. In this step, make sure you take into account the major shadow shapes such as under the nose and chin, as well as lightly marking out the location of any highlights you want to add. ➡





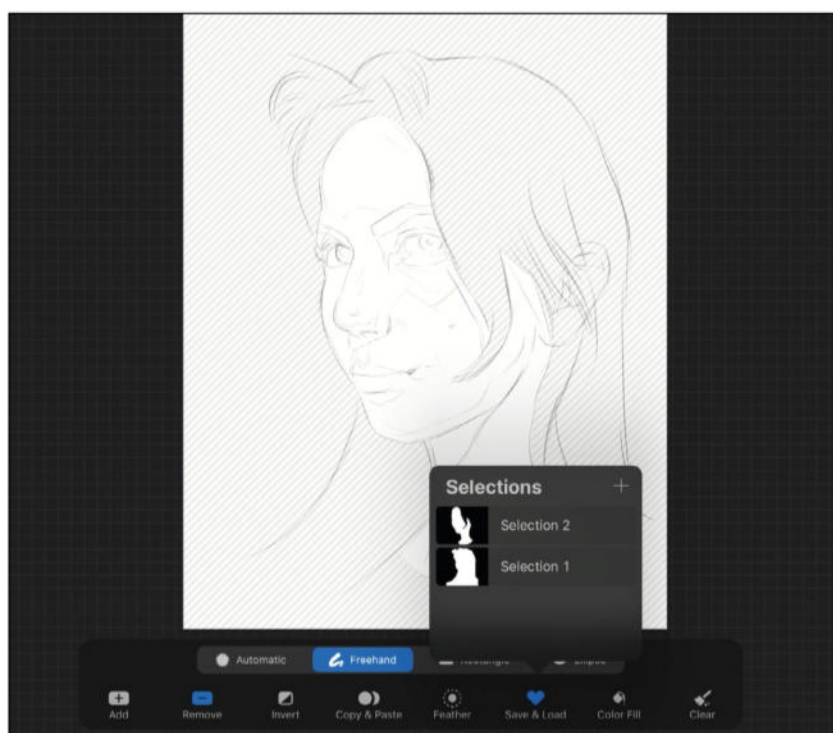
3 Flip your canvas

This is the point to make minute changes and tweak the overall look of the portrait. I'll use a shortcut in the QuickMenu to frequently flip the canvas over horizontally, which gives me a different perspective of the piece and makes any elements that look lopsided or askew stand out easier for me to fix up.



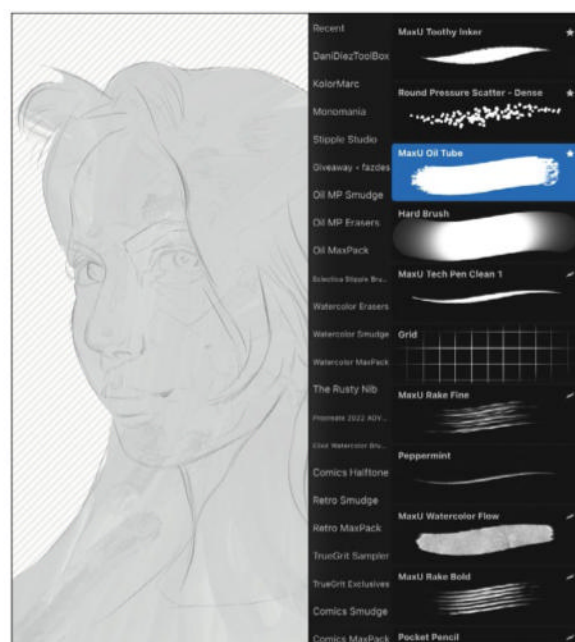
4 Cut out the portrait

Use the Selection tool to single out the portrait from the background. This essentially creates a stencil that we can use with large textured brushes without any danger of colouring outside the lines.



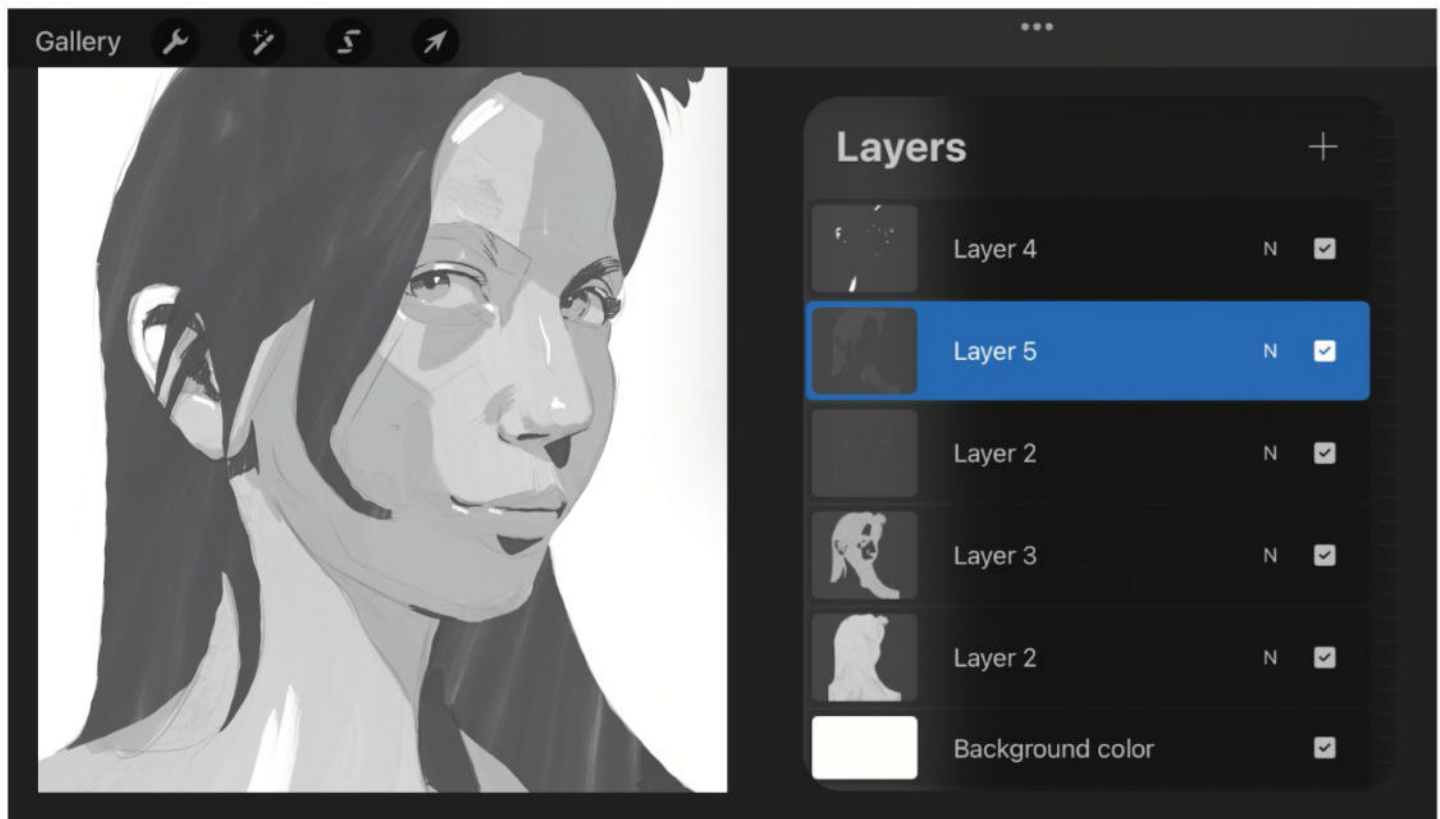
5 Create more selections

Once we've made the selection using the Freehand option, use the 'Save & Load' option to save your selection ready to return to whenever it's needed. From there, draw out and save more specific parts of your portrait, such as the character's face and hair, as their own loadable selections.



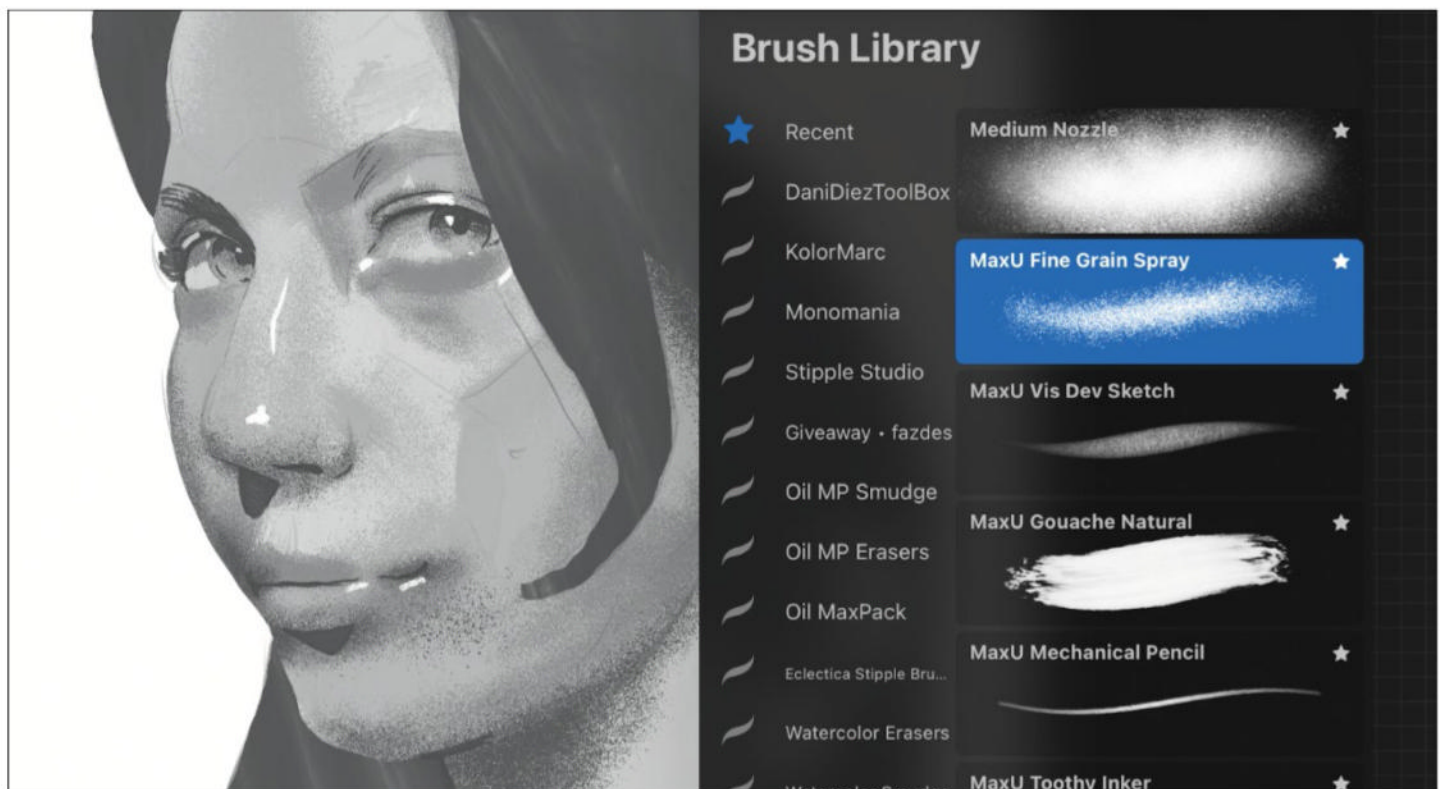
6 Greyscale for values

With the original saved selection, fill in a base value colour using a textured brush. As I used the MaxU Oil Tube, which mimics oil paint from the tube, this gave me an interesting foundation for texture that I could build from. Work in greyscale for these first steps of the rendering process, as it will help you focus on the values before beginning to think about colour.



