10 WAYS TO GIVE YOUR ART MEANING

Strengthen your illustrations using emotion and symbolism with **KATJA ŠKORJANC**

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PAGES OF 3D ART ADVICE AND INSIGHT
INCLUDING
WORKSHOPS
BACK TO BASICS
RIK SCHUTTE INTERVIEW
GALLERIES

WORKSHOP
STORYTELLING MASTERCLASS
Use worldbuilding to inform your painting

STUDIO TOUR WITH
AARON BLAISE
Lions, tigers and bears! We go wild for the Disney animator's setup

ALSO INSIDE
DISCOVER TOOLS TO BROADEN YOUR SKILLS
EXPLORE A SKETCHBOOK FILLED WITH CRITTERS
DEVELOP IMMERSIVE CYBERPUNK SCENES

ALIEN: ROMULUS CONCEPT ARTIST **MATTHEW SAVAGE** TALKS STRONG DESIGN

Welcome to…

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

Discovering fresh ways of working can make a huge difference to an artist. It can inspire innovative projects and help them reach new audiences. With this in mind we bring you a collection of tips from Katja Škorjanc. This month's cover artist reveals how traditional Slavic art informs the symbolism that's present in her own striking artwork.

Meanwhile, Lucas Lacerda explains how the world lore of your project can guide your creative choices throughout your art process. You'll also learn how to use Procreate to colour your 3D renders with advice from Entei Ryu, who showcases her techniques for combining different tools. And don't forget to check out the next instalment of our 3D Basics series, in which we cover the fundamentals of working in the third dimension.

At ImagineFX we love a nose around an artist's workspace, which is why we take you on a tour of Aaron Blaise's new studio, which is kitted out with historical Disney gear as well as Aaron's tools of the trade. It's a fascinating exploration!

Enjoy the issue.

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

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"I was making tea and
coffee, drawing Daleks
and then on into movies"
Matthew Savage

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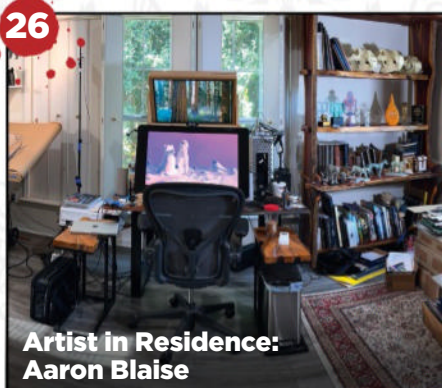
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ImagineFX
FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART

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GET YOUR RESOURCES

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

1 Go to the website
Type this into your browser's address bar.
https://bit.ly/artwithmeaning

2 Click the download link
Find your files ready for download.

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

Next month

Next month in...
ImagineFX
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

PAINT WORLDS WITH DEPTH

Concept designer Cheri Wang shows how a backstory can boost the realism of your work

Create key art that terrifies!
Learn how game studio Athena Productions ramps up the tension.

Enter a spiritual studio space
Aviad Sajevitch invites us to tour his home setup… and meet his cats.

Explore a game artist's drawings
Fantasy characters leap off the pages of Cole Eastburn's packed sketchbook.

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FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Rex

LOCATION: France **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint, Illustrator, Photoshop
WEB: www.instagram.com/_rexpo

Rex is an illustrator and character designer. Her work is rooted in fantasy settings inspired by the JRPs and MMORPGs she grew up with, along with fashion and graphic design.

1 BRÛLURE D'ESTOMAC
"An artwork of my original character Jude. A big part of the universe I'm building revolves around dragon-eating girls, so you are what you eat, I guess. I also used a very loose interpretation of an écorché."

2 CRYING KNIGHT
"This is my original character Etain. To be honest, he was mostly used as an excuse for me to draw a suit of armour."

3 UNICORN (PINK VERS)
"My original character, the Unicorn. I usually draw her wounded yet unconcerned, since she's immortal."

4 RITA'S TORMENT
"Art of Rita surrounded by beasts. I'm a terrible creature designer, so the only way I make them frightening is by making them grotesque. I'm inspired by medieval and Renaissance depictions of demons."

Want to submit your work? Visit http://ifxm.ag/getinifx

5

5 RITA'S WOUND
"An artwork of my character Rita. She's a sad and silent character who is always crying. I'm drawn to the idea of open wounds, and I see her as a kind of martyr."

FXPosé

![photo] **Ari Targownik**

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: https://nuclearwarrior.artstation.com

Ari enjoys painting sci-fi, horror and fantasy-themed artwork. His personal work sometimes borders on the surreal, and is often not sketched out in advance. Instead, he starts by painting and sees what emerges.

1 WELCOME
"Although this piece is sci-fi themed, I wanted it to evoke a feeling of horror. I also enjoy painting strange, organic forms."

2 LAVASHAPER
"This is a mix of sci-fi and fantasy, as well as the organic and mechanical."

3 UNDERSEA LORD
"A motif that I often repeat is dominating or imposing characters, often illuminated by strong, top-down lighting. This approach is both dramatic and a lot of fun to paint."

4 TOMB
"After studying Egyptian art (an early influence on H.R. Giger) at a museum, I created several pieces that were inspired by it."

FXPosé

Beth Fuller

LOCATION: Denmark **MEDIA:** Krita, Photoshop, Heavypaint, Procreate **WEB:** www.artstation.com/bethfuller9

Beth is a concept artist and illustrator. Having completed a graphic novel in 2025 and an MA in game art, she's now exploring art direction with a new video game project. Her influences include Ian McQue and Linnea Sterte.

1 WANDERING THE CONTINENT

"I worked on a project about a stranded angel while at a summer course at Gobelins. This is a slightly pensive drawing – the rest are more comical and lighthearted."

2 IMPACT

"This piece was exciting to draw; I enjoyed trying to make the ship look as vast as possible. I drew lots of space art after attending a Scavengers Reign panel at LightBox Expo."

4

3 TRIREME AIRSHIP
"A commissioned drawing for a client. The anachronistic blend of an ancient Greek ship design with a modern Zeppelin was an interesting challenge."

4 DESOLATE SHORE
"This is a piece of concept art for an ongoing project. I wanted to evoke the misty, watery light and crunchy lichen textures of Scottish and Irish islands."

Kevin Zamir Goeke

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint, Blender **WEB:** www.instagram.com/kevinzamirgoeke

Kevin is a freelance artist at CD Projekt Red, and one of the organisers of the event company Drink and Draw Berlin. His personal art revolves around life, death and the search for meaning in people's actions.

1 THE SKY ABOVE CORINTH – LAST STEPS

"'The end of the stairway was just above the clouds, beyond your view. As soon as you broke through, it became clear how many steps remained. You reached your destination faster than you thought, and hopefully you don't regret holding back on your way up.' Arnold Böcklin lives rent-free in my head."
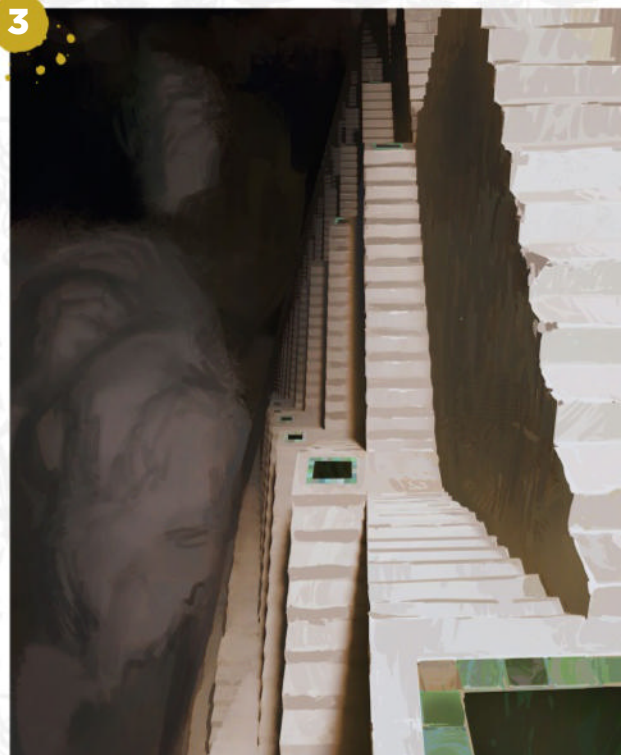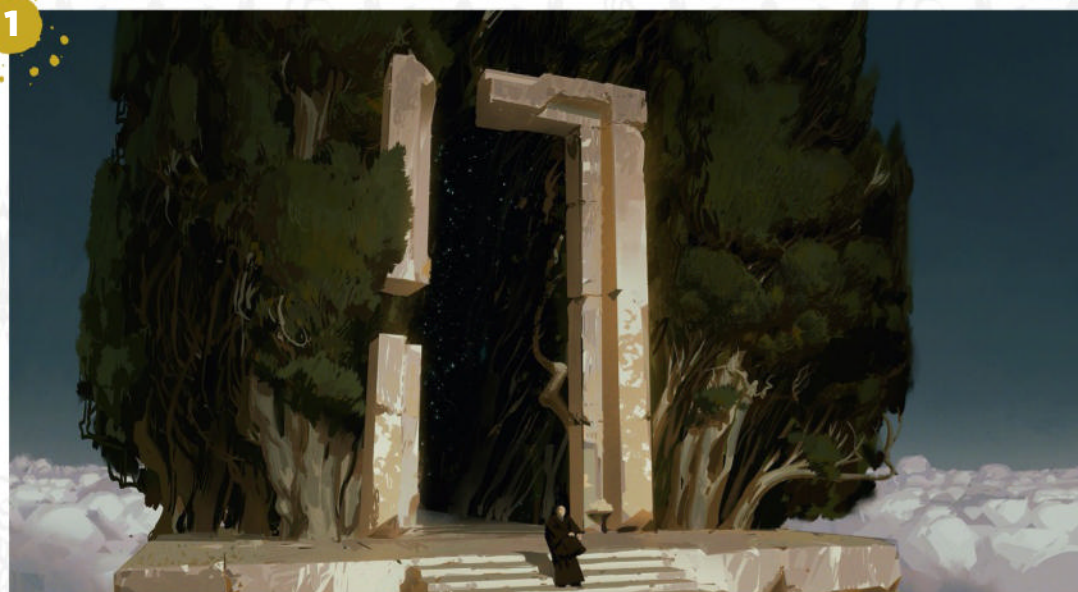
2 THE MAZE: TREST

"I painted this as a gift for one of my best friends, Lars Weiler. He has a talent for world-building, and this is the capital city from his own D&D campaign, The Maze."

3 THE SKY ABOVE CORINTH – STAIRS

"This is about the countless paths we can take in life – each winding its own way, yet all leading toward the same quiet end."

MACBETH

4 DRINK AND DRAW BERLIN – MACBETH
"A poster design I did for our costumed drawing session. I did this without any specific style in mind; however, afterwards I wasn't able to deny the Ghibli influence. Some art just has such a gravitation, you cannot run from it."

Do you want to see your art on these pages? Then email five pieces of your work and a short caption on each one, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to **fxpose@imaginefx.com**

Cheeseguard

YEAR CREATED: 2024 **MEDIA:** Photoshop

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

"Cheeseguard is a project I worked on at the end of my time at The One Academy. I've always loved darker, fantastical worlds such as Warhammer, Elden Ring and Trench Crusade, hence, I imagined a place where Cheese is sacred, driving a desperate struggle against grotesque, ratlike abominations, blending grim fantasy with a touch of absurdity."

Quest: Ambush the Carriage at The Canals

Quest: Kill the Hidden Boss

Combat Concepts

Cheese Phase
The Prince launches cheese from his cannon, damaging swarms around the splash radius.

If hit, Player is marked and slowed, primed to damage by the swarm.

Thrashing Phase

Quest Complete: Loot the CheeseGuard

GREAT ENEMY FELLED

Everytime the Prince's swarm gets killed, he engages in melee combat by spinning and thrashing in a singular direction, dealing high damage in quick succession. Player is encouraged to dodge and bait the Prince to collide with fellable to stun him for a short while.

If below 30% hp, losing so much weight, the Prince now spins and thrashes faster in quicker succession, getting hit almost ensures a sure death.

The Prince summons 3 CheeseGuardian to protect with him.

GAMEPLAY CONCEPT

Artist
PROFILE

Samuel Kuar Xin Yu
LOCATION: Malaysia

Sam is a concept art graduate from the award-winning The One Academy, Malaysia, who aims to find beauty in the unconventional, seeking inspiration in places often overlooked or deemed unappealing by others.
www.therookies.co/entries/37170

The Silent Night: Sci-fi Worldbuilding Project

YEAR CREATED: 2022-2024 **MEDIA:** Photoshop

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

"The idea behind this project is to have a story framework to base my concept art on, since I also have a passion for worldbuilding and writing. I started the project by creating a world in the form of a detailed timeline, and gradually filled in the visual concepts that represent factions and key events that take place at different times during the fictional history."
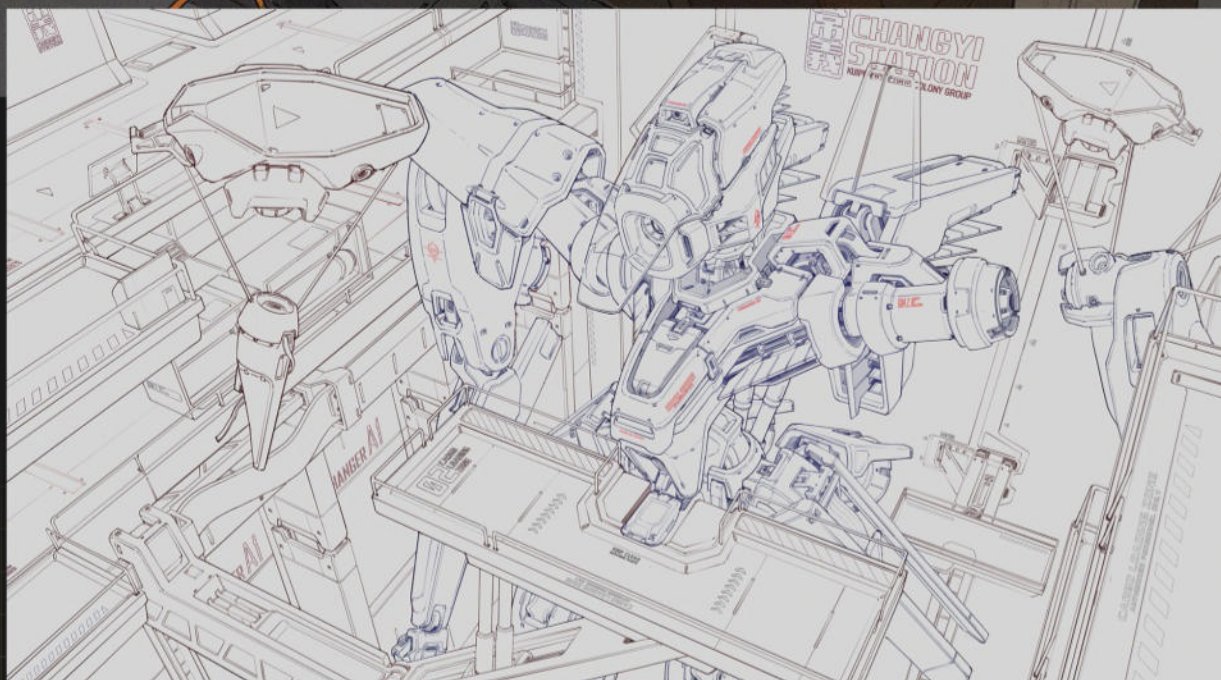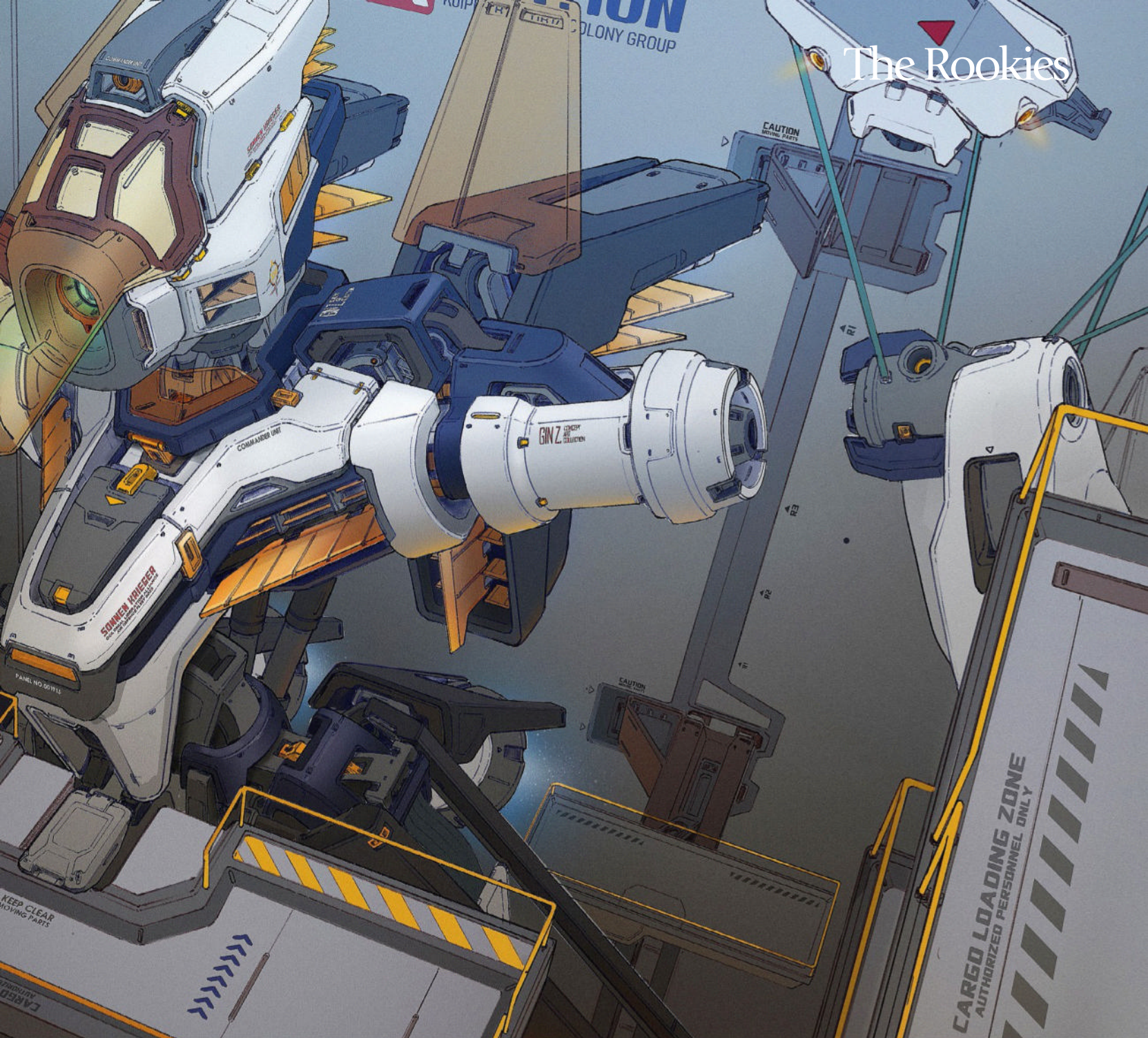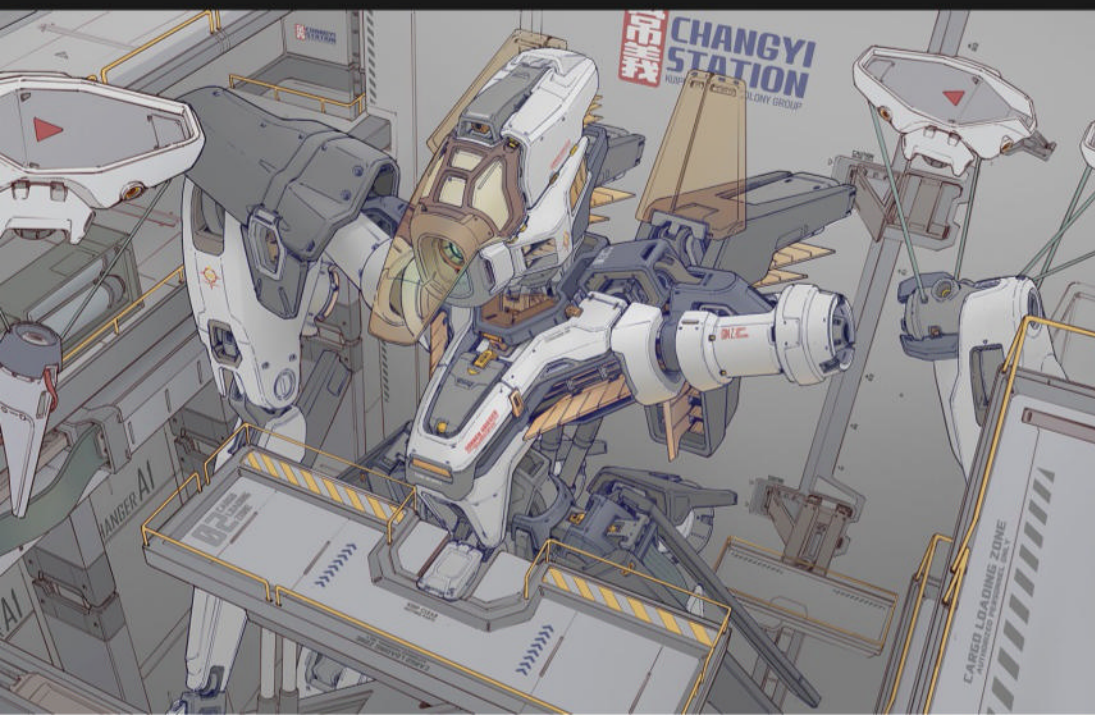
Artist
PROFILE

Gin Zhang
LOCATION: US

Gin graduated from ArtCenter College of Design in 2024 and is now working as a concept artist at Electronic Arts on Battlefield 6. He specialises in hard-surface prop, vehicle and environment design
www.therookies.co/entries/37321

Juliet Nneka captures her subjects with photogrammetry and then paints over the 3D geometry using Procreate.

