



NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS Imagine

IX

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Explore the must-have apps for creating incredible art

ALL-NEW
SONIC AND JUSTICE LEAGUE COMIC



PROCREATE

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Give your work a glow-up with otherworldly effects

NAIL YOUR

CHARACTER DESIGNS

Get your hands on expert tricks and tips for painting charismatic compositions

ALSO INSIDE

LEARN TO RENDER INTRICATE TEXTURES INSIDE A COLOURFUL MANGA WORKSPACE
35 UNIQUE DOODLES OF CHUBBY MECHS



FUTURE
ISSUE 253

SELL YOUR ART MASTER MARKETING SKILLS AND FORGE YOUR OWN PATH!



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



If you're an enthusiastic hobbyist or not so far along your journey as a pro artist, you may well be wondering how you can turn your passion into something that pays the bills and allows you to stay creative. This issue we take a look at how you can sell your work,

with stories from those that have done it before and advice on marketing yourself, as well as a collection of resources to help you make the most of taking that leap into the professional world.

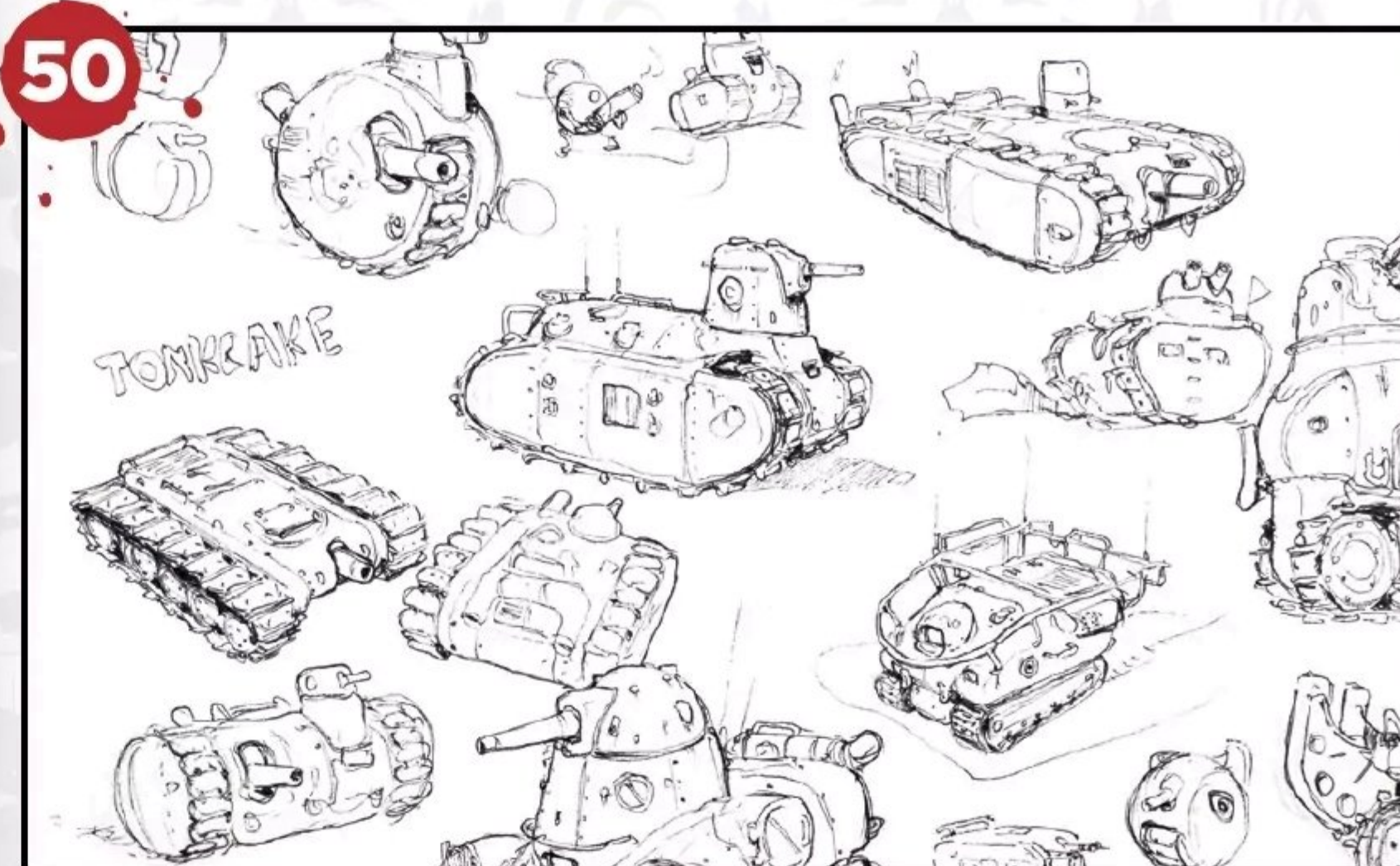
But no matter what stage of your career you're at, it's always good to learn some new skills or refresh those muscle memories. With that in mind, visit our training section where you can learn how to use composition to create eye-catching character art, use lighting effects to add an otherworldly, dreamlike feel, or take out your pens and inks and get traditional by mastering the art of rendering stunningly detailed drawings. Plus, we review the latest gear and take a look at the best Photoshop alternatives on the market today.

Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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



Explore a world of unique war machines

Patrick Wagesreither opens the pages of his sketchbook, crammed full of odd soldiers and chubby mechs.



Paint distinctive character art

Discover Yona's insightful tips and add personality to your next piece with tricks for dynamic creations.



Craft intricate fantasy drawings

Mateusz Lenart shows you how to make gorgeous classically inspired illustrations with pen and ink.

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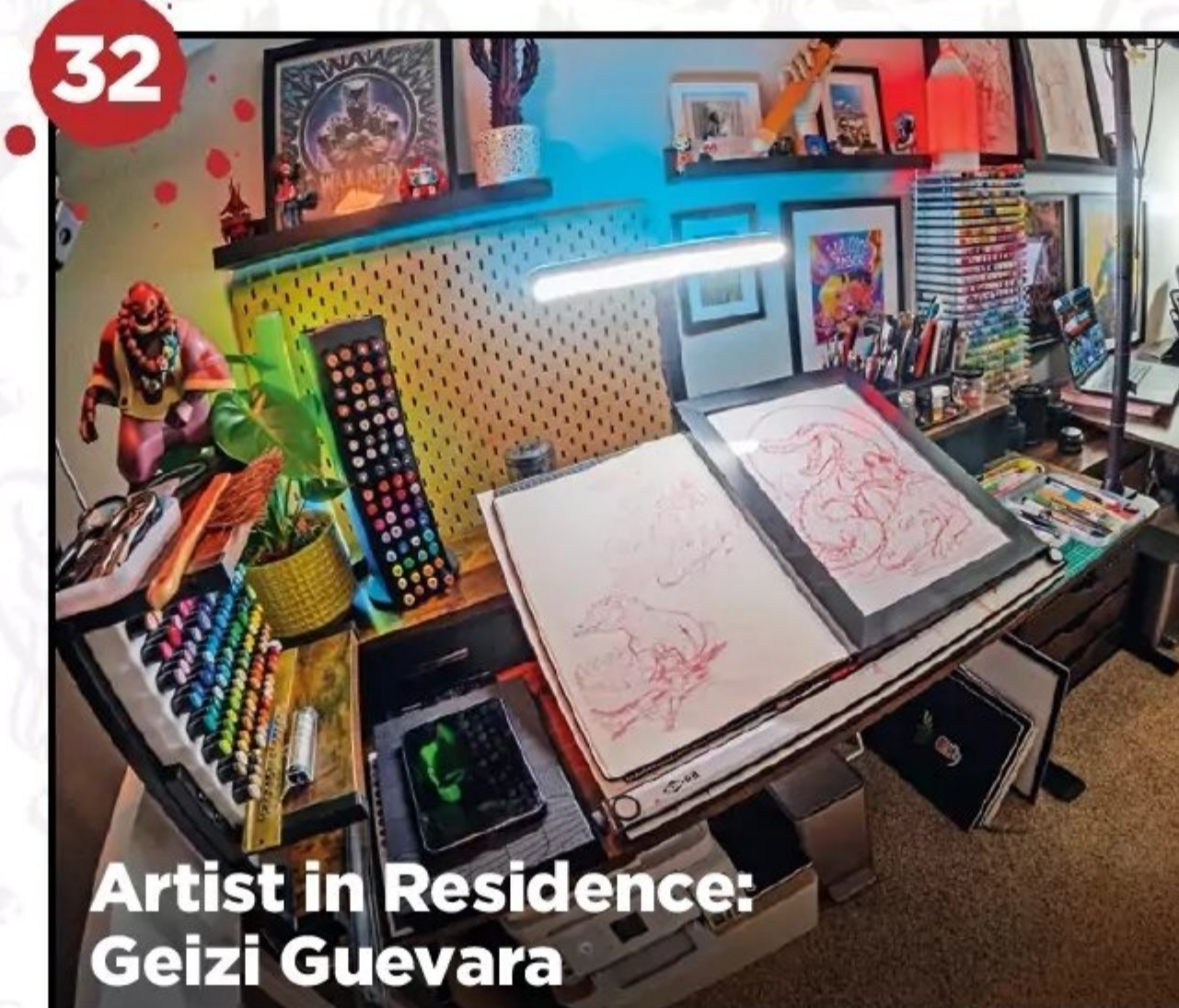
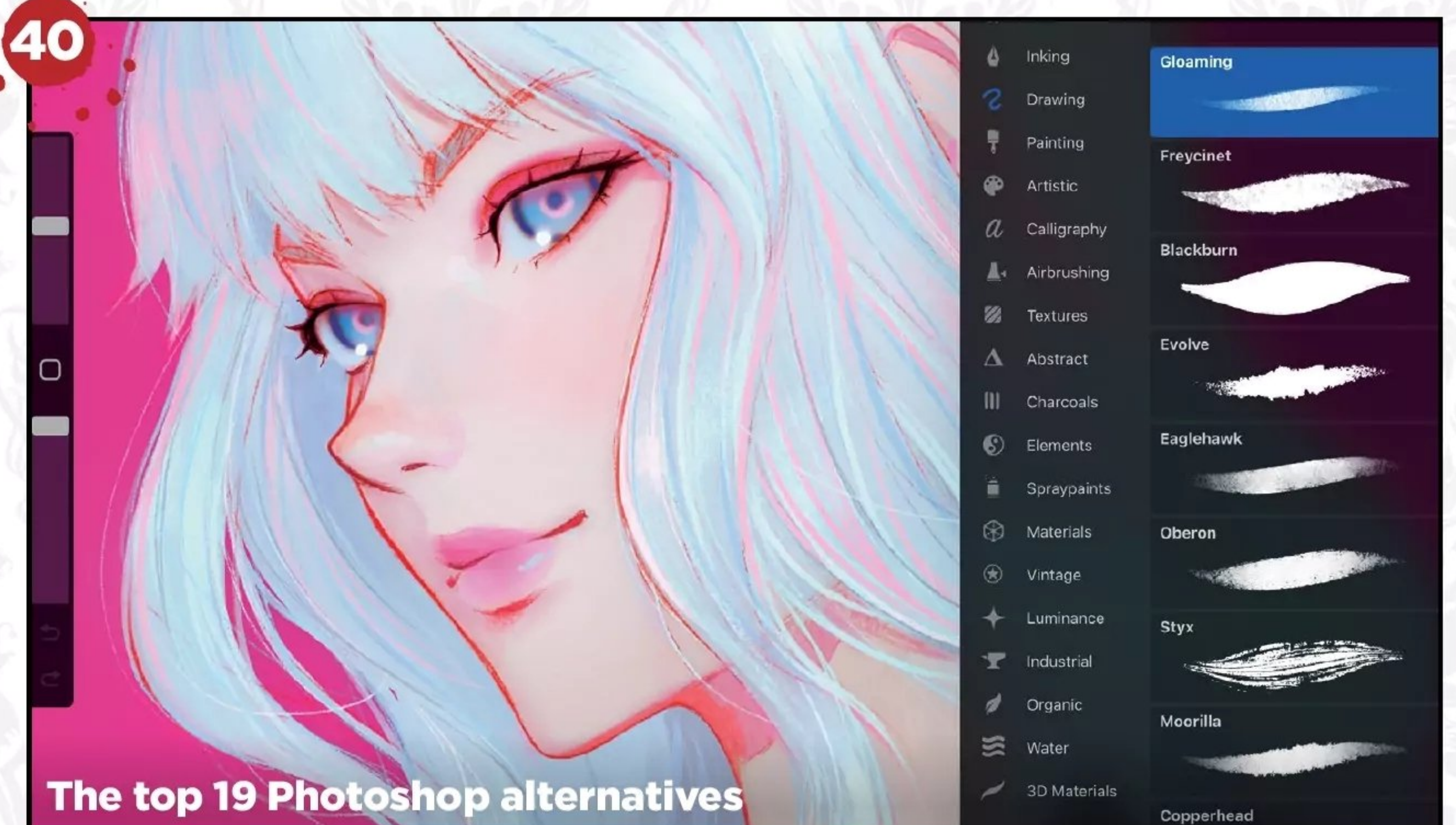
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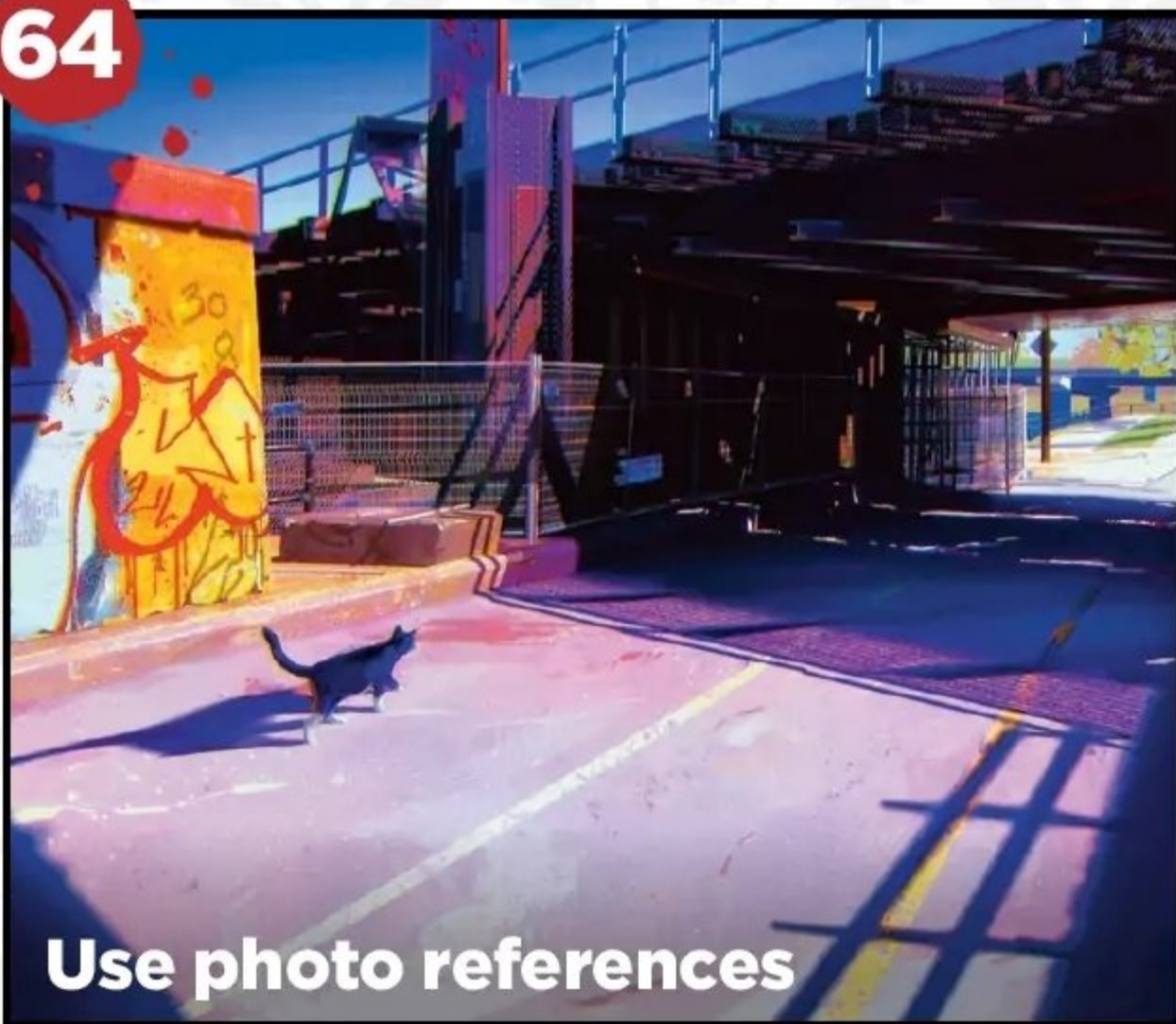
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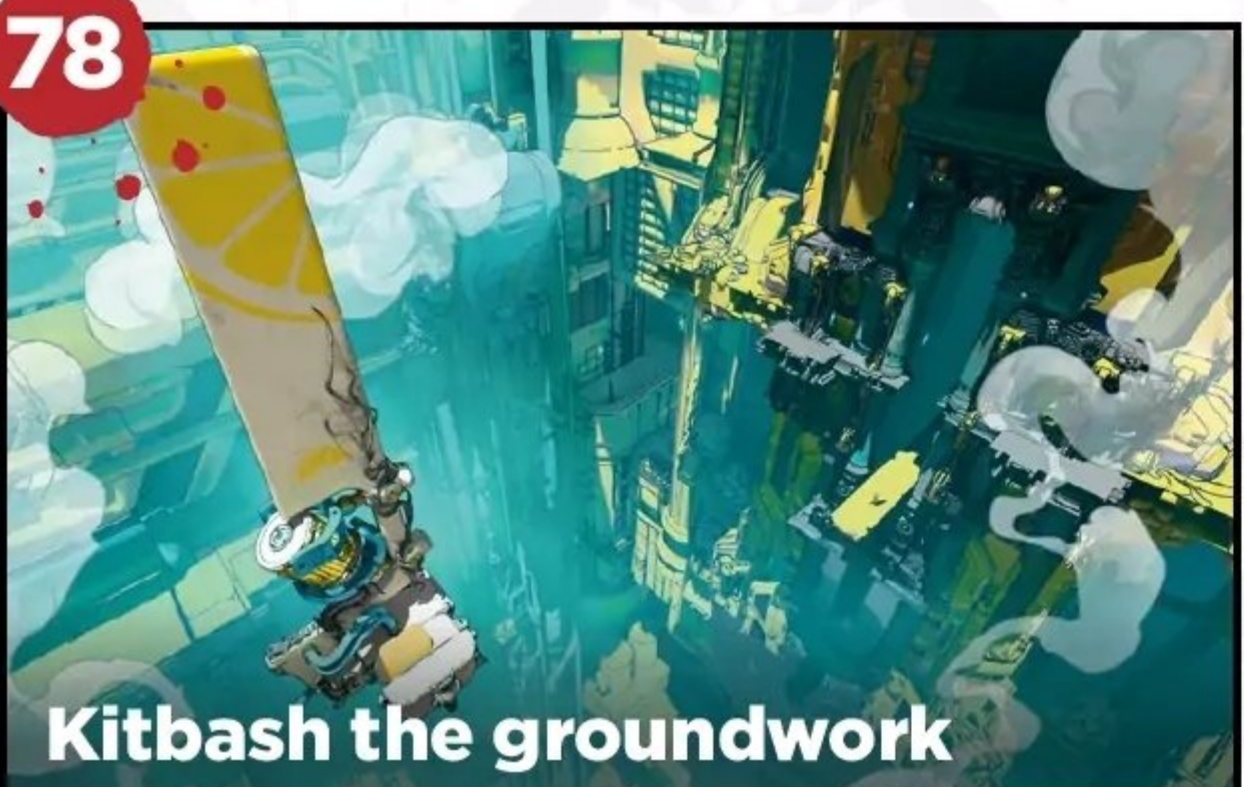
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GET YOUR RESOURCES

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

- 1 Go to the website**
Type this into your browser's address bar.
<https://ifxm.ag/character-design>
- 2 Click the download link**
Find your files ready for download.
- 3 Download what you need...**
Save the files or watch the videos.

Next month

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Next month in...

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CREATE GAME ART THAT SLAYS

Thomas Elliott shares his process for crafting
a brutal cover for **Doom: The Dark Ages**

The making of Arcane season 2

We go behind the
scenes to discover
the secrets of the hit
animation's finale

Develop visual style for games

Discover how titles
including Atomfall
and Eternal Strands
are brought to life

In the mind of a manga icon

Katsuya Terada tells
us about the many
inspirations for his
revered artwork

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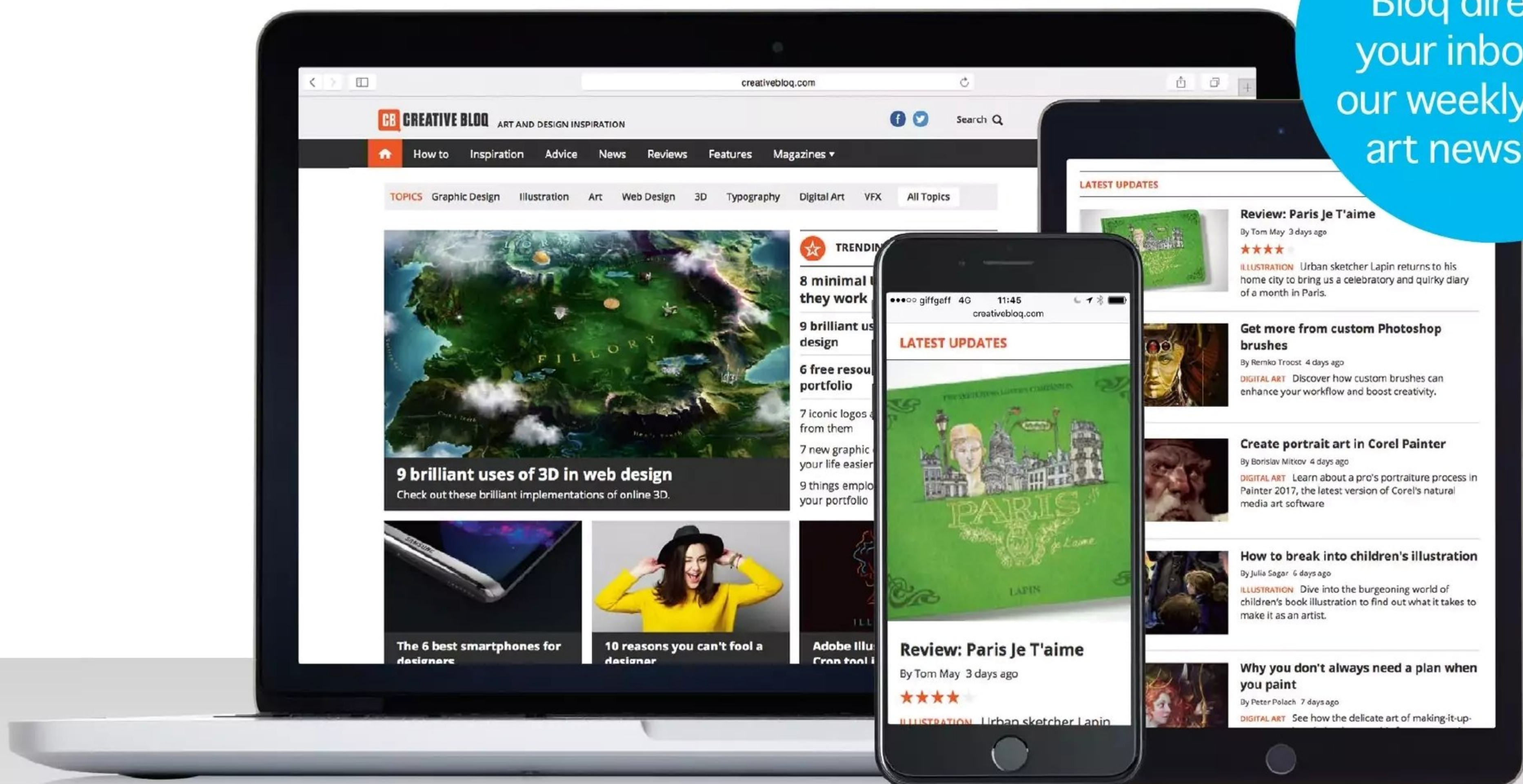
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FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Ksenia Kim

LOCATION: The Netherlands **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/goldkanet

A character artist and illustrator, Ksenia studied architecture but turned her passion for gaming and drawing into a career. She loves dark fantasy and has worked on Diablo IV and Magic: The Gathering.

1 ELF WARRIOR

"Even though I've always loved fantasy, I haven't drawn too many elves. This concept is a rare exception to that, and I enjoyed every moment of creating it."

2 VAMPIRE

"My favourite game is Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines, and I couldn't resist painting an original character inspired by it."



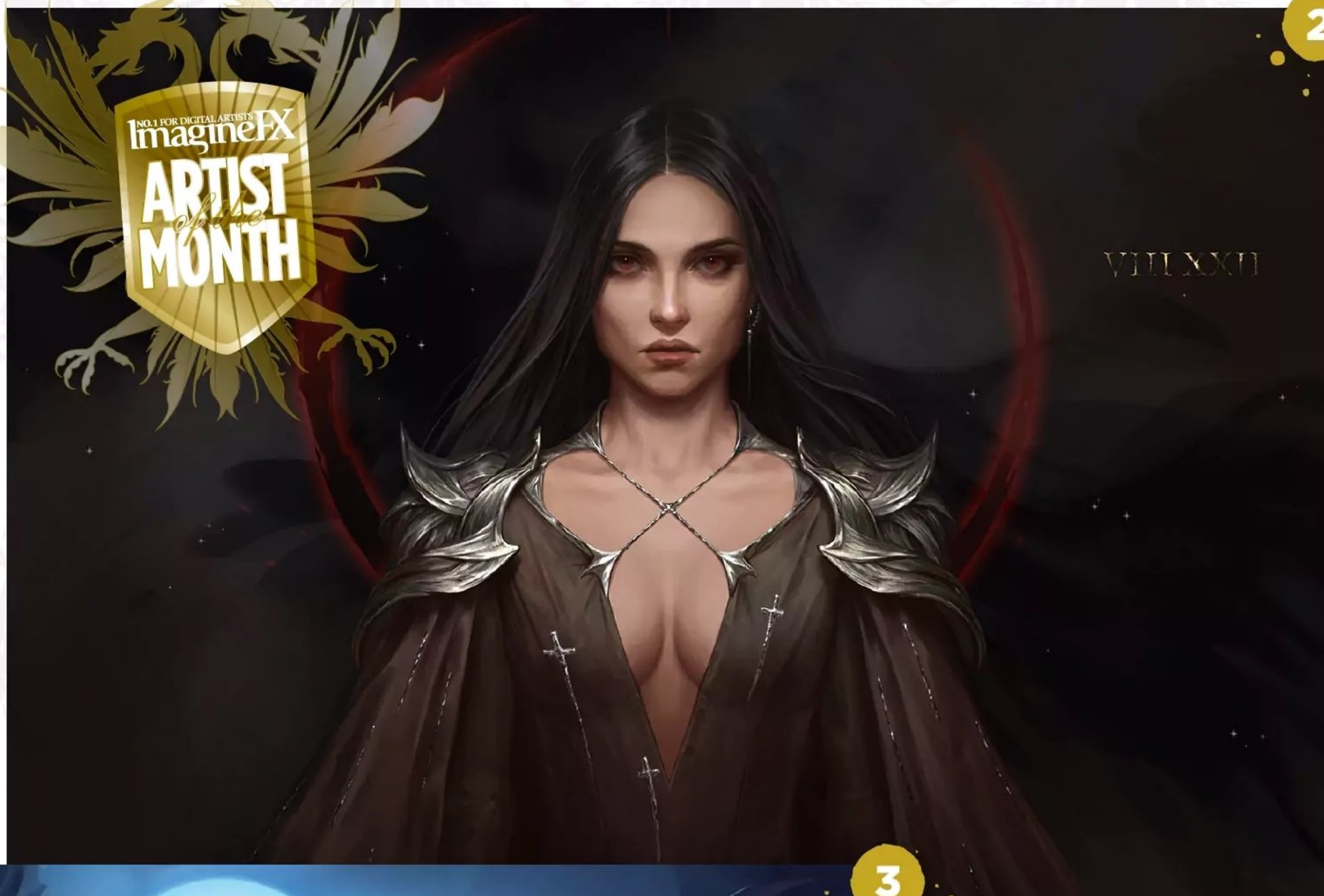
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3 KATARINA - LEAGUE OF LEGENDS FAN ART

"This was done for an illustration course, where we had to choose an existing character for the task. I've always admired Riot Games' artwork, so I chose Katarina from League of Legends."

4 POISON IVY

"This artwork is a tribute to my childhood dream of becoming a comic book artist. I wanted to capture an iconic character with a more painterly approach."



2

1







Ar Siu

LOCATION: Hong Kong **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint **WEB:** www.artstation.com/arsiu

Ar Siu works in the game art industry, primarily designing concepts for characters and scenes. He's also been known to dabble in book design and board game art.





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1 CONDOTTIERE CONCEPT

"Here I combined contrasting elements of classical knights and mechanical technology. I paid close attention to the brushwork in order to give this piece the quality of an oil painting."

2 AVALONIA - REAPER FACTION CONCEPT ART

"Designs for a board game. As well as sci-fi elements, I build backgrounds for various races, like heretical cults, and objects and colours to represent them."

3 X-MEN IN THE APOCALYPSE

"As a fan of the X-Men comics, I integrated the characters into my fan art. With this piece, I wanted to reimagine them living in a post-apocalyptic world."

4 AVALONIA - SAVIOURS FACTION CONCEPT ART

"Because of my fascination with post-apocalyptic sci-fi and military aesthetics, I often incorporate the two into my work to create a unique style."



Nico Lee Lazarus

LOCATION: Thailand **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint **WEB:** www.instagram.com/nicoleelazarus

Nico is a concept artist and illustrator for video games and films who is originally from Johannesburg. He enjoys experimenting with different styles and constantly considers himself to be a student of art.

1 PROJECT PURGE

"A horror-survival project inspired by a marathon of The Purge movies."

2 GROWING CAST

"As part of an original creation, I wanted to make additional people that my character Millia the Mechanic would meet on her journey."

3 MILLIA THE MECHANIC

"An original character that saw me experiment with new styles to tell the story of Millia and her two dogs out on adventures."

4 CRIMSON

"A parody project where The Hoods are a mercenary group inspired by Little Red Riding Hood."

1



2



3



4



5 PIRATE

"A demo for a team of characters that explores how narratives can push designs and make them more interesting."





Anand Ramcheron

LOCATION: South Africa **MEDIA:** Procreate **WEB:** www.instagram.com/anand_ramcheron

Anand is a freelance illustrator and a graduate of The Kubert School who specialises in illustration, visual development and comics. His clients include Marvel, Sony Pictures Animation and Netflix.

1 HUNTER OF IMMORTALS

"A cover designed for WuxiaWorld's Hunter of Immortals title. The piece combines cyberpunk and noir themes with the use of heavy blacks and vibrant colours."



2 LETHAL CHALLENGERS

"This is a cover drawn for an independent comic. I pushed the cyberpunk aesthetic by using black more harshly and playing around with the greyscale values."



3 GEHENNA

"A pin-up-inspired illustration that was heavily influenced by the late, great Akira Toriyama. Vehicles and characters are particularly fun and challenging for me."

4 PANZER MOTORS

"This manga-inspired piece began life as a casual sketch and evolved into a mock comic cover that experimented with screentones. Influenced by the works of Katsuhiro Otomo and Maciej Kuciara."





Michelle Cheng

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Procreate, Photoshop **WEB:** www.lemoncholy.net

Michelle is a storyboard and visual development artist currently working in the games industry. On the side, she runs a YouTube channel called lemoncholy and creates illustrations based on her love for travel and history.

1 LATE NIGHT JAZZ

"This is from my formative exchange semester in Paris. I wanted to remember the wonder I felt in a city that was so different from my upbringing in gridded North America."

2 NANJING ROAD

"Shanghai in the 80s, during its economic boom. I thought about the hope my parents' generation might have felt at the time. Historical photographs inspired the colour palette."



2



3



3 SECRET

"We passed a Chinese guardian lion while driving through the Californian desert. The landscape's strange beauty reminded me of the final scene from *In the Mood for Love*."



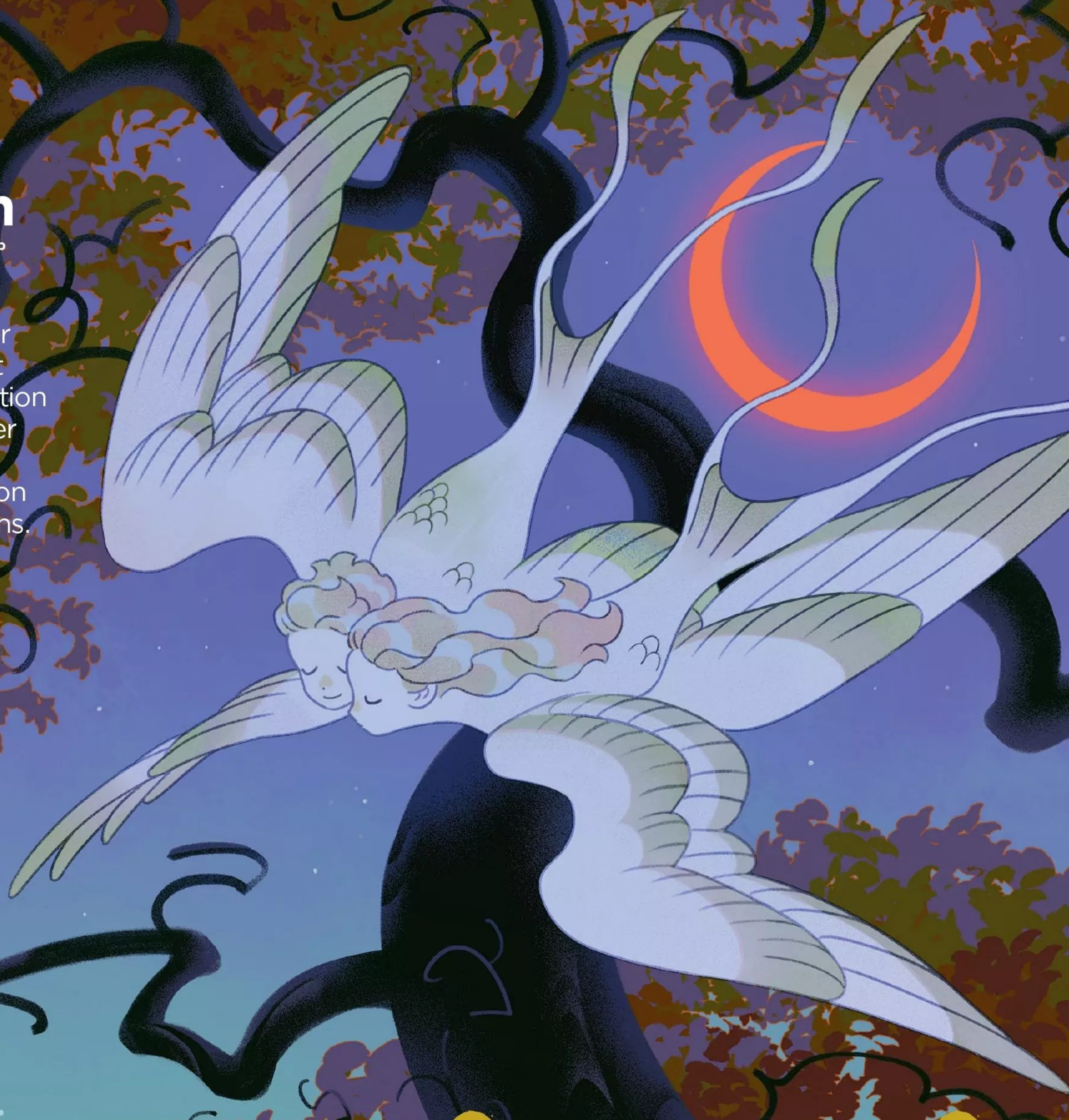
Sara Kipin

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop

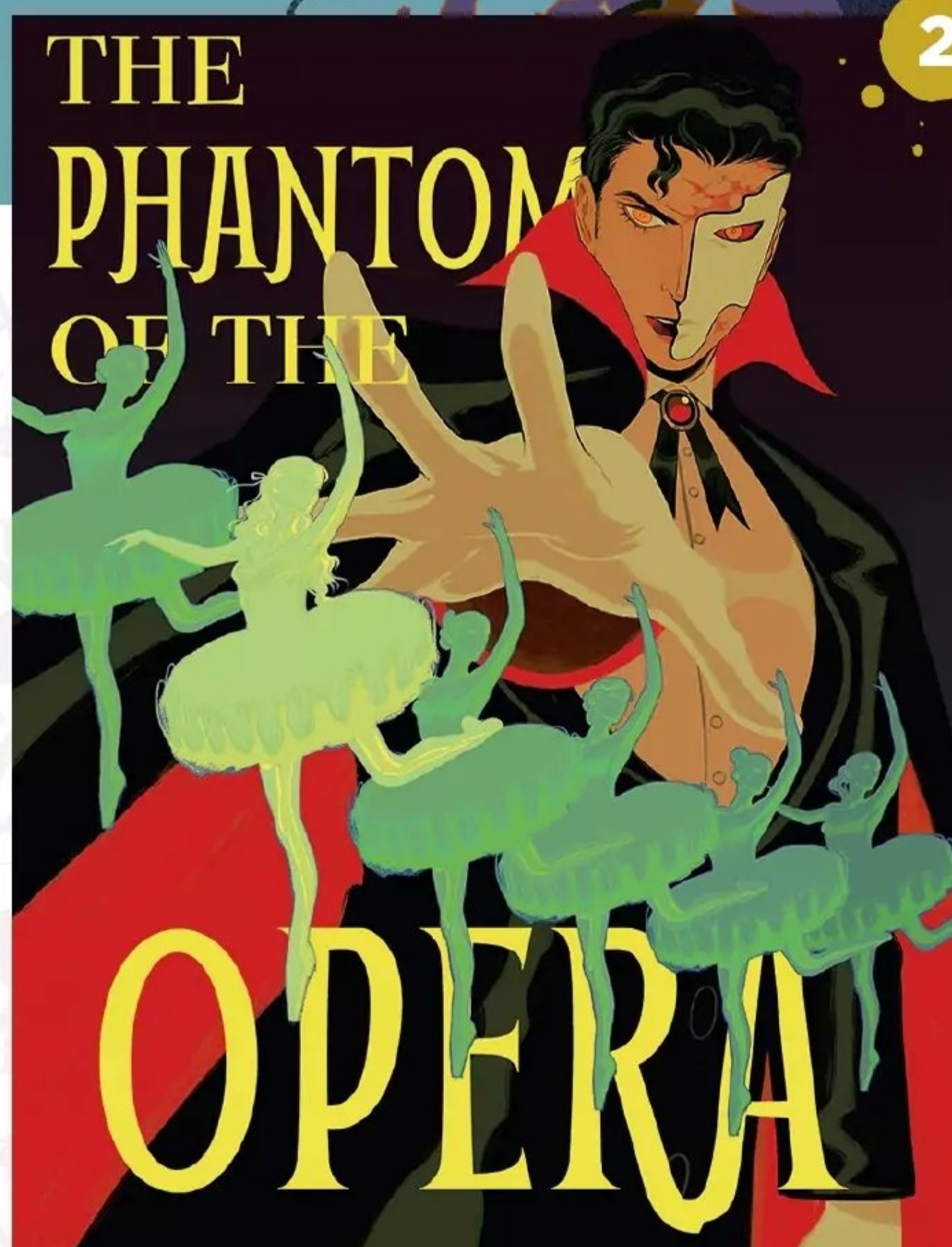
WEB: www.sarakipin.com

Sara is an illustrator and visual developer currently working at Nickelodeon Animation Studio as a character designer for the upcoming production Avatar: Seven Havens.

1



2



3



1 HARPIES

"An illustration dedicated to me and my husband's first wedding anniversary, this was inspired by romantic fantasy illustrations from the late 1800s. Think of the fairy books by Andrew Lang."

2 PHANTOM

"A piece created to celebrate musicals for a Gallery Nucleus show in Los Angeles. The Phantom of the Opera's gothic tone has been an inspiration for me since childhood."



3 DRAGON RIDER

"A personal illustration to celebrate Valentine's Day 2022. I wanted to evoke compositions in Medieval tapestries and explore complicated botanical borders."

4 THE HUNT

"An ode to the opening from The Last Unicorn. I tried to capture the mood in 1970s animation, particularly in the backgrounds and character design."



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Heart of Darkness SCP

YEAR CREATED: 2024 MEDIA: Photoshop, ZBrush

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

"This started as a concept for a game add-on at a studio. They wanted to make some entities inspired by the SCP Foundation, a wiki-based collaborative writing project based on paranormal and mysterious phenomena, to feature in an SCP add-on. I relied on written descriptions

for the Heart of Darkness entity to create this concept design. I took a model I made in ZBrush and painted over to enhance it in Photoshop, adding details and texturing, adjusting the colour palette, and painting on dramatic light and shadow to create a more ominous mood."

Artist PROFILE

Ava Luening

LOCATION: US



Ava has a passion for exploring the many possibilities of what life can look like through creature design. Using both 3D and 2D mediums together to create her

concepts, she combines the strengths of the two forms to bring her ideas to fruition.

www.therookies.co/u/AvaLuening



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The Rookies



Kooks says: "Make sure your portfolio page has an easily noticeable contact email address!"



"Offer something valuable for free to encourage people to sign up for your mailing list," Lisa says.



"My favourite platform is Bluesky. I've found good engagement with other artists there," says Michelle.

© Lisa Glanz

How to sell your artwork

Promotion commotion Tanya Combrinck discovers how getting serious about marketing can pay off and hears advice from artists across a range of industries

The topics of marketing and business aren't natural for the creative soul, but learning about them in a serious way can make a huge difference if you're not making the income you want from your work.

Fortunately, some artists have studied them in depth and devised ways to apply the business principles they've picked up to the art world. One such artist is **Kelsey Rodriguez**, a painter working in oils who also offers coaching and resources to artists looking to improve their incomes.

"The big mistake I see creatives making all the time is undervaluing the importance of selling, or avoiding it out of feelings of discomfort," she says. "I've worked with artists who have over 100,000 followers but

struggle to pay their bills because they're afraid to promote their work, or tried to sell one time and didn't get any results and so never tried again."

THINKING POSITIVE

As Kelsey sees it, taking a different attitude to selling can change your life. "There's this really damaging and pervasive belief, especially among professionally trained artists, that somehow selling compromises your creative integrity, or it cheapens your work. The reality is that after a certain threshold, your artistic skill has basically nothing to do with your financial success, but your confidence in selling absolutely does."

On her YouTube channel, Kelsey shares what she has learned about running an art business through a combination of study, trial and error,



"When someone joins your email list, they're expressing a deeper interest than just a casual follow. These people love what you do and want to buy from you," says Kelsey.

producing videos that are both motivating and practical.

As a starting point, Kelsey explains that thinking carefully about the audience or customer for your art will help you build the foundation of your business. "You need to have a deep understanding of the kind of person your work is for," she says. "Not just their demographics, but their values, what motivates them emotionally, how your work can impact them, and how it fits into their lives. ➡➡

“There's this really damaging and pervasive belief that somehow selling compromises your creative integrity”



DC AND SONIC COMIC COMBO

Two legendary IPs come together for a frenetic comic series! Find out more about the brand new release in our chat with artist Adam Bryce Thomas. **Page 30**



WORKSPACE WITH VIBES

Step inside the studio of manga illustrator Geizi Guevara, who explains how his huge collection of inspiration and creative tools set the mood for his work. **Page 32**



PERFECTION IN PURPLE

We select our favourite artworks submitted for the latest ImagineFX Art Challenge, which laid down the task of creating with a magical purple colour scheme. **Page 38**



Dominik says: "Do what you love. The fire and emotion you put in your work will shine through and spark inspiration and joy in others."

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

LESSONS TO LEARN

Business and marketing resources for creatives

Inkwell

www.youtube.com/inkwell

Dustin Panzino, a character and environment artist in the gaming industry, discusses his selling strategies, analyses different income streams, tells you which artist alleys are best, and dissects social media. He also has great guest artists who provide additional industry insight and advice.

Brandon Chen

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

Brandon quit his job in finance to make manga full-time and he now has a studio running multiple projects. Through his YouTube channel, he explains how he turned his passion into a successful business and tells you everything you need to know about making comics and publishing online.

Creative Hive

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

If you want to sell your work online, creative Mei Pak has a solid body of advice based on her own extensive experience of running a business selling art and handmade products. She gets straight to the point and dispenses her advice with great efficiency, so each video is packed with information.

ArtBusiness subreddit

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

Sharing your struggles and successes with other people in the same boat as you build your business can be helpful and motivating. Here you'll find moral support and handy advice from other artists of all stripes trying to carve out a living from their work.



"Nobody can buy your work if they don't even know that it exists," says Kelsey.

➔ "What problem does your work solve, or what value does it provide? Does it bring beauty into their home, help them express their identity, or connect them to something in a meaningful way?

"When you know the answers to these questions, every single marketing task becomes so much easier, from what content to create and where to share it, to how to talk about your work. Marketing at its core isn't about manipulating someone, it's about creating a genuine connection with the people who already value the art that you make."

CREATE WITH PURPOSE

Another good resource is The Honest Designers Show podcast, which discusses the business side of making



a living out of creative work. One of the hosts, illustrator **Lisa Glanz**, echoes Kelsey's advice about the need to build

up a detailed mental image of who is going to pay for your art.

"You need to create work that either solves a need or fulfils a purpose for someone else's project or product," she explains. "Being the

Dominik says: "Try making videos of your process. Maybe you're good at one specific thing. Let people know how you do it."



Lisa says: "Building an email list is one of the best ways to maintain control over how you reach your audience. Having a direct line through their inbox is absolute gold!"

