

1 NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

DISCOVER THE

RISING STARS

Meet the new generation
of talent primed to make
waves in 2D and 3D art

15 TIPS FOR FILM CONCEPT ART

- Find gestures to direct the eye
- Mix cool and warm colours
- Learn one-point perspective

WORKSHOP

CREATE VIBRANT MANGA!

Harness the power of
alcohol markers today



ISSUE 245

AND MORE

READ THE INSIDE STORY OF
CARA, THE ANTI-AI ART APP

DESIGN A CREEPY HORROR
SETTING USING BLENDER

PAINT PERFECT DETAILS
FROM YOUR REFERENCES

Cover artwork by Ngan Hoang

CHARACTER ART WARM UP YOUR CREATIVE MUSCLES WITH OUR FUN EXERCISES

PLUS!

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CHARMING
SKETCHES

FROM SIMONE
GRÜNEWALD



ONES AND ZEROS.

You will hit a wall.

It may be before you even start and there is a blank canvas. Maybe in the middle of a piece that at first was so inspiring, but fell flat after a few late nights.

All the challenges of balance, light, depth and composition appear overwhelming and unconquered.

It's breaking through the wall that pushes you creatively. Those are the times when process and willpower prevail - when the energy returns and the piece becomes human.

It's good to be human.

Don't be ones and zeros.



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



The autumn is many people's favourite time of year, and for those eager to pursue a career as a digital artist it brings with it extra excitement thanks to end-of-year shows, graduate showcases and other new prospects on the horizon.

This issue we take a look at the best up and coming artists out of some of the leading digital art schools from around the world. The quality of talented individuals coming out of these schools is truly inspirational, so take a look to see for yourself, as these names are bound to be sticking around and making waves. And if you want to take on a course yourself, there's even a special offer from one of the schools. Give it a go!

There's also plenty of new skills to learn if you head over to our workshop section, where you can get the lowdown on all sorts of techniques from using shapes to generate characters and concept design tips, all the way through to colouring vibrant manga with alcohol markers.

Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor

Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

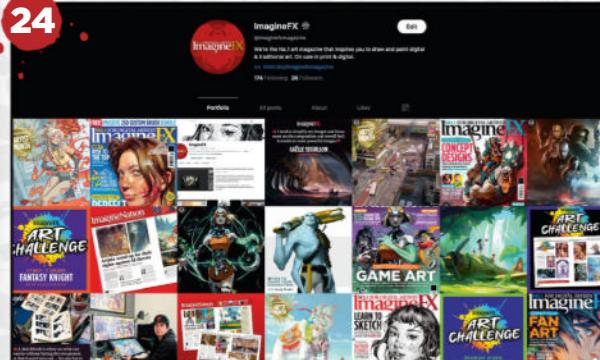
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A new home for artists

Founder Jingna Zhang tells us about Cara, a new safe haven for artists that's free from AI-generated art.

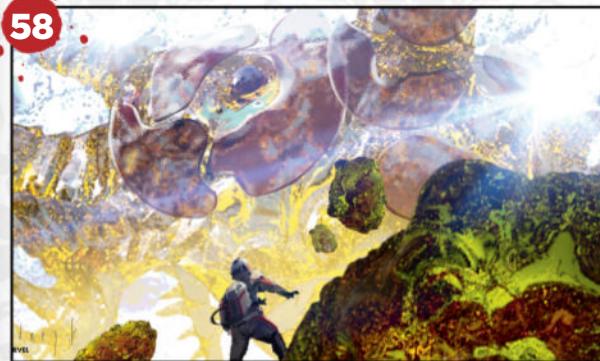
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The Rising Stars of 2024

We discover the latest crop of emerging artistic talent from a selection of leading digital art schools.

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15 concept design tips and tricks

Explore Marvel Studios artist Rodney Fuentebella's expert tips for creating great concept art projects.

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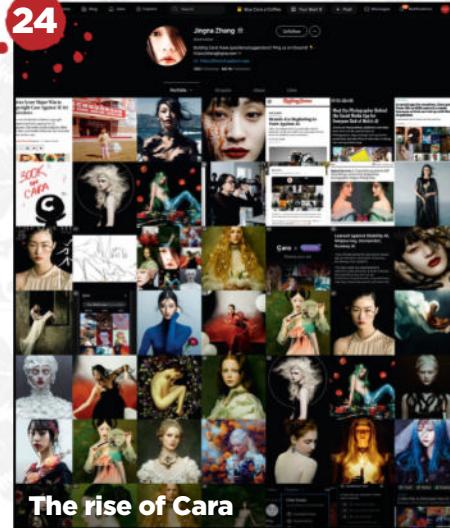
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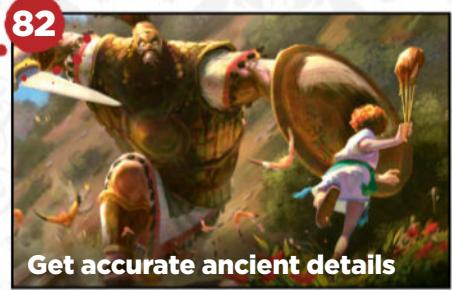
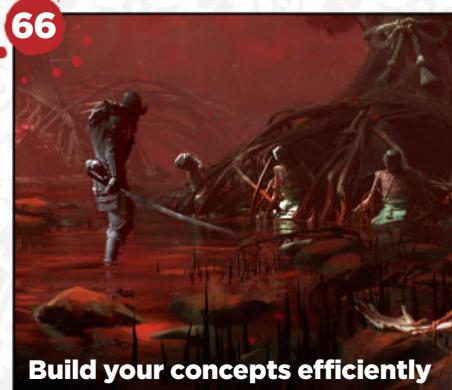


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Margaux Kindhauser

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Sketchbook:
Simone Grünewald



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The finest traditional art, sent in by you!

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

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Type this into your browser's address bar.

<https://ifxm.ag/risingstars>

2 Click the download link

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3 Download what you need...

Save the files or watch the videos.

Next month

Artwork by Jan Wessbecher



Next month in...
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ImagineFX

SKETCHBOOK SPECIAL

Back by popular demand! Get inspired with over 90 pages of dazzling sketches

A passion born in video games

Jan Wessbecher reveals how some classic titles set out an artistic pathway

Find out what energises you

Top concept artist Slawek Fedorczuk shares advice for getting motivated

Contest winner to expert artist

We learn all about Kyounghwan Kim's unique path to a character art career

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HYPER LIGHT BREAKER

We speak to Heart Machine about making the leap from pixels to polygons

INSPIRING CG ARTISTS

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EXPERT ADVICE

AAA PROPS

Model game-ready assets for Unreal Engine projects

TOON SHADER TIPS!

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SUPER FAN ART
Put your own twist on a classic game character

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Learn how to self-build the ultimate 3D workstation

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EXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Haiyang

LOCATION: China MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: shy.artstation.com

Haiyang is a concept designer with a love for mysterious cultures. Curiosity for the world around him is his main inspiration, while he also likes to use elements of history in his magical worlds to make them more realistic.

1 ASHIYA

"Ashiya is the main character of my personal universe. She's an Onmyoji from Harima."

2 HAMAYA RIN

"Rin's family is ancient and mysterious. Every 100 years there will be a wizard in the family who can draw the Hamaya arrow that has been passed down from ancient times. Rin drew it when she was 14 years old."

1



2



3



3 ASHINA

"Ashina is Ashiya's half-sister. When they were young, their family was wiped out by hostile forces and the sisters were separated on the battlefield, but the bond of blood has always pulled them together."

4 ASHIYA RETURNS

"In the ancient East, the legendary nine-tailed fox is well known, and seems to have lived for nearly 1,000 years. Here Ashiya meets the fox for the first time, with a battle on the horizon."







Esteban Guzman

LOCATION: Uruguay MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: <https://x.com/mustakro>

Esteban is a self-taught digital artist who switched from traditional art in 2020. He's fascinated by dark fantasy and finds inspiration in games such as Elden Ring and Bloodborne. His work is a hybrid of comics and manga.

1 HUITZILIN, CURSED SON OF HUITZILOPOCHTLI

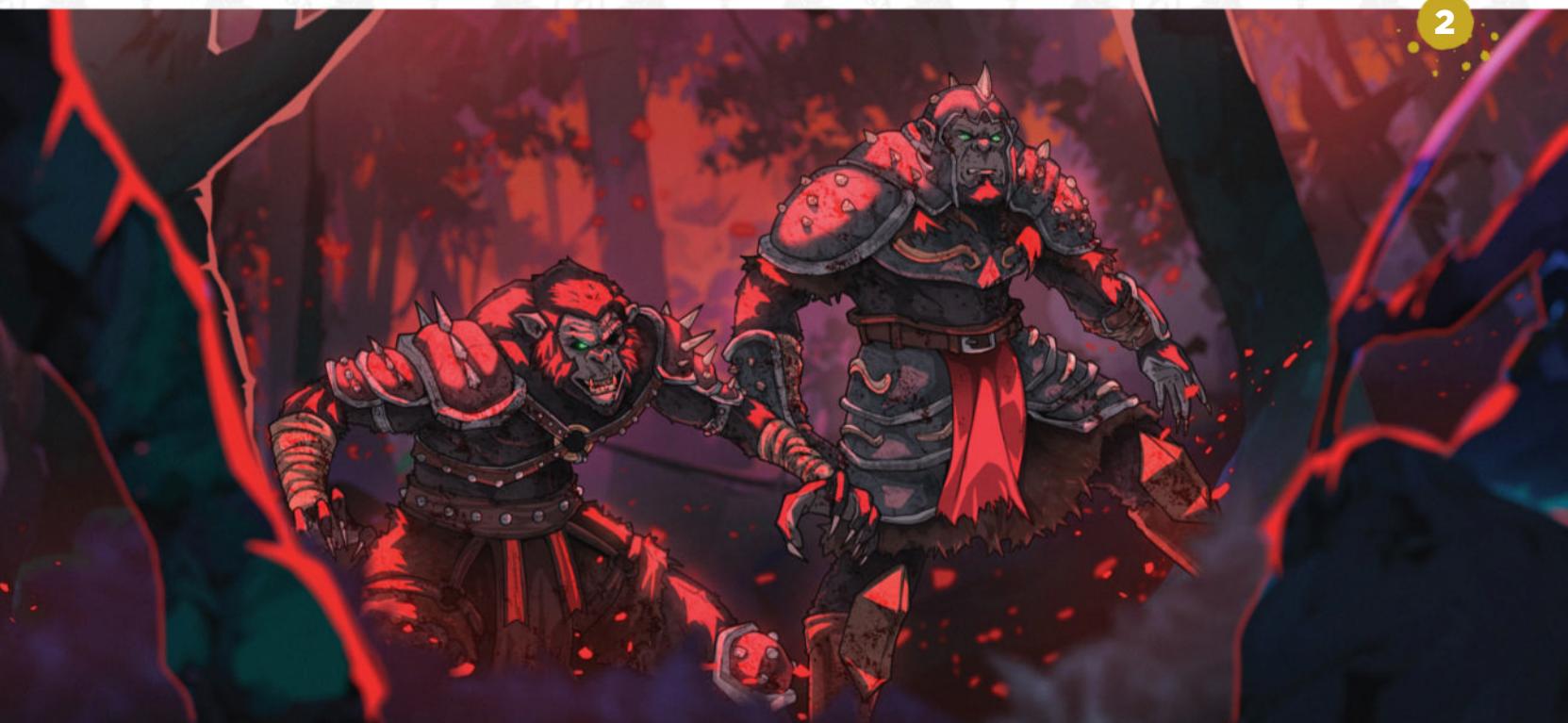
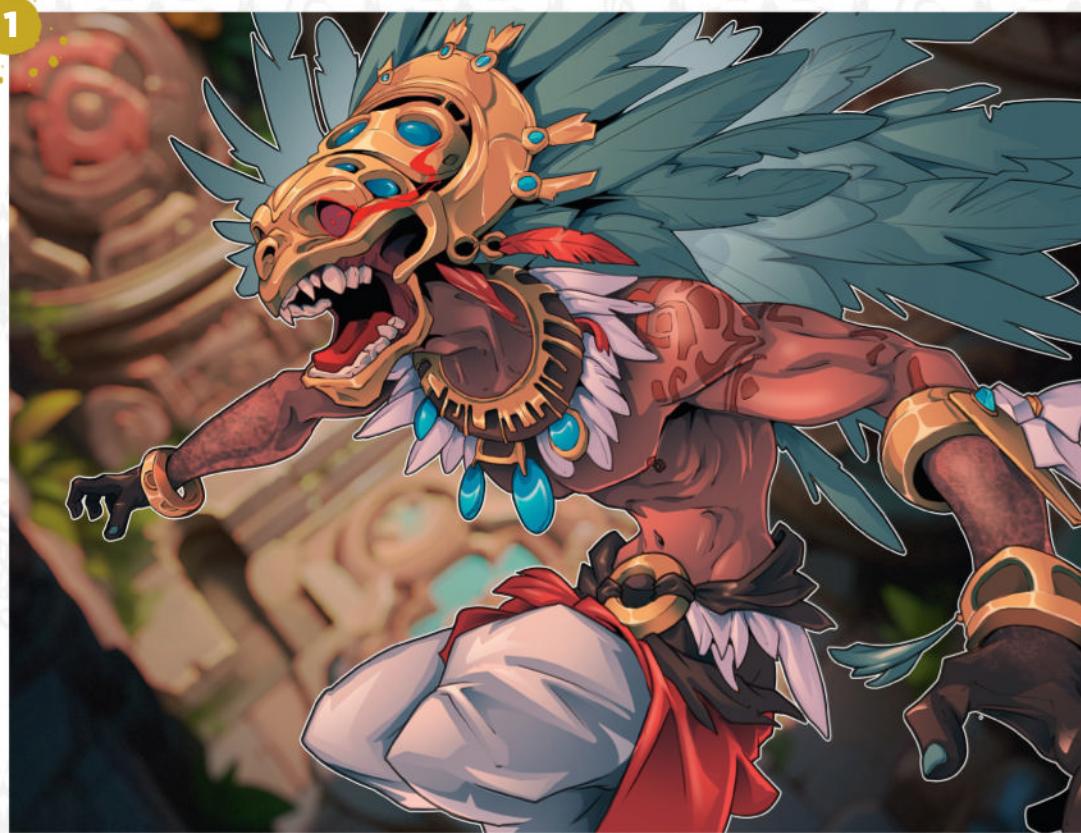
"A little personal project of different character design ideas, combining the rich visuals of Aztec and Mesoamerican mythology with dark fantasy."

2 COMRADERY

"A D&D campaign moment where two beastly barbarian brothers face the dangers of the world. The main inspirations for these characters were Caesar and Koba from the Planet Of The Apes franchise."

3 RANNI THE WITCH

"A reimagining of an Elden Ring character in her prime, way before the events of the game. I always feel curious about this world and its characters in the past."







Zara H

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: zarahartist.bigcartel.com

Zara began drawing to bring the characters in her head to life, and is hugely inspired by games, horror and fantasy. She designs characters through the lens of Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) people and culture.

1



1 SHADOWHEART

"As a big gamer, I wasn't immune to the pull of Baldur's Gate 3, and drew Shadowheart and her connection to the Mysterious Artefact."

2 VAMPIRE

"As vampires are a huge inspiration, I created this original character in 2020 as an attempt at a vampire who didn't adhere to the old legends and myths."

3 SHADOW LADY

"I was inspired by creatures known as shadow people, and wanted to create one that was sat like a noblewoman you'd find in an old portrait."

4 THE SONG OF ACHILLES

"Inspired by both the book and the legend from Greek mythology, I attempted to recreate classical paintings of Achilles and Patroclus."

2



3



4





Jakob Eirich

LOCATION: Germany MEDIA: Clip Studio Paint, Blender, Quixel Mixer, Substance 3D Modeler WEB: www.jakobeirich.de

Jakob has long been inspired by Japanese and western media, and their themes and styles can be seen in his work. From fantasy to sci-fi and stylised to realistic, Jakob sees beauty in all artistic approaches.

1 SQUAWK

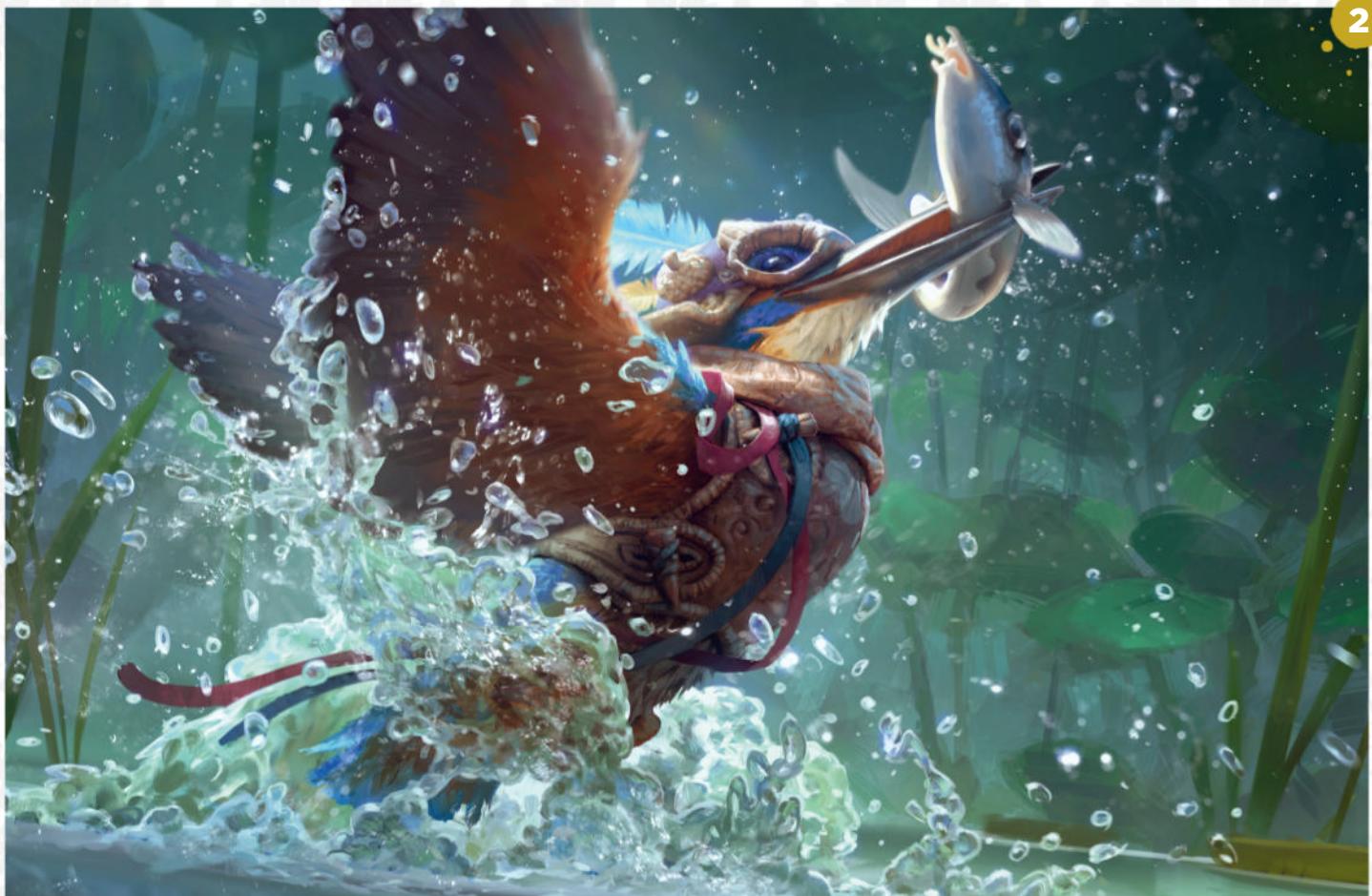
"An early exploration of fully 3D assets where I delved deeper into hard surface design. The heads have been painted on top in a semi-stylised way."

2 KNIGHTFISHER

"This is one of the many paintings I've been happy to make for Magic: The Gathering. Here I'm blending stylised and semi-realistic rendering to make the focal point stand out."

3 MILLIONAIRES

"This painting has been a milestone in my career. It was created for an art challenge and won first place."



© Wizards of the Coast







Lei Chu

LOCATION: China MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender WEB: www.artstation.com/yyo

Lei Chu is a freelance game artist with an interest in travel, which can be seen in his story about a magician who visits different places and sees amazing things. He likes to use simple techniques in his work.

1 TOAD CITY

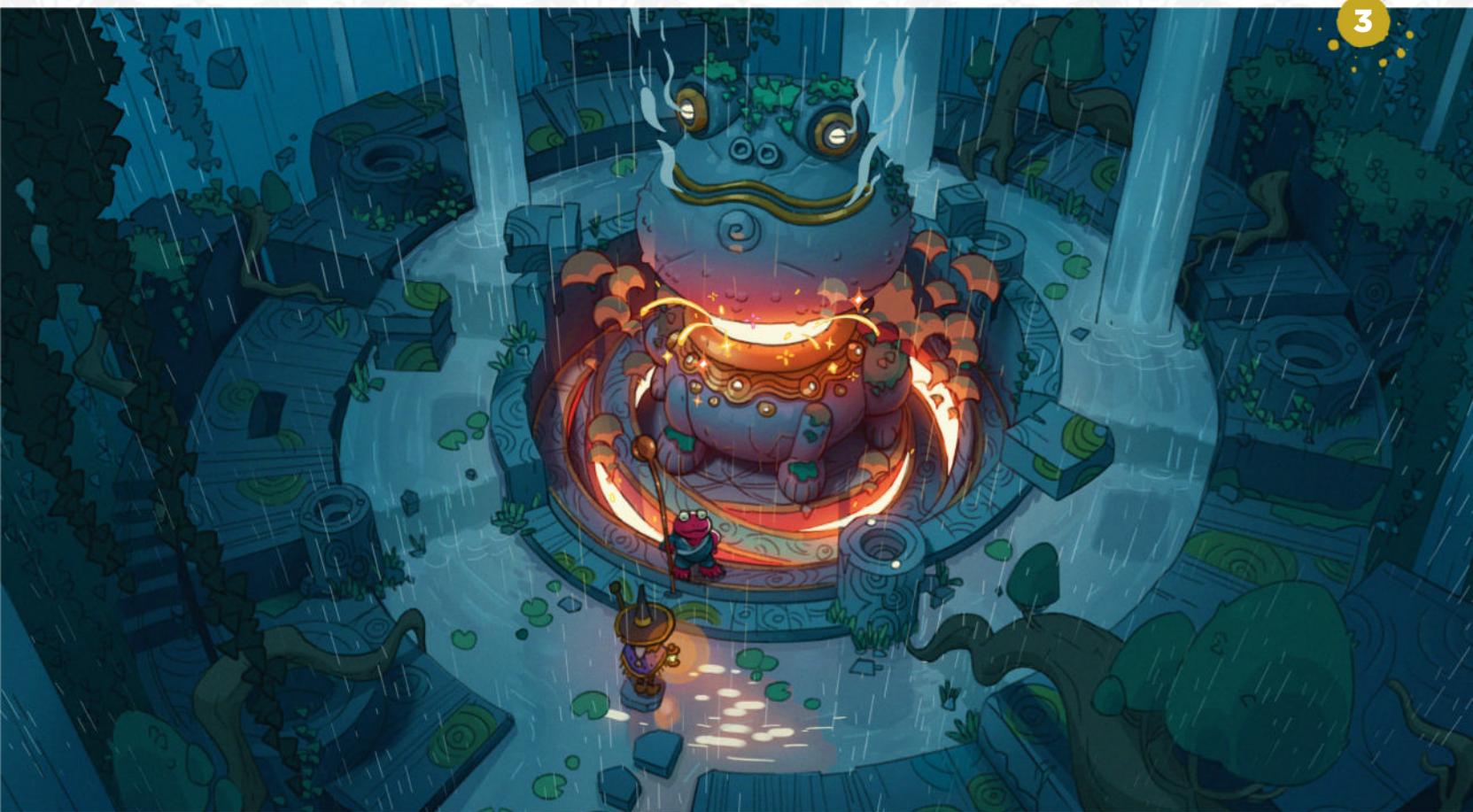
"It requires luck to find the Toad City. In my pictures, I care more about rhythm and contrast; painting is similar to music, there's a rhythm to it. If the rhythm is even, the picture won't look good."



2 TOAD CONCERT

"I've always been interested in toads and steampunk, so I put them together. The combo might be a little niche, but I like it."





3 MR HAMA

"The magician was travelling in the mountains, where he found the toad priest boiling medicine. I used Blender to make sure the shapes were correct, and then started to draw the lines and colours."

4 BRONZE BIRD

"These remains may have once housed bird people and contained magical treasures. Sometimes I'm inspired by museum artifacts, and this bronze bird can trace its style back to artworks from ancient China."



Kauê Daiprai

LOCATION: Brazil **MEDIA:** Photoshop, ZBrush, Blender **WEB:** www.artstation.com/kauedaiprai

Kauê is an artist and teacher driven by a sense of wonder for the natural world and the landscape of imagination. He's also inspired by artists such as Moebius, Paul Felix and Claire Wendling, and is developing his own comic.