"While it's not imperative for concept art, I would always recommend that people starting out get a basic understanding of 3D and Blender," says Jordan Grimmer.
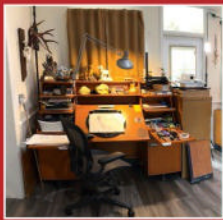
A character from Kelvyn Hulsey's upcoming game, Enter the THRALL.
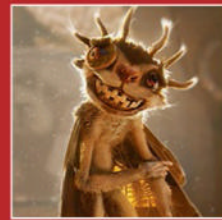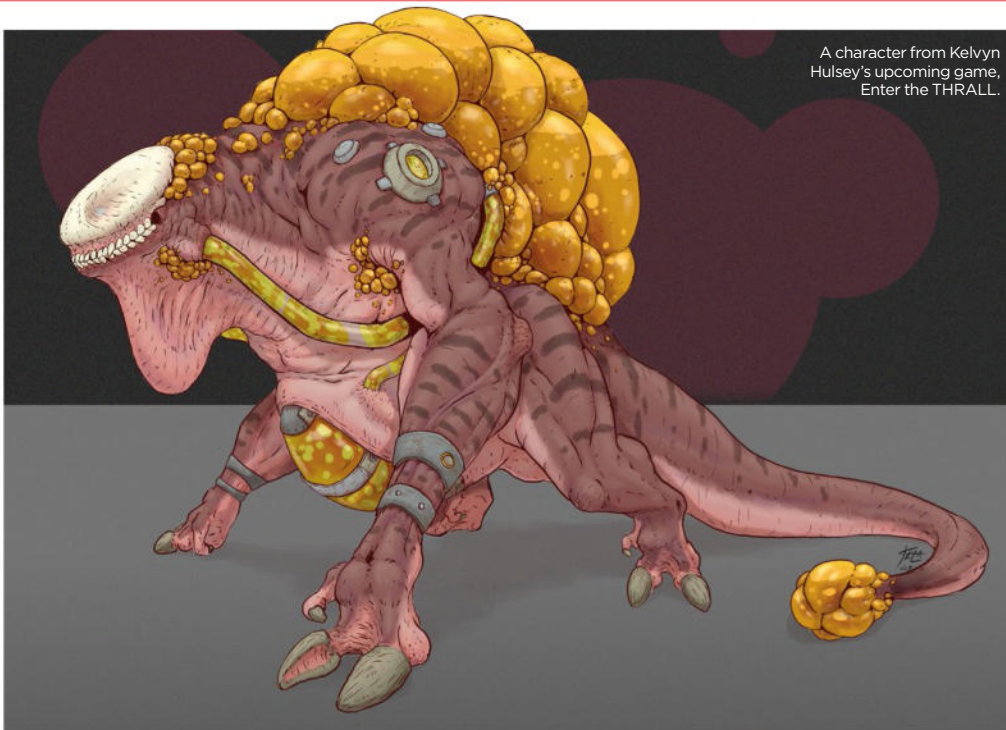
New horizons

Think different Tanya Combrinck looks at the tools that are helping 2D artists push their work into exciting new realms and dimensions

More and more artists who have used 2D painting tools for years are expanding their craft into other dimensions and mediums. It's clear that 3D software in particular is opening up new channels of creativity.

Some are going beyond 3D and into AR and physical sculpture. Others are learning game engines. All of this is made more accessible by tools such as Blender, Affinity Studio and Unreal Engine being free to use, making it easier than ever to try new things.

Concept artist **Jordan Grimmer** tells us that learning Blender has been a turning point for him. "It has completely changed how I approach creating images and has removed barriers when it comes to experimenting with different workflows," he says. "For example, I may use it to create a simple block-out for an environment shot, just to help with perspective and lighting, and

then paint over it in Photoshop. Or I might get more in-depth and model a few assets for my own scenes."

Getting to grips with 3D can be a challenge, and like many, Jordan found other 3D software overwhelming when he tried to learn it. But Blender was different. "I think with Blender being

> ❝ Learning Blender has completely changed how I approach creating images ❞

free and accessible it's allowed me to learn at my own pace, and there are so many resources out there to help you along. It's now an industry standard in my field of video games, too."

Juliet Nneka, who is an engineer as well as an artist, uses Procreate to paint lush portraits that place female figures ➤➤

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

FREE AND OPEN SOURCE

Kelvyn Hulsey on the importance of free tools

Tell us about the free software you use.
I have a pretty good system of using Krita alongside PureRef. Krita gives me nearly all I need to create amazing digital art pieces, but in unison with PureRef I feel like everything I need is streamlined and easily accessible. What I really like about PureRef is that I can gather reference images for the project I'm working on and then see everything I need without cluttering or distracting from my workspace on Krita. I can also use it for vision boards for my larger-scaled, world-building projects.

What do you think of the subscription model for creative software?
It takes me back to my days as a new digital artist. You're bogged down by the financial burden of keeping up to date with all the hardware needed to make artwork, and then the additional monthly subscription to use a piece of software seems like just a kick to the knees.

I think we need to support as many of the free software programs as possible. We want to make sure that they're around not only for those that might have fallen on hard times financially, but for those who are just entering the digital art field. They are as desperately needed and beautiful as that first pencil and paper in an artist's hands. And in supporting them, you are supporting the idea that anyone can be an artist.

Kelvyn Hulsey specialises in concepting creature designs that have one leg/claw/tentacle in the real world.

https://cara.app/kelhconceptartist

within the folds of petals, leaves and fungi. She was inspired to experiment with 3D when she identified a similarity between her 2D art process and her work on a project to design prosthetics based on 3D images made from anatomical scans.

"I was taking a direct imprint of a biological structure and translating it into a digital geometry," she tells us. "This felt strangely close to what I already do in 2D art: transmuting real experiences or internal images into figurative art. That connection made me wonder why I wasn't doing the same using 3D. So I experimented with painting on scanned topographies and expanding that emotional process into an additional dimension."

THE APPEAL OF NOMAD SCULPT

Everything in Juliet's 2D work is alive, curvaceous and flowing, and these aspects are accentuated in her experiments with 3D. She captures her subjects using photogrammetry (creating a 3D model based on many photographs taken from different angles) and works in Nomad Sculpt.

"I begin by cleaning and repairing mesh topographies in Blender, then bring them back into Nomad to sculpt further and push the stylisation," she explains. "After that I use my Procreate brushes to paint directly onto the geometry. Then it pretty much mirrors my 2D workflow after establishing values, but with the added dimension of height and physicality."

"Learning something new can strain your creative process, but that's temporary, and I always try to remind myself that for an artist, learning is never truly done," says Kelvyn.

As Juliet explores the possibilities of 3D, she is finding pathways into other technologies. "One of the features I'm most excited about is the ability to view my 3D objects in augmented reality through Procreate," she says.

From here, a drive to bring her digital work into the physical realm is emerging. "Digital art is already inherently ephemeral, but 3D feels closer to a real-world object. This has made me increasingly interested in translating some digital sculpts into physical objects. The bridge between digital ephemerality and a physical artefact feels like a natural progression of the experiment."

Juliet has noticed that capturing her subjects using these creative technologies instead of drawing them

"In an era of mass-produced images, artists with a strong, personal workflow have even more room to stand out," says Juliet.

in the traditional way does come at a cost. "You lose a certain gestural intuition when you rely heavily on references or technical aids," she says. "But you also gain accuracy, depth, and a different kind of control."

Weighing these factors is part of the creative process. "It depends on the intention behind the piece. Every tool has a trade-off, and it's up to the artist to decide what technical qualities matter most for that specific work or workflow."

As Juliet progresses the work, she sees it evolving firstly into larger digital installations, possibly followed by AR, and finally into something physical. "I want to keep deepening the connection between my scanned topographies, my sculptural experiments and my painted surfaces," she says. "The long-term goal is to let the 3D work influence my 2D practice and vice versa, creating a continuous loop between dimensions."

One of the ways that creative tools support artists as they carve out new

> ## 66 Every tool has a trade-off, and it's up to the artist to decide what technical qualities matter most 99
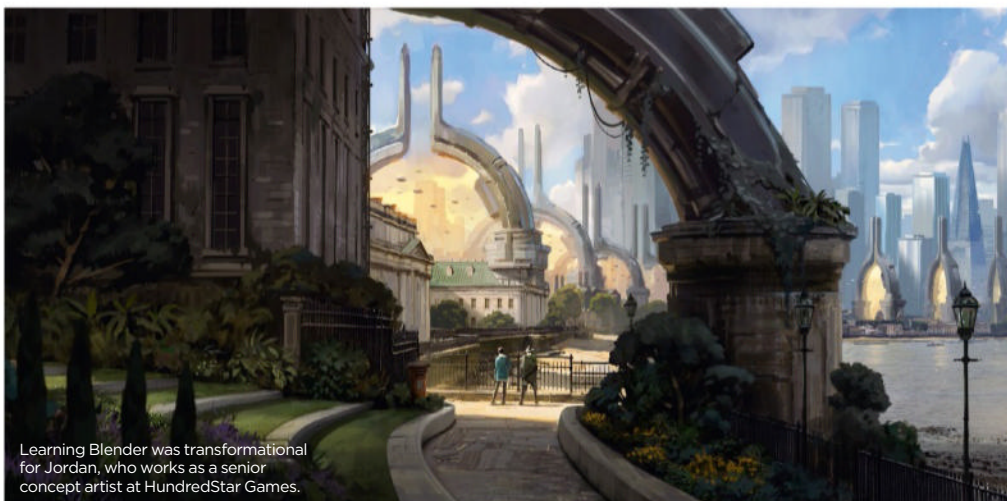
Learning Blender was transformational for Jordan, who works as a senior concept artist at HundredStar Games.

Juliet says: "What differentiates us is not the tool, but the lived experience behind the work."

Kelvyn says: "I admit that I am hesitant to learn new software. What if I waste time that I could be putting into art?! Time is like gold in an artist's life."

Ghost Town is personal work created in Blender by Jordan.

modes of expression is by being free. Having to pay a costly subscription every month puts the pressure on someone trying to learn a new tool in their spare time – so much so that they might just not bother.

CREATING CREATURES IN KRITA

Creature concept artist and free software aficionado **Kelvyn Hulsey** uses Krita as his main painting tool, which is open-source software and free to use. He previously worked in Photoshop and Clip Studio Paint.

"Switching to Krita was simple and I found that it had all the necessities of Photoshop, but was more intuitive," he says. "Where Photoshop feels more like it's tailored for photographers, Krita felt like it was developed with artists in mind. It had everything that I had loved about Clip Studio Paint, but felt like it was closer to working traditionally, which is important to me.

"That marriage between traditional work and digital is where I find my best creative flow and artistic process. Krita feels so natural that I can do a traditional drawing in a sketchbook and then throw it into Krita to make clean line art and painting without it feeling disconnected."

Like many artists today looking for new ways to engage audiences with their creativity, Kelvyn is learning a game engine and developing his own game. His choice is the free and open source engine Godot. He tells us: "It's fairly straightforward and easy to learn, and it helps to make the whole game development process feel like making art – which is exactly what it should feel like!"

Kelvyn believes that free tools are "just as good if not better" than the paid-for alternatives. "What they lack in polish, they make up for by taking the feedback of the communities that actively use them," he says. "It feels more collaborative, and with this open communication, everyone wins." ◼

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

My Black Magic camera and arm is invaluable for shooting my traditional demos at the big drawing table.

Various Disney maquettes from films I've worked on. These are Simba and Nala from The Lion King, and Yao from Mulan.

My Herman Miller Aeron chairs are incredibly important. I'm always spouting about having the right equipment and these are the best you can get, in my opinion.

I use my mahl stick to put against my large drawings and paintings. I can rest my hand on it without smearing the image.

Aaron Blaise

Wild side The artist takes us on a safari around his hybrid studio that's full of pencils, paint, tablets and cameras

I've worked in a lot of studios over the years, but my favourite is the one that I walk into every morning, right in my home. The slightly chaotic, camera-ridden workspace is my home within my home.

The heart of it is my animation desk – my original Disney desk – which I've had for over 35 years now. It's followed me through Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, The Lion King, Pocahontas, Mulan and Brother Bear. If the house were on fire, I'd probably try to drag it out with me.

The desk is permanently covered in loose animation drawings, half-used pencils, maquettes staring down at me and whatever art supplies I swore

I'd put away yesterday. It also doubles as my painting desk for smaller works, because I've never mastered the art of keeping dedicated surfaces dedicated.

ROLL WITH IT

Across the room is my big drafting table, which is where I do my large-scale drawing and demoing. I love drawing big. It allows me to go nuts and be expressive. So I keep a huge roll of cheap painter's paper mounted to the side. I can just yank it across the table like a conveyer belt whenever the urge to draw hits.

When I want something more permanent, I switch to a heavier, archival paper roll that's mounted ➤➤

My collection of awards for my animated short Snow Bear, from its year-long run at various film festivals.

My telescoping plastic portable seat goes with me whenever I'm out drawing in the field. It's a lifesaver, keeping me from having to stand and saving my old back.

My certificate of completion for my Disney Internship in the summer of 1988. I trained under the great Glen Keane. It changed my life and launched my 38-year career.

Most important is my 24oz Tervis Tumbler with lid. I drink a lot of coffee during the day and this keeps it nice and hot. I fill it twice each day.

Walt Disney Pictures
FEATURE ANIMATION
Congratulations to
AARON BLAISE
*For successfully completing the
1988 Summer Intern Program*

This is a piece I did in Photoshop. It's one of a series of images featuring animals and butterflies together.

66 The slightly chaotic, camera-ridden workspace is my home within my home 99

Since my return from Churchill, Manitoba, in November last year, I've had polar bears on the brain. This is a drawing I did as a demo while attending the CTN animation expo in Los Angeles.

I used to have a powered parachute. It was basically a flying lawn chair, but I loved being up in the clouds. My friend Ronnie Williford made this for one of our Disney caricature shows.
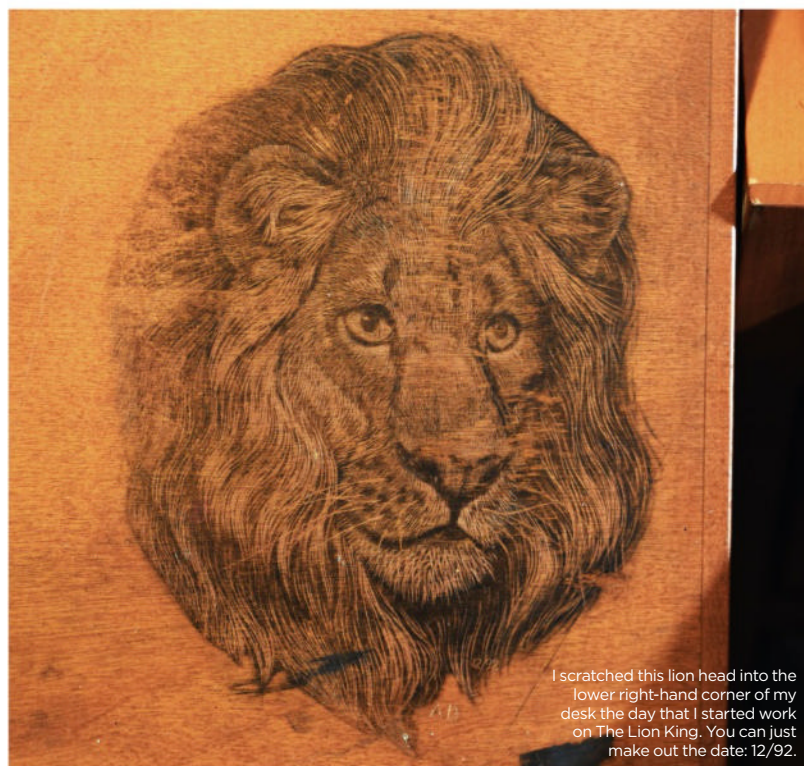
I scratched this lion head into the lower right-hand corner of my desk the day that I started work on The Lion King. You can just make out the date: 12/92.

CERTIFICATE OF NOMINATION FOR AWARD

BE IT KNOWN THAT

Aaron Blaise
Robert Walker

WERE NOMINATED FOR AN
ACADEMY AWARD
OF MERIT
FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT
IN 2003
ANIMATED FEATURE FILM
"Brother Bear"

ACADEMY OF

MOTION PICTURE

ARTS AND

SCIENCES

President

My Oscar nomination for Brother Bear, which was released by Disney in 2003. Attending the 2004 Oscars was an incredibly memorable night.
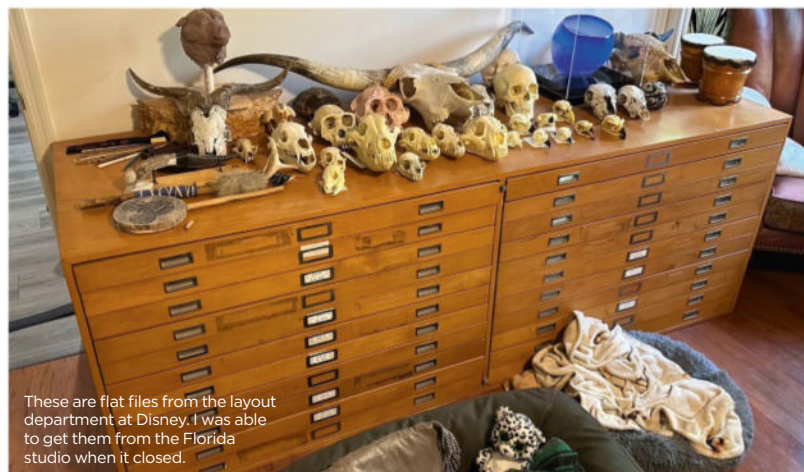
These are flat files from the layout department at Disney. I was able to get them from the Florida studio when it closed.

This downshooter is where I shoot all of my hand-drawn animation when I do it on paper, which by the way I still do often.

I love working at my large drafting table. I keep two rolls of paper attached at all times – all I need to do is pull it across the table and start drawing.

I never leave on a trip or go out drawing without my Artie from LiloRosh.com. This hand-made art bag wonderfully organises my drawing and painting utensils.

Tanzanian Queen. Acrylic on illustration board.

to the top edge of the desk. It's a bit like having a sketchbook the size of a billboard.

Most days, though, I end up sitting at my digital desk. It's the command centre of my little universe. It's here that I answer emails and check my schedule for the day. It's also where we have our weekly staff Zoom sessions, because all of the employees at CreatureArtTeacher work from their homes.

I created Snow Bear entirely at this desk, animated on my Wacom Cintiq 32-inch Pro, which I love for its sheer acreage. Both the Cintiq and my second monitor sit in custom wooden stands that I built in my woodshop. My cedar shelves (also home-made) hold a rotating collection of art books,

The Cintiq and my second monitor sit in wooden stands that I built in my woodshop

sketchbooks, a clutch of Snow Bear accolades, skulls and a few animal anatomy maquettes.

On the opposite side of the room sits my down-shooter setup, which I use for filming traditional animation demos and art lessons for my courses. It also tends to collect random piles of papers, props and mysterious objects that I'm sure I'll need 'later'. If you can't find something in my studio, check the down-shooter table. It's probably under a stack of animation drawings or unopened pack of acrylic paint pens.

Aaron is an animator, director, educator and wildlife sketch addict who seems to keep making animated films about bears. When he's not drawing, he's teaching others to do so at CreatureArtTeacher.com. You can follow Aaron on Instagram by visiting www.instagram.com/aaronblaiseart.

This is a watercolour that I did of an egret. It was done as a demonstration for one of my online classes.

My animation desk is full of drawers within drawers.

This is a mixed media piece that I did as a demo after my return from Churchill, Manitoba, observing polar bears in the wild.

I animated all of my new film Snow Bear sitting here. This is my Wacom Cintiq 32 Pro. My second monitor is set in a home-made adjustable frame that I built myself.

Last year I was honoured to receive the Winsor McCay award for Distinguished Lifetime Contributions to the Art of Animation. I was completely taken by surprise and will continue to try to live up to the honour.
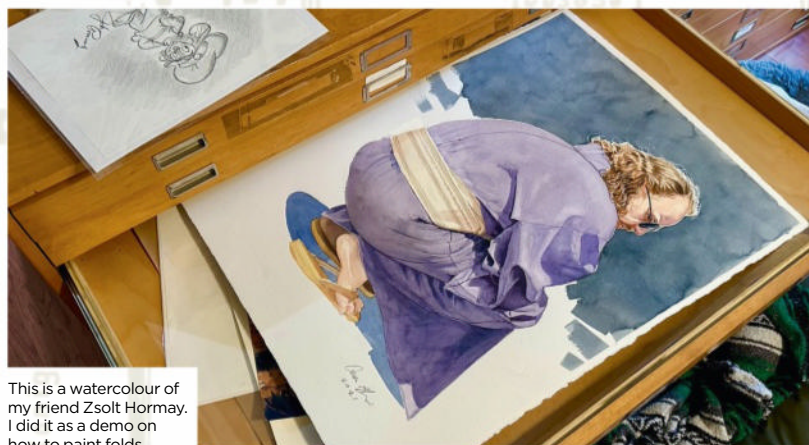
This is a watercolour of my friend Zsolt Hormay. I did it as a demo on how to paint folds.
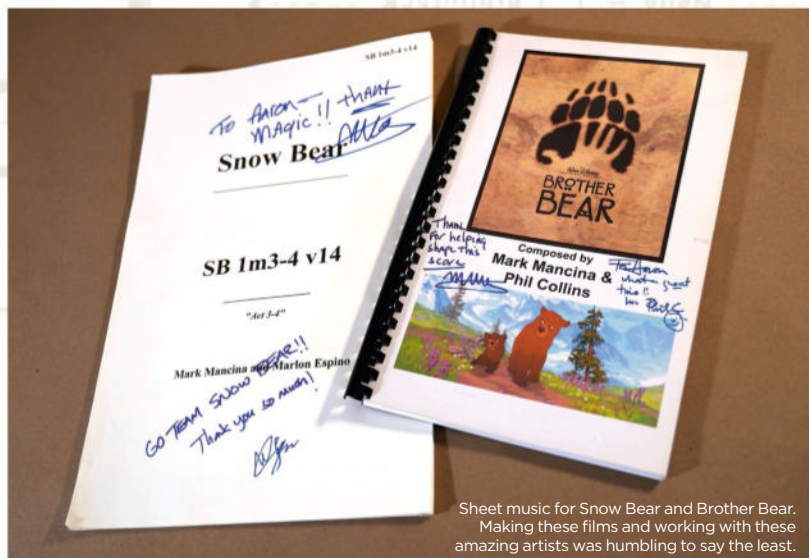
Sheet music for Snow Bear and Brother Bear. Making these films and working with these amazing artists was humbling to say the least.

Lake Como Comic Art 2026 reveal

Mamma mia! Italian lakes, Alpine views and Liam Sharp's Conan portfolio are all good reasons to visit this comic con

The Lake Como Comic Art Festival is coming back to Villa Erba in April. If you've ever dreamed of visiting a comic convention that feels more like an artist's retreat than a pop-culture stampede, then this is the one to circle in red ink.

The organisers have unveiled their plans for this year's event, and the result is a guest list so stacked that it borders on the surreal. There's also a VIP package built around an exclusive Conan the Barbarian portfolio from the pen of British comic artist **Liam Sharp** for attendees to look forward to.

