

1 NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX

ARTIST INSIGHT

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ISSUE 251



EXCLUSIVE
WORKSHOP

DRAW THE ICONIC MEGA MAN!

Have a blast creating the cult hero with an expert walkthrough from top **manga artists**

ALSO INSIDE

LEARN NEW WAYS TO
SKETCH ON LOCATION

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DELVE INTO THE BIZARRE WORLD OF VIVID ANIME MASTERPIECE **DAN DA DAN**



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



There are many genres of art and they move or inspire different people in different ways. Manga has been one of the favourites of our readers over the years, so it feels about time we took a deeper dive into the iconic Japanese style.

Mega Man is just one huge name from Japan. As well as taking the starring role on our cover, he's the subject of our lead tutorial, where the artists commissioned to create cover art for the character's new manga series give a detailed look at the process of drawing and colouring their art. And if you've ever wanted to create gorgeous sci-fi settings, check out Edward Barons' workshop as he combines Blender and Photoshop.

The steady rise of manga and anime in this part of the world has meant more and more people have been exposed to this style of storytelling, and Netflix has been a part of this. That's why we take you behind the scenes on the animated adaptation of *Dan Da Dan*, talking to its creative team who give us all the details about the process of bringing its colourful chaos to the screen. Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor

Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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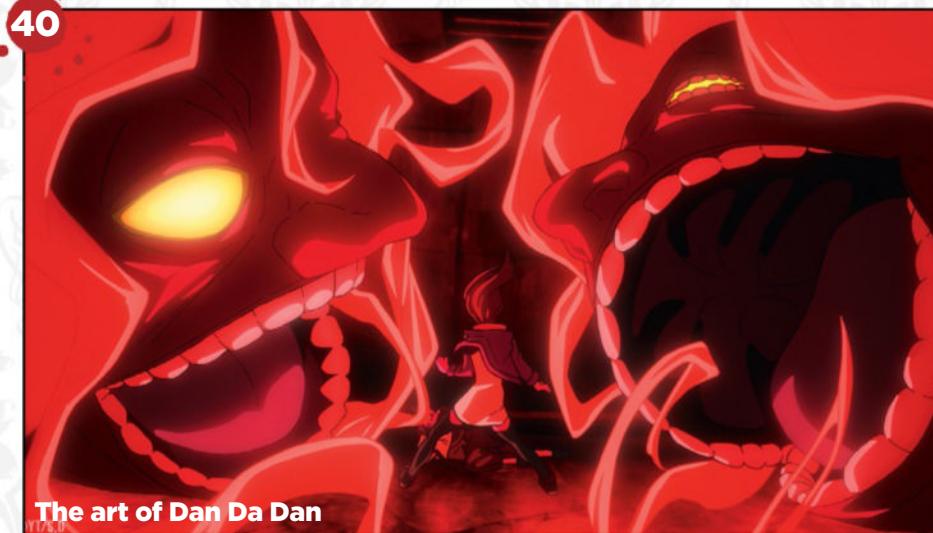
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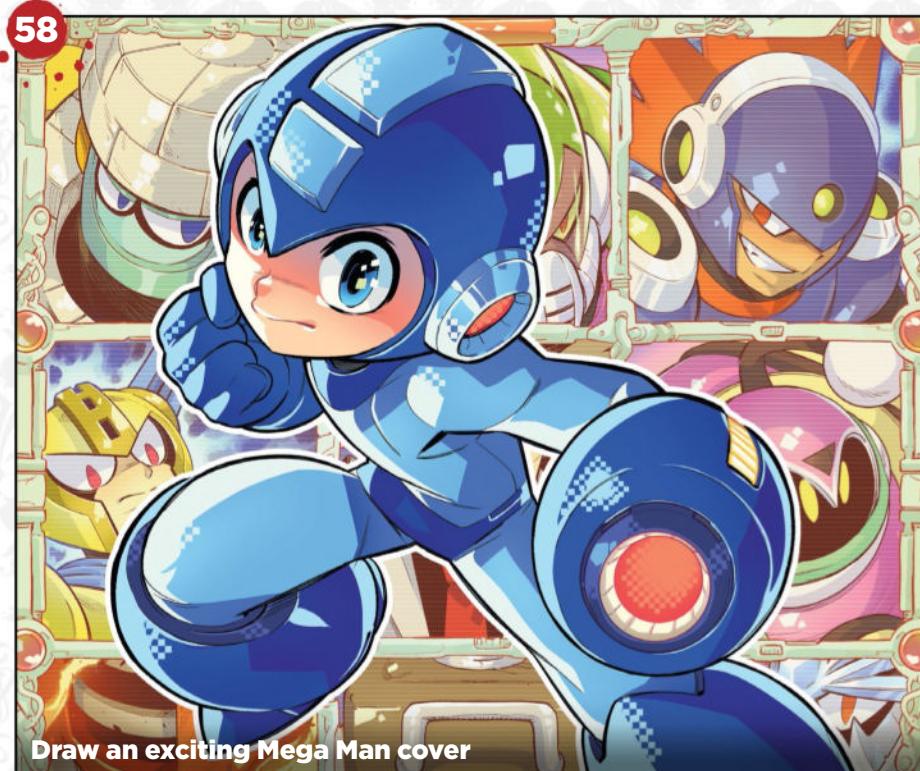




Create a dynamic sci-fi composition



Paint believable environments



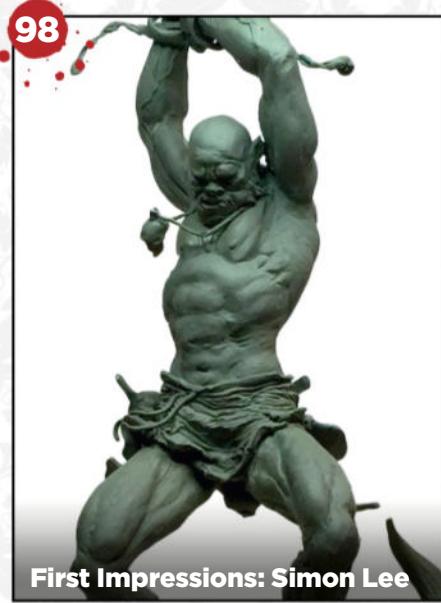
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Embrace the weird ideas



Sketch absurd art on location



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Next month

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Next month in...
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THE ART OF MARVEL RIVALS

Find out how legendary characters made the leap from comics to the video game

Advice from a Tank Girl artist

Jamie Hewlett gives his tips for creating comic stories with plenty of attitude

Draw gorgeous character art

Whip out your pencils and follow along with Chuma Hill's workshop

The African comic boom

Explore the rise in stunning work being produced by African artists

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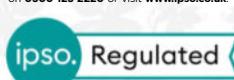
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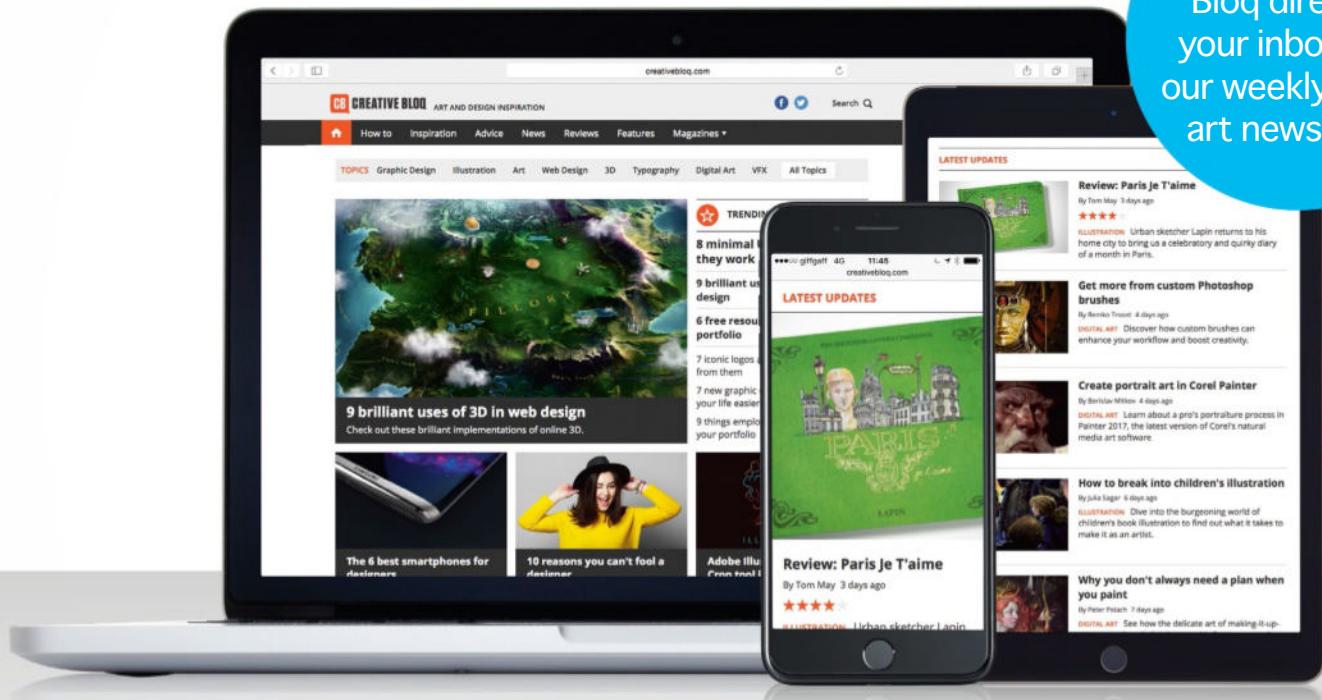


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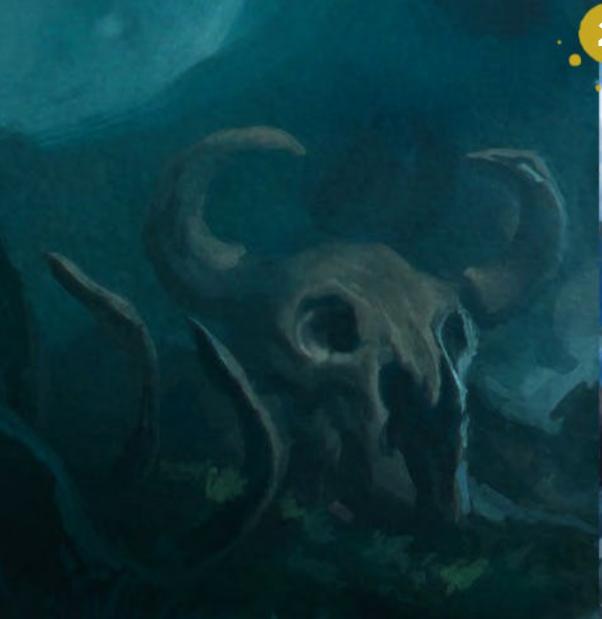
THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Caio Maciel Monteiro

LOCATION: Brazil MEDIA: Photoshop, ZBrush WEB: <https://caiomonteiro.artstation.com>

Caio has been drawing ever since he was a kid. He was introduced to Magic: The Gathering and Dungeons & Dragons in the early 2000s, which began his passion for fantasy art. The two brands are now his main clients.



Art direction: Taylor Ingvarsson ©Wizards of the Coast

Art direction: Andrew Vallas © Wizards of the Coast



1 ANCIENT BLACK DRAGON

"A personal piece for my portfolio. The idea is to paint four other images like this, each one with an ancient chromatic dragon. I hope to finish the project this year."

2 RESET

"The first card I made for Magic: The Gathering. I'm not too into landscape painting, so this one was a challenge. I spent a lot of time on these waves."

3 SORCERER OF THE FANG

"A really bad card, but I love the result of this painting. Another one of my favourites for Magic: The Gathering."



Yun Huai Huang

LOCATION: Taiwan MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender, ZBrush WEB: www.artstation.com/yunhuaihuang

Yun is a character concept artist currently working on his indie game. His work explores a fusion of diverse elements, blending historical aesthetics with imaginative design to create interesting characters.

1 FALLEN UNION

“A beheaded maiden and her failed knight, fused into an undead abomination – bound by death, they are cursed to wander as one.”

2 NPC AND FRAME

“NPC concepts for my game, with personalised frames inspired by global architecture and medieval illuminated manuscripts that reflect each character’s unique traits.”



2





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3 ASTRAL CULTIST 4

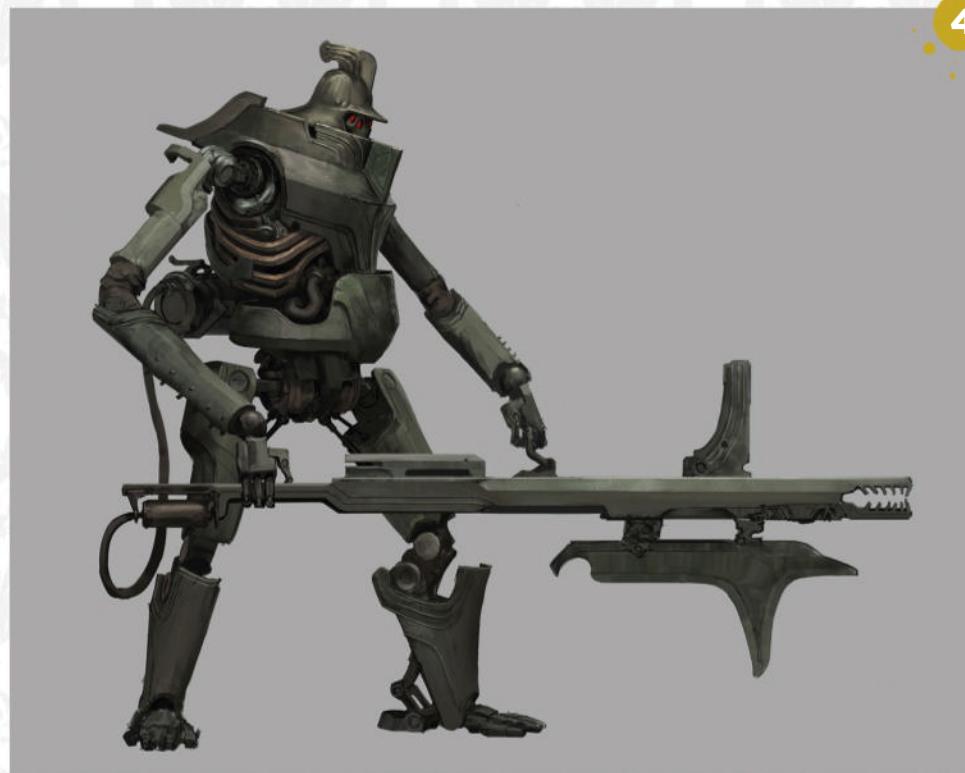
"Fusing ancient blood magic with advanced space technology, these characters embody a contrast of primal rituals and futuristic science as they fight aliens."



4

4 VANGUARD

"Just a cute robot with a gun. I blended parallel lines and ancient bronzeware elements into a humanoid form, merging traditional aesthetics with futuristic engineering style."





Amad Mir

LOCATION: France MEDIA: Photoshop, pencil WEB: www.artstation.com/amadmir-15

Amad is an illustrator and character designer for video games and advertising animations. He enjoys drawing chaotic, dystopian worlds, and settings where diverse races, languages and fashions coexist.



1 ONE LIFE AMONG MANY

"I'm intrigued by the myriad forms of life; their shapes and colours captivate me. Coexisting with these diverse beings, as integral parts of nature, feels both magical and meditative."

2 A FLEETING MEMORY

"This image is an exploration of cultural themes combined with surreal elements."



3 TRAIN STATION

"In every big city, my favourite neighborhood is the one that's the most diverse, mixed and chaotic. I love to illustrate characters in these environments, with little stories unfolding throughout the scene."

4 KEEPING IT SIMPLE

"These pieces showcase my approach to character design and the simplified style I favour when creating brand new characters."



Šárka Štvrtňová

LOCATION: Czech Republic MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.artbyclaina.com

Šárka, also known as Claina, often livestreams her creative process. She draws inspiration from fantasy worlds and creates colourful art influenced by Warcraft. Recently, she has explored darker themes.

1 SKIRMISH IN REVENDRETH

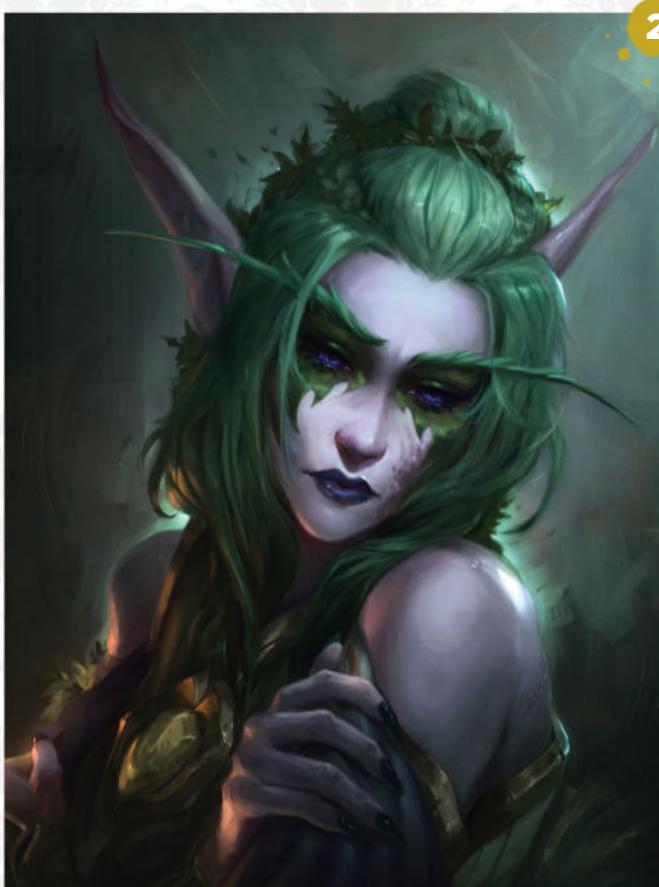
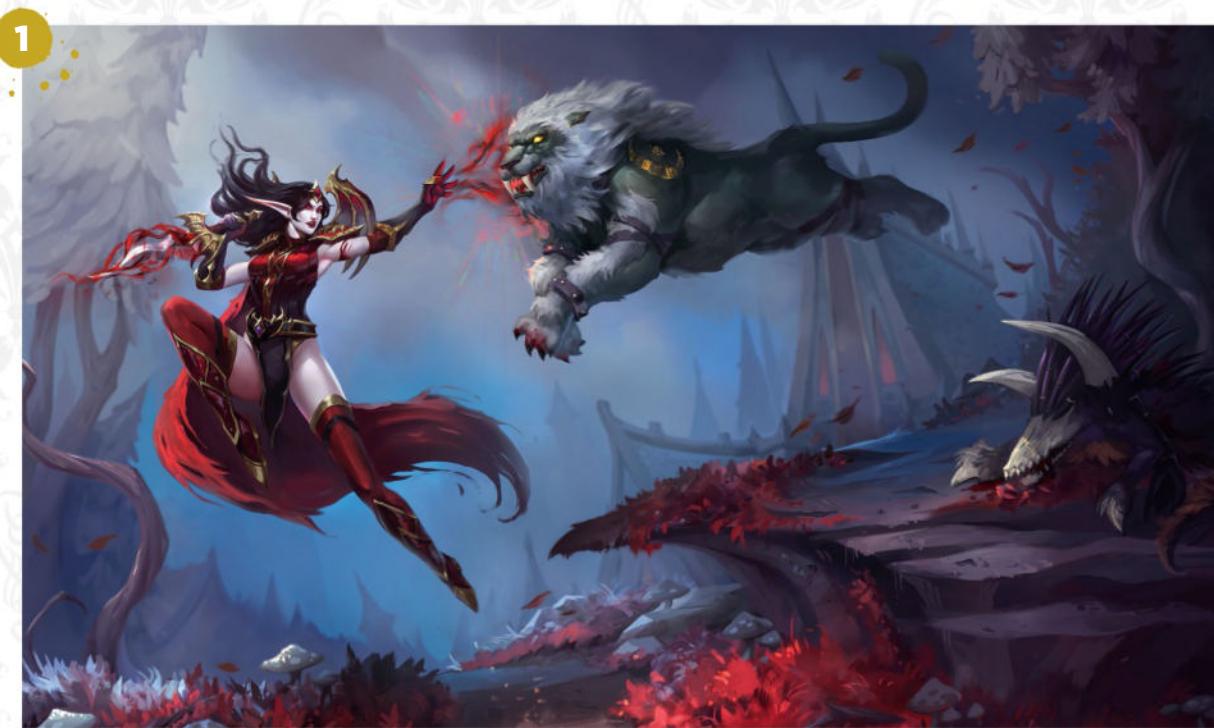
"An action piece inspired by the famous Revendreth realm from the Warcraft universe. I enjoyed working on a more complicated composition that reminded me of a fresco."

2 SORROWS OF ISUDA

"The goal was to convey sorrow and an oil painting look. I've been going through things myself, and think pain weaves art from the soul."

3 A LIZARDFOLK FOODIE

"A first D&D commission with only a description to work from. I think stepping out of your comfort zone teaches you so much. This was awesome to work on!"



2



3

4 THE HIGH INQUISITOR

"As a priestess of the Light and the High Inquisitor of the Scarlet Crusade, Sally Whitemane is a strong, powerful character. The low-angle pose shows this off well."





Bahryi Vadim

LOCATION: Belarus MEDIA: Photoshop, ZBrush WEB: www.artstation.com/bahryi

Bahryi never thought he would make a living from drawing because there were no game dev opportunities in his country when he graduated. Fast forward 20 years and he's turned his art and gaming passions into a job.

1 ROBBERS

"This piece was a test assignment for a placement at a gaming company. I had to draw a shootout between cops and gangsters, but I made sure not to glamourise a life of crime."

2 PIRATE

"I drew this after I was fired from my job. At that moment, I felt a lot like this guinea pig. I wanted to say, 'Yes, things are bad, but I'm not scared. I'm the captain!'"





3 DRAGON "This drawing is a gift for my friend Dima, nicknamed Dragon. When I was in prison, he sent me tiny letters hidden inside buns and socks so I didn't go crazy."

4 MONK "This drawing has no story. I was just drawing how I felt at that moment: calm and composed."



Romain Kurdi

LOCATION: France MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate, Blender WEB: https://romain_kurdi.artstation.com

After 10 years working in animation, Romain moved into fantasy illustration and has since developed his own world called Oberant. His inspirations include Craig Mullins, Dmitry Belyukin, Ilya Repin and many more.

1 MEETING WITH THE NAZGÜL

"Tolkien's Lord of the Rings will always have a special place in my heart - very shocking for a fantasy fan, I know! It's good practice to reimagine an already established world, as it lets you focus on design."

2 SORIN FAN ART

"I discovered Magic: The Gathering when I was a teenager. I was in awe of the beautiful card art, and it solidified my desire to become an artist."

3 OBERANT: LAVAMANCER

"One of the things I love most about fantasy is how you can play around with costume design, and it helps to establish an art direction."



2



3

4 OBERANT: THE ENCHANTRESS
"Oberant is a high fantasy world where magic is tied to sound and music. Creating your own world is a good (and fun!) exercise, and a great way to build a portfolio."



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Long Live the King

YEAR CREATED: 2024

MEDIA: Maya, Clip Studio Paint,
Photoshop, Krita

“I wanted to participate in the Golden ROI contest to create a more ambitious illustration than usual. It allowed me to work on several subjects at a time, from 3D blocking to painting and a bit of anatomy! It was also a great chance to try something different, as I’m not very used to this type of rendering.”





Artist **PROFILE**

Nawel Benhannou

LOCATION: France



Nawel is a former game art student who graduated in 2021. She's currently focusing on developing her artwork and skills with numerous projects, which are mostly set in fantasy or magical worlds. www.therookies.co/u/Nawli

The Rookies





El Ombligo de la Luna

YEAR CREATED: 2023

MEDIA: Photoshop

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"I created this image as an initial concept for my graduation film El Ombligo de la Luna. We'd spent months working on the story, and when we decided that our two characters would go to the moon in a VW Beetle, I was inspired to make this image of them driving on the moon."

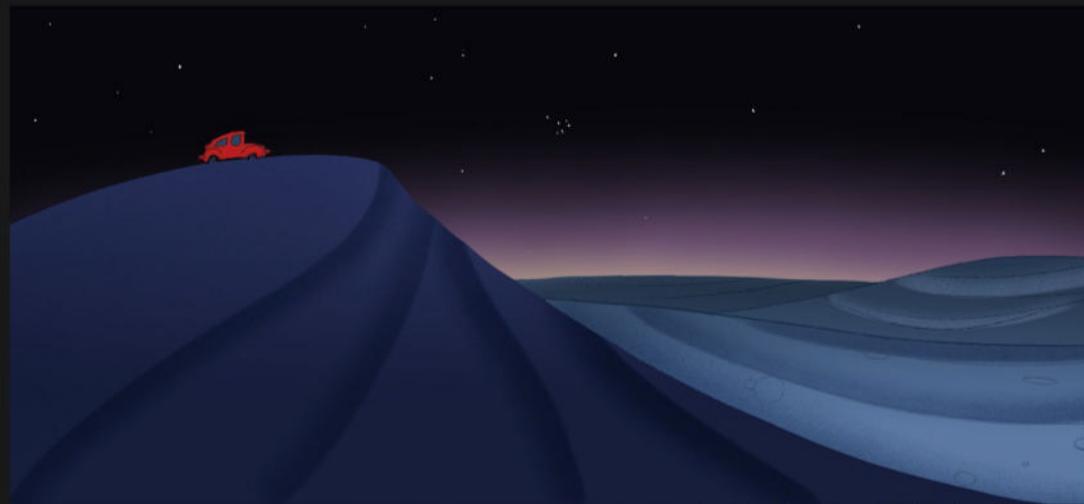
Artist **PROFILE**

Bokang Koatja

LOCATION: South Africa



Bokang is an animator, writer and director from South Africa who has a passion for storytelling that moves people. He graduated from the Gobelins Paris animation school in 2023 and is currently working to produce his first independent short film. www.therookies.co/entries/27609



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"Write down your entire story in brief terms before starting the storyboards for a chapter," advises Nashi.



Brandon's manga God Game is available to read for free on VoyceMe. Illustration by Chromatic Studios.



How to publish your first manga

Make your breakthrough **Tanya Combrinck** meets six top manga artists to uncover the secrets behind their success

Producing and publishing your first manga might seem like a big project. But with online publishing platforms that can place a global audience of comic fans within easy reach, you don't need anything beyond your own drive and creativity to find an audience for your work.

Your first step is to decide which of your ideas to develop. **Brandon Chen**, a prolific writer and producer of manga with six comics on Webtoon and a popular YouTube channel, tells us that you shouldn't put too much pressure on yourself for your first project.

“For creators, one-shots are a way to learn how to finish a chapter without committing to an intensive project”

"It's meant to be a learning experience," he says. "In five years, you'll look back on that project and say, 'Oh god.' Not because you won't be proud of the work, but because you're constantly getting better. The first one is about learning the process rather than being perfect. It's about finishing something and using that experience to develop."

Brandon recommends starting with a one-shot for your first project. He explains: "One-shots are short, one-off projects that complete a short story within a chapter. One-shot competitions are common in Japan as a way to test concepts and



"I know a lot of manga artists who posted their work online, and had publishers contact them to make it into paid series and printed books," says Chihiro on the benefits of using comic platforms.

stories before committing to a longer serialisation. For creators, they are a way to learn how to finish a chapter without committing to an intensive project. There are many one-shot competitions in Japan that allow for serialisation opportunities for aspiring mangaka [manga artists], so it's a ➤



TAKE A TRIP TO TOKYO!

Top anime and manga art duo Linnea Kataja and Bellamy Luna Brooks give us a peek inside their shared home studio based in the Japanese capital.
Page 32



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YOUR VIEWS, YOUR ART

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Page 39



66 says: "Be prepared for the world to give its feedback – both positive and negative. You have to develop a thick skin. Don't be afraid of using those block and mute buttons."

