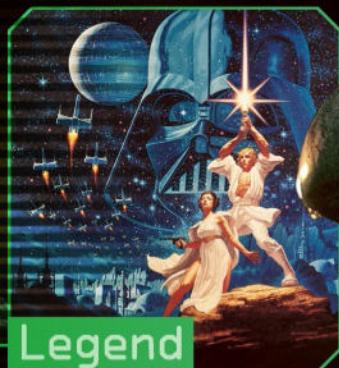


NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

NOSTROMO 180924609



Legend

TRIBUTES TO A GREAT

Artists remember
Greg Hildebrandt

Also inside

THE SECRETS OF
VIBRANT MANGA

TELL STORIES IN
ILLUSTRATIONS

VISIT A STUDIO
ON THE COAST

THE ART OF ALIEN

We go in-depth on the iconic franchise

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Meet the concept artists
behind **Alien: Romulus**

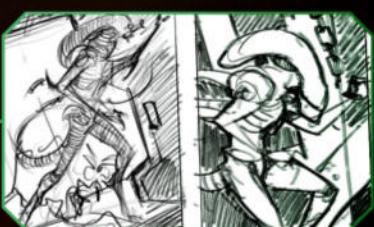


How **HR Giger** and more
influenced pop culture



Including

Pro film artist **Nick Stath**
builds a horror setting



Learn to create our terrifying
xenomorph fan art cover



Workshop

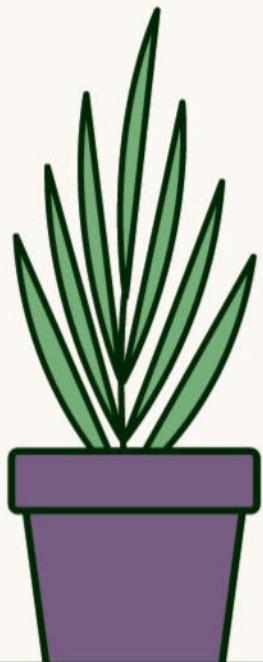
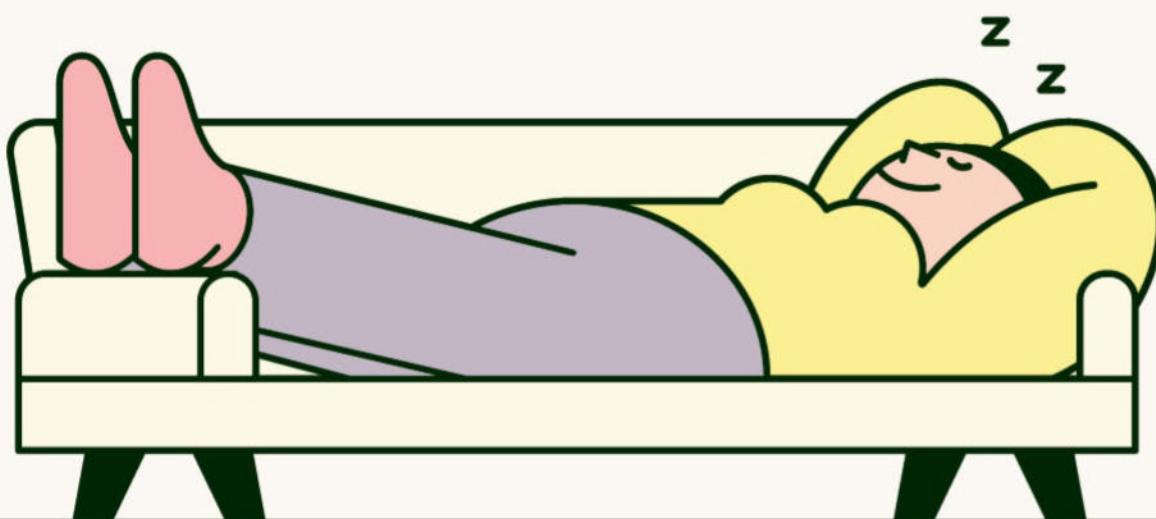
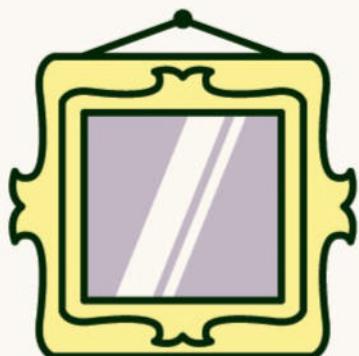
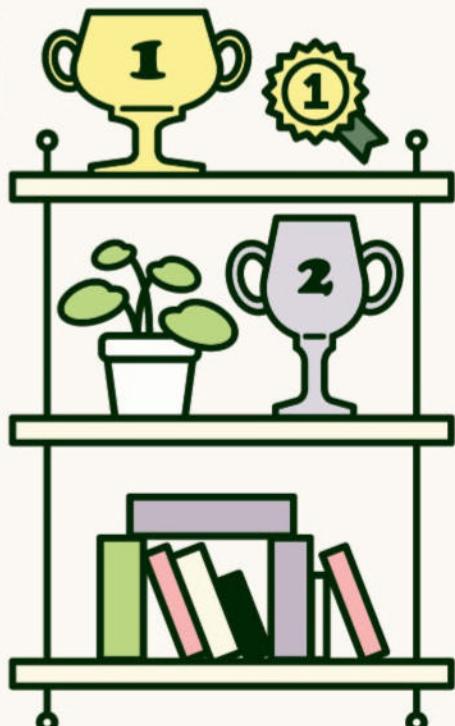
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with environments



ISSUE 248

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



There are only a handful of movie franchises where you know exactly what world you're being transported to in mere seconds. The Alien universe is one of them, so with *Alien: Romulus* bursting onto big screens in August, we thought it was about time we revisited this epic setting for an in-depth exploration.

First up you'll notice our stunning cover art! If you're looking to create similar pieces you're in luck, as we have a detailed workshop on just that with creature and character artist Kyle Brown. Then we have a conversation with the artists behind *Romulus*, as well as a deeper look into the history of the Alien franchise's visuals across the years and its impact on popular culture.

For those of you looking to develop your skills, we have a wide variety of workshops, from showing you how to add narrative elements in your art through to sharing techniques for using markers to create beautiful manga. On top of that we review the latest art tech, from tablets to storage.

Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor

Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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Striking sketches

Katerina Putilina showcases her distinctive style as she opens up the pages of her sketchbook.

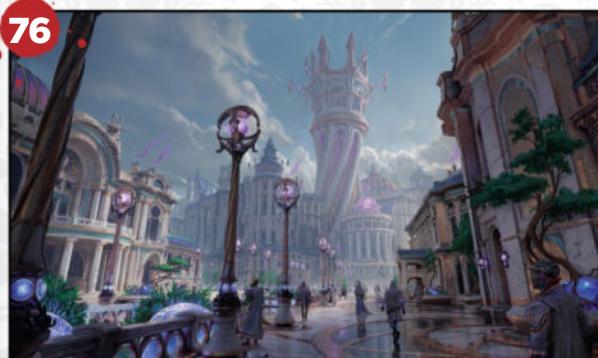
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Paint fan art with emotion

Gain insight into how to make your fan art truly stand out with emotion and warmth from Baptiste Boutié.

76



Forge a world through colour

Discover Gabriel Nagypal's key points for building authentic concept art for city environments.

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ImagineFX

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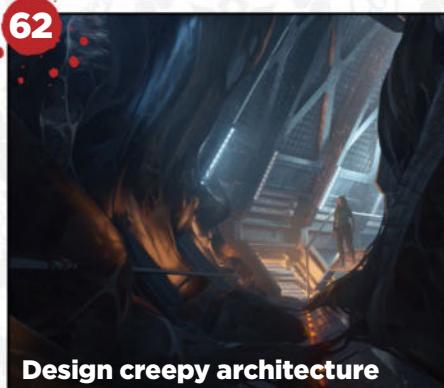


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The artist reveals the spark that ignited her imagination for fantasy worlds.



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Next month



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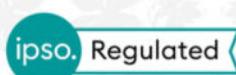
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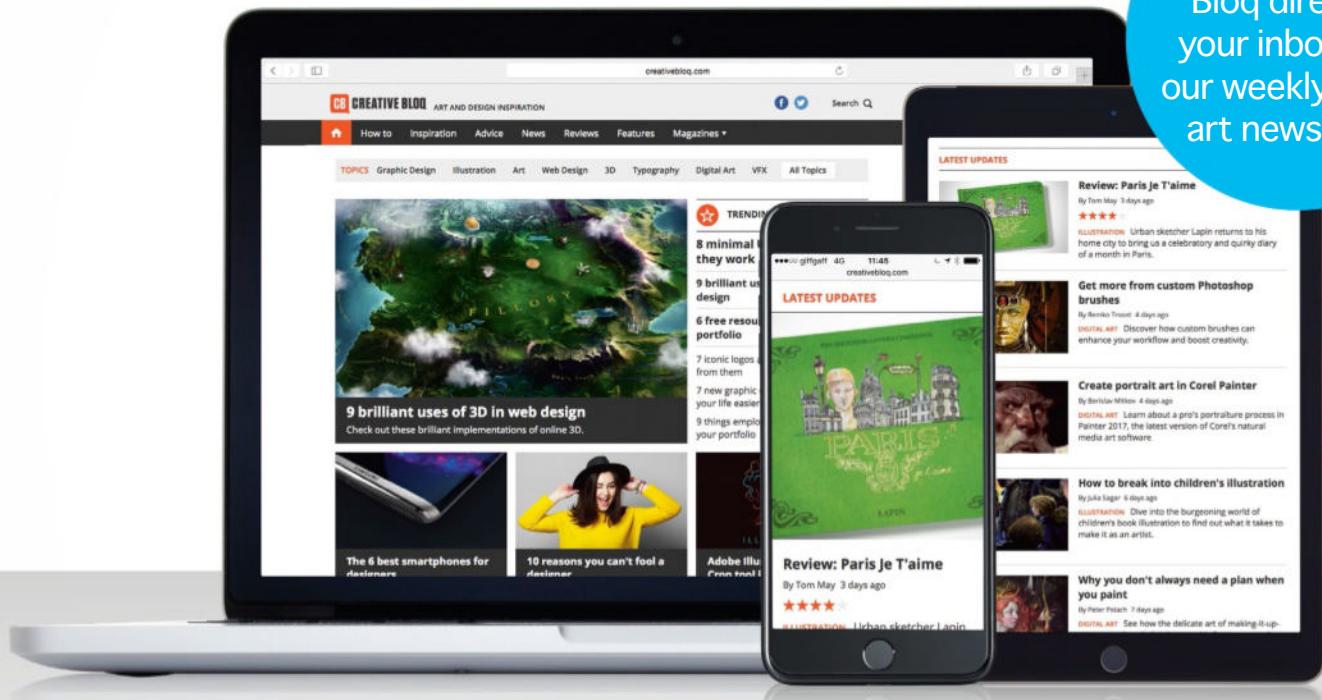
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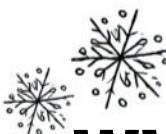
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EXPosé

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Maria Spieker

LOCATION: Germany MEDIA: Procreate, Photoshop WEB: <https://bit.ly/3UPrlae>

Maria's artwork focuses on emotions, memories and feelings, and she adjusts her style to the task at hand. She mainly works on children's books, with the world around her being a huge source of inspiration.



1 O DEATH, WHERE IS THY STING?

"This was an emotionally hard piece for me to create and took a lot of rethinking and redrawing. The enemy will be conquered; the finishing line just beyond the horizon."



2 A SUMMER BAZAAR 1

"It's impossible to leave a good bazaar empty-handed! Either you'll find something to buy, or something will find you."

3 A SUMMER BAZAAR 2

"At bazaars, every small detail can tell its own big story. Using aspects of comic drawing, a single picture feels as though it's a part of something bigger."



10

ImagineFX

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Teo Skaffa

LOCATION: Italy MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.teoskaffa.com

“I’m from a small place in the Netherlands you’ve probably never heard of, and now live in an even smaller place in the Italian countryside you definitely haven’t heard of,” says illustrator and character designer Teo, who’s grateful to make a living by drawing.

1 MAYBE IN ANOTHER LIFE

“I wanted to draw something that conveyed a feeling of sadness, and I also really wanted to draw a bus stop in the darkness. I always try to draw spooky things, so the ghost was a given for this piece.”



3 FELT CUTE, MIGHT DELETE LATER

“Fun fact: did you know that these days vampires can take selfies? This is because there’s no silver used in digital film and photography.”

2 THE DOGS LOOK WEIRD HERE

“I thought it would be funny to have a girl walking her grotesque monster dog. This was one of my first images where the monster is more creepy than it is cute. He’s still a good boy though!”



4 THEY'RE OUT OF YOUR FAVOURITE BRAND

“Luckily this store has a special cryptid food section for all your chupacabra’s feeding needs. You don’t want them going hungry!”







Masae Seki

LOCATION: Canada MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate, traditional media WEB: www.masaeseki.com

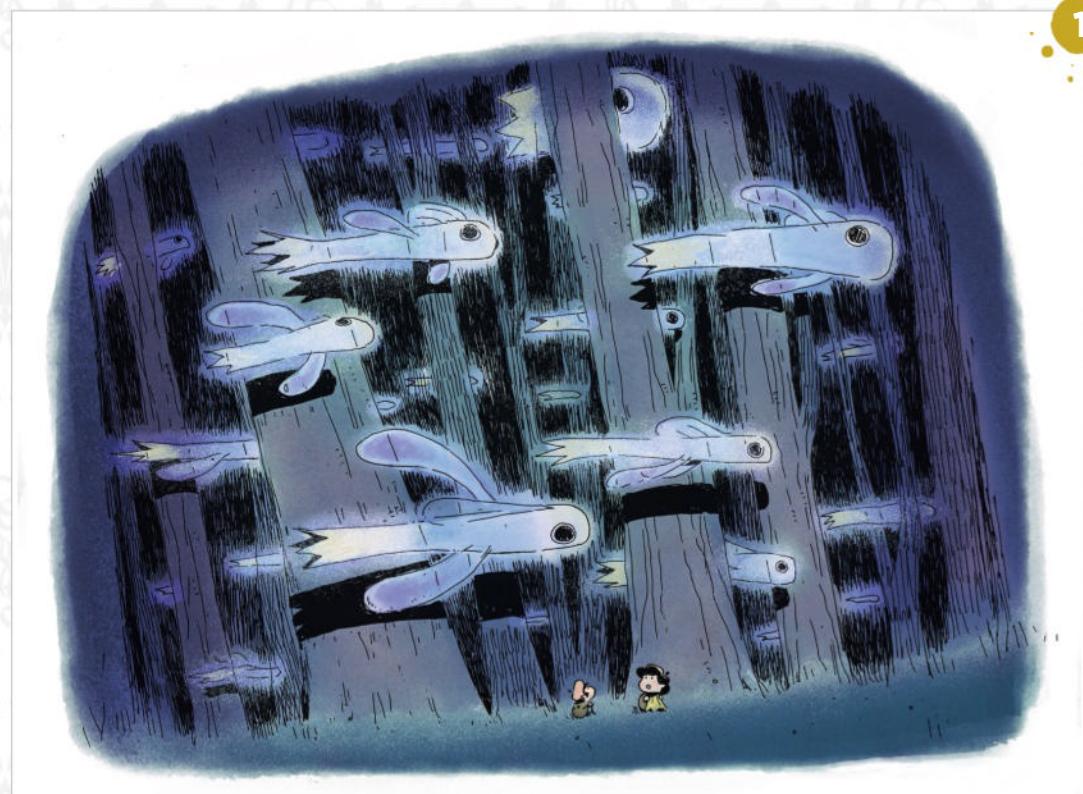
Masae is a Japanese-Canadian artist inspired by nature and personal experiences. She enjoys creating art that tells heartfelt stories and reflects her deep appreciation for life's meaningful, simple moments.

1 HIKE

"I created a series of ink drawings featuring two little adventurers: Ginkgo Boy and Acorn Girl. I inked them on paper and brought them to life with colour in Procreate."

2 PLAID

"I adored this thrifited shirt for its fun geometric shape and design. Inspired by it, I wanted to create a design that pushes playful, geometric shapes and finds that same joyful energy."



**3 ORANGE**

3 ORANGE "Inspired by a photo of a child on a bike, I imagined a story where a boy discovers a box of kittens and faces the dilemma of whether or not to take them home."

4 MARY AND LAMBS

4 MARY AND LAMBS "I find a lot of inspiration in daydreaming and cloud watching. One day I saw a girl with a flock of lambs following closely behind her, which sparked this idea."



Oscar Jiménez Vargas

LOCATION: Spain MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.instagram.com/oscar_j_vargas

Oscar is an art director and character designer on animation and mobile game projects. With western and eastern influences, he focuses on clear lines, simple forms and striking silhouettes.

1 CREATING ASTARTE'S EXPRESSION SHEET

"One of the characters from The Missing Lynx movie. Giving expression to an anthropomorphic bird was tricky, especially making the beak flexible without looking soft, so I studied classic 2D animations for guidance."

2 UGLY DAVE EXPRESSIONS

"Designs for Netflix's Love, Death & Robots episode The Dump. It was exciting to work on a grittier, adult project. Sometimes I use Photoshop's Liquify tool to exaggerate initially restrained expressions."

3 LAMA KUNG FU GIRL

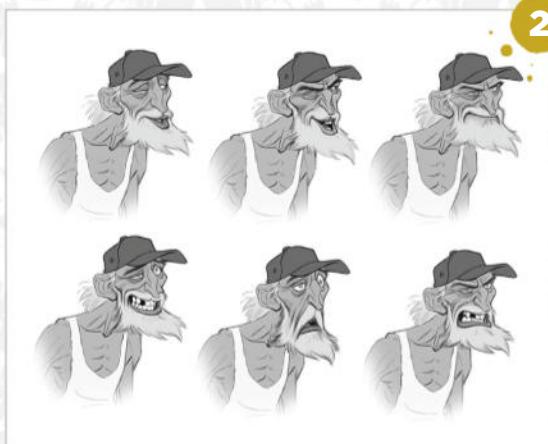
"This captures some movements from my kung fu practice. I chose pencils and markers for expressiveness, emphasising strong action lines and clear silhouettes, finishing up with watercolour brushes in Photoshop."

4 SENTENA

"I like to reinterpret live-action movie characters in an animation style, like Lee Van Cleef here. I study references first, then set them aside to let creativity flow."



© Kendor Moon



© Netflix





Haneul Nam

LOCATION: South Korea MEDIA: Procreate, Photoshop WEB: <https://rayaportfolio.carrd.co>

Haneul is a self-taught freelance illustrator who specialises in creating concept paintings. Witches, serenity and loneliness are recurring themes in her work, and she's greatly inspired by Hayao Miyazaki.

1



1 TRIBUTE TO AUTUMN

"A painting that expresses appreciation for autumn and nature. A witch is visiting an unknown being in the forest with a bouquet of flowers."

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



3



4



2 JOURNEY

"This painting doesn't show where the witch and her companion are going. I like to make the audience imagine their destination."

3 ROSE WITCH

"A rose-coloured witch standing in a garden full of flowers. I sprinkled yellow around the red colour so the audience's eyes could flow smoothly."

4 SPRING WITCH

"Spring is lively and bright, but I expressed a sense of calmness here by lowering the saturation and controlling the colour to balance my style."



THE
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Seanesis: Day of the Steel Tide

YEAR CREATED: 2023 MEDIA: Photoshop

“This is a personal project inspired by coastal cultures and their connection to the sea. Set in a fantasy world, Seanesis envisions a festival where joyful artists and citizens come together to celebrate the sea with their creations and intricate metallic creatures. Driven by a desire to evoke a sense of peace and tranquillity, I crafted a serene universe where people honour the sea in a unique and imaginative way.”



The Rookies



SERNESIS DAY OF THE STEEL TIDE

Every year at the beginning of spring, the Sernesis takes place on the coast for several days. It is a big festival that attracts families from all over the region. It celebrates life from the ocean and the recent births on the coast.

This event brings together families, artisans and artists of all kinds. All express their attachment to the sea and celebrate the marine world with fabulous creations of steel. Parades, shows and ceremonies are held in honour of the aquatic gods.



Artist **PROFILE**

Gabrielle Penager

LOCATION: France



A concept artist and illustrator working in the video game industry, Gabrielle has always been fascinated by the worlds created in video games, movies and books. She started out by drawing her favourite characters, and then began to craft creations for her own unique stories. www.therookies.co/entries/32858

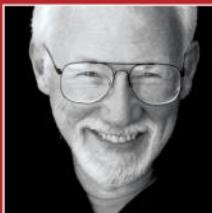
ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS

ImagineNation

AT THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY



"It was a difficult balance between lovingly homaging the original designs, and still bringing something new to the story," says Dane Hallett.



TRIBUTES TO A TRUE GREAT

The art world pays its respects to legendary artist Greg Hildebrandt, who worked on Star Wars, The Lord of the Rings and many more much-loved franchises. **Page 30**



WORKING ON THE COAST

Concept artist Mike Butkus lets us explore his ever-changing California workspace and explains why he couldn't live without the beach nearby. **Page 32**



FANTASTIC FAIRY ART

Our latest ImagineFX Art Challenge set you the task of creating elemental fairies. We picked a few of our favourite entries to showcase this issue! **Page 36**



All images ©20th Century Studios

The art behind Alien: Romulus

Xenomorphology Tanya Combrinck meets the Alien-obsessed concept artists who revived the visual style of the classic films

Set between Alien (1979) and Aliens (1986), Alien: Romulus, the latest addition to the sci-fi horror franchise, eschews the slick look of the last two instalments and takes us back to the chunky, grimy aesthetic of the original films. We're back in a world where computer operating systems are text-based and DOS-like, where every grainy video feed jitters to life on an analogue screen, and every creaky, dishevelled piece of tech is ancient-looking and coated in filth, but somehow still works. Just about.

For director Fede Alvarez and his production designer Naaman Marshall, evoking the look and feel of the earliest films was more than just a case of assembling a world-class art department. It was also a matter of putting the team to work in a way that

took full advantage of the synergy that arises when immensely talented creatives get in a room together – or in this case a Zoom call. With just two artists working in-house, most of the team was remote, drawing talent from the UK, Australia, the US and beyond.

Naaman asked them to combine their powers by staying in touch and sharing assets, references and ideas. And that initial instruction gave rise to a level of collaboration that went well beyond what the artists were used to, and the group evolved into a tight-knit team that stayed in continual contact

A rough xenomorph sketch by Dane Hallett, who took on the mantel of conceiving the classic creatures.



via regular video chats, and shared everything they were working on in a group Dropbox.

TEAM ENVIRONMENT

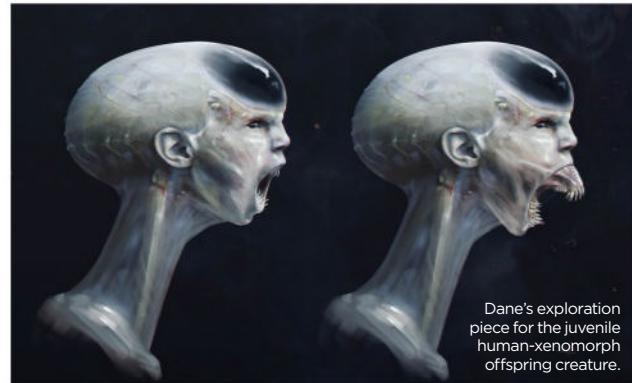
"It became like our own personal social media of Alien art," says

Nick Stath, who designed the Romulus lab, the conveyor hallway and the hive. "Each day we could see what everyone had produced, which created a healthy, competitive environment that ➤

“We were provided good, concise direction and a lot of free rein at the same time”



"Naaman and Fede emphasised our designs should refrain from the use of 90-degree angles, and use asymmetry and chamfering," says Nick.



Dane's exploration piece for the juvenile human-xenomorph offspring creature.

► motivated us to learn from each other and lift our game. Naaman said he had never seen an art department take it upon themselves to create such a collaborative environment."

The chosen aesthetic was locked in from the outset, but beyond that the artists were given freedom to experiment. "It sounds contradictory," adds **Matt Savage**, "but we were provided good, concise direction and a lot of free rein at the same time."

Taking a lead from the series' two earliest films was a vital part of the



process, says **Col Price**. "From the start it was clear that the whole look for the film would be determined by its timeline, which is between Alien and Aliens," he tells us. "So it was a great chance to go back to that 70s and 80s vibe that we all loved."

"Naaman gave me rough sketches and we talked online, but he would just let me run wild. Everything was on the table, but we all loved the franchise so much and knew it inside



Col's design for the street in the Jackson's Star colony, the set for which was built inside an old power plant in Budapest.

out, so we knew what would and wouldn't be a good fit in the universe."

The starting point for Matt was to make mood boards of finishes, details, lighting, photography and the artwork of Ron Cobb, who conceived the original films. He explains: "I rely on research in everything I do design-wise. For example, in the case of the Corbelan ship, Fede had photos of real-world trucks and trains he liked the attitude of, and I combined them

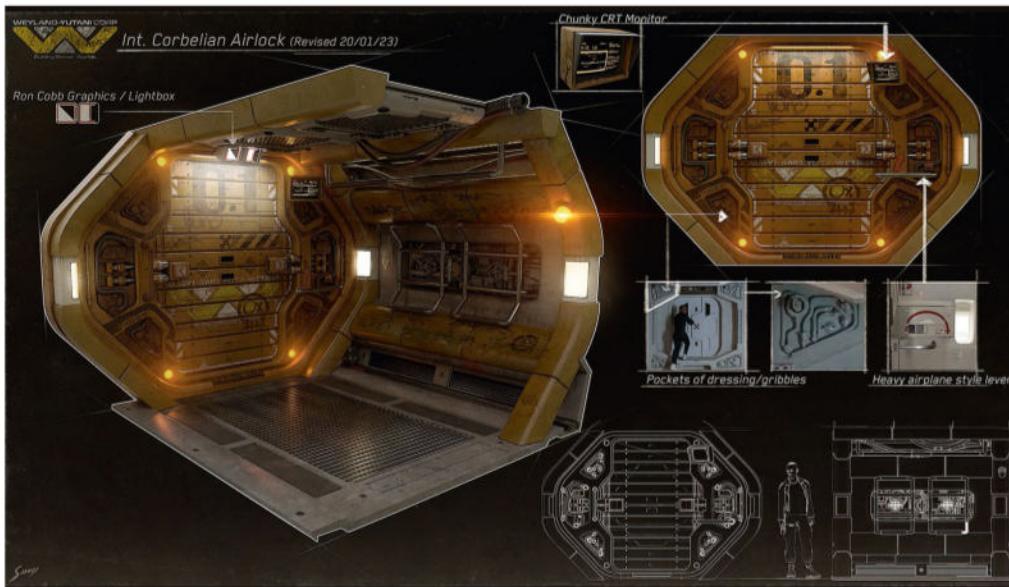
“There were flourishes and painstakingly considered details we implemented”

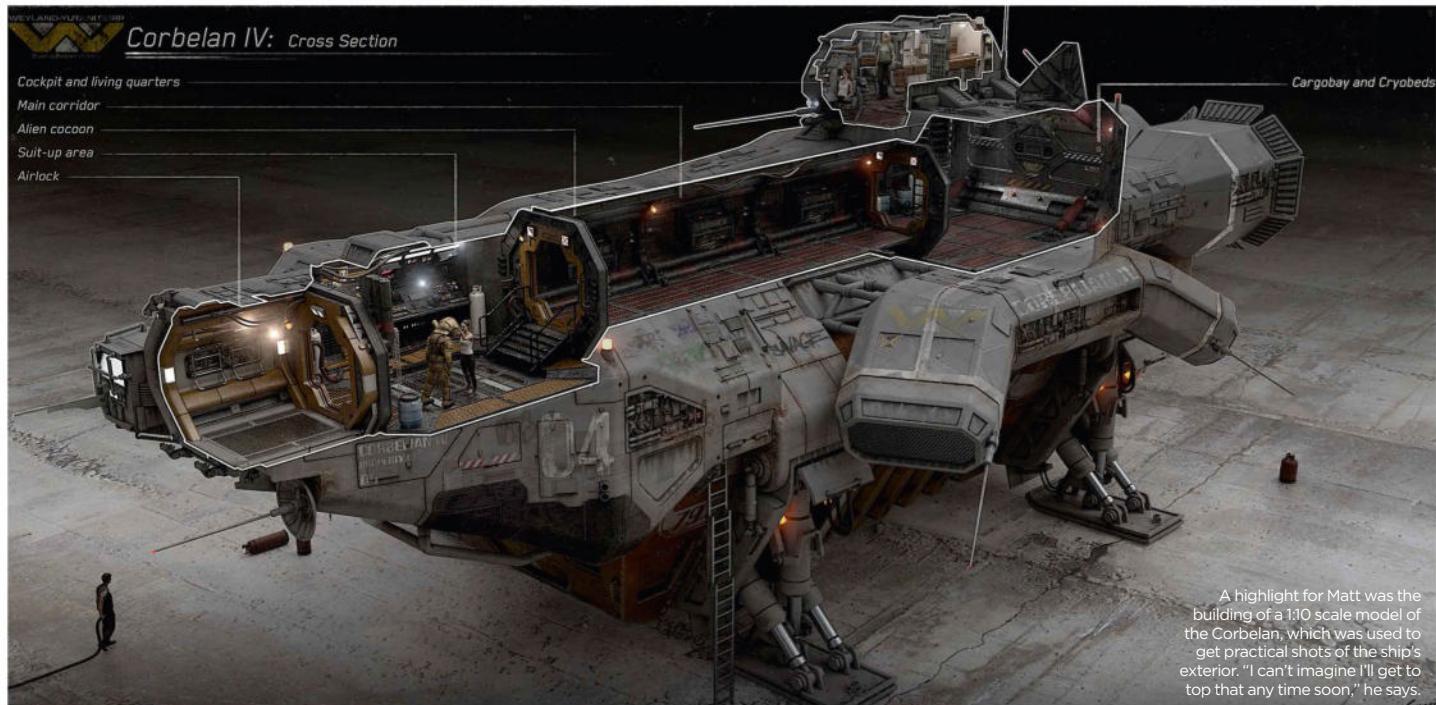
with my mood boards and Ron Cobb concepts to make sure I got the right level of 1979 kitbashed look in there.