For Liam, this isn't just another commission. Conan has been a totemic figure throughout his life, and the artist speaks about the character with rare tenderness. "He made me feel stronger at a time when I needed it," he recalls. The new portfolio gathers a suite of classic-inspired

This year's festival takes place over three days, from 24 to 26 April.

Liam Sharp's Conan the Barbarian portfolio has been created exclusively for the event.

THE TOWER OF THE ELEPHANT

Liam reveals that Conan – painted by Frank Frazetta – made a lasting impression on him at an early age.

A WITCH SHALL BE BORN

Conan scenes, each VIP edition graced with an original hand-drawn remarque and the artist's signature.

HEROIC ART

Liam has drawn for Spawn: the Dark Ages for McFarlane (writing, drawing and colouring) and The Savage Sword of Conan (writing and art). Other work includes Wonder Woman, Batman: Reptilian and The Green Lantern.

He tells us, "Conan struck my young impressionable psyche like a lightning bolt when I first saw him glaring out at me from a book cover – painted, I would later learn, by the astonishing Frank Frazetta – on the shelves of a local newsagents when I was around eight or nine. I would go back and stare at it every day, until one day it

was just gone. I felt bereft! Later I rediscovered him as rendered by John Buscema and my favourite inker, Alfredo Alcala, in the pages of The Savage Sword of Conan. It blew my mind again. Later still, I discovered Barry Windsor-Smith's astonishing version via my copy of The Studio, prompting me to track down as much of his work as I could find!

"And now I was reading the novels. And finally, the Arnold movie became the icing on the cake."

But the portfolio is only one reason why the event on Lake Como has become such a pilgrimage for comic-art lovers. The festival is intimate by design, stripping away the noise of cosplay parades, blockbuster film trailers and food-court crushes. Instead, it offers uninterrupted time with the world's best artists, surrounded by lake-light, gardens and 19th-century Italian architecture.

This comic convention is like taking a well-earned break, relaxing at the

> ❝ Conan struck my young impressionable psyche like a lightning bolt ❞

XUTHAL of the DUSK

ROGUES IN THE HOUSE

THE TOWER OF THE ELEPHANT

foot of the Alps amid Italian coffee shops, which just happen to have some of the world's best comic and fantasy artists queuing for a freshly made cappuccino.

COMIC COLLECTIVE

This year's guest list? It's a collector's fantasy rolled into a single weekend. Names like Alan Davis, Brian Bolland, Esad Ribić, Gabriele Dell'Otto, J. Scott Campbell, Sara Pichelli, Stanley 'Artgerm' Lau, Juanjo Guarnido, Mahmud Asrar, Frank Cho and Riccardo Federici – alongside more than two dozen equally heavyweight talents – will fill the halls of Villa Erba. For many visitors, it's the one place on Earth where you can move from a Dustin Nguyen watercolour, to an Enrico Marini noir page and to a Frank Cho pin-up without breaking pace.

The festival opens on Friday 24 April with its now-traditional lakeside reception, a gentle welcome that feels more like joining a secret society of art obsessives. The following two days (25–26 April) are slower and richer, and filled with conversations that can only happen when an event trusts its audience and its artists.

Four ticket tiers are available now, including the new VIP package that's sure to sell out quickly thanks to Liam's ultra-limited portfolio. You can also book a two-day or single-day pass.

If you adore the craft of comics, the line work, the storytelling, the wild mix of tradition and imagination, or just love relaxing in beautiful places, Lake Como Comic-Con is shaping up to be one of the this year's best art events.

Visit **www.lccaf.com** for more details on tickets, dates and prices.

Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

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

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Anna Podedworna's nature-filled workspace doubles as a calming creative sanctuary.

Natural beauty

Hi Rob, I've been reading ImagineFX for a long time and one of my favourite features each month is the tour of an artist's studio. I was very pleased to read your article on how to set up a workspace, as I'm looking to convert a spare room into my dream room. I was particularly inspired by Anna Podedworna's absolutely beautiful studio. So many plants – they must work wonders for her. I'll be borrowing that idea for myself, and I'm looking forward to seeing more of these inspiring setups in future issues.
Sasha, via email

Rob replies *Hi Sasha. Thanks for writing in. Anna's workspace is stunning, isn't it? As well as looking lovely there are clear health benefits to having certain plants in a room too, making this a double whammy! Good luck with your remodelling project and do feel free to send us photos once you're done. We would love to see how it all turns out and maybe you'll find yourself in the mag, too!*

DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE? Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 261 at **ifxm.ag/ single-ifx**.
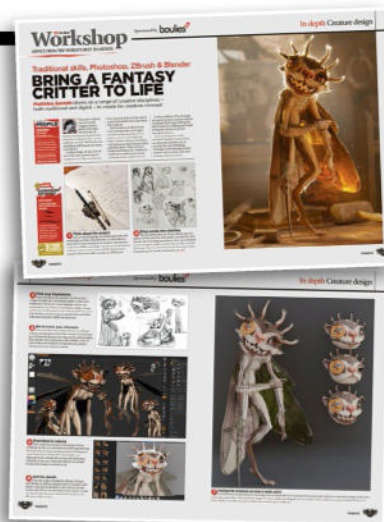
Matthieu Sarazin showed his workflow for creating characterful 3D projects in issue 261.

Striking light

Hello, as an aspiring illustrator I've spent a lot of time learning anatomy, values and other fundamental parts of the trade, but haven't really explored how to add the final polish to my work. Your last issue has really helped me to change that. Jiunn Kuo's tutorial on adding lighting effects was fantastic and I learned so much, which I'll be putting into my own work from now on. Thank you.
Sean, via email

Rob replies *Hi Sean. Thanks so much for getting in touch. It's always good to hear from people who get something from the magazine. Juinn's workshop was a great one and had some top advice for magical lighting effects. I liked the use of blurs and layers to help it all feel integrated. Do send us your results. We love to see new art!*

Keep it simple

Hello Rob, I've been a concept artist for most of my career but recently I've started to explore using 3D in my work, as I like the speed and the fact that I can adjust things more easily. I'm still pretty new at this, so lots to learn. I've been enjoying the new 3D section and most recently the tutorial last issue by Matthieu Sarazin. I liked that he didn't go into specifics, but focused on the overall workflow. Please do more of these style of workshops!
Alan, via email.

Rob replies *Hey Alan. Good to hear from you and I completely agree. While it can be useful to get detailed instruction for tool-specific training, I think that a more pipeline-based approach can lessen the feeling that you're just making a copy of someone else's artwork.*

New works that have grabbed our attention
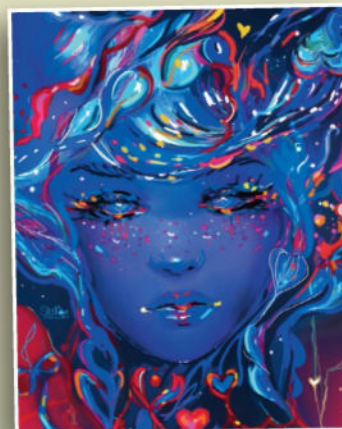
Estelle Chomienne @stella_artist_corsica

Darren Elwell @darrenelwell

Satyaki Sarkar @satyaki_who_draws

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

THE ART OF
MATTHEW SAVAGE

The film, TV and video game concept artist discusses his career path and creative process with **James Clarke**

aving been a concept designer since the early 2000s, Matthew Savage has established himself as a leading practitioner in his discipline. We find out how his patience and determination was rewarded with work on a range of hugely popular films, including Alien: Romulus, The Batman and Star Wars: The Force Awakens.

Matthew, how did your career as a concept designer begin?
I graduated from University of Wales in Newport with a degree in design futures. It was basically product design and multimedia, as we called it back

then, using software like Flash and Macromedia Director. After that, my route into the industry was through film and TV.

Like most people, I started with no contacts. I didn't have any way in and so I felt like I had to claw my way in. And my way in – which is probably a traditional way into the UK film industry, and it might feel a bit old-fashioned – was that I came into the art department through being a runner and art department assistant, which is the entry level. That's a tea and coffee and running-around-the-studio job, and I was delivering

drawings to departments on Thunderbirds and then Batman Begins. The really useful part of this was that I met everyone: the carpenters, the plasterers, the electricians, the director of photography. Basically, I got a little glimpse of every department.

I really enjoyed it and I was fortunate enough to go on and do Doctor Who for BBC Wales in 2004 for the reboot. As a big fan, that was a huge deal. It was poorly paid, but incredibly well-paid in terms of the experience and working on things I had loved. Doctor Who was very good because it was period, sci-fi and contemporary; ➤➤

Matthew Savage

IN FLIGHT
Concept art for Alien:
Romulus showing the
Corbelan IV mining hauler.
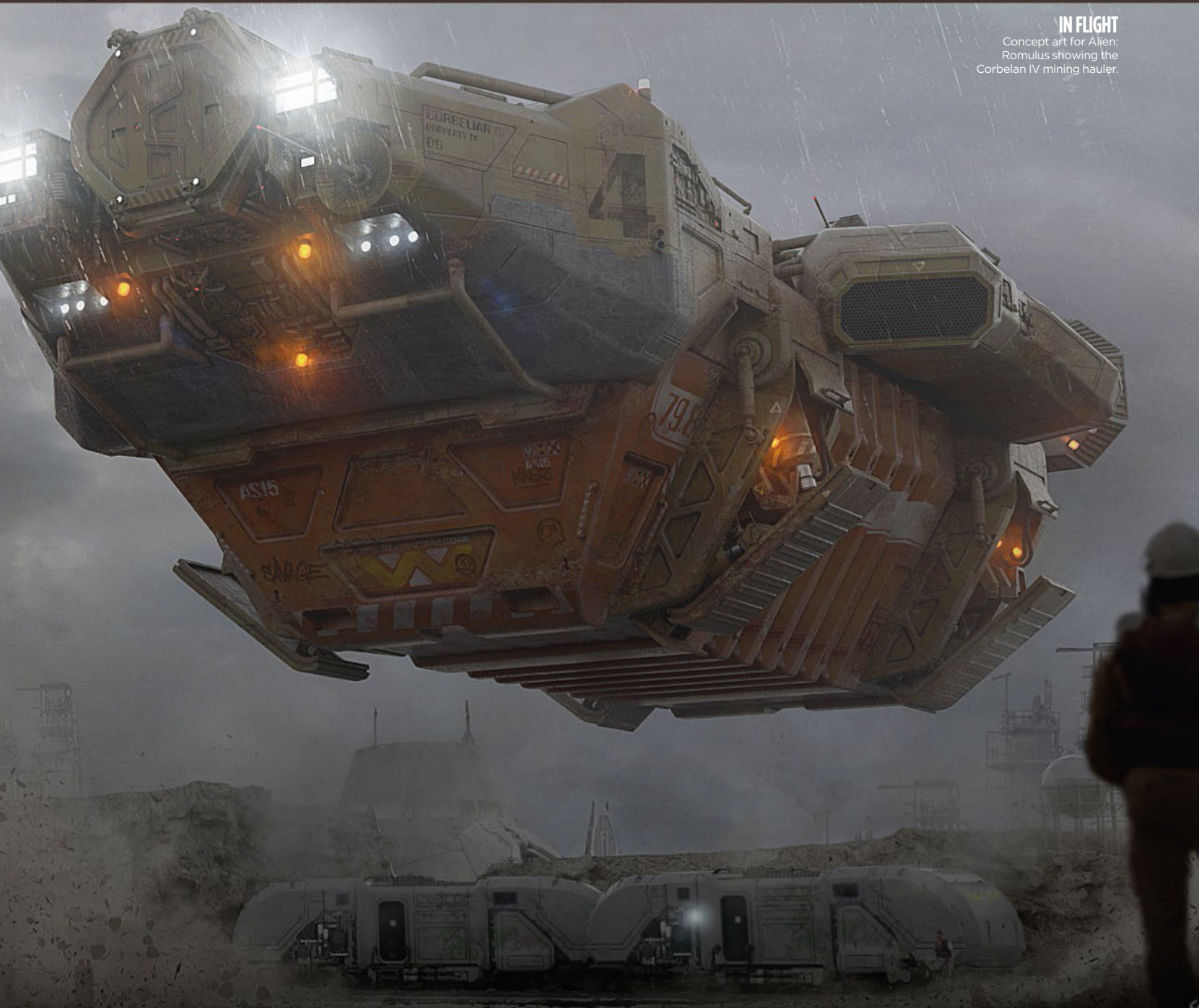
© 20th Century Studios

GLEAMING SURFACES
Halsey's Lab from Halo, the
TV series that's based on
the legendary Xbox game.

SPACE STATION
Personal work from Matthew, here
exploring lighting and form.

© Showtime

© BBC

BIGGER ON THE INSIDE
Matthew's early work for
Doctor Who saw him
tackle the redesign of
the TARDIS's interior.

CITY LIMITS
Concept art created for the planet
Reach, which is colonised by
humans in the Halo storyline.

➡ a bit of everything, on a modest budget and so it was a very strategic job in terms of how you make things work. So that was the first two or three years: making tea and coffee, drawing Daleks and then on into movies.

What's a key aesthetic foundation for your work?
If the audience is going to be able to relate to the thing on screen in any way, it has to have a real-world footing. The number of times I've had people say, "I want you to design something we've never seen before." Well, I can do that, but it will be so abstract because that's the only way you can do that. If the audience needs to know it's a spaceship or a digger, it has to be grounded in something you can relate to.

In industrial design and product design, pre-iPhone, the rule is form follows function. That's your base level, your first lesson. So, to make anything relatable you have to follow those basic rules. That gives you a very basic function of design and then you're off. You have your basic shapes and you can elaborate or test as much as you want within that.

SNUB-FIGHTER
A personal portfolio
design informed by
the Star Wars 'used
universe' aesthetic.
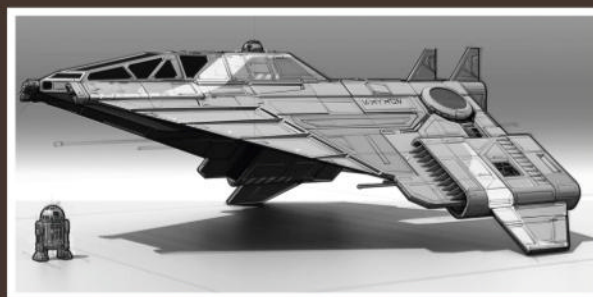
Whose work has influenced your design style?
I have this conversation with all of my concept buddies about how, in all of these universes, there are parallels but there are differences. Star Trek being the most fantastical of that group. 2001: A Space Odyssey being the most grounded. Star Wars feels somewhere in the middle. When you look at Ron Cobb's work on Alien, every door is slightly different; every one has a slightly different thickness because

> ❝ **When you look at Ron Cobb's work on Alien, every door is slightly different** ❞

he's considering the very slightly different pressures on them. They all look super-cool, and they're all slightly different for a reason: that they're the function of what's going on. And corridors are small because it's so expensive to put anything into space and so you have to keep space to a minimum. In something like Star Trek, however, where it's more fanciful, you can have bigger spaces.

What kind of scope is there for concept artists to imprint onto the narrative arc of a movie?
The production can lean on you a bit for that kind of guidance sometimes. One example of this would be the very final act of Alien: Romulus: originally, the sandhopper under the ship was going to open like a skip and drop the alien out at the end. For whatever reason, that hadn't worked and so the production designer very early on had requested we make the ship a bit like a sky crane, which would pick things up. Someone had made the decision that we could jettison the sandhopper. That wasn't in the script and the design semi-led the decision to do that. ➡

Matthew Savage

© Showtime

A MIX OF OLD AND NEW

Matthew discusses analogue and digital approaches when working on big-budget productions such as Alien: Romulus

"Sometimes productions like you to go to colour with a design. But sometimes they like you to keep in black and white because colour might come later on with a different department. I love it if I can do the whole thing. My ideal handover is a solid 3D model with colour and texture. But they might not want you to go that far. On Alien: Romulus, I tried to nod to the way it was originally done, and Fede [Álvarez, director] was keen to honour those methods, and so it made sense to start the process on paper. That was nice to do, and then move into 3D. You have to work in 3D if you want to be part of the pipeline. In terms of a percentage of time, it's probably five to 10 per cent tops on paper, and then you're into 3D or Photoshop."

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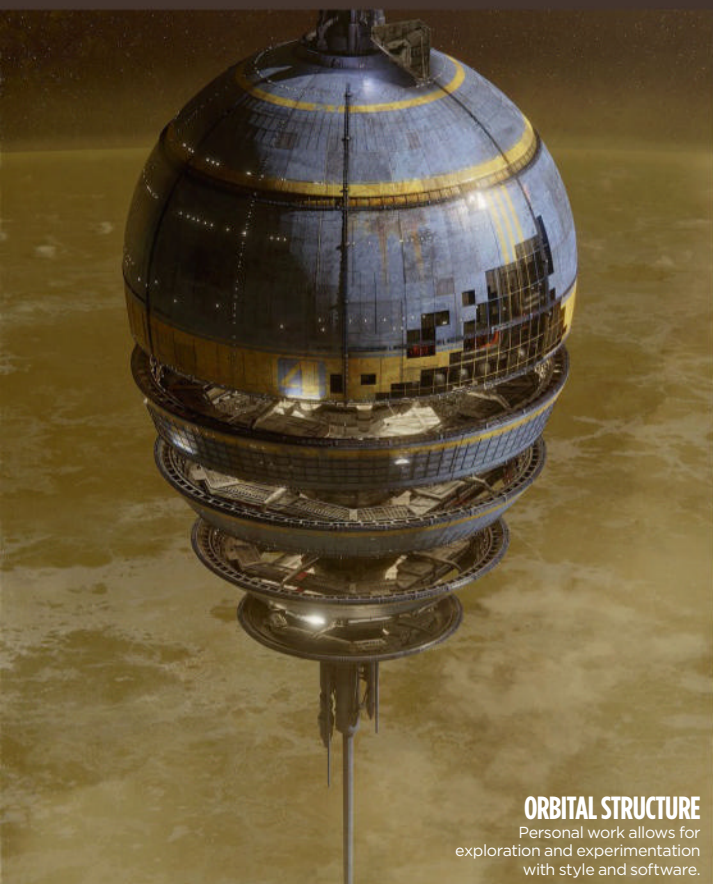
ORBITAL STRUCTURE
Personal work allows for exploration and experimentation with style and software.
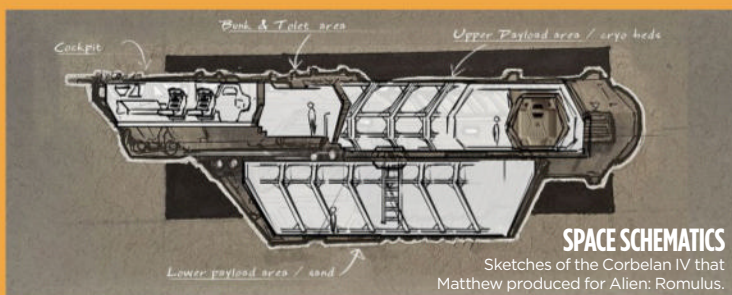
SPACE SCHEMATICS
Sketches of the Corbelan IV that Matthew produced for Alien: Romulus.

Interview

➤➤ It's quite nice to have any kind of influence on how things go.

How have you been able to develop opportunities to contribute to movies beyond the initial, preproduction design work?

The more 3D you use – and I really enjoy using Blender now – the more you can get involved in postproduction. If the director really likes your design, then pre-vis can plug it into their work and there's less room for people down the line to change things. If the director likes your design, it gets locked in. When I worked on props on Star Wars: The Force Awakens, that job ended when the cameras rolled. But on Alien: Romulus and the TV series Halo, I got so locked into certain designs that they carried on into postproduction. At some point you stop coming out of the art department budget and then VFX begins to pay for you and you can carry on. The production designer can then have more say through you. Often, and wrongly, their job ends when they finish shooting and I feel that if there's a lot of post design-work, the production designer should carry through.

Do you have a favourite project from just over two decades of work?

Last year, I worked on the forthcoming new movie, Project Hail Mary. I'm really excited about that one. It's really nice to work on an original science fiction movie. I'm very keen in 2026 to go back into movies. Movies are my first love and are the thing that gives me the biggest satisfying feeling. But, I have enjoyed working on two video games this year. It's the same job as working in movies, but with slightly different workflows.

© Showtime

In terms of dream jobs, I spent about eight weeks developing, with Ridley Scott, the Blade Runner TV show; working to develop a pitch document with him and his team. To get to talk to him about Blade Runner and have my work looked at and critiqued and made way better by his input was a joy. Everyone wants you to jump straight into the images, but Ridley was interested in architecture, lighting and photography. In the best possible way, he didn't want to see anything finished for a couple of weeks. It was research and tone and he had his own mood-boards and things that he wanted in the pitch. You have to work very fast, but process-wise he's

CONTROL ROOM
Interior concept art of the tug ship piloted by Soren, a character from the Halo TV series.

SHIP DESIGN
An external view of the tug design from Halo, which leans into its utilitarian role.

© Showtime

very good for slowing it down and making you think and getting into his headspace. And he's very good – he started as an art director – about making you think about giving the production finished images right away.

Matthew, what advice might you offer aspiring concept artists?

Traditionally, the advice I would give, aside from the obvious – staying on top of software, doing life drawing – is to get as much life experience outside of concept art: theatre, cinema, travel. All of those things that really enrich you as a person, you hope will filter into your work. There are so many people doing concept work now and we are all using similar packages, and so the thing that's really going to make you stand out is your own specific voice. Find ways that make you able to talk to a director or a production designer on a slightly more interesting level. You don't have to necessarily be the strongest with all of the software packages, if you're more interesting as a person culturally. I think that really benefits you. ◗

> ❝ Get as much life experience outside of concept art: theatre, cinema, travel ❞

FILTRATION SUIT HELMET

FILTRATION SUIT

ASTRONAUT
The inspiration of Ron Cobb's work suffuses Matthew's aesthetic, in this personal artwork.

MATTHEW SAVAGE
CONCEPT DESIGNER

Echo 203, W unmanned space probe cross section
Cockpit / CPU Area
Cargo bay doors
Payload / Cargo bay
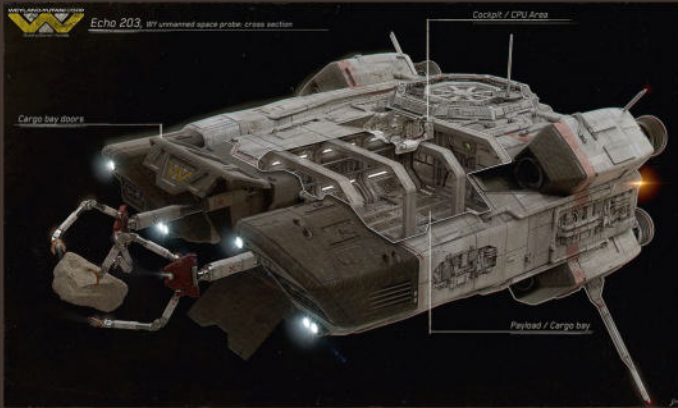
EXPLORATORY CRAFT
The Echo Probe 203 ship design for Alien: Romulus. The unmanned vehicle is seen at the start of the film.

