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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

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15 TIPS TO CRAFT BELIEVABLE LANDSCAPES

EXCLUSIVE GO BEHIND THE SCENES AT ILM
Art director Jason Horley on the studio's culture

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FUTURE
ISSUE 263

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



We have reached 20 years of ImagineFX and to mark the occasion, we look back at some highlights of our two decades.

At the time of writing, it's the new year and, for many, that means resolutions, new ventures or setting some goals to do more of a beloved hobby.

With that in mind, we're covering a wide gamut this month, with the aim of both inspiring your projects and helping you learn some new skills to aid you in levelling up.

We have a fantastic Marvel Snap, Spider-Punk tutorial by Léo Chiola, where he takes you through his entire process, from sketch to delivery.

Discover Cheri Wang's advice for imbuing your art with backstory to ground it in realism.

For the 3D fans out there, our friends at Athena Productions demonstrate their methods for creating terrifying key art.

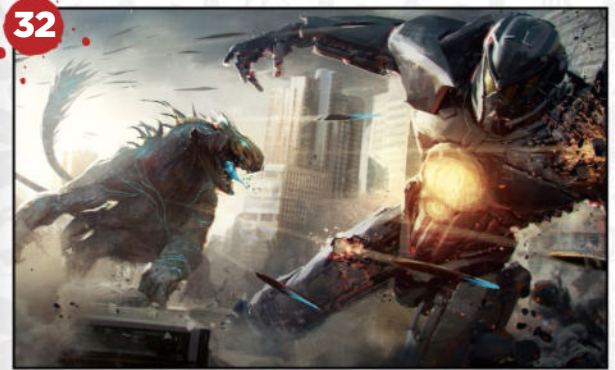
On top of that, we have stunning sketches from Cole Eastburn and a look at how to develop a pair of concept characters with Nick Bray.

Enjoy the issue.

Rob

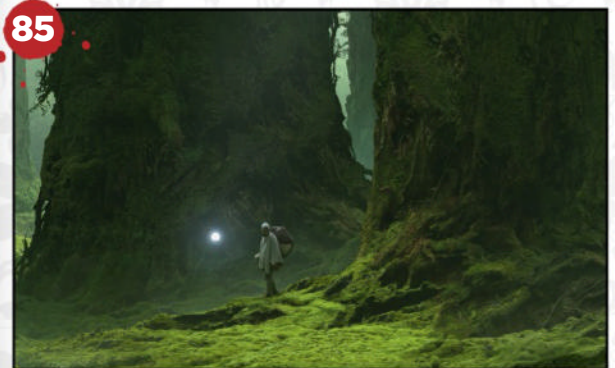
Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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



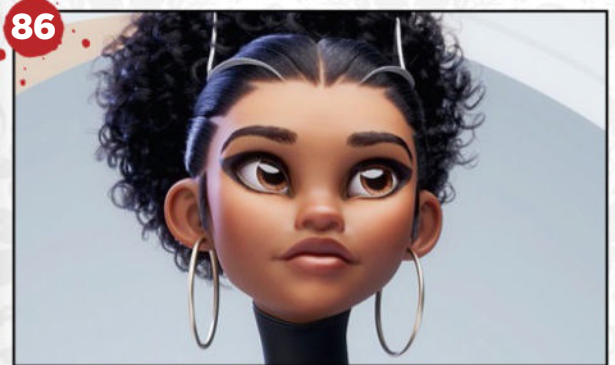
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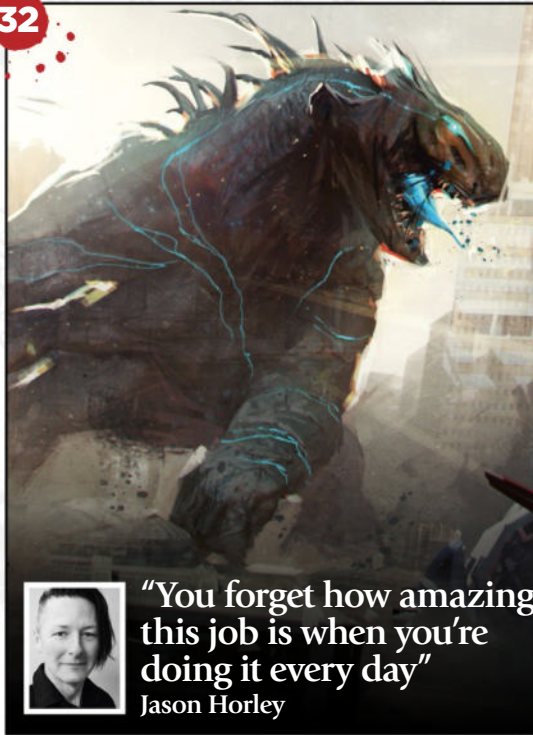
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"You forget how amazing this job is when you're doing it every day"
Jason Horley

FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



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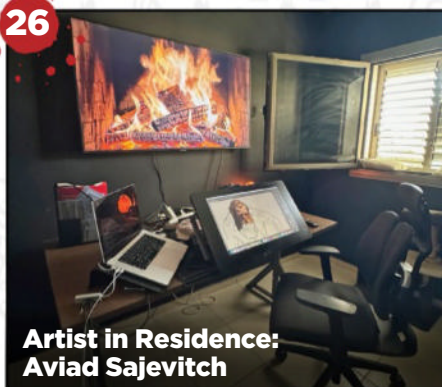


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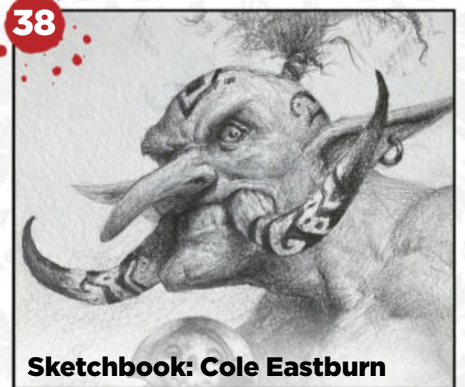
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Artist in Residence:
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Sketchbook: Cole Eastburn



FANTASY SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX
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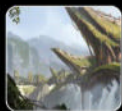
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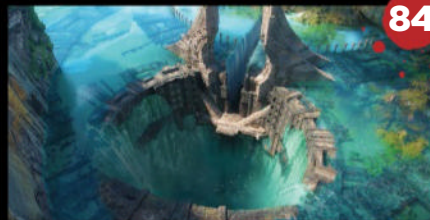
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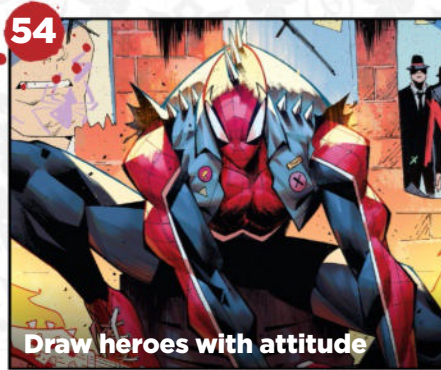
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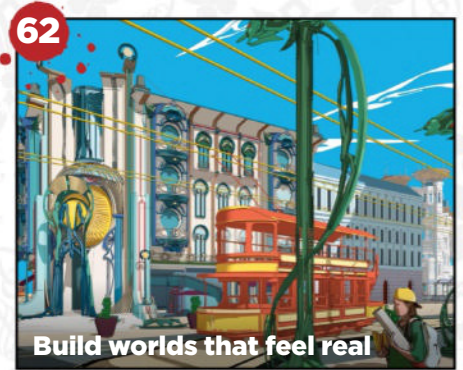
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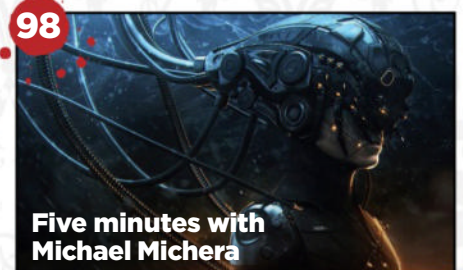
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<https://bit.ly/shapelanguage>
- 2 Click the download link**
Find your files ready for download.
- 3 Download what you need...**
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Next month

Artwork: Oscar Juárez



Next month in...
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MODEL EPIC FIGURINES

Turn your favourite designs into 3D-printed collectibles with our beginner's guide

Become an online hit with fan art
Learn how to grow your audience and open doors with beloved characters

Dragons, warriors, pigeons and more!
Joe Gronow uses his expressive lines to create a sketchbook of wacky characters

Orchestrate sci-fi settings in Blender
Game concept artist Thomas Osbourne shows his process for futuristic scenes

ISSUE 264 ON SALE 10TH MARCH
IN PRINT & DIGITAL

Content of next issue is subject to change

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

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State of the *Art*

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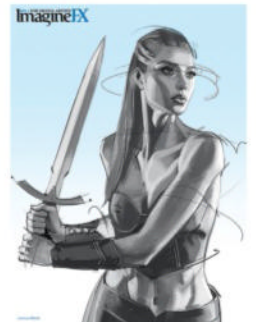
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THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



YuCong Tang

LOCATION: China **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate **WEB:** <https://tyc001x.artstation.com>

YuCong is a concept designer from China. He prefers direct brushstrokes when working digitally. "I enjoy depicting huge machinery and natural environments, so they often appear simultaneously in my work."



2





1 THE GARRISON TROOPS OF THE FORTRESS

"This is a story I'm working on. In this world, set in the late 19th century, there will be dragons serving as aerial forces and huge ground warfare machines."

2 DISASTER EVENTS IN THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE

"I incorporated elements from horror and monster movies to tell the story of a team dealing with sudden anomalies. Arrival and Godzilla (2014) inspired me."

3 PENGUIN EXPEDITION TEAM

"People drive huge machines to explore extreme environments. I was inspired by polar documentaries and the giant machinery used in mines."

4 HIGH-ALTITUDE SUPPLY SHIP

"Inspired by large airships and refuelling aircraft, I designed a fuel supply vessel that navigates through clouds. It features a heavy industrial style."



Polina Gipp

LOCATION: Vietnam **MEDIA:** Paint Tool Sai 2, Clip Studio Paint **WEB:** <https://artstation.com/gipp>

Polina is a fantasy illustrator specialising in narrative and story-driven art for tabletop RPGs, games and books. She's developing her own comic book project alongside her illustration work.

1 A SPEECH

"The main task here was to ensure that the oracle's pose conveyed the context and main thrust of his speech, while at the same time leaving a hint of subtext concealed behind his back."

2 A PARTY

"I decided to diversify the classic plot with additional dynamics, as well as a reminder that bad habits are harmful to your health!"

3 A BLIZZARD

"It was important to make the atmosphere feel cold, because this is a key plot point for the character. As a result, more time was spent on the snow than on the central figure!"







Kyle Enochs

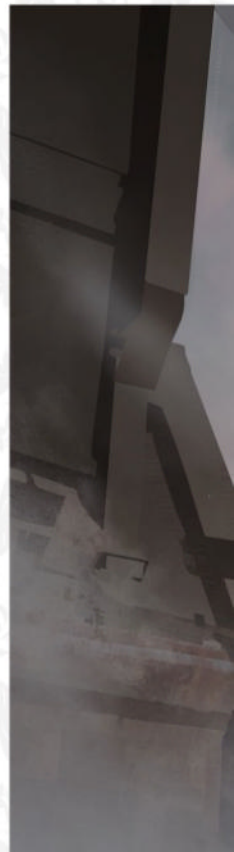
LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Unreal Engine, Blender **WEB:** www.artstation.com/neonpolygon

Kyle leads the concept department at Gunfire Games, and has contributed to several film and book covers. He enjoys sketching, searching for ideas with a hook and finding ways to imply a wider context through design decisions.

1



2



3



1 BARNACLES

"I love thinking about worlds, but drawing environments has never come to me as naturally as characters. I'm always working to expand the range of ideas that I can confidently express."

2 SPLINTERS OF HEAVEN

"Finishing images has always been a struggle. But a book cover illustration job - one with rich source material and a collaborator relying on me - was a good way to push myself."

3 THE MAGE HUNTER

"I love westerns, history, the weird and combining things in unexpected ways. Most of my personal work focuses on weaker areas, but this is a rare character."

4 TEAMWORK

"When creating a scene, I often fall back on characters. The juxtaposition of big and small characters is something I've gotten a lot of mileage out of."

4



Margherita Castello

LOCATION: Italy MEDIA: Clip Studio Paint WEB: www.leevolt.carbonmade.com

Maggie is an illustrator and comic book artist who loves to explore fantastical and surreal themes inspired by nature and history, in particular the Middle Ages. In her artwork she likes to blend mystery and subtle storytelling with deep, vibrant hues.



1 THE ARRIVAL

"This piece is inspired by late-medieval depictions of comets. I used rich blue hues and referenced architecture from the era to capture the mysterious atmosphere."

2 BARNABAS

"This simple artwork features an angelic character from a story of mine. I used soft digital pastels for the rendering and tried to emulate a stylised iridescence on his sparrow wings."

3 THE CURSED

"Created for the upcoming Cursed Zine and inspired by Michelangelo's Torment of Saint Anthony, this artwork is a fantasy interpretation of the biblical devil."



4 WATCH YOUR STEP!

"I made this artwork for Gallery IYN in Osaka in late 2022. It showcases two characters from one of my projects. I wanted to paint a beautiful and slightly ominous atmosphere shrouded in greenery."





Antonio José Manzanedo

LOCATION: Spain MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.artstation.com/ajmanzanedo

Antonio is an illustrator who specialises in dark, epic fantasy art, with a client list that includes Wizards of the Coast and Blizzard. He fuses digital tools with a classic, painterly aesthetic to craft brutal worlds and legendary creatures.

1 SHATTERFALL

"I used a high contrast of vibrant reds and cool tones to increase the dramatic tension. I chose a low angle and an exaggerated, contorted pose in order to capture the character's internal turmoil. The wings and broken feathers help me create movement and frame the composition."

2 WEREWOLF

"A strong moonlight illuminates the werewolf. Something has caught his attention; he knows where his prey is and is about to strike. I used muted blue, violet, and green tones to create a cold, mysterious atmosphere. I love painting anthropomorphic beings, pushing their anatomy to the limit."





4

3 KEEPER OF LOST SOULS

"In this piece, I used a desaturated and limited colour scheme to enhance the gloomy atmosphere. The silhouette of the massive raven and the rider act as the main focal point, while the graveyard setting adds weight to the narrative."

4 DRAGON RIDER

"When painting, I don't feel the obligation to define every detail. I prefer to detail only areas of interest while blurring others to guide the viewer's eye. This approach helps involve the viewers with the work."



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



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Tideborn

YEAR CREATED: 2025 MEDIA: Blender, 3D Coat

“I discovered sea fort references while browsing for inspiration, which sparked a strong interest. With a long-time fascination for pirates and the sea, I researched the structure and history of such forts. My goal was to create a grounded yet distinctive design, blending real-world details with imagination to make the setting feel engaging and memorable.”

THE WATCH





Artist **PROFILE**

Jordan Loo

LOCATION: Malaysia

Jordan is an aspiring environment artist who enjoys building worlds and themes through art. Their works aim to tell stories and spark imagination.



www.therookies.co/projects/87216



ARTIST NEWS, SOFTWARE & EVENTS

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FANTASY & SCI-FI DIGITAL ART ImagineFX

YOUR DIGITAL ART ON SHOW

16-page gallery of inspirational fantasy and sci-fi artwork

see page 10



FREE FANTASY POSTER!
With artwork from the world's leading digital artists

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WAYS TO DRAW BETTER BODIES

Discover the secrets of the human anatomy

Turn to page 84

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All the files you need to create stunning artwork
Page 67

Also inside

- Fantasy painting made easy
- Create sci-fi characters in Poser
- Learn how to draw manga
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Create amazing
FANTASY ART

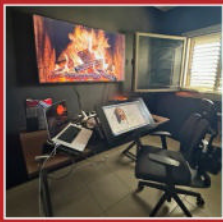
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Start on page 67

ALL THIS AND WE MEET THE MAN BEHIND THE ART OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR

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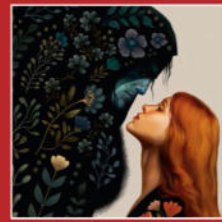
FIRE UP YOUR IMAGINATION

Artist Aviad Sajevitch likes to work in front of a blazing fire... or rather, a wall-mounted TV of a fireplace streaming from YouTube. It creates a cosy atmosphere!
Page 26



SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

We catch up with Thomas Brissot, a concept artist turned illustrator who reveals how he's making a living from his own imaginary worlds.
Page 28



YOUR VIEWS, YOUR ART

One reader tells us that issue 262's cover might be her favourite. There's also praise for concept artist Matt Savage and Lucas Lacerda's tutorial on lore-driven art.
Page 31

Celebrating 20 years of ImagineFX

Happy birthday 2026 marks 20 years since ImagineFX burst onto newsstands, making it the perfect time to look back at two decades of serving the art community

If you're a long-time ImagineFX reader, it may only feel like yesterday when we first appeared in the shops to inspire artists, highlight new talent and champion the work of industry-leading professionals. And whether you work with pencils or pixels, we sincerely hope you've enjoyed the journey as much as we have.

Ever since our inaugural issue was published in 2006, it's been our goal to bring the artistic community together with fascinating interviews, deep dives into art techniques and key product reviews that can elevate your craft. If we've helped even just one of you to

take your work to the next level, we consider our mission accomplished.

Birthdays are the perfect time to take stock, though. And to celebrate, we've decided to look back on some of our proudest moments. From exploring the studios of art heroes to covering the latest developments in the industry, it's been a busy 20 years. Whittling down our top picks was tough, but the one thing that unites them is the passion of the community that we continue to be grateful for.

It's been a real honour to have you along for the ride. Here are just some of the highlights of the story so far...

ISSUE ONE OF IMAGINEFX...

Digital art was still in its early stages in 2006, but our first issue- with cover artwork by **Kyung-Min Cho** - tapped into people's desire to learn more. Inside were the likes of **George Hull**, Don Seegmiller, Henning Ludvigsen, Frazer Irving, **Robert Chang**, and children's book illustrator **Jonny Duddle**, all keen to pass on their knowledge.



GO ON A STUDIO TOUR

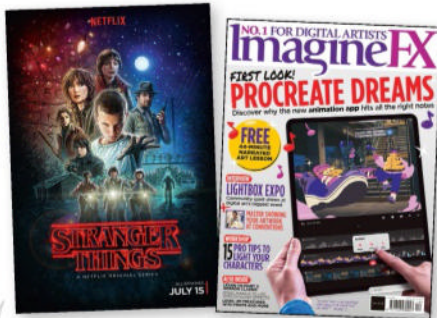
Issue 43 was our first Artist in Residence feature, when we visited **Lee Carter's** studio, and since then it's gone on to profile a variety of creative setups ranging from the tidy to the chaotic. Just take the workspace of Magic: The Gathering artist **Steve Argyle**, which he describes as "a decadent little corner crockpot of clutter, slow roasting Heaven and Hell."





DIGITAL ART TITLE GOES DIGITAL!

In October 2011, ImagineFX broke new ground by being one of the first magazines to launch a **digital edition** on Apple's Newsstand platform. Today, readers can enjoy a new issue the instant that it's published on iOS, Android, Windows, Mac or ebook.



PROCREATE LANDS ON THE IPAD

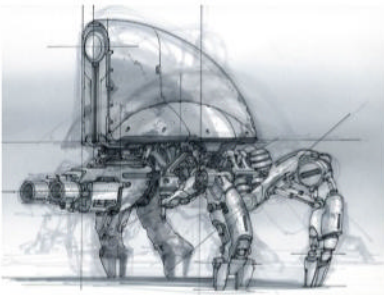
2011 was a digital art game changer thanks to the launch of Procreate. The affordable iPad art app has been used by **Kyle Lambert** in his iconic Stranger Things poster – see issue 140 – and **Doug Chiang's** Star Wars concept art. In issue 232, we even looked at how the world of animation could be shaken up with the release of **Procreate Dreams**, which also won't break the bank.



ROLL FOR WISDOM

We weren't the only ones celebrating a landmark birthday recently. **Dungeons & Dragons** turned 50 in 2024, and to mark the occasion we dedicated issue 247 to the popular tabletop role-playing game. Complete with a cover by Larry Elmore that pays homage to his iconic box art, this special edition looks back on D&D's rich artistic history with insights from the likes of renowned fantasy author and artist Tony DiTerlizzi, who pins the success of his career on the game. Ralph

Horsley – who would eventually go on the work on the property – shares how D&D changed the direction of his art when he started playing at age 13, and creature designer Alexander Ostrowski reveals how he updated its classic dragons for a modern audience while staying true to their storied history. Topped off with insights from Anne Stokes, who proudly flies the flag for painting "kick arse" girls in armour, this issue was a true delight to put together.





COVER ARTISTS

One of the regular high points of collaborating with industry-leading artists is seeing the covers they lovingly create for us. Each issue has a goal or theme in mind, whether it's the mighty **Loish** helping us to celebrate issue 150, **Asia Ladowska** explaining her manga art skills (issue 172), profiling a titan like the late, great **Kim Jung Gi** (issue 178), **Karl Kopinski's** tips to get better at drawing (issue 192) or advice on painting Catwoman from comic artist **David Nakayama** (issue 229). Over 20 years, that's a lot of standout cover art – and artists!

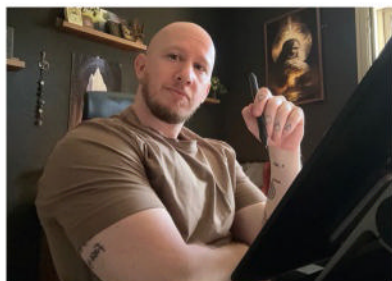
SKETCHBOOK INSIGHT

Finished artworks are all well and good, but there's also plenty to learn from raw drafts. This is the thinking behind our regular **sketchbook specials**, which invite pros such as Ben Mauro, Rain Rouhani, Achy Bright and Jennifer Park among many others to share their rough drawings and doodles. Elsewhere, issue 235 saw legendary life-drawing illustrator **Glenn Vilppu** pass on his advice, which launched our 'how to draw...' series for artists keen to master the portrayal of the human form.

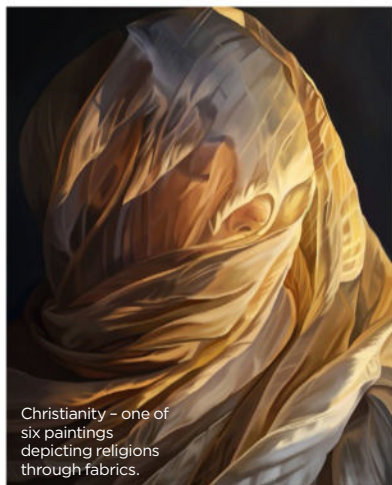


VISIONARY ARTWORK

Recently we've had a raft of talented artists appear in ImagineFX, who have all worked on films, TV shows and comics. Whether it's the art of **Dune** (issue 207), the iconic **Alien** films (issue 248) or Mike Dorey, Dylan Teague and Toby Willmsmer – all artists who have drawn for **2000 AD** (issue 211) – fictional franchises continue to inspire.



Reclining in my studio, waiting for some inspiration to take hold.



Christianity - one of six paintings depicting religions through fabrics.



4k fireplace on YouTube - keeps the atmosphere warm and cosy.

Reinforced window. The cats also use it as a balcony.

My MacBook Pro. The cotton swab underneath is for cleaning the fans in the Cintiq.

The monster of the room, my Wacom Cintiq Pro 24. Bought in 2018, our love keeps growing every day.

Aviad Sajevitch

Safe haven How this digital artist fuses technology with spiritualism to create his perfect working space



My studio is located in my home. As a self-employed artist and digital creator, I spend most of my day in this workspace. I live in Rishon LeZion, a city not far from Tel Aviv, Israel.

I've always had small work corners, whether in the living room or my bedroom, but in the home where I've been living for over two years now, I finally built the studio I had dreamed of. Given the reality of life in my region, I set it up inside the reinforced security room of the house, so I can continue creating even during times of danger.

My daily routine is quite steady. I usually wake up around 5am. There's something about those quiet early hours that lets me begin the day calmly and without pressure. A ritual of black coffee, meditation and gratitude is always how I open the morning, along with greeting my two cats who share this space with me. After that, I head out for my morning workout. Strangely enough, that's often when many creative ideas come to me - physical movement seems to get the creative wheels turning, whether it's for my personal paintings or commissioned work.



Klara, the lady of the house.

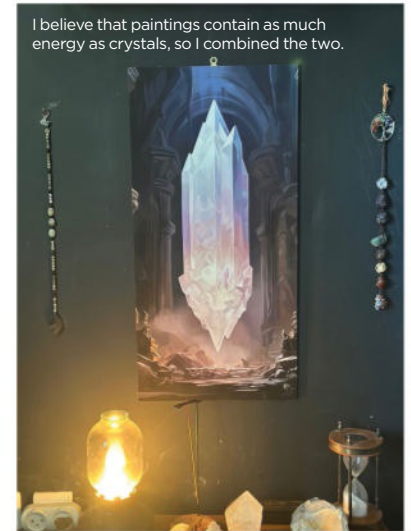
I usually start working around 10:30 or 11am, and continue until about 2pm, which is when I have my first meal. I've found that intermittent fasting really enhances my creativity and helps me stay deeply focused on the work itself. After a short break, I return to the studio and work until around 7pm.

SOUND SPACE

Music is an inseparable part of my day. There's always something playing in the background, usually classical music or something that matches the theme or energy of the painting I'm working on. As part of my spiritual path, I also guide people through past-life regressions and energy healing, so I have a small corner in my studio dedicated to crystals and purification tools. I feel these elements - the crystals, the incense, the sage and the overall atmosphere - are deeply woven into my creative process.



The entrance and reinforced door. The energy really shifts when entering.



I believe that paintings contain as much energy as crystals, so I combined the two.



This painting was born from the realisation that we are all connected.



The spiritual section of the studio: some of my crystals, sage, incense, and of course, my Tarot deck that I've been working on for two years.