© Lisa Glanz

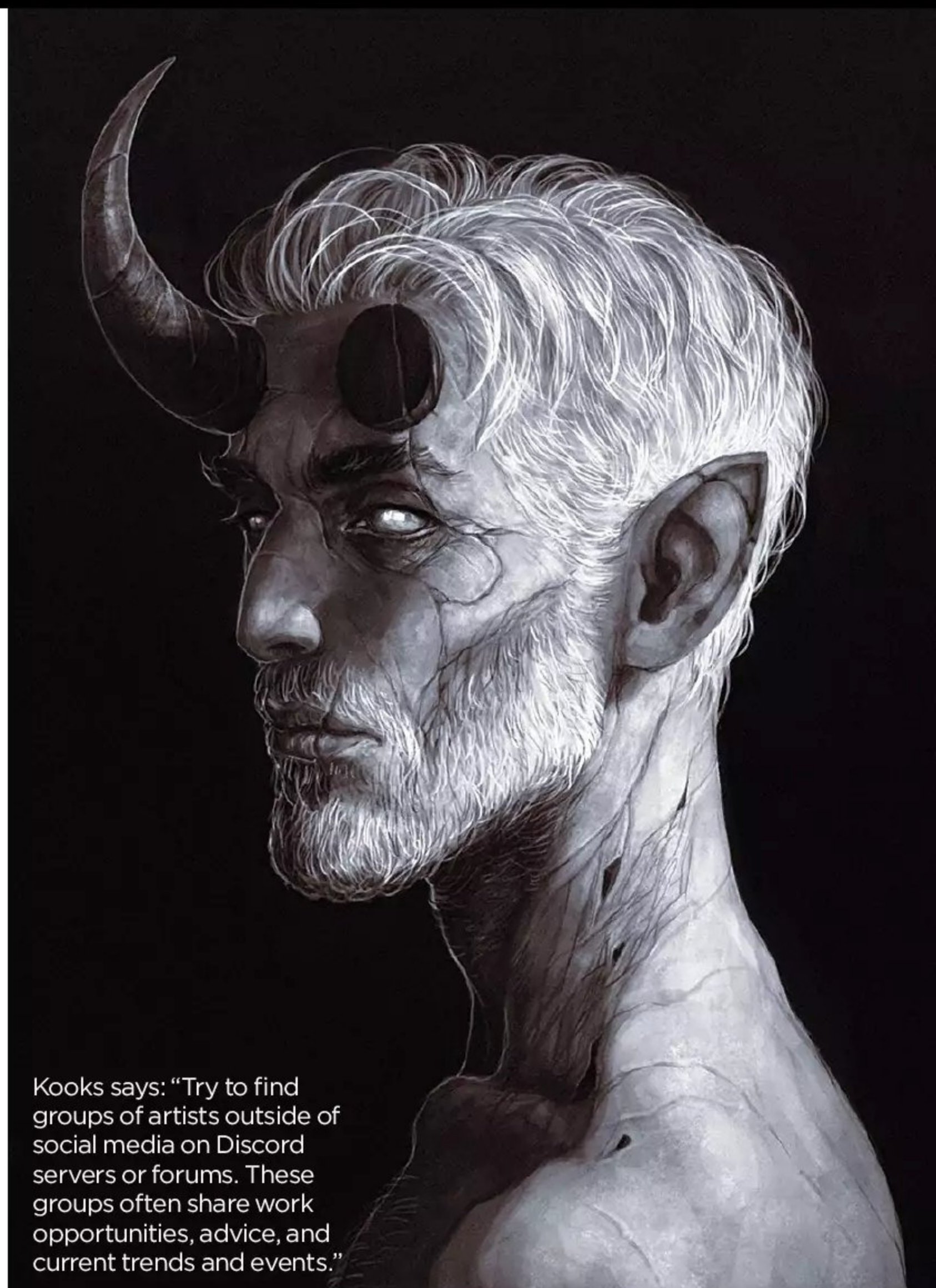
solution to a client's pain point is what makes you valuable."

Lisa recommends concentrating your energies on serving a particular audience. "That doesn't mean sacrificing your unique style or the kind of work you genuinely enjoy creating; you should still stay true to what excites you. But having a clear understanding of your ideal customer will help you decide what to make, from the subject matter to the format or application they're looking for. As

an example, if you want to get hired for editorial work, create and showcase artwork that helps an art director envision your illustrations in their magazine."

At the beginning of your career, Lisa advises you to choose your niche and stick to it. "Choose a clear path for your art and focus on the type of work you'd love to be paid to do. Put your energy into getting really good at that. Clients and customers are drawn to artists with a strong, recognisable

“ Focusing on the things I was obsessed with was crucial in terms of developing my skills and expanding my reach ”



Kooks says: "Try to find groups of artists outside of social media on Discord servers or forums. These groups often share work opportunities, advice, and current trends and events."



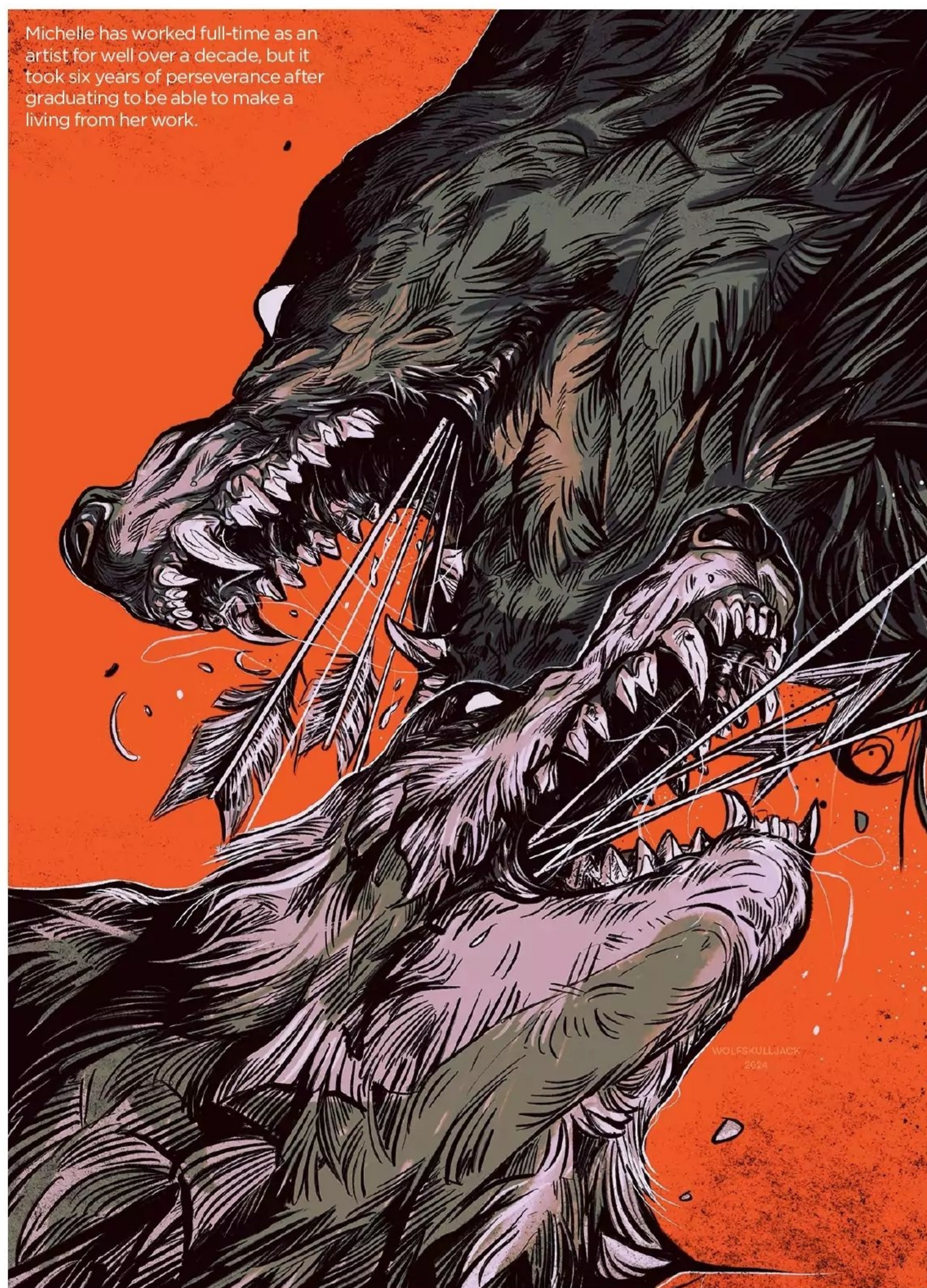
Universal Pictures courtesy of costume designer Paul Tazewell

style and a clear area of expertise, so lean into the work that reflects your strengths and passions."

LOVE YOUR OBSESSIONS

The importance of leaning into your passions is also important for the illustrator known as **CoupleOfKooks**, whose clients include Wizards of the Coast and Dark Horse Comics. "Get obsessed with it," Kooks advises. "Focusing on things I was obsessed with and not on pieces that were 'good for my portfolio' was crucial, both in terms of developing my skills

Phillip's spellbinding costume concept for Glinda from Universal's hit film *Wicked*.



Michelle has worked full-time as an artist for well over a decade, but it took six years of perseverance after graduating to be able to make a living from her work.

and also in expanding reach, back when I was building up a presence on social media."

Kooks got their first illustration jobs when their fan art and personal artworks were noticed through social media. These initial commissions then led to further work. "Fan art certainly has a much higher chance of getting noticed, but personal pieces and your own stories do build you an invested audience," Kooks tells us.

Social media isn't what it was when Kooks was starting out, so these days it's more important to have a portfolio on your own website. They add: "Make it simple but elegant, easy to browse, and show only your best work – don't make it a blog with everything you've done. Feature the type of illustrations you'd like to be commissioned for."

It's important to keep the faith in the early stages of your career, as often just a single high-profile

commission can be the turning point that changes everything. Illustrator



Michelle Jack, also known as WolfSkullJack, whose clients include bands Metallica and Trivium as well as game developer BioWare, found that to be the case.

Metallica was her first famous client, and her work for them caught the attention of Wizards of the Coast, which now gives her regular work. "The hardest part is getting those first big jobs, and once you can be seen to work well for others it starts to attract more of a clientele," she says.

Once you're established as an artist, **Phillip Boutté Jr.**, a costume and concept artist in the film industry, explains that you should think about how the skills you've honed can be transferred to other areas of work. "It's important ➡





➡ for artists to fan out and use their skill sets across multiple different areas of entertainment,” he says.

“Are you good at storyboarding? Then apply those sequential imagery skills in multiple areas like children’s books, comics, keyframes, editorial, integrated marketing, music videos, story art for animation, video games, and so on. As the market opens and broadens worldwide, ditching the ‘speciality’ moniker keeps artists buoyant and adaptable.”

It’s also good to think about how you might be able to combine your art with other complementary skills. Writing and illustrating her own books

proved to be transformational for



Jessica Roux’s career.

“Working in the publishing industry really changed things for me,” she reflects. “I was finally

doing what I loved, and I could focus on the subject matter that I’m really passionate about. I’ve always had an interest in writing, but realising that I could create projects for myself

“ Find the right audience and search for the places where those people go ”



© Lisa Glanz



An early character concept by Phillip for Marvel’s blockbuster movie Black Panther.

Disney/Marvel Studios courtesy of costume designer Ruth E. Carter

through that skill has really made all the difference for me.

“I don’t have to wait and rely on clients to come my way; instead, I can pitch ideas to publishers and make the things I want to make. While I’ve always loved illustrating, I feel so much more inspired and happier when I get to follow through with my own ideas and turn them into finished projects.”

MEET AND GREET

Making connections in the real world is another avenue that shouldn’t be overlooked. “Talking to potential clients face-to-face is always best as people are much more likely to



remember you if you had a proper meeting,” says **Dominik Mayer**, an art director and illustrator in the film and games

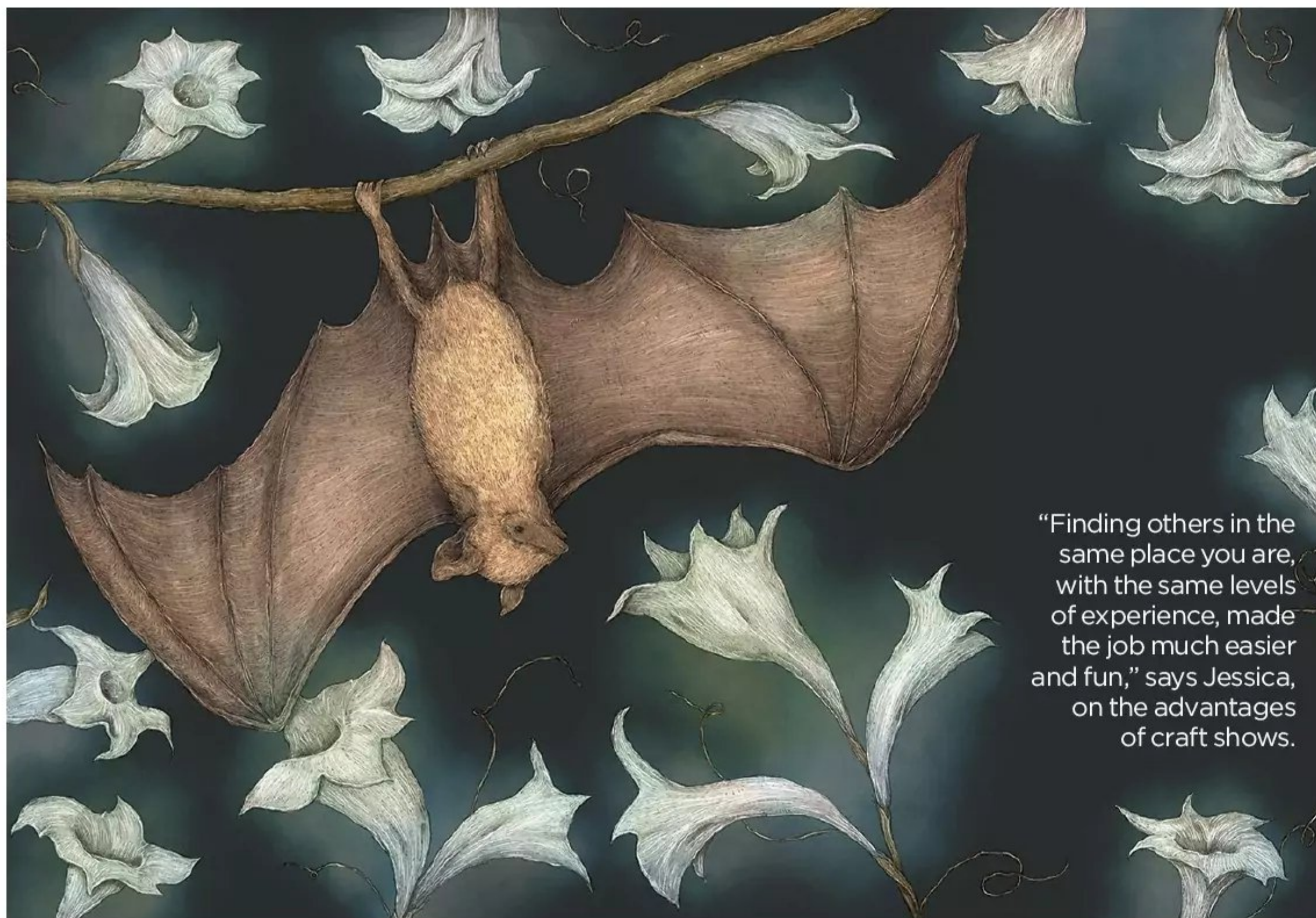
industries. To get started, he suggests going to shows and conventions and approaching people at their booths.

Dominik also finds it valuable to exhibit your art in galleries and other venues that are suitable for your style. “I approached a local comic store and asked to exhibit my work there, which was amazing,” he says. “Try to find the

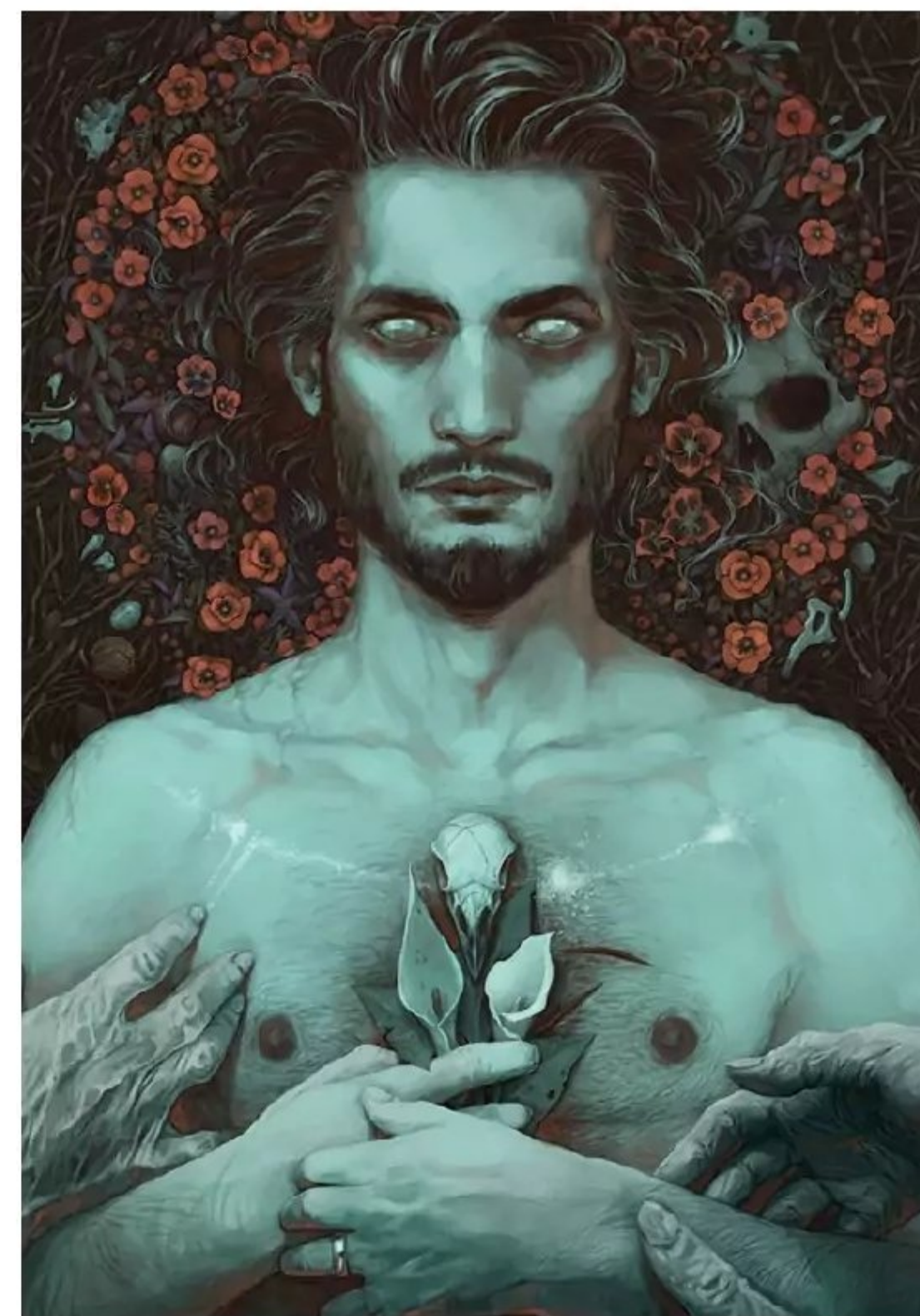
Lisa and her Honest Designers Show co-hosts regularly share advice on the podcast.

Artist news, software & events

"Sometimes there are really active communities on smaller platforms like Discord where the interaction can be more direct," Dominik suggests.



"Finding others in the same place you are, with the same levels of experience, made the job much easier and fun," says Jessica, on the advantages of craft shows.



Kooks creates art with themes of Gothic horror and witchcraft.

"It's fellow artists forming a respectful, supportive community that will get us through," says Michelle on current industry conditions.

right audience and search for places where those people go, then put your art there for them to see."

As social media platforms become less useful for artists, it's wise to build up a more direct connection with your customers. For that task, multiple artists told us that email is now a more important tool than ever before. "Email marketing is one of the most powerful methods that creatives can use to both sell their work and disconnect from social media," Kelsey explains. "Ultimately, social media platforms are a great tool for getting yourself discovered, but the real key to developing a more sustainable business is moving your followers onto a platform that you control." 🍷



"No matter your medium, having work displayed in a gallery is powerful, provides context, and helps the public zero in on our craft," says Phillip.





© Sega / DC

DC and Sega join forces

Comic collaboration Adam Bryce Thomas talks about the challenge of combining two classic IPs as Sonic partners up with the Justice League for a new adventure

Sonic and the Flash racing? Batman and Shadow riding together? Fans were in heaven when Sega revealed the first DC x Sonic the Hedgehog collab created by writer Ian Flynn, artist Adam Bryce Thomas and colourist Matt Herms.

A series of five comics has the Justice League meet Sonic and friends in an unlikely crossover. DC x Sonic the Hedgehog #1 sports a cover by Pablo

M. Collar with a variant cover created by Ethan Young.

First announced at Sega's Sonic Central livestream event in September 2024, issue #1 went on sale in March. The story sees DC villain Darkseid cross dimensions to invade Sonic's world. While Sonic has faced mad scientists and ancient spirits, an attack by the forces of Apokolips requires extra help from the Justice League.

instincts bleed into my franchise work and I like to think the reader response to it, combined with reliability on my end, was key in securing the role. It felt like my hard work paying off.

"After seeing the final issue #1 with full colours and letters, I was excited for the rest of the books to come out since they were gorgeous with Matt's colours, and I believe my work has improved with subsequent issues having become more familiar with the DC cast and more ambitious layouts. The audience reception has been stellar, which makes me very happy."

Adding some of DC's iconic characters to the mix meant a fresh twist for Adam. "My biggest challenge was trying to avoid visual disharmony with the stylisation," he says. "I believe I found a decent approach that appreciates both of the franchises and unifies the line work."

"DC and Sega were both very accepting. Communication has been smooth and I haven't gotten too much criticism on my storytelling, which means a lot to me. There's a lot going on in the book, so finding a way to fit everything in was engaging."

“There’s a lot going on in the book; finding a way to fit everything was engaging”

Having previously worked on Sonic comics for IDW, the character was no stranger to artist **Adam Bryce Thomas**. "DC and Sega selecting me for this role was extremely validating - I was thrilled," he says. "During my tenure with Sonic I've been working hard to establish a unique approach to the storytelling and presentation for my art, especially in my personal work. I let those



Speed demons Sonic and the Flash take on supervillain Darkseid in the five-issue series.

© Sega / DC



© Sega / DC

The series wasn't the first time Adam has teamed up with writer Ian and colourist Matt. "I've worked with Ian and Matt for nearly a decade, and they're both incredible craftsmen," Adam adds. "We take our roles very seriously to provide fun and engaging stories for our audience. It feels like there's a lot of trust between us to do what we believe is right for the work. That respect is always reciprocated."

Pablo M. Collar created the cover art for the first issue of the crossover.

The comic series will be followed by a range of merchandise featuring toys and collectibles. Toys will include Shadow the Hedgehog as Batman, Knuckles as Superman, Amy Rose as Wonder Woman, Silver the Hedgehog as Green Lantern, Tails as Cyborg, and Sonic as the Flash. The first apparel celebrating the DC x Sonic collab has already launched online through US store Target.

ImagineFX quick quiz

Find out if you're a digital art brainbox!

1) What is the name of the animation software launched by Procreate in 2023?

- A) Visions
- B) Move
- C) Dreams
- D) Action

2) The artist Loish was born in which country?

- A) The Netherlands
- B) Belgium
- C) Germany
- D) Luxembourg

3) What colour does the C in CMYK stand for?

- A) Crimson B) Carmine
- C) Cerise D) Cyan

4) Which famed artist designed the xenomorphs for Alien?

- A) Ian McQue
- B) H.R. Giger
- C) Moebius
- D) Alan Lee

5) What do you call it when all your parallel lines meet?

- A) Rule of thirds
- B) Vanishing point
- C) Golden ratio
- D) Layer mask

6) What year was the first Sonic the Hedgehog game released?

- A) 1991 B) 1992
- C) 1993 D) 1994

7) What art style is made entirely of dots?

- A) Expressionism
- B) Spotwork
- C) Pointillism
- D) Symbolism

8) What is the opposite of landscape orientation?

- A) Seascape
- B) Still life
- C) Portrait
- D) Cloudscape

9) What does the word impasto make reference to?

- A) Canvas
- B) Applying thick paint
- C) Software tool
- D) Mental block

Answers: 1C, 2A, 3D, 4B, 5B, 6A, 7C, 8C, 9B

ImagineFX Artist in Residence



This setup is pure creative fuel. The marker towers are my go-to palette, ready for anything from speed sketches to full illustrations.

My first iPad and the reason I got into Procreate. I don't use it to draw anymore, but keep it close for pulling up reference images or inspiration.

The wooden hand holding a giant pencil reminds me that everything starts with an idea and a line. But it's the photos next to it, including my daughter as a newborn and a snap of my wife and I with our pups, that remind me why I create.



Where the real work gets done! From pitch decks to character sheets or packaging, this setup is built for speed and flexibility.

This portrait was painted in 2019 as part of a series I called Intuition. It was an experimental phase where I let instinct guide the brush more than usual.

Having images side-by-side on my Cintiq helps me think about palette harmony while letting each breathe. I like setting up my workspace this way before diving into the colour.

A Ninja Turtles piece illustrated a few years ago when I got back into 3D as a tool for finished client work. The base model was created by my friend Vinicius Cardoso, and I gave it my own visual twist.

Geizi Guevara

Vibrant harmony Step inside a high-energy art space packed with gadgets, artbooks and creative chaos

The first drawing for my upcoming artbook Primora. I wanted to showcase a few of the thumbnail sketches I like to play around with and framed one of my favourites.



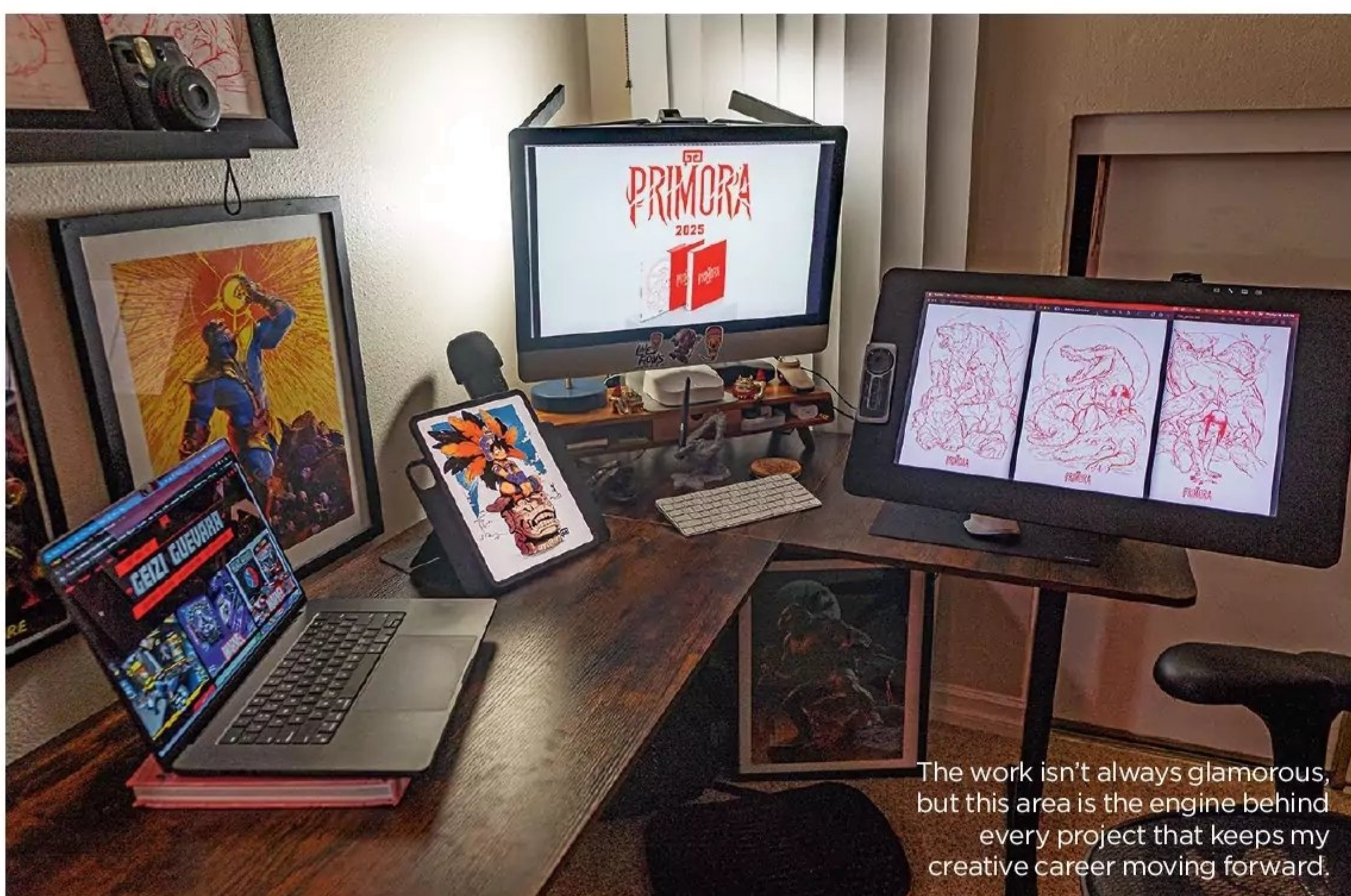
I've always believed your workspace should reflect what fuels your creativity. Mine is a compact, ever-evolving hub based in Los Angeles, where every inch is either

stacked with tools, lit up with personality, or displaying a piece of my journey. It's not a massive space, but it's dialled in to work hard for me, whether I'm inking characters, designing toys, or filming content for a new collab.

The heart of the studio is my tilted drafting table, where most of my ink work happens. Next to it is a rainbow tower of markers, always within arm's reach. I keep my iPad docked nearby so I can bounce between digital sketching and ➡

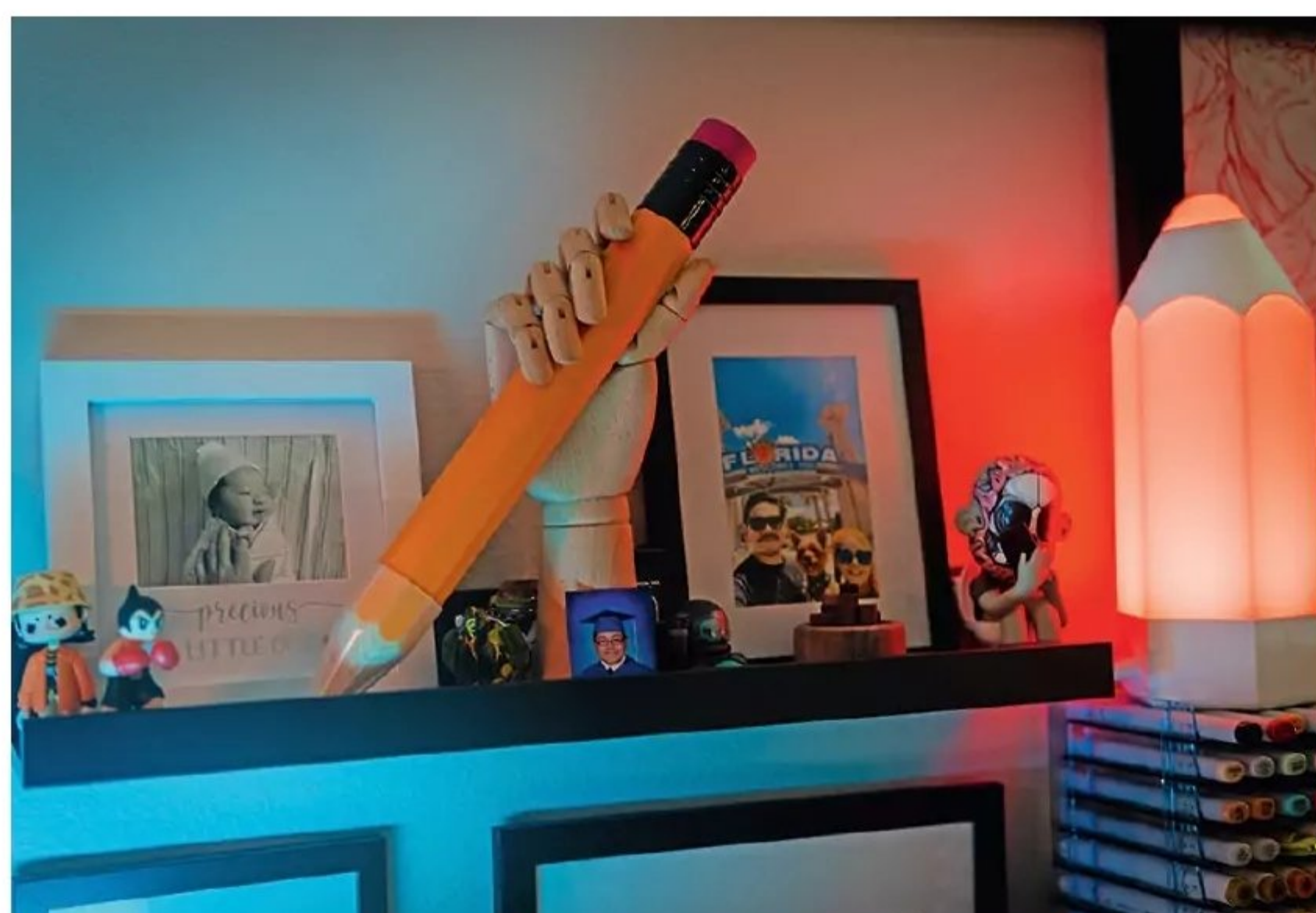
ImagineNation Artist in Residence

This is where I do a lot of my personal work, usually after a long day of digital projects. Sitting down with my traditional tools helps me decompress and reconnect with the fundamentals.



The work isn't always glamorous, but this area is the engine behind every project that keeps my creative career moving forward.

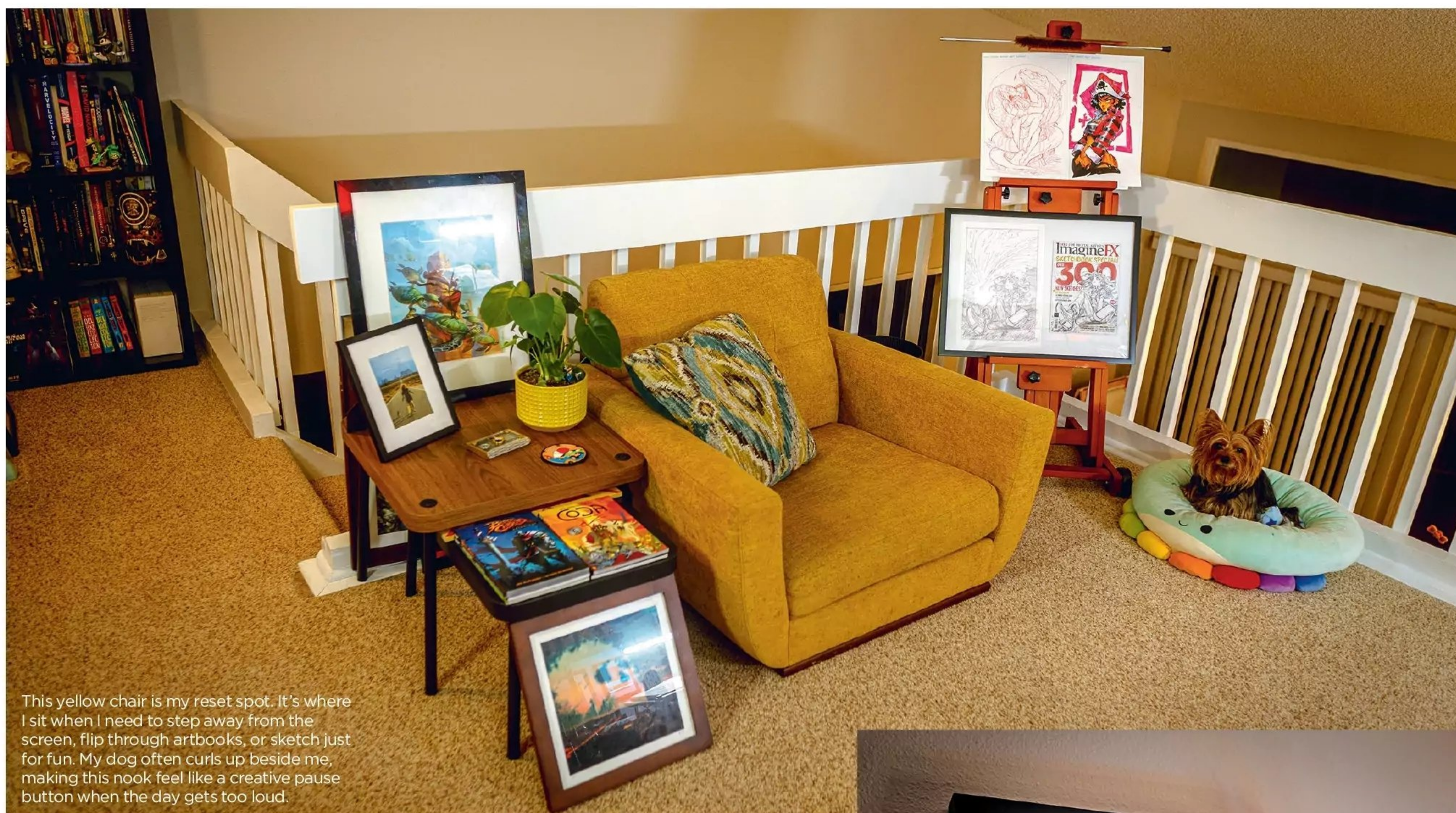
This shelf is a mix of humour and symbolism that grounds me. When the pressure kicks in, I look over and instantly remember who I'm doing all this for.



There was something about the energy and viral moment of the Peaches song that made me want to reimagine her in my style; fierce, magical and battle-ready.

“Every inch is stacked with tools, lit up with personality, or showing a piece of my journey”

The Kuta vinyl toy on top of my marker tower reminds me of the bold, expressive style of Sean Galloway, also known as Cheeks-74, whose character work continues to be a huge creative influence for me.



This yellow chair is my reset spot. It's where I sit when I need to step away from the screen, flip through artbooks, or sketch just for fun. My dog often curls up beside me, making this nook feel like a creative pause button when the day gets too loud.

“My biggest lesson? Create a space you actually want to come back to, not just one that looks good for Instagram”

➡ traditional textures seamlessly. My workspace blends old-school art techniques with today's modern tools. Sometimes I'll jump from Photoshop and Procreate across to traditional red-pencil roughs, depending on the mood and the project.

I've also layered my walls with art and inspiration. Some are my own, some from artist friends or past

collaborations. There's a Wakanda Forever print watching over the studio like a guardian, and a collection of vinyl toys and books that remind me where I started out. I'm a morning-to-late-night kind of artist, meaning I'll often jump into work at sunrise with a strong coffee in hand and not leave until my playlist runs out and my Apple Watch tells me that I've only stood up once all day.

RGB AMBIENCE

Lighting is everything for me. The warm glow from my custom LED rig lets me film content without harsh shadows, while RGB accent lights shift with my vibe. Blue is for focus, and red when I'm deep in a storytelling sequence. The studio isn't perfectly organised, but that's intentional. Every single pen, toy and sketchbook in there has earned its place.

One of the weirdest things about my setup? I can't jump into a serious drawing without kicking things off with music. It's usually something nostalgic like a video game intro – The Legend of Zelda always hits just



The framed Wakanda Forever art is from one of the last Marvel board games I art directed. It's a visual mantra of strength, culture and legacy that sits above my desk to remind me to lead with purpose.

right – or some retro hip-hop. That first track flips a switch in my brain and suddenly I'm in the zone. I've learned to embrace those rituals instead of trying to force a routine that doesn't fit with me.

My biggest lesson from working here is to create a space you actually want to come back to, not just one that looks good for Instagram. Your art will thank you for it.

Geizi Guevara is an LA-based illustrator and designer who's been building worlds and characters for over 16 years, blending traditional ink with digital tools. He's all about staying curious, pushing ideas, and creating art that sparks something in others.
www.instagram.com/ggkoncepts.



A trio of DC heroes that was a gift from Warner Bros. Studios during an office visit. I art directed the visual branding for their 2018-2020 master toy line.

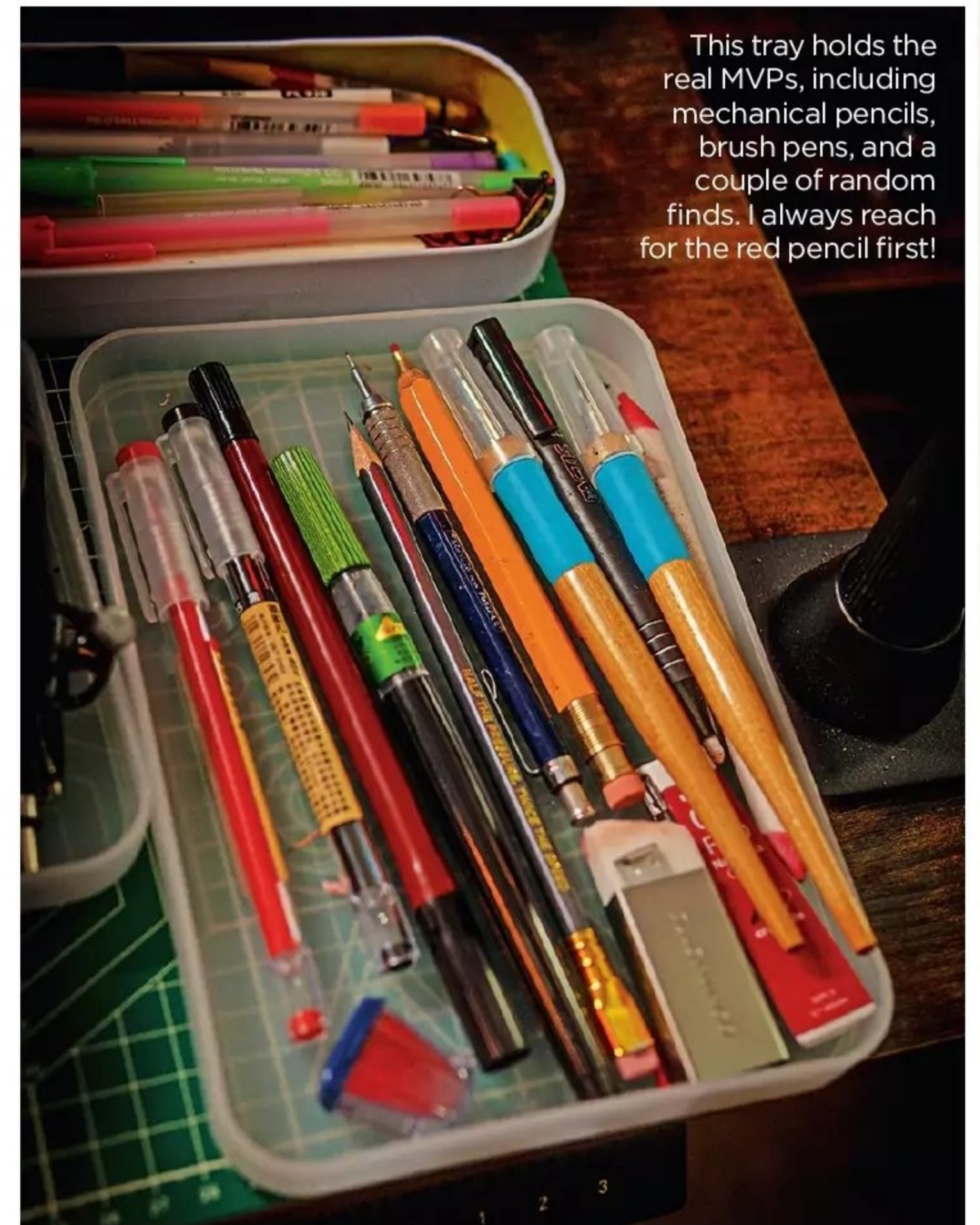
Artist news, software & events



This pen gets more use than any other tool, so it felt right to give it a base that inspires me. The figure was designed by Keos Masons, one of my favourite digital sculptors.



The skull was a gift from a friend who knew I loved studying form and light the old-school way. Beside it is a limited edition print of a skeletal pencil deity.



This tray holds the real MVPs, including mechanical pencils, brush pens, and a couple of random finds. I always reach for the red pencil first!



This corner is a curated mess of everything I love: artbooks, graphic novels, animation bibles and collectibles. All the prints are signed pieces from artists I admire that I've collected over the years attending conventions and expos.



This easel holds one of my proudest moments: my cover for ImagineFX's Sketchbook Special. I framed the pencils used with the published version to honour the process and the result. It reminds me how far I've come as an artist.



Photography has always been one of my favourite creative outlets outside of drawing. These lenses aren't just gear, they're tools I use to train my eye, explore light, and practise composition in real life.

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
**ART
CHALLENGE**

Purple reign You picked out a mystical colour theme to test your skills as our Art Challenge returned



Kimmie Fransson Web: www.kimmiefransson.com



Eszter Kókainé Budai
Web: www.instagram.com/librae44



Erica Bey Web: www.instagram.com/erica_bey



Reggie Thomas
Web: <https://bit.ly/4lqKaMY>



Fernando Martín Antón
Web: www.instagram.com/phrenan_illustrations



Lou Basali Web: www.instagram.com/loubasali

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

Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



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



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Bring me to life

Hi Rob. I'm a budding comic creator but have always struggled with the storytelling side of things. I know I can draw really well, it's just adding a dash of personality to the characters and panels that's always had me stumped.

But I've been feeling so much better after reading Simone Ferriero's advice in last month's ImagineFX. I've followed his tips and now my comics feel way more lively. I'm not quite there yet but I'll keep practising. Cheers Simone!

Laila, via email

Rob replies Thanks for getting in touch Laila! It's so lovely to hear from aspiring artists who know where their strengths and weaknesses lie and even better to hear that we've helped you take a step towards your goals. Simone did a great job with that workshop, with some really good advice to improve this side of the comic creation process, and I'm so glad you got something from it. We try to cover a whole range of skills in the mag, so keep your eyes peeled for more in future issues.

Simone Ferriero shared his tips for upping your comic game last month.



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?

Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 252 at ifxm.ag/single-ixf.



African comics are on the rise! We spoke to eight artists about their explosive growth in issue 252.

Around the world of art

Thank you for the feature you did on African comics recently. I love travelling the world and find it inspires new things in my art all the time. I've never been to Africa though, so learning about the art and the type of stories that local artists tell was super interesting. The colours in the artworks you featured were so bold and vibrant too – amazing!

Benny, via email

Rob replies I've been very lucky in that I've managed to travel a lot too, and I completely agree with you Benny. Visiting new places and discovering how the history and culture influences local artists can be fascinating and something we don't get to experience when we stay home, or don't take the time to explore, even online. I'm so pleased you enjoyed the feature and art.

