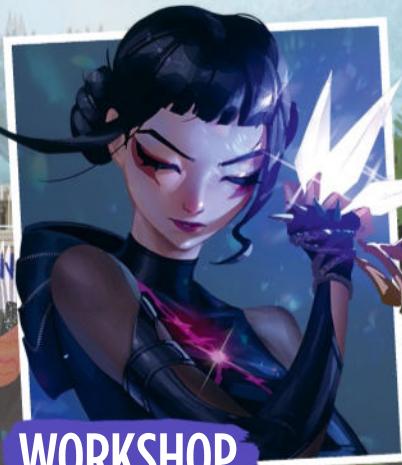


# NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

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*See page 98*

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**PAT IMRIE INTERVIEW  
BACK TO BASICS  
GALLERIES**



POSTER ARTIST **MATT FERGUSON** ON COMPOSITION FOR THE MODERN AGE



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



There's something about seeing another artist's studio or home workspace that's instantly intriguing. How do they go about creating their art? What objects do they surround themselves with? Some studios take the minimalist route, with clear surfaces that leave very

little room for distraction. Others are rammed full of reference materials, limited-edition prints and toy figurines, and must be brimming with inspiration. Then there are pets. We always love to see a faithful cat or dog (and plants).

With that in mind we talked to a number of artists to see what goes into a studio setup, how they function and what you need to do to put together your perfect working environment.

Elsewhere, we look at the striking poster art of Matt Ferguson and delve into Wynton Redmond's mecha-filled sketchbook. There are also workshops covering everything from magical lighting effects to designing, modelling and rendering a fantasy critter, in our new 3D section.

Enjoy the issue.

Rob

### Editor

Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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- @imaginefxmagazine
- imaginefx.creativebloq.com



### EDITOR'S CHOICE

Three of my top picks this month...

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#### Use 3D models as a foundation for your art

This month's cover artist, Misa Steinmetz, goes into detail about her hybrid 2D and 3D process.

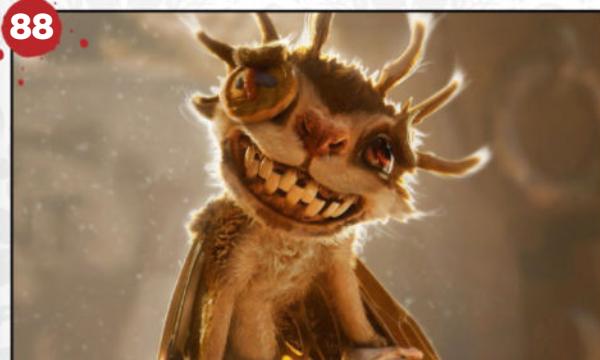
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#### Add light to your character design

Get in-depth instruction on how to make your art sparkle and pop with advice from Jiunn Kuo.

88



#### Design a fantasy critter

Matthieu Sarazin takes us through his pencil and paper, Photoshop, ZBrush and Blender workflow.



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# ImagineFX

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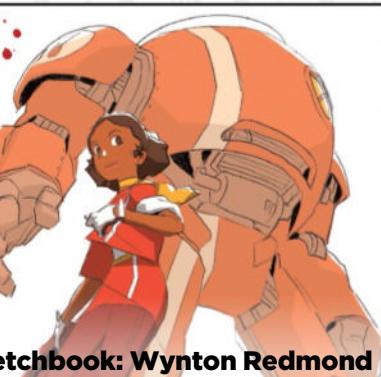
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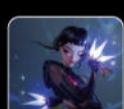
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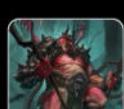
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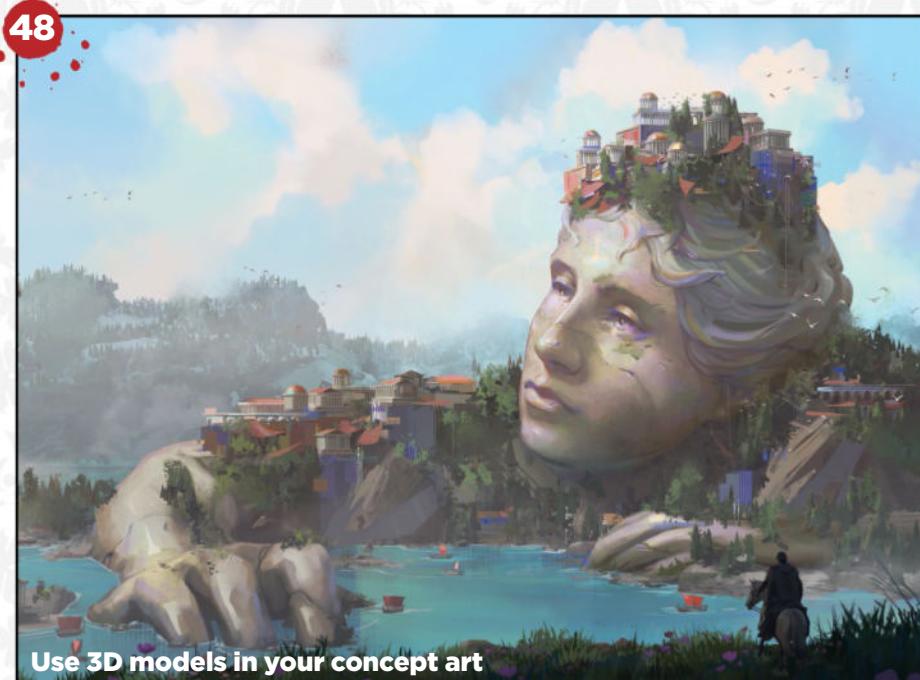
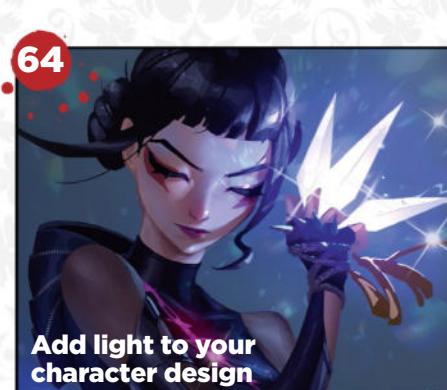
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Traditional skills: Photoshop, ZBrush & Blender

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 Find your files ready for download.

3 Download what you need...  
 Save the files or watch the videos.

# Next month

Second Dinner/Marvel Snap



Next month in...  
**NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS**  
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## MARVEL-OUS MISCHIEF!

Paint with personality, using expert advice from Marvel Snap artist Léo Chiola

### **Sculpt in ZBrush, finish in Procreate**

Entei Ryu shows how she creates her dinosaur-themed BONEGIRLS art.

### **Explore the cute and the creepy**

We check out the curious character art inside concept artist Jae Park's sketchbook.

### **Aaron Blaise's epic art studio!**

The award-winning painter, animator and film director shows us around.

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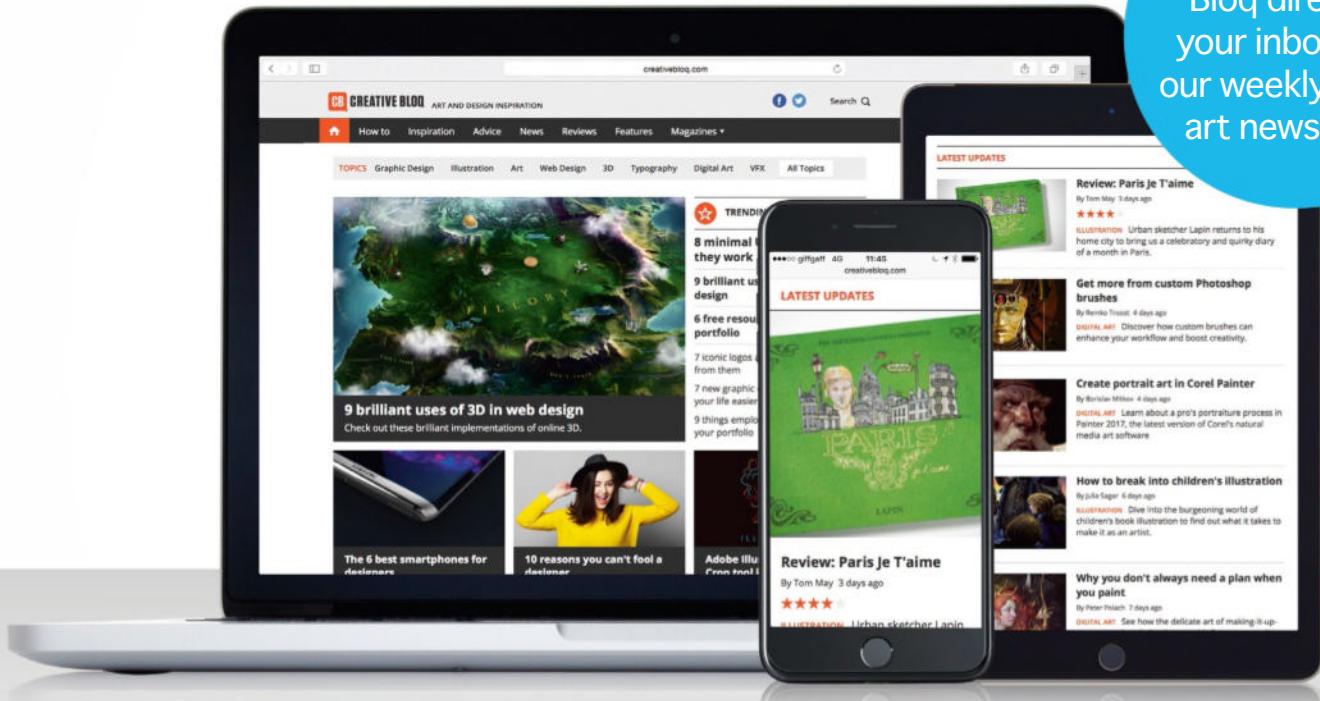


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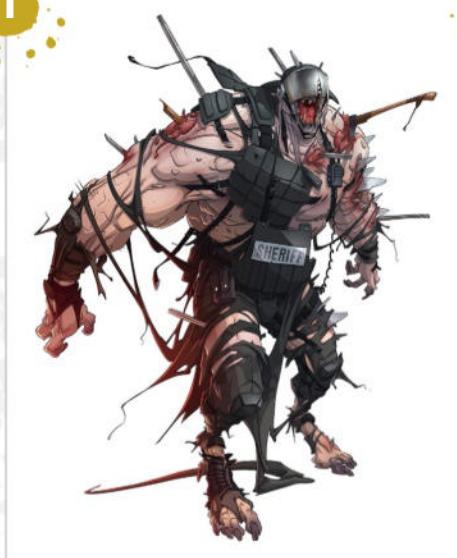
## Édouard Guiton

LOCATION: France MEDIA: Clip Studio Paint WEB: [www.artstation.com/edouardguiton](http://www.artstation.com/edouardguiton)

Édouard is a French illustrator and character designer who works mainly in board games and video games. His stylised approach focuses on energy, strong shapes and storytelling through expressive characters.



1



### 1 ZOMBICIDE

"A riot police officer turns monstrous, his uniform bursting as flesh grows over and beneath, mutating him into a terrifying new form. Colours by Éric Nouhaut."

2



### 2 THE REAPER

"While keeping the classic Reaper look, I wanted to add something new and threatening with tentacles, all while preserving the iconic floating silhouette. Colours by Giorgia Lanza."

### 3 FIRE ELEMENTAL

"I wanted this to feel like more than just flame; it's an ancient entity inhabiting empty armour, a living artefact of forgotten power. Colours by Giorgia Lanza."



10

ImagineFX

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5

**ZOMBICIDE**

"I loved creating a dynamic composition of multiple characters, framed by buildings and surrounded by zombies. This conveys real danger and a massive invasion, while keeping the scene readable. Colours by Giorgia Lanza."



5

**THE FOUR HORSEMEN**

"I loved reinterpreting these mythic riders – War, Death, Pestilence and Famine – while staying true to the original descriptions. A timeless classic and a real exercise in style. Colours by Giorgia Lanza."



## Ilker Serdar Yildiz

LOCATION: Turkey MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate, Clip Studio Paint, Blender

WEB: [www.artstation.com/ilkerserdar](http://www.artstation.com/ilkerserdar)

Ilker's favourite illustration subjects revolve around fantasy and medieval themes. Inspired by the likes of Leyendecker and Sergio Toppi, he's worked on projects for Magic: The Gathering, Gwent, and Mount & Blade: Bannerlord.

1



### 1 GOG

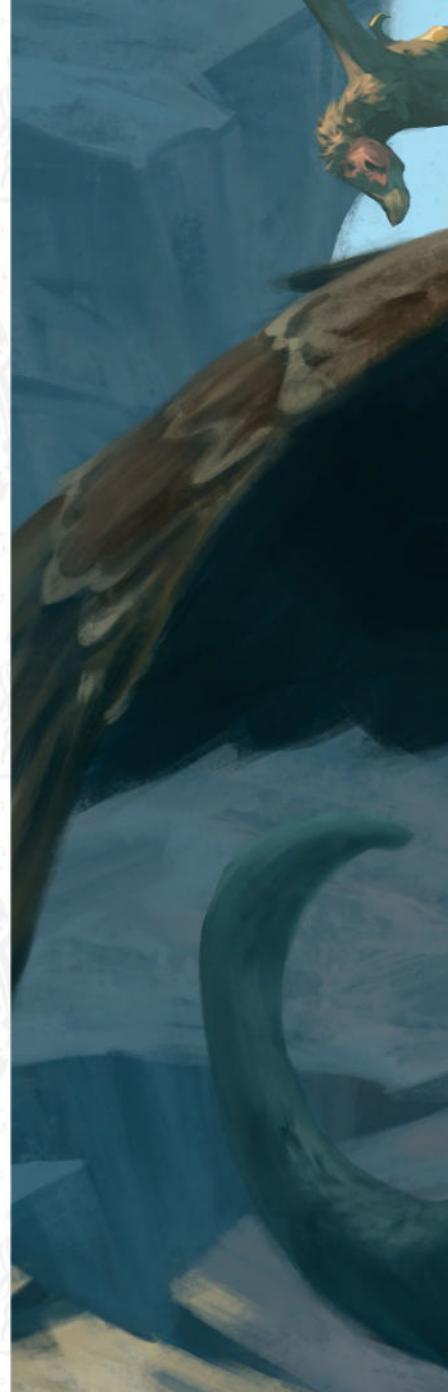
"This painting was based on a contradiction in terms of content: goats that don't quite fit in with an unfriendly place, guarded by two large, ruthless warriors."

### 2 SCOUTS

"I wanted to portray a moment featuring a group of people doing a strange job at very high altitudes, paired with unusual mounts."

### 3 THREE KNIGHT

"Some knights from a place where different creatures lived in a different time. It's a picture based more on a geometric arrangement and character design than anything else."





#### 4 ATTACKING

"I tried to develop the silhouettes in this crowded composition of slightly stylised characters. At the same time, I wanted there to be a moment of movement rather than stagnation."



## Feng Wei

LOCATION: China MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: <https://fengweic12.artstation.com>

Feng Wei is a concept artist and external lecturer at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He's inspired by classical literature and combines this with current art trends to create strong contrast in his work.

1



2



### 1 FAIRY TALE REBIRTH SERIES

#### “FROG PRINCE AND PRINCESS”

“This painting depicts the beautiful moment when the frog prince and the princess dance on the water.”

### 2 FAIRY TALE REBIRTH SERIES “MERMAID”

“A little mermaid has lost her voice and is about to be turned into a bubble by a witch. Then the angel gives her a new life.”





## Ulysse Verhasselt

LOCATION: Finland MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender, PureRef WEB: [www.artstation.com/ulyssev](http://www.artstation.com/ulyssev)

Ulysse's biggest artistic inspirations have always been nature and light. He aims to create environments where he can imagine himself living in them. "I'm obsessed with stylisation and brushstroke efficiency," Ulysse reveals.

1



### 1 ULFURIC LANDS

"This image started as a demo for a workshop about stylisation. I wanted to demonstrate how far you can push colours and brushstrokes while staying readable. Very fun to paint!"

### 2 MOSSY ROCKS

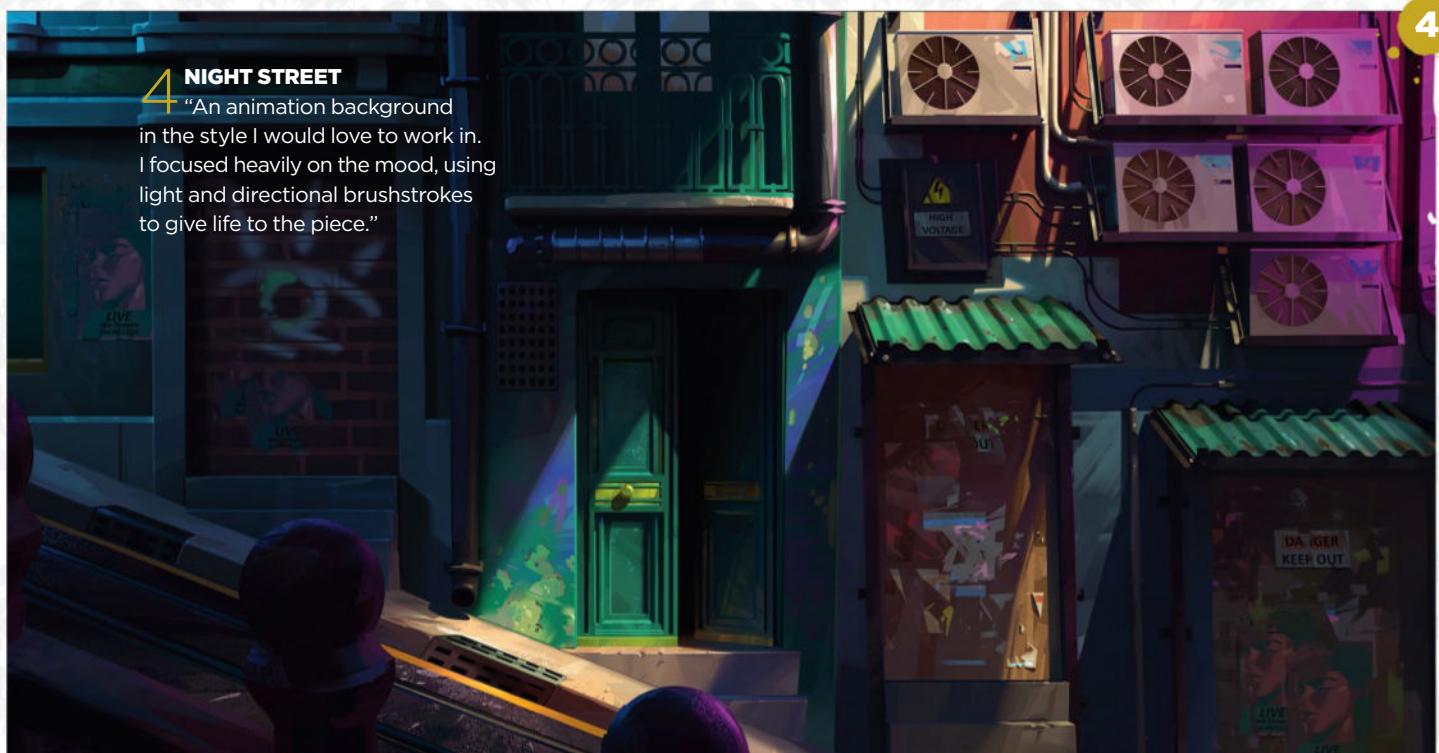
"I love to explore environmental props, especially natural ones. Moss and rocks are subjects that let you play with boundless shapes and textures. They are the perfect subject to experiment with!"

### 3 HIEDANRANTA FACTORY

"I took inspiration from a nearby factory and channelled all of my current interests, including architecture, technology and the glory of nature."

2







## Patrycja Wójcik

LOCATION: Poland MEDIA: Procreate, Photoshop WEB: <https://wojcik2d.com>

Patrycja is an illustrator and concept artist whose greatest inspirations have always been fantasy worlds, fairy tales and recently the Slavic atmosphere. She focuses primarily on colour and the depiction of female characters.

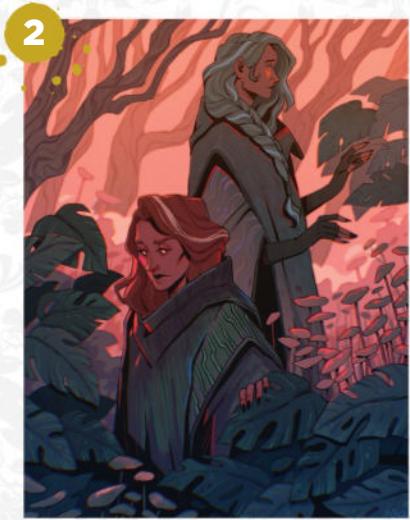
### 1 SISTERS OF THE KNIGHT

"This illustration was my contribution to the CODEX Obscurus artbook, which featured work from 145 artists. It was published by Spiridon, after it was Kickstarted in 2024."



### 2 PAST

"In this piece I was experimenting with more of a comic book look. When I was younger I always wanted to make a short comic, but I could never finish it!"



### 3 RED

#### 3 RED

"The main theme of this piece was the colour red. It depicts a female figure in a futuristic outfit inspired by elements of Japanese armour."

#### 4 OBSIDIAN KNIGHT

"I love taking part in challenges, and this piece comes from the Character Design Challenge. Lava, fire and obsidian were my main inspirations for creating this knight."





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## Phaya Akat – The Sanctuary

YEAR CREATED: 2025

MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender, ZBrush, Plasticity

+

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"Phaya Akat's Sanctuary Village began from a simple idea inspired by Thailand's tradition of boiling eggs in natural hot springs. I expanded this concept into a large-scale village centred around hot spring cooking, set in a travertine landscape. Drawing on my architectural background, I designed it to tell a story through multiple stages, blending culture, functionality and imaginative, large-scale food preparation."





## Artist **PROFILE**

### **Choomcherd Virapat**

LOCATION: Thailand



Choomcherd is a concept artist and illustrator who specialises in environment design. With an architectural background, he works mainly in Blender, ZBrush and Plasticity before finishing his pieces in Photoshop.  
[www.therookies.co/u/choomvi](http://www.therookies.co/u/choomvi)





Nuri Durr's studio is designed to suit both his digital and traditional work.



# How to create an effective home studio

**WFH wonders** Setting up a creative space requires time, money and consideration. **Dominic Carter** discovers what artists need to keep in mind when creating one

**As with any job or pursuit, the best results emerge from a well-prepared environment. Art is no exception: a home studio can be just as important to creators as paints and pencils.**

"Artists create their best work when they can do so in an environment that is comfortable, inviting and practical," says character designer and illustrator **Nuri Durr**.

"We can spend hours in the same spot toiling away at our art, so it makes sense to customise and tailor our workspace to suit our needs and tastes."

"A good setup is incredibly important when you work from home," says illustrator and concept



artist **Anna Podedworna**.

"Spending eight hours a day in a chaotic or poorly optimised workspace can turn into

a hellish experience very quickly. To avoid ending up hating my job, I can't spend half of my waking hours in a distracting, ugly environment."

## GETTING STARTED

A personal art studio doesn't have to be a dedicated building furnished with an array of inspiring knick-knacks. If artists are just starting out and working to a strict budget, even the most humble of spaces can yield effective results.

Anna Podedworna's studio benefits from easily manageable lighting and ventilation. "I get to create my art in warmth and darkness - like a mushroom."

"To make a good home studio, you need a room you can close off from your living space," says creature designer and illustrator **Constantine Sekeris**.

"Being able to get away from your work will help you to have a good work-life balance, plus you will be able to miss work and therefore be excited to get back to it."

"The difference between a beginner and a more experienced artist is their tools and workflow. An experienced artist has a definitive process, which allows them to work smart with what they have. Meanwhile, a younger artist needs ➤



## WATCH THE BIRDIE

We take a sneak peek at Liang Mark's upcoming art book entitled *Crow*, which has been eight years in the making but well worth the wait.

Page 26



## CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

Petra Zemánková, otherwise known as Tofusenshi, shows us around her creative space, where her Twitch followers can watch her at work.

Page 28



## READERS - GET IN TOUCH

There are differing opinions on our new 3D art section, with one reader welcoming it and another sad over the loss of traditional art coverage.

Page 31



## INDUSTRY INSIGHT

### CHUCK GRIEB

*Chuck reveals how he carefully constructed his own home studio*

#### What do artists need to make a good home studio?

Use what you have. I used to work at a small, inexpensive drawing table in our living room. Noise-cancelling headphones can help isolate your attention and remove distractions. Don't let the lack of a dedicated space stop you, but enjoy the opportunity to put together a studio when you can.

#### How can artists keep studio costs down?

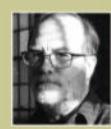
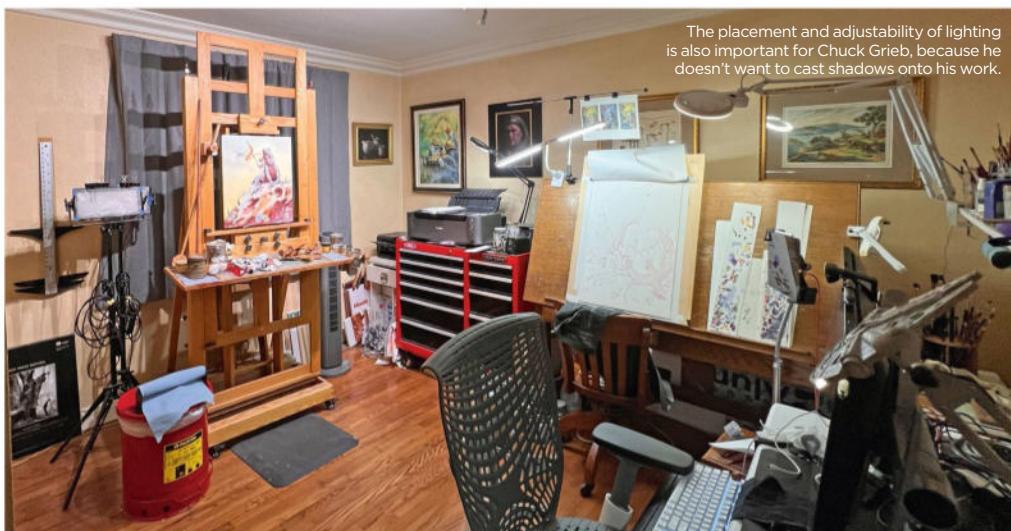
Plan what you need and start small, expanding when you are confident that the piece you add will help you to create. Shop for used items online, at swap meets, flea markets and antique stores.

#### How do you avoid clutter?

Set aside time when you finish a project to clean up and organise. I've just completed a redesign of my studio space, spending a week transitioning to a new, much smaller, desk for my Cintiq and computer. This allowed me to reorganise the room to better accommodate everything else in the space.

#### What's the biggest mistake people make when creating a home studio?

Using furniture that doesn't fit the space. You need space to move and work in the room. Be sure the furnishings meet your needs and fit in the space. Measure the space, design the layout and consider using tape on the floor to help plan where items will be placed.



Chuck works across illustration, storytelling and animation. He also teaches at Azusa Pacific University.

<http://chuckgrieb.com>

→ to learn how to get there and experiment with new tools."

For Nuri, a small corner that you can work in comfortably is perfect for both beginners and seasoned professionals. "It doesn't need to be flashy. It just needs to get the job done," he explains.

"When I was starting out, that space was a dining room table. Later on I had a dedicated room with more space that allowed me to customise and decorate more. No matter how big or small the space is, the goal should always be to create a space that better facilitates the creative process."

