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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX ANNUAL



SORA KIM



LUX MILY



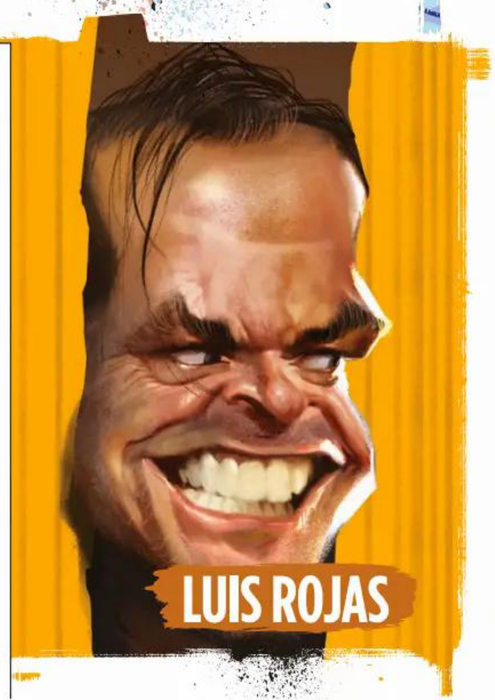
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TESSA NELISSEN

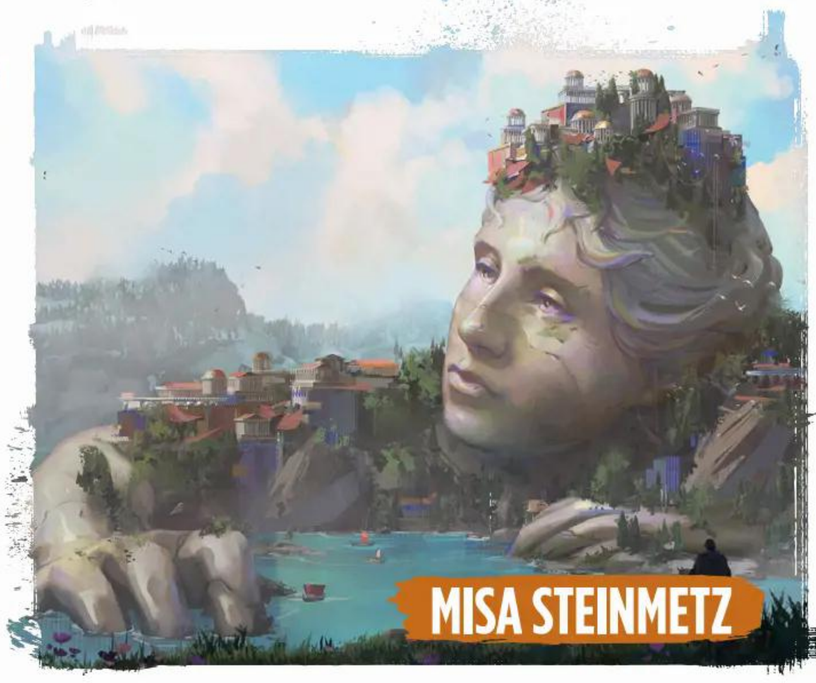


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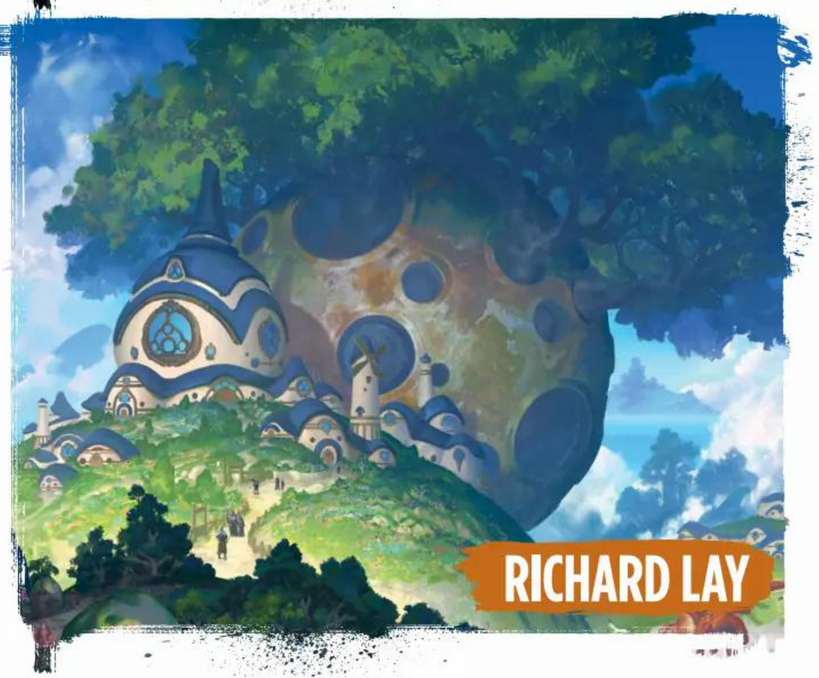
KATJA ŠKORJANC



LUIS ROJAS



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Digital Edition

FUTURE

VOLUME TEN

Welcome to

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX ANNUAL

Welcome to the very best content from the last year of **ImagineFX** magazine. Packed with fantastic tutorials to help you master digital art, interviews with some of the best creators in movies and gaming, and illustrations from some of our favourite contributors, there is something for everyone inside, whether you're a budding artist just starting out or a seasoned pro looking to brush up on some new skills.



Image: Johanna Forster

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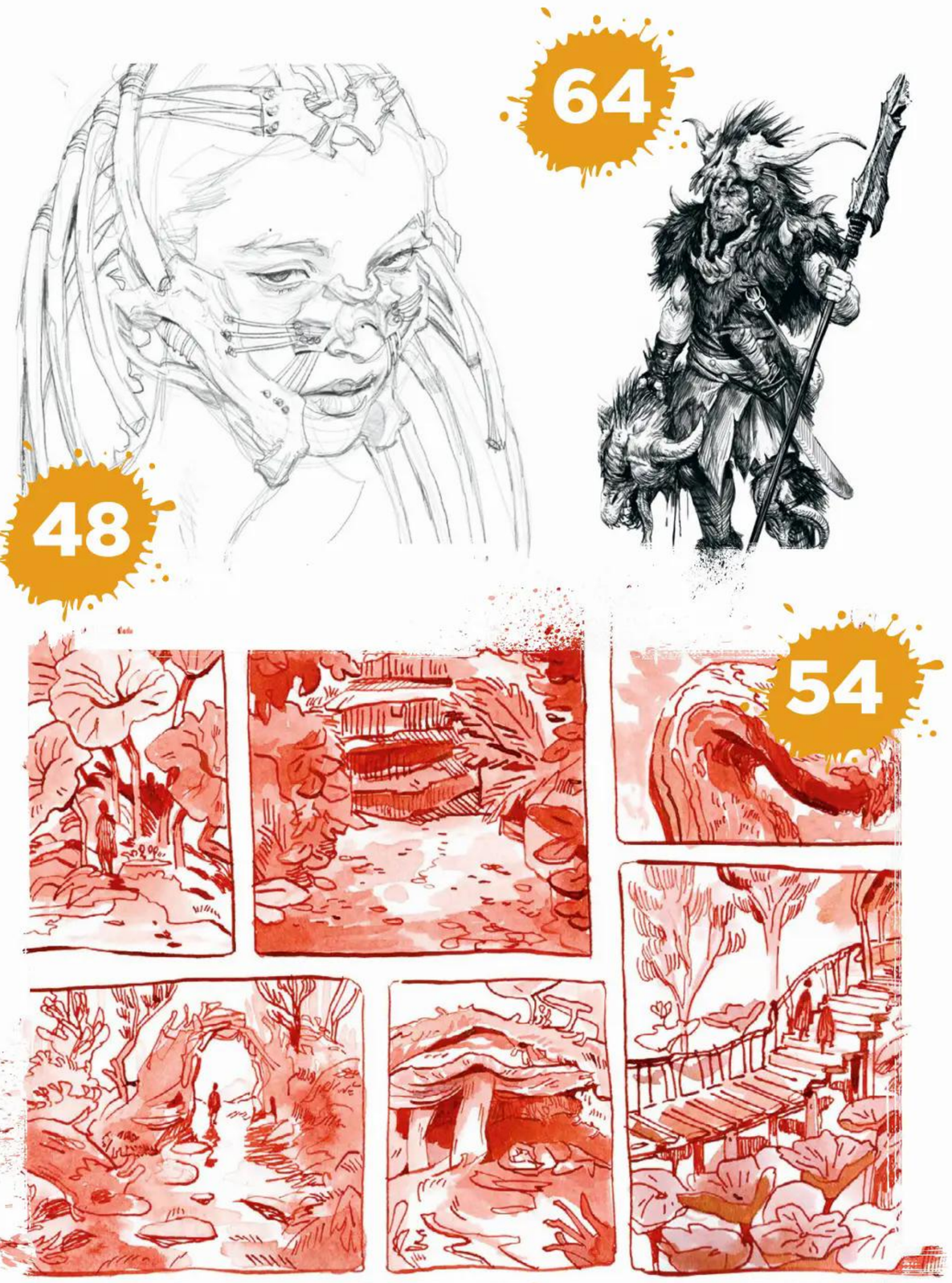
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GET YOUR RESOURCES

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Type the website link on the relevant tutorial into your browser's address bar.

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

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

FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Wencke Schaper

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Procreate **WEB:** www.instagram.com/rakasademon

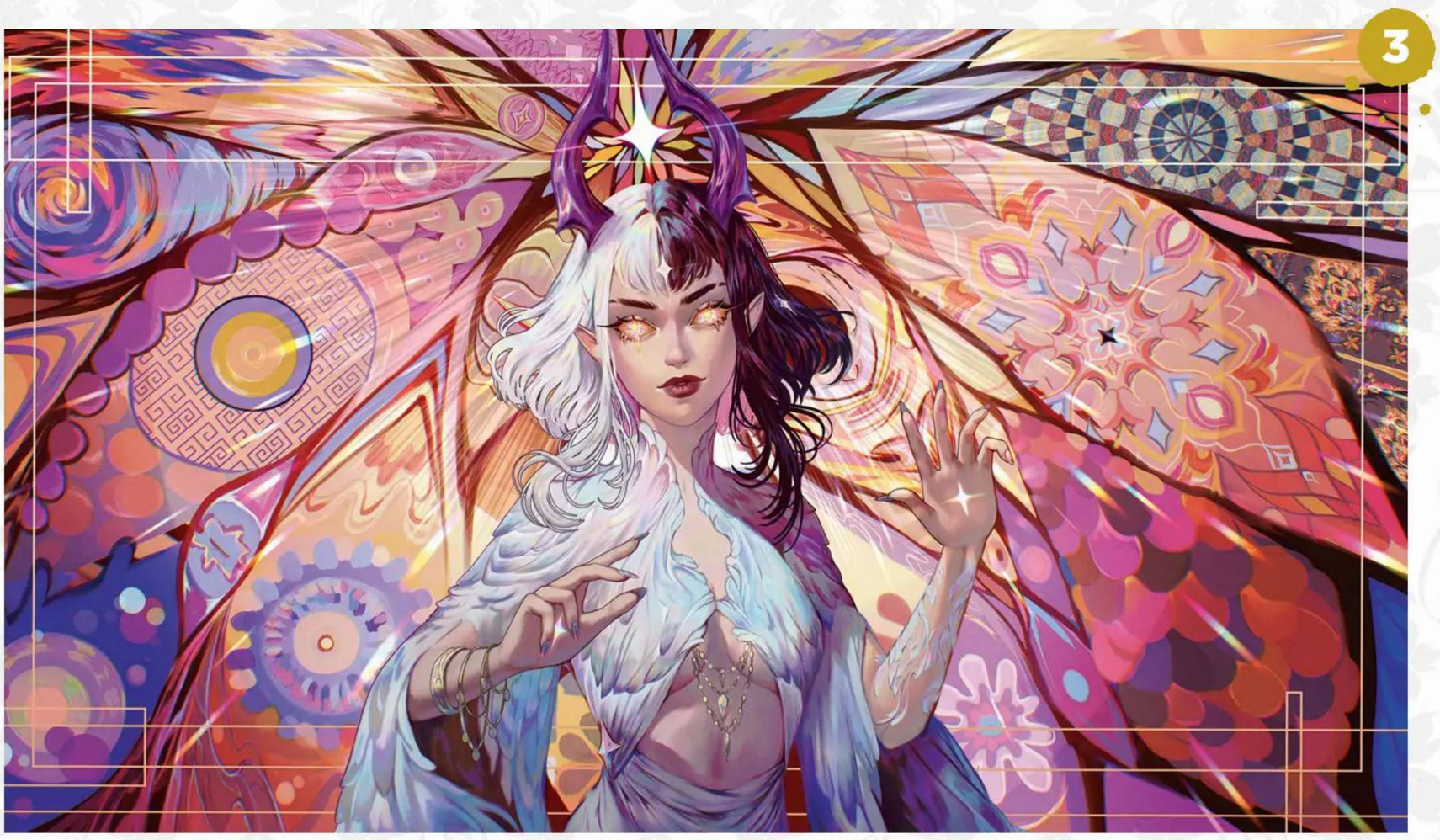
Wencke wants to celebrate the beauty of life in her artwork, which she expresses through heavy use of colours and patterns. Most of her inspiration comes from other artists, nature and life itself.



1 THE SUN
"A painting that uses a lot of textures, gradient maps and inverted colours to create a very interesting and vibrant effect."

2 TAKE CONTROL
"This painting is inspired by the Japanese technique of kintsugi, where broken pottery is mended with gold-dusted lacquer to make it more valuable. This concept can apply to humans too."





3 LEADING STAR
"This was my first illustration of 2025. I tried to channel all of my positive hopes and aspirations into it and let it lead my art forward into a successful year."

4 TRANQUIL
"A fan-shaped shadow on a wall was the inspiration for this painting. The contrast between the bright and dark colours helped to create a lot of depth in the piece."

Wencke Schaper





Tessa Nelissen

LOCATION: Norway **MEDIA:** Procreate **WEB:** www.instagram.com/jessali_tn

Tessa is a Dutch illustrator who specialises in cute and colourful characters plus scenery, often containing cats. When she's not creating illustrations, character art and comics, she indulges in her passion for sustainability.

1 BALANCE

"Two cats playing together in a field of flowers. Adding a little feline twist on the classic yin and yang symbol."



2 MOODS

"These characterful cats are expressing a range of emotions. Which of their moods do you most relate to today?"





3 SILLY KITTIES

"An experimental piece that started with putting down large graphic shapes, then transforming them into cats."

4 BLUE

"I saw this kimono pattern somewhere and decided to draw a character wearing it. The cats and birds were added to give it a cute factor."

Tessa Nelissen

4



Eve Forrest

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Clip Studio Paint **WEB:** www.instagram.com/eve_4est_art

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

1



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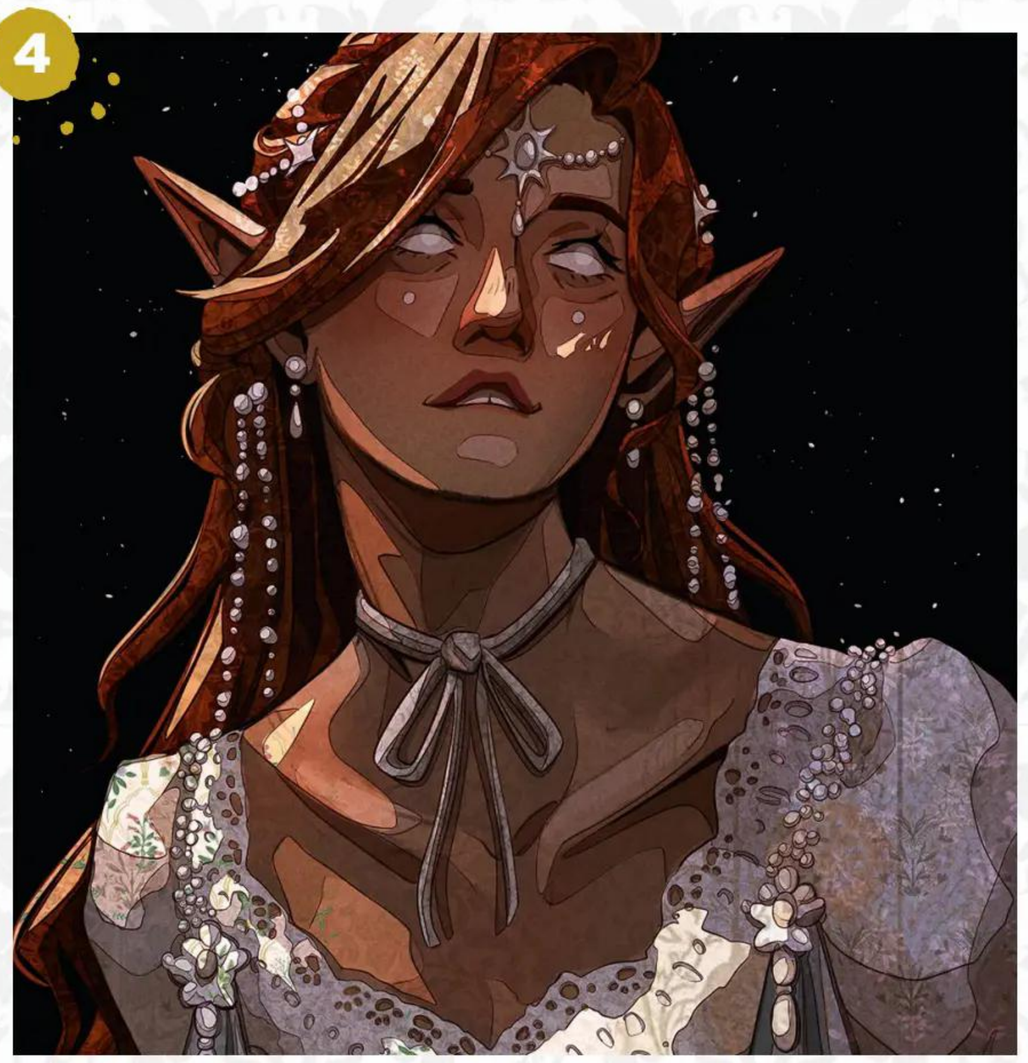
1 C&C (CIGARETTES & COLOR THEORY)
"Sometimes, my colour choices in my illustrations can be lost in my go-to dramatic lighting style. For this illustration, I didn't allow myself to use any harsh lighting so I would be forced to focus solely on the colours."

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

3



4



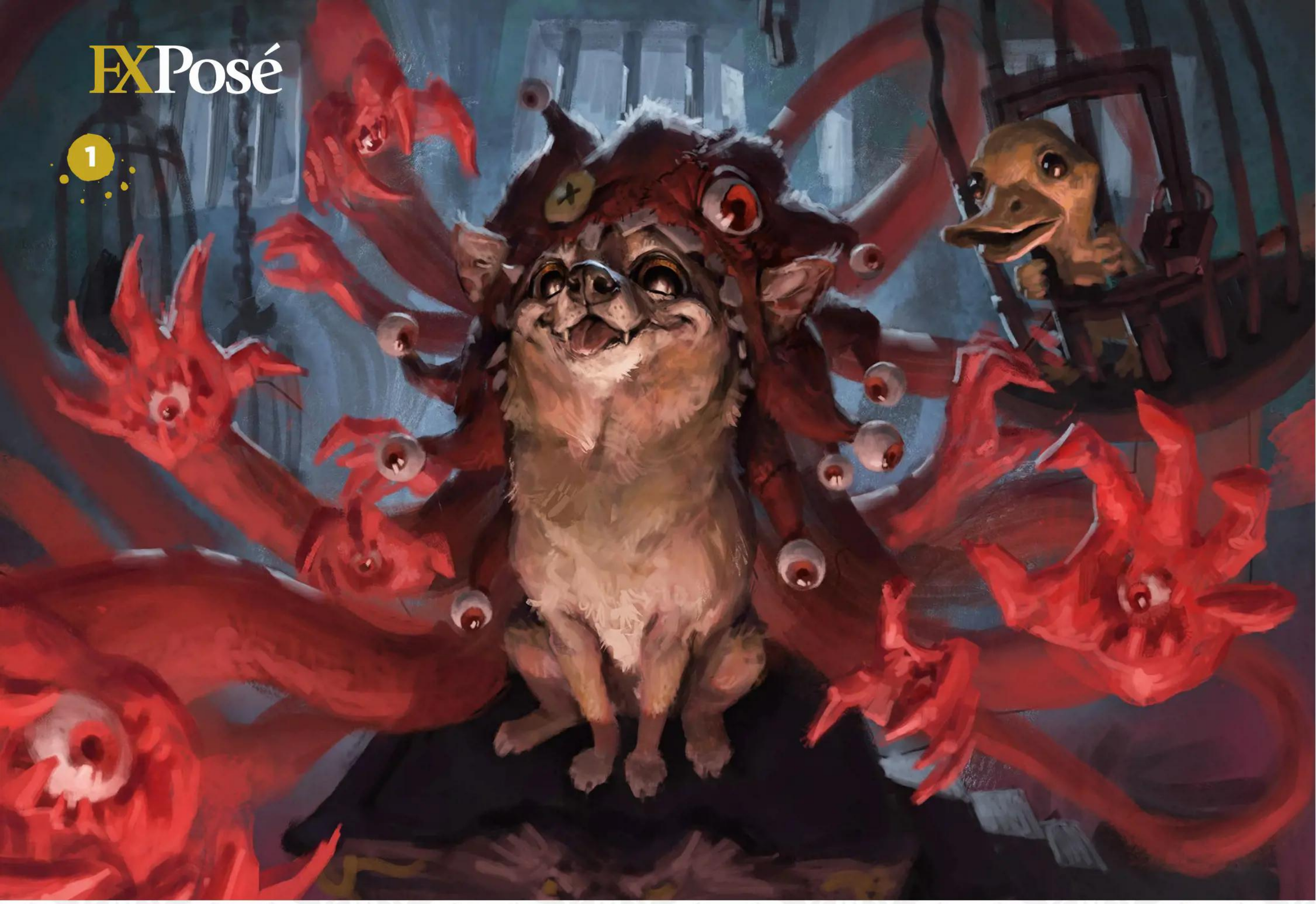
3 THE FOOL KING
"For this illustration, I drew from a photo taken of the Royal Ballet performing The Prince of the Pagodas in London. Dancers are a great reference source for any artist looking to draw complicated poses."

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



5

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



Vorueg

LOCATION: US **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.instagram.com/vorueg

Vorueg is an illustrator and concept artist who has been working with digital tools for six years. He particularly enjoys making painterly fantasy art based in the medieval era. "The more painterly, the better!"

1 BAD DOGE
"Dogs always seem cute and playful on the outside, but who knows – maybe they're not as sweet as they seem."

2 EVOLUTION OF ART
"Art has come a long way technologically. But no matter the period or the tools, we will never stop making fancy, painterly brush strokes."



3



4



3 MERCENARY DUO: GRIM & PICKLE

"This pair may be clumsy and wonky, but they are an inseparable duo. Grim is a strong brute, Pickle is an agile sniper and together they'll get the job done for as little as five gold coins."

4 GUARDIAN OF THE WILD

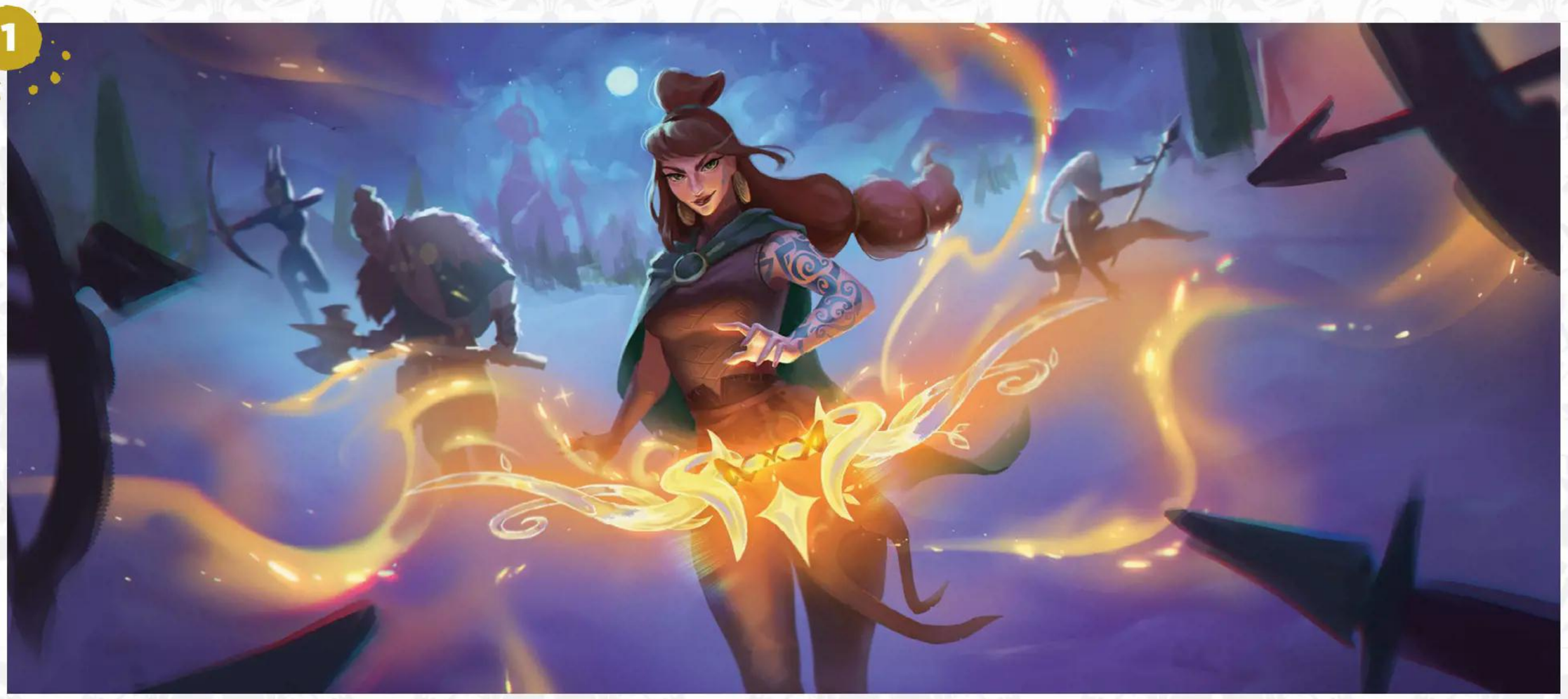
"Sir Bear helps frogs cross the lake, cracks open hazelnuts for squirrels with his iron gauntlets, shields the baby birds from those villainous snakes, and sometimes the bees award him with honey for his good deeds."



Natali Samutina

LOCATION: Armenia **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Daz Studio, Blender **WEB:** www.instagram.com/tashina.art

Natali is a freelance illustrator who specialises in splash art and dynamic illustrations. She aims to make her characters feel as believable as possible, allowing the viewer to imagine the scene coming to life in front of them.



1 **AIRIS**
"An illustration of one of my own original characters, Airis, standing against the people who want to destroy her city. Celtic and Pict cultures always inspire me."

2 **CYBERDEMON EVELYNN**
"This splash art depicts Evelynn from League of Legends in a cyberpunk skin. I tried to create an environment and mood that suited her vibe."

3 **BASTET AND SEKHMET**
"This work was inspired by the game Hades. I love the unique style of this game and decided to create my own characters based on Egyptian mythology."

Natali Samutina



1

1 COCO'S ADVENTURE
"This piece marks the beginning of an adventure series. It explores the animation-inspired visual style I want to keep developing."

2 THE READING PILOT
"A pilot character from my Coco project. Here, I wanted to experiment with a more detailed and dense painting style."

3 THE YOUNG WITCH AT DAWN
"This piece reinterprets a photograph I found some time ago with my own colour palette. I wanted to capture a slightly rough and expressive visual style."

2



Choi Keun Hoon

LOCATION: South Korea **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.instagram.com/hoon2shoot

Choi is a game art director whose work emphasises primary bold tones and a comic-inspired aesthetic to convey feelings. She is currently developing her own animated universe.

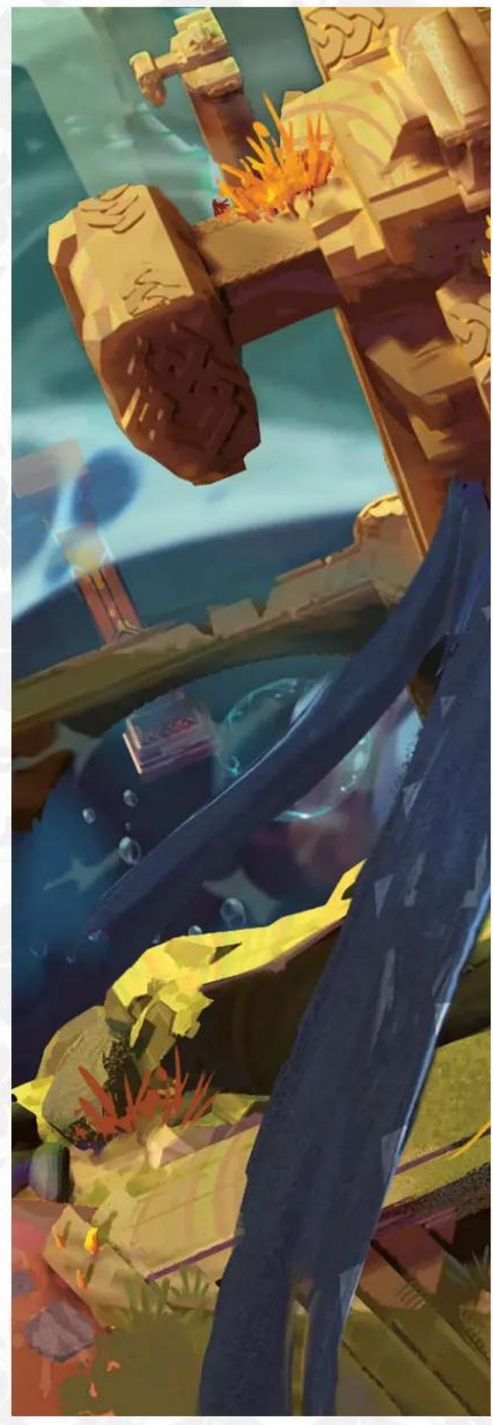




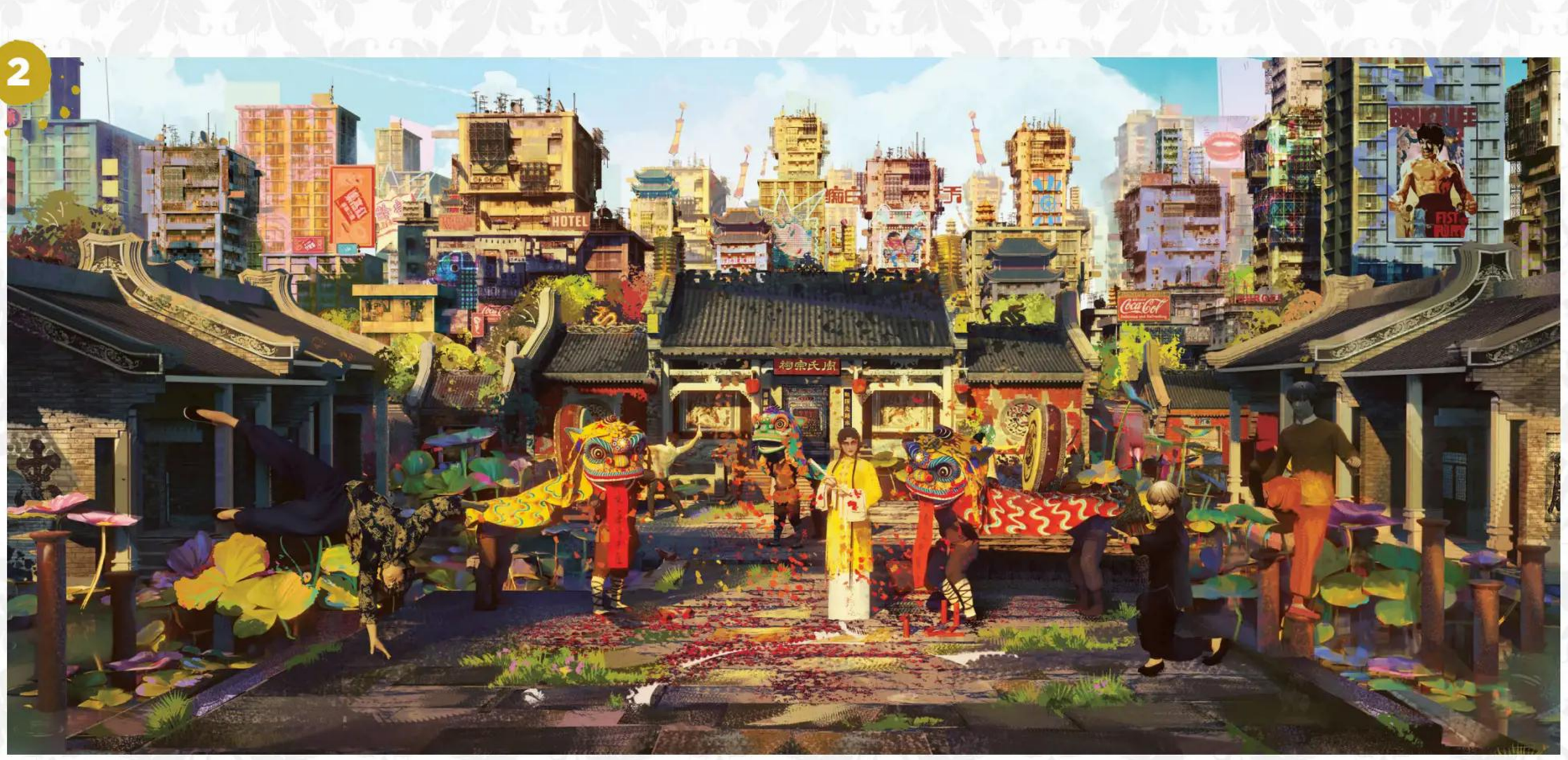
Cyril Yong Zhou

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

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

4

Features



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40





22


THE STAR WARS SAGA CONTINUES
STAR WARS
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK
IN THEATERS SEPTEMBER 25
MARK HAMILL · HARRISON FORD · CARRIE FISHER
BILLY DEE WILLIAMS · ANTHONY DAILS
DAVID PROWSE · KENNY BAKER · PETER MAYHEW · FRANK OZ
IRVIN KERSHNER GARY KURTZ LEIGH BRACKETT LAWRENCE KASDAN
GEORGE LUCAS GEORGE LUCAS JOHN WILLIAMS


NEBERIAS

34



© 20th Century Studios

THE ART OF MATT FERGUSON

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

Rich in heritage, illustrated movie posters have been enjoying a resurgence and renewal in recent years.

A leading exponent of this renaissance is Matt Ferguson. Over the past decade and a half, Matt's work has played its part in reinvigorating the poster-art tradition for science fiction, fantasy and horror movies – both new titles and anniversary rereleases.

Matt, how did your fascination with visual art and design evolve?

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

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



© Hasbro Inc

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

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



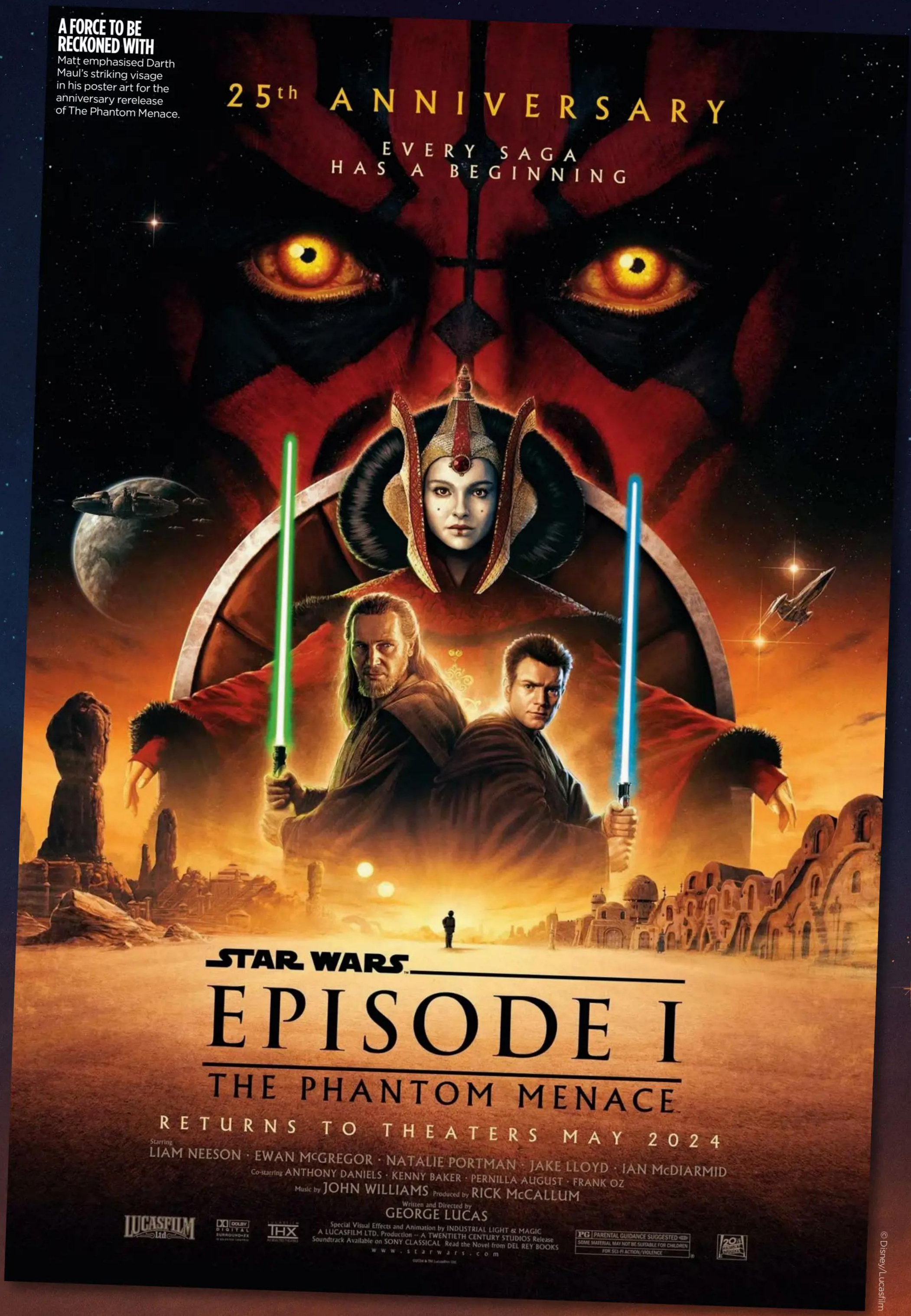
© Universal Pictures International

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

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

Matt Ferguson

A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH
Matt emphasised Darth Maul's striking visage in his poster art for the anniversary rerelease of The Phantom Menace.



© Disney/Lucasfilm

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

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

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

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

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

Artist PROFILE

Matt Ferguson

LOCATION: England



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

WEB: www.cakesandcomics.com

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

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

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



© 20th Century Studios

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

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

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

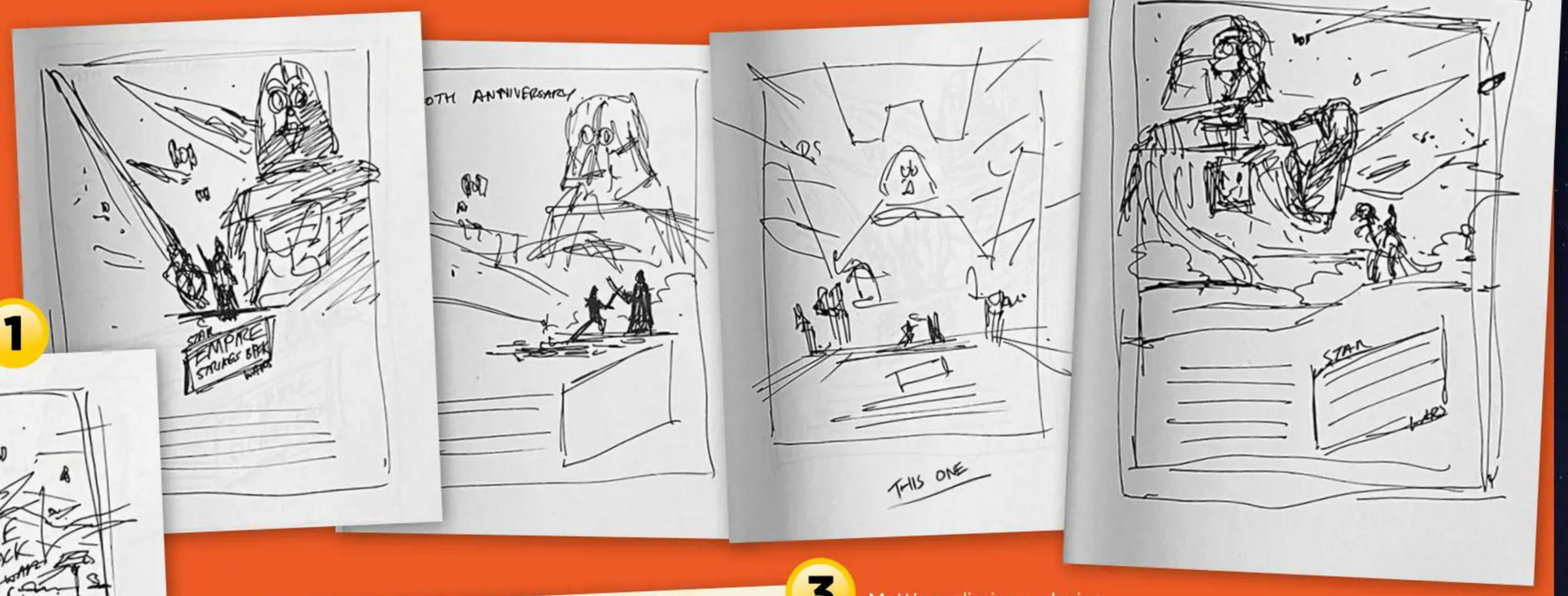


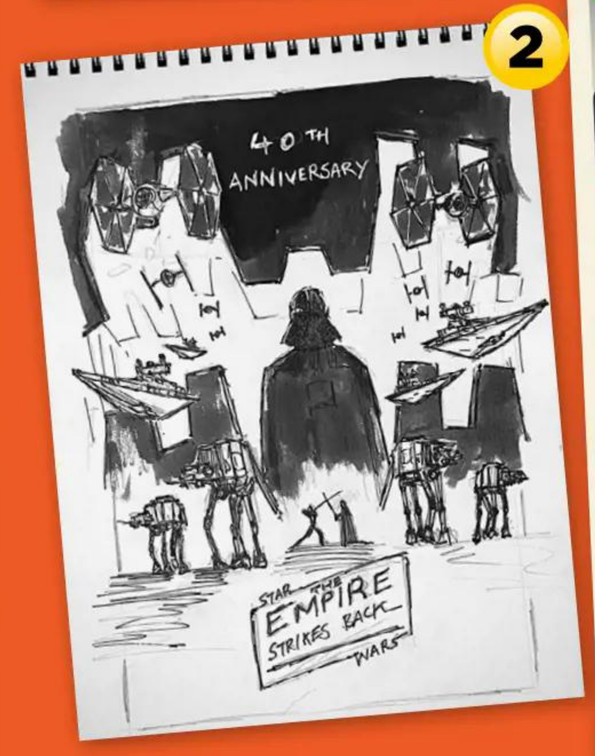
© Paramount Picture Corp

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

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

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





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



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



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

OF SITH AND A STRIKING DESIGN

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

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

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

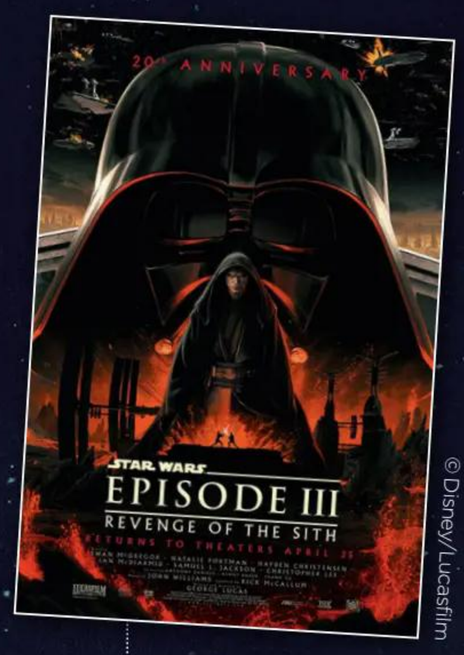
"The first port of call is to pull references together from the movie and then do a sort of collage. I illustrated the Empire poster digitally with some 3D modelling to block stuff out because it's got a lot of perspective. I used 3D modelling to block out shapes, such as where ships are and to build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

© Disney/Lucasfilm

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

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

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



© Disney/Lucasfilm

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

> "I can remember looking at movie posters in the cinema when I was a kid"



© Marvel Studios

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



© 20th Century Studios

PICTURING THE TRUE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Matt Ferguson



© 20th Century Studios

CUTTING-EDGE ART (LEFT)

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

BATTLE ROYAL (BELOW)

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



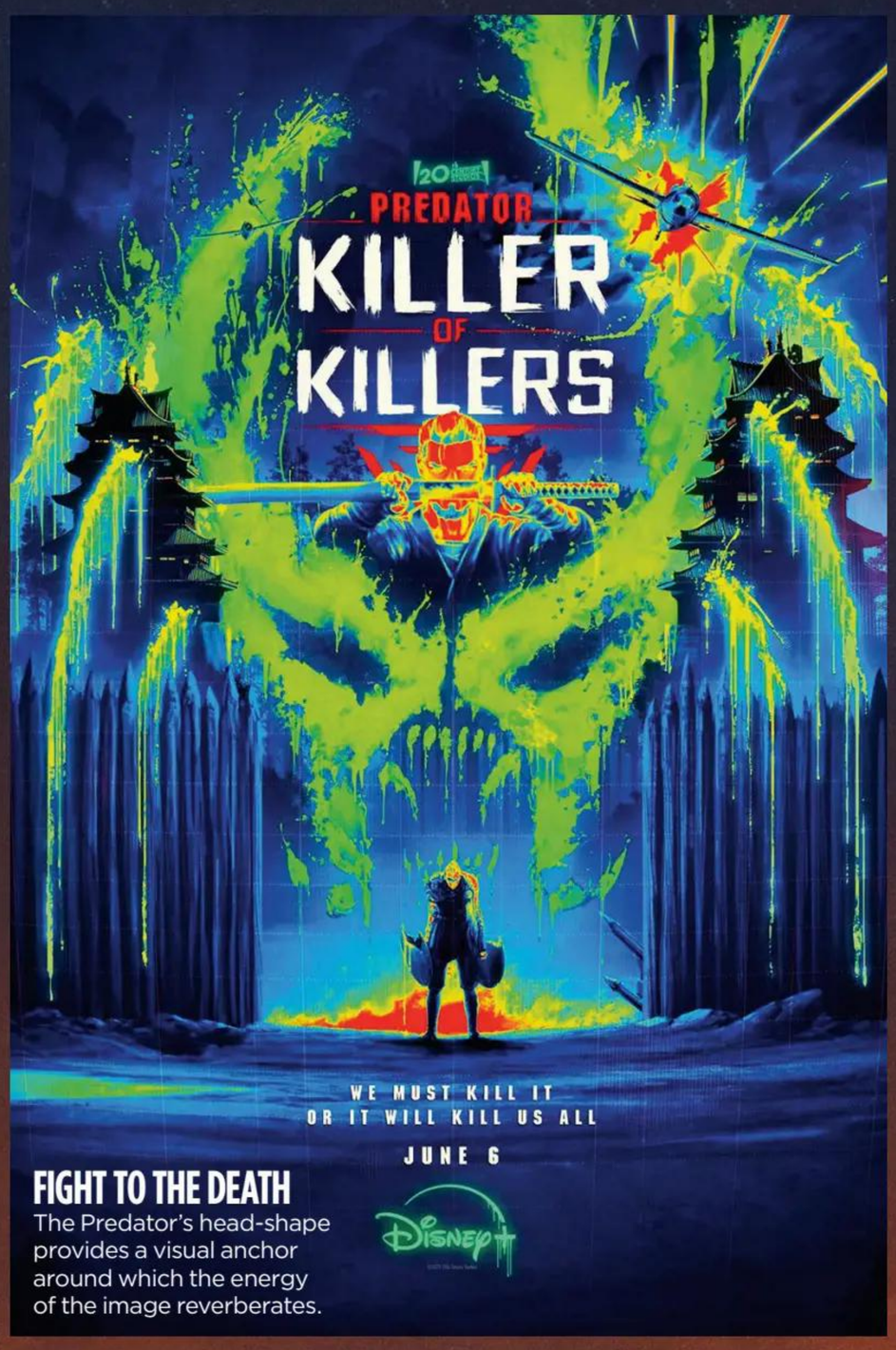
© 20th Century Studios

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

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

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

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



FIGHT TO THE DEATH

The Predator's head-shape provides a visual anchor around which the energy of the image reverberates.