7 Place the highlights and darkest areas

Paint in the shadow shapes on a separate layer, then on further layers paint the highlights, as well as the darkest values for the image. Creating each of these helps us set the value scale so that we can focus on the subtle value changes in between them.



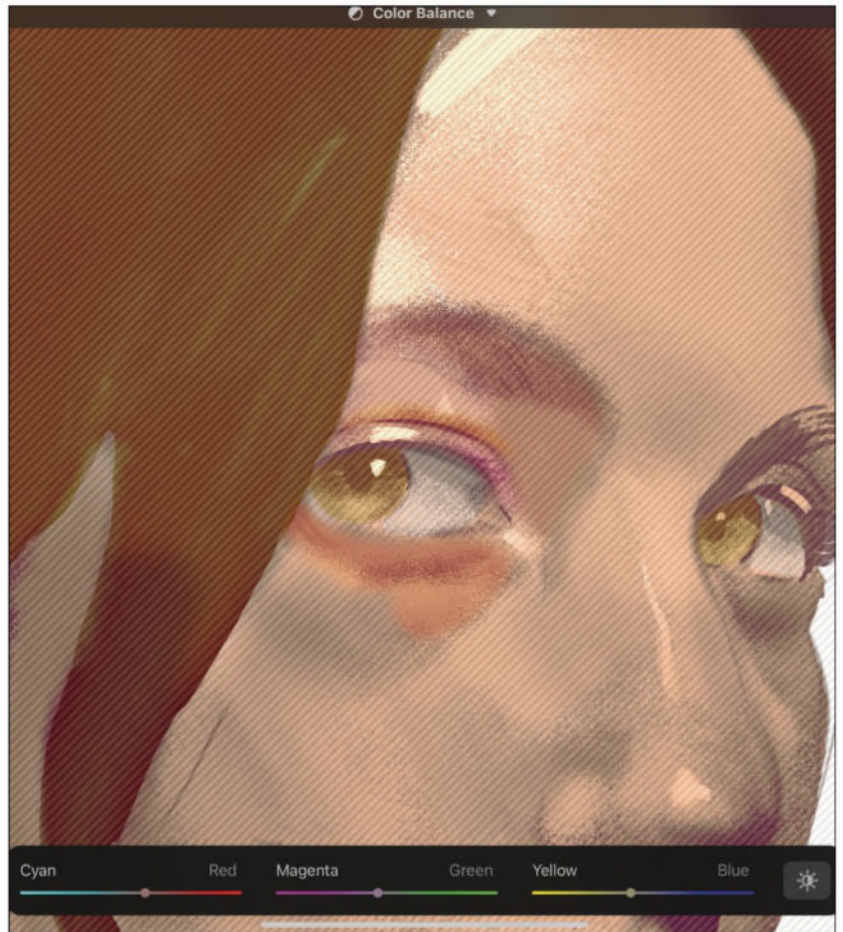
8 Develop the finer changes in your values

With another textured brush, such as the MaxU Fine Grain Spray brush, we'll now lay subtle value changes between the limit values that we've already set. After this, smooth out some of those textures with a finer, softer brush; in this case I'm using a spray paint brush. ➡



9 Choose the base colour

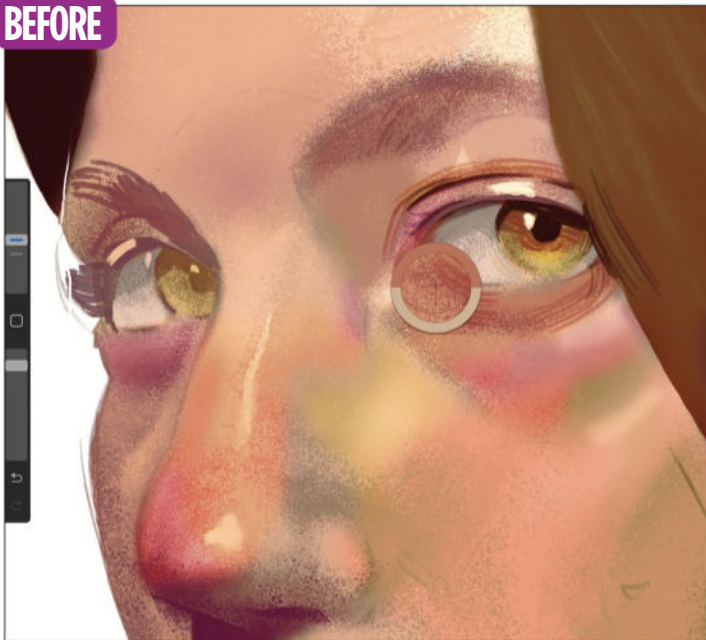
Once you're happy with the values in greyscale, you can then move on to bringing in the colour. First merge all of the layers together and then use the Midtone setting in the Color Balance options to set a base colour for the portrait. I'm going for a warm look, so I set the base layer to a subtle tan and yellow hue.



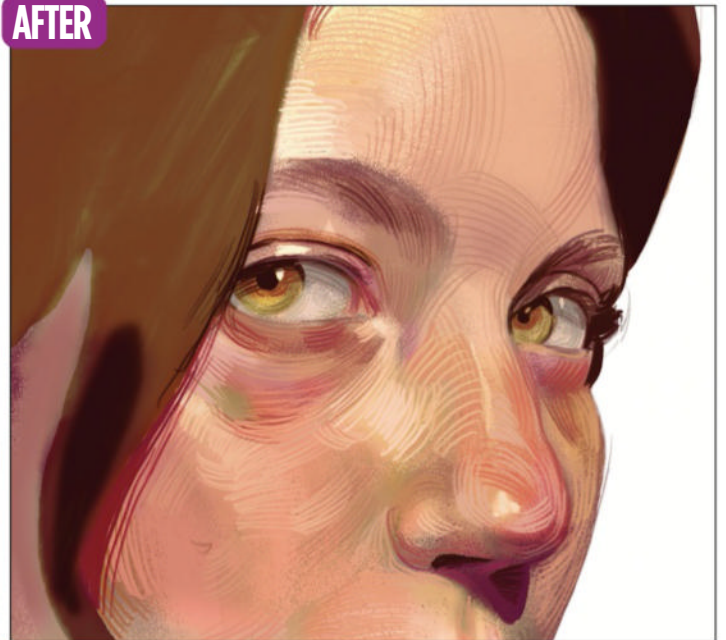
10 Adjust the colour balance

Using the Selection tool, pick out individual parts of the face and change their colours using the Color Balance sliders. These sliders enable you to edit the colours of the shadows, highlights and midtones within your artwork.

BEFORE

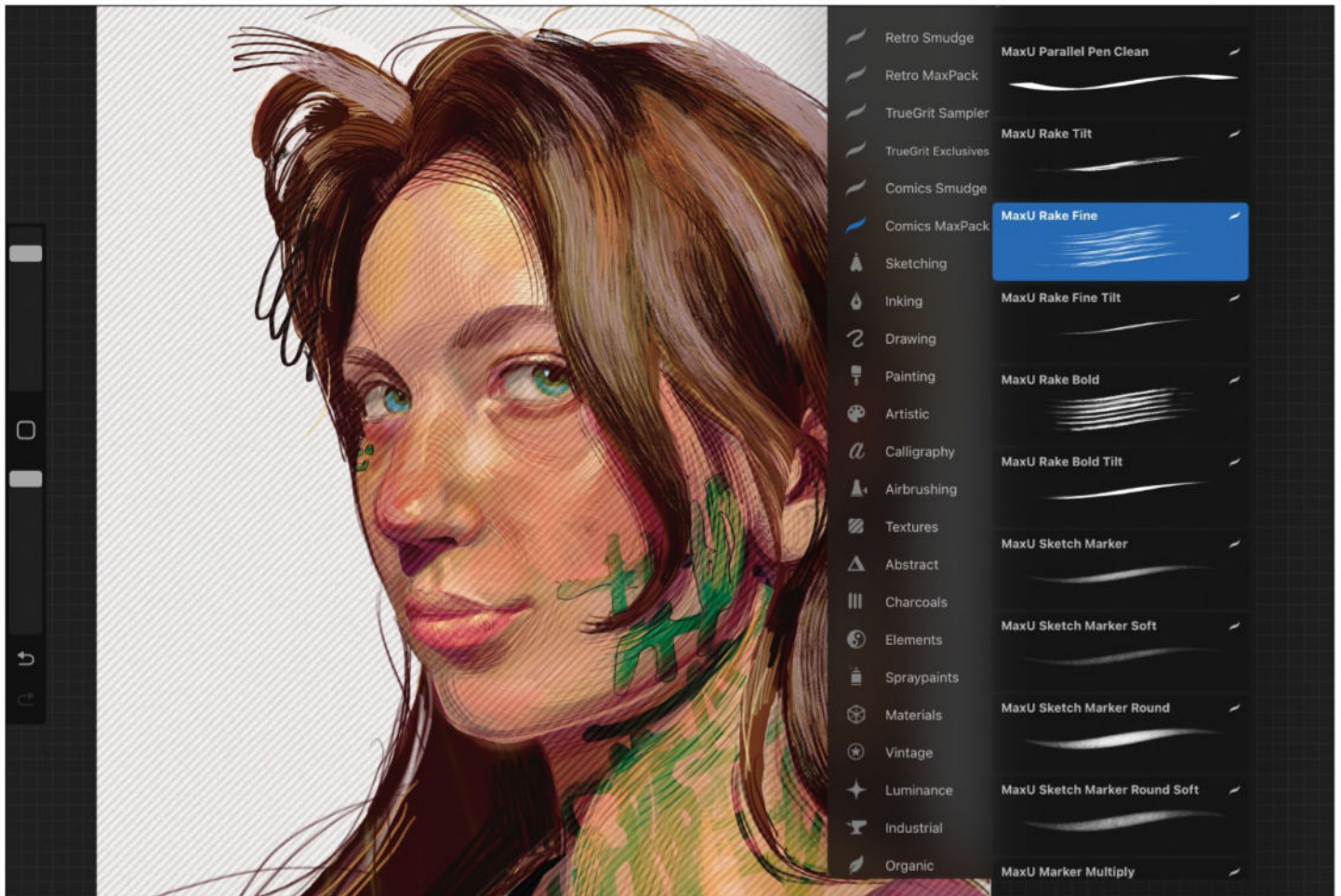


AFTER



11 Develop the facial texture with hatching

The next step is to add a hatching texture, which I did with the MaxU Mechanical Pencil brush. Use the Color Picker feature to select a colour for this. Knowledge of facial muscle and bone structure is helpful here, as using hatching that follows the facial contours looks natural.



