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Painted by Nina Vakueva



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



There are times when you can let your imagination run wild and paint whatever's in your head. Then there are those occasions when you need to nail the fundamentals and strengthen your core skills.

Anatomy is one of those art disciplines that even the casual viewer will pick up on if not done right, so ensuring you're on your A game is important. That's why, this issue, we're covering both parts of the creation process. We have our usual wide variety of stunning art across galleries and workshops, but we also have some key training on how you can get the most out of your next character-driven piece, with some fantastic insights on drawing and painting the human form.

If you're here more for inspiration then check out our feature on Magic: The Gathering creative Yigit Koroglu, where he talks about his work and his journey from interior architect to full-time artist. Plus we review the latest gear to help you decide what's worthy of your hard-earned cash.

Enjoy the issue!

*Rob*

**Editor**  
**Rob.Redman@futurenet.com**

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#### Step inside the studio

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#### From architect to artist

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#### A matter of light and shade

Illustrator Chris Legaspi shows you how to define anatomical form through the accurate use of lighting.

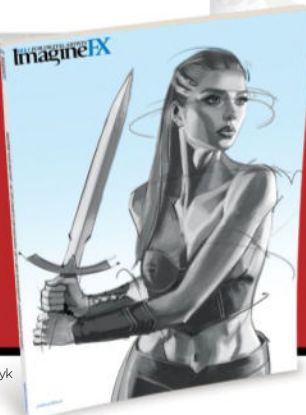
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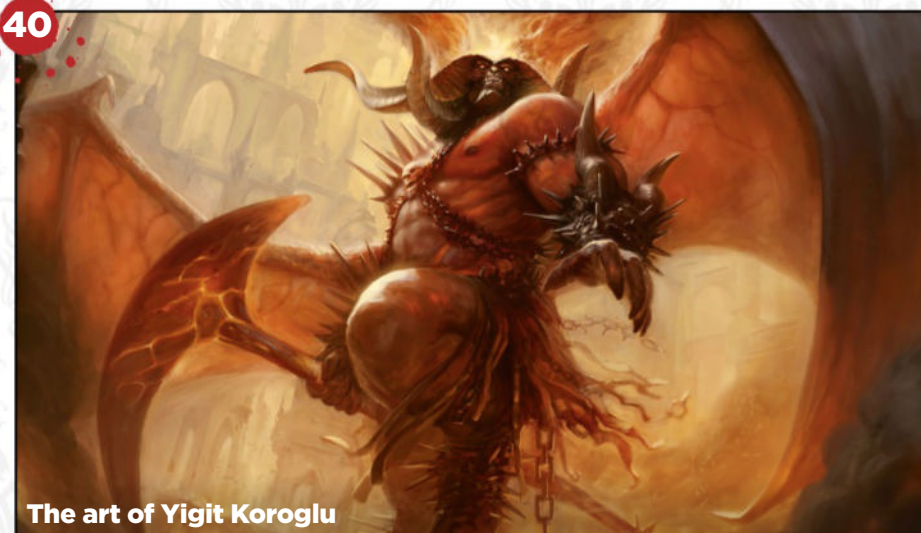
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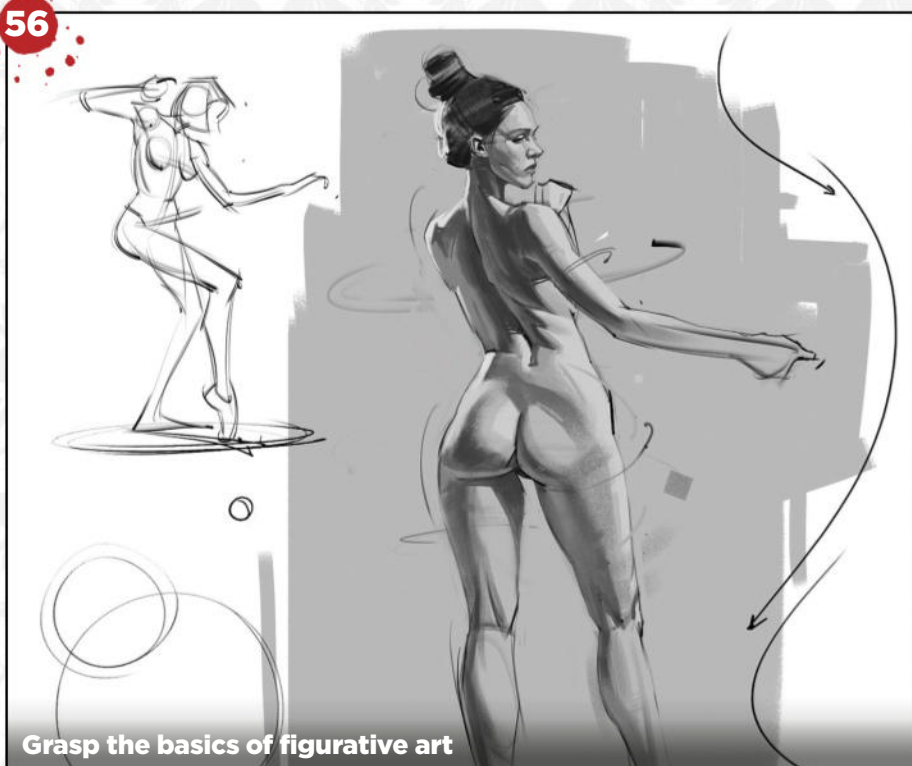
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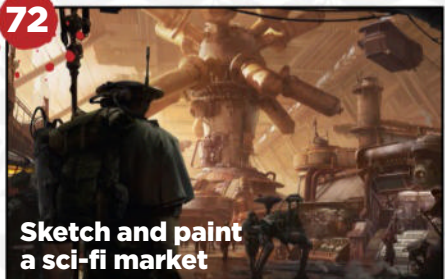
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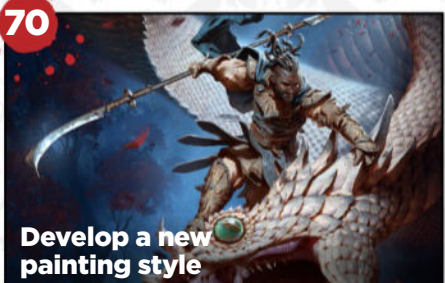
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The finest traditional art, sent in by you! This month we showcase artwork from Gabriela Niko and Kevin Antoine.

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### GET YOUR RESOURCES

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

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<https://bit.ly/theanatomyissue>
- 2 Click the download link**  
Find your files ready for download.
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# Next month

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS  
**ImagineFX**

#### Editorial

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## Next month in... NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS **ImagineFX** **EPIC MANGA MADE EASY**

Unleash your manga potential in Procreate  
with Lux Mily's composition tricks

### Inside a comic artist's lair

Jerry Gaylord's  
studio is chock-  
full of sequential  
art inspiration

### Create a dynamic dyno-styled duo

Mix ZBrush with  
Procreate to render  
drop-dead character  
art with Entei Ryu

### NEW SECTION! 3D ART & ADVICE

Experts reveal new  
workflow techniques,  
plus pro tips, galleries  
and much more!

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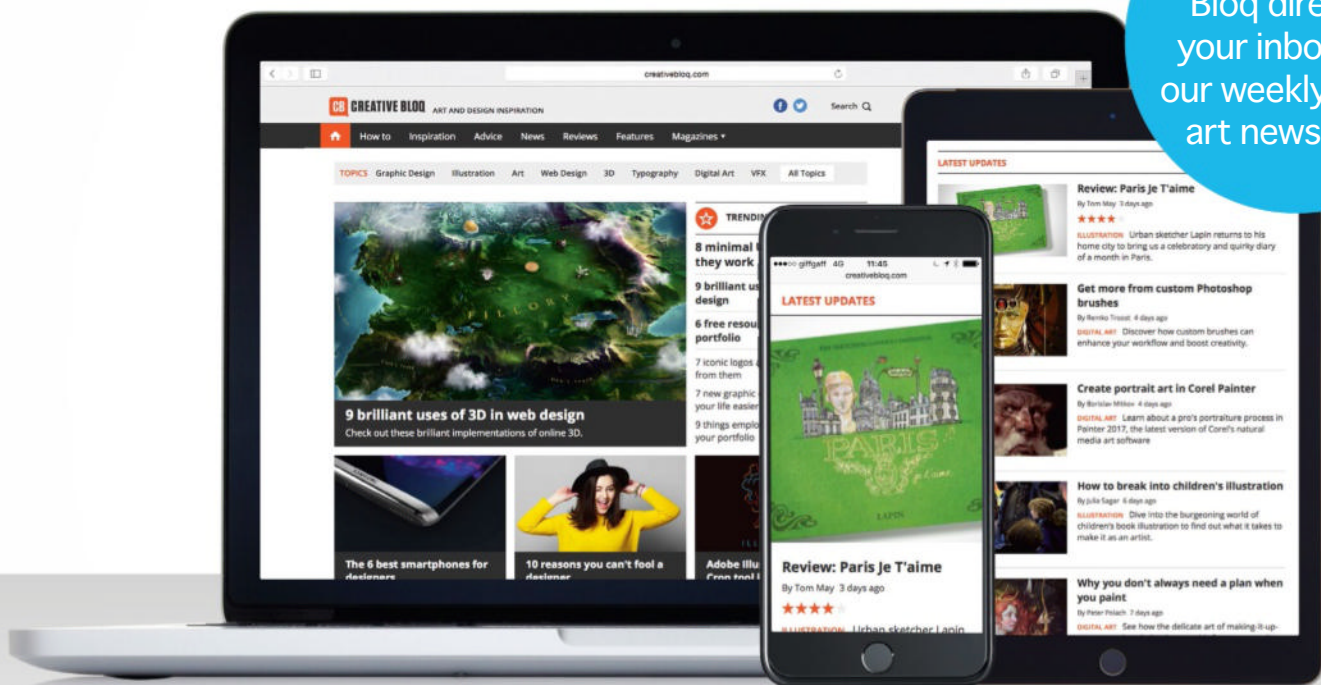


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features such as Puppet Warping and improved filters for colour corrections – you can even add 3D models to use as references. And you could get it free with a new ImagineFX subscription!\* For more about the app, visit [www.clipstudio.net](http://www.clipstudio.net).



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Artwork by  
Jen Bartel



# FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



## Nikola Matkovic

**LOCATION:** Serbia **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate

**WEB:** [https://nikola\\_matkovic.artstation.com](https://nikola_matkovic.artstation.com)

After a five-year detour into 3D and mobile games, Nikola is back to creating things that go bump in the night. With a gritty, traditional approach to digital art, he hopes to help others find beauty in the dark places too.

2



1



### 1 LORD OF DUNES

"This early piece was a turning point. It led to collaborating on projects that little me couldn't even dream of. Crazy how one painting can change your life forever."

### 2 USHI-ONI

"Growing up in a mountain town steeped in folklore made mythology a key part of my identity. Putting my own twist on creatures like Ushi-oni remains an absolute creative joy."

### 3 FROSTBOUND EXILES COVER

"Created for an upcoming solo RPG by Blackoath Entertainment. We obsess over technique, but finding collaborators who let you create work that's just 'us' is just as vital."



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## Mel Mo

**LOCATION:** Australia **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender **WEB:** [www.artstation.com/melteas](http://www.artstation.com/melteas)

Mel's work is inspired by the cosy vibes of Animal Crossing, the dreamy palettes of the Impressionists, and current animation found in the Spider-Verse films and Bad Guys. She loves working in Blender before finishing her art in Photoshop.

2



1



3



### 1 LUMA - ROBOT MAINTENANCE

"Designed as marketing art for LUMA, a collaborative project, this piece was made to reflect the world's subtle technology paired with its rustic charm."

### 2 LIMEHOUSE CHINATOWN - ESTABLISHING SHOT

"East meets West as I imagine what London's first Chinatown might have looked like in a magical context."

### 3 LIMEHOUSE CHINATOWN - STOREFRONTS

"It was important to me to pay homage to my cultural heritage, mainly through the couplets, the lanterns and the colours. I wanted to evoke a certain kind of nostalgia."

### 4 XJIANG'S TEAHOUSE

"The approach for this one was to create an exterior that felt local and lived-in, while also echoing the story's thematic symbol of the peach."







4







## Marius Villard

**LOCATION:** France **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender **WEB:** [www.artstation.com/mariusvillard](http://www.artstation.com/mariusvillard)

Marius specialises in world-building. He adores black and white photography inspired by Abbas Attar, and is influenced by Sergey Kolesov and Adrian Bush. "My art is dynamic and tainted, like a failed paradise."

### 1 MOMENT IN SPACE

"This was my love letter to graphic design and trying to break from the formula of traditional illustration."

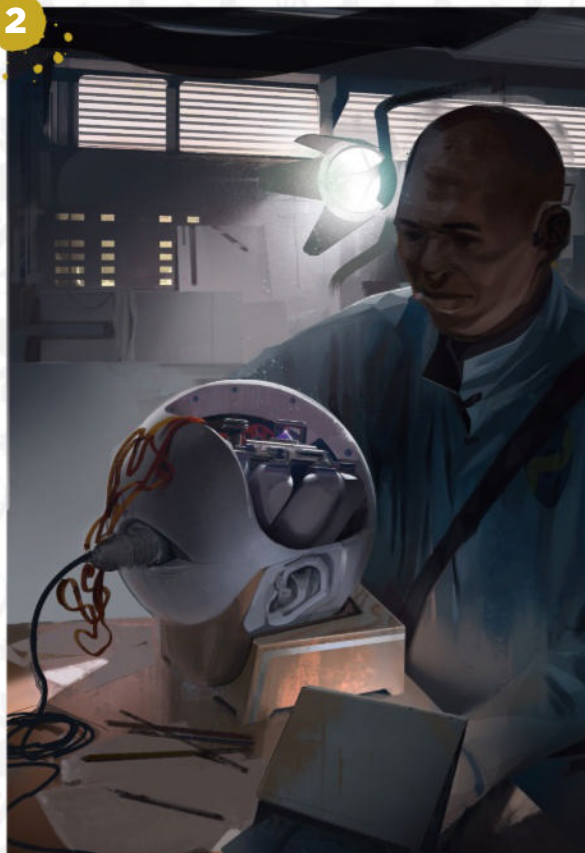
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### 2 WE BUILT THE TRACKER

"I challenged myself to push graphic shapes and enhance the rendering, all while preserving the base."

2

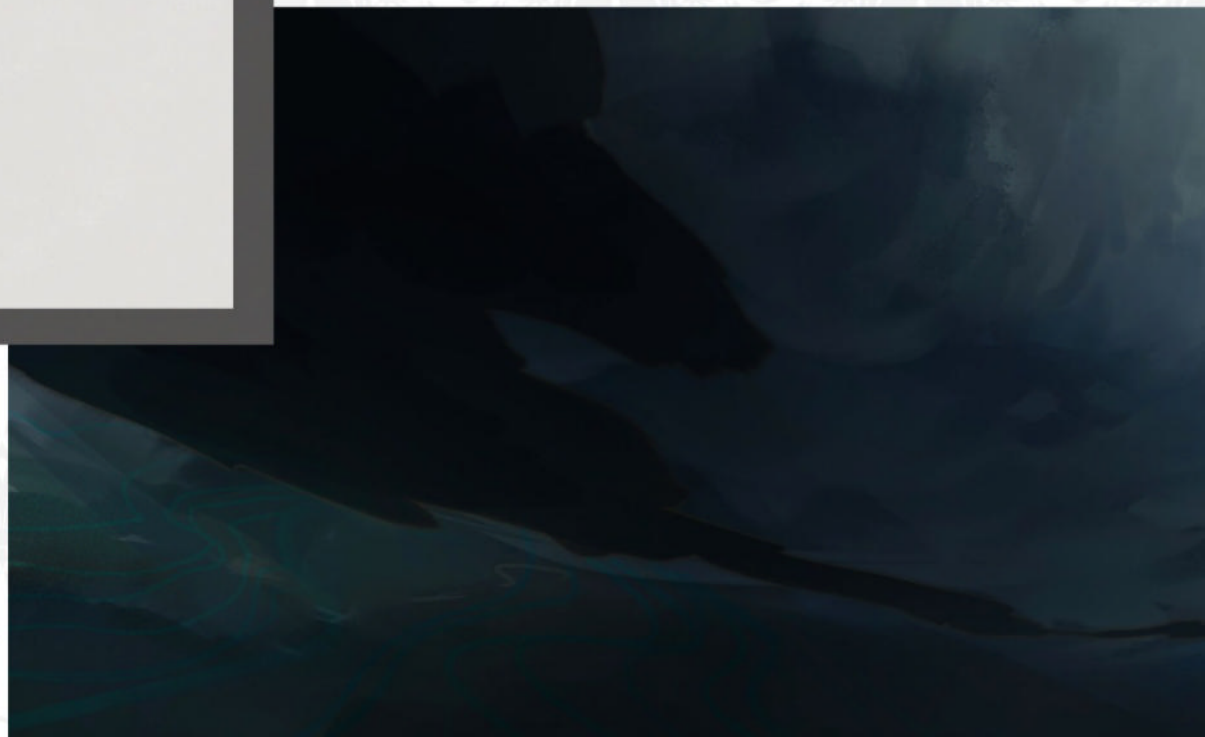


### 3 BOM DIA INTERIOR DESIGN

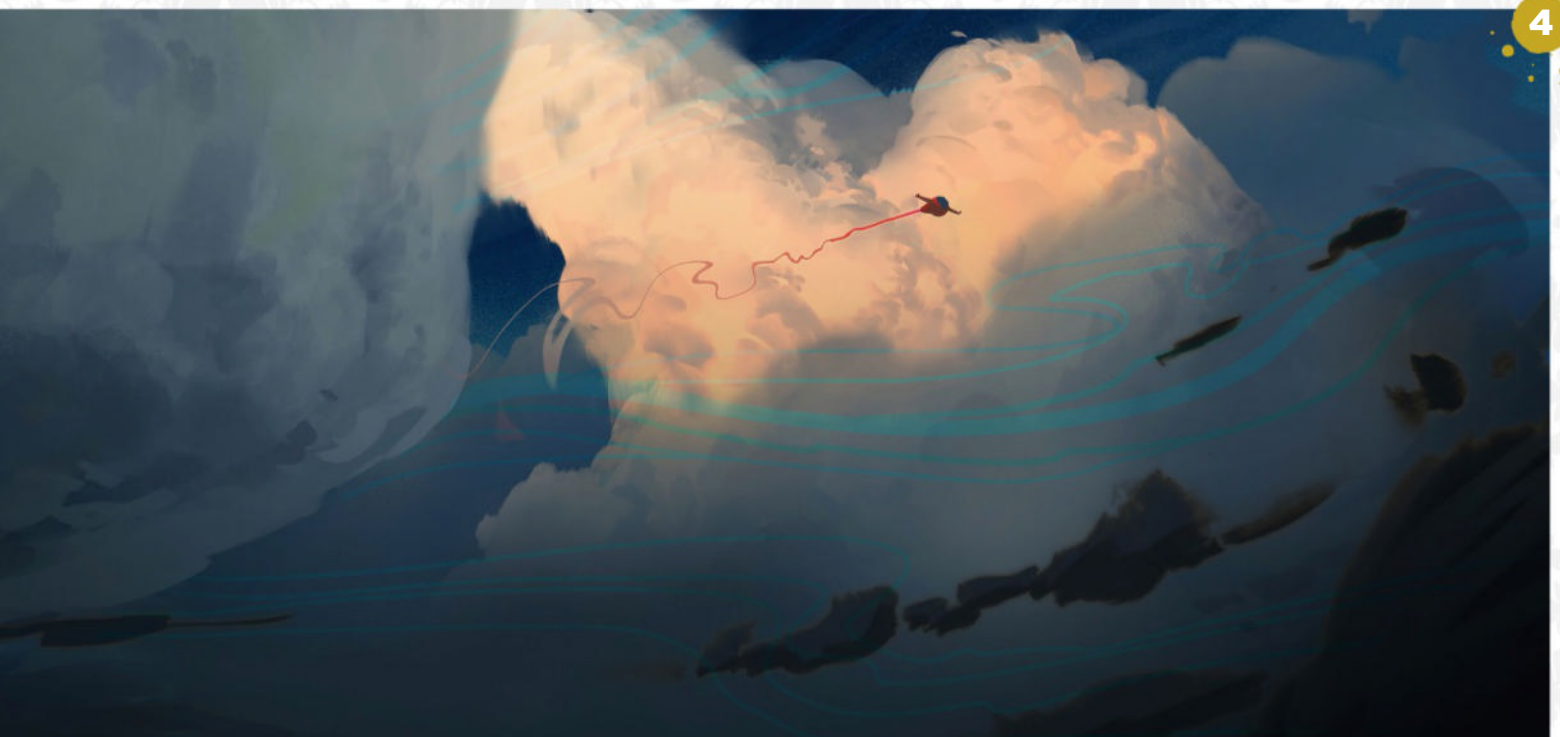
"This piece explores Bom Dia's home, inspired by Deathloop, Half-Life 2 and City of God."

### 4 SKY

"This began as a training exercise with my friend Jonathan Kiem, but then evolved into mood pieces for a personal project."











## Elijah Riley Ring

**LOCATION:** US **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate, pen and pencil on paper **WEB:** [www.artstation.com/e-thundering](http://www.artstation.com/e-thundering)

Raised by artistic parents, Elijah was exposed to the arts early in life. His earliest inspirations include Akira Toriyama, Hayao Miyazaki and Don Bluth. He was self-taught until he attended and graduated from New3dge.





## Amari

Wanderer in the Dark



## Lucifeus

"Apostle-King of Light, the Morning Star, the Fallen Star, White One, Great Thief"



### 1 FROST GIANT

"Part of my contribution to the New3dge final year group projects. I had the honour of depicting the MC, Bjorn and the big bad – Hrimthur – for the Viking project, Einvala."

### 2 ONI BABA

"Created during a one-week character course under the guidance of Simon Tosovsky. The prompt was 'Necro Alchemist' so I created an old ogress looking to restore her former beauty."

### 3 WANDERER

"Amari, the Wanderer in Darkness, is the foil to the Apostle of Light. I painted her alongside the Apostle during a six-week online course with Ricardo Padierno at New3dge."

### 4 APOSTLE

"Lucifeus, the Apostle of Corrupting Light, was conceptualized during the same six-week course. The brief was to create a character who used light for evil."





## Antoine Gadoud

**LOCATION:** France **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** <https://antoinegadoud.artstation.com>

Antoine attended the New3dge art school in Paris, which enabled him to learn the fundamentals of concept art. He then joined Mooncolony, a studio that made it possible for him to live his dreams.

### 1 CLOWN

"A small project; I just wanted to draw a simple clown and do some good line-art, which is an important step in creating a good render later on."



### 2 PRINCIPAL GNOBLIN DUKART

"The headmaster of a school of magic. This small project was done during a live stream on Twitch as part of a challenge."



### 3 SWORDTEMBER

"The Swordtember is a challenge that takes place once a year in September, where the goal is to make one sword per day. These are my favourites from last year."

### 4 DEAL?

"This character was a personal exercise where I tried to go as far as possible with the rendering. I learned a lot from it."











## Eve Forrest

**LOCATION:** US **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint **WEB:** [www.instagram.com/eve\\_4est\\_art](http://www.instagram.com/eve_4est_art)

Eve is a self-taught digital illustration artist. Their art style is heavily inspired by the Baroque, Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau periods. "I've taken my love for history and fantasy and combined them to create my illustration style."

### 1 C&C (CIGARETTES & COLOR THEORY)

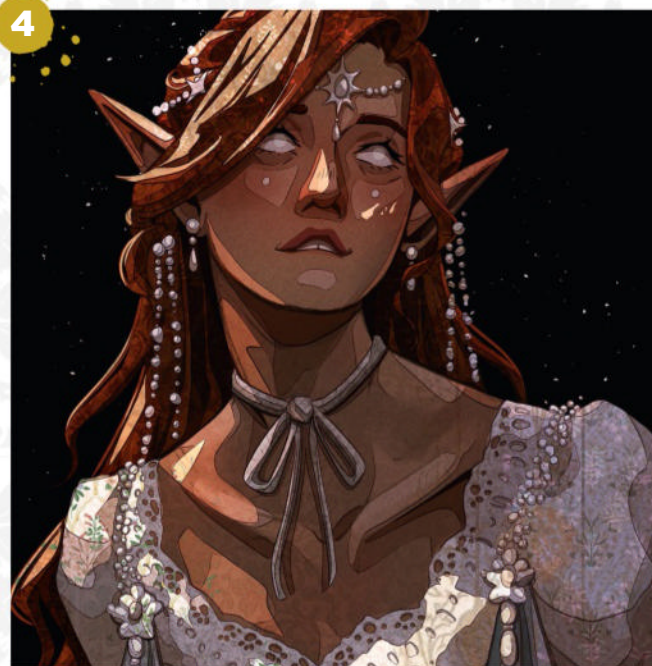
"Sometimes, my colour choices in my illustrations can be lost in my go-to dramatic lighting style. For this illustration, I didn't allow myself to use any harsh lighting so I would be forced to focus solely on the colours."

### 2 THE WATCHFUL JEWEL

"I used a reference image for this illustration with the specific intent to better draw jewels. Every artist has a common enemy: hands, horses and, in my opinion, jewellery."



### 3 THE FOOL KING



### 3 THE FOOL KING

"For this illustration, I drew from a photo taken of the Royal Ballet performing The Prince of the Pagodas in London. Dancers are a great reference source for any artist looking to draw complicated poses."

### 4 LIRAE

"This is a portrait of my original character Lirael Fairview. Illustrating her like this enabled me to experiment with her character design and show the intricate detailing of her dress, jewellery and eyes."





**5 SCI-FI RENAISSANCE**  
“I created this character design by merging elements of science fiction, (loose) historical fashion and fantasy. Combining different prompts is a great way to get your creativity flowing.”

**Do you want to see your art on these pages?** Then email five artworks and a short explanation about each one, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to [fxpose@imaginefx.com](mailto:fxpose@imaginefx.com)





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## The Nutcracker

YEAR CREATED: 2024 MEDIA: Photoshop

“The Nutcracker was developed as my final project for the Animation Concept Art Program at Vancouver Film School. In this retelling of Tchaikovsky's ballet, Clara journeys through realms like Swan Lake and Sleeping Beauty to recover her prince's shattered heart after he's transformed into a Nutcracker. I focused on colour, light and atmosphere to capture the wonder of ballet, while adding my own dark fantasy twist.”





## Artist **PROFILE**

**Naomi Iwadare**

**LOCATION:** Canada



Naomi is a Japanese-Mexican visual development and concept artist with a deep love for animation, art and video games, who's driven by a passion to create art that inspires others.