© 20th Century Studios

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

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

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

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

Interview



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



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

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 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.

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

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 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.

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.

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.

Interview





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? 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"

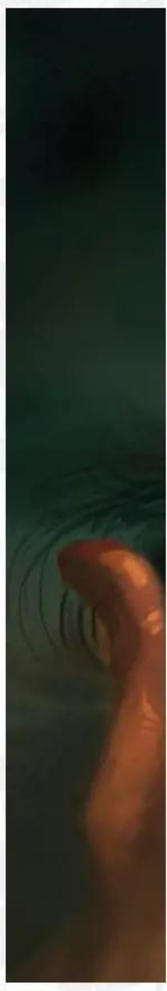
What are the creative spaces and opportunities for illustrators and artists in Peru?
We have a movement, and I think it's growing. We have growing areas that are giving more opportunities. It's giving young artists many more opportunities, for example in video games and animation. Also, I can see that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

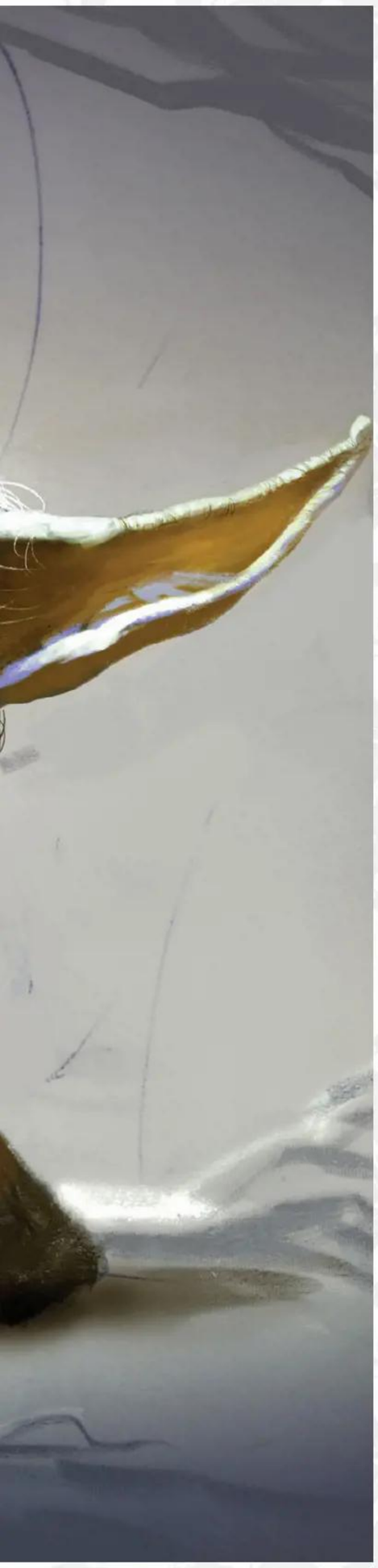
What makes a work of art human?
I think that we're in a really amazing age. We're in strong competition with artificial intelligence, because AI is creating images in just a few seconds. But at some point, those images are soulless. One imperfect drawing could have a lot of soul. And that's another important 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.

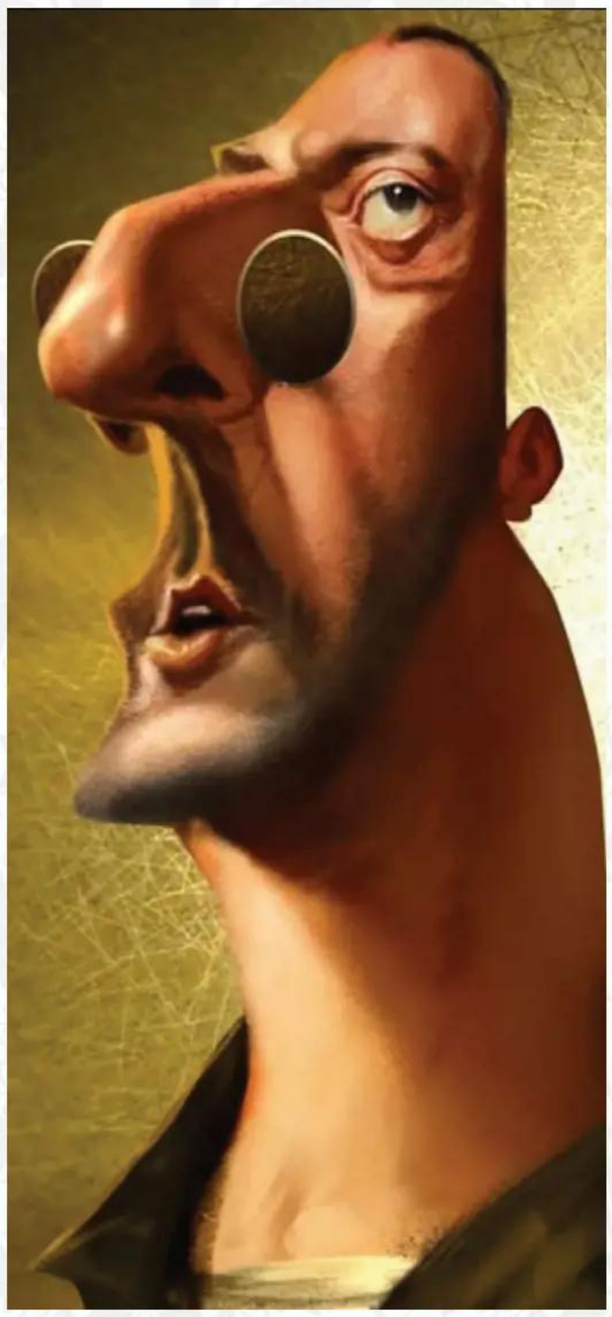
GHIBLI GRIN
Luis honours the creative achievements of anime director Hayao Miyazaki.

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.

Feature

FANNING THE CREATIVE FLAME

ImagineFX takes a bigger-picture look at fan art and the challenges and possibilities that it poses for creativity



THE GREEN KNIGHT
Berenice Nelle's enthusiasm for Legend of Zelda finds expression in this image of Link.

Writer and pop-culture maven, Ray Bradbury – one of the original heroes of fandom and, indeed, one of the first self-proclaimed geeks for all things science fiction, fantasy and horror across all media – offered this rallying cry for fandom: "Imagination should be the centre of your life."

That spirit of devotion and affection, and a vivid sense of just how cool a particular story and its characters are, lies at the heart of fan art and its culture. From the gaming world of Fable to the anime world of My Neighbor Totoro; from the comic Gothic of Batman and the bittersweet whimsy of Peanuts, fan art that responds to existing, copyrighted material expresses the investment of significant creative and emotional energy. It can also function as a showcase for emerging and established talent.



HORNET
Fan-artist Kassini works in Photoshop to express his fascination with Hornet from Hollow Knight.

MAINTAINING ORIGINALITY

There's an existential question in all of this, however, and that centres around issues of authenticity and originality. It's a discussion that perhaps feels particularly acute at this moment in time.

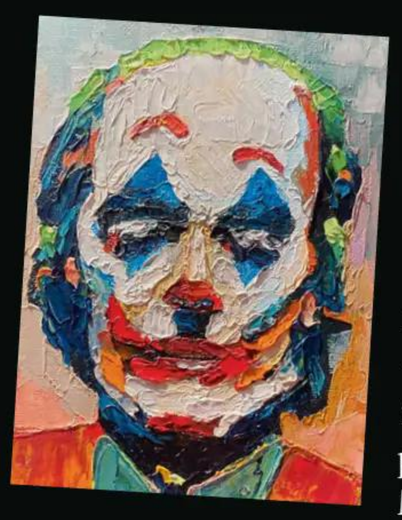
Considering the bigger-picture ideas around fan art and its cultural variations are a handful of useful questions, of which the following is perhaps key: how can a fan artist maintain some degree of authenticity and originality in their work when it's explicitly using existing character design, visual style and aesthetic as its basis? Well, it's complicated.

Other questions also bear mulling over: how can an existing character design be rendered to fit a given fan artist's own style? Is this fundamental point a hindrance or a motivator? Why does fan art thrive and hold such a valuable place in illustration and image-making culture?

Perhaps one observation that ties together these questions is this observation made by M. Manifold in their essay, Fanart as Craft and the Creation of Culture, in which they write that the creation and consumption of fan art allows for a situation in which an "Appreciation of local and global aesthetic is quickened, and a desire to develop a high level of skill is inspired."

That development of creative skill is evident in the works of artist

> "Exploring fan art opens you up to a vast library of ideas to draw from"



KILLER PORTRAIT
Cody Taylor, an animation student at Birmingham City University, captures the ghoulish menace of The Joker.

Shayleen Hulbert, whose fan art has often been a creative response to game characters. Shayleen's interpretation of Sheik from Overwatch was a collaboration with artist Jack Hamilton, and also prompted a workable rig that was made freely available for personal projects and education. Meanwhile, Shayleen's depiction of Sakura from Cardcaptors was inspired by their long-standing fandom for the game.

"Whenever I am lost and unsure what I want to create, I will turn to other pieces of existing fan art for inspiration," says Shayleen. "Exploring fan art opens you up to a vast library of ideas and concepts to draw from, heavily reducing the fear caused by the 'blank page' problem many creatives face."

"Knowing what to make can feel quite paralysing at times," Shayleen continues, "but finding inspiration in media that excites you serves as a clear jumping off point to further develop your design and technical skills. I always recommend putting your own spin on it by introducing something fresh, rather than merely replicating what already exists."



SAKURA
Shayleen Hulbert's longstanding fandom for the show Cardcaptors is the inspiration for her depiction of Sakura.



WARRIOR PRINCESS
Kassini honours the heroism of Wonder Woman.



WITH THE FISHES
A piece by Sebrina Stain, a student at Birmingham City University, illustrated using Procreate.

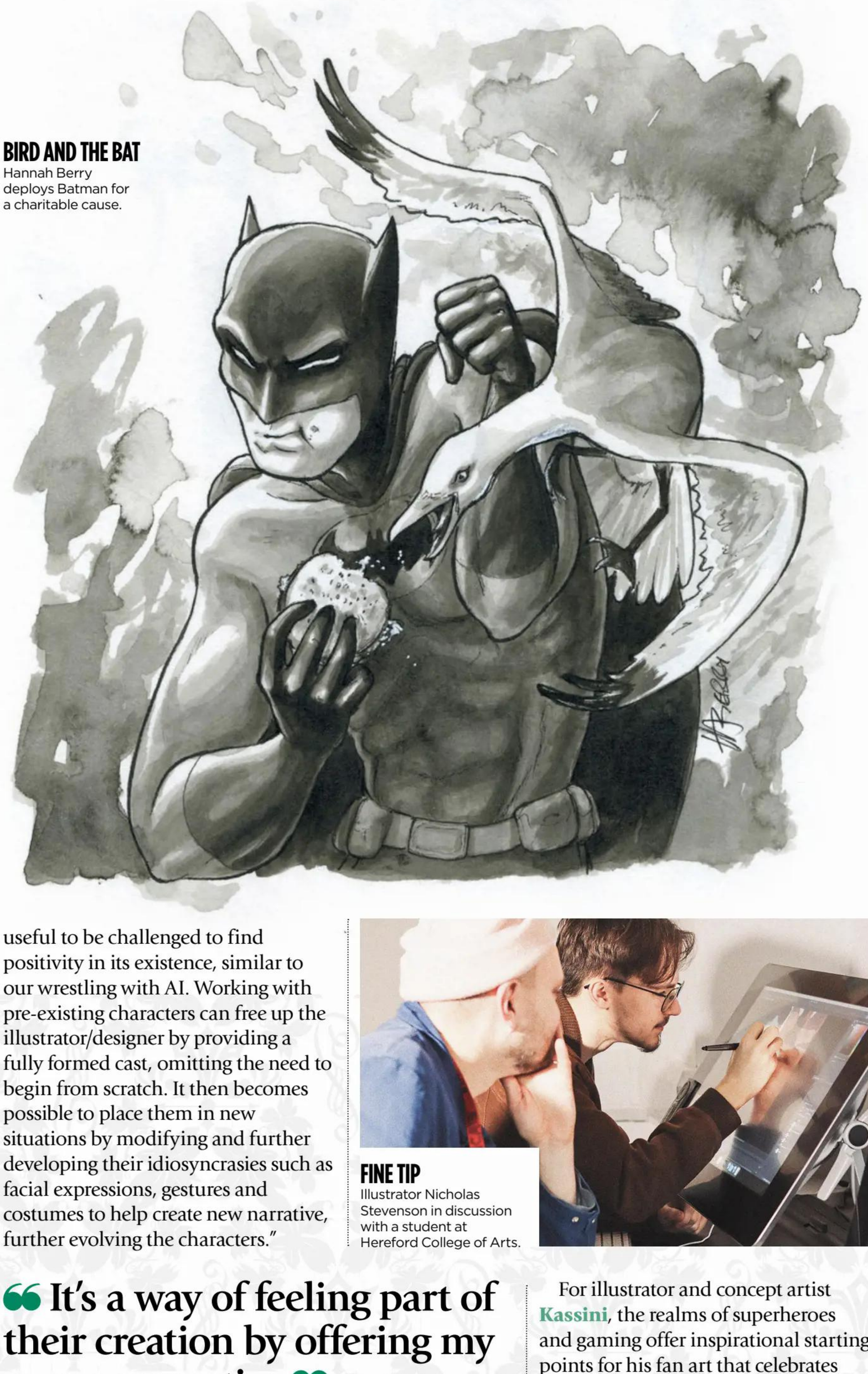
The various dynamics around fan art culture can manifest themselves in the work of aspiring illustration students who may decide to include fan art in their portfolio submissions for a given course that they wish to pursue. For illustration tutors, the complication arises when they have to explain that those images don't qualify as true illustration, even though they have likely been rendered with devotion and great enthusiasm.

HELPFUL STARTING POINTS

With so much reference material available for fan artists, how can they leverage it to improve their own work in terms of accelerating skills and engaging with the demands of form and composition?



As **Neil Hadfield**, Course Leader of the BA (Hons) Illustration & Animation course at Hereford College of Arts, notes: "We see many, many portfolios of bad fan art and have to painstakingly call out that the course does not condone it as true illustration. That said, it is useful to be challenged to find positivity in its existence, similar to our wrestling with AI. Working with pre-existing characters can free up the illustrator/designer by providing a fully formed cast, omitting the need to begin from scratch. It then becomes possible to place them in new situations by modifying and further developing their idiosyncrasies such as facial expressions, gestures and costumes to help create new narrative, further evolving the characters."



BIRD AND THE BAT
Hannah Berry deploys Batman for a charitable cause.

FINE TIP
Illustrator Nicholas Stevenson in discussion with a student at Hereford College of Arts.

> **It's a way of feeling part of their creation by offering my own perspective**



DESIGN SCHOOL
Hereford College of Arts.

For illustrator and concept artist **Kassini**, the realms of superheroes and gaming offer inspirational starting points for his fan art that celebrates Trench Crusade and Silk Song.

Kassini says: "Being able to draw the characters I love is like waving to my childhood self, who did the same when watching a film, seeing an animation, or reading a comic. It's not just a personal satisfaction, but also a way of feeling part of their creation by offering my own perspective on a character, just as their creators did."

This confluence of originality and working with an existing aesthetic is a point that **Hannah Berry**, comic writer and also former UK Comics Laureate (2019-



© Rah Petherbridge



MAN OF STEEL
Kassini emphasises the intensity of Superman.



TWISTED AND EVIL
Cody Taylor's interpretation of Darth Vader in whimsically menacing mode.

21), also has a view on, stating: "For mainstream comics there is a fairly distinctive artistic style – which is not to say that artists can't bring their own voices to it, but that there is a way of drawing, inking and colouring that is very recognisable. I largely work in the indie comics side of things, where the majority of comics are self-published and there are very few gatekeepers. This means most creators are writing and drawing exactly the kinds of stories they enjoy and become known more for their 'voice', and while having an income is important, artistic expression is usually the drive."

"For someone interested in working in this area, learning the ropes by taking known characters and, basically, having fun reproducing them, can be a good way to challenge yourself artistically, but can also build a portfolio that may help you with approaching these publishers in the future," believes Hannah. "Professional opportunities in mainstream comics are very competitive, and being able to demonstrate that you know a particular publishers' canon inside out, and that you have a good grasp of their style and tone, can help you get a foot in the door."

For Neil, the tension between original expression in the context of fan art requirements (that it's recognisable and familiar) is one that is negotiated by illustration tutors and their students.

"Fan art characters, at their best, already follow many of the principles of good design, including proportion, anatomy and pose, which provide a solid, classical template on which to base new characters," he says. "There are also principles which help define staging or background/environmental art as scenes or locations for action. These principles can be learnt and used as a basis for original creations in set design in a wide range of media."

LEGAL ISSUES

In thinking through a set of ideas

NEGOTIATING COPYRIGHT COMPLEXITIES

Fan art walks a line between free expression and copyright infringement.

As a fan art creator, it's time well spent familiarising yourself with the nuances of copyright and fair usage. Certainly, there's a range of detail readily available in print and online about what artists should know and be aware regarding (potential) copyright infringement. Originators of characters and story-worlds (across various media) can vary in their acceptance and openness to fan art. It's also useful to note that British copyright law differs in various ways to American copyright law.

Here's a listing of useful resources that might provide you with information about issues around copyright:

The Graphic Artist Guild: https://graphicartistsguild.org/

The UK government website details copyright issues here: https://bit.ly/4aMPQvV

The annually published handbook The Writers and Artists' Yearbook contains guidance in relation to copyright law: https://bit.ly/4cuFqnx

The Comics Creators network is a membership group that operates as part of the work of The Society of Authors: https://bit.ly/4cQNFtU

around creative expression and fan art, there's another dynamic to be mindful of; namely the ever-present issue of copyright law.

To some degree, a balance is understood to exist: fan art created solely as an expression of enthusiasm for a given character or story is permissible. The problem will arise for the fan artist if they decide to sell their fan art of characters (properties) that are protected by copyright law. Different companies may utilise different strategies and responses to fan art: they may send a cease-and-desist letter or a takedown notice or eventually initiate a lawsuit. The AI context intensifies this further.

Indeed, during the writing of this piece, Disney sent out a cease-and-desist to AI company ByteDance for infringement of their copyrighted characters. All of that said, some high profile companies, such as Marvel and Sony, recognise that fan art amplifies awareness of their output.

Beyond the considerations of style and aesthetics, fan art also taps into a broader cultural landscape that might see it placing established characters into a kind of stylistic stew that has the potential to produce something more inclusive.

Hannah says: "When I see fan art at comic conventions or shared on social media it's never a direct replica; it's always creators riffing on these characters or stories – sometimes from other comics, but more often from video games, cartoons, film and TV – to make their own fanzines, comics and prints. Rather than hindering creativity or self-expression, known characters and settings can provide a kind of jumping off point – not unlike using the specific tropes of a genre within a framework that the reader immediately recognises – in order to explore particular themes. I was sure somewhere on my shelves I had a neat little comic musing on the mundane pressures of secret relationships featuring Luigi and Bowser, but I can't find it now…"



NOSFERATU THE VAMPYRE
Hannah Berry pays homage to the classic movie adaptation of Dracula.



GRIMDARK
Kassini's art relishes the doomladen world of Trench Crusade.

THE 'WHAT IF' POWER

Fan art, then, can be thought as having the potential to occupy a place in a diverse artistic mix; in a kind of cultural gumbo. For **Dr. Christopher Holliday**, fan art's power and possibility lies in the ways that "the culture of fan art is driven largely by control, ownership and participation."

He explains: "Fan art gives an indication as to the ways that fans and fan communities immerse themselves into their objects of fascination, and, by extension, how they consume and re-negotiate popular culture. Yet fan art does not just enthusiastically respond to a particular artefact in playful and inconsequential ways, but it in fact helps shape the many ways that we can and do think about cultural products.

"This feedback loop is vital," believes Dr. Holliday, who offers that "fans are devoted to a specific media text and feel compelled to take on its characters, icons and images to create new narratives through their art. Yet these visual stories should not be dismissed as frivolous activities by over the top participants, but rather they can be used as vital evidence that helps to map the trends, desires and fantasies that surround beloved cultural products."

He continues: "Fan art can rework the classics just as much as it can recover things we have forgotten, whether this is providing characters with elaborate futures or generating new backstories and scenarios. The 'what if' power of fan art is necessary and lively precisely because it hinges on an indirect relationship between fan and text – there are, after all, so many positions and perspectives from

> **Fan art should not be dismissed as frivolous; rather it can be used to map trends, desires and fantasies**



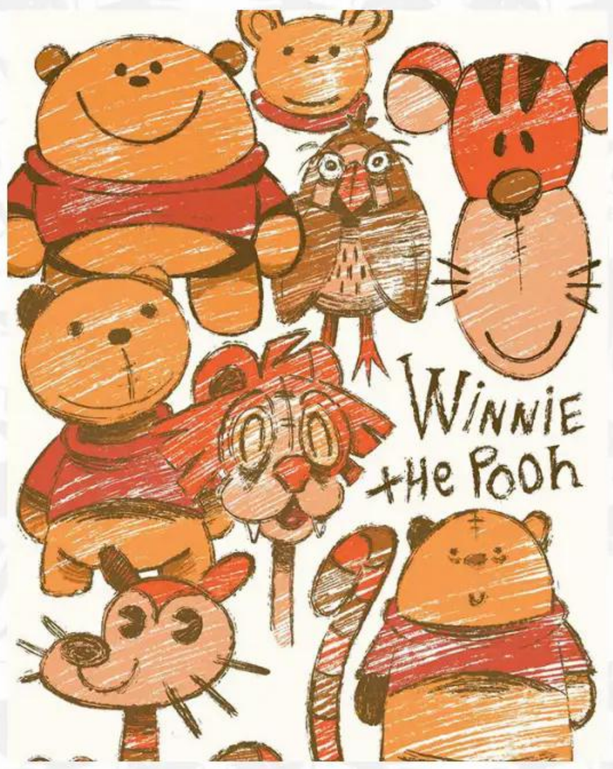
THE PIRATE HUNTER
Berenice Nelle's One Piece art celebrates the character of Zoro.



THE ANTAGONIST
Berenice Nelle's portrait of Silco from Arcane.



FINAL GIRL
Kassini reimagines Serah Farron from Final Fantasy XIII.



BEAR NECESSITIES
Cody Taylor reimagines the whimsy of Winnie-the-Pooh and his friends.

which fans can engage with their objects of fascination."

PERSONAL CONNECTION

For **Berenice Neale**, who worked as the illustrator of the graphic novel



Hollow (2022) that reimagined the story of Sleepy Hollow, creating illustrations in the fan art space has real personal value to her as an artist.

"Fan art, to me, is a playful way to interact with the characters or stories that have moved me. It allows me to stay within a world and explore it further, even after the movie ended. To process a piece of media beyond pure consumption and to create something new from the inspiration it gave me. As a creative myself, it's also a way for me to express my admiration for the hard work of other creatives and study it in each and every detail."

Berenice's work has recently included creative responses to the animated TV show Arcane and also to the worlds of Zelda and of One Piece.

Fan art is a complicated space that honours enthusiasm for a given piece of existing media, but that might also prove challenging for artists who want to express their own creative identity. And yet, looking at fan art from another perspective, we might well be able to recognise fan art's capacity to make connections across diverse creative voices and audiences. In doing so, fan art might also empower consumers of media to reinvent and reimagine it as a central point in their own creative lives.



SHEIK
Shayleen Hulbert reimagines Sheik from the Overwatch universe by using Maya, Substance 3D Painter, ZBrush, 3DCoat and Photoshop.

WESTERN COMICS: A PRIMER

Asha Bardon agrees that comics are cool, but given the number of countries around the world, where do you begin – and where did they?



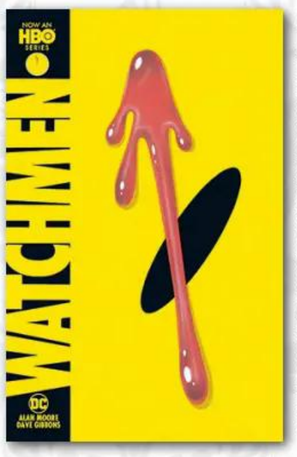




Think of the word "comic" and you're probably either drawn to manga from Japan or comics from Western countries, such as the US or France, each with their own histories and subcultures. But, as we move into the latter half of the 2020s, one thing is key: regardless of region, comics are cool.

No longer the sole province of nerds and picky readers, comics are in vogue, both as living pieces of art on bookshelves and walls, and inspiring everything from Netflix's next big hit to summer blockbusters. But where did they come from and how did we get here?

Comics are as varied as the genres they cover and the mediums they're created in, from satirical single panels in political magazines and daily newspapers to short strips such as Fred Bassett, Peanuts and Strange Planet, to longer story-length titles like Watchman, Kabuki or adaptations of other media, such as The Last Unicorn, Doctor Who or Hellraiser.



© Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons/DC Comics



© IDW Publishing

COVER STORIES
Top: The cover of the 2019 edition of classic comic Watchmen, by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. Above: The cover of the graphic novel adaptation of Peter S Beagle's The Last Unicorn by Peter B Gillis (author), and Renae De Liz (artist).

The most freeing part of the medium is its versatility; each publication or strip has its own distinctive art style, some black and white, others coloured. Some are written by one person, others are collaborations between writers and artists, with patron saints such as Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Alan Moore. And, now we live in an online world, they're often available in digital form as well, meaning they're even more accessible than ever for anyone with a phone, Kindle or library card.

ART AS EDUCATION

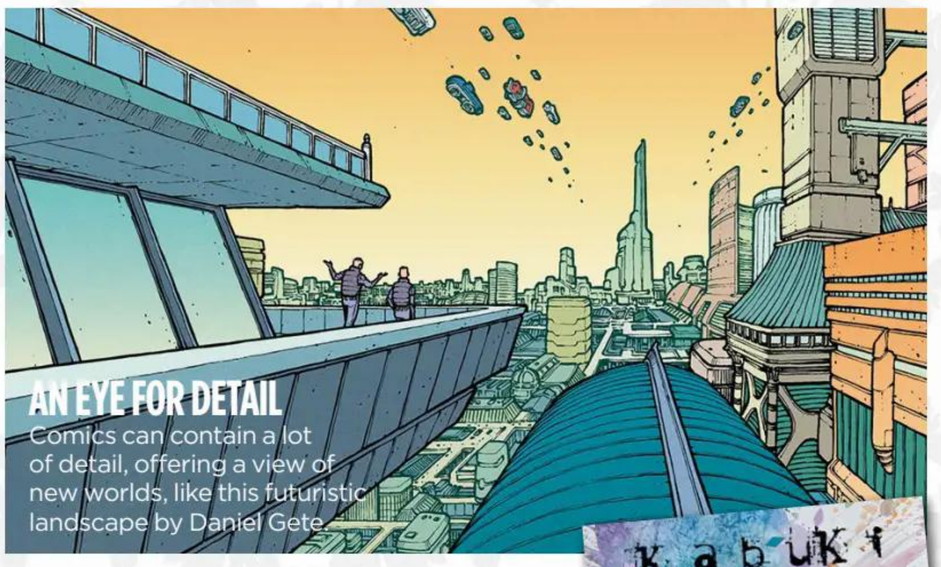
Art has always been a way for people to tell stories, dating back to hunters in the famed French caves of Lascaux – now a UNESCO World Heritage site – where the art has been dated to around 20,000 years ago. This was well before humans could write, before complex civilisations existed or words were pressed into clay tablets or scribed on papyrus paper.

In times when literacy was rare, art became instructive. Look at ➳

PANEL SHOW

Panels from Daniel Gete, an artist from Spain who's worked professionally on several comic series.

© Daniel Gete/Oni Press



© Daniel Gete/Oni Press

AN EYE FOR DETAIL
Comics can contain a lot of detail, offering a view of new worlds, like this futuristic landscape by Daniel Gete.



COMICS AS ART
Kabuki's bright covers make the graphic novel really pop.

stained glass in churches, which was used to tell stories to non-literate worshippers back when every window was not just about glory to God but also about instructing a populace who could rarely read, let alone had access to the Bible in anything but Latin.

By this definition, the Bayeux Tapestry – a 70-metre work that retells the Battle of Hastings of 1066 in colour and stitches – is, technically, a woven narrative that could easily be an early ancestor of modern graphic novels. It has a narrative. It has scope and characters with their own arcs. And it exists today thanks to its fame.

FROM SATIRE TO SOMETHING MORE

Early newspapers used drawn images where we would use black and white or colour photographs today, relying on artists to illustrate stories. As a result, the first comics were often found in satirical newspapers. Thanks to politics being a universal medium for comedy and caricature, these became named "cartoons" in 1845, although that term is much, much older, and originally referred to a kind of Italian art form on over-sized paper.



SATIRICAL COMEDY
The first issue of The Beano was published in 1938 and is still going strong today.

During this period, the idea of serialisation was popular, with novels serialised in literary magazines and only afterwards printed into so-called penny dreadfuls and early paperbacks. It's no surprise that the latter evolved into a way to bring illustrated stories and cartoons to the masses.

Modern comics were born in the early 20th century, with The Adventures of Tintin by Hergé (the pen name of Georges Remi) in 1929 and The Beano in 1938. In the US, Detective Comics (or DC) was founded in 1937 and introduced Superman the following year, ushering in the Golden Age of Comics.

Such publications were initially aimed at children, with serialised stories and popular characters – including superheroes – but each has its own distinctive art style, some black and white, others coloured, some available weekly and others sold as graphic novels or collected volumes.

Comic books feel like a modern and accessible format, mixing art and words to create a hybrid medium that takes the best of imagery and mixes it with the narrative found in language.

Yet they've been looked down on for decades as somehow being lesser than novels and other non-art-based fiction. Thankfully, the digital age means anyone, be they an artist or a writer with a flare for storytelling, can publish work online for all to read.

> **"The Bayeux Tapestry could easily be an early ancestor of modern graphic novels"**



© Getty Images/Hans Georg Roth / 2x ©Getty Images/Bonnafe Jean-Paul

LASCAUX
These cave drawings in France date from around 20,000 years ago, preserved thanks to the depth and humidity.

BAYEUX
A panel from the 11th-century Bayeux Tapestry, which shows the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

© Asha Bardon



ART AS INSTRUCTION
St Stephen's Church in Norwich has a modern stained glass window that tells the visual story of the Calming of the Storm from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Austin Briggs, an artist from Tacoma in the US, says: "What draws me to comics is the freedom – they feel bold, personal and unapologetically creator-driven. Indie and strip formats especially have this raw honesty where you can feel the artist behind every panel. That authenticity is what makes them powerful and why readers connect so deeply with them."

Comic books have been viewed as somehow inferior or even cheating when it comes to exploring narratives,

GET STARTED WITH SHORTER COMICS

Comics can be short and sweet, long and complicated, or somewhere in between. Let's start small...



© Nathan W. Pyle /Penny Arcade

Given the sheer number of comic books and the decades of publication, it's sometimes difficult to know where to start. If you like superheroes, then DC and Marvel are a good place to start, but given the complex storylines and lore, it can be a little overwhelming. For this reason, if you want to get into mainstream comics, try their cinematic universes to help learn the basics. But if you want actual comics, start with strips over long form.

Start short; if you like sci-fi, try **Strange Planet**, which mixes human humour with grey aliens living day to day. If you like gaming, try **Penny Arcade**. For politics, look to newspapers like the New Yorker. Social media like Instagram is an excellent place for short comics, as well as sites such as Webtoon and Pixiv. Solicit friends, artists and otherwise, seek recommendations and go from there.

© DC Thomson and Kabuki © Dark Horse
The Beano © David Sutherland / DC Thomson



COLOUR AND DEFINED CHAOS
Artists can use full pages to really make panels pop, such as this page by Brazilian Mari Costa.

but the reality is that, thanks to the accessibility of the format, comic books are an evolved form, which takes the best from novels along with the distinctive art styles of their artists.

Think of comics and you'll probably focus on the United States, the ancestral home of modern comics, on DC and Marvel, the two great publishers of so many popular series, from Batman to The Avengers. But that's only the start. When you mention comics, especially the Big Two, it's often superheroes who come to mind first.

Daniel Gete, an artist from Spain who worked on Uber: Invasion, Warrior Nun and Biker Mice from Mars, explains: "I guess I love Western comics and particularly superhero comics ➳



STYLE AND SUBSTANCE
Some art styles are all about intricate and sweeping details, like this panel by Austin Briggs.

LEARN HOW TO MAKE ART LIKE ANTON W BLAKE

Anton W Blake is a cartoonist and TTRPG designer based in Austin, Texas.



"While the techniques and technology have changed a lot, the major steps of making comics have persisted since the early days of the medium. Unlike in most mainstream American comics, where these steps are done by different people, most indie creators wear many or all of the hats of comic creation. There are, of course, deviations from the process, such as taking shortcuts due to tight deadlines."



ANTON'S WORKFLOW:

1 THUMBNAIL SKETCHES

"These are done small and are where the layout, panel composition, perspective and speech bubble/caption placements are decided. The majority of the storytelling and flow of a comic is done at this stage. Doing all of that heavy lifting at this stage will always make the other stages easier."

2 PENCILS

"Next, the thumbnails become more refined drawings. Depending on the artist or the art team, this stage might be very tightly drafted or still somewhat sketchy."

3 INKS

"This is where the linework enters its final rendered appearance. It can range from following the pencils very closely to adding further depth, energy and contrast."

4 COLOURS

"This is mostly done digitally these days, but some (myself included) use a variety of traditional mediums, sometimes mixing digital and traditional."



5 LETTERING

"Every speech bubble, caption, font choice and the majority of sound effects are added this way (though some artists add those in at the pencil/inking stage). For books that I write, I also treat this as a place to revise dialogue."

because that's what I started reading as a child. They were simply there first for me. Later, I started reading and also falling in love with European comics and manga, but superhero comics were my first love. I loved everything about them: the mythology, the costumes, those vibrant colours. They were easy to follow and so much fun. I was mainly focused on the art: Alan Davis, Jim Lee, Arthur Adams. That's how they got me!"

There are smaller but still influential publishers like Dark Horse Comics, IDW, Oni Press and the like. Then there are all the independent publishers and artists who post their art online, either on their own custom sites and social media like Instagram, X and Facebook, or via platforms such as Webtoon, Pixiv and ArtStation.

But comics are as universal as art, with myriad styles and focuses, from black and white and simplicity, to full-colour panels and pages that tell longer, more complex narratives.



IMPORTANT MOMENTS

Artists can craft moments of emotional impact using lighting and colour, like in this example from Austin Briggs.

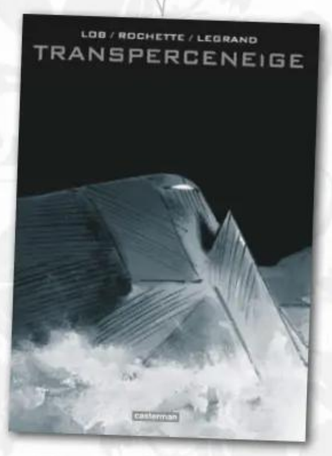
EVOLUTION AND ACCESSIBILITY



Stephen Brown, a UK artist who's made the jump, says : "Going from indie to professional work has meant higher standards and tighter deadlines, but the creative passion remains the same. I think Western comics stay popular because they evolve with culture, and the internet has made them more accessible than ever."

Mari Costa, an artist from Melbourne, Australia, explains: "As a child growing up in Brazil, I was an avid reader of Turma da Monica (Monica's Gang) and it's even the primary way I learned how to read, so I've bought into the comic book hype for a long time!"

Most people immediately think of US comics but countries like France have had a complex comic culture for decades, with series like Barbarella and Le Transperceneige (Snowpiercer). Many of these stories are probably better known by their film or TV adaptations but the graphic novels have their own stories and fanbases who are just as loyal to the medium.



The are plenty of stories that, like manga, find themselves adapted as movies and television shows – films such as Snowpiercer (which exists as both) and The Eternaut, which is based on the Spanish comic book by Héctor Germán Oesterheld and Francisco Solano López, for instance. With many of these series, like The Boys, Strange Planet and The Old Guard, hitting massive streaming platforms such as Amazon Prime, Apple Originals and Netflix, as well as independent creators on YouTube, this means a potential worldwide audience who might never have otherwise seen them, but who will now look out for the comic and read it.



Le Transperceneige cover and panel © Casterman

7

TALE OF A TRAIN

A page from the post-apocalyptic French graphic novel Le Transperceneige (known as Snowpiercer in English).

> **Comics are continuing to evolve and change, sometimes changing society, too**

Thanks to the internet and the rise in non-English media – partly due to the popularity of manga and similar media from across Asia – this has led to curiosity around comic books from other countries, from China to France. And thanks to the internet and international bookstores, it's also a lot easier to access both original series in their native languages and authentic versions in translation.

Mari continues: "Seeing the evolution of Western comics, from cape comics to graphic novels to webcomics all the way to webtoons, has been really incredible! I'm super-grateful it's happening in my lifetime!

FREE AND EASY

Because of the medium's freedom, comics can be made in any style, with Daniel Gete's style well suited to comics.







© David Gete/Oni Press

© Fantagraphics Books



ADAPTATION = NEW AUDIENCES
The Eternaut is a 1957 sci-fi classic from Argentina, and is just one of many comic series to get a recent live action adaptation by Netflix.

MAKING THE JUMP TO BROADCAST MEDIA

There's a long legacy of series that have seen adaptations that give a new lease of life to old stories.

Comic books might be fashionable but they've also become the next big thing when it comes to adaptations in other forms of media. While we often assume that this is something new tied to the cinematic worlds of publishers such as Marvel, it's not. For example, Superman hit radios between 1940 and 1951, and has now found new life as a podcast. The franchise then moved to TV, with spin-off series such as Smallville, and more movie adaptations than you can shake a cape at. Yes, the MCU did kick-start a cinematic universe, but comics have been inspiring TV series, novels and film for decades. The real question is, as media evolves and our consumption of it changes, where will comics go next? How long until we have holographic comics or mixed media for VR headsets that brings comics into augmented reality?



RADIO WAVES
Many don't know that Superman had a radio show, now reborn as a podcast.



DESIGN FOR DEVOTEES
Because of the range of art styles in comics, every creator can craft a specific audience, and Stephen Brown has found his niche.



ARTISTIC LICENCE
The internet and digital tools mean it's easier than ever for artists to get their styles out there, like Mari Costa's cutey comic art here.

UNIVERSAL THEMES
Life inspires art and art is very much inspired by life, as simpler strips tell universal stories, like this short strip by Mari Costa.

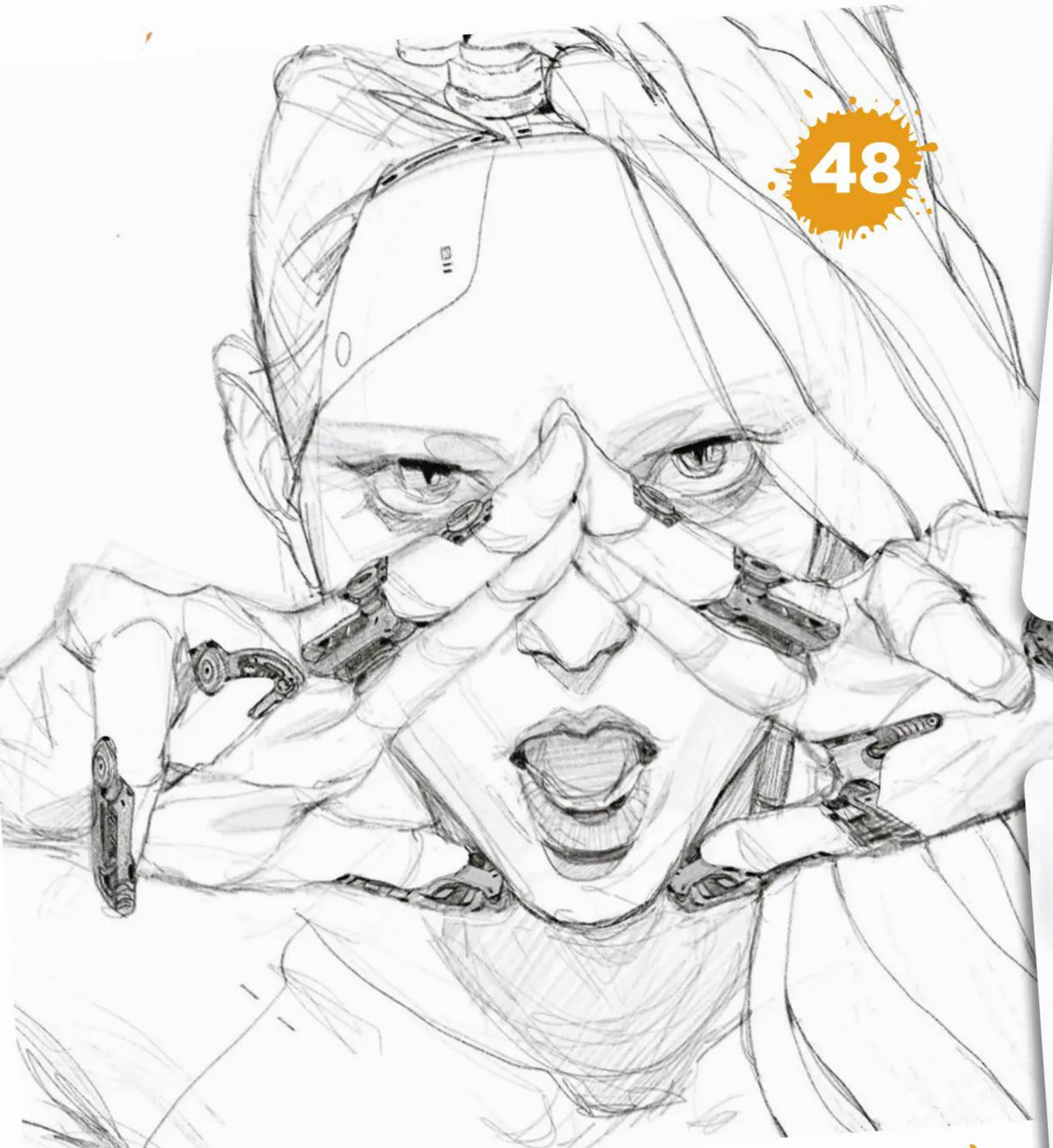
Nowadays it's super-easy to get started making your own comic and I encourage anyone to try it."