A STUDY IN TAN
More sketches for the Corbelan IV's exterior for Alien: Romulus, this time exploring a possible colour choice for the ship.

Corbelian Sketches
Skeletal Frame
Ramp Area to Aid Loading Cargo
Cargo Loading Doors
Detachable Payload Bucket
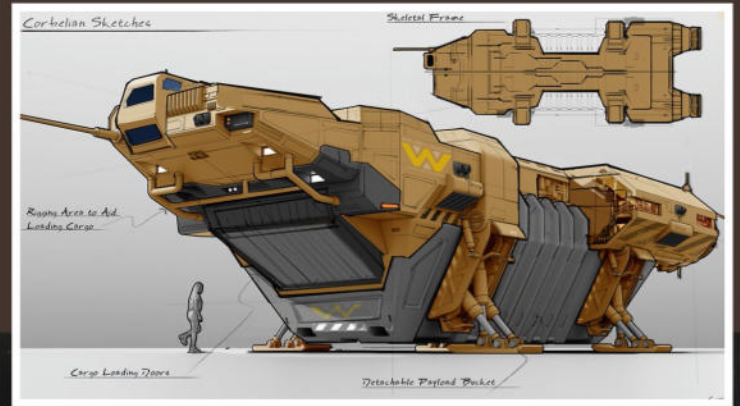
Corbelian IV: Colour and decal study

SIZE MATTERS
Corbelan IV exterior concept art, indicating the ship's size and scale in relation to a human figure.

HEAVY CONSIGNMENT
Interior view of Echo Probe 203's cargo bay, from Alien: Romulus.

TARGET ACQUIRED
Alien: Romulus concept art that shows how drifting objects in space are captured by the unmanned probe ship.

"A VOLLEY OF SKETCHES AND SILHOUETTES"

From creating mood boards to ending up with a handful of refined sketches, Matthew reveals his approach to a design brief

"I always do my own research, so I'll make some mood boards. This is how we did the two ships in Alien: Romulus – the Echo and the Corbelan. I send the mood boards off with the sketches because it's good for production to see what you're thinking. They might approve or disapprove, but it's good to know that either way. This is followed by a volley of sketches and silhouettes; finding, more for my benefit, the nicest, simplest read and then doing maybe four or five pretty decent iterations of sketches. That might be a 3D blockout. I block in Blender and sketch over the top. You can get four or five quite good blocky sketches done in a day. Assuming the art director or the production designer likes one of those, then I'll work on one or two of them. It's like a funnelling down of scattergun reference sketches."

Development sheet

PROJECT TITLE: LORCAN THE LITERATE

Arne Billen believes that conceptual contrast can lead to a successful design. He demonstrates this with Lorcan, a character from his D&D campaign who combines literacy with a fighting spirit

Artist PROFILE

Arne Billen
LOCATION: Belgium

Arne is a freelance concept artist working in the indie game industry and a long-time teacher who specialises in expressive, stylised character design. His Dungeons & Dragon-related design work has been his go-to way to relax while creating.
www.artstation.com/arnebillen

Ideation stage
While a good brief will focus our options, we still need a decent spread of ideas to get started. I like to concentrate on the core traits of the character and ignore any specifics until later on in the process. In this case I just keep in mind a few key words: gnome, fighter, old, likes poetry, sailor, mentor. These make up the thread connecting all other options.

Design choices
I make my pick based on the personality and if I like the vibe of the character. Only then will I move on to the specifics we skipped earlier. For this particular design, I don't want the costume and armour to take centre stage. I think it's much more important to portray a certain charm with the character's physicality, as opposed to overdesigning the entire outfit. This way we can keep our message humble and precise.

Establish the colour direction
I want to fill the canvas with the colour that will eventually make up the entire atmosphere in the scene. In this case, I know candlelight is going to be the main source of light. The warm oranges immediately set the right tone for the rest of the painting process.

Unusual technique
I know that people can struggle during the transition from line art to painting. I have a brute-force approach to this problem. I start by colouring my line art. Each line gets a colour that matches the colour of the object it's describing. It's then a simple task of painting on top, not underneath. This way I can choose which lines to leave in, and those to leave out!

Background elements
The background is the last thing I refine. Not because it's the least important – in fact, it might be the most important. But because I think it needs the most delicate touch to bring the entire piece together. Having a finished character in place enables me to carefully arrange my shapes in the background to highlight specific parts of my character.

Sketchbook

Jae Park

The video games concept artist has filled his sketchbook with stoic-looking characters and fun-loving critters

Artist PROFILE

Jae Park
LOCATION: US

Jae is a concept artist working in the video games industry, specialising in characters and creatures. He takes his inspiration from fantasy settings seen in media from his childhood, such as Spirited Away, Avatar and Kirby, and general folklore. Ultimately, he wants to create worlds for many others to enjoy – games or otherwise.
www.jaesekki.com

DIGITAL SKETCHBOOKING

"I find it best to keep a mix of serious and goofy sketching, to let myself both limit test and relax with stress-free doodles. Smaller doodles also help populate the place as well as test designs in a macro view."

SPEED PAINTS

"Where I'm the most comfortable. I'm very much a painter than a draftsman, and getting things established in colour and form is far more fluid to do. These continue to be a fun exercise in process and quick design."

MIXED BAG OF INSPIRATIONS (OPPOSITE)

"Sometimes, when I'm really feeling excited for a genre or aesthetic, I'll just do a page just like this to just play around with what I'm observing. This was a mixed bag of inspirations, including medieval drawings of animals, bone carvings, Final Fantasy, and otherwise different forms of fantasy."

❝ Smaller doodles help populate the place as well as test designs in a macro view ❞

TESTING THE WATERS

"If I'm really not feeling particularly creative on any given day, I'll usually opt for a page like this where it's a lot of easy-to-make art. This one was anchored around the little creature I have as my profile picture, a subject that I can experiment with and draw with zero pressure. A funny little test subject for my art, if you will."

big simple cute BOB.

liking this direction so far. maybe simpl. the detail ideas with the inblv. strands.

simpler direction ✓ + closer value structure

the below bright

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**

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

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VIDEO WORKSHOP

Advice from the world's best artists

This issue:

Artist insight
DRAW ON EMOTION AND SYMBOLISM

Katja Škorjanc brings aspects of Slavic folklore into her art – not just to make it look 'nice', but for greater meaning

Artist
PROFILE
Katja Škorjanc
LOCATION: Slovenia

Katja is a full-time senior concept artist and art director at a mobile game company. She has an art history masters degree and is a musician in her free time, playing a range of instruments.
https://bit.ly/4oZJIFS

Did you ever come across an artwork that looked beautifully ornamental, symbolic and emotionally charged, but somehow uncanny in that 'woo-woo' sense? Symbolism and folklore that were imbedded in the culture we grew up in give our artworks a sense of depth that goes beyond aesthetics. These elements carry inherited meaning and ancestral knowledge. They activate memory, ritual and emotion – even when viewer can't explain why.

As a Slovene I'm close to Slavic folklore in particular, which is rooted in cycles of nature, labour and liminal states of life/death, so its visual language feels primal and bodily. As such, ornamentation is also presented as a form of protection and invocation (embroidery and weaving): repetition becomes rhythm, and rhythm becomes grounding.

I'm using these forms today, not to quote history, but to try to reactivate it. Viewers may not recognise the Slavic references, but they feel the presence of earth, labour, protection and ancestral continuity. In that way, Slavic symbolism doesn't decorate an artwork. Instead, it roots it, giving contemporary images soul, memory and even ritual weight.

1 SYMBOLISM IN THE ART

'Monster' in this artwork has key botanical symbols: vines and dark ferns that grow close to the ground, symbolising buried tenderness, grief, root and karmic descent (cold colour values). The only warm exception is the bright flower placed in the chest area, symbolising faint hope in his heart. The shape of his body is big and ominous above 'Maiden'.

Maiden features warm florals (reds, corals), which represent life force, heart-fire and compassion. She carries warmth, but not innocence – it's chosen empathy, not naivety. Her figure is showing more skin: she's more exposed compared to Monster, especially her neck, which symbolises love at risk. Her shape is small, but her posture with the lifted chin speaks about endearment and curiosity.

Both figures wear flowers, just in different palettes. This implies they're the same being at different stages of acceptance. Leaf density versus exposed skin (protection versus vulnerability) indicates that Monster is fully armoured while Maiden is partially exposed. I use the visual language of patterns, shapes and flowers to relate to the viewer who each character is, along with their nature. ➤➤

2 BODY AND SHAPE

Build the figure as a vessel, not a body. The silhouette that we see here is rounded, iconic and spiral, and there's sacred logic behind it. It's depicting Mokosh, the Slavic goddess of earth, weaving, fertility, woman's work and destiny. She's known for weaving the thread of destiny of people, so her shape is symbolically spiralled: it echoes cycles of fertility, spinning thread and earth currents. Perspective is secondary here; space is flat and clear. I try not to chase realism, but rather clarity of meaning. Let the image feel timeless, almost ritualistic and not overbearing. Repeating motifs (leaves, petals, dots) work like a chant. In folk art, repetition isn't boring – it's magical reinforcement, incantation. Repeating shapes creates rhythm, memory and spiritual gravity.

3 LIMIT YOUR PALETTE

Earthy reds, moss greens, bone whites and soot blacks – all earthy and plant-based dyes. Restricting colour strengthens the symbolism, so think what you want to tell with your art and the colour palette that you're using. Each hue should feel earned, not decorative. That's why a large number of oversaturated colours can feel overwhelming. I've grown to like more 'peaceful', calming, earthy colour palettes lately. They are an escape from the overstimulating times we're a part of right now. I just want more peace and time, ha ha!

4 LIGHT VS SHADOW, LIFE VS DEATH

Our culture's mythology can be liminal and this is also how I approach most of my art. I want it to have clear contrast, in these cases Maiden/Monster, bloom/decay, above/below, etc. A character split between worlds – the conscious self adorned, and its shadow self that's rich with (hard-edged) secret growth. Compose your pieces around mirrored states – not necessary opposites, but two reflections of the same soul.

> 66 **Every leaf, petal and dot should feel intentional – like an offering** 99

5 ORNAMENTS AND PATTERNS AS SYMBOLS (OPPOSITE)

Choose ornaments based on emotion and fate, not aesthetics alone. Let them grow from the body/silhouette and treat decoration (florals) as extensions of the skin or soul. Notice how vines either replace clothing or become anatomy. In folk art, patterns aren't decorative – they emerge organically. Every leaf, petal and dot should feel intentional, like an offering. Emotion is carried by pattern and posture, not expression. Flowers in symbolism carry weight as well: roses/poppies (love, sacrifice, blood and remembrance); carnations (devotion, grief and resilience); wildflowers (ancestral memory and untamed feminine energy); and marigolds (protection and birth), for example. ➤➤

6 AVOID PERFECTION

Striving for perfection is where authentic art goes to die. At least in the early stages. Whenever I look back at my art it's the most authentic, not the most technically perfected artwork, that holds the best quality and meaning (in me and in the viewers' eyes). So I try to avoid perfection and focus on humble, repetitive forms that create more of a spiritual and introspective idea in the artwork.

7 VISUAL PLAN

Create a mood board of images, photos, quotes and text that inspires you and keeps your work visually (and thematically) consistent. This approach also helped me find my own way through multiple art styles that I have tried out over the years. While working full-time in a mobile game industry where I create a completely different kind of art, it really helped having a mood board that forced consistency into my personal style. And above all, make sure the mood board displays items that you really feel drawn to, and are inspired by. Let it become a representation of little pieces that make you who you are, in your most authentic way possible.

8 KNOW YOUR LORE

Dive into the theme of your motif before you start. Research its background, especially if it's somehow historically connected to the theme and message that you're trying to convey. Perhaps it's just an emotion, or maybe it's just a beautiful visual – all of the details that you're going to use in it can hold some kind of symbolism of your own choosing, which will then spark a degree of emotion or memory in the viewer. Try to think why this artwork is especially important to you and what do you want it to say.

> 66 Try to think why this artwork is important to you and what do you want it to say 99
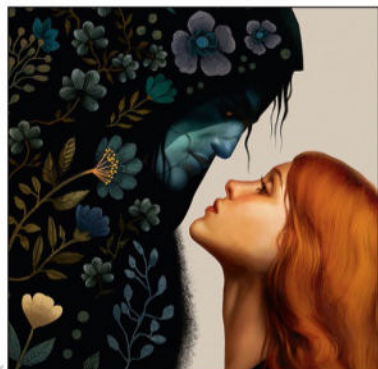
9 COMBINING BEAUTY WITH UNEASE

Slavic aesthetics often balance softness with something eerie. Floral patterns wrapped around darkness, monsters rendered tenderly – such tension is key. If it's only beautiful, then it's missing the folklore edge. You can also notice calm faces, closed eyes and tilted heads. Folk imagery often avoids overt drama. Emotion is contained, which makes it more powerful. Stillness becomes haunting.

10 BE CREATIVE

Humans have such a strong need to create and it's one of our most primal desires. So please, go draw, create that music piece, go do that sculpture, build that house or write that book. You were granted with a curiosity for the creative field and your whole life is going to involve searching for knowledge and experiences to grow within it. As long as you're doing that, it's going to make your heart sing. And isn't this what we came here for?

Technique focus
MAKE USE OF SHAPES, COLOUR AND LIGHT

Artist PROFILE
Raymond Tan
LOCATION: England

Raymond is a senior concept artist who's worked with Ubisoft, Lucasfilm and Capcom. He is a comic and manga enthusiast, and the head instructor at Musings Art Academy.
https://bit.ly/4ilRNgQ

Raymond Tan takes us through the creation of an ominous scene from his upcoming graphic novel

"This is from Made In Manila, a graphic novel that I'm working on. For a project like this I start by writing a research checklist and grounding abstract ideas with sketches. Tools like Photoshop and Blender help me to paint the scene broadly with an understanding of space, form and light. I then finish it off with stylised line work that expresses my style and influences. Details add to the story – not just the image's density – by communicating the illustrations' visual subtext of eyes. Once the silhouettes and colours harmonise, I lit it dramatically with story-driven intent. Well-planned lighting always enhances a piece."

How I create...
A TENSE STREET SCENE

1 Start simple and graphic
My approach comes from the basic structure of painting and then combining it with line work. I start by establishing the purpose of this shot, then the Notan design principle helps to make it readable with lighting and contrast. Visualising the composition is easier thanks to the harmony of light and dark, and the shapes that I like.

2 **Paint, flats and line work**
I begin with rough line work to define the visual information, then paint broadly to establish mood and colour. I treat each panel as a painting; shaping silhouettes and overlapping forms to build depth and avoid tangents. Once the scene reads clearly, I simplify the colours into flats and finish with refined line work to sharpen the read and stylisation.
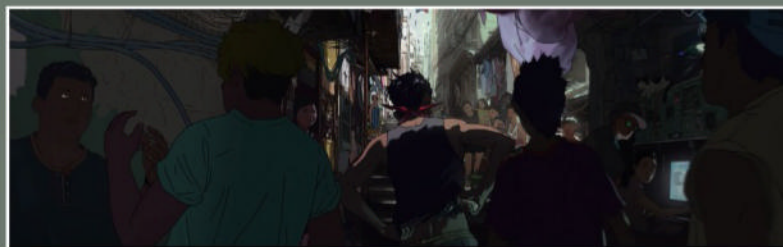
3 **Light and colours**
A key step is selecting the ambient light's hue (sky) to establish the palette (flats), followed by adding ambient occlusion for depth. On the darks, I add artificial lights for colour accents. To elevate the visual impact, I use a key light (sun) to highlight interesting subjects, and finish with a soft bloom, blending the cel-shading to enhance the vibe.
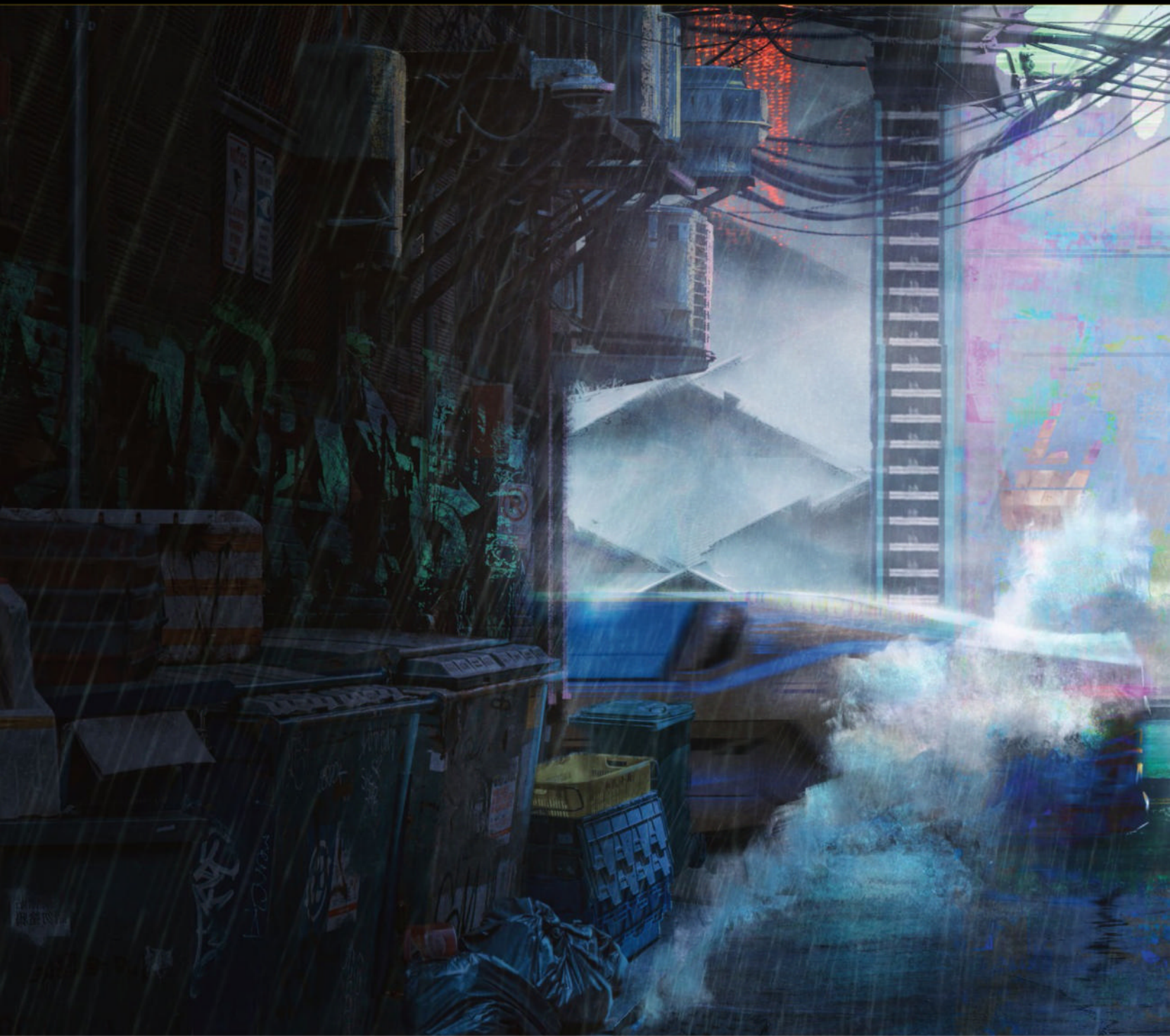
Photoshop
CONCEPT A MOODY CYBERPUNK SCENE

Oleg Topor uses a variety of creative techniques to portray a meeting of criminals in the depths of a futuristic city

Artist PROFILE

Oleg Topor
LOCATION: Ukraine

Oleg has a background in academic painting and used to work as an architect. He changed disciplines and has been creating concept art for the games industry for the past seven years.
https://bit.ly/3MlfppI

In my illustration, the action takes place within a futuristic metropolis. It's here, in the depths of the sprawling city, that ruthless streets gangs conduct their dirty business.

Taking my initial inspiration from science fiction films such as Blade Runner, the adaptations of Ghost in the Shell and The Creator, and the video game Cyberpunk 2077, I wanted to create a piece of concept art that would convey a sense of dark noir atmosphere, but also be from the same cyberpunk/sci-fi stable as those celebrated titles.

My initial step is to collect reference images that inspire me. But to create the necessary mood I recognise that I need to play around with contrasts. These include establishing the dark foreground of the alleyway versus the illuminated street in the background. As I start detailing, I introduce poorly maintained, dirty environmental elements that can be seen in the foreground (garbage, pipes, dangling wires and air-conditioning units) set against the calm, empty-looking background. The polarity of the two male figures and the advertising display that features a female character further builds on the contrasting elements in the scene.

The steady rain amplifies and emphasises the play of light and colour. Flashes of rain on the asphalt and on the building facades, smoke from the hatch… all this brings the artwork together so that it looks both harmonious and coherent.

DINGY STREET ART

Break up the scene

At the beginning of any artwork I always make several black and white sketches. Then I divide the whole scene into the main elements. In this case there is the alley (the foreground), the illuminated street (the background), and the male characters together with the woman in the motion advert. I start with the foreground. I select photos of suitable details of building facades and gradually form the plane of the alley walls. Then I add garbage, cans, air-conditioning units, wires and pipes, followed by the characters. I merge these elements into a folder and create a new fill or adjacent layer.

Create contrast

It's important that I clearly separate the planes and focal points in my art. There is contrast in the nearest plane caused by the static positions of the characters, as opposed to the dynamics of the horizontal motion on the screen and the movement of the passing vehicle. The diagonals of the building's panels and hanging wires create a visual rhythm.