[www.therookies.co/u/niwadare](http://www.therookies.co/u/niwadare)

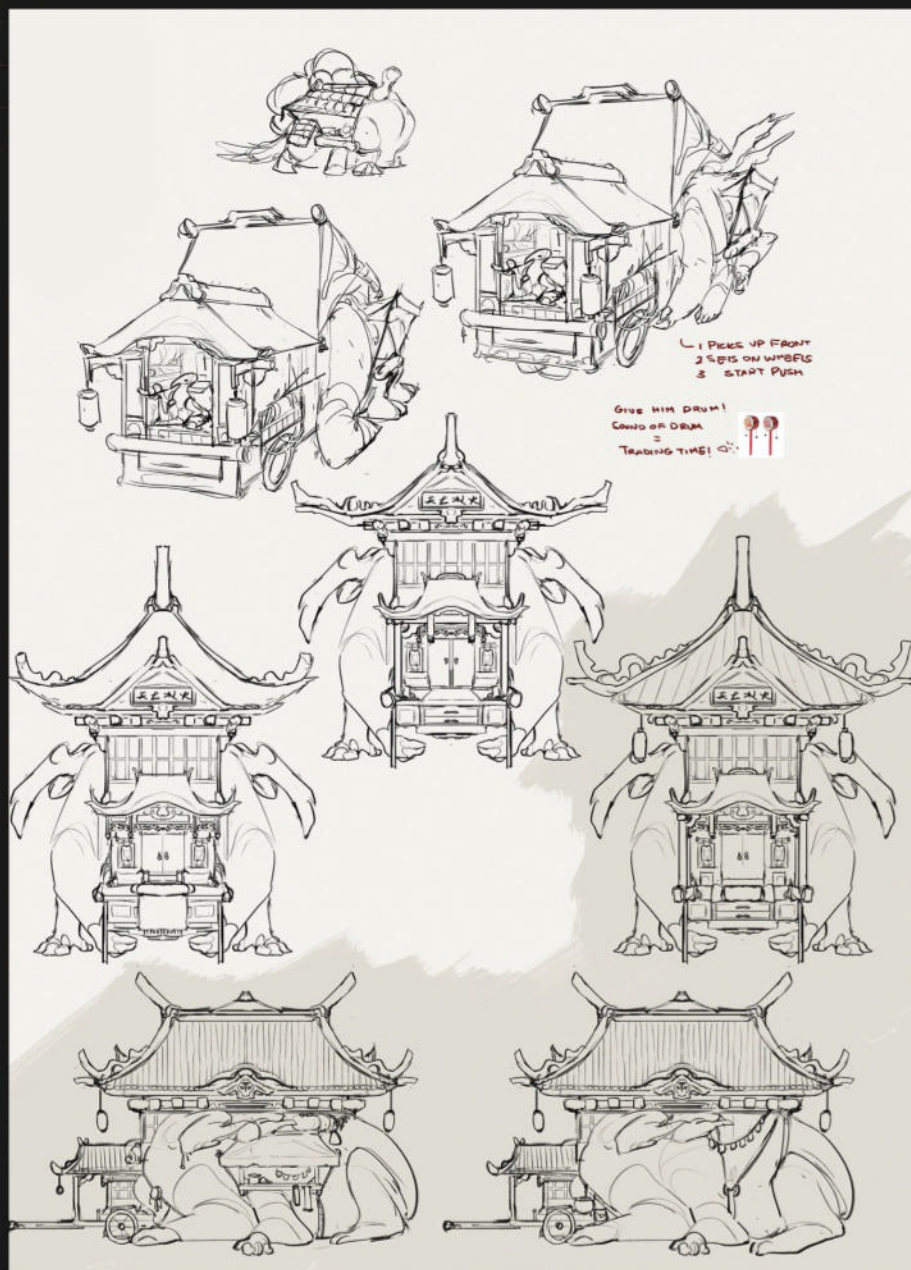




## HEATH: character line-up

YEAR CREATED: 2024 MEDIA: Photoshop

“A character line-up of an East Asian-inspired world-building project called HEATH. The story follows a wanderer and adventurer from a wealthy and isolated tribe, Orakina, as she runs away from her home and explores a world of fantastical creatures and characters.”





## Artist PROFILE

**Jeannette Wang**

**LOCATION:** Australia



Jeannette is a 2D concept artist from Singapore, now living in Australia. She specialises in characters and creatures, but she's also done work with props, environments and sculpting.

[www.therookies.co/u/jeanagerie](http://www.therookies.co/u/jeanagerie)





# ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS ImagineNation

THE CORE OF THE DIGITAL ART COMMUNITY



Keith Christensen says: "I've always been into movies and television. I was born in 1974, an amazing time in film history: Star Wars, Indiana Jones, The Goonies, The Dark Crystal, Tron, Conan... the list goes on."







## ANOTHER DAY IN THE OFFICE

Jason Shawn Alexander invites us into his studio, housed in a office block whose residents are unaware there's an award-winning creative in the building.

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## LET'S HEAR YOUR VIEWS

There's a lot of love for ImagineFX's recent Sketchbook issue, with one reader singling out Johanna Forster's art as 'gorgeous'. And who are we to argue?

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# Working as a concept artist in film

**Screen break** Tanya Combrinck finds out that creative talent alone won't open doors to the movie industry

**The work of a concept artist in the film industry goes well beyond the dreaming up of fantastical creatures, machines, costumes and environments: at heart, you're a storyteller and a problem-solver.**

**Keith Christensen**, a concept artist



who worked on both Dune films, The Batman, and Avatar: The Way of Water, tells us he has always had a strong urge to make images that are driven by story: "A landscape is nice, and a landscape with a cabin is better. But the overgrown, burned-out ruins of a cabin with someone – or something – crouching in the shadows: that's the kind of thing that's fun for me."



Good concept artists, says **Matt Hatton**, whose recent projects include Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga and Kingdom of the

Planet of the Apes, have the ability to "think holistically, like a director". He explains: "Use that angle, that length of lens – or indicate it in the distortion of the image – and use those colours, that shape language, to relay the story. Or you're just doing 'cool' pictures that don't tell people anything."

## PROBLEM SOLVER

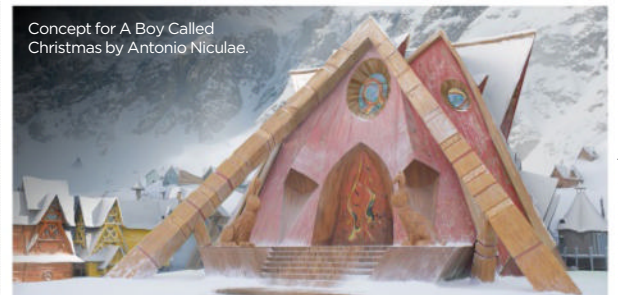
Beyond conveying narrative, a concept artist's job is to solve the visual problems presented by a brief. For example, an environment might need to look claustrophobic, but there still has to be room for all the action to take place. A costume might have to tell a story about the character and

**“Try to understand what it is that you specifically have to offer, what sets you apart”**



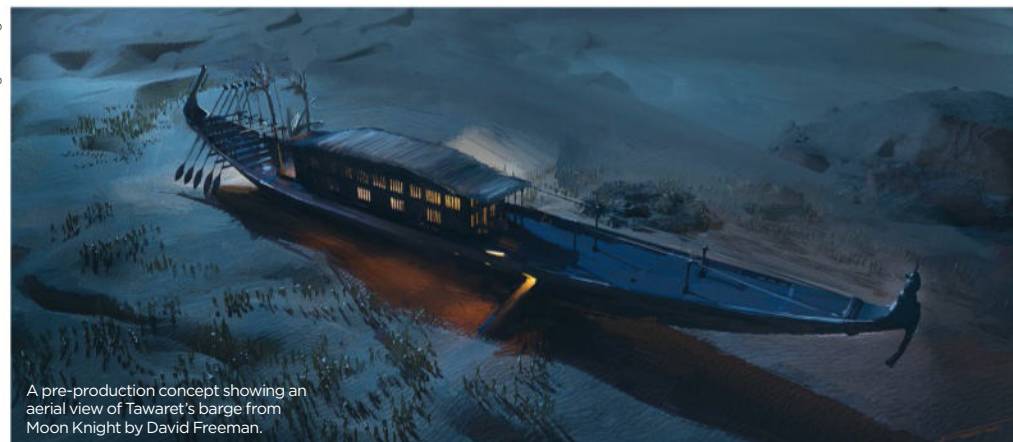
A concept for Alien: Covenant by Matt Hatton, who also contributed to Alien: 40 Artists 40 Years, published by Titan Books.

© Disney



Concept for A Boy Called Christmas by Antonio Nicolae.

© 2021 Netflix US, LLC - StudioCanal SAS



A pre-production concept showing an aerial view of Tawaret's barge from Moon Knight by David Freeman.

© Industrial Light & Magic

express their personality, but it also has to be practical for the actor to wear and appropriate for the time period of the film. Concept artists work within these constraints to produce visual solutions that satisfy the requirements of the filmmaker's vision. No two sets of constraints will ever be the same, and this is what keeps the job interesting. Every project brings a brand new challenge. Keith tells us he loves this constant change: "There's always a new problem to solve," he says.

Keith's advice for breaking into the industry is to identify your strengths and find where they fit. "Try to understand what it is that you specifically have to offer, what sets you apart, and then figure out how that melds with the industry" ➔



➡ standards and expectations of potential clients. It's a strange balance to combine the expected with the novel, but that's ultimately the job. Brace yourself for struggle, chaos and absurdity."

He adds that a broad range of interests and experiences beyond the art world is useful. "I've always been interested in history, anthropology, archaeology, etc. and no matter how obscure the reference, a job will come along that brings it to the surface."

Matt recommends developing as wide a skill set as you can. "Being able to work in different styles, across different disciplines, and in different departments will give you a better chance at a long career," he says. Even at the start, you should be building your knowledge of the visual elements of different time periods

**“It’s a strange balance to combine the expected with the novel, but that’s ultimately the job”**

and types of architecture, as well as your understanding of the art fundamentals that will give you confidence in your abilities as you take on bigger challenges.

## CORE ART SKILLS

Matt explains: "Some people say 'I just wanna design monsters'. Well don't we all?! But your monsters will be much better if you know anatomy, even if you're departing from the real stuff. And it will be in context."

"Watch tons of movies, and don't just look at the visuals but ask yourself, why did they do that? Turn the sound off so you can concentrate on what



© Legendary Pictures

Concept for a Sardaukar warrior, created for Dune: Part One by Keith.



"Star Wars and Blade Runner first inspired me to start drawing as a child," says Kamen Anev.

"My childhood was spent drawing, painting, sculpting and fabricating things from whatever movie or show I was into at the time," says Keith.

they're doing visually if that helps. Martin Scorsese did that. It works.

"All this will also help immeasurably not just to be ready for your first job, but so you can take a brief from your boss. Or be able to understand the director when they use cinematic shorthand to talk about what they want."

**Kamen Anev**, another artist who produced concepts for the Dune films, as well as Blade Runner 2049 and Star Wars: Episode IX - The Rise of Skywalker, tells us that on top of your visual and technical skills, strong communication abilities are also essential. "You need to understand the brief and be able to justify your visual solutions," he says. "What there's no time for in this fast-paced

industry is misunderstanding or ignoring instructions."

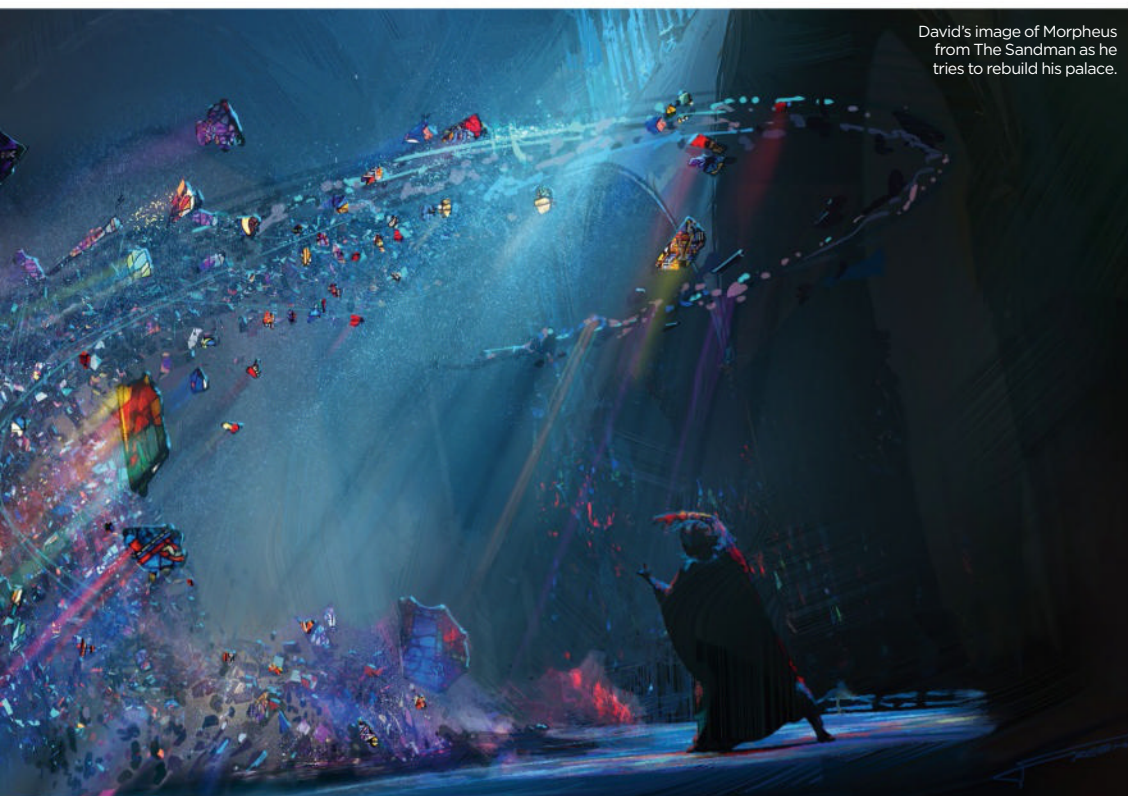
Like Matt, Kamen emphasises the benefits of immersing yourself in movies. "Perhaps the most important thing of all is a genuine love and knowledge of films, and the ability to find elements to fall in love with - regardless of the genre or script - so you can stay motivated and do your job with passion," he says.

It's this devotion to the medium that will give you an edge and the ability to create exceptional work. "It's important to believe in the transformative power of film - to believe that this work can truly improve people's lives and ways of thinking," says Kamen. "The key is understanding that filmmaking has ➡



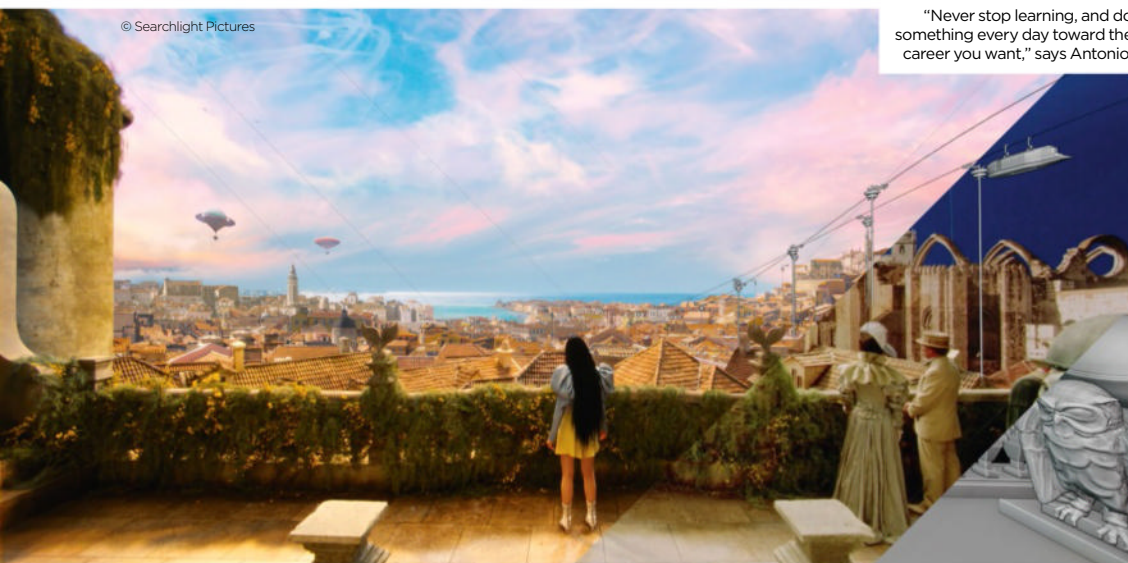
© Marvel





David's image of Morpheus from The Sandman as he tries to rebuild his palace.

© Industrial Light & Magic



© Searchlight Pictures

"Never stop learning, and do something every day toward the career you want," says Antonio.



Kamen's render of a 70s-style spaceship.

## INDUSTRY INSIGHT CONCEPTING FOR FILMS

*David Freeman's advice for standing out in a crowded space*

### What skill set and aptitudes do you need as a concept artist in the film industry?

Learn to use industry-standard software, both 2D and 3D. Know what a client wants and always ask questions if you are unsure of anything you're being asked to do. Be willing to take constructive criticism and don't get too precious about your work. Believe in yourself and never be afraid to discuss ideas when the time is right.

### What made you want to do the job?

Although I had posters of Ralph McQuarrie and Joe Johnston's concept art on my wall as a kid, I never realised that I could do this as a job. This changed when I happened to come across Ryan Church giving a talk on concept art for the Star Wars prequels at a VFX event in London.

### What advice do you have for someone who wants to break into the industry?

Get your work online and connect with other artists working in the industry. Events like Concept 101 are a great opportunity to meet other artists and get feedback on your portfolio. Look at working in an art department, both on set and within a VFX company, and the career path best suited to that type of work. I started in VFX, but if I had the knowledge I have now, I would have started my career by working as an art assistant on set, under the helm of a production designer.

It is pretty tough out there right now, but don't give up and don't be afraid to ask those already in the industry for advice.



David produces concept work including vehicles, characters, environments and creatures, for film and high-end TV.

<https://conceptdave.artstation.com>





Landing Zone – a personal study by Kamen.



"Even if you're doing something specific like a prop, extra knowledge and, more importantly, understanding of narrative context and such will put you ahead and keep you there," says Matt.

➡ always been a collaborative process. Our images only have real value if they help streamline that process, not complicate it. This mindset is something that comes across in a portfolio, and it can often be the difference between success and failure.

"Another important aspect is to build a portfolio that moves comfortably across different film genres, rather than sticking to just one. The profession itself is extremely diverse and increasingly fragmented. Success often depends on being equally at home with environment, prop and character concepts."

**David Freeman**, an artist whose recent credits include *The Creator*



and *A Quiet Place: Day One*, echoes this advice to strive for range in your portfolio. Also, he says: "Your portfolio might not

be perfect, but employers can spot potential, so don't be too much of a perfectionist and put off getting it out there."

## PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

To make it as a concept artist in film, David tells us you'll need to be so dedicated that you're willing to spend all your spare time improving your skills – but the rewards are worth it. "Getting to walk around a full-scale set based on the concept model and keyframes that I have worked with the production designer to create is definitely one of the most amazing experiences," he says.

**“Build a portfolio that moves comfortably across different film genres”**



"Know your stuff, and know more than you need. Eventually you'll have pride instead of secret imposter syndrome," says Matt.



Keith's designs for *Dune's* Harkonnen desert battle costumes.

In terms of formal education, it's not essential to take a course that leads specifically into the film industry, but it can be valuable. **Antonio Nicolae**, who's produced concepts for *Poor*



*Things and A Boy Called Christmas*, earned his Master's degree in Production Design at the National Film and

Television School in the UK. "During the course, we made a ton of industry contacts, which is one of the most important things in this field, since knowing who to reach out to is crucial for landing work," he says.

His advice for getting into the business, beyond getting really good at what you do, is to be persistent. "This industry is tough, and there are countless talented concept artists, but there's room for everyone," he says. "Keep producing work, keep applying for jobs, network relentlessly, and don't back down. Sooner or later, one of those contacts will call and say, 'Come in tomorrow'. It only takes that one person to give you a chance.

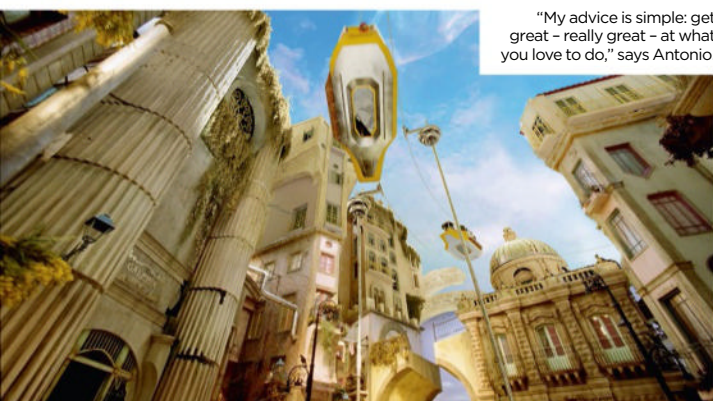


Some of David's work on *The Creator*; an environmental concept showing Nomad breaking through the clouds.





Matt says: "Draw, draw, draw. It'll make the Photoshop or 3D work much better!"



Once you're in, don't get complacent. Keep doing that extra bit of work, even if it's just watching a one-minute tutorial online!"

Antonio's determination has led him into a career that surrounds him with fellow artists he loves working with. He explains: "For me, it's not just what I'm drawing, but who I'm drawing it with. Whether I'm crafting massive sci-fi cities or a tiny 4x4 room with white walls and a single chair, doing it alongside people you respect and enjoy working with makes every day exciting."

Keith shares the sentiment about his art connecting him to other people. "Getting paid to make art every day is amazing," he says. "But the best part is the possibility that my work may inspire someone in the way that other artists have inspired me. Dune might be to some people what The Empire Strikes Back was (and is) to me. It's the thought that some kid might be suiting up to ride a sandworm in his back yard the same way I trained with Yoda in mine, and I got to participate in that. What a cool feeling."





## Jason Shawn Alexander

**Multiple choice** A range of workstations and stacks of art and books make up this LA artist's long-occupied space

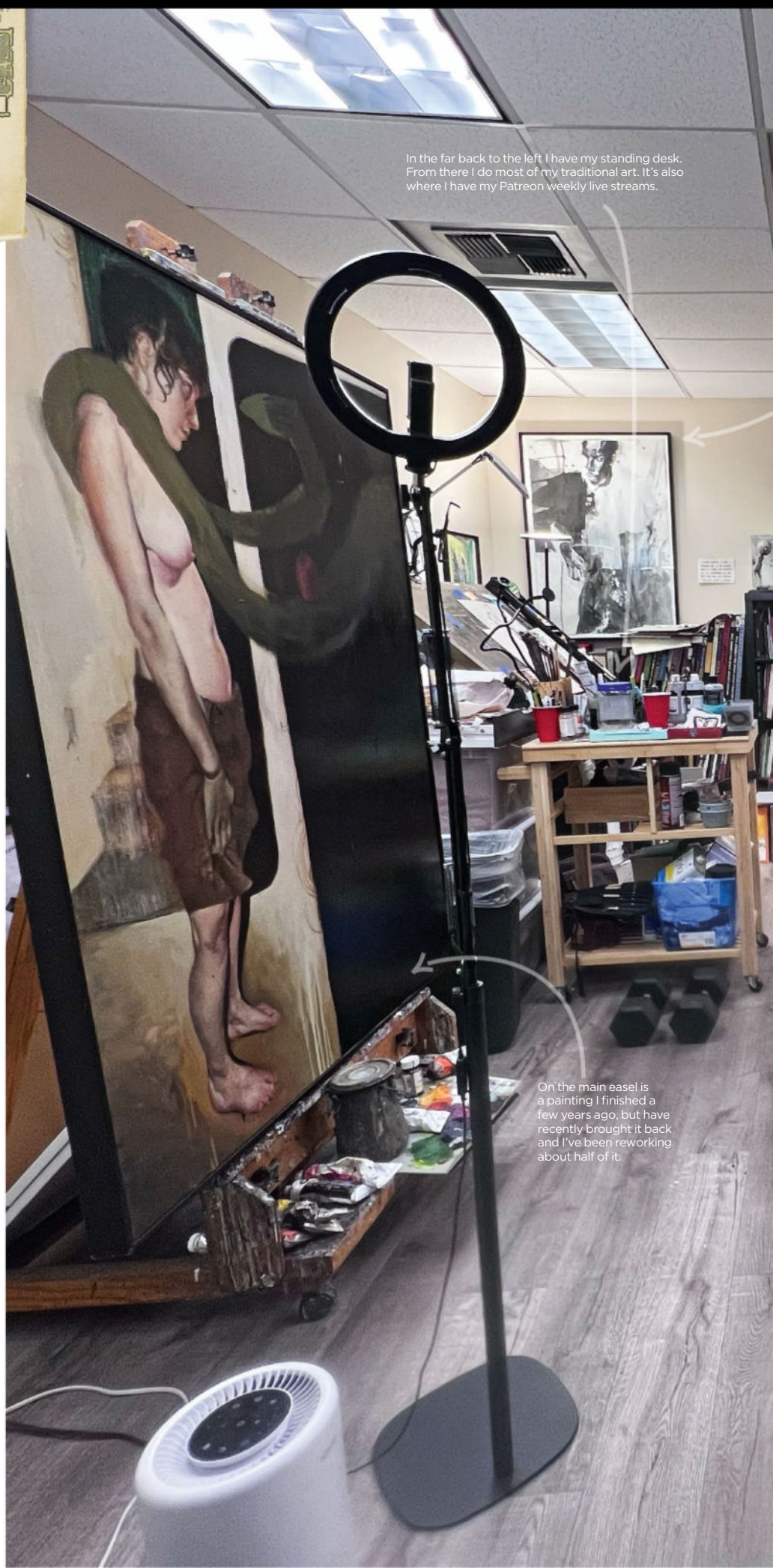


**I roll into the studio around 5am most days. There's a front office where a lot of my books are and where my assistant works, and a lot of hanging art.**

After you pass through the office you're in the main studio that's been designed to be as completely comfortable – almost homey – as possible. Bookshelves and sitting areas abound. I have ADHD, so any given day I could need to work differently than the day before. Because of that I have multiple sitting and ➡



This is a digital study of a future comic cover for my Empty Zone series, which I plan to paint traditionally.



In the far back to the left I have my standing desk. From there I do most of my traditional art. It's also where I have my Patreon weekly live streams.