That's a wrap!

Hey ImagineFX team. I just wanted to say how much I loved the wraparound cover you did for your last issue with all the Marvel Rivals characters on it. So mega! I've been playing the game since it's release day (I'm ranked Celestial I, humblebrag!) as I'm a huge geek for anything Marvel. Seeing all of the characters in one place was awesome and the feature was totally fascinating.

Pierce, via email

Rob replies Hi Pierce. Thanks for the kind words. We agree, that was a fab cover and really the only way to do justice to a universe with such a huge range of iconic characters. Marvel has managed to create such a truly immense set of worlds, heroes and villains that sometimes it doesn't feel right to only feature a single one and Rivals really shows the breadth of creativity. Art director Dino Ma and his team did a great job getting the style for Rivals just right.



New works that have grabbed our attention



Heather Hattrick
[@heatherhattrick](https://instagram.com/heatherhattrick)



HEW Animation
[@hewanimation](https://instagram.com/hewanimation)



Erotokritos Papis
[@erikpapis](https://instagram.com/erikpapis)

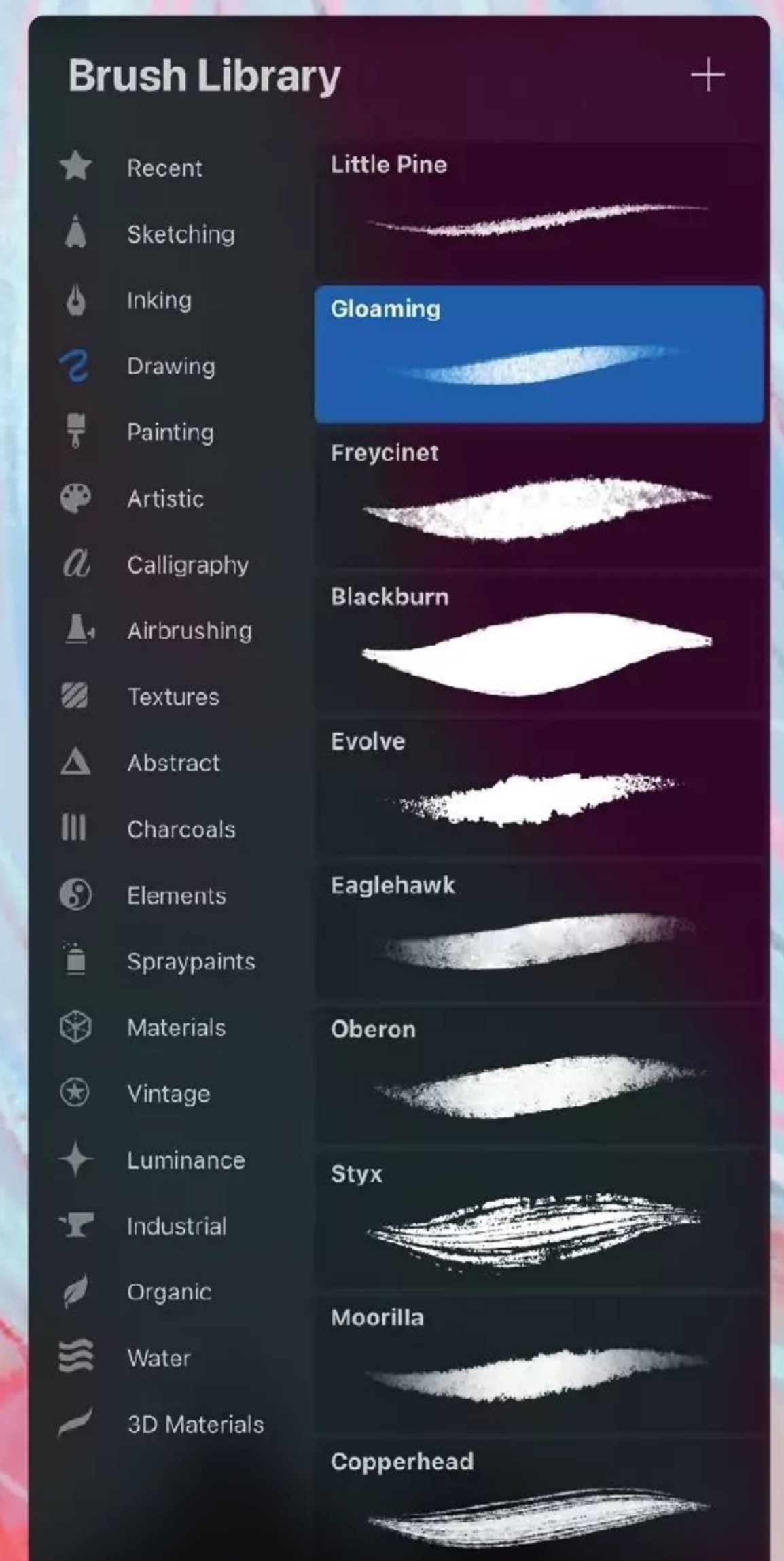
If you've created art that you want us to shout about simply tag us on X or Instagram, and use the hashtag #imaginefx

THE TOP 19 PHOTOSHOP ALTERNATIVES

Confused by the endless choice of digital art apps on the market? We're here to help with a breakdown of the best options for you

The leading digital art software available today provides more choice and variety than ever, from painting software that can simulate real physical media to photo-editing tools that provide the versatility for all kinds of digital art.

We've tested and reviewed a wide range of art software using real-world workflows to compare all the options for different needs. And with all that experimentation in the bag, we put together a handy guide to compare and rate our picks of the very best in terms of features and tools, versatility, ease of use, and price.

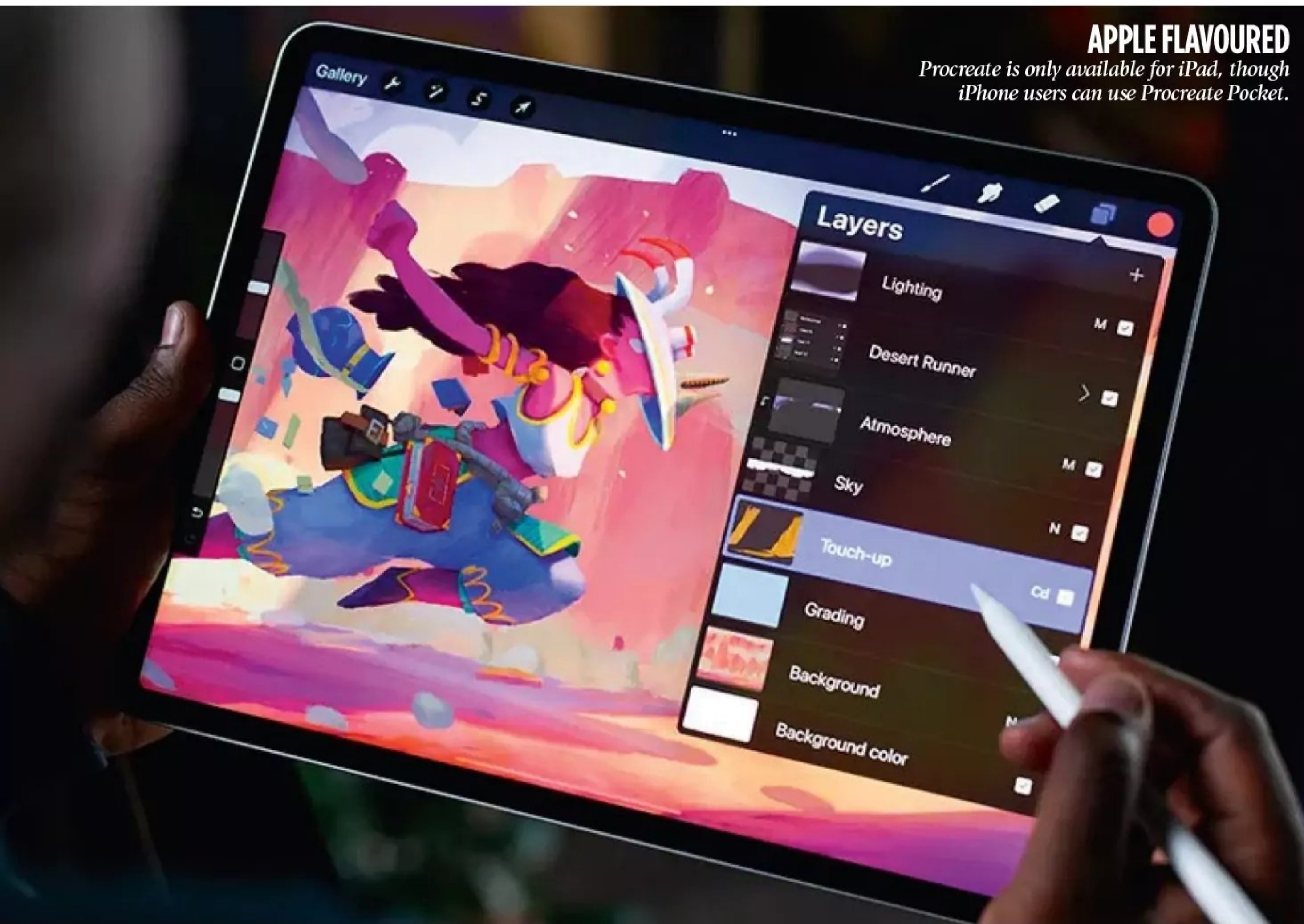


BRUSH BONANZA

Procreate offers a ton of brushes, with plenty more to download for the perfect stroke.

Top Photoshop alternatives

All images © Procreate



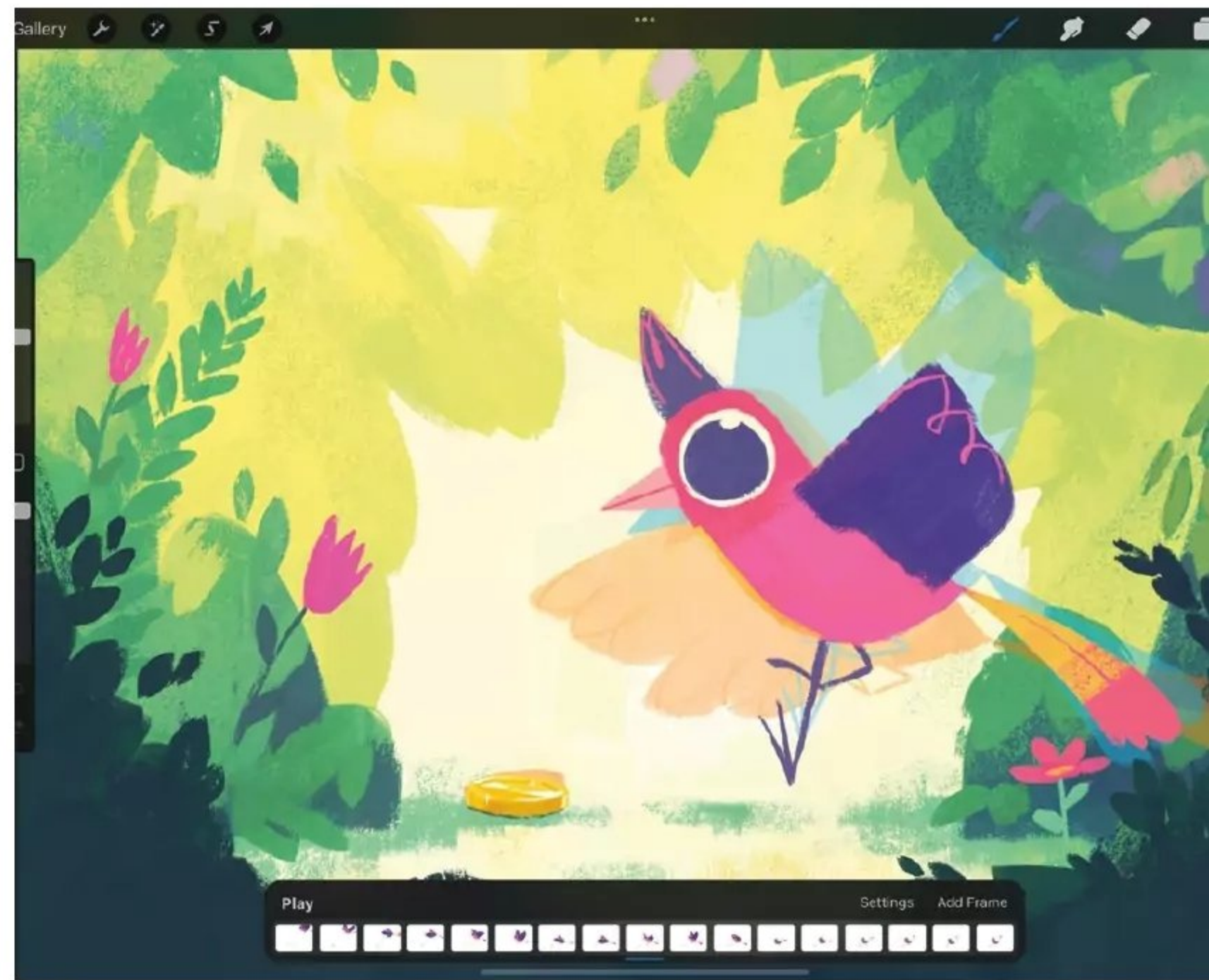
APPLE FLAVOURED

Procreate is only available for iPad, though iPhone users can use Procreate Pocket.



ROCK AND ROLL

For us, there's no better software than Procreate available right now when it comes to drawing and painting.



PROCREATE

The powerful iPad software is a fan favourite with a wealth of brushes for a bargain price

DON'T GET IN A FLAP

The straightforward UI in Procreate makes it a breeze to get started with.

We still consider Procreate to be the best digital drawing and painting software that we've tested. It doesn't have the massive array of features and use cases that are provided by Photoshop, but what it can boast of are powerful brush tools and a smooth UI that have won it a big following among artists. It also ticks the box for great value as a one-time purchase.

The size and quality of Procreate's customisable pre-installed brushes out of the box is impressive, and now it's hired Adobe's former brush designer Kyle T. Webster that will only grow. There are plenty more Procreate brushes available to download too since the app has a strong community.

We've always found Procreate good for more realistic digital painting and illustration. You can work with

Price £12.99/\$12.99
Platform iPadOS
Company Savage Interactive

hundreds of layers, plus masks and blend modes. While the layers aren't as versatile as in Photoshop, they're useful for planning projects and going back and forth with clients as it's easy to move elements around and tweak based on feedback. The typography tools add a whole extra layer of creative functionality, and Procreate now has 3D painting features, which we particularly enjoyed testing out.

“The size and quality of the customisable, pre-installed brushes is impressive”

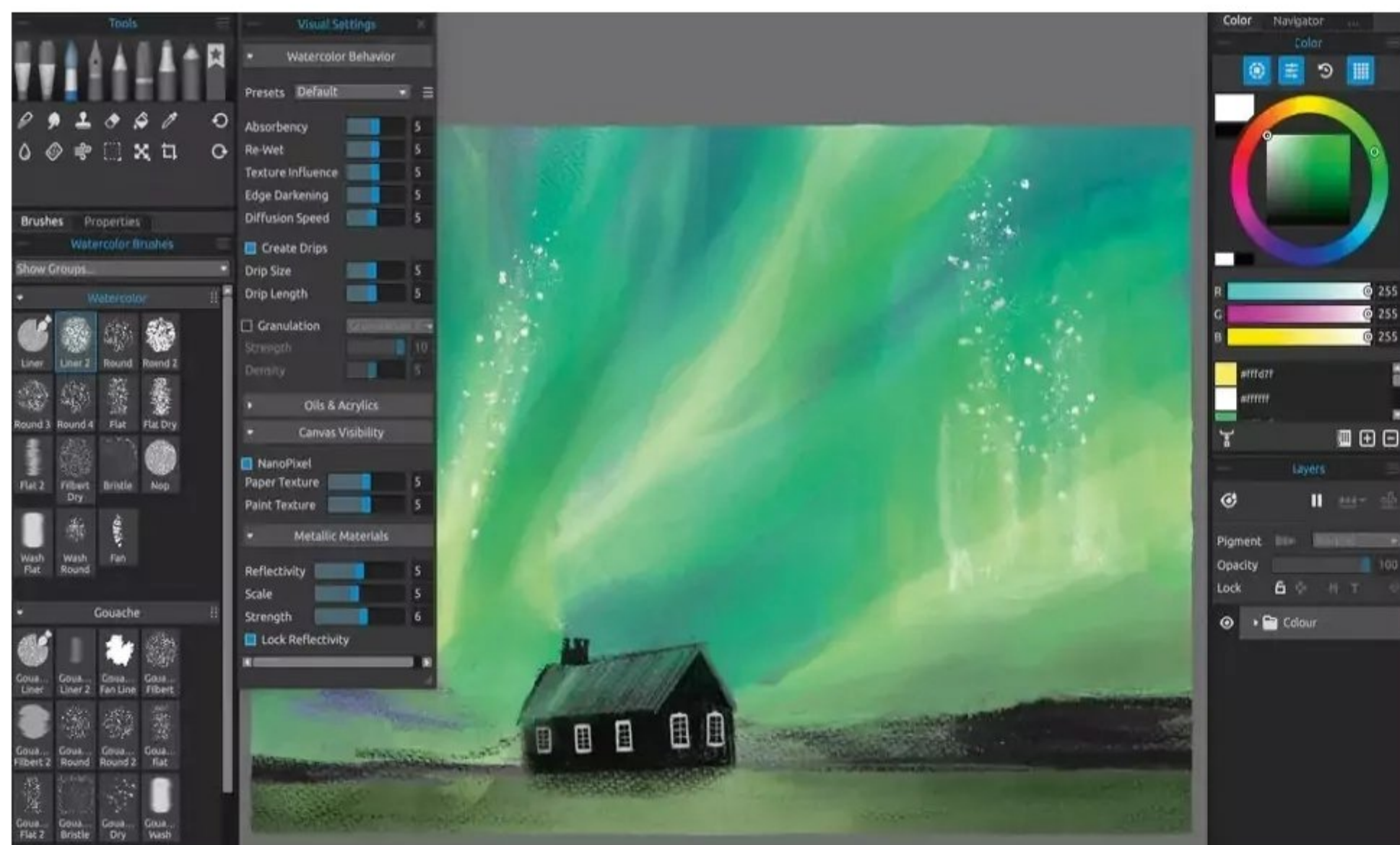
It's an incredibly approachable app. It has the simplest UI and menu structure of any art software we've tried, making it easy and intuitive to use. Much more so than Adobe Fresco (page 46), and the audio feedback makes for a better experience all-in.

Fresco is now free, but after comparing the two, we still believe it's well worth paying for Procreate. The app is such good value that it's worth adding to your toolkit even if you already use other software.

FAMOUS FACES

Plenty of well-known artists love Procreate, including Loish.





REBELLE 7

Simulate traditional painting with realistic watercolour, acrylic, wet and dry media

Looking for desktop painting software? Rebelle 7 and Rebelle 7 Pro are great-value alternatives with particular strengths of their own. They're an affordable option, and we found the Pro version to be a powerhouse for simulating natural media.

With over 250 brush presets included, Rebelle 7 is a highly impressive digital painting app. Accurate blending and paper/canvas simulation make the Pro version the best digital art software we've tested when it comes to mimicking the way that paint behaves in the real world. We were able to create realistic watercolours complete with edge bleeds that respect the laws of physics, even dripping when we tilted the drawing tablet. Plus we were able to build up acrylic or oil textures for thick impasto effects.

Our reviewer was also struck by the metallic paints and ray-



GOING FOR GOLD

Make the step up to Rebelle 7 Pro and you'll be able to work with metallic paints.

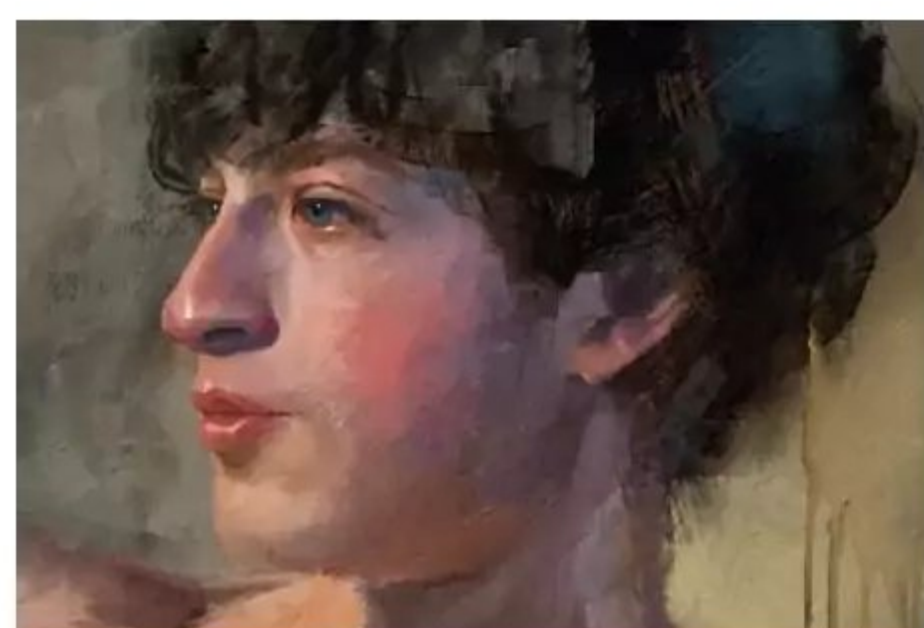
traced canvases for even more realistic results. There are superb resize and export options along with stabilisation and texture features, as well as powerful

Warp and Liquify tools ready for action.

Rebelle 7 is intuitive to learn through trial and error, but there are also helpful videos on YouTube and on its website. We only struggled when using the Pro version on less-

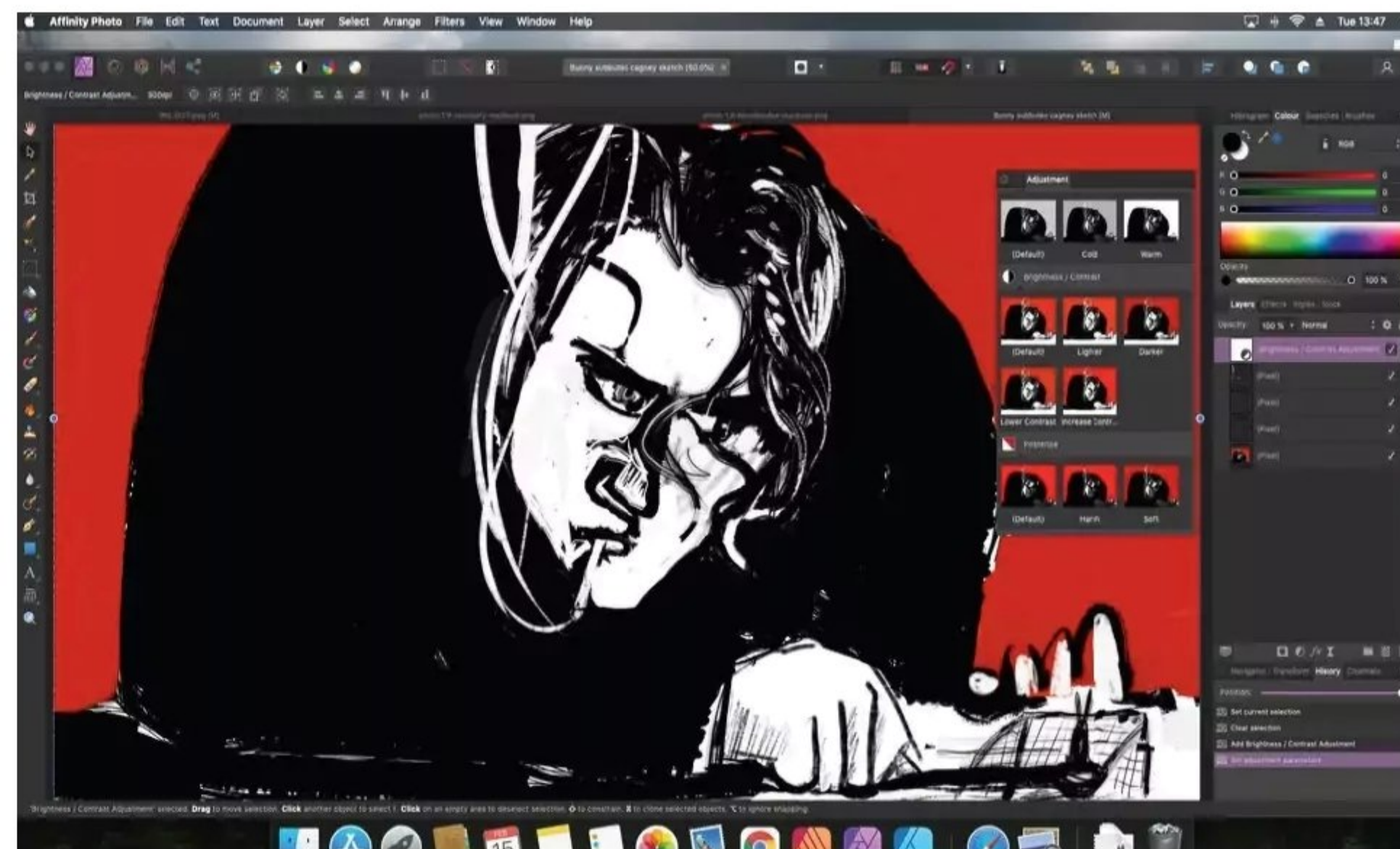
capable hardware. Those paint simulation tools appear to be quite resource-hungry, slowing down old machines. We'd recommend using a device with at least 16GB of RAM and a good processor.

A reasonable one-off price makes Rebelle 7 an affordable alternative to Painter, and there are sometimes discounts to be found. The Pro version is almost twice the price but includes the metallic paints and pigments colour mixing. Both are more expensive than Procreate, but can do more for you.



REALISTIC EFFECTS

Nothing beats the simulation of traditional materials found when using Rebelle 7.



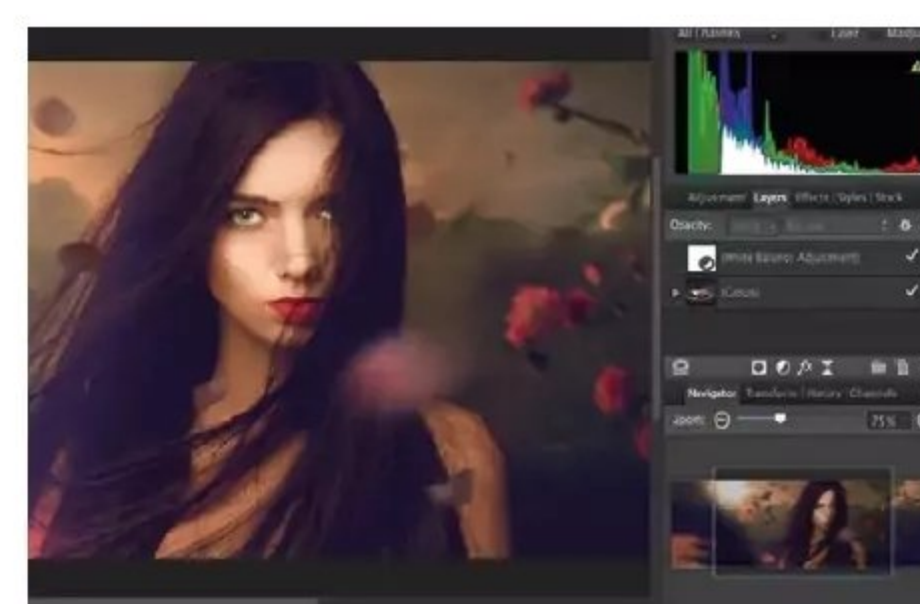
AFFINITY PHOTO 2

The best straight-up alternative to Photoshop offers options for digital art and photo editing

Perhaps the biggest sticking point with Photoshop is it's recurring cost. If you like the idea of Photoshop's versatility for image-editing and digital painting but don't want to be stuck with a subscription, then Affinity Photo 2 is the best alternative. It offers excellent value and can do a lot of what Photoshop can, with a few added strengths of its own.

If you've already used Photoshop but want to move away from the subscription model, you should feel at home with Affinity Photo. Like Adobe's software it's aimed at image manipulation as well as digital art, so you can add lighting effects and composite in the same app as you paint.

In terms of power and performance, we found that Affinity Photo was much on a par with Photoshop, with some caveats. It can handle 100-plus megapixel images, so you don't have to worry about working



CLOSEST MATCH

Affinity Photo 2 is the most comparable software to Photoshop's range of use cases.

with super high-resolution files, and the Warp, Liquify and Paint Mixer Brush tools work well, but it does lack some of Adobe's most advanced new features.

The UI will be familiar to anyone who knows Photoshop. There's a learning curve for those who aren't, but that's something that comes with such fully featured software.

We were impressed by the speed and compatibility. Unlike Photoshop, we found it worked well on less-capable hardware. And if you prefer to draw on an iPad, Affinity Photo for iPad is also available, as well as the Windows and Mac versions.

Helpfully, Affinity Photo can both import and export PSD files, which makes it easy to migrate projects and could make Affinity an option even if you're working with clients or a team that all use Photoshop. And like Adobe, Affinity also has a suite of apps. If you create vector art, Affinity Designer is a solid alternative to Adobe Illustrator.



COMPLETE SUITE

Affinity has software that mimics Adobe's Illustrator and InDesign apps.

Top Photoshop alternatives



Graphixly

CLIP STUDIO PAINT

A great drawing and painting tool aimed at those who specialise in creating manga and comic art

Clip Studio Paint is one of the very best digital art programs for comics and manga art. It's earned a dedicated community of fans, and pen pressure detection makes drawing feel natural if you're on a graphics tablet.

Painter (page 44) has a much fuller brush engine, runs a little smoother and is better suited to simulating traditional art, but Clip Studio Paint has most of the tools you need for comic styles at a fraction of the price.

It comes in two versions: Pro and EX. Confusingly the Pro version is the cheaper. If you have the money, EX is the way to go for more animation

Price £42/\$58.50 (Pro); £184/\$258 (EX) both perpetual
Platform Windows, macOS, iPadOS, iOS, Android, ChromeOS
Company Celsys

tools and rulers, but if you just want to see what it's all about you can jump in with Pro to begin.

Clip Studio Paint (CSP) is harder to get started with than Procreate, which is more streamlined. CSP throws a lot of settings at you, but the setup is customisable and still comfortable to work in with just the brushes, layers, colour wheel and preview. There are lots of tutorials available too.

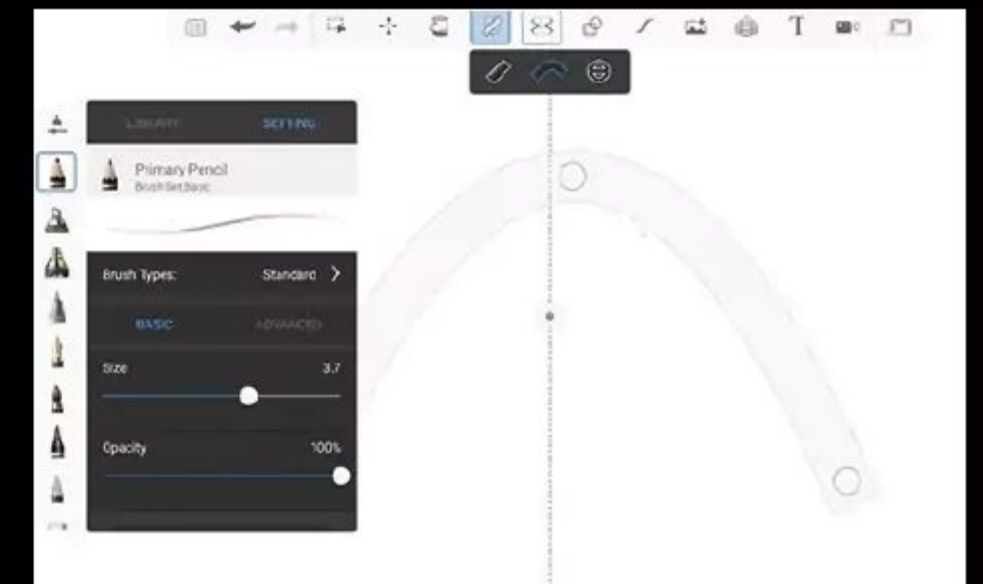
“Clip Studio Paint has most of the tools that you need for creating with comic style”



The app has a huge array of pricing options. You can get a perpetual licence for the full EX version for £184/\$258 or the Pro version for £42/\$58.50. That makes the software expensive in comparison with an iPad app like Procreate. But if you only want to try it out or use it for a short period of time, there are also options to use it via a monthly subscription. And if you don't want to commit any cash to begin with, both the EX and Pro versions are available on free trials for up to three months, at the time of writing this guide.

MORE APPS FOR ANDROID ARTISTS

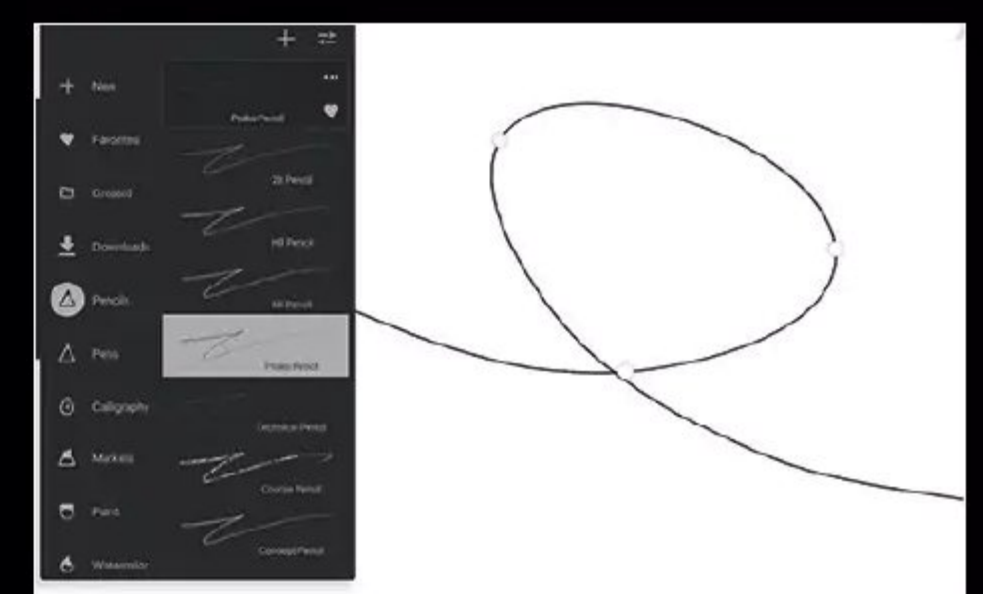
If you're on the hunt for some alternative Android apps, check these out...



Sketchbook

Web www.sketchbook.com

Price Free, Premium available



Infinite Painter

Web www.infinitestudio.art

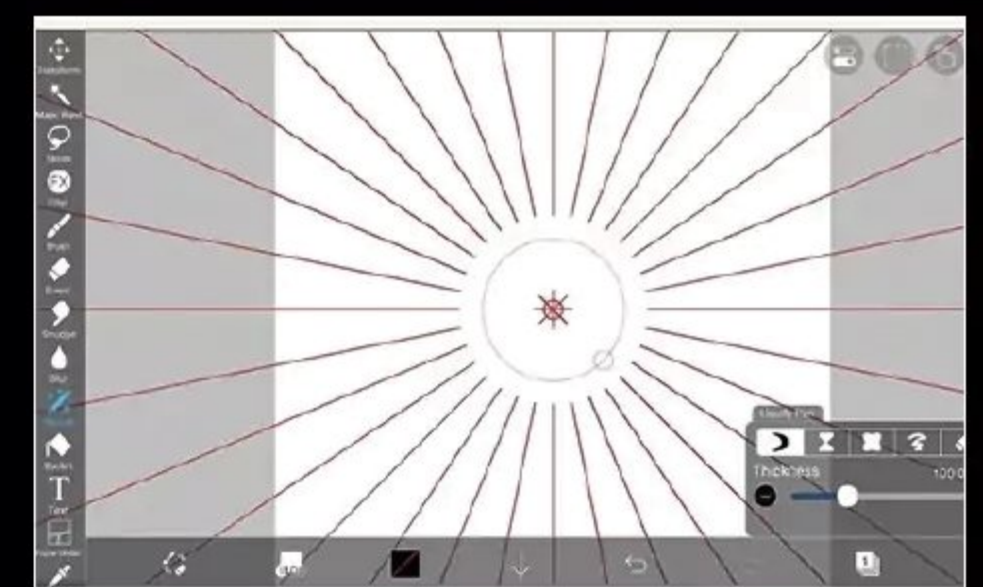
Price £8.99/\$9.99



MediBang

Web <https://bit.ly/44idcbd>

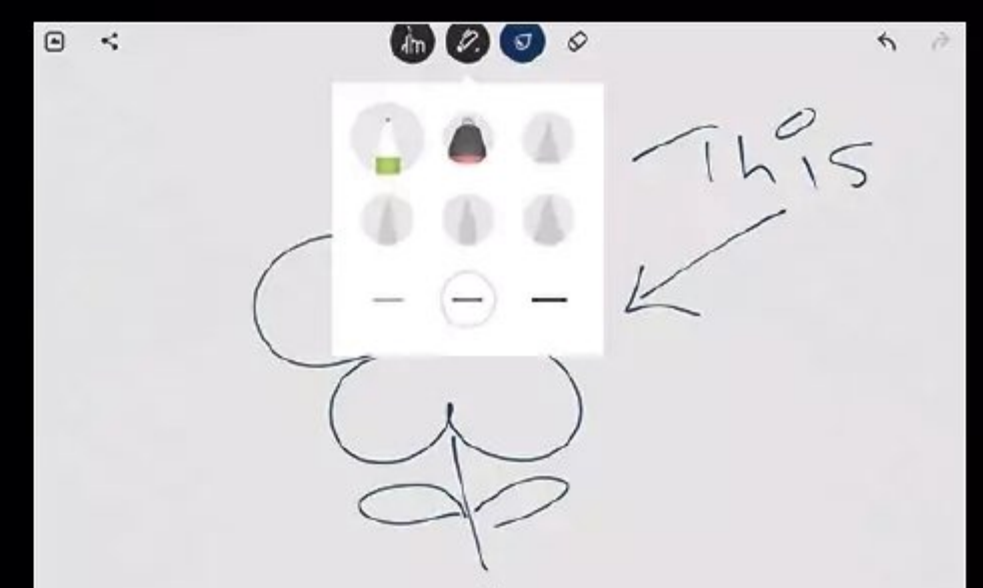
Price Premium from £2.39/\$2.99



ibis Paint X

Web <https://ibispaint.com>

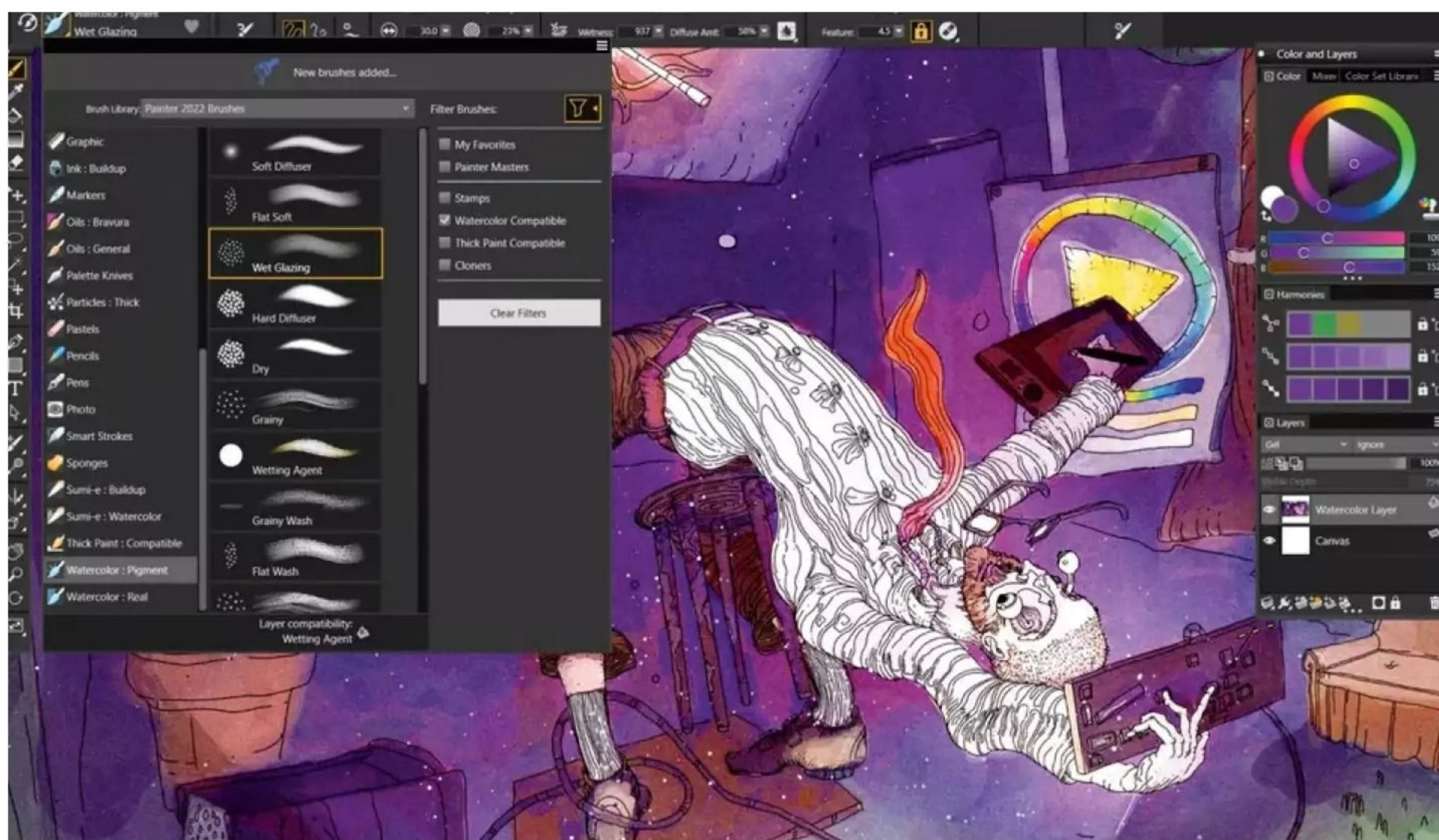
Price Prime £23.49/\$27.99 yearly



Bamboo Paper

Web <https://bit.ly/3R17vve>

Price Free with in-app purchases



PAINTER 2023

One of the most complete options for painting, although updates appear to have gone AWOL

We're not really sure what's happening with Painter. We used to get annual updates, but it's still on Painter 2023 at the time of writing. Things have been quiet since Corel rebranded as Alludo in September 2022, but Painter is nevertheless still a well-featured program for digital painting.

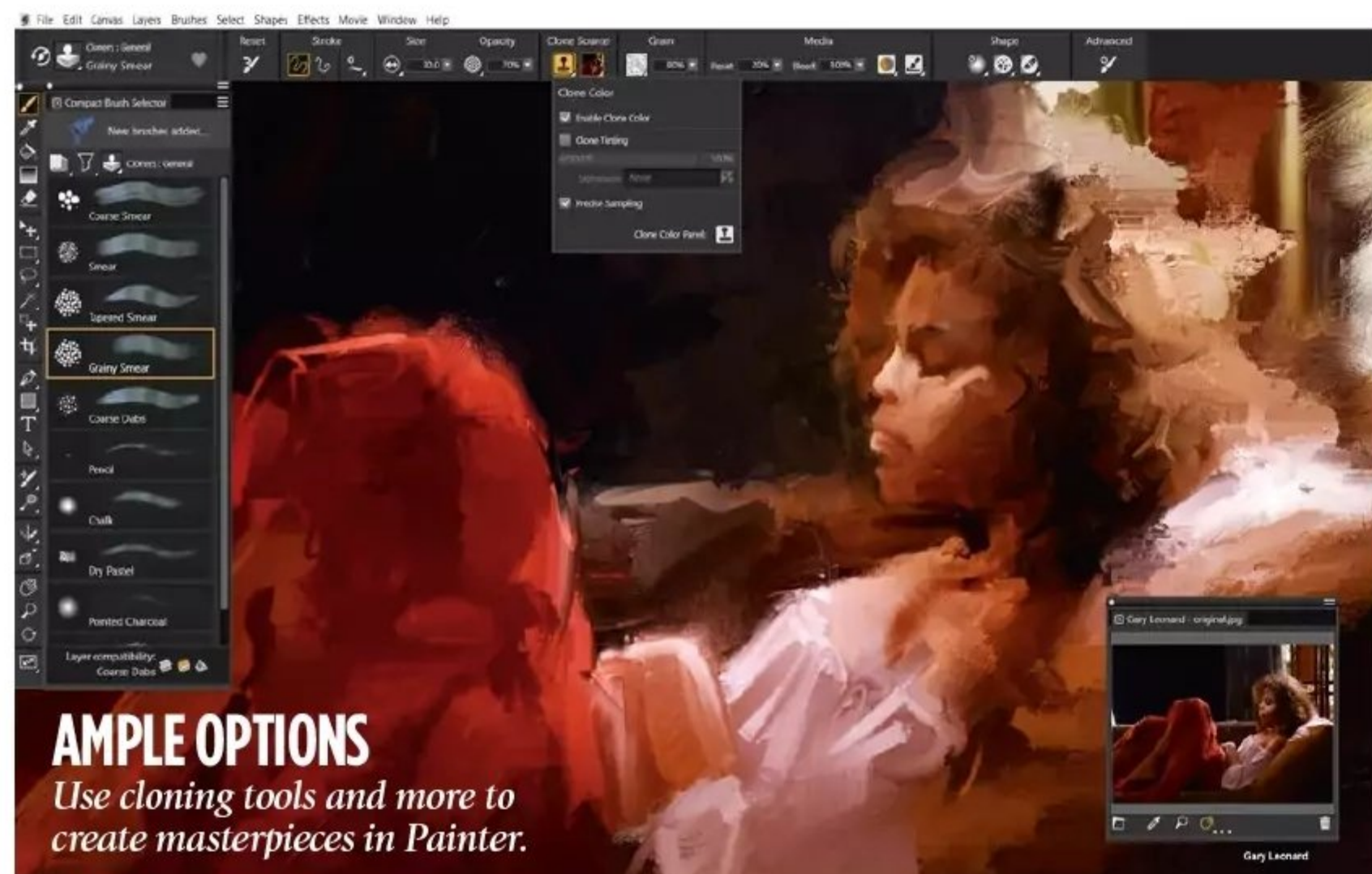
Many are torn between Rebelle and Painter for pure drawing and painting. The former is more affordable and has more realistic natural paint behaviour, but Painter is the more complete software and customisable for precise control. We haven't found another program that offers as much control of brushes and texture management. The 2022 update improved on the paint flow and mixing system, and the Fluid Brush system enables layers of paint to be built realistically.