1 OLD WINDMILL SHORE

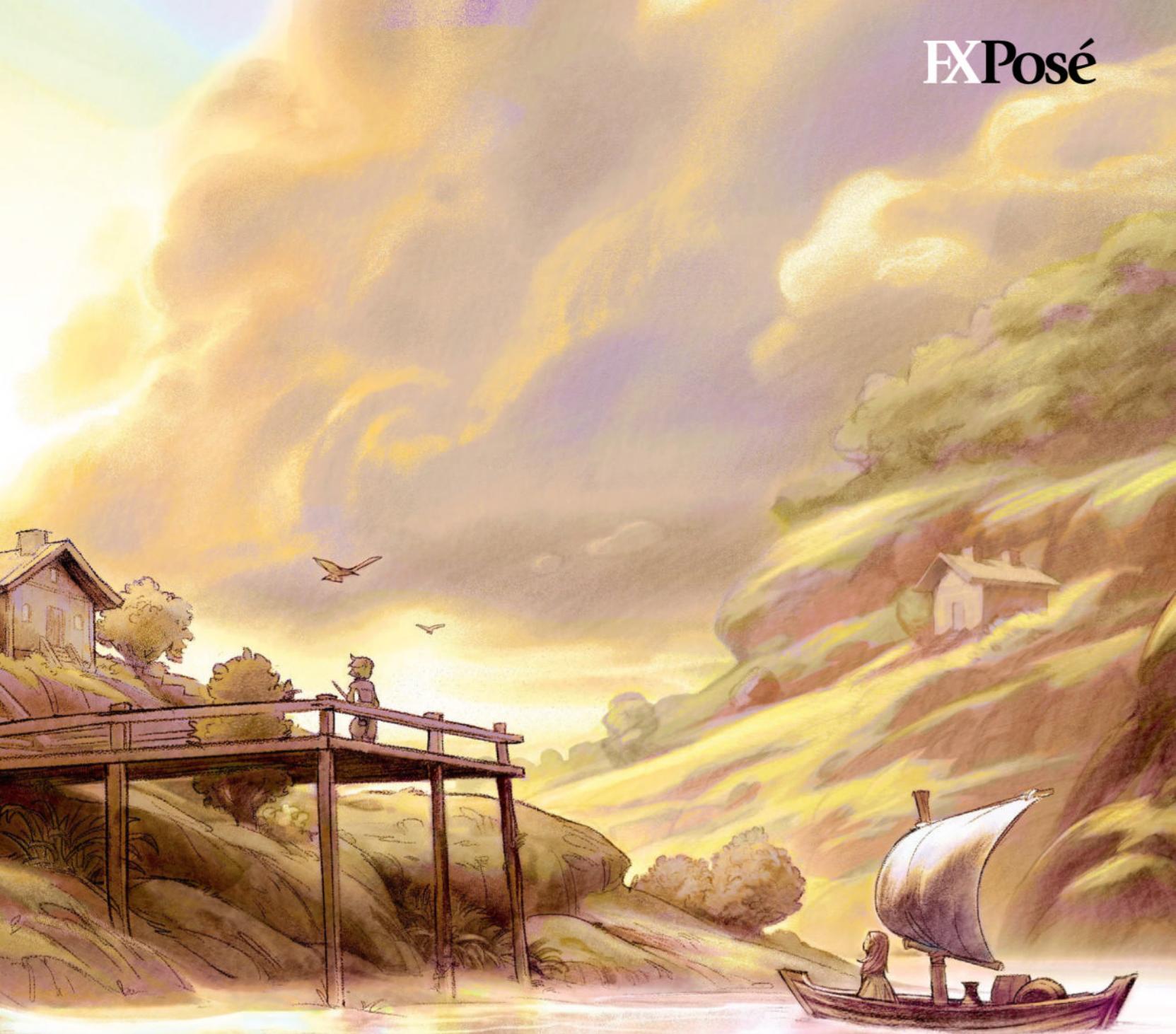
"Inspired by the grassy hills near the sea found in southern Brazil, this piece conveys the feelings of freedom and adventure I associate with these beautiful landscapes."

2 REGRESSION

"Inspired by a regressive experience where I imagined myself as a wounded warrior aided by a river faerie. This reflects my connection to the element of water."

3 BOWMAN VS IRON HOG

"This tells the joy and nostalgia of my childhood playing MapleStory. I wanted to capture the excitement of those times and connect with others who share that."



2



3

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



THE
ROOKIES

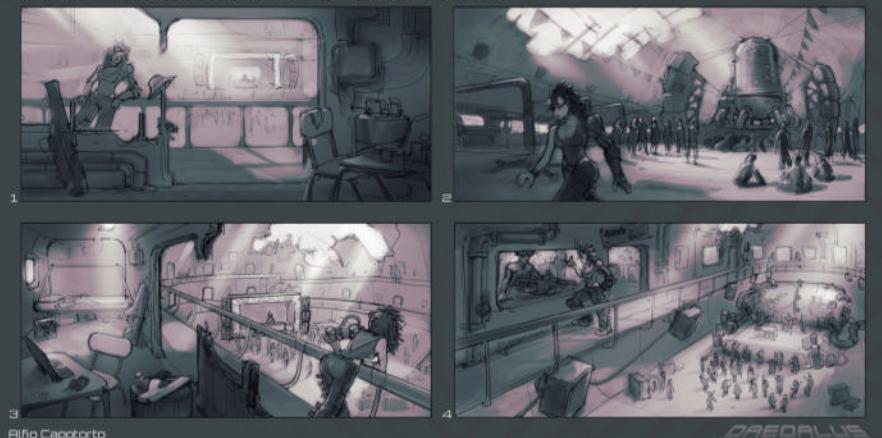
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CARGO SHIP RAVE PROCESS

The cargo bay of the crashed spaceship was turned into a rave venue, powered by a power core stolen from Claymores Industries that's ironically shaped like a guitar. Gersh was such a seasoned raver that she enjoyed having a broken wall in her room to let the music in.



DAEDALUS

YEAR CREATED: 2024 MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender, Medium by Adobe, Plasticity

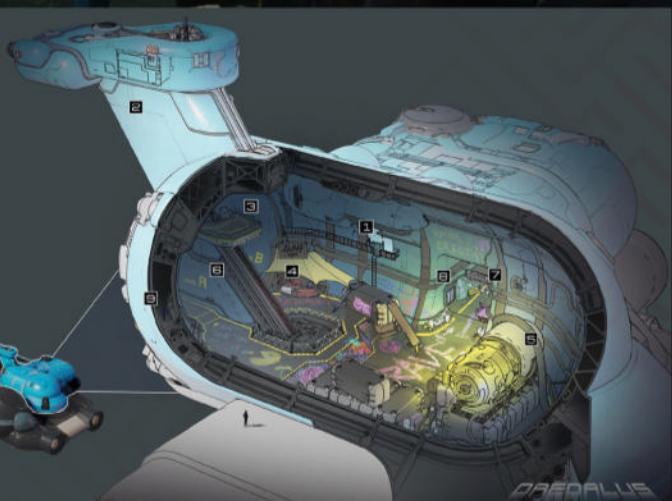
“DAEDALUS is the graduation portfolio from my studies at Syn Studio. It features environments, characters and props designed as a video game project. It's based on a universe where music was banned on Earth, which led to a militia stealing a ship to find a new home.”



CARGO SHIP OVERVIEW

Section of the crashed cargo ship stolen and used as a base (and rave venue) by the RVR Matia

Storage room	1
Control tower	2
Elevator	3
Armory	4
Claymore power core	5
Cargo access doors	6
Sleeping quarters	7
Dining hall	8
Maintenance corridor	9



Alfio Capotorto

Artist PROFILE

Alfio Capotorto

LOCATION: Canada



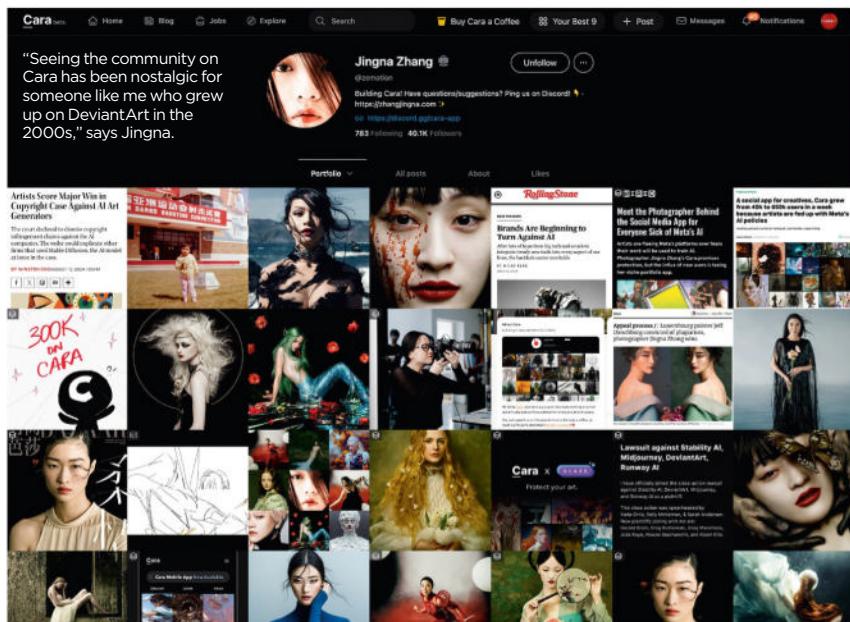
Alfio is an Italian concept artist focusing on hard-surface design and environments. His dream is to work in a studio creating amazing projects with visionary artists.

www.therookies.co/u/Alfio

ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS

ImagineNation

AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY



"I hope platforms like Cara can be a healthier approach to visibility online," says Norwegian artist Jaws Stone.



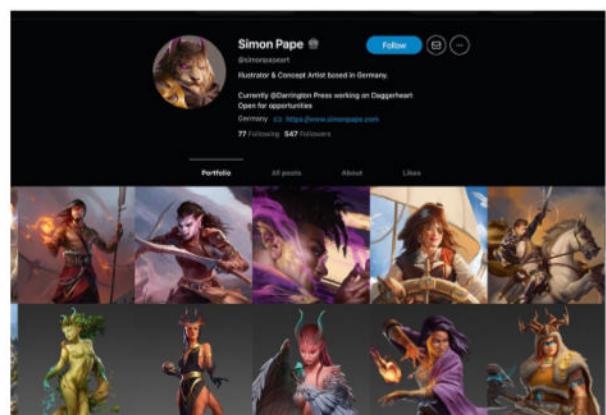
The rise of Cara: A home for artists

Putting humans first **Tanya Combrinck** talks to founder Jingna Zhang about the anti-AI portfolio and social app that's dedicated to supporting the art community

At the end of 2022, the year that generative AI ominously forced itself onto the art scene, photographer and artists' rights activist Jingna Zhang was feeling frustrated. Like so many, she had been hoping that ArtStation would finally see the light and support the art community by banning the waves of AI-generated images that were flooding the site. Instead it doubled down and issued a statement saying it didn't want to stifle AI research.

Stunned by this betrayal, Jingna, who is also part of two class-action lawsuits suing AI companies for theft

of artists' work, hatched a plan to build a new platform where artists' interests come first. Working with a small team of volunteers and self-funding the project, she laid the foundations for Cara, an art portfolio and social app that doesn't host AI art, and automatically adds NoAI tags to let AI companies know that the owner doesn't consent to their work being scraped. It's also integrated with Glaze, a tool for cloaking images so they can't be used to train AI models. The result is a space where people can find human artists easily, and artists can come together to support each other as they navigate the changes



German illustrator and concept artist Simon Page began posting on Cara back in June.

that AI is bringing to their passions and their livelihoods.

Jingna intended to grow Cara up slowly, but that plan was blown out of the water this summer by Meta's announcement that images on Facebook and Instagram would be used to train its generative AI tool. ➡

“We've only been around a year, so I appreciate that despite these challenges, people are still coming back to Cara”



ANSWER THE CHALLENGE

Readers take on the latest ImagineFX Art Challenge, which set the task of creating an image with a blue and orange colour scheme. We pick our favourites! **Page 30**



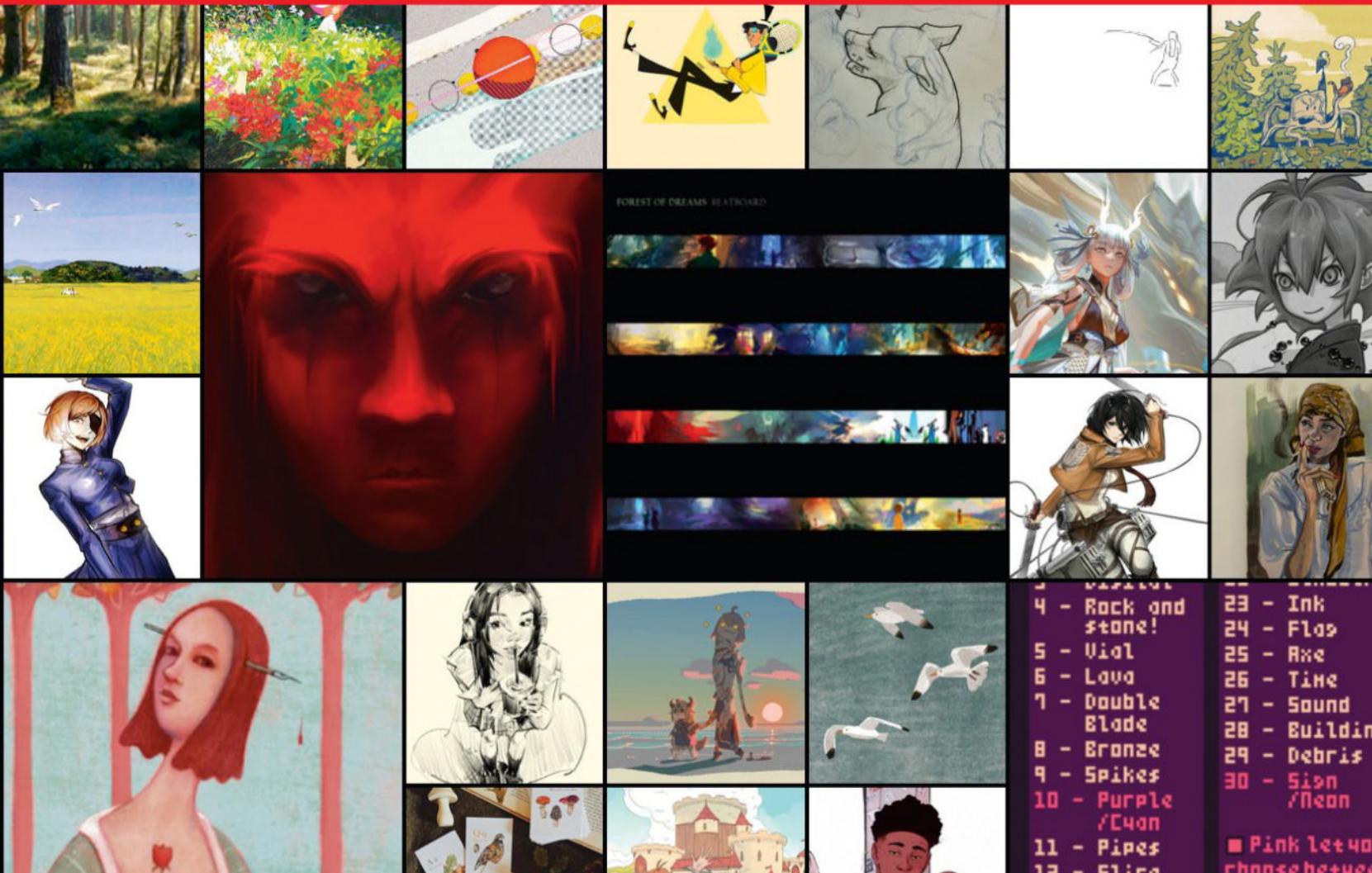
A NOOK FOR ILLUSTRATION

Swiss artist Margaux Kindhauser tells us why she loves the nostalgic touches in her studio, as she gives us the grand tour and shares some of her fantasy art. **Page 32**



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 39**



1 - **Water**
 2 - **Clouds**
 3 - **Wind**
 4 - **Rock and stone!**
 5 - **Vial**
 6 - **Lava**
 7 - **Double Blade**
 8 - **Bronze**
 9 - **Spikes**
 10 - **Purple / Cyan**
 11 - **Pipes**
 12 - **Stone**

■ **Pink let me choose the best**



A collection of inspiring human-made art awaits you on Cara.

"As a professional working artist, I've found the past two years really rough due to how much gen AI has already disrupted the industry," says Simon.



"Modern platforms have altered our impressions of what success looks like," says Jaws.

➡ Artists were outraged and signed up to Cara in droves. The userbase surged from 40,000 to over one million in just a few weeks.

Jingna describes this event as "a validation of the movement" for artists' rights. She says: "Times have changed since we started all these lawsuits. There was a perception from the public that no one cares and it's just a few loud activists. But now, here are one million people who care about this. It's strength in numbers. It validates how people feel."

SUDDEN COSTS

A passionate community is thriving on the app and artists are excited to find an online home that respects them and their work. But the surprise influx has caused countless problems for Jingna and her team, most notably a \$96,000 server bill, and left her scrambling to keep Cara operational and find the funding to sustain it. "In the first few weeks I was sleeping once every other day," she tells us.



© Kingwood Games

Fantasy illustrator Chris Seaman says: "The Cara community has talent and lots of it. As artists we need to find inspiration and Cara has it in droves."



Simon says: "Having a platform that values my work and integrity instead of wanting to steal it for their own profit is something I value very much."

Suddenly growing to one million users came with both expected and unexpected costs. "You might think that the image hosting would be the most expensive thing, but it's actually only about 15 per cent of our total expenses," Jingna explains. "The most expensive things are database related; activities such as comments, likes and notifications. These are the things that are constantly making calls back and forth to the server."

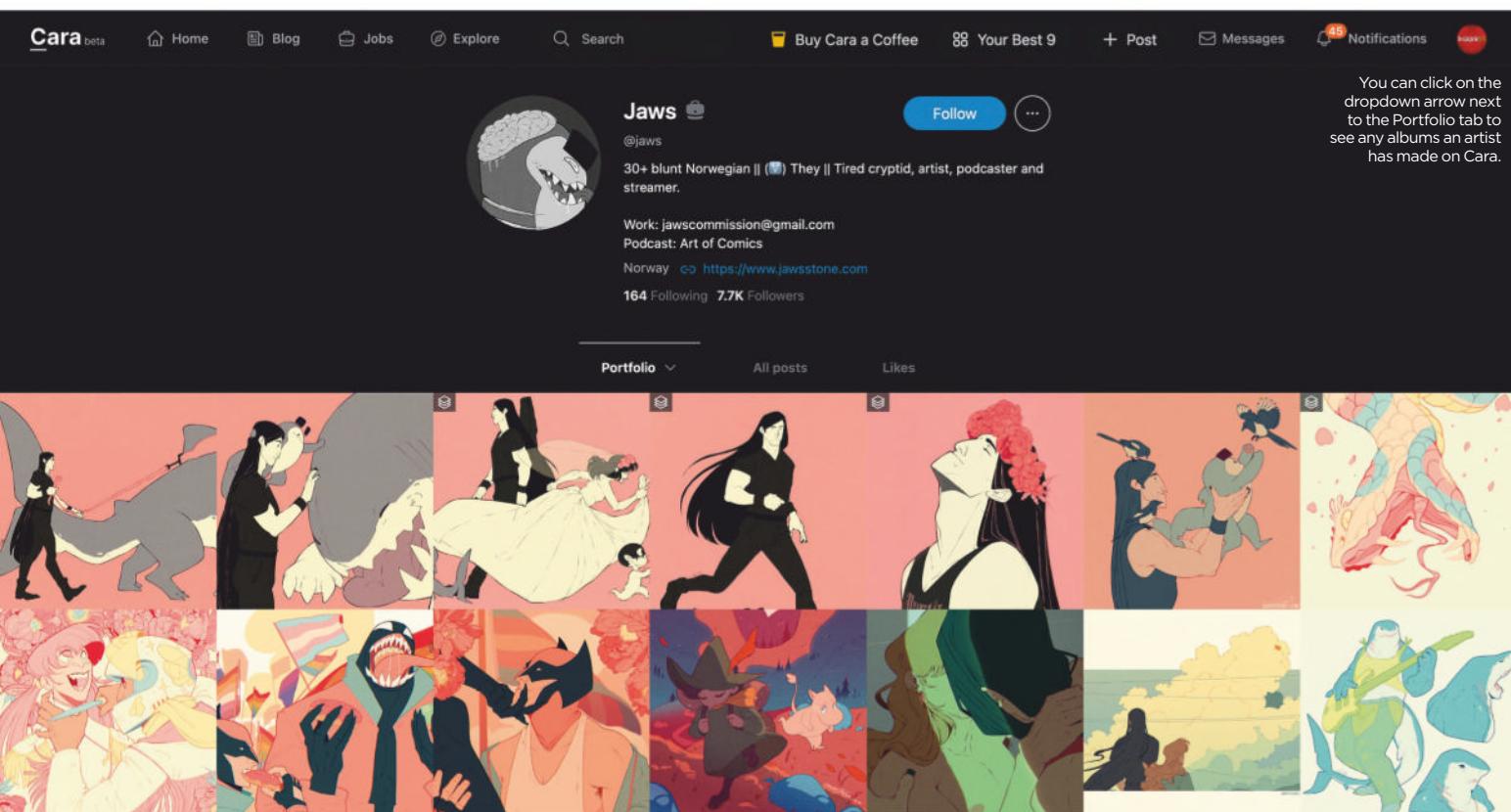
If a post has 20,000 likes and lots of comments, that costs money. And the

effect of this is exacerbated by the fact that Cara wasn't built for scale, so the code isn't as efficient as it could be. It will take time to optimise it. But if you're thinking of holding back on the likes, Jingna says: "Don't stop using Cara because you think it will help with the bills! We're handling it."

Finding income streams to keep Cara going is a top priority. One option is subscriptions, and the team is working on a proper way for people to subscribe within the app. When this feature is set up, they'll have a better

“Here are one million people who care about artists' rights. It's strength in numbers. It validates how people feel”

Artist news, software & events



The screenshot shows the Cara beta website interface. At the top, there are navigation links: Home, Blog, Jobs, Explore, Search, Buy Cara a Coffee, Your Best 9, Post, Messages, Notifications, and a user icon. The main area features a profile for the artist 'Jaws' (@jaws), who is described as a 'blunt Norwegian' cryptid, artist, podcaster, and streamer. Their profile picture is a stylized illustration of a shark's head. Below the profile, there are links for Work (jawscommission@gmail.com), Podcast (Art of Comics), and a website (https://www.jawsstone.com). It shows 164 Following and 7.7K Followers. A dropdown menu for 'Portfolio' is open, showing options for 'Portfolio', 'All posts', and 'Likes'. Below this, a grid of 12 small illustrations by the artist is displayed, showcasing various characters and scenes in a colorful, artistic style.

idea of the extent to which Cara can be sustained by subscriptions.

The other main option is to take money from investors such as venture capital firms, other companies, or individuals such as family and friends. But of course, Jingna won't allow the mission and values of the project to be compromised, as that would defeat the purpose of setting it up in the first place. "Whether we have investment or not, I will want us to stay in control, but that makes it a lot harder to fundraise," she says.

INTENSE SCRUTINY

The question of investment and the sustainability of Cara brings us to the most difficult aspect that Jingna has had to face in this venture. As is often the case with a highly invested online community, a minority of people feel entitled to dictate how the site ought to be run and resort to directing hate and harassment at the founders if their suggestions aren't followed.

Jingna recalls: "When I first talked of potentially needing to fundraise, people's knee-jerk reaction when they hear the word 'investor' is, 'Oh, if you take VC [venture capital] money, you're evil and you're going to sell out. You should just shut down.' But they don't know what's really happening



© DarringtonPress LLC

"Cara combines robust social features, such as having a dedicated feed to share your thoughts and art, with portfolio features akin to those of ArtStation. It's the best of both," says Simon.

behind the scenes. They don't know about the conversations I'm having."

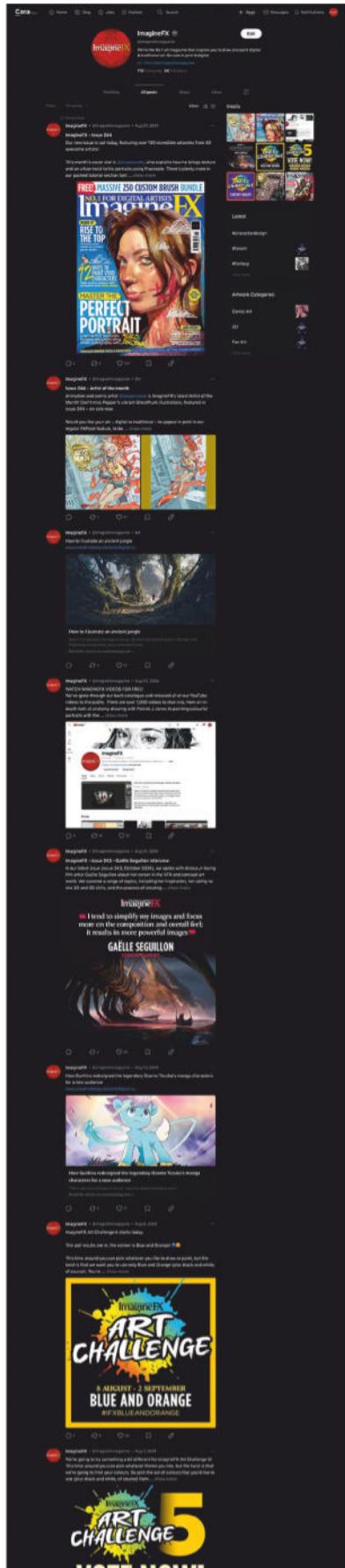
One way of protecting Cara's interests is to register it as a public benefit corporation, which means that the mission and vision would come first and if it did take venture capital money, that investors couldn't force the company to prioritise profit. Jingna is also exploring options with trusted individuals who would be

prepared to give her funds while allowing her to retain full control.

Despite this, and despite her track record as an advocate for the art community, the scrutiny, criticism and harassment she has faced has been intense. It has even curtailed funding options for Cara, because if Jingna were to take community funding, it would make people feel even more entitled to attack her. ➤

ImagineNation News

Find us on Cara, @imaginefxmagazine, and join in the discussion - we're posting all the latest updates on the magazine, our Art Challenge and more.



Simon says: "Cara celebrates authentic, artistic expression by real human beings."

→ While Jingna's immediate focus is on keeping the site afloat, she also thinks a lot about how she can build powerful social media features for her users, and how Cara might avoid some of the issues that are causing artists to be disillusioned with the mainstream social media sites, such as bad algorithms not showing them what they want to see, not having enough control over their feed, and their posts not reaching many of their followers. Cara users are currently delighted with how the platform offers a refreshing escape from these.

CHALLENGES OF SCALE

"It's always easier in the beginning when it's a smaller platform," says Jingna. She points out that, to a great extent, problems with visibility and unfavourable algorithms are a result of mainstream sites having billions of users posting on all different topics. Even with one million users, Cara is

Jaws says: "I like the potential and promise of Cara. It brings back memories of art communities from 20 years ago."



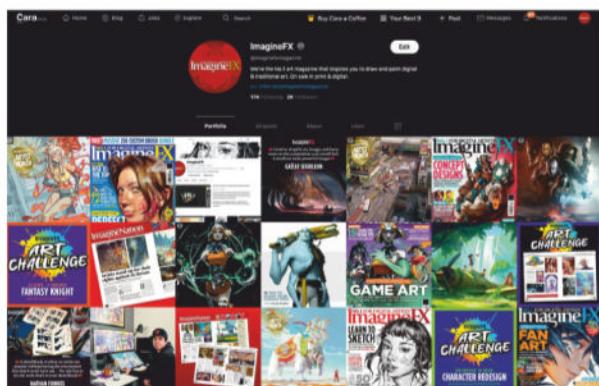
“We’re still very much an app that’s in beta. Going viral didn’t change that”

tiny by comparison, so at the moment the site avoids the issues naturally by being small, and by being dedicated to one topic. But as it grows, it will have to face some of the challenges that come with scale.