"My personal approach [to the worldbuilding] was to treat the movie like a period film and make every design fit into the 1979 Alien universe in the same way I'd hope designs would sit seamlessly in a 1940s New York period movie, or a film set in London during the Blitz. It's the same approach and level of research."

ARTIST AND ARCHITECT

Nick says that he made reference boards with screen grabs from Aliens that sought to capture "the materiality and lighting that gives Aliens its particular industrial aesthetic". He took the perspective of an architect working for Weyland-Yutani, the corporation that owns the spaceships and the colony, as a way to establish a consistent design language in his work. "When in doubt, think Ron Cobb" was the key reminder to us artists," he says.





A highlight for Matt was the building of a 1:10 scale model of the Corbelan, which was used to get practical shots of the ship's exterior. "I can't imagine I'll get to top that any time soon," he says.



Dane gave the chestburster a flash of black pigment, but otherwise remained true to the original design.

A point of discussion that emerged early on was the question of how to design things that fit into an established universe while still bringing something new to the table. "You want to stay true to the originals, but also not be a slave to it and limit your creativity," says Nick.

Finding the right balance between old and new was always likely to be a challenge according to **Dane Hallett**, who conceived the creatures for *Romulus*. He says: "Fede said that if we do something crazy, we'll be crucified. If we do something tame or too similar to what has come before us, we'll be crucified. So in the end, there were several flourishes and painstakingly considered details that we managed to implement.

"The facehuggers, for example, now have these nasty spikes in the 'fingerprint' section of their digits.



Spiked digits make these facehuggers subtly different to those in the classic films.

The chestburster is a close homage to the one from *Alien* and *Aliens*, but now flashes the black pigment that will soon come to dominate the organism's skin. The alien itself now features a rough, toothed skin, akin to that of a shark, as opposed to the smooth designs we're used to."

STICKING THE LANDING

In the environment work, the artists explored the use of striking silhouettes as a means to innovate. "I found the best way to break ground and design

something new, yet have it fit in the universe, was to start with a really strong new shape or silhouette," explains Matt. "I'd then fill that shape with *Nostromo* [the ship from *Alien*] dressing language to tie it to the universe. For example, at one point the Corbelan was looking good but I hadn't fully stuck the landing yet, design-wise. Fede suggested adding engines like the ones the *Nostromo* has on its sides. We did that and suddenly the whole thing clicked and felt at home in the universe." ➤

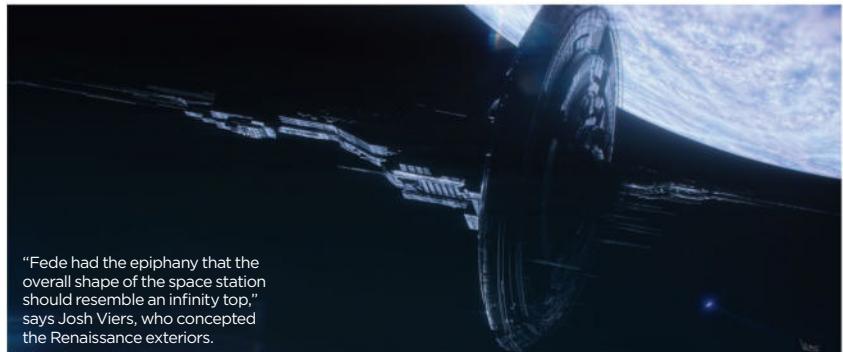


“It was a great chance to go back to that 70s and 80s vibe that we all loved.”

“Jackson’s Star was pretty much all practical; the sets were huge,” says Col. “Fede was all about building everything for real. It was extremely impressive to see.”



Dane's concept for the stages of the human-xenomorph hybrid egg, which is birthed by the character Kay.

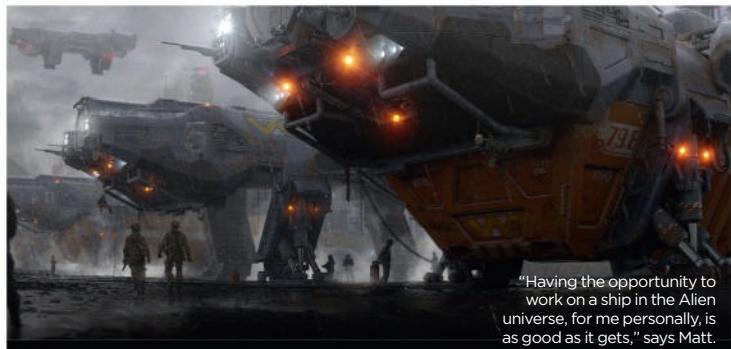


“Fede had the epiphany that the overall shape of the space station should resemble an infinity top,” says Josh Viers, who concepted the Renaissance exteriors.

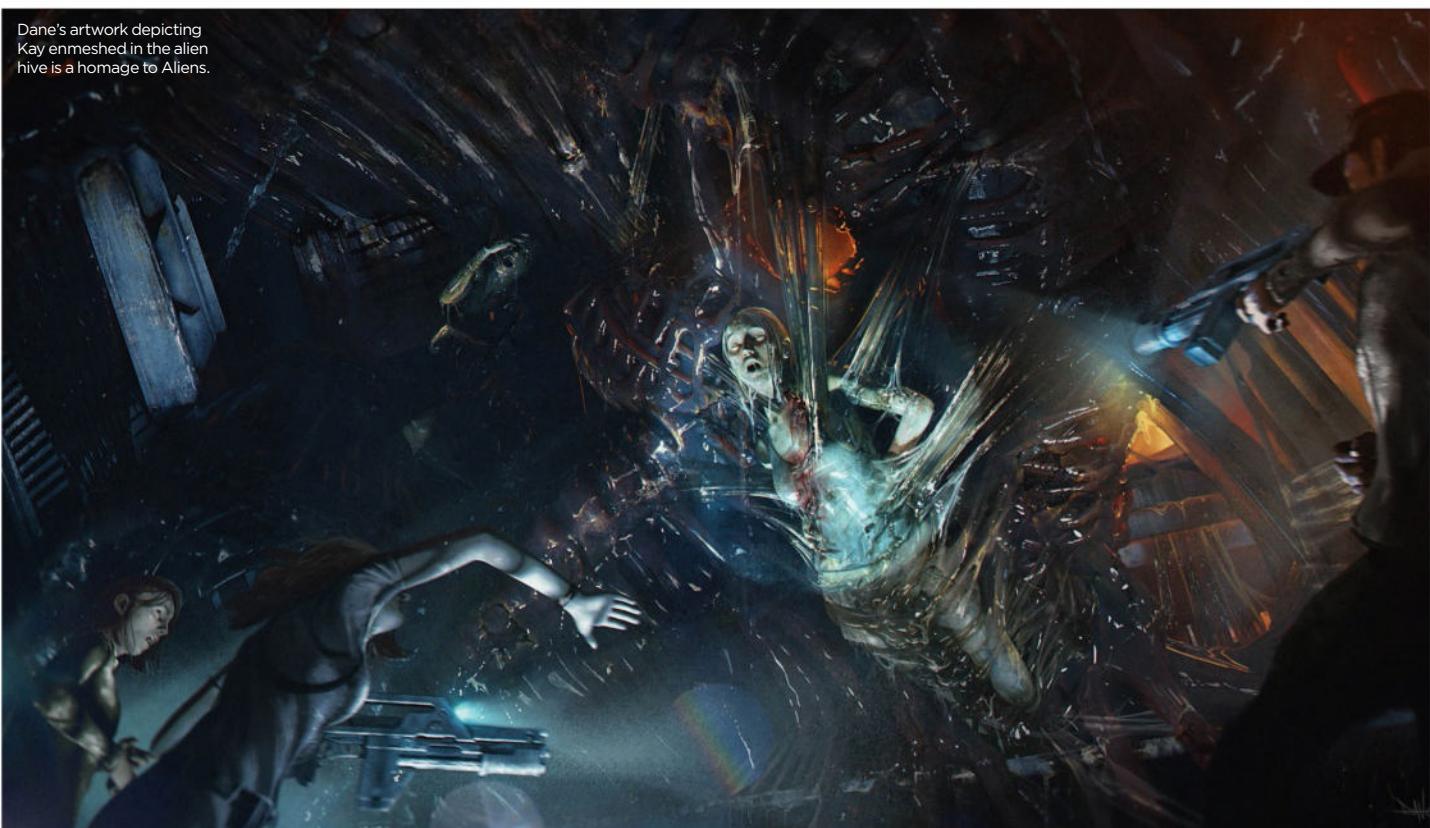




A mining trailer design by Josh Viers, who also worked on the docking bay, cryo lab and space station exteriors.



"Having the opportunity to work on a ship in the Alien universe, for me personally, is as good as it gets," says Matt.



Col's image of crops grown under artificial lighting in the dystopian colony, which never sees the sun.

→ Nick used a similar approach for the conveyor hall setting, which he goes into more detail on in a tutorial on page 62. "I wanted to try an original shape for the silhouette," he says. Nick took cues from the story, using architectural gestures to amplify the feeling of what was going to take place in the space he was designing.

He explains: "The fear, uncertainty and pressure is mounting on the protagonists as they exit the Romulus lab and enter the hallway. In response, I proposed a dramatic angle that would lean over the characters. The intent of this awkward geometry was to create a feeling of weight and discomfort, making it unique and specific to the story being told." Like Matt, he would finish his design by dressing it with the Aliens aesthetic to maintain consistency.

CHANNELLING BLADE RUNNER

Things were a little different for Col when he was designing the street areas and trailer park for the Jackson's Star colony. There's no similar environment in the original films, so doing something new was built into the job. "It was a huge task to get everything to fit in one aesthetic," he says. "My main idea was that this place had to be the back-end of space. It had to be so dystopian that it would give these kids a reason for leaving and risking everything."

"I had to extrapolate the design work from the two movies and build a world around it. One of the biggest points of reference was the original Blade Runner movie. I've always felt that the two belonged in the same universe, and using that really helped to build up the dystopia."

An aspect that sets this film apart from other projects is how closely the



One of Dane's concepts for the human-xenomorph hybrid when fully grown.



"I remember feeling butterflies before reading the script," says Gus Mendonca.



Another work-in-progress image for the offspring.

set designers and VFX team stuck to the output from the art department. "I don't think I've worked on a film before that was built almost 1:1 from the concept art," says Col. "Standing in the Jackson's Star location sets in Budapest was just mind-blowing. I was so proud of how much everything looked like our work."

The filmmakers were eager to build as much as possible practically. "I used

 many practical elements directly in the designs," says **Gus Mendonca**, who worked on a number of the space station interiors.

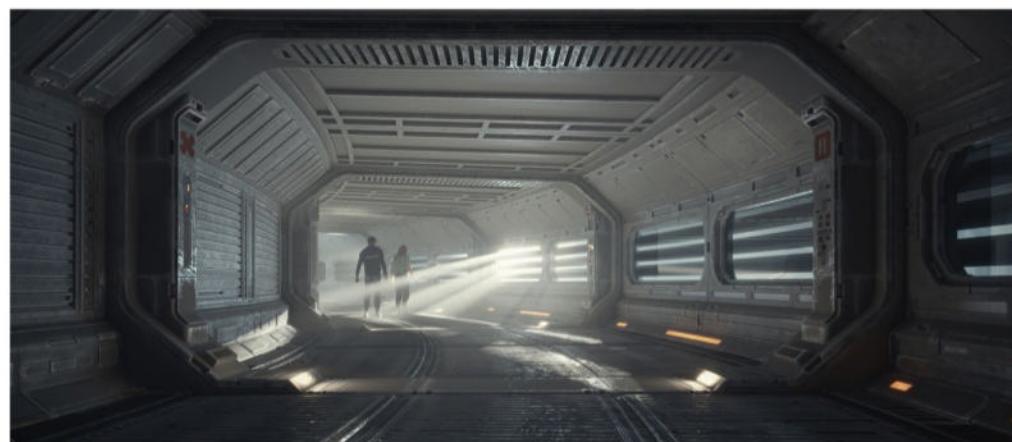
“Collaborating with such a ferocious team of artists was incredibly rewarding”

"For instance, I put significant thought into how to light these sets, striving to include practical lights in the designs themselves. This allowed us to have believable, motivated lighting at our disposal as part of the architecture."

PRACTICAL DESIGNS

Not only do the sets need to be buildable and suitable for what takes place within them in the film, they also need to accommodate the shooting equipment. Gus says: "In the case of the freight elevator, it was important to facilitate easy set extension in post-production, while also designing the set so that what is a vertical space in the movie can be filmed horizontally. This design consideration enabled the camera crane and wire rigs to fit comfortably, allowing for the camera movement we wanted to explore."

All of the artists designed in 3D to some extent as a way to communicate their ideas efficiently to the other departments. "Another reason 3D was



Artist news, software & events



"Naaman Marshall strikes a unique balance between providing direction and allowing artists to express their creativity and bring their own perspectives to a project," says Gus.



Dane's design for the Romulus and Remus sculpture seen on the wall in the Renaissance space station.



Col took inspiration from Blade Runner to create a dystopian appearance for the Jackson's Star colony.

used heavily was because many of us also animated our designs to show how they worked mechanically," says **Alex Nice**. "For instance, I animated the locking mechanism for the spaceship-to-spacestation docking process for Airlock 5B. Solving those problems early streamlined the creative process, and it ended up being 1:1 in the film."

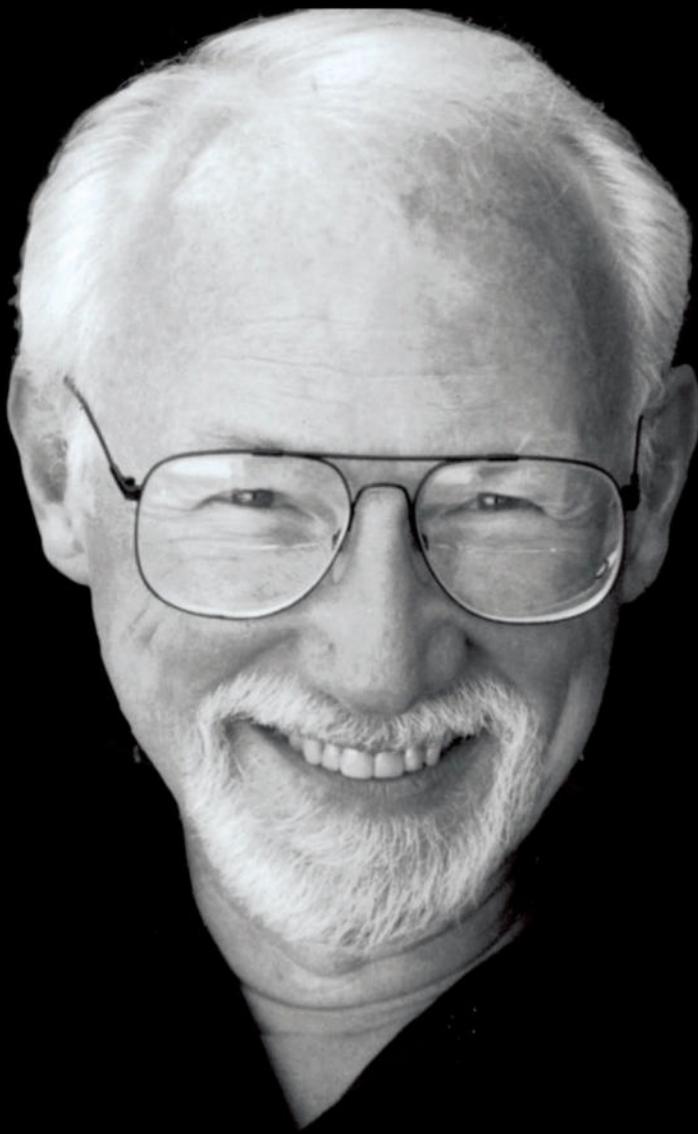
The end result is a movie with the worn down, dystopian atmosphere of the original films that takes us back to the glory days of the franchise. And

for the artists, working with such beloved material was an experience they will never forget. "I'm most proud of my work on the collision of the space station into the planetary ring for the third act," says Alex. "That was amazing to watch on the big screen, it gave me goosebumps. To see something that started as some loose pencil sketches evolve into that epic ending was a true career highlight."

For Dane, it was the human factor that stood out. "Collaborating with such a ferocious team of artists under

the leadership of Fede and Naaman was so rewarding. What started out as a daunting, intimidating group of some of the most formidable artists in their respective fields of expertise became a gang of tight-knit friends with this incredible bonding experience between us that may never be topped."

Alien: Romulus is out now at digital retailers including Apple TV, Prime Video and Fandango. An *Alien* and *Alien: Romulus* two-movie digital bundle is also available.



A Tribute to Greg Hildebrandt

A masterful artist Tributes pour in as the art world remembers a truly legendary figure

An artist whose work spanned some of the best-loved worlds found in sci-fi and fantasy, Greg Hildebrandt was a legend.

He and sibling Tim, known as the Brothers Hildebrandt, are best remembered for their iconic poster art for the original Star

Wars film and Lord of the Rings calendars from the late 1970s.

A master across styles, Greg also worked on comics for Marvel and DC, Dungeons & Dragons, album art for Black Sabbath, and so much more during his career.

Rest in peace, Greg.

"We are saddened to learn of the passing of artist Greg Hildebrandt, who famously painted the iconic blue Star Wars poster with his brother Tim in 1977. Greg and his brother's artwork will live in the hearts of fans forever."

Star Wars

"So sorry for your loss. Greg was a sweet guy and will be missed."

Patrick J. Jones

"I've been affected by Greg's art since before I even knew what art was. He was a true legend of the art community, who will be sorely missed."

Rob Redman

"Godspeed, Mr. Hildebrandt and thanks for everything!"

Scott Wetterschneider

"We're deeply saddened to hear Greg Hildebrandt has passed away. Greg was a truly renowned illustrator who painted sci-fi and fantasy into stunning reality, including one of the most iconic sets of Marvel masterpieces that we will never forget. Our hearts are with his family."

Marvel Entertainment

"Rest in peace Greg. His light will shine forever."

Francis Vallejo

"His understanding of light and colour was, and remains, beyond my comprehension. Though I never met him, he was a true legend to this kid. Godspeed, master of the paintbrush and palette."

Tony DiTerlizzi

"RIP Greg Hildebrandt, both brothers are gone now."

Wesley Burt

"We have lost the great Greg Hildebrandt. The sadness is overwhelming. I am thankful for all the wonderful work the Brothers Hildebrandt gave us to enjoy. We will carry it in our hearts, always."

Drew Struzan

"Greg and his brother Tim were two of the most iconic and influential people in the industry, and such lovely people. Rest in peace Greg."

Greg Staples

"Oh no. I'm so incredibly sorry! Greg and his brother were such huge influences."

Bill Sienkiewicz

"I never met Greg but his talent and gifts entertained me since I was nine years old. What an impact. Condolences."

Rob Liefeld

"My heart is with his family. Greg was such a beautiful, joy-filled person. His laughter will always ring in my ears when I think of you all."

Donato Giancola

"RIP Legend. Thank you for an endless source of inspiration."

Geizi Guevara

"Thank you Greg Hildebrandt for helping make Magic what it is today. His art spanned many of the original Ravnica signets to the legendary contributions on The Lord of the Rings: Tales of Middle-earth, and will forever be a part of our game."

Magic: The Gathering

"My heart goes out to his wife Jean Scrocco and his son, Greg Jr. I trust yours does, as well. Greg will be remembered as not only a top-tier talent who inspired decades worth of up-and-coming artists, but as a kind and generous man who never had a curt word for anyone. Rest in peace, Greg, and in the knowledge of all the joy and amazement your work has brought to people and will continue to bring for countless years to come."

Joe Jusko

"Greg was a huge inspiration to me and thankfully I had the pleasure to meet him at an art show. He was the kindest artist I met and so passionate about art. Thank you, Greg."

Bella Rachlin

Artist news, software & events

"Such sad news. I owe so much to him for the influence and greatness he created."

Scott Mackay

"While Greg and Tim's vast portfolio of artwork will likely be celebrated for generations, it's the original luminous 1977 poster graphic that will live long in the hearts of Star Wars fans, created by two brothers whose talents and aesthetic sense produced a perfect balance of heroism, darkness, adventure and possibility."

Lucasfilm

"Condolences. Greg is one of my all-time idols."

Ben Harvey

"Dearest Greg, thank you for all the work you did, for being my guide with your art when no one was there."

Tamara A. d'Amato

"Sad news about an amazing and inspiring artist."

David White

"What an artist! What an inspiration! Thank you so much for being a spark and inspiring so many artists. Rest in peace, good sir."

Rob Roberts

"He was such an inspiration and a truly wonderful human being. He will be forever missed. May his work continue to inspire and awe forever."

Vance Kelly

"Greg, your art will always be with me and I will share your work with everyone that gets to see it. Deepest condolences to the family, close friends and those touched by your work."

Gill Fahrenheit

"Such a gentleman, and a glowing light of inspiration. I'll never forget the first time I saw his stunning colours for the Tolkien calendar and the Sword of Shannara. I was just a kid, but his joyous colours were a beacon."

Colleen Doran

"I'm another of the millions of creatives that Greg inspired to play with paint and colour. A legendary artist whose work will bring joy forevermore."

Chuck Lukacs

"We are sorry for your loss. Such a great and kind man. Sending love and warmth."

Duff McKagan
(Guns N' Roses)

"He really was a tremendous talent and a wonderful guy. I met him a few times, and was always the better for it."

Peter Scanlan

"I'm so sorry to hear that Greg has passed away. He was such a lovely fellow, and though our contact was only fleeting I was very much enriched by the experience. Absolute lovely fellow. Goodbye, old chap."

Ian Miller



We've featured Greg's art multiple times, including a tutorial on his famous Star Wars poster and his personal work.



Greg's timeless poster for the original Star Wars film appeared on the cover of ImagineFX issue 74 back in 2011.

"Greg's work has influenced me since I was a child. It's one of the most inspiring aspects to my career. He knew how to beautifully capture the atmosphere with detail."

William Ford

"Legendary illustrator Greg Hildebrandt has passed away. I took notice of his work in sixth grade when the first Star Wars movie came out. Loved him and his brother's artwork."

Von Glitschka

"Rest in peace Greg Hildebrandt, the original popular artist, together with his late brother Tim, of J.R.R. Tolkien's works. Gone but not forgotten, he will live on through his artwork."

Eric Bram

"One of my favourite artists has passed away. RIP, Greg Hildebrandt. Your art will live on forever."

Richard H. Fay

"What an inspiring illustrator Greg Hildebrandt was. His Star Wars poster was one of my first VHS tapes."

Michael Reid

"Missing my buddy Greg Hildebrandt. Having a hard time processing that he is truly gone. He was just so filled with positivity and life."

Jimmy Palmiotti

"Greg Hildebrandt is one of the best artists to ever do it. His work was massively influential growing up, especially his legendary Marvel cards."

Rob Keyes

"This one hurts. Greg Hildebrandt was one of my favourites growing up. Revisiting his art tonight to celebrate him."

Brandon Lee Hunt

ImagineNation Artist in Residence



A traditional movie poster illustration for *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes* for 20th Century Fox. Made in acrylic, gouache and colour pencils.

Mike Butkus

Surf's up! Why coastal comforts lured the artist to his California home



My studio has seen quite the evolution over the years – from the bustling streets of Burbank, California, to the laid-back vibe of Hawaii, and now to a peaceful little town on the Central Coast of California: Morro Bay. Each location has had a huge impact on how and when I work, and every time I've set up a new studio, it feels like a new chapter.

Back in Burbank, I was in a large studio, with all the bells and whistles I could ask for but also the terrible LA traffic and smog, and I never quite felt at home there. It was a convenient location in that the ad agencies were just an hour's drive away, but it ➡



“My studio has plenty of space and is just a 10-minute walk away from the beach”



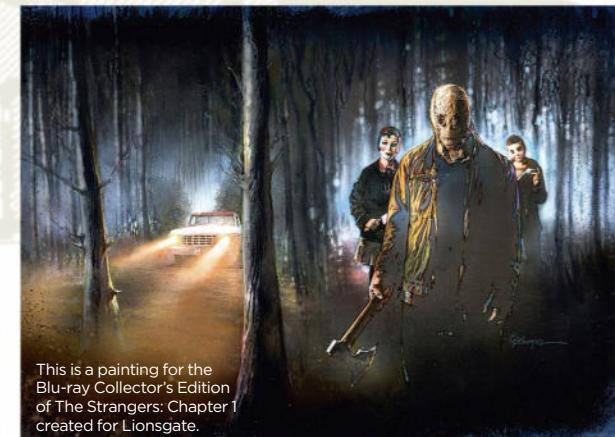
This is Off Leash Studios in Morro Bay, where we host our workshops and my studio.



Artist news, software & events



I used acrylic and watercolour to create this poster artwork for the Bethesda video game Starfield.



This is a painting for the Blu-ray Collector's Edition of The Strangers: Chapter 1 created for Lionsgate.



My assistant, Jerry the skeleton. I use him when teaching anatomy classes.

At the top of my studio, just below the lights, is a bar I use to attach studio portrait lights. Behind the curtains is where I do photoshoots and have extra equipment storage.

Many of you probably have questions like, "Why is there a huge air canister by his desk?" No, it's not for making balloon animals - I use the CO₂ canister for my airbrush.

I used to box when I was younger, but now use the heavy bag and weights to keep in shape. It's also a great stress reliever when you're working on crazy deadlines at 3am.

Meet my beautiful redwood glass palette, which also comes with a slide-out oil paint drawer.

I have many model cars that I use quite a bit for photographs, as I often do action-adventure car chases for movie posters.



► I lacked the inspiration I needed. So, when the chance to move to Hawaii came up, I jumped on it.

I downsized to a smaller studio in the home but the difference in lifestyle was profound. I'd work in the morning, then spend the afternoon with my son, snorkelling or surfing in the clear, warm water before returning home to enjoy the sunset on our porch with my wife and a glass of wine in hand.

But, like many others, Covid and family matters shifted things. We found ourselves back on the mainland, this time settling in Morro Bay as we

could no longer be far away from the water. It's a quiet coastal town with a healthy dose of summer tourism and quickly became home. My new studio here is about 3,000 square feet, has plenty of space, and is just a 10-minute walk from the beach.