A panel drawn by illustrator Jose Fernandez from Brandon's manga *Samurai no Tora*, which is published by Webtoon.



Chihiro Howe is the creator of *Raven Saga* on Webtoon, and author of instructional book *Manga Academy*.

www.instagram.com/chihirohowe

INDUSTRY INSIGHT JUST GETTING STARTED

Chihiro Howe's tips for taking the leap into an original comic

Should you follow your passion, or commercial success instead?

The industry is filled with stories that are created with what's likely to be commercially successful in mind, but the ones that stick out and become popular are stories the creators are passionate about. Also as the creator, it's important you enjoy what you create, as it's a stressful job and it's hard to continue if you're burnt out.

Why did you pick Webtoon to publish *Raven Saga*?

Webtoon Originals asked me to create a series for them. Before that, back when other platforms weren't as well established or didn't exist yet, I saw Webtoon was getting big so I uploaded my hobby series, *The Other Day I Met a Bear*, in the hope it would reach a larger audience. It got a lot of readers, and that's when Webtoon approached me and *Raven Saga* was greenlit.

What advice do you have for someone just starting out?

Completing a manga is more important than making a great one at first. Starting with a short, simple story and finishing it gives you a confidence boost, which helps with motivation.

What are your tips for pitching to publishers?

Have a good summary that becomes the core of your story. They also like to see how the characters are going to develop, so be specific about that.



► great way to practice and break into the industry. These competitions are increasingly becoming available to international artists."

PASSION PROJECT

When starting out, many creators think about how to strike a balance between making something you love and connecting with a large audience. The manga artist known as **66**, creator of the Webtoon Original series *City of Blank*, tells us that this decision all depends on what your goal is. "I think it's entirely valid to make a story that aims more for commercial success, especially in today's world," they say. "You just have to go in with the awareness that you might not be

"Consistency is key, so be sure to hold yourself accountable and upload regularly, even if it's just once or twice a month," says **uru-chan**.

as passionate about it, and that it might start feeling more like a job than a project you love. If your goal is to simply tell a story you're passionate about, then by all means do that. But be aware that it might not achieve the commercial success you hope for."

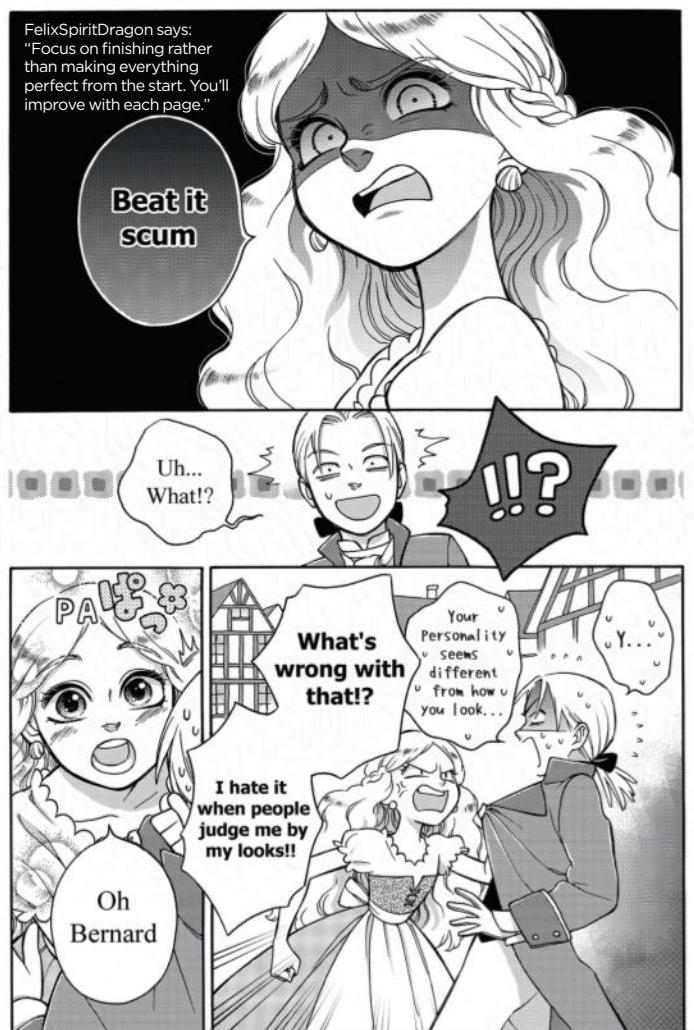
The extent to which you aim for commercial success can depend on the length of the story you're trying to write, says **uru-chan**, creator of the Webtoon *unOrdinary*. "For shorter stories, I think it's fine to experiment with trends and craft something for clicks and numbers," she tells us. But she warns that if you do that with a long-form story, "you could be stuck with that project for years", and could risk burnout if you don't have much love for it.

EVOLVING STORIES

Fortunately, most creators find that when they're passionate about a story,



"Your art is always going to grow and improve. The art in your first chapter will be bad compared to your later chapters," says **66**.



there's usually a way to express the elements that they most care about in a way that connects with a good cohort of readers.

And it's important to remember that your first project is likely to evolve in ways you won't anticipate at the outset. This was the experience of **FelixSpiritDragon**, a freelance concept and character designer and animator, whose manga series *Dawn in the Abyss* runs on both Webtoon and VoyceMe.



She started her first project as a young teenager and found herself outgrowing the characters and themes as she developed as a storyteller. But this first work did form the basis for the series she writes today. "I reworked key characters and concepts, reshaped the narrative,



FelixSpiritDragon says: "Have fun and stay consistent. Your first project is a learning experience, so be sure to enjoy the journey!"

and built a more interesting and diverse world with a theme I enjoyed – one that I believed would excite both me and the audience," she explains.

FelixSpiritDragon echoes Brandon's sentiment that the first project is a learning experience. "It teaches you how to format your story, improve your storytelling, and understand what works and what doesn't," she adds. "Rather than worrying about whether to focus on passion or commercial success, aim to create something you truly enjoy, as passion projects can become commercially successful if you refine and commit to them. Sometimes, the key is simply finding the right direction."

When you're ready to start putting your work out into the world, an online publishing platform is the easiest way



"Thanks to social media and the online comic platforms, things have gotten much easier for manga creators to make a living with their work," says Chihiro.

to reach a large audience. Many authors and artists choose Webtoon because it has the biggest userbase.

Webtoon has two models: Canvas and Originals. Anyone can self-publish their work on Canvas for free. With this model you retain ownership of your IP, and you'll also earn a portion of the advertising revenue once your audience reaches a certain size.

With Originals, creators sign a contract and get paid for their work, but you'll sometimes be selling the rights to your IP when you take this route. On the plus side, as well as the

income, the process of working with a knowledgeable and experienced editor at Originals can be a valuable learning opportunity for new creators.

PICK A PLATFORM

Other options include GlobalComix, which some artists view as being very creator-oriented, and Manga Plus Creators, which has monthly contests with cash prizes and the opportunity for your work to be published as an official series alongside famous manga from the Japanese publishing company Shueisha. ➤

“If your goal is just to tell a story you’re passionate about, then by all means do that”



Despite being an artist who primarily publishes her work in print, **Nashi** still sees online comic platforms as a great way to find a large audience and try things that might not be possible with regular publishers. "I started an adventure manga on Webtoon and Tapas, and was surprised how quickly it got such a big response," she says.

Irrespective of which publisher you choose, illustrator and manga artist



"If you plan on having your work printed eventually, draw your story in a page-by-page format. Then you only need to make small adjustments when converting to the Webtoon scrolling format to post online," uru-chan says.



Chihiro Howe suggests you hire a lawyer to look over any contract before you sign. "It's important to protect your work so you don't get taken advantage of," she says. "The publisher is a business, not a charity, and everything they do is for the benefit of their company, not the creators."

FelixSpiritDragon agrees with Chihiro's advice. "Never sign away your IP rights unless you're fully prepared to lose control of your story and characters," she says. "If possible, negotiate for licensing agreements that let you retain ownership. Don't be afraid to walk away if the deal isn't in your best interest. Your work is



FelixSpiritDragon says: "Research, research, research! Understanding storytelling, pacing and paneling will help bring your vision to life."



“Sharing my process with the world enabled millions of people to see my talent”



Chihiro's Raven Saga is a popular series on Webtoon about a girl whose grandmother is taken by a mysterious boy and his raven affiliates.

valuable, and the right opportunity will come along!"

SOCIAL PROMOTION

Once you've put your manga out there, you'll need to promote it intensively to find your audience and commercial opportunities. "The unfortunate reality is that the most creative or talented people aren't the ones who get the most offers - it's the ones who have talent, but also extraordinary marketing skills," says Brandon. "Some might not like this part of the industry, but I believe that in this competitive landscape it's almost a requirement to succeed."

Many artists find that sharing their creative process as well as their final output is a good way to build a large following and attract attention.

Brandon uses multiple social channels (<https://brandonchen.carrd.co>) to share advice on how to succeed as a manga artist, and even landed his first serialisation deal due to some of his videos going viral.

"I'm constantly building my brand and audience through social media," he says. "Sharing my process and project with the world enabled millions of people to see my talent, and it only takes one special person in the industry to change your life."



"Have all the designs for the main characters and environments ready before starting the actual manga pages," Nashi suggests.



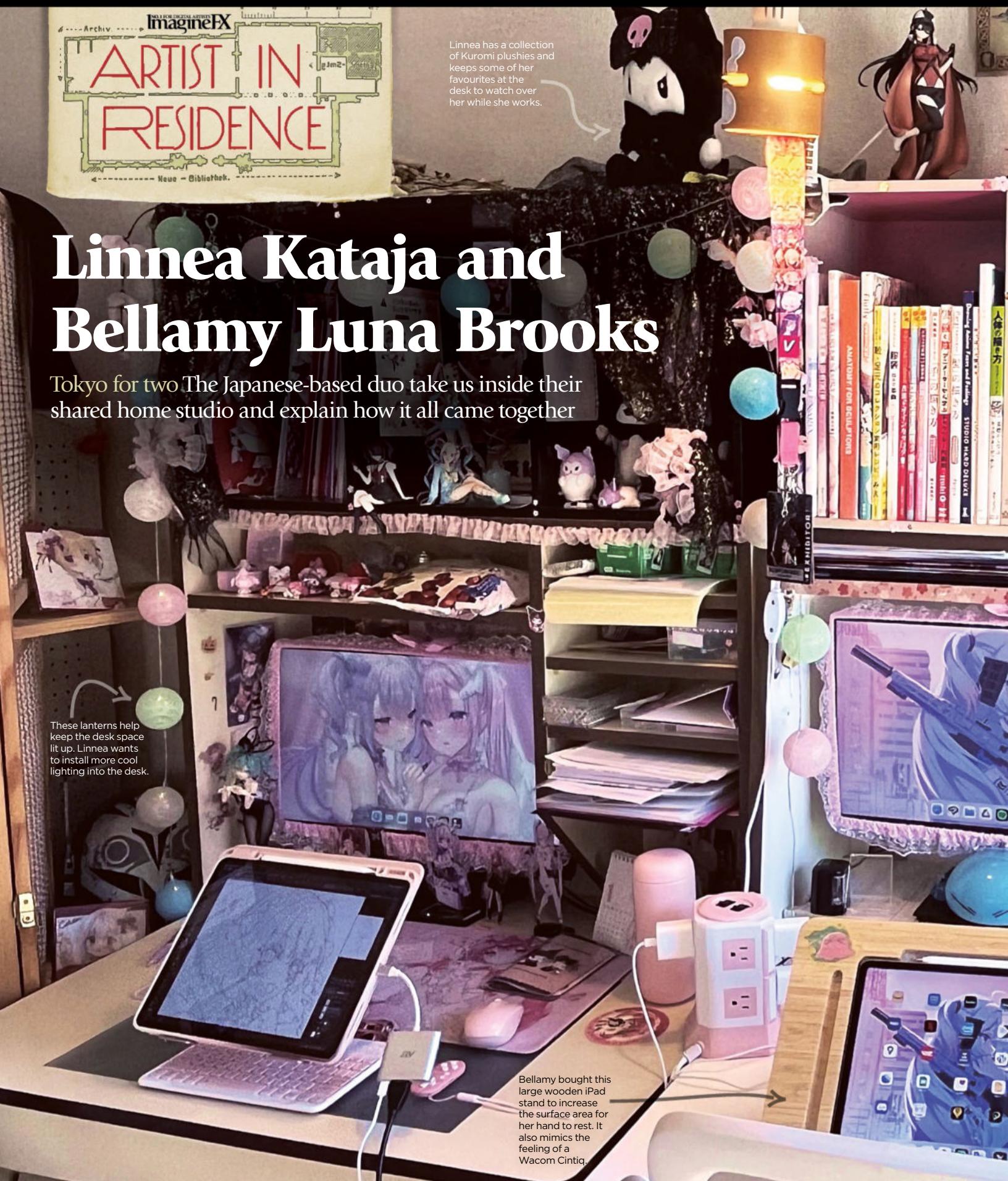
Linnea has a collection of Kuromi plushies and keeps some of her favourites at the desk to watch over her while she works.

Linnea Kataja and Bellamy Luna Brooks

Tokyo for two The Japanese-based duo take us inside their shared home studio and explain how it all came together

These lanterns help keep the desk space lit up. Linnea wants to install more cool lighting into the desk.

Bellamy bought this large wooden iPad stand to increase the surface area for her hand to rest. It also mimics the feeling of a Wacom Cintiq.

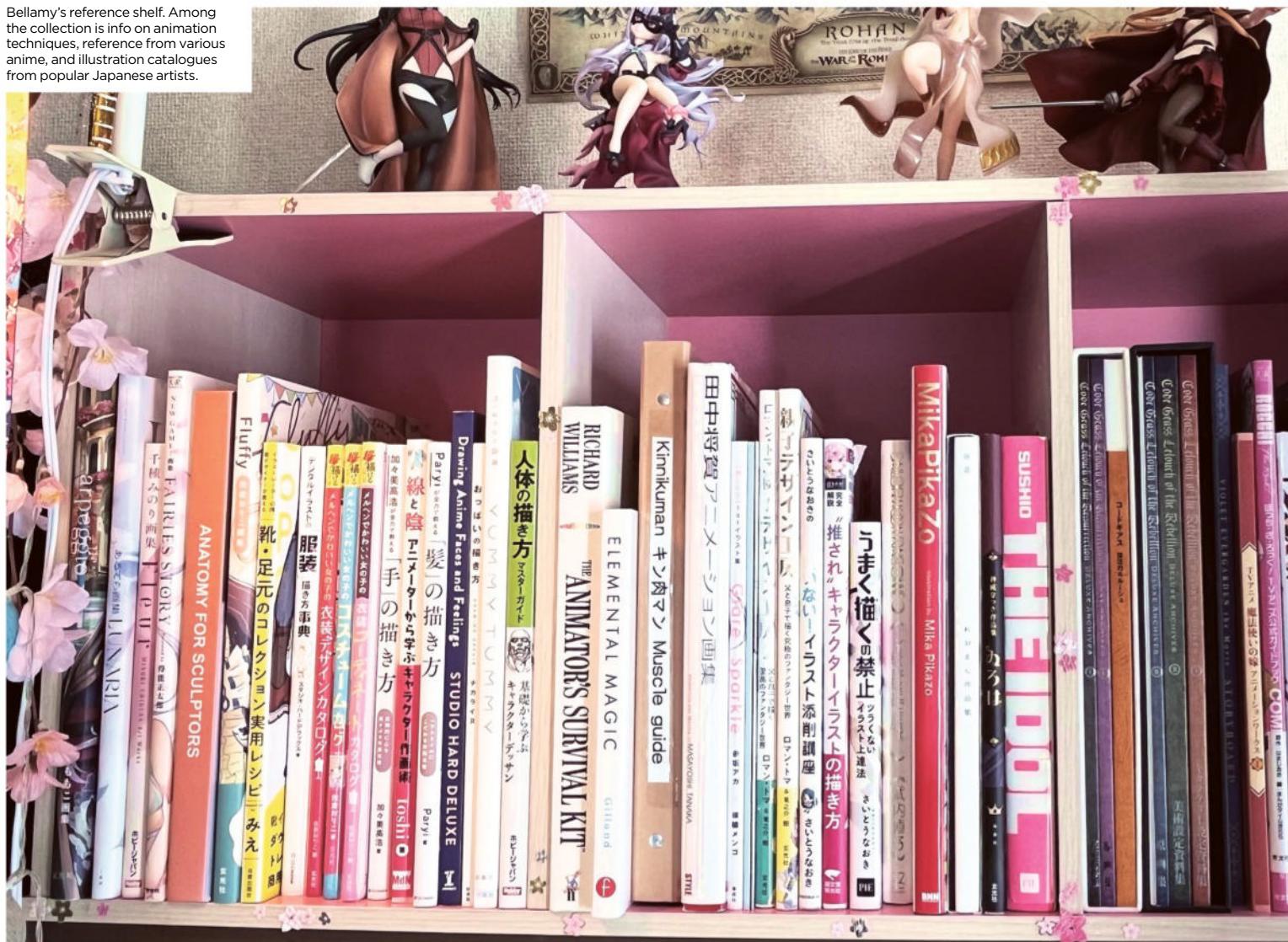


Artist news, software & events



ImagineNation Artist in Residence

Bellamy's reference shelf. Among the collection is info on animation techniques, reference from various anime, and illustration catalogues from popular Japanese artists.



"When I'm not in-person at an anime studio helping out with their projects, this is where I do most of my work," Linnea explains. "My partner Bellamy and I have our work desks together, mine is on the left and hers is on the right.

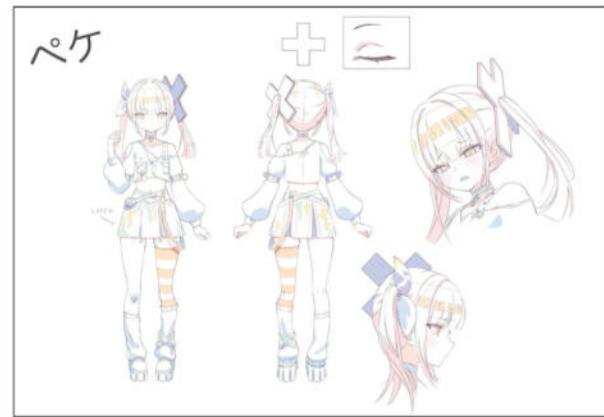
"We wanted to create a cute and comfy atmosphere to work on our projects together. Our main work is as keyframe supervisors, helping quality



Animated artwork created for VShojo Nova, which was art directed by Linnea.

control the drawings of the animation in the Japanese anime pipeline to make sure that the characters are on-model, the perspective is correct, and so on. In order to do this we'll partially or fully redraw animation frames to make sure they match the look of the rest of the show. We also help to correct parts of the animation on request of the director and assistant director for the shows we're working on. Bellamy also does character designs and I do storyboard for some other indie animation projects.

"The desks we are using are douga and sakuga desks, normally found in traditional anime studios in Japan. They have a few small shelves on the right side to hold animation paper, and a light table underneath to help with traditional animation. We rarely end up using the light tables since most of our work is done digitally using our iPad Pros and Clip Studio Paint.



Bellamy was the character designer and keyframe supervisor for the VShojo Nova trailer. This is one of the character sheets.

"The shelves on the right of my desk have sakkan paper used in traditional animation to do keyframe drawing corrections and timesheets that time and notate the animation. In Japan, every cut of anime uses a timesheet to time by the frame when certain cels are used. Anime is timed on 24 frames per second, so you'd write the ➡

Artist news, software & events



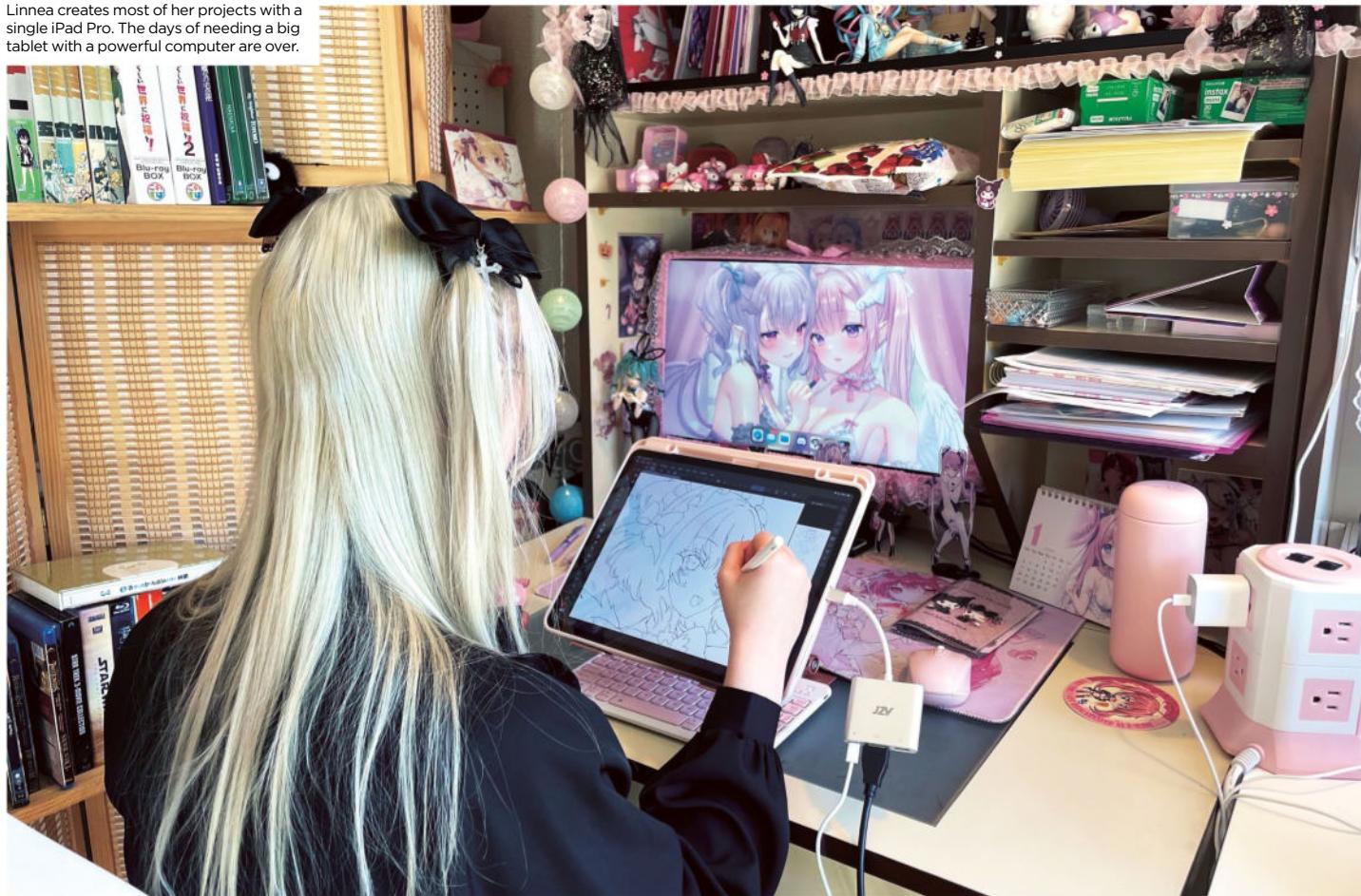
A close-up of Linnea's workspace. Her second monitor has a wallpaper by the illustrator Yuyuko. She uses the second monitor to either respond to work DMs, open references for animation, or just to watch anime while she works.



An illustration by Bellamy for her self-published doujinshi Petals.

ImagineNation Artist in Residence

Linnea creates most of her projects with a single iPad Pro. The days of needing a big tablet with a powerful computer are over.



“It was exhausting and we had so many weird looks, but I’ll never forget dragging those desks across the city”

► number cel on the slot you want keyframes and inbetweens to come in.

“The majority of my shelves hold various collectibles from artists I like, but we also have plenty of art and reference books here that are helpful for creating animation.

“I usually like to work on my own manga projects and illustrations once I come home from work. I’ve been enjoying creating manga by hand recently, so I have various traditional tools stocked to do just that. I also have a phone holder set up so I can stream my process on social media if I’m in the mood.”

BOX CART ADVENTURE



Bellamy adds: “Our studio was born out of both passion and necessity. After our office was shut down, we could keep any furniture we

wanted, so we decided to hold on to our traditional sakuga and douga desks. The real challenge was transporting them. Hiring a moving company was too expensive and a taxi was too small, so in the end we did what we had to do.

“We strapped them down in parts to a small box cart and physically pushed them across Tokyo on foot. It was exhausting, and we’ve never gotten so many weird looks, but I’ll never forget dragging those desks all across the city.”

Linnea works as a keyframe supervisor in the Japanese anime industry. Her work can be seen in TV anime as well as popular VTuber media for groups such as Hololive and VShojo. <https://linneakataja.com>. Bellamy is a character designer, producer and animation supervisor. She is known for dozens of contributions to TV and movies, and designing many animations for online creators. www.instagram.com/bythebelle.



Artist news, software & events

Bellamy gave Linnea this feather duster to brush away eraser shavings. The tools in the cup include inking supplies like nib pens and brush pens.



Linnea is a big fan of KAngel/Ame from the video game Needy Streamer Overload, and created a small shrine to the character.



The shelves of Linnea's animation desk hold a lot of sakkan paper and timesheets, plus some random items like Polaroids for her camera and an extra fan for the hot Japanese summers.

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Tips galore!

I loved all the tips and tricks you had in your last issue. It was a great way to celebrate such a big milestone for the magazine. I really like how you themed them, making it easy to find the sections when I was going back to them later. Huge congrats on reaching 250 issues!

Mo, via email

Rob replies Thanks for dropping us an email Mo, and I'm so pleased to hear you liked our bumper tips collection! We're very lucky to have worked with some of the biggest names in the art world who were ready to help us celebrate, sharing their skills and knowledge with our fantastic community. Hopefully you found at least a few of the themes useful.

Digital texture

Hello Rob. I love drawing and painting, but don't have room to create a setup for watercolours or oils and the like, so am stuck in the digital realm for my art. Something that I've struggled with is giving my art a more painterly look, so

Our ginormous pro tips collection covered topics from anatomy through to book covers and more.



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 250 at ifxm.ag/single-ifx.



Mandy Jurgens showed you how to create digital art with a traditional aesthetic in Photoshop in issue 250.

I can only say thank you for Mandy Jurgens' tutorial in issue 250. That has really helped me make changes to my art that I'm super happy with.

Clare, via email

Rob replies Hi Clare. You're very welcome! Mandy is fantastic and truly manages to give a traditional flavour to digital art. It's easy to download brushes or use tools that emulate that aesthetic, but applying them so they look as you'd hoped is another matter entirely, which I think she explained really well.

Bases covered

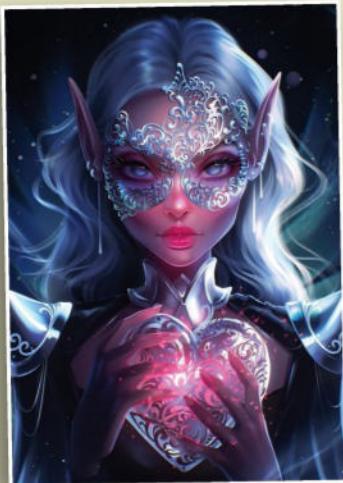
Hi team ImagineFX. I'm writing to thank you for your last issue. I do like the detailed tutorials you publish but they don't always suit my projects. Seeing all those tips in issue 250 was very useful for me, as it meant I could find topics that were much more in my ballpark. It was also much easier to read a section here and there, while on a break, without needing to commit to a large chunk of time dedicated to a single article or workshop. Keep up the good work on the magazine!

Alexia, via email

Rob replies Hello there, Alexia, and thanks for the kind words. I'm glad you found it easy to get what you wanted out of our gigantic tips feature. And I know what you mean; it can be difficult to find a way to set aside time for a more in-depth read, which is why we try to give you all a mix of those detailed articles and the shorter ones. Even our bite-sized Tech Focus pieces offer some useful nuggets of info, while also serving as an inspiration source. We're actually putting together a reader survey to go out in the near future, so keep an eye open for that and let us know what you'd like to see in upcoming issues.