On the main easel is a painting I finished a few years ago, but have recently brought it back and I've been reworking about half of it.



# Artist news, software & events

My studio is in an office building full of realtors and physical therapy offices. No one really knows there's an art studio on the first floor.

On the far wall are three pieces of art: an ink and mixed media piece of mine from my last exhibition in LA; an original comic page by Will Eisner; and my first movie poster for a short film called Vandal.

One of my favourite things is my book collection. I'm still bringing books from home as we remodel, so the stacks of books get bigger and bigger.

The sitting area is where I stack books and take short naps on the couch.

My comic rack is one of the cooler things I have decorating the studio.

“The studio has been designed to be as completely comfortable – almost homey – as possible”





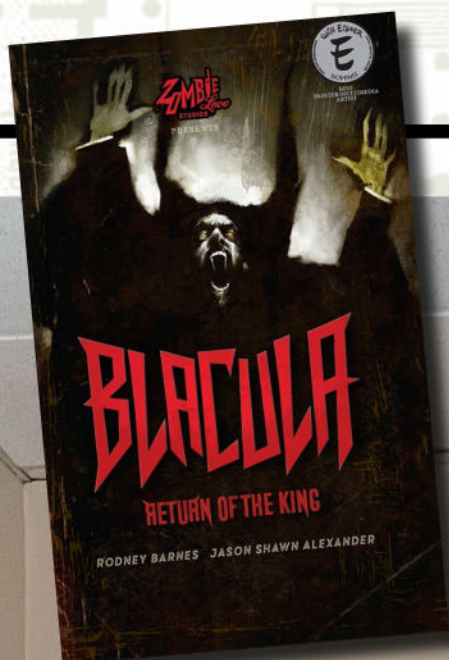
My first movie poster for Vandal. Since then I've gone on to do storyboard and concept design work for the writer/director Eddie Alcazar's next three projects.

“The goal is to not let my ADHD give me an excuse not to work, but rather to roll with it”

A two-page spread that opens the new Empty Zone comic series that's coming in 2026. This is the first time the cyberpunk-horror title has been drawn digitally.







My traditional art table. I love working in mixed media, so at any given time I'm gonna need something different. I try and keep as much as I can near me.



Blacula: Return of the King is a graphic novel, written and published by Rodney Barnes, that's the perfect sequel to MGM's 1972 film Blacula. I had 128 pages to explore digital painting and I took every opportunity. It's still some of my best comic work.



In this shot we see my digital drawing space, where I do 90 per cent of my illustration work. Up close is a collaboration painting I did with fellow artist Jim Mahfood.





Variant cover for Image Comics' Skybound Presents: Afterschool, a homage to the 1920s RCA Victor ads.

➡ standing options, and three or four different work stations. The goal is to not let my ADHD give me an excuse not to work, but rather to roll with it. I have options.

Both digital and traditional art gets made here: from ink and watercolour to oil to digital. I have more books than I can count. There's everyone from Cy Twombly to Syd Mead. Just looking at art inspires me enough to want to make it. On the walls there are multiple pieces by artists I admire – Barron Storey, Phil Hale, Will Eisner and others – along with gig posters and album covers and movie posters that I've done.

## UNDETERRED BY TIME

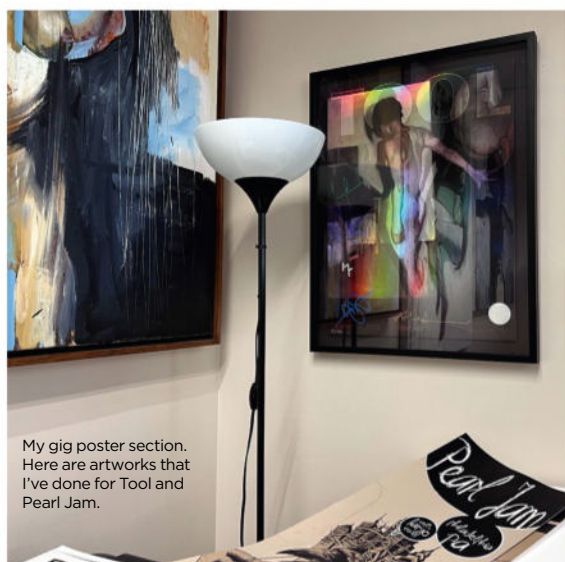
One of my favourite attributes of the studio is that it lacks any windows. I can work and work and not see that the day is getting late. Or at 9am, I can turn off most of the lights and it feels like I'm making comics back in my bedroom at 3am, 25 years ago. Being able to control the environment to a degree, in my workspace, is essential and has worked for me for the past five years or so.

*Jason is an artist and writer, and has been in the industry for over 25 years. He's exhibited his fine art in the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery as well as galleries in Los Angeles, New York, London and Berlin. For his illustration work, Jason has received seven Eisner Award nominations and the Silver Medal from the Society of Illustrators. Empty Zone, his comic series that he writes and draws, has garnered much critical acclaim. [www.studiojsa.com](http://www.studiojsa.com)*

“I can work and work and not see that the day is getting late”



I created Empty Zone over 20 years ago and it's been my passion to bring it back and explore that world again.



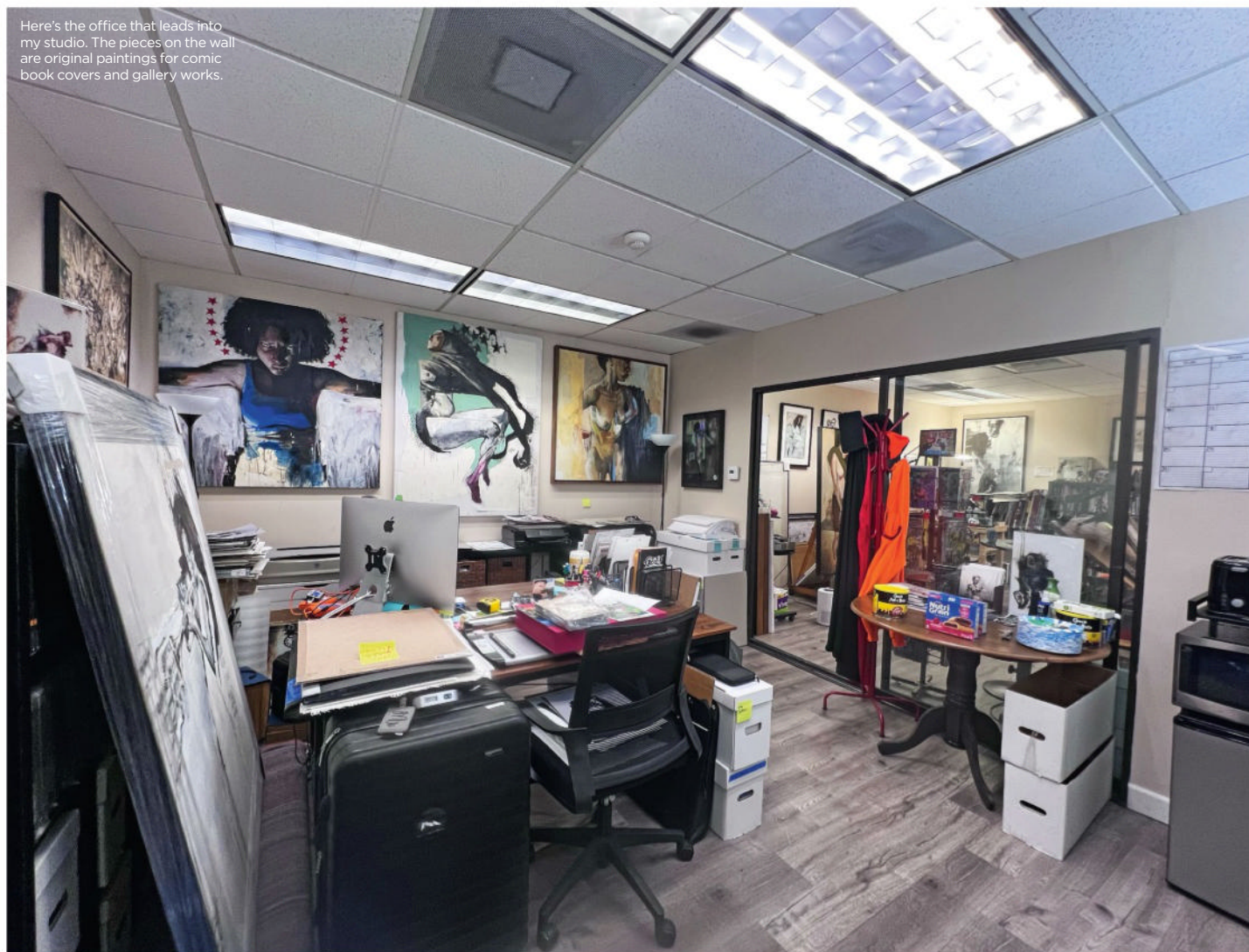
My gig poster section. Here are artworks that I've done for Tool and Pearl Jam.



Repeater, oil on linen. It's a portrait of a friend, done at a time when I was pushing myself to become a more expressive figure painter. The work was exhibited at the Smithsonian



Here's the office that leads into my studio. The pieces on the wall are original paintings for comic book covers and gallery works.



A variant cover, created digitally, for The Magic Order comic by Mark Millar and Olivier Coipel. All I was told was that it should be sexy and awful. Apparently that was right up my alley.



This is the art for Ozzy's last album. This cover was done by me with Todd McFarlane.



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# Letters

## YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



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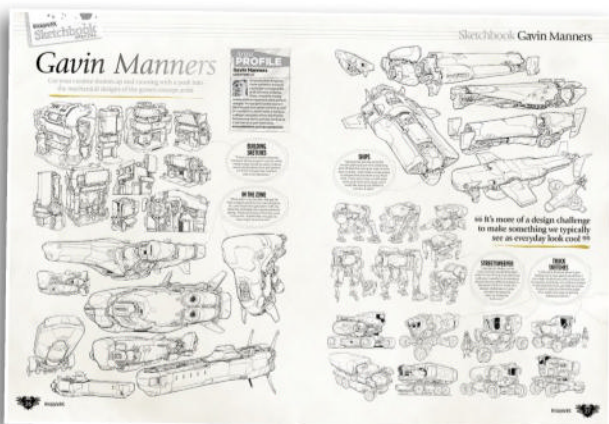
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### Delightful doodles

Hi ImagineFX. Just read your latest issue and I'm in love with it. I'm an aspiring concept artist and hope to one day work in the games industry, so seeing such a massive range of sketches is a huge inspiration. I enjoy vehicle design most and Gavin Manners' work really stood out to me. I hope to see more of this in the future.

**Dale, via email**

**Rob replies** Hi Dale. It's fantastic to hear you got so much out of our sketchbook special and I agree wholeheartedly about Gavin's work. It's interesting to see how he produces variations on a theme and his line work is so crisp. There will absolutely be more of this coming in the future. Good luck with what I'm sure will be a wonderful career.

### Spectacular sketches

Hello Rob. As a long-time subscriber I've been looking forward to another sketchbook issue. It seems like a great way to showcase the maximum amount

As well as a massive 500+ sketches, our last issue also featured some insightful interviews.



**DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?** Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 257 at [ifxm.ag/single-ixf](http://ifxm.ag/single-ixf).



Johanna Forster showcased a variety of whimsically wonderful character designs in her sketchbook.

of art and this latest one blew me away. So much in there that I love. I'm always impressed by the way artists use these sketchbooks to crank out such diverse designs, as well as making them so beautiful. Here's to the next one!

**Heather, via email**

**Rob replies** Thanks for the kind words Heather. We love putting these sketchbook specials together for that very reason. There is so much amazing art out there and we can't feature it all, so these specials are rammed with as much as possible. Don't worry, I'm sure we will be doing more.

### Insightful interviews

Hello all at ImagineFX. As much as I loved the vast array of sketches I found real inspiration from reading the interviews in your last issue. Dan dos Santos in particular resonated with me, so thank you for taking the time to talk to the artists and getting them to spill the beans on their work and thoughts.

**Ryan, via email**

**Rob replies** Hi Ryan. I'm with you there. Lots of art is great, but getting to talk to the people behind some of it is equally valuable. I'm so glad you enjoyed it.

### Veggie visuals

Hi Rob. Loved the latest copy of the mag, especially Johanna Forster. She shows a lot there, but my favourites were the plant creatures. Gorgeous!

**Fran, via email**

**Rob replies** Hi Fran. Thanks for getting in touch. I'm pleased to hear you enjoyed the issue and you're on to something there. Johanna's creatures are both beautifully drawn and fun. I liked the Game Boy-style characters too. But as a fan of Adventure Time's BMO, I am a little biased.



New works that have grabbed our attention



**Tomek Larek**  
[@tomek\\_larek](https://twitter.com/tomek_larek)



**Germain Ludot**  
[@bouboulonlon](https://twitter.com/bouboulonlon)



**André Meister**  
[@meister\\_art](https://twitter.com/meister_art)

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 ART OF YIGIT KOROGLU

**Dominic Carter** talks to the interior architect-turned-artist about creating characters with personality and working on Magic: the Gathering

**F**reelance illustrator and concept artist Yigit Koroglu has poured his passion for all things science fiction and fantasy into an impressive career that has seen him working for the likes of Wizards of the Coast and Atomhawk Design. We caught up with him to learn more about his creative process, and why working in large teams is the key to continuously honing his skills as an artist.

**Tell us a little about your background as an artist. How did you get started and what has your career been like so far?**

I have a bachelor's degree in interior architecture, but after trying it for a couple of years I found out that it wasn't my fit. I took some courses that introduced art and design, art history and drawing, and I was already drawing fantasy art as a hobbyist when I was a student. Digital art was getting popular when I graduated, so I gave it a try and realised that being a fantasy artist, using a tablet, was the route to take for the rest of my life. I started to get commissions and ➤

## Artist PROFILE

### Yigit Koroglu



**LOCATION:** England

**FAVOURITE ARTISTS:**

Frank Frazetta, Ralph McQuarrie, Brom, Jeff Easley, Paul Dainton, Adrian Smith

and Todd Lockwood

**MEDIA:** Photoshop, acrylic, pencil, marker, ink, ballpoint pen

**WEB:** [www.yigitkoroglu.com](http://www.yigitkoroglu.com)



# Yigit Koroglu

## RAKDOS, LORD OF RIOTS

"Painted for Magic: The Gathering's Ravnica Allegiance Guild Kits. It's my vision of the ancient demon leading his frenzied cult, spreading terror and chaos through Ravnica's streets."



“I realised that being a fantasy artist, using a tablet, was the route to take for the rest of my life”





“Over time I discovered that adding some stylisation made my work more distinctive”

➡ contributed to projects of various sizes, including indie games, mobile games and book illustrations. One of them was to design the protagonist for a short animation film called *The Begun of Tigstone*. Then in 2018 that short film got the green light for a two-season run to be aired on Adult Swim. I painted nearly 200 characters, creatures and props for the series.

During the same year I started creating card art for *Magic: The Gathering*, which had been my childhood dream. In 2022 I began working for Atomhawk Design and relocated to the UK from Turkey. I've worked there for three years as a character concept artist.

**How has your art developed over the years, and what has driven those changes?**

I've been a freelance illustrator and concept artist for a decade. I would

## DEFENDERS OF ARDASH

"Personal work that shows the last of the Urmahlullus defending the ruined city of Ardash from invading snake-people. The Urmahlullus - half-lion and half-human beings - originate from ancient Sumerian mythology."



## MAKE YOUR CARD ART THE LEADER OF THE PACK

Tempted to break into the world of trading card games? Yigit shares what to keep in mind when creating art for the format

● **Size:** Trading cards are small, and the artwork on them is even smaller. While high-quality rendering is essential, avoid spending hours on tiny details that won't be visible. Focus on the main subject and overall impact.

● **Silhouette:** The subject should be instantly recognisable. A clear, strong silhouette will help the character or creature to stand out at a glance.

● **Colour:** This plays a major role, especially in games like *Magic: The Gathering*. While the image shouldn't be strictly monochromatic,

the palette should still reflect the card's mana type or thematic tone.

● **Values:** Value structure is fundamental, not just in trading card art, but in all visual art. Strong values give volume, enhance readability and make the illustration immediately understandable.

● **Context:** Creating a visually striking image is important, but it must also serve the purpose of the card and fit within the narrative and design constraints of the brief. Even the most beautiful piece falls short if it doesn't serve its intended function.

describe my style as realistic with a touch of stylisation. Early on, I aimed for purely realistic results, but over time I discovered that adding some stylisation made my work more distinctive. I love hand-painting every element in a piece because I believe that the texture of brushstrokes helps to make the artwork recognisable; you can think of brushstrokes as your personal watermark.

After joining Atomhawk, I had the chance to work alongside incredibly talented artists with exceptional skills and great personalities. It made me realise that no matter how long you've been in the industry, there's always so much more to learn. I studied a lot of anatomy, picked up new techniques to speed up and smooth out my workflow and, most importantly, learned how to collaborate effectively within a team to achieve better results.

**You've illustrated plenty of stunning *Magic: The Gathering* cards. How did you get into doing this? Have you always been a fan of the game?**

When I was very young, I came across a booster pack from one of the earliest *Magic* sets and instantly fell in love with the artwork. Without even knowing what the game was about, I bought the pack purely for the art.



I kept buying more sets just because I admired the artwork, even though there was no one around to play the game with me. Collecting those sets filled with amazing art probably influenced my decision to pursue this profession. Later, while illustrating for Paizo's *Pathfinder Adventure Paths*, my art director Andrew Vallas moved to Wizards of the Coast to become an AD for *Magic: The Gathering*. He invited me to illustrate a *Phyrexian Altar* for the *Ultimate Masters* set. I completed the piece, they were happy with it, and I've been working as a freelance illustrator for WotC ever since. ➡➡



# Yigit Koroglu

## ANGER OF THE GODS

"My interpretation of Hazoret for Magic: The Gathering's Amonkhet Remastered set. I portrayed the god unleashing a devastating meteor shower, emphasising her divine fury."



All Magic: The Gathering images © Wizards of the Coast, shared with permission from Wizards of the Coast

## SHURALI CONCEPT

"I designed this monster concept during downtime while working at Atomhawk. Inspired by Turkic mythology, it combines bear anatomy with twisted tree thickets to evoke a powerful, sinister forest spirit."





# Interview

➡➡ Can you tell us a bit about the card art creation process? Are you given a brief to work from, and do you need to be aware of how it fits into a larger deck or release?

This is definitely the best part of working on Magic: The Gathering! We receive highly confidential concept guides that provide detailed answers and an in-depth presentation of the world we're illustrating for.

While respecting confidentiality, I can say that the art directors really value each artist's unique style and encourage different creative approaches within the brief. The challenge lies in the small size of the printed card: silhouettes need to be instantly recognisable, and compositions must support the narrative while remaining dynamic. Even though we don't always know the exact power of the card or its name in the game, our job is to create the best illustration possible.

**What is it about science fiction and fantasy that particularly appeals to you as an illustrator?**

When I was a child, the video games I played – mostly RPGs – had very primitive graphics, leaving much of the story to my imagination. This encouraged me to visualise the game's world in my mind by studying the cover art and handbook illustrations, filling in the missing details myself. You could think of it as an organic version of Generative Fill! I believe this greatly boosted my creativity.

The 'untold' elements in science fiction and fantasy fuelled my imagination, and as I grew, I developed the skills to bring what I envisioned in

All Magic: The Gathering images © Wizards of the Coast, shared with permission from Wizards of the Coast



## MYOJIN OF CRYPTIC DREAMS

"One of two Myojins I designed and painted for Magic: The Gathering's Kamigawa: Neon Dynasty set. I loved its vibrant, exciting world, but had time for only two."

## “The ‘untold’ elements in science fiction and fantasy fuelled my imagination”

### BASAT CONCEPT ART

"A personal character concept of Basat, a Turkic hero from Anatolian myths. Created while job hunting, it features three distinct roles, references, size charts, back views and skill sketches for detailed 3D interpretation."

my mind to life through illustration. While many see science fiction and fantasy as escapism, I believe they're deeply rooted in human nature: our ongoing quest to understand the unknowns of the past, and a blueprint for how we might progress to uncover the mysteries of the future.

**Your work on AAA games involves working under pressure and to tight**

**deadlines. How do you stay on top of everything while maintaining consistently high standards?**

Working on AAA games can definitely be stressful, but at its core it's all about teamwork. Everyone on the team needs to be fully dedicated and constantly pushing their limits. Each person brings different strengths and weaknesses: one might be an incredible designer but a bit introverted when sharing ideas; while another might work more slowly but offer valuable feedback. The key is to highlight your teammates' strengths and support them in areas where they struggle. ➡➡







### DRAGONSPeAKER SHAMAN

"This is a promo illustration for Magic: The Gathering's Tarkir: Dragonstorm set. It depicts a shaman on top of Shiv's mountains, channelling the mystical, fiery power of dragons."





## MYOJIN OF BLOOMING DAWN

"This is a character that I designed for Magic: The Gathering's Kamigawa: Neon Dynasty set. I love this one especially, since it brings back joyful memories of my childhood and freedom."



All Magic: The Gathering images © Wizards of the Coast, shared with permission from Wizards of the Coast

➡ The team leader plays a crucial role by understanding each member's abilities and assigning tasks accordingly. When these elements come together, and the team produces great work, all that's left is to hope that the players are kind in their reception.

### As a character artist, how do you go about capturing the personality of your subject?

Before starting sketches, every concept artist should prepare a thorough moodboard. Gathering references helps your brain make connections

and clarifies the character's direction. Think of it as a set of visual hashtags. Spending as much time on the moodboard as on sketching helps ideas flow naturally.

When sketching, begin with silhouettes to capture the character's personality. Choose dynamic poses and expressive facial features to convey mood. For example, a hand on the hip and a downward gaze can suggest assertiveness, while crossed arms may indicate resistance to new ideas. Warhammer 40,000's Space Marines are a great example: although

they wear almost identical armour and have similar roles, their body language and expressions give each soldier a distinct personality that feels real and relatable.

From a technical standpoint, use foreshortening, cast shadows and reflected light to give your characters volume and depth. Details such as clothing, armour and props should feel connected to the character's world and their environment. Applying the Large-Medium-Small principle helps to establish a clear visual hierarchy.



## MYOJIN OF BLOOMING DAWN

Yigit explains the creative process behind this strange figure painted for Wizards of the Coast

I created this piece for Magic: The Gathering's Kamigawa: Neon Dynasty, inspired by Japanese mythology and a childhood memory. I started by building a huge moodboard focused on Japan; there was so much visual richness that it was impossible not to be inspired. Since I was given a written brief but no visual reference for the Myojin character, I had full creative freedom to design it from scratch.

I began with black and white shape and value sketches instead of line art, which is how I usually work. Then I added colour washes and used a few Overlay layers to push the mood further. The colour palette was different from my usual soft, muted colours in the front, contrasted with bright whites and deep blues in the back. For the flowers, I only painted a few shapes clearly – the rest are just loose brushstrokes, giving the illusion of a full meadow. Looking back, I'd tweak a few areas, but I'm proud of the result.



**Of all the work you have created, what are you most proud of and why?**

I think the illustration I created for Magic: The Gathering's Kamigawa: Neon Dynasty set, Myojin of Blooming Dawn, is the piece I'm most proud of because it allowed me to convey a cherished memory from my childhood through a fantasy illustration.

When I was around seven or eight, there was a meadow between our house and school that, in springtime, was filled with waist-high flowers. I would walk through them, surrounded by butterflies, sunshine

### MARE

"Mare is a personal piece that reflects frightening, depressing nightmares. It depicts my ex-bogeyman, always waiting at my bedroom doorway as I tried to fall asleep."



### DRAGON TURTLE

"The first illustration I created for Dungeons & Dragons: a gargantuan dragon wreaking havoc as it attacks vessels. I wanted to emphasise its scale, power and chaotic impact on the surrounding seas."

**“I recommend carrying a sketchbook to jot down even your wildest or silliest ideas whenever inspiration strikes”**

and a gentle breeze carrying the scent of grass. That moment felt almost magical and left a lasting impression on me. While creating this illustration, I used that memory as a reference (the flowers were actually yellow), and I'm very pleased with how it turned out.

**What advice would you give to other artists thinking of becoming concept artists and illustrators?**

It's a challenging field these days and it can feel intimidating at times, but as long as you truly enjoy what you're doing, success (however you define it) will eventually follow. For aspiring concept artists, no matter what tools you use, the key is to generate original, functional ideas quickly rather than

spending too much time perfecting polished but generic concepts. I always recommend carrying a sketchbook to jot down even your wildest or seemingly silliest ideas whenever inspiration strikes. You'd be surprised how creative you can get in the most unexpected of moments and places.

Illustrators should focus on storytelling and mood – these are essential. You only have a few seconds to grab the viewer's attention, so your piece needs to convey emotion and narrative immediately. Fundamentals like anatomy, composition and colour are crucial. Even untrained eyes can sense when something's off, so make sure everything works in harmony to support your visual story. ●



# Development sheet

## Artist PROFILE

### Alejandro Burdisio

LOCATION: Argentina



Known online as Burda, Alejandro is a self-taught designer and concept artist. He's been working for over 30 years, and his long-time

dedication to fantasy art enables him to participate in video games, animation productions and films for various companies around the world.