A WORKSPACE IN FLUX

The studio itself is ever-changing. I rearrange constantly; sometimes for a new piece of equipment, for a project that needs more space, or sometimes just because I'm bored. One of the unexpected benefits of my current

As you can see, my studio changes quite a bit. I like to switch up my furniture and layout, but sometimes I need to for staging.

studio is the strong friendship I've cultivated with a family of bluebirds this past year. I saw that they loved hanging out in the tree in front of my office, so I'd leave nuts and seeds on my window ledge for them to snack on. The mother bird would actually sit on the windowsill and tap on my window if I forgot.

“It’s essential to carve out a space that allows me to zone in without any distractions”



This was a drawing for the game Borderlands that was then digitally painted by the super talented folks at Bond Advertising. I did the design and illustration.

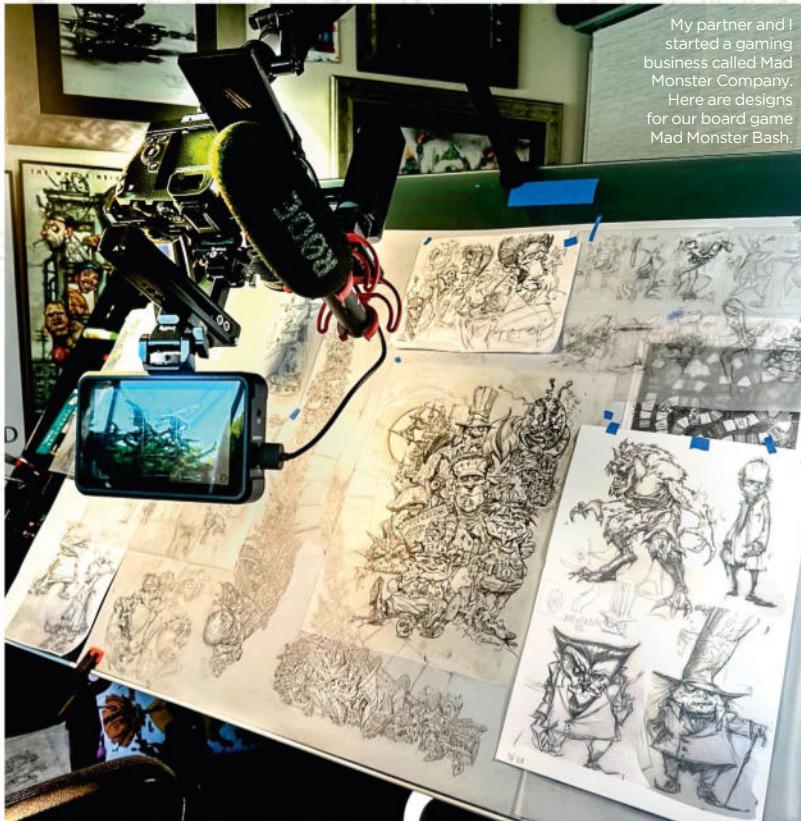
The only unhappy campers though are the retired chiropractor couple living across the street. They have several feeders outside their windows for the bluebirds, but apparently they now favour my offerings over theirs. I've caught the couple glaring at me through their partially closed blinds quite a few times; very creepy.

What's the lesson I've learned from all this changing of studios? It's the importance of having a dedicated workspace that can be separated from home life.

Artist news, software & events



Most of my work is traditional, but I still need a computer system to scan and make revisions.



My partner and I started a gaming business called Mad Monster Company. Here are designs for our board game Mad Monster Bash.



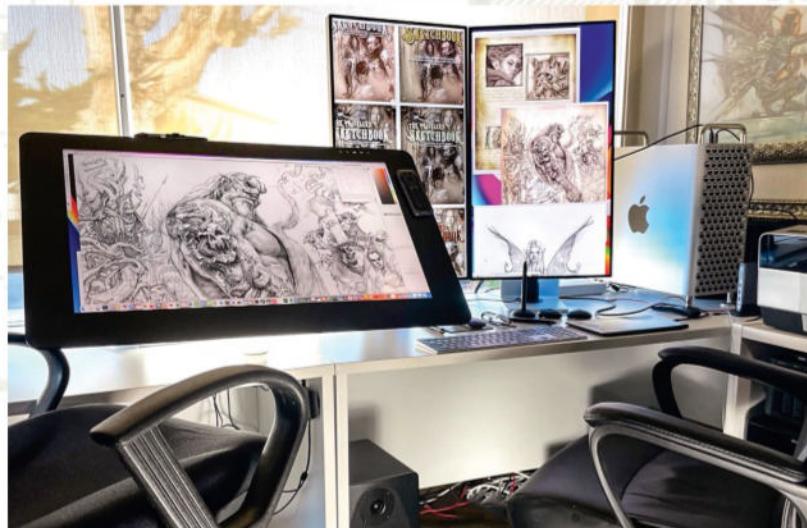
I used acrylic and colour pencil in this Starfield poster art, which was tweaked by the client.



It's especially important for my line of work because I don't have a set schedule. A lot of times I'm juggling multiple projects and need to work straight through the night or get up at 1am to make the deadline.

It's essential to carve out a space that allows me to zone into my work without any distractions, no matter what time of day it is, while having freedom to step away and take in the beauty outside my door. My studio in Morro Bay allows me to do that.

Mike Butkus is an award-winning concept artist who has worked on over 5,000 games, films, TV series, books and toy designs for the likes of Netflix and HBO. To see more visit www.mikebutkus.pro.



A painting for the History Channel called Doomsday Preppers. This one's a fun spoof on Norman Rockwell.

Cover designs for my book a Traveller's Guide to Drawing the Extraordinary Creatures of the Universe Volume 1: Aetherin. It releases in early 2025 and teaches creature art techniques.

ImagineFX ART CHALLENGE

Fae gathering Our readers and the fantastical fairies they created were in their element for our latest Challenge



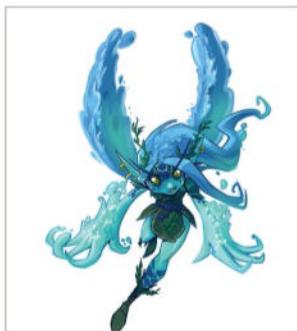
Giulia Riva

Web: www.instagram.com/guillyliaa

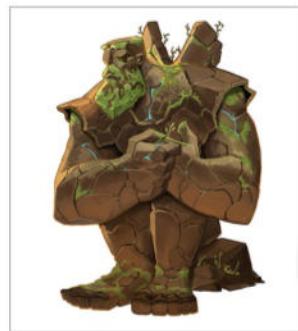


Gina Kühn (GreenfinchG)

Web: www.instagram.com/greenfinchg_illustration



Aleksa Stajsic Web: www.instagram.com/astajsic



Kinga Juszka

Web: www.instagram.com/nerimitsu



Jei Kim Web: www.instagram.com/kimchi.paints



Alina Nesterova

Web: www.instagram.com/alli_april

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**

Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



Contact the editor, Rob Redman, on mail@imaginefx.com or write to ImagineFX, Future Publishing, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, England



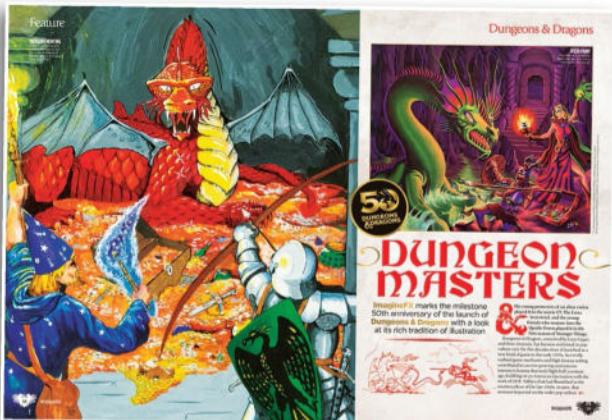
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Dungeons & drawings

Hi Rob, I loved your last issue so much. I've been drawing dragons for years, mostly as I was really into D&D as a teenager. I'm not very good at it, but am feeling inspired to get properly back into my art after reading your D&D issue. Thank you so much for the push.

Simone, via email

Rob replies Thanks for getting in touch Simone, and I'm so glad you enjoyed our Dungeons & Dragons celebration. A little inspiration is always sure to ignite the drive to draw and D&D certainly has an abundance of material to get you kick-started, from the legendary Larry Elmore's art through to the incredible artists that work on the franchise today.

Magic touch

Hi ImagineFX, I am writing to say well done to Daria Anako. Her Procreate tutorial (issue 247) was fantastic! I really liked the art, but the tutorial also helped me to make better art myself, and I learned some new tricks to use when I'm

We celebrated the 50th anniversary of the original D&D release with a special feature in our last issue – plus an epic Larry Elmore cover!



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 247 at ifxm.ag/single-ifx.



Daria Anako's fantastic Procreate tutorial in issue 247 cast a magical spell over us and our readers.

making my own magical illustrations. Thank you! And can we get more Procreate workshops please?

Greg, via email

Rob replies Daria's workshop was just wonderful, wasn't it Greg? I thoroughly enjoyed that myself and learned a few new techniques I've not seen before. It's good to know you're keen for more Procreate content too. We'll absolutely have more in the future as so many of you use it, and we're here to help you improve your skills after all, as well as inspire you to try new ways of working.

Epic battles

Hey Rob! I've been a massive fan of Thomas Elliott's art for some time, since I first saw his work on Warhammer. He's a big source of inspiration for me and I really enjoyed learning about his process last issue, even though I only work in Photoshop. I feel I might have to try drawing the traditional way now. The video was nice to see too, although I'd love to have a longer and slower version to really see the details. Thanks!

Billy, via email

Rob replies Hello Billy. We're big fans of Thomas too! He's a lovely chap and a very talented artist, so I completely agree with you on that. As for trying new things, I say go for it. Testing the waters with different tools, or even media, can help with your existing way of working. It can help build muscle memory and control, and the lack of an undo button can be a benefit. Sometimes restrictions lead to us thinking differently and being more creative in the process.

I'm with you on the video too. We're looking to include more in future, but there are also over 1,000 videos from past issues on our YouTube channel for you to explore.



New works that have grabbed our attention



Aythami Alonso
[@aythamialonsoart](https://www.instagram.com/aythamialonsoart)

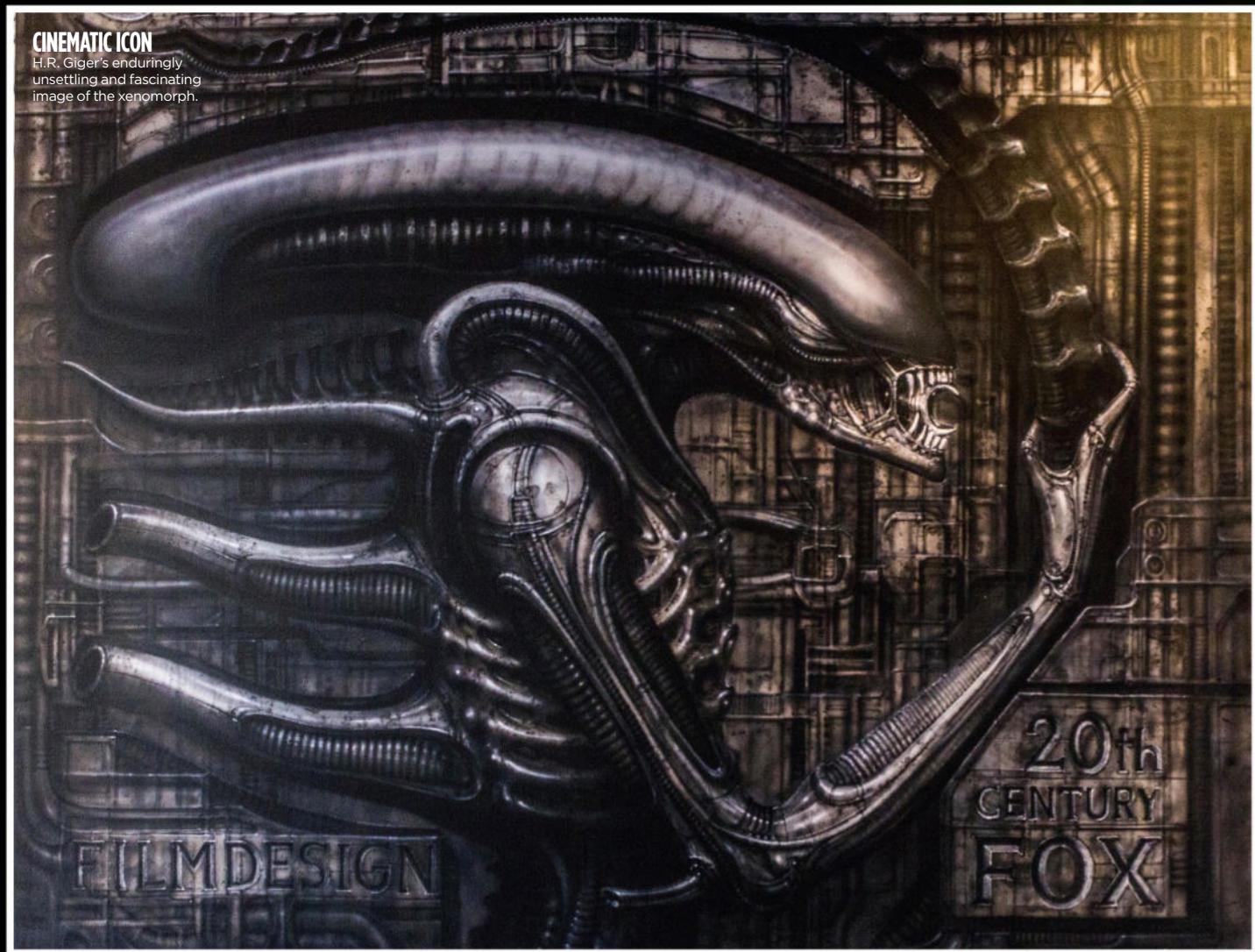


Tomek Larek
[@tomek_larek](https://www.instagram.com/tomek_larek)



Nicolas
[@nico_jam](https://www.instagram.com/nico_jam)

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



Deyan Baric / Alamy Stock Photo

FEARFUL VISIONS

ImagineFX explores the visual heritage of the visceral **Alien** cosmos and its development over the franchise's history



"I am afraid of my visions." Thus spoke **H.R. Giger**, the artist whose paintings led to him being engaged by director Ridley Scott to design the xenomorph for the first *Alien* film in the late 1970s. Giger's art, showcased in his book *Necronomicon IV*, and his subsequent work for *Alien*, sparked a dazzling tradition of dynamic and

inventive creature and worldbuilding design across a memorable series of films and wider pop culture. That wave of influence has most recently been reimagined and interpreted again in *Alien: Romulus*.

Also foundational to the work undertaken for *Romulus* was the art of Ron Cobb, who had been one of two principal designers on the original *Alien* film released in 1979. Cobb's designs, along with those of Chris Foss, were foundational when it came to establishing the *Alien* aesthetic. Indeed, their contributions went so deep that Cobb also designed fictional corporate insignia for integration with John Mollo's costume design for the maiden film.

That iconic collection of art left a major mark on concept designer **Matt Savage**, who went on to work on spaceship designs for *Romulus*. "As a teenager, I was obsessed with Giger and Ron Cobb's work," he recalls. "With Cobb's art, I always felt like I could see a way to produce that work; it felt achievable. My brain isn't unplugged from reality like Giger's is. I still find Ron Cobb completely inspirational – he's the big one."

Matt has been able to apply the sensibilities of Cobb's work to his own efforts for the concept designs within ➤

GOTHIC TONES

The biomech aesthetic in the Alien saga suggests mystery and threat, and is both cosmic and Gothic.



Feature

AJ Pictures / Alamy Stock Photo © 20th Century Fox



HORROR IN WAITING

Giger's image of the alien egg fuses science fiction with horror.



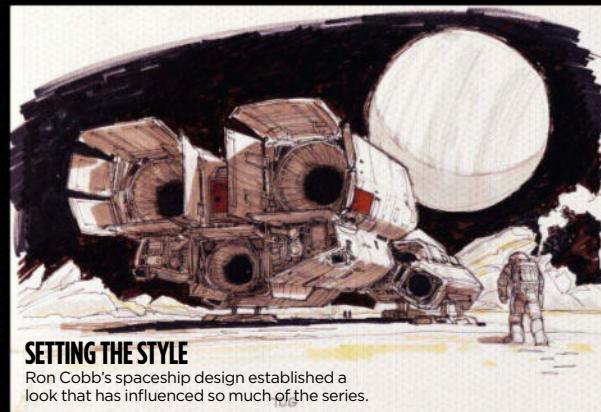
FACE FIRST

The facehugger was visualised as a visceral threat in Giger's work for *Alien*.



CAN I HAVE A HUG?

Various iterations of the facehugger were drawn up by Giger.



SETTING THE STYLE

Ron Cobb's spaceship design established a look that has influenced so much of the series.



Cinematic / Alamy Stock Photo © 20th Century Fox

➡ Romulus. "One of my dreams was to work on a spaceship in an *Alien* movie," he adds.

Such was the effectiveness of Cobb's work on the original film that for its 1986 sequel *Aliens*, writer and director James Cameron brought him back into the design space where he worked on the settings of Hadley's

visual design touchstone for *Aliens*. The real-world military design influence for *Aliens* was memorably deployed for dramatic effect and would become hugely influential beyond the movie itself.

Another key design collaborator for Cameron on the film was Syd Mead, whose own dropship design ideas

"There's so much shape language James Cameron brought to *Aliens* that I feel hasn't been exploited in the universe"

Hope and the Atmosphere Processor, and on the military design of the dropship and various tech that's used by the marines.

WARTIME AESTHETICS

Cameron wrote the screenplay for *Aliens* in parallel with his work on the screenplay for *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. As such, a military focus is front and centre in both films, with the Vietnam War a dramatic and

fused the form of an Apache gunship with that of a Phantom jet. In a design flourish as part of the ship's operation, Mead looked to the structure of a scorpion's tail for the arrangement of the weapon pod arms.

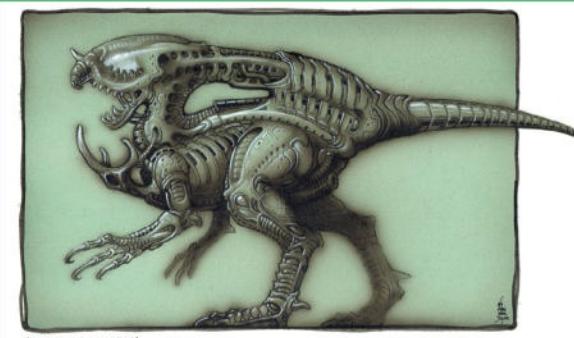
Mead's other key contribution to *Aliens* were his designs for the interior and exterior of the USS Sulaco ship. Mead drafted cross-sections and longitudinal sketches of the Sulaco, working to Cameron's indication that

it should be imbued with the design characteristics of a submarine.

The designs found within *Aliens* have been underused across the rest of the franchise according to concept artist **Andrew Baker**, who worked briefly on visual development for Romulus. "There's so much shape language that James Cameron brought to the design that I feel hasn't quite been exploited in other parts of the *Alien* universe," he says. "I thought ➡



"HUNTER"



"HUNTER"

ALIEN INFLUENCES ON OTHER MOVIE WORLDS

Two films produced in the 1980s, between *Alien* and *Aliens*, demonstrate the influence of Giger's work

The xenomorph has erupted into the visual design of other films. A lesser-known example of this fluidity of the alien form can be found within the sci-fi musical short film *Captain EO* that stars Michael Jackson, was directed by Francis Ford Coppola, and has George Lucas among its writing credits.

Produced for exclusive screening at Disney theme parks, the film evokes Giger's design work in its presentation of the Supreme Leader. Portrayed by Anjelica Huston, the character hangs like a steampunk spider from her lair,

ALIEN MEETS PREDATOR

William Stout evoked Giger in his preliminary ideas for what would become the Predator.

and her face and head are a monochromatic, biomech fusion that vividly calls to mind Giger's classic design for *Alien*.

In an intriguing cinema history note, when a film called *Hunter* was being developed in 1985, concept artist William Stout worked on a look for the titular beast. Ultimately his design wasn't used, but its overt evocation of Giger's xenomorph form is striking and embodies the degree to which the design for the original *Alien* movie has endured and informed so many filmmakers working within sci-fi and horror.

Hunter would be retitled and the creature's design reworked – you may know it now as *Predator*.

AJ Pics / Alamy Stock Photo © 20th Century Fox



TIMELESS TERROR

Giger's xenomorph has been sustained across the *Alien* saga.



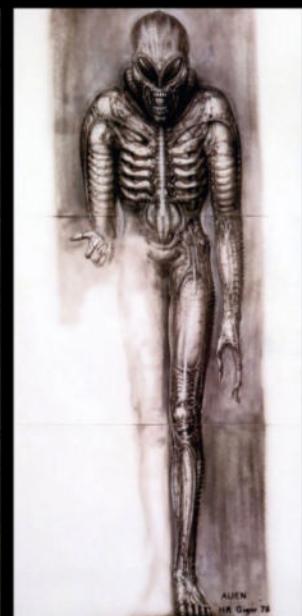
LOST IN SPACE

Plausibility and function were emphasised in Cobb's design style for the USCSS Nostromo spacecraft, where much of *Alien* takes place.



MIGHTY ADVERSARY

The sheer enormity of the xenomorph is seen in all its glory in concept artwork that Giger created for the original *Alien* film.



Cinematic / Alamy Stock Photo © 20th Century Fox

Feature

AN ITERATION OF A CLASSIC

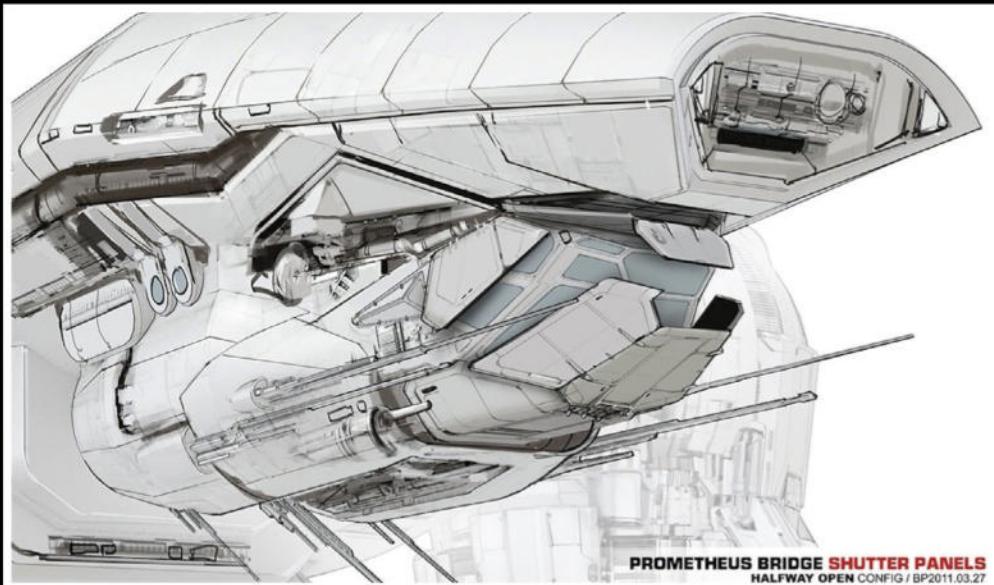
A creature design by Ivan Manzella for the blood-curdling proto-xenomorph that featured in 2012 film *Prometheus*.



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CLEANING UP THE CONCEPT ART

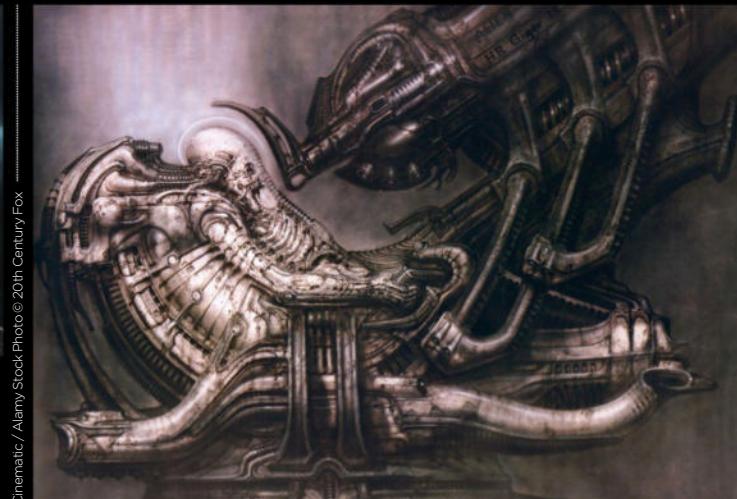
For *Prometheus*, director Ridley Scott steered his team towards a look distinct from the industrial grunge of *Alien*.



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HEADS UP

The landscape for *Prometheus* was designed by the MPC Visualization team.



Concept Art by Ridley Scott © 20th Century Fox

JEWELS OF THE GALAXY

Fashioning fearful forms into glistening personal decoration



Wrapped around a wrist or dangling from a necklace in pendant form might be the last places that you'd expect to see the world of *Alien* celebrated, but jewellery has proved an ideal means of expressing the fascination with all things xenomorph and biomech, born from Giger's fever dream image of almost 50 years ago.

Xenomorphs and facehuggers both find a new lease of elegant life in a jewellery collection from RockLove. The facehugger ear cuff and xenomorph finger ring in particular are striking designs suited to reimagining the grotesque allure of Giger's art. www.rocklove.com

» there was an opportunity to throw some of that in here [on Romulus]."

In *Alien 3* (1992), notably the first feature film from director David Fincher, the design world emphasised an oily, fiery and hellish environment, and a xenomorph that showed it could take on the form of whatever its host creature was. Famously, the film includes an alien dog.

Indeed, before Fincher directed the movie, emerging director Vincent Ward had begun developing the film and his rendition is considered one of the great science fiction films that was never made. Religious imagery and visual ideas abounded in Ward's eventually abandoned iteration, which would have taken place within a wooden planet inhabited by monks,

SPACE JOCKEY

Giger's design for the Pilot, who embodies the *Alien* movie mythos.

though many of his ideas still went on to inform the basic structure of Fincher's final film.

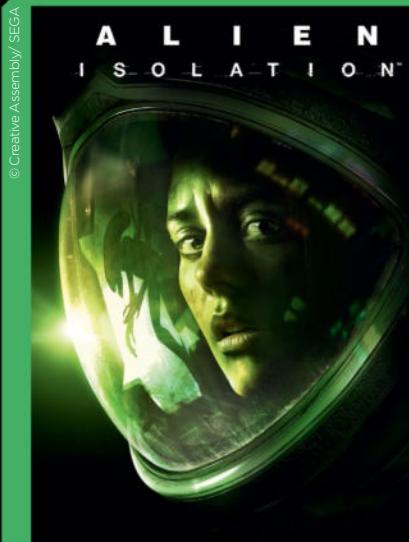
BIOLOGICAL FUSION

The visual language of the fourth instalment in the series, 1997 release *Alien Resurrection*, emphasised a Gothic visual tradition combined with an industrial look. Intriguingly, one of the artists who worked on the concept design for the film's xenomorph newborn was Chris Cunningham, who would go on to direct a series of landmark music promos.

Cunningham's striking designs for *Resurrection* didn't translate in a consistent way to the big screen. His designs imagined a dazzling fusion of human form and xenomorph that was an inventive and refreshed move in a distinct direction as beguilingly hideous as it was mysterious.

Another 15 years on, Ridley Scott returned to the *Alien* saga to direct *Prometheus*. He wanted a world that

"The geeky part of me was yearning to go back, but Ridley [Scott] was keen to go in a different way"



THE ALIEN EXPERIENCE

The visual language of the Alien film series has been revisited and reinterpreted in gaming.



FITTING DESIGNS

The environments for Aliens: Colonial Marines evokes the designs of Ron Cobb and Syd Mead.

was distinct from what had been seen in his original entry. As such, while the rather definitive form of the Engineer from Alien was revisited, the world in which the space vessels and technology were homed evidence a wealthy and well-funded space exploration project quite in contrast to what was seen in Alien.