How I create...
STARTING POINTS FOR MY ARTWORK

1 **Composition options**
Before settling on the final composition I look for different options. I make quick sketches that help shape the final vision. These include: dark shapes among the scaffolding; fabrics and banners flapping in the wind; movement directed towards the characters; partially visible silhouettes; and a composition divided into light and dark.
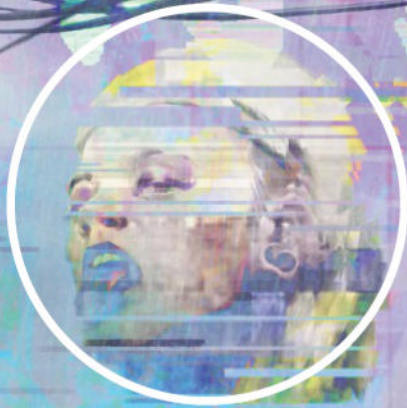
Work smarter

I use a female character that I had painted previously to create the advertisement banner. I paint over it to achieve the desired result, adding neon lighting and depicting simulated interference on the screen.
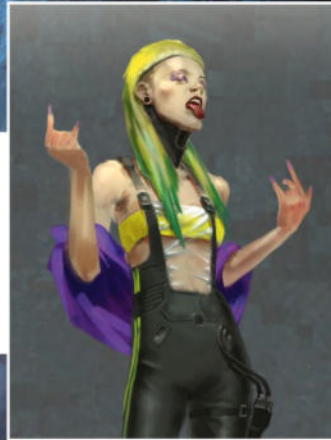
Enhancing the focal point

I constantly keep in mind the focal point and what is secondary in the composition to maintain balance. When everything is finally arranged and laid out, I use the Smudge tool to blur the edges. To liven up and unite the scene I pay particular attention to the atmospheric lighting from the advertisement. It creates aerial perspective and brings everything together.

2 Amplify the sense of perspective

This version contains more vertical and clear lines. The idea is to reveal the perspective of the city. The windows and wires add rhythm and a sense of urban atmosphere. Then I bring in the figures.

3 Balance static and dynamic elements

This version is similar to the first one, but there are more silhouettes at the edges. At this stage I'm happy with the contrasting dynamic and static elements that are present in the scene.

Technique focus
MAKE USE OF FILTERS

Artist
PROFILE

Brandon Liao
LOCATION: US

Brandon is a concept artist with a focus on visual development, cinematic illustration and art production for video games.
https://bit.ly/4pO2IrA

Concept artist **Brandon Liao** gives insights into his visual development work on Spectre Divide

"The illustration was created as part of the visual development effort to conceptualise the world of Spectre Divide, a first-person shooter. The image depicts a part of Wildhaven District in Breakwater, one of the settings that the game takes place in. The goal was to create several illustrations together, so speed was a factor. The artwork made heavy use of filters in Photoshop that gave the photos used in it a more gouache-like look, which gave me a workable base before painting in earnest.

Art programs such as Photoshop have many tools. Finding creative uses for them is half the work and fun of digital painting."

How I create...
A VIDEO GAME CONCEPT
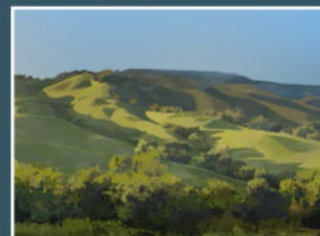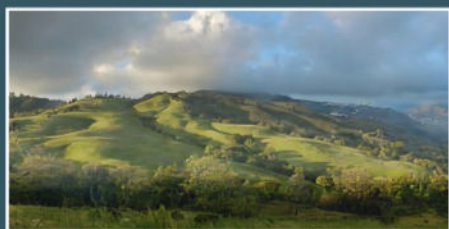
1 Prepare the photo base
With a composition already in mind, I start the painting with a photo that I expand using Photoshop's Generative fill. This creates a base for applying filters on top of, removing artefacts and noise that come with using that tool. I use a few adjustment layers to adjust and bring out the new base's colours.
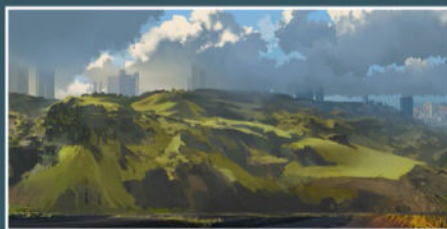
2 Add elements to the scene
Using custom watercolour and gouache Photoshop brushes, as well as more photos, I paint in detailed natural elements, replace the clouds and sky, and add distant city buildings. I want to mimic watercolour and gouache backgrounds similar to those seen in classic anime films.
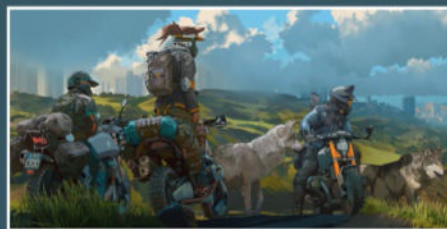
3 Refine the foreground
I add characters, as well as grass and rocks to create a better sense of visual space and depth. The figures are photo references with painterly filters applied to them. I then paint over them and add line work. Finally, I colour grade the image with a mix of adjustment layers including LUTs.

Photoshop
PAINT LORE-DRIVEN CHARACTER ART

Lucas Lacerda creates unique characters with depth, using lore and a world-building approach to guide his design choices

Artist
PROFILE
Lucas Lacerda
LOCATION: Brazil

Lucas is a character designer and illustrator working in the games industry. He's passionate about creating characters who feel alive.
https://bit.ly/4pJ6uT2

Creating characters is about much more than making cool or beautiful art. At its core, any design is a problem-solving process, one that balances form and function. As artists, we often lean into one or the other, but great design usually balances these factors. So, how can we find that balance?

While inspiration can come from emotions, objects or personal experiences, one of the most powerful tools for grounding your designs is lore. A character's backstory and their world don't just add depth – they provide boundaries, focus, and purpose. All the information found on a character's lore is full of clues that can guide our creative decisions. Who is this character? What's their role in their world? What's their mindset, social status or relationships? Questions like these reveal practical and visual cues, from clothing and gear to posture and silhouette.

Rather than seeing lore as a constraint, we'll see it as a compass. It narrows our choices, but in the best way possible, giving us direction and purpose.

In this workshop, I'll walk you through how to use a character's backstory and world as a foundation for design, revealing how every step of the creative process – from posing and costuming to lighting and rendering – is intertwined with a character's lore. We'll use storytelling to create characters who feel real.

1 Choose key storytelling elements

Our character is the queen, running away with her son from the insane king, his poisoned kingdom and a murderous cult. To start defining her, let's focus on key elements of the plot that affect the queen's reality. The fact that she's a queen already brings interesting visual elements: a crown, jewellery, fine clothing. However, the background is unsettling. There's a curse, insane people, the urge to flee. Take note of the key elements you can find!

QUEEN
SON/PRINCE

CURSE INSANE
BLOOD FLEEING

QUEEN
- Gloves
- Fine clothing
- Wealth
- Mother
- Superiority
- Pride
- Crown
- Sceptre
- Jewellery
- Nobility
- Long dress
- Power

CURSE
- Pain
- Decay
- Plague
- Disease
- Suffering
- Torment
- Rotten
- Poison

INSANE
- Unpredictable
- Imprisoned
- Isolated
- Sad
- Mania
- Voices
- Visions
- Suffering

SON/PRINCE
- Lineage
- Heir
- Noble
- Protected
- Young
- Innocence
- Newborn
- Child

BLOOD
- Red
- Viscous
- Iron
- Wound
- Cut
- Sword
- Dagger
- Scratch

FLEEING
- Protection
- Undercover
- Action
- Fear
- Danger
- Rush
- Tiredness
- Bags
- Luggage
- Sneak
- Caution

2 Expand and correlate ideas

Now that we have the base ideas for our character and the world, let's take the key elements above and expand them. What pops into your mind when you think of a queen, a curse, or a person who's fleeing a dangerous situation? Brainstorm a bit and work up the early ideas, adding new concepts and meanings to them. I'm using Xmind, a mindmap software, to organise my ideas. ➤➤

3 Search for visual reference

By following this process, we end up with lots of concepts that not only help to define our character's visuals, but also her emotions, state of mind and her reality. With all this information, the next step is to search for visual references that somehow match the looks and mood you're planning for your character to convey. All these concepts and references will serve as inspiration for our design.

4 Iterate on posing (right)

Now, let's explore the pose of the queen. This is a troubling moment for both characters. The queen is scared, fears for her life and her child's, and can trust no one. Considering this, let's go with slightly dynamic poses, adding some twisting motion to her body – something that reflects her fear and uneasiness. The goal is to create quick, simple poses, focusing on gesture instead of structure or anatomy.

A Sneaky Cautious Hidden

B Vulnerable Scared Cautious

C Dramatic Strong Stable Sad

Early line art

Polished line art
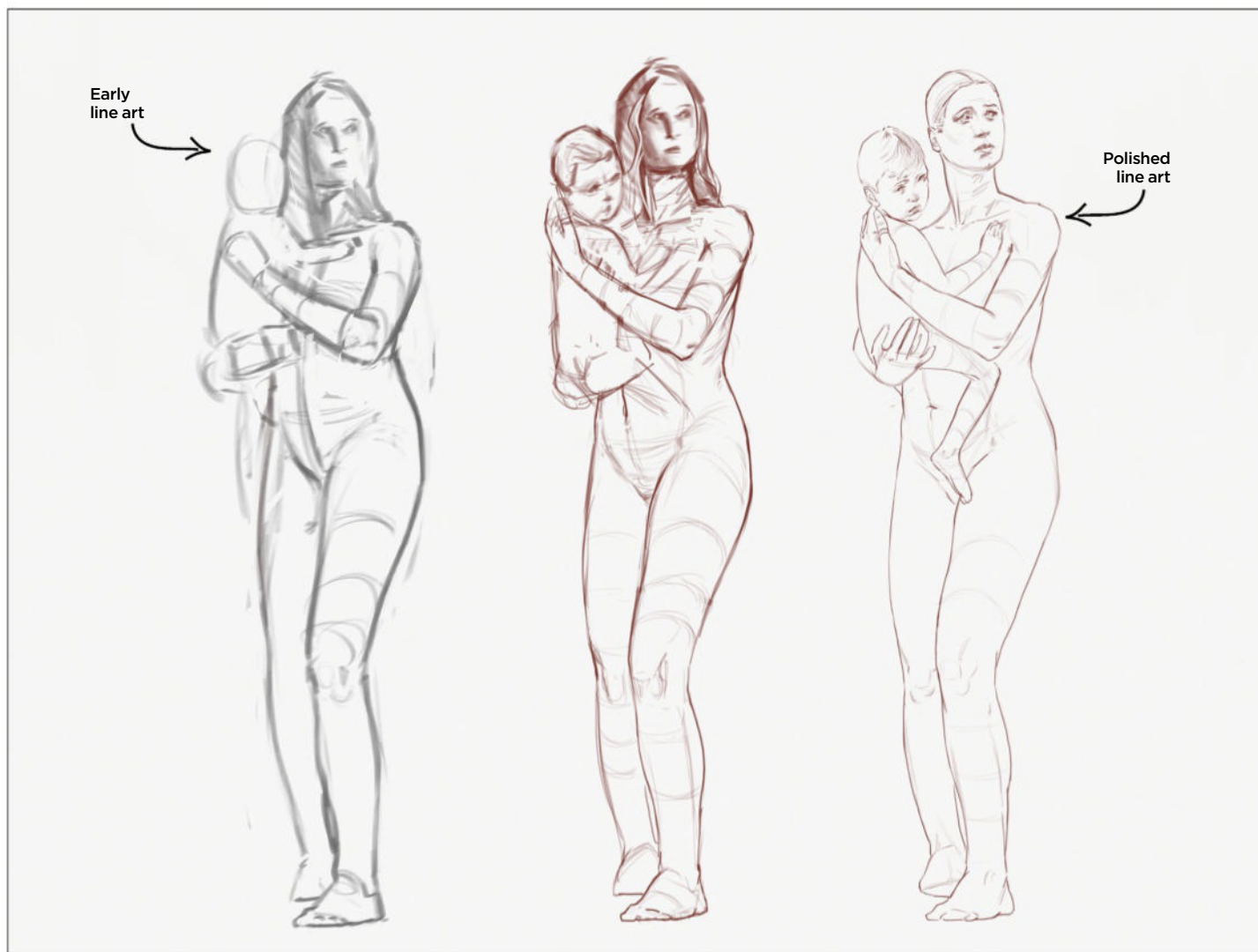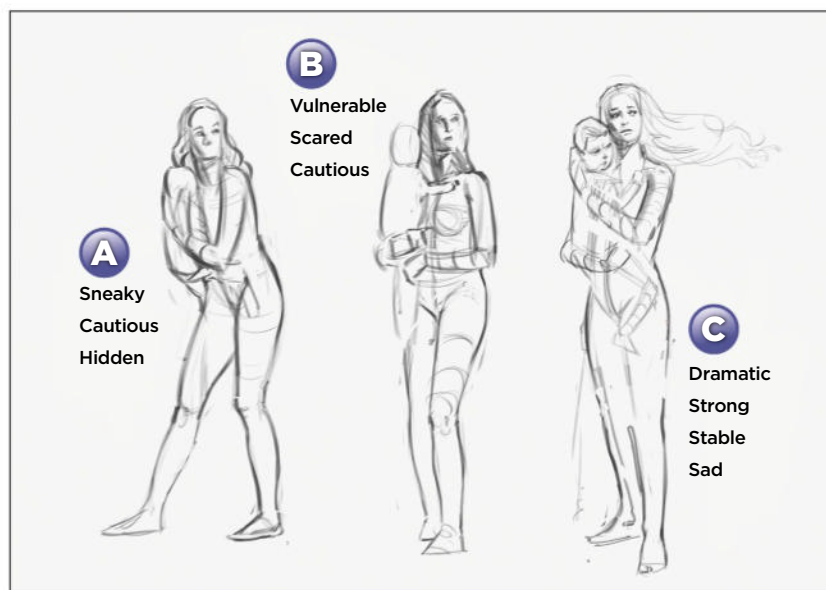
5 Refine the base drawing

After choosing the best-fitting pose for the character, let's refine it a bit. What I'm doing here is mainly adjusting proportions, simplifying the line work and adding more anatomy to the queen and her son. Notice that I split the refinement into two steps, first by adding more anatomy, and then cleaning the line and fine-tuning the characters' facial expressions.

Hair resembles a crown

Layered drapery

Jewellery

Holding the crown

Crown in a purse

Dagger

Purse
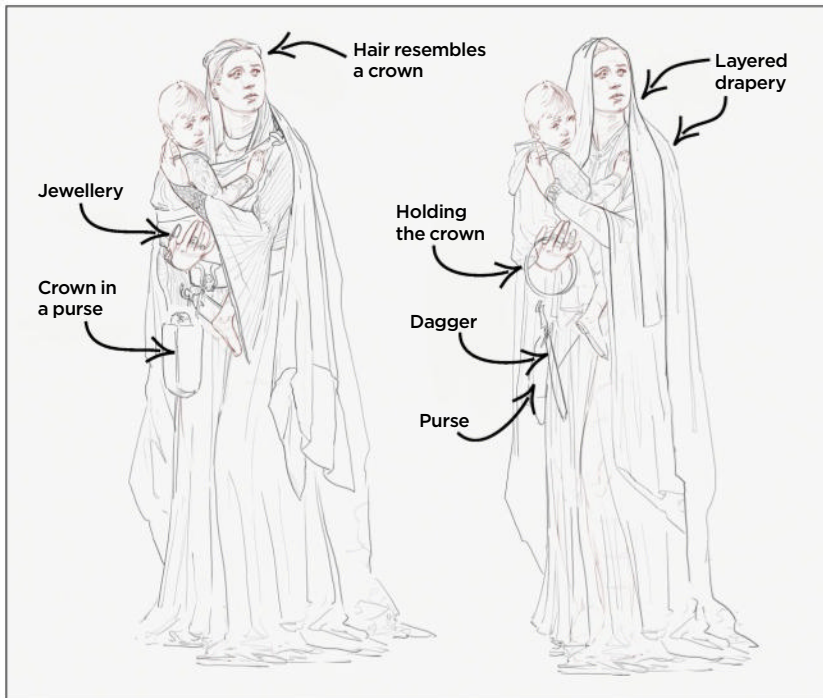
6 Iterate on costuming

We've already put some effort into posing our characters in a way that's appropriate for their backstory. Now it's time to do the same with their costumes. Even though she's the queen, our character is also trying to escape and avoid danger. The challenge here will be to make her look like a queen, but not in an obvious way, because the moment she's experiencing demands she goes unnoticed.

7 Final line art

After choosing a general direction for our character's clothes and items, it's time to refine them even further, using the design exploration as a base to create a final line art. This will guide the next phase, making it much simpler to proceed with the painting steps.

Layer arrangement

Final Lineart

Silhouette

Final Lineart

Local Values (normal)

Silhouette

Background

Palette
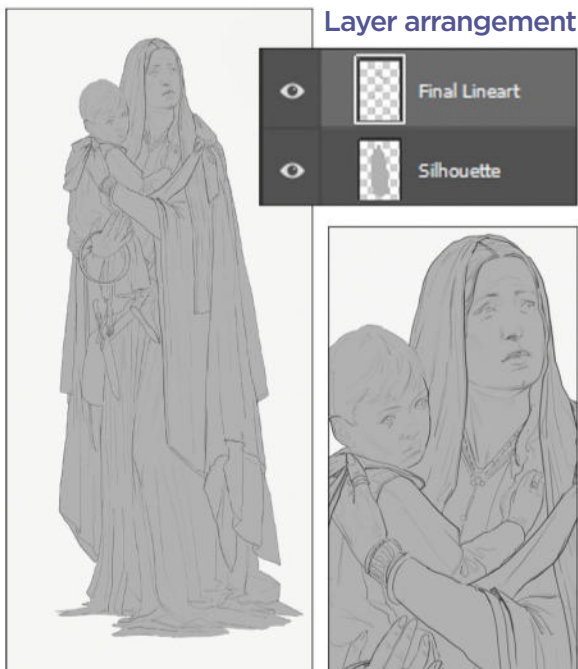
8 Base colour and silhouette

Once the line work is done, we'll create a flat coloured layer underneath the line art. This layer will work as our character's silhouette. You can choose any colour for it, because it'll only serve as a frame, almost like a clipping mask to which we'll bind the actual painting layers. To bind a layer to another one, hold Alt/Option+ click, with the mouse cursor between the two layers.
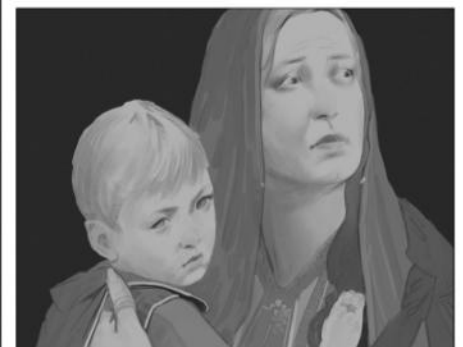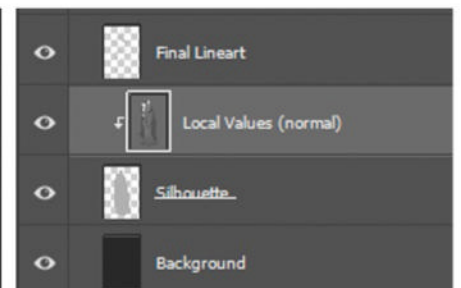
9 Bringing in local values

Now we're ready to add some values to this character on another layer. Limit your values to three or five options. The goal is to explore local values, dividing them between light, medium and dark. This will be the base of the painting. This layer goes on top of the silhouette. Bind this new layer to the silhouette layer. ➡➡
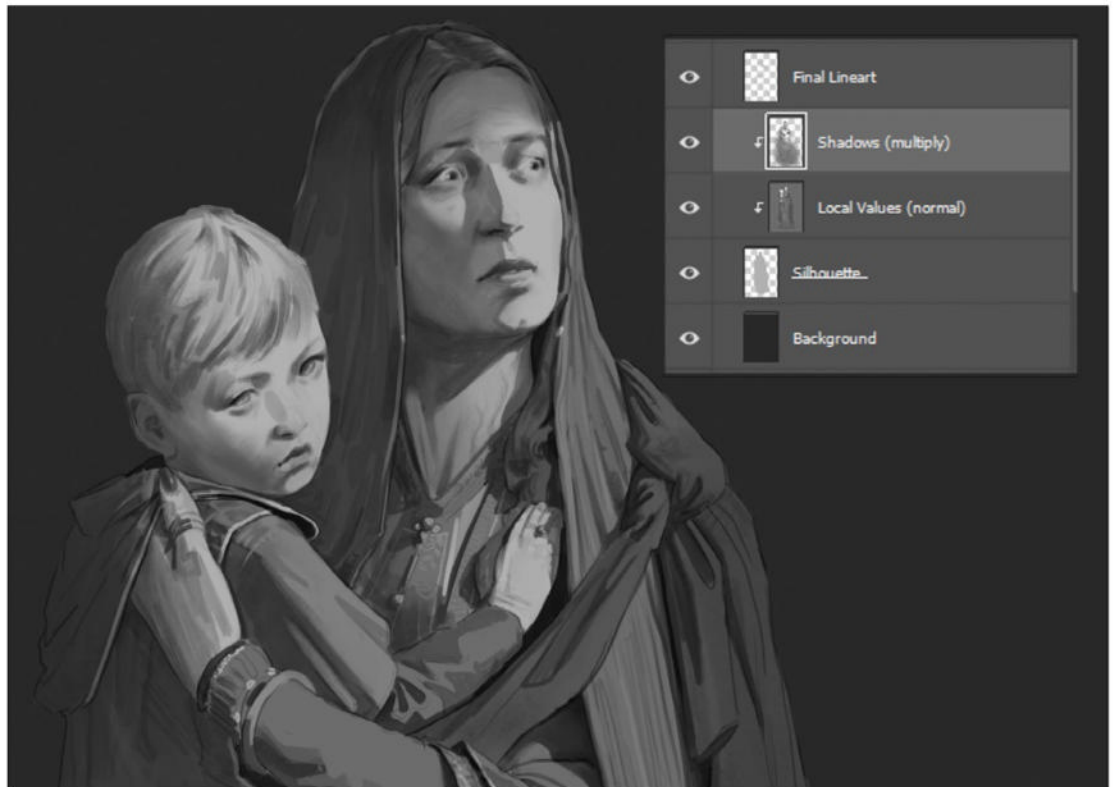
10 Refining form with shadows

On top of the local values layer, we'll create a new layer set to Multiply, and start adding all kinds of shadows to our painting. To support storytelling, I want the painting to be dark overall, making it half-lit. This directs our focus to their faces and the queen's expression, while also creating uneasiness, as if she were walking down a dark alley and was suddenly hit by a light.
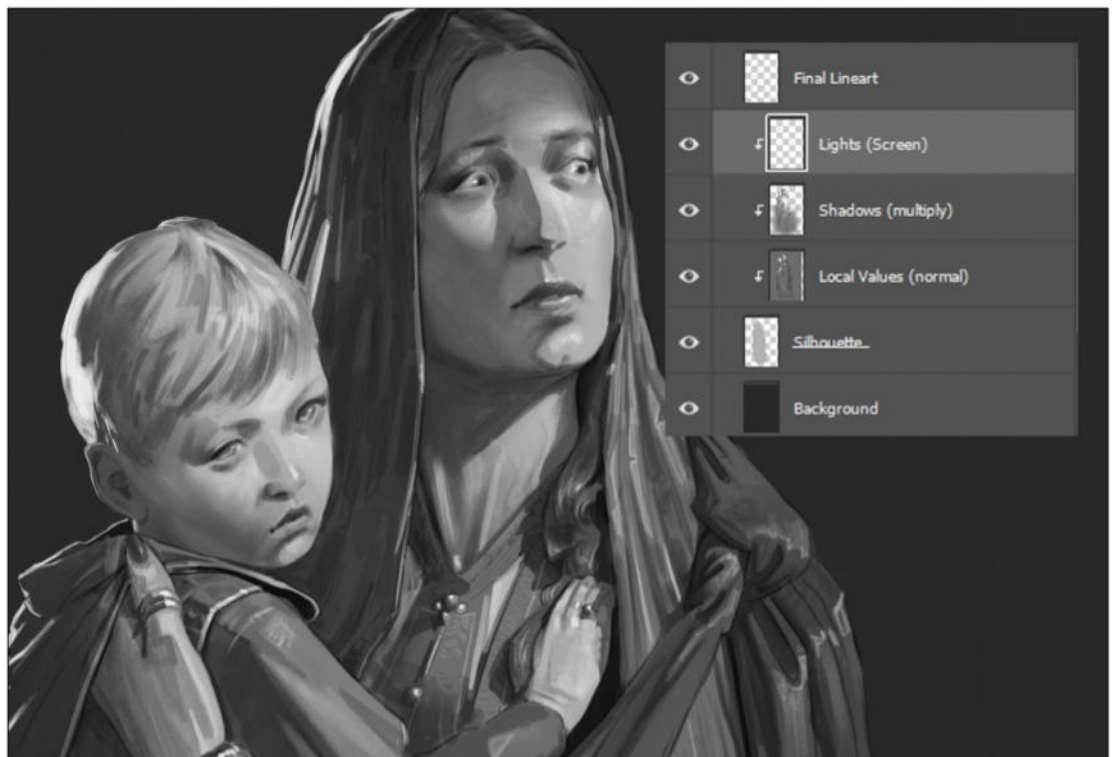
11 Adding more light to the composition

With the shadows established, let's create another layer on top of it and set it to Screen mode. The goal here is to power up the contrast and recover some elements that have been lost in the shadow side. I'm doing this by adding a secondary source of light, coming from the left. The main advantage of keeping everything separate is that you can easily tweak lights, shadows and local values.