Price £360/\$429
Platform Windows, macOS
Company Alludo

Brush control in Painter can feel complicated at first given the brush engine is so dense, but the program's layout and workspace customisability make it one of the most flexible we've used for digital painting. Exporting palettes as BOX files is also handy.

Previous versions had a reputation for taxing computer hardware. We found that largely fixed in the latest version, but the lack of hardware acceleration can be taxing, particularly at 4K. It can be buggy, and doesn't work with Windows Ink, but it's a good fit for using with a dedicated drawing tablet. Users have reported a

“Many are torn between Rebelle and Painter for pure drawing and painting”



AMPLE OPTIONS
Use cloning tools and more to create masterpieces in Painter.

MISSING IN ACTION
Updates for Painter have gone silent, but it remains a powerful piece of kit.

MORE APPS FOR IPAD ARTISTS

There's a host of software beyond the big names that are well worth trying...



Inspire Pro

Web <https://snowcanoe.com>

Price £9.99/\$9.99



Art Set 4

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

Price Free with in-app purchases



ArtStudio Pro

Web <https://bit.ly/3G5LGnI>

Price £6.99/\$6.99 monthly



iPastels

Web www.ipastels.com

Price Free, Pro upgrade £7/\$7

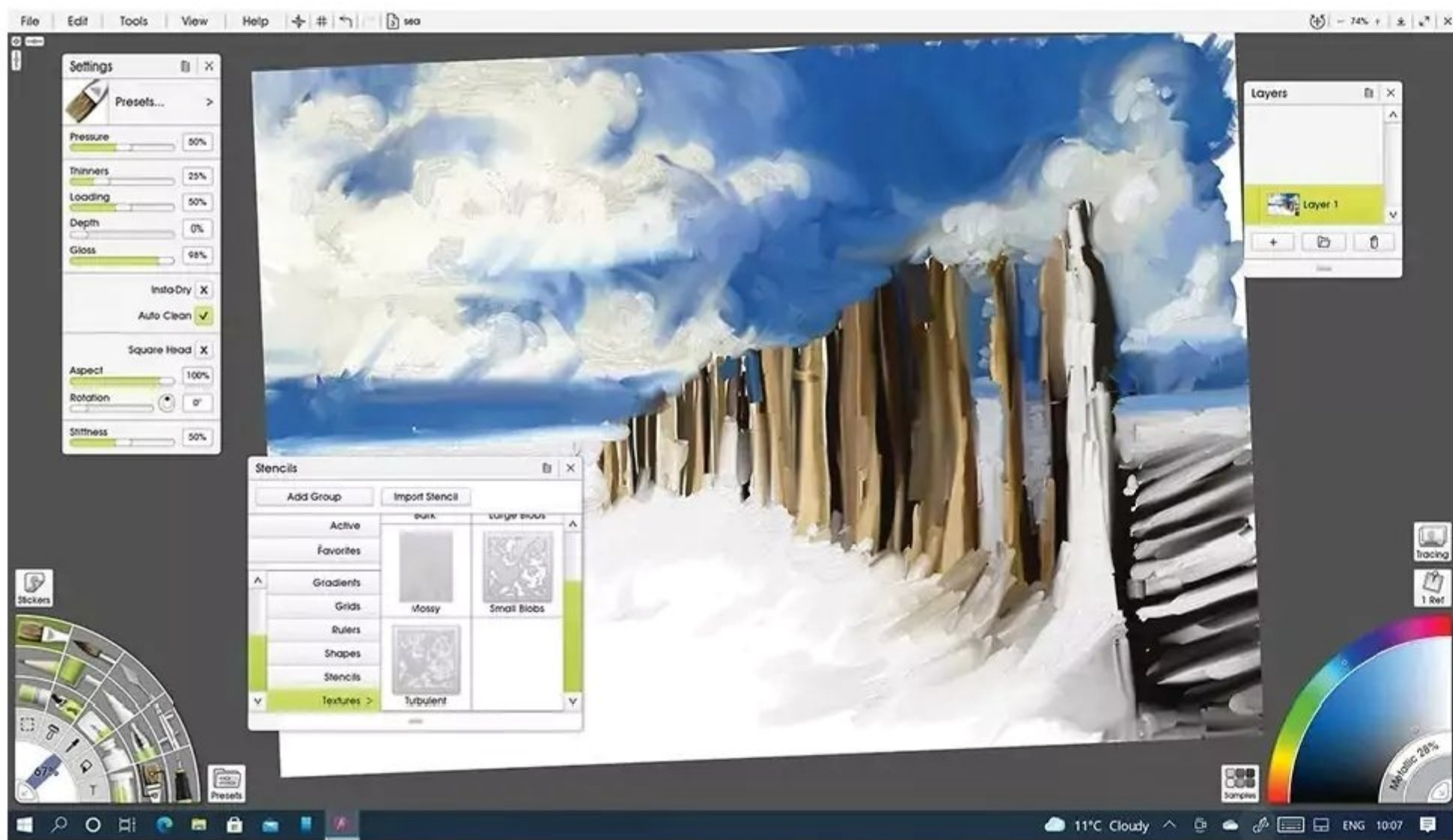


Comic Draw

Web <https://plasq.com>

Price £9.99/\$9.99

Top Photoshop alternatives



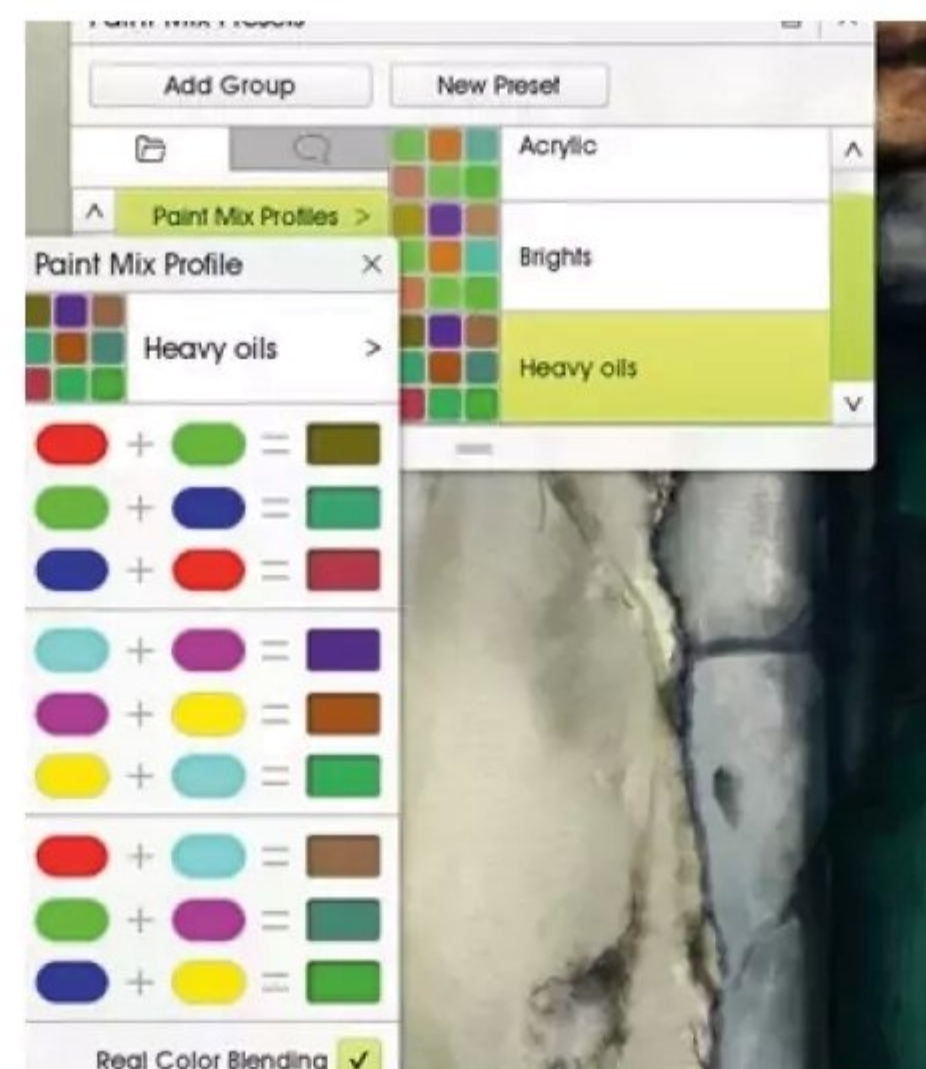
ARTRAGE VITAE

The cross-platform painting software brings a set of realistic tools to the table

Android devices often miss out on the best digital art software, but ArtRage Vitae is a strong tool that has a loyal following among artists and illustrators. This natural painting app has versions for Mac, Windows, Android and iOS. It provides realistic paint texture and colour at a cheaper price than many of the other options on our list.

Although ArtRage is mainly focused on natural media and painting, there's a solid range of tools available – brushes, Palette Knife and even a Glitter Tube, and we found it more precise than rivals such as Art Set 4. You can customise brushes, record your own actions and adjust the look of your canvas.

ArtRage Vitae is easy to use overall. The UI may look fairly basic, and a little dated, in comparison to some of the software featured here, but it's incredibly easy to grasp, which



USER-DEFINED BLENDING

Make your own colour-mixing profile to get the precise palette you desire.

Price £65/\$80 (desktop), £4/\$4.99 (Android, iOS)

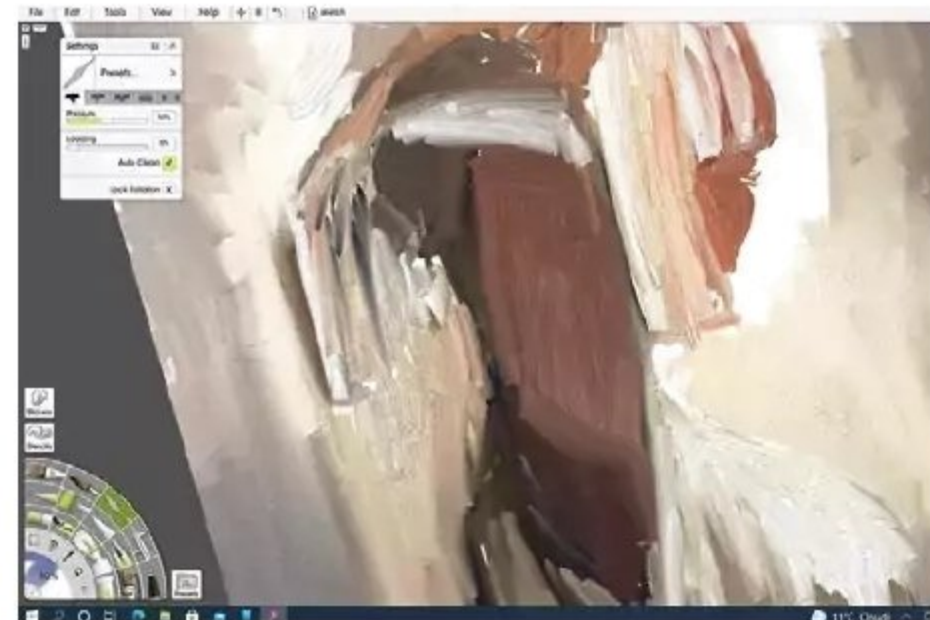
Platform Windows, macOS, iOS, Android

Company Ambient Design

ensures you can focus your attention on the art creation. You can get up and running in mere minutes, and the same UI transplants to the iPad too, so whether you're painting from a desktop or on your lap, it's all the same.

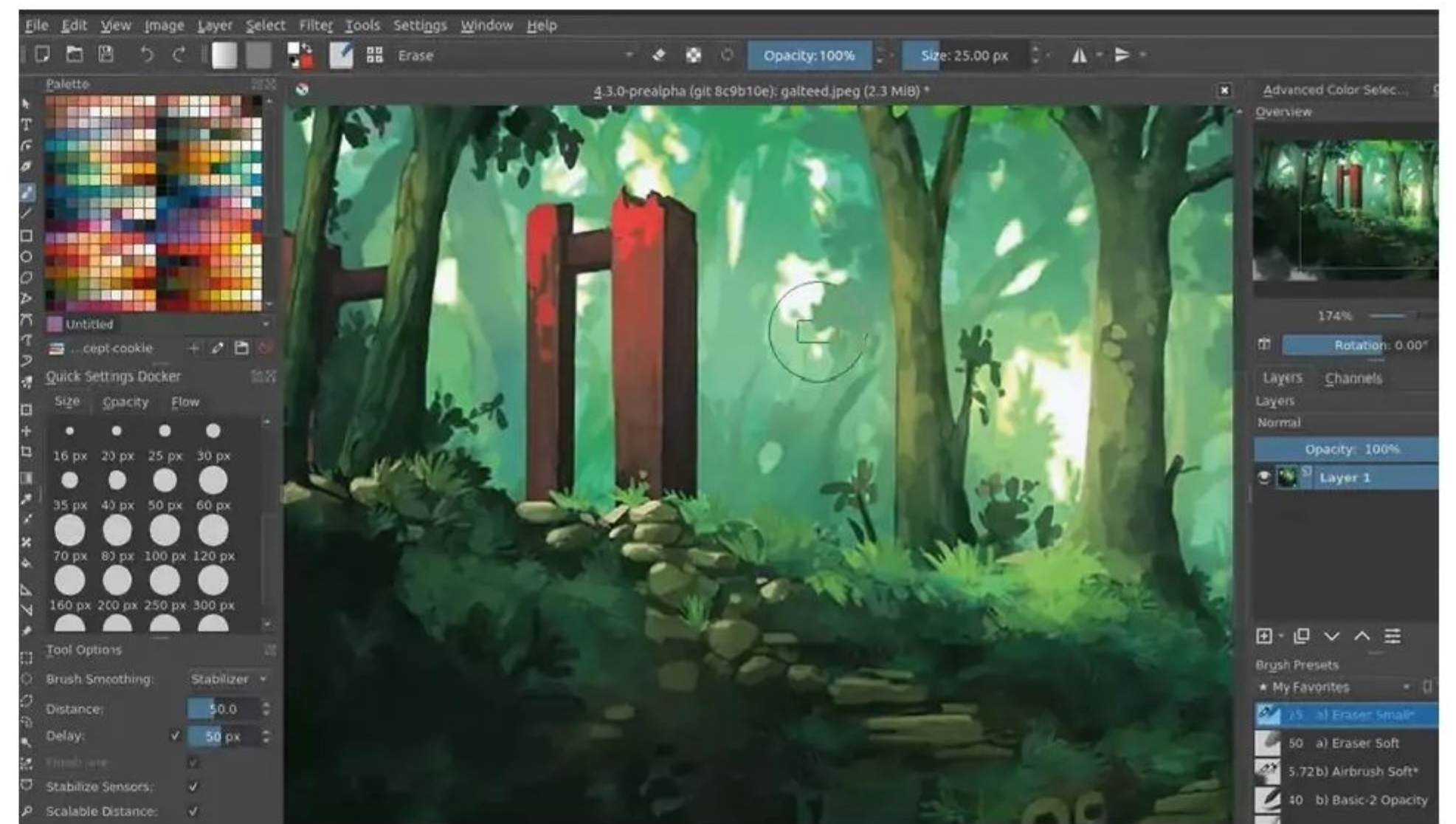
That said, ArtRage can be more laggy than Procreate, but then Procreate is only available for iPad. If you don't own an Apple device, ArtRage really is a must-have app.

The cost varies depending on which version you want. At the time of writing, the desktop software costs \$80 (around £65) while the iOS and Android apps cost just \$4.99 (around £4), which makes the latter a real no-brainer for anyone who wants to paint directly on an Android phone or tablet.



MIRROR IMAGE

The ArtRage UI is shared between the desktop and iPad versions, making it easy to switch.



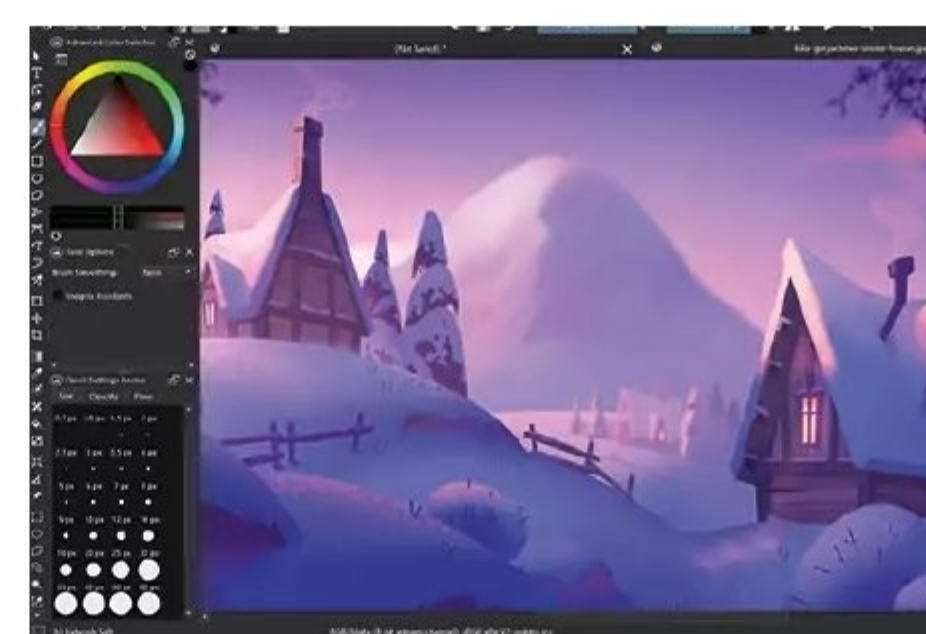
KRITA

It might be a little rough round the edges, but this open-source software is a strong no-cost option

We've already suggested a strong subscription-free alternative to Photoshop in the form of Affinity Photo. That's great value, but if you're looking for free digital art software, we've found none better than the open-source Krita.

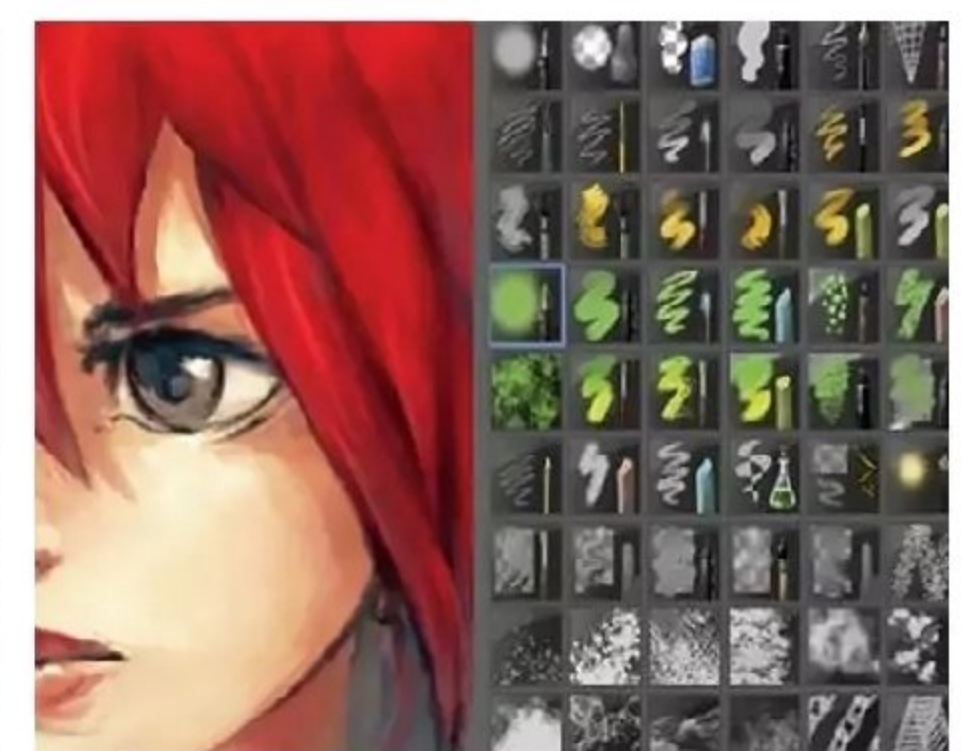
It has been quietly going about its business since releasing in 2004, and is one of the best-kept secrets in the digital art world. It has a great set of mediums for digital painters and illustrators including pencils, watercolour, chalk, charcoal, bristles, rollers, painting knives, technical pens and plenty more to boot.

You can import brushes and texture packs or create and share your own, and we also liked the brush stabiliser, which helps achieve perfectly smooth lines. The range of brush adjustment possibilities are immense, and the layer functionality proves excellent too.



SNOW BUSINESS

The app can be used for a variety of art styles, such as this gorgeous environment by Sad Tea.



FREE RIDE

Krita has been steadily developed for over two decades as an open-source software.

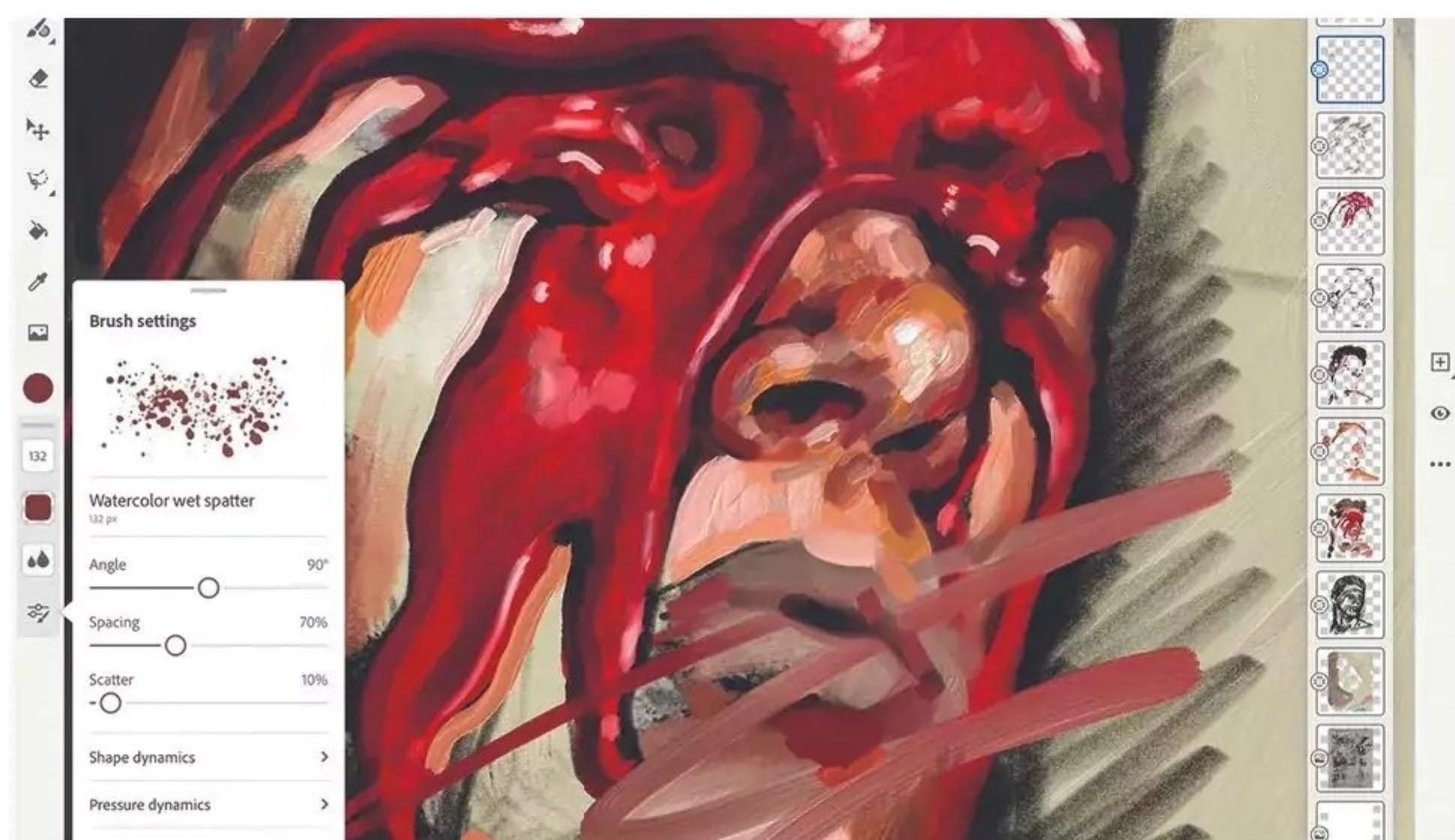
But just like Photoshop and Affinity Photo, it can handle graphic and photo-editing tasks as well.

Unsurprisingly, the retouching, blending options and filters are not quite as robust as those found in Photoshop. For example, our reviewer

found the Smart Patch Tool slow and blurry when compared to Photoshop's Healing Brush tool.

The app has a semi-guerrilla nature, which means there isn't much in the way of customer support, so you may need to consult some online tutorials to get the most out of it – but our testing found it's pretty easy and fun to learn as you go.

Krita does have its quirks: some find the brush workflow a bit awkward compared to Photoshop since you can't quickly change brush without clicking on presets, and our reviewer thought previews for individual channels were off.



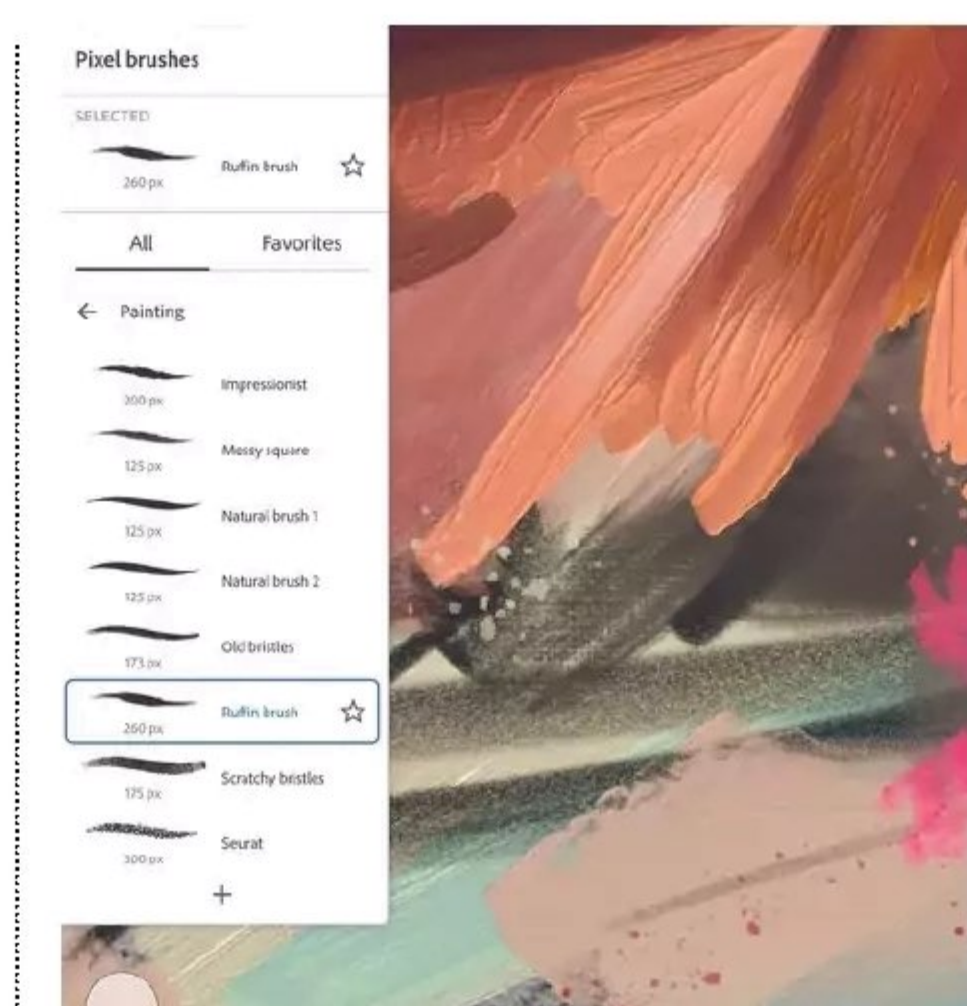
FRESCO

Adobe hopes to reel artists into its ecosystem with a tidy free offering

Adobe Fresco is another option for those looking for free software. We prefer the workflow and UI offered by Procreate for working directly on iPad, but Fresco has no cost and can be used for vector art as well as raster images.

Our highlight of Fresco was its ability to blend vector, live and pixel brushes in a single place, reducing the need to work across different apps. Fresco automatically picks a new layer for this, handily.

It also has a selection of Live Brushes that aim to replicate real-world media, but we found these to be disappointingly synthetic-feeling; they don't blend, spread and interact with the realism of those found in ArtRage or Rebelle. The oil brushes lacked depth, sheen and texture, though the watercolours were a little more convincing. We felt the app was also let down by a lack of options for canvas texture, which resulted



CHANGE OF HEART

Fresco was a paid-for app before Adobe decided to make it available for free.

Price Free

Platform Windows, iOS, iPadOS

Company Adobe

in a lack of variety in the effects as pressure was the only element that had any influence on the flow of paint.

The interface is relatively simple and intuitive, but a little bloated when compared to Procreate. That said, the UI can be customised. Brush panels can be docked where you need them, and the full-screen mode removes all distractions from view. Brushes are easy to import, but we felt that brush customisation was easier in Procreate.

Adobe originally charged for Fresco, but has since made it free, presumably to entice people into its wider ecosystem, which includes Creative Cloud apps such as Photoshop and Illustrator. That means Fresco is worth downloading to see how it works for you before jumping into a subscription package.



MIX AND MATCH

The software is a one-stop shop for working with both vector and raster art.



DRAWING DESK

One for the kids! Get them started early with basic lessons including Marvel characters

Drawing Desk is unique on this list as it's primarily aimed at kids to teach them the common principles of form, shape and perspective. The app has a clever training mode that first draws a shape or line that you then draw over. There's a degree of snapping to these lines but with enough room for errors and artistic licence. Gradually, a sketch begins to take shape with colouring and painting done the same way.

We found the Marvel tutorials fun and engaging, and best of all it teaches the basic principles of how to use a digital art app, from layers to masks, as well as how to build a sketch from primary shapes for perspective and correct form.

There are a number of licensed tutorials,

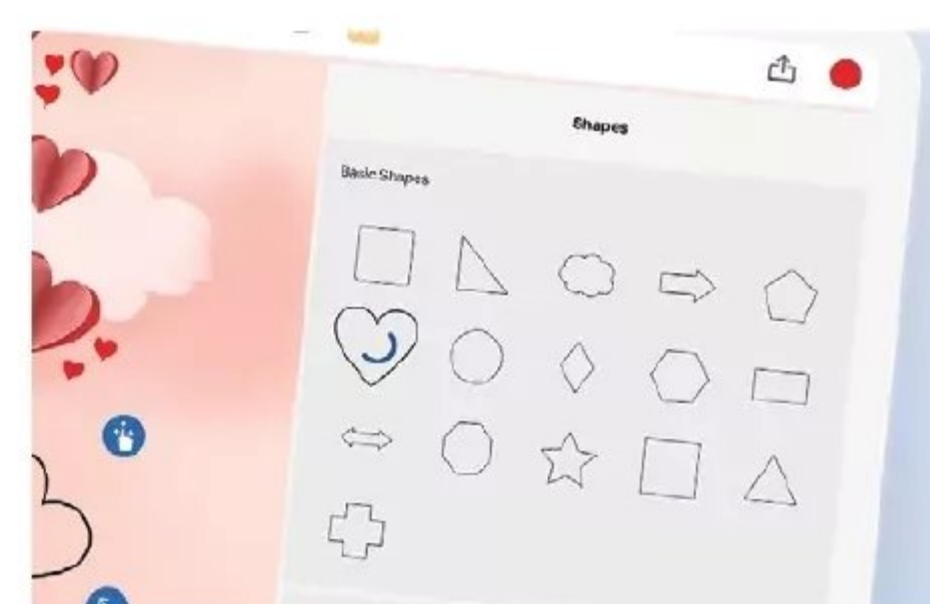
TEACHING PLATFORM

Follow the guided tutorials within the app to see artwork gradually come to life.

Price Free (in-app purchases)

Platform Windows, macOS, Oculus

Company 4Axis



SHAPES LIBRARY

You can choose from a range of ready-made forms to get a head start in Drawing Desk.

including Marvel, with more in-app purchases on hand. Drawing Desk can also be used as a fairly rudimentary digital art app with the core tools you'd want and a decent simulation of paints and markers, but this isn't its real intent.

One thing to note, within Drawing Desk are a number of sub-apps for digital art, and more, and it can be a little confusing as to what's free and what needs to be purchased. But stick to the drawing tutorials and this is an excellent teaching tool.





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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 252 June 2025

Comic capers abound! Our big feature explores how iconic Marvel characters have been given a fresh twist for hit game Marvel Rivals. Also discover top tips for creating epic comics, and learn to paint an exquisite geisha.



Issue 251 May 2025

If you love manga, you won't want to miss this issue! Learn to draw the iconic Mega Man just like our cover, find out how to get your first manga published, and visit a Tokyo art studio. Plus, we explore vivid anime Dan Da Dan.



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 Lorcana and get awesome tips from game art specialist Vincent Dutrait, plus 2024's top releases and more.

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Issue 241
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May 2024



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*Resource files are available from issue 85 onwards.

Sketchbook

Patrick Wagesreither

Delve into a unique collection as the concept artist shows off his chubby war machines and unusual soldiers

Artist PROFILE

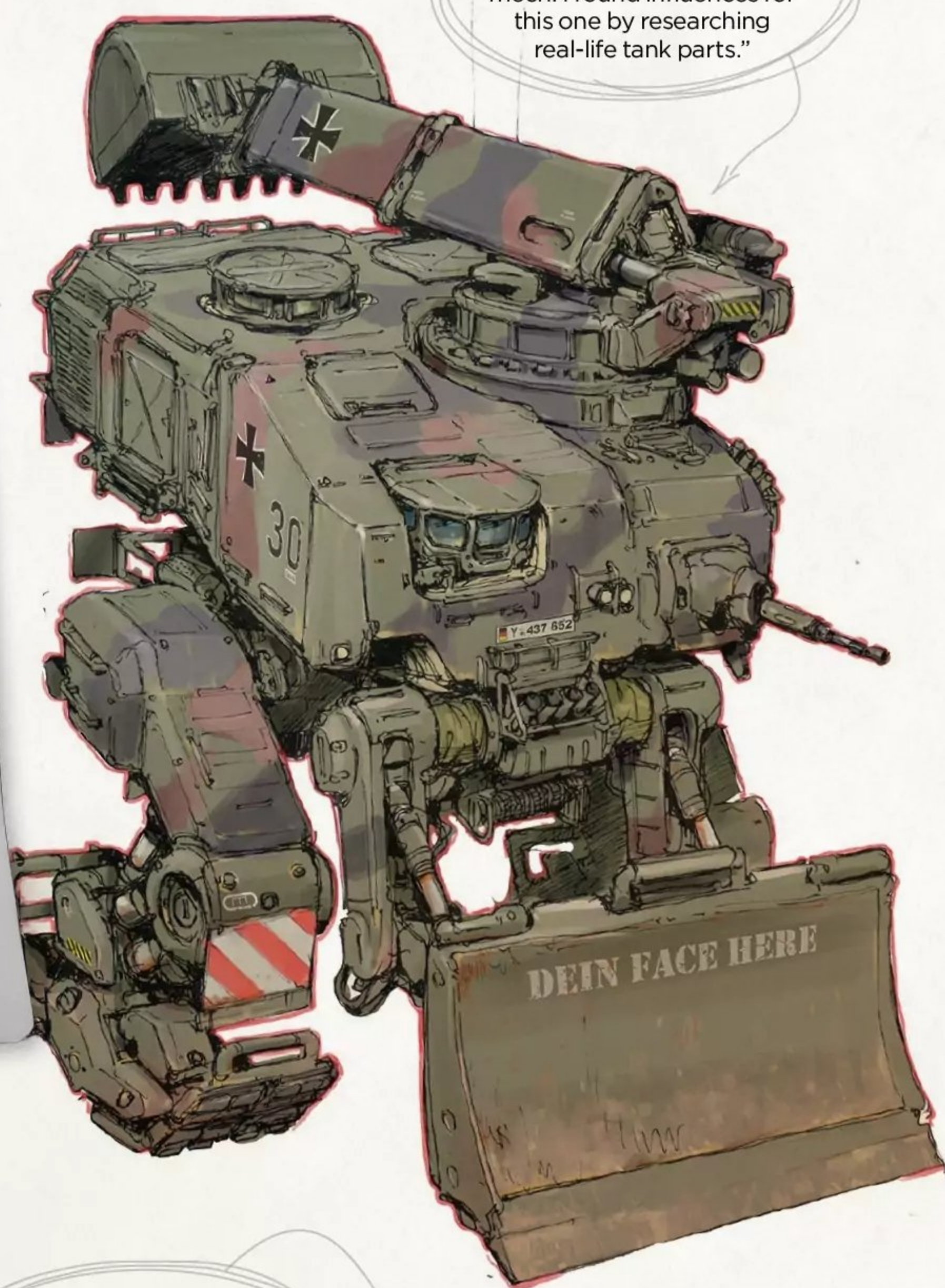
Patrick Wagesreither
LOCATION: Austria



Patrick has tried a lot of things on his route to becoming an artist, from dropping out of school to military service, and then studying at university. Nowadays he's a part-time high school teacher and concept art freelancer, but enjoys sketching and doodling full-time.
www.artstation.com/patso_catso

THE ENGINEER

"A sketch of an engineering mech. I found influences for this one by researching real-life tank parts."



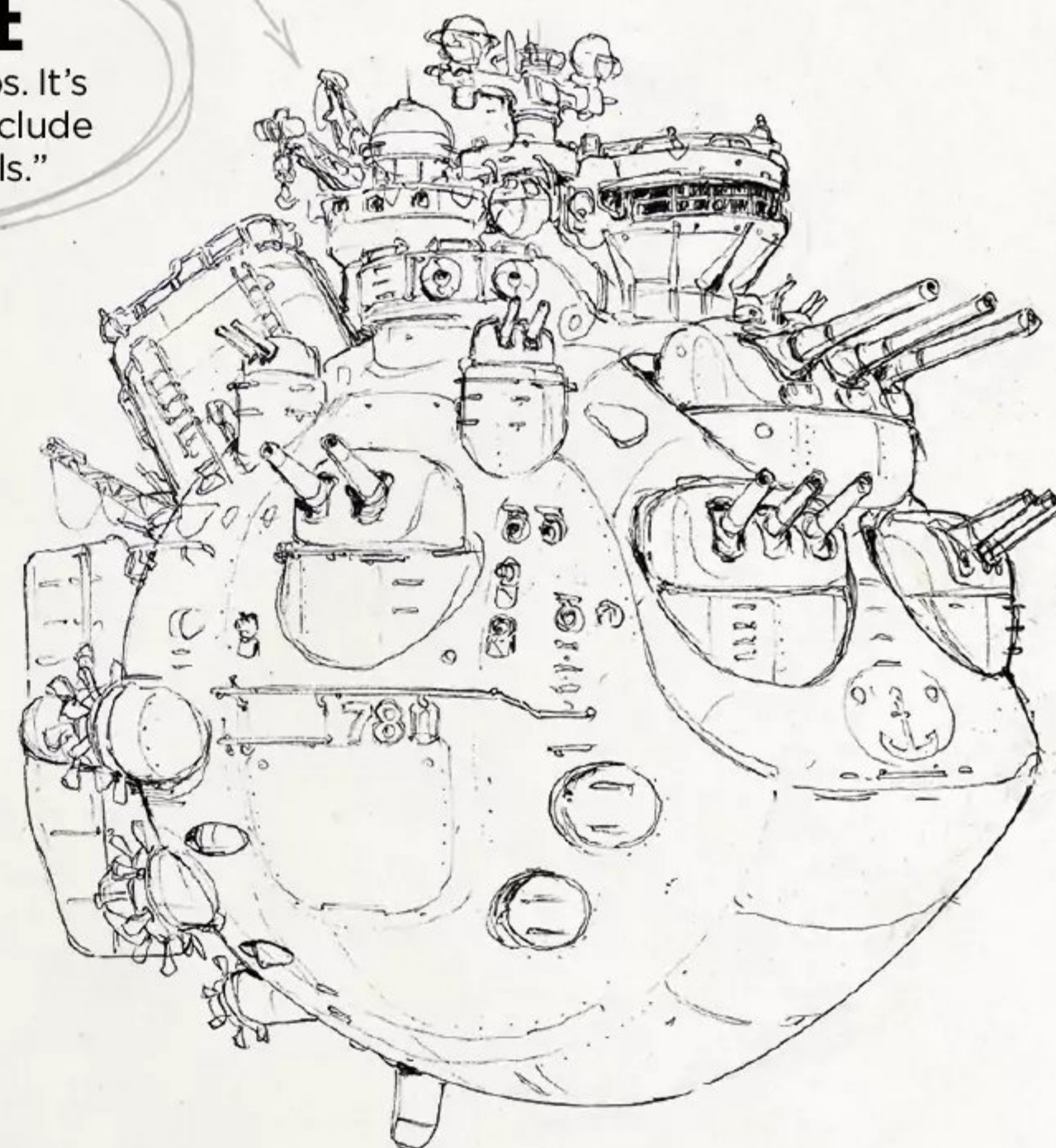
READY FOR BATTLE

"A little bit of armed architecture. It's a genre that I really enjoy."



SHIP SHAPE

"I love drawing ships. It's just so relaxing to include all the small details."



MACCIES

"A sketch of a Second World War-era transport that I turned into a field McDonald's."

“ I’ll scan many of my sketches and give them a layer of digital colour ”



ADDING COLOUR

“I’m always sketching a lot of mechs. I’ll scan many of my sketches and give them a digital colour layer, just like this not-so-ferocious feline.”

Sketchbook

INFANTRY

"I'll sketch the odd weird animal – armed of course! They're mostly cats though, not elephants."



“The challenge is always how to place the real details onto a new surface”



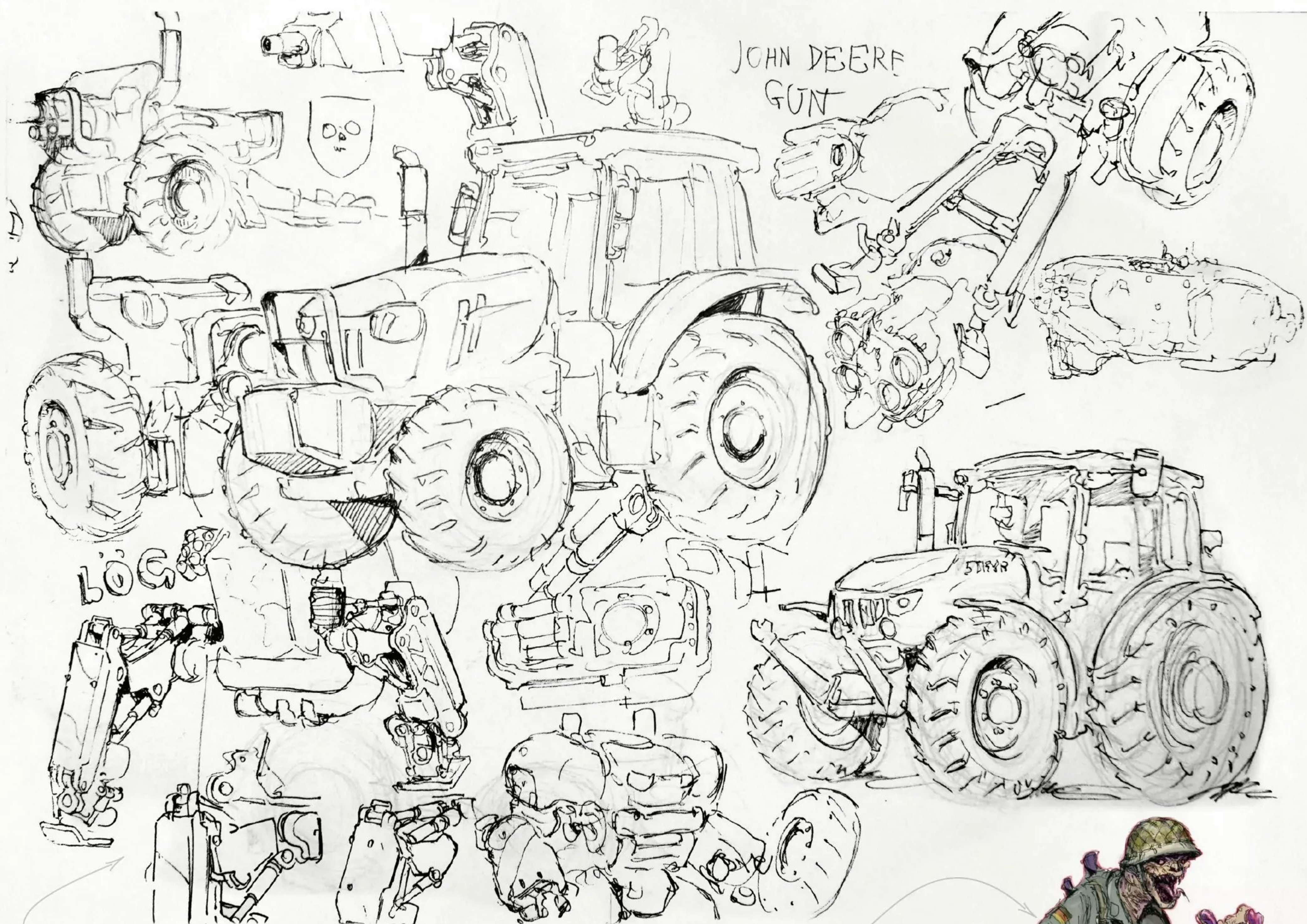
ROTUND MECH

"I love nothing more than creating oddly shaped mechs. They're the best!"



WAR MACHINE

"A Vietnam-era flying bike based on American aircraft from World War II."



TRACTOR TESTERS

"This is one of my exploration pages, where I usually just draw to familiarise myself with stuff. In this case it was mostly tractors."

BOAT BOTS

"My sketchbooks are filled with these kinds of weird mech. These ones are inspired by World War II battleships."