Beyond the desk, paintings, crystals and shelves displaying children's books I illustrated in the past, I chose to paint all the studio walls black. People often think black is a colour that closes in or feels heavy, but for me, it's the exact opposite. I believe black holds within it the entire spectrum of colours, which makes the walls the most colourful they could possibly be. An added benefit is that there's no light reflection from the walls onto the screen when I work, so the colours appear much clearer and more accurate during the creative process.

There are many challenges, pros and cons to being an artist who works alone from home. At times, it can feel lonely or frustrating, but on the other hand, it offers an incredible sense of freedom and flexibility. Painting, for me, is a deeply intimate experience – a process of exploration. Because I mostly work in a hyperrealistic style, the act of painting requires deep focus and research.

As I mentioned earlier, my spiritual life has become a very strong part of who I am, and it naturally finds its way into my art. This house feels alive – you can sense another kind of



Bagheera, the studio's gatekeeper.

presence in almost every room, especially in the studio. When I paint, it often feels like a pure meditative state. Sometimes it even feels as if it's not me painting at all, but rather that I'm serving as a channel for something beyond myself to move through me.

These experiences tend to appear while I'm working – small, almost magical moments. Like any artist, there are times when I'm unsure about a piece or doubting how it's progressing. Then, out of nowhere, something falls off a shelf behind me, or the TV suddenly changes channels on its own, right to something that gives me exactly the message or inspiration I needed to move forwards.

Aviad Sajeitch is a 36-year-old Israeli artist and digital painter, who for over a decade has been creating exclusively in digital media. He signs his work under the name Ascendious, most of which can be found at www.instagram.com/ascendious_art.

The path of... Thomas Brissot

Fine fantasy Thomas shares his journey and evolution as an artist



An old, wise diplomat enters the circle of power, where the future of states is decided.

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?

I grew up in Paris in the 1980s, a city rich in culture and history. I spent a lot of time in museums, read manga and comic books, and played many video games that are now considered retro classics. At home, my mother dedicated an entire shelf to books about painters, so I was surrounded by images of all kinds and genres.

Looking back, I think my work sits at the crossroads of all those influences – fine art, popular culture, games, and illustration – without ever feeling the need to separate them.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your artwork through the years?

Introspection and getting to know myself better have had a huge impact on my work over time. I've also been playing jazz for about 25 years and learned two different instruments. Music taught me a lot about rhythm, improvisation, and intuition, and I often borrow ideas and wisdom from composers and musicians as much as from painters. It helped me build bridges between disciplines and stay open to experimentation.



Exploring the digital medium, finding interesting ways to paint light, volumes, their perception and expression.

This gang rules the underworld, its reach touching Kaolin's elite; meeting them by docks or trains means trouble.

Is there a painting that you saw in your formative years that changed everything? What was it?

The work of Erik Tiemens was a key revelation for me. It showed me how to connect my European painting background with more modern, entertainment-oriented imagery. His work also demonstrated that traditional painting and digital tools don't have to be opposed. His blog was called Virtual Gouache Land, which says a lot about that bridge between worlds.

Tell us about your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?

As far as I can remember, it was a series of illustrations depicting passages from the Bible for a Catholic magazine aimed at teenagers. My

current work is much freer, darker, and more graphically experimental. Interestingly, though, I find myself bringing mythology and spiritual themes back into my work more and more, so there's still a subtle connection between then and now.

What's the last piece you finished, and how does it differ from your earlier work?

The last piece I completed is called The Purple Gang. It depicts a violent group of thugs operating in the underworld of an ancient China-inspired fantasy world. I've always enjoyed portraying villains and darker themes, which, in a way, are very present in mythology and religious texts as well. Compared to my earlier work, this piece feels more confident, more narrative-driven, and more comfortable embracing darker tones.

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

Pretty much, with all the challenges and rewards that come with it.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Focus on the what rather than the how. Technique will develop naturally with time, but clarity of intention is much harder to build later on.

How has the art industry changed for the better since you've been working in it?

There are far more studios and opportunities today, which is a very positive change. When I started,



“ I often borrow ideas and wisdom from composers and musicians as much as from painters ”



It was at the end of a summer day that the news reached the governor.



In humid, deceptive nights, the legendary Tiger guards the Magical Porcelains. Thieves who sense weakness rarely survive.



around 2009, concept art positions felt almost unattainable, and I often had to explain what a concept artist even was. Now there are excellent schools teaching concept art, and many more ways to share and sell work independently.

Comic artists don't necessarily need publishers, and last year I don't think my artbook GRIT could have existed without crowdfunding. You can sell brushes, prints, books, or even build a career around sharing your process. It's a very different landscape, and in many ways a healthier one.

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

I project myself into every character or scene I paint. I approach it almost like acting, briefly stepping into each role. My goal is that everything I draw, paint, or sculpt contains a part of me.

That feels even more important today, at a time when images can be generated without any human sensibility or lived experience behind them.

What's your next step in art or life?

This year, I'm focusing on producing and selling high-quality fine art prints of my illustration work. I miss the physical presence of images and the relationship they create with the viewer. I'm also working on a second

A Visit to the Oracle: part of a series of paintings around themes of spirituality, myths, and robots.

artbook, continuing to develop my own imaginary worlds.

At the same time, I'll keep collaborating on video games and art-directing projects, including one I hope to develop myself with other talented artists.



Raised in Paris, Thomas studied fine arts and illustration at the École des Arts Décoratifs in Strasbourg.

After over a decade as a concept artist in games and animation, he now focuses on digital painting and illustration, creating atmospheric fantasy and science-fiction worlds designed to exist as standalone images, high-quality prints and books.
www.artstation.com/thomasbrissot

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Matt Savage shared some of his extraordinary concept work when he sat down to talk about his art and career.

now, but still find it immeasurably valuable to see other artists' work, to be inspired by and to learn from. Seeing Matt's work has fired me up, as well as reading all he had to say. Thank you!

Dean, via email

Rob replies *Dean, I love how that feature has your passions ignited. That's what we aim for here, and Matt's work is a key candidate for it. I love what he does, and his particular design style speaks to me too, so very glad I'm not alone in that.*

Colourful dimensions

Hi Rob. I'm writing to thank you for the tutorial in your last issue, where Entei Ryu showed how you can colour your 3D work using 2D software. I've always believed that 3D had to be completed in the render, with maybe a few tweaks in post, but this has opened my eyes to different ways of working and new styles to explore. I'm loving the new 3D section!

Arnold, via email

Rob replies *Great to hear from you, Arnold. So good to know you're enjoying our 3D section and that Entei's workshop opened some new doors for you. I love that final artwork, and it's testament to the art of exploring new workflows and not being confined by a single tool or bit of software.*

Laden with lore

ImagineFX team, please pass on my thanks to Lucas for his tutorial on using lore as a design tool. I found it really useful for a project I'm working on.

Jessica, via email

Rob replies *Hi Jessica. I will indeed, and glad his words of wisdom have proved useful. Using background is a great way to help characters fit the world they're in.*



New works that have grabbed our attention



Krishen Cotta
[@krishen.c](https://www.instagram.com/krishen.c)



Nicolas Jamonneau
[@nico_jam](https://www.instagram.com/nico_jam)



Joms Art
[@21_joms_art](https://www.instagram.com/@21_joms_art)

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



Cover star

Hello ImagineFX. As a long-time subscriber, I get very excited to see what the new issue looks like when it drops through the letter box. I wasn't disappointed last month. I think that has to be my favourite cover of all time. Beautiful composition and colours. It was fascinating to read the tutorial on its creation, too, having never even thought of symbolism in my own art. Well done!

Sabrina, via email

Rob replies *Greetings, Sabrina. It's always a pleasure to hear from our subscribers and I'm so happy you're a fan of Katja's cover art. She certainly knows how to draw on heritage and culture to give her art extra layers of meaning. I'm glad to hear she's inspired you, and I hope you manage to use some of her teachings in your next piece.*

Savagely good

What an artist Matt Savage is! I've been working as a concept artist for a while

Our last cover has proved a big hit, with its wonderful use of colour and composition.



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE?

Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 262 at [ifxm.ag/single-iff](https://www.ifxm.ag/single-iff).



PICTURING POSSIBILITIES

Jason Horley, supervising art director at Industrial Light & Magic's London studio, reveals all about the company's concept art culture with **James Clarke**

The dynamic between visual development, visual effects production and the shaping of creative choices underpins the flow of work across departments at ILM. Unpacking process and the spirit of creative exploration, **Jason Horley** offered us a detailed insight into life for the artists at the fabled studio, unpacking process and the spirit of creative exploration in a peek behind the curtain.



In its work on movies and television projects, in live-action and animation,

the ILM art department comprises a team of professionals based across all of the company's studios.

Its origins reach back to the 70s and the work of Ralph McQuarrie, who had been engaged by writer-director George Lucas to visualise key scenes and characters in action for Star Wars. These earliest images showed what the

“I never realised that my uni course could become an avenue into a film career”

world of a galaxy far, far away looked and felt like. Across the decades, that fluid dynamic between concept, image and screenplay has underpinned the studio's work on a diverse range of projects. Most recently, the ILM art department has contributed to movie releases including Lilo & Stitch and Superman, creating images that help to capture the feeling and tone of a given moment of visual spectacle.

Jason, can you tell us about your background as an artist?

I went to Falmouth School of Art [now Falmouth University] for two years, and at the time they were illustration courses with the idea that the artists on them would end up becoming book illustrators. I didn't realise that this would be an avenue into a film career. I hadn't planned on that. ➤



MIGHTY BATTLE

Jason combined Maya, KeyShot and Photoshop in this visual development image for 2018's Pacific Rim Uprising.



DESIGNS ON THE MOVE

Tron: Ares key art, which helped to define the dramatic tone of the environment and indicate motion.

All images courtesy of ILM

Interview

➔ I've been doing this now since the mid-90s. I started off by working at Disney when they were still doing traditional animation movies, and later transitioned across into various live-action films and TV.

What would you say characterises the ILM art department?

We're always doing so much in an art department that's working on multiple projects at the same time. Often, we'll work on projects and maybe will only be on it for a couple of weeks, then move on to something else. Compared to the VFX side of ILM, which is more post-production, we literally work in two phases: there's that early phase of getting stuff going, and then once a project's greenlit, we'll then carry on designing for the actual show, whether it's TV or film release. After that, we go through a phase of a few months of pre-production development and then it will be filmed. They'll film it all on location and on sets, and that footage comes back to ILM. The actual VFX work starts at that point; that's when we'll then come back on to the project and carry on designing all of the visual effects as well. As a department, we're probably working on any given film the longest in that respect.

In what way do the art department's concept artists have an impact on the evolution of a story?

Often, in those really early stages, the scripts will go through many revisions, so when we see a script in those early days, it's often quite thin and needs fleshing out. Over those early months of a show, up until the filming starts, a script goes through many changes. So, when we're on that really early stage and we start designing, we'll be



FILM FASTBALL

Senior concept artist Evan Whitefield depicted a high-energy showdown for last year's Superman movie, pitting the hero against the Engineer.



MOODY METROPOLIS

A cityscape paintover for The Creator, made by ILM senior concept artist Brett Northcutt.

doing everything from the characters to environments to props, to whole world-building ideas. A lot of the time, we'll create a design and the director or the production designer will see something in one of our concepts that will influence the script. They may see something and say, "Oh, we really love this character!" even though it's just a sketch of a character that's been put to one side. In that case, we might go back and flesh that design out, and

“It's great to still have those traditional skills like drawing, posing, colour and light”

then it becomes a bit more prominent within the final script.

How does the art department's work relate to other departments and disciplines on a production?

We often work with the production designer in the pre-production stage, before they go on to creating the sets that they're going to be filming on. Because we work at ILM and it's a VFX facility, we can bridge that gap. Our team can work with the production designer to help design a set, but also inform where they stop building a practical set and let VFX take over.

What is the dynamic between the traditional and contemporary processes you use?

Because there are lots of shortcuts and advantages now, especially speed-wise with 3D, there are so many things that you can use to speed up process. It's great to still have the traditional skills, such as the fundamentals of drawing, posing, colour and light. Having that basis to work from is really helpful.

Are there any artists whose work has had a particular influence on you?

I like the late 1800s: that's an era of painting that came a little bit before the Impressionists, when you had artists such as John Singer Sargent and John William Waterhouse. You had Joaquin Sorolla, who was a ➔

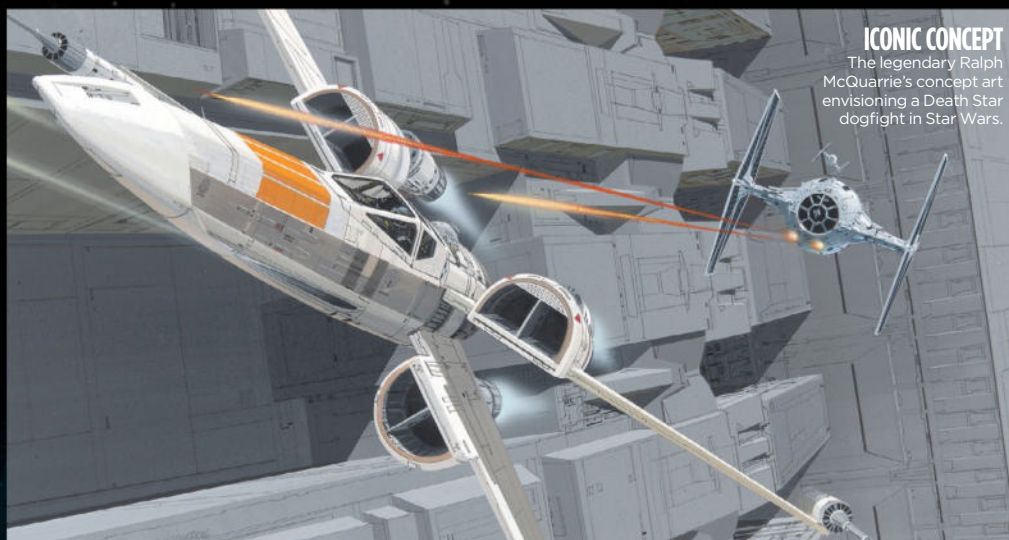
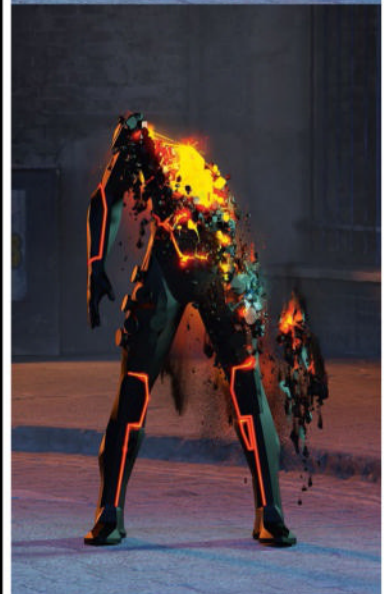
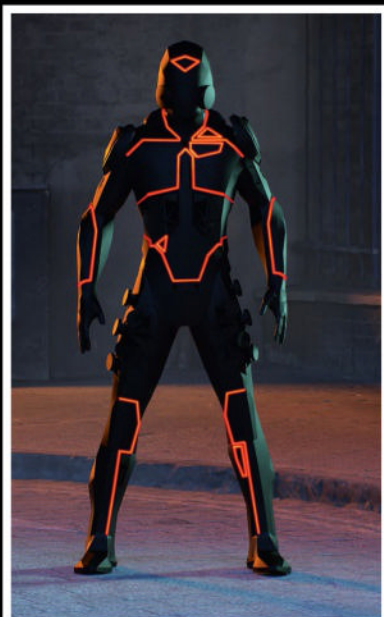


EGYPTIAN TEMPLE

Outside of his role at ILM, Jason's personal work allows him to explore style and process.

DRESS TO IMPRESS

Jason's art for *Tron: Ares* developed the series' established aesthetic in costume and form.



ICONIC CONCEPT

The legendary Ralph McQuarrie's concept art envisioning a Death Star dogfight in *Star Wars*.

STUDY THE VISUAL LANGUAGE TO BUILD ON EXISTING WORLDS

Creating with a universe's established physical cues is vital, as Jason tells us

"When it comes to working on an established franchise, they often already possess a visual language. If you compare *Star Wars* with *Star Trek*, for example, you can see that both are epic sci-fi worlds, but also very different. And so it's about studying existing material and

thinking, 'What is it about this world that's being created? What are those visual cues?' Even if you're creating something new, keeping some of the visual cues from movies or source material will let the audience know they're still within that universe and that world."



ROBOTS HAVE FEELINGS TOO

Concept art for *Transformers*: One needed to emphasise the body and facial mechanisms used for emotion and thought, as captured by Amy Beth Christenson.

SHADOW REALM

Jason looks to artists such as Joaquin Sorolla for the use of light and shadow in his art.



Interview

➔ Spanish painter. You had these amazing artists and they got to a peak of knowledge about colour and light – it was amazing. I always head for this era of painting. It's the pinnacle and those artists were economic in their level of detail; literally, a brush stroke was the right shade, the right colour or the right tone. It's incredible to see that in a traditional painting. Whenever you see that kind of thing, it's not only very inspiring, but that knowledge also sinks in. Whenever I'm doing a piece of concept art, even though it's digital now, I'm always thinking back to traditional paintings.

Is there a space at ILM for staff to refresh and explore fundamental drawing skills?

Yes. I'm going to deliver a couple of courses this year on life-painting. One will be in acrylics and one will be oils. We'll get a live model in, and we'll get some nice lighting set up. That's good because it'll be traditional painting, and even though we work digitally, people want to learn and have this experience. I've been doing it a while, so if somebody in the department doesn't really have the same level of traditional painting, I'll be passing on the knowledge to them. But then some of the younger members of the team, they've got knowledge that I don't have, perhaps in terms of modelling with ZBrush, so they're going to be passing on that knowledge to me and to other people. Everyone on the team

“ Sometimes you forget just how amazing this job is when you're doing it every day ”



ANCIENT WORLD

An early design for the main set of Marvel series Moon Knight.

J HORLEY



KNIGHT TIME

Jason's work for Moon Knight spanned initial sketches through to keyframe images.

has a solid skill set that they can share with others. It's a great opportunity to work with other people who can pass on that sort of knowledge.

How does your role as supervisor relate to the work you do as an artist within the department?

Because I'm fundamentally an artist, I don't ever want to lose that part of the work, so I'm hands-on pretty much all the time. Yes, I supervise the department as a whole, but then I'm also working on various projects just like the rest of the team. I really enjoy creating and painting.

What has been a recent standout project for you?

One of my favourite projects to work in recent years was Moon Knight, the Marvel television series based around the Egyptian gods. I worked with the production designer for a long time in pre-production, crafting all the sets they built for that show. I particularly enjoyed that; it's amazing when you're designing something and then see it built. There's something interesting, actually, because the main stage I built in 3D – and I remember some of the Egyptian statues that I built – there were some errors in the sculpt. I knew they were a little bit hidden, so it didn't really matter and I left them there. But when they built all those sets for real, they included those details. So literally everything you do, they match exactly. It's really interesting when you see those sets built and then lit properly. With every project that we work on in the department, we have to familiarise ourselves with the source material. A lot of these projects have a fanbase, and it's a fine line because you don't want to do exactly what's been done before – you want to bring something new to it – but you also can't stray too far from that source material, because then it won't be within the world that's already been created. So you have to familiarise yourself with the source material and then kind of riff off it.



ON THE HUNT

Foreground and background relationships create an engaging composition in another classic concept from Ralph McQuarrie.



CURSED AWAKENING

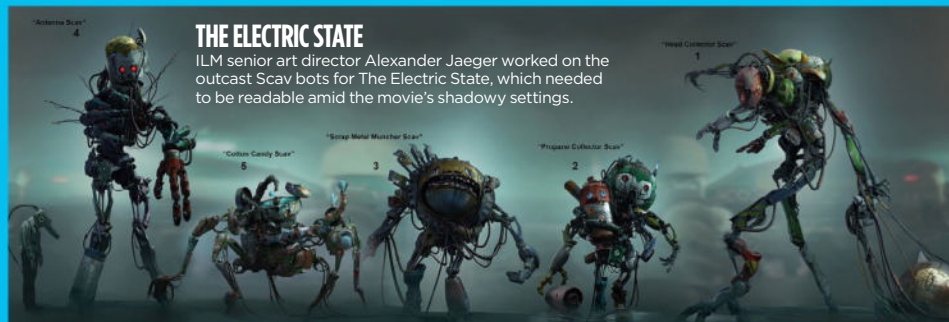
The title character from 2017's *The Mummy*, as depicted by Jason during development.

What advice would you offer to aspiring concept artists looking to break into the industry?

There are so many tools you can use that are simply amazing in terms of 3D modelling and painting. If you rely on these tools, they'll get you so far and you'll get some incredible results. But if you have fundamental art skills, you can take that knowledge and push certain elements further. We do things in 3D and you can tell the computer to render out the scene. It will look amazing, but if you don't have the art fundamentals – about drawing, painting, light and colour – you can't then take that scene and say, "Well, I'm going to change the lighting here and I'm going to increase some colour in the foreground, or play around with the scene." It's really beneficial to have those skill sets as your basis.

Does the international nature of ILM's different studios have an impact on enriching the creative work of the art department?

It's a really nice global melting pot. I know a lot of people who wonder whether they'll be a freelancer or work within a studio when they're leaving art school. One of the great things



THE ELECTRIC STATE

ILM senior art director Alexander Jaeger worked on the outcast Seabots for *The Electric State*, which needed to be readable amid the movie's shadowy settings.

SKETCHING AND SELECTING

Jason reflects on how he approaches the iterative design process

"Quick sketches are often just silhouettes or roughs that we build up to finish with a whole page. For example, you might have a page of 20 silhouettes and that'll go to the director, production designer and producers. There's a process in designing, especially when it comes to characters. Most of the work we do never

gets seen by anyone – it's only the final design that gets approved and eventually gets seen. And for that, there's been probably months of design work to get to that point. That's not to say the months of design work beforehand is bad, it's just not quite right and is all a part of the process the public never know about."



ADDED DIMENSION

Evan Whitefield needed to maintain the soul of *Stitch's* cartoon design for the reboot film's photorealistic style.

about working in a studio is that you learn from each other. When you're freelance, it can be a little solitary. You might freelance for a company, but you're not necessarily working within a team. I like the fact that in the VFX house, we've got an art department, we've got a team, and we can help each other. Everyone has a different set of skills and everyone brings a different background to the studio. One of the major advantages of being at ILM is that we have a global team who bring together those different ideas to share; you can see that coming through all the time. Sometimes you can forget how amazing a job like this is because you're doing it every day.



RINGS OF POWER

Visual development art for TV series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* made by Jason.

Cole Eastburn

The artist introduces an army of twisted creatures from his video game work and personal sketches. Tootsie Pops beware!

Artist PROFILE

Cole Eastburn
LOCATION: US



Cole has worked on video games and TCGs for more than two decades - with over 15 years making art for World of Warcraft. His passion has always been for creating characters and universes, especially fantasy-based, but loves working on any IP based in a creative world. Cole lives by a simple motto told by one of his idols - ABC: always be creating!
www.artstation.com/colehole

TROLL PENCIL SKETCH

"Just a sketch of a troll dreamed up while I was on a flight. They are one of my absolute favourite fantasy creatures."



HALLOWEEN ORC DRAWING

"Done for Orc-tober, these guys are another thing I can't stop drawing. It only takes him one bite to chomp his way into the centre of a Tootsie Pop."



CENTAUR

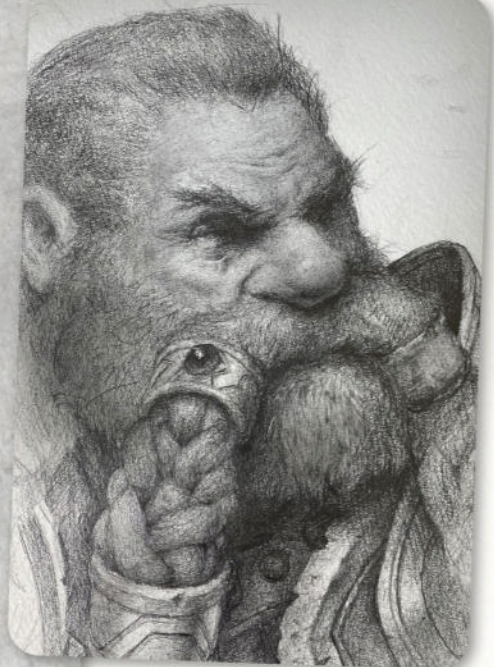
"Because who doesn't love a spiked horseshoe-clad, brass-knuckled centaur?"



“Gargoyles are one of those cool fantasy staples, right up there with orcs”

EVIL WITCH

"A simple yet terrifying character that I cooked up using Krita."



DWARF

"There's something I just seem to love about drawing dwarves. Don't ask me why, there's probably some weird trauma in my childhood, but I don't care! This bearded fella was done with HB pencil on some toothy sketch paper."



GARGOYLE

"Another sketch done in Krita as a mood piece for our new game at Notorious Studios - Eldegarde. Gargoyles are one of those cool fantasy staples, right up there with orcs or goblins, if you ask me."

BAT CREATURE

"A concept for a new flying creature. I used a toned paper and white pencil approach in Photoshop."



DRAGONKIN

"One of the future enemy concepts for Eldegarde. I wanted to make a more ripped and buff dragonkin character, lighting their dragonsteel blades on fire with their breath."

“There’s something I seem to love about drawing dwarves, just don’t ask me what!”



DARK VENDOR

"A concept for a shady dealer NPC. I liked the idea of just a smile in the darkness staring back out at you, as well as a huge dip in his table from where he leans on the same spot day in, and day out."



DARK VENDOR



WIZARD MAGE

"A playable character concept that needed a classic look, as if Gandalf and Merlin had a baby!"



WARRIOR

"Classic badasses like Conan were the inspiration for this burly character."

THREE HEADS

"What could be better than a two-headed ogre? Three heads! The brains are in the centre, with the dumb muscle and a wizard on either side."