## DIGITAL VS TRADITIONAL

By their very nature, digital and traditional artists have unique workflows. This is reflected in their studio setups, which need to cater

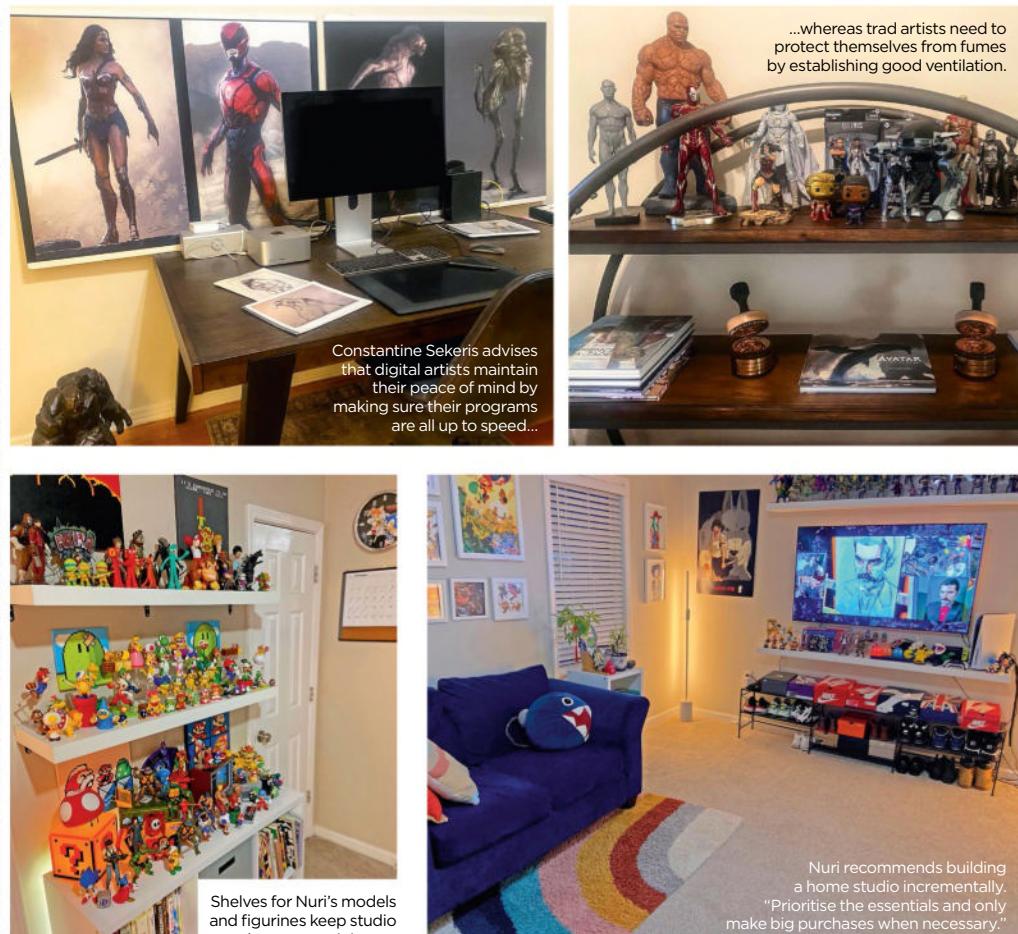
to their different needs. Illustrator **Chuck Grieb** works across both mediums and has created separate spaces that are dedicated to each.

"Traditional media requires space and can be messy," he reveals. "I find that the digital workstation requires less space and is less messy. An iPad alone can serve as a powerful and very portable digital art-making tool.

"My wife, who is also an artist, works predominantly with digital tools. Her workspace is much smaller than mine. She sits at an old steel tanker desk outfitted with her PC and a Cintiq. The desk is set into what was once a closet space. Folding doors allow her to close the space off when



Buying ergonomic kit may hurt Anna's wallet, but it's saved her body: "You can't buy a healthy spine."



Constantine Sekeris advises that digital artists maintain their peace of mind by making sure their programs are all up to speed...

...whereas trad artists need to protect themselves from fumes by establishing good ventilation.

Nuri recommends building a home studio incrementally. "Prioritise the essentials and only make big purchases when necessary."

she isn't using it. She loves her small digital studio and works there eight hours each day, every day."

Meanwhile, Anna believes that artists from across the board can benefit from the same essential elements of comfortable, ergonomic furniture, good natural lighting and tools that match their medium.

"In my case, that means a good PC and a Wacom Cintiq. For beginners, it's better to keep costs low – when you're not yet sure what works for you, there's no point in overinvesting. For more experienced artists, there's a



**“When you’re not yet sure what works for you, there’s no point in overinvesting”**

stronger case for spending more on specialised equipment. And let's be honest: the older you get, the more comfortable your furniture needs to be if you don't want to wreck your body."

## KEEPING CLEAN

These core elements can help artists focus when it comes to creating a home studio. After all, it's easy to prioritise aesthetics over functionality. This doesn't mean that studios have to be clean and tidy, though. As Nuri points out, some artists thrive in organised chaos.

"I prefer a more orderly workspace where I know where everything is, though," he says. "I like to think that my surrounding area reflects my state of mind. If you don't have a lot of space to work with, mount as much stuff as you can to free up desk and floor space. Ideally, everything should be close by and easy to find."

# Artist news, software & events



Chuck advises traditional artists to maintain a colour temperature of between 5,000 and 6,000° K.



Constantine keeps his studio costs down by only upgrading software when absolutely necessary.

According to Constantine, keeping a studio decluttered is also good for your mental health, as it frees artists up to create in peace. "To keep my space clean, I designate one day a month to organise my studio," he says. "This makes for a productive environment, and if I have Zoom meetings I want to make sure that the space I work in looks professional."

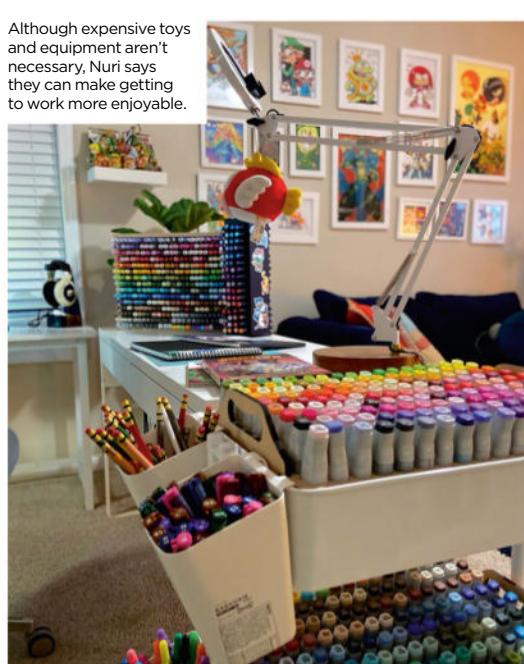
## COMMON MISTAKES

Separating your workspace from your living space is also good for an artist's mental health. Anna finds that failing to do so is one of the most common mistakes she sees when people set up a home studio.

"At the very least, don't eat at your workstation and try to take calls somewhere else," she says. "Your brain needs clear signals for when work ends and life begins. If you don't provide that separation, you may feel like you're mentally 'at work' every waking moment, and nobody wants that. I'm fortunate to have enough space for a separate room for my studio, and I think it's a big reason I've been able to avoid burnout so far."



Wheels fitted with locks are a useful way for Chuck to move around bulky equipment.



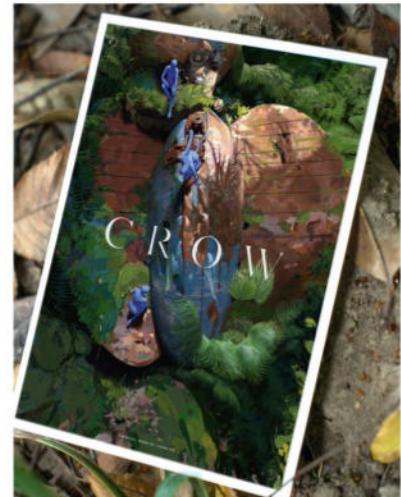
Although expensive toys and equipment aren't necessary, Nuri says they can make getting to work more enjoyable.



Anna's studio also houses her snakes, which give her eyes a break in between work projects.



In Liang Mark's art book, the pathogen designated 'CROW' lurks within glaciers, triggering the evolution of mechanised beings.



CROW-Alphas have evolved to mimic human forms, bringing limitless unknowns and a threat to the world.

## Enter the world of CROW

**Passion project** After eight years spent drawing, world-building and storytelling, Liang Mark's art book CROW is ready to take flight

**Over the years the ImagineFX team has seen its fair share of art books that have original narratives running through them. However, Shanghai-based Liang Mark's CROW has really grabbed our attention.**

Not only is the Riot Games art director's book packed with visuals of lavish locations, otherworldly ship designs and intriguing character concepts, but the story has plenty of scope too. It centres on the renewal of a futuristic civilisation. In CROW's sci-fi universe, the world has been reorganised and a core resource – codenamed 'Crow' – is being fought over by five major factions.

Liang's influences come from a range of movies, sci-fi novels and games, such as Star Wars, Dune, Isaac Asimov's classic Foundation, as well as video games such as Homeworld. "I love stories set in the future," he says. "After about a year of posting my own art, I started wondering if

A significant portion of Liang's time has been devoted to refining the world, the lore and its intricate details.



**“After a year of posting my own art, I started wondering if I should create a story”**

CROW is a curated collection of concepts, daily sketches and art journals spanning Liang's eight-year artistic journey.



I should create a story. I had come up with some scattered storylines and felt I should integrate them into a single world. It was just like when I was a kid playing with my toys – it was fun!

"At the beginning, I didn't realise it would take this long. I simply wanted to tell a story about a protagonist exploring a strange world. Later, I discovered that my process was somewhat like writing a diary, which was actually quite nice."

Liang tells us that he enjoys the initial exploration phase during the creative process. "I gather a lot of reference materials to understand real-world cultural characteristics, religious

legends, geography and so on. I then express all these ideas through speed paintings to verify that they fit into the broader story background of CROW. It's very interesting."

Over the years, Liang's collection of illustrations has grown beyond the scope of the first book, to the point that he's now visualising a larger world view to allow more creative space for future work. "There's still a lot of content to flesh out and I expect it will continue for another three years before the story is fully told," he says.

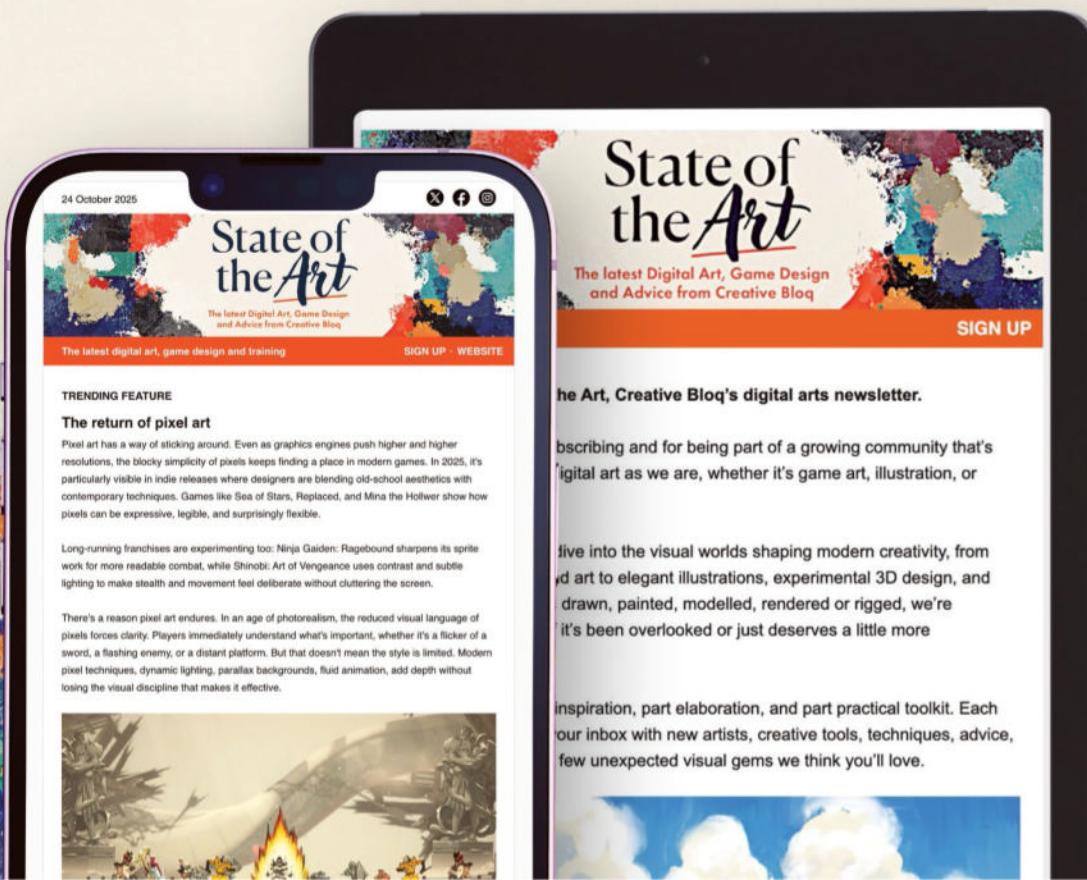
CROW is packed with over 120 illustrations across 144 pages and the book's Chinese version, published by Electronic Industry Press, is available at <https://bit.ly/4inwelv>. A full English translation is expected to be released next year. To keep up to date with Liang's work and his future art projects, visit <https://liangmark.artstation.com>.

SUBSCRIBE AT [WWW.CREATIVEBLOQ.COM/NEWSLETTER](http://WWW.CREATIVEBLOQ.COM/NEWSLETTER)

# State of the Art

Get art inspiration and advice  
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## Petra 'Tofusenshi' Zemáneková

**Multi-tasker** Digital artist, traditional artist, convention artist and a streamer?! That calls for a big room and a whole lot of equipment



**When I was setting up this room I knew from the start that I would need a huge table. It runs from the door and curves below the window, and means there's space for my entire drawing and streaming setup. Not only that, there are two of us in the room, so we've split it equally. I have the majority and my man is gaming on his 40cm table allowance... the things we do for love, am I right?**

**and curves below the window, and means there's space for my entire drawing and streaming setup. Not only that, there are two of us in the room, so we've split it equally. I have the majority and my man is gaming on his 40cm table allowance... the things we do for love, am I right?**

I love that whenever I enter my room, I can immediately see the tablet waiting for me. I have to admit that I'm pretty lazy, so if the setup wasn't ready, I wouldn't be drawing as often. I'm used to only having one screen, but since it was on the left it made my neck go crazy whenever I was doing studies and turning around all the time to check my reference. I've solved that problem by having two screens directly above my tablet for references, Discord or my stream chat.

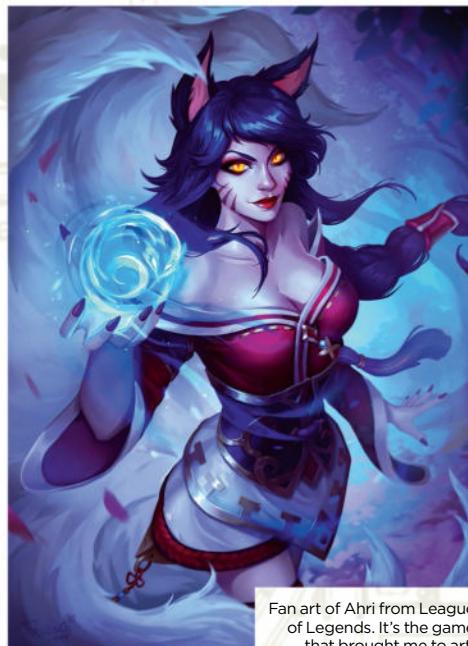
What makes my setup a bit more complicated is the streaming part. You have to fit in the lights, camera and a mic. I've redone and upgraded the arrangement a couple of times and I'm happy with how it looks now. The only issue is that the lights tend to hit the tablet and then bounce back into my eyes. This can make me feel a bit tired. There's also sound-absorbing foam running all over my walls to

**“I love that whenever I enter my room, I can immediately see the tablet waiting for me”**

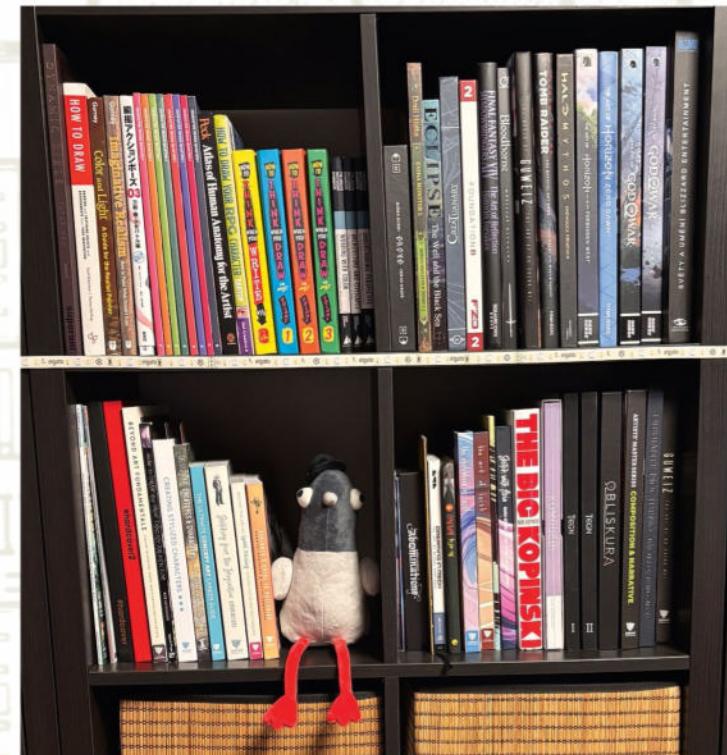
# Artist news, software & events

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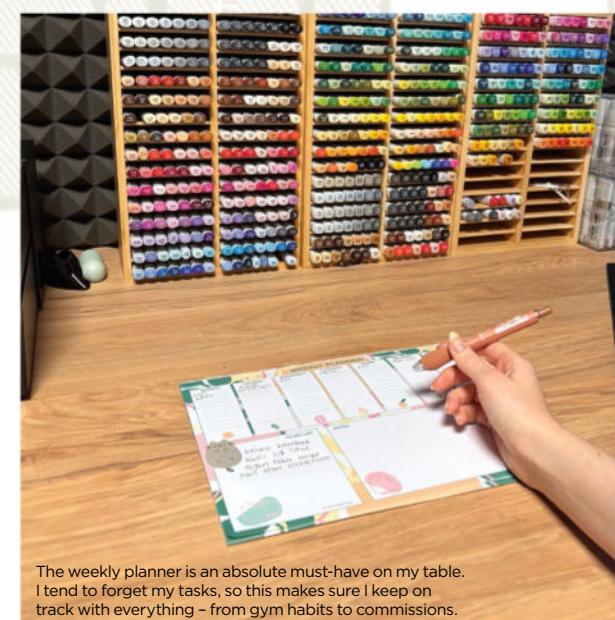
Monuscript



Fan art of Ahri from League of Legends. It's the game that brought me to art.



Wanna see where most of my money has gone? I'm a big art book fan and I've bought quite a few over the years. I browse through them whenever I need inspiration or want to do something art related that isn't necessarily drawing.



This pigeon plushie was gifted to me by one of my wonderful Twitch mods and now it sits on the shelf and guards my chat!



reduce any echo. Because I sometimes stream traditional art, I have a mount drilled into my wall, which enables me to have my camera directly above the drawing.

On the left side I have my traditional art setup. I've always had to take out all the markers whenever I've wanted to do traditional art, but since I've

bought these stands I can easily grab them. It does limit the space on the table, but I'm really happy with it. I store my papers and other traditional artist supplies that I absolutely had to buy (!) in the drawers on the right. I can't emphasise enough how important storage space is for me, especially when it comes to convention merchandise.

There is one time when this room becomes absolutely hell and that's during con prep. Print boxes and displays everywhere, my sticker cutter running on full speed and me panicking that I've forgotten something!

*Tofusenshi is a freelance digital artist who streams from the Czech Republic in the heart of Europe. She loves drawing fantasy characters, but also creates commissioned work. See more of her art at [www.artstation.com/tofusenshi](http://www.artstation.com/tofusenshi).*

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# Letters

## YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



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



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### 3D love

Hello ImagineFX. In your Christmas edition for 2025, you introduced the new 3D section, featuring the work of 3D artists along with some tips and tricks. It was awesome.

I had imagined what it would look like if the magazine unravelled the 3D world as well bit by bit and it did not disappoint. I love it! Because let's face it, most things are 3D now.

A little suggestion: maybe in the future could there be a section for motion graphics or animation tutorials as well? But so far, I've enjoyed this and the inspiration that your magazine brings me. Cheers.

*Inez, via email*

**Rob replies** Hi Inez. Thanks for writing in and your high praise. I'm really happy to hear you're enjoying our new 3D section. There's definitely a lot of 3D used across many forms of art now, which is why we decided to add this section, to help you discover new inspirations, tools and techniques. I can see us possibly covering

Our new 3D section includes a showcase gallery of new art.



**DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?**  
Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 260 at [ifxm.ag/single-ifx](https://ifxm.ag/single-ifx).



For the traditional art lovers out there, we still have a regular gallery of the best and latest trad art.

some animation tutorials, but the core of ImagineFX is focused on still digital art and I think looking at the concept art side of things will remain at our core.

I'm open to hearing from our readers though, so please write in and let me know if you'd like to see more of this.

### No hard feelings

The last years have led me to unsubscribe from your magazine. A few years ago, we had 13 issues a year with original content. Now, every year, we get an issue filled with sketches that have already been printed in the magazine throughout the year.

The latest change, over the past two issues, is the replacement of traditional art tutorials with 3D ones. I can understand the direction you've chosen, but the new ImagineFX no longer resonates with me.

Good luck! No hard feelings. Thank you for the inspiring magazines you produced in the past.

*Wlad, via email*

**Rob replies** Hi Wlad. Thanks for getting in touch and for sharing your thoughts. First up, we don't republish old sketches from previous issues. Our sketchbook specials are all new!

I appreciate your thoughts on our traditional section and we feel it too, but we still have our Trad FXPosé section, showcasing the latest traditional art.

As for 3D, learning new skills and staying up to date with new tools and techniques is important for some and I hope that many readers will discover new ways of working, which could be of value when looking at the industry, on the hunt for a new role.

That said, we know we can't please everybody all of the time, but I hope you come back and enjoy the mag again.

### FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention



**David Hoffrichter** @davidhoffrichter



**bouboulonlon** @bouboulonlon



**Sandra Winther** @sandrawintherart

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

# Interview

© 20th Century Studios



# THE ART OF MATT FERGUSON

The artist discusses his career journey and shares his creative process for illustrating movie posters with **James Clarke**

**R**ich in heritage, illustrated movie posters have been enjoying a resurgence and renewal in recent years. A leading exponent of this renaissance is Matt Ferguson. Over the past decade and a half, Matt's work has played its part in reinvigorating the poster-art tradition for science fiction, fantasy and horror movies – both new titles and anniversary rereleases.

**Matt, how did your fascination with visual art and design evolve?**  
As a teenager, I got heavily into video games and taught myself Photoshop

and a bit of 3D so that I could start editing and adding to video games, like Quake. That almost turned into a career when I got a job offer from a games studio when I was 17. I did that on and off and I got some credits on a few games; including a Star Wars game. I then decided to go to university, and I did a film degree.

Film was a big passion in my life and it was my girlfriend – she's now my wife – who said to me that, "You can combine illustration and film." This was around 2009 or 2010, and back then there was this undercurrent of fan art and alternative art coming up with artists like Olly Moss. ➤

## MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

A curvilinear form frames the focal point of Matt's poster art for Transformers: The Movie, marking the animated movie's 35th anniversary.



## SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

Matt's poster for the recently released Black Phone 2 – the sequel to the 2022 film – features the mask worn by The Grabber, the film's murderous villain.

Matt Ferguson

A FORCE TO BE  
RECKONED WITH

Matt emphasised Darth  
Maul's striking visage  
in his poster art for the  
anniversary rerelease  
of *The Phantom Menace*.

25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

EVERY SAGA  
HAS A BEGINNING



# Interview

► I saw his work and thought, "Yeah, I want to do that."

So, I did that and then, very quickly, in 2010 or 2011, I did an Avengers piece and that got noticed online and led to my first actual job doing this kind of work for Marvel. My first real job doing film art was for The Avengers.

**What's your experience of having established yourself during the illustrated poster renaissance of a decade or so ago?**

There's been a pushback against the rise of photo manipulation in the 1990s. It can be a great tool, but if done in a lazy way, or in a quick way, you can get boring results. There were a lot of what I would call boring movie posters being produced that would be just a photo of an actor.

But then there were artists who started doing their own thing. The film studios noticed that, and they started hiring people because a piece of artwork online had got a positive response. It's even more important now with the rise of generative AI, I think, for people to say, "Somebody made this." So, I'm more than happy to have my name attached to work that I've done that's online.

**“When there's a definitive piece of artwork, especially for a film, I don't rip it off, but I try to evoke it”**

## Artist PROFILE

### Matt Ferguson

LOCATION: England

A leading exponent of movie poster illustration, for both new releases and anniversary rereleases, in recent years Matt's art has been globally recognised. His portfolio includes the creation of posters for a range of beloved film franchises that capture the spirit of those movies. Matt is also the creative director and co-owner at Vice Press. **WEB:** [www.cakesandcomics.com](http://www.cakesandcomics.com)

**What poster serves as an ideal example of your work illustrating a 'legacy' movie release?**

One poster that I'd like to talk about is the anniversary poster that I did for The Empire Strikes Back. I feel like it was a turning point in my career. And it came at the right time, just when Covid was kicking off and I remember thinking, "This is going to distract me from all of this horrible stuff." Because it's such a classic film, and for a lot of people it's the number one film of all time, and probably the best Star Wars film, there was this huge, daunting task ahead of me.

When there's a definitive piece of artwork, especially for a film, I don't



© 20th Century Studios

### IN THE BEGINNING

For 2023's The Creator, a circular form functions as the poster's focal point, evoking an important aspect of the movie's storyline.

rip it off, but I try to evoke it. Especially if I'm doing an old film – like an anniversary poster such as the Star Wars one. I want to evoke the memories of the films, but also the artwork because, for lots of people that's their access point for the films, whether it's the posters or the book covers. I know that with the original Star Wars, I had the book and that was my access point because the film wasn't available: we didn't have VHS, we didn't have streaming. There were photos in the middle of the book and then there was this amazing artwork on the front cover. They trigger the imagination.

**One of your latest movie poster projects has been to illustrate the poster for Predator: Badlands. What's the process and dynamic that's characterised that?**

Because Predator: Badlands is a new film, it's a little bit different to working an anniversary film [poster] where there's a vast amount of material available online to refer to and you can watch the finished film. When I was working on Predator: Badlands, the film wasn't finished. But, because I'm working directly with the studio, they can send me reference material. It's a back and forth and then once we get a concept that's good and ►

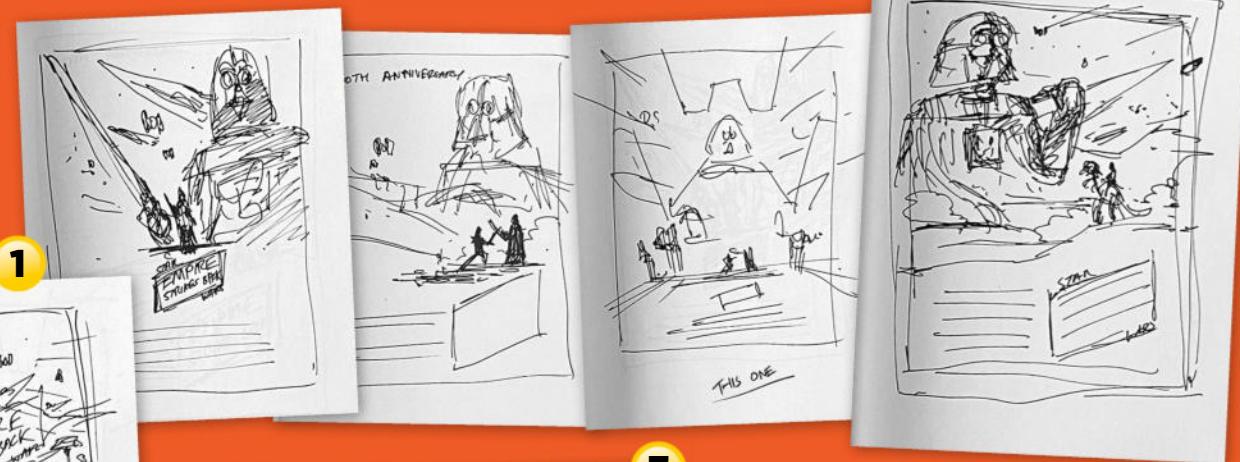
### THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

Matt's Star Trek III: The Search for Spock poster emphasises the drama and the spectacle of the movie.