The layer panel shows the following layers from top to bottom:
- Final Lineart
- Shadow deepening (overlay)
- Glazing (hard light)
- Lights (Screen)
- Shadows (multiply)
- Local Values (normal)
- Silhouette
- Background
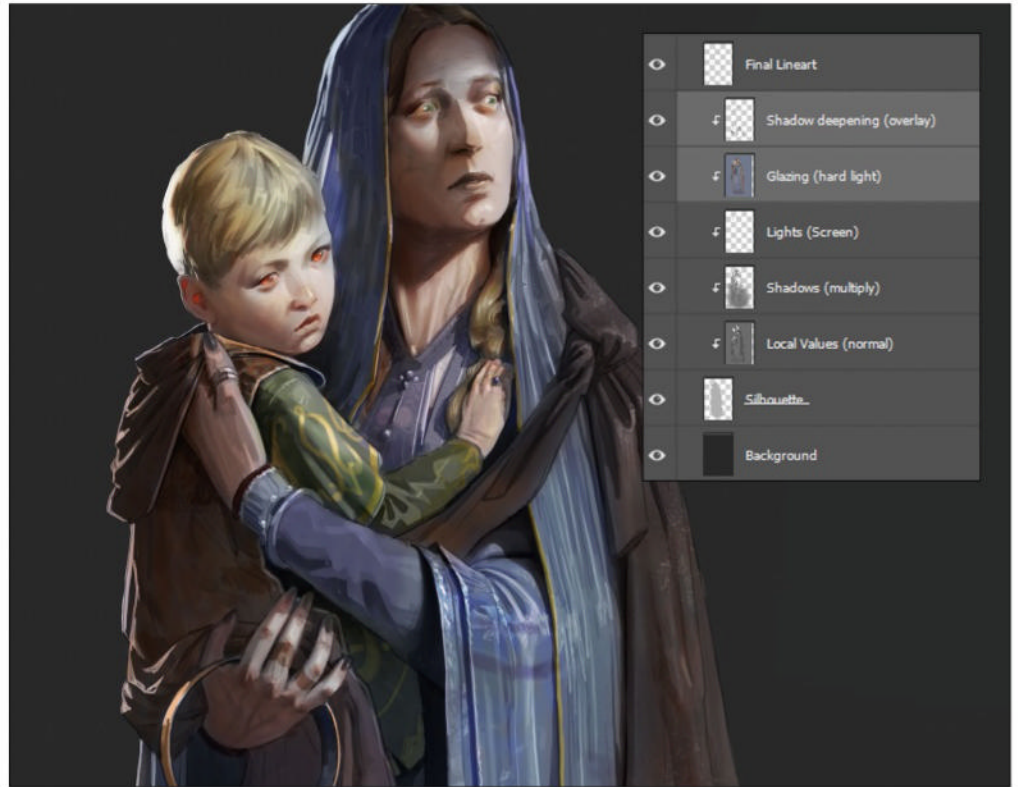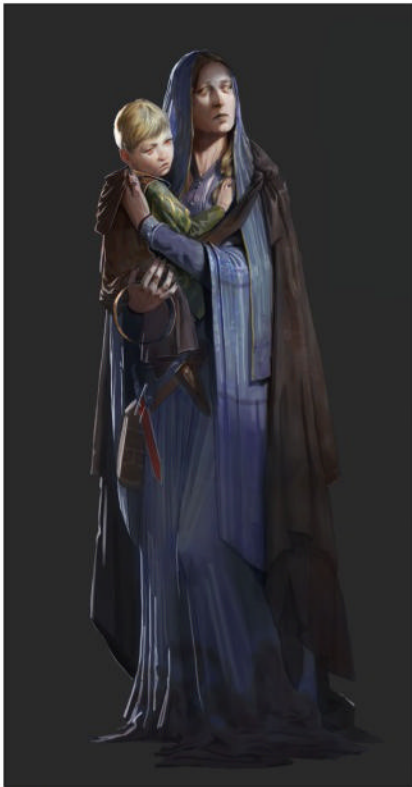
12 Introduce a digital 'glazing' stage

Now, just like glazing on traditional oil painting, we'll start adding colour to our characters by creating a new layer on top of the greyscale, set to Hard Light mode. I'm making the colours somewhat desaturated to match the painting's mood and backstory. Notice that adding colour will change the previously created value structure. So, always check your values as you paint, making sure not to change them too much.

13 Rendering the artwork

After all these steps, I create a new Normal layer on top of everything, including the line work, to focus on the rendering. Most of the work goes into polishing their faces and clothing. At the same time, I increase the contrast slightly and add some shapes to the background, further highlighting the characters' faces.

14 Finishing touches

Now that everything's in place, we can work on some finishing touches, creating new layers to tweak the lights and shadows, change the contrast or add small details. I increase the contrast and add blood droplets to their faces and clothing. Notice how, even in the last steps of the process, it's still possible to add storytelling elements to our design and take it up a notch!

Technique focus
SEEK OUT NEW APPROACHES

Discover how **Ivan Shavrin** brings the energy of his initial sketch into the final art for a book cover

"This is the cover art for a book by Alex Knight. The brief was simple: a wizard stands with his back to a goblin who is greedily drinking a potion, while the wizard studies the vessel with suspicion. Everything takes place in a magical laboratory, and I was given full creative freedom. Since this is a wraparound cover, I needed a composition that felt dynamic and balanced on both sides while keeping the focus on the characters. In terms of style, I wanted the raw energy of the sketch to stay alive in the final piece. That honesty is what keeps my work vibrant. I always recommend chasing something new rather than relying on what works."

How I create...
A LAB SCENE OF IMMINENT CHAOS

1 Sketch the scene
I make it as precise as possible so that from a distance it's almost indistinguishable from the final illustration. Broad strokes, bold decisions – everything to make the image feel inspiring from the very start.

2 Refine the line work
I distort the perspective to create a stronger sense of presence, all while keeping the lines rough, crooked and alive. This stage is all about building a solid foundation that makes the final step effortless.

3 Layer on texture
This includes brushstrokes, dust, light, grit, highlights and bright accents. I push for a slightly "bookish" look, the kind that makes people ask me later: "Wait... is this really digital?" And that's it – finished!

The Gallery

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS
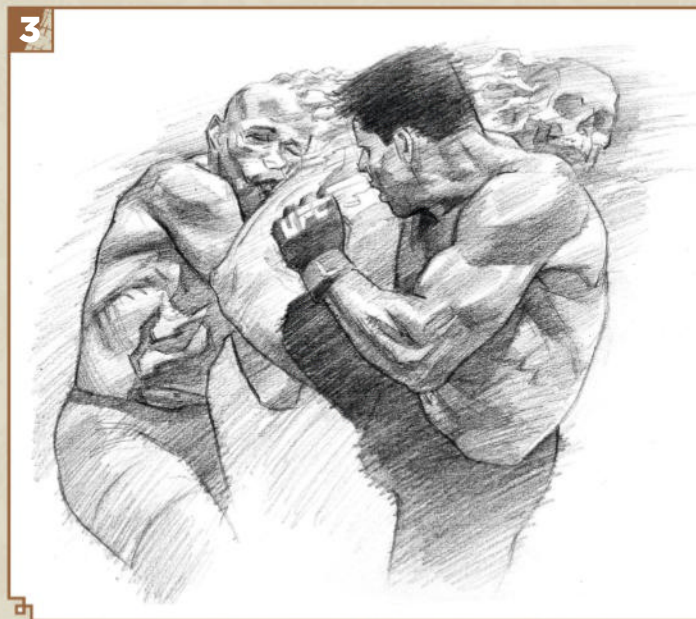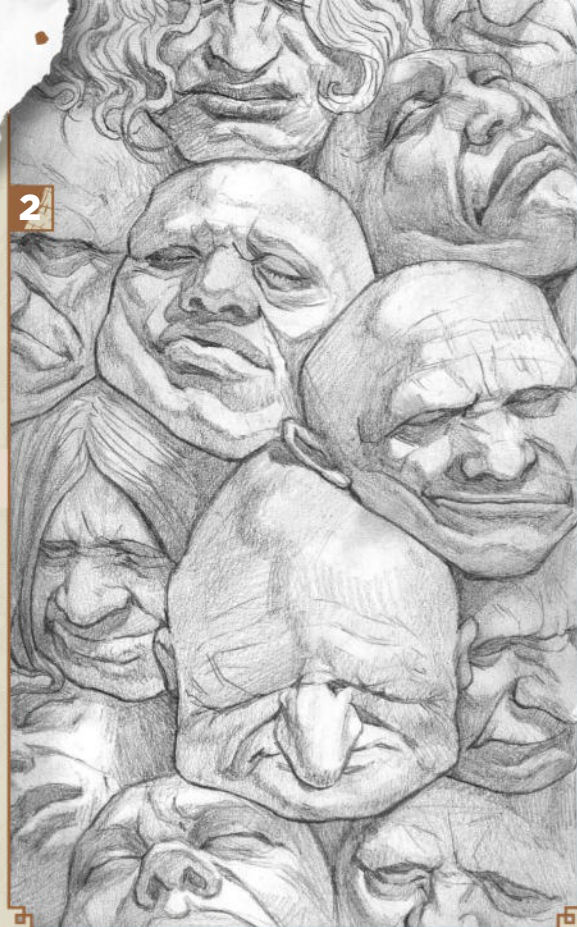
Tu Minh Bui

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Pencil, ink, markers, watercolour **WEB:** www.instagram.com/artoftu

Tu is a Vietnamese refugee who grew up in the US during the 90s. He's inspired by games, comics and martial arts, which are also recurring themes in his work, and is drawn to traditional art due to its tactile quality.

1 GOTH MERMAID
"A pencil sketch of a Gothic mermaid. I wanted to draw something more unconventional than the typical portrayal of the fantasy creature."

2 HEAD PILE
"This started as a photo study of a 3D head by Esteban Diácono, but I proceeded to draw other heads around it from memory."

3 HEAD KICK
"This was a photo study of a bout between Paulo Costa and Yoel Romero. I added motion lines and drew in the skull to sell the impact more."

4 OWL RIDER
"One of 31 ink pieces that I made for 2025's Inktober. The theme was 'Arctic', hence the snowy owl. I used a dip pen for lines and brushes for ink washes."

4

Sabin Petrov Boykinov

LOCATION: Bulgaria **MEDIA:** Mechanical pencil, pencil **WEB:** www.artstation.com/boykinov

Sabin is a video game concept artist and illustrator with more than 20 years' experience. He is inspired by seaside stories and maritime superstitions as a way to navigate memory, mystery and the unknown.

1 THE COLLECTOR OF SEA DREAMS

"The banner's meaning comes from the sailor's Latin motto, Non Terra Sed Aquis, which means Not By Land, But By Water. I believe there is something meaningful to be found in the wisdom of ancient sea explorers."

2 DINNER FOR THE KING

"It's my personal tradition to create an illustration for St Nicholas Day – the patron saint of sailors, fishermen and travellers. In my homeland it's celebrated on 6 December."

3 AWAKENING THE GODS
"Every year, I create a Halloween illustration. This is my latest story featuring my long-time character – the Pumpkin Boss! It's a small tribute to classic adventure games and Indiana Jones films."

4 THE TRAVELER
"The ocean is a dream-maker and a secret-keeper – hiding, revealing and whispering old seaside tales. The Traveler is my fictional character who moves between two realms: the world of the sea gods and our human reality."

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**

Reviews

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

1

© ASUS

2

© Acer

3

© Microsoft

Best laptops for digital artists

SCREEN TEST Each of these devices is well worth considering, if you're looking to upgrade your creative toolkit and want a screen you can draw on with a stylus

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BEST FOR DIGITAL ART OVERALL
ASUS ProArt PZ13
Price £1,099/$1,099
Company Asus
Web www.asus.com

1 The ASUS ProArt PZ13 combines refinement and ruggedness in a unique way. The screen is brilliant for digital art, and the stylus is included along with other accessories such as a detachable keyboard, stand and protective sleeve, so you won't need to factor in additional purchases to have the perfect two-in-one device for drawing. This laptop is best for artists who have a well-rounded workflow and money to spend.

Pros ■ Various accessories included ■ Incredible OLED touchscreen ■ Competitive pricing
Cons ■ Not good for 3D work ■ Fairly heavy ■ Not the most powerful Copilot+ model

Rating ★★★★☆

BEST FOR ARTISTS ON A BUDGET
Acer Chromebook Spin 514
Price £379/$399 (Ryzen 3); £600/$580 (Ryzen 5)
Company Acer
Web www.acer.com

2 If you're looking for an affordable two-in-one drawing device, the Acer Chromebook Spin 514 offers impressive value. While ChromeOS limits your choice of software, its 14-inch Full HD touchscreen and versatile design make it ideal for digital sketching and note-taking. The AMD Ryzen 5 CPU delivers snappy performance for ChromeOS apps and Android drawing tools.

Pros ■ Fast and reliable performance ■ Large 14-inch FHD touchscreen ■ Sturdy aluminium frame
Cons ■ Flash memory rather than SSD

Rating ★★★★☆

BEST PREMIUM LAPTOP FOR DIGITAL ART
Microsoft Surface Laptop Studio 2
Price Starting from £2,069/$1,999
Company Microsoft
Web www.microsoft.com

3 The Surface Laptop Studio 2 is a versatile choice for artists, offering a three-position design that transforms from laptop to tablet. Its 14.4-inch touchscreen with 120Hz refresh rate makes drawing feel incredibly natural and responsive. Although it packs the latest 13th Gen Intel processors and NVIDIA RTX graphics options, it's more suited to digital art and design than demanding 3D work.

Pros ■ Beautiful design, stunning display ■ Multiple positions for the display ■ Touchscreen
Cons ■ Very expensive ■ Poor battery life

Rating ★★★★☆

© HP

© Microsoft

© ASUS

BEST 2-IN-1 SCREEN FOR DRAWING

HP Spectre x360 14 (2024)

Price £1,519/$1,899
Company HP
Web www.hp.com

4 The HP Spectre x360 14 (2024) stands out as a versatile 2-in-1 laptop with a focus on creative work. The responsive 14-inch OLED touchscreen features a crisp 2,880 x 1,800 resolution and 120Hz refresh rate, while the included HP Rechargeable MPP2.0 Tilt Pen offers precise input for digital artists. Powered by Intel's latest Core Ultra 7 processor, it handles creative tasks well.

Pros ■ Great screen ■ Responsive in use ■ Stylus included in the box
Cons ■ No discrete GPU ■ Heavy as a tablet

Rating ★★★★½

BEST PORTABLE DRAWING LAPTOP

Microsoft Surface Pro 12

Price £929/$949
Company Microsoft
Web www.microsoft.com

5 Microsoft's tablet-laptop hybrid is a great choice for artists who prioritise portability. With an ARM-based Snapdragon X Plus processor, it delivers solid CPU performance for everyday creative tasks. The device's clean, portable design makes it ideal for sketching on the go, but the keyboard cover and stylus are expensive add-ons.

Pros ■ All-day battery life ■ Premium build quality ■ Tablet-laptop flexibility
Cons ■ GPU performance lags behind ■ Accessories cost extra ■ Windows tablet mode needs work

Rating ★★★★☆

BEST LAPTOP SCREEN FOR DRAWING

ASUS Zenbook 14 OLED (UX3405)

Price £1,100/$1,300
Company ASUS
Web www.asus.com

6 The ASUS Zenbook 14 OLED combines a gorgeous 3K OLED touchscreen with the new Intel Core Ultra processor featuring AI acceleration. The included ASUS Pencil 2 and the ability to lay the device completely flat make it particularly suitable for digital artists who prefer a traditional laptop form factor over a tablet.

Pros ■ OLED screen excels ■ AI neural CPU boosts performance ■ Undercuts MacBook Air on price
Cons ■ Graphics performance could be better ■ Not enough ports

Rating ★★★★½

Extending the paper feed and output trays make the imagePROGRAF PRO-310 look even bigger on a tabletop.

The printer works over Wi-Fi, but setup can be problematic and so a wired internet connection might be the better choice.

The individual ink cartridges – there are 10 in total – can be easily swapped out when supplies run low.

Canon imagePROGRAF PRO-310

GLOSS OVER Artists and photographers who create gallery-quality prints of their work will want to make room in their studio for Canon's latest printer

Price £699/$849 **Company** Canon **Web** www.canon.com

Let's say it straight from the get-go. We don't recall the last time we were this sorry to send a piece of review tech back to the manufacturer.

A lush A3+ printer that uses individual Lucia Pro II pigment ink cartridges, including a matte black ink for maximising monochrome and a Chroma Optimizer cartridge for a sleek glossy appearance, Canon's latest device is designed to deliver smoothly graduated colours in gallery-quality prints that last.

A replacement set of ink cartridges costs around £155 if bought from Canon directly.

The imagePROGRAF PRO-310 takes up a hefty portion of worktop space, especially when the top feed and output tray are unfolded. At 639mm along its longest edge, it's fine for home use, but it's not something that's going to perch elegantly on a desk next to a laptop.

Operation is conducted via the front buttons and three-inch screen, the latter of which you'll almost certainly prod a few times with a finger before you realise it's not a touchscreen. The top input and bottom output trays fold out smoothly, and it's no trouble to open up the central part to replace empty ink cartridges when required.

Using the screen, you can select your size and type of paper. Unsurprisingly, all of Canon's own papers are at the top, but the manufacturer does magnanimously include profiles for papers made by

The printer's controls are on the top of the unit and easy to access, although some users will bemoan the lack of a touchscreen.

VERDICT

Producing luscious quality on matte and glossy paper alike, this is an ideal all-in-one photo printer for home use. It's not the fastest, it's pretty hefty and it can rattle its way through its ink tanks, but you won't care about any of that when you're holding these beautiful prints in your hands.

Pros
- Stunning print quality
- Does well on different paper types
- Easy setup and operation

Cons
- Temperamental, fiddly Wi-Fi setup
- Screen not touch-sensitive
- Ink costs rack up

Rating
★★★★☆

other popular manufacturers, such as Hahnemühle and Fotospeed.

We were stunned when we saw the deep blacks of an A3+ print on proper matte paper, or the pitch-perfect gloss of a borderless A3 print. The prints from this thing are gorgeous. It's capable of capturing such subtle differences in tonality. Monochrome prints look glorious, with that matte black cartridge producing some of the deepest blacks we've seen in a home-printed image. The colours on glossy absolutely pop, making the most of the paper's natural shine.

We timed a full-colour print on A3+ matte paper, and it took six minutes and 40 seconds. Not the fastest, sure, but it'd be churlish to complain when the results are this good.
Jon Stapley

❝ The prints from this thing are gorgeous. It's capable of capturing such subtle differences in tonality ❞

Clever packaging prep work done by Secretlab means the desk can be built in less than an hour.

Secretlab Magnus Evo

REAL STEEL Does this pro sit-to-standing desk rise to the occasion?

Price £599/€699
Company Secretlab
Web https://secretlab.co.uk

RATING ★★★★½

One of the best deskmakers around is Secretlab. Its line of Magnus and Magnus Pro desks in particular have been a huge hit with PC gamers and creatives.

The Magnus Evo, with a simpler design and (slightly) less bulk overall, paired with a lower price tag, is likely intended as an entry point into the Secretlab Deskonomic Universe.

There are two size options available: the 150cm wide Magnus Evo and the Magnus Evo XL, which ups the size to 177cm. The back and side panels have magnetic steel surfaces, and concealed underneath the back is a steel cable tray that's screwed in on one side and magnetically attached on the other. This means you can open it up slightly to access your power strip and then tuck it away again to keep the cables out of view.

On the front a touchscreen controls the height, with a simple up-down button next to three programmable preset buttons. This makes it possible to program a preset standing height for consistency, with spare slots available for other users.

With stellar cable management, easy height adjustment and excellent build quality, the Magnus Evo is a great workspace investment.
Erlingur Einarsson

Geekom A9 Max

COMPACT COMPUTING The A9 Max offers almost identical performance to its Intel-powered sibling, muddying its USP a little

Price £999/$950   **Company** Geekom   **Web** www.geekom.co.uk

The Geekom A9 Max squeezes AMD's Ryzen AI 9 HX 370 into a truly tiny chassis, promising desktop-class grunt and modern inputs and outputs in a package that disappears behind your monitor.