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

Development sheet

Artist PROFILE

Nick Bray

LOCATION: Sweden



Nick Bray is a concept artist based in Stockholm, Sweden. His work is heavily influenced by his love of fantasy and science fiction,

which can be seen throughout his portfolio, which encompasses everything from characters through to environments.

<http://artstation.com/nickbray>

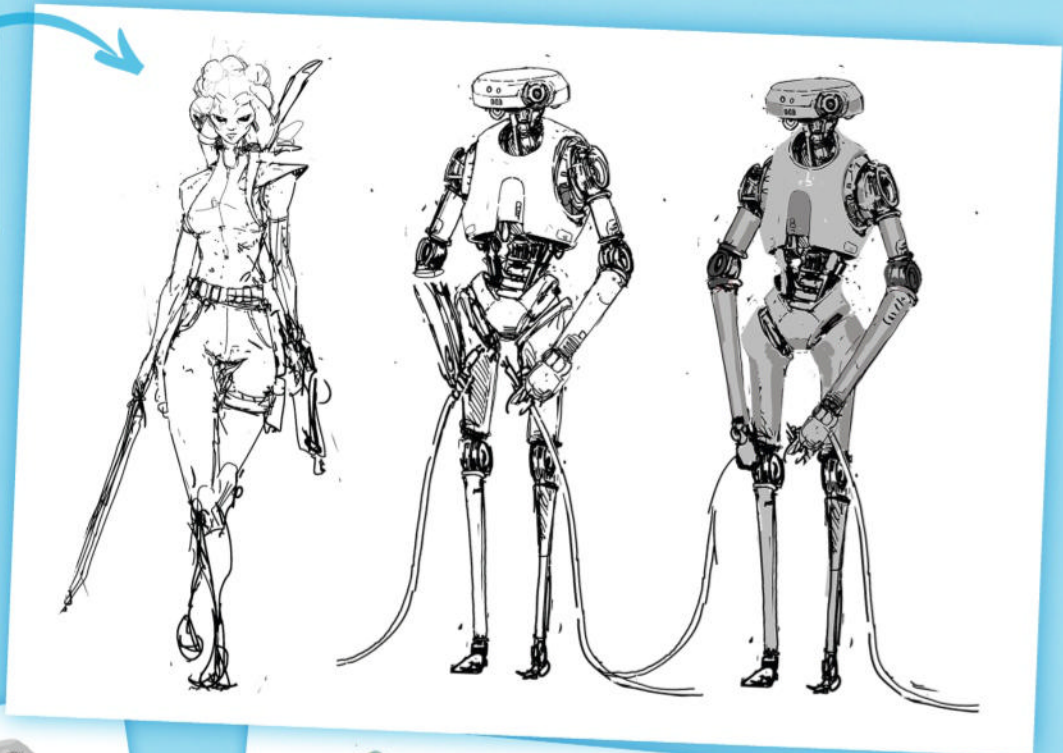
NO. 1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

PROJECT TITLE: OUTER RIM RASCALS

Nick Bray talks us through the process of creating two characters he designed to fit a Star Wars setting - Nautolan outlaw and smuggler Akomi and her droid companion Rudy

Rough lines

I start off with very rough line work sketches to work out the general shape and vibe I want. I knew going in that I wanted two characters, with one being a droid. I raided various artbooks for reference to get close to other designs in this universe.



Adding values

I tie down the sketches with some basic blocking in values or flat colours. This is where I start figuring out what details I want that might best communicate the type of characters these are.



Tweaking the concept

Here you can see the biggest jump in refinement. I decided I'm not happy with the outfit on my smuggler and changed it significantly to match the character better. I also refine the materials of the droid with the intent to make him feel old and weathered.





Supporting elements

At this point I started exploring what other kinds of tools and gadgets my smuggler might have, again with more exploration of source material where I really got a sense of the design language I wanted to emulate.



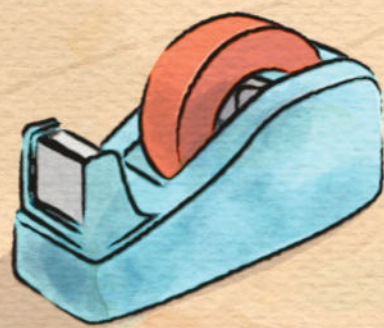
The ageing process

Final designs, with additional details added. I wanted the droid to feel like an almost ancient model, like a really old computer with too many components. The smuggler should feel reckless and no-nonsense.

SEND US YOUR CONCEPTS!

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

LET US KNOW! Email your WIPs and final images to: mail@imaginefx.com

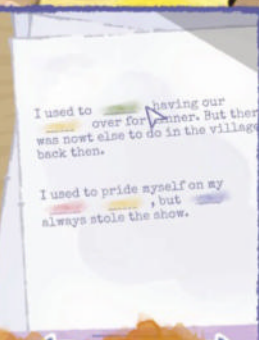


A Storied Life

Tabitha



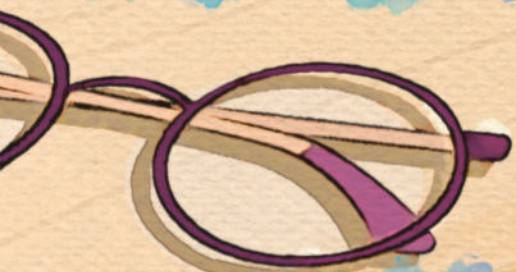
Piece together Tabitha's story through the items she's left behind



A story of love, laughter and memories



What do the objects we keep say about the lives we've lived?



Playable Demo



NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX Workshops



Workshop assets are available...

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

Advice from the world's best artists

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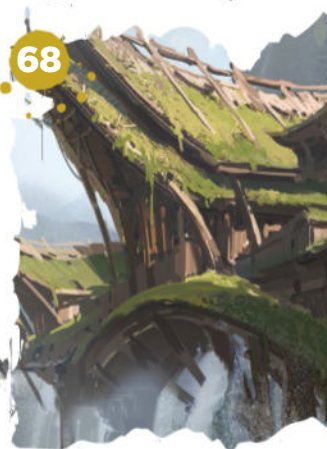
60



62



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This issue:

46 Use shape to aid composition

Eran Alboher shares his use of shape language to build engaging characters.

50 Start with values
Murat Gül guides us through the process of creating a dark fantasy environment.

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Get the most from your prints with a selection of advice from guru Heather Sterland.

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Léo Chiola reveals how he uses a hybrid process to create his illustration of Spider-Punk.

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Environment specialist Marco Gorlei gives insight on creating a moody, gloomy scene.

62 Build worlds that feel real

Cheri Wang talks through her process for building a fantastical yet believable world full of detail.

68 Add visual tension to designs

Discover how Dawn Pu creates a sense of danger in a daily sketch inspired by a real-life structure.

Photoshop USE SHAPE TO AID COMPOSITION

Artist PROFILE

Eran Alboher

LOCATION: Slovenia

Specialising in character design, illustration and 2D animation, Eran's work spans multiple creative industries, including games, films and TV. His main inspirations come from nature, fantasy, cartoons, art and music.

<https://bit.ly/3O4IT1B>

Eran Alboher shares his use of shape language to build engaging characters that tell their own story



In this piece, I aimed to create a small witch traveller riding a bird, focusing on atmosphere, character and visual clarity. From the beginning, I had in mind a mysterious figure with a calm, nonchalant personality; someone who feels experienced and self-assured rather than dramatic. I

wanted the character to appear as though she were quietly passing through the forest, observing rather than demanding attention.

In my work, I always put strong emphasis on shape design, using clear silhouettes and simplified forms to make the character immediately readable. My design thoughts were aiming towards triangular shapes in the overall

space, with circular ones to create shape contrast and lead the viewer to the focus point.

I combined natural elements, such as feathers, fabric and organic matter, with a more graphic and stylised approach. This balance allowed the design to feel grounded in nature, while at the same time maintaining a sense of visual boldness and intentionality.

How I create...

A TRAVELLING WITCH RIDING A BIRD



1 Simple planning

When I start a piece, I first set the 'architecture' of the illustration or design, which includes three points: a clear silhouette and having shapes that play well with each other (details are not important at this point); positions of objects and spacing; and flow and action lines. This blueprint helps with making faster iterations and setting your rules for the design.



2 Colours

These are not randomly picked; it involves a blend of mathematical principles and emotional responses. Understanding contrast can make elements stand out, while harmony can create a seamless integration. By choosing colours, you influence the mood and atmosphere, shaping the viewer's experience and evoking feelings associated with your work.

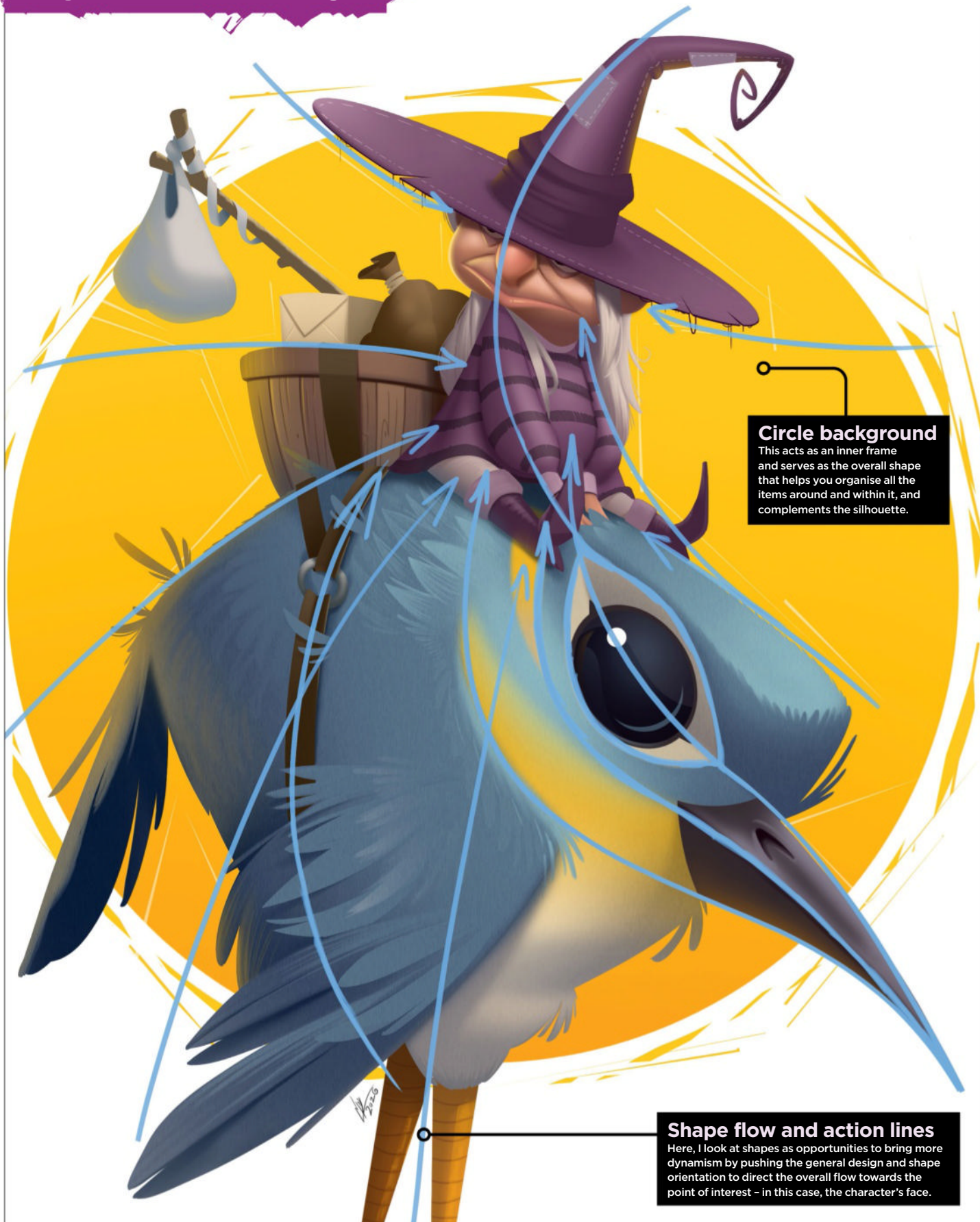


3 When's it done

There are a few things I look at before I ship it: whether the details are consistent, because I don't want elements to feel off or isolated; if it's saying what I intended, or adjustments need to be made; and whether I enjoyed making it. As the process is what makes it enjoyable, it's important to like what you did - or at least the process - and see what you could do better next time.



INSIDE THE IMAGE

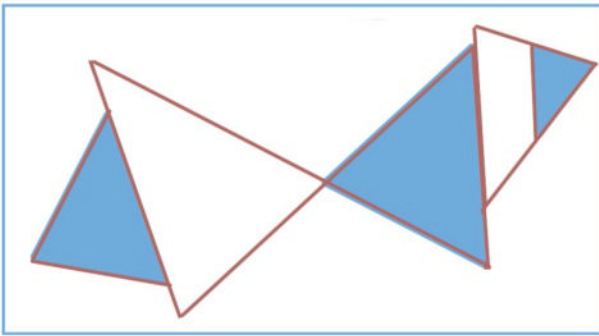


Circle background

This acts as an inner frame and serves as the overall shape that helps you organise all the items around and within it, and complements the silhouette.

Shape flow and action lines

Here, I look at shapes as opportunities to bring more dynamism by pushing the general design and shape orientation to direct the overall flow towards the point of interest - in this case, the character's face.



Spacing

In this part, I look to music notes by trying to find the right spacing and negative spaces, so that I can get a nice rhythm. This also helps me find clarity of objects within a chosen space.

Contrast through shapes

I try to use shapes that can complement each other. In this case, most of the design is led by triangles, while around the character's face the shapes are rounded.



Shape in negative spaces

In this part, I try to use similar shapes to give clarity to the surroundings and keep the design's shape harmonies.

Technique focus

START WITH VALUES

Murat Gül guides us through the process of creating a dark and mysterious fantasy environment



"This artwork is inspired by Blizzard's Diablo series, which shaped my love for dark, moody, semi-stylised environments. I began by sketching with large, textured brushes, focusing on clear shapes and composition rather than details. At this stage, I avoided using pure black or pure white values, which

makes it much easier to introduce colour later. I recommend pushing the greyscale phase as far as possible – almost fully resolving the environment in values first.

Once the composition was solid, I applied Photoshop's Gradient Map tool to establish the base colour palette. For final refinements, the Smudge and Sharpen tools enhance textures, materials and atmosphere."

How I create...

A FOREBODING TOWER



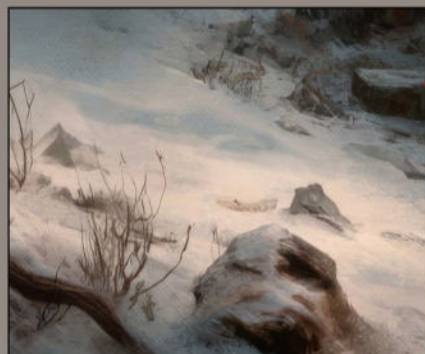
1 Establish composition and value structure

I start with a loose greyscale sketch, focusing on simple shapes to define the environment and structure. Using large brushes and clear silhouettes, I block in major forms such as the tower, terrain and trees. This shape-based approach helps me to quickly establish composition, depth and scale before refining details, lighting or textures later in the process.



2 Base colouring with the Gradient Map tool

I apply base colours using the Gradient Map tool to build up mood and colour harmony. This helps translate greyscale values into a cohesive palette. I refine the lighting and atmosphere, adding fog and soft transitions to separate depth layers. Limited colours and controlled contrast guide the eye towards the focal structure, maintaining balance and clarity.



3 Texture refinement and polishing the work

In the final stage, I refine materials and storytelling details. I use the Smudge tool to shape snow flow and organic textures, creating natural movement. For harder surfaces such as stone, I selectively apply sharpening to restore edge definition. Details come into focus near the figure and the structure. I keep the background softer for depth, atmospheric readability control and overall visual hierarchy.

Artist PROFILE

Murat Gül

LOCATION: Türkiye

Murat is a lead 2D artist at United Tech. He crafts moody environments and powerful characters with a cinematic, painterly style, inspired by dark fantasy. <https://bit.ly/4bbY8Q7>



Artist insight

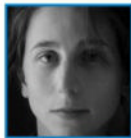
MAKE BEAUTIFUL ART PRINTS, EASILY

Heather Sterland shares tips for fine art printing, from colour profiles to natural fibre rag and alpha cellulose paper.

Artist PROFILE

Heather Sterland
LOCATION: England

British musician, designer, journalist and film-maker who has produced fine art prints, film, books and vinyl.
www.shear-rock.com



In an environment where Artificial Intelligence is still figuring itself out – the emerging EU AI

Act legislation needs to safeguard the labyrinthine issues that will almost certainly need addressing in the coming years – the idea of producing tangible artwork is more appealing

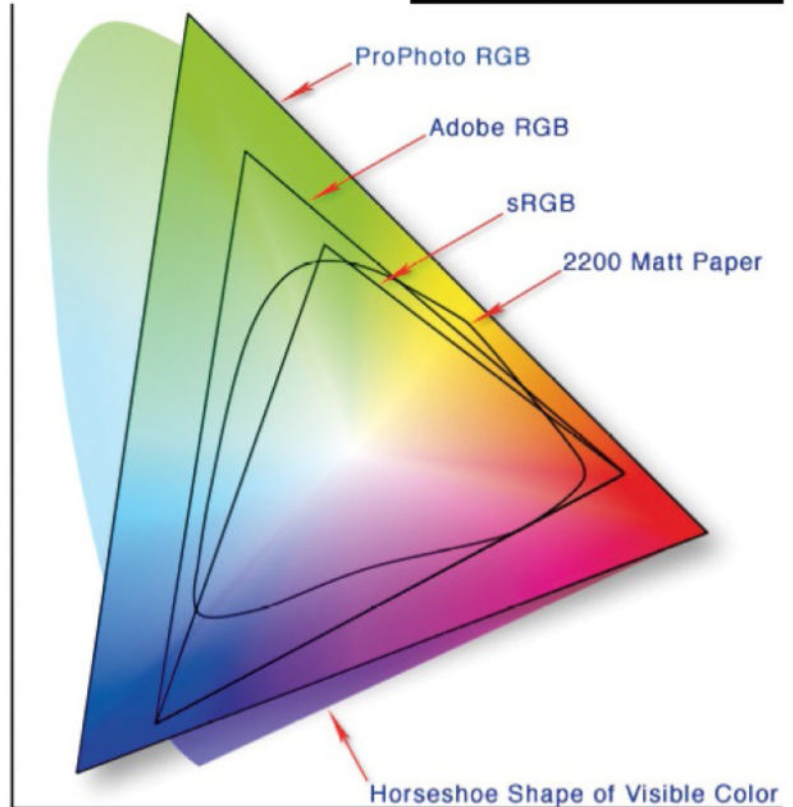
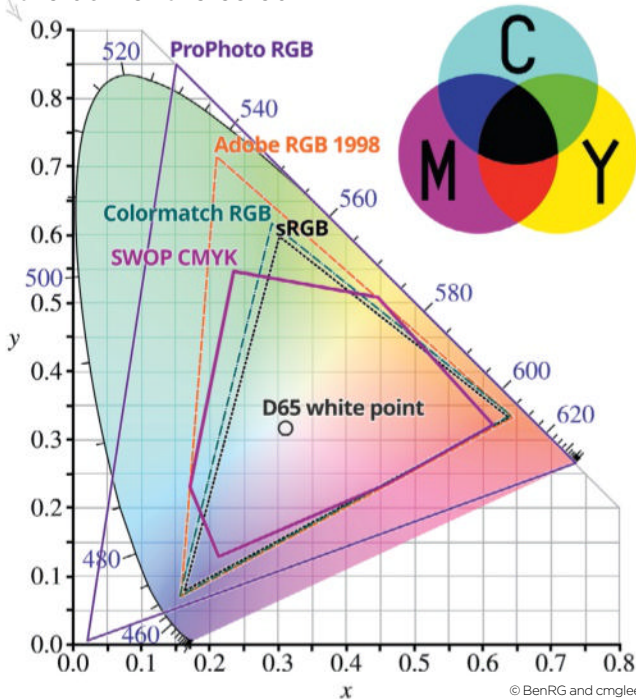
than ever. But producing beautiful prints that will last a lifetime? That requires the right physical materials, like high-quality inks and archival papers, designed for preservation.

From software settings to light-resistant inks and natural fibre rag papers, the tips below provide key details on how you can create high-end physical prints.



1 CMYK BASIC THEORY

CMYK is the language of print. It's subtractive: a drop of ink on paper will reduce total incoming light and emit a different wavelength. A drop of cyan ink on white paper will absorb red lightwaves and reflect just blue and green; magenta pigment will absorb green, reflecting red and blue, while a yellow pigment absorbs blue, reflecting only red and green. The more drops of ink that are mixed? The more lightwaves absorbed, the darker the colour.

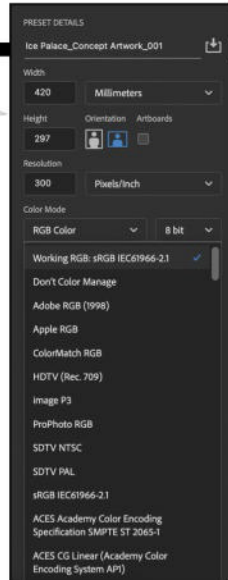


2 SRGB OR ADOBE RGB?

RGB is the language of screen. It's additive. Wavelengths of red, green and blue light combine to make white, and the profile determines colour range. Two common profiles include Adobe RGB and sRGB. Even though it has a narrower colour range, sRGB is compatible across more screens – it's the base for Windows' software. Windows devices still have around 70% of the market, and not all screens can display the range of colours in Adobe RGB.

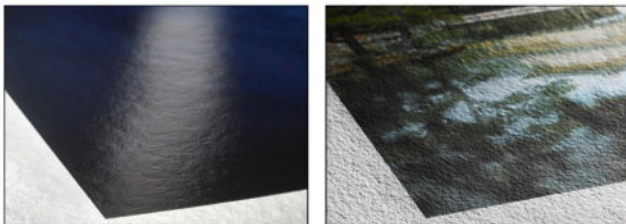
3 RESOLUTION: 300 OR 720 DPI?

Resolution is interesting, because we all see so differently. Very young children focus two inches away; 'average' adults focus at four. Adults with incredible (0.4 arc minute) vision, might discern 2190 DPI, four inches away; those with 'normal' vision might see 876 DPI. Likewise, at 30cm away, your eagle-eyed client might see 720 DPI; most might see closer to 300 DPI. 300 DPI is certainly acceptable, but prints can stretch to 720. You're juggling file size and human eyes.



4 ARCHIVAL INKS

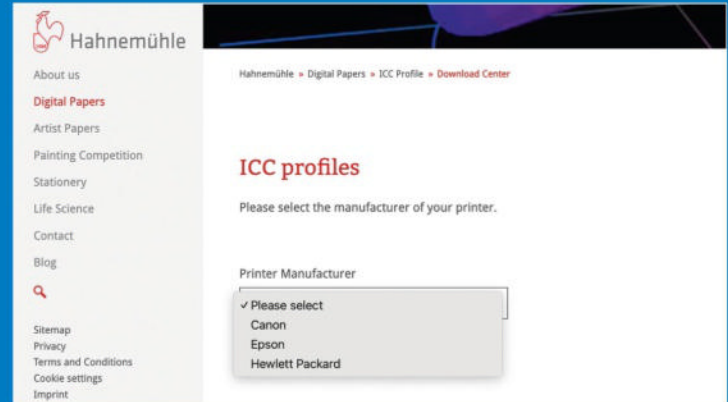
'Giclée' is synonymous with fine art. Coined by French printmaker Jack Duganne, it means 'to spray'. A Giclée must use coated archival paper and UV-resistant, pigment archival inks. Epson's Expression Photo HD XP15000 creates A3s with six colours: CMYK, plus red and grey. Ten- or twelve-ink A3 systems add red, greys, light cyan and magenta, and photo/matt blacks with archival 'Lucia Pro' inks. Epson's UltraChrome PRO 12 pigment inks add orange, magenta and green.



5 PAPER STOCK: CHOOSE A QUALITY TO LAST FOREVER

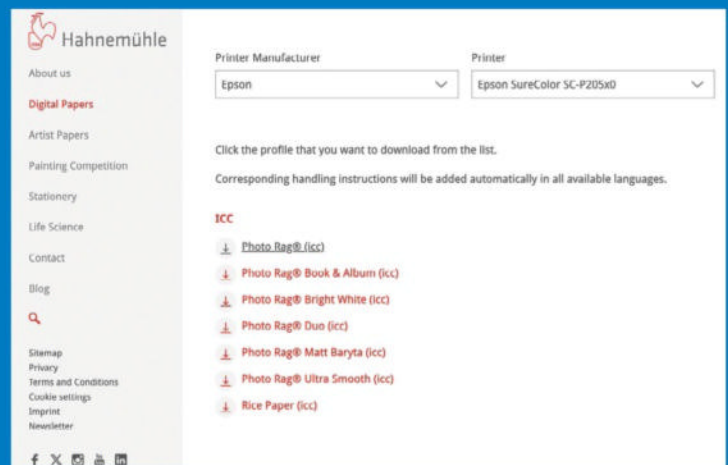
From cotton, linen and hemp 'rag', to α-cellulose (wood pulp), natural paper stocks are beautifully textured, designed for archival inks. They're acid and lignin free. Lignin fibres are found in wood pulp, but removed as they degrade in sunlight, producing acid, which yellows and embrittles paper. One kind of fine art paper, Baryta, made to replicate darkroom photographic paper, has either rag or α-cellulose base, and features a barium sulphate layer, helping create dense blacks.