As we enter a new digital golden age, comics are continuing to evolve and change, sometimes changing society at the same time, as well as introducing new generations to classics of the genre, plus new takes on older narratives, such as 2025's Superman and the upcoming Avengers: Doomsday.

Regardless, 2026 is a great time to be a comic book reader and this is only set to continue as we edge towards 2030 and beyond. The world is embracing original work, in English and other languages, as a dynamic form of media, offering new stories to tell beyond what we're used to.



Sketchbook







48 Choro Choi
Open up the Guerilla Games artist's bad-to-the-bone sketchbook to explore her personal projects

54 Johanna Forster
Dive into the natural world with some vegetable-flavoured character designs

58 Julie Arendt
Mesmerising, intricately crafted artwork make for an evocative sketchbook from the video game artist

60 Rain Rouhani
Join the artist on his journey through life, doodling the sights and stories he finds along the way

64 Miro Petrov
Digital art is used here to create fantastical beings that look like something more traditional



60









64



58

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

Sketchbook

Choro Choi

Open up the Guerrilla Games artist's bad-to-the-bone sketchbook to explore her personal projects and fascination with faces

Artist PROFILE

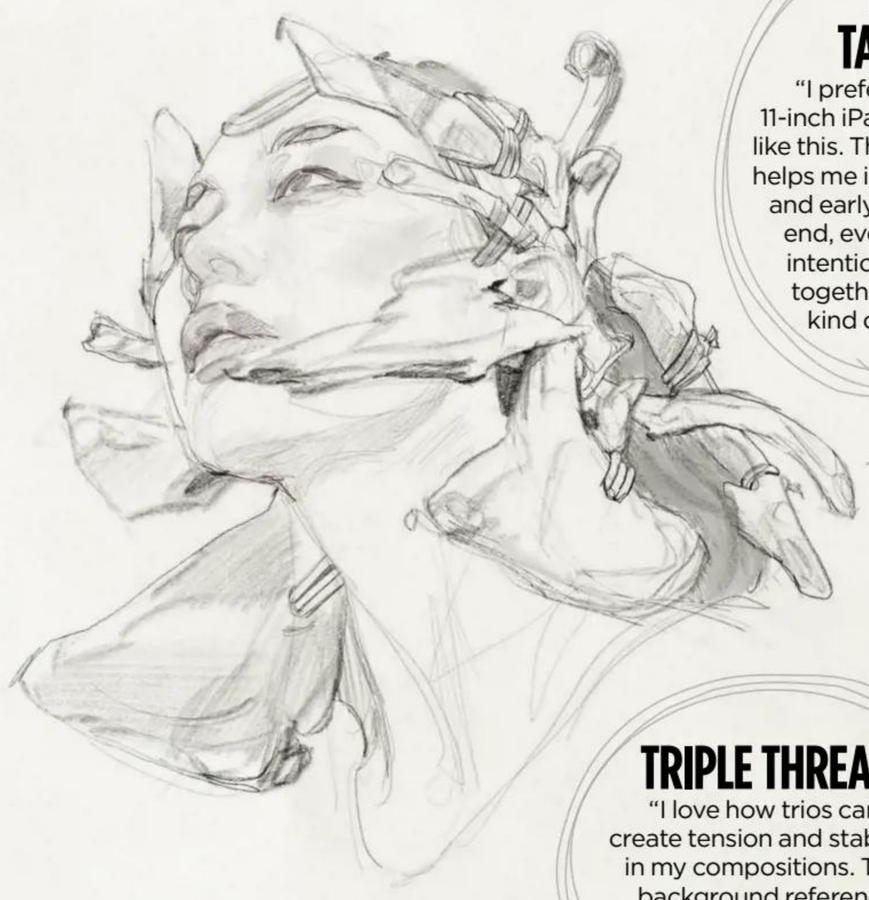
Choro Choi

LOCATION: The Netherlands



Originally from South Korea, Choro Choi has a background in fine arts and has been a character concept artist for over 13 years. She is currently based in Amsterdam as part of the team at Guerrilla Games, contributing to the likes of Horizon Forbidden West. Choro loves to draw faces, and likes to play with the tension between realism and exaggeration in her artwork to develop engaging characters.

www.artstation.com/choro



TOP TABLET

"I prefer using my 11-inch iPad for sketches like this. The small screen helps me ignore mistakes and early marks. In the end, every line feels intentional, coming together to form a kind of texture."



TRIPLE THREAT

"I love how trios can create tension and stability in my compositions. The background reference was a photo taken in Seoul, where I used to live."

ELECTRIC ATHLETICISM

"While travelling in Seoul and Tokyo, I took so many photos of electricity poles. Inspired by these, I imagined a character running across them. Although I was aware the perspective might be off, I chose to prioritise the vibe and mood that I wanted to convey. Since the rise of AI tools, I actually find it fun to embrace these 'flaws' as proof that this is truly human-made art."

“I actually find it fun to embrace flaws, as it’s proof that my artwork is truly human-made”



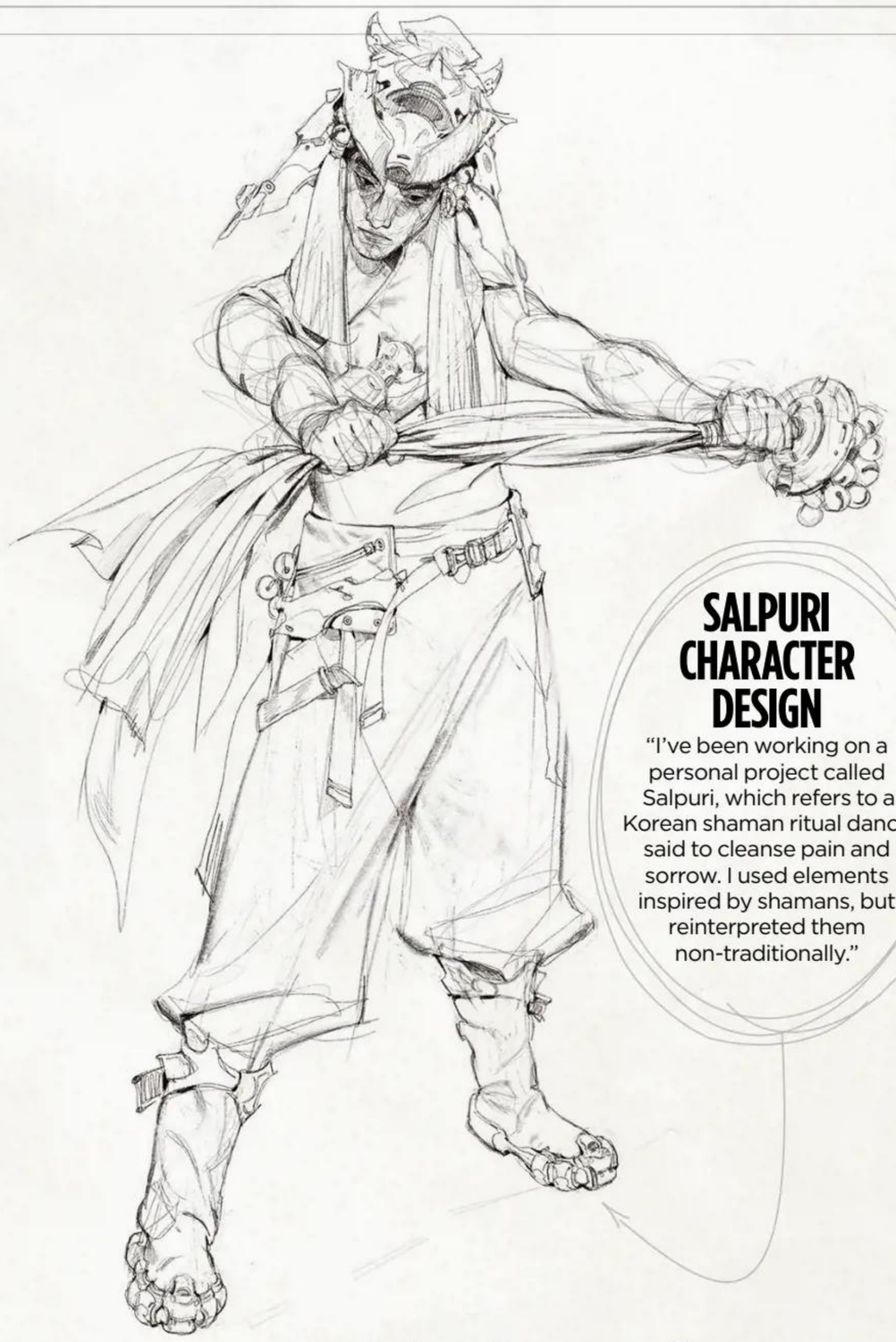
THREAD AND BONE

“I enjoy drawing bones. They reminds me of the fleeting nature of life and, paradoxically, how precious it is.”



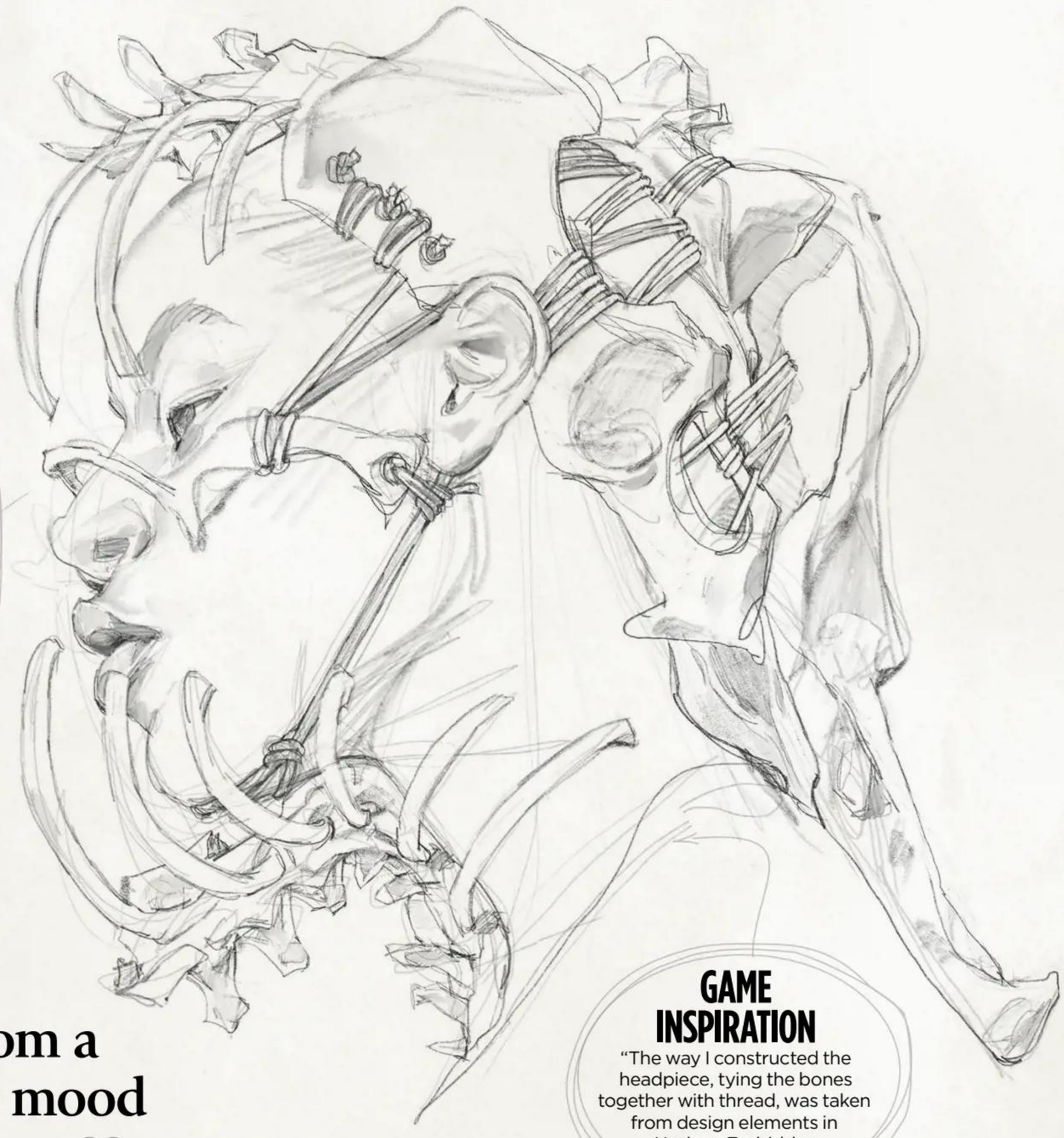
UNIQUE CREATIONS

"I use references because I want my work to feel grounded. But I also try to look at them from a different angle or focus on the mood I want to convey, as I'm aiming to create images people haven't seen before."



SALPURI CHARACTER DESIGN

"I've been working on a personal project called Salpuri, which refers to a Korean shaman ritual dance said to cleanse pain and sorrow. I used elements inspired by shamans, but reinterpreted them non-traditionally."



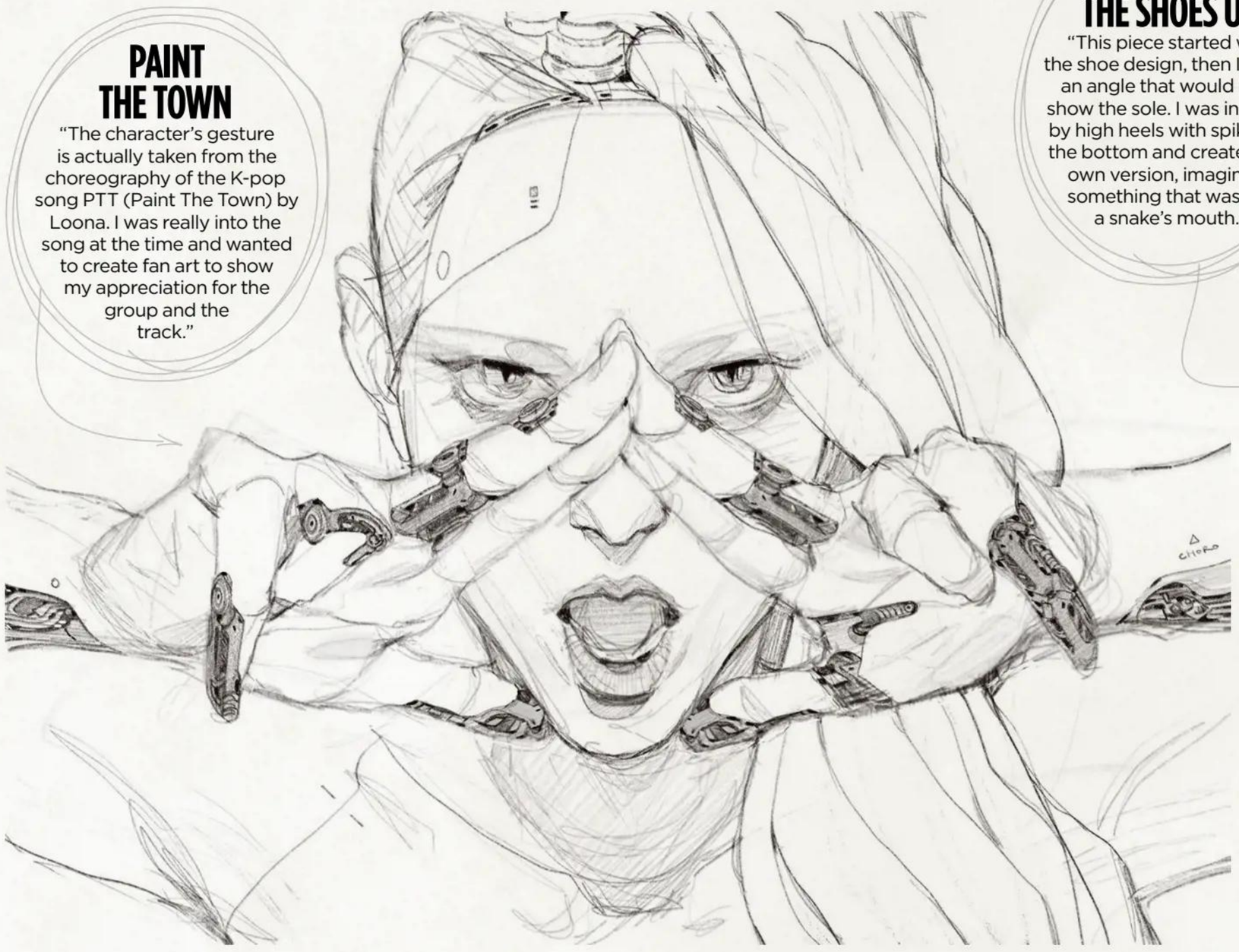
GAME INSPIRATION

"The way I constructed the headpiece, tying the bones together with thread, was taken from design elements in Horizon Forbidden West."

"I try to look at references from a different angle or focus on the mood that I want to convey in an image"

PAINT THE TOWN

"The character's gesture is actually taken from the choreography of the K-pop song PTT (Paint The Town) by Loona. I was really into the song at the time and wanted to create fan art to show my appreciation for the group and the track."



FROM THE SHOES UP

"This piece started with the shoe design, then I chose an angle that would best show the sole. I was inspired by high heels with spikes on the bottom and created my own version, imagining something that was like a snake's mouth."



CARD GAME

"These characters are playing with hwatu (flower cards). I imagined them killing time between calls while waiting for their next task."

ON THE LOOSE

"I've always been drawn to loose, wobbly lines, though they haven't come naturally to me. This piece was an early attempt to explore that direction and gave me a glimpse of how I might approach them. Around this time, I started enjoying the combination of the HB Pencil and Smudge tool in Procreate, a pairing that I still use often."

TAILORED WARDROBE

"My Salpuri project is set in a world that blends sci-fi and shamanism together, and features traditional Korean outfits and other cultural elements. These are the character's different outfits for when she's working, in the office, or at home."

SOLE SISTER

"I started this piece just out of a desire to buy a pair of shoes designed by Rombaut, but it ended up turning into something more. It's always fun to see where an artwork goes; sometimes it feels like they have a will of their own."

POLE POSITION

"I like drawing electricity poles. I never paid much attention to them when I was living in Korea, but after moving to a city where all the power lines are buried underground, they started to feel symbolic, almost like a quiet reminder of my roots and hometown."

IN A RUSH

"I was trying to capture an image that came to mind while building the character's background details. I like her gesture and how the black hair resembles comic-style speed lines."

> "It's fun to see where a piece goes. At times it can feel like they have a will of their own"

Johanna Forster

Dive into the natural world with some vegetable-flavoured character designs amid a host of delicate doodlings

Artist PROFILE

Johanna Forster
LOCATION: Germany



Illustrator Johanna has a background in video games and colouring books, and says nature is her number one artistic inspiration. Drawing in her sketchbook is part of Johanna's morning routine and helps her improve as an artist. She hopes a peek into her latest creations can fill you with new-found inspiration.
www.johannaforster.com



COMBINE IMAGINATION AND OBSERVATION

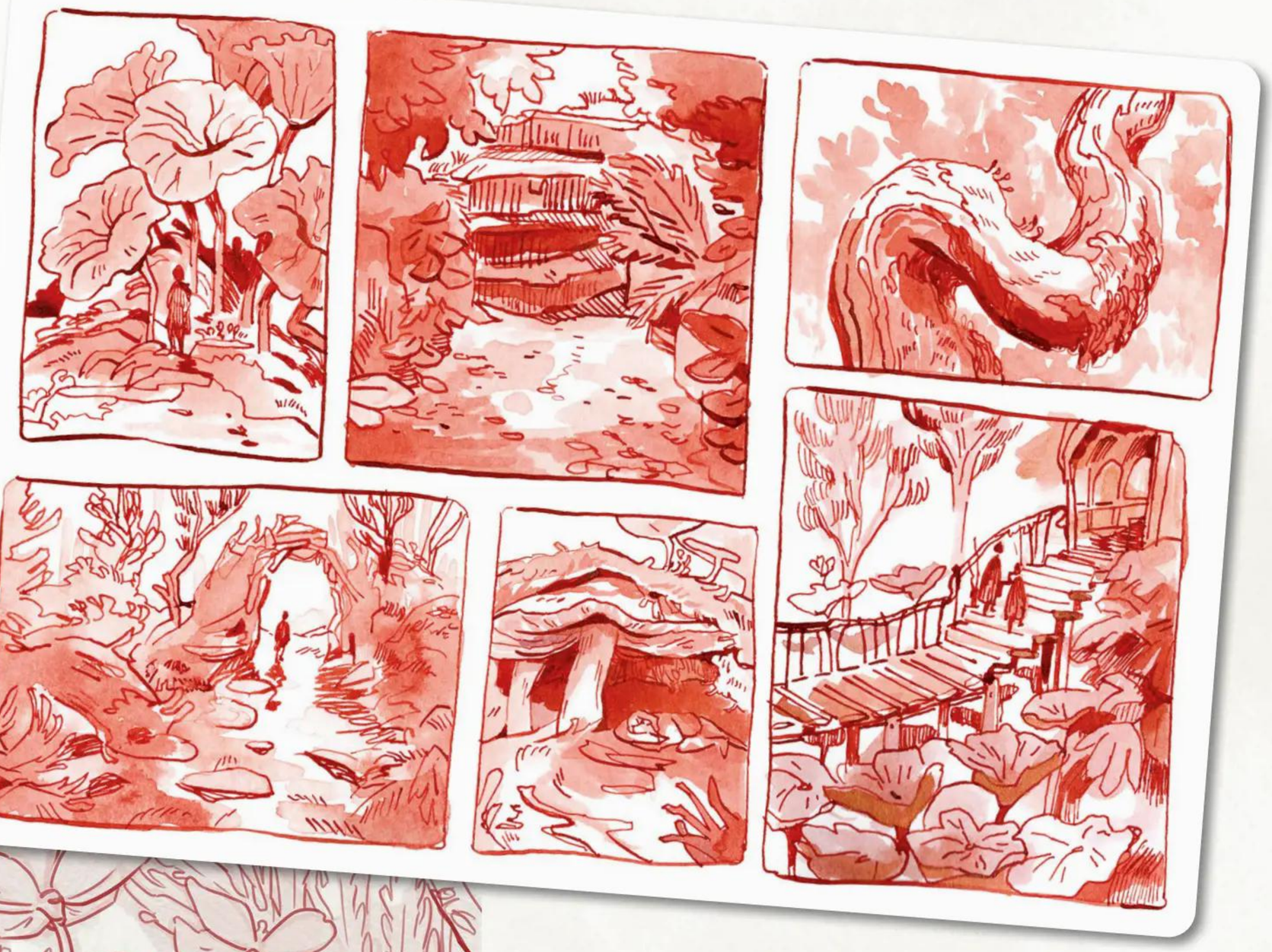
"To create something new and exciting, you can use reference images of things you find interesting and combine them with other elements. In this case, I imagined a herd of retro devices coming to life as robots powered by plant energy."

EXPLORING VARIATIONS

"A larger project can keep you motivated. At the moment I collect a lot of ideas that would fit into a series of illustrations of lost places that I'm working on. I don't erase anything, but scribble down many variations in my sketchbooks."

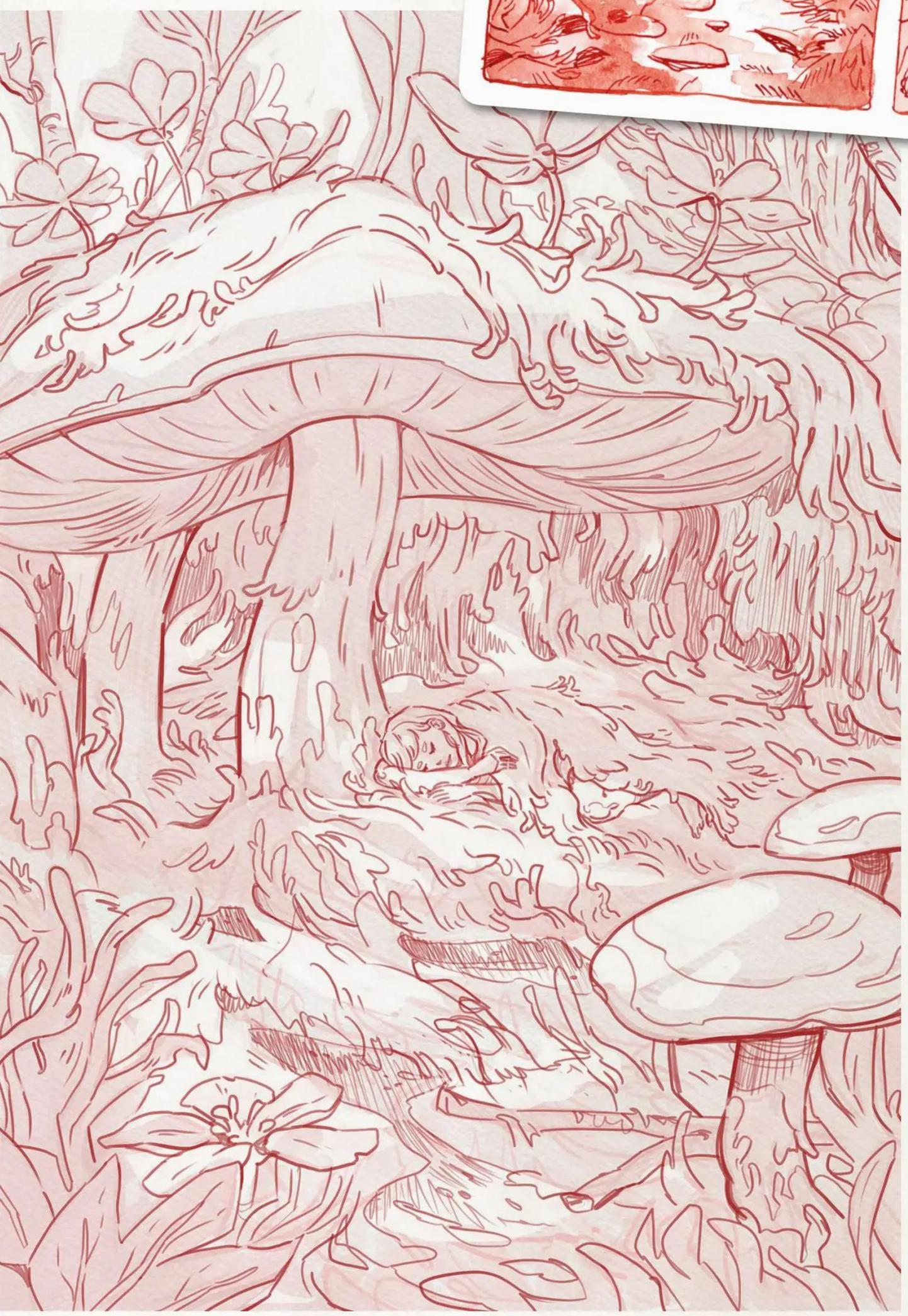
PLANT IDEAS...

"A sketchbook is a great place to collect all the little things that spark your imagination. Small mock-ups and a limited colour palette are good ways to keep ideas simple. On this page, done in ink, I started with photo references and added my own twist."

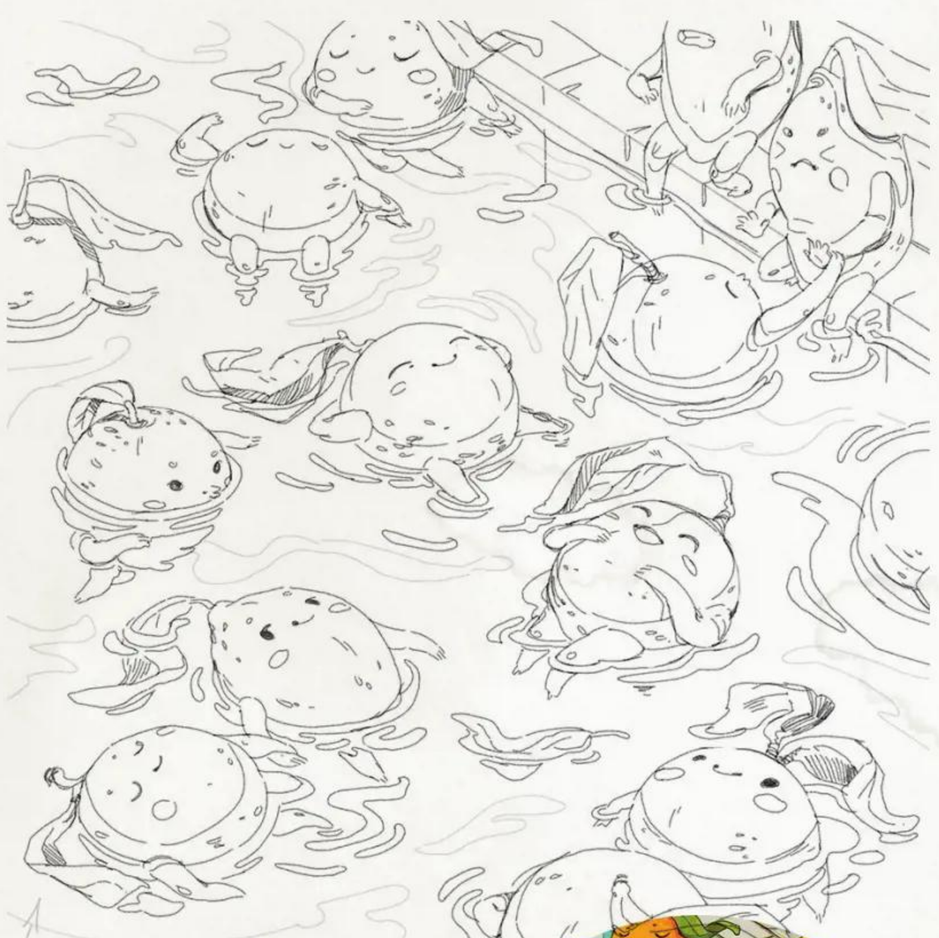


...AND LET THEM GROW

"If I like one of my ideas, I develop it further by creating a more detailed sketch, like this nap amid the moss. For larger illustrations, I usually work digitally so I can experiment with options more easily."



"A sketchbook is a great place to collect all the things sparking your imagination"



PEEL THE LAYERS

"If a sketch is to serve as the basis for an artwork, I draw one or two more layers of sketches on top of each other that will become increasingly cleaner before I place the final line-art on top."

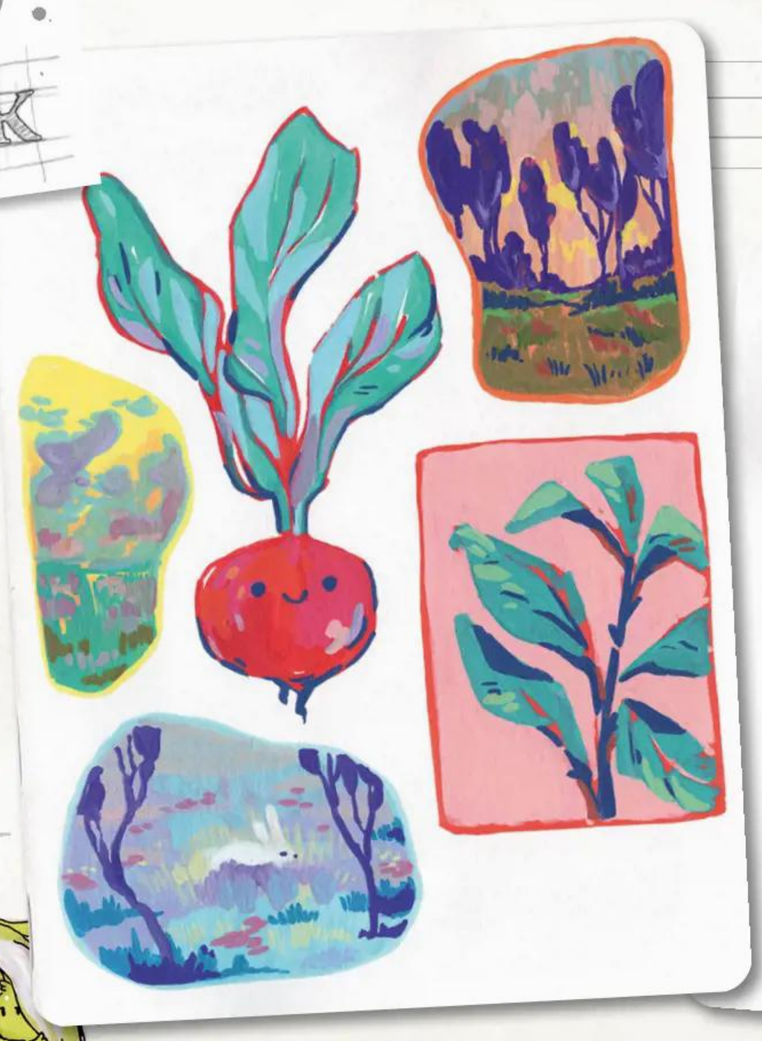


NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

Sketchbook

EXPERIMENT WITH TECHNIQUES AND MATERIALS

"You don't have to stick to one style or medium. I even believe that trying new things helps you develop as an artist. This was the first time that I tried out acrylic markers and I worked out some good colour combinations with them."









SETTING A THEME

"It helps to set yourself a prompt for pages like 'spring flower faeries'. When I don't have the time to draw, I note down these ideas on my phone."



FINDING THE STYLE

"Practising life drawing realistically is important if you like to draw characters, but stylising them from imagination is way more fun to me. I don't always stick to one style and like to experiment in my sketches."

OUR BEAUTIFUL WORLD

"Nature is a huge source of my inspiration, and a sketchbook is the perfect tool for capturing its most beautiful aspects. In this spread, I sketched the plants around my apartment and experimented with colour combinations using water-based markers."



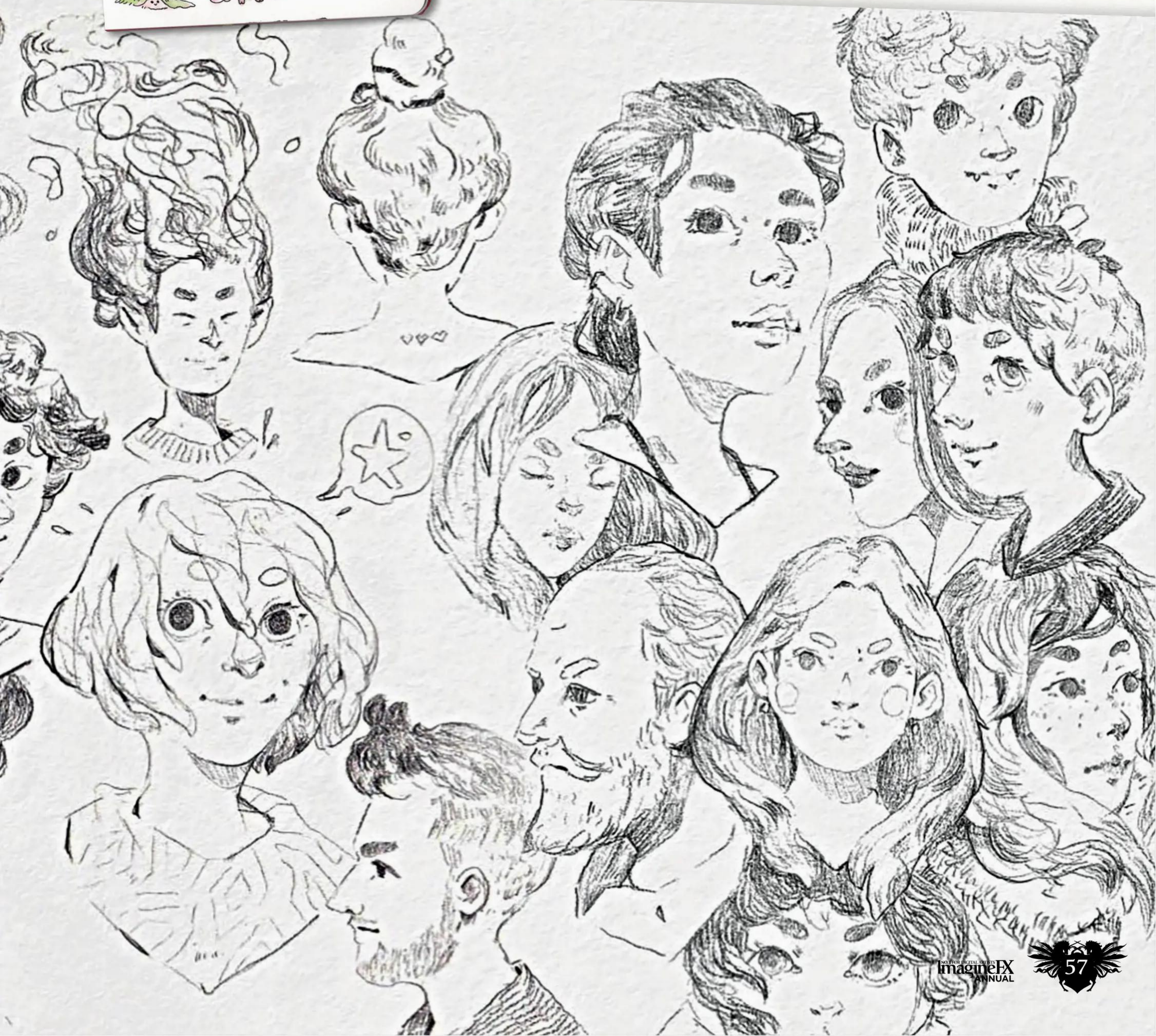
> "You don't have to stick to one style… trying new things helps you to develop as an artist"

Sketchbook Johanna Forster



FROM THE PLAYGROUND

"Sketching silly creatures is one of my favourite things to do. I often start out with silhouettes in watercolour or markers and then draw over them with lines."



Julie Arendt

Mesmerising, intricately crafted artwork make for an evocative sketchbook from the video game artist

Artist PROFILE

Julie Arendt
LOCATION: Ireland



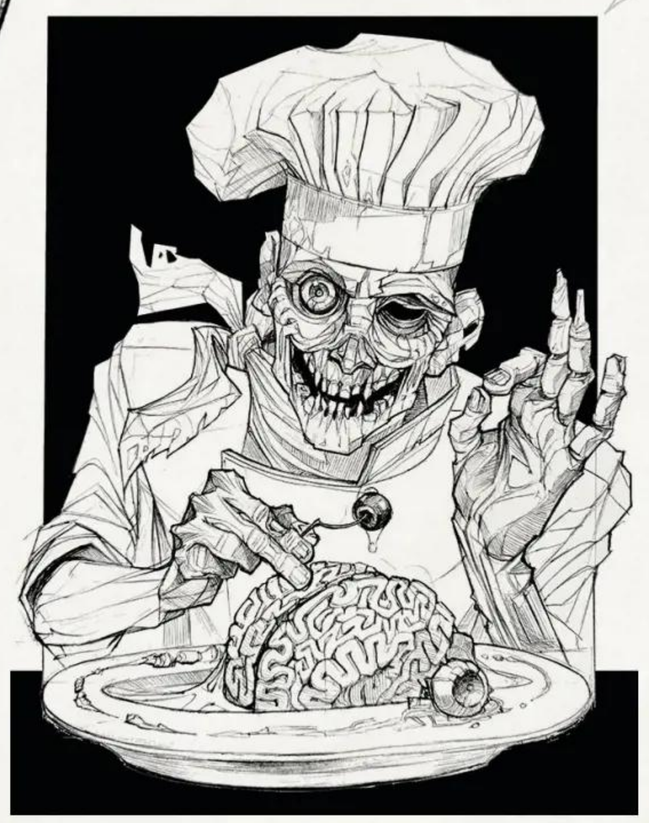
Julie traded architecture for game development and has worked on titles such as Cyberpunk 2077, Dying Light, Call of Juarez and its sequel Gunslinger. Her domain is urban design, flow of movement, and game maps. Julie also designed sets for the Netflix series Wednesday.
www.artstation.com/julare

PRIESTESS

"This is a part of my portrait series based on the beauty of structure and symmetry. The richly detailed head decoration and complex jewellery fades into the skin's structure."

BON APPÉTIT

"Playing with the form and lines. Zombies will always be dear to my heart after working on Dying Light."





PORTRAIT

"Exploring the concept of the portrait itself. Is it a sum of its parts or something more? The face is in part a purely decorative element."

> "Richly detailed head decoration and complex jewellery fade into the structure of the skin"



KISS

"I wanted to play with the idea of elements in contrast using a static composition and its mirror image."



BARBARIAN

"With this sketch, I used a cartoon style with disturbed proportions and sharp lines. It was part of a bigger project."



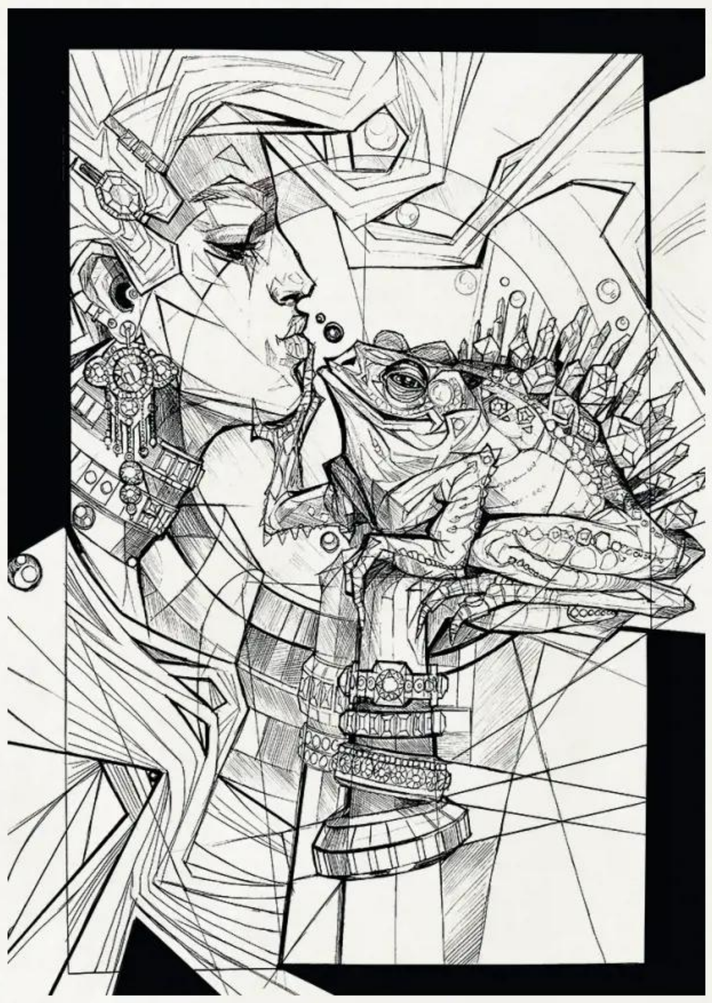
INSIDE BEAUTY

"For this poster, inner beauty is expressed by a chaotic mass of altering forms. Showing yourself is the moment when we're vulnerable; the face is focused and waiting in fear."



WARRIOR

"Decorative style and simple lines were key for this forest person portrait."



THE DIAMOND PRINCE

"Geometry and structure used directly to create a sketch of uneven levels and density."