New works that have grabbed our attention



Sandra Winther
[@sandravintherart](https://sandravintherart.com)



John Washam
[@john.washam.art](https://john.washam.art)



JConcepts
[@jordanconcepts_](https://jordanconcepts.com)

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

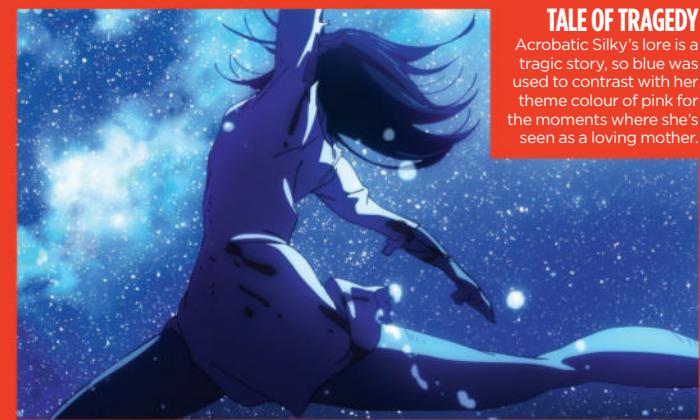
の芸術 THE ART OF DAN DA DAN

Trevor Hogg dodges aliens and ghosts to uncover the calculated and colourful madness of a bizarre anime adaptation



One of the essential elements of visual storytelling is the colour palette, which plays a role in setting the tone, establishing or supporting themes, and directing the viewer's attention by highlighting and de-emphasising objects depending on their importance within the frame. Going into vibrancy overdrive is the anime adaptation of Yukinobu Tatsu's manga DAN DA DAN, now is streaming on Crunchyroll and Netflix, distributed by GKIDS, directed by Fūga Yamashiro, and animated by Science SARU.

The story centres around a dare that sees a young extraterrestrial enthusiast get possessed by a yokai and lose his testicles, while his spirit-believing classmate gets abducted by sexual reproduction-obsessed aliens that ➤



All images ©YT/S.D. Courtesy of GKIDS





CREATIVE FREEDOM

Colour script artist Sophie Li was given a freedom to come up with the character closeup shots that begin the somewhat psychedelic opening title sequence.



TRIPPY OPENING CREDITS

Every good show needs a unique title sequence to really hook the audience

"We had a colour script that was used to make the colours for the opening title sequence," notes Kondo. "But the direction was to make it more psychedelic, and each frame impactful. The opening draws the viewer in and gets them invested in it, in addition to the opening being something that's fun to watch, which is the main purpose of it."

Li adds: "I worked heavily with directions from Abel Góngora; he had a clear vision of what he wanted in the later parts of the opening. For when Okarun mimics where his balls once were, we had a discussion about whether to use blue or red for his aura because red was used in the show, but the director had a clear vision that it had to be blue. It was a back and forth. The UFO shot was simple and blue, but at the time I was like, 'What if it's a rainbow-coloured feeling like in the manga?'

There was more freedom allowed in conceptualising the first couple of shots. "I did a lot of versions of the characters' faces in the opening closeups," says Li. "Those were fun to do because it's breaking away from the storytelling. I could go crazy and put the feeling of DAN DA DAN in the colours."



DIFFERENT LOOK (BELOW)

The opening titles provided an opportunity to experiment with the colours free from the storytelling.





MONOCHROME MELEE
Momo and Okarun during a shot in the black and white fight with the Flatwoods Monster in Episode 102.

All images ©YTS/D. Courtesy of GKIDS

► inadvertently awaken her psychic abilities – and live to regret doing so. And in the middle of all this craziness is a budding romance that holds everything together.

The character colour concepts were shared between Yamashiro and Science SARU colour designer Satoshi Hashimoto. "There was a mutual understanding so we didn't have a lot of issues with the base colours," recalls Hashimoto. "What we ended up dealing with more was figuring out the colours for each cut and scene, especially because this was director Yamashiro's first time working as a full director of a series or film.

"There were a lot of times when he would get back a composited movie version of the cut, or we would look at the work in progress and he would say, 'Oh, no, I want to do retakes' on this and that, because maybe it wasn't

what he was expecting. Especially the action scenes in Episode 101; we were doing retakes and multiple versions for a long time to get them right."

MANGA REFERENCES

The source material was influential. "What I noticed about the manga is that it has everyday and occult themes, action, and the romance between Momo and Okarun," says Hashimoto. "I feel with a lot of other animated projects, you have one theme or genre that's strong. If it's a romance project it's just romance. If it's an action project it's just action. But this time there were all these different kinds of



THROWING SHADeS

Turbo Granny doesn't always retain the same red colour. Sometimes orange takes over the character depending on her mental state.

genres mixed together, so we pushed things in different directions based on the context and content of a scene.

"As for the general colour direction, maybe this is hard to understand if you're not familiar with the original manga if you aren't Japanese; there are lot of references to Japanese retro pop culture in the manga, both in props and items, but people will also mention old songs or commercials. ►

“We pushed in different directions based on context and content of the scenes”



Feature



DOLLED UP

Exploring various poses and expressions for the doll possessed by Turbo Granny.



GETTING A GRASP ON PSYCHIC POWERS

By moving her hands, Momo is able to manipulate and control her new psychic abilities.



MOMENTS OF GOOFY DELIGHT

Momo gets physically exaggerated to emphasise her enjoyment eating the giant crab she defeated.

» I was also inspired by that to create something more nostalgic and retro-feeling, especially in the normal everyday scenes in terms of how the backgrounds are drawn and coloured. But then with the action scenes I wanted to contrast that and go with a much more vivid look."

DISTINCTIVE LOGIC

Director Yamashiro brought a unique take on the use of colour throughout the series. "When a director says you have one theme colour as a colour person, you always think that the complementary colour also has to be there," says Sophie Li, a colour script artist at Science SARU. "However,

FLATWOODS MONSTER

The Flatwoods Monster gets a black and white treatment, while the red associated with Okarun serves as an accent.

for DAN DA DAN it has to be monochrome, as per the director's vision, and that part was tricky to get to. We had a lot of iterations where we did different blues for the Serpo [a race of aliens], find the right one and say, 'We don't want any other colour. How do we make it work in the scene?'

"We slowly build up to the point where the whole image is dyed in the same colour for the fight sequences. DAN DA DAN was interesting and challenging because it's not like those colours don't appear when it's daily life. Those colours still appear, but they follow a different colour logic."

The series' character and story arcs are reflected through the colours. Li adds: "Because we already know what the story is with the manga, Yamashiro-san had clear directions

on everything, so I'm iterating what he said to me in the meetings. But the colour has to show who has the upper hand in the battle and that's what makes it easier to think about. So when Okarun and Momo are losing a fight their colour dies down a bit, while the colour of the monster becomes stronger."

At times an absence of colour dominates the screen. "For the Flatwoods Monster, I watched black and white films, such as Sin City or the works of Akira Kurosawa, to figure out the vibe," reveals Li. "It needed to be a stern but strong character and had to read well in the space. I don't think about it in colour at all.

"And vice versa when I did the Acrobatic Silky sequences; I started with the pink and tried to balance »



“I was inspired to create something that was more nostalgic and felt retro”

**TRANSFORMATION CURSE**

A major point of discussion for Okarun was how far his transformation needed to go for various changes to occur.

THE MANY FACES OF A MORPHING PROTAGONIST

Okarun's various states of transformation during the series presented a challenge

"With Okarun, we see his skin becomes greyer, and his hair turns whiter. There's a pattern or level to the extent of his transformation," explains Hashimoto. "We have the regular Okarun, half-transformed Okarun, cursed Okarun, and we have a pattern or two where the hair transforms or he gets the mask on with the big teeth. Sometimes it's the whole face or only part of it. Luckily, we had model sheets for all of those ready, but basically had to figure out on our end at which point the hair turns white or grey, how far the transformation needs to go for the various changes to occur. There was a lot of trial and error trying to work that out."

**RED FLAIR**

Each of Okarun's states was colour designed, with red highlights being a throughline.



ODE TO THE ORIGINAL
A graphic panel recreated from the manga that was reinterpreted with colour.

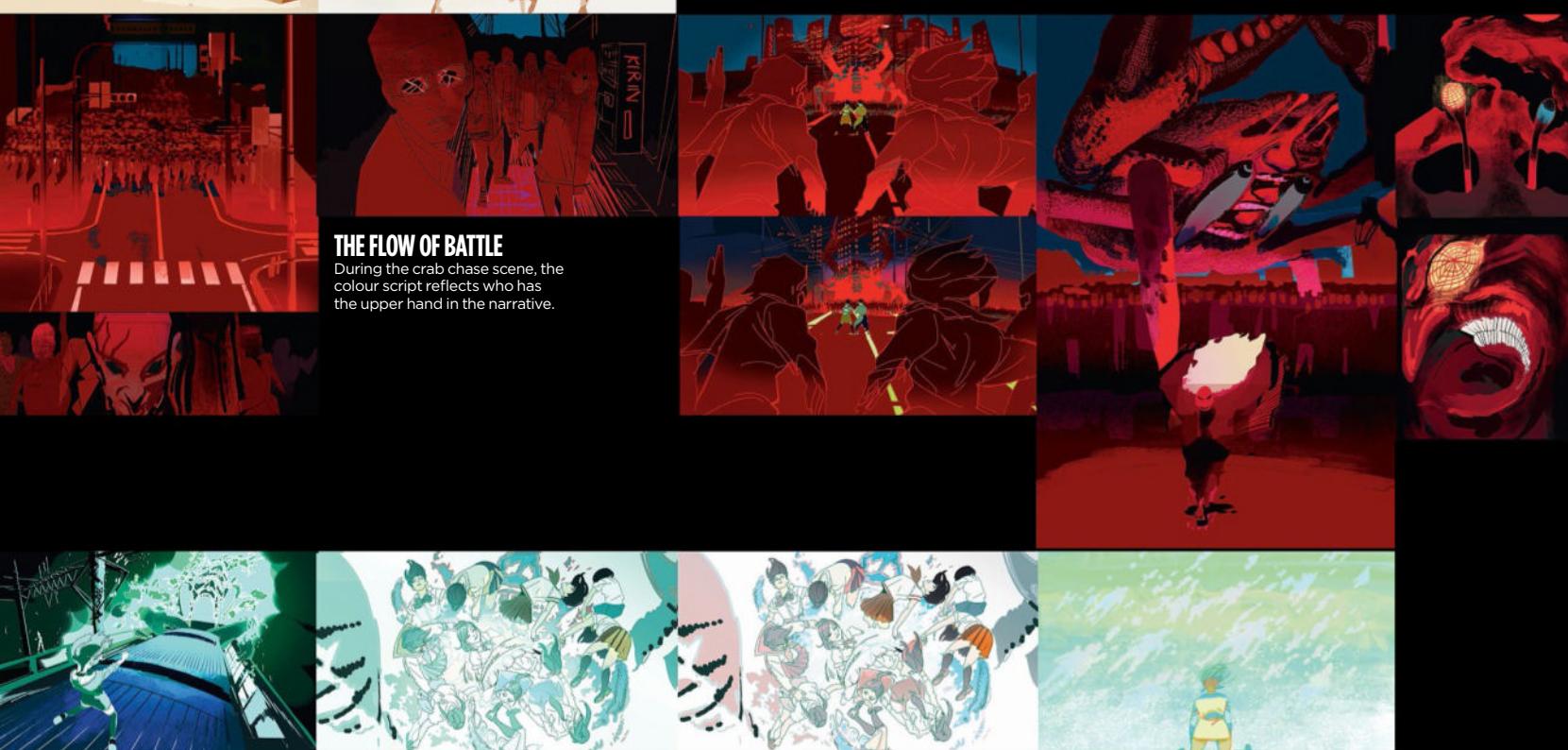
VIBRANT ACTION

The vivid, high saturation modern anime look was saved for action scenes to make them pop.





“We had to figure out how the crab would influence the shot’s colour on a cut-by-cut, scene-by-scene basis”



► out the other colours. For Silky, it was tricky because it’s pinkish, but is also red and rusty because of the rusted, decayed background.”

The colour script that went through the most iterations was the Acrobatic Silky fight, which intercuts with her backstory. “There are so many things going on,” says Li. “I worked on it for a long time. I think about the two different parts separately. From my point of view, Silky’s story is so sad and impactful but grounded in reality. I wanted it to look realistic. The

sequence where Silky is dancing on the rooftop, she’s in the dark but illuminated by a sea of light. It’s like the most beautiful dance you’ve ever seen on a beautiful stage.”

CRUSTACEAN ILLUMINATION

Then there are moments where the characters go in and out of the daily life and action colour schemes, such as when Okarun and Momo encounter the crab as they attempt to lift Turbo Granny’s curse on Okarun. “It was difficult,” admits Science SARU colour

designer Makiho Kondo. “We had an idea of how far the crab’s influence extends. We would say that within a few metres, maybe it would make all that kind of stuff red. But it was deciding how far that goes. We had to figure that out on a cut-by-cut, scene-by-scene basis. If they’re in the sky then they go back to normal colours. It was difficult to figure out whether they were normal or red.”

A dramatic scene for both the viewer and Momo is when she unlocks her psychic abilities. “You can see that there’s a lot of surprise when Momo first activates her powers,” notes Hashimoto. “That’s shared by the



GOULISH CUT

Pink was the theme colour of Acrobatic Silky, with the black hair serving as a reminder that she is an evil spirit.



SETTING THE TONE FOR DRAMA

Each action sequence has its own colour theme, from alien cool to yōkai warm

"We have the overall colour that we're going to use, but then we have to make adjustments to the tones," Hashimoto explains. "We have to decide what exact shade of red, pink or grey we're going to use. That also changes based on how it affects each character, because if you're

using the exact same tone for the entire screen, it becomes boring."

"With the Turbo Granny scenes she's red, but it's not a bright, vivid red, it's more of a darker, grotesque red. Then with Acrobatic Silky we went for more of a pink colour. It's a bit brighter than some of the other yōkai

because you have that motherly nature of the character. But at the same time she's still an evil spirit, so using the strong blacks within that environment was a way for us to express the darkness of the character while emphasising the motherly love aspect. We did that well, I hope."

INTERSECTING NARRATIVES

The colour script for when Okarun gets possessed by Turbo Granny in the tunnel and Momo's Serpo abduction, plus the ensuing fight when the storylines meet.



people who are watching as well, because it happens so suddenly. She turns this emerald green colour, which we continued to use later on. For example, during the later episodes you'll see Momo take this pair of hands out of her back.

"But there was one point we did well in terms of depicting the growth of her powers. That was in the episode where she uses her psychic powers to grab Turbo Granny's red soul, which looks like a flame. We go to Momo's point of view and everything turns black and white. We did a good job of showing her growth and making that easy to understand for the audience."



SPIRITUAL TONES

Warm colours were used for yōkai, with a dark red for Turbo Granny.

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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 250

April 2025

Celebrate our milestone 250th issue with a bumper selection of magical tips from artists including Tony DiTerlizzi, Iain McCaig and more! Donato Giancola also has advice for fun sketches, and learn to create our unicorn cover.



Issue 249

March 2025

Roll the dice and grab a copy of our packed tabletop games issue! We chat with three of the artists behind hit TCG Disney Lorcan and get awesome tips from game art specialist Vincent Dutrait, plus 2024's top releases and more.



Issue 248

February 2025

Dive into the Alien universe with a hive full of xenomorph-shaped treats. Explore the series' impact on popular culture, read our chat with the concept artists of Alien: Resurrection, and learn how to make epic fan art just like our cover.



Issue 247

January 2025

Dungeons & Dragons is 50 years old! To celebrate, we look back at the history of the RPG's iconic art, including an interview with the legendary Larry Elmore. There are also top character design tips and advice for magic illustrations.

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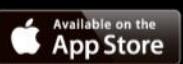


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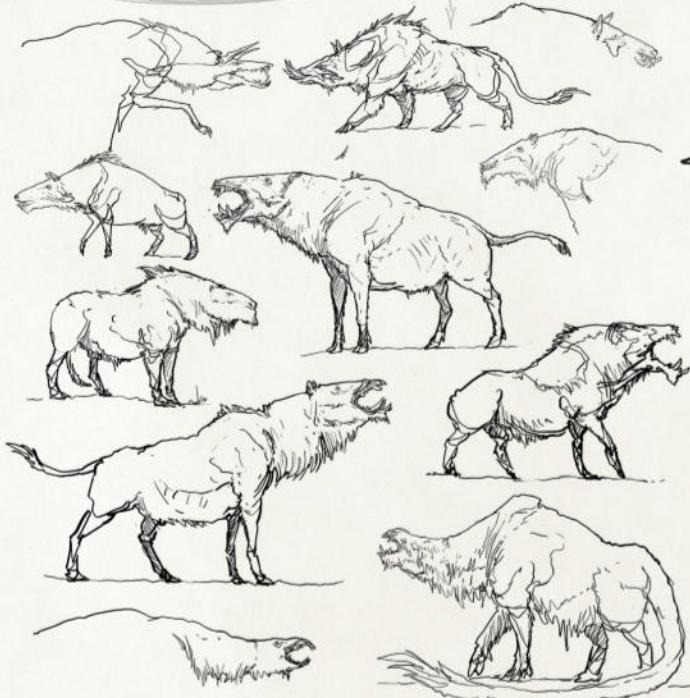
Sketchbook

Florent Desailly

Fierce beasts from French folklore are among the mythical creatures reimagined in the artist's personal project

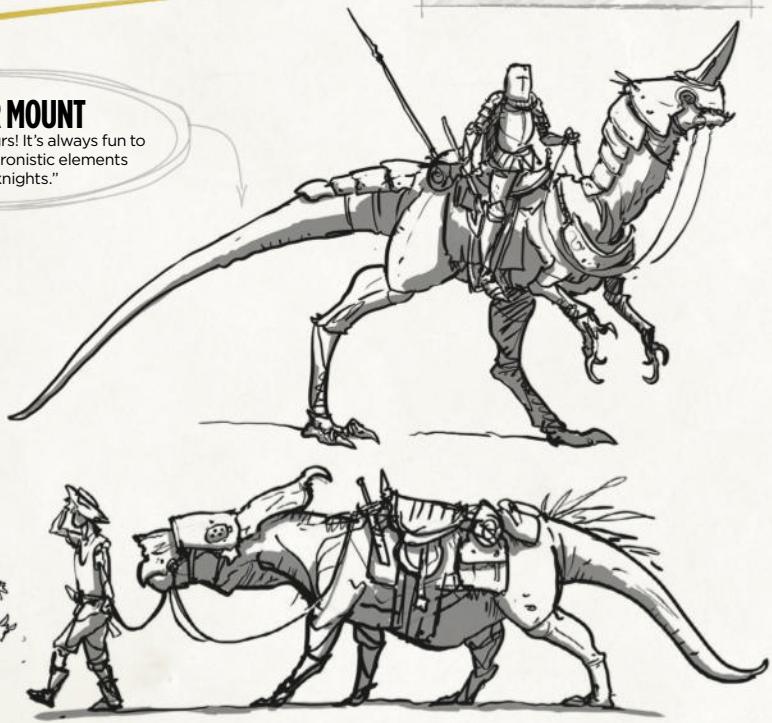
BETE DU GÉVAUDAN

"My take on the Beast of Gévaudan, inspired by the Entelodontidae, or prehistoric hell pig, for a personal project where I reimagine creatures from French folklore."



DINOSAUR MOUNT

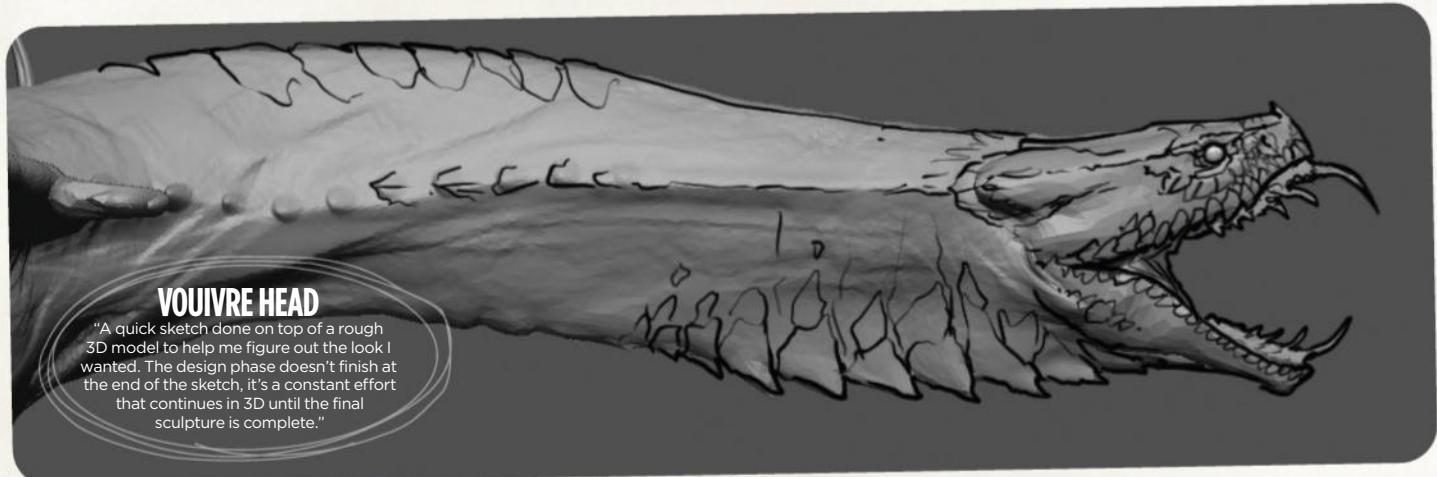
"I love drawing dinosaurs! It's always fun to mix them with anachronistic elements like feudal knights."



“The design phase doesn't finish at the end of the sketch, it's a constant effort that continues in 3D”

VOUVRE HEAD

"A quick sketch done on top of a rough 3D model to help me figure out the look I wanted. The design phase doesn't finish at the end of the sketch, it's a constant effort that continues in 3D until the final sculpture is complete."



Artist PROFILE

Florent Desailly

LOCATION: France



Creature designer Florent specialises in games and films, recently working on animated adventure movie *Flow*. As a huge wildlife enthusiast, he loves to design and explore weird and interesting fantasy creatures. Florent works with a mix of rough 2D drawings and more polished 3D sketches, and learned his craft solo while sharing his journey online. <https://lakoh.artstation.com>

Sketchbook Florent Desailly

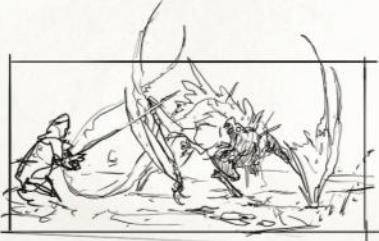


TARRASQUE

"A sketch on top of a rough 3D blockout to figure out the design of a sculpture I was working on. I like to go back and forth between 3D and 2D, as it allows you to refresh the eye and take the best of both techniques."

VOUVRE SLAUGHTER

"Some thumbnail sketches for a keyframe I wanted to make."

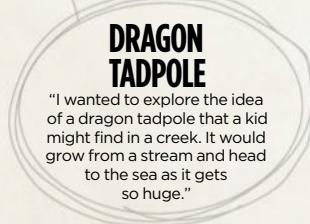
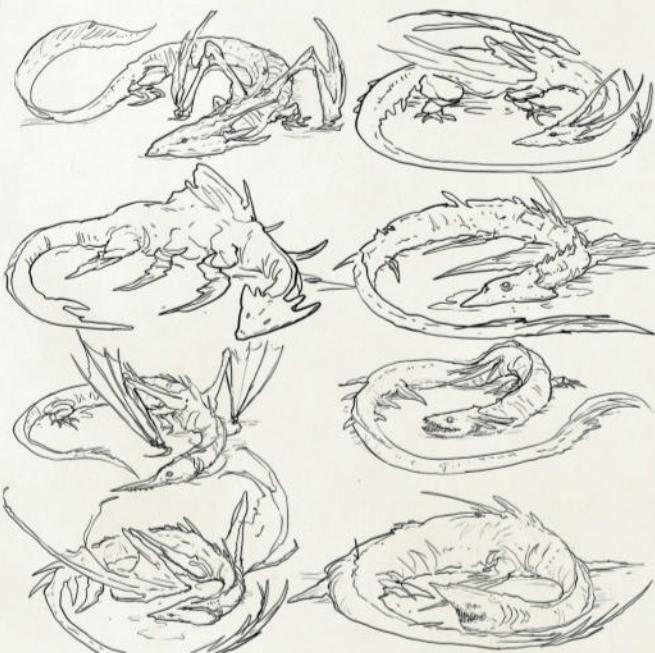
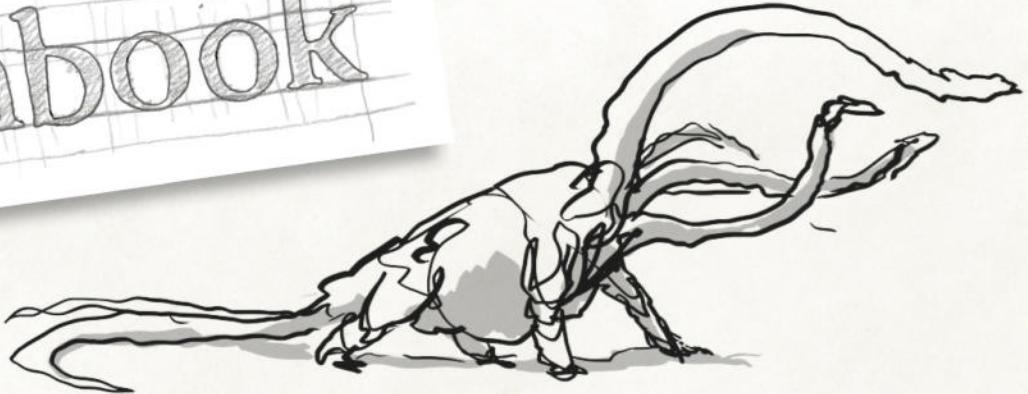


MAMMAL MOUNT

"Sketching imaginary mounts is always fun. Having the human scale integrating in the sketch makes it more natural. I can add lots of storytelling elements in the rider's costume and saddle."



