

NO. 1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

100
PAGES OF EPIC
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TRAINING

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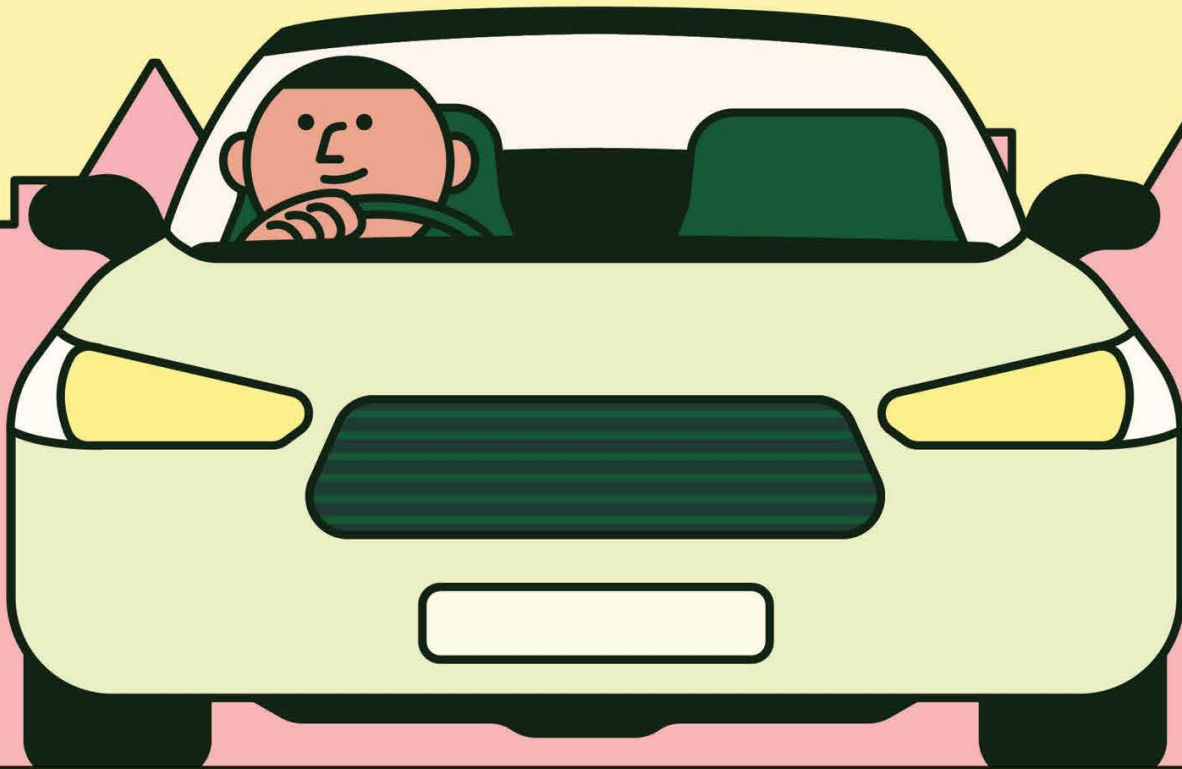
WEIRD

Dive into the extravagant anatomies of caricature artist Luis Rojas, who takes the human form to extremes

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I think it's fair to suggest that pretty much every artist, working in every genre, will need to paint anatomy at some point or another. Even if the character is a fantastical beast, the most successful portrayals tend towards a basis in reality so the viewer understands how

the creature, human or otherwise, works, if they are young, old, strong or weak, or even alien, and to do this you need an understanding of anatomy, which is our main focus this issue.

Our news feature looks at how five artists use anatomy to do just this, informing their creature creations, and then we have our cover artist Luis Rojas, who has made a career out of contorting human anatomy in his wonderful caricatures.

Elsewhere, JC Jongwon Park turns his humanoid creations mechanical while keeping them relatable in his in-depth tutorial.

And if you want to take a break from heroes and villains to focus on setting, then check out our environment tutorial by Bill Yi, who lays out his Photoshop paintings in Blender.

Enjoy the issue!

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

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

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Bella Liu opens the pages of her sketchbook, bursting with fantasy animals and characters.

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Design relatable mechanoids

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Use 3D to aid your 2D environments

Bill Yi goes in-depth on his workflow for designing and painting epic environments.

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Keeping it super-real

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Sketchbook: Bella Liu

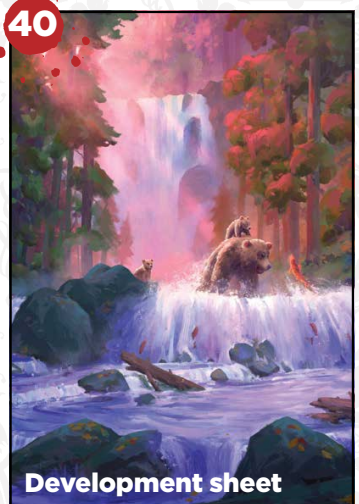
FXPosé

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See page 10 for the best new art ➔

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Development sheet



FANTASY SCI-FI DIGITAL ART
ImagineFX
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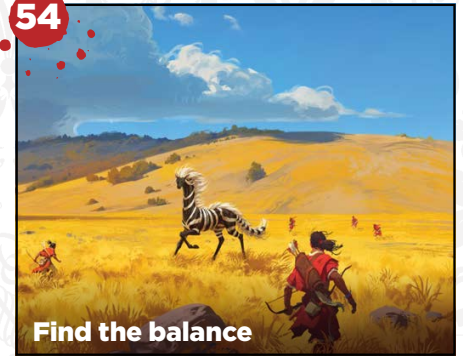
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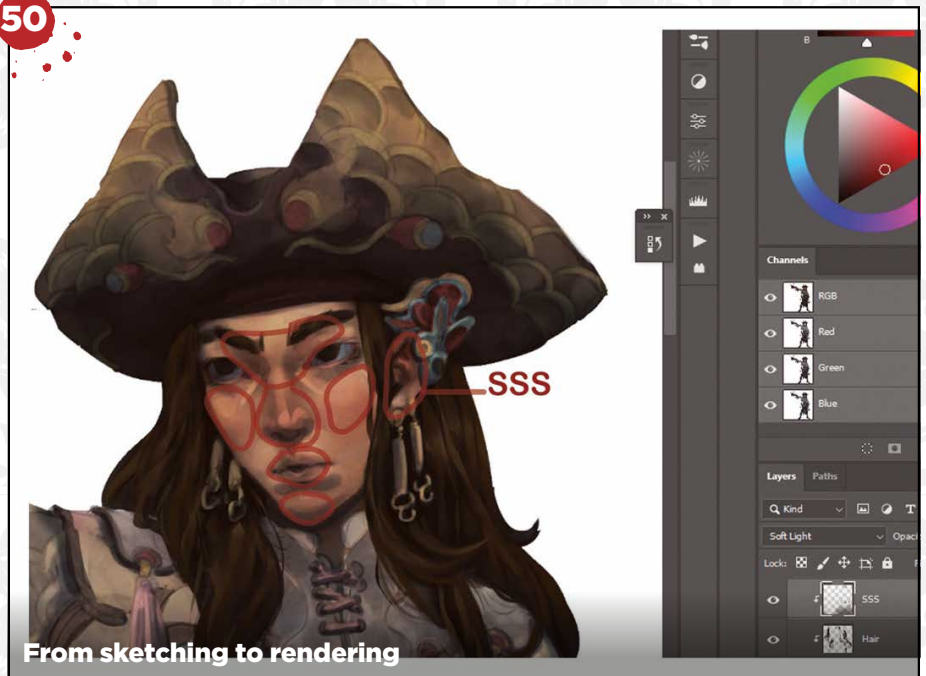
A cinematic cyberpunk scene

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Find the balance

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From sketching to rendering

3D Artist

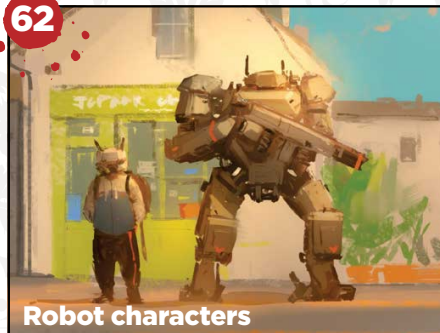
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Five minutes with Ali Eser

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Blend inspiration

GET YOUR RESOURCES

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

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

Next month

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Next month in...
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EXPLORE MAUL: SHADOW LORD

Go behind the scenes with **Lucasfilm** as the art director shares a wealth of concept secrets

Art wizardry
Illustrator Billy Christian shows how he crafts his magical heroes using Photoshop

Familiar oddity
Learn how to paint everyday scenes with a touch of the weird, with advice from Lê Long

Inside the studio
Take a tour inside the trinket-filled illustration studio of traditional artist Nik Henderson

ISSUE 267 ON SALE 2 JUNE
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Content of next issue is subject to change



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SFX

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A STRANGER THINGS ART CARD!
7 STRANGER THINGS STICKERS!

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FOR ALL MANKIND SPIN-OFF

THE MANDALORIAN AND GROGU
JON FAVREAU SPEAKS TO SFX

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GOOD OMENS 3
THE FINAL CHAPTER

HOCUS POCUS
THE UNSEEN EDIT

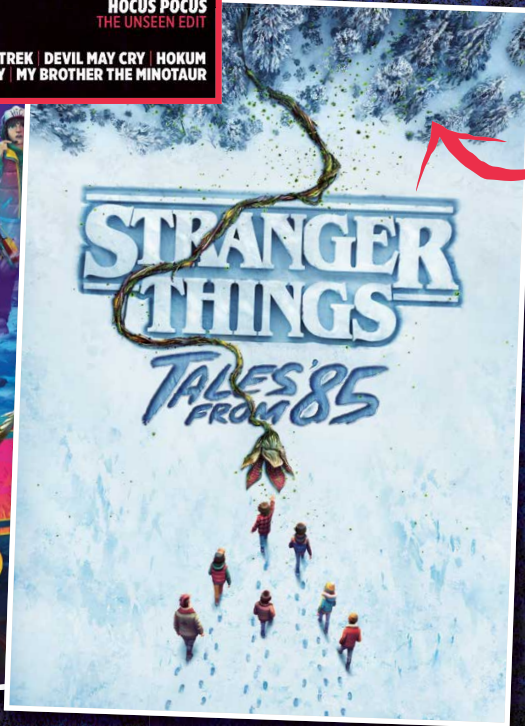
PLUS! THE LOST BOYS | MORTAL KOMBAT | OBSESSION | STAR TREK | DEVIL MAY CRY | HOKUM FROM ROSE OF NEVADA | STAR WARS | BEN 10 | WIDOW'S BAY | MY BROTHER THE MINOTAUR

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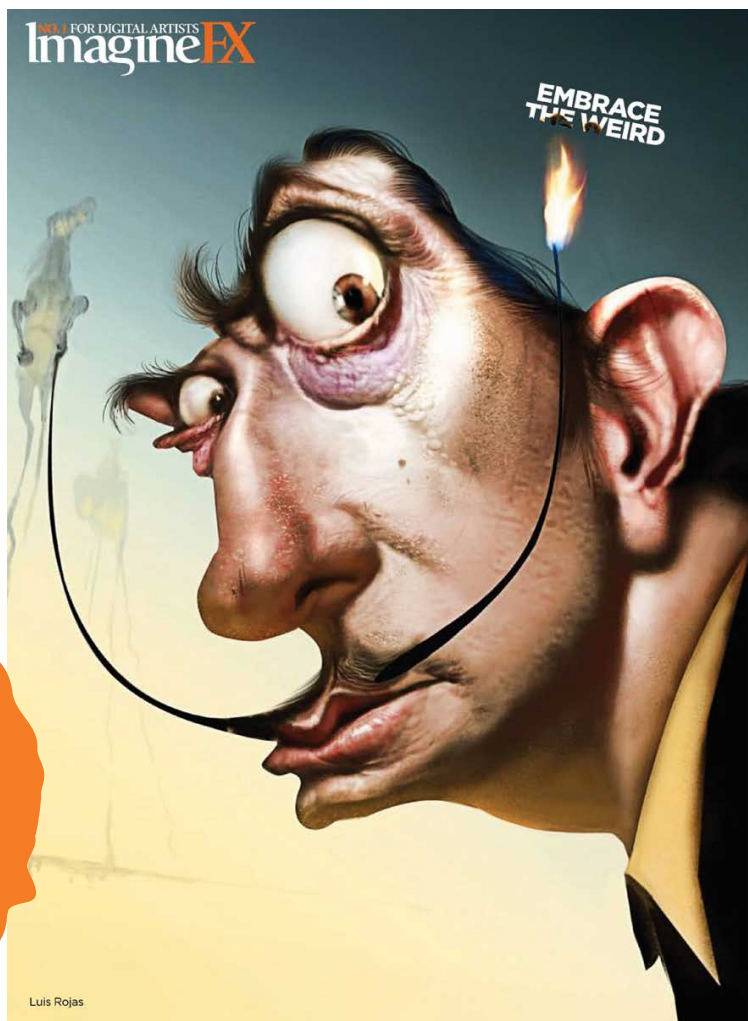
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Tristan Bideau

LOCATION: France **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender

WEB: www.artstation.com/tristanbideau

Mythology and fantasy novels shaped Tristan's imagination from an early age and sparked a lasting passion for fantasy worlds. After graduating from École Pivaut, he began his career as a freelance illustrator with Altered TCG.

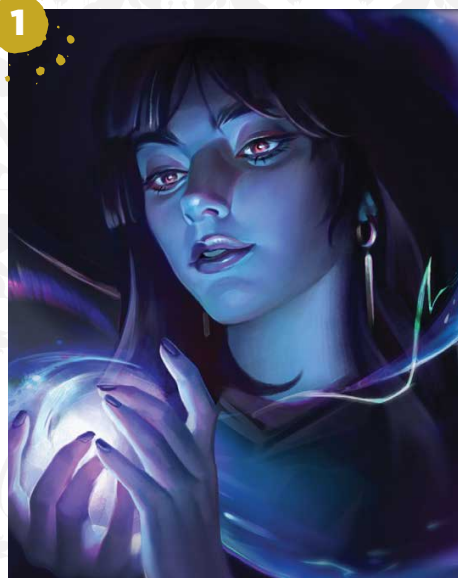
1 WITCH

"In my free time, I enjoy turning study references into new illustrations. It's a great exercise, and also a fun way to explore, learn, and create something more personal."

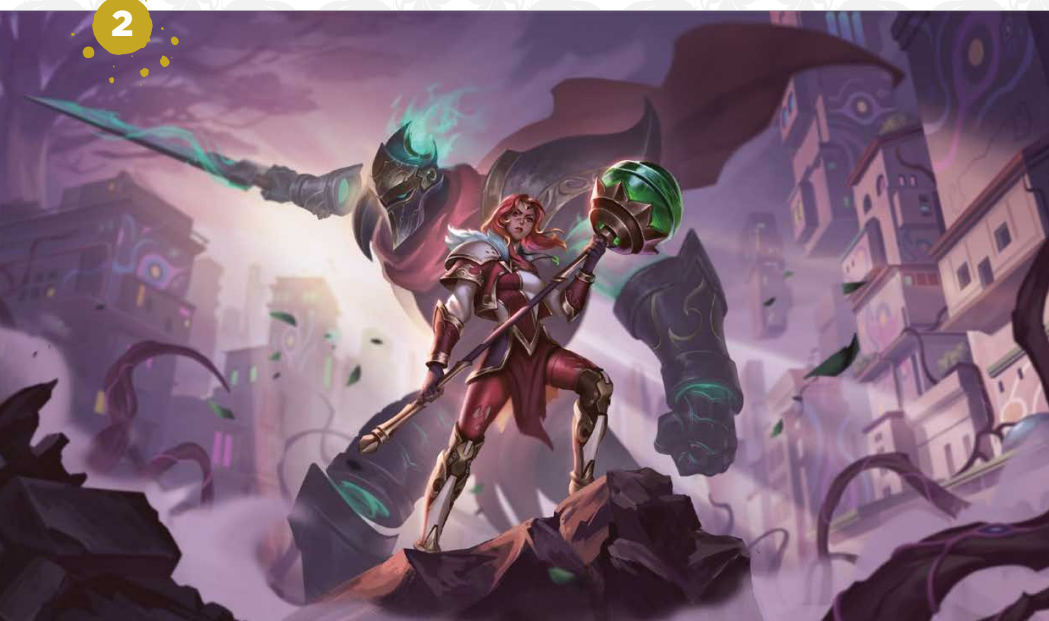
2 THANK YOU ALTERED

"Created for Altered TCG, this illustration was a joy to paint in both composition and atmosphere. Above all, it marked a turning point, making me feel I had grown artistically."

1



2

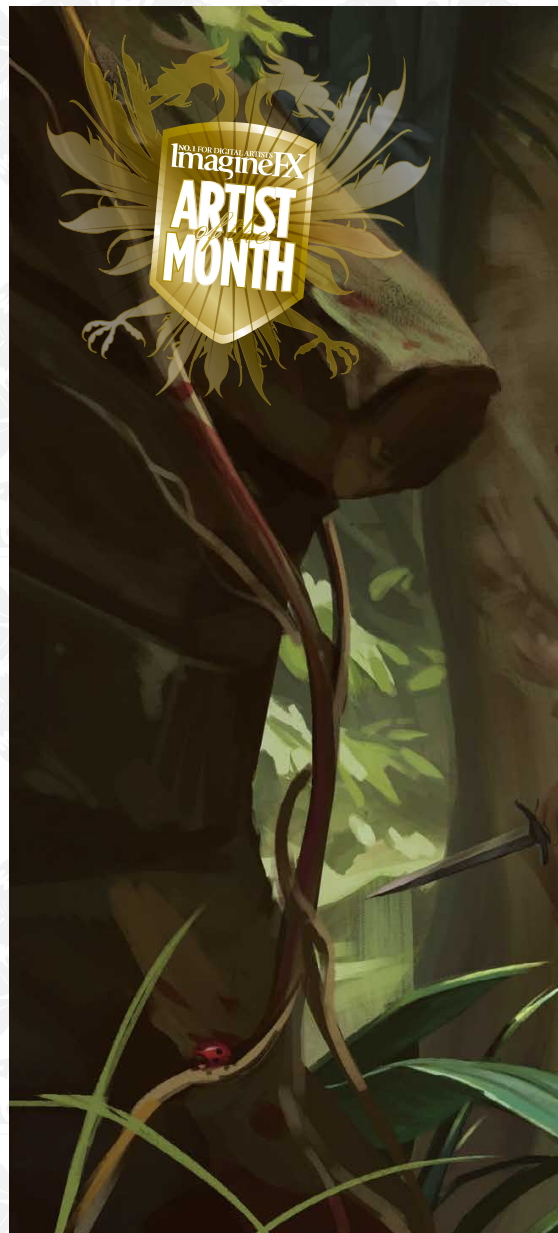


3 JOURNEY TO BALDUR'S GATE

"This piece brings my character, Wurm, to life alongside Rook, my girlfriend's character; it celebrates our shared journey through Baldur's Gate 3 and some unforgettable moments with Astarion and Karlach."

4 THE FANG OATH

"Created for Drawbento's DTIYS challenge, this was inspired by The Witcher 3 soundtrack and the Mistborn novels. I wanted to create a piece filled with mystery and atmosphere."



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3



4





Raja Nandepu

LOCATION: India **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate **WEB:** www.artstation.com/raja

As an environment concept artist and illustrator with over 10 years of experience, including *Magic: The Gathering*, Raja enjoys creating unique worlds by focusing on atmosphere and storytelling through light and colour with expressive brushwork.

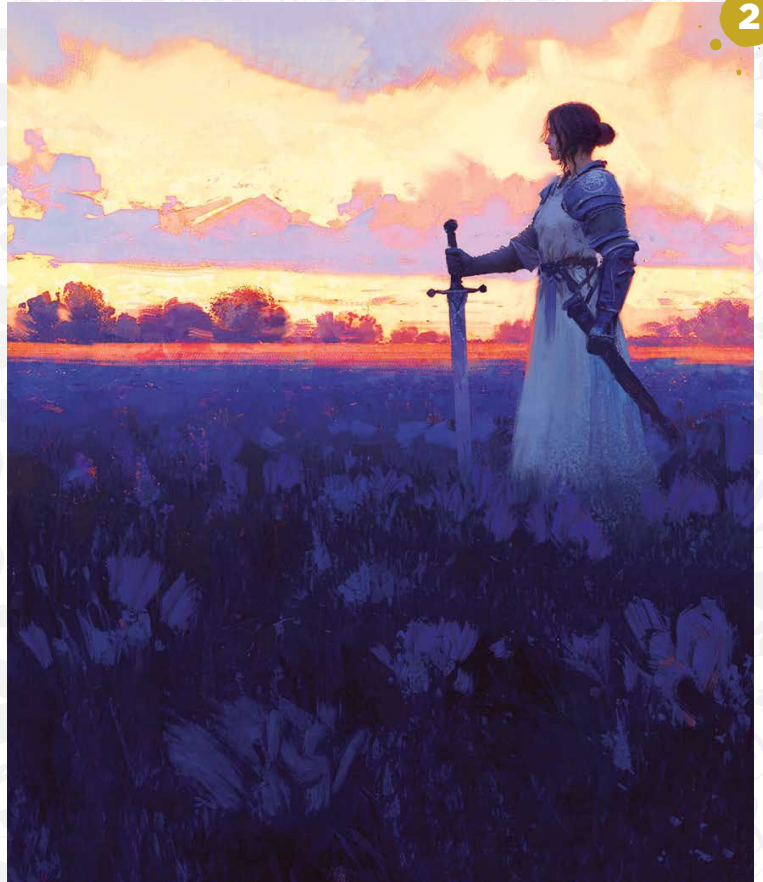
1 WINTER OATH

"This is from my warriors series. I focused on mood and light, using cool tones with soft warm highlights. I made the figure feel quiet and inward-looking, suggesting a story through a still, paused moment."



2 EDGE OF EVENING

"I focused on capturing the contrast between the light of the warm sky and cool evening. I made the figure feel calm and grounded, capturing a pause in time where light and space carried the emotion."

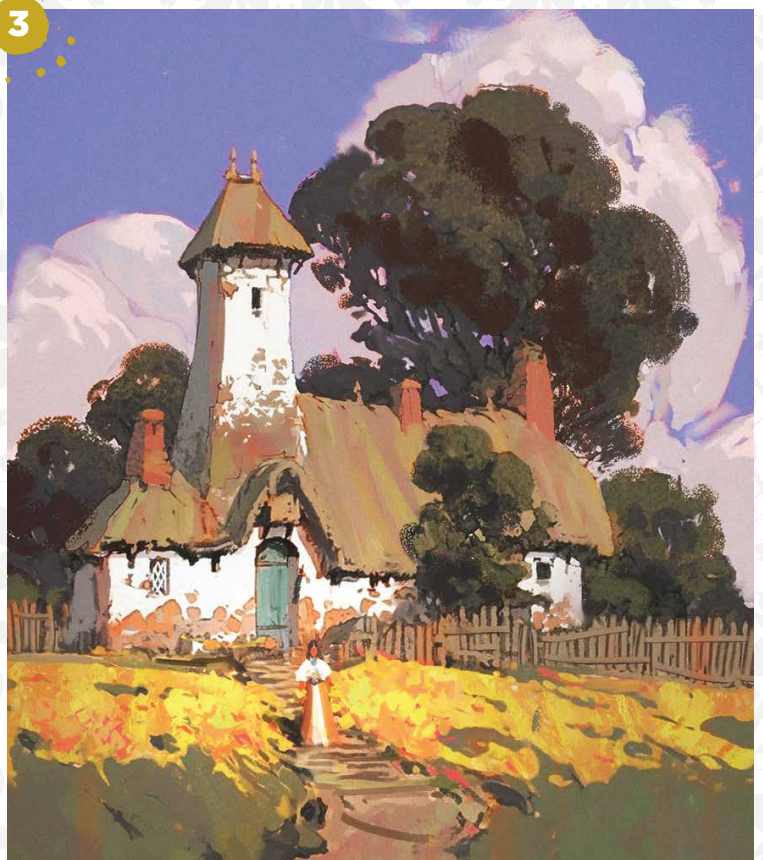


3 GOLDEN FIELD HOME

"I focused on simple shapes for the house and loose brushwork for the fields. Inspired by calm golden fields, I used warm light and texture to create a peaceful feeling and included a figure for some gentle storytelling."

4 EMBER PLAINS

"This piece is about space and mood, with a lone rider to give scale and a sense of quiet movement. I like working with strong colour contrasts, so I wanted to keep this palette limited to red and white, with a few hints of blue."



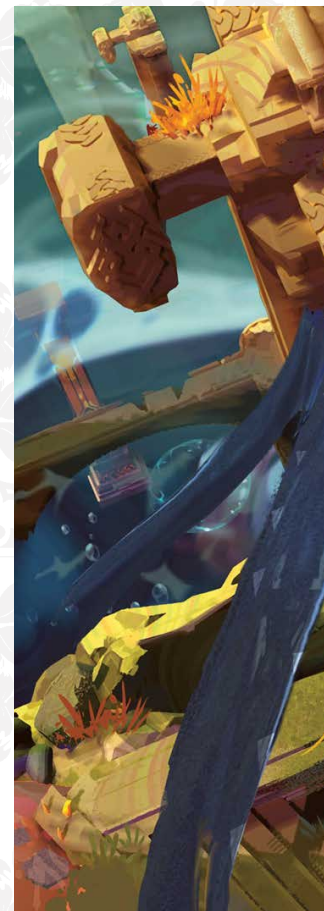




Cyril Yong Zhou

LOCATION: China MEDIA: Photoshop, Blender WEB: www.artstation.com/cyрилzhou

Cyril is a concept artist and visual designer with 12 years of experience in film and games, including projects such as Honor of Kings and The Eight Hundred. He creates atmospheric environments that blend digital painting, 3D workflows, cinematic mood, and cultural memory.



1 THE GOLDEN HARBOUR CITADEL

"A golden capital rises above the harbour, combining monumental architecture, layered districts, and bright atmosphere. Airships and sunlight reinforce a vision of prosperity, power, faith, and wonder across the skyline."

2 LION DANCE IN THE OLD QUARTER

"A courtyard is a stage where lion dancers, martial movement, and modern city forms collide. This explores cultural continuity through contrast, performance, celebration, and urban memory made visible."

3 RUINS BENEATH THE TIDE

"An ancient ruin that's been transformed by water, drifting fabric, and strange growths. The scene frames exploration through layered space, vivid colour, and a sense of mystery, danger, and forgotten history."

4 MARKET STREET BELOW THE CASTLE

"This bustling market street in a medieval town leads the eye towards a distant castle on a hilltop, using layered rooftops, banners, and figures to build a welcoming storybook sense of place."