For concept designer Matt Savage, looking back to his work on the 2012 film, he recalls how it provided him the opportunity to engage with this aspect of the worldbuilding. "Ridley was very keen at that time to work in a different corner of that Alien universe: more funded, more affluent," he says. "Before I started, I think they'd made a full-size mock-up of a space suit. However, Ridley deemed it too Alien, too Nostromo [the ship from the original Alien film], so we were definitely pivoting away from that."

"The geeky part of me was yearning to go back, but Ridley was keen to go in a different way. If there was a brief, it would have been to make the ➤"

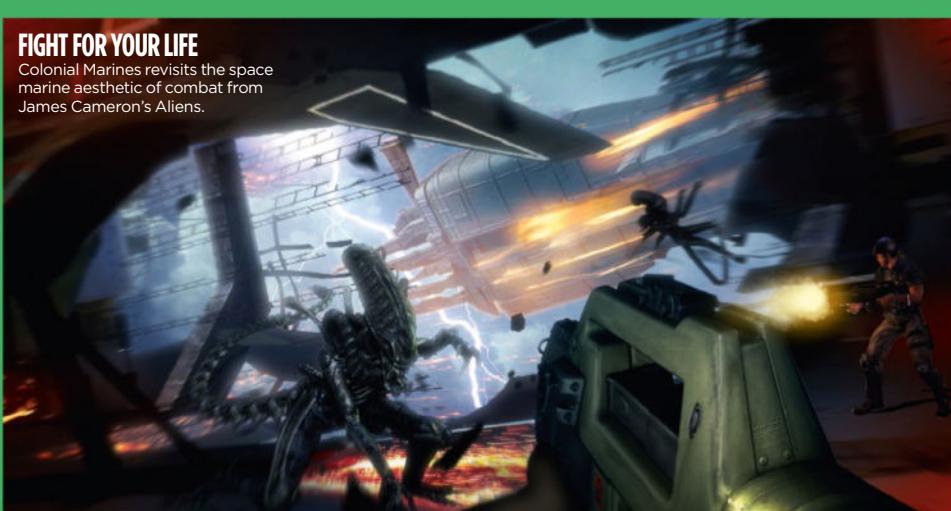
GAME OVER, MAN

Aliens: Fireteam Elite showcases the apocalyptic aspect of the movies.



FIGHT FOR YOUR LIFE

Colonial Marines revisits the space marine aesthetic of combat from James Cameron's Aliens.



PLAYFUL INFLUENCES

A wide range of games have reimaged the Alien universe

Gaming has evoked and utilised some of the key tropes of the Alien saga. Perhaps the clearest influence is felt in the design of the Tyranids in Warhammer 40K and their evocation of the visual language of Aliens. The Contra video game series also utilises a biomech influence in its creature design. You can look too at the hugely popular Halo, Doom and Mass Effect games, which all attest to the visual appeal of the space marine and heavy artillery style of Aliens.

There's also a tradition of Alien-specific games that have been produced that are worthy of note, such as third-person shooter Aliens: Fireteam Elite, while survival horror title Alien: Isolation leans heavily into the original film's aesthetic. In an appropriate collaboration, and as a note of authenticity, Syd Mead contributed to the visual language of 2013's Aliens: Colonial Marines.



EVOCATIVE LANDSCAPE

This visual development image produced for Prometheus by MPC evokes dread and mystery.



➡ space suits engineered and feel custom-made for this expedition. I remember that he wanted nicely milled panels and pieces of engineering; clean and modern."

For 2017 entry *Alien: Covenant*, meanwhile, the visual language again assumed a distinct aesthetic. Key to this was the concept and design work produced by the Visualization team at famed VFX studio MPC. The task undertaken by the unit included designing the alien environment discovered by the Covenant crew, as well as the design of the xenomorph and the neomorph.

As before, the film's director Scott was committed to bringing a new visual language to the screen for the series, and his brief to designers was that he wanted the xenomorph to

MOODY SCENE

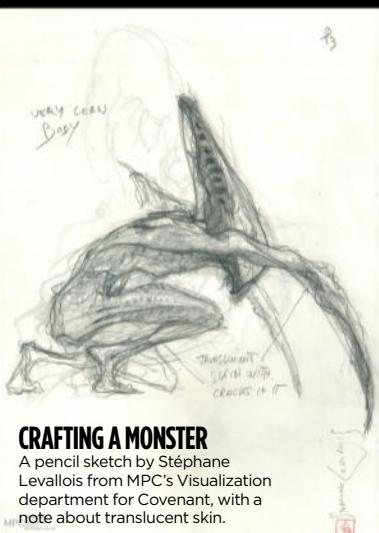
MPC defined the desolation of the wilderness and the organic form of the derelict ship from *Alien: Covenant*.

EARLY DESIGN

Giger's own artwork of the wishbone-shaped derelict spacecraft.



MaximumFilm/Alamy Stock Photo © 20th Century Fox



CRAFTING A MONSTER

A pencil sketch by Stéphane Levallois from MPC's Visualization department for *Covenant*, with a note about translucent skin.

"The design look means that as soon as you see the films, you know what they are"



Leaping forward to 2024, we saw *Alien: Romulus* arrive on cinema screens in August. Concept designer **Col Price**, whose work on *Romulus* was primarily centred on environments with a brief and successful foray into some creature designs, recalls how his imagination had been sparked by Fede

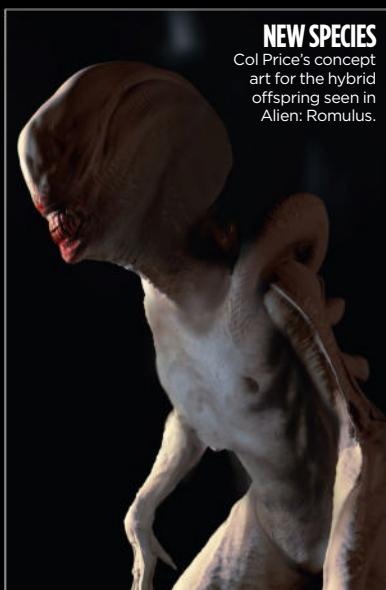
appear less natural than it had before in terms of its physiology. As such, its proportions were not human and are instead developed around fascinating design shapes.

Álvarez's vision for the film. Col explains: "Fede said that, 'We're setting it between the first and second films, and we want the aesthetic to be the same.' It wasn't going to be the ultra-modernistic stuff from *Prometheus* and *Covenant*." He adds with a smile: "For me and all of the team, we were like, 'This is heaven.'"

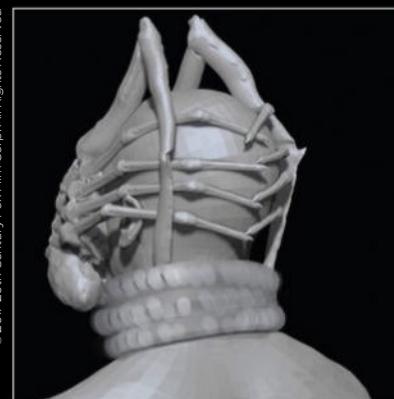
A MYTHIC, MONSTROUS UNIVERSE

Col makes the point that the franchise's iconic visuals immediately set an unmistakable tone and place. "Because there have been that many *Alien* films, that whole design look means that as soon as you see them, you know what they are. They've all got a certain feeling," he says.

It's that combination of all-out furious imagination fused with a sense of the plausible and believable that makes the *Alien* world so vivid. To understand the power of its visual



NEW SPECIES
Col Price's concept art for the hybrid offspring seen in Alien: Resurrection.

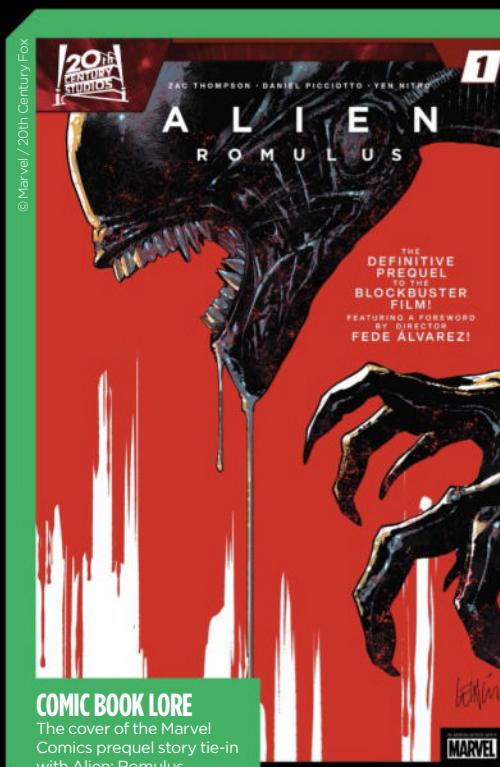


ON THE ATTACK

These models from MPC Visualization show how one of Alien: Covenant's revolting facehuggers attack its unfortunate victim.

language we can revisit the mindset of Ron Cobb about the work that he did on the universe, as well as the wider allure of science fiction and fantasy cinema in all of its forms. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times in 1988, Cobb observed: "I'm very impressed by the act of creation. I like myth making."

The Alien saga endures as a myth and, as such, looks likely to continue providing artists with a creatively rich opportunity to explore deeply resonant images that dig down into ideas of fear and the unknown.



COMIC BOOK LORE

The cover of the Marvel Comics prequel story tie-in with Alien: Resurrection.



FROM INSIDE TO OUT

Concept artwork for an alien attack in Alien: Covenant, made by the MPC team.



HI, BIG CHAP
Alex Nice's concept art for Alien: Resurrection shows a fateful moment.



Sketchbook

Katerina Putilina

Explore the striking, emotive imagery found in the illustrator's sketches

GARRICK OLLIVANDER

"Working in an animation studio, I only drew in Photoshop and really missed traditional drawing. And then one day I tried drawing Inktober on the theme of Harry Potter. Daily ink drawings helped me get back to paper."

THE NIGHT

"Sometimes a complex drawing will come out right the first time. This illustration is quite contrasting. The child is sleeping peacefully, and the father is one step away from despair."

Artist PROFILE

Katerina Putilina

LOCATION: Cyprus



Katerina is an artist and illustrator who has worked in the animation industry for several years, and currently specialises in creating visual development art. As an artist, she enjoys drawing in both traditional and digital mediums.

www.artstation.com/putilina



THE LITTLE MERMAID

"This is one of my many drawings of The Little Mermaid. I adore Andersen's fairy tale, and I think it's important that the image of the main character was formed in my mind by the book, and not the cartoon. Interestingly, I almost never draw her with a fish tail."



MY STONE STORY 1

"I began returning to this story more often when I wanted to talk about loneliness."



“Sometimes a complex drawing will come out right the first time”



MY STONE STORY 2

"After going back to my stone story, I started drawing with ink and it turned from a children's fairy tale into a story."

Sketchbook



A BOY

"This young boy drew colourful fangs on his mask using crayons, and I did the same."

A FEMALE PORTRAIT

"I don't know why, but most often it's easy for me to draw sadness. Publishers come to me when they need to illustrate a sad story. Drawing this may look easy, but you don't see how much ruined paper I throw away!"

A DEAR GIRL

"This scene takes place in Japan. There's almost no colour in the work as I used black ink as a reference to Japanese painting."



A FAIRY

"I like to escape from reality into imaginary worlds. I often draw fairies and mermaids, and like to interpret famous characters in my own way."



ON THE WAY TO THE SOUTH

"It's easier for me to draw without preparatory line work. To me, spontaneous lines and random spots are important. That's why some drawings come out the first time, and sometimes you need nerves of steel to repeat the illustration again and again on a new sheet."





AN INK PORTRAIT

"I love using ink. It flows and behaves unexpectedly, so I try not to plan too much; I listen to what the ink tells me. The process of drawing is like playing a violin, the halftones, pressure of the brush, and thickness of the line are important."

“I love using ink. It flows and behaves unexpectedly... I listen to what the ink tells me”



STORYTELLING

"The first draft of a story centred around a stone, featuring a girl, a house on rocks in the water, and flowers. I was curious about the story behind the flowers, so I started from a time before they came to life. This small series was commended by several book illustration festivals."



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Workshop

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Alien super-fan Kyle Brown mixes 2D and 3D techniques to create a xenomorph.

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Baptiste Boutié shares the details of his touching tribute piece to the film *Tekkonkinkreet*.

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Learn how to design horror-style settings just like *Alien: Romulus* concept artist Nick Stath.

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Tools and textures help Ann Maulina develop a tactile feel in her webcomic *Raruurien*.

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Bring your characters to life through the world around them with Magdalina Dianova.

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Gabriel Nagypal reveals his process for creating a city powered by magic.

ZBrush, KeyShot & Photoshop

CRAFT A HIDEOUS ALIEN NIGHTMARE

Follow along as character and creature artist **Kyle Brown** makes xenomorph fan art inspired by *Alien: Romulus*

Artist PROFILE

Kyle Brown

LOCATION: US

Lead concept artist Kyle works in games and live action. He adores all things Star Wars, Aliens and Jurassic Park. His list of projects include Star Trek: Discovery, Star Citizen and Blood Line: A Rebel Moon Game. <https://bit.ly/3ZsuMGX>



I've been a fan of the *Alien* series for as long as I can remember. James Cameron's *Aliens* is one of my favourite films of all time thanks to my mum, who let me see it at a young age. My parents are a huge reason why I love doing what I do!

Seeing *Alien: Romulus*, Fede Álvarez's incredible contribution to the franchise, with its impeccable attention to detail and adherence to

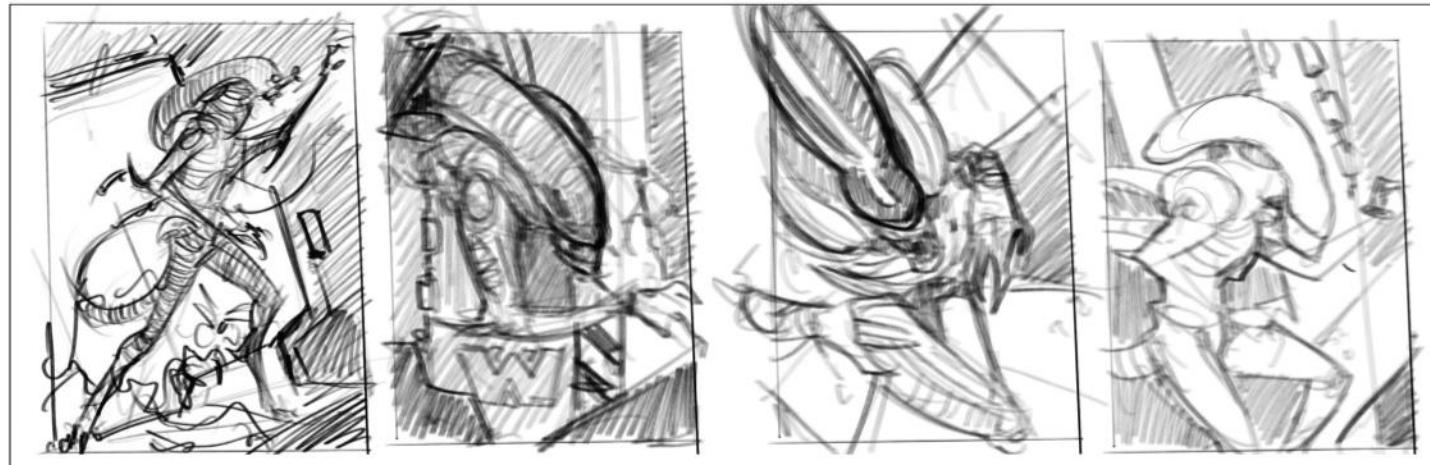
the aesthetics of *Alien* and *Aliens*, inspired me to start my own piece. It's a love letter to H.R. Giger's perfect organism: the xenomorph.

In this tutorial, I'll showcase the workflow that I utilise on most of my final creature designs. We'll look at the initial reference gathering, quick thumbnail iterations, 3D sculpting in ZBrush, rendering in KeyShot, and final compositing and painting in Photoshop. I use 3D blockouts to give me forms that I can work and

rework in 2D, allowing me to see a design from multiple angles and provide opportunities to explore.

I'll cover general digital sculpting processes and render setups, before finishing with post-processing effects. I use these techniques to create filmic moments that showcase the design and give the audience a sense of the creature in a moment they'll see on the big screen.

Suit up, because in this tutorial no one can hear you scream!



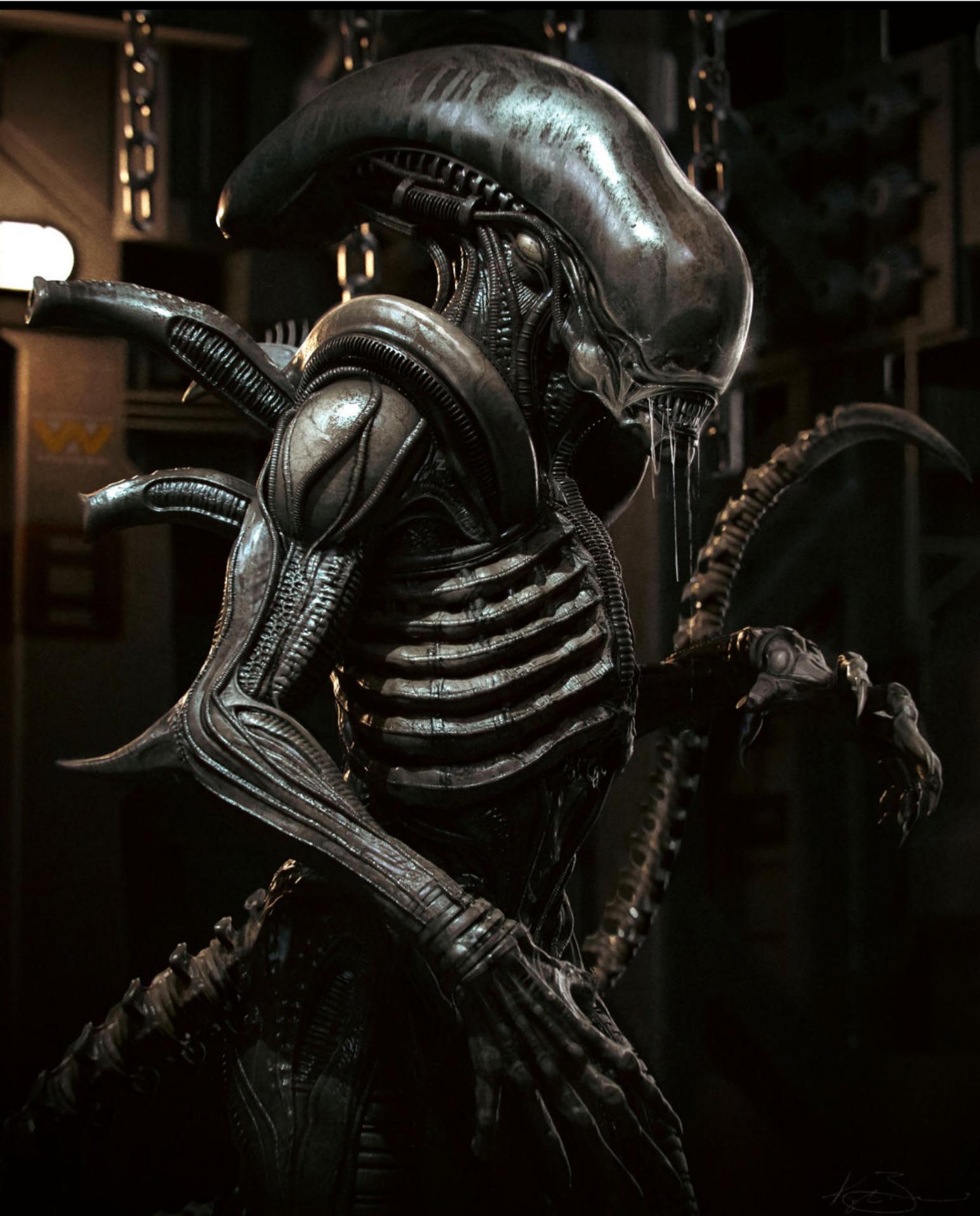
1 Getting started

It's crucial to kick off with great references. For xenomorphs there are essential elements such as the porpoise-like head. Thumbnails are also vital, no matter the medium, to plan ahead. I wanted a comic cover-style composition similar to the Dark Horse *Alien* comics.

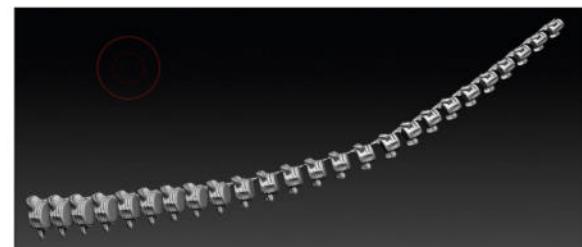
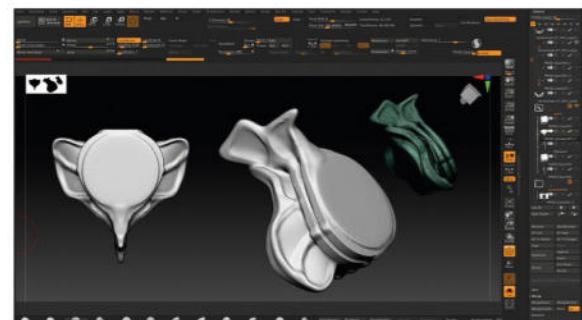
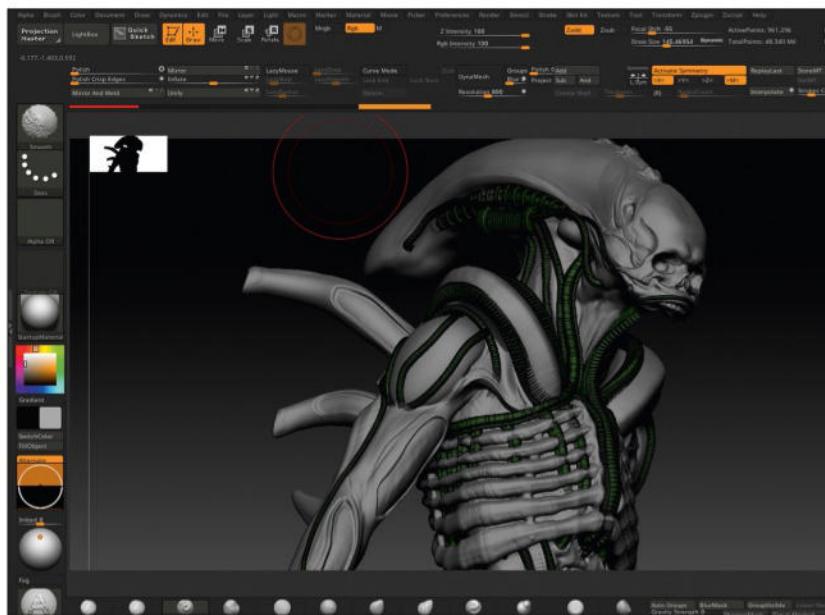
2 Block out the sculpt

I love ZBrush as a concept and illustration tool. Using DynaMesh at low resolution, we can start from a simple sphere, pushing and pulling until we find the silhouette. Big forms are most important here, so don't get lost in details or use fancy brushes. I wanted to hit the landmarks quintessential to Giger's xenomorph. ➤

In depth Horrifying xenomorphs



Workshops



3 Have fun with biomechanics

Some versions of the xenomorph dip into the organic shapes more, but I've always loved the biomechanical quality of the original suit and the Aliens version. Pablo Muñoz Gómez (Pablander) at ZBrush Guides has a great Insert Brush set inspired by Giger. I used some of the mechanical tube brushes to start laying all the intricate repeating elements, but it is possible to make your xenomorph with the standard brushes. Why not make your own elements to try to find some unique forms? See how far you can push the design and make sure not to rush this part.

4 Build repeatable shapes

In ZBrush, sculpt a single exoskeletal element of the tail. Rather than sculpt it over and over again, you can create one piece and decimate it to lower the point count. This shape will be repeated dozens of times, so we want to make sure that even though ZBrush can handle it, the point count doesn't explode. Make sure you don't overdo the decimation and wash away the detail. Next create an Insert Multi Mesh (IMM) brush from your piece. Make sure it's angled to your camera so when you set it to Curve mode, it draws out at the correct angle. Set the curve to Size so it tapers evenly to the end as you draw it out. The actual tail blade is sculpted separately.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: 1PT PEN

A great brush for fine, sharp details. I use this to clean up edges or add absolute details.

SQUARECHALK01

A chunky brush that's good for big shapes and giving a little bit of texture to a surface.

TEXTURED CHALK 01

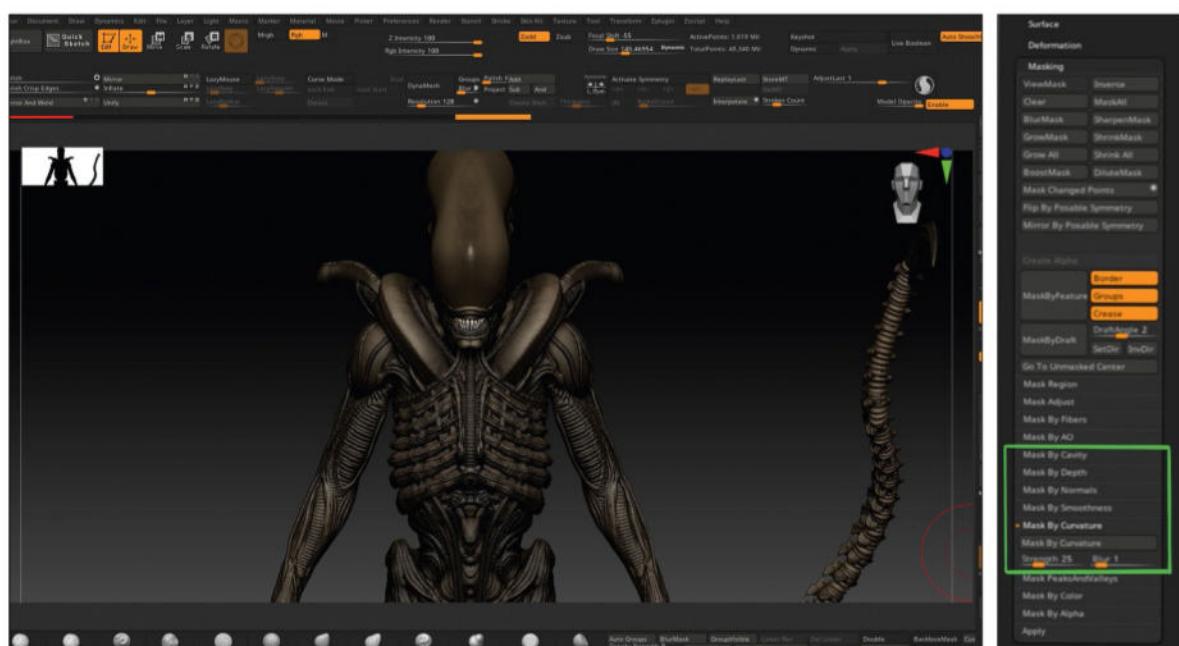
This brush has some tooth to break up the digital feeling of renders when painting details.

TEXTURED CHALK 02

Breaks up the surface, provides nice texture, and can be used nicely with image grain.

GET YOUR RESOURCES

See page 5 now!