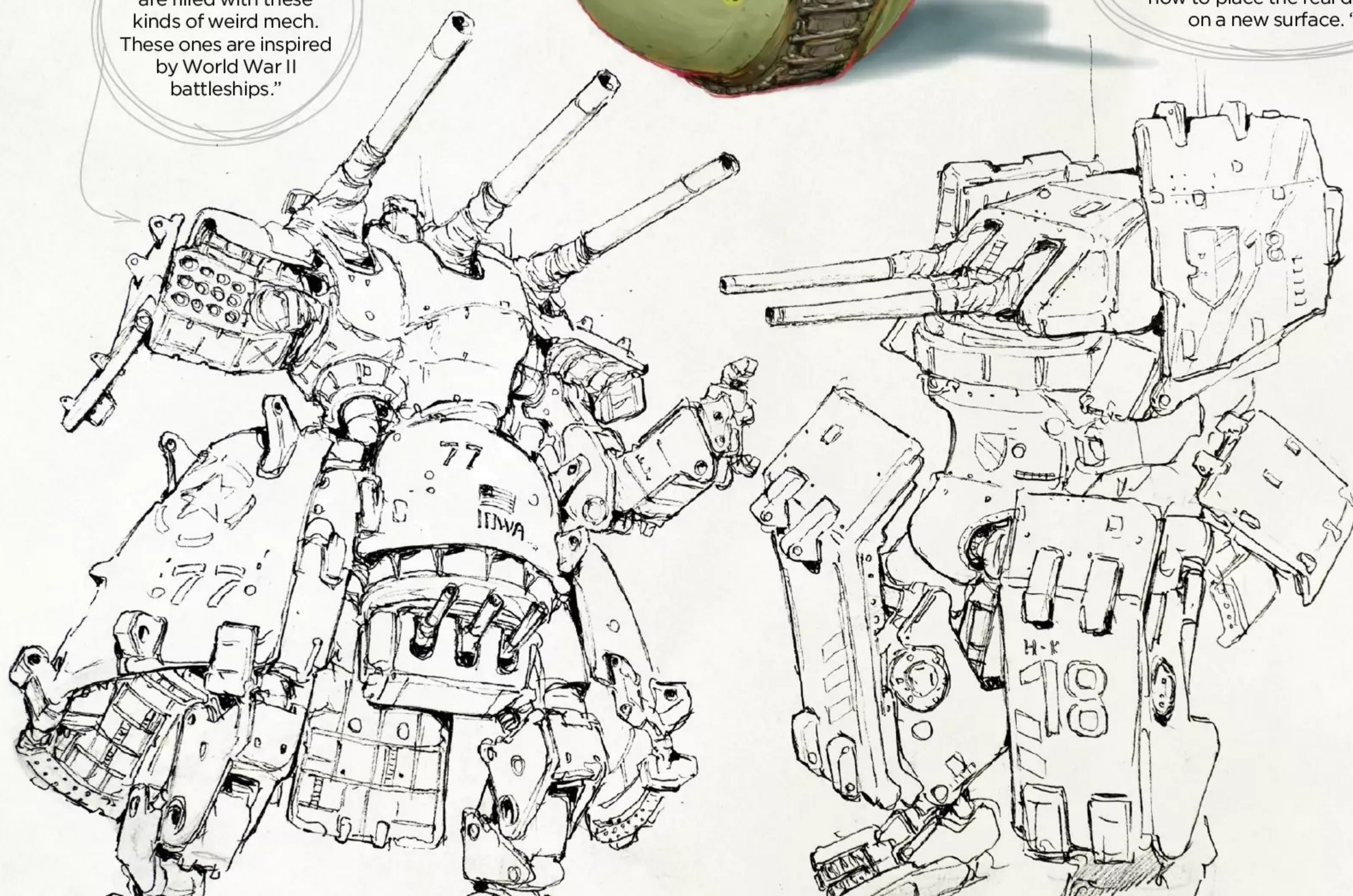
GENESTEALER

"A 1970s German soldier, reimagined as a Genestealer. I'm a Warhammer fan, as you can tell!"

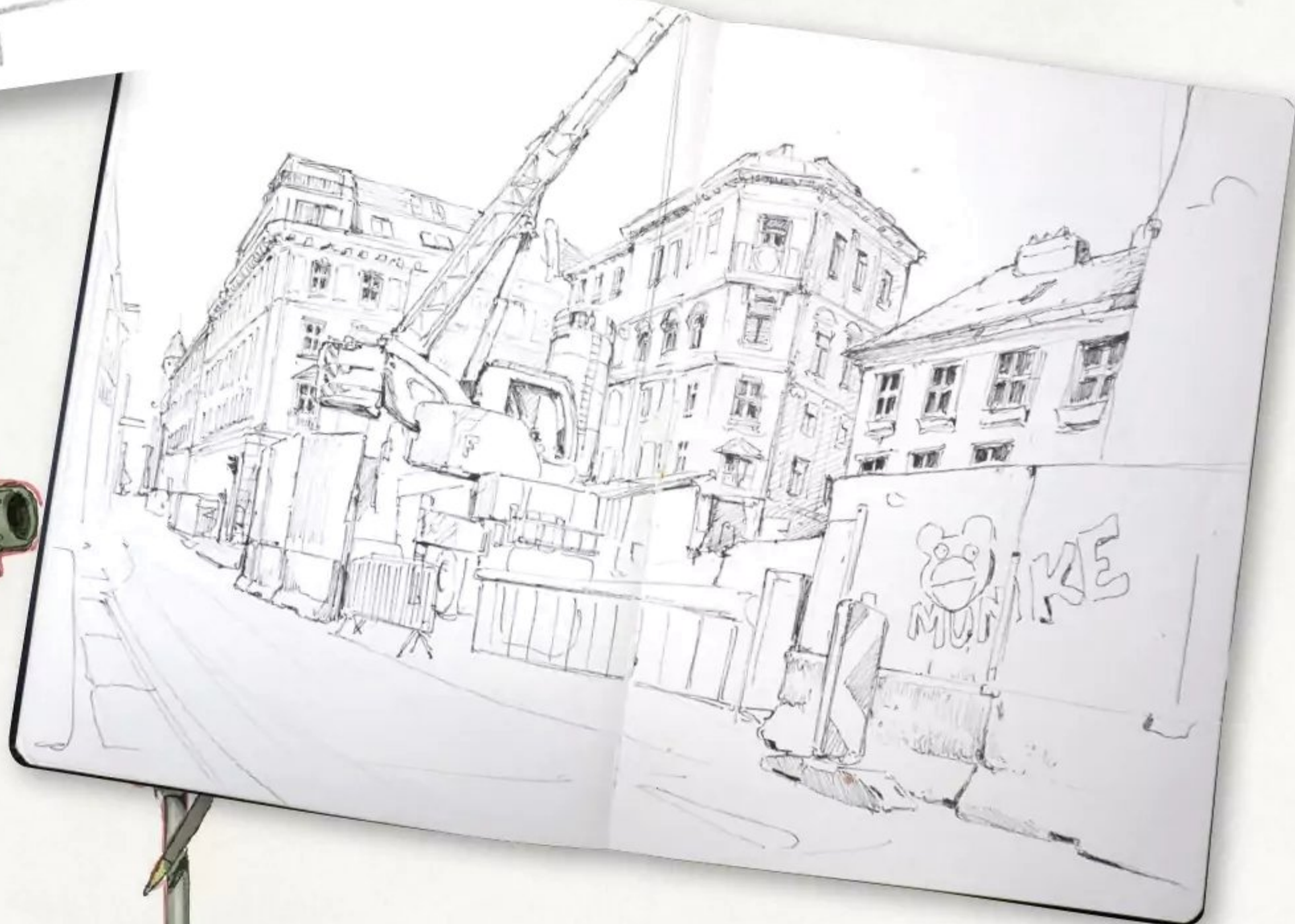
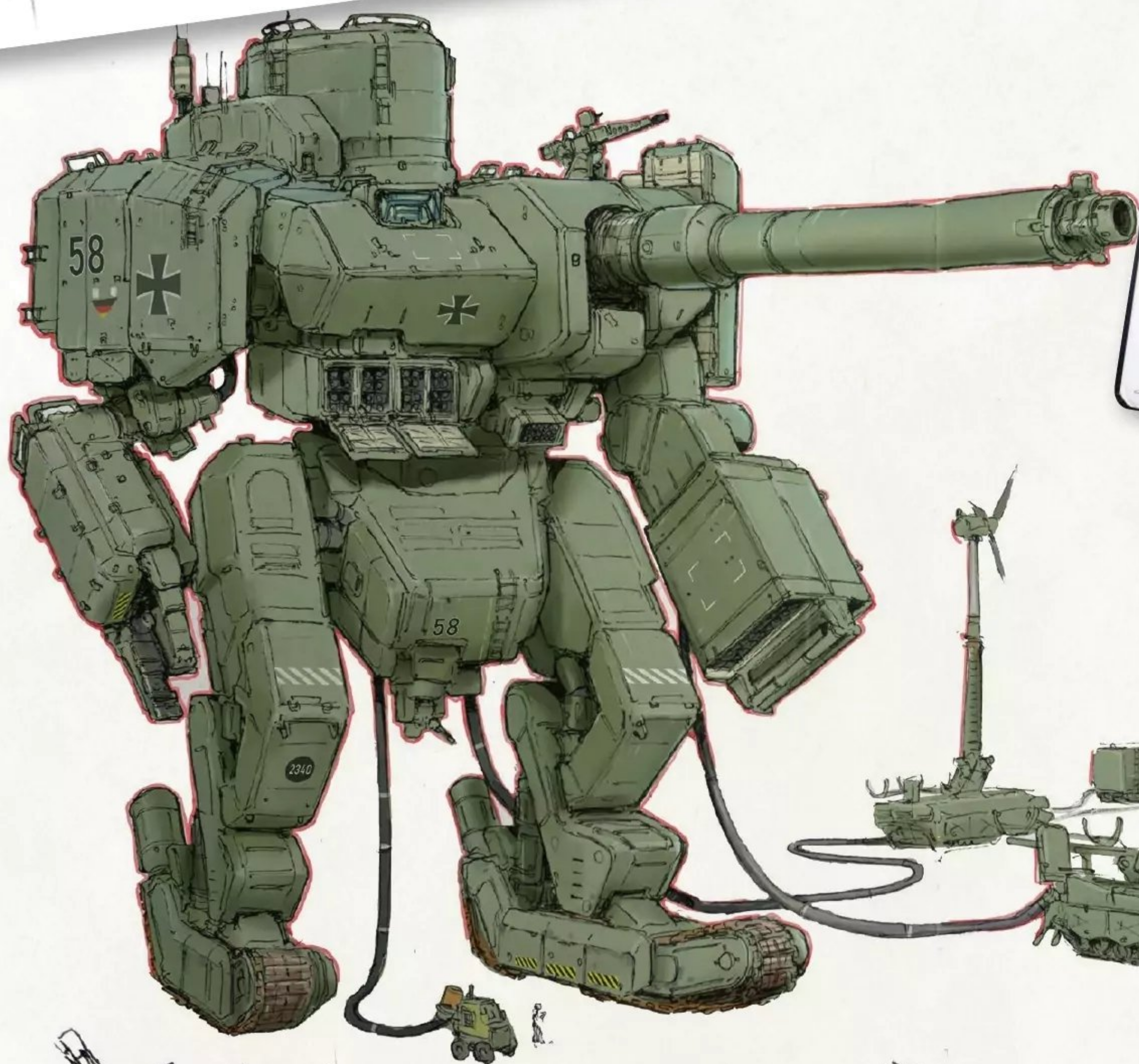


FAT TANK

"Another round vehicle, this time an AMX-13. The challenge is how to place the real details on a new surface."



Sketchbook



LIFE LESSONS

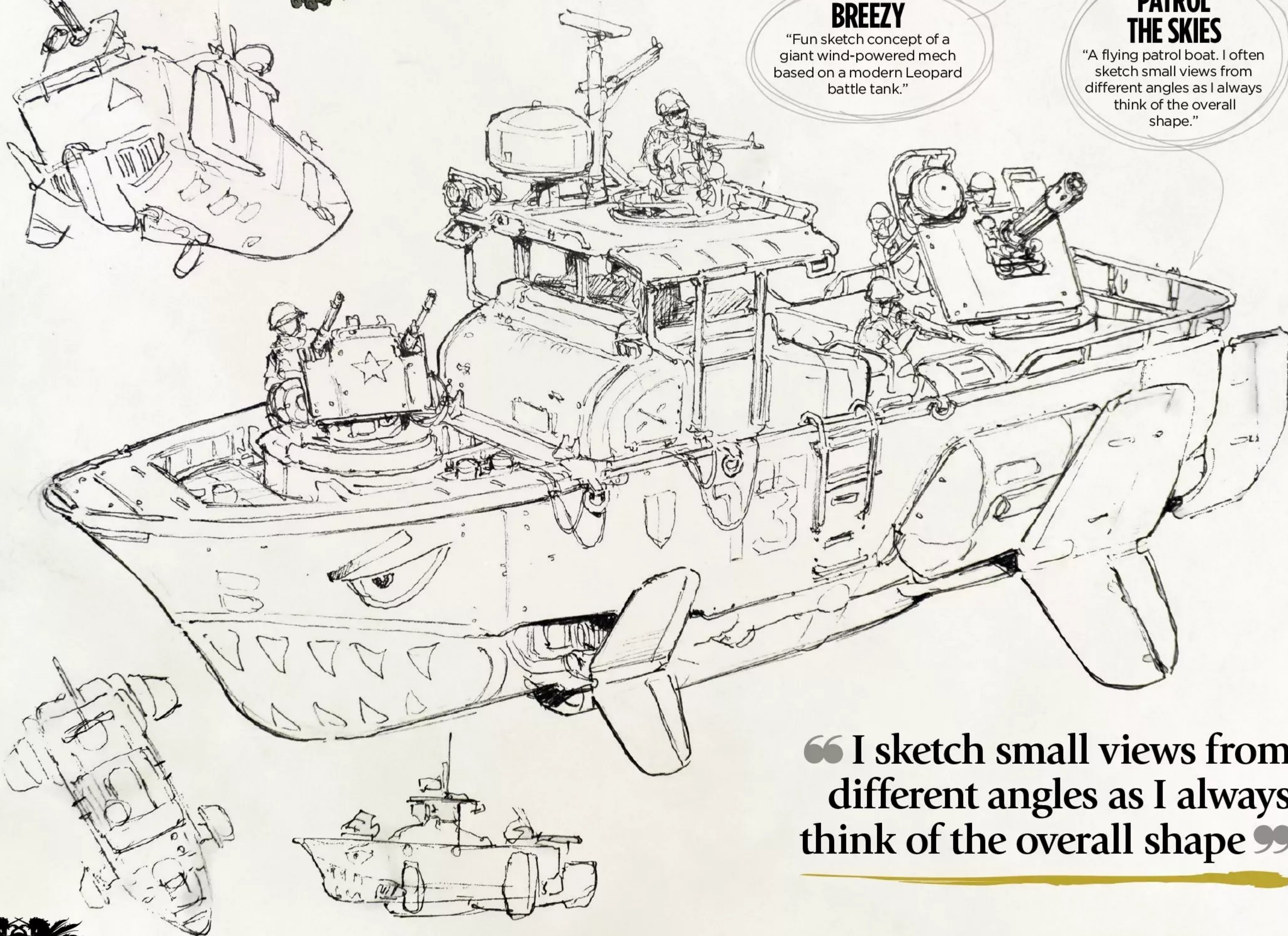
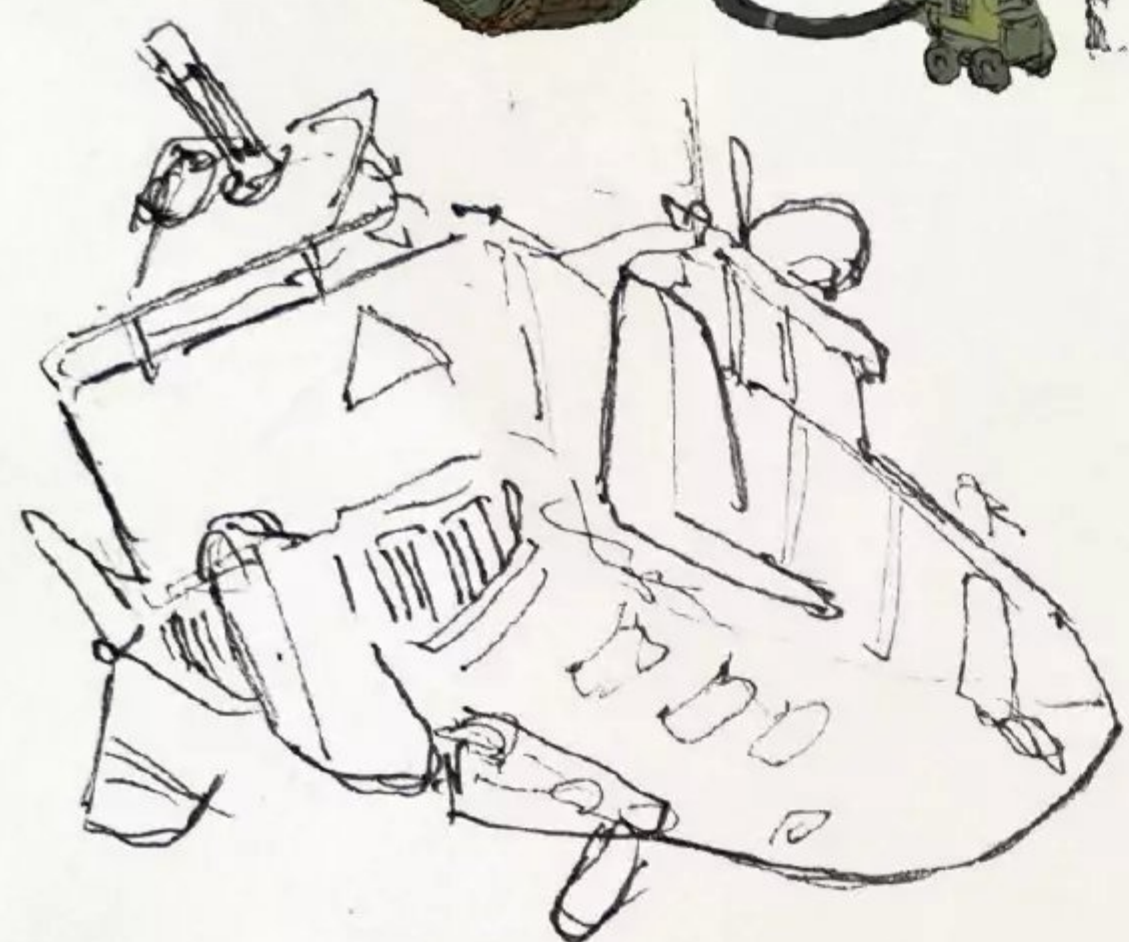
"Even though I love to sketch science fiction and military stuff these days, I also like to draw from real life every now and again."

BREEZY

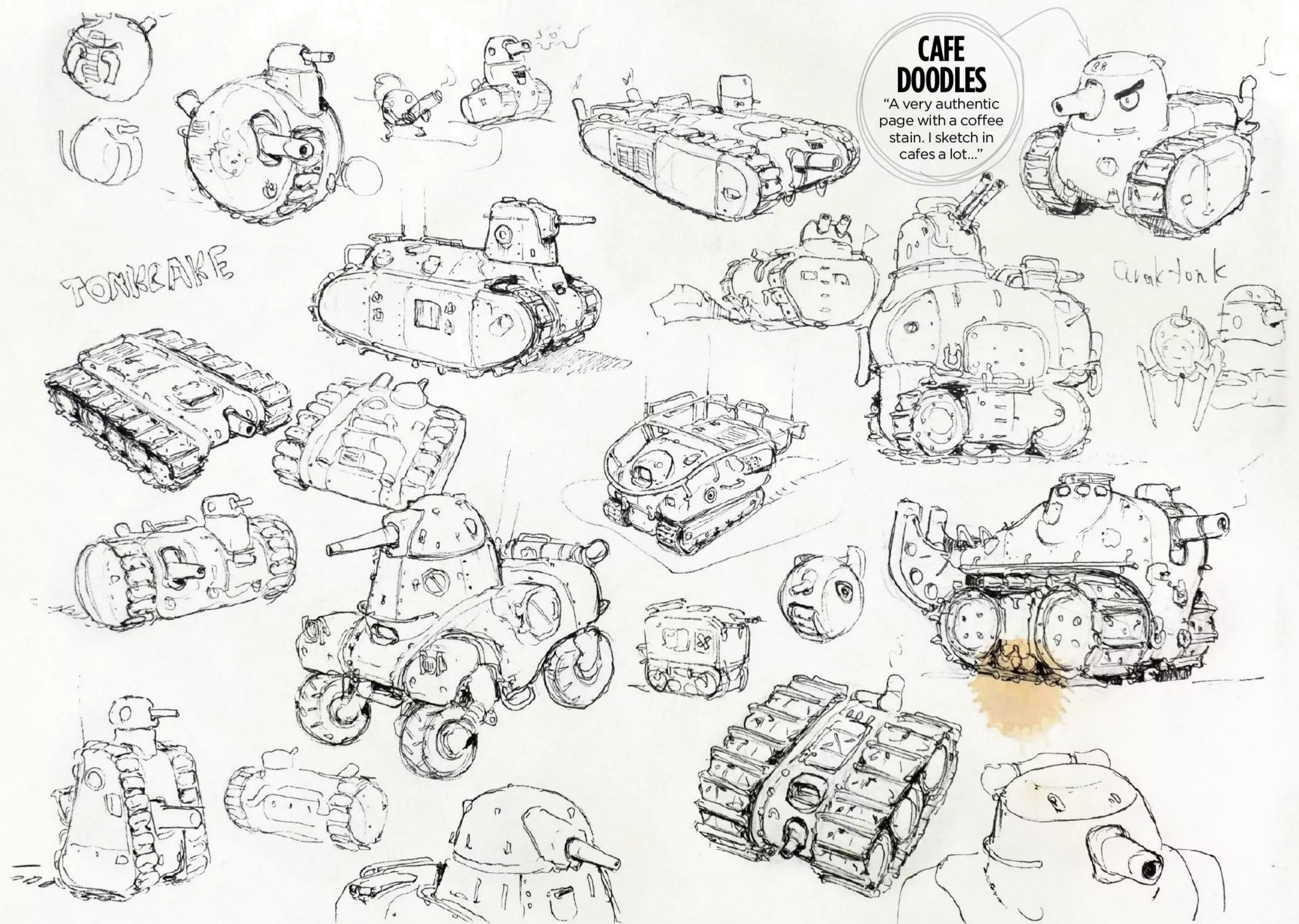
"Fun sketch concept of a giant wind-powered mech based on a modern Leopard battle tank."

PATROL THE SKIES

"A flying patrol boat. I often sketch small views from different angles as I always think of the overall shape."



“I sketch small views from different angles as I always think of the overall shape”



CAFE DOODLES

"A very authentic page with a coffee stain. I sketch in cafes a lot..."

TONKRAKE

Crack-Tank

OLD SCHOOL

"I'll never become tired of sketching retro sci-fi mechs."

OFF THE RAILS

"Another wild page done with a ballpoint. I sketch a lot when on the train and use whatever I have on me."

SHER-MAN

STU-FROG

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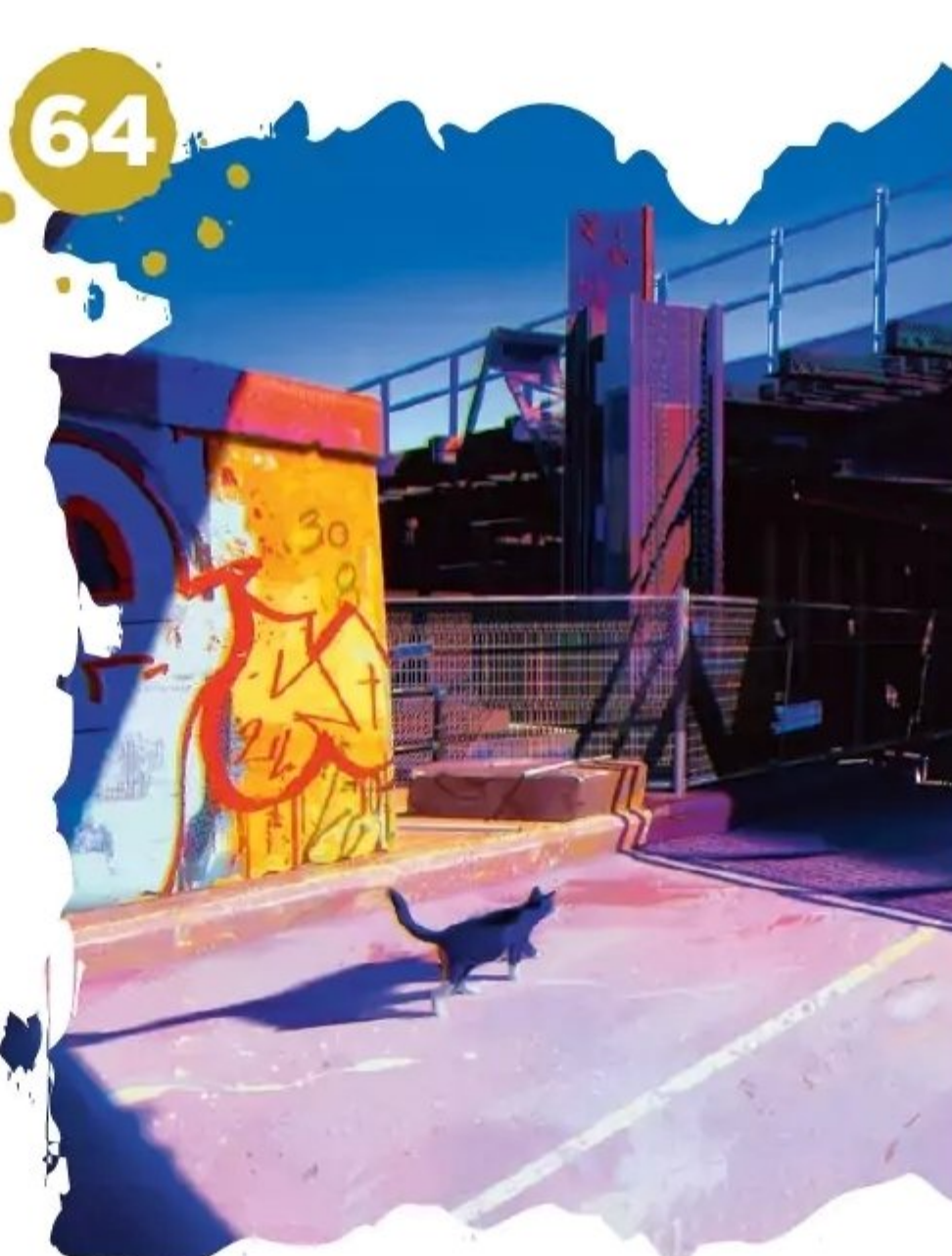
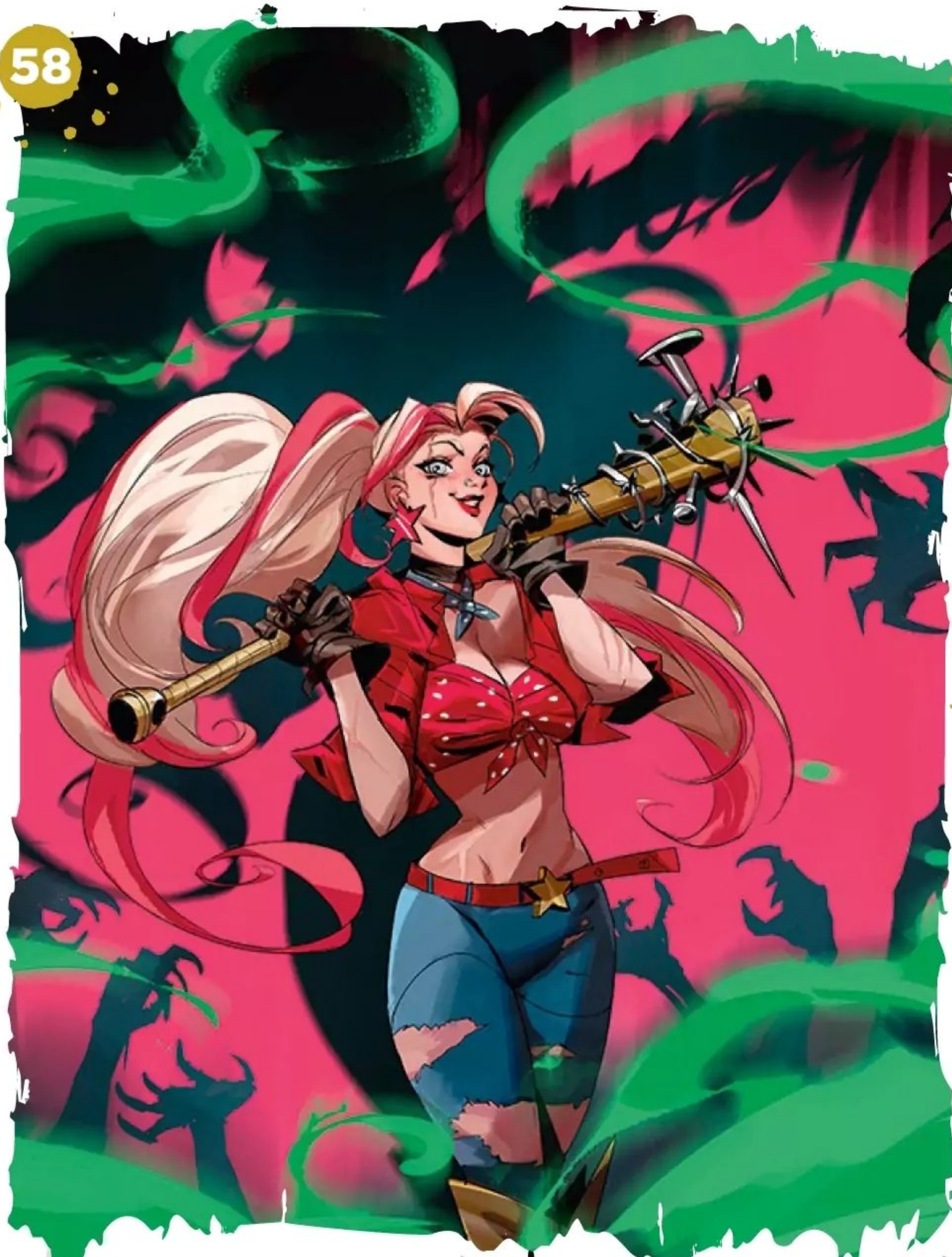
Workshops

**Workshop assets
are available...**

Download your resources by turning to page 5. And if you see the video workshop badge, you can watch the artist in action, too.



Advice from the world's best artists



This issue:

58 Paint distinctive character artwork
Jump into Yona's top tips for developing standout figures with simple composition tricks.

64 Use photo references
Quentin Marsollier gets his inspiration from real-life images as he creates stunning scenes.

66 Develop magical portal effects
Take a deeper look at Richard Lay's fantasy forest scene as he picks out the key elements.

70 Harmonious world design
Sail Lin nurtures a battalion of quirky characters to fit into his unique concept project.

72 Create ethereal light and colour
Learn how to paint mysterious mood with an in-depth guide from artist Pauline Voss.

78 Kitbash the groundwork
Starting with a "doodle-fest", Sebastian Luca tells us how he develops an epic sci-fi shot.

Artist insight

PAINT DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER ART

Yona shares his advice for creating powerful, personality-filled characters using simple and dynamic composition techniques

Artist PROFILE

Yona
LOCATION: Uruguay

Yona is an illustrator with a focus on creating comic covers, characters and game art. He works across the comics and publishing industry.
<https://bit.ly/3G1zFzm>



My focus has always been to stay true to my artistic vision. For years I tried to follow the “rules” of art,

hoping to fit into what was supposed to be my style to get work. However, I realised that this didn’t make me happy or help me stand out. It was only when I decided to simplify my

art and focus on the essentials that my work truly began to resonate with myself and others.

In this workshop, you’ll learn to create characters that don’t need busy backgrounds or excessive details to stand out. I’ll show you how to strategically use poses, anatomy and composition to create striking and expressive characters.

The key is focusing on the details that really matter and letting go of any unnecessary elements.

What I want you to take away is the confidence that sometimes less can be more. You’ll learn to simplify your work without losing power or emotion, and discover how that simplicity might be what truly makes your art stand out.



1 STRIKE THE PERFECT POSE

A character’s pose is essential to express their personality and emotion without words. Through posture, we can show action, power or vulnerability. I think about how my characters interact with their environment: are they standing tall, in motion, or relaxed? Sometimes a slight tilt of the head, eyes, or a hand at a specific angle can say more than a background full of details. Each pose should tell a story, but what’s key is making sure the character’s body speaks for itself, revealing their emotional state and role in the story.



2 USE ANATOMY AS A FOUNDATION

Anatomy is essential to make your characters feel real. You don’t need to know every muscle in detail, but understanding how the body works is fundamental. I focus on the basics: the bone and muscle structures. This allows me to create characters with natural poses, even when I work in a stylised way. I’m not looking for perfect bodies, just believable ones. I practice constantly and experiment with different positions. This way, I can bring my characters to life while keeping them dynamic and consistent.



3 REMEMBER THAT LESS IS MORE

Simplicity doesn't make your art less impactful. On the contrary, removing details helps your character stand out more. Using a clean background or a vibrant colour, like a red circle behind them, focuses the viewer's attention on what matters: pose, anatomy and expression. By removing the unnecessary, the visual message becomes stronger. It's not about skipping elements, instead it's about focusing on what really matters. A minimalist design can be just as powerful as a detailed one if you use it strategically.



4 COLOUR AS AN EMOTIONAL TOOL

Colour has a direct impact on the emotion we want to convey. Warm colours like red or orange can suggest energy, passion or tension, while cooler tones like light blue or violet evoke calm, serenity or mystery. When choosing colours, ask yourself what you want the character to express. Are they strong and dynamic, or more calm and reflective? Use colour to complement the character's personality, set the right mood, and reinforce the main emotion of the image. Colour is just as important as pose when it comes to what we try to communicate.

“Simplicity has an incredible power to convey the emotion in our artwork”

5 HIGHLIGHT THE PERSONALITY OF YOUR CHARACTER

To create an effective composition, focus on keeping things simple. Use basic shapes and empty space so the character stands out. It's not necessary to fill every single corner of the image with details. By keeping the background clean and placing a few elements strategically, we can highlight what really matters: the character's personality. Following this minimalist approach not only makes the image more visually appealing, but it also helps the viewer to focus on exactly what the character in question is expressing, without any distractions. Simplicity has an incredible power to convey emotion in our work.



6 GUIDE COMPOSITION WITH PATTERNS

Sometimes using a simple pattern in your composition can be every bit as effective as any complex background. I use circles or a repeating shape as a base to direct the viewer's attention and give visual flow. Here, I used a circular sequence of hands as the background. It's not just about drawing a literal figure, but creating a structure or cycle that guides the eye without being too obvious. Experiment with silhouettes or repeating elements and see how your image gains coherence without needing unnecessary details. ➡➡



7 MASTER COMPOSITION

When composing an illustration, I think about what's happening between the characters. It's not just about how they look, but also what their posture, gaze and placement say. A sword dividing the image, a gaze in another

direction, or a figure in the background illuminated by the moon can suggest influence or importance to the narrative. Using composition to show what's happening between the characters is a powerful way to tell a story without words.



8 PERFECT LIGHTING AND CONTRAST

This can completely transform how a character is perceived. I use light and shadow not just to define form, but to create emotion and drama. The contrast of light and shadow creates focus and highlights what I want to be seen. By playing with lighting, you can give characters a sense of depth or make them stand out further against a minimalist background. Simple shifts in lighting can make the whole composition more impactful.



9 MOVEMENT BRINGS CHARACTERS TO LIFE

Adding movement brings energy to the composition. When I created a character with the idea of a "leap of faith," I thought about how to express that feeling using the pose. Even if the image is static, I can show motion through the position of the arms, the direction of the gaze, or how the elements are arranged. Movement can be subtle or very clear, but always try to include it, as it helps bring dynamism and gives life to the piece, as if the character exists beyond the canvas.

“With a single change in posture, we can say a lot without adding a single word”

10 BODY LANGUAGE

The body also speaks. When I draw, I pay attention to how the characters stand, where they look, and what they do with their hands. A hunched pose shows insecurity, but a firm one portrays confidence. With a single change in posture, we can say a lot without adding a single word. That helps the viewer understand the emotion or intention right away. ➡➡

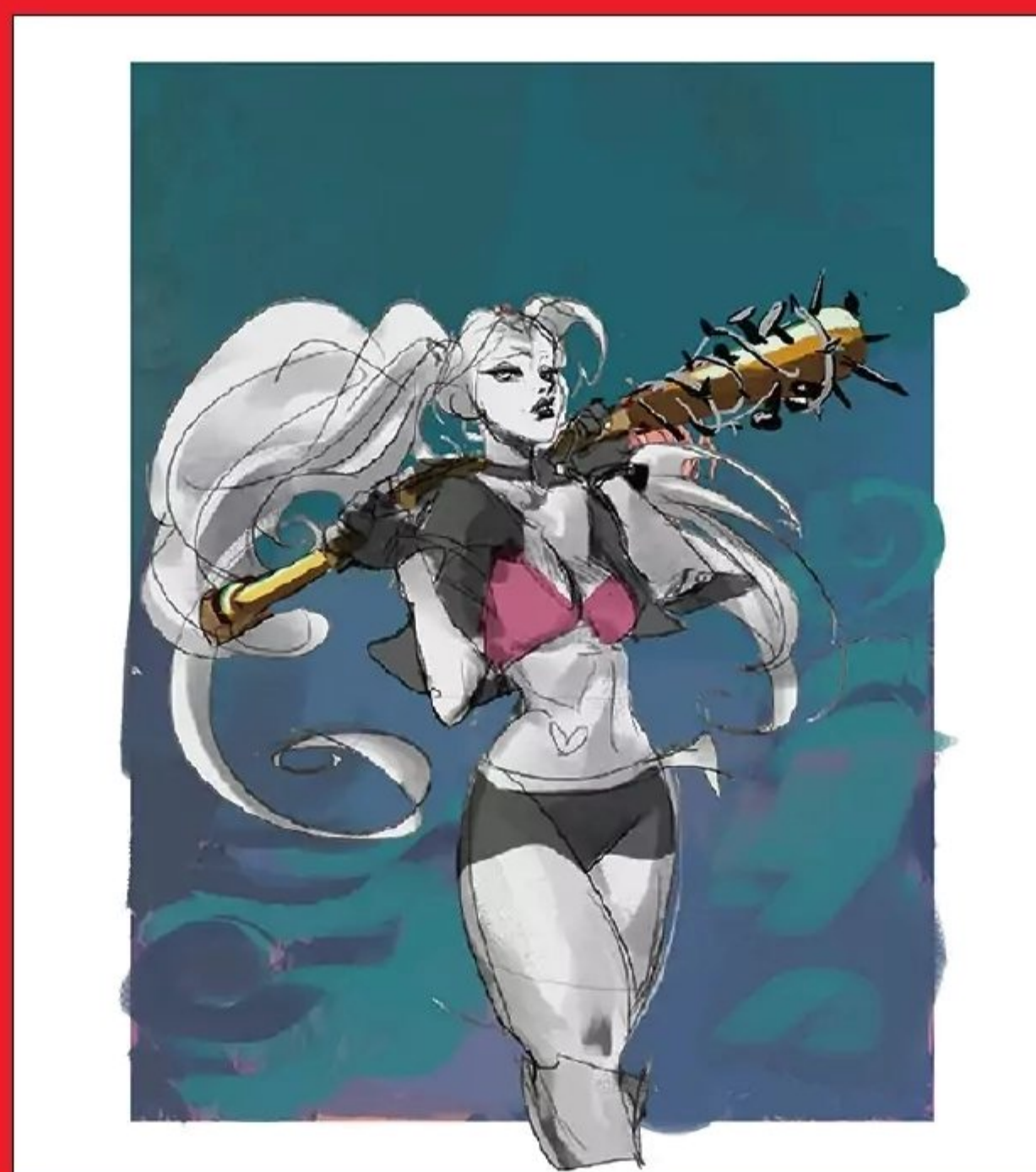
11 GIVE YOUR CHARACTERS CHARISMA

Delivering a touch of personality can make artwork truly stand out



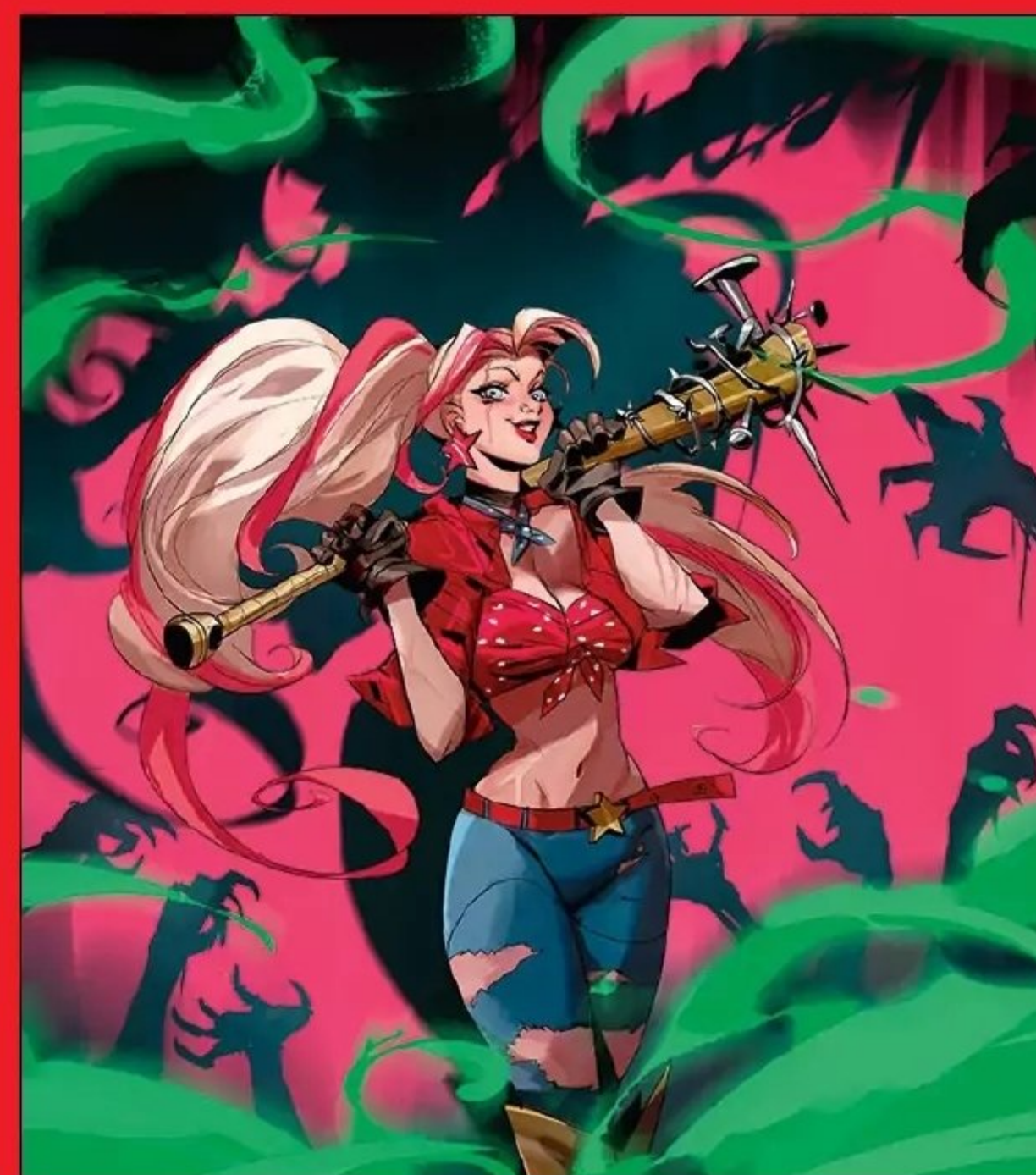
A Sketch the energy

Start with a simple sketch where you define the pose, space and energy of the character. If the sketch conveys what you want to say, the rest will flow. Focus on making sure the character's attitude feels strong from the very first line, which should help it continue throughout.



B Clean up and shadows

Begin cleaning up the sketch, defining the silhouette and volumes. I use shadows as a tool to create depth and direct attention toward the character. Even if I'm still in the pre-inking phase, I'm already building the mood that I want to reinforce later with the colours.



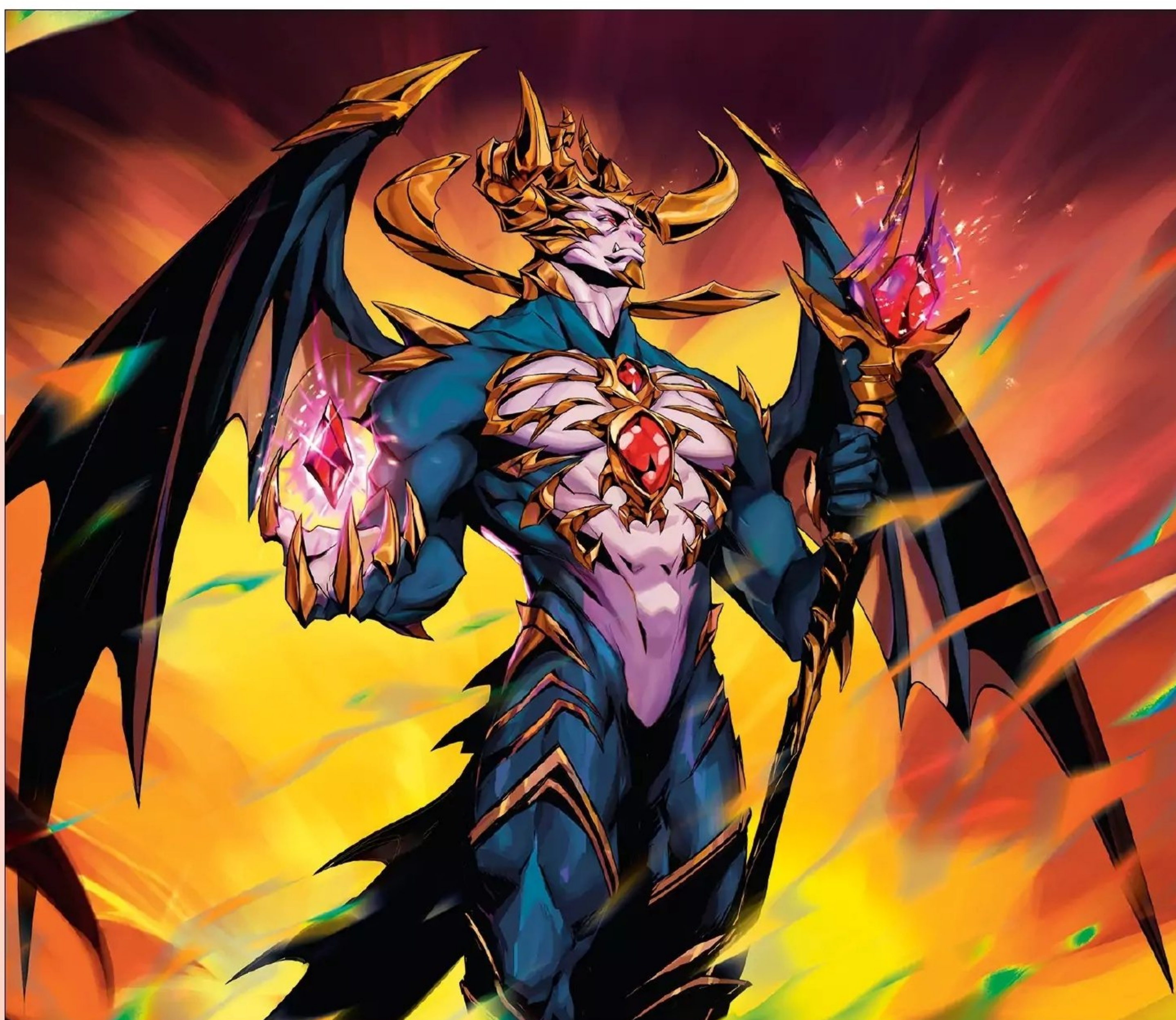
C Add the colour, depth and attitude

With the colour and inking done, we can define the layers. For me that's her shadow and the zombie hands in the background, the character, and a green foreground mist. The environment adds tension, but the scene revolves around her confidence.