3



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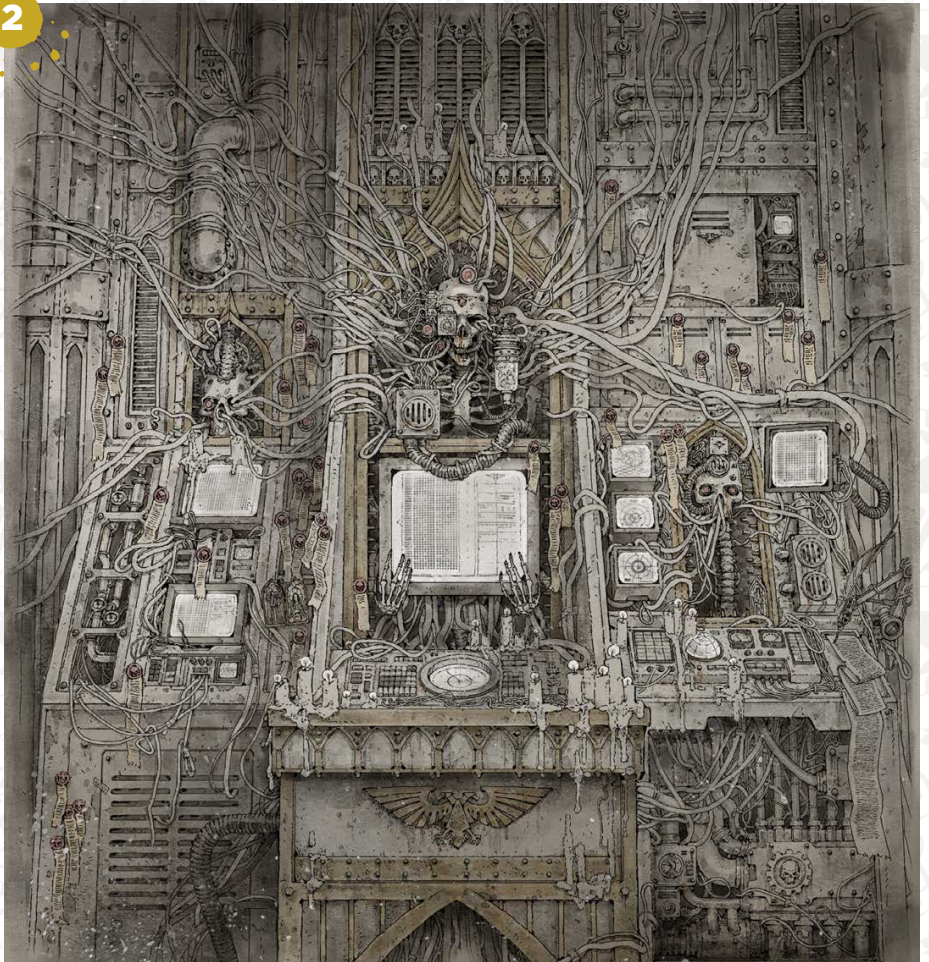
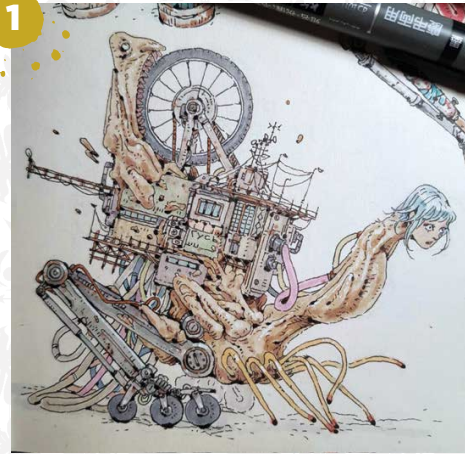




Anastasiya Landasseln

LOCATION: Uzbekistan **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint, and traditional media **WEB:** www.artstation.com/naiss-ryo

Anastasiya is a concept artist, illustrator, and creature design teacher who mainly works on Warhammer 40,000 projects. The fusion of living and artificial forms are central to her work, alongside expressive visual storytelling.



1 ABSETZER

"After visiting a real bucket-wheel excavator, I made this traditional sketch inspired by the experience. It shows a mass of living human biomatter fused with a gigantic industrial machine."

2 WARHAMMER 40,000: ROGUE TRADER - COGITATOR

"Cogitators are data-processing machines in the Warhammer 40,000 universe. I approached this piece as a fusion of machinery, ritual, and oppressive atmosphere rather than clean or familiar futuristic technology."

3 ADEPTUS MECHANICUS TECH-PRIEST

"This personal piece reflects my fascination with the Adeptus Mechanicus aesthetic, especially the merging of flesh, machinery, and belief. Their cybernetic body modifications make them one of my favourite factions to draw."



4 ENT CONCEPT EXPLORATION SKETCHES

"These sketches explore both male and female Ent designs as I searched for their visual identity. I imagined the Entwives as smaller, more earthbound, arthropod-like beings, less humanoid and more deeply connected to the soil and undergrowth."

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5



5 WARHAMMER 40,000: ROGUE TRADER - CASSIA ORSELLIO

"This piece depicts a story moment from Cassia Orsellio's personal quest, in which she encounters one of her Navigator ancestors. I wanted the image to feel mysterious, ceremonial, and charged with the strange atmosphere surrounding her lineage."

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Nia Kovalevski

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** niakovalevski.com

As an illustrator, Nia focuses on character and story-driven imaginative realism. With an academic background in graphic design, German studies, and psychology, she now works mainly in games and publishing, such as Magic the Gathering, Brotherwise Games and Fantasy Flight Games.



© Fantasy Flight Games

1 MARK OF ELOKOSS

"Done for Fantasy Flight Games. I enjoyed playing with dramatic light, vintage fashion, and a darker mood here. I wanted the character to feel mysterious and rooted in the story."

2 KEEN EYE

"A personal piece inspired by J.R.R. Tolkien."

3 MERRY AND PIPPIN

"Another personal piece, this time depicting the two mischievous Hobbits from the Fellowship."

4 LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

"Personal concept project of the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale in a noir fantasy-horror setting."



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

4





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WWW.THEROOKIES.CO



Artist **PROFILE**

Jérémy Cohen

LOCATION: France



Jérémy, a 23-year-old concept artist, just finished his studies at New3dge Concept Art. His work is heavily influenced by his love of horror and fantasy.

His creations, most focused on environment design, transport viewers into mysterious, atmospheric worlds filled with enigmatic details and a sense of haunting beauty.

www.therookies.co/entries/37883

The Lurking Fear

YEAR CREATED: 2025 **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Blender

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

This project was a great opportunity for Jérémy to express his artistic tastes. His goal was to immerse the player in the horror of this place by gradually revealing mysterious elements as they progress through the manor, leading up to the descent into the underground. He is truly happy to have concluded his last two years at New3dge with this work.



Make imaginary creatures believable

Tanya Combrinck talks to five artists about their approach to **fictional anatomy** in creature design

Inventing creatures can be an opportunity to let your imagination run wild, but only up to a point... stray too far from realistic anatomy or what's physically possible and your designs won't hold up.

“I’m a firm believer that a fantasy artist cannot alter or distort anatomy convincingly, human or otherwise, without knowing anatomy and body mechanics thoroughly,” says veteran artist and educator **Ed Binkley**, who taught figure drawing and concept art for 30 years.

“When I look at the fantasy creature artists I love the most – Wayne Barlowe, Arthur Rackham, Terry Whitlatch, or James Gurney – I can tell that they’re always looking at anatomy references when they work

and that they’ve studied animal anatomy for many years.

“That depth of knowledge and practice combined with real-time use of reference images translates into thoroughly convincing anatomy on a creature that has never existed.”

A rigorous study of both human and animal anatomy will get you a long way, but if you want to make your creatures look real, you need to think about gesture, says Ed.

“Gesture in art basically means body language – how a creature stands, holds itself, looks at you (or doesn’t), slouches. Does it have an

RJ says to avoid design tropes that might not be accurate, like jaw flaps on dragons.

attitude? Is its stance relaxed, seductive, tense, scared? I’ve found over the years that gesture is the real ‘secret’ to the anatomy looking alive; it’s the difference between an accurate anatomy chart and the illusion of a sentient being.

“When knowledgeable anatomy is applied over living gesture, they enhance each other, and the result is a breathing, living being that somehow connects with the viewer. Details are important, of course, but they must ride on top of lifelike gesture.”

Creature and concept designer **Vincent Coviello** tells us that as well as having a good technical knowledge of how all the parts fit together, it’s useful to grasp how they work mechanically. “Anatomy isn’t just about copying real animals – it’s about understanding structure, weight, and movement. Once you understand how bones support the body and how muscles

“A rigorous study of both human and animal anatomy will get you a long way”



ALPINE ART STUDIO

Take a trip into the Austrian mountains to visit the canvas-filled, green-walled apartment of Raffaella Lerch, the face behind Aronja Art. **Page 26**



OF MICE AND MEN

Chris Falkenberg talks us through how his experiences have shaped his art, from his professional work to personal projects like Mouse Knight. **Page 30**

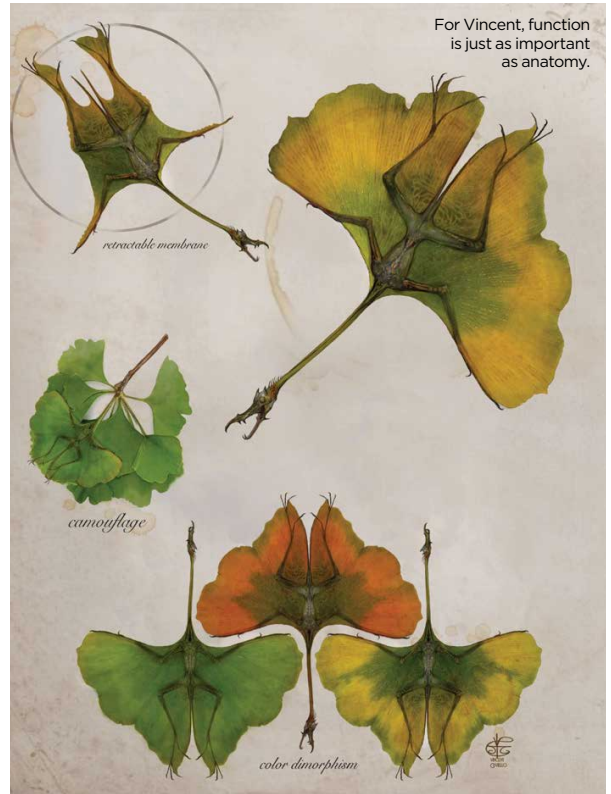


HAVING YOUR SAY

One reader loved the glimpse into Gretel Lusky's studio, while two others have been inspired to try new techniques in their own art. **Page 33**



Mastering gesture gives Ed's creature creations a high level of believability.



For Vincent, function is just as important as anatomy.

create motion, you can push those ideas in imaginative ways while keeping the creature believable.”

It's also important to get a sense of how a live body moves in real life. “I spend a lot of time looking at reference material,” says Vincent. “Observing how the body behaves – how the ribcage tilts, how the pelvis shifts when an animal stands, or how skin folds when an arm bends – all helps build that mental library. That knowledge makes it easier to draw from imagination without the anatomy falling apart.”

When you first start planning out your creature, Vincent explains that it's useful to think about how its body will function. “If it flies, the anatomy should support strong wing muscles and a lighter frame. If it burrows, it might have thicker forelimbs and stronger shoulders. These choices help the creature feel like it evolved for a purpose instead of being randomly assembled.”

Similarly, Ed likes to tell himself a story about the creature and its environment as he works. “What's the degree of gravity? What are the creature's habits or personality?”

Vincent thinks about what a creature is capable of and how its design can support those elements.



VINCENT CAVILLO



Ken believes the form of a creature is the most crucial design aspect.



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➔➔ How do they get around or feed? Do they need large eyes, or any eyes at all? Then I create rough sketches that answer those questions.

“Once the rough looks convincing, I go to my reference material and render actual structures and surface details onto it. I might use a photo of a crocodile’s neck details to render a dragon’s belly, or a raccoon skull’s muzzle to design a vampire’s nose.”

Concept artist **Lionel Prats** takes a similar approach, starting with questions about purpose and then doing detailed research into how his functional requirements are satisfied in nature.

“For example, if I need to draw a creature with a stinger, I immediately start thinking about its purpose. Is it a retractable stinger or a permanent one? Is it used to inject venom, like a wasp? Or is it more of a weapon, like a spine or a blade?”

“Depending on the answer, I’ll study animals that use similar mechanisms.



“Parts must be combined in a functional way so they can work as a unified whole”

This helps me understand whether it needs a venom sac, whether that sac should be visible, where it would be located, how it would connect to the rest of the body, and so on.”

The chosen body parts must be combined in a functional way so that they can work as a unified whole. For example, in his design for a horned centaur, Lionel had to consider how bodily components that don’t go together in nature could be adapted to accommodate each other in his design. “I spent a lot of time thinking about the musculature required for a human chest to realistically articulate on a horse’s body: how it bends, how it absorbs movement, which muscle groups would be essential,” he says.

“For the head, the same logic applies: if a human had gigantic horns, they wouldn’t be able to

move their head without oversized neck musculature. So I intentionally reinforced that area to make the whole design believable.”

This kind of “biological logic”, as he calls it, is Lionel’s guiding principle. But sometimes it’s okay to bend the rules in service of a stronger image.

“I have to admit that disturbing reality, when it’s voluntary and conscious, sometimes allows me to reach more aesthetic or interesting images or compositions,” he says. “I do try to make my monsters believable within their environment, but if anatomical logic gets in the way of creativity or visual impact, I look for compromises. The most important thing from my point of view is to find the right and subtle balance between anatomical consistency and artistic freedom.”

If you deviate from the technique of making choices based on function and anatomical logic, Vincent cautions against taking things too far. “A mistake artists often make is adding complexity just for the sake of making a design look ‘cool,’” he says. “Extra

Lionel studies how every part of a creature needs to work together and the mechanisms behind each part.

RJ carefully researches anatomical features to bring his creatures to life in a realistic way.



RJ.PALMER.COM



limbs, spikes, or exaggerated muscles can easily overwhelm the design if they don't serve a purpose."

Another wrong turn that artists sometimes take is focusing on the details before making sure the basic structure is properly nailed down, explains illustrator and concept designer **Ken Barthelme**.

"I always used to start with details too early. I worked for hours on tiny textures only to realise that the form wasn't working, and then I had to redo everything from scratch.

"Form and silhouette are the most critical aspects of a successful design, whereas details glue everything together. Always start with the base, and work in layers - start with the basic shapes, then add form and muscle, followed by bigger wrinkles, and finally the smaller textures like pores and veins."

Concept illustrator **RJ Palmer** tells us that copying trends without having researched them properly is also a pitfall. "Some artists lean heavily on design tropes they have seen without understanding what the original reference point was. For example, the trope of the skin flap at the jaw joint on dinosaurs and dragons.

"This was popularised by the Jurassic Park animatronics that needed a thin piece of material there for jaw articulation. It's not actually representative of real jaw muscle structure, yet you often still see this repeated in designs that do not have the same mechanical limitations.

"I would advise any artist interested in designing creatures to really invest time in research and learning why things look the way that they do, fictional or otherwise."



Overall, the key to making your creatures hold up is doing thorough research, choosing parts based on function, and making sure it all flows together cohesively. Vincent sums it up: "I look for ways to unify shapes, rhythms, and proportions across the design so everything feels intentional. By grounding the design in biological inspiration while also allowing room for creative interpretation, I can create creatures that feel both imaginative and believable." ●

Ken warns against making things too detailed early in the design process.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT **RJ PALMER**

RJ Palmer on his love of learning about the details

How do you adapt the principles of anatomy when drawing creatures that don't exist in nature, or that are highly stylised?

Creature design is really just looking at the real world for puzzle pieces and then blending those together into a cohesive whole. Even the most stylised designs are only made better with that level of understanding going into the design behind the scenes. Regardless of the style I'm chasing, I'll be thinking about how the creature moves, what it eats, what it needs to do for the story, and so on.

How do you keep anatomy looking believable?

At their core, any good creature designer is just a student of nature. When you understand why anatomical forms have evolved the way they have, you can reverse engineer them to fit any desired effect to add that level of plausibility to a fantasy world.

What is your process for combining references from existing creatures to create your designs?

I relish the research and reference gathering part of the process. Sometimes I'll spend an entire day or two just learning about elements and collecting resources to flesh out the idea I have. I like to really understand every facet of a thing I'm designing so I'm never in a position where I don't have an answer for why the thing looks the way it does. You can really tell a story through the way the anatomy is constructed, and I want to make sure my stories don't suck!

RJ is a freelance concept illustrator whose clients include Ubisoft, Tencent, and Wizards of the Coast.

www.rj-palmer.com



Aronja-Art

Alpine art Based in Austria's mountains, this traditional artist paints immersive fantasy scenes in oil and acrylic on canvas

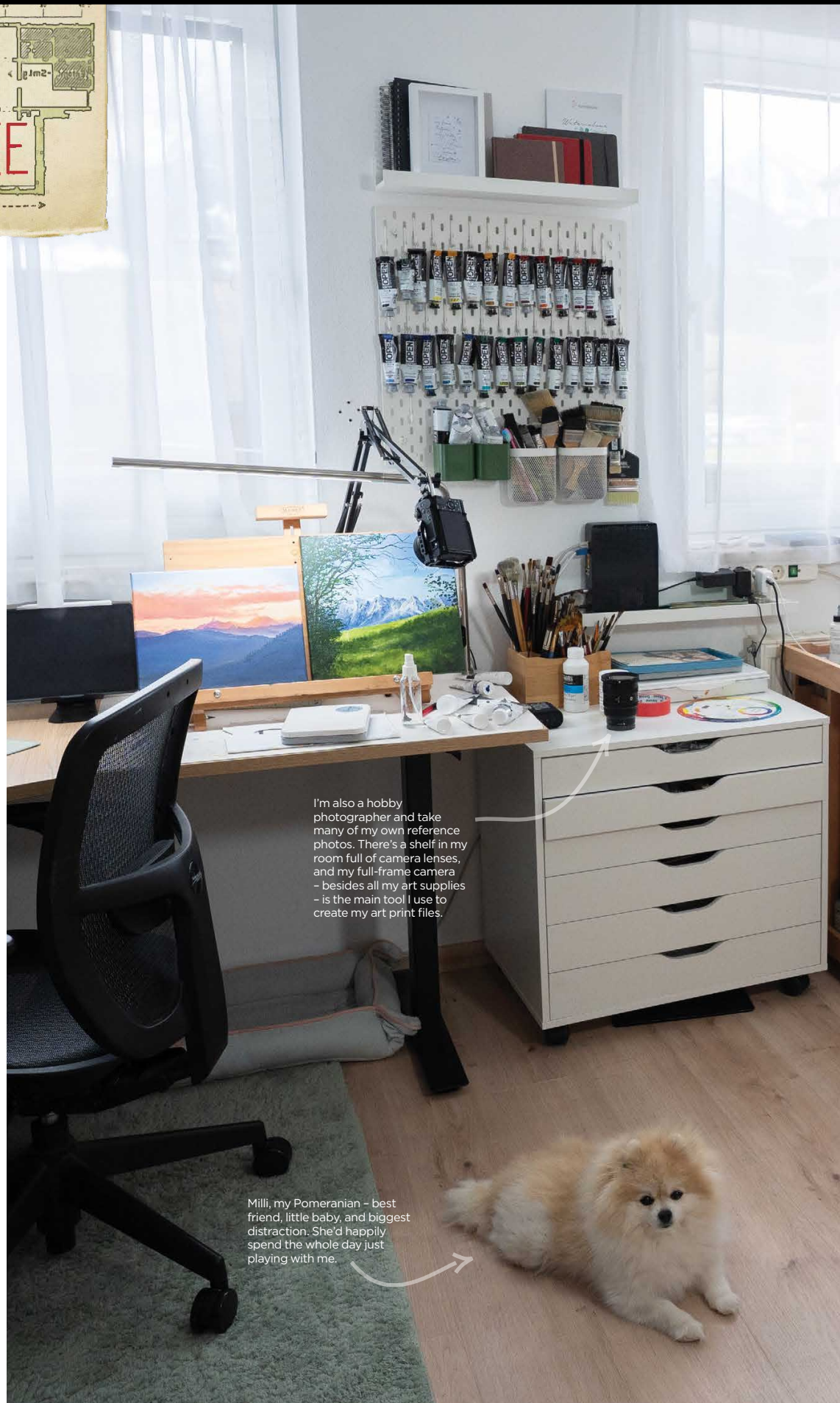


My workspace is in a small apartment in the Austrian mountains, where I've been working full-time as an artist since 2020. The room itself isn't very big and also doubles as my gaming space, so it's a bit of a mix between studio and everyday life. Over time, it has naturally adapted to my needs, and even though it's quite compact, it works well for how I paint and organise my day.

I mainly work with traditional oil and acrylic paints. One of the most important things in my setup is →



Holding Toad Warrior, an oil painting created this year.



I'm also a hobby photographer and take many of my own reference photos. There's a shelf in my room full of camera lenses, and my full-frame camera - besides all my art supplies - is the main tool I use to create my art print files.

Milli, my Pomeranian - best friend, little baby, and biggest distraction. She'd happily spend the whole day just playing with me.

Artist news, software & events



The true treasure here in my room: the folder full of blank artist proof cards of the Sorcery card game - waiting to be painted. So glad and thankful to be part of this.

My Meeden storage cart! And one from Ikea. Both do great jobs storing tons of colour tubes. I can move them around wherever I paint.

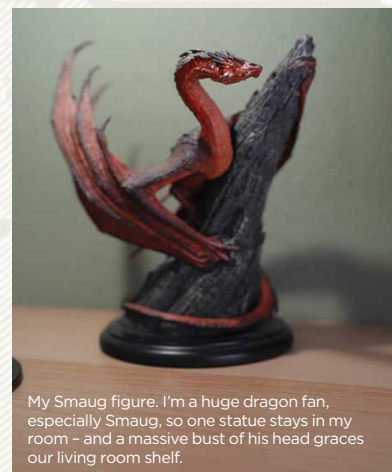
My easel! My main workstation and a truly sturdy companion. It's a few years old and easily the best I've ever owned. Made by Mabef, it features a crank for height adjustment and two handy drawers. I got it for much less than it costs today!



Penitent Knight, an acrylic painting from 2024.



Yep, a dead plant. I tried buying a few, but it turns out I really don't have a green thumb.



My Smaug figure. I'm a huge dragon fan, especially Smaug, so one statue stays in my room - and a massive bust of his head graces our living room shelf.



➔ my daylight lamp, which I use all the time to make sure my colours stay accurate.

Apart from that, my workspace is filled with brushes, paints, canvases I never finished, plants I forgot to water and of course finished paintings that are waiting to be bought in my shop.



I love mice, so I had to get this super-cute wooden mouse business card holder - which actually only holds one card - but it's cute as hell!

I like things to be organised, but in reality, it often ends up a bit messy, especially when I'm working on multiple pieces at once.

EARLY PAPERWORK

My day usually starts with a cup of coffee while I check emails, update my online shop, fulfil orders, and take care of bookkeeping. It's a big part of working as a freelance artist and something I try to get done early in the day. I also try to eat somewhere in between, although that doesn't always happen on a strict schedule. And of course, my Pomeranian Milli is always around, making sure I take breaks and give her attention.

During the daytime, I often focus on smaller tasks or more flexible creative work. I'm very lucky to be part of the

One thing I'm especially happy about is a painting I made of a Frodo mouse that was signed by Elijah Wood. He even took a photo of it because he liked it so much, which was a really special moment. A picture of us together, with him holding the painting, has a place of honour on my shelf.

Sorcery: Contested Realm card game, and at the moment I have a lot of artist proof cards to work on. That's something I can do during the day while also thinking about new ideas, gathering inspiration, or planning future paintings.

For larger canvas pieces, I prefer working in the evening or at night. That's when everything is quiet, and I can concentrate much better. I tend to get into a strong focus during those hours and sometimes work quite late. It's simply the time of day where painting feels the most natural to me.

One thing I've learned from working at home is that the space doesn't have to be perfect. It's more important that it feels comfortable and supports your routine. Even a small room can work well if you make it your own.

I'm a full-time Austrian painter working in oil and acrylic, focused on fantasy art. My work combines imagination, landscapes, dragons and animals. www.aronjaart.com Instagram: @aronjaart

“ During the daytime, I often focus on smaller tasks or more flexible creative work ”

Artist news, software & events



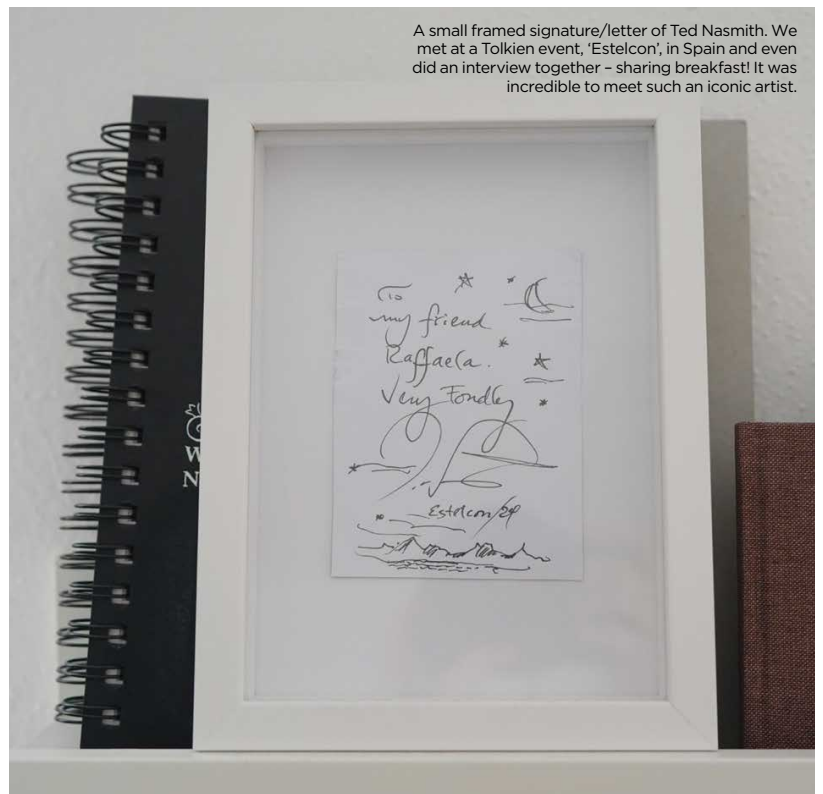
I painted my favourite view, of the Schüflucker at GroBarl.



A small round green battery lamp with cute legs, I had to get this lamp as it matches perfectly with my green walls and makes my paintings in the shelf shine



As I often forget to eat or I am too busy to cook, I love drinking these meal drinks. There is always one bottle on my desk (of course I also eat normal food, but hey these are handy!!)



A small framed signature/letter of Ted Nasmith. We met at a Tolkien event, 'Estelcon', in Spain and even did an interview together - sharing breakfast! It was incredible to meet such an iconic artist.

Gone Fishing: one of a series of concept artworks based on an amphibious vehicle.



The path of... Chris Falkenberg

Fantasy worlds The concept designer tells us about his evolution as an artist and how the world of digital art is forever changing

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

I grew up in Colorado and was very fortunate to spend a lot of my childhood in nature. I think having the Rocky Mountains in my backyard was very inspirational and shaped the way I think about scale and environment.

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

Living life! It took me a while to recognise it, but your experiences end up in your work whether it's intended or not: the places you've been, the people you've met, the things that

The Mistfall Archives: the largest treasury of knowledge in the fantasy world of Aethelion, which Chris is slowly expanding.



have moved or unsettled you. You don't always see it happening in the moment, but you look back at old work and it's very noticeable. Other forms of media – games, film, books and animation – are also a big source of inspiration; getting immersed in different worlds and stories inspires me to create my own.

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

I think that discovering Craig Mullins' digital paintings was a turning point for me. I had been interested in art from a young age, but always thought of fine art as the only career path for an artist. Seeing digital art being used in the entertainment industry was very exciting and more in line with my interests.

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

My first commission was for an isometric mobile game. Looking back, I'm honestly surprised anyone was willing to pay for my work at that point. It's a pretty far cry from where I am now, but I think it was a huge confidence boost for me at the time and is a nice reminder of the progress I've made over the years.

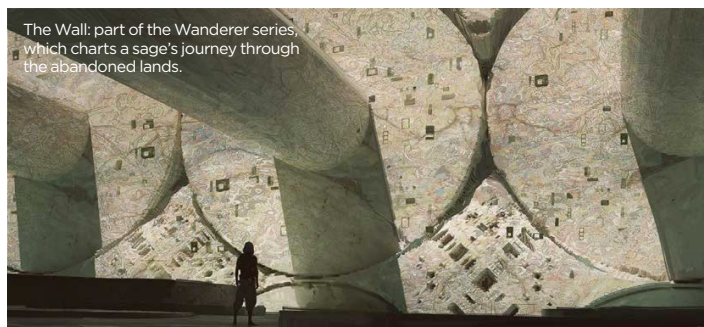
What's the last piece that you finished, and how do the two differ?

My most recent piece was an image from my Mouse Knight series. It's a bit more stylised than my typical work and a fun way to branch out and try something new. Compared to that first commission, it's almost a different universe. Foundationally the image is much stronger, of course, but I also now have confidence in my work and an ability enough to experiment and play.

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

Pretty much! It's hard to beat a career doing something you love. There are definitely a lot of challenges and stresses, though.