06 DOWNLOADING AN ICC PROFILE



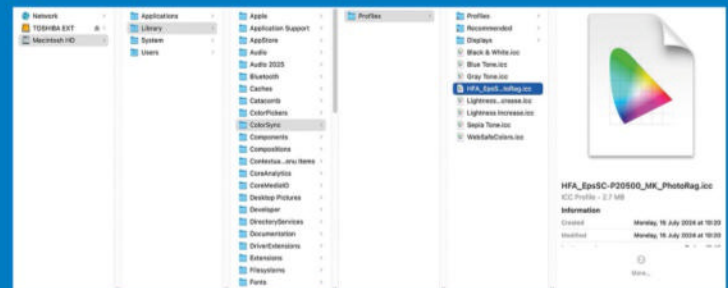
A Go to the manufacturer's website

Printers work in CMYK, but receive RGB, translating RGB data to CMYK by mapping RGB values to the CMYK range, using an ICC profile – instructions, written for certain paper and ink combinations. ICC profiles that best suit your paper and printer are found on the paper manufacturer's website.



B Customise according to your preferences

Select the printer model and paper stock. The manufacturer's website generates ICC colour profiles that suit your paper-printer combination. The ICC profiles are created in RGB, because RGB colour range is wider than CMYK, helping to preserve wider colour range.



C Install it on your computer

Download the ICC profile, and import to your laptop by dragging it into the folder on your computer which holds all the other colour profiles. You can now select in your software.

Clip Studio Paint & Photoshop

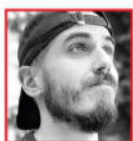
DRAW HEROES WITH ATTITUDE

Léo Chiola reveals how he uses a hybrid traditional and digital process to create his Marvel Snap card illustration of Spider-Punk

Artist PROFILE

Léo Chiola
LOCATION: Canada

Léo is a senior storyboard artist at Gearbox Software and a freelance comic artist and illustrator. Over the past decade he's worked on projects such as Marvel Snap, Marvel Rivals, Fortnite and more.
<https://bit.ly/LeoChiola>



I had the chance to illustrate several Spider-Verse cards for Arachnid Anarchy, the new Marvel Snap season, and in this workshop I'll walk you through one of my favourites: Spider-Punk. I'll break down the key steps, as well as the challenges that come with creating a detailed, Marvel character-focused illustration.

Because my workflow is a hybrid of traditional and digital techniques,

I'll also go over the tools I use: pens, paper, digital brushes and more. That said, every step can be done fully traditionally or fully digitally, so don't worry if you don't have the exact tools I mention. What matters is the intention behind each step, not the specific equipment you choose.

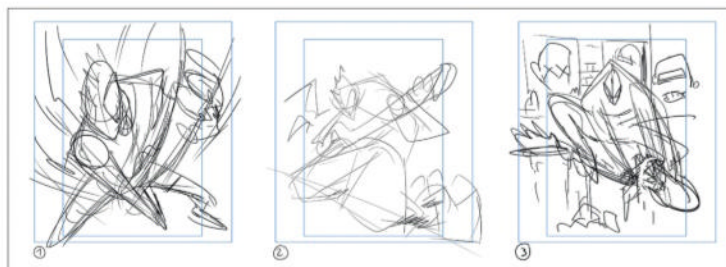
It's also worth noting that even though my workshop focuses on creating Marvel Snap card art, the overall process (sketch, line-art and colour) is essentially the same one

that I use for most illustration work, especially in comics and the video game industry. The only difference is that some projects involve more or fewer feedback rounds between stages, depending on the client.

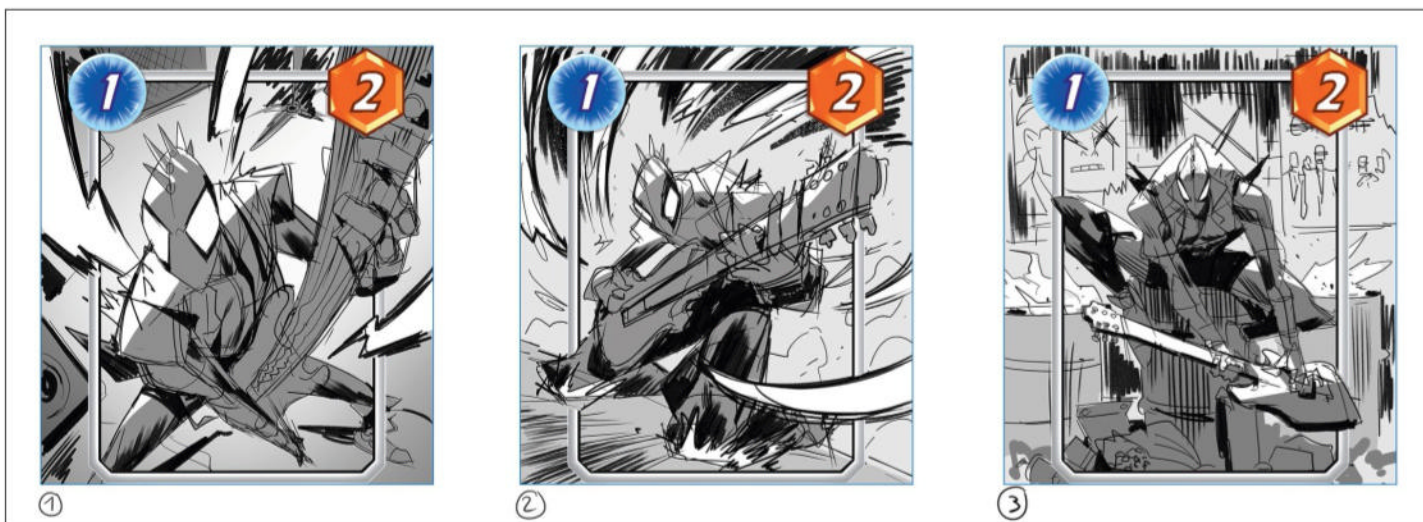
Finally, this tutorial is for artists of all levels, from beginners to pros. I'll explain my process clearly, but I recommend studying anatomy, composition, values and colour theory to get the most out of your illustrations and grow consistently.

1 Know your character

Before I start any illustration, I try to learn as much as possible about what I'm about to draw. In this case, as a Marvel fan, I already knew about Spider-Punk, so I didn't have to do much research, but I highly recommend doing some reading or watching videos about the character to know which type of situation you can put them in.



All images: Second Dinner/Marvel Snap



2 Use thumbnails to formulate your ideas

This is the most creative part. I usually do each sketch in two parts: a scribble to put down the idea and a slightly more refined pass to indicate the shadows. The most important thing here is to keep the energy, so I try to keep them very loose. I also need to consider the frame break of the card, where the elements of the character overlap the border (in the game). ➡



WORKSHOP BRUSHES

CLIP STUDIO PAINT

CUSTOM BRUSH: REDJUICE INK

This was created by Redjuice999. I used it for the thumbnails. I also use it when I digitally ink.

DARKER PENCIL

This is the default brush from Clip Studio Paint. I usually use it for all the digital sketching phase.

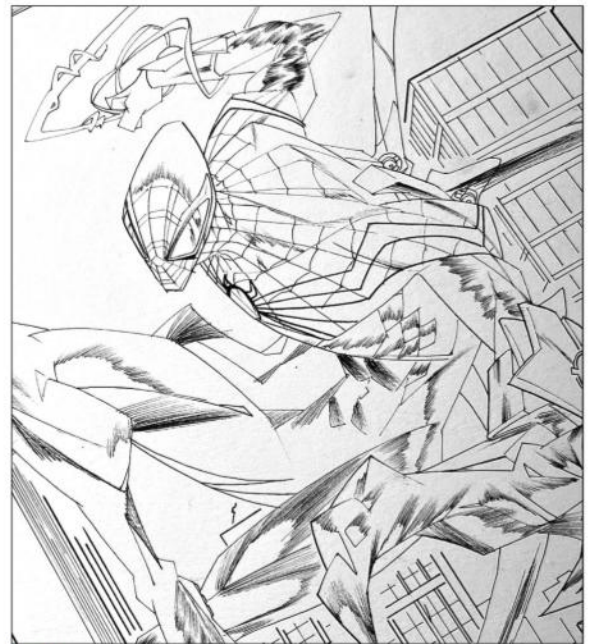
FLAT 1

This Clip Studio Paint brush was created by the amazing artist Nesskain. I use it for everything: render, shadow and light.

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 5 now!



3 Digital pencil
Once a sketch is selected, I move to what I call a pencil phase. In this case, sketch three is chosen. I create a new 300 DPI 11x17-inch file, size up the thumbnail on there and start to tighten up the sketch. I need to have everything figured out at that stage and ready to ink. I use Clip Studio Paint and the default Darker Pencil brush for this stage.



4 Ink: line
Once the pencil sketch is ready, I print it on 11x17-inch paper, place a Strathmore 11x17-inch vellum Bristol board over it on my HSK A2 lightbox and start inking. My first stage is a clean one-liner pass over the whole composition using Uni-PIN liners (sizes 005–08). I don't have a process photo of Spider-Punk at this stage, so I use one from another Marvel Snap piece instead.



5 Ink: shadows
My next inking stage is to establish the shadows. With a light source in mind and following what I prepared with my pencil, I start mapping the shadows with defined shapes. When I feel it necessary, I also add some soft edge using a 003 liner or a Zebra fine brush pen. I also use a Pentel Pocket brush to fill a large black area.



6 Ink: thick and thin
This is the final inking stage. At this point, the drawing should look complete – but to add depth and contrast, I build the thick and thin of my lines, usually making the contour thicker and the inside thinner. I also use Uni-PIN liners for this, sizes 01 to 05.



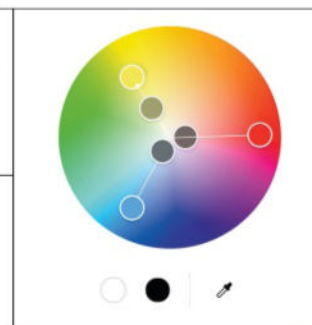
7 Digital screentones

With the inking done, I move to the screentones phase. The first stage is digital: I scan the inked piece, bring it into Photoshop and adjust the levels so blacks are solid and whites clean. Then I simplify values with flat greys (50-90% luminosity) under ink and add dots in Clip Studio Paint (Layer>New Layer>Tone). Once satisfied, I rasterise the tone layer and adjust its opacity for a nice textured finish. ➡



8 Traditional screentones

Following the values I have established with the digital pass, I cut and paste grey sticky paper, called screentones, on the original art. I usually use Deleter tone SE-61 (10%), SE-63 (30%) and SE-65 (50%). I used the 10% on the background, 50% on foreground and blue local, and 30% on the red local and main barrel. This phase is just to have nice original art and not necessary to finish the illustration.



9 Plan your palette

Before I start to move on to the colour, I try to think about the palette I will use and which colour harmony would fit best. Here, I had the idea to go with a triad: red, blue and yellow, with the red being dominant, blue a close secondary and yellow the third extra colour. I use the free online Adobe colour wheel and take a screenshot of the palette that I'm planning to use.

BEFORE



AFTER



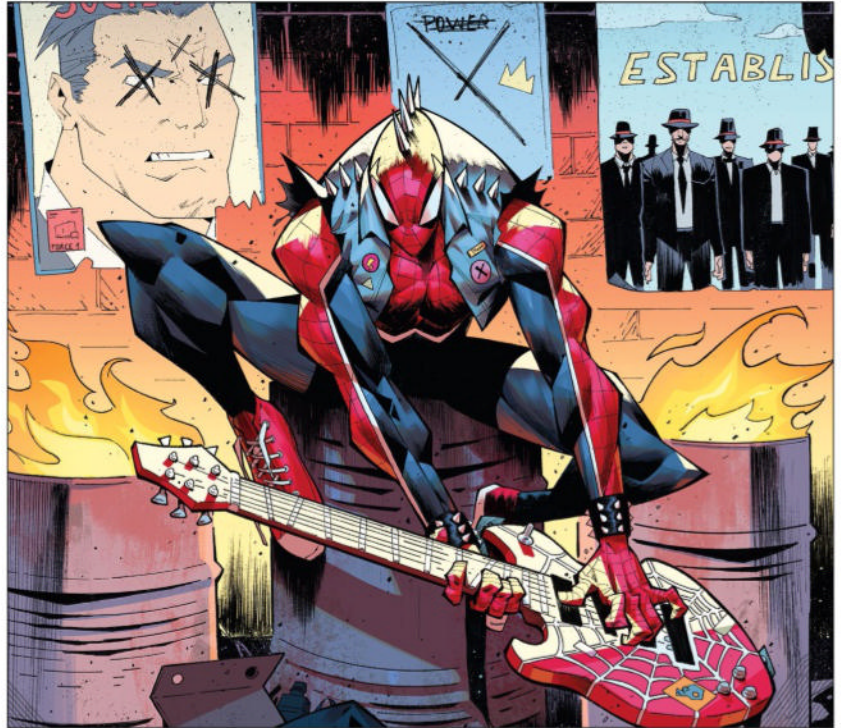
10 Flat colours and background

Turning the flat greys that I prepared during the digital screentone phase to colour and adding new flats with the help of the Lasso tool in Photoshop, I start building the main colours. Usually, I try to work on the background first to establish the mood and give me an idea of how the light will affect the character.



11 Mapping shadows

Once my flats are settled and my background slightly established, I move back to Clip Studio Paint and focus mainly on the character, starting by separating the light and shadow on the figure. I use a Multiply layer and the Flat 1 brush to block the shadow. I imagine a cold, soft light on the character, so I chose a warm colour for the shadows to create a nice contrast. I apply the same formula for background elements.



12 Focus on light

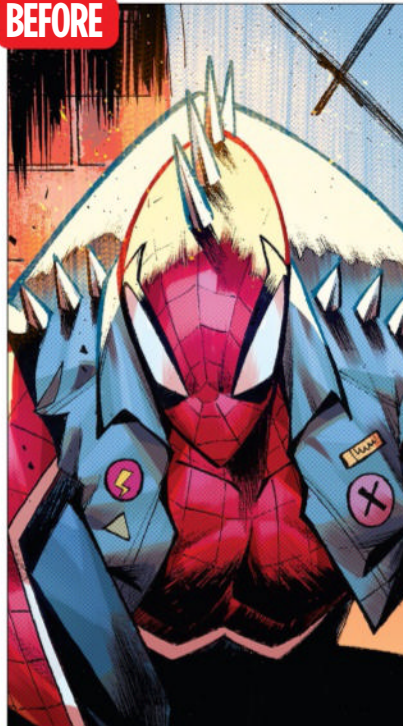
Once I'm happy with the shadows (I usually keep one or two values), I move on to the light and mid-tones. I create a new Normal layer and add my mid-tone (often the most saturated colour) with two or three lighter values. Because I chose a cold lighting setup, the colours lean towards bluish, slightly desaturated tones.



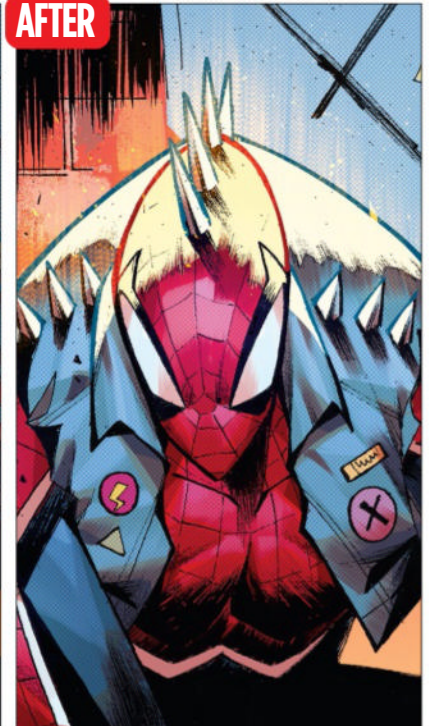
13 Final touches

This is the final stage, where I add some effects and noise, colour the line, adjust the level... anything that can add some extra juice into the piece. I add some graffiti on the posters and some noise on the wall to help break up the large, empty area feeling. I also add a round shadow on the wall to both improve the focus on the character and balance the palette more.

BEFORE



AFTER



14 Step back and feedback

Spider-Punk is finally done. Before sending a piece for review, I like to take a short break – half a day or a full day when possible – and return to it with a fresher eye. It really helps catch obvious mistakes. I didn't show it much in the workshop, but I initially drew the character too hunched over. With that fresh look, I correct the issue, and fortunately there's no feedback from the client. ●



Technique focus

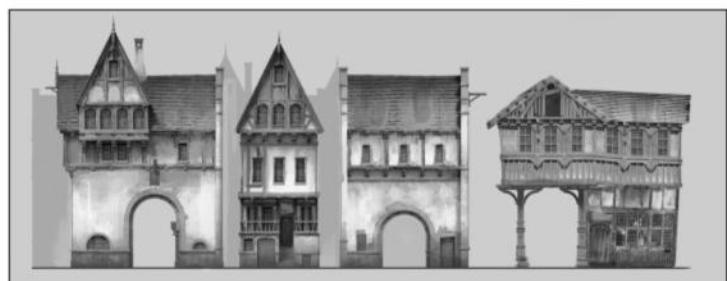
PRE-PREPARE MATERIALS

Environment artist **Marco Gorlei** gives his insight on creating a moody, gloomy scene



"I had the idea of a smuggler's cove that felt moody, dark and in shambles. I initially established the composition with rock formations, but I scrapped that to make the port the focus. I'd been making building assets as prop call-outs before

starting the environment, so once composition was established it was all about the assembly of different elements I'd prepared. The 3D is mainly used to establish materials and the mood; if the material is established properly you can overlay photos to give it that extra punch while keeping lighting accurate." ●





Artist PROFILE

Marco Gorlei
LOCATION: England

Marco is an environment artist with 10 years of experience in games and movies, currently freelancing for Karakter Design Studio on a range of exciting IPs, with the latest being Dawn of War IV.
<https://bit.ly/45WUINv>

How I create...

A DOCK DRAPED IN SOMBRE FOG



1 Block in terrain

To create the terrain, I use basic cubes merged using different rotations and angles. A Remesh modifier is applied to blend the seams. A procedural texture with displacement is then applied. The displacement turns into a natural formation rather than a bunch of cubes.



2 Drop in assets

Here, I push the 3D forward. I developed my own assets like cranes, boats, and buildings and tried to get the materials to feel weathered, checking references in the process. It's important to have these assets fleshed out as it creates guidelines for an easier paintover. This is where I'll solve the details, rather than in Blender.



3 Blend in photos

For elements like characters or sails, I extract photos using Marquee Select subject. I use a clip mask on a silhouette with the same shape and a colour that fits the mood. Then I change the light mode and use levels to play with the values to blend in photos.

Artist insight

BUILD WORLDS THAT FEEL REAL

Cheri Wang takes you through her fascinating process for building a fantastical yet believable world, filled with detail and beauty

Artist PROFILE

Cheri Wang
LOCATION: US

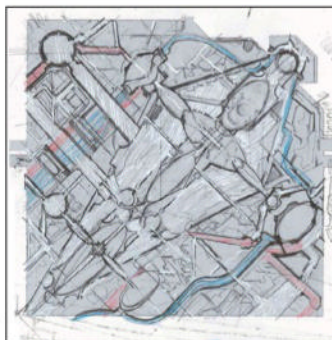
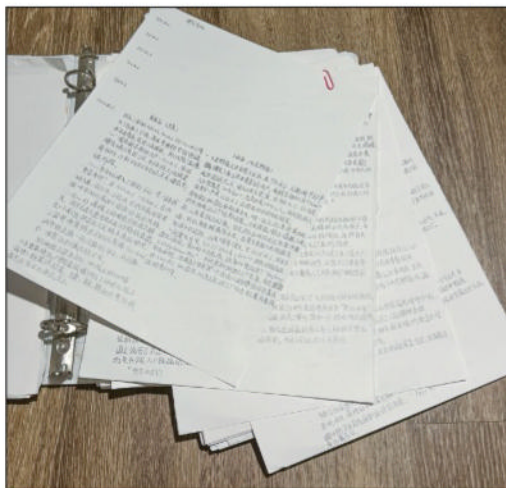
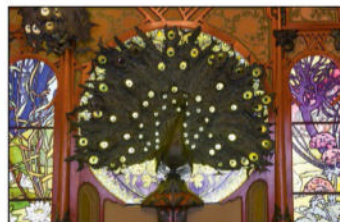
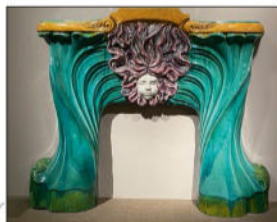
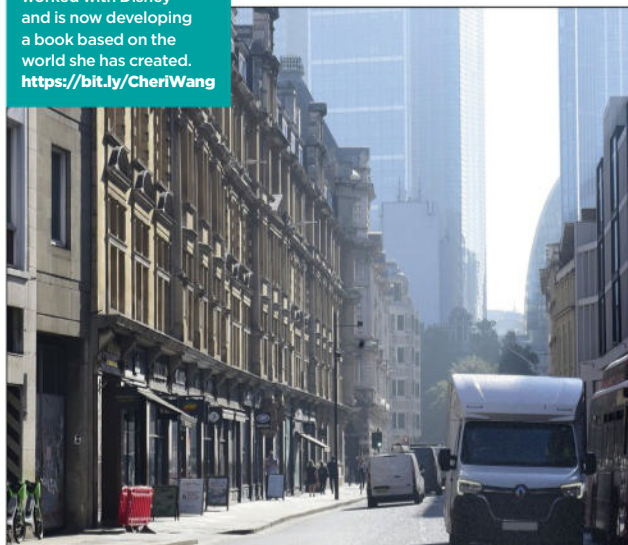
Cheri is a concept artist with experience in themed entertainment and games. She has worked with Disney and is now developing a book based on the world she has created. <https://bit.ly/CheriWang>



In my line of work, I frequently need to world-build to bring a director's vision to life. For me, world-building goes beyond developing the atmosphere for the story to take

place. It's a way to let people (or the clients) experience a culture in all its facets, from the extraordinary to the everyday. I love giving every object a backstory: something you might catch if your hand brushes along a wall while walking down a city

street, or a pattern you'd notice after sitting on the same café porch every day. The most effective world-building doesn't always have to be monumental – sometimes, a small flyer can reveal as much about a culture as a grand train station.



1 DRAW ON YOUR INSPIRATIONS TO WRITE A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CITY

As I wandered the streets of London, the mix of buildings from different eras made the city feel rich with history. That inspires me to create a city in my own world that also reflects both its past and its present. Another major influence is the art nouveau movement. I envision a warm, coastal city that grew through industrialising its vast marine resources, with architecture adorned in ornaments that echo the colours and forms of the ocean. Even after two centuries, the city remains a vibrant destination that draws countless visitors every year.

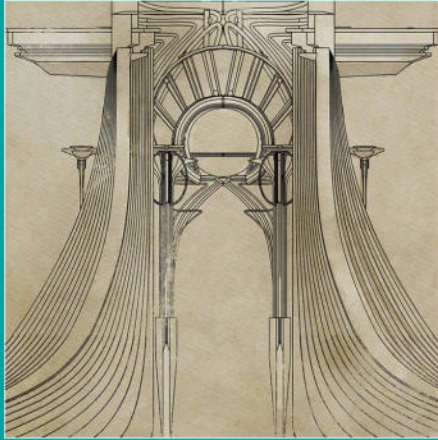
2 DEVELOP AN ART STYLE INFORMED BY ANALYSIS

As I delved into research on the art nouveau movement, I took note of a few recurring observations. For instance, flowers appear as a dominant motif, and artists often experimented with a wide range of materials to give their work an exotic quality.

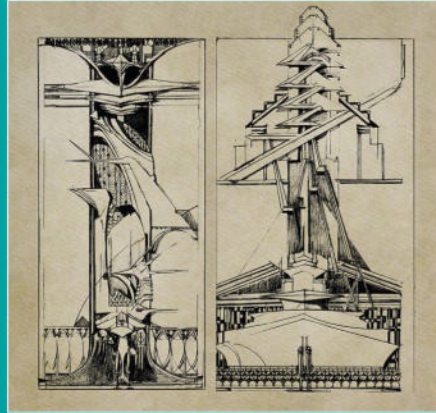
However, because I don't want my world to simply replicate art nouveau aesthetics, I turned back to the city's own history and chose to draw from marine elements instead. I freely put down everything I have in mind, whether in words or in the form of quick sketches.

3 FORGING A UNIQUE VISUAL IDENTITY

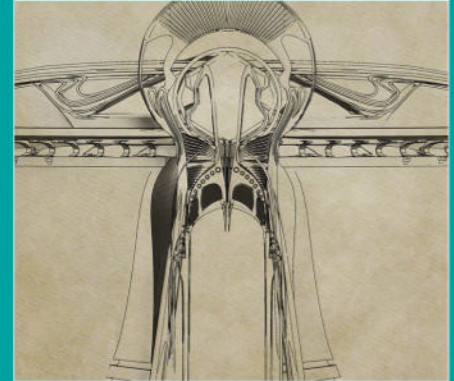
The goal here is simply to get a feel for the look of my world



A Trial and error
I'm not satisfied with the direction of this piece, because it resembles existing art nouveau styles too closely.

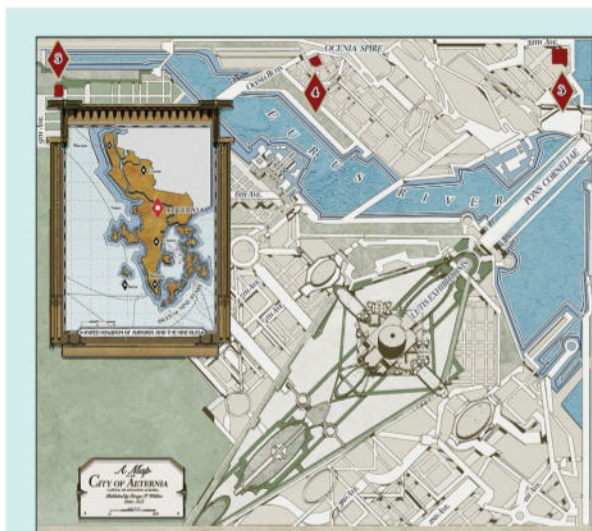


B Experiment
Here, I tried making the marine motifs more visible by incorporating elements like whales, squids and ships. Although I like the direction, the shapes feel too geometric.



C The right balance
Finally, I came across an amazing reference: the skeleton of a manta ray. It has just the right balance of structure and visual intrigue, making it a strong foundation for the designs that will follow.