© Paramount Picture Corp

Moments from the movie are key reference points in the evolution of a composition. Suggestions of differently scaled figures and other compositional elements feature in Matt's sketches.



1



2



2



3

Matt's preliminary design explorations account for text on the poster format.

The final version of Matt's Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back 40th anniversary poster.

4



This sketch emphasises the unifying effect of silhouettes in Matt's visual style, and ended up being selected as the basis of the poster.

## OF SITH AND A STRIKING DESIGN

Matt Ferguson recalls his initial difficulties in coming up with a poster to celebrate The Empire Strikes Back's 40th anniversary

"The first thing I did was watch the movie to get a sense of the mood. I then looked at lots of other artwork. I looked at the official poster, at fan art, everything. Then I thought, 'Right: what can I do that's different to that?' And I remember, I just couldn't think of anything. It's so iconic. It's Star Wars and it's Darth Vader! This was one of the first times where I watched the film again and I wrote down a list of key things about it. It's The Empire Strikes Back so it's got to be the Empire on the poster. Darth Vader is the real big-bad by this point, so he's got

to be imposing in the design, and then the core story is about Luke fighting back against these oppressive forces.

"I kept thinking to myself: 'I need something that's different.' I focused on Darth Vader's rejuvenation chamber. When we see the chamber in the film, I remember thinking it was this big, black shape that was bright inside and so, for the poster, you could have a graphic contrast. I did a thumbnail and was like, 'That's it!' I was so excited. I then did a bit more of a detailed pen and pencil sketch by hand, before going digital.

"The first port of call is to pull references together from the movie and then do a sort of collage. I illustrated the Empire poster digitally with some 3D modelling to block stuff out because it's got a lot of perspective. I used 3D modelling to block out shapes, such as where ships are and to build out a bit of the chamber. I can get all of the perspective right, and then use that as a base for the final illustration which is all done with a Wacom tablet in Photoshop. It's then just a matter of time to do it, which was a couple of weeks."

# Interview

► everyone's like, "We're excited about this!" then I'll take it to final. There might be tweaks or requests to change this and change that. Tiny things, really.

**In your work, there's a visually appealing use of circles and semi-circles and silhouettes. What's the aesthetic idea with that?**

At one point on my Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith anniversary poster, Anakin Skywalker was almost more a part of the mask. The idea was that it was enveloping him, but then I pulled back and made it a little bit less strange. It was a bit strange for a while, to be honest. Initially, I used to do lots of silhouettes. It's easier than drawing somebody. With Indiana Jones it's easy, because you've got his hat and you're there. Sometimes, for technical reasons, and sometimes



**THE HEAT IS ON**  
The inferno of the film's dramatic climax provides the guiding colour palette for this rerelease poster.

**“I can remember looking at movie posters in the cinema when I was a kid”**



## TRIPPING THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

Matt's illustration embodies the retro sci-fi aesthetic of the 37th film from Marvel's Cinematic Universe, which sees the Fantastic Four take on Galactus.

**LESS TALK,  
MORE STALK**

A variation for the Predator: Badlands promotional campaign.

**FIRST HUNT.**

**LAST CHANCE.**



© 20th Century Studios

## PICTURING THE TRUE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Matt discusses his creative choices for the Predator: Badlands poster, which included giving the angry alien a heroic stance

“It's very much a new Predator movie and the initial brief on that one was that it's got to be illustrated. And, so, I was looking at Drew Struzan's posters, because he was the master of that.

“Going from there, it was about doing lots of compositions. It was during that process when I thought, 'This movie is like Conan. It's an adventure film. I'm going to make him look a bit like Conan.'

“The other Predator movies are a lot more horror-coded, but in Badlands, this guy's the hero on a hostile alien planet and luckily the studio said: 'This is it!' and so I got to illustrate it.”

Of the poster's composition, Matt notes that, “It was all about using harsh V-shapes and leading your eye. I tend to do this thing – and I've done it quite a lot – where I like to have something small at the bottom of the image and big at the top. It's like a bullet-shot composition: something central with stuff flying off, and a lot of the time I even have those diagonal lines.

“I also like to do the type on all my posters and so that adds an extra element of design. I designed this poster purposefully to have the tagline on either side of the guy's head. Most good illustrators will leave a place for type.”



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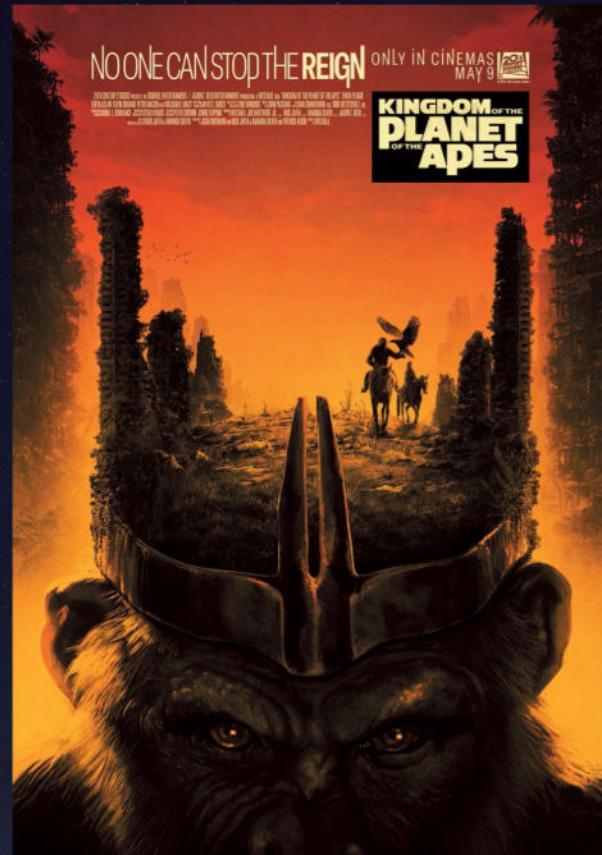
# Matt Ferguson

## CUTTING-EDGE ART (LEFT)

The silhouette of Ryan Gosling's Blade Runner grounds this image, evoking a dark world of illusion and menace.

## BATTLE ROYAL (BELOW)

Matt's poster for the Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes, the fourth film from the rebooted saga.



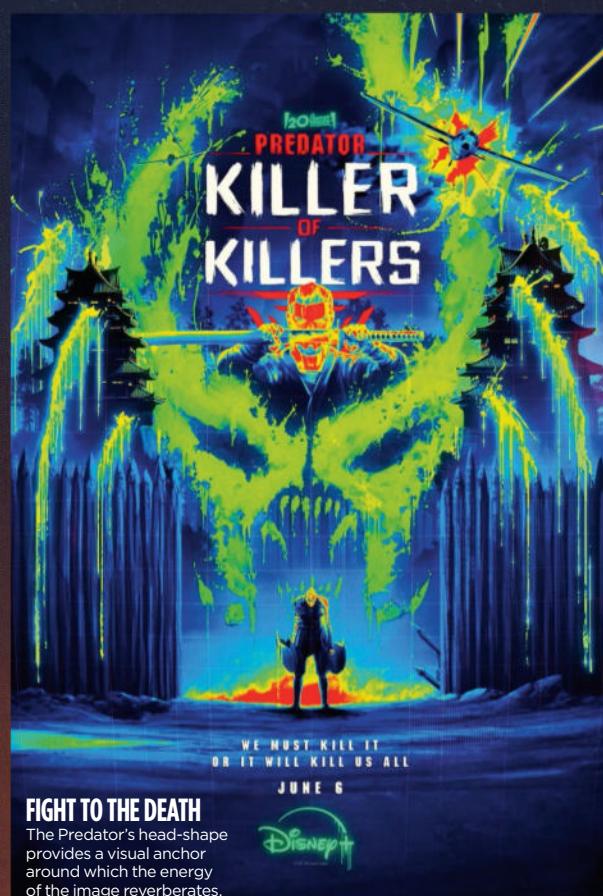
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because you can't get the likeness right, and you can't get the approval of the actors, you'll decide to just do it as a silhouette. But then, it's about how you put that together in an interesting way. Superheroes have a shape to them that work well as silhouettes. I do like using silhouettes!

**What issues should illustrators be mindful of when creating movie posters for a smartphone- and tablet-using audience?**

Another thing that's different about movie posters now is that old-fashioned movie posters were designed to be seen in a cinema foyer and so they were large. But now, people are seeing posters on their phone, and so I say to artists who I work with: "Make sure you do the standard test: make sure your composition is small, like the size of a business card, because that's how most people are going to see it." Simpler compositions with fewer elements go down well online.

**What does it mean to work on posters that allow you to express your enthusiasm for movies?**



I'm a massive fan of everything that I do. I'll say no to jobs where I don't care about it. Star Trek is pretty much my favourite and I like Transformers, too, because of the toys. The Star Trek films have always been a big thing for me. So doing those is like a passion project, in a way.

I love Star Wars, and it's been a really big and important job for me. People have been so positive about my work on the Star Wars movies, and so I feel a lot of responsibility to make each new one that I do as good as it can be.

**Coming full circle, Matt, what was your origin story in relation to movie poster art?**

I've always liked movie posters. I can remember looking at movie posters in the cinema when I was a kid. I've always had a thing for quad movie posters. I was nine or 10 when the Steven Spielberg film Hook came out and I remember liking it. My local Odeon cinema had a big mural of the Hook artwork blown up, and I can remember getting close to it and seeing all of the brush strokes on it. And that was when I had my first thought of, "Oh... somebody painted this."

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# SITTING SMART

In the **Boulies Ergonomic Chair Sale** you can save up to £180 and enhance your studio space – just in time for Christmas!

 If you spend long hours working, creating or gaming then your chair can make or break your day. Poor posture, neck strain and back pain are all-too-common complaints when using standard seating. Thankfully, there's a smarter, healthier way to sit.

Right now, you can upgrade your comfort and productivity with Boulies' ergonomic chair sale. The company is offering unbeatable discounts on chairs

that are designed and engineered to support you from the ground up.

Ergonomic chairs are built around the way your body naturally moves. Instead of forcing you into rigid, unhealthy positions, they adapt to your posture, weight and movement. Features such as adjustable lumbar support, tilt control, armrest positioning and breathable materials work together to reduce pressure points and improve circulation. This means you stay focused for longer, experience less



## DIVINE RECLINE

All Master Rex chairs have a built-in leg rest that can be extended as you lean back, for the ultimate in comfort.



fatigue and feel more energised by the end of the day, so you won't feel like you need a break before adding your next brush strokes, wrangling those nodes or beating the end-of-level boss.

For anyone who spends hours at a desk, whether you're fighting that boss in your favourite game, painting an epic masterpiece or working on the next great motion-graphics spot, a Boulies ergonomic chair is more than a luxury – it's an investment in your long-term health. A proper seating position can decrease the risk of muscle and joint problems, and boost productivity by improving comfort and focus. In short: when your body feels better, your work and play improves, too.

## SEASONAL SAVINGS

Boulies, globally recognised as one of the best designers of ergonomic chairs, has a Christmas sale, enabling you to grab a bargain either for yourself or a loved one, at a fantastic price. Each model has been engineered for comfort, crafted for durability and



“When you sit smarter, you work better, play longer and feel your best every day”



## HEALTH INVESTMENT

All Boulies chairs have been designed to provide ergonomic support, boosting posture and improving circulation.

## FINISHING TOUCH

Choose from a range of colours and materials, including leather, ultraflex PU and water-repellent fabric for added durability.



**boulies<sup>®</sup>**  
PRODUCTIONS  
[www.boulies.co.uk](http://www.boulies.co.uk)

styled to complement any office or studio setup. You can save up to £180 and get a three-year warranty. Better still, if you're buying as a gift, the 14-day return policy can be extended until Boxing Day, for ultimate peace of mind.

The Boulies Master chair provides two sizes: Master and Master Max, from £289.99 during the Christmas sale. Master Rex is a plus model for people who would prefer to relax or lean back, with its extra footrest for supreme comfort. It's available from £320.99 during the Christmas sale.

If that wasn't enough, Boulies offers free two-day shipping, with your purchase securely transported via DPD.

So don't settle for discomfort. Take advantage of Boulies' limited-time sale and transform your space into one that supports you – literally. Comfort, health and focus, all in one chair. Grab yours while you still can. Because when you sit smarter, you work better, play longer and feel your best every day.

**Boulies' Christmas sale ends on 30 December. For more information please visit [www.boulies.co.uk](http://www.boulies.co.uk)**

# Development sheet

## PROJECT TITLE: FANATICAL CYBORG

Character artist **Zhang Huang** takes us through the creative process behind Zod, an unpleasant mix of man and machine working in perfect harmony to try and ruin your day

### Artist PROFILE

#### Zhang Huang

LOCATION: China

Zhang Huang is a character designer working in the video games industry. They enjoy creating original environments and then designing characters who match their unique settings, using props and costumes to build up a sense of storytelling. Outside of work they enjoy exercising and drawing figures from Warhammer 40k. [www.artstation.com/wtmwar](http://www.artstation.com/wtmwar)

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**ImagineFX**

#### Establish the character

Line sketches help me to determine the overall temperament of the character. This step will also establish their equipment, as well as ensuring that the design doesn't deviate too much from the original intention during the development process. It doesn't need to be overly detailed; the main aim here is to find the general direction.

#### Colour exploration

I carry out basic colour matching to ensure that the main colour blocks of the character can be easily identified when the character is reduced in size. This will enable me to see the silhouette, temperament and final impact the character has more intuitively. Adding some appropriate colours can also make the character appear more realistic.



#### Add colour and contrast to the clean line art

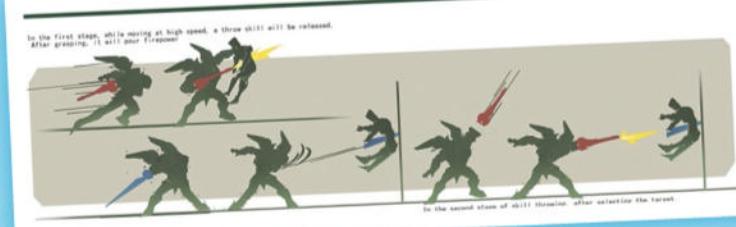
I take the sketch to a finished line drawing. The cleanliness of the line drawing will determine the ease of subsequent stages, and I can spot any structural errors during the process of cleaning up the line drawing and make corrections. After producing the complete line drawing I add the colours, based on my work from the previous stage. Finally, I apply some simple refinements to the character and improve the level of contrast between the primary and secondary areas.





## Refine the design

I need to make the main character large enough to clearly see the details and ensure the balance of his overall design. In addition, I want to add some textual explanations to help viewers who want to know more about him better understand the intention behind my design choices. Finally, I also create some artwork which makes it possible for viewers to see how this character utilises his fighting skills.



## 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

# Wynton Redmond

Mecha racing art jostles for room with character and composition explorations in this US artist's sketchbook

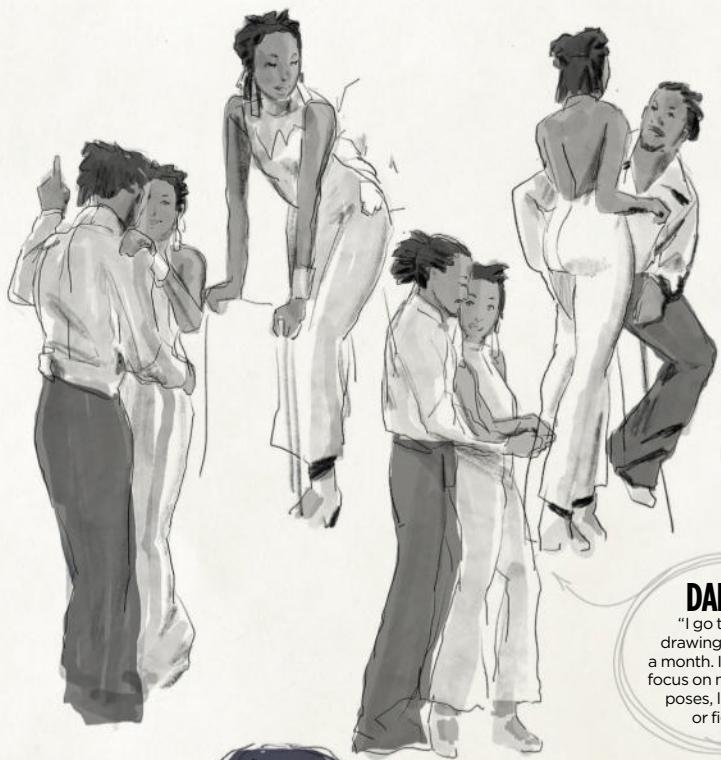
## Artist **PROFILE**

### Wynton Redmond

LOCATION: US



Wynton is a Los Angeles-based storyboard artist and character designer. He initially worked in IT and web development, but drew for fun on the train to work. After receiving a random email he's been in the animation industry for the past 10 years. Notable projects include, Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse, Invincible and KPop Demon Hunters. <https://wyntonred.com>

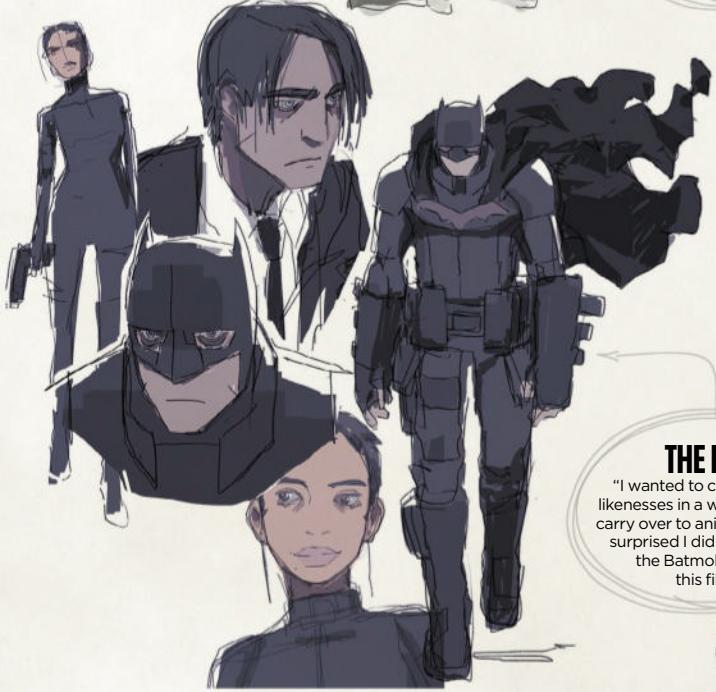


### AIM FOR THE LEAD

"One of my bucket list projects is to create a racing mecha show. I know it's been done before, but I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel, just make it faster (sorry, that was corny!)."

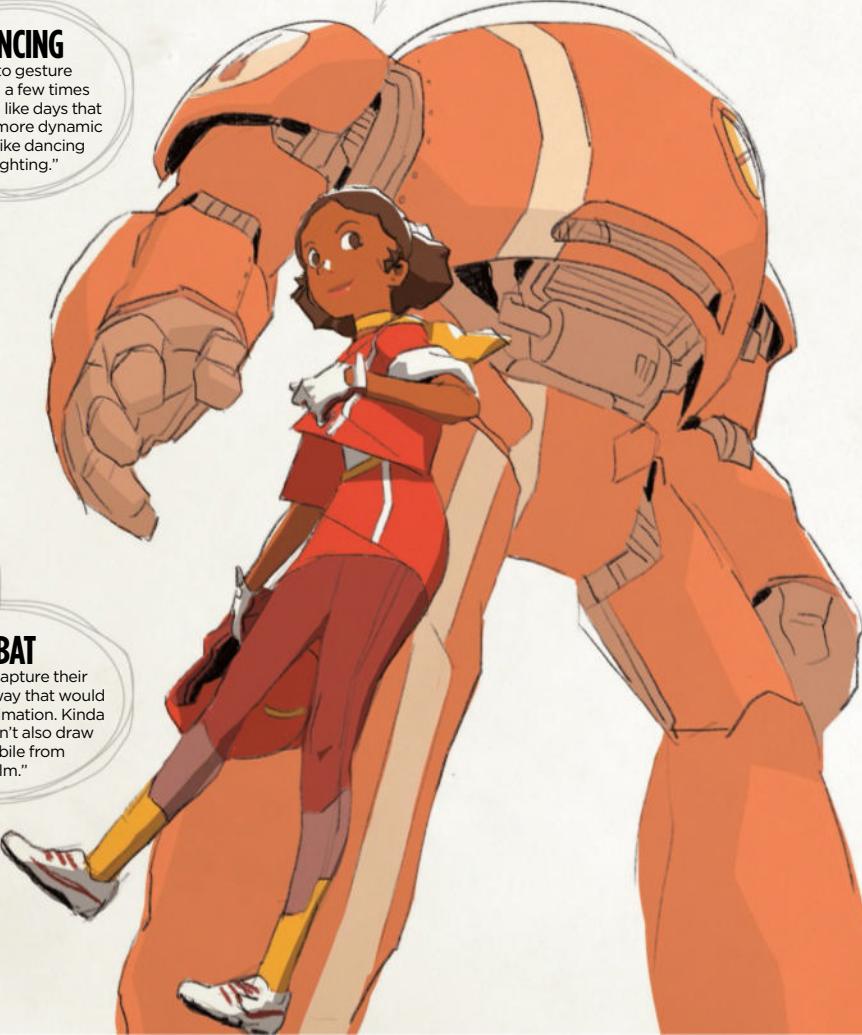
### DANCING

"I go to gesture drawing a few times a month. I like days that focus on more dynamic poses, like dancing or fighting."



### THE BAT

"I wanted to capture their likenesses in a way that would carry over to animation. Kinda surprised I didn't also draw the Batmobile from this film."



# Sketchbook Wynton Redmond

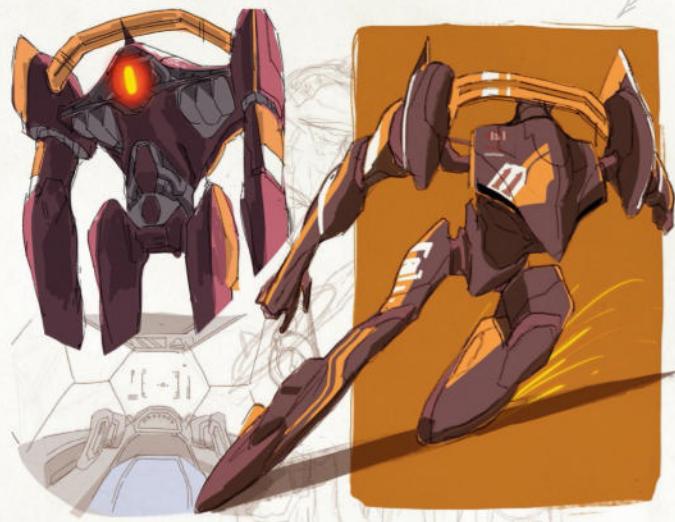


## DELIVERY

"I sketched this on the plane. Just thinking of a fantasy RPG about the US Postal Service."

## FORMULA X

"More racing mecha! This one is inspired by Formula 1. My favourite part is the rear diffuser."



“One of my bucket list projects is to create a racing mecha show”



## SKATES

"Skating isn't as fun as racing, but it's a close second. This sketch was inspired by hanging out at Venice Beach."

**BENIMARU**

"I'm a huge fighting game fan. The animation and illustrations in games like Capcom vs SNK 2 and Street Fighter 3 are very influential to my work."

**PARADE**

"These drawings were pure practice of composition and playing with reflections. I'm always building a mental library of shots to use when storyboarding."

**ZELDA**

"I've always appreciated the design language in Nintendo games, especially Legend of Zelda and Metroid."



“I live near a bike path,  
so I often see huge groups  
of road bikes”

**ROAD  
BIKE**  
“This sketch started  
as a study of shoulder  
anatomy. I live near a  
bike path, so I often  
see huge groups  
of road bikes.”

**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)



Playable Demo



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# ImagineFX

# Workshops

Advice from the world's best artists

**Workshop assets  
are available...**

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



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70



## This issue:

### 48 Use 3D models in your concept art

Misa Steinmetz explains how she incorporates 3D techniques into her 2D workflow.

### 54 Take a figure design into 3D

Yohan Houel adapts a character from Arcane, making it suitable for a video game pipeline.

### 56 Painting a scene of Greek drama

Alexander Leskinen creates a stormy environment featuring a group of mythical harpies.

### 60 Mix inspiration

Xie Xufeng's retrofuturistic urban scene has its roots in insect behaviour and daily human life.

### 62 Riff on your passions

Max Froer draws on a range of influences when rendering a beast that's part machine.

### 64 Add light to your character design

Jiunn Kuo on how and why he uses striking lighting, glow effects and atmosphere in his character-focused illustrations.

### 70 Work smarter with colours

Álvaro Jiménez reveals the workflow process he follows to summon an armoured demon.

# Photoshop & Blender USE 3D MODELS IN YOUR CONCEPT ART

**Misa Steinmetz** explains how she incorporates 3D techniques into her 2D workflow, creating this month's cover painting

## Artist PROFILE

### Misa Steinmetz

LOCATION: US

Misa is a visual development artist at Sony Pictures Animation, with a background in fine art. She loves plein-air painting in her free time. [www.misasteinart.com](http://www.misasteinart.com)



I started my career just with digital painting, but over the years I began to incorporate more and more 3D techniques to speed up my process. Having a solid understanding of the art fundamentals and 2D skills is essential, but learning how to use 3D – even in a basic way – is very useful for producing quick iterations and making amendments when working with clients.

3D has been incredibly useful in all of my concept art and matte painting work in animation, games and movies. Knowing how to use 3D helps with passing your work on to other departments, creating more images in a shorter amount of time, and working in a non-destructive manner for potential changes.

Blender has been my 3D tool of choice because it's free and there are so many tutorials and resources online available. There are many

more 3D tools to learn such as Unreal Engine and 3DCoat, but I always recommend Blender as a starting place for your 3D journey.

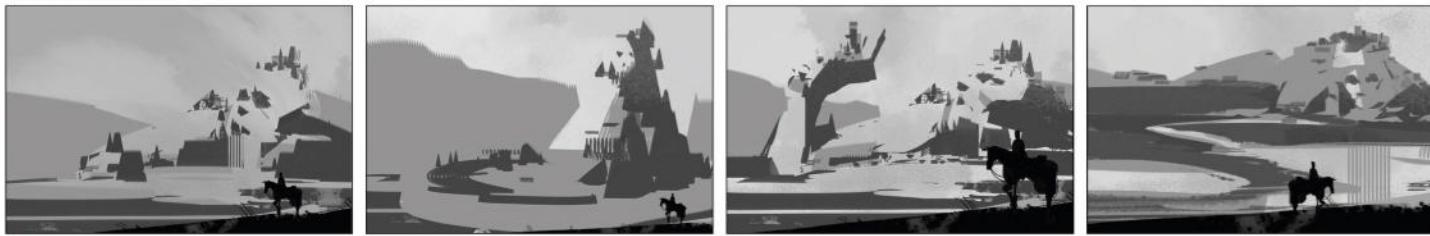
It can be easy to get sucked into spending too much time in 3D and not progressing on your piece, but I've found that going between your 3D scene and painting over in 2D helps a lot, and for this workshop I'll be sharing my process of creating a simple 3D blockout to push to a final painting in Photoshop.