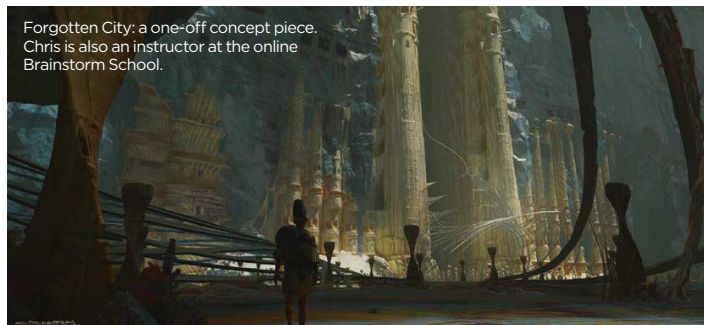
“ Even if you work in-house, the industry can be fairly volatile and you have to learn to ride the waves ”



The Wall: part of the Wanderer series, which charts a sage's journey through the abandoned lands.



Forest Protector: this magical creature is the spirit guardian of the forest.



Forgotten City: a one-off concept piece. Chris is also an instructor at the online Brainstorm School.



The Wall Part 2: another piece from the Wanderer science-fiction series.



The one thing I underestimated was the inconsistency. Before I started, I assumed there would be a point where the work just stabilised, became predictable. It doesn't really work that way. Even if you work in-house, the industry can be fairly volatile and you have to learn to ride the waves and build your own stability where you can.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way?

Get away from the desk and make time for other things! When I was starting out, I thought I needed to

spend every waking second doing art and improving. It took me a while to realise that your experiences are what feed your art and creativity and having interests outside of art will always help you improve.

Has digital art changed for good since you've been working in it?

Digital art, and concept art specifically, is constantly changing. It's a relatively young industry and it seems to have a major disruption every few years. New tools, new pipelines, and new platforms force you to constantly adapt. I think

Hollow: part of the Buck the Mouse Knight series. Chris says it was fun to do something a little different from his usual work.

whether changes are 'good' is pretty subjective, but it definitely keeps things interesting!

What is your next step in art or life?

I'm continuing to develop personal projects and original IPs. Commercial art is a great way to make a living, but creating worlds that are entirely my own is what I find to be most fulfilling.



Chris is a concept designer with experience working in live-action film and AAA games.

He is currently working at

Sony Interactive's Bluepoint Games.

www.chrisfalkenbergdesign.com

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**EMBRACE THE
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Dive into the extravagant anatomies of caricature artist Luis Rojas,
who takes the human form to extremes

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Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



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



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In-depth training on how to create comic panels from start to finish.

from initial sketches, which I think is often overlooked. I really enjoyed seeing the whole thing come together.

Celine, via email

Rob replies Hey Celine. I'm so pleased you found Ludo's workshop useful and that it has sparked your own projects. That's exactly what we aim for. I completely agree about covering not just the more polished sections of the process, but also the initial ideation stages too.

Rushed heroes

Hi Rob. I wanted to say a big thank you for getting Brett Bean in the mag. I absolutely love his art and it was nice to see a bit of his process and to know that it isn't just me that has the odd looming deadline to contend with. I now need to go out and buy a copy of D'Orc! It looks amazing, and funny too.

Ethan, via email

Rob replies Hi Ethan. You can't go wrong with a dwarf-orc combo! Brett's work is so full of colour, humour, and dynamics. What an honour to have him as our cover star!

Mixed dimensions

I loved the tutorial on mixing Blender with Photoshop in your last issue. I'm amazed at how it looks like a painting but has so much 3D in it. I have never fully understood how to do that kind of thing, but will try it myself now.

Becca, via email.

Rob replies Hey Becca. Great to hear from you and so glad that was useful to you. Tristan did a fine job on showcasing his process, and I completely agree, his art is wonderful. Really vivid and filled with personality, and it's very hard to spot where the 3D ends and the 2D starts.



Colour love

Your latest issue was amazing! So many things in there that I enjoyed, but a highlight for me was the tour of Gretel Lusky's studio. What an incredible place to work. No wonder her art is so striking when it's made surrounded by all that colour. Looking forward to seeing who you feature next. It's my favourite part of the magazine.

Andrea, via email

Rob replies Hi Andrea. Gretel's work space is gorgeous, isn't it? We love our 'Artist in Residence' section too, and I'm always intrigued to check out what artists surround themselves with. We have some great ones coming up, so keep an eye on our future issues.

Panel joy

Ludo Lullabi's tutorial on creating comic panels was so useful! I've only ever drawn single images, and now I'm fully geared up to start my own comic project, so thank you! It's also really nice to see a project coming together

We help you learn how colour can boost your story ideas.



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE? Don't worry – you can get hold of issue 264 at ifxm.ag/single-ixf.



New works that have grabbed our attention



Katerina Belikova
[@ninjajo_art](https://instagram.com/ninjajo_art)



William Thompson
[@the300chickennuggets](https://instagram.com/the300chickennuggets)



Ian Permana
[@iannocent](https://instagram.com/iannocent)

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



KEEPING IT SUPER-REAL

ImagineFX speaks with Lima-based artist **Luis Rojas** about his work in caricature and why creativity matters

How did your journey as an artist begin?

I was an introverted kid, so the paper and pen were my best friends. I started drawing, and it was a really good way to start connecting with things that I saw through the window.

Did you study art and illustration in a more formal way?

I started learning oil painting when I was 17 years old. However, my learning wasn't from an academy, but from informal ateliers. For me, it was a really good opportunity. Here in Peru, art is really expensive to study: the materials, the social connections for the position that you can have, the time that you spend learning. But I knew what I wanted to do. I was painting and

I was learning the fundamentals of anatomy, light, texturing, colour, and the canvas that are all so important. When I was going to be a painter, I was learning from still life. After that, I was doing portraits. The base of my caricature work is the portrait – the realistic portrait. Artists ask me 'Why do your caricatures look like oil paintings? What is your technique?' It's because my base is in oil painting.

What does the art of caricature give you as a form of creative expression?

I was never really attached to realism. Some artists say that doing realistic things is boring. I don't think so. I think that the caricature gives you the opportunity to create another level of realism. This I call super-realism. It's like fantasy. Fantasy

HERE'S JOHNNY!
Iconic pop culture characters are key to Luis' work.



Artist PROFILE

Luis Rojas

LOCATION: Lima, Peru
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Norman Rockwell, Aaron Blaise, Will Eisner
MEDIA: Photoshop
WEB: bit.ly/4dDhRJK





➔➔ is most important when you want to do art, and fantasy is always connected with human nature. When we're kids, we're fantasising about the world. The caricature is like taking that average reality to create another reality – the super-reality. Caricature creates something that you're feeling, and that makes you read what you see as beyond realistic proportion. But you can see the expression and something that's connecting and communicating.

How does an understanding of anatomy contribute to your caricature portraits?

I'm really concerned about anatomy.

First of all, everyone is reading anatomy; it's just like how everyone reads emotion through facial features. We're all experts in how we read emotions by the way our muscles are moving, how they're working. As artists, we can represent them with lines, and that takes experience. It takes time to do that representation on paper, with a pen or with a brush. And it's so important. Anatomy is something that's complementary

BRITISH ICON

A caricature of Michael Caine. Luis' work is inspired by artist Norman Rockwell.

“I feel more free working on paper. It's more organic and it feels more natural”

with perspective. Then, later in the process, even if you're working in grey, or black and white, or colours, you need to understand how light works because, finally, light creates the volume and creates the sense of distance. Our eyes are the tool to understand how the fundamentals work together, and that understanding creates an immersive experience, allowing us to feel what we are seeing. And that's amazing.

Could you talk us through your picture-making process?

First of all, there's always the observation. In the beginning, the most important process is ➔➔

REALISM AND INFLUENCE

Luis talks about drawing animals and the influence of Aaron Blaise on his work

“There’s an expression that says that everything is connected. And when you create art, everything is a strong reinforcing of what you’re choosing to do. Norman Rockwell was one very strong influence for me in choosing to do caricatures. But another influence is Aaron Blaise, an absolutely phenomenal artist from the US. His animals are characters. It’s really amazing that by drawing animals, you can express human emotions so well.

Animals are just like humans. It’s universal. We can feel through Blaise’s representations that emotion is everywhere, and that’s something that teaches me a lot. For example, I can understand how a plant is bending and giving us a sensation of emotion, telling us the feeling of the moment. I’m working with a lot of respect when I’m doing a caricature and when I’m drawing animals. For me, the most important thing is expressing emotion.”



observation because this gives you the sensation. I'll be feeling nervous. I never know what I'm going to do or how it's going to end. Secondly is the sketching. And there's not just one sketch. I can do 20 sketches. You're retouching all the time and you're fixing what you're doing. Just like a sculptor, I'm going from the big size to the smaller size. I clean the drawing in the sketch. When I'm creating, I include force lines, and that's so

RHINO RIDER

Consideration of where light falls on a subject is key to Luis' visual style.

MONSTER MASH

Re-imagining iconic characters maximises Luis' expressive opportunities for colour and texture to create mood and feeling.

important. I also restructure and refine proportions. I'm always working with edges that coordinate because they're the perfect guide. Also, if you place the light source in the wrong direction, the expression can be missed. So where you're going to focus your light is important. That's something Norman Rockwell was always working with. It's like Leonardo da Vinci said: we're not painting things, we're painting the light.

Do you work with pencil and paper at all, or are you working entirely with digital tools?

I use paper, and then I can take a scan of my finished work. I can take a picture or scan it later, you know, because I feel more free working on paper. It's more organic, and it feels much more natural to me. But I am comfortable with Photoshop. I work for eight hours every day. This is part of my life.



➤➤ **What are the challenges of working in caricature?**

For me, every caricature that I create is a challenge, but at some point, for me, creating realistic expression is kind of simple in some way. I will use this example: you know the song With a Little Help from My Friends? For free mags check sastatus.com You hear the original version from The Beatles, and then when you hear the version from Joe Cocker, it's a totally different song. Working in caricature is exactly the same thing. You see the reference that you're taking. But when you see the caricature, it's not quite the person, but it seems more realistic. It seems more lifelike. And that is the most challenging thing that you can hit when you're doing a caricature. At least for me, it's the most difficult.

““ **The base of my caricature work is the portrait – the realistic portrait** ””

What are the creative spaces and opportunities for illustrators and artists in Peru?

We have a movement, and I think it's growing. We have growing areas that are giving more opportunities. It's giving young artists many more opportunities, for example in video games and animation. Also, I can see that there are opportunities for comic illustrators. It's interconnection that's happening now, and that's good.

What makes a work of art human?

I think that we're in a really amazing age. We're in strong competition with

artificial intelligence, because AI is creating images in just a few seconds. But at some point, those images are soulless. One imperfect drawing could have a lot of soul. And that's another important thing that I take from my experience. It's important to never give up when you make a mistake when you're doing art. Your mistakes help you to keep growing. I keep learning. And that's something that we're forgetting: that mistakes are what defines human beings. Human beings are like artists. Every artist feels like a special human being, but actually every human being is a special kind of artist. I say this because artists can be everything. We are in some way humble enough to keep learning. You know, it's so important to never give up if you make a mistake.

Ghibli Grin

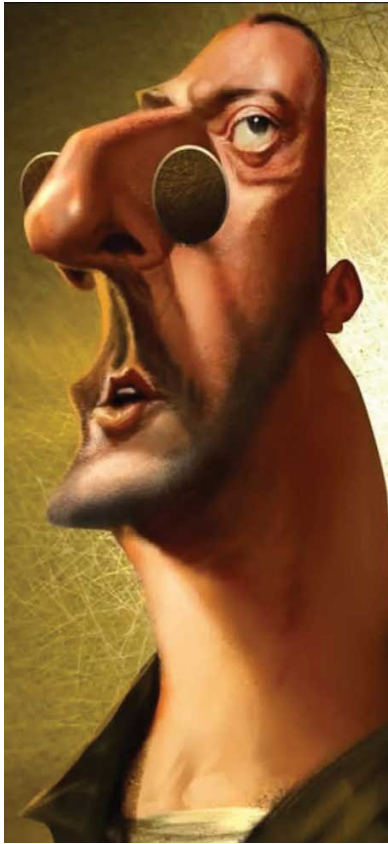
Luis honours the creative achievements of anime director Hayao Miyazaki.

Master Yoda

A sense of volume in a caricature is enhanced by lighting, as in this caricature of Yoda.

Movie Magic

Luis' caricatures affectionately honour movie stars Jean Reno, Emma Stone, and Joaquin Phoenix.



ALL IN THE DETAIL

Luis discusses the value of detail to the overall storytelling effect

"I go through details. The decisions that you're going to make are going to make all the difference to what you're seeing. It's not like forcing yourself to be genuine. It's not like that at all. It's more like choosing what you want to do because you're connected with what you're doing. It's about taking risks. Art is about taking risks and making decisions. And that's amazing, because it's an experience that

never ends. Finally, I can go through the little details and elements like the clothes. Those things are so important because they're telling us something of the storytelling and the total image. When Norman Rockwell was creating his paintings and his illustrations, he was putting a lot of emphasis on movement. And the details are creating the sense of movement."



REFINEMENT

Luis may iterate an image 20 times before completion.

WILD WEST

Luis' portrait of Clint Eastwood as the Man with No Name evidences his super-real visual quality.

Development sheet

Artist PROFILE

Gavin O'Donnell

LOCATION: Portugal



Gavin is an Irish concept artist and illustrator who lives in Porto, Portugal. He has been working in the field of animation and video games for over 10 years. He's currently working for One Man Studio as a Senior Concept Artist.

www.artstation.com/gavinodonnell

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ImagineFX

PROJECT TITLE: GRIZZLY FALLS

Gavin O'Donnell takes us through the process of creating a dramatic wildlife scene of a mother bear and her cubs as she teaches them how to hunt and survive in this beautiful but dangerous landscape

Stage 1

Exploring a scene depicting a mother bear and her cubs, I sketch ideas for an important moment of growing up, like learning to catch fish in the falls or learning about the dangers of the wild. I opt to go with the 'A' sketch depicting the mother and cub at the falls hunting for tasty salmon.



Stage 2

I decide to change the silhouette of the bears from the sketch, something a little more dangerous and readable from afar. I'm blocking in the colours on top of an underpainting. I cover the canvas in brush strokes of deep browns/oranges; you'll see those colours poking through in places.



Stage 3

I'm blocking in the large colours and defining the general colour palette. I want a warm light spilling in from behind the waterfall. This will create a nice contrast of warm and cool light. From here I'm building up the focal point of the bears and the salmon they're trying to catch.





Stage 4

Next, I'm adding more details and really pushing the lighting coming from the back and the overall atmosphere. I add more details around the focal point, more salmon, rocks and broken logs. I separate the bears with more lighting on their top areas.



Stage 5

Finally, I'm adding the polish and cleaning up the image. I make sure the focal area is sharp/detailed and radiating out, and the outer areas are more painterly. I also remove the moss from the rocks as the green was a little overpowering. I push the water splashes and overall highlights around the bears.

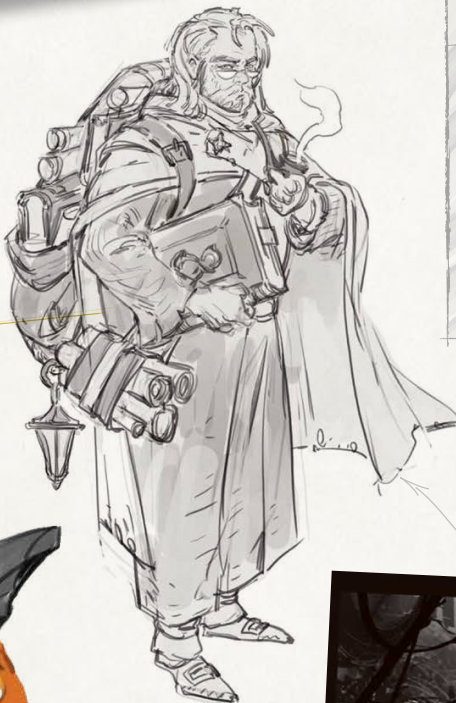
SEND US YOUR CONCEPTS!

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

Bella Liu

Fantasy and fairy tales inspire dynamic characters and rich environments



Artist PROFILE

Bella Liu
LOCATION: US



Bella is a concept artist and illustrator working in the games industry, currently contributing to Blizzard's Diablo universe.

She designs characters, environments, and illustrations, blending narrative with strong visual storytelling. Inspired by fashion, mythology, and cinema, she creates atmospheric worlds and is open to illustration and visual development opportunities.

www.instagram.com/bellalqianlin

SCHOLAR CONCEPT

This design explores a weathered scholar shaped by time, experience, and quiet intellectual strength.

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

I explored a twist on the tale: what if the grandmother became the wolf, and Little Red Riding Hood was a punk witch?

This piece grew from that playful, dark idea.



STORYBOARD

A storyboard capturing an orc pausing mid-action, sensing danger, and shifting from calm to tension within a single beat.





RAIN

A colour study inspired by childhood memories of playing in summer rain, capturing warmth, nostalgia, and fleeting light.

“ A colour study inspired by childhood memories of playing in summer rain ”

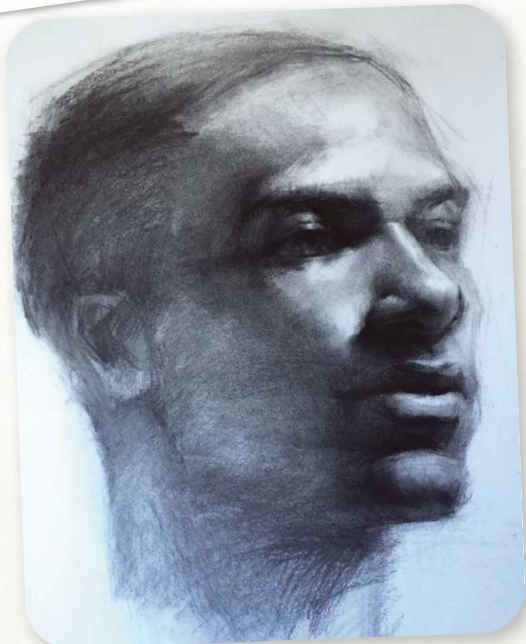
CRAFTSMAN CONCEPT

An NPC design for Diablo Immortal, portraying a spirited, sharp-eyed craftsman with a sense of vitality and personality that's grounded in everyday realism.



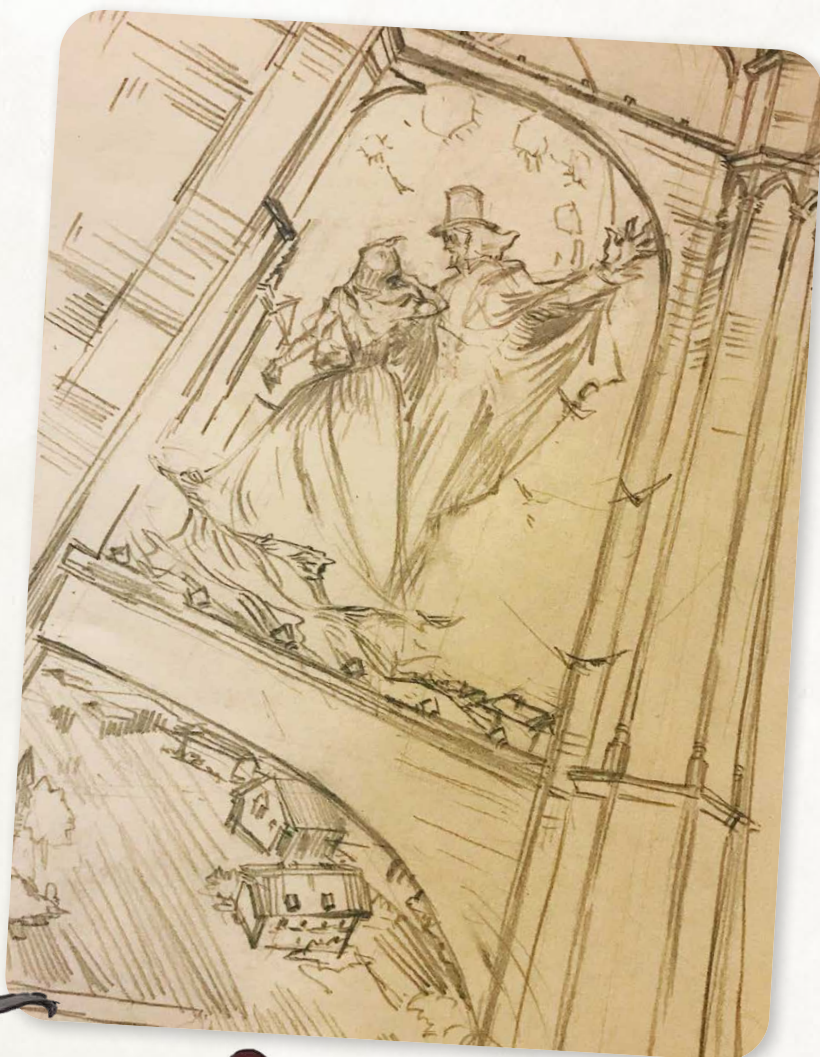
WITCH

A Halloween illustration inspired by vintage witch imagery, exploring an eerie, ritualistic atmosphere that has a sense of quiet mystery.



TRADITIONAL HEAD PORTRAIT

An academic portrait study focusing on structure, proportion, and subtle tonal shifts to capture both likeness and presence.



TRADITIONAL DRACULA

A vampire-inspired composition with a strong sense of drama and theatrical staging, rendered in pencil to emphasise mood and silhouette.

“ Her costume reflects strength, movement, and quiet resilience ”

MULAN

I wanted to capture a bold side profile of Mulan, re-imagining her costume to reflect strength, movement, and quiet resilience in a moment before action.





1



2

SHIBA SKETCH

A playful exploration imagining a Shiba Inu as a samurai, combining character charm with stylised storytelling.



3



4



STEAMPUNK SERVANT - BUTLER

A continuation of the steampunk servant series, re-imagining a classic butler archetype with mechanical elegance and subtle character detail.



COTTAGE

Inspired by Pride and Prejudice, this piece explores a calm, poetic countryside atmosphere through soft colour and composition.

TRADITIONAL FANTASY

I imagined a melancholic, poetic scene and brought it to life in pencil, exploring how storytelling can emerge through atmosphere and composition.



ALICE

I re-imagined Alice in my own style, blending whimsy and surrealism with a quiet sense of strength, capturing a dreamlike moment where innocence and transformation coexist.



WITCH HOUSE

Inspired by ancient architecture, I introduced imaginative distortions to create an uncanny, whimsical structure suitable for a witch's dwelling.



“ I imagined a poetic scene and brought it to life in pencil ”

MORGAN LE FAY

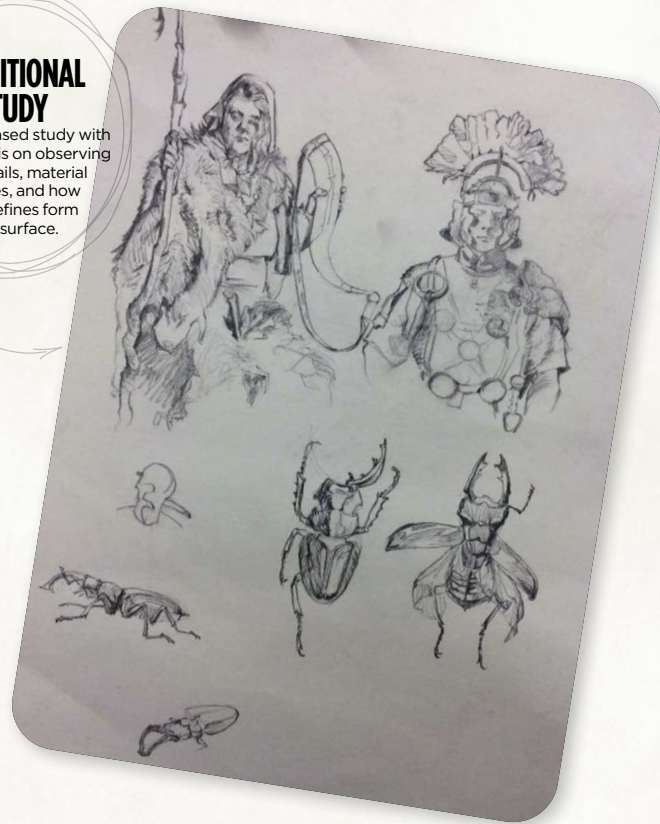
A reinterpretation exploring mysticism and elegance through stylised shapes and flowing design.





TRADITIONAL STUDY

A photo-based study with an emphasis on observing fine details, material changes, and how light defines form and surface.



POETIC ILLUSTRATION

An illustration inspired by classical oil paintings, aiming to evoke a mysterious, poetic, and romantic narrative moment.



COMBAT CHARACTERS

A character exploration influenced by military aesthetics, pushing exaggerated forms and dynamic silhouettes to create a strong, action-driven presence.



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

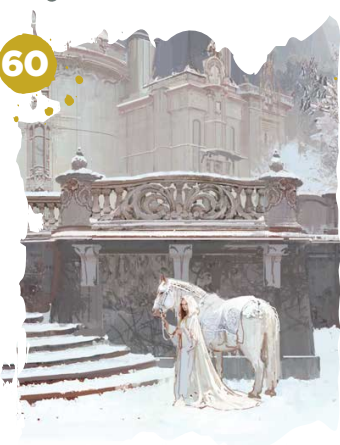
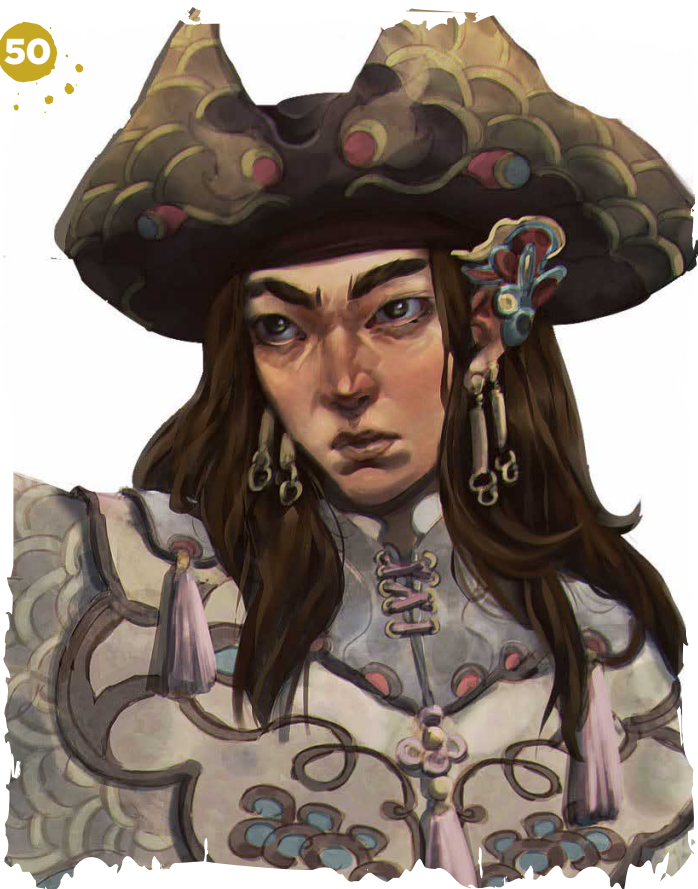
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX Workshops

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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Photoshop

FROM SKETCHING TO RENDERING

Concept artist **Fano Rakotoh** explains his technique for building a polished character design, from raw silhouette to final render

Artist PROFILE

Fano Rakotoh
LOCATION: France

Fano is a 22-year-old French concept artist from Madagascar who has been freelancing in the entertainment industry for three years. He specialises in worldbuilding and is always looking to create unique designs.
<https://bit.ly/47YqJrg>



Staring at a blank canvas, trying to design a character can feel completely overwhelming. Where

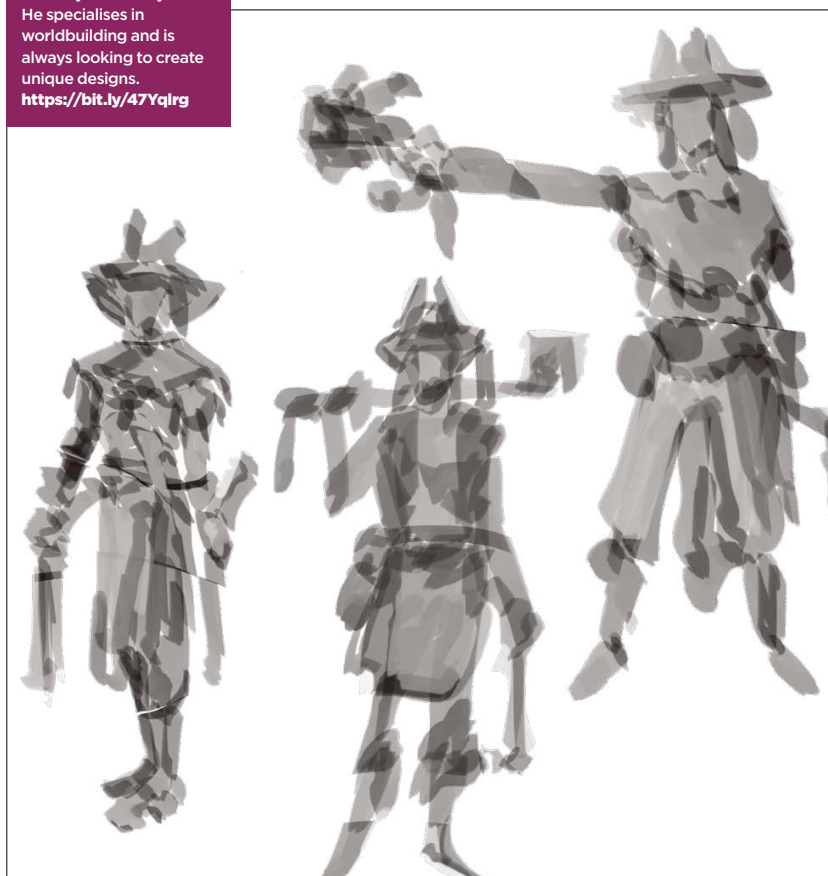
do you even begin? How do you take a rough idea and turn it into a polished piece? In this workshop,

we'll explore a structured Photoshop workflow, taking you from a basic silhouette all the way to a final render.