Sketchbook



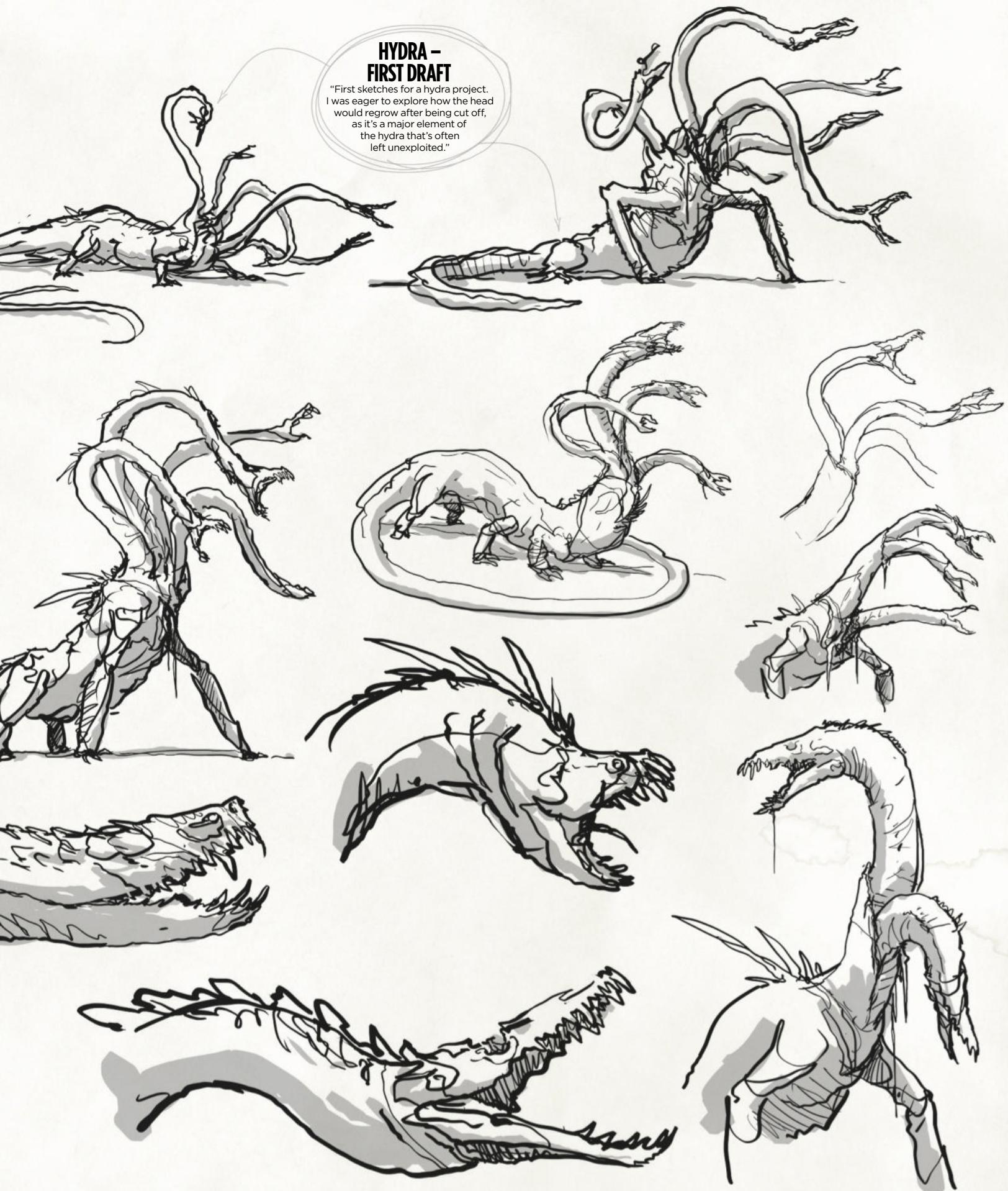
DRAGON TADPOLE

"I wanted to explore the idea of a dragon tadpole that a kid might find in a creek. It would grow from a stream and head to the sea as it gets so huge."

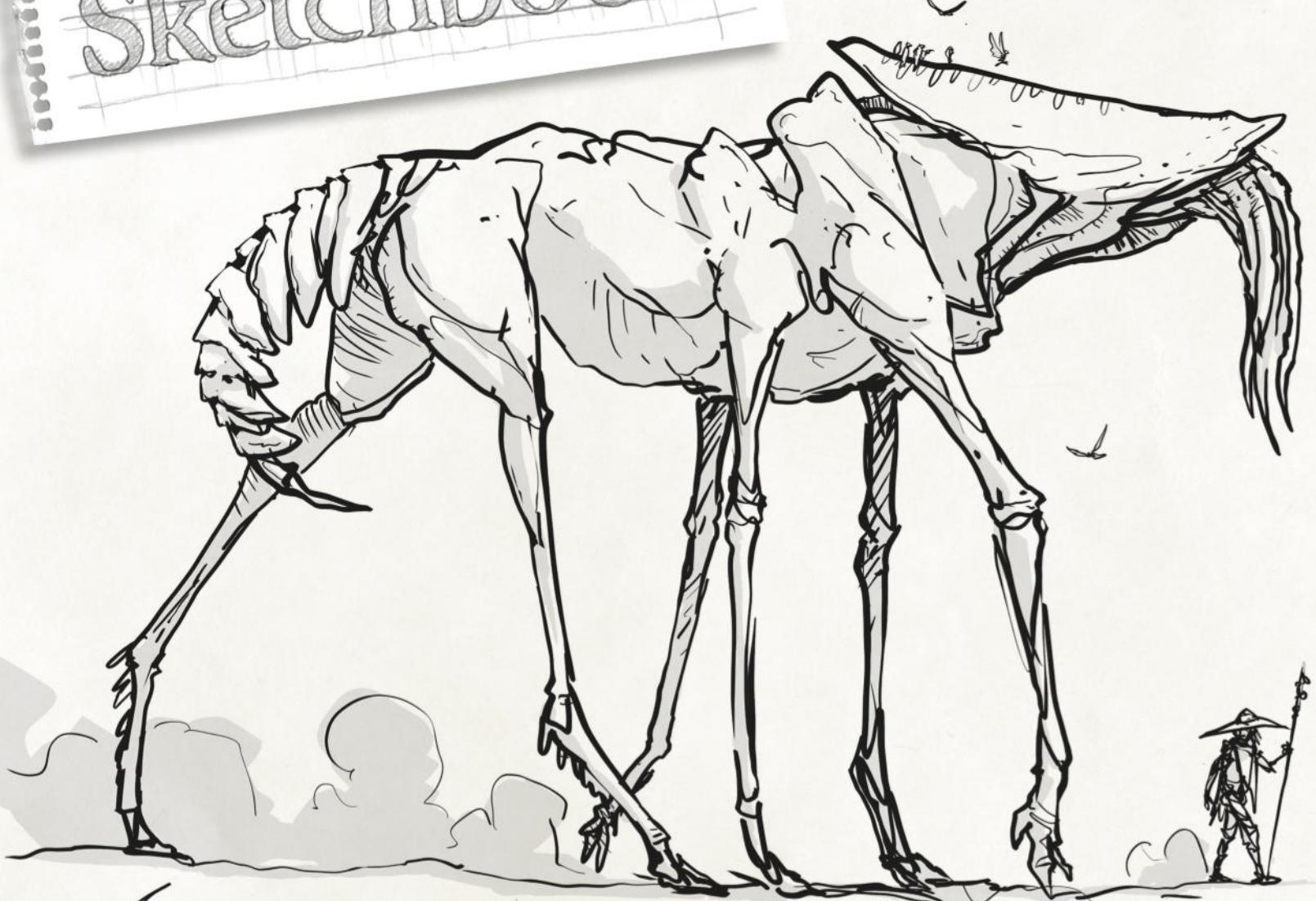
Sketchbook Florent Desailly

HYDRA – FIRST DRAFT

"First sketches for a hydra project. I was eager to explore how the head would regrow after being cut off, as it's a major element of the hydra that's often left unexploited."

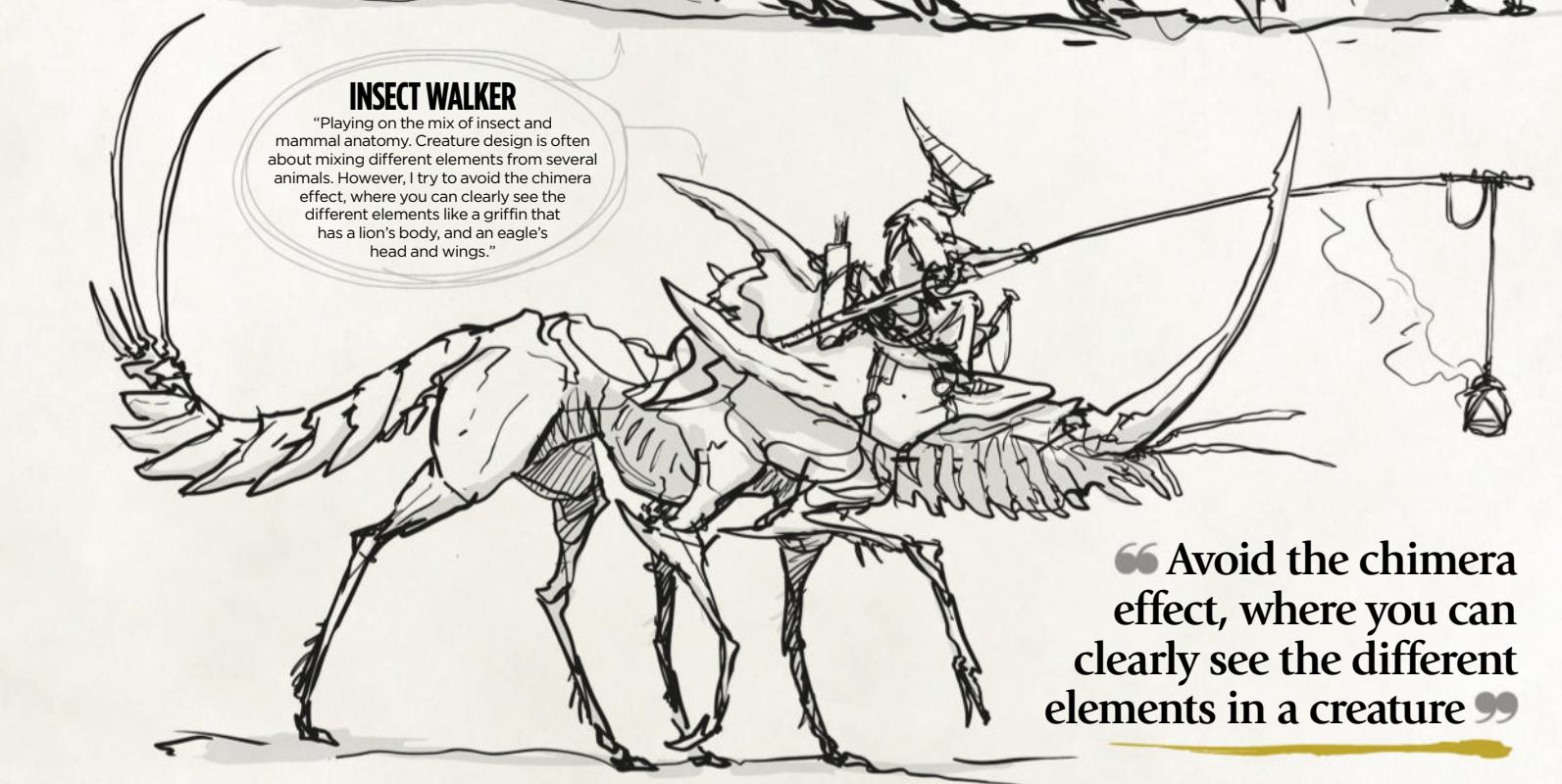


Sketchbook



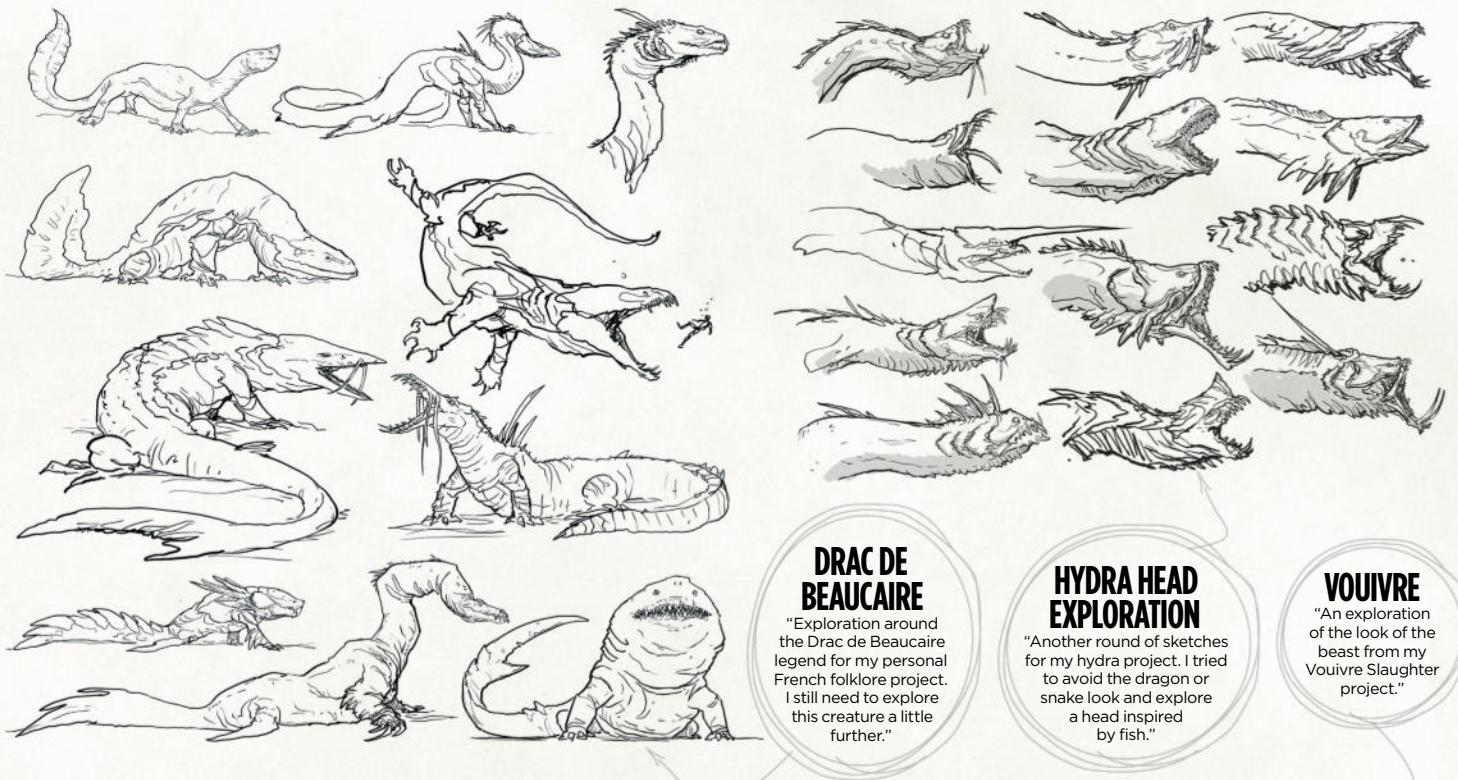
INSECT WALKER

"Playing on the mix of insect and mammal anatomy. Creature design is often about mixing different elements from several animals. However, I try to avoid the chimera effect, where you can clearly see the different elements like a griffin that has a lion's body, and an eagle's head and wings."



“Avoid the chimera effect, where you can clearly see the different elements in a creature”

Sketchbook Florent Desailly



DRAC DE BEAUCRAIRE

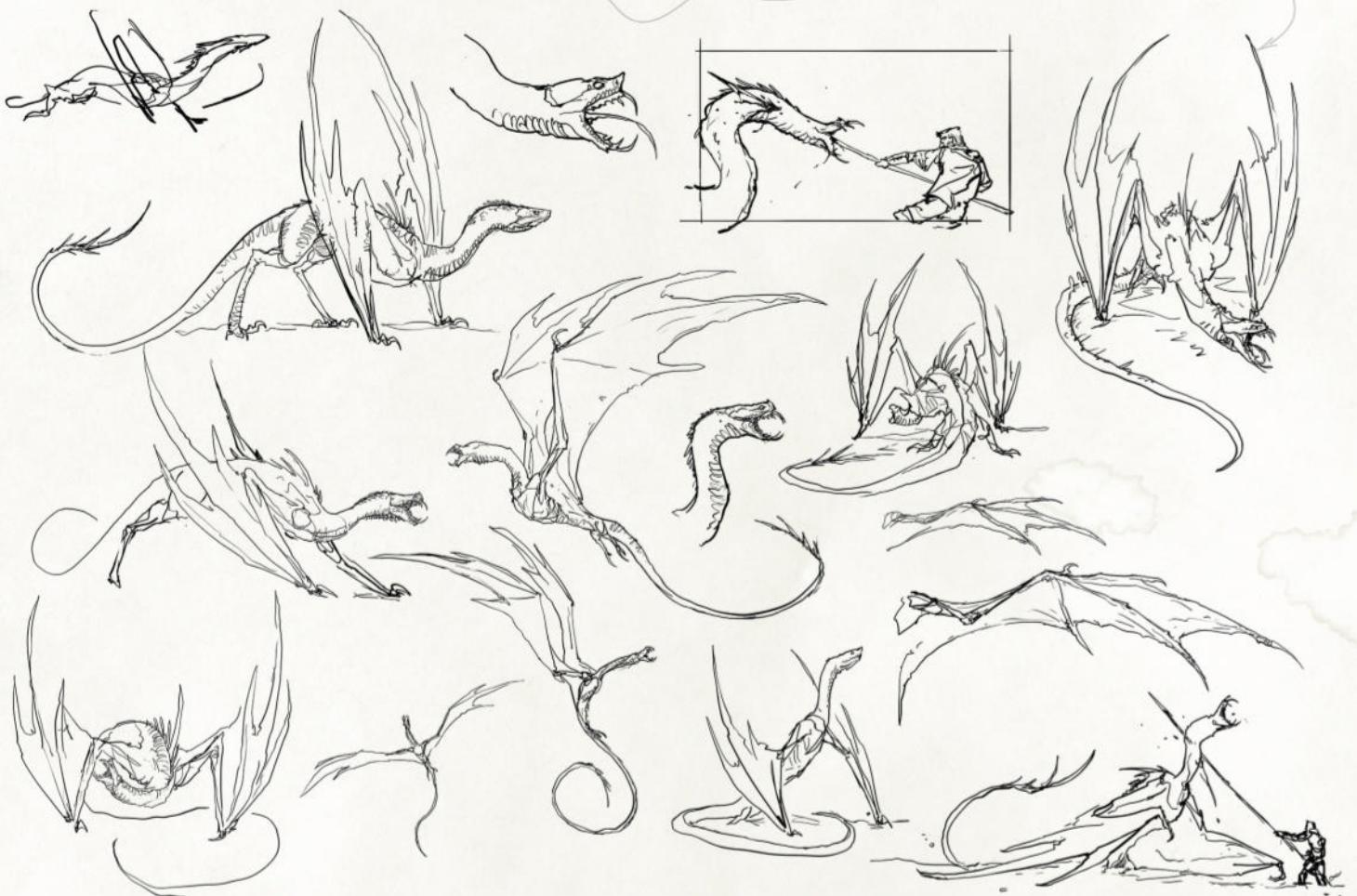
"Exploration around the Drac de Beaucaire legend for my personal French folklore project. I still need to explore this creature a little further."

HYDRA HEAD EXPLORATION

"Another round of sketches for my hydra project. I tried to avoid the dragon or snake look and explore a head inspired by fish."

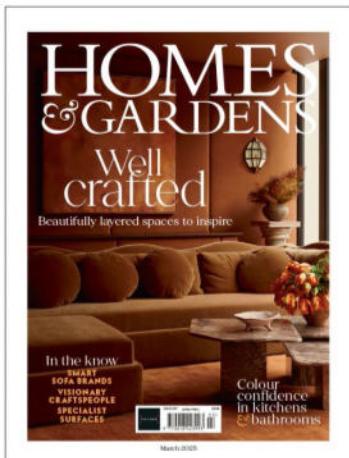
VOUVRE

"An exploration of the look of the beast from my Vouivre Slaughter project."

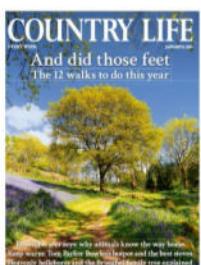


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Advice from the world's best artists



This issue:

58 Draw an exciting Mega Man cover

See how the duo of Kenny Ruiz and Noiry inked and coloured our stunning manga cover art.

64 Find strength in abstraction

Clément Blum develops concept art by leaning into the abstract ideas that spring to mind.

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Cyberpunk aesthetics meet a little bit of retro style in Tano Bonfanti's anime piece.

70 Combine your inspirations

A sci-fi craft is merged with a classic Czech painting by Adolf Lachman for a book cover.

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Edward Barons teams up Photoshop and Blender for a gorgeous concept scene.

78 Embrace the weird ideas

Don't hold back! Arne Billen explains the backstory to his D&D-inspired character.

Clip Studio Paint

DRAW AN EXCITING MEGA MAN COVER

Follow along as **Kenny Ruiz** and **Noiry** guide us through the process of crafting a cover for Mega Man Timelines



What better choice for teaching you how to create a stunning character cover than the iconic Mega Man. Udon Entertainment commissioned cover art for Mega Man Timelines, which was inspired by Mega Man 11. The idea was to use the game's iconic enemy selection grid and make Mega Man stand out. The main challenge

for us was to capture the character's strength and agility.

For a cover, it's crucial to work directly in the final reproduction format or a proportional one. From the start, you must consider the space needed for the logo, publisher, and other essential information, which impacts the composition.

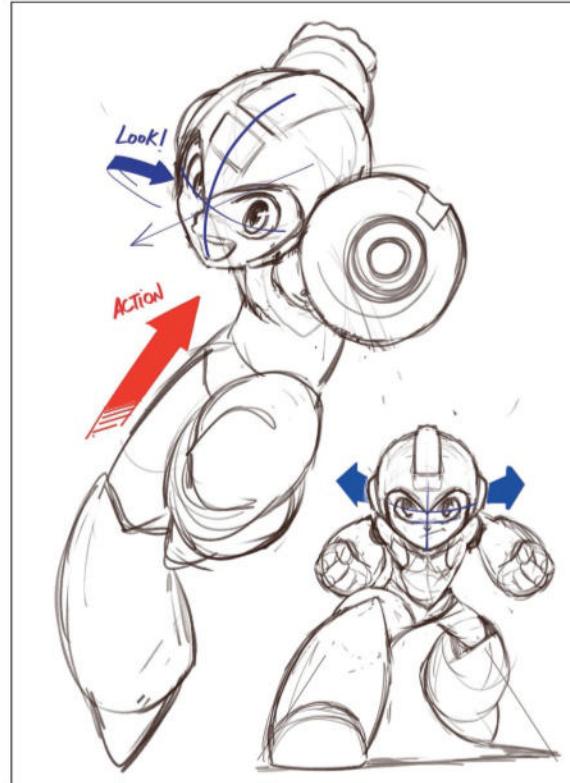
First, Kenny will create a rough sketch and test some options. Often, the first is the best, but it's important to push beyond our comfort zone and try alternatives. He'll then work on the main character separately, before Noiry takes over to talk about her process for using colour and light to make the character pop.

SKETCH, INKING AND BACKGROUND

Photograph by José García-Pozuelo

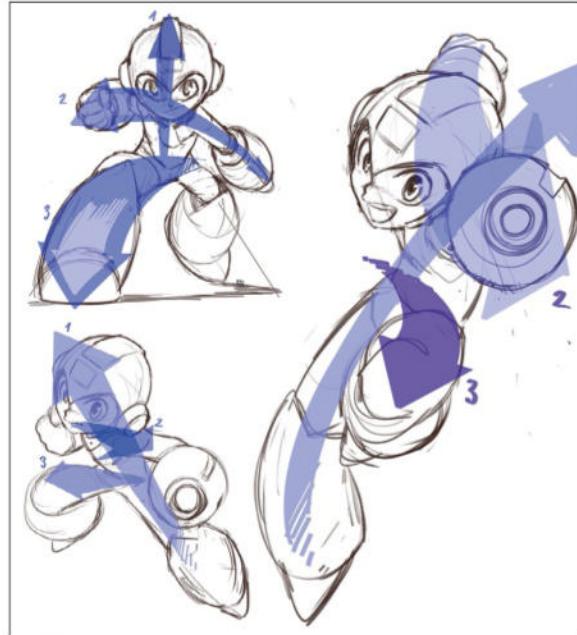
Artist PROFILE
Kenny Ruiz
LOCATION: Spain

Kenny has worked as a comic artist for over 20 years creating series such as *Dos Espadas* and *Team Phoenix*, and has collaborated with writers including Víctor Santos and Kid Toussaint. www.kennyruiz.com



1 Explore visual connection

I began with two options for creating a connection with the viewer. The first was a direct frontal gaze that challenges the audience. I also tried a secondary gaze where Mega Man is pictured in dynamic action but, for a split second, locks eyes with the viewer.



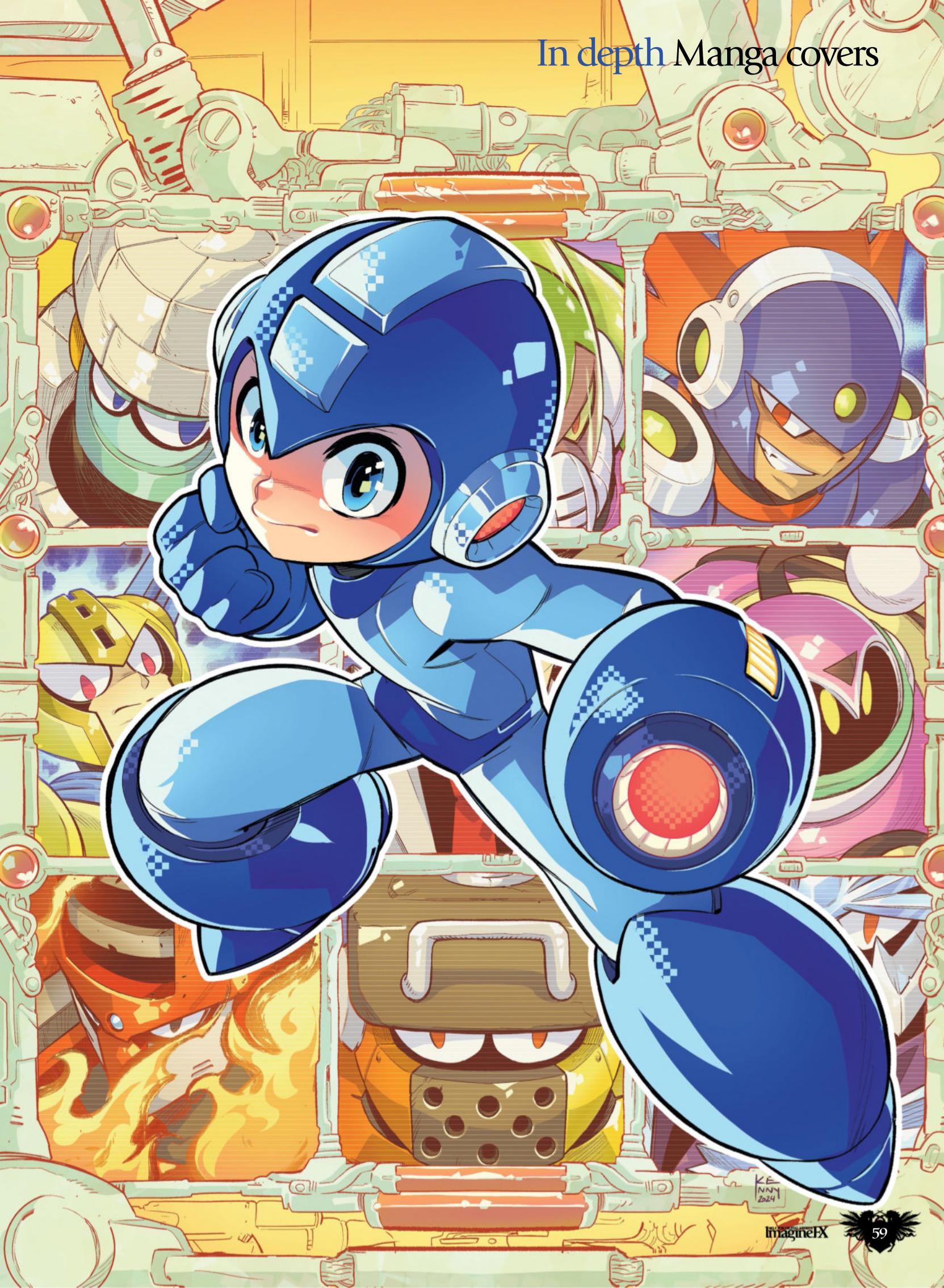
2 Make motion lines

I love dynamic poses, so I also explored different options for them. For me, the recipe for success divides a character's movement into three axes:

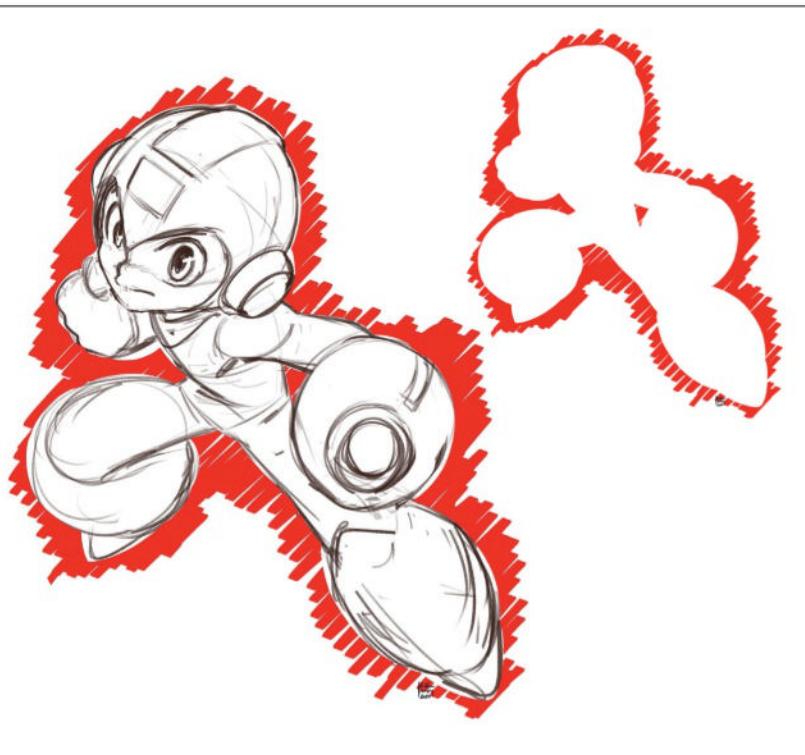
- Main movement: the body's general direction.
- Shoulder axis: connects the hands.