“Using fewer elements, but with intention, makes everything carry more weight”

12 FOCUS THE VIEWER'S GAZE

When I start out on an illustration, I always think about which part I want the audience's eyes to see first. Use contrast, lines or gesture direction to guide the gaze. For example, if I want them to notice an intense expression, I'll make sure there are no distractions nearby. The clearer its focus, the stronger an impact it makes.



13 BALANCE THE VISUAL RHYTHM

I like to give the character space to breathe. If everything is filled with detail, the image feels crowded. That's why it's good to alternate busy zones with simple ones, like flat shadows or clean backgrounds. This creates a balance between chaos and order, and makes the character stand out much more.



14 CREATE DETAILS THAT TELL STORIES

Don't draw details for the sake of it. Every accessory, scar or torn garment says something about the character. Sometimes a single object tells their whole story. Try to choose carefully what to show and what to leave out. Fewer elements, but with intention, make everything carry more weight.



15 IF THE SILHOUETTE READS, IT WORKS

Many times my characters start from shapes. I always try to give each one a clear silhouette that works even in shadow. Play with proportions, angles and poses to break repetition. Varying the silhouettes keeps everything feeling fresh and helps each design have its own identity.



Artist **PROFILE**

**Quentin
Marsollier**

LOCATION: Canada

Quentin is a French visual development artist and senior matt painter in the animation industry. He loves developing 2D environments and is passionate about creating stories through colourful images.
<https://bit.ly/4leP27v>



Technique focus

USE PHOTO REFERENCES

Quentin Marsollier studies images to get inspired for striking scenes



"These studies are based on photos, which were good opportunities to explore new techniques. For the two men arguing next to a car [inset left], I tested out new brushes. This lets me make technical

progress and work faster on a production. For the street study with the cat, I used the photo's fantastic lighting to create a graphic illustration. Before painting, I always try to analyse the strong points of an image as much as possible, for example: how can the lighting help the composition? Then I can have fun and paint."



Photoshop

DEVELOP MAGICAL PORTAL EFFECTS

Richard Lay gives us the lowdown on all the key details and techniques that went in to creating his spellbinding scene



Artist PROFILE

Richard Lay
LOCATION: US

Richard was born and raised in California and grew up watching anime and other entertainment. That was the inspiration and motivation to create his unique art, which captivates thousands of followers across his social media accounts. <https://bit.ly/3RhYMjR>



For this piece I wanted to create a scene where a mysterious event was happening in the forest. It originally started life as an older illustration, where I decided to expand on the original composition to create a little more visual interest.

Although I liked the original design I'd created, I felt as though the scene was too small and the characters didn't have enough about them to occupy the space that I

needed. The answer was simple: let's add a giant portal! It's a great way to have a clear focal point and bring additional colour diversity into the piece, while also blending it with the scene using some vegetation growing out of the edges.

I also added a few lizards as a contrasting element to the scene to create a more playful, whimsical vibe, plus some plants and insects for a sensation of calmness. Every major element you see is in a state of near stillness, while almost all the

movement is happening within the portal as it spirals, leaving the creatures in the scene transfixed.

A running theme you can find in a lot of my artworks are these very centric compositions. I enjoy finding ways to guide the viewer's attention towards my main subjects. In my experience, the easiest way is using a variety of artistic techniques, including the shape design, colour, values, flow and so on. But there are advanced tools in Photoshop that can build the magic too.

ENTER THE PORTAL



Thinking big and small

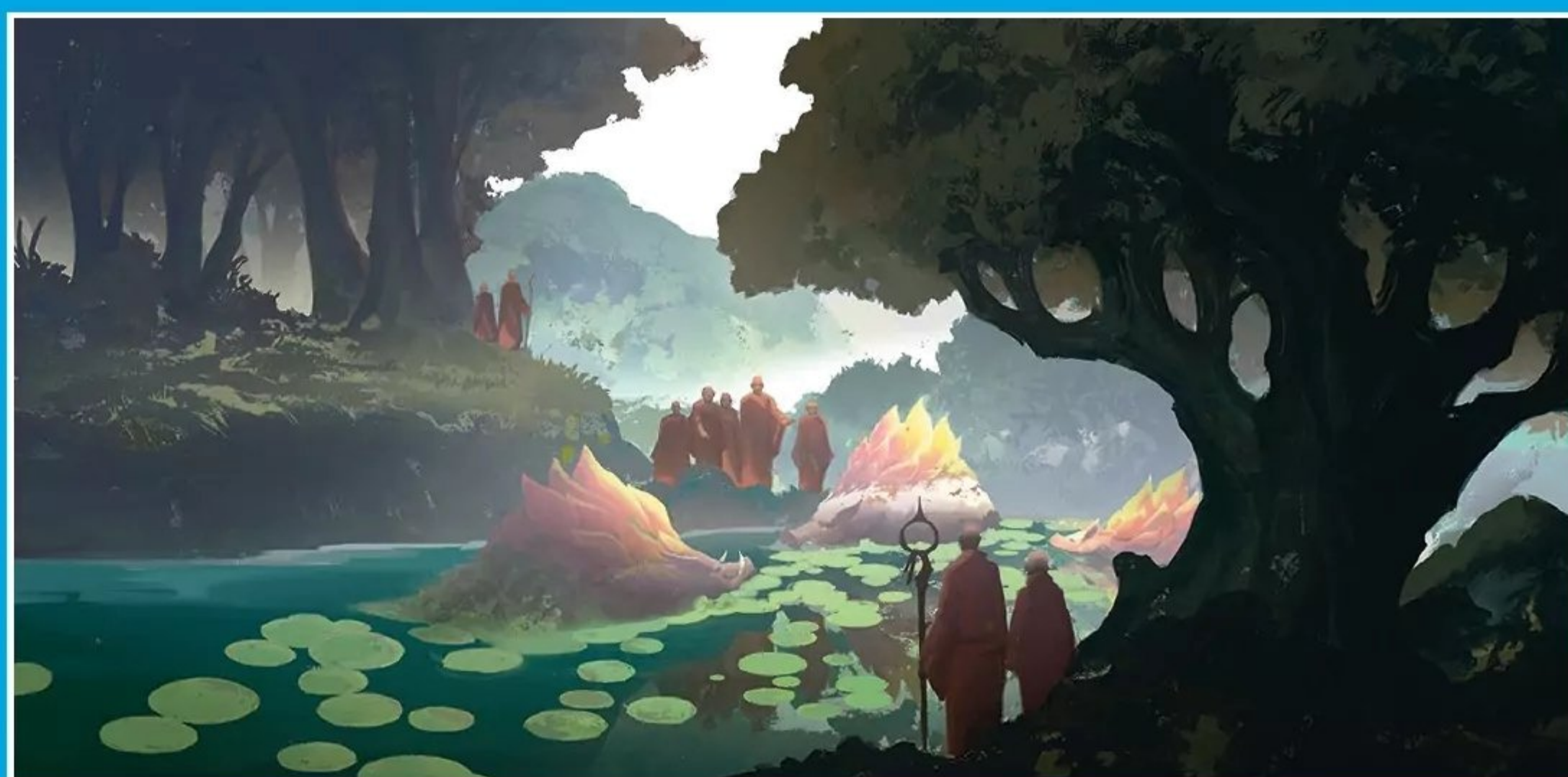
When creating a large-scale piece, it's important to keep track of all the smaller elements used within the scene. Micro-composition can sometimes tell a story or serve as its own side narrative within a larger piece. For this one, I created some visual framing by carefully placing elements around the scene to guide the viewer's eyes into this smaller area of composition.



How I create... AN ENCHANTING FANTASY FOREST

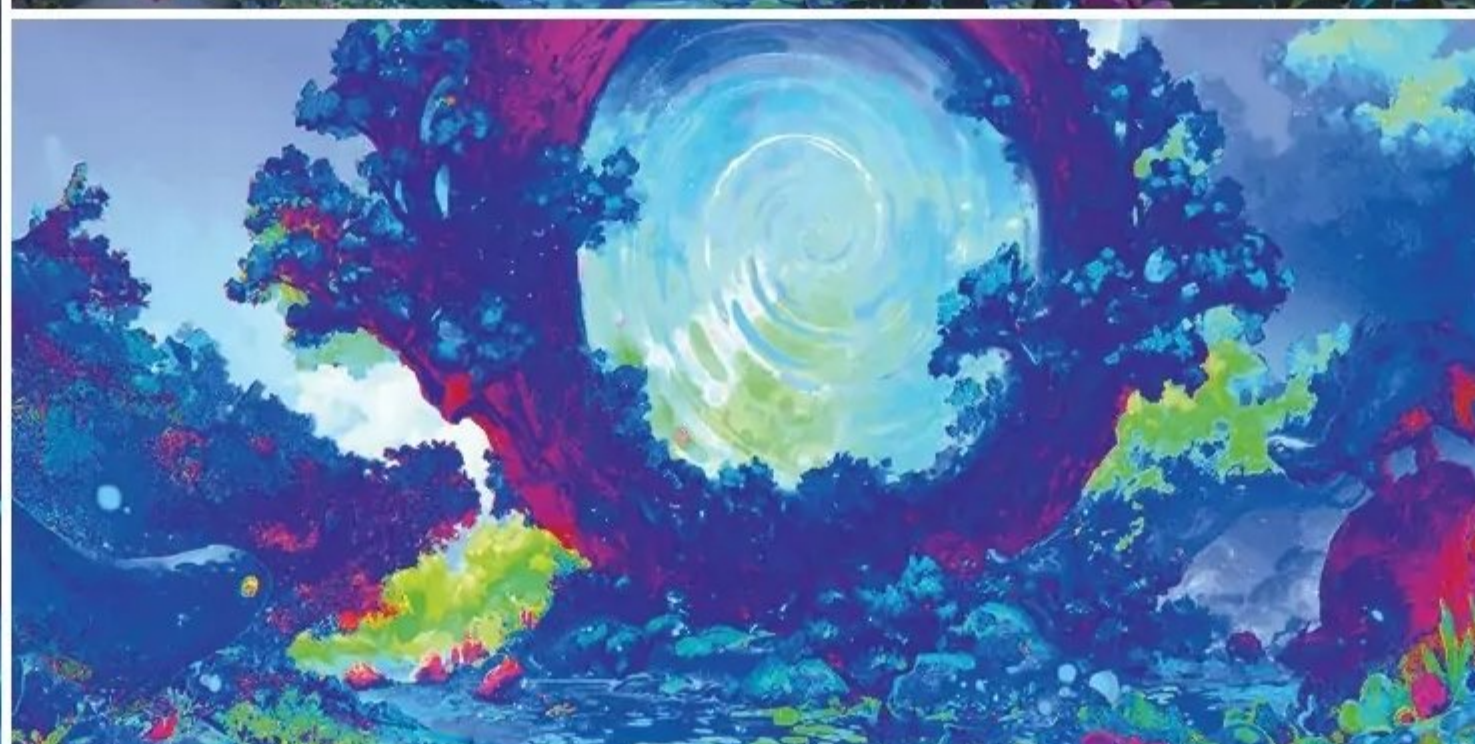
1 Initial ideas

My starting point is often very different from the end, which is a bad habit of mine. I start with a more muted palette and add colours for contrast and saturation as I progress. Here the people started out as monks, but later became more wizard-like as the scene began to get more fantastical while I developed the narrative.



Dynamic dragon

This dragon is ready to jump while almost everything else is still. This is one more ratio to consider: the energy and movement within a piece. As the character is the only one jumping, it creates that sense of imbalance and also offers a hint of dynamism.



Create an organic feeling

Play with your ratios so that they're never 50:50 or 100 per cent. Having a bit of imbalance and imperfection can add to this effect. In the first image, most of the creatures and other elements are pointing towards the portal with a couple facing away, while in the second shot everything is mostly blue and green with bits of violet for contrast. When your ratios become too even it gives a sense of balance and perfection that can make an image feel artificial. This isn't necessarily a bad thing depending on what you're going for, but keep in mind that nature is more organic and imperfect – why not play into that.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: RAKE BRUSH



Used mainly for the portal and hatching out some thin unified strands within the piece.

SCALE BRUSH



This was a stamp brush used on the lizards and the portal tree, along with the Warp tool.

Distortion effects

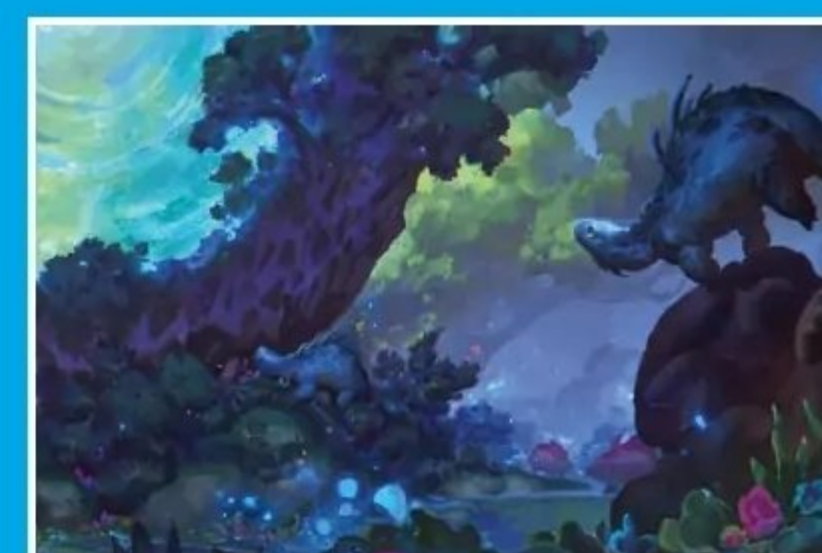
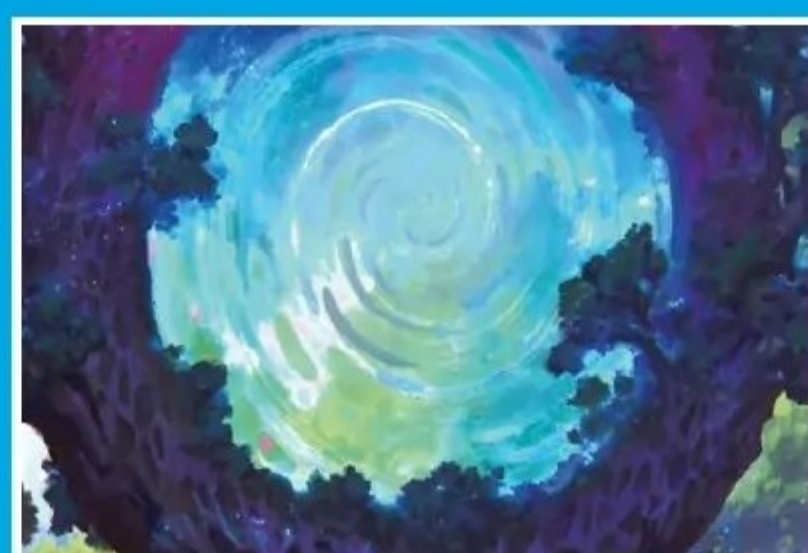
The spiral can be achieved by laying down an assortment of base colours. My choice was for complementary blues, which I adjusted to my liking with the Hue sliders. Under the Distort tool you can select Twirl to create the effect, while the haze was created with the Ocean Ripple filter. When you combine these distortions together, it can create plenty of unique effects, so experiment!

Shared elements

The textures on the lizard and the tree are from the same stamp brush. This can be used as a subtle way to show the relationship between the portal and the animals, as you can see on zooming out that only the lizards are really looking towards the portal.

2 Evolve the narrative

The story that I wanted to tell wasn't clear from a narrative standpoint. Part of me liked the way the piece was with that feeling of ambiguity, though over time I felt a clear message was more appropriate and changed the composition. I didn't completely remove the story, but added to it, making some events in the scene more of a side story. The main narrative would be the portal, which was more simple and clear.



3 Choose a colour combination

At this stage the final composition has been established. I pushed the colour saturation enough to not break the flow and picked an 80:20 ratio with my colour scheme, favouring an 80 per cent blue composition with small accents of violet and pink for more visual interest.



Artist **PROFILE**

Sail Lin

LOCATION: China

Sail is a senior game concept designer who has been a part of projects such as Delta Force and FragPunk. He is currently the head of the firearms design team for the game Strinova.
<https://bit.ly/42hKogi>

Technique focus

HARMONIOUS WORLD DESIGN

Sail Lin takes the battle to the vegetable plot with an army of carefully crafted characters



"These guns are a set of personal conceptual artworks. They belong to animals who fight against villains with weaponry made from different types of fruit and vegetables.

Each gun is tailored to a different animal, for example the gun made from carrots is used by a little rabbit.

Meanwhile, the shape of the food dictates the weapon, so a long spring onion becomes a sniper rifle, and a corn cob lends itself well to being a submachine gun. Once the firearms were made I began to create the cute characters that would wield them, which in turn helped me to construct the world they live in and the stories that I could tell within it."



Procreate

CREATE ETHEREAL LIGHT AND COLOUR

Pauline Voss shares her approach to crafting luminous, mystical lighting and using layered colours for atmospheric characters

Artist PROFILE

Pauline Voss
LOCATION: Germany

Pauline is a freelance concept artist and illustrator specialising in creating strong female characters and magical themes. Her previous clients include Wizards of the Coast, Disney and HarperCollins.
www.skadivore.com



For me, light and colour are everything. They define the mood, depth, and emotional core of an artwork.

Over the years, I've developed my own approach to creating ethereal, glowing light effects, which I'll be breaking down in this tutorial.

I build my lighting up gradually, layer-by-layer, playing with various blending modes, opacity and subtle erasing to create soft, semi-realistic

effects. It's an organic process rather than a fixed method, which means there is always room to play and discover happy accidents, too. But for this breakdown I'll try my best to give a more structured explanation that will help get you started.

The tutorial follows my core workflow: sketching and refining line work; laying down flat colours; gradually building shadows and highlights; and experimenting with layer blending and all the different

effects available to achieve that glowing, dreamlike effect.

This process helps me retain control while allowing for creative discovery. Whether you're new to digital painting or looking to refine your colour and lighting skills, this method might help you push the depth and luminosity of your work.

I'll be using my custom Procreate brush pack throughout this tutorial, which you can find all the details for at the bottom-left of this page.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PROCREATE

CUSTOM BRUSHES: SMOOTH SKETCH

Perfect for smooth lines with a flowing taper for any line work.

MESSY BLUR FUSH

This brush makes use of Procreate's blur feature.

HARD BASE

A more organic custom version of the standard brush. I use it for flat colours or lines with a small stroke size.

FUSCH SMUDGE

Used for satisfying, textured smudging. It can be used softly and powdery, or strong.

You can purchase Pauline's brush set for this tutorial by visiting <http://cbr.sh/van78q>



1 Sketch the foundation

Before diving into colours, establish a solid base sketch. This step focuses on defining proportions, gesture and composition to create a strong foundation. Keep your lines loose and organic at first, then refine them until you're happy with the level of detail.

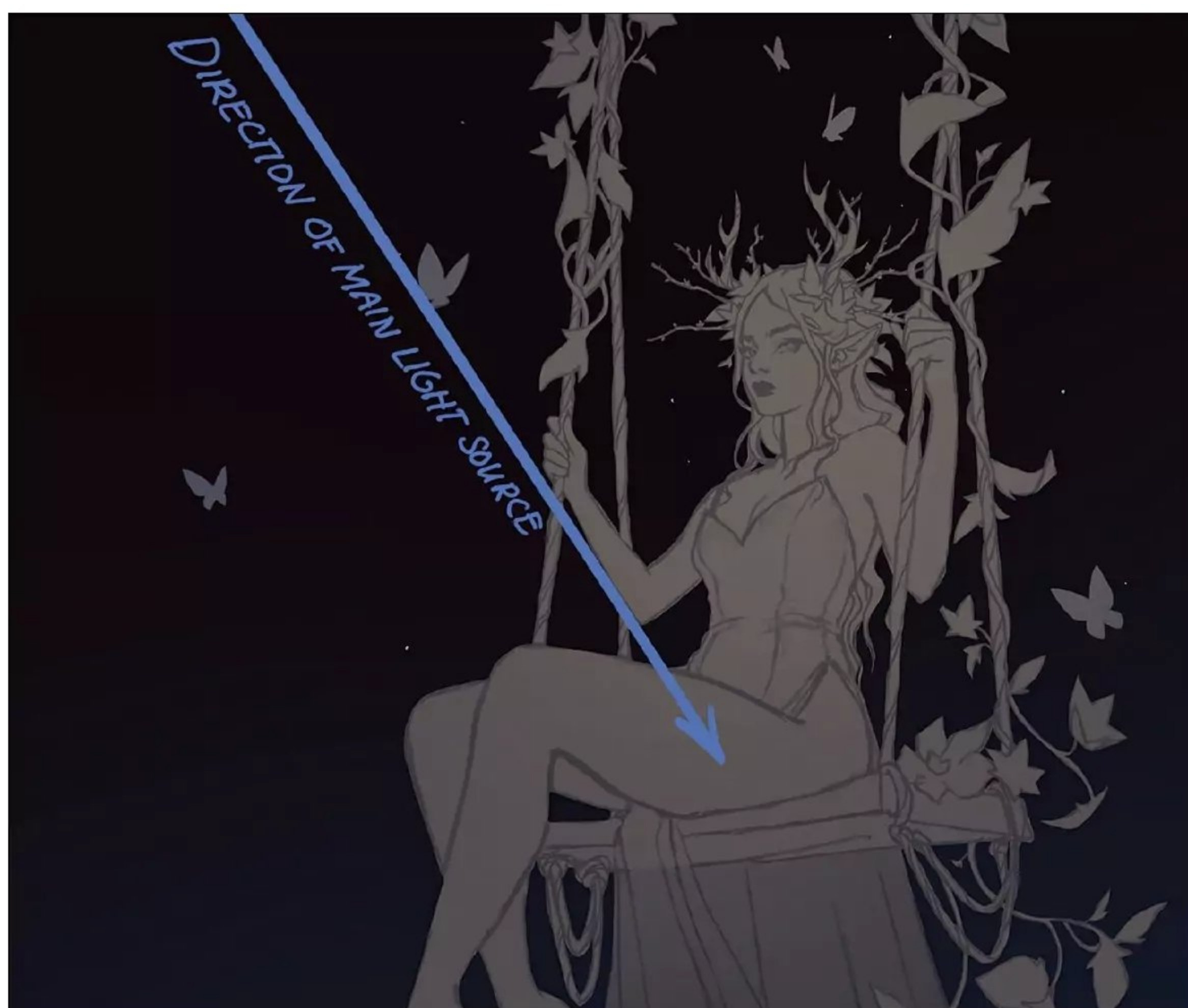


2 Block in the image

Create a new layer underneath the sketch and block in a flat base of any colour for the character. This isn't about shading yet, just defining the shape that will serve as a base for all different kinds of elements, materials and the light effects later. Since the lighting will play a major role, you should also think about where the different light sources might come from at this stage. ➡

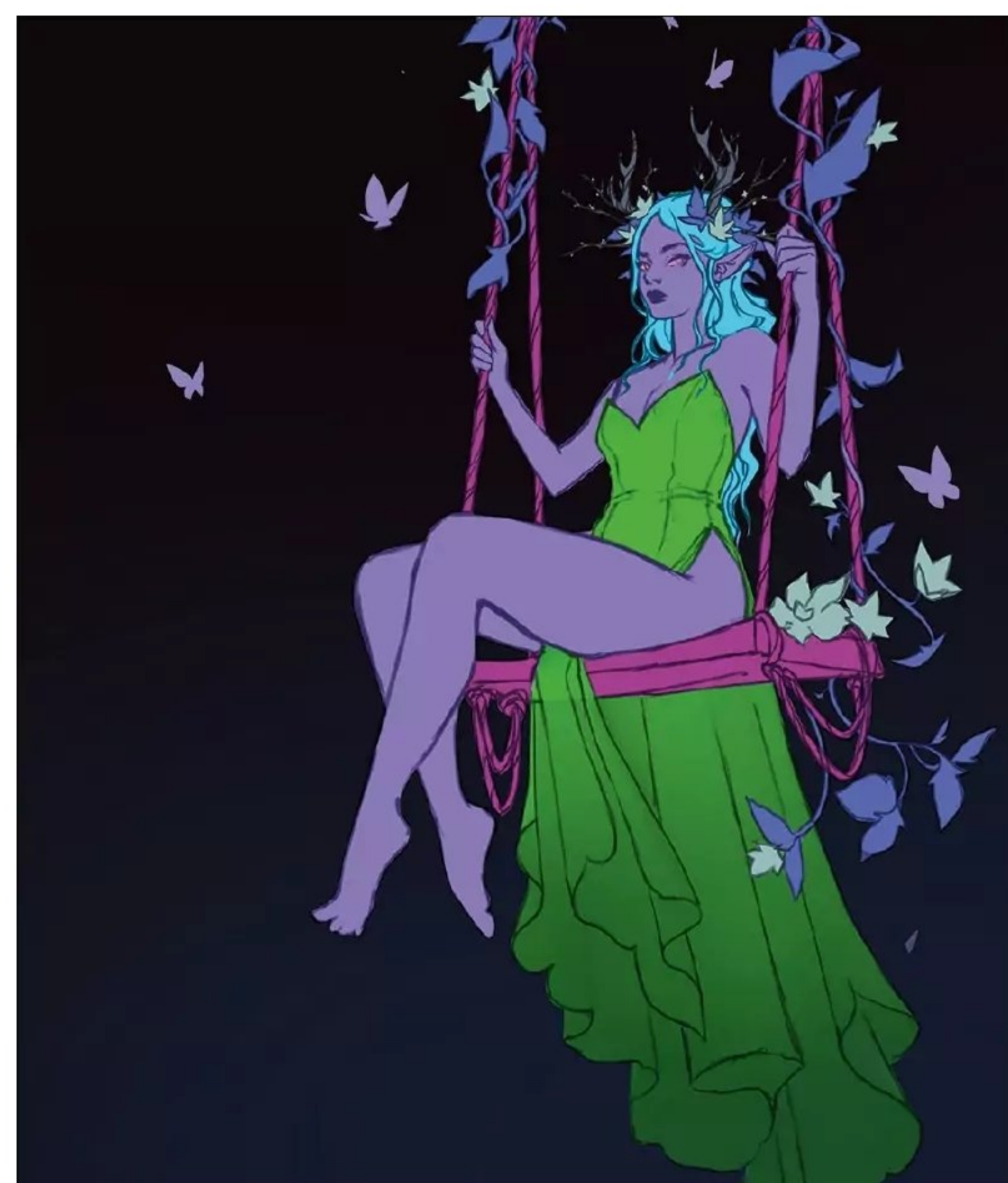
In depth Ethereal atmosphere





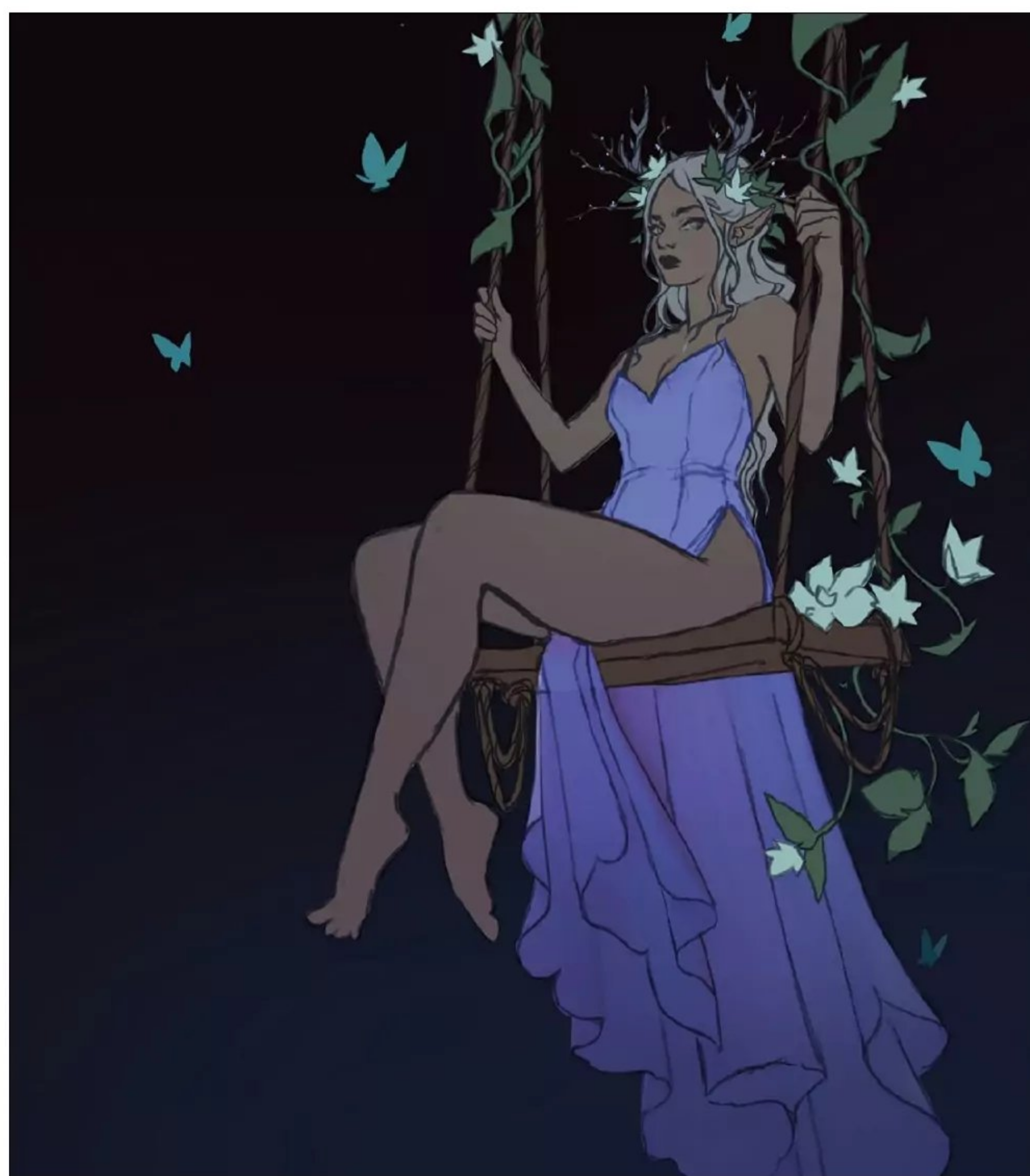
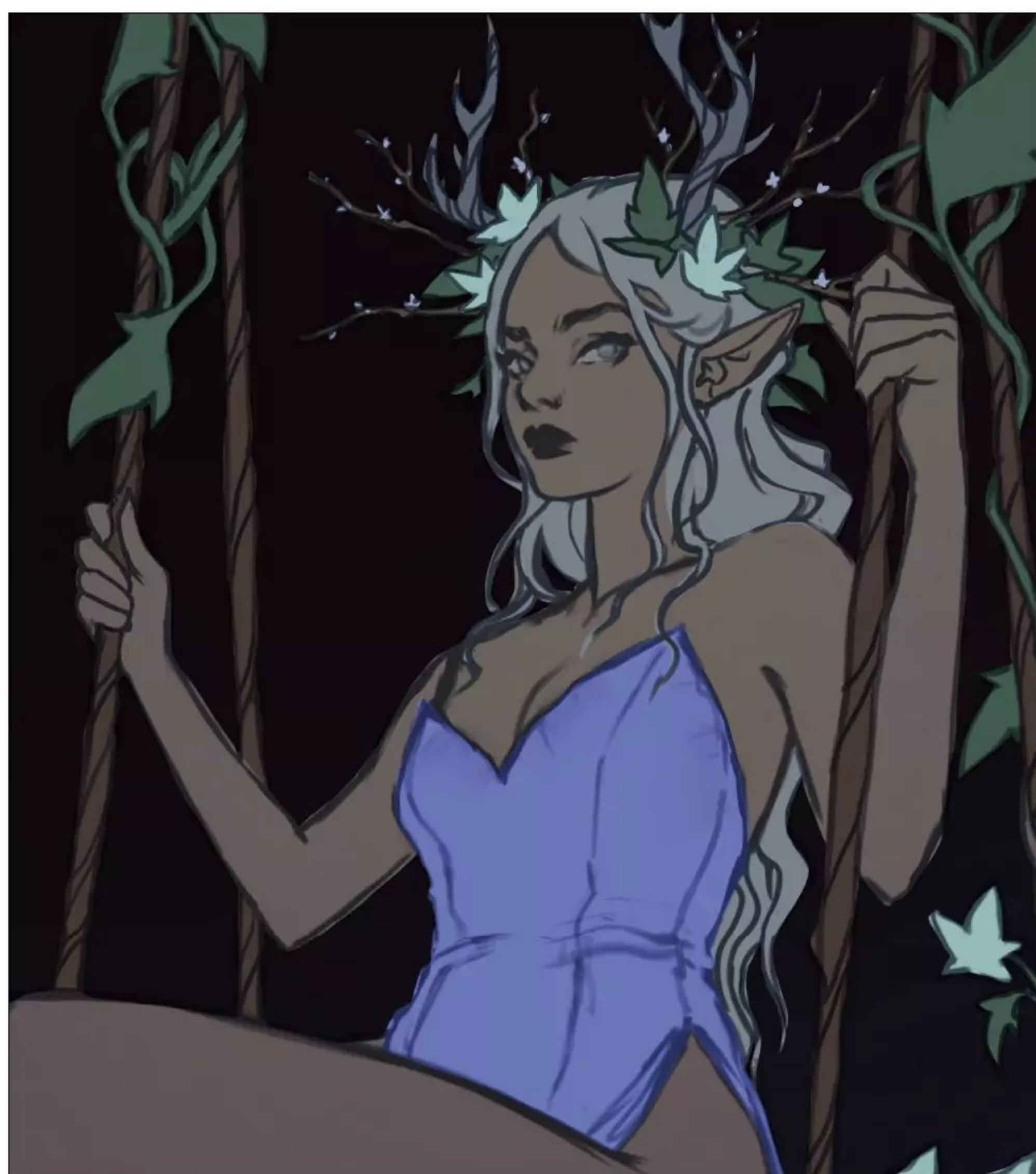
3 Set the mood

To establish the overall mood and lighting, add a gradient layer on top of a solid background. This helps to give a sense of depth and atmosphere. You can also add a gradient transparency using layer mask on the shape layer, establishing the ethereal elements early in the process. On top of that, using a Clipping Mask, place a gradient that becomes lighter in an upper corner, which also acts as a rough orientation and direction for the overall lighting decisions going forward.



4 Organise with masks

Using clipping masks all based on the base shape layer, separate different elements of the painting – the materials, details and so on – to keep things organised. This step ensures easy control of colour adjustments and blending modes without affecting the entire canvas. I find using crazy colours helps keep myself entertained during the process and stops my eyes getting tired.



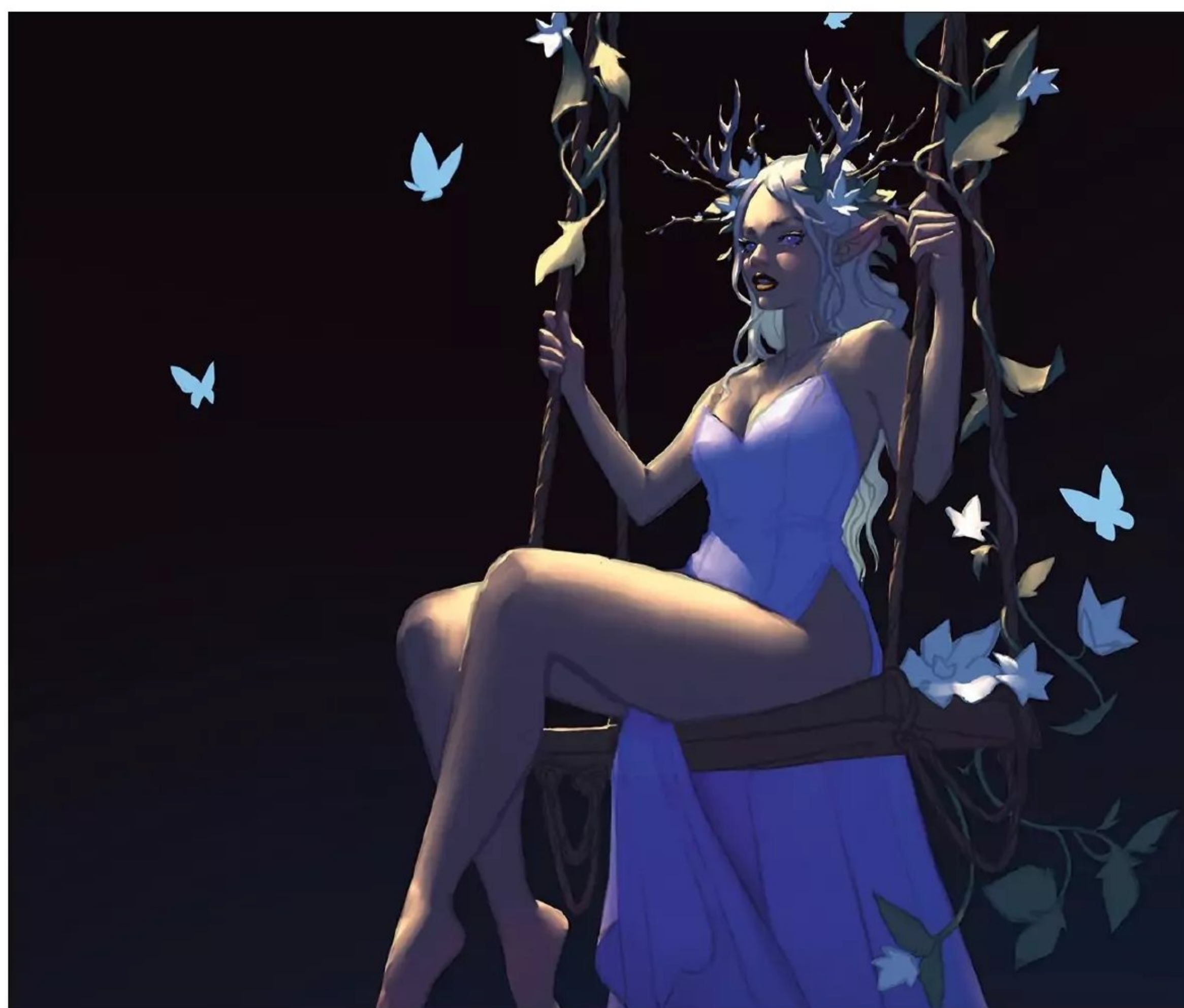
5 Fine-tune your colour palette

At this stage, tweak hue, saturation and brightness to bring the local colours closer to your vision. They don't have to be perfect yet, but I prefer keeping them cohesive unless I'm introducing a deliberate pop of contrast. A monochromatic palette is often the key to a moody look.



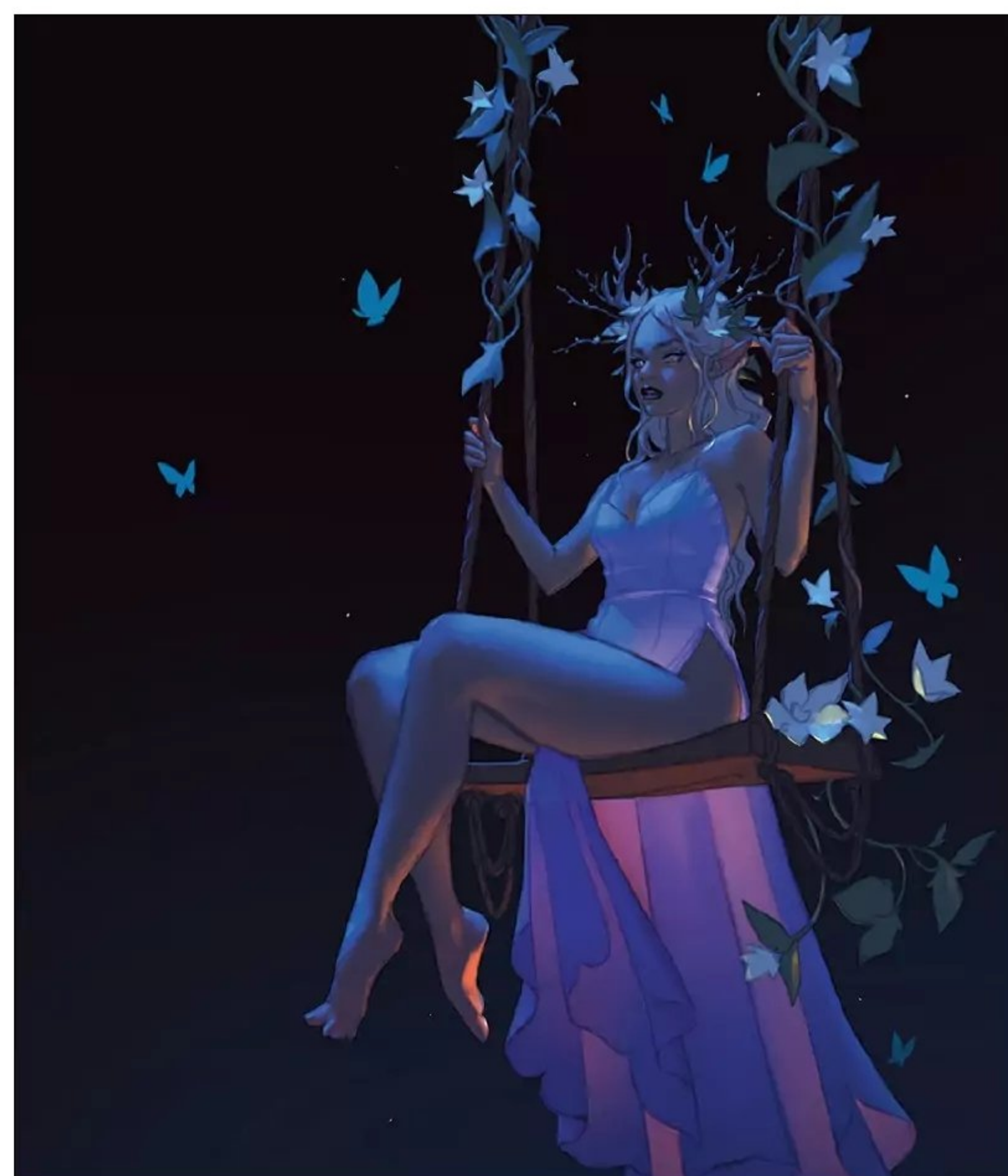
6 Prepare for lighting with shadows

Before adding light, first darken the overall scene to make room for contrast. This pulls the scene together and brings the colours even closer. Since the upcoming lighting will be the main focus, this step ensures the highlights pop more dramatically later on.



7 Define the primary light source

Now establish the main light source that will drive the composition. I paint it in with a hard brush and blend with my messy blur brush, usually to an extreme degree and in an inaccurate colour to later pull back and colour correct, making it easier to see where the light goes. Next consider the light's direction, intensity and temperature; is it a warm sunset glow, cold moonlight or magical artificial light?