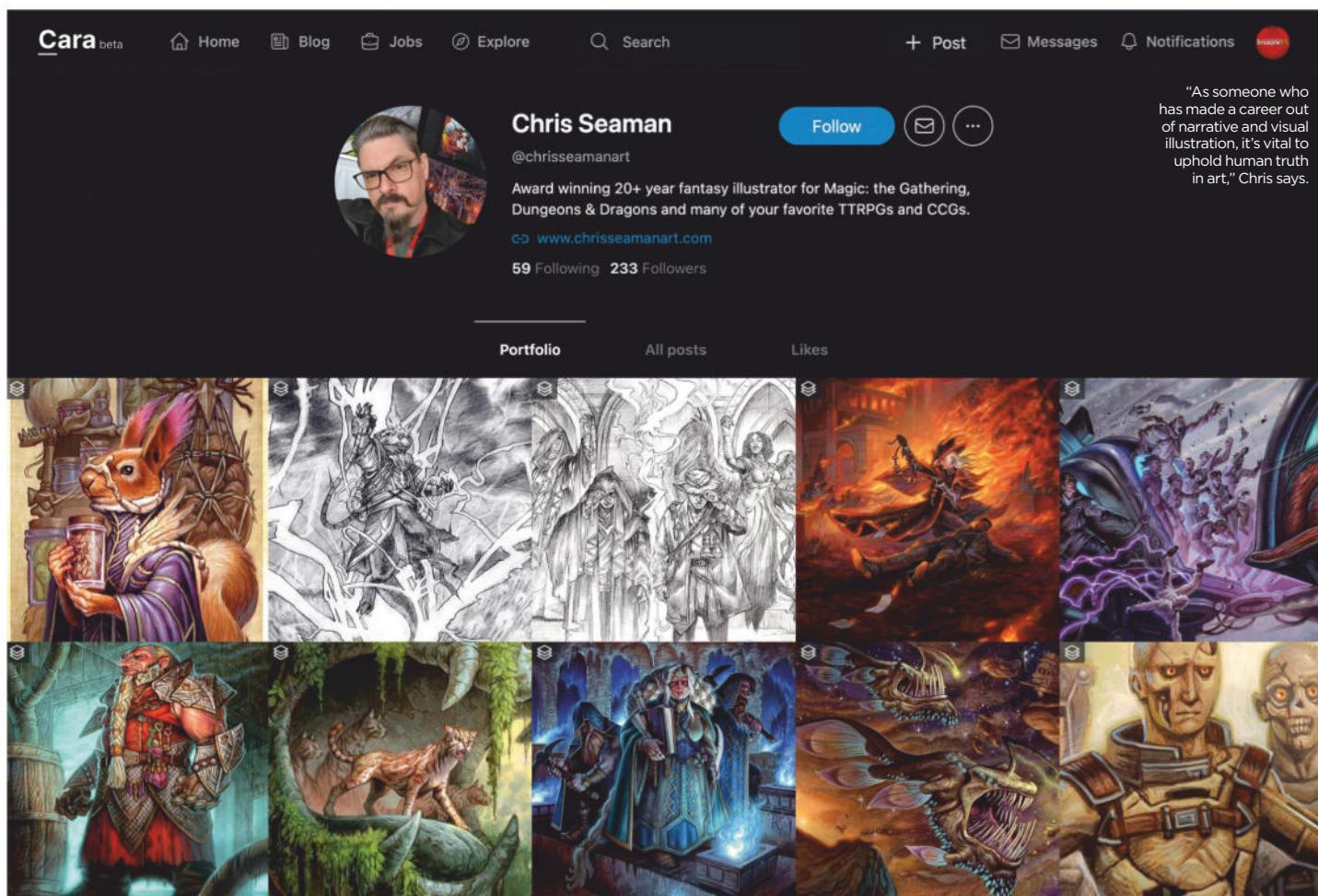
For example, Cara doesn't have an algorithm yet. As a broader range of artists starts to join, there will be many who would prefer to see something other than the dominant art style, so it will be necessary to make a way for Cara to show people the kind of art that they're interested in.

"Recommendation is something we want to build, but we want to build it thoughtfully and carefully," Jingna says. Her aim is to find a way to do it that allows users to both discover new content and curate their timeline by following their chosen artists.

One feature that allows people to get a fine degree of control over their



Artist news, software & events



The screenshot shows the Cara beta app's user interface. At the top, there are navigation links for Home, Blog, Jobs, Explore, Search, and a sign-in button. Below the navigation is the artist profile of Chris Seaman, featuring a circular profile picture of him, his name, handle (@chrisseamanart), a bio about his career as a fantasy illustrator, a website link (www.chrisseamanart.com), and follower counts (59 Following, 233 Followers). To the right of the profile is a quote from Chris: "As someone who has made a career out of narrative and visual illustration, it's vital to uphold human truth in art," Chris says. Below the profile is a navigation bar with links for Portfolio, All posts, and Likes. The main content area displays a grid of ten thumbnail images representing various pieces of Chris Seaman's artwork, including a rabbit-like character, a white dragon, a group of people in a cathedral, a fire scene, a crowd of people, a bearded man, a tiger-like creature, a wizard in a blue robe, a large shark-like creature, and two skeletal figures.

feed is the capability to subscribe to someone's updates and filter out their reposts, almost like a customisable RSS feed. These are the kinds of powerful, user-centric features that people miss from the old internet. "I think something like this can be very valuable to people, and it's not easy to find platforms that let you do things like this these days," says Jingna.

Another example of how Cara puts its users in control is the recently introduced portfolio albums feature, which allows artists to arrange their work into categories. It's hoped that one day it will be possible for artists to offer separate links so that people can follow their social feed, profile timeline or portfolio.

JUST GETTING STARTED

It's important to remember that despite the existence of these great features and a strong overall user experience, it's still early days for Cara and there are bugs. "We're still very much an app that's in beta. Going viral didn't change that," says Jingna. "We've only been around for a year



"Cara doesn't seem to be bogged down by dubious algorithms that most social media platforms suffer from these days, so people can actually see the art or posts you make," says Simon.

and we're built by volunteers and my bank account, so I really appreciate that despite these challenges, people are still coming back and regularly using Cara."

The app is giving artists a space to form a community and stand together against AI companies' misuse of their work. And it's not the only win for artists' rights that has been achieved this summer: one of the class-action

lawsuits that Jingna is part of has recently progressed to an important next stage. That means there's hope that eventually AI companies will have to respect artists' copyright. It's a hard fight, but Jingna and other activists are doing all they can. "I hope these conversations can continue and platforms like Cara can continue to validate how important this is to people," she says. 



Show your colours Our readers sent in another batch of stunning artworks for the Blue and Orange theme

We went with something a little different for the latest ImagineFX Art Challenge. Instead of setting out a prompt to draw from, we wanted you to follow a colour scheme.

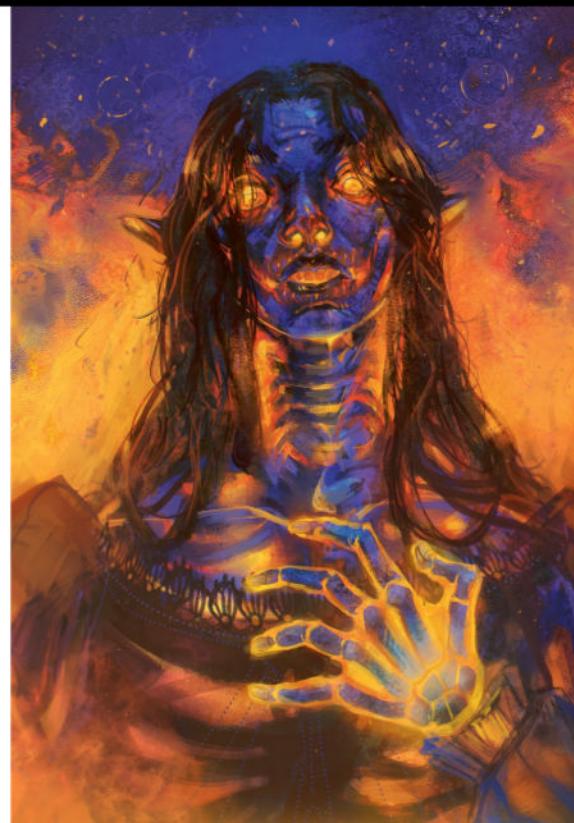
After a public vote, you went for a combo of blue and orange. The huge variety of artwork we received was

superb, featuring everything from abstract and stylised pieces through to an anthropomorphic orange. We're always amazed by your creativity!

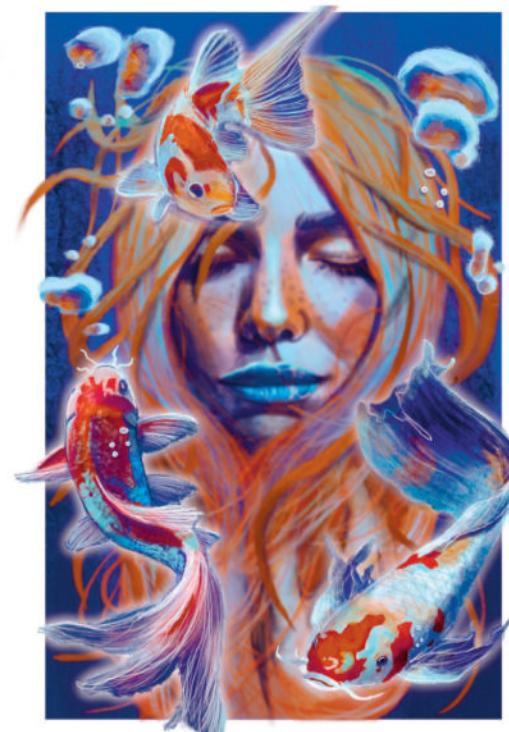
Our next Art Challenge will run during October with daily prompts to tackle. We've already published the list on our social media – don't miss it.

Parnian Farshhomayounzad

Media: Photoshop Web: <https://cara.app/parinfhz>



Stephanie Bradley Media: Clip Studio Paint
Web: www.instagram.com/_dream.snail_



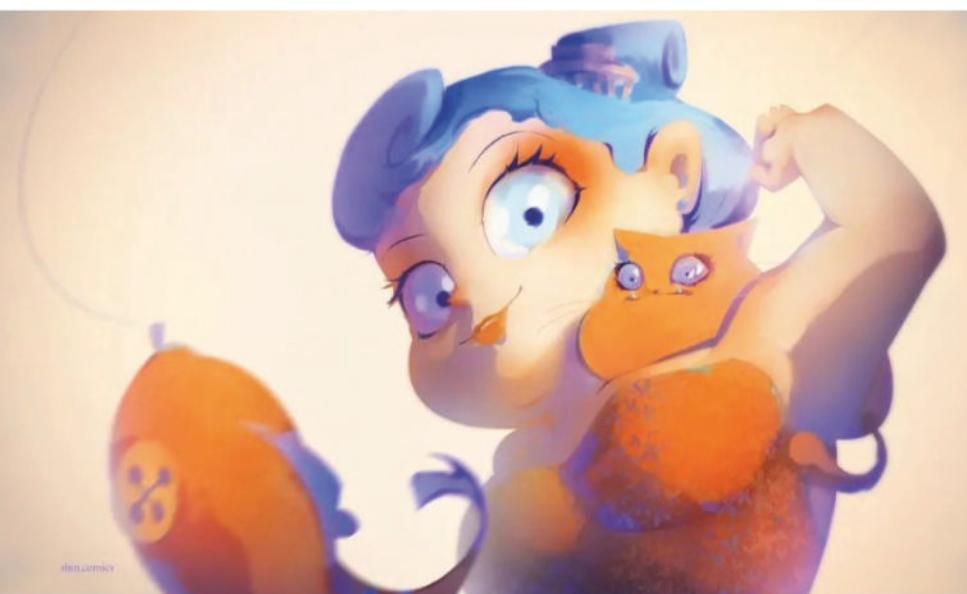
Kimberley Jane Bradshaw Media: Affinity Photo
Web: www.instagram.com/kimble_art

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**

Artist news, software & events



Esther Viola Piternella *Media: Procreate Web: www.instagram.com/spectralstories*



Shin *Media: Photoshop Web: www.instagram.com/shin.comics*



Elisabeth Aarebrot Madsen
Media: Photoshop Web: www.emeraldusdesign.com



Margaux Kindhauser

Cosy corner Welcome to this work nook that's a blend of curiosities and an inspiring art studio



I finally set up a real work office at home three years ago. Even though I've been working as an artist professionally since 2007, I've never had the luxury of owning a whole room destined to be an art studio.

I live in Switzerland, a very expensive country where housing is pricy. All those years in previous apartments, I was either working on a desk in a bedroom, a table in a living room, sometimes in a kitchen, or squatting a friend's art studio. I even did a few storyboard pages in a bathtub! Finally having my own dedicated space was a real level ➡



This is Anya Eisenstern, the main character of a comic heavily inspired by dark academia.



“I’m a bit of a hoarder, and I love to surround myself with reminders of what I love”

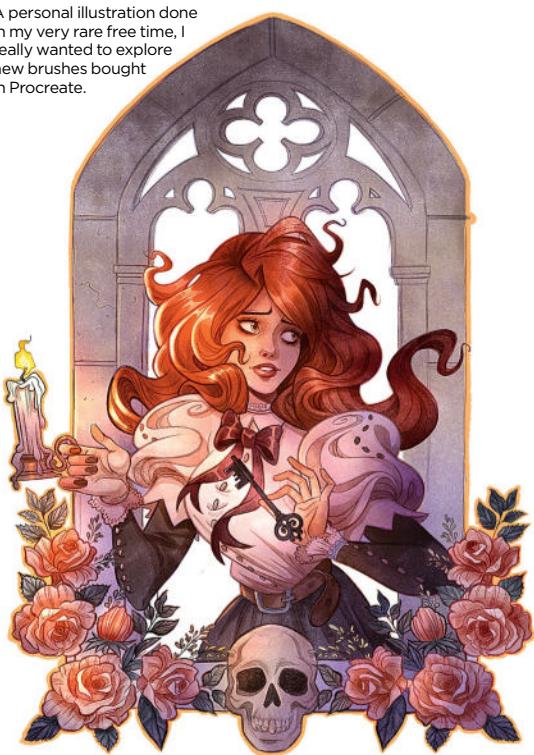
The mechanical pencil and Col-Erase pencil are my two ultimate favourite tools. Almost all of my art starts with blue or brown Col-Erase pencil and I then ‘ink’ my art using a mechanical pencil. I can’t actually ink for the life of me, but this technique seems to suit my art well.

Artist news, software & events



ImagineNation Artist in Residence

A personal illustration done in my very rare free time, I really wanted to explore new brushes bought in Procreate.



This is part of my artbook collection. As a self-taught artist, I learned to draw by copying most of the art in some of these books.

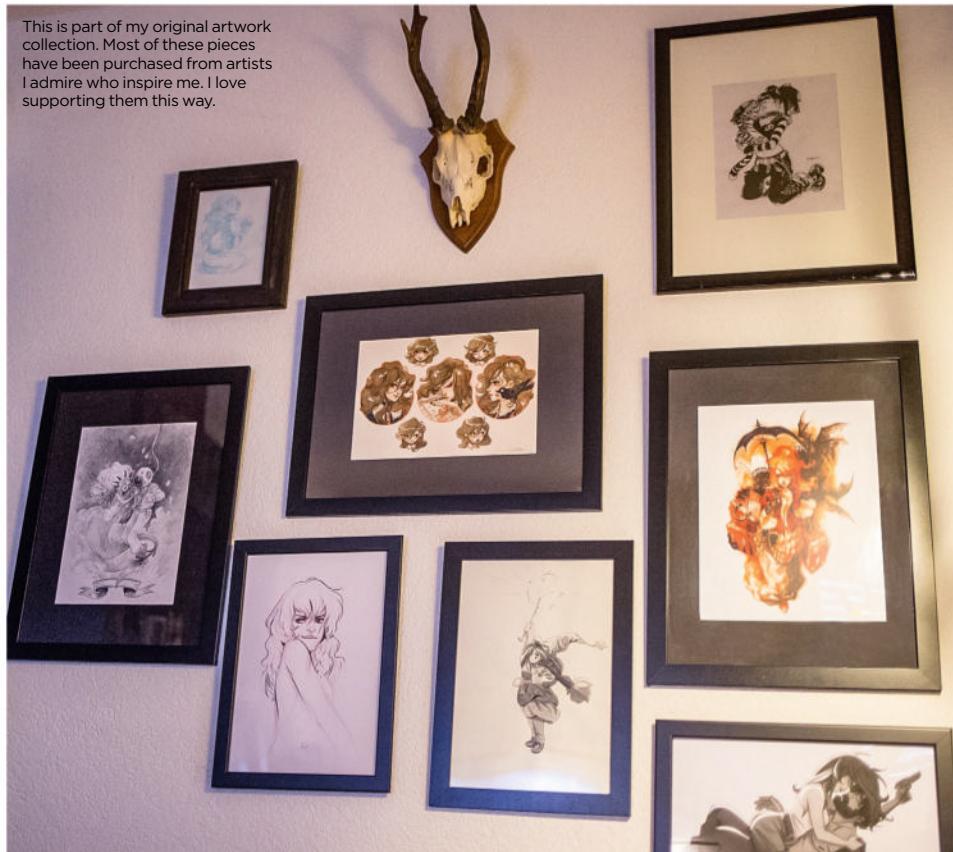


I always have my published books around, even though I hate to flip through them as I only see all the mistakes! But sometimes I need them to go back to certain details that need to be drawn again in my ongoing series Spirite, such as backgrounds or costumes.

Artist news, software & events



This is part of my original artwork collection. Most of these pieces have been purchased from artists I admire who inspire me. I love supporting them this way.



“Every time I clean my desk it ends up in chaos the same day, despite my efforts”



I love creating fantasy creatures and women, and mix all kinds of stuff inspired by flora and fauna. They're relaxing to draw!

ImagineNation Artist in Residence

My desk is my safe haven. It contains hundreds of items, some almost as old as I am, that match who I was and who I've become over the years. I'm nostalgia-driven and it comforts me to be surrounded by things that remind me of where I came from.



➡ up and it did wonders for my persistent imposter syndrome. It's also useful to be able to lock the place before the kids barge in and decide to scribble across any sheet of paper they can find – including my art of course – with their chocolate spread-covered fingers!

Generally I'm more productive in the morning and crash out completely in the afternoon. It took me two kids and the whole new life that comes

“It took two kids to realise that I was actually a morning person and not a night owl”

I love collecting autumn leaves as it's my favourite season. I keep a bunch to display in pictures when I show my art on social media. They make for pretty setups that match my artwork so well.

with them to realise I was actually a morning person and not a night owl! I wake up around 6.30am, drink lots of coffee, tend to the kids until 7.45am, and work non-stop from 8am-2pm.

Instead of beating myself up for being an unproductive slug once the lunch-induced food coma hits for the afternoon, I embrace the sluggishness and take a long nap, then fetch the kids, spend the rest of the day with them, and manage to cram an hour or two of work in after their bedtime. That's if I'm not doomscrolling in bed after a hectic family evening that's drained me. I think I've finally found a pretty neat work-life balance overall. Embracing the sluggishness has changed my productivity!

I had a lot of fun decorating my office, if decorating means placing

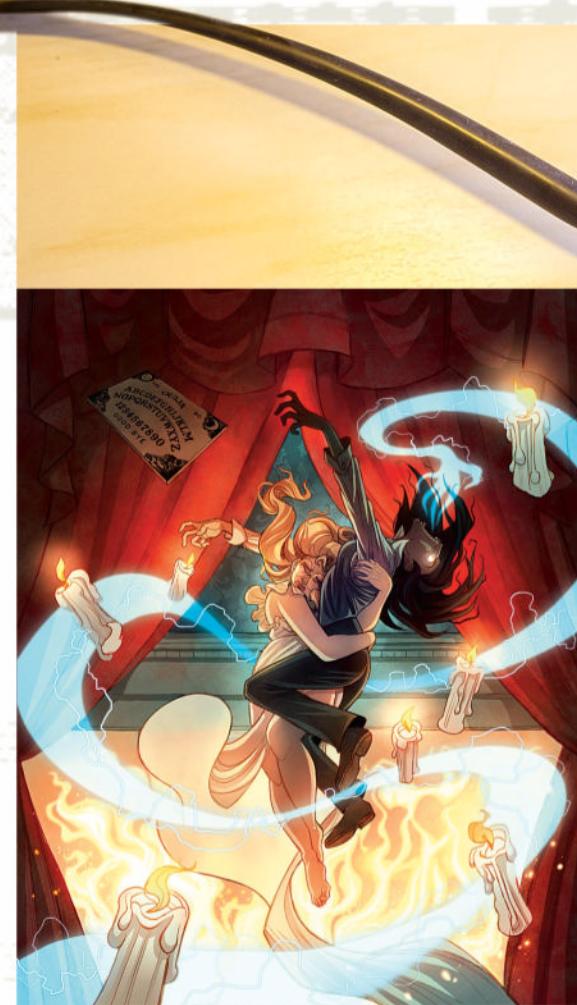
random objects in almost any random places they can fit in. I'm a bit of a hoarder and I love to surround myself with things that remind me of what I love: my friends, my family, and my other interests. I own a few original drawings that I've bought or been gifted from artists I love, and they hang on my wall above my desk.

Unfortunately, I'm a very messy person. Every time I clean my desk – most of the time to look for an overdue bill I suddenly remembered I need to pay – it ends up in chaos the same day, despite all my best efforts. When I finally decide to clean my office, I like to take photographs to immortalise it during that rare window of time my desk doesn't look like a group of rabid wild boars has been foraging through it.

Margaux is a Swiss illustrator and comic book writer who began working as an artist in 2007. She currently also teaches character design at an art school in Lausanne. To find out more about Margaux's work, head over to www.instagram.com/margauxmara.



Artist news, software & events



The cover of my next comic book, Spirite Vol. 3, which depicts a spiritual seance gone wrong. It's one of the main scenes in the book.



I bought this pipe when I was a huge Lord of the Rings fan in 2002, and smoked it while reading the book under a tree like an actual Hobbit. It still smells of burnt tobacco and brings back awesome memories!

This handmade water bottle is filled with water from a special spring in France: La Fontaine de Barenton. It's said to be the magical place where Merlin and Vivien met. I filled this bottle in 2001, and it's so old that a whole ecosystem of algae is growing inside! When I start work on a special traditional painting, I use a drop of it in my rinse water for good luck.



Another one of those comfort zone illustrations I love making, which are basically made from girls, fantasy details, detailed gowns, armour and flowing hair. They all make me happy.



This feather belonged to my late cockatiel Albus, my most trusted companion. He had a feisty personality, but loved head scratches and napped on my arm.



This crocheted spider belonged to my late friend Ketty, who died in September 2021. She was such an incredible person and loved spiders. I miss her dearly, but I'm surrounded by a lot of her wonderful stuff that makes me think of her every day.

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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 244

November 2024

Add urban style to your portraits thanks to our tutorial from cover star Alvaro Escobar. Elsewhere, we find out how to reach the top of the games industry with advice from the pros, and visit the studio of a horror manga artist.



Issue 243

October 2024

Dive into the world of concept art withoodles of expert insight. We speak to dino-loving film artist Gaëlle Seguillon about her career, and find out what it takes to work in costume design. You also learn how to create our wild cover art!



Issue 242

September 2024

We go big on games with a look at the gorgeous art of Hades II and speak to art director Jen Zee. Plus, look behind the scenes of Destiny 2 expansion The Final Shape, and learn to create a Dark Souls-inspired fantasy setting.



Issue 241

August 2024

Discover how to sketch like a pro with Brooks Kim's tips on drawing a portrait like his beautiful cover artwork. Disney artist Nathan Fowkes also shares his story in an insightful Q&A, plus top skills for photobashing, Blender and more.

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ImagineNation
AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY

The path to the top at a video games company

Hi ImagineFX team. I wanted to congratulate you on a really useful article in your last issue. I'm still early in my career working in video game design and haven't really had much of an idea how to progress, so I was super interested to read what you had to say about reaching the top. As a self-taught artist, it was good to hear that other people much further along in their careers are the same and stay ahead of the game in their free time. Thank you so much for the informative feature!

Stephanie, via email

Newbie to pro

Hi ImagineFX team. I wanted to congratulate you on a really useful article in your last issue. I'm still early in my career working in video game design and haven't really had much of an idea how to progress, so I was super interested to read what you had to say about reaching the top. As a self-taught artist, it was good to hear that other people much further along in their careers are the same and stay ahead of the game in their free time. Thank you so much for the informative feature!

Stephanie, via email

Rob replies Thanks for writing in, Stephanie! It's great to hear you're feeling positive about your future. I agree with a lot of what was said in that article.

Alexander Alza mentioned using free resources and free time to keep your skills up to date and I think that's common for many people these days, utilising YouTube and the like to brush up on their skills. I hope that works for you too. Good luck with your career!

Five pro video game artists gave us insight on how to climb the ladder in our last issue.



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 244 at ifxm.ag/single-ifx.

CREATIVE STRENGTH IN COMMUNITY

In issue 244 we talked to THU founder André Luís about the story behind a big community event.

Trojan tribes

I loved reading your article about THU. It's an event that I've been to on a couple of occasions and I always come away reinvigorated and enthused, as well as having made new friends. I feel this is so important as many artists, myself included, work alone for much of the time and it's really good to get out and meet people, as well as learn. These events are great for many reasons.

Lorna, via email

Rob replies Hi Lorna. You're totally right. THU has a reputation for not just being informative, but as a place where bonds are formed and inspiration is found. I think the insular nature of many artists' working practices can work against them, so getting out to an event like THU is a hugely beneficial experience. It can prove so inspirational and motivational. I've been many times and always come away with new skills, new friends, and a passion to start new projects.

A different take

Hello there! I'm writing to say well done to Yong Nam Kim. That sketchbook in issue 244 was beautiful and seeing characters drawn in a new style was just lovely, his take on a young Genghis Khan in particular. For a figure usually drawn in a much darker way, it was refreshing to see a different approach. Please find more artwork like this.

Gareth, via email

Rob replies I think you're on to something there for sure, Gareth. Seeing someone that's usually characterised as a brutal and bloodthirsty conqueror being portrayed in a friendlier, more innocent manner is a real breath of fresh air. I'll make sure to keep an eye out for more of this unique art for our future issues.

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention



Sandra Winther
@sandrawintherart



Thiago Baltar
@thiago_baltar



Michelle Webb
@lionart.studio

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

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
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RISING STARS

We shine a spotlight on the superstars of the future and their work at top art schools



2024

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Students introduce their personal art and projects for well-known publishers

Visual Arts Passage offers custom-tailored online art courses delivered by the biggest names in the entertainment, illustration and fine arts industries. The school assists its students in identifying and achieving their dream art careers. While studying Visual Arts Passage's courses, students are able to hone their skills and process, while discovering and developing their own personal artistic voice.

www.visualartspassage.com



"In The Wild Swan, the princess is the archetypal youth from fairy tales. After the witch takes her voice, she can't utter a word in self-defence or explanation, or even complain about solving everyone else's problems."

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Get a **\$100 discount** on a Visual Arts Passage course with the exclusive code
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Nate specialises in publishing, editorial and poster illustration, and his clients include the Los Angeles Times, Sports Illustrated Kids, ProPublica, Rolling Stone and Forbes.