- Hip axis: defines leg positioning.

Sometimes all three of these reinforce the same action. If the second and third axes go in opposite directions, then the action feels more dynamic. I also try simpler compositions, which can often get better results. ➤

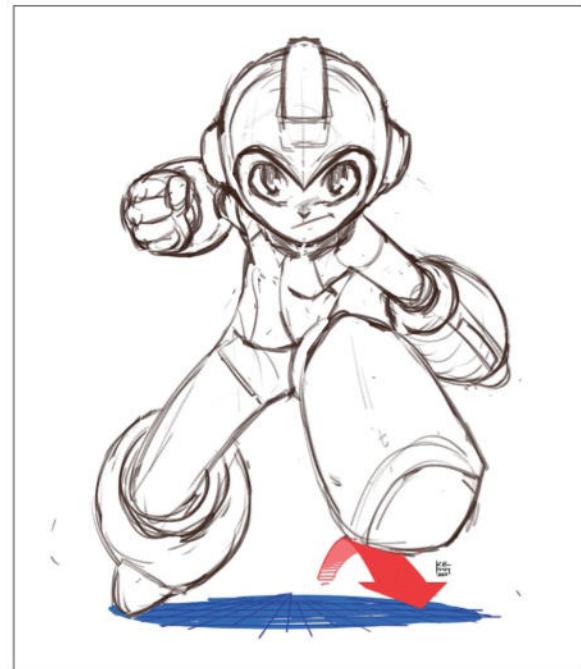


Workshops



3 Consider the silhouette and negative space

The silhouette is crucial. Throughout the process, ensure the negative space – the space left by the character – is clear and easy to read. It's essential to find those gaps between the joints. If necessary, I slightly modify the pose to achieve them. You can see this between Mega Man's laser cannon and his hip.



4 Create an imbalance

Imbalance always suggests movement. If the character isn't fully grounded, the viewer immediately imagines the next step in the action. Simply lifting one foot can create that sensation of a step in motion. Instinctively, I tend to look for balanced poses because they are more visually comfortable, but I fight against this and push the angles to the maximum.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

CLIP STUDIO PAINT

CUSTOM BRUSHES: KENNY PEN

Although I have tons of brushes, I ink everything with a single pen created from a G-pen. It has an irregular stroke to create small imperfections that feel more human.

PIXEL BRUSH

I prefer hard brushes for shadows and highlights, and airbrushes or soft brushes for gradients. This Pixel Brush can easily be replicated.

GET YOUR RESOURCES

See page 5 now!



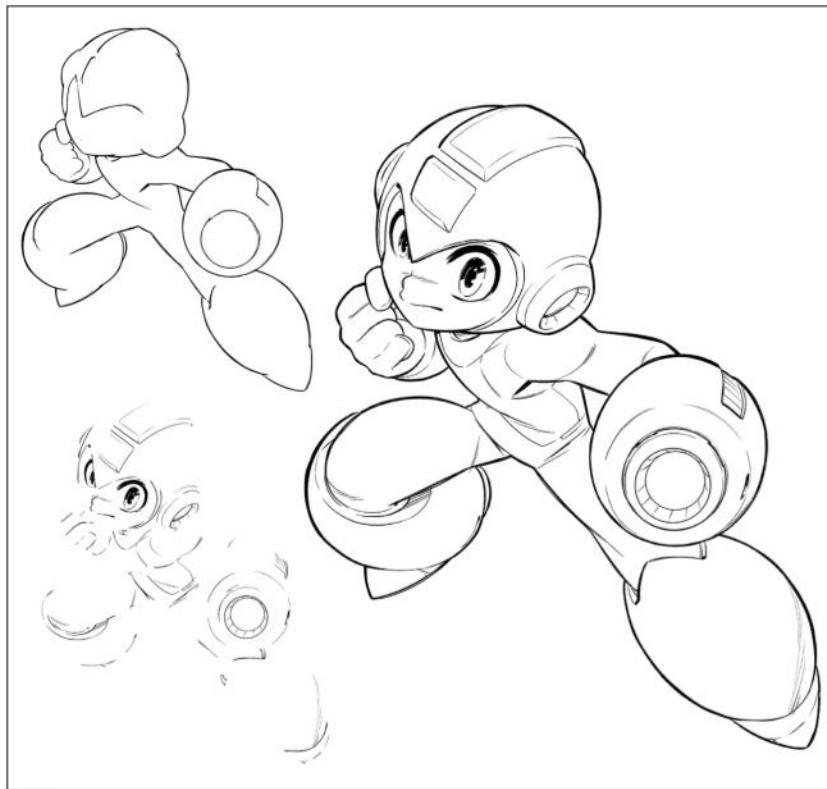
5 Depth and movement

Pay close attention to depth in the figure and ensure there are at least three depth planes in the pose. Specifically for a cover, making the character leap forward creates the feeling that they're bursting towards the reader. You may remember Wolverine and the New X-Men breaking through the cover. Although my option isn't that extreme, I always keep the idea in mind.



6 Perfect the facial expression

I always ink the face first – if the gaze is on point, everything else falls into place. The line in drawing is like the words in a poem; each one conveys shape, volume, movement and rhythm. It's amazing how much a single line can express. I always keep in mind the priority of each stroke. For the eyes, I aim for fluidity and a lighter stroke because I believe it conveys humanity.



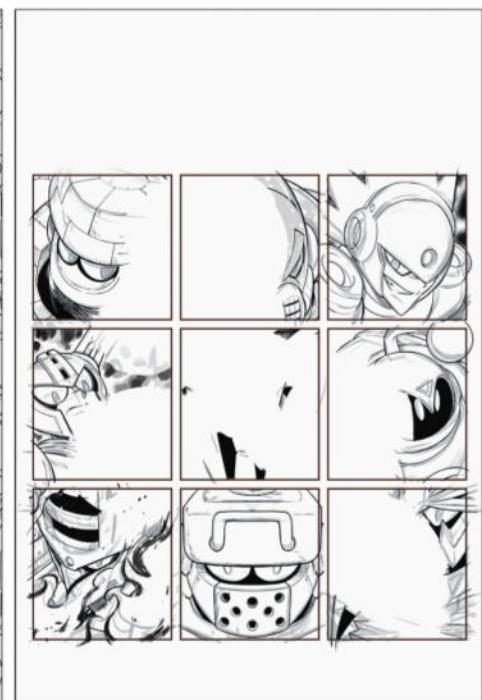
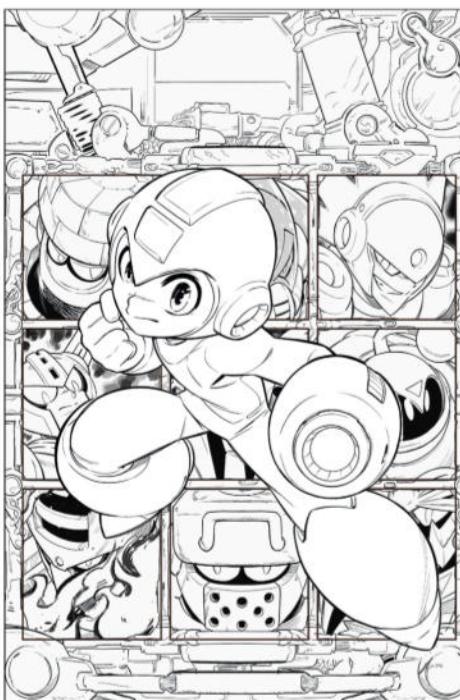
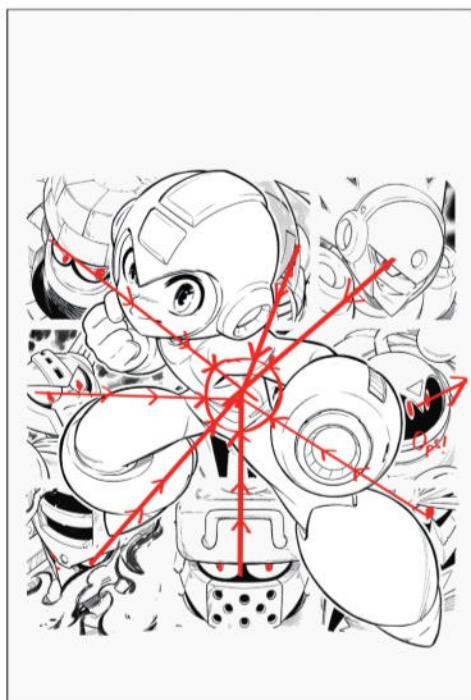
7 Develop outlines and details

Thicken the contour lines and vary the strokes to add volume. Where the volume is more defined, we want the stroke to thicken slightly. You can see this on the right thigh, where it overlaps with the boot. With a thinner stroke, we'll refine textures and auxiliary lines. The lines that convey less important information are kept very thin with little modulation; they're light and subtle.



8 Mechanical texture

A machinery-style design places Mega Man in his universe, and for this I use thin lines to avoid visual noise. The background is like another character, but we often don't give it much attention. My technique is to think about the purpose of everything I draw. For instance, a fuel container that connects to a pipe, which then powers some gizmo, which needs a turbine. Giving everything an internal logic makes it more fun to draw, and that way, can help us pay more attention to it.



9 Fill the background with villains

Each frame features an enemy from *Mega Man 11*, all directing their gaze to the centre, other than Bounce Man and his tricky silhouette, for which I chose the lesser of two evils. There's little space to characterise them, but tilting the perspective in closeups is useful; a slightly low-angle shot gives a sense of superiority, while a high-angle shot feels more challenging. To avoid repetition, I had to use several tricks. ➤

Workshops



10 Beat the final boss

Once everything is together, add a power line, in this case a white contour that separates the figure from the background. With that done, it's time to pass our Mega Man over to the colourist, Noiry. There might be some things that I'd like to change, and this can be the

hardest part of the profession: we have to live with the imperfections and accept that our flaws are just as much a part of us as our strengths. When I see something that doesn't work, I make sure to learn from it for next time. But this illustration? It's already in the past – and no one should live trapped in the past. The only way is forward!

COLOUR, LIGHTING AND SHADOW



Artist PROFILE

Noiry

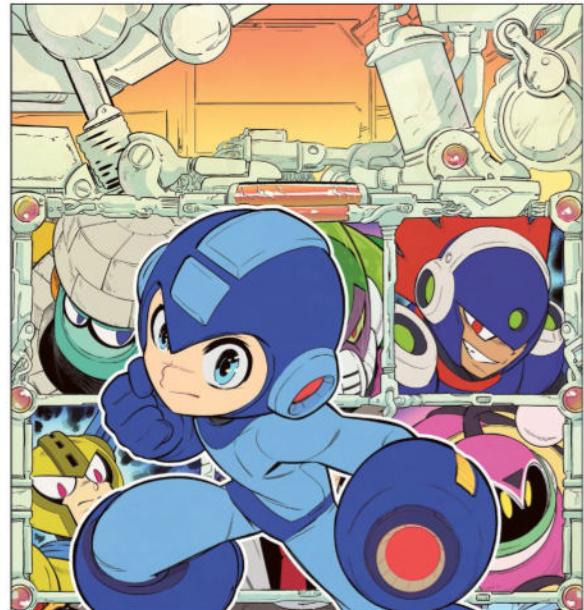
LOCATION: Spain

Noiry has been a comic artist and colourist for more than a decade. Her forte is bright, explosive colours and narrative palettes. You can see her work in Kenny Ruiz's Team Phoenix and Sylvain Repos' Yojimbot. <https://noirgraphite.com>



11 Find the right style

Whenever you get a new artwork for colouring, read the image and try to figure out what style fits it the best. Sometimes you're lucky and can ask the artist about their ideas, but sometimes you're on your own. My purpose is always to elevate the artwork, bringing the best out of it, without imposing colour over the line-art. For this cover, I chose simplicity and effectiveness to develop a more typical anime look.



12 Work smarter, not harder

You should want the viewer to focus on the main character, then the secondary characters. Most of the background will be covered with logos and text, so overdetailing it will only be distracting and make it all harder to read. Keep things simple by adding a soft shadow, mild texture and some gradients to enhance the contrast between background and central figure.



13 Add a touch of depth

While I chose an anime style with sharp-edged shadows and blocky shapes, I also felt that subtle gradients here and there could make a world of a difference. With a soft brush of your choice, add faint blush on the skin, and subtle highlights or shadows in the metallic parts; just enough to bring some life but still retain the anime look.



14 Make it pop

With the basics down, it's time to give the cover some shine – literally! I kept the blocky style as a nod to Mega Man's origins as a video game. On Mega Man himself I took that to the extreme and created a pixel-like brush to make him more unique. Rim lighting also helps the character to pop out.



15 Final fixes

In the final stage, I balance out the colours and add effects like the screen texture over the baddies here. I want Mega Man to stand out more so I lighten and even the palette of the characters behind. Zoom out until the picture is barely the size of a stamp on your screen, and if the colours and shapes are still recognisable, you can call it a day.

Technique focus

FIND STRENGTH IN ABSTRACTION

Clément Blum explains the development of an illustration that became increasingly eccentric



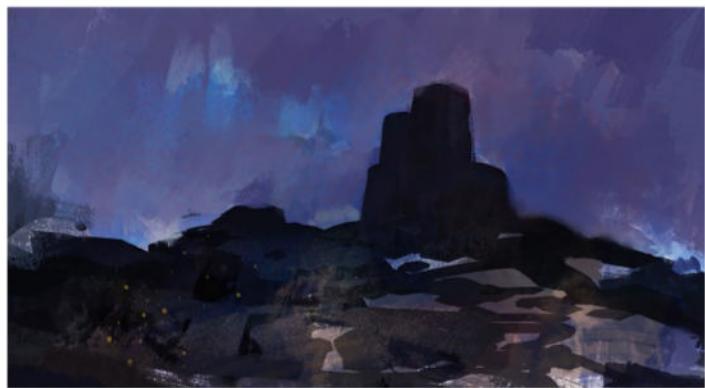
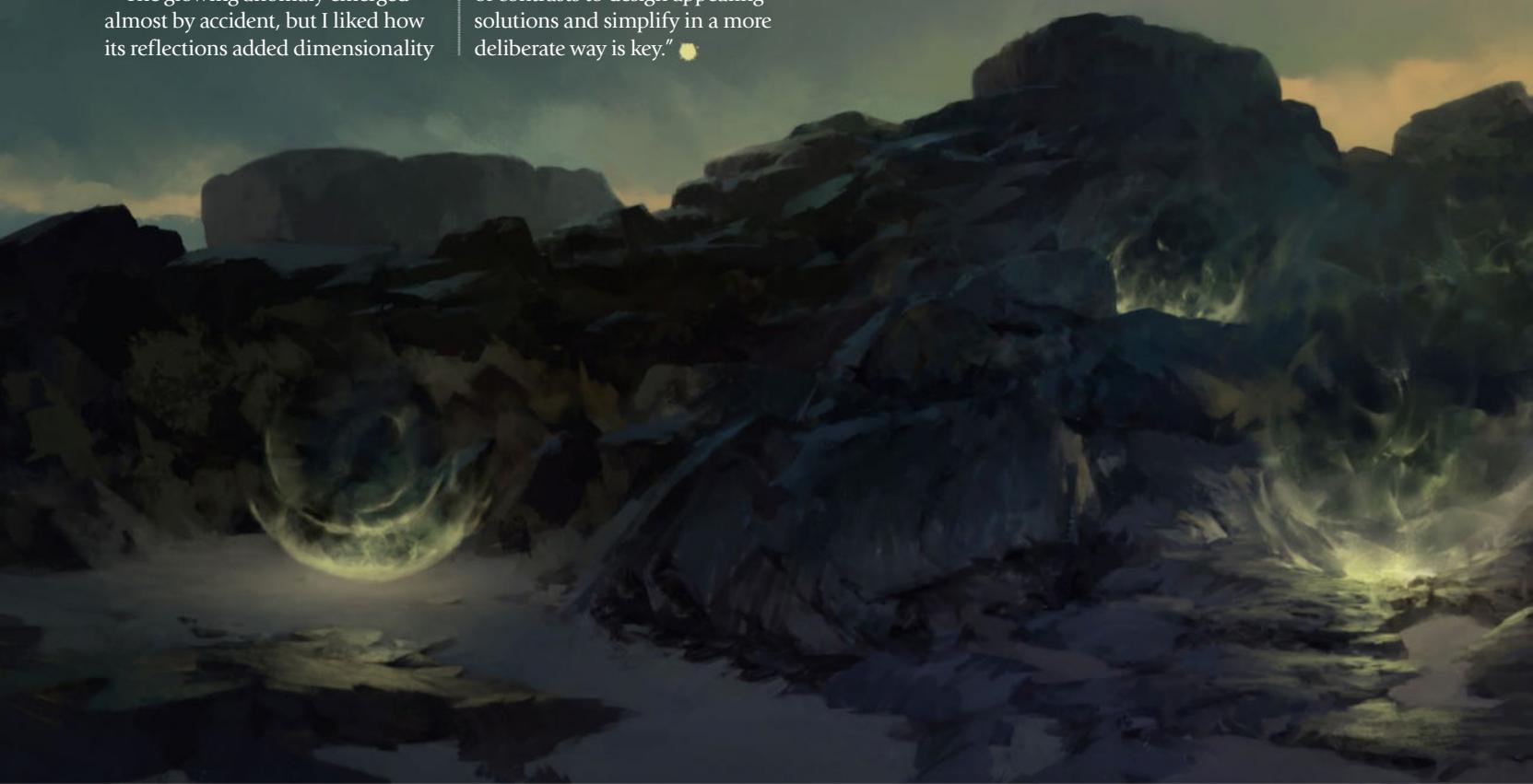
"This piece started as a demo for my students, but then became a personal illustration.

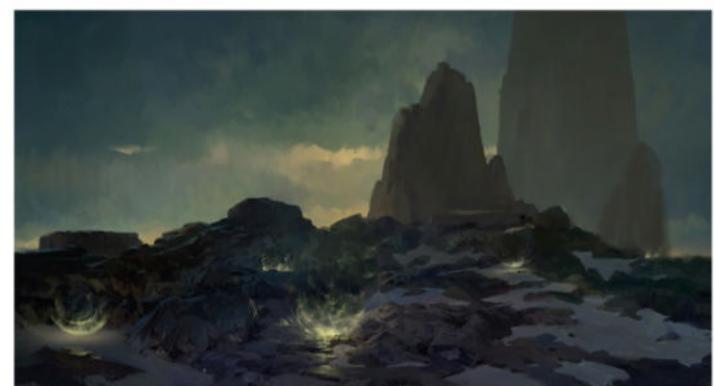
At first I focused on balancing the composition with different sizes of shapes, trying to arrange them in interesting ways.

The glowing anomaly emerged almost by accident, but I liked how its reflections added dimensionality

to the surrounding environment, so I decided to lean into it. Later I refined the mood and added figures to reinforce the scale and narrative.

As a 2D artist, I think there's strength to be found in abstraction – it's a powerful way to approach complexity. Using different types of contrasts to design appealing solutions and simplify in a more deliberate way is key."





Procreate DESIGN A DYNAMIC SCI-FI COMPOSITION

Concept artist and illustrator **Tano Bonfanti** details how he melds anime style with cyberpunk aesthetics for an exhilarating image

Artist PROFILE

Tano Bonfanti

LOCATION: Italy

Argentinian artist Tano has worked within the entertainment industry since 2015. He has a passion for line work and creating cyberpunk-themed imagery. www.tanobonfanti.com



My approach to creating an image isn't always the same, but in this instance I started off with the profile of a character, who I knew needed a dynamic pose and a vehicle involved. I've always loved mechanical and vehicle design, and I wanted this bike to feel like a mixture of the 70 and 80s look coupled with a bit of the classic 90s

sticker aesthetics. Meanwhile the background mech was an unusual decision for me, but I feel as though it give a nice sense of scale compared to the main characters.

I was inspired by the animes of the late 80s and 90s. I think that's something that informs all of my work, so I wanted to create a piece that was both dynamic and detailed, and had a cyberpunk meets space-Western feeling to it.

While I'm doing my initial research, I always play soundtracks of movies or shows that I like and start thinking about what I want to make. I find this is a really nice way to approach a new personal illustration, as it helps me get in the right mood and gets my creative juices flowing. For me, that's a key way to find the ever-elusive balance between relaxation and focus that helps me work at my best.

How I create... A FUTURISTIC SCENE



1 Begin with the sketch

My work relies heavily on line-art, as I love the freedom it gives me to create anything quickly. I usually sketch a couple of ideas and stick with the one that suits the project, although I do sometimes save the others for later. When you have a good flow it's like a stream of consciousness. I use an iPad Pro with a paper-like protector for the extra sensation, as it slows the stylus gives and gives you greater control.



2 Form a composition

Once I have the basic line work, I block the silhouette and see how the shapes interact with each other. At this stage, I start thinking about the colours I want and play around with the different elements of the illustration, adding or removing detail here and there. This is when a composition starts to appear. Digital media is useful for this as you can rearrange the elements at any time.



3 Find the vibe

Once I have the overall feel and composition of the piece, I think about the final lighting and vibe. This is crucial, as it can help or hinder the illusion. I find myself spending more time at this stage now. I realise that I have to be involved as much as possible in every part of the process equally, as that's when you actually learn. Some things come easier than others, but you won't know unless you push yourself.

In depth Dynamic composition



Workshops

DEVELOP AN IMAGE

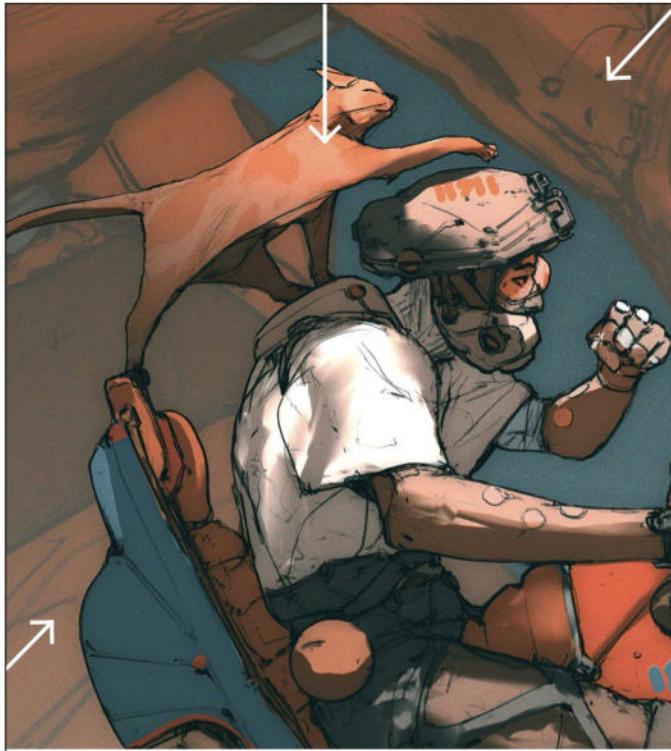
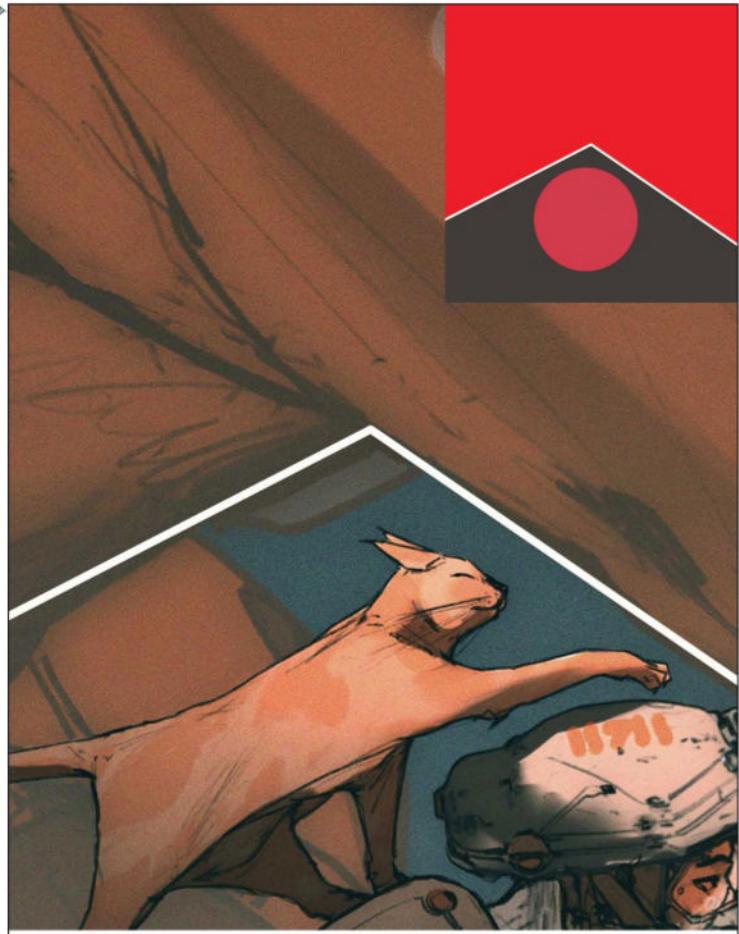


Figure out the light sources

This image uses several sources of light to convey a sense of drama. To assist in this dynamic, chaotic effect, the mech in the background is being illuminated from below, while the characters are illuminated from above. This wouldn't be possible in a normal situation, but I'm happy to take that liberty in this scene. In my mind the light source below the mech could be something like an explosion, a search light, or an electrical line being torn out; this creates the effect of controlled chaos. Meanwhile, the rider and cat are illuminated by a more natural light source, such as a ray of sun that's hitting the protagonists in the face.



Find a focal point

Another key part of any illustration is the composition. In my piece, you can see how the composition makes the focal point stand out and separates the subjects. Coupled with the lighting, your eye moves immediately to the centre of the image. You have to approach each illustration as if you're giving your eye a trail to read the story behind it. For instance, if the cat and the rider were in any other place, the image wouldn't be as strong.