Rain Rouhani

Join the artist on his journey through life, doodling the sights and stories he finds along the way

Artist PROFILE

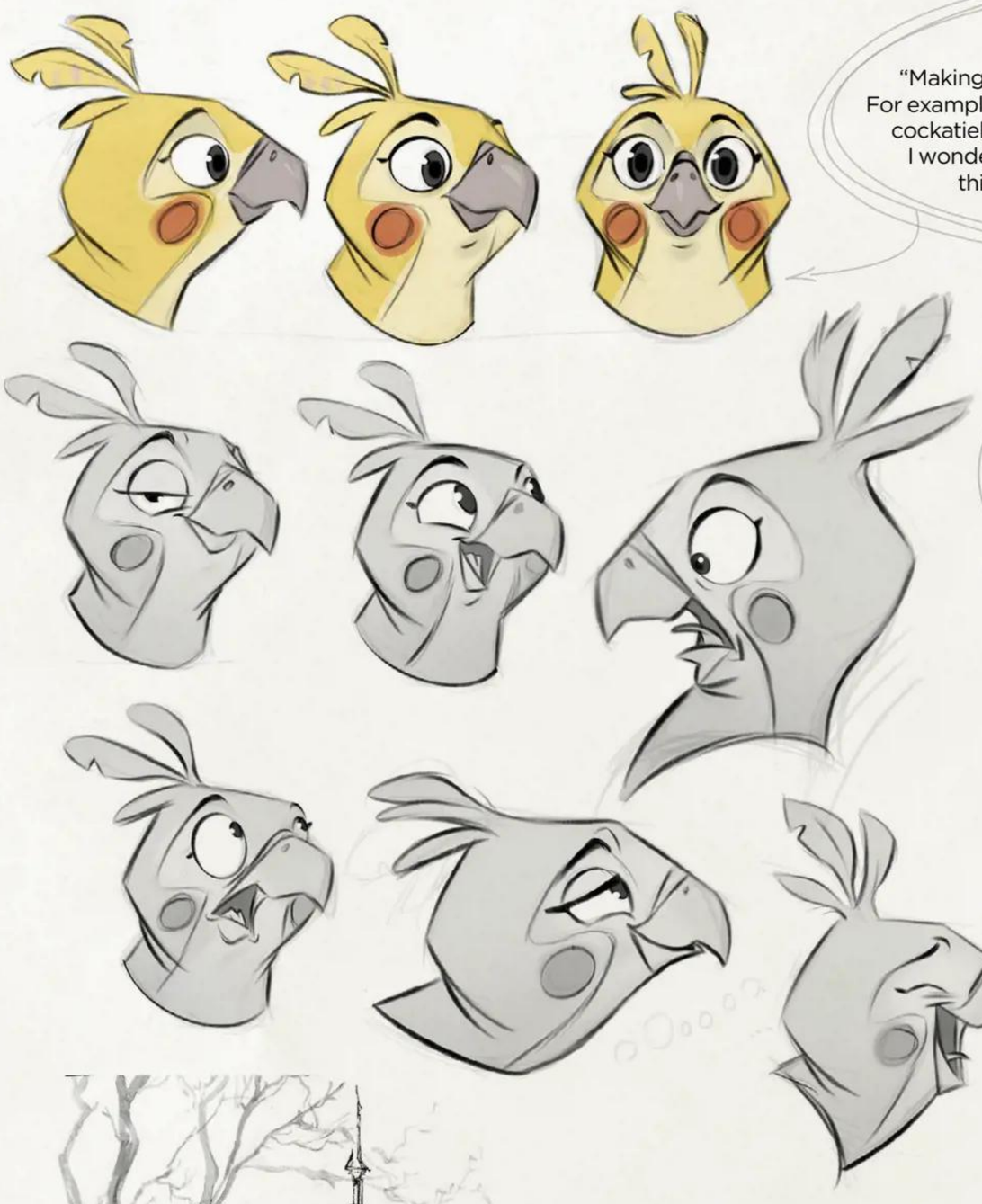
Rain Rouhani
LOCATION: US



Multitalented Rain is a 3D character modeller, CG generalist, and visual and look development artist. He is passionate about storytelling in both 2D and 3D, and loves playing his part in the creative process. Whether he's working on films, series or video games, Rain's goal is always the same: to help bring worlds and characters to life.
www.artstation.com/rain_rouhani

KESHA THE COCKATIEL

"Making characters out of everything is just the best. For example, this is Kesha – she's based on my best friend's cockatiel! She's feisty and a little crazy, and sometimes I wonder that if Kesha could tell us everything she's thinking, what would she say or do? Then I sketch her acting it out."



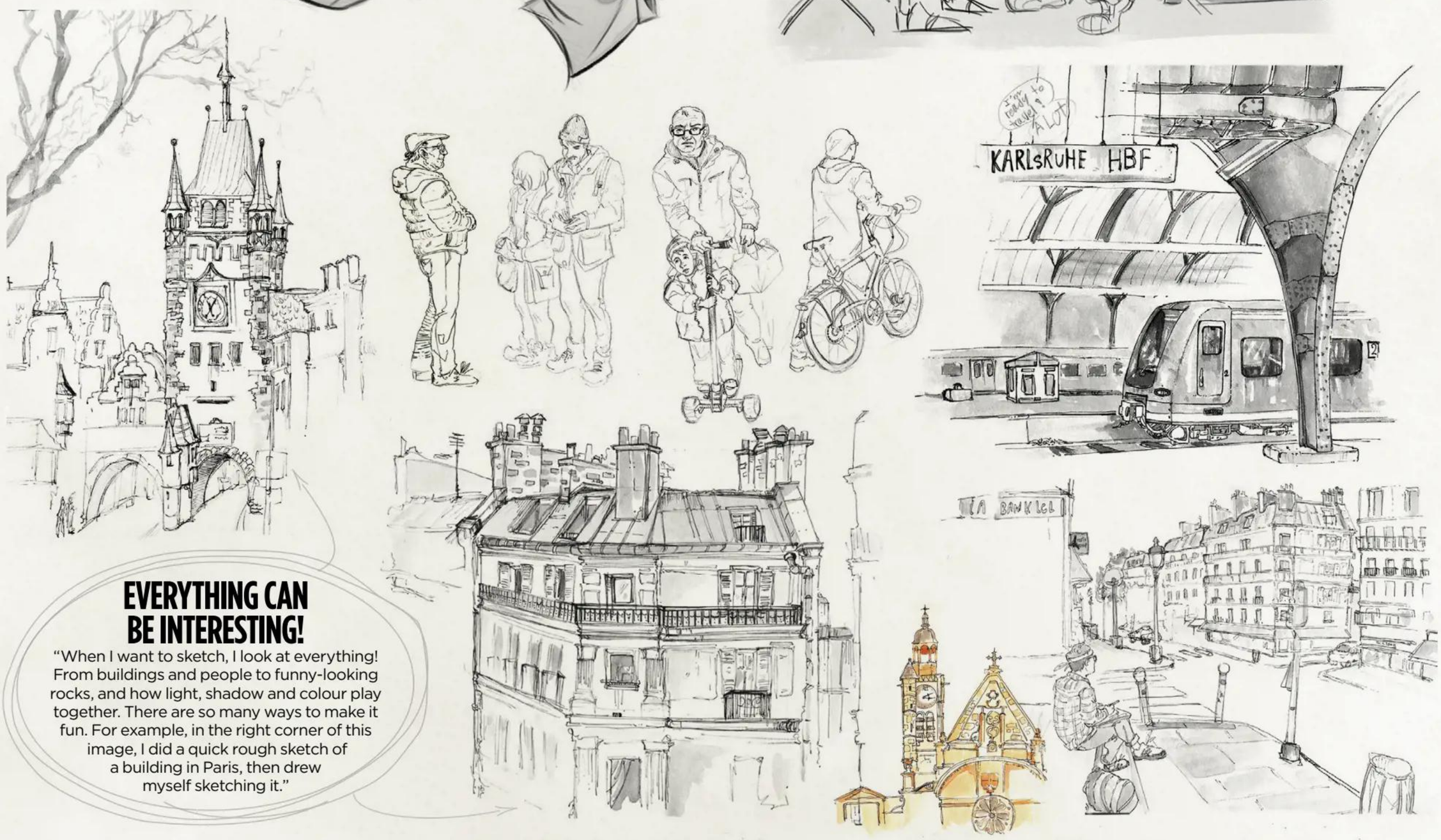
FROM LIFE TO PAPER

"I noticed these two people talking outside a restaurant and wanted to make a quick sketch of them to capture the moment in my sketchbook."



EVERYTHING CAN BE INTERESTING!

"When I want to sketch, I look at everything! From buildings and people to funny-looking rocks, and how light, shadow and colour play together. There are so many ways to make it fun. For example, in the right corner of this image, I did a quick rough sketch of a building in Paris, then drew myself sketching it."



FUN SKETCHES OF ANIMALS

"Exploring the anatomy and shape language of animals and playing with their facial expressions is one of my favourite pastimes!"

PEN, PAPER, PEOPLE

"My sketchbook is filled with people living their life, captured still amid their daily activities."

WATERCOLOUR EXPLORATION

"It's fun to get inspired by real people and then do something different. For instance, here is a goblin dad helping his daughter win a fight with her hair."



"My sketchbook is filled with people living their life, captured still amid their day"

CHARACTERS IN THE MOMENT

"The fun part comes after sketching outside. I either get inspired to create something new or build on a character based on someone I saw. I can turn them into a character design, give them different expressions, imagine what they do, and create a whole world around them."

NEGATIVE SPACE

"I've been having a lot of fun playing with negative space; letting the viewer's eyes rest and fill in all the gaps."

WHAT'S THE STORY?

"I love going out to draw, especially at cafes. Watching people and how they live inspires me. I'm always making up little stories in my head, wondering what someone is reading, what they might be thinking, or what their name could be. I ask myself questions about their hobbies or fears and imagine answers. These people become part of my day, even if only in my mind."

> "Sketching like this is supposed to be fun and freeing. There's a beauty in making mistakes"

THEIR FACES SAY IT ALL

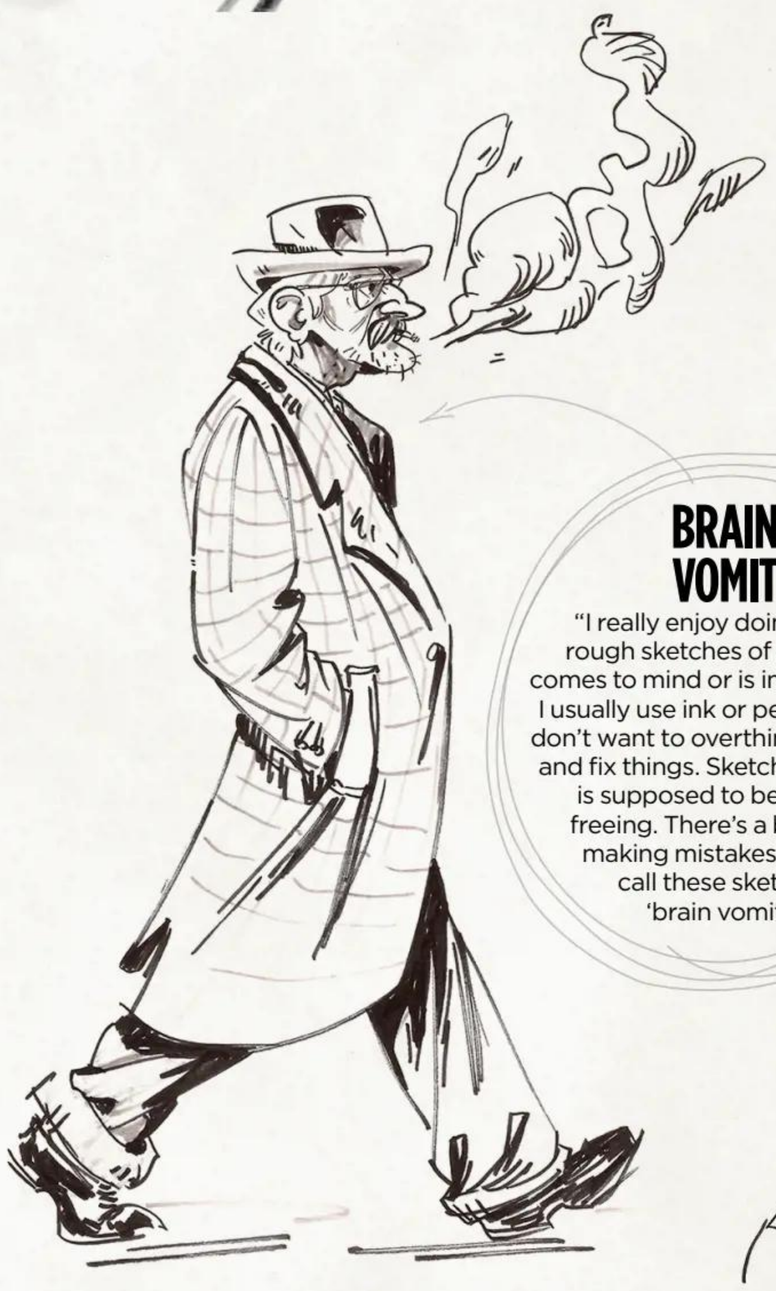
"One of the best parts of sketching is paying attention to people's expressions and trying to see the scenario they are in from their perspective."





GENTLE, TIRED LIONESS

"This lioness is channelling the calm I was feeling that day!"



BRAIN VOMIT

"I really enjoy doing quick, rough sketches of whatever comes to mind or is in front of me. I usually use ink or pen because I don't want to overthink it or erase and fix things. Sketching like this is supposed to be fun and freeing. There's a beauty in making mistakes; I like to call these sketches 'brain vomit'."



NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

Sketchbook

Miro Petrov

Fantastical beings are the name of the game here, with digital art used to create something that looks more traditional

Artist PROFILE

Miro Petrov

LOCATION: Bulgaria



Miro is a concept artist and art director with 20 years of experience specialising in character and creature design, and environmental artwork. He has published two art books: The Art of Miro Petrov: The Fellowship and The Art of Miro Petrov, Volume 2. Companies he has worked with include Wizards of the Coast, Riot Games, Gameloft and Facebook.

https://soulsurvivor.artstation.com

GOBLIN

"A sketch of yet another goblin design. There is no specific backstory behind this character; just a pure training on the paper."

CAPTAIN HIKO

"Concept art of a pirate captain who leads the largest pirate faction. It's digital art, but designed to look like it's made with inks."

WEREWOLF

"A head concept sketch of the creature. I experimented with slightly different proportions. I drew this one with a 2B pencil."

DEMONIC HOUND

"An experimental take on Cerberus. Instead of three heads, this version has a single head and two bladed limbs."

> "It's designed to look like it's made with inks"

Sketchbook Miro Petrov



BATTLE DWARF

"This dwarf was inspired by the popular game Warcraft. He is a protector and warrior of the mighty air kingdom of the winged dwarves."

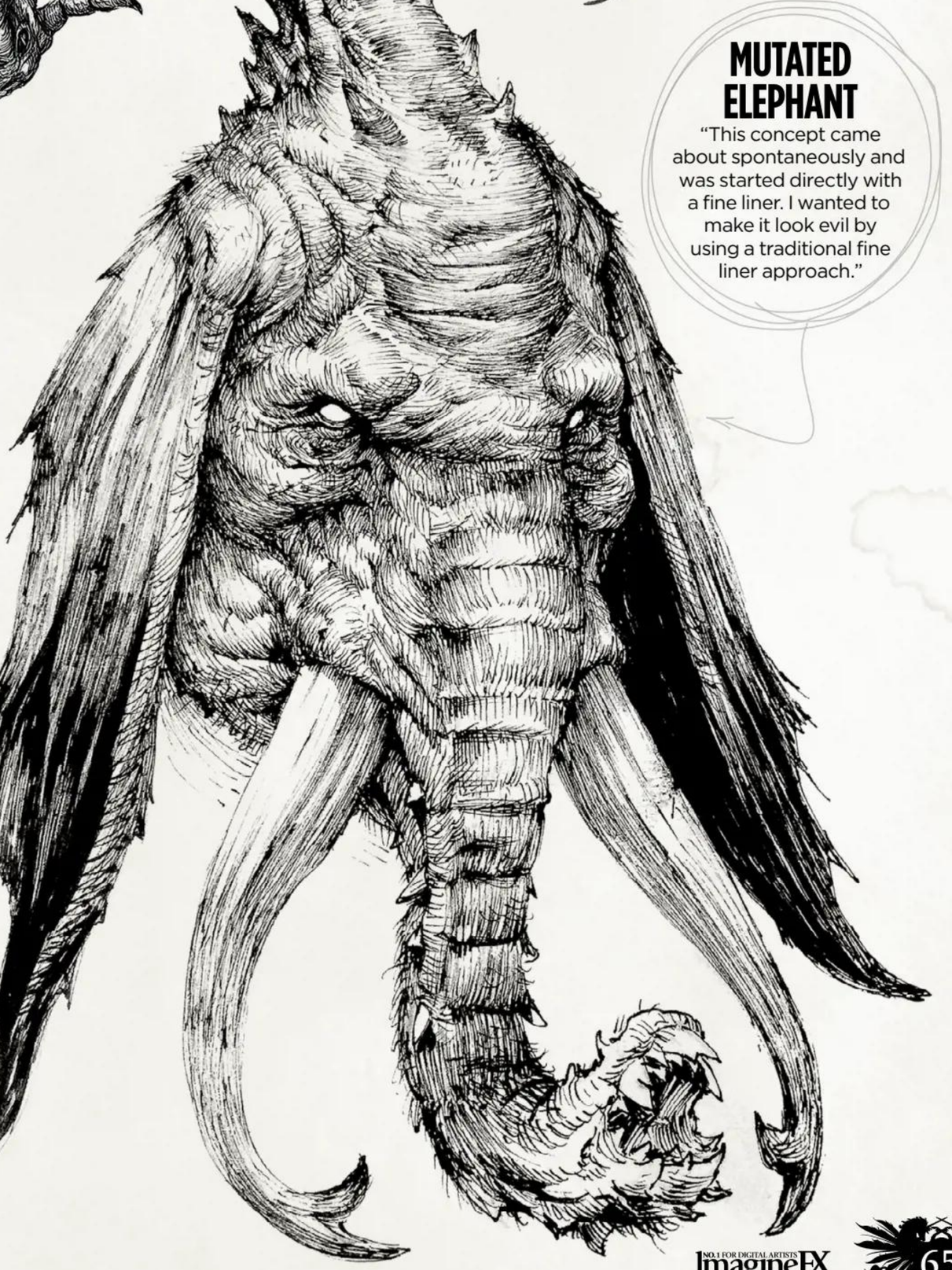
COMBAT SUIT 5

"A conceptual sketch of an exoskeleton armour suit. I was exploring a bit of a different approach to this subject."



MUTATED ELEPHANT

"This concept came about spontaneously and was started directly with a fine liner. I wanted to make it look evil by using a traditional fine liner approach."



MIND CONTROLLER

"A demon sorcerer who manipulates minds and commands the demonic hound on the left page. He was also created digitally."

ALIEN

"A conceptual drawing of a demonic-looking alien species based on an idea that I had a long time ago, created with a 0.05mm fine liner."

MONSTER SLAYER

"I wanted to portray a veteran demon hunter, along with the trophies he has collected and wears as proof of his battles."

WOODLAND DWARF

"An idea for a new type of dwarf that lives in forests, wearing helmets made of wood and animal materials."

BIRD MAN

"My first more successful drawing, which was published on several art websites. I really love to mix birds with human proportions."

ARENA ROBOTS

"I like to live stream while I create and these pieces were painted during one of those. It's a great way to stay fresh and solve problems on the fly, building new iterations as and when I think of them."

"These were created during an online live stream as conceptual sketches"

OCEAN MAN

"An idea for a race that lives in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean. It's a traditional concept sketch made with a 2B pencil."

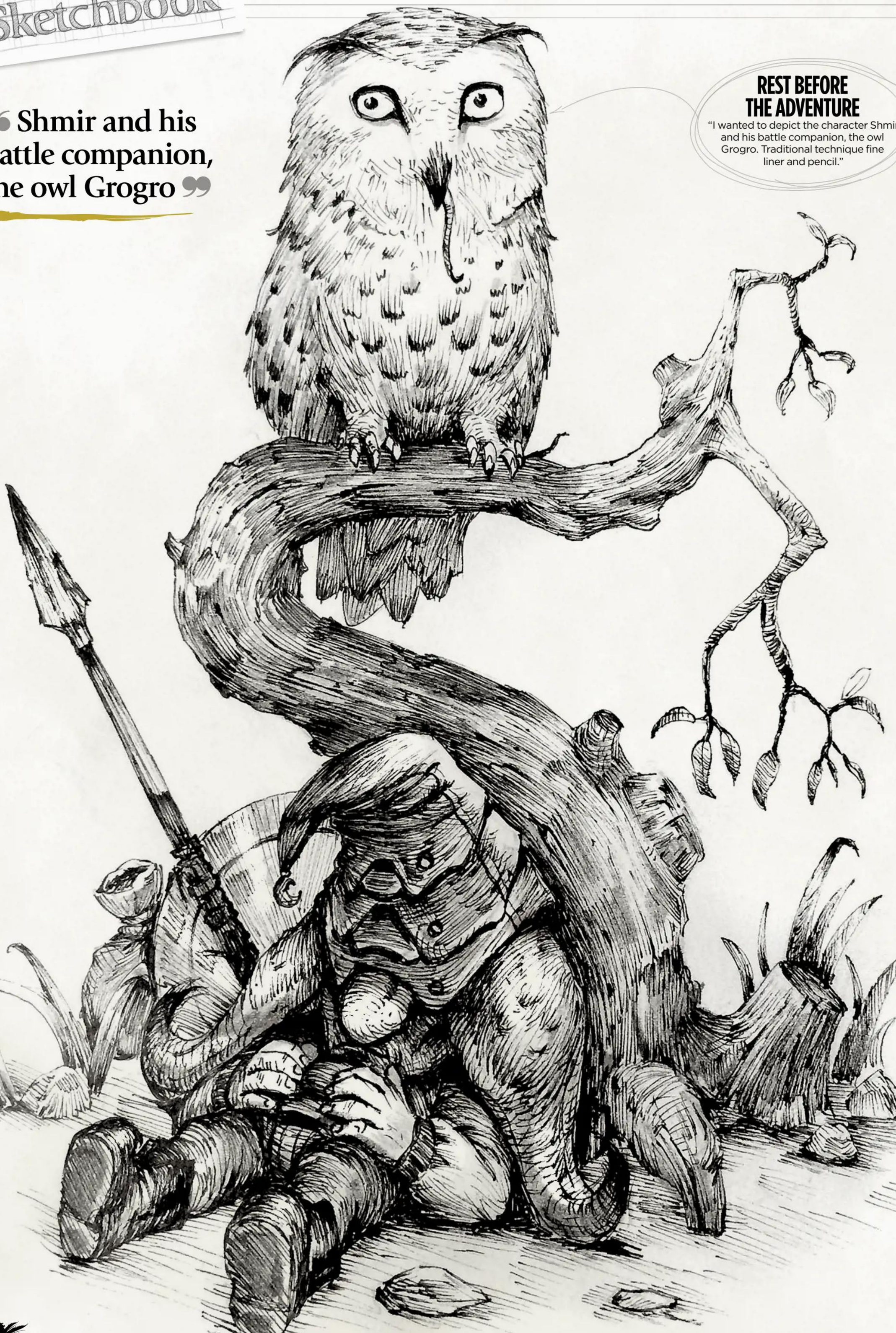
BIRD GOBLIN

"A new race of blind goblins with a twist on their original concept. Their facial features resemble those of birds."

“Shmir and his battle companion, the owl Grogro”

REST BEFORE THE ADVENTURE

“I wanted to depict the character Shmir and his battle companion, the owl Grogro. Traditional technique fine liner and pencil.”





JACK

"Inspired by Jack and the Beanstalk, I love the book, so I wanted to express it on the paper with the fine liner."

PIRATE

"Pirates have always fascinated me. In this piece, the inspiration from Pirates of the Caribbean is clear. Again, it's› digital artwork imitating traditional ink."



GLADIATORS OF THE ARENA 2

"I have been a long-time fan and player of Quake Arena. These characters were created during an online live stream as conceptual sketches, focusing on character design and development."



Workshops

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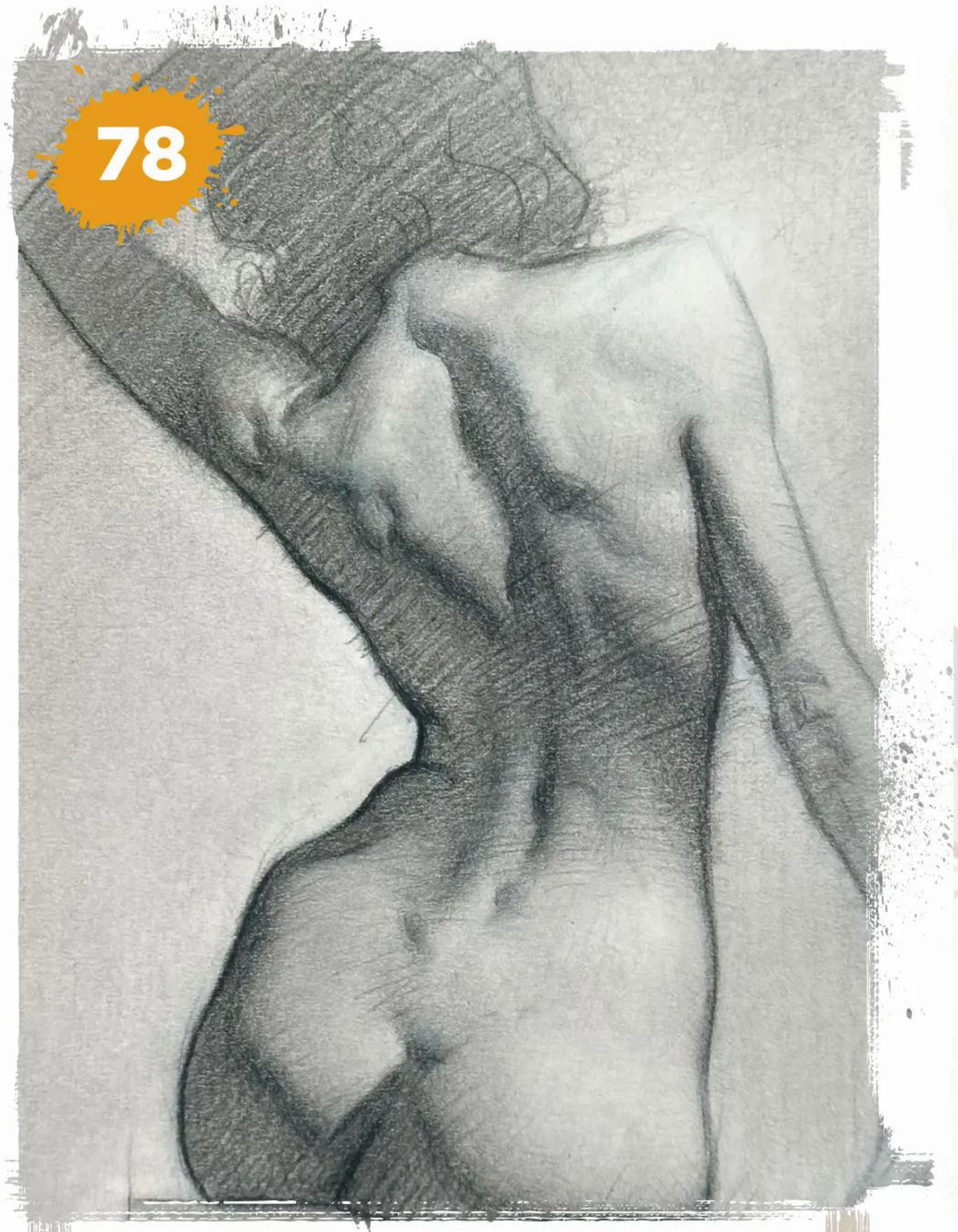
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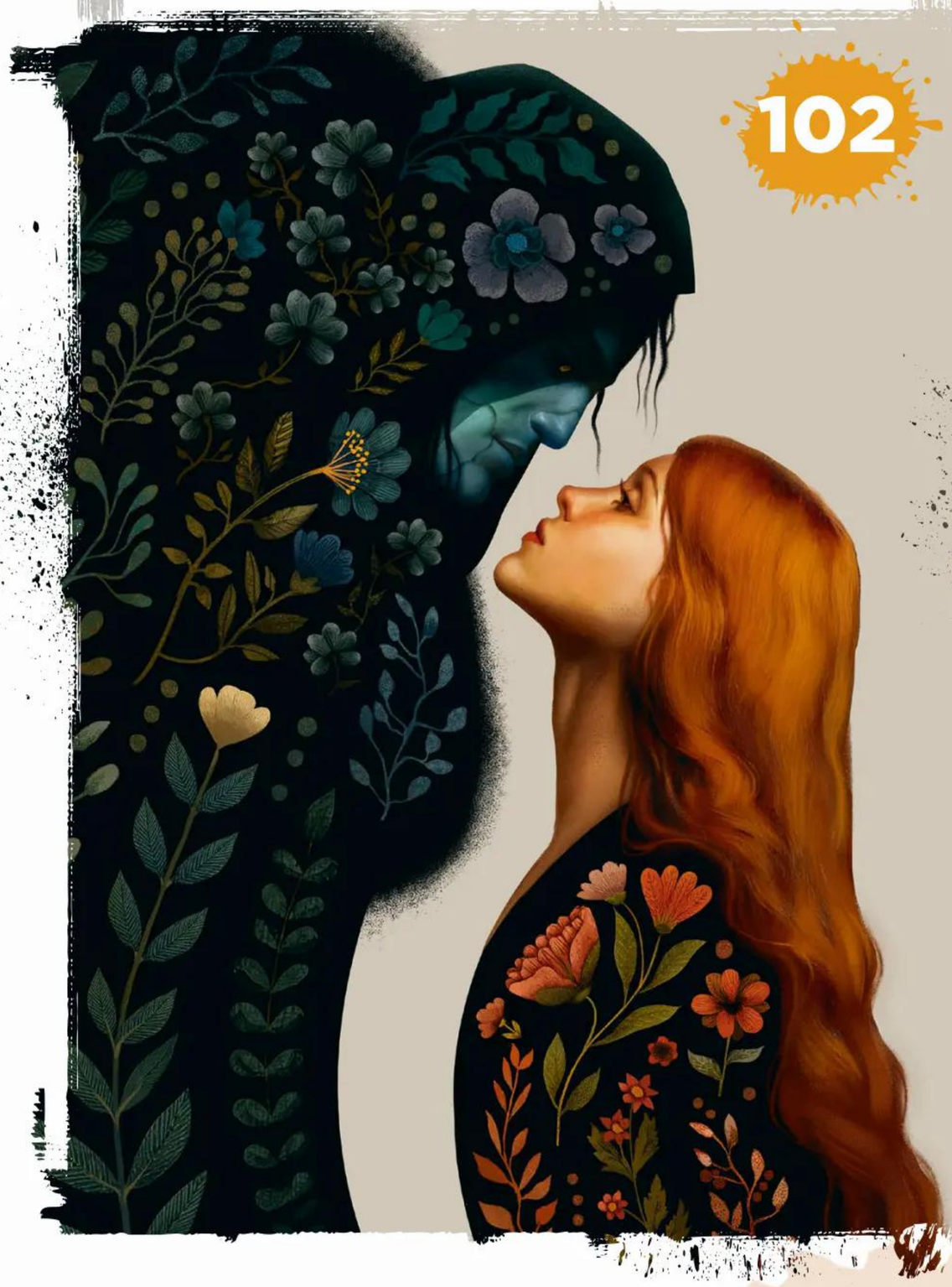
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Photoshop

ILLUSTRATE AN EPIC BOOK COVER

Learn how to create captivating fantasy artwork that draws in readers as **Fernanda Suarez** goes in-depth on her workflow

Artist PROFILE

Fernanda Suarez

LOCATION: Chile

Santiago-born Fernanda is a digital artist who currently works as a freelance Illustrator. Character design and storytelling are her biggest passions.

https://bit.ly/4I6MGXW



This is the cover art for Laura E. Weymouth's fantasy novel Steel and Spellfire. It's set in Valora, a city inspired by Victorian-era London.

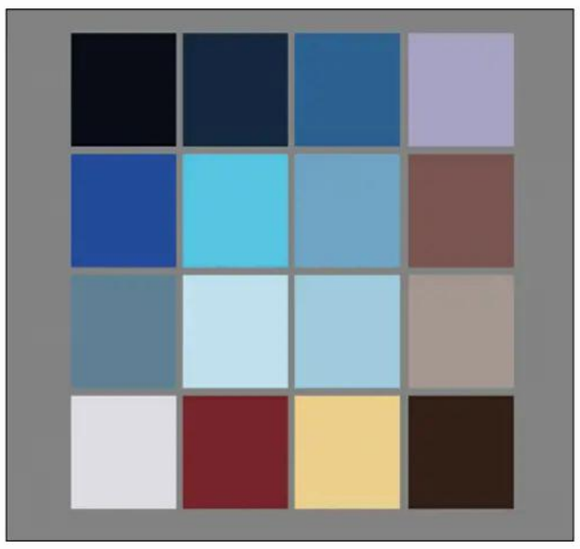
The main protagonists are Pandora Smalls, who has learned to hone and wield her magic in a way the world has never seen, and Kit Beacon, a promising young member of the Royal Guard. Pandora's magic – called Spellfire – takes the form of blue flames. In the scene, we see Pandora and Kit facing up against a monster in a dark alley.

For this tutorial, I'll guide you through the process of creating a book cover illustration just like this. We'll explore drawing the rough concept, how to convey your idea at an early stage and creating dynamic compositions, all the way through to finalising the details.

To follow along you'll need a solid understanding of anatomy – enough to be able to draw characters in a variety of poses and angles. Also handy is a grasp of basic composition fundamentals such as balance and focus, plus standard lighting and colour concepts.

I used Photoshop for this piece, but any digital art software you're familiar with should do the job, as we'll be working with fairly standard tools. A drawing tablet would also be an advantage to utilise pen pressure when using some of the brushes.








1 Get prepared with research and a mood board

When working with a client, we're given a brief with the basic concept for the cover. Having that, the first thing to do is get some research in. Look for images that work with the idea you have in mind, serve as references, or provide inspiration. When you've got a collection ready, create a mood board and a colour palette. The client might also show examples from your portfolio that they like.



RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: MULTITASK



I used this for almost all my rendering. I like it for hair and clothing; it has a nice texture.

FOG 01



Make sure that Transfer is enabled in the Brush Settings in order to get a softer stroke.

FIRE 01 & FIRE 02



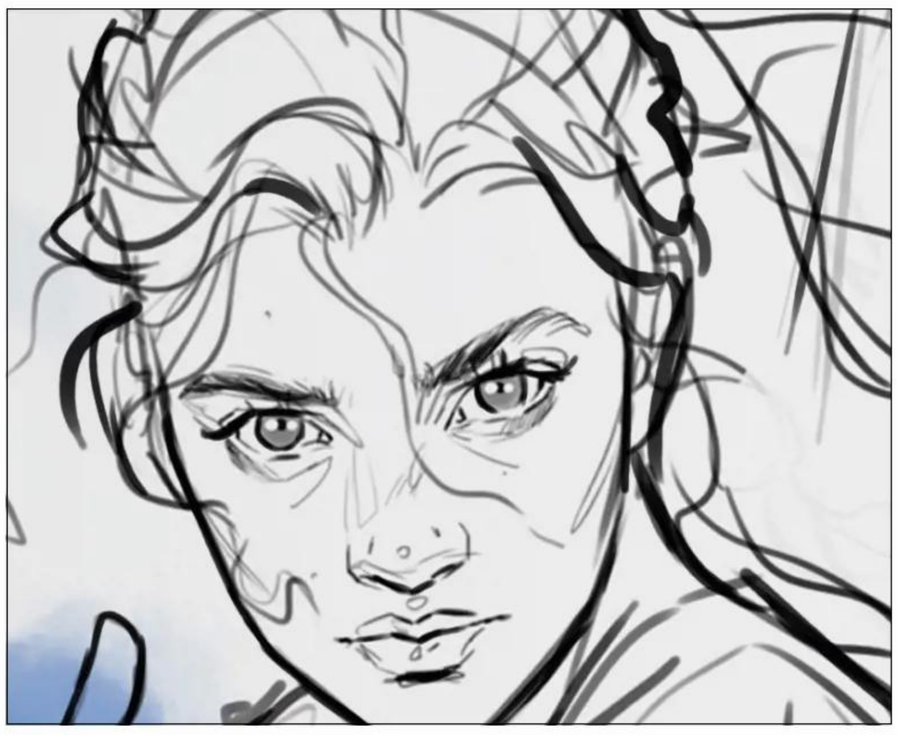
The Angle Jitter setting is dropped to 0% for Pen Pressure in the Brush Settings for both.

GET YOUR RESOURCES

https://ifxm.ag/fantasybooks

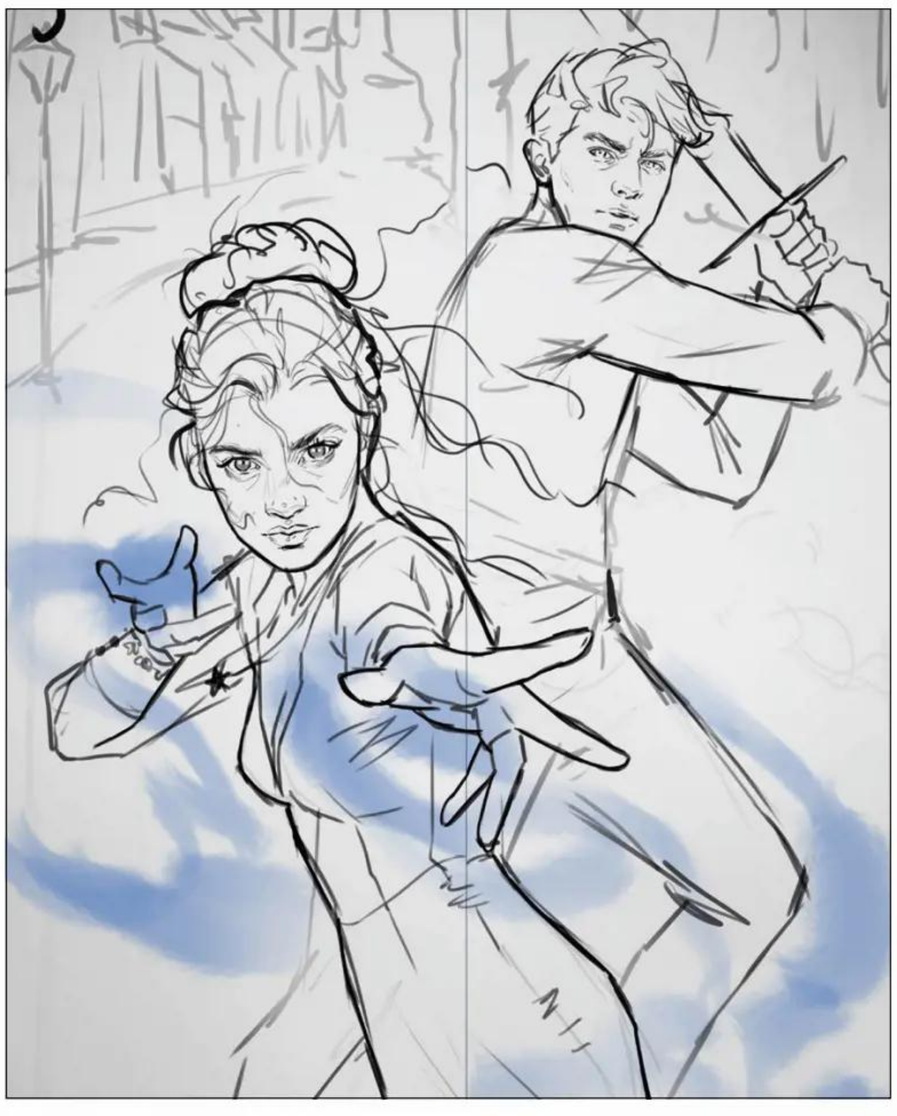
2 Work on the initial sketch

It's time to work on the rough sketch. This can look messy, but don't worry! We want to create something dynamic, so the characters' poses require a feeling of movement. The idea is to try to capture a moment where the character is in motion rather than static. You can use diagonal lines to guide the placement of the characters and seek out balance within the composition, incorporating focal points while leaving other areas bare.



3 Clean and adjust

I like experimenting with different line weights, which can help create a visual hierarchy. You can also clean up the line work if it's too messy; the important thing is to keep it readable for the client. Focus on the characters' expressions to ensure they convey the right emotion and intensity needed. Having the characters look directly at the viewer creates stronger engagement.





4 Colour mock-up

When you have a sketch approved, start work on the colour mock-up. This is where we decide on the colour scheme and lighting. Using a round soft-edged brush, quickly add colour and place light and shadow. We need to set the overall mood for the piece, so the values and colour are crucial. My image will have cool colour temperature and feature darker, ambient lighting.



5 Set a good base

To begin the refined rendering stage, I like to create separate layers for all the different elements of the image, such as skin, hair, clothing, magic and so on. Fill in the complete area or shape for each of those elements and then lock the layer when you're done – then we can move on to adding flat colours.



6 Add colour and light

This is a polished version of the colour mock-up. With flat colours on all the separate layers, use a round soft-edged brush to add light and shadow where needed, as well as colour variation. It's essential to keep in mind the lighting and colour scheme you've chosen. Adding some rim lighting to the characters also helps to create more depth. I suggest focusing on the characters to begin with and retaining the background from the mock-up.



7 Begin rendering

Now is the time for more refined rendering. Paint the characters with a slightly warmer colour palette at first, then adjust the temperature further down the line. Always focus first on the main focal point of the image, in my case the two characters. Using a round hard-edged brush, sculpt and define the bigger areas of the face. We're creating hard edges with our brushstrokes now.



8 Go step-by-step developing the face

For the face, focus on the bigger volumes first such as the forehead, cheeks, nose and jaw. Next add the finer details to the eyes, lips and other features. To achieve a nice skin texture, avoid over-blending your brushstrokes. If it's a realistic look you're aiming for, you need colour variation – for example, adding red to the cheeks or a cooler colour underneath the eyes.



9 Use two layers for the hair

When you do hair, use a base layer that covers the entire shape. Add a new layer on top and start painting the highlights with a lighter colour – my Multitask and Multitask Soft brushes in this issue's resources are great for this. Lock both hair layers and adjust the value and colour as needed for depth and volume.



10 Design the clothing

The Multitask brush is also good for clothes, with a round hard-edged brush for finer details. It's essential to know the type of material you're painting to understand its qualities and how to translate them into a painting. In this case, I was painting a silky ivory dress that's shiny and flowy, and a guard uniform that's thick and opaque. Same as the skin, I like to leave brushstrokes visible.



11 Fix any mistakes

I worked on the male character at this point and added the blue flames using my Fire brushes. You might catch something that needs to be fixed at any moment. For example, I needed to adjust the angle of the male character's head so it followed the line of movement and spine more effectively. If everything is on separate layers, it should be easy to change.



12 Work on the background

With your characters almost completed, switch your attention across to the background. I have the objects and buildings of my background on separate layers as well. I initially worked on the design in black and white, then added colour back using colour, Color Balance and Overlay adjustments. I did this to save time and because it doesn't require a lot of different colours.



13 Create atmosphere with effects

To complete the scene, pump up the atmosphere by adding depth through value adjustments. I also added fog to my image to enhance the mood and evoke a cold sensation, plus a warm glow to the lamps for contrast. The blue flames were also developed with highlights using the Multitask Soft and Fire brushes.



14 Make the last adjustments

Finally, I want to tie everything together and enhance the image to look as good as possible. For example, you can adjust the contrast and values using a Levels layer, tweak the colours with a Color Balance layer, or intensify colour with an Overlay layer. These are subtle adjustments that finalise everything.