Jo Tomsick



Jo is an oil painter working in the Sandhills of North Carolina. As a dedicated student of Visual Arts Passage for several years, she credits the programme with giving her a community of artists to grow alongside, and with helping her to find her voice.

"The Wild Swan is a personal favourite fairy tale about a princess from a kingdom taken over by a witch, who also takes her voice. She's a saint in the story, but I imagine that a bevy of screaming, needy swans would be enough to make anyone lose their cool." www.jotomsick.com

Chiara Vercesi



Chiara is an award-winning illustrator based in Amsterdam. Recognised for her vibrant style and atmospheric brushstrokes, her illustrations are attention-grabbing and bold, yet light and with a natural flow. "This piece is an editorial illustration for the College of William & Mary Alumni Magazine's story on the US opioid overdose epidemic. It represents the challenge of addressing opioid addiction and also highlights the importance of taking a multifaceted approach."

www.chiaravercesi.com

"Reportedly, over 67,300 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2018, many due to prescription opioids.

The article explored various efforts to combat this crisis, featuring stories from social workers, lawyers and policymakers working on the front lines."



Erin Ruffino

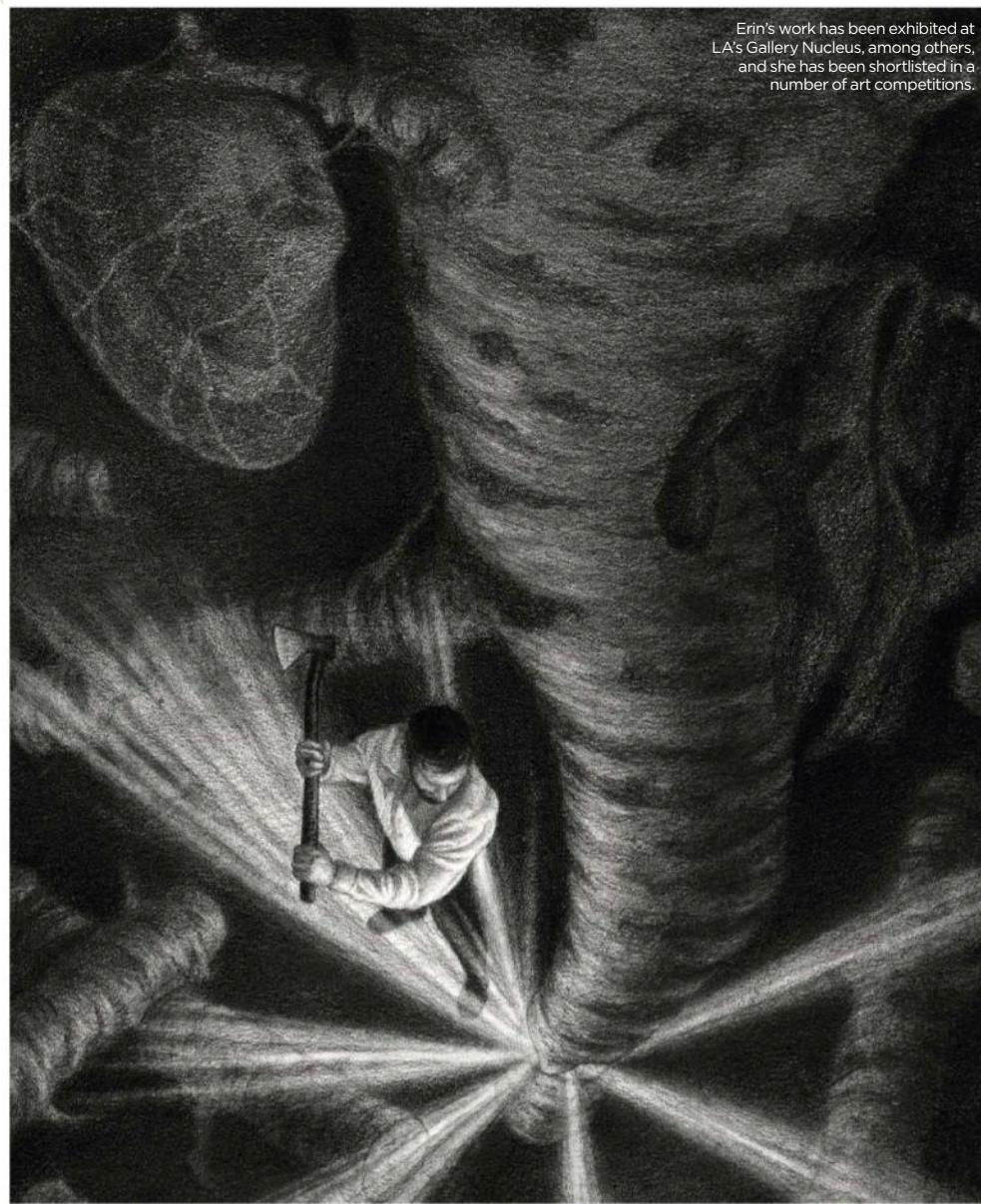


Erin lives in Upstate New York, where she graduated from the State University of New York at Fredonia in 2019 with a bachelor's degree specialising in drawing and painting. She often works with graphite and oil paint to explore fantastical situations in nature, and is represented by RJD Gallery in Romeo, Michigan.

Reading psychology texts and listening to experts on podcasts inspire Erin to create work that mediates our inner critics by raising questions of self-improvement. Her personal fine art investigates the idea of developing identity through figurative surrealism, and personal images from memory, associations and pop culture are superimposed on her portraits.

"Inspired by country singer Kali Baxley's song Boy Got It Bad, I created a series of drawings where a boy outgrows his troubled past and sets sail for better horizons. Here in Act 1, each clap you can hear in the song is a chop of the axe as my protagonist strains to fell birch trees, which is symbolic of his past self growing out of control."

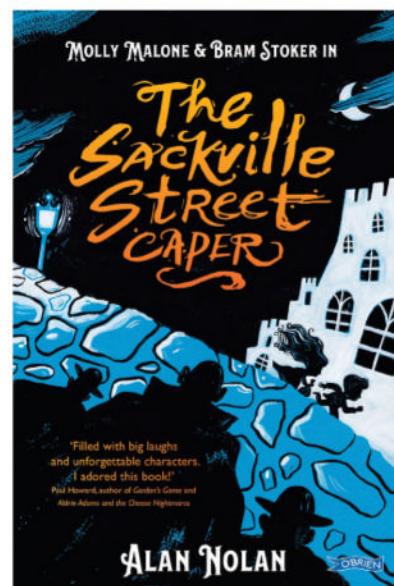
www.erinruffino.com



Erin's work has been exhibited at LA's Gallery Nucleus, among others, and she has been shortlisted in a number of art competitions.

Shane's work has garnered recognition from the

Society of Illustrators, American Illustration, and Communication Arts. His clients include The New Yorker, The Wall Street Journal, Simon & Schuster, Politico, BBC History and Sony Music.



Shane Cluskey



Shane is an award-winning Irish illustrator and designer. He trained at the School of Visual Arts in New York and Illustration Academy in Kansas. "Restless Dreams is a drama from leading audio dramatist Dan Rebellato and part of Radio 4's series marking the centenary of Franz Kafka's death. The art director suggested adding 'by Kafka' to a flying piece of paper. Subtle but effective!"

www.shanecluskey.com

“My goal was to marry classical rendering with stylised shapes”



New3dge

The concept art school develops another class of talented graduates out to make their mark

The team at New3dge Concept Art believe there's no better person to teach you about the art form than someone who is actually succeeding in the industry. The school strives to find the best concept art professionals and have them share their wealth of knowledge about what it means to be a working artist. With each course, New3dge students focus on a specific task they must accomplish, and week after week they increase their ability to build the worlds and characters that will fill the movies, shows and video games engrossing the audiences of tomorrow.

<https://new3dgeconceptart.com>

Antoine Decamps



Antoine is a recent graduate of New3dge and has traded in his former life working as a software engineer for that of a concept artist. He specialises in creating science fiction environments, props and vehicles, which allows him to combine a love for worldbuilding with his background.

"This artwork was done during Danar Worya's class at New3dge Concept Art. At this time I still had very little experience with sci-fi design, so this course was a great opportunity to learn how to

tackle that. I wanted to design a resource-extraction facility with a prominent central element that would still maintain a sense of believability in the scene.

"I used a combination of Blender and Photoshop to create this artwork. Most of the design thinking and sketches were done directly in 3D so I could get fast iterations that could be seen from multiple angles. After that I developed the lighting and the texturing, as well as adding the details to help sell the scale, using Photoshop."

www.artstation.com/adecamps



"I wanted to create a base that's main function is extracting resources, and chose to design it integrated with the location that it's mining from."

Amandine Patte



Amandine is a Paris-based concept artist who graduated from New3dge this year. She specialises in developing semi-realistic characters and enjoys fantasy worldbuilding.

"Silas is one of the three characters I created for my graduation project, which is set in a world where humans

live on the surface and underground, with each civilisation having distinct cultures and features. This character serves as the protagonist of my project. A nomad with bird-like characteristics, he belongs to a race that considers themselves true humans due to their unique biological evolution."

www.artstation.com/amandinepatte



“Most of the design and sketches were done directly in 3D so I could get fast iterations from multiple angles”



Marvin Hillmann



Marvin is an environment concept Artist from Germany with a passion for creating fantasy architecture and worldbuilding.

"This concept was created for my graduation project at New3dge Concept Art and is based on the Fantasy book series The First Law by Joe Abercrombie. It portrays The Agriont, the citadel at the heart of Adua, which is the capital of the kingdom known as the Union. My workflow began with 2D sketches in Photoshop to establish the shape language, followed by 3D iterations and composition in Blender. I then created the final assets in 3DCoat, assembled them in Blender, and completed the project with a final overpaint in Photoshop."

www.artstation.com/marvinhillmann

Misa Steinmetz

Misa is a concept artist and matte painter who has a fine art background and works in both video games and animation. In her spare time she is an amateur geologist and loves urbexing.

"This concept was made during a group project for New3dge called Icali, which is a fantasy game inspired by Aztec civilisation."

My role involved designing the city where the player begins their journey, with a focus on the gameplay of the space. I started by sketching and designing the layout and then chose an angle to show the escape route from the arena to the city walls for this shot. I went back and forth in Blender and Photoshop, then painted on top."

www.artstation.com/misastein

"This was part of a collaborative project with the game art and VFX students at New3dge, who made a game demo and short cinematic."

"This project would be a concept for an animated movie where the viewer follows a journalist and a local girl up the tower, and experiences it through their eyes."

Jonathan Kiem

Jonathan is a concept artist from South Tyrol. After finishing high school in Italy, he moved to Paris to study concept art at New3dge.

"This is the second of four paintings that I did for my graduation project, Babel. I reimagined the classic tale of the tower from the Bible and gave it my own twist. In the heart of the tower you can find many villages on the various pillars, where the atmosphere is lively and productive. The team is making their way through and up, passing all kinds of different little makeshift huts. It's clear that the underlying structure wasn't built the same way as the little wood houses that are attached to the walls."

www.artstation.com/jonnystickino

IMAGINEFX

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Gnomon

A brilliant batch of students from the revered California college share their stunning art

For over 25 years, Gnomon has educated many of the world's best digital artists on its state-of-the-art campus in Los Angeles. Named on Forbes' list of America's Top Colleges in 2023 and called "the MIT of visual effects" by Fast Company magazine, Gnomon offers a variety of educational options to help its students reach their goals in the entertainment industry, with both certificate and degree programmes available, and over 100 individual courses. The school is dedicated to empowering aspiring artists with the skills and expertise they need to succeed in today's competitive creative landscape.

www.gnomon.edu



Among the revisions to his work, Bryan says he was better able to separate the subject and background.

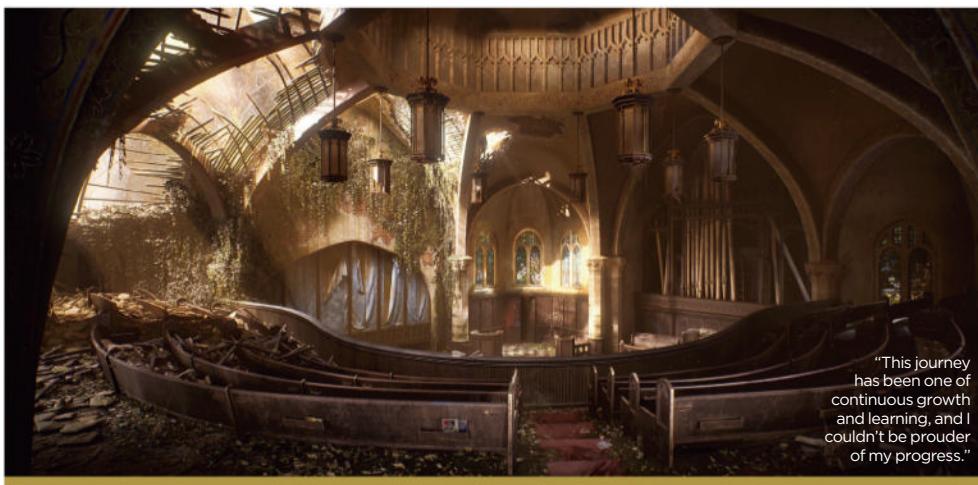
Bryan Soegondo



Bryan is a recent graduate of Gnomon's certificate in digital production course. As a character artist and 3D generalist, he specialises in sculpting, texturing, look development, hair grooming and compositing. During his time at Gnomon, he won several Best of Term competitions for stylised and realistic character pieces.

"This likeness portrait of Audrey Hepburn starring as Holly Golightly in Breakfast at Tiffany's is an update to a personal project I created in 2022. With revisions made to the sculpting, textures, grading and composition, I was able to highlight my proficiency in 3D software such as Mari, ZBrush, Marvelous Designer, Nuke and Blender."

www.artstation.com/soegondo



Sasha Honcharova



Sasha graduated from Gnomon's bachelor of fine arts programme, concentrating on game art. In her time at Gnomon, she was president of the Texturing and Modeling Club and won multiple awards from The Rookies and Gnomon's Best of Term competitions.

Sasha currently works as an environment art intern at High Moon Studios, an award-winning studio known for helping to develop the Call of Duty franchise.

"My Abandoned Church piece was the first environment project I created at Gnomon. With it, I was able to improve and strengthen my composition, lighting, texturing and storytelling skills."

www.artstation.com/sasha_honcharova

Rafael Serralheiro

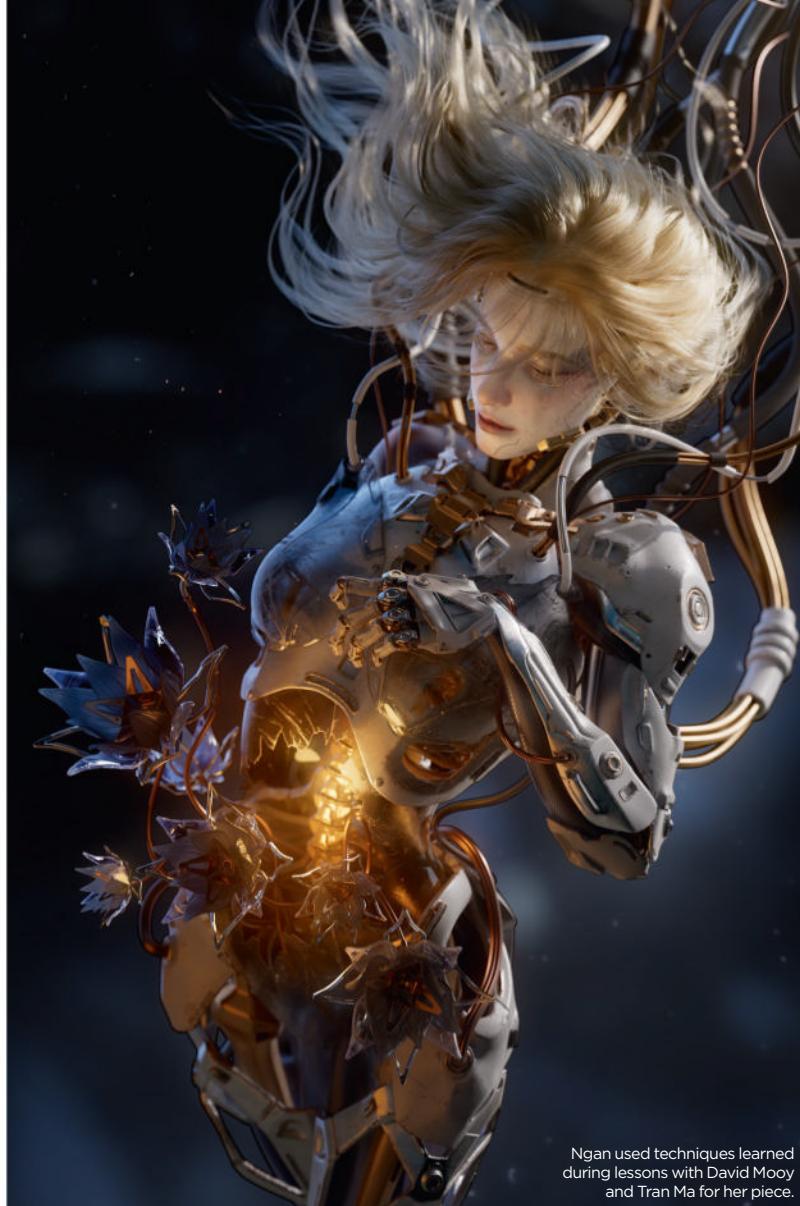


Rafael is currently training on Gnomon's bachelor of fine arts programme in digital production, focusing on the world of 3D environment art for games. He specialises in game asset creation, modelling, sculpting, texturing, rendering and look development. Rafael has won Gnomon's Best of Term category prize and been featured in several industry outlets.

"Tipi Tales is a project inspired by the culture and people of North American Indians that I created in nine weeks during Gnomon's environment creation for games course. I executed it using the video game pipeline and Unreal Engine 5, where I was responsible for all aspects of the scene, including the original concept, post-production and everything in between."

bit.ly/47jtVdN





Ngan used techniques learned during lessons with David Mooy and Tran Ma for her piece.

Ngan Hoang



Ngan is currently training in Gnomon's certificate in digital production course. Originally from Vietnam, She has a background in concept art and illustration, and is honing her technical and creative skills as a 3D artist.

“Finding Rhythm in the Rigid is a project I completed in my second term at Gnomon through hard-surface modelling, texturing and shading courses. While early in my studies, I pursued an original concept piece, challenging myself and further defining my artistic style in character and hard-surface modelling. Despite being a challenging piece, being able to finish gave me a good start in finding my style, and an idea of what to expect in the future.”

www.artstation.com/plavilotos

“My project gave me a good start in finding my style and an idea of what to expect in the future”



Ryan Donnaho



Ryan is studying Gnomon's bachelor of fine arts course in digital production. While learning all aspects of the 3D production pipeline, visual arts and general education, he's specialising in character design projects. During his time at Gnomon, Ryan has won a category in Best of Term and was a finalist in a competition run by The Rookies.

“Based on a concept by Marcin Rubinkowski, Kraken was completed in nine weeks during a texturing and shading course. It encompasses the entirety of the creative journey, from design and texturing to rigging and animation. I gained a wealth of knowledge while thoroughly enjoying the creative process.”

www.artstation.com/ryandonnaho



Liz Chua



Liz is a recent graduate of Gnomon's bachelor of fine arts in digital production. She began her studies by enrolling in the school's foundation in art and design series to gain new skills and quickly took on the full-time course. She was president of the Texturing and Modeling Club, a teacher's assistant, and

won several Best of Term competitions. “Bubble Bandits began as a quick sketch in my free time before I decided that I wanted to complete an original concept. It was animated in my Maya course before I graduated. The jumping raccoon is Rocko and the little one is Bartholomew, in case anyone was curious!”

www.artstation.com/lizchua3d



“This colossal marvel, a fusion of steel sinew and ancient technology, is the last hope for a dwindling species.”

Magic Box

The school's students and graduates put us under a spell with their awesome artwork

For over 12 years, Chris Oatley and his staff at The Magic Box Academy – formerly known as The Oatley Academy – have been helping artists break in at major companies including Disney, Laika, Cartoon Saloon, DreamWorks, Blizzard and Wizards of the Coast, or launch their own independent creative businesses. The school also has prestigious instructors such as Loish, Lauren Panepinto and Tiffanie Mang join for special events to help students develop important skills such as composition, colour theory and professional networking.

In Magic Box's flagship course The Clockwork Heart, students work to maximise creative fulfilment in a vibrant, positive and supportive community through the transition from aspiring to experienced. The Clockwork Heart meets online and in real-time on Fridays or Saturdays, which is left to the student's choice. Enrolment for Magic Box opens again in the spring of 2025, with places available on the waiting list by contacting the school.

<http://HowToBecomeAProfessionalArtist.com>



"To create the exterior, I scattered tree and plant assets and filled in the background, as well as hand-placing assets for areas nearer the camera."

Carmen Thora Smith



Seattle-based artist Carmen loves to create immersive, atmospheric environments. She has a background in film and theatre as a set designer and prop master, but is now focused on the digital realm, building interactive worlds in Unreal Engine 5.

"This is an environment concept that used assets built in Maya and SpeedTree. I wanted an atmospheric interior with lots of plants, natural light, and a natural landscape on the outside. I researched trees and plants to create a Pacific Northwest wetland environment." www.artstation.com/carmenthora

Elizabeth Person



Elizabeth is a concept artist and interactive storyteller currently working on her personal project Carmilla in VR. Before this, she studied visual development and visual storytelling under Chris Oatley for eight years. After realising her affinity for vampire stories and Gothic castles was more suited to video game concepts than feature animation, she has taken the past year to readjust her creative pathway.

"I'm so proud of creating this piece, which was my final painting for the composition portion of Chris Oatley's painting drama mentorship. I left the class an entirely new and improved visual storyteller."

<https://elizabethperson.squarespace.com>



Lucy has a degree in animation production from Arts University Bournemouth.

Dan Tompkins



Dan works as a graphic designer and illustrator and has been creative since he was a child. Whether drawing comics or building with LEGO, he always gravitated towards the



artistic path. Dan has an insatiable appetite to hone his skills and be the best storyteller possible.

"I love creating lineups, and these were inspired by a visit to the Seattle Art Museum. I saw an exhibit featuring two sculptures

that were abstract but humanoid in nature. I loved the proportions, and from that came BeeBee, the blue character, and Olly, the purple ninja, who needed some friends for their exciting quests." www.danieltompkins.org

Lucy Ledsam



Lucy is a 2D background and visual development artist who specialises in sets, environments and props. Most of her time is spent figuring out fun new ways to tell stories through backgrounds and honing her skills.

"This story is about a little girl in a space that belonged to her mother, in a chair too big for her. She's overwhelmed and the emptiness that's left behind is where she sits. She has the daunting reality of all that's left to take care of. It's intimidating, but she'll try her best." <https://lucyledsam.carrd.co>



Aside from being an artist, Mutia is an avid traveller and foodie with an appreciation and fascination for different cultures and histories.

Mutia Terian



Mutia is a character designer and visual development artist currently based in Bali, Indonesia. She has been working in the animation and games industries since 2011,

creating 2D and 3D animated series, casual games, board games, music videos, AR animation, advertisements and children's books. Her passion lies in creating simple and appealing designs that convey compelling and engaging stories.

"This piece, After Hour, started out as an art test for a local game studio. I had to make a key moment painting of the main character and her sidekick. Unfortunately I wasn't the right person for the role, so I decided to rework it entirely and gave it lots of my own flavour and personality, which resulted in a completely different result. Chris Oatley also played a big role in making this piece one of my favourites so far with his guidance."

www.mutia-terian.com



Laura Horan



Laura is a character designer and illustrator whose dream is to work in visual development for animation. She gravitates to bright colours and angular line-art, and finds inspiration in the hand-drawn cartoons of her childhood.

"Above is a trio of jam jars, each with their own unique fruit flavour. Each has their own quirks, with the peach jam in particular seeming a bit... ajar. You can also meet Aydan (below), a rambunctious young opossum that loves to sneak out of bed at night in search of adventure, while all the other animals at camp are fast asleep. Aydan is a playful, mischievous ball of controlled chaos and I wanted to capture that in their design."

www.laurahoranart.com



Andrea Ivetic Vicai



A visual development artist, Andrea is interested in animation work and crafting creature designs for film and games.

"My Lich King comes with a twist: combining myth and my love of animal skeletons. My depiction abandons the old trope of a humanoid character and embraces anthropomorphic figures. Inspired by the artwork of David Palumbo, the piece shows moodiness combined with a more saturated expression of eeriness."

www.artstation.com/shwampy



Rami Juma



Rami is a passion-driven visual development artist with extensive experience in animation and an affinity for environment art, colour and worldbuilding. He worked with

Cartoon Saloon on My Father's Dragon and Studio Ponoc for anime feature film The Imaginary, both of which were for Netflix.

"This painting was a study from a photo I took in Wadi Mujib in Jordan, a popular hiking destination and one of my favourite areas in the region. I hoped it would inform further concept art for my project The Falcon Lore with the layers of sedimentary rock providing endless curves, patterns and colours, while being showered by sunlight and water below."

https://ramijuma.com

“Aydan is a rambunctious young opossum that loves to sneak out of bed at night for adventures”

Veronica Kosowski



Veronica is a visual development artist and background painter for animation. In her role as the lead background artist at Factory Create, she helped bring the world of Slumberkins to life in collaboration with The Jim Henson Company and Apple TV+.

"I knew I wanted to build on the rich legacy animated classics like Bambi have brought to stories about animals. Something I treasure about that film is how intentional the artists were in combining their observation of the natural world with artful stylisation and emotive character acting. I immersed myself in researching thylacines [Tasmanian tigers] to inform this heartfelt moment's design."

https://veronicakosowski.com

Focal Point

Talented concept artists show the skills they've learned from their expert tutors

Focal Point provides a solid array of courses covering all the necessary skills that any successful artist needs to design and illustrate concepts at the highest level.

The school was founded when concept artists Darek Zabrocki and Michal Kus teamed up in 2018 and has a physical campus located in the Polish city of Gdańsk. Focal Point's motto is "motivation, dedication, discipline", which it follows through a programme that strives to improve every term to give students the best learning experience possible for an ever-demanding industry.

Aside from teaching students fundamental skills and keeping them in touch with current industry trends, the school also aims to connect them with working industry professionals in order to elevate them to the next level and make their dream jobs become a reality.

www.focalpointschool.com



Focal Point teacher Darek Zabrocki was the art director for Joaquin's ZORADX work.



Joaquin Lepore



Joaquin is a concept artist and illustrator from Buenos Aires in Argentina. He made constant improvement throughout his time studying at Focal Point with his dedication to the school's advanced courses.

"Here are exterior and interior shots for the ZORADX project for Darek Zabrocki's advanced environment design classes. This project was really hard because it was out of my comfort zone, but it was fun to do."
<https://bit.ly/3ZcuGUO>

Maxi Vazquez



Stockholm-based Maxi is a 3D artist who has his focus on hard-surface design. He is now a senior environment artist at Shapefarm.