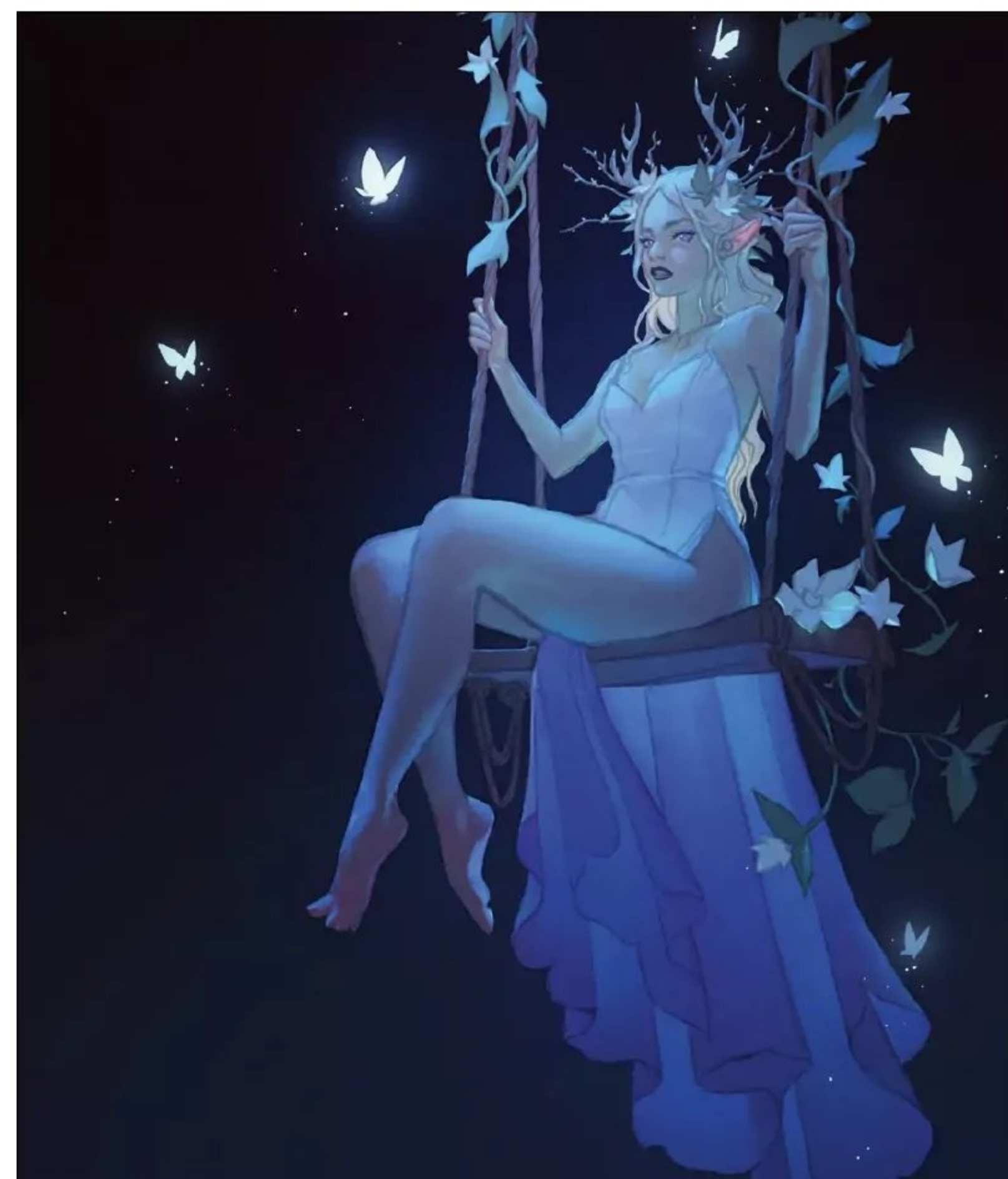
8 Introduce a secondary light

To add more depth and richness, add a secondary light source to the image. This could be reflected light from the environment or an intentional effect such as magical fairy dust or an unseen source of energy. It adds interest to the storytelling, but also colour variation, and makes the scene feel more immersive. ➡



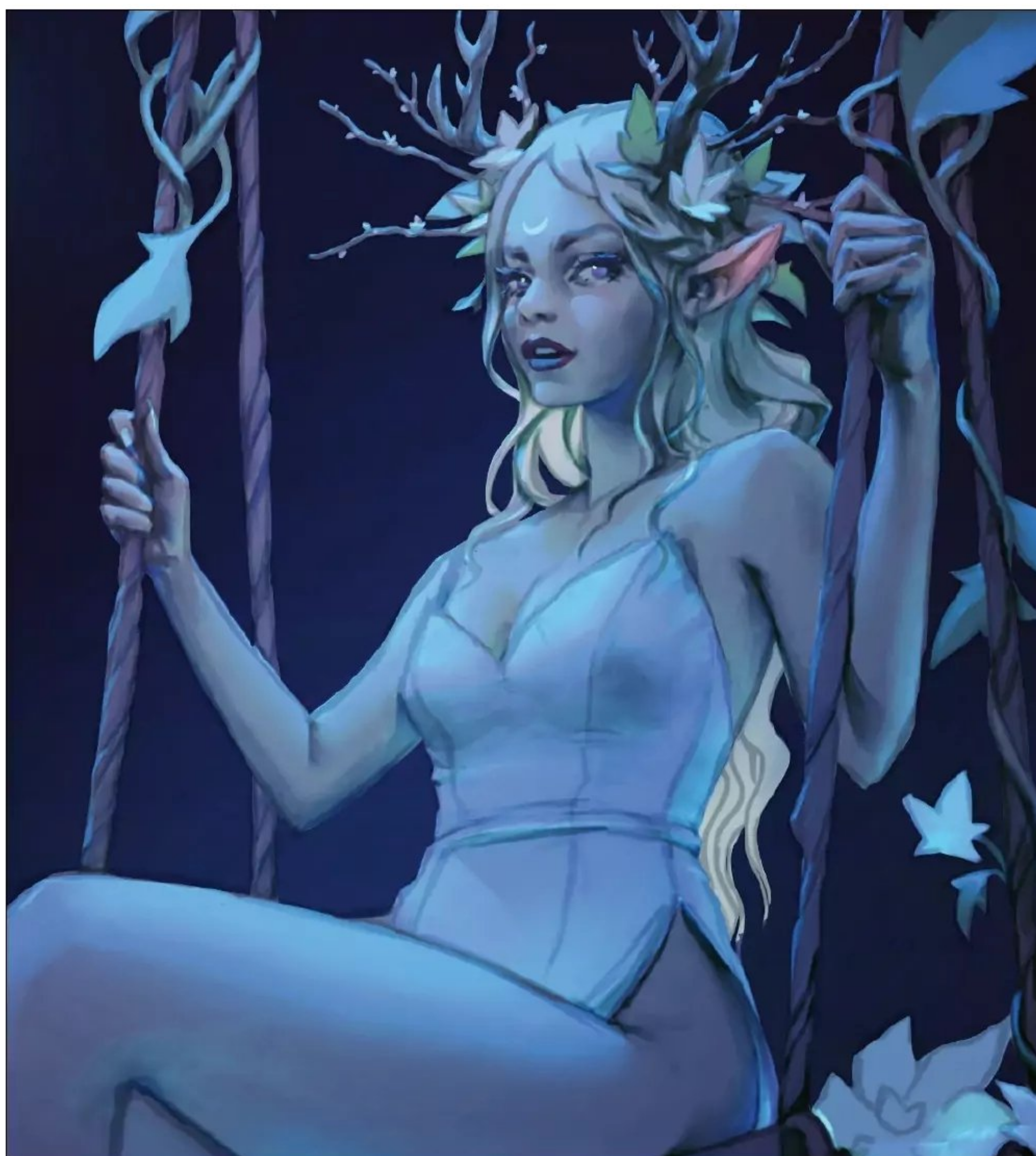
9 Enhance the glow

Use a soft airbrush to selectively improve the glowing effects, emphasising the luminous areas. Elements such as butterflies get a boost with the Add blending mode, which is one of my favourites. Experiment with the Screen, Add and Colour Dodge modes to increase brightness without overexposing details. This step is what gives the image its otherworldly, dreamlike quality.



10 Subsurface scattering

For organic elements such as skin, fabric or leaves, introduce subsurface scattering; the way light passes through semi-transparent materials. A bright red/orange accent can be added to the ears and fingers, and a neon green to leaves to make them appear both more lifelike and magical at the same time.



11 Increase the depth in your shadows

The impression of shadows automatically happens when we paint in the light and leave out certain areas. But to add more depth to the painting I usually add a layer of ambient occlusion set to Multiply. Just like after each step, I'll go in with strong contrast and then after finishing with the painting, adjust the layer to a softer version by adding saturation and lessening the intensity.



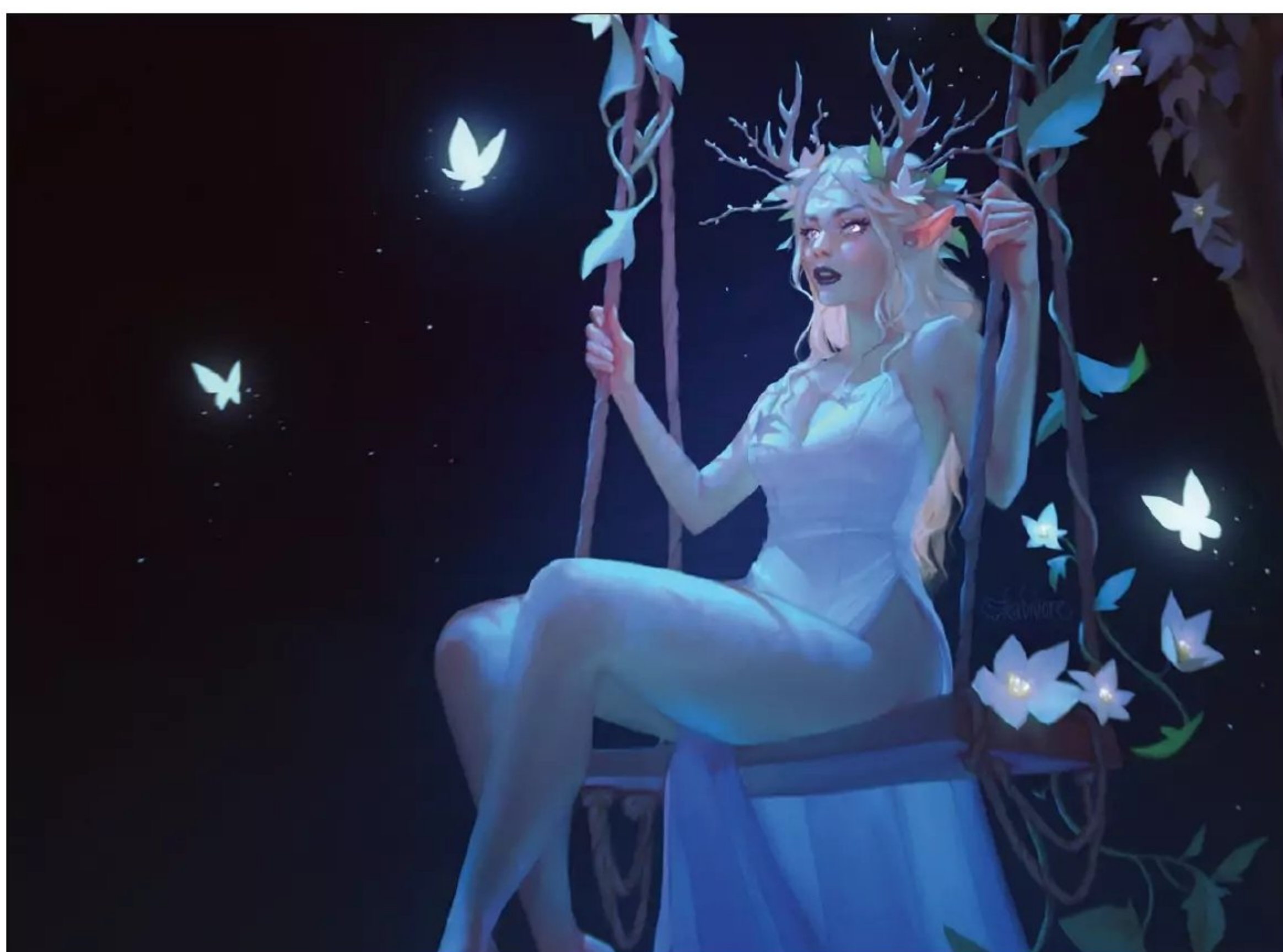
12 Refine the lighting and go through each layer again

With a layer mask on the main light layer, carve out shapes created by leaves and other objects in the way of the light. This means erasing or masking areas to create sharper edges, glow breaks and silhouettes. On some materials, especially skin, it can be interesting to hem those shapes with a reddish/orange as subsurface scattering. Go through each layer, retouching blending modes, hue, and so on to see what works.



13 Merge the layers and make adjustments to proportions

With most of the elements in place, you can reduce the opacity of the line work and merge the layers for a final proportion check. This is where I subtly tweak details like the head shape, arm length or pose, ensuring the overall flow and composition feel balanced.



14 Final tweaks and post-production

At this stage, I step away for a while before making last changes. Staring at a piece for hours can make it hard to spot mistakes, so a fresh perspective helps. Flipping the canvas also reveals imbalances. Make a final colour grading pass, adjusting brightness, contrast and saturation to unify the painting. Sometimes I add a subtle vignette to guide focus towards the subject, while I also love using chromatic aberration; it reminds me of looking at the moon through binoculars. Lastly, clean up the remaining line work and add final storytelling elements; perhaps glowing flower pistils, enchanted eyes, or in my case even a whole tree to add more context, bringing everything together in a magical, cohesive way.

Technique focus

KITBASH THE GROUNDWORK

Sebastian Luca reveals the process that resulted in his dystopian lemonade stand

"This piece started as a chill doodle-fest where I kitbash shapes and ideas until something vaguely coherent emerges. That's how I ended up with an overly ambitious lemonade stand floating in a dystopian cityscape. The process itself is straightforward: I grab generic models from the market, kitbash them into something larger, and model the custom details myself using 3DCoat and Blender. For this sketch, I rendered everything in KeyShot, though Unreal Engine is usually my go-to. I'd recommend kitbashing everything, as it skips the technical drudgery and leaves you with more brainpower for the fun, creative stuff." ●





Artist **PROFILE**

**Sebastian
Luca**

LOCATION: Romania

Sebastian is a senior concept artist who treats kitbashing like a sport by throwing together models, sculpts and wild ideas until something cool sticks. Sometimes his technique works, and the rest of the time the results are abstract.

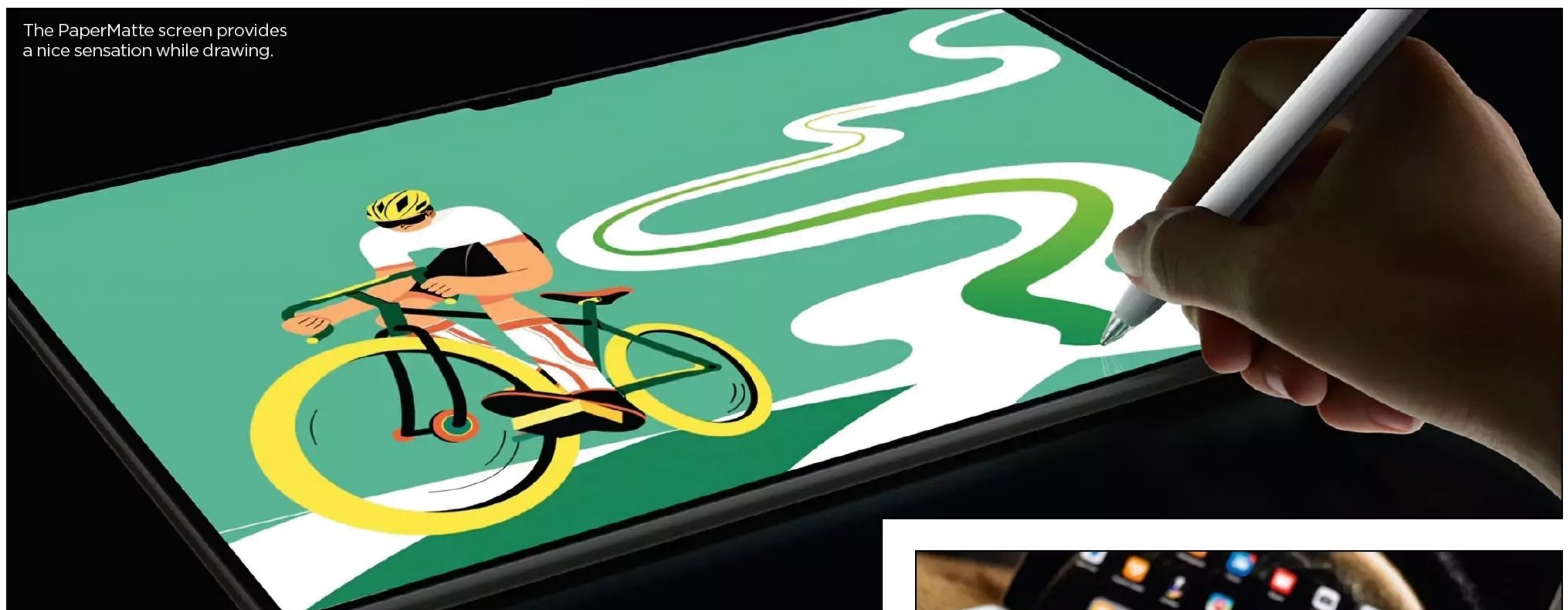
<https://bit.ly/3R3mY9u>

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!



Huawei MatePad Pro 13.2 (2025)

APPLICATION CONUNDRUM The updated tablet is still a baffling combination of hardware and software



Price From £1,000/\$1,300 **Company** Huawei **Web** www.huawei.com

We've had our hands on a couple of Huawei tablets before, finding them to be perfectly respectable hardware often let down by their software. This new model, with a 13.2-inch OLED screen and both a stylus and a keyboard case in the box, aims to be an even more tempting offering from the Chinese brand, though it's not substantially different to the previous release.

Once again we find potentially great hardware with a software offering that's hard to get along with, though improving. So if you do find yourself considering the MatePad Pro as a tablet to sling in your bag, and even do some work on – and there are plenty of other options among the best tablets for drawing at this price

point – make sure the apps you want to use are supported first.

EXCELLENT DESIGN

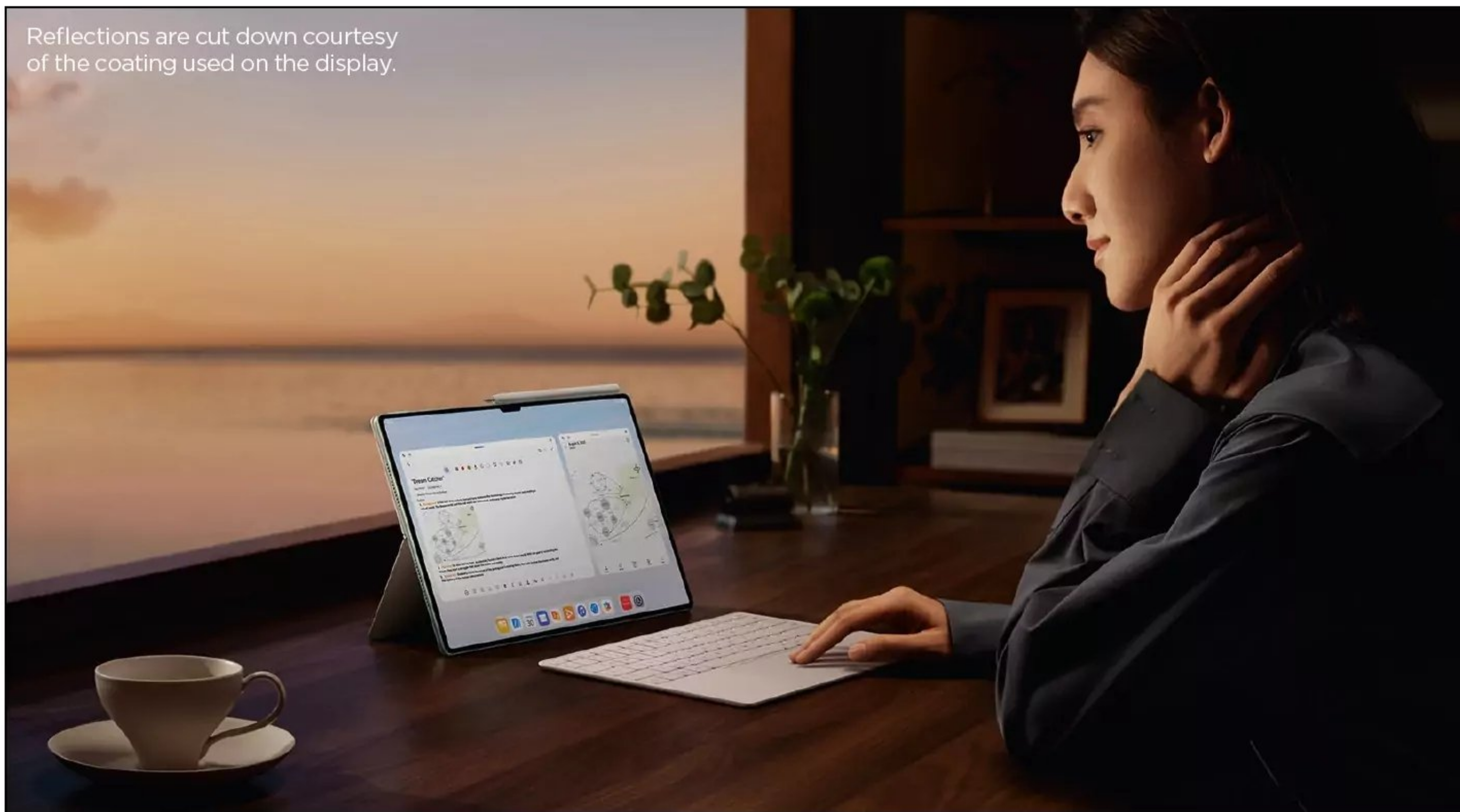
The first thing you'll notice upon picking up the MatePad Pro is that it's nice and light, especially compared to



other 13-inch tablets such as the iPad Pro. The next is the screen, which is a 16:9 OLED with Huawei's lovely PaperMatte coating that successfully cuts down on reflections and feels nice to run your finger over. Huawei calls the screen a 'flexible OLED', but there's no flexibility to the tablet at all: made from plastic and metal, it's thin but stiff and feels sturdy.

As a 13.2-inch tablet, it's the same size as many laptops, especially if you slot it into the keyboard case that comes in the box. This is a two-part operation involving a magnet, and while it may feel flimsy at first, it's a simple process and a flap folds out from the back to provide support, much like some Surface devices.

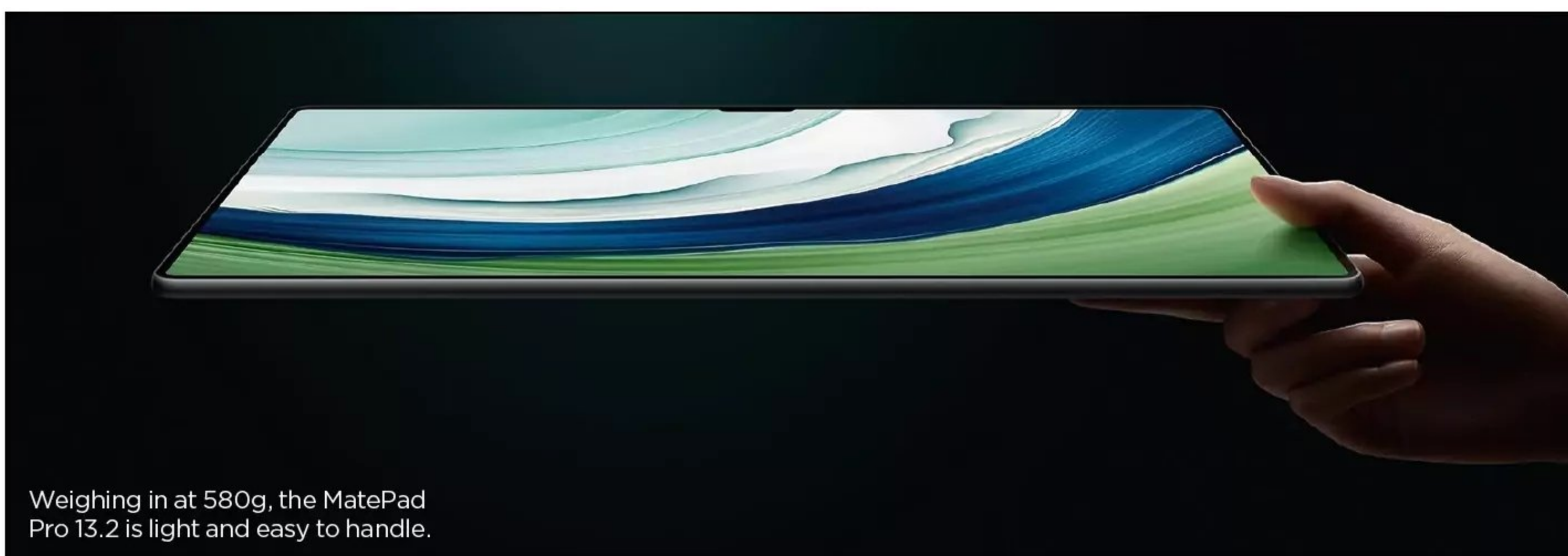
The lock switch is nicely recessed so it won't get pushed accidentally too



Reflections are cut down courtesy of the coating used on the display.



The rear camera features 50MP and 8MP lenses. Not award-winning, but likely rarely used.



Weighing in at 580g, the MatePad Pro 13.2 is light and easy to handle.

many times and the front camera is capable of facial recognition to get you up and running quickly. It resumes from sleep almost instantly, and the keyboard has a touchpad that not only allows you to move a mouse pointer on-screen, but sketch out gestures too. One thing we discovered is that the tablet doesn't notice when the keyboard has been detached, leaving you unable to use the on-screen keyboard. We ended up disabling NearLink to disconnect it, just so we could search the web.

On the back, there's a circular camera bulge. You'd never guess there are four microphones and six speakers buried in the chassis, while Bluetooth means you'll be able to connect a headset, as there's no headphone jack.

The OLED screen shines out of the front of the MatePad Pro and is a marvellous, HDR-compatible display. Unpack the pressure-sensitive stylus

and you've got a responsive drawing tablet to use with whatever painting app you can get to work. Krita and Infinite Painter installed and worked, while HiPaint was on the AppGallery and GoPaint was pre-installed. The stylus is comfortable to use despite being hard plastic, has a flat edge to magnetically snap to the tablet and stop it rolling away, and doesn't lag.

LESS THAN APPY

A tablet is nothing without some software to run on it, and even though HarmonyOS is built on Android, Huawei doesn't have access to the Google Play Store. There's the Huawei AppGallery, which should be your first port of call, and there are plenty of apps on there, including the Opera and Edge browsers if you don't like the built-in one, and Microsoft 365 if you're an Office/OneDrive user. GoPaint is pre-installed, as are Maps,

“If you do find yourself considering the MatePad Pro, make sure the apps you want to use are supported first”

VERDICT

Huawei makes great tablets – this slightly matt screen is great to read from and draw on – and comes with useful accessories. Sadly, its software lets it down as the app service just isn't as instant as other app stores. It is improving, however, and with stylus response and screen quality like this one, you still might love it if you can find the right apps.

Pros

- Excellent screen
- Keyboard and stylus in the box
- Feels snappy to use

Cons

- Android without the Google bits
- Installing apps not always simple

Rating



Mail, Notes, and all the usual things you'd expect from a tablet, though not necessarily under names familiar from Android. So far, so good.

If you want to install something not covered by the AppGallery, it will still appear in a search, and direct you to an APK site to download it. Given all the warnings we get from our mobile devices about not installing apps from unknown sources, there's a degree of trust required here. It's not in Huawei's interests to direct you to malware-riddled APKs, and there were no problems we know of with the apps we installed this way. But it still feels a long way from the simplicity of Google Play or the App Store.

We installed Microsoft Teams and Amazon Kindle as APKs, from two different download sources, and while Kindle worked okay, Teams wouldn't sign in properly. The Geekbench app we use for comparing performance on phones and tablets wouldn't install at all, despite us downloading the APK twice. The CPU is hardly flagship-level, but clearly has enough oomph in its eight cores to make apps responsive, helped by the 12GB of RAM.

Anything can run web apps. What we want from a £1,000 tablet is a smooth experience, and Huawei hasn't quite got there yet, though it has improved. If you're a heavy user of Google services this isn't the tablet for you. CorelDraw Go wouldn't work at all – the Edge browser looked like it was going to manage it, but errored after a while. The web version of Photoshop didn't want to work in the mobile browser but would in Edge, while Photopea worked in all the browsers. Perhaps there's hope for it yet if there's a software update on the horizon; a desktop-class browser would be a big step.

Ian Evenden

Acer DS2 Series Pro

NEW DIMENSION The monitor delivers eye-boggling 3D SpatialLabs technology, but comes at a significant price

Price £3,000/\$3,400 **Company** Acer **Web** www.acer.com

Whether or not the dedicated 3D visual technology in the Acer DS2 Series Pro SpatialLabs monitor will appeal to a broad enough market is yet to be seen, but the tech is still impressive nonetheless.

The 27-inch display itself is 4K resolution with a 16:9 aspect ratio. The display itself is fairly standard but it's the multiple cameras at the top and the bottom-mounted speakers that first catch the attention.

The overall design is rather boxy and dated with few curves to speak of. There's a sizeable amount of tech packed into the case that means the base is larger than we would have liked. This results in the display panel sitting almost flush with the front of the base, protruding uncomfortably far onto the desk.

The display offers an unbelievable level of adjustment. This is evidenced by the fact the swivel goes up to 45 degrees in both directions, while the tilt ranges from -7 to 33 degrees, which is significant flexibility. This continues with the height adjustment, which goes up to 150mm.

Using SpatialLabs Experience Center Pro, users can take advantage of specific tools including SpatialLabs Model Viewer and software add-ons. These are designed to accelerate workflows and capture audiences. Users of Unreal Engine and Unity both can harness Acer and SpatialLabs



The 3D technology used is impressive, but may not yet have broad appeal.

tech to view stereoscopic output without the need for glasses. In the same vein, the Acer SteamVR Bridge transforms virtual reality creations into high-resolution, glasses-free visuals.

Despite arguably aiming at a very niche market, the DS2 Series Pro actually performs well. Through the SpatialLabs software you have access to SpatialLabs Go, SpatialLabs Model Viewer and SpatialLabs Player. These tools provide everything required to turn 2D content into 3D in real-time, as well as watch side-by-side videos in stereoscopic 3D.

The monitor does an admirable job of converting 2D data into viewable 3D data courtesy of its pair of eye-tracking cameras and dedicated 3D lens. You can do away with those 3D glasses you paid good money for. It's still a more than capable 2D offering too. The DS2 Series Pro delivers outstanding colour quality and depth, with impressive levels of contrast when working on image editing or watching videos.

Paul Hatton

VERDICT

This monitor is a dedicated solution for 3D developers who don't want to mess around with additional hardware when testing. The movement from 2D to 3D viewing is pretty seamless, but at the price it's difficult for many people to justify. It may push out the boundaries of what is possible, but whether there's a market to justify it is another question entirely.

Pros

- 4K resolution
- Switch between 2D and 3D modes
- No need for VR goggles

Cons

- Seriously expensive
- Large base
- Dated design

Rating



Harsh lines and angles don't make for any aesthetic goodness.



The speakers hang from the bottom of the display.

Barely bigger than a USB flash drive, this slimline SSD is quick, tough and portable.



Seagate Ultra Compact SSD

SPEEDY STORAGE

Small on the outside, gigantic on the inside

Price From £110/\$90

Company Seagate

Web www.seagate.com

RATING ★★★★★

The Seagate Ultra Compact drive lives up to its name. It's tiny, for an SSD, and also noticeably smaller than the other portable SSDs we've reviewed in recent issues.

At 24g it's also very light, and is made from aluminium. There's a rubber cap to go over the USB-C plug, which isn't retractable, and a silicone sock to protect most of the rest of the drive. This sock is soft and almost sticky, and will attract dust and bits of fluff easily.

The USB-C plug rather than a port for a cable gives the drive extra usefulness, as you can plug it straight into your phone or tablet if you need to; it comes formatted as exFAT so is pretty universal. It's also durably built, with a 3m drop rating and IP54 dust and rain resistance.

Inside the drive you get 1TB or 2TB of flash – there are no other capacities available at the time of writing. Seagate advertises a transfer rate of 1,000MB/s and that's exactly what we get. In the CrystalDiskMark benchmark it posted a read figure of 1,053 MB/s and a write speed of 1,027 MB/s.

This drive won't keep up with the new generation of Thunderbolt 5 SSDs starting to emerge, but it's still an affordable, portable unit.

Ian Evenden

MASTER THE TECHNIQUES YOU NEED TO CREATE YOUR BEST FANTASY ART

Let the industry experts at ImagineFX be your guide as you dive into a wealth of tips, tricks and techniques for incredible fantasy art, from how-to guides to programs from Photoshop to Krita, to in-depth technique masterclasses



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The Zenbook Duo unravels into a portable two-screen laptop setup.

ASUS Zenbook Duo

DOUBLE TROUBLE We love the 2025 update of the dual-screened laptop, but it still hasn't managed to shift its one disappointing flaw

Price £2,100/\$1,700 **Company** ASUS **Web** www.asus.com

The ASUS Zenbook Duo was a portable revelation when it first dropped. How was it possible not to adore such a mad, brilliant piece of PC engineering? Two OLED screens and a wireless keyboard that can be put together in a way that resembles a traditional laptop, then unfurled into a glorious portable workstation with no shortage of screen space.

It was an excellent machine, and continues to be one in this 2025 refresh, which ups the CPU to an Intel Core Ultra 9 Arrow Lake model. That said, it still lacks a proper GPU, relying on Intel integrated graphics to push both 2.8K displays. Those are better than most laptop screens and have



Open the clever pop-up port to reveal the ASUS Pen 2.0's hidden USB-C charging port.

decent colour reproduction, showing our colorimeter a good time.

The screens are touch-sensitive and there's an optional stylus, the ASUS Pen 2.0, you can use for digital painting. It's made from black plastic that's almost, but not quite, soft to the touch. There are two buttons on the side of the shaft where your index finger can reach them, and another at the end where the eraser would be.

Arrow Lake processors give a decent speed bump, but CPU power isn't the problem. If only ASUS had been able to put a separate GPU chip into the Duo. That's not to say you can't run creative apps – you can absolutely build up intricately layered creations in Photoshop and lots more besides – it'll just take a little longer than something with an Nvidia chip.

Little has changed on the outside. That's because it ain't broke. The keyboard is thin and can feel a little flimsy on its own, especially as it lacks feet underneath to adjust its position. It's a full chiclet keyboard though, with good key travel, and is nice to type on.

Ian Evenden

VERDICT

ASUS' gorgeous two-screened laptop returns for a 2025 refresh and is as good as ever. That comes with a caveat though: there's still no discrete graphics chip. If you can live with that then the Duo is a great laptop experience.

Pros

- Nippy CPU performance
- Good keyboard
- Two OLED screens

Cons

- Uses integrated Intel graphics
- Attracts attention
- Lacking in ports

Rating

★★★★★

The screen flips out on a top-mounted hinge, making it easier to work with.



Revopoint Miraco Plus 3D scanner

YES WE SCAN! This impressive device sets a high bar for its rivals

Price £1,725/\$1,800

Company Revopoint

Web <https://bit.ly/4lf25G5>

RATING ★★★★★☆

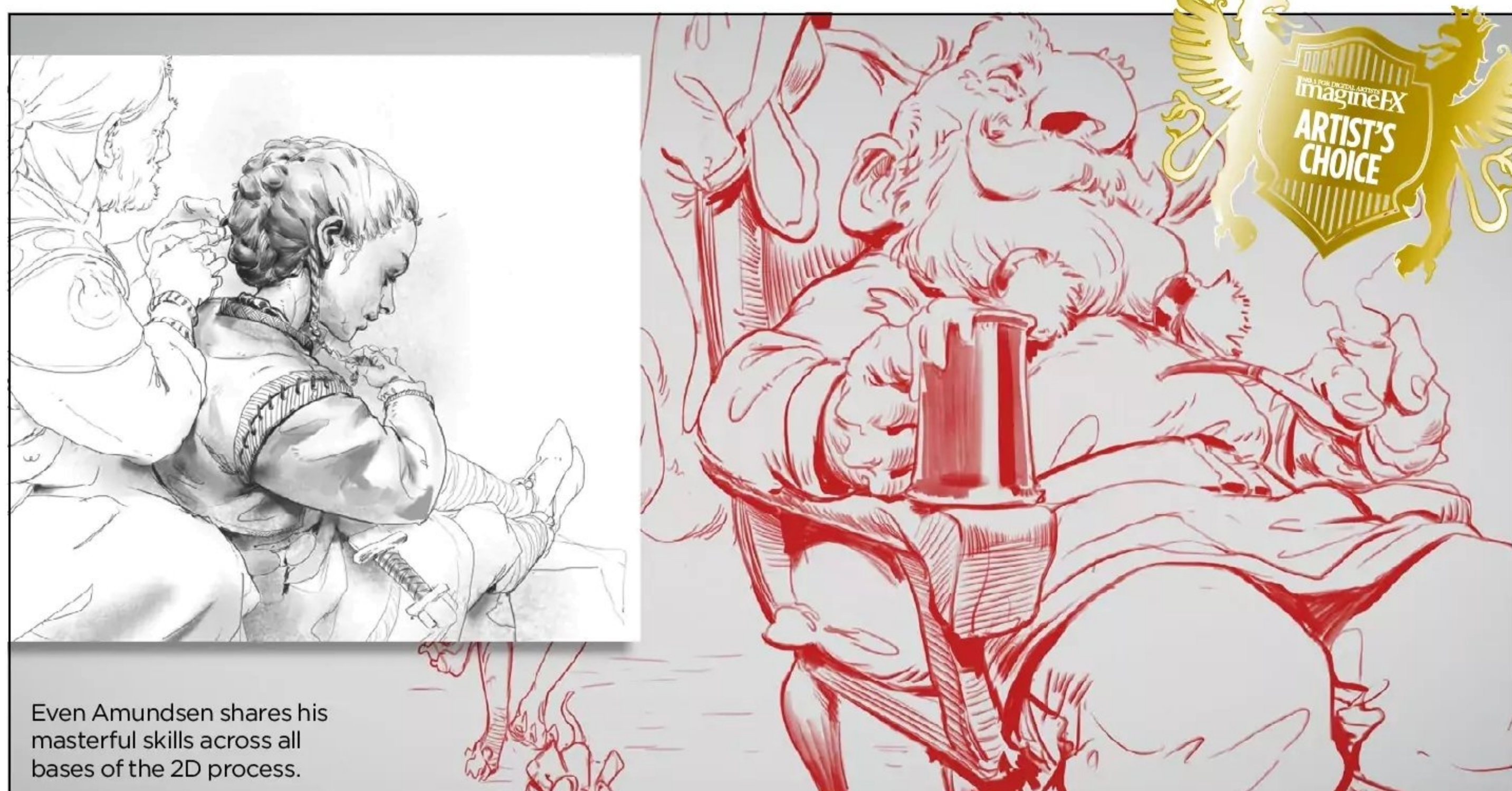
Time and time again Revopoint has led the charge of what's possible when using portable 3D scanners, and they've done it again here. Despite being almost identical to the original Miraco, the inclusion of a photogrammetric metrology kit (PMK) enables users to create incredibly accurate scans of large objects.

The Miraco Plus is super portable and can be held in one hand, being something of a cross between a traditional DSLR, minus the lens, and a smartphone. Scanned data is visible on a six-inch 2K AMOLED touchscreen. It's sizeable enough to see what you're scanning and even provides multiple views of what the various scanner cameras are recording at once.

The scanner offers a variety of adjustable settings before performing a scan. The first is to choose between the far and near modes; the former is ideal for large objects such as cars and people, while the latter is best for small objects or detailed areas.

It comes into its own in terms of accuracy for large objects. The PMK contains a range of markers that are quick and easy to apply to objects, with the magnetic coded targets ideal for using with steel, iron and stainless steel.

Paul Hatton



Even Amundsen shares his masterful skills across all bases of the 2D process.

Concept Art: Character Design & Worldbuilding

LEADING LIGHT Want to learn how professional worldbuilders think? Even Amundsen's course has all the answers you need

Publisher Domestika **Price** £40/\$50 **Format** Online **Length** 3hr 46min **Web** www.domestika.org

Good concept artists spend as much time researching and thinking as they do drawing, and that point is embedded throughout this fantastic course by Even Amundsen, who has worked for the likes of Blizzard, Riot Games and Wizards of the Coast, and is renowned for his own TEGN series of books.

After a detailed and humorous introduction into how Even got into the concept art world, he then uses his TEGN creation, Nintendo's Mario, and Tolkien to explore worldbuilding, the thought process behind it and different character archetypes.

No actual drawing is done until the third part of the course, and this makes a lot of sense as Even speaks with an engaging style that shows how drawing is more a product of the entire process that has led up to



Course teacher Even has created art for a number of huge names in the industry, plus his own series of books.

it, rather than being the first thing that's done when creating a new world or character.

The character drawing is a masterclass in process, starting with how to beat the troublesome artist block and then moving through proportion, line, lighting and colour, finishing with rendering and refining. This is a 2D art software base, so artists using Procreate and Photoshop will be well served here.

This is an easy course to like and learn from; although Even is a fantastic teacher and outstandingly talented, it's his thought process that the "drawing starts with the idea" that's the real key. He's honest enough to admit that what's shown is his own personal process, and this humility is an inspiration for a course of this type.

Mike Griggs



Before getting into learning about drawing, the course shares plenty of insight on thought process.

VERDICT

The first two chapters covering the thought process for character and world design are worth the price alone. Back that up with an instructor who is clear in his intent and inspiration as an artist, and this is a real must-have for any artist that wants to expand on character development as either a hobby or career.

Pros

- Engaging teacher
- Thorough examples of workflow
- Emphasis on theory

Cons

- Workflow only character-based
- Drawing examples all medieval fantasy

Rating

★★★★★

Brushing up...

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



Sierra Noir

Artist G.A.R.M

Software Procreate

Brushes 20 **Price** £17/\$22

Rating ★★★★★

For Procreate artists looking for a 1950s futuristic aesthetic, this set offers 20 brushes comprising pens and filler brushes, along with colour palettes to maximise their retro cool. The brushes can be bought for a suite of apps.

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



Free Christmas Brushes Set

Artist @di_syukov

Software Procreate

Brushes 18 **Price** Free

Rating ★★★★★

More a series of stamps than brushes, but for free it's an easy win! With icicles, snowflakes, ice cracks and even a jumping reindeer, it's easy to get ahead of Christmas illustrations.

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



The Comics MaxPack

Artist Max Ulichney

Software Procreate

Brushes 75 **Price** £11/\$15

Rating ★★★★★

An insane amount of brushes for the price, which will aid any aspiring comic artists out there. The set includes pencils, charcoals and a range of inking brushes from clean to scratchy that suit a wide range of artistic outputs.

<https://maxulichney.gumroad.com>

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Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists



This issue:

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

92 Craft intricate fantasy drawings
Mateusz Lenart channels the style of 19th-century masters in his spectacular illustration.

98 First Impressions: Tamara Nederkoorn
Discover the creative sparks that fuel the artist's work and her long journey of development.



FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Carolina Soares

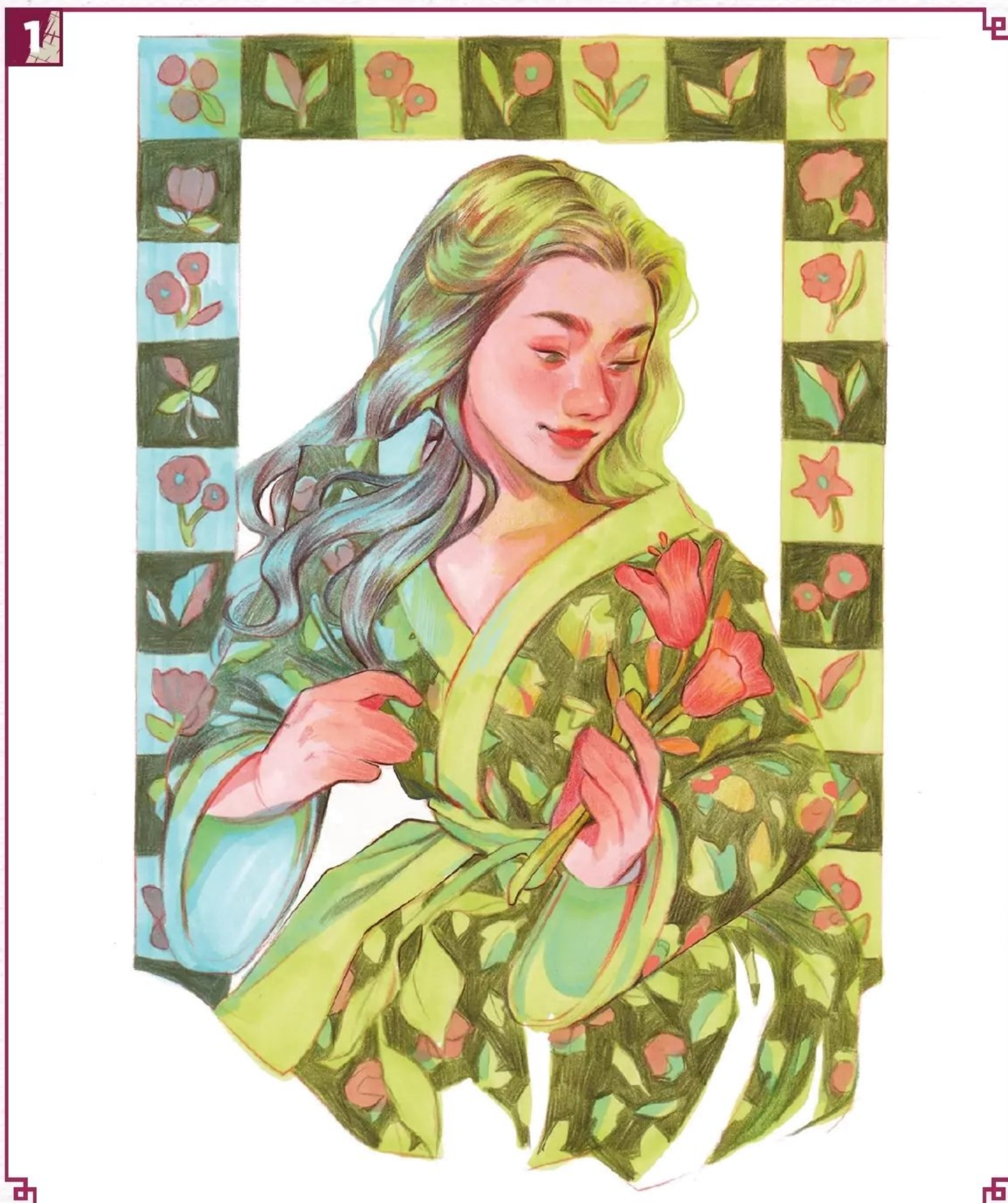
LOCATION: Portugal **MEDIA:** Coloured pencil, alcohol markers, ink

WEB: www.carolemellow.com

Freelance artist Carolina explores magical themes and stories through her artwork by combining colour and whimsy to express her thoughts.

1 HER FLOWERS

"In this illustration, I was inspired by the peaceful feeling that only nature can bring. The colours and shapes actually soothed some of my anxiety while I was creating it!"



2 NIGHTMARE KEEPER

"A whimsical illustration behind my fictional concept: the Nightmare Keeper. This creature takes away people's nightmares, relieving them of their fears until the morning comes."



3 NO SORROWS

"This is a piece of hope, illustrating the story of an angel holding on to her music, content with it being the last little thing that no one can take away from her."

4 BRIGHT

"This piece was an explosion of colours that taught me how embracing the chaos and being more playful when using my alcohol markers can actually bring so much more life to my illustrations."





Faith Schaffer

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Watercolour, ink, gold paint **WEB:** www.faithschaffer.com

Faith works in animation, illustration and publishing, with her backgrounds appearing in shows such as Amphibia and The Owl House. She's inspired by turn-of-the-century illustration, medieval art and folklore.