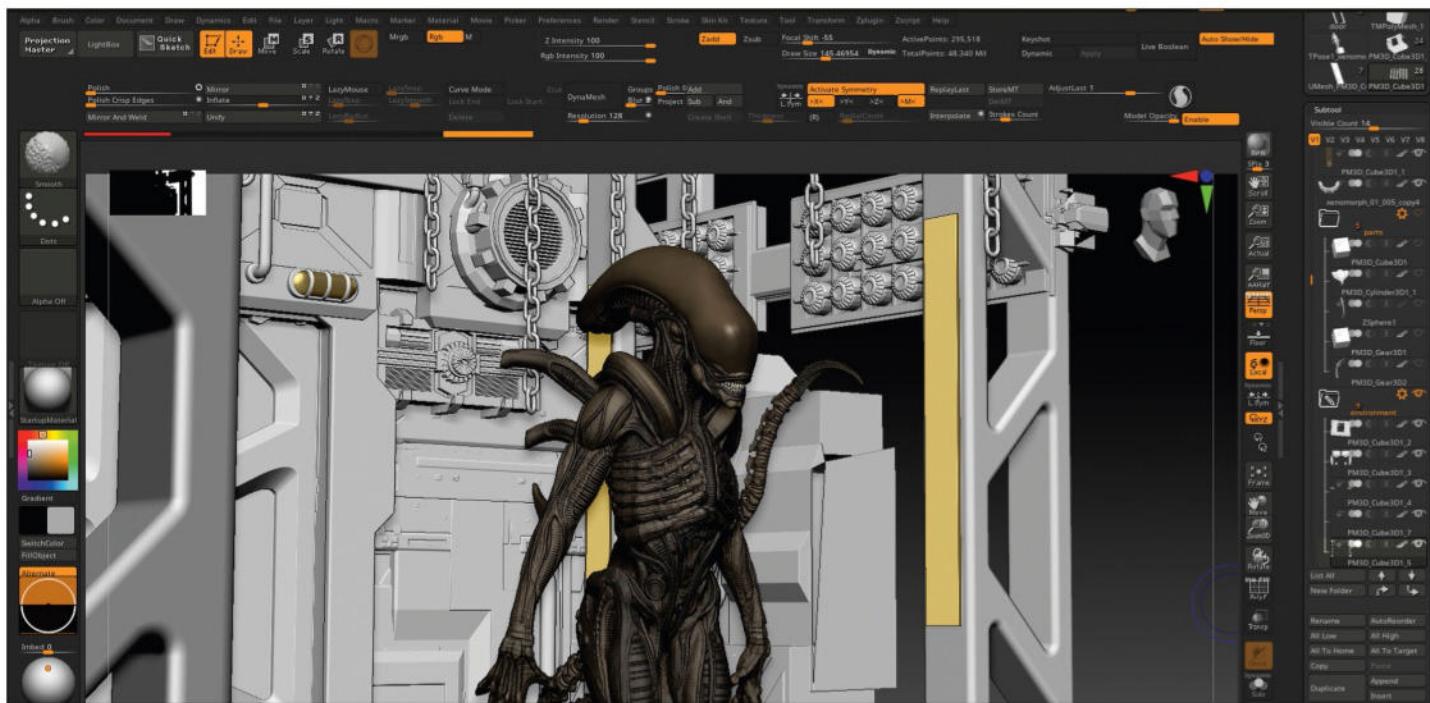


5 Polypaint the model

With the sculpt nearing completion, having been ZRemeshered and subdivided to get enough resolution to add details, we can move on to Polypainting. This is a process of vertex colouring that actually applies colour to a vertex. I've found that studying traditional special

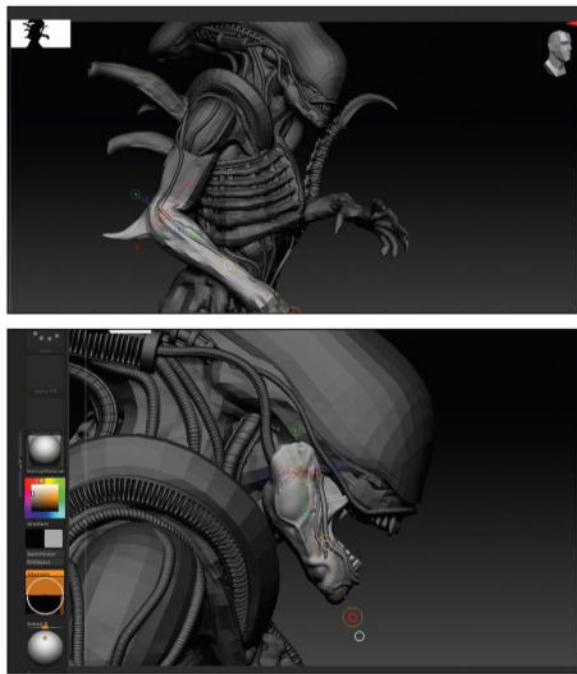
effects makeup techniques has helped my digital sculpt painting. Using workflows like washes and dry brushing, you can accentuate the details and add more life to the sculpt. Use the Masking submenu to mask off certain areas so you can paint freely. I enjoy the Cavity Mask that only applies paint to raised surfaces.

In depth Horrifying xenomorphs



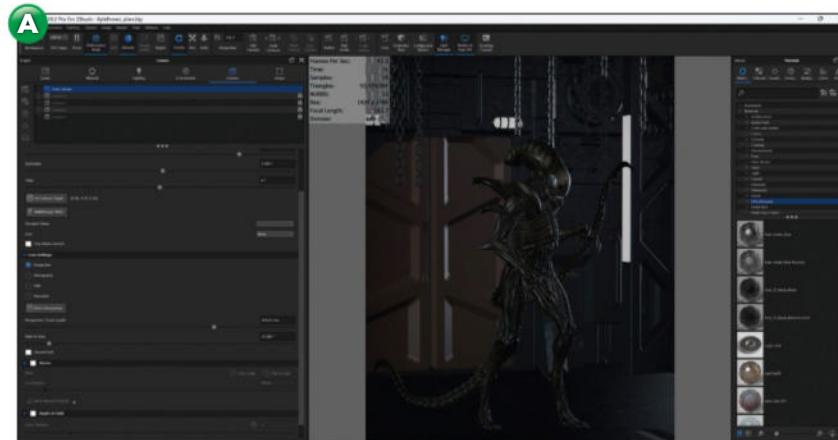
6 Create the environment around the character

Block out the environment with the iconic design elements seen in the film. Create the door and throw up some chains, as seen hanging in the Nostromo. Don't overdo it, we don't want it to become visual noise that will compete with the Xenomorph. Most will fall into shadow.



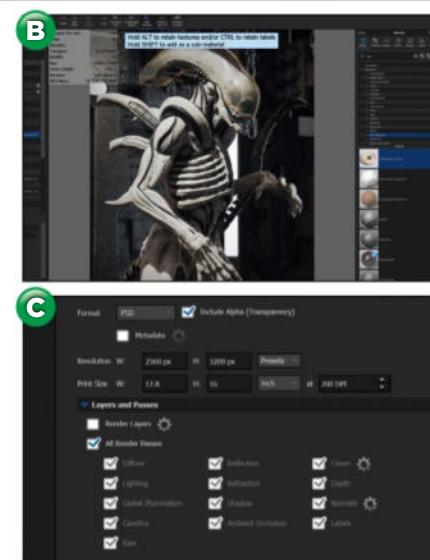
7 Pose with the Transpose Master

Go to Plugin>Transpose Master, and you can use this plugin to merge all visible SubTools to their lowest subdivision level, making it easier to move individual pieces together. Consider soft or sharp masking to get the appropriate posing. For the arm, an area of rigid articulation, use a sharper mask so it doesn't look like a wet noodle. It's also fun to bring the creature to life, so play with opening the lower mandible and releasing its inner second jaw. You can make these changes on another layer so they can be changed later if desired.



8 Render in KeyShot

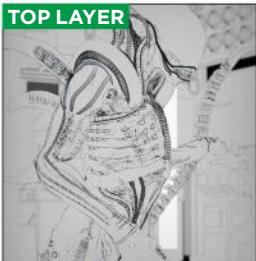
KeyShot remains my go-to for rendering (A). When dragging a material onto a part with Polypaint, hold Alt to retain the colour while applying the new material's properties (B). It's great for adding a material with subsurface scattering for an organic feeling. You can use HDRIs to light your model, and set up physical lights to control the composition. Use the Camera menu to find the right perspective and focal length, while depth of field can give your piece a filmic quality too. When setting up render passes, I like to make sure it's at least 2K resolution and export with the usual list of render passes that will help compositing (C). ➤



Workshops

9 Composite the render passes in Photoshop

Next we'll take our KeyShot renders and layer them up. Follow the order below, from top to bottom of the left column, then the right.



Line work

An optional pass that gives the piece more of a graphic, illustrative appearance. It may make it easier to paint or draw into, but could also take away from the filmic look.



Lighting

This clay pass can be set to Overlay to help unify the lighting a bit more. It will brighten the highlights and darken the shadows. I'll usually lower the Opacity of this pass significantly.



Roughness

Like the Specular pass below, set this to Screen or a similar blend mode. This pass is driven by a texture with a lot of natural breakup that looks like moisture collecting on the surface. This one in particular brought my piece together.



Specular

Set this to Screen or Linear Dodge so the dark values disappear and the high, bright values remain. This gives a sheen or wet look that can be masked in and out for specific parts of the composition.



Satin

Set this pass to Screen or a similar blend mode. As it has a more dispersed highlight, it works well for adding form to the surface, but use it sparingly and try lowering the opacity to avoid getting a plastic feeling if it's too intense.



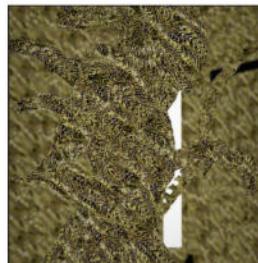
Cavity

Select all, copy, then paste this pass into a mask. It allows you to apply textures or paint in recessed areas. If we invert the mask, we can paint on raised elements like traditional dry brushing.



Overall texture

This is a texture that can be overlaid on top of the entire image to give it tooth, or a texture that can help break up the digital sensation of the renders and make it easier to paint into.



Material textures

Flat textures that can be blended on top of the renders below. They can add extra surface texture and visual interest. I find the Overlay mode often works best.



Materials

You can render out a series of one-material renders that can be combined with the beauty pass to achieve some interesting looks, or help with some materials not present in the base render.



Beauty Pass

At the bottom of our layer stack, this one is the base layer, which everything else will be built on top of. The vast majority of our work here will be done from this render pass.



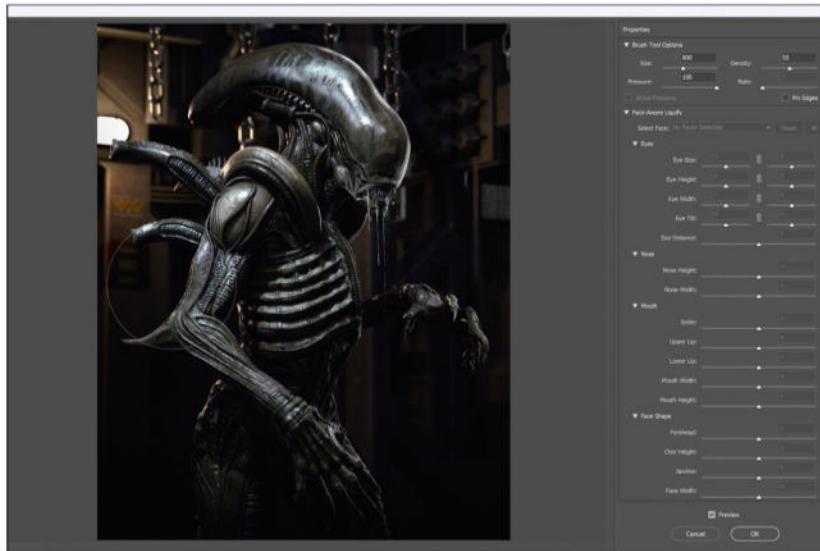
10 Add some slime

Extra effects can really help bring the image to life. The xenomorph is known for its drooling snarl. You can find great reference images for this online that can help make your own dripping saliva. Either paint on a transparent layer, or you can search for effects on a black background. Set your layer blend mode to Screen or one similar depending on the effect you desire.



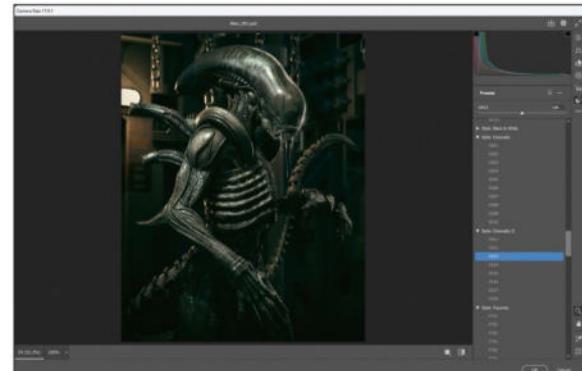
11 Begin working on the paintover

This part of the process is my favourite. After setting everything up and compositing all of our layers together, we'll start using different chalky brushes to break up the digital feeling that comes with 3D renders and make the xenomorph a bit more illustrative. The brushes give a little tooth to the image. If you introduce grain or noise at this stage, it's easier to use brush work without it feeling jarring or out of place on the photorealistic render. Paintovers give you the ability to fix mistakes or add details that weren't present in the sculpt or base render.



12 Liquify the image

No matter how much effort you put in, inevitably there will be elements that need adjusting. As the piece nears the end, keep an eye out for odd proportions, visual tangents, and things that just look funky. Using the Liquify tool's Forward Warp feature with a large brush radius is a great way to finesse shapes into place. Even though the render is correct for the 3D sculpt, the 2D image is the ultimate goal, so we can make adjustments for the best look possible. This stage can include final tweaks to your value range; use contrast to drive the eye to areas of focus.



13 Final touches and lighting

Part of capturing the feeling of a piece is getting the lighting and colour grading right. I sometimes use LUTs (lookup tables) to drive colour corrections, although by using the Camera Raw filter, you can find a huge list of presets, including two sections for cinematic lighting. I wanted to match the deep blacks of Alien, but also experiment with the warmer tones from Alien 3. Play around with the selections, and consider colour, value range and detail. Each preset will have a different effect on these properties, and most have a slider that can lessen or increase the effect. You can use Chromatic Aberration and Noise to mimic the feeling of real film stock and give the final piece a cinematic quality.

Photoshop PAINT FAN ART WITH EMOTION

Baptiste Boutié goes in-depth on his approach for creating visual appeal in a tribute to *Tekkonkinkreet*



Artist PROFILE

Baptiste Boutié

LOCATION: Sweden

Baptiste is a French concept artist working at Envar, an outsourcing and video game studio in Stockholm, Sweden. He loves traditional painting, comics, and is inspired by animated movies. He's also a huge basketball fan. <https://bit.ly/4hUVP4H>



Illustrating fan art has always been a great way for me to keep myself painting, as I find it's fantastic for staying motivated and active after a long day of work. If I enjoyed a movie, comic or game, why not make fan art to celebrate it? In the process, I can try to analyse and

understand why that particular piece of media inspired me.

I recently saw *Tekkonkinkreet*, based on the Taiyō Matsumoto's manga, and was blown away by the backgrounds' richness. It's packed full of details and life that emphasise the verticality of the cityscape.

Watching early-2000s animated movies such as *Spirited Away*,

Cowboy Bebop and *Steamboy* staggers me in the amount of time and care taken for each and every background, which sometimes appear for just two seconds!

I believe that social media has decreased our attention spans, and I wanted to create an illustration where the viewer can spend time looking at the details.



TELLING A STORY

Connect with the viewer

While painting out elements like walls or ground, references are essential to get credible and interesting details. Your painting becomes richer because the audience identify those elements as realistic, which helps them feel more engaged. Pulling specific detail out of your imagination can work until a certain point, until the audience sense that the creator is stuck within their own soup of visual reference.

Ready-made subjects

Character design isn't a strength for me, which is another reason I enjoy fan art; you can draw existing characters without needing new designs. I wanted to feature Kuro protectively hugging Shiro. The pose is still a bit stiff, but there's not much I can do besides practising.



Extra details

I wanted the scene to be rife with electrical panels, pipes and cables. I used photos taken while I was visiting a decommissioned submarine for some guidance. Although secondary in the painting, it's valuable to treat those elements aesthetically, with logic and care, to enhance the sense of chaos throughout these messy, manufactured objects.

Setting the stage

Something I usually do at the start of the painting is to get rid of the white on the canvas, like some oil painters do. I pick warm tones for this, so that the orange just bleeds underneath when I'm painting. You can see it in some parts of the image, even after 10 hours of work on it, and I think it's nice.



Shine a light

The overall scene is exposed to direct lighting, so many of the elements are casting shadows. When starting your painting it's crucial to remain consistent with the lighting structure, otherwise something will feel off. To help with that you can simply draw some arrows on top of your painting to remind you of the direction, and add in any shadows accordingly.



RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: BRUSH KOLESOV ALL-AROUND

I do 90% of my paintings with this brush as I like the rich texture when applying less pressure.

KEVIN ZAMIR GOEKE

Used for deep occlusion and rim light. I like the inking style it provides.

BASIC AEROBRUSH

This brush is excellent for giving scenes a sense of realistic lighting, thanks to the smooth transitions it makes.

GET YOUR RESOURCES

See page 5 now!

Environmental storytelling

The story doesn't have to be complicated, nor always include characters in action. Adding manufactured objects like this vending machine surrounded by natural elements is always an interesting contrast to show how time can alter objects. Look up references for logos, design and branding to make those props more believable.

How I create...

AN ENGAGING MOVIE TRIBUTE



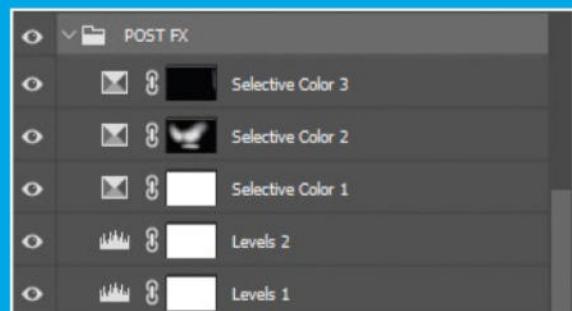
1 Initial drawing

I usually start with a rough drawing, especially for an illustration that has a lot of manufactured elements; I don't want to improvise those down the line. Recently I realised that the more time I spent on the drawing step, the less I was struggling to fix drawing issues later.



2 The 70-30 rule

This painting has a lot of elements, and I can't provide the same care and energy everywhere. The 70-30 rule enables me to focus on 30% of the painting area, where the storytelling unfolds. When this part is mostly done, I can spend the rest of my time on the remaining 70%, which can be painted more loosely.



3 Post-production tweaks

Adjustment layers aren't mandatory for a successful painting, and I think you should try to avoid using them as much as possible, as they can deform your original vision. That said, I like using Levels to kick up the contrast and Selective Color to enhance some of the colours that were lost during the painting process.

Blender, Procreate & Photoshop DESIGN CREEPY ARCHITECTURE

Nick Stath explains how he built an eerie, atmospheric environment for the sci-fi horrors of *Alien: Romulus*

Artist **PROFILE**

Nick Stath

LOCATION: Australia

Nick is a concept designer in the film and entertainment industry, including *Love, Death & Robots*, *Alien: Romulus* and *Secret Level*.
<https://bit.ly/40Nfrsk>



This tutorial will break down the process I followed for designing the conveyor hall and hive setting in *Alien: Romulus*. The aim is to show you how I apply architectural thinking when designing a feature-film set, and use methods of proportions, scale, lighting, composition and materiality to develop a dramatic environment that matches perfectly with the *Alien* universe.

My workflow will be broken up into four phases: sketching a plan and section to break hesitancy and get ideas onto paper; blocking out in

Blender to explore the initial idea in 3D; applying details, lighting and materials to ensure the design ties into the aesthetic of the first two *Alien* films; and finally painting over the render to add details, atmosphere and hive elements that would have been too time-consuming in 3D.

By the end of this tutorial you should have a good understanding of the thorough, planned process that allowed me to be efficient in designing under time constraints, while also creating a detailed interior that can provide a high level of production value for development in a major science fiction film. ➤➤

In depth Alien environments



Workshops

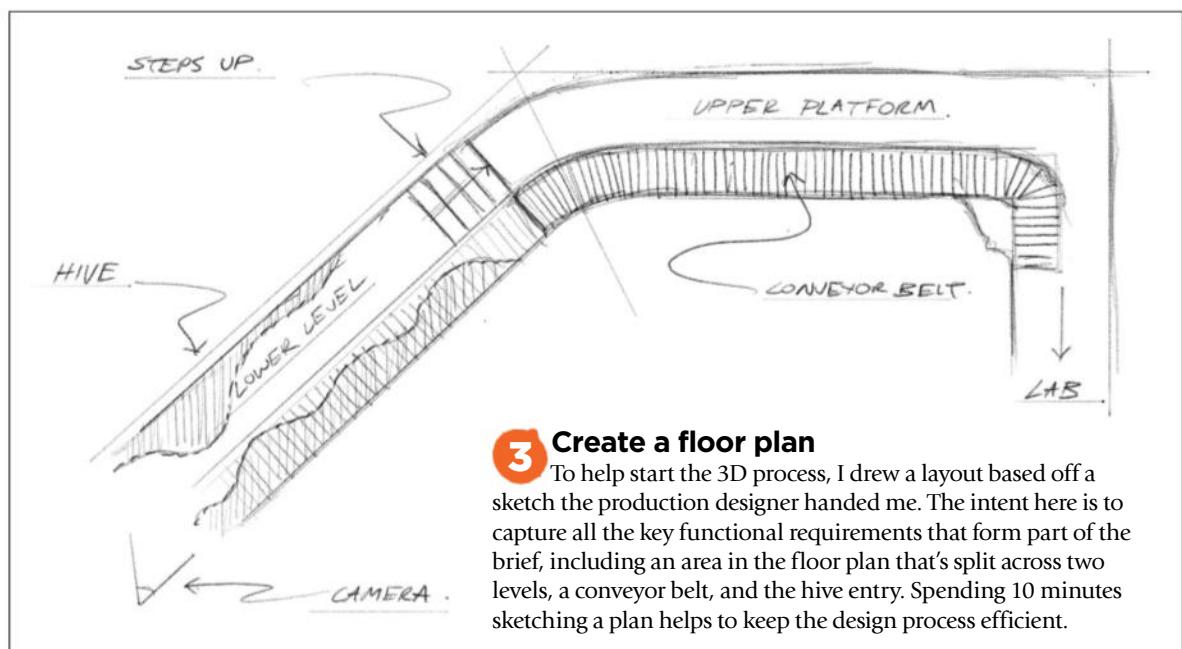
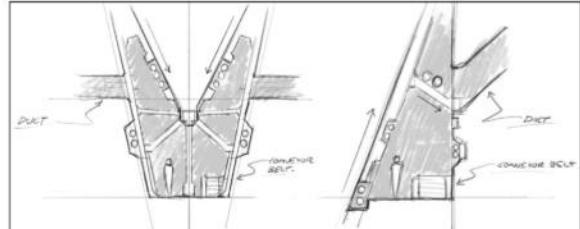


1 The importance of finding good references

The brief I was given for the conveyor hall/hive environment was for it to have the look and feel of Aliens, the second film from the series. The most important part of the process is to have a sheet of screen grabs that are the most suitable for the design task. These references help you to get a quick understanding of the shapes, angles, lighting and materiality that were used in the film.

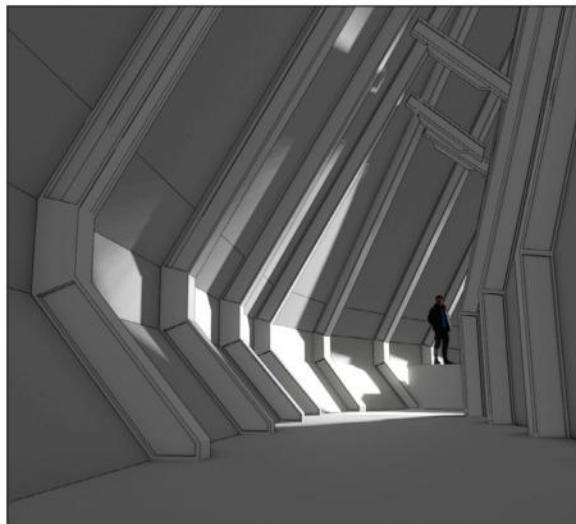
2 Sketch out a cross-section

The production designer's brief was for the corridor to be a tall, narrow space with a "back alley, industrial" feel. To get started, quickly sketch out some silhouettes. I felt as though mine could have an interesting shape language that references the dramatic angles in the colony hallways from Aliens. As tensions are rising at this point in the movie, I thought it was important for the architecture to lean over the protagonists and create a feeling of weight and discomfort.



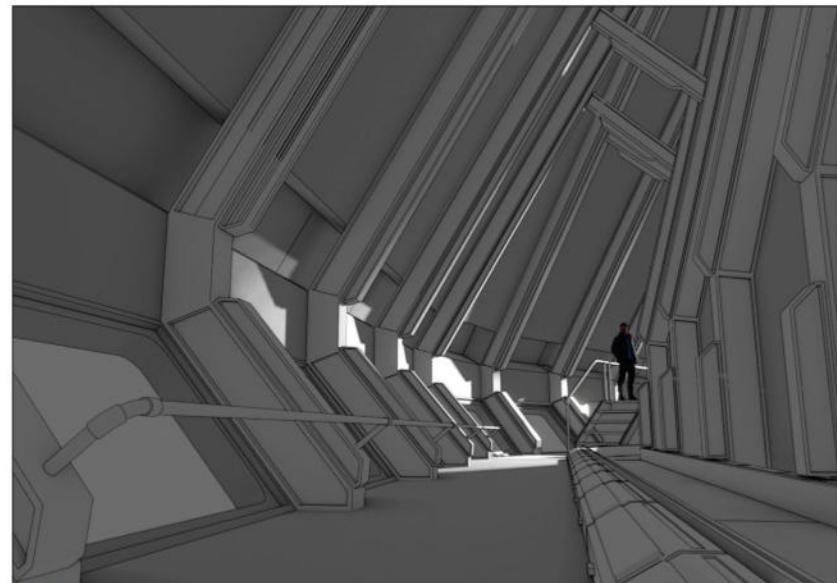
3 Create a floor plan

To help start the 3D process, I drew a layout based off a sketch the production designer handed me. The intent here is to capture all the key functional requirements that form part of the brief, including an area in the floor plan that's split across two levels, a conveyor belt, and the hive entry. Spending 10 minutes sketching a plan helps to keep the design process efficient.



4 Model the basic proportions

First, use simple polygonal modelling tools to create basic geometry based off your sketches. Starting with a character for scale, push and pull the width and height of extruded surfaces until you get proportions that look right. Once the basic shape for the environment is blocked in, add a light to define the space, followed by a series of columns that bring an element of repetition to the scene for some preliminary details.

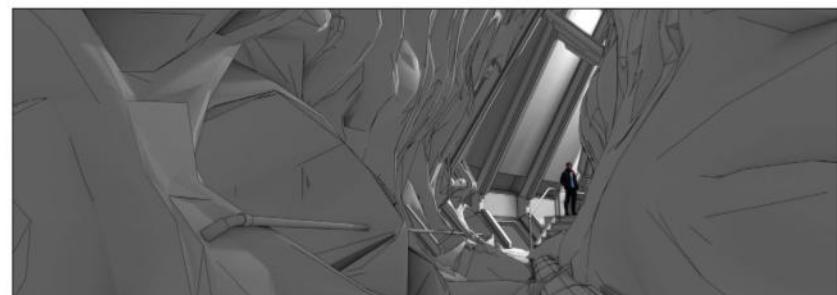


6 Block in the hive

Organic geometry isn't particularly my forte, so to keep progressing with my design I used a 3D model that was provided to me by the director. In order to make the asset fit in, I used the Snake Hook sculpting tool in Blender to warp and stretch the geometry to match with the interior. Don't be concerned with how accurate or low-poly the mesh appears during this process, as we'll be painting over it later down the line.

5 Make the space functional

I believe that functional elements are some of the most important aspects of a good design, as they are what makes a space believable and helps tell a story. In my scene, I brought in a simple conveyor belt to the right of the frame, as well as windows, stairs and a handrail. The low-lying nature of these elements help to accentuate the height of the space, while the handrail and steps introduce relatable, everyday architectural elements that aid us in better understanding its use.