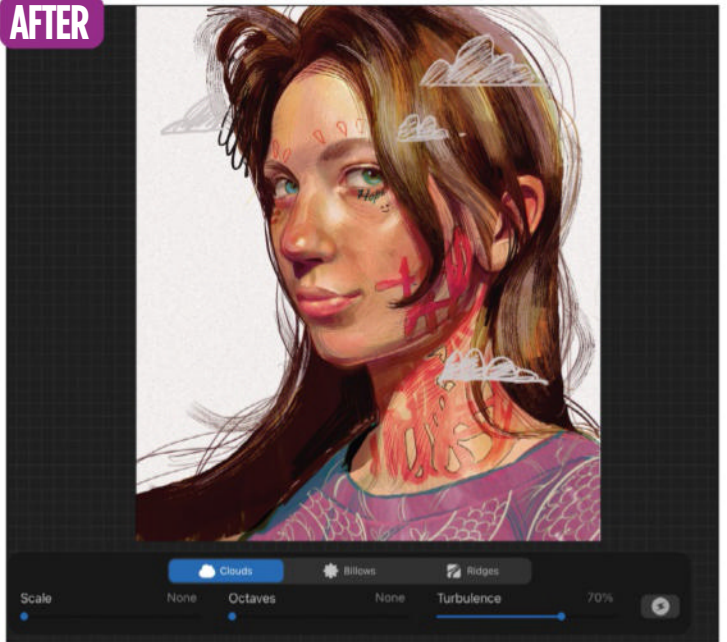
12 Create realistic texture for the hair

Using a fine rake brush, layer brush strokes to create a smoother finish on your character's hair. Your saved selection will help a lot for this step as it enables you to work faster without having to worry about accidentally drawing over the rest of the portrait.

BEFORE



AFTER



13 Add unique elements to make your work stand out

Typography and graffiti feature heavily in most of my work. Here I used the Vivid Light blending layer to add graffiti elements to the face. As a final touch, add a layer of solid white fill in the Multiply blend mode, then use the Noise feature to add noise to the layers below.

Photoshop CREATE EPIC ARTWORK FOR AN RPG COVER

Antonio De Luca shares the key elements that went into crafting an attention-grabbing Gandalf piece

Artist PROFILE

Antonio De Luca

LOCATION: Italy

Antonio is a professional artist who has worked with companies such as Warner Bros., Ubisoft, Free League Publishing, CMON and more. He is also the headmaster of Quadra Academy.

<https://bit.ly/3yrXw7W>



I was given an exciting challenge by Free League Publishing for this piece, created for The Lord of the Rings

Roleplaying game. Interpreting a beloved character like Gandalf is a massive artistic responsibility that pits you against a wealth of well-established imagery. It's complex to be both innovative and respectful.

Fortunately, Tolkien's work has a lyricism free from the excesses of other fantasy universes, which teams up well with the stylistic research I've been carrying out over time to bring aspects from traditional painting aesthetics into the digital world. On one hand, I wanted to suggest a fairy

tale atmosphere, suspended in time, drawing inspiration from the great Alan Lee. On the other, I wanted to breathe in drama and intensity.

The difficult part is to harmonise the ingredients: composition, light, colour, acting and body language, and of course brushstrokes upon brushstrokes. I love adding symbolic elements that nod to the theme of the journey, such as the mystical value of the portal or the barn owl messenger. Even the little lizard you can see in the bottom corner has a meaning linked to the immortality and rebirth of the character. And finally, what could be more heroic, and satisfying, than painting a rearing Shadowfax?



The Lord of The Rings™ Roleplaying / Core Rules / © Free League / Sophisticated Games / Middle-earth Enterprises All rights reserved

How I create...

AN EVOCATIVE FANTASY IMAGE



1 Strong thumbnails

One of the key aspects of a cover is visual impact. Offering the essential elements of the image from the start encourages readability and grabs attention. That's why I often use effective silhouettes for my thumbnails, simple but capable of showing the image's strength.



2 Colour sketch

Colour is an essential aspect of image conception, which is why I insert colour keys in my thumbnails. As everything is still very rough in this phase, the lack of detail is precisely what helps me capture atmosphere, allowing me to focus on the lighting design and to hope for some happy accidents while I work.



3 Placing the details

The hardest part of finishing is often choosing and distributing details. I always try to avoid putting details everywhere; I like to place them where they're needed, leaving the rest to the imagination. Sometimes I suggest detail without representing it, increasing the number of marks, brushstrokes and textures on the focus point.

DEVELOPING DETAIL



Visual vectors

Part of the structure of an image is identifying good visual vectors. The blue here shows the direction of the journey, which slants upwards to show the character's strength. It's further enhanced by the black line that dramatises, and by the purple that shows torsion. In red, the upward perspective gives a feeling of grandeur, while in the green we have an echo that balances the red and centralises the image. Finally, the yellow shows the light, which promotes a new beginning.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

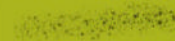
PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: TEXTURE ROTATION



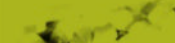
I have three brushes that have good stroke and texture. I alternate them to get good variation.

DROP WATERCOLOR



This adds a particle that has a traditional feeling to it, which is similar to watercolour drops.

SPECIAL



Used for light effects in a Linear Dodge layer. You get can good results through utilising delicate brushstrokes and setting out colour variations.



Forms from brushstrokes

Each brushstroke has an intrinsic value. They can tell you the direction of the surface, which helps with the 3D understanding of a form. Brushstrokes also show the soul of a gesture, the soft and delicate surfaces, what's sensual, hard or violent, or dusty and dry. Knowledge of this relationship lets us weave stories into surfaces.

Light effects

In some paintings I like to add flare or brushstrokes that suggest the opening of the light spectrum. I add these effects in the latter stages, but have already identified what I want to convey from the colour thumbnail. I use various brushes to get these effects, and often add them on a layer with Linear Dodge. Here, I thought they could benefit the fairy tale atmosphere.

Research and references

I like to constantly feed my visual library with ideas, and working on a new piece is a great chance to do just that. Although it's impossible to list the huge amount of artworks I examined to inspire this one, my collection of equestrian references certainly expanded. Among other things, I also used photobashing to integrate some art nouveau design elements to decorate the portal.

Use of texture

Surfaces can transmit so many sensory hints. Adding a texture to a surface characterises it, and tells us about its history and experiences. Obviously these must also be used responsibly, concentrating only on the elements that dominate the scene, while being more sparing with any secondary elements.

Visual harmony

Of course the acting of the characters in your artwork is important, but one aspect I believe is vital is to make every element of the image work towards the feeling I want to express. So in addition to the tensor torsion of Gandalf, the angular drapery of his clothes, the smoke of his beard, the clawing of his staff that reverberates in the branches of the foreground, the waving of the leaves, and the vapours of the dusty, humid background all play a part in the visual concert of the image.

Symbolic touches

I like to think that artwork has the ability to lead towards symbolism, themes and archetypes. As a sorcerer, Gandalf is already symbolic in himself. Exploring themes such as thresholds, crossing the forest, and more are all fascinating to me.



Technique focus

PUSH COLOURS WHILE PAINTING

Richard Lay recommends gradually developing a vibrant palette when creating your next artwork



"This is a piece made in Photoshop for the Huion drawing contest. I had some free time and felt like this sort of thing was totally my vibe.

I wanted the piece to be whimsical and show a few students heading towards a witch academy. My focus was on trying to use more vibrant

colours compared to my previous artwork. To do this, I used a mixture of photobashing, texture brushes, and pre-existing assets.

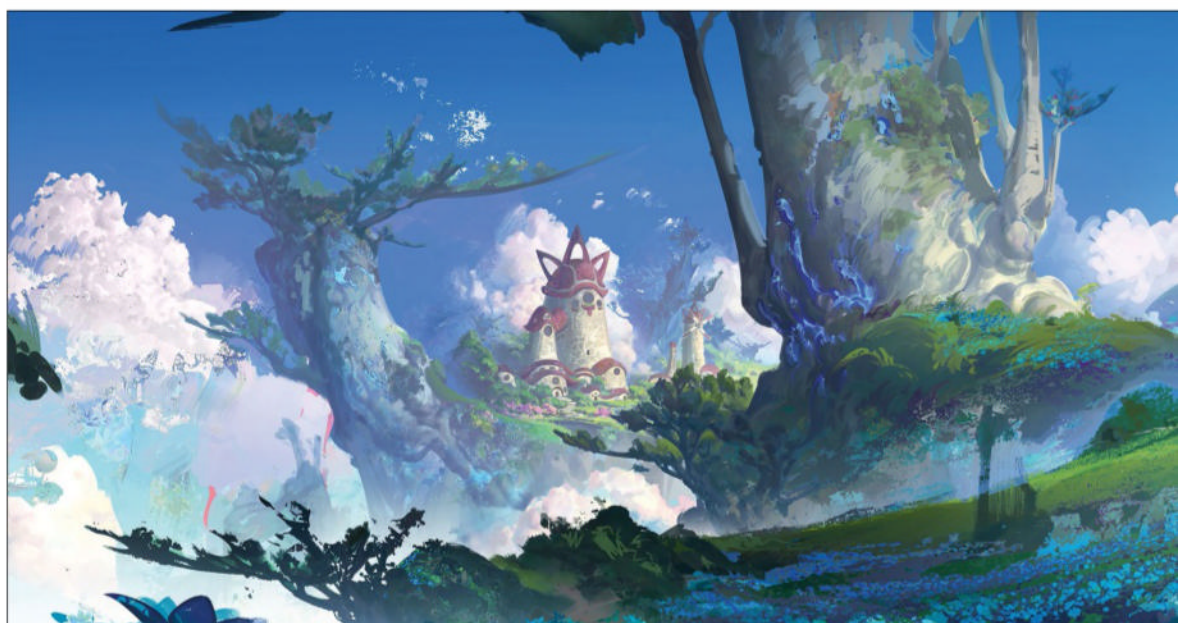
I started with muted colours in the beginning and adjusted along the way as needed. Much of the heavy lifting was done using sliders and colour adjustments towards the end of the creation process."



Artist PROFILE

Richard Lay
LOCATION: US

As an illustrator and concept artist, Richard Lay sets his focus on creating artwork that expresses his interest in visual storytelling and developing imaginative fantasy landscapes.
<https://bit.ly/46nUZrY>



Photoshop

BUILD ATMOSPHERE IN ILLUSTRATION

Take your art to the next level with **Eugenia Vi** as she talks through vital techniques for setting a mood in your work



Artist PROFILE

Eugenia Vi

LOCATION: Indonesia

Also known as EvKimo, Eugenia is an illustrator, art director and concept artist whose long list of credits includes the hit dungeon-crawling RPG Diablo IV among a range of other projects.
<https://bit.ly/4fFc183>



Every illustration is a harmony of many aspects, which can be a difficult task to bring together. One of the most difficult aspects of illustration to get right is the atmosphere. With it, we can understand not only the vibe of a piece, but also the feelings and emotions that arise in the viewer when looking at the illustration.