[www.artstation.com/burda](http://www.artstation.com/burda)

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## PROJECT TITLE: SIESTA (NAP TIME)

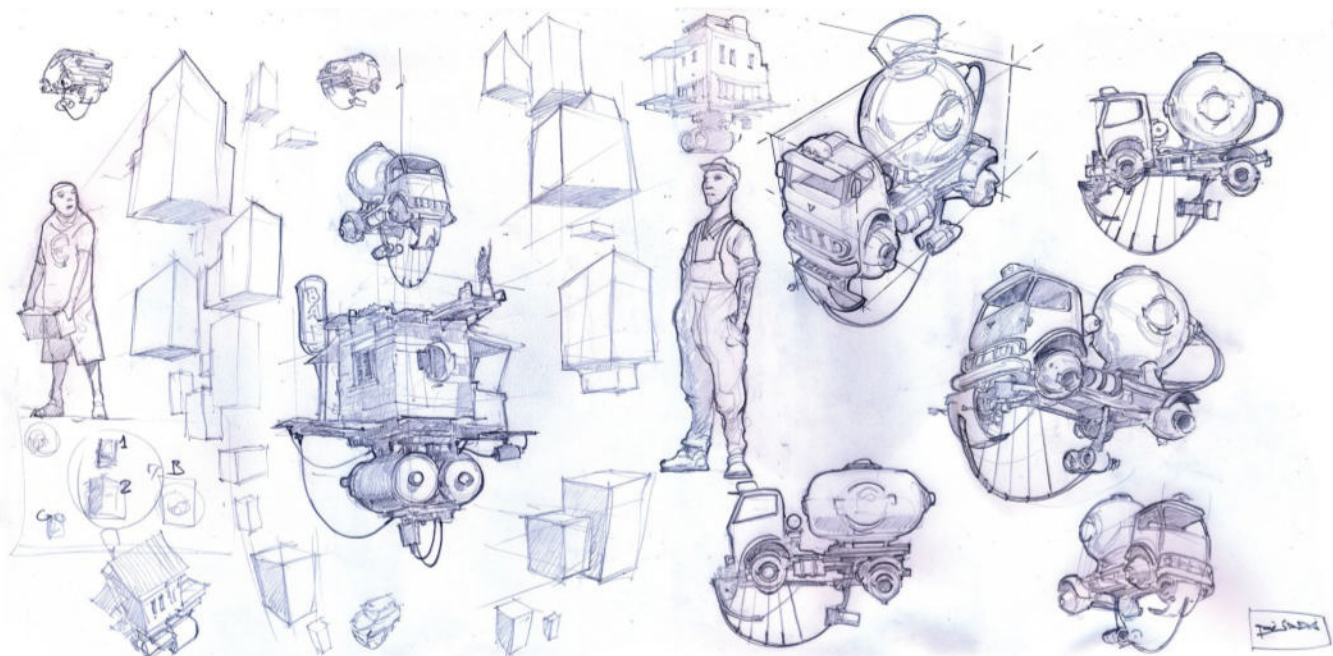
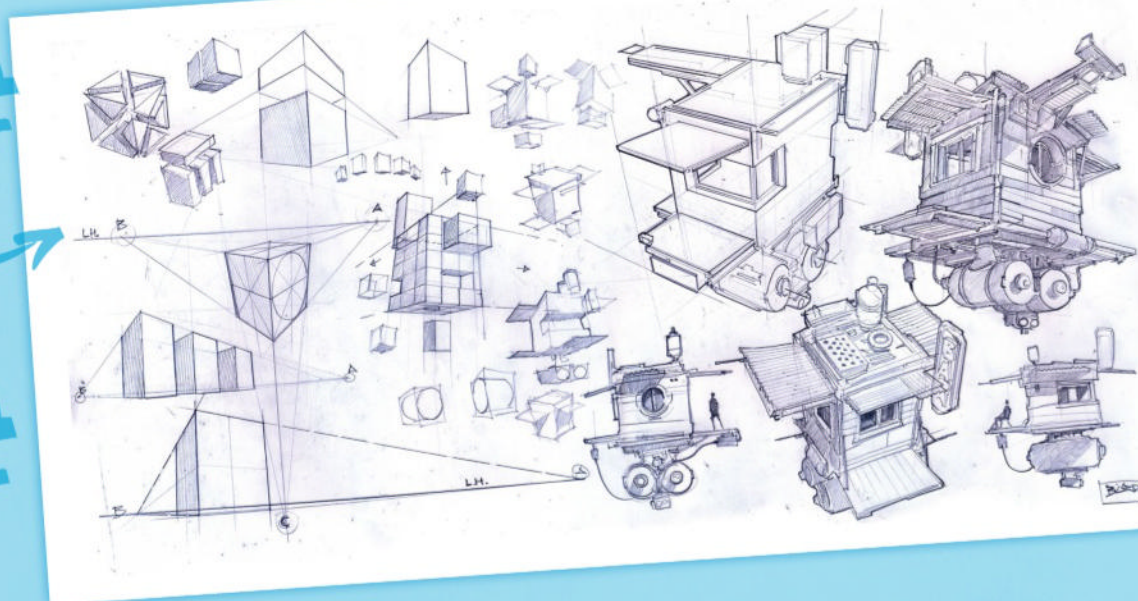
**Alejandro Burdisio** takes us through the creation of an artwork from his Universo Chatarra, which translates as 'Scrap Universe'. It's his ongoing personal project inspired by the buildings and cars from Argentina's past

### Explore shapes and elements

This is the beginning of the design process, when I create geometric studies of the various elements that may eventually become part of the composition. I also use this stage to detect possible matrixes or design fractals.

### Vary the views

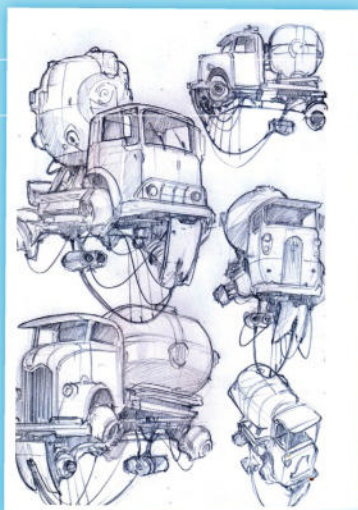
I work up the designs of the different elements, ensuring that they match the aesthetic of the Universo Chatarra. I try out alternative ways to depict the key elements. Here, geometry and design combine with the narrative through aesthetics that including humour, drama, grotesqueness and absurdity.





## Work up designs of the main vehicle

I lay down a preliminary sketch of the composition and explore the look of the main vehicle in the scene. I make aesthetic adjustments and use sketches to verify the position of each element, changing proportions, size ratios, dynamics and the position of the camera.



## Start painting

I lay down a base colour in Photoshop and build on this with basic lines and silhouettes, sculpting the colour and always striving to maintain an integral atmosphere with the colour palette. I use light to define and shape the volume of each element.

## Storytelling is the goal

The finished image's main goal is to verify and validate the design, the colour palette, as well as the visual narrative. I always aim to tell a little story about a moment in time – a situation where humour, drama, a feeling of calm, contemplation or perhaps even the absurd may play a part, whether subtle or significant, in the overall appreciation of my artwork.



## SEND US YOUR CONCEPTS!

Are you working on a fresh project or doodling your own development sketches that you'd like to share with us?

**LET US KNOW!** Email your WIPs and final images to: [mail@imaginefx.com](mailto:mail@imaginefx.com)



# Sketchbook

## Michaela Nienaber

Creature features and devilishly good art appear in the personal work of this artist



### Artist PROFILE

**Michaela Nienaber**

LOCATION: US



Michaela's worked in the video game industry for around 10 years, starting at Blizzard Entertainment as an environment concept artist and then moving into indie studios. She loves doing a bit of everything, from characters to creatures and more. Drawing figures, animals and interaction in her personal art is what Michaela enjoys the most.  
[www.mnienaberart.com](http://www.mnienaberart.com)

### KITTY SPOTS

"Pencils toned in Photoshop; based on ocelots, but with more exaggerated ears just for fun."

### PUMA SKETCHES

"Sketches of cougars. I love how in big cats, there's so much variety of face shapes in each species. With pumas, I love the rounded cheeks."



### DEVIL REPENT

"Old Inktober entry, around the theme of a demon offering comfort to a starving calf/young goat."

### COMMITTED SWAMP MONSTER

"Another Inktober drawing - this was following random themes I set for myself. He's a committed swamp monster because if you see his longest finger, there is a ring on the end!"





“Using traditional media first gives you much better marks to use as the foundation”



## OFFERING

“Pencil, ink, Copics and Photoshop. I wanted the eye to be led fully around the piece with an emphasis on the top heaviness, so viewers focus on the tentative closeness between the two characters.”



## NIGHTMARES

“I wanted to keep the composition flowing as much as possible in this, to add a sense of feeling trapped/predators circling.”



## WOLFSTRUCK

“Inktober from last year. I used Copics and brush pens to gradate the wolf’s fur, but a lot of the blending was thanks to Photoshop. Still, using traditional media first gives you much better marks to use as the foundation.”

## UNDERSEA PENCIL

“Pencil and ink. I really wanted to do an undersea picture that still used a lot of texture from traditional media in the base. This was actually drawn quite small for a scene, the sketchbook being about eight inches tall.”





# Sketchbook



## BLUE

"A traveller imagines being comforted. My main goal here was to just explore a tilted, vertical composition."

## DEVIL GAL

"Pencil, ink and Photoshop. My favourite thing to do here was make sure the highest contrast was actually on her earring rather than the flames."





“I wanted to really push the pose and ferocity here”

## INK DRAGON

“A commission drawing of someone else's character. I wanted to really push the pose and ferocity here.”

## PURGE

“An ink piece. My favourite part is the transition of hand prints into beast prints alongside the cliff wall.”

## BONDED

“This was for Inktober last year. I had the most fun laying down the red first and then filling the black so that you can still see red flecks coming through.”

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



# MASTER THE TECHNIQUES YOU NEED TO CREATE YOUR BEST FANTASY ART

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Moritz Cremer gives his character concept a strong backstory, which informs his ideation stages.



## Artist insight

# GRASP THE BASICS OF FIGURATIVE ART

Anatomy, gesture and line quality are key aspects of figure drawing.

**Joshua Black**'s advice will enhance your character work

### Artist PROFILE

**Joshua Black**  
LOCATION: US

Joshua's been part of the video game industry for almost 18 years and is currently working at indie studio Stoke Games as a senior concept artist. He also teaches figure drawing and human anatomy online.  
<http://bit.ly/3VE9oeU>



The artwork on this month's cover is an example of one of the studies and sketches I do every morning

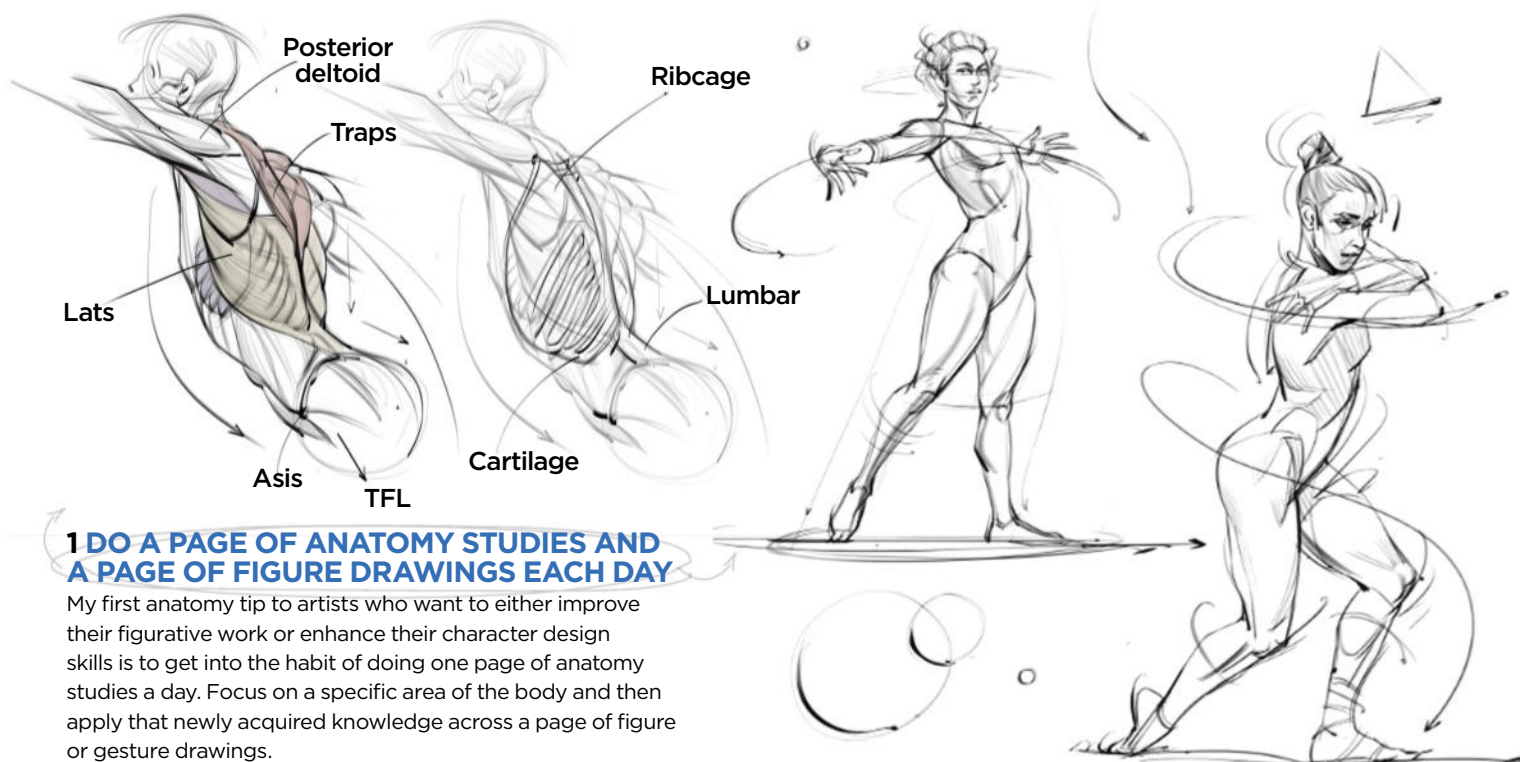
I do every morning to better myself as an artist. I drew this figure with the goal of working on my values and lighting.

I enjoy going back and forth between doing colour and black and white portraits. Both hone different sensibilities. If you're just starting out with painting, I advise working with black and white first, which will help

you learn how to organise your values, understand the basics of lighting and get you comfortable with working with paint before adding the complexity of colour.

Having a specific skill set in mind that you're keen to focus on with your studies will go a long way in speeding up your learning and help you get more out of it. Many artists will just randomly pick something to paint or draw, without any thought on what skill or concept they want to gain a better understanding of.

One of the greatest hurdles for me as a young artist was knowing what to study and how to study. I strongly believe in the power of daily goals and in their ability to build up your skills and mold the artist that you want to become. With that in mind, I've put together these 10 tips to act as a guide on how to approach your daily art goals and to hopefully get rid of some of the damaging preconceived notions I had, which held me back when starting out on my art journey.



### 1 DO A PAGE OF ANATOMY STUDIES AND A PAGE OF FIGURE DRAWINGS EACH DAY

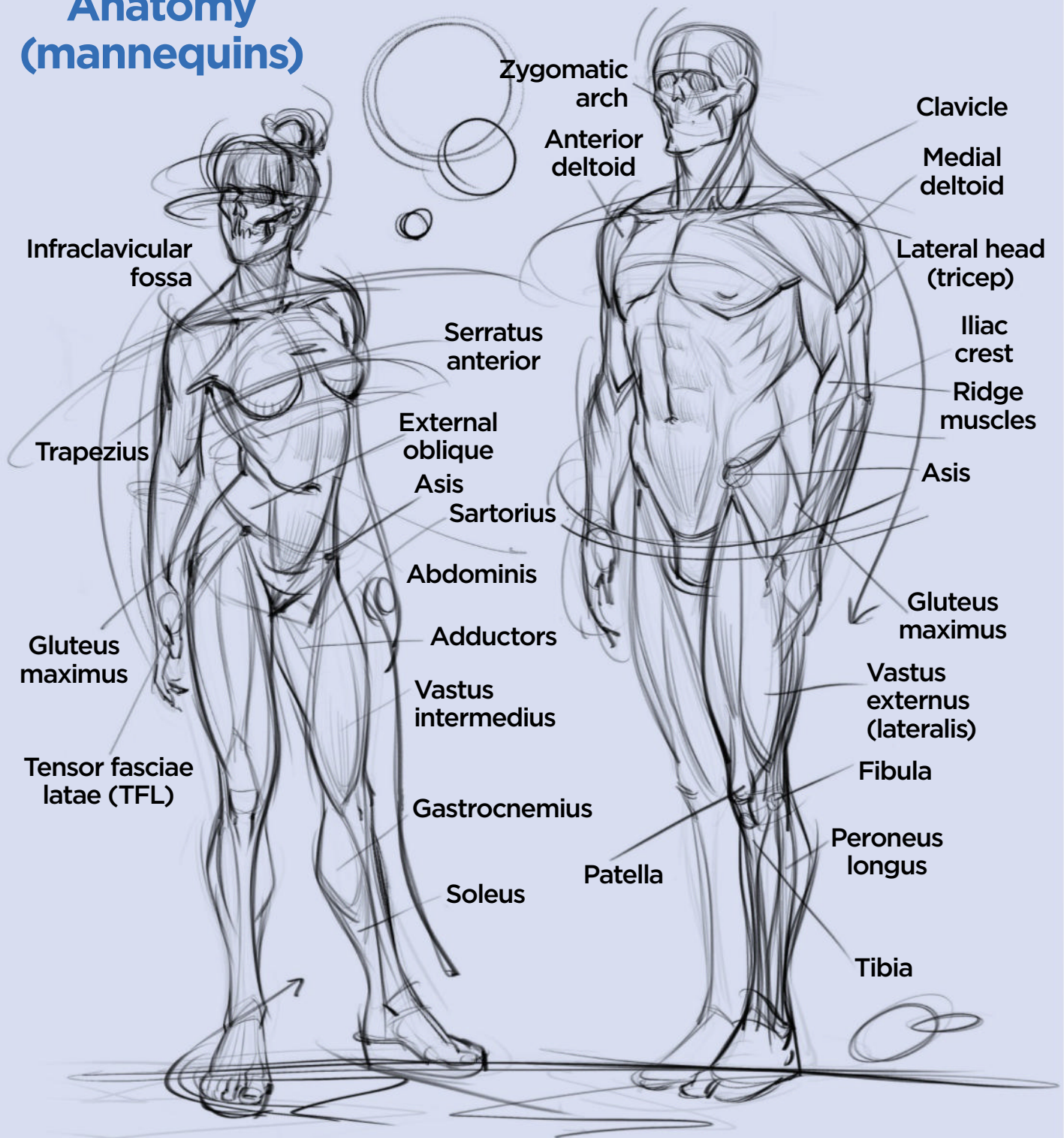
My first anatomy tip to artists who want to either improve their figurative work or enhance their character design skills is to get into the habit of doing one page of anatomy studies a day. Focus on a specific area of the body and then apply that newly acquired knowledge across a page of figure or gesture drawings.

This is the equivalent of professional athletes supplementing their training and athletic performance with daily weight lifting, stretching and cardio. You got to make it a habit. The first few weeks will seem gruelling, but once you get over the first month of art training it will become more of a routine that you'll look forward to completing.

“Focus on a specific area of the body and then apply that knowledge across a page of figure or gesture drawings”



## Anatomy (mannequins)

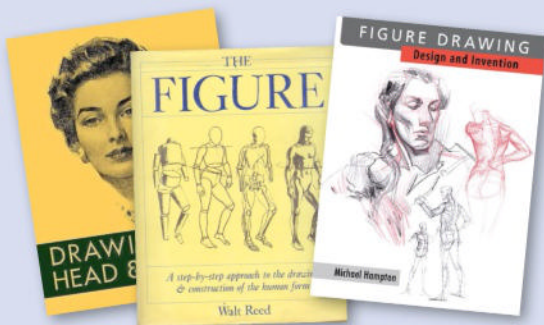


### 2 DRAW ONE PAGE FROM MEMORY

Another great exercise for internalising the anatomical knowledge that you learned from your studies from tip one is to do a page of sketches – redrawing what you drew from those studies, but this time without reference. This forces you to draw from memory. Through this

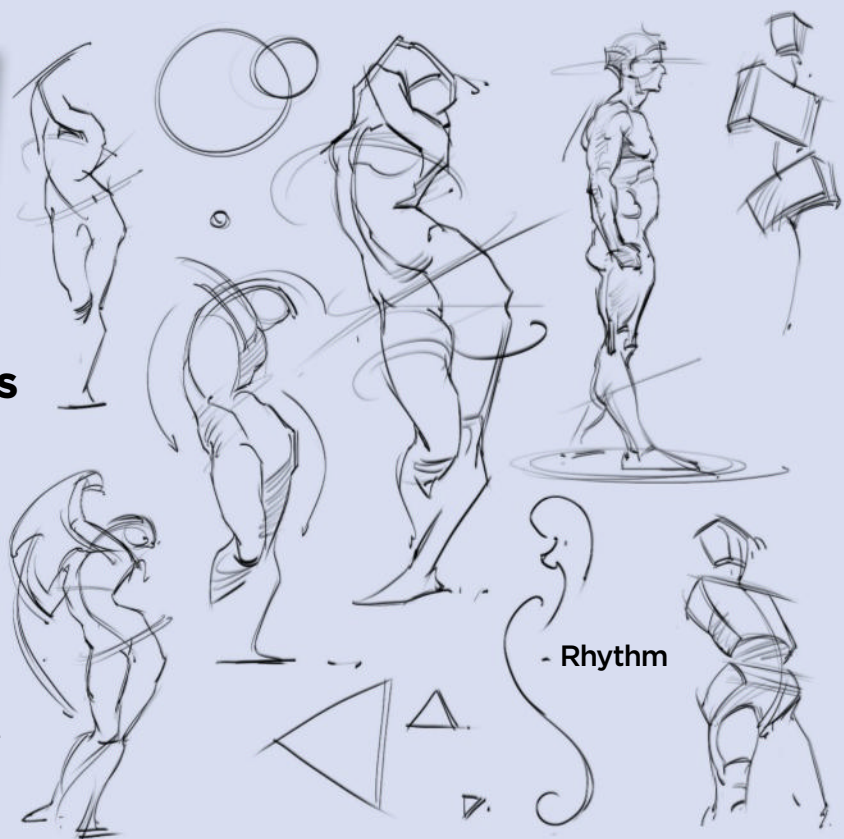
exercise, you'll increase your observation skills and it'll also help you focus more during your other exercises, knowing that you have to commit them to memory and redraw them in the future. This will come in useful when you're drawing out of your head or need to streamline work from reference. ➡





### 3 STUDYING FROM THE MASTERS

I recommend studying anatomy books from master artists both old and contemporary: Andrew Loomis, George Bridgman, Walt Reed and Michael Hampton to name but a few. Read the material first without copying the drawings – this will enable you to absorb their words and ideas. Once you’ve read the material, go back and copy the drawings while keeping in mind what was said by the artist. I made the mistake as a beginner to skip the text and go straight to the drawing. I think the combination of both will give you the best results.



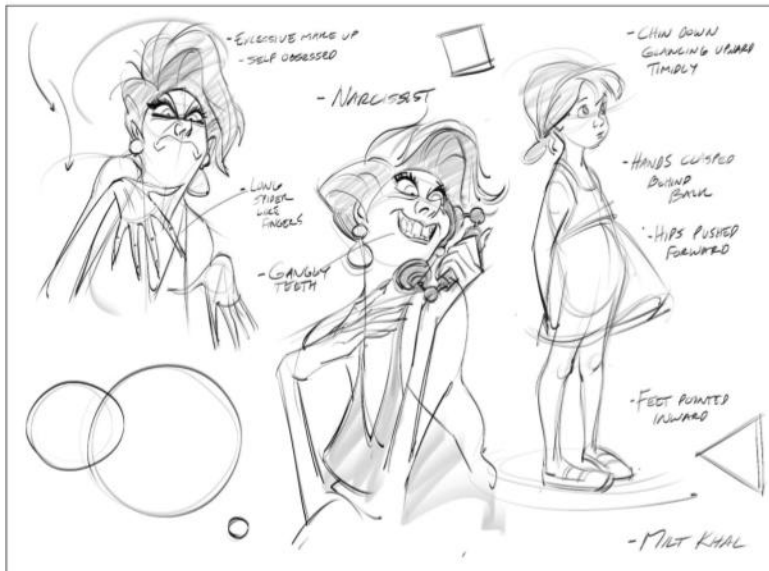
Getty Images/Kathrin Ziegler



### 4 KEEP A SKETCH BOOK

Carry a sketch book with you and draw from observation. This is an extremely helpful exercise that will inform your work with reference from the real world. So many artists today refer to the same images online, and lose the magic that comes from studying the world around us. It will help you create a more unique and personal touch to your art. It's also a great way to increase that pencil mileage and to build up your mental library.

“It’s a great way to increase that pencil mileage and to build up your mental library”



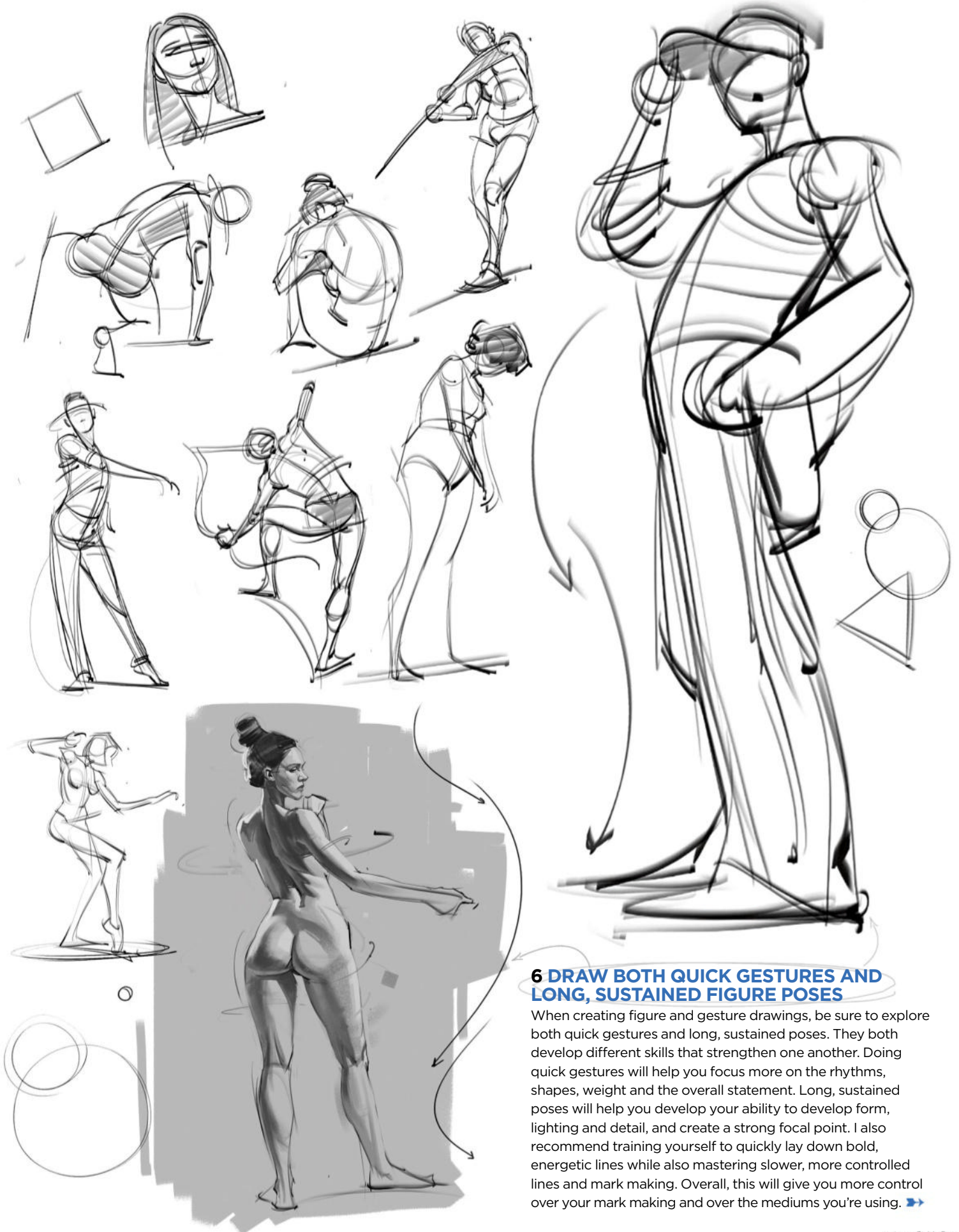
### 5 CARRY OUT STUDIES AND COPIES OF ARTISTS' WORK THAT YOU LIKE

This was something that I wish I'd known when I was starting out. Don't hesitate to copy and learn from other artists, especially paintings that you get excited and want to emulate.