# In depth Environment concept

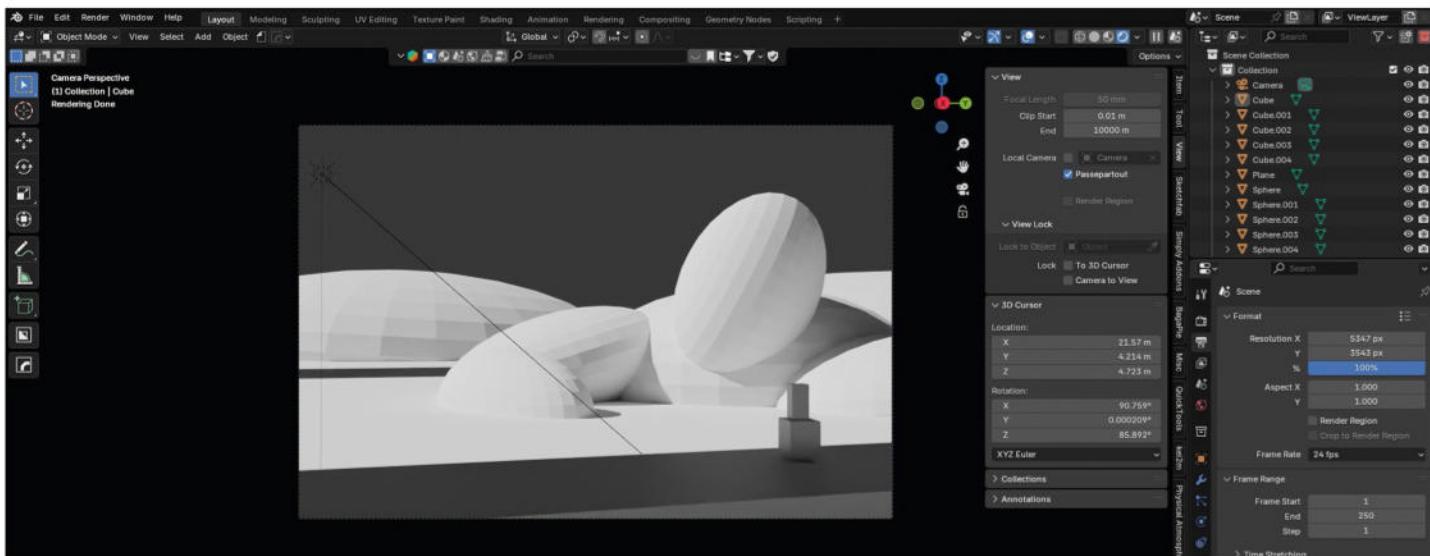


# Workshops



## 1 Create thumbnail sketches

Once I have a couple of references for my painting organised in PureRef, I start sketching some thumbnails. I draw rough lines first to indicate the fore-, mid- and background, and then paint a quick value pass on top. For this piece I need the focal point to be on the right-hand side of the image, so I focus more on producing variations with secondary shapes throughout the left-hand side and the midground.



## 2 Build and light a rough 3D blockout

After the composition is chosen, I set up my Blender scene with the camera angle, base shapes and lighting. I use simple geometry to block out the scene and place the sun in the correct position to match my value sketch. I set the focal length for the camera in this scene at 50mm.

**RESOURCES**

### WORKSHOP BRUSHES

**PHOTOSHOP**

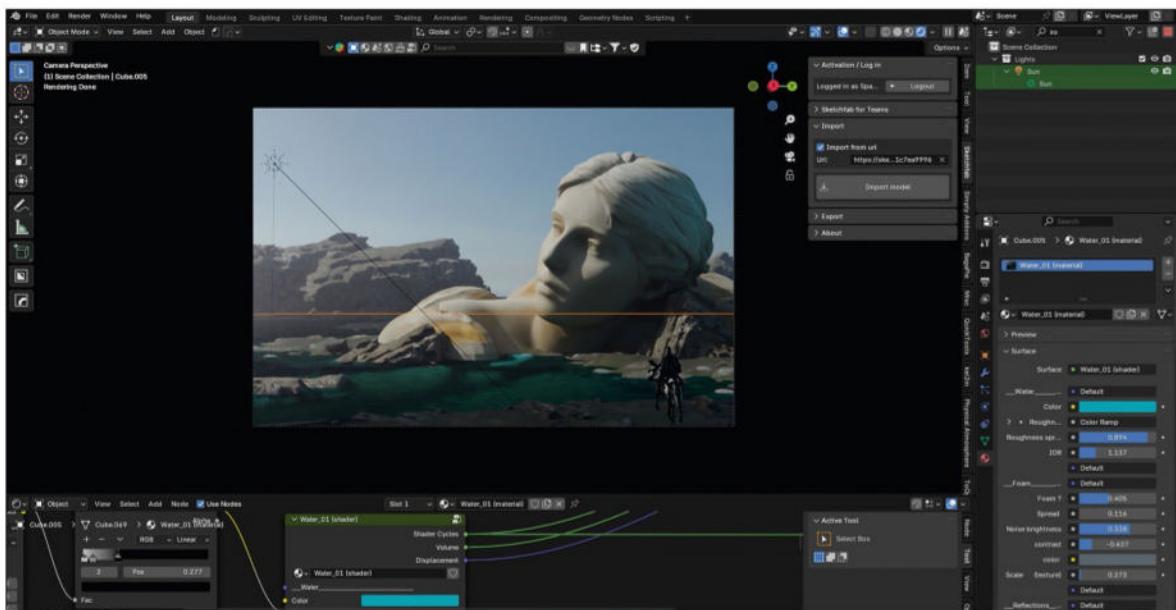
**CUSTOM BRUSHES: FOLIAGE**

Useful for painting trees, bushes and some rock textures because of its jagged edges.

**LINE TEXTURE**

I used this brush for painting sharp lines and blocking out the buildings. I also used it to paint sharper lines on the statue.

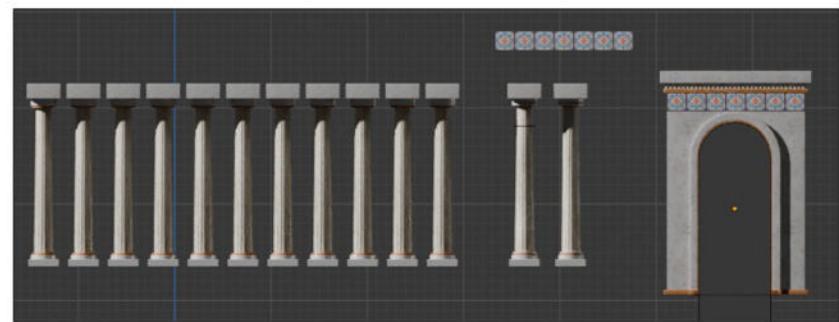
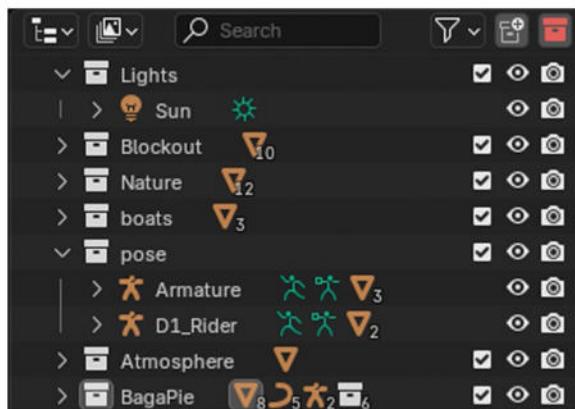
**GET YOUR RESOURCES**  
See page 5 now!



## 3 Introduce 3D assets to the composition

I use Quixel's Megascans to download and add environmental pieces to my scene, such as rocks and foliage. I also set up an HDRI for ambient lighting, and make use of other assets that I've previously purchased or found free to use from Sketchfab. I've collected many assets over the years that I can reuse for different projects.

# In depth Environment concept



## 4 Cleaning up the scene

Once the blockout is finished, I like to start cleaning up my collections. I can add my blockout to a separate collection by pressing the shortcut M. Next, I create folders for lighting, nature and atmosphere. As I continue my illustration, I make sure to keep my 3D scene clean and in the folders so I can easily turn elements on and off if required.

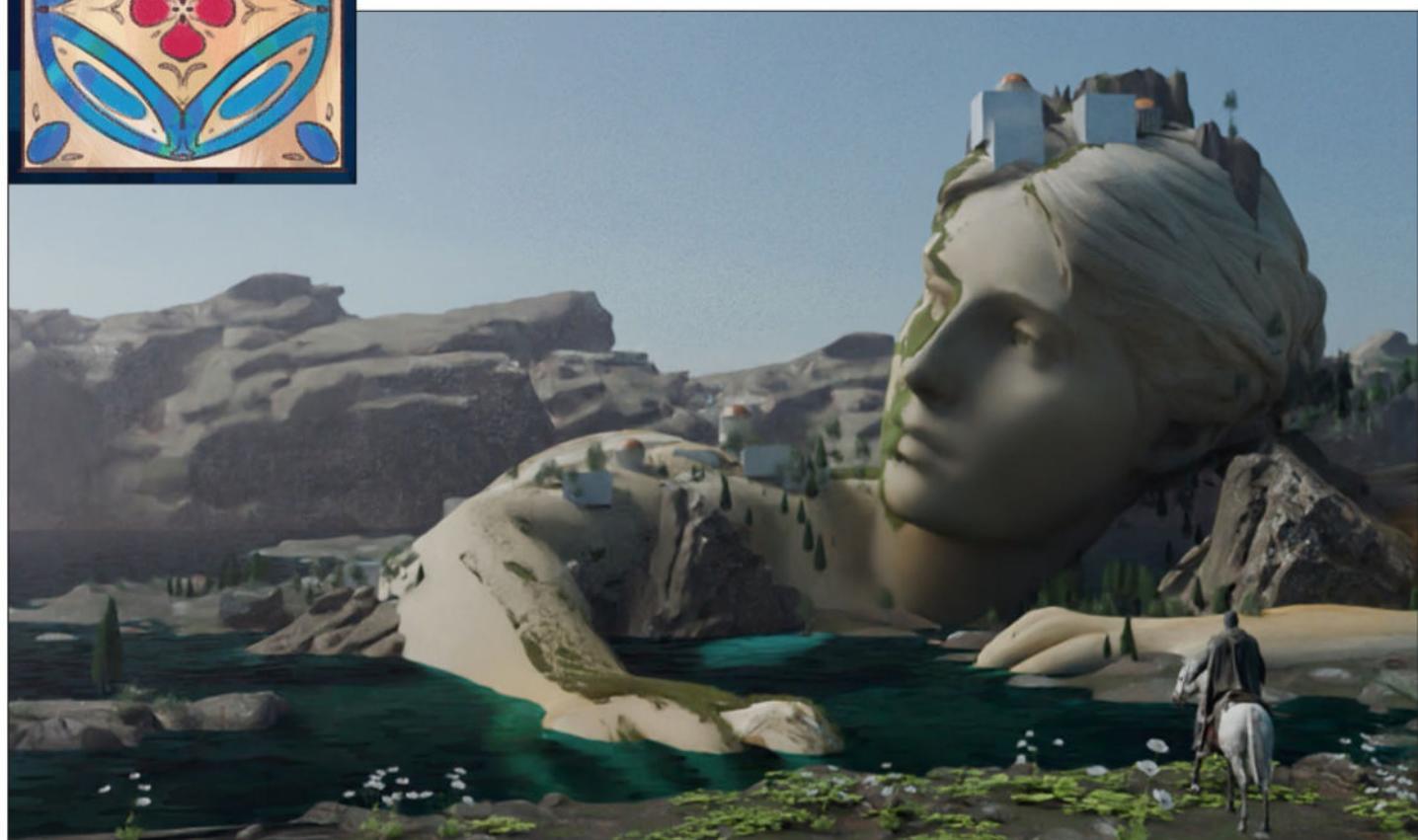
## 5 Constructing 3D set pieces

My next step is to start creating my own assets. After studying a collection of reference photos of Roman architecture, I break down what I need to construct my own city in a fantastical environment. I start with a simple Roman column, dome and archway. These can be reused multiple times to develop different buildings. I need to be efficient in my time for creating these structural elements because the buildings are a secondary detail in the painting.



## 6 Paint a tile in Photoshop

For my own kitbash set I want a reusable tile design so I paint a square tile in Photoshop with the Symmetry setting turned on. I then bring this into Blender as a material and use the array on the plane to duplicate the texture many times. I add this texture to my buildings as small details.



## 7 Posing the arms of the gigantic statue

I like to use Mixamo for posing simple characters in my scenes. I find a base character on the website and choose a pose that I like. Next, I download the fbx file to import into my scene. I change the material to be the same as the head, scale it up and place it in the water. I try adding moss into my scene, but later remove it because it causes lag. ➡

# Workshops



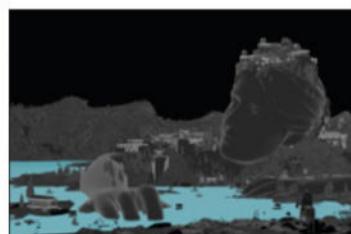
## 8 First pass in Photoshop

I go from 3D to 2D a couple of times in my process, and I find that this helps me see what I can add to my painting without spending too much time trying to finish everything in 3D. I'm happy with my initial blockout, so I render it and then do a paintover. At this stage I render my piece with 50 samples or fewer, for a faster render time.



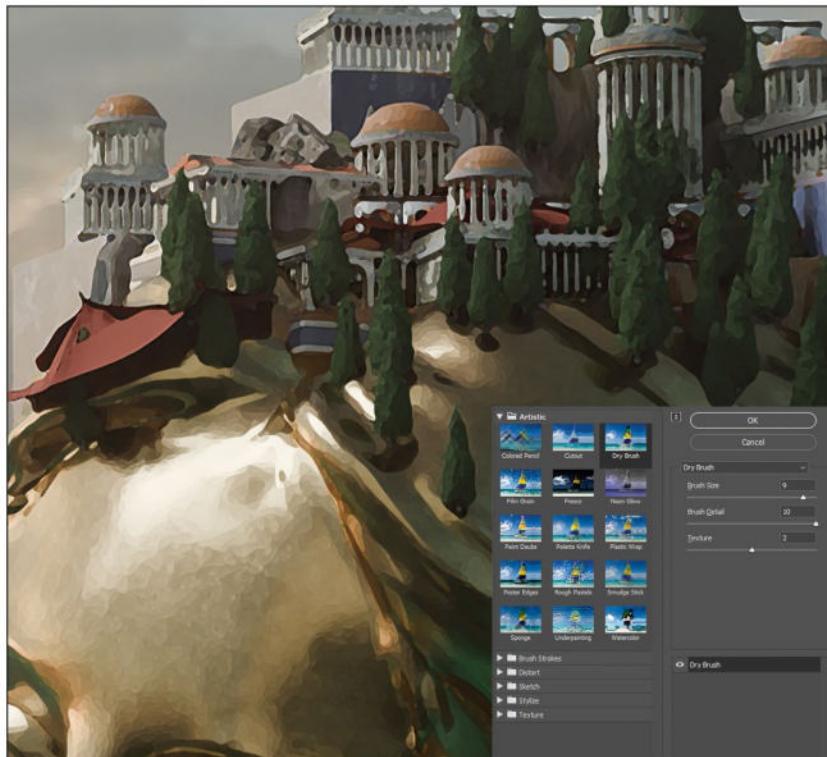
## 9 Assembling more buildings

After my paintover, I go back to my kitbash set and create larger buildings to add into my piece. I combine what I made previously and join the mesh together. After creating these, I bring them back into my main scene and decimate them. I have a Blender add-on called ToOptimize Tools and this helps me see which geometry may be the heaviest.



## 10 Rendering 3D passes

I go back into Blender and push my scene's details more with the city, props and nature elements. I also test a couple more materials for the main statue, to see if I like the colours. I want to bring it back into Photoshop so I render my scene again. At this stage I render two mist passes, alternate material passes and a clown pass to make selections in Photoshop easier.



## 11 Apply Photoshop filters

After bringing all my new 3D renders into Photoshop, I like to add a filter on the 3D base from the Filter Gallery. I use Dry Brush the most, but I use the Cutout filter and Watercolor filter occasionally. They have the effect of softening the 3D look and helps me to begin the paintover process, too.



## 12 Pushing the painting

I use the clown pass to select the fore-, mid- and background, separating them into different layers. I then look for ways to add pops of colour and shapes to continue breaking up the 3D look. I use the Lasso tool and abstract brushes with Color Jitter to add small flecks of saturation in areas around the image.



## 13 Adding light to the face

The face is blending in with the scenery so I adjust the material to be brighter and more stone-like. I start using smaller brushes and slow down around the forms to clarify the planes in the face. I paint in details such as cracks and add moss to indicate the age of the statue.



## 14 Making final touches

After rendering for a while, I step back from my painting to see what is and isn't working. The scene is a bit yellowish so I adjust the hues to be more blue, and add grass and flowering bushes to the foreground. Near the end I merge all my layers and do any final painting and adjustment layers on top.



## Technique focus

# TAKE A FIGURE DESIGN INTO 3D

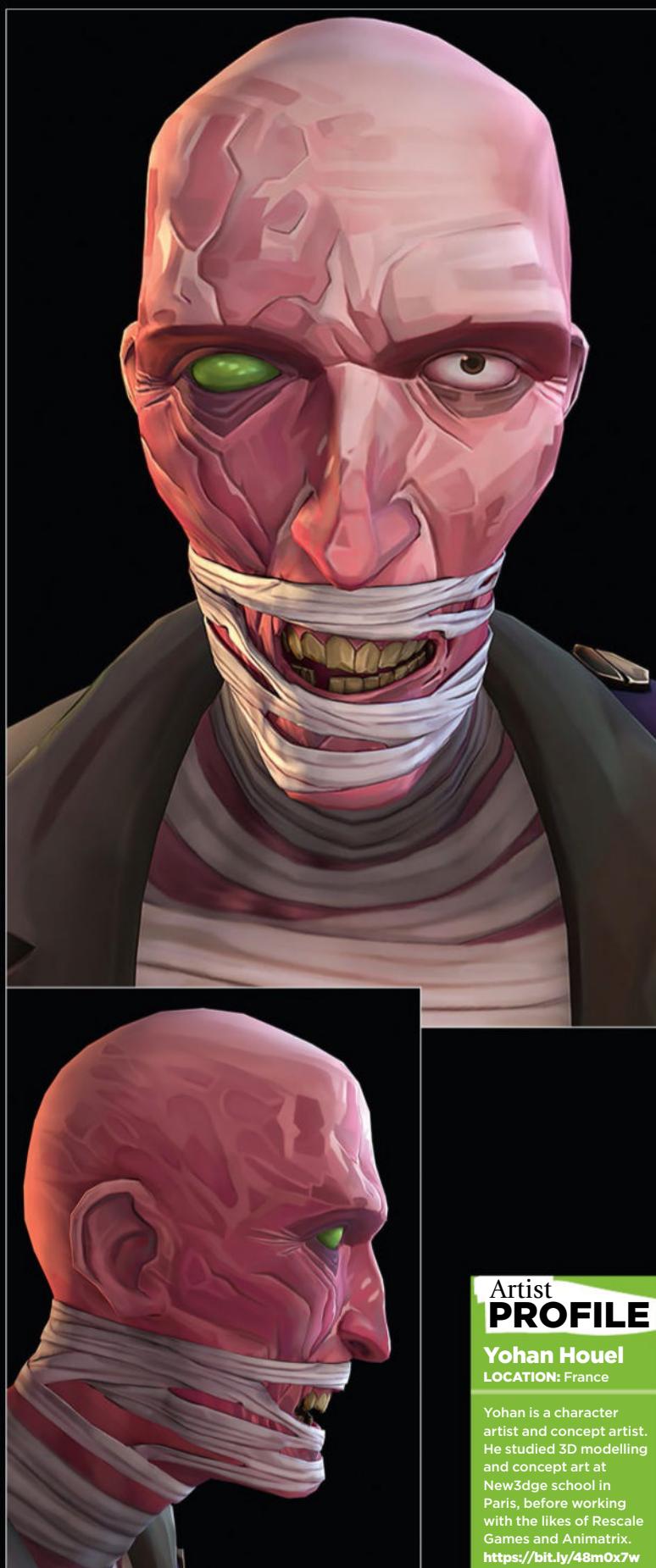
**Yohan Houel** adapts a character from Arcane, making it suitable for a video game pipeline



"This article is on my reinterpretation of Singed from the Arcane TV show. The main goal of this artwork was to study and translate the stylised shapes and dynamic proportions defined by Arcane's artistic direction. I also focused on recreating the painterly texture treatment seen in the show. Another

important objective was developing a clean, low-poly topology suitable for video game production. My top tip for approaching this style is to practise 2D painting studies in Photoshop, as it greatly helps in better understanding Arcane's shapes, brushwork and visual language. It also helped refine my sculpting workflow and overall artistic decisions."





**Artist PROFILE**

**Yohan Houel**  
LOCATION: France

Yohan is a character artist and concept artist. He studied 3D modelling and concept art at New3dge school in Paris, before working with the likes of Rescale Games and Animatrix. <https://bit.ly/48m0x7w>

## How I create... A 3D MODEL WITH STRONG VISUALS



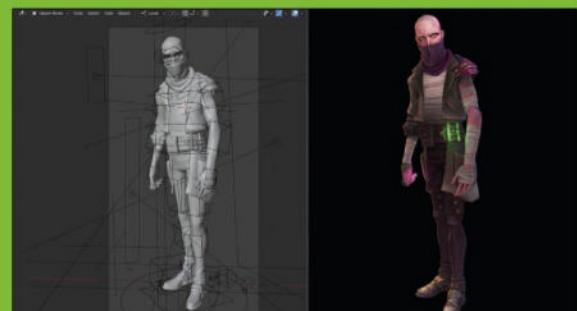
### 1 Blocking in shapes

I block out the main shapes in ZBrush to establish proportions and a clear silhouette. I focus on refining the high-poly sculpt, enhancing forms, details and shapes to match the character's personality. In Maya I create clean retopology and efficient UVs that are suitable for baking.



### 2 Lay down textures and colour

With the retopologise model ready, I bake the high-resolution sculpt details onto the low-poly mesh to capture crisp shapes and surface information. For texturing, I begin with base colours, AO and curvature in Substance 3D Painter, then move to 3DCoat to hand-paint the character, reinforcing a stylised and painterly look.



### 3 Refining the pose

I export the model and maps into Blender. Using Auto-Rig Pro, I create a pose that emphasises Singed's attitude and silhouette. I set up lighting to enhance the sculpted forms and material contrasts. The final render focuses on clarity, mood and readability, ensuring the character's presence and expression have instant impact.

## Photoshop

# PAINTING A SCENE OF GREEK DRAMA

### Artist PROFILE

#### Alexander Leskinen

LOCATION: Armenia

Alexander has been a part of the CG industry for over 15 years. He's currently freelancing, creating promotional art and illustrations for various game projects, working on Magic: The Gathering and other card games. <https://bit.ly/4pxuGYq>

**Alexander Leskinen** creates a stormy environment featuring harpies, the winged messengers of Zeus



This illustration was created for a zine on ancient Greek mythology, so it was important to adhere to the canonical depiction of harpies in Greek art and ensure the image aligned with how ancient Greeks envisioned these characters, avoiding pop-culture distortions. Harpies are bird-like messengers of Zeus, sent by

the Olympian ruler to punish humans for their crimes. They embody sudden gusts of wind that carry away human souls.

I decided to depict them bathing in a storm. I emphasised the strong wind through flowing hair and tunics. The sharp light from a lightning flash was meant to make the image more tense and dramatic. I directed the gaze of the nearest

harpies towards the viewer, as if the viewer were seeking shelter from a severe storm by the seashore and accidentally stumbled upon the carefree, bathing harpies.

I chose a dark tone for the illustration to emphasise the grim nature of these characters. The colour scheme consists of cool shades with a slight warm contrast on the horizon, caused by the setting sun.

### How I create...

## A TENSE ENCOUNTER



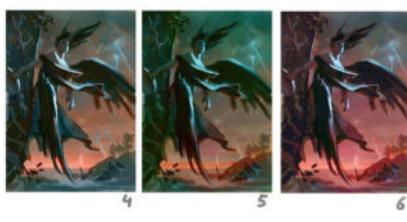
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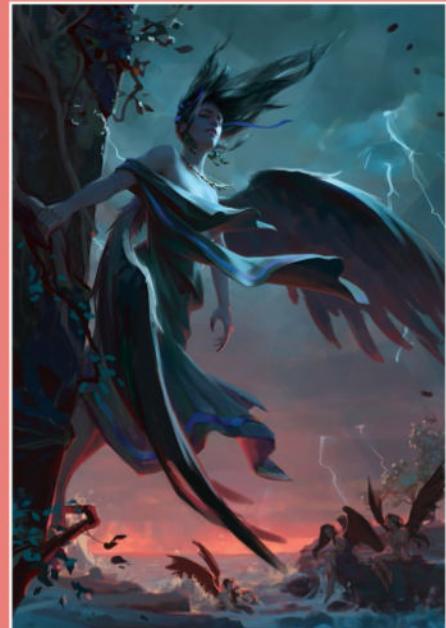
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6



### 1 Working up the idea

I always start my illustrations by putting down tonal masses and rhythms. I quickly create several compositional drafts using spots and rhythms. At the second stage, I refine one of the preferred options with minor adjustments, and at the third stage I go on to develop the overall vision and idea of the illustration in black and white.

### 2 Moving into colour

I create several colour variations using the black-and-white sketch and layer blending modes to select colours. I settle on a cooler option because it adds more tension and better suits the character's design. I place the colour contrast at the periphery, near the horizon line, so that the colour contrast opposes the tonal contrast in the upper part of the composition.

### 3 Rendering the scene

Now it's just a matter of rendering everything. I work on the entire illustration as a whole, starting from the compositional centre and gradually moving to the surroundings. During the process, I work on the entire illustration at once. This prevents me getting stuck on one section and helps maintain cohesion, preserving the hierarchy toward the compositional centre.

In depth Lighting insights



## ILLUMINATING ADVICE

**RESOURCES**

**WORKSHOP BRUSHES**

**PHOTOSHOP**

**CUSTOM BRUSHES: BASE**

A simple Round brush, that doesn't change size with pressure, making it very easy to control.

**OVAL**

A Round brush that's compressed into an angular oval. It allows for sharp, dynamic strokes.

**TEXTURE**

A standard texture brush that creates textures and adds a slight element of randomness to the work.

**GET YOUR RESOURCES**

See page 5 now!

**Breaking down the light**

This illustration uses three light sources that are arranged in a hierarchy: primary, secondary and tertiary. The first and strongest, sharpest light source is the lightning flash, with the main light flow directed at the compositional centre. The second light source is the glow of the sunset. It's directional and warm, but much weaker than the first, creating a warm-cool contrast and adding a painterly quality. The third, minor light source is the light from the twilight sky – a diffused light source. Always establish a hierarchy in lighting. It will make your illustration appear more interesting and expressive.

# In depth Lighting insights

## Strike the right tone

Always work with tonal values first during the process. Tone is the foundation of your illustration. Without proper tonal structure, it's impossible to select colours correctly since tonal value is an integral part of colour. Without well-established tonal relationships, your composition, accents, depth, spatial arrangement, mood and atmosphere won't function effectively. Simply put, nothing in the illustration will work if the tonal values are incorrect.

## Work smarter

This illustration features deep shadows, so I don't add much detail there, even though it's the compositional centre. Never over-detail areas where the detail won't be visible – this helps maintain cohesion in your work and saves time.

## Establish depth

To create spatial depth in the figure, I use differences in edge contrast. The silhouette of the far shoulder is softer than the near one, which visually pushes the near shoulder toward the viewer. The start of the near wing recedes behind the shoulder in space, emphasised by a more contrasting line of the fabric on the shoulder and the soft silhouette of the feathers. The silhouette of the far arm is softer than the fabrics overlapping it, which are closer. Always use contrasts in illustrations – it makes the image more expressive and interesting. Here, the contrast between soft and hard works in the silhouettes.

## Colour temperature

When using multiple light sources, try to differentiate between them not only in intensity but also in colour temperature. In this illustration, I'm using a warm red-orange light – the complementary colour on the colour wheel to the cool blue tones of the primary lightning flash.

## The warm-cool contrast

Because the main lighting in this illustration is cool, I make all the deep shadows warm in colour temperature. This enables the piece to remain within a cool colour scheme while retaining a painterly quality. The warm sunset also helps maintain the warm-cool contrast. It's important to preserve the overall lighting temperature principle across the entire illustration – this makes it cohesive and believable.

## Secondary characters

To convey scale and a sense of space, I place other bathing harpies in the background. Without them, the illustration would lack small elements to complement the large figure, as well as a sense of space, since the upper part only contains the character and the sky. Aim for at least three planes in an illustration to create a comfortable sense of space.