“And to make the process more enjoyable, I name the streets as well”



4 MAKE A MAP

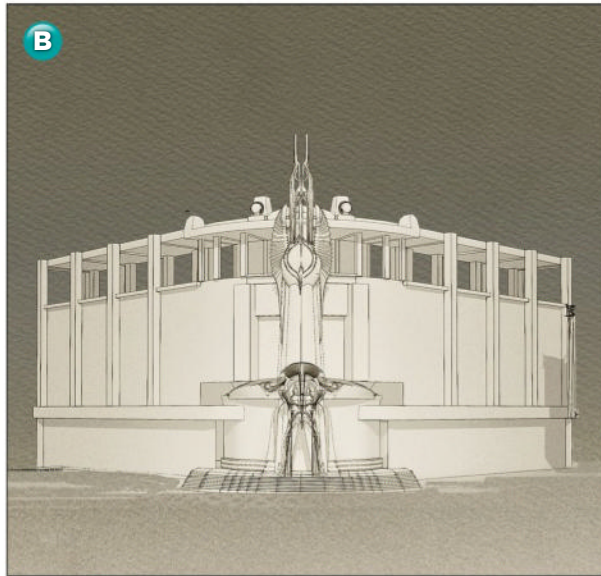
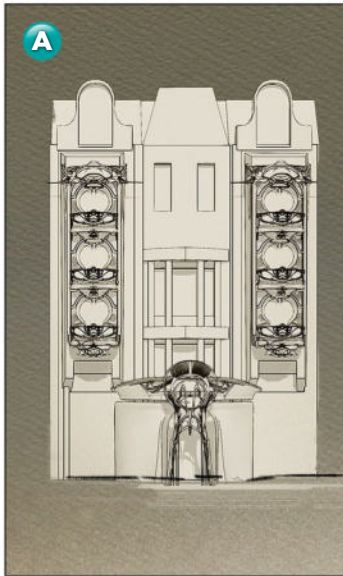
At this stage, I draft a map of the city. It's important not to design in a vacuum. A map helps inform how each building should look based on its location. For example, a landmark at the city centre will have a very different presence from a building in a quiet residential district. And to make the process more enjoyable, I name the streets as well.



5 EVERYDAY OBJECTS

Unique street lights are a common feature in historical cities. In my world, Eisener - the fictional architect who pioneered this art nouveau movement - is the craftsman behind this particular design. The street lamp also appears in a furniture catalogue as an advertisement. ➡

Workshops



6 THINK ABOUT THE FORM

Now it's time to populate my city with a few landmark buildings. I decided to start with a hotel. Based on the map, Location Four, an intersection, offers strong commercial potential, making it an ideal site for a major establishment. To convey the hotel's grandeur, it can't remain just a flat facade as in **A**. By combining elements from **B** and **C**, I give the building a more imposing presence and a sense of elegance.

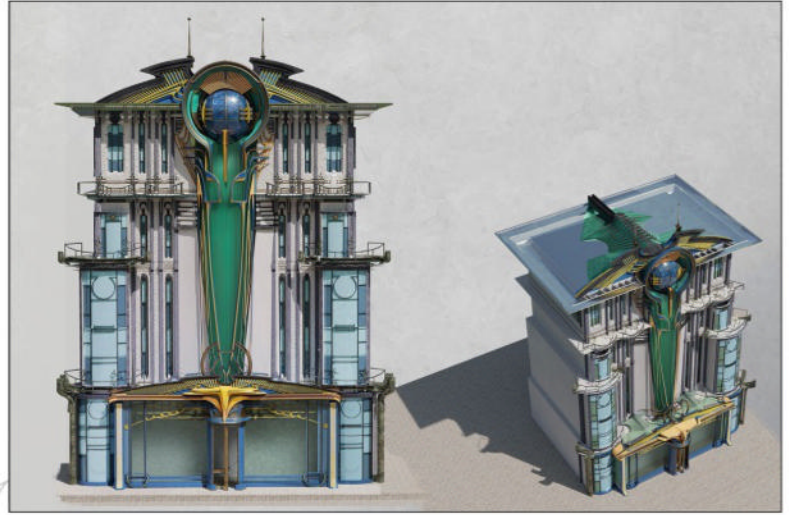


7 PROOF OF CONCEPT

I want to produce a preview of what the city feels like by assembling the building and the street light that I designed. Keeping the materials simple helps me focus on the overall picture before moving on to texturing. I chose a print-style rendering to mimic postcards from the era.



“To add some life to an otherwise plain structure, I plan to make the ground floor a retail space”



8 A BACKSTORY FOR EVERYTHING

I enjoy giving the objects that I design a backstory. I named this building Hotel Caesia, also designed by Eisener. Originally, it was a luxury apartment, but after two centuries the building has been repurposed as a hotel.

9 WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE THERE?

Moving forward, I want to design a residential building for Location Five on the map. To add some life to an otherwise plain structure, I plan to make the ground floor a retail space. Since the building is situated in a quiet yet chic neighbourhood, I decided that the store will specialise in clothing.



10 KNOW WHAT PEOPLE WEAR

When I design clothes, I consider the setting in which they will be worn. I plan to create two types of outfits: a formal one (A) and a casual one (B). A garment's silhouette is always a product of its time. Since modern people no longer wear petticoats or rigid undergarments such as bustles or crinolines to support their clothing, I pick a streamlined, fitted silhouette that aligns with the contemporary world they inhabit. ➡



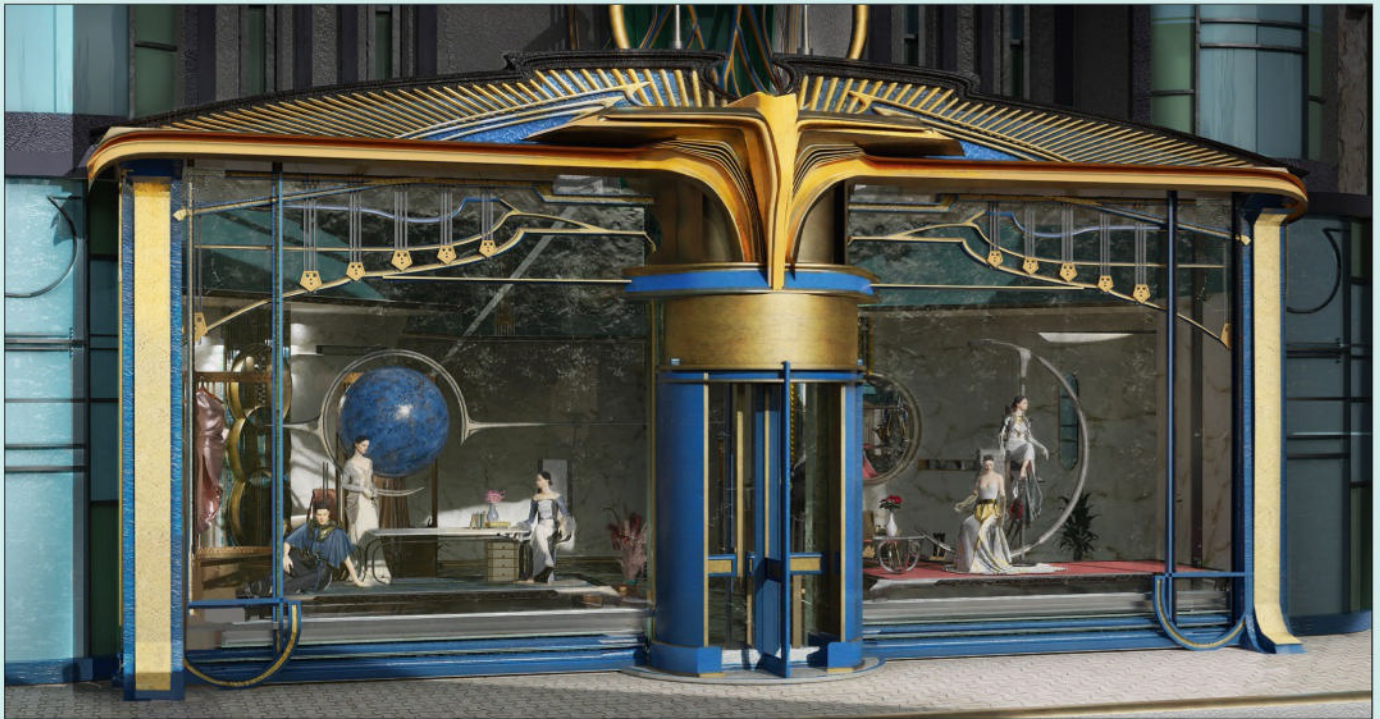
11 THINK ABOUT THE WINDOW DISPLAY

Different materials can dramatically alter the impression of a garment. Soft, matte surfaces tend to feel rooted in the past, while shiny, rigid materials suggest a more futuristic aesthetic. Combining two contrasting textures can add interests to the design. Here, I pair reflective leather for the jacket with a velvety fabric for the dress, giving the design a contemporary edge.



12 CHANGING FASHION

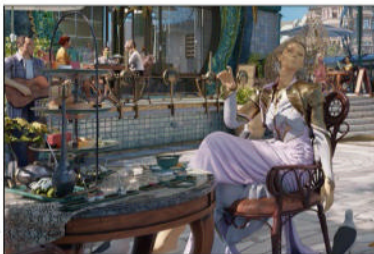
Even though the storefront is two centuries old, the interior should feel modern. I want to emphasise this juxtaposition by opting for a modernist set design. I name this luxury brand Auralia. The figures are now showcasing their collection for the upcoming autumn season.



13 PUT IT INTO CONTEXT

Once the window display is completed, I proceed to roughly model the interior of the shop. Afterwards, I populate the storefront with the assets that I've created so far. This is one of my favourite steps, because it's always encouraging to see the world come alive in small, incremental steps.

“ I populate the storefront with the assets I've created. This is one of my favourite steps ”



14 PREPPING YOUR WORK FOR A PAINTING

Now comes the final step: turning everything I've created so far into a painting. I want to capture an idyllic scene – people going about their daily lives against the backdrop of a historical city. To achieve this, I gather all the previous assets into a new scene, which will serve as a reference base for the painting.



15 THE FINAL PRODUCT

In the painting stage, I adjust my 3D setup if it will improve the final image. Here, I enlarged the foreground and reduced the background to make the figure stand out more. This painting serves as an introduction to my world, and I hope you enjoy exploring this guide as much as I enjoyed creating it! ●



Technique focus

ADD VISUAL TENSION

Artist PROFILE

Dawn Pu

LOCATION: China

Dawn Pu is a senior concept artist and art director. He has over 17 years of experience working in fantasy and hard-surface sci-fi design, and is the co-founder of Art Vision Studio.
<https://bit.ly/4pUZKkZ>

Dawn Pu takes inspiration from a real-life bridge to depict a structure that defies the power of nature



"This scene is inspired by China's Zhuoshui Fengyu Bridge. The composition features strong visual tension, which I found especially compelling, and the art is developed around this perspective. I combined Southeast Asian roof shapes and materials, and

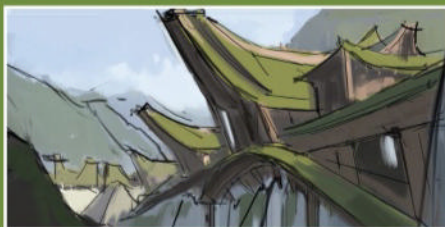
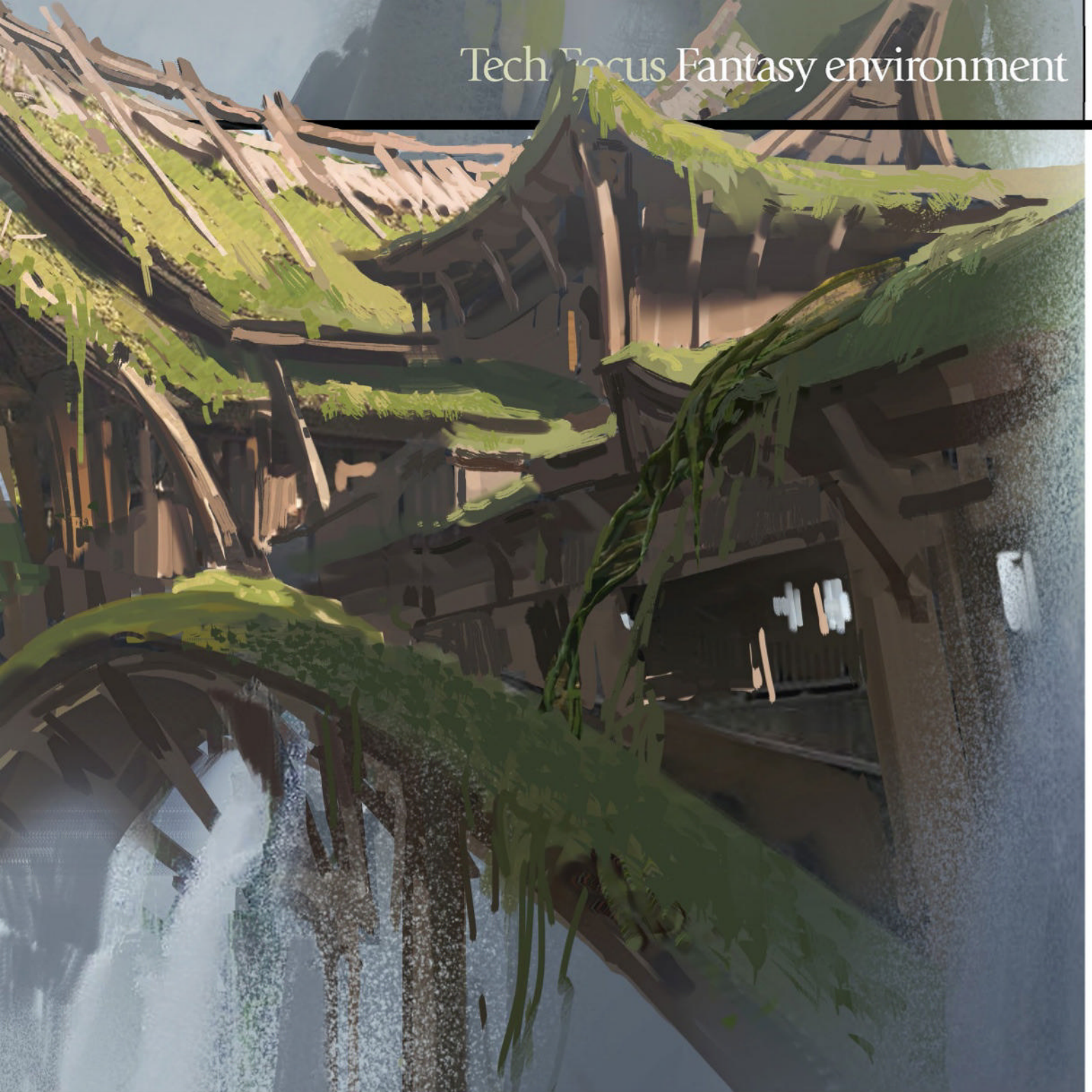
introduced a waterfall to the setting to create a dramatic yet dreamlike atmosphere. I also added dynamic elements such as spray from the water and a flock of birds to bring life and movement to the scene. The entire piece is hand-painted in 2D, with the emphasis on maintaining a loose and expressive painting style." ●

How I create...

A BRIDGE WITH A STORY

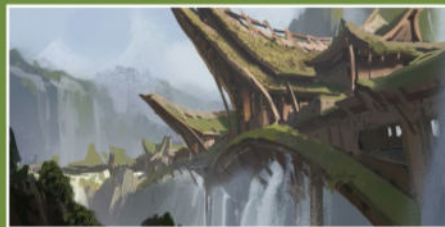


© Getty Images/CHAO-FENG LIN



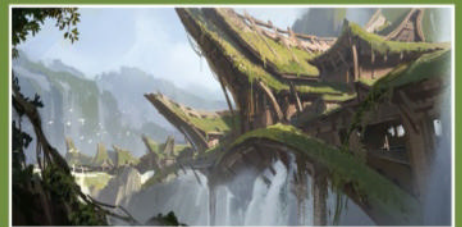
1 Establish composition

The bridge reference is used as a perspective foundation. The architecture is integrated into the waterfall and mountain, creating a strong sense of danger. The colour palette is inspired by Southeast Asian architecture. The scene was developed using line-art and colour blocking.



2 Add clarity

This step sharpens the material's light and shadow, focusing on the architectural structure – mainly through its position by the waterfall – and the waterfall-mountain-rock relationship. It clarifies distant outlines with loose strokes, honing the building's shape and colour gradations precisely.

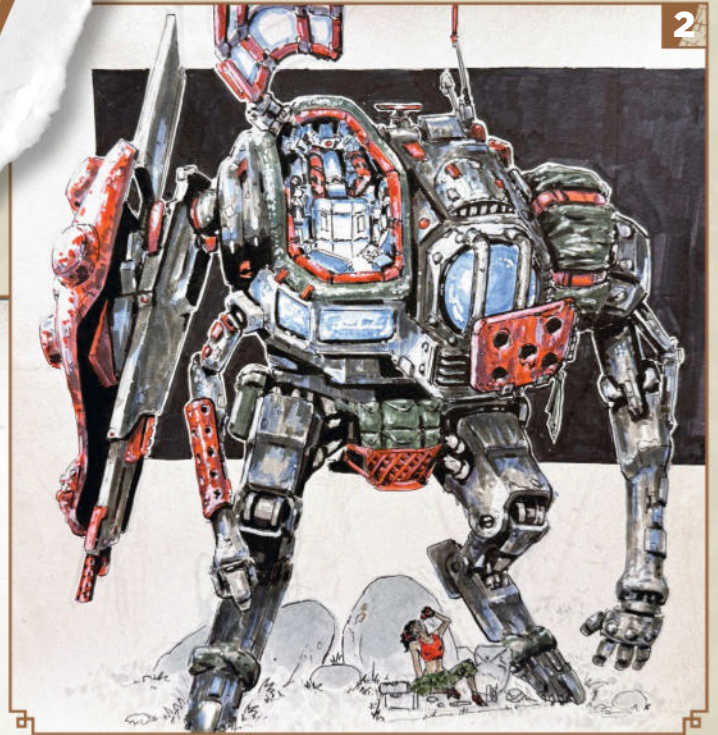


3 Final detailing

Now I concentrate on detailing the scene by defining the grass on the roofs and wooden structures, adding texture and realism to the water, and enriching the foreground with leaves, roots and vines blending with the building. Distant buildings and birds add a sense of vitality.

The Gallery

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Ben Greene

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Markers, brush pens, Sharpies, mechanical pencils, ballpoint pens, watercolour, gouache, metal leaf

WEB: www.artstation.com/mrblackcap

Ben is an art director in the video game industry. Outside his day job, he finds creative refreshment in sketchbooks. He loves drawing with markers and ink, as the permanence of the media challenges him to solve problems.

1 JEKALLIMN

"I drew this while hanging out with dear friends and fellow creators at our weekly sketch club. Here, we see my character, Jekallimn, taking tea with the dead."

2 LUNCHBREAK

"Here, I decided to bring more colour into my sketchbooks. Here, I'm experimenting with Tombow markers and muting them with greyscale Prismacolor markers."

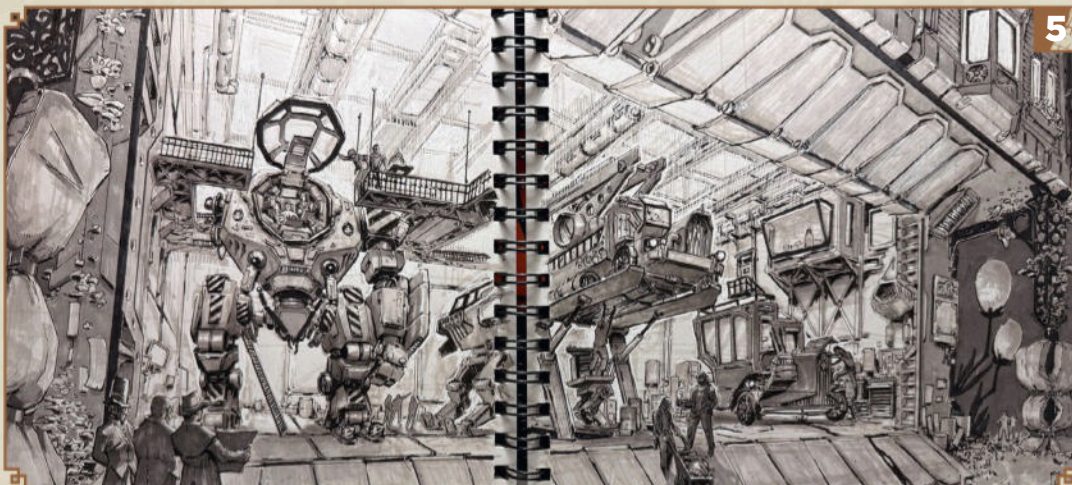
3 WORM TROUBLE

"I had never drawn many mechs until this image. Now, my sketchbooks are full of them! My mechs tend to feel a little more organic and creature-like, I think."





4



5

4 ATRAH

"I used one of my characters (Atrah) to try out my first set of uni POSCA markers. I also really enjoyed adding some metal leaf for an unexpected pop!"

5 MAINTENANCE GARAGE

"I'm a sucker for perspective and pushing a sense of depth in these otherwise 2D pages. Like many of my sketches, this was drawn entirely in marker, then inked."



Fred Gambino

LOCATION: England **MEDIA:** Water soluble oils on board, paper and canvas **WEB:** www.artstation.com/fredgambino

Fred has been working as an illustrator and concept artist for five decades. Originally working with acrylics and oils, he switched to digital tools before reverting to water-soluble oils.





1 BREEL AND THE DISMANTLER

"A painting in oils on canvas featuring the main protagonist from my Dark Shepherd novel, Breel. There is a process video on my Fred Gambino YouTube channel."

2 JUNKER

"Oil on primed board. I wanted to paint as loose a picture as I could. As far removed from my early 'every-nut-and-bolt' paintings as possible."

3 TITAN SKY

"An oil commission based on an early digital image that marked my transition from traditional to digital. 30"x30" on canvas. Also on YouTube."

4 ROCHE LIMIT I

"Inspired by a scene from my second novel Reality Rift, number two in the Dark Shepherd trilogy."



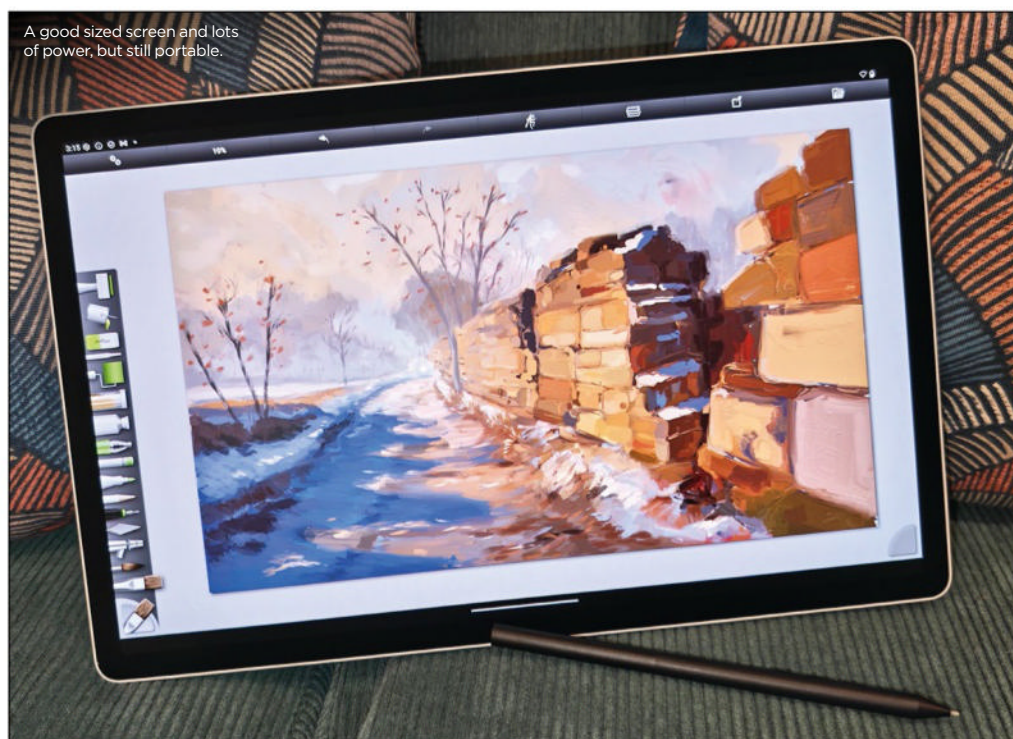
Do you want to see your art on these pages? Then email five pieces of your work and a short explanation about each artwork, along with a photo and a few details about yourself, to fxpose@imaginefx.com

Reviews



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

Artist's Choice Award
Art resources with a five-star rating receive the ImagineFX Artist's Choice award!



A good sized screen and lots of power, but still portable.



The unusual white back is a pleasing touch.



Minimal bezels make the Movink feel sleek, modern and attractive.

©Wacom

Wacom MovinkPad Pro 14

HIGH-END PORTABILITY OLED and the excellent Pro Pen set a new benchmark for artists who are looking for a mobile pen display with built-in computing power

Price £750/\$900 **Company** Wacom **Web** www.wacom.com

Every so often, a device lands that redraws the line for an entire category. The Wacom MovinkPad Pro 14 feels like one of those moments. This tablet finally makes Android feel grown-up and serious as a platform for digital artists.

Wacom teased us with the release of the super-slim and lightweight Movink 13, but it lacked both an OS and chipset to stand on its own as a desktop or smartphone. MovinkPad 11 was a first toe-dip into a fully fledged Android tablet, but as such it was there to catch up with the competition – the XPPen Magic Drawing Pad – and not to overtake it. MovinkPad Pro 14 is

something bigger, both physically and in terms of ambition.

This tablet is the Wacom team using its decades of pen know-how, display science and artist-first thinking on a fully standalone device, and doing so with confidence. After a week of solid sketching, painting and throwing just about everything at it, the MovinkPad

You get three buttons on the Pro Pen 3, unlike most rivals.