I started my art career in the fine arts and unfortunately that gave me

a false sense of guilt when I copied other artists' work with the hopes of learning and getting better. All artists learn from what others have done in the past, similar to how we learn to speak from our parents. We have art parents that help us to learn how to communicate with shape, colour, line, composition and value. What is important is what we have to say with those words and elements.





## 6 DRAW BOTH QUICK GESTURES AND LONG, SUSTAINED FIGURE POSES

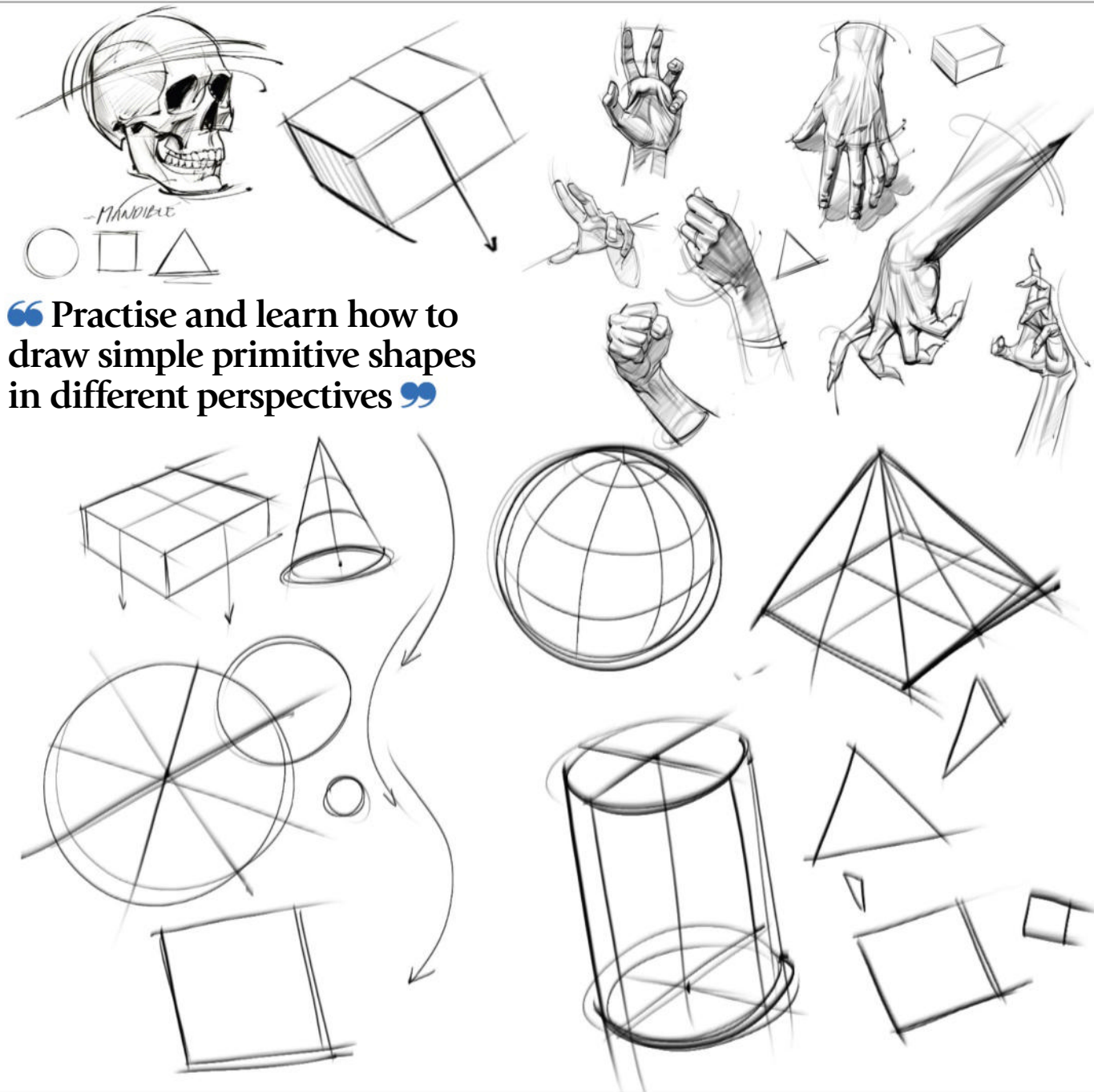
When creating figure and gesture drawings, be sure to explore both quick gestures and long, sustained poses. They both develop different skills that strengthen one another. Doing quick gestures will help you focus more on the rhythms, shapes, weight and the overall statement. Long, sustained poses will help you develop your ability to develop form, lighting and detail, and create a strong focal point. I also recommend training yourself to quickly lay down bold, energetic lines while also mastering slower, more controlled lines and mark making. Overall, this will give you more control over your mark making and over the mediums you're using. ➡➡



## 7 DON'T FEAR MAKING MISTAKES

One of the most important tips I can give to beginner artists, and artists in general, would be to not demand perfection from every drawing and painting that you do. Don't let that fear of messing up slow down your ability to learn and

improve. In addition, don't wait for the perfect reference image or subject matter to give yourself an excuse to draw. Find something that you have an interest in or something you're keen to learn more about – then draw it! Pencil mileage goes a long way towards improvement.



“ Practise and learn how to draw simple primitive shapes in different perspectives ”

## 8 PRACTISE DRAWING FUNDAMENTAL SHAPES AND FORMS PRESENT IN ANATOMY ART

This is a suggestion you've most likely heard from other artists and teachers. Practise and learn how to draw primitive shapes and forms, such as cylinders, cubes, cones, circles, ellipses, triangles and squares. Drawing pages and pages of these shapes in different perspectives is

not only a great way to warm up, it also helps train your hand-eye coordination and helps beginners transition from visualising their drawing surface as a flat, 2D face to thinking three-dimensionally. It will also help you to draw through the form, meaning you're not just limiting yourself to drawing the contours, because you can imagine the basic 3D shapes that make up an object.





## 9 WHEN IN DOUBT, DRAW

Try to get as much pencil mileage in as you can. Remember that the artists you're competing with are professionals. They have jobs that require them to design, draw and paint every day, for at least eight hours each day. Hopefully, you have enough love and passion for drawing that this amount of time sounds exciting to you!



## 10 REMEMBER TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Don't neglect your mental and physical health. Set aside some time for exercise – whether that's lifting weights, jumping on your bike, going outside for a walk or doing whatever physically engaging activity you find yourself enjoying. Doing that often will help you maintain the physical energy you need to be a successful artist, and will prevent burnout too.

Finally, find the time to socialise with friends and family. We are social creatures and that will help you to keep your sanity. ●



## Technique focus

# DEFINE YOUR COMPOSITION WITH COLOUR

**Germán Reina** creates detailed isometric art to help celebrate Supercell's 15th year



"Mobile developer Supercell asked me to create an illustration to celebrate its 15th anniversary. The brief was to capture five games, 15 years and countless screaming barbarians. I was given total freedom except for one rule: I had to create the artwork using its IPs in my art style.

I was already a fan of Supercell's games, so my goal was to showcase the craziness of the developer's worlds in a playful, funny way, using its sense of humour. For this piece I wanted the viewer to travel through the artwork, discovering little stories along the way – just like you would in Supercell's games – all while enjoying the characters it's created over the years."



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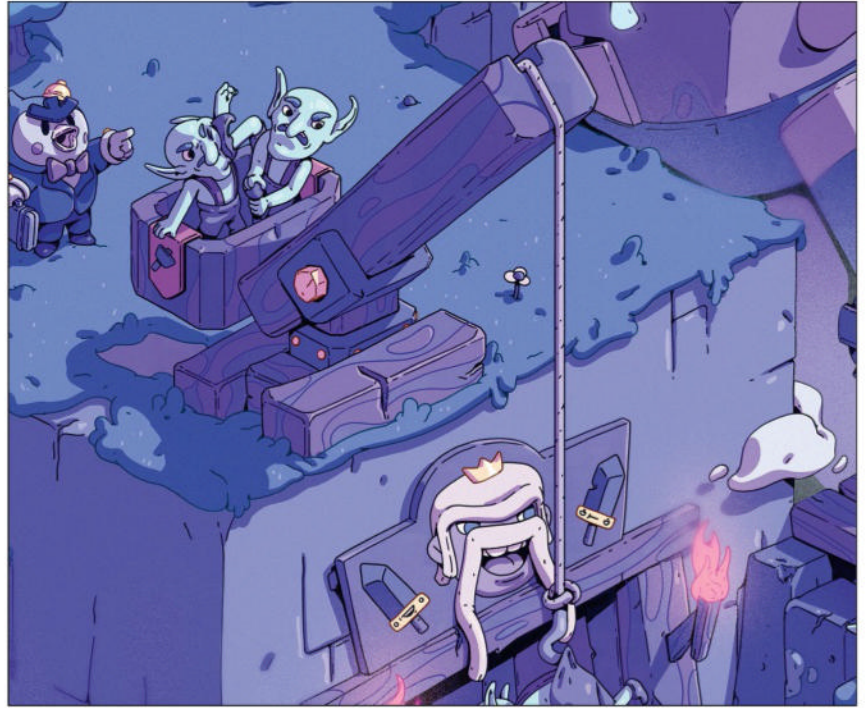
GERMÁN REINA

## Artist PROFILE

**Germán Reina**  
LOCATION: Spain

Germán is an artist in the videogame industry, with notable projects including OlliOlli World. He's working on Clash of Clans and passing on his creative insights in his Art Discipline newsletter. [www.germanreina.com](http://www.germanreina.com)





How I create...

## CHARACTER-FILLED ART WITH CLARITY



### 1 Lay down a sketch

I focus on the aspect that has the most impact on the viewer and will be the fundamental for the artwork: composition. The answer is in front of me: go isometric. This mirrors the POV of Supercell's games, enables me to build up multiple tiny scenes and prevents any visual hierarchy among the different IPs. It also gives me a visual framework to start assembling the world.



### 2 Refine the line art

This stage requires patience and a lot of references in order to build up the line work of different characters and props from the developer's games. The process here consists of drawing over my sketch in Photoshop. What's crucial is making sure that the poses and proportions of the characters look good. The isometric view helps with the scale of the different parts.



### 3 A colouring nightmare!

I use flat, cool-toned colours with warm accents to block zones and set the mood. By focusing on clarity, colour helps bring the composition together and creates the feeling I want to express. A shadow pass using a Multiply layer and a mask makes the process quick and editable. I then apply different effects like glows, highlights and depth tricks to make the image feel alive.



## Artist insight USE LIGHT & SHADE TO BEST EFFECT

Renowned illustrator **Chris Legaspi** reveals how he establishes the composition and brings his figurative art to life using light and shadow

### Artist PROFILE

**Chris Legaspi**  
LOCATION: US

Chris is a poster artist for Hollywood films, author and NMA instructor. He's obsessed with the figure, and wants to restore beauty in the world.  
[www.drawwithchris.com](http://www.drawwithchris.com)

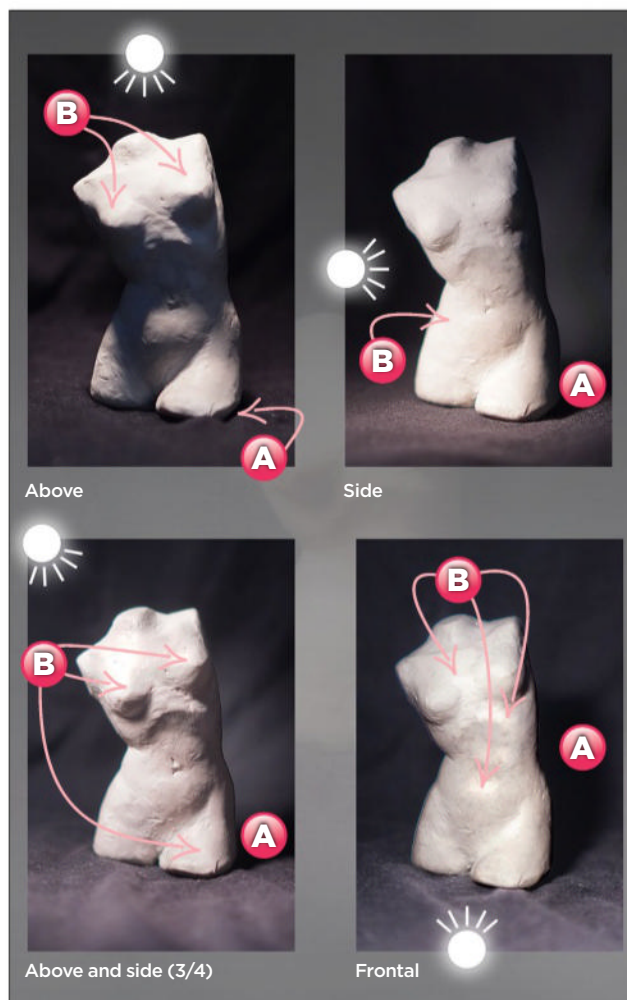


Designing with light and shadow is one of the most powerful tools I use to bring my figures to life. It's more than just copying what I see. I use light and shadow to shape the form, guide the viewer's eye, and create mood and feeling. When used with purpose, light and shadow also help design the composition by

adding structure, movement and clarity to the drawing.

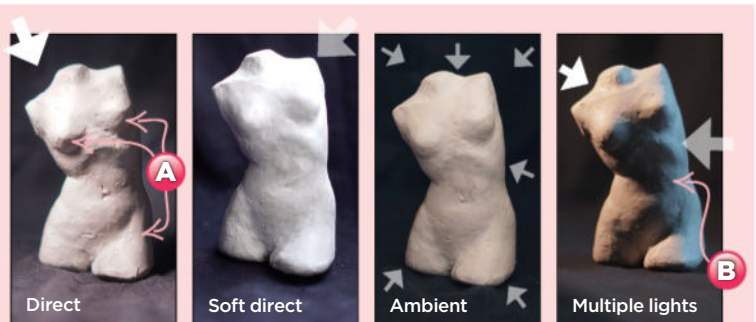
There are two aspects to the process of designing light. First, I take a moment to observe quietly and with purpose. I look at the light, the pose, the background and anything else that sparks an idea or inspires me. Then, once I have a clear picture in my mind, I move on to the next phase: crafting and shading.

Shading is not just about copying values. It's about showing form, leading the eye and telling a story. Whether I'm drawing from life, a photo or imagination, I'm always thinking about how my values, shapes and shading techniques support the figure and the message I want to share. Here, I'll show some of my favourite ways to design with light and build a strong, powerful image.



### 1 WHERE IS THE LIGHT?

The first step in my observation process is to simply observe the light. The more I know and understand about the light, the more clarity I'll have when designing the drawing. Understanding the light will also make the shading process smoother and more efficient. The first observation I make is the location of the light. This answers the question: Where is the light? The most common locations are above, side or in front. Looking for clues such as cast shadows (A) and highlights (B) help me to accurately define the light.

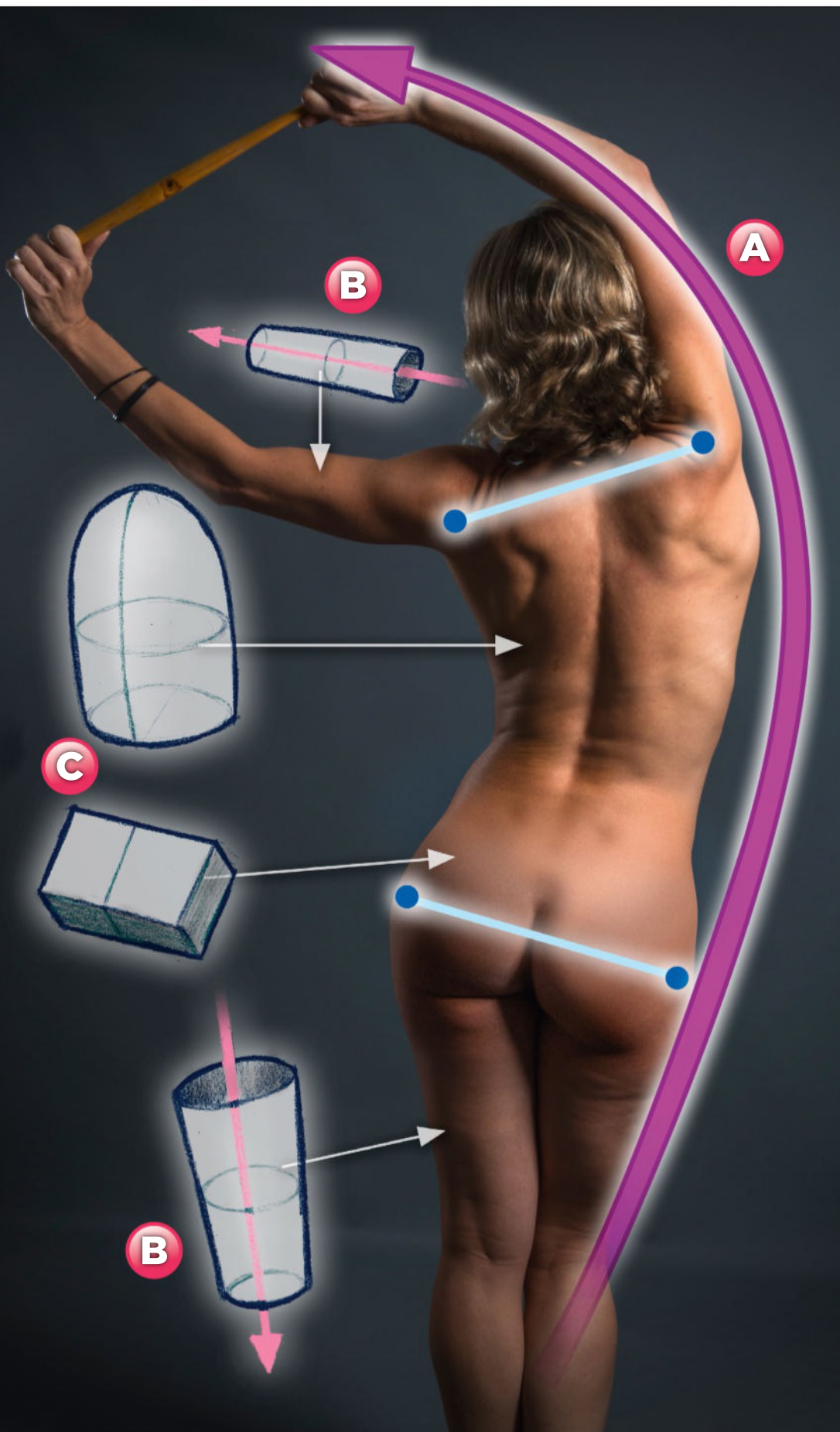


### 2 WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE LIGHT?

Once I identify the location of the light, I then observe and evaluate the nature of the light. This answers the question: What kind of light is it? Different light sources create different and unique looks, so the nature of the light will affect how I design the final drawing.

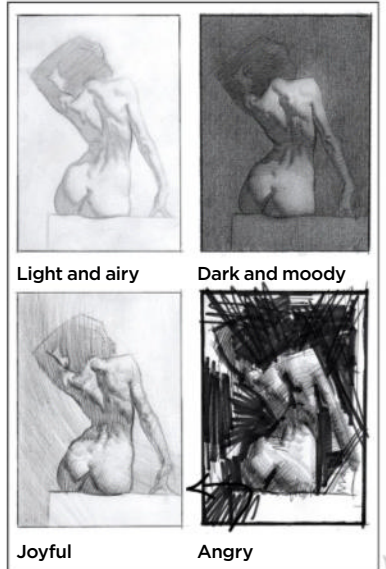
Some common types of light are direct, soft and diffused, ambient, and multiple lights. To help me identify the light's nature, I look for the shadow shapes (A), contrast and even colour (B).





### 3 UNDERSTANDING THE POSE

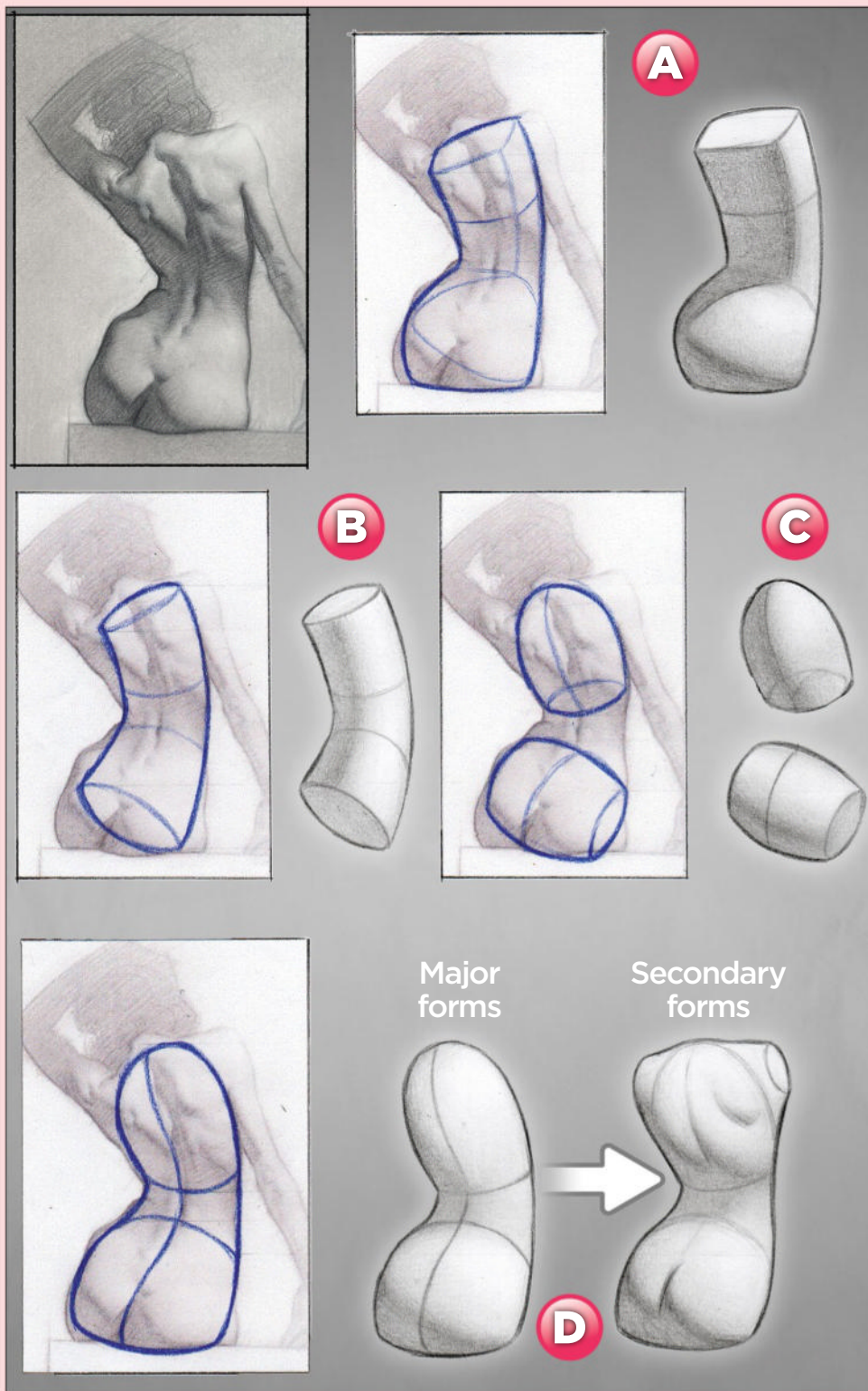
Next, I observe the model and their pose. The question in my mind is: What is the model doing? Answering this question helps me to define the gesture, movement and crucially the primary action of the pose, which becomes the foundation of my design (**A**). Next, I look for key landmarks and forms. First, I define the shoulder line and hip line, then the action and position of the limbs (**B**). Finally, I define the position of the body's forms in 3D space, especially big forms like the ribcage and hips (**C**).



### 4 CONSIDER WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY

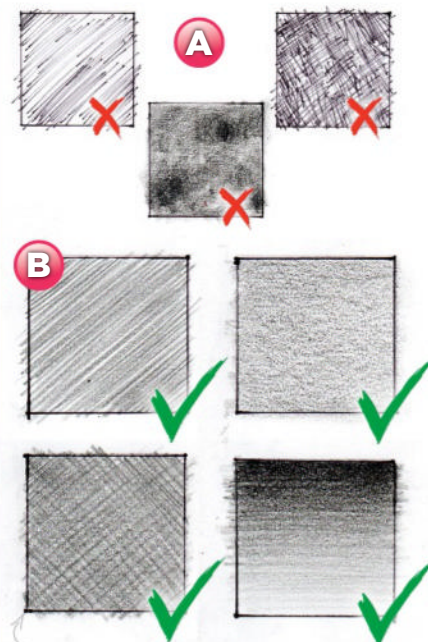
Light and shadow is more than just 3D form and shading techniques. It's a way to tell a story or convey something meaningful. One question I ask myself is: What do I want to say? Imagining and defining a story helps me make decisions during the shading and finishing process. To work out story ideas, I create multiple composition thumbnails, which helps me to quickly iterate, refine and test various compositions, lighting, atmosphere and mood. ➡➡





## 5 SIMPLIFYING FORMS AND TONE WASHES

To create the illusion of realism, I focus on first describing form. I train my eye to see the simple, major forms of the figure (A). Then, when I start to apply tone and shading, I use large washes and soft, gradient-style marks. I apply this tone as if I were shading very simple, geometric forms such as cylinders (B) and eggs (C). Once I have these major forms established, I can easily add secondary forms, and smaller shapes and details (D) while maintaining a solid, believable structure.