## Technique focus

# MIX INSPIRATION

All aboard! **Xie Xufeng's** retrofuturistic urban scene has its roots in insect behaviour and daily human life

"The inspiration for this piece came from a photograph of a grasshopper, whose pose as it hung upside down from a branch captivated me. The photograph reminded me of the streetcars that I take every day for my commute.

I tried to blend these two very different elements together when

creating this piece. In the midst of the bustling city streets, a train with countless mechanical legs slowly crawls into the station, while people wait patiently on the platform. This scene, I hope, adds a touch of whimsy and delight to the otherwise monotonous routine of daily commuting."

## How I create... A SCI-FI TRAIN





## Artist PROFILE

**Xie Xufeng**

LOCATION: China

Xie Xufeng is a concept artist and illustrator in the gaming industry who has done work for major studios.  
<https://bit.ly/4i4g68z>

### 1 Lay down the initial sketch

I begin the artwork by outlining my ideas and composition of the unusual-looking commuter train pulling into a station in monochrome line art. This approach makes it possible for me to quickly visualise the desired shapes and design concepts without becoming distracted by other visual elements. Focusing solely on structural clarity at this stage helps to solidify the foundation before moving on to complex rendering.



### 2 Value blocking

I add greyscale value layers to establish foreground/background relationships. Each object is on a separate layer for organisational efficiency, creating a clear roadmap for colour application later on.



### 3 Apply colour to the composition

I start with flat base colours (local colours), initially avoiding complex colour mixing to maintain clean hue relationships. Once this colour framework is established, I move on to refinement and detailing, ensuring colour harmony remains intact throughout the polishing process.



## Technique focus

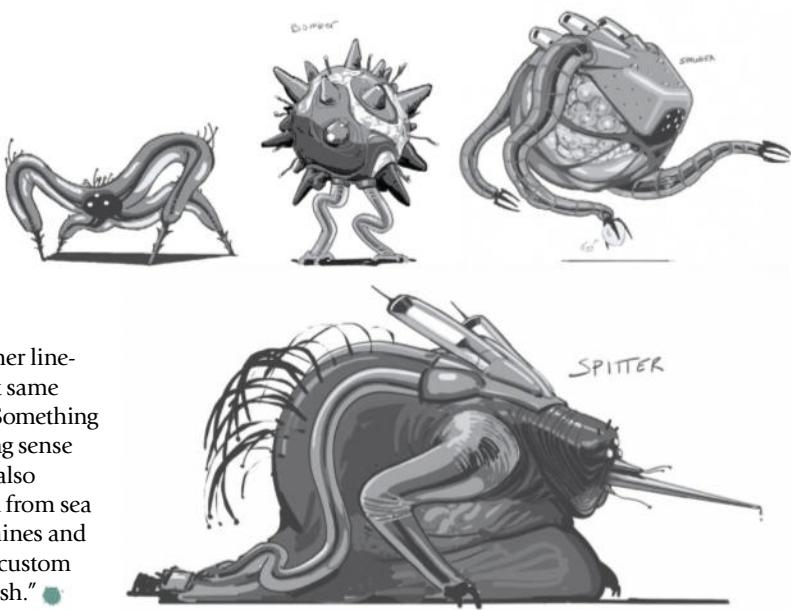
# RIFF ON YOUR PASSIONS

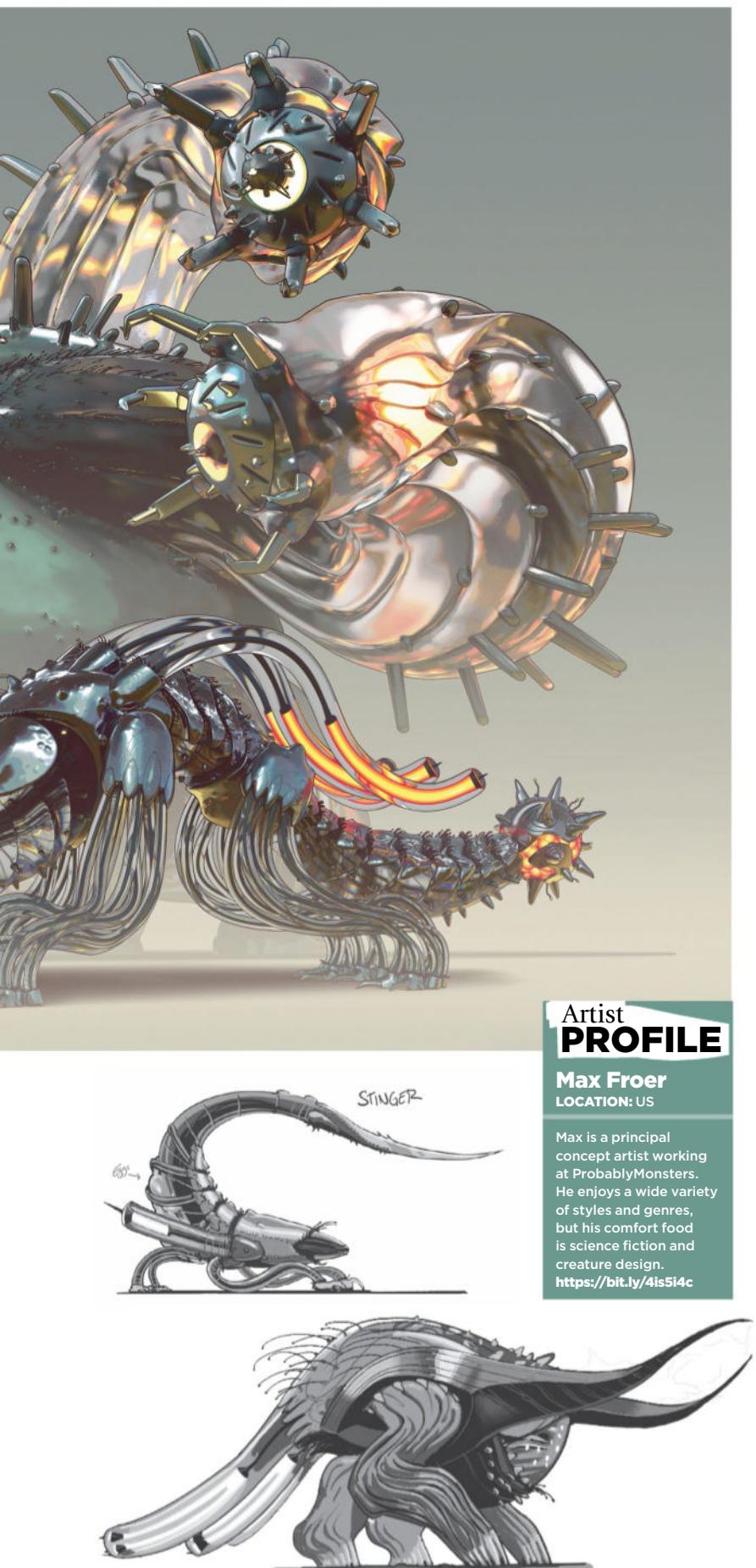
**Max Froer** draws on a range of influences when rendering a beast that's part machine



"Throughout my life I've taken inspiration from the Combine in Half-Life 2. The creatures from that universe have this brilliant blend of insect and machine, to the point where it's impossible to tell if it's a machine-augmented bug or the other

way around. For my Shimmer line-up, I wanted to capture that same feeling but in my own way. Something that feels alien, with a strong sense of mystery. A bit gross, but also beautiful. I combined DNA from sea life, 80s-style chrome machines and the glass-like tubes seen in custom PCs to create something fresh."





## Artist PROFILE

### Max Froer

LOCATION: US

Max is a principal concept artist working at ProbablyMonsters. He enjoys a wide variety of styles and genres, but his comfort food is science fiction and creature design.

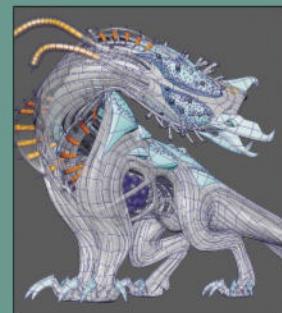
<https://bit.ly/4is5i4c>

## How I create... A TRANSLUCENT ANIMAL DESIGN



### 1 Value sketches

I start with rough sketches using no more than three values. If the design feels powerful in just three values, I know I've got something promising. From here I work with clean topology, so I can make adjustments and design choices on the go.



### 2 Applying texture and lighting

Since these creatures have a translucent, organic hard-surface, I found that box modelling offers the most forgiving approach. The model is thrown into KeyShot where I set up lighting and apply materials. I test several different lighting scenarios and materials before refining the translucency. I want the refractions to feel chaotic without becoming unreadable.



### 3 Finalise with Smart Blur filter

The model is brought back into Photoshop where I colour adjust, paint over and push shapes. I find that using Photoshop's Smart Blur can effectively remove a lot of the 3D artefacts and stiffness from the render.

# Photoshop ADD LIGHT TO YOUR CHARACTER DESIGN

**Jiunn Kuo** reveals how and why he uses striking lighting, glow effects and atmosphere in his character-focused illustrations

## Artist PROFILE

### Jiunn Kuo

LOCATION: Taiwan

Jiunn is a digital artist focused on dynamic characters, lighting and fantasy themes, with experience on projects including League of Legends and Legends of Runeterra.  
<https://bit.ly/481knor>



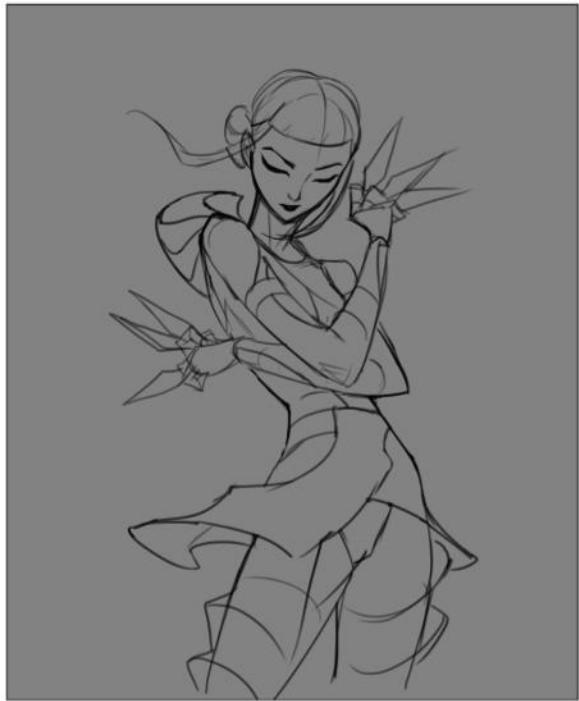
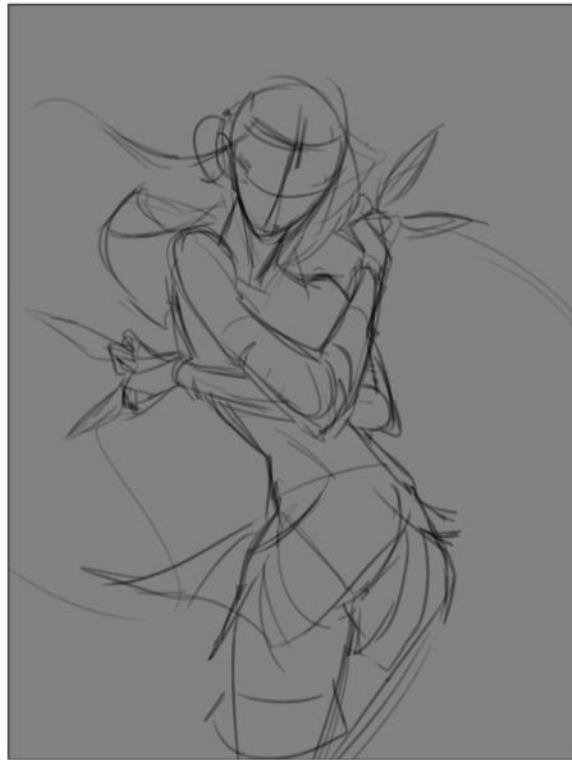
Lighting in character illustrations is more than a finishing touch of highlights. It shapes the emotion of the scene, guides the viewer's eye and gives the character a strong sense of presence. This artwork is part of a fan-art series that I've been developing, and I'm excited to share both the final result and the creative process behind it. Expressive lighting has become one of my signature

approaches in illustration and something I constantly enjoy exploring as I refine my style.

The workshop begins with a clean line drawing and a simple value pass to establish the essential forms before any colour is added. Setting the light and shadow structure early on helps define the strength, direction and contrast of the illumination, enabling the rest of the painting to develop more confidently. From there, I organise the character, background

and effects into distinct layer groups so the artwork remains flexible and easy to adjust at every stage.

I'll also explain how I build glow effects, place soft and sharp accents and maintain a stable value structure even when using bright and stylised lighting. By dividing the painting into manageable steps, these methods can be applied to a range of styles, whether you prefer subtle, atmospheric lighting or bold, luminous highlights.



## 1 Set your composition with a sketch

I use loose, simple lines to capture the character's pose and movement, relying on reference images when required. I focus on the proportions and the overall balance without adding details. The goal is to place the character quickly within the composition.

## 2 Improve your line art

I refine the initial draft by clarifying shapes, strengthening the silhouette, correcting proportions and establishing the main forms while keeping the lines clean and readable. This step also involves organising the muscle structure, clothing design and overall line flow. Clear line art makes the upcoming colour-blocking stage smoother and more efficient. ➤

## RESOURCES

### WORKSHOP BRUSHES

#### PHOTOSHOP

#### CUSTOM BRUSHES: JIUNNKUO'S BRUSHES

Used throughout the workshop for sketching, blocking shapes, establishing values and adding lighting details.

### GET YOUR RESOURCES

See page 5 now!

# In depth Illumination techniques

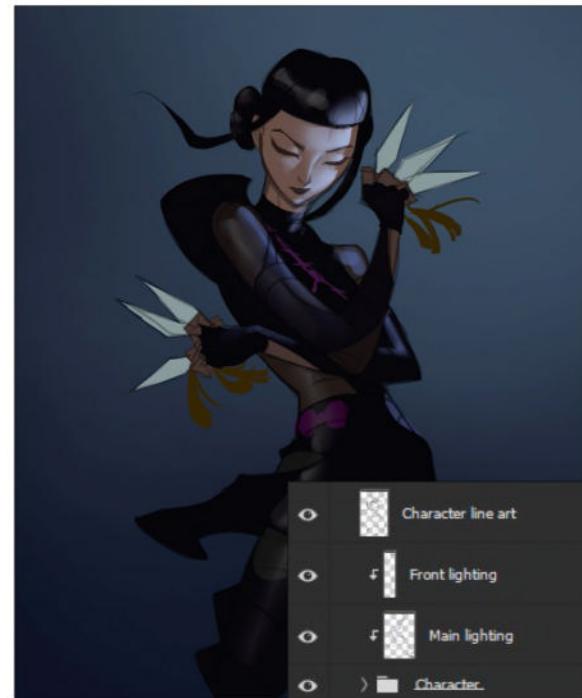


# Workshops



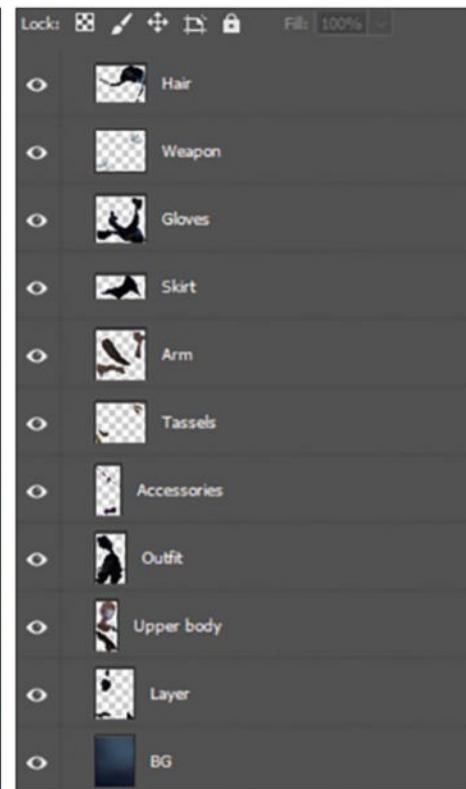
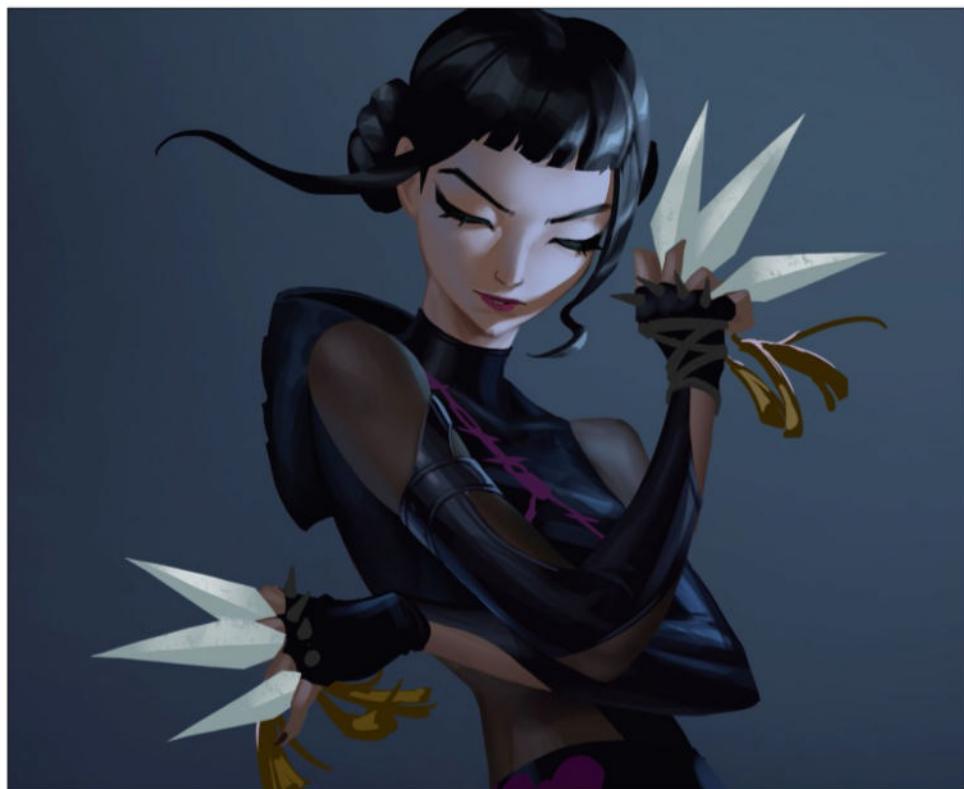
## 3 Apply base colours

I begin by laying down flat base colours to set the character's overall palette, keeping the tones simple and consistent to maintain clear shapes. I then block in key areas such as skin, hair and clothing, but don't add shading yet. Clean and solid base colours create a stable foundation, making lighting and rendering easier to control.



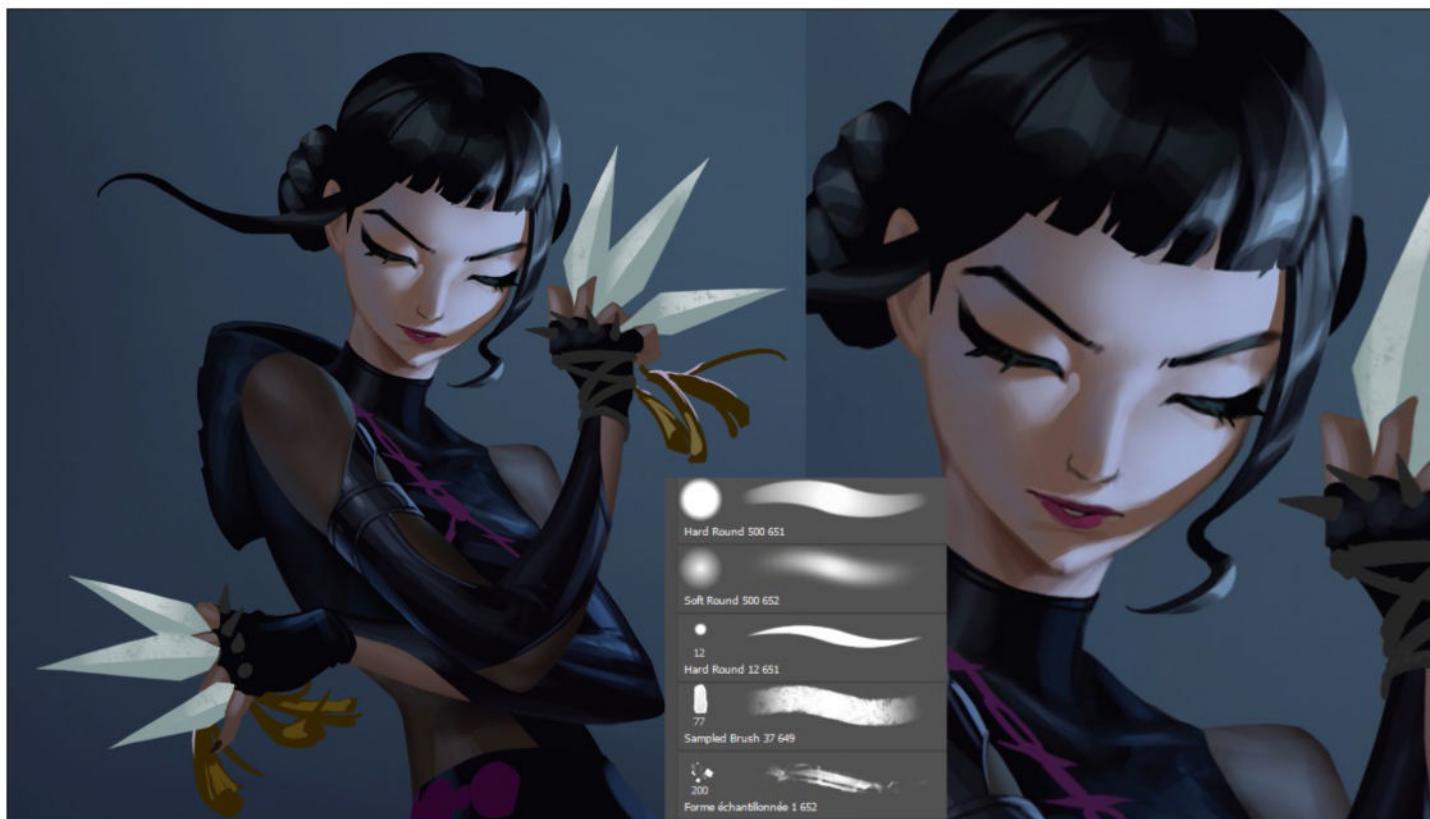
## 4 Lighting to the character

I use a Lighten layer to softly build the primary light source, enabling the illumination to blend naturally without disrupting the base colours. I establish the direction and intensity first: I usually have one light from the weapon and another main light on the character. I block in broad light areas, then refine them gradually.



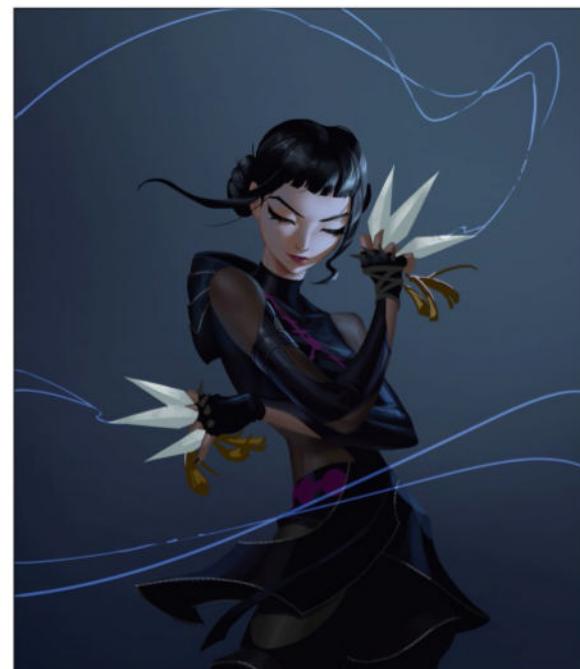
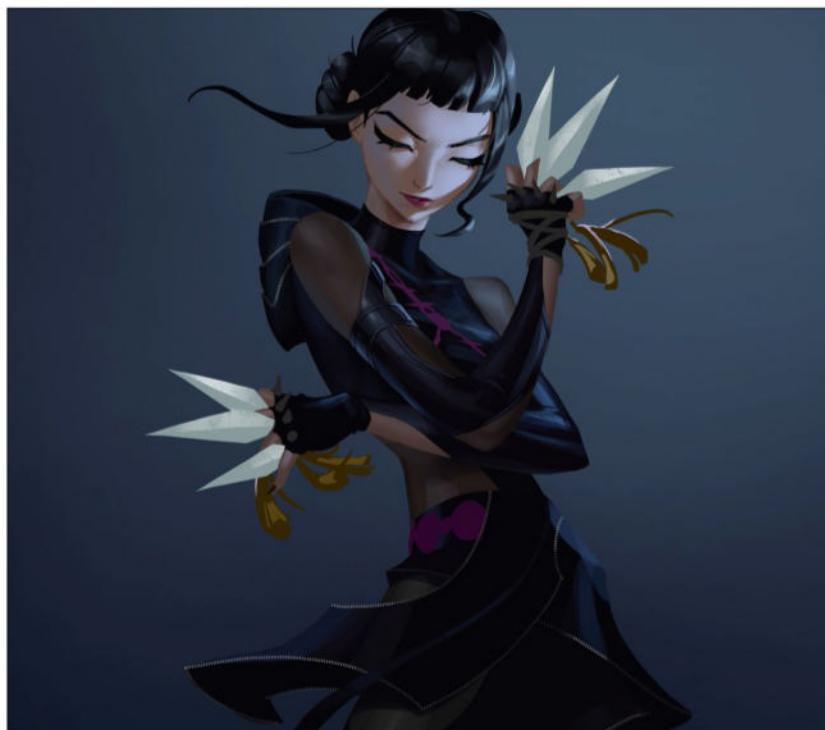
## 5 Prepare your render by creating separate layers

After merging the lighting and base colours, I separate the character into layers such as hair, skin and clothing to make later refinements easier. I adjust the forms on each layer, strengthen the edges and improve the structure. The main goal is to make the important shapes clearer.



## 6 Use different brushes for different materials

Different brushes create varied textures and edge qualities. Most of the time I rely on basic brushes, and occasionally I add texture brushes to introduce detail or roughness. Switching brushes helps control depth and clarity in the painting and gives each area a more expressive finish.