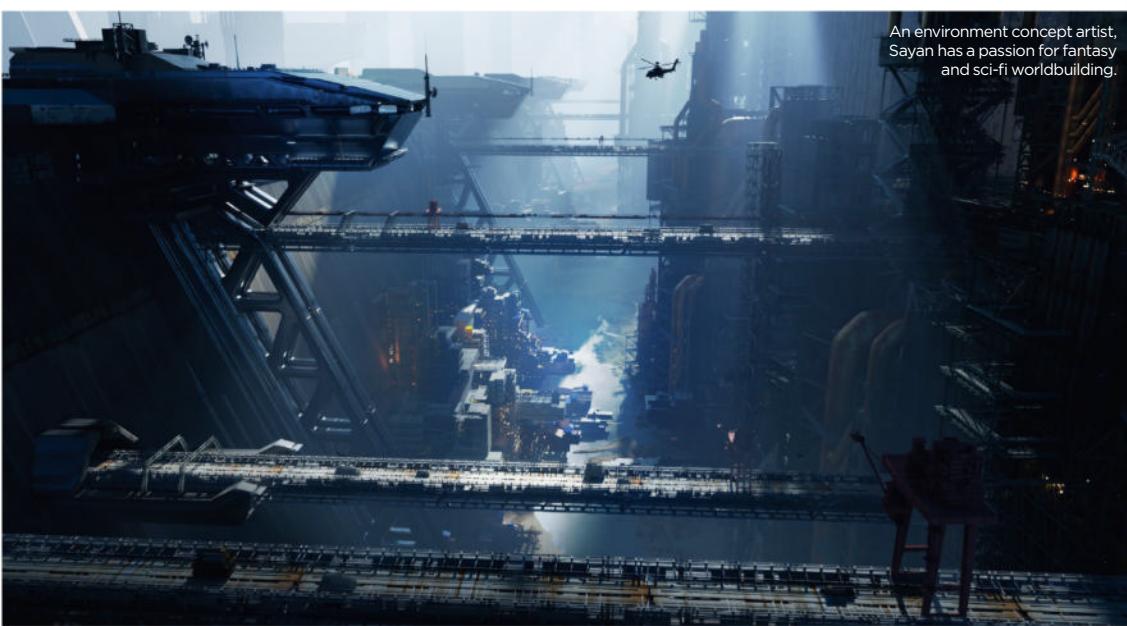
"I made this Soviet reconnaissance mech during Focal Point's advanced

hardware design class. The task was to design a four-legged recon mech that could house a crew of three and would fit into Michal Kus' Project 1952 universe. I had a ton of fun exploring both the exterior and interior of this vehicle."
www.artstation.com/maxivz



Maxi's Soviet mech was made using a combination of Blender and Photoshop.





An environment concept artist, Sayan has a passion for fantasy and sci-fi worldbuilding.

Sayan Biswas

Sayan is a concept artist and illustrator from Kolkata, who won Focal Point's recent Scholarship contest. Of his work, Sayan's tutors at the school said: "We decided he would be one of the contest winners as we knew that with this kind of attitude and discipline, we'd be able to elevate him to an exceptional level where he would shine, with strong design sensibility and the awareness of what it means to output top-tier concept art." www.artstation.com/anomander

“I found each assignment at the school challenging and exciting! ”



Beata Krzywdzińska



Concept artist and illustrator Beata is from Focal Point's home of Gdańsk, Poland. She loves telling stories through detailed illustrations that show a wide variety of themes and styles of execution. During her time at Focal Point, Beata was able to swiftly progress her art skills.

“These are some of the studies I did at Focal Point during the advanced digital painting class. I found each assignment at the school challenging and exciting! I started with paintings of a Red Bull can and a Pepsi bottle, and ended with studies of Clyde Aspervig and Syd Mead paintings.” <https://bit.ly/3MJKRk1>



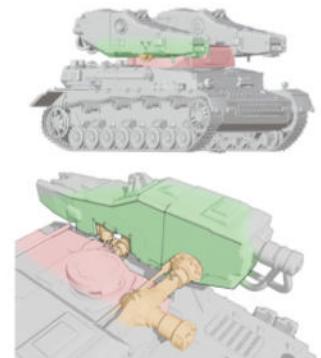
This image was one of the first that Beata completed after starting full-time at Focal Point.

Tiago Coelho



Tiago is a concept artist and illustrator from Lisbon with a passion for drawing, design and games. As a recurring student at Focal Point, he has showcased his vast array of design styles and techniques.

“Through my journey, I've developed skills in traditional and digital art, focusing on perspective, anatomy, composition, design and rendering. I strive to create visually captivating and functional designs. I'm also eager to learn, value constructive feedback, and thrive in collaborative settings.” www.artstation.com/tiagocoelhework



Sketchbook

Simone Grünewald

The everyday antics of mother and son are translated into fantastical settings with a series of adorable illustrations



MUM'S TERRIBLE MATH

"Should I go and get the drink for him, or let the child squeeze out of his seat, probably spill most of the water while getting it, and have more work after?"

FOOTBALL ENTHUSIAST

"My son was really hyped by the European Football Championship and now frequently asks me to play with him."



Sketchbook Simone Grünewald



CARVED BROOMS

"Here I explored the design of my son and myself as witches. I added quick colours in Procreate with some watercolour brushes."

GINKGO LEAF PATTERN

"This was the beginning of a series of sketches involving ginkgo leaves. On a hunch I picked up a couple on a morning walk. The one the character holds is stuck in my sketchbook."



“I loved the idea of talking to the bird and getting snotty replies”



LANDSCAPE STUDIES

"In April I painted the first view MapCrunch offered up to take part in the #pleinairapril challenge on a near daily basis. I changed the format to square to force myself to rethink the composition."

ON TIME

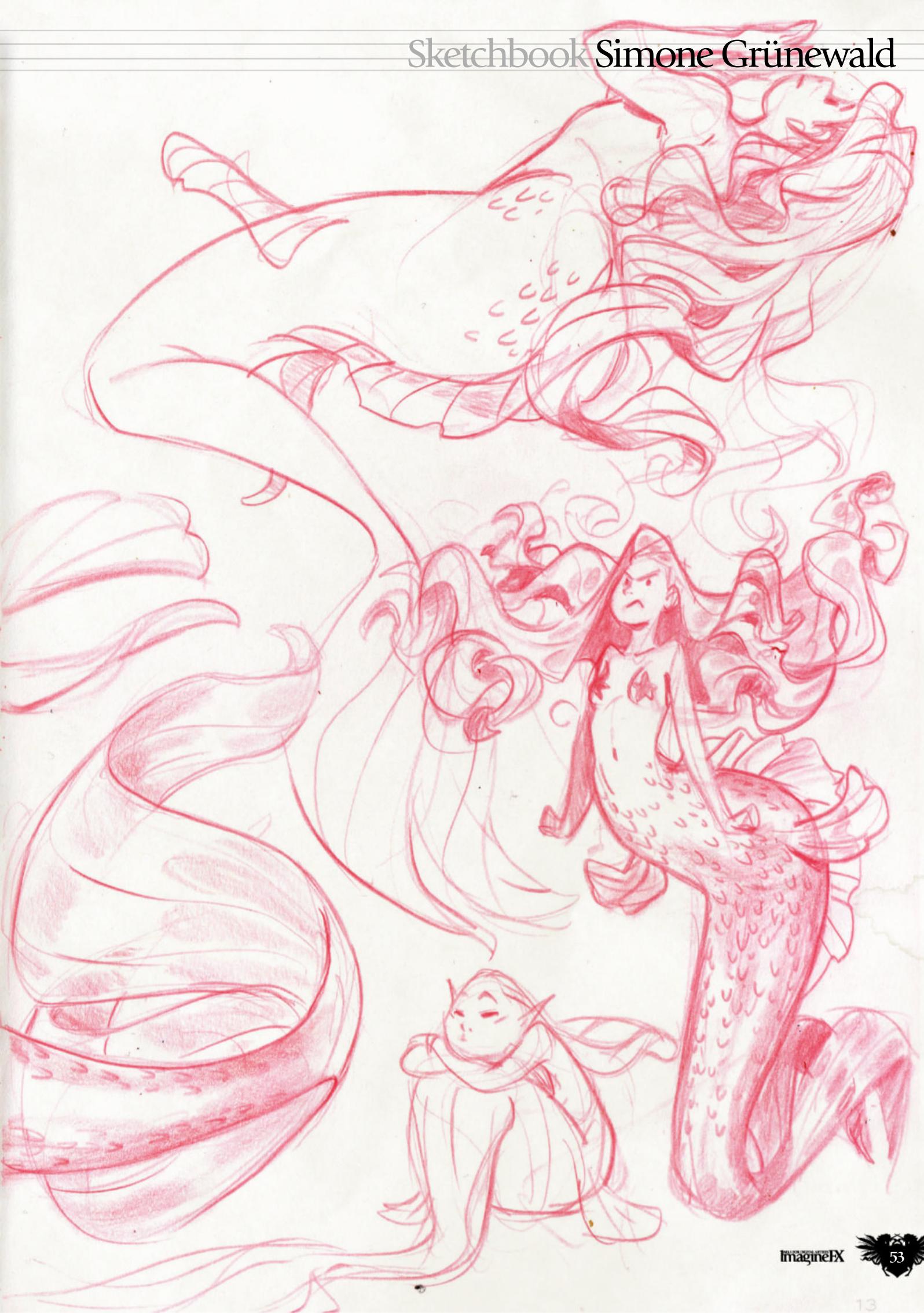
"I put all of my appointments in our family calendar since I often forget to look at them. Luckily my husband does!"



MERMAID SHAPES

"This is an example of me loving to play with mermaid shapes and the ways they flow. I enjoy sketching underwater hair."





**TEA TIME**

"My small people have a good relationship with their local witch - me! They exchange goods with her and she has them over for tea whenever possible."

**CARVING AN OWL**

"I wanted to capture the intensely happy but awkward carving of my son, and the owl looking as if it dare not move. Sketched using a Carmine Red Col-Erase pencil, with the colour added in Procreate."

**PICNIC**

"I love documenting our family situations! Here they're eating healthy outside with loads of veggies and pasta salad. It's not always easy to get a kid to eat their vegetables, but I never give up."

MERMAID 2024

"Taking part in social media drawing challenges is great since they give me a theme, and my brain races off and has ideas that I then happily try to translate onto paper."

Sketchbook Simone Grünwald

THE BEST SPOT

"...is often taken by my son. He listens to some Terry Pratchett audiobook and I think that he's living the best life sitting there on our balcony."

DAMN IT, FAV SPOT
TAKEN...

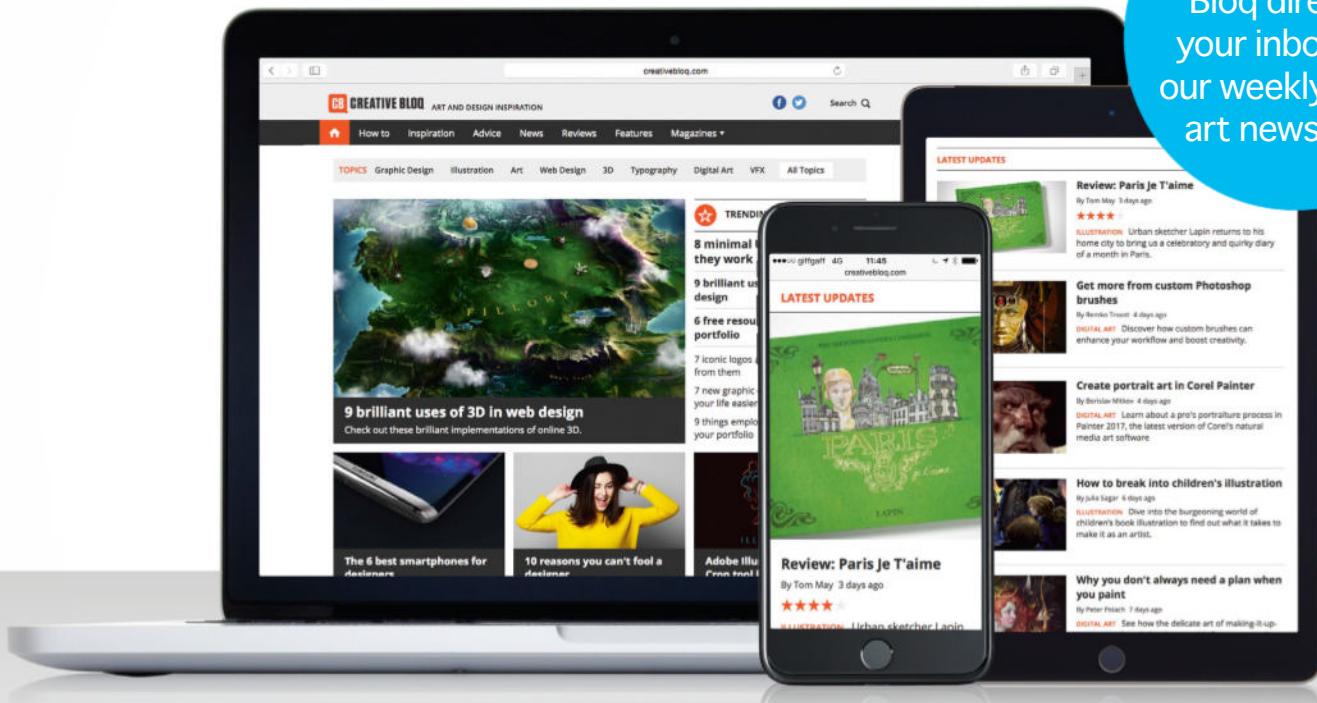


“My small people have a good relationship with their local witch – me!”

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

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This issue:

58 15 tips for great concept designs

Marvel Studios' artist Rodney Fuentebella introduces pointers he's learned on the job.

64 Kitbashing for speedy images

Concentrate on composition and silhouettes before you go jumping into the details.

66 Build your concept art efficiently

Step into an eerie world with Connor Sheehan as he builds a moody piece using Blender.

72 Pack in details

Jon Juarez explains how he brings viewers back for another look at his vibrant artwork.

74 Get warm with a creative exercise

Experiment with shapes as Stephanie Rizo reveals how she explores character designs.

80 Let the picture guide the way

Krzysztof Maziarz lets his art go with the flow as he designs a colourful cartoon scene.

82 Create accurate ancient details

Armand Serrano makes the most of detailed research in his depiction of David and Goliath.

Artist insight

15 TIPS FOR GREAT CONCEPT DESIGNS

Marvel Studios artist **Rodney Fuentebella** shares the top tricks he's learned working on major movies and shows

Artist PROFILE

Rodney Fuentebella

LOCATION: US

Rodney is a supervisor at Marvel Studios and has worked on over two dozen feature films, a handful of shows, and theme park attractions at Disneyland.
<https://bit.ly/471LOcd>



I've now been working at Marvel Studios for over a decade and have learned so many things as a concept artist and supervisor. From creating huge, epic scenes to using tools

learned on the job, I've managed to use the fundamentals I picked up in school in this fast-paced industry.

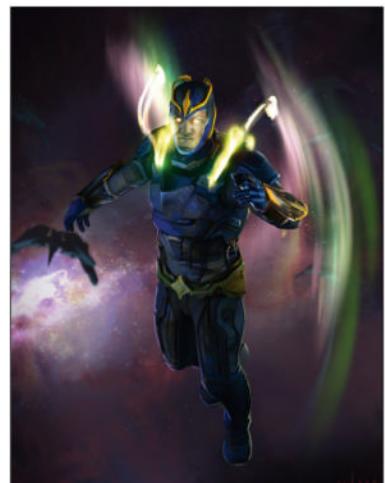
There's the old phrase we've all heard in some form that "a jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of

one." I love trying new techniques out, even if it means that I'll never master anything to the degree I want, and that's okay. Here I've put together tips that have helped me in my career so far working at Marvel Studios and in the film industry.



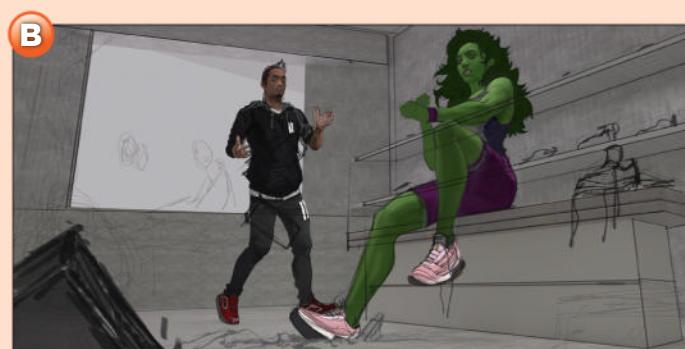
1 SMALL, MEDIUM AND LARGE SHAPES

When I do character pieces, I use the idea of small, medium and large shapes, not only in design but in composition. Creating different shapes for the figures and forms helps bring variety to the piece. I always struggle to use this idea because my brain wants to have similar shapes and sizes of figures, forms and so on. I always want to show every aspect of every character, but so often less is more.



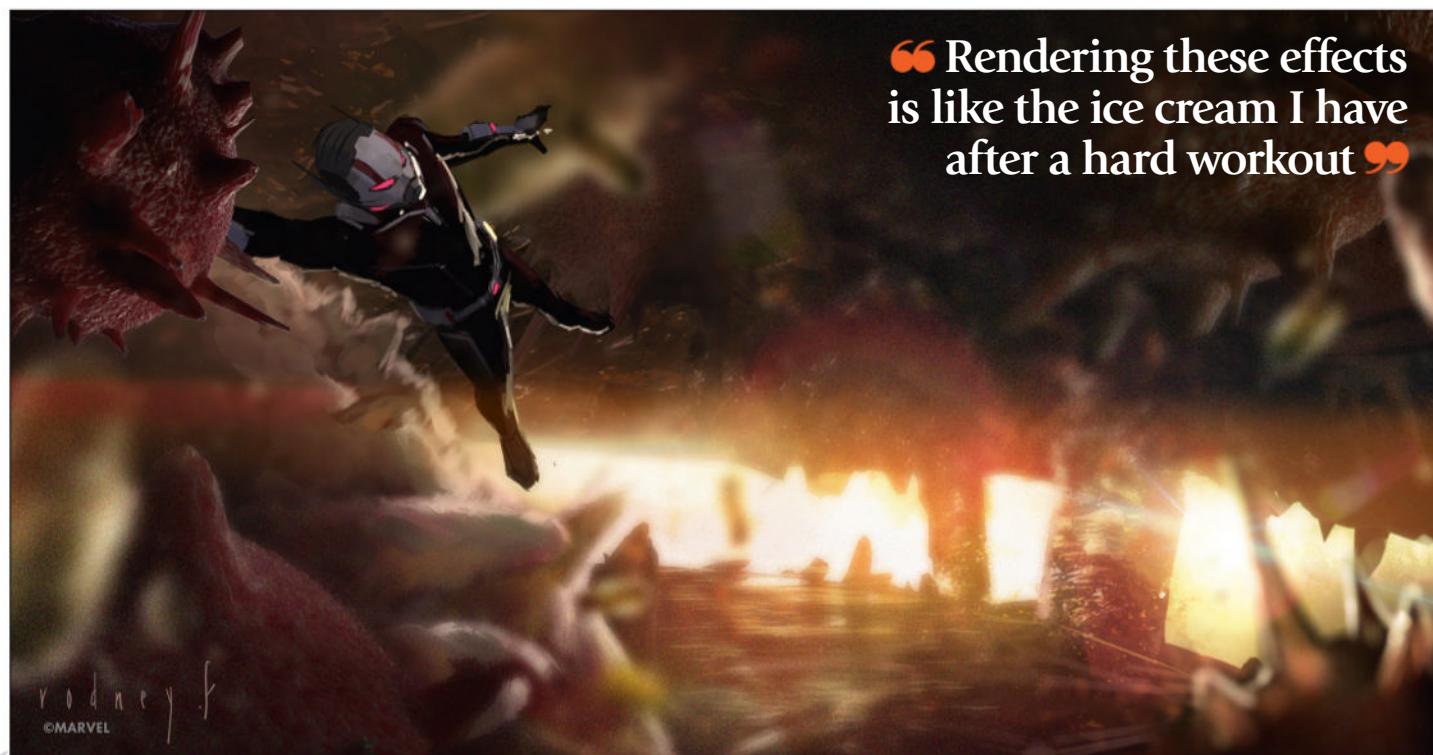
2 HAVE FUN WITH EFFECTS

I love putting special lines and gestures in the effects I create. These gestures are the fun part of the pieces I do. I try to make the effects have a through line that helps bring the piece together and create excitement in it. The character design is the most important part of the process, but effects are cool to do. Rendering these effects is kind of like the ice cream I have after a hard workout.



3 USE 3D SOFTWARE FOR ENVIRONMENTS

Interior shots are difficult to illustrate. When I have to deal with people, objects and multiple vanishing points, I use 3D tools to do a lay-in of the setting, plus whatever I think would be a pain to figure out the size and position of in the environment. I have to remember the software is a tool and that I still have to make a scene that shows the right mood. However, knowing that I don't have to worry much about the placement and perspective of the room helps me out a lot.



4 HAVE AN ANCHOR FOR READABILITY

For these shots in *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, the environment was nothing relatable to our world, so I had to make sure that there was an anchor, in this case our main character. Having a character within a scene makes the scale and perspective easy to understand. I also heavily separated the foreground from the background to create a sense of depth and make the image as readable as possible. ➡

Workshops



5 EXPERIMENT WITH THE COLOURS AND SHAPES

When I'm given the opportunity to think outside the box, I like to go for broke! I try out a bunch of different ideas and a lot of them don't work out, but some that make the grade are kind of cool. I love playing with unique colour and shape combinations to see what sticks. It can be scary to experiment with ideas and colour combos that may look bad if we're thinking traditionally, but who cares! I'll try them anyway.

“When I create a concept, I have to think of the simplest way to best show the idea”



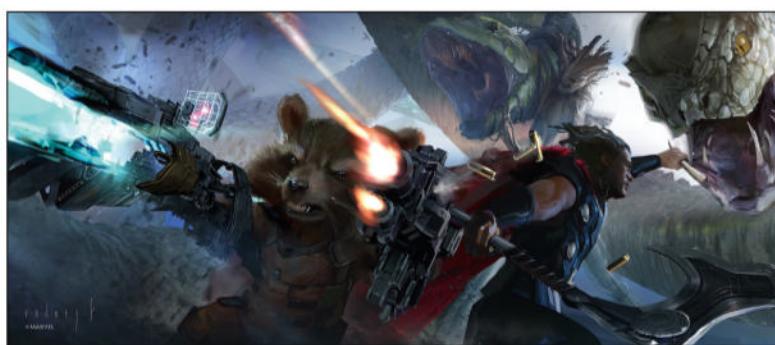
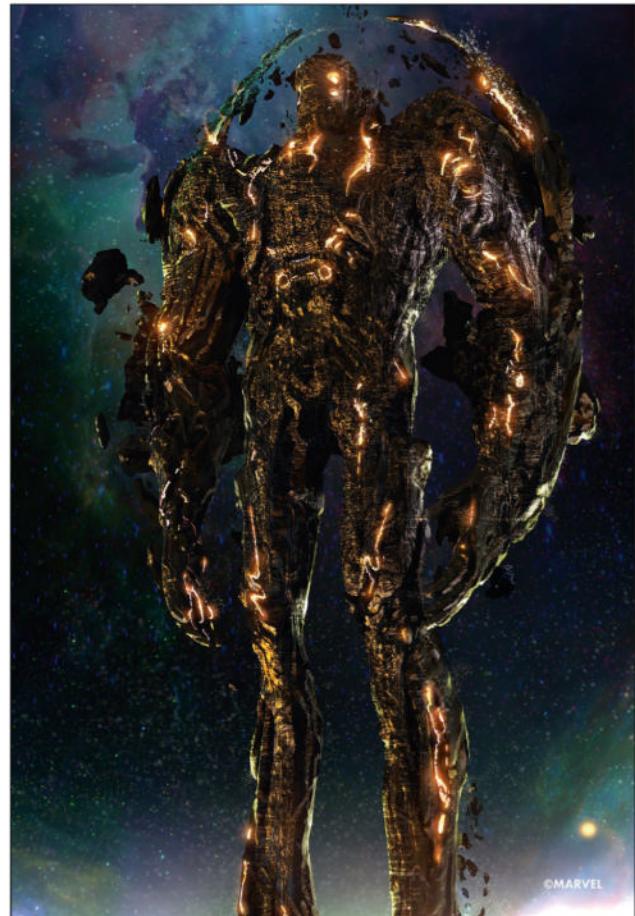
6 COMBINE COOL AND WARM COLOURS

I remember my landscape painting classes where I was taught all about cools and warms; placing down a cool colour and thinking of where to put a warm one to complement it. I bring that idea into my concept work in subtle ways, and other times very obviously. Knowing these fundamental ideas and finding ways to incorporate them in my concepts is challenging, but often the result is a piece I'm happy with.



7 FIND GESTURES TO DIRECT THE EYE

When I do complex illustrations showing something exciting, I find it easy to lose my focus and have to remember to ask myself what the main idea of the illustration is. Gesture is a key idea I use to keep me on track. It can be simple or complex as long as it directs the eye in a logical direction. I use lighting, action lines with loose clothing, poses and eyeline, and whatever else keeps the eye moving around the piece and back to the main idea.

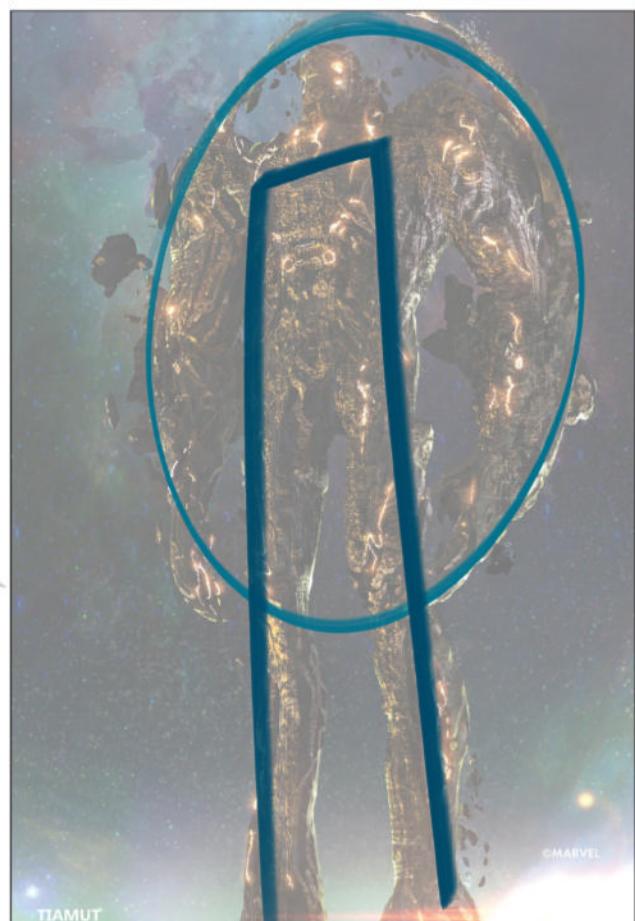


8 MAKE FOCAL POINTS

When I create keyframes with multiple main characters, I have to make sure that each of them is highlighted while still remembering to create a visual hierarchy. What that means is that some might be placed in the foreground and others in the midground or even in the background. Because of this, each character has something special that draws your eye to them.