## 6 PERFECT TONE MASSES WITH QUALITY MARKS

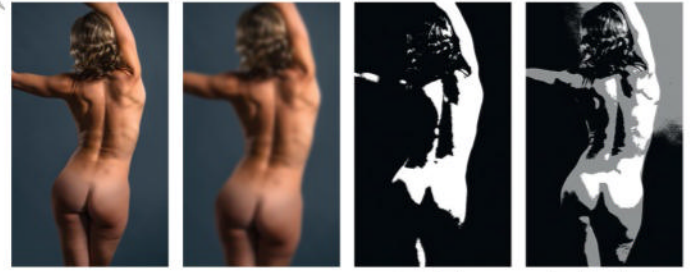
One way to easily ruin a drawing is to make careless, ugly, low-quality 'spotty' marks and tones (A). Conversely, one way to dramatically improve a drawing with very little effort is to create high-quality marks, lines and tones. To improve my marks and tones, I practise filling boxes with various strokes, hatching techniques and gradients. I practise until my tone boxes are clean and smooth (B). Comparing the two sets of marks, it's easy to see which is more attractive, pleasing and will add to the quality of the drawing rather than detracting from it.





## 7 SIMPLIFYING AND LIMITED VALUES

To help me control values, I first observe the pose and the light. Squinting helps me to see less colour and detail information, and more of the value information. The goal here is to simplify the values into two- or three-value shapes and masses. To start the drawing, I begin with a simple two-value design (A). Next, to achieve more form and realism, I add the half-tones to create a three-value design (B). Three values are enough for me to suggest form, especially when I simplify the forms into geometric volumes such as boxes, cylinders and spheres (C). ➔



Squinting



A



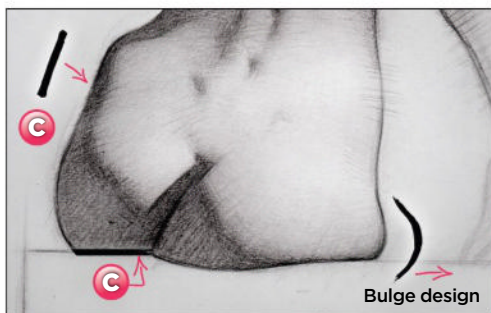
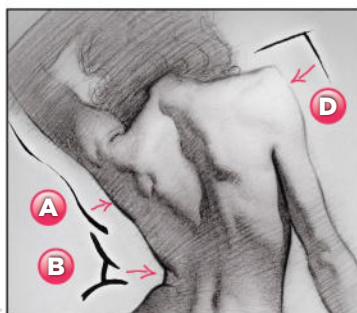
B

C



“The goal here is to simplify the values into two- or three-value shapes and masses”

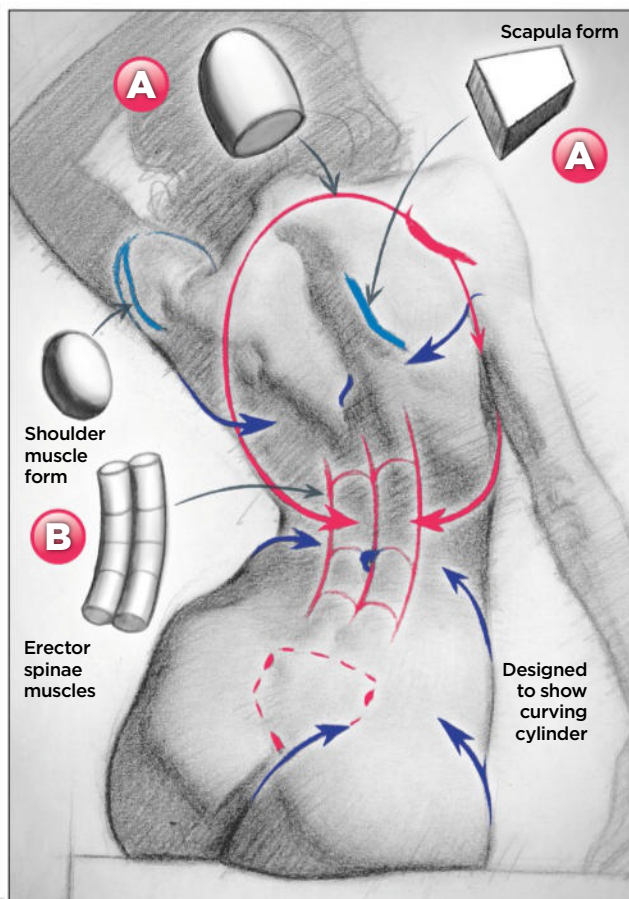




“Contour design can also define intersecting areas and suggest weight”

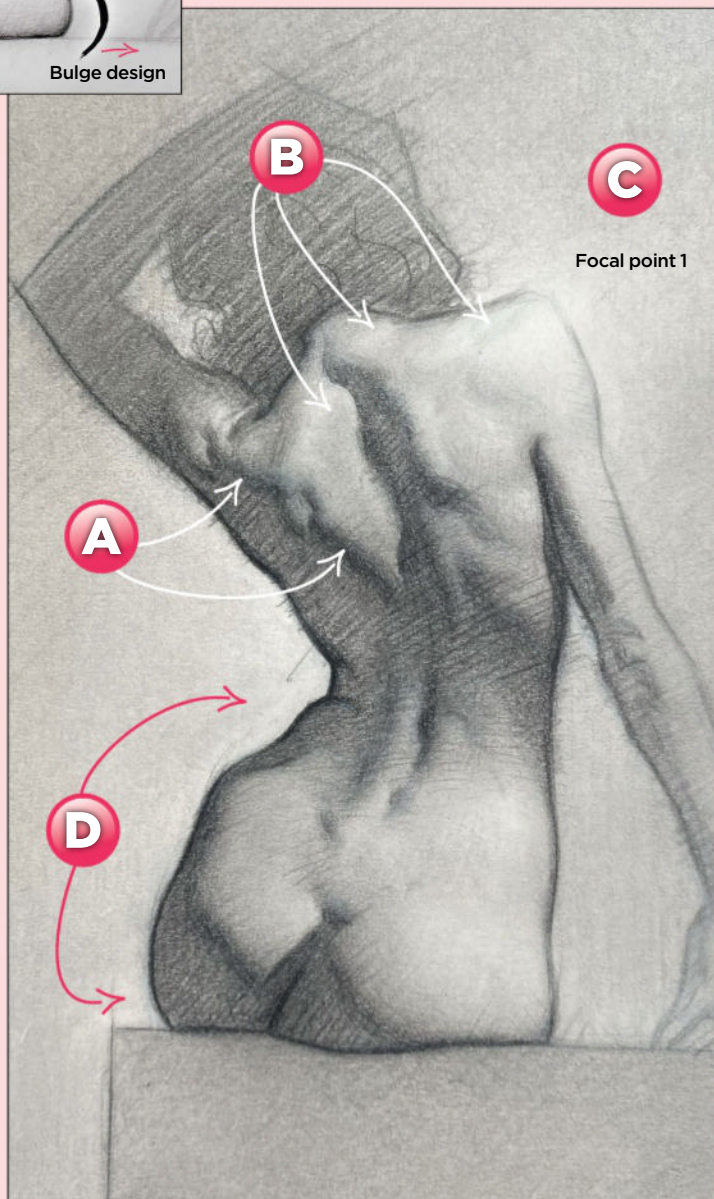
## 8 DESIGNING THE CONTOUR

Although shading and a 3D-looking form are my goals, one of my favourite tools to create the look of realistic figure and form is with the contour. I use simple contour design techniques such as thick or thin (A) and dark accents (B) to suggest light and shadow. Subtle straights (C) and corners (D) create contrast and suggest harder parts of the body (bone or muscle). Contour design can also define intersecting areas and suggest weight, such as when the model is seated or in contact with a surface.



## 9 DON'T COPY DETAILS - DESIGN INSTEAD

When drawing a pose with beautiful light and shadow, it's easy to fall into the habit of 'see-copy' - blindly copying details without design or intention. To help me properly design a realistic drawing I focus on describing simple, geometric forms. For example, I shade the upper body with egg-like and boxy forms (A). With simple cylinder forms I can communicate both the large masses of the torso, and secondary muscles and forms (B). Along with shading and tone, I emphasise contour lines that both lead the eye and reinforce the feeling of 3D form.



## 10 CONTROLLING CONTRAST FOR THE WIN!

To make the drawing feel both finished and 'real', I thoughtfully and carefully design and control the contrast. For example, I direct the contrast of core shadows (A) to help emphasise light and shadow. Controlling the value and contrast in the highlights (B) helps to define form, set the direction of the light and create a sense of atmosphere.

To really make a drawing feel 'finished' I introduce a lot of contrast in key areas, especially around focal point areas (C) and parts of the background (D). This also suggests depth, atmosphere and develops a dynamic eye flow. ●



## Industry-first Pen Display with Calman Ready Built-in

Xencelabs Pen Display 24+



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at [xencelabs.com](https://xencelabs.com)



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## Technique focus

# DEVELOP A NEW PAINTING STYLE

**Alexander “Minze” Thümler** develops a fresh workflow for his upcoming graphic novel project



“This piece is an experiment – I wanted to explore an art style for my graphic novel.

I started with a thumbnail sketch to capture the idea and quickly establish the composition and lighting. After refining the drawing and blocking in local colours, I added cast shadows

and ambient occlusion on Multiply layers. For the light areas, I used Color layers and Adjustment curves, separating them from the shadows with masks. Additional Normal layers enabled me to paint reflections on metal, skin and other surfaces, as well as indirect light in the shadows. To avoid time-consuming rendering, I decided to keep the line art.” ●



Artist  
**PROFILE**

**Alexander  
"Minze"  
Thümler**

LOCATION: Germany

After working as a concept artist and illustrator in the entertainment industry for several years, Alexander is now focusing on his own graphic novel.  
<http://bit.ly/482R9Hs>





Photoshop & Blender

# SKETCH AND PAINT A SCI-FI MARKET

**ZiYuan Wang** demonstrates his creative process when working up an environment concept for the video game industry





## Artist PROFILE

**ZiYuan Wang**  
LOCATION: China

ZiYuan Wang is a freelance concept artist and designer who's created assets for video game companies including Perfect World Games, Virtuos and Tencent Games.  
<http://bit.ly/4lRr06K>



There are many approaches an artist can take when painting concept art for the video game industry, but because it's artwork that will be used to create a commercial product there are certain aspects that need to be borne in mind. In this workshop I'm going to show you my process step-by-step, as I create an environment concept and break down my approach from a concept designer's perspective.

This tutorial will be of interest to those who want to create their own concept art, and especially for artists who aspire to break into the video game industry.

The aim of this workshop is to give you an insight into my thinking and methods as an concept artist, and explore my workflow for video game assignments. You'll see some steps that involve the free, open-source 3D tool Blender, which is widely used to create visuals in the gaming industry. It would be helpful if you have some

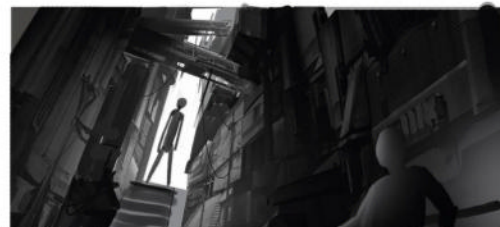
basic knowledge of Blender, because you'll understand more of my process. However, don't worry if you're new to Blender because this article is going to show you my workflow rather than teach you how to use software. And if you're keen to learn, you can find plenty of Blender tutorials on YouTube.

One final point: it's okay if you're unfamiliar or not keen on the sci-fi theme, because I use most of the processes mentioned in this article to tackle other subjects, too.



## KEYWORDS

**Sci-fi**  
**Dangerous**  
**Post-apocalyptic**  
**Lively**  
**Chaotic**  
**Narrative**  
**Black market**



### 1 Set an design objective

For this workshop I want to depict a market in a post-apocalyptic sci-fi setting. It needs to have a lively atmosphere and a little bit of chaos and danger, too. I'll always give myself a list of prompts before I start a painting. I believe it's very useful – especially if you're self-teaching – because it provides an entry point and you can refer back to the list if you're unsure where next to take your artwork.

### 2 Conduct research with purpose

This key step will help you generate a loose image in your head and set the tone of the concept. You'll find plenty of inspiration using Google Images, Pinterest, YouTube and more, but stay focused and do your research with purpose – otherwise you may get lost in it!

### 3 Make a reference board

Gather your images to create a reference board, which will be easy to check as your artwork progresses. If you're going to create a environment concept, the board should include information such as atmosphere, layout, natural environment and cultural elements. You don't need to track down every reference at once. Instead, just start sketching when you have some vague ideas, and add to your reference board along the way. I use PureRef ([www.pureref.com](http://www.pureref.com)) to create my reference board.

#### REFERENCE BOARD CATEGORIES

Plants

Terrain

Creatures

Cultural elements

Layout reference

Atmosphere

Colour reference

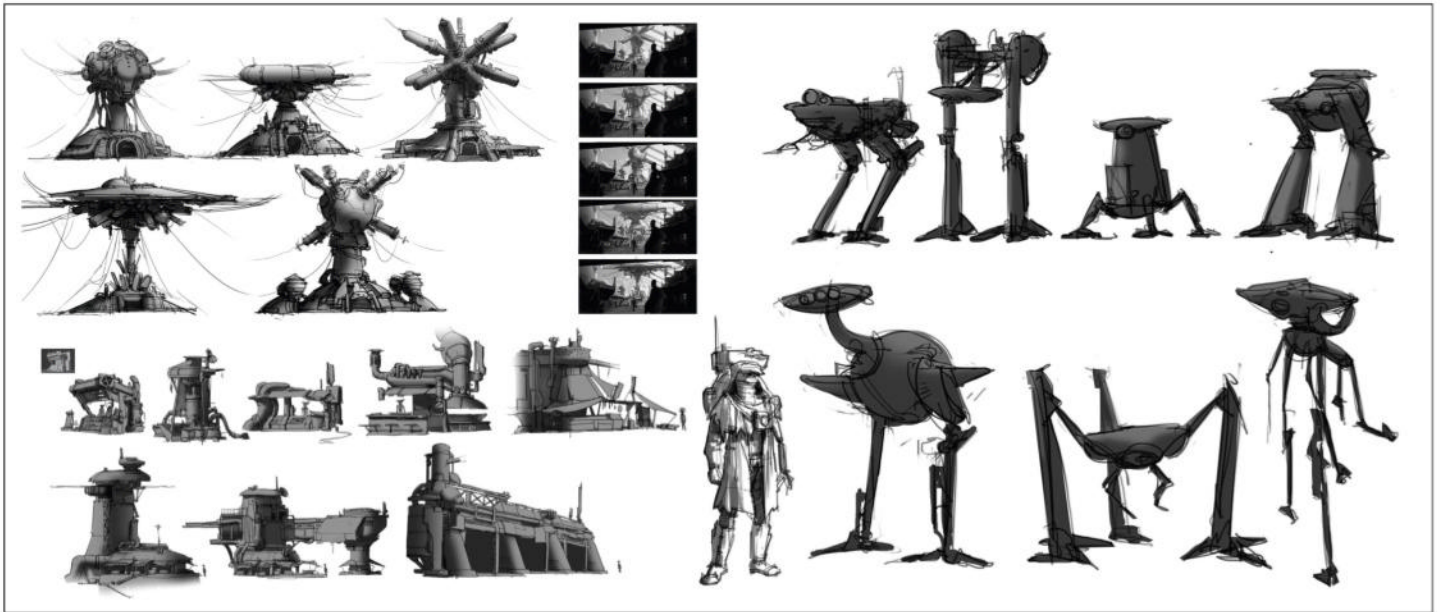


### 4 Try different solutions

I recommend visualising as many of your ideas as possible in the form of sketches, before deciding on a composition. It's good design practice and you can figure out what you want to depict during the process, especially if you're just starting to learn concept art. Taking this approach will give you the space to refine your design and can even lead to new ideas.







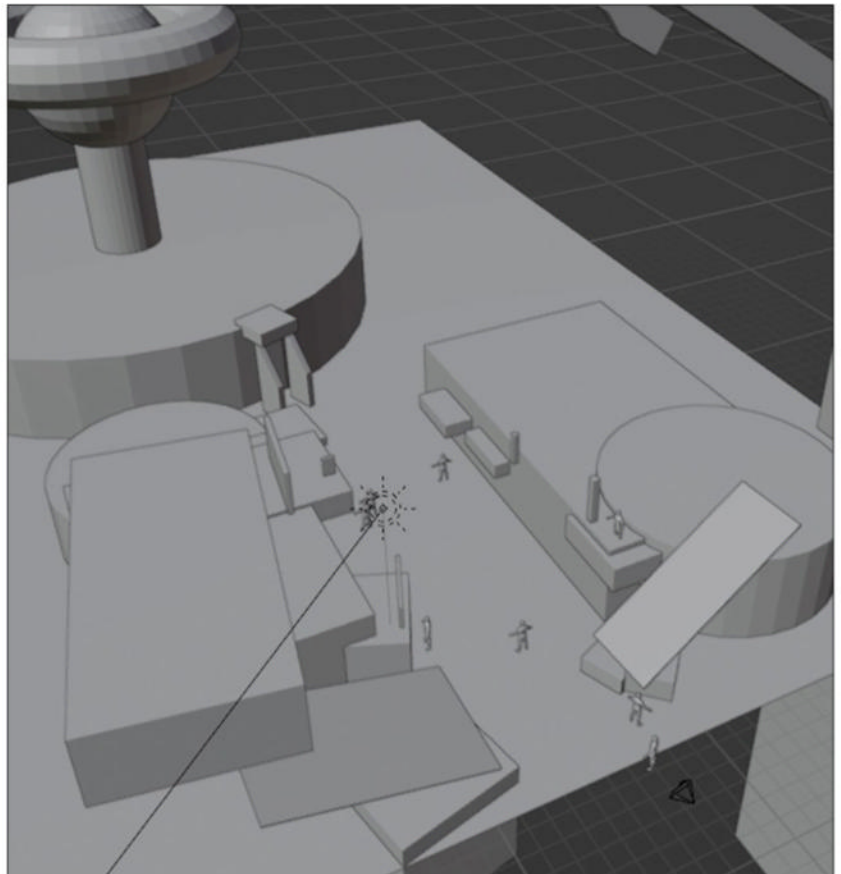
## 5 Let the design speak to its audience

I convey a lot of visual information by designing small elements in my composition. When creating environment concept art, you'll find that you need many such elements. They may include props, characters, layout details and so on. If you convey the right amount of authentic visual information through your design then your artwork will succeed in engaging its audience.



## 6 Check your progress

I now have the composition and sketch in place. Before I jump to the next step, I'll take a few minutes to check my work with a critical eye. Is the atmosphere right? Is this the best camera angle? Does it look as good as other artworks with similar themes? If it doesn't, why not? If you find something's not working, you can fix it before you go too far in the wrong direction.

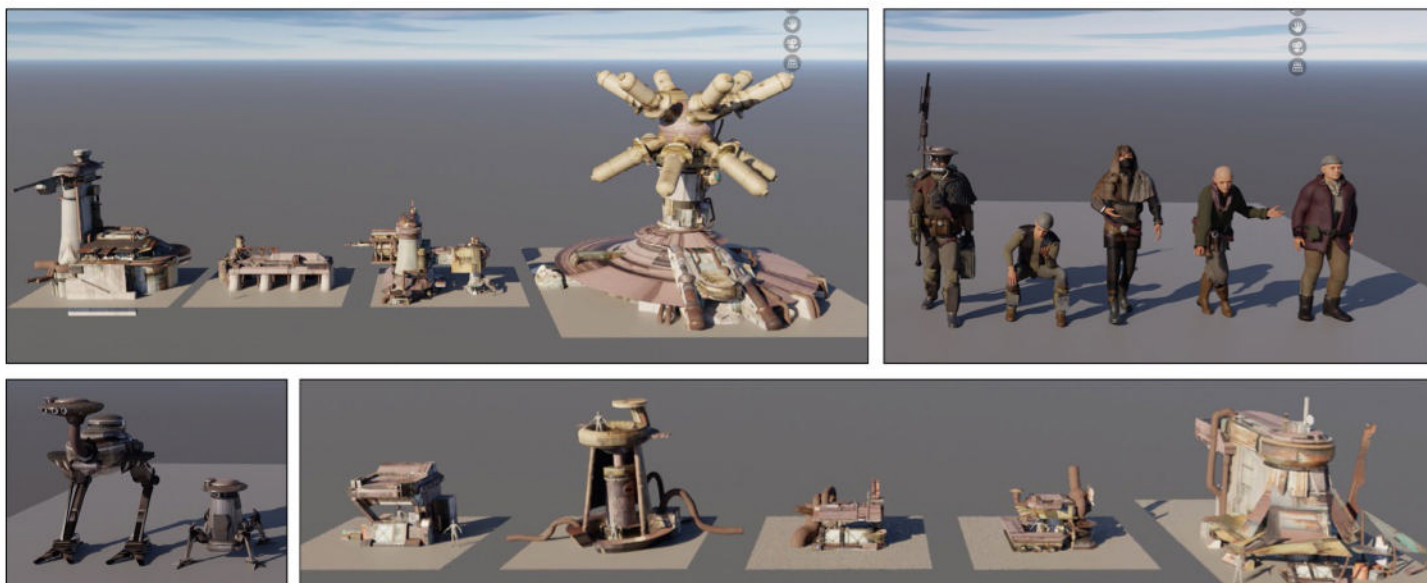


## 7 Verify the layout with basic shapes

I use simplified shapes to visualise the layout in Blender. It's a technique used by many video game designers who work on environment layouts and is an efficient way to check for flaws in the scene. It also enables you to assess the environment from the player's perspective and helps colleagues from different departments to understand your design if you're working in a video game company. ➡



# Workshops

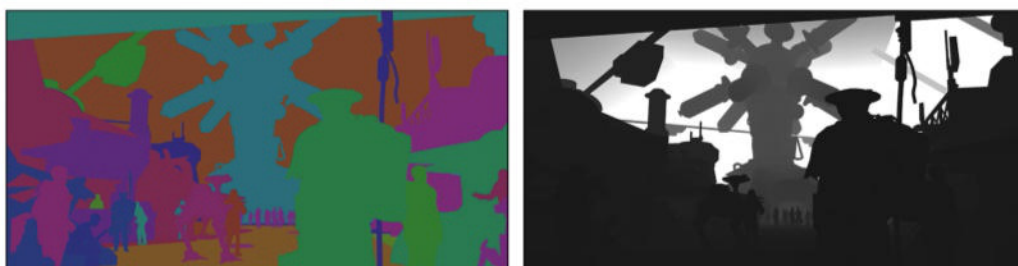
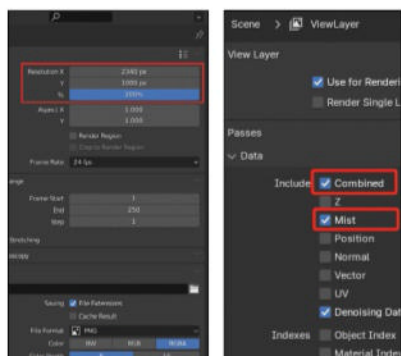
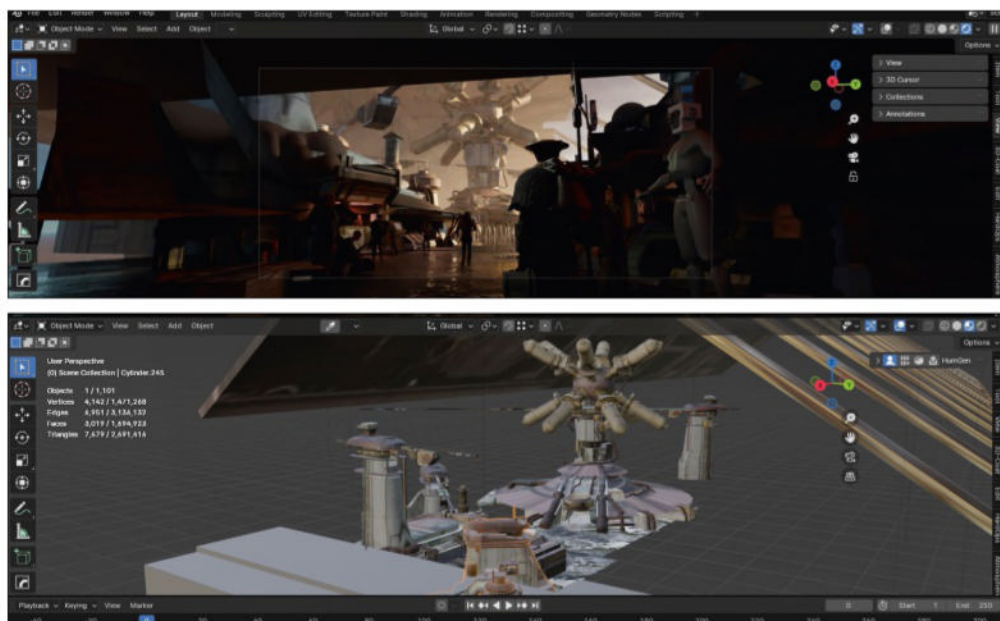


## 8 Plan your 3D assets

I create 3D assets based on what I've designed so far. Note that I wouldn't recreate everything in my composition as 3D models because that would take too much time – it's just concept art, after all. Focusing on the main objects of your concept is probably the best approach. I take these assets to a level of finish based on my experience and requirements; such assets can provide a clear silhouette and basic structural information. If you're well versed in 3D software and not constrained by time then feel free to make the assets more elaborate.

## 9 Place assets and light

I substitute the simplified shapes from step 7 with the assets I created in the previous step, and use Blender's default light to illuminate the scene. You may find that the loose composition sketch differs slightly from this tighter, 3D version, but this is acceptable and there may be an advantage in studying both versions for further ideas and possible areas of refinement. Since this is concept art, the goal here is not total accuracy, but rather an inspiring visual. Now is also a good opportunity to explore different camera angles and lighting schemes, since they are easy to adjust in 3D software.



## 10 Render out the scene

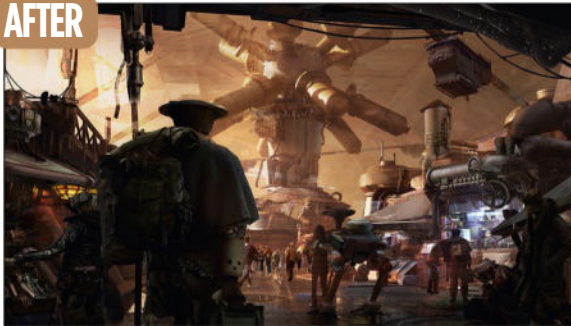
Here are my basic rendering settings in Blender. Among them, Z path is a useful layer that you can get by covering a simplified shape in the scene with a specific shader. It could add atmospheric perspective to create depth, and you can change the strength of it – even in Photoshop. Another tool I recommend is ID path. It differentiates areas by colours so you can easily isolate them with Photoshop's Selection tool.