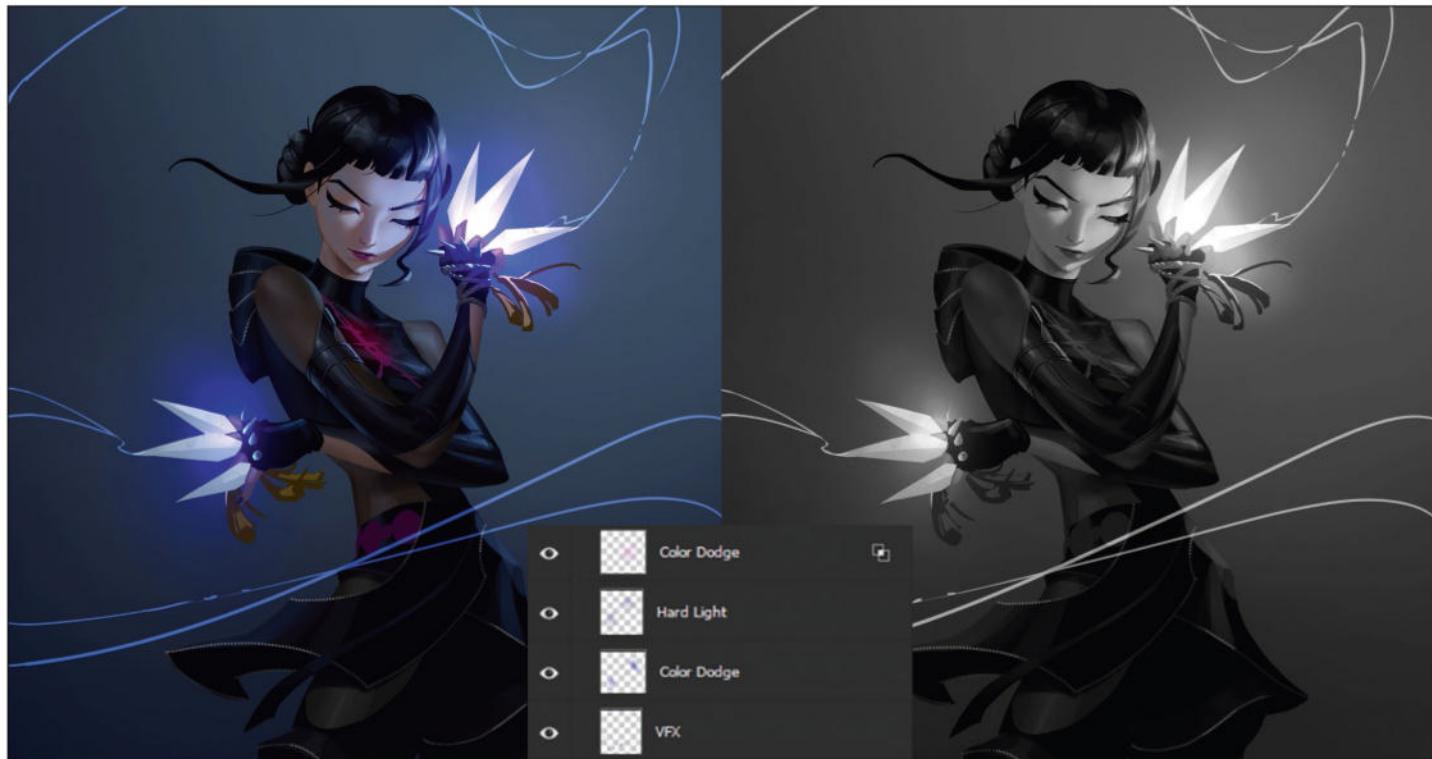
## 7 Keep working into the render

I add elements such as hair strands and chains only in areas that need emphasis. These details enhance the surface richness without disrupting the main forms. Applying them selectively keeps the design clear and controlled, and the right amount of small accents makes the overall artwork feel more polished and refined.

## 8 Depict the weapon effects

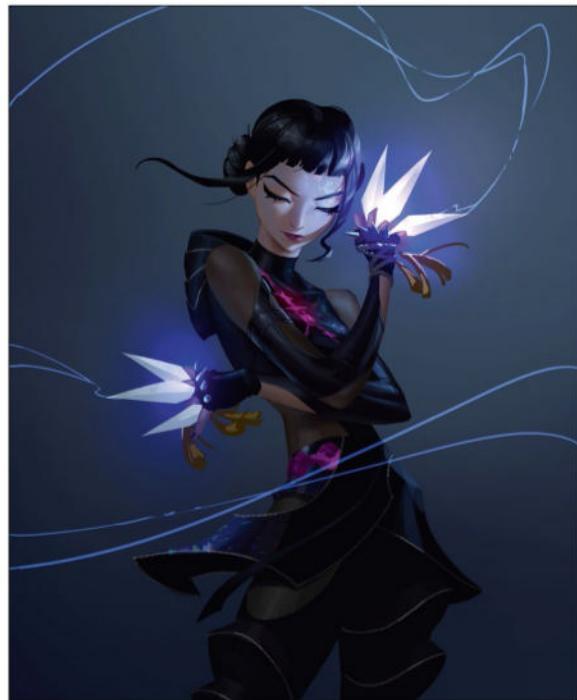
I like adding streamlined motion effects to the weapon, using Linear Dodge (Add) to emphasise direction and a sense of force. Clean and flowing shapes suggest speed and energy without pulling attention away from the character. These lines help guide the viewer's eye and give the weapon a stronger sense of rhythm. ➤

# Workshops

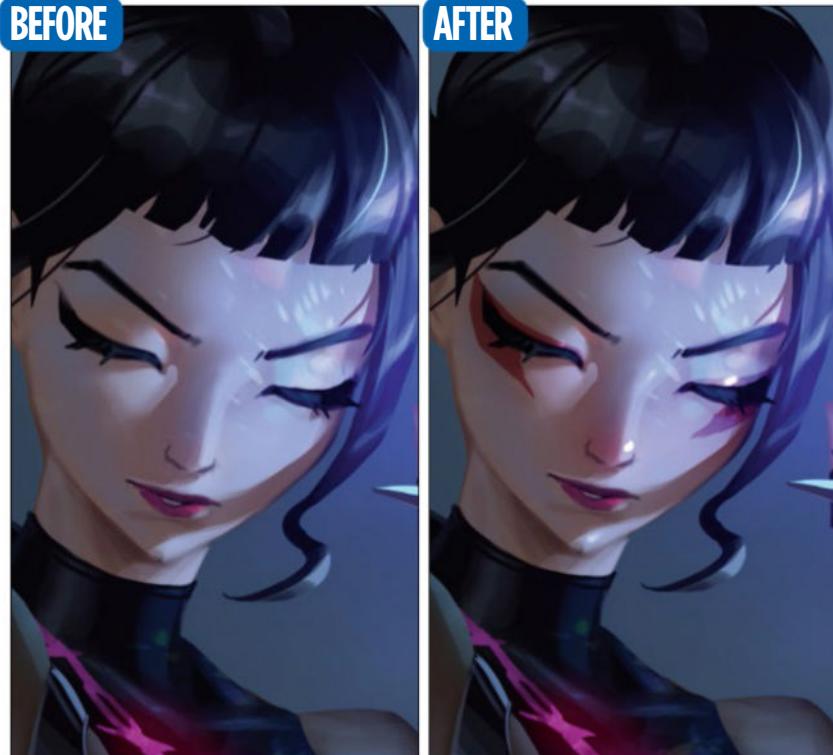


## 9 Make it glow and check the values

I use the Hard Light or Color Dodge blending modes to gradually build up the highlights on the weapon. I'm careful to increase the brightness slowly to keep it controlled, and frequently switch to black and white to check the overall value structure. I keep the brightest point on the weapon so it becomes the visual focus. Strong lighting enhances contrast and energy.

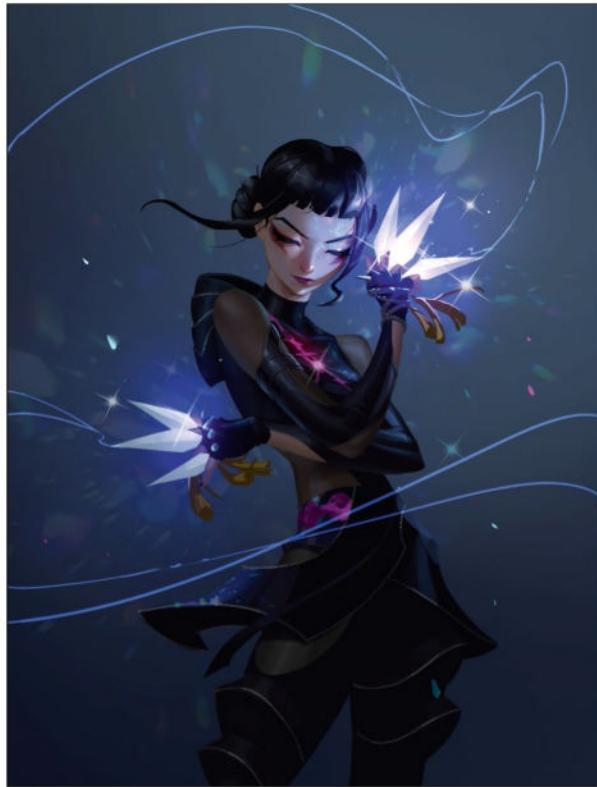


**10 Improve surface interest**  
I add texture to the character to give the surfaces more depth and make each area feel more engaging. You can use fabric patterns, light noise or textured brushes to enrich the design. The aim is to introduce details that support the overall look without making the image feel too busy.



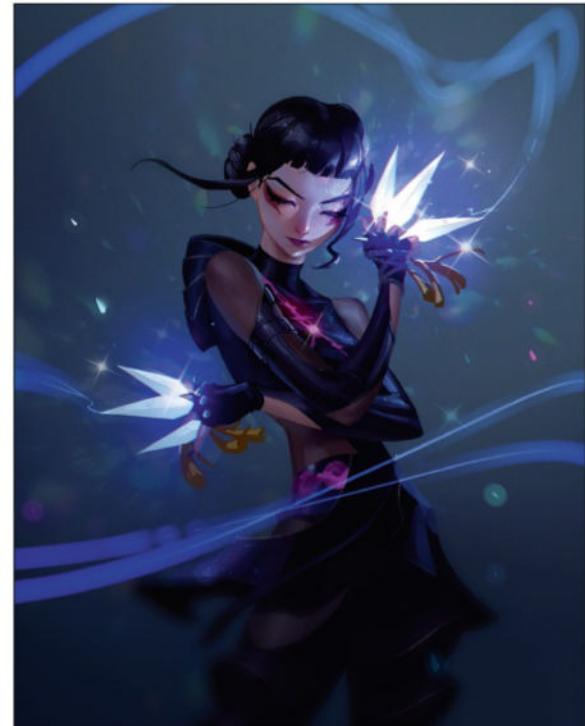
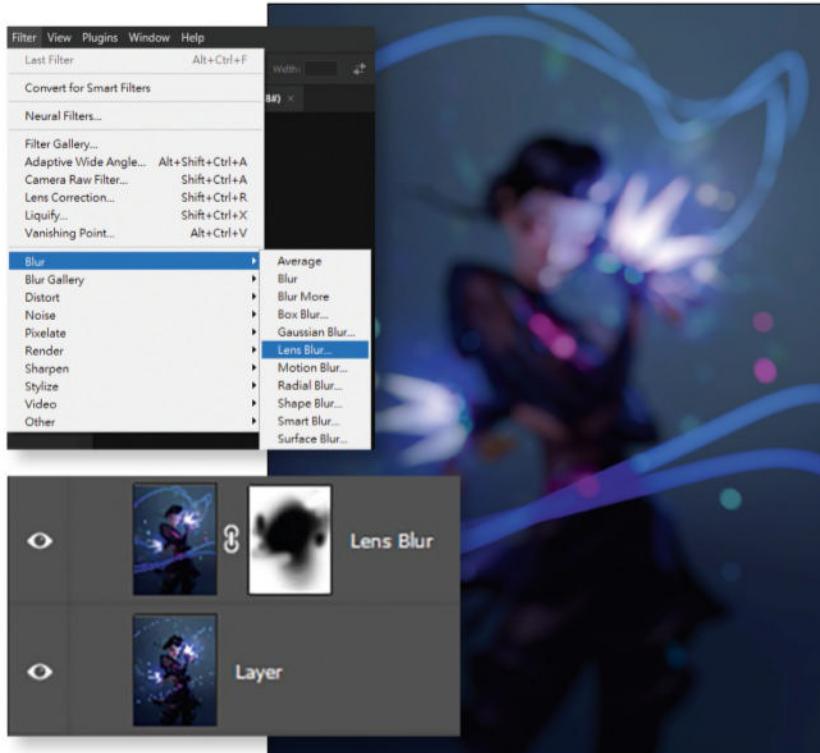
**11 Enhance facial detail**  
I use an Overlay layer to add soft warm tones and natural blush to the face. Light touches of color around the eyes or nose can enhance the expression. I add small highlights to clarify the volume. These subtle adjustments help refine the facial features and make the character feel more lively.

# In depth Illumination techniques



## 12 Enhance the background atmosphere

I add soft light sources and particles to enhance the background and atmosphere. I keep the lighting gentle so it doesn't overpower the character. Light beams guide the viewer's eye and strengthen the sense of space. These touches add depth while keeping the environment supportive.



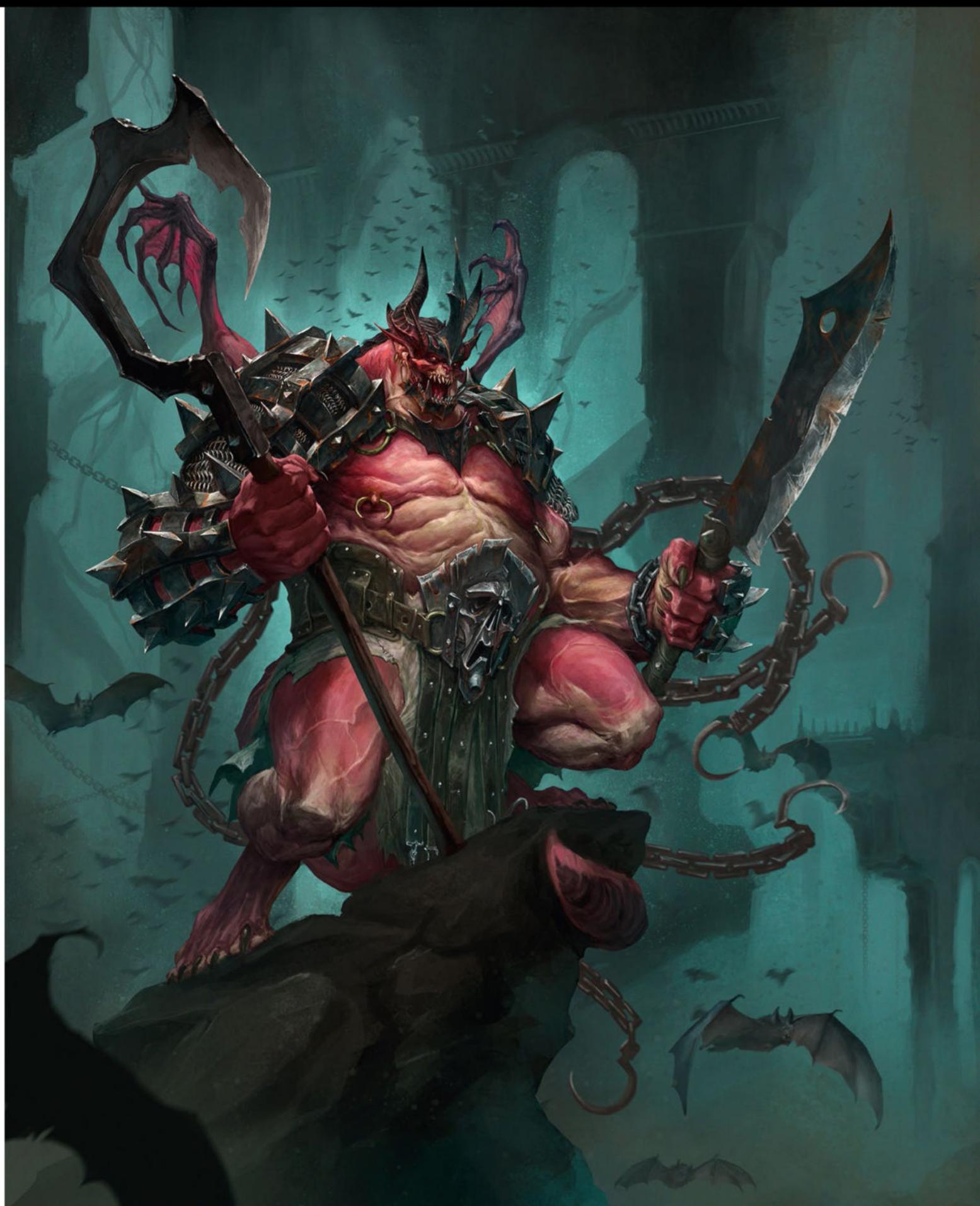
## 13 Use filters to enhance depth of space

I use the Lens Blur filter to enhance depth of field. A layer mask enables me to keep the main subject sharp while blurring only the secondary areas. Strengthening the depth of field improves visual readability and helps direct the viewer's focus toward the most important parts of the illustration.

## 14 Final touches

I make precise adjustments to the colours, contrast and details in the final stage. I refine any shapes that need more clarity and ensure the lighting remains consistent across the illustration. These final touches help the artwork feel more polished, clean and cohesive.

# Workshops



## Technique focus

# WORK SMARTER WITH COLOURS

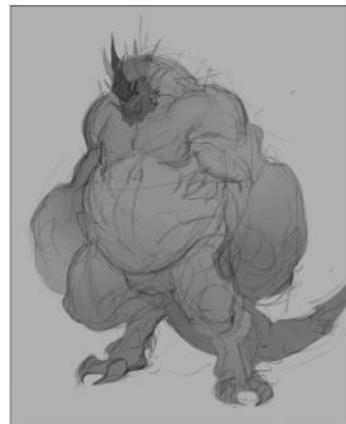
**Álvaro Jiménez** reveals the workflow process he follows to summon an armoured demon



"This is a character concept for Kimera Models, a miniature's brand for war game and hobby painters.

I was commissioned to make a demon, similar to the mood and style of Blizzard's Diablo saga. My process is quite simple: I try to stay as close as possible to traditional media. I usually work with greyscales as they help me to quickly establish solid values and lighting. I then work on a Multiply blending mode layer, using black and white to build the

main volumes with a very noisy brush. You can achieve this by going to Brush settings > Color dynamics > Foreground/Background Jitter and increase this by 2-5 per cent. This will help your strokes look more traditional. Once I achieve a solid greyscale, I use Color Balance to kill the greys and Soft Light layers to colour it, keeping an eye on the resulting contrasts by using complementary colours to make my design vibrant. The render stage is where I put all my attention on the details and shapes."



## Artist PROFILE

**Álvaro Jiménez**

LOCATION: Spain

Álvaro is a full-time illustrator and concept artist who likes epic fantasy. His artwork can be seen in Warhammer, Sideshow, Bandai Namco and a lot of other fantasy IPs. <https://bit.ly/4i2zkv0>

## How I create... AN ARMOURED DEMON

### BEFORE



### AFTER



### BEFORE



### AFTER



#### 1 Strong sense of identity

Initially, I focus on the shapes of the character with loose strokes. This achieves a freshness that will help with the pose by giving him a strong sense of identity. Once I'm happy with the result, I start with the values. I like to work with a greyscale to quickly establish the volumes and lighting.

#### 2 Adding colour

It's time for the colours to do their thing. A Color Balance adjustment layer helps me to define the early temperature of the illustration. I love to use complementary colours, so on this occasion I use a cool red, closer to magenta, that helps to lift the demon out from the turquoise background.

#### 3 Establish the narrative

Once the character is fully coloured it's rendering time! I just let myself go, focusing on materials, details and narrative. It's fun to give the character some lore even though it's concept art. I don't spend a lot of time on the background, and keep it loose. I don't want it to steal the show!

# The Gallery

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



## Julien Delval

LOCATION: France MEDIA: Acrylics on canvas or wood WEB: [www.instagram.com/juliendelval.art](http://www.instagram.com/juliendelval.art)

Julien studied fine art before becoming an illustrator, creating visuals for RPGs and books. Today, after a stint in comics and board games, mainly with Days of Wonder, he spends time on personal paintings, supported by the Daniel Maghen Gallery in Paris.

### 1 ACANTHUS PEOPLE

"I wanted to create a procession of fairies as a tribute to Victorian painters of this genre, while also adding a touch of Brian Froud's style. I used the shape of the ornamental acanthus leaf to create fantastical creatures."

### 2 THE FLIGHT OF ATLANTIS

"A fisherman, straight out of a Turner painting, witnesses the launch of this Atlantean structure. It all started with a very small sketch that I liked."

### 3 THE WREKERS

"A mix between King Kong's island and Jason and the Argonauts, and a desire to paint a raging sea."

### 4 THE LAST DEPARTURE

"This painting stems from a desire to depict perspectives and a vast, deserted city. Is the flying ship carrying away the last inhabitants?"

# Traditional art

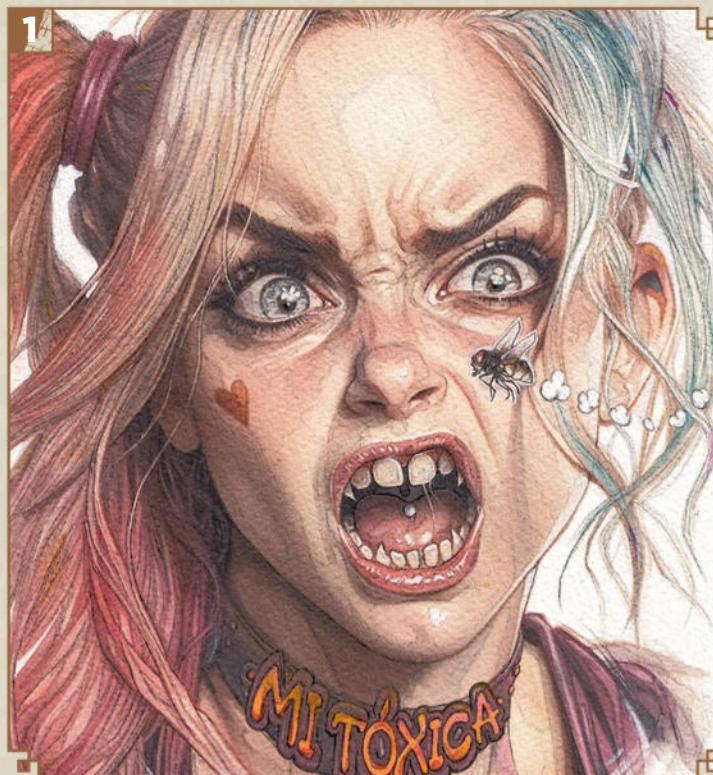




## Fran S Cano

LOCATION: Spain MEDIA: Watercolour, acrylic, oil, ink WEB: [www.artstation.com/franscano](http://www.artstation.com/franscano)

Fran works across painting, drawing and sculpture to build an artistic system where various disciplines nourish each other. His work explores the body as a mutable threshold, where identity, gesture and memory meet.



### 1 THE FLESH AND THE CODE (DETAIL)

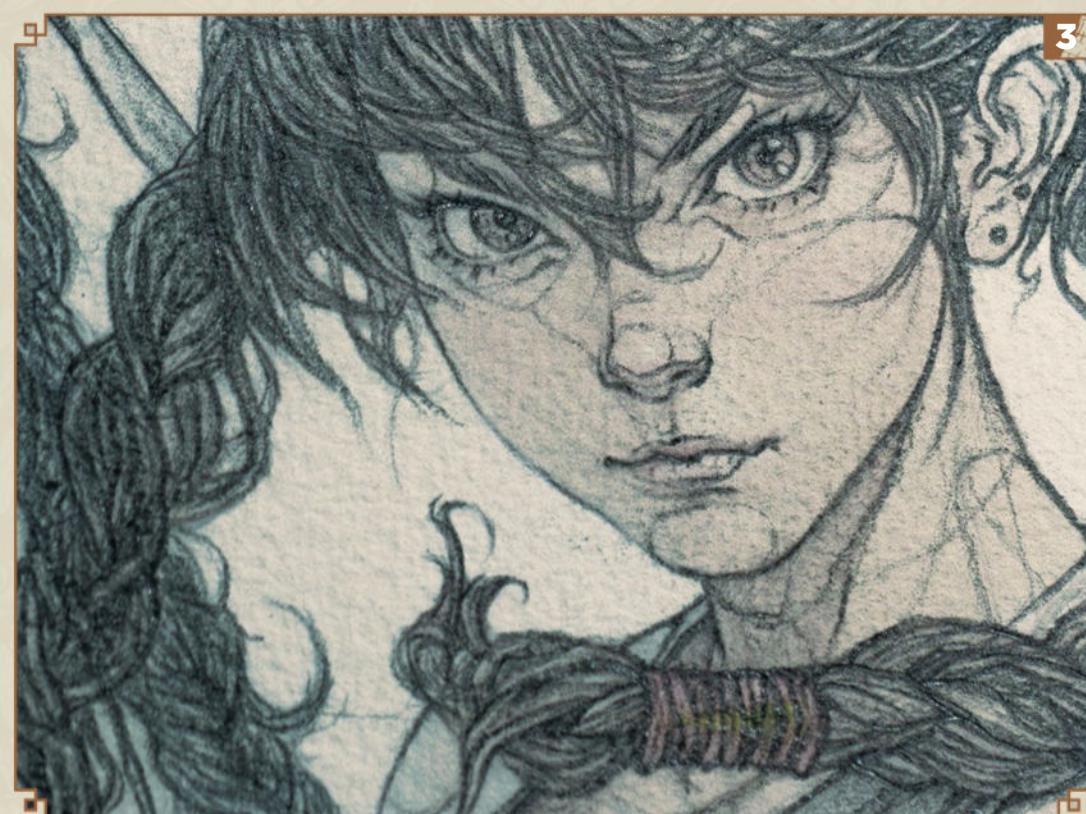
"Harley Quinn stands as an archetype of the mutant icon. Between control and delirium, reason and desire, she inhabits a symbolic threshold where flesh confronts the image."

### 2 ECHOES OF PHILOTES

"Sculptures that are a part of my own sculptural system, which interprets matter as thought and form as memory."

### 3 FRAGMENTS: SPACE AND TIME IN THREE ACTS (DETAIL)

"A graphite piece that reimagines Lara Croft across time and identity. I wanted to capture her strength, introspection and determination, reflecting on the evolving mythology of the heroine in visual culture."





#### 4 WARRIOR OF THE LIMINAL REALM (DETAIL)

"My reimagining of Morrigan featured alongside Chun-Li and an original pin-up fighter [not shown], exploring strength, desire and identity through fragmented forms and a shared symbolic tension."

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

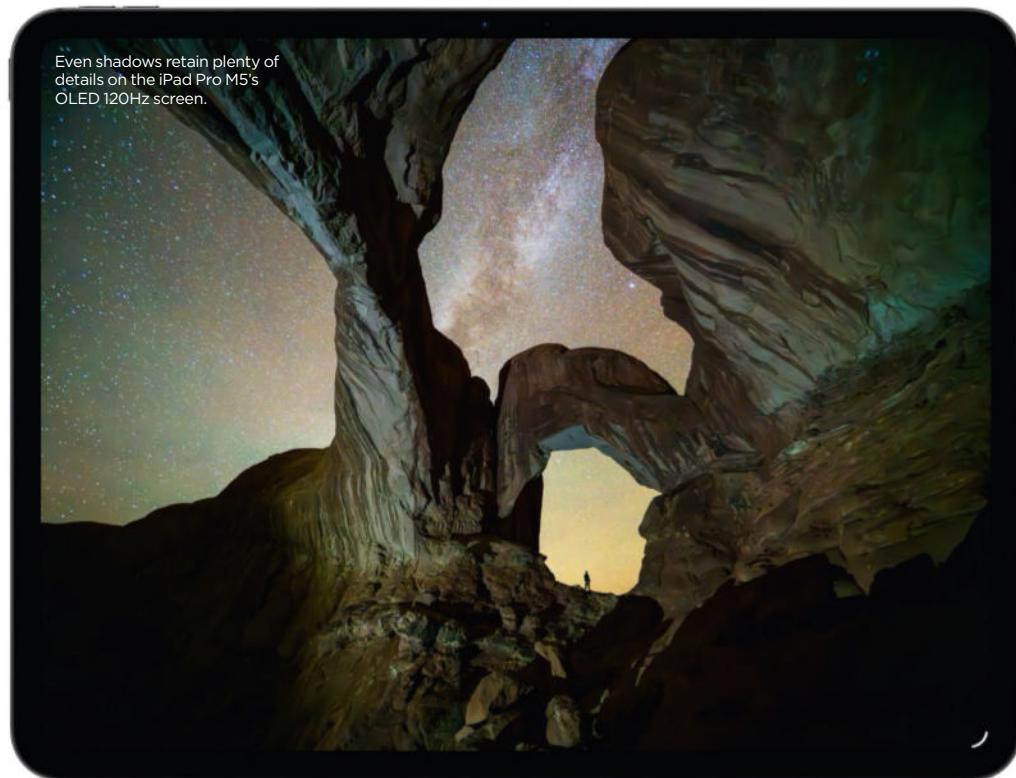
# Reviews



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!



## iPad Pro M5

**TOUCH SENSATION** Super powerful and pricey as heck, the M5 version of the iPad Pro is the best creative tablet of 2025

**Price** From £999/\$999 **Company** Apple **Web** [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)

**H**as the iPad Pro finally become the laptop alternative for creatives that it always promised to be? It's only taken 10 years of iterative iPad generation updates.