Artist insight

USE LIGHT & SHADE TO BEST EFFECT

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

Artist PROFILE

Chris Legaspi
LOCATION: US

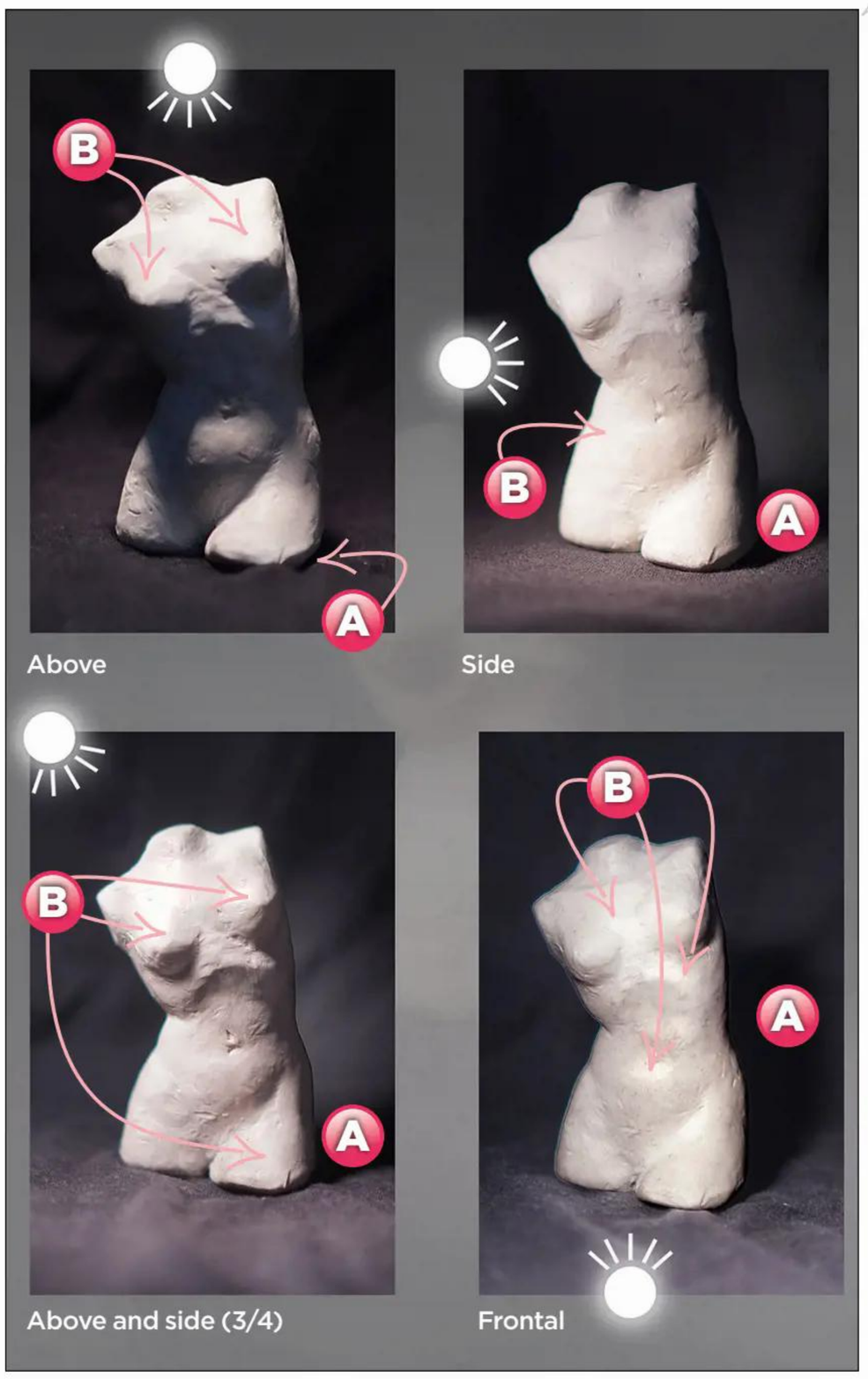
Chris is a poster artist for Hollywood films, author and NMA instructor. He's obsessed with the figure, and wants to restore beauty in the world.
www.drawwithchris.com



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

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

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



1 WHERE IS THE LIGHT?

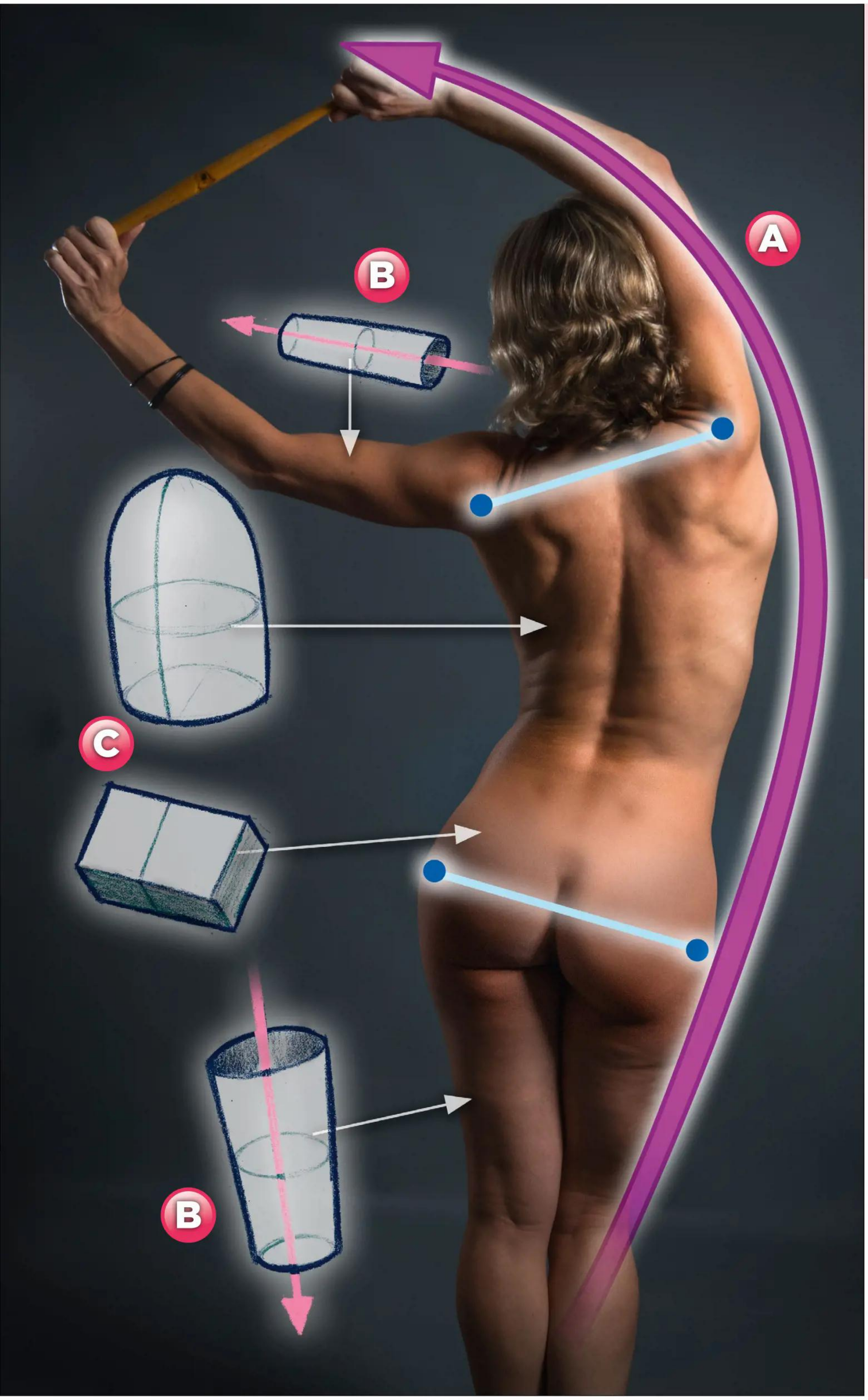
The first step in my observation process is to simply observe the light. The more I know and understand about the light, the more clarity I'll have when designing the drawing. Understanding the light will also make the shading process smoother and more efficient. The first observation I make is the location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



2 WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE LIGHT?

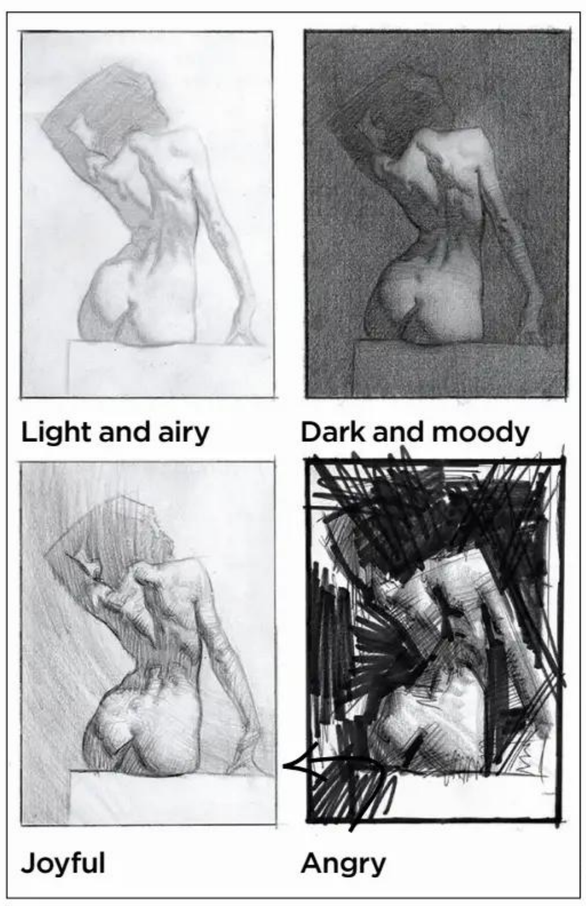
Once I identify the location of the light, I then observe and evaluate the nature of the light. This answers the question: What kind of light is it? Different light sources create different and unique looks, so the nature of the light will affect how I design the final drawing.

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



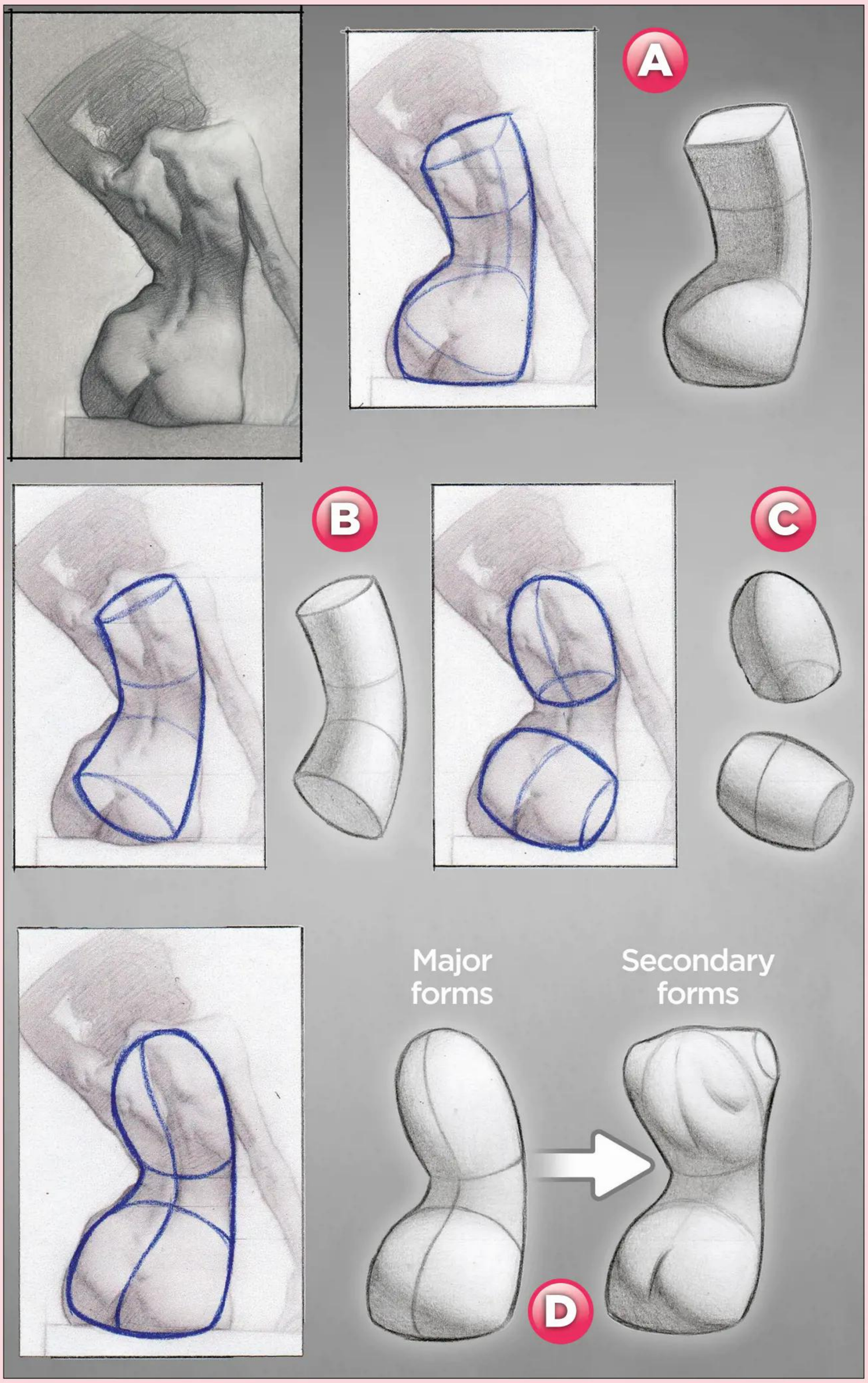
3 UNDERSTANDING THE POSE

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



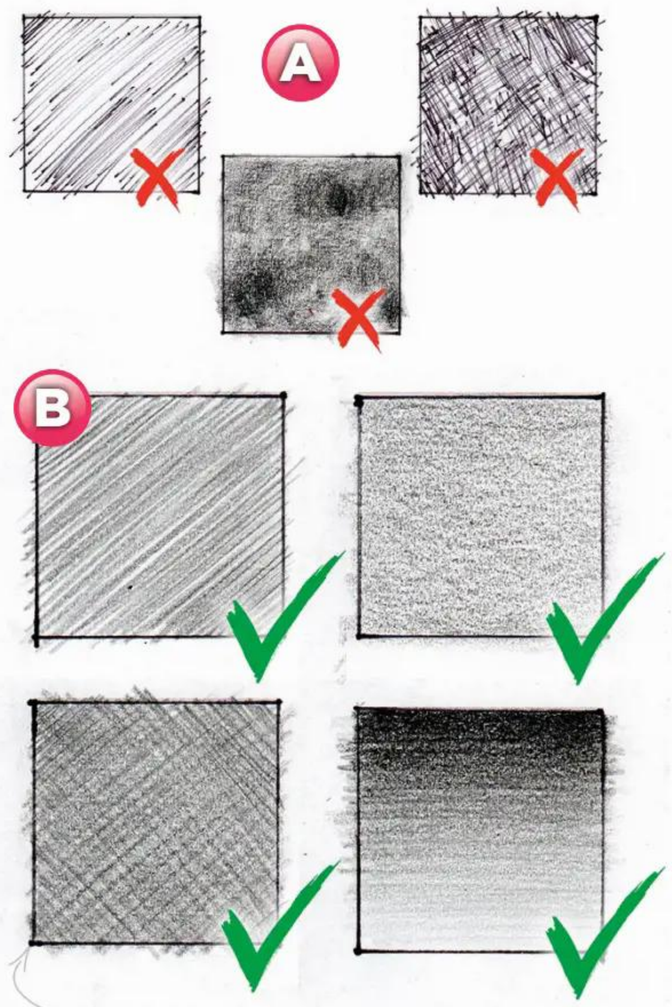
4 CONSIDER WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY

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



5 SIMPLIFYING FORMS AND TONE WASHES

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



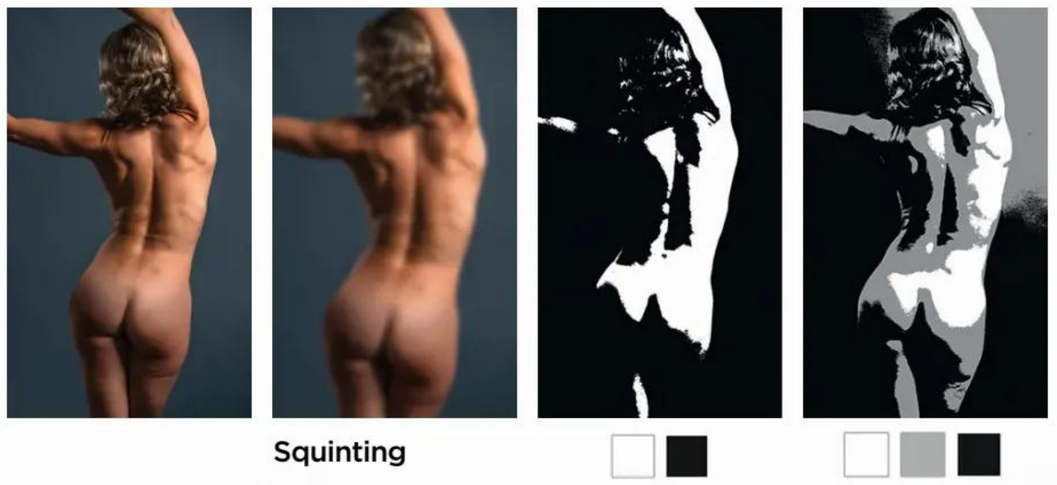
6 PERFECT TONE MASSES WITH QUALITY MARKS

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

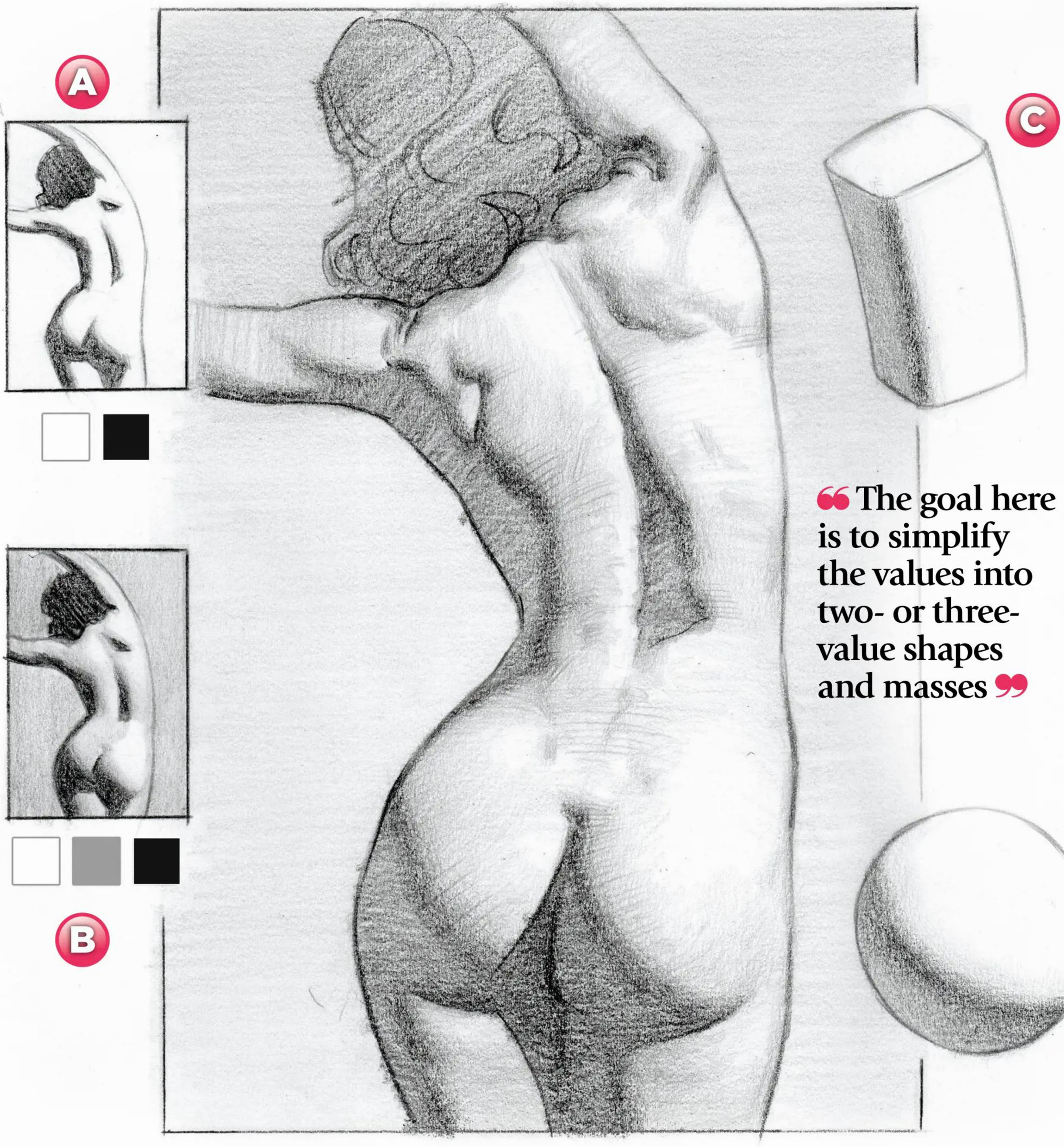


7 SIMPLIFYING AND LIMITED VALUES

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



Squinting

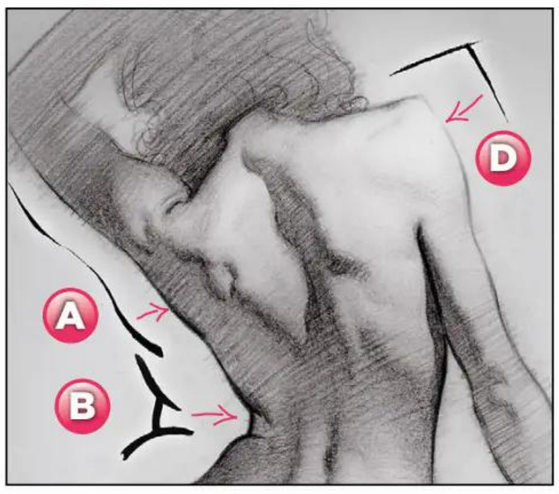


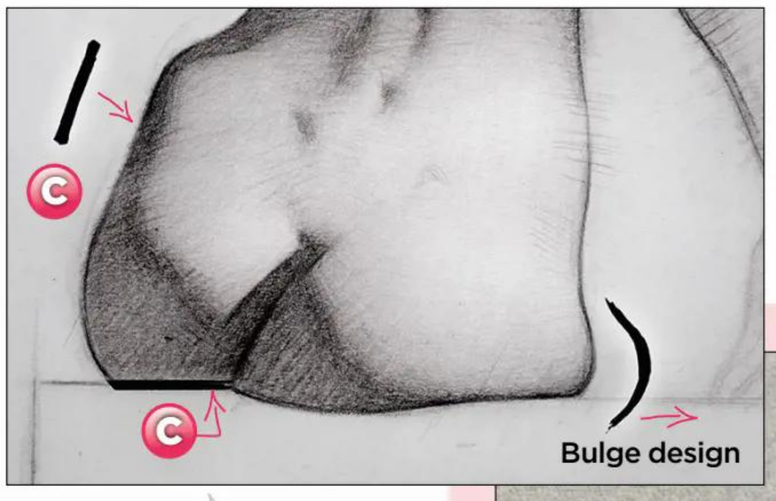
A

B

C

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

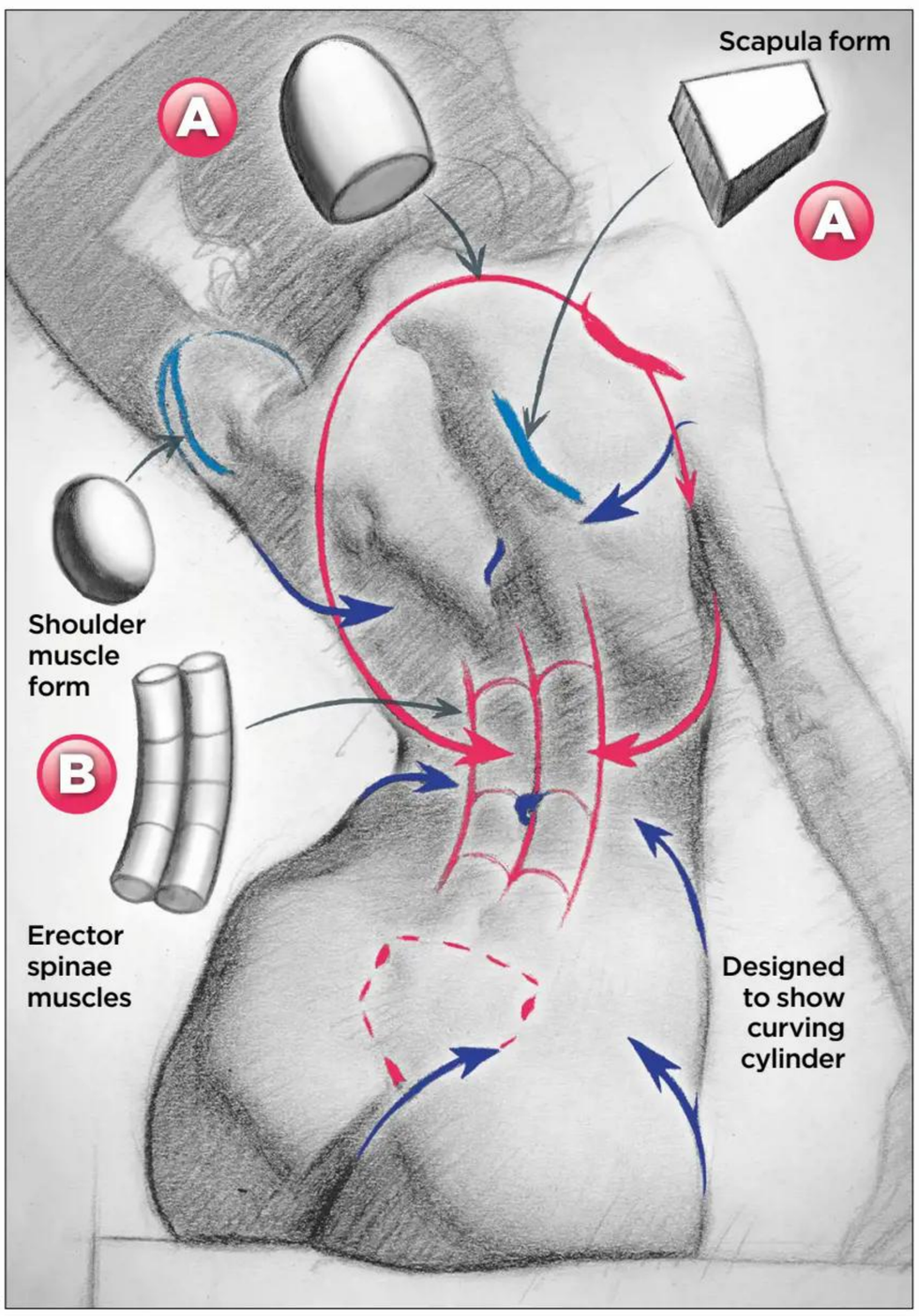




> Contour design can also define intersecting areas and suggest weight

8 DESIGNING THE CONTOUR

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



9 DON'T COPY DETAILS – DESIGN INSTEAD

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



10 CONTROLLING CONTRAST FOR THE WIN!

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

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

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Procreate

CREATE DETAILED CHARACTER ART

Lux Mily shares her process for illustrating an engaging fantasy portrait with a strong colour scheme and polished details



This workshop breaks down the process for creating this artwork in Procreate, from the initial sketch to final render. The entire illustration was created using various brushes, with a strong emphasis on layer organisation, colour exploration and refining details over time. I like to work with greyscale early on to build up the values first, then experiment with colour later to ensure that the composition works well in both black and white, and full colour.

A big part of this process is using the Selection Tool to separate areas, making it easier to drop in flat colours or adjust specific sections without messing up the surrounding details. I also use Clipping masks a lot to add shading and lighting in a controlled manner. By working in stages, it gives me the freedom to experiment – whether that's trying out different palettes, testing lighting or rearranging compositional elements such as the birds in this piece.

One thing to keep in mind while working like this is patience. It's tempting to rush into the details, but it pays to take the time to build up each layer of the work carefully, step by step. I also recommend zooming out often to check the composition and make sure things are balanced before committing to heavy rendering. This approach helps keep the whole piece cohesive from start to finish.

Artist PROFILE

Lux Mily
LOCATION: Canada

Lux is a freelance artist and creative mind living in Toronto. She creates portraiture based on literature and imagination.
http://bit.ly/4gFuOSP

GET YOUR RESOURCES

https://bit.ly/259assets

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PROCREATE

CUSTOM BRUSHES: BLOCK BRUSH



A large square brush that is used to block in large areas of shapes.

HAIR BRUSH



Pressured brush with sharp tips for rendering smoke, hair and birds.

LINE BRUSH



Brush made with thin lines for creating texture on the face and hair.

ROUND BRUSH



Pressured brush use to render bits of everything.



1 Lay down a rough sketch

Have a general idea in mind, then lay down a loose black line sketch on a blank canvas to establish the basic composition and gesture. Keep things rough at first before getting too focused on fine detail and rendering. Be expressive and make mistakes before committing to a composition. This foundation is typically drawn on a single layer using a pencil or technical brush, allowing flexibility before colour or value work begins.



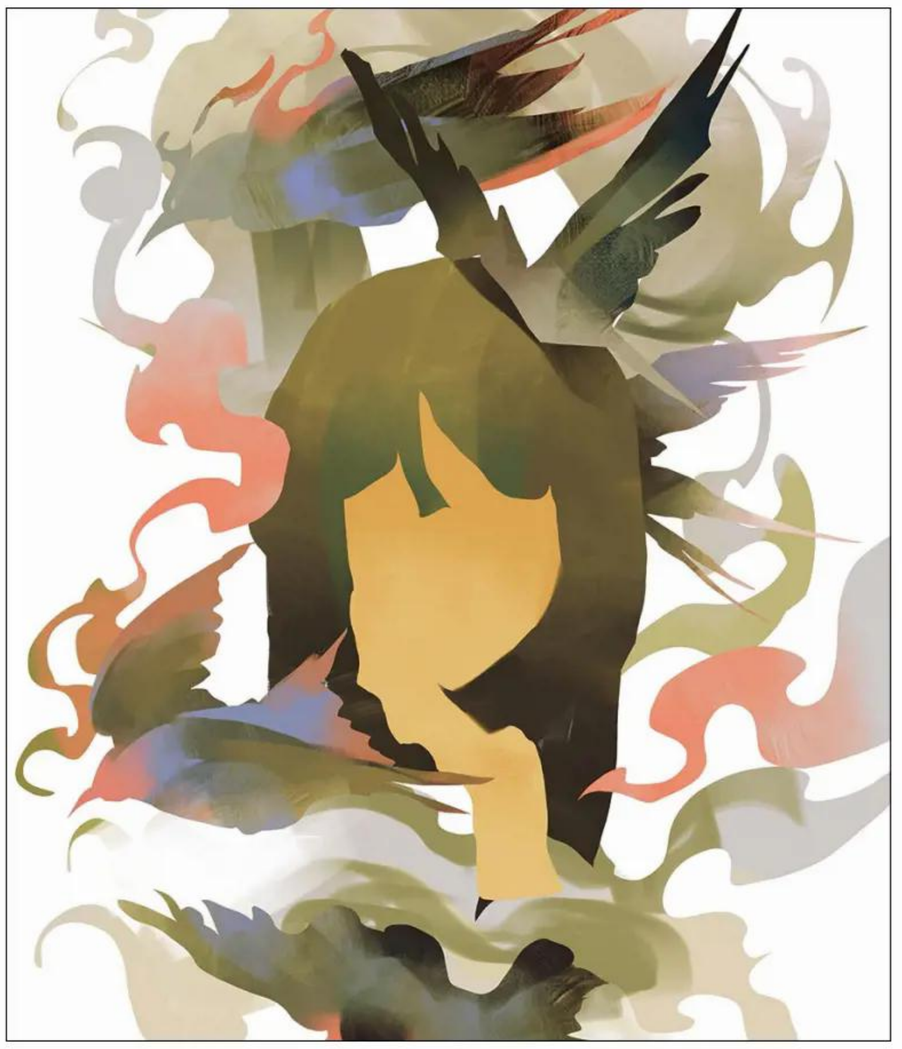
2 Block in shapes

A large brush is used to roughly block in broad areas of greyscale. The figure's silhouette and surrounding smoke are filled with light to mid-tone grey, while the hair and background elements are kept darker to create contrast. Each element is placed on a separate layer, serving as a guideline for balancing lights and darks, and establishing visual clarity before any details are added.



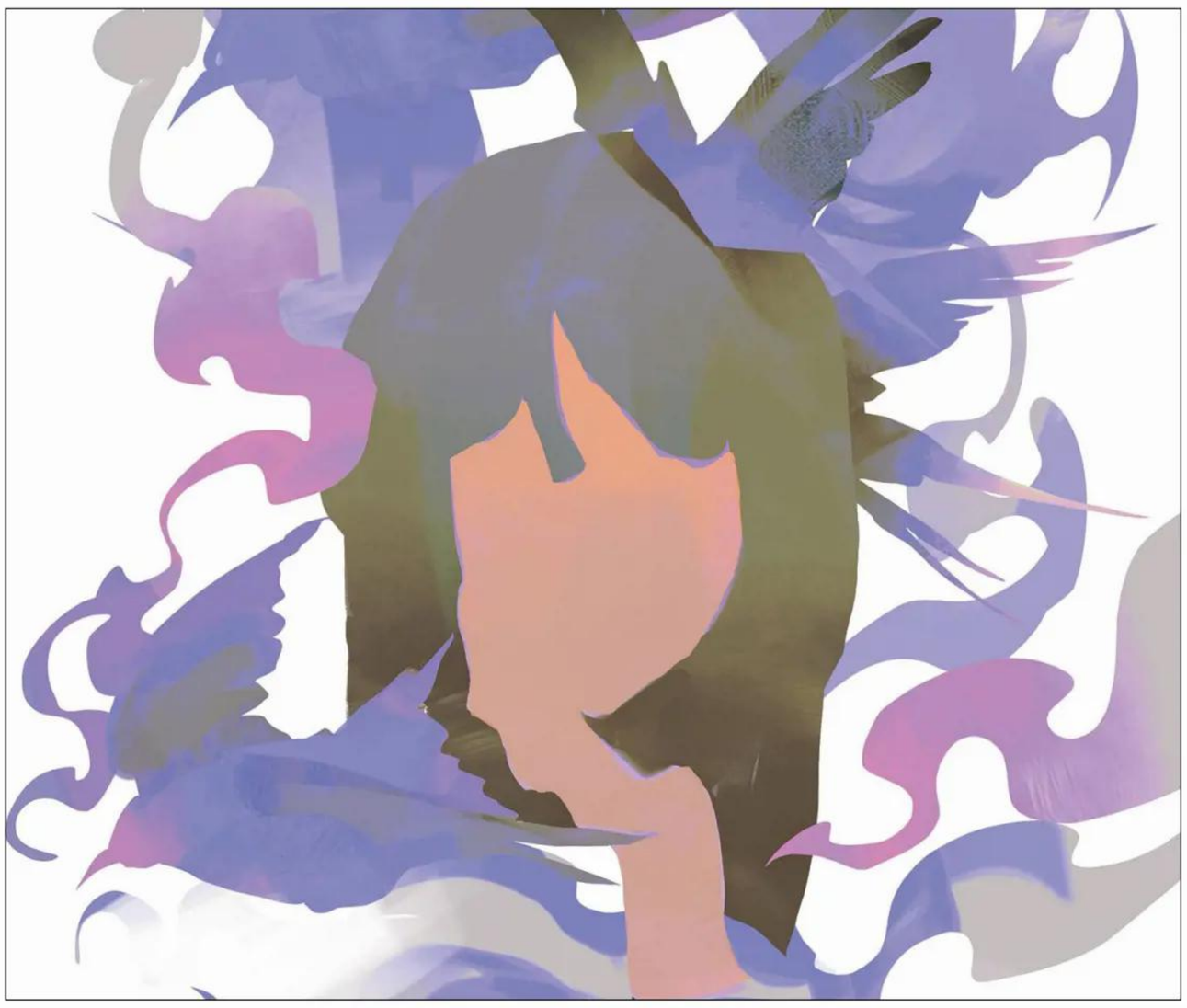
3 Focus on layer management

The Selection tool is used to precisely outline each individual object, helping to cleanly define shapes and edges. The smoke surrounding the figure is created by freehanding swirls and organic forms to maintain a sense of movement. At this stage, careful layer management becomes important. Understanding which layers stack above or below others will make adjustments easier later on.



4 Arranging values

Flat colour is applied to the separated layers, each of which is alpha locked to allow quick and clean colour placement. An earthy tone is used for the figure, providing contrast against the vivid pink strokes. Detailed rendering is avoided in favour of viewing the composition as a whole, maintaining a broad perspective on colour balance and visual harmony.



5 Experimenting with the colours

The colour scheme can be adjusted using tools such as Gradient Map and Curves to explore a wider range of variations. Have some fun experimenting with contrasts of hue, warm and cold, complementary colours and so on. Colours have strong emotional associations, and exploring colour interactions will unlock so many more options when setting out to create an artwork.



6 Finalising the colours

The colour palette is finalised, establishing a solid foundation for further rendering and detail work. Simple shading is introduced to begin shaping the forms, while any variation in brush stroke size is kept to a minimum. This approach helps prevent over-rendering in small areas. It also mimics the limitations that one would experience when working with traditional media.



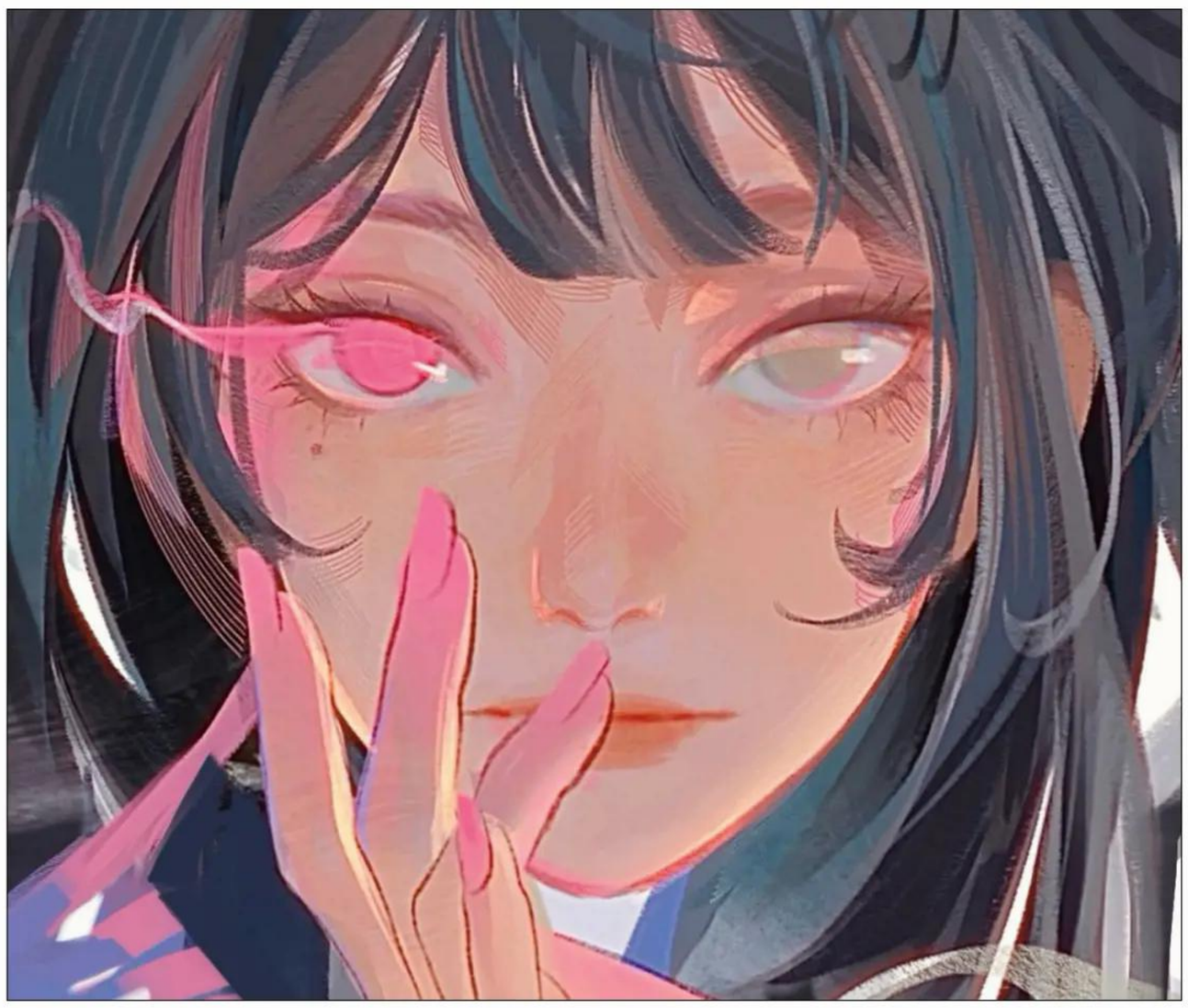
7 Begin rendering the portrait

Simple rendering begins at this stage. Alpha locks previously used to preserve crisp edges can be turned off to allow for more organic rendering. A general rule of thumb is to avoid perfect, round brush strokes because they can be distractingly soft or hard edged. Try to keep the brush strokes clean and big. Heavily textured brushes are best avoided: they can complicate the subject and reduce clarity. ➳



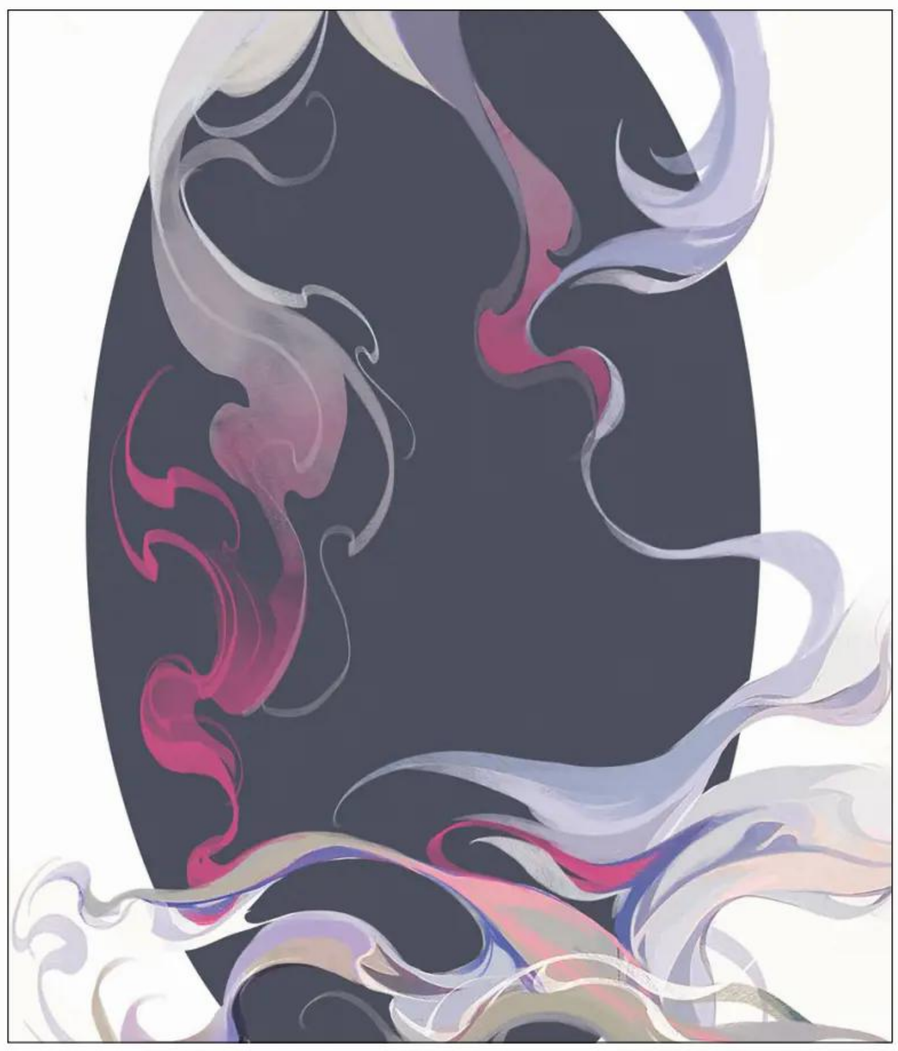
8 Define the main figure

Details on the figure are gradually built up, with shadows developed around the eyes, nose and cheeks to add three-dimensionality and depth. Brush strokes transition from large and blocky to more refined and precise. The hair is rendered using uniform line strokes following its natural direction. Attention is given to layering the hair, treating sections as groups rather than individual strands.



9 Applying stylised texture

Tighten the face with greater details, adding a light source and highlights. Line direction, stroke weight, texture and colour can bring a lot of personality to the work. Customised line brushes are used to add subtle texture, enhancing the skin and hair details. Play around with different brushes, approach the renders in a more expressive way, and just have some fun!