**BEFORE**

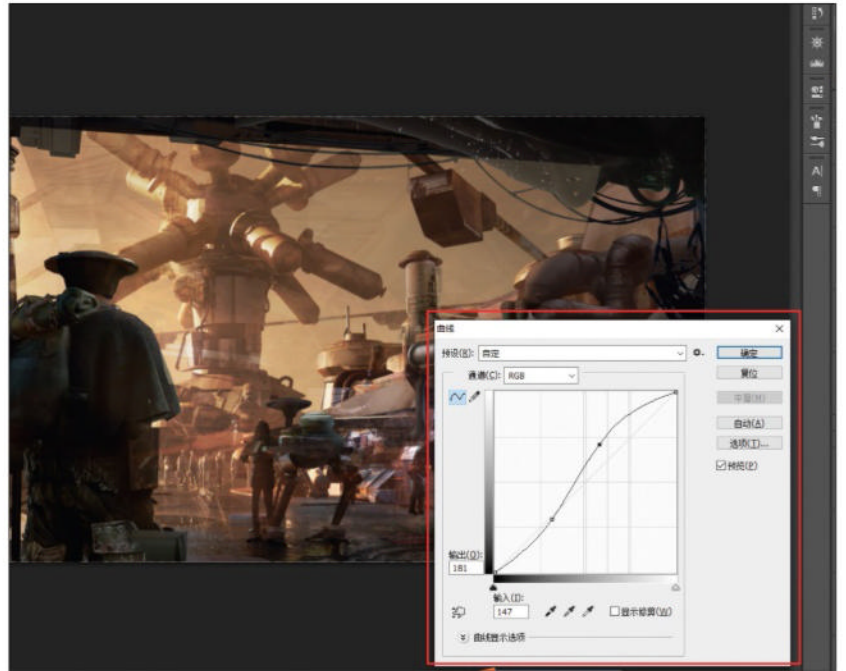


**AFTER**



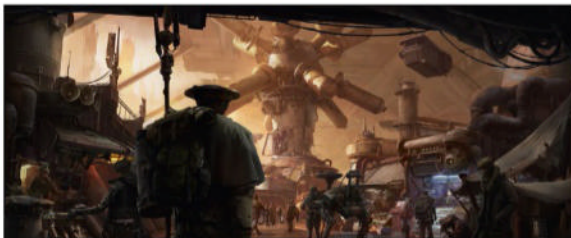
## 11 Build up a rich environment

I now have a rough rendering from Blender. It has some basic structures, but not enough. A 3D-rendered composition could omit a lot of detail and visual information, reducing its usefulness as concept art. I fix this through photobashing. This can quickly provide a huge of information, but it's fine if you want to use other techniques as long as you achieve the goal of the concept.



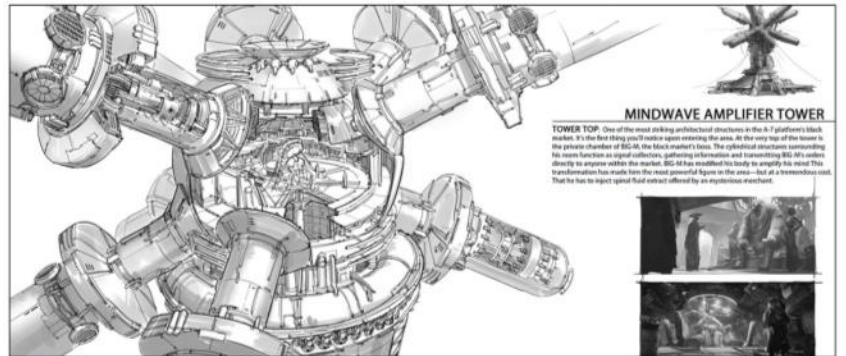
## 12 Adjust the value of layers

I divide the image into different layers based on its fore-, mid- and background views, and refine the values of them to make them look more natural and readable. I want to avoid some layers visually mixing so that the viewer can't immediately differentiate between them. I use Z path as the shade layer for a layer with pure colour (similar to the tone of the concept), put it on the top of all the other layers and then adjust atmospheric perspective by altering the curve of the Z path's shade layer. Again, it's not an essential step, but it can save time.



## 13 Elevate the scene to AAA level

After all those steps, I have a cool-looking artwork that conveys the atmosphere and a huge amount of information. But if I want to push it to a higher level – similar to an image from a AAA video game – there are still some thing I can do. For example, I add some texture to suggest there's a complex mechanical structure on the ceiling of the market. I adjust the position of some characters to make the visual rhythm more fluent. I also enhance the reflections in the puddles to make them look more realistic, and add pieces of garbage and rising steam to make the market scene feel more authentic.



## 14 Presenting the concept

Finally, I'll present my work to an audience. I prefer to keep the composition clean and tight, to avoid distracting from the most important thing: the concept itself. I put together a design breakdown to show my creative process, which is a good way to review the work to see if anything can be improved. I also draw some line art to show more details of my design – it's a great way to explain your work.



## Technique focus

# FIND THE STORY

**Moritz Cremer** gives his character concept a strong backstory, which informs his ideation stages

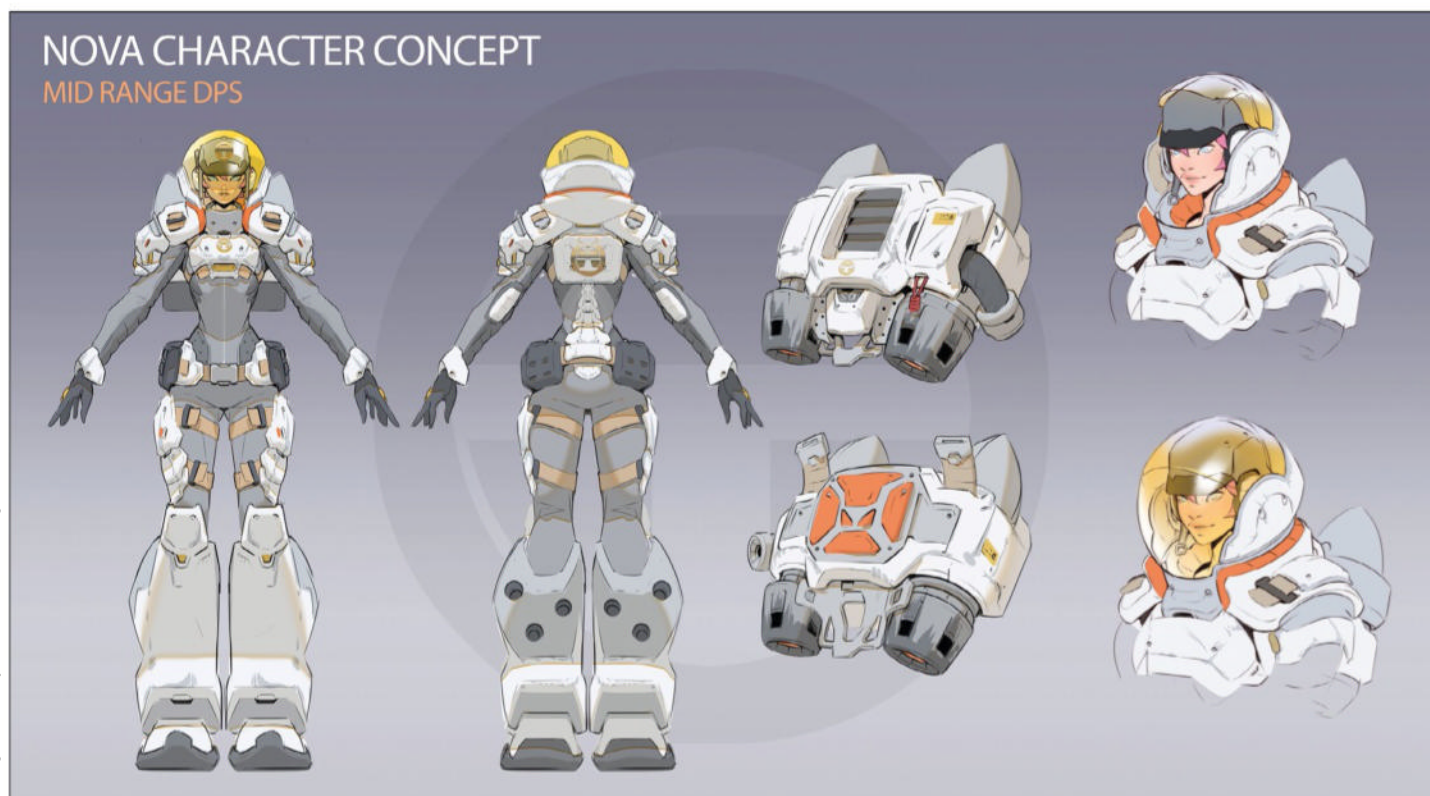


"Nova is a character who's part of a bigger personal project of mine and she was designed with the aim

of making her fit into this world. I started by sketching silhouette shapes to experiment with body proportions and shape languages that could communicate her

personality. The colour palette was inspired by astronaut suits, and I added a huge gun with a glowing element, which is a recurring theme in my work.

Starting with a strong backstory helped Nova's futuristic design to come together. It also guided my creative choices and made the character feel more alive."





## Artist PROFILE

**Moritz Cremer**

LOCATION: Germany

Moritz is a senior concept artist for video games who loves bringing imaginative worlds and characters to life through shape language.

<http://bit.ly/45aHmgL>



How I create...

## A WELL-DEFINED SCI-FI CONCEPT



### 1 Generate thumbnail sketches

Quick sketches enable me to explore shapes, poses and silhouettes without focusing on details. I play with proportions and experiment with silhouettes to capture Nova's features and personality. This stage helps me to narrow down the direction of the concept.



### 2 Put down clean line work

I refine my chosen thumbnail with line work that defines Nova's structure, details and tech. Here, I'm figuring out the shape language and the type of outfit she would wear. I pay attention to Nova's face and expression, since I don't want to end up with an awesome costume design worn by a character with no personality.



### 3 Adding lighting and material

Lighting emphasises differences in form and materials, such as the metal and fabric. A directional light source adds depth and good shape harmony. This helps to convey the 3D look of the figure, making them feel more grounded. I always try to make everything look as impactful as possible in this step.



# 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!



All images © Xencelabs

## Xencelabs Pen Display 24+

**DREAM SCREEN** Squaring up to Wacom on both price point and features, this is a pro-level tablet that delivers accurate colour and a tactile drawing experience

**Price** £1,850/\$1,899 **Company** Xencelabs **Web** [www.xencelabs.com](http://www.xencelabs.com)

**J**ust a few short years ago, Wacom dominated the market. Recently, however, new companies have emerged, challenging each other to create better products at more attractive prices. Xencelabs is one such competitor, and with the Xencelabs Pen Display 24+ is aiming squarely at the top-end user, promising some impressive features.

The packaging here is minimal, but boy, do they pack a lot into it. Not only do you get the pen display, with stand, but the Quick Keys remote and holder, US and UK power supplies, a lovely

case for the dual pens and spare nibs, a huge number of cables, a couple of pen clamps for the side of the display, and a large quick-start guide.

Setup was a breeze. Once the power and the USB-C cable were plugged in, it fired up straight away, as did the Quick Keys remote, which didn't require pairing or any other setup. It simply displayed a message to download the drivers. The tablet worked fine without the drivers, but it's best to install them, so you get full

Two pens are supplied, one with three buttons and a slimmer, two-button stylus. Both have eraser functionality.



access to features, such as the ability to map buttons to functions that can be done per software.

Build quality is generally very good. There are a few slightly brittle and cheaper-feeling plastics here and there, but it all feels robust and secure. There are slots on the top and side of the display where you can insert pen holders. These are preferable to the chunky screw-in thing on this author's Wacom Cintiq Pro 22.

The flip side of this is the stand. The Wacom's stand is smooth, infinitely adjustable and is generally built like a tank. The Xencelabs product feels





The larger bezel enables the Quick Keys remote to be attached and provides access to three touch-sensitive buttons.

The remote's OLED screen shows your customisation choices.



It's very easy to adjust the angle of the Pen Display 24+. There's no way to vary its height, though.

The protruding rubber feet on the front edge prevent slippage, but are an acquired taste.



The screen sits behind a laminated glass top that's covered by a very good antiglare coating. It's a 4K (3,840x2,160) display, and it runs at 60Hz, at 330cd/m2, which is bright and fast enough for most art and design needs. The Pen Display 24+ also has excellent colour accuracy, with 99% Adobe RGB, REC.709, and 93% DCI-P3 coverage. You also get Pantone and Skintone certification. This is good for any user expecting to see accurate colour, but vital for photo finishers and colourists.

On top of this, there's Calman Auto calibration, done via Calman's software, which gives you the very best colour accuracy, via software and the Studio 24+ firmware. If you work in colouring, animation, texture painting or other colour-critical fields then this is a very welcome addition.


## CALIBRATION ADVANTAGE

It's worth noting that some pen displays such as XPPen's Artist Pro 24 (Gen2) 4K are Calman verified. Xencelabs' device has Calman software built in, so it talks directly to Xencelabs, enabling automatic calibration of your pen display and keeping colour reproduction as accurate as possible.

Earlier we mentioned a preference for the standard pen, but for those who prefer a sleeker, slimmer one, it works just as well. Nib changes are identical, button layouts match too, and both are battery-free.

The actual drawing experience is very good. Whichever pen-nib combo you choose, the reaction to pressure is exceptional, with none of those odd start points or stroke tails you can get on some devices. Parallax is minimal, too. It feels as though you're drawing directly on the pixels, unlike some pen displays where there can be a visible gap between nib and 'paper'.

All the pressure curves, button layouts and so on are easy to adjust if your project leans toward needing a heavier or lighter hand. Just press the settings button up at the top right, and you can make swift changes without having to leave your creative program.

The Quick Keys remote holder can be slid around the edge of the screen, too. Keyboard-shortcut purists may dismiss this feature, but this author found himself using it more frequently: lowering it for some projects and pushing it up and out of the way at other times. Great design. 

**Rob Redman**

a little feeble in comparison. There's no height adjustment, either. That said, it still does a great job, with good variability from 16 to 72 degrees.

## CUSTOMISATION OPTIONS

The Quick Keys remote offers a lot of customisation, with clear labelling on the central OLED screen and a nice rotary encoder. The three illuminated circles at the top right of the main screen aren't physical buttons, but instead are touch sensitive and can be set to open or close various menus.

The pen case is very nice, with space for both the standard and slim pens. This writer's preference is the standard pen, but that's a force of habit, having used a similar-sized pen

for decades. Swapping to a felt nib was again a personal preference for a slightly more paperlike feel.

There's plenty of room on the front face of the Pen Display 24+, around the actual screen. Generally, we all seem to strive for minimal bezels on screens, but with a pen display, a larger bezel is desirable, as you aren't blocking parts of the screen while working. This also means there's room for the quick select buttons and the Quick Keys remote in its holder.

Interactions with the tablet were enjoyable and mishap-free. No button presses went unregistered and there was no lag in the pen. This might be in part due to the powerful computer used: a 2025 M4 MacBook Pro.

## VERDICT

If you're on the hunt for a new drawing tablet, preferring a larger screen and higher resolution, then you can't go wrong with Xencelabs' Pen Display 24+. The screen is a joy, the colour accuracy is great and, bar a couple of small niggles, the overall experience is very good. It may not be cheap, but it's also not as expensive as some of the competition, and is excellent value.

### Pros

- Great build quality
- Excellent colour accuracy
- Lovely drawing experience
- All cables and accessories supplied

### Cons

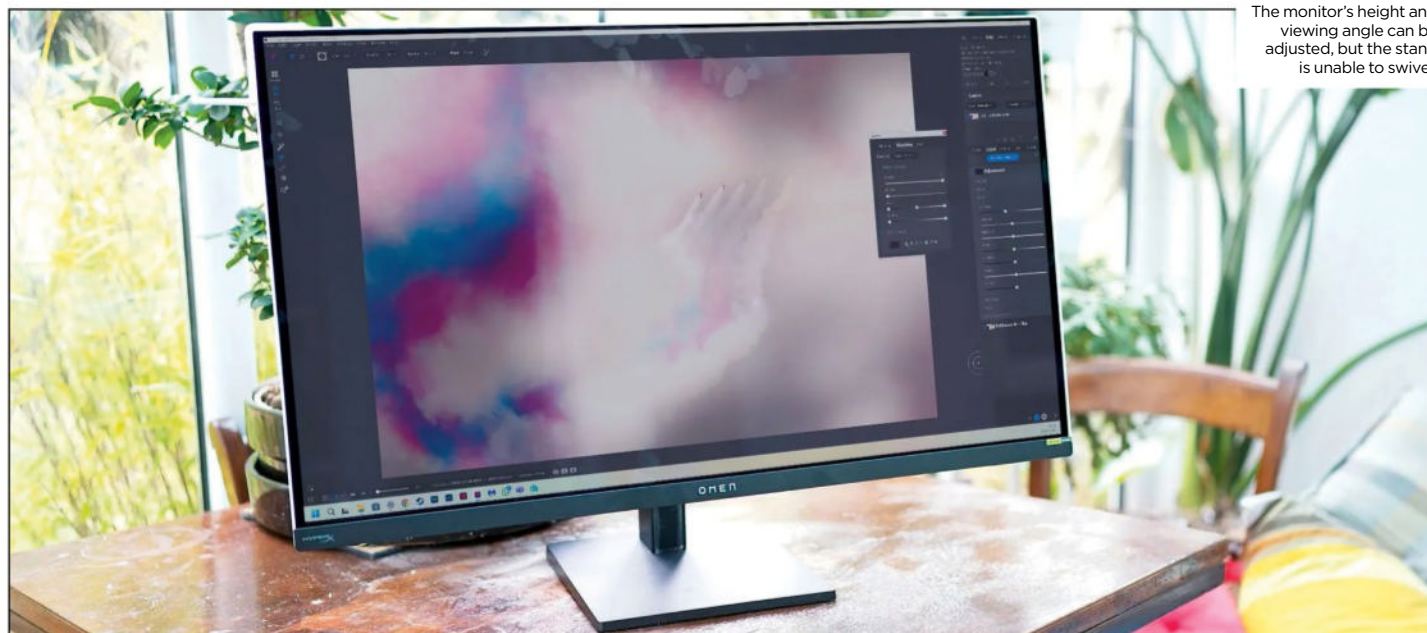
- The stand lacks some features

### Rating



“The drawing experience is very good. Whichever pen-nib combo you choose, the reaction to pressure is exceptional”





The monitor's height and viewing angle can be adjusted, but the stand is unable to swivel.

## HP Omen Transcend 32 OLED

**MULTI-PURPOSE SCREEN** HP's latest display positions itself as straddling the worlds of busy creatives and demanding gamers. Does it make the grade on both fronts?

**Price** £1,199/\$1,300 **Company** HP **Web** [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)

**LEDs make some of the best monitors for artists. And while many of the Transcend 32's features are aimed at gamers, that doesn't mean creatives can't benefit from them. The 240Hz refresh rate will produce the kind of smooth video playback anyone working with high frame rate video or scrubbing through footage shot with slow motion will appreciate.**

The USB-C hub is one of the screen's best features that doesn't relate to the screen itself. It comes with a Type-C port as well as three Type-A ones. The USB-C input runs at 10Gbps, so you'll be sharing that across the hub, but it's nice to have not only because the USB-C output provides 15W of power

itself, perfect for charging your phone. Alongside this, you get two HDMI and one DisplayPort input, so it's possible to share this monitor among computers, consoles and streaming sticks – handy if it's your only screen.

There is an impressive range of presets to be found on the Transcend 32's OSD, split into Professional and Gaming sections. The Pro section includes AdobeRGB, P3 and BT.709 as well as sRGB and an eco mode. You can adjust RGB values if you want to correct bias, and there's a selection of multiple-input picture-in-picture modes too. It displays 98 per cent of P3 in P3 mode, with 90 per cent of Adobe RGB and 100 per cent of sRGB. Switch to Adobe RGB mode

The HP Omen branding is pretty subtle from the front, while the back is mostly white with a black inset rectangle, and this has a light-up ring around it.



### VERDICT

The HP Omen Transcend 32 might be the best 32-inch 4K OLED monitor we've yet seen. Its combination of a colourful Samsung panel, excellent OSD, USB hub and plenty of inputs means it's ideally placed for creative studio use. The price isn't bad either, if you can get it on offer.

#### Pros

- OLED brightness and colours
- Handy USB hub
- 240Hz refresh rate

#### Cons

- Still a lot of money
- VESA mount tricky to access
- Power brick is more of a megolith

#### Rating

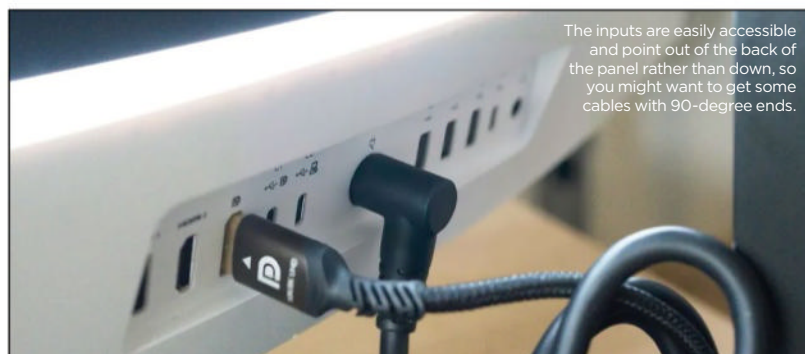
★★★★★

and you get 93 per cent Adobe, 90 per cent P3 and 100 per cent sRGB.

And being an OLED, it puts out the kind of colour saturation other screens can only dream of. We've seen an increase in the brightness of IPS and especially Mini-LED panels recently, but nothing's yet beating OLED when it comes to contrast and detail in dark areas. HP claims a full-screen brightness of 250 nits, rising to 1,000 over small areas of the screen in HDR mode, and our tests bear this out.

A big, sharp screen with excellent colour reproduction like this one is ideal for InDesign and Photoshop gurus. Video editors will find much to like too. And if you happen to have a card such as the GeForce RTX 5090 that can feed it a 4K, 240Hz signal at brain-melting framerates, then your games will never look better, either.

**Ian Evenden**



The inputs are easily accessible and point out of the back of the panel rather than down, so you might want to get some cables with 90-degree ends.



The drive is plastic and doesn't come with an IP rating, but feels solid enough in the hand.



## Corsair EX400U

### ATTRACTIVE FEATURE

A portable SSD built with the iPhone in mind

**Price** £200/\$200

**Company** Corsair

**Web** [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)

**RATING** ★★★★★

**Corsair's SSD distinguishes itself by not only being pretty fast, but with a magnetic MagSafe ring on the back it puts itself in the sights of iPhone filmmakers and social media professionals.**

The Corsair EX400U SSD is fairly conventional, taking the shape of a square with rounded corners. There's a single USB-C port to break up the edges, and a white LED that indicates activity, tucked away by the USB port.

The magnetic ring underneath the SSD has a couple of potential uses. The most obvious one is to attach the SSD to the back of an iPhone. The two pieces of tech snap together very firmly. It'll stick to the back of an iPad Pro (with its useful USB4 port) too, though not nearly as firmly, and the cable tension tends to pull it off. It mounts up as an external drive perfectly well under iPadOS.

The second is that you can attach it to just about any metal piece of furniture. This means it's handy to hide out of the way, the cable leading to the back of your PC or Thunderbolt dock the only clue to its existence. Speaking of which, there's a braided USB-C cable in the box, and it's good enough to get the full speed out of the drive.

**Ian Evenden**

# Huion Kamvas Slate 13

**OFF-TARGET** This large-format Android sketchpad scores points for its design, but falls short when it comes to creating pro-level art

**Price** £449/\$499 **Company** Huion **Web** <https://store.huion.com>

**T**he Huion Kamvas Slate 13 is a tablet that promises a lot. Yet after spending four weeks with the Slate 13, drawing, note-taking and testing its limits, we found this tablet to be a device with more style than substance. It's a beautiful missed opportunity, a solid tablet and an improvement on the Slate 10, but it's let down by performance niggles.

Straight out of the box, the Kamvas Slate 13 impresses. The aluminium chassis is rigid and cool to the touch, the bezels are slim without being fiddly and the 12.7-inch display offers a large blank digital canvas; its 4:3 aspect ratio makes for a uniquely large drawing area.

What stands out is the screen. It's matte laminated glass, not a cheap plastic film, and resists glare well. It feels premium. It's not slippery, but neither is it textured like the paper-style surfaces found on some pen displays.

For general Android tasks, such as web browsing, video, emails and even light gaming, this new tablet is snappy enough. But push it into creative workflows and the cracks appear, which is a shame as digital artists are the core target users.

For starters, Huion's tablet is underwhelming in bright environments.



At the rear of the Slate 13 are two cameras that are set in etched rimmed casings.

While it's sharp, the display lacks contrast and brightness, especially outdoors. The blues are muted and muddy. For colour-critical work and for professional digital artists, the Slate 13 is not as reliable as the iPad Pro, say.

Using Huion's H-Pencil is fine. It's a nicely weighted pen to hold, but latency and accuracy leave something to be desired, especially when drawing fine lines or detail. Light strokes sometimes fail to register, too. Tilt works, but feels inconsistent.

Multitasking is also a weak point. With Android 14, split screen is supported, but the processor just doesn't handle heavier apps well.

The Slate 13 is suitable for casual sketching, hobbyist art, or creating loose art styles, but if you're looking for a professional tablet for comic art and fine illustration, the iPad Pro and Apple Pencil Pro are better options (though three times the cost).

**Ian Dean**

## VERDICT

The Huion Kamvas Slate 13 is a beautiful piece of hardware that's let down by underwhelming digital art performance and stylus inconsistency. That said, if you're after a large-format Android sketchpad with a lovely build and aren't too precious about colour accuracy or pen precision, the Slate 13 has its place. Just know exactly what you're getting, and what you're not.