Pro 14 feels like the Android drawing tablet that every other device in the market now has to measure itself against, and one that comfortably sits among the best drawing tablets you can currently buy.

NO FRILLS, NO WASTE

The MovinkPad Pro 14 includes the bare-bones Pro Pen 3 stylus as well as a USB-C charging cable, but no stand, case or even plug for the cable. You get some digital treats, including a year's subscription to Clip Studio Paint Debut and Wacom's own apps: Wacom Canvas for quick sketching and Wacom Shelf for storing your art and references. The upshot is that you





The Pro Pen 3 is a great stylus for navigating and drawing.



(Left) You can use the Movink to mirror your laptop's screen, a handy extra benefit.



Powerful enough for the pro artist to work on the move.

display isn't just bigger than most; the 2,880 x 1,800 resolution and 16:10 aspect ratio give you genuinely usable vertical space. That size makes a difference when working in Clip Studio Paint or ArtRage, where layers, brushes and palettes can otherwise crowd the canvas.

The OLED panel is outstanding. With deep blacks, high contrast and full DCI-P3 coverage, colour work feels confident and precise. Gradients are smooth thanks to 10-bit colour, and highlights punch through with up to 900 nits of brightness. In comparison to tablets positioned as the top cheap Android options, the difference here is immediate: this display has depth, subtlety and consistency that budget panels simply can't match.

The Snapdragon 8s Gen 3 chipset paired with 12GB of RAM finally gives Android the headroom it has been missing. Large canvases, dense brush sets and multitasking all run smoothly, avoiding the stutters or hesitation we've encountered on other Android drawing tablets when pushing them to their limits.

We tend to default to ArtRage on Android, and the MovinkPad Pro 14 handles it beautifully. Our brushes stayed responsive, strokes remain clean, and the tablet never feels like it's struggling to keep up.

The new Pro Pen 3 continues Wacom's long tradition of getting the fundamentals right. It's light and slim; perhaps a touch too light for some, but the drawing experience itself is excellent. Pressure feels intuitive, the pen does exactly what your hand expects it to, and the buttons are unobtrusive yet genuinely useful. Among the best tablets with a stylus, this is still the benchmark for pen feel.

The MovinkPad Pro 14 is for artists who want serious creative capability without having to be tied to a desk. Illustrators, concept artists, designers and animators will all feel at home here. It's also one of the strongest options yet for newcomers who want to learn digital art properly, without quickly outgrowing their hardware.

If you've ever thought Android was the compromise choice for creative work and the only option is either an iPad or iPad Pro, this is the tablet that challenges that assumption. ●

Ian Dean

get what you need with no waste. Wacom's own apps are excellent and more Apple-like in execution than rival efforts such as Huion and Clip Studio Paint Debut.

The first surprise is how nice the MovinkPad Pro 14 feels in the hand. Instead of the usual cold blacks and industrial greys, Wacom has gone with a white, textured rear panel that's warm, tactile and oddly comforting. There's something about the device that genuinely feels like picking up a favourite sketchbook or drawing pad – slightly 'cardboardy', meant in the best possible way.

The rear panel also features four small rubber feet for stabilisation when lying flat on a desk. There's no built-in stand to angle the tablet, but we're not convinced you need this in

all honesty. We've been using it in our hands, on our laps or flat.

The front is all business. Slim bezels, edge-to-edge glass and absolutely no visible gapping between display and frame. It's a small detail, but it adds up to a finish that feels premium and carefully considered.

The textured glass OLED display is excellent, with a 120Hz refresh rate that makes drawing on the tablet feel smooth and effortless. The wider screen shape means there's more room to sweep a brush than on an iPad, showing Wacom's art know-how.

SIZE MATTERS

Specs only matter if you feel them under the pen, and this is where the MovinkPad Pro 14 quietly outclasses its Android rivals. The 14-inch OLED

VERDICT

Between the superb OLED display, great performance numbers, a thoughtfully planned onboarding and the unmatched stylus technology Wacom brings to the market, the MovinkPad Pro 14 feels like a real turning point, setting a whole new benchmark for what Android drawing tablets can offer.

Pros

- Wacom tech in an Android tablet
- Wonderful OLED screen
- Simple to set up and easy to use

Cons

- A case would be a welcome addition

Rating



“The first surprise is how nice the MovinkPad Pro 14 feels in the hand – warm, tactile and oddly comforting”



The 16:10 screen is handy for working with wider creative projects or multiple windows.

The small section at the top of the screen means the webcam doesn't eat into the display.



Photographs © Lenovo

The aluminium shell helps add strength, but does weigh more than a plastic-cased alternative.

Lenovo Yoga Pro 9i Gen 10 Aura Edition

CREATIVE CONTROL The Gen 10 Aura Edition has enough RAM, power and display clarity to handle creative work without a fuss

Price From £1,700/\$2,399 **Company** Lenovo **Web** www.lenovo.com

The Lenovo Yoga Pro 9i Gen 10 Aura Edition (161AH10) is a creator-focused laptop with an Ultra 9 processor, dedicated GPU, and a generous 32GB of RAM, ready for some serious work straight out of the box.

It handled everything from batch editing to web research and serious multitasking without any signs of slowing down. For me, the standout feature is the OLED screen, which is crisp, bright and colour-rich, making it an absolute joy to work on.

For creative professionals looking for a machine that can comfortably handle real creative workloads, this laptop should be on your shortlist. In fact, I'd place it among the best laptops for photo editing and content creation currently on the market.

Its aluminium chassis is sleek, while still feeling strong and durable. The hinge opens smoothly and positions well, so you can get fantastic viewing angles, and also opens up a full 180° so you can lay it flat. Connectivity-wise, there's plenty of ports. You'll find two USB-A, an HDMI 2.1 and two USB-C, as well as an SD card reader, which is perfect if you're like me and constantly misplace your dongle.

The keyboard is lovely to work on. It's comfortable to use, and the keys are well spaced out. The full number pad is also welcome.

The OLED display is where this laptop really shines. The colours are vivid and rich. The blacks are deep, and the detailing remains sharp. The 16:10 ratio also gives you plenty of space, which is ideal if you're a multitasker and like a lot of windows

VERDICT

The Lenovo Yoga Pro 9i Gen 10 Aura Edition (161AH10) is everything you want and need from a creator-focused laptop. It's fast, responsive, and built to keep up with demanding workflows. The Ultra 9 chip, dedicated GPU and 32GB of RAM make multitasking feel effortless, while the OLED display is a joy to work on. If you're looking for a machine that's powerful but portable, this is the one.

Pros

- Ultra 9 CPU and GPU
- Gorgeous OLED display
- 32GB RAM

Cons

- Fans get noisy under heavy workloads
- Proprietary charger which is bulky

Rating



Unusually on a laptop, there's even a full number pad included.

open at the same time. The Lenovo Yoga Pro isn't just another boring laptop; it's packed full of features that are actually useful, from the Intel Ultra processor and dedicated GPU to the 32GB of RAM.

Connectivity is another huge plus point: you get plenty of ports, including a full-sized SD card slot and 3.5mm mic and audio jack, which makes it easy to plug in everything you need without having to mess around with hubs or dongles.

For everyday creative work, the Lenovo Yoga Pro 9i Gen 10 Aura Edition didn't skip a beat.

Rachael Penn

“The OLED screen is crisp, bright and colour-rich, making it an absolute joy to work on”



While this bedslinger is certainly not perfect, the print quality is fantastic.



Anycubic Kobra 3 V2

PRINT POWER The V2 prints flawlessly in single colour

Price £329/\$349

Company Anycubic

Web <https://anycubic.com>

RATING ★★★★★

Last year, I managed to lose my confidence in Anycubic. But I'm pleased I had the chance to test this new version of the Kobra.

I would class it as one of the best 3D printers on the market right now when it comes to a balance of quality with value. You see, the issue with the Kobra 3 V2 is not so much the printer itself, but the ACE Pro (Anycubic's version of an automated material system for multicolour printing) unit that the combo bundle ships with.

The bottom line: Anycubic's Kobra 3 V2 is miles ahead of the Kobra 2 series, but it remains light years behind Bambu Lab's design and interface in terms of ease and effortless operation.

The setup process for the Anycubic Kobra 3 V2 was easy. It came with everything pretty much preassembled, including the frame.

The design and build of the Kobra 3 V2 is straightforward but solid. It offers a high top rail for taller prints – just about big enough for cosplay helmets.

I found during testing that you need to babysit this printer and handhold it to prevent finding a string of spaghetti mess.

The print quality when everything runs smoothly is actually quite impressive, but avoid the Ace Pro, which can cause issues.

Beth Nicholls

ASUS ProArt Display PA32KCX

DESKTOP DELIGHT The hugely expensive professional ASUS ProArt Display PA32KCX is bright, bold, and brilliantly beautiful

Price £7,999/\$8,799 **Company** ASUS **Web** www.asus.com

Ready your Z9s, GFX ETERNA 55s, and URSA 12K LFs. ASUS has a new 8K monitor on the market.

An 8K screen isn't something you pick up on a whim, and you'll probably already know if that many pixels will be helpful to your creative workflow or not, but the ASUS ProArt Display PA32KCX takes it to another level.

This screen, which from the outside looks a perfectly ordinary 32-inch with a USB hub aimed at creatives much like BenQ's 4K PD3225U, costs an eye-watering amount of money. But its Mini-LED backlight gives it remarkable brightness, and its colour reproduction is second to none.

There's a degree of adjustability in the mount, with tilt, swivel, pivot, and height adjustments so you can get it into a comfortable position. The height adjustment doesn't quite go high enough so that you can easily swing it into a vertical position.

It's extremely well built and has a flip-up colorimeter to help calibrate the screen. Helpfully, it plugs into the mains with a three-pin kettle lead, making it fast to set up.

Aside from its fearsome resolution and brightness, the ASUS ProArt



A USB hub that can power your laptop is a particularly useful addition.

Display PA32KCX has a couple of useful features for the desktop. One is a comprehensive USB hub, which ties into the Thunderbolt 4 input to give you a single-cable connection that can charge your laptop at 96W too.

The panel is the biggest draw about the ASUS ProArt PA32KCX, and that's apt, as it's truly excellent. ASUS claims 1,000 nits of sustained brightness, with a peak of 1,200. If you're working in 5K, you can have your video at native resolution with an interface around the edges, which proves to be a real boon for creative users.

Overall, though, this isn't a monitor aimed at gamers – but we're sure that an 8K gaming monitor will be just around the corner. ●

Ian Evenden

VERDICT

Bigger is always better, and ASUS has crammed 32 million pixels into the 32-inch Mini-LED screen of the ASUS ProArt Display PA32KCX. It produces excellent detail, brightness, and colour, but there's no getting away from the fact that, at this price, 8K might be a step too far for many creatives who aren't working for a multinational company.

Pros

- Bright
- Excellent colour
- Built like a tank

Cons

- So much money
- Hood can feel flimsy
- Rather heavy too

Rating

★★★★★

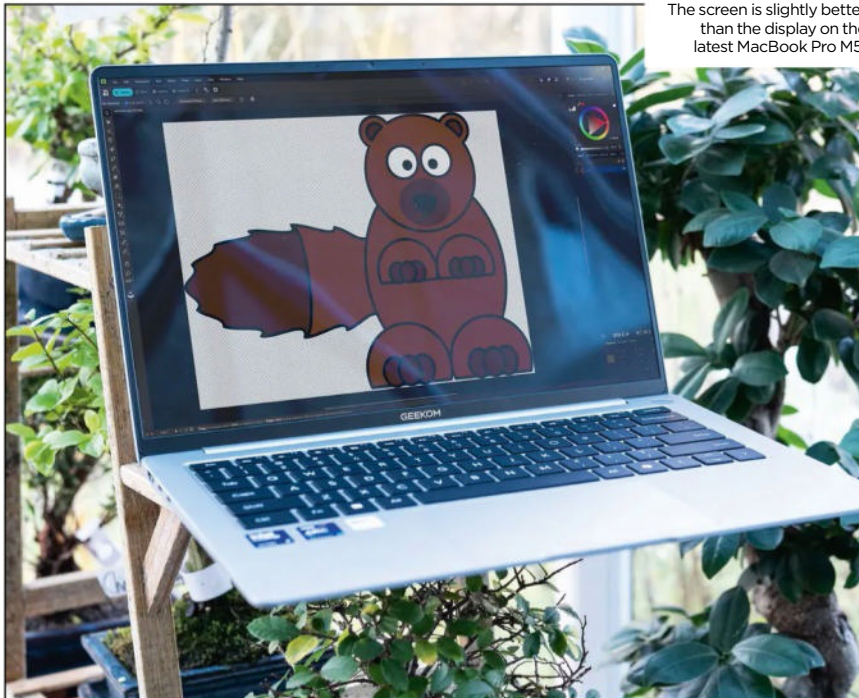
Photographs © ASUS



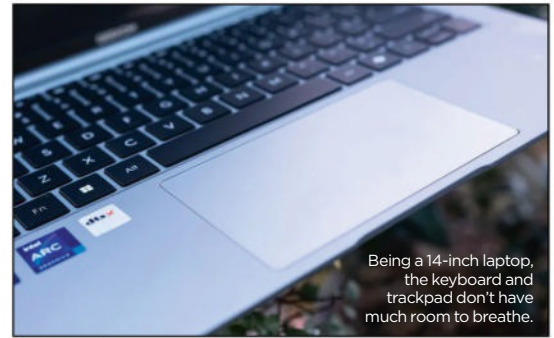
The screen shade is a bit of a fiddly undertaking and feels flimsy once it's attached.

The ASUS ProArt Display PA32KCX is quite heavy, and comes with an appropriately robust stand.

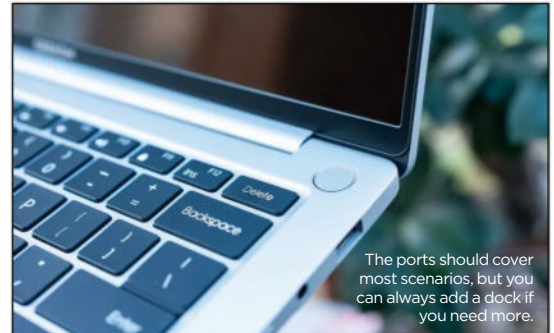




The screen is slightly better than the display on the latest MacBook Pro M5.



Being a 14-inch laptop, the keyboard and trackpad don't have much room to breathe.



The ports should cover most scenarios, but you can always add a dock if you need more.

Geekom GeekBook X14 Pro

SMALL BUT MIGHTY A new challenger enters the battle for the thinnest and lightest laptop – and this one's packing some power within its svelte frame

Price From £935/\$1,249 **Company** Geekom **Web** www.geekom.co.uk

Thin and light are two words that you'll often see used in relation to laptops, as manufacturers try to position theirs as the thinnest and lightest out there.

There's not that much that differentiates portable PCs, so physical size is something they can capitalise on to make their product stand out.

Enter the GeekBook X14 Pro from mini-PC specialist Geekom. It's an



The magnesium alloy body is warm to the touch, rather than the cold feel of aluminium.

extremely light all-metal laptop that rivals the Asus Zenbook A14 for slimness and, unlike Asus's slender effort, packs an Ultra 9 Intel processor instead of a Snapdragon chip. Is that enough to make it one of the best laptops for Photoshop, though? We got it in to find out.

You get a pair of USB4 ports, a USB Type-A that's perfect for a wireless keyboard dongle, and an HDMI to hook up to an external display. It's not the largest number of ports we've seen on a laptop, but it covers most eventualities and fits how we use our laptops – reserve one Type-C for charging and the other for an external SSD or camera connection, and you've got everything you need.

The first generation of Core Ultra processors, Meteor Lake, was a step away from Intel's i-series of chips. The Ultra 9 185H isn't a bad chip, and its status as the elder statesman of the



If you prefer working on a larger display, the HDMI port makes hooking one up simple.

VERDICT

Sometimes you buy a laptop based on its size and weight, and the Geekom GeekBook X14 Pro impresses by weighing in at a smidge under a kilo but still managing to pack a Core Ultra 9 processor. It's not all good news, but for lovers of ultrabooks, Geekom's laptop has a lot going for it.

Pros

- Impressively thin and light
- Really good screen
- Plenty of RAM and storage

Cons

- Last-gen CPU
- Integrated graphics
- Pricing could be a bit keener

Rating



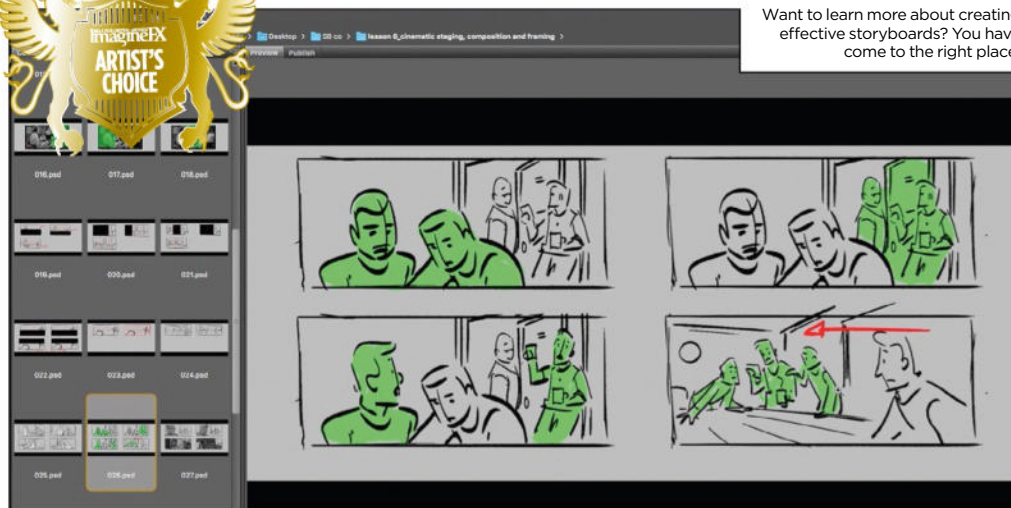
Core Ultra line may mean you'll be able to pick up the GeekBook X14 Pro for a lower price once its newer replacement appears. It has 16 cores for a total of 22 simultaneous software threads, and Geekom has backed it here with 32GB of DDR5 RAM and a 2TB SSD, which makes for an effective package for a wide variety of tasks.

Working in 2D and without on-device AI calculations going on, the performance from the GeekBook is fine, almost snappy.

The OLED display is able to show 99% of the P3 colour gamut, 95% of Adobe RGB, and 100% of sRGB with a maximum brightness of 415 nits, which compares well with a MacBook Air.

Ian Evenden

“Working in 2D and without on-device AI calculations going on, the performance is fine, almost snappy”



Want to learn more about creating effective storyboards? You have come to the right place.

The Art of the Storyboard with Lyndon Ruddy

DRAWING BOARD Learn all about the complete storyboarding process from a 20-year animation veteran

Publisher CreatureArtTeacher **Price** £48 approx/\$65 (frequently discounted) **Format** Online
Length Over 14 hours **Web** <https://creatureartteacher.com>

Storyboarding sits quietly beneath almost every form of visual storytelling, yet finding proper training beyond the basics can be difficult.

This course from Lyndon Ruddy – a story artist with 20+ years at Blue Sky, Disney, Warner Bros and Sony – delivers exactly that.

At 14+ hours, this is not a quick overview, and to the course's credit, it doesn't try to be. Ruddy works through the complete process methodically: shot selection, framing, the 180-degree rule, eyelines, camera angles and when to move the camera. Each concept is illustrated with production examples, which is always the best way to learn.

What makes this particularly lovely is watching Ruddy work in real time, even if his workspace looks a bit cramped. The course includes many



Lyndon Ruddy draws on his vast experience to craft a brilliantly immersive course.

hours of practical demonstration, following an original sequence from concept through thumbnailing to polished boards. He explains every decision using a show-don't-tell technique, which may not be for the impatient, but it's worth it to watch a working professional think through real creative problems.

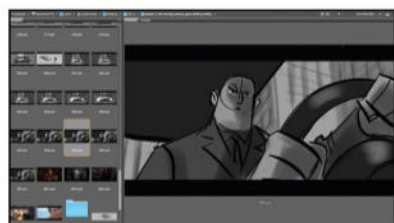
Ruddy's philosophy is clear: work on the fundamentals until they become second nature so you can focus on what matters – acting, character performance and ideas. He provides a wide range of support materials, including additional resources, Photoshop brushes and template files. While the focus is animation, the principles translate directly to comics and sequential art. It's worth watching even if animation isn't your primary focus. ●

VERDICT

A comprehensive and practical storyboarding masterclass from an industry veteran. The depth of content justifies the runtime, and Ruddy's clear teaching style makes complex concepts accessible. Essential viewing for anyone serious about sequential visual storytelling.

- Pros**
- Genuine industry expertise from major studio experience
 - Near real-time process demonstration
 - Comprehensive coverage from fundamentals to advanced techniques
 - Includes practical bonus materials
- Cons**
- 14+ hours requires significant time commitment
 - Animation-focused (though principles transfer)

Rating
★★★★★



The course focuses on learning by doing, and you get plenty of opportunities to do so.

Brushing up...

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



Storyboard Artist

Artist Francisco Beltrán

Software Photoshop

Brushes 46 **Price** £7 approx/\$10

Rating ★★★★★

A comprehensive 46-brush toolkit built specifically for budding storyboard artists. The set covers the full range of mark-making needs – from quick gesture sketches to clean inked frames which for 10 bucks is amazing value!
bit.ly/3NBWZHJ



Shiyoon 1920x1080 Storyboard Brushes

Artist Shiyoon Kim

Software Photoshop

Brushes 6 **Price** £7 approx/\$10

Rating ★★★★★

A series of brushes designed to work within the the document size while still being enjoyable to draw with. The set covers three distinct feels: Microny, Inky and Sketchy. A focused, professional toolset for serious storyboard work.
bit.ly/4jYGIOL



Ulrich's Storyboard Tools

Artist Ulrich Zeidler

Software Procreate, Photoshop

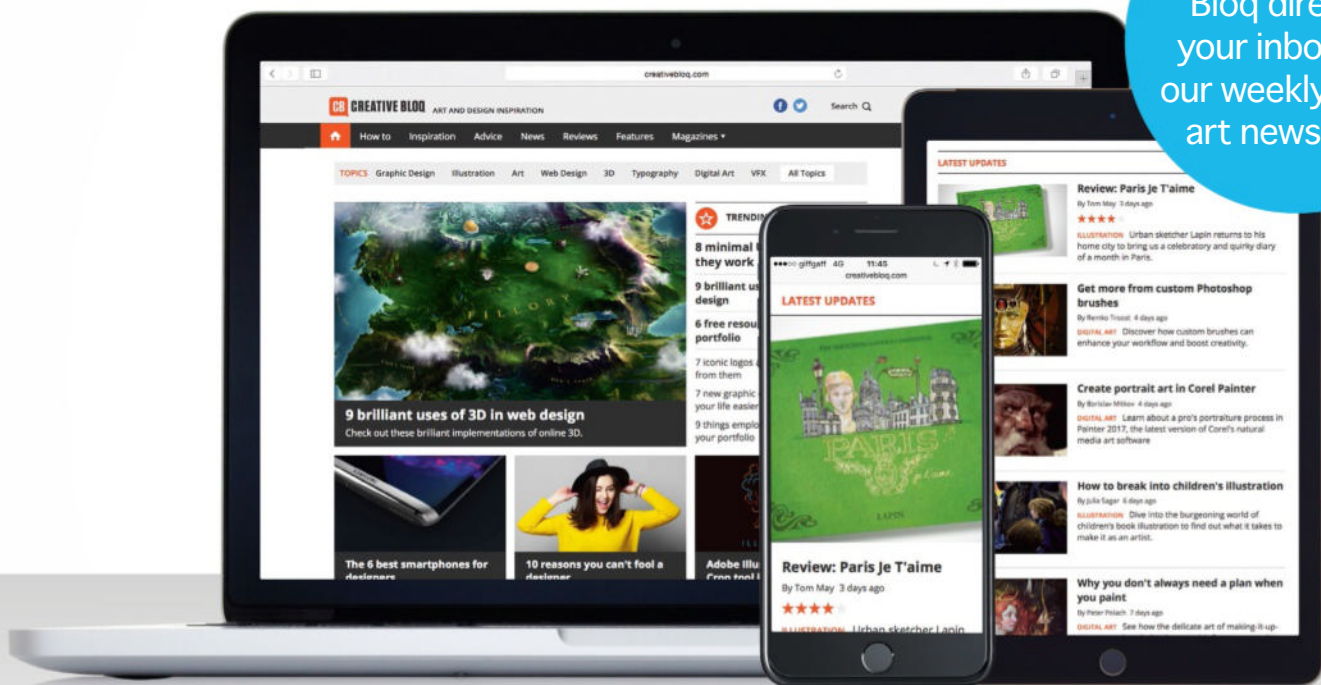
Brushes 6+ **Price** £3 approx/\$4

Rating ★★★★★

Designed to work just as well, whether you're using Procreate or Photoshop, this package includes a fineliner, an ink brush, a dry brush, a round flat, and an airbrush, catering for a wide range of storyboard styles in the process.
bit.ly/49PoaGq

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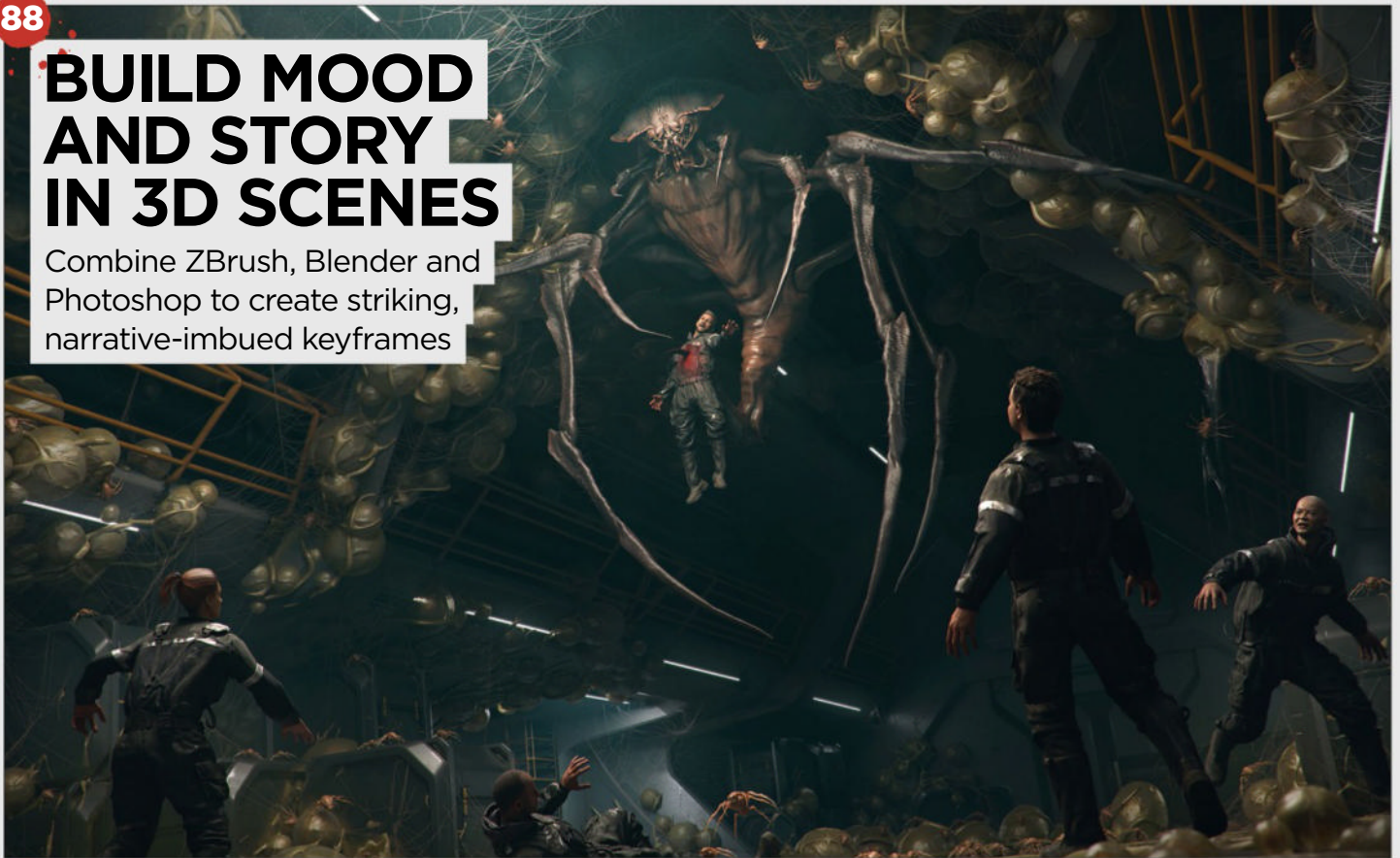
3D Artist

Your ultimate source for art, inspiration and know-how

88

BUILD MOOD AND STORY IN 3D SCENES

Combine ZBrush, Blender and Photoshop to create striking, narrative-imbued keyframes



82



The best 3D art around
Discover atmospheric scenes, otherworldly environments and cool character designs.