The combination of the M5 processor and iPadOS 26, which offers floating, multitasking windows in a way that's almost 100 per cent usable and not completely annoying, together with a software offering that's broadening in the direction of creative apps, means it has a lot of computing potential in a thin and ultraportable form. That it still requires multiple accessories and costs as

much as a MacBook Pro to get the best out of it is the only thing holding it back.

Apple hasn't gone for a radical redesign for the M5 generation. Everything, including the MacBook Pro, looks pretty much the way it did before. In fact, you can place the M1



If you want to get close to laptop territory with your iPad Pro, then the Magic Keyboard will set you back £349.

and M5 versions of the 13-inch iPad Pro against each other, and the only real difference apart from the weight is that the new model has a few more holes in its speaker grilles and there's no longer any engraving on the back (apart from the Apple logo). The M1 iPad Pro doesn't fit the M5's Magic Keyboard case, so there must have been some slight shuffling of the position of the magnets, but it's not something immediately noticeable.

There's clearly a lot more going on inside the iPad, however, and it's remarkable that Apple can squeeze a full laptop chip – no cut-down GPU core counts this year – into such a thin,



All photos © Apple

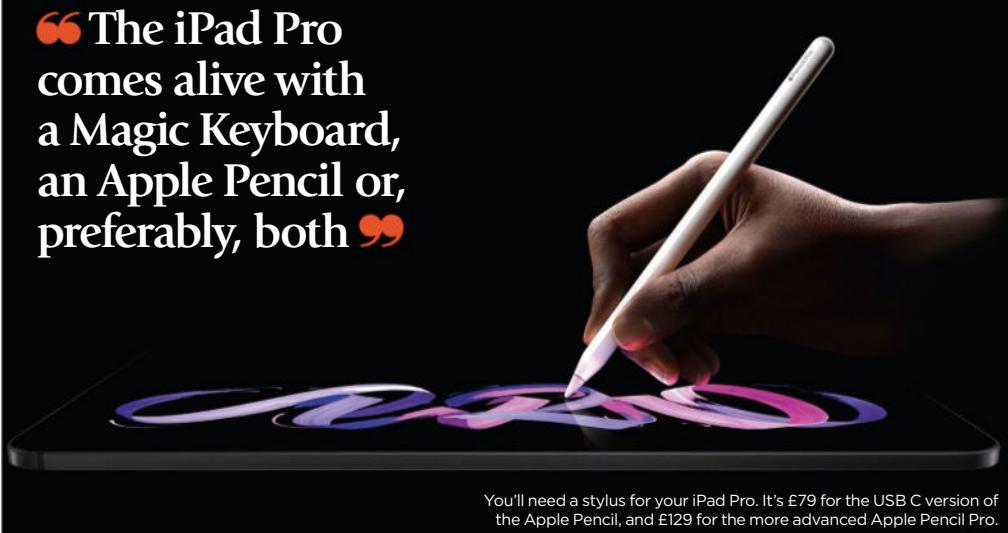
The iPad Pro M5 comes in silver or black and is made from 30 per cent recycled materials (by weight).

The Magic Keyboard employs a floating cantilever design, enabling the attached iPad Pro to be used at multiple viewing angles.



The Magic Keyboard includes a 14-key function row for quick access to screen brightness, volume controls and other features, and a USB-C connector for pass-through charging.

“The iPad Pro comes alive with a Magic Keyboard, an Apple Pencil or, preferably, both”



You'll need a stylus for your iPad Pro. It's £79 for the USB C version of the Apple Pencil, and £129 for the more advanced Apple Pencil Pro.

passively cooled tablet and not have it run so hot that it glows red.

The screen is an OLED, just like the M4 model, and it's beautiful. The 120Hz, wide-colour display is bright and vibrant, and will show off just about anything you're working on to its best, with the ability to drop as low as 1nit for shadows that retain plenty of detail.

### SOLID CONSTRUCTION

Build quality is exemplary, with the optional Magic Keyboard case attaching with a magnet and turning the iPad into the laptop-alike of your dreams. It's hard to be too enthusiastic about the way iPad Pros are made, and the fact that this year's model weighs slightly less than the M4 (and significantly less than the M1) makes it even more portable than before.

The iPad Pro comes alive with a Magic Keyboard, an Apple Pencil or,

preferably, both. The ability to type and sketch makes it endlessly useful, though you may find yourself wondering why you didn't just buy a laptop. Adding the accessories boosts the cost of the cheapest 11-inch model to well over the price of a MacBook Air, and a 13-inch model with 1TB of storage becomes more expensive than the entry-level M5 MacBook Pro.

Without these accessories, it's still a powerful device, and it's possible to hook it up to just about any wireless mouse and keyboard, as well as an external monitor, via its USB-C port and a suitable dock or hub. iPadOS 26 needs room to breathe, and with suitable extras can provide a laptop-like experience. However, you're still restricted to its selection of apps and some odd design decisions, such as the way menus sit at the top of the screen, window control buttons that

look like those in macOS but don't work in quite the same way, and rounded corners that don't quite line up.

The only real hardware feature on the iPad Pro itself is the USB-C port, and while it's nice to see that it's a USB4/Thunderbolt 3 standard socket, the fact that there's only one and it's responsible for charging means the likely purchase of another accessory to break it out into useful ports.

It's always been hard to come up with scenarios within the purview of iPadOS apps that will test the iPad Pro, and that continues with the M5 model. Video editing in Final Cut Pro or DaVinci Resolve, running multiple tracks in Logic Pro, building up a lot of layers in Procreate or Illustrator, crazy stuff in ZBrush or Nomad Sculpt. Apps like the Affinity suite or Photoshop are now so at home on iPad that it's barely breaking a sweat.

### HIGH ACHIEVER

While the performance you'll achieve out of creative apps depends on the complexity of your project, the numbers that we get from synthetic benchmarks don't lie. The MacBook Pro M5 has some of the best single-core scores we've seen in Geekbench, and that goes for the iPad Pro version as well, with the passively cooled M5 just a few hundred points behind the version with a fan. The same goes for the GPU: using the Metal API, the iPad scores 74,046 against the MacBook Pro's 76,397, a difference of just 3.12 per cent.

As for a performance uplift over previous iPad chips, we're looking at a 56.28 per cent rise in single-core CPU performance over the M1 iPad Pro, and a 30 per cent rise over the M3 chip in last year's iPad Air. It's a significant bump if you can make use of it, and if you shell out for the 1TB or 2TB iPads (we're testing the 1TB model here), you get 16GB of RAM instead of 12GB, which will also make a difference.

While it's unlikely to be your sole computer, the M5 iPad Pro works well as a machine you use most of the time for sketching, editing, typing... just about anything. There are still areas where it's not as good as a laptop, but they're getting smaller as the software offering improves, and the sheer quality of the hardware means that, if you can get past the price, it is the ideal creative companion.

**Ian Evenden**

### VERDICT

The iPad Pro M5 is expensive, but it could be worth the outlay if you can make use of its supreme processing power and don't mind buying a few extra bits. The new iPadOS makes it easier than ever to flip between pro-grade apps, while the OLED screen and improved graphics mean it's at home with video, 3D and even games.

#### Pros

- Powerful
- Excellent build
- iPadOS 26 works well

#### Cons

- Expensive
- You'll want accessories
- Loses out to laptops in some cases

#### Rating





## HP Omnibook X Flip 16

**DOUBLING UP** HP's latest Omnibook 2-in-1 is a decent-enough productivity laptop, but it truly shines when it's transformed into tablet mode

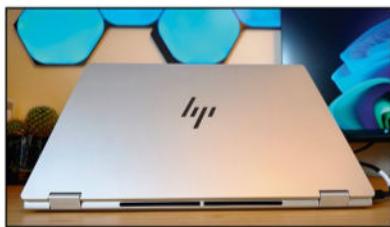
**Price** £1,049/\$1,179.9 **Company** HP **Web** [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)



**P** has proven itself better than just about anyone at one specific laptop variant: the 2-in-1.

While a dedicated drawing tablet might be the preferred choice for creatives, many will want to combine a fully fledged laptop and drawing tablet in one device, and that's the HP Omnibook X Flip 16's selling point.

At first sight, the Omnibook looks much like any nondescript enterprise laptop in ubiquitous silver. However, the magic element here are the



These hinges, like the rest of the chassis, are firm and sturdy (there's no flex in the body or screen).

“The screen is wondrously responsive in touchscreen mode, with the multitouch setting making drawing a delight”

hinges that continue moving the screen all the way around until it turns into a tent (270 degrees) or a tablet (360 degrees), with the keyboard on the back. The screen orientation flips automatically based on what position you hold the laptop in.

Once completely flipped, the Omnibook comes into its own. Although the 16-inch screen doesn't offer the highest resolution around (1,920x1,200), the responsive IPS panel, laid out in a 16:10 ratio, gets its moment in the spotlight. The laptop is also well equipped with ports, containing both a DP-supporting Thunderbolt 4 port and a dedicated HDMI port, along with a USB-A port and a second 10Gbps USB-C port. Both USB-C ports support charging.

On the inside, you'll find 1TB of SSD storage along with 16GB of RAM, something that has quickly become the new minimum standard for

The Omnibook comes with a decent range of connectivity options, including Thunderbolt 4 and HDMI.



### VERDICT

Despite feeling slightly underpowered at its £1,000 price point, the Omnibook's 2-in-1 function is executed perfectly, making it a compelling, big-screen tablet option. That alone should make it a tempting choice for artists.

#### Pros

- Tablet mode is amazing
- Big, sharp, bright touchscreen
- Competitive price

#### Cons

- Not particularly powerful
- Keyboard not to everyone's taste

#### Rating



demanding creative users, along with Intel's new integrated GPU of choice, the Arc 140V. All this runs on the Intel Core Ultra 7 256V processor.

The screen isn't spectacular in terms of colour gamut (only 62.5% sRGB), but it's bright at 400 nits and wondrously responsive in touchscreen mode, with the multitouch setting making drawing a delight. Oh, and it ships with a stylus, offering good pressure and tilt sensitivity.

The HP Omnibook X Flip 16 is merely a decent laptop, but it's as a tablet where it becomes an attractive option. Yes, it's a big, big tablet. But a really useful one that works well for those who love drawing, painting and artwork on one. And they'll get a pretty good laptop along with it.

**Erlingur Einarsson**

The DXRacer Master may be expensive, but sometimes you can't put a price on comfort.



## DXRacer Master

**SITTING PRETTY** The Master is a gaming chair for grown-ups

**Price** £377/\$499

**Company** DXRacer

**Web** [www.dxracer-europe.com](http://www.dxracer-europe.com)

**RATING** ★★★★☆

**Gaming chairs have a bad rep – and we're not alone in thinking this. There are too many god-awful £50 options out there that literally break down underneath you over time.**

Not so the DXRacer Master. Although it's not perfect, and there's fierce competition in this price range, we can definitely see it barging into our list of the best ergonomic chairs on the market.

The design of the Master chair couldn't shout 'gaming chair' vibes more, with an altogether thought-through aesthetic. The white stitching over black leatherette, the chevron-patterned panelling on the front and back of the body and on the seat... even the integrated head cushion looks great.

The seat cushion is fairly firm and absolutely comfortable. Meanwhile, the tilt function is excellently balanced: use the lever to recline a touch, then push further and tilt back some more. The arm rests are decent. They adjust plenty, and you can angle them in either at the top or bottom of the rests.

We think the Master offers a lot of comfort, style and durability, and is well worth your consideration.

**Beren Neale**

# Anker SOLIX C1000

**BOX OF DELIGHTS** The chonkiest power bank around is powerful, portable (after a fashion) and boy is it well built

**Price** £999/\$799 **Company** Anker **Web** [www.ankersolix.com](http://www.ankersolix.com)

**W**e were glad to get our hands on the Anker SOLIX C1000. For one thing, it's the fastest recharging portable power station, as certified by Guinness World Records.

Anker's device is an incredibly well-built portable power station that blends a high power output with reasonable portability. It's far from small or light, but Anker has succeeded in delivering a form factor that's ideal for on-the-go creative endeavours as well as off-grid weekend trips, with its solid, comfortable handles built in.

The ports are located primarily along the front face with a clean and well-organised layout. There's a set of four AC outlets that are generously spaced and directly above these are the four USB ports, which are ideal for powering phones, laptops or even smaller power banks.

While using the unit, we were grateful for the large, informative LCD display that provided all the real-time data that enabled us to make informed charging decisions.

The SOLIX C1000 features HyperFlash fast-charging technology that enables the unit to recharge from



Not just a black box: blue highlights break up the power bank's functional appearance.

## VERDICT

The Anker SOLIX C1000 is much more than a mere power bank; it's an impressive power station that is worth every penny, especially when it's discounted, which it often is. It's far from lightweight, but we never regretted carrying it around with us. The generous range of ports would benefit from a few more USB options, but overall, we were rarely left wanting. If you're looking for a solution to keep your creative pursuits suitably powered then you won't be disappointed.

### Pros

- Ultra-fast recharging
- High power output
- Built to last

### Cons

- Heavy and bulky
- No built-in solar panel
- Loud fan noise

### Rating

★★★★★



© Anker



A selection of ports are on both edges of the laptop, including HDMI and a MicroSD card slot.



The Triton's stylus can be used on the touchpad, but it's slightly too small a space for creating art.

# Acer Predator Triton 14 AI

**MIXED BAG** The Predator Triton 14 AI offers cutting-edge kit in a slender metal shell, but there are a few design compromises that might put off potential buyers

Price £2,699/\$2,500 Company Acer Web [www.acer.com](http://www.acer.com)

**A**cer's latest 14-incher, the Acer Predator Triton 14 AI, comes with the Nvidia Studio logo on the front and studio drivers installed, so it's fairly clear that the creative arts are well within its sights.

With its 50-series GPU and second-generation Lunar Lake Intel Core Ultra processor, this represents the cutting edge of laptop technology at the end of 2025. Yet the Triton's USP is its size: 14-inch laptops are always compact, but given the kind of ferocious internals it's stuffed with, being just 17.3mm at its thickest point makes this machine especially slender. The Acer Predator Triton 14 is larger than a MacBook Air, and indeed slightly thicker and wider than a 14-inch MacBook Pro, but still feels compact when you pick it up.

The ports are placed at the sides of the chassis and are easily accessible. However, the USB-A and USB-C ports on the right are too close together, and it's unclear which one of the Type-C ports on the Triton is a Thunderbolt 4.

The trackpad is a slab of glass illuminated by white lights at the sides, and in conjunction with the stylus that comes in the box makes an excellent note-taking surface, although it's really too small for most kinds of digital art. It's worth noting there's nowhere on the body to stash it – not even a magnet for it to stick to.

The OLED screen is touch-sensitive, albeit only for your fingers, and puts out a lot of colour and light: 100 per cent of sRGB, 95 per cent of Adobe RGB, and 97 per cent of DCI-P3, plus 400 nits. In our tests, these are good levels of accuracy for colour.

**“The OLED screen is touch-sensitive, albeit only for your fingers, and puts out a lot of colour and light”**

## VERDICT

With its cutting-edge components and compact frame, the Acer Predator Triton 14 AI looks like a creative powerhouse, and it can be exactly that. There's even a stylus in the box, though it's limited in use. However, it's an expensive laptop, and there are a lot of other machines out there that will compete for your attention.

### Pros

- Compact and powerful
- Lovely OLED screen
- Stylus in the box

### Cons

- Not keen on third-party chargers
- Stylus only works on touchpad
- Which one's the Thunderbolt port?

### Rating

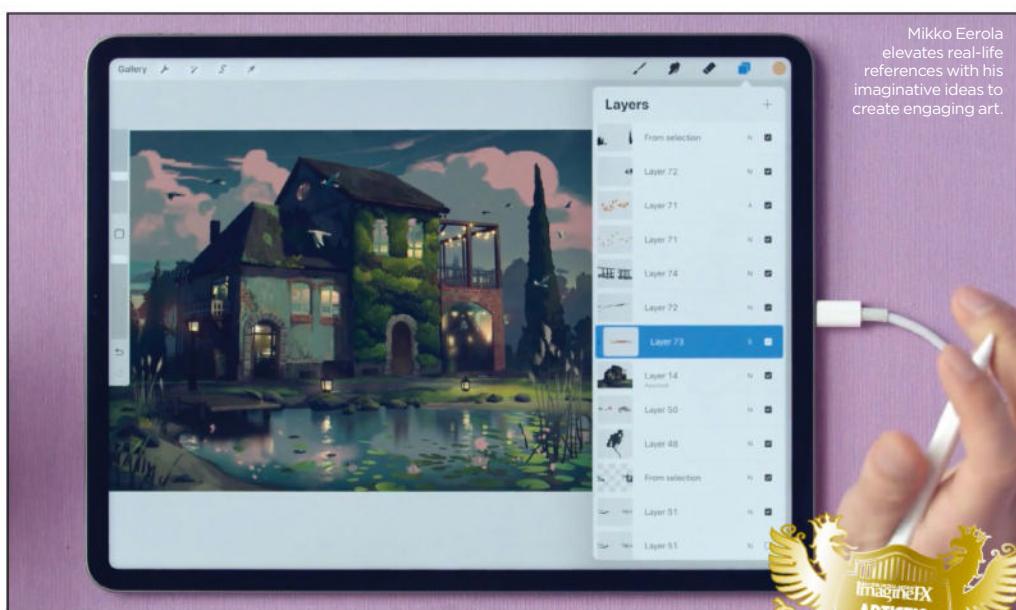


There's nowhere to store the supplied stylus, so you'll have to keep it close by when it's not in use.

Opening the laptop up reveals a nicely spaced keyboard that takes up the full width. The keys are pretty good considering the thickness of the Triton, with a good level of springiness as you release them. The speakers are relegated to tiny grilles on the sides and there's no number pad.

It does surprisingly well in the battery life test: just playing a video for hours doesn't tax the GPU much, Turbo mode gets switched off because it's running on battery, and the Triton eked out nearly seven hours of use. That's an excellent result and might help allay your cost concerns.

**Ian Evenden**



## Painting in Procreate: Reimagine Your Surroundings

**VISIONARY WORK** Across 20 lessons, Mikko Eerola reveals how he brings his ideas to life on the iPad using Procreate

**Publisher** Domestika **Price** £39.90 **Format** Online  
**Length** 5h 11m (20 lessons) **Web** [www.domestika.org](http://www.domestika.org)

**T**his five-hour Domestika course has been put together by Finnish artist Mikko Eerola, who has worked as a professional concept artist across video games, TV and film, and is also an art teacher and YouTuber. He has a range of painting styles, making this is an excellent choice for those new to art and who want to get the most from Procreate.

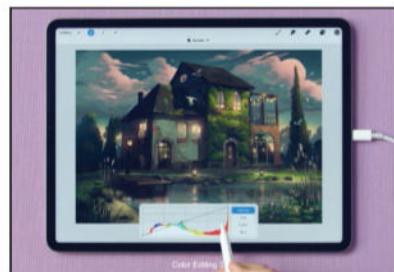
The 20 lessons are designed to teach the fundamentals of imagination without having to wait for inspiration. To Mikko's credit, this course is full of resources in terms of background references, and this is where his strength as a YouTube teacher really does shine through.



For example, although the art created is full of detail, the inspirations go back through decades of game art as well as colour theory.

The Procreate aspect runs from the basics to producing finished art, which could make this the only Procreate course you need, but a wide range of shortcuts are also explained, such as merging layers with a finger pinch, which will be brilliant for experienced artists looking to get up to speed quickly. It's not just about how the iPad-based app works, though. The course also shows how powerful Procreate can be when using compositional techniques, which Mikko is an expert in.

**Mike Griggs**

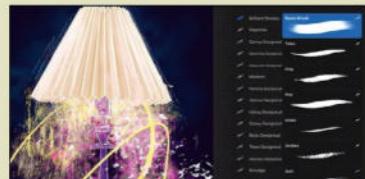


Learn how to adjust colours in your Procreate art.

Mikko Eerola elevates real-life references with his imaginative ideas to create engaging art.

## Brushing up...

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



### Brilliant Strokes Procreate Brush Set

**Artist** Paperlike with @Designcal  
**Software** Procreate  
**Brushes** 10 **Price** Free  
**Rating** ★★★

Give your digital art a more natural feel with this decent set of free brushes for Procreate, which feature rough edges, shape scatter, colour blending, smudging and bleeding properties.

<https://bit.ly/3Xi2VqU>



### LP Inking Brushes

**Artist** Lucas Peinador  
**Software** Procreate, Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint  
**Brushes** 50+ **Price** £17  
**Rating** ★★★★

A brilliant set of brushes with a strong focus on inking, with options for line, washes, textures and smudging. It comes with a video tutorial to help you capture the raw feel of classic comics.

<https://bit.ly/40lhXr9>



### Colorlab For Procreate

**Artist** Retro Supply  
**Software** Procreate and your application of choice  
**Brushes** 140 **Price** £31  
**Rating** ★★★★★

While expensive for a brush pack, see this more as a full colour kit if you ever need to create colour work with that distinctive 1960s retro vibe.

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



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# 3D Artist

## Your ultimate source for art, inspiration and know-how

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### CONCEPT A FANTASY CRITTER

Vis-dev artist Matthieu Sarazin uses traditional and digital media

84



#### The best 3D art around

We showcase environments by Tarmo Juhola and sci-fi vehicles from Marnix Rekkers.

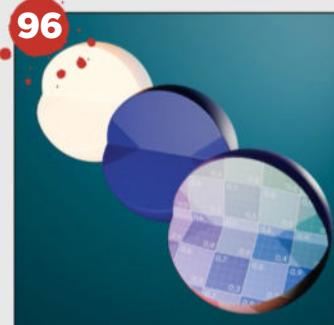
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#### Get efficient at lighting

Discover how Erik R. Ramalho makes use of a HDRI texture to speed up his 3D workflow.

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#### Back to basics

Why colouring a 3D object isn't straightforward, and how Surface Normals work.

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#### Five minutes with...

Veteran animator Pat Imrie on why he'd like to experience the early days of 3D art again.

# 3DArtist Showcase —

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## Tarmo Juhola

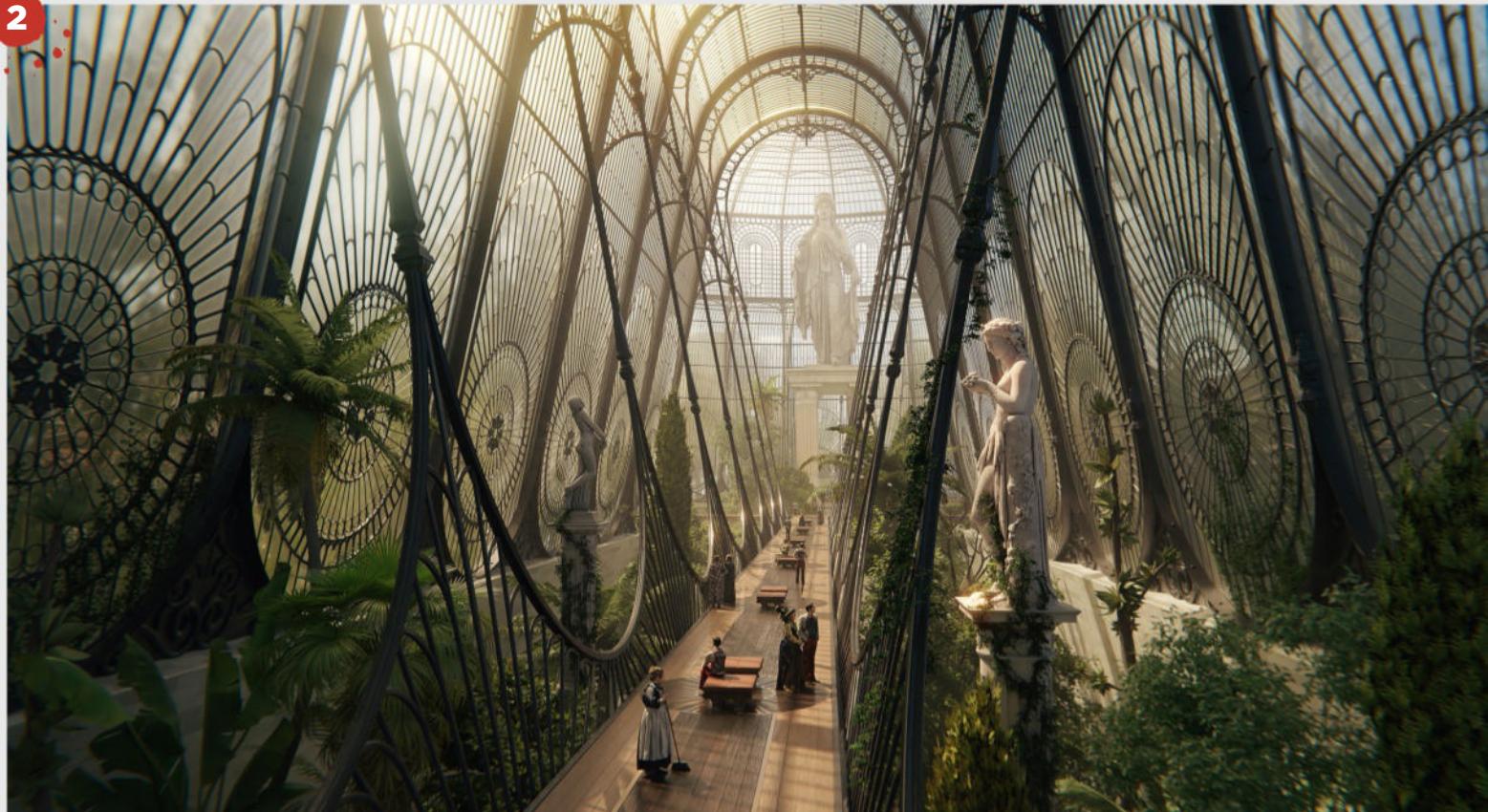
LOCATION: Finland MEDIA: Blender, Photoshop, Character Creator, Rhino WEB: [www.artstation.com/tarmojuhola](http://www.artstation.com/tarmojuhola)

Tarmo was an architect for about a decade before becoming a full-time freelance concept artist. He's worked in the entertainment industry since 2018, participating on many AAA games and high-profile film projects.

1



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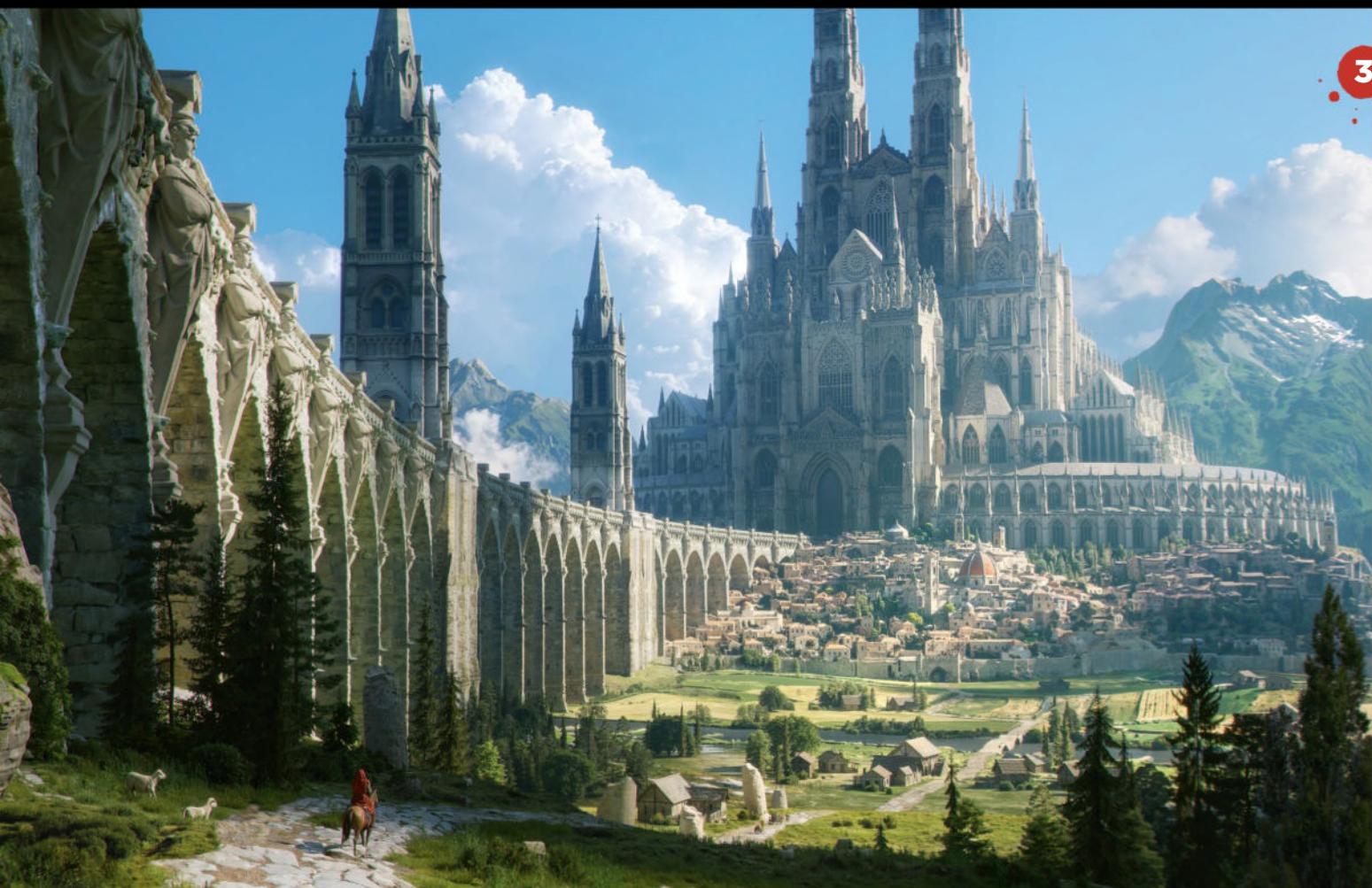


84

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3



4



## 1 PARTY HEADQUARTERS

"With my architectural background, brutalism is a comfort zone for me. With proper delineation a building can be as imposing as a sheer cliff face."