The best part is that this method is totally flexible. We will build your character in clear stages: silhouette, sketch, line art, flat colours, patterns, ambient occlusion, lighting, and post

processing. Because every step builds on the last, you can easily go back and make changes at any time.

Just make sure to gather plenty of reference images first. Understanding light and shadow is also crucial for the later stages. This process will elevate your art.



1 Silhouettes

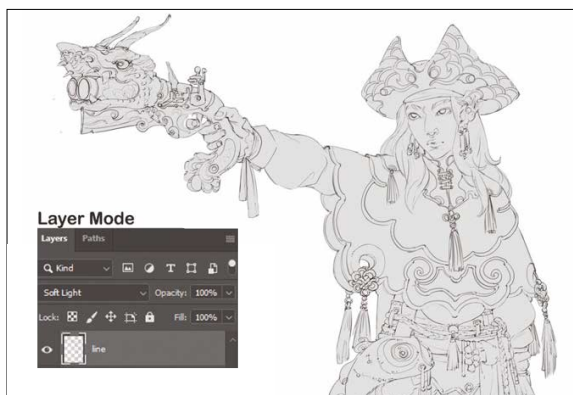
Start with your brief and reference board. Paint loose, abstract silhouettes, and don't worry about detail yet. The goal is to explore shape language quickly: mass, weight, and personality. Try at least six to ten variations before committing. Strong silhouettes are instantly readable in isolation, so test yours in black and white. This phase informs and sharpens your reference board, helping you lock in a clear visual direction before you invest time in detail.



2 Refined sketch

Once you've selected the strongest silhouette, draw over it to define props, clothing, and accessories. Use this stage to clarify the character's pose and facial expression; both should communicate personality at a glance. Don't over clean it; this is still an exploratory sketch. Push and pull proportions, try different costume details, and keep the lines loose. The goal is to nail your design concept before committing to clean line work.

In depth From sketching to rendering



3 Line art

Line art is the final design checkpoint. Keep your lines clean, confident, and varied in weight, using thicker lines for foreground elements and finer lines for background detail. In this non-destructive workflow, your line art validates the design before you start using colour. Once complete, fill your character with a flat mid-grey beneath the line layer. This neutral base will make the upcoming colour and lighting passes far easier to judge accurately.



4 Albedo/flat colour

The albedo pass establishes your character's base colours –think of it as the colour of each material under perfectly neutral light. Choose colours informed by your character's cultural references, the materials they're wearing, and your own creative instinct. Use the Surface brush here: its colour dynamics create subtle hue and saturation variation across each stroke, building micro-texture without disrupting value, an essential quality for materials like fabric, leather, or skin. ▶▶

RESOURCES

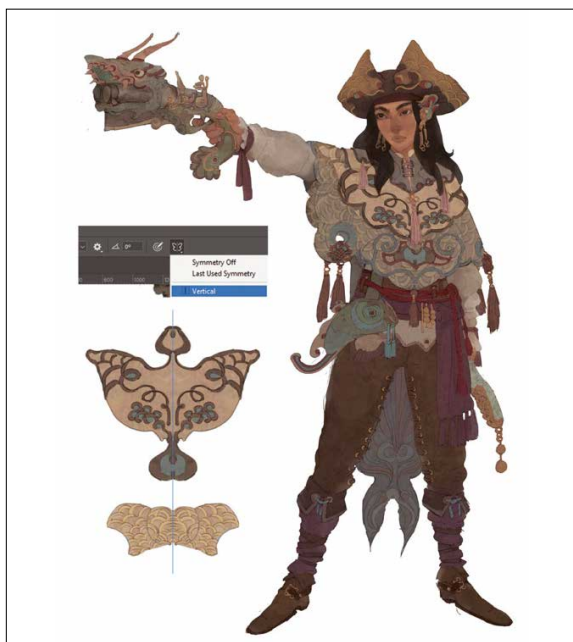
WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

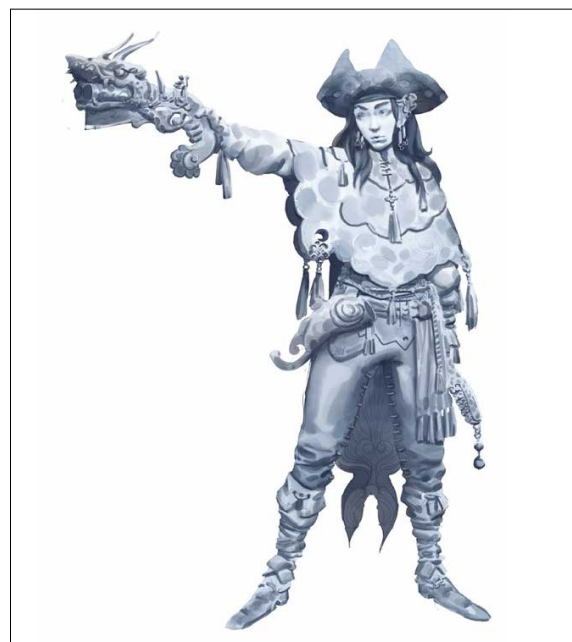
CUSTOM BRUSH: SURFACE



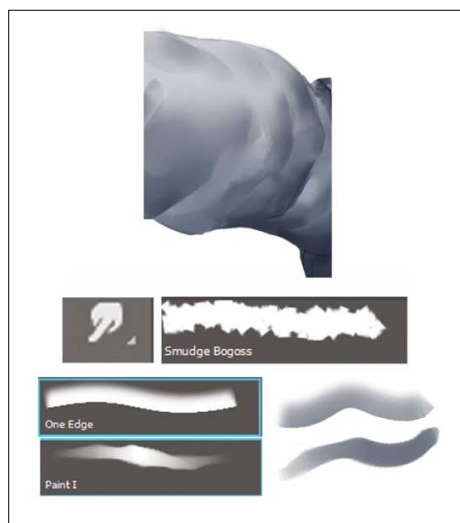
A colour-dynamics brush that varies hue and saturation per stroke without shifting values, ideal for building rich, textured albedo passes on skin, fabric, and leather.



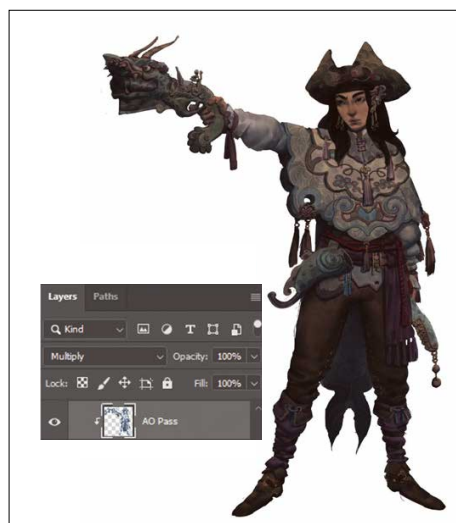
5 Patterns
Real-world garments and props are rarely plain. Add patterns to bring authenticity and visual richness to your design. For simple patterns, paint directly over the line art. For complex repeating motifs, design them separately using Photoshop's symmetry tool, then place the finished pattern into your albedo layer. This keeps your workflow flexible, as patterns can be swapped, scaled, or recoloured without affecting other passes.



6 Ambient occlusion
The ambient occlusion (AO) pass defines volume by darkening areas that light naturally struggles to reach: deep folds, tight joints, cavities, and contact shadows. Work in greyscale on a dedicated layer, building shadow depth carefully. This pass is also a great opportunity to suggest material roughness – matte surfaces show stronger, softer AO, while smoother materials require a more restrained touch.



7 Soft and hard edges
Edge quality is one of the most powerful tools in any painter's arsenal. Hard edges attract the viewer's eye, while soft edges let it rest. Use the One Edge brush to create crisp, sharp transitions on focal points, facial features, weapon details and key costume elements. Use the Smudge tool to soften edges on peripheral areas and smooth gradients. Apply this principle throughout all passes, not just the AO, to direct attention and control visual flow.



8 AO layer mode
Now it's time to integrate the AO pass into your composition. Set the AO layer blending mode to Multiply. This will darken the albedo colours beneath without completely overriding them, preserving colour richness while adding depth. Zoom out and assess the full image. If the shadows feel too heavy or too light, adjust the layer's opacity globally, or paint back into individual areas to fine-tune. Always evaluate the pass in context, not in isolation.

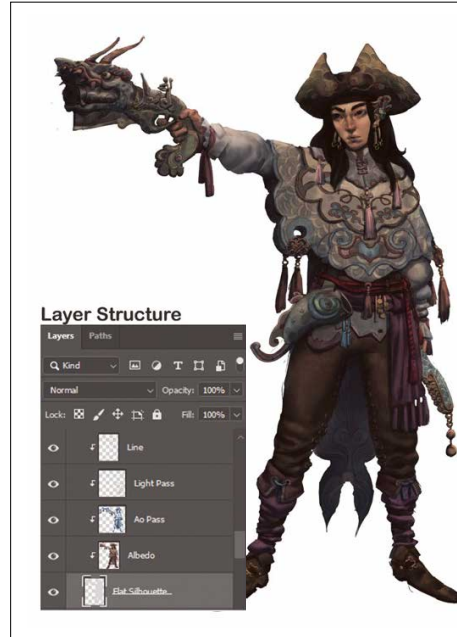


9 Light pass
The light pass adds direct illumination to your character, pushing values higher to describe form convincingly. Decide on your primary light source, its direction, colour temperature, and intensity. Bright highlights on raised surfaces reinforce volume and make the character read clearly from a distance. The light pass also lets you differentiate materials further: rough cloth will diffuse light broadly, while a polished metal surface will carry a tight, bright specular.



10 Light layer

Set your light pass layer to Overlay mode. Overlay simultaneously brightens highlights and deepens shadows relative to the layers below, giving the lighting a natural, integrated quality that would be difficult to achieve by painting directly. As with the AO pass, step back and evaluate the full image. Reduce opacity if the effect is too strong, or paint selectively to control exactly where the light lands on your character.



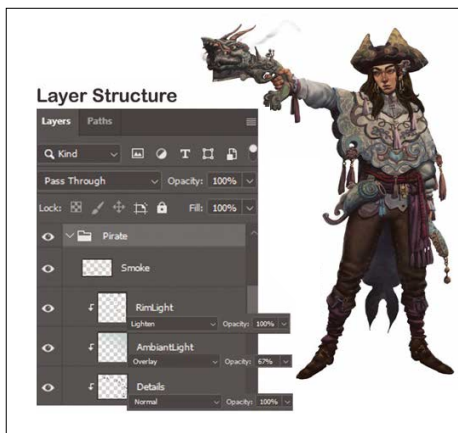
11 Unification

At this stage, bring all three core passes, albedo, AO, and light, into harmony. Look for areas that feel disconnected: colours that clash, shadows that contradict your light source, or materials that lack consistency. Use Hue/Saturation, Curves, and Colour Balance adjustments on individual passes rather than flattening your file. The non-destructive structure allows you to revisit and modify any element without rebuilding from scratch, a critical advantage when working with clients.



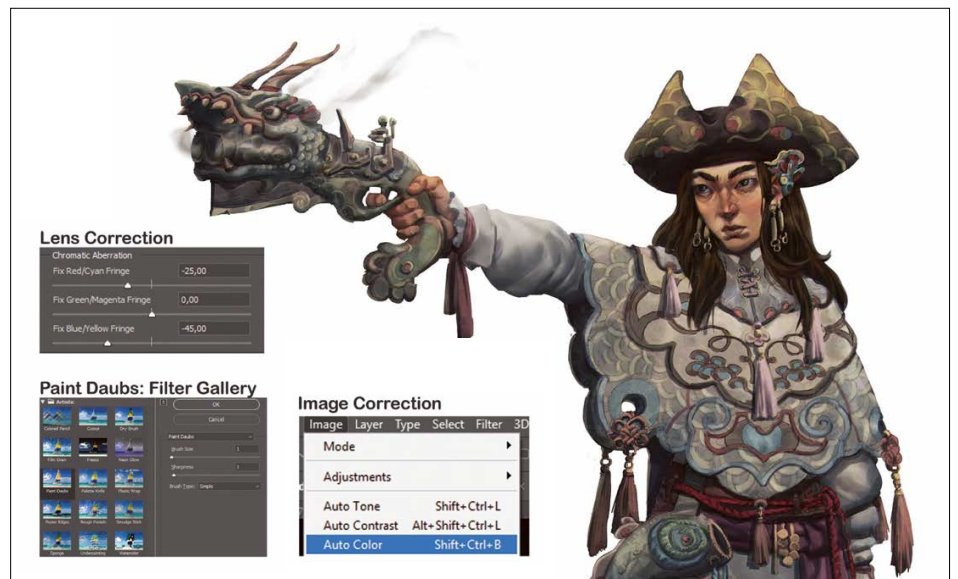
12 Subsurface and hair

Subsurface scattering (SSS) describes how light penetrates semi-translucent surfaces like skin, earlobes, and fingertips. Add warm, pinkish-red tones to these areas on a separate layer set to Screen or Add. For hair, paint fine light reflections along the direction of the hair flow using a small, soft brush. These details are subtle but transformative; they push the rendering from a flat illustration into something that feels genuinely alive.



13 Details

Use a basic round brush to refine focal point details: the iris and catchlights in the eyes, engravings on weapons, scales, stitching, or jewellery. Work on a Normal layer. This level of detail is only necessary if you or your client want to push the rendering further. Once you're satisfied, add ambient light, a soft, colour-toned fill that wraps around the character, then finish with a subtle rim light on each side to visually unify the figure against the background.



14 Post-processing

In the final pass, use Photoshop's Auto Colour, Auto Contrast, and Auto Tone adjustments on a flattened duplicate of your image. These tools can quickly correct colour balance, tonal range, or contrast issues you may have become blind to during the render. Duplicate the layer, apply any adjustments, then use the opacity slider to blend the effect to taste. You can try Lens Correction or Filter Gallery as well. Finally, assess the image at a small scale. If the read is strong at thumbnail size, the design is working.

Technique focus

FIND THE BALANCE

Sylvain Sarrailh on transforming shapes and colours into something cohesive

Artist PROFILE

Sylvain Sarrailh

LOCATION: France

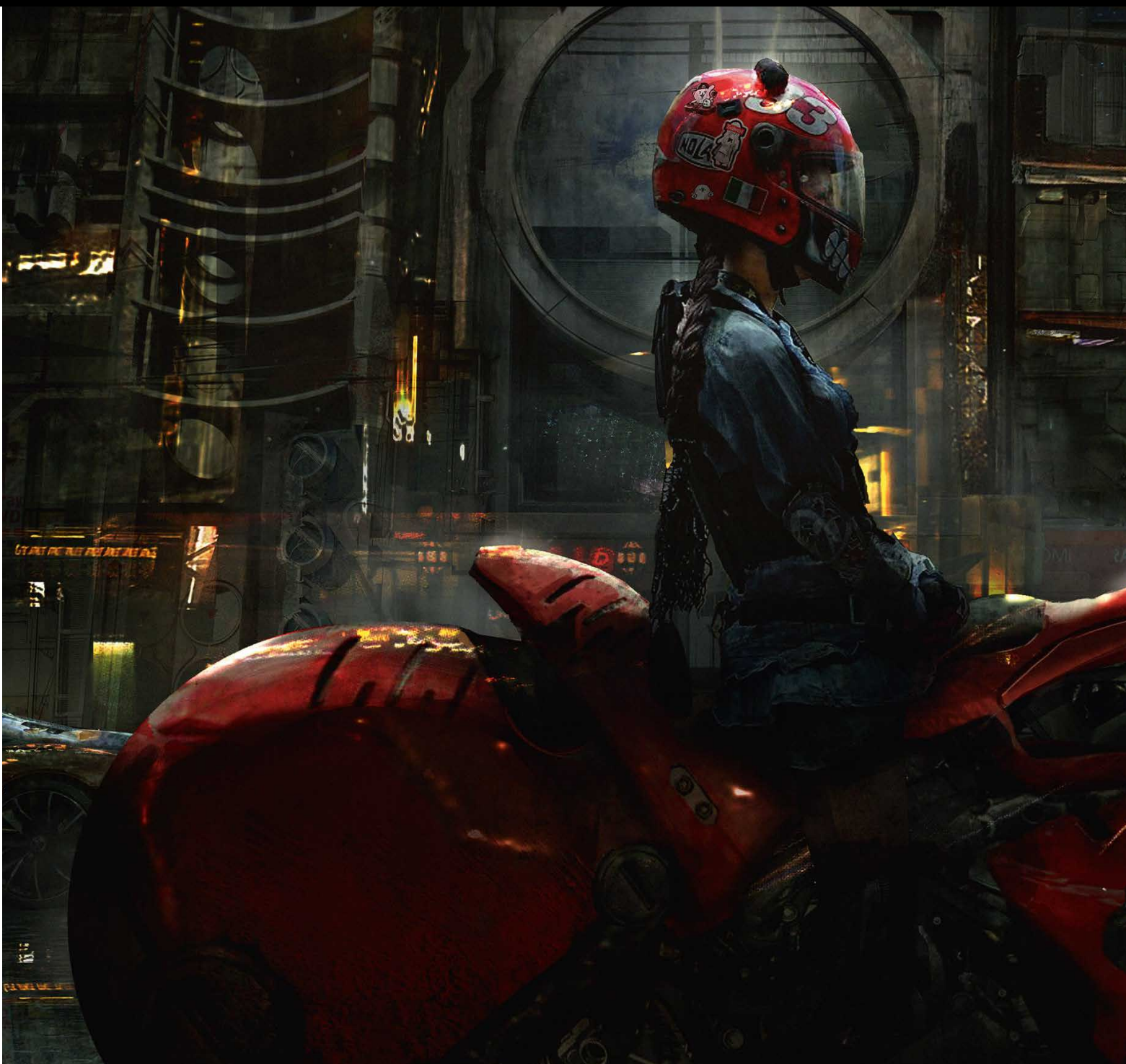
Sylvain is a 2D and 3D concept artist and art director at Umeshu Lovers. Some of his recent clients include Ubisoft, Guerrilla Games, Illumination, Sony, and Dreamworks. <https://bit.ly/4ms8BKE>



“For my personal illustrations, I always start with large masses of colour without really having a specific goal in mind. I lay down abstract shapes, like the sky, the meadow, and the hills here. By accident, I created the strange shape

of the large cloud, as well as the red patches that transformed into a figure. From there, I found the coherence of my composition: large yellow meadows, an original cloud shape, and a large expanse of blue to give it breathing room. It’s the rhythm of the elements that allows me to find the final balance!” ●

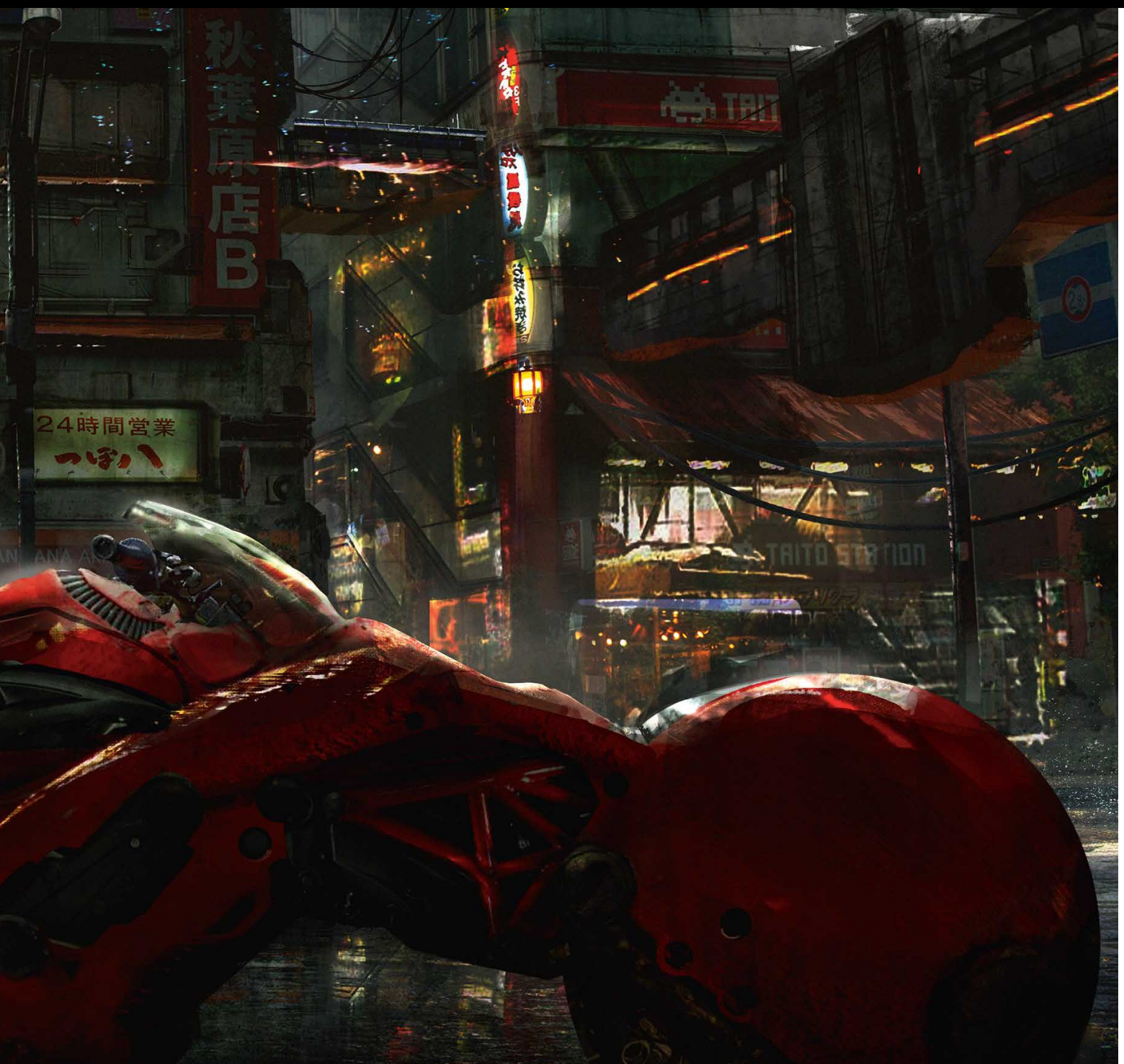




3D Coat & Photoshop

MAKE A CINEMATIC CYBERPUNK SCENE

Eddie Mendoza shows how he created his iconic Biker Girl piece using a mix of photobashing and digital painting



Artist PROFILE

Eddie Mendoza
LOCATION: US

Eddie is a senior concept artist and art director with a focus on worldbuilding. He's also the creator of a graphic novel called Blossom City: Exo Angels.
<https://bit.ly/486g9gf>



Biker Girl is the key image for my personal IP, Neon Drift. Inspired by my favourite anime and films, I wanted to create a keyframe illustration that successfully summed up the mood and feel of the world. Neon Drift is about a group of motorcycle couriers that transport illicit goods in New Eden, a rundown city with a bleak future.

In doing this, what I wanted to do was capture one of the couriers in a

moment of rest, contemplating the best route to take to her destination: one that would have the best chance of avoiding police and rival gangs in the process.

Storytelling was paramount for this scene, and I decided that a side profile showcasing the world and bike design would best show the 'moment of rest' feeling that I was attempting to convey here. The red metal of her helmet and bike are meant to provide contrast with the greener-tinted, grungier world that is behind her.

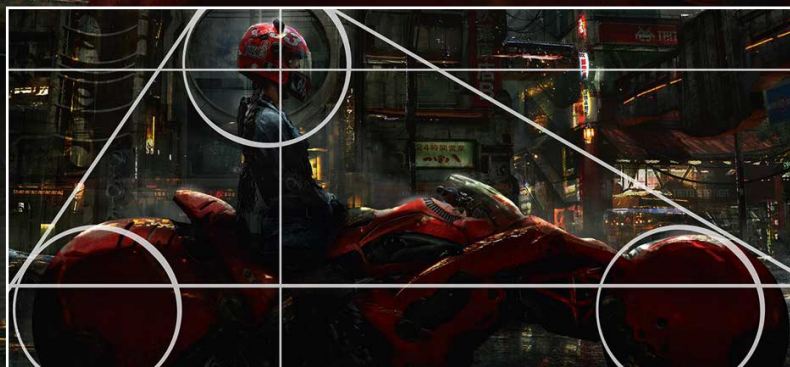
With every piece I make, I aim to evoke further imagery and stories within my viewer. Biker Girl is the 'hook' image for this world that will look to hopefully get the viewer captivated, engaged and curious to want to see more.

In this workshop, my aim is to show the process and design thinking for this image – a blend of photobashing, digital painting and 3DCoat – as well as my future ambitions for the world that is contained within this painting.

FUTURISTIC CITYSCAPE

Dystopia-inspired

The world design was inspired by Tokyo and Hong Kong, with an added layer of the high-tech architectural movement on top for a blend of sci-fi with a lived-in feel; a future gone wrong.



Rule of thirds

The composition of the image uses a standard rule of thirds approach, but to further drive the focal point home, I framed the character's head within a circular architectural motif that also echoes her bike's wheels. This creates a balance and 'tipping of the scales' effect that helps avoid a feeling of symmetry in the image.