94



Plan your layouts ahead
Stefano Federico tells us why being prepared is vital when building futuristic settings.

96



Back to basics
Learn how you can navigate 3D space like a pro to get the best from your next project.

98



Five minutes with...
Concept designer Michael Michera on how his art was influenced by Jurassic Park.

3D Artist Showcase

Sponsored by **boulies**

BE INSPIRED BY THE BEST DIGITAL ART AROUND

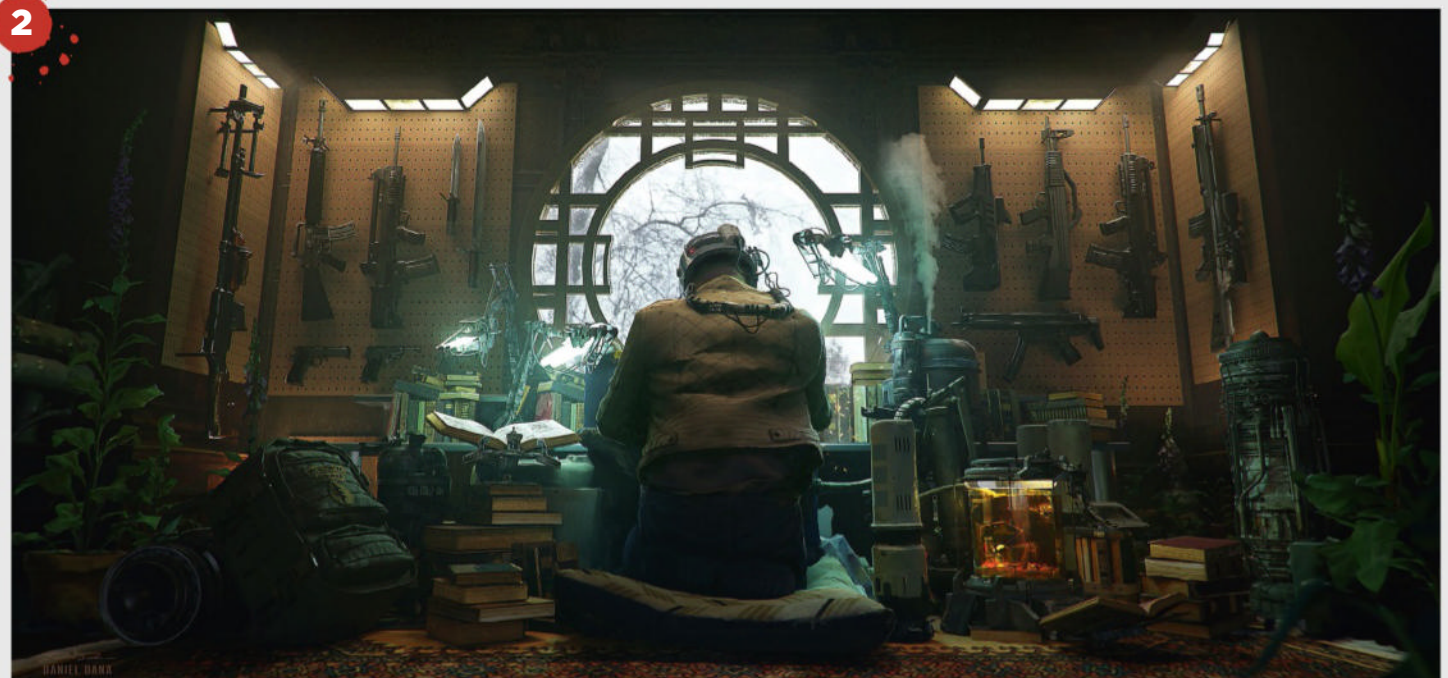
ImagineFX
ARTIST
MONTH



Daniel Dana

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Blender, Photoshop, Gravity Sketch, 3DCoat **WEB:** www.artstation.com/daniel_dana_art

Daniel is a concept artist and illustrator who works across film, television and advertising. Currently, he's working with Terraform Studios, with previous clients including Netflix, Insomniac Games and One Pixel Brush.





3



4

1 CHRISTMAS IN THE CITY
“When the Christmas holiday season is approaching, I often feel the desire to make a piece like this one; something cosy, wintry, or perhaps possibly even romantic.”

2 THE HOBBYIST
“This piece was made with the intention of practising more cinematic lighting and composition. It was one of those ‘aha’ pieces for me early in my process of learning 3D.”

3 RARE MINERAL MINES
“This one is an exploration of otherworldly shapes and forms. The environment was designed using an array of deform modifiers on terrain photoscans in Blender.”

4 PASSAGE TO XIBALBA
“This piece was nominated for excellence in independent environment concept art by the Concept Art Association. It was awesome seeing it presented at the 2023 Concept Art Awards!”



Felix Riaño Sanchez

LOCATION: England **MEDIA:** Blender, Adobe Medium **WEB:** www.artstation.com/felixriano

When it comes to personal work, Felix is always looking for “happy accidents”. Born and raised in Colombia and currently working in the UK, his main inspirations are comics, movies, and weird internet stories.



1 GRAZING

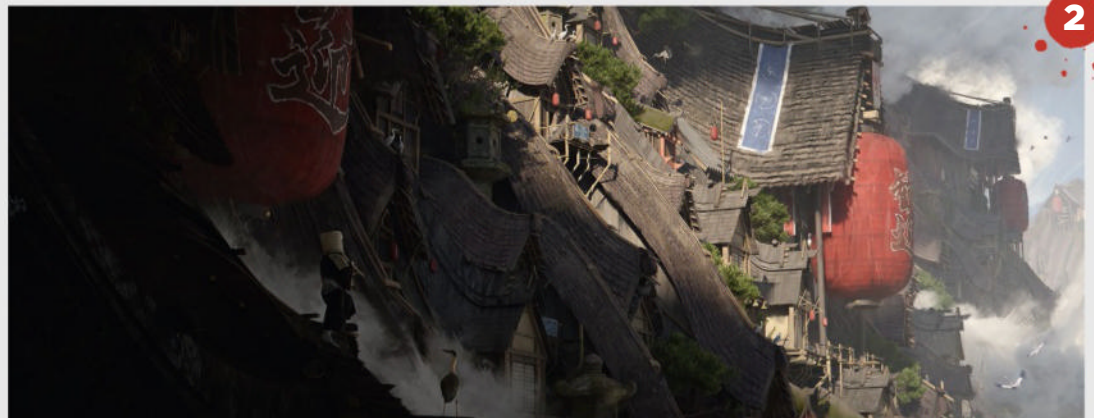
“I had this idea of soil being carved into intricate patterns, brought it to an everyday scene and ran with it. I’m happy to let the viewer come up with their own story.”

2 SONGS FOR THE HERON

“I started by just exploring a couple of ideas. I ended up stretching some models and the whole thing started taking shape, then I added the birds.”

3 THE CHASE

“From a simple premise of bringing futuristic ideas to a historic moment, this turned into cowboys trying to rob an arriving spaceship.”





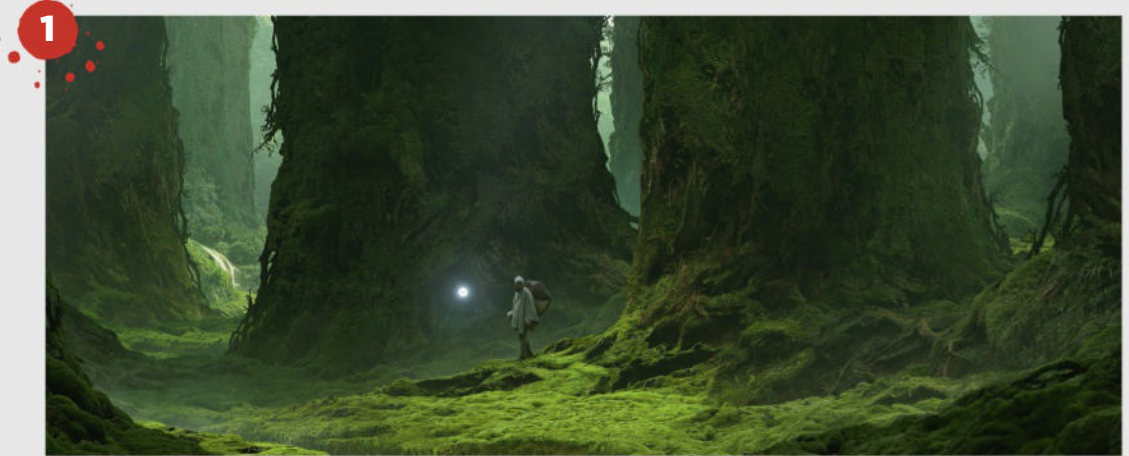
John Sweeney

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop, 3DCoat **WEB:** www.artstation.com/johnsweeney

John is an Otis College of Art and Design graduate whose career started in theme park illustration for BRC Imagination Arts. Since then, he's gone on to work at Naughty Dog, Insomniac Games and Bad Robot Games.

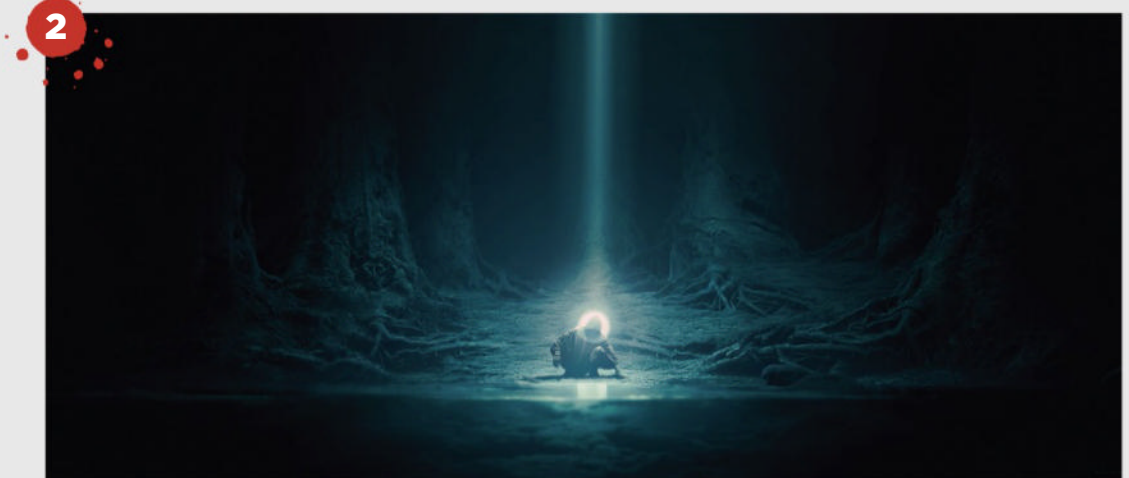
1 IN THE HEART OF THE FOREST

"I wanted to use some of the reference photos I took in both Japan and Iceland to flesh out a lush environment inspired by both."



2 REFLECTION

"This was a way for me to explore both lighting and the above and below of the water plane. I wanted to try to create one illustration with two separate atmospheres."



3 THE APPROACH

"I wanted to create an image for myself that would imply a much larger world and inspire future images. This image was the first of a few within a fantasy series exploring this cliffside city."





Kevin Beckers

LOCATION: The Netherlands **MEDIA:** Maya, 3ds Max, ZBrush, Substance Painter, V-Ray, Arnold, Unreal Engine
WEB: www.artstation.com/tycane3d

Kevin started as an architectural and product 3D artist before pivoting to characters. He tries not to stick to one style, instead preferring his portfolio to be more all over the place. He's inspired by Blur Studio's work.

1 GILLIAN

"This started out as a bit of a nod to the Marvel Rivals art: big, bold shapes, easily readable. Unfortunately, I'm not great at 2D-style textures, so mine turned out a bit less cartoony."

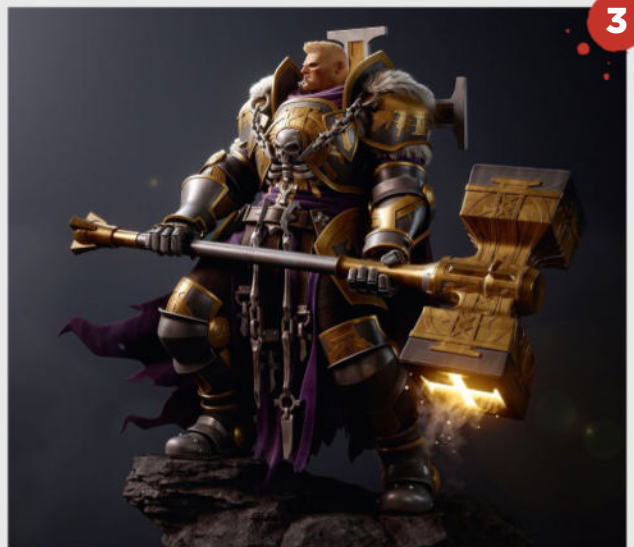


2 RATCATCHER

"I think this is my personal favourite piece because it reminds me of the Rien Poortvliet books that I used to read as a child. They contained beautiful illustrations of gnomes and trolls."



2



3

3 PALADIN

"The goal here was to make a cool character that was visually dense and challenging, and the design by Jianfeng Xing was definitely that."

4 UMWESHI

"I was trying to create something of a Disney or Sony-style cool female African warrior. She had to look clean, sharp, and easy to recognise."



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

3D Artist Workshop

Sponsored by **boulies**

ADVICE FROM THE WORLD'S BEST 3D ARTISTS

Photoshop, ZBrush & Blender

BUILD MOOD AND STORY IN 3D

Renowned concept art studio **Athena Productions** share their techniques on how they created a terrifying, tension-filled keyframe



Artist PROFILE

Athena Productions

LOCATION: England

Athena Productions is a game outsourcing studio partnering with major developers and sharing process insights through their YouTube videos. www.athena-productions.com

Here at Athena Productions, we are fortunate to work on a wide range of video games, from indie to AAA titles. Every image we create tells a story, whether it's the function of the smallest prop or the narrative behind the largest environment. There is always a story being told.

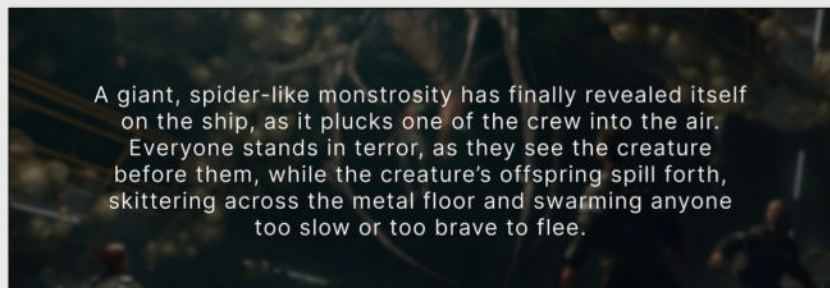
Creating effective horror concept art is all about intention. Every design decision, from composition and lighting to creature silhouette, needs to be made with the viewer's emotional response in mind. The

goal isn't just to make something look scary, but to build tension, atmosphere and impact, from the initial brief all the way through to the finished piece.

In this workshop, our team has managed to create a terrifying keyframe using ZBrush, Blender and Photoshop, featuring a spider-like creature revealing itself to a petrified crew. During this feature, we will walk you through the process of how we developed the creature design – starting with the familiar

silhouette of a spider, and then pushing into the unfamiliar in order to create something that's truly unique and harrowing.

From there, we will then move into the environment, using a blend of 2D and 3D techniques to go about rapidly iterating and refining our setting. Finally, we will bring the creature into the scene and use lighting, mood and storytelling details to fully sell the final keyframe. Read on to discover the secrets of how we work...



A giant, spider-like monstrosity has finally revealed itself on the ship, as it plucks one of the crew into the air. Everyone stands in terror, as they see the creature before them, while the creature's offspring spill forth, skittering across the metal floor and swarming anyone too slow or too brave to flee.



Getty Images/Anton Petrus/Vac1

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: EXAMPLEBRUSH_01

Great brush for adding small dust particles, helping to add a layer of atmosphere to images.

EXAMPLEBRUSH_02

Used for initial rough sketches and adding in some of the slime dripping from the eggs.

EXAMPLEBRUSH_03

Simple soft brush but with a subtle texture added. Adds atmosphere and masking layers.

EXAMPLEBRUSH_04

Textured soft brush, adds layers of haze. Texture introduces an extra layer of interest.

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 5 now!

1 The story

Before gathering references, we start by establishing the story for the scene. This can be a simple one-line idea or a longer description – whatever helps define the core 'hook' that guides your design decisions. For this piece, we aimed to capture a tense moment in a sci-fi corridor as a spider-like creature reveals its presence to the crew, unleashing chaos.

2 Collecting references

As always, we start by gathering references. Even with a strong visual library, memory isn't enough. Details like spider leg movement or webbing behaviour require research. We explore sci-fi corridors, architecture, arachnid anatomy, horror films and practical effects to find the balance between realism and spine-chilling fantasy. Software like PureRef or Photoshop helps us organise references while keeping the brief focused.



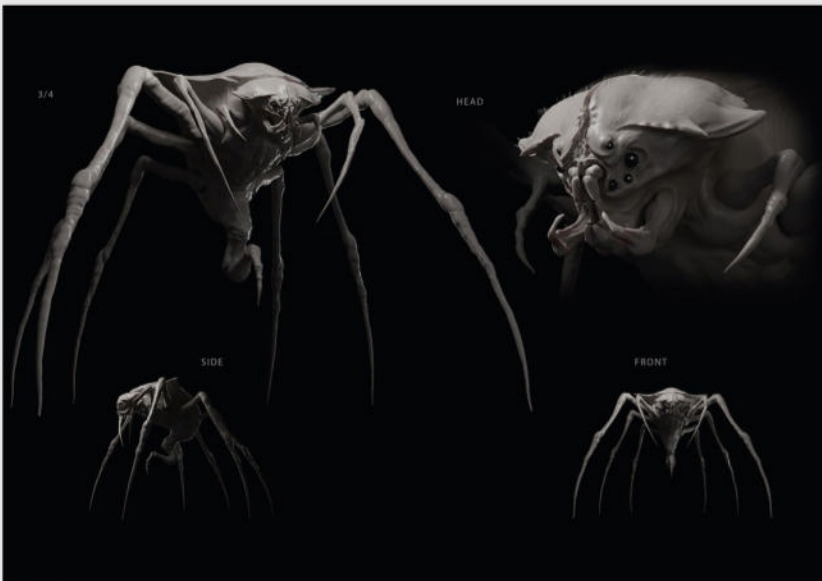
3 Sketching the monster

We start with black-and-white 2D silhouette sketches to explore the creature's design. Early sketches are for rapid iteration; not final polished art. Staying loose lets us test many ideas quickly and move on when something doesn't work. At this stage, we stick to 2D in Photoshop, focusing on speed and iteration rather than detail, keeping the process flexible before we commit to refining the designs.



4 Refining the designs

When we are ready, and feel that we've got a good direction, we go into ZBrush to explore some of the designs that we like in more depth. We try a few body silhouettes and begin to explore the facial structure of the creature, making sure that it is as terrifying as possible.



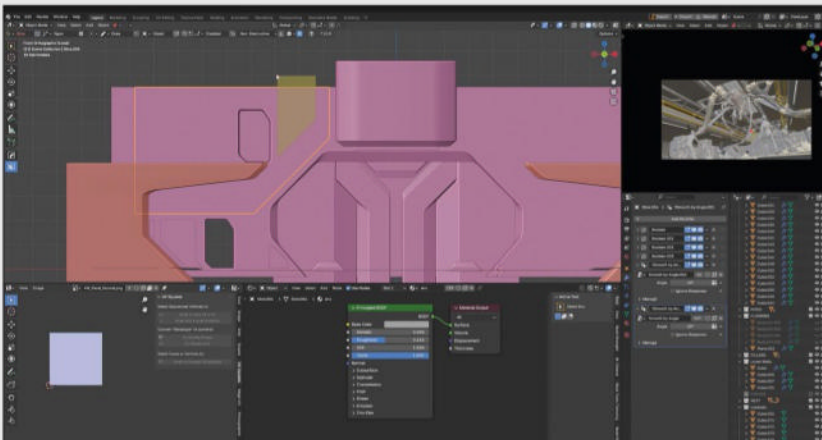
5 Creating the monster in ZBrush

For the main monster, when sculpting in ZBrush, we start with big shapes and rough details. We work to scale and use IMM brushes, ZSpheres and Dynamics to block forms, separating key parts for easier sculpting. Using GoZ speeds up tests between Blender and ZBrush. For texturing, we use ZRemesh, UV unwrap, Polypaint and bake normal and displacement maps for Blender.



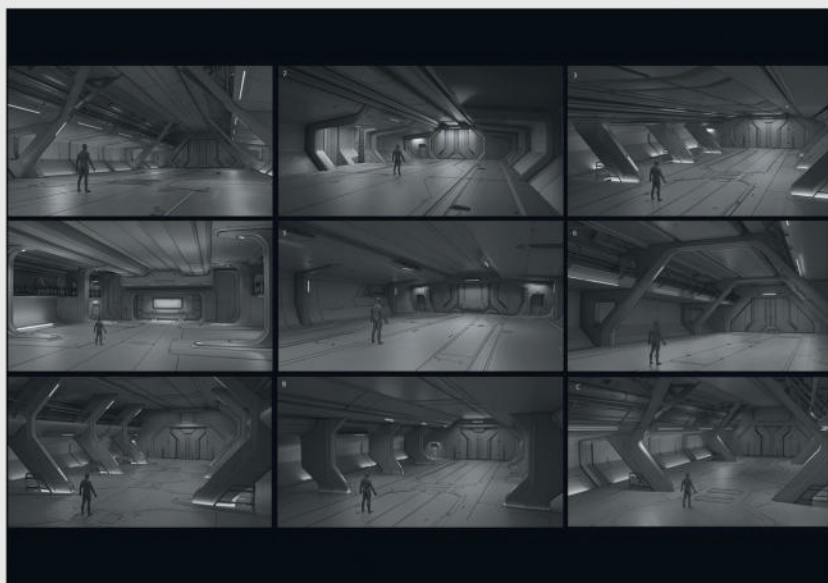
6 Supporting cast

We knew early on that this would be the creature's nest, so we added eggs and hatchlings. Once the monster design was approved, we created the spiderlings as simplified versions of the main model – younger and less developed. They needed to read as its offspring that will eventually grow into the same horrifying creature.