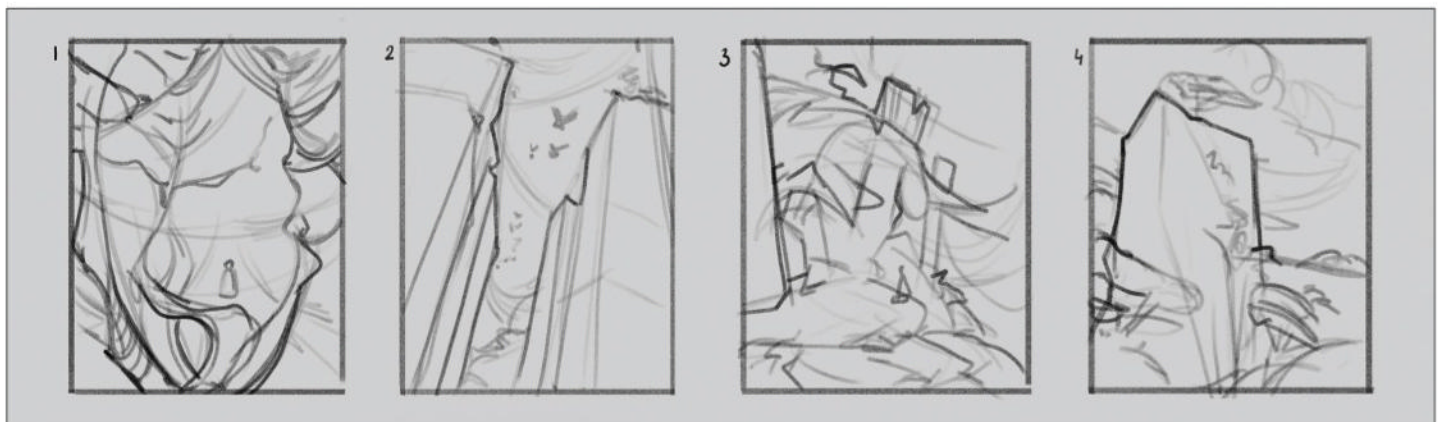
Because of this, each new artwork begins with some fundamental

questions: what story do I want to tell? What feelings should it evoke in the viewer? It's understanding the answers to these questions that underlies the choice of atmosphere and its depiction through the basic tools of any artist in composition, colour and light.

The purpose of this workshop is to show an approach to creating an atmospheric illustration, which we'll talk through step by step. To start off I'll explain my own ideation process,

sharing some pointers to help find your initial inspiration and a fundamental idea. We'll also talk about building up the image, from laying down values to adding colour. Finally, we're going to take a look at the final stages, adding in details and adjusting the final composition to create a unique piece that displays the mood we set out for.

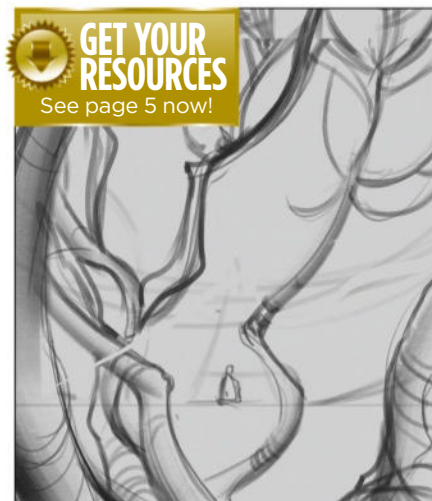
My artwork went for a peaceful atmosphere, but the same concepts can be used to create any mood.



1 Find inspiration and start searching for an idea through your sketches

The world around you is amazing and multifaceted. When you're searching and studying the vast amount of visual material on the internet – for example on sites such as Pinterest, Flickr and 500px – you can take in a lot of interesting ideas. Photos can be a great source of inspiration for paintings and atmospheric sketches.

When you start working on an illustration, it's a good idea to begin by creating a selection of thumbnails. These loose little sketches are great for helping you see what ideas will work well, and what composition will best convey the feeling that you're looking for. At this stage, it's good practice not to get hung up on drawing one specific idea, but to test out as many different approaches as you can, one of which will probably end up being exactly what you need for your brand new piece.



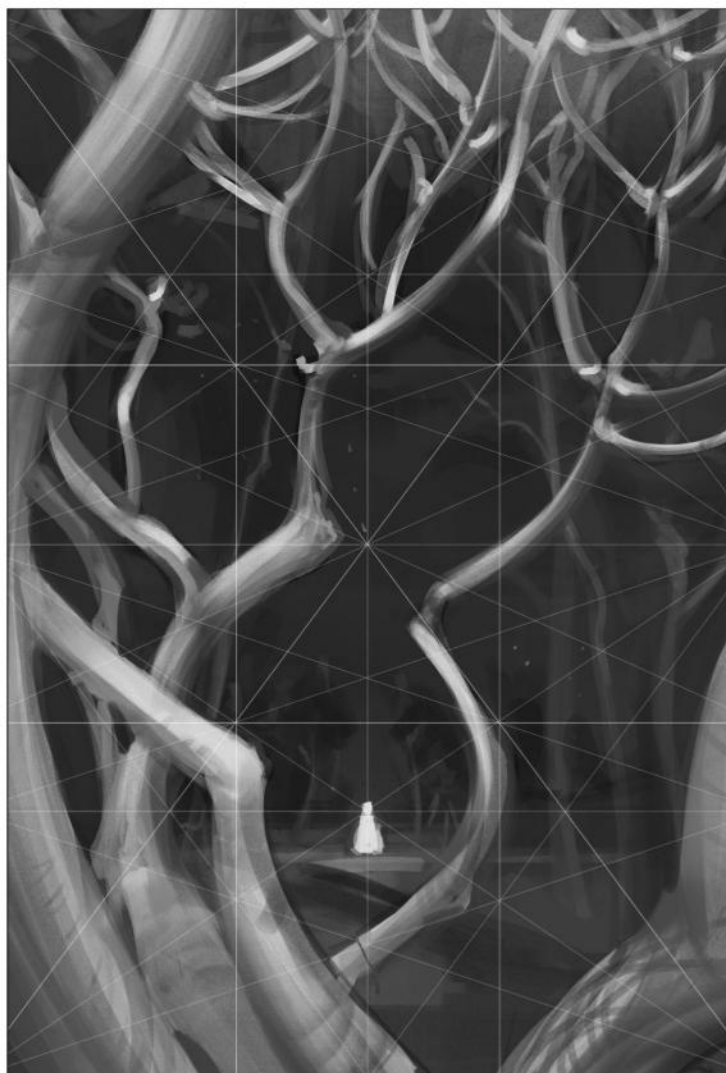
GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 5 now!

2 Clarify the sketch

From my thumbnails, I felt the story I wanted to tell about a pensive character was best emphasised by the ornate and filled composition of option one, as this sketch was the most interesting and promising for further work. Since the thumbnail was extremely rough, at this stage it's necessary to clear up and harmonise the composition. The placement of the character and the branches arranged around them that form a frame enhance the image's feeling of their thoughtfulness and isolation, which brings extra narrative and depth to the illustration. ➡

In depth Develop atmosphere





RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES:
SEMI-HARD ROUND

A simple semi-hard and semi-transparent brush useful for anything from drawing to erasing.

SMALL ONE EDGE SOFT

This is a good brush for creating volume using a minimal number of strokes in your work.

ONE EDGE SOFT

Almost the same as the Small One Edge Soft, but with a different texture and larger size.

3 Begin working with values

The next step is completed in greyscale. Already at this stage of the process, the illustration is beginning to acquire atmosphere and mood through correctly constructed tonal relationships. The lighter branches echoing the luminous character and contrasting with the surrounding darkness create a mysterious and slightly magical atmosphere, perfectly complementing the idea of thoughtfulness and isolation set by the composition. It's also worth paying attention to the composition at this stage, and I'd recommend checking it over using a composition grid to ensure the guides and compositional centre are positioned in the right places.

4 Push your idea forward

Once the basic values have been built and the composition has been corrected, you can move on to finalising the contrasts. Since the character is the focal point of the illustration, they should be the element with the most contrast on the page. As you move away from the focal point, the contrasts should become softer. Along with refining the contrasts, some key details can be outlined for further painting to enhance the atmosphere of the illustration. For example, the water and stars are key to giving the illustration a mystical atmosphere.



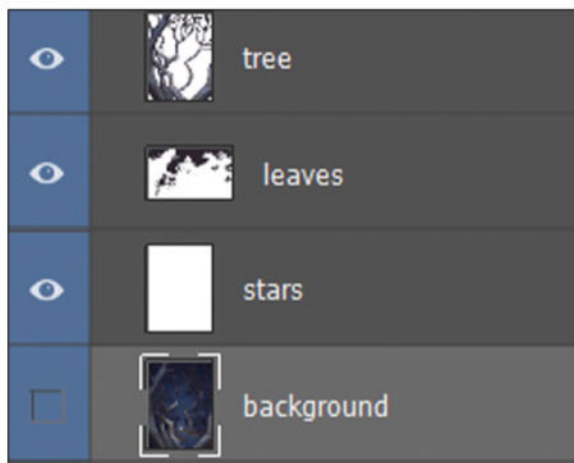
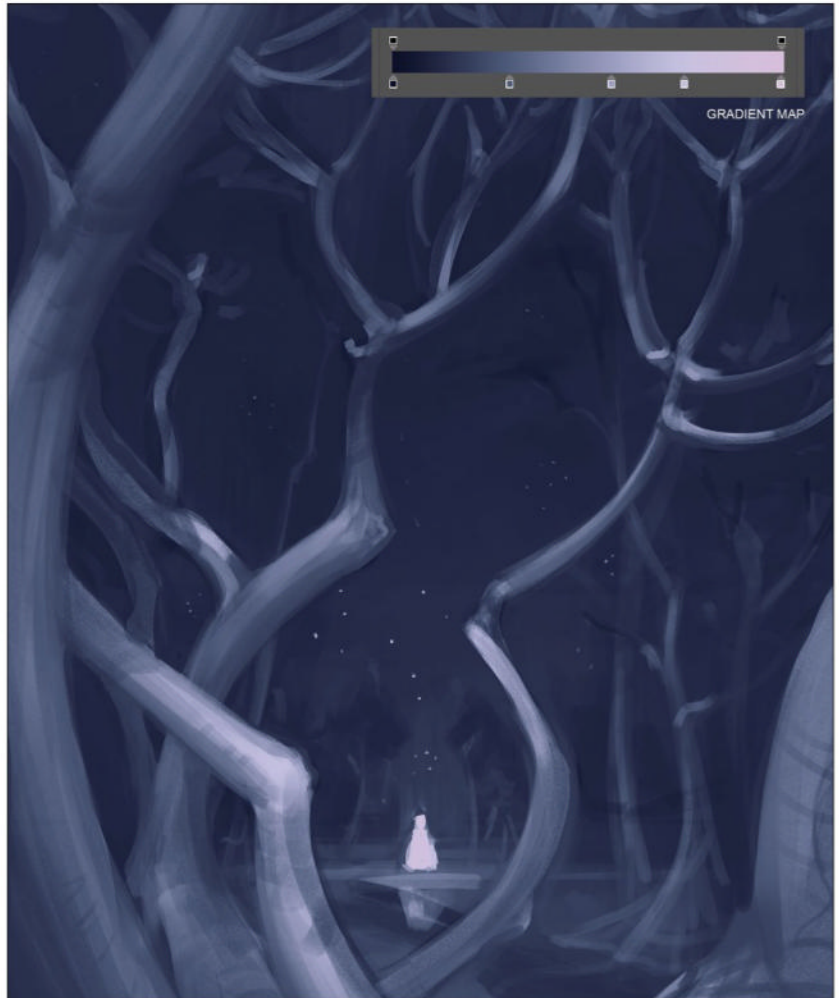
5 Search for references

After completing the greyscale, you can move on to adding colour. To make this process easier, you should find around five references that will become a reliable support for further work. For this illustration, the paintings *Night Brings Good Counsel* and *Silent Night* by Eric Bowman, and *Blue* by Min Yum were all excellent help. The atmosphere, colour and light of these paintings perfectly resonate with both my idea and the finished greyscale. To ensure your work is focused, you need to clearly understand what purpose each reference serves. *Silent Night* was my main reference for colour and light, *Blue* was a great example of graphics, and *Night Brings Good Counsel* was the key reference for the mood.