7 Industrial elements

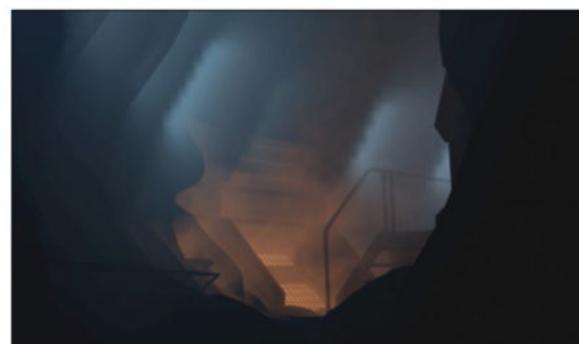
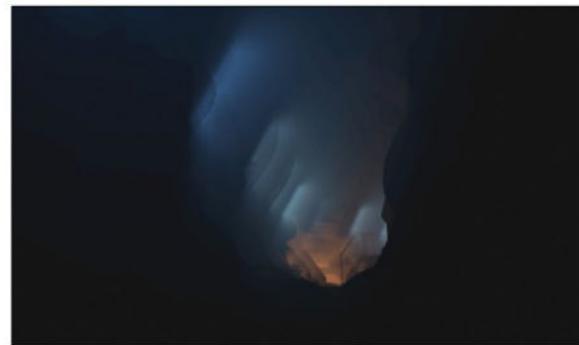
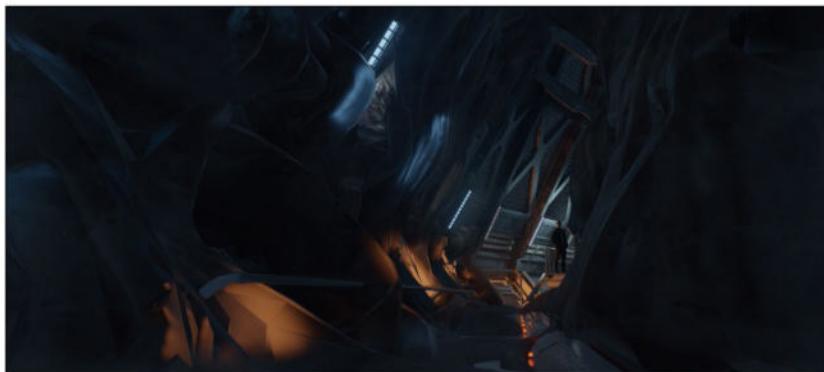
Tertiary details come next and are crucial in helping the space feel like it belongs in the wider world. Start to treat the bare architectural surfaces by adding pipe work, cross bracing and mesh panels to help the space feel industrial and utilitarian, drawing from the details in your references. ➤

Workshops



8 Develop the lighting to push the eerie feeling

I changed the environment from grey to a deep blue reminiscent of the atmosphere in *Aliens*, and designed a series of fluorescent lights that sit vertically on each column and add a warm exterior uplight projecting through the windows and into the space. I also strategically included a series of small orange LEDs along the conveyor belt that contrast against the cooler tones and guide the eye toward the focal point.

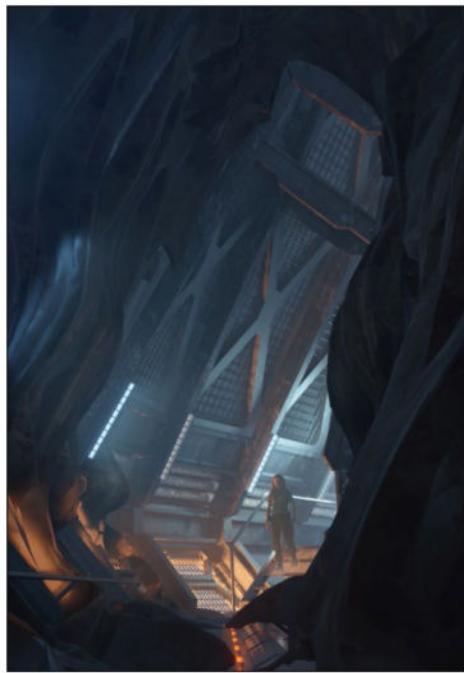


9 Add appropriate materials

For the hive, I used a skin material from Quixel Megascans to get an extra layer of detail for the complex surface. As my brief was for the corridor to feel industrial, I ensured the surfaces would read as highly reflective metalwork with a scratched and worn aesthetic. Always keep the amount of the materials in the frame to a minimum so that the image can be read clearly.

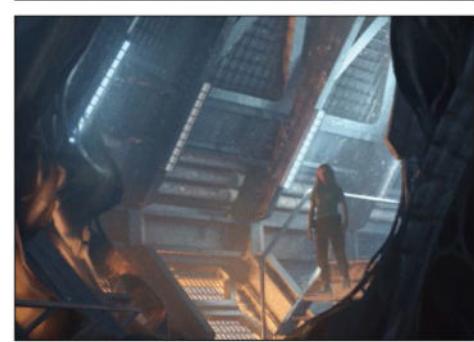
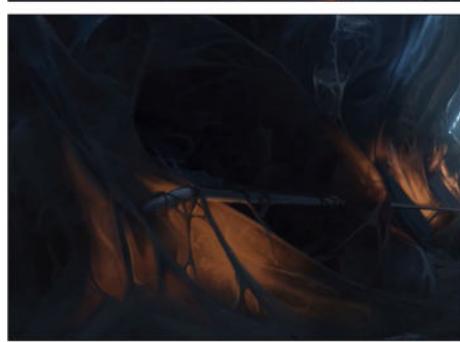
10 Take your renders to Procreate

Render out the image along with three key render passes to help add depth to the shot: Volume, Mist and Bloom. Over in Procreate, the Volume layer is applied on a Screen layer at 100%, while the Mist pass is set to Screen on 40%. I adjusted the hue of the Mist layer to a cooler tone. Finally, Bloom is also applied on Screen at 100% to give a soft glow to all the lighting.



11 Create extra depth and atmosphere in the scene

To further enhance the depth of the image, let's mask out the end of the hive using the Selection tool, set to Freehand. By using a large airbrush with a hint of texture, we can gently paint in a light, cool tone to make the character's portion of the corridor stand out.

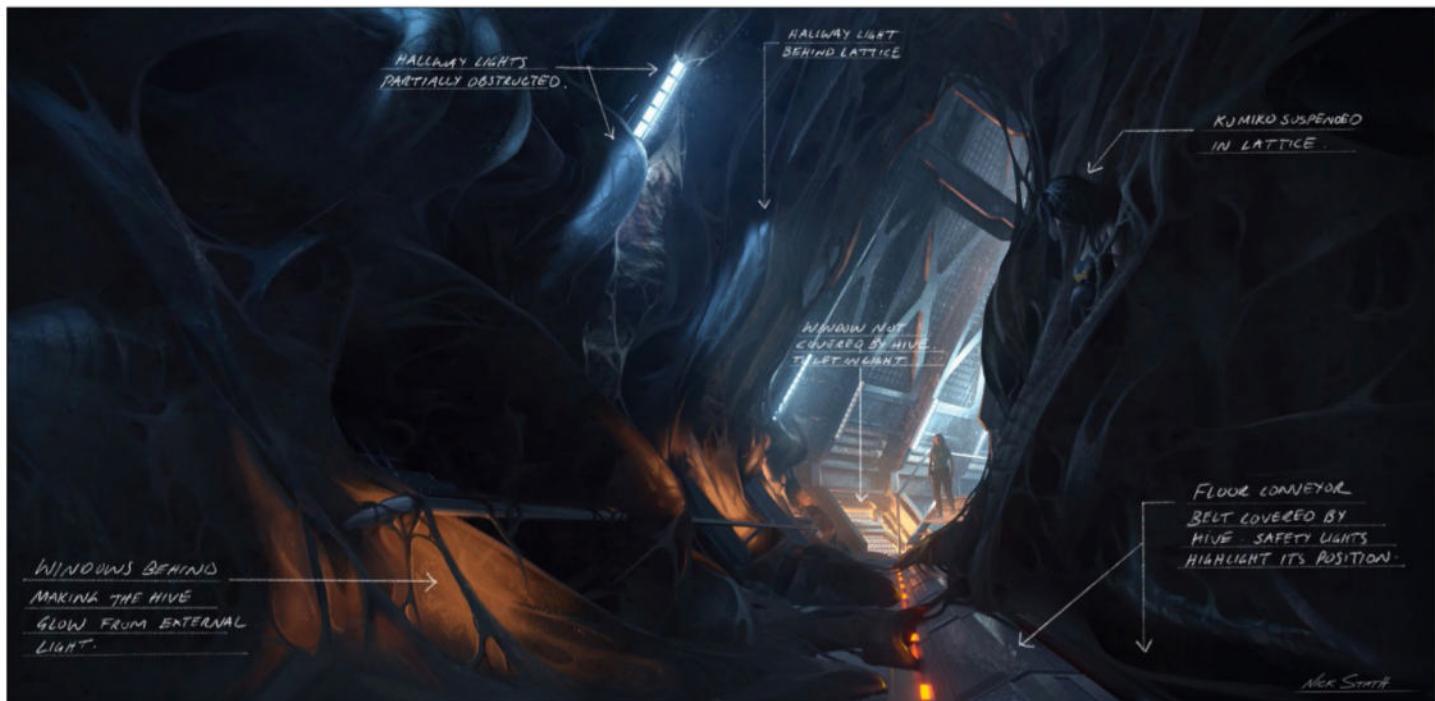


12 Paint over the hive

Begin the painting process by smoothing out unwanted edges, surfaces and triangulation visible on the low-res hive. Using Procreate's Nikko Rull brush, I targeted the areas that are most visible in light, such as the orange glow in the bottom-left corner. On top of this, I painted in finer webbed details, and then repeated the process across the rest of the hive structure.

13 Bring in glow and dust, and place a character

Using the airbrush, subtly paint in a vignette at the edges of the frame to enhance contrast. To increase the atmosphere, you can paint a soft glow to all the light sources, followed by a hint of particles using the Driven Snow brush. Finally, I added a screenshot of the character Kay to the Hive in my piece and adjusted her Hue, Brightness and Contrast to match.



14 Head over to Photoshop and complete the scene

Export the image and take it into Photoshop for final touches, adding a Levels adjustment layer to increase the dark and light values of the image. On top of this, I decided to add a 50% grey layer with a Noise filter set to 3%. This layer is set to 30% opacity on Overlay. The final part of the process is to write up notes that capture all the key ideas of the design, and then you're ready to present your concept. 🚀

Technique focus

CREATING A NATURAL SENSATION

Ann Maulina explains the tools and tricks that add another layer to her webcomic





"These characters are from my webcomic Raruurien. It's a slice-of-life story of a single mother and her two kids, wrapped in a fantasy theme. I wanted their everyday activities to evoke a sense of cosiness and nostalgia, so I drew this. It portrays their dynamic where Rien is doing daily chores and her children are there to help. Most of the time

her youngest is there for fun.

I started by using flat pastel colours. Then, to achieve a watercolour-like feel, I used a textured brush for a touch of gentle gradation. Lastly, I added a canvas paper texture on top of it."

Artist **PROFILE**

Ann Maulina

LOCATION: Indonesia

Ann is a comic book artist from Indonesia. She is the author of Raruurien webcomic, and drew Horizon Zero Dawn: The Sunhawk. <https://bit.ly/3ARd9Hd>

Photoshop & Blender

BUILD NARRATIVE USING INTERIORS

Find out how illustrator **Magdalina Dianova** creates a cosy setting that helps to express her character's personality

Artist PROFILE

Magdalina Dianova

LOCATION: Bulgaria

Magdalina is a self-employed artist and illustrator with a passion for character design and her many, many hobbies. <https://bit.ly/3YLWEnk>



A well-crafted environment can tell us so much about a character: their values, interests, or even their weaknesses. In this tutorial, we'll explore the details that make a space feel authentic and lived-in, turning it into a powerful storytelling tool.

We'll start by setting up a 3D scene in Blender to establish perspective

and lighting. There's no need for any advanced skills, as we'll mostly arrange placeholders and add basic lighting for reference. As we go, I'll share some tips on balancing shapes, creating a harmonious colour scheme, and using lighting to set the mood and tell a story. I'll also show you how you can use adjustment layers to paint light more efficiently and direct the viewer's attention.

Your character's story will inform every decision you make, so the first step is to think about who they are and write down some key traits. Do they have any special interests? What's one thing about them that you really want to communicate in your piece? You don't have to write a full story, but the more information you have, the more depth your illustration will have.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: SKETCHY

I used this custom brush for creating the sketch.

CHONKY

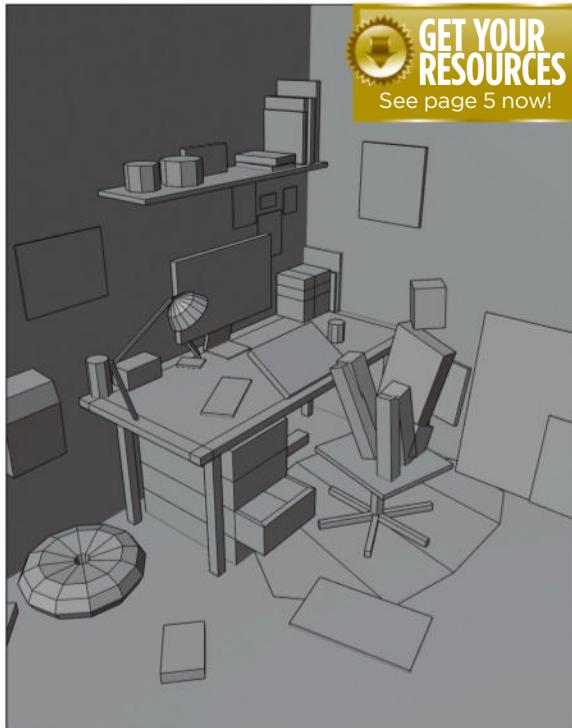
The line work was created with this brush, blocking in the colours and painting.

DEFAULT BRUSHES: SOFT AIRBRUSH

A default brush I use to paint light, glow effects and the soft shadows or gradations in my images.

HARD ROUND

When set to a lower opacity, this brush is excellent for blending colours and painting.



1 Create your scene in 3D

I always start by building a rough 3D scene to establish the camera angle and composition. There's no need to model specific props here, just arrange boxes as placeholders. I set up a second viewport to see through my camera, which allows me to check the positions of the elements within the frame and avoid any tangents. Remember to set the camera's focal length, as this will determine the perspective distortion.

2 Work big to small

Once you're done with the model, take a screenshot and start sketching in the big volumes on top, balancing big, medium and small shapes for visual interest. I use a lot of overlaps because they add a sense of depth. Also think about what your character would own. Would their desk look sleek and modern, or worn and vintage? Imagining the items they'd keep nearby helps build the story and adds personality to the environment. ➤

In depth Interior environments



Workshops



3 Add story and personality

Small details can breathe more life into the illustration. For example, tangled cables, a messy drawer, or scattered art supplies might suit a character who's creative but disorganised. Imperfections, such as mismatched socks or silly little knick-knacks, can help make the space feel authentic and lived in.



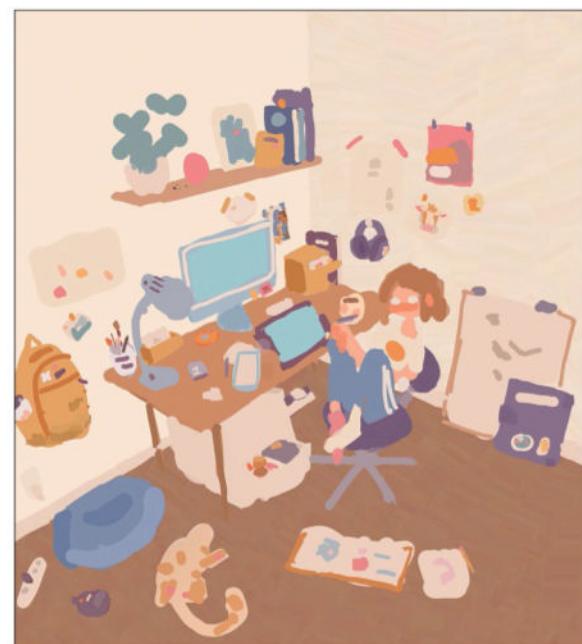
4 Develop expression through story

The character's pose and expression should always be motivated by the narrative. For instance, my character is easily distracted, so instead of drawing she's taking a break and holding her phone. I want to show her face, so I'm having her glance to the side as if someone just opened the door, which gives her pose purpose. Every choice you make should support the story.



5 Consider layer economy

To refine the lines, you can either clean up your sketch layer or make a new pass on top. Make sure to group elements onto separate layers to make changes down the line easier. To maintain a manageable file size, group large elements that don't touch on the same layer, and keep the character isolated on their own layer.



6 Choose your black

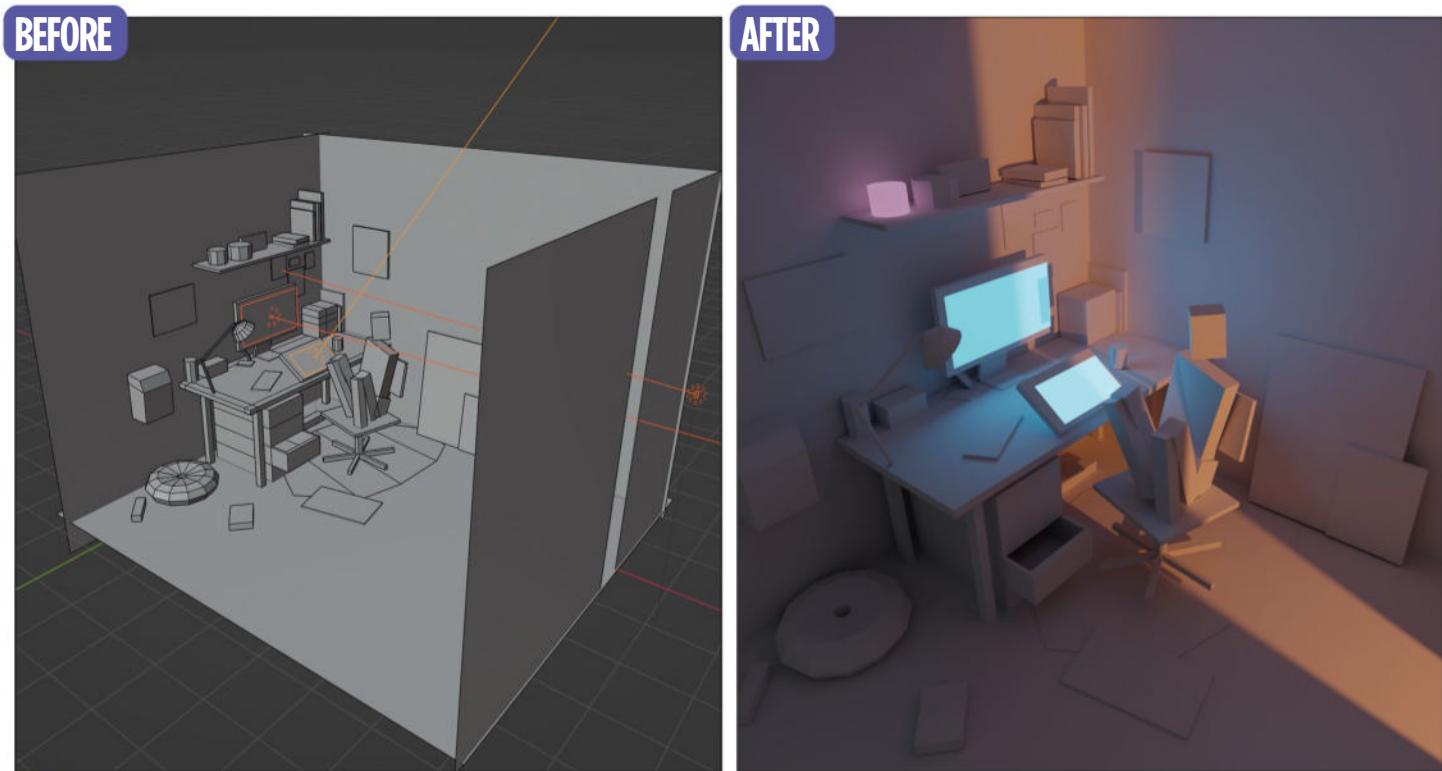
Colour is another great tool you can use to communicate your character's personality and set the mood of the scene. To develop a unique palette, start by choosing one colour that's going to be your 'black'; mine is a deep, desaturated purple. No colour should be darker than that. This is going to affect the rest of your colour choices, pushing the image in an interesting direction.

In depth Interior environments



7 Explore personality by using textures

After establishing the colour scheme, scale it down and start colouring in the elements, grouping them onto layers again. At this stage, add simple form shadows to darken the planes that won't catch any light. I'm using an opaque brush with colour variation to add more texture to my image. Details like worn spots on the floor or smudges on the desk give life to the scene and enrich the character's story.



8 Light your scene with some 3D assistance

Using Blender again, let's set up the lighting. The goal is to support the story while creating an engaging composition and separating the character from the background. Since my character is looking at the open door, I'll have warm light seeping through in contrast with the dark blue room. For this, I have one 600W orange area light coming between two planes on the side, and two cool 20W ones for the displays. ➤➤

Workshops



9 Move on to the shadows

Create a shadow layer filled with a dark blue colour and set it to Multiply mode. Referencing your 3D render, use a mask to erase the areas where the light hits, with a combination of soft and hard brushes for better edge control, while simplifying the shadow shapes to make the image more readable. To get deeper shadows, you can paint with a darker colour in certain areas.



10 Adjust the lighting

Using adjustment layers to add the lighting gives you a lot of control over the image. I'm applying a Hue/Saturation layer to bump up the saturation and add warmth in my image. Adding a Color Balance layer also brings more reds and yellows to the highlights. Make sure you mask any adjustment layers so their effects aren't applied to the shadow areas. If you change the shadow shapes later on, remember to update the masks for these layers to keep your lighting consistent.



11 Save time with the help of blending modes

Use a layer on the Hard Light blending mode to enhance the light's vibrancy, and an Overlay layer to paint that saturated band between light and shadow. Focusing on one light source at a time helps you maintain control and makes your lighting more cohesive.

In depth Interior environments



12 Don't forget the secondary light sources

An Add layer is great for any practical lights, like the two displays or the cat lamp seen here. Duplicating the layer and applying Gaussian blur gives the light that soft glow effect – just make sure to erase it on objects that wouldn't be affected. Bring in another Hard Light layer to paint the areas where secondary light hits, like the surface of the desk, and to add a soft, warm glow around the character's face.



13 Group your values

I simplify and flatten the areas where I don't want to draw too much attention, such as the shelf and the corner beside the desk, with a masked Brightness/Contrast adjustment layer. Darkening the background behind my character creates contrast, which helps them stand out and directs the viewer's attention.

14 Unify the colours

Finally, set a gradient map on Soft Light blend mode to help unify the colour scheme. At this stage you can paint finishing touches like wispy hairs and strands on the carpet where it catches the light to enhance its fluffy texture. To add light particles you can either use a splatter brush, or paint with a soft white spot using a big airbrush and set the layer mode to Dissolve at 1-2% opacity.

Technique focus

FORGE A WORLD WITH COLOUR

Gabriel Nagypal talks about the choices made building concept art for a fantasy city setting

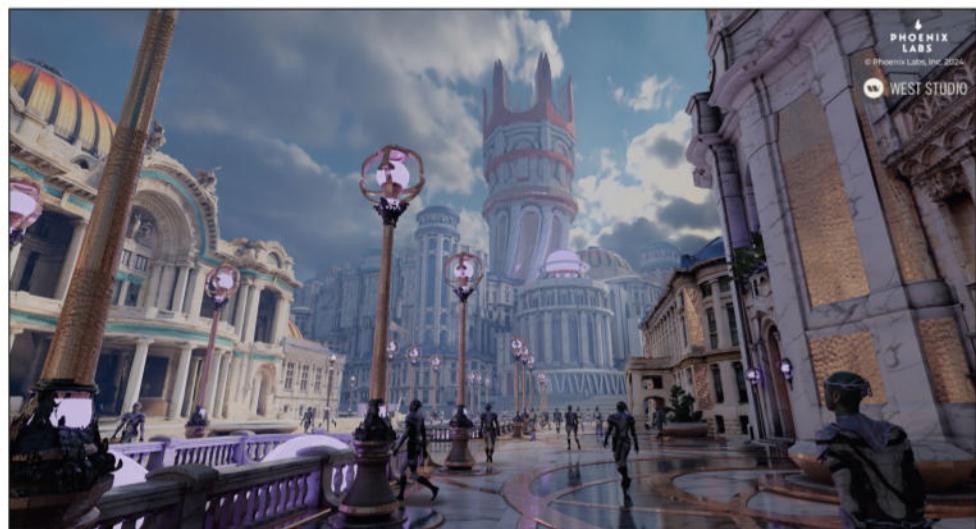
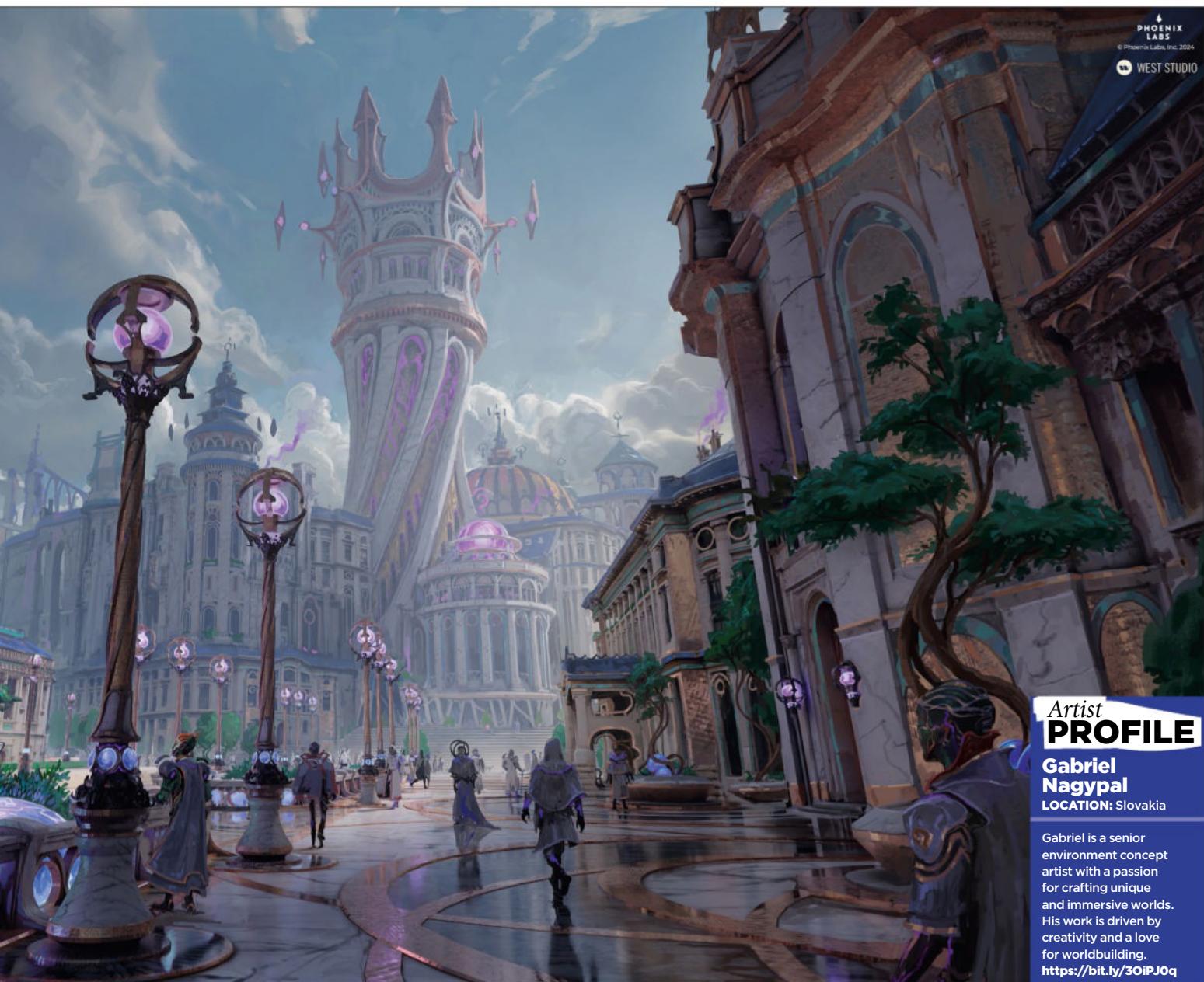


"This is my key image for the Council Tower of the Navoz leaders in the LAX universe, part of an unreleased project I worked on. After sketching out different variations of the capital city, we settled on a design that captures what a city would look like if magic functioned like electricity. It also contains Spanish baroque influences and a harmony between the citizens and nature."