9 THINK SIMPLE

When I create a concept, I have to think of the simplest way to best display the idea. In this example, I wanted the eye to encircle the character, so I made a circle motif to bring my audience in and keep them there. I like to find a simple shape and try to see it through from the initial drawing or sculpt all the way along to the finished rendering and painting. ➤



Workshops



10 CONSIDER HOW YOU BUILD COMPLEXITY

Once I have a simple idea laid out, the challenging dance of finding ways to add complexity while maintaining the concept's simplicity begins. With every new gesture, expression, effect and detail, the more of the story I'm creating. But I also need to ask myself whether it complements the simplicity of the concept, or if these complexities just muddy the waters? Sometimes the answer is no, sometimes it's yes. Aligning those complexities with the simple concept from the initial sketch is a both fun and frustrating part of the job.

11 TRY NEW IDEAS

For the design of the Deviants in Eternals, I wanted to try something new and, to be honest, I didn't know whether I was wasting my time. These attempts at a concept are risky, but I felt that I had to try and think laterally from my normal ways of designing. Instead of thinking anatomically, I thought how an alien would construct an arm solely from making spaghetti-like parts. Strange I know, but why not?



12 FIND INSPIRATION IN YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES

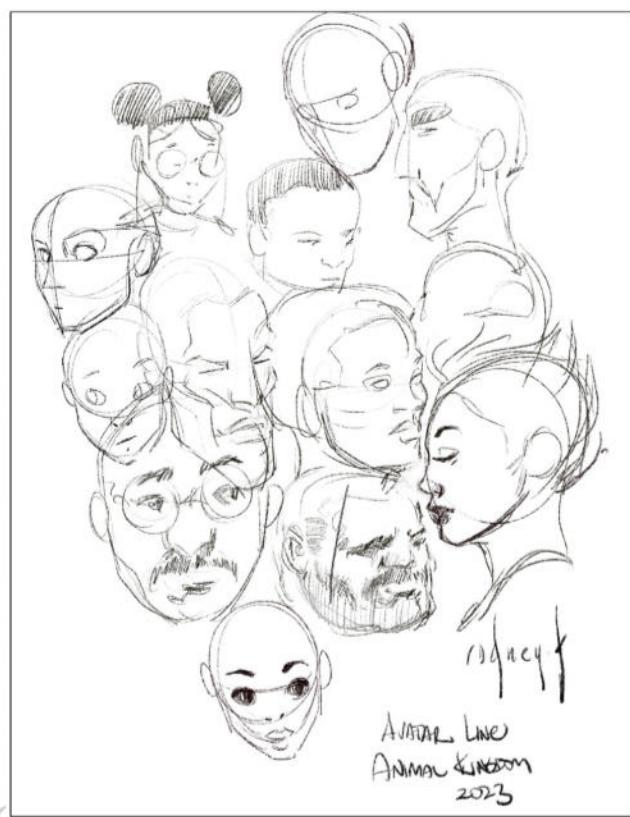
When I create characters, such as cute spiderbots like this, I can't help but draw inspiration from the world. Sure, I don't have spiders as pets, nor do I have kids with glowing blue eyes, but I did notice how my kids look when they're paying attention or being naughty. I noticed how a simple button on my phone makes it look sophisticated and friendly, which I put in a similar shape on the leg. I noticed how french bulldogs have a cute yet tough stance, which I put in one of the initial designs. Look all around and draw inspiration from the world; it's everywhere!

13 ORGANISE WITH A ONE-POINT PERSPECTIVE

For busy shots like this where I have a crowd, spiderbots, hidden easter eggs, a mess on the table, sketches on the walls and mechs, I have to organise my thoughts. Sometimes a single point of view (POV) is super helpful for this. It makes the subject easy to find, and in the right height and size. On top of this, elements like long lights, fixtures and pipes create arrows that point to the subject thanks to the simple and direct one-point perspective.



“Look all around and draw inspiration from the world; you'll find it everywhere! ”



14 BREAKTIME SKETCHES

I guess this would be the equivalent of artistic meditation. I really don't care if these sketches are good or bad. They're for me, and that's it. On some lunch breaks or when I know I'll be waiting a while, I get some sketches in. I use this time to sketch away from the demands of work and let my artistic thinking go into a meditative state. These sketches are a way to unwind and think differently than how I'd go about work on concepts. Getting in a reset is a good thing for artists.



15 CREATE A MOOD FOR THE CHARACTER

For character design pieces, I want to display what the character means to the show and to me. For this one, I wanted a moody feel that makes the audience feel a little off and intimidated. That's why I tilted the perspective, made the character look down on the viewer, and situated the highest contrast away from the face, which is unusual placement.



Technique focus

KITBASHING FOR SPEEDY IMAGES

Ronan Le Fur fills a rainy afternoon by crafting a spectacular sci-fi scene with a range of techniques

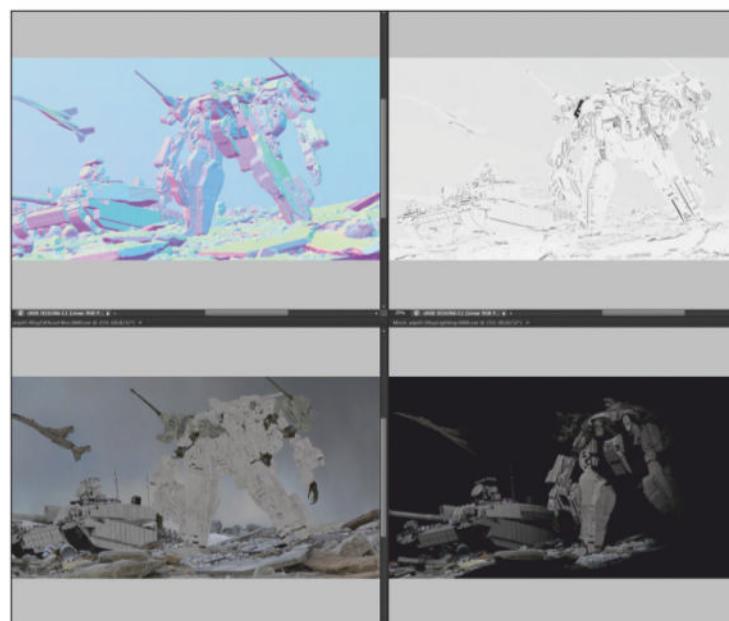


"The idea for this personal work was to produce a finished image quickly, using existing 3D models

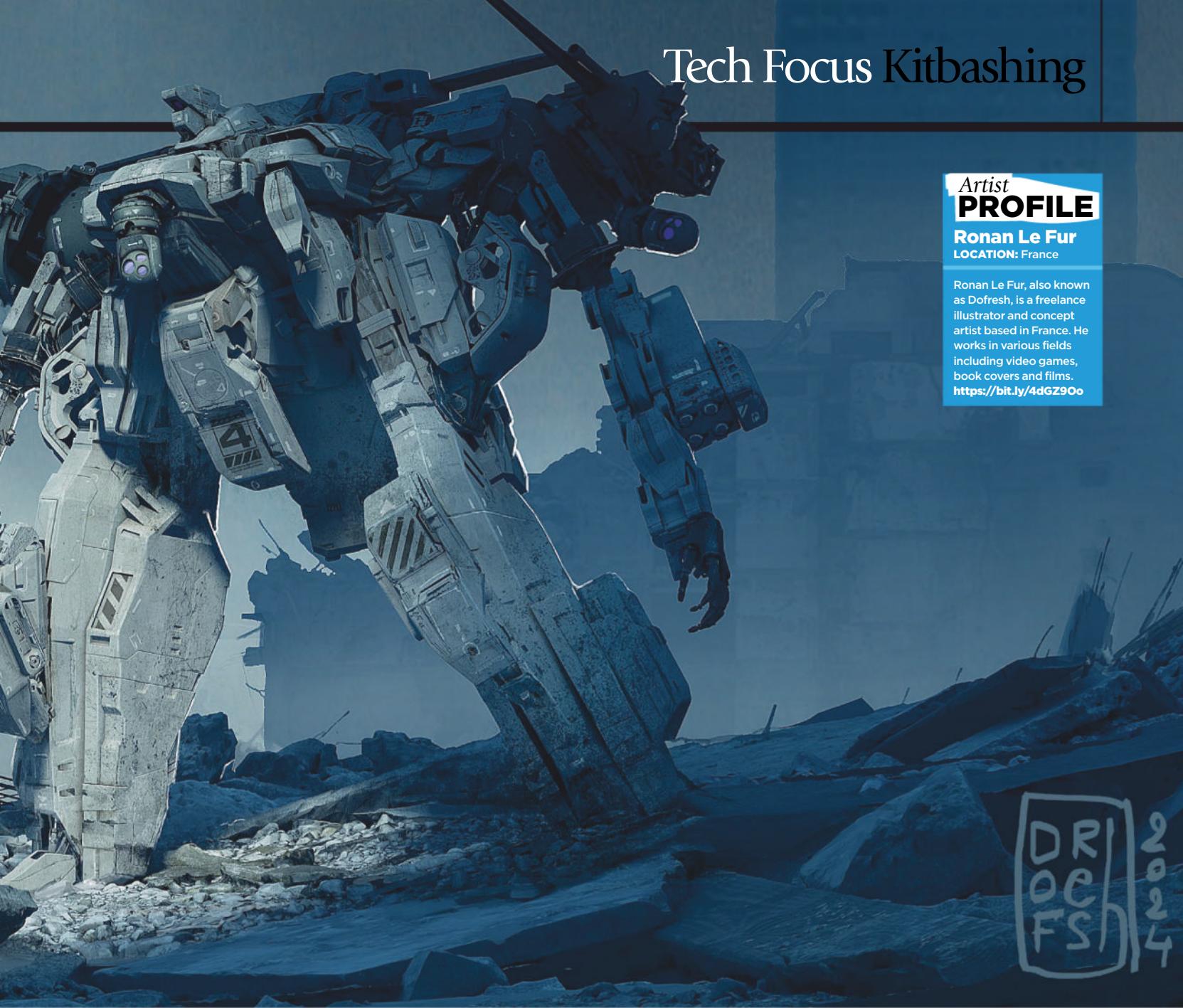
and therefore making intensive use of kitbashing. In this case, it needed one long, rainy Sunday afternoon.

As I was able to quickly build up some detailed 3D elements, to which

I applied very basic textures, I was able to concentrate on the silhouettes and the composition of the image. In my opinion, this is the most vital aspect here. Once the 3D rendering was done, I was able to refine and polish the illustration in Photoshop. And of course, don't forget to add a stupid title, in this case I went with Fifty Shades of Grey!"



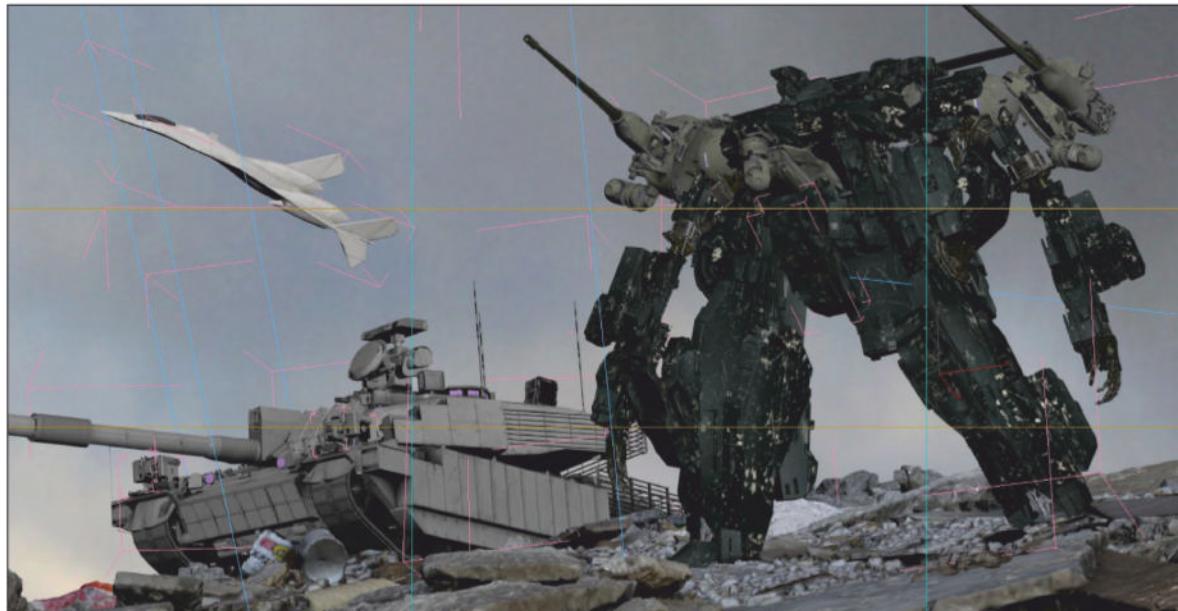
Tech Focus Kitbashing



Artist PROFILE

Ronan Le Fur
LOCATION: France

Ronan Le Fur, also known as Dofresh, is a freelance illustrator and concept artist based in France. He works in various fields including video games, book covers and films.
<https://bit.ly/4dGZ9Oo>



Blender & Photoshop BUILD YOUR CONCEPT ART EFFICIENTLY

Learn how to utilise dynamic production workflows to create a mood-rich piece with **Connor Sheehan**



In this tutorial, I'm going to show you how to break down a larger concept design into different stages, ultimately creating an image that takes a serene scene and injects horror elements. Instead of tackling a finished painting head-on, we'll pay attention to the key elements and simplify the process. This could help you in tackling larger tasks more easily and can be instrumental in production pipelines. In this task, it's important to recognise that we're

designing an environment first and a painting second, as it's easy to get caught up in the many rules of painting before even considering design aspects of the subject itself.

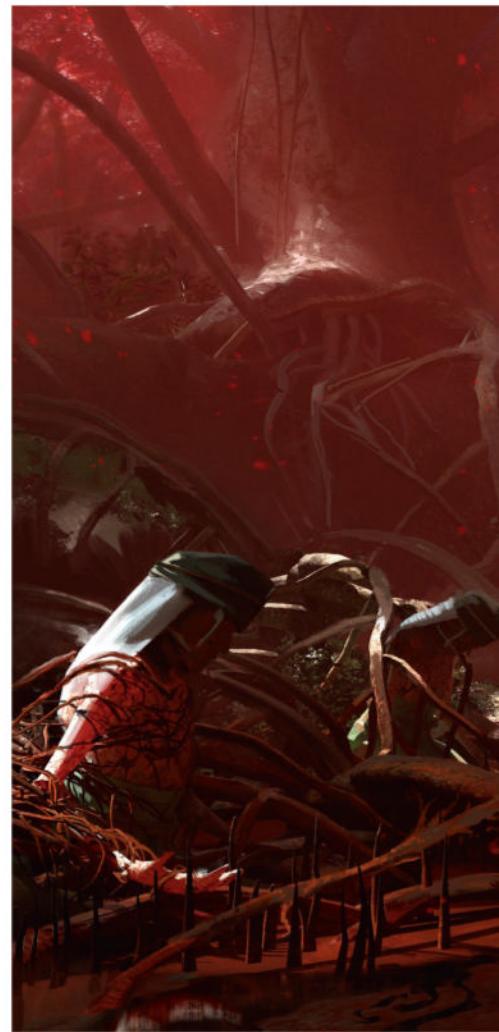
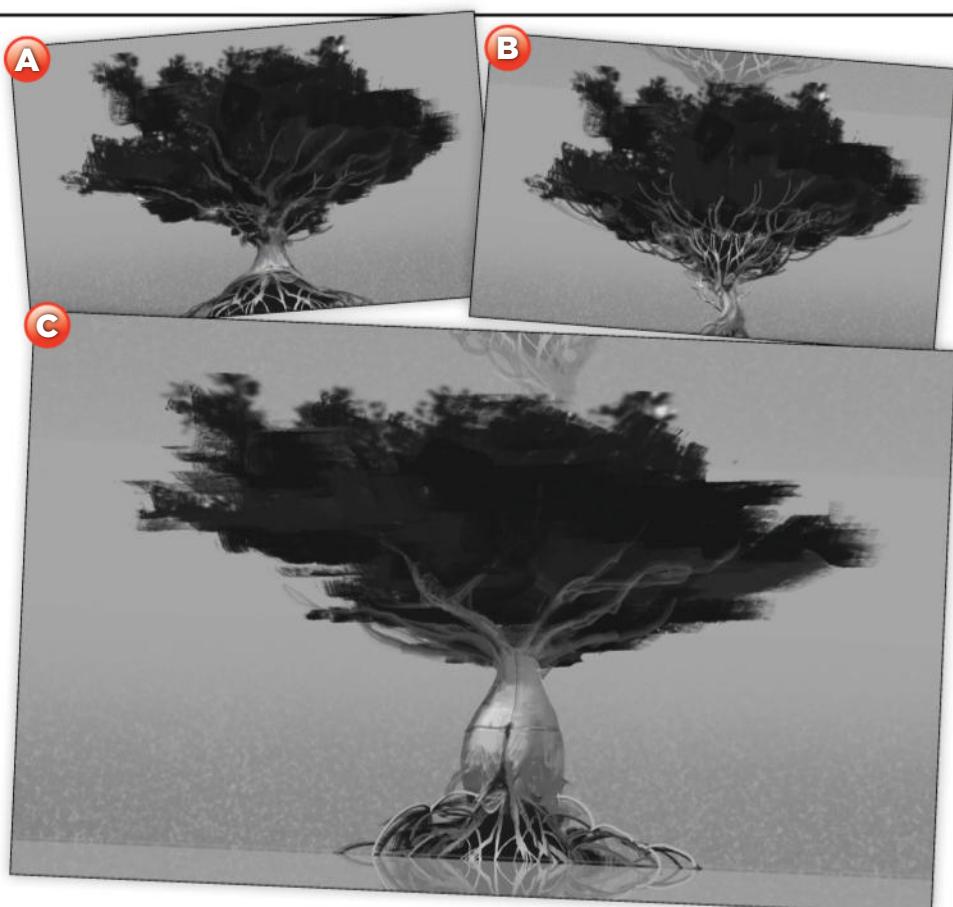
After identifying our task and gathering references, we'll begin with designing our hero assets. Isolating these allows for greater freedom in creativity that can often lead to new ideas that ripple into the surrounding environment. Once there's a creative thread to pull on, we'll follow that through the environment and then, by extension, the painting itself.



© Alamy Stock Photo

1 Find reference images and create thumbnails

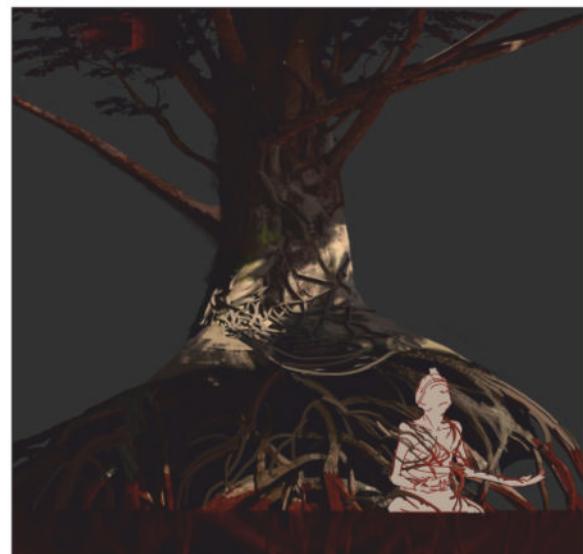
It's time to dig in and explore ideas. Gathering references is foundationally important to the piece as it informs every aspect of the design. Our task will be based on a horrific scene of a vampiric forest inspired by coastal mangrove trees, so our primary focus is on references for the trees. It's important to not only gather images, but to also properly research more information behind the subject. In our example, we want to discover why mangrove trees' roots are the way they are. What purpose do they serve? How do they grow in the unique way they do? How can we bend reality to fit our purpose in a believable way?





2 Refine the design

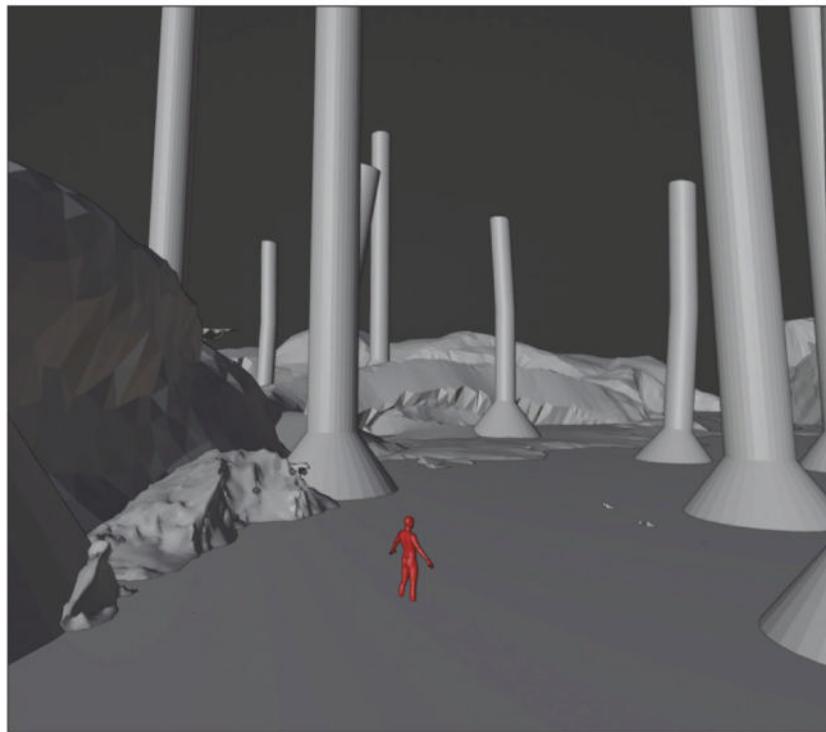
To evolve a more vampiric design, we'll adapt the roots to be more vein-like and shape them to look as though they burst out of the trunk. Using a combination of my own models and others I'd purchased, I roughly put together some elements to find nice shapes and forms along the lines of my thumbnails.



3 Influence the story

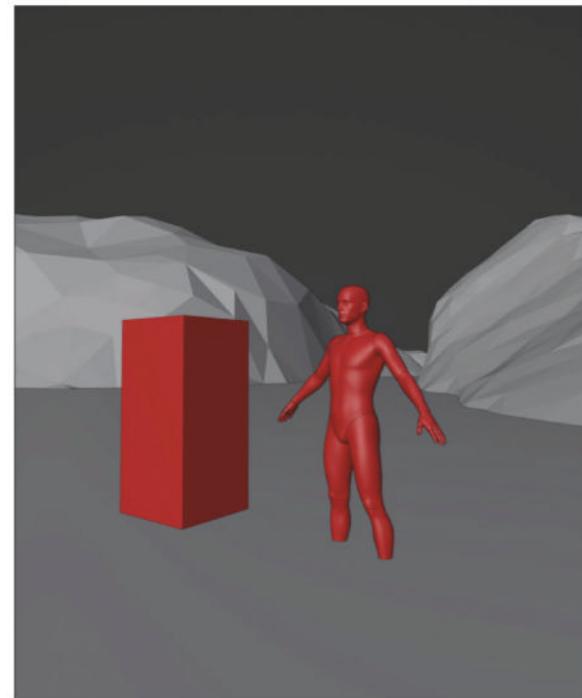
Now this design begins to inform our story. Perhaps these trees didn't start out as mangroves, but got a taste for blood and were corrupted. To strengthen this, let's add some cultist characters that have willingly given themselves to the tree. Human blood bags! It's time to move across to 3D software to create the environment and discover what assets we need. ➡

Workshops



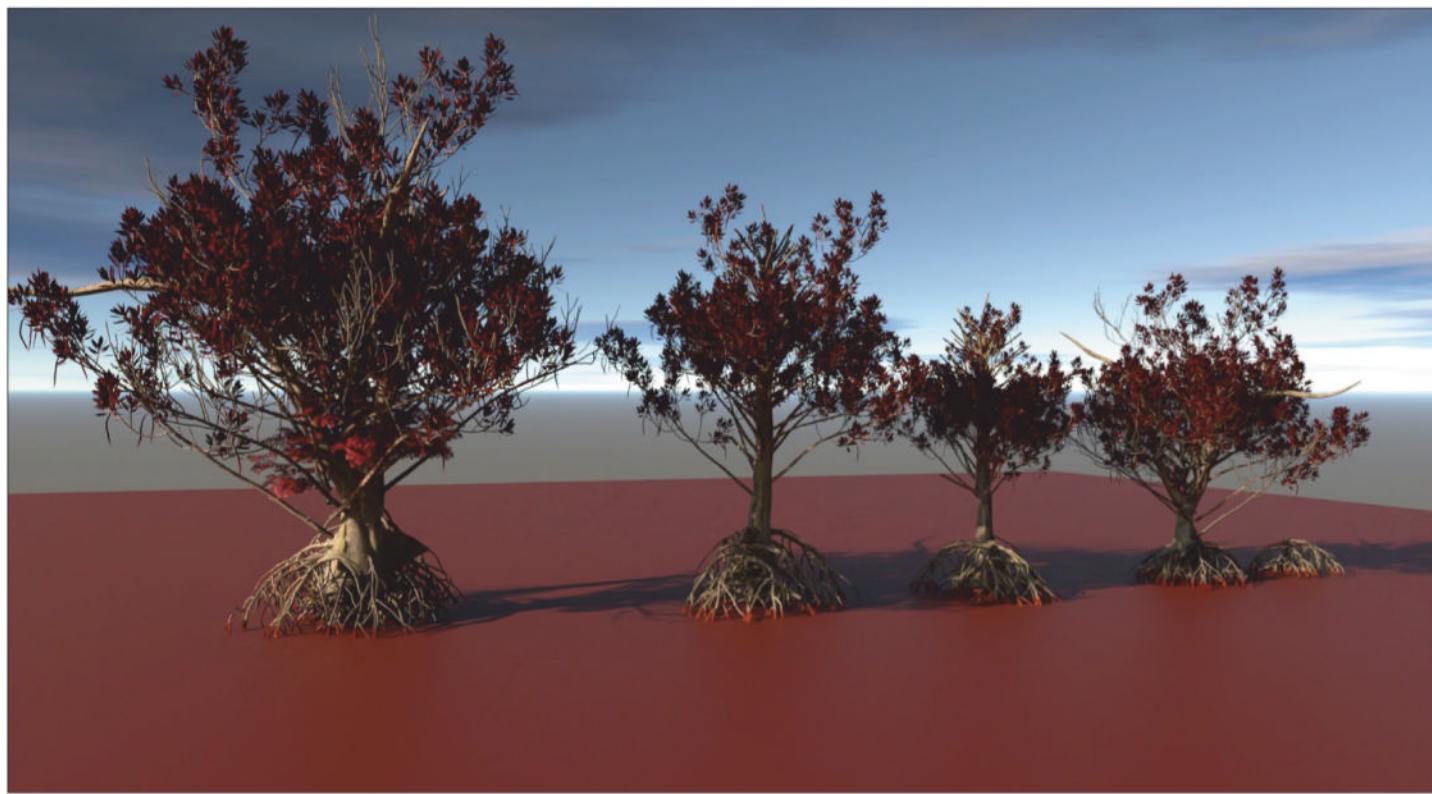
4 Nail the larger forms first

The key to using 3D in your concept work is to start broad and simple. I use basic shapes to indicate elements and masses within my scenes. Like sculptures, you want to get the bigger forms correct before working into the finer details. If you don't have access to an asset library such as Quixel or purchasable models, then Blender's native Sculpt mode can work just fine too.