6 Bring in a base colour (right)

It'll be easier to start working with colour if you set a base colour using a gradient map. This allows you to immediately put several basic shades into the illustration that will be simpler to work with in future. My gradient map uses dark blue for the shadows, lilac for midtones, and pink for the highlights. It's easiest to stick to more neutral colours now so you have room to add pops of colour later on. Of course, you can immediately play with more saturated colours if the illustration requires it.

Continue building up colour on a new layer on top of the base colour layer. This way we'll still have the opportunity to roll back a few steps and try other colours. Distribute colour spots, keeping in mind the hierarchy of values and contrast distribution within the illustration. You shouldn't get too focused on the greyscale at this stage; if you want to change some aspect for the sake of better representing your idea, then go for it!



7 Keep your artwork layered

Before finalising the illustration, make sure it's made in layers that are convenient to work with. Doing this will enable you to make changes more freely to different areas of the image without the fear of spoiling the finished and successful elements already in the bag. I've found the most optimal method for this is to divide the illustration into the foreground, midground and background, as well as to separate small and complex details, for example tree leaves in the foreground or stars in the background, onto separate layers. ➡➡

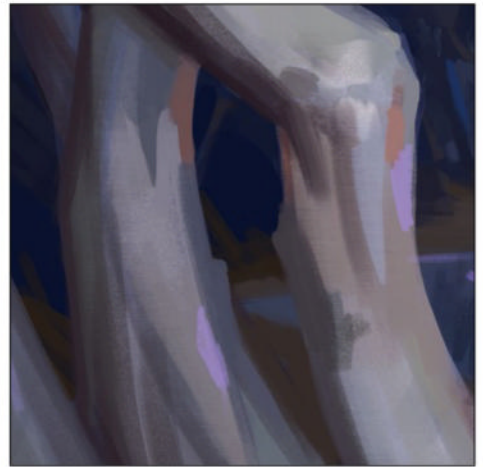
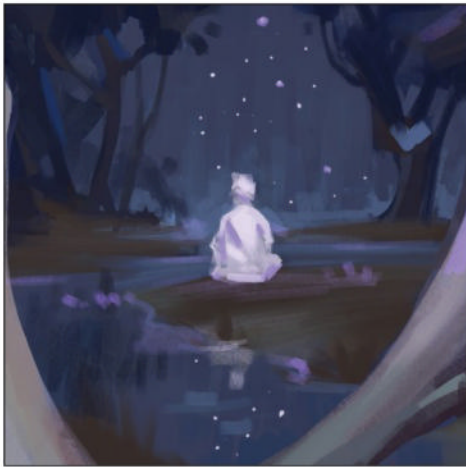




8 Work on the background

Since the foreground already looks quite final, the next step is to work on the midground and background. To do this, we need to work out the forms better and add more medium and small details. It's important to remember that the further the object is from the viewer

and the less significant it is, the more general its detailing should be. At this stage it's also worth enhancing the sense of space. Since this illustration tends more towards graphics than painting, the aerial perspective used here isn't so strongly expressed and the space acquires its depth primarily due to the scale and guides.



9 Add more details to make the atmosphere stand out

Come this point most of the illustration is ready, but its magical atmosphere can still be enhanced by adding colour accents. I chose a rich light purple colour for this task. In addition to the fact this colour is commonly associated with all things mystical, it harmonises well with the blue, purple and brown shades already used throughout the artwork. Along with the accents, at this stage it's necessary for us to once again go through the entire illustration, refine all the rough edges and strengthen the focal point. As a result, the branches seen in the foreground became a touch more refined, and some additional accent details appeared around the focal point.



10 Extra touches

Now the illustration will need to go through some post-processing. At this stage, adding overlay effects and making small changes to the values, colour or textures can create additional interesting features. For this illustration, a slight darkening vignette has been added, and the contrast of the focal point has been increased slightly. A noise effect was also added on top of the scene. The best way to do this is to create a new layer on top of the entire image, fill it with a medium grey, go to Filter>Noise>Add Noise and apply it to this layer with any values you like, then change the blending mode to Soft Light. The saturation of the effect can be adjusted using the layer's transparency settings.



11 Turning up the atmosphere

After considering some feedback, I felt it was worth revising the composition of my illustration to push the atmosphere up a notch. It became clear the idea of branches in the foreground should be abandoned, as although they created an interesting frame, at the same time they were close to the viewer and fragmented the space too much. However, simply removing them would have left the space too empty, so larger trees and an aurora were brought in, which helped to further develop the expressive, atmospheric feeling of the image. ●

Technique focus USE SOFT SHAPES

Simone Ferriero plays with a looser perspective for his art



"In this artwork, I wanted to make a witch interact with a ghostly cat, both of which are signature elements in my illustrations. The witch is protecting the ghost cat from the strong sunlight with her hat."

When I approach a design, I often take inspiration from my own life

and surroundings. And since it's currently the summer here in Italy, I wanted to depict the strong heat, architecture and vibes, making the artwork very personal and intimate to me. I don't use a rigid perspective in my artworks, which allows me to bend the shapes in any way I want, in turn giving the artwork a more distinctive look."

Artist PROFILE

**Simone
Ferriero**

LOCATION: Italy

Simone Ferriero is an Italian artist. He loves drawing whimsical illustrations and comics of magical creatures, witches and ghost cats.
<https://bit.ly/4dt54Yq>





Artist insight

12 TIPS TO DEVELOP YOUR CHARACTERS

Animation artist **Brian Weisz** gives an inside look at his work, offering insight on drawing exercises, ideation and key principles of design

Artist PROFILE

Brian Weisz
LOCATION: US

Brian is a freelance character designer with a background in fine art. He has produced work for animation, adverts and games with clients including Disney, Nerds Candy, Baskin Robbins, Framestore, Google Play, Cricket Wireless and 2 Minutes animation. www.brianweisz.com



Studying character design is certainly a multifaceted subject. There are lots of ways to approach designing original characters, and learning design principles from all angles will round out your skills and strengthen your portfolio.

My experience creating characters for TV and film has taught me the importance of balancing technical skill with creativity and imagination. Generating creative ideas and being an effective visual communicator are key to finding work in animation.

Creating expressive characters full of appeal takes practice and instincts

that can be attained through focused study. Part of being an artist is understanding that your evolution is a lifelong pursuit and progress is made by taking consistent small steps. Follow along as I offer ways to show personality in your work and draw from life experiences to find your voice as a character designer.

1 BODY LANGUAGE

The body language of a character communicates their emotional state and is an essential part of creating characters packed with life. Their expression runs through the entire design and doesn't solely depend on the face. Body language can be loud and bold or soft and subtle, and the hands can be just as expressive as the eyes and face. Even the colour is a form of expression. In this case, the hummingbird's feet are acting more like hands, which brings it more personality and dexterity. The pink and gold tones of the feathers provide a softness that balances the bold, sharp beak shape.



2 KEEP IT SIMPLE

A wide range of emotions can be drawn with just a few simple lines. A great exercise is to practise drawing clear, easy-to-read facial expressions.

Create a front-facing base template character using flat shapes and experiment to see how many different expressions you can come up with. Let the placement of the marks and shapes do the work. This fun and simple drawing exercise will help you get comfortable with moving facial features around and help develop a sense for how facial expressions function. If you're feeling ambitious, pick one expression and try drawing it in a three-quarter view!



3 GRAB THE ATTENTION

Artists create focal points and lead the viewer's eye where they want it to go. This compositional tool is typically used in painting and illustration, but can also be applied to individual standalone characters. A crisp detail or an area with high contrast will grab the viewer's immediate attention.

In this example, I made the terrier's eyes the main focal point by giving them the most detail and contrast. The second focal point is the mouth; the shapes of the teeth and tongue are flat but have some contrast and pops of colour. Next are the collar and ears. Notice how simple I kept the rest of the body. The visual contrast of flatness against rendered forms creates a focal hierarchy.

“Creating art from personal narrative will infuse it with emotion”



4 UNDENIABLY PLAYFUL

Creativity is rooted in experimentation and play. Let your personality shine through in designs by incorporating your own sense of humour, whimsical nature or personal interests. By doing so, your work will become relatable and visually engaging.

Nostalgia can be a powerful tool for making art. Try using a memory of something fun that you used to do as inspiration for a new character design. Creating art from personal narrative will infuse it with emotion. With this piece, I wanted to create a whimsical atmosphere that highlights the joy and simplicity of blowing bubbles. I simplified the visual language of the bubbles with bright colours that pop from the illustration to evoke the sweetness of candy and heighten the playful spirit of the characters. ➤

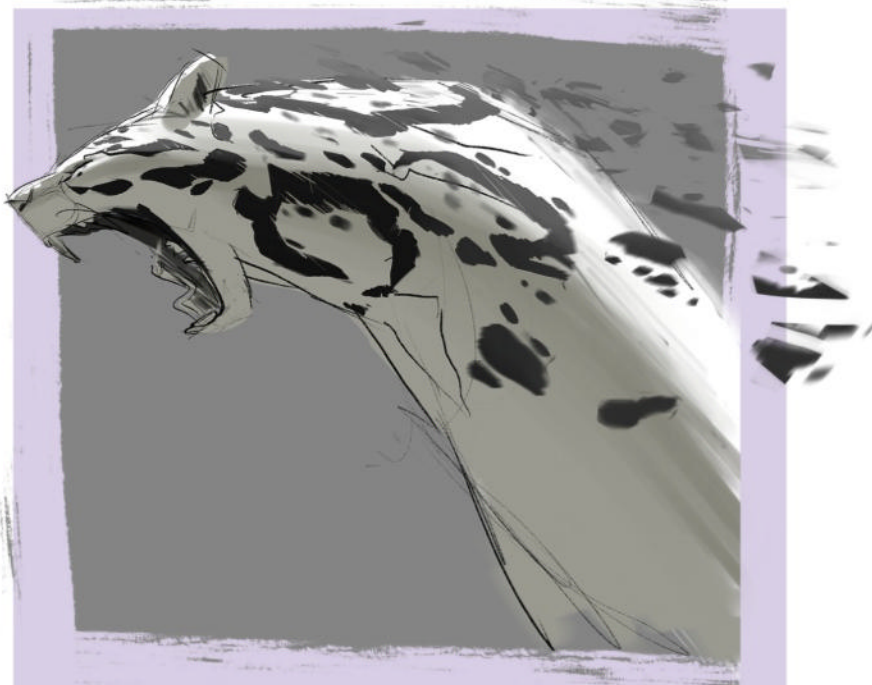




5 CHARACTER INTERACTIONS

Storytelling is a major pillar of animation. It's a character designer's responsibility to conceptualise characters with dynamic and unique personalities that complement each other. Think of yourself as a sort of casting director for animated characters; you're determining the look, feel and chemistry between a line-up of them.

A great way to put these skills to the test is to depict character interactions. Try composing a scenario where two or more characters are visually responding to one another. Focus on capturing the emotion or connection between the characters. While you practise your storytelling skills, you'll also be building up portfolio pieces for future opportunities!



6 ENERGY IN APPLICATION

Mark making in art is pure expression. The way you apply a mark carries energy, whether soft or bold. In art, sometimes it's not what but how something is done that makes it unique. Mark making varies with every artist and depends on many factors. Artistic choices stem from personal taste, state of mind, and the artist's relationship to the medium. Clearly the leopard here is roaring, but the energetic lines and shattered spots flying off from its body intensify the character's action. When you're looking at art or character design, notice how the application of paint or pixels affects the subject matter.