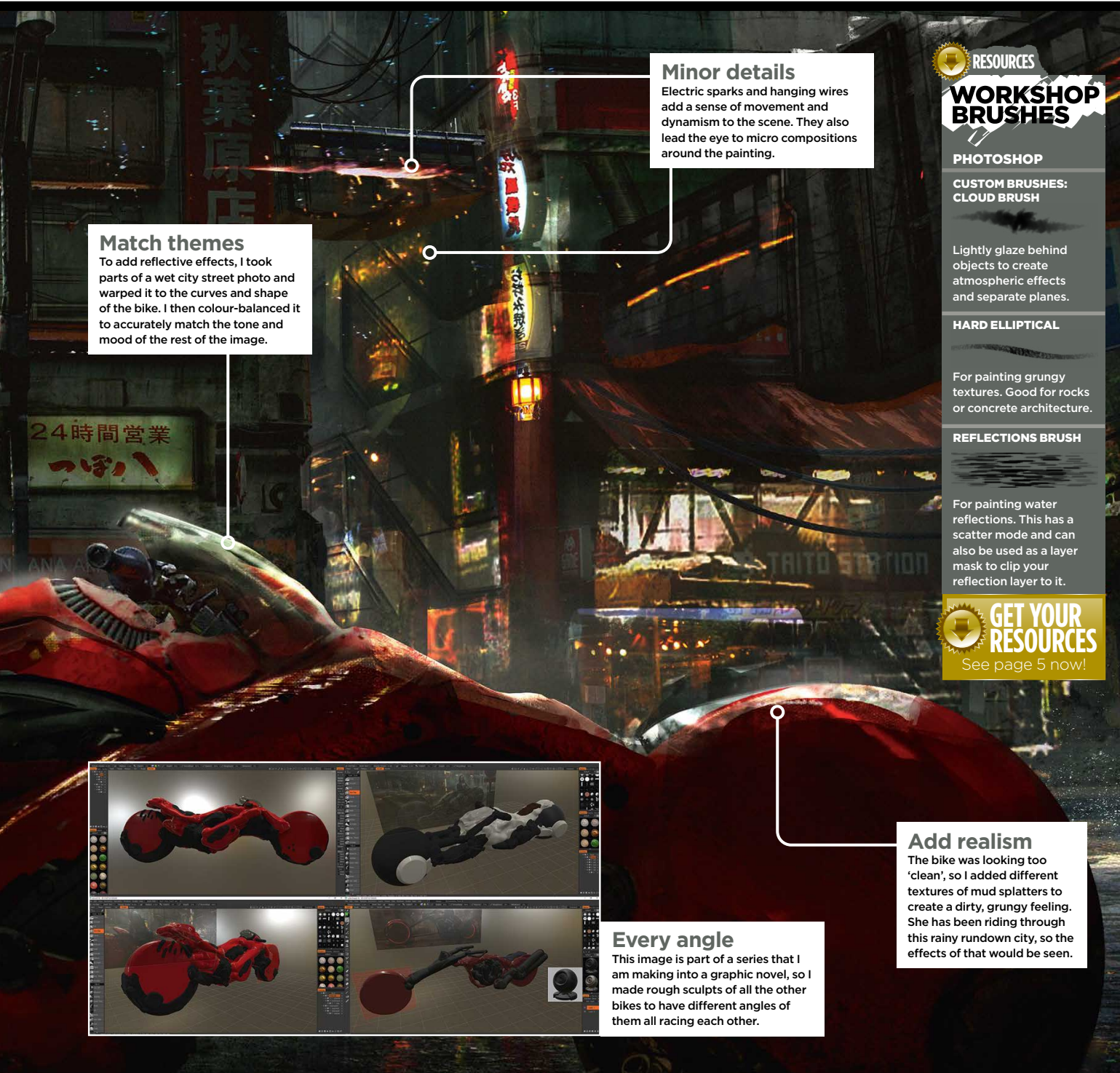
How I create...

A NEAR-FUTURE MOTORBIKE

1 Plan the bike and set the scene

I started off by designing the bike first, which is an obvious tribute to Kaneda's bike in Akira. I warped and stretched various parts of a Ducati monster to arrive at the final design. I then start photobashing the rest of the scene. I used various pictures of Tokyo and Hong Kong to create a grungy and lived-in world.





Match themes
To add reflective effects, I took parts of a wet city street photo and warped it to the curves and shape of the bike. I then colour-balanced it to accurately match the tone and mood of the rest of the image.

Minor details
Electric sparks and hanging wires add a sense of movement and dynamism to the scene. They also lead the eye to micro compositions around the painting.

RESOURCES
WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES:
CLOUD BRUSH

Lightly glaze behind objects to create atmospheric effects and separate planes.

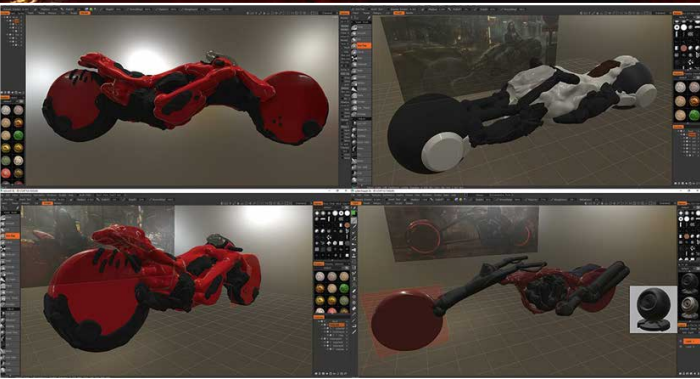
HARD ELLIPTICAL

For painting grungy textures. Good for rocks or concrete architecture.

REFLECTIONS BRUSH

For painting water reflections. This has a scatter mode and can also be used as a layer mask to clip your reflection layer to it.

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 5 now!

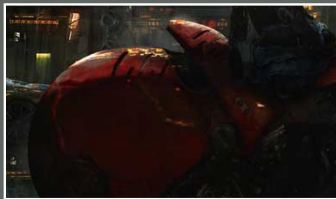
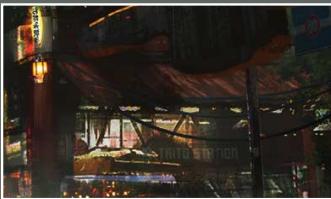


Add realism
The bike was looking too 'clean', so I added different textures of mud splatters to create a dirty, grungy feeling. She has been riding through this rainy rundown city, so the effects of that would be seen.

Every angle
This image is part of a series that I am making into a graphic novel, so I made rough sculpts of all the other bikes to have different angles of them all racing each other.



2 Concentrate on the background elements
Since all the elements came from photos with different lighting scenarios, I darken the scene with multiply and overlay modes, then paint back in the overcast lighting with layer masks.



3 Enhance the environment
I then introduced neon lights and reflections in the environment by adding nighttime city photos with colour dodge modes. The final step is painting and blending all these elements together, finalising details such as mud splatters on the wheels and ensuring edges are clean and sharp by refining layer masks.



Technique focus

HARNESS CONTRAST

Yoojin Seong gives her insight on creating a tranquil scene of a fairy-tale castle in winter

How I create... A SNOWY WINTER SCENE

Artist PROFILE

Yoojin Seong
LOCATION: South Korea

Yoojin is a concept artist working across games and film who specialises in spatial design, worldbuilding, and visual storytelling. Her previous projects include *Avatar: The Way of Water*, *Avatar: Fire and Ash*, *AION 2*, and *Lost Ark*.
<https://bit.ly/4mzDvB4>



"In this piece, I wanted to explore the juxtaposition of a winter setting with an Art Nouveau castle.

"Set against a quiet, overcast landscape, the design draws heavily from classical architectural language. I incorporated acanthus ornamentation and subtle owl motifs to evoke a sense of heritage, wisdom, and an underlying mystery.

"The core inspiration came from the striking visual similarity between falling snow and drifting cherry blossom petals. By using the organic, flowing lines of Art Nouveau in a frozen environment, I aimed to evoke a quiet, almost poetic anticipation of spring within the stillness of winter. The curved elements soften the rigid architectural structure, guiding the viewer's eye and creating an atmosphere that is both serene and enigmatic."



1 Establish the structure and lighting

The process begins in Blender with a 3D blockout to establish the spatial relationships. This foundational stage is crucial for defining the overall volume, architectural scale, and visual circulation. I introduce an overcast lighting setup very early on; this soft, diffused light helps eliminate harsh shadows, perfectly supporting the muted, atmospheric winter mood I am aiming for.



2 Develop mood and identity

With the blockout serving as my structural canvas, I begin integrating the specific design language. I use the 3D base to develop the overall mood, introducing acanthus motifs and owl elements to bring in classical references and symbolic meaning. These details act as visual anchors, reinforcing the historical identity and the quiet narrative of the space.



3 Refinement, curves, and cohesion

The final stage involves additional 3D passes and refinement. A key transformation here is replacing the straight fence elements with sweeping, curved forms. This softens the composition, introducing a rhythmic, Art Nouveau flow to the rigid architecture. The distant gate is further developed and pushed deeper into the atmospheric fog, enhancing the depth of field and completely unifying the cold, snowy environment.

Photoshop

CONCEPT ART USING ROBOT CHARACTERS

JC Jongwon Park reveals his personal workflow for creating effective mechanical concepts

Artist PROFILE

JC Park

LOCATION: South Korea

JC is an illustrator and concept artist based in Hamburg. With years of experience across games, film, TV, and publishing, he has contributed to titles such as Gears of War and Everspace, bringing immersive worlds to life with intricate details and striking compositions. www.j-circle.net



Creating a sense of overwhelming scale and believable mechanical design is one of the most

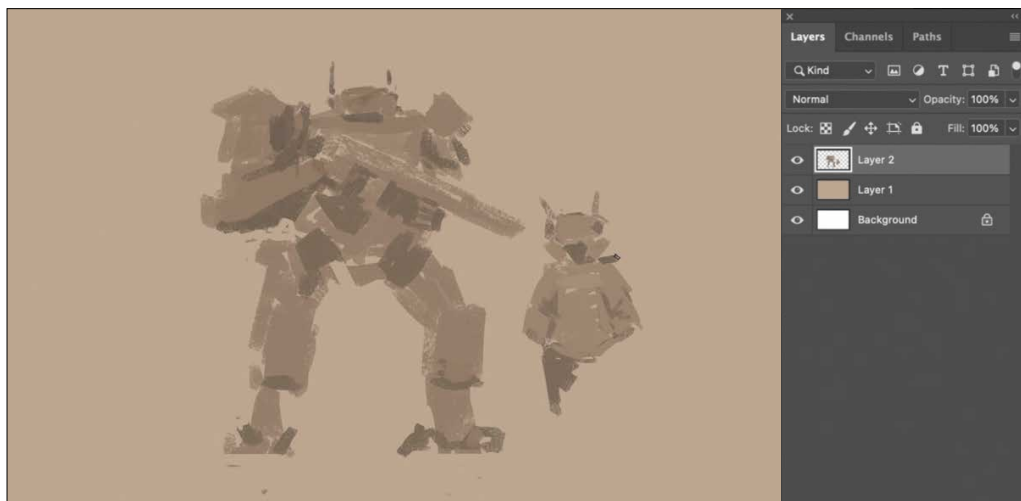
rewarding challenges in digital concept art. In this tutorial, I invite you to join me as I break down the entire creative process behind my latest piece, Robot Standing. My goal is to show you how a strategic approach to composition and lighting can transform a simple idea into a powerful visual narrative.

For the core concept, the heart of this session lies in mastering scale contrast. We will explore how to achieve a perfectly balanced composition by juxtaposing a colossal, towering mech against a human-scale character. You will learn how to use these size differences not just for visual impact, but to establish a grounded sense of

reality while integrating supporting environmental elements that tie the whole scene together.

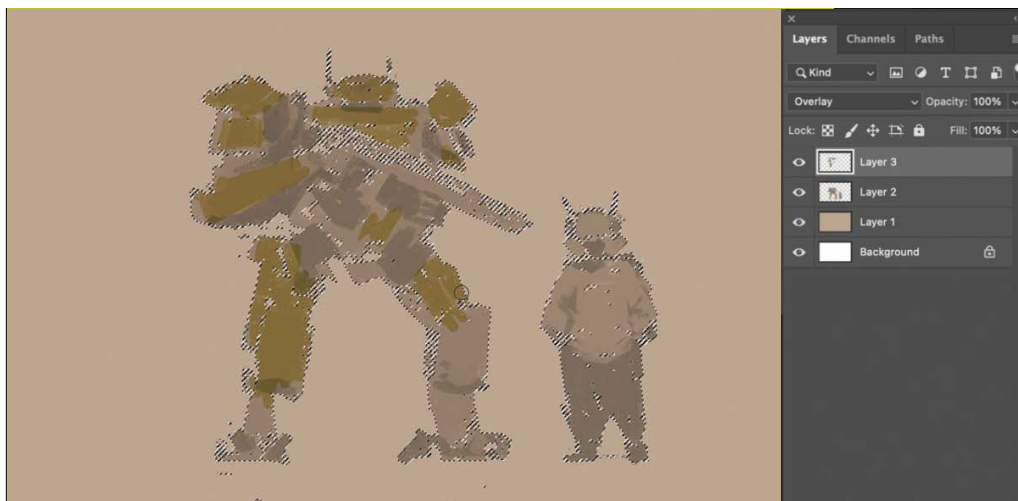
For the process and technical workflow, our journey begins with an initial silhouette exploration, where we focus on establishing a strong commanding presence and a clear, readable form. Once the foundation is set, we transition into a dedicated phase of refining details and calibrating light to give the concept a tangible, realistic feel.

Throughout the tutorial, I pull back the curtain on my personal Photoshop workflow. I will share the specific brush sets I rely on, my step-by-step layering techniques, and my professional know-how for fine-tuning colour and lighting. By the end, you will have a deep understanding of how to orchestrate these elements to breathe life into your own mechanical concepts.



1 Silhouettes

Focus on the silhouettes to build the overall shape. Use a tone slightly darker than the background, avoiding too much contrast. Don't worry about specific details for now – just quickly capture the silhouettes of the two characters. To avoid the added stress of colour, stay in monotone and focus purely on form. Pay close attention to the size difference between the characters and focus on creating a harmonious standing pose. Another important point is to create the silhouette on a separate layer from the background; this makes it much easier to edit later.




2 Try out colours With only the character layer selected, try out various base colours for the large robot on the left. Set this up on a separate layer so you can easily switch between blending modes like Overlay later. Feel free to experiment with different colours, as you can always adjust the hue or value by selecting the colour layer separately later on. Instead of colouring individual parts in detail, focus on establishing the primary overall colour for the robot first. Detailed colour separation will be handled later; for now, concentrate only on the overall colour flow.

RESOURCES

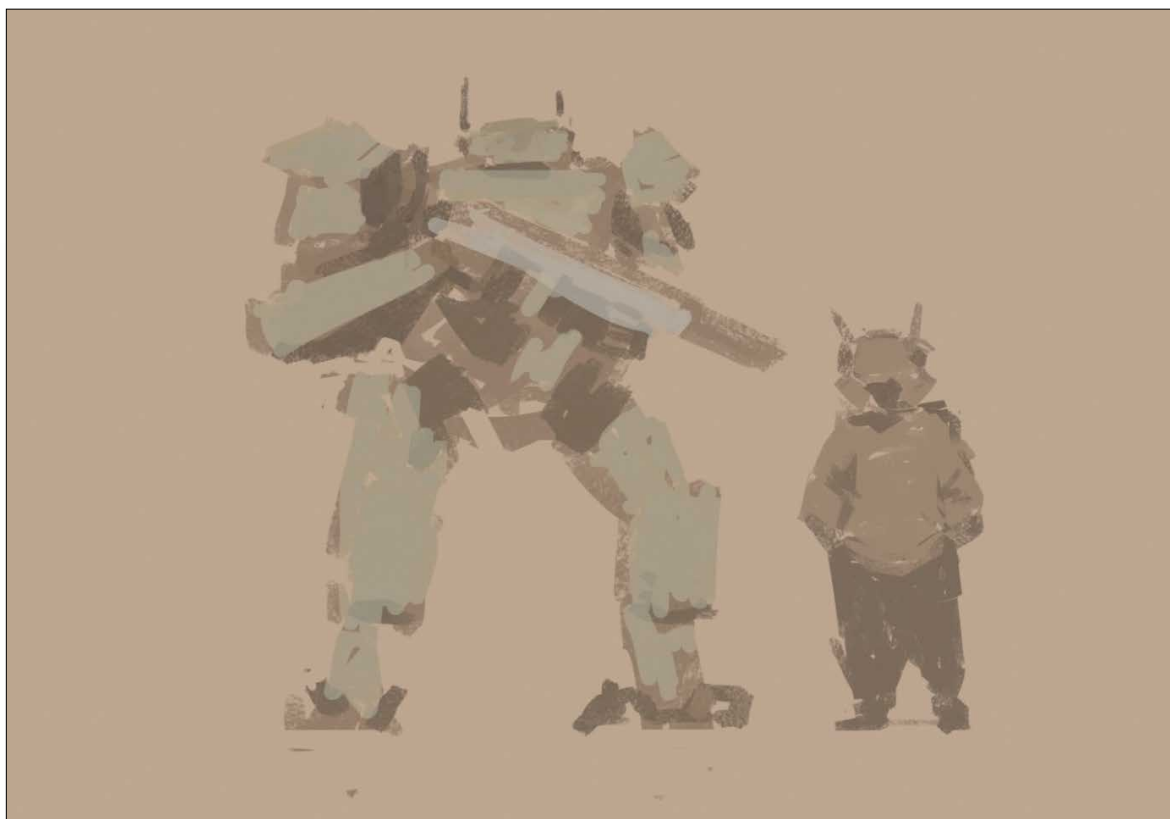
WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

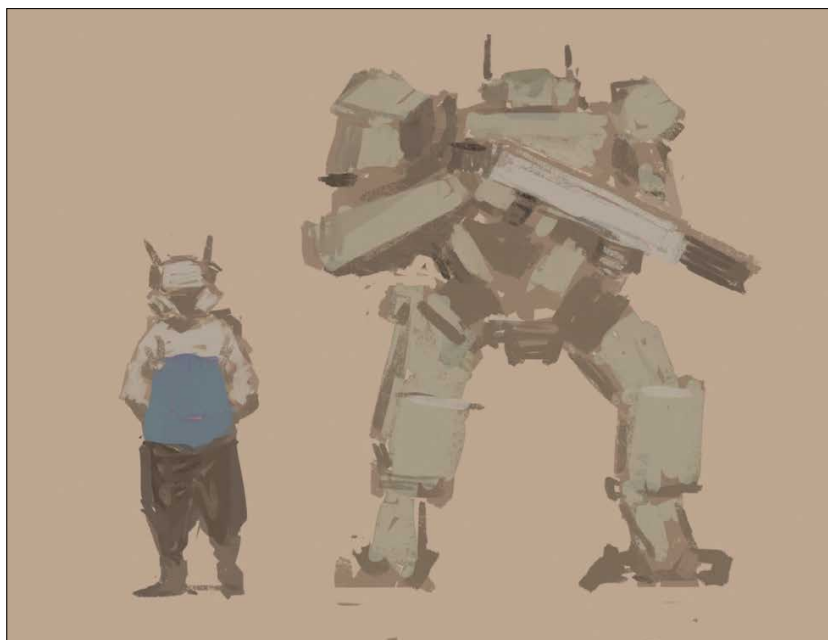
CUSTOM BRUSHES:
JONGWON'S BRUSHES



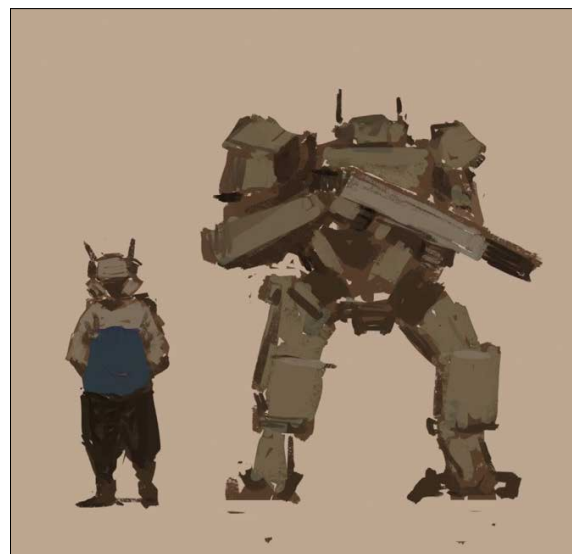
I use these two brushes for over 90% of my work. The Oil Pastel brush is great for quickly capturing forms and silhouettes, while the Soft Round brush is used to represent lighting and to smoothly blend angular sections.



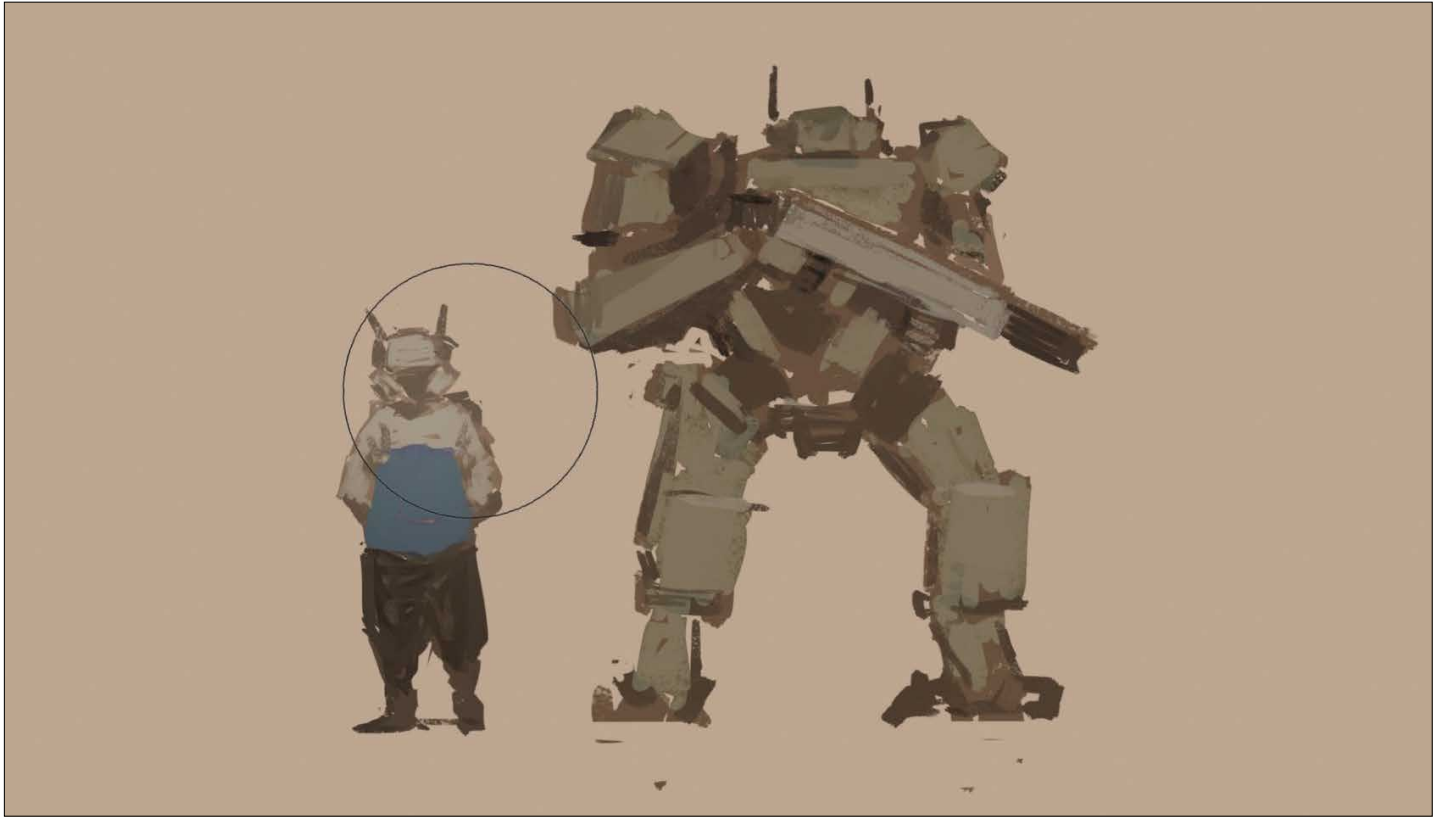
3 Subtle shading
With only the colour layer selected, use the Hue/Saturation settings to aim for a slightly lighter grey tone. Avoid creating sharp contrasts to maintain overall colour flow. Roughly mark the areas to be darkened, such as joints, and apply the colour while excluding those sections. I recommend keeping the saturation low for now while you work.



4 Composition adjustment
Since the large robot seems to be pointing its gun at the smaller character, I swap their left-right positions. By arranging the characters from small to large (left to right), the composition is now easier to read and eliminates any awkward confrontation. This adjustment makes them feel more like allies or partners, which is a better direction for the piece. I also apply a touch of blue as a point colour to the character on the left, adding a bit of vitality to what was an all-monotone look.

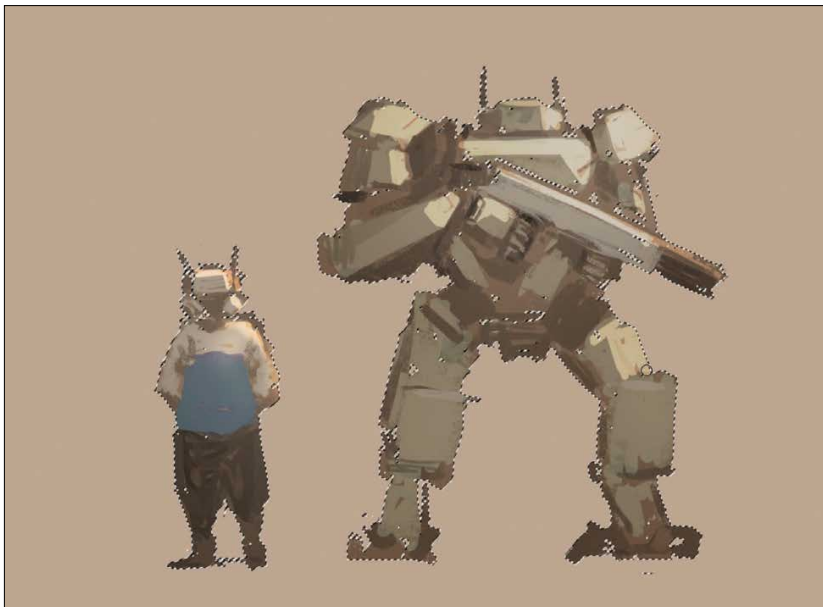


5 A darker tone
After duplicating the character layer, setting it to Multiply will unify the overall volume in a darker tone and give the result a stronger sense of mass. At the same time, this significantly increases the contrast against the background, so there's no need to work with dark sketches on a light background during the initial sketching stage. If there are any messy sketch marks around the silhouette, this is the perfect time to clean them up.



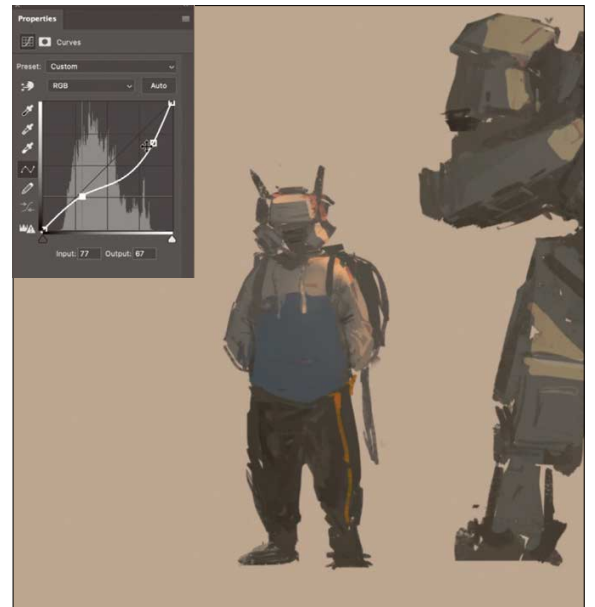
6 Erasing a lighting gradient

Using an airbrush-style eraser, start erasing parts of the darkened Multiply layer according to the light source. Since the light is intended to flow from right to left, begin erasing from the right side of the characters to create a rough gradient that gets darker towards the left. To achieve this smooth transition of light, choose a soft-edged airbrush eraser rather than a hard-edged, angular brush.