5 Keep a consistent scale

It's important to maintain the scale consistently throughout this process. The best way to do this is to import a scale-correct mesh that every piece of your environment can be compared to. If you don't have a human model, then you can just use a simple box that's been scaled to the right measurements.



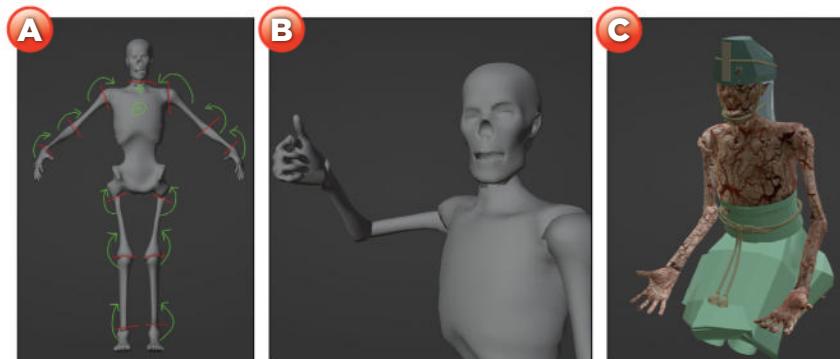
6 Create a set of trees to populate the scene

Using the rough model from step 4, we can extrapolate a mini set of trees to use in place of the blockout. Don't feel like these need to be too refined, as this is concept modelling after all! It's easy to paint a lot of the imperfections out later in the process.



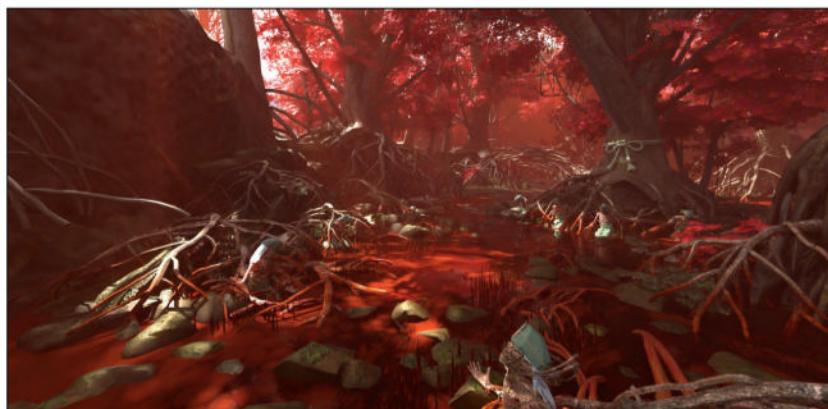
7 Adapt a third-party model

By sourcing a decaying zombie/human model, it creates a good base to build our cultists from. We want them to appear on the brink of death and drained of blood, but not as if they've died already. They need to feel like they're still alive in the environment. Creating a faux rig and then posing each cultist in different positions creates a nice variation that indicates movement.



8 Build a faux rig

A neat trick for posing humanoid and animal models is to create a faux rig. This is done by cutting the mesh at key points, shown in red (A), then parenting each segment to the one before it in the chain, seen in green. Riggers or animators will cringe at this half-baked 'rig', but it's a fantastic way to create variations.



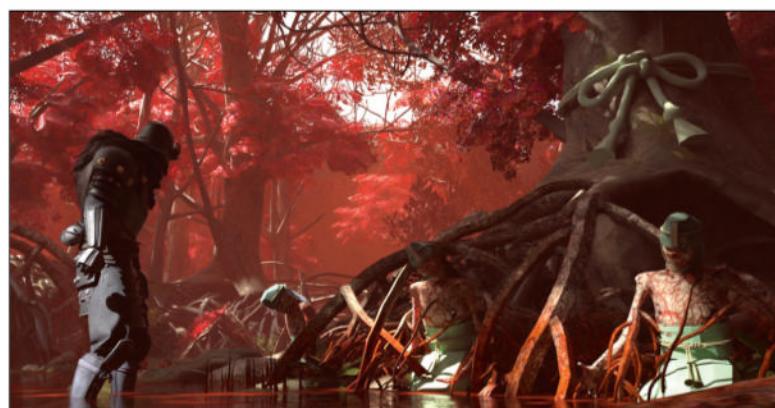
9 Add some atmosphere

The image's mood is supposed to tread the line between serenity and horror. To do this, we can utilise both lighting and fog to create an ethereal scene. Using the Physical Starlight and Atmosphere Blender add-on, we can quickly create an HDRI lighting scene based on our sun's direction. Next use a cube with its material set to Volume Scatter to envelop the forest in a thick haze. Playing with the colour input, the haze can be shifted to a warm, rich red.



10 Fake the light

While the add-on does a lot of the heavy lifting, it's handy to use spotlights and fake the dappled light. Given the forest's warm red haze, it would be a good choice to use a cool blue for the pools of light. This creates contrast and colour harmony within the image.



11 Find the composition

Bring in another character – mine came from an internal project – and pose them, set against more spotlights. Adding a character almost always helps with story, drawing the eye and for the context of scale. Since we have our environment set up it's straightforward,

so now we want to pick out nice shots and compositions, amending the light if needed.

We can reduce the camera's Focal Length to force elements to feel bigger than they are. In this example, we're bringing one of the cultists way closer to the camera to frame our character and give a close-up view. Removing

the light on the foreground cultist helps with the value hierarchy.

Moving the camera closer to the floor plane, or the water's surface here, and bringing the characters into frame creates a more intimate composition that feels like it has more focus on the narrative. ➤

Workshops



12 Separate the scene into layers for macro changes

Much like our 3D blockout, it's important we tackle the larger changes first before we begin noodling. Using a Cryptomatte layer – or a Material ID or Clown Pass – to isolate certain areas of the image with the Lasso tool, it's easy to then use a simple soft round brush to create more atmosphere between the layers. Think about breaking down the image into foreground, midground and background layers.



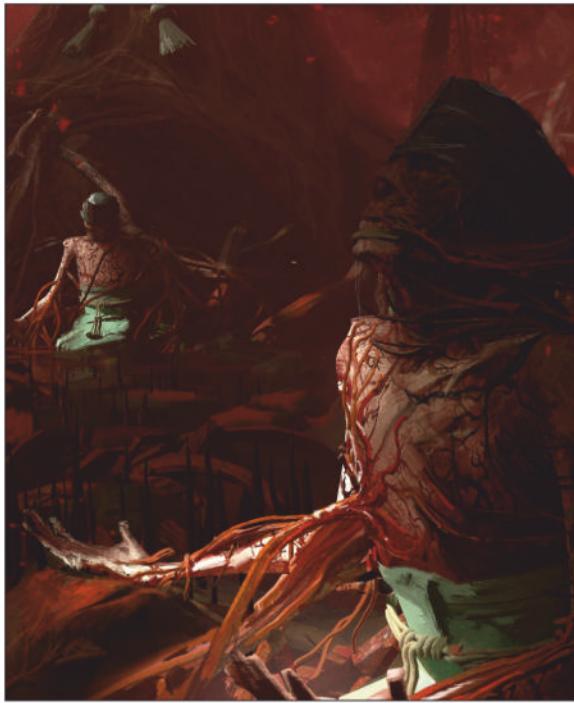
13 Enforce the read

To focus on the environment's value hierarchy, we can isolate and hide the character for now. In Photoshop, we can use a Color layer on 50% grey to get an accurate view of the value structure of the image. With this method, we're able to alter the image's atmospheric perspective and reduce the intensity of some of the pools of light. These will be painted in later with a more purposeful hand.



14 Begin rendering

When the macro changes are at a good point, it's time to start rendering! By using a small selection of brushes that create texture super easily, we can combine it with the Color Picker for hue and value changes. A reliable method for creating texture is working with the Flow Percentage levels of the brushes. A lower level will create a drier application, while a higher level creates more opaque strokes. Play around to find a good result.



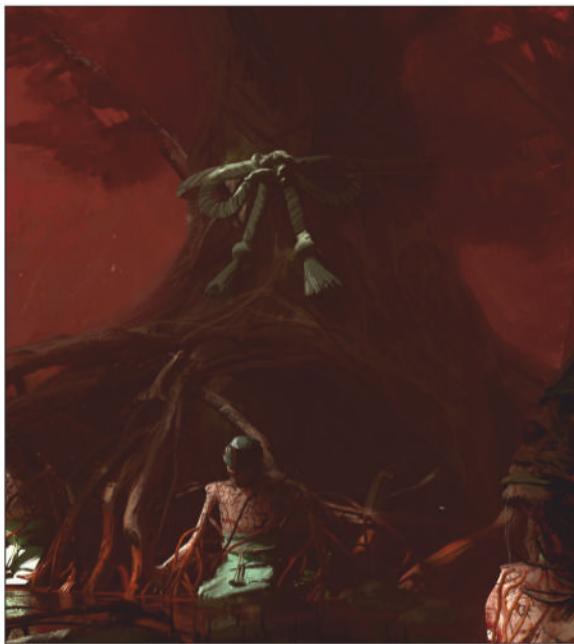
15 Find value relationships

Using a soft brush to create subtle gradient shifts on certain elements helps develop contrast and interest. For example, the closest cultist has a gradient shift that darkens towards the top. This not only allows the light at the bottom to draw the eye, but to also stand out against the atmospheric perspective behind the figure.



16 Start the second render pass

The Mixer Brush is a fantastic tool to create texture and emulate real-world painting. Combining it with the Smudge tool, we're able to pick out hard and lost edges in the piece that help to create that style of traditional work. You'll notice the focal points are more contrasted with harder edges to draw attention while the trees and other background elements feel softer and pushed back.



17 Hard and lost edges

Lost edges help guide the eye by reducing the contrast and fidelity in areas, instead focusing the viewer on harder edges and higher-contrast areas. Using a Mixer Brush set to 'Very Wet, Heavy Mix', we can soften up and lose some edges. To reduce the performance load when doing this, it's possible to flatten the painting layers into a new layer and untick 'Sample All Layers'.



18 Work on the final rendering

It's time to bring our character back into the scene and add the final touches. Sunbeams are created using either a Linear Dodge or Color Dodge layer filled with black, and then painting in a colour with a soft brush. Another neat trick to create falling petals is taking small blobs from a hard round brush or a scatter brush and applying a light motion blur to simulate movement.

Workshops

Artist PROFILE

Jon Juarez

LOCATION: Spain

Jon Juarez worked on speculative future design at a big tech company before becoming a concept artist for video games and audiovisual projects. His production design for the HBO Max TV series *Scavengers* was nominated for an Annie Award. <https://bit.ly/4fZXMfk>

"This illustration is the cover for the second book of a fantasy trilogy written by the author Regina Salcedo. We're currently developing new illustrations for this saga that can be seen in a new reissue.

My working method has been the same for practically 15 years: I play with the structure of the scene by modelling a space in 3D, then I choose a suitable camera shot. Next

Technique focus PACK IN DETAILS

Jon Juarez explains how he creates engaging cover art

Tech Focus Engaging covers



Artist insight

GET WARM WITH A CREATIVE EXERCISE

Artist PROFILE

Stephanie Rizo

LOCATION: US

Stephanie is a Mexican-American artist working in animation. She is currently a story artist at Walt Disney Animation Studios and has also worked for Warner Bros. Animation, Nickelodeon, and DreamWorks. In her time at Sony Animation, Stephanie was a part of the team that created *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*. www.stephanierizo.com

Stephanie Rizo reveals how she prepares for a character design session with a fun and simple shape exploration



Sometimes when designing a character, it's easy to get lost in making a complex design that looks and feels interesting. As a character designer who has been working in development for the past seven years, I've learned the importance of shape language and having fun exploring a variety of designs by using nothing more than simple shapes.

Boiling down what complex versus simple is can be quite challenging – wrestling with less versus more and clean silhouettes while also trying to keep things fresh, pushed and stylised can be an overwhelming task. When I first got overwhelmed and stuck looking at a blank canvas, I wanted to find something to help me warm up, an exercise pushing shapes and designs in a fun way. What may initially look like random

pushed and pulled blobs are shapes that can make almost any design you can think of with enough practice, repetition and imagination.

This shape warm-up exercise has helped me get out of my head and stay loose, because the scariest part is getting started. I'll be showing you how to use this shape exercise to help loosen up and practise using shapes in your designs too! It doesn't have to be scary, so let's get started.



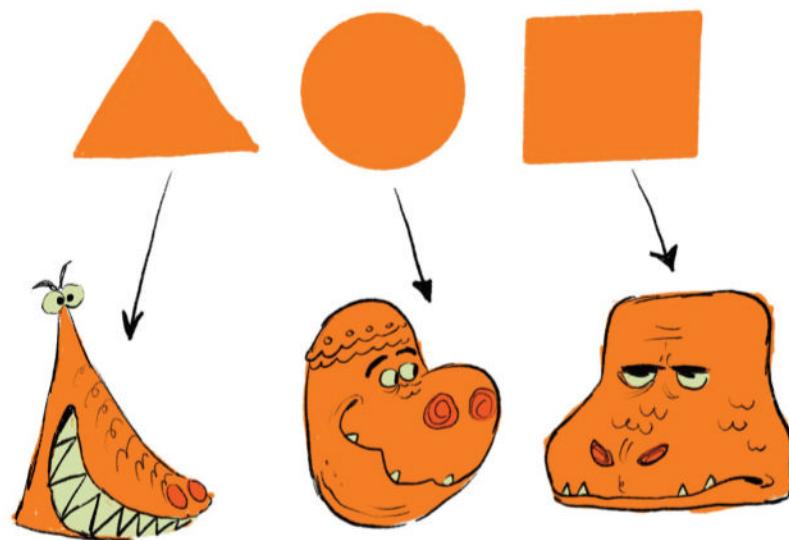
1 CHOOSE YOUR THEME FROM THE BEGINNING

When I start this exercise, I like to think about what I'm going to draw in the shapes. You can pick animals, people, cars or anything you like! It's great to challenge yourself with these themes and make them as specific as possible, but it's also good to be simple too. Sometimes I can pick something as simple as one animal and challenge myself by drawing them differently in every shape. Either way, sticking to a theme is important in order to push yourself; try not to change it before you start or else it may become too easy.



2 EXPERIMENT WITH THE MATERIALS

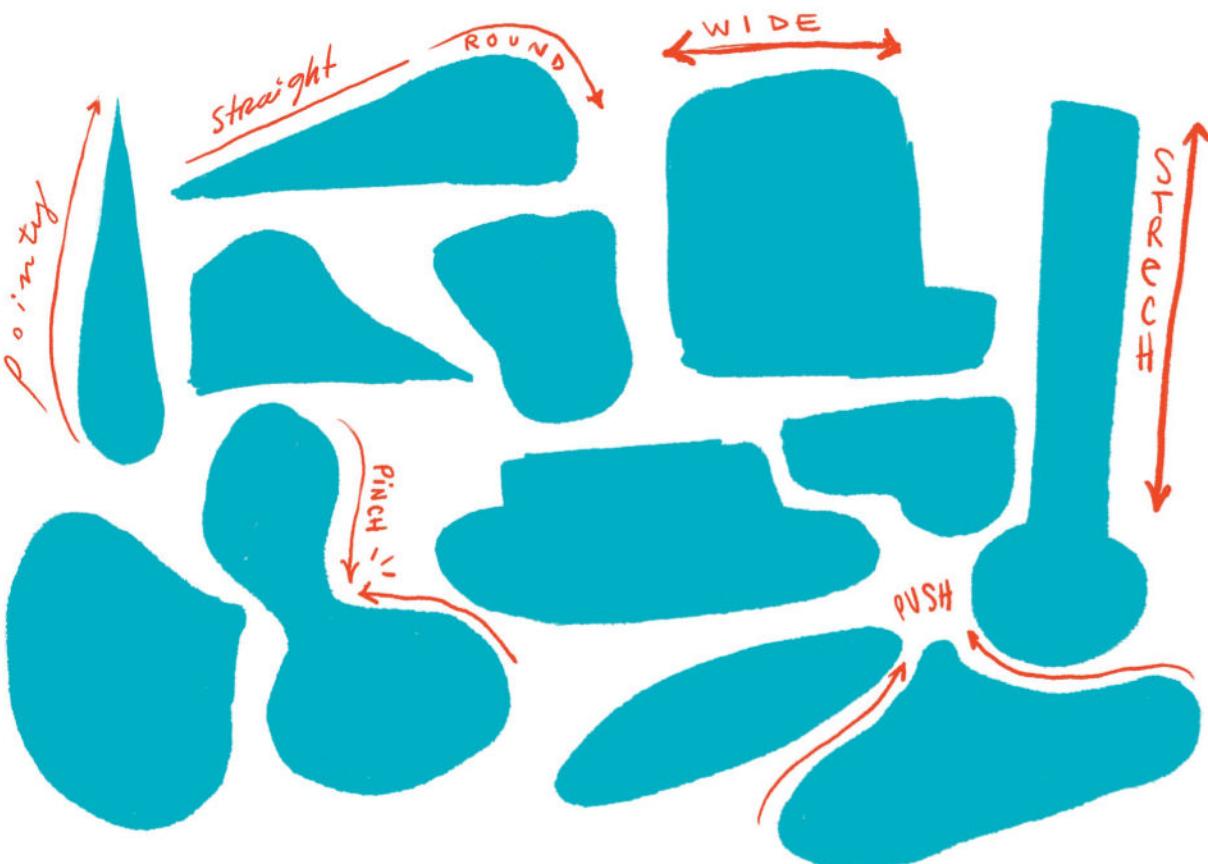
You need to know what you're going to use to make your shapes and draw in them. You can use any physical media such as paint, crayons, ink, or even digital tools like Procreate. You just need to create larger shapes with a bigger material and then carve into them with a smaller one, like pens, pencils or anything that can let you contrast your line work from the shape itself. Don't feel limited, you can create any amount of shapes with any material and can even play around with switching materials up for every exercise you do.



3 UNDERSTAND HOW TO USE DIFFERENT SHAPES

Learning basic shapes such as triangles, circles and squares is important when it comes to designing a character. Each shape can convey an emotion or personality, so in this shape warm-up you can use, or even combine, a lot of shapes to create an interesting design. Triangles are both exciting and scary, circles are round and soft, and squares are grumpy and grounded. When I'm laying out all my shapes to draw in, I try to have a variety of them so that I'm forced to draw my theme into them to convey different personalities for characters. ➡

Workshops



4 HOW TO COMBINE SHAPES

A. Basic shapes: Circles, triangles and squares are your starting points to create a variety of fun shapes and combinations. Most other shapes are already a combo of these three, so try not to use anything too complex like stars or crescents.

B. Putting them together: Being able to combine these shapes to make organic silhouettes can allow you to have fun designs for faces and poses. Be sure to combine them in a way that doesn't make them look too busy.

C. Push and pull: Don't just use the same sizes of each shape. Feel free to make your triangles longer or shorter, your squares taller and flatter, and your circles bigger, smaller or even ovals! This will challenge you to create complex shapes in the simplest way and allows you to use more than one shape language to make characters even more unique.

“Be sure to combine your shapes in a way that doesn't make them look too busy”



5 CLEAN SILHOUETTES

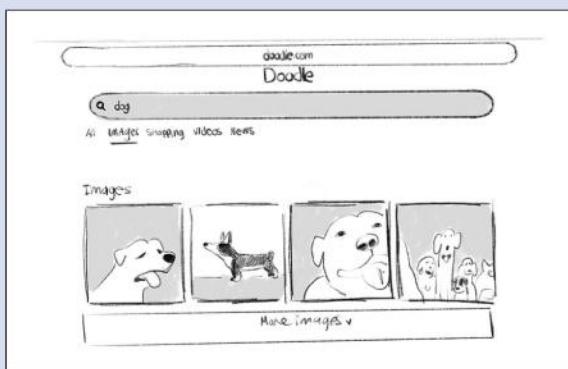
When making your shapes, try to create them with a clear silhouette. Don't make them too complex or busy, even if you're combining more than one shape to create a new one. Although they may just look like blobs, in their simplicity they also have a clear gesture. The harder you make it to decide elements of the design. Being simple and having a clean silhouette helps you challenge yourself to sell your theme in the movement of the shape, and forces you to think simpler. Try to make anywhere between four and ten shapes to begin with.



6 TRY USING DIFFERENT COLOURS

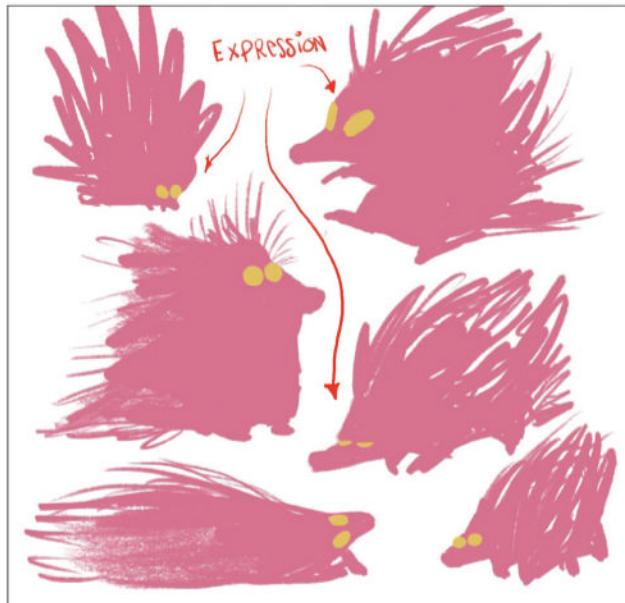
Sometimes I like to add colours to create mood or contrast in each shape. This is an added challenge because colour can sometimes add more to what each character is feeling or what their personalities are like. If colour is too complex, feel free to just use basic colours or greyscale for your shapes. For example, sometimes it's as simple as me just wanting to use the colour blue to challenge myself with what a blue raccoon could look like if that was my theme. Explore complementary colours, or just have fun with a colour you want to use that day. ➡

Workshops



7 FIND REFERENCES

Now you have your theme and shapes, it's always great to have reference for what you're drawing. For example, if you picked an animal, you may have an idea of what that looks like in your head, but reference keeps you accountable and helps you discover something new as you explore your shapes with different styles and textures. Reference is super important in everything that you do, so implementing it in this exercise is a good habit to get into. Try to grab as many references as you'd like in order to fully understand all the angles of your theme.

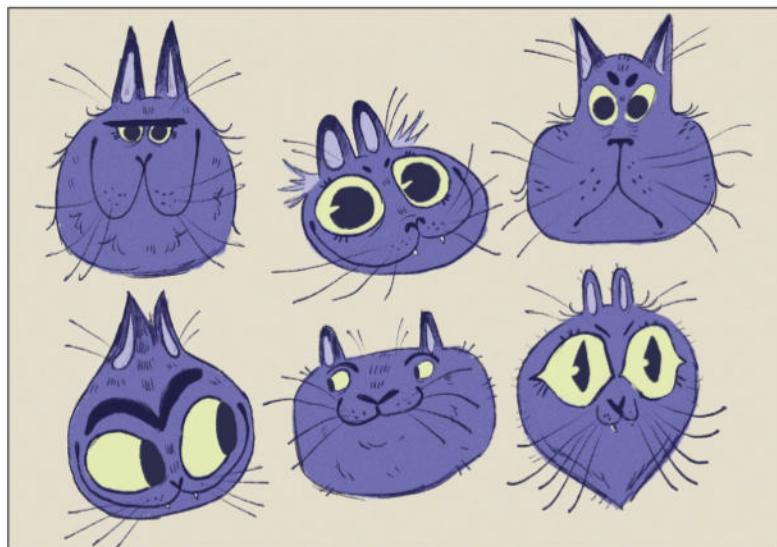
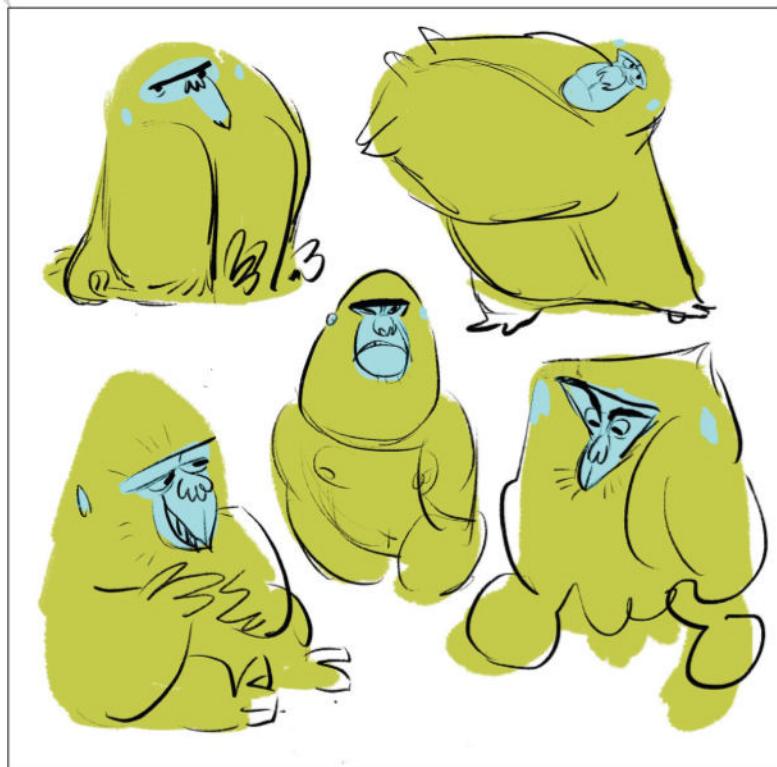


9 DEVELOP EXPRESSIONS

When I'm drawing, I'm thinking about each characters' mood and expression for each shape. For me, it's helpful to start with the eyes because they hold so much story in them, and a lot of the time, the rest of the face and expression can follow. I try to make sure that each expression gives the characters life while working in this exercise so I can implement them better in my designs outside of it. Try to figure out what the shape and silhouette is conveying and use it to create fun expressions to guide and build the rest of your design.