7 Sketching the environment

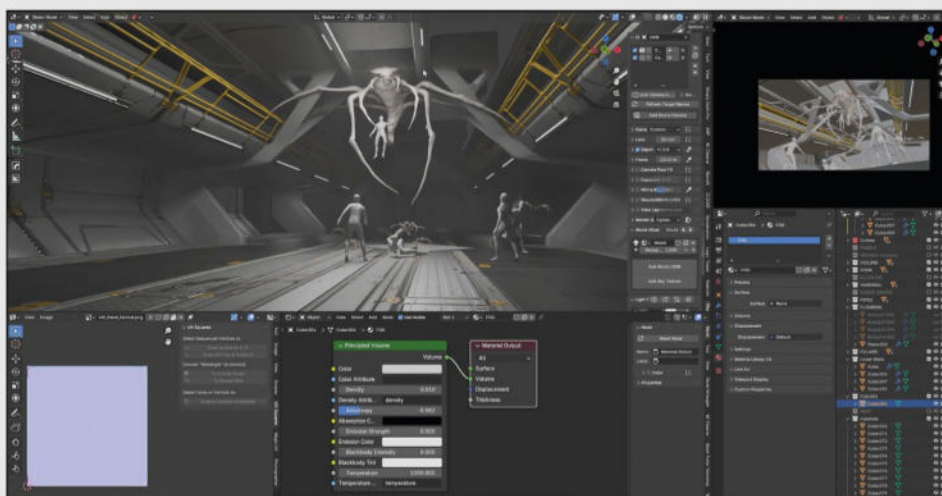
When building environments, we start with blockouts in Blender using shapes to establish a layout of the environment before going into details. We knew that we wanted the corridor to feel more dynamic than just one floor, so we introduced two levels. This helps create verticality and lets us stage the monster in horrifying ways. This stage focuses on hard surface modelling, shape, composition and lighting, which is crucial for horror. Tools like HardOps and Boxcutter, combined with basic modelling techniques, help us block in the corridor quickly before adding details. ➡➡



8 Hybrid workflows
 We often use Blender to quickly block out the 3D environment, before switching to Photoshop to sketch additional details over it and handing the work to an art director for feedback. This approach lets us nail camera angles and perspective efficiently without slowing down the process by getting into needless details. It's a technique that we rely on frequently during production on video games, allowing us to iterate and hand-in to clients rapidly!

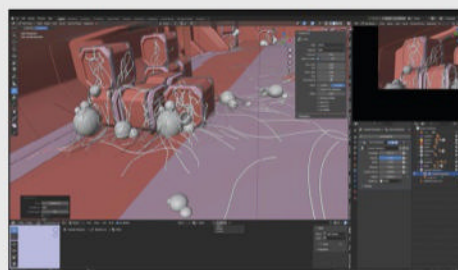


9 Adding in the monster
 Now that we've established the environment, we bring in the star of the show: the creature! We import from ZBrush into Blender, before rigging the monster with the plugin Rigify. This allows us to pose it dynamically, and it also will allow us to easily animate this later. From here, we can test different camera angles and compositions, always searching for the most unsettling perspective.

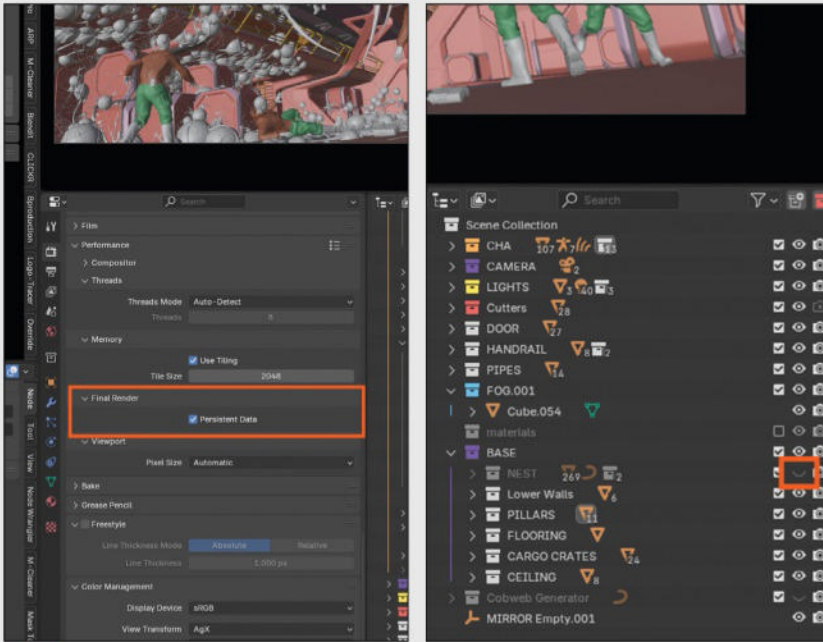


10 Let's talk about mood
 Lighting and colour are some of the most important tools for conveying emotion. Horror relies on the contrast between shadow and light, so we plan where things vanish into darkness and where slivers of illumination reveal glimpses of the nightmare. Cold colours like blue or green enhance tension. Shadows let viewers imagine unseen threats, while strategically placed ceiling lights and leading lines guide the eye, directing focus and building suspense.

11 The nest
 At this stage, we import the eggs and spiderlings that were originally sculpted in ZBrush into Blender. We do the same sort of workflow as we did with the creature, adding a rig to the spiderlings so that they could crawl, leap and fall across the environment. We scatter eggs on walls, floors and ceilings, exploring materiality from slimy to leathery.

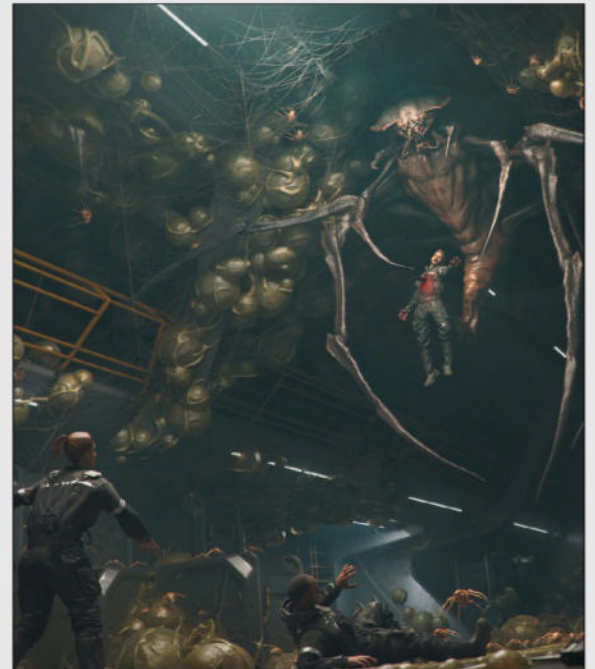


12 Adding expressions to characters
 We begin posing human characters. Some cower in terror, others flee, and one unfortunate soul is already ensnared by the creature. These narrative moments bring the environment to life. We use a simple rigged base mesh, combining BMS Industrial Characters for bodies, and costumes with Character Creator to adjust faces and expressions through Blender sliders via the CC bridge. Character expressions get special attention here – we want to see shock, fear and resignation. Every face has to tell a story.



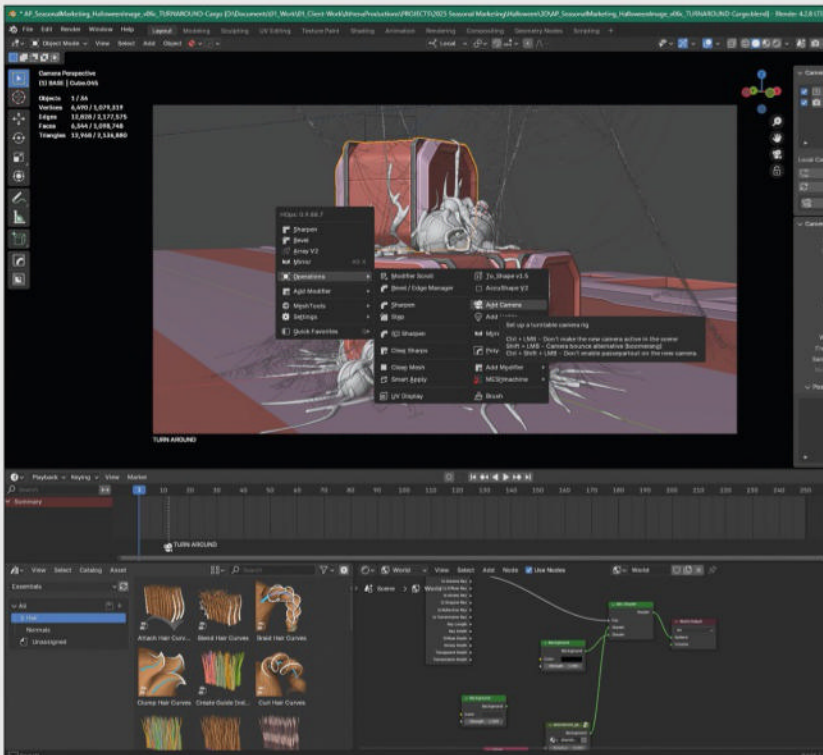
13 Render tips

Once everything is staged, we render our shots. As we work, we optimise the scene by avoiding unnecessarily large textures, and enabling options like Persistent Data, which is especially useful for animations, as it caches render data in memory. We also decimate heavy geometry and use instances. A little tip to make your viewport run smoother: disable visibility within the viewport, but keep it in the final render. You can also use GPU denoise and play with the Noise threshold and samples to get that perfect render!



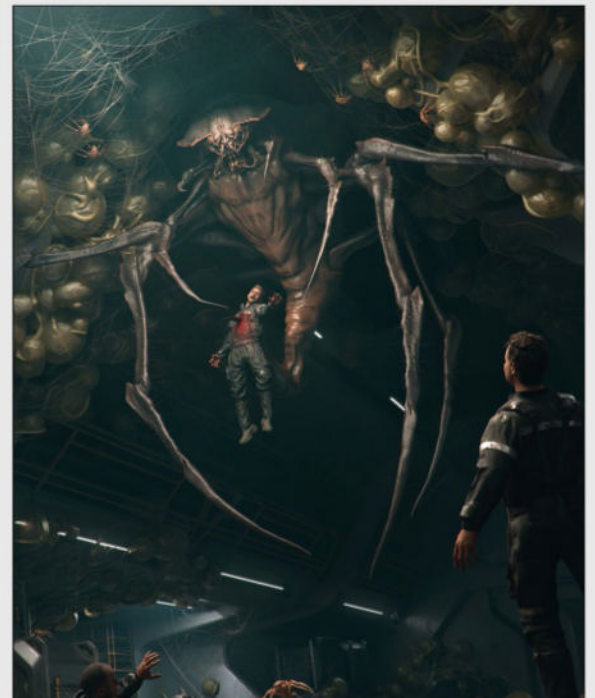
14 Photoshop time

Once the 3D is complete, we bring everything into Photoshop for the final pass. Our artist renders out a bunch of useful render passes and composites them together to enhance the base render. This is also where the atmosphere comes to life – we push the lighting, add fog, dust, dirt and slime to lean into that horrifying vibe.



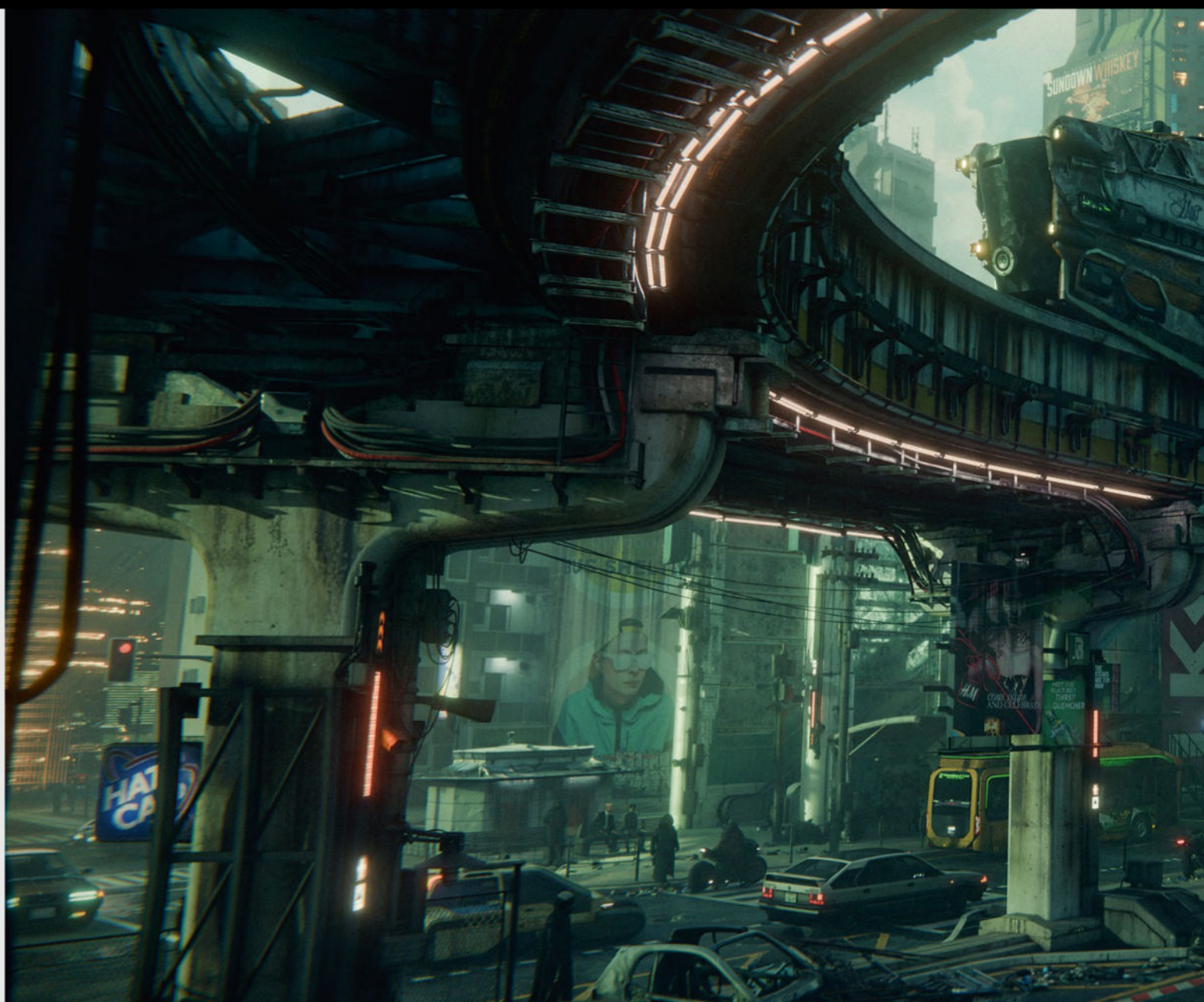
15 Creating turnarounds and preparing for animation

Everything in our scene is rigged, from the creature to every human character so the groundwork for animation is already in place. For creating turnarounds, HardOps is especially useful, offering a quick turnaround camera that makes setting up clean, consistent rotation renders fast and straightforward.



16 The final result

This scene doesn't just look spooky; it's genuinely terrifying! It lets you feel the tension of standing in that corridor, staring up at a newly revealed nightmare, knowing escape is impossible. When mood, lighting, design and storytelling details all work together, they can create a truly horrifying moment frozen in time. ●



Technique focus

MAP OUT YOUR ENVIRONMENTS

Planning is vital when creating a futuristic urban scene, explains **Stefano Federico**



"This is a personal project inspired by my love for future tech, urban settings and the beauty that can be found in the decay of public spaces. I started with a rough blockout to define the main layout. Then, after experimenting with composition

sketches, I worked individually on the most important 'hero assets'. Finally, I put all the pieces together with the proper set-dressing.

In large-scale scenes it's important to decide on the overall layout and distribution of all elements early on in the process. Detailing too much and too early can be overwhelming." ●

How I create...

FUTURE WORLDS



1 Blockout sketching

Here, it's important to clarify the main layout and placement of main designs. No need for details. Just work to a realistic human scale and establish a simplified version of all architectural elements. This enables us to experiment with the composition and design later on.



Artist PROFILE

Stefano Federico

LOCATION: Italy

Stefano is a freelance concept artist. He loves to make believable, near-future designs and futuristic worlds with a keen eye for lighting and cinematography. <https://bit.ly/4k2KqBm>



2 Composition and assets creation

It's time to start designing all the main elements in the image by slowly adding details in the relevant areas. Key assets that require special treatment can be worked on in separate files and then simply linked in, so the main 3D scene is light and responsive. As well as that, it's important to establish the main camera angle and lighting.



3 Set-dressing and refinement

Now we add extra details and refinements. Add simple environmental story-telling bits and more high-density details where needed, but keep a balance between visual noise and rest areas. Tweaks to lighting and colours can be done with the post-process nodes and Photoshop.

3D Artist Back to basics

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

Thinking about navigating a 3D app the way you would use a game controller is a great way to start using a 3D app.



HOW DO I MOVE AROUND MY 3D SCENE?

Getting lost in (3D) space can be easy when you're new to 3D apps — **Mike Griggs** shows how to go about finding your way back



If you are used to using 2D software or a piece of paper and want to learn 3D, the kicker is learning to navigate in an extra dimension.

If you've ever opened a 3D application and felt lost, you're not alone. Unlike a 2D canvas, where up is up and left is left, a 3D viewport is a window into an empty, infinite space that you can view from any angle. Once you've learned the three core moves – orbit, pan and zoom – you'll

find that they work almost identically across every 3D application.

Orbit rotates your view around a central point. Pan slides your view without changing angle. Zoom moves you closer to or further from what you're looking at, narrowing or widening your field of view.

These moves typically use a combination of mouse buttons and modifier keys (Alt, Shift, Ctrl or Cmd). The logic is universal: one button orbits, add a modifier to pan, add

another to zoom. Most applications also support scroll-wheel zoom.

The viewport can switch between standardised views – top, front, side – and perspective and orthographic projections. Perspective mimics how we see the real world. Orthographic flattens this depth, which is invaluable for precise alignment work.

Mike is the founder of Creative Bloke and has experience in content creation, workflow design and emerging creative technology. See www.creativebloke.com.

The basic functions in a 3D application

1 Orbit, pan and zoom

Every 3D app shares three navigation fundamentals. In Blender, middle-mouse orbits, Shift+middle-mouse pans, and scroll-wheel zooms. Cinema 4D or Maya use Alt



plus mouse buttons instead. The key is learning your app's shortcuts until they become muscle memory – it's usually swapping a position in a different app.

2 Switching views

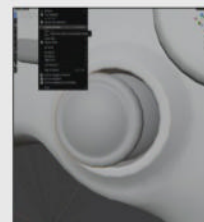
Most 3D apps offer preset viewpoints: top, front, left, right, which in Blender are accessed via the multicoloured gimbal at the top, number keys or the View menu.



Switching between perspective (realistic depth) and orthographic (no depth distortion) is important – the latter is essential when you need to line objects up.

3 Frame your selection

Sooner or later, you'll zoom too far or orbit into oblivion and lose sight of your object. Every 3D app has a 'frame selection' command that centres and zooms in on



whatever's selected – learn this early. Also worth knowing is that most apps let you frame the entire scene or jump back to the origin point (0,0,0) with a single command.

Vertex colours can be used for a multitude of reasons – a common one being to define areas of a mesh in the rigging process.



MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR VERTEX COLOURS

Vertex colours are a model's secret weapon that unlock multiple benefits, reveals **Ant Ward**



We've now discussed many of the elements that make up a 3D model. As we've seen, edges, vertices and UV's are all key components in affecting how the model looks, so what else is left to cover? Well, vertices don't just store positional and UV data – they also hold colour data, too.

Vertex colours aren't immediately obvious, but you will have seen them in action at some point. For example, if you use Maya, when painting skin weights the values are represented using vertex colours. In sculpting applications, when you paint colour information onto the models, this is usually done using vertex colours, too.

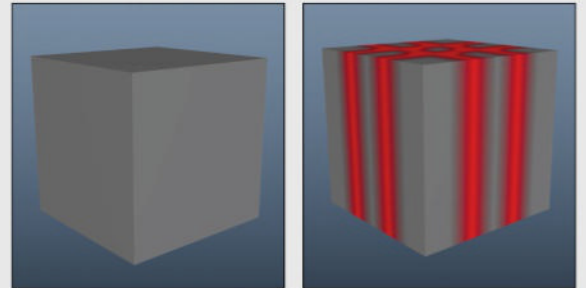
What's interesting is these colours aren't purely cosmetic, they can have other uses as well. In video game

development, they're often used to hold additional data which the game engine can read and then interpret in the game. This could be anything ranging from dictating the type of surface the character is walking on – sticky or slippery – to helping to blend different textures.

Another benefit is that vertex colours are relatively cheap to use. Storing texture pages can be quite expensive, so games running on lower-powered devices often opt to colour their models using vertex colours instead of needing hundreds of texture pages. Let's look at how to apply them.

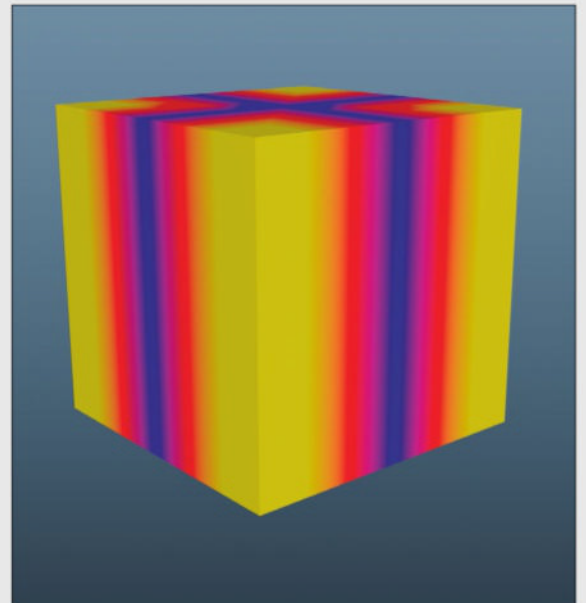
Ant runs antCGI, which supplies quality digital art, game art, rigging, animation and illustration services to a wide range of clients. Learn more at www.antcgi.com

Understand how your 3D software sees vertex colour



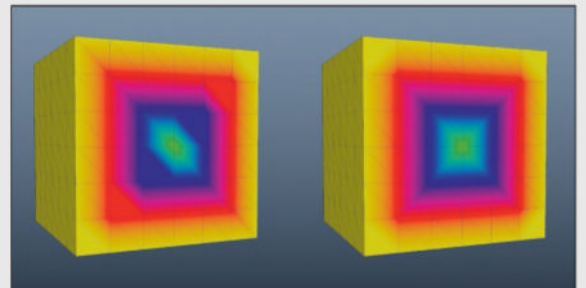
1 Paint by brush, not selection

Most 3D applications offer the ability to paint vertex colours directly onto your model, rather than doing it on a per-vertex level. This is much more user-friendly, especially when you have a dense mesh to work with, where selecting vertices can be challenging.



2 Blend your colours

Vertex colours blend between each neighbouring vertex. This means that the denser the mesh, the more detailed colours you can have. This will then mix the colours to produce additional hues.



3 Control the flow

On lower-resolution models, you have some control over the flow of the colours. Simply rotating or flipping an edge will redirect the spread of the colour, giving you far greater control of the end result.

FIVE MINUTES WITH MICHAEL MICHERA

Exposure to movies like Jurassic Park sparked a love for design in the award-winning concept artist



Where did your artistic journey start?

My artistic journey started very early in life, with a fascination with dinosaurs and animals in general. Drawing became a natural way for me to process that curiosity and give it form.

What do you consider to be your main source of inspiration?

Nature is my main source of inspiration – animals, biology and the way evolution shapes form and movement. Science fiction and a futuristic aesthetic provide the framework for pushing those ideas into design concepts.

As a young artist, were there worlds – perhaps in movies, comics or art, for example – that gave you a desire to create your own?

I was four when I first saw Jurassic Park on VHS, and I instantly became obsessed with velociraptors – their sleek shapes, movement and apparent intelligence. That early fascination with creatures and biology never really left me.



ALICE – STILL ALIVE

Michael created this artwork to accompany a music project by Atom Music Audio.

Tell us about your first paid commission, and does it stand as a representation of your talent?

The first project I was paid for was a hand-painted digital illustration for a post-apocalyptic book cover. It had a sci-fi edge, but the setting was intentionally close to the present.

It showed a young girl wearing a gas mask and holding a teddy bear. It doesn't really represent the kind of work I do today, but it shows where I was at the time and how I was thinking visually. My focus has shifted much more toward design-driven work and building worlds rather than single illustrations.

What's the last piece you finished, and how do the two differ?

Recently, I completed a predatory creature as part of my own personal project. It's fast, aggressive in its design language, and built around the idea of movement and function rather than a single illustrative moment.

Compared to my first paid commission, this work is much

“Choosing a clear direction matters more than trying to be flexible about everything”

more design-driven. It explores a modern, subtly biomechanical approach, while staying largely organic, and focuses on how the creature would exist and behave within a larger world rather than just how it appears in one image. It feels closer to the kind of work I've always wanted to do.

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

My goal was always to work on major cinematic productions, and I've started to see that goal take shape in reality. I had the opportunity to work on Transformers: Rise of the Beasts, which confirmed that I was moving in the direction I wanted.

I was fairly clear early on about the kind of work that I wanted to do. At the same time, the path wasn't as linear as I once imagined – there were long periods of uncertainty and quiet before things started to move.



CHIMERA LACERTIUM

This piece is about evolution and is part of Michael's ongoing personal project, Machimera.

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

To focus early on the kind of work I want to do, rather than trying to meet every industry expectation at once. Choosing a clear direction matters more than trying to be flexible about everything.

Are there challenges to 3D?

3D doesn't let you fake things the way 2D sometimes does. It's demanding, but that's also why it's such a powerful design tool.

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

Computers are far more powerful than they used to be. Back in 2014, sculpting complex designs – especially robots – on a laptop often meant creatively working around hardware limitations.

What is your next step in art or life?

My hard-surface background taught me a modern way of thinking about design – how mechanisms work, how structure supports function, and how complexity can be broken down into readable parts. I'm now applying that to creature design, especially through a biomechanical lens. I now want to focus more on what I want to do: creature design, art direction and worldbuilding.

A concept designer specialising in creature design and robotics, Michael's style has been built on his passion for biology and sci-fi. He has worked for Paramount Pictures among others, and Machimera is his personal project. In 2017, he won the Golden Brush Award. You can see more of his work at <https://bit.ly/45RD3XN>



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