7 NOT JUST THE EYES

A lot of emotion comes from the eyes of a character, but additional features support and enhance their overall expression. For example, animals express a lot of emotion with their ears. When ears are facing downward it can imply sadness, worry or sincerity. When the ears are upwards it shows alertness, happiness or excitement! How the ear shape is drawn and where it's placed will have a big impact on expression. Try drawing the ears on a separate layer and move them around to see what works best with the facial expression.



8 SELECT AN EMPHASIS

Try to choose or find an emphasis for your character. It's like putting an exclamation point on a specific part of your design. I chose to emphasise this golden retriever's mouth and tongue to enhance its happy-go-lucky nature and personality. The uptilt perspective of the dog's head accentuates this even more by allowing the viewer to almost peer into the mouth. With only one eye visible, the mouth takes on even more importance in the drawing.



9 BE YOURSELF

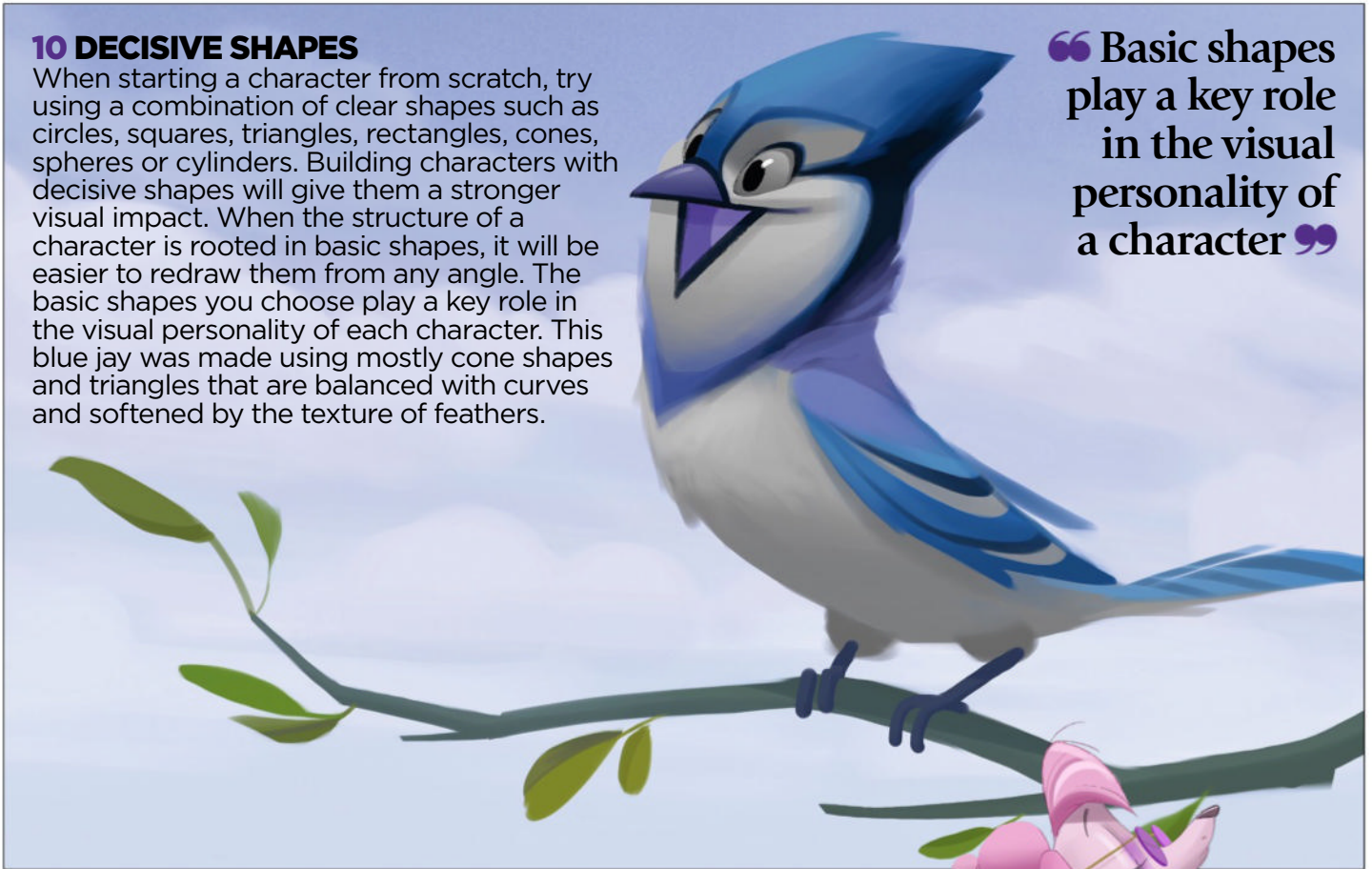
Your art is an extension of who you are. Your personality, interests and lived experiences are what make your art uniquely yours. Let your work share a glimpse of who you are to the viewer. Celebrate your individuality and create your own world with your work. Creative fuel can be found when you understand what truly inspires you, so let your interests, memories or dreams be your North Star. When you look inward, you can draw inspiration from things that are unique to you.

I was born in the Year of the Ox, which inspired this modern take on my Chinese zodiac sign. I show my personality through my shape language and love of volumetric form. Take time to get to know your creative tendencies and visual preferences, and with time you'll develop your personal aesthetic and taste as an artist. Knowing who you are as an artist is essential to finding your own creative voice. ➤

10 DECISIVE SHAPES

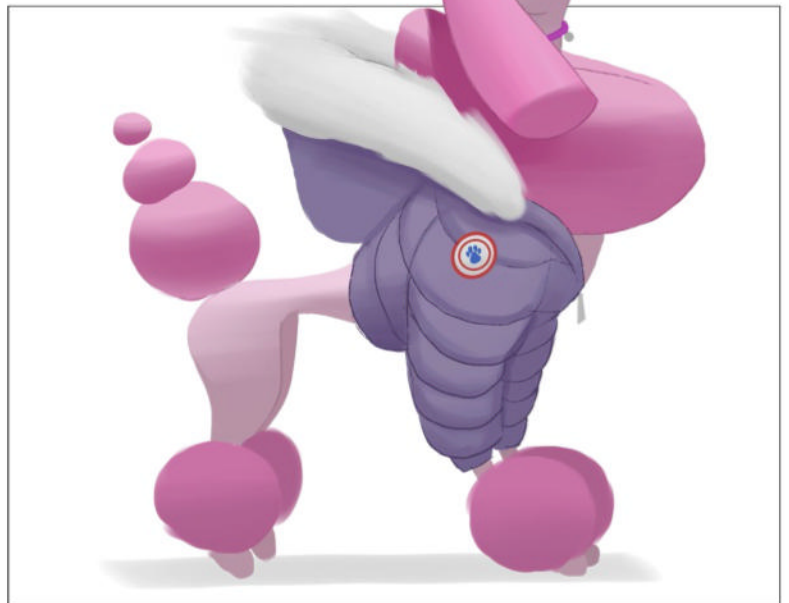
When starting a character from scratch, try using a combination of clear shapes such as circles, squares, triangles, rectangles, cones, spheres or cylinders. Building characters with decisive shapes will give them a stronger visual impact. When the structure of a character is rooted in basic shapes, it will be easier to redraw them from any angle. The basic shapes you choose play a key role in the visual personality of each character. This blue jay was made using mostly cone shapes and triangles that are balanced with curves and softened by the texture of feathers.

“Basic shapes play a key role in the visual personality of a character”



11 REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES

Have you ever been caught in a rainstorm? Your character designs can be bolstered by using real-life experiences. Adding storytelling elements that you've personally faced can bring more life and emotion to the character. I'm constantly thinking about how a character's design can relate to my everyday life. As an exercise, try creating a character that depicts something that has happened to you.



12 ALL ABOUT THE MOOD

What's the mood of your character? The mood is the immediate tone you feel upon the first glance of a character. Determining the mood can help you make stronger design choices. If the mood of your character isn't established, I'd recommend taking a moment to reflect on what you're trying to get across with your design. Mood can stem from the pose, expression, colour choices or costume. This poodle is undoubtedly posh, being dyed pink with its nose up in the air. The sunglasses and puffy coat give her a fashion sense that makes her look like a high-maintenance pooch. ●

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Technique focus

PLAN OUT YOUR COMPOSITION

Jules Darriulat gets himself set up for success as he creates a terrifying necromancer scene

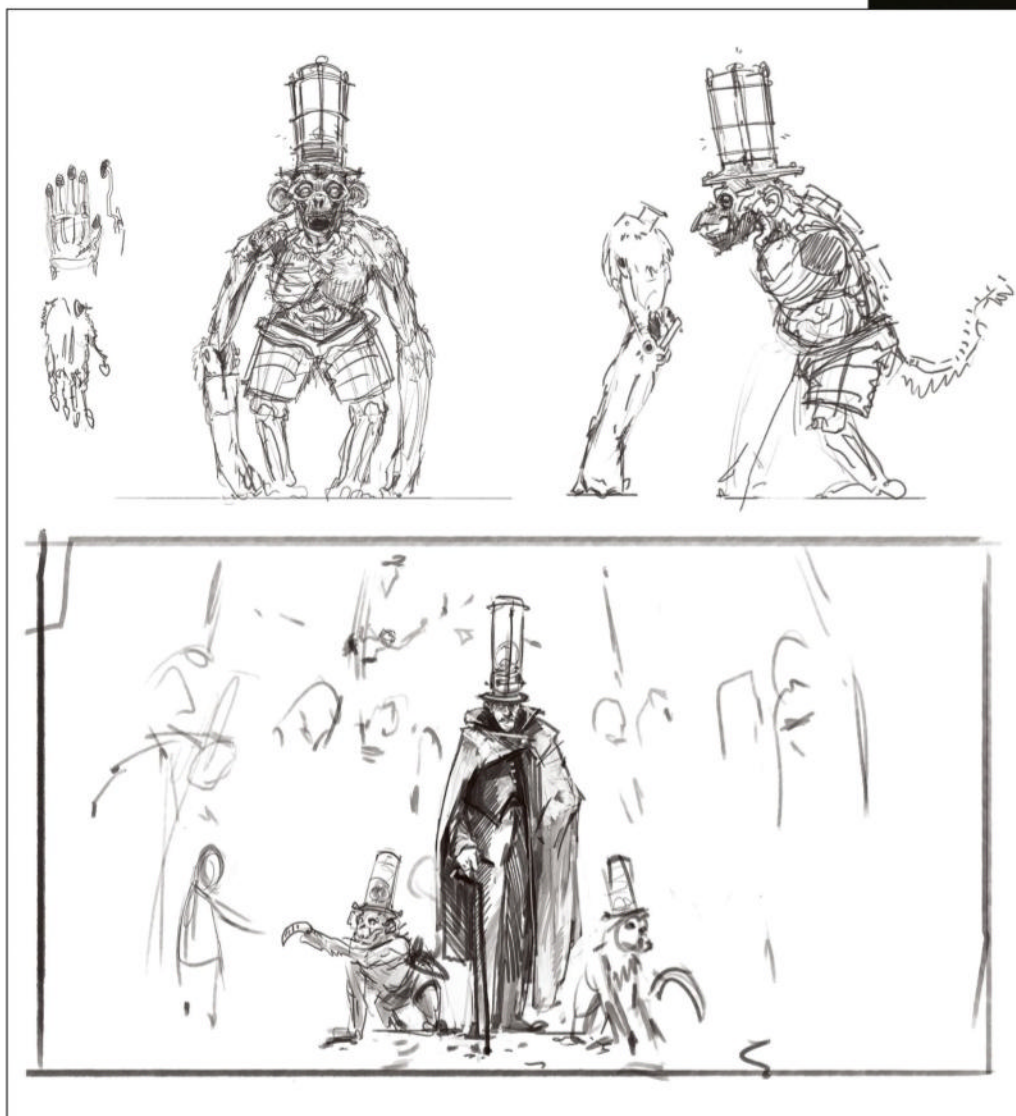


"I started off this image by sketching out the characters and then planning the composition, which is the most enjoyable part for me. At this stage the design is key, so it's worth taking all the time needed to get everything figured out on paper.