It's compact, well-made and punchy where it counts (especially for photo-editing), although its integrated GPU and close resemblance to Geekom's Intel-chipped IT15 mean that it won't astonish everyone.

Geekom has kept the mini-PC formula tightly focused: a sturdy, mostly metal shell with a VESA-friendly footprint that's small enough to vanish behind a display and robust enough to survive desk life.

When unboxing and during testing, the A9 Max felt solid and reassuringly engineered. The inner frame and anti-slip feet give the sort of build confidence you want from a machine that you'll tuck away and forget until you need it.

Ports are plentiful and sensibly placed across the chassis: twin USB4 Type-C, multiple USB-A, dual HDMI 2.1 and two 2.5Gb Ethernet ports are the highlights. It means that setting up multiple monitors, external drives or

Blistering CPU for the money, sensible GPU for compact-PC expectations and real-world photo-editing snappiness will please creators on a budget.

a network-heavy workflow is painless. The form factor is extremely compact, and it's easy to set up out of the box.

Under the hood, the A9 Max leans into AMD's latest Strix Point platform, pairing the Ryzen AI 9 HX 370 CPU with Radeon 890M graphics and NPU-assisted AI capabilities. Memory and storage are flexible: dual-channel DDR5 SODIMMs up to 128GB and dual M.2 slots (2280 + 2230) with PCIe 4.0 support for big, fast drives. Our review unit, just like the IT15 and last year's GT Mega, was fitted with 32GB of RAM and a 2TB SSD.

For anyone who values CPU headroom and a full set of ports without paying a premium for an ultraportable, the A9 Max represents strong value. 🔴
Erlingur Einarsson

VERDICT

The Geekom A9 Max is an AMD-powered, extremely compact mini-PC that leaves a strong impression. It's decked out in ports, offers great connectivity, and the CPU performance – thanks to 32GB of RAM – belies its sub-£1,000 price point. It's a great value proposition, especially for photo-editors who are tight on desk space.

Pros
■ Great CPU specs
■ A welcome 2TB of storage
■ Covered in ports

Cons
■ iGPU limits video/3D performance
■ Not that different from its IT15 sibling

Rating
★★★★½

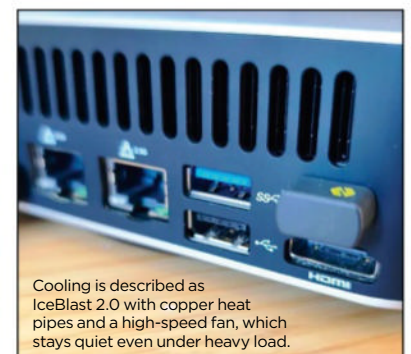Alongside the power button at the front are four USB 3.2 ports and a 3.5mm headphone jack.

You'll need a monitor as none is provided with the A9 Max, as well as a keyboard and mouse, just like most other mini-PCs on the market.

Cooling is described as IceBlast 2.0 with copper heat pipes and a high-speed fan, which stays quiet even under heavy load.

Corning's Gorilla Matte Pro surface treatment has been applied to the Swift Edge 14 AI's screen, which significantly reduces glare and reflections.

The selection of ports on the left- and right-hand side include HDMI, an audio jack, and USB Types A and C.

The hinge design enables the laptop to be laid out flat, but it's not possible to transform it into a tablet.

Acer Swift Edge 14 AI

WHITE KNIGHT This beautiful laptop delivers on design, but what about the amount of computing power on offer?

Price £1,399/$1,199 **Company** Acer **Web** www.acer.com

This is Acer's ultra-premium AI laptop and it's looking to go beyond AI gimmick branding and deliver a broader set of industry-leading specs. As such, the focus is on portability and display technology.

Indeed, one of the highlights of the laptop is the gorgeous 14-inch 3K (2,880 x 1,800px) OLED display that delivers vibrant colours and a high level of contrast. It's capable of a 120Hz

The magnesium-aluminium alloy chassis keeps the Swift Edge 14 AI's weight at just under 1kg.

refresh rate, which is ideal for most casual gamers. It's also a touchscreen that enables it to be used like a tablet. If the hinge allowed for a complete 360-degree rotation then the Swift Edge 14 AI could be used exactly like one. Still, we found the laptop hinge to be robust and hard-wearing, and the 180-degree flexibility impresses, which makes it possible for the whole thing to lie completely flat.

The ports are set out across the left and right-hand sides of the laptop, in part because the 180-degree hinge wouldn't allow for any at the back. Acer has opted for a fair spread across USB Type-C and USB Type-A ports, and a 3.5 mm combination audio jack.

The Intel Arc Graphics 140V GPU offers good performance, especially for such a thin-and-light form factor. Yet as expected, it doesn't hit the dizzy heights of those laptops running a discrete NVIDIA GPU.

> ❝ **The strong single-core performance delivers a high level of responsiveness when adding filters and brush strokes** ❞

The keyboard has a soft-touch finish with a UV-cured coating, making it resistant to wear and stains.

VERDICT

The Acer Swift Edge 14 AI is a great-looking, hyper-portable laptop that remarkably weighs in at under 1kg. That's less than the MacBook Air, making it the hybrid worker's dream. The lightweight design ethos might not have affected the impressive 3K OLED display, but the general hardware under the hood is a little limited, especially given the premium price.

Pros
- Hyper portable and lightweight
- 3K OLED display with anti-glare
- Good port selection

Cons
- High price point
- Gimmicky AI features
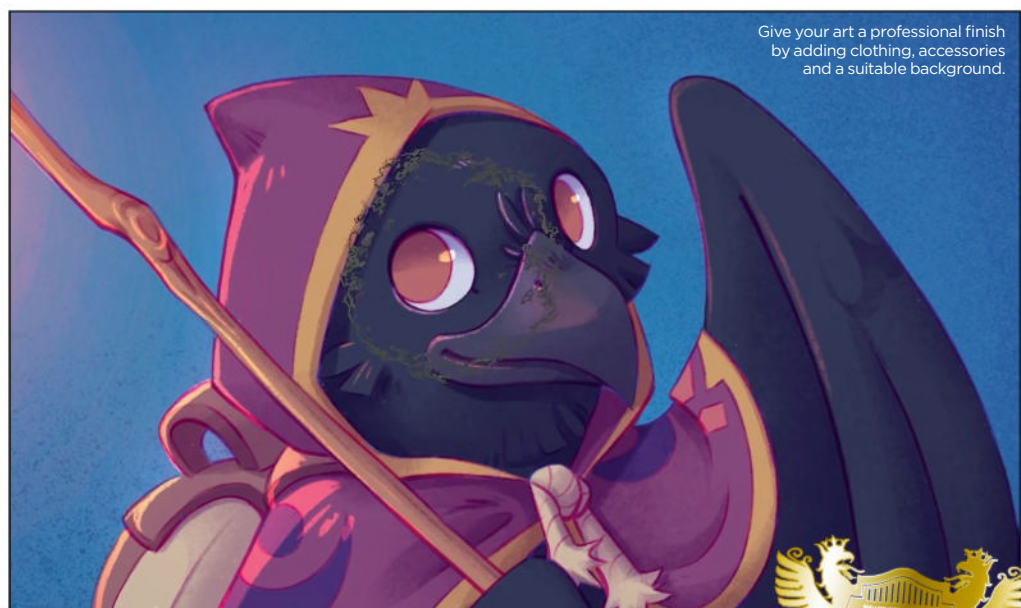- Needs more power

Rating
★★★★⯪

As has become all too common for AI-branded laptops, the Swift Edge 14 AI includes an Activity Indicator built into the touchpad. This indicates the status of the system as it relates to AI processing. There's also a dedicated Copilot key on the keyboard, which provides quick access to AI features.

The strong single-core performance delivers a high level of responsiveness when adding filters and applying brush strokes. Its multi-core power then takes over and provides the necessary speed for complex filters, and AI-driven features such as Denoise.

As for battery performance, the Swift Edge 14 AI managed nearly 14 hours. It's more than enough for a day's work and a little bit of entertainment in the evening. Just keep in mind that despite its Intel CPU, generous RAM and AI smarts, more demanding creative pursuits will require a discrete GPU.
Paul Hatton

Give your art a professional finish by adding clothing, accessories and a suitable background.

Illustrating Fantastical Animals with Procreate

BEAST QUEST Julia Körner's creature creation course will help you along your concept art journey

Publisher Domestika **Price** £19 **Format** Online
Length 2 hrs 29 mins (14 lessons) **Web** www.domestika.org

This Domestika course from **Julia Körner (aka Dyru). focuses on how she creates the incredible art that led to her 'discovery' on ArtStation.**

As an example of how to be found, Julia is a brilliant ambassador for a career in creature making. After going through her inspirations – always useful for finding new sources – Julia is honest about what types of characters will get you noticed. She then details how to respond to a brief, no matter how short, and this forms the focus when teaching her technique. Her manifesto is that context is everything when creating characters.

In terms of Procreate, the course starts with strong basics, and it's
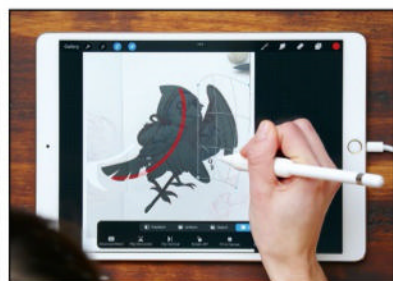
Once you've settled on the creature's design, adjust its pose in Procreate for maximum visual impact.

good to see an older iPad being used, which helps with optimisation no matter how good your device is. Then it's a deep dive into Procreate. This is worth watching even if you're used to Procreate, because Julia's workflow is designed to get to characters quickly, with an early focus on colour blocks and shapes. This comes before jumping to a mood board, which is a refreshing change; if you're new to Procreate you won't feel as intimidated as you might when overloaded with other artists' work.

This is a lovely course to follow along with, and a great starter for artists who doodle and noodle and want a way into digital creation.
Mike Griggs

Consider the overall shape of your fantasy creature.

VERDICT

This is a solid course with a unique structure that dips in and out of a variety of processes and software training. It will inspire and support any artist looking to gain confidence with their creature-creation skills.

Pros
▪ A good mix of software teaching and creative inspiration
▪ Focus on optimising workflow
▪ A wide range of downloadable content comes with the course

Cons
▪ Some students may not be comfortable with this back-and-forth approach
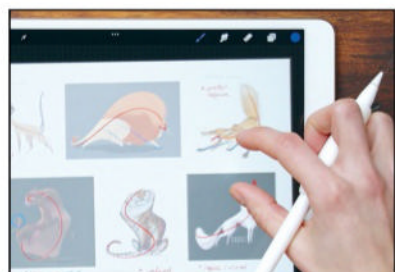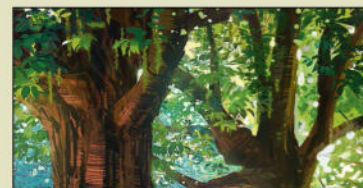▪ Julia focuses on a very specific range of character styles

Rating
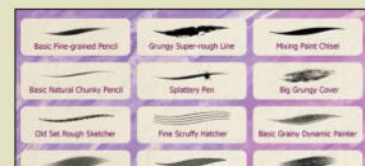★★★★★

Quick Environment Brushes
Artist Madeleine Bellwoar
Software Photoshop/Procreate
Brushes 128 **Price** £9.91
Rating ★★★★

This 128-brush pack with voiceover demo combines painterly tools with graphic shapes, suited to virtual plein-air and visual development work. It's great value for Photoshop and Procreate artists.
https://bit.ly/44KY5qc

Jason's Free 2025 Illustration Brushes
Artist Jason Heeley
Software Procreate
Brushes 24 **Price** Free
Rating ★★★

Jason's free brushes focus on sketching and inking fundamentals. It's a useful baseline set that's handy for pairing with specialised primary brushes, or for testing workflows before committing to his paid-for Procreate brushes.
https://bit.ly/3YgBU7C

Digital Atelier: Painter Brushes
Artist Ramon Miranda
Software Krita
Brushes 51 **Price** €19.95
Rating ★★★★

Ramon Miranda's official Krita bundle delivers 51 presets split across oil, pastel and watercolour brushes. The included two-hour video tutorial demonstrates Ramon's painting workflow, making this a solid Krita starter set for artists.
https://krita.gumroad.com/l/sFbEb

3D Artist

Your ultimate source for art, inspiration and know-how

90

COLOUR YOUR 3D ARTWORK

Entei Ryu depicts two figures from her BONEGIRL series

84

The best 3D art around
Explore sci-fi cinematic scenes, renders of real-world objects and images driven by a story.

94

Story-led design
Nelson Tai takes cues from his sci-fi project when building a hard-working droid.

96

Back to basics
Discover how 3D objects can be made transparent, and how to add texture to a model.

98

Five minutes with...
Rik Schutte, Blender's lead animator, on how the Elder Scrolls games influenced him.

Wadim Kashin

LOCATION: Thailand **MEDIA:** Blender, Substance 3D Modeler **WEB:** www.artstation.com/septicwd
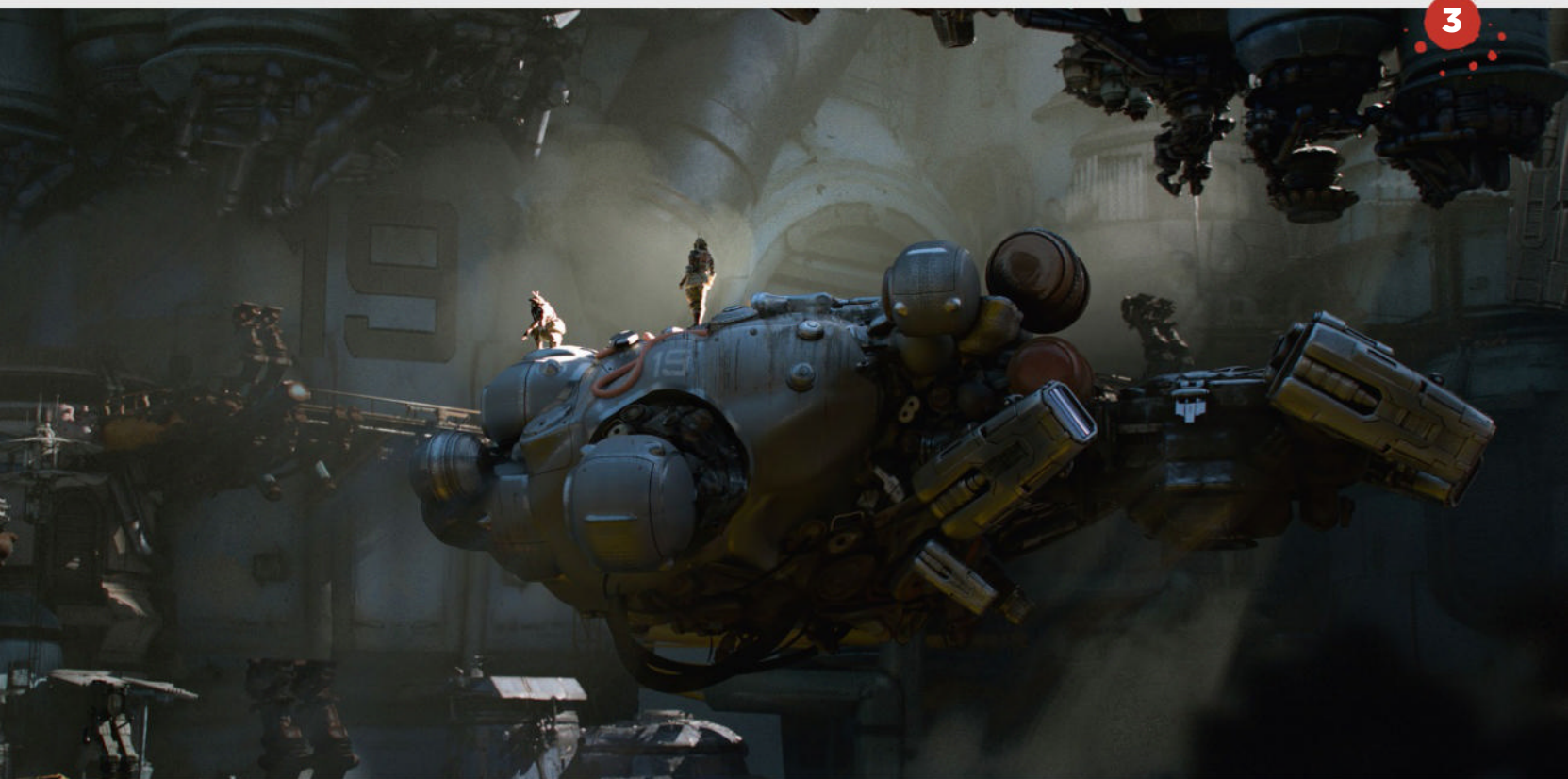
Wadim is a concept artist who likes to play with unconventional shapes when depicting buildings, machines and anything that bends the rules. "By mixing abstraction with realism, I get the clearest idea."

ImagineFX ARTIST of the MONTH

Want to submit your work? Visit http://ifxm.ag/getinifx

1 JUMPER 1
"I was initially inspired by the APU battle mechs featured in The Matrix: Revolutions. But I wanted it to have a large, enclosed cockpit and a big gun."

2 SCRAP METAL 1
"I don't often use something like a Dutch angle, but in this shot I wanted to capture the dynamics of flight."

3 SCRAP METAL 2
"One of my old ideas for mixing the post-apocalyptic with sci-fi. Playing with shapes like spheres and cylinders inspired me to create this machine."

4 JUMPER 2
"At some point I decided that, in addition to his hydraulic legs, it would be cool to add some thrusters to his back. This helps him to make big jumps."

Want to submit your work? Visit http://ifxm.ag/getinifx

Ryan Bown

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Substance 3D Designer, Substance 3D Painter, Marmoset Toolbag, Unreal Engine, ZBrush, PhotoScan, Krita, Maya, Plasticity, Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/mentor_3d

Ryan is a professional artist with over 25 years of experience that spans two industries. With a love for fine art and video games, he decided to fuse both passions. Currently, he teaches production art at The University of Utah.
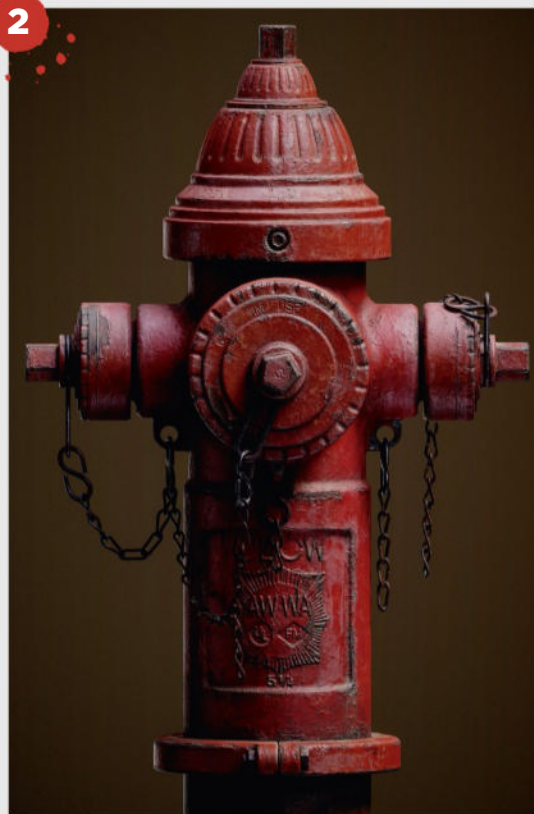
1 TRUE KNIFE B&W

"A personal project modelled in Plasticity, textured in Substance 3D Painter and staged with Megascans. Here I wanted to sharpen my texturing and rendering skills."

2 FIRE HYDRANT

"This fire hydrant was the first asset I created under the mentorship and supervision of Dan Kenton. Working with Dan to create this fire hydrant has helped me get up to speed with industry standards and workflows, and I can't wait to pass this information on to my students."

Want to submit your work? Visit http://ifxm.ag/getinifx

Piotr Gajda

LOCATION: Poland **MEDIA:** Blender, Character Creator, World Creator, Photoshop **WEB:** www.artstation.com/ravirr17

Piotr is a trained civil engineer with a lifelong passion for illustration. He particularly likes modelling, and bases his work on 3D scenes in order to create atmospheric, story-driven images.

1 GALLEON

"A 3D model crafted like a detailed miniature, built plank by plank to create an authentic structure. Subtle wear, layered textures and controlled lighting help suggest a long history embedded in the object itself."

2 DEATH KNIGHT

"Developed from a high-poly sculpt to establish weight and material separation. The character's presence is the result of controlled lighting coupled with grounded proportions. I wanted to suggest a silent, battle-worn guardian emerging from a forgotten legend."

3 DESERT RUINS

"Built from large-scale 3D models to control mass, depth and lighting. I wanted the ruins to feel newly uncovered; ancient architecture emerging from rock, mixing believable scale with a quiet, story-driven sense of discovery."

Karim Yasser Ahmed

LOCATION: Egypt **MEDIA:** Unreal Engine 5, DaVinci Resolve **WEB:** www.artstation.com/karimyasser1

Karim is a senior lighting artist with over seven years of experience in AAA games. He loves working on environment lighting: "I treat my environment as a canvas that is getting lit as a painting, and I truly enjoy this process."

1 GLJÚFUR
"Got inspired by Icelandic canyons so I decided to work on this project. This scene was built with the help of Quixel Megascans library and Quixel Trees."

2 NORTH 'N' WOODS
"A new approach to light a building. It has a vintage look, which is quite different from the other projects."

3 LOST EMPIRE
"This is a massively big project in which I explore new ways to light such a large environment."

4 STUCK IN ROOTS
"This is a new, stylised approach of using Quixel Megascan assets to craft completely new forms and shapes."
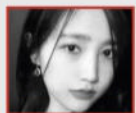
BEFORE

AFTER

ZBrush, Blender & Procreate

COLOUR YOUR 3D ARTWORK

Entei Ryu reveals how she sculpts and paints Triceratops and T-Rex, two characters from her BONEGIRL series

"This is a personal piece that's based on character designs from my original sculpture series FIERCE GIRLS, with a sub-line called BONEGIRL that also comes in a range of action figures. The two characters who are pictured here – Triceratops and T-Rex – are both part of this line. The concept features girls who have been fused with dinosaur skeletons and metallic armour. I wanted to place Triceratops and T-Rex back-to-back to create a balanced structure. The main colour theme is a striking contrast of white and red, which I chose to help create a greater sense of visual impact."

Artist PROFILE

Entei Ryu
LOCATION: Japan

Entei Ryu is an illustrator, sculptor and comic artist who has also worked on high-profile IPs such as Assassin's Creed and Final Fantasy. She's a lead concept artist at Kojima Productions.
https://bit.ly/4rJTqin

SKELETON CREW

Flat composition
The piece uses a relatively flat structure. The background isn't based on realism, but drawn with abstract line work for decoration.