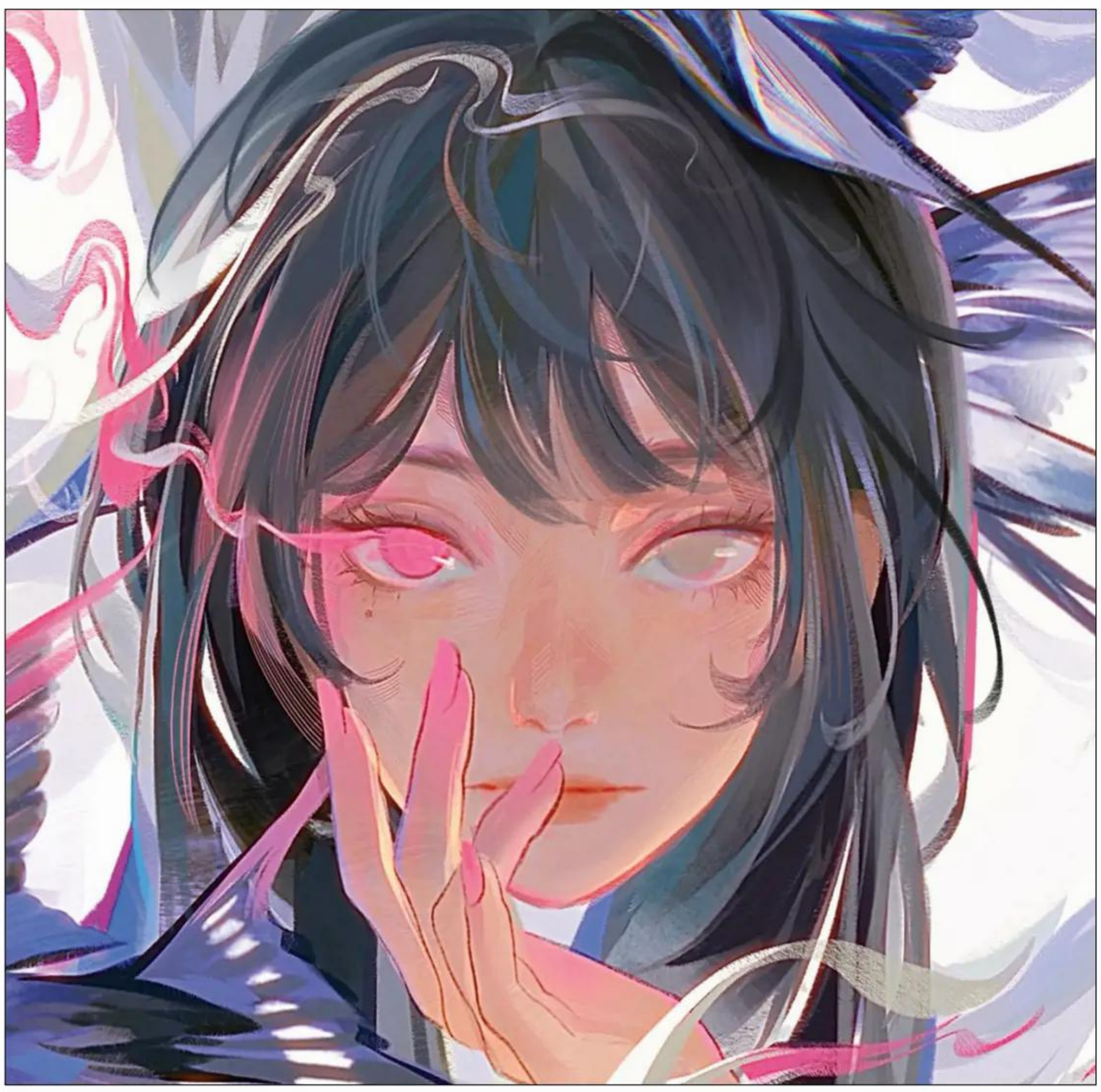
10 Rendering background

Decorative elements are worked on next. Often, the surrounding space in a painting can be as evocative as the subject itself, so attention to negative space is important. The Selection tool is used to establish the general flow of the smoke, followed by the addition of smaller details to increase visual interest.



11 Rendering the birds

The background is rendered separately with other layers hidden to maintain visual clarity. The edges of the wings are made more transparent and softly faded to convey a sense of lightness. Because the portrait is relatively static, the secondary subjects are given more dynamic poses to create contrast. Each bird is painted on its own layer, allowing for easy rearrangement to achieve a balanced composition around the figure.



12 Adding the final details

The figure and birds are combined. A mix of large areas of hair and smaller, loose strands adds visual interest. The outermost layers of hair are thinner.

Photoshop

USE COLOURS THAT BOOST YOUR ART

Create illustrations with high saturation and strong contrast to catch the eye, with concept artist and illustrator **Sora Kim**

Artist **PROFILE**

Sora Kim
LOCATION: South Korea

Sora has been a concept artist and illustrator since 2014, working on many fantasy games while developing a versatile range of styles.
http://bit.ly/3J4AgCp



I have often designed suits of fantasy armour using animals as motifs. For this personal project, however, I wanted to use an animal that rarely appears in my work. The koi, a type of carp, is an ornamental fish raised in Korea, Japan and China. This series actually started with a plate armour design. Although the armour had a Western form, I used Asian-style strings to connect the armour plates and swords.

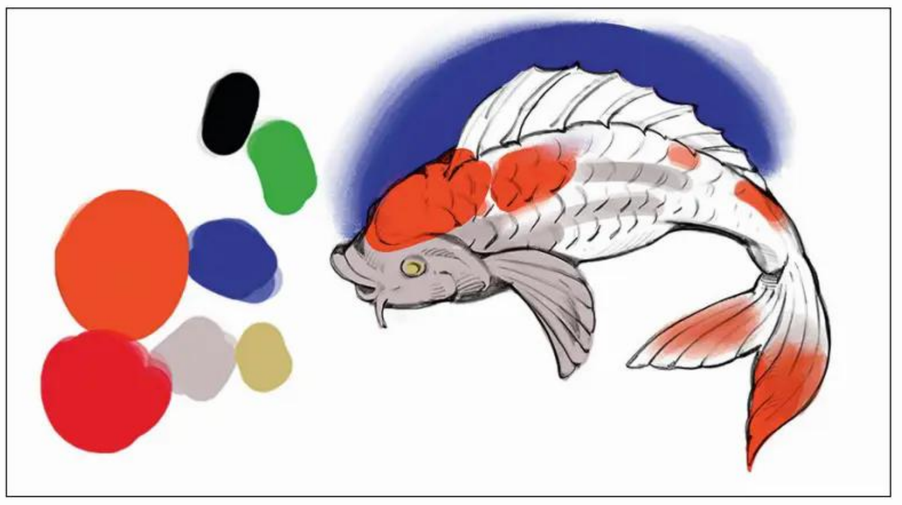
This time, I took the concept further by including traditional Korean elements, drawing a female character wearing a hanbok (traditional Korean dress). I wanted the overall silhouette, to evoke the shape of a fish, not just the decorative details. As part of a series from the previous artwork, I maintained a strong contrast in light and shadow and used rich primary colours, adding various textures to prevent the image from looking flat.

In this workshop, I'll show you my process and explain how to create and apply your own texture patterns from a photo.



1 Taking elements from the koi armour

I decide to incorporate graphic elements from the previous work: strong contrast, high saturation, rich colours and primary colour usage. I also decide to use the flat fish line drawing from the piece. Although I change the armour to a dress, I keep the three swords and the Asian-style armour ties.



2 Colour palette

I prepare a high-saturation colour palette, knowing that I'll need to control the amounts used to create visual emphasis and an eye-catching image. For this illustration, I'll mainly use orange and red, with ultramarine – the complementary colour – for the background.





3 Sketching with a silhouette in mind

I designed a fish-shaped helmet for my previous armour artwork. This time, I want a more indirect fish-like silhouette. I transform the traditional Korean hairstyle (gachae – a large wig) into a fish silhouette. I also tie up the skirt to resemble a fish's fin. ➳







4 Establishing dark shadows in the sketch phase

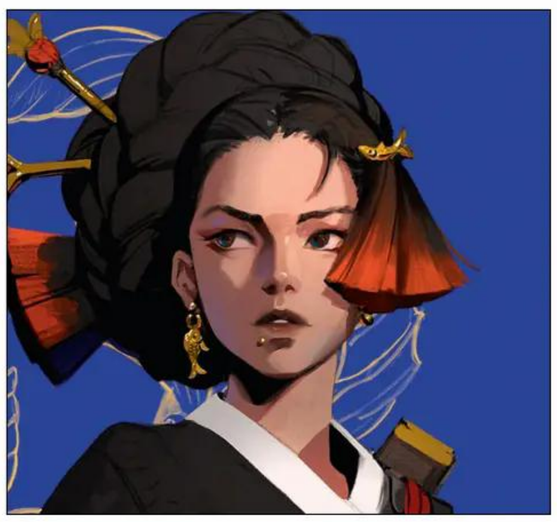
I apply the black values for contrast during the early sketching stage. I decide to make this character look stronger, so I give her a sword to hold in her right hand – previously the figure's skirt was being held by this hand.



5 Understanding the tonal value by laying down flat colours

I block in the colours, focusing on the orange/red hues of the koi. This step helps me understand the overall colour scheme. I recommend exploring various colours during this step, creating many options before deciding. I now decide on the primary colour, and I plan to add richer primary colours later on, such as blue, gold and green.

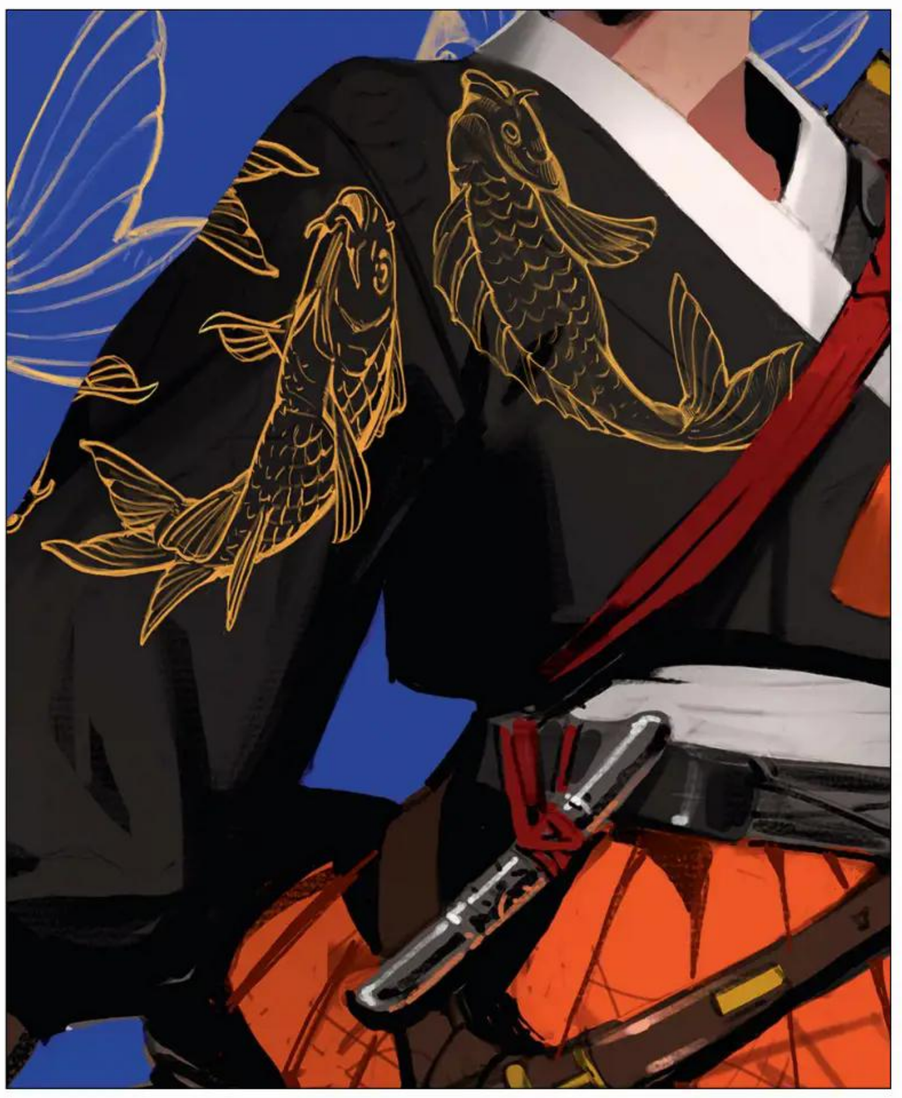






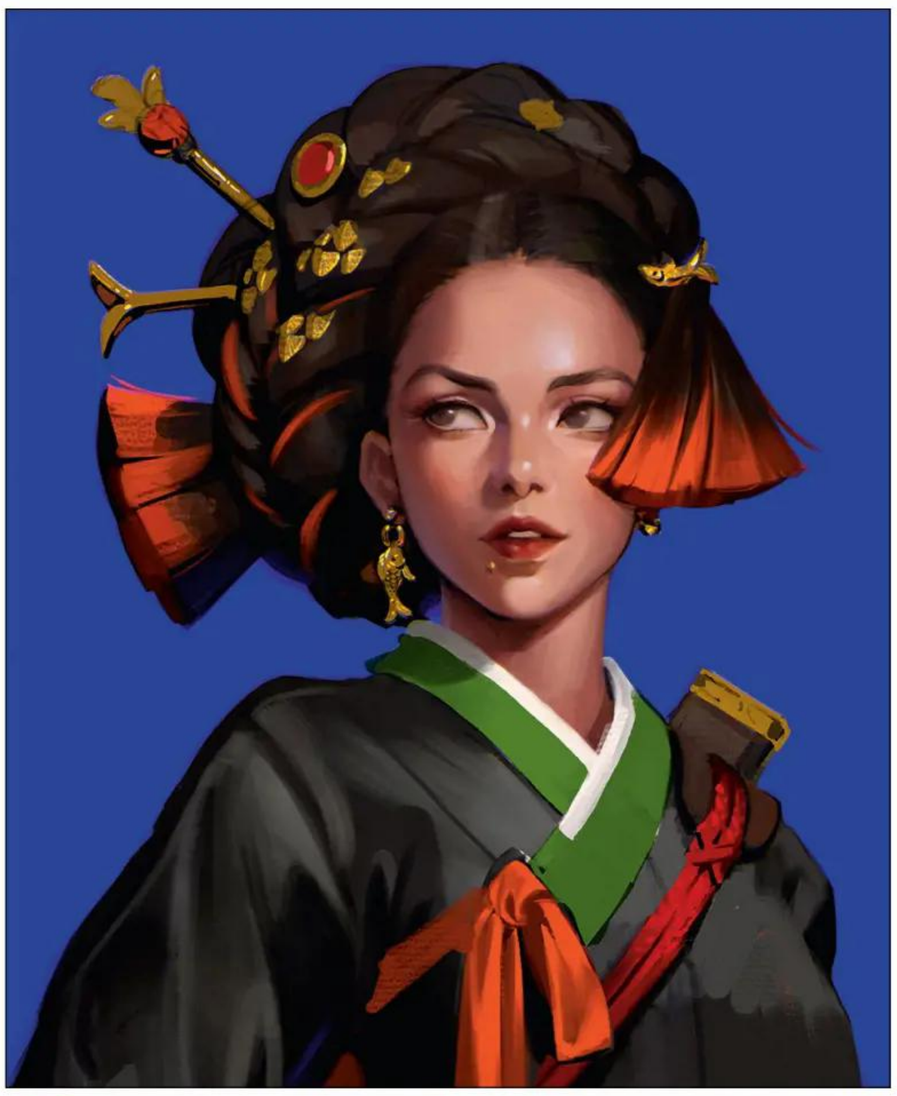
6 Refining the colour scheme

I want to add a bold colour to the background, and because the main motif is a fish, blue seems like a good choice. I keep the background on a separate layer and merge the sketch and colour layers to prepare for rendering. The contrast between blue and orange is a key technique for drawing the viewer's gaze towards the character's face. However, the background's darker value simultaneously makes the figure and the background appear poorly separated. To fix this, I emphasise the contrast by further brightening the light areas on the face and skirt.



7 Temporarily apply patterns to the character's clothing

The overall look is missing a sense of luxury, so I add gold trim to the top. I also arrange the line drawing of the fish design I made in the previous artwork. I keep the pattern on a separate layer and work with a Clipping mask to avoid mixing it with the clothing's wrinkles.



8 Detailed rendering

I paint reflections from the background's blue light onto the character. I also add green to the collar for a richer colour palette. If you establish the colour palette in advance, you can easily apply it. I experiment with various brushes, making sure not to break the main forms.







9 Boldly changing the design

I add more decorations and render them in detail. I also paint a white petticoat under the skirt to create the appearance of a rich, flowing fin. This change also obscures the shoes, making the character look even more like a fish!



10 Drawing the clothing pattern

After finishing the rendering of the wrinkles, I refine the fish pattern. Working with a separate layer and a Clipping mask makes this step easier. Compared to the black or green fabric texture, the gold embroidery is described with a wider range of values, ensuring it stands out. ➳





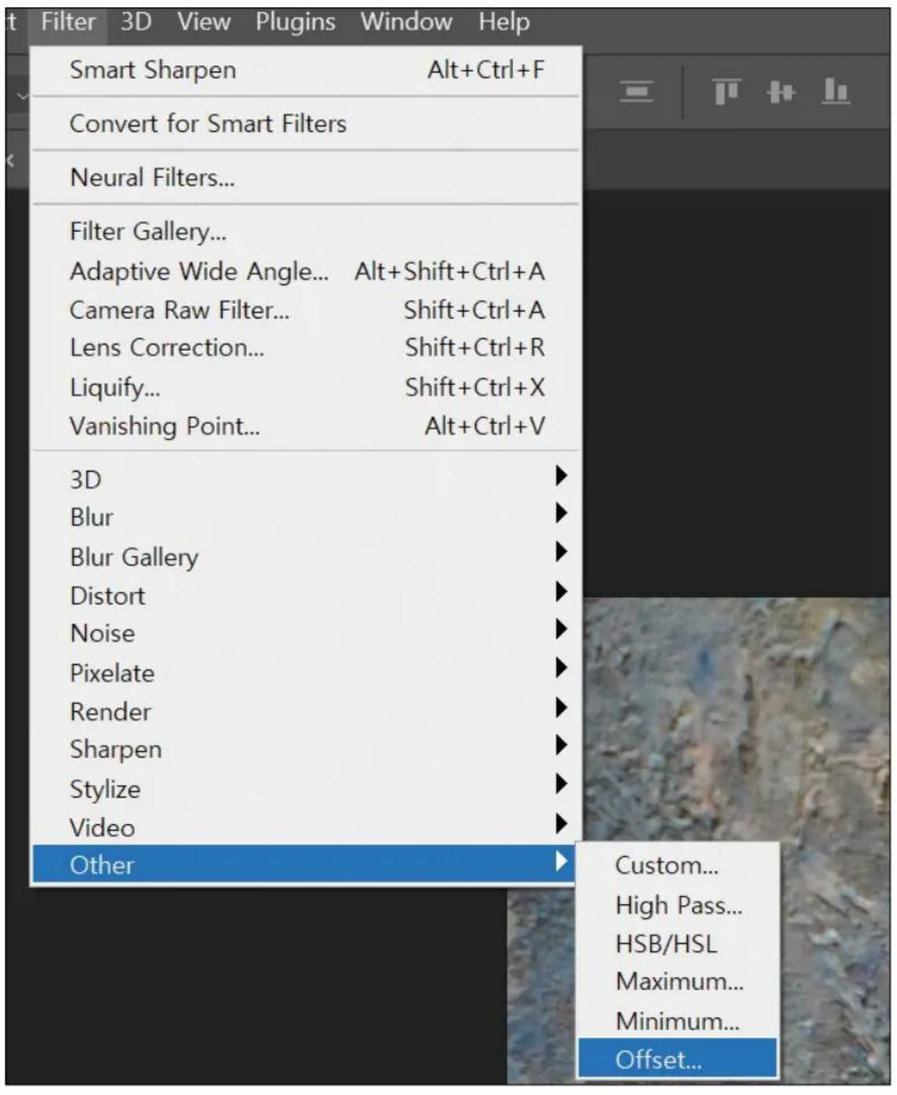
11 Finalising the character details

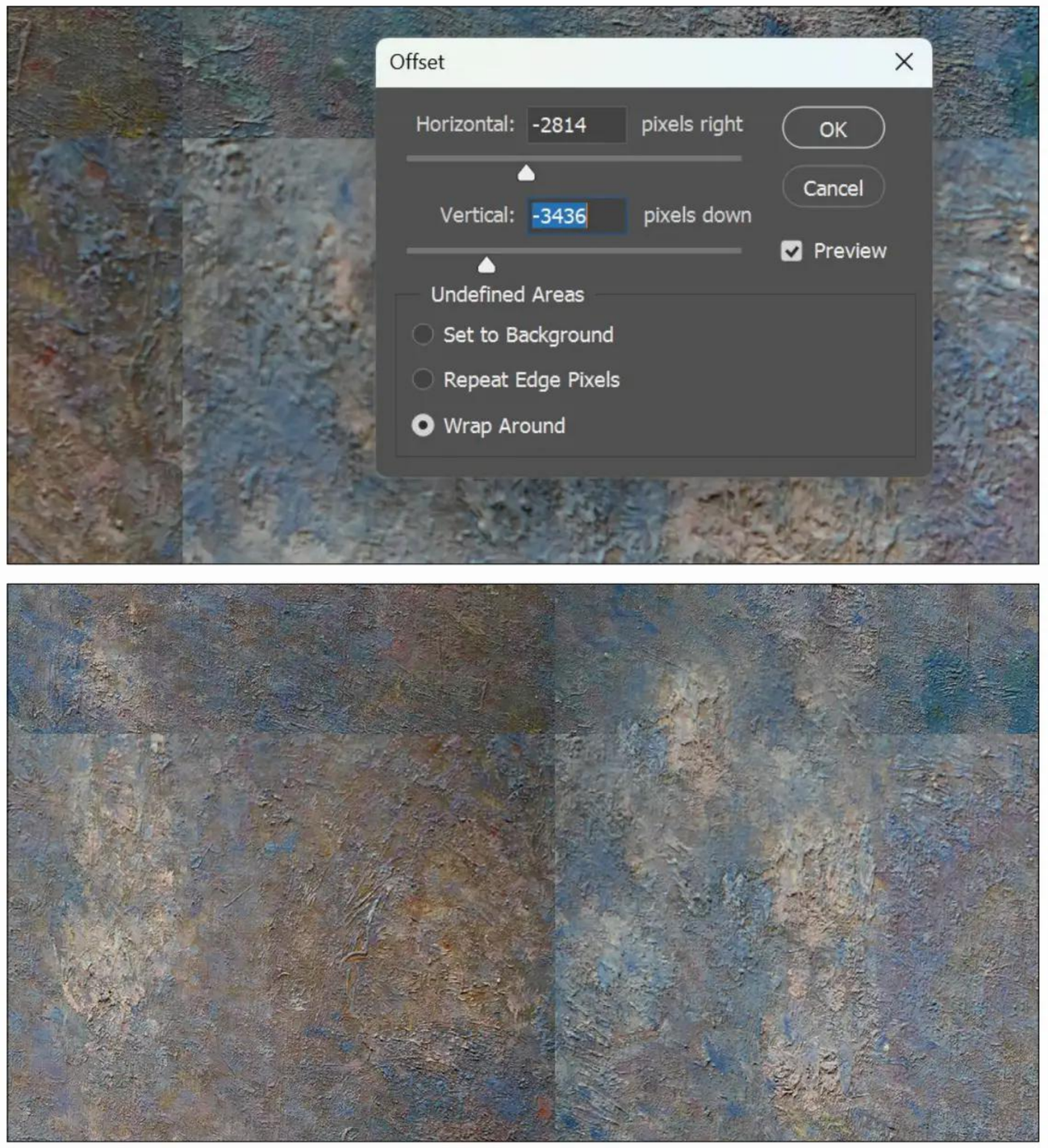
I render the accessories further and pay attention to the folds to complete the skirt. I make the outer orange skirt look like a silk texture. I use the blue, green and orange colours used on the accessories to let the rich colours spread throughout the composition. I also add strands to hair to the figure's head, which is the focal point.



12 Photographing an oil paint texture

I want a straightforward way to introduce a painted feel to my artwork without compromising either the contrast that I've created or my choice of highly saturated colours. I decide that the solution is to take a texture from an old art piece and apply it to my brush. I crop a section from a photo that I took at the Getty Center in Los Angeles of a painting by Claude Monet, entitled The Portal of Rouen Cathedral in Morning Light. I used a photograph, but if you're skilled with oil paint then you could also paint the texture yourself.





13 Adjusting the photo

In Photoshop, I use Filter>Other>Offset to shift the image vertically and horizontally. Next, I use the Clone Stamp Tool to blend the edges, creating a seamless image. It's also a good idea to adjust the lightness to a mid-range value. Adjust the saturation and colour to your preference. I prefer to make it highly saturated.





14 Registering and using the pattern

I register the finished seamless image as a pattern by selecting Edit>Define Pattern. Next, I return to the Tools menu, find the Pattern Stamp Tool and select the pattern that I've just registered. I apply this pattern in Soft Light blending mode with 50 per cent Opacity, which gives the illustration a textured feel.





15 Give the artwork a final polish

I lightly apply the pattern to the character and check the overall balance before finishing. During the final finishing stage I apply Sharpen, Chromatic Aberration and Noise filters to achieve a result that's both sharp and raw/gritty. Before calling the artwork complete, I make sure that the high saturation, strong contrast and rich colours I planned at the beginning are all clearly expressed on the canvas.



Photoshop & Blender

USE 3D MODELS IN YOUR CONCEPT ART

Misa Steinmetz explains how she incorporates 3D techniques into her 2D workflow, creating this painting of a giant statue

Artist **PROFILE**

Misa Steinmetz

LOCATION: US

Misa is a visual development artist at Sony Pictures Animation, with a background in fine art. She loves plein-air painting in her free time.

www.misasteinart.com



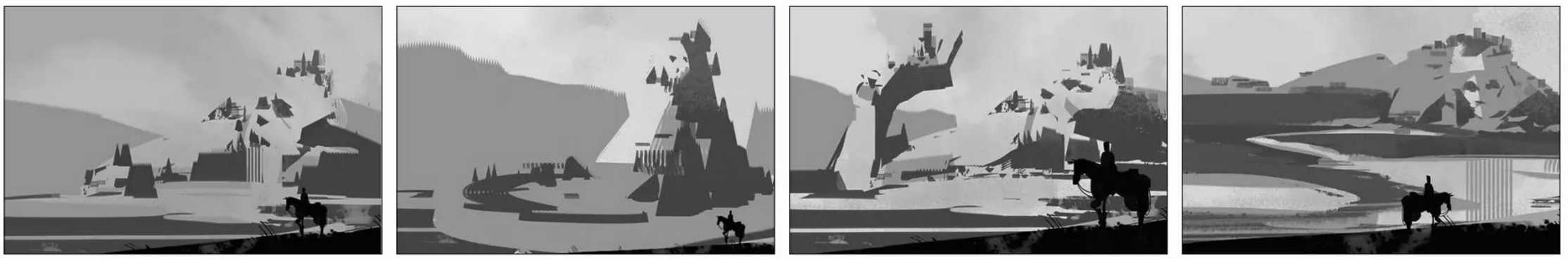
I started my career just with digital painting, but over the years I began to incorporate more and more 3D techniques to speed up my process. Having a solid understanding of the art fundamentals and 2D skills is essential, but learning how to use 3D – even in a basic way – is very useful for producing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

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

Blender has been my 3D tool of choice because it's free and there are so many tutorials and resources online available. There are many more 3D tools to learn such as Unreal Engine and 3DCoat, but I always recommend Blender as a starting place for your 3D journey.

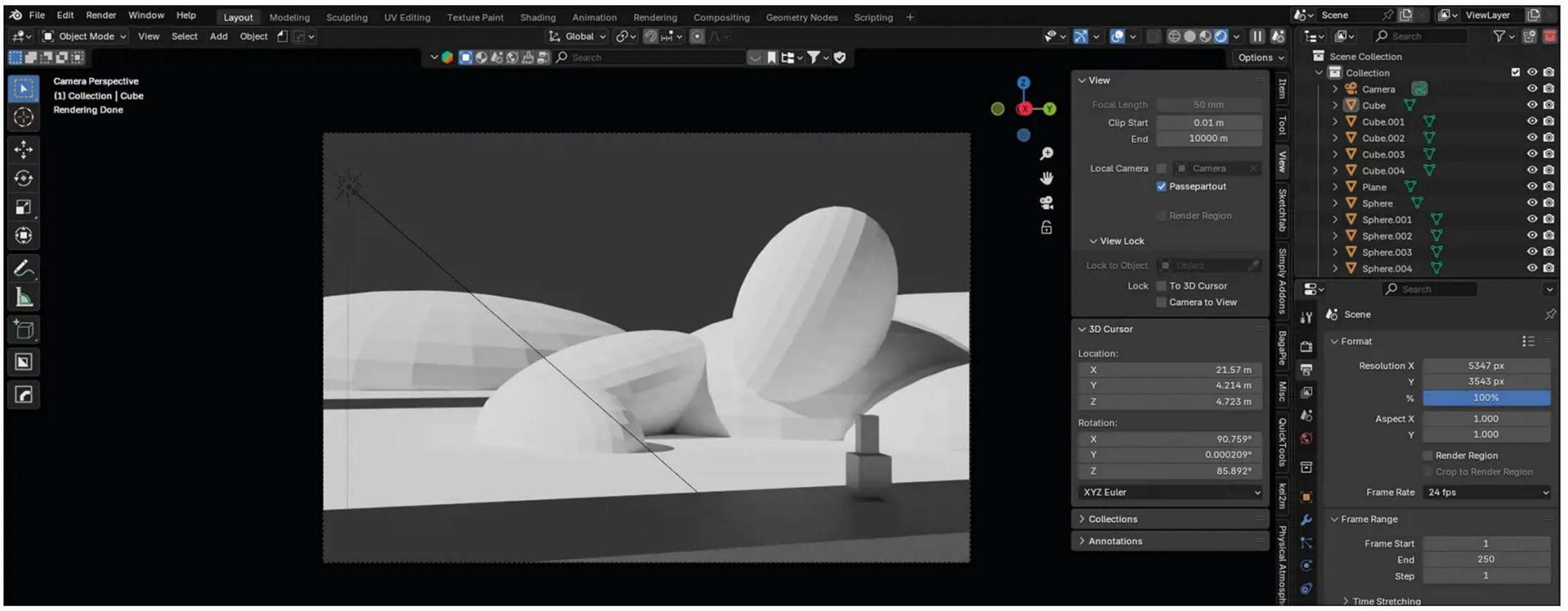
It can be easy to get sucked into spending too much time in 3D and not progressing on your piece, but I've found that going between your 3D scene and painting over in 2D helps a lot, and for this workshop I'll be sharing my process of creating a simple 3D blockout to push to a final painting in Photoshop.





1 Create thumbnail sketches

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



2 Build and light a rough 3D blockout

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

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: FOLIAGE

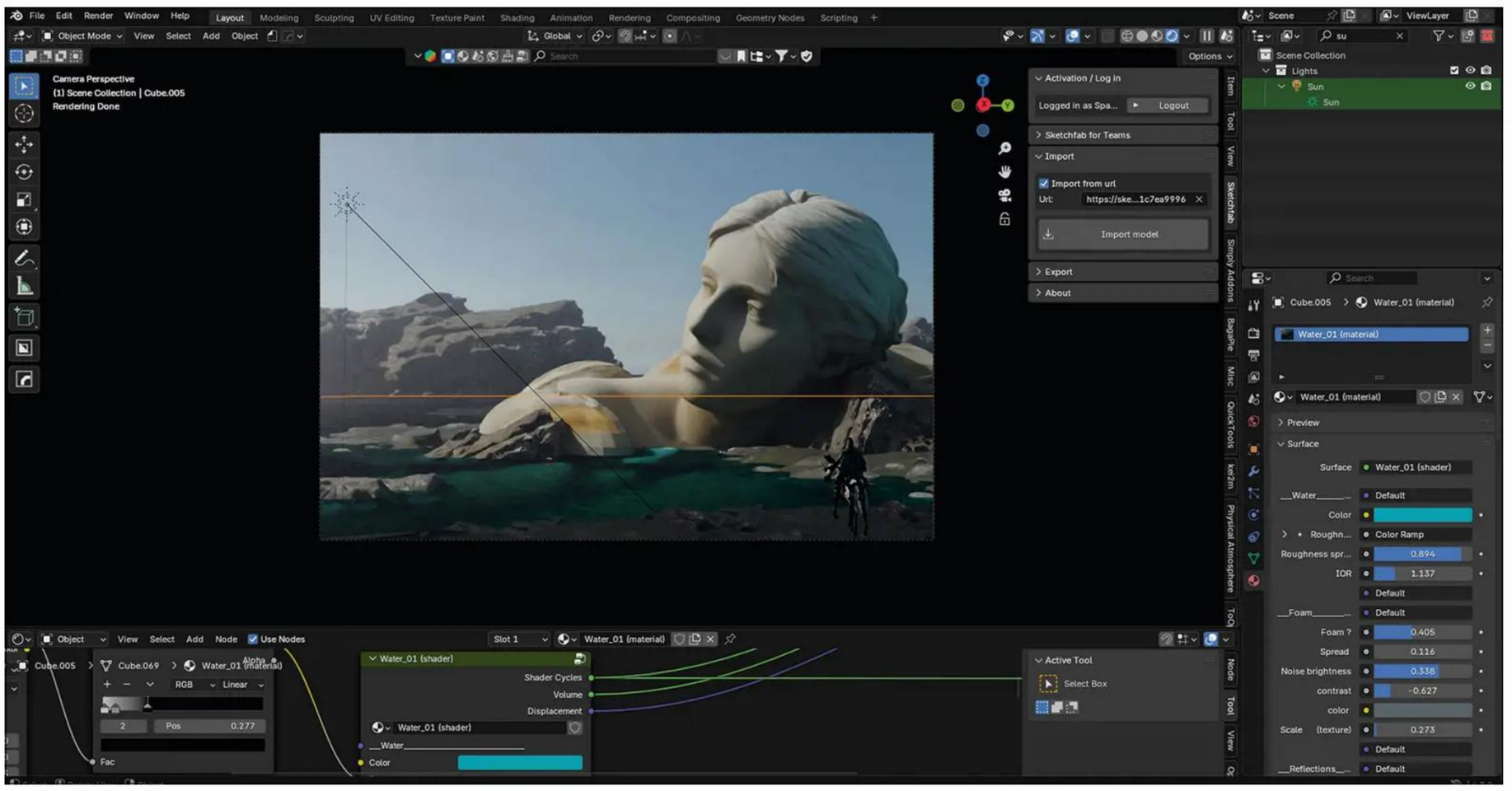
Useful for painting trees, bushes and some rock textures because of its jagged edges.

LINE TEXTURE

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

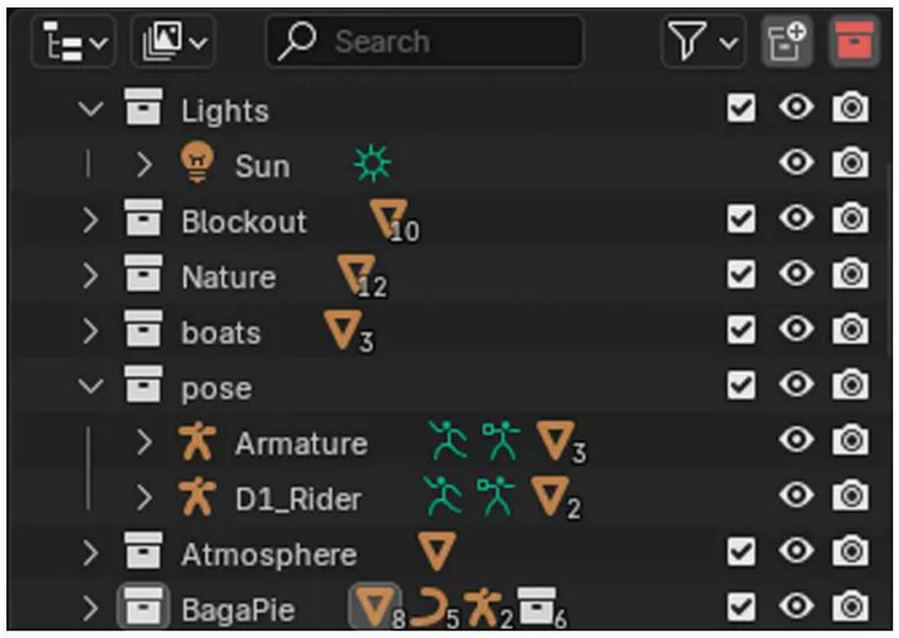
GET YOUR RESOURCES

Visit https://bit.ly/2Dmeets3D



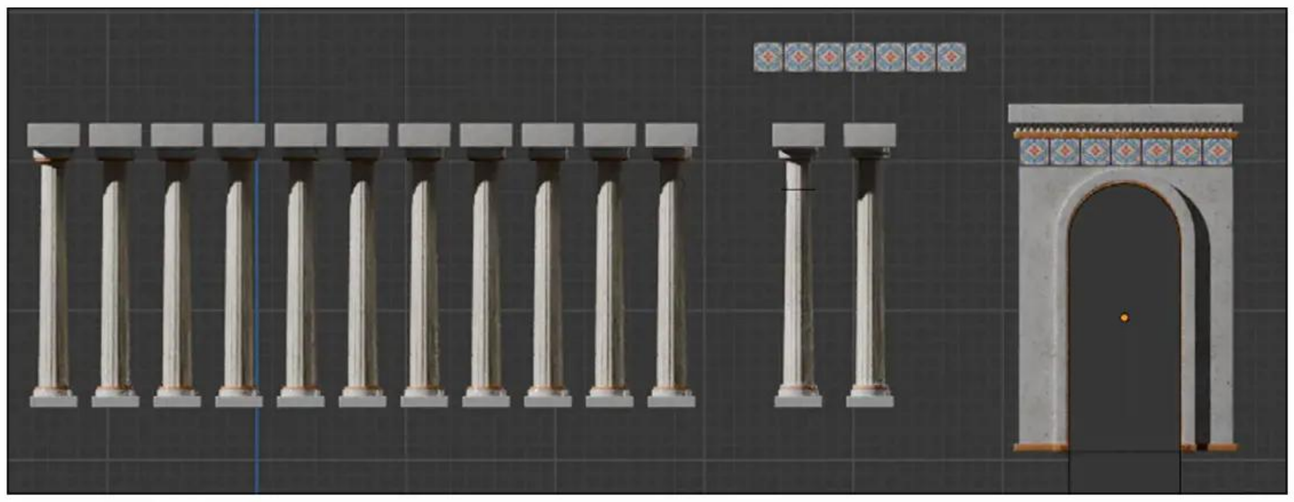
3 Introduce 3D assets to the composition

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



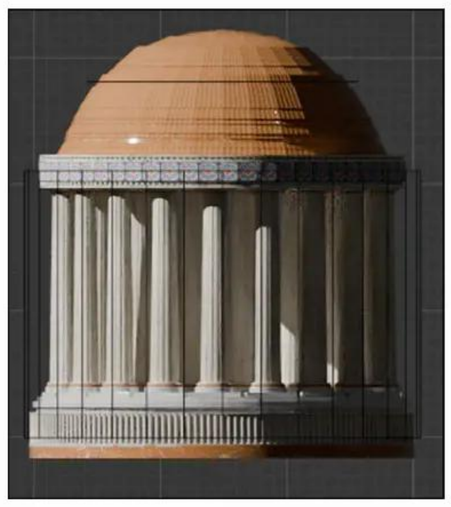
4 Cleaning up the scene

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



5 Constructing 3D set pieces

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





6 Paint a tile in Photoshop

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



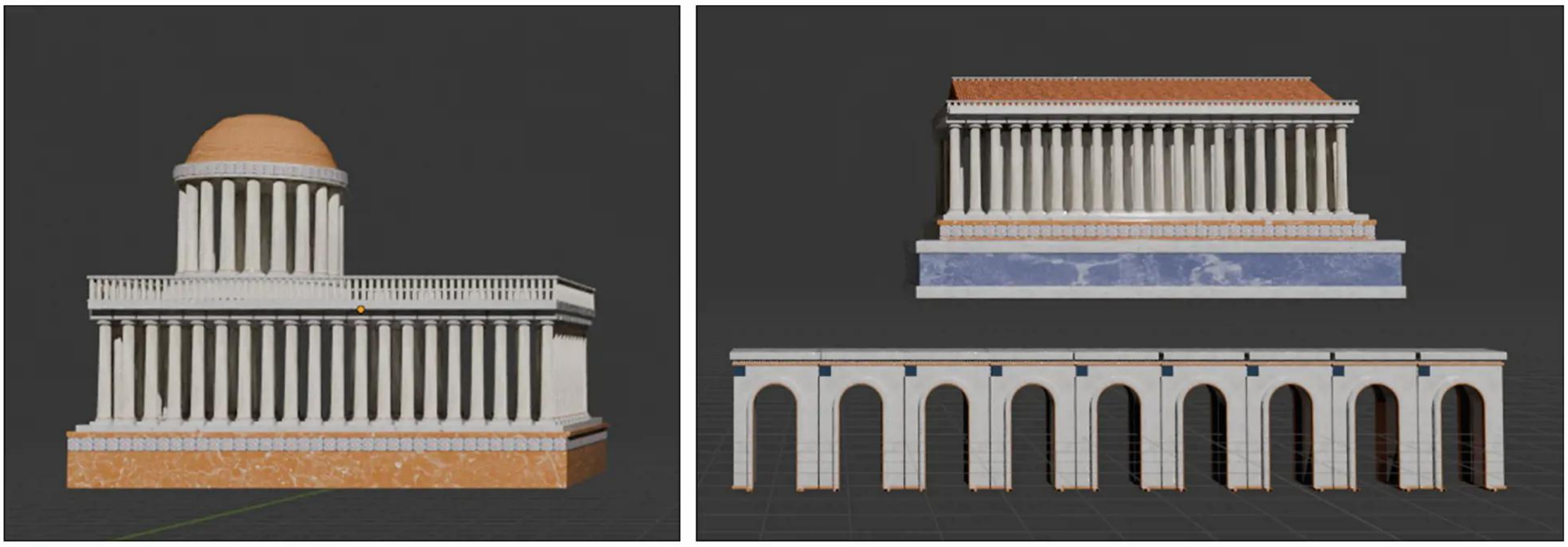
7 Posing the arms of the gigantic statue