I worked with a combination of Blender and ZBrush to model the characters and foreground. Most of

the work was done on the monkey character, whose body I sculpted and then gave some 3D fur that was roughly rigged in Blender. After setting up the lighting and camera, I exported my render into Photoshop.

To finish the piece, I photobashed the background using pictures that I'd taken during a trip to Rome. I also extensively painted on top of the whole image to polish, detail, and create a cohesive final result."





Artist PROFILE

Jules Darriulat
LOCATION: England

Jules is a concept artist working in the film and TV industry. Among a range of projects, he has helped to develop His Dark Materials, 3 Body Problem, Paddington 3 and Wednesday.
<https://bit.ly/4dmvEkf>



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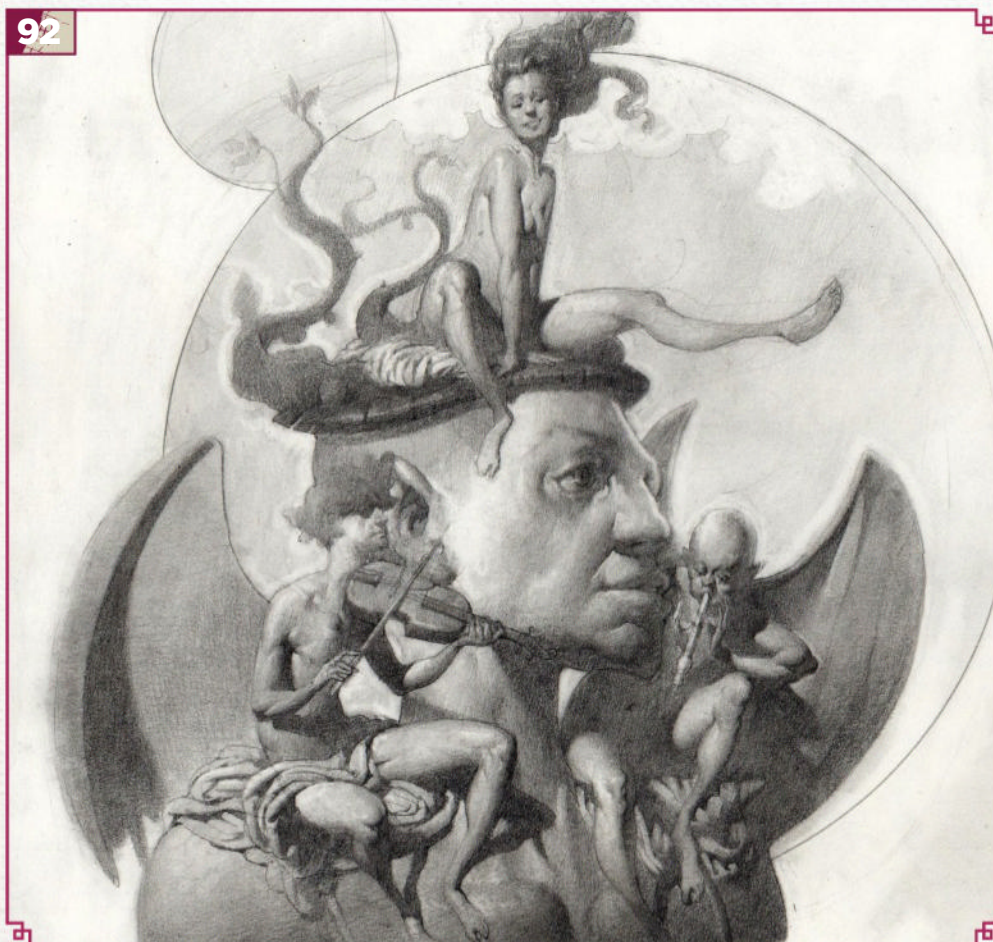
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Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

92



98



88



This issue:

88 Traditional FXPosé

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

92 Draw fascinating symbolic artwork

Jump into Julián de la Mota's imagination with a pencil piece.

98 First Impressions: Ed Org

The influences that led the artist into the world of mythology.

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

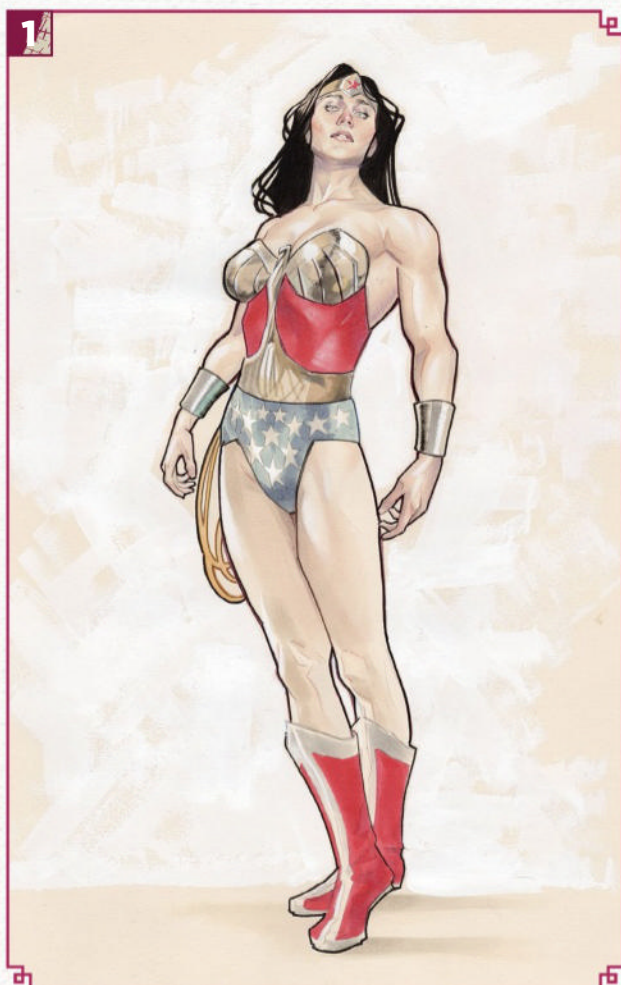


Thaddeus Robeck

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Ink, Copic markers, pencil, acrylic, gouache, watercolour, oil

WEB: www.artstation.com/nihilo-ren

Thaddeus has been drawing from the moment he could hold a pencil, but it was the 2020 lockdowns that gave him the time to focus on honing his skills.



1 THE THEMYSIRAN

"Few things motivate me to draw a pose more than strong, well-defined shoulders. White paint over cream-coloured paper makes negative space engaging."



2 RAVEN'S COLLECTION

"I always find that Skulls are fun to draw, so why not draw a whole pile of them! I made this artwork using markers and coloured pencil on paper."

3 SILENT SIREN OF STAGE AND SILVER SCREEN

"This depiction of the silent film actress Maude Fealy was created on toned tan paper with alcohol markers, ink and white chalk."

4 QUEEN OF HEL

"That's just one L, thank you very much. Ink, markers, airbrush and coloured pencils on paper were all combined to create this fantasy artwork."





Allen Douglas

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Pencil, acrylic, oil, gold leaf, silver leaf **WEB:** www.cryptidvisions.com

Allen has been painting professionally since 1994 for the publishing and gaming industries. Inspired by folklore, he distorts the size, relationships and environments of animals, and calls his paintings 'unusual wildlife'.

1 INFINITE GLEAMER

"This painting represents my first experiment with gold leaf. The only way to achieve the look I was going for with this piece was to paint over a lot of the gold."

2 WHISPERS UNDERFOOT

"I often carry certain themes through a number of artworks. This one features insect-based fairy folk. I'm captivated by the idea that if you just look a little closer at your everyday surroundings, there's so much to be discovered."



3 ASHFALL

"This painting is part of a series that features volcanic landscapes. Sometimes I choose to paint animals as they exist here on earth, but add a unique twist by placing them into an unexpected new environment."

4 UNTROUBLED MIND

"Sometimes I'll create subtle fan art using the animal surrogates that populate my paintings. This artwork is an example of that. I'll leave the viewer to decide how this one fits into that model."









Pencil

DRAW FASCINATING SYMBOLIC ARTWORK

Learn how **JULIÁN DE LA MOTA** creates a composition from his imagination with a focus on crafting figures, volumetric modelling, and light and shadow

The process behind my art is all about generating images that stem from my inner self, connected to my emotions and deeper psychology. It's always a journey of discovery where I'm aiming for my creativity to emerge spontaneously, akin to a dialogue or dance. Mastery of technical elements is essential for this approach, which we'll focus on in this workshop.

I want to delve into the detailed creation of a piece from scratch, with the aim of showing you the creative method I've developed and honed over the course of many years, rooted in improvisation with strokes and lines to generate suggested forms and composition. We'll explore the use of

MATERIALS

PENCILS

■ 2H, HB, 2B, 4B

PAPER

■ Schoeller 240g, matte white, fine grain surface for graphite

MISCELLANEOUS

■ Rubber eraser
■ Blending stump
■ Tissues for blending

various materials to develop art from imagination with a symbolist result. All this culminates in a piece where we'll review construction, form, line, light and shadow, and other crucial elements in making art.

To get ourselves going, we'll first explore establishing compositions that intrigue us, then organise them with the interplay of strokes. After this, we'll add solidity and volume to our forms, achieving order in light and shadow masses while refining our material use.

My own preferences lean towards traditional methods, particularly figurative artwork that features symbolism, surrealism, imagination and expression. I create without any references, emphasising patience,

contemplation, and connection with my work. The process should always be open to new possibilities; what emerges should surprise and reveal new insights, much like dreams that unfold with spontaneous creations and emotional stimulation.

In my view, art should be linked to this process, where the technique serves to refine and accompany your creativity. While drawing relies on traditional technical foundations, its real strength lies in creative and playful expression.



Julián is an Argentinian artist and illustrator who draws from imagination and has illustrated various books, including a Spanish translation of Dante's *Inferno*. www.juliandelamota.com.ar



GET YOUR RESOURCES

See page 5 now!



1 *Stimulate your imagination*

To begin, I play with curved lines and rhythm, using midtone shades to suggest stimulating shapes. It's important to stay attentive and inspired to capture forms. For this, I use soft pencils, rubber erasers, and tissues to spread graphite freely. Warming up the imagination is a crucial part of my process.



2 *Initial approaches and decisions*

Gradually aim for more recognisable forms. Using fluid, curved lines, align figures rhythmically with the main head. For the large skull, I worked towards more constructive methods to add weight and volume.



3 *Search for unity*

At this stage I'm aiming to integrate all the figures into a single composition. Refine anything stimulating and suggestive by giving it more shape with lines. Continue using soft pencils (4B) as nothing is final, keeping things flexible to change as needed.