Glowing eyes and facial expression
The eye rendering emphasises their glossy look and the characters' personality. Eyelashes and skin texture details bring life to the face. I define the hair with clean line work.

Composition and pose
The composition is structured around two curled-up characters. This pose was chosen to show more of their costumes and body design. The hands, feet and fold lines help balance the composition. Lighting comes from the top front, much like stage lighting.

Focus on facial details
The two characters have their own distinct personalities and facial expressions, which I define at the 3D stage before painting.
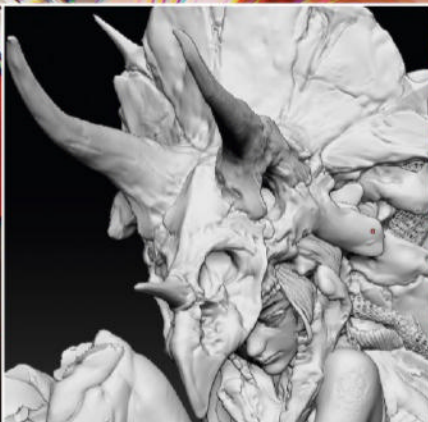
Dinosaur skull
This is the detailed skull of a triceratops. Staying accurate in the realistic parts makes the fantasy elements more convincing. Even if not all details are visible, structural accuracy matters from any angle.

How I create...
FIGURES CLAD IN UNIQUE ARMOUR

1 Digital sculpting in ZBrush
These characters were in standing poses from previous sculptures, later adjusted into back-to-back poses for this piece. This arrangement showcases their skeletal and costume details with more visual tension.

2 Material painting and rendering
The base colours for skin, armour and bones are painted in ZBrush, then rendered in Blender. Although the final artwork leans toward a flat look, I emphasise the metallic textures and reflections to bring it to life.

3 Take the 3D model into Procreate
The final illustration is painted in Procreate. I focus on facial features, expressions, skeletal details, armour textures, the overall colour balance and the decorative abstract background.
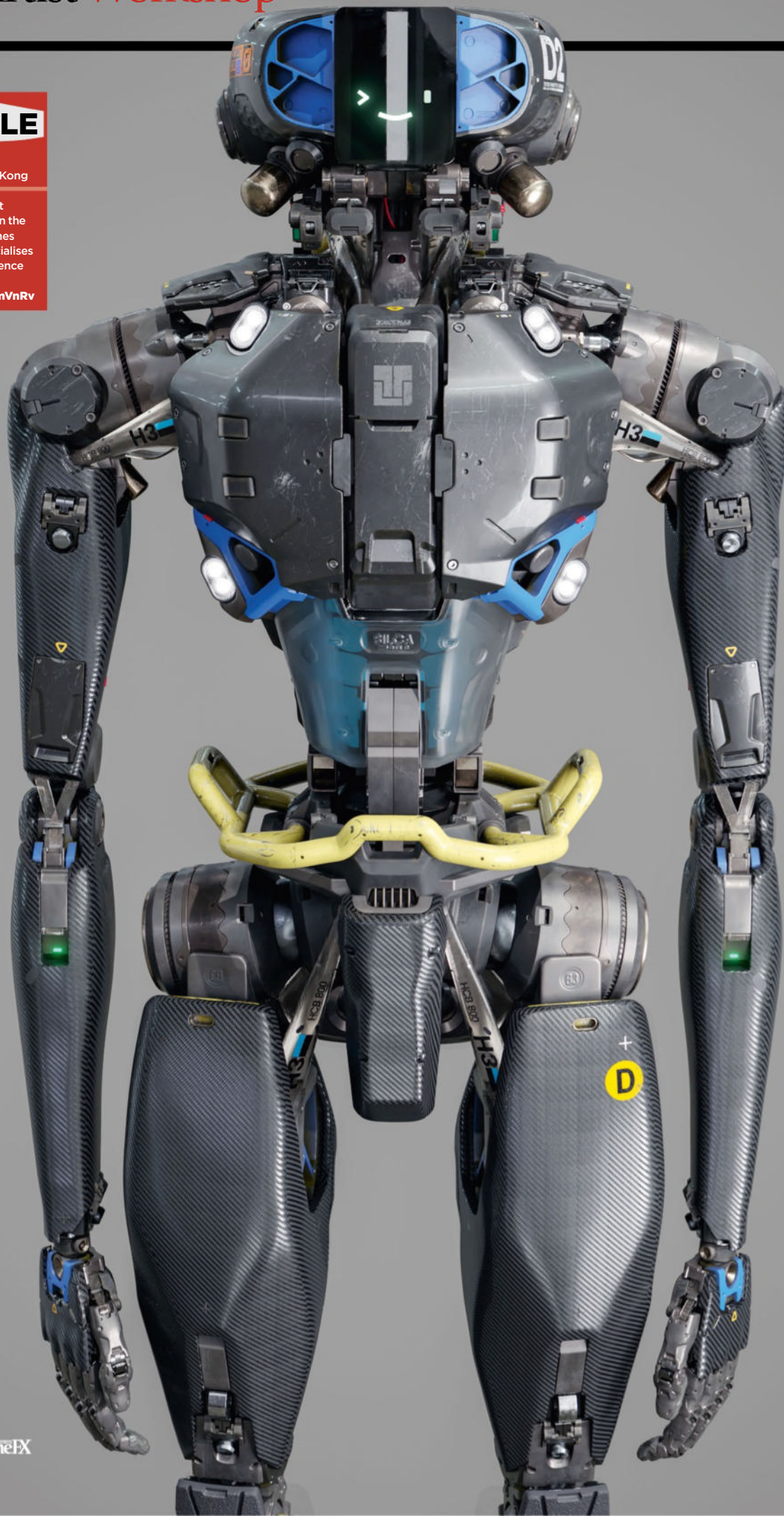
Artist
PROFILE
Nelson Tai
LOCATION: Hong Kong

Nelson is a concept designer working in the film and video games industries. He specialises in hard-surface science fiction designs.
https://bit.ly/3MmVnRv

Technique focus

LET THE STORY LEAD THE DESIGN

Nelson Tai takes cues from his personal sci-fi project when constructing a hard-working droid


"This droid is from MOMENTUM!, an ongoing personal project that I have in development. The Tetsu Robotics' D2 droid's job is to deliver the next generation of mobility, intelligence and machine assistance. I wanted to design a droid, and the upcoming story provided the perfect reason to create one. It carries out a lot of heavy-lifting tasks in its crucial role as part of a hyperpod racing pit crew, so with this in mind I designed it with exposed mechanical elements and a frame structure to reflect its functionality."
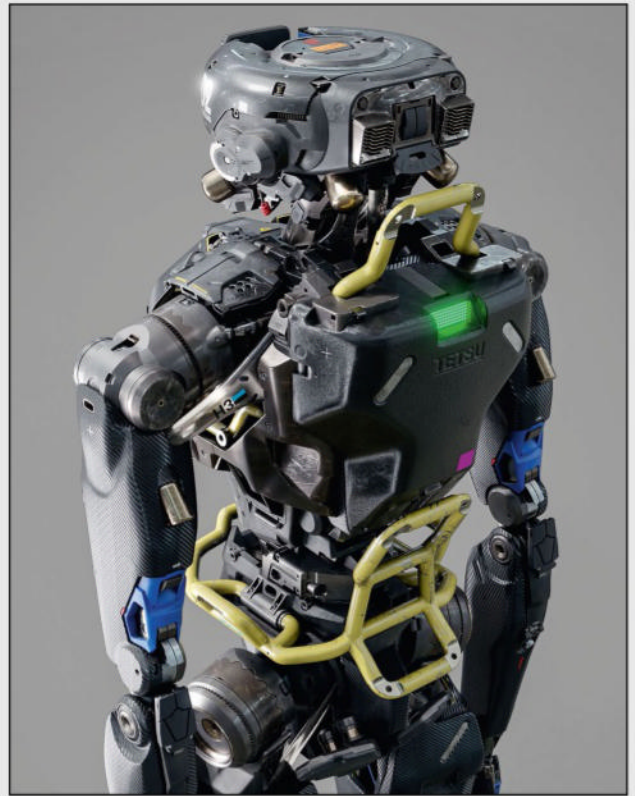
How I create...
AN INDUSTRIAL ROBOT CONCEPT
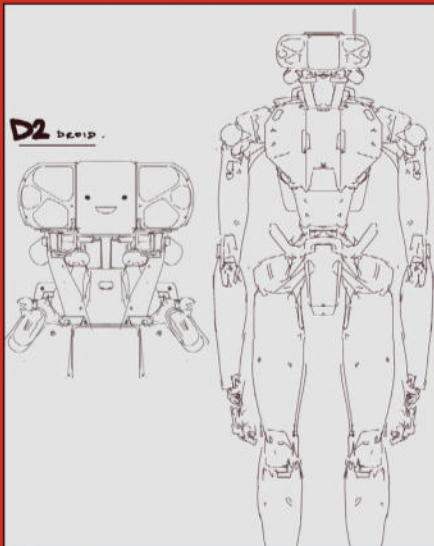
1 Starting sketch
It's best to begin with a quick 2D sketch. It gives you an overview of the design, and it's a chance to easily revise any elements that you're unhappy with, once you visualise them. This will always be a faster and more efficient way of working, compared with directly jumping into doing a 3D sculpt or blocking things out.
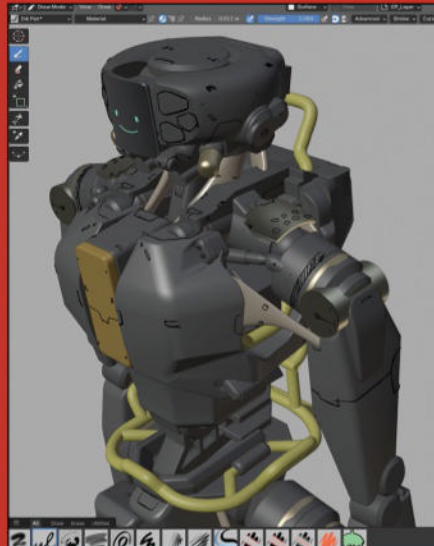
2 Refine with grease pencil
After blocking out the design in 3D, I use Blender's Grease pencil tool to start defining and planning out the design more precisely. Set the Stroke placement to 'surface', then freely sketch on anything that can help with further visualising the design. Set the Eraser brush to 'Eraser Point' to cleanly erase strokes.

3 Lay down meshes
When working on more complex shapes and blending them, I send meshes over to ZBrush for further design work with the free add-on GoB. Blender is able to handle extremely dense meshes, but I would still recommend meshes to be decimated before sending them back, to keep file sizes manageable.

Even though a model may look solid, it's nothing more than a skin of polygons.

To create see-through 3D objects depends on understanding transparency, refraction and roughness.

MAKE A 3D OBJECT SEE-THROUGH

Adjusting a model's transparency in 3D applications is easy and complicated at the same time, reveals **Mike Griggs**

Once you're comfortable applying a colour to an object (see last issue), the next common question is how to make something see-through? Glass, water, skin, gemstones… unless it's the blackest of blacks then all materials have a degree of transparency.

However, transparency in 3D isn't a single setting. A material that simply lets light through would look like cling film at best. When light rays hit the surface of an object, some rays enter the object, 'bend' through it and then escape on another part of the object; the bending through the object is called refraction. Reflection is where the remaining light rays have bounced off the surface of the object to show the world around it. It's the mixing of reflection and refraction and their inherent properties that makes glass look like glass, for example.

As with colours, these attributes are handled by a material/shader within 3D applications. While this may seem counterintuitive (it's a material that controls the transparency, not the object), remember that we're telling the 3D tool how to display the object when we render, not what we're seeing in the viewport window when we edit. Figuring out the difference between a render view and an edit view is one of the biggest 'ah ha!' moments when learning how to use a 3D program.

Mike has experience in content creation, workflow design and emerging creative technology. See www.creativebloke.com.

## Establish different views of an object

1 **Render view vs Edit view**
What you see while editing isn't necessarily what you get when you render. Most 3D tools show a simplified view while you work: objects might look transparent in the Edit view (if set to wireframe mode, say) but still look solid when it's time to render. If your transparent object looks like a solid lump while rendering, this could be the reason.

2 **Index of Refraction (IOR)**
Refraction is a phenomenon that varies depending on the material. Increasing IOR controls how much light bends as it passes through. Water has an IOR of around 1.33, for example. The foreground sphere has its IOR set to 0 and the background sphere has its IOR set to 1.52. This shows how adjusting IOR values can achieve different artistic effects.
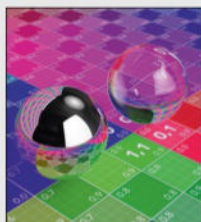
3 **Hollow vs solid objects**
3D objects are usually just a shell of polygons rather than a solid 'object', and this can affect how transparent materials work with them, especially if there's an object inside. The foreground sphere is solid and shows the interior object very differently from the background sphere, which has been modelled with a slight thickness to the glass.

An diagnostic texture map has been applied to this model to check for spacing and warping.
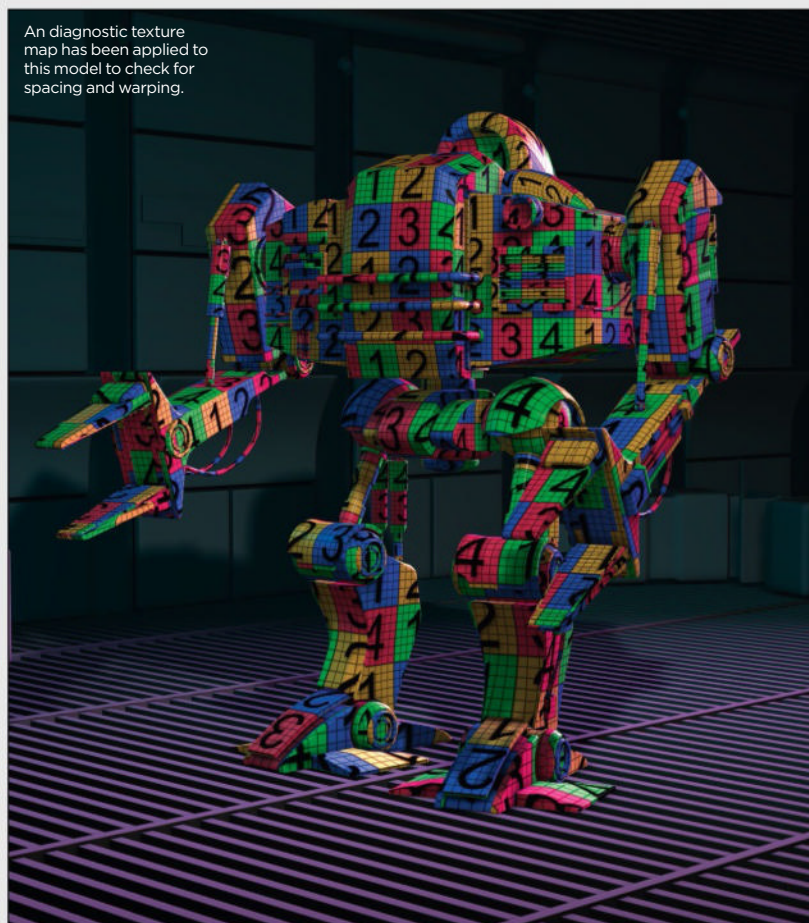
ENHANCE ANY 3D MODEL BY APPLYING TEXTURES

Ant Ward explains how UVs and texture maps are an easy way to add detail to a 3D object

Truth be told, a basic polygon model can look pretty boring. You can soften the normals, which we discussed in the previous issue, or for more experienced users, play around with its shaders. We'll cover these topics in a future instalment, but shaders can be used to change the surface properties of a model, such as its colour, shininess and reflectivity, together with a host of other options.

These are good for overall model appearance changes but what if you require more detail? To achieve this you would use a texture map. This is a flat image that's wrapped around the model – much like how you would use a roll of jaunty festive paper to gift-wrap a Christmas present.

However, you can't simply cover a model with a texture. First you have to
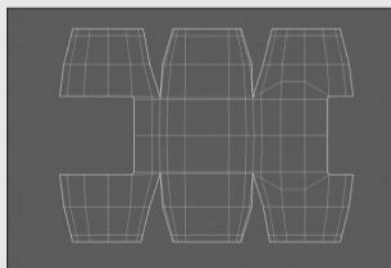

An unwrapped UV shell, ready to match the texture page before being applied to a 3D model.

define a set of UVs. These are coordinates located at each vertex. They point to a position on the texture page, enabling you to plot each polygon to a part of the page. Let's have a quick look at how you would approach this. *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.*

## Create a new set of UVs and generate a UV shell
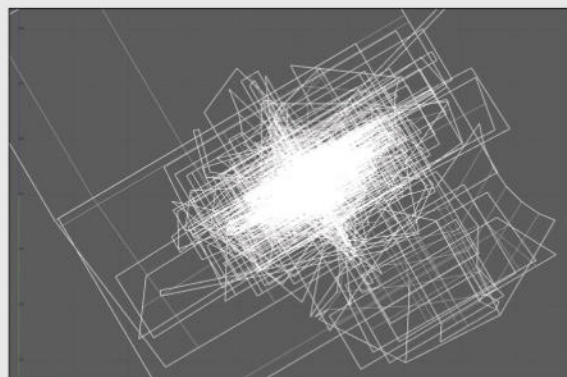
1 Establish base UVs
A model will have some UVs by default, but as it's worked on these can become jumbled and unusable. To fix this you can first apply a new set of UVs to the model. These are quite generic, but will give you a good starting point to work from.
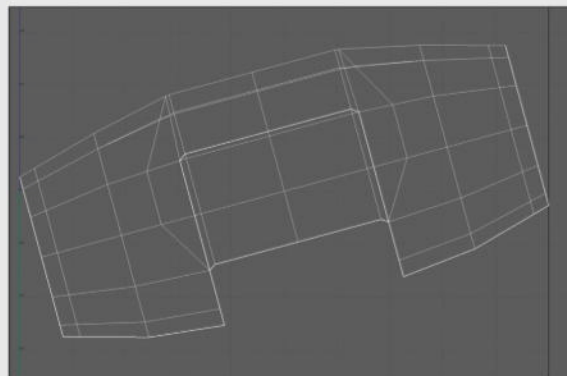
2 Cut and unwrap
UVs need to be laid out flat to match the texture page, and to achieve this you simply cut them into pieces, referred to as 'UV shells'. Each shell can then be spread out and untangled, giving you an unfolded version of that section of the model, a process often called 'unwrapping'.
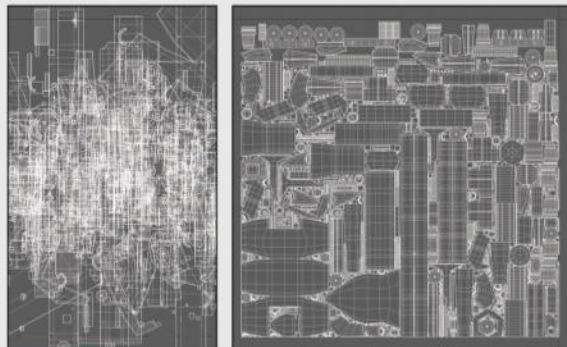
3 Organise your shells
Now comes the fun part. All the shells that you've made now need to be arranged so they fit into a square, all while wasting as little space as possible. The size of each shell is important too and needs to be proportionate to how the texture will be seen on the model.

RIK SCHUTTE

Blender Studio's lead animator talks about the influence of video games and changing sources of inspiration

Where did your artistic journey start?
I've been drawing figurines, cars and animals for as long as I can remember. I'd say the spark was already there in primary school, when a friend and I decided we wanted to make video games together. We drew our own stories, characters and enemies on paper. That was really the beginning of my artistic journey.

What is your main source of inspiration?
I've got to say that this has changed quite a bit over the years. As an aspiring artist, I used to look up to experienced animators from major animation studios. Nowadays, I try to find inspiration in the ordinary things in life.

As a father of three young kids, I'm often inspired by the chaos,

FACE FACTS
Rik and the Blender Studio team have been working on a facial-rigging workflow that enables artists to build high-quality character facial rigs in Blender. The latest character, Storm, includes new features and tools from Blender 5.0. Animators can download this character and animate him for their own movies or portfolio shots. A facial-rigging course will be available to enable riggers to apply this workflow elsewhere.

drama and charm they bring into my world. Spending holidays in nature or clearing my mind on a long hike also helps a lot. It creates space for new ideas and inspiration to enter my brain. Weird how that works, but it does!

As a young artist, were there worlds – perhaps in movies, comics or art, for example – that gave you a desire to create your own?
The Elder Scrolls series of games is still incredibly nostalgic to me. I had my dad's old computer set up in the cupboard under the stairs, where I'd stay up all night playing with a friend. When I eventually got my hands on 3ds Max, I figured that we could start making our own open-world adventure game! I still remember the excitement of realising what 3D software could do.

Tell us about your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?
When I was studying 3D animation, I applied for a freelance marketing

> 66 **Blender Studio is a unique place that challenges me both creatively and technically** 99

gig for a web-development startup. Since no one at the company had any experience with 3D, I had to produce everything myself. I learned a lot from that project. The freedom and autonomy were incredibly valuable, and being able to handle it all gave me confidence for future work.

What's the last piece of art that you finished, and how do the two differ?
I've now been working at Blender Studio for four years now and I really love it. It's a unique place that challenges me both creatively as well as technically, by pushing the boundaries of animation. I got hired as a lead animator and that evolved into directing Blender's short film: Wing It!.

Because it relates to my first commission, the confidence and freedom it gave me to explore new skills back then are fully reflected in the work I do now at Blender.

EERIE EXPEDITION
Released in 2021, the short film Sprite Fright – an 80s-inspired horror comedy – was Rik's first project as lead animator at Blender Studios.

If you were starting out now, what advice would you most appreciate?
Surround yourself with positive-minded people. But to move forward, be bold and explore. You need people around you who encourage that. Being connected with the right people can help you take huge leaps in developing your skills and creativity.

Are there any challenges to working in 3D?
The challenge is to have the computer do as little as possible when it comes to creative decisions, so the stylised art can truly come to life. For me, it's important to see the 'handcraft' of the artist behind both the artwork and the software.

How has 3D changed for the better since you've been working in it?
It's definitely become more diverse and interesting in terms of style. When Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse was released, I felt like a new paradigm had opened up for mainstream animation movies. I'm very thankful to be a part of this as I was working as an animator on that movie. It set a new milestone and many new styles have been explored since.

Born and raised in the Netherlands, Rik fell in love with 3D computer graphics when he was in high school. He was hired by Blender Studio as a lead animator on the short films Sprite Fright and Charge, and made his directorial debut on Wing It!, Blender's open movie project.

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