1 DIPTYCH OF SOLDIERS

"My favourite part of painting this diptych was continuing the background elements across each piece to make a single, unified image. The gold background is reminiscent of medieval diptychs."



2 A NEST OF SILVER TWIGS

"As a background designer, I love drawing trees. There's so much fun you can have composing an illustration with their organic, gnarly shapes. This piece just stemmed from wanting to draw a really satisfying tree!"

3 THE STAND-OFF

"I usually use a brush pen for line work but recently I've been experimenting with ballpoint pens. I love the thinner, scratchy line quality I can get with them and the way I can use the line-art to create value."



4 THROUGH THE FAE WOOD

"This piece is a love letter to all the fairy tales I grew up with. I wanted to capture the mystery and energy of a fairy tale forest, an ever-important magical setting where anything can happen."





CRAFT INTRICATE FANTASY DRAWINGS

MATEUSZ LENART outlines his workflow for creating dynamic pen and ink art in the classical style of 19th-century masters

The best illustration isn't just about craft – it's about storytelling, rhythm and intention. In this tutorial, I'll walk you through an illustration from concept to final touches. The goal is to share not only techniques, but also the reasoning and philosophy behind each step.

The subject I chose, a reversal of the classic knight-versus-monster



MATERIALS

PAPER

■ Stonehenge Aqua, hot press, 300GSM, 100 per cent cotton

PENS

■ Micron pens (0.1, 0.5, 0.8)
■ Zebra FD-502 Double Tip Brush Pen
■ Pentel Brush Sign Pen Artist SESF30C, ultra fine
■ Uni POSCA PC-1MR, white

PENCIL

■ 2B pencil

dynamic, allowed me to play with the scale, tension and the viewer's expectations, while still staying grounded in traditional methods.

Pen and ink is a demanding, often unforgiving medium. Every line counts and there's no undo button, so each mark must serve the bigger picture. That's why I emphasise planning and structure from the very beginning: sketching, studying values, and understanding how line direction can enhance form.

While I draw inspiration from 19th-century masters such as Franklin Booth and Gustave Doré, as well as more modern artists like Bernie Wrightson, I also experiment with tools, combining my precise technical pens with expressive brush pens, and even some dry brush

techniques to bring a little organic energy to the page.

You'll see how different textures require different tools and strokes. I'll discuss how to maintain a sense of depth, light and composition while keeping the line work alive and dynamic. Throughout, I focus on clarity, contrast and pacing, making sure the viewer's eye flows where I want it to go.

I hope this workshop helps you look at ink not just as a tool, but as a language – one that you can bend, break and master.



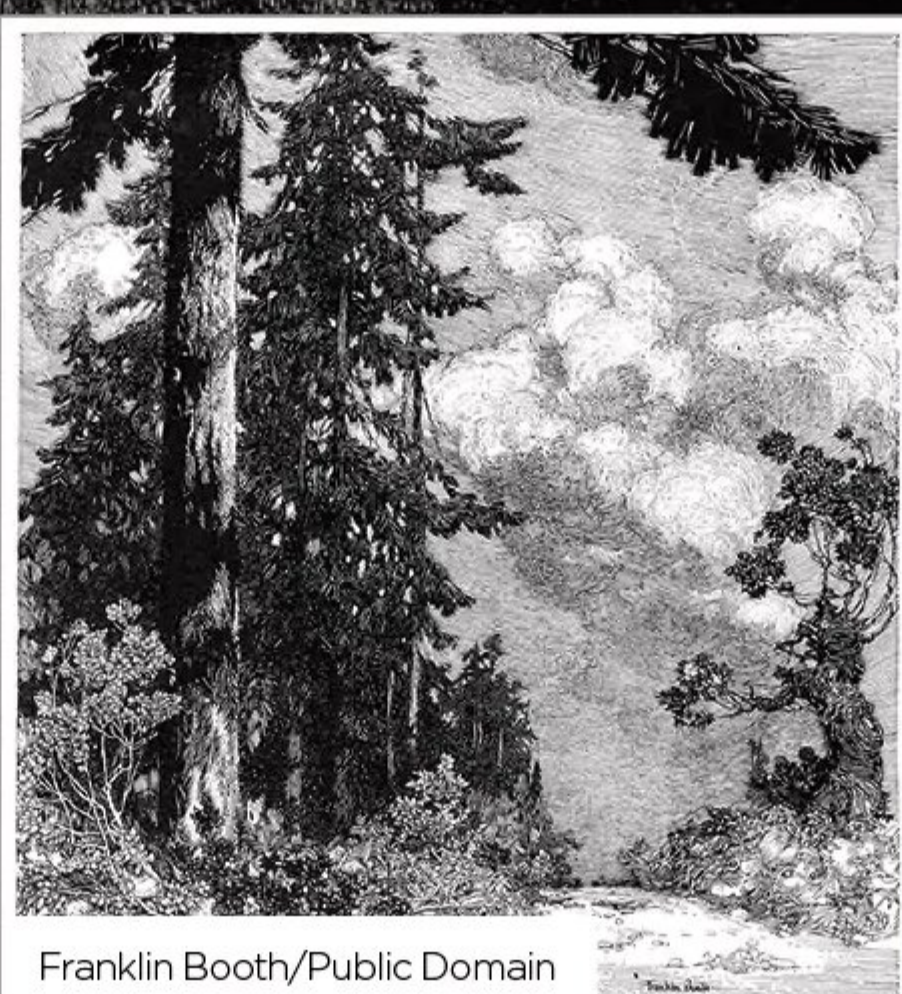
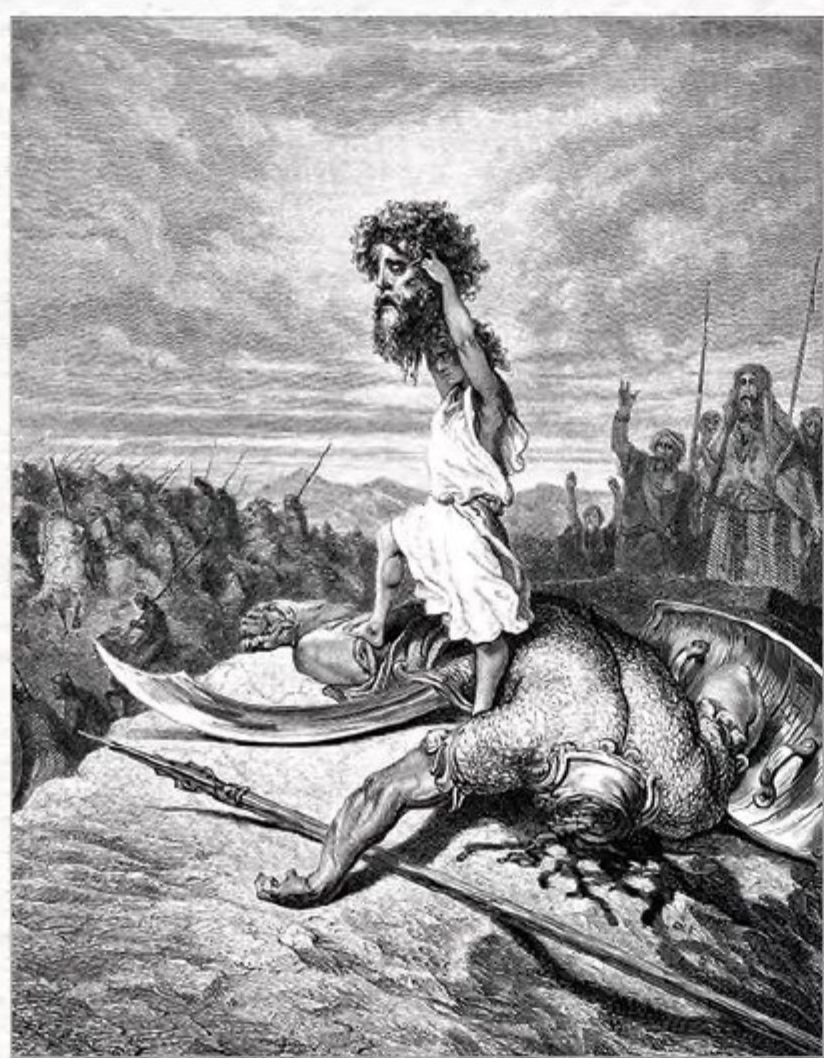
Mateusz Lenart has over 18 years of experience working in the video games industry and is the creative director of the Silent Hill 2 remake.
https://linktr.ee/mateusz_lenart

Traditional Artist Workshop

Abraham Bosse/Public Domain/Metmuseum



Gustave Doré/Public Domain



Franklin Booth/Public Domain

Anton Robert Leinweber/Public Domain



Gustave Doré/Public Domain



1 Choose the subject

Every compelling illustration begins with a strong concept. I aimed to subvert expectations by flipping the classic hero in peril narrative, playing with scale and perspective. The key is to build a story within the image, encouraging the viewer to pause, reflect, and imagine the events that preceded or will follow this moment. I chose to explore the classic knight-versus-giant trope.

2 Learn from the masters

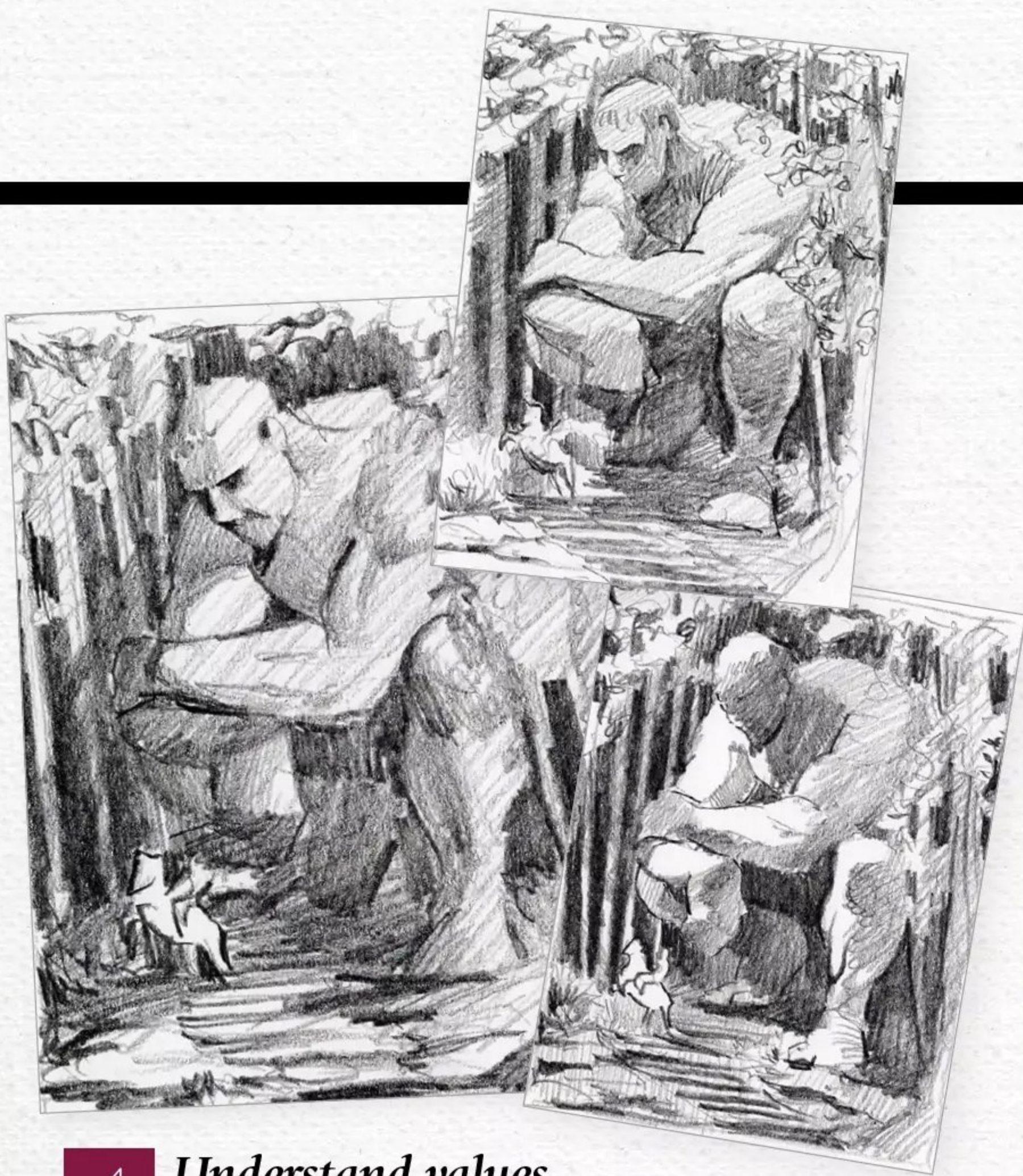
We're all students of the great masters, and there's no better way to improve our skills than by studying the works of our idols. My series draws its inspiration from 19th-century pen and ink techniques. I reference classical masters such as Franklin Booth, Gustave Doré, Bernie Wrightson and Joseph Clement Coll, analysing their line work and shading to achieve a traditional style.



3 Plan early and sketch the composition

Planning starts with quick sketches to explore impactful compositions. The goal is to direct the viewer's attention through lines and energy. I aimed to place the knight in a challenging situation, highlighting the contrast with the giant. Ultimately, the giant's gaze and hand guide the audience's focus towards the knight, with the tree directions further steering the eye.





4 Understand values

At the sketching stage, it's important to test how light and shadow will distribute across the image. Playing with the values is key to creating depth and realism. By balancing light and dark areas we can enhance the composition, which draws attention to the image's focal points. The giant and knight should emerge from the dark background with the giant in half shadow to direct the focus onto the knight in the light.



5 Refine the sketch

Once the composition is in place, it's time to refine the sketch. At this stage, lightly block in the line work and shapes. I use horizontal lines for the ground, vertical ones for the trees, and organic forms for the giant in order to provide a solid foundation for building the piece while helping with the visual balance of the scene.



6 Establish shapes with ink

Begin blocking in the shapes of the image using a brush pen to solidify the structure. It's important not to commit too heavily to dark tones too soon, as it will limit your flexibility. Gradually introducing darker areas as we progress keeps the artwork fresh and allows for adjustments to be made in terms of light and shadow, which create the depth in our image.

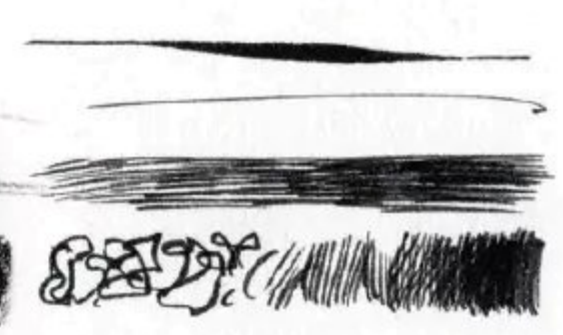
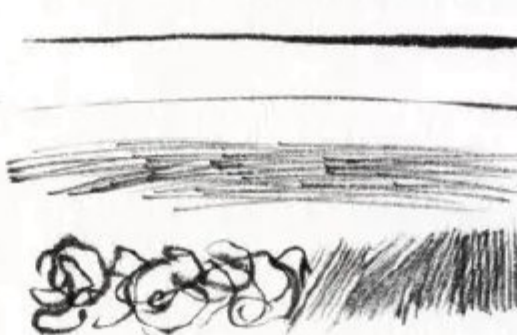
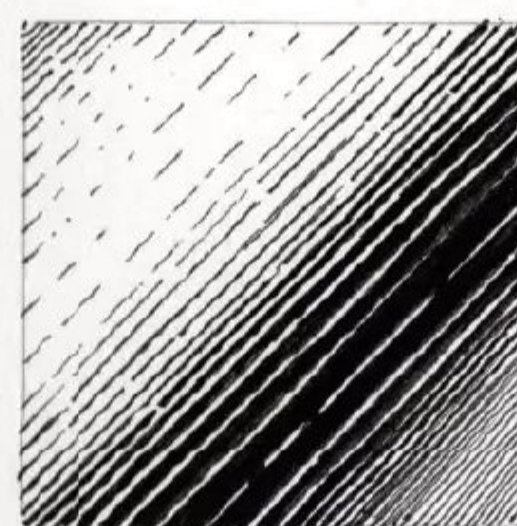


Micron

Zebra FD-502

Dry brush

Pentel Sign Pen



7 Stone surface detailing

I like to vary tools depending on the part of the illustration I'm working on. For stones and hard surfaces I often switch techniques, using firmer tools like a Micron pen. Start with the darkest areas, working from dark to light, and maintain horizontal lines as this anchors the composition, stabilising the image while differentiating the stone texture from the other elements. ➡➡

Traditional Artist **Workshop**



8 *Depict the vegetation*

This requires a softer touch, so I often use dry brush techniques for the grass to allow for a delicate, windswept look. The brush should be slightly worn for subtler lines, which creates a more fluid and natural effect. This technique helps the plants to feel dynamic, adding life to the composition.



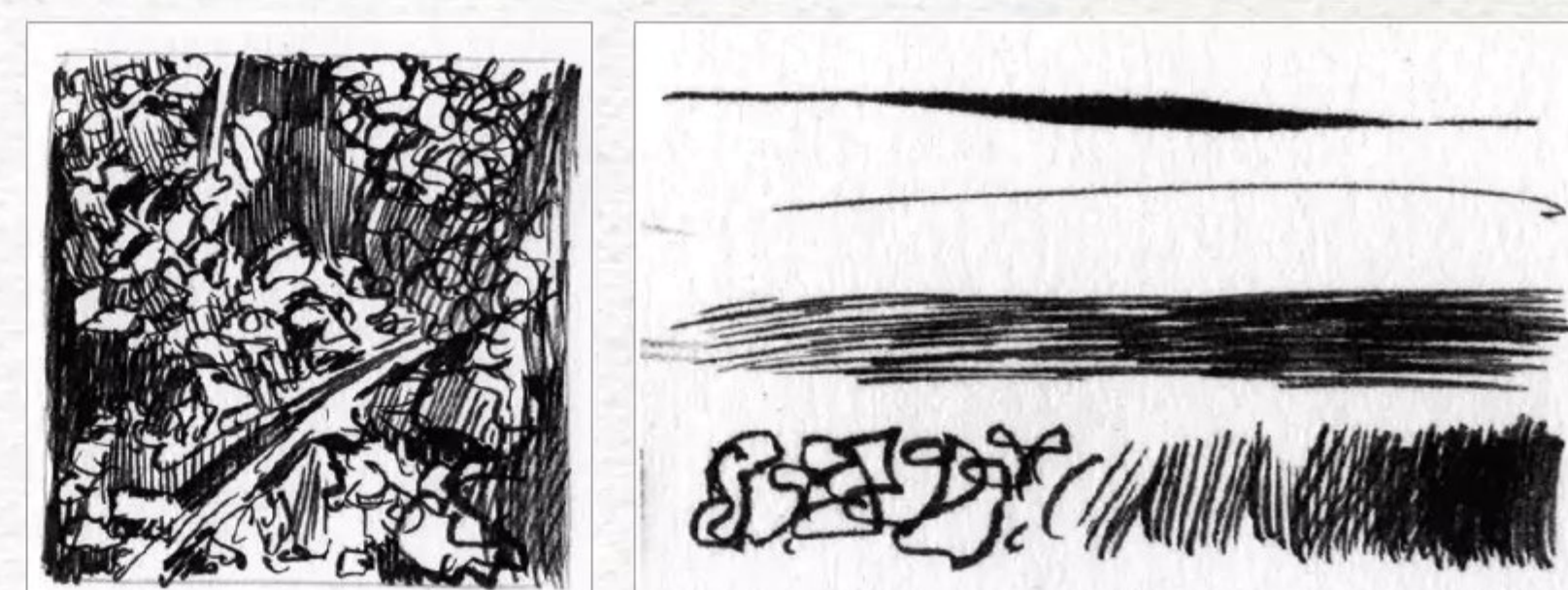
9 *Use the dry brush technique*

Ink is an unforgiving medium; without water, every mark is permanent and bold. By adjusting line thickness and density we can suggest tone. The dry brush technique, when used well, breaks traditional pen and ink rules by creating soft, pencil-like greyscale textures. It takes a light, fast touch to avoid harsh strokes and keep the effect subtle. I'd recommend using a slightly worn-out brush for this purpose.



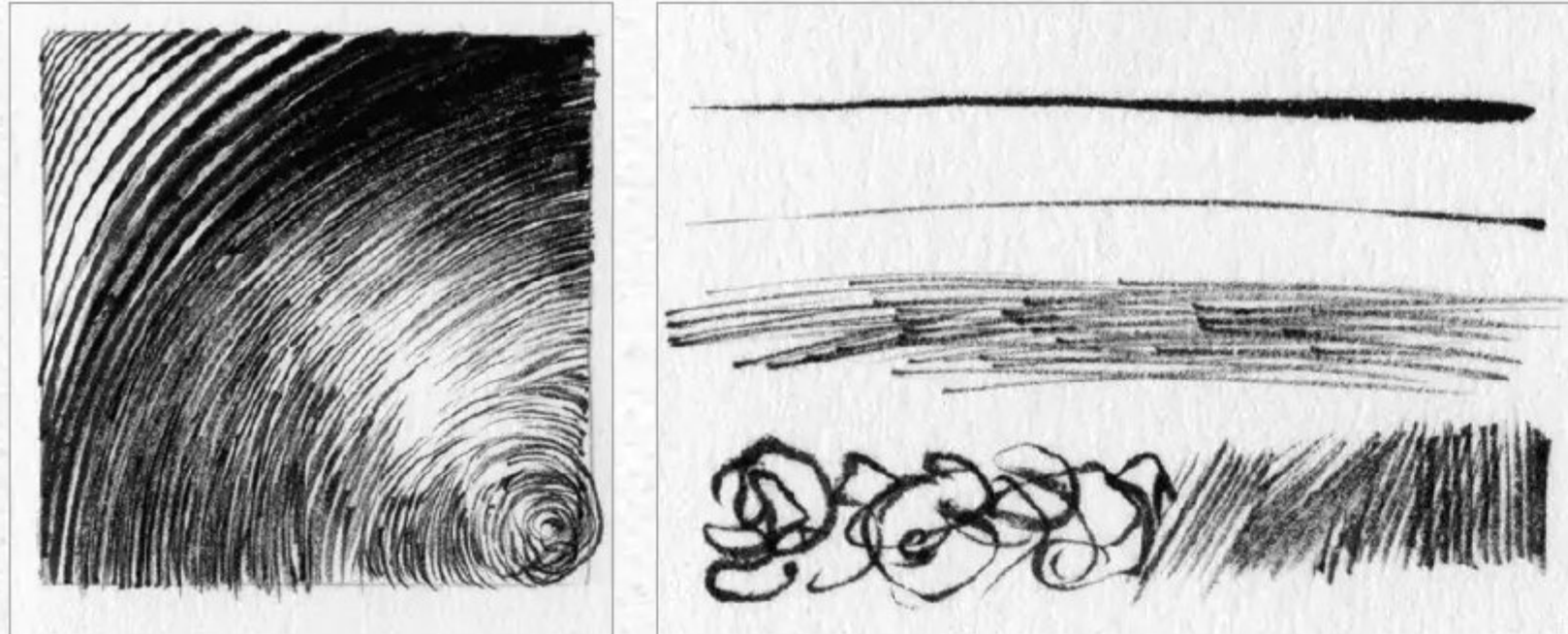
10 *Block out the entire illustration*

At this stage, move through the entire image to refine the blockout and add layers. I keep whites intact for a long time to maintain flexibility for adjustments. Make sure to leave room to darken areas where necessary to strengthen focus. You'll also start to see which areas are supposed to be filled with solid blacks.



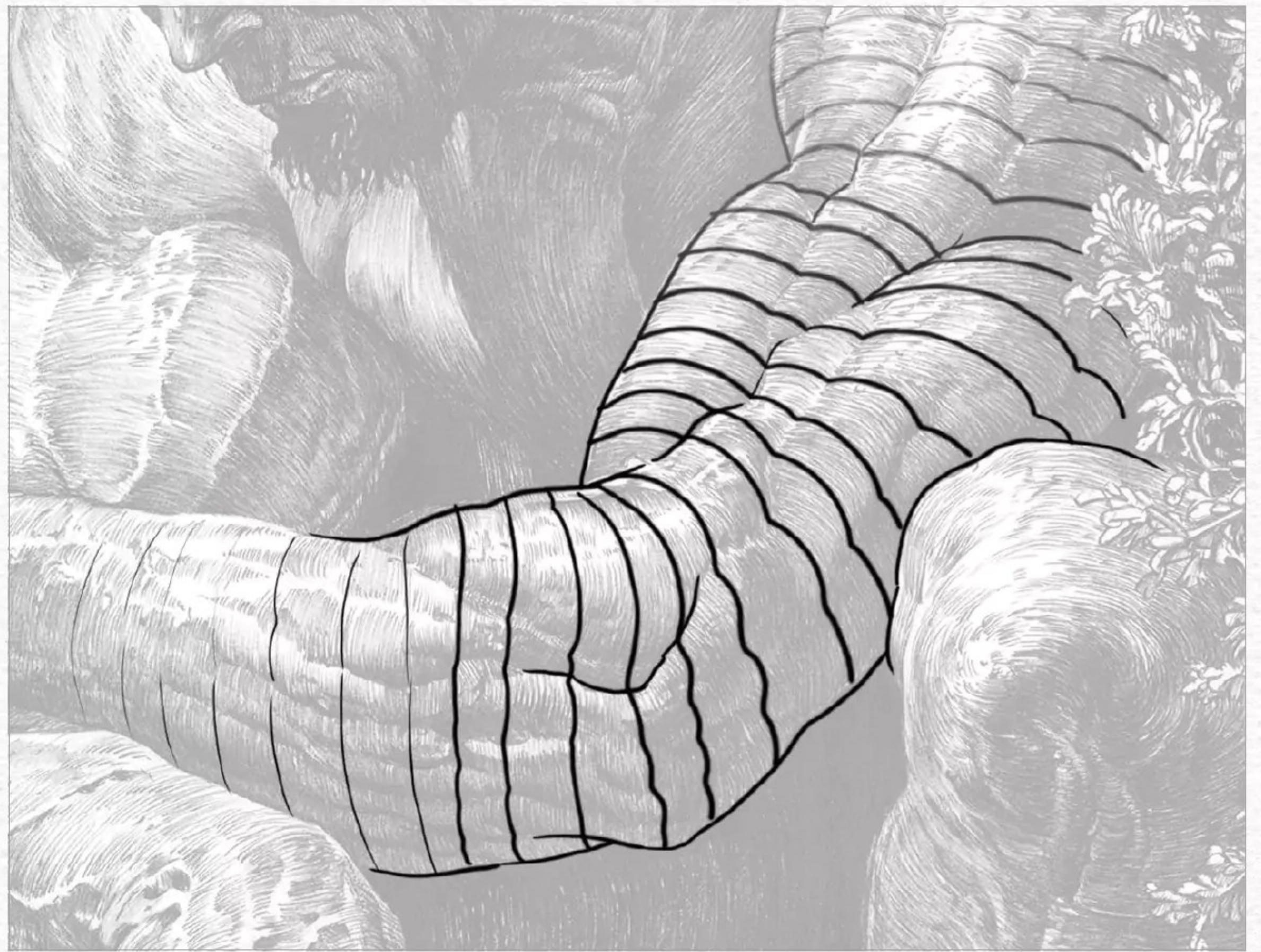
11 *Detail the trees*

For the trees, I employ a combination of Micron pen and fine brush techniques. For the barks, I'm using vertical lines in particular, as these marks bring out the texture and help create a natural flow in the illustration. For the leaves I use an ultra-fine brush pen from Pentel, creating loose, organic lines. This section is where I can allow myself more freedom and let the lines flow in various directions without a rigid structure.



12 Control line work with a brush pen

Brush pens are also great for creating the detailed line work, as they offer you excellent control over the thickness of the lines. This is especially useful for delicate areas such as the skin. For the shading on my giant, I used a softer tool in the FD-502 Double Tip Brush Pen from Zebra to create finer, subtler lines that enhance texture and depth within the character.



13 Follow the anatomy

When inking organic forms like the body, it's crucial to follow the muscle shapes with line direction. Plan out your line flow before shading to maintain structure and visual continuity. It's almost like tracing a dense 3D wireframe, using lines to build the illusion of volume and form. With the pen and ink technique it's also good to keep the balanced rhythm of the entire image.



14 Evaluate the illustration

This is the moment for a critical review. Assess whether certain areas need further darkening to enhance tonal transitions and the focus points. A good practice here is to apply principles used in black-and-white photography, balancing the full greyscale spectrum to avoid over-contrasting the image. Taking a break to let the image rest before returning with fresh eyes often leads to better decisions during this phase.



15 Wrapping up

The final step is refining the smaller details – adding fine lines, textures, subtle touches and so on to bring it all together. I try to avoid using white ink in this kind of work, but occasionally I allow myself to add a hint of dust or glint. Finally, sign your piece, and the illustration is complete. ■

First Impressions

✧ Tamara Nederkoorn ✧

The Dutch artist tells us all about forging her own path



Where did your journey start?

I've drawn my whole life, starting at age three. I think the

passion for art has been passed down through the generations, as my father and grandpa also drew. They were great at landscapes, while I've always had more of an interest in portraits, so I had to shape my own creative journey.

What's your main source of artistic inspiration?

I find inspiration in almost everything. It's fascinating how you can find little sparks of creativity in the world around you. Nature especially is a significant source of inspiration, like springtime with its abundant growth and renewal, plus all the feathers, branches and colours, especially the pastel tones that nature offers. The emotions I'm feeling also often have an influence on my artwork. Then of course there are holidays, each with their own seasonal elements.



MOJITO BREEZE

I created a girl with lime colours, fresh ingredients in her hair, and Ohuhu-logo leaves to symbolise summer's refreshing vibe.

“It's fascinating how you can find little sparks of creativity in the world around you”

What plays in the background while you work?

I find myself mostly listening to 'trailer' music, or epic music like Two Steps From Hell and Thomas Bergersen. It gives such great energy.

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

I knew it was hard to make a living as an artist. My parents didn't want me to go to art school; they knew how difficult it could be to make a living from art, so I followed the traditional path. But it's hard not to do what you love. I kept drawing and, especially over the past seven years, I've dedicated nearly all my time to creating art, and developing my skills and style.

It's only in the last few months I've started to earn a little money from my art, though it's far from making a full living. My husband works a full-time job to support us, which allows me to focus on my art without worrying about financial instability. I'm extremely grateful for that. I hope, one day, I'll be able to earn enough through my art to make it my full-time career.

If you were starting now, what advice would you most appreciate?

How to find your own style. It takes time, and for me it took over 37 years to truly discover what feels right. At about 12 years old, I first felt the pressure to conform to expectations and began pushing to find a style others would like.

Since then, I've constantly been searching and experimenting, and with the rise of the internet things became even more complicated. The more I tried to fit into a mould, the further I drifted from my true self. It was only after stepping into my comfort zone that I finally found my personal style.

How has the art industry changed for the better since you started?

In the past, my reach was limited to people who knew me or saw me at fairs. Thanks to social media, I have the opportunity to connect with people all over the world. While this is exciting, it has its challenges: the constant changes in algorithms, and there being so many talented artists. It can feel overwhelming and hard to get noticed.

What's your next step in art or life?

I hope to stay close to myself as an artist. I'm looking forward exploring new media, like watercolour, and thinking about creating acrylics on larger canvases again. I look forward to where my art will take me next.

Self-taught artist Tamara Nederkoorn explores warriors, mystical beings and ethereal figures in her work, created with alcohol markers. <https://bit.ly/3G9zG46>



VALORA'S ARROW

Inspired by a Draw This In Your Style challenge, this helped me break through an art block and pushed me to explore new designs.



RAVEN

Made for the Purple ImagineFX Art Challenge. I immediately associated the colour with a raven, so I blended feathers into her hair and dress.

HOPE
AND
HOMES
FOR
CHILDREN



URGENT APPEAL



Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is not just a humanitarian crisis for the Ukrainian people; it's a child protection emergency.

Up to 100,000 children warehoused in Ukraine's vast orphanage system – a network of over 700 buildings – risk being forgotten. Left to face the dangers of war alone as staff flee. As families are torn apart or forced from their homes, many more children are at risk of being separated from the love and protection they desperately need. Worse still, they are at risk of trafficking, or being placed in overcrowded, understaffed and poorly resourced orphanages in border countries.

We must act now.

Born out of the Balkans conflict 30 years ago, we've championed the vital importance of family and community-based care of children and our teams are on the ground in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania to ensure this war does not rob children of the love and protection they need now more than ever. Across all three countries, we're directly supporting displaced families and unaccompanied children with material and emotional

support. We're working closely with authorities to keep families together when they are at their most vulnerable and to fight for the safe tracking, monitoring and care for children without parental care. And we won't stop when the fighting stops.

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With your help, we can avert a child protection crisis of epic proportions and ensure children are protected and kept in families. Never orphanages.

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FOR CHILDREN



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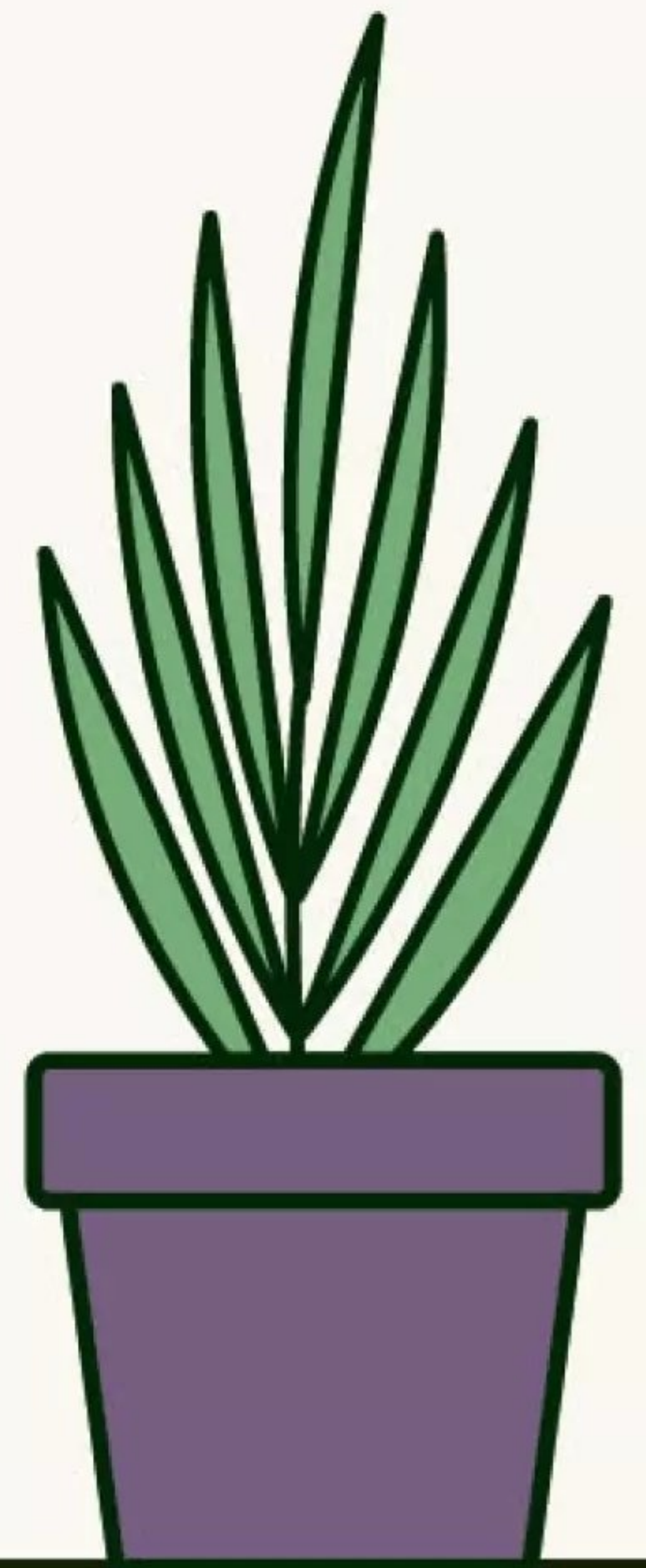
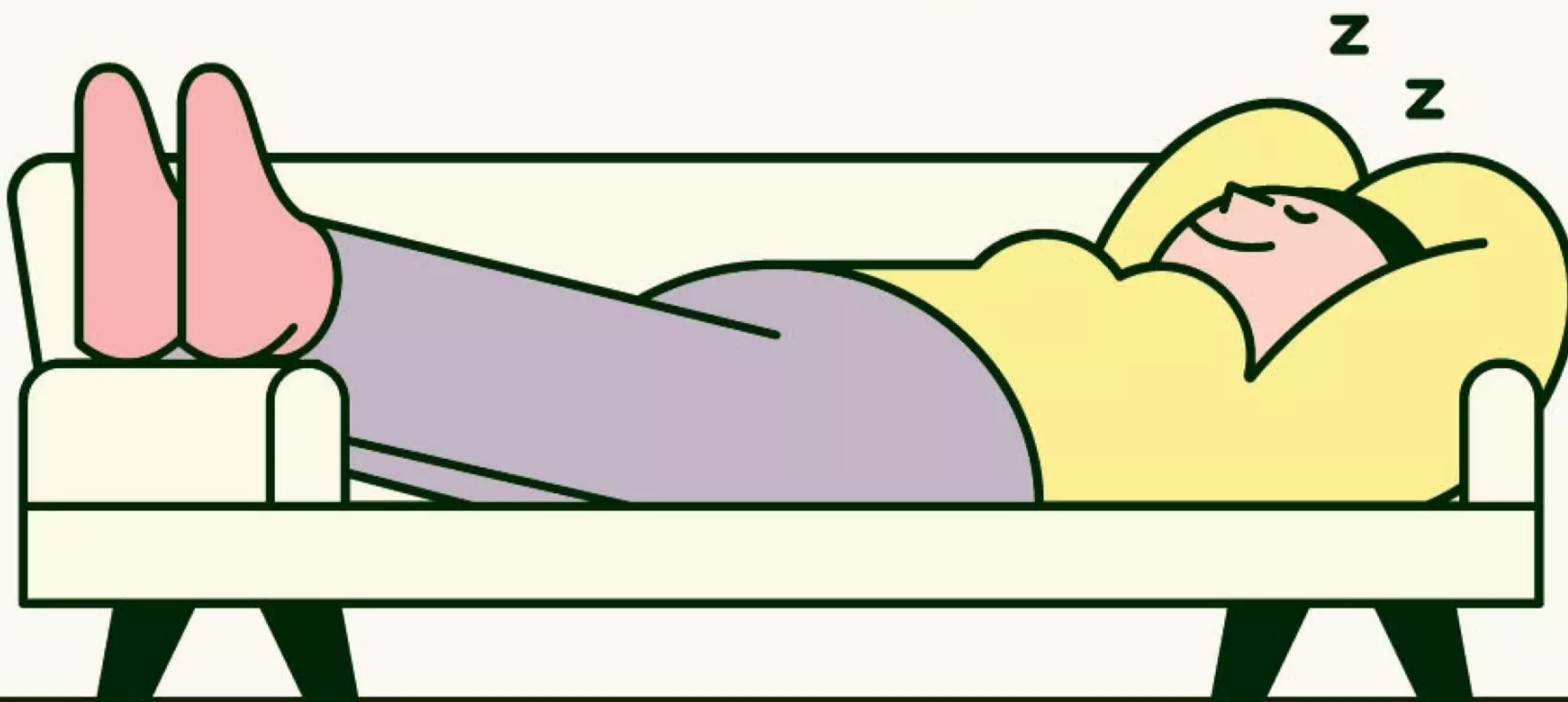
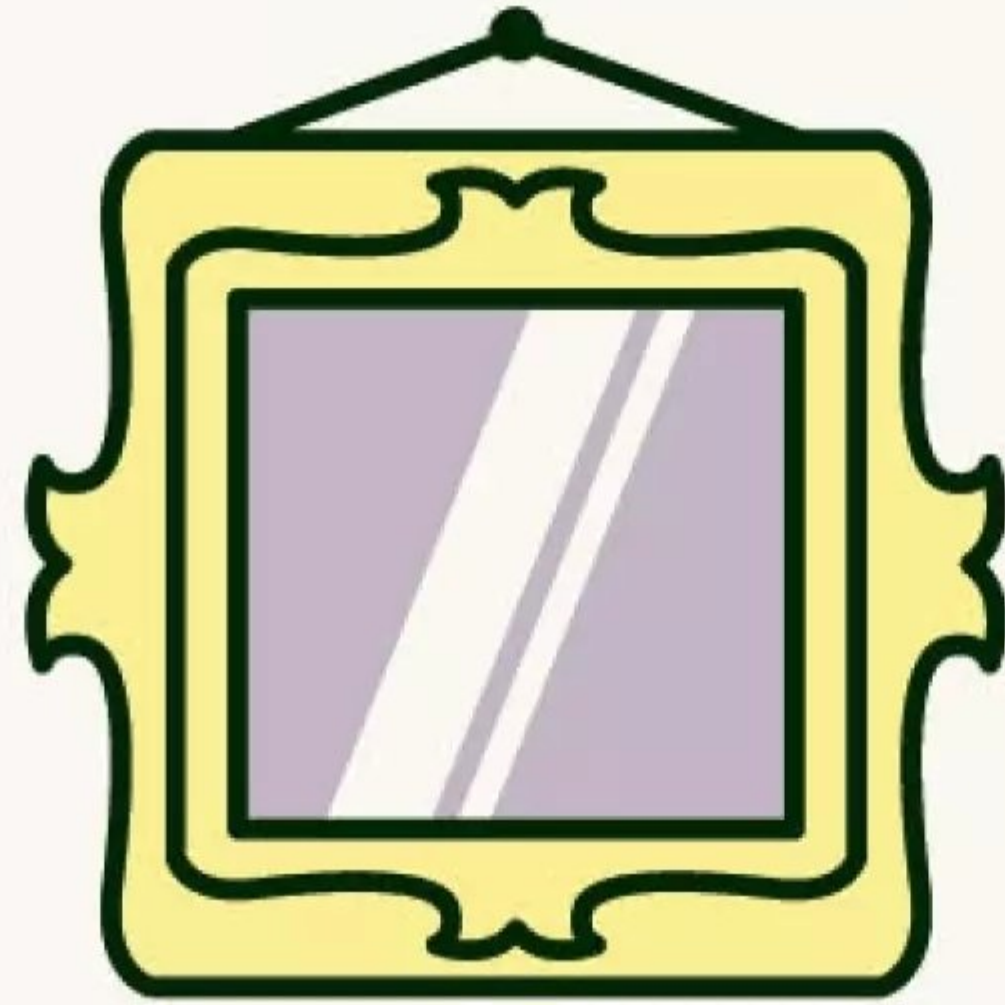
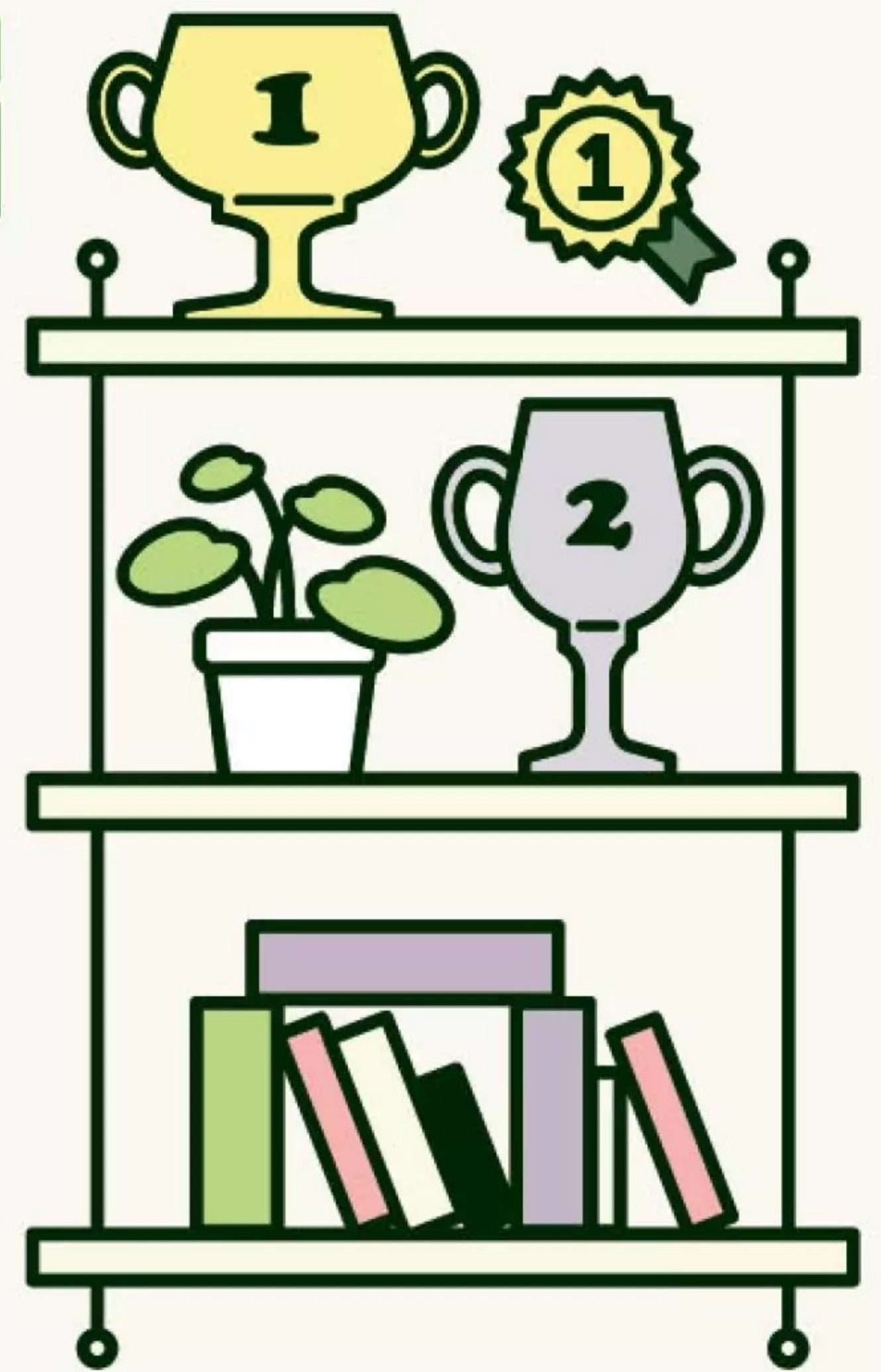
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