8 KEEP IT LOOSE

As you finally start drawing in and around your shapes, remember to stay loose and have fun! Draw without stress and try not to think too hard. Try to make it fun and keep in mind that this is just an exercise to get better. Test many lines, or even as few as possible. The goal is ensuring there's clarity of your theme in the shapes, while trying new things to get different designs of the same subject. It can be hard at first, so stay loose and stick at it.



10 REPETITION IS VITAL

Do this again and again! If you're struggling to find your art style, technique or material when doing this exercise, it's okay. Finding a style isn't trying to reinvent the wheel, but instead taking from art and things that inspire you, and shaping them as your own. It's important when exploring this to listen to your gut and the things that get you excited, and translating that into your art. It's like creating a palette but with your creative sensibilities; it takes that, patience and repetition for your style to grow and transform.

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Technique focus

LET THE PICTURE GUIDE THE WAY

Krzysztof Maziarcz encourages the concepts to set his path, using Unity as a creative launchpad



"When I start working on an illustration like this, I prefer creating a 3D scene, usually in Unity, with a bunch of simple boxes and start messing around with the cameras and the lighting. When I see that something interesting might come out of it, I

begin to sketch in Procreate. I start with raw buildings and continue to add more and more layers to fill the scene with life. For me, drawing these sort of pieces is like going on a journey. I don't know where the end is. Every new layer of details opens up some new paths and I just choose which I want to explore further."



Tech Focus Concept ideation



Artist **PROFILE**

**Krzysztof
Maziarz**

LOCATION: Poland

Krzysztof is a freelance illustrator and 2D game artist based in Poland. He is currently a senior 2D artist at Artifex Mundi. <https://bit.ly/4cDSgMI>



Photoshop

CREATE ACCURATE ANCIENT DETAILS

Armand Serrano makes sure he has all the right references for his stunning artwork depicting the story of David and Goliath



BELIEVABLE DETAIL



Thumbnail choices

I always like to play with a few character design styles using the research information that I've gathered and build a simple art direction. Part of that was combining designed patterns around the character's armour. Though Goliath supposedly stood at around three-metres tall, I decided to scale him up a little to give higher contrast in comparison to David. I envisioned the character combining the vibes of a WWE wrestler and the Incredible Hulk.

Artist PROFILE

Armand Serrano

LOCATION: US

Based in California, Armand Serrano is a production designer at Skydance Animation. He has also worked for major names including Marvel, Disney, Blizzard Entertainment, Netflix Riot Games, and more. <https://bit.ly/4cHPMNe>



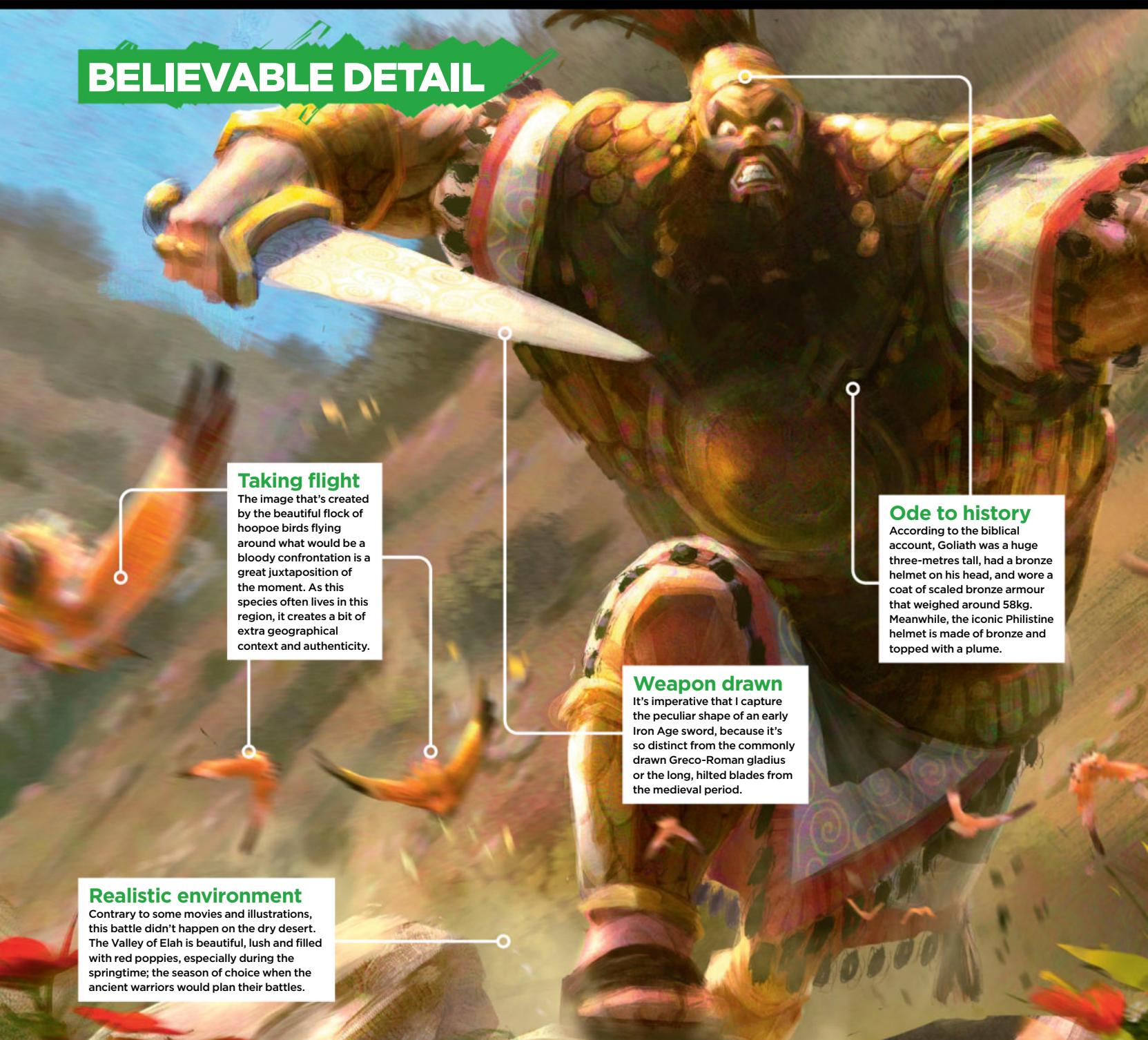
Proper research and understanding of the historical, cultural and geographical backdrop are vital when you're depicting any subject, particularly one as significant as the ancient story of David and Goliath that appeared in the Bible and has been retold so many times in so many ways.

When historical illustration is blended with sufficient research and then topped with skilfully styled interpretation, it leaves an enduring

image. Authenticity and design are the tools needed for believability and appeal. While portraying a well-known topic like David and Goliath, there's a major risk of predictability and lacklustre presentation. This is likely why some images created about this tale have so often been relegated to a story only for children.

My goal was to leave an impact with the intensity and message of the image. I made a nod to illustrators Dean Cornwell and Harry Anderson for that classic golden age vibe too.

BELIEVABLE DETAIL



How I create... AN EYE-CATCHING, DYNAMIC BATTLE

1 Getting started

Using the thumbnail as my foundation, I began applying loose, dry brushstrokes to create the impression of the background terrain seen in my references. Then I started working on the values and colour details of Goliath using a Photoshop brush with subtle Color Vibrance settings.



In depth Ancient details

Ancient touches

Goliath is a Philistine, who are widely considered to be among the Sea Peoples that settled on the Mediterranean coast of modern-day Israel during the Late Bronze Age. Research provided me with the information about the design and functionality of their armour, specifically their iconic plumed helmets and the shapes of their swords.

Dynamic camera angle

To help the dynamism within the scene, a Dutch-angle camera setup and radial blur filter are added to simulate intensity and movement.



Character design

David was little more than a boy at around 11-16 years old, and referred to as handsome and glowing with health. As a young and skilled shepherd boy, he had already killed a lion and a bear with his sling in order to protect his father's flock of sheep.

Rough composition

Initially I created a couple of thumbnails to figure out which of my compositions would provide the biggest impact on the audience. For lighting, it would be a sunny day around spring, and the staging would be viewed from a low, Dutch-angle shot to make both of the characters feel equally heroic.



Poppy visual

The red poppies that grow in the fields in the valley paint a beautiful contrast to the moment, and the blood-red colour foreshadows what is about to happen.



2 Build up the backdrop

Next I turned my attention to the background details. I painted over David, adding the high-contrast red poppies in the foreground, some rough flying birds and a little atmosphere to build the depth.

3 Perfect finish

Subtle detail adjustments were made to the characters, such as Goliath's head size and David's proportions. Motion blur was also added to the birds, poppies and background elements to simulate speed of movement. To get everything just right, I also made some tweaks to the contrast, and highlights were applied.



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SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Bella Rachlin

LOCATION: Italy **MEDIA:** Pencil, ink pens, watercolour pencils, watercolour paint, acrylic, Copic markers, Posca markers **WEB:** www.instagram.com/bella_rachlin

Bella is a mixed-media comic and fantasy artist who is mostly self-taught from books and YouTube. Her biggest influences are Boris Vallejo and Julie Bell.



1 MAGIK

"I used watercolour pencils and paints, Posca markers and liquid acrylic to depict Magik from the X-Men in this fan art piece that I was commissioned to create earlier this year."

2 PREDATOR

"Another fan art commission, this time from 2019. As usual, this was made with watercolours, colour pencils, Copic markers and liquid acrylic, but also some waterproof ink."



3 NINJA TURTLE

"This fan art of Leo from TMNT was done as a recent private commission. I used Copic markers, watercolour pencils and paints, Posca markers, liquid acrylic and acrylic spray."

4 DEADPOOL

"Dramatic fan art of Deadpool that was realised with Copic markers, Posca markers, watercolour pencil and paint, and liquid acrylic. It was another commissioned piece."





Brookes C. Morris

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Ink, watercolour WEB: www.instagram.com/brookes_arts

Freelance artist Brookes draws on the inspiration of his kids to create art that appeals to all ages. His range of clients include the likes of ChapterHouse Comics.

1 SPACE EXPLORATION WITH A PET NAVIGATOR

"This piece features intergalactic travels with a pet who has the uncanny ability to communicate using a speech collar enabler. A concept that came from the imaginations of my kids."



2 LOCAL COMIC SHOP COMMISSION

"A cover recreation that was presented to a longstanding comic shop owner upon retirement. It was made with sumi inks and a wash."

3 VIBES TO CLASSICAL COMPOSITIONS

"This piece is inspired by my girls, who love music from all ages. It was made on toned paper, which creates its own cool value that I emphasised with inks, Ohuhu markers and a white-out pen."

4 DINO DRAGON WARRIOR

"Inspired by a John Buscema composition. This piece was created alongside my son, who comes up with these ideas to mash up science fiction concepts that involve time travel and diabolical cat dictators."







Markers

DRAW COLOURFUL MANGA ARTWORK

CHIHIRO HOWE guides us through the process of creating a manga-style character using alcohol-based markers

Alcohol-based markers are a medium that shuns both hassle and mess, and is fairly easy to use once you get the hang of it. The colour choices are abundant, the colours are vibrant, and they're extremely fast to dry, so there's no worrying about making any accidental ink smudges or waiting for them to dry.

Because they're alcohol rather than water-based, they rarely damage the paper. However, unlike paints, the ink will bleed through the paper unless you're using coated sheets. The techniques I use here won't work well with coated paper, so I'd suggest placing a bit of scrap paper under the drawing to prevent the ink from bleeding through to the next surface.

MATERIALS

PAPER

- X-Press It blending card
- Standard paper

PENS

- OLO alcohol markers
- Brown liner pen, size 003 and 005

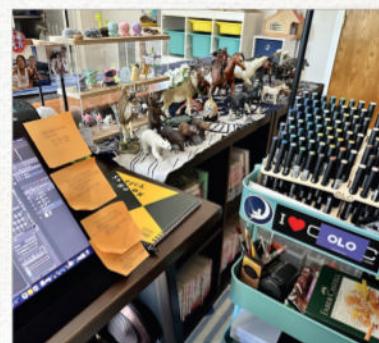
PENCIL

- General's white charcoal pencil
- Faber-Castell coloured pencils

Because the colours are dyes, they don't do well with sunlight either, so make sure you don't expose your drawing to the sunlight after you're done to prevent it from fading.

I started using alcohol markers about 20 years ago, as I found the vibrant colours and smooth look I could achieve with them matched well with my style. A lot of Japanese manga artists have used them too, because they're often pressed for time and alcohol markers are quick.

My art is stylised, so the colouring will be fairly simplified compared to more realistic styles. I don't add too many details such as shadows when I don't have to either. My aim isn't to be realistic, but to keep my image believable enough that the artwork is still enjoyable to look at.



Chihiro Howe is a manga artist currently working on a Webtoon Originals series called *Raven Saga*. She has also worked at Imagination International Inc., a former distributor of Copic markers in North America, as a resident artist. See more of her art at www.chihirohowe.com.

In depth Colourful manga



Traditional Artist Workshop



1 Start with a sketch

Because it's easier to fix and make any changes, I usually do the rough sketches digitally using Clip Studio Paint. I wanted to draw something summery and blue for this piece, so I played a word association game to come up with the themes of summer, blue, ocean, lighthouse, seagulls and sailor. I like to keep the background in a box with the character protruding outside of its boundaries to give the effect that they're coming out of the page.

2 Print and prepare

Because we're working traditionally this time, let's print out the sketch. The paper for the print doesn't matter as we'll be colouring on a different piece of paper. Use some tape with weak adhesive and stick the sketch onto the back of the marker paper. Personally, I like to work on X-Press It blending card.



3 Ink the lines

I use a lightbox to assist me when inking the drawing onto the marker paper, done with liner pens. Make sure the pen you use doesn't smudge with the alcohol ink. It's always good to try it out on some scrap paper first, preferably the same type of paper that you'll be doing your colouring on. I usually avoid black pen when I ink

because they're too dark and harsh for my taste, so I use browns instead. Because we're going to outline the background with a coloured pencil later down the line, we'll trace with a light blue pencil. Keep the sketch paper on the back of the marker paper to prevent the ink from bleeding onto your desk. This also helps to stop the ink from oversaturating the paper when you use a lot of it to blend.



4 Pick the colours

I like to have my colours listed out so I can easily find the right one. The OLO markers I use have the most accurate cap colours I know of, but it's not always the case with other brands, so making a colour chart can be helpful. No matter how many times you've used your markers, always double check how they'll blend and look together before you get started on your image.



5 Colour the skin

I always start with the lightest colours in the drawing. Let's begin with the skin so the character doesn't feel so empty when we're colouring the other areas. Don't use just one colour for this, use at least two: one for the blush, and one for the base colour. Unlike watercolour, using the clear ink to blend will make it blotchy, so in order to get nice, smooth blending, we'll start with the darker of the two, the blush, and then use the base skin colour to blend it out. I purposely colour over some areas of the hair and the clothes to create a soft look.



6 Create the shadows

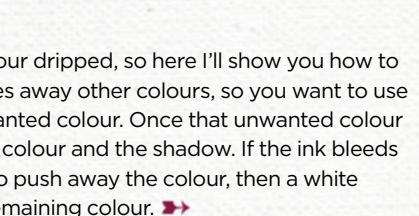
I never use grey for the shadows on the whites as I like vibrant colours, so to keep this drawing from looking dull, we'll use purples and blues instead. Use a bluish-purple and a bit of pinkish-purple for the girl to match with her pink skin tone, and some light blues and the same pinkish-purple shade from the girl when colouring the seagulls. To show depth, use lighter colours for the seagulls that are deeper in the distance, and to avoid monotony and to enhance the shadows, add some dark areas along the edges here and there.



7 Add shadows on the skin

To have crisp lines, wait for a while before colouring in the shadows on the skin. We'll use a greyish-pink for the shadow, and blend with the blush and the base skin colour. Just like we did with the whites, pull out a slightly darker purple to add in some dark areas that help enhance the shadows.

The pink ink from the shadow colour dripped, so here I'll show you how to fix it. Alcohol ink is unique in that it pushes away other colours, so you want to use a clear ink marker to push away the unwanted colour. Once that unwanted colour fades, go over it again with the base skin colour and the shadow. If the ink bleeds over to the white area, use the clear ink to push away the colour, then a white charcoal pencil to essentially erase the remaining colour. ➤



8 Correct any colour drips

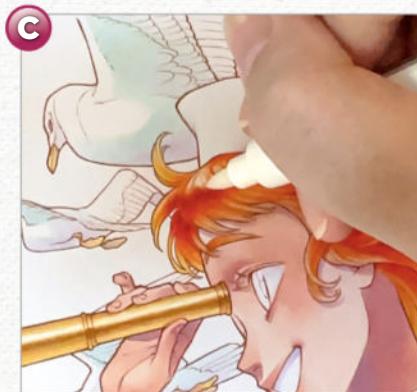
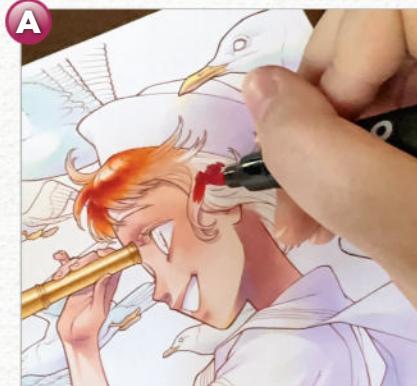
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Traditional Artist Workshop



9 Make a metal surface

Unlike other materials that are shown here such as the skin, fabric and feathers, metals are reflective and shiny, so its look will be led by the colours and forms of the environment around it. We don't want to go too realistic here for this image, it's more like simplifying what a metallic pipe would look like. Colour with highly contrasting colours to achieve the metallic appearance. Instead of a gradual change between the darkest and lightest colours, sharp changes with white highlights in between will make the surface look more accurate.



10 Draw the hair

Hair is soft, which can be shown by using four to five colours. Darker colours go on the inside where the head prevents the light from coming through, getting lighter as you move towards the outside and tips of the strands where the light can show through. We'll also leave the colour of the skin where it touches the hair, as this will create the transparent look that helps it appear soft. To enhance the shine in the hair, use the clear ink to push the colour away.



11 Shade the wings

Seagulls have black tips on their wings, but as I said earlier, I try to avoid using black. To make the toned-down black, we'll use dark grey and greyish-purple to add colour and not leave it too dull. As before, use lighter colours for the seagulls in the back and darker colours for the ones in the foreground to develop depth.

12 Give the eyes some pop

The eyes are the most important part of any character, so pick colours that stand out from the face and the areas around them. As our character has red hair and her skin is pink, we're going to use the opposite colour in green. I like to make the eyes transparent and jewel-like, and think of it as if I'm colouring a marble; because marbles are transparent, the light goes through the material instead of shining on the surface. Add the lightest colour at the bottom of the eye and the darkest colour on top where the eyelids cast a shadow.



13 Work on the clothes

With alcohol markers, I find it easier to blend the colours if I go from dark to light. With the light colours we'll colour the base first and add the shadows after, but with dark colours any ink added afterwards will darken it, so start with the shadows unless crisp lines are the goal. Any colour I want to blend, I colour it in first and blend it out using the lighter ink. Because there's also reflective light involved here, keep the edges lighter.



14 Fill the background

Outlining with coloured pencil first could smudge the line and leave a mark on the marker tip, so colour first. We want to use a lighter tone to colour the background and keep it simple so it doesn't steal the focus from the character. Next, outline using a blue pencil to match with the sky and the ocean, so as not to make it stand out too much from the image as a whole.



15 Pencil in highlights

We won't be using the marker anymore, so you can take off the sketch paper from the back. The blotches of colour on the paper is where a lot of ink was used. Now use the white charcoal pencil to add some highlights to the eyes, and the edges of the characters and the birds. Put the highlights where the light touches the most, and where the reflective lights would be.

16 Extra character outlines

To develop a little more depth, add white outlines to the birds and the character in the foreground. This technique is used a lot in manga, and I find it a nice, easy way to show depth in the drawing without having to colour realistically. We'll group the layers in the drawing: the three seagulls in the front as the first, the girl as the second, and the four closest seagulls behind the girl as the third and add the outlines on each layer, overlapping the layer underneath. The rest of the drawing will be the fourth layer, which is left without the outlines.

First Impressions

Andy Brase

The artist tells us all about his career and future artbook plans



Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art? I grew up in Iowa and started drawing at a young age. I found out that I really liked to create, whether it was sketching or other projects.

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

Music and movies, although those are other forms of art. The things I see in nature and life experiences are big influences.

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

It's hard to pinpoint my first paid work. When I was in high school I drew many of my own comics and original characters. At 19, I created, pencilled, inked and wrote a full comic called Turaxx for the small publisher Hall of Heroes. This didn't pay directly, but I got a box of the comics to sell. I did numerous small press comic projects, including a pinup for Pitt from Image Comics.

Then I inked several issues of a D&D comic over my friend Tyler Walpole's pencil work. After that I did many RPG illustrations for Fantasy Flight Games and White



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DOCTOR STRANGE: THE LAST DAYS OF MAGIC

This is the ink version of the card created and omnibus cover art that I created for Marvel.

Wolf Publishing. My first comic cover work came when Michael Turner hired me to do a couple of drawings for Aspen Comics, which led to an offer from Marvel to draw some covers featuring Sabretooth.

I learned a lot and progressed quickly while doing game art. Some

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?
The work I'm closest to are the original characters and art for my own world design.

What are your painting rituals?

I'm more of a pencil, ink, line-art artist. I do rough sketches first, then a more focused drawing before the final art. With that done, I'll then add colour when it's needed.

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

My work became much more illustrative than I originally set out to be. When I was working full-time doing drawings for RPG books, I learned so much and my art became something different than I'd ever dreamed of it being. I discovered the art of Bernie Wrightson and Frank Frazetta around this time and it had a strong impact on me. I feel that my own work took a sharp turn to where it is now.

What does the future hold for you?

More art of course. My main goal has always been to do my best work no matter the project and always push forward and discover new things with my drawings. I've never been totally satisfied with most of my art. There are always new walls that can be broken down, new things to learn, and new characters to be created.

I do want to put together a new artbook that collects many of my drawings, including my original character art for my own world design. I want to continue with more work for exciting comics and games. I'd love to do more original creature and character design for concept projects as well.

Andy Brase has created art for many titles including Magic: The Gathering, Alien, Star Wars, Assassin's Creed and more, including book covers for stories by George R.R. Martin and Neil Gaiman. Visit www.instagram.com/andybrase_art to discover more of his work.

“The work I'm closest to are the original characters and art for my own world design”

of that work still stands up well. My drawings prior to that were still very much developing my art. As an artist you're constantly evolving.

What's the last piece you finished, and how do the two pieces differ?
I recently did some work for Magic the Gathering on The Mycotyrant. It's certainly much more advanced than my early work.



THE MYCOTYRANT

Card art made for Magic: The Gathering's The Lost Caverns of Ixalan expansion.

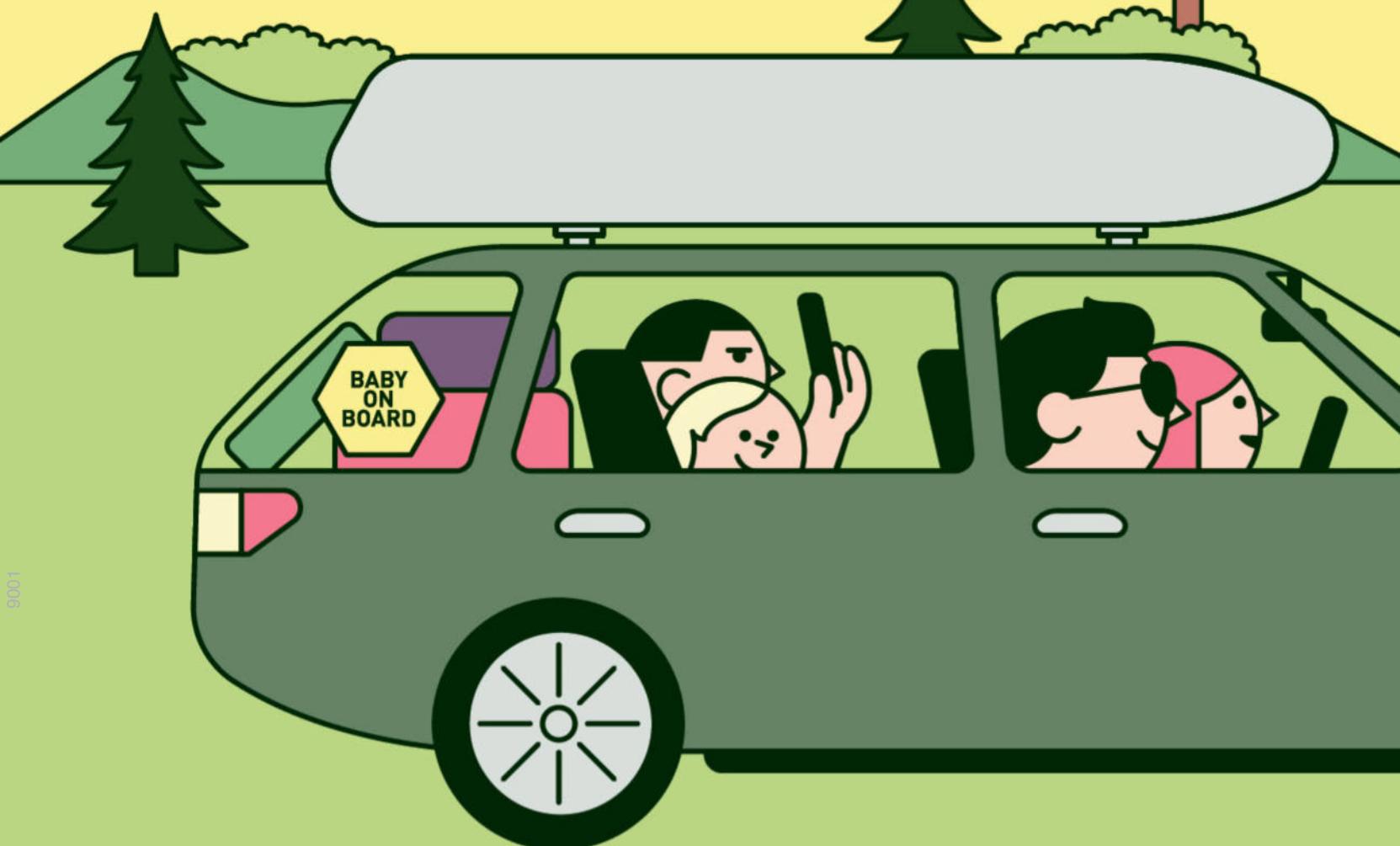


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