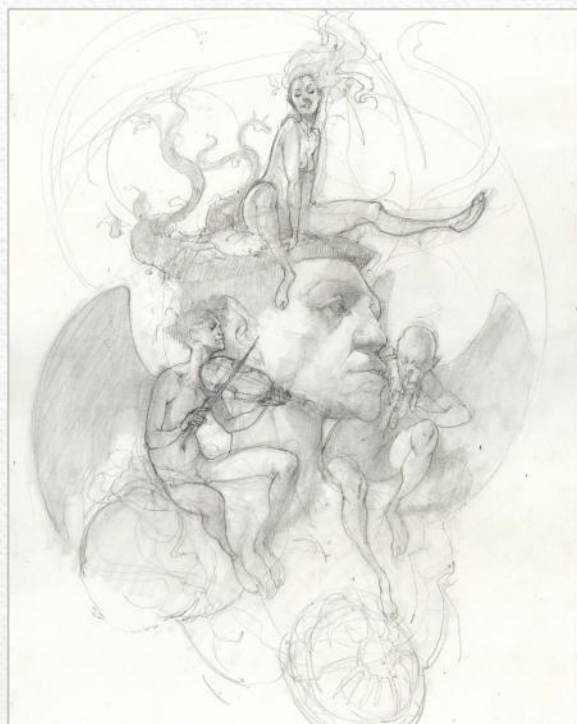
4 *Build structure*

Work on the whole piece to develop an integrated and solid composition without losing fluidity. Achieving movement with solidity is crucial now. Use soft pencils to blend, subtly pressing on the paper. Your lines encapsulate the suggestions of the shaded areas, with nothing still finalised.



5 *Add midtone shading*

With a little more confidence in the line drawing, blend again and create more midtone shading to add mass and weight to the composition. Adding in grey gives more presence to emerging shapes. Remember, I'm improvising and always looking to highlight the interesting forms.



6 *Bring it together*

Integrate the forms into a unified design while keeping in mind the need to be ready for change. I blend to find richness and suggest elements. The lines define figures and composition for an illusion of greater unity.



7 *Enclose shapes and construct geometry*

In the detail you can see that the line work coordinates with the shaded areas, enclosing them in a similar value that's not too dark. I aim for geometric forms, like the violin, to gain solidity using structure and perspective.



8 *Graphite smudging*

Here, start by smudging everything with graphite powder, giving it a mid-grey value to include light and shadow in the design. At the level of general shapes and figures the drawing is outlined, while the entire drawing is covered in a grey veil.



9 *Unity in values*

On the graphite-smudged sheet, use an eraser to differentiate the compositional group from the background. You can also play with possible light sources for your characters. My faces, bodies and other areas are lit from the left, which helps to organise the light and shadow masses.



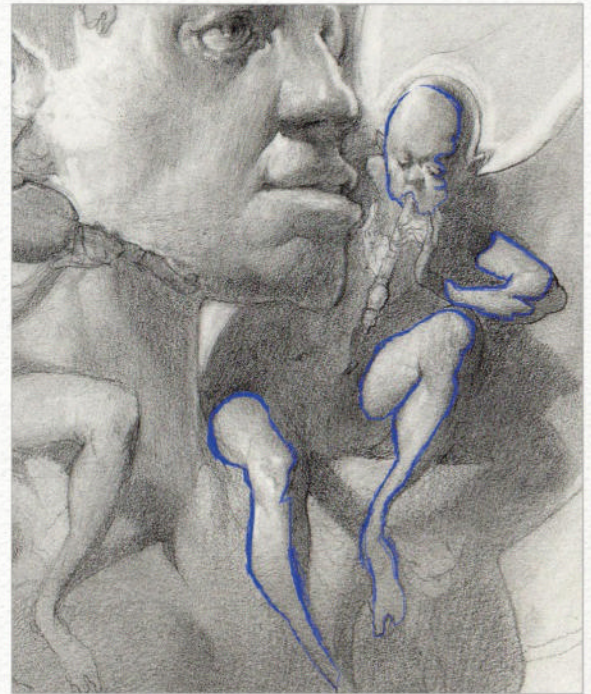
10 *Test the light and shadow*

During this process of trial and error, I strive to craft appealing areas of shadow and prioritise aesthetics over realism. The red lines you can see above show the detail of how I enclosed the shadows, creating flat spaces that organise the composition and create the forms of the figures. ➡



11 Solidify and organise the shadows

Work with the shadows as independent elements, seeking out the darkness and differentiating them from the light. The advice mentioned in step 10 for the figures now extends to everything in the image. Aim for unified, recognisable shadow masses with carefully defined boundaries, especially in cast shadows.



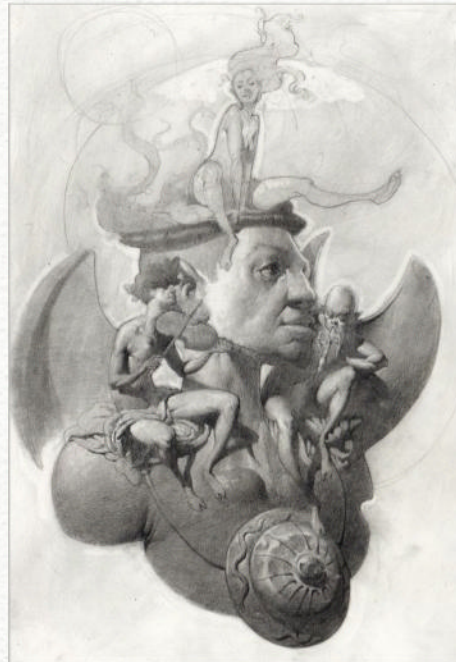
12 Model light like a sculptor

While working on shadows, also carefully model the lit areas using hard pencils (2H or HB). This results in smooth gradients and detailed forms without blending into shadows. The light-shadow areas, outlined in blue, demonstrate seamless transitions and gradients.



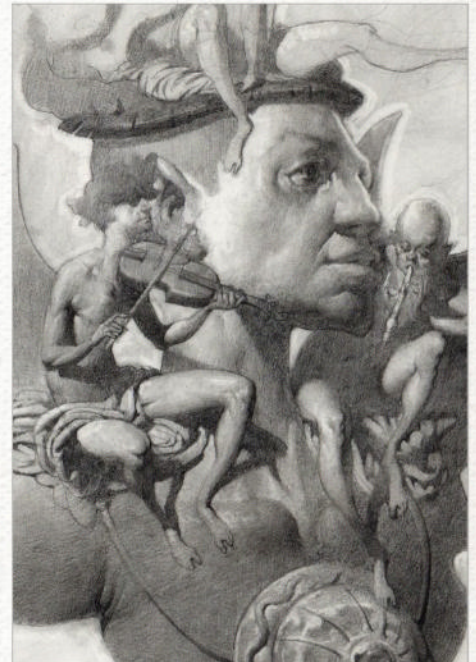
13 Develop more forms

Next up, I created the shape and engraving on the medallion, aiming for darkness in the lower part to fit the overall lighting plan. To define the design, I used 2B and 4B pencils without much pressure for strong darks. This ensured that the lower area of the object was darker than the top.



14 Continue shading

Following that same lighting logic, all the underside surfaces become darker, while the upper-facing surfaces are lighter. This is achieved using soft pencils (B, 2B, 4B). To eliminate textures and flatten the surface, use harder pencils (such as H) next, which will ensure a dark but neat surface.



15 New forms and details

As you advance with the composition, forms and overall values, continue designing the image as a whole. In my piece, I worked on the fabric the figures sit on. I used a softer pencil (4B) for movement and folds, then modelled light areas in hard pencil (2H), also calming the soft pencil's texture with the 2H.



16 *Combine your elements with contrasts and solid shadows*

Progress by enhancing contrasts and solidifying the shadow forms to further unify your composition. I used softer pencils (4B) for contrast and then refined them with harder pencils. This gave me a cohesive arrangement of masses and maintained order in my composition.



17 *Simplify the complexity*

This step is similar to the previous one, but involves deepening shadowed areas and improving their solidity and contrast. This simplifies what the viewers see and helps to clarify complex forms in the artwork.



18 *Model illuminated surfaces*

For this step, I used hard pencils to model the female figure at the top. Lighter areas are carefully shaped to give a curved, fleshy appearance using highlights from an eraser. I also enhanced the contrast in her surrounding forms to highlight the main figures, just like we saw in step 12.



19 *Last additions and perfect presentation*

Towards the end, look to refine shapes and erase any unwanted areas. I added clouds behind the girl to emphasise the circles, which are designed to symbolise wholeness and close the composition effectively. ●

First Impressions

✧ Ed Org ✧

The artist talks about his journey into the mythological world



Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?

I was born in 1955 just outside Lawley in Shropshire. Lucky enough to have parents who saw and understood the value of the countryside, mine was a childhood spent exploring dappled woodland, secret pools, ruined barns and cottages; all places rich in wildlife.

My father was from Estonia, a country of forests and lakes, which probably accounts for the Northern feel of my work. My surname means 'guardian of the valley', the meaning lost in the dim and distant mystical past of the Estonian Viking Age.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your work?

After leaving art college in 1979, I began work as a graphic designer producing brochures for companies as diverse as British Airways to the Countryside Commission. During these years I became interested in the reenactments taking place across the UK. A collection of photographs grew: Anglo-Saxon, medieval, Viking and so on. These, allied to my growing interest in Arthurian legends, plus the downturn in



“Today I consider myself as a traveller through a realm cloaked in a magical mist”

THE WIFE OF LLEU

The inspiration for this piece comes from the Mabinogion, a collection of Celtic tales. A wife is formed by magic for the Welsh hero Lleu Llaw Gyffes.

graphic work around 1992, pushed me into making the decision to strike out on my own.

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

While selling my work at various prestige craft fairs in the grounds of stately homes around the UK, I was able to build up a following for what in essence was a travelling gallery. From this, I was commissioned by the owner of a brewery to produce some artwork for their beers. That was an interesting departure for me, and encouraged me to experiment more with colour work, but I'd say that the pencil work is what I'm predominantly known for.

What's the last piece you finished and how has your work developed?

My most recent piece, The Huntress, features Emily, who has posed for me many times. For 30 years I've also collected various costumes, props and books that have aided me in my compositions, and with more experience you endeavour to be more inventive subject-wise.

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?

With a mix of history, poetry and myths to draw on, my large triptych The Wife of Lleu is the piece I consider my most successful. The idea was formulated from a 1919 copy of Francis Ledwidge's poetry. He was an Irish volunteer in WW1 who was killed at Ypres. His poetry has spoken to me across the years.

What are your painting rituals?

I don't involve myself with the technicalities of rituals as such. As long as my drawing board is clean and all the materials are to hand, reference material primed, and various discs in the CD player, I'm ready to start creating.

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

I have only ever thought of my graphic design work back in the 1980s as a 'career'. Today I consider myself as a traveller through a realm cloaked in a magical mist. For here there be dragons, sirens, witch-music and lost knights.

What does the future hold?

When I started out there was no internet or social media, so you stood or fell by your artistic ability. With AI, artists' futures are more uncertain. As for me, I believe that traditional art will win out. I'll keep listening for the eldritch calls of the muse and the elfland king.

Working as a freelancer in the graphics industry, Ed creates personal mythological art in pencil and watercolours. To find out more, visit <https://bit.ly/3SuTKRD>.





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