Expressive characters

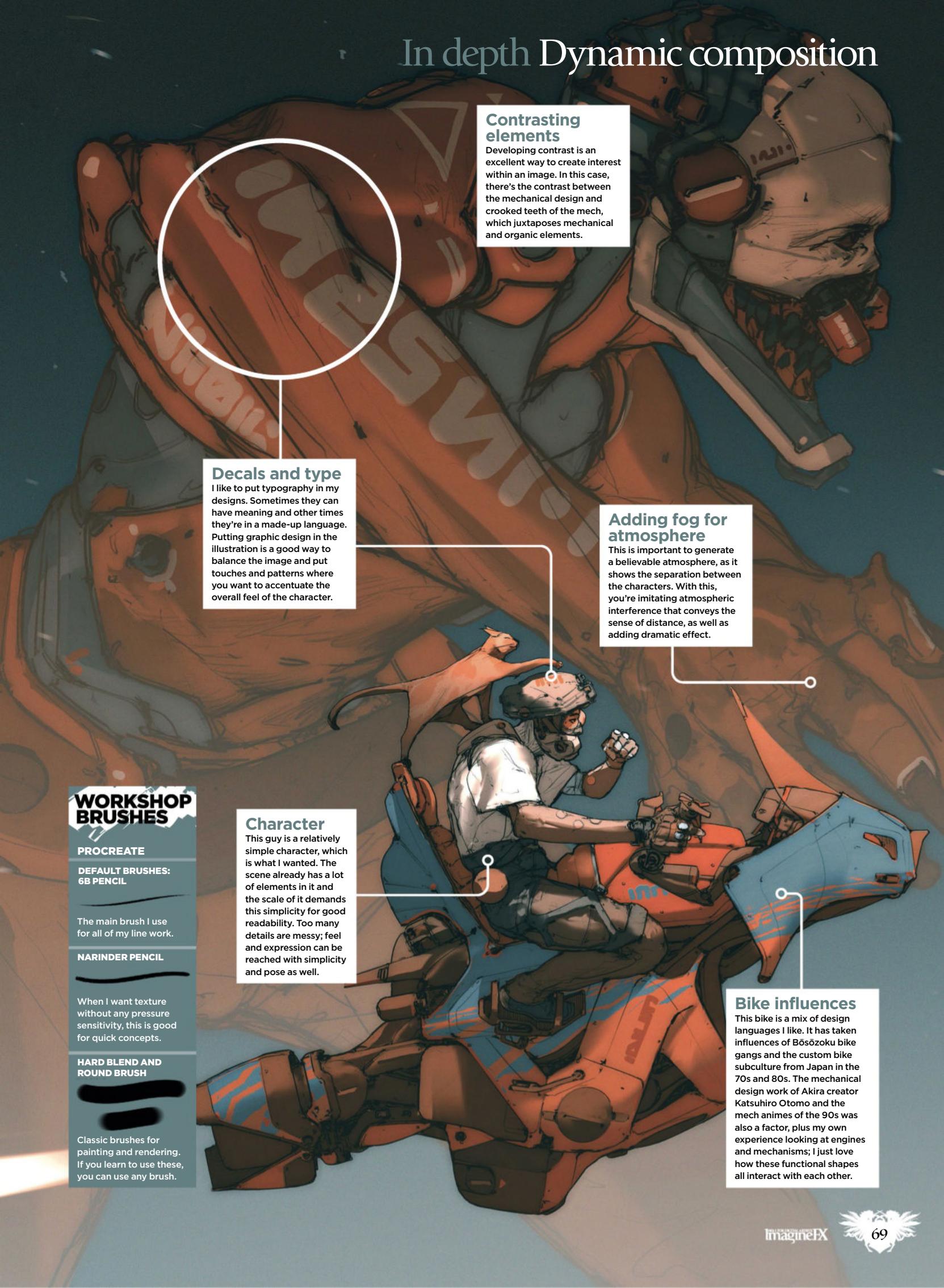
Adding expression to a character is extremely important for creating a sense of realism in the scene, while giving the viewer a hint of the personalities of the characters portrayed. Since the rider has a covering over his face, I decided to balance the image out with one of them having a crazy expression, so you can see that they're having fun, even though there are darker undertones to what might be happening.



Explore the artwork's mood

To wrap up the illustrations, I spend a couple of hours playing around with the feeling I'm seeking for the final image, which can make or break a piece. One bit of advice for getting this just right is to relax and let the work speak back to you while you're hunting for the best combination of elements and composition possible.

In depth Dynamic composition







Technique focus

COMBINE YOUR INSPIRATIONS

Adolf Lachman uses a centuries-old painting to create a spectacular new fantasy design

Artist PROFILE

Adolf Lachman

LOCATION:
Czech Republic

Adolf is a Czech artist specialising in traditional drawing, digital painting and sculpting. He works for the independent game studio Amanita Design as lead 2D artist. <https://bit.ly/3CSwF74>



"This painting was originally created as a cover for the book Design in the Czech Lands 1900–2000, which chronicles a century of Czech applied arts. The name "Lachman" that you can see on the side of the Mechobot doesn't refer to me, but Stanislav Lachman, a prominent Czech designer from the 1960s. It's

purely a coincidence that we share the same surname!"

Mechobot Under Ríp, combines the unknown Mechobot object with a traditional 19th-century Czech landscape oil painting. In this way it's a literal parasite living off the original painting, offering new context that makes a fresh visual narrative. I frequently do this to combine machines with nature."



Photoshop & Blender
**PAINT BELIEVABLE
ENVIRONMENTS**

Concept artist **Edward Barons** breaks down his thought process when building convincing details into a scene



Artist PROFILE

Edward Barons

LOCATION: England

Edward is a concept artist who primarily works on video games. He's currently part of the team developing a variety of AAA games at Flix Interactive.
<https://bit.ly/4hMlo7l>



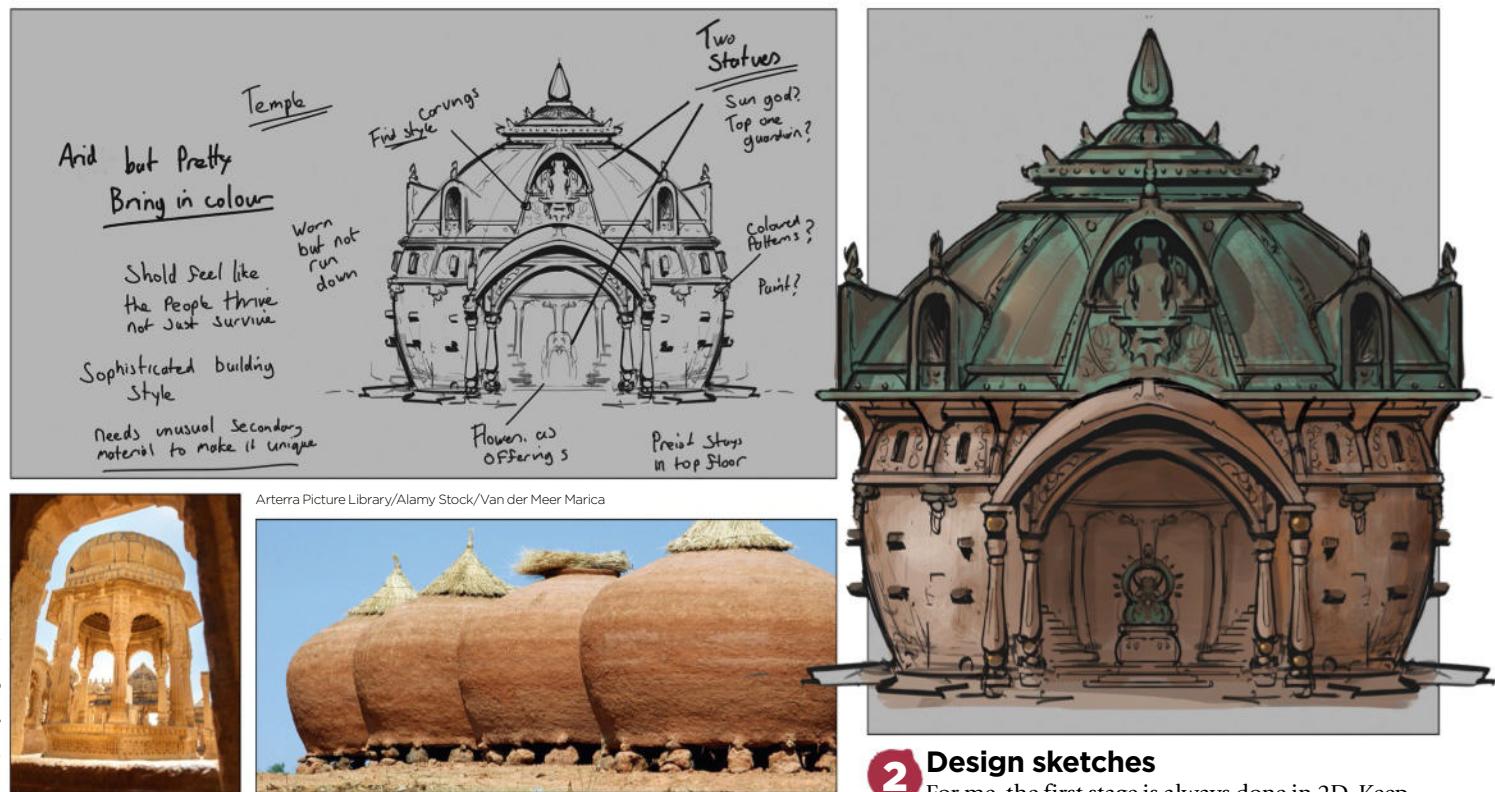
Everything around us tells a story, from the scuffs left on a house wall when someone was moving in, to the worn-away sections on famous statues that everyone touches as they walk past. Making an environment concept that feels like a believable place, no matter how outlandish the setting, often comes down to capturing these small details and placing yourself in the world.

In this tutorial, I'll share the steps I took in approaching a detailed personal project, how I keep my concepts moving and avoid getting stuck, and the thought process I go through to add life to the scenes by trying to capture a human element. Hopefully this will demystify the design process. I'll also share some small tricks and tips that help me manage detailed scenes.

For the 3D portion of this work, I used Blender with Sanctus Library,

and Physical Starlight and Atmosphere, plus scans from Poly Haven as a base, which I highly recommend. Even when I use little or no 3D in the process, with more stylised pieces for example, the ideas remain the same. The lighting and composition are both done in thumbnail form, and ideation for level of detail around the focal point from the early stages are the same, they're just inverted so I add details rather than take them away. ➤

Workshops



istock/Getty Images Plus/Elena Odareva

1 Consider the who and why

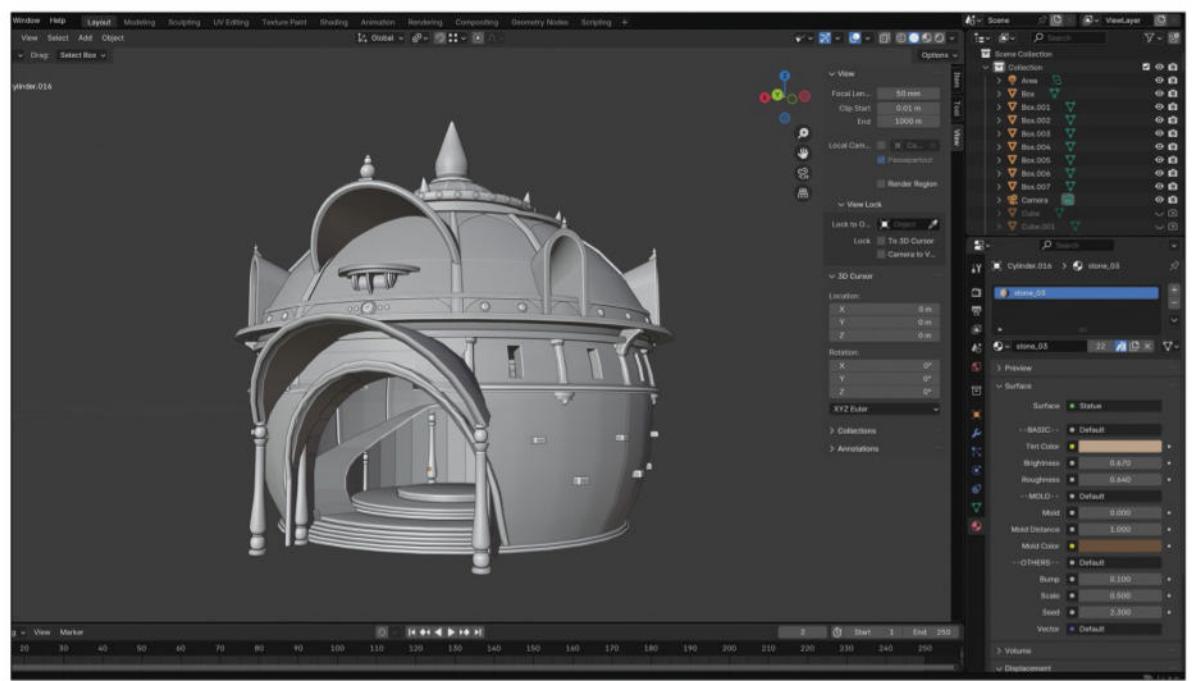
I often think a good concept comes from the head more than the hand. Throughout the process, ask yourself questions about the world, who the people are, and what's happened there. Look to add details to support these ideas, even if we never explain them to anyone else, it will make your designs much richer and more believable as everything will have a reason for being.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: CLOUDS PASTE



Besides the obvious, this is an atmosphere brush, often used for variance in dust and smoke layers.

WATER COLOUR

A good overall brush, for when you need more break-up than the Hard Round will give you.

PAINTY TEXTURE

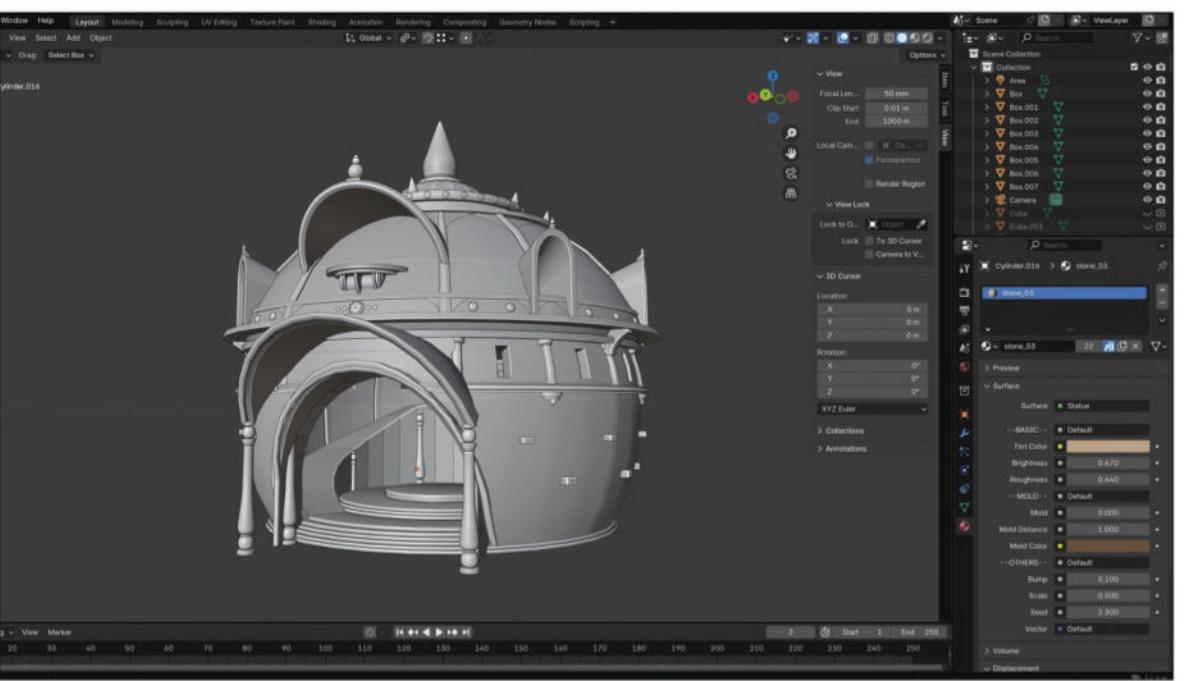
This brush is used for blending on rough surfaces, dirt or damage.

GET YOUR RESOURCES

See page 5 now!

2 Design sketches

For me, the first stage is always done in 2D. Keep these sketches fast and loose, as this stage is supposed to be messy – that way you can experiment with different shapes and levels of detail without becoming tied up in making something pretty. Cut up the sketches, move some areas and scale others. Spending the time here lays the foundations for everything that comes after.



3 Build a basic 3D blockout

This stage can feel slow, but it will save time down the line. You don't need to be amazing at modelling to create the basic shapes and proportions for your buildings. If you use your design sketch and make sure that your shapes work in 3D before moving further along the pipeline, the 3D artists will be thankful! During production, we can even pass these models on to the artist, giving them some helpful extra context.



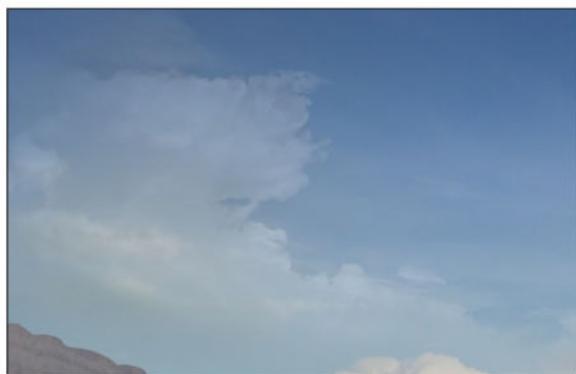
4 Create 3D details

I'm not the best modeller, so sometimes I find museums that upload 3D scans of their collections under free licences for added details. Make a note of these elements and make sure that they're painted over, as they are just placeholders for your own details.



5 Add colour and texture

Let's apply some basic textures or colours. The Sanctus library add-on for Blender is a lifesaver if you're not great at texturing like me. After that, add in some basic land masses for the main areas. These models and land masses can then be lit. Design your lighting to highlight your focal point – I'll use floating geometry off camera to get the shadows and light to fall where I want.



6 Begin painting in Photoshop

My first stage is always to replace the sky with a placeholder and add background elements. The sky sets our mood, and clouds are a fantastic tool to lead the eye to our focal point later on. Unlike painting from scratch where we add detail, we want to eliminate details in any areas that we don't want the viewer to focus on, while having high-detail areas around our focal point.

7 Get yourself unstuck

With large and detailed concepts, it's easy to get lost and not know what direction is best when you're working on it day after day. To beat this, every now and again I'll paint over my work as if I was giving feedback to another artist, adding in some rough versions of the extra details, lighting effects and any colour adjustments, and then use that to guide my own next steps. ➔

Workshops



8 Develop the extra details in your scene

Now we can start adding in smaller rocks and plant life to make the world feel more alive and grounded. If you photobash, this is a good stage to bring those elements in, but remember to control the values and amount of detail so they don't stand out. If your piece is more painterly, go to Filter>Noise>Median and then use the radius to precisely control the amount of photo-like detail.

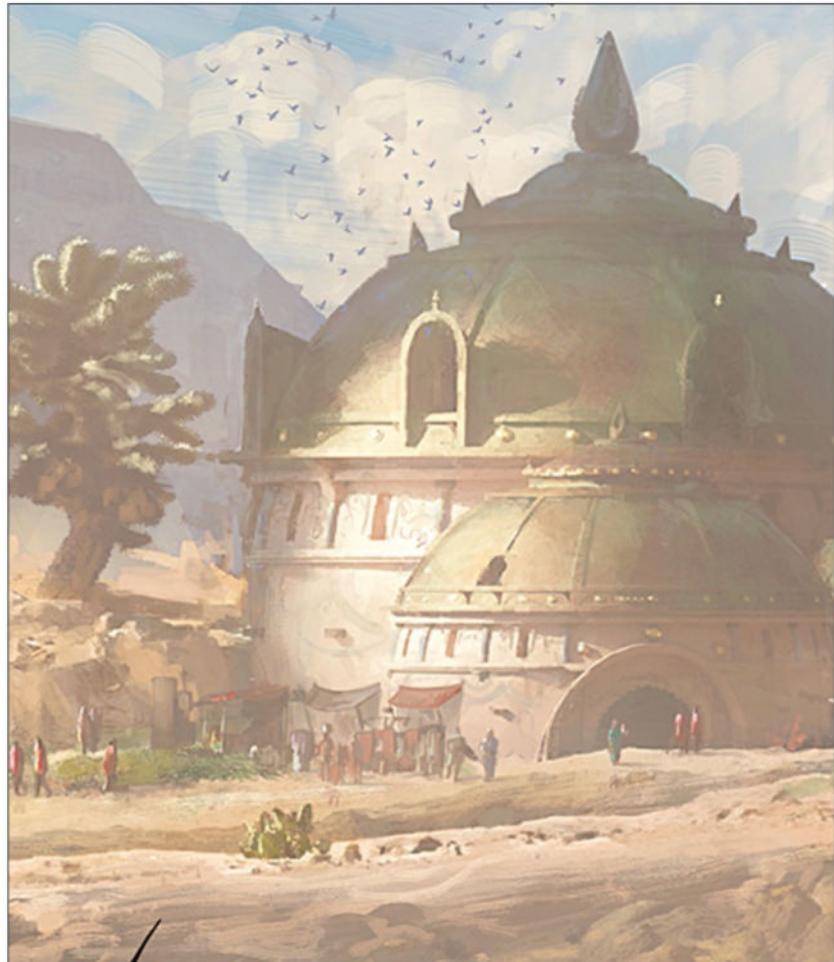


9 Check the values

We have lots of elements to balance, so to make sure the values work, create a group with a black filled layer set to Colour mode, and a Posterize adjustment layer set to three levels. If the piece doesn't read at 2-4 values, no amount of detail will help as the foundation isn't there. Periodically check by unhiding this group.

10 Add atmosphere

One of the best ways to control values is through atmospheric perspective. If your scene isn't naturally hazy, dust clouds, steam or smoke can be great ways to push back areas you don't want your viewer to focus on while enhancing your focal point. If it's logical, it doesn't need to be realistic – you have artistic licence, so use it!



11 Wear and tear

Adding in some wear and tear to objects near the end of the piece will ground your concept in the real world and make it feel more lived in. But don't add it thoughtlessly; tell a story. What happened 100 years, 10 years, 10 minutes, or 10 seconds ago? Use these answers to guide what and where you add your damage and details, and don't forget environmental conditions.

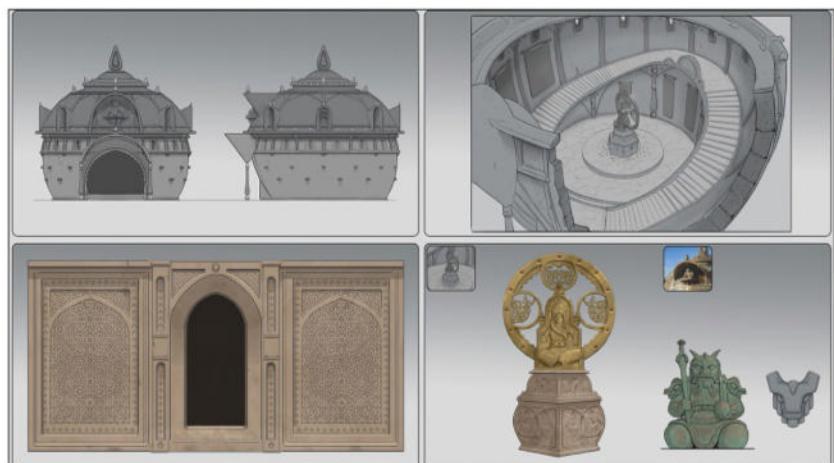


13 Final adjustments

To enhance the lighting effects, we'll add a Levels adjustment layer to make the highlights pop, and only fill the mask and paint back in where we want those highlights. Colour Dodge and Linear Dodge can also add bloom to your reflected highlights, fire or magic. Use these sparingly however, as it's easy to make it look cheesy. Layer opacity of around 10% is your friend here.

12 Use humans for scale

We all love the simple image of a guy with his stick, but you can use the people in your scene to make it feel more like a slice of life and tell a story. Ask yourself, what you would be doing in this environment. Making food? Sheltering from the weather? Sitting around while waiting for a friend? In my scene, people are carrying flowers to the shrine, collecting water, and going to the market.



14 Don't forget the callouts

Callouts turn your piece from a pretty illustration into a usable concept, but are so often forgotten in junior artists' portfolios. These will be the blueprint for the 3D artist to work from, so providing this clarity is key. If you're looking for a concept artist role, don't ignore these; they're almost more important than the main piece and show that you understand the task.



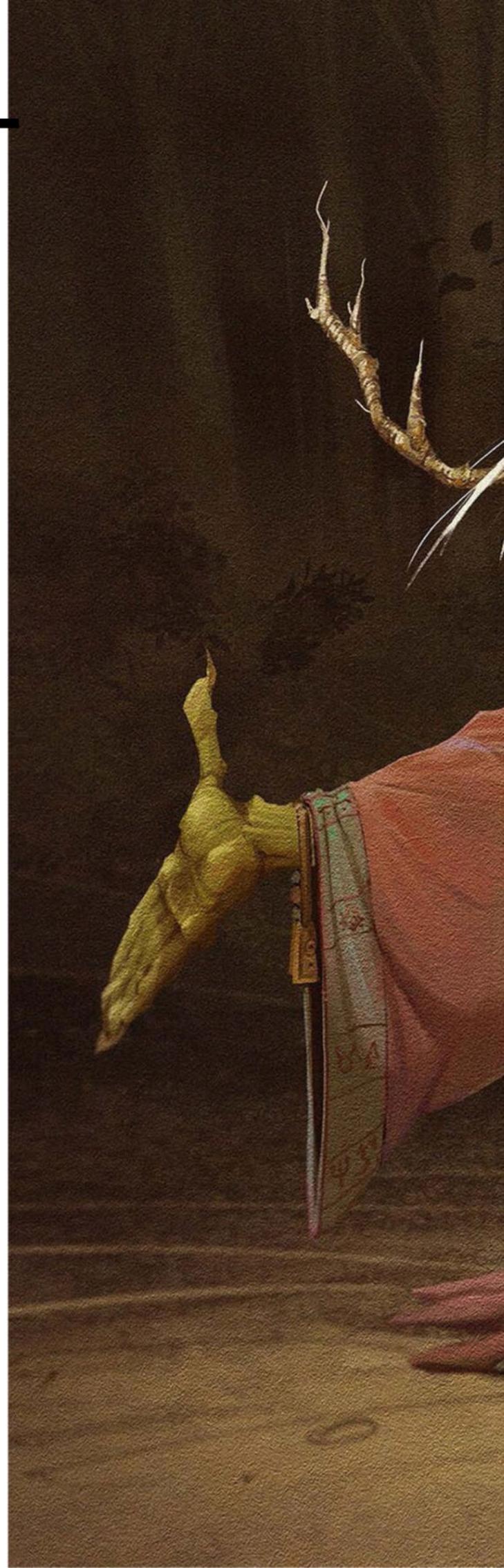
Technique focus

EMBRACE THE WEIRD IDEAS

Arne Billen crafts a crooked character from his Dungeons & Dragons vision



"This piece was born during a D&D session. The dungeon master described a horrible green hag to us as we encountered the monster. I immediately knew that I had to design this lady and that nailing the personality was crucial. For a design like this, I like to lean into uncanny proportions intentionally. A slightly awkward posture, off-balance anatomy, and crooked shape design helped me craft a creature that's both feeble and menacing. If you feel the need to turn away after coming across her in a dark forest, I've done my job right."



Tech Focus Character design

Artist PROFILE

Arne Billen

LOCATION:
The Netherlands

Arne is a freelance concept artist who has a keen interest in teaching people how to create. He loves to experiment and discover new ways to bring his worlds to life.
<https://bit.ly/4gJshoK>



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!



MSI Creator A16 AI+

SWEET SIXTEEN MSI harnesses the power of AI for exemplary performance and efficiency in a package aimed at creatives

Price From £2,350/\$1,800 Company MSI Web www.msi.com

The game is being taken to creative powerhouses like Apple's MacBook Pro and Dell's XPS 14. MSI's market placement is obvious when you look at the specs, namely the Nvidia GeForce RTX 4070 laptop GPU.

MSI is known for its primary focus on gaming laptops, which double as some of the best laptops around for running creative applications. That's why it's good to see MSI expanding its offering to creatives more directly.

The metal chassis adopts a sleek aesthetic that oozes quality. At 2.1kg it's not exactly heavy, but think twice before transporting it, especially on a regular basis. The 16-inch display is large enough to use without an external monitor, but it does mean it's not as portable as smaller alternatives.

We tested the QHD+ (2,560 x 1,600) resolution, although you can upgrade it to UHD+ (3,840 x 2,400). The display is bright, vibrant and crystal clear. One of the biggest positives is the abundance of ports. The inclusion of HDMI and DisplayPort is welcome, but the single USB-C port on offer is underwhelming. The HDMI port is capable of delivering either 8K at 60Hz or 4K at 120Hz. Both will be more than enough for most and if you do find yourself working at the top resolution, a 60Hz refresh rate is still generally acceptable.