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



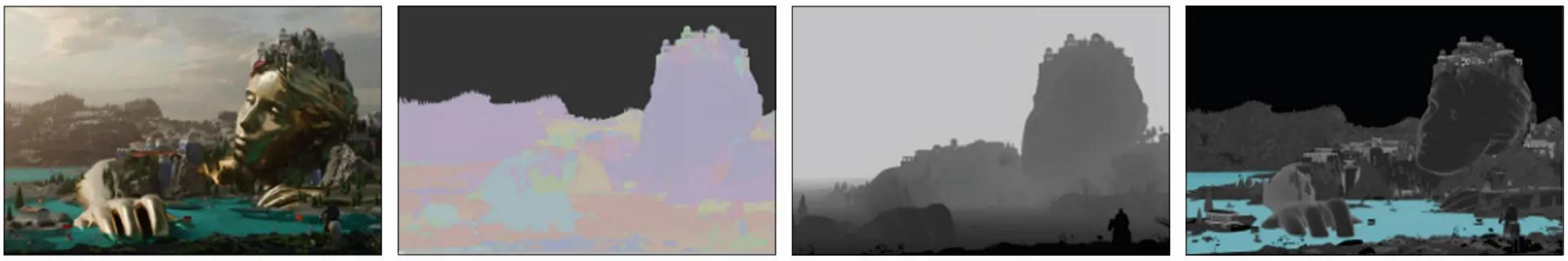
8 First pass in Photoshop

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



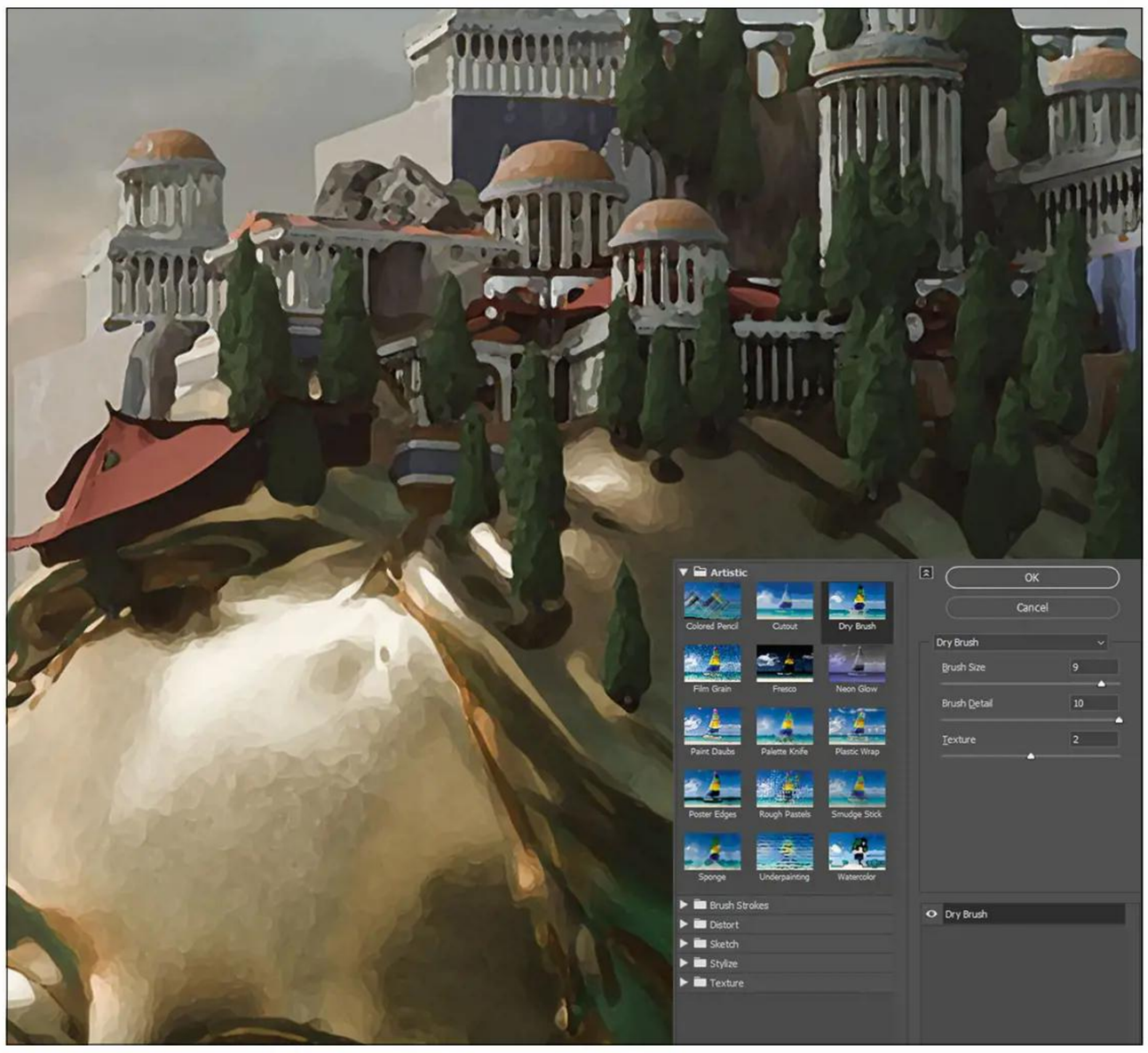
9 Assembling more buildings

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



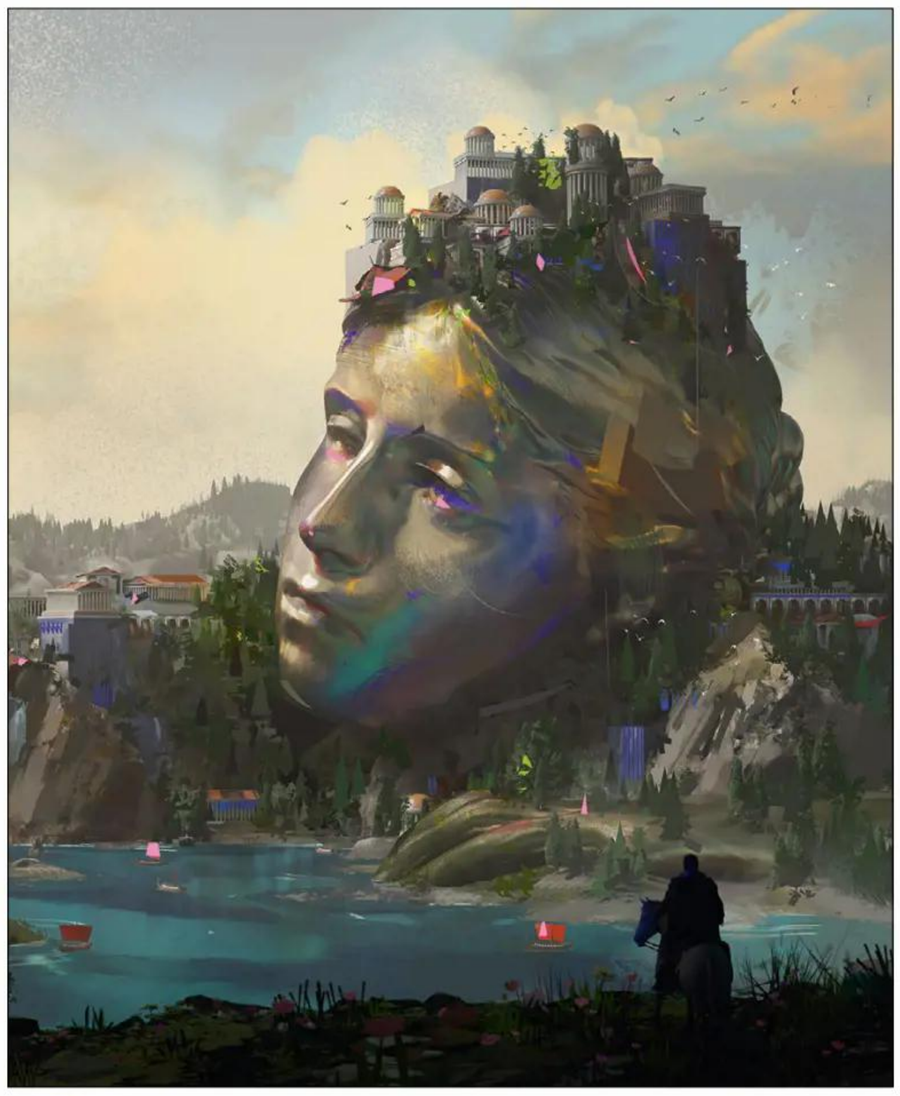
10 Rendering 3D passes

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



11 Apply Photoshop filters

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



12 Pushing the painting

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



13 Adding light to the face

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



14 Making final touches

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

Artist insight

DRAW ON EMOTION AND SYMBOLISM

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

Artist **PROFILE**

Katja Škorjanc
LOCATION: Slovenia

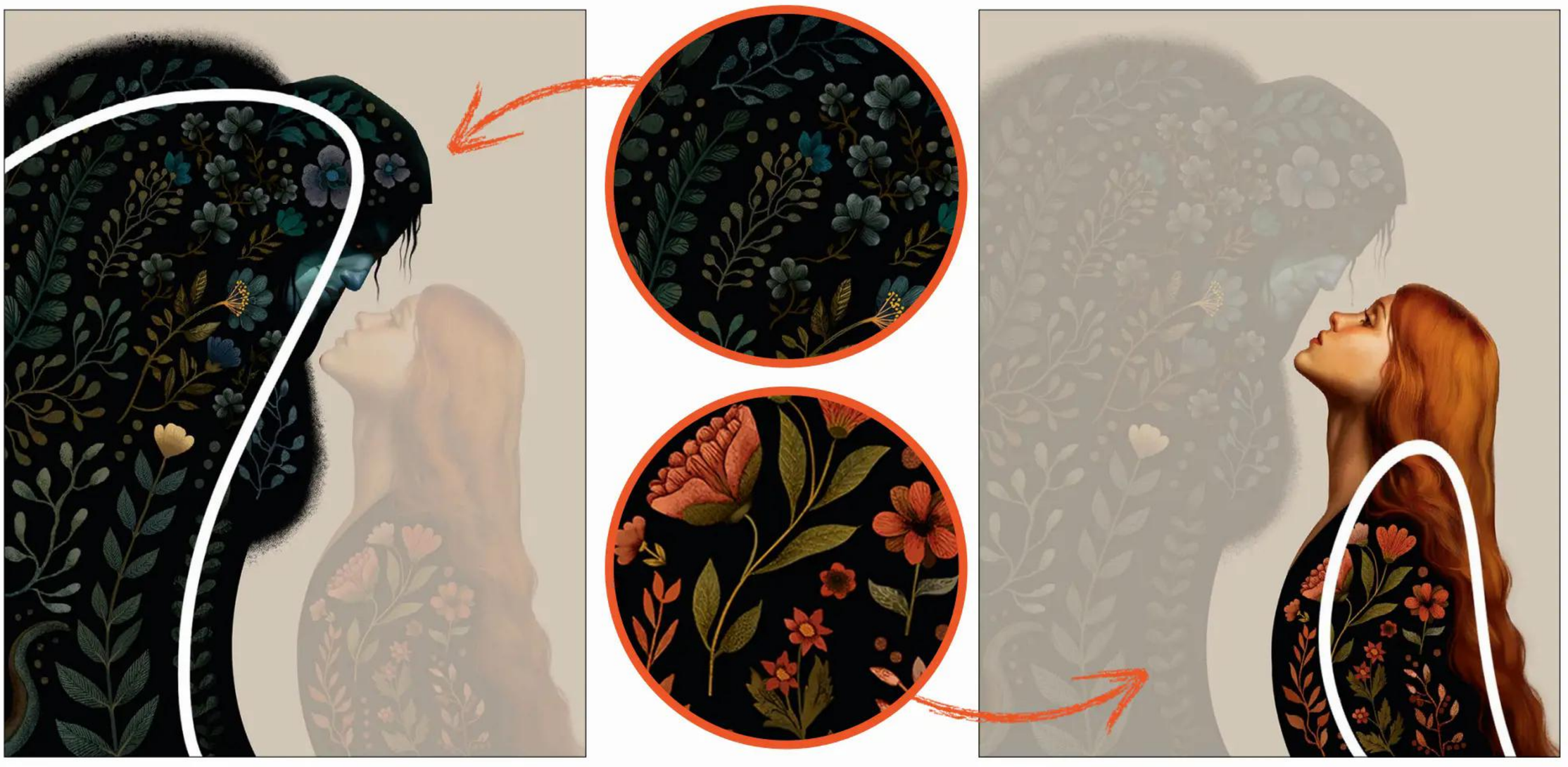
Katja is a full-time senior concept artist and art director at a mobile game company. She has an art history masters degree and is a musician in her free time, playing a range of instruments. **https://bit.ly/4oZJIFS**



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

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

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



1 SYMBOLISM IN THE ART

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

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

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

2 BODY AND SHAPE

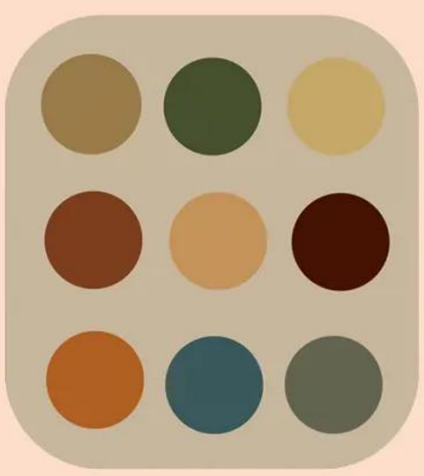
Build the figure as a vessel, not a body. The silhouette that we see here is rounded, iconic and spiral, and there's sacred logic behind it. It's depicting Mokosh, the Slavic goddess of earth, weaving, fertility, woman's work and destiny. She's known for weaving the thread of destiny of people, so her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





3 LIMIT YOUR PALETTE

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



4 LIGHT VS SHADOW, LIFE VS DEATH

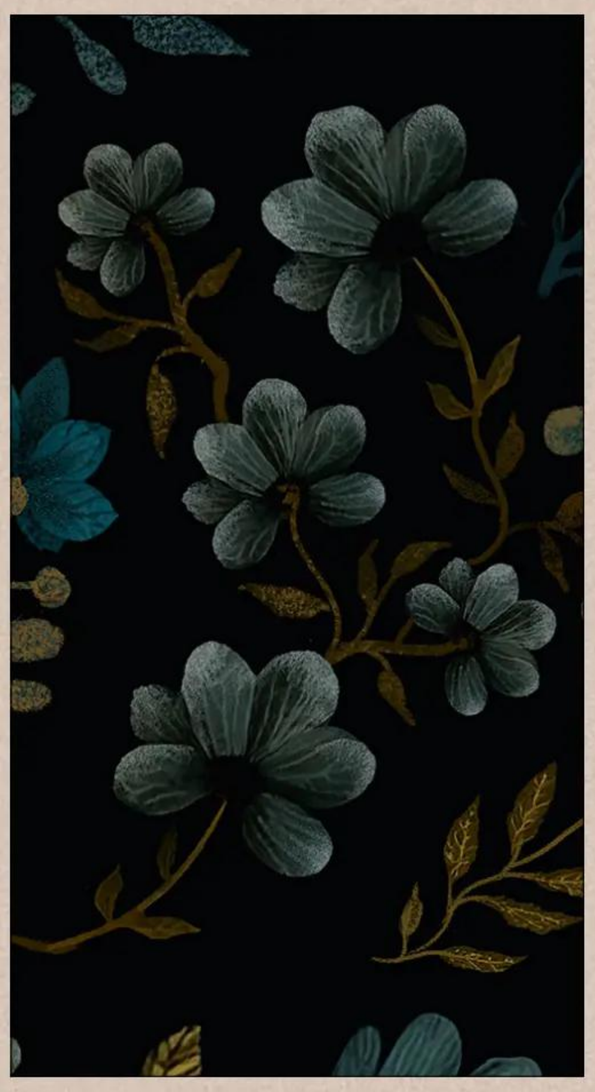
Our culture's mythology can be liminal and this is also how I approach most of my art. I want it to have clear contrast, in these cases Maiden/Monster, bloom/decay, above/below, etc. A character split between worlds – the conscious self adorned, and its shadow self that's rich with (hard-edged) secret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

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

5 ORNAMENTS AND PATTERNS AS SYMBOLS (OPPOSITE)

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





6 AVOID PERFECTION

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

7 VISUAL PLAN

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

8 KNOW YOUR LORE

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

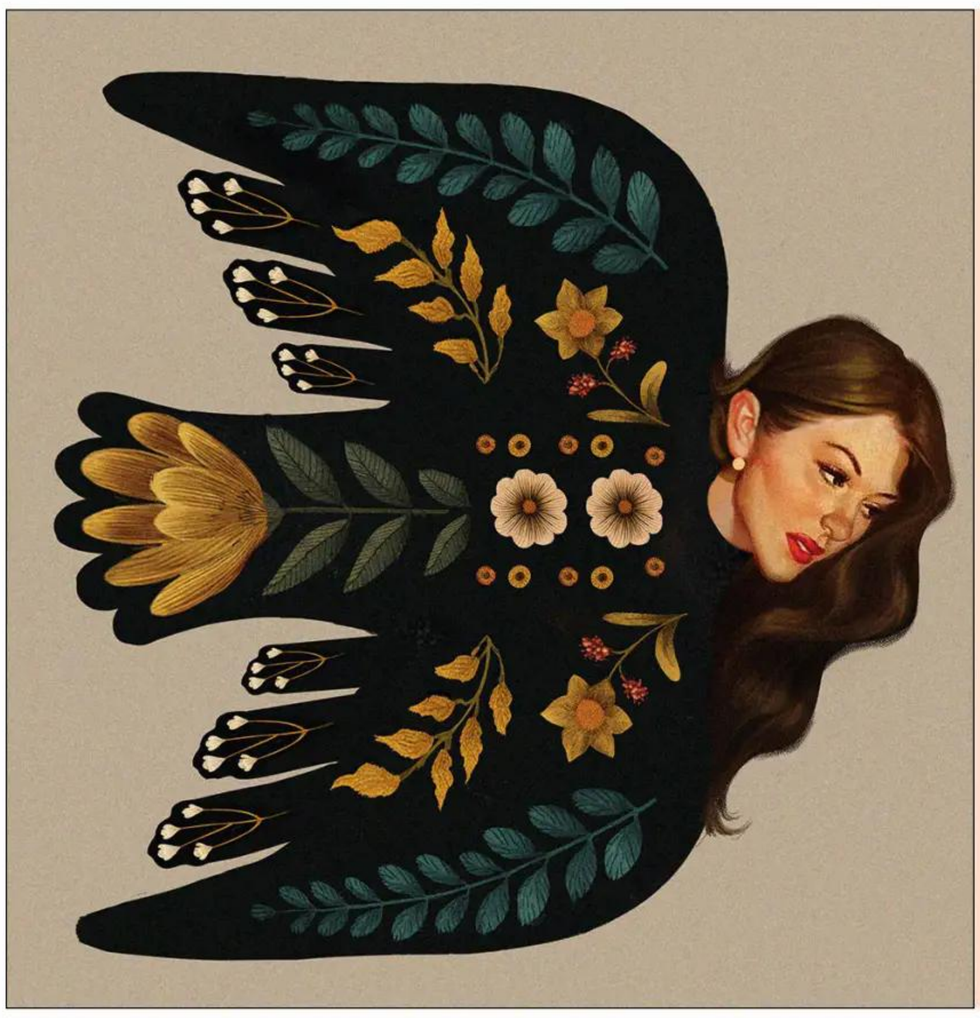


> "Try to think why this artwork is important to you and what do you want it to say"



9 COMBINING BEAUTY WITH UNEASE

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



10 BE CREATIVE

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

Photoshop

USE SHAPE TO AID COMPOSITION

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

Artist **PROFILE**

Eran Alboher
LOCATION: Slovenia

Specialising in character design, illustration and 2D animation, Eran's work spans multiple creative industries, including games, films and TV. His main inspirations come from nature, fantasy, cartoons, art and music.
https://bit.ly/3O4IT1B



In this piece, I aimed to create a small witch traveller riding a bird, focusing on atmosphere, character and visual clarity. From the beginning, I had in mind a mysterious figure with a calm, nonchalant personality; someone who feels experienced and self-assured rather than dramatic. I wanted the character to appear as though she were quietly passing through the forest, observing rather than demanding attention.

In my work, I always put strong emphasis on shape design, using clear silhouettes and simplified forms to make the character immediately readable. My design thoughts were aiming towards triangular shapes in the overall space, with circular ones to create shape contrast and lead the viewer to the focus point.

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

How I create...
A TRAVELLING WITCH RIDING A BIRD







1 Simple planning

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

2 Colours

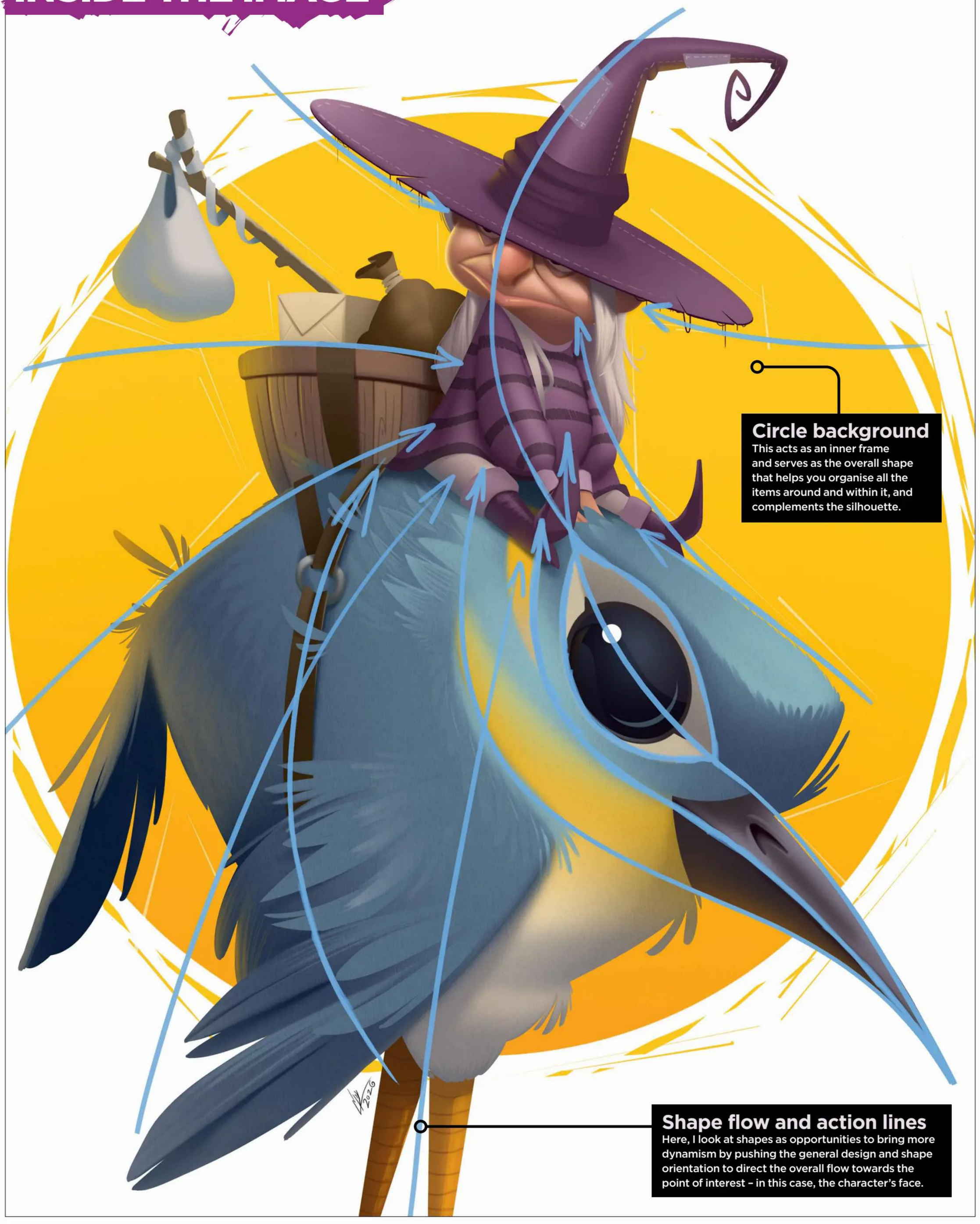
These are not randomly picked; it involves a blend of mathematical principles and emotional responses. Understanding contrast can make elements stand out, while harmony can create a seamless integration. By choosing colours, you influence the mood and atmosphere, shaping the viewer's experience and evoking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

3 When's it done

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

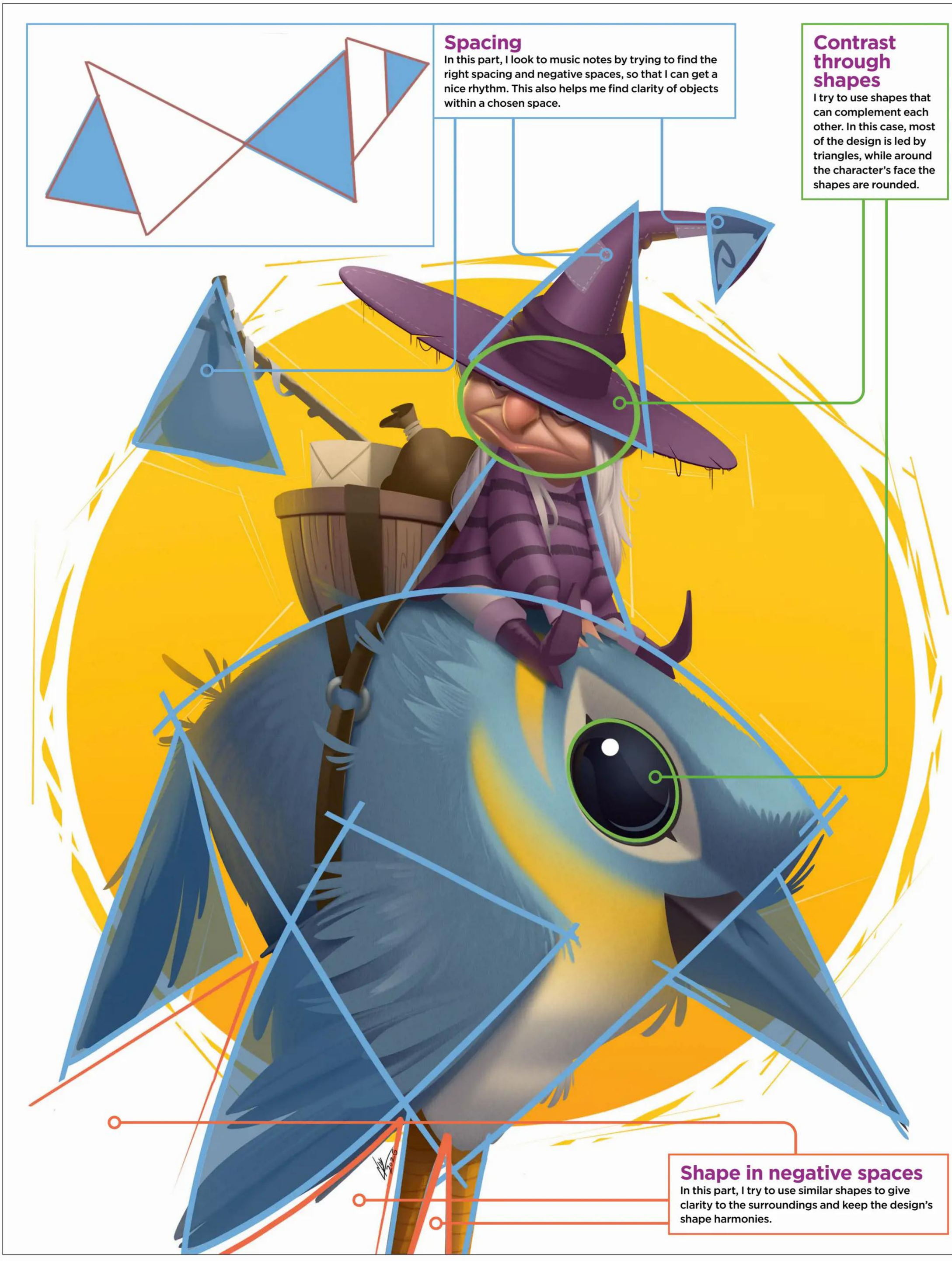


INSIDE THE IMAGE



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

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


Spacing
In this part, I look to music notes by trying to find the right spacing and negative spaces, so that I can get a nice rhythm. This also helps me find clarity of objects within a chosen space.
Contrast through shapes
I try to use shapes that can complement each other. In this case, most of the design is led by triangles, while around the character's face the shapes are rounded.
Shape in negative spaces
In this part, I try to use similar shapes to give clarity to the surroundings and keep the design's shape harmonies.

Artist insight

HOW TO MASTER COMIC PANELS

Comic artist and writer **Ludo Lullabi** takes us through his entire process, from idle sketching to adding the final tweaks

Artist PROFILE

Ludo Lullabi

LOCATION: France

Ludo Lullabi lives in southern France and is a freelance comic artist and writer. He's worked on several Blizzard projects, including as penciller on the World of Warcraft: The Comic series.
https://bit.ly/4bq9zDe



I've worked for many years in the video game industry, notably at Blizzard on Hearthstone, where I was responsible for storyboards and layouts for cinematics and trailers, as well as creating a large number of cards. I've also collaborated with Airship Syndicate on several games (Battle Chasers, Darksiders Genesis, Ruined King), mainly working on cutscenes and visual storytelling.

More recently, I've been working actively on my personal project Ghost Pepper, a comic series published by Skybound/Image Comics. On a long-form project like this, with a sustained production rhythm, it's essential to have a workflow that is clear, solid and adapted to your everyday reality as an artist.

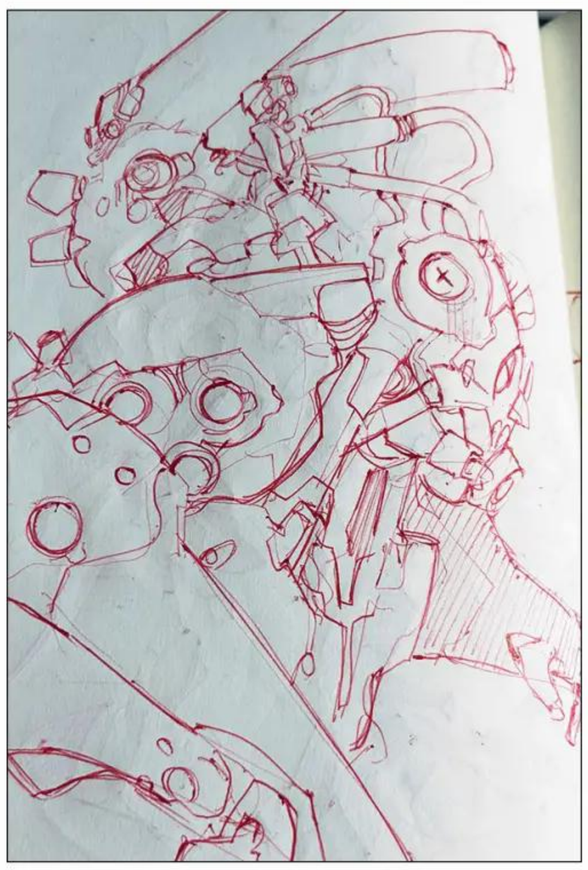
For all of my work, I use Manga Studio 5 EX, the predecessor of Clip Studio Paint. It's a piece of software I've been using for more than 15 years, and I mainly rely on its core, basic tools.

Even though I'm constantly questioning my technique and the way I work, some principles remain unchanged. In this workshop, I'm sharing a very practical, experience-based approach to my process, moving from beginner-friendly advice to a more direct method designed for professional production.

DOODLING

Starting with some loose doodles can get the creative juices flowing, even if the results are never used







DRAWING WITHOUT AN OBJECTIVE TO BUILD MUSCLE MEMORY

For me, doodling is not a production step. It's drawing without a specific goal, narrative or visual intention. I'm not looking for a usable result or an idea to develop. The objective is to let the hand move freely without constraints. I often doodle in a small sketchbook using a pen or pencil, sometimes while watching TV or on the phone. I'm not fully focused on the drawing, and that's what makes the exercise interesting. There's no pressure to achieve a result. These 'invisible' drawings build muscle memory, maintain fluency and develop a natural confidence in the line. Even if they're never used directly in a project, they make drawing more fluid and instinctive. Don't confuse this freedom with a productive work stage; doodling trains the hand, it doesn't prepare a final image.

BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE

Before moving to a fast production mindset, it's important to master a more segmented workflow. This is recommended for anyone with the time to build pages more confidently

1 THUMBNAILS – THINKING SMALL TO SEE CLEARLY

When I'm not sure which direction to take, I start with thumbnails. Working at a very small scale allows me to quickly explore composition, pacing and layout without getting lost in details. On the first issue of Ghost Pepper, I wasn't yet under heavy production pressure, so I took the time to fully develop this step.

Thumbnails are personal tools. They don't need to look good or be readable by anyone else. A few rectangles and lines are often enough. The goal is simply to trigger an idea and establish a direction. The more free and intimate this stage remains, the more effective it is.

> **Thumbnails don't need to look good or be readable by anyone else**



2 ROUGHS – THE TRUE CREATIVE STAGE

In my opinion, the rough is the most important stage of the process. This is where everything is decided: framing, angles, intent and storytelling. Early on with Ghost Pepper, I was still working on roughs at a smaller scale than the final page, sometimes even adding flat colours to test moods and atmospheres. During this phase, I test a lot. I erase, redo and change angles constantly. This is never wasted time. As long as I'm in the rough stage, nothing is locked in. My goal is to find a solution that fulfils the narrative needs while remaining enjoyable to draw.



3 CLEANING AND INKING: SEPARATING CREATIVITY FROM TECHNIQUE

In this 'easy' method, I strongly recommend separating creative phases (thumbnails, roughs) from more technical ones (clean lines, inking). The clean stage is meant to clarify the rough, not to produce a final drawing. It prepares the ground for inking.

Alternating between these phases helps avoid burnout. Switching from creative thinking to a more mechanical task often gives the brain time to keep working away in the background. It's a healthy and efficient way to move forward without getting stuck.

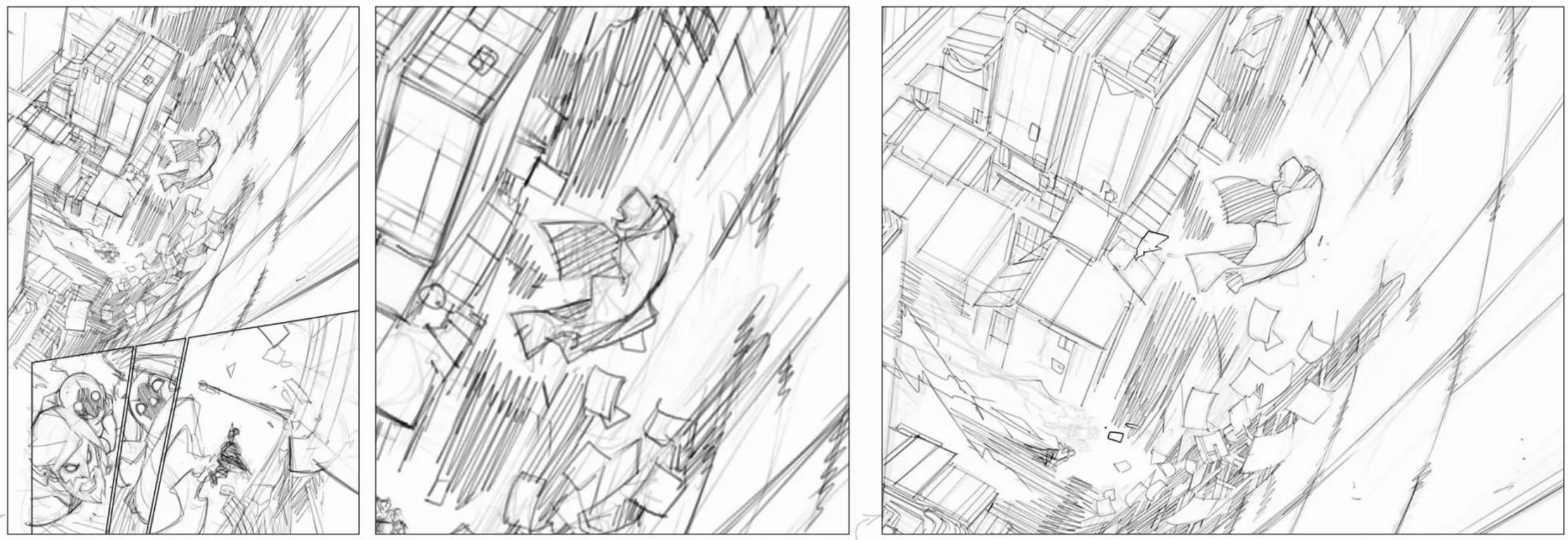




> Alternating between these phases helps avoid burnout

SMART PRODUCTION WORKFLOW

If working on a comic with a sustained production schedule, adapting your process becomes necessary. With experience, certain steps can be merged or even removed

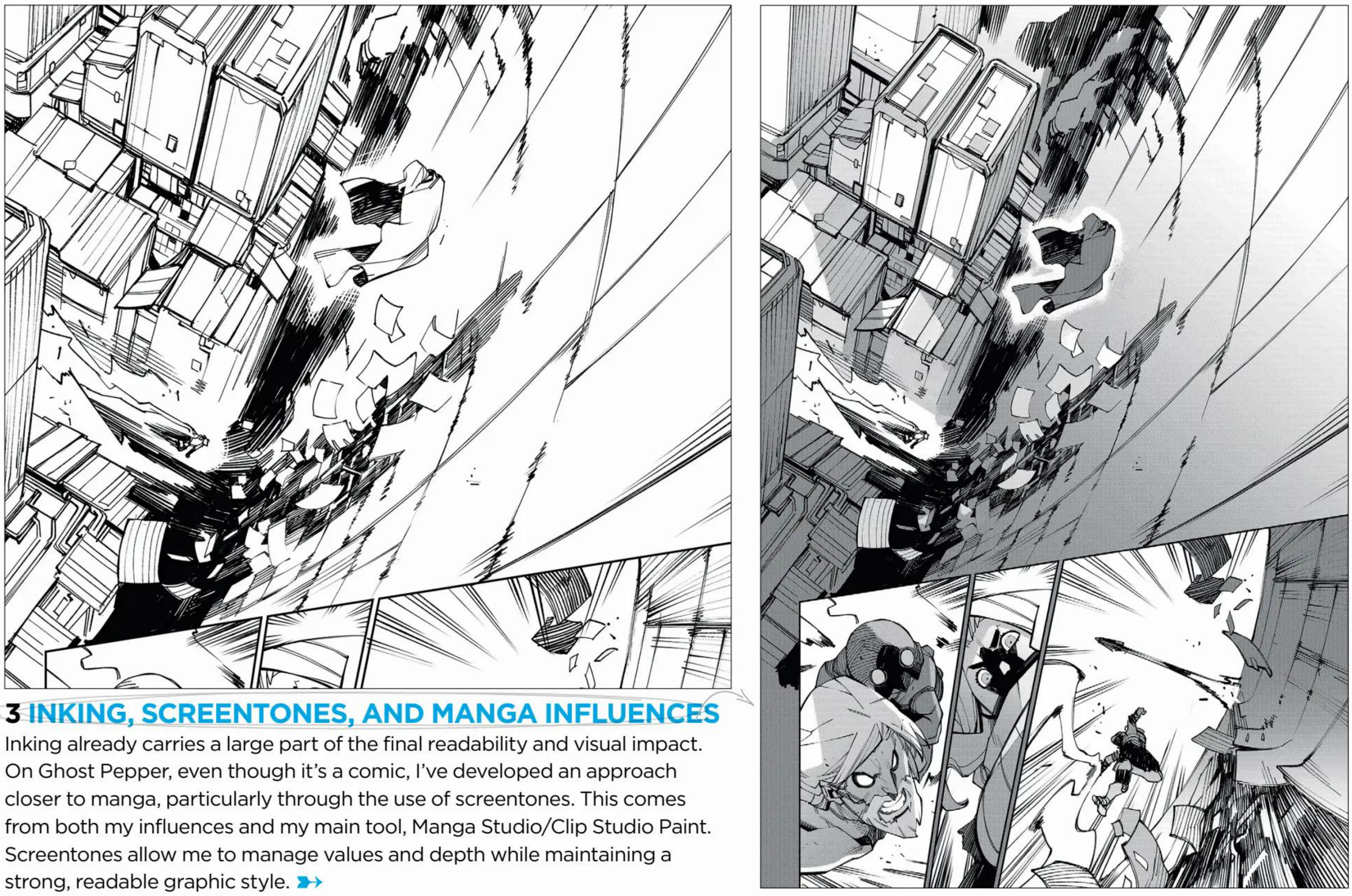


1 ROUGHING DIRECTLY ON THE FINAL PAGE

I begin by laying out my rough on the final page. It's a very free phase where I test compositions and framing, without hesitation to erase or start over. I block out a specific amount of time, to secure strong foundations. I only move on when I feel a genuine desire to continue. That feeling is important: it means the solution is clear and the drawing can progress smoothly.

2 CLARIFYING WITHOUT OVER-DETAILING

The clean stage is not a finished pencil drawing. It's a clarification of the rough, designed with the upcoming inking in mind. Since I ink my own work, I don't need an overly detailed clean pass. Doing too much at this stage only slows the process down.

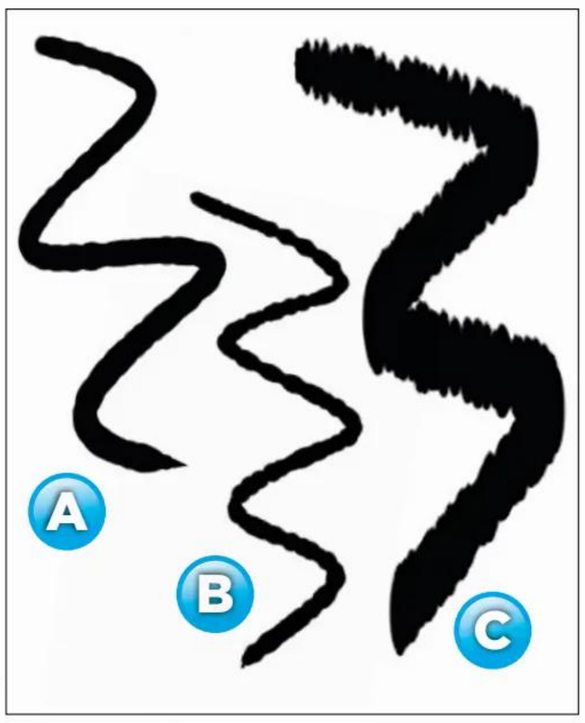


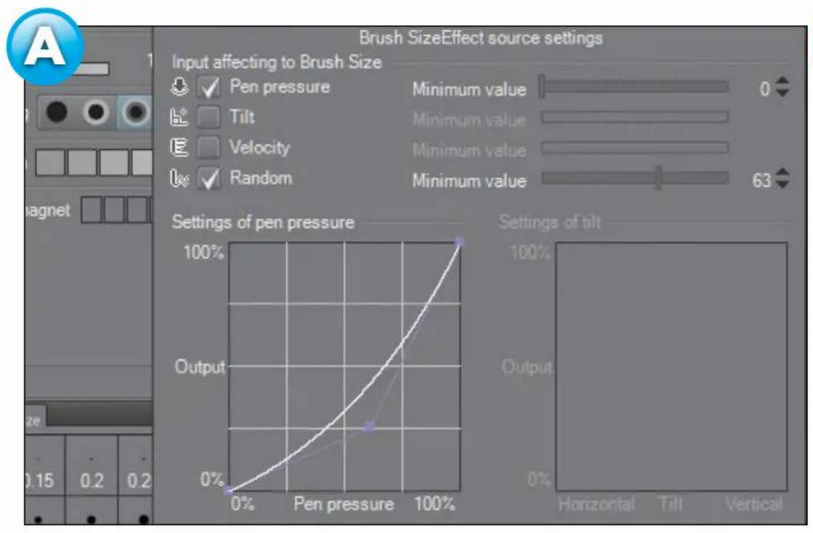
3 INKING, SCREENTONES, AND MANGA INFLUENCES

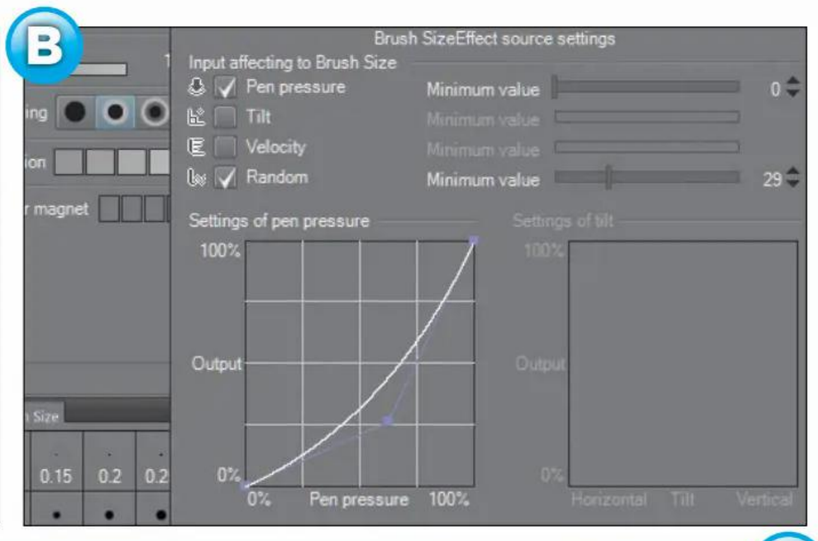
Inking already carries a large part of the final readability and visual impact. On Ghost Pepper, even though it's a comic, I've developed an approach closer to manga, particularly through the use of screentones. This comes from both my influences and my main tool, Manga Studio/Clip Studio Paint. Screentones allow me to manage values and depth while maintaining a strong, readable graphic style. ➳

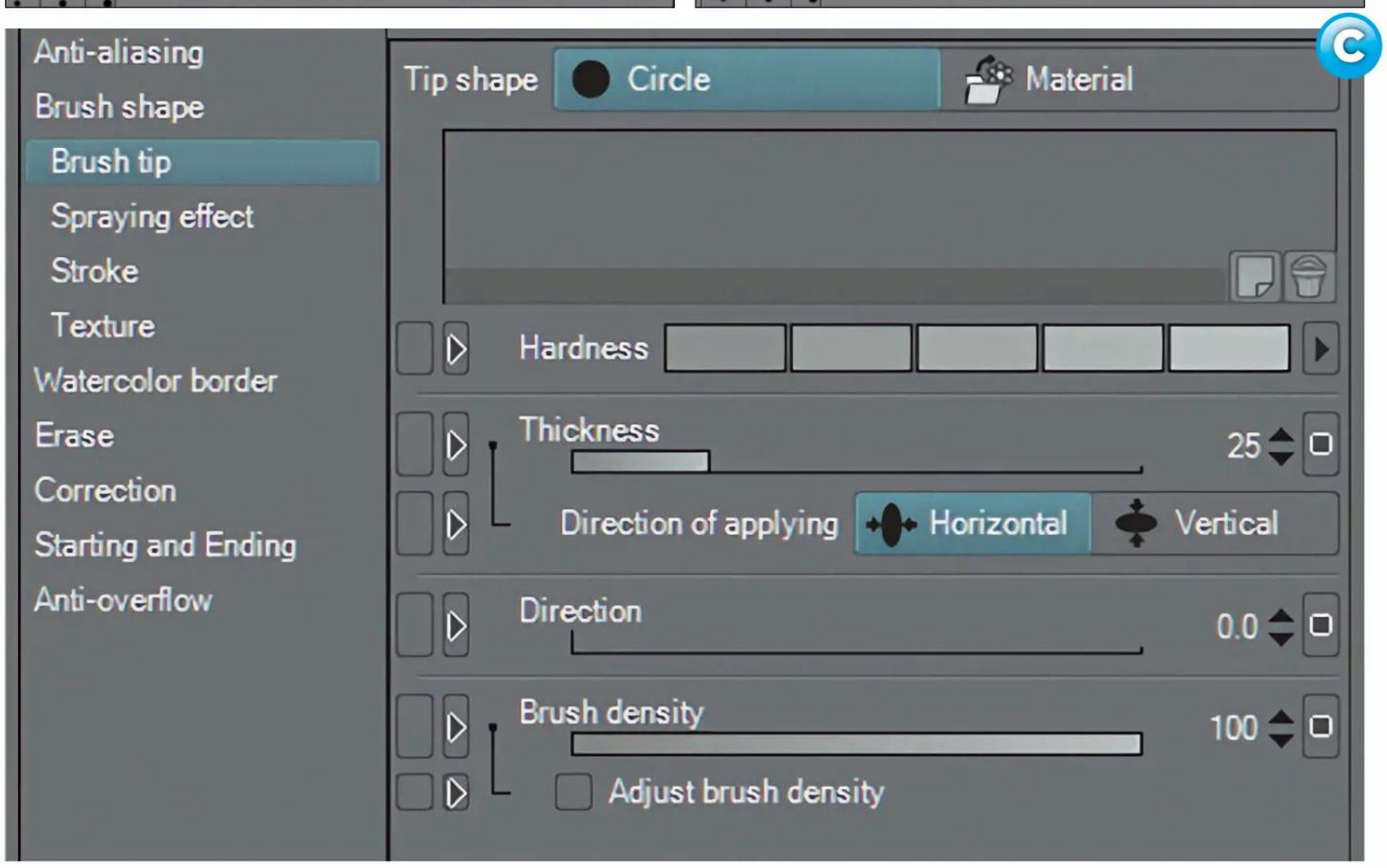
DETAILED INKING, DONE RIGHT

Make use of my years of experience in the industry to learn how you can master the final stages of creating comic panels: the inking



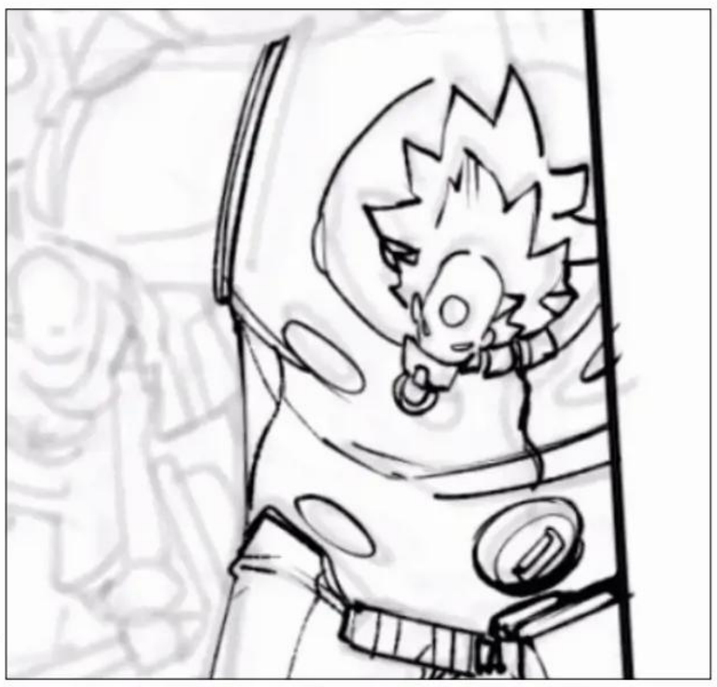






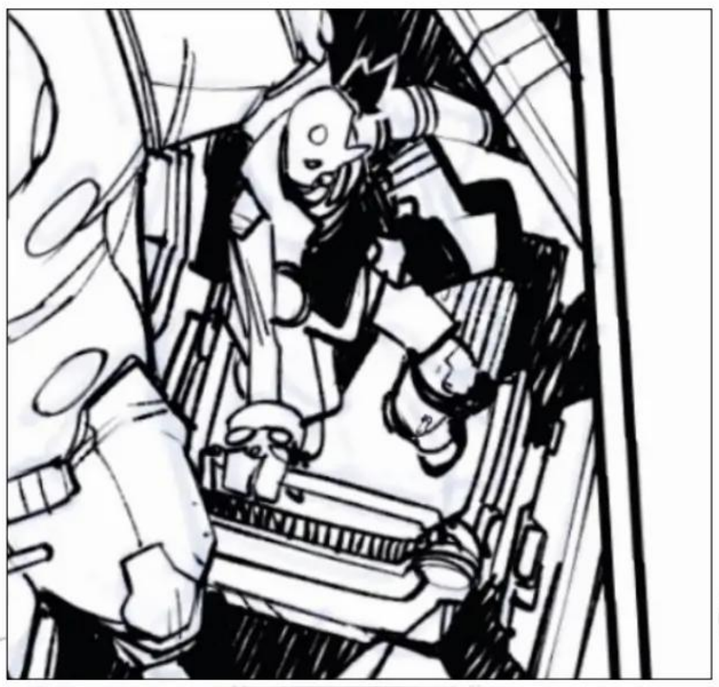
1 INKING TOOLS

I mainly use the G-Pen tool, customised into three different versions. The first is my primary tool, slightly adjusted using the Random setting to give the line a more natural, grainy feel. The second is an even more textured version, which I mainly use for hatching and grey areas. The third is based on the first, but with the Thickness setting modified to create a more chiselled line.