### Pros

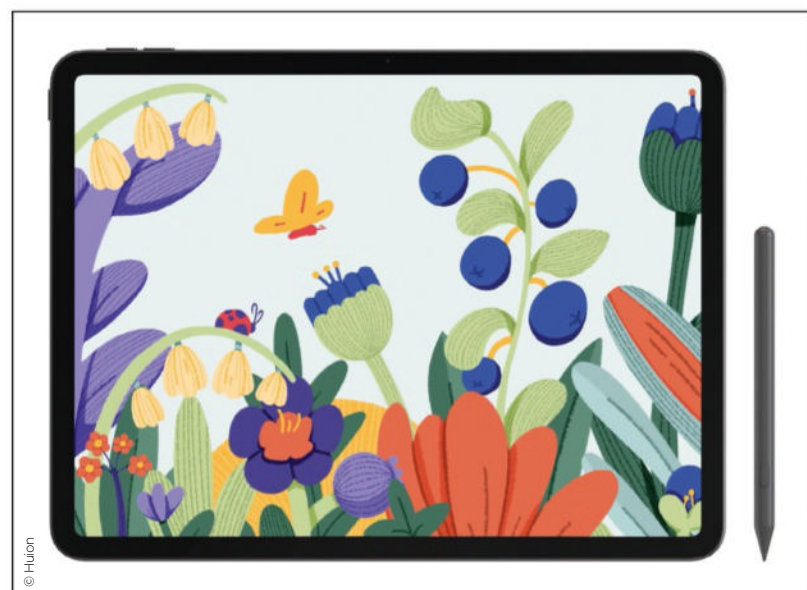
- Premium build quality
- Decent QHD display
- Solid general performance

### Cons

- Stylus could be better
- Lacks precision for fine lines

### Rating

★★★★☆



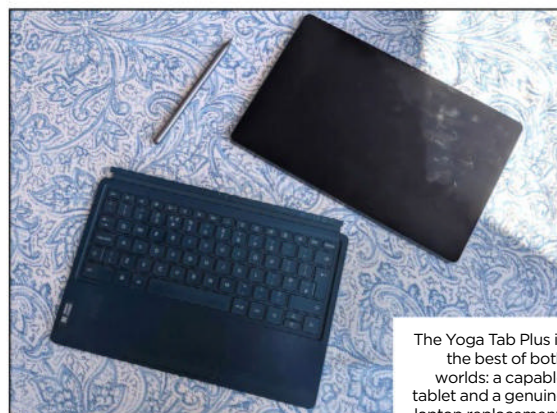
The supplied H-Pencil supports tilt, pressure and fast charging via magnetic connection.

The Kamvas Slate 13 is eminently suitable for casual sketching or creating hobbyist art.





Lenovo's built-in AI tools means you can upload docs to generate summaries, ask questions or transcribe content — all offline, thanks to a dedicated NPU.



The Yoga Tab Plus is the best of both worlds: a capable tablet and a genuine laptop replacement.



No more hunting around for the stylus – Lenovo's Tab Pen Pro can be magnetically attached to the tablet's body when not in use.

## Lenovo Yoga Tab Plus

**PLUS POINT** Lenovo wants its high-end Android tablet package to become a creative and entertainment replacement for your laptop. We discover if it achieves this goal

**Price** £799/\$770 **Company** Lenovo **Web** [www.lenovo.com](http://www.lenovo.com)

**T**he Lenovo Yoga Tab Plus steps confidently into the premium Android tablet market. Its standout 12.7-inch 3K display delivers vivid visuals with a bright, smooth 144Hz refresh rate – perfect for everything from video streaming to detailed work. But it's the inclusion of a responsive stylus with gesture controls and a well-designed keyboard cover that elevates the Yoga Tab Plus beyond a typical tablet experience.

One of its standout features is the integrated USB-C 3.2 Gen 1 port, which enables users to connect an external monitor. It's a useful addition for multitaskers, whether you want to mirror your screen for presentations or expand your display setup. Indeed, the Yoga Tab Plus has been designed

with productivity at its core. The included keyboard cover has a fast, spacious layout and a responsive touchpad that supports shortcuts for quick multitasking.

The stylus recognises handwriting with precision, adds real-time feedback through vibration and sound, and introduces a clever gesture system: swipe up to copy, swipe down to paste. These shortcuts make everyday tasks like editing text or taking notes far more efficient. The writing experience rivals premium competitors like the Apple Pencil.

The Lenovo Yoga Tab Plus, powered by the Snapdragon 8 Gen 3 chipset and backed by a generous 16GB of RAM, delivers consistently smooth performance across everything from demanding games to video editing and heavy multitasking.

### VERDICT

The Lenovo Yoga Tab Plus is a genuine tablet replacement for a laptop, for those wanting to slim down their gear. With its responsive stylus, desktop-style keyboard and local AI tools, the Yoga Tab Plus is perfect for note-takers, digital artists and multitaskers alike. Add in its vibrant display and punchy speakers, and it's just as capable for winding down with a film as it is for powering through a work day.

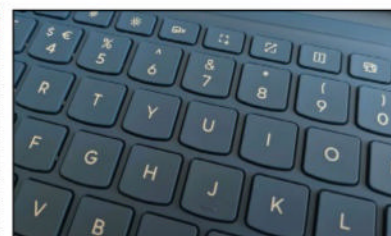
#### Pros

- Stunning, bright 3K display
- Advanced stylus with intuitive, time-saving gestures and precise handwriting
- Robust performance

#### Cons

- Battery life shorter than some rivals
- Some overheating issues

#### Rating



The detachable keyboard provides instant access to Lenovo's AI-powered smart tools.

Cameras are a highlight too. The 13MP front camera is excellent for video calls, while the rear dual-camera setup includes a 13MP wide-angle and a handy 2MP macro lens for close-up shots just 3cm from the subject. Both front and rear can shoot in 4K at 30fps.

Battery life is the main trade-off for all these capabilities, with six hours and 20 minutes at max brightness leaving us underwhelmed compared to major rivals. Although 45W charging is decent, a faster option would be welcome. It's the only notable flaw in Lenovo's otherwise excellent device.

**Rachael Davies**

“It delivers smooth performance across everything from demanding games to video editing and heavy multitasking”



Over the course of 21 lessons you'll learn how to script your manga story and bring its characters to life.



## Manga Comics for Beginners



**PAGE TURNER** Established Swedish artist Natalia Batista takes viewers through the creation of a complete manga comic

**Publisher** Domestika **Price** £49.90 **Format** Online **Length** 4 hrs 54 mins **Web** [www.domestika.org](http://www.domestika.org)

**A**s the course's subtitle indicates – **From Concept to Creation** – Swedish manga artist Natalia Batista reveals how she approaches creating a full manga comic. She has a wide career of published works and art for video games, and it's great to get a detailed background on her journey and influences, which grounds the course from the start.

The purpose of the course is to give all the tools the artist needs to make a single manga page, rather than a book, and this gives an achievable goal, making the investment in the course worthwhile. It focuses on an analogue-first style with traditional drawing tools, screen tone sheets and paper, and scanning techniques to get drawings into the computer. The tools are then put to the side to focus on developing characters and script.



Storyboarding and then sketching out your story will enable you to identify its narrative beats.



The art part of the course comprises drawing, inking and digitising, and is thorough with a follow-the-tutor methodology. This prevents you from skipping through the course, and ensures you're creating your manga and not just copying Natalia. It's great that the digitising element is left to the end with the focus on how to prep the artwork for professional export rather than just 'use a computer' to make things easier. This theme of doing everything 'properly' makes this course a standout.

Once the journey to the final lettered manga pages is complete, the course wraps up with how to get your work out into the field, making Natalia's videos an excellent how-to for anyone wanting to develop a complete creative workflow. 🍌

**Mike Griggs**

Three chapters from Natalia's course break down how to ink your comic's pages.

### VERDICT

With the typical high production values of a Domestika course, Natalia creates a potential one-and-done experience that is essential for any artist wanting to develop an understanding of the unique nature of manga and how to create it, and is an excellent addition to any comic artist's learning bank.

#### Pros

- Covers the entire creative process
- Focus placed on analogue creation
- Excellent content on the history of manga

#### Cons

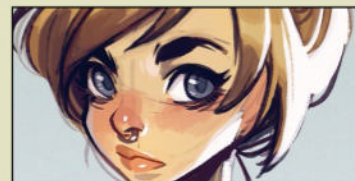
- Manga is not to everyone's taste
- Course can be expensive if not found on discount

#### Rating

★★★★★

## Brushing up...

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



### Loish's Free Brushset

**Artist** Lois van Baarle

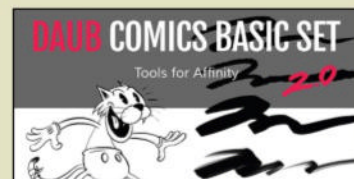
**Software** Photoshop

**Brushes** 6 **Price** Free

**Rating** ★★★

There are only six brushes, but as ever with free brush packs, finding the artist's pages and well-organised resources (a lot more of which are free) makes this a sound recommendation.

<https://loish.net/free-resources>



### DAUB Comics Basic Set

**Artist** DAUB

**Software** Affinity Designer

**Brushes** 12 **Price** Free

**Rating** ★★★★★

Another free set of brushes, this time for Affinity Designer, which create an easy-to-use set of essential brushes for those wishing to improve their digital drafting and inking work.

[www.daub-brushes.com/affinity](http://www.daub-brushes.com/affinity)



### The Rusty Nib

**Artist** True Grit

**Software** Photoshop, Procreate, Affinity Designer, Clip Studio Paint

**Brushes** 130 **Price** from \$26

**Rating** ★★★★★

This excellent set of brushes and resources on how to use them will make your artwork look worn, old and potentially even creepy.

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



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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS  
**ImagineFX**

# Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists



## This issue:

### 88 Traditional FXPosé

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

### 92 Bring a fantasy character to life

Illustrator Max Dunbar reveals how he draws an original fantasy figure using pencil, pens and grey tone markers.



# FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



## Gabriela Niko

**LOCATION:** Poland **MEDIA:** Sketchbooks, alcohol and acrylic markers, graphite and coloured pencils **WEB:** [www.instagram.com/doodle\\_traffic](http://www.instagram.com/doodle_traffic)

Gabriela's love for sketchbooks led her away from a design career toward a more intuitive, joy-driven art practice that embraces imperfection as beauty.



**1 ARIEL (IN BETWEEN)**  
“A coloured pencil fan art of Ariel, combining the animated version with the live-action reinterpretation. I imagined her floating between both: soft, self-possessed and a little timeless.”

**2 SOFT ARMOR**  
“They say women barely flinch or complain during tattoos. I liked that quiet toughness. This portrait mixes softness and stillness, drawn with alcohol markers and coloured pencils.”

**3 FIRST STAR TONIGHT**  
“Drawn with coloured pencils and markers, inspired by my love of stars and quiet moods. I like capturing that in-between mood when a character looks calm, but you’re not sure why.”

**4 FROG HAIR DAY**  
“A playful portrait that blends fantasy with sketchbook looseness and overgrown details. I aim for subtle emotions in my characters: open to interpretation, but deeply felt.”









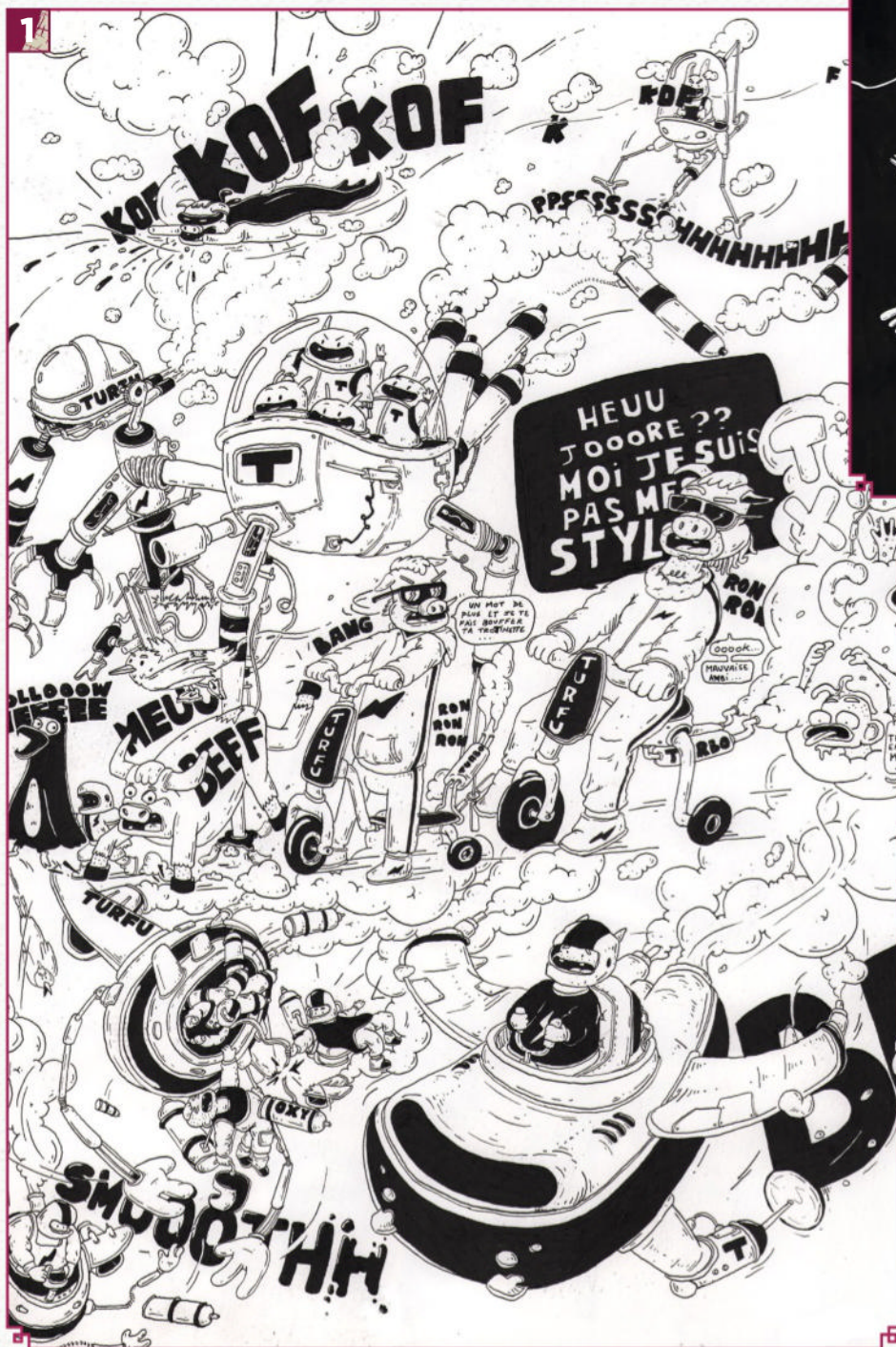
## Kevin Antoine

**LOCATION:** Belgium **MEDIA:** Ink **WEB:** <https://antoineink.myportfolio.com>

Kevin (aka ANTOINE) is a freelance artist, director and consultant in 2D animation. He draws with ink on paper without sketches. "Each line is intentional, each mistake is part of the story." By using minimal tools, he keeps his work spontaneous.

### 1 TURF

"This is a good result of the meditative process: I start somewhere and let it drift. Guided by emotions."



### 2

### 2 ALZHEIMER

"I suppose what I fear most is that it might happen to someone I love."



### 3



### 3 METAMORPHE

"I often redraw from memory, as a way to explore how imagery embeds itself and evolves over time."

### 4

### 4 ABYSS MECHANIC

"Organic and mechanical tension echoes the drama of our times. The machine takes over."













Pencil • Ink • Markers

# BRING A FANTASY CHARACTER TO LIFE

Illustrator **MAX DUNBAR** reveals how he draws an original fantasy figure using pencil, pens and grey tone markers

Creating your own characters is one of the most gratifying things you can do as an artist. It's a great way to solidify the various thoughts and concepts that can be churning around in your mind when dreaming up some exciting new creation.

Drawing a character pin-up brings together different disciplines and challenges that can be frustrating to encounter, but rewarding to overcome. Here, I'll explain how I tackle this process, in a way that blends a healthy amount of pre-planning to achieve a solid structure, but allows for enough spontaneity and freedom to keep the drawing energetic, exciting and fun. If I could emphasise two particular points

## MATERIALS

### PENCILS & PENS

- Mechanical pencil: 0.5mm HB
- Copic Multiliner pens: 0.03, 0.05, 0.1, 0.3 and SP 0.03
- Copic Sketch markers Neutral Grey: N0, N1, N2, N3 and N4

### PAPER

- Printer paper: 8.5x 11-inch 20lb
- Strathmore Bristol Board: Series 300 Smooth 9x12-inch 100lb

### TOOLS

- French curve, circular template, 6-inch ruler

above everything else, it's to be patient with yourself, and draw lightly. It's easy to get frustrated when things aren't going the way you want, but if you draw lightly, you can erase and try again. There is no shame in trying something out and redoing it if it doesn't turn out the way you want it to.

When you're drawing your character, there are many exciting things to consider that will breathe life into your creation. What kind of pose should the character be in? Do I want to show off their clothes and armour with something more reserved? Or showcase their abilities with something more dynamic and action oriented? What will their expression convey? After the base structure, pose and anatomy are completed, what will they be

wearing? What condition will the clothes or armour be in? What kind of equipment do they need, and what do they carry in their hands, on their belt or on their back? Do they have cultural embellishments, ancient relics or treasure from past adventures?

You can ask yourself all of these questions as you draw your creation, and each one will add personality and story into the visuals as they develop, and they will elevate your character into something special and personal to you.



Max Dunbar is a comic book and concept artist who has worked for DC and Marvel Comics, Wizards of the Coast and Avalon Hill. You can see more of his work at [www.maxdunbar.com](http://www.maxdunbar.com).



# Traditional Artist **Workshop**



## **1** *Set up your work area and start small and loose*

I like to begin with a piece of scrap paper and use my pencil to draw a small sketch to figure out the pose and proportions of the character. This way, it's easy and quick to make changes or try new ideas. As I'm sketching, I want to keep the line work nice and light, and scribble out a rough pose starting with very basic shapes to figure out the structure of the figure.



## **2** *Layer on loose details*

Keeping the pencil light, I rough in basic shapes for armour ideas, major pieces of equipment and even a hint at an expression if I can, just to see what looks good together. It's also a great opportunity to sketch in an idea for a background. Once the small sketch is done, I'll keep it near so I can reference it as I'm drawing the final, full-sized version.



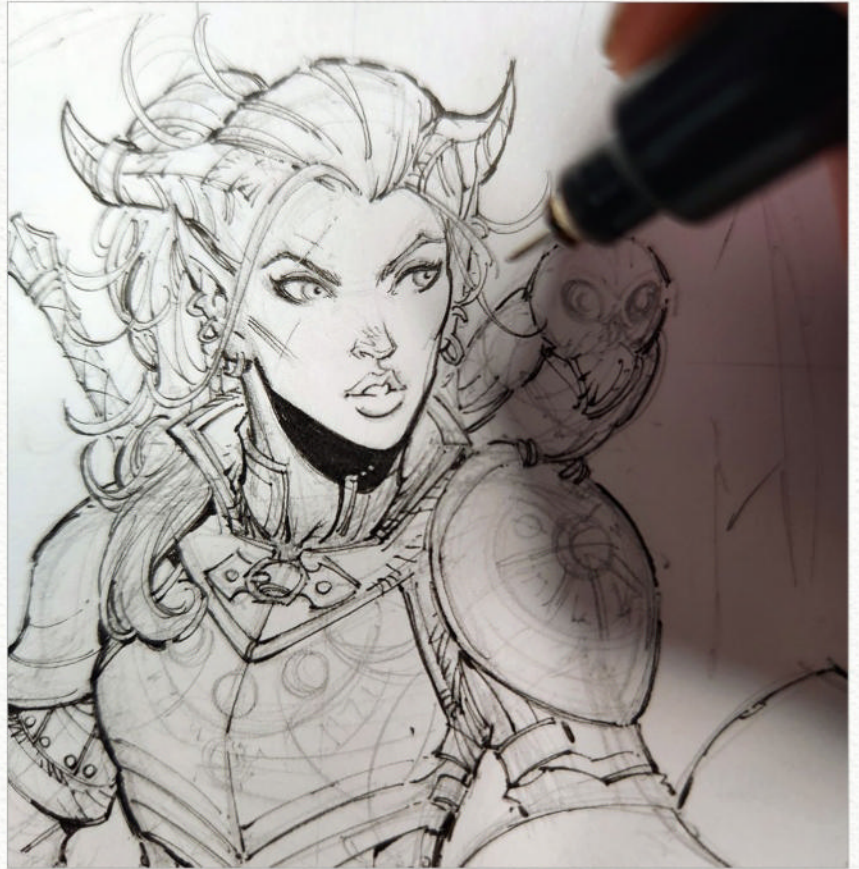
## **3** *Start lightly in pencil and layer on refined details*

For the final drawing, I'll use thicker paper to better handle the ink and markers. I'll lightly sketch a rough form in light pencil, to block in the pose and make sure everything fits on the paper. I don't want to get bogged down in detail and find out I've run out of room for the whole character. Because the pencil is light, it's easy to layer details right on top of it. I press slightly harder to make the more refined details stand out and use a small mirror to flip the image, which enables me to see any glaring mistakes more easily.



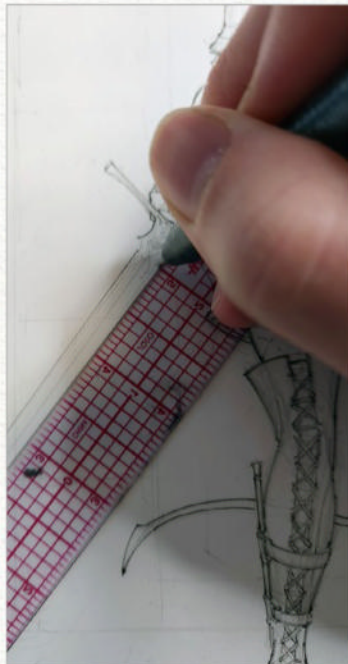


## In depth Draw an adventurer



### 4 *Begin inking and remember that fine lines are forgiving*

I like to start inking most of the fine details with one of my thinner pens, like a 0.05. Fine lines can be built up with repeated pen strokes, but you can't take away from a line that's too thick. The face is the most important part of most characters, so I use the finest-tipped pen I have when inking here to give me the most control.



### 5 *Build up a variety of line weights*

Thicker lines and black shadows add volume and weight to a character, and a variety of line weights can help your piece feel more energetic and less flat. Rulers and templates aren't always necessary, but if you want to keep your lines uniform and clean (and convey finely crafted weapons and armour) then they can be handy to have nearby. ➡





## **6** *Fill in the surface details*

Once all the main parts of the character have been inked, I fill in the small surface details that can really help add that extra level of story and depth to a character, like small armour details, runic text and filigree.



## **7** *Pencil the background*

Now that the character is inked, the background can be tackled. Taking it from a light, roughed-in sketch to tighter pencils is always a good idea before inking, just to make sure that all the right details are in place.



## **8** *Ink the background*

Even though the background isn't as prominent as the character, rushing it can hurt the artwork, so I like to try to treat the background as a character unto itself, and add a story where I can. Once the ink dries, I erase all the pencil lines and leave only the ink behind. The Bristol board and ink hold up to erasing well, but I still want to be careful and not press too hard or be too rough with the eraser.







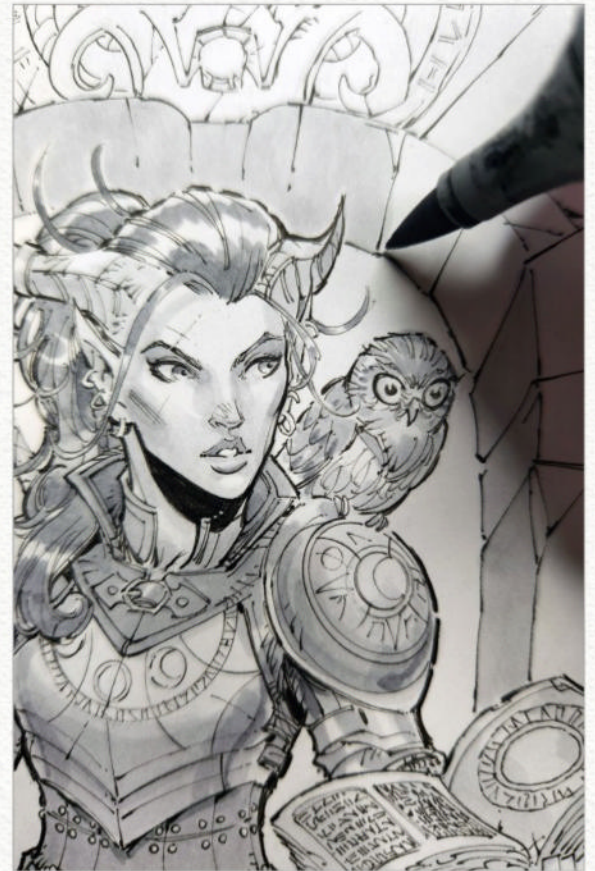
## 9 Start with the lightest marker

Using the lightest marker, N0, I render areas I know are going to have the lightest elements in them. Marker can act as either pigment or shadow, and I leave some areas blank to signify strong light reflection. Moving to the next darker marker, N1, I fill in areas that are going to be slightly darker. If I layer on top of any of the N0, it will add to the tone already on the paper. This is a great way to do subtle gradients and blends.



## 10 Render in the mid-tones

I like to use N2 for mid-tones. It's still light enough to see all the line work, but dark enough to stand out substantially from the white paper. Using it for leather works really well, and for darker areas of the face such as lips and irises. For my style of art, I like the line work to still shine through wherever possible. N3 is a good level of darkness for most of my characters, and works great to separate out the areas between leather or lighter metal.



## 11 Finish up

When drawing in this style, I don't like to over-render the background. Hopefully the line art will be strong enough to convey the mood you want, and a flatter grey tone can help make a rendered character pop. ■



New section coming next month...

# 3D Artist

Your ultimate source for art,  
inspiration and know-how

16

PAGES OF  
3D ART AND  
ADVICE

Artwork by  
Prashan Subasinghe



## READER SHOWCASE

Check out inspirational art  
from the 3D community



## IN-DEPTH WORKSHOPS

Learn modelling and  
sculpting the easy way



## ARTISTS Q&A

ImagineFX experts answer  
your biggest 3D queries



## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS

Gain insights into the life  
and careers of top artists

Artwork: Papam Rajabi, Ertai Ryu,  
Paul Hinton, Alessandro Paladino



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.

## Will you help us by donating?

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

To help protect vulnerable children, donate online at: [www.hopeandhomes.org/donate](http://www.hopeandhomes.org/donate). Or call **01722 790 111** Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm.

Please quote **FP22 - Tec** when making your donation.

In the event that funds raised exceed what is needed to deliver Hope and Homes for Children immediate and longer-term response to this crisis, we will use donations where the need is greatest.

HOPE AND HOMES  
FOR CHILDREN



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users



Jasper,  
age 11

I'm young, disabled, but not so different

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