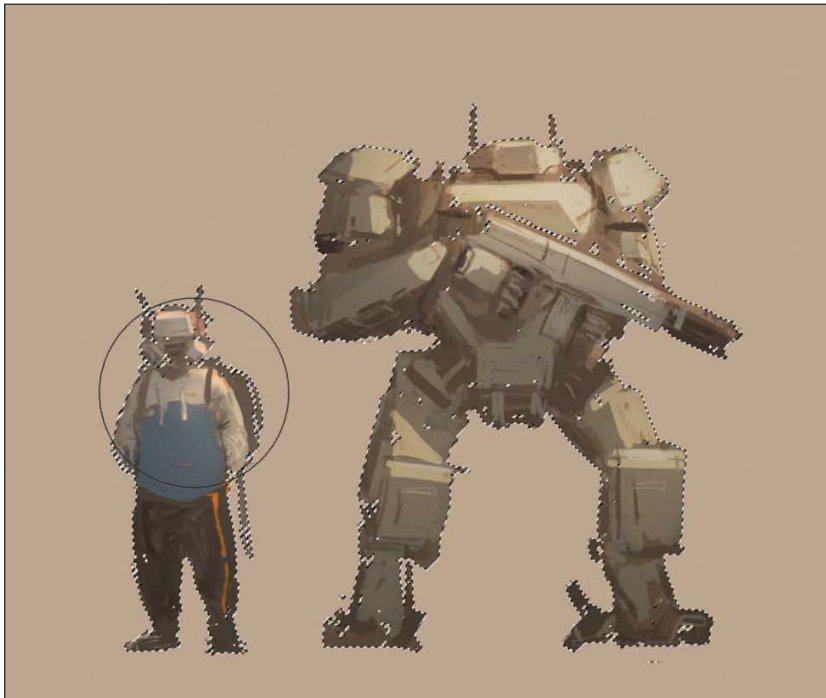
7 Apply the lighting

Now it's time to apply the lighting in earnest. The light should flow from right to left; apply a soft, flowing light to the clothing of the character on the left while accentuating the surface angles of the robot on the right. Set the layer mode to Overlay and choose a warm, slightly desaturated bright-yellow tone to represent the light. By working with the character layer selected, as shown in the image, you can apply the lighting cleanly without it bleeding outside the character's silhouette.



8 Balance light and shadow

Click on Adjustment Layer from the options at the bottom of the layer panel, and select Curves from the menu to balance the overall light and shadow. The key to this step is achieving a well-balanced distribution of highlights and shadows. Don't worry if the bright areas become a bit darker; just focus on the overall balance, as we will reapply the highlights in the next step.



9 Reapply lighting

Merge the Curves adjustment layer from the previous step with the character layer, then create a new layer on top and set it to Overlay to reapply the lighting. This time, use a warmer, brighter colour overall. Since the sharp edges and faceted areas have already been defined, use a soft-edged brush like an airbrush to apply the light smoothly.



10 Start on the background

Now, let's put the characters aside for a moment and move on to the background. Since the characters and the background are on separate layers anyway, create a new layer between the character and background layers to begin your background sketch. The contrast of the background should be less intense than that of the characters, and it's perfectly fine to start working with colour right away. Work with a light-hearted, rough approach compared to the detail you put into the characters.



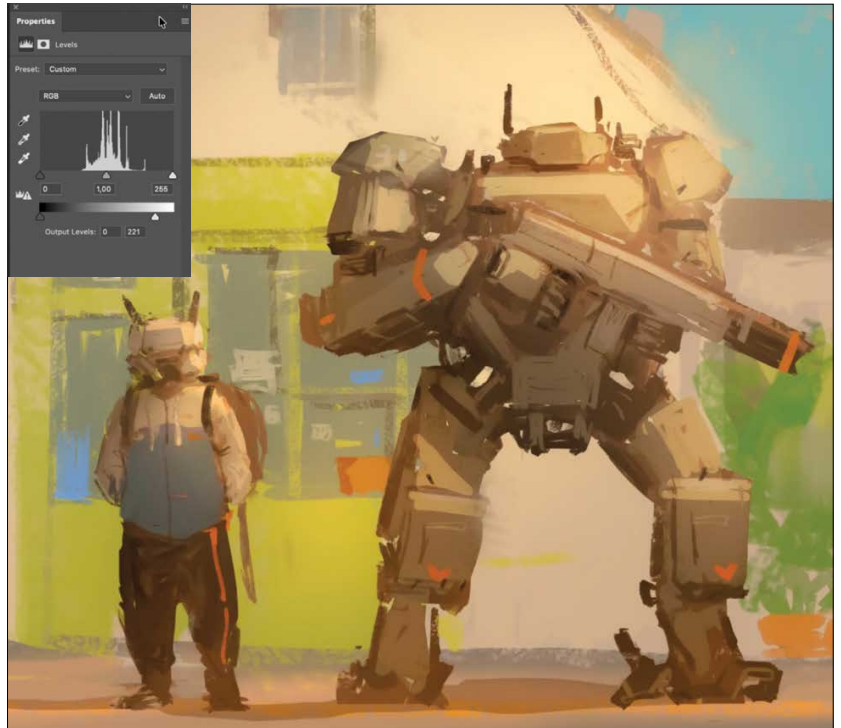
11 Add interest to the background

You have complete freedom in what you choose to place in the background. The most important point to keep in mind is that it should not distract from the characters; therefore, the contrast must be less intense than that of the characters. Also, ensure the lighting aligns with the characters by keeping in mind the light source flowing from right to left.



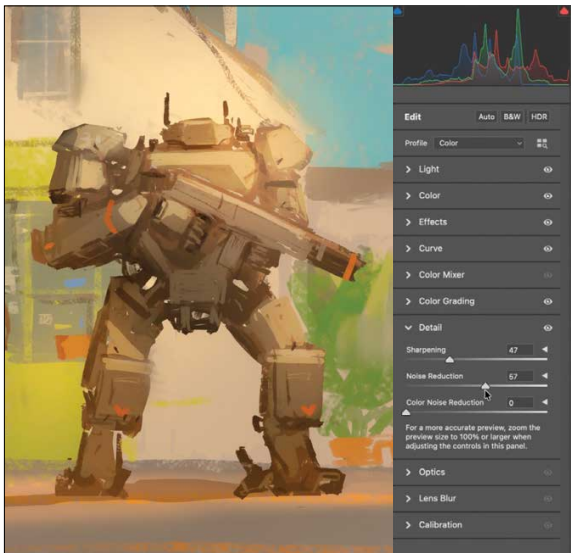
12 Light and shadow

From the adjustment layer menu at the bottom of the layer panel, use Levels to enhance the overall contrast, saturation, and brightness. Just like with the characters, create warm-toned light in the background using the Overlay mode. Gradually add details such as stickers on the window, flower pots, door shutters, and window frames. Then, apply the same process to create the characters' shadows. Since the light is coming from the right, the shadows should cast towards the left of the characters.



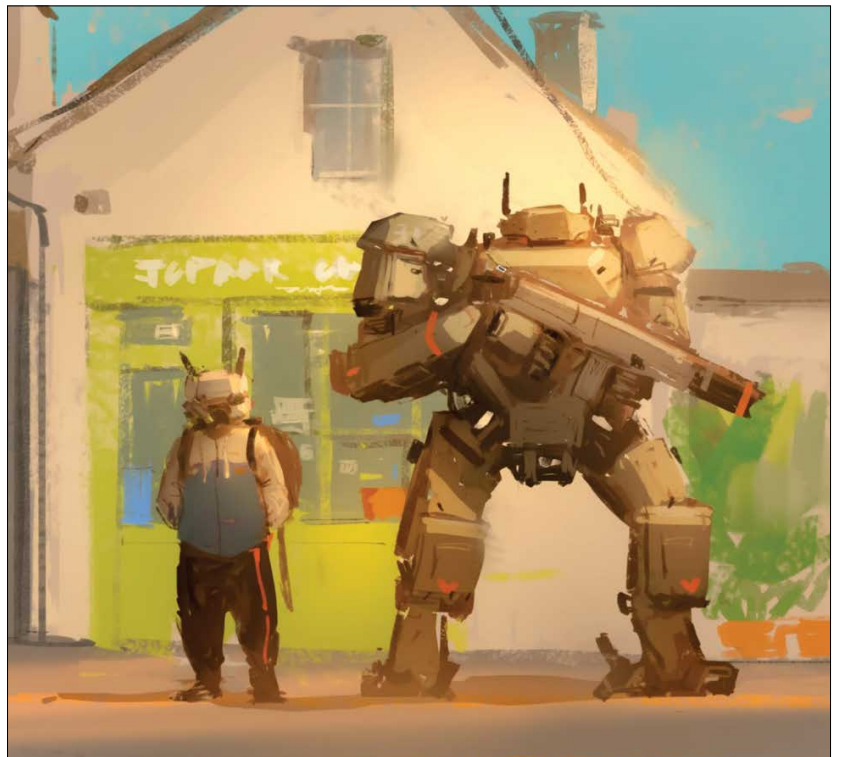
14 Finishing touches

Adjust the Levels once more to fine-tune the overall balance. As we're now approaching the final stages, take extra care in balancing the elements. Additionally, go through the piece one last time to apply any missing highlights or shadows that you may have overlooked.



13 Adjust settings

Go to Filter in the top menu of Photoshop and select Camera Raw Filter to open the settings window. Explore various categories such as Light, Color, and Effects by moving the sliders left and right to find the look that works best. Since these adjustments vary entirely depending on the art style, lighting direction, intensity, applied colours, and contrast, there is no single 'correct' numerical value that works for everyone. You must evaluate the balance of colour and light reflected in real-time as you adjust the sliders to achieve the final result.



15 Make it your own

The overall process is now complete. Since this piece was created specifically to demonstrate the initial workflow, it may lack fine detail. However, by repeating the process of adding details and balancing elements within this framework, you can further incorporate all the specific features and refinements you desire. ●

Technique focus

BLEND INSPIRATION

Devesh Pariyani creates a harmonious union of music and dance inspired by Hindu mythology



"Sangam re-imagines Hindu mythology, depicting the divine union between a Gandharva (celestial musician) and an Apsara (celestial dancer). I portrayed the Gandharva with traditional equine features and a four-armed anatomy to balance a monumental, veena-inspired instrument, which serves as a physical stage for the Apsara's performance. By blending cinematic scale with classical Indian iconography, such as the bird-headed carvings, the piece illustrates the rhythmic harmony between the celestial realms of Svarga. I used 3D primitives to check the anatomical logic before painting. Even with multiple arms, the silhouette must feel functional and balanced to remain believable within a high-fantasy cinematic setting."



How I create...

A MYTHOLOGICAL DANCE SCENE



1 Sketch and research

After sketching, I built a mood board to solve the challenge of morphing a horse's features into a human face. I studied structural muscle, hair translucency, and traditional ornaments. This included classical Indian dance poses and veena designs, ensuring every fantasy element is grounded in cultural and physical reality.



2 3D blockout and value sketch

Next, I translate my sketches into a 3D blockout using Blender. This step is vital for managing the multi-armed perspective and the instrument's massive scale. Once rendered, I moved into Photoshop for a greyscale value sketch. This allowed me to establish the cinematic lighting and "broken" edges, softening the 3D forms into a more natural, painterly composition.



3 Final colour and refinement

In the final stage, I apply colour glazes and focus on materials like gold and silk. I use custom brushes to add the glowing effects around the Apsara and the intricate carvings. Sharp specular highlights on the jewellery provide the final pop to separate the character from the atmospheric background of the celestial realm.

Artist PROFILE

Devesh Pariyani

LOCATION: India

Devesh is an Indian digital painter who bridges ancient mythology with cinematic futurism. He explores divine themes through atmospheric realism, storytelling, and high-fantasy worldbuilding.
<https://bit.ly/4cwHN7B>

The Gallery

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Joshua Striker

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Pen and ink WEB: www.instagram.com/artby_jks

Joshua is a self-taught pen-and-ink artist based in Lakeland, Florida. His work draws on the engraving traditions of Doré, Booth and Wrightson and explores dark fantasy landscapes where solitary figures inhabit worlds of overwhelming scale and quiet dread.

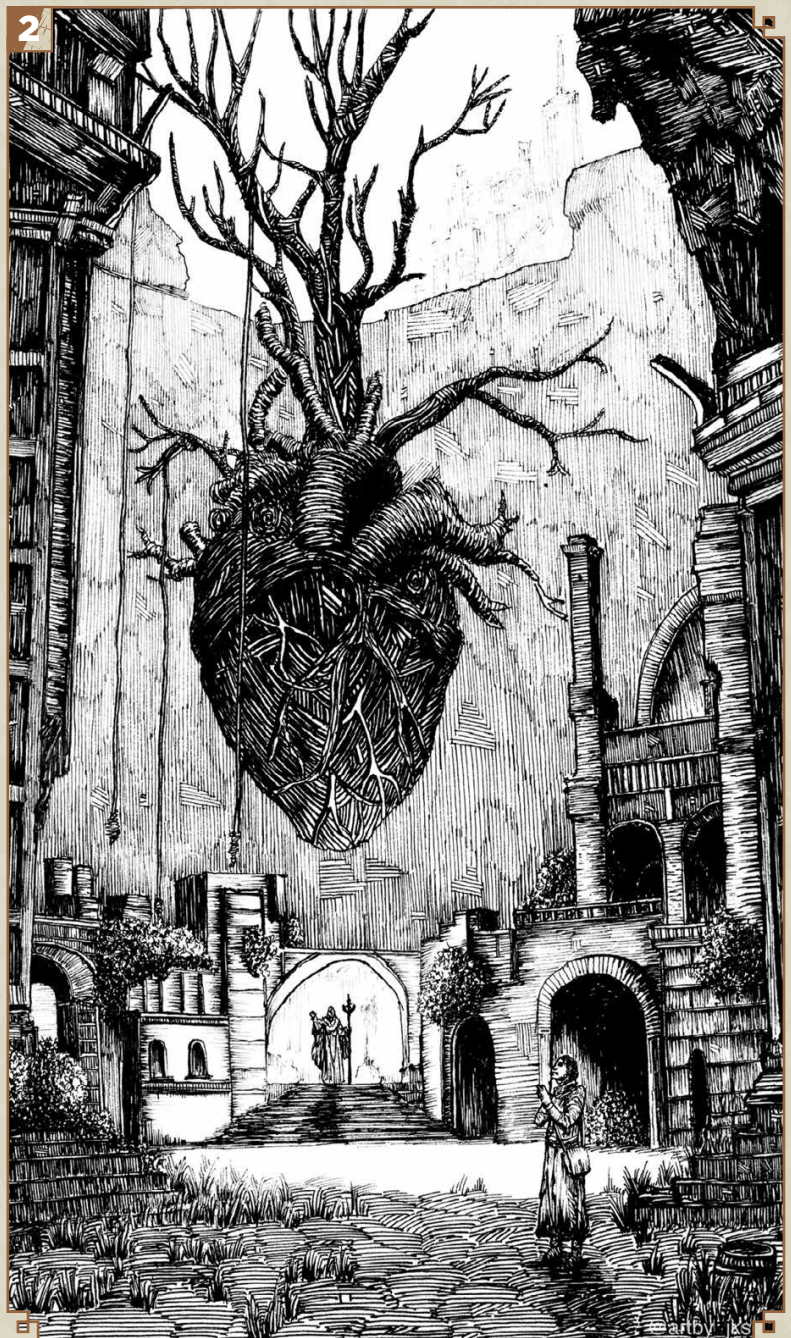


1 GOLDEN DUST

"Here is an ancient stone arch situated on a clifftop, with a figure who is too small to matter standing right there in front of it. Some things predate meaning."

2 AUTONOMY

"A giant anatomical heart suspended over a city built entirely in its shadow. No one knows what it is. No one questions it. They just built around it and called it sacred."



Traditional art

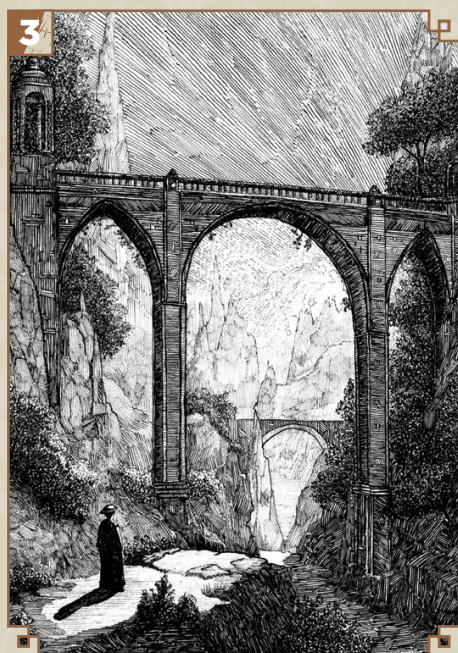


4 ETERNAL

"A sorcerer faces off against a dragon in a collapsed canyon. The dragon is enormous, but the powerful sorcerer doesn't care."

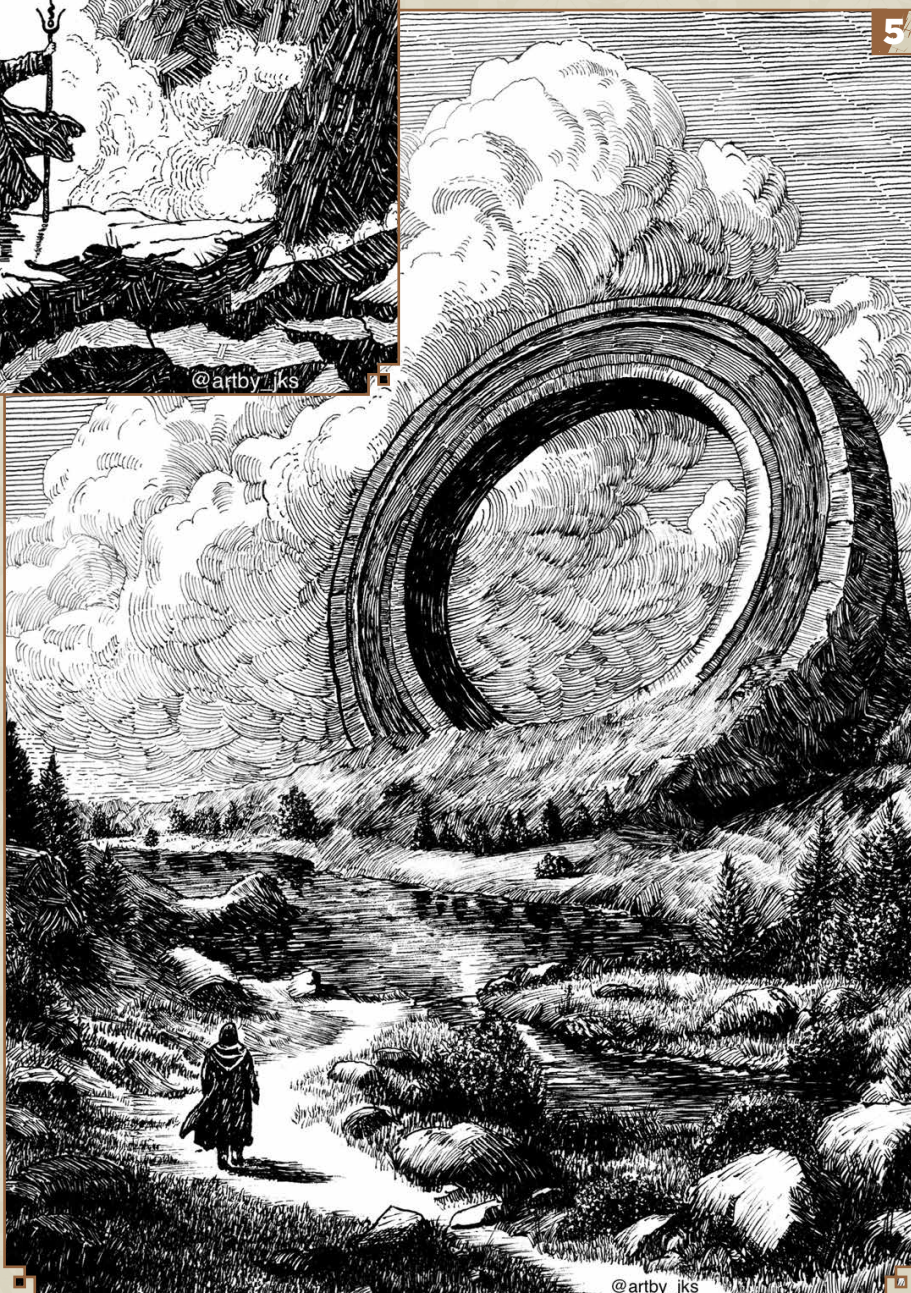
5 PASSENGER

"A figure on a path heading towards something that has no business existing in the landscape. I wasn't interested in explaining the portal; I just wanted to attempt to convey the approach to it."



3 ISOLATION

"A Gothic viaduct spans a mountain gorge, with a single figure beneath it. I'm drawn to spaces so big that they make tiny figures almost disappear."





Conrad Keely

LOCATION: Bulgaria MEDIA: Acrylic on canvas, acrylic on wood panel WEB: <https://conradkeely.com>

Conrad has a profound love of history – born near Richard III’s final stand at the Battle of Bosworth. He fronted the band ...And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead for 20-odd years, but shifted to art because “the current music industry is far darker than any dystopian fantasy painting”.

1 BEFORE THE BATTLE

“Originally titled ‘Pray the gods will force Spotify to pay artists what they deserve’, I like the idea of seeing what happens before a warrior enters the shield wall.”



1

2

2 ORACLE OF CUPS

“Another theme I always return to, the oracle priest holding a goblet. This acrylic painting on a smooth wooden panel provided a challenge in building up layers.”



3 LEONIDAS BEFORE THERMOPYLAE

"Another before-the-battle scene, showing the Spartan king, who is weary from six days of battle, resigning himself to his fate on the seventh day."

4 PRISONER OF THE LABYRINTH

"Being a Taurus, I sympathise with poor Asterion (the Minotaur). Painting monsters is less stressful than humans because you have a lot of leeway with realism!"

5 LAGERTHA

"I'm a fan of the Vikings TV series (and the sagas). I wanted to portray the famous shield-maiden, Lagertha, as also being a protective mother. I couldn't resist the Star Wars-esque blue and red lighting."



Rossana Castellino

LOCATION: Italy MEDIA: Pencils and pastels WEB: [instagram.com/midnight.nymph](https://www.instagram.com/midnight.nymph)

Rossana is an Italian illustrator and jewellery maker whose charming mixed-media artworks are mainly crafted using pencils and pastels. Her creations move between nature and fantasy, often focusing on quiet introspective atmospheres.



1 STEAM REHAB

"An old inventor repairing a small mechanical creature in his workshop. I used mixed media to layer details and atmosphere, focusing on the slow, careful gesture and the subtle connection between maker and creation."

2 DEER PRINCESS

"I wanted to draw an ancient forest ruler with a slight Art Nouveau influence. I used coloured pencils, focusing more on mood than detail, trying to keep her presence quiet and restrained."

3 SHROOM PEOPLE

"A series of small mushroom creatures I sketched while experimenting with shapes and variations. Colored pencils helped me keep everything light and playful without overthinking the designs too much."



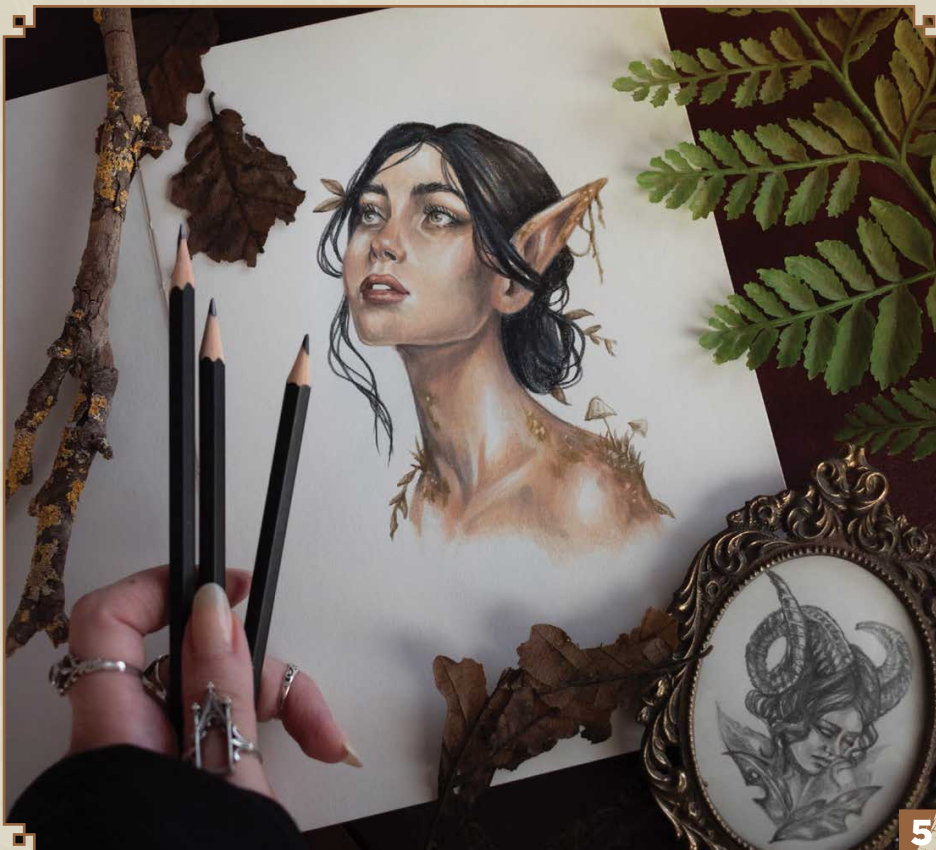
4

4 SLUMBER SPELL

“A forest fairy resting inside a tree, but while she sleeps, another little pixie seems to want to steal something that hides a secret. I used pastels and acrylics to build soft textures and light, trying to capture a suspended moment.”

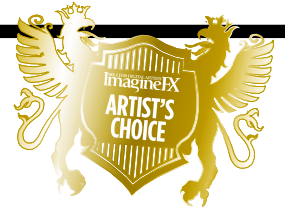
5 ELF STUDY

“A portrait study focused on light and expression. Made with coloured pencils, I was trying to capture something delicate and slightly distant, like a presence that doesn't fully belong here.”



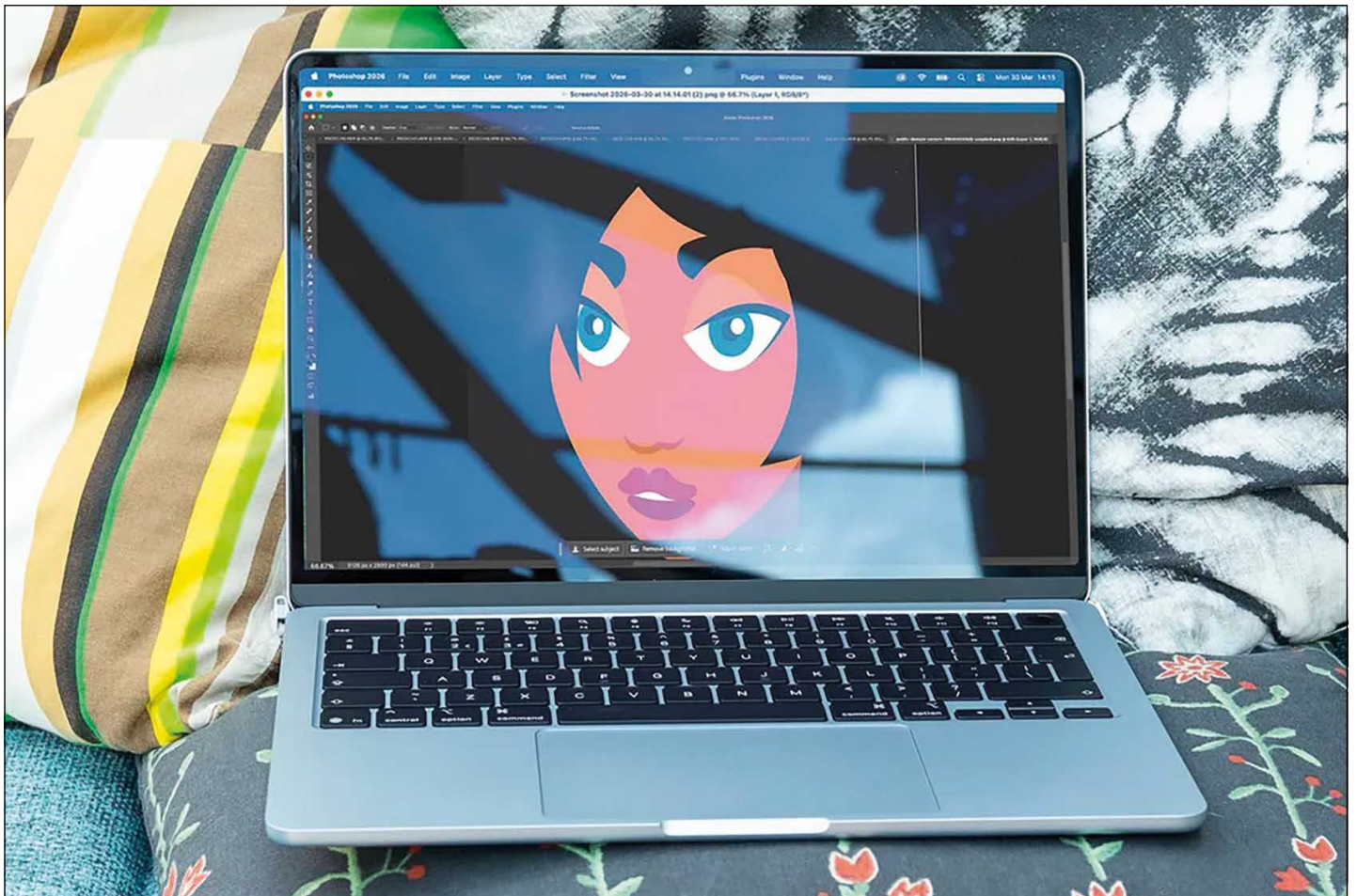
5

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!