I started by blocking out base 3D shapes to find the right composition and lighting. An authentic feel was achieved by gathering every possible architectural building block, before I designed the lamps, floors and windows using Blender. Once I had enough 3D elements, I overpainted almost all of the image. The biggest challenge was to make the magical and otherworldly design feel cohesive, which was achieved through the colour palette."



Tech Focus Worldbuilding



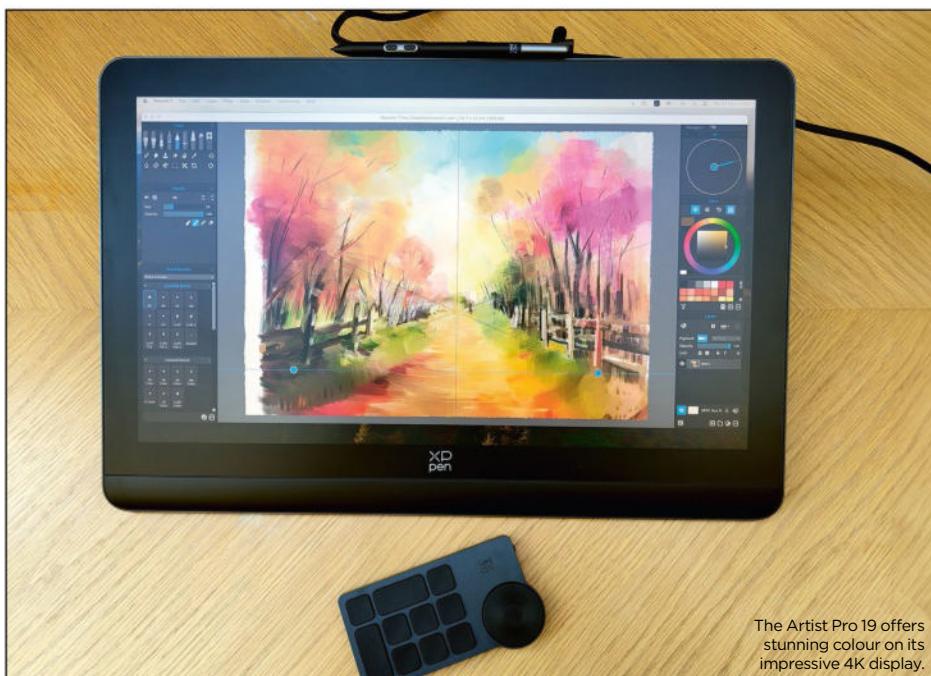
Reviews



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

Artist's Choice Award

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



The Artist Pro 19 offers stunning colour on its impressive 4K display.



The display itself features only a handful of buttons to keep down the clutter.



A host of cables for all occasions are included inside the box.

XPPen Artist Pro 19 (Gen 2)

NEXT GENERATION Whether you're a pro artist or a passionate hobbyist, this pen display offers something for everyone with beautiful colour and accurate drawing

Price £900/\$900 **Company** XPPen **Web** www.storexppen.co.uk

The new Gen 2 range from XPPen comes with some big headline features, not least the boast of offering Calman-verified colour performance. After using the new Artist Pro 19 for a number of weeks, we can honestly say those promises are backed up.

This medium-sized pen display is competing against some of the best drawing tablets released recently, and is becoming sought after. XPPen isn't shying away from the fight for artists' cash with a 4K resolution, two 16K pens, and three colour modes.

If you're a hobbyist you can plug in, get painting and it's simply fun, but pro artists will enjoy the deeper customisation options, size, spec and colour profiles and performance. This

drawing display has one foot in both markets, and each will love it.

WELL BUILT

The Artist Pro 19 feels more solid and less plasticky than previous budget pen displays. There's a definite step-up in build quality, while retaining many of the popular design features from previous XPPen tablets. For example, this display has the same subtly curved wrist mount at the tablet's bases as last year's Artist Pro 16 (Gen 2), but here it feels stronger. Despite the more affordable price, this drawing display feels premium.

Many of the design features are unsurprising but nice, including the fold-out feet to stand the display in a gradual incline. The rear VESA fittings

We found setting up and adjusting the Artist Pro 19's settings a straightforward task.



mean it can be set up vertically and used as a second display, for conference calls or entertainment.

The lack of on-frame shortcut keys means XPPen can cut the cost of production and offer some startling tech for less than its biggest rival, Wacom. It's a choice many tablet brands are making, and the supplied Wireless Shortcut Remote is solid.



Though the Artist Pro 19 doesn't come with a stand, it does have solid fold-out feet for support.

Boom and openCanvas that support 4K displays. If your preferred app doesn't support 4K, then it could end up looking a little burry.

A JOY TO USE

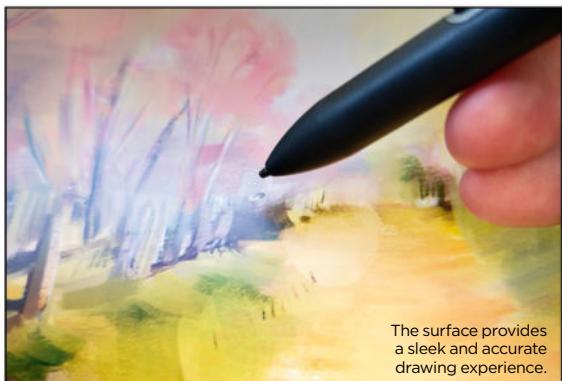
The actual experience of using this pen display is good; the matte glass, anti-glare coating doesn't dampen the colours as some do. It can add a slight grain to your images but it's hardly noticeable under standard lighting. XPPen has also a 20 per cent blue light ratio, resulting in less eye strain and more comfortable long-term use.

Overall it's smooth to swipe across, and if needed, the stylus nibs can be swapped out with felt nibs for a softer, more traditional feel. The styluses are accurate and precise. We made a point of trying different brush styles, size, opacities and repeated lines, and found we could accurately repeat over the top of thin lines and covered them precisely time and again.

It's worth mentioning the size of the display is just right for desktop software. Pro artists may want more space, which is why the Artist Pro 24 exists. The display size means that every menu was visible and the canvas is perfectly sized for making broad, long and sweeping strokes.

The remote is a little basic, ideal for zooming in and out and cycling brushes or accessing one or two regular commands, but touch controls could still be preferable. Ultimately this is a personal choice, and some artists hate touch control and find it intrusive. And yet interestingly, after a day of use we didn't miss finger gestures.

Overall, the Artist Pro 19 is a pen display that offers a lot of tech that can be tailored to your needs and a joy to use. It may not be the cheapest pen display on the market, but neither is it the most expensive.



The remote itself is nicely made and pretty standard in its design, but not as feature-laden as the one used by Xcelcelabs in its Pen Display 24 bundle. Its design is functional, but not flashy.

The included styluses, however, are incredibly flashy. XPPen set the standard for 16K levels of pressure sensitivity last year, and the two supplied here are no different. One is a slimmer style, while the second is fatter. Which you prefer is personal, but generally the fatter stylus with its extra button roller dial could find fans.

IMMEDIATE IMPACT

First impressions matter, and the Artist Pro 19's display is incredible. It's vibrant, punchy colours and deep, rich

blacks are a joy to look at. Thankfully it's not a one-trick display and is as good to use as it is to look at.

Our initial thoughts were that the display has no latency, particularly after completing a quick 30-second stylus calibration. A few quick pen strokes and squiggles prove the cursor accuracy is excellent with no drift even when heading over to the corners or moving the stylus quickly.

Of course, the 4K display makes everything looks sharp, which means it's good for using desktop software with smaller menus. For example, Rebelle 7 is great but has small icons, yet on the Artist Pro 19 these are clear and easily used. XPPen offers some software for free, including Toon

The Wireless Shortcut Remote attempts to stand in for the lack of touch controls.

VERDICT

This is a drawing display with clout, one that offers a sharp 4K screen with Calman-verified colour performance, plus improved build quality and a consistently accurate drawing experience. However, it has no touch control.

Pros

- Super vibrant and crisp display
- An accurate, easy drawing experience
- Excellent stylus

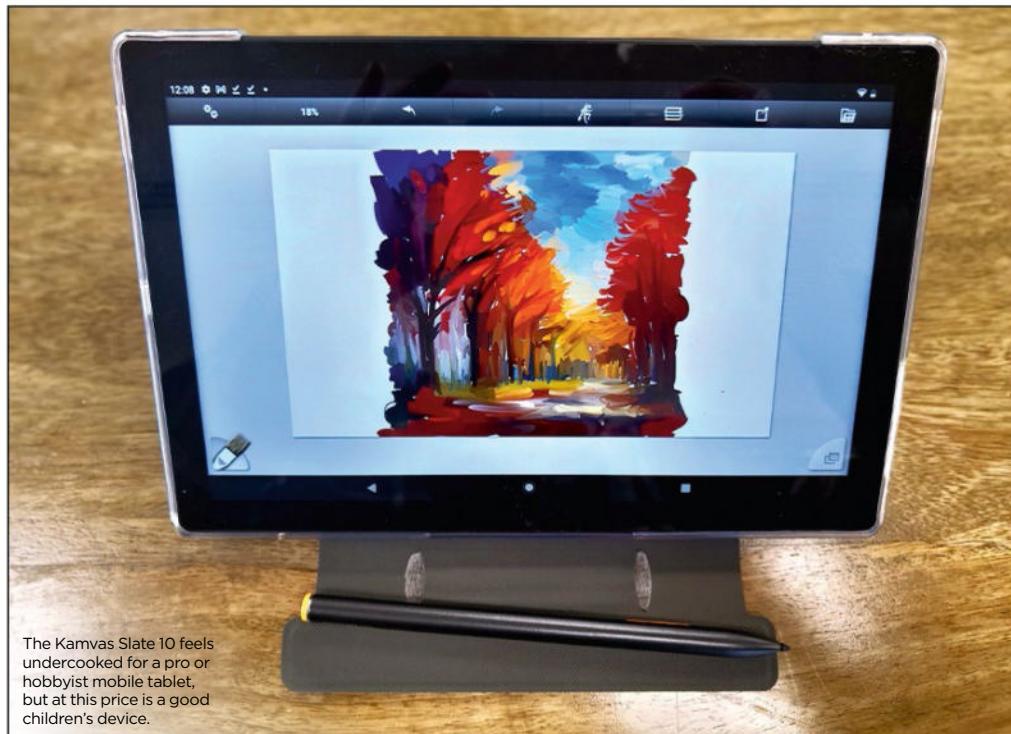
Cons

- Lacks any form of touch controls

Rating



“The Artist Pro 19 is a pen display that offers a lot of tech that can be tailored to your needs, and a real joy to use”



A thick bezel combined with the protective case makes the Kamvas Slate 10 feel somewhat chunky.



Painting loosely in ArtRage is fun on the tablet, and there seemed less lag when working this way.

Huion Kamvas Slate 10

KID FRIENDLY It may be a touch too basic for pros and hobbyists, but this is still a solid choice of tablet for burgeoning junior artists

Price £259/\$249 Company Huion Web <https://store.huion.com>

The Huion Kamvas Slate 10 is the latest mobile drawing tablet to pop up that challenges the dominance of Apple's iPad for digital artists who want to get out and paint on the go. For anyone who loves digital plein air, these new Android tablets are eye-catching entries, and are priced below an equivalent iPad.

XPPen set the benchmark with the excellent Magic Drawing Pad, which feels like a real drawing tablet with the bonus of a CPU, and the other brands have been playing catch up. The Kamvas Slate 10's tech isn't going to blow away the new iPad, and it lags behind the Magic Drawing Pad.

The Slate 10's display is fully-laminated but glossy, and offers a 1080p resolution, which on a 10.1-inch screen is good enough. The stylus is

nicely designed and feels good in the hand. It's lightweight, so can take some getting used to, but it has two buttons for control and the display offers 10-point touch, so the combo of stylus and gestures is nice. The Slate 10 comes with an older but solid 4,096 levels of pressure sensitivity.

Looking at the tablet's design, it has some nice features that suggest Huion is building this one for children. It comes in a pre-fixed protective soft-plastic case that does make it chunkier than rival tablets, and its weight and thickness is off-putting at first.

Using the Slate 10 is a mixed bag. It's simple to use and the pre-loaded HiPaint software offers some unique brushes that create lovely anime-style line art. It has the ease of an Android device too, with apps launching in under a second. ArtRage also works

The lightweight stylus can be an odd feeling initially, but is good overall.



VERDICT

While it lacks the accuracy and features many digital artists crave, and drops behind both Apple and XPPen, the Kamvas Slate 10 is a fun, cheap mobile drawing display.

Pros

- Cheap and cheerful
- Android tablet
- Lovely stylus
- Free software is fun

Cons

- Latency and lag is an issue
- Glossy display
- Basic features

Rating



well. The colours are surprisingly punchy and there was little slowdown when using the app.

The real issues occurred when sketching and attempting a line-art image using ArtRage's Ink Pen and Pencil. There's definite line wobble and lag, which makes it frustratingly hard to create precise lines. The glossy display doesn't help either, feeling slippery. While there's a little artificial resistance, the sensation that you're drawing on a screen is inescapable.

The experience improves when painting loosely and quickly using ArtRage's oil brushes, as this sketchy painting style fits the lower-end tech better. That said, some issues pop up, such as inconsistent palm rejection.

“ Looking at the tablet's design, it has some nice features that suggest Huion is building this one for children ”

The M18 has a sleek, simple and effective design, and is available in a variety of colours.



Sihoo M18

BUDGET CLASSIC

A chair that punches well above its weight

Price From £256/\$300

Company Sihoo

Web <https://sihoooffice.com>

RATING ★★★★★

Sihoo is famous for its budget office chairs, and though they can be hit and miss, the company has struck gold with the M18. It offers comfort, a cool, easy design, and decent ergonomics.

The M18 has a foam seat with indentations shaped for your upper legs. It's nice and wide so you can shuffle about a bit, and never lost its shape and comfort for us. The back panel is mesh, so provides a nice bit of ventilation during the warmer days. It's also responsive to leaning back, with just enough give to make you feel fully supported.

The headrest is one of the better ones we've tested. It goes up and down and has rotation to it, as per most headrests, but the specific curve and design just works. It's also got a nice layer of foam that gives some extra cushioning.

The M18 has a decent lumbar support that you can adjust up and down, and in tension. It also features armrests that have a long range of movement up and down. They don't move sideways, which would have been a nice addition, but that certainly isn't expected at this budget price range.

Veikk Studio 16

NO-BRAINER Bag a quality drawing display at a great price with Veikk's entry into the expanding low-cost marketplace

Price £330/\$300 **Company** Veikk **Web** <https://veikk.com>

Pen displays used to be prohibitively expensive pieces of gear that you'd only find in the studios of pro artists and designers. But these days the technology has advanced and the average price has dropped.

It's impressive Veikk has managed to build something that feels this premium for under £300. The Studio 16 surprised in terms of build quality and performance. In use it did a top job drawing and painting, as well as simple day-to-day computing.

It may only have a 1,920 x 1,080 screen, but there's good contrast at 1,000:1 and it's plenty bright enough for even a well-lit room. The glass has a slight texture; the nib and surface are spot on, giving a pleasing paper-like feel. It also has a laminated screen with extra coatings for anti-glare and anti-fingerprint, which both work well.

Two pens are included – 10mm and 13.7mm versions – and though they're not the most premium, they certainly don't feel cheap. The low-profile buttons feel good and the casing has a satin feel, which is nicer than some of the silicone covers seen elsewhere.

These pens are pretty accurate too. Don't be fooled into thinking an HD



The Veikk Studio 16 ships with a simple multi-angle stand that has rubberised sections to keep everything firmly in place.

VERDICT

The Studio 16 offers surprising quality and functionality considering its cost. The build is excellent and the drawing surface has a nice feel. The display is a little behind the times at just HD but works well, making this a no-brainer for budget-conscious artists.

Pros

- Lovely drawing experience
- Excellent build quality
- Choice of pens

Cons

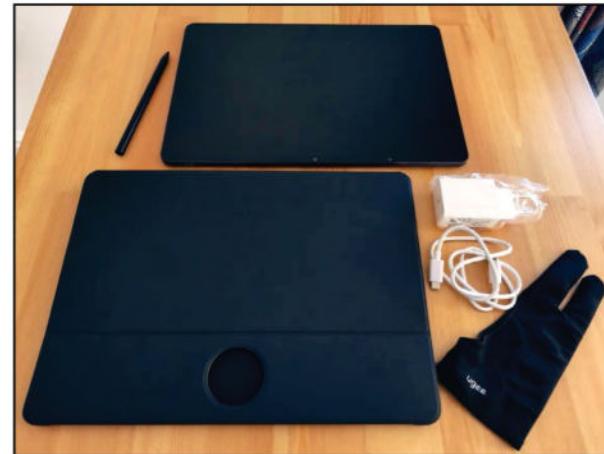
- Not the latest in picture quality

Rating

★★★★★

Small enough for a compact desk setup or travel, the Studio 16 is also big enough to do real work on.





Inside the box is everything you need, including a good protective case, stylus and more. A selection of pre-installed art apps are also ready to boot up.



The UT3's display is vibrant and colourful, even with its matte finish, anti-glare coating, and works well in all of the lighting scenarios that we tested.

Ugee UT3

SOLID CHOICE A quality Android drawing tablet that won't break the bank, but comes with one small niggle

Price £450/\$430 Company Ugee Web <https://shop.ugee.com>

Not everyone wants to sign up with Apple, and Android tablets are becoming more capable generally, now for creating digital art too. The Ugee UT3 – the self-anointed 'Fun Drawing Pad' – is one of the more impressive Android pen displays we've tested.

This is an 8-core CPU tablet with 8GB of RAM and 256GB of storage, and supports Android 14. The eye-catching 14.25-inch anti-glare display has been designed for drawing on, unlike other Android tablets. The design of the UT3 is lovely too; it oozes class, feels like a premium product, and is a top-tier display.

The screen is matte-finished and closer to a traditional drawing display than an iPad. It's also smooth to the touch but has a little tooth to it when

using the stylus. Colours are vibrant and punchy, and while the anti-glare finish can result in a small amount of noise it's hardly visible, and the 400-nits brightness makes everything crisp and clear. Given the coating, the UT3 works well in all lighting conditions tested, from bright, direct light to dim room lighting.

We trialled the UT3 with ArtRage, MediBang and ibisPaint, and each demonstrates the agility and precision of the tablet. Loosely painting proves fun, and ArtRage's paint and oil simulation never stutters or lags. Both ibisPaint and MediBang, with more of a focus on sketching, handle precise, speedy line-art well.

Where the tablet struggles slightly is in creating slow line-art and straight line drawing; there's a tiny wobble in the line delivery. If you're drawing

“The design of the UT3 is lovely. It oozes class, feels like a premium product, and is a top-tier display”

VERDICT

With a beautiful display designed for digital art and enough power for the majority of Android art apps, the Ugee UT3 is an excellent budget tablet with a premium feel. However, it's let down slightly by small lag and its poor line accuracy. A perfect hobbyist display.

Pros

- Brilliant display for drawing
- Slim, lightweight and capable
- Good for use in a variety of lighting

Cons

- Some latency issues
- Poor palm rejection

Rating



There are both front and rear cameras featured on the UT3 that fit nicely with the tablet's design.

organic, loose art it's not an issue, but if you want a cleaner look you may need to consider more closely which brushes you choose.

The stylus is nicely designed and features a curved body with a flat edge to lay it flat on a desk. It has two buttons at the nib end that can be customised in apps, and a top button assigned as an eraser. This is an active capacitive pen with 4,096 levels of pressure and 20ms latency.

The size of this tablet makes it a good second screen too, plus it's capable of split-screen mode and supports other Android 14 features, as we've now come to expect from high-end devices.

The slim-designed crucial X9 is easily tucked away inside your bag or laptop case.



Crucial X9

SPEEDY MEMORY

A fast, portable drive ideal for those on the go

Price From £85/\$95

Company Crucial

Web <https://uk.crucial.com>

RATING ★★★★☆

A portable SSD is a handy thing to keep around, as this kind of speedy storage can be used to quickly suck up image files, or even make a speedy backup of important documents, before being tucked away and taken somewhere more private.

The Crucial X9 comes in a flat plastic case that has a degree of drop protection, and even bundles in a few apps that may be useful to someone who hasn't already invested in a backup solution. Otherwise, it's just a cost-effective way to copy a lot of files.

A flat, low-profile shape means the X9 is easy to tuck away, and you'll be able to find a pocket on a laptop or camera bag that will serve to contain it. It's also discreet in use, and if you use a short cable it won't be too noticeable.

Crucial claims the X9's read speed is 1,050MB/s. These claims are often based on use in the very best of circumstances, but in our tests the X9 actually managed a bit more, topping out at 1,053MB/s when connected to a USB 4 port with an appropriate cable.

Its interface is USB 3.2, so you're not going to get much better, even with Thunderbolt 4. Write speeds are heavily influenced by the cable used, so it's always worth picking up a high-rated cable to get the most out of a drive.

3DCoat 2024

MODELLING MARVEL The long-running software gets a timely update that brings a number of brand new features to the table

Price £315/\$400 **Company** Pilgway **Web** <https://3dcoat.com>

Ever since 2007, 3DCoat has gone from strength to strength. What began as a robust, versatile graphics editor has evolved into one of our most trusted digital sculpting and texturing applications.

Now we have version 2024, which has several new features including live Booleans, topology tools and a Blender export link. There's nothing particularly revolutionary in there to tempt artists away from alternatives such as Substance 3D Painter, but existing users will be glad to benefit from improved functionality.

Booleans were always one of those unknown entities that delivered variable results and often destroyed geometry in a way that made a mesh unusable. But they've improved since, and having live, non-destructive capabilities is one reason why.

3DCoat has had Booleans for a while, but live capabilities were only introduced as a beta feature towards the end of the 2023 software life cycle. Now a fully fledged feature, it's possible to carry out Boolean operations non-destructively.

This is a big step forward for expanding 3DCoat's modelling tools. After a Boolean operation, it's now possible to apply a texture to the new geometry. The Boolean object has to be a child of the primary object, which is a little limiting and makes it difficult

3DCoat was part of Sylvain Aublin's workflow for creating his Solar City project.



Modelling tools such as 3DCoat can be a great way to concept 2D artwork.



to use the same Boolean object for multiple operations.

Other New tools include Edge Flow and Equalize Edges tools. Both help modellers select and adjust edges in a way that maximises efficiencies. These tools will be particularly helpful for artists involved in hard-surface modelling such as cars, robots, or engineering objects. There are better modelling applications with more extensive feature sets, but 3DCoat is fast becoming rich enough in tools to be a more than capable package.

3DCoat now also supports direct exports to Blender 4. The functionality was already present for 3ds Max, Modo and up to version 3 of Blender, but that was all. After installing the Applink plugin in Blender, it's possible to export from 3DCoat directly into Blender. The export settings provide a specific set of parameters tailored to what Blender requires.

VERDICT

3DCoat has achieved incredible success in the past 15 or so years. This iteration is a successful attempt to strengthen its position and attract new users. While there's still a lot of development work required on it, 3DCoat looks to be in as good a position as ever.

Pros

- Improved support for the latest DCCs
- New modelling workflow tools
- Live Booleans

Cons

- Lacks some tools that are available in Substance 3D Painter

Rating

★★★★☆

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Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists



This issue:



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

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Break out your marker pens and follow Lidia Cambon's tutorial.

96 First Impressions: Sarah Finnigan
Find out the story behind the artist's imagination for fantasy.

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Luvamiart Valladolid

LOCATION: Spain MEDIA: Pencil, charcoal, ink WEB: www.luvamiart.com

For Luvamiart, there's something special about the versatility of a simple pencil. "In our fast-paced world, I want people to stop for a moment and appreciate the small details and magical stories they can form."



1 THE TOYMAKER

"A magical toymaker whose creations come to life when spinning the wheel. He often ditches them as he tries to create toys that will stay alive."



2 THE LOVER'S LAMENT

"A piece about loss and grief. The lover and her dragon companion visit the tomb of her deceased beloved every year, when peonies bloom."



3 FROM THE ASHES

"The phoenix is one of the best recognised symbols of rebirth and glory built from decay, yet there's melancholy in it too."



4 EMPRESS OF BARN OWLS

"I've always loved barn owls and often incorporate them into different pieces, usually involving mysterious women living among them."



Luke Eidenschink

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Ink WEB: www.instagram.com/luke.ink

With a love of telling stories through his illustrations, Luke creates scenes of epic fantasy and heroic swordsmanship and sorcery. His characters are worn and weathered to suggest history and a sense of wonder.

1 SERPENT OF THE GRASSLANDS

"I like suspenseful scenes. The moment just before the action happens, that's where the tension is – that's the excitement!"



2 SUPPLICATION

"Why is this character standing before the dragon and her nest? Just one of many questions implied here. I wanted the viewer to interpret this piece in their own way."

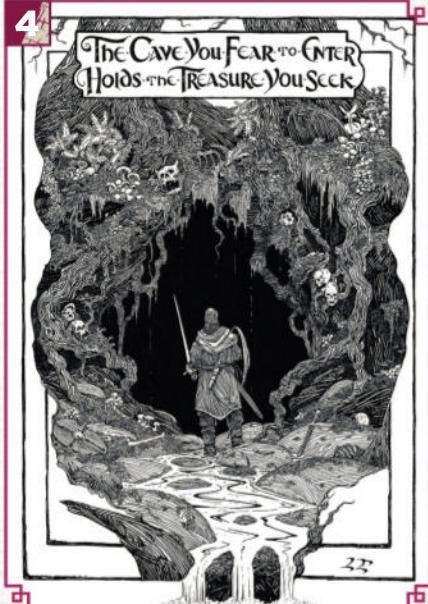
2 SUPPLICATION

"Why is this character standing before the dragon and her nest? Just one of many questions implied here. I wanted the viewer to interpret this piece in their own way."

3



4



3 READY FOR BATTLE

"Ink is a powerful medium. See how the lines convey motion? How so many textures can be built up? There's so much to love about ink. It's addictive!"

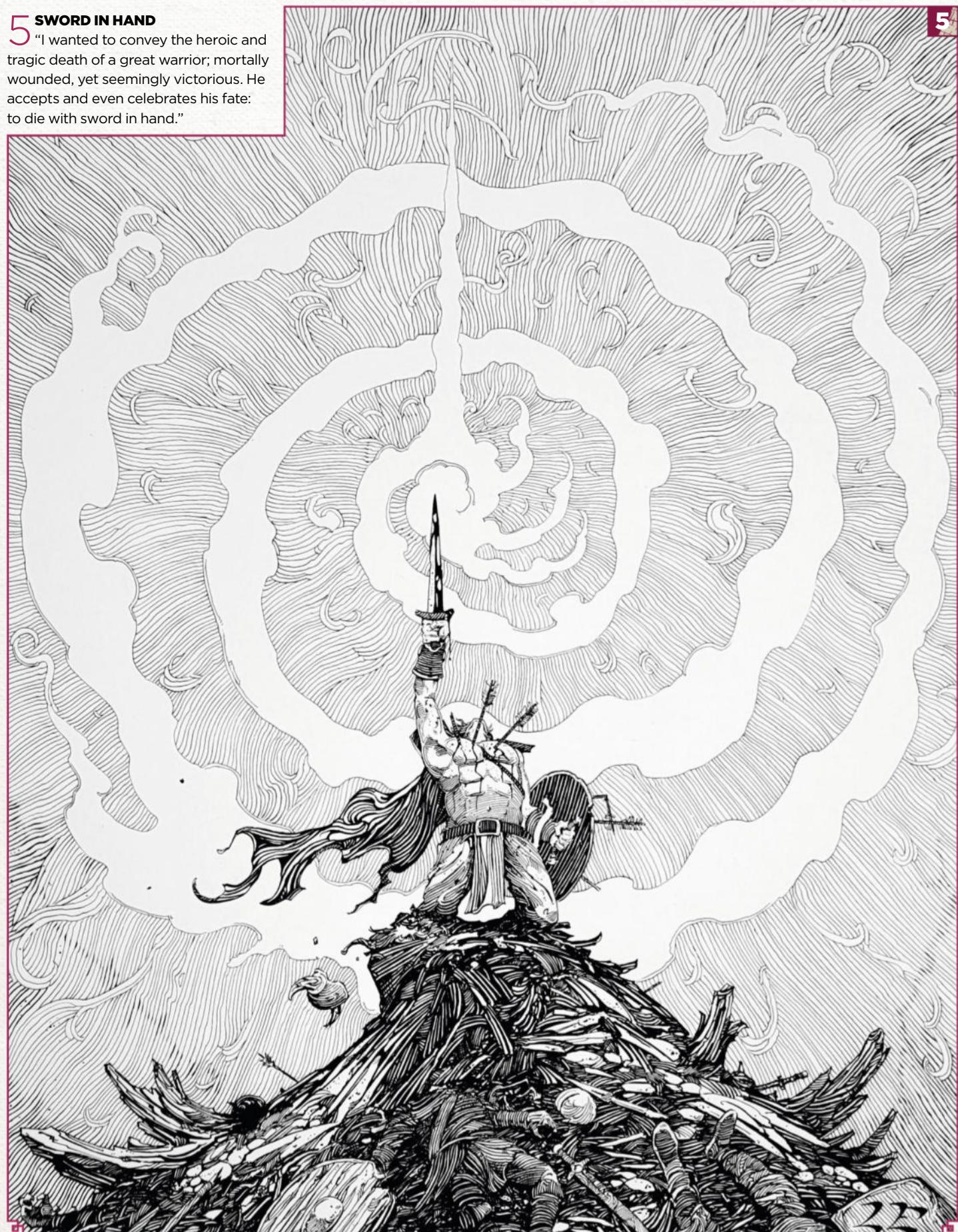
4 THE CAVE

"The quote here – 'The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek' – is from the mythologist Joseph Campbell. It's always resonated with me."