Processing power comes from an AMD Ryzen AI 9 HX 370 CPU and the RTX 4070 GPU. That's a whole lot of creative power. 3D artists and game creators working in real-time will love the GPU's ability to deliver incredible

VERDICT

This powerful laptop is a creator's dream and packs a real punch. At 16 inches it's not the most portable option on the market, but if MSI was to add a 14 or 15-inch alternative into the range, then they'd make a significant dent in the market.

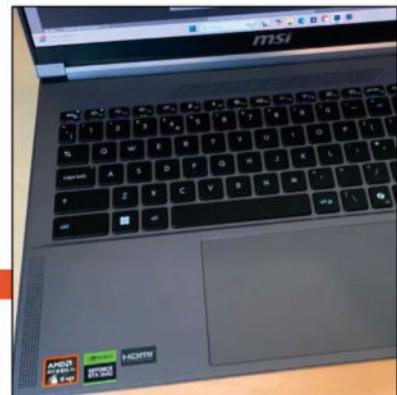
Pros

- Solid CPU and GPU performance
- Impressive display
- Fantastic battery life

Cons

- Lacks portability
- Expensive

Rating



The trackpad is responsive, accurate and perfectly sized for working on the go.

performance on the most demanding projects. It could be argued that this is one of Nvidia's best GPUs.

You get the top-notch performance that you'd expect for the price. Our benchmarking tests suggest middle-to-high level of performance when it comes to gaming and video editing.

We also ran PugetBench for Photoshop. Considering 7,000 or higher is considered a good overall score, the Creator A16's 8,296 mark will mean you have no problems working with demanding Photoshop tasks and dealing with large, complex files and filter-heavy applications.

Photos: Paul Hutton

Capturing small and medium-sized objects is a simple process using the Moose.



Photo: Paul Hatton

3DMakerPro Moose 3D Scanner

SCAN AND DELIVER

An entry-level offer for newbies and hobbyists

Price £555/\$700

Company 3DMakerPro

Web <https://bit.ly/3CUj27s>

RATING ★★★★☆

3DMakerPro's Moose is a portable and lightweight scanning solution that's perfect for first-time users and hobbyists. It's still an excellent choice for those who are looking for an easy-to-use scanner.

Set-up is a breeze; everything you need to get started is included in the package and the JMStudio software is available for download on both PC and Mac from the 3DMakerPro website. Thanks to its AI-tracking algorithms, the Moose prevents frame loss during the scan, ensuring highly accurate results with excellent resolution.

Objects between 15-1,500mm will be captured with ease, which is perfect for small and medium object workflows. Larger objects can be captured, but need to be made up of a collection of smaller scans that are merged in post. It's ideal for anyone doing 3D printing, creating miniatures, or a hobbyist with an interest in 3D scanning.

Single-frame accuracy is 0.03mm while the resolution is 0.07mm. Considering that many handheld scanners can provide accuracy and resolution up to 0.02mm or even 0.01mm, the Moose isn't designed for absolute accuracy.

Equipped with a 24-bit colour camera, the Moose produces highly accurate colour replication. Texture data is automatically applied, so there are no alignment issues.

HP Omen 35L

TOWER OF POWER The latest iteration of HP's popular gaming PC offers plenty of oomph for those working on creative projects

Price From £2,300/\$2,900 **Company** HP **Web** www.hp.com

Workstation PCs built to churn through rendering tasks don't have to be boring beige boxes. A gaming PC is often built with the kind of pixel-pushing prowess in mind that designers and editors can harness, which makes HP's Omen 35L an interesting proposition.

It has one of the very latest Intel processors on-board, along with the kind of Nvidia GPU that gamers drool over. It will power through video processing, resizing and re-encoding, as well as driving high-res monitors, and it will look good while it does it.

The HP Omen 35L is the smaller sibling of the Omen 45L, and houses just an RTX 4080 Super GPU and comes in a case that's surprisingly compact. It's very well-built, though, adorned almost entirely in white and with lights across everything, from the RAM to the AIO cooler and fans.

There's no getting away from the fact that it's a desktop tower PC instead of something small like the Mac Studio, and the transparent side panel and lighting rig underline the fact that it's been built with gamers in mind. There's no reason we shouldn't use lighting to celebrate the work of creatives, and perhaps it looks good when clients come to visit.

The Intel Core Ultra 7 265K CPU proved a benchmarking beast,



The Omen 35L is stylishly decked out almost entirely in white, along with plenty of RGB lighting.

VERDICT

HP has loaded this Omen 35L with the latest tech, and it will help anybody who renders, edits or encodes to save time. While it lights up like a Christmas tree, it's not aggressively styled and looks good on the end of a studio desk. It's expensive, but the capabilities makes it worth the cost.

Pros

- ▀ Nicely built, compact tower PC
- ▀ Extremely powerful
- ▀ Surprisingly quiet

Cons

- ▀ Can get expensive
- ▀ SSD a little slow
- ▀ Has only one Thunderbolt 4 port

Rating

★★★★★



If the machine is left out of sight, it's so whisper quiet you may forget it's there.



Photo: Ian Everden



In a world of utilitarian silvers and greys, the iMac is almost zen-like in appearance.



The addition of USB-C to the keyboard, mouse and trackpad makes for extra convenience.



Apple's Magic Mouse 2 has a range of colours to match your machine for a stylish workspace.

Apple iMac M4

NICHE BUT NICE The all-in-one powerhouse is an excellent piece of kit for the right user, capable of taking on weighty creative jobs

Price From £1,300/\$1,300 **Company** Apple **Web** www.apple.com

Some might say the iMac doesn't need to exist. In a world of smartphones, tablets and laptops, the static desktop computer has been increasingly sidelined over the years, to the point that it now arguably represents a niche, or even 'luxury', product. But Apple has remained faithful to its famous all-in-one, and while it won't be an appropriate Mac for everyone, it's a stunning machine for the right user.

Of course, the iMac is almost all screen. The 24-inch (4,480 x 2,520) display is stunningly bright, and with the M4 model Apple has given the option to add a nano-texture display to reduce glare. It may add £200 to

the cost, but the nano-texture display is a brilliant addition, providing a soft, matte feel and seriously reducing glare and reflections. Honestly, we couldn't go back to an iMac without it.

The screen is plenty big enough for both everyday and creative tasks. But if you're an artist who needs a bigger screen, you might be better with the M4 Mac mini and adding a monitor.

We tested the iMac with the 10-core CPU, 10-core GPU and 16-core Neural Engine M4, with 32GB of RAM and 2TB of storage. For everyday tasks, there's nothing it can't handle. With far too many tabs open in Chrome, and with Photoshop and Final Cut Pro running at the same time, we didn't notice any slowdown or stuttering.



VERDICT

The concept of the static all-in-one is becoming increasingly niche, and with that in mind the iMac might seem an extremely expensive proposition – one that can't move and only offers one screen size. But for the right user, it's an incredibly appealing machine packing monumental power in one of Apple's most beautiful designs ever.

Pros

- Stunning design
- Incredibly powerful
- Nano-texture display is superb

Cons

- Screen might be too small for some
- Expensive for a non-portable device
- Unable to adjust screen height

Rating



“The iMac M4 is one of the most powerful machines money can buy”

But creative tasks are where the M4 iMac truly shines. It was able to handle multiple large files with several layers on Adobe Photoshop, and export them in a matter of seconds, and the same was true of large vector files on Adobe Illustrator. Video performance was also solid, exporting a 4K video with several cuts in Final Cut Pro in less than a minute.

Simply put, the iMac M4 is one of the most powerful all-in-one machines money can buy, with some of the most impressive benchmark results we've seen across the board.

Even at its starting price the iMac is expensive – and that's before adding extras like the nano-texture display and RAM upgrades. In today's world, chances are you'll want a laptop too, or at least an iPad, so if the iMac is a second device, that hole in your wallet is starting to look pretty gaping.

The Master Max comes in fabric, synthetic or leather finishes, with various colours available.



Boulies Master Max

ALL WORK AND PLAY

A mid-range chair ideal for the office or gaming

Price From £400/\$500

Company Boulies

Web <https://boulies.co.uk>

RATING ★★★★☆

Straightforward to build, not too bulky, and reasonably comfy, the Master Max is an office or gaming chair able to undercut many of the other top choices for somewhere to park your posterior regularly.

Unless you were considering a budget chair, you're to likely save at least £100 here. As something you're likely to be sat in all day, you want an option that's going to be comfortable and not leave you stiff and aching. A chair like this is the middle ground and good value.

Along with adjustable armrests – which move up and down, in and out, forward and back – the Master Max has the expected height and angle adjustments for the seat via controls underneath, and the back angle can be changed with a handle on the right-hand side.

Making adjustments is easy, and everything is easily reachable when sat in the chair. With the lumbar support adjusted to fit you, the tailored cushions are comfortable to sit on for long periods, but we've seen thicker ones elsewhere.

The chair that we were sent was a grey one with a water-repellent fabric finish, and it looks like something you'd find in a bank. That's not necessarily a criticism, but it can look a little plain.

Asus ProArt PA27JCV

BOUGHT IN 5K A monitor that delivers on its selling point of high-quality visuals for graphic artists and content creators

Price £750/\$800 **Company** Asus **Web** www.asus.com

This is no run-of-the-mill monitor. The ProArt PA27JCV is a high-end and high-quality screen designed for those who need extra quality on a daily basis.

The first words that came to mind when bringing up some apps and imagery were "snappy" and "crisp". The display was sharp across all of the screen elements, even smaller icons, and towards the edges of the screen.

The contrast of everything was much higher than we're accustomed to. The white canvas in any paint program was almost searingly white – perhaps too white for regular use, but it's nice to see the monitor is capable of such brightness. And at the other end of the spectrum, things got a bit too dark; it felt like the blacks and gamma were biased slightly too far towards the darker tones. Even so, this screen is already well-balanced for an accurate display of tones, colours and gamma out of the box.

The other measurable spec that helps create the sharpness is the high resolution of 5,120 x 2,880 – that's 218 pixels per inch. Such high resolution means something special is going on. After all, most 27-inch screens have a resolution that's closer to HD.

Our testing with a SpyderPro colour calibrator backed Asus's claim that the monitor covers 100% of the sRGB colour gamut, though only 91% of the AdobeRGB gamut. We left the



You'll find excellent front panel controls on the monitor, including options for pro video and HDR settings.

gamma set to its default at 2.2, and while the SpyderPro returned it at 2.1, that's close enough for us.

Physically the monitor looks good, but it's not without a few issues. It's more wobbly when touched than we'd prefer, mostly due to its lack of heft. And while the unit allows a decent level of customisation, it's perhaps a bit shorter in height than it should be, ranging from just 16-21 inches.

The screen also offers decent tilt, as its range goes from roughly vertical to about a 20-degree upward tilt. It also provides full rotation and can be positioned in portrait or landscape, and swivelled left and right.

Another feature, that's often found in high-end production monitors, is the ability to add screen overlays including rulers and grids. These are accessed by buttons on the front of the screen. On the rear are slots for HDMI, DisplayPort, a 96-watt USB-C port that carries DisplayPort and other data, as well as two USB-A ports, and a jack for headphones.

VERDICT

Niggly complaints aside, this monitor does exactly what content creators want, delivering a solid and reliable colour display for mission-critical projects, all while doing it at a price point that's half of some competitors.

Pros

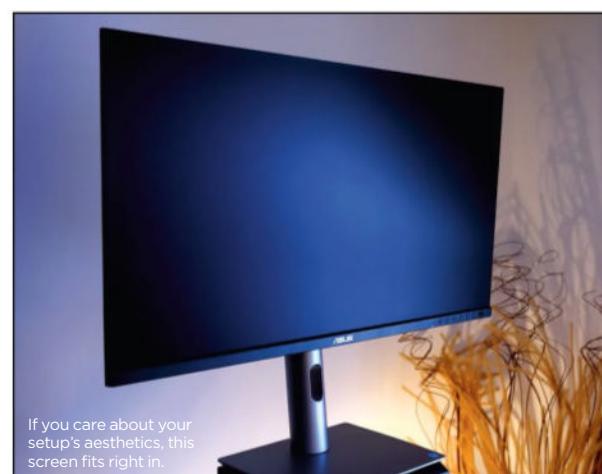
- Top colour, contrast and sharpness
- A superb price compared to similar specification monitors
- Ample ports and front controls

Cons

- Plasticky build
- No audio speakers
- Adjustable height range is lacking

Rating

★★★★★



The monitor offers tilt and rotation for use in either portrait or landscape.



Photos: Lance Evans

There's little to nothing in the way of ostentation about the UM760 Slim's nondescript design.



Cleaning your resin prints is no longer a chore courtesy of Elegoo's Mercury Plus V3.0.



Elegoo Mercury Plus V3.0

PRO PRINTS A perfect solution for washing and curing your 3D models

Price £140/\$160

Company Elegoo

Web <https://elegoo.com>

RATING ★★★★☆

Resin 3D printing can produce exceptional results, albeit at the cost of messy post-processing. While you could wash and cure manually, gizmos like the Elegoo Mercury Plus V3.0 are here to help make it as mess-free as possible.

The Mercury is suitable for decent-sized projects and the washing vat/basket can hold 7.5L of liquid, which equates to a usable volume of 230 x 135 x 260mm, depending on the method you use.

Set up is as straightforward as you could hope. Take out the components, remove a few protective films, plug it into the power and you're ready to go.

You can use the basket to hold your print jobs, or the adjustable hangers on the top to fit your print bed and wash with that in place, which is useful for certain printers. We wish Elegoo sold the tubs and baskets separately as having one for a first wash and another for rinsing would be great.

Once clean you can lift the prints out and let them air dry, remove the supports and then cure. This means swapping the washing tub out for the platter, which rotates like in a microwave so that the models are all equally exposed to the two columns of UV LEDs. There's plenty of coverage for a nice, even cure.

Photo: Minisforum

Minisforum UM760 Slim

MIGHTY IN MINIATURE This unassuming mini PC packs lots of computing power into a teeny tiny form factor at a solid price

Price £380/\$320 **Company** Minisforum **Web** www.minisforum.uk

The Mac Mini, for many and especially since its recent redesign, is the perfect computer. But it has one glaring flaw: it doesn't run Windows, and that means compatibility issues with some niche programmes.

Though it doesn't quite match the size of the Mac Mini, the Minisforum UM760 Slim has a powerful x86 processor, an AMD option with a relatively powerful iGPU, 16GB of RAM by default and 1TB of storage.

The real star of the show is the Ryzen 5 7640HS processor, which boasts six cores and 12 threads, as well as Radeon 760M integrated graphics. It isn't quite enough to set the world alight, but for the price,

and with 16GB of RAM included, it does make a difference.

In everyday use, the machine flew through everything we threw at it. Whether that was Photoshop work, light to medium-intensity games or web browsing with a boatload of tabs open, it handled all without breaking a sweat and didn't get too hot.

Under load, the fan did whirr into life and was audible, but was never distracting. The 16GB of RAM is enough to future-proof the machine for some time, and we never ran into memory management issues.

It can support up to three displays: up to one 8K display at 60Hz or 4K at 120Hz over HDMI 2.1, 4K at 144Hz over Display Port, and one 4K display at 240Hz over USB-C, which is more than the Mac Mini can claim.

From a design perspective it's everything a mini PC should be: small, easily hidden, robust and has a good range of ports. If you're a professional needing the very best in performance, this isn't for you. However, if you have a lighter workload and a smaller budget, it's an attractive package.



The machine features a wide variety of ports for a mini PC, but needs more than one USB-C slot.

VERDICT

Budget mini PCs are often a hard sell; bargain bin chips stuffed into generic cases and sold by no-name builders, but the UM760 Slim bucks the trend. Featuring a powerful processor, generous specs, and a nice selection of ports, it has a lot of positives going for it. At this price it's a genuine steal for the right user.

Pros

- Generous specs
- Enough power for most tasks
- Unobtrusive design
- Well priced

Cons

- No speakers included
- Can run a little noisy under heavy load
- Only one USB-C slot

Rating

★★★★☆



Practical Light and Color

SHINING BRIGHT Jeremy Vickery's theory lessons are an excellent example of why older training courses shouldn't be overlooked

Publisher The Gnomon Workshop **Price** £50/\$57 monthly subscription (7-day free trial available)
Format Online course **Length** 1hr 56 mins **Web** www.thegnomonworkshop.com

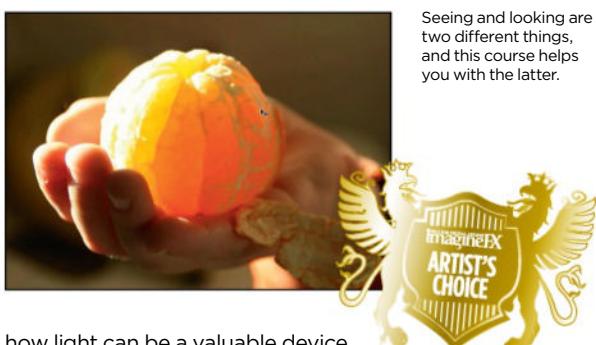
Whether you're a student just starting out or a seasoned professional wrapped up in deadlines, it's easy as an artist to forget the fundamental difference between seeing, a passive activity, and looking, which is all about intentional engagement with what is being perceived.

This is where a refresher course in the fundamentals of looking can be a brilliant way to engage with the world, and this Gnomon Workshop course with Jeremy Vickery does just that.

This course is worth looking at for any artist, whether they use traditional media, digital painting or 3D. It covers the basics of light from a scientific perspective and how that knowledge (literally) illuminates the world. The course also teaches you what to look out for when crafting an image, and



The course has eight chapters covering everything from the basics through to applying the knowledge.



Seeing and looking are two different things, and this course helps you with the latter.

how light can be a valuable device in your storytelling.

While the course was clearly made a long time ago (DVDs are mentioned), this doesn't detract from its educational value. Vickery illustrates his theories with multiple examinations of photographs and then demonstrates the conclusions he reaches by drawing.

The course isn't software specific, and the chapter that covers Art Study particularly highlights the fact that the theories taught are centuries old. The mastery comes in using light to tell stories, and that's only truly achievable when the artist has a deep understanding of how light works.

As professional artists and content creators with decades of experience, we loved this course. It took us back to basics and reminded us why the art of looking is so enjoyable.

VERDICT

An excellent course from The Gnomon Workshop that shouldn't be judged by its age. Any artist, regardless of their skill level, will benefit from the couple of relaxing hours this short course takes to watch.

Pros

- Excellent for any skill level
- Software agnostic
- Short and sweet

Cons

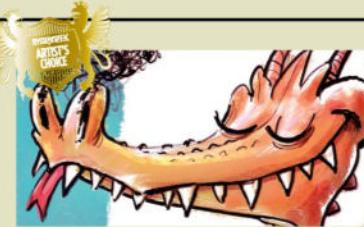
- Showing age in production value
- Too basic for some

Rating



Brushing up...

We put three packs through their paces to find out whether they're worth downloading



MattyB's Brush Pack for Procreate: Hatch

Artist MattyB

Software Procreate

Brushes 35 **Price** Donation

RATING

This excellent pack of 35 different hatching effects is a joy to use. With a wide range of dots, scratches and lines, these brushes are a great way to add illustrative texture to sketches.

<https://mattyb.gumroad.com>



Nikko's Brushes

Artist Nikolai Lockertsen

Software Procreate

Brushes 5 **Price** Free

RATING

These five brushes from digital artist Nikolai Lockertsen are potentially all the Procreate brushes that you could ever need. They have a lovely feel to them, and the BleedRand in particular can add some great effects.

<https://bit.ly/4gAnzKd>



Digital Watercolour Brush Pack

Artist Adilson Farias

Software Procreate

Brushes 43 plus tools **Price** \$22

RATING

This set of watercolour brushes feels delightful, but more impressive are the tools such as the watercolour eraser brushes and the wide array of textures and guides that come with the pack.

<https://bit.ly/4jX2Lzi>

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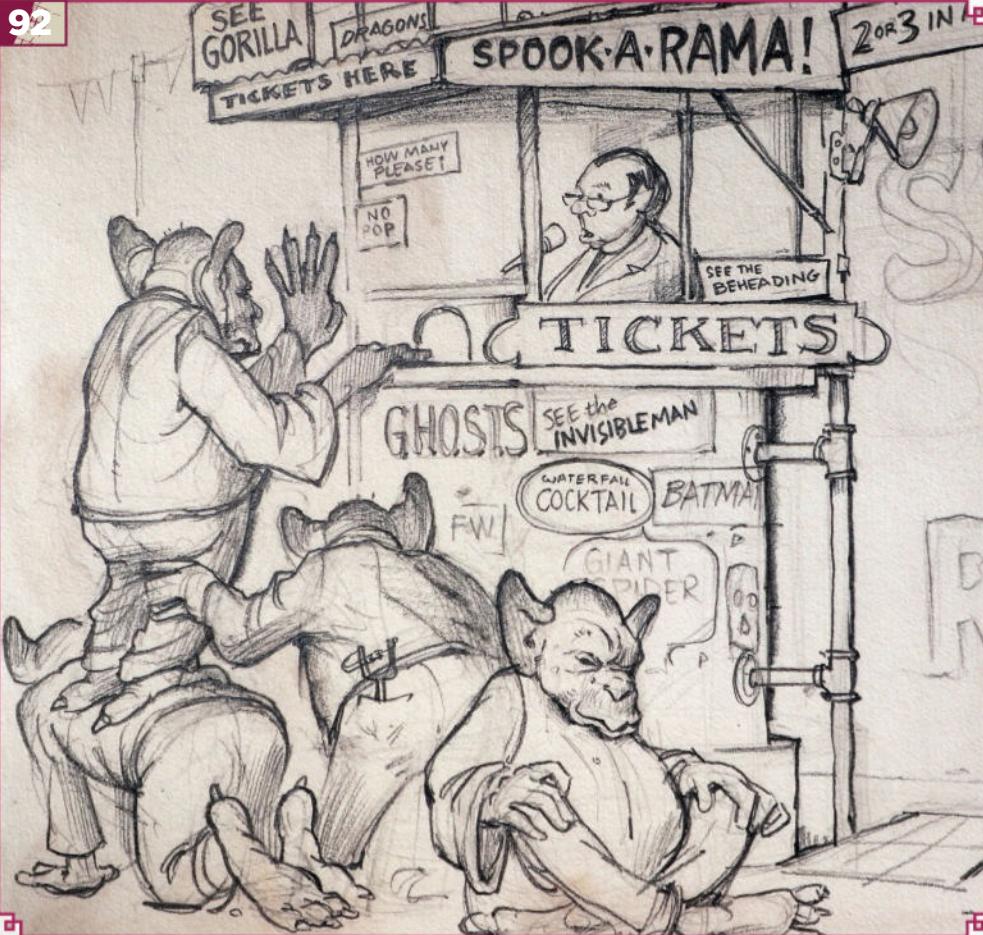
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Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

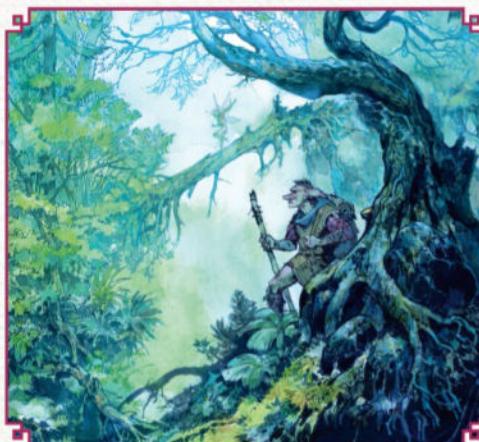
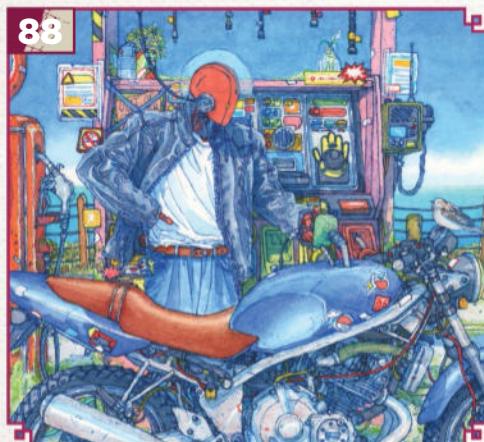


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Discover this month's selection of the finest traditional art, which has been sent in by you!

92 Sketch absurd art on location
James Gurney and Thomas Kinkade share their advice for creating sketches on the go.

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Get an insight into the sculptor's journey, which has taken him from Beijing to the United States.



FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Rain Szeto

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Pencil, ink, watercolour WEB: <https://shop.rainszeto.com>

Rain uses details from the small, cluttered shops of Hong Kong to make her settings feel real. Recently she has been getting into drawing machines.



1 REGULARS

"I wanted to capture the light filtering through the curtains of a yatai at night. I thought it'd be funny to show a human silhouette, plus a cat sat right next to them."

2 IN YOUR IMAGE

"When I first drew this robot character, I based the design on the shape of the human skull and vertebrae. I think they collect and sell objects like an antique store."

3 MOTO ROBO SAPPHIRE BLUE

"Named after one of the stock paint colours Honda uses for their motorcycles. The gas pump has been repurposed to cater to both bikes and their robot riders!"

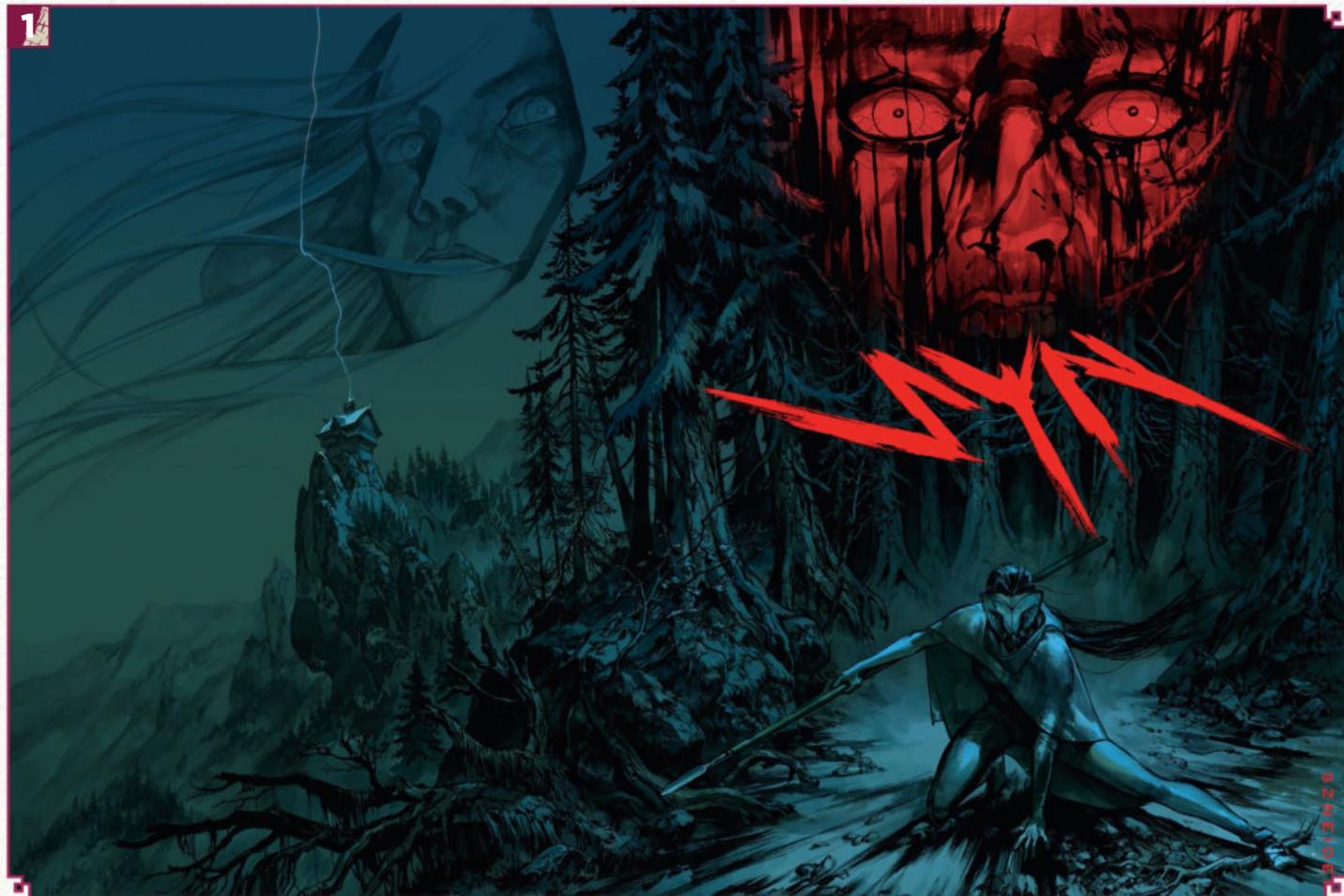




Benedykt Szneider

LOCATION: Poland MEDIA: Watercolour, ink WEB: www.artstation.com/szneider

Benedykt is a concept artist, co-writer and creative director of the game Ruiner. He previously worked as an artist, graphic designer and animation director on titles including The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt and Cyberpunk 2077.