MacBook Air M5 13-inch

POWERFUL ENOUGH While the new MacBook Neo is a cheaper option, the Air delivers much better performance for creatives and offers good value for money

Price £1,099 / \$1,099 **Company** Apple **Web** <https://apple.com/store>

The MacBook Air currently sits in a strange sort of limbo. If you want a low-cost Mac, there's the MacBook Neo. If you want a more capable machine, there's the MacBook Pro, which really isn't that much bigger. So who is the MacBook Air for in 2026?

The answer seems to be a simple one: those for whom the Neo is too

little, and the Pro too much. The base-model Pro costs a lot more than the Air, and all it really brings to the party is a cooling fan – this means it's got a bit more grunt when you're pushing it hard, but the main draw of the MacBook Pro now seems to be that you can add things to it, potentially creating something like the monstrous M5 Max model. The Air, which comes in 13-inch and 15-inch variations, slots

With the same M5 chip as the lower-end MacBook Pro model, the Air has a fair bit of power under hood.

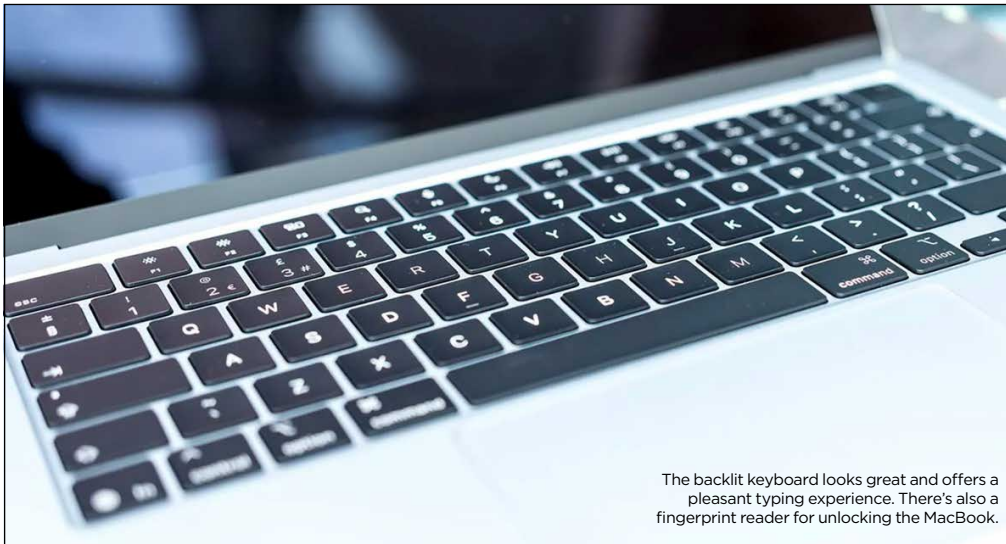
neatly into the MacBook lineup, and performs well too.

COOL SHADES

Our 13-inch MacBook Air review model uses the Sky Blue colour scheme. The Airs aren't as colour saturated as the Neos, with the options featuring a golden Starlight alongside the blue, black and silver choices, but they look great. The



Unlike the Neo, the MacBook Air has two Thunderbolt 4 ports and MagSafe charging.



The backlit keyboard looks great and offers a pleasant typing experience. There's also a fingerprint reader for unlocking the MacBook.

wedge-shaped design is long gone from the MacBook range, and it resembles a slightly smaller MacBook Pro. As the name isn't written anywhere on the laptop's body, you'll need to be very aware of the different Macs' relative thicknesses to tell it apart from the MacBook Neo, especially if they're both in silver.

Despite the appearance of the Neo, the Air is still the thinnest Mac, though there isn't much in it. The two 13-inch laptops even weigh the same and have very similar screens, so the battle of the ultraportables is going to come down to price as much as computing power needs.

The MacBook Air's feature-set is much more like that of the MacBook Pro than the MacBook Neo. It gets a backlit keyboard, a 12MP webcam with Center Stage tech, a Force Touch trackpad, MagSafe charging and

Thunderbolt 4 instead of the Neo's mismatched USB solution.

This makes it a slightly more versatile laptop, as your Thunderbolt-compatible fast storage will run at a much faster transfer rate if it can, while you can use two external monitors against the single extra screen supported by the Neo, but most of the added features are geared toward quality of life.

The Liquid Retina display is big enough and bright enough to be used in most lighting conditions, though it's worth noting that the nano-texture anti-reflective display coating offered on the MacBook Pro isn't available on the Air. Not being an OLED, it's not a particularly reflective screen even without it, but if you're working near strong lighting you may pick up some interference that way. Like the screens on top-end MacBooks, it's tailored to

the P3 colour gamut, and it makes a fantastic home for streaming video as well as design projects.

Apple's keyboards came in for a lot of criticism during the butterfly switch era, but that's been over for years now. Its current keyboards are extremely nice to type on, with just enough depth to the keypresses, and the new Air has a slightly cleaner look over Macs of old by removing the wording from keys such as Caps Lock, leaving them with just a symbol. Unlike the Neo, every model of Air has a fingerprint reader for unlocking the Mac, but like all the other MacBooks you get easy all-day battery life.

PROCESSING POWER

What we've seen from MacBook Airs in the past is a level of performance that comes close to the lowest end of the MacBook Pro line while still leaving enough of a gap to justify buying into the more expensive model if you feel you need it. A lot of this comes down to the laptop's thermal envelope, which is extended in the Pro thanks to the presence of a cooling fan.

The passively cooled Air can't work quite as hard without getting its CPU too hot. This shows when you compare it to the M5 MacBook Pro's test results: the M5 and M5 Max hold the top two spots in the Geekbench 6 single-core ratings, while the Air comes in third ahead of the iPad Pro M5. There is nothing to touch Apple's chips for single-core performance right now, and the top nine places are some kind of Mac, with the plucky little Neo beating the M3 in this test.

Things are different when you start comparing multi-core performance, however, where the likes of the Core Ultra 9 make their presence felt due to the presence of more physical cores on their silicon. The Geekbench 6 GPU results put the MacBook Air within two percent of the Pro, but well down the rankings generally in the company of something like the Nvidia RTX 4060 of the ASUS V16. That's not a bad result for an integrated graphics solution.

In Photoshop, the Air more than doubles the scores of the Neo, while being only 14% behind the M5 MacBook Pro. Interestingly, it beats an older MacBook Pro with an M3 Max processor which would have cost at least £3,299/\$3,299 back in 2023.

Ian Evenden

VERDICT

When the MacBook Air was the bottom rung on Apple's laptop ladder, it was an easy recommendation. Now that the upstart MacBook Neo has snuck in below it, providing surprising performance from its iPhone processor, the Air looks like a trickier proposition. However, given that the performance it provides is much closer to the MacBook Pro than to the Neo, it's still a relevant purchase for creatives.

For

- Good performance for the price
- Slimmest MacBook
- Usual excellent screen from Apple

Cons

- No longer the cheapest MacBook
- 32GB max RAM
- Screen only 60Hz

Rating



“The MacBook Air's feature-set is much more like that of the MacBook Pro than the MacBook Neo”

The frame is metal, but has a nice wooden texture and a satin finish



With hardware for table or wall mounting, the Frame looks great in place

Switchbot AI Art Frame

DON'T BE PUT OFF BY AI This e-ink art frame isn't restricted to generative imagery and does a great job as a display piece.

Price £349/\$470 (13.3-inch model) **Company** Switchbot **Web** www.switchbot.com

If you've ever wanted to display your art but don't want to pay for high-end prints, then a colour e-ink frame might be just the ticket.

The problem is e-ink hasn't got a reputation as a great way to show high-quality imagery, but Switchbot is looking to change that with its AI Art Frame, available in various sizes.

Now, don't get caught up by the AI part of the name. Here at ImagineFX we are all for the artist and won't be pushing any AI tools. The Switchbot does come with an app that lets you use AI to add a 'look' to your image, so if you wanted to make a manga or impressionist version of your work, you can do it, but that's not what we think this is best suited to.

The frame comes in a range of sizes and we tested the 13.3-inch version which sits in the middle of the lineup.

Build quality is excellent, with a strong metal frame and the usual hanging hooks on the back, along with a mat. It comes with a couple of spares too, should you need them. The display has a nice satin finish, so it looks good but has far less glare from lights than a glass picture frame. This makes it easier to see the images from all angles.

Now, we haven't been fond of e-ink in the past, but the Switchbot uses Spectra 6 e-ink, which gives richer colours and greater contrast, while minimising blue light. It really does have a very paper-like appearance and doesn't at all resemble a screen, which would have broken the whole premise for us.

Getting art on to the frame is easy. Simply boot up the app, navigate to your image and press sync. In a few seconds it transfers over and, after a

Good-quality mounting hardware comes fitted



VERDICT

A neat way of showcasing your digital art, using the latest e-ink tech. Slideshow mode keeps things fresh too, showing a series of images. The Art Frame is built to last, with excellent battery life and a metal frame.

Pros

- Good-quality colour e-ink display
- Nice satin finish to the metal frame
- Superb battery life between recharges
- Good-quality mounting hardware

Cons

- Gimmicky AI tools, best ignored

Rating



brief bit of flickering as the colours arrange themselves, the image appears and will stay there until you change it. The battery lasts up to two years, which is very impressive. When time is up, it can be charged via USB-C and left to run for another couple of years!

A handy feature is the carousel, so you can sync a number of images which it will rotate through. Not a new idea, but it's well implemented and makes for a nice addition.

All in all, this is a very high-quality e-ink display and one that could serve well at home or at stands and events.

Rob Redman

“The Switchbot uses Spectra 6 e-ink, which gives richer colours and greater contrast, while minimising blue light”



The accompanying resources include a working Clip Studio Paint file to experiment with.

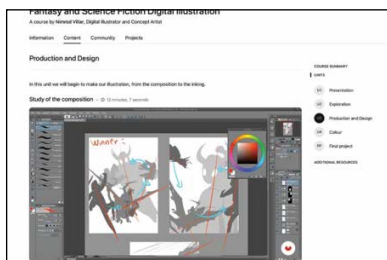
Fantasy and Science Fiction Digital Illustration, Nimrod Villar

REFRESHING COURSE Follow along with a complete sci-fi and fantasy scene workflow using Clip Studio Paint

Publisher Domestika **Price** £20 (approx \$27) **Format** Online
Length 24 lessons (5h 18m) **Web** www.domestika.org

For many artists who are looking for an alternative application to Photoshop for image creation that works across multiple desktop and mobile platforms and offers a perpetual licence, Clip Studio Paint has become their home, especially since it's available on long-term free trials.

This course by Spanish concept artist Nimrod Villar can be considered as both an intro into his amazing work and really well thought-out creative workflow and as a full introduction to Clip Studio Paint. From how workspaces work to how to use brushes and where to get them, this is a great introductory course to the software.



Comprising five units, this introductory course to using Clip Studio Paint is easy to follow.



Nimrod Villar guides you through the process of creating a fantasy illustration with Clip Studio Paint.

In terms of its creative aspects, this is one of the best courses we have ever seen. Villar supplies one of the Clip Studio files that are created during it, along with some other background resources.

For anyone wanting to see a full 'sketch, inking and colour workflow', creatively this is an amazing course with a lot of opportunity to see how Villar's thorough workflow, where there is a creative challenge at every step, is very refreshing and is rewarded with stunning artwork.

While the audio is patchy in places, the resources available in this course make it an easy way to enhance one's creativity and learn how to use Clip Studio Paint as well.

Mike Griggs

VERDICT

With the resources available, including an actual working Clip Studio file, this course serves as both an excellent introduction into a comic-style illustrative workflow and an essential tutorial for artists wanting to get to know Clip Studio Paint.

Pros

- Really strong creative workflow
- Clip Studio Paint file supplied
- Strong array of inspirations referenced

Cons

- Audio quality is patchy
- Limited for artists using other applications

Rating



Brushing up...

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



Sebijy's Essentials Brush Pack

Artist Sebijy

Software Clip Studio Paint

Brushes 90+ **Price** \$4+

Rating ★★★★★

A great starter pack from artist Sebijy, with over 90 Clip Studio Paint brushes spanning painting, inking, pencils, and blending. An accompanying YouTube video shows workflows. At a pay-what-you-want price starting from four dollars, it's great value.

<https://sebijy.gumroad.com/l/ZgWcS>



Basic Clip Studio Brush Pack

Artist Magda Proski

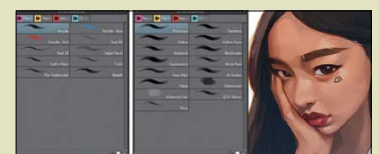
Software Clip Studio Paint

Brushes 9 **Price** Free

Rating ★★★★★

Ubisoft concept artist Magda Proski has made this set of Clip Studio Paint brushes available for free. Sometimes less is more and this set, with this artist's pedigree, should not be ignored when so readily available.

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



The Essential Clip Studio Paint Brush Bundle

Artist Eric Anthony J

Software Clip Studio Paint

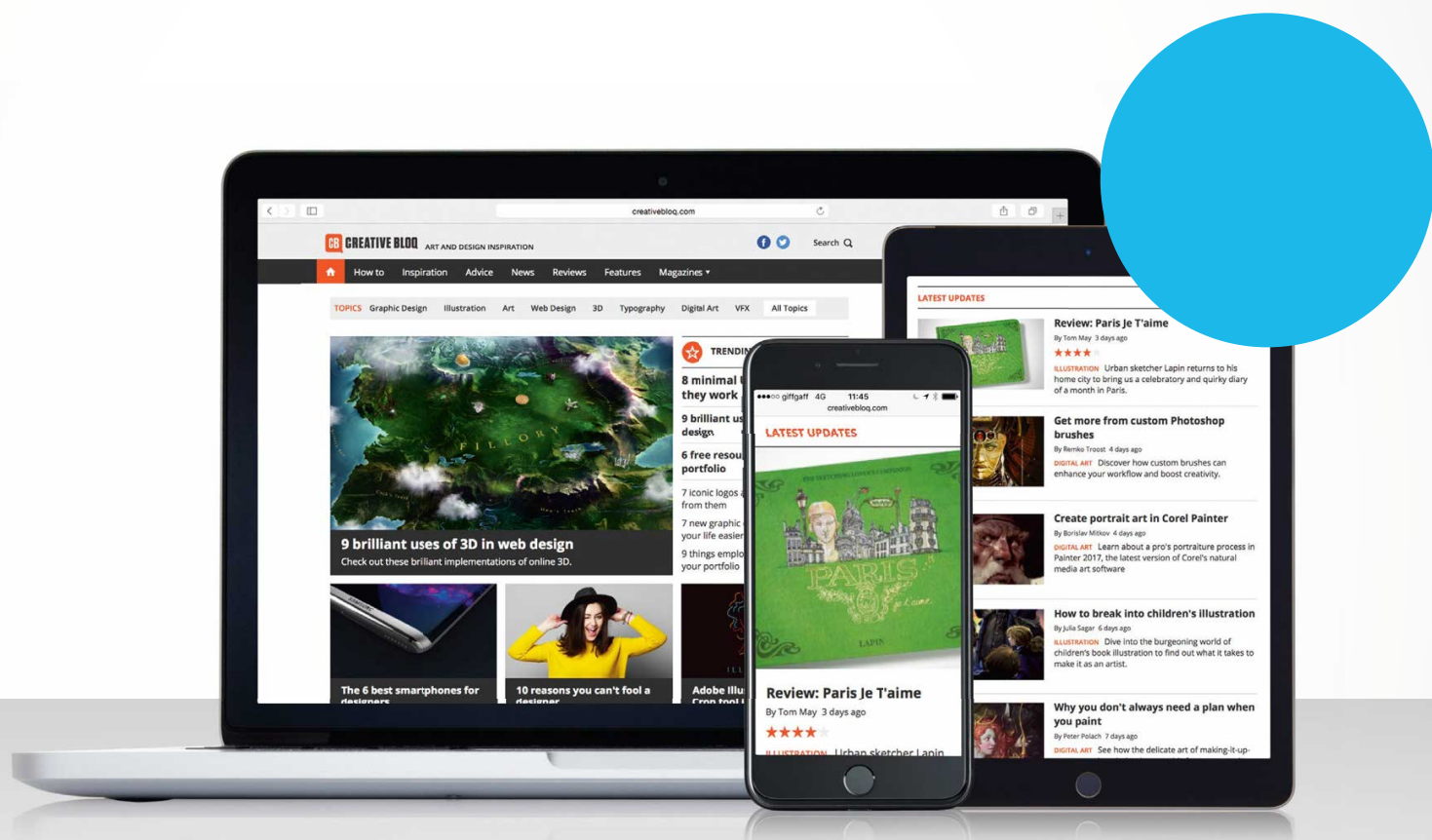
Brushes 50 **Price** \$10

Rating ★★★

Fifty personally crafted brushes from illustrator and concept artist Eric Anthony J, covering paint, pencils, ink pens, blenders, and special effects. This set also has the potential to work in Manga Studio 5.

<https://bit.ly/4mqCn1S>

The number one destination for **digital art** news, views and how-tos



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VISUALISE YOUR ENVIRONMENTS WITH 3D TOOLS

Bill Yi shows his process for creating epic environments

82



The best 3D art around
Melvin Okoronkwo, Zak Sham, and Pavel Merlugov showcase their work.

94



Recreate a drawing
Jörg Grubmüller was inspired to turn a 2D illustration into his own 3D scene.

96



Back to basics
Use textures to add detail and learn how to get your models ready to animate.

98



Five minutes with...
Ali Eser on his love for his home country and how it inspires his art.

3D Artist Showcase

BE INSPIRED BY THE BEST DIGITAL ART AROUND



Melvin Okoronkwo

LOCATION: Australia **MEDIA:** Substance 3D Painter, Marvelous Designer, Unreal Engine, Maya, ZBrush **WEB:** mortarstudios.com.au

Melvin is a 3D character artist specialising in realistic humans and detailed hair. He enjoys bringing characters to life from concept illustrations.





LADY KÖKÖCHIN

“The main inspiration for this piece was the TV show Marco Polo on Netflix, as I quickly fell in love with the Mongolian nomadic culture. I find the traditional Mongolian clothing interesting, especially the ceremonial ones. My Lady Kököchin piece pays homage to the real-life princess of the Bayaut tribe of Mongolia.

“My goal was to make a beautiful Mongolian woman wearing an elaborate and colourful costume to capture the essence of what she could have looked like coming from that region. I took inspiration from supposed images of Queen Genepil, and combined ideas from traditional Mongolian wedding attire. The challenges were sourcing

accurate references for the headdress and jewellery. In some cases I had to improvise, such as how the wings are fastened at the back of the headdress. The body was generated using MetaHuman, as was the head, which was also taken into ZBrush for sculpting. The texturing was done using VFace as a base in Substance 3D Painter.”

Zak Sham

LOCATION: China **MEDIA:** Blender, Photoshop
WEB: artstation.com/shamzak

This graphic designer is using 3D techniques to create their own series of environmental concept designs.

CARGO SHIP

"I created this picture in my free time as practice work. It's inspired by Mark Zhang's concept design, which I've transformed into 3D. It's been more than a year since I started working with Blender last April, and hard-surface design has always been something I've had an interest in. The

biggest challenge for me is balancing the details with the bigger picture, and how to build a proper backstory for the ship. That's why I designed a future technology company that would automate transport between the planets and give my cargo ship a little more credibility."





“The biggest challenge for me is balancing the details with the bigger picture”





Pavel Merlugov

LOCATION: Uruguay **MEDIA:** Blender **WEB:** youtu.be/qZaGLVzk2IE

Pavel likes creating 3D environments with a focus on interior design. He has experience in 3D modelling, texturing, lighting, and rendering.



LOFI ANIMATION

"At first I intended to create a simple animation in a realistic genre that would convey the atmosphere of the beginning of a work day: a desk by the window, trees outside, sun shining, the camera smoothly zooming in on a laptop, a cup of coffee entering the frame with steam rising from it, and a message popping up saying, 'time to get to work'. I created the scene, animation,

and lighting; all that was left was to finalise it, but I lost interest in the idea, and the project remained unfinished.

"After some time, during another session of listening to lofi, I got an idea to switch gears and create my own lofi animation to complete my unfinished project and capture the vibe of the end of the working day. I got to work, changing the render engine to

Eevee, adjusting the materials and lighting, and using the Grease Pencil in Blender to create object outlines and achieve a traditional 2D animation look. This was my first experience using this tool, so I had to spend time studying tutorials on YouTube. Finally, I added some fog and life outside the window to enhance the atmosphere, and my cosy lofi animation was complete. ▶▶



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

ADVICE FROM THE WORLD'S BEST 3D ARTISTS

Photoshop & Blender

VISUALISE YOUR ENVIRONMENTS WITH 3D TOOLS

Concept artist **Bill Yi** explains his techniques for creating massive environments in your concept art

In depth Visualise your ideas



Artist PROFILE

Bill Yi

LOCATION: Taiwan

Bill Yi is a concept artist who has over 11 years of experience in the entertainment industry. Past projects include Silent Hill f, Final Fantasy 7 Rebirth, Halo Wars 2, Total War, Star Wars: The Old Republic, and Resident Evil Resistance. Billyart.com

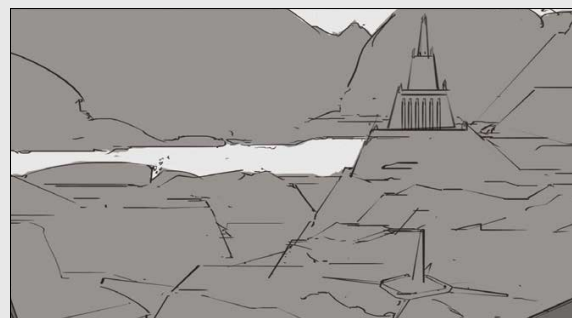
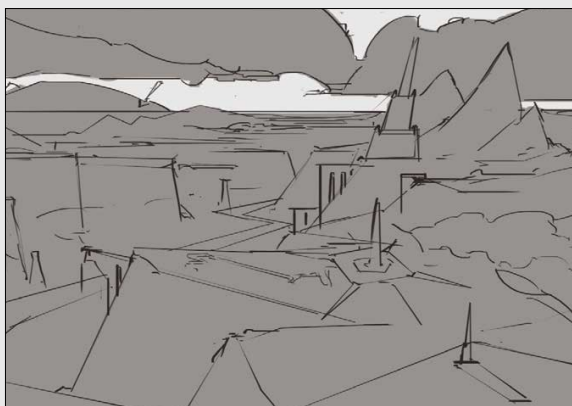


The techniques showcased in this tutorial represent the core of my professional concept design workflow. My philosophy centres on the belief that compositional power lies in simplicity; simple shapes and symbolic forms are not merely aesthetic choices – they serve as the foundational visual language that dictates the viewer's gaze. By prioritising bold silhouettes over premature details, we can establish a narrative structure that is both clear and compelling.

A pivotal element of my process is the strategic interplay between light and shadow. I treat value distribution as a rhythmic tool, giving the environment a 'breathing' quality. This approach creates a seamless visual path, guiding the audience through the depths of the scene without inducing visual fatigue. It's about balancing the massive scale of industrial structures with the organic flow of the atmosphere.

On the design front, we will delve into how to make objects both visually interesting and instantly readable. I will introduce the

principles of clear silhouette reads, focusing on the sophisticated balance between positive and negative forms. Through a series of foundational sketches, I will demonstrate how these concepts translate from a 2D thought process into a robust 3D environment using tools like Blender and World Creator. These are the practical, day-to-day techniques I use to build vast, immersive worlds. Whether you are kitbashing complex machinery or painting atmospheric clouds, the goal remains the same: to create a cohesive piece that feels both grounded and grand.



RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

DEFAULT BRUSH HARD ROUND

I use these brushes for most of my work. The Hard Round brush is ideal for creating hard edges and creating silhouettes.

DEFAULT BRUSH COLOR DODGE AND HIGHLIGHT

Color Dodge and the Highlight brush are used for shadow and gradient when needed.

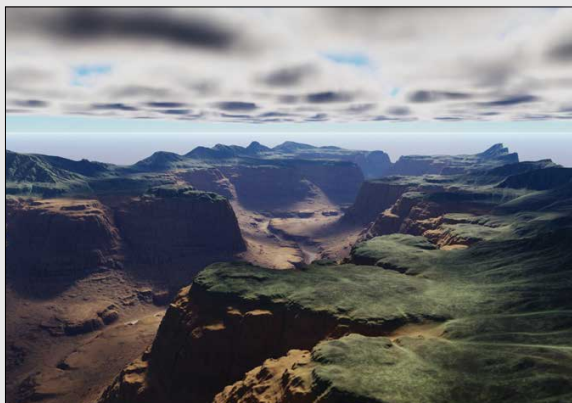
DEFAULT BRUSH SAMPLED

The Sampled brush is used for creating noise to add texture and achieve a painterly feel.

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 5 now!

1 Gather your thoughts

For what you want to create from your mind, begin with loose black-and-white sketches to define the composition. Focus on the silhouette and visual flow rather than details. This stage is crucial for establishing a strong foundation before moving into 3D, ensuring your core idea translates perfectly through shapes and light.



3 Create terrain from sketches

I'm using World Creator to make terrain from my sketches, transforming flat shapes into a massive 3D environment. Focus on translating the leading lines and silhouettes from your sketches into the landscape. This will allow you to explore the scene depth and scale quickly, thus ensuring that the landforms perfectly support your initial visual language.