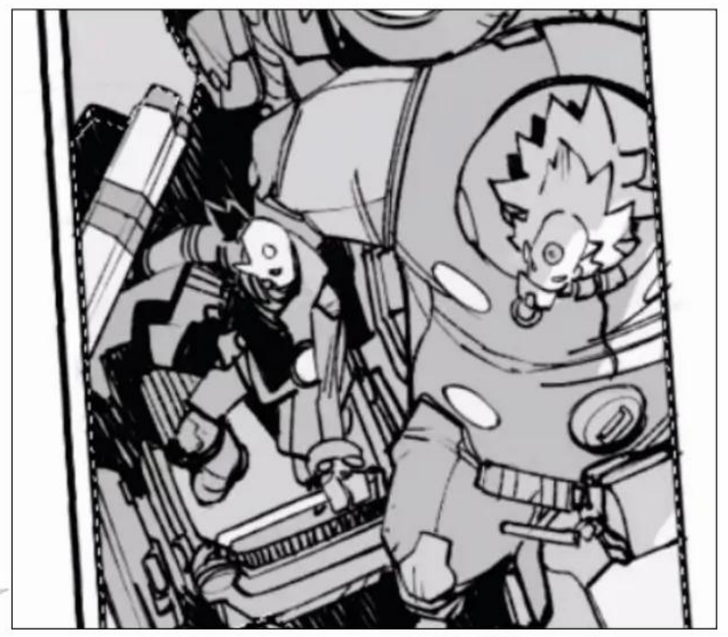
2 BASE INKING

I start by grouping the rough and clean layers into a folder and lowering its opacity. On a new layer, I do the base inking using my primary tool. This pass establishes the core structure of the drawing.



3 REFINEMENT AND HATCHING

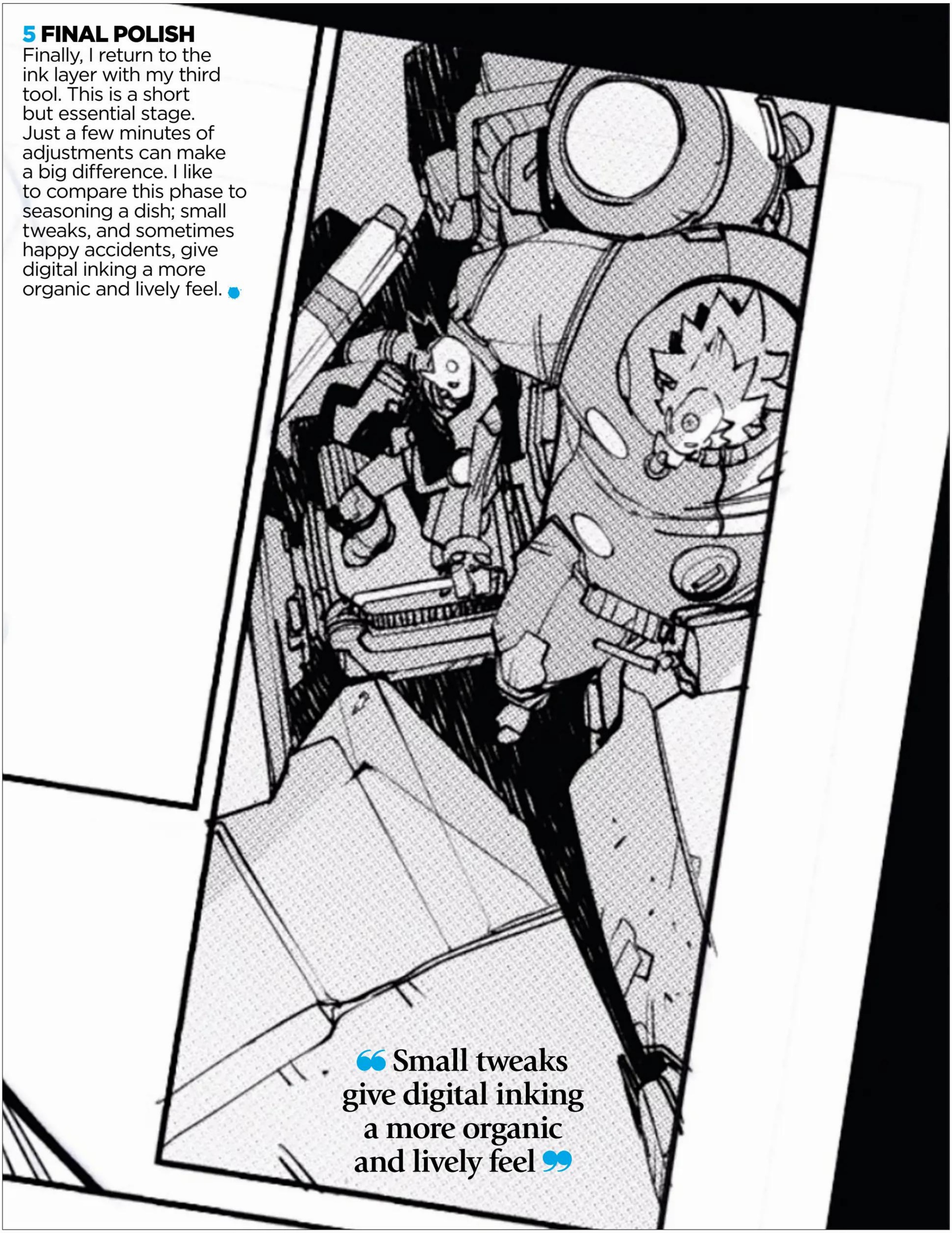
Once the base is done, I turn the rough/clean folder blue, because I rely on it less at this stage. I then use my second tool to refine the drawing, emphasise volumes with hatching, and work in a more spontaneous way.



4 SCREENTONES AND DEPTH

On a layer placed beneath the inks, I work with greyscale values to create screentones. Manga Studio allows me to convert these greys into tones using the Tone option. I vary the dot size based on the depth of elements to reinforce spatial reading.

5 FINAL POLISH
Finally, I return to the ink layer with my third tool. This is a short but essential stage. Just a few minutes of adjustments can make a big difference. I like to compare this phase to seasoning a dish; small tweaks, and sometimes happy accidents, give digital inking a more organic and lively feel.



“Small tweaks give digital inking a more organic and lively feel”

Photoshop

STRANGE SCI-FI FROM REAL LIFE

Illustrator **Lê Long** explains how to transform an everyday street corner into an extraordinary scene from his own perspective

Artist **PROFILE**

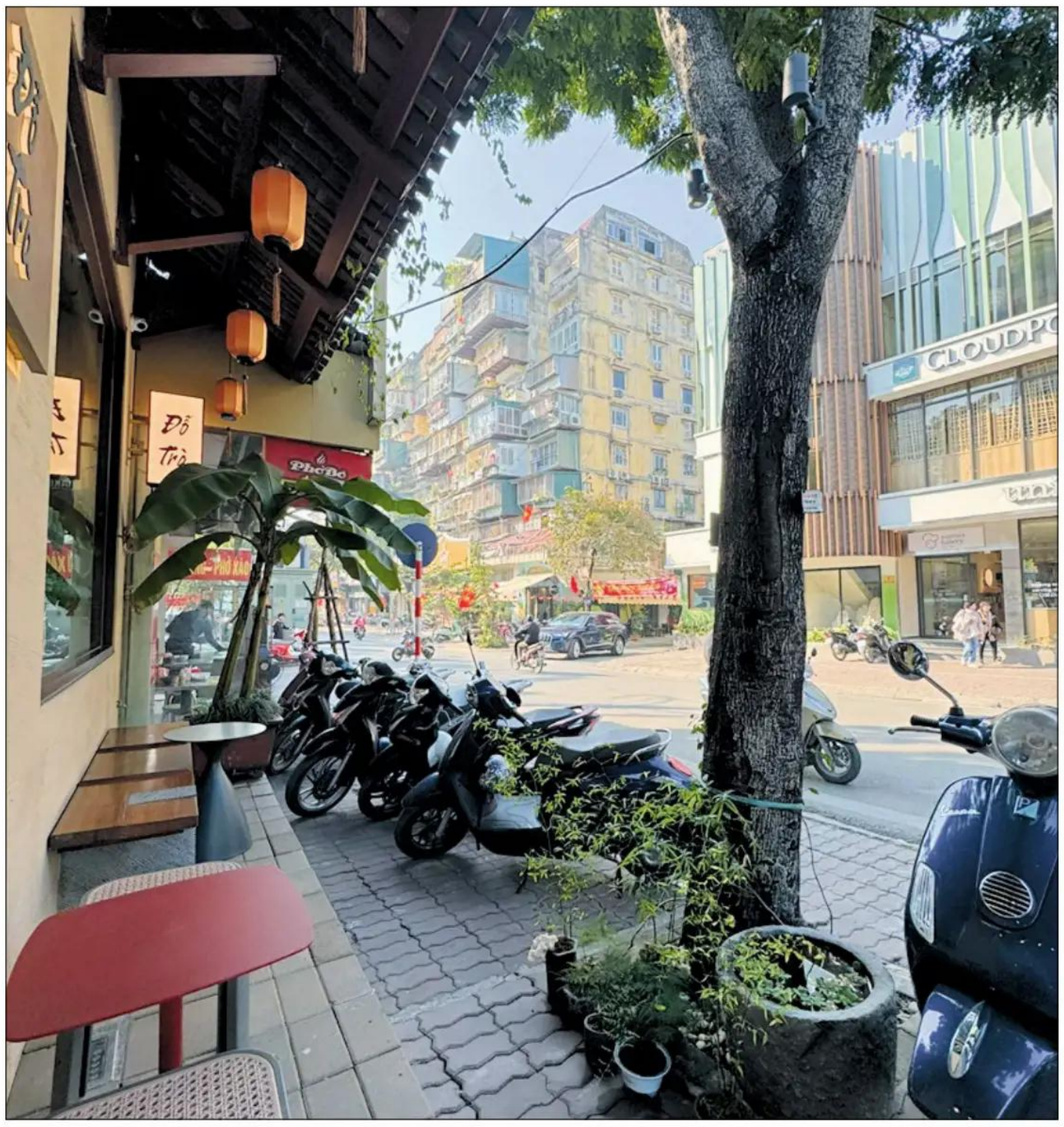
Lê Long
LOCATION: Vietnam

A freelance illustrator and concept artist, Lê is inspired by daily life and everyday surroundings.
https://bit.ly/3QK3byR



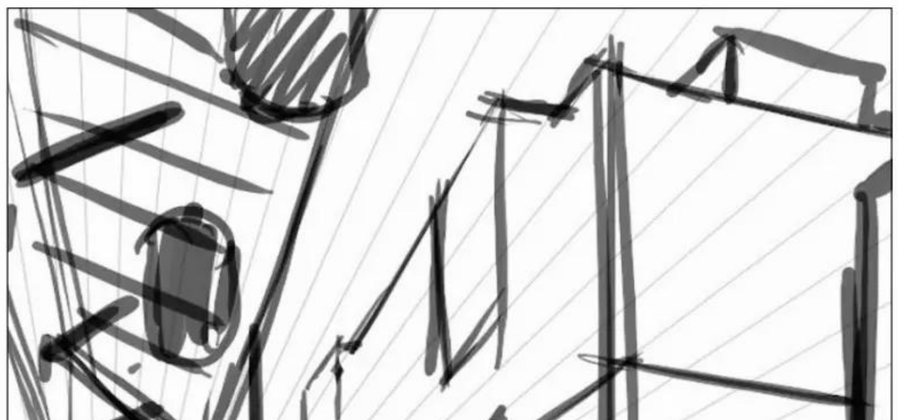
This painting is based on a view I see every Friday morning while I'm having tea with a close friend. The main subject is the old 1980s Hanoi apartment blocks. These buildings are famous for their "tiger cages" – extra living spaces built (without permission) by residents using temporary materials. This creates a messy and chaotic look, but it also has a lively, modern rhythm. To me, it feels both dangerous and full of character.

I wanted to capture this scene with a touch of imagination. I turned it into a future world with flying cars and floating buildings while keeping the "organised mess" that's so typical of Hanoi and Southeast Asian streets. Technically, I didn't use anything special – just basic knowledge of perspective. The rest is about arranging the composition, creating the atmosphere, and adding creative details. My goal was to combine all of these elements to make the final scene look both imaginative and believable.



1 Reference photo and inspiration

This is the real-life photo of the view I wanted to capture. The focal point of the scene is an old apartment block featuring messy, improvised extensions. While these structures appear somewhat chaotic and unsafe, they possess a unique architectural character that's very specific to the heart of Hanoi.



2 Initial rough sketch

Don't worry about whether your lines look "good" or "bad." Many artists feel pressured to be perfect, but at this stage, focus only on the camera angle and composition. The most important thing is setting the horizon line and the ratio between sky and ground. Cleanliness doesn't matter at this point; just focus on capturing the vision in your head. ➳



3 Blocking and shape design

Next, I refine the lines and focus on large-scale shape design. I adjust the proportions of the main elements to ensure they have enough cohesion while remaining distinct. I also start visualising elements I will add later. This helps establish a sense of depth and distance through relative scale, showing how big or small objects are compared to each other.



4 Light setting

I determine a light source and define the boundary between light and shadow. By limiting the values to a range of three to five tones, I can effectively establish the overall atmosphere and highlight the primary and secondary focal points. This simplified lighting scheme ensures the composition remains clear and helps guide the viewer's eye to the most important areas.



5 Colour palette and tones

The original scene already has a harmonious palette, with yellow as the dominant colour, accented by red and green against a pale-blue sky. My main focus here is deciding whether to exaggerate the warm and cool contrast between the light and dark sides of the main building. I want to see if heightening the difference between the sunlit surfaces and the shaded areas will make the atmosphere more dynamic and engaging.



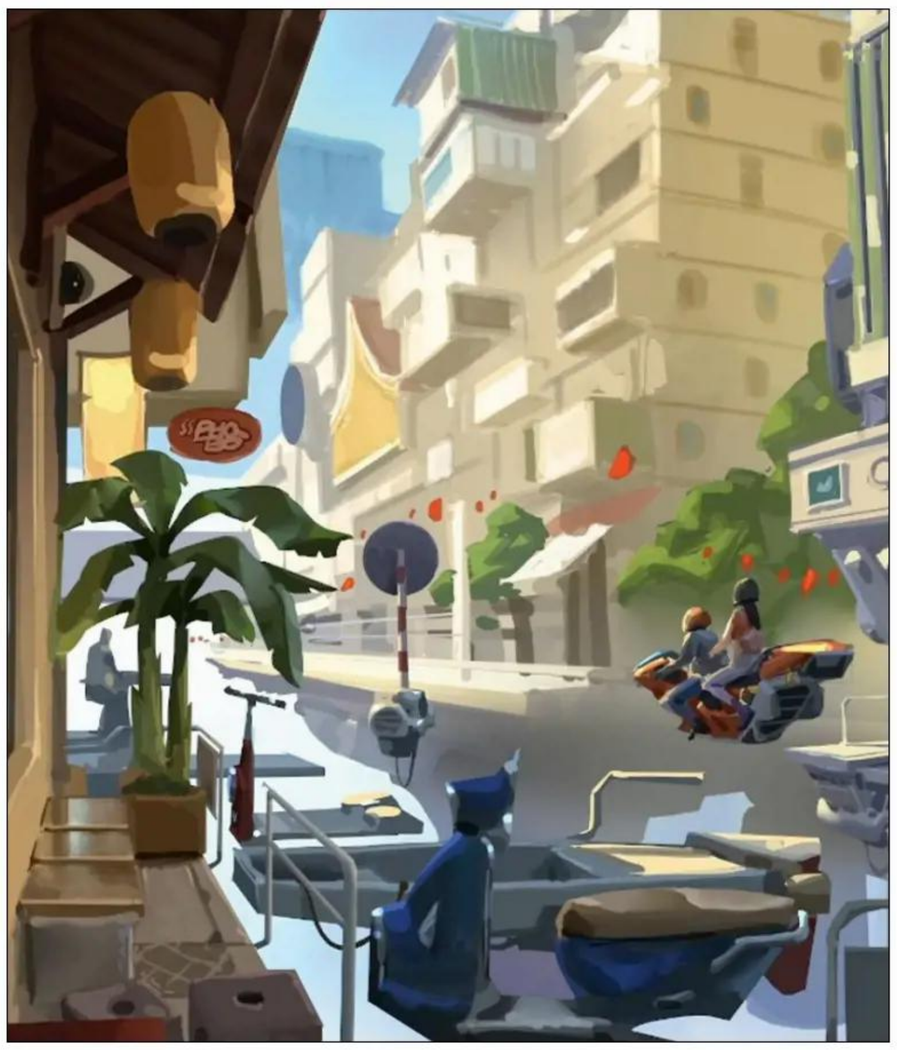
6 Adding foreground details

Typically, the background is detailed first to define the environment around the main subject. However, as my focal point is the apartment block in the distance, I start with the foreground instead. This helps establish a solid sense of space and acts as a foundation for the more detailed elements I will imagine and integrate in the following steps.



7 Defining the main building

With the foreground set, I define the apartment blocks' shapes. I repeat box structures with varying proportions and add green and yellow accents. I introduce a second vanishing point far to the right for upcoming details. Although it doesn't perfectly match the foreground's perspective, the large spatial gap between planes allows me to "get away" with this slight inconsistency.



8 Colour adjustment and forms

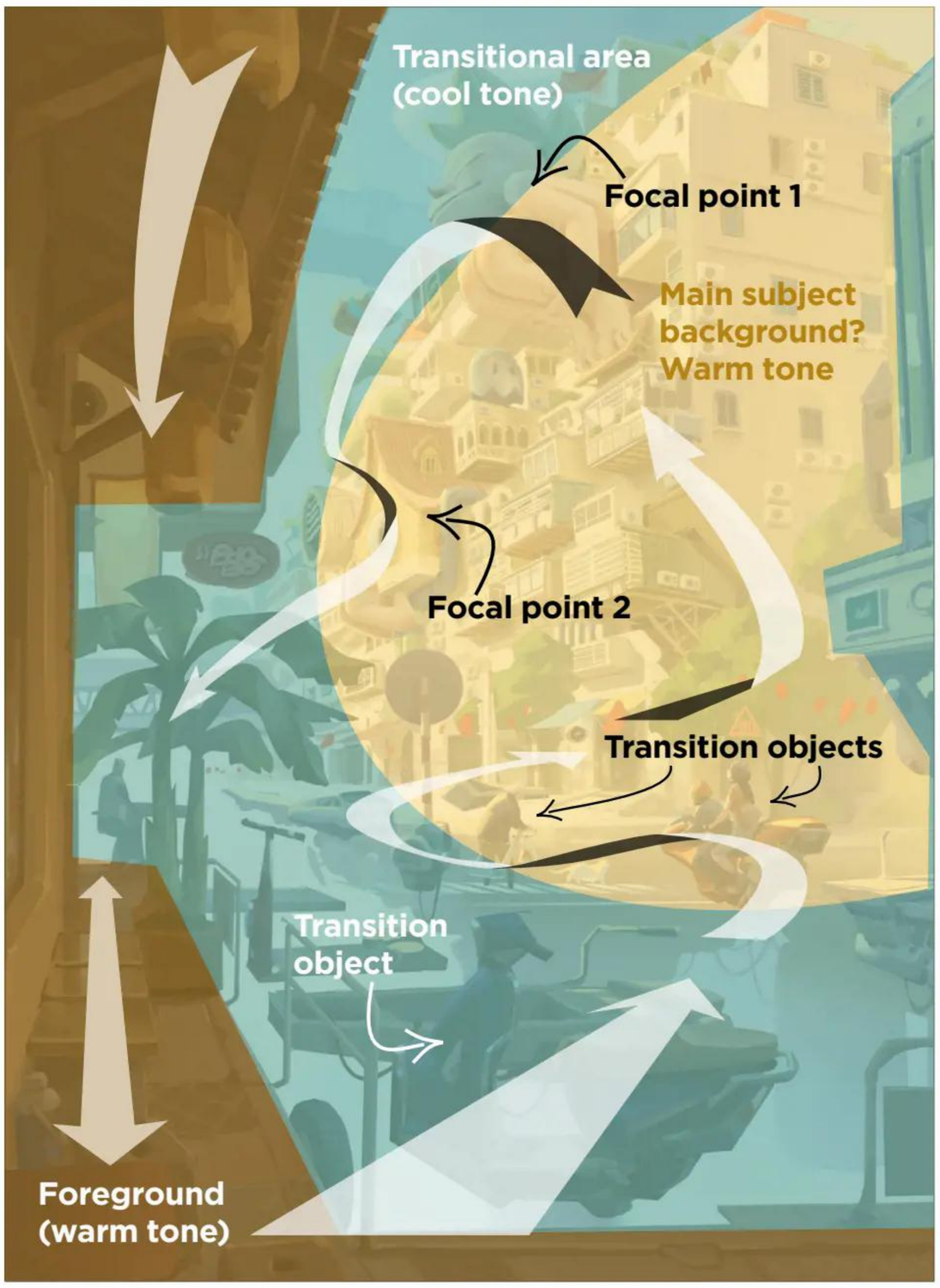
I add details to the main building. After evaluating the progress, I abandon the blue tints on the building's shadow sides. Instead, I unify everything with a warm yellow tone to capture the essence of a sunny day. This emphasises the humid yet vibrant tropical atmosphere characteristic of Hanoi's old apartment blocks.



9 Designing focal point highlights

With the atmosphere set, I detail the focal point by integrating playful, imaginative elements into the original structure. These "fantasy" additions transform the familiar apartment block into something more unusual, provoking contrast while seeking unity. My goal is to preserve the authentic character and "organised mess" that defines the soul of these iconic Hanoi apartments. ➳





10 Planning compositional flow

I step back to review the compositional plan one more time. This diagram illustrates how I try to arrange transition areas and leading movements to guide the viewer's eye. I hope the audience may discover the story and details in the specific order I intended.

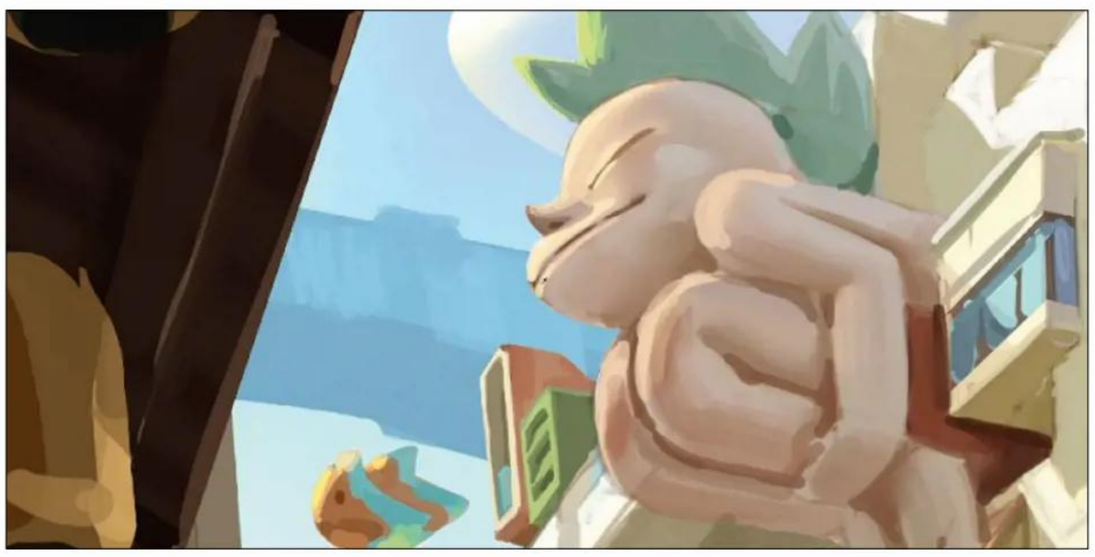


11 Balancing light and colour

Both the foreground and central block share a dominant yellow tone, but the foreground sits in shadow to remain less prominent. In contrast, the apartment block receives direct sunlight, creating the high contrast and vitality needed for a focal point. Splashes of green and red add variety, while the overall yellow and brown scheme keeps the composition unified.

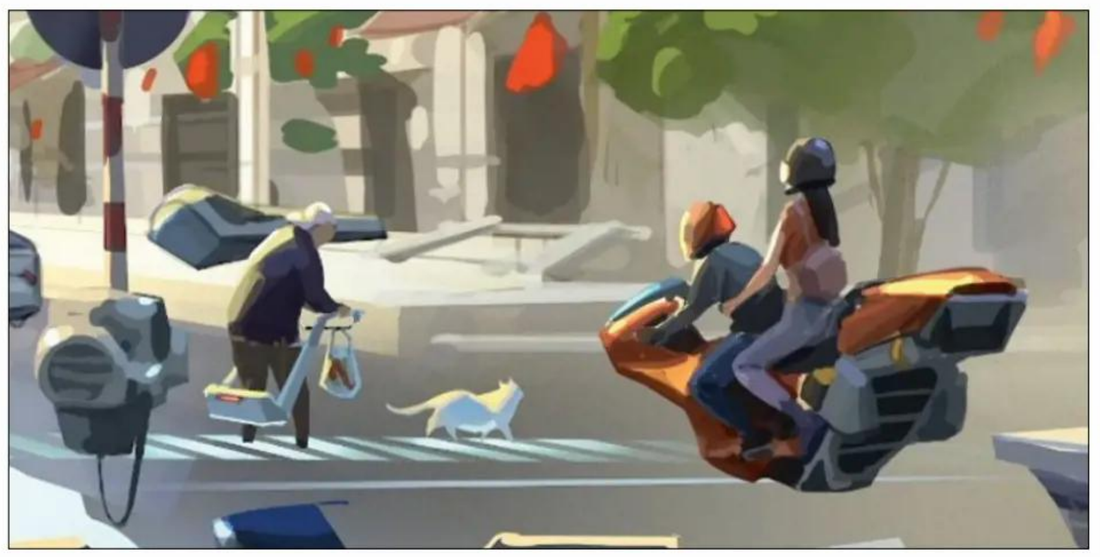
12 Refining key elements

A strange figure on the façade? A couple on a fancy sport bike waiting for an old lady and her cat to cross the street? I hope these details create some contrast and curiosity to make viewers search for a hidden story. I'm never quite sure if these subtle touches are effective, or even noticeable, but for me they're the essential sparks of imagination that bring the scene to life.



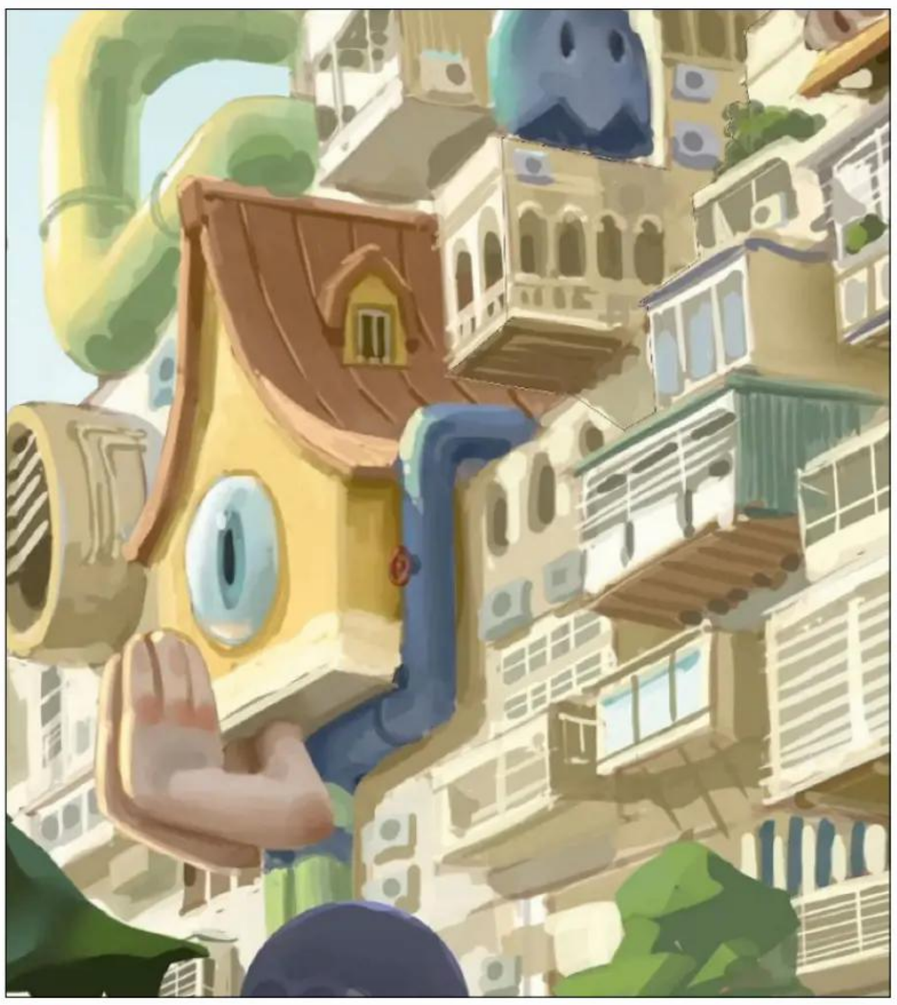
The figure on the façade

This shape is adapted from the boxy forms of the building's improvised extensions. Its crouching pose is inspired by countryside children jumping into rivers during summer, while the Mohawk is a nod to 1970s punk rock, which is also the era these buildings first appeared in my country.



Pedestrians and the big bike

These characters bridge the foreground and midground, suggesting a moment of tension: is the biker impatient or polite? The vibrant red of the bike might suggest the couple's impatience, while the old lady's futuristic walker, in white and dull tones, emphasises her slow and steady pace.



13 A second focal point

The real-life scene featured a Thai restaurant with a traditional curved roof. I wanted to keep this reference, but pushed the design further by adding eyes and hands in a prayer-like gesture. This transforms the building into a "hybrid" creature – a fusion of architecture and living being – unlike the Mohawk character, a strange boy "sitting" on the building.



14 Building technical systems

I handle the mechanical sections underneath, which enable the structure to "float" in mid-air. I keep these details subtle, using just enough silhouette to suggest a massive machinery system hidden below the building's foundation. This addition is enough to spark the imagination of a sci-fi world where traffic and residential districts exist high in the sky.



15 Final touches

I give the scene a final review, focusing on atmosphere and edge management. This helps separate overlapping layers that are physically far apart in the 3D space. Finally, I add micro-details like windows, AC units, and windowsill plants. These small touches make the building look believable and "lived-in", showing how each resident has uniquely personalised their own living space.



Photoshop

PAINT A VERDANT FANTASY SETTING

Richard Lay shares his process for designing a fantastical landscape through the use of various painting techniques



Artist PROFILE

Richard Lay

LOCATION: US

Richard was born and raised in California, and grew up watching anime and other media. That was the inspiration and motivation to create his unique art, which captivates thousands of followers across his social media accounts.
http://bit.ly/4hrxt2S



I had an image in my mind of a wide, expansive landscape showing a large amount of depth. I wanted to paint a scene with an alien-looking object of interest to help draw the viewer into the fantastical environment and give them a sense of wonder.

The final image looked a lot different from my initial concept of the landscape, as I expanded my ideas on the canvas to really sell the space and depth of the piece. I knew what I wanted to achieve overall, but much of getting to the final image was a case of figuring things out as I went along.

I wanted the alien object to be curvy. This is echoed in the design of the round dwellings, to help with the overall flow of the piece. The people who live here made the structure their place of refuge and built their homes on the land surrounding it. I wanted to heighten this contrast by indicating that the town and the alien object are constructed from two distinctly different materials.

Turning my attention to the colours. I wanted the piece to convey the sensation of taking a deep breath of fresh air. With this in mind, I incorporated mainly vibrant colours – greens and blues – to show the presence of nature and that invigorating outdoor feeling that we can all relate to. I placed a small orange dragon in the mid-ground to serve as an accent colour, just to finish off the overall look.

BUILDING A WORLD

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: CLOUD BRUSH



My primary brush for this image. Mainly used for small details and noise.

TEXTURE BRUSH



I painted the surface of the alien object with this brush. The results differ, based on Pressure.

CHALK BRUSH



A build-up brush I use for blocking out big shapes. It has a fuzzy edge that allows for quick colour transitions.

The hand-crafted look

To continue creating visual interest I try to make every circular object within the scene a different size, as well as ensure that all the designs in the windows are different. I don't use the Ellipse tool because I don't want the windows to have a 'copy and paste' feel. Instead, I paint each circular window frame imperfectly, to give each one a unique and individual look.

Economical painting

Sometimes there are a lot of details that need painting, but time is short. In this situation, prioritise what you want the viewer to see. Focus on tackling key elements by introducing more details to those areas and less to others. A small illusion here is achieved by giving a bit of detail to the flowers in the foreground and using a simple Round brush to depict the remaining flowers in the background.

How I create...
AN UNUSUAL SETTLEMENT

1 Building up my house designs

I rough out the architecture. I want the houses to be made from the surrounding materials: wood, clay and stone. As I build them up I use bigger, chunky brush strokes to feel out my shapes, staying loose and not committing to anything until my final comp is set. Initially, my main focal point is a big house. Perhaps someone important lives there.





Object placement

Including a variety of different circular elements can help push not only the visual interest, but also the depth of a piece by having the same object in the fore-, mid- and background. This technique enables the viewer to grasp just how big certain elements are in a scene, from their placement alone.

Focal points

You can lead your viewer towards points of interest in your composition. This is achievable by having elements flow into one another, maintaining a constant sense of movement within your piece and having points of visual interest at major stopping/resting points. This ensures that the piece feels whimsical.



Vary your visuals

There are many ways to achieve certain effects. I achieve the texture for the alien object by using a textured brush over a basic ball. I then fade the edges to blend the textures in. With the Selection tool you can pick a value range of colours and shift them around using the sliders in Photoshop to produce a range of interesting looks.

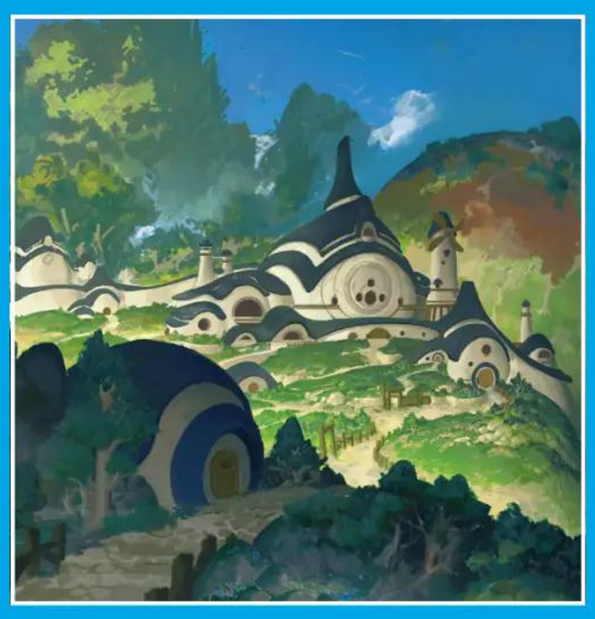
A sense of scale

It's important to keep track of micro compositions – areas in an image that can be viewed in isolation – in a painting. These details really help to bring an image together. In this example I place the man riding the dragon next to the birds to indicate scale, by having large and small creatures near each other. Different levels of scale can be achieved depending on how you arrange such elements in your scene.



2 Time for a rethink

The composition has changed quite a bit. I'm happy with the houses that make up the town, but the vastness of the world itself isn't represented as well as I had hoped. The solution is to expand the scope of the scene. I move my colours in a more vibrant direction by pushing the saturation in the greens and blues. To create more visual interest I place the round alien object right in the centre of the composition.







3 Finishing touches

I make sure everything reads and flows together as a whole. I alter the shapes of the mountains, trees and houses to help create visual rhythm, add people and birds to give a stronger sense of scale and highlight a few things such as the blue window to call attention to the main building.

Technique focus

ADD VISUAL TENSION

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



"This scene is inspired by China's Zhuoshui Fengyu Bridge. The composition features strong visual tension, which I found especially compelling, and the art is developed around this perspective. I combined Southeast Asian roof shapes and materials, and introduced a waterfall to the setting to create a dramatic yet dreamlike atmosphere. I also added dynamic elements such as spray from the water and a flock of birds to bring life and movement to the scene. The entire piece is hand-painted in 2D, with the emphasis on maintaining a loose and expressive painting style."

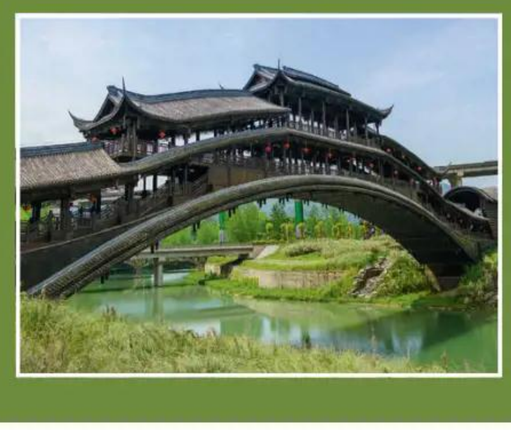
Artist **PROFILE**

Dawn Pu
LOCATION: China

Dawn Pu is a senior concept artist and art director. He has over 17 years of experience working in fantasy and hard-surface sci-fi design, and is the co-founder of Art Vision Studio.
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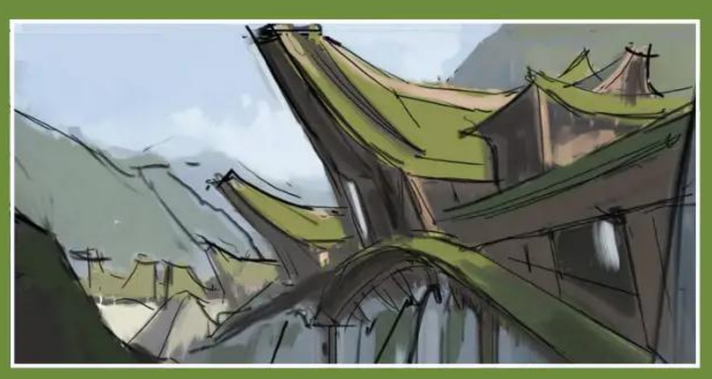
How I create...

A BRIDGE WITH A STORY



© Getty Images/CHAO-FENG LIN





1 Establish composition

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



2 Add clarity

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



3 Final detailing

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

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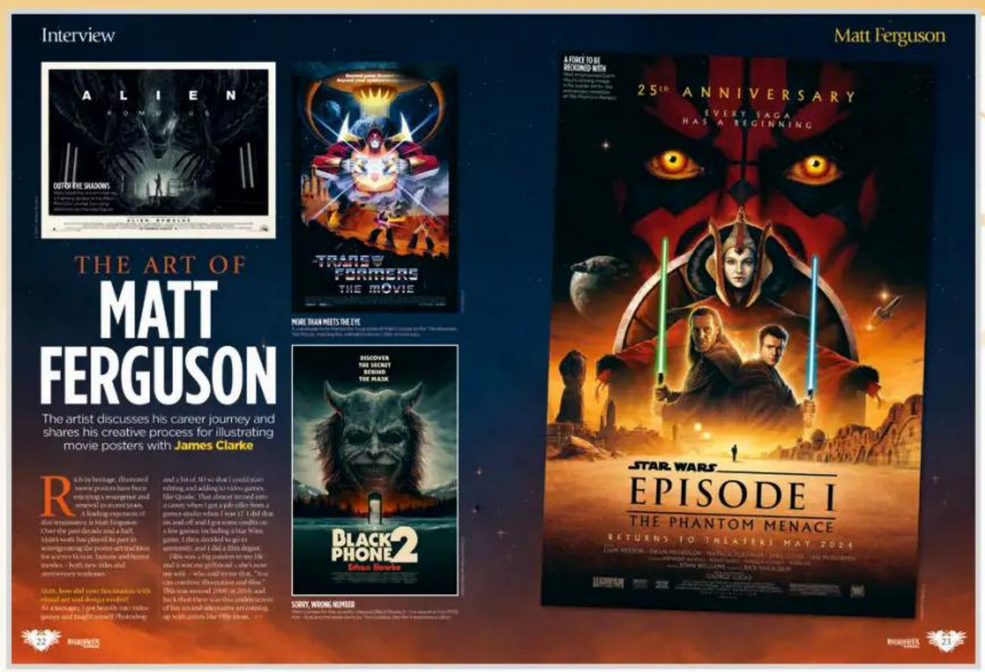
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