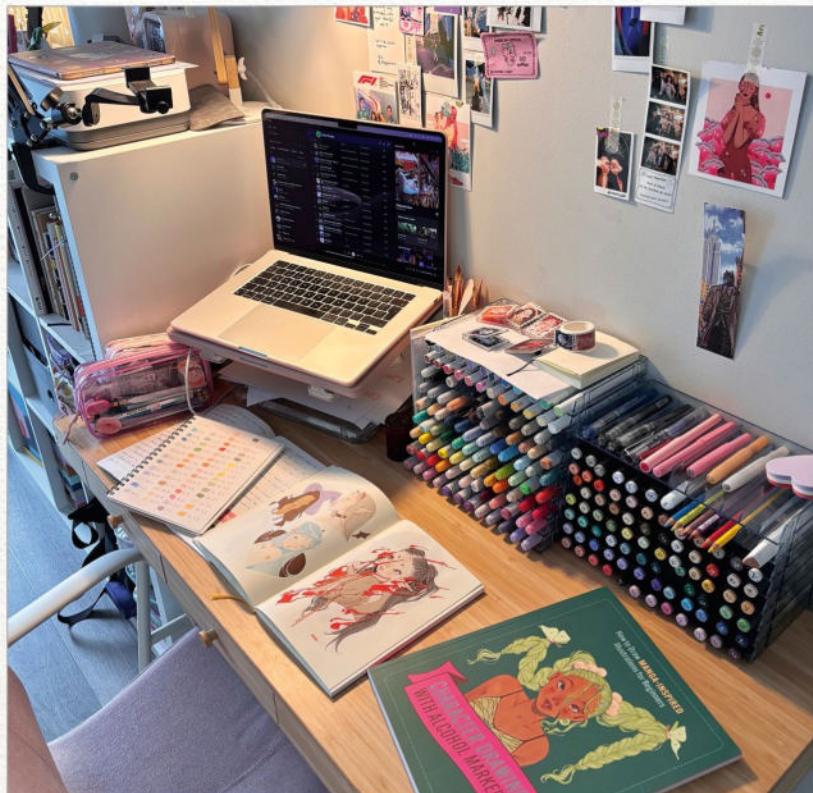
5 SWORD IN HAND

"I wanted to convey the heroic and tragic death of a great warrior; mortally wounded, yet seemingly victorious. He accepts and even celebrates his fate: to die with sword in hand."



Traditional Artist Workshop





Markers Procreate

DRAW VIBRANT CHARACTER ART

LIDIA CAMBON reveals her step-by-step process for creating a full-body illustration from first sketch to vibrant, cohesive colour with markers

Alcohol markers can be a challenging and intimidating medium that isn't always intuitive to use. My goal with this guide is to inspire you and make the process easier so you feel confident picking up markers.

For this tutorial, I'm working with a reduced colour palette to show that you don't require an extensive collection of markers to achieve great results. I've also listed my materials, as the tools you use – especially the paper – make a big difference when working with alcohol markers.

MATERIALS

PENS

- OLO Markers
- Staedtler coloured fineliners

PENCIL

- Col-Erase pencil

PAPER

- Midori MD paper

MISCELLANEOUS

- Procreate

While this isn't a deep dive into the drawing process, I'll highlight my foundational techniques for creating a solid silhouette and a dynamic pose, using digital software to design the initial sketch in my case. These methods have been invaluable in my own work, and I'm excited to share them with you.

I focus on character design using alcohol markers in my work as an illustrator, and share most of my work on Instagram if you want some extra inspiration. I'm also excited to announce the release of my book *Character Drawing with Alcohol*

Markers, which explores how to create professional, clean-looking designs. Some of the techniques that I'll be sharing today can be found in the book, so think of this as a little sneak peek inside!

Without any further ado, let's dive in. I hope you enjoy this guide and feel inspired to create.



Lidia Cambon, also known as Msshanh, is a London-based artist and illustrator. She is originally from Spain, and loves to combine her passions, tech and art, in her work. See more of her art at www.instagram.com/msshanh.

Traditional Artist Workshop



1 Start with the silhouette

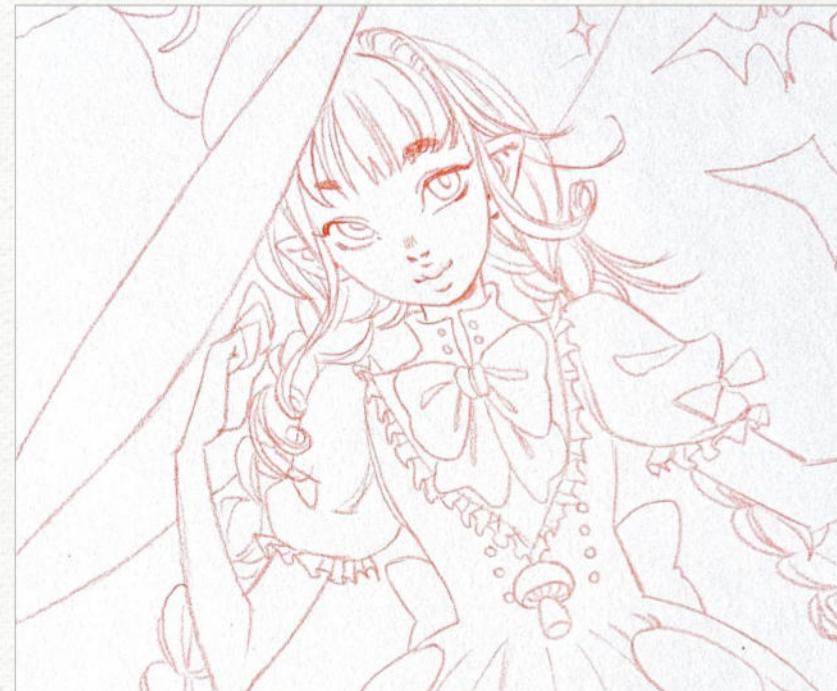
Begin by establishing the basic shape of your character. This step sets the proportions and overall silhouette, which is essential in character design. For this piece, I determined the character's proportions, including her dress and accessories such as the big hat. I also decided to add a sense of movement to make her pose dynamic and expressive right from the start.

2 Create the initial sketch

With the shape established, start sketching in the details. Add specifics like the outfit, face and hair, and also consider extra elements for the background or accessories, like the small bag that I added. Using a slightly finer brush, be sure to add important details while keeping this stage still pretty loose, focusing on the main features without getting bogged down in small details.

3 Make the final line-art

Next we'll clean up the sketch and lay down our line-art. Switch to a much finer brush with 100% Opacity, which will allow you to define all the details clearly. Take your time here, because this step becomes the foundation for the rest of the illustration. I prefer brushes that mimic a ballpoint or gel pen with consistent opacity and size, to ensure the lines translate well on paper.

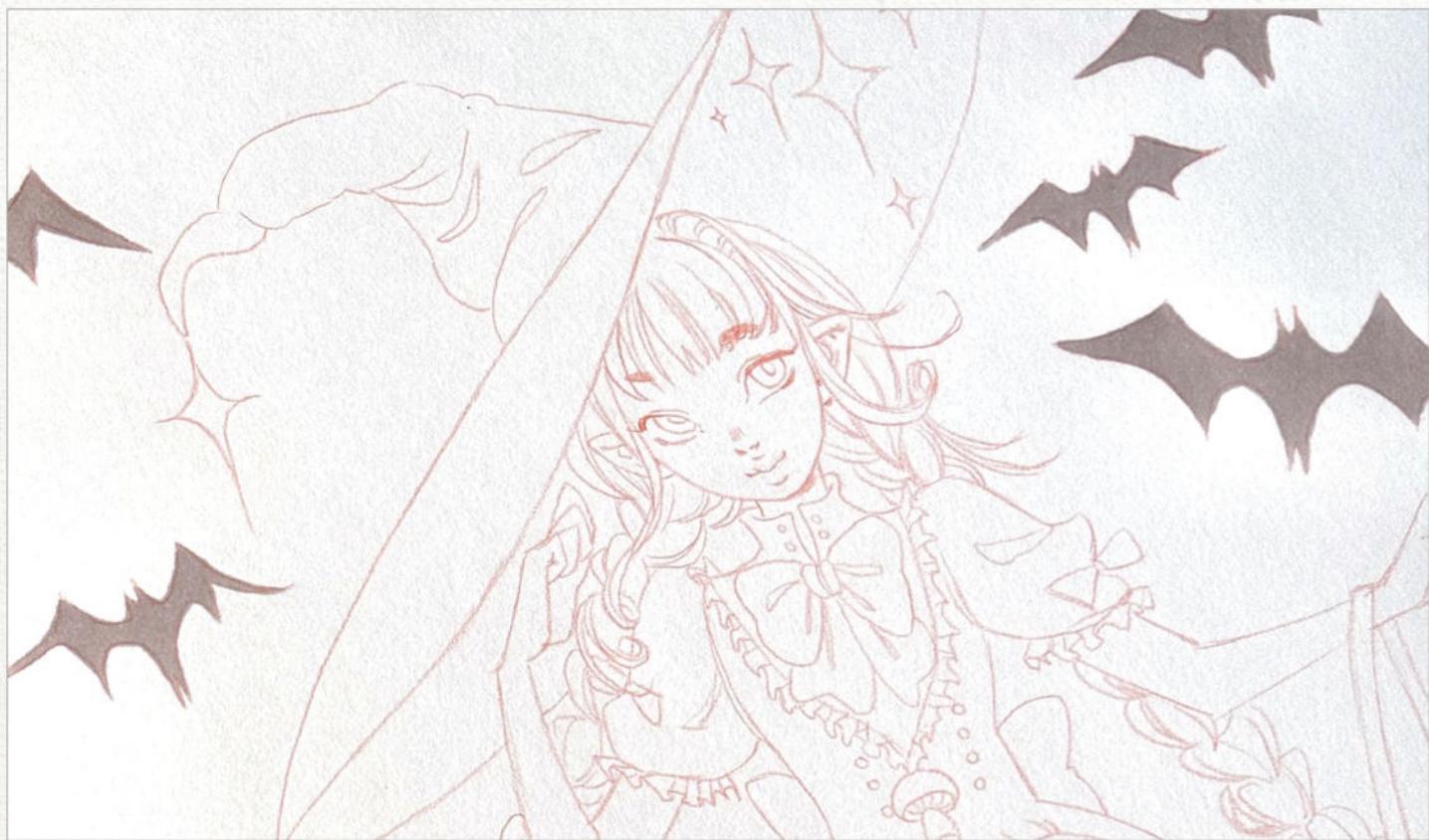


4 Figure out your colours

Let's create a colour composition, which is an essential step for traditional art, as it's less forgiving than digital. Establish the main colours for each area of the character, ensuring contrast and harmony, and that important areas stand out. This planning step helps us avoid mistakes later when colouring on paper.

5 Transfer the line-art to paper

I use a Col-Erase red pencil for this task, as it minimises any smudging and allows for easy layering with alcohol markers, keeping my lines visible without affecting the final colours. I'm using Midori MD cotton paper for my final piece, and have a light box to help me transfer the sketch across.



6 Put down the local flat colours

Start applying the flats, establishing the base for your illustration. To avoid streakiness, fully saturate the paper with each marker and avoid overlapping dried areas. I began with the background this time, but there's no strict order, so do whatever works and feels right.



7 Work on creating depth within the image

Continuing with flats, I use a soft grey for areas that are technically white. Using a light tone instead of pure white adds life to the illustration. For larger areas, you can break them into smaller sections to ensure smooth colour application. For instance, I divided the ruffles in her skirt based on where the line-art will be later so I know that any marker overlap will be covered. ➤

Traditional Artist Workshop



8 Apply the colour to your artwork

Next add the main colour of the design, which for me was the red areas. As this colour plays a significant role, follow the same technique of dividing large sections into smaller parts. This helps avoid streaks, and any minor imperfections will be hidden by the line-art or shading.



9 Time for the skin colour

Now apply the skin tone. I chose a deeper shade for this particular piece, which requires extra care to avoid streakiness in the colours, especially in prominent areas like the face, while lighter tones are more forgiving. Take your time here to ensure smooth, even coverage. Once again, put your focus on saturating the paper with ink and always working wet-on-wet.



10 Finalise flats with the hair

To complete the flats in your piece, add the hair colour, which was the darkest shade in mine. Work quickly and saturate the paper to prevent streaks. Since we'll add detailed line-art later on, any minor imperfections won't be noticeable. My main focus at this point is maintaining the hair's dynamic movement, which is an important aspect of the character's look.



11 Begin shading

For this task, use the same markers as you did for the base colours. Once dried, layering the same shade creates a slightly deeper tone, allowing us to build shadows gradually without going too dark. I kept the lighting straightforward here, just using a simple light source from above.



12 Define shapes through inking

Use fineliners in various colours, like the red for lighter areas and dark brown for shaded sections here, to ensure your line-art feels both dynamic and dimensional. You can also use black ink for a more traditional look. I avoided outlining the bats in the background to keep the focus on the character.



13 Last details

Finally, add in extra touches for visual interest. I deepened the shadows with a darker purple and used a red fineliner to design the socks, keeping interest in the areas that were looking a bit flat. With a white gel pen, I also added buttons, polka dots, catch lights in her eyes, and hair highlights, which bring life to the character.

First Impressions

★ Sarah Finnigan ★

The artist explains how her imagination for fantasy was born



Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art? I grew up in Texas, right on the edge of

the Piney Woods near the border to several other ecosystems, all of them flat and, in the grand scheme of earth's variety of landscapes, boring. But we lived in an area undergoing a lot of development, which meant hundreds of acres of woods and old logging trails that were no longer on private property and could be thoroughly explored.

The flat, monotonous landscape meant the threshold of what would inspire my imagination was low. The slightest sloping toward a river was downright mountainous to me, and a tunnel through thick yaupon holly could be hiding anything beyond my view. The thick trees made everything feel uncharted and ripe for exploration.

Now as an adult, my parents live out in Colorado, and even from just visiting them I feel myself become more accustomed to what used to take my breath away. In a way, I think it actually benefited me artistically to keep those beautiful places at arm's length.



SNOW PLAINS

This was my first painting for Magic: The Gathering. I hoped to capture the feeling of ice crystals in the air.



CHASING SMOKE

They say of eclipse photography that you can't capture the eclipse, you can only chase it. I felt it was a good analogy to those things we chase in life that would lose their appeal if they were ever caught.

What, outside of art itself, has most influenced your artwork?

There was a game series in the 90s; the first one was called *Myst* but I especially loved the sequel *Riven*. They placed you on abandoned islands and you had to puzzle out the narrative from what was left in the environment. They were all first person, and while empty places in a game can just feel unpopulated if done wrong, these felt eerie and lonely, like liminal spaces.

I've always appreciated the stories a place told and how it made me feel, and those games distilled that in a way that still has an impact. The settings were vaguely fantasy, but could very much be real, and toeing that line of the otherworldly and mundane. I try to find that feeling in much of my work.

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

Nope. Can I skip this question? I just don't tend to look at singular pieces or artists for inspiration, and I never have done.

No one painting has done that for me, but the closest I can think of is when I found the work of several contemporary western artists. The design in Brett Allen Johnson's art, the composition and lighting in Logan Maxwell Hagege's, and the colours in Eric Bowman's all really blow me away.

Tell us about your first paid commission. Does it stand as a representation of your talent?

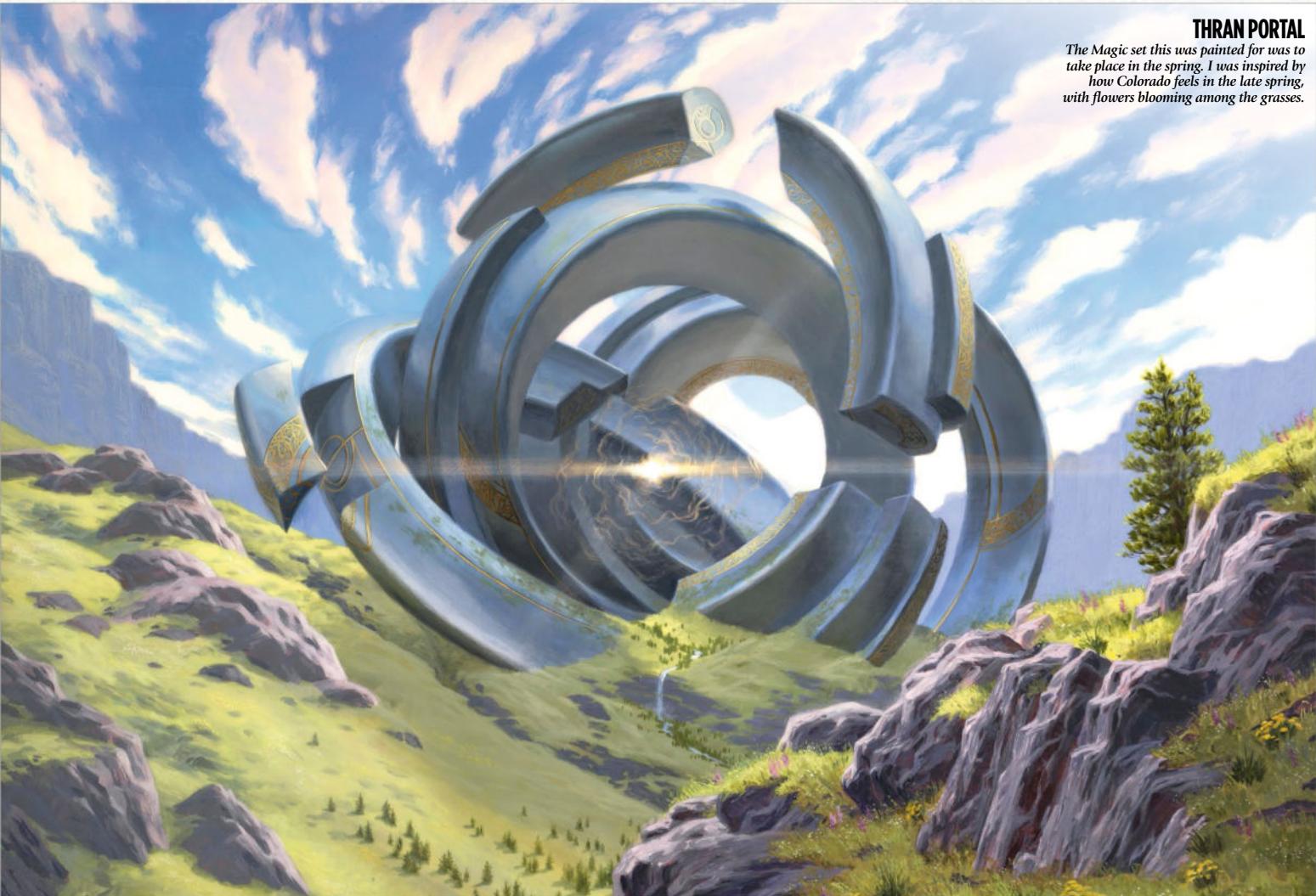
My first real client work was for *Magic: The Gathering*. I loved it because they give the artists a large amount of art and information to draw upon, and the set I was working on was for a snowy Norse mythology-themed world. It had a distinct feel to it, and I leaned into representing what that world felt like as a whole in my first set of sketches, although I was only illustrating one location.

What's the last piece that you finished? How do the two differ?

I finished *Chasing Smoke*, and they're almost too similar! My primary focus is on my personal work and keeping any client work I do in line with my body of work. Often I'll come back to similar compositional solutions to evoke the same emotions. This one features two trees holding lanterns on either side of a path, underneath a solar eclipse.

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

In most ways, yes. I thought I'd love every minute of it, and I love most minutes. I enjoy the business stuff, I enjoy the days on end of just painting, I enjoy conceptualizing new work. What I didn't expect was to



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THRAN PORTAL

The Magic set this was painted for was to take place in the spring. I was inspired by how Colorado feels in the late spring, with flowers blooming among the grasses.

NARRATIVE

Perspective and assumption saturates everything we know about the world and others. I wanted to paint a tree bending to fill the gap in the sky behind it with stars.



“You can have a lot of eggs in one basket, but you have to keep the other baskets stocked up too”

feel so torn between all of my different responsibilities.

I feel like I’m playing a never-ending game of Tapper, running between client work, personal work, events and family. Can’t let any of the root beers slide off the end of the bar! If I don’t regularly do personal work, then my client work suffers. Spend time on personal work and, oops, I neglected to get things ordered and ready for a big trip. Get back from events and time has ticked away on deadlines.

The solution is to cut it down and narrow in on what you enjoy most, and what’s working best, but that brings up the other thing I didn’t fully appreciate before going full-time on art. The survivors in this

field are agile. The market shifts and suddenly what was working stops, and something you’ve neglected has become really important. You can have a lot of eggs in one basket, but you have to keep the other baskets stocked up too.

What advice would you give to your younger self to help them along on their journey?

To stop trying to make the art I thought would get me hired, that I thought other people wanted to see, and that made me feel like I was performing as a ‘fantasy artist’. I was painting a lot of people in armour and creatures because that’s “what you’re supposed to do”, but it wasn’t me. ➤

Traditional Artist Interview

» Things clicked for me one day when I sketched a landscape that I really loved the idea of, how it made me feel, and then I spent two days trying to figure out how to shoehorn a person into the image without ruining it.

Initially I thought the figure ruined it because it was blocking things. But after a few days I realised their presence, no matter how small or in what capacity, made the environment be about them and their experience of it, and not about the viewer, whose perspective had been placed over stepping stones leading into the image. It's so important to make art that strikes an emotional chord in yourself.

How has the art industry changed for the better since you've been working in it?

That's the very definition of a loaded question! I think there's a bright side to a lot of what's been going on in the industry in the last few years. I love seeing traditional art in person, and AI has pushed many artists to take up the paintbrush or pencil again.

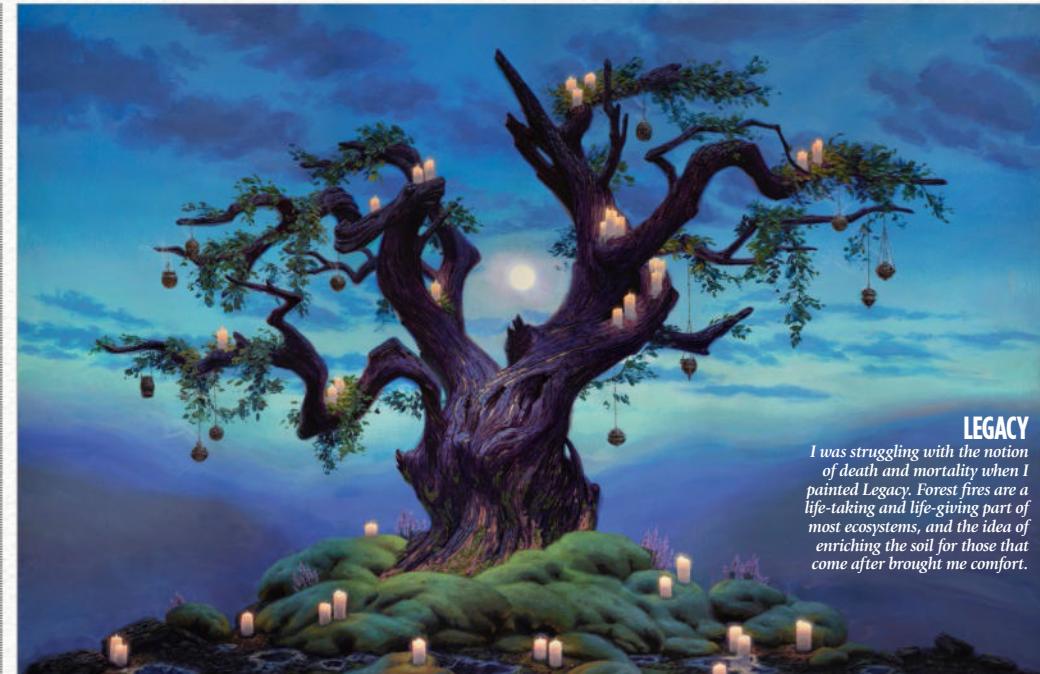
I also think the homogenous aesthetic to AI-generated images is educating viewers and giving them a better eye, if much slower than it has for the rest of us. More clients are hiring a wider range of styles too, which is exciting to see.

What character or scene that you've painted do you most identify with?
My painting *Narrative* is about how our beliefs and our perspective is shaped by the stories we tell and those we have handed down to us. It's something I keep in mind often, and I was happy to be able to create a piece of art about it.



SURVIVOR

Inspired by a loved one, I wanted to paint about how trauma transforms us. This tree has been irreparably changed, but it's still beautiful and celebrated, not in spite of, but because of the fire.



LEGACY

*I was struggling with the notion of death and mortality when I painted *Legacy*. Forest fires are a life-taking and life-giving part of most ecosystems, and the idea of enriching the soil for those that come after brought me comfort.*

“It's so important to make art that strikes an emotional chord with yourself”

We still use constellations to relate stars to one another, seeing three-dimensional space flatly from our limited perspective without acknowledging that some are several times the distance of others, and then relating those grouped stars to mythological stories. It's such a great example of how humans must use narrative to organise the world around us in order to make sense of it. So often we're not even aware of distortions to our perspective, or to how others may see the same thing in a different way.

Is there a particular artist or franchise that would be a dream collaboration for you?

It would be fun to collaborate on a project with a friend where we each retain our own creative vision in the final product, but I don't dream about contributing to franchises. It's my opinion that in this industry, our own fandom for our subject matter is frequently used against us, and can result in artists being taken advantage of.

I've felt collaborative with art directors before, where I've been able to bring ideas to the table and

contribute to the direction of the piece I'm working on, but I don't confuse that with collaborating on a franchise. There are huge benefits to being very involved in the visual direction of a product that has a huge fanbase, but in the end the results are 100 per cent theirs, and there are costs to that to consider.

My personal work is important to me, and contributing too significantly to a single franchise could lead to my art being conflated with that IP, and no longer fully belonging to me.

What are the next steps in your artwork and life?

Hopefully there will be more exploration. When doing client work, you have an obligation to deliver consistency, and the first half of the year was all freelance.

I want to push against what I've always done with my process and see where things go when I'm not forced to call something done before I'm ready to. I'm craving the excitement of finding a new way to do things. But the root beers keep sliding and I have to catch them, so who knows.

Sarah Finnigan is a Houston-based artist creating portraits of allegorical landscapes. She infuses her work with fantastical elements to spark curiosity and the desire to explore, and to inspire a sense of reverence, awe and wonder. See more of her work at www.sarahfinnigan.com.

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Jasper,
age 11

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