2 Make sketches

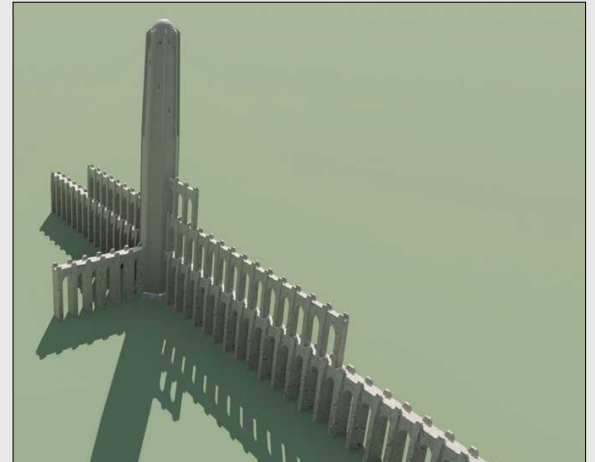
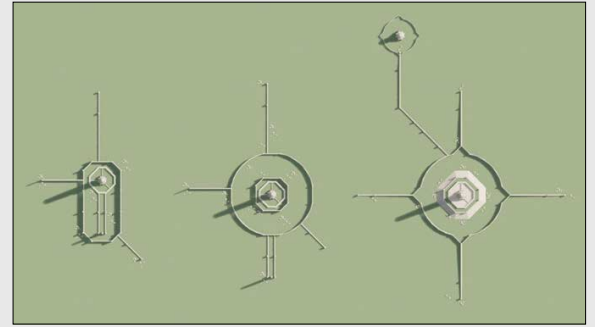
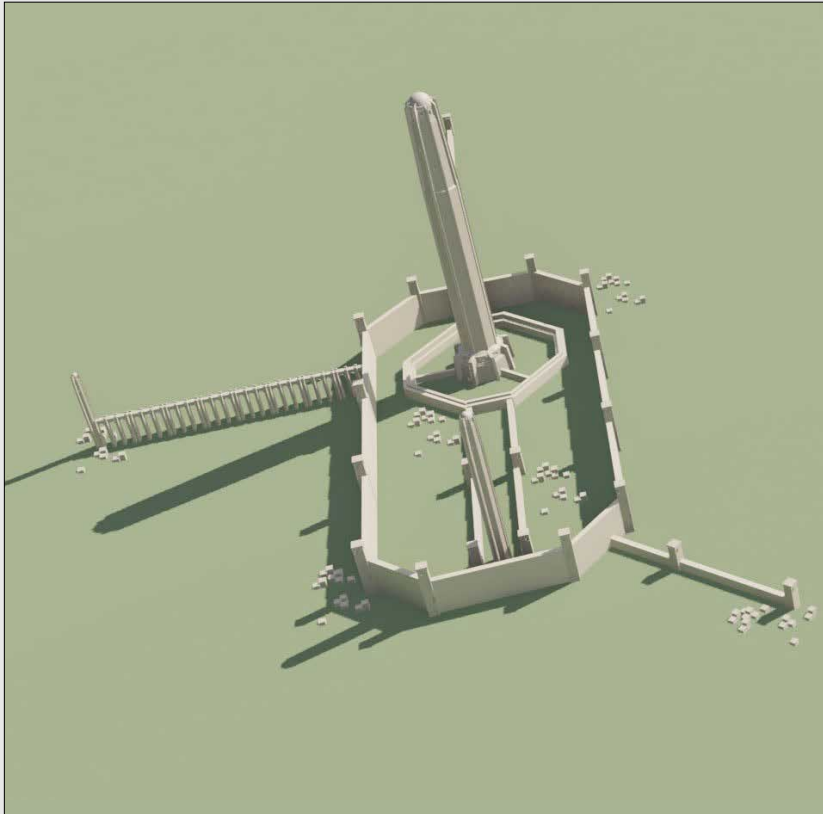
Starting sketches of the scene you are viewing in your imagination, focus on bold black-and-white thumbnails to explore composition. Use simple shapes to define the visual hierarchy and leading lines. This stage isn't about detail; it's about capturing the rhythmic breathing of the scene and establishing a clear silhouette for 3D blocking. Also, I won't do something too detailed on my sketches because that will block my freedom after moving to do detail design.



4 Start photobashing and painting

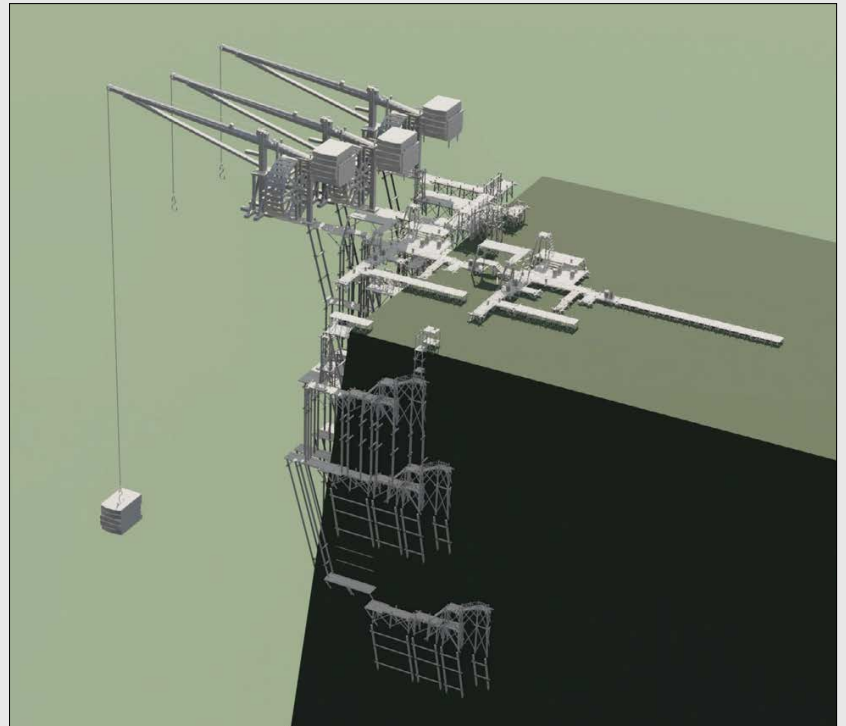
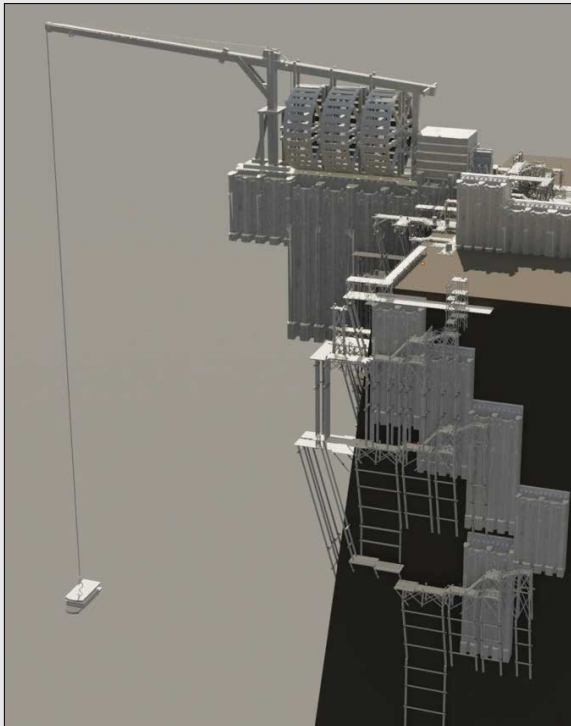
I have prepared some photos that I purchased online; they are mostly scenes of green mountains. I then proceed to carefully integrate these photographic textures to enhance the 3D terrain, using only 10% painting to blend the edges. You should focus on following the established visual flow, ensuring that each photographic element reinforces the rhythmic depth and maintains the organic feel of the landscape.





5 Use 3D sketches for buildings

Here, I'm using Blender to kitbash some of the models I've made and brought from my sketches, focusing on the silhouette structure and the balance of positive and negative space. I then strategically place these architectural elements in order to define the visual path, thus ensuring that the buildings feel integrated within the terrain while adding structural complexity.



6 Add industrial structures

Again using Blender to kitbash some industrial models that I've constructed, I utilise these cranes' long structural lines in order to guide the viewer's eye. By carefully placing these vertical and horizontal elements, I subsequently create a dynamic visual flow that manages to add both massive scale and industrial rhythm to the natural environment. ➡➡



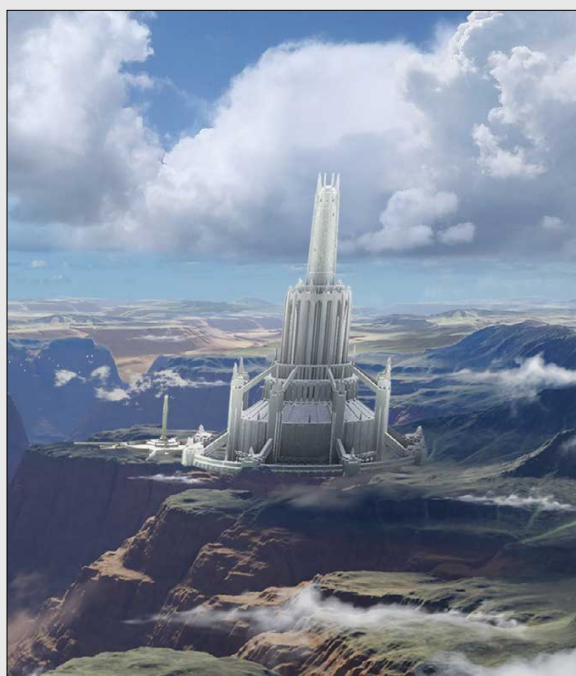
7 Add the main building

Using Blender again to kitbash models, I am looking to design a powerful focal point. I focus on the balance of positive and negative space that is present within the silhouette to ensure clarity. This central structure ties the environment together, acting as the primary anchor for the viewer's eye.



8 Paint the foreground and add buildings

We now have a basic landscape where I can start adding details like buildings, clouds and foreground elements. By refining the foreground, I can then add more depth and layers to the scene. This grounding ensures a rhythmic visual flow, guiding the viewer's eye smoothly from the front into the distance without subsequently being left feeling fatigued.



9 Place clouds strategically

The clouds are very important for storytelling in every environment concept; I use their organic shapes to direct the gaze and balance the composition. By placing clouds strategically, I can hide unwanted edges or reinforce leading lines, adding more depth and a sense of breathing to the massive industrial structures.



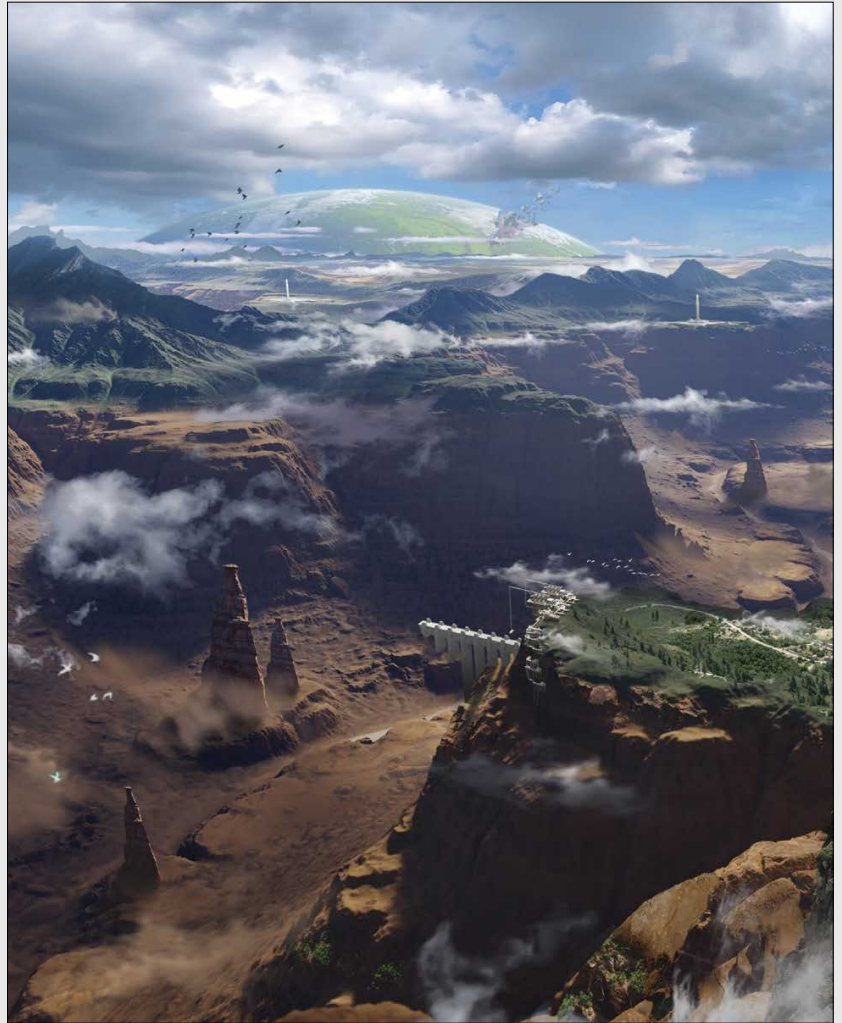
10 Adjust visual flow with the foreground and mid foreground

Start adding details on the city in the front, using intricate structures to ground the composition. I carefully balance these details to ensure they support the visual flow without cluttering the view. This layering creates more depth, guiding the eye naturally from the dense city textures toward the vastness of the background.



11 Enhance the main building

The main building is our primary focal point, so here what I want to do is enhance its contrast and silhouette to capture immediate attention. I refine the surrounding leading lines – such as the cranes and clouds – to point directly toward the main building. This ensures the eye finds its destination, creating a powerful and intentional visual climax.



12 Add hints to the distant background

I always like to have some little stories or hints present in the faraway background, often in the form of subtle structures or lights that spark curiosity in the viewer. These tiny details give the world a sense of vastness beyond the canvas. By keeping them soft, I add more depth without distracting from the main building, rewarding the viewer's exploration.



13 Use clouds for softness

The cloud movement in the foreground here is to create a visual flow to guide the viewer's eye, acting as a dynamic bridge toward the main building. By blurring these shapes, I then add a sense of motion and rhythmic breathing. This has the effect of softening the industrial edges, enhancing the overall depth while keeping the focus sharp on our primary subject.



14 Add the final touches

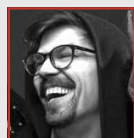
In the final scene, I want to make foreground to have more layers in the visual to give more spatial depth, so I apply subtle atmospheric haze and grain to unify the textures. By fine-tuning the balance of light and shadow, I ensure the 3D base and photobashed elements blend seamlessly, creating a polished, professional concept that feels both vast and breathable. ●



Technique focus

RECREATE A DRAWING AS A 3D SCENE

Jörg Grubmüller on how he challenged himself to turn a 2D illustration into a detailed 3D scene using Blender



"I found myself with a bit of downtime between projects, so I decided to use it to work on some personal pieces and build up my portfolio. While scrolling through Instagram, I came across an illustration [of a dragon and mouse] by Derek Laufman that immediately caught my eye. It had such a fun style

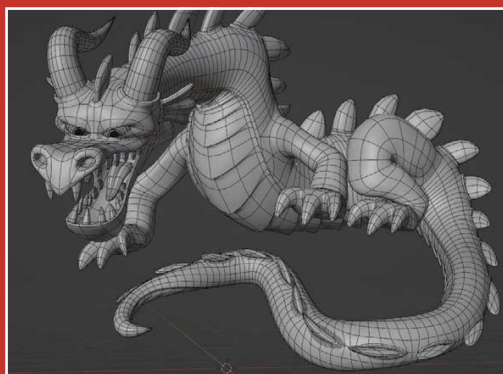
and atmosphere that I felt inspired to try bringing it into 3D. I thought it would be a great challenge to recreate the scene in Blender, while also adding my own touches along the way. The project turned into a really enjoyable exercise, giving me the chance to experiment with lighting, materials, and composition while translating a 2D illustration into a fully realised 3D scene." ●

Artist PROFILE

Jörg Grubmüller
LOCATION: Austria

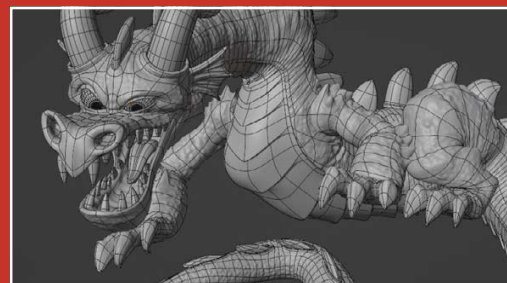
Jörg is a 3D generalist with over five years of experience across the full pipeline. He has a background in motion design, combining strong visual storytelling with advanced coding and procedural workflows.
<https://bit.ly/47QCAG5>

How I create... A 3D DRAGON



1 Blocking and modelling

I start by blocking out the island to get a strong sense of composition and proportions, placing simple shapes that have the effect of defining the scene. Once that foundation feels right, I begin refining the environment, adding rocks, the pile of coins, and distant mountains to build up the world. From there, I introduce more assets and details, keeping most elements simple while focusing on the overall mood. Finally, I move on to the dragon, shaping its form and presence to tie the whole scene together.



2 Sculpting details and texturing

Once the main shapes are in place, I first start adding detail through sculpting, especially on the dragon, using a Multires setup and a mix of simple brushes and alphas. For texturing, I opt to stay entirely inside Blender, mostly working with procedural materials, combined with a few image textures and vertex groups to get the look I am after.



3 Lighting and compositing

Lighting is where everything really comes together. Instead of daylight, I go for a darker, moodier night setup. I then use a cool rim light from the moon in order to shape the scene and separate forms. To draw attention to the mouse, I first replace the sword with a glowing staff, and add a subtle light inside the dragon's throat to hint at an upcoming fire breath.



3D Artist Back to basics

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

Using different types of texture maps adds surface detail, as well as colour, to a 3D model.



ADD DETAIL TO MODELS WITH TEXTURES

Making your 3D models more detailed can be time-consuming, but it needn't be.

Mike Griggs explains how to speed up the process with 2D textures



Using a 3D application can feel like being a god creating creatures in fantastic landscapes, but it can also feel like a tedious grind when getting into the detail of a model.

Thankfully, simple 2D images can be used to drastically speed up the modelling process. Different image types can be used to control not just colour, but also which parts of the model are visible, which parts are

raised or recessed, and even how shiny a model is. These images can (mostly) be created in any 2D image software and then wrapped onto the model using various wrapping methods, of which UV maps are the most popular.

In our main image, each of the three figures has a pedestal in front of them, showing how a simple black-and-white dot pattern can affect a model – from creating indents to making actual holes – which would require a

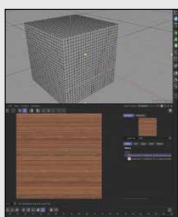
lot of modelling know-how to create. Applications like Adobe Substance Painter can help you apply image maps, or create ones that can be used in other 3D applications. It can make you feel like a 3D modelling god again, with the superpower of simple images.

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

Using 2D images to detail a model is one of the hidden secrets of 3D

1 How do images manage to control materials?

A material in a 3D application is a combination of layers. Each one is grouped by function, like reflection, opacity, and



colour (aka diffuse). A texture can be used as the input for each of these. It can be the same texture, or different. Here, the look of the box is controlled by the image in the bottom right.

2 Model detail with images

The black-and-white image shown controls how the planks on the box look three-dimensional. It shows where to indent the model: darker areas push in, lighter areas



stay out. This is placed into the displacement group of the wood material. Bump and normal maps offer a similar effect, and can be created in applications like Adobe Substance Painter.

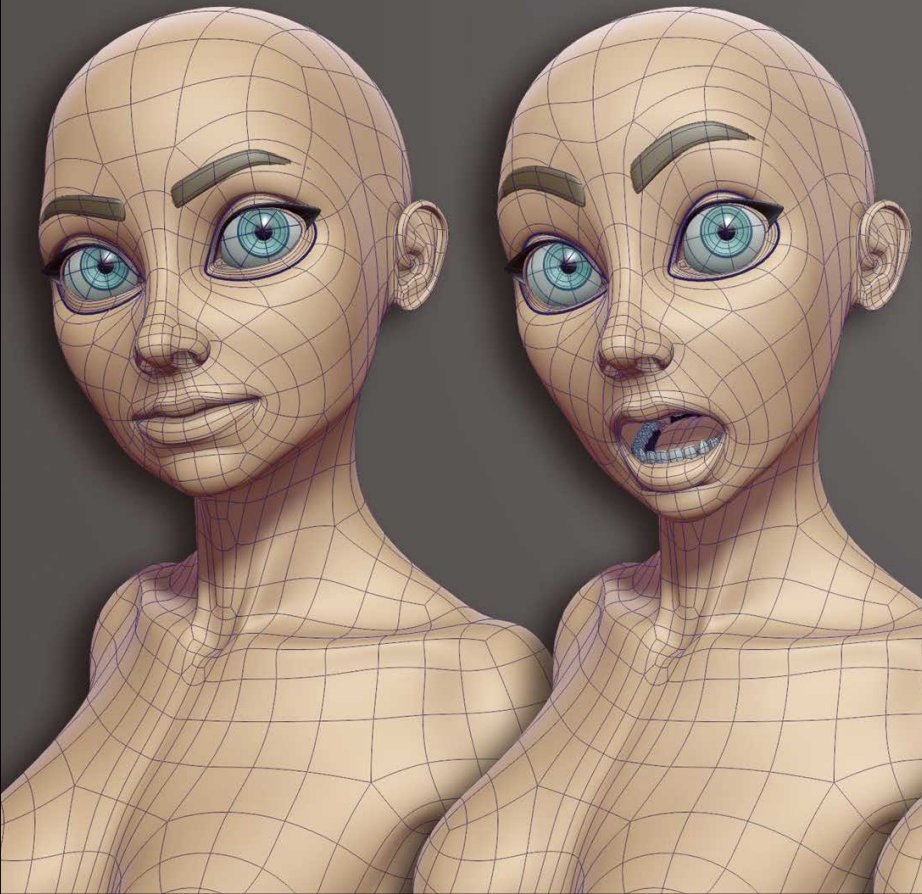
3 Cut holes with textures

Textures can even be used to create holes in models. However, be mindful that even when using displacement, images only affect the surface of a model. If you require



close-up detail, modelling is still the best approach. Learning how to use transparency in an image is a great way to place text or icons created in 2D applications onto your model.

For animation, it's important to adjust models so they will move in a natural way.



ANIMATION-READY MODELS

Antony Ward on how building a model is one thing; making it animation-ready is a whole new ball game



By now you should be comfortable with building a model, and have a good grasp of terminology like vertex normals, UVs, and topology. In this section, we will look at how to make your model ready for animation as we explore what is needed to help it move and deform in a more natural way when posed.

A basic grid style layout of your edge loops simply won't work. As your model bends and twists, these edges dictate how the surface will look, and an incorrect layout will result in pinching, creasing, and stretching, which will ultimately make the model look unnatural as it moves.

Instead, a good knowledge of how edges should flow, and where is best to add extra geometry, is essential. So over the next few stages we will look at a few key areas to keep in mind as you prepare your character to act and emote. And don't worry, in the next issue we will begin to look at model deformation, which will tie into the following steps nicely, and give you a quick way to test how your model deforms.

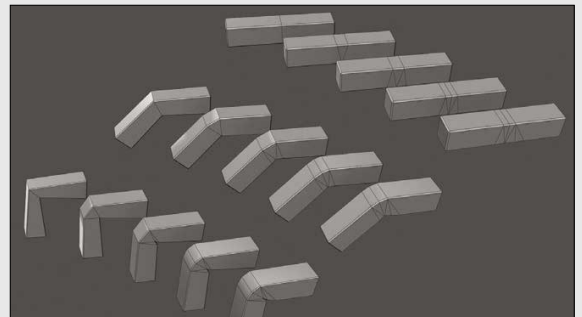
Antony Ward, aka antCGI, has been creating digital content for over three decades. Whether it's game development, rigging, or recording in-depth courses for his YouTube channel, he boasts extensive experience in most areas of 3D.

Three steps to getting a model ready to move



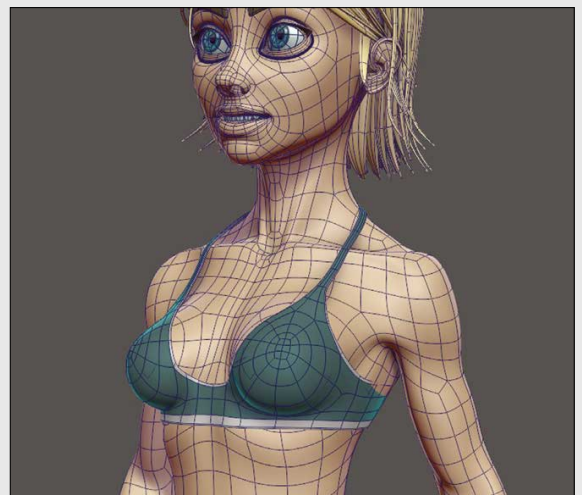
1 Match muscle lines

When reworking your topology, the first step is to adjust the edge flow to mimic natural muscle lines. This can be tricky, but taking the time to do this will ensure your model deforms in a more natural way.



2 Update bending areas

Next, check the areas that bend or twist in order to ensure that there is enough geometry to make the deformation smooth and not at all jagged. This doesn't need to involve lots of new edge loops. In fact, you can successfully get a good bend with just a small amount of polygons placed in the correct way.



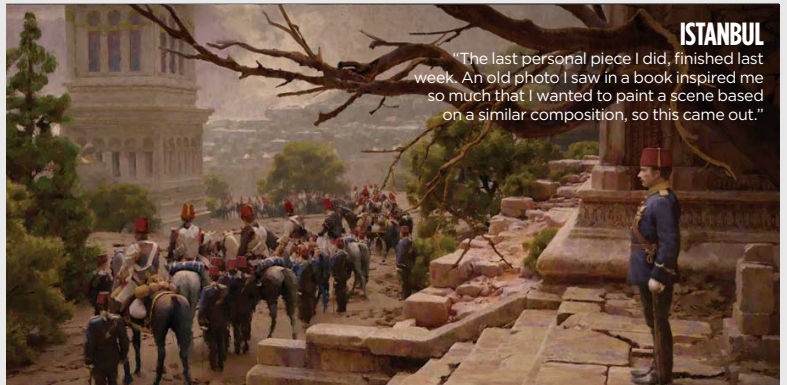
3 Test poses

As a final step, check how your work holds up by temporarily deforming and posing it. This could simply be by moving or even sculpting the model, or you can quickly add joints which will allow you to temporarily bend key areas.

FIVE MINUTES WITH

ALI ESER

The Turkish concept artist on how his country inspires his art



What is your main source of inspiration?

I think my main source of inspiration is my country, the land I grew up in and travelled around, every sight and sound of it floating around in my unconscious forming images that communicate some specific and unique feeling about here. My goal in art is to explore this realm and bring back what I can to show to other people.

Of course, I have other things that interest me and attract me to attempt to create images, but they tend to be secondary.

When you were a young artist, were there worlds – in movies, comics, art, etc – that gave you a desire to create your own?

I remember my father bringing home a collection of Tintin books, which mesmerised me endlessly, and I would re-read them every week for years. As I grew up, I found other European comics like Moebius, Manara, Schuiten and Heavy Metal stuff became the bedrock of my taste. Along with that, I found a lot of inspiration in old paintings: artists like Sorolla,



RYTMA, THE BEACH

"This was a concept painting I did for Rytma, where I was trying to find the specific mood I wanted for the project. This was one of the first images that felt like I've found that feeling from my trips in the Turkish Riviera."

Sargent and Mucha polished my taste further. Beyond visual taste, I think it has always been books and games that triggered the joy of creating imagined places and cultures for me, and there are too many of them to name.

“The real challenge is to stay interested in the work for years and decades to come”

RYTMA, THE CITY

"This was one of the last concept paintings I did for Rytma, before moving on to actually building the assets and world in Unreal."

What plays in the background while you work – music, podcasts, movies or something else?

If I'm doing something cognitively demanding, like design work, solving some visual problem, exploring something or I'm learning something new, usually silence, or ambient music from someone like Brian Eno, Aphex Twin, Porya Hatami.

If I'm doing something that's purely habit-based where I can leave the work fully to my body, then an audiobook, usually something about history, science, philosophy, politics etc.

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

Honestly, it turned out better than I thought it would be. Maybe I'm really lucky, but I've been fortunate to work on some great projects, with great people, learned a bunch from all of them, enjoyed working for (almost) all the projects that I've worked on. I've switched to freelance after four years of in-house work and that also has been such a joy, having the freedom and choice of managing my time the way I want to. When starting out, I might have consciously lowered my expectations as to not get disappointed, but that hasn't happened yet.

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

I think it would be to be patient, that the progress I sought will take a very long time and it is the only way to get there, and the real challenge is to stay interested in the work for all the years and decades to come. Additionally, that sometimes the best way to understand why you love something is to get as far as possible from it for a while.

Do you have an ongoing passion project?

I've been working on a passion project called Rytma for some years now; it's something I always come back to and keep developing. It's a puzzle game project about music, truth and beauty – inspired by Anatolian mysticism and impressionist art.

Interested in drawing from an early age, Ali is a largely self-taught freelance concept artist who has worked on the animated film Flow, and video games such as We Kill Monsters, Yami, Gecko Gods, and an unannounced project by ArenaNet.





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I'm young, disabled, but not so different

Jasper,
age 11

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