1 SYN: THE HUNTER

"This is the cover for the second issue of SYN, a comic book series I write and draw. In a war-torn medieval land, a young boy is raised among a dark sect of pain-worshippers."

2 BACKALLEY

"An exploratory concept for our video games. I wanted to convey the feeling of a morning coffee break where people have the day ahead of them. Anything can happen!"

3 NARROW PASSAGE

"This was an unused cover commissioned for an RPG game. I wanted the artwork to feel fresh and simple, similar to the vibe of certain French comic books."





Artist insight

SKETCH ABSURD ART ON LOCATION

Sketching adventurers **JAMES GURNEY** and the late **THOMAS KINKADE** explore ways to transform an ordinary scene into eye-catching imagery

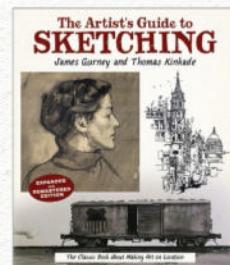
While sketching at the zoo one morning, a small boy asked me for a pencil and a piece of paper. He proceeded to transform the bison near us into an alien monster, complete with attack bees, laser beams and sound effects. Comparing his sketch to mine, I realised how I was limiting myself by trying to render the bison literally.

Seeing the boy's creativity made me want to cut loose a little. And I realised that there was nothing

really preventing me from using my imagination when I'm drawing brand new sketches on the spot.

But what kinds of imaginative transformations are possible? Any form can be exaggerated or distorted with the magic wand of your pencil. You can combine or juxtapose any two things, the more dissimilar the better. To do that we'll need to look at the subject with a child's eyes.

In this article, I'll share some of my favourite tips for adding fanciful or bizarre twists to your location sketches. The art is all from the



newly expanded and remastered edition of *The Artist's Guide to Sketching*, originally written and illustrated in 1982 by me and the late Thomas Kinkade. The tips marked JG are by me, and the ones labelled TK were made by Thomas.



At age 22, James Gurney

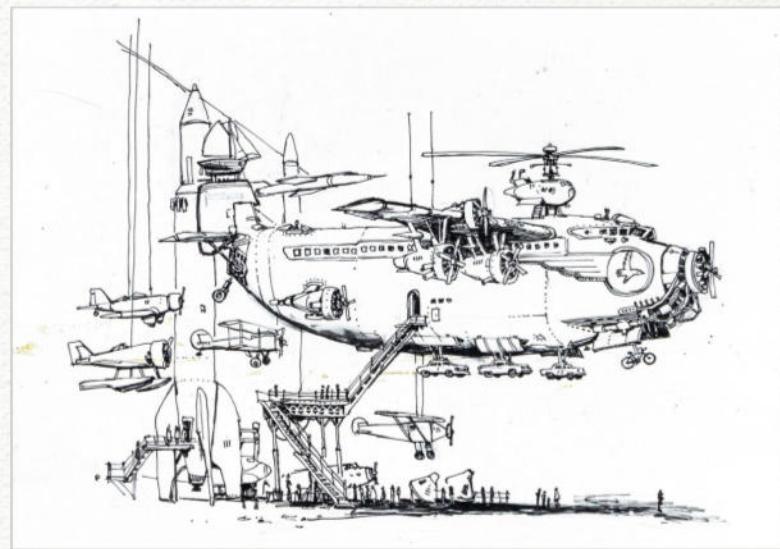
*(pictured) and Thomas Kinkade dropped out of art school and hopped the freight trains. Those adventures led to their later creative careers. James created *Dinotopia*, while Thomas became the Painter of Light.*

<https://jamesgurney.com>.



1 Transforming a tree stump

I chose to sketch this in a weed-infested lot, humming with the sound of mosquitoes. A stunted tree caught my eye, its branches suggesting a fanciful face. I coaxed the face out of hiding, emphasising the eyebrow-branches and open mouth, then eliminated background details to play up the silhouette. A sprinkler becomes a contrasting afterthought. Sketching on-site among weeds and mosquitoes stimulated my imagination far more than working in a studio. **JG**



2 Collaborate with strangers

At the National Air and Space Museum, I was sketching an antique aeroplane with a fountain pen when a group of curious kids gathered around to ask what I was going to draw. I said "the ultimate aeroplane." Together, we brainstormed ideas, combining planes and helicopters. The sketch evolved without a plan, detail upon detail. It reminded me of the way I'd draw as a child – this carefree approach was a refreshing balance to my usual careful and serious drawing style. **JG**

In depth Absurd sketches

3 Make one feature oversized

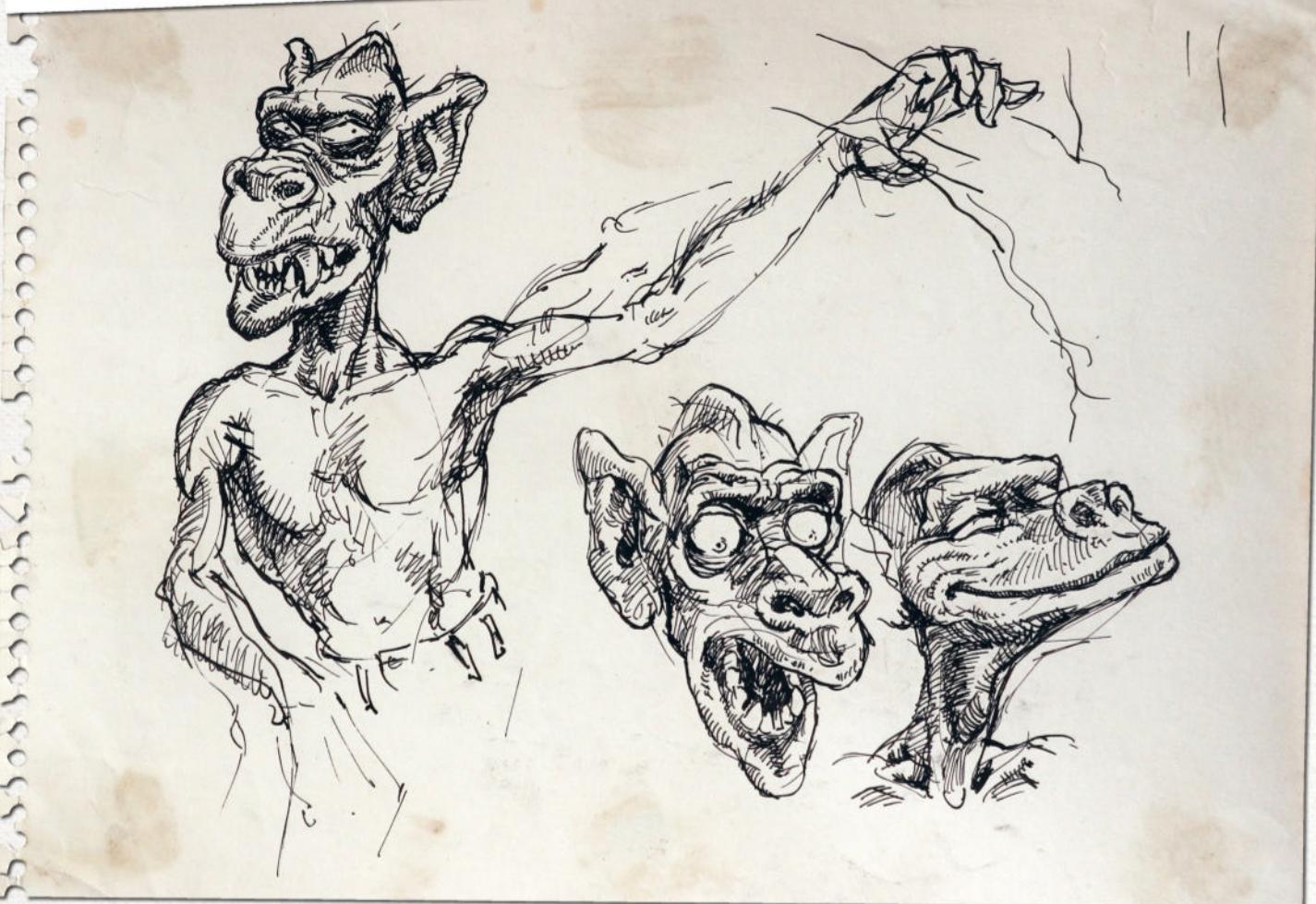
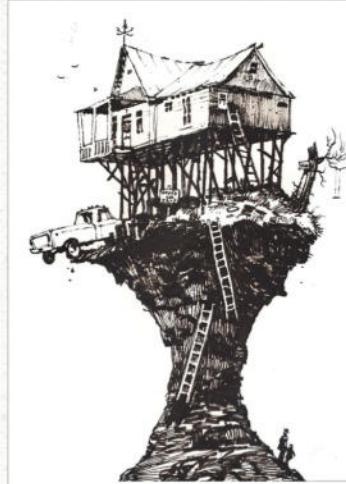
With a breeze, this creature could fly – at least the way I draw him. I exaggerated his moderately large ears far beyond reality to enter the realm of absurdity. I enjoy distorting animal characteristics, but find taxidermy animals are better subjects than live ones. This sketch was drawn at San Francisco's natural history museum, a welcome diversion from my usual serious studies. Imaginative sketches like this offer a fun break. **TK**



4 Exaggerated setting

As I sketched out a ramshackle house in West Virginia, an onlooker said, "The hills are steep, but not that steep." I exaggerated the effect, making the house look precariously perched. I also hollowed out the sides of the hill and added details like a dangling truck and ladders to push the precariousness, inspired by elements in the actual scene. Sketching on location sparks imagination to create unique brand new angles and focal points. **TK**

“I realised that there was nothing really preventing me from using my imagination when I’m on the spot”



5 Use real-life expressions and gestures to craft a monster

Sketching was my escape when sat in college lectures. I drew without an underdrawing, exaggerating features. My psychology professor, discussing aggressive behaviour, contorted his face into odd expressions and confrontational poses. In my mind he transformed into a creature. Inspired by gorilla skull studies, I added details. From the back of the class, I create strange creatures, letting my imagination run wild. **JG**

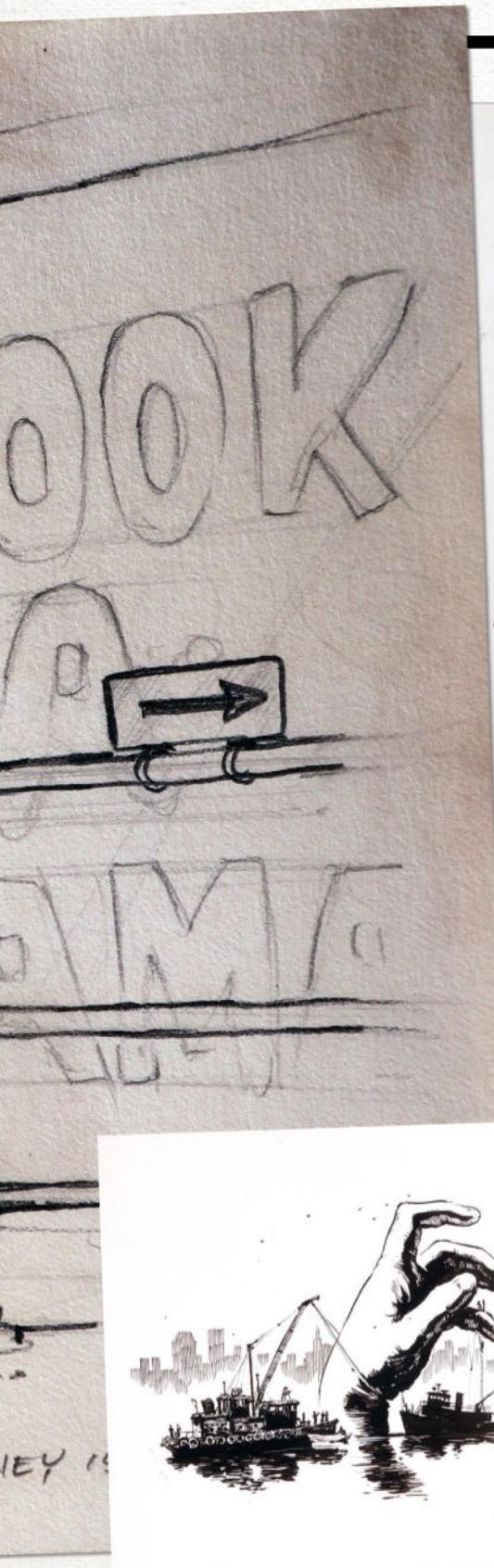
Traditional Artist Workshop



6 *Invent a family of creatures*

I once set up near the ticket booth for Coney Island's dilapidated horror show, surrounded by giant green plaster spiders and leering statues. The weird setting inspired me to add my own spooks to the scene. One character led to four, and pretty soon it was a whole group, each doing something different. I lightly sketched them using a No. 2 pencil, then reinforced lines with softer graphite. To avoid any clutter, I lightened the pencil lines around the creatures' heads and hands. **JG**

“The weird setting inspired me to add my own spooks to the scene”



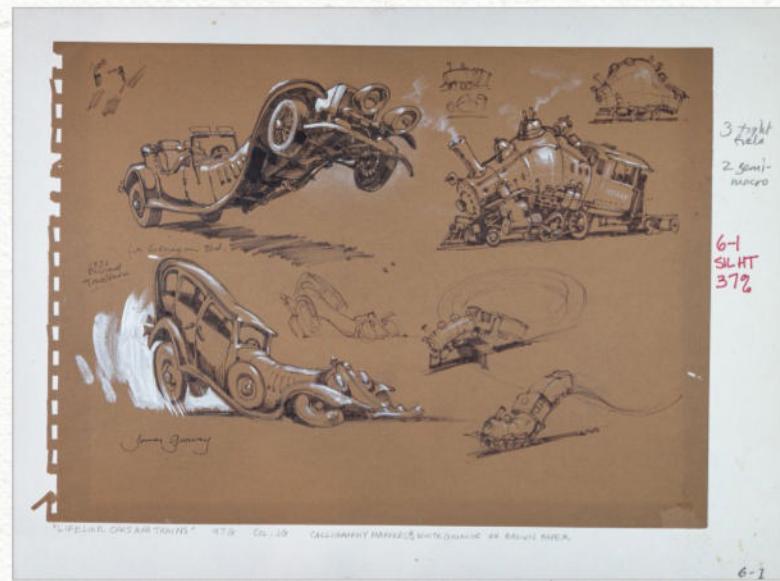
8 Mess with the scale

A simple scale distortion can spark a provocative idea. Inspired by the huge scale of the Statue of Liberty that I'd seen earlier, I started thinking of a giant hand looming over the Hudson River's work boats, and used my own left hand as a model rising out of the murky depths. All the other elements, such as a car, shack, birds, figures and boats, are in proportion to each other, making the giant hand the absurd element. **JG**



7 Draw a floating element

As I leaned against a Coney Island boardwalk rail, I sketched a merry-go-round. I left blank space around it with no idea at the time how I might finish the sketch. Months later, atop fish crates in Morro Bay, California, I stumbled on the sketch while preparing to paint fishing boats. I decided to add that element to the setting in front of me, creating a surreal floating merry-go-round. **JG**

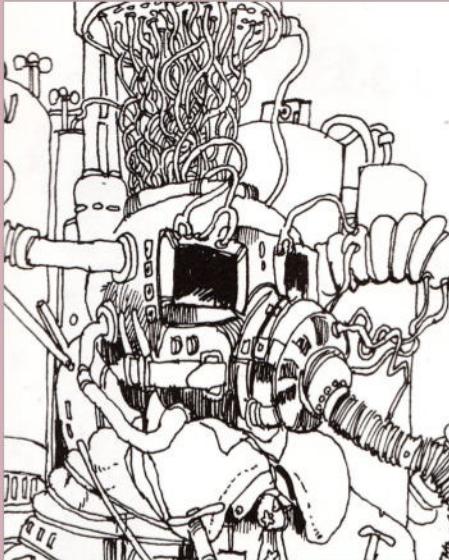
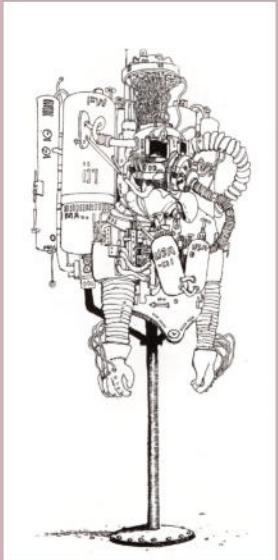


9 Think like an animator

Imaginative sketching lets me defy nature's laws. Within my sketchbook, steel twists, stretches and inflates; inanimate objects come alive. At a historical museum, I ask "what if?" questions. What if a car rears up or flops down like a dog? What if a locomotive inhales air? These questions help me focus on a single point. Walking around these vehicles in a museum, interacting closely, excites my imagination and makes creative decisions much easier. **JG**

Traditional Artist Workshop

10 Deranged detail: Thomas Kinkade builds ridiculous sketches



A CREATE INSANE ELEMENTS

An old-fashioned flight suit at the Smithsonian caught my attention. I then improvised, adding details that the original designers never imagined. I unified the elements by repeating themes, such as spaghetti-like wires above the head and near the hands, and segmented tube forms throughout the sketch.



C EXTRAPOLATE REAL FORMS

A piece done in pen on smooth paper. The actual building facades in Philadelphia were only half as tall and half as detailed as this exaggerated version. I clustered the detail at the top of the tower to the left and in the centre of the building front and right, letting the detail fall away as it approaches street level.

B KEEP ADDING MORE

My subject here was a weathered tree, but I turned it into a stump instead. As I textured the bark, I added a woodsman's axe stuck in the trunk, and that one axe led to another. I then switched to pen and ink to accentuate the various textures.



D GO FOR THE LIMIT

How tall can you make this card spinner rack before it becomes ridiculous? And how many cards before it becomes absurd? Whatever that amount, add 20 per cent more! **TK**



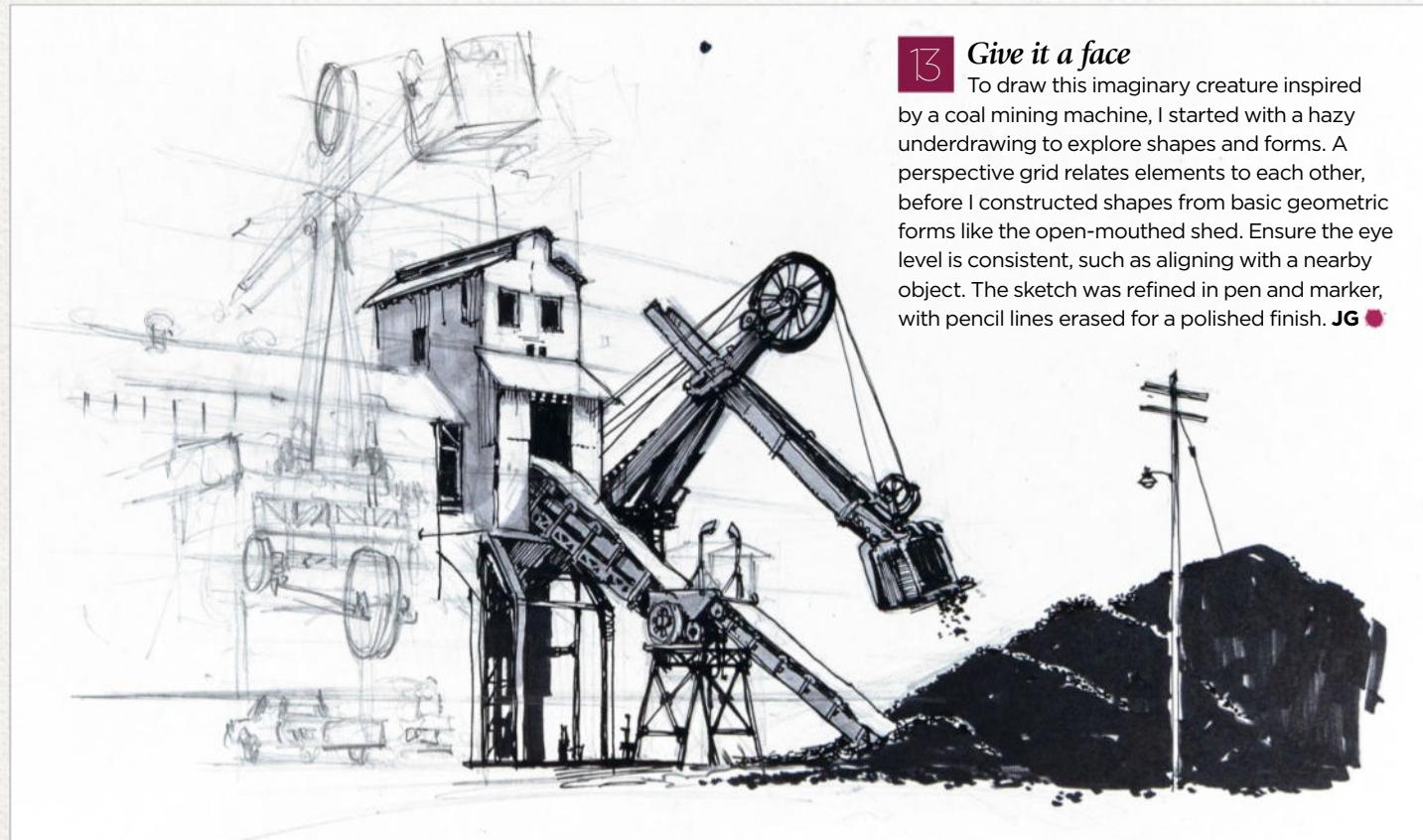
11 Combine two worlds

When I decided to sketch a trailer and hitch, I had no idea it might transport a giant vulture head. But that's what happens when we let the imagination take over. Initially the trailer sketch seemed boring, so I tucked it away. Later, at a natural history museum, I stumbled upon the sketch and saw a stuffed vulture. Its worn texture contrasted perfectly with the trailer's crisp forms and I couldn't resist combining them. **TK**



12 Develop contrasting characters

Any character you draw will become more interesting if you juxtapose them with another character of an opposing dominant trait. A weakling looks weaker beside a ruffian. A rich man makes a beggar seem poorer. In this case I was sat in a barbershop making the customer look tough and hairy, while the barber looks scrawny and carefully coiffed. Spotting the black in the hair drives interest. **JG**



13 Give it a face

To draw this imaginary creature inspired by a coal mining machine, I started with a hazy underdrawing to explore shapes and forms. A perspective grid relates elements to each other, before I constructed shapes from basic geometric forms like the open-mouthed shed. Ensure the eye level is consistent, such as aligning with a nearby object. The sketch was refined in pen and marker, with pencil lines erased for a polished finish. **JG**

First Impressions

Simon Lee

The sculptor charts his journey and how it reflects in his work



Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art? I was born in Beijing, China, and lived there until I was 10. Then I lived in Hong Kong for another 10 years before settling in the United States. My art is closely related to my life, so every cultural influence that I was ever exposed to has shaped my artistic language and expression.

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

My art has always been a response to my life, so in a way art itself was least influential to me. Experience has always been the key driving force in the evolution of my art.

Are there any works you saw that changed everything?

I'm a self-taught artist. I started sculpting on my own at age five, but growing up in a traditional Chinese family, the notion of becoming a full-time artist never entered my mind. I went to business school in college and majored in marketing.

When I was 38 years old I became a dad, and that was the wake-up moment of me deciding to truly value my passion and become a professional artist. My first project as a professional was as a concept designer for Guillermo del Toro, which started a decade-long explosion of self-reflective artistic growth and discoveries.

In a way, the artwork that triggered all that was my child, the best creation I could ever create.

Can you tell us about your first paid commission?

My first paid commission was a resin model created for the Shiflett



THE LAST CATCH
A demo piece on storytelling for my advanced students.



FISH MONSTER

This maritime monstrosity was one of my model kit releases from back in 2020.

“Experience has always been the key driving force in the evolution of my art”

ANGUISH

A design and sculpture demo that I created during one of my on-site workshops for Blizzard Entertainment.

Brothers. I did it when I was still a web designer and hobbyist sculptor.

It was a representation of who I was at the time. I see all of my artwork that way: an almost photographic record of a moment in time from my artistic journey.

How does your art differ now?

I used to take days, weeks, and sometimes months to create a single piece. Now I can create something in minutes. I don't see my art as singular beings but rather parts of a flowing stream. So the older artworks show where I was, and the current ones show where I am. I don't place too much attention on my work, but rather on what my art is telling me about my life.

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

For me, living is living. By diving deeper into my art, I delved deeper and deeper into my life. In my world, becoming better in one requires being better in the other. I can honestly say my art has made me a much better person.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way? My advice would be to keep an open mind. To get better at art you'd need to look outside of art. Expand your horizon, for art is both a reflection and reaction to life.

How has the art industry changed for the better?

There is no absolute good or bad, that's always relative to the person you're talking to. For me, the industry just is, and my place in it. It's like an ocean: there's no good wave or bad wave, just waves. The question really is whether we can ride the waves. I certainly can.

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

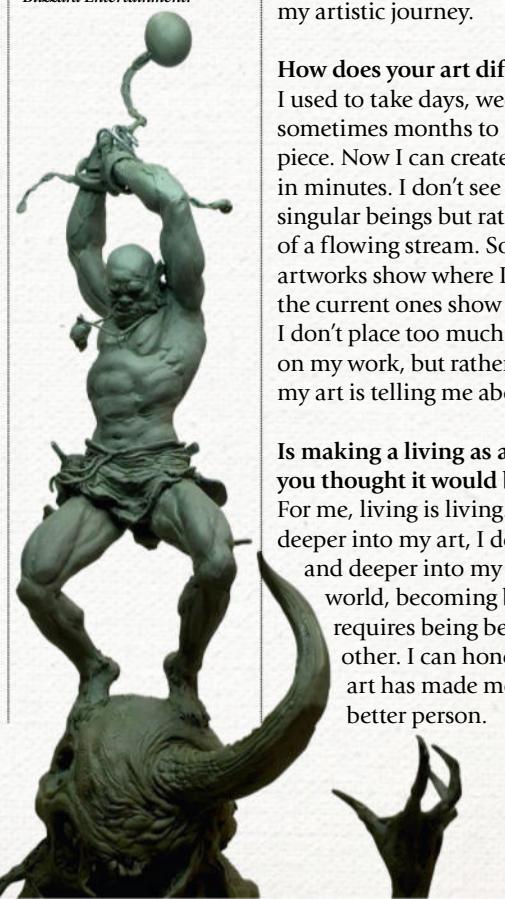
All of them; they're all an extension of me. Just like I identify with all my fingers, they all serve a purpose.

What's your next step in art or life?

To continue growing as a person. Education doesn't end with school graduations or begin with class enrolments. I learn every day about life and myself. I have the technical skills to express myself artistically, and use my art to communicate my emotions constantly. I want to keep growing and share my discoveries with as many people as I can.

Simon Lee is an educator and creature art director for feature films and games. He has lectured all over the world and taught professional artists for over a decade.

www.instagram.com/spiderzero





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