## 2 BOTANICAL GARDEN

"This piece started with a five-minute shape sketch, which then transformed into something else, while retaining the initial cool silhouette."

## 3 GOING TO CHURCH

"This fantasy landscape ended up feeling a lot more grounded than I anticipated. I guess I lean towards realism even with preposterous designs."

## 4 LEVIATHAN

"A night-time naval battle in an extreme storm seemed terrifying, but adding a giant sea serpent made the scenario truly terrifying."



## Marnix Rekkers

**LOCATION:** The Netherlands **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Mol 3D, Blender, Keyshot **WEB:** <https://marnixrekkersdesign.com>

Marnix discovered digital art while studying graphic design in college. After graduating he studied game development, which led to an internship at Opus Artz. Now a freelance concept artist, he specialises in vehicle design.

1



2



### 1 RAPTOR HELICOPTER DRONE

"This is an assault helicopter redesigned as an autonomous drone. It grew out of work I completed for a big client, but I found that the design took on a life of its own."

### 2 BLITZ HYPER RACER

"This was my first real attempt at using Blender. I decided to use it to design a sci-fi racing vehicle - it turned out quite nicely."

### 3 BEETLE

"The idea for this was to design a massive, land-based, drone-carrying vehicle for the military. From this command centre, multiple drones can be launched and operated."



**Do you want to see your art on these pages?** Then email five pieces of your work and a short explanation about each artwork, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to [mail@imagineFX.com](mailto:mail@imagineFX.com)

## Traditional skills, Photoshop, ZBrush & Blender BRING A FANTASY CRITTER TO LIFE

**Matthieu Sarazin** draws on a range of creative disciplines – both traditional and digital – to create his creature concept

### Artist PROFILE

#### Matthieu Sarazin

LOCATION: France

Matthieu is a concept artist working at Shiro Games, who specialises in visual development for character and creature creation. He's passionate about the strangeness and mystery that come with the act of creation. <https://bit.ly/4oPcwSk>



This project tells the story of a small, winged creature – gentle yet strange – which holds the buried memories of a lonely house. Behind its smiling face lies a secret well kept, one that only the few tiny inhabitants still living in the house can truly see.

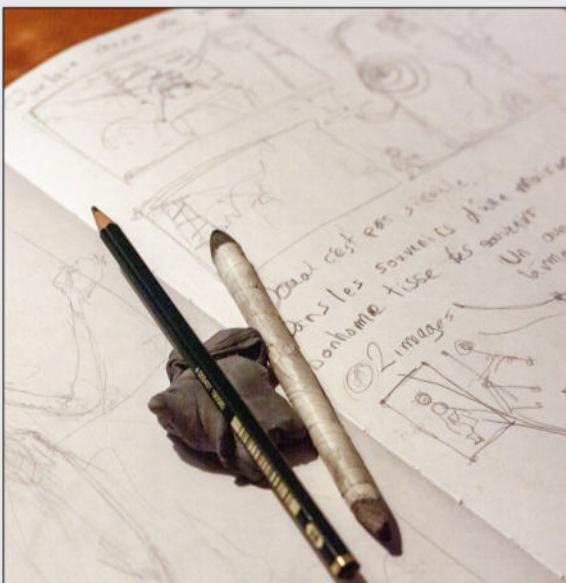
Creature design, for me, is by far one of the most creative parts of imaginative art. They can take any

form, be good, dark or both, and it's exactly that duality that makes them feel so special.

Each creature is a mirror of our own contradictions: both fragile and alive at the same time. Every person, creature or living being hides a diverse collection of feelings and experiences that belong to them and them alone. When we try to bring something to life, I believe it's important to celebrate the beauty and depth of the world we live in.

In this workshop, I'll go through my creative process, starting with the 'terrifying' blank page, followed by sketch research, sculpting and finally setting the creature in motion through keyframes.

I'm not trying to be overly technical. Instead, I want to focus on what truly matters to me as an artist: the way of thinking. Technique comes through practice. A perfect line can exist, but it tells nothing without intention.



### 1 Think about the project

Art is a visual language, but defining its path with words helps us find a clear direction. It's often hard to know how to start the process of creation. You just have to dive in, scribble something, write down your intentions, and try to extract a part of yourself. The beginning of a project often starts with a scratch on a blank page.

### 2 Bring words into sketches

The first sketch phase is, for me, the key part of a project. It's the most free and creative, but also the most decisive for everything that follows. Here, your intention is at its strongest, and it's crucial to keep it alive until the final step. I also use a lot of 'automatic drawing': simply letting the pencil wander and surprise me. ➤

### RESOURCES

#### WORKSHOP BRUSHES

#### PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES:  
SKETCH, SOFT SKETCH,  
SMUDGE

These are the three brushes I use for digital sketching. I use the Smudge brush in the same way I'd use the palm of my hand, to blend transitions.

#### GET YOUR RESOURCES

See page 5 now!

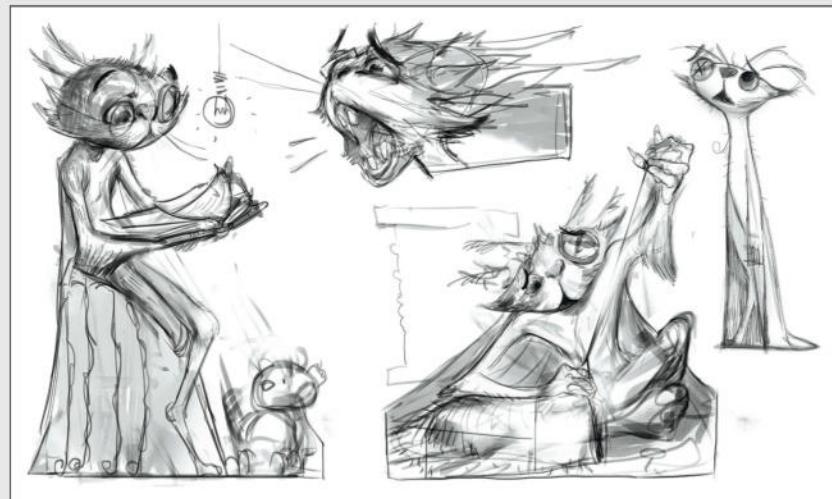


## 3 Find your inspirations

Once your ideas are on paper, it's time to turn a vague thought into something tangible. Gather your inspirations, define the visual language: the era, the mood and so on. I choose something nostalgic, strange and lonely. For this project a lot of my inspirations comes from theatre scenery, German expressionism and fabric dolls that bring back childhood memories.

## 4 Get to know your character

Once your direction is clear, it's time to really get to know your imaginary friend (or enemy). An important part of visual development for characters is understanding their attitude, their expressions, their hobbies. Now it's time to play and bring your acting skills into practice and step into your character's shoes!



## 5 From lines to volume

Next, make your creature real and give it form. Sculpting, for me, is a continuation of drawing following the same rules of understanding volumes, blocking out main shapes first, and quickly capturing the core silhouette before refining the second and third passes of details. In my case, I keep the volumes very simple because the creature is covered in fur.



## 6 Add the details

Once the sculpt is finished in ZBrush, I bring it into Blender to add fur using the Native Geometry node system. I pay special attention to how the fur can add rhythm and flow to the silhouette of my creature. I make sure that the fur is in sync with both the rhythm and silhouette of the creature.



## 7 Posing the creature so that it looks alive

The shift from the spontaneity of drawing to the technical side of 3D can quickly become tricky when you want your creature to feel alive. So it's time to give life to that inanimate puppet! I create a skeleton and apply it to my model, which enables me to pose it freely. The key is to find a rhythm and silhouette that reinforce the creature's personality. ➡

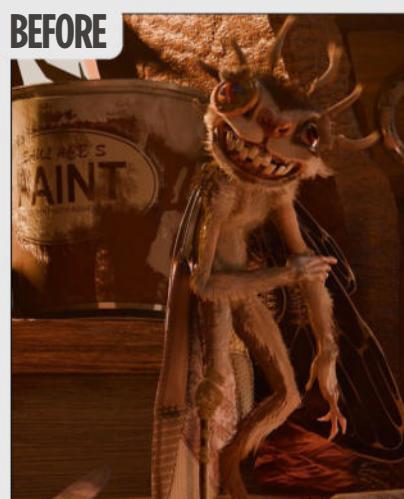
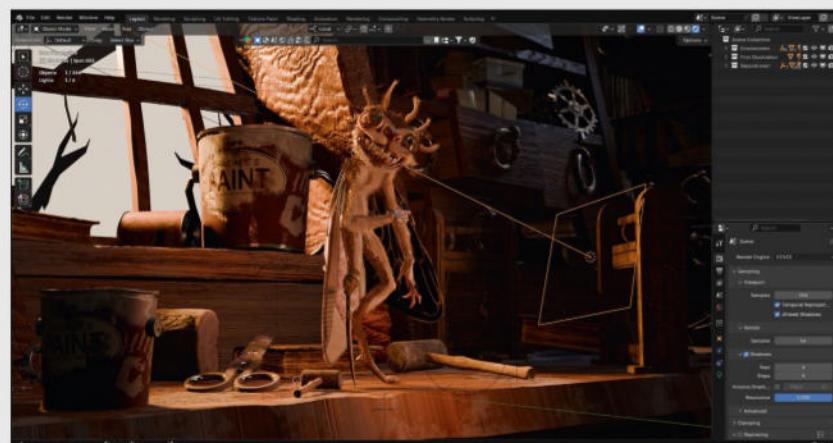
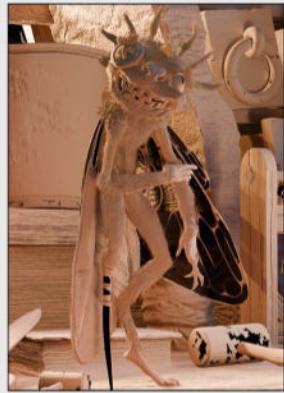


## 8 Place your character in an environment

Once your character is posed, it's time to anchor it more in its environment. This step adds depth, gives a sense of scale and helps us understand that he belongs. I start with a simple block-out then add texturing, props and finally lighting. It's important to take a step-by-step approach, just like a set-dressing team and a director of photography would.

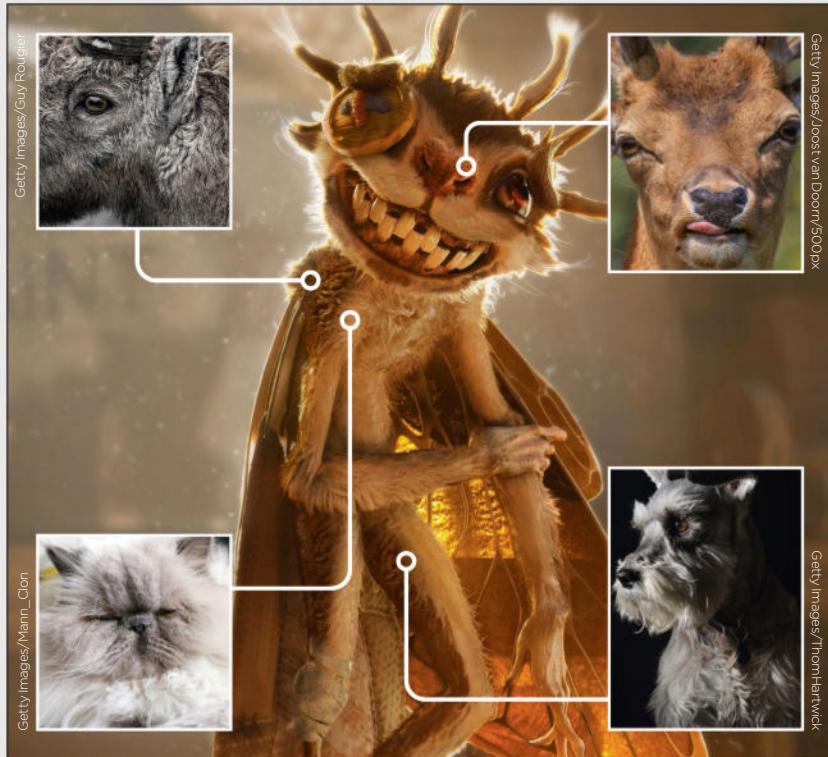
## 9 Set the right mood

How do you define the right atmosphere to faithfully convey what you want to say while remaining true to the initial ideal? It's essential to remember that for creature/character concept art, you should keep your subject as readable as possible and clearly highlight your design choices for your audience. The chosen atmosphere helps define his personality and habitat. In my case, I choose a warm and soft atmosphere to counterbalance the 'strange' side of my character.



## 10 Compositing and rendering

Time for rendering! Since I know I'll move to Photoshop for compositing, I don't waste time trying to achieve perfect light effects or render quality. In Photoshop, I play with ambient occlusion, depth and the object passes to separate my creature's silhouette and make it pop out of the scene.



## 11 Add life and personality

A common complaint made about 3D renders is that they look stiff or too clean. So I add a photobashing pass to bring in imperfections and small details. When doing this, the most important thing is to balance values, colours and contrast so that everything blends naturally. I do a lot of back-and-forth, switching to black and white and working while zoomed out to keep a clear overall view.



 Bridging intention and technique

**13** **Bringing intention and technique** One crucial point for me when creating a character is keeping that spark from the first sketches alive until the very end. Our work is a long, sometimes bumpy process, and losing that initial emotion means taking away a vital part of the character: their soul.



## 12 The importance of keyframes

**12 THE IMPORTANCE OF KEYFRAMES** A keyframe is a key moment in a story often based on a storyboard. It projects your character into a crucial moment of the plot, bridging concept art, illustration and storytelling. For this project, I want to explore solitude and the mystical aura of the universe I had in mind, through two keyframes with distinct atmospheres.



## 14 Create something that resonates with yourself

A last thought about personal projects, whether it's for a portfolio or just for yourself: as with writing we can only truly speak about what we know best. So what's more fulfilling than putting a bit of yourself into something as personal as creation itself? Enjoy! 

## Artist **PROFILE**

### Erik R. Ramalho

LOCATION: Brazil

Erik is a character artist who discovered 3D through their childhood love of drawing. Over the past seven years they have been studying and practising it every day.  
<https://bit.ly/44f2D0s>





## Technique focus

# FASTER LIGHTING USING TEXTURES

Discover how **Erik R. Ramalho** uses a HDRI texture to speed up his 3D workflow



"This artwork began as a series of assignments in Glauco Longhi's class, in which I completed a few each week. It's inspired by a concept from Ruan Jia. I aimed for a rough sculpture feel that's different from my previous, clean, production work. One of my

main goals was to make each piece presentable quickly. Lighting can slow you down when working in 3D, so I kept it simple using a HDRI texture called Studio Tomoco. If you get tangled in a complicated lighting setup that does not work, try that. It is a fast, effective solution – just don't get too comfortable!"

## How I create... A CHARACTER MADE OF STONE



### 1 Blocking and sculpting the base form

First, I start with a Dynamesh in ZBrush to establish the basic form. I like using the Clay Buildup brush with a Lazy step of 0.01 for cleaner strokes. Once the main shapes are set and unlikely to change drastically, I ZRemesh for secondary and tertiary passes. Along the way, I also experiment with Noises and Cavity masks for additional detail.



### 2 Decimation, UVs and texturing

After that, I decimate the model to create a low-poly version, then generate automatic UVs in Rizom. Now I have both a high-poly and low-poly mesh, ready for baking in Substance and starting the texturing process. While texturing, I focused on maintaining the rough sculpture feel and experimented with combining cold and warm tones, using mostly cold in the cavities.



### 3 Lighting and final rendering

Once the textures are complete, I export the maps to Maya and render in Arnold. The setup is simple, using the Tomoco Studio HDRI as a skydome with no additional lights. I place a white wall in the background instead of adding it in post, helping the figure to integrate into the environment.

# 3DArtist Back to basics

OUR 3D EXPERTS ARE HERE TO SHARE THEIR KNOWLEDGE...



There are many ways to colour 3D models, which can enhance realism in a scene.

## HOW DO I COLOUR A 3D OBJECT?

The process of colouring a 3D image has a lot of layers, so let's start at the surface. **Mike Griggs** weighs up the material requirements



Colouring an object in 3D is one of the more complex parts of learning 3D. It's not the same as assuming the colour you see on-screen is the object's colour. Some 3D programs, especially those focused on design or those showing a simplified viewport view, will colour an object to make it easier to manipulate and edit, rather than to reflect the material assigned to it.

The first complication to understand is that, in many cases, the colour of the

object you see when you render (the term for an output image of what the 3D application sees through the camera) has little to do with the object itself. Instead, it comes from the material applied to the 3D object.

As far as the 3D application is concerned, a material is a separate item that can be applied to as many objects as the artist wants. A single change to a material's colour will apply to every object in the 3D scene that has that material applied. This is

powerful and efficient once you get comfortable with your 3D application, but it can leave newcomers puzzled and looking for simpler options.

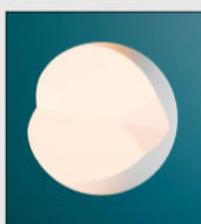
We'll break down these different aspects of materials in later articles, but for now let's look at the main ways an object can be coloured in a 3D application.

*Mike is the founder of Creative Bloke and has experience in content creation, workflow design and emerging creative technology. See [www.creativebloke.com](http://www.creativebloke.com).*

### Colouring options for a 3D element

#### 1 Use a light

With features such as Light Linking in Blender, a light (or multiple lights) can colour an object in a scene. By assigning specific lights to specific objects, you can



tint surfaces without changing their materials. However, it can be hard to balance colour with the light's power, and changes to scene lighting will affect the objects anyway.

#### 2 Use a material

Applying a material to an object is usually the best way to colour it in a 3D program. Here, a blue colour is set in the material, which is then applied to the object.



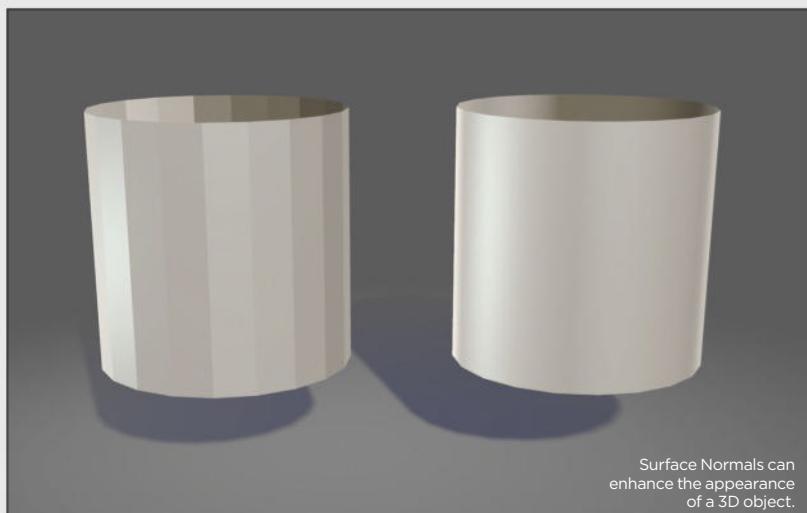
Materials are separate from the object, so the same material can be shared across multiple objects. Alter the colour once and every object using that material updates automatically.

#### 3 Use an image in a material

While tools can create patterns within materials, these are often 3D-specific. You can use an image to apply colour within a material; these images can also control the opacity of



an object and add more detail. Even a simple checker pattern (shown here) becomes a texture that wraps around the object. How the image wraps can be a learning journey in itself.



## HOW SURFACE NORMALS IMPROVE YOUR 3D ART

**Ant Ward** explains how to quickly change the way a polygon model looks by adjusting its normals



As discussed in previous issues, a polygon model is made up from vertices, edges and faces, but there's more. Hidden within the model you'll also find UVs and Vertex Colour Data, which we will discuss in future instalments, but in addition to this you also have Surface Normals.

A model's normals dictate how light will travel across its surface, effectively softening or hardening its appearance. Changing the angle of the normals can make a flat, polygon plane look almost rounded and it's because of this that you usually can't see the individual polygons that make up a mesh, giving it the appearance of being more complicated than it is.

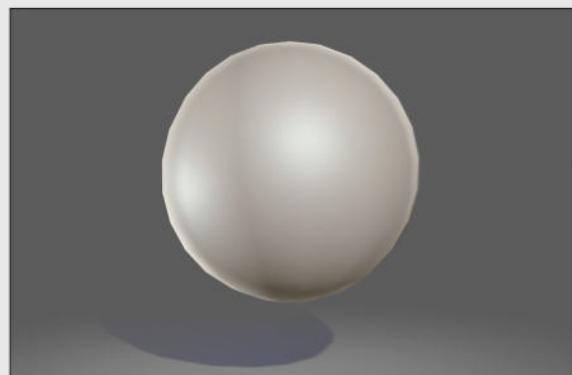
You can see an example of this in the image of the two cylinders above. The model on the left has a much harsher appearance where you can see how it's been constructed. In contrast, the same model – shown on the right – looks much smoother with the polygons almost blending into each other.

This may sound complicated, but luckily in most 3D applications there will be a simple option to swap between the two states, and you can change them on either part of or all of the model.

*Ant runs antCGi, which supplies quality digital art, game art, rigging, animation and illustration services to a wide range of clients. Learn more at [www.antcgi.com](http://www.antcgi.com).*

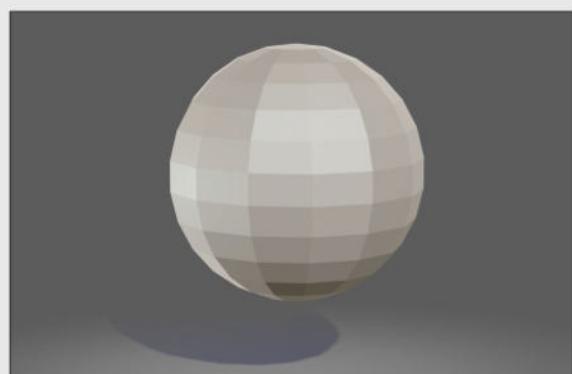


### Adjust the settings of Surface Normals



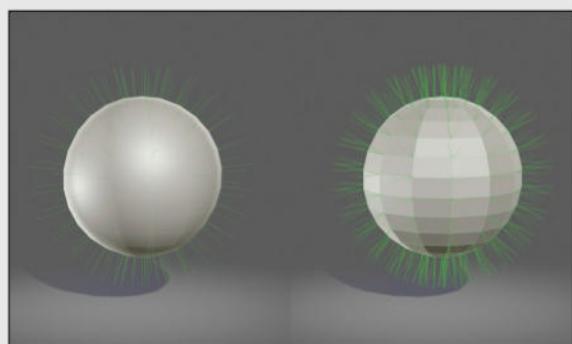
#### 1 Soft normals

If you create a basic polygon model such as a sphere, by default the surface will look smooth so you don't see each and every face and edge. This gives it the appearance that it's higher quality than it actually is.



#### 2 Harden your normals

If you choose to harden the normals on the model (again, this will be a simple option in your chosen 3D application), you can clearly see each and every polygon, in addition to their edges.



#### 3 Display the normals

If you display the vertex normals, which are the little green lines shown above, you can clearly see the difference. The softer-looking sphere's normals are more aligned with each other, which enables them to blend into those surrounding it. On the hardened sphere they have split and as a result look more complicated, but this forces each normal to be perpendicular to its polygon, making it appear flatter.

## FIVE MINUTES WITH

# PAT IMRIE

Big-screen blockbusters and a certain 3D art magazine helped set this creative on his career path



#### Where did your artistic journey start?

I was always drawing and sketching as a kid and originally aspired to be a comic book artist. However, after seeing Jurassic Park and Toy Story in the cinema and more specifically the behind-the-scenes details in books and magazines, it got me hooked on how movies were made and I decided then that I wanted to work on films.

That idea faded over the next few years, and I thought about 'real' jobs. However, when I was 14, I read an issue of 3D World magazine, which reignited my interest in CG, film and animation. I learned everything I could about the industry. Initially thinking I might become an animator, it wasn't until I read an article on the visual effects behind the film Underworld that it all clicked for me: that this is what I truly wanted to do as a career.

**“A sketchbook is still my go-to before I go anywhere near the computer”**

to fail and that it can be more beneficial to your growth as an artist than the successes are.

#### Are there any challenges to working in 3D?

There are several challenges to working in 3D, with each one being unique to the specialism you work in. Be that modelling, animation, rendering and so on. Artistically, for me one of those challenges is adapting a 2D design into 3D. Copying it will only get you so far – you must reinterpret the design, altering it in the right places to ensure you retain the original 'character' of the design while equally respecting the design choices of the original artist.

#### How has the 3D/VFX industry changed for the better since you've been working in it?

Accessibility. It's so much easier to get into 3D and VFX than ever before. Learning resources are more plentiful than when I started. Hardware and software, while still expensive, are more affordable and

#### What plays in the background while you work?

Movies are my go-to for when I'm working – always something I've seen hundreds of times, so it doesn't distract me. The Goonies, Indiana Jones, Back to the Future and the Alien franchise are the most common. Alternatively, I'll listen to podcasts or documentaries – anything informative or interesting. Topics can range from wildlife, historical, true crime... even supernatural or paranormal myths and legends are in the rotation.

#### If you were starting out now, what words of wisdom would you most appreciate?

Setting boundaries as an artist and knowing your worth would probably be high on that list. It's important for your own wellbeing, which is something I didn't consider as a younger artist. Additionally, learning that it's OK (and normal)



**YODA**

The final render of a project created over several Livestream sessions. Based on the art of Bob Q.

in many cases, there's a litany of open-source alternatives to enable anyone to start creating. Open source is kind of like today's equivalent of getting free software on a disc from a magazine! You can try things out, be creative and just enjoy the process. I wish I could go back and experience that again.

#### Do you tend to stick to 3D or do you sketch and draw as well? If so, what and why?

I always have a sketchbook within reach – it's still my go-to before I go anywhere near the computer. Sketching and writing out my thoughts is still my preference – I find it's the most direct way to get the idea out of my head.

#### Do you have an ongoing passion project?

Yes! It's a short film project that has evolved several times over the past several years as I have continued to develop it. It's based on a short story that a friend of mine wrote while they were at university. I finished a new draft of the script recently and I have started the modelling process of the main character, which is a big milestone for the project. Currently the plan is to produce it in Unreal Engine.

*Pat has 17 years' experience in VFX, TV, animation and games. Alongside working for companies such as DNEG, Cinesite and Framestore, he's also taught CG and visual effects for over 15 years, including at The Gnomon Workshop. You can see more of his work at [www.patimrie.com](http://www.patimrie.com).*

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